Hinchingbrooke Country Park Joint Group –
19th November 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?
Brampton	Open	No

LEAD RANGER'S REPORT

Executive Summary:

This report summarises the work delivered at Hinchingbrooke Country Park from the summer and autumn 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 Hinchingbrooke Country Park Joint Advisory Group with an update on the management and operation of Hinchingbrooke Country Park during the Summer and Autumn 2026 period.

1.2 The report summarises progress against the Hinchingbrooke Country Park Management Plan, including habitat management, visitor infrastructure improvements, volunteering, staffing changes, and operational developments. It also provides an update on the Hinchingbrooke 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 Hinchingbrooke 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 Hinchingbrooke 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 is now part of the newly formed 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 Hinchingbrooke 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 Hinchingbrooke 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.

2.5 In July, Hinchingbrooke Country Park was accredited with the Green Flag award for a 9th year in a row.

2.6 In October, the Hinchingbrooke Country Park was once again successfully accredited with full country park status by Natural England, for another three years. HCP was awarded a Green Flag Award for the 9th year in a row.



3. STAFFING

3.1 The Parks and Open Spaces service is now part of the new Active Environments Service.

3.2 The Nature, Conservation and Volunteer Manager role provides strategic leadership for biodiversity, conservation, volunteering and the management of the Council's parks and open spaces, including Hinchingbrooke Country Park.

3.3 The Ranger Team at Hinchingbrooke Country Park now consists of one Lead Ranger and two Rangers, supported by the Nature, Conservation and Volunteer Manager.

3.4 The Rangers team is now at full capacity and participates in a weekend rota to ensure that both Hinchingbrooke 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 Hinchingbrooke 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 Over the reporting period, the Hinchingbrooke Country Park volunteers, and Green Team collectively contributed 501 day's work of work to support the park.



Volunteer work party planting woodland bulbs as part of the Ops Yard mitigation works.



Volunteers supporting the Rangers with key habitat works.

4.4 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 Hinchingbrooke 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:

- August:
  - Butterfly surveys carried out by volunteers
  - Successful switch of Rangers based at Paxton to join team at Hinchingbrooke.
  - Trail cameras have been positioned in the wildlife wood, and a high diversity of species have been recorded.
  - Meadow management, footpath cutting back.

- September:
  - Cut balancing ponds back.
  - Successfully recruited for a new BNG ranger role
  - Improved social media presence – wildlife focus.

- October:
  - Cut back the ‘snake pit’ to maintain habitat for reptiles.
  - Replacing post and rail fencing down by The Wash pond to continue to use site for educational events
  - Orchard hedge has begun to be cut, and pruning can begin once colder weather hits.

- Lots of understorey planting has taken place in areas of the woodland to promote better flora diversity.
- Support and work by volunteers to create resources for the Paxton Halloween event – this proved to be a success and was well received by local residents.

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



Volunteers supporting with key habitat works



Volunteers supporting with seasonal Orchard works.

6. VISITOR INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENTS

6.1 The Ranger Team has continued to support delivery of the Hinchingbrooke 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.
- Supporting the Aqua Park operation and ensuring that ecological and biosecurity measure were in place to limit any impact on the environment.
- Managing and maintaining footpaths and regrowth along edges around the Park for the increased footfall over summer.
- Removal of old post and rail fencing down by The Wash pond and replacement with new materials. This will ensure it can be used in the future for other educational events.
- Maintenance of benches around park to prevent plants growing up underneath.
- Watering of memorial trees on site during drought.

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. RANGER LED EVENTS

7.1 Over the summer, the Rangers and Events team delivered a series eight bat education and detection events at Hinchingbrooke Country Park. This was double the number of events that were delivered last year. These events were supported by the Friends of Hinchingbrooke Country Park, who funded the purchase of a further six bat detectors to allow us to increase the capacity of these events.

7.2 The events were able to engage with over 200 residents over the summer. In addition, the events made a surplus of income which can be reinvested in future events at the park, which was made possible by collaborating with the cafe team, who provided a food and beverage offer for the events.

7.3 The events were well received by those who attended them and the joint approach led to a series of series of successful events.

8. OPERATIONS YARD PROGRESS

8.1 The boundary fencing is now complete, with installation of the gate between the two yards remaining outstanding. The yard extension to accommodate the water tower has also been completed. The proposed canopy is no longer being pursued; marquee options are being explored, with careful consideration given to their appearance and visibility from outside the yard.

8.2 Environmental mitigation works have begun in the adjoining woodland. Areas affected by soil compaction from machinery have been air-spaded, and a 5 cm layer of woodchip is being applied to support soil recovery. Bulbs have been purchased and planted. A grass seed mix selected by Sam James has also been purchased, with sowing planned once the woodchip has decomposed sufficiently.

Completion of the habitat mound is awaiting suitable fine topsoil, expected to become available during the car park works. One further tree is proposed for

removal to improve ground-level light conditions and support the establishment of the grass seed, shrubs, and additional trees.

9. WHAT'S NEXT

9.1 During the next reporting period the Ranger Team will focus on:

- Winter bird surveys scheduled in throughout the winter.
- Felling in plantation woodland area as part of the ongoing HMP rotational cycles.
- Footpath repairs
- Glade creation in woodlands
- Creating invertebrate habitat on wet meadows
- Building and planting stock of black poplar & wild service

10. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED & NOT RECOMMENDED

10.1 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.

11. POST-DECISION IMPLEMENTATION

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

12. IMPLICATIONS OF THE DECISION

12.1 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 Hinchingbrooke 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.

12.2 Financial Implications

12.2.1 The activities described within this report are being delivered from existing approved revenue and capital budgets.

12.2.2 The operational work of the Ranger Team is funded through existing service budgets. Delivery of the Hinchingbrooke Country Park Improvement Project is funded separately through the Council's approved capital programme.

12.2.3 Volunteer support continues to provide significant additional value to the service by assisting with practical conservation work and visitor management activities.

12.2.4 There are no additional financial implications arising from this report.

12.3 Policy Implications

12.3.1 The report supports delivery of:

- Hinchingbrooke 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.

12.4 Legal & Constitutional Implications

12.4.1 The report is provided for information and does not require the Joint Advisory Group to make any statutory decisions.

12.4.2 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 Hinchingbrooke Country Park.

12.5 Community Impact

12.5.1 Hinchingbrooke 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.

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

12.6 Environment & Climate Change Implications

12.6.1 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.

12.7 Equality & Diversity Implications

12.7.1 There are no adverse equality implications arising from this report. Hinchingbrooke 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.

12.8 Implications on Resources

N/A

12.9 Health & Wellbeing Implications

N/A

12.10 Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) Implications

N/A

13. RISK MANAGEMENT

N/A

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

N/A

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