

Newsletter

Haysden Country Park

ISSUE 4

DATE 22/10/21

Welcome to the fourth edition of the Haysden Country Park newsletter, which replaces the User Panel meeting that is usually held in the Autumn of each year.

Top stories in this newsletter



User Panel



Coronavirus



Tonbridge School



Leigh Barrier

User Panel



The period of the pandemic has given us an opportunity to try out newsletters. It is now time to decide the way forward for this panel. The attendance at past face-to-face user panel meetings from members of the public has in recent years generally been low, with on average 9 people attending meetings (which includes both local councillors and concessions). So, we now want to hear your views on how we should continue in the future, the options are:

Face to face meetings – meet twice a year in a room round table as we have done previously. This option does incur a cost for room hire and increased carbon footprint for people traveling by car.

Virtual meetings – held online, little to no cost, little carbon footprint.

Newsletters – continue with a newsletter either twice or four times a year. No extra cost, we can include photographs and website links. Readily accessible, to most people, could potentially reach a far wider number of people (higher distribution numbers). Low carbon footprint.

Please email your preferred option to chris.fox@tmbc.gov.uk by 1 December 2021.

Coronavirus



With the removal of national restrictions, the Council has removed the measures put in place to keep the public safe, including those around the catering area and signage.

For the latest details on how TMBC are dealing with Coronavirus, please visit our web page <https://www.tmbc.gov.uk/services/health-and-social-care/health-and-medical-advice/coronavirus-covid-19>

Tonbridge School



As part of 'Giving Day' in August, boys and masters from Tonbridge School offered funding and volunteered for the day in the park. Under the direction of a few of the Haysden Country Park Volunteers and Council staff, they helped installing a new revetment around Barden Lake, cleared some water plants in The Shallows and undertook a litter pick around the park. Their work and funding was greatly appreciated.

Leigh Barrier



Flood defence work – this is being undertaken by the Environment Agency (EA) on the Leigh Barrier embankment and has continued at Haysden Water over the summer. These works are being carried out under the Reservoir Act. The work involves lifting the topsoil of the existing 1.5 kilometre main embankment and laying reinforcing materials. This reinforced layer will be covered with a layer of soil then sown with grass to further stabilise the surface. Once these works are complete, the embankments will look very similar

to how they look now. These works will ensure the Leigh FSA continues to safely reduce flood risk to Tonbridge, Hildenborough and downstream communities into the future. The first section was completed in the park this year. The car parks currently being use by the contractors are expected to be returned to the Council in November this year and will not we understand be needed for the next section of work.

A Statutory Order has now been served on the Council by EA for the Mud Lane area, which is the next section. Advanced work clearing vegetation along Mud Lane has now started.

These works will we understand be followed by the 'Leigh Flood Storage Area Scheme', which is a separate scheme that will increase the storage capacity behind the Leigh Barrier, the public inquiry is now closed. Updates can be found here

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/leigh-expansion-and-hildenborough-embankments-scheme/leigh-expansion-and-hildenborough-embankments-scheme>

Other news

There continues to be an increased number of visitors in the park, and the impacts on the park itself continue to be monitored. The income from car parking this year has so far been above predicted levels. There is still additional wear and tear around the play area with little grass now, and wear on surfaced paths which has been significant in places. The unmade paths along the River Medway for example are now encroaching on the meadows and uncut area. Due to the Council imposing financial restrictions, we have been unable to repair these areas. As many unmade paths are now bare of grass, they are likely to be muddy again this winter. Additional car parking has remained opened for the public but will be kept under review and closed when not required.

We have taken the decision as we did last year, to extend the twice daily cleaning of the toilets until the end of October.

Some anti-social behaviour has occurred around the car parks and in the park during this summer and the Council has continued to employ extra security staff to monitor the covid rules and as a bonus this has meant that we have had additional staff presence to deal with anti-social behaviour issues over the summer. We have experienced issues with dogs off leads chasing waterfowl, and in some cases kill or

injuring birds which is of concern, and signs have been installed, and the Councils Dog Warden continues to monitor this. Waterfowl have also been injured in the breeding season by other birds and we are grateful for the support of the charities RSPCA and Folly Wildlife Trust who have assisted us with this.

Car parks - cars have been caught racing around the car parks. The height barrier has been damaged and repaired on several occasions over the last few months (which is not unusual) we assume this is being caused by cars with bicycles on car racks, (we have warning signs and other precautions already in place) there has also been damage to bollards and gateposts around the car parks by careless driving.

Sponsored seat scheme – we have continued to see a rise in demand for seats and several more seats have been installed since the Spring.

Green Flag Award judging

We are pleased to announce that the park has been awarded the Green Flag Award again for the 15th year running.

<https://www.greenflagaward.org/>



Work completed

- The Council's Media team have launched the new website
- Three new lidded litter bins were ordered and have now been installed to try and reduce the issue of vermin pulling the litter out of key litter bins
- Three new seats have been donated and installed around Barden Lake thanks to sponsors
- A new ramp for the jetty has been installed at Barden Lake for easy access
- Three speed bumps have been replaced on the main drive as they were worn out
- Revetment work around Barden Lake has been ongoing
- Fencing repairs undertaken around the area of Friendship Wood and the railway arch
- Work with the Haysden Country Park Volunteers leaders to agree and prioritise the work programme
- Signs put up around Barden Lake reminding people to keep dogs under control and not chase waterfowl
- New fishing swim areas installed around Barden Lake by the concession
- Tree work around the park following our inspections, a major oak tree that fell over along the river path has also been cleared
- Park wide wildflower a survey completed thanks to volunteer Alan Hayes
- Park Breeding Bird Survey completed thanks to volunteer Martin Garwood
- Security measures around the building and car park have been enhanced
- Picnic table painting has been started

- Bollards replaced along the drive and car park
- Drain clearance at Audley Rise car park
- 'Contact us' information on car park notice boards updated
- Pay by phone new signage installed for RingGo contactless payment in the car parks – this contractor replaces the original one

Other work in progress

- The junior multi play unit in the play area is being replaced this Autumn with a new unit and the surfacing under this along with the surfacing under the existing toddler swings
- HCPV work at the far end of Barden Lake to create meadows
- One more new sponsored seat still to be installed at Barden Lake awaiting delivery
- Cutting back overhanging trees around Barden Lake by angling concession
- Renewal of the Town Sailing Club, TriSwim, Dog Exercise, and Tonbridge and District Angling and Fish Preservation Society agreements will be progressed by the Property and Legal Services teams
- Re-tender of the Public Conveniences and Pest Control contracts is being progressed by the Waste Services team
- Reviewing and update leaflets and print these
- Revetment work around Barden Lake work will continue
- Two dog bin replacements on order
- Planning new circular walking trails around the park
- Mitigation measures in the park relating to the Environment Agency (EA) Leigh Barrier works including Botany pond clearance of vegetation
- A mural for the sewage plant gates is to be created to hide the plant
- Environment Agency (EA) removal of tree from River Medway and move stile after bank slips
- Two vandalised seats to be repaired by the volunteers
- Continue working on the new 'Ranger-Led Activities' booklet as time allows
- Sharps Bridge by the boat landing stage - KCC are arranging the supply and replacement of the bridge as this is in their ownership on a public right of way path MU92
- Cycle route signage being replaced where needed on the off-road sections
- Rabbit control around the Leigh Barrier being reviewed with the EA
- Cutting back vegetation and lifting trees and laying surfacing for access by machinery along Mud Lane as part of the EA Leigh Barrier embankment work
- New line of the fence along the back of the Leigh Barrier being discussed with the EA
- Replanting trees and shrubs around the bat cave area by the EA
- Replacing the gates and barriers around the car parks removed during the works by the EA
- Planting hedges and trees in the park this Winter

- Replacement of the damaged leaflet racks – awaiting funding
- Drainage on public footpath MU51A under the railway arch from The Shallows to Stone Lock has now been reported to KCC the public rights of way department. The land under the railway here is not in the Council's ownership.

Volunteering update

Highlights of work completed

- Litter picking
- Balsam pulling
- Hedge cutting
- Cutting back vegetation along paths
- Cutting back scrub in the uncut meadow
- Planting hedges around the park
- Revetment work around Barden Lake
- Hedge laying in Kissing Gate Meadow

Number of volunteer hours (April 2021 to September 2021)

Haysden Country Park Volunteers – 1353 hours

Community Payback - 520 hours (re-started in July after over a year's break because of covid)

Other volunteers – 480 hours (Tonbridge School)

Total hours 2353

There are a few of new, long-term volunteer projects that will start this year:

Wildflower meadow - we have been working with the Haysden Country Park Volunteers to select a suitable site in the park to create a wildflower area.

We have now agreed on a grassland area at the far end of Barden Lake that has very few wildflowers in amongst mainly amenity grasses and the volunteers have started work. The two areas shown on the map below will be treated in different ways to see what happens on each of them. Both areas coloured

below will continue to be mown once a year at the end of summer by our grounds contractor. The volunteers will be responsible for the ongoing management of the two areas.



The orange area shown in the below picture will be tractor-mown in the next few days, raked by hand (the grass cuttings taken off the land) then tractor-harrowed. It will then be hand sown with Yellow Rattle and Red Bartsia (both these plants suppress grass growth and so allow other plants to thrive) we will then allow natural

regeneration of wildflowers from the soil seed bank with the option of adding wildflower seed from other parts of the park. The purple area will just be tractor-mown and tractor-harrowed with natural regeneration of wildflowers to occur here without any sowing of seed. The soil seed bank often holds plant seed for decades just waiting for the right conditions and opportunity to grow. The volunteers will carry out plant surveys over the next few years to monitor progress and see how many new plant species occur and depending on the result we may decide to sow more native species here. Hand raking (and taking off the cuttings) from the orange area by volunteers will continue annually after the mowing (for as long as they can sustain this). Removing the cuttings reduces competition and nutrient levels and encourages our native wildflowers which mostly like low nutrient levels.

Plant of the month – a poster has been introduced in the park from October thanks to Jane Brazier with the assistance of our volunteer botanist Alan Hayes.

Community Payback – they are currently cutting back vegetation in Friendship Wood to create clearings for more potential wildflowers and ensuring the paths through the woodland are free from overhanging vegetation. In addition, throughout the winter community payback will be coppicing and clearing vegetation around the scrape in the woodland along the straight mile, adjacent to Kissing Gate Meadow.

Events

The following events are being considered to run this year (subject to covid restrictions at the time). We hope to run other events starting next year.

Halloween self-led trail in October
Christmas self-led trail in December

Call for recorders

Field surveys - several new volunteers have come forward to undertake field surveys, sadly owing to the ongoing covid pandemic, and financial constraints, we have been unable to provide training or start field surveys. We now hope to start field surveys in 2022. We are still looking for more volunteers to come forward to undertake the surveys and to assist when others are away.

- **Pond surveys** - in July. For basic information on what is involved see the UK Freshwater Habitats Trust website <https://freshwaterhabitats.org.uk/projects/surveys/psym-method/>
- **Small mammals** - live trapping surveys, monthly between January and April. For basic information about what is involved see the website <https://blog.nhbs.com/how-to-guides/nhbs-guide-to-small-mammal-survey-equipment/> The Kent Mammal group <https://www.kentmammalgroup.org.uk/> and Wildwood Trust offer training

- **Bat surveys** - in the months of June, July, August and October. Some free basic information and training is available from the UK Bat Conservation Trust website <https://www.bats.org.uk/events> and via the Kent Bat Group <http://www.kentbatgroup.org.uk/>
- **Reptile surveys** - monthly survey for reptiles, monthly between April to October. Some free basic training from the UK Amphibian and Reptile Trust is available online at <https://www.arc-trust.org/training> and information via the Kent Amphibian and Reptile Group at <https://kentarg.org/about/>
- **Amphibian surveys** - recording of amphibians, pond surveys and egg searches, in April and again in June. Some free basic training from the UK Amphibian and Reptile Trust is available on their website at <https://www.arc-trust.org/training> and information via the Kent Amphibian and Reptile Group at <https://kentarg.org/about/>

The above links will give you some idea of what is involved. To assist those who might be interested, we have also prepared a risk assessment and information sheets about how to carry out these surveys in the park, these are available on request. During the survey period one of the outdoor team will always be available if you need any help or have any questions. If this is something you would like to assist us with, please do talk to Jane Brazier or Chris Fox.

Training – there is a free talk about reptile recording organised by Froglife as part of a project they have been delivering and we supported. The online training called Reptile identification ecology and survey methods takes place on 27 October at 0930-12:30. If you think that you may be interested in helping with recording reptiles, please register for the free talk on Eventbrite <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/reptile-identification-ecology-and-survey-methods-tickets-178690426877> Then let us know afterwards if this has sparked an interest.

Any other business

If you have a question for the Council about the park, please use the contact details below.

Date of next update

The next update for the Panel will be in the Spring of 2022. The arrangements for this will be subject the outcome of the above consultation and will be advised.

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