

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the HINCHINGBROOKE COUNTRY PARK JOINT GROUP held in the Countryside Centre, Hinchingsbrooke Countryside Park on Friday, 11 March 2016.

PRESENT: Councillor R J West - Chairman.
Councillors R C Carter, T Hayward and R J West.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillor T D Sanderson.

IN ATTENDANCE: Mrs J Arnold, Mr M Chudley, Mr J Milligan, Mr C Moss and Mrs M Sage,

13. ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED

That District Councillor R West be elected as the Chairman of the Hinchingsbrooke Country Park Joint Group for the remainder of the Municipal Year.

Following which Councillor R West took chairmanship of the meeting.

14. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 27th March 2015 and the Notes of the inquorate meeting held on 16th October 2015 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

15. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

There were no declarations of interest received from those Members that were present.

16. APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED

That District Councillor T Sanderson be appointed as the Vice-Chairman of the Hinchingsbrooke Country Park Joint Group for the remainder of the Municipal Year.

17. MEMBERSHIP OF THE GROUP

The Membership of the Hinchingsbrooke Country Park Joint Group for 2015/16 was noted as follows:

(a) Cambridgeshire County Council

Councillor Sir P Brown.

(b) Huntingdonshire District Council

Councillors R C Carter, T F Hayward, T D Sanderson and R J West.

The Group expressed their continued concern at the lack of attendance at the meetings by Cambridgeshire County Council. In an attempt to resolve the matter it was agreed that the Chairman would again write to the Leader of Cambridgeshire County Council to express the Groups' continued concern.

18. SENIOR RANGER'S REPORT

In receiving and noting the content of the Senior Ranger's report on park activities for the period October 2015 – February 2016, comment was made in relation as follows:

(a) Staffing

The Group was informed that following the Café Supervisor ceasing employment, as part of the ongoing restructure, a new Hospitality Supervisor position had been created to manage both the operation of the café and Countryside Centre. It was anticipated that a person would be in post from May 2016.

A new post of Events and Promotions Officer had been created within the Countryside Services team, and this position had been occupied by the former Countryside Centre Co-ordinator. However, until the new Hospitality Supervisor was in post it was impacting on the Events and Promotions Officer being able to fully dedicate to this role.

(b) Volunteers

The Country Park received more interest from students regarding work experience placements than it could accommodate and it had learnt from past experience to be specific as to the requirements of the students and the role.

The Council was considering where apprenticeship schemes could be accommodated, which would include Countryside Services.

The Park received funding from Cambridgeshire County Council for ten adult volunteers who were accompanied by two support workers.

(c) Wider District

As part of the national 'Clean for the Queen' campaign to celebrate the Queen's 90th birthday, a series of community clean-ups events had been organised over a number of sites. The first event was a success and had generated a significant number of volunteers.

(d) Café

In response to question, it was confirmed that there had been cursory investigations as to the viability of relocating the café to within the Countryside Centre. However, the costs and remedial works required to facilitate this had made the idea impracticable.

(e) Countryside Centre

In discussing whether there was further scope as an educational facility it was explained that due to the national curriculum and the resultant lesson timetable it was difficult for secondary schools to allot time to use the Country Park. A number of primary schools already used the Park mainly from Easter through to July.

It was noted that although Hinchingsbrooke Hospital had its own training room, there was a need to better promote the Park at the hospital

(f) Events and Activities

The Group was informed of a new Policy due to be approved by the Cabinet for events in the Council's parks and open spaces and the introduction of fees and charges, which would have an impact on events held at the Country Park.

The new policy framework would establish clear guidelines for the consideration of applications and the staging of events, to provide greater control.

Previously events in Council parks and open spaces were agreed outside of any policy framework, with no coherent structure of fees and charges to ensure the Council recovered the costs incurred with accommodating the events.

There was flexibility within the schedule of charges and deposits depending upon the type of organisation applying to hold an event.

The Group was informed that the Park was part of the Naturally Healthy Week which received national publicity. The Naturally Healthy campaign was submitting a bid for research regarding health benefits from being outside.

(g) Friends of Hinchingsbrooke Country Park

The Friends were seeking a volunteer who could assist with applying for grants.

The Chairman of the Group would be attending the Friends Annual General Meeting.

(h) Financial Position

Members' attention was drawn to the positive financial position of the Country Park. Regarding the Hinchingsbrooke Country Park and Management budget it was noted that there had not been much spend on the maintenance of the building and there had not been as many events organised mid-year. However, combined the running costs and income were on target.

Having installed a log burner in the Centre, £1k funding was received per annum. To generate additional funding the Park was selling surplus logs on a small scale from the Park. However, a more suitable location would be the community nursery.

The nursery was not located within the Park and the Group discussed potential options regarding the future of the nursery.

The Hinchingsbrooke Country Park budget for 2016/17 required savings of £30k to be identified.

Whilst discussing the future of the Hinchingsbrooke Country Park Joint Group it was suggested that it would be preferable to have a Group that considered all open spaces throughout the district, and not solely the Hinchingsbrooke Country Park. Subsequently the Group tasked the Interim Head of Service (Operations) and Cllr Carter along with the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being) to consider opportunities on how to progress the matter, which the Group hoped would be expeditiously actioned.

19. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Group noted that their next meeting would be held on 14th October 2016 at 10am.

Chairman