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## WERNETH LOW COUNTRY PARK JOINT MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

**Day:** Wednesday  
**Date:** 11 October 2023  
**Time:** 10.30 am  
**Place:** Lower Higham Visitor Centre - Werneth Low Country Park

Item No.	AGENDA	Page No
1.	<b>APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE</b> To receive any apologies for the meeting from Members of the Joint Committee.	
2.	<b>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST</b> To receive any declarations of interest from Members of the Joint Committee.	
3.	<b>MINUTES</b> The Minutes of the proceedings of the previous meeting of the Werneth Low Country Park Joint Management Committee held on 14 June 2023 to be approved as a correct record.	1 - 4
4.	<b>GREENSPACE DEVELOPMENT OFFICER'S REPORT</b> To consider the report of the Greenspace Development Officer.	5 - 10
5.	<b>DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS</b> To note the dates of future meetings to be held on:- <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 21 February 2024</li></ul>	

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From: Democratic Services Unit – any further information may be obtained from the reporting officer or from Charlotte Forrest, Senior Democratic Services Officer, to whom any apologies for absence should be notified.

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# Agenda Item 3.

## WERNETH LOW COUNTRY PARK JOINT MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

14 June 2023

**Commenced:** 10.30 am

**Terminated:** 11.30 am

**Present:** Councillors J Fitzpatrick, Kitchen, Owen, Robinson, Roderick, Colbourne, Mr Ainger, Mr Bell, Mrs Durkin, Mrs Ellis and Ms Halliday

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

**Apologies for Absence:** Councillor Bowden

### 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 22 February 2023 were agreed as a correct record.

### 3. MEMBERSHIP OF THE JOINT COMMITTEE 2023/24

It was reported that the following representatives had been appointed to serve on the Joint Management Committee for the Municipal Year 2023/24:-

#### ***Representing Tameside MBC –***

Councillors Bowden, Colbourne, Fitzpatrick, 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 2023/24

#### **RESOLVED:**

- (i) That Councillor Peter Robinson, Tameside MBC, be appointed Chair of the Joint Management Committee for 2023/24.
- (ii) That Mrs Jane Durkin, Hyde War Memorial Trust, be appointed Deputy Chair of the Joint Management Committee for 2023/24.

### 5. WERNETH LOW COUNTRY PARK JOINT MANAGEMENT AGREEMENT UPDATE

The Greenspace Development Manager submitted a report updating the Joint Management Committee of progress towards the signing of a new Joint Management Agreement. Both parties remained committed to the general principles of maintaining the Country Park and the principles of cooperation and joint working were important to all concerned.

It was reported that at the last Working Group meeting on 10 March 2023, a draft copy of the new Joint Management Agreement was shared with the areas of change clearly highlighted. Hyde War Memorial Trust had instructed their legal team to assess the Agreement and work with Legal Services at Tameside Council to finalise the Agreement. A further update on progress would be provided at the next meeting of the Joint Management Committee, scheduled for 11 October 2023.

The Greenspace Development Manager advised that another meeting of the Working Group needed to be convened and asked for confirmation of membership from Tameside MBC and Hyde War Memorial Trust. Members of the Joint Management Committee were reminded that it had previously been agreed that there be equal representation from both parties on the Working Group.

**RESOLVED:**

- (i) That the report be noted;**
- (ii) That membership of the Working Group comprise of three Tameside MBC representatives and three Hyde War Memorial Trust representatives;**
- (iii) That the three representatives from Hyde War Memorial Trust be confirmed via email to the Greenspace Development Manager; and**
- (iv) That the three representatives from Tameside MBC be confirmed via email to the Greenspace Development Manager.**

## **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 (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 it was reported that the Tameside Countryside Estates Team completed the path works (phase 1), which saw improvements to drainage and surfacing from the top of Cow Lane up to the Cenotaph, during March and April 2023. This allowed pedestrians an opportunity to walk on a surfaced path from the Visitors Centre Car Park up to the Cenotaph, whilst keeping the track wide enough to accommodate vehicles when needed. The work had been joint funded by the Hyde War Memorial Trust (HWMT) and Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council (TMBC).

The Greenspace Development Officer advised that they had completed a review of the Werneth Low Management Plan, which set out how the site would be managed from 2023 to 2028. Officers would circulate a draft version of The Plan after the meeting for comments by the JMC. The Greenspace Development Manager requested that comments be submitted by the end of July and an update would be provided at the next meeting of the Committee, scheduled for 11 October 2023, prior to consultation with other groups such as the Volunteers and Werneth Low Environment Group.

The JMC were informed that the Greenspace Development Officer carried out a full site inspection in April 2023, the report had been shared with the Greenspace Development Manager and actions were prioritised and planned. A further full inspection would take place in October. Greenspace Volunteers had carried out a full review of the site signage and a map of the site, with a full list of repairs required, had been produced. Where possible these repairs were immediately put into action and others would be completed as soon as possible

Members were notified that the hazel coppicing project at Mousefields, which started in Winter 2022, has had further work completed with the addition of some rabbit guards around the coppiced stools to help and protect the re-growth from predation. As part of the Greenspace Conservation days, a pond renovation project was completed at the edge of Great Stone Low and New Piece. Himalayan Balsam was currently being removed from this area in an aim to free it entirely and to prevent any further encroachment of this invasive plant on site.

It was reported that the grass cutting season had started with TMBC Grounds Maintenance Teams completing grass cutting on formal areas such as the Orchard, around the Visitors Centre Car Park and picnic areas on the site. The entrance to Beacon Lane Picnic Area had been widened by the Greenspace Volunteers to enable the larger mower to access the site so this area can be cut again this year.

Litter and Fly tipping incidents unfortunately remained an issue with hotspots located at Quarry car park and Windy Harbour. Volunteers from the local community, along with Greenspace Volunteers, regularly litter picked the site. The Greenspace Officer responded to Fly tipping incidents where practicable and all Fly tipping incidents were investigated if evidence was found and the Council Street Cleansing and Fly Tipping teams supported with the clear up.

With regards to Public Events, the Committee were informed that The Cheshire Dry Stone Walling Association (DSWA) ran a two day course over the weekend of 13-14 May in the country park. New stone was needed for the course and the Trust had kindly contributed towards the cost of this. A route had been agreed for a local farmer to deliver the stone to site using the tracks from Werneth Low Road, therefore preventing any potential damage to New Piece and nesting birds on site. As usual, the riding track was closed for the weekend to ensure safety. Some stone remained for use at the next course, scheduled to take place on the weekend of 9-10 September 2023, posters for which were being displayed on site.

The fee for this course was funded by the TMBC Greenspace Volunteer budget and by the end of the weekend, another stretch of the wall along the riding track, between New Piece and Rough Moor, was completed to the usual high standard. One of the trainees on the course was a new volunteer whose new skills could be put into practice when needed. Thanks were extended to the Cheshire DSWA for organising the course and ensuring high standards of work and work practices.

It was reported that the 'Tour de Manc' had returned to Werneth Low on 30 April 2023 with cyclists from across the country taking part in the circular route around Greater Manchester. Refreshments were on offer to the participants after the climb up Cowlshaw Brow and thanks were extended to the Greenspace Volunteers for making the visitors feel welcome and making the site look great with flowers and decorations.

The JMC were told that HWMT were busy making preparations for this year's Peace Day celebrations on the 25 June 2023 and Greenspace staff and volunteers would be available to help with logistics on the day. The Werneth Low Environment Group had met with the Cheshire Wildlife Trust in May to explore project possibilities, especially renovating some of the ponds on site and wildflower seed collection from the meadows. This was in the very early stages but more information would be received from the group in due course and information on working together to make some of the ideas a reality on the ground.

In relation to the Lower Higham Visitor Centre, it was noted that the café continued to operate every Sunday and was run by volunteers from HWMT along with supporting other events. Feedback from visitors had been extremely positive with a recurrent theme for it to be open on more days.

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 hedge cutting, litter picking, removal of graffiti, weekly maintenance in the formal gardens and orchard, dry stone wall repairs, Himalayan Balsam removal, repairs to fencing and gate improvements and culvert digging.

This was in addition to the hazel coppice at Mousefields and pond renovation project at the edge of Great Stone Low and New Piece as detailed in the main body of the report. The tool stores and garage continued to be used as shelter and storage, which worked well.

The JMC were advised that a Volunteer Questionnaire had been circulated that would be used once a year to enable everyone to have a say on the work completed and how the day was run. Officers were grateful to everyone for their responses and their continued hard work on site making it better for both people and wildlife.

Members of the JMC asked for their sincere thanks and gratitude to be extended to the volunteers for their hard work, dedication and the amazing work that they undertook and discussed ways in which their appreciation could be shown. Members also stressed the importance of the walk that took place immediately before the start of the meeting and the benefits of seeing first-hand the great work that was undertaken by everyone.

**RESOLVED:**

- (i) That the report be noted;
- (ii) That a draft copy of The Management Plan 2023-28 be circulated to Members of the Joint Management Committee for comment;
- (iii) That Members of the Joint Management Committee feedback their comments on The Management Plan 2023-28 by the end of July 2023; and
- (iv) That a revised Management Plan 2023-28 be brought back for final agreement by the Joint Management Committee at the next meeting, scheduled for 11 October 2023, prior to consultation with other groups such as the Volunteers and Werneth Low Environment Group.

**7. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

**RESOLVED:**

That the Joint Management Committee meets as follows:-

- 11 October 2023
- 21 February 2024

**CHAIR**

# Agenda Item 4.

<b>Report To:</b>	<b>WERNETH LOW COUNTRY PARK JOINT MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE</b>
<b>Date:</b>	11 October 2023
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	Emma Varnam - Assistant Director, Operations and Neighbourhoods
<b>Subject:</b>	<b>GREENSPACE DEVELOPMENT OFFICER'S REPORT</b>
<b>Report Summary:</b>	To inform Members of activities undertaken within the Country Park since the last meeting of the Joint Management Committee (14 June 2023).
<b>Recommendations:</b>	That the report be noted.
<b>Links to Community Strategy:</b>	To ensure that the Country Park is an attractive and environmentally friendly place to visit.
<b>Policy Implications:</b>	The activities in the Country Park are in accordance with Council policy priorities.
<b>Financial Implications: (Authorised by the Section 151 Officer and Chief Finance Officer)</b>	The funding for the projects is met by the Operations and Greenspace revenue budget.
<b>Legal Implications: (Authorised by the Borough Solicitor)</b>	It is important that the Joint Management Committee is kept informed of activities undertaken in the Country Park.
<b>Risk Management:</b>	Activities in the Country Park are kept under review in order to ensure any potential risks are dealt with adequately.
<b>Access to Information:</b>	Background papers and information can be obtained by contacting Katie Lowry, Greenspace Development Officer,   phone: 07519 617 515   e-mail: <a href="mailto:katie.lowry@tameside.gov.uk">katie.lowry@tameside.gov.uk</a>

## **1. MAINTENANCE OF SITES**

- 1.1 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 was completed in early August to make modifications and improvements to water collection and prevent erosion.
- 1.2 The Council Grounds Maintenance Teams have been completing grass cutting on our 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.
- 1.3 The hazel coppicing project at Mousefields (No. 5), which was started in Winter 2022 was looking great in the spring and early summer, it seems however the local deer may have found it in the last few weeks and have been feasting on it. The Greenspace Officer will be reviewing the work based on this and making a new planned approach for winter 2023.
- 1.4 Efforts this year have concentrated on trying to push the Himalayan Balsam back and prevent it encroaching into new areas of the Country Park. There have been successes in the woodlands at the bottom of Baron Fields where we have seen a big reduction after efforts in that area in the last two years. This year the Greenspace Officer and Volunteers have focussed on preventing it jumping 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 are grateful to members of the public and volunteers who have put extra time in this year into tackling this invasive plant.
- 1.5 The pond renovation project at the edge of Great Stone Low and New Piece has seen some life returning to the area. Continuous visits to remove Himalayan Balsam throughout the season has hopefully reduced existing seed stock in the soil for next year. With the lack of rain at the start of the summer the pond did entirely dry up, however once the rains returned Officers observed Brown Hawker Dragonflies laying eggs in August and a more diversity to the vegetation at the edge of the ponds with a lovely patch of meadow sweet popping up along with foxgloves and lots of sedges and rushes.
- 1.6 Ground Nesting Birds – Hyde War Memorial Trust 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. The signs were erected in the parts of the site that the ground nesting birds such as Sky Larks were occupying. Officers are grateful for the information received to help locate the nests and for 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 are 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.
- 1.7 The Country Park's wildflower meadows were looking wonderful again in mid-summer. Hay cutting was delayed until 21 August due to the continuous rainfall throughout early August. Hay was then cut, baled and removed from the Country Park by the Tenant Farmers. Some incidents with bales rolling did occur, with some damage to a dry stone wall on site. Officers will look to address this next year and put measures in place to prevent possible accidents. The young cows have now returned to site, occupying in the first instance the fields near the Visitors Centre and Spring Avenue, then to be moved around site to new pastures for the remainder of the season. The cows complete the cycle of management, grazing to remove the 'aftermath', providing disturbed soil for seeds to settle and encouraging hay meadow flowers to thrive.
- 1.8 Litter and Fly tipping incidents are still an issue with items dumped at Windy harbour and along Werneth Low Road. Volunteers from the local community along with Greenspace Volunteers regularly litter pick the site and everyone is grateful for their time and efforts.



The Greenspace Officer responds to fly tipping incidents where practicable and support is received where needed with the clear up from the Council Street Cleansing and Fly Tipping teams. All Fly tipping incidents are investigated if evidence is found.

## **2. PUBLIC EVENTS**

- 2.1 The Cheshire Dry Stone Walling Association ran a two day course over the weekend 9-10 September 2023, posters for which are displayed on site. We also welcomed the Lancashire Dry Stone Walling Association for a weekend course on the 16 July who completed another section of the wall along the riding track at the back of New Piece field. Officers are very grateful for the improvements to the walls on site, which is achieved on these weekends. Hyde War Memorial Trust paid for the stone to be delivered to site and the site preparation costs.
- 2.2 Hyde War Memorial Trust ran another great event for this year's Peace Day ceremony on the 25 June 2023. Despite the ominous clouds building in the distance and threat of thunder and lightning, the Brass Band managed to get up and down the hill without incident. The Trust then welcomed members of the public back into the Visitors Centre after the event for light refreshments and an opportunity to chat and remember those who have been lost. Greenspace staff and volunteers also helped out with car parking and logistics.
- 2.3 The Council Culture Team ran a great event called 'Forage Delights' on Wednesday 9 August from 11-15.00 where there was natural art created, stories told and herb scented play doh was made with over 150 people who came along. Hyde War Memorial Trust also opened the café and Visitors Centre for people to use the facilities and get refreshments - a great team effort.
- 2.4 Another event; "Apples & Alchemy" at Werneth Low Country Park has been arranged by the Council Culture team on Sunday 29 October from 1100-15.00

## **3. THE LOWER HIGHAM VISITOR CENTRE**

- 3.1 Officers note that the café is now operating every Sunday run by Volunteers from Hyde War Memorial Trust.
- 3.2 The Visitors Centre and Café have also supported other events organised and run by the Trust, which have enhanced the visitor experience and encouraged new people to visit the site and appreciate what it has on offer. The weekly 'Welly Walks' have been a great success, the Heritage Open Day in September brought 50 visitors to the site to appreciate the wonderful Heritage it has to offer with guided walks and archives to look through. There has also been visits from the Brownies, a Werneth Low Calendar Competition created and the new Facebook page which has been organised by the Trust. The Facebook page has enabled better communication to members of the public around regular activities such as farming and also when events are arranged.

## **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**. They have continued to use the tool stores and Garage as shelter and storage which has been working well.
- 4.2 A Volunteer 'Afternoon Tea' Celebration was arranged by Hyde War Memorial Trust on Tuesday 26 September for the Greenspace Volunteers to thank them for their contributions

to the upkeep of the site on a weekly basis. The food and cake was delicious and was very much appreciated by the volunteers as were the kind words spoken.

## **5. RECOMMENDATIONS**

5.1 As set out at the front of the report.

## APPENDIX 1

<b>Project Ref</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Task</b>	<b>Completed</b>
1	Cow Lane Riding Track	Cut back encroaching vegetation from along the track including brambles invading the space and over hanging tree branches.	June
2	'Flaggy' Path	Cut back hedges, nettles and brambles on this narrow path to enable access to walkers.	July
3	Golf Course Riding Track- from Werneth Low Road towards the Cenotaph.	Hedge cutting- keeping this hedge trimmed to maintain a good passage for horses and when vehicles need to access this track.	July
4	Windy Harbour towards Pipers Clough	Clearance of paths, Balsam removal and digging out cross drains.	July
5	Higham Lane- crossing over the road	A gate has been installed by the Volunteers here to allow people who struggle to get over the stile an easier passage.	July
6	Higham Cottages Riding track and footpath- steps	We cleared the overgrown steps to enable ease of access for walkers, cut back over hanging branches and cleared mud from the riding tracks.	August
7	Formal gardens and Orchard	Weekly maintenance, removal of saplings coming out of flags, weeding of beds and maintaining the garden of remembrance.	Weekly
8	Higham Cottages Riding Track, Windy Harbour, Baron Fields and the small renovated pond	Himalayan Balsam removal.	Throughout the summer until mid August when setting seed.
8	Orchard Rise/Baron Fields	Clearance of the ditches and streams on site along with the pathways including at the side of the allotments.	August
9	Various	Dry Stone walling repairs, small and larger repairs needed through vandalism on site. Camping and fires on site- there have been a couple of instances of people camping and leaving burnt out tents on site- these have been cleared ASAP.	July-September
10	'Shippons'	Cleared this Heritage feature of vegetation on site ready for the Heritage Open Day	September
11	Visitors Centre Car Park and Quarry Car Park	Weekly litter pick, signs cleaned and driveway drainage maintained to keep clear.	Weekly

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