

Report To: WERNETH LOW COUNTRY PARK JOINT MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

Date: 30 November 2022

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.

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 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



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1. MAINTENANCE OF SITES

- 1.1 The Greenspace Officer for Werneth Low has undertaken chainsaw training and assessment during the Summer of 2022, which will allow more self-sufficiency to react to fallen trees on site and undertake other woodland management work.
- 1.2 After the site inspection was undertaken by the Greenspace Officer in April 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 have been installed along the path down the edge of Higham Lane and near the Cenotaph to ensure horses do not access this area from the bridle path.
- 1.3 The Council Grounds Maintenance Teams have continued with the grass cutting programme on site, which has now completed for the year. We had issues with the width of the opening into the picnic area at Beasoms Lane, which meant this area did not get cut. We will widen this entrance next year to ensure the new mowers can fit through.
- 1.4 The cutting of some of the meadows has been problematic again this year with contractors engaged not cutting at an appropriate time of year for the habitat and species in these areas due to lack of communication. We will endeavour to prevent this happening again in future.
- 1.5 The rabbit population has remained high, as seen by the damage in certain areas of the site. The volunteers along with local horse riders have been filling some of the more problematic holes; such as in the riding track up from Higham Cottages and around the cenotaph where risk of injury is higher.
- 1.6 Thanks again 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 we will now monitor this for regrowth and treat again if necessary in the coming year.
- 1.7 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 have been erected at the entrances of the fields where the cows are grazing on the site to warn members of the public of their presence, especially those with dogs. The cattle are all young and have 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. We will continue to work to improve practices in future.
- 1.8 Litter and fly tipping incidents remain high, we have also suffered continued antisocial behaviour through the summer, with groups of youths gathering and destroying walls. A local resident has raised concerns about the ditch next to land close to Windy Harbour, as cars have been driving onto this area during the summer. We will investigate increasing the depth and width of this ditch to prevent this from happening again. All fly tipping incidents are investigated if evidence is found and support is received through the Council Street Cleansing and Fly Tipping teams where needed with the clear up.
- 1.9 Himalayan Balsam is continuing to advance and claim new areas of the site despite many hours put into control methods by the Greenspace Volunteers. We have shared 'Best Practice' documents with HWMT to pass onto Werneth Low Golf Club at a meeting between the two parties to raise awareness on the matter.

- 1.10 A full site inspection has been carried out, as per the Council Greenspace Policy, in October 2022. Fencing, especially post and rail stock fencing, is showing signs of deterioration and we need to find a way of funding these, especially the longer stretches of fencing, which will be too much for the TMBC Countryside Estates team to take on along with other regular commitments.
- 1.11 Pathworks on site - different options for surfacing are currently being explored by the Greenspace Officer with help from colleagues in the Council. These may offer a better solution to the erosion we are suffering when heavy rains fall on Werneth Low that wash the smaller stones away. This will be discussed with the Joint Management Committee to prioritise the paths that are most needed to be repaired and what the costs of this will be.
- 1.12 Werneth Low Environment Group (CIC) - the Greenspace Officer has continued to attend the meetings of this newly formed group who would like to offer support, guidance and assistance for events and projects at Werneth Low. Since the last report there have been more meetings and a walk on part of the site.

2. PUBLIC EVENTS

- 2.1 The Cheshire Dry Stone Walling Association (DSWA) completed the second course of the year on 10 and 11 of September. 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 1 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 his skills over the course of the weekend. Another great stretch of wall was completed and course dates are currently being set for next year.
- 2.2 Many thanks to HWMT for accommodating the up and coming Greater Manchester Orienteering event at Werneth Low on Saturday 12 November by opening the café and toilets to support the organisers of the event.
- 2.3 The Remembrance Sunday event at the Cenotaph was held at 12noon on Sunday 13 November, organised by HWMT and supported by the Greenspace Officer and Greenspace Volunteers on the day.

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. Thanks to HWMT for the afternoon tea, which was put on for the Greenspace Volunteers in October.

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**.
- 4.2 We have continued to use the tool stores and garage as shelter and storage, which has been working well.
- 4.3 Greenspace Officer and Volunteer Mike Kelly held a meeting to discuss the next sections of hedge to lay. Hedge laying has now commenced for the season, starting with a field boundary hedge near the masts.

- 4.4 We have welcomed new volunteers into the group in recent weeks. Numbers remain high with on average 11 volunteers attending each week, which allows us to complete multiple tasks around the site with the excellent skills the volunteers have acquired, for some, over many years.
- 4.5 We have bought more bulbs for the site this Autumn, adding to the colour in the gardens in Spring and adding to the diversity of the site with wild daffodils being added to the edge of the woodlands. The Gardens have been well looked after and managed by the Greenspace Volunteers who have added plants and maintained others to keep it looking lovely throughout the year.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

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

APPENDIX 1

Project Ref	Location	Task	Completed
1	Quarry Car Park	Remove overhanging branches from obscuring the view for cars exiting the car park.	July
2	Various	Footpath cut back, footpaths across the site need cutting back regularly throughout the summer. Volunteers trained in using power tools such as strimmer and hedge trimmers to increase the speed at which this work can be undertaken but it still takes many days.	July-September
3	Various Locations	Himalyan Balsam removal- we are hoping to push back to areas difficult to control.	July- September
4	Park Picnic area close to Quarry Car	Cut back hedge and remove clippings.	September
5	Side of the riding track next to the Golf Course	Clear ditch to prevent blockages and cut back hedgerow	September
6	Baron Fields- near Orchard Rise	Cut back vegetation along the ditch to prevent flooding.	October
7	Formal gardens and Orchard	Weekly maintenance and planting of bulbs.	October
8	Main path from Quarry Carpark to the Cenotaph	Dry Stone walling repairs.	September
9	Werneth Low Road Paths	Cut back to allow ease of passage.	September
10	Across site	Cross drains- these need regularly digging out to prevent further erosion on the stone paths.	July- October
11	Higham Cottages	Step clearance and bridleway management, removing overhanging branches and filling in Rabbit holes in the path.	September
12	Field boundary wall- Cow Lane side of riding track	Rebuild wall damaged by youth	September
13	Woodland near Arnold Road entrance	Removing rope swings, litter and debris from woodland after summer holidays.	September
14	Visitors Centre Car Park	Weekly litter pick, signs cleaned and driveway drainage maintained to keep clear.	Weekly
15	Cow Lane and Cenotaph	Clearance, cutting and preparation for Remembrance Sunday with help from TMBC Road sweepers.	November