

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the COUNTRYSIDE JOINT GROUP held at the Countryside Centre, Hinchingsbrooke Country Park, Huntingdon, Cambridgeshire on Thursday, 19 April 2007.

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

IN ATTENDANCE: Miss H Ali, Mrs J Arnold, P Knight and Mrs S Martin.

10. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Group held on 13th October 2006 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

Pursuant to Minute No 06/07, Councillor Mrs J Chandler reported that she had spoken to the Leader of the Council, Councillor I C Bates, on the future role of the Group now that its terms of reference had been broadened to encompass the range of District Council activities in the countryside. Given their extended remit, Members felt that biannual meetings were not regular enough to allow the Group to monitor, in sufficient detail, the work being undertaken in the various locations across the District. To overcome this deficiency the Group proposed that quarterly meetings be held at different venues. In view of the suggestion to widen the terms of reference and increase the regularity of meetings, the Group requested the Democratic Services Officer to seek the views of Cambridgeshire County Council on the suggested new arrangements and their contribution towards future meetings on the understanding that a minimum of one meeting per year would continue to take place at Hinchingsbrooke Country Park. Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

- (a) that the Head of Administration be requested to prepare a quarterly programme of meetings at various locations across the District for consideration in the Autumn; and
- (b) that the views of Cambridgeshire County Council on the proposed new arrangements be requested.

11. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

12. 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 in the Park. Having regard to the health and safety of volunteers, it was reported that all volunteers were now required to complete an application form, prior to providing their assistance in the Park.

(b) Countryside Centre

Details of the number of users of the Countryside Centre for the period October 2006 to March 2007 inclusive were presented. Although the number of users had decreased by 10% in comparison to that of the previous year, Members were encouraged to note that the range of users of the Centre had remained the same.

(c) Café

The Group were pleased to note the continued success of the Café and noted that buffets, catering for up to 20 people, were now being offered to users of the Countryside Centre.

The Senior Ranger reported that further consideration was being given to suggestions to extend the café.

(d) Events and Activities

The Senior Ranger presented the Group with details of the events and activities at the Centre over the autumn/winter period. Particular mention was made of the success of the Nordic Walking Group.

(e) Wider District

Members noted the range of work being undertaken in other parts of the District. Particular attention was drawn to Coneygeare Park where "drainage saucers" for the trees had been created and damaged trees had been removed and replaced. Members were encouraged to note that positive feedback had been received from the public on the progress that had been made.

(f) Park Management

The Senior Ranger informed the Group of the various work being undertaken at the Country Park which included path building around the lake area, new fencing for the llamas and repairs to the crack in the brick bridge.

(g) Friends of Hinchingsbrooke Country Park

Members were encouraged that membership of the “Friends of Hinchingsbrooke Country Park” had increased and noted the range of fundraising activities which had been organised by the Group. Particular mention was made of the success of the Christmas Shopping Evening.

Arising from this, the Countryside Services Manager reported that it was the intention to form a new “Friends of Holt Island” Group which would be applying for charitable status. Members remained hopeful that this Group would continue to contribute funding for the Park activities.

(h) Miscellaneous

The Chairman drew Members’ attention to an article which had appeared in the local press, highlighting concerns raised by a local resident who believed that the Park was turning into a “wasteland” because of the increase in vehicle movements in the Park. Having been advised that the resident in question had arranged a public meeting, scheduled to be held on 22nd April 2007, Members expressed disquiet that the resident had not highlighted any concerns to staff located on site in the first instance and neither had a representative from the District Council been invited to attend the meeting. After much discussion on the proposed way forward, it was concluded that the Chairman, together with the Countryside Services Manager, should attend the meeting on the 22nd April in a personal capacity. Councillor Mrs J Chandler undertook to contact the Ward Member to ask if he could similarly attend the meeting.

13. PAXTON PITS NATURE RESERVE

Members received and noted the contents of the 2006 Annual Summary for Paxton Pits Nature Reserve (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) which detailed a range of issues and initiatives that had occurred at the Nature Reserve over the previous year. Members were encouraged to note that around 2,200 members had joined the “Friends of Paxton Pits Nature Reserve” Group.

14. WIDER DISTRICT

The Countryside Services Manager acquainted Members with a range of initiatives across the District which included details on Godmanchester Nursery, the Meadow Trail in St Neots and the Barford Road Pocket Park in Eynesbury. With regard to the Ouse Valley Biodiversity Project, Members were encouraged to note that the District Council were currently working in partnership with various other groups on the project.

15. COUNCILLOR MRS J CHANDLER

In light of her decision to retire as a District Councillor at the end of her term of office in May, the Group took the opportunity to express their appreciation to Councillor Mrs J Chandler, Executive Councillor for Leisure, who was attending her last meeting, for her contribution to the growth and success of the Country Park over many years and extended their best wishes to her for the future.

16. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Group noted that their next meeting would be held on 12th October 2007.

17. SHORT WALK AROUND THE PARK

At the conclusion of the meeting, the Senior Ranger led Members on a short walk to visit the llamas.

Chairman