

**Report To:** **WERNETH LOW COUNTRY PARK JOINT MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE**

**Date:** 24 July 2017

**Reporting Officer:** Ian Saxon – Assistant Executive Director, Place  
David Cannon – Greenspace Development Officer

**Subject:** **ANNUAL REPORT 2016/17**

**Report Summary:** To inform Members of activities undertaken within the Country Park during the period 2016/17.

**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:** The funding for the projects is met from existing budgets.  
**(Authorised by the Section 151 Officer)**

**Legal Implications:** It is important that the Joint Management Committee is kept informed of activities undertaken in the Country Park.  
**(Authorised by the Borough Solicitor)**

**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 David Cannon, Greenspace Development Officer:

 phone: 0161 368 6667

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# **Werneth Low** **Country Park**

**Annual Report**  
**2016/2017**



**WERNETH LOW COUNTRY PARK JOINT MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE**  
**(TAMESIDE COUNCIL AND HYDE WAR MEMORIAL TRUST)**



## CONTENTS:

## Page:

1.	WERNETH LOW – A HISTORY	3.
2.	WERNETH LOW – SITE INFORMATION	4.
3.	VISION FOR WERNETH LOW COUNTRY PARK	5.
4.	MANAGING THE COUNTRY PARK	6.
5.	INVOLVING THE COMMUNITY	7.
6.	CONSERVING HABITATS AND WILDLIFE	8.
7.	PROVIDING A QUALITY SERVICE	9.
8.	PLANNED DEVELOPMENTS FOR 2017/2018	9.
9.	HOW MUCH DOES IT COST	9.

## APPENDICES:

1.	List of Staff and Volunteers at Werneth Low Country Park 2016/2017	10.
2.	Minor Works Programme 2016/2017	11.

(Front cover photograph: Peace Day Service at the Cenotaph 26<sup>th</sup> June 2016).



## 1. Werneth Low – A History

Werneth Low is an area rich in history and interest. The story of this special place begins over 4,000 years in the Bronze Age when the Low was used as an outdoor Cathedral for worship and burials.

Tribal Britons were defeated in a great battle fought on Werneth Low as the Roman occupation of Britain spread north. A Romano-British fort was built which included a system of ditches and earthworks.

Werneth is mentioned in the Domesday Survey of 1086 as *Warnet* where it is described as waste, containing woodland three leagues long and two leagues wide and was assessed at 1 Virgate. It was held before 1066, by a free man as a manor, and probably formed part of the Anglo-Saxon Lordship of Longdendale. By 1086 it was held directly by the Earl of Chester.

The manor of Werneth is first recorded as belonging to the Higham family as early as 1330. This family were referred to as freeholders in Werneth by 1445 when a John Higham was listed amongst the knights, gentleman and freeholders of Cheshire.

For the Medieval period the survival of extensive ridge and furrow earthworks, coupled with early field boundaries and farm sites, make the Werneth Low landscape one of the best surviving medieval areas in Greater Manchester.

The best known landmark on Werneth Low is the stone Cenotaph commemorating the 710 lives lost in the Great War 1914 to 1919. The majority of those killed were in the Cheshire Regiment in the years 1916 and 1917. The loss of so many from such a small town as Hyde was devastation. At a council meeting in the Mayor's Parlour at Hyde Town Hall on 3rd March 1920 it was decided to remember those fallen soldiers, sailors and airmen from Hyde by purchasing by public subscription the Lower Higham Farm Estate. The land to be kept open and free for the ***“health and recreation of the people of Hyde”***.

The Hyde War Memorial Committee reported to the townspeople of Hyde ***“Those who lived through the war will not forget but those who come after us should be reminded of the sacrifices which have been made”***

The appeal for public subscriptions raised by the end of May 1920, £14,013 14s. 8d.

The Lower Higham farm and land was purchased for £4,000 and the memorial cenotaph was erected at a cost of £2,000.

The Cenotaph was unveiled on the 25<sup>th</sup> June 1921 by Mrs Evelyn Welch, built of Grey Cornish Granite the total weight is 34 tons. It was designed by Messrs J. Whitehead & Sons of London.



**Unveiling of the Cenotaph 25<sup>th</sup> June 1921**

## **2. Werneth Low – Site Information**

### **Location and Size**

Werneth Low Country Park is located 15km (9½ miles) east of the city centre of Manchester on the edge of the Pennines. All the land in the Country Park is in the Borough of Tameside. The town of Hyde, along with the villages of Gee Cross and Newton, are just 2.5km (1½ miles) away to the west.

The Country Park consists of approximately 81 hectares (200 acres) of hilltop and hillside.

### **Ownership**

60 hectares (150 acres) belong to the Hyde War Memorial Trust, including the visitor centre building. Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council owns the remaining 21 hectares (50 acres) of land in the park.

### **Creation of the Country Park**

The Country Park was officially established in 1980 when the Hyde War Memorial Trust and Tameside MBC and the Greater Manchester Council entered into a formal agreement relating to the management of the park. Responsibilities relating to the Greater Manchester County Council were passed on to Tameside MBC in 1986 when the County Council was abolished.



**View from Werneth Low across the Cheshire Plain October 2016**

### 3. Vision for Werneth Low Country Park

The Vision for Werneth Low Country Park is of a place where landscape and nature conservation and informal countryside recreation are in balance. It is a place where natural beauty is enhanced, where wildlife will thrive, and where visitors, regardless of their ability or background, can spend an enjoyable and fulfilling time. It is a place that is cared for and looked after, not just for now but for future generations.

#### Country Park Overall Aims:

1. To manage the Country Park in a way that sustains and improves the quality and variety of its wildlife and landscape, and where recreation activity is in harmony with this.
2. To facilitate access for all, irrespective of ability or background.
3. To manage the Country Park for its cultural and historic importance.
4. To engender an understanding of the various aspects of the Country Park through programmes of lifelong learning.
5. To provide a high quality service to visitors, involving them in decision making about how the Country Park is run.
6. To maintain a safe and health environment, befitting the Country Park.

#### These general management aims are supported by the Tameside Greenspace Service Priorities:

1. Improving the quality of Greenspace for residents.
2. Building capacity amongst Friends Groups and Volunteers.
3. Conserving the natural environment and increasing biodiversity.
4. Maximising opportunities to improve the health of all residents.
5. Developing opportunities to bring in external funding.



**The New Year's Walk January 2017**

## 4. Managing the Country Park

The Country Park is formally managed by the Werneth Low Country Park Joint Management Committee. The Committee is made up of Trustees of the Hyde War Memorial Trust and elected members of Tameside MBC. The Committee meets three times a year and the Greenspace Development Manager, and Greenspace Development Officer, report directly to the Joint Committee.

The Werneth Low Country Park Joint Management Committee receives reports from its officers concerning the care and maintenance of the Park's fabric and infrastructure ensuring the area is safe and in good condition. The Committee issues instructions to its officers to implement programmes of management, which at times involves outside organisations such as approved contractors.

Programmes of management are produced annually, and triggered by the Country Park Business Plan. The funding of projects is a mixture of both joint and individual organisations which include Tameside Council and The Hyde War Memorial Trust.

All the maintenance of sites programmes are linked directly to conserving and maintaining local distinctiveness and spirit of place.

### 2016/2017 Highlights

- Annual programme of grass cutting footpaths, picnic sites, cenotaph area, car parks and areas around the visitor centre completed during April to October.
- The Hyde War Memorial Trust funded the installation of 38 metres of new steps at the Mottram Old Road access point.  
**Cost: £3,524.**
- Tameside Council funded the purchase of new fruit trees for the Orchard at Lower Higham, and the purchase of shrubs and spring bulbs for the gardens around the Visitor Centre. **Cost: £1,213.**



- **New steps at the Mottram Old Road access point.**

## 5. Involving the Community

Involving the community plays a crucial part in securing the wellbeing of the Country Park. It is an objective that is at the very heart of our management philosophy.

Examples of community involvement include: The Country Park Volunteers Service, The Hyde War Memorial Trust, Tenant Farmers, and other tenants of Country Park land such as Werneth Low Golf Club.

The Public Events programme provides an excellent opportunity for people to come together and experience the delights of the outdoors.

### 2016/2017 Highlights

- We welcomed **3,519** people to the Lower Higham Visitor Centre (Previous year's total: **4,072**).
- The Country Park Greenspace Volunteers completed in total **4,101** work hours (Previous year's total: **3,940** work hours). See Appendix 1. and Appendix 2.
- Using an electronic counter on the footpath from Lower Higham to the Cenotaph the total number of visitors recorded from April 2016 to March 2017 was **57,328** (Previous year's total: **64,828**). On the footpath near Quarry Car Park the total number recorded for the same period was **53,286** (Previous year's total **62,402**).
- During the year the Greenspace Development Officer organized **11** events at which **284** people attended (Previous year's total: **11** events at which **1,135** people attended).



**The All Day Ramble to Mottram Church 4<sup>th</sup> December 2016**



## 6. Conserving Habitats and Wildlife

In January 2010 Werneth Low Country Park, in partnership with Natural England, began a new management agreement for wildlife nature conservation. This new Environmental Stewardship agreement covers the years 2010 to 2020 and it has five primary objectives:

- Wildlife conservation
- Maintenance and enhancement of landscape quality and character
- Natural resource protection
- Protection of the historic environment; and
- Promotion of public access and understanding of the countryside

Environmental Stewardship – Higher Level agreements are only suitable for land that is of “*significant environmental interest*” so to receive this agreement is confirmation that past management of Country Park land has been correct.

The agreement is implemented through a programme of annual works and during the period of this report we have been fully compliant.

### 2016/2017 Highlights

- Environmental Stewardship agreement 7<sup>th</sup> year compliant securing **£2,175** of grant income.
- Environmental Stewardship grant income to date since commencement of agreement in January 2010 **£36,983**.
- Maintained field boundary habitats, both hedgerows and dry stone walls.
- Maintained all Sites of Biological importance and undertook removal of non-native invasive weeds from adjoining areas.



**South Meadow 286 metres of Hedgelaying completed by Mike Kelly - Volunteer  
September 2016 to March 2017**

## 7. Providing a Quality Service

We work in close partnership with visitors, the local community, groups and organisations and we listen very carefully to their comments, suggestions and ideas. The Lower Higham Visitor Centre, staffed by volunteers, has continued to be open every week throughout the period of this report. The Centre remains the main focal point for visitors for information and assistance.

### Planned Developments 2017/2018

- Complete Year 8 of the Environmental Stewardship Agreement.
- Complete the 2017/2018 Maintenance of Sites Programme.
- Complete the 2017/2018 Wildlife Nature Conservation Programme.
- Complete programme of repairs to footpaths and riding track network.

### How Much Does it Cost

During the period of this report the costs of looking after Werneth Low Country Park was provided from the Greenspace Development Budget of Tameside Council with contributions from the Hyde War Memorial Trust. Based on past expenditure and this year's financial accounts it has cost around **£53,000** to run the Country Park during 2016 to 2017. This works out at about **23p** a year for each person over the age of 18 who live in Tameside. The costs are for:

- Maintaining the Country Park.
- Organising public event programmes.
- Promoting the Country Park locally and regionally.
- Delivering visitor services including the Visitor Centre.
- Staff Salaries.



**Dry Stone Walling Weekend at Hackingknife Meadow September 2016**

# Appendices

## Appendix 1.

### List of Staff and Volunteers at Werneth Low Country Park 2016 -2017:

**Nicola Marshall** – Tameside Greenspace Development Manager

**David Cannon** – Tameside Greenspace Development Officer

### Greenspace Volunteers:

**Anita Allan**

**Alan Bamforth**

**Norman Bamforth**

**Mark Bruniges**

**Colin Bates**

**Dorothy Hollingworth**

**John Jones**

**Mike Kelly**

**Raymond Knowles**

**Linda Mellor**

**Denis Middleton**

**Rob Nicholls**

**Ross Pape**

**Hazel Shepherdson**

**Sam Simpson**

**Maurice Smith**



## Appendix 2.

### Maintenance of Sites Programme, Greenspace Volunteers, October 2016 – March 2017

Project	Location	Task
1	Lower Higham Gardens	Plant 1,000 Pseudo narcissi
2	Lower Higham Gardens	Plant 3,000 Snowdrops in the green
3	Lower Higham Gardens	Plant 600 Tulip bulbs
4	Lower Higham - Cow Lane	Cut back, prune hedgerow and sweep lane, clean-out grids
5	Cenotaph Area	Cut grass/edge off. Clean area ready for Remembrance Day
6	Lower Higham Gardens	Clean borders and prune shrubs ready for Remembrance Day
7	Lower Higham Orchard	Plant six fruit trees
8	Lower Higham Car Park	Prune all borders
9	Lower Higham Orchard	Cut Back 40 metres of hedgerow
10	Flaggy Path Hedgerow	Cut Back 124 metres of hedgerow
11	QCP Picnic Area	Cut Back 54 metres of hedgerow
12	Lower Higham Car Park	Cut Back 20 metres of hedgerow
13	Ash Cottage Picnic Area	Cut Back 46 metres of hedgerow
14	Holy Trinity Paddock	Cut Back 60 metres of hedgerow
15	Riding Track	Cut Back 140 metres of hedgerow
16	Higham Lane	Cut Back 298 metres of hedgerow
17		<b>Total Hedge Cutting 812 metres</b>
18	South Meadow	286 metres of hedgelaying by Mike Kelly
19	Quarry Car Park	Plant 2,000 Pseudo narcissi
20	All Sites	Complete control of non-native invasive plant species
21	Baron Fields Woodlands	Selective thinning especially along rights of way
22	Baron Fields Woodlands	Clear drains on Baron Road to Aspland Road footpath
23	Country Park Waymarking	Audit of Country Park Signs
24	Country Park	Completed weekly litter patrols of all sites





**Remembrance Garden, Lower Higham Visitor Centre, June 2016.**

**David Cannon  
Tameside Greenspace Development Officer  
(April 2017).**

**(All the photographs in this report were taken April 2016 to March 2017).**

