

A meeting of the **HINCHINGBROOKE COUNTRY PARK JOINT GROUP** will be held in the **WREN ROOM, COUNTRYSIDE CENTRE, HINCHINGBROOKE COUNTRY PARK, BRAMPTON ROAD, HUNTINGDON, PE29 6DB** on **THURSDAY, 4 APRIL 2019** at **3:00 PM** and you are requested to attend for the transaction of the following business:-

**Contact
(01480)**

APOLOGIES

1. MINUTES (Pages 5 - 10)

To approve as a correct record the Minutes of the meeting held on 12th October 2018.

**Democratic Services
388169**

2. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

To receive from Members declarations as to disclosable pecuniary and other interests in relation to any Agenda item.

3. SENIOR RANGER'S REPORT (Pages 11 - 18)

To receive a report by the Senior Ranger on park activities for the period October 2018 to March 2019.

**J Arnold
388666**

4. UPDATE ON STAFFING

To receive a verbal update from the Senior Ranger on staffing.

**J Arnold
388666**

5. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

To resolve:

that the press and public be excluded from the meeting because the business to be transacted contains information relating to the financial or business affairs of a particular person (including the authority holding that information).

6. UPDATE ON HINCHINGBROOKE COUNTRY PARK INVESTMENT AND LEASE

To receive an update on progress with the investment and lease at the Country Park.

**N Sloper
388635**

7. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

To note that the next meeting of the Hinchingsbrooke Park Joint Group will be held on 11th October 2019 at 10:00am.

Dated this 27 day of March 2019



Head of Paid Service

Notes

1. 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.*

Non-Statutory Disclosable Interests

- (4) *If a Member has a non-statutory disclosable interest then you are required to declare that interest, but may remain to discuss and vote providing you do not breach the overall Nolan principles.*
- (5) *A Member has a non-statutory disclosable 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 a disclosable pecuniary interest, 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, or*
 - (c) *it relates to or is likely to affect any body –*
 - (i) *exercising functions of a public nature; or*
 - (ii) *directed to charitable purposes; or*
 - (iii) *one of whose principal purposes includes the influence of public opinion or policy (including any political party or trade union) of which you are a Member or in a position of control or management.*

and that interest is not a disclosable pecuniary interest.

2. Filming, Photography and Recording at Council Meetings

The District Council supports the principles of openness and transparency in its decision making and permits filming, recording and the taking of photographs at its meetings that are open to the public. It also welcomes the use of social networking and micro-blogging websites (such as Twitter and Facebook) to communicate with people about what is happening at meetings. Arrangements for these activities should operate in accordance with guidelines agreed by the Council and available via the following link [filming, photography and recording at council meetings.pdf](#) or on request from the Democratic Services Team. The Council understands that some members of the public attending its meetings may not wish to be filmed. The Chairman of the meeting will facilitate this preference by ensuring that any such request not to be recorded is respected.

Please contact Habbiba Peacey, Democratic Services Officer, Tel No: 01480 388169 / email: Habbiba.Peacey@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 Group.

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 Elections & 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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HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the HINCHINGBROOKE COUNTRY PARK JOINT GROUP held in the Countryside Centre, Hinchingsbrooke Countryside Park on Friday, 12 October 2018.

PRESENT: District Councillors Costello, R J West,
D R Underwood, J M Palmer and
T D Sanderson.

County Councillor A Costello.

1. ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED

that District Councillor R J West be elected as the Chairman of the Hinchingsbrooke Country Park Joint Group for the remainder of the Municipal Year.

Councillor R J West in the Chair.

2. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 16th March 2018 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

3. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

There were no declarations of interest received from those Members that were present.

4. APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED

that District Councillor J M Palmer be appointed as the Vice-Chairman of the Hinchingsbrooke Country Park Joint Group for the remainder of the Municipal Year.

5. MEMBERSHIP OF THE GROUP

The Membership of the Hinchingsbrooke Country Park Joint Group for 2018/19 was noted as follows:

(a) Cambridgeshire County Council (appointment until 2021)

Councillor A Costello

(b) Huntingdonshire District Council

Councillors J M Palmer, T D Sanderson, R J West and D R Underwood.

6. SENIOR RANGER'S REPORT

In receiving and noting the contents of the Senior Ranger's report on park activities for the period February – September 2018, comment was made in relation as follows:

Staffing

There had been further reductions in staffing at the Park as one of the Rangers had resigned leaving Hinchingsbrooke Country Park in September.

There continued to be an Acting Senior Ranger who divided his time between the Park and Paxton Pits. However, it was noted that resources within Countryside Services had reduced and this was having an impact on service delivery. The hot weather had meant that frequent grass cutting had not been required.

In response to questions regarding maintenance of the pathways around the Park, it was explained that the Park was now in receipt of the sand required to remedy the paths around the lake. However, some paths required a long term solution, such as a boardwalk, which had significant cost implications.

Reference was made to Minute No.26 regarding the Timebank scheme launched in Godmanchester and the suggestion that it might be able to provide assistance to Godmanchester Nursery. However, the Group was advised that this had not been progressed due to sickness absences.

The Group were concerned to hear of the continued staff pressures and enquired of any plans to resolve the situation. It was explained that the consultant's report regarding the long term business plan for the Park had been awaited prior to recruitment to ensure that the future staffing structure was sustainable, to progress the aspirations for the Park. The advertisement of two Ranger posts would imminently be presented for approval to the Senior Leadership Team.

There had also been staffing issues in the Café, following the resignation of the Supervisor. This had now been resolved.

Despite a reduction in staff resources, it was agreed that the Park was being maintained to a high standard, which the Group commended. However, it was important that staff were able to take annual leave, which was currently proving difficult. In response it was explained that there had been some delay regarding the item due to be presented to the Cabinet for determination regarding the long term plan for the Park, the reasons for which were explained. The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Customers and Partnerships) had previously received a presentation on the outline business case.

It was accepted that the Business Plan was being established for the future of the Park but until it reached fruition it was enquired whether there were any interim plans to address the staffing issues. It was explained that existing staff were accommodating the staff shortages,

which was not sustainable. The full business plan would include financial implications and be incorporated within the 2019/2020 budget.

Volunteers

Given the current staffing levels, the Park was unfortunately unable to accept any further volunteers. It was however noted that volunteers had worked 421 days over the previous 6 months.

The assistance provided by the volunteers was invaluable particularly that of the Green Team who were able to work without supervision, which was vital given the lack of staff.

Park Management

In noting the continued high standard of service and maintenance in the Park the Group commended the achievement of the Green Flag award and the Tripadvisor Certificate of Excellence for the consistent high ratings from visitors, as well as being the host for the judging day for the 'In Bloom' competition, for which Huntingdon was awarded gold.

Friends of Hinchingsbrooke Country Park

Following the resignation of a number of Committee Members one of the Huntingdon Parkrun organisers had joined the Committee.

The Friends had agreed to act as receiver of money donated by other groups. Parkrun had successfully received £1200 to replace some bins and the Canoe Club had applied for money to repair their porta cabin. These groups continued to assist with practical tasks such as the non-slip surface on Trolls Bridge.

Café

As previously advised a newly appointed Café Supervisor was now in post and staff levels were returning to an acceptable level following a number of staff leaving for university. This was something which the Park experienced and planned for every September.

It was noted that the Business Plan for the Park also incorporated future plans for the Café.

An apprenticeship role in the Café was being considered which would include responsibility for the management of refreshment bookings within the Countryside Centre.

Events, Activities and Promotions

An Emergency Services Day was held at the Park on Sunday 17 August 2018 which had evolved following conversations between Park staff and the emergency services as a result of an incident within the Park earlier in the year.

The event had been hugely successful with over 3000 visitors. The event had significant financial implications for those attending, yet due

to its success the Police had already confirmed attendance at any future events. The fire service had been requested to attend an incident on the day and returned to the event, which was unusual and was another example of how successful the day had been.

The Countryside Support Worker and Café Assistant who were instrumental in organising the event were acknowledged by the Group.

As a result relationships had been formed with Hinchingsbrooke Hospital who now allowed the Park to use the hospital car park for functions.

A similar event next year was being considered which would be an opportune time to celebrate the Parks 30th year. It was requested that the Chairman of Council should be formally invited to any such event.

As Chairman of Disability Huntingdonshire, Cllr Underwood, noted that the Charity recognised the facilities available at the Park for disabled people and also suggested that as the majority of the Park was wheelchair accessible the Park should consider featuring on a website called 'Walks with Wheelchairs' which was a resource of accessible walks throughout the UK. It was noted that there were aspirations to further develop accessible facilities at the Park.

Financial Position

Members' attention was drawn to the financial position of the Park. It was noted that the 2018/19 forecast budget included figures for September.

It was explained that variances in both the 2017/18 Outturn Budget and 2018/19 Budget was as a result of the reduction in Section 106 contributions, which although the reduced figure was predicted last year, the bid to remove this from the budget was rejected.

The Group requested that details of Section 106 contributions be circulated amongst the Group.

Whereupon it was requested:

that an update regarding staff and progress with the long term Business Plan for the Park be presented to the next meeting.

7. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Group noted that their next meeting would be held on 15th March 2019 at 10am.

8. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED:

that the press and public be excluded from the meeting because the business to be transacted contains information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

**9. VERBAL UPDATE ON HINCHINGBROOKE COUNTRY PARK
LONG TERM BUSINESS PLAN**

In addition to the information already discussed within Minute No. 33, the Hinchingsbrooke Country Park Joint Group were provided with a verbal update as to progress and aspirations contained within the long term Business Plan for the Park.

10. DEMOCRATIC SERVICES OFFICER

In concluding the meeting the Chairman informed the Group that it was the last meeting that Melanie Stimpson would attend as she was due to leave the Council's employment at the end of October.

On behalf of the Group, the Chairman expressed appreciation to Ms Stimpson for her support and contribution to the Group and wished the very best in her new role.

Chairman

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Senior Ranger's Report

October 2018 to March 2019

The winter of 2019 has been a very good winter for the Rangers. The first half the winter saw a lot of the annual management jobs being undertaken. A bit of a restructure of the habitat management by the Senior Ranger meant that some jobs which have traditionally been undertaken in the later part of Winter were done in October and November, leaving the Rangers with more time to undertake the smaller jobs in early 2019.

Work undertaken as part of the annual management of the site includes:

- Felling a section of the new plantation – this annual job took the Rangers just 2 days to complete. Enough trees were felled to heat the Countryside Centre for a year, with enough surplus to continue exploring the possibility of generating income from log sales and charcoal production.
- Removal of Alder regrowth between the wildlife lake and the wash – this alder copse naturally encroaches more every year, meaning the site loses valuable wet grassland habitat. The Rangers removed a large section of it meaning this job won't have to be done again for at least another 2 years
- Removal of scrub in the old Llama paddock – these fields are managed as part of the Service's Higher Level Stewardship programme and were in a declining state. The removal of encroaching scrub and bramble means HDC can maximise the grant contribution for this area.
- Management of the 2 balancing ponds on site – both the Christie Drive and Dartmoor Drive ponds have had their annual cut. This not only keeps both areas looking presentable to the public but also maximises wildlife potential.
- The Green Team from Huntingdon Regional College have spent a lot of time managing the park's Golden Osier beds for willow production. Much of this material was used as part of the Santa's Grotto event, which was a huge success for the service.
- A new group called Fireflies Forest School started using the park in Feb 2018 to run Forest School Sessions for young children throughout term time. These sessions are run on a Friday morning and will run in blocks of 6 weeks. It is hoped that there will also be extra sessions run for older children in school holidays.

In the coming month the Rangers will be:

- Extending the jetty on the main lake to enable wheelchair users to access sailing dinghies.

- Replacing 3 existing dog bins which are in a poor state for new litter bins. This has been grant funded by Leeds Building Society via FHCP and Parkrun.
- Installing an anti-slip surface on the Troll's Bridge to maximise safety for the park's visitors. Again, funded by Leeds Building Society via FHCP and Parkrun.
- Process this year's timber produce. The Ranger's will split and stack a majority of the produce but will leave some unsplit to cater for the market of people who are happy to buy it unprocessed and split it themselves at home.
- The fortnightly cutting of the short grass areas in the park will begin shortly to maintain a good appearance throughout the summer months.

Volunteer Activity

The volunteer numbers on site have, again, been steady at around 70 days a month for the last 6 months. The Rangers regularly get up to 9 on a Wednesday work party, and 8 on a Thursday. There is still scope to increase these numbers of practical volunteers in the coming months under the new Senior Ranger.

The number of event volunteers is growing with a keen number of people regularly helping with breakfasts. All the Christmas events were only possible with the help from these people. This is a growing team and attracting a totally different type of person.

The Green Team from Huntingdon Regional College have held a steady presence on site. They have had their own staffing issues which have meant their numbers have been reduced; nevertheless, they have still been vital to the park's management.

The Rangers and Countryside Centre staff hosted a Christmas lunch for all the Volunteers at the end of December. This gesture was widely appreciated by all and is a vital way of keeping volunteers happy with their experience, and keeps them coming back again. The country park would not look as good without their input and now with a steady staff team the supervision will be in place again to increase the amount of work that can be undertaken.

Countryside Centre

	Occupancy	Bookings	Revenue from room hire
Oct – Mar 2017/2018	5220	160	£11,244.75
Oct – Mar 2018/2019	5569	167	£14,433.75

- Larger groups booking for longer meetings
- Weekly bookings produce a regular source of income

- Evening and weekend bookings have increased. Some weeks the building is used four evenings a week. This does have a staffing implication but is manageable through flexible working patterns

Income comparison over financial years

	Room hire
April – March 2017/2018	£20,943.08
April – March 2018/2019	£27,202.25
April – March 2019/2020	£14,362.25 potential revenue for confirmed bookings so far

User demographic

We have a consistent number of groups who rebook every year: Probation Service; Alzheimer’s Society; Parkinson’s Society; HBKA; BRJ Run & Tri; Carer’s Trust to name a few.

2018-19 has seen the continuation of regular evening bookings The Dog’s Trust every Wednesday evening throughout the year £3600 per year. Huntingdonshire Youth Theatre every Tuesday evening in term time and generates a yearly revenue of £2000.00, plus revenue from performances.

EVENTS, ACTIVITIES and PROMOTIONS

The country park hosted more events over the Christmas period than it has for quite a few years.

Christmas Fair in November generated about £450.00 in revenue.

Overall, Christmas events generated £4246.00, with a profit of £3200.00. The amount of publicity via Facebook, goodwill and the comments in person cannot be quantified but other than income, we have gained more volunteers and users.

Santa’s Grotto proved a very successful weekend. Volunteers and rangers created the grotto inside the Countryside Centre and activities for young people whilst they waited in the warm were provided. 183 tickets sold online and 70 on the door and generated an income of £3255.00.

Initial outlays such as Elf and Santa costumes, snow and fog machines, presents for children, PRS music licence and lights so the spend was about £1000.00. However, it is expected that next year’s expenditure will be a lot less as we now have everything required for making the grotto a great experience. We have also had a provisional booking for one day of the grotto in 2019 for a corporate day, so this will be guaranteed income

We also had a Breakfast with Santa event which generated £610.00 and Hot Chocolate with Santa £381.00.

New Year's Breakfast continued as last year but were not as popular. After evaluating the event, it was identified that when New Year's Eve and Day fall in the year has a significant impact: this year it was a Monday and Tuesday rather than a weekend. £820.00 revenue was generated from this event.

Facebook feedback



Facebook

Our Facebook page continues to be a great resource for promoting the park, as well as all the events and activities that take place. We currently have 5265 followers. As such we can put on extra events at short notice and know the word will be circulated.

<https://www.facebook.com/hinchingbrookecountrypark>

Events 2019

We have planned a solid calendar of events for 2019, with the Country Park's 30th Anniversary celebrations over the summer being the largest. This will run over a week and weekend in August and will involve stakeholders and lots of activities, stalls, exhibits to attract visitors. Rangers will be running some children's activities, the first of which was den-building on 21 February. Allocated and bookable timeslots for activities seem to work well and create income whilst using resources efficiently. Two hours of ranger time can generate £240.00. The Grotto will run over four days rather than two to maximise revenue for the effort of creating the setting. We have 6 people again volunteering to be Father Christmas and 3 to be Mother Christmas making this a very practical and sustainable event.

<http://www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk/media/3768/events-at-hinchingbrooke-park-2019.pdf>

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HINCHINGBROOKE COUNTRY PARK 2017/18 OUTTURN AND 2018/19 BUDGET AND FORECAST
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	2017/18 Outturn			2018/19 Forecast		
	Budget	Actual	Variance	Budget	Forecast	Variance
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Hinchingbrooke Country Park and Management						
Staff	102	87	-15	102	73	-29
Running Costs	21	34	13	23	57	34
Income	-53	-28	25	-47	-20	27
Total	70	93	23	78	110	32
Countryside Centre						
Staff	43	29	-14	45	35	-10
Running Costs	17	10	-7	18	14	-4
Income	-41	-39	2	-41	-46	-5
Total	19	0	-19	22	3	-19
Café						
Staff	57	69	12	58	67	9
Running Costs	60	63	3	65	66	1
Income	-143	-152	-9	-155	-155	0
Total	-26	-20	6	-32	-22	10
Total Hinchingbrooke Country Park	63	73	10	68	91	23

Comments on Variances

The 2017/18 actual variation is mainly due to Commuted Sums income. There was an expectation of £32,000, however, the calculation released only £4,000. Due to Commuted Sums coming to the end of their life.

For the current year 2018/19, the budgeted commuted sums income is down as expected, we currently expect only £4,000 and not £32,000 to be drawn from reserves, this will reduce the overspend. Although the reduced commuted sums figure was predicted last year, the bid to remove this from the budget was rejected.

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