

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the HINCHINGBROOKE COUNTRY PARK JOINT GROUP held in the Countryside Centre, Hinchingsbrooke Countryside Park on Friday, 24 March 2017.

PRESENT: Councillor R J West – Chairman.
Councillors Ashcroft and T Hayward.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors Mrs A Dickinson and J E White.

10. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Joint Group held on 14th October 2016 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

11. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations of interests were received.

12. MEMBERSHIP OF THE GROUP

The Membership of the Hinchingsbrooke Country Park Joint Group for the remainder of the 2016/17 Municipal Year was noted as follows:

(a) Huntingdonshire District Council

Councillors Mrs A Dickinson, T F Hayward, R J West and J White.

(b) Cambridgeshire County Council

Councillor P Ashcroft.

The Group placed on record its appreciation of the constructive and helpful approach of Councillor R C Carter during his time as Executive Councillor for Operations and its recognition of his work on behalf of the Country Park.

13. SENIOR RANGER'S REPORT

In receiving and noting the contents of the Senior Ranger's report on park activities for the period September 2016 – February 2017, comment was made as follows:

(a) Staffing

Following a reduction in the number of employees at the Centre, including the departure of the Hospitality Manager, new ways of

working had been introduced. The new arrangements were working well, particularly at the café.

(b) Volunteers

Attention was drawn to the activities of volunteers with Special Educational Need and Disability (SEND). It was noted that a SEND group had been working at Spring Common, Huntingdon.

(c) Wider District

The Council's Tree Strategy was valued by parish councils. The Countryside service would have an input into a review by Overview and Scrutiny into the way trees were managed. The service had worked with the Tree Warden to find places for 4,500 trees. Members commended the work that took place in this respect and recommended that it should be publicised. The Joint Group was then acquainted with the extensive ways in which this was already done via social media. The latter provided feedback on users' interests.

(d) Park Management

Storm Doris had added to the winter maintenance workload. Better working relationships with the Operations section had improved the way this was managed.

(e) Café

The café had achieved a significant increase in income in the reporting period.

(f) Countryside Centre

Income from bookings at the Countryside Centre had increased significantly, producing consistent income. This was partly the result of a trend to more unusual uses.

(g) Events, Activities and Promotions

More emphasis would be given to events in the future. A number had already been held, such as the Lego event and a map reading challenge. Some events had received national recognition.

A lunch had been held for the volunteers to thank them for their input into the service.

(h) Financial Position

The report on the service's financial position indicated that for the Country Park in the current year there was a forecast reduction in staff costs, running costs were as expected but income was slightly lower than the budget. The financial position

for the Countryside Centre was as expected. Income at the Café was higher than the budget, which offset higher staff costs.

The report submitted now included the budget for the following year. It showed a significant decrease in staff costs; however, this attributed to a change in the way the costs of staff at other sites were coded.

The Joint Group then discussed District Council Members' involvement in the management of the Country Park and other District Council countryside assets. It was argued that there would be merit in Members having a greater understanding of and responsibility for countryside assets including their wider benefits in terms of their contribution to the local economy. However, the Joint Group had been established to exercise the responsibilities of the District and County Councils for Hinchingsbrooke Park and it was for the District Council to put in place its own arrangements to carry out the suggested functions, possibly through the appropriate Overview and Scrutiny Panel.

14. FRIENDS OF HINCHINGBROOKE COUNTRY PARK

With the aid of a report by the Friends of Hinchingsbrooke Park the Joint Group was reminded that a new Committee of the Friends was established in 2014 with a revised Constitution. The report also outlined the projects completed by the Friends since 2006 and indicated that there had been a 26% increase in Membership in the period March 2015 to March 2016. The Chairman of the Joint Group undertook to prepare a written statement to be presented at the Annual General Meeting of the Friends.

A copy of the Friends' Newsletter for January 2017 was appended to the report. It was noted that the Friends were keen to work more closely with other groups that used the Park. For that reason, a letter from the Chairman of the Friends to the Park's user groups also was attached. In that context, the Joint Group noted the approach to be adopted to develop and implement projects at the Park in the next three to five years.

15. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Joint Group noted that the next meeting would be held on 13th October 2017.

Chairman