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**To: Joint Committee**

**On: 19 February 2021**

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**Report by: Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park, Park Coordinator**

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**Heading: CMRP – Covid Operational Update**

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## **1. Summary**

1.1 This report seeks to inform the Joint Committee of the ongoing activities across the Park and highlights the benefits of its open spaces and path networks.

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## **2. Recommendations**

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Joint Committee:
- (i) Note the contents of this report and the benefits of accessible green spaces for people's mental and physical health.
  - (ii) Note the on going efforts of Regional Park staff to follow COVID advice and continually adapt the provision of services.
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## **3. Background**

- 3.1 This report highlights the importance of accessible green spaces for people in particular as well as the natural environment.
- 3.3 Park staff have adapted to 'work from home' or remotely and to operate with 'social distance' and 'good hygiene' in place. Duty of care work has continued throughout all lockdown/tier restrictions.
- 3.4 The Ranger Service in particular have used digital resources and social media channels for communicating and messaging with the public.
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#### **4. 'Outdoor' Operations for All**

4.1 In line with government advice Regional Park facilities closed to the public on 23 March 2020. Regional Park service provision has been 'outside', socially distanced or online for nearly a year.

The open spaces of the Regional Park have remained open all year. When car parks were closed in the first lockdown the Regional Park continued to be a valuable outdoor resource for all those able to access these spaces on foot or by bike.

Regional Park car parks reopened at slightly different times depending on local authority location in late June or early July. Since re opening all sites have seen higher levels of activity with people enjoying the outdoor space for fresh air, well-being and exercise. Paddleboards were a regular sight, especially at Castle Semple Loch during the summer and into the autumn months.

Even in winter this year on dry and sunny days, car parks are full by lunchtime, this was especially noticeable during the festive holiday period, during the wonderful spell of settled weather and Tier 4 restrictions.

A 'takeaway café' service has been provided at Castle Semple Centre from 18 July until 15 January 2021 when new government guidance for takeaways in particular has resulted in a pausing of service to minimise opportunities for 'a crowd gathering'.

Outdoor activity delivery followed governing body covid operational guidance, in 2020 it ran from 14 September to 16 December.

Activity and coaching sessions were delivered for a variety of groups and individuals such as Spinal Injuries Scotland, Focus Youth Centre, Erskine Waterfront Education Campus.

Children's sailing courses were delivered in the October school holidays.

Park staff supported a variety of Duke of Edinburgh expedition planning and delivery activities for Renfrewshire Youth Services throughout the year.

The Countryside Rangers and Estate Team have and continue to be busy with regular and additional countryside maintenance activities such as forestry, fencing and footpath repairs.

Unfortunately not nearly as much Conservation Volunteer Group work has been possible during the pandemic. The Groups have been able to make use of zoom to continue the socialising aspect of volunteering. A few volunteers have been able to help with litter picks and beach clean recording.

Fortunately there are many people that have been appreciating the Park and have taken the time to tell us:

Joe said on facebook *“When we visit a country park and enjoy the country side in all its glory, it is too easy, to forget the hard work that has went into creating and maintaining the paths by staff and volunteers.*

Eliz said on facebook *“Really appreciating the work done on the Parkhill Woods paths....told the guys as I was passing them.”*

The Countryside Rangers have been creative in their delivery of outdoor learning. Learning ‘technology’ themselves in many cases and have gone (much more) online with the creation of videos, photo galleries and DIY kits for eg Christmas wreath making *“Thanks Rangers for making this possible even though we couldn’t have a workshop in person.”* Helen via FB.

Materials available online include self-led themed trails, route cards and ‘wildlife hunt’ type activities to keep all, but especially younger visitors, engaged when out for (another) household walk.

Two new sites for the green hairstreak butterflies have been found close to Muirshiel while orange tip, peacock and tortoiseshell have all been noted locally. A number of wildlife counts have been able to continue all year.

Muirshiel Country Park was officially 50 years old in June 2020, the oldest local authority owned Country Park in Scotland. The Rangers hosted an online display of historical images and gathering of memories to celebrate 50 years of people working in and visiting ‘MCP’.

The Semple Stories Grant funded project was completed during the pandemic, there were variations to format of project delivery activities as face to face activities for example where not possible. New interpretation boards, solar powered audio posts and online content including a leaflet and audio clips have been well received. Duncan via FB (in response to Solar Audio Posts installation) said: *“They’re very good only used the one by the loch near the information boards they are great. Great to see improvements like this in these hard times.”* Project legacy activities include social media content, self-guided

history walks, increased community interest on local history and the desire to share knowledge.

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**5. Conclusion**

5.1 The Covid pandemic has resulted in many more people visiting our outdoor locations. High visitor numbers clearly demonstrate the continued importance and value of our green spaces for physical and mental wellbeing, outdoor learning and leisure activities.

5.2 Regional Park facilities and service provision will continue to evolve to meet the latest government guidance.

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**Author:** Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park, Park Coordinator

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