

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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