

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the HINCHINGBROOKE COUNTRY PARK JOINT GROUP held in the Wren Room, Countryside Centre, Hinchingsbrooke Country Park, Brampton Road, Huntingdon, PE29 6DB on Thursday, 4 April 2019

PRESENT: Councillor R J West – Chairman.

Councillors Mrs A Costello, J M Palmer and T D Sanderson.

APOLOGY: An Apology for absence from the meeting was submitted on behalf of Councillor D R Underwood.

11 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 12th October 2018 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

In response to a query raised by the Chairman, Councillor T D Sanderson undertook to circulate information he had received detailing Section 106 contributions around to the Group.

12 MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

13 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) on park activities for the period October 2018 to March 2019. In doing so, comment was made as follows:

Park Management

The Group were encouraged to note the range of work being undertaken as part of the annual management of the site which included tree felling, removal of alder regrowth between the wildlife lake and the wash, removal of scrub in the old llama paddock, management of the two balancing ponds and maintenance of the golden osier beds.

Planned works for the coming months included an extension of the jetty on the main lake, replacement of three existing dog bins, installing an anti-slip surface on the Troll's Bridge, processing this year's timber produce and commencement of the fortnightly cutting of the short grass areas in the Park. Some these works had already been completed.

Additionally, it was noted that weekly bookings were now being taken for the Fireflies Forest School which was proving popular.

Comment was made by a Member that a more robust solution was required for the maintenance of the footpath around the lake which was noted by Officers.

Volunteers

Volunteers continue to be vital to the Park's management particularly Huntingdonshire Regional College's Green Team. In recognition of their efforts and assistance, staff hosted a Christmas Lunch for all volunteers at the end of December 2018 which was appreciated by all.

With a newly appointed Senior Ranger in post, efforts would be made over the coming months to increase the number of practical volunteers.

Countryside Centre

Attention was drawn to occupancy levels, the number of bookings taken and the revenue generated at the Countryside Centre between October 2018 and March 2019. The figures reflected an increase when compared to the same period the previous year which was encouraging to note. Evening and weekend bookings have increased and have been managed successfully owing to the flexibility of staff.

In noting the potential revenue anticipated in the current financial year, the Countryside Manager reported that the figure related to confirmed bookings made to date and that income levels would increase over the course of the year.

Events, Activities and Promotions

Events which had taken place over the reporting period included a Christmas Fair, Santa's Grotto, breakfast/hot chocolate with Santa and a New Year's breakfast. Whilst each of the events had proved a success in terms of attendance and income, it was noted that the New Year's breakfast event would, in future, be held at the weekend instead of mid-week to increase attendance levels.

Prior to the commencement of the meeting, the Countryside Manager tabled pictures of the Santa's Grotto event which had generated £3,255 income. The event would be extended to four days in December 2019 with a view to maximising income generation opportunities. Social media, in particular Facebook, had played a significant part in promoting the event with a number of commendations having been received from attendees.

Members were pleased to note that the Country Park's Facebook page had now reached 5,500 followers. Consideration was currently being given to setting up an Instagram account.

Hinchingbrooke Country Park 30th Anniversary Celebrations

To mark the Park's 30th Anniversary, a week long programme of activities would be held in August 2019 involving stakeholders, stalls and exhibitions.

Friends of Hinchingsbrooke Country Park

The Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the Country Park would be held on Thursday 2nd May. Having worked at the Park for 29 years the Countryside Manager had been invited to attend as the guest speaker to talk about the Park's 30th Anniversary Celebrations.

Financial Position

Members' attention was drawn to the financial position of the Park. Having had their attention drawn to the variances, it was explained that this was largely a result of low levels of budgeted income expected from commuted sums. The full impact upon this year's budget would not be known until the end of December 2019. The Head of Operations advised that he would take this away as an action and investigate the matter further.

A brief discussion ensued on S106 funding. It was not yet known if all S106 funds had been expended.

14 UPDATE ON STAFFING

The Countryside Manager delivered an update on the latest position with staffing across the Countryside Service.

The Group were encouraged to note that a new Senior Ranger for the Country Park had been appointed. M McGettigan took up his new post on 1st March 2019 with responsibility overall for the Country Park, Spring Common, Views Common, Stukeley Meadows and Colne Graveyard. Volunteers for the Countryside Centre and the café would both be welcome to enable the service to continue offering additional activities. One of the younger paid holiday/weekend staff in the café is about to undertake training on a formally recognised apprentice course.

M Hall had commenced his role as Senior Ranger for Paxton Pitts from 1st April 2019 having transferred from the Country Park. Responsibilities included Barford Road, Sudbury Meadows, Mill Common and the sites located in St Ives.

Attention was drawn to the part vacant post of Countryside Development Ranger which would be advertised shortly. The Group were informed that the job description for this post was in the process of being reviewed for an 18 month period to incorporate responsibility for managing the voluntary wardens at Paxton Pitts.

Discussion took place on the volunteers which included how they were recruited, their skills set and the significant value they offered to the service.

15 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED

that the press and public be excluded from the meeting because the business to be transacted contains information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

16 UPDATE ON HINCHINGBROOKE COUNTRY PARK INVESTMENT AND LEASE

The Head of Operations delivered an update on the Park's future investment and lease and responded to questions raised by the Group.

17 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Group noted that their next meeting would be held on 11th October 2019 at 10:00am.

Chairman