

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

NOTES of the meeting of the HINCHINGBROOKE COUNTRY PARK JOINT GROUP held in the Countryside Centre, Hinchingbrooke Countryside Park on Friday, 8 October 2010.

- PRESENT: Councillor M G Baker – Chairman.
Councillor Arnold, M G Baker,
Mrs M Banerjee and Patrick Knight.
- APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of District Councillor C R Hyams and Mrs L Kadic.
- IN ATTENDANCE: Mrs J Arnold, P Knight, Mrs S Martin and Mrs J Walker.

1. QUORUM

Arising from the meeting being inquorate, Members noted the following matters.

2009/10 Final Accounts

In receiving and noting the contents of the report by the Treasurer reflecting the annual accounts for the 2009/2010 financial year, comment was made as follows:-

In noting that net expenditure for the Country Park was below the budgeted figure Members were advised that the majority of savings were attributable to uncontrollable items such as irrecoverable VAT, capital charges and central department re-charges.

Having regard to income, Members noted that the variation of £9,000 above the budgeted figure was a result of the cafe generating more income than expected. The Group was informed by the Countryside Services Manager that the café's staffing levels needed to be reviewed to ensure that the overall budget target was achieved in future years.

Senior Ranger's Report

In receiving and noting the contents of the Senior Ranger's report, comment was made as follows:-

(a) **Staffing**

It was reported that two future job fund trainees were approaching the end of their six month appointment with the Country Park and two new future job fund staff had started, one in the cafe and one as a ranger.

(b) **Volunteers**

Members noted that the number of volunteers for the period April to September 2010 was 473 which included four school

work experience students and one student from Shuttleworth College. The Group was advised that some Duke of Edinburgh volunteers were due to begin work in the cafe which would reduce staffing costs.

(c) **Countryside Centre**

Details of the number of users of the Countryside Centre for the period April to September 2010 were presented.

Members noted that groups were now hiring the centre for shorter periods which was affecting income. However, it was hoped that themed children's parties would be held at the centre which would raise further income.

(d) **Cafe**

Members were pleased to note that the cafe continued to be busy and income had exceeded that predicted for the first year. Furthermore because the cafe had been able to utilise future job fund staff the wages bill would be lower than last year's.

(e) **Events and Activities**

Members were presented with details of events over the summer period. It was noted that all events and activities were widely publicised in the local press.

(f) **Wider District**

Members noted that a range of work has been undertaken in other parts of the District under the countryside services remit.

It was reported that the boardwalk at Holt Island was virtually complete. Members were encouraged to note that three years had been allowed for the completion of this task, however, due to the 2,000 hours of volunteer time that had been dedicated to this exercise it had taken twelve months. Furthermore, quotes for this work had been obtained from contractors and were in excess of £300,000, yet due to the work of volunteers the task had only cost £10,000.

Members noted that the groups involved with the community nursery in Godmanchester continued to grow and that the food produced at the nursery was used at the Country Park Café. Furthermore plants which were grown at the nursery were used for Oxmoor's entry into the In Bloom Competition. The Countryside Services Manager emphasised that he was keen to ensure that there was no cost to the Council attributed to the provision of the community nursery service. It was noted that the nursery had established a "Friends of" group which had a membership of 50. The Group highlighted the potential for the nursery to sell plants and saplings to the public, in response the Countryside Services Manager stated that he hoped the Friends of the Community

Nursery would be able to enable this.

Members requested that their next informal visit be arranged to include a stop at the Godmanchester Community Nursery.

(g) **Park Management**

It was noted that tree surveys and associated works had been undertaken.

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

It was reported that the Friends of Hinchingsbrooke Country Park had purchased a new camera to focus on bird feeders and a monitor for the cafe which had proved very popular.

The Grandparent's day event which had been organised by the Friends in August was very successful and would be repeated in 2011.

(i) **Balancing the Budget**

The Group was acquainted with the Rangers ideas for increasing income, among the suggestions discussed were licensing the countryside centre for weddings and providing areas for camping and caravans. The possibility of a charity shop being run by the various Friends groups was also suggested.

Car Parking Charges

The Group was informed that parking charges had been introduced at the Country Park at the beginning of September. Members were pleased to note that the reaction to the implementation of charges had been better than expected. It was reported that a number of issues had been encountered when the ticket machines were first installed. Members noted that the six hour limit for vehicles parking at the Country Park had deterred commuters and hospital workers from parking there which had freed up parking spaces for users of the park.

The Group was advised that a season ticket could be purchased for £50 a year which worked out at 15p per day. If someone with a permit visited the park three times a month this would be cheaper than paying £2 per visit to park.

Chairman