

A meeting of the **HINCHINGBROOKE COUNTRY PARK JOINT GROUP** will be held in **COUNTRYSIDE CENTRE, HINCHINGBROOKE COUNTRY PARK, BRAMPTON ROAD, HUNTINGDON, PE29 6DB** on **FRIDAY, 21 JULY 2023** at **10:00 AM** and you are requested to attend for the transaction of the following business:-

AGENDA

APOLOGIES

1. MINUTES (Pages 3 - 6)

To approve as a correct record the Minutes of the meeting held on 21st April 2023.

Contact Officer: B Buddle
01480 388008

2. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

To receive from Members declarations as to disclosable pecuniary, other registerable and non-registerable interests in relation to any Agenda item. See Notes below.

Contact Officer: B Buddle
01480 388008

3. SENIOR RANGER'S REPORT (Pages 7 - 14)

To receive a report by the Senior Ranger on park activities for the period April to June 2023.

Contact Officer: M McGettigan
01480 388401

4. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

To note that the next meeting of the Hinchingsbrooke Country Park Joint Group will be held on 17th November at 10:00am.

Contact Officer: B Buddle
01480 388008

13 day of July 2023

Oliver Morley

Head of Paid Service

Disclosable Pecuniary Interests and other Registerable and Non-Registerable Interests.

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

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Please contact Democratic Services, Tel No: (01480) 388169 / email: Democratic.Services@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 Committee/Panel.

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.

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the HINCHINGBROOKE COUNTRY PARK JOINT GROUP held in Countryside Centre, Hinchingbrooke 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

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Public
Key Decision - No

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Title/Subject Matter: Senior Ranger's Report

Meeting/Date: Hinchingsbrooke Country Park Joint Group –
21st July 2023

Executive Portfolio: Executive Councillor for Leisure, Waste and Street
Scene

Report by: Senior Ranger

Ward(s) affected: All Wards

Executive Summary:

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

Recommendation:

The 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, one Ranger and one Assistant Rangers are based at Hinchingsbrooke with each working one weekend in three.
- Work-parties are run regularly with volunteers to support the limited staff

1.2 VOLUNTEERS

- Work-parties are continuing to work at full strength.
- SEN volunteers are consistent numbers. Some volunteers are trying different activities to increase their range of skills
- We hosted a corporate work party from Dovista of some 80 employees who performed extremely well. They installed more of this year's fence replacement, brought in the wood from the New Plantation, and installed some invertebrate habitat in the Wildlife Area.

1.3 HINCHINGBROOKE COUNTRY PARK MANAGEMENT

The weather has played a significant part in the work undertaken this spring, with the very hot weather of June

- Meadows have grown well; end of summer cut is being planned.
- Park furniture such as benches have been refurbished in accordance with the management plan.
- Some potholes in the path around the Main Lake have been filled.
- Work is ongoing to create more waymarkers.
- Replacement of old fences, which are falling into disrepair, with new post and rail fences.
- Due to dry and hot weather watering of many of the new trees planted this winter has been necessary. This has been a significant amount of work.

And Looking Forward...

- Meadow cutting should begin from Mid/Late July weather dependent and will continue slowly over the late summer and autumn, this will give flowers time to recover in areas cut before we cut the next area, providing a constant nectar source.
- New waymarkers will be installed.
- Further work will take place to replace more old fences.
- Damaged underline roof of the shelter by the café will be replaced as there is a possibility of installing a “dog-wash”. Negotiations are ongoing

1.4 COMMUNITY GROUPS

- Established groups are all operating well, including weekly Parkrun and monthly Zigzag runners, mountain bike training, and Huntingdon Canoe Club.
- A group of local scouts held a weekend camp in our fire-pit area over the first weekend in July.

1.5 SATELLITE SITES

Views Common

- Cutting back along the path took place at the end of June
- Regular patrols and litter picking continue.

Stukeley Meadows

- Bee orchids are present again and 33 individual flowering plants were counted in April.
- Grounds Maintenance have continued to carry out management of this site except for the conservation of the Bee Orchids.

Spring Common

- We are making progress with the new management plan.
- We are looking into opportunities to improve interpretation on the site and encourage more community ownership.
- Groundworks are helping us with a project to restore the pond area.
- Littering and anti-social behaviour both remain commonplace.

1.6 CAFÉ

- The income across the café counter 2022/2023 was the highest ever year. Significantly there was a massive rise on usual quieter days and double income on some bank holidays etc
- Q1 of 2023/24 has seen an increase of just under £20,000 on the same period last year
- Leasing 2 new coffee machines has proved very popular and we now compete with the costa coffee that we use to miss out to.
- Re-introducing hot meals and listening to the customer needs has ensured that we are maximising our customer base during the cost-of-living crisis. We have become peoples treat, offering a plentiful meal at an affordable price.
- Recruiting a full-time café team leader has given the consistency that the café was lacking.
- Increasing dietary items such as Vegan, Gluten Free and Vegetarian has proven a success - again increasing our client base.

Income across the café counter:

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Q 1	55,681	45,005	53,687	18,122	54,103	63,015	82,592
Q 2	52,600	51,962	64,649	52,314	44,350	77,723.	
Q 3	33,364	38,896	29,348	23,188	32,584	50,612	
Q 4	28,249	43,749	24,999	24,958	35,366	56,047	
Total	£169,896	£179,612	£172,683	£118,582	£166,403	£247,399	£82,592

1.7 EVENTS, ACTIVITIES and PROMOTIONS

Interactive trails encourage exploration of the site and are different to guided walks so more appealing to families Easter trail was very popular an operated almost entirely with volunteers on the day
Robin Hood is July 9th and Halloween trail will be in October

Indoor boot sales were tried this year and the first 2 in the wet and cold weather were much more successful, but the drier weather saw a fall in attendance. We will reintroduce them in the winter months- avoiding the very successful grotto which this year we hope to have more sessions available.

Trialling the inclusion of the pop- up café to keep people within the same building as the boot sale. This seemed to work well and did not take custom from the café- rather it gave an opportunity for impulse purchases

Event	Event Income	cost	Event profit	Pop up café (income over counter)
Easter trail	650	130	£420	
Indoor boot sale	132		£132	82
Dog show	551	65.00	£486	300

Coming up...

Robin Hood Interactive Trail	July 9 th
Mini ranger days	Various dates throughout August
Tag archery with 1642	Various dates throughout August
Halloween Interactive trail day time	29/10
Guy Fawkes event – making guys, fire lighting	5/11
Santa's Grotto	Dec 2023
Santa Paws doggy grotto	Dec 2023

1.8 COUNTRYSIDE CENTRE

- The countryside manager continues to organise the usage of the centre, until it closes for the refurbishment. It will be managed then by the intended newly appointed commercial manager

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/2023	2023/2024
Bookings	408	412	42	124	199	43
Users	12965	12931	1033	3473	6160	1602
Income	£27,769	£31,590	£4,572	£14,150	£28,721	£7470

Bookings with potential room hire of £10,265 are currently on the spread sheet with plenty of vacancies yet to fill in Q3 and Q4 of 023/2024. The countryside centre will remain fully open for this financial year, with construction of the car park prioritised and footpath and countryside centre refurbishment following on.

2. FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

Unfortunately, the actual application has yet to be submitted. The consultants struggled to get final survey reports from their subcontractors, however we do believe everything is now received

Communication plan has been produced and an external organisation engaged to work alongside the internal team to ensure timely engagement with all stakeholders

	Elements	Estimated Completion Date
Hinchingsbrooke Country Park Development	Pre application	Feb March 2022
	Play installation	March/April 2022
	Planning application	July 2023
	Tender process	Oct 2023 2022
	Appointment of contractors	Dec 2023
	Construction phases	2024
	Completion date including spring planting	Spring 2025

HINCHINGBROOKE COUNTRY PARK 2022/23 OUTTURN AND 2023/24 BUDGET AND FORECAST

	2022/23 Outturn			2023/24 Forecast		
	Budget	Actual	Variance	Budget	Forecast	Variance
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Hinchingbrooke Country Park and Management						
Staff	108	111	3	112	113	1
Running Costs	23	47	24	34	33	-1
Income	-15	-32	-17	-15	-11	4
Total	116	126	10	131	135	4
Countryside Centre						
Staff	28	19	-9	29	5	-24
Running Costs	18	12	-6	31	26	-5
Income	-22	-59	-37	-11	-47	-36
Total	24	-28	-52	49	-16	-65
Café						
Staff	57	74	17	65	121	56
Running Costs	65	106	41	90	106	16
Income	-155	-200	-45	-170	-200	-30
Total	-33	-20	13	-15	27	42
Total Hinchingbrooke Country Park	107	78	-29	165	146	-19

Comments on Variances

2022/23

General increase in running costs for the HCP management. Increased sales from the gift shop contributed to the increase in income.

Countryside centre room hire income has recovered to outpace pre-covid levels. Income from various events run throughout the year. Countryside support worker role was vacant during 22/23 which saw a large drop in employee costs. Low running costs.

Café income budget was increased in 22/23. There was an increase in the café income which was offset by increase in catering supplies cost. This extra footfall also saw an increase in employee costs.

2023/24

Budgets we realigned for 23/24, so the expectation is that the HCP management unit will be around net zero.

We are forecasting that the room hire income will continue to be strong in 23/24 as it was in 22/23. Countryside support worker role is expected to remain vacant during 23/24 which will see a large drop in employee costs.

The new café staffing structure has been put in place which has increased the employee costs in 23/24. Currently forecasting that the income/expenditure trend will be match 22/23's outturn.

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