

A meeting of the **HINCHINGBROOKE COUNTRY PARK JOINT GROUP** will be held in the **COUNTRYSIDE CENTRE, HINCHINGBROOKE COUNTRY PARK, BRAMPTON ROAD, HUNTINGDON, PE29 6DB** on **FRIDAY, 14 OCTOBER 2022** at **10:00 AM** and you are requested to attend for the transaction of the following business:-

AGENDA

APOLOGIES

1. ELECTION OF CHAIR

To elect a Chair of the Hinchingsbrooke Country Park Joint Group for the remainder of the Municipal Year.

2. MINUTES (Pages 5 - 8)

To approve as a correct record the Minutes of the meeting held on 18th March 2022.

Contact Officer: H Peacey - (01480) 388007

3. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

To receive from Members declarations as to disclosable pecuniary, other registerable and non-registerable interests in relation to any Agenda item. See Notes below.

Contact Officer: Democratic Services - (01480) 388169

4. APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIR

To appoint a Vice-Chair 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 2022/23 as follows:

(a) Cambridgeshire County Council

Councillor K Billington

(b) Huntingdonshire District Council

Councillors M L Beuttell, C A Lowe, D L Mickelburgh and S L Taylor.

6. SENIOR RANGER'S REPORT (Pages 9 - 16)

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

Contact Officer: J Arnold - (01480) 388666

7. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

To note that the next meeting of the Hinchingsbrooke Country Park Joint Group will be held on 17th March 2023 at 10:00am.

Contact Officer: H Peacey - (01223) 752548

6 day of October 2022



Head of Paid Service

Disclosable Pecuniary Interests and other Registerable and Non-Registerable Interests.

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

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The District Council also permits filming, recording and the taking of photographs at its meetings that are open to the public. Arrangements for these activities should operate in accordance with [guidelines](#) agreed by the Council.

Please contact Habbiba Peacey, Democratic Services Officer, Tel No: (01480) 388007 / 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 Joint Group.

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 in the Countryside Centre, Hinchingbrooke Country Park, Brampton Road, Huntingdon, PE29 6DB on Friday, 18 March 2022

PRESENT: Councillor R J West – Chairman.

Councillors K Billington, T D Sanderson and Mrs S R Wilson.

8 INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

In welcoming all to the meeting, the Chairman was pleased to report the news that the District Council had secured a 99-year lease for the Country Park together with the fact that it had been awarded Green Flag Status once again.

9 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 21st October 2021 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

10 MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

11 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 October 2021 to March 2022. In doing so, comment was made as follows:

Staffing and Volunteers

Members were encouraged to note that both former Kickstarters had now secured full time employment and that two new individuals had started within the team since October 2021. These individuals required more support than the previous cohort which was impacting upon existing workloads. It was further noted that another individual was due to start their placement in the next few weeks.

Having regard to volunteers, the Group were encouraged to note that volunteer numbers had returned back to pre-Covid levels with the exception of SEN volunteers Whilst some had returned, others were unable to owing to the availability of carer support.

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 installing new pictorial meadows, spring maintenance of park furniture such as benches, way-marker posts and fences, installation of additional way-marker posts and temporary interpretation, the installation of new play equipment, which had been delayed owing to a shortage of materials and ground conditions and the submission of a planning application for the investment project.

A brief discussion was held on the potential conflict with the District Council's Tree Strategy which had recently emerged. This was being dealt with as a high priority by the Countryside Services Manager and the Senior Ranger in conjunction with the District Council's Planning Policy Team.

Community Groups

Members were encouraged to note that community groups had also returned to pre-Covid levels. In noting that negotiations were ongoing with Love to Swim, and in response to questions, it was confirmed that this group had their own insurance arrangements in place and that they would be undertaking their own water quality checks and responsible for providing their own lifeguards.

Satellite Sites

An update was delivered on the range of work being undertaken across Views Common, Stukeley Meadows and Spring Common. It was reported that consideration currently was being given to collaborate with other services to with a view to providing better management practices for these sites.

Café

The "Grab & Go" system remains a popular choice in the Café together with the gift shop which proved popular during the wetter months whilst also generating additional sales in the Café. Attention was drawn to the income levels from the Café when compared to previous years where it was noted that £151,476 had been generated to date in the current financial year.

Events, Activities and Promotions

Events had been arranged in accordance with COVID guidelines which included the Robin Hood interactive trail event, Flix & Picnics, Halloween interactive trail, Den Building interactive trail and Santa's Grotto. The New Year's Eve party had to be cancelled owing to COVID and the outdoor cinema had not proved popular this year due to poor weather conditions and the re-opening of public houses.

The Group's attention was then drawn to a number of upcoming events planned at the Country Park until the end of the calendar year which was welcoming to note.

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 an improvement when compared to 2020/21 with income to date reported as £14,150. It was noted that the Countryside Services Manager

continued to organise usage of the centre, with continuing reluctance for participants to meet indoors. It has therefore been difficult for the Countryside Services Manager to predict a pattern of usage in the short and medium-term as the type of bookings at the Centre have been variable.

Future Development

Work continues to progress with the development of the project. The Assistant Director (Recovery) reported that the District Council's Cabinet had approved Community Infrastructure Levy funding at their meeting last night which was a positive step for the project. £1.5m of funding had been secured which would help towards the rising costs of materials for the project such as timber and fuel.

In response to a question which had been raised, it was anticipated that works to commence the installation of the new play equipment on site would begin at the end of April/beginning of May 2022. This had been delayed owing to wet weather conditions.

It was confirmed that the Group would have sight of the development plans for the Country Park once public consultation during the planning application phase was underway. It was likely that a Special Meeting of the County Park might be needed to review the plans as part of the development process.

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 Autumn 2023.

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 terms of the latter, it was reported that there was an expected underspend for the Countryside Centre attributed to savings from a vacant post and a reduction in building and maintenance costs. Members were encouraged to note that the Café's income would be expected to reach pre-COVID levels.

Councillor T D Sanderson drew the Countryside Services Manager's attention to potential funding available from the County Council's Cultivate Fund. County Councillor K Billington drew the Group's attention to Brampton Community Shed and suggested that Officers might wish to approach this group about the possibility of selling their wares at the Café site and/or at the upcoming planned Craft Fair.

12 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED

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).

13 PROPOSED LIAISON AGREEMENT

The Group discussed in detail the proposed Liaison Agreement and made suggested changes/amendments to the document. The Countryside Services Manager was tasked with circulating around electronically an updated version to Members of the Joint Group for final comment. It was agreed that the matter would be discussed in six months' time at the next meeting.

14 RE-ADMITTANCE OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED

that the press and public be readmitted to the meeting.

15 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

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

Chairman

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Title/Subject Matter:	Senior Ranger's Report
Meeting/Date:	Hinchingbrooke Country Park Joint Group – 14th October 2022
Executive Portfolio:	Executive Councillor for Leisure, Waste and Street Scene – Councillor S L Taylor
Report by:	Senior Ranger
Ward(s) affected:	All Wards

Executive Summary:

This report summarises the summer months and provides an update on the investment progress. It covers the period March to October 2022.

The dry and hot summer had a significant impact on the site being cracked and dry and with no water in many areas, as well as some work parties being cancelled due to the extreme heat. However, the park has remained popular and fortunately no major fire incidents occurred.

Recommendation:

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

1. SENIOR RANGERS REPORT

1.1 STAFFING

- The Park remains significantly busier since the Covid lockdowns this additional workload should now be accepted as a new normal for the site – and will probably increase further with the ongoing investment.
- The Assistant Ranger, has successfully moved on to a higher-grade position in HDC. This added pressure on the two remaining rangers
- A replacement Assistant Ranger started in mid September
- The Kickstart programme has finished so only one Kickstarter on site this summer limiting the evening hours available
- The extreme drought and heat this summer meant some work parties were cancelled and staff were careful to select tasks in the shade where possible
- Without the full-time support worker, a slight increase of workload for both rangers and countryside manager continues, but this was eased slightly with a college placement.
- A full time café team leader was appointed in August, to build up the team, to raise the standards and to ensure consistency of service ready for the new café.

1.2 VOLUNTEERS

- Work parties are at full strength and both Wednesday and Thursday have waiting lists.
- The Green Team volunteers continue, and this term are gearing up ready for Santa's Grotto. Over the spring they helped with a willow project to support the Godmanchester Mill Steps development and during the summer continued with footpath clearance and litter collection
- We held a volunteer social on 21st of May 2022- much appreciated after the covid hiatus

1.3 HINCHINGBROOKE COUNTRY PARK MANAGEMENT

- Continued to install new fishing platforms, supplied by the Environment Agency (EA) and Brampton Angling Society. The approaches are still under construction. More are expected in due course.
- New way-marker signs have been installed using wood sourced as a by-product of the habitat conservation work carried out over winter. These have been very well received! The equipment was purchased by the Friends
- Wood sourced as a by-product of the winter habitat conservation works has also been used to replace gateposts and planks on a troll's bridge - saving a significant budget spend.
- Cutting back hedges after bird nesting season has started.
- Enforcing "No Swimming" rules, and the temporary "No BBQs" policy during the drought conditions this summer has taken a considerable amount of staff time.

And Looking Forward...

- Hopefully cutting the final bits of meadow if the tractor can be available and in safe working order
- Planting trees to replace those that died in the drought and to improve diversity in the glades and coppice plots.
- Planting more mature trees to provide shade in areas used for picnicking – these have been provided via our Friends group with a donation from a Islamic Community Group from Huntingdon.
- Winter felling works in the glade
- Helping with the set up and running of our successful Santa's Grotto event.

1.4 COMMUNITY GROUPS

Segway Events – £1000 for using the site. Good feedback from participants

We are currently looking into possibilities of a new joint venture with CCC water sports centre (based at Grafham Water) to provide boating and wild swimming in the Main Lake over the summer holidays and weekends in 2023.

1.5 SATELLITE SITES

Staff time on these sites has been put under pressure with the change in staff. Going forward the Countryside Ranger will take a more active role in Spring Common to try to drive this site forward.

Views Common

- Litter picking has continued
- We plan to cut back along pathways this Autumn/Winter

Stukeley Meadows

- Litter picking has continued.
- Grounds Maintenance have taken over the day-to-day practical works
- We have mown the Bee Orchid area this autumn in accordance with management for this species.

Spring Common

- Litter picking has continued.
- The Countryside Ranger will take a lead with this site, improving interpretation and community involvement, and undertaking more significant maintenance.

1.6 CAFÉ

- The income reflects the weather with a busy spring and summer- although with very high temperatures people wisely stayed away. We do not have staff to cover evenings which could have been profitable. The investment allows for longer opening hours
- Maintaining the “grab & go” system is more cost effective since the number of staff required is less, however people's expectations have changed and now we are reintroducing hot lunch options again.

- A new Lazzarro coffee machine has been installed. With quality coffee and hot food and mini café events, and deals, we hope this will encourage people to visit just for food throughout the winter.

Income across the café counter:

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Q 1	55,681	45,005	53,687	18,122	54,103	53,374
Q 2	52,600	51,962	64,649	52,314	44,350	65,136
Q 3	33,364	38,896	29,348	23,188	32,584	
Q 4	28,249	43,749	24,999	24,958	23,848	
Total	£169,896	£179,612	£172,683	£118,582	£154,885	£118,510

1.7 EVENTS, ACTIVITIES AND PROMOTIONS

	Comment	Profit
Easter trail	Interactive trail with “farmers and rabbits to find! £700 taken	£650
Robin Hood	Interactive trail through the woods £625 taken	£580
Den building	Family event, appeared on ITV news very popular with limited costs	£140
Minibeast and pond dipping	Sold out... weather dependant... very hot one day... raining another!	
Halloween	Halloween evening guided nature walk with rangers and soup in café afterwards Interactive trail. Pilot event. That is now sold out. Very popular and capable of growing – once we have done this trial	Nearly sold out £700 taken
Guy Fawkes	Family event fire lighting and guy making	Sold out £200 taken
Grotto	Tickets available 672 tickets sold so far 210 Last year 500 children over 6 days. This year we can expand the number of sessions if needs be	
Santa paws....	We are going to try a session for dogs and their owners!!	
New Years Eve party	Family event £25.00 per adult £18.00 under 16s Please join us!	

1.8 COUNTRYSIDE CENTRE

Business is now back to and possibly greater than pre covid- although with only one room.

- The countryside manager continues to organise the usage of the centre
- Advance 33 confirmed bookings with confirmed room hire of £3740 for the remainder of the year. Other dates are available which will be booked over the coming months

	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
	2 rooms	2 rooms	2 rooms	2 rooms	1 room	1 room	1 room
bookings	204	339	408	412	42	148	91
users	7253	11404	12965	12931	1033	3951	2924
income					£4572	£18,035	£14,010

2. FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

Work continues to progress the development project

- Pre app was submitted in May as per schedule, but at the time of writing had not had formal written advice due to the issues within the planning service
- CIL application was successful so it is now a £3million project due to rising costs (there may still need to be more compromises on the proposed plan and we are actively seeking other funds)
- Meetings with informal cabinet, overview & Scrutiny and Cabinet have been held and cabinet formally gave the agreement to progress through the development stages on 21st September
- Communication plan has been followed through the installation of the play equipment (2 phases- one in July and one in September) and enabled collection of positive feedback and constructive comments
- Exhibition of proposed plans began 3rd October
- Submission of full application will be November
- Propose to go out to tender at the same time as a “stacked” procurement process to try to keep on track with timescales

Elements	Estimated Completion Date	Updated timeline
Pre application	Feb March 2022	Submitted May awaiting written feedback
Play installation	March/April 2022	Phase 1 completed July Phase 2 completed September
Planning application	May 2022	November 2022
Tender process	Sept 2022	Jan 2023
Appointment of contractors	Dec 2022	March 2023
Construction phases	Jan to Aug 2023	Summer 2023 to Spring 2024
Completion date	Autumn 2023	Spring 2024

PowerPoint presentation to show the progress so far will follow.

HINCHINGBROOKE COUNTRY PARK 2021/22 OUTTURN AND 2022/23 BUDGET AND FORECAST

	2021/22 Outturn			2022/23 Forecast		
	Budget	Actual	Variance	Budget	Forecast	Variance
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Hinchingbrooke Country Park and Management						
Staff	106	125	19	108	107	-1
Running Costs	23	42	19	23	26	3
Income	-10	-23	-13	-15	-17	-2
Total	119	144	25	116	116	0
Countryside Centre						
Staff	28	18	-10	28	13	-15
Running Costs	18	6	-12	18	14	-4
Income	-19	-36	-17	-22	-25	-3
Total	27	-12	-39	24	2	-22
Café						
Staff	55	50	-5	57	58	1
Running Costs	65	72	7	65	75	10
Income	-135	-147	-12	-155	-166	-11
Total	-15	-25	-10	-33	-33	0
Total Hinchingbrooke Country Park	131	107	-24	107	85	-22

Comments on Variances

2021/22

Long term sickness was covered by 2 existing posts who were given acting up pay. Increased sales from the gift shop contributed to the increase in income.

Countryside centre room hire income recovering after covid, increased income from Christmas events. Countryside support worker role was vacant during 21/22 which saw a large drop in employee costs. Reduced running costs

The café income recovered quicker than expected after covid which contributed the underspend

2022/23

Countryside support worker role is current vacant, assumption is that it is to be filled in October

Increase in the café income offset by increase in catering supplies cost

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