



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, 21 APRIL 2023** at **10:00 AM** and you are requested to attend for the transaction of the following business:-

AGENDA

APOLOGIES

1. MINUTES (Pages 3 - 6)

To approve as a correct record the Minutes of the meeting held on 14th October 2022.

Contact Officer: H Peacey - (01480) 388007

2. 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

3. SENIOR RANGER'S REPORT (Pages 7 - 14)

To receive a report by the Senior Ranger on park activities for the period October 2022 to March 2023.

Contact Officer: M McGettigan - (01480) 388401

4. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

To note that the next meeting of the Hinchingsbrooke Country Park Joint Group will be held on 14th July 2023 at 10:00am.

Contact Officer: H Peacey - (01480) 388007

11 day of April 2023

Oliver Morley

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](#)

Filming, Photography and Recording (including Live Streaming) at Council Meetings

This meeting will be filmed for live and/or subsequent broadcast on the Council's YouTube site. The whole of the meeting will be filmed, except where there are confidential or exempt items. If you make a representation to the meeting you will be deemed to have consented to being filmed. By entering the meeting you are also consenting to being filmed and to the possible use of those images and sound recordings for webcasting and/or training purposes. If you have any queries regarding the streaming of Council meetings, please contact Democratic Services on 01480 388169.

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.

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the HINCHINGBROOKE COUNTRY PARK JOINT GROUP held in the Countryside Centre, Hinchingsbrooke Country Park, Brampton Road, Huntingdon, PE29 6DB on Friday, 14 October 2022

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

1 ELECTION OF CHAIR

RESOLVED

that Councillor M L Beuttell be elected Chair of the Hinchingsbrooke Country Park Joint Group for the remainder of the Municipal Year.

Councillor M L Beuttell in the Chair.

2 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 18th March 2022 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3 MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

4 APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIR

RESOLVED

that Councillor C A Lowe be appointed 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 Mrs M L Beuttell, C A Lowe, D L Mickelburgh and S L Taylor.

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 October 2022. In doing so, comment was made as follows:

Staffing and Volunteers

It was reported that the Assistant Ranger had been successfully recruited to a position elsewhere within the Council with a replacement Assistant Ranger in post since mid-September. Members were encouraged to note that one Kickstarter had started as an Apprentice Ranger at Paxton Pits Nature Reserve and that a new full time Café Team Leader had also been appointed.

In terms of volunteers, it was reported that work parties were at full strength and that this group of volunteers had been pivotal in the delivery of new signage at the Country Park. Cambridge Regional College's Green Team continued to deliver projects with work underway to create the Santa's Grotto for this year's event.

Hinchingsbrooke Country Park Management

The Group noted the completion of the first phase of the installation of new fishing platforms supplied by the Environment Agency and Brampton Angling Society. Over the dry summer months, strimming and grass cutting activities had been undertaken (though less than usual due to the extremely dry weather) as well as the removal of reeds in The Wash as part of the maintenance work required for open water whilst maintaining and managing wildlife habitats.

Looking forward, it was reported that tree planting work would continue to be undertaken by the Friends of Hinchingsbrooke Country Park replacing those that had died in the drought and to improve diversity in the glades and coppice plots as well as planting more mature trees to provide shade in areas used for picnicking.

Additionally, it was reported that the Country Park were currently trialling the use of duck nest boxes.

Community Groups

Members were pleased to note the Segway events that were currently taking place at the Country Park with 320 individuals booked this coming weekend. The Canoe Club and BRJ Club had funded the steps up to the new sailing facilities and a new joint venture with Cambridgeshire County Council and Grafham Water was currently being pursued to provide boating and wild swimming in the Main Lake over the summer holidays and weekends in 2023. In terms of the latter, a brief discussion was held on the current "No Swimming" policy and the recent national guidance which advises to "Swim Safely". Some work will initially be required to review the Council's policy and signage if the Council were to adopt the national position. In response to questions it was confirmed that events organised by a group would be required to take their own water samples.

Satellite Sites

A fire had broken out at Spring Common over the summer but the cause of it was yet to be identified. Litter picking across all sites remains a very time consuming task and can only be negated through educating the population.

In respect of Stukeley Meadows, an agreement has been reached with the Grounds Maintenance Team to undertake work in this area in exchange for some survey work to be undertaken by the Countryside Team.

Countryside Centre

Attention was drawn to occupancy levels and the number of bookings taken at the Countryside Centre compared to previous financial years. Whilst the number of users to date was down for 2022/23 compared to 2021/22, satisfactory income levels had been achieved thus far.

In response to a question raised by Councillor C A Lowe, it was confirmed that all twigs and branches from fruit trees were used to heat the Countryside Centre. Nevertheless the Countryside Manager noted the suggestion to sell this produce on to BBQ and outdoor groups for smoking purposes. It was also confirmed that the number of school visits had continued to decline since the COVID pandemic.

Income generated from car parking at the site was expected to be reinvested back into the Country Park from 2024 onwards. It is envisaged 8 electric vehicle charging points will be incorporated within the plans and it was further reported that a new parking tariff had also been agreed by the Cabinet. The Assistant Director (Recovery) undertook to circulate the report that went before the Cabinet to Members outside of the meeting. In discussing electric vehicle charging further, it was reported that options would be reviewed at tender stage in December/January.

(At this point during the meeting, at 10:40am, Councillor C Lowe left the meeting).

Having queried public access to toilets, the Countryside Manager reported that the facilities only were available when a Ranger was on site. Previously the facilities had been subjected to vandalism, graffiti and drug-use which was costly for the Council to maintain. It was however noted that some thought would be given to greater access to toilet facilities as part of the redevelopment project.

Café

It was noted that a new Lavazza coffee machine had been installed in the Café. Furthermore, the Café had extended its offerings to include Doggy Ice Cream, to target the dog walking community, who were largely the Country Park's main users over the winter months. Hot meals have been reintroduced as a trial and so far have been positively received. It is hoped to gradually reintroduce more choice but maintaining consistency and quality is key to success.

Events, Activities and Promotions

The Group's attention was drawn to the number of upcoming events planned at the Country Park until the end of the calendar year. Specific mention was made

of the Halloween, Santa's Grotto, Santa Paws and New Year's Eve party events. Of the 670 tickets available for the Grotto, 230 had been sold to date.

Future Development

Members attention was drawn to the pop up banners on display around the room and the new branding that would be associated with the Country Park going forward. The pop up banners would relocate to Pathfinder House in due course. The first phase of the redevelopment programme (play provision) was now complete. The Group were encouraged to note the positive feedback received thus far, which included a quote from a parent of a disabled child who had stated that the proposals would be "Life changing for us".

Financial Position

Members' attention was drawn to the outturn position of the Park for the 2021/22 financial year and the forecast outturn position for the 2022/23 financial year. The Park had generated better returns than expected in 2021/22. The Countryside Manager was continuing to manage the Countryside Centre and only 5 week days remained available for booking in the month of November. Hot food was now offered as an option in the Café where it was noted that the service would continue to adapt as demands changed.

7 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was agreed that the Hinchingsbrooke Country Park Joint Group would now meet on three occasions per year in April, July and November to receive updates on the redevelopment proposals. Dates will be confirmed with the Joint Group outside of the meeting.

At the conclusion of the meeting, the Countryside Manager and the Assistant Director (Recovery) sought feedback from the Joint Group on the proposed redevelopment plans.

Chairman

Public
Key Decision – No

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Title/Subject Matter: Senior Ranger's Report

Meeting/Date: Hinchingsbrooke Country Park Joint Group – 21st April 2023

Executive Portfolio: Executive Councillor for Leisure, Waste and Street Scene

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, financial year on year comparisons have fluctuated dramatically, but the site has remained open for public access. Usage is up and positive feedback continues to show how much visitors value the site

Recommendation:

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

1. SENIOR RANGERS REPORT

1.1 STAFFING

- One Senior Ranger, one Ranger and one Assistant Ranger 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 has now concluded. Unlike last year, split shifts over the summer will not be possible without this additional workforce. So far unsuccessfully, attempts to start a “volunteer duty ranger” scheme are underway.

1.2 VOLUNTEERS

- Work-parties are continuing to work at full strength.
- SEN volunteers have returned to pre-covid levels.
- We hosted a corporate work-party from the Environment Agency who performed extremely well and installed a new path in Pine Avenue.
- We continue to build on volunteer wildlife surveys with a number of promotional days planned for the spring and summer.

1.3 HINCHINGBROOKE COUNTRY PARK MANAGEMENT

The park’s management was all completed on time over winter.

- Woodland work in new plantation has continued and been completed in good time and to a high standard.
- Creation of a new glade in Bobs wood completed. This has also been planted up with native tree species to speed up succession as identified in the management plan and the need supported within the reports of the MKA biodiversity surveys.
- Creation of a large hibernacula and seasonally wet area in new glade completed.
- A total 700 trees have been planted including the glade, open spaces in the New Plantation, within the flood plain and around the Main Field. 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.
- Installation of the new path in Pine Avenue which will reduce footpath erosion and protect wildflowers from trampling.
- Hedge laying at the Christie Drive Balancing Pond, two thirds of which is now complete, the last third will be completed next winter. This creates habitat for insects and birds and is visually attractive for the local residents

- 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, including a new stretch of woodland flowers besides the new path in Pine Avenue.
- Spring maintenance of park furniture such as benches, way-markers and fences.
- Continued Installation of new way-markers. These were started last year and were very well received.

1.4 COMMUNITY GROUPS

- Established groups are all running well, including weekly Parkrun and monthly Zigzag runners, mountain biking training, and Huntingdon Canoe Club.
- Fireflies, our resident forest school are investing in improving their area and have begun to take on more sessions.
- Service level agreements will be renewed in May for approximately 12 community groups

1.5 SATELLITE SITES

Views Common

- Cutting back around the edge of the site to ensure clear views of road signs took place before bird nesting season.
- Regular patrols and litter picking continue.
- Areas beside the path have been planted with trees as part of the A14 works.

Stukeley Meadows

- Bee orchids are present again and will be surveyed this spring.
- Following our review of the way that we collaborate with other services, to provide the best management possible for the satellite sites, Grounds Maintenance have now taken on the management of this site except for the conservation of the Bee Orchids.

Spring Common

- A more detailed management plan is being created.
- We have created links with Wild About Huntingdon and Huntingdon Town Council to involve more residents in the conservation work with the hope of creating work parties and potentially a Friends group.
- Further work to cut back and willow again to keep combatting the regrowth. This aims to recover the wet grassland. Last year's work seems to have improved the area, so we hope to build on this.
- Littering and anti-social behaviour both remain commonplace.

1.6 CAFÉ

- The income reflects a change in habits, people are using the café more and more. Some people found us in covid and haven't left, some people use us because we offer value for money.
- The price increase which was implemented in February for Q4 to stay in line with supplier prices.
- Employing a contracted team leader in August has proven an asset to the park, ensuring more consistency with the service and products.
- Increasing the menu to sit down hot dinners has again been welcomed, with people choosing the café as a destination for a treat under £10 during the cost-of-living crisis.
- Two coffee machines have been leased selling lattes, cappuccinos etc, this has proven very popular. Filter coffee remains available as a budget option
- People have returned to socialising indoors again, so increasing the capacity in the new café will be popular.
- The gift shop has proven popular taking £8253.32 this year, of which we retain 10%. This is providing a source of interest for users who now recognise the standards of gifts and come to site specifically to buy presents. The café benefits from people buying refreshments

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	63,015.85
Q 2	52,600	51,962	64,649	52,314	44,350	77,723.12
Q 3	33,364	38,896	29,348	23,188	32,584	50,612.89
Q 4	28,249	43,749	24,999	24,958	20439 (to 27/02/22)	56,047.55
Total	£169,896	£179,612	£172,683	£118,582	£151,476	£247,399.41

1.7 EVENTS, ACTIVITIES and PROMOTIONS

Events rely on the involvement of volunteers; we were lucky enough to have 36 Volunteers at Christmas including 5 Santa's which helped us achieve even more slots.

The events now sell out quite quickly as we have built a reputation with visitors knowing that we deliver a great event which is always customer focused.

Event	Card Payment taken	Cash sales	Outgoings	Profit
Bouncy Castles	£ 400.00	£ 600.00	£ -	£ 1,000.00
Easter	£ 600.00	£ 1,066.00	£ 50.00	£ 1,616.00
Robin Hood	£ 525.00		£ 50.00	£ 475.00
Den Building	£ 140.00		£ 4.00	£ 136.00
Pond dipping	£ 120.00		£ -	£ 120.00
Afternoon tea	£ 225.00		£ 80.00	£ 145.00
Halloween trail	£ 590.00		£ 50.00	£ 540.00
Nature walk	£ 96.00		£ 12.00	£ 84.00
Bonfire	£ 100.00		£ 15.00	£ 85.00
Santa Paws	£ 1,650.00		£ 30.00	£ 1,620.00
Santa	£ 12,920.00		£ 3,055.00	£ 9,865.00
Elf workshop	£ 320.00		£ 270.00	£ 50.00
	£ 17,830.00	£ 1,666.00	£ 3,616.00	£ 15,880.00

Based on the trial of some new events and the success of others, together with the growing team of reliable volunteers, some activities in 2023 will be accommodate more attendees.

Facebook continues to be the main media source used for advertising. Last week 8 posts reached 28,900 readers. There are 10,800 followers.

1.8 COUNTRYSIDE CENTRE

- The countryside manager continues to organise the usage of the centre, until it closes for the refurbishment. It will be managed then by the intended newly appointed commercial manager.

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/2033
Bookings	408	412	42	124	199
Users	12965	12931	1033	3473	6160
income	£27,769	£31,590	£4,572	£14,150	£28,721

Figures are difficult to compare as there were 2 rooms and now only one, however income is approximately back to pre covid levels. Some groups are still asking about Covid precautions so it is right to keep the space to a maximum and minimise cancellations.

Prices were not increased in 2021/2022 or 2022/2023 to encourage people back. The main repeat users include police, NHS, and Cambridgeshire County Council. The Dogs Trust alone has generated an income to HDC of £4500

71 confirmed bookings with potential room hire of £11,060 have been taken so far for 2023/2024. It is likely the countryside centre will remain fully open for this financial year, with construction of the car park prioritised and footpath and countryside centre refurbishment following on.

2. FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

Work continues to progress the development project, aiming to submit the full planning application late spring 2023. This is later than hoped with external contractors undertaking surveys and initial feedback from planning slower than anticipated.

Having reviewed the pre-planning comments, obtained surveys and recommendations from numerous external bodies such as the Environment Agency it is hoped the application will be a smooth process.

- Public displays were held in October, and plans were positively received. Suggestions and comments have been included in the revised plans
- External communications company has been engaged to ensure stakeholders are updated once planning approval has been received and construction begins
- Contractors will be prioritising the creation of the car park, before progressing to the café and pathway
- The park will remain open as much as possible with signed diversions in place where appropriate.
- A food trailer has been acquired so that for events, and if the café has to close, will still be able to purchase refreshments from an alternative source. This should increase income over the summer months as some people don't like to queue to long
- It will be necessary to purchase / hire a storage cabin whilst the countryside centre is out of use.

	Elements	Estimated Completion Date
Hinchingsbrooke Country Park Development	Pre application	completed
	Play installation	completed
	Planning application	Late spring 2023
	Tender process	Sept- November 2023
	Appointment of contractors	Dec 2023
	Construction phases	2024
	Full completion including spring planting	Spring 2025

HINCHINGBROOKE COUNTRY PARK 2021/22 OUTTURN AND 2022/23 BUDGET AND ACTUAL
--

	2021/22 Outturn			2022/23 Provisional Outturn		
	Budget	Actual	Variance	Budget	Actual	Variance
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Hinchingbrooke Country Park and Management						
Staff	106	125	19	108	111	3
Running Costs	23	42	19	23	42	19
Income	-10	-23	-13	-15	-32	-17
Total	119	144	25	116	121	5
Countryside Centre						
Staff	28	18	-10	28	19	-9
Running Costs	18	6	-12	18	8	-10
Income	-19	-36	-17	-22	-57	-35
Total	27	-12	-39	24	-30	-54
Café						
Staff	55	50	-5	57	72	15
Running Costs	65	72	7	65	96	31
Income	-135	-147	-12	-155	-200	-45
Total	-15	-25	-10	-33	-32	1
Total Hinchingbrooke Country Park	131	107	-24	107	59	-48

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

General increase in running costs for the HCP management. Increased sales from the gift shop contributed to the increase in income.

Countryside centre room hire income has recovered to outpace pre-covid levels. Income from various events run throughout the year. Countryside support worker role was vacant during 22/23 which saw a large drop in employee costs. Low running costs.

Café income budget was increased in 22/23. There was an increase in the café income which was offset by increase in catering supplies cost. This extra footfall also saw an increase in employee costs.