

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the HINCHINGBROOKE COUNTRY PARK JOINT GROUP held in the Wren Room, Countryside Centre, Hinchingsbrooke Countryside Park on Friday, 14 October 2011.

- PRESENT: Councillor M G Baker – Chairman.
Councillors Mrs M Banerjee and Mrs L Kadic.
- APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors N J Guyatt and R J West.
- IN ATTENDANCE: Ms J Arnold, Mr E Kendall, Ms S Martin and Mrs H J Taylor.

9. 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.

10. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 25 March 2011 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

11. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations of interest were received.

12. APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED

that County Councillor Mrs L Kadic be appointed Vice-Chairman of the Group for the ensuing Municipal Year.

13. MEMBERSHIP OF THE GROUP

The membership of the Hinchingsbrooke Country Park Joint Group for 2011/2012 was noted as follows:-

(a) **Cambridgeshire County Council**

County Councillor Mrs L Kadic.

(b) **Huntingdonshire District Council**

District Councillors M G Baker, Mrs M Banerjee, N J Guyatt

and R J West.

14. 2010/11 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 for the 2010/11 financial year.

In noting that net expenditure for the Country Park was below the budgeted figure, Members were advised that employee costs had increased as staffing levels in the café had been higher than anticipated, however these costs had been mostly offset by savings on premises including a refund of £46k on National Non Domestic Rates for the park.

Members were reminded that the 2011/12 Medium Term Plan had set the Countryside Services a target of £199k savings to be achieved by 2013/14. It was reported that savings of £101k were expected in the current year due in the main to the deletion of the Countryside Services Manager post.

The Treasurer reported that during a recent review of working practices in the Accountancy division it had been decided that, in view of the timescales involved, the final accounts would no longer be reported to this meeting and that an outturn for the following year would be incorporated into the Senior Ranger's report.

RESOLVED

that the contents of the report be noted.

15. SENIOR RANGER'S REPORT

In receiving and noting the contents of the Senior Ranger's report, comment was made as follows:

(a) **Staffing**

Members' attention was drawn to recent staff changes including the release of Pat Knight, Countryside Services Manager and Roland Fletcher, Ranger at Paxton Pits, under the District Council's voluntary release scheme.

(b) **Volunteers**

The Group noted that the number of volunteer days worked currently stood at over 900.

(c) **Countryside Centre**

Details of the number of users of the Countryside Centre for the period April to September 2011 compared to previous years were presented. Members noted that fewer lunches were being booked which was attributed to organisations/businesses cutting back during the economic downturn.

(d) **Café**

Members were advised that trade in the café was heavily weather dependant, however £1000 profit had been made through the sale of a small range of goods. The Senior Ranger reported that from 1st April, staff in the café had agreed to reduce their hours to 4 days a week, subsequently a member of staff had left which had resulted in the Senior Ranger covering in the café for holiday and sickness cover.

(e) **Events and Activities**

The Senior Ranger informed the group of the various events/activities that had been held since the last meeting. A highlight of that period had been the Sports Day which had attracted 570 people partaking in 15 different sports. Members were advised that, in order to save money, an events leaflet had not been produced this year however in response to a number of complaints/comments it has been agreed to produce a scaled down publication, using paper formats rather than glossy brochure, next year.

(f) **Wider District**

Members noted that a range of work had been undertaken in other parts of the District under the countryside services remit. Particular mention was made of the partnership work with Urban & Civic and Godmanchester nursery to grow plants for their Alconbury site.

In response to a question by a Member, the Senior Ranger explained that Rangers continued to work with volunteers and community groups to improve Coneygear Park and Oxmoor estates, however the Community Gardens scheme had not been successful in these areas. Members were pleased to noted that Moor in bloom had gained silver for Best Urban Community in Anglia in Bloom and Huntingdonshire Community Nursery Rangers had been awarded best special needs garden.

(g) **Park Management**

The Senior Ranger informed the Group of the various work being undertaken at the Country Park including tree surveys, construction of fences around the Wash and a new bird hide on the Spit.

(h) **Friends of Hinchingsbrooke Country Park**

It was reported that the Friends of Hinchingsbrooke Country Park would be holding a Christmas Shopping day in the Visitors Centre on 20th November 2011.

(i) **British Open Water Swimming Society**

In response to a question by the Chairman, the Senior Ranger

advised the Group that the British Open Water Swimming Society held regular sessions at the Country Park. Those attending had to be members of the Society and other safety measures were in place including the use of wet suits and safety boats.

(j) **Car Park**

The Group was informed that the introduction of parking charges at the Country Park at the beginning of September 2010 had not resulted in noticeable changes to attendance levels. Members noted that the six hour limit for vehicles parking at the Country Park had deterred commuters and hospital workers from parking there which had freed up parking spaces for users of the park.

16. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Group noted that their next meeting would be held on 30th March 2012.

Chairman