

Projects pay off



Investing in development, improvement and glamping

From subtle landscaping to complete renovations, projects can be never-ending for park businesses and Celtic Holiday Parks are no stranger to this.

The need to pre-empt the progressive needs of visitors and respond to customers' ever-changing demands is the driver in this process and why so many of the projects have improved both the park and its reputation with owners, guests and the local community.

With a number of ongoing projects both big and small across all three parks, it's no surprise they are busier than ever – and the projects aren't all linked to accommodation. BH&HPA Vice-President, Huw Pendleton explained that *'even the small changes have made a big difference'* over the years they have been developing their parks.

Customers who visited some twenty years ago may now find the parks unrecognisable, but all changes have been made for the benefit of the holidaymakers and owners who come to enjoy Pembrokeshire's beauty. ▶

Groundwork at Croft Country Park



Huw Pendleton during the stargazers development at Noble Court



Current status of the 'Puffin' development at Meadow House



History and ideas

In 1999 Huw, his parents and grandmother moved from North Wales to start a new venture within the holiday parks industry, and according to Huw *'it has been quite a journey with a lot of learning'*.

The family purchased Croft Country Park in Reynalton that same year and since then the business has grown in number as well as its stylish offerings. Today the family owns and operates Croft, Noble Court in Narbeth and Meadow House in Amroth.

Huw relishes the challenge of continuously improving the quality of the parks and is always full of ideas to develop them in terms of product and service. *'Over the years the desire has been to improve the visitor experience and deliver something special,'* said Huw.

They are always on the lookout for new ideas when out and about – whether that be attending shows or talking to others in the industry. *'There's always something new coming out or something you may not have thought about. Talking to others in the industry and sharing experiences is invaluable.'*

The idea across all three parks may have been about adding luxury – however, that was never meant to detract from the Welsh traditional holiday in the UK many experienced as children. Celtic Holiday Parks' main aim was to evoke childhood memories of enjoyable family caravan holidays, relaxing with friends, having a great kick-about and enjoying long sunny days. Now they wish to recreate these feelings, but in pure luxury, showing just how much holidays at home have evolved over the years. ▶



How Meadow House looked three years ago, prior to the 'Puffin' development



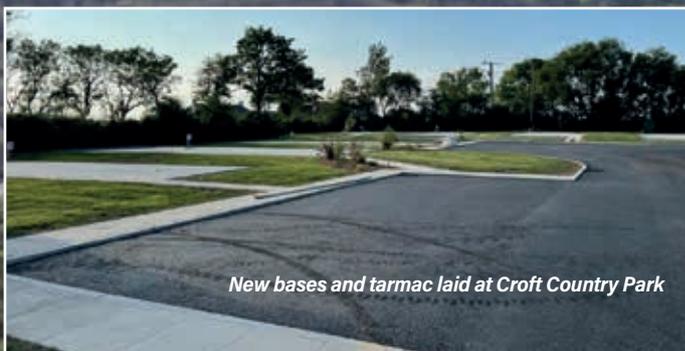
Main facilities building at Croft Country Park



Holiday caravans forming the 'Puffin' development at Meadow House



New bases and tarmac laid at Croft Country Park



Renovation works at Croft Country Park



Catering for variety

Examples of Noble Court accommodation



'Customers are always wanting something new to discover,' said Huw, whether it is their first stay at a park or their fiftieth. 'We've had guests returning year after year, but they won't always book for the same accommodation. The first year they come they may book a pod, but the next year may be a lodge and then a safari tent. Each year they are excited to come back to see what is new.'

From pods to stargazers, luxury lodges to safari tents, 'Celtic Escapes' at Noble Court Holiday Park appeals to a range of tastes and has tried to stay ahead of demand changes.

Tradition meets luxury



When guests first arrive at Noble Court, they are met with an understated, traditional entrance opening out to a large area, with holiday caravans overlooking a playground and not a safari tent in sight. For those of a more traditional mindset, this is how they may imagine a holiday park to be. However, even these conventional holiday caravans have started to look a little different, with hot tubs introduced to the hire fleet.



'Hot tubs have been one of the key additions over the last few years. The demand for them has been incredibly high and they are a major attraction for all rental units now,' said Huw. 'There's something very special about sitting in your own hot tub, taking in the magnificent views of the sea and glorious Pembrokeshire countryside vista.' This has resulted in high, sustained occupancy for the busy periods and demand continues well into what would traditionally have been considered quieter months.



Although hot tubs present their own challenges of testing and cleaning, as well as appropriate health and safety recording and training, the park is constantly looking at ways to make this more efficient. For instance, the team now carry out photo auditing with time stamps to demonstrate that each hot tub has been tested and cleaned appropriately. This helps the team stay on track and monitor, whilst also offering photographic evidence should any queries be raised.



Bluebell Pods at Noble Court

High-end luxury

Demand has also risen for high-end luxury stays and so the park's luxury lodges with their views over the Pembrokeshire countryside have performed well since their introduction.

The Hampton lodges exude high-end elegance and serenity and 'without exception, each visitor to these lodges bursts out in wide smiles, and gasp in awe!'. With architectural design features including timber panelling, high-pitched ceilings, exposed beams, timber floors, neutral and ocean-inspired colours and natural materials, they were designed to be a true reflection of Pembrokeshire as a coastal destination.

Extensive decking, surrounded by seamless glass balustrading, shows off the stunning views and offers the perfect spot for a barbecue or dip in the hot tub.

The one-bedroomed Hampton lodge is bespoke to Noble Court and was designed by Huw. Special design features include patio doors leading from the living area and bedroom directly to the hot tub, which has a feature glass ceiling, and opens onto a private deck with equally beautiful views.

Given the popularity of bookings for this type of accommodation, Huw has invested heavily into the area surrounding it: roads have been resurfaced, landscaping cultivated, car parking areas created in out-of-the-way spots and there are even future plans to provide 'Celtic Escapes' at Noble Court with its own exclusive entrance providing a dramatic arrival and a breathtaking first glimpse of the stunning accommodation which awaits.

'Customers desiring this type of break want the feeling of privacy,' Huw explained. 'They want to look out over the deck and see the beautiful countryside, but they also want to experience luxury living inside.' This is why each lodge has a high-end feel inside as well as out, with quirky features making each unique – they aren't identical, so each time someone stays they experience a slightly different aesthetic, but still the same feeling of individual luxury.



Safari tents at Noble Court

Glamorous camping

Glamping has seen a dramatic boost as well. This is not much of a surprise with the new generation of holidaymakers increasingly wanting to experience something out of the ordinary they can share on social media. Glamping accommodation has been an ongoing project for the Pendleton family, who have continually developed the range they offer.

The park already has three types of glamping pods. The Hideaway Log Pods are continually popular in terms of bookings, despite their more basic offering (although even this includes electricity, heating and comfortable beds). The five Poppy Pods are also very popular, with the two-storey fun and quirky accommodation featuring a mezzanine sleeping area and a versatile space packed with features.

The Bluebell Pods, on the other hand, were designed to offer the 'ultimate' glamping experience, incorporating stunning views to make the most of the fabulous sunsets and each with its own hot tub and private deck.

When designing the area, it was decided that the interiors of these pods needed to reflect the exteriors, and so a relaxing woodland retreat was born. All the Bluebells are centrally heated, have TVs, fully equipped kitchens and feature Bluetooth connectivity, allowing guests to stay in touch – an increasing necessity for today's customer!

In true camping in style fashion, the safari tents were another popular addition to Celtic Escapes when they were introduced. Each having their own private deck and hot tub, four-poster beds and glass chandeliers, they definitely meet the glamorous camping definition and offer a true experience for holidaymakers wanting something different.

In keeping with the demand for experience-based travel and the desire for a feeling of getting back-to-nature, the newest additions to Noble Court are three stargazing pods. Bought off-plan, these glamping units were a bit of a risk, but one that has certainly paid off. *'They offered something different for guests,'* commented Huw, also explaining that *'by opting to place them in a less developed part of the park, customers are truly able to have a back-to-nature experience'.*

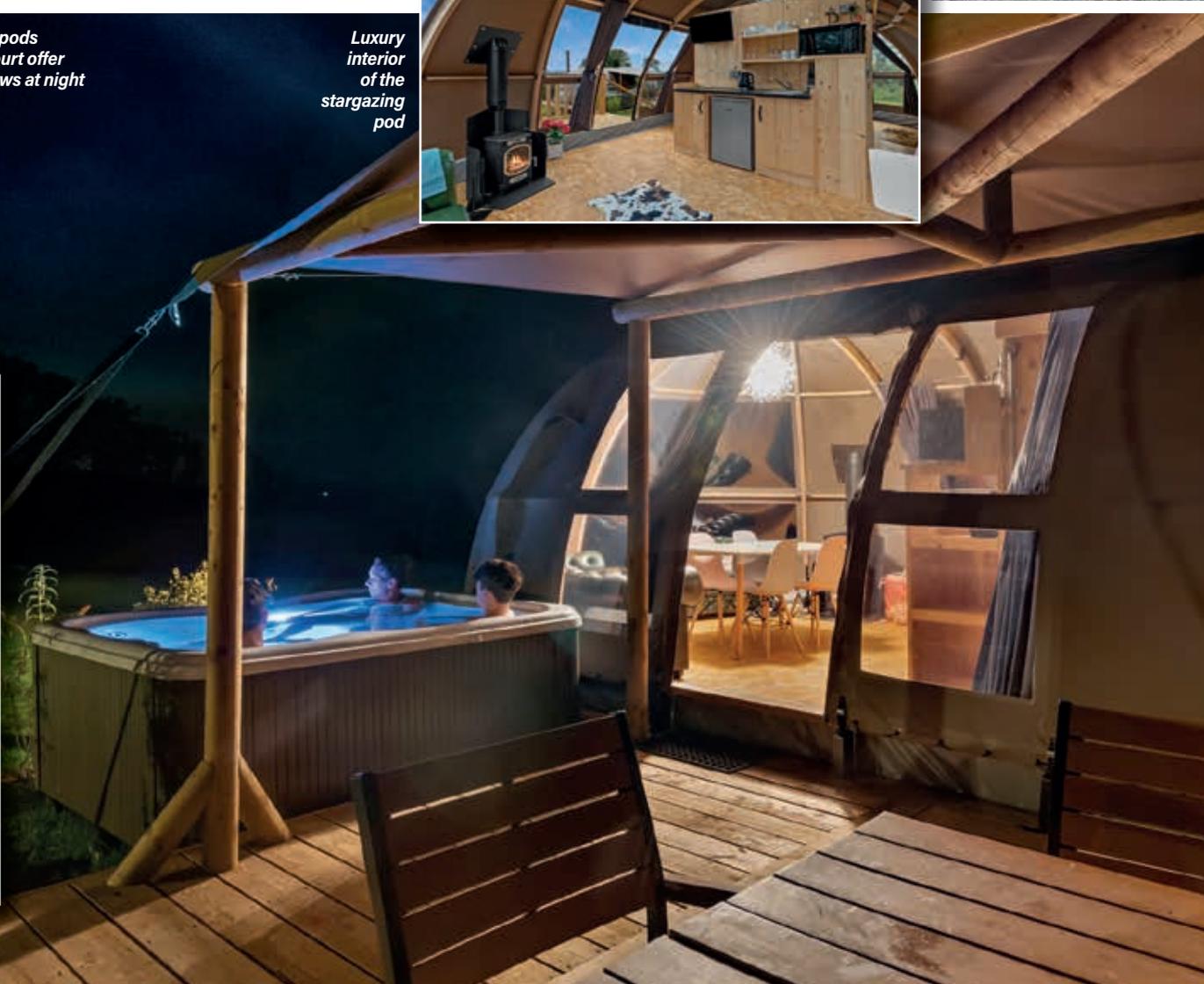
Whilst a risk in not seeing them beforehand, the stargazer tents proved time-efficient in their build and turnaround time. Simple in their design, the tents feature a curved birch wood framework and the all-weather canvas means customers can enjoy stays even in adverse weather. The addition of log burners and central heating make them exceptionally cosy. ➤

The Hideaway Log Pod at Noble Court



Stargazing pods at Noble Court offer the best views at night

Luxury interior of the stargazing pod



Creating character

The experiential trend shows no signs of stopping anytime soon – and not just in terms of accommodation. Guests also like to be able to enjoy where they dine, and food and drink imagery posted on social platforms create a real buzz around the venue experience.

One thing Huw really wanted to do with the redevelopment of their restaurant and bar, Charlie's Tavern, at Noble Court was to 'create a unique and quirky atmosphere' to help satisfy this trend. With a giraffe in the entry, teapots on the wall and a cow on the ceiling, it's safe to say the interior is very Instagrammable!

All of the additions Huw felt were 'worth the investment in order to provide a memorable experience for customers'. Guests sharing these experiences with friends and family, whether by word of mouth or through social channels, are also likely to encourage future business and raise the park's online presence.

'It's really important to keep an eye on the way the business changes over time. That's why we decided to move away from the traditional entertainment offering and instead focus on the type of demographic we were attracting and what they wanted from us,' said Huw, explaining the reasoning behind the refurbishment project. They paid close attention to their food and drink provision, opting for a strong cocktail offering and gastro-style food which was more reflective of growing trends within the marketplace.

It's not just park guests the newly renovated tavern appeals to though, with locals and passing trade also frequenting the restaurant. Since the refurbishment, there's been a new lease of life for Charlie's Tavern which relies on local support over the quieter winter months.

Both Croft Country Park and Meadow House have also undergone transformations to their bars and restaurants in recent years. Whilst developed to suit the demographics of their customers, all three restaurants carry the same theme and feeling of luxury across all Celtic Holiday Parks. With colourful velvet seating embellished with Swarovski crystals, the investment in finishing touches reflects the attention to detail of the project, both on individual parks and as part of the much wider design change across the business.

It's not just the luxurious style they share however – the name 'Charlie's' comes before each of their bars and restaurants, so named for Huw's grandfather. The brand is now synonymous with great food, drinks and a warm welcome.

Character is also showcased across the parks in the unique lighting used, with a variety ranging from chandeliers to brass hanging monkeys. Such a subtle thing to which no one often pays attention, but an area that can create interest and joy. Guests often comment on how such simple things such as a light fitting can convey so much personality.



The Charlie's Celtic Tavern redevelopment at Noble Court really shows its character throughout, from lighting to chair coverings





Little touches - big difference

Whilst customers are first attracted to a holiday caravan, lodge or glamping unit because of its look and location, this is only the first step. Each accommodation offering needs to get the basics right first – cleanliness. A very important step to get right according to Huw and one which a lot of their guests compliment them on frequently in their feedback.

When customers arrive it's also important that they feel welcomed and valued, with recognition of a sense of place. Leaving complimentary welcome packs always go down a storm with guests. 'Some Welsh cakes, drinks and snacks can go a long way,' said Huw.

It's often the little things like this, the customer service and getting the basic details of a holiday right, that see customers arrive and leave happy. Creating a good first impression, which at Celtic includes guest touch base calls, up to two weeks prior to arrival, means it's easier to build upon that at each stage of the customer journey and often results in happier customers who want to come back year after year. ➤

Welcome hampers are provided as a courtesy



The stylish, characterful interiors are echoed in Meadow House (above) and Croft Country Park (below)



An ever-evolving business

Celtic Holiday Parks have developed all three of their parks to keep pace with trends, be that through accommodation types, welcoming different demographics or even just enhancing the offering for regular customers and seasoned owners. *'It's really important to be constantly evolving and adapting,'* commented Huw.

Sometimes a small change makes a big difference and helps the evolution process. Moving trees to different areas of the park, resurfacing a road, repainting white lines, widening pathways or simply enhancing kerb appeal – these things are often overlooked, but can make a huge difference to the look and feel of a park.

Noble Court, Croft Country Park and Meadow House have each undergone changes over recent years. They have seen car parking spaces moved to give more space and privacy, trees repositioned to make way for more light and lots of creative landscaping to best show the nature available right on the doorstep of so many holiday caravans.

Croft Country Park's changes have been about making the most of and enhancing what the park already offered: a calm and relaxed atmosphere with a sense of privacy for everyone, yet with a warm community feel. When Huw and his family decided to expand into the next field, this feeling was one they most certainly wanted to carry through.

Understanding what drives the desire for holiday caravan ownership, undertaking postcode and other statistical analysis together with the demand-led proposition, ensured the new 'Beeches' development of 22 caravan and lodge pitches sold well in advance of completion. New roads were laid, pitches spaced out with bases and paths paved. Everything was made to look clean and fresh with a sense of space.

The leisure complex at Croft has also received considerable investment over the years and boasts an indoor hydro-active saltwater swimming pool. *'The inspiration [at Croft] has been to provide hotel-style facilities within a holiday park environment. We wanted a modern feel that was fresh and appealing to all age groups,'* said Huw. ►

The hydro pool available at Croft Country Park



*(Before)
Noble Court undergoing development*



*(After)
Noble Court's lodges, Poppy Pods and safari tents as they are today*



Holiday and owner caravans form the 'Puffin' development at Meadow House



Landscaping as part of The Beeches development at Croft Country Park

Future development

There are currently 12 ongoing projects across the three Celtic parks and many more planned for the future.

According to Huw, these various projects were not all supposed to be done at the same time, but with COVID-19 causing delays for some areas, it meant the progression of others and created even more ideas.

Huw explained, *'We're always keen to develop the parks with new projects, developments and ideas. If not, it's easy to be complacent and fall behind. Investment is key to change with the times.'*

Meadow House is currently being expanded with 31 new holiday caravans and lodges being sited in what is known as the 'Puffin' development. This investment has proven so popular that before they have even finished the development, there are only four lodge pitches left to be sold.

Croft Country Park is also undergoing an expansion of over 20 pitches for lodges and holiday caravans in their new development, The Beeches. With all caravan pitches sold and only two lodge pitches remaining, it's clear to see this is another investment that has paid off.

As for Noble Court, there are sure to be more luxurious lodges and glamping options in the future given their popularity with guests, which shows no sign of letting up anytime soon! ■



Bases down, with paving and kerbs put in ready for the next steps at Croft Country Park

