

HINCHINGBROOKE COUNTRY PARK JOINT GROUP

A meeting of the **HINCHINGBROOKE COUNTRY PARK JOINT GROUP** will be held in **COUNTRYSIDE CENTRE, HINCHINGBROOKE COUNTRYSIDE PARK** on **FRIDAY, 25 MARCH 2011** at **10:00 AM** and you are requested to attend for the transaction of the following business:-

A G E N D A

APOLOGIES

1. ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

To elect a Chairman of the Group for the ensuing Municipal Year.

2. MINUTES (Pages 1 - 4)

To approve as a correct record the Minutes of the meeting held on 9th October 2009.

3. NOTES (Pages 5 - 10)

To receive the notes of the meeting held on 26th March and 8 October 2010.

4. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

To receive from Members declarations as to personal and/or prejudicial interests and the nature of those interests in relation to any Agenda item. Please see notes 1 and 2 overleaf.

5. APPOINTMENT OF VICE- CHAIRMAN

To appoint a Vice-Chairman of the Group for the ensuing Municipal Year.

6. SENIOR RANGER'S REPORT (Pages 11 - 14)

To receive a report by the Senior Ranger on park activities for the period October 2010 to March 2011.

7. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

To note the next meeting of the Group will be held on 14th October 2011 at 10.00am.

Dated this 16 day of March 2011

Helen J Taylor

Secretary

Notes

1. *A personal interest exists where a decision on a matter would affect to a greater extent than other people in the District –*
 - (a) *the well-being, financial position, employment or business of the Councillor, their family or any person with whom they had a close association;*
 - (b) *a body employing those persons, any firm in which they are a partner and any company of which they are directors;*
 - (c) *any corporate body in which those persons have a beneficial interest in a class of securities exceeding the nominal value of £25,000; or*
 - (d) *the Councillor's registerable financial and other interests.*

2. *A personal interest becomes a prejudicial interest where a member of the public (who has knowledge of the circumstances) would reasonably regard the Member's personal interest as being so significant that it is likely to prejudice the Councillor's judgement of the public interest.*

Please contact Mrs Jessica Walker, Trainee Democratic Services Officer, Tel No 01480 387049/e-mail: Jessica.Walker@huntsdc.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 – www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk](http://www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk) (under Councils and Democracy).

If you would like a translation of Agenda/Minutes/Reports or would like a large text version or an audio version please contact the Democratic Services Manager and we will try to accommodate your needs.

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.

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Agenda Item 2

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the HINCHINGBROOKE COUNTRY PARK JOINT GROUP held in the Countryside Centre, Hinchingbrooke Countryside Park on Friday, 9 October 2009.

PRESENT: District Councillors M G Baker, C R Hyams and Mrs M J Thomas.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of District Councillor Mrs M Banerjee and County Councillor Mrs L Kadic.

IN ATTENDANCE: Mrs J Arnold, P Knight, Mrs S Martin, A Roberts and Mrs J Walker.

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 held on 9th April 2009 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

3. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations of interest were received.

4. APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED

that District Councillor Mrs M J Thomas be appointed Vice-Chairman of the Group for the ensuing Municipal Year.

5. MEMBERSHIP OF THE GROUP

The membership of the Hinchingbrooke Country Park Joint Group for 2009/2010 was noted as follows:-

(a) **Cambridgeshire County Council**

County Councillor Mrs L Kadic.

(b) **Huntingdonshire District Council**

District Councillors M G Baker, Mrs M Banerjee, C R Hyams

and Mrs M J Thomas.

6. 2008/09 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 the Country Park for the 2008/09 financial year.

In noting that net expenditure for the Country Park was below the budgeted figure, Members were advised that employee costs had increased as extra staff had been employed in the cafe, however these costs had been mostly offset by additional income from the cafe.

Having regard to income, Members noted that the variation of £51k above the budgeted figure was the result of higher than anticipated Section 106 receipts being utilised at the site. Furthermore, the cafe had generated more income than expected, though other income was slightly lower than the amount in the budget.

Councillor Hyams reported that he had been liaising with District Councillor T D Sanderson and the Service Development Manager on the possibility of investing Section 106 money further to improve play areas. He also expressed the view that possible changes to car parking and the café could have an effect on the Park's trading performance in the future.

7. SENIOR RANGER'S REPORT

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

(a) Volunteers and Staffing

Members were informed of recent staffing changes and noted that the number of volunteers currently stood at 491.

(b) Countryside Centre

Details of the number of users of the Countryside Centre for the period April to September 2009 inclusive were presented. Members noted that the number of school bookings was significantly lower than in the previous year, which was attributed to schools cutting back on school trips to ease the financial pressure on parents during the economic downturn.

(c) Cafe

Members were encouraged to note that the cafe was performing well and that local suppliers were being used wherever possible.

(d) Events and Activities

The Senior Ranger presented the Group with details of the events and activities over the Spring/Summer period.

Members were pleased to note that local organisations appeared to be choosing to hold events at the Country Park. Particular attention was drawn to the Multiple-Sclerosis Society Walk in which 150 people had taken part.

(e) **Wider District**

Members noted that a range of work had been undertaken in other parts of the District. The Senior Ranger informed the Group that with contributions from Park Rangers, Coneygear Park had been awarded Bronze and Silver Awards in the National and Anglia in Bloom Competitions respectively, and that Huntingdon Park had received a Gold Award from Anglia in Bloom.

(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 new footpath to the Park from the parking area. As visitors seemed reluctant to change their previous habits, play equipment would be installed to encourage families to use the new route.

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

Members were pleased to note that membership of the Friends of Hinchingsbrooke Country Park currently stood at 80 members. The Senior Ranger reported that a Christmas event would be held on Sunday 15th November.

(h) **Miscellaneous**

Members were encouraged to note that the amount of damage, litter and drunken behaviour over the summer had been low. This was attributed to joint working between the Police, CCTV, PCSOs and the Rangers.

Members discussed the possibility of repositioning or adding a further bird hide to the site. The Group was informed that the hide was purposely sited in a wild area but was presently not well used. The Countryside Services Manager added that bird watchers tended to go to Paxton Pits. Furthermore, hides were costly to install and run as they attracted anti-social behaviour.

8. BOUNDARY MANAGEMENT

The Countryside Services Manager updated the Group on progress with the installation of fencing at various locations around the boundary of the Park. It was proposed that the boundary then would be inspected every three months.

Members were reminded of the consultation that had previously taken place with a number of owners of land abutting the Country Park. In addition, it was reported that all those who contacted the Park on this matter received a formal response from the Park's Management. It

was agreed that the situation would be reviewed at the next meeting of the Group.

9. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Group noted that their next meeting would be held on Friday 26th March 2010.

Chairman

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

NOTES of the meeting of the HINCHINGBROOKE COUNTRY PARK JOINT GROUP held in the Countryside Centre, Hinchingbrooke Countryside Park on Friday, 26 March 2010.

PRESENT: Councillor M G Baker – Chairman.

Councillor Mrs M Banerjee.

APOLOGY: An apology for absence from the meeting was submitted on behalf of Councillor Ms M J Thomas.

IN ATTENDANCE: Mrs J Arnold, Mrs D Breedon, P Knight, Mrs H Taylor and Mrs J Walker.

10. QUORUM

Arising from the meeting being inquorate, Members noted the following matters:-

Senior Ranger's Report

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

(a) **Volunteers**

Members noted that the number of volunteers for the period October 2009 to February 2010 was 335, this was considered to be high given the inclement weather during the winter months.

(b) **Countryside Centre**

Details of the number of users of the Countryside Centre for the period October 2009 to February 2010 were presented. Members were encouraged to note the increase in income over the previous months, although this was mainly attributed to bookings of the Countryside Centre by the District Council for statutory meetings during the building of the new headquarters. It was hoped that the meeting facilities would continue to be well used following the migration of Council meetings back to Pathfinder House.

(c) **Café**

Members were pleased to note that the café continued to be busy and income had exceeded that predicted for the first year, however wages had also been much higher than estimated. Measures have been put in place in an effort to improve efficiency.

(d) **Events and Activities**

Members were presented with details of events over the winter period. Particular attention was drawn to the Junior Rangers Event held in February which had been fully subscribed.

(e) **Wider District**

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

It was reported that 500 hours of volunteer time had gone into works at Holt Island.

The launch of Anglia in Bloom was held at Coneygear Park, which had been entered into the Best Open Space Category in the Britain in Bloom Competition.

(f) **Park Management**

Damage to the rabbit fencing alongside the School was being monitored and repairs were being undertaken where necessary. Tree work had been undertaken free of charge by Shuttleworth College who had carried out the works as a training exercise.

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

It was reported that the Friends of Hinchingsbrooke Country Park were organising the purchase of a camera for monitoring bird feeders as well as a monitor screen for the café. Funds were also being raised for some new interpretation signs.

(h) **Car Parking Charges**

Councillor Baker expressed discontent that the Joint Group had not yet been consulted over proposed parking charges at Hinchingsbrooke Country Park.

Chairman

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

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HINCHINGBROOKE COUNTRY PARK JOINT GROUP 25TH March 2011

**SENIOR RANGER'S REPORT
September 2010 to March 2011**

STAFFING

Future Jobs Fund employees finished last week. There are currently no similar schemes but investigation into offering work placements in the café are being made

The Housing Growth funding has finished so Judi is returning to HCP as senior ranger. Pete Hobbs will continue to run all practical teams working at HCP and around the north of the district

Pat has been accepted for voluntary redundancy to help save Countryside costs.

Beth Gordon will have a holding brief whilst the work of Operations is completely reviewed and departments possibly amalgamated

Judi will additionally support the countryside team with reference to budgets, personnel and H&S issues and have a bigger role with business aspects and increasing income whilst minimising costs.

Kirsty Drew will take on the planning aspects of Pat's job and continue to support the Great Fen Project

Paul Claydon is going to move from HCP to Paxton Pits from April onwards as over time they will take on more land responsibility and lose one member of staff. The number of days worked on the Ouse Valley Way will drop from 3 to 2 per week.

VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers: Sept to March inclusive: 500+

At the moment, each Wednesday we are having 9 volunteers a day

Instead of the traditional but costly bowling, this years volunteers "thank you" day was a games afternoon held at HCP

COUNTRYSIDE CENTRE

Number of Groups/people from beginning to September 2010 end Feb 2011 was as follows:

	Groups	Number of People	Income
01/10/06-28/02/07	132	2544	£12,000
01/10/07-28/02/08	139	3218	£17,000
01/10/08 – 28/02/09	172	3845	£20,300
01/10/09 – 28/02/10	173	3786	£25,000
01/10/10- 28/02/11	136	3307	£20,278

These figures include income from all headings to the countryside centre, room hire, Teas & coffees, equipment hire etc.

These included such groups as: Cambs Advisory Service, Early Years & Childcare, Forensic Science Service, Learning Disability Partnership

We are currently looking to cut costs and overheads but to increase income through additional usage. Any additional hours will be covered by existing Rangers

Publicity has been changed to encourage more family parties and to increase use at weekends.

The decision has been made not to offer any discounts on room hire. Investigations are currently being made to try to secure grants to cover the room hire to allow wildlife groups to still use the facilities

CAFÉ

With careful management the staff rotas have been amended and wages costs are more under control. The income for the whole year is less than expected and this can be directly attributed to the weather and to car parking charges.

3 young people continue to volunteer in the café and we have a regular adult volunteer to help one morning a week. We are looking to increase this.

In accordance with the council aims to cut costs, staff in the café volunteered to drop their hours to 30 per week and to work even more flexibly. This should make a saving of approximately £14,000 but will continue to cover basic opening hours. Additional support at weekends will be provided mainly by Judith.

Following a visit to Brandon Country Park, a small range of sales goods has been purchased to raise income. Initial signs are that visitors have been impressed by the choice of goods. The range will change once patterns of popularity have been established and to reflect the season. At present, no additional display units have been purchased.

EVENTS & ACTIVITIES

No events brochure has been published for the year 2011. Events run by Rangers will not occur this year, but Rangers will instead support other groups eg Friends groups.

Santa's grotto was extremely popular and very successful with the weather being kind to us. A profit of £600 was made. Talks have been held to establish ways to improve this and make it even better if it is considered worthwhile

A successful "Potato day" was organised by the local self sufficiency group

2 excellent Frostbite races have been hosted

WIDER DISTRICT

Holt Island –the circular part of the boardwalk has been completed, well ahead of expectations. And the section from the entrance to the

loop has been started with much of the funding coming from the FHINR

There is a good possibility that an otter is living on the island. It has been sighted several times by a boat owner, but as yet, not seen by any Rangers

Coneygear Park has suffered from

- i) an attempted break in - 2 people were caught and taken to court
- ii) the wooden screen of the rangers hut was damaged when a moped was propped against the building and set on fire. The cost of the repairs is £1250

Spring Common- hedgerow along the astro turf play field has been dramatically cut back, early to stop any growth covering the footpath

PARK MANAGEMENT

Tree surveys & associated work

Path repairs around the lake and at the bottom of the wildlife wood

A hedge has been planted along the top of with Wildlife Wood to stop the number of informal paths that were being created. Some 20 volunteers worked for 3 weeks and have used trees from the Nursery to create the screen

To improve the quality of the muddy footpaths in Bobs Wood, a trial has been established using eco grid from Holt Island. This has not incurred any costs.

Bird hide by the wildlife lake has been replaced

Ash and willow regrowth around the lake has been cut

FRIENDS OF HINCHINGBROOKE COUNTRY PARK

The Christmas Shopping day raised £280

FHCP have agreed to run events on Good Friday and to repeat the Christmas Shopping Fair to raise funds

New interpretation boards have been funded by the Friends

FUTURE BUDGET POSITION

Countryside will need to make a 40% saving over the next three years. This equates to approximately £200,000 in total per year. The proposed cuts are shown below

Year 1, £100,000 2 staff will become redundant and savings will be made to the revenue budget

Year 2, £50,000 It is expected that additional income should be generated to cover this

Year 3 £50,000 Some staff savings will probably need to be made unless additional income can be generated

Contact Officer – Judith Arnold 07810 637547

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