

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, 25 APRIL 2025** 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 meetings held on 15th November 2024 and 2nd April 2025.

Contact Officer: Democratic Services - (01480) 388169

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. HEAD RANGER'S REPORT (Pages 9 - 14)

To receive a report by the Head Ranger on park activities for the period November 2024 to April 2025.

Contact Officer: D Rook - (01480) 388666

4. FINANCE REPORT (Pages 15 - 16)

To receive the Finance Report for the Park.

**Contact Officer: D Adeoye
01480 388869**

5. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

To note that the next meeting of the Hinchingsbrooke Country Park Joint Group will be held on 18th July 2025 at 10:00am.

Contact Officer: Democratic Services - (01480) 388169

15 day of April 2025

Michelle Sacks

Chief Executive and 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 Democratic Services, Tel No: (01480) 388169 / email: Democratic.Services@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.

This page is intentionally left blank

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the HINCHINGBROOKE COUNTRY PARK JOINT GROUP held in Countryside Centre, Hinchingbrooke Country Park, Brampton Road, Huntingdon, PE29 6DB on Friday, 15 November 2024.

PRESENT: Councillor M L Beuttell – Chair.
Councillors C Lowe, S L Taylor and D J Shaw.

APOLOGIES: An apology for absence from the meeting was submitted on behalf of Councillor K Billington.

IN ATTENDANCE: .

9. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 12th July 2024 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

10. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

11. SENIOR RANGER'S REPORT

The Group received and noted the contents of the Head Ranger's report (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) and a PowerPoint presentation on park activities for the period July to October 2024. In doing so, comment was made as follows:

Staffing

The new staffing structure within the Parks and Countryside Service was discussed, with particular attention drawn to the appointment of two Weekend Wardens which would relieve the requirement of a ranger presence within the park over the weekend. It was also noted that the appointment of a new Commercial Manager had been completed and that the appointment would be from the new year.

Volunteers

Volunteer engagement continued to successful over the period within corporate groups helping to fulfil different tasks.

Park management

Delays had been experienced to planned work due to flooding however the end date would still be achievable. It was clarified that green hay was hay which was immediately baled once cut, then moved to a receptor site where it was spread to dry when it was again

baled. This allowed for seeds, especially native species from the district, to be distributed into new areas. It was noted that the resulting hay was sold to a local farm for use with livestock.

It was reassured that a communications plan was in place to help spread the reasons behind recent tree felling within the park and the positives this would bring to the parks biodiversity. The Panel heard that alongside selling the resulting logs, the timber would also be processed through a sawmill to provide for future park projects.

Satellite Sites

Following a discussion about the internal department restructure and the realignment of Head Ranger's duties, it was agreed that future ranger reports would focus solely on Hinchingsbrooke Country Park.

Café

It was reported that a positive season had been completed and that the pizza van had been a worthwhile investment.

Events

The introduction of trail packs at the park had received positive feedback and engagement whilst proving to be profitable for the park. The Wild about Huntingdonshire festival had been postponed due to flooding and adverse weather and was being rearranged for Spring 2025.

The Group heard that there would be a move during the festive season from the previous Santas Grotto to a breakfast event. Ticket sales were positive and this style of event would be easier to manage whilst works to the park and the building were in progress.

12. 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 July to October 2024. In doing so, comment was made as follows:

The Group heard that there was a forecasted underspend of £77,000 within the budget due to the delays of the park redevelopment. It was advised that the figures would be monitored as the development got underway and re-forecasted as necessary.

13. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Group is due to be held on 25th April 2025 at 10:00am.

Chair

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 Wednesday, 2 April 2025.

PRESENT: Councillor M L Beutell – Chair.
Councillors C Lowe and D J Shaw.

APOLOGIES: An apology for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillor S L Taylor.

IN ATTENDANCE: None.

14. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No interests were declared.

15. EXCLUSION OF THE 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).

16. UPDATE ON HINCHINGBROOKE COUNTRY PARK DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

The Group gave consideration to an exempt presentation by the Head of Leisure, Health and Environment, (a copy of which was appended in the annex to the Minute Book), providing an update on the Hinchingsbrooke Country Park Development Project.

Chair

This page is intentionally left blank

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Title/Subject Matter:	HEAD RANGER'S REPORT A presentation from the Head Ranger on park activities for the period November 2024 to April 2025
Meeting/Date: DATE.	Hinchingbrooke Country Park Joint Group 25th April 2025
Executive Portfolio:	Executive Councillor Simone Taylor
Report by:	Head 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.

Recommendation:

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

HEAD RANGER'S REPORT

1.1 STAFFING

- Two Rangers and one Assistant Ranger are based at Hinchingsbrooke typically working Mon to Fri.
- Weekends are covered by Weekend Wardens. The site is covered every weekend.
- Work-parties are run regularly with volunteers to support the limited staff.

1.2 VOLUNTEERS

- Work-parties are continuing to work at full strength.
- SEN volunteer numbers are consistent.

1.3 HINCHINGBROOKE COUNTRY PARK MANAGEMENT

Winter works have been carried out successfully, despite another mild and wet season, we have been able to complete all the planned works in good time. This has included the thinning of oaks in the Oak Plantation which will increase light to the woodland floor and help develop a more complex woodland structure, benefiting wildlife and visitors.

- Meadows were cut over Autumn and Winter.
- The tern raft has been covered over to prevent Black Headed Gulls colonising it before the Terns arrive.
- Trees identified as hazardous by the Arboricultural Team have been felled and the wood used to create habitat piles.
- Support has been given to the events team in constructing and tidying up after the Christmas events.
- A coppice plot in the New Plantation has been cut and a dead hedge constructed to protect coppice stools from deer damage.
- The hazel triangle has been coppiced and the stakes used for hedge laying.
- The winter pruning of the community orchard has been virtually completed and reduced to an appropriate height and shape. Some large walnut trees still need attention. Going forwards, it should be possible to have more community volunteers involved in the maintenance.
- Snowberry – a non-native invasive species has been removed from the site again and regrowth will be tackled after bird nesting season.
- Thinning works have been carried out in the Oak Plantation.

Looking Forward...

- Installation of interpretation features such as waymarkers.
- Continuing to install more, new and improved, post and rail fencing to replace the old design which is starting to fail.
- Maintenance of park furniture such as picnic benches
- Supporting the events team with the Preparing and running of easter holiday events.

1.4 COMMUNITY GROUPS

Established groups are all operating well, including weekly Parkrun and monthly Zigzag runners, mountain bike training, and Huntingdon Canoe Club.

1.5 CAFÉ

	2023/24 Outturn			2024/25 Provisional Outturn		
	Budget	Actual	Variance	Budget	Actuals	Variance
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Staff	65	114	17	163	139	-24
Running Costs	90	131	41	123	159	36
Income	-170	-228	-45	-191	-296	-105
Total	-15	17	32	95	2	-93

HDC has continued to see strong growth in the café income which has led it to outperform the budget again in 24/25. We have seen inflationary increase in the operational expenditure but due to the increase in income it is likely that the café will be a small cost to the council in 24/25.

1.6 EVENTS, ACTIVITIES and PROMOTIONS

November 2024 to April 2025

Guy Fawkes Making	Saturday 2nd & Sunday 3rd November
Grotto	Saturday 30th November to Monday 23rd December
Wellies In The Woods	Thursday 9th January
Wellies In The Woods	Thursday 16th January
Wellies In The Woods	Thursday 23rd January
Wellies In The Woods	Thursday 30th January
Wellies In The Woods	Thursday 6th February
Frostbite Races (HBK)	Sunday 9th February
Wellies In The Woods	Thursday 13th February
Easter Trail & Crafts	Friday 18th April

Event Overview and Purpose

Between November 2024 and April 2025, Hinchingsbrooke Country Park offered a rich and varied programme of events, continuing its role as a hub for community wellbeing, seasonal celebration, and environmental learning. These events were designed to cater to a range of age groups, with a strong emphasis

on family-friendly engagement and nature-based experiences. Highlights from this period include:

1. **Guy Fawkes Making (2nd & 3rd November):**
 - a. *Purpose:* A creative hands-on activity allowing families to mark Bonfire Night by crafting traditional effigies, encouraging intergenerational participation and cultural learning.
 - b. *Participant Expectations:* Engaging, family-friendly craft activities in a safe and welcoming setting.
 - c. *Outcomes:* Informal feedback suggested high levels of enjoyment and repeat interest in seasonal craft activities.
2. **Grotto (30th November to 23rd December):**
 - a. *Purpose:* Delivered throughout the festive season, the Grotto experience invited families to take part in storytelling, craft, and meet Santa, all within a magical natural setting.
 - b. *Participant Expectations:* A festive and memorable experience for children, with attention to detail and friendly staff.
 - c. *Outcomes:* Strong bookings and positive social media engagement highlighted this as a core seasonal offer with consistent local support.
3. **Wellies in the Woods (January – February):**
 - a. *Purpose:* This programme encouraged young children and their carers to explore the woodland environment in winter, developing confidence, social skills, and a connection to nature.
 - b. *Participant Expectations:* Safe, developmentally appropriate outdoor sessions led by engaging facilitators.
 - c. *Outcomes:* Listed on external event platforms and supported by ongoing participation, this series remained popular and aligned well with early years outdoor learning priorities.
4. **Frostbite Races (9th February):**
 - a. *Purpose:* Part of the regional Frostbite League, this event was intended to welcome runners of all abilities to participate in a winter cross-country challenge. Unfortunately, the original date for the run was in January which was cancelled due to adverse weather conditions and unsafe ground
 - b. *Participant Expectations:* A well-managed, scenic route with a community-friendly atmosphere.
 - c. *Outcomes:* Park's selection as a host site reinforces its ongoing reputation as a valued venue for outdoor sport.
5. **Easter Trail & Crafts (18th April):**
 - a. *Purpose:* A celebration of spring designed to engage children through interactive trails and creative crafts in a woodland setting.
 - b. *Participant Expectations:* Affordable, accessible activities suitable for young children and families.
 - c. *Outcomes:* Widely promoted via social media and community pages, the event drew a good number of visitors, contributing to increased footfall during the Easter period.

1.7 COUNTRYSIDE CENTRE

- The business support officer continues to manage the booking process for the countryside centre.
- No bookings are being taken from September in readiness for the expected development works.

	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/2023	2023/2024	2024/25
Bookings	412	42	124	199	118	104
Users	12931	1033	3473	6160	3559	4173
Income	£31,590	£4,572	£14,150	£28,721	£26,500	£35,413.80

This page is intentionally left blank

HINCHINGBROOKE COUNTRY PARK 2023/24 OUTTURN AND 2024/25 BUDGET AND PROVISIONAL OUTTURN

	2023/24 Outturn			2024/25 Provisional Outturn		
	Budget	Actual	Variance	Budget	Actuals	Variance
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Hinchingbrooke Country Park and Management						
Staff	112	119	7	118	116	-2
Running Costs	34	50	16	37	39	2
Income	-15	-38	-23	-13	-20	-7
Total	131	131	0	142	135	-7
Countryside Centre						
Staff	29	18	-11	32	21	-11
Running Costs	31	11	-20	23	36	13
Income	-11	-50	-39	-6	-33	-27
Total	49	-21	-70	49	24	-25
Café						
Staff	65	114	17	163	139	-24
Running Costs	90	131	41	123	159	36
Income	-170	-228	-45	-191	-296	-105
Total	-15	17	32	95	2	-93
Events						
Staff	0	0	0	78	24	-54
Running Costs	0	0	0	0	3	3
Income	0	0	0	-15	-17	-2
Total	0	0	0	63	10	-53
Total Hinchingbrooke Country Park	165	127	-38	349	171	-178

Comments on Variances

2023/24

Budgets were realigned for 23/24 and the management unit for Hinchingbrooke Country Park outturned without a variance.

Countryside centre room hire income recovered to outpace pre-covid levels. Income from various events run throughout the year. Countryside support worker role was vacant during 23/24 which saw a large drop in employee costs. Low running costs.

There was an increase in the café income which was partially offset by increase in catering supplies cost. The new café staffing structure has been put in place which has increased the employee costs in 23/24.

2024/25

The budgets for 24/25 were aligned to the previously revised business case which was signed off at the Change board. It wasn't updated to the most recent business case as this was not approved until February/March.

Due to the delay in the redevelopment of the country park the centre was still able to hire its rooms throughout the year.

HDC has continued to see strong growth in the café income which has led it to outperform the budget again in 24/25. We have seen inflationary increase in the operational expenditure but due to the increase in income it is likely that the café will be a small cost to the council in 24/25.

The events manager post was recruited to part way through the year and the vacant events officer post has led to an underspend within employee costs.