

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 Friday, 13 March 2020

PRESENT: Councillor R J West – Chairman.

Councillors T D Sanderson, Mrs S R Wilson and Mrs M L Beuttell.

APOLOGY: An apology for absence from the meeting was submitted on behalf of Councillor Mrs A Costello.

8 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Group held on 11th October 2019 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

In response to a question, the Senior Ranger confirmed that the slide was ready to be returned to the play park but that wet weather had prevented its re-installation.

D Adeoye confirmed that the position in respect of the income from S106 projects had not changed since the last meeting and that projects were continuing to come to the end of their life which would impact upon the accounts at the end of the financial year and future years.

9 MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillor Mrs S R Wilson declared a disclosable pecuniary interest in Minute No. 20/11 by virtue of her membership of Godmanchester Town Council.

10 APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

Owing to membership changes, the Group were informed that the post of Vice-Chairman now remained vacant. In doing so, Members placed on record their thanks to Councillor J M Palmer for his contributions to the work of the Group. Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that Councillor Mrs M L Beuttell be appointed Vice-Chairman of the Hinchingsbrooke Country Park Joint Group for the remainder of the Municipal Year.

11 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 September 2019 to March 2020. In doing so, comment was made as follows:

Hinchingbrooke Country Park Management

Whilst being encouraged to note the range of work being undertaken at the Country Park over the reporting period, the Senior Ranger reported that winter tree felling work had not commenced owing to delays with the processing of a felling licence from the Forestry Commission and higher levels of wet weather in recent months. In response to a question raised by Councillor Mrs M L Beuttell, it was reported that there were various areas across the Park where trees would be felled which included the main woods to enable light to reach the ground and encourage the growth of plants and flowers.

In noting that there were sufficient supplies of felled and split wood to fuel the site this year, the Group were informed that the Park were part of the Biofuel User Scheme which enabled funding to be received. The Senior Ranger advised that investigations would be made into whether the Country Park could produce and sell biofuel to the public. At present, the Country Park were only permitted to undertake the former.

A brief discussion ensued on the viewing platform at the pond which was regarded as being unsafe. There have been delays with this work owing to ineffective communication with the supplier of the metal footings required for the platform. The matter was being pursued and the Senior Ranger was hopeful that the work would be completed in the near future.

Hinchingbrooke Country Park Development Proposals

In response to questions, it was confirmed that the Business Plan for the development of the Country Park was due to emerge in April 2020. The Plan would then make its way through the formal decision-making process. Members were hopeful that this would be in Summer 2020.

Godmanchester Nursery

The Group were informed that Godmanchester Nursery would formally transfer over to Godmanchester Town Council on 31st March 2020.

Volunteers

It was noted that there was an average of 86 volunteer days per month which was welcomed by Members.

Community Groups

The Countryside Manager drew attention to the opening of the viewing gallery at the apiary hosted by Huntingdonshire Beekeeper's Association on 9th April 2020. Members were encouraged to attend. The Chairman acknowledged the

popularity of the Fireflies Forest School which continued to be popular despite the wintery weather.

Staffing

In discussing staffing levels, comment was made at the difficulty in completing chainsaw work over the reporting period. The work required fully trained and able staff and volunteers. As a result, hazardous trees have been cordoned off with barrier tape to reduce the risk to the public.

Coronavirus

In discussing the current pandemic, the Country Park confirmed that they were following guidance issued by the District Council and had adopted basic measures on site to enable the Country Park to remain open and fully operational. To date, two cancellations had been received for room bookings which was expected to rise further. It was anticipated that in the event of school closures, members of the public may wish to visit the Park for fresh air and exercise but that it was likely the Café might not be fully operational.

Financial Position

Members' attention was drawn to the financial position of the Park where overspends were reported on Hinchingsbrooke Country Park and Management and the Café. The reduction in income from S106 projects coming to the end of their life were attributed to the former and expenditure on café assistants and an increase in costs for catering supplies were attributed to the latter. Members were however encouraged to note that an underspend of £20,000 had been achieved at the Countryside Centre owing to the generation of income from events including New Year's Eve and the Christmas Grotto and the hire of rooms.

In response to a question raised by Councillor T D Sanderson, D Adeoye undertook to circulate details of S106 projects around to the Group. Staffing in the café was also discussed where it was noted that staff were either paid on an hourly, permanent or casual basis.

Other matters that were discussed included the car parking machines. Regarding the café, discussion took place on the introduction of OAP days and Friendship Cafes, both of which may have the potential to encourage volunteers. In noting the installation of a new fast cook oven in the café and a change of internal layout, Members were informed of the potential benefits which included increases to the speed of service and income.

Healthy Open Spaces and Play Strategy

Members were pleased to note that plans were underway to develop a Healthy Open Spaces and Play Strategy which was currently undergoing public consultation. The Group were encouraged to submit their comments online, details of which had previously been circulated to Members. The Strategy was due to be considered by the District Council's Cabinet on 16th July 2020.

12 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the next meeting of the Hinchingsbrooke Country Park Joint Group would be held on 16th October 2020.

Chairman