

WERNETH LOW COUNTRY PARK JOINT MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

11 October 2023

Commenced: 10.30 am

Terminated: 11:30am

Present: Councillors Robinson (Chair), Kitchen and Owen
Jane Durkin (Deputy Chair), Pete Ainger, Sue Ellis and Maggie Halliday

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

Apologies for Absence: Councillors Bowden, J Fitzpatrick, Roderick, Colbourne and John Bell

8. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

9. MINUTES

RESOLVED

The Minutes of the Werneth Low Country Park Joint Management Committee held on 14 June 2023 were agreed as a correct record.

10. 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 the JMC were told that, 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 had been completed in early August to make modifications and improvements to water collection and prevent erosion. It was reported that this was working well and had coped well with the recent inclement weather. Members of the Committee were encouraged to report any issues that they encountered.

The JMC were informed that the Council's Grounds Maintenance Teams had completed grass cutting on 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. The hazel coppicing project at Mousefields, which was started in Winter 2022 had looked splendid in the spring and early summer, but had unfortunately deteriorated in the past few weeks due to local deer eating the foliage. The Greenspace Officer would review the work based on this and plan a new approach for winter 2023.

The Greenspace Development Officer advised that a concerted effort to push the Himalayan Balsam back and prevent it encroaching into new areas of the Country Park had taken place with successes in the woodlands at the bottom of Baron Fields, where there had been a big reduction in

the last two years. The Greenspace Development Officer and Volunteers had focussed their efforts on preventing it encroaching 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 extended their thanks to members of the public and volunteers who had put extra time in this year into tackling this invasive plant.

An update was provided on the pond renovation project at the edge of Great Stone Low and New Piece. It was reported that some life had returned to the area with sightings of Brown Hawker Dragonflies laying eggs in August and there was more diversity to the vegetation at the edge of the pond with a patch of meadow sweet emerging alongside foxgloves and lots of sedges and rushes.

The JMC were notified that the Hyde War Memorial Trust had 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 about the presence of Ground Nesting Birds. The signs were erected in parts of the site that the ground nesting birds such as Sky Larks were occupying. Officers were grateful for the information received to help locate the nests and also to the 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 were 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.

It was reported that the Country Park's wildflower meadows were looking wonderful again in mid-summer. Hay cutting had been delayed until 21 August due to the continuous rainfall throughout early August. The hay was then cut, baled and removed from the Country Park by the Tenant Farmers. Unfortunately some incidents of bale rolling did occur, with damage to a dry stone wall on site. Officers would look to address this next year and put measures in place to prevent possible accidents. The young cows had now returned to site, occupying in the first instance the fields near the Visitors Centre and Spring Avenue, then they would be moved around site to new pastures for the remainder of the season.

The JMC were made aware that litter and fly tipping incidents unfortunately remained an issue with hotspots located at Windy harbour and along Werneth Low Road. Volunteers regularly litter pick the site and everyone was grateful for their time and efforts. The Greenspace Development Officer responded to fly tipping incidents where practicable and support was received where needed with the clear up from the Council Street Cleansing and Fly Tipping teams. All Fly tipping incidents were investigated if evidence was found.

In relation to Public Events, the Committee were informed that the Cheshire Dry Stone Walling Association ran a two-day course over the weekend 9-10 September 2023, posters for which were displayed on site. The Lancashire Dry Stone Walling Association ran a weekend course on the 16 July and completed another section of the wall along the riding track at the back of New Piece field. Officers were very grateful for the improvements to the walls on site that had been achieved on both of these weekends. It was noted that the Hyde War Memorial Trust had paid for the stone to be delivered to site and the site preparation costs.

It was reported that the Hyde War Memorial Trust ran another great event for this year's Peace Day ceremony on the 25 June 2023 with a brass band. The Trust welcomed members of the public at the Visitors Centre after the event for light refreshments and an opportunity to chat and remember those who had been lost. Greenspace staff and volunteers assisted with car parking and logistics. The Trust were congratulated for their fantastic organisation.

The Greenspace Development Officer advised that the Council's Culture Team ran a successful event called 'Forage Delights' on Wednesday 9 August from 11am to 3pm, which was attended by over 150 people, where natural art was created, stories told and herb scented playdoh was made. The Hyde War Memorial Trust opened the café and Visitors Centre for people to use the facilities and get refreshments. She was pleased to announce that another event, "Apples & Alchemy", had

been arranged by the Culture Team to be held at Werneth Low Country Park on Sunday 29 October from 11am to 3pm.

The Greenspace Development Manager told the JMC that BBC Manchester Radio had requested to do a piece on Werneth Low and she would keep them updated with the details.

With regards to the Lower Higham Visitor Centre, it was noted that the café continued to operate every Sunday and was run by volunteers from the Hyde War Memorial Trust along with supporting other events, which had enhanced the visitor experience and encouraged new people to visit the site and appreciate what was on offer. It was reported that the weekly 'Welly Walks' had been a great success, 50 visitors had attended the Heritage Open Day in September to appreciate the wonderful Heritage on offer with guided walks and archives to look through. A family orienteering day, based on a Halloween theme, was planned for 28 October. There had also been visits from the Brownies, a Werneth Low Calendar Competition, an example of which was shown to the members of the JMC, and a new Facebook page, which had been organised by the Trust. The Facebook page had enabled better communication with members of the public around regular activities such as the work undertaken on site and the dates and details of various events.

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 vegetation and hedge cutting, hedge laying, path and ditch clearance, a gate installation on Higham Lane, weekly maintenance in the formal gardens and orchard, Himalayan Balsam removal and dry stone wall repairs.

Thanks were extended to the Hyde War Memorial Trust for arranging an Afternoon Tea Celebration on Tuesday 26 September for the volunteers to thank them for their contributions to the upkeep of the site on a weekly basis. It was conveyed that the refreshments and kind words were very much appreciated by the volunteers.

The Greenspace Development Manager commended the improved communication and collaborative work between the Council and the Hyde War Memorial Trust. She thanked those who had submitted their comments on the Werneth Low Management Plan 2023-2028, which had been updated to reflect the comments, and advised that a final version of the Plan would be circulated to members of the JMC prior to consultation before formal adoption at the next meeting of the JMC, scheduled for 21 February 2024.

The Chair requested an update on the Joint Management Agreement. The Greenspace Development Manager advised that she had received it back from the Trust and would forward it onto the Council's legal team to review the comments. She further advised that a meeting of the Working Group needed to be convened imminently and asked for confirmation of membership from Tameside MBC and Hyde War Memorial Trust, who had equal representation on the Working Group.

RESOLVED:

- (i) That the report be noted;
- (ii) That a final version of The Management Plan 2023-2028 be circulated to Members of the Joint Management Committee prior to consultation with other groups;
- (iii) That The Management Plan 2023-2028 be brought to the next meeting of the Joint Management Committee, scheduled for 21 February 2024, for formal adoption by the Committee;
- (iv) That the three representatives from Hyde War Memorial Trust be confirmed to the Greenspace Development Manager;
- (v) That the three representatives from Tameside MBC be confirmed to the Greenspace Development Manager; and

- (vi) That a meeting of the Working Group be arranged at the earliest possible convenience for all parties.

11. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

RESOLVED:

That the Joint Management Committee meets as follows:-

- 21 February 2024

CHAIR