

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the HINCHINGBROOKE COUNTRY PARK JOINT GROUP held in the Countryside Centre, Hinchingsbrooke Country Park on Friday, 26 April 2013.

PRESENT: Councillor M G Baker – Chairman.
Councillors Mrs M Banerjee, Mrs L Kadic and R J West.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillor N J Guyatt and Mr N Green.

IN ATTENDANCE: Mrs J Arnold, Mr J Craig, Mr P Hobbs and Mrs A Jerrom.

8. MINUTES

Subject to the amendment of the name Mr N Brown to Mr N Green in the list of attendees, the Minutes of the meeting of the Group held on 12th October 2012 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

Further to Minute No.6 para. (i), it was agreed that a site visit to Godmanchester Community Nursery, the new boardwalk at Holt Island and the Colne graveyard be arranged for June 2013. With regard to the Community Nursery, Mrs Arnold explained that Urban and Civic had been funding a member of staff to work with the nursery staff in order to gain the knowledge required to carry out future tree planting at the Alconbury Enterprise Zone.

9. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

10. SENIOR RANGER'S REPORT

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

(a) Staffing

Members were advised that the staffing restructure had been completed. Mr P Hobbs had been confirmed as the Senior Warden, Mrs J Arnold the Countryside Services Co-ordinator and Mr J Craig the Green Spaces Manager. In addition Mr J Milligan had been promoted to Ranger and Mr B Gardner who had been responsible for Coneygear Park would now be based at Hinchingsbrooke and look after Coneygear Park when

required.

Mrs Arnold explained that a reduction in hours by the admin officer had provided funding for an extra warden to cover the busier summer months.

No further areas could be identified for savings.

(b) Volunteers

The Group noted that 844 volunteers had provided the equivalent of 5064 man hours of work between September and February.

(c) Countryside Centre

Details of the number of users of the Countryside Centre for the period September 2012 to February 2013 inclusive were presented, along with figures from the previous six years for comparison. Although group bookings had fallen as a result of the economic climate, income continued to increase, more volunteers were being trained and educational opportunities were being increased in order to attract older students and provide out of season opportunities.

(d) Café

Visitor numbers to the café had fallen as a result of the appalling weather conditions, however the café supervisor had worked hard to try and maintain levels by competitive pricing, careful purchasing and the introduction of a medium priced lunch option. A recent upturn in the weather had resulted in a recent Saturday being the café's busiest ever.

(e) Events and Activities

The Senior Ranger informed the group of the various events and activities that had been held since the last meeting. A highlight of the period had been Santa's Grotto which had attracted 192 children despite the very wet weather.

Subsequent to the report being written 'parkruns' had commenced, the free 5km runs took place every Saturday morning and were expected to attract in excess of 100 runners.

The park, in association with the Active Lifestyles Team and with the aid of grant from Cambridgeshire County Council, was in the process of obtaining a selection of adapted bicycles for people of all abilities to hire.

(f) Wider District

Members noted a range of work that had been undertaken in other parts of the District. It was reported that Hinchingsbrooke rangers and volunteers had assisted with the installation of a

new hut at Holt Island and had taken over all practical work at Stukeley Meadows Local Nature Reserve as a contractor was no longer employed for the purpose. The management plans for Spring Common and Stukeley Meadows had also been updated.

(g) Park Management

A new efficient wood fired heating system had been installed at the Countryside Centre and new night storage heaters had been installed in the Visitor Centre and staffroom. Work on improving the woodland rides in Bob's Wood and the New Plantation had commenced. Tree safety surveys had also been carried out and remedial work was under way.

(h) Friends of Hinchingsbrooke Country Park

As a result of fundraising £400 had been provided to the rangers for the purchase of a bird watching scope and tripod to help with the wetland bird survey.

(i) Financial Position

Members' attention was drawn to the park's controllable budget and forecast for 2012/13 and the budget for 2013/14. Members were advised that based on current figures the forecast outturn remained fairly accurate. It was explained that the café remained efficient and was expected to break even despite the weather.

Thanks were expressed to Mr Hobbs and all the staff and volunteers.

In response to a request from an Executive Councillor for any further activity development ideas, Mrs Arnold explained that a programme of events had been arranged, including a walking festival during May. The festival encompassed 90 events many of which would be held on countryside sites. More importantly, the attraction of many volunteer leaders from numerous organisations and the use of sites and routes around the District would publicise the work of not only Countryside but the Council as a whole. Members were reminded of the physical and mental benefits of the park and its associated events to the residents of the District. It was suggested that all elected members be invited to a development day to raise awareness of the park and the wider work carried out by Countryside Services.

11. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Group noted that their next meeting would be held on Friday 11th October 2013.

Chairman