

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, 12 OCTOBER 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. 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 of the Group held on 30th March 2012.

3. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

To receive from Members declarations as to disclosable pecuniary, non-disclosable pecuniary or non pecuniary interests in relation to any Agenda item. See Notes below.

4. APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIRMAN

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

5. MEMBERSHIP OF THE GROUP

To note the Membership of the Group for 2012/13 as follows:

(a) Cambridgeshire County Council

Councillor Mrs E Kadic

(b) Huntingdonshire District Council

Councillors M G Baker, Mrs M Banerjee, N J Guyatt and R J West.

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

To receive a report by the Senior Ranger on park activities for the period April to September 2012.

7. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

To note that the next meeting of the Group will be held on Friday 22nd March 2013.

Dated this 3 day of October 2012



Head of Paid Service

Notes

A. Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

- (1) *Members are required to declare any disclosable pecuniary interests and unless you have obtained dispensation, cannot discuss or vote on the matter at the meeting and must also leave the room whilst the matter is being debated or voted on.*
- (2) *A Member has a disclosable pecuniary interest if it*
 - (a) *relates to you, or*
 - (b) *is an interest of -*
 - (i) *your spouse or civil partner; or*
 - (ii) *a person with whom you are living as husband and wife; or*
 - (iii) *a person with whom you are living as if you were civil partners*

and you are aware that the other person has the interest.
- (3) *Disclosable pecuniary interests includes -*
 - (a) *any employment or profession carried out for profit or gain;*
 - (b) *any financial benefit received by the Member in respect of expenses incurred carrying out his or her duties as a Member (except from the Council);*
 - (c) *any current contracts with the Council;*
 - (d) *any beneficial interest in land/property within the Council's area;*
 - (e) *any licence for a month or longer to occupy land in the Council's area;*
 - (f) *any tenancy where the Council is landlord and the Member (or person in (2)(b) above) has a beneficial interest; or*
 - (g) *a beneficial interest (above the specified level) in the shares of any body which has a place of business or land in the Council's area.*

B. Other Interests

- (4) *If a Member has a non-disclosable pecuniary interest or a non-pecuniary interest then you are required to declare that interest, but may remain to discuss and vote.*
- (5) *A Member has a non-disclosable pecuniary interest or a non-pecuniary interest where -*
 - (a) *a decision in relation to the business being considered might reasonably be regarded as affecting the well-being or financial standing of you or a member of your family or a person with whom you have a close*

association to a greater extent than it would affect the majority of the council tax payers, rate payers or inhabitants of the ward or electoral area for which you have been elected or otherwise of the authority's administrative area, or
(b) it relates to or is likely to affect any of the descriptions referred to above, but in respect of a member of your family (other than specified in (2)(b) above) or a person with whom you have a close association

and that interest is not a disclosable pecuniary interest.

Please contact 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.

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Agenda Item 2

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the HINCHINGBROOKE COUNTRY PARK JOINT GROUP held in The Wren Room, Countryside Centre, Hinchingsbrooke Country Park on Friday, 30 March 2012.

PRESENT: Councillor M G Baker – Chairman.
Councillors Mrs M Banerjee, Mrs L Kadic and R J West.

APOLOGY: An Apology for absence from the meeting was submitted on behalf of Councillor N J Guyatt.

IN ATTENDANCE: Miss H Ali, Mrs J Arnold and Mr J Craig.

9. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 14th October 2011 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

10. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations of interest were received.

11. SENIOR RANGER'S REPORT

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

(a) Staffing

Members were advised that following a recent restructure of the Council's Operations Division, Mr J Craig, Green Spaces Manager would be responsible overall for Countryside Services. It is intended that structural changes would now be made to the Countryside Service, with a review of all job roles and responsibilities currently being undertaken. Whilst it was reported that the restructure might result in redundancies, assurances were delivered that efforts would be made to ensure that this was the last option available. At the request of the Chairman, Mr J Craig undertook to keep the Group informed of any developments and reported that he had initiated discussions with County Council Officers to consider the review of the service.

(b) Volunteers

In noting that 674 volunteers had presented themselves at the Countryside Centre between September 2011 and March 2012 inclusive, the Group were encouraged to learn the value of the contributions received from volunteers across the whole of Countryside Services as being £205,000 for the first three

quarters of the financial year. The Senior Ranger reported that she was yet to re-calculate these figures to take into account the number of volunteers assisting the service over the final quarter.

(c) Countryside Centre

Details of the number of users of the Countryside Centre for the period September 2011 to February 2012 compared to previous years were presented. Income from the Centre was reported as being low when compared to the previous year's figures. The Senior Ranger reported that this was attributable to users reducing their expenditure on hospitality offered by the Countryside Centre.

(d) Café

In noting that expenditure on café employees had significantly been reduced from £110,000 to £50,000 over previous years, the Group were pleased to note that £110,000 in income from the Café had been generated over the 2011/12 financial year. Members were advised that Café income was heavily reliant on the weather, however there have been occasions where up to £1,000 in income had been generated on a single day. Members have placed on record their concern over the impact the long term absence of a café employee is having upon the Country Park, given the fact that the Senior Ranger is currently providing cover in the Café. In response, it was confirmed that options for voluntary and external support were currently being explored.

(e) Events and Activities

The Senior Ranger informed the Group of the various events and activities that had been held since the last meeting. The production of an Events Leaflet is now being undertaken by Rangers, resulting in a saving of approximately £5,000 - £6,000 per annum. Members were encouraged to note the turnout for the Sport Relief Mile event which had attracted 485 participants on the day.

(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 work undertaken at Holt Island, a significant proportion of which had been undertaken by volunteers.

(g) Park Management

The Senior Ranger informed the Group of the various work undertaken at the Country Park which included tree surveys, hedge planting, completion of the bird hide, installation of play equipment for younger children, relocation of gym equipment together with hay cutting around the lake and the redecoration of the toilets in the Visitor Centre.

(h) Friends of Hinchingsbrooke Country Park

It was reported that the Friends of Hinchingsbrooke Park had raised £280 from their Christmas Shopping Day event.

The Senior Ranger drew Members' attention to the receipt of £9,000 Lotto Grant from the Hunts Bee Association which would be utilised to erect a bee shed within the Country Park. This would be used primarily for educational purposes. Further opportunities such as running training courses for potential bee keepers and the sale of honey would arise as a result of this project.

Members also noted the fundraising efforts of the Friends of Paxton Pits Nature Reserve who had donated a sum of £20,000 to the Park for works to the site.

(i) Budget

The Group noted the impact of recent budget cuts upon the Countryside Service. Having had their attention drawn to the financial information for County Park, Members noted that an income budget of £198,000 for the 2012/13 financial year had been set. It was confirmed to Members that this would be an achievable target. Other matters that were discussed included the Repairs and Renewals Fund and the budget line referring to Supplies and Services.

At the conclusion of their discussions, the Group thanked the Senior Ranger for delivering a comprehensive report.

12. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Councillor R J West drew the Group's attention to the fact that the Chairman had recently received an MBE Award. In so doing, the Group placed on record their congratulations to Councillor M G Baker for his longstanding commitment to the local community.

In response to questions, it was confirmed that the Countryside Service reported to the District Council's Executive Members for Environment and Healthy and Active Communities. Dependent upon the subject matter in question, the Portfolio Holders were accountable to the Overview and Scrutiny Panels (Economic Well-Being) and (Social Well-Being).

Other matters that were discussed included the Green Corridor between St Neots and Earith, a scheme that was being pursued as part of Ouse Valley Way and the Great Fen Project. Additionally, the Group welcomed the work undertaken at Godmanchester Nursery which had been funded by Urban and Civic.

Councillor Mrs L Kadic offered her assistance to the Senior Ranger in generating third party funding for projects for the Country Park.

In discussing the forthcoming restructure of Countryside Services, Mr J Craig reported that it was likely that post titles would be changed as a result of the review.

13. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the next meeting would be held on Friday, 12th October 2012.

Chairman

SENIOR RANGER'S REPORT FOR April 2012 to September 2012 **Agenda Item 6**

STAFFING

Staffing structure for Greenspaces is still not resolved although progress has been made and suggestions put forward. 1 full-time and 1 part-time appointments to the Green spaces team (replacing staff who have recently moved away.) Countryside has seen no changes.

VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers: April to Sept inclusive: 900 practical working days at HCP alone including 7 school work experience students, one long term student from Shuttleworth and one from Bournemouth university studying for a degree in applied biology and wildlife conservation.

The café has 2 regular volunteers and DofE students help each Sunday

COUNTRYSIDE CENTRE

Working figures regarding number of groups/people from beginning April to end September 2012 was as follows:

	Groups	Number of People (includes school children)	Number of schools
01/04/07 - 30/09/07	181 £20311	4334	30 £4095
01/04/08 - 30/09/08	197 £20346	5679	39 £5377
01/04/09 - 30/09/09	188 £17859	4690	17 £2844
01/04/10- 30/09/10	187 £16260	5107	30 £4012
01/04/11 – 30/09/2011	159 £20,258	5273	23 £4985
01/04/11 – 30/09/2012	120 £17513	4747	16 £3326

These included such groups as: our regular, repeat bookings from Early Years, Cambridge Advisory Service and new users Huntingdonshire Inter faith organisation as well as several private parties.

CAFÉ

With appalling weather between April and June, the cafe income was £10,000 less than the same period last year. The following months have been on a par, but again some days in the summer have been way below expectation, directly attributed to wet weather.

With just 2 permanent staff we then rely on casuals to keep costs down. This can add stress on days of sickness or holidays, and when there are buffets in the countryside centre.

Food prices have risen, yet the amount spent is roughly £2000 lower than this time last year. Roughly equivalent to 33% of the £10,000 as would be expected

Work is currently being undertaken to calculate the value of buffets being provided on site. It may be that a decision is made to stop providing them and outsource on behalf of countryside centre users, as previously happened.

FINANCIAL POSITION

The outturn for last year, and the controllable budget and forecast for the current year are:

	OUTTURN 2011/12 £000s	BUDGET 2012/13 £000s	FORECAST 2012/13 £000s
Hinchingbrooke Country Park			
Staff	129	129	132
Running Costs	34	43	43
Renewals Fund Contribution	10	10	10
Income	(32)	(30)	(29)
Total Country Park and Management	141	152	156
Countryside Centre			
Staff	74	75	75
Running Costs	4	7	5
Income	(49)	(47)	(47)
Total Countryside Centre	29	35	33
Cafe			
Staff	53	58	54
Running Costs	36	36	36
Income	(103)	(112)	(100)
Total Cafe	(14)	(18)	(10)
Total Hinchingbrooke Country Park	156	170	185

HDC budgets are prepared and monitored on a controllable cost basis. They do not include support costs (for example HR, Payroll, ICT, Finance etc) or capital charges. Last year these amounted to £50k.

Country Park and management income for 2011/12 includes £16k funding from the County Council for volunteer placements, £5k for work on Colne Graveyard, £4k for sales of souvenirs and £3k for commuted sums for maintenance. Sales of souvenirs are forecast to be £2k less in the current year due to the poor weather.

Country Park and management running costs for 2011/12 included a £4k under spend on transport and £2k on site work.

The budgeted surplus for the cafe has proved to be an overly ambitious target. The budgeted surplus has been reduced from £34k to £17k by transfer of savings from elsewhere in the Green Spaces budget. However, in addition to being an attraction to visitors, the surplus still represents a financial contribution to the overall expenditure of the Country Park.

The forecast reduction in the Cafe surplus reflects the impact of the poor weather.

The original objectives of the Countryside Centre were educational research and visits. However, over 60% of the Centre's expenditure is funded through income generation.

Business Rates of £2k each year are no longer payable on the Countryside Centre as it has been taken out of rating.

From 2013/14 onwards HDC's medium term plan assumes a further £50k a year saving on Countryside overall. How and if this should be done is under review.

EVENTS & ACTIVITIES

- Sports taster Day – 600 people had a go at many different sports and met people from the local sports clubs. A dry day meant an excellent turn out. The number of activities offered is growing each year. This event led to the busiest day ever in the cafe!
- Following a change of thought, a few additional events have been added compared to last year, and an internally produced activities leaflet has been produced. Free pond dipping and mini-beast hunting events have been very well received at HCP and countryside as a whole is beginning to get back “on the radar” as places to go when families are looking for activities.
- Some 917 pupils attended school visits at HCP organised by Rangers.
- The popular Santa’s Grotto is going to be 23rd December

WIDER DISTRICT

- Less input with the “in bloom” events this year, due to staff cuts and redistributing staff time. However winners within the district in which we have significant involvement included silver for Moor in Bloom, silver gilt St Ives, and gold for both Godmanchester and Huntingdon.
- Stukeley Meadows has had more input this year as we are no longer employing Wayside Wildlife due to budget cuts. The impact has been felt more this year with additional cutting and hedgerow work required.
- Colne graveyard continues to have regular work parties and recently Rangers have met some new volunteers keen to improve interpretation as well as help with mowing.

PARK MANAGEMENT

- Tree surveys & associated work
- Very large chestnut tree beside lake felled due to disease. Timber to be used in boiler
- CC has planned a new boiler which hopefully will prove to be more efficient and therefore reduce costs. Funded by HDC environment team who obtained a grant to forward energy savings around the district
- Snake pit has had major work party from MOD working on clearing the area and improving hedgerow
- 2 bike shelters have been erected thanks to a green transport grant

FRIENDS OF HINCHINGBROOKE COUNTRY PARK

- Two more Trampers been purchased with support from Huntingdon Freemans Charity
- Halloween disco on 27th October
- Christmas Shopping day is on November 22nd

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