

		AGENDA ITEM 4
		GTP/03/12
Meeting:	GREAT NOTLEY COUNTRY PARK JOINT VENTURE PARTNERSHIP BOARD	
Date:	18 July 2012	
Great Notley Country Park Site Report January – June 2012		
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2011-2012 was a successful year for the country park. The team achieved a great amount of work within the year. We saw a large number of visitors using the site. The park budget was on line and all income targets were achieved. This year we have seen a slow start due to the bad weather and also possibly due to the current economic climate. However, the team are looking forward to a change in the weather and hopefully a busy summer.

Staff

There has been a change in staffing at the park. There are now six full time employees based at Great Notley. Duncan Fisher has returned after his secondment with the Natural Environment Team. However, due to short falls in the Natural Environment Team, it has been agreed that Duncan will continue working for them for one day every fortnight. Richard Bicheno started a full time permanent contract as a ranger in January. Pam Winter retired in April after giving around twenty years service for Braintree District Council.

Steve Bunn, Tom Hamilton and Richard completed their chain saw courses of differing levels. Richard has completed and passed his trailer course. Duncan's first aid qualification has been renewed and he is also scheduled to complete an 'Encouraging Wildflowers to Woodlands' course. This course will enable him to improve the biodiversity in our woodland sites.

A side arm flail course and mini digger course are in the pipeline for Tom and Richard. These qualifications and courses are a valuable resource when maintaining the country park. For example, the mini digger will be used to improve the drainage around the site and also to create wet areas as a suitable habitat for amphibians.

Events and User Groups

In the last six months a number of events and activities have been keeping staff busy. Duncan attended the Community Information Fair at John Ray Junior School in March and promoted country parks.

The North Essex Astronomy Group along with Notley staff hosted eight astronomy events on site. The visitor numbers for these events has been steadily increasing and one event each month is scheduled for the coming year.

Birthday parties are still being delivered at the park. July and August are still the most popular months for birthday parties.

The Education Team have organised nineteen Puddleducks events on the park since January for toddlers and their families. Staff believe this has significantly contributed to an increase in awareness of the park for young families outside of school holidays.

Event preparation has begun for Cursed, which is now in its fourth year. The rangers will be running it again at Cressing Temple, but this year the event will be run over four nights. The aim is to achieve an increase in visitor numbers to the event and also an increase income.

Preparations for Spooky Fun are also underway and the team are working in conjunction with Cressing Temple staff for Cressing Unwrapped in December.

There has already been a number of charity events organised on the site. These have included a Guide Dog Walk and Greyhound Dog Show. Unfortunately the Greyhound Dog Show was cancelled due to extremely bad weather, but the organisers have rescheduled the event for August during the summer holidays. The Greyhound Walks Charity continue to hold their monthly meets on site and are also organising a National Greyhound and Lurcher walk in June.

There have been a large number of sporting events on the park between January and June including the Witham Running Club cross country, the Born to Tri duathlon in April and the Salvation Army Scouts walk around the park. Trailnet, who operate the Cycle Hire from the park are running regular weekly health rides from the Discovery Centre. There has been a number of charity cycle rides along the Flitch Way, including the Sky Home Services sponsored bike ride.

Great Notley Football Club is also using the site as a training ground, as well as 'Boot Camp' and the 'Nordic Walkers'. We have also had a group of people training in the park for the three peaks.

Claire Jones has worked in conjunction with the Essex County Council Waste Reduction Team in May in to deliver a free compost giveaway event. Twelve tonnes of compost was delivered on site and by 5.00pm that evening the compost had all been given away to Essex residents. It is hoped the Waste Recycling Team will want to repeat this event in the future.

The Christchurch Easter Service was held on top of the hill again this year. Go Bonkers, the inflatable company; have been on site during the school holidays. However, some of the event days were cancelled due to bad weather.

Services

There has been a noticeable decline in conference room bookings. So far there has only been twenty one conference room bookings.

School and college trips organised by the Education Team have included activities, such as geocaching, play ground physics, pirate days and environmental art. The staff are also noticing the site is becoming popular with teachers who bring their pupils to the site independently without requesting a guided activity.

We will be receiving two mobility scooters in the near future. This will enable visitors with limited mobility to gain greater access and independence when exploring the site.

Maintenance

Improvements to the park have included three new bridges that have been installed over the ditches around the park. Areas of fencing have been removed around the site to make the site more accessible to our visitors.

It has been difficult to keep up with the grass cutting this year as the weather has been perfect grass growing conditions. However, this has allowed other species to flourish and there has been an increase in Bee Orchids around the site. Duncan cut an experimental area which he then reseeded with wild flower mix. The idea is to try to increase the biodiversity of plants and insects within that area. The rangers are also trying out new cutting regimes, by leaving more areas as grassland uncut to improve the environment for wildlife.

Tree work has been identified to be carried out on site. Some of this work has already been dealt with and the other work has been scheduled for this autumn, as now is not the right time or year to carry out tree surgery.

Tree planting has been carried out around the park with volunteers, staff and girl guides.

Play equipment improvements were completed ready for the spring season and the increase of visitors after the winter period. These improvements have involved replacing items such as ropes and maintaining the safety surfacing around the equipment.

The reed bed channel was redirected to increase the flow of water in the reed beds. This should improve the environment for pond life. A series of newt surveys have been carried out by ecological contractors commissioned by Countryside Properties in conjunction with the new proposed industrial estate at the southern end of the park. We will be receiving the reports and recommendations for habitat improvements in due course.

Volunteers

We currently have one Duke of Edinburgh student, who is completing his bronze award working at the park. He will be with us every other Sunday for three months.

Three work experience students from local schools and also Writtle College have also been working at the park.

Over the last six months there has been 37 volunteer days with the Friends of the Flitch Way (FoFW). These work parties have mainly taken place on the Flitch Way, however, they have also been volunteering at Great Notley County Park on several occasions. Some of their tasks have included construction work, habitat creation and ride clearance to name a few activities. The FoFW are a great asset to the Country Park and ECC as they are a very committed and skilled workforce.

Green Flag

The team put in the application for the Green Flag award in January and had an inspection on 22nd May from the Green Flag judges. It was a clear, bright sunny day and the judges seemed to be impressed by the site. We will find out the result in July. The team are hoping they will be awarded another flag.

Issues

Two car park machines were stolen at the beginning of the year. New machines with a new system have been installed. The new system has been installed to reduce the transference of tickets by visitors. Tickets are now vehicle specific as visitors have to type in their car registration number. This new system should generate more income as there will be a reduction in ticket swapping.

At the beginning of the year snow caused access problems with people parking on the carriage way, even though car park was open. The incident was reported to the police, but they did not attend the site.

The Wettest Spring on record has had an impact on our visitor numbers and therefore income. We hope the weather will improve for the summer holidays.

For the future the team are looking forward to the summer and hopefully an increase in visitors. They are hoping to receive the new Green Flag award for the fourth year running. The team are looking forward to working with partners such as the Cressing Temple team on the three large scale events.