

Pentland Hills Regional Park Consultative Forum

Dalkeith, 7 November 2008

Present:-

Midlothian Council – Councillor O Thomson (Convener).

The City of Edinburgh Council – Councillor A Paisley.

West Lothian Council – Councillor Carl John.

British Horse Society – Constance Newbold.

Damhead Community Council – Lorna Goudie.

Fairmilehead Community Council – Alison Elfick.

Scottish Wildlife Trust – Ken Knowles.

Friends of the Pentlands – Mike White.

Orienteering – Janet Clark.

Farming – Robert Barr (NFU).

Ramblers – Johanna Carrie.

Scottish Natural Heritage – Carolyn Clark.

In Attendance – Alan McGregor (Acting Regional Park Manager); Chris Alcorn (West Lothian Council, Planning Services); Linn Denholm (Midlothian Council); Susan Falconer (Pentland Hills Regional Park); Keith Logie (City of Edinburgh Council); Neil McCulloch (Scottish Water); D Emerson and Jack Dunn (City of Edinburgh Council).

1 Minutes

1.1 Pentland Hills Regional Park Consultative Forum of 18 April 2008

The minutes of the meeting of the Consultative Committee were approved as a correct record.

1.2 Pentland Hills Regional Park Joint Committee of 17 October 2008

The minutes of the meeting of the Joint Committee were noted.

Pentland Hills Regional Park Consultative Forum
7 November 2008

2 Regional Park Manager Post – Update

Keith Logie, City of Edinburgh Council explained that the post of Regional Park Manager had become vacant on 3 April 2008 but had been filled on an 'acting' basis for a period of six months from 23 June 2008. The postholder, Alan McGregor, had been recruited from the City of Edinburgh Council, having previously held the post of Outdoor Access Officer.

A recruitment process had been initiated with input from Midlothian and West Lothian Councils, and advice from Scottish Natural Heritage, with a view to making a permanent appointment before the end of 2008 calendar year.

Decision

To note that an Acting Regional Park Manager has been appointed and that the recruitment process for a permanent appointment was underway.

(References – Minute of Pentland Hills Regional Park Joint Committee of 17 October 2008 (item 3); report by the Parks and Greenspace Manager of 17 October 2008, submitted.)

3 Green Flag Award in 2008

The Acting Regional Park Manager reported that the Pentland Hills Regional Park had been awarded the Green Flag Award for 2008 by Greenspace Scotland. The scheme sought to improve the quality of green space throughout Scotland. The Regional Park was the first of the parks to have achieved the award and, as such, represented the largest area of land in the country with the award.

The Regional Park had been assessed by external judges against a range of criteria which had placed the emphasis on quality of visitor's experience; standards of maintenance and management. The judges had provided detailed feedback to the authority on strengths and weaknesses and had included a number of recommendations where improvements might be made. Alan McGregor gave a presentation and spoke on the findings and the areas of comment by the judges.

Ken Knowles (SWT), referring to a comment that 'woodland management was not too good' (in the Bavelaw area), indicated he disagreed with the remarks and questioned whether the judges were fully aware of aims in terms of habitat protection. The Scottish Wildlife Trust however welcomed an opportunity to engage with the park authority further in regard to management of the Red Moss area and other wildlife sites in the park, and the report findings were useful in this regard. Mike Smith (Friends of Pentlands) concurred with the view that the recommendations offered a useful benchmark from which to consider

Pentland Hills Regional Park Consultative Forum
7 November 2008

development in the park and his organisation too would welcome meetings with the Park authority managers to discuss some of the issues.

Bob Barr (NFU) generally welcomed the independent opinions in the report: on 'marketing', however, he questioned their views as against the original aims of the park which were not to actively promote visits but rather to manage existing pressures. It was necessary always to bear in mind that the park was a working environment. He wanted to see more Rangers on the ground, to assist with this balance of conflicting interests.

Decision

- (1) To congratulate the authority on the achievement of a Green Flag Award for 2008 by the Regional Park
- (2) To note the comments from members and which would be taken up by the acting Regional Park Manager.

(References – Minute of Pentland Hills Regional Park Joint Committee of 17 October 2008 (item 4); report by the Parks and Greenspace Manager of 17 October 2008, submitted.)

4 Glencorse Water Treatment Works Project

Neil McCulloch, Project Manager, Scottish Water, gave a presentation on the new water treatment works at Glencorse. The £130 million development had started in August and was part of the 'Edinburgh drinking water project', a strategic programme to replace ageing mains and storage tanks providing the water to Edinburgh and surrounding areas. The new plant would replace the existing Victorian-built water treatment works at Alnwickhill and Fairmilehead.

The new treatment works would essentially be built into the ground and thus hidden from view, using a fitted 'green' roof, made of grass and sedum, and which should blend in with the countryside. Some innovative environmental features were being incorporated, with diverted rainwater creating a new habitat for birds. A temporary mobile pipe manufacturing plant would be used during construction, to reduce lorry journeys by 75%, and an on-site wind turbine would supply a third of the plant's energy needs. Also, Scottish Water were actively engaging with young people to allow first hand experience of the different aspects of a large scale, multi disciplinary, construction project – with partnerships with local schools, colleges and universities, to be explored.

He answered questions from members, particularly regarding the vacated sites at Alnwickhill and Fairmilehead (which would be sold around 2011); the green roof (which would require only light maintenance), and the general matter of

Pentland Hills Regional Park Consultative Forum
7 November 2008

disruption to local resident over the course of the construction works. On the latter point, Lorna Goudie (Damhead CC) said that local people had welcomed the consultation but the disruption to residents at a very local level could be quite severe and should not be under-estimated by Scottish Water.

Councillor Thomson, as a Midlothian member, said that his council had been very pleased generally with the co-operation from the developers, there having been four planning applications, and the efforts made on the consultation process by Scottish Water had been very good.

Decision

To thank Scottish Water for the presentation and update on this project.

5 Key Projects - Update Report

The acting Regional Park Manager gave an update on several key projects within the Regional Park.

With regard to the proposed Flotterstone headquarters and visitor centre, it had been reported to the Joint Committee that it now appeared very unlikely that the funding of £2.3M required would materialise. The capital commitment currently available was a sum of £380,000 as set aside in the City of Edinburgh Council's budget. The remainder of funding would require to be obtained from external sources and the prospects of achieving this now appeared to be remote. Also, the establishment of a charitable trust, if under local authority leadership, was not likely to assist in a significant manner in this regard. The park authority was however still keen to develop the proposal of a charitable trust and officers had to report back with a possible remit and role but involving a voluntary organisation as the lead. They wished to speak to Friends of the Pentlands about possible involvement.

As regards the future, the main imperative for the Gateway proposal had been the requirement for the Regional Park service to secure an alternative headquarters building, given that the current lease would end in March 2012. The City of Edinburgh Council had therefore assigned an officer to carry out an analysis of possible alternative properties within the Regional Park. This would include the two key features of the original gateway proposal i.e. an operational headquarters base and improvements to visitor facilities. The outcome of the study was to be reported to the Joint Committee at the earliest opportunity.

The City of Edinburgh Council was being asked to confirm that the capital sum of £380,000 identified earlier for the Gateway Centre would continue to be made available for use towards alternative accommodation facilities within the Regional Park.

Pentland Hills Regional Park Consultative Forum
7 November 2008

The Joint Committee had agreed –

- 1) To note the outcome of applications made for funding for the Gateway Centre from external sources and consequently that there was a significant shortfall in potential funding for the project.
- 2) To request the City of Edinburgh Council to confirm that the capital sum of £380,000 identified for the Gateway Centre would continue to be made available for alternative facilities.
- 3) To recommend that discussions be held with WREN to assess whether elements of the funding application could be re-directed towards an alternative facility within the Regional Park.
- 4) To note that a study was under way into the possibilities for alternative accommodation for the Regional Park Headquarters and as outlined in the report, the outcome of which was to be reported back to the Joint Committee.
- 5) To agree that discussions should be held with Friends of Pentlands regarding the possibilities for a charitable trust for the purposes of fundraising for projects in support of the aims of the Regional Park.
- 6) To ask the officers to report back to the Joint Committee on the terms of the contract entered into with the consultants engaged to investigate possible external sources of external funding and the work realised under this contract.

In regard to other matters affecting general funding, Scottish Natural Heritage was altering their method of grant support, such that monies would be paid to local authorities rather than go directly to the park authority. Officers were in discussion with SNH over the mechanisms as to how this would work in practice.

During discussion, members expressed support for the idea of development of a Conservation Trust. Mike Smith (Friends of Pentlands) confirmed that he was due to meet with the Park Manager later this month to consider the proposal. In regard to possible alternatives to Flotterstone, it was noted that Hillend was being considered, as also were various other sites on both sides of the Pentlands.

Decision

To note the update report and in particular the intention to seek an alternative headquarters location and to pursue the proposal to develop a charitable Conservation Trust.

Pentland Hills Regional Park Consultative Forum
7 November 2008

(Reference – reports by the Parks and Green Space Manager 17 October 2008, submitted.)

6 Consultative Forum – Request for Additional Membership

The Regional Park Joint Committee had agreed to refer a report on community council membership to the Consultative Forum for its views.

The acting Regional Park Manager reported on a request from Balerno Community Council to be represented on the Consultative Forum. There were three community council places at present on the Forum – allocated on a basis of one for each local authority - as occupied by Fairmilehead, Damhead and Kirknewton Community Councils. The geographical area of the Regional Park covered nine community council areas in total.

During discussion, members felt that the existing representation was perhaps reasonable, bearing in mind the balance of representation across landowners, recreational and community representatives. However, it was perhaps desirable that community councils were able to be informed of developments in the park area. There was also an opportunity for councils to raise items with the Regional Park Manager and thereby bring them on to agendas; the community council could make a request to speak to the Forum on the particular point.

Decision

- (1) To respond to Balerno Community Council in terms that the current arrangement of one community council per local authority was considered to be appropriate for the Consultative Forum and therefore to adhere to the status quo as regards representation.
- (2) To ask the Clerk to write to the nine community councils within the Pentland Hills Regional Park boundary with a view to making an arrangement whereby the community councils were able to be informed of agendas and papers for meetings and of procedures for making requests to speak to the Consultative Forum.

(References - Minute of Pentland Hills Regional Park Joint Committee of 17 October 2008 (item 7); report by the Parks and Greenspace Manager of 17 October 2008, submitted.)

Pentland Hills Regional Park Consultative Forum
7 November 2008

7 Forum Member Updates

A 'round table' opportunity for members to provide an update on matters relevant to the Regional Park.

Bob Barr (NFU) highlighted concerns over the deterioration of paths in the Harlaw area due to usage by horse riders, cyclists and walkers during wet weather periods; this was a constant problem for the farming community. Constance Newbold stated that the British Horse Society provided written rules to riders using the Pentlands and indicated that she would be happy to meet with farmers on the advice to be provided. The Acting Regional Park Manager suggested that this was a definite area where Rangers, and the volunteer ranger service, could be of assistance in terms of making contact with visitors on the ground, and the giving of advice on sensitive areas and protocol.

Keith Logie, Park Strategy Manager, highlighted that there was a possibility of working more closely with the Friends of the Pentlands to explore ways of obtaining funding to improve paths, with a view to easing pressure on the well-known areas considered to be sensitive. Mike Smith reported on discussions with a specific landowner as taken up by his group, with a view to trying to draw in funds. Joanna Carrie suggested that the Ramblers might also be approached to see whether any scope for assisting by means of fund-raising. Possibly, there was a role in seeking corporate sponsorship from large Edinburgh based companies, by the park authority.

The points made were noted.

8 Date of Next Meeting

It was agreed that the next meeting of the Forum should be held on Friday 27 March 2009 at 2pm, with a request for use of Midlothian House, it being considered to be a very satisfactory venue.