

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the COUNTRYSIDE JOINT GROUP held at Hinchingsbrooke Country Park, Huntingdon, Cambridgeshire on Friday, 13 October 2006.

PRESENT: District Councillors M G Baker, Mrs M Banerjee, Mrs J Chandler and J D Fell and County Councillor Mrs E Kadic.

IN ATTENDANCE: Miss H Ali, Mrs J Arnold, P Knight and Mrs E Smith.

1. ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED

that District Councillor M G Baker be elected Chairman of the Group for the ensuing Municipal Year.

Councillor M G Baker in the Chair.

2. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Group held on 31st March 2006 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

3. APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED

that District Councillor J D Fell be appointed Vice-Chairman of the Group for the ensuing Municipal Year.

4. MEMBERSHIP OF THE GROUP

The membership of the Countryside Joint Group for 2006/07 was noted as follows:-

(a) Cambridgeshire County Council

County Councillor Mrs E Kadic.

(b) Huntingdonshire District Council

District Councillors M G Baker, Mrs M Banerjee, Mrs J Chandler and J D Fell.

5. 2005/06 FINAL ACCOUNTS

The Group received and noted a report by the Treasurer (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) reflecting the final accounts for 2005/06, which indicated that net expenditure had been £232,000 representing an increase of approximately £20,000 compared with the

original budget.

Members were advised that this variation had occurred primarily as a result of increased National Non Domestic Rates, irrecoverable VAT and Central Department recharges, all of which had been beyond the direct control of the Senior Ranger.

At the same time, Members were pleased to note that £38,000 additional income had been generated by the Café since its opening in October 2005.

6. SENIOR RANGER'S REPORT

In receiving and noting the contents of the Senior Ranger's report (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) comment was made as follows:-

(a) Volunteers and Staffing

Members were pleased to note the contribution that continued to be made by volunteers, particularly those with registered disabilities, and young people from the Youth Offending Scheme.

In response to questions from a Member regarding the health and safety of all volunteers in the Park, Members were assured that strict processes were set in place to prevent accidents from occurring, particularly for those volunteers with disabilities.

(b) Countryside Centre

Details of the number of users of the Countryside Centre for the period March 2006 – September 2006 inclusive were presented. Members were pleased to note that the number of users were at a similar level to those of the previous year. In response to questions, it was noted that charges for room hire had been based on those imposed for hire of village halls.

(c) Café

The Group were pleased to note the continued success of the café.

(d) Events and Activities

The Senior Ranger presented the Group with details of the events and activities at the Centre over the spring/summer period. Members were pleased to note the success of the literacy week and noted that another event would be arranged in the future.

(e) Wider District

Members noted the range of work being undertaken in other parts of the District. In particular, mention was made

of the footpath clearance and woodland work in the Thicket, St Ives and the installation of new dog bins around the Park, which had been provided by Wood Green Animal Shelter, as part of their “responsible dog ownership” project.

(f) Park Management

The Senior Ranger informed the Group of the various work being undertaken at the Country Park. Particular mention was made of the improvements to the toilets in the visitors’ centre and to the exterior of the Countryside Centre.

(g) Miscellaneous

Having discussed the problem of young people and litter within the Park and in particular the occurrence of broken glass, the Group noted that with the involvement of Park staff, the Police and CCTV, steps were being taken to prevent the problem from reoccurring. It was further reported that the existing byelaws for the Park would be reviewed in light of this matter.

Members were encouraged to note that membership of the “Friends of Hinchingsbrooke Country Park” had increased and welcomed the range of fundraising activities being organised by the Group.

In response to questions from a Member regarding the possible extension of the café, it was reported that due to a busy summer period, no further consideration had been given to the matter. A short discussion ensued on the possibility of using S106 monies from the Northbridge development to help fund any extension and it was reported that agreement had already been reached, in principle, to provide the Park with additional funding for staff. The Senior Ranger undertook to progress the plans for an extension to the café further and to report back thereon at the next meeting.

7. CHANGE OF NAME - COUNTRYSIDE JOINT GROUP

Members noted that the Cabinet had agreed to reconstitute the former Hinchingsbrooke Country Park Joint Liaison Group as the Countryside Joint Group at their meeting held on 18th May 2006 with a view to their terms of reference being extended to include all matters relating to countryside and riverside parks and other parks and open spaces.

In view of some uncertainty as to their new remit and the current status of the Group given that the Country Park was a joint initiative between the District Council and the County Council, and the difficulties this might pose when discussing other open space areas which were District Council owned, it was

RESOLVED

- (a) that Councillor Mrs J Chandler, Executive Councillor for Leisure at the District Council, be requested to seek further guidance on the future role of the Group from the Leader of the Council and Chairman of the Cabinet; and
- (b) that to reflect their new responsibilities a report on Paxton Pits Nature Reserve be submitted to the Group at their next meeting.

8. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Group noted that their next meeting would be held on 30th March 2007.

9. SHORT WALK AROUND THE PARK

At the conclusion of the meeting, the Senior Ranger informed Members that 6 llamas would be arriving in the Park as part of a grazing project under the government's single farm payment scheme. Members welcomed the project as it would provide an additional feature in the Park at no cost which would also potentially generate extra income.

Chairman