

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

NOTES of the meeting of the HINCHINGBROOKE COUNTRY PARK JOINT GROUP held in the Countryside Centre, Hinchingsbrooke Countryside Park on Friday, 16th October 2015.

PRESENT: Councillors T Hayward and R J West

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors B Hyland, T D Sanderson and County Councillor Sir P Brown.

IN ATTENDANCE: Mrs J Arnold, Mr A Green, Mrs S Martin, Mr A Merrick and Mr C Moss

1. QUORUM

Arising from the meeting being inquorate, Members noted the following matters:-

(a) Operations Review Update

It was noted that according to the Medium Term Financial Strategy the Operations Division had a target to reduce its budget by £2.3million over the next five years. As a result of this a fundamental service review was currently taking place within the Division. Part of the review had involved a restructure and Mr Merrick, Interim Head of Operations explained further details of the restructure. The main points were as follows:

- The number of senior managers had been reduced from five to three.
- The Division would be structured around three distinct business units: Commercial, Environmental and Business Development.
- The Street Cleansing and Grounds Maintenance functions were being integrated as a new Street Scene Service within Environmental Services that would be deployed in two area teams, (North and South). The current Greenspaces Team were being re-shaped as a development team to support the Street Scene Service.
- The Countryside Service sits within Environmental Services and would continue to be managed as a separate team but would work closely with the Development Team to ensure the optimisation of resources.

Other areas discussed included the following:

- It was noted the income stream from recycling fluctuated dependent upon the demands of the market. This reflected in the net costs of the Waste Service for

the Council as the Council gets an income share from the sale of the recyclates. Mr Merrick reported that the Council gets paid for plastics by weight and not volume.

- Huntingdon Town Council had responsibility for 20 play areas in addition to those maintained by the Council and Mr Merrick believed that this was too many to be sustainable. However following a further analysis it was discovered that the north of the town was underprovided. This was currently being reviewed through a shared needs analysis with the Town Council to determine future priorities.
- As part of needs analysis for St Ives, it was found that apart from the need to upgrade two play areas the Town is well provided for in terms of open spaces and allotments.
- Mr Merrick stated that there would be a new Management Plan for the Country Park to determine the future development priorities and maintenance regimes. This would be subject to consultation with the Joint Group. In respect of the remainder of the District, there was not currently a robust database of all the sites owned by the Council. In response to a question from Councillor Hayward, Mr Merrick explained that Parish Councils could assist by sharing information on sites owned by them with the Council; and
- Members noted that the Council does not have the technology to carry out live checks on waste bin enquiries. Currently customers who had phoned the Call Centre regarding a missed bin collection are advised to ring back at 2.30pm. Mr Merrick informed Members that the refuse collection rounds would be reconfigured to re-balance the rounds and to deliver efficiencies by reducing the number of rounds. In addition Members were advised that a waste collection shared service would not realise many benefits.

Discussion ensued in relation to Hinchingsbrooke Country Park matters. The key points were as follows:

- The post of Countryside Co-ordinator had been redefined as Countryside Manager to place a stronger emphasis on the overall management of the service; and
- The Countryside Centre and Café was identified to become more commercial. There was also a Plan to let out meeting rooms to organisations that do not normally utilise the Country Park to encourage a broader use and enable a sustainable income stream.

(b) Staffing

Members noted that Jim Milligan had been appointed as Senior Ranger at the end of July 2015 and Sam James as Ranger at the beginning of September 2015. As a result there was now enough Ranger capacity to take on work experience

staff for the ensuing year. Lesley Cann had left her post of Countryside Centre Cleaner to take up a Caretaker position at Pathfinder House. This had left the Countryside Centre Cleaner post vacant. A project looking to combine the role of Café Supervisor and Countryside Centre Supervisor was currently being investigated

(c) Volunteers

The service had lost several long term volunteers recently as they have moved from the area. However it was reported that three new volunteers had started work at the Park. A handbook for tool use was being developed for training with the trainees receiving a certificate once training was complete.

(d) Wider District

There was currently no capacity to undertake additional work around the District as LEAN was affecting staff cover particularly as staff, had taken leave or had been absent through sickness.

(e) Park Management

The Country Park had been nominated for the 'Best Biodiversity' category within Anglia in Bloom this year.

(f) Café

Members noted that income received at the Café had increased by £9k on this period last year. In response to a query on the increase the Countryside Manager reported that this had been attribute to an enthusiastic Team with good personalities, good homemade food as well as the weather conditions.

(g) Events and Activities

In referencing the Terms of Reference Members asked what the service had been doing in terms of adults with disabilities. In response, it was noted that there had been 40 new users of the wheelchairs. In addition, the specially adapted bicycles had been serviced twice a year by volunteers of the Friends of Hinchingsbrooke Country Park funding the parts. Members were reminded that Hinchingsbrooke was funded by Cambridgeshire County Council to provide 10 volunteer placements per week for people with additional needs.

(h) Finance

Members' attention was drawn to the current positive financial position of the Country Park.

Chairman

DRAFT