

Hinchingsbrooke Country Park Joint Group – 16 July 2026

Report by: Nick Massey, Nature, Conservation & Volunteer Manager

Lead Cllr: Cllr Julie Kerr
Executive Councillor for Parks and Countryside, Waste and Street Scene



Wards	Open / Exempt	Key Decision?
All	Open	No

LEAD RANGER'S REPORT

Executive Summary:

This report summarises the work delivered at Hinchingsbrooke Country Park from the spring to summer months, the progress and issues over the period and provides a summary of the future months.

Recommendations

- 1.1. The Group is asked to review and comment upon the report and note the progress made to date.

Key Corporate Plan Priorities

- 1 Improving quality of life for local people.
- 2 Creating a better Huntingdonshire for future generations
- 3 Doing our core work well

Place Strategy Priorities

- 1 Protect and enhance our natural environment
- 2 Support healthy, active, and connected communities

Report Author(s)

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1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1** The purpose of this report is to provide the Hinchingsbrooke Country Park Joint Advisory Group with an update on the management and operation of Hinchingsbrooke Country Park during the spring and summer 2026 period.
- 1.2** The report summarises progress against the Hinchingsbrooke Country Park Management Plan, including habitat management, visitor infrastructure improvements, volunteering, staffing changes, and operational developments. It also provides an update on the Hinchingsbrooke Country Park Improvement Project and highlights the priorities for the coming months.
- 1.3** The Joint Advisory Group is invited to review the progress made, note the work undertaken by the Ranger Team and volunteers, and provide any comments or observations to help inform the continued management and development of the Country Park.

2. BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

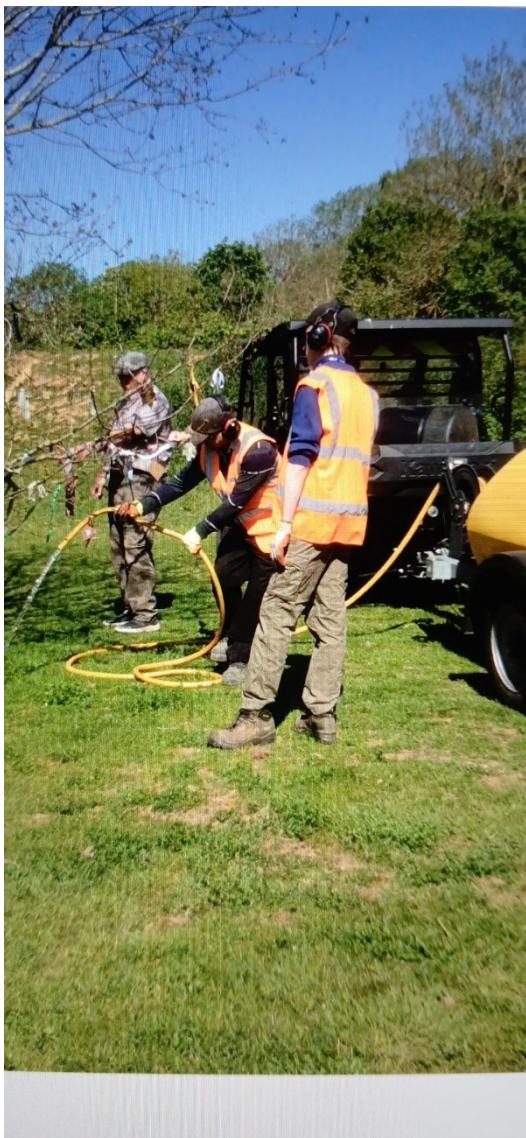
- 2.1** Hinchingsbrooke Country Park is Huntingdonshire District Council's flagship country park, covering approximately 150 acres of woodland, grassland, lakes, and recreational space. The park attracts an estimated 300,000 visitors each year and provides a wide range of opportunities for recreation, health and wellbeing, environmental education, volunteering, and biodiversity conservation. It is managed by Huntingdonshire District Council under a long-term lease from Cambridgeshire County Council and continues to hold the internationally recognised Green Flag Award for high standards of park management.
- 2.2** The park is currently undergoing the most significant period of investment since it was established. The Hinchingsbrooke Country Park Improvement Project includes the construction of a new Visitor Centre and café, improved visitor facilities, enhancements to accessibility, new parking arrangements, and associated infrastructure improvements. Throughout the construction programme, the Ranger Team has continued to ensure that the park remains open, safe, and welcoming for visitors while protecting its important habitats and wildlife.
- 2.3** Alongside the capital improvements, the Parks and Open Spaces service has recently undergone organisational restructuring as part of the creation of the Council's Active Environments Service. This has introduced the new Nature, Conservation and Volunteer Manager role, providing strategic leadership for biodiversity, conservation, volunteering and the management of parks and countryside sites across Huntingdonshire. The Ranger Team continues to play a vital role in delivering both the day-to-day operational management of Hinchingsbrooke Country Park and the Council's wider environmental objectives.
- 2.4** This report provides an update on staffing, volunteering, habitat management, visitor infrastructure, progress against the Hinchingsbrooke Country Park Management Plan and the Improvement Project. It also highlights the key priorities for the coming months as the park continues through this significant period of change.

3. STAFFING

- 3.1** The Parks and Open Spaces service has recently undergone a restructure and now forms part of the new Active Environments Service.
- 3.2** Following this restructure, the new Nature, Conservation and Volunteer Manager role has been created to provide strategic leadership for biodiversity, conservation, volunteering and the management of the Council's parks and open spaces, including Hinchingsbrooke Country Park.
- 3.3** The Ranger Team at Hinchingsbrooke Country Park now consists of one Lead Ranger and two Rangers, supported by the Nature, Conservation and Volunteer Manager.
- 3.4** Following the removal of the dedicated Weekend Warden post, Rangers and the Nature, Conservation and Volunteer Manager now participate in a weekend rota to ensure that both Hinchingsbrooke Country Park and Paxton Pits Nature Reserve continue to have a staff presence during weekends and peak visitor periods.
- 3.5** The team continues to work flexibly across operational, visitor, conservation, and estate management functions, supported by an active volunteer programme.

4. VOLUNTEERS

- 4.1** Volunteer support remains an integral part of the successful management of Hinchingsbrooke Country Park.
- 4.2** Volunteers continue to support Rangers throughout the week with practical conservation, habitat management, visitor infrastructure improvements, and estate maintenance, significantly increasing the amount of work that can be delivered each year.
- 4.3** During National Volunteers' Week, one of the Rangers produced a social media video recognising the invaluable contribution made by volunteers across Huntingdonshire's parks and countryside sites.
- 4.4** A volunteer thank-you event was organised by the Events Development Team on 25 June, bringing together volunteers and staff to celebrate achievements over the past year through photographs, quizzes, and refreshments. The event was very well received and reinforced the Council's commitment to recognising volunteer contributions.
- 4.5** The service continues to explore opportunities to further develop volunteering as part of the wider Active Environments Service.



5. **PROGRESS AGAINST MANAGEMENT PLAN**

- 5.1** Delivery of the Hinchingsbrooke Country Park Management Plan has continued throughout the reporting period despite resources being focused on preparing for the major Improvement Project.

Habitat Management

- 5.2** Routine habitat management has continued across the park to maintain biodiversity and visitor access.

Highlights include:

- Trialling a robotic mower to improve efficiency when maintaining footpath edges.
- Processing and milling timber harvested on site into thirty bird box kits for students at Hinchingsbrooke School, supporting environmental education and biodiversity enhancement.

- Cleaning and refurbishing the Wildlife Lake tern raft, including replacement of nesting gravel ahead of the breeding season.
- Commencing seasonal vegetation management and cutting back encroaching vegetation along key visitor routes.
- Orchid monitoring was scheduled during early June but had to be postponed due to operational priorities. Surveys will be rescheduled where practical.

These works contribute towards the ongoing objectives within the Country Park Management Plan and Green Flag Award standards.



6. VISITOR INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENTS

- 6.1** The Ranger Team has continued to support delivery of the Hinchingsbrooke Country Park Improvement Project whilst ensuring the park remains open and welcoming to visitors.

Key achievements include:

- Supporting the Visitor Experience and Commercial teams with preparation of the temporary "Nestbox" café area.
- Constructing a temporary fenced compound within Bob's Wood to facilitate stakeholder access during construction works.
- Installing additional "No Swimming" signage around the main lake to improve visitor safety.
- Removing infrastructure from the main field to prepare for forthcoming construction activities.
- Relocating the Green Flagpole to accommodate the construction programme.
- Hosting the Green Flag Award judging visit during May 2026. The outcome is awaited.

The Ranger Team continues to work closely with project managers and contractors to minimise disruption to visitors while protecting the park's ecological value throughout the construction phase.



7. OPERATIONS YARD PROGRESS

- 7.1** Considerable progress has been made towards completing the new Operations Yard. The remaining construction work consists of the delivery of approximately 200 tonnes of stone together with completion of the boundary fencing.

Once construction has been completed, attention will move towards establishing operational procedures including:

- Governance Arrangements;
- Health and Safety Documentation;
- Risk Assessments;
- Safe Systems of Work;
- Timber Processing Procedures.

The new facility will improve operational efficiency, timber management, and long-term estate maintenance across the Active Environments Service.



8. WHAT'S NEXT

- 8.1** During the next reporting period the Ranger Team will focus on:
- Supporting delivery of the Hinchingsbrooke Country Park Improvement Project.
 - Completing the Operations Yard and bringing it into operational use.
 - Continuing seasonal habitat management, including grassland, woodland, and lake management.
 - Delivering autumn tree planting and woodland management works.
 - Supporting volunteers through regular practical work parties.
 - Preparing the park for the autumn and winter visitor season.
 - Continuing delivery of the Hinchingsbrooke Country Park Management Plan and maintaining Green Flag Award standards.

9. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED & NOT RECOMMENDED

- 9.1** No alternative options have been considered as this report is provided for information only. The report updates the Joint Advisory Group on operational activity, progress against the Management Plan and planned future work.

10. POST-DECISION IMPLEMENTATION

- 10.1** Following consideration by the Joint Advisory Group, the Ranger Team will continue delivery of the Hinchingsbrooke Country Park Management Plan and Improvement Programme. Progress will be reported through future Joint Advisory Group meetings.

11. IMPLICATIONS OF THE DECISION

11.1 Council Key Priorities and Performance

This report supports the delivery of the Council's Corporate Plan by:

- **Improving quality of life for local people** through the continued management of a safe, accessible, and high-quality country park for recreation, health, and wellbeing.
- **Creating a better Huntingdonshire for future generations** through habitat management, biodiversity enhancement, volunteering, environmental education, and sustainable land management.
- **Doing our core work well** by maintaining park infrastructure, improving visitor facilities, supporting volunteers, and progressing the Hinchingsbrooke Country Park Improvement Project.

The report also supports delivery of the Country Park Management Plan and the Council's wider commitments relating to biodiversity, climate resilience, and community engagement.

11.2 Financial Implications

- 11.2.1** The activities described within this report are being delivered from existing approved revenue and capital budgets.
- 11.2.2** The operational work of the Ranger Team is funded through existing service budgets. Delivery of the Hinchingsbrooke Country Park Improvement Project is funded separately through the Council's approved capital programme.
- 11.2.3** Volunteer support continues to provide significant additional value to the service by assisting with practical conservation work and visitor management activities.
- 11.2.4** There are no additional financial implications arising from this report.

11.3 Policy Implications

- 11.3.1** The report supports delivery of:
- Hinchingsbrooke Country Park Management Plan.
 - Huntingdonshire Corporate Plan.
 - Biodiversity Duty under the Environment Act 2021.
 - Green Flag Award management standards.
 - Huntingdonshire Parks and Open Spaces management objectives.

11.4 Legal & Constitutional Implications

- 11.4.1** The report is provided for information and does not require the Joint Advisory Group to make any statutory decisions.
- 11.4.2** Operational management continues to be undertaken in accordance with relevant health and safety legislation, environmental legislation, the Council's policies, and the terms of the lease for Hinchingsbrooke Country Park.

11.5 Community Impact

- 11.5.1** Hinchingsbrooke Country Park provides significant benefits for residents and visitors by:
- encouraging physical activity and healthy lifestyles;

- providing access to nature and outdoor recreation;
- supporting volunteering opportunities;
- delivering environmental education;
- providing opportunities for community events and engagement.

11.5.2 The continued management and improvement of the park contributes positively to the wellbeing of local communities.

11.6 Environment & Climate Change Implications

11.6.1 The Ranger Team continues to deliver positive environmental outcomes through:

- Woodland management;
- Meadow and Grassland Management;
- Habitat Enhancement;
- Tree Planting;
- Biodiversity Monitoring;
- Sustainable use of timber;
- Volunteer Conservation work.

These activities contribute towards biodiversity recovery, climate resilience, and the Council's environmental objectives.

11.7 Equality & Diversity Implications

11.7.1 There are no adverse equality implications arising from this report. Hinchbrook Country Park continues to improve accessibility for visitors through accessible paths, mobility scooter provision, adapted cycling opportunities and inclusive visitor facilities. The Improvement Project will further enhance accessibility across the site.

11.8 Implications on Resources

N/A

11.9 Health & Wellbeing Implications

N/A

11.10 Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) Implications

N/A

12. RISK MANAGEMENT

N/A

13. BACKGROUND PAPERS– LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

N/A

Document List	Custodian	File Location
None	N/A	N/A