

**Report To:** **WERNETH LOW COUNTRY PARK JOINT MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE**

**Date:** 27 July 2015

**Reporting Officer:** Ian Saxon – Assistant Executive Director, Environmental Services  
David Cannon – Greenspace Development Officer

**Subject:** **ANNUAL REPORT 2014/15**

**Report Summary:** To inform Members of activities undertaken within the Country Park during the period 2014/15.

**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 from existing budgets.


**(Authorised by the Borough Treasurer)**


**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 David Cannon, Greenspace Development Officer:

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# **Werneth Low** **Country Park**

**Annual Report**  
**2014/2015**



**WERNETH LOW COUNTRY PARK JOINT MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE**  
**(TAMESIDE COUNCIL AND HYDE WAR MEMORIAL TRUST)**



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**Front cover photograph: Hackingknife Meadow August 2014**



## 1. Werneth Low – A History

Werneth Low is an area rich in history and interest. The story of this special place begins over 4,000 years in the Bronze Age when the Low was used as an outdoor Cathedral for worship and burials.

Tribal Britons were defeated in a great battle fought on Werneth Low as the Roman occupation of Britain spread north. A Romano-British fort was built which included a system of ditches and earthworks.

Werneth is mentioned in the Domesday Survey of 1086 as *Warnet* where it is described as waste, containing woodland three leagues long and two leagues wide and was assessed at 1 Virgate. It was held before 1066, by a free man as a manor, and probably formed part of the Anglo-Saxon Lordship of Longdendale. By 1086 it was held directly by the Earl of Chester.

The manor of Werneth is first recorded as belonging to the Higham family as early as 1330. This family were referred to as freeholders in Werneth by 1445 when a John Higham was listed amongst the knights, gentleman and freeholders of Cheshire.

For the Medieval period the survival of extensive ridge and furrow earthworks, coupled with early field boundaries and farm sites, make the Werneth Low landscape one of the best surviving medieval areas in Greater Manchester.

The best known landmark on Werneth Low is the stone Cenotaph commemorating the 710 lives lost in the Great War 1914 to 1919. The majority of those killed were in the Cheshire Regiment in the years 1916 and 1917. The loss of so many from such a small town as Hyde was devastation.

At a council meeting in the Mayor's Parlour at Hyde Town Hall on 3rd March 1920 it was decided to remember those fallen soldiers, sailors and airmen from Hyde by purchasing by public subscription the Lower Higham Farm Estate. The land to be kept open and free for the ***“health and recreation of the people of Hyde”***.

The Hyde War Memorial Committee reported to the townspeople of Hyde ***“Those who lived through the war will not forget but those who come after us should be reminded of the sacrifices which have been made”***

The appeal for public subscriptions raised by the end of May 1920, £14,013 14s. 8d. The Lower Higham farm and land was purchased for £4,000 and the memorial cenotaph was erected at a cost of £2,000.

The Cenotaph was unveiled on the 25<sup>th</sup> June 1921 by Mrs Stanley Welch, built of Grey Cornish Granite the total weight is 34 tons. It was designed by Messrs J. Whitehead & Sons of London.



Unveiling of the Cenotaph 25<sup>th</sup> June 1921

## **2. Werneth Low – Site Information**

### **Location and Size**

Werneth Low Country Park is located 15km (9½ miles) east of the city centre of Manchester on the edge of the Pennines. All the land in the Country Park is in the Borough of Tameside. The town of Hyde, along with the villages of Gee Cross and Newton, are just 2.5km (1½ miles) away to the west.

The Country Park consists of approximately 81 hectares (200 acres) of hilltop and hillside.

### **Ownership**

60 hectares (150 acres) belong to the Hyde War Memorial Trust, including the visitor centre building. Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council owns the remaining 21 hectares (50 acres) of land in the park.

### **Creation of the Country Park**

The Country Park was officially established in 1980 when the Hyde War Memorial Trust and Tameside MBC and the Greater Manchester Council entered into a formal agreement relating to the management of the park. Responsibilities relating to the Greater Manchester County Council were passed on to Tameside MBC in 1986 when the County Council was abolished.



**View towards the Cenotaph from Higham Meadows July 2014**

### 3. Vision for Werneth Low Country Park

The Vision for Werneth Low Country Park is of a place where landscape and nature conservation and informal countryside recreation are in balance. It is a place where natural beauty is enhanced, where wildlife will thrive, and where visitors, regardless of their ability or background, can spend an enjoyable and fulfilling time. It is a place that is cared for and looked after, not just for now but for future generations.

#### **Country Park Overall Aims:**

1. To manage the Country Park in a way that sustains and improves the quality and variety of its wildlife and landscape, and where recreation activity is in harmony with this.
2. To facilitate access for all, irrespective of ability or background.
3. To manage the Country Park for its cultural and historic importance.
4. To engender an understanding of the various aspects of the Country Park through programmes of lifelong learning.
5. To provide a high quality service to visitors, involving them in decision making about how the Country Park is run.
6. To maintain a safe and health environment, befitting the Country Park.

#### **These general management aims are supported by the Tameside Greenspace Service Priorities:**

1. Improving the quality of Greenspace for residents.
2. Building capacity amongst Friends Groups and Volunteers.
3. Conserving the natural environment and increasing biodiversity.
4. Maximising opportunities to improve the health of all residents.
5. Developing opportunities to bring in external funding.



**View towards the Cenotaph from Ash Cottage, Higham Lane January 2015**

## 4. Managing the Country Park

The Country Park is formally managed by the Werneth Low Country Park Joint Management Committee. The Committee is made up of Trustees of the Hyde War Memorial Trust and elected members of Tameside MBC. The Committee meets three times a year and the Greenspace Development Manager, and Greenspace Development Officer, report directly to the Joint Committee.

The Werneth Low Country Park Management Plan guides the work of the Joint Committee in safeguarding and protecting all land in the Park. The document covers the years 2011 to 2016. It includes an annual programme of management prescriptions which filter down to action undertaken by the Greenspace Development Officer, Greenspace Volunteers, contractors working on behalf of the Joint Management Committee and other partners with an interest or connection with the Country Park.

All the maintenance of sites programmes are linked directly to conserving and maintaining local distinctiveness and spirit of place.

### 2014/2015 Highlights

- Annual programme of grass cutting footpaths, picnic sites, cenotaph area, car parks and areas around the visitor centre completed during April to October.
- At Rye Field Meadow installed 95 metres of stone path pitching and resurfaced 208 metres of rolled stone path. Cost: **£9,274.**
- At Radcliffe Meadow installed 80 metres of stone path pitching. Cost **£6,695.**
- On the Country Park's riding track network installed new drainage and resurfaced 293 metres of track surface. Cost **£15,156.**
- The Hyde War Memorial Trust funded the purchase of new stone for 2 dry stone walling training weekends where 30 metres of new wall was built. Cost: **£650.**
- Completed Minor Works Programme of replacing gates, stiles and bench seating.
- Revised and updated Werneth Low Country Park Management Plan 2011 – 2016.



**Stone Path Pitching Rye Field Meadow September 2015**

## 5. Involving the Community

Involving the community plays a crucial part in securing the wellbeing of the Country Park. It is an objective that is at the very heart of our management philosophy. To have the collective support and understanding of our local community is a major asset.

We work with and assist a wide range of community partners: Trustees of the Hyde War Memorial Trust, Tenant Farmers, other tenants of Country Park land such as Werneth Low Golf Club, schools and colleges, organisations such as Cub and Scout groups, residents of the area and local businesses. Working and engaging directly with these groups forges understanding and partnerships that have positive and rewarding outcomes.

Mention must also be made of our public events programmes which provide excellent opportunities for people to meet each other and learn about the place where they live.

### 2014/2015 Highlights

- We welcomed **4,010** people to the Lower Higham Visitor Centre (Previous year's total: **3,281**).
- The Country Park Greenspace Volunteers completed in total **4,908** work hours (Previous year's total: **4,100** work hours). See Appendix 1. and Appendix 2.
- Using an electronic counter on the footpath from Lower Higham to the Cenotaph the total number of visitors recorded from April 2014 to March 2015 was **61,870** (Previous year's total: **62,835**). On the footpath near Quarry Car Park the total number recorded for the same period was **55,684** (Previous year's total (**49,070**). For more information see Appendix 3.
- During the year the Greenspace Development Officer organized **12** events at which **871** people attended (Previous year's total: **11** events at which **347** people attended).



**The 26<sup>th</sup> Cown Edge Ramble September 2014**



## 6. Conserving Habitats and Wildlife

In January 2010 Werneth Low Country Park, in partnership with Natural England, began a new management agreement for wildlife nature conservation. This new Environmental Stewardship agreement covers the years 2010 to 2020 and it has five primary objectives:

- Wildlife conservation
- Maintenance and enhancement of landscape quality and character
- Natural resource protection
- Protection of the historic environment; and
- Promotion of public access and understanding of the countryside

Environmental Stewardship – Higher Level agreements are only suitable for land that is of “*significant environmental interest*” so to receive this agreement is confirmation that past management of Country Park land has been correct. The agreement is implemented through a programme of annual works and during the period of this report we have been fully compliant.

Informal countryside recreation and wildlife nature conservation on the surface seem to be incompatible elements. Promoting access while at the same time working to conserve wildlife is a constant challenge. Engaging with and informing visitors about a wide range of conservation matters helps resolve conflicts of interests. We install information signs around the Country Park in spring asking people not to wander through farmed meadows thus reducing disturbance to ground nesting birds. Such simple yet effective actions as these have a positive and beneficial impact.

### 2014/2015 Highlights

- Environmental Stewardship agreement 5<sup>th</sup> year compliant securing **£3,648** of grant income.
- Environmental Stewardship grant income to date since commencement of agreement in January 2010 **£28,827**.
- Implemented all wildlife nature conservation items from the Werneth Low Country Park Management Plan 2011 – 2016.
- Maintained all Sites of Biological importance and undertook removal of non-native invasive weeds from adjoining areas.



**Mike Kelly, Volunteer, hedgelaying at Baron Fields Meadow March 2015**

## 7. Providing a Quality Service

During the period of this report, for an eleventh consecutive year, we achieved a prestigious Green Flag Award. This confirms the high standards of service the public can expect at the Country Park.

We work in close partnership with visitors, the local community, groups and organisations and we listen very carefully to their comments, suggestions and ideas. Continual improvement philosophy underpins our approach in a myriad of matters. Documents such as the Country Park Management Plan 2011 – 2016 will guide management direction.

### Planned Developments 2015/2016

- Submit application for Green Flag Award subject to review.
- Implement year 5 of the Werneth Low Country Park Management Plan 2011/2016.
- Complete Year 6 of the Environmental Stewardship Agreement.
- Complete the 2015/2016 Maintenance of Sites Programme.
- Complete the 2015/2016 Wildlife Nature Conservation Programme.
- Complete programme of repairs to footpaths and riding track network.

### How Much Does it Cost

During the period of this report the costs of looking after Werneth Low Country Park was provided from the Greenspace Development Budget of Tameside Council with contributions from the Hyde War Memorial Trust. Based on past expenditure and this year's financial accounts it has cost around **£83,000** to run the Country Park during 2014 to 2015. This works out at about **40p** a year for each person over the age of 18 who live in Tameside. The costs are for:

- Maintaining the Country Park.
- Delivering educational programmes.
- Organising public event programmes.
- Promoting the Country Park locally and regionally.
- Delivering visitor services including the Visitor Centre.
- Staff Salaries.



**Dry Stone Walling Weekend at Hackingknife Meadow May 2014**

## Appendices

### Appendix 1.

#### List of Staff and Volunteers at Werneth Low Country Park 2014 -2015:

**Nicola Marshall** – Tameside Greenspace Development Manager

**David Cannon** – Tameside Greenspace Development Officer

#### Greenspace Volunteers:

**Anita Allen**

**Alan Bamforth**

**Norman Bamforth**

**Mark Bruniges**

**Colin Bates**

**Dorothy Hollingworth**

**John Jones**

**Mike Kelly**

**Raymond Knowles**

**Linda Mellor**

**Denis Middleton**

**Rob Nicholls**

**Ross Pape**

**Hazel Shepherdson**

**Sam Simpson**

**Maurice Smith**



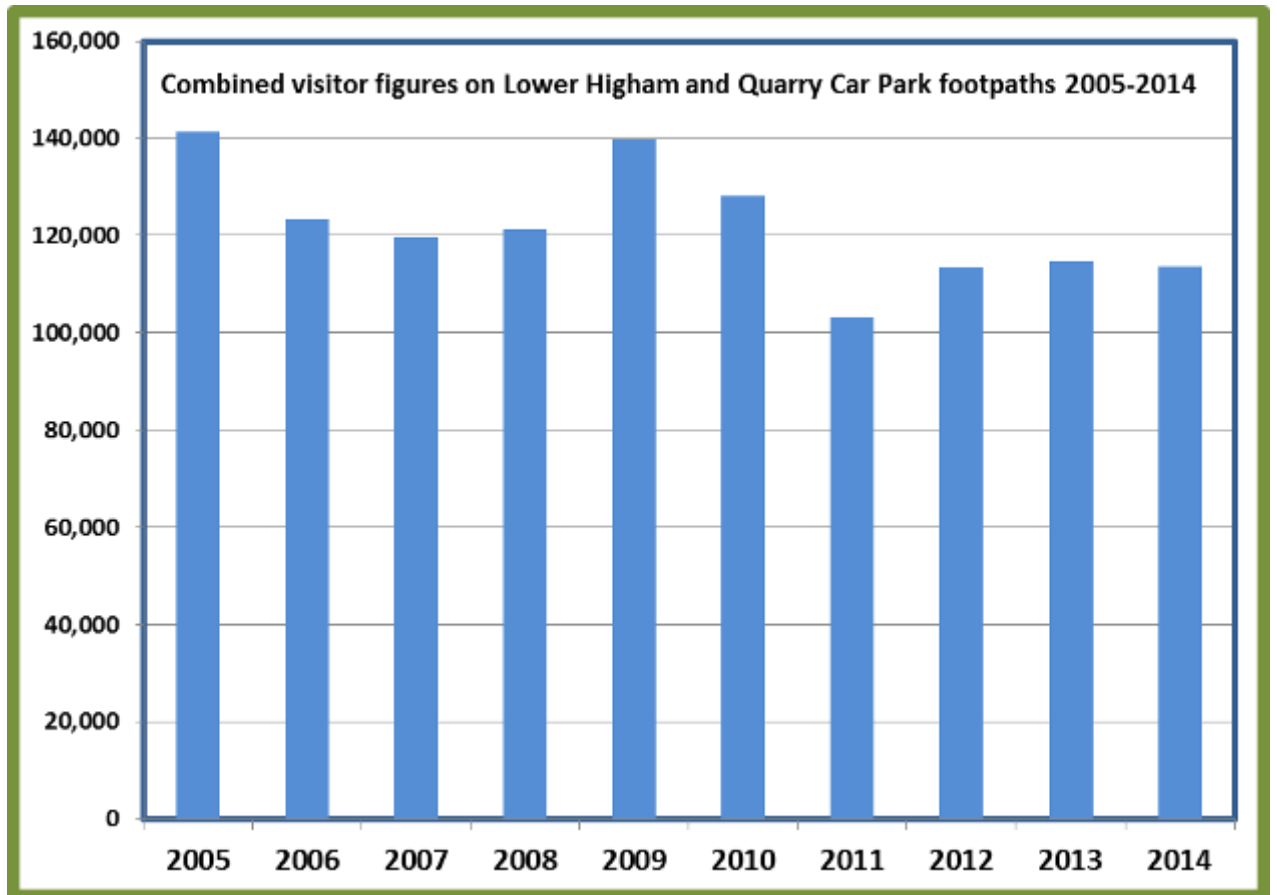
## Appendix 2.

### Maintenance of Sites Programme, Greenspace Volunteers, October 2014 – March 2015 Projects in order of completion:

<b>Project</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Task</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>Lower Higham Gardens</b>	Re-design Wildflower Garden
<b>2</b>	<b>Lower Higham - Cow Lane</b>	Cut back, prune hedgerow and sweep lane, clean-out grids
<b>3</b>	<b>Cenotaph Area</b>	Cut grass/edge off. Clean area ready for Remembrance Day
<b>4</b>	<b>Lower Higham Gardens</b>	Clean borders and prune shrubs ready for Remembrance Day
<b>5</b>	<b>Flaggy Path</b>	Edge -off and clean 134 metres of flaggy stones
<b>6</b>	<b>Hackingknife Woodland</b>	Selective thinning
<b>7</b>	<b>Holy Trinity Paddock</b>	Grub out ivy growing along hedgerow 60 metres
<b>8</b>	<b>Flaggy Path Hedgerow</b>	Cut back 124 metres of hedgerow
<b>9</b>	<b>QCP Picnic Area</b>	Cut back 54 metres of hedgerow
<b>10</b>	<b>Lower Higham Drive</b>	Cut back 30 metres of hedgerow
<b>11</b>	<b>Ash Cottage Picnic Area</b>	Cut back 46 metres of hedgerow
<b>12</b>	<b>Holy Trinity Paddock</b>	Cut back 60 metres of hedgerow
<b>13</b>	<b>Riding Track</b>	Cut back 140 metres of hedgerow
<b>14</b>	<b>Earl of Warrington Meadow</b>	Grub out 128 metres of new laid hedgerow
<b>15</b>	<b>Werneth Low Road</b>	Hedgelaying: Werneth Bungalow to Metal Gate 70 metres
<b>16</b>	<b>Werneth Low Road</b>	Hedgelaying: Metal Gate to Lofty Top 135 metres
<b>17</b>	<b>Werneth Low Road</b>	Hedgelaying: Lofty Top to QCP Picnic Area 148 metres
<b>18</b>	<b>Flaggy Path Hedgerow</b>	L 36 ES Post laying trim 124 metres
<b>19</b>	<b>Baron Fields Woodlands</b>	Selective thinning especially along rights of way
<b>20</b>	<b>Lower Higham Compost Bins</b>	Dismantle and rebuild using galvanised wire fencing
<b>21</b>	<b>Baron Fields Woodlands</b>	Clear drains on Baron Road to Aspland Road footpath
<b>22</b>	<b>Baron Fields Woodlands</b>	Clear out Brambles from beneath Oak trees
<b>23</b>	<b>Lower Higham Gardens</b>	Cut and reduce height of hedgerow bottom of Cow Lane
<b>24</b>	<b>Higham Lane</b>	298 metres of hedge cutting layed hedgerow
<b>25</b>	<b>Lower Higham Orchard</b>	Plant 4 replacement fruit trees
<b>26</b>	<b>Baron Fields Woodlands</b>	Relay 90 metres of existing hedgerow

**Appendix 3.**

**Bar Chart of combined visitor numbers on footpaths at Lower Higham and Quarry Car Park January to December 2005 to 2014.**





**Remembrance Service at the Cenotaph 9<sup>th</sup> November 2014.**

**David Cannon  
Tameside Greenspace Development Officer  
(April 2015).**

**(All the photographs in this report were taken April 2014 to March 2015).**

