

**REPORT OF THE ACTING CORPORATE DIRECTOR, CHILDREN, FAMILIES
AND CULTURAL SERVICES AND THE GROUP MANAGER, PLANNING****SERVICE UPDATE REPORT FOR THE PERIOD 6 APRIL TO 17 MAY 2015****Purpose of the Report**

1. To update the Committee on a range of initiatives being undertaken to improve and enhance the quality of life for Nottinghamshire people.

Information and Advice**LIBRARIES, ARCHIVES, ARTS, INFORMATION AND COMMUNITY LEARNING****World Book Night**

2. World Book Night is an annual celebration of reading and books that takes place on 23rd April every year. It sees passionate volunteers give out hundreds of thousands of free books in their communities to share their love of reading with people who don't read regularly or own books. Nottinghamshire Libraries took part in two ways in this event. Firstly, libraries were used as pick up points for the public to collect books to distribute amongst their communities. Nottinghamshire Libraries also held a number of activities around the County to celebrate World Book Night. These events included a murder mystery play, an evening with Anne Zouroudi, a talk on Far from the Madding Crowd, quiz nights and the distribution of World Book Night Books in locations as diverse as dentists, takeaways, on trains and a variety of other community locations.
3. As always World Book Night proved to be a useful way to not only highlight the enjoyment that reading can bring to non-readers but also allowed Nottinghamshire Libraries to promote the variety of events and services that are offered.

COUNTRY PARKS AND GREEN ESTATES

4. The annual "Grand Historical Bazaar" took place on 25th & 26th April 2015 at Rufford Abbey Country Park. The event is free to enter but a £5 special event parking charge applies, which recoups the costs of staging the event. Just under 5,000 visitors attended the weekend event, in which historical re-enactors from various periods of British history staged displays and demonstrations, with trading stalls in the summer marquee. The event was managed for the Park by a specialist historical events company and the costs of this specialist management were offset by offering 'pitches' for small traders. Excellent weather on the Sunday added to a successful and popular family event.

5. Meanwhile, Sherwood Forest Visitor Centre kicked off the main visitor season with a variety of family activities ranging from an Easter Trail and children's den building events to Morris dancing, willow weaving and a May "Dawn Chorus" walk into the forest, commencing at 4am – certainly one for the "Early birds!"
6. Catering and retail recorded a very busy trading period in the Easter half term holiday, benefiting from fine and sunny weather. Trading in the week commencing Easter Monday was some of the best on record excluding the annual Robin Hood Festival week. A Groupon catering promotion in the Savile Restaurant Carvery attracted 2,800 customers, including many customers new to Rufford Abbey.
7. Rufford and Sherwood continue to attract very good feedback from customers. The popular consumer website for tourist attractions, TripAdvisor, currently ranks Sherwood Forest Visitor Centre as 4 out of 5 stars based on 75 recent customer reviews, and Rufford Abbey Country Park ranks as 4.5 out of 5 stars based on 223 recent reviews.
8. At Bestwood Country Park Monday and Thursday volunteer groups continue to do valuable work, led by parks' Community Officer, Sue McDonald. The Monday group has been keeping Bestwood's miles of path clear of fast growing vegetation. Half a dozen of the "Thursday Vols" sanded down and repainted the large entrance door to Bestwood's Dynamo House, and carried out a complete spring clean of this well-used community building.

CONSERVATION

County Show and Nottinghamshire Local History Fair

9. On Sunday 10th May, members of the Conservation Team represented the County Council at two major events in the County. The County Council stand at the Nottinghamshire County Show had displays and photographs about the wide range of biodiversity that is supported by the Country Parks and Green Estate sites, including some species, such as the Welsh Clearwing Moth, that are found nowhere else in the County. A "mini museum" gave visitors the opportunity to handle real archaeological finds from the County and replicas of objects from the Paleolithic period onwards. A range of activities for children was also provided, including wildlife word searches, animal masks and Viking puppets, and these proved to be extremely popular with children and parents alike.
10. The Great Nottinghamshire Local History Fair, held at Mansfield Library, had displays and demonstrations by local history groups, heritage organisations and attractions from across the County. The County Council stand had displays about heritage tourism and volunteering opportunities, including community archaeology and building conservation. There was also an opportunity for visitors to try their hand at the traditional building skill of lime mortaring and to test their knowledge of local dialect words.

Mansfield Quakers Project

11. The 25th April saw the launch of a heritage trail and unveiling of a plaque commemorating Mansfield Quakers. The town has strong associations with the beginning of the Quaker movement. Its founder, George Fox, lived in Mansfield and his first converts were local

people. The plaque which has been unveiled in the Bus Station commemorates the Quakers who were once buried on the site, before their remains were transferred to the cemetery. The County Council's Heritage Tourism Officer also worked with theology students from Nottingham University to research and produce an audio trail of the town's Quaker heritage. This is part of a wider project looking at the tourism potential of Nottinghamshire's religious heritage and also a developing programme to provide practical opportunities for the development of skills and experience in the heritage and tourism sector.

Thoroton Mud Wall

12. In 2014 the County Council's building conservation officers noted a rare example of 'monolithic earth' wall in the village of Thoroton. Although earth, or mud, buildings are known to have been a familiar type of vernacular building in the Vale of Belvoir area a hundred years ago, there are now only a handful of examples left in Nottinghamshire. The wall was in a poor state of repair, covered by ivy that threatened its stability and, since the splitting up and conversion of the old Church Site Farm, is in no-one's ownership. Barbara Glossop of the local parish meeting and Council conservation officers have been working with Anthony Goode, a mud conservation specialist, and volunteers from the village to repair the wall, mixing mud and straw by foot and applying it by hand, a truly ancient craft. Materials have been kindly provided by a local farmer and Anthony Goode, who has been giving his time to the project for free. Anthony also brought along Alex Gibbons, the education officer of Earth Buildings UK, to assist and advise and the restoration work is progressing well, with over half the length of the wall now repaired. The volunteers hope to finish the project this summer.

RECOMMENDATION

- 1) That the update on a range of initiatives being undertaken to improve and enhance the quality of life for Nottinghamshire people be noted.

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