

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the HINCHINGBROOKE COUNTRY PARK JOINT GROUP held in Countryside Centre, Hinchingsbrooke Country Park, Brampton Road, Huntingdon, PE29 6DB on Friday, 21 April 2023.

PRESENT: Councillor M L Beuttell – Chair.

Councillors K Billington, C Lowe,
D L Mickelburgh and S L Taylor.

8. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 14th October 2022 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

9. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

10. 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) and a PowerPoint presentation on park activities for the period November 2022 to March 2023. In doing so, comment was made as follows:

Staffing and Volunteers

Following the conclusion of the KickStart scheme, the Group heard that recruitment was underway to ensure that the valuable nature of this additional workforce be maintained. The Group also heard that the Park was currently benefitting from two apprenticeships.

It was advised that the team had had a productive winter and had ensured seasonal work across the parks was completed within planned timescales.

The Group heard that this year would mark the 10th anniversary of the Park Run at the Park with the longstanding successful nature of this event and the benefits it brings to the local community being noted.

The growing support from volunteers, particularly for seasonal events at the Park was praised.

Café

The Ranger advised that the alternative options worked up for the café during the COVID pandemic, such as the Grab and Go range, had proved very popular. A recent appointment in the café to fill a vacancy will help the Café develop long term refreshment options catering for all Park visitors.

Events

Popularity of events at the Park continues to grow and diversify with 2022 seeing the inaugural Santa's Grotto for dogs which had proved very popular.

Investment Project

The anticipated timescales for the project were shared with the Group. It was hoped that the planning application would be submitted by May 2023 with a view to construction beginning in 2024. It was advised that queries over the swing had been investigated and that overall a positive response to the consultation had been received to date. It was further advised that the electricity supply details were pending a ground condition survey and would be updated following the outcome of that.

The Group heard that it was intended to keep the Park open during the works with diversions in place where appropriate. It was also advised that a food trailer had been acquired to allow for a refreshment option to be available throughout the duration of the works, and with a view to forming a second refreshment option for visitors in the long term.

The consultation responses had shown that there was not a huge appetite for gender neutral toilet facilities at the Park, therefore the plan would be adapted to allow for segregated facilities in addition to a gender neutral facility.

Climate

The redevelopment will provide an opportunity for the team to illustrate the changes that the works would make to the buildings EPC rating with the positive introduction of solar panels and air source heat pumps alongside water recycling. The Group were advised that a biodiversity statement would be developed and shared in due course.

Finance

The Group heard that the good footfall over the previous year had benefitted the Park however the costs of utilities and supplies had also increased in line with the national economy.

Following a question from Councillor Taylor, the Group were advised that the financial details were still being adjusted as the figures available at the time of publication were provisional.

It was advised to the Group, following a further question from Councillor Taylor, that there were no current plans to fill the long term vacancy, rather a new staffing model was being introduced with a switch to fixed term rather than variable hours contracts to allow for better time and budget management. Furthermore, the Group heard that the recruitment for a Commercial Manager had been paused in line with the revised timescales of the planned development.

In response to a question from Councillor Taylor, the Group were reassured that the recent acquisition of the food trailer would allow for better opportunities for the Park. It would be able to run in conjunction with the existing café, cover alternative locations within the Park and allow opportunity to increase the offer and capacity for customers. It would also allow opportunity for the site to capitalise on events within the Park rather than relying on external suppliers. The Group were assured that all relevant licenses and health and safety checks would be obtained in line with Council policies.

Following a question from Councillor Beuttell, the Group heard that the new benches introduced around the Park were made of recycled plastic. These benches were chosen for their durability and the use of recycled plastic meant less landfill waste.

11. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Group is due to be held on 14th July 2023. The Group requested a tour of Hinchingsbrooke Country Park to coincide with this meeting.

Chair