

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

Date: 25 July 2016

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

Subject: **ANNUAL REPORT 2015/16**

Report Summary: To inform Members of activities undertaken within the Country Park during the period 2015/16.

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)** The funding for the projects is met from existing budgets.

**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 David Cannon, Greenspace Development Officer:

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Werneth Low **Country Park**

Annual Report
2015/2016



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



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(Front cover photograph: Common Spotted Orchids, Higher Higham Meadows – June 2015)



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 25th June 1921 by Mrs Stanley 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 25th 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.



Higher Higham Meadows June 2015

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.



View towards the Cenotaph from Higham Lane March 2016

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 Management Plan guides the work of the Joint Committee in safeguarding and protecting all land in the Park. The document covers the years 2011 to 2016. It includes an annual programme of management prescriptions which filter down to action undertaken by the Greenspace Development Officer, Greenspace Volunteers, contractors working on behalf of the Joint Management Committee and other partners with an interest or connection with the Country Park.

In 2016 the Country Park Management Plan will be reviewed in full and a new Management Plan will be redrawn and adopted. All the maintenance of sites programmes are linked directly to conserving and maintaining local distinctiveness and spirit of place.

2015/2016 Highlights

- Annual programme of grass cutting footpaths, picnic sites, cenotaph area, car parks and areas around the visitor centre completed during April to October.
- At Baron Fields Tameside Council and the Hyde War Memorial Trust funded the resurfacing of all the footpaths and the installation of new drainage.
Cost: **£6,366**
- The Hyde War Memorial Trust funded the purchase of new stone for 2 dry stone walling training weekends where 30 metres of new wall was built.
Cost: **£650**.
- Completed Minor Works Programme of replacing gates, stiles, fencing and bench seating.
- Revised and updated Werneth Low Country Park Management Plan 2011 – 2016.



Baron Fields Footpath Improvements August 2015

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. To have the collective support and understanding of our local community is a major asset.

We work with and assist a wide range of community partners: Trustees of the Hyde War Memorial Trust, Tenant Farmers, other tenants of Country Park land such as Werneth Low Golf Club, schools and colleges, organisations such as Cub and Scout groups, residents of the area and local businesses. Working and engaging directly with these groups forges understanding and partnerships that have positive and rewarding outcomes.

Mention must also be made of our public events programmes which provide excellent opportunities for people to meet each other and learn about the place where they live.

2015/2016 Highlights

- We welcomed **4,072** people to the Lower Higham Visitor Centre (Previous year's total: **4,010**).
- The Country Park Greenspace Volunteers completed in total **3,940** work hours (Previous year's total: **4,908** work hours). See Appendix and Appendix 2.
- Using an electronic counter on the footpath from Lower Higham to the Cenotaph the total number of visitors recorded from April 2015 to March 2016 was **64,828** (Previous year's total: **61,870**). On the footpath near Quarry Car Park the total number recorded for the same period was **62,402** (Previous year's total **55,684**). For more information see Appendix 3.
- During the year the Greenspace Development Officer organized **11** events at which **1,135** people attended (Previous year's total: **12** events at which **871** people attended).



The 27th Cown Edge Ramble September 2015

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.

Informal countryside recreation and wildlife nature conservation on the surface seem to be incompatible elements. Promoting access while at the same time working to conserve wildlife is a constant challenge. Engaging with and informing visitors about a wide range of conservation matters helps resolve conflicts of interests. We install information signs around the Country Park in spring asking people not to wander through farmed meadows thus reducing disturbance to ground nesting birds. Such simple yet effective measures as these have a positive and beneficial impact.

2015/2016 Highlights

- Environmental Stewardship agreement 6th year compliant securing **£3,987** of grant income.
- Environmental Stewardship grant income to date since commencement of agreement in January 2010 **£34,805**.
- Implemented all wildlife nature conservation items from the Werneth Low Country Park Management Plan 2011 – 2016.
- Maintained all Sites of Biological importance and undertook removal of non-native invasive weeds from adjoining areas.



**Rig Field Meadow 252 metres of Hedgelaying
September 2015 to March 2016**

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.

Continual improvement philosophy underpins our approach in a myriad of matters. The redrafting of the Country Park Management Plan will be an important milestone in the year to come, and this document will guide the future direction of the Country Park in the immediate years up to 2020 when the present formal Country Park Management Agreement comes to an end.

Planned Developments 2016/2017

- Redraft the Werneth Low Country Park Management Plan.
- Complete Year 7 of the Environmental Stewardship Agreement.
- Complete the 2016/2017 Maintenance of Sites Programme.
- Complete the 2016/2017 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 **£68,000** to run the Country Park during 2015 to 2016. This works out at about **33p** 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 May 2015

Appendices

Appendix 1

List of Staff and Volunteers at Werneth Low Country Park 2015 -2016:

Nicola Marshall – Tameside Greenspace Development Manager

David Cannon – Tameside Greenspace Development Officer

Greenspace Volunteers:

Anita Allen

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 2015 – March 2016

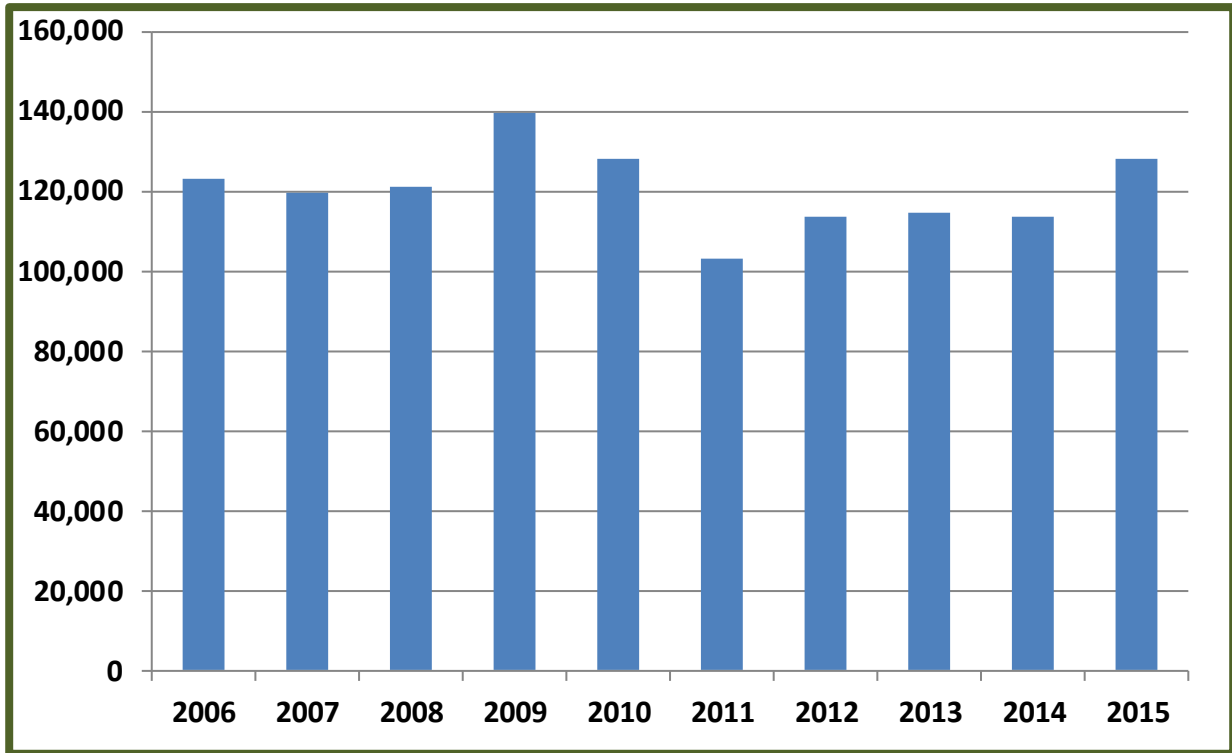
Project	Location	Task
1	Lower Higham Gardens	New planting in Wildflower Garden
2	Lower Higham - Cow Lane	Cut back, prune hedgerow and sweep lane, clean-out grids
3	Cenotaph Area	Cut grass/edge off. Clean area ready for Remembrance Day
4	Lower Higham Gardens	Clean borders and prune shrubs ready for Remembrance Day
5	Lower Higham Gardens	Plant 3,000 Snowdrops in the green
6	Lower Higham Main Drive	Crown lift evergreen trees
7	Hackingknife Woodland	Selective thinning
8	Lower Higham Car Park	Prune all borders
9	Flaggy Path Hedgerow	Cut back 124 metres of hedgerow
10	QCP Picnic Area	Cut back 54 metres of hedgerow
11	Lower Higham Drive	Cut back 30 metres of hedgerow
12	Ash Cottage Picnic Area	Cut back 46 metres of hedgerow
13	Holy Trinity Paddock	Cut back 60 metres of hedgerow
14	Riding Track	Cut back 140 metres of hedgerow
15	Earl of Warrington Meadow	Grub out 128 metres of new laid hedgerow
16	Higham Lane	298 metres of hedge cutting layed hedgerow
17	Rig Field Meadow	252 metres of Hedgelaying
18	Baron Fields Woodlands	Coppice Hazel trees in Memorial Coppice
19	Baron Fields Woodlands	Selective thinning especially along rights of way
20	Baron Fields Woodlands	Clear drains on Baron Road to Aspland Road footpath
21	Baron Fields Woodlands	Clear out Brambles from beneath Oak trees
22	Lower Higham Orchard	Prune fruit trees
23	Country Park Waymarking	Audit of Country Park Signs
24	Country Park	Completed weekly litter patrols of all sites



Appendix 3

**Bar Chart of combined visitor numbers on footpaths at Lower Higham and Quarry Car Park
January to December 2006 to 2015.**

Total: 1,205,168





Remembrance Service at the Cenotaph 8th November 2015.

**David Cannon
Tameside Greenspace Development Officer
(April 2016).**

(All the photographs in this report were taken April 2015 to March 2016).

