

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the HINCHINGBROOKE COUNTRY PARK JOINT GROUP held in the Countryside Centre, Hinchingsbrooke Country Park, Brampton Road, Huntingdon, PE29 6DB on Friday, 18 March 2022

PRESENT: Councillor R J West – Chairman.

Councillors K Billington, T D Sanderson and Mrs S R Wilson.

8 INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

In welcoming all to the meeting, the Chairman was pleased to report the news that the District Council had secured a 99-year lease for the Country Park together with the fact that it had been awarded Green Flag Status once again.

9 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 21st October 2021 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

10 MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

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) and a PowerPoint presentation on park activities for the period October 2021 to March 2022. In doing so, comment was made as follows:

Staffing and Volunteers

Members were encouraged to note that both former Kickstarters had now secured full time employment and that two new individuals had started within the team since October 2021. These individuals required more support than the previous cohort which was impacting upon existing workloads. It was further noted that another individual was due to start their placement in the next few weeks.

Having regard to volunteers, the Group were encouraged to note that volunteer numbers had returned back to pre-Covid levels with the exception of SEN volunteers Whilst some had returned, others were unable to owing to the availability of carer support.

Hinchingsbrooke Country Park Management

The Group were encouraged to note the range of work undertaken at the Country Park since the last meeting and noted the work to be undertaken over

the coming months which included installing new pictorial meadows, spring maintenance of park furniture such as benches, way-marker posts and fences, installation of additional way-marker posts and temporary interpretation, the installation of new play equipment, which had been delayed owing to a shortage of materials and ground conditions and the submission of a planning application for the investment project.

A brief discussion was held on the potential conflict with the District Council's Tree Strategy which had recently emerged. This was being dealt with as a high priority by the Countryside Services Manager and the Senior Ranger in conjunction with the District Council's Planning Policy Team.

Community Groups

Members were encouraged to note that community groups had also returned to pre-Covid levels. In noting that negotiations were ongoing with Love to Swim, and in response to questions, it was confirmed that this group had their own insurance arrangements in place and that they would be undertaking their own water quality checks and responsible for providing their own lifeguards.

Satellite Sites

An update was delivered on the range of work being undertaken across Views Common, Stukeley Meadows and Spring Common. It was reported that consideration currently was being given to collaborate with other services to with a view to providing better management practices for these sites.

Café

The "Grab & Go" system remains a popular choice in the Café together with the gift shop which proved popular during the wetter months whilst also generating additional sales in the Café. Attention was drawn to the income levels from the Café when compared to previous years where it was noted that £151,476 had been generated to date in the current financial year.

Events, Activities and Promotions

Events had been arranged in accordance with COVID guidelines which included the Robin Hood interactive trail event, Flix & Picnics, Halloween interactive trail, Den Building interactive trail and Santa's Grotto. The New Year's Eve party had to be cancelled owing to COVID and the outdoor cinema had not proved popular this year due to poor weather conditions and the re-opening of public houses.

The Group's attention was then drawn to a number of upcoming events planned at the Country Park until the end of the calendar year which was welcoming to note.

Countryside Centre

Attention was drawn to occupancy levels and the number of bookings taken at the Countryside Centre compared to previous financial years. The figures showed an improvement when compared to 2020/21 with income to date reported as £14,150. It was noted that the Countryside Services Manager

continued to organise usage of the centre, with continuing reluctance for participants to meet indoors. It has therefore been difficult for the Countryside Services Manager to predict a pattern of usage in the short and medium-term as the type of bookings at the Centre have been variable.

Future Development

Work continues to progress with the development of the project. The Assistant Director (Recovery) reported that the District Council's Cabinet had approved Community Infrastructure Levy funding at their meeting last night which was a positive step for the project. £1.5m of funding had been secured which would help towards the rising costs of materials for the project such as timber and fuel.

In response to a question which had been raised, it was anticipated that works to commence the installation of the new play equipment on site would begin at the end of April/beginning of May 2022. This had been delayed owing to wet weather conditions.

It was confirmed that the Group would have sight of the development plans for the Country Park once public consultation during the planning application phase was underway. It was likely that a Special Meeting of the County Park might be needed to review the plans as part of the development process.

Having had their attention drawn to the key elements of the development proposals and the estimated completion dates for each, it was noted that all scheduled works were due to be completed by Autumn 2023.

Financial Position

Members' attention was drawn to the outturn position of the Park for the 2020/21 financial year and the forecast outturn position for the 2021/22 financial year. In terms of the latter, it was reported that there was an expected underspend for the Countryside Centre attributed to savings from a vacant post and a reduction in building and maintenance costs. Members were encouraged to note that the Café's income would be expected to reach pre-COVID levels.

Councillor T D Sanderson drew the Countryside Services Manager's attention to potential funding available from the County Council's Cultivate Fund. County Councillor K Billington drew the Group's attention to Brampton Community Shed and suggested that Officers might wish to approach this group about the possibility of selling their wares at the Café site and/or at the upcoming planned Craft Fair.

12 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED

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

13 PROPOSED LIAISON AGREEMENT

The Group discussed in detail the proposed Liaison Agreement and made suggested changes/amendments to the document. The Countryside Services Manager was tasked with circulating around electronically an updated version to Members of the Joint Group for final comment. It was agreed that the matter would be discussed in six months' time at the next meeting.

14 RE-ADMITTANCE OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED

that the press and public be readmitted to the meeting.

15 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the next meeting of the Hinchingsbrooke Country Park Joint Group will be held on 14th October 2022 at 10:00am.

Chairman