

## HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the HINCHINGBROOKE COUNTRY PARK JOINT GROUP held in the Countryside Centre, Hinchingbrooke Countryside Park on Friday, 21 March 2014.

- PRESENT: Councillor M G Baker – Chairman.  
Councillors M G Baker, Mrs M Banerjee and R J West.
- APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors Brown and R B Howe.
- IN ATTENDANCE: Mrs J Arnold, Messrs J Craig and P Hobbs and Mrs H Taylor.

### **8. MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 11<sup>th</sup> October 2013 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

### **9. MEMBERS' INTERESTS**

No declarations of interest were received.

### **10. SENIOR RANGER'S REPORT**

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

#### **(a) Staffing**

Members were advised Stephanie James had started as Café Assistant at the end of November.

Training had continued over the winter months for Rangers and selected volunteers on the use of chainsaws, brush cutters/trimmers.

#### **(b) Volunteers**

The Group noted that the number of volunteer days worked currently stood at 585, providing 3510 hours of work.

#### **(c) Countryside Centre**

Details of the number of users of the Countryside Centre for the period October 2013 to March 2014 compared to the previous years were presented. It was reported that income for the Centre continued to fall which was attributable to users reducing their expenditure by reducing the number of days

they hire out the facilities. Members were advised that officers were investigating various ways that the building can be used to generate income.

**(d) Café**

Visitor numbers to the café had fallen as a result of the very wet weather conditions over the winter, however a recent upturn in the weather may help to lift the income figures.

Members noted that following the concerns expressed at the previous meeting in relation to a suggestion that the operation of the café be contracted out alongside the Council's other catering services, the tendering exercise had been put on hold.

**(e) Events and Activities**

The Senior Ranger informed the Group of the various events and activities that had been held since the last meeting.

**(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 at Spring Common coppicing 15 small trees around the pond and removing all the cuttings from the site. As well as tree safety work at Hartford Wood, cutting of hedges at Stukeley Meadows Local Nature Reserve and the removal of a hectare of scrub at Stukeley Meadows Railway cutting.

Members referred to the use of volunteers when operating the sites at Paxton Pits, Holt Island etc. Particular mention was made of the need to retain a professional element when steering the volunteers.

**(g) Park Management**

Tree safety surveys had been undertaken at the park and an area of the new plantation thinned out with new trees being planted in various locations.

In response to a suggestion that the Rangers could assist local Parish and Town Councils with tree safety issues, the Green Spaces Manager confirmed that it was unlikely the Rangers would have capacity to undertake this work and that it might be better placed with the dedicated tree surgeon in the Operations division.

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

It was reported that since the last meeting, thermometers, light meters, compasses and membership of a learning outside the classroom organisation had been funded by the Friends of the Country Park. An application also had been submitted to

WREN for funding for a pagoda which, if successful, would benefit outside teaching.

**(i) Financial Position**

Members' attention was drawn to the park's controllable budget and forecast for 2013/14. Members were advised that the current figures for income for the café were likely to change due to a recent increase in sales as a result of the warmer weather.

**11. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The Group noted that their next meeting would be held on Friday 10<sup>th</sup> October 2014.

Chairman