

HINCHINGBROOKE COUNTRY PARK JOINT GROUP

A meeting of the **HINCHINGBROOKE COUNTRY PARK JOINT GROUP** will be held in **THE WREN ROOM, COUNTRYSIDE CENTRE, HINCHINGBROOKE COUNTRYSIDE PARK** on **FRIDAY, 30 MARCH 2012** 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. MINUTES (Pages 1 - 4)

To approve as a correct record the Minutes of the meeting of the Group held on 14th October 2011.

2. 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.

3. SENIOR RANGER'S REPORT (Pages 5 - 8)

To receive a report by the Senior Ranger on park activities for the period October 2011 to March 2012.

4. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

To note that the next meeting of the Group will be held on Friday 12th October 2012.

Dated this 21 day of March 2012



Head of Paid Service

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, Democratic Services, Tel No 01480 387049/e-mail: Jessica.Walker@huntingdonshire.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 (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.

Agenda Item 1

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the HINCHINGBROOKE COUNTRY PARK JOINT GROUP held in the Wren Room, Countryside Centre, Hinchingsbrooke Countryside Park on Friday, 14 October 2011.

- PRESENT: Councillor M G Baker – Chairman.
Councillors Mrs M Banerjee and Mrs L Kadic.
- APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors N J Guyatt and R J West.
- IN ATTENDANCE: Ms J Arnold, Mr E Kendall, Ms S Martin and Mrs H J Taylor.

9. 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.

10. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 25 March 2011 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

11. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations of interest were received.

12. APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED

that County Councillor Mrs L Kadic be appointed Vice-Chairman of the Group for the ensuing Municipal Year.

13. MEMBERSHIP OF THE GROUP

The membership of the Hinchingsbrooke Country Park Joint Group for 2011/2012 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, N J Guyatt

and R J West.

14. 2010/11 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 2010/11 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 staffing levels in the café had been higher than anticipated, however these costs had been mostly offset by savings on premises including a refund of £46k on National Non Domestic Rates for the park.

Members were reminded that the 2011/12 Medium Term Plan had set the Countryside Services a target of £199k savings to be achieved by 2013/14. It was reported that savings of £101k were expected in the current year due in the main to the deletion of the Countryside Services Manager post.

The Treasurer reported that during a recent review of working practices in the Accountancy division it had been decided that, in view of the timescales involved, the final accounts would no longer be reported to this meeting and that an outturn for the following year would be incorporated into the Senior Ranger's report.

RESOLVED

that the contents of the report be noted.

15. SENIOR RANGER'S REPORT

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

(a) **Staffing**

Members' attention was drawn to recent staff changes including the release of Pat Knight, Countryside Services Manager and Roland Fletcher, Ranger at Paxton Pits, under the District Council's voluntary release scheme.

(b) **Volunteers**

The Group noted that the number of volunteer days worked currently stood at over 900.

(c) **Countryside Centre**

Details of the number of users of the Countryside Centre for the period April to September 2011 compared to previous years were presented. Members noted that fewer lunches were being booked which was attributed to organisations/businesses cutting back during the economic downturn.

(d) **Café**

Members were advised that trade in the café was heavily weather dependant, however £1000 profit had been made through the sale of a small range of goods. The Senior Ranger reported that from 1st April, staff in the café had agreed to reduce their hours to 4 days a week, subsequently a member of staff had left which had resulted in the Senior Ranger covering in the café for holiday and sickness cover.

(e) **Events and Activities**

The Senior Ranger informed the group of the various events/activities that had been held since the last meeting. A highlight of that period had been the Sports Day which had attracted 570 people partaking in 15 different sports. Members were advised that, in order to save money, an events leaflet had not been produced this year however in response to a number of complaints/comments it has been agreed to produce a scaled down publication, using paper formats rather than glossy brochure, next year.

(f) **Wider District**

Members noted that a range of work had been undertaken in other parts of the District under the countryside services remit. Particular mention was made of the partnership work with Urban & Civic and Godmanchester nursery to grow plants for their Alconbury site.

In response to a question by a Member, the Senior Ranger explained that Rangers continued to work with volunteers and community groups to improve Coneygear Park and Oxmoor estates, however the Community Gardens scheme had not been successful in these areas. Members were pleased to noted that Moor in bloom had gained silver for Best Urban Community in Anglia in Bloom and Huntingdonshire Community Nursery Rangers had been awarded best special needs garden.

(g) **Park Management**

The Senior Ranger informed the Group of the various work being undertaken at the Country Park including tree surveys, construction of fences around the Wash and a new bird hide on the Spit.

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

It was reported that the Friends of Hinchingsbrooke Country Park would be holding a Christmas Shopping day in the Visitors Centre on 20th November 2011.

(i) **British Open Water Swimming Society**

In response to a question by the Chairman, the Senior Ranger

advised the Group that the British Open Water Swimming Society held regular sessions at the Country Park. Those attending had to be members of the Society and other safety measures were in place including the use of wet suits and safety boats.

(j) **Car Park**

The Group was informed that the introduction of parking charges at the Country Park at the beginning of September 2010 had not resulted in noticeable changes to attendance levels. 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.

16. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Group noted that their next meeting would be held on 30th March 2012.

Chairman

STAFFING

- It has been decided that John Craig is the new Green spaces Manager and Judi will continue with the co-ordinating role.
- Total restructuring of countryside will be necessary to formalise roles of all remaining staff, once future budget cuts have been established. The original plan of another two redundancies and a saving of £100,000 still stands.
- With the changes within each department, our accountant is now Nigel Green

VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers: Sept to March inclusive: 674 this includes volunteers who managed to come in over the cold and snowy days!

COUNTRYSIDE CENTRE

Number of Groups/people from beginning to September 2011 end Feb 2012 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
01/10/11 – 28/02/12	121	3665	£17623

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,

Income is down. We are still noticing that many organisations are telling their clients to bring packed lunches (not having so many buffets) and some organisations are only having half day meetings (reducing income from room hire)

CAFÉ

- Café supervisor has been on long term sick since middle of September. Judi has covered all the office work and many of the actual hours. Part timers have been carefully used to cover essential hours but this situation cannot continue. It is not yet known whether the supervisor will be able to return.
- As a result the predicted savings made on salaries (through cutting hours and dropping permanent staff to 4 days a week) has been lessened. However indications show that there is still a substantial saving of approx £5000
- Young people undertaking their Duke of Edinburgh award continue to volunteer in the café and we have a regular adult volunteer helping on Saturdays.
- The weather has been very good during the last 6 months and there is a direct correlation to the café income compared to the same winter months last year, the café income is up £6000 compared to last year's winter income.

EVENTS & ACTIVITIES

- Rangers have started producing their own events leaflets and are once again running cost effective activities
- Santa's grotto was again extremely popular. This year 257 children visited Santa. In 2012 we think we will have to run over 2 days
- Hosted a number of sports events including HDC sports taster day and Sport relief Mile
- Wildlife trust plant sales

WIDER DISTRICT

- Holt Island –following the board walk improvements, work to improve the gate and the hut is now underway
- Thicket is now benefitting from regular visits by volunteers to undertake litter picks and some tree work has been started. Much has been identified
- Spring Common -redid the stone work around the spring head
- Views Common –removed fence along the path edge as plants are now better established and have introduced a better mowing regime to improve plant diversity
- Colne Graveyard - replanted some of the hedgerow which hadn't taken the previous year

PARK MANAGEMENT

- Tree surveys & associated work is up to date
- Along the A14 approx 100 m of hedge has been laid
- Finished the bird hide on the main lake
- Added more play equipment for younger children and relocated gym equipment
- Introduced hay cut around the lake as better meadow management
- Toilets have been redecorated

FRIENDS OF HINCHINGBROOKE COUNTRY PARK

- The Christmas Shopping day raised £280
- FHCP are organising an Easter trail and again plan the Christmas shopping fair
- This year they have an additional 3 interpretation boards around the lake

We have recently heard that Huntingdon Freeman's Charity are donating £12,000 to replace the battery powered wheel chairs.

BUDGET CUTS

Following the redundancies and staff reshuffles, countryside has identified that to continue offering all the services that they currently do, Rangers are stretched to the limits when the unexpected occurs. Staff structures and responsibilities are to be fully reviewed.

FINANCIAL PARAGRAPHS – HINCHINGBROOKE COUNTRY PARK MARCH 2012

With the changes within each department, our accountant is now Nigel Green

Financial Information

The table below shows the latest budget and forecast for the year 2011/12 together with actual income and expenditure for the first 11 months of the year (April to February).

2011/12	Latest Budget £'000	Forecast £'000	Actual £'000	% of Budget Spent
Employees	253	253	231	91
Premises	25	18	18	72
Transport	5	4	2	40
Supplies & Services	51	50	43	84
Irrecoverable VAT	3	3	0	0
Repair & Renewal Fund Contribution	10	10	10	100
Total Controllable Expenditure	347	338	304	88
Income	197	187	162	82
Net Controllable Expenditure	150	151	142	95

Premises reduction is made up of several items most significantly NNDR refund on business rates which is permanent and a saving on electricity so far. This may change as the boiler recently failed and is being totally replaced at no cost to us, however we are currently relying on electric heaters in this building.

Income looks as if it is down because the original budget for the café was very high.

x.3 The table shows the original budget for the coming year 2012/13.

2012/13	Budget £'000
Employees	257
Premises	26
Transport	5
Supplies & Services	47
Irrecoverable VAT	2
Repair & Renewal Fund Contribution	10
Total Controllable Expenditure	347
Income	198
Net Controllable Expenditure	149

x.2 The 2011/12 Medium Term Plan (MTP) set Countryside Services a target of £199k savings to be achieved of £101k in 2011/12, £149k in 2012/13 and £199k each year thereafter. Some of these have and will impact on Hinchingsbrooke Country Park.

How the further savings for 12/13 onwards are under review. Every effort is being made to identify areas where more income could be generated or where staff could be used more efficiently to achieve the remainder of the savings target.

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