

WERNETH LOW COUNTRY PARK JOINT MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

14 June 2023

Commenced: 10.30 am

Terminated: 11.30 am

Present: Councillors J Fitzpatrick, Kitchen, Owen, Robinson, Roderick, Colbourne, Mr Ainger, Mr Bell, Mrs Durkin, Mrs Ellis and Ms Halliday

In Attendance: Nicola Marshall Greenspace Development Manager
Katie Lowry Greenspace Development Officer

Apologies for Absence: Councillor Bowden

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

2. MINUTES

The Minutes of the Werneth Low Country Park Joint Management Committee held on 22 February 2023 were agreed as a correct record.

3. MEMBERSHIP OF THE JOINT COMMITTEE 2023/24

It was reported that the following representatives had been appointed to serve on the Joint Management Committee for the Municipal Year 2023/24:-

Representing Tameside MBC –

Councillors Bowden, Colbourne, Fitzpatrick, Kitchen, Owen, Robinson and Roderick

Hyde War Memorial Trust –

Messrs Ainger, Bell, Mrs Durkin, Mrs Ellis and Ms Halliday

4. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR AND DEPUTY CHAIR FOR 2023/24

RESOLVED:

- (i) That Councillor Peter Robinson, Tameside MBC, be appointed Chair of the Joint Management Committee for 2023/24.
- (ii) That Mrs Jane Durkin, Hyde War Memorial Trust, be appointed Deputy Chair of the Joint Management Committee for 2023/24.

5. WERNETH LOW COUNTRY PARK JOINT MANAGEMENT AGREEMENT UPDATE

The Greenspace Development Manager submitted a report updating the Joint Management Committee of progress towards the signing of a new Joint Management Agreement. Both parties remained committed to the general principles of maintaining the Country Park and the principles of cooperation and joint working were important to all concerned.

It was reported that at the last Working Group meeting on 10 March 2023, a draft copy of the new Joint Management Agreement was shared with the areas of change clearly highlighted. Hyde War Memorial Trust had instructed their legal team to assess the Agreement and work with Legal Services at Tameside Council to finalise the Agreement. A further update on progress would be provided at the next meeting of the Joint Management Committee, scheduled for 11 October 2023.

The Greenspace Development Manager advised that another meeting of the Working Group needed to be convened and asked for confirmation of membership from Tameside MBC and Hyde War Memorial Trust. Members of the Joint Management Committee were reminded that it had previously been agreed that there be equal representation from both parties on the Working Group.

RESOLVED:

- (i) That the report be noted;**
- (ii) That membership of the Working Group comprise of three Tameside MBC representatives and three Hyde War Memorial Trust representatives;**
- (iii) That the three representatives from Hyde War Memorial Trust be confirmed via email to the Greenspace Development Manager; and**
- (iv) That the three representatives from Tameside MBC be confirmed via email to the Greenspace Development Manager.**

6. GREENSPACE DEVELOPMENT OFFICER'S REPORT

The Greenspace Development Officer submitted a report informing members of the activities undertaken within the Country Park since the last meeting of the Joint Management Committee (JMC).

The report outlined the following:-

- Maintenance of Sites
- Public Events
- The Lower Higham Visitor Centre
- Werneth Low Country Park Greenspace Volunteer Service

With regards to Maintenance of Sites it was reported that the Tameside Countryside Estates Team completed the path works (phase 1), which saw improvements to drainage and surfacing from the top of Cow Lane up to the Cenotaph, during March and April 2023. This allowed pedestrians an opportunity to walk on a surfaced path from the Visitors Centre Car Park up to the Cenotaph, whilst keeping the track wide enough to accommodate vehicles when needed. The work had been joint funded by the Hyde War Memorial Trust (HWMT) and Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council (TMBC).

The Greenspace Development Officer advised that they had completed a review of the Werneth Low Management Plan, which set out how the site would be managed from 2023 to 2028. Officers would circulate a draft version of The Plan after the meeting for comments by the JMC. The Greenspace Development Manager requested that comments be submitted by the end of July and an update would be provided at the next meeting of the Committee, scheduled for 11 October 2023, prior to consultation with other groups such as the Volunteers and Werneth Low Environment Group.

The JMC were informed that the Greenspace Development Officer carried out a full site inspection in April 2023, the report had been shared with the Greenspace Development Manager and actions were prioritised and planned. A further full inspection would take place in October. Greenspace Volunteers had carried out a full review of the site signage and a map of the site, with a full list of repairs required, had been produced. Where possible these repairs were immediately put into action and others would be completed as soon as possible

Members were notified that the hazel coppicing project at Mousefields, which started in Winter 2022, has had further work completed with the addition of some rabbit guards around the coppiced stools to help and protect the re-growth from predation. As part of the Greenspace Conservation days, a pond renovation project was completed at the edge of Great Stone Low and New Piece. Himalayan Balsam was currently being removed from this area in an aim to free it entirely and to prevent any further encroachment of this invasive plant on site.

It was reported that the grass cutting season had started with TMBC Grounds Maintenance Teams completing grass cutting on formal areas such as the Orchard, around the Visitors Centre Car Park and picnic areas on the site. The entrance to Beacon Lane Picnic Area had been widened by the Greenspace Volunteers to enable the larger mower to access the site so this area can be cut again this year.

Litter and Fly tipping incidents unfortunately remained an issue with hotspots located at Quarry car park and Windy Harbour. Volunteers from the local community, along with Greenspace Volunteers, regularly litter picked the site. The Greenspace Officer responded to Fly tipping incidents where practicable and all Fly tipping incidents were investigated if evidence was found and the Council Street Cleansing and Fly Tipping teams supported with the clear up.

With regards to Public Events, the Committee were informed that The Cheshire Dry Stone Walling Association (DSWA) ran a two day course over the weekend of 13-14 May in the country park. New stone was needed for the course and the Trust had kindly contributed towards the cost of this. A route had been agreed for a local farmer to deliver the stone to site using the tracks from Werneth Low Road, therefore preventing any potential damage to New Piece and nesting birds on site. As usual, the riding track was closed for the weekend to ensure safety. Some stone remained for use at the next course, scheduled to take place on the weekend of 9-10 September 2023, posters for which were being displayed on site.

The fee for this course was funded by the TMBC Greenspace Volunteer budget and by the end of the weekend, another stretch of the wall along the riding track, between New Piece and Rough Moor, was completed to the usual high standard. One of the trainees on the course was a new volunteer whose new skills could be put into practice when needed. Thanks were extended to the Cheshire DSWA for organising the course and ensuring high standards of work and work practices.

It was reported that the 'Tour de Manc' had returned to Werneth Low on 30 April 2023 with cyclists from across the country taking part in the circular route around Greater Manchester. Refreshments were on offer to the participants after the climb up Cowlshaw Brow and thanks were extended to the Greenspace Volunteers for making the visitors feel welcome and making the site look great with flowers and decorations.

The JMC were told that HWMT were busy making preparations for this year's Peace Day celebrations on the 25 June 2023 and Greenspace staff and volunteers would be available to help with logistics on the day. The Werneth Low Environment Group had met with the Cheshire Wildlife Trust in May to explore project possibilities, especially renovating some of the ponds on site and wildflower seed collection from the meadows. This was in the very early stages but more information would be received from the group in due course and information on working together to make some of the ideas a reality on the ground.

In relation to the Lower Higham Visitor Centre, it was noted that the café continued to operate every Sunday and was run by volunteers from HWMT along with supporting other events. Feedback from visitors had been extremely positive with a recurrent theme for it to be open on more days.

It was reported that the Werneth Low Country Park Greenspace Volunteer Service continued to take place every Tuesday completing various essential tasks around the site with weekly litter picking. Examples of completed works were appended to the report and included hedge cutting, litter picking, removal of graffiti, weekly maintenance in the formal gardens and orchard, dry stone wall repairs, Himalayan Balsam removal, repairs to fencing and gate improvements and culvert digging.

This was in addition to the hazel coppice at Mousefields and pond renovation project at the edge of Great Stone Low and New Piece as detailed in the main body of the report. The tool stores and garage continued to be used as shelter and storage, which worked well.

The JMC were advised that a Volunteer Questionnaire had been circulated that would be used once a year to enable everyone to have a say on the work completed and how the day was run. Officers were grateful to everyone for their responses and their continued hard work on site making it better for both people and wildlife.

Members of the JMC asked for their sincere thanks and gratitude to be extended to the volunteers for their hard work, dedication and the amazing work that they undertook and discussed ways in which their appreciation could be shown. Members also stressed the importance of the walk that took place immediately before the start of the meeting and the benefits of seeing first-hand the great work that was undertaken by everyone.

RESOLVED:

- (i) That the report be noted;
- (ii) That a draft copy of The Management Plan 2023-28 be circulated to Members of the Joint Management Committee for comment;
- (iii) That Members of the Joint Management Committee feedback their comments on The Management Plan 2023-28 by the end of July 2023; and
- (iv) That a revised Management Plan 2023-28 be brought back for final agreement by the Joint Management Committee at the next meeting, scheduled for 11 October 2023, prior to consultation with other groups such as the Volunteers and Werneth Low Environment Group.

7. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

RESOLVED:

That the Joint Management Committee meets as follows:-

- 11 October 2023
- 21 February 2024

CHAIR