

NEWSLETTER

Haysden Country Park

ISSUE 2

DATE 30.10.20

Welcome to the second Haysden Country Park newsletter - this year these have replaced the User Panel meetings that we normally hold in the Spring and Autumn of each year, because we are unable to hold face to face meetings at this time.

Top stories in this newsletter



Coronavirus



Dog exercise area



Educational visits



Management plan

Coronavirus



The Council has made a number of changes to services in response to the coronavirus outbreak. The Council's grounds maintenance contractor, Landscape Services, have continued to work throughout the pandemic. All volunteering in the park stopped work between March and the end of July, which has meant there is now, unfortunately, a backlog of jobs to do. The car parks and toilets re-opened in May, and the re-opening of other concessions followed. The Council has worked closely with all these organisations in developing new procedures ensuring compliance with the law and the current restrictions.

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>

Dog exercise area



The Dog Exercise area has now reopened with some new additions provided by the ranger. We have provided a 'dog library' with balls and sticks for you to use whilst in the area with your dog. We hope that this will prove popular.

Educational visits



A new carved table and wooden seats for the outdoor learning area have been collected and are awaiting installation. These will be sited near to the dipping platform for educational visits. Staff have continued to work on the redesigning of the 'Ranger-led activity pack' which is aimed at primary school and youth group visits to the park. The new pack should be available from the spring. We anticipate that there may be renewed interest from schools for this service from the autumn term onwards.

Management plan



The public consultation on the new park management plan has been completed and subsequently has been reported to the Communities and Housing Advisory Board in July (the earlier scheduled meeting of this Board having been cancelled due to the pandemic). A few changes were proposed, the most relevant to reflect civil emergencies, which has now been added to the SWOT analysis, with a new project in year one of the Action Plan to look at the impact of Covid-19. This will allow the Council to undertake any necessary changes to services as the country recovers from the pandemic. The plan was then approved by the Council. Final amendments to the plan have now been made, and the adopted plan can be found on the Council's website at www.tmbc.gov.uk/hcp

Other news

There has been a marked increase in visitor numbers to the park over the period of the outbreak and an increase in the number of people walking to the park along Lower Haysden Lane. In the park staff have adopted new ways of working, and in response to the changes we have: prepared and installed additional signage, segregated areas with fencing in the catering area and cut back foliage to widen paths. Additional car parking has been opened for the public but, due to the unforeseen increased visitor numbers, this has still been at capacity at times. Litter control also became an issue in the park since the easing of lockdown, with bins not coping with the volume of litter at the original frequency of twice weekly emptying. In an effort to keep costs down signs were installed on bins asking people to take their litter home with them. Despite this, we have needed to increase the frequency of bin emptying over the summer. We will continue to monitor these changes in usage and seek to adapt to the new normal. These changes have meant that our staff and

contractors have been very busy over the last few months. An update was reported to the Housing and Communities Advisory Board meeting, stating that ‘The pandemic has also seen a greater awareness of the benefits of enjoying the outdoors by the public and it is anticipated that the park will grow in popularity in the future’¹.

We find ourselves in unknown territory as the impacts of the pandemic continue and as reported to the Board meeting¹, ‘The financial impact of the pandemic on the Council’s budgets will clearly limit opportunities for investing further in the site and there will be an even greater reliance on external funding and developer contributions’. Revenue budgets have also been affected this year with the Council placing strict restrictions on expenditure.

Public convenience maintenance – The Council’s contractor has experienced some staffing issues over the last few months, and a fall in standards over late summer became evident. This was immediately raised with the contractor and assurances that this will not reoccur were received. The issues have now been resolved with a new cleaner appointed by the contractor. The frequency of toilet cleaning which normally reduces from twice a day during the summer months to once a day at the end of September for the winter months has also now been extended until the end of October.

Some activities, such as monitoring wildlife, have not been possible this year.

Green Flag Award judging

We are delighted that we have once again retained the Green Flag Award at the park. Thank you to everyone who has assisted us with this achievement.



Catering unit Christmas closure

The catering contractor, Willards, plan to close from Monday 7 December 2020, re-opening after the New Year on 2 January 2021.

Work completed

- Work with licensee’s contractors to re-start concessions in the park
- Work on covid security in the park, keeping people safe
- Negotiated cost of additional litter bin collection with the contractor
- Negotiated cost of new sewage plant maintenance, servicing and emptying
- Work with the Haysden Country Park Volunteers leaders to agree and prioritise the work programme
- Published a new webpage working with other departments called ‘Online

community activities' to highlight the many organisations offering (mainly free) online activities to occupy people at this time

- Work with the Angling Society considering fishing swim layout and design
- Amended the consultation draft of the management plan and preparing the final copy ready for the adoption of the plan
- Work with the Environment Agency consultants on plans for the Leigh Barrier major works
- Canadian pond weed growth has been monitored and has not been so much of a problem this year
- Blue Green Alga monitoring continued. Confirmed that the harmful species was blooming by a lab test in Haysden Water Lake in late September and the signs are currently still in place, monitoring continues
- Barrier repairs at Haysden Water and at the main entrance
- New storage containers have been installed for the volunteers and caterer
- Applied to Tesco's bags of Help to fund equipment for children's events and volunteer field surveys
- Produce information sheets for each of the animal field survey methods for use in the park, to have a consistent method in place for these surveys. This was also useful in identifying the equipment needed for the above funding bid
- Repairs to the children's play area following the annual inspection, including new steps for the embankment slide
- Prepared a Christmas quiz trail and Halloween trail
- Hedges around the drive and car park cut in July by the grounds contractor
- A volunteer has begun a survey across the whole of the park for wildflowers, comparing these with previous records and recording where they are. This is a big project and we thank the volunteer
- Breeding Bird Survey completed thanks to a volunteer
- Toilet roof replacement and new skylights - building work was delayed until the Autumn due to the coronavirus outbreak, but is now complete
- Toilets interior redecorated in early October and skylights replaced
- Tree health and safety work completed, including along the cycle route, where we had had to reduce several trees
- Replaced bollards along the drive and added a new drop bollard

Other work in progress

- Highway Agency A21 bridge works currently in progress on site 5-23 October (safe routes, barriers, machinery movement, and signage for the public were all considered and included in their work programme)
- New entrance signs being made and to be installed
- Renewal of the Town Sailing Club, TriSwim, Dog Exercise, and Tonbridge and District Angling and Fish Preservation Society agreements will be progressed by the Estates and Legal Services teams

- Re-tender of the Public Conveniences and Pest Control contracts will be progressed by the Waste Services team
- Dog Warden services contract extended by the Council and a new Dog Warden has been appointed by the contractor
- Finish and publish the new 'Ranger-Led Activities' booklet this winter
- Mark new trails around the park
- Leigh Barrier major works – there are continued discussions with the Environment Agency along with proposals for mitigation measures in the park, planning permission is now submitted
- A mural for the sewage plant gates is to be created to hide the plant
- A Council website review and updating of information will be progressed by the Council's Media team
- An events programme for 2021 is now being considered by the Outdoor team
- A review of all budgets for 2021/22 will be considered by the Council

Volunteering update

Highlights of work completed

- Litter picking
- Cutting back vegetation along paths
- Repair of vandalised memorial bench
- Extended seating built around manhole cover in dog exercise area
- Himalayan balsam pulling
- Ragwort removal around Barden Lake
- Estate management, replacing gates, repairing litter bins, cutting back vegetation and fallen trees
- Clearing reeds in The Shallows to increase water flow

Number of volunteer hours

Hayden Country Park Volunteers – 680 hours

Community Payback - 0 hours (not re-started yet)

Total 680 hours

Events

Forthcoming events on open spaces around the borough are being reviewed on a weekly basis by the Leisure Services Management Team. At the time of writing all events in the parks have been cancelled until the end of October 2020, and this may be extended. The 'Holiday Activities' for children were also cancelled in the park this year.

Where Eventbrite events were cancelled, and bookings had been taken, customers were contacted using the Eventbrite system and refunds were made. Using Eventbrite for bookings has proved very useful and enabled us to contact people

quickly and efficiently.

We are currently investigating new ways of running events safely for next year. Updates can be found on the Council website, and on Eventbrite where booking is required.

The Big Butterfly Count self-led count did go ahead in the park. The results for England can be found at <https://butterfly-conservation.org/news-and-blog/big-butterfly-count-2020-the-results>

Next events:

Halloween self-led trail between 26-30 October

Christmas quiz self-led trail from 5 December – 1 January

Christmas decoration sale cancelled

Big Garden Bird Watch RSPBs self-led birdwatch in January 2021

Call for recorders

In the past, volunteers have undertaken field surveys in the park to record the plants and animals present, but unfortunately many of these volunteers are no longer able to continue. We presently have volunteers carrying out the Breeding Birds Survey, a waterway bat survey, and a plant survey. We would like to find some new volunteers who are willing to undertake regular visits to the park to carry out surveys. Ideally these people would have some experience in this field, but please don't let the lack of experience deter you from coming forward, as these skills can be learnt. We are looking for volunteers to work together in pairs for each of the following 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 online at <https://www.arc-trust.org/training>
- Pond surveys in July. For basic information on what is involved from the UK Freshwater Habitats Trust see <https://freshwaterhabitats.org.uk/projects/surveys/psym-method/>
- Bat surveys, in the months of June, July, August and October. Some free basic training is available from the UK Bat Conservation Trust at http://bats_new.brix.fatbeehive.com/nbmp_tutorials/tutorial5.html
- 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>
- Small mammal live trapping surveys, monthly between January and April. For basic information about what is involved see <https://blog.nhbs.com/how-to-guides/nhbs-guide-to-small-mammal-survey-equipment/>

The above links will give some idea of what is involved. To assist those who might

be interested, we have prepared a risk assessment and information sheets about how to carry out these surveys in the park. 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 contact Chris Fox by email at Leisure.services@tmbc.gov.uk

Volunteer calendar

Now available for sale from the café at £6.50 each or two for £12 - cash only please.

User Panel

The next update for the Panel will be in the Spring of 2021. Subject to prevailing circumstances at the time, a face-to-face meeting will be arranged or a further newsletter will be circulated.

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1. Housing and Communities Advisory Board 21 July 2020, available [online on YouTube](#)

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