

## Emberton Country Park PLUG Minutes 19 January 2023

### Attendees:

Chair & Olney Ward Councillor

Olney Town Council

Emberton Country Park Manager

MKCC, Projects and Development Manager Country Parks

Grounds Café

Park user

Friends of Emberton Country Park

Emberton Parish Council

Emberton Park Sailing Club

Adventure Cycles

### Apologies:

Olney Ward Councillor

Portfolio holder Public Realm

Olney Ward Councillor

Emberton Park Sailing Club

1. The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting at the Sailing Club. Introductions were made.

2. Notes and actions from previous meetings were discussed:

Love Exploring YouTube clip was circulated with the minutes and visitor levels for October half-term were doubled as a result of the app being at ECP.

Regarding GDPR and customers purchasing visitor passes the Project and Development Manager and Park Manager have met with Customer Services and they are having to check whether or not we can use customer data for marketing purposes as that is not in line with the Council's purposes for retaining contact details.

The Chair raised about the park accounts and it was explained that an FOI was raised and overall income generated and expenditure was sent to the Parish Council, as the information that is available in the public domain. The Chair stated it was good to know broad headline figures and was happy with that information.

The Park Manager made contact with The Wildlife Trust, but they wanted to do an eco appraisal, which would cost and not necessary as quite recently had similar done by Middlemarch. It was asked about access to their members as potential volunteers, but it is thought that they prefer to put them to use on their own sites.

It was confirmed that Rangers and volunteers are aware of habitats and that the old benches have now been removed near the café.

### 3. Adventure Cycles

The company was introduced himself and explained that their operation began at the end of the summer holidays and the uptake afterwards had not been great, so will resume in the Easter break, unless the weather is particularly good in February half-term.

They have 4 small cycles that require an adult to go with the users, as well as 4 x 2 seaters, 2 x 4 seaters, some singles and 3 big cycles.

It was pointed out that at the lower gate the area to the side is very boggy.

**Action: Park Manager to check to see if the area needs to be filled.**

### 4. Operational Update

The Park Manager said that a long section of poplars on the edge of the static site towards the touring field had been felled and this work is on a 3 year cycle. The Parks Trust will remove the trunks that are surplus to our requirements.

Also, said that we are in contact with Community Trees:MK about re-planting. The Chair asked if we had a plan and it was confirmed that we do, as some trees are pollarded with a view to removal later and this was included in the presentation sent out with the October minutes.

The Mayor of Milton Keynes came to see the boot wash. She also opened the refurbished bird hide, which Willmott Dixon had generously replaced the roof to make it water-tight again and the Rangers had made benches from trunks and scaffold boards found at the park. The re-painted interior now hosts images of resident and migratory birds, as well as a blackboard for comments to be left about what has been seen. Also, people are now emailing images of birds to ECP so that we can display on our Facebook page and in the hide.

The Mayor also got to see the new duck feeder. The Park Manager explained that the duck feeder is free to local authorities and educates the public on not feeding birds bread. 10% of the profits generated come back to the park to spend on biodiversity.

The Ranger team have been trained with the Love Exploring app so that they can create new trails (means vulnerable areas can be avoided to protect them) so now have nature trails, mini beasts, dinosaurs, fairies and planets are coming soon.

The volunteers were hazel coppicing yesterday and about 25 people turned up and worked for three and a half hours. Any bits that we cannot make use of are offered to the volunteers. Park staff have cut back at fishing swims and viewing platforms at Snipe Pool, Heron Water and Grebe Lake. Otter Pool is still to be done. The Rangers have created a fence of willow on Grebe in place of the Heras fencing at the fallen willow. It is both a safe option and more pleasing to look at.

There will be further nature walks this summer: dawn chorus in May, dragonfly walks in the summer and bat walks late summer.

There was a question about whether there would be any events coming up, such as for the coronation. It was confirmed that there will be nothing laid on in the park. There are local activities through the summer months and do not wish to risk investing when competing for visitors. As it is visitor figures showed a sharp increase this summer with increased use of social media.

Other work that has been done lately is the re-surfacing on the way to the static caravan area. There is further work to be carried out by Highways and dates and final costs still awaited but the urgency of this before the season begins is understood.

## 5. Stakeholder Update

Emberton Parish Council enquired as to whether any new static caravans coming on to site. It was confirmed that we had three new ones last year and there are enquiries. The Project and Development Manager confirmed that as we get the area improved, we will invite journalists to have a look to promote it further. Also, there is decorating work going on in the bathrooms to improve the overall appearance.

A park user raised concerns about parking on the river bank by fishermen when it is water-logged.

**Action: The Park Manager will contact MKAA if this becomes a real issue.**

Friends of Emberton stated that there is a small amount of money available for the volunteers, so if tools are needed for example, they can be bought and receipts will be required to evidence the spend.

Olney Town Council said that there is an enthusiastic local who is keen to plant black poplars and inclined to do so without consent.

**Action: Olney Town Council to put black poplar enthusiast in touch with The Park Manager.**

Friends of Emberton mentioned a grumpy individual who posts negative comments about the park.

The Sailing Club are hoping to have an open day over one of the May Bank holiday weekends. This will be decided at the meeting at the beginning of February.

**Action: Sailing Club to let the Park Manager know when the open day will be so that we can promote it on ECP Facebook page.**

**Future meetings:**

Thursday 20 April 2023  
Thursday 15 June 2023  
Thursday 17 August 2023  
Thursday 19 October 2023