

WERNETH LOW COUNTRY PARK JOINT MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

22 February 2023

Commenced: 10.30 am

Terminated: 11.45 am

Present: Mrs Durkin (Chair), Councillors Robinson (Deputy Chair) and Roderick, Mr Bell and Mrs Ellis

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

Apologies for Absence: Councillors Bowden, Cooper, Kitchen, Owen, Colbourne, Mr Ainger and Ms Halliday

8. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

9. MINUTES

The Minutes of the Werneth Low Country Park Joint Management Committee held on 30 November 2022 were agreed as a correct record.

10. 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 recently received 'Off Road Driver' training in January 2023 that had provided the skills to help minimise the impact of the vehicle when it was necessary to drive off road on the country park's sensitive ground, which was kept to a minimum. The Greenspace Development Officer had rebuilt a dry stone wall at the pedestrian entrance to Quarry car park after it had been knocked down during a road traffic collision.

It was reported that the Tameside Countryside Estates Team had installed a new gate into the Wood Yard after the old one had become rotten and difficult to open. Members of the Werneth Low Environment Group had renovated two of the notice boards on site (near Quarry car park and at Lower Higham car park), replacing rotten wood and adding new Perspex to allow visitors to see the information more clearly, which was currently being updated for 2023.

Following on from reports at the previous meeting, the rabbit population remained high and continued to be a problem as they had damaged the ground on site by undermining paths, fence posts and creating holes that could cause trips and falls. Regular site visits had identified these issues and it was planned to fill them with soil, which would be taken from elsewhere on site to maintain the PH balance of the soil. There had been a few dead badgers reported on site. The

Greenspace Development Officer had worked with South Manchester Badger Group representatives to ensure they were examined to try and determine the cause of death to rule out the cruel actions of badger baiters. It had been confirmed that all deaths had been due to road traffic incidents.

Litter and Fly tipping incidents remained high with hotspots located at Quarry car park, Windy Harbour and along the road past the masts towards the golf course. The Greenspace Officer had responded to these where practicable. All Fly tipping incidents were investigated if evidence was found and the Council Street Cleansing and Fly Tipping teams supported with the clear up.

Members of the Joint Management Committee were informed that costs had been obtained from the Council's Estates Team for repairs to the section of footpath from the top of Cow Lane onto the Cenotaph. The work would be phased and would then continue down the field line. It was essential to control the flow of water to ensure these repairs were successful and therefore a new drainage ditch would need to be constructed. The Greenspace Development Manager advised that the costs of the work would be £18,000 and were seeking a contribution of 50% (£9,000) from the Hyde War Memorial Trust (HWMT) as it was on their land. Trust representatives stated that an accessible path was required from Cow Lane to the Cenotaph and they felt assured that the work would be carried out by the Council. A request was made for a project plan to be provided in order to share with other members of the Trust. This would also help to manage public expectations and provide an explanation for vehicles being on site so that dog walkers were aware. In response to questions, it was confirmed that works could begin within the coming weeks once the Trust had agreed their financial contribution for the work.

With regards to Public Events, the Committee were informed that two dates had been agreed with The Cheshire Dry Stone Walling Association (13-14 May and 9-10 September 2023) to run courses in the country park. More stone would need to be delivered to site, which the Association were currently investigating and the Chair provided an update on the current position. The Greenspace Development Officer advised that the delivery to site would need to be carefully managed due to the potential of nesting skylarks, therefore a different access point may be required.

The 'Tour de Manc' would return to Werneth Low on 30 April 2023 with an official drinks station being sited at the Hare and Hounds car park from 7.30am with support from colleagues in Culture Services and the Right of Way officer. Greenspace volunteers would also be in attendance to assist in welcoming visitors and handing out refreshments. A variety of filming requests had been received with two requests (one for a Channel 4 documentary and one for an ITV weather report) currently being considered. The Council's webpages relating to Werneth Low were in the process of being updated and a page relating to the visitor centre, which contained inaccurate information, had been removed.

With regards 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.

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 a hazel coppice at Mousefields; removal of trees on the Heathland on Hacking Knife; removal of a den near the pond by the Cenotaph; clearing the site of fireworks and other festivity debris; clearing ditches at Baron Fields and by the side of the riding track; weekly maintenance in the formal gardens and orchard; and dry stone wall repairs.

The number of volunteers remained high with an average of 11 volunteers attending each week. Volunteers enjoyed a Christmas celebration in the wood yard and a walk. Hedge laying along the field boundary near the masts had been completed and the remainder of the 'brashings' would be

removed from the fields in the coming weeks. Hedge laying would continue along the riding track from Higham Cottages outside of the volunteering days.

Trust representatives advised that two local Neighbourhood Watch Groups had recently undertaken a litter pick at the Queen's Triangle and had filled 40 bin bags of litter. They planned to call a meeting in an attempt to address the problem, as it was believed to be due to vehicles parking along Werneth Road on the way to Greave that left litter behind. It was reported that a bulge on the retaining wall at the entrance to the car park had been observed. The Trust intended to consult The Cheshire Dry Stone Walling Association on the extent of the risk and to ask to be signposted to possible contractors to fix the wall.

Trust representatives notified the Joint Management Committee that the Dogs Trust had been invited to site and would bring information on responsible dog ownership that would be prominently displayed within the visitors centre. It was important to raise awareness of the rare birds on site and the impact loose dogs had on farming. There was a lack of signage within the country park and the Trust would look into viable options to rectify this. A suggestion was made for more involvement by children and potentially hosting an event in the country park aimed at that cohort. The Greenspace Development Manager advised that a funding stream was available that community groups could apply for to encourage more people to utilise the Borough's green spaces. The funding could be used by groups to host an event or commission a specialised company to run the event.

Trust representatives requested an update on the Joint Management Agreement. The Greenspace Development Manager advised that they would arrange a meeting of the working group in the coming weeks and that the Joint Management Agreement would be a standing item on future agendas.

The Chair provided an update on the work of HWMT and advised that a governance review was now underway. Safeguarding training was a priority and all trustees would be subject to an enhanced DBS check. The 5-year Environment Strategy was under development with an aim to match aspirations to the Council's management plan in order to complement one another. Negotiations on the farm tenancy agreement, which expired at the end of the year, had commenced. The Trust had submitted an objection to a phone mast on land that belonged to the Trust which was currently on a long term lease to the Scouts.

It was reported that the café continued to do well and the Trustees were very pleased with the positive feedback it had received. Footfall remained high and was rising and it was utilised by the community, including a high proportion of families. It was a challenge to keep it staffed with volunteers but due to its success, the possibility of extending opening hours and / or days would be explored. Work needed to be carried out and a request for a copy of the full structural survey, that was undertaken in August 2022, to be made available to the Trust if possible.

In conclusion, it was reported that discussions had taken place with Tameside Historical Society and the Council's Cultural Service regarding the archives with a view to make them more imaginative and interactive. An exciting discovery had been made of a potential 711th man, who made the ultimate sacrifice in the First World War, who originated from Hyde but served in a regiment in Liverpool. He was commemorated in Liverpool but the Trust would like him to be added to their records. The information needed to be validated and an update would be provided in due course.

RESOLVED:

- (i) That the updates be noted;**
- (ii) That the Trust representatives discuss the proposed footpath works with their fellow Trustees and confirm to the Greenspace Development Manager their financial contribution at their earliest possible convenience;**
- (iii) That the Greenspace Development Manager make arrangements for a project plan to be created of the proposed footpath works and share this with the Trust;**

- (iv) That the Greenspace Development Manager make arrangements for a meeting of the working group to discuss the Joint Management Agreement;**
- (v) That the Joint Management Agreement be a standing item on future agendas;**
- (vi) That an update report from the Hyde War Memorial Trust be a standing item on future agendas; and**
- (vii) That a copy of the full structural survey, that was undertaken in August 2022, be made available to the Trust if possible.**

11. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

RESOLVED:

That the Joint Management Committee meets as follows:-

- 14 June 2023**
- 11 October 2023**
- 21 February 2024**