

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**