

Report To:	WERNETH LOW COUNTRY PARK JOINT MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE
Date:	11 October 2023
Reporting Officer:	Emma Varnam - Assistant Director, Operations and Neighbourhoods
Subject:	GREENSPACE DEVELOPMENT OFFICER'S REPORT
Report Summary:	To inform Members of activities undertaken within the Country Park since the last meeting of the Joint Management Committee (14 June 2023).
Recommendations:	That the report be noted.
Links to Community Strategy:	To ensure that the Country Park is an attractive and environmentally friendly place to visit.
Policy Implications:	The activities in the Country Park are in accordance with Council policy priorities.
Financial Implications: (Authorised by the Section 151 Officer and Chief Finance Officer)	The funding for the projects is met by the Operations and Greenspace revenue budget.
Legal Implications: (Authorised by the Borough Solicitor)	It is important that the Joint Management Committee is kept informed of activities undertaken in the Country Park.
Risk Management:	Activities in the Country Park are kept under review in order to ensure any potential risks are dealt with adequately.
Access to Information:	Background papers and information can be obtained by contacting Katie Lowry, Greenspace Development Officer,
	 phone: 07519 617 515
	 e-mail: katie.lowry@tameside.gov.uk

1. MAINTENANCE OF SITES

- 1.1 Following on from the work completed in March and April by the Tameside Council Countryside Estates Team to redesign drainage and improve surfacing from the top of Cow Lane up to the Cenotaph, more work was completed in early August to make modifications and improvements to water collection and prevent erosion.
- 1.2 The Council Grounds Maintenance Teams have been completing grass cutting on our formal areas such as the Orchard, around the Visitors Centre Car Park and picnic areas on the site along with the grass at Arnold Road Entrance.
- 1.3 The hazel coppicing project at Mousefields (No. 5), which was started in Winter 2022 was looking great in the spring and early summer, it seems however the local deer may have found it in the last few weeks and have been feasting on it. The Greenspace Officer will be reviewing the work based on this and making a new planned approach for winter 2023.
- 1.4 Efforts this year have concentrated on trying to push the Himalayan Balsam back and prevent it encroaching into new areas of the Country Park. There have been successes in the woodlands at the bottom of Baron Fields where we have seen a big reduction after efforts in that area in the last two years. This year the Greenspace Officer and Volunteers have focussed on preventing it jumping over the riding track from Higham Cottages up into the important heathland habitat, the hedgerows at the top of Baron Fields and removing it from the edges of South Meadow. Officers are grateful to members of the public and volunteers who have put extra time in this year into tackling this invasive plant.
- 1.5 The pond renovation project at the edge of Great Stone Low and New Piece has seen some life returning to the area. Continuous visits to remove Himalayan Balsam throughout the season has hopefully reduced existing seed stock in the soil for next year. With the lack of rain at the start of the summer the pond did entirely dry up, however once the rains returned Officers observed Brown Hawker Dragonflies laying eggs in August and a more diversity to the vegetation at the edge of the ponds with a lovely patch of meadow sweet popping up along with foxgloves and lots of sedges and rushes.
- 1.6 Ground Nesting Birds – Hyde War Memorial Trust commissioned new signs to be made in Spring 2023, which were made from durable materials with an attractive design and displaying a clear message to visitors. The signs were erected in the parts of the site that the ground nesting birds such as Sky Larks were occupying. Officers are grateful for the information received to help locate the nests and for volunteers for erecting the signs (numbered so they can be re-used next year) and taking them down again at the end of the season. Officers are also grateful to the vast majority of visitors, especially those with dogs, who adhered to the message to stick to paths to avoid disturbing these rare birds to help increase their numbers nationally.
- 1.7 The Country Park's wildflower meadows were looking wonderful again in mid-summer. Hay cutting was delayed until 21 August due to the continuous rainfall throughout early August. Hay was then cut, baled and removed from the Country Park by the Tenant Farmers. Some incidents with bales rolling did occur, with some damage to a dry stone wall on site. Officers will look to address this next year and put measures in place to prevent possible accidents. The young cows have now returned to site, occupying in the first instance the fields near the Visitors Centre and Spring Avenue, then to be moved around site to new pastures for the remainder of the season. The cows complete the cycle of management, grazing to remove the 'aftermath', providing disturbed soil for seeds to settle and encouraging hay meadow flowers to thrive.
- 1.8 Litter and Fly tipping incidents are still an issue with items dumped at Windy harbour and along Werneth Low Road. Volunteers from the local community along with Greenspace Volunteers regularly litter pick the site and everyone is grateful for their time and efforts.

The Greenspace Officer responds to fly tipping incidents where practicable and support is received where needed with the clear up from the Council Street Cleansing and Fly Tipping teams. All Fly tipping incidents are investigated if evidence is found.

2. PUBLIC EVENTS

- 2.1 The Cheshire Dry Stone Walling Association ran a two day course over the weekend 9-10 September 2023, posters for which are displayed on site. We also welcomed the Lancashire Dry Stone Walling Association for a weekend course on the 16 July who completed another section of the wall along the riding track at the back of New Piece field. Officers are very grateful for the improvements to the walls on site, which is achieved on these weekends. Hyde War Memorial Trust paid for the stone to be delivered to site and the site preparation costs.
- 2.2 Hyde War Memorial Trust ran another great event for this year's Peace Day ceremony on the 25 June 2023. Despite the ominous clouds building in the distance and threat of thunder and lightning, the Brass Band managed to get up and down the hill without incident. The Trust then welcomed members of the public back into the Visitors Centre after the event for light refreshments and an opportunity to chat and remember those who have been lost. Greenspace staff and volunteers also helped out with car parking and logistics.
- 2.3 The Council Culture Team ran a great event called 'Forage Delights' on Wednesday 9 August from 11-15.00 where there was natural art created, stories told and herb scented play doh was made with over 150 people who came along. Hyde War Memorial Trust also opened the café and Visitors Centre for people to use the facilities and get refreshments - a great team effort.
- 2.4 Another event; "Apples & Alchemy" at Werneth Low Country Park has been arranged by the Council Culture team on Sunday 29 October from 1100-15.00

3. THE LOWER HIGHAM VISITOR CENTRE

- 3.1 Officers note that the café is now operating every Sunday run by Volunteers from Hyde War Memorial Trust.
- 3.2 The Visitors Centre and Café have also supported other events organised and run by the Trust, which have enhanced the visitor experience and encouraged new people to visit the site and appreciate what it has on offer. The weekly 'Welly Walks' have been a great success, the Heritage Open Day in September brought 50 visitors to the site to appreciate the wonderful Heritage it has to offer with guided walks and archives to look through. There has also been visits from the Brownies, a Werneth Low Calendar Competition created and the new Facebook page which has been organised by the Trust. The Facebook page has enabled better communication to members of the public around regular activities such as farming and also when events are arranged.

4. WERNETH LOW COUNTRY PARK GREENSPACE VOLUNTEER SERVICE

- 4.1 The Greenspace Volunteers have continued to meet every Tuesday 10am till 3pm since the last report, completing various essential tasks around the site and weekly litter picking. Examples of the work completed can be found in **Appendix 1**. They have continued to use the tool stores and Garage as shelter and storage which has been working well.
- 4.2 A Volunteer 'Afternoon Tea' Celebration was arranged by Hyde War Memorial Trust on Tuesday 26 September for the Greenspace Volunteers to thank them for their contributions

to the upkeep of the site on a weekly basis. The food and cake was delicious and was very much appreciated by the volunteers as were the kind words spoken.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 As set out at the front of the report.

APPENDIX 1

Project Ref	Location	Task	Completed
1	Cow Lane Riding Track	Cut back encroaching vegetation from along the track including brambles invading the space and over hanging tree branches.	June
2	'Flaggy' Path	Cut back hedges, nettles and brambles on this narrow path to enable access to walkers.	July
3	Golf Course Riding Track- from Werneth Low Road towards the Cenotaph.	Hedge cutting- keeping this hedge trimmed to maintain a good passage for horses and when vehicles need to access this track.	July
4	Windy Harbour towards Pipers Clough	Clearance of paths, Balsam removal and digging out cross drains.	July
5	Higham Lane- crossing over the road	A gate has been installed by the Volunteers here to allow people who struggle to get over the stile an easier passage.	July
6	Higham Cottages Riding track and footpath- steps	We cleared the overgrown steps to enable ease of access for walkers, cut back over hanging branches and cleared mud from the riding tracks.	August
7	Formal gardens and Orchard	Weekly maintenance, removal of saplings coming out of flags, weeding of beds and maintaining the garden of remembrance.	Weekly
8	Higham Cottages Riding Track, Windy Harbour, Baron Fields and the small renovated pond	Himalayan Balsam removal.	Throughout the summer until mid August when setting seed.
8	Orchard Rise/Baron Fields	Clearance of the ditches and streams on site along with the pathways including at the side of the allotments.	August
9	Various	Dry Stone walling repairs, small and larger repairs needed through vandalism on site. Camping and fires on site- there have been a couple of instances of people camping and leaving burnt out tents on site- these have been cleared ASAP.	July-September
10	'Shippons'	Cleared this Heritage feature of vegetation on site ready for the Heritage Open Day	September
11	Visitors Centre Car Park and Quarry Car Park	Weekly litter pick, signs cleaned and driveway drainage maintained to keep clear.	Weekly