

Public Document Pack



ASHTON-UNDER-LYNE · AUDENSHAW · DENTON · DROYLSDEN · DUKINFIELD · HYDE · LONGDENDALE · MOSSLEY · STALYBRIDGE

WERNETH LOW COUNTRY PARK JOINT MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

Day: Wednesday
Date: 22 February 2023
Time: 10.30 am
Place: Lower Higham Visitor Centre - Werneth Low Country Park

Item No.	AGENDA	Page No
1.	APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE To receive any apologies for the meeting from Members of the Joint Committee.	
2.	DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST To receive any declarations of interest from Members of the Joint Committee.	
3.	MINUTES The Minutes of the proceedings of the previous meeting of the Werneth Low Country Park Joint Management Committee held on 30 November 2022 to be approved as a correct record.	1 - 6
4.	GREENSPACE DEVELOPMENT OFFICER'S REPORT To consider the report of the Greenspace Development Officer.	7 - 10
5.	DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS To note the provisional dates of future meetings to be held on:- <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 21 June 2023• 11 October 2023• 21 February 2024	

From: Democratic Services Unit – any further information may be obtained from the reporting officer or from Charlotte Forrest, Senior Democratic Services Officer, 0161 342 2346 or charlotte.forrest@tameside.gov.uk, to whom any apologies for absence should be notified.

This page is intentionally left blank

Agenda Item 3.

WERNETH LOW COUNTRY PARK JOINT MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

30 November 2022

Commenced: 2.00 pm

Terminated: 3.15 pm

Present: Councillors Colbourne, Cooper, Owen, Robinson and Roderick
Mr Ainger, Mrs Durkin, Mrs Ellis and Miss Halliday

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

Apologies for Absence: Councillor Kitchen and Mr Bell

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

2. MINUTES

The Minutes of the Werneth Low Country Park Joint Management Committee held on 23 February 2022 were agreed as a correct record.

3. MEMBERSHIP OF THE JOINT MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE 2022/23

It was reported that the following representatives had been appointed to serve on the Joint Management Committee for the Municipal Year 2022/23:-

Representing Tameside MBC –

Councillors Bowden, Colbourne, Cooper, Kitchen, Owen, Robinson and Roderick

Hyde War Memorial Trust –

Messrs Ainger, Bell, Mrs Durkin, Mrs Ellis and Ms Halliday

4. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR AND DEPUTY CHAIR FOR 2022/23

RESOLVED:

- (i) That Mrs Jane Durkin, Hyde War Memorial Trust, be appointed Chair of the Joint Management Committee for 2022/23.
- (ii) That Councillor Peter Robinson, Tameside MBC, be appointed Deputy Chair of the Joint Management Committee for 2022/23.

5. HYDE WAR MEMORIAL TRUST UPDATE

The Greenspace Development Manager submitted a report that provided an update to members of the Joint Management Committee on the changes that had taken place in Trustee membership at Hyde War Memorial Trust.

The report detailed that at the Annual General Meeting of Hyde War Memorial Trust, which took place on 21 July 2022, there had been 12 Trustees appointed and a new Chair and Secretary were

also appointed. Officers were committed to working with the Trust and had met twice with the new Chair, Secretary and other Trustees on an informal basis to agree best ways of communicating and to understand the respective roles of Officers and Trustees.

The Chair provided a further update and notified the Joint Management Committee that eight priorities had been agreed for the Trust, as follows:-

- Undertake a full governance review, in order to produce an updated operating framework
- Commission an independent full financial audit
- Finalise the Joint Management Agreement
- Develop a 5 year Environment Strategy
- Produce an Events Plan for 2022-23 that also identified opportunities to expand the use of the Visitors Centre
- Create an Estate plan
- Improve Trust communications
- Implement an operating structure and finance arrangements for the cafe

The Trust met on a monthly basis and numerous sub-groups had been established in order to carry out the eight priorities – Finance and Governance, Environment, Estates, Café 710 and Events. Updates from each sub-group were provided in turn.

With regards to Finance and Governance, it was reported that the Trust had become a member of the National Council for Voluntary Organisations in August 2022 and a governance review, led by the National Council for Voluntary Organisations, would commence in December 2022 with an expected completion date of Easter 2023. Independent advice had been sought on an audit, with a full audit expected in the 2023/24 financial year, and an independent bookkeeper had been appointed.

In terms of the Environment, thanks were extended to the Greenspace team for the invaluable work they carried out and the Trust welcomed the partnership with the Werneth Low Environment Group, and were represented at meetings. Constructive discussions had been held with Werneth Low Golf Club on topics such as Himalayan Balsam, reeds and dry stone wall repairs. An agreement on farm tenancy was in place until the end of 2023 and negotiations would commence at the start of 2023 on renewal.

With regards to Estates, there were a large amount of Trust assets and it was planned to commence a review of the ground rents and leases at the start of 2023. A lawyer had been instructed to advise on obligations under charity law. The flat tenancy at the Visitor Centre would continue and a full structural survey had been undertaken in August 2022, which would inform a long-term maintenance / development plan for the building. The Cenotaph was due to be inspected by the Council.

The Joint Management Committee were notified that the Café at the Visitor Centre (recently named Café 710) had been trading on Sundays since May 2022 and was run by volunteers, making it financially viable. Any profit had been reinvested into equipment and accessories. There had been a marked increase in footfall with positive feedback and reviews left on social media and it was seen as a 'hub' by the community with many members accessing the facility. Further investment was required in the fixtures and fittings, which would be carried out in time.

Finally, in terms of Events, an afternoon tea had been held for the Greenspace team in October; another successful Remembrance Sunday service was held in November; a Greater Manchester Orienteering event was also held in November; and Age UK Dementia walking group met each month.

It was reported that there had been increased community engagement; a new Facebook page had been launched in September; the noticeboards within the Country Park had been renovated and the Trust would build on relationships with local schools and uniformed organisations.

The Chair of the Joint Management Committee was thanked for an insightful and informative update and praise was bestowed upon the Trust for an excellent Remembrance Sunday event. Members of the Joint Management Committee expressed their disappointment on behalf of residents that the event in the Country Park to mark the Queen's Platinum Jubilee on 2 June 2022 was not public. The Greenspace Development Manager explained that this was due to health and safety as access to the event was via uneven footpaths in the dark and offered to circulate the official response with regards to this.

RESOLVED:
That the update be noted.

6. 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.

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 it was reported that the Greenspace Development Officer had undertaken chainsaw training during the Summer months, which would allow more self-sufficiency to react to fallen trees on site and undertake other woodland management work.

A site inspection was carried out in April 2022 and it was found that many of the gates and stiles were in a poor condition. The Tameside Council Countryside Estates Team were engaged to undertake replacement and refurbishment works at several places across the site. New stiles and supporting fencing had been installed along the path down the edge of Higham Lane and near the Cenotaph to ensure horses did not access this area from the bridle path.

The Council Grounds Maintenance Teams had continued with the grass cutting programme on site, which had now been completed for the year. There were some issues with the width of the opening into the picnic area at Beasoms Lane, which meant this area unfortunately did not get cut. The entrance will be widened next year to ensure the new mowers can fit through. The cutting of some of the meadows had been problematic again this year with contractors not cutting at an appropriate time of year for the habitat and species in these areas due to lack of communication. Every effort would be made to prevent this happening again in future.

The rabbit population remained high, as seen by the damage in certain areas of the site. The volunteers, along with local horse riders, had filled some of the more problematic holes; such as in the riding track up from Higham Cottages and around the cenotaph, where risk of injury was higher.

Thanks were extended to Greenspace Officer John Courtman for spraying the Japanese Knotweed on Orchard Rise for a second day this year. Residents contacted the Council and the area was treated. As previously reported, a licence for spraying herbicide near water courses was applied for and granted by the Environment Agency for this area and would be monitored for regrowth and treated again if necessary in the coming year.

A review of the Site Risk Assessment was carried out and shared with the Hyde War Memorial Trust (HWMT). Consequently a meeting was arranged with the HWMT farming contractor to consider and review the Health and Safety practices of the work on site. Posters had been erected at the

entrances of the fields where the cows were grazing on the site to warn members of the public of their presence, especially those with dogs. The cattle were all young and had been selected by the farmer on their behaviour to try and reduce risk. During the dry weather at the start of the grazing season, bowzers were brought onto site to ensure the cattle had drinking water, which were situated safely at the edge of the field. Work would continue to improve practices in future.

Litter and fly tipping incidents remained high and there had been continued antisocial behaviour through the summer, with groups of youths gathering and destroying walls. A local resident raised concerns about the ditch next to land close to Windy Harbour, as cars had been driving onto this area during the summer months. Investigations would be carried out with a view to increasing the depth and width of this ditch to prevent this from happening again. All fly tipping incidents were investigated and the Council Street Cleansing and Fly Tipping teams supported with the clear up.

Himalayan Balsam was continuing to advance and claim new areas of the site despite many hours put into control methods by the Greenspace Volunteers. 'Best Practice' documents had been shared with HWMT to pass onto Werneth Low Golf Club at a meeting between the two parties to raise awareness on the matter.

A full site inspection had been carried out, as per the Council Greenspace Policy, in October 2022. Fencing, especially post and rail stock fencing, was showing signs of deterioration especially the longer stretches of fencing, which would be too much for the TMBC Countryside Estates team to take on along with other regular commitments.

Different options for surfacing pathworks on site were currently being explored by the Greenspace Development Officer with help from colleagues in the Council. These would offer a better solution to the erosion that occurred when heavy rains fell on Werneth Low that washed the smaller stones away. This would be discussed with the Joint Management Committee to prioritise the paths that were most needed to be repaired and what the costs of this would be.

The Greenspace Officer continued to attend the meetings of the Werneth Low Environment Group (CIC) who would like to offer support, guidance and assistance for events and projects at Werneth Low. Since the last report, there had been more meetings and a walk on part of the site.

With regards to Public Events, the committee were informed that The Cheshire Dry Stone Walling Association (DSWA) had completed the second course of the year on 10 and 11 of September 2022. Once again the Bridlepath next to the work site needed to be closed for safety and signs were erected to give advance notice of this one week before. The path was then closed for the duration of the weekend with barriers and signs. The site was prepared by the DSWA, who kindly accommodated another participant, the Grounds Keeper from Werneth Low Golf Club, who was hoping to improve their skills over the course of the weekend. Another great stretch of wall was completed and course dates are currently being set for next year.

Thanks were extended to HWMT for accommodating the Greater Manchester Orienteering event at Werneth Low on Saturday 12 November 2022 by opening the café and toilets to support the organisers of the event. Options to reinstate a permanent course would be explored but would be dependent on securing funding. The Remembrance Sunday event at the Cenotaph was held at 12noon on Sunday 13 November 2022, organised by HWMT and supported by the Greenspace Officer and Greenspace Volunteers on the day.

With regards to the Lower Higham Visitor Centre, it was noted that that the café was now operating every Sunday and run by Volunteers from HWMT along with supporting other events. Thanks were extended to HWMT for the afternoon tea, which was put on for the Greenspace Volunteers in October.

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 removing overhanging branches at

Quarry car park; footpath cut back at various locations; removal of Himalayan Balsam; cutting back vegetation and hedgerows; clearing ditches; weekly maintenance and planting of bulbs in the formal gardens and orchard; and dry stone wall repairs.

New volunteers had been welcomed into the group and numbers remained high. The tool stores and garage continued to be used as shelter and storage, which was working well. A meeting has been held to discuss the next sections of hedge to lay and hedge laying had now commenced for the season, starting with a field boundary hedge near the masts. Bulbs had been purchased to add colour to the gardens in Spring with wild daffodils being added to the edge of the woodlands. The Gardens had been well looked after and managed by the volunteers who had added plants and maintained others to keep it looking lovely throughout the year.

In response to a question on Ash Dieback, members of the Joint Management Committee were informed that a programme of formal reporting would be carried out next season and a detailed discussion on Ash Dieback and the number of Ash trees in the borough ensued. Questions were also raised on planting memorial trees in the borough and information was provided.

The Greenspace Development Manager advised that the working group that had been established to discuss the Joint Management Agreement needed to be reconvened with a view to holding a meeting at the Lower Higham Visitor Centre in January 2023. Discussions regarding the representatives on the group would take place between the Greenspace Development Manager, the Chair and the Deputy Chair of the Joint Management Committee.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

7. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

RESOLVED:

That the Joint Management Committee meets as follows:-

- **22 February 2023**

This page is intentionally left blank

Agenda Item 4.

Report To:	WERNETH LOW COUNTRY PARK JOINT MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE
Date:	14 February 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 (30 November 2022).
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 There was a Road Traffic Collision at the top of Joel Lane, which resulted in the dry stone wall at the pinch point pedestrian entrance to Quarry Car Park being knocked down. This was repaired by the Greenspace Officer.
- 1.2 The Tameside Countryside Estates Team have installed a new gate into the Wood Yard after the old one had become rotten and difficult to open.
- 1.3 Members of the Werneth Low Environment Group have renovated two of the notice boards on site (near Quarry Carpark and at Lower Higham Carpark), replacing rotten wood and adding new Perspex to allow visitors to see the information more clearly. Information is in the process of being updated for 2023.
- 1.4 The rabbit population has remained high, and continues to be a problem due to damaging the ground in certain areas of the site (undermining paths, fence posts and creating holes which can cause trips and falls). Regular site visits identify these issues and time is planned in to fill with soil - which is taken from elsewhere on site to maintain the PH balance of the soil etc.
- 1.5 The Greenspace Officer has received 'Off Road Driver' training in January 2023, which has given the skills to help minimise the impact the Ford Ranger has when it is necessary to drive off road on the country park's sensitive ground - this is kept to a minimum.
- 1.6 There have been a few dead badgers reported or seen on site. The Greenspace Officer has been working with the South Manchester Badger Group representatives to ensure they are examined to try and determine the cause of death. All have been road traffic related deaths but it is important to rule out the cruel actions of badger baiters.
- 1.7 Litter and Fly tipping incidents remain high. Quarry Car park, Windy Harbour and along the road past the masts towards the golf course are all hotspots. The Greenspace Officer responds to these where practicable. All Fly tipping incidents are investigated if evidence is found and support is received where needed with the clear up through TMBC Street Cleansing and Fly Tipping teams.
- 1.8 Pathworks on site - costs have now been obtained from TMBC Estates Team for repairs to the section of footpath from the top of Cow Lane onto the Cenotaph. Work will be phased and will then continue down the field line. It is essential to control the flow of water to ensure these repairs are successful and therefore a new drainage ditch will need to be constructed. Hyde War Memorial Trust (HWMT) will be asked to contribute towards these costs as the work required is on land solely owned by the Trust.

2. PUBLIC EVENTS

- 2.1 The Cheshire Dry Stone Walling Association have proposed the dates for the Dry Stone Walling courses to be run this year; 13-14 May and 9-10 September 2023 have been agreed. There is a need for more stone to be delivered onto site, which the Association are currently investigating.
- 2.2 Many thanks to HWMT for accommodating the Greater Manchester Orienteering event at Werneth Low on Saturday 12 November by opening the café and toilets to support the organisers of the event. Officers had reports back that it was a very successful event, which they hope to repeat again in the future.
- 2.3 Tour de Manc will return to Werneth Low again this year on 30 April 2023 and the venue is the Hare and Hounds Car park. This event sees a wide range of cyclists from Greater

Manchester, the country and even from abroad take in the Werneth Low air and sights following the gruelling climb up Cowlshaw. The event is being organised by Tameside MBC colleagues in Culture and with the Tour de Manc. Greenspace Volunteers will also lend a vital hand in making the visitors feel welcome, handing out refreshments and making the site look great for everyone to enjoy.

- 2.4 Officers continue to receive various filming requests for TV programmes to be filmed on Werneth Low. Many of these come in to us with very short timescales and cannot be accommodated. However there are others that we can agree to when site constraints allow. We are currently working with production teams to agree a drone flight for a Channel 4 documentary and ITV would like to film a weather report from Werneth Low. Agreement is always sort from Tameside MBC Communications Team along with HWMT and any outside parties before any agreements are decided. Production teams also have to provide us with the necessary documentation to protect the health and safety of everyone involved, the site and site users.
- 2.5 Updates to Tameside MBC webpages relating to Werneth Low: we have removed a page relating to visitors centres that included inaccurate information about the Lower Higham Visitors Centre and are currently overhauling the Werneth Low page so it provides more accurate information and further highlights how we would like visitors to use the site to prevent harm to wildlife and to follow the Countryside Code.

3. THE LOWER HIGHAM VISITOR CENTRE

- 3.1 Officers note that the café is now operating every Sunday run by Volunteers from HWMT along with supporting other events and has received great feedback from site users.

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**. We have continued to use the tool stores and garage as shelter and storage, which has been working well.
- 4.2 We had a Christmas Celebration with a walk and celebration in the wood yard leading up to the Christmas break. This offered the opportunity to socialise and celebrate the year's achievements with some music, poetry and good food.
- 4.3 Volunteer Mike Kelly has completed hedge laying the field boundary hedge near the masts, which is looking great. We have the remainder of the 'brashings' to remove from the fields in the coming weeks. Mike has now continued laying the hedge along the riding track from Higham Cottages outside of the volunteering days.
- 4.4 We have enjoyed getting to know the new volunteers who joined the group and making them feel at home. Numbers remain high with on average 11 volunteers attending each week.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 5.1 As set out at the front of the report.

APPENDIX 1

Project Ref	Location	Task	Completed
1	Mousefields	Hazel Coppice - planted over 20 years ago by Dave Cannon and the Stockport Conservation Volunteers, we have sectioned this large area into 16 'Coupes' which will be coppiced using traditional methods where possible, one section each year. The work is beneficial for wildlife by presenting a mosaic of different ages of Hazel regrowth.	Ongoing each winter season
2	Heathland on Hacking Knife	We have been removing some of the trees on the heathland on Hacking Knife. This will be done very gradually over the coming years but is essential management to ensure that the oak, hawthorn and other trees do not take over this important BAP priority habitat.	Ongoing each winter season
3	Pond near the cenotaph and area nearby	We have had to remove a den made from old planks, which was posing a risk to site users and some of the planks had made their way into the pond. The area has been cleared and removed off site.	December
4	Various across site	Post festivities clear up of fireworks and other debris.	January
5	Side of the riding track next to the Cenotaph	Clear ditch to prevent blockages in heavy rain, we used the soil to fill in the rabbit holes in this area presenting a health and safety risk to site users.	January
6	Baron Fields	Keep drainage ditches and cross drains clear of soil build up and leaves.	December
7	Formal gardens and Orchard	Weekly maintenance.	Weekly
8	Various across site	Dry Stone walling repairs, small and larger repairs needed through vandalism on site.	Various
9	Across site	Cross drains- these need regularly digging out to prevent further erosion on the stone paths.	Various
10	Visitors Centre Car Park	Weekly litter pick, signs cleaned and driveway drainage maintained to keep clear.	Weekly