

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the HINCHINGBROOKE COUNTRY PARK JOINT GROUP held in Lancaster, Civic Suite, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon PE29 3TN on Friday, 17 April 2026.

PRESENT: Councillor M L Beuttell – Chair.

Councillors C Lowe and D J Shaw.

APOLOGIES: No apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors .

15. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 21st November 2025 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

16. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

17. HEAD RANGER'S REPORT

By means of a report and presentation by the Ranger, 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 was presented to the Group.

The Group heard that the Ranger's Winter Action Plan had been completed successfully. Following a question from Councillor Beuttell, the Group heard that plans were being put in place for watering of the new trees which had been planted to ensure they were successfully established. Moving in to the Summer months, Orchard management to ensure maximum fruit production, meadow and habitat management to ensure long term habitat health.

It was advised that volunteer numbers had increased and were now at around 60 volunteers per week helping with various tasks around the Park and in the café. It was noted that Flood Management would be a key challenge going forward and this was being managed both from the impact on nature habitats and visitor safety.

Partnership working with the Grounds Maintenance team had been developed with a yard on site and allowing the Park to benefit from the teams arboricultural knowledge and enhanced the management of woodland within the Park. Following a question from Councillor Shaw, the Group heard that the yard was being used for the processing of trees and wood and that screening would be developed to minimise visible impact of the area to visitor and improve the streetscene.

It was noted that due to the impact of the development on biodiversity within the Park, BioDiversity Net Gain (BDNG) Credits would be established to replace the areas lost and additionally deliver a 10 percent uplift on those areas. It was further advised that talks were underway with a developer to buy BDNG credits within the Park which would help the team to achieve their Year One BDNG target. Following a further question from Councillor Shaw, the Group heard that the work undertaken by UK Power Networks in the Brampton Wood did not affect the work planned at the Park.

The Group heard that an archaeological dig had been undertaken on the site of the new development and that this had been concluded without any significant discovery. It was noted that the aftermath of the dig was rather unsightly however this was being addressed as the development progressed.

An overview of recent Park events was provided to the Group with the recent Easter Eggventure in the Park noted for the footfall generated, positive reviews and commercial success.

The Group heard that the construction phase of the development had now begun with completion scheduled for Spring 2027. The temporary café had been sited in its new location and would serve an achievable menu of customer favourites suitable to the new facility. In response to questions from Councillor Lowe and Councillor Shaw, the Group heard that new disabled parking bays had been established and that toilet facilities would be completed within the next week. It was also noted that CCTV, which linked to the Council's CCTV control, would be sited at appropriate structural locations throughout the Park, focusing on site security and staff safety. It was further noted that the temporary café was a cashless establishment to further ensure staff safety. In line with the progress of the construction project, a stakeholder update would be distributed on a monthly basis.

It was advised that a waterpark inflatable had been purchased and would be in place by the Summer to increase the visitor experience in the Park. Following concerns from Councillor Shaw, the Group were assured that suitable carparking and access for this attraction would be established as part of the project.

Further commercial opportunities were being developed for the Park with opportunities including an augmented reality trail, high ropes and woodland weddings.

18. 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 provisional outturn for the Park was higher than anticipated. It was noted that the forecast for the year had been done with the anticipation of development works having commenced, however as this had only begun in April the financials reflected this. It was also noted that the Park had shown an increased return on the previous financial year. In particular it was noted that the café had overperformed against the budget and that, due to a new energy tariff, savings had been made on utilities. Following a question from Councillor Beuttell, the Group were advised that detail on the number

of Park vacancies would be sought and circulated following the meeting. It was clarified following a further question from Councillor Beuttell, that competitor analysis had been undertaken on the carpark and that charges following the completion of development would be reviewed, but that carpark monies would be retained by the Park following the redevelopment project.

Councillor Beuttell reflected upon her association with the Park, from her tenure in Cabinet when the lease extension was signed, to her position as Chair of the Hinchingsbrooke Country Park Group seeing through the plans for the redevelopment of the Park into the construction phase and expressed her thanks to the Officers past and present for all that they had achieved in bringing the potential of the Park to fruition.

19. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the next meeting would be held on 16th July 2026 at 10:00am.

Chair