

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the HINCHINGBROOKE COUNTRY PARK JOINT GROUP held in Countryside Centre, Hinchingsbrooke Country Park, Brampton Road, Huntingdon, PE29 6DB on Friday, 12 July 2024.

PRESENT: Councillor M L Beuttell – Chair.

Councillors C Lowe and D J Shaw.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors Billington 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 19th April 2024 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 2024/25 as follows:

(a) Cambridgeshire County Council

Councillor K Billington.

(b) Huntingdonshire District Council

Councillors Mrs M L Beuttell, C A Lowe, D Shaw 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 April to June 2024. In doing so, comment was made as follows:

Country Park Management

The team had focused on people related tasks over the period so as not to disturb the wildlife.

A path has been developed to allow for accessible pond dipping to take place, the access had been designed for both wheelchair users and also for those with young children. The area is used both by the Forest School and the site.

Surveys of bee orchids have continued with an average number of the plants having been identified over the season. The team are compiling data to enable annual comparisons against previous years and seasonality. The Group heard that the meadows would be cut in the later part of August and that the seeds distributed by this process would be left for the following years growth.

It was noted that the Ecology surveys were underway but that these were very new and that it would take time to establish trends but that they would assist in maximising biodiversity and opportunities at the Park and its satellite sites.

It was observed that with the increased footfall over the summer months, there was an increase in litter. The Group heard that whilst enforcement action can be taken for flytipping, smaller acts of littering were harder to trace back to an individual. The ranger advised that new bins were being developed which would minimise litter flying back out of the bin, and that positive reminders about littering would be publicised more strongly with the introduction of these bins.

Following a question from Councillor Shaw, the Group were advised that the Park aimed to keep seasonal sales, such as ice cream, in house in order to maximise profits for the Park.

Activities and Events

A wild swimming group has been established in the lake and safety around this activity will be explained to park users. The Grafham Water team have continued to utilise the facilities at the park with canoeing and paddleboarding.

A Wild About Huntingdonshire Event was scheduled to be held at the Park on 28th and 29th September 2024. It was hoped that this event would bring together local groups and suppliers along with the local community to showcase the very best of the district.

Country Park Development

Plans were underway to resurface the footpath throughout the Park but that this required careful study and consideration as even small

changes could have a huge impact on habitats throughout the Park.

The Group heard that alternative lighting options for the proposed car park were being investigated so that visitor safety and the local bat population were both maintained.

The Group were assured, following an enquiry from Councillor Beuttell, that the plans remained on budget and that opportunities to utilise volunteers or to develop alternatives were being considered to ensure that a robust budget could be adhered to as well as the best possible outcome for the Park being delivered.

7. FINANCE REPORT

The Group received and noted the contents of the Finance report (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) for the period April to June 2024. In doing so, comment was made as follows:

The Group heard that the forecasting for the café income had been pessimistic but that the forecast had now been increased. It was noted that there was a current underspend due to vacancies expected to be recruited to later in the year.

8. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was observed that Judith Arnold, a long term member of the team at Hinchingsbrooke Country Park, would be retiring over the summer. The Panel would like to place on record their great appreciation for her hard work and outstanding contribution to the Park over the years and wish her a long and happy retirement.

The next meeting of the Group is due to be held on 15th November 2024 at 10:00am.

Chair