

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

Date: 16 July 2018

Reporting Officer: Ian Saxon, Director of Operations and Greenspace
David Cannon, Greenspace Development Officer

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 (19 February 2018).

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 by the Operations and Greenspace revenue budget.
(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,

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1. MAINTENANCE OF SITES

- 1.1 The summer grass cutting programme for 2018 started in April. The programme includes the grass cutting of the Lower Higham Visitor Centre area, car parks, access points, picnic areas and strips along footpaths. The cost of this programme of maintenance is paid by Tameside Council.
- 1.2 We have now received quotations from our contractors in regards to a small number of projects. The projects and costs are as follows:-
- Resurfacing the footpath from Lower Higham to the Hackingknife: **Cost: £6,384.**
 - Resurfacing the footpath from the Cenotaph across Hackingknife Meadow: **Cost: £3,327.**
 - Reforming ditches along Riding Track alongside Golf Course: **Cost: £300.**
 - Repairing 30 metres of drystone walling at Quarry Car Park: **Cost: £4,860.**
 - Installing new drainage at Baron Fields: **Cost: £580.**
- 1.3 The Operations Maintenance Team are undertaking two projects in the Country Park this summer. At Ash Cottage Picnic area on Higham Lane they will be installing new steps, and at Lower Higham they will be replacing a wooden seat.

2. ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP – HIGHER LEVEL AGREEMENT 2010 – 2020 UPDATE

- 2.1 Environmental Stewardship agreements have 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”.

- 2.2 Since the agreement started in January 2010 the Country Park has received in total to date £42,420 of grant income from Natural England.
- 2.3 At the time of this report the Country Park is compliant with all aspects of this agreement.

3. PUBLIC EVENTS

- 3.1. The winter/spring 2017 to 2018 programme of events at Werneth Low Country Park came to an end in April. The attendance was as follows:-

Date	Event	Attendance
17 December 2017	Christmas Ramble Around Werneth Low	34
28 January 2018	New Year's Ramble Around Werneth Low	27
25 March 2018	Roman History of Werneth Low Walk	26
1 April 2018	Easter Egg Hunt	485
30 April 2018	Ramble to Chadkirk Chapel	23
Total		595

- 3.2 The summer 2018 programme of public events is currently underway. The programme includes Flora Walks, a History Walk, a Poetry Walk and an all-day ramble to Cown Edge. All the events will be included in Tameside's Greenspace publications and social media platforms.

4. WERNETH LOW COUNTRY PARK GREENSPACE VOLUNTEER SERVICE

- 4.1 Since the last meeting of the Country Park Joint Management Committee the volunteers have held 3 meetings. The volunteers assist the Greenspace Development Officer with public events, the maintenance and general upkeep of sites and staffing the visitor centre. There are at present 16 members in the volunteer service.
- 4.2 The Greenspace Volunteers are very busy through the summer on a multitude of projects and none more important than the control of non-native invasive flowers. The main species is Himalayan Balsam, which if left unchecked will choke out native wildflowers. We monitor the amount of time site by site and record the data on a spreadsheet. This information is analysed at the end of the year, which enables us to decide the most important sites to attack the following year and to give an overall picture of the problem the Country Park faces from these dangerous weeds. The target spreadsheet for this year can be found in **Appendix 1** at the end of this report.
- 4.3 In 2007 the Country Park replaced all its post and wire stock proof fencing right across land belonging to both Tameside Council and the Hyde War Memorial Trust. This capital expenditure was secured by the Joint Committee from Council funds and the total cost for replacing 4,693 metres was £25,248. At this time suppliers of treated timbers had without consultation changed the chemical compounds of the timber preservation treatment. The outcome of this action has been the significant reduction in the viability of outdoor land management timbers such as post and wire fencing. Following a survey of the Country Park we are now in the process of replacing fencing posts the number of which amounts to many hundreds. This work is being undertaken by the Park's Volunteer Service.

5. PEACE DAY SERVICE OF REMEMBRANCE 2018 – 1 JULY 2018

- 5.1 On a wonderfully sunny afternoon 50 people gathered at the Cenotaph to remember the 710 men from Hyde who perished in The Great War 1914 - 1919. This service of remembrance commemorates the date of the signing of the Peace Treaty of 1919 at Versailles, which was the formal end of The First World War. Of the 710 men the youngest was Harry Whittaker aged 15 and the oldest William Sawyer aged 65.

6. THE LOWER HIGHAM VISITOR CENTRE

6.1 The number of visitors to Lower Higham is as follows:-

Month	Lower Higham Visitor Centre
January	201
February	158
March	164
April	852
May	125
June	220
July	-
August	-
September	-
October	-
November	-
December	-
2018 Totals	1,720
Previous Years Total:	3,680

6.2 On the 17 of April the 11th Alder School Cross Country Run around Werneth Low Country Park was completed. This annual event raises thousands of pounds for The Christie Hospital in Manchester and is a great link between our local schools and the Country Park.

6.3 In June sixty children from Leigh Street Primary School visited Werneth Low Country Park as part of their local geography project. The Visitor Centre was used as a base and the children had a splendid day exploring the area and taking in the panoramic views on a fine summer's day.

7. WILDLIFE NATURE CONSERVATION

7.1 The Country Park's hay meadows have once again delivered a colourful seasonal display of grasses and wildflowers. At more locations around the Country Park Southern Marsh Orchids (*Dactylorhiza praetermissa*) have been found. This species is well distributed throughout the south of England as far north as North-east Yorkshire but is absent from Scotland and Ireland where it is replaced by the Northern Marsh Orchid. The presence of such special wild flowers in the Park's hay meadows is a reassuring point that our sympathetic environmental management is helping to conserve this increasingly rare habitat. The meadows are also a major visitor attraction for those with an interest in wildlife nature conservation.

7.2 Earlier in the summer, around the Lower Higham area, Common Grasshopper Warblers (*Locustella naevia*) have been heard making their distinctive territorial call. These birds breed across much of temperate Europe and western Asia. They are migratory, wintering in north and west Africa. The genus name *Locustella* is from Latin and is a diminutive of *locusta*, "grasshopper". Like the English name, this refers to the characteristic insect-like song of the common grasshopper warbler and some others in this genus. This small passerine bird is found in short dense vegetation, often close to water. It is a medium-sized warbler about 13 cm (5 in) long. The adult has streaked brown back and whitish grey underparts, which are un-streaked except on the undertail coverts. The sexes are identical, as with most warblers, but young birds are yellower below. Like most warblers, it is insectivorous. Four to seven eggs are laid in a nest on or near the ground in thick

vegetation or in a tussock of grass. This is a species which skulks in the undergrowth, creeping through bushes and low foliage and is very difficult to see except sometimes when singing from a prominent position. The song, which gives this species its name, is a monotonous mechanical insect-like reeling, often given at dawn or dusk.

