

A meeting of the **HINCHINGBROOKE COUNTRY PARK JOINT GROUP** will be held in **COUNTRYSIDE CENTRE, HINCHINGBROOKE COUNTRY PARK, BRAMPTON ROAD, HUNTINGDON, PE29 6DB** on **FRIDAY, 18 MARCH 2022** at **10:00 AM** and you are requested to attend for the transaction of the following business:-

AGENDA

APOLOGIES

1. MINUTES (Pages 5 - 8)

To approve as a correct record the Minutes of the meeting held on 21st October 2021.

Contact Officer: H Peacey - (01223) 752548

2. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

To receive from Members declarations as to disclosable pecuniary and other interests in relation to any Agenda item.

Contact Officer: Democratic Services - (01223) 752548

3. SENIOR RANGER'S REPORT (Pages 9 - 18)

To receive a report by the Senior Ranger on park activities for the period October 2021 to March 2022.

Contact Officer: J Arnold - (01480) 388666

4. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

To resolve –

that the press and public be excluded from the meeting because the business to be transacted contains exempt information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

5. PROPOSED LIAISON AGREEMENT (Pages 19 - 22)

To discuss the proposed Liaison Agreement for the Country Park.

Contact Officer: J Arnold: (01480) 388666

6. RE-ADMITTANCE OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

To resolve –

that the press and public be readmitted to the meeting.

7. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

To note that the next meeting of the Hinchingsbrooke Country Park Joint Group will be held on 14th October 2022 at 10:00am.

Contact Officer: H Peacey - (01223) 752548

10th day of March 2022



Head of Paid Service

Disclosable Pecuniary Interests and Non-Statutory Disclosable Interests

Further information on [Disclosable Pecuniary Interests and Non - Statutory Disclosable Interests is available in the Council's Constitution](#)

Filming, Photography and Recording at Council Meetings

The District Council permits filming, recording and the taking of photographs at its meetings that are open to the public. It also welcomes the use of social networking and micro-blogging websites (such as Twitter and Facebook) to communicate with people about what is happening at meetings.

Arrangements for these activities should operate in accordance with [guidelines](#) agreed by the Council.

Please contact Habbiba Peacey, Democratic Services Officer, Tel No: (01223) 752548 / email: Habbiba.Peacey@huntingdonshire.gov.uk if you have a general query on any Agenda Item, wish to tender your apologies for absence from the meeting, or would like information on any decision taken by the Committee/Panel.

Specific enquiries with regard to items on the Agenda should be directed towards the Contact Officer.

Members of the public are welcome to attend this meeting as observers except during consideration of confidential or exempt items of business.

Agenda and enclosures can be viewed on the [District Council's website](#).

Emergency Procedure

In the event of the fire alarm being sounded and on the instruction of the Meeting Administrator, all attendees are requested to vacate the building via the closest emergency exit.

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HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the HINCHINGBROOKE COUNTRY PARK JOINT GROUP held at the Countryside Centre, Hinchingsbrooke Country Park, Brampton Road, Huntingdon, PE29 6DB on Thursday, 21 October 2021

PRESENT: Councillors T D Sanderson, Mrs M L Beuttell and R J West.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors K Billington and Mrs S R Wilson.

1 ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED

that Councillor R J West be elected Chairman of the Hinchingsbrooke Country Park Joint Group for the remainder of the Municipal Year.

Councillor R J West in the Chair.

In his introductory remarks, the Chairman welcomed the news that Huntingdonshire's Parks had been awarded Green Flag Status once again. Councillors Mrs M L Beuttell and T D Sanderson echoed the views of the Chairman and commended the staff and volunteers for their hard work over the last 18 months. The Chairman also wished to place on record the Group's thanks to County Councillor Mrs A Costello for her contributions to the Group in previous years.

2 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 12th March 2021 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

3 MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

4 APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED

that Councillor Mrs M L Beuttell be appointed Vice-Chairman of the Hinchingsbrooke Country Park Joint Group for the remainder of the Municipal Year.

5 MEMBERSHIP OF THE GROUP

To note the membership of the Group for 2021/22 as follows:

(a) Cambridgeshire County Council

Councillor K Billington.

(b) Huntingdonshire District Council

Councillors Mrs M L Beuttell, T D Sanderson, R J West and Mrs S R Wilson.

6 SENIOR RANGER'S REPORT

The Group received and noted the contents of the Senior Ranger's report (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) and a PowerPoint presentation on park activities for the period March to September 2021. In doing so, comment was made as follows:

Staffing and Volunteers

Members were encouraged to note that 2 young people had been assisting the Service under the Kickstart Scheme. It was further reported that a work experience student had been recruited 2 days a week to assist with bookings for the Countryside Centre.

Work parties were now at full strength with some of the SEN volunteers having returned back to the Country Park.

Hinchingbrooke Country Park Management

The Group were encouraged to note the range of work undertaken at the Country Park since the last meeting and noted the work to be undertaken over the coming months which included the cutting of wild-flower meadows and creation of habitat piles, completion of the new fishing platforms on the main lake, commencement of winter tree works in the new plantation, Bob's Wood and Hazel Triangle, the laying of part of the hedge around the Christie Drive balancing pond and the planting of more wetland trees around the main lake.

Following questions which were raised around the antisocial behaviour of a small number of young people causing issues and damage over recent months, it was reported that the matter had been reported to the Police and that social media was being utilised to generate awareness of the problems with a view to encouraging individuals to help identify the perpetrators. The Countryside Manager was hopeful that the issues would slowly come to an end in the near future. It was further confirmed that the site currently did not have any active CCTV cameras but these would be included as part of the future development plans for the Country Park.

Community Groups

Members were encouraged to note the increase in the number of health activities being undertaken on site, which included fitness classes for the community, Happy Mamas, Everyone Health nutrition and exercise sessions and Zig Zag runners. Early negotiations are occurring with Love to Swim with a view to increasing the number of open water sessions from Spring 2022.

Satellite Sites

An update was delivered on the range of work being undertaken across Views Common, Stukeley Meadows and Spring Common all of which had experienced increased footfall and littering.

Following a question raised by Councillor T D Sanderson, the Countryside Manager reported that discussions were ongoing in respect of the dispute over ownership with Highways England to identify responsibility for the maintenance of Views Common. The Countryside Manager then went on to report that in conjunction with a local volunteer who is focusing on litter picking, vegetation had been cleared under the underpass in this area.

Countryside Centre

Attention was drawn to occupancy levels and the number of bookings taken at the Countryside Centre compared to previous financial years. The figures showed a marked improvement when compared to 2020/21 with projected total income of £17,000 expected at the end of 2021/22 subject to no further lockdowns. It was encouraging to note that users of the Centre were able to continue hiring rooms with appropriate social distancing measures in place.

Café

The successful implementation of the "Grab & Go" system remains popular, helping to reduce queues and enabling the Café to become more cost effective by operating with reduced staff. The gift shop has proved popular providing local amateur crafters with an opportunity to sell their wares. Footfall at the Café remains high and income generated over Quarter 1 and Quarter 2 is on par with pre-COVID levels.

Events, Activities and Promotions

Events had been arranged in accordance with COVID guidelines which included the outdoor cinema, Robin Hood interactive trail, Den Building competition, Halloween interactive trail, Santa's Grotto and New Year Eve's Party. The outdoor cinema had not proved popular this year and resulted in a loss of £964. Poor weather had attributed to this together with the fact that indoor cinemas and public houses were now open for business.

Future Development

COVID-19 had resulted in delays with the investment programme. The Group noted the difficulties experienced with the supply of timber which had impacted upon the installation of the play equipment, originally scheduled in Autumn 2021, to Spring 2022.

Having had their attention drawn to the key elements of the development proposals and the estimated completion dates for each, it was noted that all scheduled works were due to be completed by Summer 2023. Despite the absence of physical work commencing, the Countryside Manager reported that work was ongoing behind the scenes which included the appointment of NCS

property consultants and a Project Support Officer and the undertaking of a number of site visits by various individuals including the landscape architect, engineers, planning consultants, service consultants and surveyors.

Councillor T D Sanderson drew the Countryside Manager's attention to potential funding available via the County Council. Matters that were further discussed included whether the existing play equipment would be replaced, the establishment of four new children's play zones on site and the positive relationship which existed amongst partners in respect of the scheme.

Financial Position

Members' attention was drawn to the outturn position of the Park for the 2020/21 financial year and the forecast outturn position for the 2021/22 financial year. In respect of the latter, it was reported that an underspend on Park Management was expected owing to increased sales of souvenirs and that Café income was expected to reach pre-COVID levels which was encouraging to note. Finally, the Group noted the underspend at the Countryside Centre owing to savings arising from the vacant post of Countryside Assistant together with a reduction in building maintenance and site works.

7 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the next meeting of the Hinchingsbrooke Country Park Joint Group would be held on 18th March 2022 at 10:00am.

Chairman

Public
Key Decision - No

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Title/Subject Matter: Senior Ranger's Report.

Meeting/Date: Hinchingsbrooke Country Park Joint Group – 18th March 2022.

Executive Portfolio: Executive Councillor for Operations and Environment – Councillor M L Beuttell.

Report by: Senior Ranger.

Ward(s) affected: All Wards.

Executive Summary:

This report summarises the winter months, the progress and issues over the period and provides a summary of the future months

As a result of Covid year on year comparisons have fluctuated dramatically, but the site has remained open for public access and staff have worked on site at all times. The ways of working have changed according to government guidelines; however, much has nevertheless been accomplished.

RECOMMENDATION:

The Committee is asked to review and comment upon the report and progress made to date.

SENIOR RANGERS REPORT

1.1 STAFFING

- One senior Ranger and 2 Rangers are based at Hinchingsbrooke with each working one weekend in three.
- Work-parties are run regularly with volunteers to support the limited staff.
- Kickstart Scheme: Both former kick-starters are now in full time employment in a field relevant to the work carried out with Countryside Services.
- Two new Kick-starters from October 2021 have required significantly more support so have been an additional pressure on existing workload.

1.2 VOLUNTEERS

- Work-parties are continuing to work at full strength.
- Some of the SEN volunteers have returned. And we have received one new SEN placement.
- Our next volunteer social event is being planned for May-not possible due to covid concerns in January.
- New volunteers trained to carry out a range of wildlife surveys.

1.3 HINCHINGBROOKE COUNTRY PARK MANAGEMENT

A small number of young people have caused issues and damage over recent months. The police are aware. One young person mistakenly left their wallet at the site of one incident and received a visit from the police. The identity of other offenders is not known.

Work continues to catch up on practical tasks that were impossible in lockdowns.

- Woodland work in new plantation has continued and been completed in good time and to a high standard.
- Significant issues have been caused with the rest of the planned woodland work due to HDC's tree officer informing us that the work could not take place as it conflicted with the Tree Strategy, despite being identified within the management plan. Having studied the Tree Strategy we have been unable to find any conflict so are working towards overcoming this misunderstanding. Some work has therefore been delayed by one year.
- Approximately 300 trees having been planted within the flood plain. Besides capturing carbon and producing oxygen these species will also help combat flooding and erosion.

- Repairing and maintaining paths affected by water damage over the winter.
- Hedge laying at the Christie Drive Balancing Pond.
- Continued winter bird surveys to build a solid set of baseline data. This will inform future site management.

And Looking Forward...

- Installing new pictorial meadows
- Spring maintenance of park furniture such as benches, way-markers and fences.
- Continue with installation of additional way-markers and temporary interpretation.
- Installation of play equipment- delayed due to shortage of materials and then ground conditions.
- Planning application to be submitted for investment project in late spring 2022.

1.4 COMMUNITY GROUPS

- Established groups are all running well, including weekly Parkrun and monthly Zigzag runners.
- Negotiations continue with the opportunity to offer supervised open – water swimming through Love to Swim.
- Agreed a new service level agreement to host a company providing Segway Experience Days.
- Service level agreements will be renewed by 12 groups in the spring.

1.5 SATELITE SITES

All sites continue to experience increased usage and littering. We are planning to review the way that we collaborate with other services to provide the best management possible for the satellite sites.

Views Common

- Some damage was caused to trees near the footpath, from the storms this winter, but safety works have now been carried out.

Stukeley Meadows

- Bee orchids have returned! 39 plants have been found in the orchid area this year as part of a new survey we will carry out year after year from now on.

- We are planning to review the way that we collaborate with other services to provide the best management possible for the satellite sites.

Spring Common

- Littering remains commonplace
- Willow regrowth on the wet meadow has been cut back and treated impede regrowth. This aims to recover the wet grassland.

1.6 CAFÉ

- The income reflects the weather Q2 was particularly wet for the summer.
- The dip in sales in Q2 may also be related to the number of other establishments reopening after lockdown.
- Inside seating still isn't being used very much due to people's cautious approach to covid recovery.
- Maintaining the "grab & go" system is more cost effective since the number of staff required is less than half.
- Massive increase in sale of hot drinks and crisps compared to other years, but the number of cakes has reduced which reflects the grab & go model.
- The gift shop has proven popular. Local amateur crafters donate 10% of their sales and so far, this has been £416 profit. Some customers are coming specifically for purchases, and it keeps people within the centre leading to additional coffees after they have looked at the selection.

Income across the café counter:

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Q 1	55,681	45,005	53,687	18,122	54,103
Q 2	52,600	51,962	64,649	52,314	44,350
Q 3	33,364	38,896	29,348	23,188	32,584
Q 4	28,249	43,749	24,999	24,958	20439 (to 27/02/22)
Total	£169,896	£179,612	£172,683	£118,582	£151476

1.7 EVENTS, ACTIVITIES AND PROMOTIONS

Events rely on the involvement of volunteers have been arranged according to demand and covid restrictions

- **Halloween interactive trail**, sold out within two weeks - 95 tickets sold
- **Santa's Grotto** – a Covid secure format permitted this to go ahead
531 Children (together with their parents/ carers / family - total 1400 others) all met Santa via the magic tunnel to the north pole (see attached)
- **New Year's Eve party** – cancelled due to covid.

	Comment	Profit
Robin Hood	Interactive trail Restrictions only just lifted so hesitancy to book Poor weather	£385
Flix & Picnics	Poor weather (thunder) cinemas reopening Pubs etc reopened	- £501
Halloween	Interactive trail. Pilot event. Very popular and capable of growing	£445
Den building	Spontaneous family event	£100
Grotto	Extremely popular and very positive feedback (see attached)	£8900

Coming up...

Laser rumble	Feb half term Easter holidays Summer holidays
Community Tree planting 400 Trees ordered	26 th March ???
Den building family rivalry	22/05 25 /09
Easter Sunday Funday	17/04
Robin Hood Interactive trail	12/06
Afternoon tea in the orchard	22/08
Halloween Interactive trail day-time	30/10
Halloween Night time nature walk Story telling- linked to Halloween	31/10
Guy Fawkes make the guys, Fire lighting	5/11
Grotto	Dec 2022
New Year's Eve Party	31/12/2022
Additional educational walks with experts	TBA

1.8 COUNTRYSIDE CENTRE

Through 2021/2022 Covid restrictions have again affected bookings. The room-hire budget was set as £11000. Income to date is £14,150.

- The Countryside Manager continues to organise the usage of the centre.
- Some reluctance to meet indoors has continued throughout the year.
- The type of meetings is variable with no real pattern emerging yet.

	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Bookings	204	339	408	412	42	124
Users	7253	11404	12965	12931	1033	3473
Income					£4572	£14150 (15/02/2022)

Advance 33 confirmed bookings with potential room hire of £3740 for the remainder of the year.

2. FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

Work continues to progress the development project, aiming for preapplication advice with full planning permission being sought in May.

- Concept plans were received.
- High level costs revealed the impact of Covid, Brexit and the building of H2 have all contributed to increase in costs.
- CIL application has been made to mitigate these unforeseen increases
- Required surveys have been undertaken.
- Communication plan has been produced and an external organisation. engaged to work alongside the internal team to ensure timely engagement with all stakeholders.

	Elements	Estimated Completion Date
Hinchingsbrooke Country Park Development	Pre application	Feb March 2022
	Play installation	March/April 2022
	Planning application	May 2022
	Tender process	Sept 2022
	Appointment of contractors	Dec 2022
	Construction phases	Jan to Aug 2023
	Completion date	Autumn 2023



Honestly, the VERY VERY BEST Father Christmas experience we've done yet. Miles better than Baytree. Highly highly recommend!



Treacle was amazing!!!!!! She was absolutely bonkers and my girls loved it 🤪 we brought our elf on the shelves in a special container so the girls could carry them and she kept making them do silly things 🤪 x x x In fact all the elves were amazing but so glad we got Treacle as our guide x



10/10! This was so so magical! Felt so safe and every elf we met had so much energy for my little man even though we were the last booking! So convincing I even fell for half of the tricks! Xxx it was magical and so much thought put into it! Definitely book again if available next year. He thinks we've been to the North Pole through a magic tunnel! It's just brilliant! Well done!!! 🍪

5 star review! ★★★★★

This really was absolutely brilliant yesterday, the kids thought it was magical but us adults thought it was even better! Well done to you all. You've created something unique and unlike anything we were expecting. I'm hoping this will become a tradition year on year. Thank you and Merry Christmas to you all.

It was the best grotto experience we've been to! Thank you for all of the effort that went in to it. My kids were in their elements 🤪🎄★



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HINCHINGBROOKE COUNTRY PARK 2020/21 OUTTURN AND 2021/22 BUDGET AND FORECAST

	2020/21 Outturn			2021/22 Forecast		
	Budget	Actual	Variance	Budget	Forecast	Variance
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Hinchingbrooke Country Park and Management						
Staff	100	102	2	106	105	-1
Running Costs	33	39	6	23	31	8
Income	-16	-13	3	-10	-16	-6
Total	117	128	11	119	120	1
Countryside Centre						
Staff	27	24	-3	28	17	-11
Running Costs	18	15	-3	18	13	-5
Income	-41	-16	25	-19	-35	-16
Total	4	23	19	27	-5	-32
Café						
Staff	54	33	-21	55	45	-10
Running Costs	65	57	-8	65	72	7
Income	-155	-109	46	-135	-146	-11
Total	-36	-19	17	-15	-29	-14
Total Hinchingbrooke Country Park	85	132	47	131	86	-45

Comments on Variances

2020/21

There was overspend across Countryside due to COVID. The collapse in income was due to the closure of the Hinchingbrooke Country Park during lockdown periods. The café and the centre did not reach pre-COVID levels after the lockdown was lifted which was expected.

2021/22

There is an expected underspend for the countryside centre which is split between savings from a vacant post and reduction in building maintenance and site works.

The café's income is expected to reach pre-COVID levels which is why there is a large underspend.

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By virtue of paragraph(s) 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

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