

<b>Report To:</b>	<b>WERNETH LOW COUNTRY PARK JOINT MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE</b>
<b>Date:</b>	14 June 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 (22 February 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 During March and April 2023 the Tameside Countryside Estates Team completed the path works (phase 1) on site, which saw improvements to drainage and surfacing from the top of Cow Lane up to the Cenotaph. This allows 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 has been joint funded by the Hyde War Memorial Trust (HWMT) and Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council (TMBC).
- 1.2 The Greenspace Development Officer has been completing a review of the Werneth Low Management Plan, which will set out how the site will be managed from 2023 to 2028. Officers will circulate a draft version for comments by the Joint Committee prior to consultation with other groups such as the Volunteers and Werneth Low Environment Group.
- 1.3 A full site inspection was carried out in April 2023 by the TMBC Greenspace Development Officer, the report is then shared with the Greenspace Development Manager and actions are prioritised and planned. A further full inspection takes place in October each year.
- 1.4 A full review of the site signage was carried out by Greenspace Volunteers John Jones and Ray Knowles with John reproducing a map of the site and a full list of repairs needed. Where possible these repairs were immediately put into action and others that need new signs on the router will be completed as soon as possible.
- 1.5 The hazel coppicing project at Mousefields, which was started in Winter 2022 has had more work completed with the addition of some rabbit guards around the coppiced stools to help and protect the re-growth from predation.
- 1.6 As part of the Greenspace Conservation days we have completed a pond renovation project at the edge of Great Stone Low and New Piece. This area is suffering with an invasion of Himalayan Balsam, which last season we were struggling to get to due to the low tree branches and bramble invading this area. In addition this seasonal pond (holding water usually only in the winter months) was over grown and unmanaged. Unless ponds are managed appropriately they will soon revert to scrub. We therefore coppiced the willows in this area to prevent them draining too much of the water in the growing season, created a 'dead-hedge' using the smaller branches around the area, acting as a barrier with excellent nesting and habitat opportunities. The logs were removed off site to prevent them taking root on the damp ground. We are now removing the Himalayan Balsam hoping to rid this area of it entirely in future years, last year it did jump the wall into the neighbouring New Piece field and our focus is to prevent any further encroachment of this invasive plant on site.
- 1.7 The Grass cutting season has started with TMBC Grounds Maintenance Teams completing grass cutting on our 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 has been widened by the Greenspace Volunteers to enable the larger mower to access the site so this area can be cut again this year.
- 1.8 Litter and Fly tipping incidents are still an issue with items dumped at Windy Harbour including two lots of Christmas Trees in April, dumped bags of growing materials and a whole garden fence, upvc windows etc. Volunteers from the local community along with Greenspace Volunteers regularly litter pick the site and we are always grateful for their time and efforts. The Greenspace Officer responds to Fly tipping incidents where practicable. All Fly tipping incidents are investigated if evidence is found and support is received where needed with the clear up through TMBC Street Cleansing and Fly Tipping teams.

- 1.9 After the snow on the 10 March we had a very near miss with a tree and a house at the end of Arnold Ave where the very top of a spruce tree snapped off and ended up in the garden, thankfully missing the house, decking and fencing. Thanks to the TMBC Estates Team for quickly removing the tree from the garden and felling the tree to ensure it is safe. The Greenspace Volunteers then made habitat piles with the logs and branches.

## **2. PUBLIC EVENTS**

- 2.1 The Cheshire Dry Stone Walling Association (DSWA) ran a two day course over the weekend of 13-14 May 2023 with excellent weather. 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 this time was one of our newer volunteer recruits who thoroughly enjoyed the course and will be putting his new skills into practice when needed on the Low. The fee for this course was funded by the TMBC Greenspace Volunteer budget. New stone was needed for the course. We agreed a route for a local farmer to deliver 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. Many thanks to the Cheshire DSWA for organising the course and ensuring such high standards of work and work practices. The next course will be delivered on the weekend of 9-10 September 2023, posters for which are being displayed on site.
- 2.2 The Tour de Manc returned to Werneth Low again on the 30 April 2023 with cyclists from across the country take part in the circular route around Greater Manchester. Refreshments were on offer to the participants after the climb up Cowlshaw Brow and thanks to our Greenspace Volunteers for making the visitors feel welcome and making the site look great with flowers and decorations.
- 2.3 HWMT are making preparations for this year's Peace Day celebrations on the 25 June 2023. Greenspace staff and volunteers will be available to help with logistics on the day.
- 2.4 The Werneth Low Environment Group arranged a meeting with Adam Linnet from Cheshire Wildlife Trust on Monday 22 May to explore project possibilities, especially renovating some of the ponds on site and wildflower seed collection from the meadows. This is in the very early stages but we look forward to receiving more information from the group in due course and how we can work together to make some of the ideas a reality on the ground.

## **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 and has received great feedback from site users.

## **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**. We have continued to use the tool stores and Garage as shelter and storage, which has been working well.
- 4.2 A Volunteer Questionnaire was circulated that we will now use once a year to enable everyone to have a say on the work we complete and how the day is run etc. Officers are grateful to everyone for their responses and of course, their continued hard work on site making it better for both people and wildlife.

## **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	Mousefields	Hazel Coppice- Added chicken wire around stools to prevent too much predation of the new regrowth.	Ongoing as time and resources allow.
2	Edge of Great Stone Low/ New Piece	Pond renovation project- as previously described above.	March
3	Stansfield Meadow- next to church yard	Hedge cutting- keeping this hedge trimmed to maintain a formal shape and keep good relations with our neighbours at the church.	February
4	Higham Lane- from Higher Higham up.	Hedge cutting- field side- this hedge was laid two years ago so was now due for cutting to help bulk up the growth within the hedge and make it a better habitat for nesting birds etc.	March
5	Windy Harbour slope	Before the new growth set in we had a big litter pick on this slope which is steep and too difficult to access in the summer- 11 bags of rubbish were collected, mainly drinks cans and bottles etc.	March
6	View finders	Paint had been spread across both of the view finders- this was cleaned with graffiti remover.	April
7	Formal gardens and Orchard	Weekly maintenance.	Weekly
8	Higham Cottages Riding Track, Windy Harbour, Baron Fields and the small renovated pond	Himalayan Balsam removal. The excellent weather in recent weeks has spurred on the growth of everything, including the Balsam. We have seen a real improvement to the amount at the bottom of Baron fields thanks to efforts last year and we will focus again on preventing it taking over new areas e.g. jumping over the riding track at Higham cottages into the heath.	End of April- May, ongoing through the Summer until seeding.
8	Werneth Low Road and various	Dry Stone walling repairs, small and larger repairs needed through vandalism on site.	March and April
9	Calf Hey Woods	Repairs to fencing and improvements to gate with wire netting added to prevent access to this sensitive area of the site.	May
10	Windy Harbour/Cock Brow grassed area	We had had several reports of people parking on this grass and setting fires and bbqs which is not allowed on site. The Greenspace Volunteers have dug out the ditch and built up a bund to try and prevent people parking on the grass and causing damage. If this doesn't work we will look at adding some posts onto the grass.	May
11	On entrance to Pipers Clough	Culvert needed digging out to prevent flooding to riding tracks causing erosion.	Ongoing
12	Visitors Centre Car Park	Weekly litter pick, signs cleaned and driveway drainage maintained to keep clear.	Weekly