

# **The Milton Creek Trust**

## **Business Plan 2016/17**

***“To nurture and sustain a green heart for Sittingbourne by engaging the local community in partnership with the Friends of Milton Creek to encourage environmental, conservation and social and economic well-being for all”.***

Date: May 2016

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## **Background**

Completed in March 2011, and described as the green heart of Sittingbourne, Milton Creek Country Park is owned by Swale Borough Council and was funded by £2m from the government's Thames Gateway Parklands fund and £250,000 from Kent County Council. It is Swale's landmark environmental project, demonstrating the strong cultural links between Sittingbourne and its stunning estuarine landscapes. This 52 hectare Park is improving access to the Creek side and providing high quality interpretation of natural and historical features.

The project has transformed a former landfill site into a children's adventure play-park, community event space, picnic area, car park and a network of paths leading through an extensive natural landscape of meadows, ponds, scrub and woodland.

It has also delivered improvements to the Saxon Shore Way linking the town centre to the Park. The path passes through a number of viewpoints along the Creek's historic wharves. Milton Creek is also at Sittingbourne's historic heart. Once a hive of industrial activity, its wharves, mills, docks and tramways have fallen into disrepair and the area was isolated from the town by semi-derelict industrial land. The scheme culminates at the largest of the historic wharves - Churchfields Wharf.

A Friends of Milton Creek group was set up in 2010 and facilitated by officers from Swale Borough Council. In 2011 the Milton Creek Trust was formed to oversee the strategic development of the Park, promote events and raise funds. Swale CVS helped the Trust get started and it has benefitted from advice and guidance from Swale BC officers ever since.

## **The Need**

Green Cluster studies set out a vision for the design of a Green Grid public realm including an action plan to support delivery. There was one specifically for Milton Creek.

Broadly the Green Cluster Studies:

- Identified a coherent sense of place for each cluster area
- Captured what was already happening
- Identified stakeholder aspirations and updated existing studies
- Identified inter-dependencies, gaps and opportunities
- Articulated a common vision for each cluster area
- Developed an outline action plan which set out actions, governance and phasing for delivering the vision
- Made the business case for investment

This work had been informed by numerous other community engagement events led by the likes of Groundwork Kent and Medway, Swale Forward and Swale BC.

## **Activity to date**

The Park has steadily become established as a valued community asset. The Trust has focused on promoting the annual 'Art in the Park' event which has become a popular fixture in the Swale calendar and serves to promote local artists and performers and to engage the local community in creative activities. This year's event on 16 July will be the fourth one; a particular theme will be the heritage of Sittingbourne and Milton Regis including traditional links with the paper industry.

Many other events have taken place for activities as diverse as walking, cycling, kite flying, geocaching, beewatch, a big butterfly count, tree planting and hedge laying.

The community orchard is now complete with 55 trees all planted by volunteers. The trees are traditional Kentish varieties on vigorous root stocks that will eventually grow into large trees and include plums, greengages, pears and 11 varieties of apples.

The much anticipated arrival of a new Park Ranger has seen a welcome increase in volunteering, with regular Tuesday and monthly weekend tasks organized, plus regular Bumblebee and Nesting Bird surveys.

The Park is also becoming recognised as a venue for events not necessarily organised directly by the Trust but with our support - events like Parkrun (every Saturday), Get Walking (every Wednesday), Nordic Walking beginners classes (every Friday), the Sport Relief Mile, the 'Colour Me Purple' 5k fun run (for a second time this year), the Rotary Club Cycle Ride and Sport in the Park (another second timer). Summer holiday activities for children are also becoming regular features. Kent Wildlife Trust's 'Painting the Town Green' project involves the Park.

All this activity raises the profile of the Park. Increased exposure to potential partners and higher visitor numbers will help safeguard and enhance its sustainability as a community asset. The Trust's current priority for improving the visitor experience is to develop marked trails and associated information on the Park's history, environment, biodiversity and wildlife. However, the ability to grow usage of the Park is limited by the current poor external signage and limited parking, issues which are raised regularly with the Council and it is understood should be improved as part of planned developments adjoining the Park site.

## **The Managing Organisation**

The Milton Creek Trust currently has seven Trustees. All elected officer positions were filled at the Annual General Meeting on 27 January 2016. Last year two new Trustees were appointed, and two resigned for business reasons.

## **Staffing**

There is a Ranger assigned to the Park, employed by Swale Borough Council and responsible for the day to day running of the Park. The post was vacant for well over a year until filled in October 2015 on a shared basis with Oare Gunpowder Works. While Trustees welcome Kris Staples' arrival, and the very positive start he has

made, they are disappointed to lose the previous full time post and will keep the situation under review. There was concern at the deteriorating condition of the Park and the impetus lost in consolidating partnership and volunteering programmes. Kris has already done much to rectify this and progress the successful development of the Park and return on the investment of considerable public funds. There are no plans for staff to be employed directly by the Milton Creek Trust.

### **Community Engagement**

The Trust is committed to securing the greater involvement of the local community, and organises events and activities to promote wider engagement as a key priority. Local volunteering is also important in this and there are a few loyal and dedicated Friends who contribute much to the Park. However, more volunteers are needed both as Trustees, to cover more strategic tasks and fund raising, and as Friends to help operationally in the Park. Take up of volunteering opportunities has been slow although the new Park Ranger has made this a priority and happily the number of volunteers helping with planting trees and regular maintenance work is starting to grow.

### **Partnership working**

The Trust is committed to work with other environmental and community groups to further its aims. Strong working relationships have been forged with Swale Borough Council, Swale Community Leisure, the Parish Church, Swale Arts Forum, Sittingbourne and Kemsley Light Railway, Kent Wildlife Trust, Amicus Horizon, Asda, the local police, Pulse Café, the geocachers network and local walking groups. The Trust looks forward to building on its developing links with Diversity House, the Prince's Trust, Bumblebee Trust, Kent Bat Group, Kent Reptile & Mammal Group, Butterfly Conservation, Kent Field Club and Rotary Club of Sittingbourne Invicta. The Park Ranger is crucial in maintaining day to day contact with these groups, and initiating contact with others.

### **Marketing Strategy**

The main source of general marketing is the Trust website - [www.miltoncreek.co.uk](http://www.miltoncreek.co.uk) and its facebook page - [www.facebook.com/FriendsOfMiltonCreek](http://www.facebook.com/FriendsOfMiltonCreek). These have live news feeds informing users about forthcoming events and activities. This web resource is complimented by a Twitter account which is automatically linked to and updated from the facebook page. A subscriber list is maintained of Friends who receive regular news updates. Specific events are advertised through local media.

The Trust currently has two event shelters, two sail flags, one large banner, one pop-up display, a table top display board and three notice boards sited at the entrances to the Park for advertising purposes.

## Financial Plan

Annual budget requirements will vary dependent on the number and type of events or activities being provided at the Park. In addition to these there will also be recurring annual costs for web hosting, insurance and once the requisite level of income is reached for professional fees eg accountants.

	1/10/14 30/9/15	-	1/10/15 30/9/16	-	1/10/16 30/9/17	-
<b>INCOME</b>	<b>Actual</b>		<b>Estimate</b>		<b>Estimate</b>	
Balance B/F from previous year	£5,555.57		£3,580.54		£670.32	
LEF Funding from district councillors	£900.00		£600.00		£600.00	
LEF Funding from KCC councillors	£500.00		£500.00		£500.00	
SBC Culture Grant	£500.00		£1,000.00		£1,000.00	
Summer Event Income	£901.08		£900.00		£900.00	
Grant from Ideas Test	£3,000.00					
Grant from Invicta Rotary	£240.00					
Grant from Asda to add to trails budget	£200.00					
Wine & Wisdom fundraising event-profit	£295.00		£300.00		£300.00	
Grant from Round Table	N/A		£250.00			
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>£12,091.65</b>		<b>£7,130.54</b>		<b>£3,970.32</b>	
<b>EXPENDITURE</b>						
Insurance	£461.76		£275.22		£300.00	
Equipment & Sundry expenditure	£79.45		£150.00		£150.00	
Wed hosting and domain fees	£125.18		£150.00		£150.00	
Training	£0.00		£110.00		£110.00	
Membership Fees (Swale Arts Forum)	£25.00		£25.00		£25.00	
Grant funded equipment	N/A		£250.00		£500.00	
Events expenditure	£3,819.72		£2,500.00		£2,500.00	
Information sheets & marked trails	£4,000.00		£3,000.00			
<b>Total Expenditure</b>	<b>£8,511.11</b>		<b>£6,460.22</b>		<b>£3,735.00</b>	
<b>Surplus / Shortfall</b>	<b>£3,580.54</b>		<b>£670.32</b>		<b>£235.32</b>	

<b>£7000 in reserve acc.12/1/15 for trails</b>			
<b>21/1/15 Moved £1000 for AitP to reserve</b>			
<b>Annual running costs</b>		<b>£710.22</b>	<b>£735.00</b>

## Critical Risk Factors

Trustees – too much reliance is currently placed on a minority of Trustees and more active Trustees of appropriate experience and calibre need to be recruited.

Income – enough income needs to be secured to cover the recurring annual insurance etc costs of the Trust. Other shortfalls in income will mean less activity delivery, which whilst not desirable will not be critical.

Fundraising – income obtained through funding applications and grant requests will be essential to the Trust as there is minimal opportunity to create a significant income stream without facilities like a visitor centre, permanent car parking, toilets etc. Trustees will continue to look at organising fundraising events like Wine and Wisdom evenings.

Staffing – the Park Ranger post is critical to the future development of the Park. Swale BC need to consult the Trust on staffing issues and all matters of significance to the Park as Council decisions will impact on the Trust's ability to operate effectively.

Marketing – key to success is keeping local residents informed of activity within the Park. Marketing funds will be limited so continuing to grow the Trust's own web site and social network is vital.

Community Engagement – it is crucial to get greater involvement by the local community in all aspects of activity within the Park, both for high profile events and regular maintenance activity. Events need to be both appealing and affordable.

Volunteering – volunteers have vital roles in the organisation and running of events and maintenance work, so it is important to ensure correct support and training is given. Continued leadership by the Park Ranger will be essential.

Charges – charges for participating in and attending events must remain affordable for local people and community groups. However, the Trust must try to cover costs so any charges levied will need constant evaluation and monitoring. The Trust cannot levy an entrance charge for attending events due to the Park's open access.

Activities for All – projects must be fully inclusive to all members of the community without discrimination. A key component will be a varied schedule of activities and services ensuring offers of something for everyone.

## **Risk Assessment**

### Loss of Trustees and/or Park Ranger

The loss of key Trustees and/ or the Park Ranger would undermine the Trust's ability to deliver its objectives.

### Failure to meet income projections

This could mean that recurring insurance costs are not met leaving the Trustees vulnerable to financial liabilities. It could also lead to the loss of web hosting which has an annual charge and lead to the website resource becoming redundant.

### Maintenance of the Park site

The maintenance liability for the Park remains with Swale BC so there is no related risk presented to the Trust. There is a management plan for the Park and the Council currently budgets to cover maintenance, repairs and renewals. Swale BC also employ the Park Ranger. Should either of these factors change then negotiations would need to be held with the Council to reach a suitable financial recompense for the Trust.

### Vandalism incurs additional time and costs

To help prevent the misuse of facilities at the Park the aim is to involve local people as much as possible in the Friends group, through attendance at events and increasing usage. It is hoped that this will create a feeling of ownership amongst local residents that will lead to greater self-policing of the Park. The Trust has developed a close working relationship with the local police, including where possible attendance at Trust meetings and events so there is a mutual understanding of the community challenges.

## Activity Plan

This section sets out the main costed plans for 2016/17. Art in the Park on 16 July is the main event the Trust will organise directly though it will support other events in the Park. A third annual Wine and Wisdom evening will take place in the Parish Hall on 18 February 2017. Otherwise the Trust will focus on developing the Park as a visitor attraction with marked out trails, designed potentially for a range of users like walkers, runners, cyclist and wildlife enthusiasts, interpretation boards and information sheets.

<b>EVENT/ ACTIVITY</b>	<b>DATE</b>	<b>COST (Estimate)</b>
<b>ART IN THE PARK</b>	16 July 2016	£2500
<b>DEVELOPMENT OF MARKED TRAILS AND INTERPRETATION</b>	Ongoing	£7000
<b>WINE AND WISDOM</b>	18 February 2017	
<b>WEBSITE</b>	Ongoing maintenance	£150
<b>TRAINING</b>	Ongoing	£110

## Friends of Milton Creek

Following much discussion prior to the formation of the Milton Creek Trust it was agreed that the Friends of Milton Creek group would best operate as a work group resource to the Trust. Separate meetings are now organised for the Friends focussing on community engagement, delivering events and help with fund raising.