



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, 12 JULY 2024** at **10:00 AM** and you are requested to attend for the transaction of the following business:-

AGENDA

APOLOGIES

1. ELECTION OF CHAIR

To elect a Chair 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 19th April 2024.

Contact Officer: Democratic Services - (01480) 388008

3. 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: Democratic Services - (01480) 388008

4. APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIR

To appoint a Vice-Chair 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 2024/25 as follows:

(a) Cambridgeshire County Council

Councillor K Billington

(b) Huntingdonshire District Council

Councillors M L Beuttell, C A Lowe, D J Shaw and S L Taylor.

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

To receive a report by the Senior Ranger on park activities for the period April to June 2024.

Contact Officer: J Arnold - (01480) 388666

7. FINANCE REPORT (Pages 15 - 16)

To receive the Finance Report for the Park.

**Contact Officer: D Adeoye
01480 388869**

8. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

To note that the next meeting of the Hinchingsbrooke Country Park Joint Group will be held on 15th November 2024 at 10:00am.

Contact Officer: Democratic Services - (01480) 388169

3 day of July 2024

Michelle Sacks

Chief Executive and 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.

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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, 19 April 2024.

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

APOLOGIES: No apologies for absence were submitted.

IN ATTENDANCE:

20. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 17th November 2023 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

21. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

22. 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 2023 to April 2024. In doing so, comment was made as follows:

Staffing and Volunteers

The Group heard that the consistent attendance of volunteers had continued thus allowing for Countryside staff to manage maintenance tasks.

Hinchingbrooke Country Park Management

It was noted that the Park had experienced a very successful winter for completion of planned works.

It was observed that the wet weather over the winter had restricted use of the Park by some regular Community Groups such as the weekly Parkrun but that it was hoped their frequency had returned to normal with the warmer weather.

Satellite Sites

The Group heard that numbers of bee orchids had increased at the Stukeley Meadows site and were also advised that training in identification of the bee orchids had been undertaken by the Senior Ranger to allow for Assistant Rangers and Ecologists to assist in

future surveys.

Café

The Group were advised that the Café's increased staffing costs had been due to a long term sickness with the café staff but that this was no longer an issue.

It was noted that the success of the café continued to grow, with an adaptable menu being credited for repeat visitors.

Events

The Christmas Grotto had once again been a great success and the Group noted that the introduction of SEN sessions for families had been very popular. Volunteers who were fluent in sign language were on hand as storytellers and Santa to create an inclusive experience for hearing impaired visitors.

Events such as the Pizza masterclass had been introduced to make the most of site facilities after the usual hours of business and had again proved popular.

Countryside Centre

It was confirmed that bookings for the centre were being taken up to March 2025 at present and that dates for the redevelopment works would be known by December 2024 allowing for the team to schedule bookings around the works and minimise disruption to regular users. In response to a question from Councillor Beuttell, the Group heard that it was anticipated for the Countryside Centre to be closed for around six months while works were carried out.

The Group were advised that the team were aware of degradation to the access road and it's painted lines, and that improvement works were planned as part of the investment project, however remedial works would be carried out if the opportunity arose.

Investment Project

The Group heard that required surveys were being carried out across the Spring and Summer and would allow for the resubmission of the planning application later in the year.

Finance

The Group were advised that the Parks forecasted running costs were static from the previous year and that the income for the Countryside Centre was back to pre-pandemic levels.

It was noted that a long term vacancy existed within the team which would be addressed in the proposed future merger with the Open Spaces team.

The Group heard that the increased income for the café and gift shop were due to the success of the range offered to customers and not due to increased prices.

23. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Group is due to be held on 12th July 2024 at 10:00am.

Chair

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HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Title/Subject Matter:	SENIOR RANGER'S REPORT A presentation from the Senior Ranger on park activities for the period April 2024 to June 2024
Meeting:	Hinchingbrooke Liaison group
Date:	12th July 2024
Executive Portfolio:	Executive Councillor for Open Spaces, 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.

SENIOR RANGERS REPORT

1.1 STAFFING

- One Senior Ranger, one Ranger and one Assistant Rangers are based at Hinchingbrooke with each working one weekend in three.
- Work-parties occur regularly with volunteers to support the limited staff.
- We are now hosting a summer intern Conservation Ranger Student Intern post who started working with us on 19th June.
- The restructure to merge Open Spaces and Countryside teams is progressing.
- In the bid to become a sustainable and service. There are no mandatory redundancies.
- The Countryside Manager will retire in August.

1.2 VOLUNTEERS

- Work-parties are continuing to work at full strength.
- SEN volunteers are consistent numbers.
- Weekend Volunteering is continuing- with opportunities for others to help.
- There are regular expressions of interest from potential new volunteers. These are being managed by our newly appointed Volunteer Coordinator.
- We hosted a corporate work party from the Environment Agency who helped repairing the parts of the path around the Main Lake that have been worst affected by the floods earlier in the year.

1.3 HINCHINGBROOKE COUNTRY PARK MANAGEMENT

We have had a successful year for winter works which started the spring work in good position

- Mowing and strimming of paths and amenity grassland areas.
- Surveys are ongoing including: bioblitz, reptile, butterfly and orchid. Orchid data is in and shows noteworthy increases and decreases in different species of wild orchid – these may be linked to weather.
- New fences have been installed around the carpark to replace old ones that were falling into disrepair.
- New interpretation panels have been installed including new signs in the fire pit and to interpret the work done to preserve Wild Service Trees.
- Work is ongoing to create the new waymarkers.
- Maintenance of park furniture is ongoing.

Looking Forward...

- Continue to mow paths and amenity grassland areas.
- Completion wildlife surveys and park furniture maintenance.
- Cutting wildflower meadows from 15th August.

1.4 COMMUNITY GROUPS

- Established groups are all operating well, including weekly Parkrun and monthly Zigzag runners, mountain bike training, BRJ junior runners and Huntingdon Canoe Club which all address the needs of physical and mental wellbeing.

1.5 SATELLITE SITES

Views Common Footpath

- Regular patrols and litter picking continue.

Stukeley Meadows

- Regular patrols and litter picking continue.
- Grounds Maintenance continue to carry out management of this site except for the conservation of the Bee Orchids.

Spring Common

- Regular mowing of paths and litter picking are ongoing.
- Work continues in accordance with the new management plan.

1.6 CAFÉ

Income across the café counter:

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Q 1	55,681	45,005	53,687	18,122	54,103	63,015	82,592	90,307 (to 26 th June)
Q 2	52,600	51,962	64,649	52,314	44,350	77,723	92,307	
Q 3	33,364	38,896	29,348	23,188	32,584	50,612	61,852	
Q 4	28,249	43,749	24,999	24,958	35,366	56,047	48,476	
Total	£169,896	£179,612	£172,683	£118,582	£166,403	£247,399	£285,227	£90,307

- The café income figures have seen an increase again.
- Regular liaison with company reps, and negotiation over prices ensure we get the best value for the products bought in.
- Mobile Pizza van, (initially purchased to be used when café is out of commission during the construction works) is being trialled as a semi-regular feature. This offers a second outlet for drinks and ice creams – reducing café queues in busy times - but also offering an alternative choice.

In June the café and pizza van combined, achieved its highest ever daily take of £3021. Some 330 sales transactions occurred compared to the

previous maximum of 286 Sales will continue to be monitored looking at trends and impact.

1.7 EVENTS, ACTIVITIES and PROMOTIONS

HCP prides itself on hosting activities that are inclusive for all and have a great community outlook. Whilst there is often a seasonal theme, the activities change. For example the last few Easters have had an interactive experience with volunteers playing the role of characters. This year was a paper-based trail looking for clues

This year so far, organised events have included;

- Bushcraft, Pizza masterclass, Cupcake decorating;
- Inflatable days throughout the summer adds a different dimension for children;
- Unlimited Crafts – offering indoor activities on wet Bank holidays;
- Bark in the Park –focused on dogs, arranged in collaboration with Cromwell Vets.

All these events received positive feedback throughout.

These events are led by the events manager but supported by an amazing group of volunteers.

Coming up...

Mini explorers	July and August
Wild about Nature tots	August
Wild About Huntingdonshire Festival	September
Halloween Trail	October
Guy Fawkes and Fire lighting	November

Wildabout Huntingdonshire (28th and 29th September) is a very large collaborative event with local residents community groups and businesses. Activities and displays will be throughout the Country Park and it is focusing on the corporate objectives

- Improving quality of life for local people
- Creating a better Huntingdonshire for future generations

The main aim is to highlight everyone can make a change and make a difference in their own lives and to the local environment.

1.8 COUNTRYSIDE CENTRE

- Business support officer arranges the administration of the countryside centre. The countryside manager continues to oversee the day-to-day usage with support from onsite staff.
- The organisation of the countryside centre is likely to fall under a hospitality manager and commercial manager within the new structure.

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Bookings	408	412	42	124	199	118	28
Users	12965	12931	1033	3473	6160	3559	952
Roomhire	£27,769	£31,590	£4,572	£14,150	£28,721	£26,500	£7370

1.9 FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

The planning application will be resubmitted in summer 2024 when the BNG (Biodiversity Net Gain) reports are completed, and the new submission will address the concerns raised in 2023. BNG is raising the needs for project reviews and some adjustment to original plans to minimise wildlife disturbance.

Key Project Elements	Estimated Completion Date
Research for business case by PSC including stakeholder consultation	Completed Winter 2018
Public consultation	Completed 2018 to 2019
99-year lease agreed with CCC to 2121	Completed Summer 2021
NCS property consultants appointed. Project manager appointed	Completed Summer 2021
CIL funding agreed	Completed Spring 2022
Pre-Application	Submitted Spring 2022
Biodiversity Audit	Completed Spring 2022
Play Installation	Completed Autumn 2022
EPC	Completed Autumn 2022
Topographical Survey	Completed Autumn 2022
Stakeholder and public consultation	Completed Autumn 2022
Pre-application feedback	Completed Winter 2022
Building Condition Survey	Completed Spring 2023
UKPN Electrical Survey	Completed Spring 2023
Tree Survey	Completed Summer 2023
Ground Condition Survey	Completed Summer 2023
Planning application submission	Completed Summer 2023

Stakeholder and public consultation	Completed 2023	Autumn
Application withdrawn	Completed 2023	Autumn
Address comments and objections	Completed	Spring 2024
Undertake desktop archaeology investigation	Completed	Spring 2024
Undertake bat surveys	Completed	Spring 2024
Undertake newt, water vole, otter surveys	Completed	Spring 2024
Engage with UKPN to process electrical upgrade due to their 12-month lead in time	Completed	Spring 2024
Undertake flora and vegetation surveys	Expected	summer 2024
BNG report	Expected 2024	Summer
Planning Application re-submission	Expected 2024	Summer
Tender Process	September- 2024	November
Appoint Contractors	Expected 2024	December
Construction Phases	2025	
Full Completion, including Spring Planting	Expected	Spring 2026

HINCHINGBROOKE COUNTRY PARK 2023/24 OUTTURN AND 2024/25 BUDGET AND FORECAST

	2023/24 Outturn			2024/25 Forecast		
	Budget	Actual	Variance	Budget	Forecast	Variance
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Hinchingbrooke Country Park and Management						
Staff	112	119	7	116	116	0
Running Costs	34	50	16	37	37	0
Income	-15	-38	-23	-13	-13	0
Total	131	131	0	140	140	0
Countryside Centre						
Staff	29	18	-11	30	30	0
Running Costs	31	11	-20	23	23	0
Income	-11	-50	-39	-6	-6	0
Total	49	-21	-70	47	47	0
Café						
Staff	65	114	17	160	160	0
Running Costs	90	131	41	123	123	0
Income	-170	-228	-45	-191	-191	0
Total	-15	17	32	92	92	0
Total Hinchingbrooke Country Park	165	127	-38	279	279	0

Comments on Variances

2023/24

Budgets were realigned for 23/24 and the management unit for Hinchingbrooke Country Park outturned without a variance.

Countryside centre room hire income recovered to outpace pre-covid levels. Income from various events run throughout the year. Countryside support worker role was vacant during 23/24 which saw a large drop in employee costs. Low running costs.

There was an increase in the café income which was partially offset by increase in catering supplies cost. The new café staffing structure has been put in place which has increased the employee costs in 23/24.

2024/25

The budgets for 24/25 were aligned to the previously revised business case which was signed off at the Change board. It wasn't updated to the most recent business case as this was not approved until February/March.

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