

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the HINCHINGBROOKE COUNTRY PARK JOINT GROUP held in the Wren Room, Countryside Centre, Hinchingbrooke Countryside Park on Thursday, 9 April 2009.

PRESENT: Councillor M G Baker – Chairman.
Councillors C R Hyams and County Councillor Mrs L Kadic.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors Mrs M Banerjee and Ms M J Thomas.

IN ATTENDANCE: Mrs J Arnold, Miss S Engelbert, P Knight, Mrs S Martin, A Roberts, Councillor T D Sanderson and Mrs J Walker.

10. MINUTES

Subject to the deletion of the final paragraph of Minute No. 08/05, the Minutes of the meeting held on 10th October 2008 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

11. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations of interest were received.

12. UPDATE ON PROPOSED TERMS OF REFERENCE

Further to Minute No. 08/06, the Group received a report (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) outlining recent developments with regard to their terms of reference and methods of operation. Members were informed that at their meeting held on 29th January 2009, the Cabinet had deferred making a decision on the proposed new method of working pending consideration of the outcome of the review of management arrangements for Leisure Centre Management Committees. In discussing the Cabinet's decision the Group were informed of the termination of the Leisure Centre Management Joint Committees and their replacement with active leisure forums. The Group were acquainted with relevant sections of the terms of reference of the active leisure forums.

Having discussed the Cabinet's suggestion, the Group decided that it would be preferable for its existing structure to be retained. In reaching this decision Members took into account the terms of the lease of the park, which required the District Council to set up and maintain a Joint Liaison Group. The Liaison Group was obliged to meet annually. As a result Members requested that their proposal to reinstate the Countryside Group to monitor the performance of the District's other countryside sites be resubmitted to the Cabinet.

RESOLVED

that the Cabinet be informed of the outcome of the Group's deliberations and requested to reconsider the report

containing the proposal to reinstate the Countryside Group.

13. 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) **Voluntary and Staff**

Members noted that the number of volunteers currently stood at 395.

(b) **The Countryside Centre**

Details of the number of users of the Countryside Centre for the period October 2008 – February 2009 inclusive were presented.

(c) **Café**

Members noted that the improvements to the café had been completed and that the official opening had taken place on 27th March 2009, which had resulted in new visitors being attracted to the Park. The Senior Ranger reported that on Sunday, 5th April 2009 the café had experienced its busiest day to date. Members were advised that it was intended to move towards using only locally sourced produce.

(d) **Events and Activities**

The Senior Ranger presented the Group with details of events and activities held over the Autumn/Winter period. Particular mention was made of the success of the Huntingdon Field Day which was extremely well attended and subsequently arrangements had been made to hold this event again on 8th November 2009.

(e) **Wider District**

Members noted the range of work being undertaken in other parts of the District. Particular attention was drawn to the improvements at Holt Island which included footpath creation, boardwalk repairs, tree work, new benches and interpretation signs. The Executive Councillor for Operational and Countryside Services requested that local residents' gratitude be expressed to Peter Hobbs and Paul Smith for their work in Godmanchester.

(f) **Park Management**

In response to a question by the Chairman, the Countryside Services Manager reported that a number of trees within the Park had reached maturity and some were at the end of their natural life. Tree management was an ongoing issue.

(g) **Friends of Hinchingsbrooke Country Park**

Members noted that membership of the Friends of Hinchingsbrooke Country Park had increased. The Group were informed that the next event being organised by the Friends was a fun run on 19th April 2009, for which seventy people had registered an interest.

14. PROPOSED CONTROL MEASURES

The Group discussed a report by the Countryside Services Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) which outlined a number of ways in which the Country Park's rabbit population might be controlled. The report had been submitted following complaints from neighbouring landowners about damage caused by rabbits. Members discussed at length each of the options contained in the report.

Legal advice had been sought in relation to the Park's responsibility in this respect but conflicting responses had been received and, significantly, no test cases had taken place. In that context, comment was made that as rabbits also existed on neighbouring land, any problems they caused could not be attributed solely to the Country Park. It was agreed neighbouring landowners should be contacted with a view to discussing whether a joint approach might be adopted towards addressing complainants' concerns. While the number of rabbits was not causing a problem for the Park, the Group agreed that if control measures were to be taken they should be humane and take into account their impact on other wildlife.

The Executive Councillor for Operational and Countryside Services suggested that further information should be obtained on rabbit control measures that were being used elsewhere. Having referred to the steps he had taken to date to solicit public views on this matter, the Executive Councillor also sought and received approval for further consultation with affected parties, including holding a meeting with residents to which local councillors would be invited. In addition, the Group requested that the County Council's views on this matter should be sought as owner of the land on which the Park was situated.

Finally, it was agreed that prior to the Group's informal visit to be held in June 2009, a meeting would be convened to report back on the results of the consultations and discuss the way forward.

RESOLVED

- a) that neighbouring landowners' views be sought on adopting a joint approach towards controlling the level of the rabbit population;
- b) that further consultation be held with affected parties, including holding a meeting with residents to which local councillors are invited;
- c) that research be carried out into the effectiveness of control measures used elsewhere; and
- d) that the County Council's views on this matter be sought.

15. HUNTINGDON WEST ACTION PLAN

With the aid of a report by the Countryside Services Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Group considered the terms of the draft Huntingdon West Area Action Plan Preferred Approach that related to the Country Park. The Plan, subject to Cabinet approval, would be made available for public consultation. It contained a range of potential improvements, which might be funded through Section 106 agreements relating to future housing development.

Members were informed that the proposals were aspirational and that the Plan covered the period to 2026. A suggestion to increase greatly the Park's boundaries was the most significant of the proposals. The Group were advised that the list of eleven possible other improvements had not been prioritised in order to retain flexibility according to the sums of money available. Having discussed details of the potential improvements and the process leading to the adoption of the Plan, the Group expressed support for the improvements proposed for inclusion in the Plan.

16. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Group noted that the next meeting would be held prior to the informal visit to St Ives on a date, which was yet to be confirmed.

Chairman