

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the COUNTRYSIDE JOINT GROUP held in the Wren Room, Countryside Centre, Hinchingsbrooke Country Park, Huntingdon, Cambridgeshire on Friday, 12 October 2007.

PRESENT: District Councillors M G Baker, Mrs M Banerjee, J D Fell and C R Hyams.

IN ATTENDANCE: Miss H Ali, Mrs J Arnold, P Knight and Mrs S Martin.

1. ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED

that District Councillor M G Baker be elected Chairman of the Group for the ensuing Municipal Year.

Councillor M G Baker in the Chair.

2. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Group held on 19th April 2007 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

3. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations of interest were received.

4. APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED

that District Councillor J D Fell be appointed Vice-Chairman of the Group for the ensuing Municipal Year.

5. MEMBERSHIP OF THE GROUP

The Membership of the Countryside Joint Group for 2007/08 was noted as follows:-

(a) Cambridgeshire County Council

County Councillor Mrs E Kadic.

(b) Huntingdonshire District Council

District Councillors M G Baker, Mrs M Banerjee, J D Fell and C R Hyams.

6. PROPOSED TERMS OF REFERENCE AND METHOD OF OPERATION: COUNTRYSIDE JOINT GROUP

Pursuant to Minute No. 06/10, the Group considered a report by the Head of Administration (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) proposing a new terms of reference and method of operation for the Group.

Having been acquainted with details of the proposals, Members discussed at great length the future role and function of the Group. As the Liaison Group is formally appointed by the District Council's Cabinet and bearing in mind the recent extension of their remit to cover all countryside matters, Members sought clarification and the views of the Cabinet as to the purpose and status of the Group. Having been advised that the former Liaison was originally a joint initiative between the District and County Councils, Members were advised that the proposals outlined were designed to extend the formal structure which had operated for many years to enable the Group to embrace a wider remit without conflicting the County Council's ongoing freehold interests in the Country Park. After much discussion on the matter, the Group

RESOLVED

that the Cabinet be requested to confirm the status and purpose of the Countryside Joint Group and to comment on the proposed terms of reference as set out in Annex B to the report now submitted.

7. 2006/07 FINAL ACCOUNTS

The Group received and noted a report by the Treasurer (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) reflecting the final accounts for the Country Park and other countryside sites across the District for the 2006/07 financial year.

In noting that net expenditure for the Country Park at £240,000 represented an increase of approximately £9,000 when compared to the original budget, Members were advised that the variation in expenditure had occurred primarily as a result of irrecoverable VAT and central department recharges, both of which had been beyond the direct control of the Senior Ranger. Members were pleased to note that the café had generated an additional £12,000 in income against the budgeted target. The Group congratulated the Café Manager and her staff for their efforts in generating the high levels of income achieved.

Members were encouraged to note that net expenditure of £240,000 for all other countryside sites across the District had only exceeded the budgeted target by £4,000.

8. SENIOR RANGER'S REPORT

In receiving and noting the contents of the Senior Ranger's report (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) comment was made as follows:-

(a) Volunteers and Staffing

Members were encouraged to note the contribution that continued to be made by volunteers to the activities in the Park, particularly from those within the Youth Offending Scheme and on Year 10 work experience.

Members noted that a new Countryside Centre Assistant would be joining the team in October 2007.

(b) Countryside Centre

Details of the number of users of the Countryside Centre for the period April-September 2007 inclusive were presented. Members welcomed the report that the range of users of the Centre had remained the same when compared to the previous year.

(c) Events and Activities

The Senior Ranger presented the Group with details of the events and activities at the Centre over the spring/summer period. Members were pleased to note the success of the courses for both adults and children, which included sessions on mini beasts and pond dipping.

(d) Wider District

Members noted the range of work being undertaken in other parts of the District. In particular, mention was made of the International Bird Fair and the work undertaken in Colne Churchyard. In response to questions raised by a Member, the Group were advised that the churchyard had been closed for burials and it was now the responsibility of the District Council to maintain.

(e) Park Management

The Senior Ranger informed the Group of the various work being undertaken at the Country Park. Particular mention was made of the fencing constructed in the wildlife area and the continuation of footpaths around the lake.

(f) Miscellaneous

Having been acquainted with details of vandalism that had occurred previously within the Park, Members were encouraged to note the involvement of the Police and PCSO's in reducing the level of anti-social behaviour.

Members welcomed the fundraising activities being organised by the "Friends of Hinchingsbrooke Country Park", which included details of a fun run and a wine evening.

Further to Minute No. 06/12(h), the Countryside Services Manager reported that the meeting held on 22nd April 2007

had provided little evidence regarding the assertion that the Park was being turned into a “waste land”. Therefore, it was noted that no further action required to be taken.

9. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Following a request made by the Senior Ranger, Members agreed to re-schedule the next meeting of the Group to 14th March 2008.

Chairman