

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the HINCHINGBROOKE COUNTRY PARK JOINT GROUP held in the Countryside Centre, Hinchingsbrooke Countryside Park on Friday, 12 October 2018.

PRESENT: District Councillors Costello, R J West,
D R Underwood, J M Palmer and
T D Sanderson.

County Councillor A Costello

1. ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED

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

Councillor R J West in the Chair.

2. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 16th March 2018 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

3. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

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

4. APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED

that District Councillor J M Palmer be appointed as the Vice-Chairman of the Hinchingsbrooke Country Park Joint Group for the remainder of the Municipal Year.

5. MEMBERSHIP OF THE GROUP

The Membership of the Hinchingsbrooke Country Park Joint Group for 2018/19 was noted as follows:

(a) Cambridgeshire County Council (appointment until 2021)

Councillor A Costello

(b) Huntingdonshire District Council

Councillors J M Palmer, T D Sanderson, R J West and D R

Underwood.

6. SENIOR RANGER'S REPORT

In receiving and noting the contents of the Senior Ranger's report on park activities for the period February – September 2018, comment was made in relation as follows:

Staffing

There had been further reductions in staffing at the Park as one of the Rangers had resigned leaving Hinchingsbrooke Country Park in September.

There continued to be an Acting Senior Ranger who divided his time between the Park and Paxton Pits. However, it was noted that resources within Countryside Services had reduced and this was having an impact on service delivery. The hot weather had meant that frequent grass cutting had not been required.

In response to questions regarding maintenance of the pathways around the Park, it was explained that the Park was now in receipt of the sand required to remedy the paths around the lake. However, some paths required a long term solution, such as a boardwalk, which had significant cost implications.

Reference was made to Minute No.26 regarding the Timebank scheme launched in Godmanchester and the suggestion that it might be able to provide assistance to Godmanchester Nursery. However, the Group was advised that this had not been progressed due to sickness absences.

The Group were concerned to hear of the continued staff pressures and enquired of any plans to resolve the situation. It was explained that the consultant's report regarding the long term business plan for the Park had been awaited prior to recruitment to ensure that the future staffing structure was sustainable, to progress the aspirations for the Park. The advertisement of two Ranger posts would imminently be presented for approval to the Senior Leadership Team.

There had also been staffing issues in the Café, following the resignation of the Supervisor. This had now been resolved.

Despite a reduction in staff resources, it was agreed that the Park was being maintained to a high standard, which the Group commended. However, it was important that staff were able to take annual leave, which was currently proving difficult. In response it was explained that there had been some delay regarding the item due to be presented to the Cabinet for determination regarding the long term plan for the Park, the reasons for which were explained. The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Customers and Partnerships) had previously received a presentation on the outline business case.

It was accepted that the Business Plan was being established for the future of the Park but until it reached fruition it was enquired whether there were any interim plans to address the staffing issues. It was

explained that existing staff were accommodating the staff shortages, which was not sustainable. The full business plan would include financial implications and be incorporated within the 2019/2020 budget.

Volunteers

Given the current staffing levels, the Park was unfortunately unable to accept any further volunteers. It was however noted that volunteers had worked 421 days over the previous 6 months.

The assistance provided by the volunteers was invaluable particularly that of the Green Team who were able to work without supervision, which was vital given the lack of staff.

Park Management

In noting the continued high standard of service and maintenance in the Park the Group commended the achievement of the Green Flag award and the Tripadvisor Certificate of Excellence for the consistent high ratings from visitors, as well as being the host for the judging day for the 'In Bloom' competition, for which Huntingdon was awarded gold.

Friends of Hinchingsbrooke Country Park

Following the resignation of a number of Committee Members one of the Huntingdon Parkrun organisers had joined the Committee.

The Friends had agreed to act as receiver of money donated by other groups. Parkrun had successfully received £1200 to replace some bins and the Canoe Club had applied for money to repair their porta cabin. These groups continued to assist with practical tasks such as the non-slip surface on Trolls Bridge.

Café

As previously advised a newly appointed Café Supervisor was now in post and staff levels were returning to an acceptable level following a number of staff leaving for university. This was something which the Park experienced and planned for every September.

It was noted that the Business Plan for the Park also incorporated future plans for the Café.

An apprenticeship role in the Café was being considered which would include responsibility for the management of refreshment bookings within the Countryside Centre.

Events, Activities and Promotions

An Emergency Services Day was held at the Park on Sunday 17 August 2018 which had evolved following conversations between Park staff and the emergency services as a result of an incident within the Park earlier in the year.

The event had been hugely successful with over 3000 visitors. The event had significant financial implications for those attending, yet due to its success the Police had already confirmed attendance at any future events. The fire service had been requested to attend an incident on the day and returned to the event, which was unusual and was another example of how successful the day had been.

The Countryside Support Worker and Café Assistant who were instrumental in organising the event were acknowledged by the Group.

As a result relationships had been formed with Hinchingsbrooke Hospital who now allowed the Park to use the hospital car park for functions.

A similar event next year was being considered which would be an opportune time to celebrate the Parks 30th year. It was requested that the Chairman of Council should be formally invited to any such event.

As Chairman of Disability Huntingdonshire, Cllr Underwood, noted that the Charity recognised the facilities available at the Park for disabled people and also suggested that as the majority of the Park was wheelchair accessible the Park should consider featuring on a website called 'Walks with Wheelchairs' which was a resource of accessible walks throughout the UK. It was noted that there were aspirations to further develop accessible facilities at the Park.

Financial Position

Members' attention was drawn to the financial position of the Park. It was noted that the 2018/19 forecast budget included figures for September.

It was explained that variances in both the 2017/18 Outturn Budget and 2018/19 Budget was as a result of the reduction in Section 106 contributions, which although the reduced figure was predicted last year, the bid to remove this from the budget was rejected.

The Group requested that details of Section 106 contributions be circulated amongst the Group.

Whereupon it was requested:

that an update regarding staff and progress with the long term Business Plan for the Park be presented to the next meeting.

7. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Group noted that their next meeting would be held on 15th March 2019 at 10am.

8. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED:

that the press and public be excluded from the meeting

because the business to be transacted contains information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

9. VERBAL UPDATE ON HINCHINGBROOKE COUNTRY PARK LONG TERM BUSINESS PLAN

In addition to the information already discussed within Minute No. 33, the Hinchingsbrooke Country Park Joint Group were provided with a verbal update as to progress and aspirations contained within the long term Business Plan for the Park.

10. DEMOCRATIC SERVICES OFFICER

In concluding the meeting the Chairman informed the Group that it was the last meeting that Melanie Stimpson would attend as she was due to leave the Council's employment at the end of October.

On behalf of the Group, the Chairman expressed appreciation to Ms Stimpson for her support and contribution to the Group and wished the very best in her new role.

Chairman