

Great Notley Country Park Partnership Board – Site Report February 2020

Steffanie Robertson and Harrison Ewan

Actions from Previous Meeting

- How are we doing against the income budget target for takings – info requested by Cllr. Butland

Income was under target (figures from Nov 19). Year to date is down on previous years as well however the closure of key pieces in the park, the weather extremes we seen this year, and the unexpected closure of the café on site will have had a big impact. The café is being refurbished and relaunched in the very near future so that will hopefully help in making up some lost income. Car parking is overachieving with our busiest and most profitable month (as expected) being August.

- End of the park where it is very wet. Update on this. Has it been rectified already or if not confirmation that it will before the Autumn/Winter

This has now been filled in so hopefully rectified. There is also a desire line which splits away from the path near this entrance. Our plan is to take several willow trees out (deemed necessary from our tree inspection), and plant in this area to help it recover. The official pathway has been grown over by grass, slightly further on, and so allowing this desire line to recover will also help with keeping the pathway managed.

Staffing

Our part-time ranger, Frank, unfortunately left us in October after being offered an opportunity he was keen to pursue with the Essex Wildlife Trust. This has meant however we have been very much running on skeleton staff and projects we had planned are now unfortunately taking longer to complete. We are however hoping to recruit to his position very shortly.

The Service has gone through a restructure beginning in November and as such, new management positions have been created. Steve Bunn (Green Space Manager) has since left Country Parks and in replacement we are pleased to welcome Paul Stokes, who has taken the position of Operations Manager. Laura Boreham (Business Development Lead) has also decided it's time for a new challenge and will be leaving us very shortly. In terms of the Skyropes team, Harri has decided to take on a new challenge, as has one of the Senior Skyropes Instructors. We wish them all the best in their new ventures.

Playtrail and Park Update

Due to the age and high use of the play equipment we continue to undertake remedial work.

After an incident on the Climbing Forest at the end of June, the piece was closed off to the public until this was investigated. An investigation was launched, and a report written/collated and sent to the HSE who did not need to make any further investigation. From this report however we agreed several recommendations that have been implemented.

The woodchip that surrounds several of the older pieces is due to be replaced in its entirety. Due to it already being closed to the public we decided to start with the Climbing Forest, allowing the ground time to recover. Unfortunately, due to the weather, ground conditions getting worse and budgetary constraints we had to stop. We plan on completing this as soon as possible and have since been focussing on the re-launch of the café.

The Lily's at Notley café ceased trading in October and the decision was made to take it back in-house. The team are working behind the scenes to get the café refurbished and opened as soon as possible.

The Essex Forest Initiative was announced by Essex County Council (ECC) at Full Council in October. ECC have committed to planting 375,000 trees across the County over the next five years, which will capture 60,000 tonnes of carbon. Mitigating the effects of Climate Change is a major priority and The Essex Forest Initiative is just one way ECC hopes to achieve this. We were pleased the Initiative launched here at Gt Notley, with the first tree planted on the 28th November.

The Essex Young Farmers contacted Country Parks asking if they could volunteer to plant trees and/or hedgerows as part of their 'Protect Your Future' campaign. I thought Gt Notley could benefit from this, and we hoped to tie this in with the Woodland Trust's 'Big Climate Fightback' Campaign which is being deemed the UK's biggest mass tree planting on 30th November, however this didn't go quite to plan with the supply of tree's being limited. I have since contacted the Young Farmers to find out if they would be interested in planting in March instead.

Now we have reached a more quiet period visitor wise, we are hoping to get on with projects such as clearing the fishing swims of reeds, cutting back some of the growth around the lakes to allow for better views, crown lifting areas of trees for visitors to picnic under when the weather turns nicer, clearing the ponds from litter and excess algae and tidying up the willow tunnel area. We will also be looking at events for the next calendar year.

Flitch Way, Black Water Rail Trail, Garnetts Wood

The Friends of the Flitch Way continue to provide invaluable support to the Country Parks team. After a number of days clearing areas on the Black Water Rail Trail, they moved to Garnetts Wood where they worked until the festive period. They have since restarted back on the Flitch Way. Other works undertaken by the rangers include tree felling, both from our tree inspection report and ad hoc emergency works.

Visitor Numbers and Income

Between July and November we had just over 65,600 visitors. Over the summer period (July 25th 2019 to September 2nd) we had 13905 cars come to site and an estimated 37544 visitors (a 10.9% decrease from 2018). Takings during this time reached £64704 (a 15% decrease from last year when we took £76222 during the same period). This could be due to the closure of the waterplay (a hugely popular area during the summer) and the Climbing Forest at the busiest time of the year. However, this decrease over summer was actually a trend across many of the other Country Parks, which could indicate that the weather extremes we had put visitors off, with either exceedingly hot days or rain.