

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 **FRIDAY, 11 OCTOBER 2019** at **10:00 AM** and you are requested to attend for the transaction of the following business:-

AGENDA

APOLOGIES

1. ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

To elect a Chairman of the Hinchingsbrooke Country Park Joint Group for the remainder of the Municipal Year.

2. MINUTES (Pages 5 - 8)

To approve as a correct record the Minutes of the meeting held on 4th April 2019.

Contact Officer: H Peacey - (01480) 388007

3. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

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

Contact Officer: Democratic Services - (01480) 388169

4. APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

To appoint a Vice-Chairman of the Hinchingsbrooke Country Park Joint Group for the remainder of the Municipal Year.

5. MEMBERSHIP OF THE GROUP

To note the Membership of the Group for 2019/20 as follows:

(a) Cambridgeshire County Council (appointment until 2021)

Councillor Ms A Costello.

(b) Huntingdonshire District Council

Councillors J M Palmer, T D Sanderson, R J West and Mrs S R Wilson.

Contact Officer: Democratic Services - (01480) 388169

6. SENIOR RANGER'S REPORT (Pages 9 - 14)

To receive a report by the Senior Ranger on park activities for the period March – September 2019.

Contact Officer: M McGettigan - (01480) 388666

7. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

To note that the next meeting of the Hinchingsbrooke Park Joint Group will be held on 13th March 2020 at 10:00am.

Contact Officer: Democratic Services - (01480) 388169

2 day of October 2019



Head of Paid Service

Disclosable Pecuniary Interests and Non-Statutory Disclosable Interests

Further information on [Disclosable Pecuniary Interests and Non - Statutory Disclosable Interests is available in the Council's Constitution](#)

Filming, Photography and Recording at Council Meetings

The District Council 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.

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](#).

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 Wren Room, Countryside Centre, Hinchingsbrooke Country Park, Brampton Road, Huntingdon, PE29 6DB on Thursday, 4 April 2019

PRESENT: Councillor R J West – Chairman.

Councillors Mrs A Costello, J M Palmer and T D Sanderson.

APOLOGY: An Apology for absence from the meeting was submitted on behalf of Councillor D R Underwood.

11 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 12th October 2018 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

In response to a query raised by the Chairman, Councillor T D Sanderson undertook to circulate information he had received detailing Section 106 contributions around to the Group.

12 MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

13 SENIOR RANGER'S REPORT

The Group received and noted the contents of the Senior Ranger's report (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) on park activities for the period October 2018 to March 2019. In doing so, comment was made as follows:

Park Management

The Group were encouraged to note the range of work being undertaken as part of the annual management of the site which included tree felling, removal of alder regrowth between the wildlife lake and the wash, removal of scrub in the old llama paddock, management of the two balancing ponds and maintenance of the golden osier beds.

Planned works for the coming months included an extension of the jetty on the main lake, replacement of three existing dog bins, installing an anti-slip surface on the Troll's Bridge, processing this year's timber produce and commencement of the fortnightly cutting of the short grass areas in the Park. Some these works had already been completed.

Additionally, it was noted that weekly bookings were now being taken for the Fireflies Forest School which was proving popular.

Comment was made by a Member that a more robust solution was required for the maintenance of the footpath around the lake which was noted by Officers.

Volunteers

Volunteers continue to be vital to the Park's management particularly Huntingdonshire Regional College's Green Team. In recognition of their efforts and assistance, staff hosted a Christmas Lunch for all volunteers at the end of December 2018 which was appreciated by all.

With a newly appointed Senior Ranger in post, efforts would be made over the coming months to increase the number of practical volunteers.

Countryside Centre

Attention was drawn to occupancy levels, the number of bookings taken and the revenue generated at the Countryside Centre between October 2018 and March 2019. The figures reflected an increase when compared to the same period the previous year which was encouraging to note. Evening and weekend bookings have increased and have been managed successfully owing to the flexibility of staff.

In noting the potential revenue anticipated in the current financial year, the Countryside Manager reported that the figure related to confirmed bookings made to date and that income levels would increase over the course of the year.

Events, Activities and Promotions

Events which had taken place over the reporting period included a Christmas Fair, Santa's Grotto, breakfast/hot chocolate with Santa and a New Year's breakfast. Whilst each of the events had proved a success in terms of attendance and income, it was noted that the New Year's breakfast event would, in future, be held at the weekend instead of mid-week to increase attendance levels.

Prior to the commencement of the meeting, the Countryside Manager tabled pictures of the Santa's Grotto event which had generated £3,255 income. The event would be extended to four days in December 2019 with a view to maximising income generation opportunities. Social media, in particular Facebook, had played a significant part in promoting the event with a number of commendations having been received from attendees.

Members were pleased to note that the Country Park's Facebook page had now reached 5,500 followers. Consideration was currently being given to setting up an Instagram account.

Hinchingsbrooke Country Park 30th Anniversary Celebrations

To mark the Park's 30th Anniversary, a week long programme of activities would be held in August 2019 involving stakeholders, stalls and exhibitions.

Friends of Hinchingsbrooke Country Park

The Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the Country Park would be held on Thursday 2nd May. Having worked at the Park for 29 years the Countryside Manager had been invited to attend as the guest speaker to talk about the Park's 30th Anniversary Celebrations.

Financial Position

Members' attention was drawn to the financial position of the Park. Having had their attention drawn to the variances, it was explained that this was largely a result of low levels of budgeted income expected from commuted sums. The full impact upon this year's budget would not be known until the end of December 2019. The Head of Operations advised that he would take this away as an action and investigate the matter further.

A brief discussion ensued on S106 funding. It was not yet known if all S106 funds had been expended.

14 UPDATE ON STAFFING

The Countryside Manager delivered an update on the latest position with staffing across the Countryside Service.

The Group were encouraged to note that a new Senior Ranger for the Country Park had been appointed. M McGettigan took up his new post on 1st March 2019 with responsibility overall for the Country Park, Spring Common, Views Common, Stukeley Meadows and Colne Graveyard. Volunteers for the Countryside Centre and the café would both be welcome to enable the service to continue offering additional activities. One of the younger paid holiday/weekend staff in the café is about to undertake training on a formally recognised apprentice course.

M Hall had commenced his role as Senior Ranger for Paxton Pitts from 1st April 2019 having transferred from the Country Park. Responsibilities included Barford Road, Sudbury Meadows, Mill Common and the sites located in St Ives.

Attention was drawn to the part vacant post of Countryside Development Ranger which would be advertised shortly. The Group were informed that the job description for this post was in the process of being reviewed for an 18 month period to incorporate responsibility for managing the voluntary wardens at Paxton Pitts.

Discussion took place on the volunteers which included how they were recruited, their skills set and the significant value they offered to the service.

15 EXCLUSION OF 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).

16 UPDATE ON HINCHINGBROOKE COUNTRY PARK INVESTMENT AND LEASE

The Head of Operations delivered an update on the Park's future investment and lease and responded to questions raised by the Group.

17 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Group noted that their next meeting would be held on 11th October 2019 at 10:00am.

Chairman

Senior Ranger's Report

March – September 2019

Matthew M^cGettigan

STAFFING

One senior Ranger and 2 Rangers are based at Hinchingsbrooke with each working one weekend in three. The staff member at the nursery has been ill since the end of August so one of the three Hinchingsbrooke Rangers is covering 2 days a week at the nursery which limits how much the three can physically work together as a team

In the café there has been an unusually high turn-over of staff as 3 have left for university and the other supervisor resigned for personal reasons. It has been hard to recruit to the role this year.

The café supervisor has taken additional responsibility for managing events and her café time is being back filled where possible. Some younger staff have been unreliable and inefficient, so we are looking at ways to incentivise young staff to remain hard working, reliable and interested through additional responsibilities.

VOLUNTEERS

Weekly work-parties have continued and numbers seem buoyant. The summer volunteer's thank you evening proved popular with positive feedback written about working as a volunteer. The Green Team volunteers have been off site for the holidays but are expected back in October.

HINCHINGBROOKE COUNTRY PARK MANAGEMENT

Rangers and Volunteers have made good progress on a range of jobs as well as accommodating the visitors during the summer months. Only 2 work-parties were cancelled due to extreme heat. We have received a special recognition for our bio-diversity work through Anglia in Bloom which is recognition for the dedication of the team.

Despite the extremely variable summer weather the following tasks have been successfully completed:

- Install new bins, paid for with a grant obtained by park run.
- Installing an anti-slip surface on the new jetty.
- Maintenance of memorial trees – putting bark chip around base and removal of tight decorations that may damage the trees.
- Bench maintenance – sanding down, re-staining and noting asset detail ready for the introduction of the Alloy monitoring system
- Repainting and re-staining park signage, prior to any development and renewal of interpretation.
- Supporting larger public events (such as the 30th Birthday celebrations).
- Repairs to path surfaces.
- Mowing and brush cutting around paths and park furniture.
- Removal of invasive trees from wildflower meadows.
- Cutting back overgrowing vegetation from paths.
- Cutting wildflower meadows.

We have changed the mowing regime and cut the meadows later to provide better habitat for invertebrates, more time for wildflowers to seed, and a more beautiful visual landscape for visitors.

Looking forward we intend to carry out the following tasks over the winter months

- Continue to cut wildflower meadows and create habitat piles/hibernacula with the arisings.
- Process the wood felled from the Plantation last year for use in Countryside Centre
- Surface the path on the top bridle ride in Bob's Wood to discourage trampling of the area.
- Open glades in woodland to create varied woodland structure and encourage woodland flowers along the ride.
- Fell this year's section of the plantation and create a dead-hedge with the brash to protect the coppice stools and improve rates of regeneration.

COMMUNITY GROUPS

We have continued to work closely with a number of community groups including:

- **Fireflies Forest School** - The Manager is now a committee member of the Friends of Hinchingsbrooke Country Park and is keen to work with the Rangers to vary the provision of Environmental Education at the site.
- **Park Run** – approximately 450 participants each Saturday
- **Huntingdonshire Bee Keepers Association** had a number of organised and spontaneous visitors to the apiary, assisted with school visits in collaboration with the Rangers and hosted the judges for Huntingdon in Bloom.
The honey has all been extracted and is on sale in the café – May is the most popular time for purchases to ward off the effects of hay fever.
- **Leonbergers Club** - Water training has continued throughout the summer.

SATELLITE SITES

- Views Common, Stukeley Meadows and Spring Common are inspected and litter picked weekly.
- Practical work is carried out by rangers and work parties but some of the mowing is undertaken by Grounds Maintenance.
- The hay at Spring Common was again cut by contractors in July as this complies with the requirements of HLS (Higher Level Stewardship) The wildflower meadow areas on these sites are now being cut.

CAFÉ

Over the first two quarters approximately 70% of the budgeted income of £155,000 has been achieved.

Purchased items are now rigorously sourced from two main suppliers with costs being negotiated and monitored. At the end of March it will be possible to identify whether the profit margin has increased based on this huge shift in supplier management.

Staff costs remain one of the key issues in returning greater profits. These are inevitably higher in the summer with more staff being needed on busy days and weekends.

Income across the café counter:

	2017 - 2018	2018 - 2019	2019 2020
Quarter 1 April - June	£55,681	£45,005	£53,687
Quarter 2 July – September	£52,600	£51,962	£56,149*
Quarter 3 October – December	£33,364	£38,896	
Quarter 4 January - March	£28,249	£43,749	
Total	£169,896	£179,612	£109,836*

▪ to 15/09/2019

New developments:

- Coca Cola provided new drinks fridge, two mobile fridges, merchandising and 10 parasols/stands. This is all free of charge but has improved the look of equipment
- New staff uniform
- Staffing is much tighter with daily judgement of weather/how busy park. Staff are told not to come in or go home if not required.
- Water boiler and washing machine have been replaced
- The café needs repainting– Teresa has negotiated payment of materials by FHCP. The volunteers will help to decorate the café.

EVENTS, ACTIVITIES and PROMOTIONS

- **Father's Day BBQ** – was another sell out with 67 people attending and arevenue of £650. Expenditure on food was £150
- **Robin Hood** –popular despite inclement (wet) weather and with such positive feedback we are repeating it in June 2020 . The interactive trail with Robin Hood characters in the forest was original and successful. We also had archery on the field and various other activities. £600. We arranged an outdoor, evening showing of Disney's Robin Hood
- **30th Birthday** – Activity week at the beginning of August generated publicity for the main celebrations over bank holiday weekend - approx. 3,500 thousand attended.

Temperatures exceeded 30° C so numbers were down compared to Emergency Services Day in 2018 and people didn't stay as long as expected. The event included a variety of demonstrations, stalls and activities.

Rangers and volunteers managed car parking and worked with the hospital to provide overflow facilities. This meant there were no complaints from the local housing estates. Revenue was generated through stalls, advertising and the café

- [Facebook](#) continues to be our most successful form of advertising with a following of 6220 May's count of 5500.
- Google shows 1425 visits to the website in August, of which 1186 asked for directions and 57 phoned

Looking forward:

to build on the success in 2018 Craft Fair in November and Christmas Grotto events in December

As we aim to broaden our appeal and increase income we will pilot:

mindfulness walks throughout September 2019

two Halloween Events for 7 to 12year olds on the evening of October 31st 2019

cycling and walking events throughout October half term

Festival of Happiness and Wellbeing 25 – 27th July 2020

Harvest Festival – a food based in event September 27th 2020

COUNTRYSIDE CENTRE

- The user demographic remains largely consistent
- Dog's Trust & Hunts Youth Theatre continue to use the CC weekly on two evenings and generate £500.00 per month between them.
- The rest are largely NHS and CCC. We continue to try to encourage new business and alternative users

	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug
% of bookable time used in the Countryside Centre, based on 1 full time member of staff	119%	126%	155%	135%	74%
Bookings	33	28	36	43	11
Occupancy numbers	620	838	1455	1186	356
Income from room hire	£2,500.00	£2,155.00	£2702.50	£3,088.00	£1,288.75

HINCHINGBROOKE COUNTRY PARK 2018/19 OUTTURN AND 2019/20 BUDGET AND FORECAST
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	2018/19 Outturn			2019/20 Forecast		
	Budget	Actual	Variance	Budget	Forecast	Variance
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Hinchingbrooke Country Park and Management						
Staff	102	70	-32	102	101	-1
Running Costs	23	65	42	23	27	4
Income	-47	-32	15	-47	-19	28
Total	78	103	25	78	109	31
Countryside Centre						
Staff	45	33	-12	35	26	-9
Running Costs	18	16	-2	18	15	-3
Income	-41	-41	0	-41	-45	-4
Total	22	8	-14	12	-4	-16
Café						
Staff	58	74	16	38	60	22
Running Costs	65	64	-1	65	71	6
Income	-155	-160	-5	-155	-170	-15
Total	-32	-22	10	-52	-39	13
Total Hinchingbrooke Country Park	68	89	21	38	66	28

Comments on Variances

2018/19

There was a £32k saving in staff costs for the HCP and Management cost centre, this is because the vacant senior ranger post was not filled until the end of the financial year. The increase of £42k in running costs, relates to consultancy fees for the HCP/Paxton Pits business case (one off cost). There was a reduction in income, this was due to S106 projects (commuted sums) coming to the end of their life.

There was a saving of £14k for the countryside centre; this mainly relates to the vacant hospitality supervisor post.

The café was overspent by £10k, majority of this relates to an overspend of £16k on café assistants.

2019/20

The forecasted overspend on HCP and Management is due the reduction in income from S106 projects (commuted sums) coming to the end of their life.

The forecasted underspend of £16k for the countryside centre mainly relates to the vacant hospitality supervisor post.

The café is currently forecasting to be overspent by £13k. The 2 main factors are a forecasted overspend of £22k on café assistants over the course year and forecasted increase of £15k in the café's food and drink sales.