

Committee Minutes

Pentland Hills Regional Park Consultative Forum

Midlothian House, Dalkeith, 11 June 2010

Present:-

The City of Edinburgh Council – Councillor A Paisley (in the Chair).

West Lothian Council – Councillor Carl John

Farming – Robert Barr (NFU).

Harperrig Community Council – Graham Hamilton.

Scottish Wildlife Trust – Ken Knowles.

Friends of the Pentlands – John Stirling.

Ministry of Defence Estates – Mark Johnston

Orienteering – Janet Clark

Kirknewton Community Council – Hugh Hunter-Gordon

Balerno Conservation and Development Group – Alan Laing.

In Attendance:- Alan McGregor, (Regional Park Manager); J Kinch (Midlothian Council), C Alcorn (West Lothian Council) and D Emerson (Committee Services, City of Edinburgh Council).

1 Chair

Councillor Paisley was appointed to the Chair.

2 Minutes

1.1 Pentland Hill Regional Park Consultative Forum of 15 January 2010

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

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1.2 Pentland Hills Regional Park Joint Committee of 8 March and 28 May 2010

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

3 Midlothian Council – Minute of Agreement

The Consultative Forum had previously noted the notice of intention to withdraw from the Minute of Agreement by Midlothian Council but that negotiations were continuing to try to find a budgetary solution.

The Regional Park Manager now gave an update on an agreement reached in negotiations between the City of Edinburgh Council as managing authority and Midlothian Council and as approved by the Joint Committee on 28 May 2010. In essence Midlothian Council had offered to pay a reduced contribution of £52,600 for the next two years, and which would provide continuity of funding until the next local government elections in 2012. This amount was a considerable reduction on the current contribution of £89,697 and would be met through re-allocation of costs to the City of Edinburgh Council and with further cost saving measures. The arrangement would allow the Park to continue to function and therefore for the minute of agreement to remain in place.

During discussion, members welcomed the fact that the authorities had reached an agreement that would allow Midlothian council to remain as a partner to the agreement, and against a difficult background of reductions in public sector funding.

Decision

To note that an agreement reached for the next two years in regard to the funding of the Regional Park.

(Reference – minutes of meeting of the Pentland Hills Regional Park Joint Committee, 28 May 2010 (item 2); report by the Parks and Greenspace Manager, 28 May 2010, submitted)

4 Pentlands Produce

The Regional Park Manager gave an update on the Pentland Produce scheme, a recent meeting of the members in the scheme having been held. The park authority was looking to try to assist the scheme with officer advice from staff in the City of Edinburgh and West Lothian Council economic development units.

Bob Barr (Farming) suggested there may be scope to bring in people with small business experience who were outside of the park but had obvious connections with the Pentland Hills and who saw advantage in being associated with the

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brand. Also, craft industries and the like could be brought on board, in addition to the traditional agricultural products of beef and lamb and other food related industry.

Decision

To note the points made in regard to support for development of the scheme.

5 Regional Park Operational Report

The Regional Park Manager gave an update on recent initiatives in the Regional Park, with particular reference to:

- **Anti-social Behaviour** – Following on from the liaison with the police and environmental wardens and others, there would be efforts to counter anti-social behaviour associated with camping, particularly at Bonaly Country Park, over the summer. The aim was not to prevent camping but to focus on irresponsible behaviour by a minority of campers.
- **Harperrig Management Group** – a number of measures were proposed including a new area of woodland within Cairns Farm, and discussions regarding a new footpath along the south shore which could be installed during 2011/12. The Central Scotland Trust were intending to plant trees during August.
- **Commercial Dog Walking** – some developments on the national front, including a Control of Dogs (Scotland) Bill passed by the Scottish Parliament – which although not specifically addressed to commercial dog walkers, did provide local authorities with new powers. Recent publicity had resulted in a number of enquiries from commercial dog walkers and the Regional Park Manager was arranging meetings with these persons on an individual and collective basis and with a view to developing a voluntary code of practice for any using the Regional Park.
- **Threipmuir Car Park** – which was proposed to be refurbished and re-designed, to be carried out in 2011/12 subject to budget confirmation of funding of £50,000.

During discussion, Mark Johnston confirmed that the Ministry of Defence was sensitive as regards the camping issue – as it could interfere with operational training requirements for the army, particularly night-time activity. They were currently looking into the legal position.

On commercial dog-walking, members were generally in favour of looking at the potential for a licensing system as a means to regulate the activity. J Kinch

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suggested that the matter of introduction of by-laws could be considered by the local authorities, though the difficulties of land in private hands was an issue.

Decision

To note the summary of recent operational matters affecting the Regional Park.

(Reference – report by the Parks and Greenspace Manager 28 May 2010, submitted.)

6 Joint Committee Site Visits

The Joint Committee had agreed to hold a meeting with site visits to follow, on 22 June 2010, with sites of topical interest to be visited.

Decision

To note the information, with site visits for members of the Consultative Forum to be arranged in due course.

7 Requests For Memorials in the Regional Park

The Regional Park Manager referred to a growing number of requests for memorials to be erected in the Regional Park by private parties. To date, these had been assessed on a case by case basis, but he felt there was now a need for more general guidance on the matter.

He gave a presentation and asked for the Consultative Forum's views. In general, members felt that requests for memorials should be resisted except where the form and type of memorial fitted well with the environment and there was a demonstrable need or operational requirement for the facility, and with a wider community benefit. Also, that particular regard be had to the areas in the higher hills which by their nature were more sensitive to impact of man-made structures. An example of a memorial deemed suitable was the 'bird hide' at Threipmuir Reservoir, as erected by the RSPB/Friends of the Pentlands, and available as a bird watching facility to the public.

Decision

To note the points made in regard to the future development of guidelines on dealing with requests for memorials in the Regional Park.

(Reference – report by the Parks and Greenspace Manager 28 May 2010, submitted.)

8 Charging in the Regional Park

The Joint Committee had suggested that the Regional Park Manager should investigate the possibility of charging for car parks and possibly other services within the Regional Park.

The Regional Park Manager now reported on areas that could potentially be looked at and ranging from active promotion of training courses in countryside management, leasing of Regional Park buildings for commercial training course, to other forms of charging for facilities which added value to private land. e.g. self-closing gates.

M Johnston referred to examples where the MoD levied charges, but more often intended as a regulating mechanism rather than income generation. He thought that there was some scope for charging but that in the current market it was limited. Other members saw some potential in advertising, through Regional Park publications. More generally there was scope for user charging for facilities such as car parks and from fund-raising from major charities or organisations concerned with countryside matters.

Decision

To note the points made in connection with the potential for charging and income generation measures in the Regional Park.

(Reference – report by the Parks and Greenspace Manager 28 May 2010, submitted.)

9 Members Updates

Members raised the following points during updates –

9.1 Wind Monitoring Masts at Fauchs Hill, Colzium

Hugh Hunter-Gordon referred to a planning application for erection of three wind monitoring masts at Colzium, near to Harperrig Reservoir, as had been lodged with West Lothian Council. The Community Council was concerned that, and as had been reported in the press, the development company had an intention to apply for permission to develop a wind farm on the site. They had concerns about the impact on the landscape, the site being on the edge of the Regional Park.

Councillor Carl John confirmed that a planning application for erection of wind monitoring masts for a period of 18 months had been received by West Lothian Council but had not been decided as yet. It was understood that the applicants were also to seek advice from the

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Scottish Executive regarding any special requirements in regards to the process of submitting any application for a wind farm on the site.

Decision

To note the position and that the officials would attempt to clarify the locus of the Regional Park if any application for a wind-farm were to be submitted to the planning authority.

9.2 Balerno Community Council

The Convener allowed Mr K Shade, Chair of Balerno Community Council, to speak as regards a request for representation by the community council on the Consultative Forum. Mr Shade considered that as the village of Balerno adjoined the boundary of the Regional Park, and particularly the important sites at Threipmuir and Bavelaw, it was closely associated with the Regional Park. He noted that there was already community council representation on the Forum, and also from the Balerno Conservation and Development Group, but felt that in view of their obvious association with the park area, Balerno Community Council should be afforded representation.

(The Consultative Forum had considered a similar request in 2008 but had then decided that the representation arrangements in place were equitable i.e. one community council per local authority area and that no change should be made. There were a total of 9 community councils covered by the area of the Regional Park and with one place allocated to Fairmilehead, Damhead and Kirknewton Community Councils.)

Decision

To make a recommendation to the Joint Committee that Balerno Community Council, and all of the other community councils covered by the Regional Park, should be invited to join the Consultative Forum.

9.3 Mark Johnston (MoD Estates)

Mark Johnston, Ministry of Defence, was leaving to take up a post in Germany. The members thanked Mr Johnston for his support to the Consultative Forum over the years and gave best wishes for his new posting.

10 Date of Next Meeting

Friday 22 October 2010, at 2.00 pm in Midlothian House, Dalkeith.