

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Housing and Environment
DATE	14 January 2014
DIRECTOR	Pete Leonard
TITLE OF REPORT	Countryside Ranger Service Annual Report 2013
REPORT NUMBER:	H&E/14/004

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

To advise members on the achievements of the Aberdeen City Council Countryside Ranger Service over 2013.

2. RECOMMENDATION(S)

That the Committee:

- (i) approves and notes the report,
- (ii) recognises the achievements of the Countryside Ranger Service,
- (iii) instructs officers to continue the development of the Service for 2014/15 and
- (iv) requests a Countryside Ranger Service Annual Report to the January 2015 Housing and Environment Committee.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications as a result of this report.

The Countryside Ranger Service is continuing to develop additional external funding to deliver this valued service to the people and countryside of Aberdeen.

4. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

This report is to feedback the achievement of the Countryside Ranger Service over the last year and as such, does not have any legal, resource, personnel, property, equipment, sustainability and environmental, health and safety and/or policy implications.

This report demonstrates the achievements of the service and current level of funding and in-kind support achieved from external sources in 2013.

5. BACKGROUND/MAIN ISSUES

The Aberdeen City Council Countryside Ranger Service is a well established team which has evolved and developed over at least the last 15 or more years. It has, and will continue to develop and respond to the changes in Aberdeen City Council. It is currently a City wide service delivered through Housing and Environment's Environmental Services. The Countryside Ranger Service is based at the Lochinch Countryside Interpretation Centre adjacent to Loirston Loch.

The Service consists of a Countryside Officer who manages the team of 2.0 FTE Countryside Rangers and one Woodlands Community Ranger. One of the part time Rangers (0.4 FTE) left the service at the end of January 2013. This post was filled in October 2013.

Since October 2009, the provision of a variety and changing funding from sources such as the Heritage Lottery Fund, Forestry Commission, Criminal Justice Service, Scottish Rural Development Programme etc has facilitated the employment the full-time Woodlands Community Ranger.

The Countryside Ranger Service manages 30 countryside sites within the City to promote nature conservation, recreation and education. This includes a wide range of functions such as ensuring that the sites are managed appropriately; site specific management plans devised by the team including, where possible, actions to deliver objectives which fit with the NE Scotland Local Biodiversity Action Plans; and keeping the sites in a fit for purpose and safe condition for all users and to encourage people to use them in an appropriate manner. The Service also holds public events to highlight the special features, history and species of the sites and provides outdoor learning opportunities for all ages through formal and informal means. The Service has to attract significant levels of external funding to deliver projects on the ground.

5.1 National Recognition

The Countryside Ranger Service was a finalist in the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) Nature of Scotland Awards 2013 in the Innovation category for the Gramps Project which has continued to reduce the levels of wilful fire raising on Kincorth and Tullos Hills and around the Bucksburn Valley area. This project was up against the Cairngorm Wildcat Project which won the category, the Scottish Beaver

Trial which was Highly Commended. To be a finalist along with such projects around these iconic species demonstrates the value that such a local community based project is seen to have at a national level.

The Tullos Hill site in the Granite City Forest Project was selected as one of the 60 new woodlands of 60 acres or more planted in the UK as a part of the Woodland Trust celebration for the Queens Diamond Jubilee. These 60 woods are all publically accessible and branded as Diamond Woods. There are 20 in total in Scotland, most of which are on private estates. All 60 Diamond Woods were recognized at reception in the presence of HRH Princess Anne at Buckingham Palace in March. The Countryside Officer attended this event to represent Aberdeen City Council.

The work of the Countryside Ranger Service was a key part of the Aberdeen City entry in the 2013 Beautiful Scotland In Bloom competition which achieved a Silver Gilt medal. The Countryside Ranger's extensive community involvement, environmental management and outdoor learning work was demonstrated to the judges along with information relating to Aberdeen's wildlife highlights such as dolphins, red squirrels, peregrines nesting in the city centre, and otters being seen more frequently.

The project to develop and manage the Tullos Hill Volunteer Rangers has been recognised by the awarding of a COSLA Bronze Excellence Award in the 'Local Outcomes' category of the 2014 COSLA Excellence Awards. (see section 5.5 for more details of this project)

5.2 Media coverage

Many of the Countryside Ranger projects have attracted good and positive media coverage both locally and nationally. Most of the public events were advertised in the local papers prior and successfully attracted increased numbers from members of the public. Some of the practical volunteer days also attracted media coverage on the day with photographers attending some of the events. (See Appendix 1)

For the first time the BBC Springwatch programme filmed in Aberdeen highlighting the dolphin population around the harbour. This was broadcast over several evenings on BBC2 TV.

The Countryside Ranger Service also worked in partnership with the RSPB to promote their Nature on the Doorstep Dolphin Watch Project based at Torry Battery. This was launched in May 2013 and attracted coverage on BBC TV, BBC Radio Scotland, STV, local radio stations and local papers. The project continued throughout the summer with RSPB staff on site each week Thursday to Sunday and attracted regular media interest as well as substantial interest from visitors to the area, both Aberdeen residents and visitors from across the UK and abroad. This project was also supported by Visit Aberdeen.

Aberdeen's input to the Saving Scotland's Red Squirrel Project has received some good and extensive coverage in the local papers with several full page spreads on the project. These have highlighted the successful management of some of our woodlands to promote and enhance red squirrel habitat and the return of red squirrels to Hazlehead Park and other areas around the City including Cults, Milltimber, Stoneywood and Bridge of Don.

Many projects have been promoted on SHMU FM through the show that the Woodlands Community Ranger has on the radio station. He has been able to invite community representatives and young people involved with projects to go on the show and talk about their work. This has been a good way to communicate with some of the harder to reach elements of the local community and given opportunities for local people to experience first hand how radio programmes work.

The work of the Woodlands Community Ranger was recognised within the Council with him winning a Star Award for the project he led at the Rosewell House, to improve the garden area for both the residents and for wildlife.

5.2.1 Social Media

The Countryside Ranger Service has started making use of Social Media to raise awareness of the work of the team and points of interest relating to Aberdeen's rich natural environment. The Countryside Ranger Service has its own Flickr account where photographs of the City's countryside areas and wildlife can be posted by anyone and a Facebook page where information about the sites, their wildlife and the work the Countryside Rangers are doing is posted regularly. Members of the public can also post items on the Facebook page. These posts have included information about damage to the sites, asking about Countryside Ranger involvement with school group and enquiries about what the service does. The Countryside Ranger Service has found this a very useful and efficient means of communicating with service users.

5.3 Granite City Forest

Following the completion of the Tree for Every Citizen tree planting in 2012 work has been on going to ensure that the trees establish well and develop into valuable woodlands. This is largely funded through the Scottish Rural Development Programme grant funding.

Part of the work to raise the profile of all the Aberdeen City Council woodland and forest areas in the City a new logo and strapline has been developed to promote the "Granite City Forest". This was developed out of a design competition open to schools in the City. Elements from the best designs were used to create the new logo. This is now being used on site signage and written materials relating to the woodlands and forest areas.

5.4 Management of wildlife

The Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2011 was enacted in January 2012 along with an associated Code of Practice. This makes landowners responsible for the management of wildlife on their land.

The programme of work to ensure various wildlife populations on ACC land is sustainable and healthy is continuing as required by the above legislation.

5.5 Woodland Community Ranger

The Woodland Community Ranger has been working two days a week to promote and encourage community involvement with the new Diamond Wood planted on Tullos Hill. During 2013 he has established a core group of volunteers who are working one day a week on projects on Tullos Hill and in the local schools and nurseries. This is to encourage them to make more use of the outdoors in their day to day work leading to using Tullos Hill on a regular basis. With some of these groups, it is necessary to support the staff and build their confidence to work outdoors with the children so using their own grounds where possible as a first step to the outdoors has worked well. The volunteers have helped develop some of the outdoor spaces to make them more interesting and useable for the children by bringing in logs, clearing undergrowth, creating woodchip paths etc. The Woodlands Community Ranger has run continuing professional development sessions to help the staff with this.

The project to develop and manage the Tullos Hill Volunteer Rangers has been recognised by the awarding of a **COSLA Bronze Excellence Award** in the 'Local Outcomes' category of the 2014 COSLA Excellence Awards.

The Woodland Community Ranger has been working with the "Unpaid Work Team" averaging two days a week offering placements to up to 5 clients a day with real worthwhile work with an element of training to add value to the process. This has enabled the Countryside Ranger Service to achieve work on some of the sites that otherwise would not have been possible. Unfortunately this role was stopped in July as there were issues surrounding the management of these teams.

Since the ending of the work with the Unpaid Work Team the Woodland Community Ranger has been working with some of the Tullos Hill Volunteer Rangers to complete some of the projects that had originally been taken on to deliver with the Unpaid Work Team. This has included work to improve outdoor areas at other schools, nurseries and community centres etc for outdoor learning as well as other site maintenance work.

Additional funding, to replace the Criminal Justice Service funding, has been allocated from the Scottish Rural Development Programme funding for the other new woodland sites planted as a part of the Tree

for Every Citizen Project. This funding is to promote and support increased levels of community engagement and use at these new woodlands.

The Woodland Community Ranger has maintained his links with the Station House Media Unit and SHMU FM. He has continued his weekly “A Round with the Ranger” programme on a Wednesday morning to promote environmental projects. This gives an opportunity for those involved with the projects to go live “on air” to talk about what they are doing around the city.

5.6 Core Path works

Over the last year less funding has been available from NESTRANS to deliver core path improvements. This is largely due to much of the funds being allocated to the repair and restoration of the Formartine and Buchan Way bridge over the River Don at Dyce. This was a joint project with Aberdeenshire Council as half the bridge falls within each local authority. The bridge was in need of urgent works to maintain its safety.

Some core path improvement work has been funded for the Coastal Path south of Nigg Bay which has been completed with NESTRANS and Aberdeen Greenspace Trust funding.

Aberdeen Greenspace Trust Volunteers have continued work to waymark core path routes in the Hazlehead and Torry areas to bring these up to the Core Path standard.



Coastal Path before and after upgrade works

NESTRANS and Aberdeen Greenspace Trust funding has been secured to upgrade a section of the path along the south bank of the River Don from the Woodside pitches to Persley Castle. This will be completed by the end of March 2014.

Planning gain funding is also now being secured to assist with the improvement of core paths in areas close to new development areas across the City. This funding is likely to increase in coming years and will potentially fund works on routes NESTRANS funding would not be considered appropriate. NESTRANS are increasingly only willing to support projects that contribute significantly to the strategic green transport network.

5.7 The North East Biological Records Centre and Local Biodiversity Action Plans

Aberdeen City Council supports the North East Biological Records Centre (NESBReC) financially and through a service level agreement, submitting biological records and funding specific projects delivered by NESBReC.

The Countryside Ranger Service is involved in the development implementation and review of local biodiversity action plans covering the north-east of Scotland as a partner in the North East Scotland Local Biodiversity Partnership.

These plans target work to help species and habitats under threat both locally and nationally. Current plans in development concern rivers and burns, lochs and burns and a variety of marine and coastal habitats.

The Urban and Communities Biodiversity Action Plan has been developed to promote, enhance and protect valuable biodiversity that relies on the urban environment. A major part of this will be to encourage greater involvement of local communities in delivering projects that will raise awareness of the urban natural environment and make habitat improvements including making cemeteries more wildlife friendly and using plants in more formal areas that are good for insects or other species.

5.8 Partnership working with local businesses.

Over the last year, several local and national companies have approached the Countryside Ranger Service for projects that their staff could volunteer for as a part of their Corporate Social Responsibility

programmes. The Countryside Ranger Service has been able to offer projects including beach cleans and gorse clearing. This has helped to raise the profile of the Service within the business community, raise the profile of some of the countryside sites and attracted positive media interest.

5.9 Other Partnership working

The Countryside Ranger Service has found that partnership working is a key to success. By bringing together a range of partners the knowledge and skills base is dramatically increased, it can pool financial resources which individually cannot deliver a project but by working together it can be delivered. Partners are not always ones with can offer finances. The ground breaking work the Service has done to reduce wilful fire raising brought together agencies and the local community to address a serious safety and environmental problem at minimal cost to any organisation but has generated large savings in time and resources particularly for the Fire Service.

The Saving Scotland's Red Squirrel Project in Aberdeen has been working successfully with the Countryside Rangers Service and other Housing and Environment staff identifying locations for grey squirrel trapping in the Council owned woods and other greenspaces. The trapping work is starting to show results with red squirrels returning to Hazlehead Woods in increasing numbers as well as being sighted in Bielside, Cults and Torry where they have not been seen for 30 or more years. The Countryside Rangers have also been assisting the project by undertaking survey transects in Hazlehead Woods and submitting records of red and grey squirrels from across the City. The Countryside Rangers held a joint public event with the Saving Scotland's Red Squirrel project during Red Squirrel Week in October at Hazlehead Woods. At least three different red squirrels were observed by

the
group.



A red squirrel photographed at St Fitticks Community Woodland, Torry.



Camera trap photographs of red squirrels in Hazlehead Woods

The Countryside Officer is a member of the Executive Committee of the Lowland Deer Network Scotland group as one of three local authority representatives. He has played an active role in this group and has developed links with a number of other local authorities in the north and east of Scotland to highlight the work of the Network and the shared knowledge across the country. This has included giving a presentation at the Scottish Countryside Ranger Association Ranger Managers Workshop on land manager's responsibilities for deer management in lowland areas under the Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2011. The Countryside Officer was also due to give a presentation about deer management in the urban environment to a Scottish Natural Heritage Sharing Good Practice event but unfortunately the event had to be cancelled. It is likely to be run again in the future.

The Countryside Ranger Service has helped Scottish Natural Heritage deliver a workshop for commercial dog walkers in Aberdeen. This workshop aimed to raise awareness of the commercial dog walkers responsibilities under the Land Reform Act and the Scottish Outdoor Access Code of Practice as well as highlighting issues that they should be aware of in terms of veterinary advice, first aid for dogs, best practice for commercial dog walking etc.

The Countryside Ranger Service has had involvement with the Friends of Hazlehead, Friends of Seaton Park, Friends of Union Terrace Gardens, Friends of Allan Park and Friends of Victoria and Westburn Park. This has included assistance with ideas to make the respective areas more wildlife friendly.

Other partnerships where the Countryside Ranger Service has been representing the Council include work with Aberdeen Greenspace, and the Dee Catchment Partnership. Many of these are regional partnerships including inputs from Aberdeenshire and Moray Council areas and the Cairngorms National Park. These open up a wealth of contacts, opportunities and experience in the environmental field that can offer invaluable help with projects in Aberdeen.

A number of small projects have been delivered with community groups and schools by highlighting opportunities to use countryside sites for activities or introducing other organisations with particular skills.

5.10 Some key statistics for 2013

(Please note that the reporting period for this changed from the financial year to the calendar year in 2011 to reflect the timing of the report to committee, so may not be entirely comparable with previous years' data).

School Groups and events

In 2013 the service worked with more school groups and held more public events than it did in 2012 despite the 0.4FTE Countryside Ranger post being unfilled from the 1st February – 3rd October, Fewer volunteer events were organized again due to staffing levels but the amount of volunteer hours overall as only slightly down. This was mainly due to the work of the Woodlands Community Ranger working on a weekly basis with a group of volunteers for much of the year.

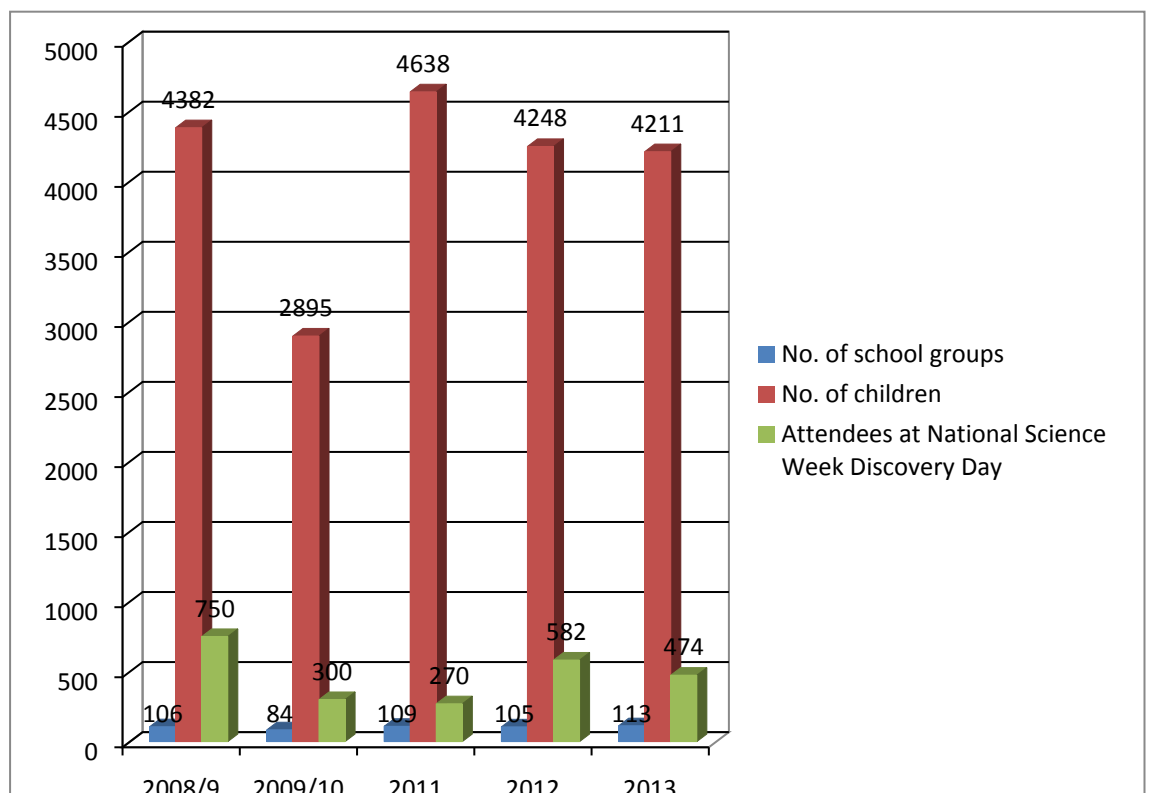


Fig. 1 Ranger Led Educational Visits

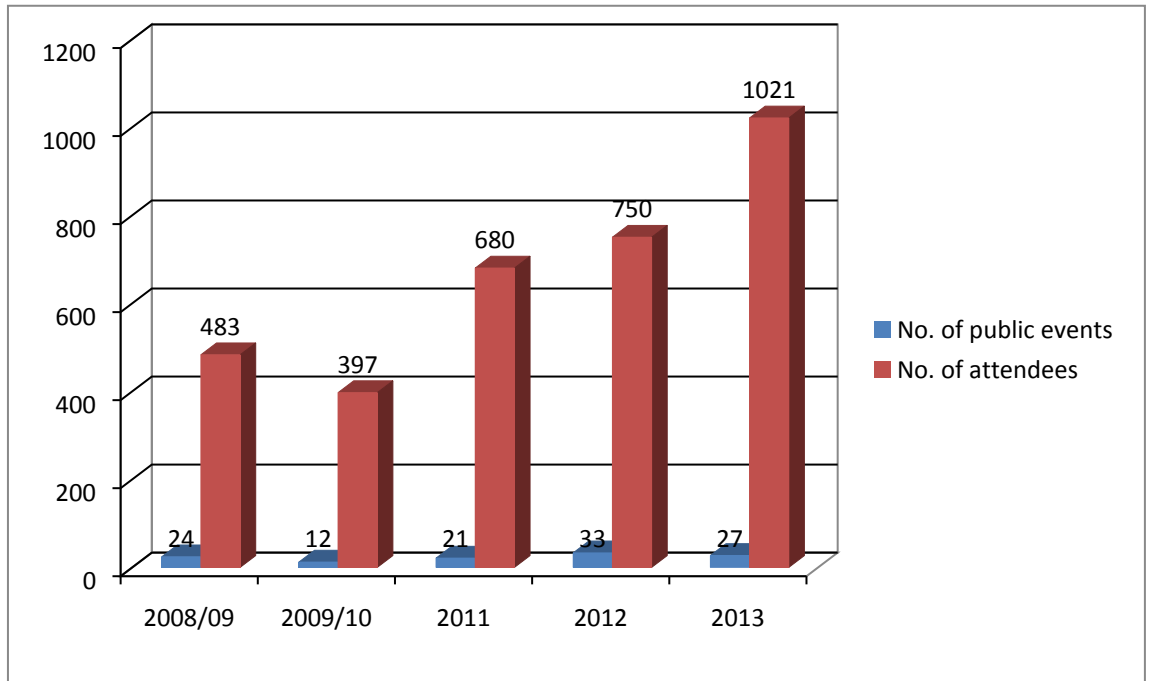


Fig. 2 Ranger led public event attendances

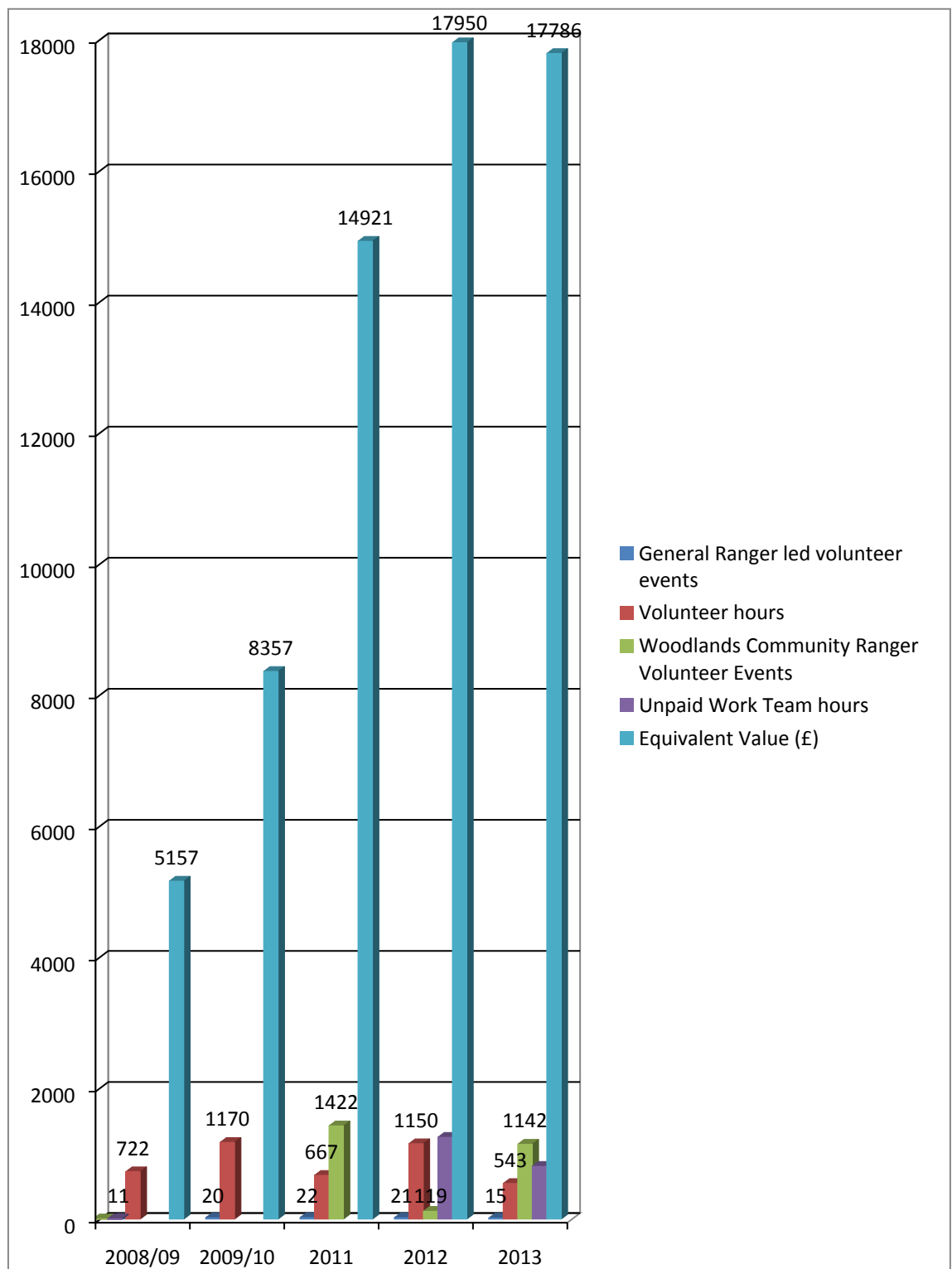


Fig 3. Volunteering statistics

Volunteers have undertaken a wide variety of habitat management tasks including gorse clearing at Scotstown Moor and Kincorth Hill, opening up wetland areas at Scotstown Moor, creating and developing outdoor learning areas on Tullos Hill and in school and nursery grounds, removal of tree shelters at Seaton, woodland management for red squirrels at Hazlehead Woods and site monitoring.



Volunteers gorse clearing at Scotstown Moor

5.11 Countryside Ranger Service income 2013

The Countryside Ranger Service continues to generate good levels of income. Some items relate to funding of specific projects which would have otherwise been funded from Council budgets.

Countryside Ranger Service Income 2013	2012	2013	
Contribution to Woodland Community Ranger costs from Criminal Justice Service	£18,883	£7603	Income to cover staff costs etc
Tullos Hill Landfill Restoration Project Contribution to Woodland Community Ranger costs	£7070	£7070	Income to cover staff costs etc each year to 2017
Contribution to Woodland Community Ranger costs from Scottish Rural Development Programme (SRDP)	£6250	£10275	Income to cover staff costs etc each year to 2017
SRDP Funding for red squirrel conservation work in Hazlehead Woods		£5550	To cover grey squirrel control costs
SURF Project Contribution to Woodland Community Ranger costs	£8490	Project complete	

SURF Project contribution to staff time for public event.	£2830	Project complete	
Contribution from Wilful Fire Task Group for staff time for Kincorth and Auchmill projects	£800	£800	Income to cover staff costs
Staff time for Core Path improvement works from NESTRANS funding & project development	Estimated £5000	Est £5000	Income to cover staff costs
NESTRANS funding for core path improvements (Coastal Path & River Don Path Woodside)		£21,711	To cover cost of works
Aberdeen Greenspace funding for core path improvements (Coastal Path & River Don Path Woodside)		£21,711	To cover cost of works
ACC Family Learning Centre hire of Lochinch Centre & staff time	£1,743	£1,743	Income from hire of facility
Payments for community groups using Ranger Services/facilities for events etc	£206	£537	Income from events
Use of Lochinch Farm Interpretation Centre for external training/events	£354	£309	Income from events
Donations from public events	£190 to Nov	£229 to Nov	Income from events
Donation from company for Family Fun Day at Lochinch Farm and staff input	£3,753	£3,753	Income from event
Grounds Maintenance funding for Ranger Service.	£45,000	£45,000	
Value of volunteering input to service based on value of £50/day	£17950	£17,786	In kind contribution
Total	£118,519	£149,077	

The funding from the Criminal Justice Service is reduced in 2013 as the decision was taken to stop the arrangement whereby the Woodlands Community Ranger would supervise Unpaid Work Team clients two days a week funded by Criminal Justice team. This was due to issues surrounding the management of these teams.

Alternative funding for the Woodlands Community Ranger has been identified through the Scottish Rural Development Programme funding for the new woodlands planted under the Tree for Every Citizen Project. Part of the ongoing funding for the establishment of the woodland was for developing community involvement at these sites which is being delivered the Woodlands Community Ranger.

Projected Funding / Income to the Countryside Ranger Service for 2014 and beyond.

Source	Value	Top up
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		funds/savings
Scottish Rural Development Programme funding for Woodland Community Ranger post	£10275 (each year to 2017)	External funding to deliver project
Contribution to dedicated Ranger time and site infrastructure improvements for Tullos Hill from Tullos Hill/Ness Farm Landfill Restoration project	£7070 (each year to 2017)	Partnership working/funding to deliver common aims
Donations for public events etc	£200	Top up funding
Staff time recharged to Core Path improvement works	£3000	External top up funding from project budget
Grounds Maintenance budget allocated to Ranger Service	£45,000	
Contribution from SRDP towards infrastructure improvements to Tullos Hill	£42,000 (over 5 years)	For path improvements, interpretation panels, leaflets etc
Contribution from Ness Farm Landfill Restoration project towards infrastructure improvements to Tullos Hill	£94,500 (over 5 years)	For path improvements, interpretation panels, leaflets etc
Staff time for Core Path improvement works from NESTRANS funding	£5000	Income to cover staff costs
Scottish Rural Development Programme funding for grey squirrel control,	£5550	Additional external funding to deliver project
AWPR Offset Mitigation red squirrel conservation project	£163,000 (Over 10 years)	To mitigate impact of AWPR on red squirrels

Number of fires on Kincorth and Tullos Hill

As can be seen from the figures below the number of wilful fires have significantly fallen again. No fires were reported after early May 2012 at Kincorth Hill, Tullos Hill or Auchmill/Bucksburn Valley area. This was first time this had been achieved since records have been kept.

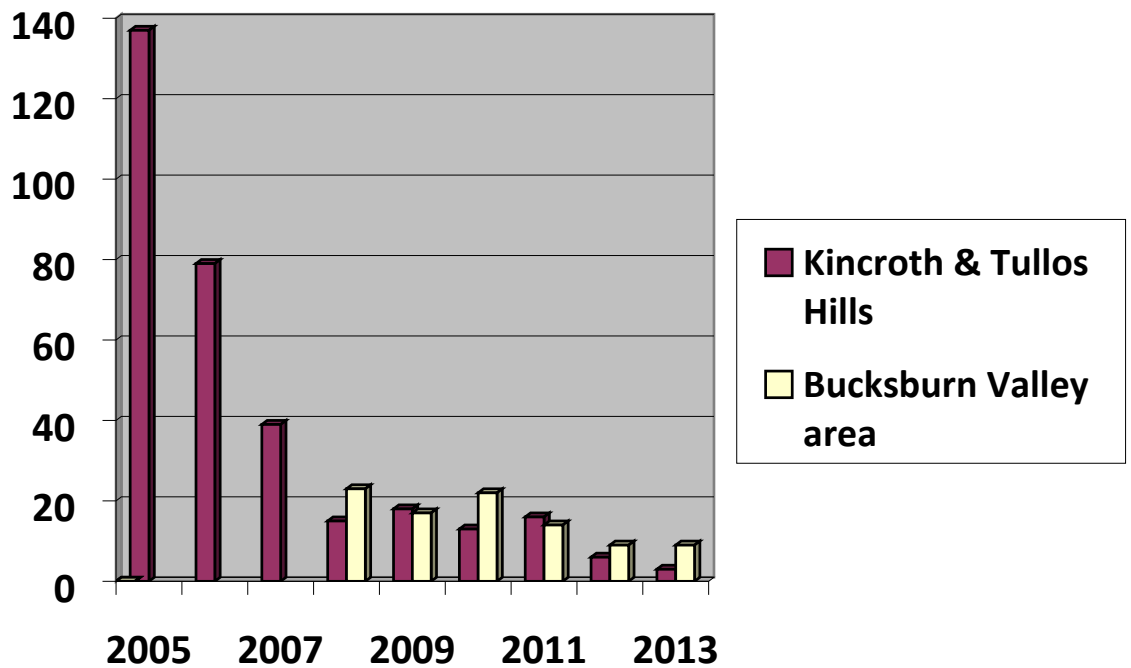


Fig 4. Wilful fire statistics

This data is provided by Grampian Fire and Rescue Service.

The work to achieve this has been largely as a result of The Gramps Project. The Gramps Project was a finalist in the RSPB Nature of Scotland 2013 Awards.

As a part of this a schools photographic competition is being run to encourage school children to visit the site either as a part of their school work or out of school time.

5.12 Challenges for 2013 onwards

There are a number of significant challenges facing the Service for in the coming years which include:-

- Attracting additional external funding.
- Achieving ongoing budgets.
- The continued protection of Aberdeen's greenspace for conservation, recreation and education including the implementation of the Local Biodiversity Action Plans.
- Identify potential new location for Countryside Ranger Service base facilities due to the potential redevelopment of the existing site at Lochinch Farm within the proposed Loirston Development Framework, along with funding to deliver an appropriate new facility through the developer contributions from the development of the existing site.
- Supporting the implementation of the ACC Nature Conservation Strategy 2010.
- Supporting the implementation of the ACC Core Path Plan

- Supporting the implementation of the ACC Greenspace Strategy
- Development of funding bid, in conjunction with ACC Arboriculture Officer for more woodland management works in our existing woodlands.
- Increase the level of marketing of the Service both internally and externally to raise the profile of the Countryside Ranger Service.
- Continued community involvement in the development and management of the ACC countryside sites.
- Supporting the development of the Curriculum for Excellence through provision of outdoor learning opportunities.
- Support for schools to be able to deliver the Scottish Government recommendation that “Every learner should have the opportunity for contact with nature in their school grounds on a daily basis and throughout the seasons through the provision of thoughtfully developed green space for outdoor learning and play”

6. IMPACT

Corporate

The Countryside Ranger Service links to many of the outcomes of the Community Plan, the draft 5year Business Plan “Aberdeen-The Smarter City” and Single Outcome Agreement.

The principal links to Aberdeen – The Smarter City are with the following Strategic Priorities

Smarter Governance – Participation
 Smarter Living – Quality of Life
 Smarter People – Social and Human Capital
 Smarter Environment – Natural Resources

The principal links to the Single Outcome Agreement and Community Plan are the following:-

“4. Our young people are successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens.”

(SOA) through helping to deliver the Curriculum for Excellence and offering a wide range of outdoor learning opportunities and educational support on sites and with facilities that schools and children can make use of as direct support and training and development support for teaching staff.

“5. Our children have the best start in life and are ready to succeed” (SOA) and Improve the healthy development of young children and their families, particularly those children most at risk (National Priority for Health Improvement).

Through enhancing access to countryside sites, waymarking, direct contact and support are all available from the Ranger Service helping to ensure children have a good start in life. The mental and physical health benefits of life long activity in the outdoors are well documented.

Children who are involved in environment-based, instructional programmes score as well or better on standardized measures in reading maths, language, and spelling. The environment-based programmes also foster cooperative learning and civic responsibility, using the natural characteristics of the school grounds and local community as the framework for the curricula (Lieberman, GA et al, 2005).

6. “We live longer, healthier lives (SOA)”: Countryside Rangers manage and maintain 31 sites in Aberdeen where residents can take recreation and benefit from access opportunities. The Ranger Service also works over a wider area to encourage, facilitate and support access. Getting outdoors is a fundamental element of a healthier Scotland with a National Performance Indicator suggesting that one of the principle methods of delivering on this agenda is to increase the number of adults visiting the outdoors at least once a week. Rangers actively promote active lifestyles through guided walks, publicity, promotion and interpretation of these facilities they encourage people to become active in their green spaces and countryside.

10. “We live in well-designed, sustainable places where we are able to access the amenities and services we need.” The Countryside Ranger Service enhances green spaces throughout the City. The Countryside Ranger Service can ensure the long term sustainable care and enhancement of these facilities. We promote these sites to the wider public where they offer free access to all sectors of the community. Green space has proven beneficial effects of people’s quality of life and well being and these areas are accessible to all sectors of the community – they offer equal access and help meet social inclusion agendas.

“11. We have strong, resilient and supportive communities where people take responsibility for their own actions and how they affect others.” (SOA). “Every citizen is enabled to be more active in his or her community regardless of their age, gender, sexual orientation, ethnic origin, where they live or disability to ensure everyone can contribute to 'active citizenship'” (Community Plan) by delivering a service which highlights the shared responsibility of all of Scotland’s residents to care for their environment. The Ranger Service offers opportunities for volunteering and getting involved in helping to sustainably manage our woodlands and get involved in their long-term care. The Countryside Rangers work with, and manage a number of local community groups who help manage these sites and form an important link into the communities including work with the Criminal Justice and Social Work Services.

“12. We value and enjoy our built and natural environment and protect it and enhance it for future generations.” (SOA) “Aberdeen’s natural and built environment is protected and the City play’s its part in protecting our planet” (Community Plan) The Countryside Ranger Service manage 31 sites, including several Local Nature

Reserves, Sites of Special Scientific Interest and a Special Area for Conservation, valuable locally, nationally and further a field for the biodiversity benefits they deliver. These sites offer an opportunity for residents to engage in green spaces and the natural environment and help protect and enhance these areas for future generations.

14. We reduce the local and global environmental impact of our consumption and production (SOA). Through all the work that the Countryside Ranger Service undertakes, be it direct contact with School groups, community groups, volunteers, land managers, fellow professionals and associated organizations, Rangers promote long term environmental sustainability and highlight issues surrounding consumerism and environmental concerns. By offering schools and community groups opportunities close to where they are live reduces the need for transport to more distant locations with associated increased carbon footprint.

Public –

This report demonstrates the wide range and quality of achievements that the Countryside Ranger Service has delivered in challenging financial conditions. It also highlights the national recognition of the work of the Service through being finalists in prestigious awards programmes.

An Equality and Human Rights Impact Assessment has not been required as it is reporting on the work achieved over the last year.

7. MANAGEMENT OF RISK

The work of the Countryside Ranger Service helps the authority to deliver its obligations under a variety of legislation including the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003, Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004, Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2011 and other high level strategic documents including the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy, Scottish Forestry Strategy and a range of new and up coming education initiatives requiring increased levels of learning in the outdoors.

As the authority is required to comply with these legislative requirements it could be at risk of challenge if it could not deliver these actions. The Countryside Ranger Service is well placed to do this.

8. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Countryside Ranger Service 5-year plan 2010-2015 report to Housing and Environment Committee 11th January 2010.

Countryside Ranger Service Annual Report to Housing and Environment Committee 11 Jan 2011

Countryside Ranger Service Annual Report to Housing and Environment Committee 24 Jan 2012

Tree for Every Citizen reports to Housing and Environment Committee on 11th January 2010, April 13th 2010, May 25th 2010; 11 January 2011, 1 March 2011, 28th August 2012

Tree for Every Citizen Bulletin reports to Housing and Environment Committee October 2010, August 2011, May 2012

Funding opportunities for the Countryside Ranger Service report to Resources Management Committee 16th June 2009

ACC Core Paths Plan July 2009, see http://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/WalkingCycling/core_paths/pla_corepaths.asp

ACC Nature Conservation Strategy 2010 -2015, see http://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/web/files/Natural_Heritage/NatConservationStrategy_2010_15.pdf

ACC Openspace Strategy 2011-2016 see www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/planning_environment/planning/local_development_plan/pla_open_space_audit.ap

Aberdeen -The Smarter City 2012 – 2017

Learning for Sustainability, The report of the One Planet Schools Working Group (Scottish Government)

Scottish Biodiversity Strategy 2013

9. REPORT AUTHOR DETAILS

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Huge fall in number of Hill fires

THE number of wilful fires at a popular nature spot has been slashed.

Blazes on Kincorth and Tullos Hill in Aberdeen - home to deer and other wildlife - have fallen from 137 in 2005 to just six last year.

According to Grampian Fire and Rescue Service, no fires were reported after early May last year.

This was the first time this had been achieved since records have been kept.

Fire officers have been working with schools to raise awareness of the problem.

Evening Express 9/1/13

Appeal for help with tree work

COUNTRYSIDE Rangers need folk to lend a hand in looking after trees.

A special event was due to be held today for people to pitch in with tree maintenance.

Work start will at 10am at the Donmouth bird hide on the Esplanade in Aberdeen and finish around 3.30pm.

Countryside Ranger Rob Rowe, pictured, said: "The main work will be to prune some of the trees in this exposed location to help stabilise them and in turn encourage the trees to grow."

"This important work will improve conditions for the trees and wildlife in this popular nature reserve and the surrounding area. Other activities to be carried out include litter picking."

Booking is essential and volunteers are asked to bring a packed lunch, waterproofs and to wear sturdy footwear.



Evening Express 19/10/13

Take walk through history on city hill

WALKERS are being invited to trek across one of Aberdeen's most historic landscapes tomorrow.

City council historian Chris Croly, lead curator Judith Stones and Woodlands Community Ranger Stephen Bly will lead a walk across Tullos Hill.

The area features a huge variety of interesting sites and contains the best preserved Bronze Age cairn field in the North-east.

Chris said: "It was a real pleasure to be involved in planning this walk on Tullos Hill because it is one

of the outstanding features of Aberdeen.

"The hill has a remarkable breadth of archaeology, combined with some fantastic history, and it also has an interesting natural history and fine panoramic views across the city and the North Sea."

Walkers should meet at the entrance on Greenbank Crescent in East Tullos Industrial Estate, next to Stena Drilling.

The walk will follow part of the extensive network of paths.

Booking is essential on (01224) 897400.

Evening Express 11/10/13

Tullos trees get royal recognition

CONSERVATION

BY DAVID MCKAY

A tree-planting project run by Aberdeen City Council has been given a royal seal of approval.

Work by the local authority has been recognised at a Buckingham Palace reception hosted by the Princess Royal.

Princess Anne is the patron of the Woodland Trust's Jubilee Woods project.

In Aberdeen, an 80,000-tree scheme at Tullos Hill was hailed as a success by the council, despite being mired in controversy.

Princess Anne: patron

Councillors supported deer-control measures in the area, prompting a public outcry and a concerted effort from animal rights activists to prevent a widespread cull.

But the woodland at Tullos Hill, one of 20 "Diamond Woods" of more than 60 acres in Scotland, has

won praise on the national stage.

The Queen launched the UK-wide project by planting a tree at Sandringham last year, while Princess Anne planted the six millionth milestone tree at a school in south London yesterday.

Countryside officer Ian Talboys attended a reception in the Queen's Gallery at Buckingham Palace on behalf of the city council. He said: "This ambitious project - part of the council's award-winning Tree for Every Citizen scheme - has gone a long way to achieving that, and it is fantastic to see the hard work of everyone involved is now being recognised."

Councillor Neil Cooney, convener of the authority's

housing and environment committee, added: "Tullos Hill provides marvellous vantage points and the Diamond Wood has been designed so that the sweeping vistas across the city and the sea have been preserved."

"Tullos Hill provides marvellous vantage points"

Two million trees have been planted in Scotland as part of the Woodland Trust's Jubilee Woods project, creating 53 new woods totalling more than 3,700 acres.



Press & Journal 28/3/13

Nature lovers needed to aid gorse clear-out



VOLUNTEERS are being sought to help clear thick gorse growing at a nature reserve.

Aberdeen City Council's ranger service is appealing for help to clear the invasive shrub at Scotstown Moor nature reserve in the city's Bridge of Don.

The bushes are threatening to take over entire areas of valuable wet heathland.

The council has organised a work day this weekend to deal clear the gorse.

Volunteers will meet in the Scotstown Moor car park on Scotstown Road at 10am on Saturday.

Countryside ranger Ruth Bone said: "This is a follow on day to the successful workday we ran in November. Anyone can join us."

Tools, equipment and hot

drinks will be provided for the work, along with safety briefings.

Everyone is welcome but children under 16 years old must be supervised by an adult.

The work area will be signposted from the car park in Scotstown Road and the Dubford Road entrance for those who arrive after 10am.

Appeal Evening Express 10/1/13