

Report To: WERNETH LOW COUNTRY PARK JOINT MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

Date: 19 July 2021

Reporting Officer: Katie Lowry - 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 (10 February 2021).

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 Katie Lowry, Greenspace Development Officer

 phone: 07519 617 515

 e-mail: katie.lowry@tameside.gov.uk

1. MAINTENANCE OF SITES

- 1.1 A site inspection was carried out during May 2021 by the Greenspace Development Officer and actions were discussed with the Greenspace Development Manager at meetings in June. These actions will be carried out through a mixture of Volunteer work and contractors.
- 1.2 A review of the gates with straps for closing mechanisms was also conducted, which showed that not one type of latch will work for all of the gates and therefore we will look to replace the straps once Coronavirus restrictions are lifted and we feel it is safe to do so. Volunteers (Mike Kelly and John Jones respectively) undertook a full review of the fencing on site and the sign posts. Post and Wire fence posts have now been replaced and two of the way marking posts, an action plan will be put in place for the autumn to action outstanding issues re: signage.
- 1.3 The summer grass cutting programme for 2021 has begun through the Grounds Maintenance team paid for by Tameside Council. The programme includes: the grass cutting of the Lower Higham Visitor Centre area, car parks, access points, picnic areas.
- 1.4 Antisocial behaviour, weekend parties and camping on the Low have unfortunately been a regular occurrence due to the lovely weather we have had so far this Spring and early Summer. This has caused many issues including lots of litter, burnt tents and large amounts of damage to dry stone walls in the area. Many hours of the volunteers time has been spent collecting litter and fixing damage, time which could have been spent on keeping more of the footpath's clear and removing invasive plants from the site etc. Queen's Piece has also suffered antisocial behaviour and issues with vehicles parking in areas blocking the busy junction, which local councillors have been involved with. As part of the volunteer days, we have laid some new stone at this access point to Werneth Low Road footpath to help visitors get through the stile following damage from car tyres.
- 1.5 The early cutting of the meadows by the Tenant Farmer on HWMT Land has caused much upset amongst residents. There have been complaints from members of the public who use the site via official channels (emails, the complaints process and social media channels such as Twitter) and through word of mouth, we have also had a letter from Jonathan Reynolds MP which is currently being dealt with.
- 1.6 As joint management partners in the Country Park we are working to an agreed management plan; 5.3- Landscape and Habitat Management (sections 5.3.3 and 5.3.4) states that, agreeing the timing of the cut is important, that the habitat management is in line with the objectives of the plan and that hay cutting will be delayed until after the end of June.
- 1.7 Cutting took place before 10 of June, which has led to claims of wildlife crimes against nesting Sky Larks in the meadows. Posters that the Greenspace Officer produced in April, placed at entrances to meadows, also confused matters as it asked people to keep their dogs on a lead to prevent disturbance to this sensitive habitat. This demonstrated some miscommunication between parties as the Council were not aware of the date of the cutting. It is important that we find a way of preventing this from happening again, not only for the prevention of damage to wildlife and habitat, but also for reputational damage to all parties.
- 1.8 We have identified a tree that needs to be removed from the edge of the wood yard, croft area and carpark, which is dying and will in future pose a threat to those using this area. This has been assessed by TMBC Arboricultural and Countryside Estates Officer and the work will be completed by TMBC Arboriculture staff.

- 1.9 Volunteers have continued to work on the formal gardens and orchard on site. On a Spring visit to the garden centre we spent £140 on plants to spruce up the gardens, which the volunteers then planted in the best places. We also had to remove a bush that had been planted half way up Higham Lane near the well, we presume by a member of the public, it was a non-native and inappropriate for this area. This was replanted behind the memorial garden wall and is now a nice addition to the gardens!
- 1.10 A decision was made by TMBC a few years ago to not spray herbicides in countryside sites due to the potential damage to wildlife and the administrator, since then some areas are more of a challenge to manage. One of these areas is the cobbles outside the visitor's centre that a volunteer has been trying to clear for a few weeks. Without the herbicide the best way to manage this would be for a new firm concrete scree to be added into the cobbles so they can be brushed off. This is a point for further discussion at the meeting as there are various options and different benefits to each one.
- 1.11 The Greenspace Officer met with a representative of the Greater Manchester Ecology Unit to ensure the footpath works described below would not impact on the Greater Crested Newt Habitat on site, which it was agreed it would not, and we can go ahead. Therefore these Footpath works on site now need to be agreed - quotes from Tameside MBC Engineers Department in December 2020 - cost of the works, as set out below:-

Visitors Centre Carpark path to where it meets Cow Lane main path to the cenotaph:

Top section above kissing gate - 112m	£3,351.60
Lower section - 112m	£3,351.60

Higham cottages culvert:

Clean out the open ditch at the bottom of the bridle path	£ 437.00
Excavate for and construct pcc flag drainage channels 4nr	£1,722.00

Higham cottages end of riding track:

130m long	£3,931.20
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Cenotaph end of the Disabled path from Quarry carpark:

Wheelchair access path - 128m long	£3,830.40
Supply and install timber marker posts - 2nr @ £89.25	£ 178.50

Quarry Carpark end of the Disabled Path:

Wheelchair access path - 518m	£9,790.20
*Excavate for and install 4 sections of land drain (approx. 80m)	£1,848.00
(* dependent on approval from Greater Manchester Ecology Unit with reference to Great Crested Newts on site)	

Quarry Car Park end Picnic Area:

Sand down and re-stain 2nr picnic benches	£ 294.00
Excavate to form 2 short paths to improve access	£ 330.75

TOTAL: £29,065.25

Additional Works (previously quoted to Dave Cannon):

- a) Excavate the vegetation and supply, spread and consolidate Gritstone surfacing from the Cenotaph across to the riding track Corner adjacent to the golf course £3,237.60
- b) Carry out vehicle barrier and stone kerb renewal and straightening in the visitor centre car park £ 730.00

- 1.12 These prices are subject, that all excavated materials being spread on site. They are also based on the works being carried out in much drier conditions if possible. We can accept all or some of these quotes.

2. PUBLIC EVENTS

- 2.1 Although Coronavirus restrictions are being lifted by the Government, the Council is still assessing each event through an application to the licencing team to ensure a Risk Assessment, including measures to prevent spread of Coronavirus, is in place. We will be reviewing other events, such as volunteer led walks, very soon to see which of these can take place safely.
- 2.2 The Greenspace Officer plus two volunteers attended Peace Day to help HWMT manage the small event and assist getting cars up Cow Lane and parked next to the Cenotaph. (**Appendix 1**).
- 2.3 "Make sense of Nature" event is up and coming on 29 July, facilitated by Tameside Culture Team - a poster has been produced, which will be displayed on site and we can provide a copy for sharing on social media. As restrictions lift further Officers can meet with the Trust to discuss bringing more events into the park to be delivered by the Trust and Volunteers.
- 2.4 The Dry Stone Walling Association (DSWA) have been back in touch, hoping to put on a course in September - a meeting onsite is to be arranged with the Greenspace Officer. The Trust had a wall in mind so we need to liaise regarding the most appropriate location for the DWSA course and suggest the Greenspace Officer takes a lead on this.
- 2.5 Tour De Manc - this event will take place on 5 September and Werneth Low will once again be on route. Along with Mike Hughes (TMBC Rights of Way Officer) the Greenspace Officer plus volunteers, will be at the Hare and Hounds from 7.30am to hand out refreshments to the riders.

3. THE LOWER HIGHAM VISITOR CENTRE

- 3.1 Officers note that further work has progressed on the Visitor Centre to enhance visitor facilities and that this has all been funded by the Trust. Officers have advised the Trust to seek advice on re-opening the Centre from Action Together who are providing expert advice to community groups throughout the Borough.
- 3.2 The alarm monitoring contract for the visitor centre has been stopped. The contract was held by the Council but since the departure of the previous Greenspace Officer there was no emergency contact details for if the alarm went off. Officers understand the frustration of the Trust that they were not informed of the date of the cancellation of the contract and acknowledge that the Trust should have been advised. The Trust were made aware when David Cannon departed that there would no longer be Council officers on emergency call out for the alarm as it is not within the remit of the Greenspace Officer to be on call.
- 3.3 Tenants are now leasing the residential property above the Visitor Centre – all works to make the flat legal and in a suitable condition to be leased have been organised and funded by the Trust.

4. WERNETH LOW COUNTRY PARK GREENSPACE VOLUNTEER SERVICE

- 4.1 The Volunteers Service has continued every Tuesday since the last report, completing various essential tasks around the site and weekly litter picking. Examples of the completed work can be found in **Appendix 2**.
- 4.2 Since the start of May the volunteer session times increased back to a 3pm finish time, which has allowed us to complete much more on site. We have continued to use the Garage as a base and have worked around the builders who have been completing works on the Visitors Centre and flat. As the garage is now a shared resource, with HWMT using the space for other activities, we will be looking to purchase some secure storage for the machinery and power tools we have in the garage as we cannot currently guarantee their safe storage and to prevent the possibility of others using this equipment when not trained or insured.
- 4.3 Greenspace Officer Peter Longbottom came to the volunteer session in May and delivered the volunteer annual machinery training, which is an essential part of ensuring safe working on site. This was well received and allowed us to complete machinery based work on site with those who are trained.
- 4.4 Peter Osbourne has joined as a volunteer litter picker, coming for bags each Tuesday before dropping them back off at the centre. Peter would like to become a full time volunteer, which we will be looking at as part of our induction of other new volunteers across the Greenspace Volunteer team very soon.

5. RECOMMENDATION

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

APPENDIX 1



Peace Day at Werneth Low

APPENDIX 2

<u>Project Ref</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Task</u>	<u>Completion</u>
1	Quarry Carpark	Install new post to prevent cars from driving out of the car park over the drainage ditch. Clearance of ditch to increase water flow.	March 2021
2	Baron Fields	Remove vegetation from bench next to stile and clear area to help with collection of litter from here- especially dumped full poo bags.	March 2021
3	Hackingknife woodland/ heath	Removal of dead branches in woodland especially over paths. Removal of brambles from Billberry plants to manage heathland.	March 2021
4	Higham Cottages-steps	Remove vegetation and scrape back stone to increase access.	Feb 2021
5	Various locations	Repairing Dry Stone Walls on site - Sam Simpson	Ongoing.
6	Baron Fields	Cut back along Orchard Rise, remove flag from the Culvert, clear cross-drains, path alongside the allotment and throughout the site, litter pick	Dec 2020
7	Formal gardens and Orchard	New planting and maintenance of existing vegetation. Sanding and wood preservative applied on benches and seating. Hedges cut back.	June 2021
8	Flaggy Path	Fence removal- collapsed fencing.	April 2021
9	Various-across whole site	Culvert checking and clearance in preparation for heavy rain	June 2021
10	Invasive species control	Baron Fields- Japanese Knotweed and Himalayan Balsam. Quarry Carpark- Himalayan Balsam	July 2021
11	Higham Lane Hedgelaying	Completed by Mike Kelly	March 2021
12	Werneth Low Road-footpath from Quarry Carpark to Lofty Top	Clearance of overgrown vegetation from Hedge and pathway with machinery. More needed in weeks to come to continue along from Lofty Top onwards.	July 2021