

Meeting: Alton Water User Group
Date: Wednesday 6th March 2024
Time: 11:00am
Location: Alton Watersports Centre

Attendees:

Will Kirstein	Anglian Water
Andy Woolnough	Anglian Water
Beth Eaton	Anglian Water
Chris Leach	Stutton Parish Council
Jo Hazlewood	Holbrook Parish Council
Simon Page	Tattingstone Parish Council
Ed Sibson	Royal Hospital School
Dave Cooke	Woolverstone Project
Karl Rolfe	Bike Active
Maddy Barrett	parkrun
Kara Edhouse-Thomas	parkrun

Agenda Items

1. Introductions

Group introduced and welcomed to the meeting.

2. General Manager Report/Presentation

Introduction:

- Andy Woolnough is the new Visitor Operations Manager at Alton.
- John Taylor has moved to a new role within AW as Projects and Estate Manager.
- Will Kirstein is the new General Manager for Rutland, Alton and Grafham.
- The wider team at Alton consists of – Ranger Team (New Senior Ranger has just been appointed), Watersports Team, Lifeguard Team, Catering Team.

Our Ambitions – Why are we here:

- Our role – A duty to provide access and maintain the site.
- However, the bigger ambition is to create a destination in Suffolk which provides wellbeing, fitness and lifestyle opportunities for all.
- Offering a range of opportunities – Cycling, Walking, Running, Fishing, Watersports, Wildlife

Watching, Events, Food/Drink, Picnic & BBQ points, Lifeguarded Beach, Open Water Swimming, Clubs.

Review of the last year:

Digital Booking System:

- All activities available at the parks can now be booked using our online booking system. These include – Campsite, Watersports Activities, Bike Hire, Angling and some Events.

Alton Beach:

- Weekend beach with lifeguards was popular.
- Access to the beach is free.
- Extending opening hours to include weekdays for this coming year 2024.
- Water quality monitored in line with world health organisation guidance.

Saturday Open Water Swims:

- Started holding Weekly Open Water swims last year.
- Giving wild swimmers access to the lake.
- Endorsed by Beyond Swim
- Held during the summer only.

Events:

- Swim Alton.
- Open Air Theatre was Wizard of Oz – popular with families.
- Seasonal events – Easter, Halloween and Christmas Trails all took place.

Licensed Cafe:

- Obtained alcohol licence for Watersports cafe to offer pizza and beer offer.
- Opened later on Friday and Saturday evenings and went down well with campsite visitors.
- Along with takeaway food and snacks.

Glamping:

- New bell tents were set up on campsite – 1 x 6m and 1 x 5m.
- More accessible accommodation for those without camping equipment.
- Offering again for 2024, but 3 x 6m tents which are better for families.

Outdoor Gym:

- Offering a range of fitness activities – personal training, bootcamps, yoga, wellness walks and lifestyle coaching.

Saturday parkrun:

- Takes place every Saturday morning all year round.

Highland Cattle:

- Continue to be popular with visitors.
- New calves born to the herd this year along with new cows bought in.
- Continue to improve the meadowland through grazing.
- Hopefully we will have more calves this coming year as well.

Meeting Room at Alton:

- The Meeting room at the Watersports centre is now available to hire all year round.
- A range of catering packages are also available and can be tied in with activities on site e.g. team building activities for corporate days.

Accreditations:

- Alton awarded Green Flag heritage status again this year and Visit England accreditation.

Future Plans:

New Club:

- New rowing club starting, introducing rowing at Alton.
- All year-round access
- British Rowing affiliated.

Volunteer Programme:

- Looking at introducing more of a volunteer programme at Alton.
- Covering conservation and fishing. Will carry out work across the site - 'park jobs'
- Regular work parties once a month,

New Events:

- New event at Alton this coming year is the Stand-up paddleboard sunrise tour taking place on 6th April 2024. Good level of interest already.

Events Calendar:

- Easter golf & trail – 29th March to 14th April.
- Sunrise SUP Tour – 6th April.
- Suffolk Walking Festival – 12th May.
- Alton Swim – 9th June.
- Open Air Theatre - Date TBC.
- Dusk/Sunset SUP Tour – 25th August.
- Halloween Spooky Trail – 26th October to 3rd November.
- Christmas Trail – TBC.

3. Questions/Feedback

Parkrun:

- Changed from a 2-lap course to 3-lap due to issues with mud. Monitoring week on week as mud and barbed wire have been a particular issue this year with the wet weather.
- Feedback from runners is that they prefer the 3 laps as it utilises the woods more.
- Struggle with volunteers over last summer, however picked up the last few months so hoping this continues this summer.
- Look at adding parkrun advertising in local correspondence.
- **Action for AW:** Add parkrun and other activities to the website.

Bike Active:

- Timber cabin – query on whether this is used by AW and if not, can this be utilised by Bike Active.
- Bike Active – Annual alarm testing recently took place on site but could not carry out for Bike Active as could not gain access. Look at providing Alton with keys – Karl Rolfe passed on contact details to Andy Woolnough as a further contact for Bike Active.

Woolverstone Project:

- Para Sailing event on 14th August – 30-40 people signed up – may generate visitors.

Tattingsstone Parish Council:

- No recent negative feedback about car parks - has settled down.
- Would improve things by being able to pay electronically/by card but unavailable at

present.

- Lemons Hill Bridge – needs clean up, beginning to show signs of age. This is currently being investigated as to whose responsibility this falls under. **Action: AW to follow up.**
- Northern section of reservoir (white horse side) - some fences are in disrepair, allowing wildlife to get in and out where it shouldn't be. **Action: AW to follow up.**
- Still getting dogs off leads – policing this?
- Cycling taking place on section not allowed. Website says can cycle all way round? Some access points don't have 'no cycling' signs up. Can signage be increased. **Action: AW to follow up.**
- Car closing signs went missing – AW to check if retrieved?

Stutton Parish Council:

- Parking along Alton Lane – look at coming up with solution for traffic/parking. Suffolk county council highways team - **Action: AW to contact Council.**