

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, 18 July 2025.

PRESENT: Councillor M L Beuttell – Chair.

Councillors M L Beuttell, C Lowe, D J Shaw and J E Kerr.

APOLOGIES: An apology for absence from the meeting was submitted on behalf of Councillor Tom Sanderson.

1. ELECTION OF CHAIR

RESOLVED

that Councillor M L Beuttell be elected Chair of the Hinchingsbrooke Country Park Joint Group for the remainder of the Municipal Year.

Councillor M L Beuttell in the Chair.

2. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 24th April 2025 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations were received

4. APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIR

RESOLVED

that Councillor C A Lowe be appointed Vice-Chair of the Hinchingsbrooke Country Park Joint Group for the remainder of the Municipal Year.

5. MEMBERSHIP OF THE GROUP

It was noted that the membership of the Group for 2025/26 was as follows:

(a) Cambridgeshire County Council Councillor

T D Sanderson

(b) Huntingdonshire District Council Councillors

Mrs M L Beuttell, J E Kerr, C A Lowe, and D Shaw.

6. HEAD RANGER'S REPORT

The Group were informed of a busy period for the park with drought issues including management of people and habitats. The infrastructure of the park had been reviewed especially the gateways. The Group heard that timber from the site was being reused on projects within the park and also in neighbouring Hinchingsbrooke House where timber had been provided to assist with replacing the doors throughout the property.

It was noted that some planned events had been postponed or cancelled due to inclement weather but that the Wild About Festival had been very well attended.

It was noted that sessions at the park were run in conjunction with Fireflies and that this would be improved upon following the completion of the development project.

The Group heard that the tree nursery was working to curate species local to the park and that Huntingdon Elms were disease resistant. With an increase in saplings the team were surveying to ensure the arbocultural management was working.

It was noted that the Kings Walk footpath was maintained by Brompton Parish Council but that the park were happy to work collaboratively to help manage the overgrowth.

It was advised that bookings for the Countryside Centre had now been suspended in preparation for the imminent development work and would recommence following completion of the project.

7. FINANCE REPORT

By means of a report by the Finance Business Partner (a copy of which was appended in the Minute Book), the Group were advised that an underspend on staffing was due to the vacancies of the Head Ranger and Café Attendant positions. It was noted that two zero hour contracts posts had been introduced to the café and that staffing levels would be maintained throughout the development works. It was further noted that the electricity and service charges were lower than anticipated creating a further underspend.

The Group heard that alternative café facilities were being installed to allow for a continuation of the service during the development works, this has allowed for a positive reforecasting of the anticipated income.

8. HINCHINGBROOKE COUNTRY PARK DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

By means of a presentation by the Head of Leisure, Health and Environment (a copy of which was appended in the Minute Book), the Group heard that the planning permission for the project had now been confirmed. It was noted that the early installation of the play equipment within the park as part of the redevelopment had helped to visualise the transitions ahead. It was also noted that the parks aim

was to become self sufficient whilst still supporting and providing for the local community.

10:40 Councillor J Kerr left the meeting.

The tight timescales of the project plan were observed, however it was noted that these would be managed through the stacking of projects to minimise lengthy disruption across the park.

The ecology of the park was discussed with noted slopes to encourage invertebrates and visitor signage to explain park habitats. Habitats would be further encouraged by the laying of traditional hedges and collaborations on ground works in sharing knowledge and skills would be encouraged where possible.

It was noted that the anticipated project costs had increased since the initial budget however this was larger due to national cost increases particularly in the construction industry. However the Group were reassured that following a forensic analysis of the costs the agreed budget would be comfortable and that payback was anticipated over 4.5 years. Further funding opportunities were being actively pursued.

9. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was requested that an alternate date be sought for the November and April meetings due to Officer availability on Fridays. It was agreed that the Democratic Services Officer would circulate alternative dates which would be agreed by the Group.

Chair