

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the HINCHINGBROOKE COUNTRY PARK JOINT GROUP held in the Countryside Centre, Hinchingsbrooke Countryside Park on Friday, 11 October 2013.

PRESENT: Councillors M G Baker, Mrs M Banerjee and R J West.

APOLOGY: An apology for absence from the meeting was submitted on behalf of County Councillor Sir P Brown.

IN ATTENDANCE: Mrs J Arnold, Messrs J Craig, N Green and P Hobbs and Mrs H Taylor.

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 of the Joint Group held on 26th April 2013 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

3. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

4. APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED

that District Councillor R J West be appointed Vice-Chairman of the Joint Group for the ensuing Municipal Year.

5. MEMBERSHIP OF THE GROUP

The membership of the Hinchingsbrooke Country Park Joint Group for 2013/14 was noted as follows:-

(a) **Cambridgeshire County Council**

Councillor Sir P Brown.

(b) **Huntingdonshire District Council**

Councillors M G Baker, Mrs M Banerjee, R B Howe and R J West.

6. SENIOR RANGER'S REPORT

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

(a) Staffing

Members were advised that Nick Atkins, full time Café Assistant, had left at the end of September. The position had been advertised and interviews would be taking place soon.

(b) Volunteers

The Group noted that the number of volunteer days worked currently stood at 683, providing 4098 hours of work.

(c) Countryside Centre

Details of the number of users of the Countryside Centre for the period April to September 2013 compared to the 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 by hiring out the facilities for half days and not ordering any lunches. However, Members were encouraged that the number of schools using the Centre had increased.

(d) Café

Members noted that although the Café had seen an increase in income over the summer, the target surplus of £19,000 was unlikely to be met. The Accountant explained that officers would be reviewing the Countryside budgets to ensure targets are challenging but also realistic.

The Green Spaces Manager reported that the management of the Café had been included in a review of the Council's catering services, alongside the café and hospitality services at the Leisure Centres and Pathfinder House. As a result of which, a suggestion to contract out the operation of the catering service was agreed. Members were advised that contractors would be invited through the tender process to bid for either all the services, a combination or alternatively just the service that they specialised in.

In the discussions that ensued, Members raised concerns that they had not been involved in the process and stressed that the café was working well. Furthermore, Members felt that any change in management could potential lower the current standard of service and result in an increase in prices. A suggestion was made that all the Council's catering services should work together to obtain the best price possible for supplies.

In response to Members' concerns, the Accountant reported that the tendering process would be required to follow the Council's Codes of Financial Management and Procurement.

Having suggested that the process was a market testing exercise, the Services Development Manager for the Operations Division agreed to circulate to the Group a briefing paper on the proposals.

(e) Events and Activities

The Senior Ranger informed the Group of the various events and activities that had been held since the last meeting. Members noted that the Summer Events Programme had promoted 27 events, attracting 1410 attendees.

(f) Park Management

The Senior Ranger informed the Group of the various work being undertaken at the Country Park, including repairs to the path around the lake after the winter and the installation of a 40ft container for the adapted bicycles project.

(g) Friends of Hinchingsbrooke Country Park

It was reported that since the last meeting, 5 new tables for the café and an adapted bicycle had been donated by the Friends of Hinchingsbrooke Country Park.

(h) Financial Position

Members noted the outturn figures for 2012/13 and the anticipated budget variations in the current year. The Countryside Accountant referred to the efforts of staff to reduce the Park's expenditure which was forecast to be £14,000 higher than the budgeted figures

7. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Group noted that their next meeting would be held on Friday, 21st March 2014.

Chairman