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 3TN9 6DB on Thursday, 16 July 2026.

PRESENT: Councillor M L Beuttell – Chair.

Councillors Lowe, L Dewey-Beckett and W Smith.

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

1. ELECTION OF CHAIR

RESOLVED

that Councillor M L Beuttell be elected Chair of the Hinchingbrooke Country Park Joint Group for the remainder of the Municipal Year.

2. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 17th April 2026 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Vice-Chair at the end of the meeting.

3. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

4. APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIR

RESOLVED

that County Councillor C A Lowe be appointed Vice-Chair of the Hinchingbrooke Country Park Joint Group for the remainder of the Municipal Year.

5. MEMBERSHIP OF THE GROUP

It was noted that the membership of the Group for 2026/27 was as follows:

(a) Cambridgeshire County Council

Councillor C A Lowe

(b) Huntingdonshire District Council

Councillors M L Beuttell, L Dewey-Beckett and W Smith. It was noted that there is a vacancy following the resignation of Councillor T Nelson.

6. HEAD RANGER'S REPORT

The Group heard that following a restructure of the Ranger roles, weekends at the Park were now covered by wardens and rangers and there were now dedicated rangers for habitat banking and Paxton Pits as well apprenticeship opportunities. It was noted that the Park team were working collaboratively alongside One Leisure and Operations colleagues on projects including the launch of the aquapark and sawmill.

Following a question from Councillor Beuttell, it was noted that the orchids were currently in bloom but that observation work had been pushed back in order to focus on the redevelopment project.

In response to a question from Councillor Dewey-Beckett, the Group heard that weekly site checks on tree health were ongoing and that rangers were on site daily to manage and maintain the woodland, and that they were especially cognisant of dry timber in the ongoing extreme summer weather conditions.

In answer to questions from Councillor Smith about engagement with volunteers and residents in relation to commercial activities at the park in particular the aquapark, the Group heard that the Friends of Hinchingbrooke Country Park were aware of the commercial sustainability plan for the park and that regular communication with the group continued to take place, and that they understood that a balanced approach to commercialisation was needed to ensure the continued viability of park activities. It was also advised that due to the confidential nature of the early part of the planning process there had been limited engagement with residents however this dialogue had developed as the project progressed. The team advised that lessons had been learnt from the project and that improved community engagement would be sought for future projects.

Councillor Lowe expressed concern about water quality, in particular Weil’s disease and other water borne diseases. The Group were assured that health and safety of customers was taken very seriously and that regular water testing took place with a specialist company which showed that the water was safe for people to use.

In response to a question from Councillor Beuttell, the Group heard that all safety documents and policies were kept electronically and were available on site at the aquapark should they be requested. It was noted that swimming in the area was discouraged.

It was advised that a sub contractor would remove and store the aquapark inflatable at the end of the season in addition to providing maintenance before reinstalling next year. The purchase of the inflatable had included a training package for staff which had been utilised and the additional lifeguards would have opportunities across the leisure service.

The Group heard that following competitor analysis, a lower introductory offer had been implemented to increase footfall and visibility and that there would be flexibility with pricing across the summer in order to react to the market.

In response to questions relating to the environmental impact the aquapark may have on the park, the Group heard that extensive work had been undertaken to minimise impact and that the inflatable itself was located away from reed beds to ensure that the wildlife would co-exist with activities within the Park.

Following a question from Councillor Smith, the Group heard that the new operations yard at the park was part of a collaborative approach between the Council's services and allowed for timber to be processed on site. This was beneficial to both services as well as having environmental and commercial benefits. The Group were further assured that the yard had been integrated sympathetically with its surroundings.

The Group heard that the development project was on track for completion in early Spring 2027 and an update on progress would be brought to the next meeting.

Councillor Lowe requested a report for Councillors to share with Parish Councils in relation to the community engagement work, the Officers agreed that this would be provided.

7. FINANCE REPORT

Following questions from Councillor Smith, the Group heard that there had been significant changes to the service and its structure prior to budget setting and as a result a very aggressive budget had been set. However this had proved to be too challenging in the year which had seen much transition and the Group were assured that a much more informed approach would be taken in the next round of budget setting.

It was further advised that the aquapark charges included carparking for participants and was away from the main carpark. It was observed that the ongoing development works were affecting carpark revenue due to reduced capacity but that this would be rectified as the project progressed and the new carpark was installed. Officers reassured that they remained mindful of neighbouring residents and monitored the impact of the carparks on them.

8. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting of the Hinchingbrooke Country Park Joint Group was noted as 19th November 2026 at 10:00am.

Chair

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