

## Emberton Country Park PLUG Minutes 19 October 2023

### **Attendees:**

Chair & Olney Ward Councillor

Static Caravan representative

Emberton Parish Council

MKCC, Projects and Development Manager Country Parks

Emberton Country Park Manager

MKAA

Park user

Emberton Park Sailing Club

Emberton Café, Meadow Brown Restaurant

Emberton Café, Meadow Brown Restaurants

### **Apologies:**

Portfolio Holder – Public Realm

Emberton Parish Council

Friends of Emberton Country Park

Olney Town Council

Sea Cadets

1. The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting at the Sailing Club. Introductions were made.
2. Notes and actions from previous meetings were discussed:

MKCC Communications Team had decided not to take any action regarding communicating about the Grounds Café lease ending and a new café opening, as this would happen very soon.

The Project and Development Manager confirmed that the static caravan owners were made aware that the Changing Places unit would not be in their area due to the results of the surveys and would now be located behind the café.

The outcome regarding the possibility of PV panels to the café/toilet building was that the cost of making the roof safe for this, maintenance, adding insulation and potential to need to move them meant that the cost saving would not be realised as the building is not 2030 compliant.

The Park Manager had a selection of emails in favour and against the gates closure. It was agreed that the outcome had been beneficial and unless the park is too busy, it would be desirable to keep the gates locked.

### 3. New café owners – Meadow Brown

The Managing Director of Meadow Brown Restaurants, explained the plans for Emberton Café are to bring in hot food and more staff. The start of the lease had happened quickly, but as this is a quieter time of year, they can take time to experiment. They are using local butchers for meat. It was confirmed that they took advantage of longer opening when busy on the day of the duathlon. They confirmed accepting cash as well as card payments. Feedback has been really positive about how good the coffee is and the improved appearance. More seating is coming, and it was stated that they wish to be a community café for local groups, so they have sofas on order for the back room.

### 4. Development update

The Project and Development Manager confirmed that Changing Places is now out to tender on Intend and the bids are due in this month for the contract to be awarded next month. This work needs to be completed by the end of March 2024 in order to meet the grant conditions. It was agreed that a Mayoral opening would be appropriate.

Once the Changing Places contract is agreed it will be possible to tell how much S106 funds we have remaining for play areas. This is the next priority. There is also some talk of a government scheme to make parks accessible which if it goes ahead, may provide some funding for equipment that is accessible for those with disabilities. The Government's Disability Unit is looking to provide an online hub of accessible playground guidance. The Chair recommended talking to Children's Services.

**Action: Project and Development Manager to update on progress at the next PLUG meeting.**

### 5. Operational update

The Park Manager explained the tree works that took place along the entrance road towards the car park. The hybrid poplars needed a crown lift as there had been branches falling, so now this is safer.

Community Trees MK are bringing 100 black poplars in January that originated in Aylesbury Vale, southern Buckinghamshire, which will be planted by volunteers along the embankment towards the sluice. There are currently hybrid poplars along the embankment which will need to come down in the future so the exceedingly rare, native black poplars will be a safer replacement.

In February there will be 650 mixed native hedgerow trees that will go along the boundary to the static area as well as the play areas. Members of the public will be invited to help plant these trees, with information going out in January.

The staff update is that the temporary Ranger, will be leaving on 31 October. He has made a strong contribution to the team this year.

The Dickens of a Christmas will be making use of the car park at Emberton Country Park for park and ride again.

The nature walks and talks have been very successful. The Dawn Chorus was well attended, as were the bat walks. This year there was less interest in the dragon fly walks, but next year we will be able to add mothing, as the Park Manager secured a grant from Bucks & Milton Keynes Environmental Records Centre to buy a moth trap so that ECP can contribute to record keeping about moth species.

The last bat walk was attended by a journalist who succeeded in getting a blog on the Bat Conservation Trust website about Emberton Country Park and the bat walk. The intention is to get other articles out to appropriate nature media to attract more visitors/campers/possible static owners.

Biodiversity has increased significantly. Great white egrets and ospreys have recently been seen in the park.

Volunteering continues to go well with both our own and corporate volunteers. Knowledge and skills are shared at these sessions as well as improvements to the park.

The coppicing around Coot Island and Heron Lake by EPSC will be chipped by Olney Town Council again, for which we are very grateful.

The Chair enquired about MK Snap and the visit to Emberton coming soon to discuss further tree planting. This will be Thursday 26 October and came about as a result of a discussion with the Chair, who unfortunately is not available to attend.

## 6. Stakeholder Updates

The Sailing Club did not have another open day. They have offered further coppicing work if required.

The static owners wished to know if there would be a bulky waste collection this year, which was confirmed by Sam.

**Action: The Park Manager to arrange the bulky waste collection and Viv to inform static owners via WhatsApp.**

### **Future meetings:**

Thursday 18 January 2024

Thursday 11 April 2024

Thursday 13 June 2024

Thursday 15 August 2024

Thursday 17 October 2024