

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the HINCHINGBROOKE COUNTRY PARK JOINT GROUP held in Lancaster & Stirling, Civic Suite, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon PE29 3TN on Friday, 21 November 2025.

PRESENT: Councillor M L Beuttell – Chair.

Councillors C Lowe and D J Shaw.

APOLOGIES: An apology for absence from the meeting was submitted on behalf of Councillor J E Kerr.

10. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 18th July 2025 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

11. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

12. HEAD RANGER'S REPORT

By means of a report and presentation by the Parks and Countryside Development Co-ordinator and the Commercial Manager (copies of which were appended in the Minute Book), the Head Ranger's report and an update on the Hinchingbrooke Country Park Development Project were presented to the Group.

Following enquiries from Councillors Lowe and Shaw, the Group heard that trees from the nursery were mainly used in tree planting events within the park and that these events were publicised on social media with volunteers being welcome.

It was confirmed, following a question from Councillor Beuttell that there were no Christmas events planned at the Park due to the planned development works, which were due to commence on 28th November 2025.

The Group heard that temporary catering facilities and wc facilities had been sourced and would be located within the current carpark area of the site to allow for the commencement of works and that temporary signage would be in place. Safe and accessible routes would remain open around the site in order to minimise impact to visitors during the construction phase of the development. Following an enquiry from Councillor Shaw about the access route through Bobs Wood, the Group were advised that this was already in hand with an anticipation that a more robust underfooting for visitors would be maintained.

The plans for the development were shared and the biophilic design was noted. It was advised that a look and feel identity for the Park was hoped for whilst keeping within the Council's corporate identity.

The Group were advised that future plans for the Park post development would aim for a dwell time of 4 hours which would also encourage secondary spend within the onsite café. Following an enquiry from Councillor Shaw about the impact of this on the onsite carparking, the Group heard that this would be reviewed in line with the business case and that the team were looking to the future and longevity of the site.

Following an enquiry from Councillor Beuttell, the Group heard that following a competitor analysis, it was hoped that the site would rival local attractions such as Johnsons and Wimpole Home Farm with country parks increasing in popularity. Councillors Lowe and Shaw enquired about the potential to include either a high ropes or water sports offer within the new site with the opportunity to appeal to both children and adults for family activities.

The proposed industrial park on the border of the park was discussed and it was noted that officers were in conversation with planning colleagues to better understand the development. Concern was expressed by the Group in relation to the height of the development and the potential impact this could have upon the Park.

Following enquiries from Councillors Beuttell and Lowe, the Group heard that 6 contractors had responded to the public tender for the project and that 2 had been shortlisted, both of whom were local to the region.

13. FINANCE REPORT

By means of a report by the Finance Business Partner (a copy of which was appended in the Minute Book), the Group heard that the large underspend shown in the report was due to vacancies during the development phase of the park and additionally assumptions made on the development when forecasting which had since been adjusted. It was also noted that the new electricity contract had also brought lower costs than budgeted. It was noted that the staffing structure would be revisited post development. The café had remained open for longer than anticipated and although catering supplies had increased in cost, more income had been generated assisted by an increase in events.

14. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the next meeting would be held on 17th April 2026 at 10:00am.

Chair

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