

Committee Minutes

Pentland Hills Regional Park Consultative Forum

Bonaly Scout Hall, Edinburgh on 11 February 2011

Present:-

The City of Edinburgh Council – Councillors C Keir (Convener) and Paisley.

Farming – Jeff Stoddart (NFU).

Fairmilehead Community Council – Alison Elfick

Harperrig Management Group – Graeme Hamilton

British Horse Society – Constance Newbold

Friends of the Pentlands – John Stirling.

Ministry of Defence Estates – Maj. K Torp-Petersen

Balerno Village Trust – Alan Laing.

In Attendance:- Alan McGregor, (Regional Park Manager); Garry Cormack (Midlothian Council), Chris Alcorn (West Lothian Council) and D Emerson (City of Edinburgh Council).

1 Minutes –

- 1.1 **Pentland Hills Regional Park Consultative Forum of 22 October 2010** – the minutes of the meeting were approved as a correct record.
- 1.2 **Pentland Hills Regional Park Joint Committee of 14 January 2011** - the minutes of the meeting were noted.

2 Regional Park – Operational Update

The Regional Park Manager gave an update on matters affecting the Regional Park. Amongst points raised were: Bonaly Country Park – woodland planting;

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Harperrig - possible new car park, footpath on the south shore and new woodland; meeting of chairs of Pentland Hills and Muirshiel Regional Parks, and introduction of charging for special events and activities provided through the Park service.

On the latter point, the Regional Park service was proposing to introduce modest level user charges for certain activities that involved costs for the Regional Park and which would bring in additional income for the service.

Decision

To note the report on operational matters and to approve the proposed list of charges for events.

(Reference – report by the Parks and Greenspace Manager, 14 January 2011, submitted)

3 Access Study – Consultations

The Regional Park Manager had invited representatives of Land Use Consultants (Edinburgh), as appointed to carry out a scoping study into possible access routes into the Regional Park, to give a presentation of their work.

The consultants explained that the intention of the study was to look at up to twelve options with a view to boiling these down to four more definite proposals which would then be scoped out to a stage of preparatory work for making applications being in place. They outlined existing strategic links, involving former railway lines, canals, routes based on Roman roads, river-ways, etc, and suggested possible options for routes into the Hills. They had had regard to both the links within Edinburgh and from the communities outside the city.

The Convener suggested that members take the time to consider and comments on the various proposals, as outlined, with the consultants recording the views outlined. Major Torp-Petersen stressed a point that, as regards Ministry of Defence land, the consultants should liaise with the designated Access Officer; some problems were having been encountered with the public straying from agreed routes onto training area at Castlelaw – any new routes in this area would require careful consideration.

There would be a further period for consultation with the landowners and other interested parties, after which the findings would be reported to the Joint Committee by the end of March.

Decision

To note the points made by members on the various options, and as would be analysed by the consultants, with a view to reporting to the Park authority by the end of March.

4 Charges For Car Parking

The Joint Committee had agreed to consult on the principle of introducing charges for car parking within the Regional Park. The proposal was to introduce charges at four public car parks i.e. Threipmuir, Harlaw, Bonaly and Flotterstone - with a system of 'voluntary charge' of £1 per visit. It was estimated that it could generate a minimum of £25,000 per annum, after operating costs, and which would be applied to improvements in the Regional Park.

In discussion, the majority of members were in favour of the proposal, considering that charges could be justified, if the income were to be shown to being applied to necessary improvement works. C Newbold (Horse-riding) suggested that consideration be given to providing a suitable parking bay for a horse box at Flotterstone; she felt the public would be happy to pay the charge. G Hamilton suggested there was perhaps a case for 'mandatory' charging – if the income were clearly to be shown to being applied to Park improvements.

J Stirling (Friends of the Pentlands) said that he was against charging in principle and on grounds that it could also lead to displacement of cars, either in a local sense or a more general displacement to other areas of the Regional Park where no charges applied and which were perhaps less able to cope with an increase in traffic.

Decision

To note the points made and that there would be further consultations with the landowners, police, public agencies and also on any scope for 'out-sourcing' the administration of charging, with a view to a further report to the Joint Committee.

(Reference – report by the Parks and Greenspace Manager, 14 January 2011, submitted)

5 Events and Activities

V Partridge (Ranger) gave an update on events carried out in the Regional Park and the programme planned for the coming year. Some specialist two-day courses and the like were to be subject to a charge this year – some of these educational/recreational courses being popular and fully booked.

He explained the ethos behind the programme of events, the objectives of the events, and the types of groups that were becoming more involved in the regional Park.

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Decision

To note the information.

6 Balerno Hydro Micro-Scheme

Mr A Laing (Balerno Village Trust) gave a presentation of the proposals being sponsored by the Balerno Village Trust for a micro hydro scheme at Harlaw and the Water of Leith. The project was progressing and the Trust was currently in discussions with the planning and utility authorities. The general intention was to create electricity to be fed into the National Grid and with any profits accruing to be applied to the local community. It was still at the design stage with a view to a grant application.

Decision

To note the information.

7 Members Updates

Members raised the following points during updates –

7.1 Vandalism Issues –

Major Torp-Petersen spoke in relation to problems of vandalism in the Regional Park, referring to the Steadings at Dreghorn, and others, and said he was pleased to have attended meetings held recently with the police and other interests in the Regional Park. The matter of cooperation amongst the various authorities was welcomed. Jeff Stoddart (Farming) referred to the NFU briefings on similar initiatives to link up farmers and others in rural areas by a 'texting' arrangement to allow rapid reporting of suspicious movements - there had been some fair success with the schemes in some parts of the country. Noted.

7.2 Friends of the Pentlands

John Stirling reported on a planned event in May for people with disabilities – to introduce some of the routes in the Regional Park. The event would involve the Blind Ramblers and Riding for the Disabled. It was the first type of event of this kind and could be developed further and was being supported by the Park service. Noted.