

A meeting of the **HINCHINGBROOKE COUNTRY PARK JOINT GROUP** will be held at the **COUNTRYSIDE CENTRE, HINCHINGBROOKE COUNTRY PARK, BRAMPTON ROAD, HUNTINGDON, PE29 6DB** on **FRIDAY, 15 OCTOBER 2021** 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 12th March 2021.

Contact Officer: H Peacey - (01223) 752548

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 - (01223) 752548

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 2021/22 as follows:

(a) Cambridgeshire County Council (appointment until 2022)

Councillor K Billington

(b) Huntingdonshire District Council

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

6. SENIOR RANGER'S REPORT (Pages 9 - 16)

To receive a report by the Senior Ranger on park activities for the period March to September 2021.

Contact Officer: M McGettigan - (01480) 388666

7. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

To note that the next meeting of the Hinchingsbrooke Country Park Joint Group will be held on 18th March 2022 at 10:00am.

Contact Officer: H Peacey - (01223) 752548

7 day of October 2021



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: (01223) 752548 / 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 Joint Group.

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 as a Remote Meeting via Zoom on Friday, 12 March 2021

PRESENT: Councillor R J West – Chairman.

Councillors Mrs A Costello, Mrs S R Wilson and Mrs M L Beuttell.

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

8 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 16th October 2020 were approved as a correct record.

9 MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

10 SENIOR RANGER'S REPORT

The Group received a PowerPoint presentation by the Senior Ranger outlining park activities for the period October 2020 to March 2021. In doing so, comment was made as follows:

Staffing and Volunteers

COVID-19 continued to impact both staff and volunteers over the reporting period. Volunteer work parties were unable to progress which had resulted in increased work upon staff at a time when the Park remained busy owing to the national lockdown. This was further exacerbated with one member of staff having undergone planned surgery but the Café Supervisor fortunately stepped in to help with ranger tasks and practical work where possible.

Volunteering activities also ceased again in November 2020 as many were in the vulnerable or shielding category. Where safe to do so, solo volunteering activities had commenced. SEN volunteers were yet to be welcomed back to the Country Park and their return would be undertaken in collaboration with carers and Cambridgeshire County Council who funded their placements.

Members were encouraged to note that every countryside volunteer received a handmade edible Christmas gift which was hand delivered by a member of staff enabling a welfare check to be undertaken as well. The return of the Green Team volunteers was planned for week beginning 8th March 2021 with small work parties returning thereafter from 29th March 2021 onwards. Having received an explanation on the background to the Green Team, Members were

assured that appropriate risk assessments had been undertaken to welcome the group back on site.

Park Management

Despite the lack of volunteers and additional usage of the Park, the Group were encouraged to note the range of work undertaken at the site over the reporting period which included the application of the second layer to path along the Top Ride in Bob's Wood, essential tree safety works, winter tree works creating a glade in Bob's Wood together with the felling of a section of the new plantation, pulling reeds in the wash, construction of an outdoor shelter near the café to facilitate COVID safe usage, the sourcing and production of new benches around the café, improvements to the bird hide area, preparing and re-siting the Tern Raft on the wildlife lake and keeping up with increased litter and anti-social behaviour at the Park.

In response to a question raised by a Member, the Countryside Manager reported that she was in contact with a local resident who organised community litter picks and that the District Council would be partaking in the Great British Spring Clean campaign again which would be taking place from 28 May to 13 June 2021.

The Group noted planned activities over the spring/summer which included urgent temporary repairs to flood damaged paths, installation of more outdoor benches, annual refurbishment of benches and park furniture, follow up on last year's work with surveys and assess impact on wildlife, assisting Huntingdon Bee Keepers association in preparing the apiary for spring/summer and starting the mowing and strimming regime for the amenity grass. Having regard to the former, it was noted that the ground remained saturated and there was a risk that water levels may rise again in the future.

Community Groups

The Group were encouraged to note that a number of the Park's Community Groups were currently in discussion about their return to the Park. Particular mention was made of the Brampton Angling Society who had experienced an increase in membership during lockdown. Together with funding from the Environment Agency the Park would be expanding and improving its offer by introducing platforms and way marker posts. The latter would add value across the Park and not just for anglers.

Satellite Sites

The Group were encouraged to note that the Views Common, Stukeley Meadows and Spring Common sites had experienced an increase in footfall over the reporting period. Work undertaken on the latter site included a deep clean on litter, repairs made to the bridge for improve safety and stump treatment to slow down the willow encroachment.

Countryside Centre

Attention was drawn to occupancy levels and the number of bookings taken at the Countryside Centre compared to previous financial years. Unsurprisingly, the

Centre had been closed for a majority of the year and in terms of income £4,500 had been generated to date, which was unlikely to change between now and the end of the financial year. This represented around 20% of the forecast budget. Members were reminded of the vacancy which existed at the Countryside Centre and that booking enquiries were currently being dealt with by the Countryside Manager. Enquiries were gradually increasing with previous users of the Centre now enquiring about the use of the site, albeit some meetings might operate in an alternative way e.g. virtually. This has however helped to inform and develop plans for the future development of the Park with consideration currently being given to reducing the size of the meeting room.

Members noted that 16th February 2021 marked the 20th anniversary of the opening of the Countryside Centre which was celebrated via the Facebook page.

Café

As expected, there has been a decline in Café users attributed to a combination of factors including adverse weather conditions, the imposition of national restrictions on socialising and the removal of seating as a means of deterring users from congregating together. A “Grab and Go” service continued to operate however food items were limited to “walk and eat” options such as hot sausage rolls and pasties. Members were encouraged to note that a new covered outdoor seating area had been constructed outside the Café.

The Countryside Manager briefly explained the types of complaints received as a result of the latest lockdown. Members concurred with the view that the option of offering hot food and beverages to be consumed alongside a walk around the Park benefitted greatly to people’s mental health and proved invaluable to the local community.

Events

Facebook and other social media platforms such as YouTube have been utilised to keep users engaged. Facebook followers have now increased to 8,092 which was pleasing to note. Provisional bookings for film events throughout July and New Year’s Eve celebrations have been made, promotional material for which would be released nearer the time.

Investment Programme

Members were acquainted with details of the multi-faceted investment programme, timescales for which had been delayed by another 12 months owing to COVID-19. As previously mentioned, plans were already underway to improve angling facilities and further watersport improvements were currently being discussed with the Canoe Club and other watersport organisations to improve changing facilities. Signage was in the process of being designed and modern play equipment was undergoing the tender process. Other planned improvements included those to footpaths and the lakeside circular route as well as alterations to the Countryside Centre and enlarging the car park on site. Members were informed that building works would be governed by the presence of great crested newts and works would only commence when appropriate to do so.

Financial Position

Members attention was drawn to the forecast outturn position of the Park for the 2020/21 financial year where it was noted that there would be an expected overspend across all Countryside Services owing to the coronavirus pandemic. It was expected that the use of the Café and Countryside Centre would not reach pre-COVID levels at the end of the financial year.

In response to questions raised by a Member concerning the availability of any grant funding, the Countryside Manager advised that the site predominantly remained open throughout the pandemic. Whilst the Café had been closed for 6 weeks, staff had been redeployed to work elsewhere during this time.

Any Other Business

A meeting of the Friends of Hinchingsbrooke Country Park was currently being arranged however it was undecided as yet whether this would be a virtual or face to face meeting.

At the conclusion of the meeting the Group thanked Adam Green, Democratic Services Officer (Scrutiny) for his support to Members during his time at the District Council and wished him well in his future role.

11 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the next meeting of the Hinchingsbrooke Country Park Joint Group would be held on 15th October 2021 at 10:00am.

Chairman

Public
Key Decision - No

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Title/Subject Matter: Senior Ranger's Report

Meeting/Date: Hinchingsbrooke Country Park Joint Group –
15th October 2021

Executive Portfolio: Executive Councillor for Operations &
Environment – Councillor Mrs M L Beuttell

Report by: Senior Ranger

Ward(s) affected: All Wards

Executive Summary:

This report summarises the spring and summer months, the progress and issues over the period and provides a summary of the future months

As a result of Covid year on year comparisons have fluctuated dramatically, but the site has remained open for public access and staff have worked on site at all times. The ways of working have changed according to government guidelines, however much has nevertheless been accomplished.

Recommendation:

Committee is asked to review and comment upon the report and progress made to date.

1. SENIOR RANGERS REPORT

1.1 STAFFING

- One senior Ranger and 2 Rangers are based at Hinchingsbrooke with each working one weekend in three.
- Work-parties have been able to continue working without interruption from lockdown restrictions.
- Kickstart Scheme 2 young people have benefitted from this with one going on to gain full time employment within HDC
- Additional hours covered in recognition of increased usage ensuring a ranger has been present on site from 8:30 to 19:30 during the summer holidays and at weekends in the summer time.
- The Café Supervisor has continued to work flexibly helping with ranger tasks and practical work where possible.

1.2 VOLUNTEERS

- Work-parties are now working at full strength
- Some of the SEN volunteers have returned.
- First volunteer social event since the lockdowns occurred on the 2nd of September
- New volunteers trained to carry out a range of wildlife surveys.

1.3 HINCHINGBROOKE COUNTRY PARK MANAGEMENT

A small number of young people have caused issues and damage over recent months. The police are aware but as yet, no action has been taken

With the return of the volunteers and two extra Kickstart personnel we have been able to begin catching up on things that were difficult to do during lockdown and catch up on jobs that were overdue.

- Replace out of date fences in various locations
- Mowing amenity grass areas and grass paths (in a very fast growing season).
- Assist the Huntingdon Bee-Keepers Association with refurbishing and reopening the Apiary
- Installing and maintaining various sports pitches on the amenity part of the Main Field.
- Installing additional benches around the café to facilitate well spaced and well ventilated seating for our growing number of visitors.
- Repairing and maintaining one third of all benches and park furniture on the site (all furniture is maintained every third year as a minimum).
- Repairing and maintaining paths
- Constructing new log stores.
- Embellishing the new Forest Schools Area

And Looking Forward...

- Complete the cutting of wild-flower meadows and creation of habitat piles
- Completion of new fishing platforms on the Main Lake
- Begin the winter tree works in the New Plantation, Bob's Wood, and the Hazel Triangle
- Lay part of the hedge around the Christie Drive Balancing Pond
- Plant more wetland trees around the Main Lake

1.4 COMMUNITY GROUPS

- Established groups are all running well with increased membership reported
- Zigzag runners have booked the countryside centre on a monthly basis for the next 12 months
- Love to Swim have put in a proposal to regular sessions of supervised open water swimming

1.5 SATELLITE SITES

All sites continue to experience increased usage and littering

- **Views Common**
Increased cutting back on the underpass along this path and have been supported by a community volunteer who has carried out some litter picking
- **Stukeley Meadows**
 - Significant increase in littering
 - Wildflower Meadows managed to encourage the return of bee orchids
- **Spring Common**
 - Littering and other forms of anti-social behaviour remain commonplace at this site.
 - The Meadow has been cut for hay, under the Higher Level Stewardship scheme.
 - This winter we will again cut back and plug the willow to continue to recover the grassland.

1.6 CAFÉ

- The income reflects the weather with a better spring and a wetter summer
- The dip in sales in Q2 may also be related to the number of other establishments reopening after lockdown.
- Maintaining the "grab & go" system is popular reducing queues and is more cost effective since the number of staff required is halved.
- The gift shop has proven popular. Local amateur crafters are being encouraged to develop their skills and business acumen.

- Seating inside will be available for the winter, however people are still being cautious and it is used as previously.

Income across the café counter:

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Quarter 1	55,681	45,005	53,687	18,122	54,103
Quarter 2	52,600	51,962	64,649	52,314	44,350
Quarter 3	33,364	38,896	29,348	23,188	
Quarter 4	28,249	43,749	24,999	24,958	
Total	£169,896	£179,612	£172,683	£118,582	£98,453

1.7 EVENTS, ACTIVITIES AND PROMOTIONS

- Events have been arranged within COVID guidelines and numbers been restricted accordingly, relying mainly on the involvement of volunteers.
 - **Outdoor cinema** was not profitable this year. The weather forced cancellation of 2 events and ticket sales were significantly down on last year, when we were the only site organising events. A loss of £964 was recorded
 - **Robin Hood interactive trail** - 84 participants
 - **Den Building Competition** spontaneous trial event 5 teams (30 people)
 - **Halloween interactive trail**, sold out within two weeks - 95 tickets sold
 - **Santas Grotto** – a changed format to remain Covid secure still with the key features of festive fun in a theatrical and magical way
There are 84 slots advertised over 4 days @ £20 per ticket with a potential £6720, If they fill we will increase the number of days
 - **New Year's Eve party** family event with maximum 80 people

1.8 COUNTRYSIDE CENTRE

Through 2020/2021 Centre income rooms and the budget was £23,000 so income was 20%

- The countryside manager continues to organise the usage of the centre to maximise income and minimise costs in the uncertain times
- There is still a nervousness amongst some organisations about indoor meetings
- The user demographic is changing
- The type of meetings is variable with no real pattern emerging yet.

	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Bookings	204	339	408	412	42	87
Users	7253	11404	12965	12931	1033	1607
Income					£4572	£6,900

Advance 92 confirmed bookings with potential room hire of £9446 for the remainder of the year.

2. FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

Covid has had knock on delays in unexpected ways. Timber is a premium item so the play equipment that was expected in autumn, will not now be installed until spring

NCS property consultants were appointed in June and a Project support Officer appointed in August.

The project outlines are currently being clarified and specialists engaged to ensure fluidity in the project.

Site visits have been made by:

- landscape architect
- engineers
- planning consultants
- Service consultants
- Surveyors undertaking topographical surveys

The detailed design work for on-site options is well underway with an outline timescale in progress, due for finalisation shortly.

Some dates have been amended due to challenges presented by current economic and global issues resulting in materials delay in manufacture

Enhancement of play offering has progressed well with installation agreed for Spring of 2022.

Communication strategy will be live and activated Spring 2022.

	Elements	Estimated Completion Date
Hinchingsbrooke Country Park Development	Signage and Interpretation	Spring 2022
	Destination Play Areas	Spring 2022
	Pathway Improvements	Summer 2023
	Sculpture Trail	Spring 2022
	Cycle Route improvements	Summer 2023
	Car Park Improvements	Spring 2023
	Countryside Centre Alterations	Autumn 2023

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HINCHINGBROOKE COUNTRY PARK 2020/21 OUTTURN AND 2021/22 BUDGET AND FORECAST

	2020/21 Outturn			2021/22 Forecast		
	Budget	Actual	Variance	Budget	Forecast	Variance
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Hinchingbrooke Country Park and Management						
Staff	100	102	2	106	106	0
Running Costs	33	39	6	23	23	0
Income	-16	-13	3	-10	-14	-4
Total	117	128	11	119	115	-4
Countryside Centre						
Staff	27	24	-3	28	16	-12
Running Costs	18	15	-3	18	9	-9
Income	-41	-16	25	-19	-20	-1
Total	4	23	19	27	5	-22
Café						
Staff	54	33	-21	55	53	-2
Running Costs	65	57	-8	65	70	5
Income	-155	-109	46	-135	-153	-18
Total	-36	-19	17	-15	-30	-15
Total Hinchingbrooke Country Park	85	132	47	131	90	-41

Comments on Variances

2020/21

There was overspend across Countryside due to COVID. The collapse in income was due to the closure of the Hinchingbrooke Country Park during lockdown periods. The café and the centre did not reach pre-COVID levels after the lockdown was lifted which was expected.

2021/22

Forecasted underspend on Hinchingbrooke Park Management from increased sales of souvenirs.

There is an expected underspend for the countryside centre which is split between savings from a vacant post and reduction in building maintenance and site works.

The café's income is expected to reach pre-COVID levels which is why there is a large underspend.

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