

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, 17 November 2023.

PRESENT: Councillor M L Beuttell – Chair.
Councillors K Billington, C Lowe, S L Taylor and D J Shaw.

APOLOGIES: No apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors .

IN ATTENDANCE:

16. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 21st July 2023 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

17. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

18. 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 April to June 2023. In doing so, comment was made as follows:

Staffing and Maintenance

The Group heard that the Park's Apprentice was undertaking a national course and that further training for the Park Rangers was ongoing. It was confirmed to the Group, following a question from Councillor Beuttell, that the Apprenticeship was expect to last for 30 months.

In addition an additional two volunteers had taken on weekend roles and were undergoing training in order to allow for a more flexible rota.

Meadow cutting had progressed well with use of the new tractor, and the team were working through the results of the biodiversity surveys to encompass the recommendations made. The Group heard that even small changes made here could make a big difference.

Works to trees were ongoing and trees posing a health and safety risk had been identified. It was noted that replacement tree planting would be staggered to allow for better diversity within the canopy and also to allow for the creation of woodland glades. The Group were assured that the relevant permissions had been sought and that the team were working in conjunction with the Woodland Trust to develop the long term sustainability of the wood.

Community

The Group heard that summer pilots of activities in conjunction with Grafham Water had been successful and that this partnership would be built on in future years.

The team continued to work to develop community relationships for Satellite Sites, with rewilding and ecology training for Rangers being undertaken.

It was advised that the brook running through the Park had been cleaned, however it was noted that the responsibility for this lay with the Environment Agency.

Following a question from Councillor Shaw regarding Biodiversity Funding, the Group heard that funding had been secured for planned projects at Satellite Sites and additionally close links had been developed with the Freemans Charity to improve biodiversity at Spring Common.

Café

The Group heard that over counter sales within the Café had benefitted from an increased footfall to the site in the Spring, however the wet summer had had a detrimental impact on sales. It was noted that a permanent team were now in place and that a long term sickness absence within the team was being positively managed.

Events

The Halloween event had been a sell-out success and had been staffed by volunteers which had helped minimise costs.

The Christmas Grotto plans were well underway with a special weekend dedicated to visitors with SEND or who would prefer a quieter experience planned.

The Countryside Centre continued to benefit from regular bookings and that an Assistant was employed to help manage this.

Investment Project

The Group heard that the planning application for the project had been withdrawn. As a number of objections had been raised, it was decided to use the opportunity to address concerns and obtain further data from surveys which had been planned for Spring 2024. It was advised that a separate application would be made relating to electricity supply improvements, this was due to a known 12 month lead time with UK Power Networks, therefore would ensure project momentum be maintained. The Group heard that these delays were expected to impact the project by 12 months.

Finance

It was noted that sales in the shop and café had increased and that the new staffing structure within the café had been accommodated in the new budget.

Following a question from Councillor Beuttell, it was advised that car parking revenue on site currently fell under HDC car park revenue however it was hoped that this would be attributed to the Park revenue following the redevelopment.

19. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Group is due to be held on 19th April 2024 at 10:00am.

Chair