

## **Economy and Growth Committee**

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<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	16 September 2021
<b>Report Title:</b>	Tatton Park Update
<b>Report of:</b>	Peter Skates, Director of Growth and Enterprise
<b>Report Reference No:</b>	EG/08/21-22
<b>Ward(s) Affected:</b>	All

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### **1. Executive Summary**

- 1.1. This report addresses performance at Tatton Park since the start of the pandemic taking account of its role as a significant economic, environmental, and cultural asset for the Borough. The report sets out some of the background to the management of Tatton Park, the impacts of the pandemic, the ensuing restrictions on operations and the arrangements in place to recover its position.
- 1.1. The report provides information to update members, highlighting Tatton Park's contribution to the strategic aims and objectives in the Council's Corporate Plan 2021-25 as follows:
  - Open** – Through its contribution to the economy of Cheshire East, Tatton Park is supporting a sustainable financial future for the council, through service development, improvement and transformation and seeking opportunities to bring more income into the borough
  - Fair** – Tatton Park provides an environment that supports the health, wellbeing and learning of our communities and specifically offers opportunities through its learning programmes for children to have a high quality, enjoyable education that enables them to achieve their full potential.
  - Green** – Tatton Park contributes to Cheshire East being 'A thriving and sustainable place', particularly in relation to it being a great place for people to live, work and visit, contributing to thriving urban and rural economies, the environment and our quality of place. Tatton Park is one of the region's foremost environmental, cultural and heritage assets, is the largest area of public green space in the borough containing habitats and heritage of

national and local importance and makes a significant contribution to the economy and wellbeing of the area.

## **2. Recommendation**

- 2.1. To note the Tatton Park update.

## **3. Reasons for Recommendations**

- 3.1 The report provides an update on performance at Tatton Park. This addresses the significant impact of the pandemic and provides information to Members to aid understanding and future decision-making as an open and enabling organisation.

## **4. Other Options Considered**

- 4.1. There are no other options to consider.

## **5. Background**

- 5.1. Tatton Park is owned by the National Trust but managed and financed by Cheshire East Council on a 99-year lease which commenced in 1961, but which transferred from Cheshire County Council because of Local Government Reorganisation on 1 April 2009. It has significant conservation assets and nationally important collections. The joint vision of the Council and the National Trust is to *conserve Tatton Park for the enjoyment of present and future generations*.
- 5.2. Tatton Park is a major destination attraction (normally attracting c.800,000 visits a year in total), regularly in the top 20 paid for attractions in England but ranked number 5 in 2020 due to the impact of the pandemic on major indoor attractions and amusement parks. However, Tatton is also a place for recreation for Cheshire East families, an educational facility for schools (c.20,000 school visits) and adult education organisations and a provider of community benefits through the volunteering opportunities (c.18,000 hours in 2019/20), community events and outreach. Tatton Park recently achieved its 9<sup>th</sup> consecutive national Sandford Award for excellence in heritage education.
- 5.3. Tatton Park is also one of the region's foremost environmental, cultural and heritage assets, being the largest area of public green space in the borough and containing habitats of national or local importance. It is therefore well-placed to maintain and enhance its natural capital, biodiversity and its contribution to the Council's Carbon Action Plan through nature-based inseting, with further scope for decarbonisation.

The importance of Tatton Park as an asset contributing the economy, environment and communities of Cheshire East is evident, but like many

similar venues it has been impacted by the pandemic. The need therefore remains to reinvigorate and nurture its contribution as confidence is rebuilt, based on the regulations or public health guidance that apply at the time.

**5.4. Governance – alignment to Economy and Growth Committee.**

**5.5.** Tatton continues to contribute to the wider corporate agenda as part of the 'Rural and Cultural Economy' service within the Council's 'Place' Directorate. The Tatton Park Board, which does not have an executive function, is appointed by the Council to have oversight of the strategic management and business performance of Tatton Park, to advise on business plans and future development of service provision, make recommendation to the Council, as appropriate, regarding the strategic management of Tatton Park.

**5.6.** Any matter requiring an executive decision by Members will be brought to the Economy and Growth Committee (or other relevant Committee) for approval.

**5.7.** The Board can also advise the Council in establishing its policies, and priorities to ensure it can realise Tatton Park's potential in contributing to the visitor economy and communities of Cheshire East. Tatton is well positioned in this regard, already being an important contributor to the economy, prosperity and 'quality of place' of Cheshire East as the borough's largest visitor attraction. It is an important rural and environmental asset and the most significant cultural/heritage asset in the area. It makes a significant contribution to the economy, quality of life and image/profile of Cheshire East and is an important contributor to the Council's environmental agenda.

**5.8. Visitor Economy - contribution**

**5.9.** In 2017 it was estimated that Tatton Park has a gross contribution of c.£35m to the North West economy and generates c.£5.3m Gross Value Added (GVA) to the local economy. As such, Tatton Park is a major contributor to the Council's recovery plans for tourism and the visitor economy, being a key attractor in its own right, creating economic benefit through its supply chain and events, generating business for local high streets, hotels, transport and hospitality or benefiting other attractions by raising the profile of the area for visitors.

**5.10.** Tatton Park has been an important driver of growth as part of the Cheshire East Visitor Economy strategy, being one of the most visited paid-for attractions in the North West. It therefore continues to have an important contribution to make as part of the Cheshire East Tourism Recovery Plan with potential to support and stimulate recovery and growth in the future.

### **5.11. Corporate Plan - Contribution**

**5.12.** Tatton Park is a valuable contributor to the rural, visitor and cultural economies of Cheshire East, and along with its contribution to 'quality of place', it plays an important role in economic well-being. Tatton Park also contributes to other policy areas including the environment, managing and improving biodiversity and the natural habitats of the borough, contributing to nature-based offsetting through the Council's Carbon Action Plan and supporting health and wellbeing, enabling people to exercise and socialise in our parks and open spaces.

**5.13.** Tatton also supports learning opportunities for our communities. In a 'normal' year Tatton's award-winning learning programme welcomes around 20,000 school visits plus adult programmes. A refreshed education programme supported by Arts Council 'Cultural Recovery' funding, will offer further benefit in future years. with blending learning (a mixture of in person and online education sessions), an increased the number of onsite sessions that can be delivered in line with current guidance and new virtual experiences to support schools which cannot physically attend.

### **5.14. Responding to the Pandemic**

**5.15.** Covid-19 has has had, (and will continue to have for the immediate future), a significant impact on the assumptions that lie behind Tatton's business plan. Because of Tatton's reliance on income (£4.2m of the £4.8m operating cost), the impact of the pandemic and the restrictions on operations that ensued, had a significant impact on the 2020/21 season.

**5.16.** In response to the worsening situation regarding COVID-19, Tatton Park introduced restricted opening arrangements in March 2020 and then closed, just as the first national 'lockdown' was announced on 24th March. Tatton Park remained closed as a destination attraction in support of the strategy to stop the spread of Coronavirus, as people were asked to stay home, avoid unnecessary travel and work from home wherever possible.

**5.17.** During that time, online resources were developed and made available to maintain interest and to provide a 'learning hub' of help to people at home and those in home-learning. Local food projects were also supported with produce from Tatton Park to assist with vulnerable or disadvantaged people.

**5.18.** The position was kept under regular review taking account of Government guidance, regulations, infection rates, risk assessments, the availability of protective measures for staff, the demands of social distancing and the position of other equivalent destination attractions. Close liaison was maintained with local attractions and national organisations to ensure a

coordinated approach, with Tatton developing Covid-19 risk assessments that were shared with others to help guide detailed plans for reopening. This included close collaboration with the National Trust to ensure a consistent level of response.

- 5.19.** A phased re-opening plan was agreed for the parkland to reopen on 3rd June 2020, followed on a phased basis by the Gardens, Farm and Mansion. New systems had to be developed and introduced to enable safe and socially distanced opening, including PPE and screens, new booking arrangements, online ticketing and time-slotted caps on numbers. A take-away service was developed for the Stables Restaurant and the 'Housekeeper's Store' food shop reopened, followed by other retail once regulations permitted. Except for a 'drive-in' cinema, which was developed specifically in line with regulations at the time, no events were able to take place, weddings were not permitted, and education visits could not take place.
- 5.20.** The remainder of 2020/21 continued to be challenging, requiring continued responses to changes in guidance, regulations, and infection rates, while two more national lockdowns followed. Throughout 2020/21 and since, Tatton staff worked tirelessly in an excellent and professional way, developing responses to new and changing circumstances, seeking to control expenditure and being innovative in income generation within the limitations imposed. With a few initial exceptions, related to the need for social distancing and the pressures on wildlife of visitors, the public response to Tatton's reopening and subsequent management was positive throughout and visitors commented on the safe and welcoming environment that was offered.
- 5.21.** As a result of the restrictions, the Covid pressure at outturn was £375k. However, this was a significant improvement on the position anticipated at mid-year, as measures were introduced to develop and sustain income where possible, some of the extra costs were mitigated and £175k compensation for income loss was received from Central Government. Long periods of closure for main attractions, along with restrictions on events, hire of facilities and impacts on retail/catering, led to a significant reduction in income levels.
- 5.22.** However, since the Parkland reopened at the beginning of June 2020 with subsequent phased reopening of attractions, actual visitor numbers performed well except when impacted by further lockdowns or restrictions. Appendix 1 provides a number of graphs that indicate 2020/21 performance since reopening compared to equivalent 2019 figures, which for Park visitors, exceeded the 2019 equivalent.
- 5.23.** The ongoing impact on events, catering, retail and our ability to operate facilities 'normally' will sustain some of this pressure into 2021/22. Changes

in visiting habits and audience confidence will continue to add an element of uncertainty in the level of business at any given time. However, the corresponding interest in domestic holidays, the importance of the outdoors and a 're-discovered' appreciation of what is 'on-the-doorstep', all offer opportunities for re-engaging with visitors, maintaining their trust and benefiting from a potential 'bounce-back' when the impact of the virus reduces.

#### **5.24. Future Investment**

- 5.25.** Investment continues to be important to both maintain Tatton's position and improve performance. Since 2011 Tatton Park has engaged in an investment programme called 'Tatton Vision' which has seen improvements in meeting facilities, catering provision, the 'Field to Fork' project at the Farm and other improvements in the visitor experience.
- 5.26.** Projects currently in development include the second part of the Stableyard and 'Welcome' project. The 'Welcome building' was completed in late 2019 having attracted £245, 676 of Rural Development funding. The Stableyard visitor facilities have been delayed due to Covid but are planned to commence in 2021/22 subject to completing new designs for sustainable energy and a final cost-plan. A new pricing strategy is in place with differential pricing to incentivise bookings and low season visits. A rapid move during the pandemic to more cash-free payments and online booking will require further investment to secure the benefits of improved EPOS and booking systems and ensure their ongoing resilience to take advantage of rapidly changing technologies and a move to cloud based systems.
- 5.27.** Plans are being developed for the Play Area which is a key investment to maintain the family market, and feasibility studies are being planned for other potential future projects. Proposals are also in hand for repair of glasshouses, additional fire safety works in the Mansion and in line with the Council's Environment Strategy and Carbon Action Plan, proposals are also being developed for decarbonisation.
- 5.28.** A refreshed education programme attracted a £180,000 Arts Council 'Cultural Recovery' grant. This will offer further benefit in future years and provide learning for other similar attractions. It will offer blending learning (a mixture of in person and online education sessions) and increase the number of onsite sessions that can be delivered in line with current guidance and new virtual experiences to support schools which cannot physically attend.
- 5.29.** Ultimately Tatton Vision investments will not only ensure Tatton's conservation, visitor experience and achievement of broader Cheshire East Council objectives, but they also provide an important contribution to the

recovery of Cheshire East's wider rural and visitor economy. If investment continues then Tatton will be well placed to take advantage of the post-Covid thirst for the real experiences and interest in the value of nature, heritage and cultural aspects. Investment proposals are based on business cases developed and submitted through the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy.

- 5.30.** The cost of managing and operating Tatton Park has significantly reduced since 2011 as a result of the 'Tatton Vision' investment, with the cash income generated by Tatton Park used to directly offset the operating and management costs of the estate. Investment has helped to reduce the operating cost over that period from 26% of turnover to 13%. However, realistically the business plan now must focus on how to get back to that sort of figure in 2021/22 and how to look forward in the changing environment in which we operate.

**5.31. Roadmap to Recovery / links to tourism recovery**

- 5.32.** There are several key next steps to be decided in 2021 as the 'roadmap' for removing restrictions unfolds. These include plans for 'normalising' a level of business, the return of activity such as weddings, group business and outdoor events, key periods such as Christmas 2021 and the lead-up to the 2022 season. In addition there will be a need for key investment decisions, such as the play area, which will be even more important in current circumstances, changes to pricing strategy to incentivise visits in quieter periods and the continuing move to get more 'bookable' product online. A marketing plan has been prepared to support this activity.

- 5.33.** The Tourism Recovery Plan identifies that Cheshire East is well positioned to exploit key themes such as:

- Outdoor experiences
- Friends and family
- Wellness
- Lifestyle and culture
- Sustainable and green

- 5.34.** These are all themes which Tatton Park can take advantage of and where it can support priorities in the Tourism Action Plan through:

**Outdoor events** – Events such as the RHS Flower Show, Pop-Up Festival and Foodies have the potential to bring many visitors providing much needed income for business and the hospitality industry.

**Filming/Film Tourism** – Filming is one of the sectors we are already seeing an increase in and Tatton Park will continue to pursue filming opportunities.



**Heritage** – During the pandemic many people have discovered the rich history of the UK through on-line initiatives. Working with other attractions, Tatton Park can reconnect with visitors looking to experience these places in person

**Culture** – Over the last year new audiences have engaged with Culture through online platforms and social media, as many venues have been closed and events have been cancelled. The opportunity is to use culture as a means to encourage people back to venues like Tatton where culture can be discovered in the open air, through public art, outdoor events, installations and happenings.

**Weddings** – for Cheshire East 74% of couples come from outside the area, bringing income and new business. Tatton Park has reflected the trend for many couples to move their dates to the second half of 2021 and has seen an increase in enquiries and additional bookings. There is also the potential for overnight stays and additional spend, plus the supply-chain associated with the sector.

**Visiting Friends & Relatives** – A key theme in the staycation market especially with the easing of lockdown measures and disparate families and friends looking to re-connect

**Green Space** - Cheshire East has an abundance of green space through the rural areas of our borough, and Tatton Park is the largest green asset in the borough. We know visitors are looking to avoid bustling crowds and this highlights one of our strengths.

**Cycling/walking** – Cheshire East is blessed with a host of wonderful cycle and walking routes. Tatton Park has its own popular routes and has links to the surrounding areas.

**Historic Estates & Houses** – along with the number of National Trust and Historic Houses properties in Cheshire East, Tatton is well positioned to benefit from attracting visitors to enjoy the open space of these attractions

**Self-Catering** – Tatton Park already has two ‘Dairy Cottage’ self-catering holiday lets and there are several others in the surrounding area. These are seen by consumers as the safest way to visit places and with the range and quality that Cheshire East has to offer.

- 5.35.** Continued investment in attractions such as Tatton Park also inspires confidence in the sector and generates wider economic impact. For example, a start on-site of the second phase of the Stableyard project is still necessary to generate the activity and vibrancy that will improve the visitor experience and be attractive to audiences. In addition, proposals for upgrading the play area and consideration of options to bring the Farm’s ‘top yard’ into use will be developed. The ‘cultural recovery’ Arts Council funded education project will create new learning experiences and the activity planning developed for ‘Field to Fork’ will be embedded in the farm programme.



- 5.36.** The ‘day to day’ operation is set against a tight fiscal background at the best of times and due to the pandemic is in an increasingly fragile visitor market. This is making it even more challenging to sustain the initial success and momentum of the Vision. Even in a difficult financial position owing to the pandemic, the challenge continues to be the successful delivery of the core business without compromising on values, contribution, quality and delivery of objectives. This sits alongside the initial challenge of recovery before being able to deliver a sustainable position once again through the ‘vision’ programme.
- 5.37.** Beyond this year, the ‘Tatton Vision’ identifies that Tatton Park will provide an even more exciting destination with a high-quality offer that appeals not only to the heritage market but delivers real growth in the family market through its attractions and events, in the business and functions market through its facilities and in cultural tourism. The ambition remains to maintain its important contribution to the economy, culture and environment of Cheshire East, to deliver sufficient additional net income to help reduce reliance on Council revenue support and to provide a sustainable platform from which to secure its current and future leasehold obligations.
- 5.38.** However, the realities of the current visitor market mean that a priority must be to regain and then sustain the position already achieved. The legacy of Covid-19 and fluctuations in the visitor market will impact on success from year to year, but the commitment from the Council’s capital programme is necessary to support these aims through new/additional investment projects as part of the refreshed Tatton Vision Phase 2 programme. This will help guide the next phase of investment. Development of this programme will also require parallel approvals through the National Trust.
- 5.39.** To regain and then maintain the position, Tatton Park will need to rebuild the full range of paying visits as well as improving on the yield from park entry revenues and secondary spend throughout existing and new visitor facilities. This improved economic performance, which underpins the business model, will only be achieved by a programme of targeted investment, continued efficiencies, development in existing visitor product and developing new product including Tatton’s offer in the family market. It will also depend on maintaining and developing the share of markets that have variously been impacted by the pandemic and related restrictions. Some elements will therefore recover at different rates.
- 5.40.** Decisions going forward will need to take account of the lessons of Covid-19 and additional consideration continues to be given to ensuring that the quality, attraction and contribution of existing core elements are maintained. The Vision investment programme will aim to impact on the level of public subsidy required in the longer term, reinforce Tatton as one of the Region’s top visitor attractions, maintain its contribution to the wider economy and

provide the opportunity to sustain or enhance the conservation and care of the historic estate for the remainder of the lease. In addition, Tatton will continue to deliver on the Council's wider agenda, particularly its important economic contribution, its profile as part of place marketing and its environmental importance, including its contribution to the carbon action plan.

## **6. Consultation and Engagement**

- 6.1.** All wards contain residents who will be able to access Tatton's facilities and whose local economy can benefit from increased visitor expenditure. Elected Members from both local wards and other parts of Cheshire East are represented on the Tatton Park Board to provide oversight and engagement through elected representatives.
- 6.2.** Visitor surveys, onsite engagement and online feedback mechanisms all play an important part in understanding the needs of Tatton's audiences and how we are meeting their requirements. These mechanisms have been, and will continue to be used, to consult with visitors and colleagues when developing 'Tatton Vision' investment opportunities. This will ensure residents' and colleagues views are listened to and responded to.

## **7. Implications**

### **7.1. Legal**

- 7.1.1.** There are no direct legal implications arising from the report and its recommendations.

### **7.2. Finance**

- 7.2.1.** There are no direct financial implications arising from the report and its recommendations. Actions outlined in this report will be delivered within existing Tatton Park budgets or subject to the Council's business planning process. Investment plans for proposals or projects referred to in the report will be progressed through the Council's business planning as part of the Medium-Term Financial Strategy.

### **7.3. Policy**

- 7.3.1.** Tatton Park is a valuable contributor to the rural, visitor and cultural economies of Cheshire East, and along with its contribution to 'quality of place', it plays an important role in economic well-being. Tatton Park also contributes to other policy areas including the environment, health and wellbeing, and learning.

### **7.4. Equality**

**7.4.1.** Given that the proposal does not represent any change of policy an EIA has not been conducted. There are no direct implications for equalities.

## **7.5. Human Resources**

**7.5.1.** There are no direct implications for human resources.

## **7.6. Risk Management**

**7.6.1.** There are no direct implications for risk management.

## **7.7. Rural Communities**

**7.7.1.** Tatton Park is a significant contributor to the rural visitor economy. The conservation of Tatton Park contributes to the protection of the rural environment and its heritage.

## **7.8. Children and Young People/Cared for Children**

**7.8.1.** Children, young people and their families form a large part of visitors to the estate. Encouraging visitors, to what is largely an outdoor activity venue, will have a positive impact on quality of life, providing social, mental and physical health benefits for all age groups. Additionally, over 20,000 school visits are normally hosted every year and Tatton has an established record, winning eight consecutive Sandford awards for excellence in heritage education as well as adult education, skills training, general life skills and interpretation.

## **7.9. Public Health**

**7.9.1.** It is expected that encouraging visitors, to what is largely an outdoor activity venue, will have a positive impact on quality of life and delivers the social, mental and physical health benefits of outdoor recreation. Provision of a safe recreational environment has been an important contributor to physical and mental health during the pandemic.

## **7.10. Climate Change**

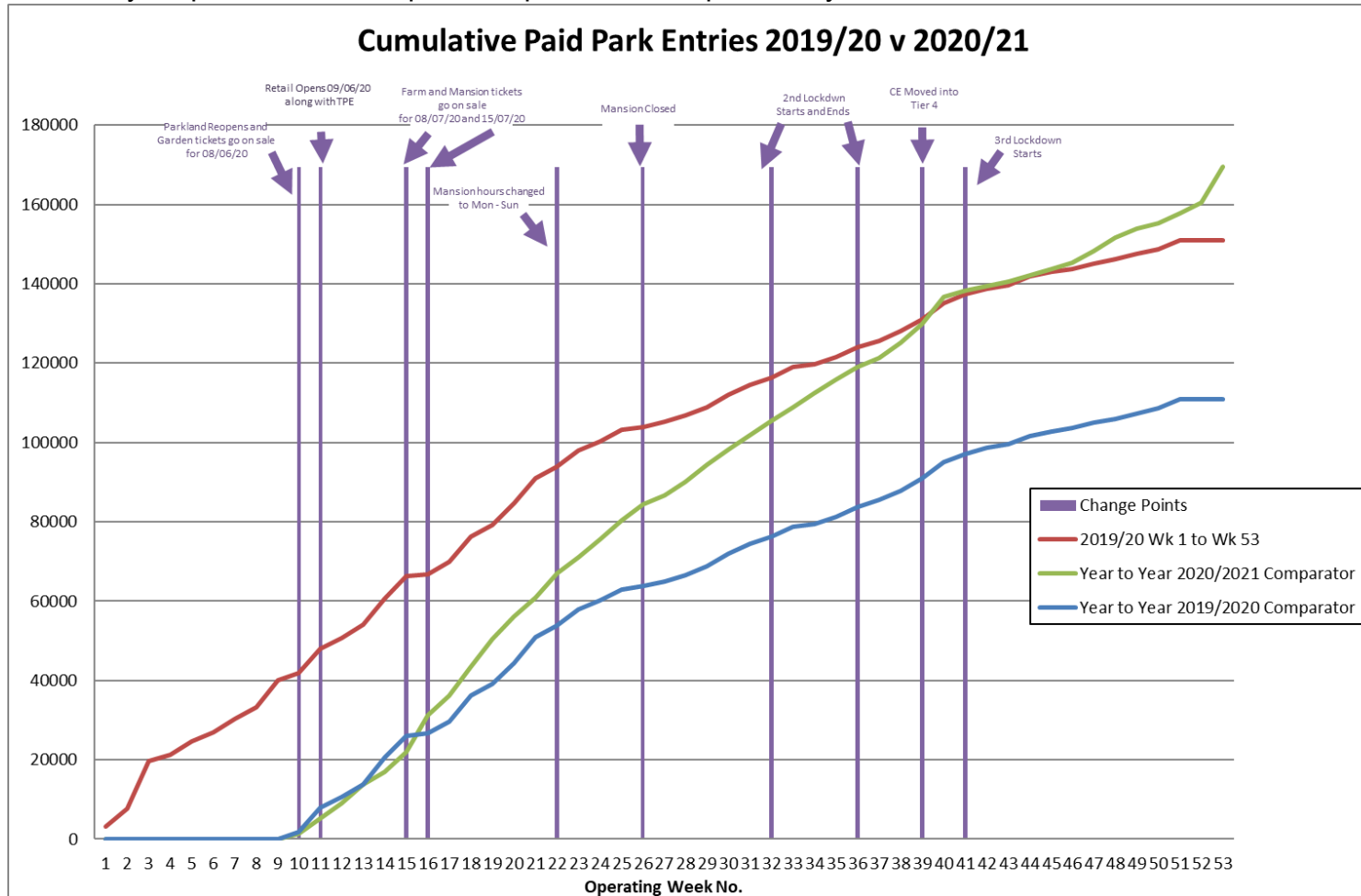
**7.10.1.** Tatton Park provides a significant environmental asset for Cheshire East and is delivering actions related to environmental sustainability, nature-based sequestration and promoting healthy lifestyles.

<b>Access to Information</b>	
Contact Officer:	Brendan Flanagan Head of Rural and Cultural Economy brendan.flanagan@cheshireeast.gov.uk 07802583903
Appendices:	Appendix 1: Tatton Park - Comparative performance graphs
Background Papers:	

## Appendix 1 Comparative performance charts 2019/20 and 2020/21

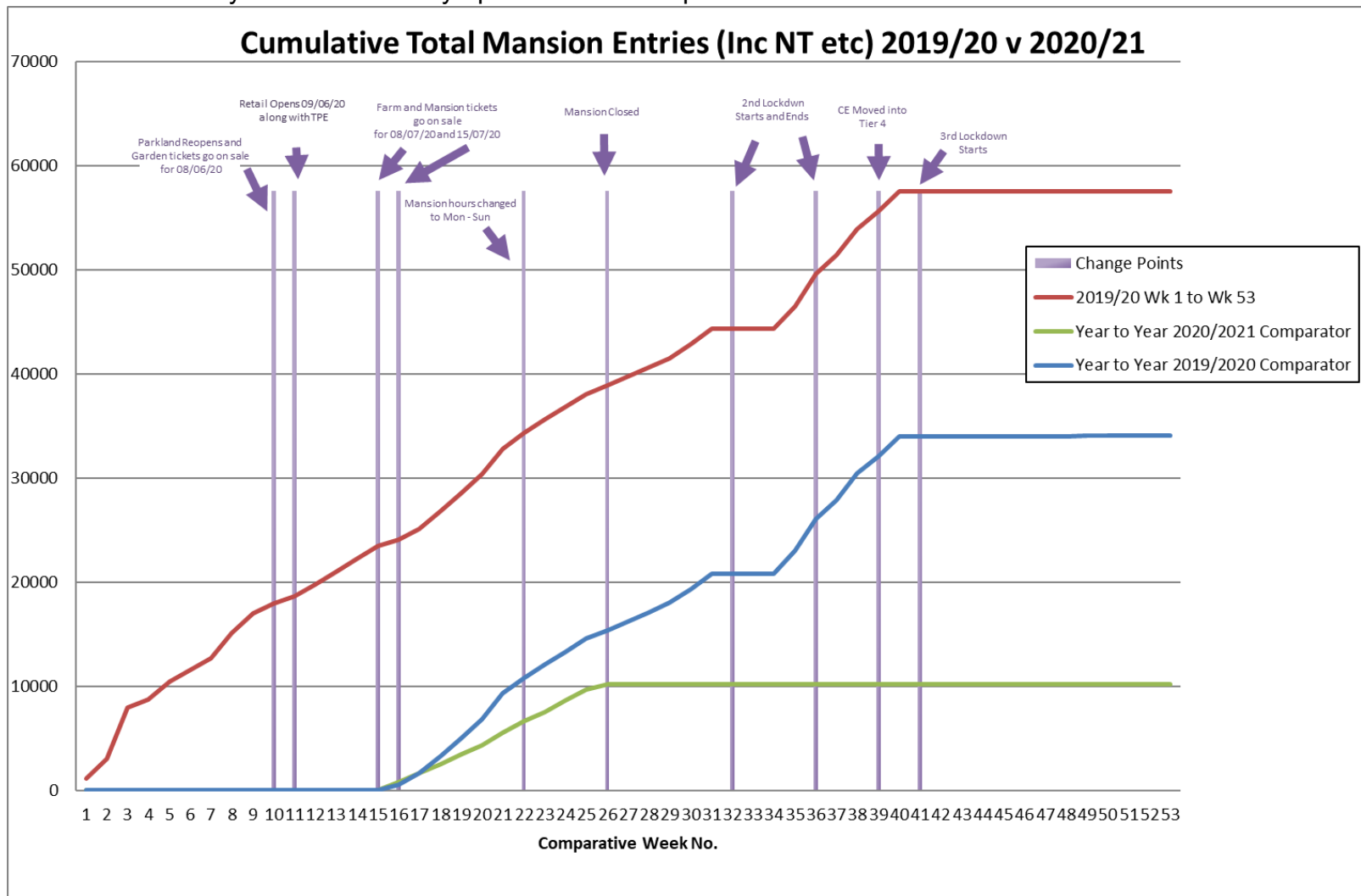
Each graph shows entries for 2019/20 calendar year together with a year-on-year comparison for the same period from the date of reopening the Park in June 2020, comparing June 20 -March 21 with the equivalent for entries June 19 to March 20.

a) Park entry outperformed the equivalent period for the previous year.



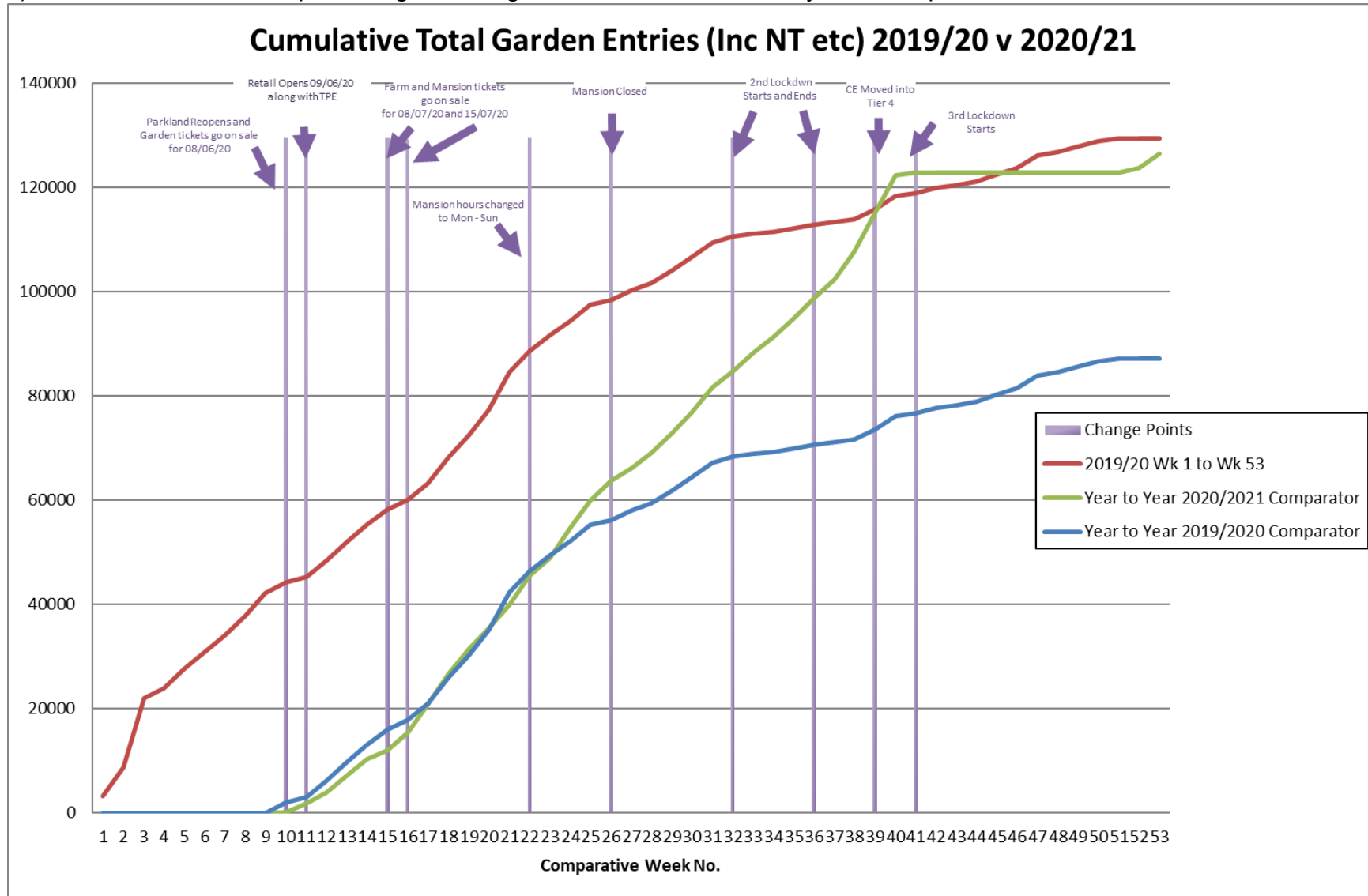
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b) As an indoor facility the Mansion only opened June – September in 2021



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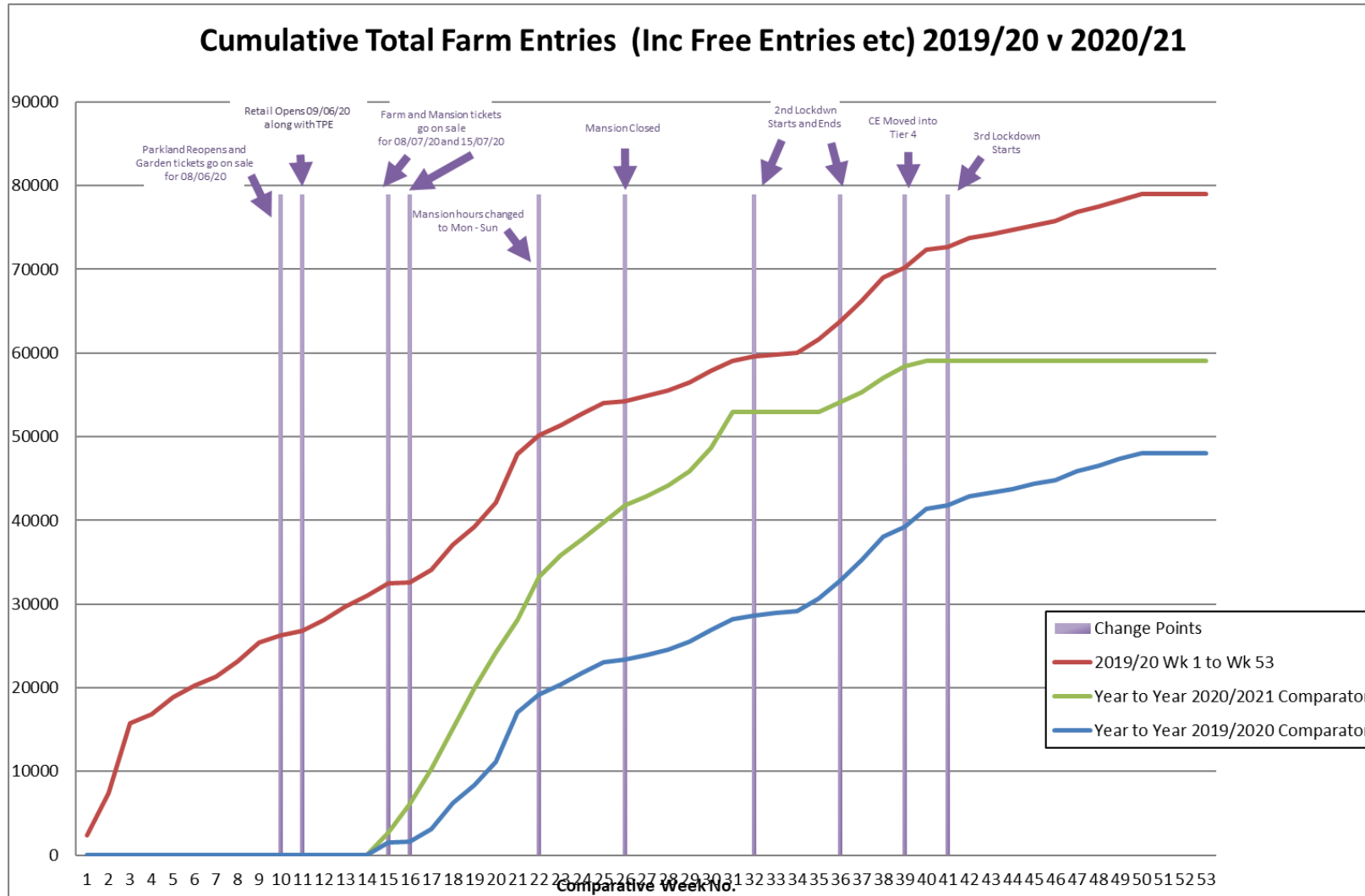
c) Garden entries were impacted again during a third lockdown closure yet almost performed as well as the whole of 2019/20.



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d) The Farm was closed for all three lockdowns and yet still managed to out-perform the equivalent period in 2019/20 on cumulative entries.



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