

Committee Minutes

Pentland Hills Regional Park Joint Committee

Regional Park Headquarters, Biggar Road, Edinburgh
22 July 2011

Present:-

Members:-

City of Edinburgh Council – Councillors Keir and Paisley.

Midlothian Council – Councillor Thacker.

West Lothian Council – Councillor Carl John.

Scottish Natural Heritage – J O’Keefe (substituting for J Winning)

In Attendance:-

A McGregor (Regional Park Manager) and D Jamieson (City of Edinburgh Council); J Kinch (Midlothian Council), C Alcorn (West Lothian Council) and D Emerson (City of Edinburgh Council).

1 Councillor Keir – Scottish Parliament

Members congratulated Colin Keir on his election as a Member of the Scottish Parliament in the elections held in May this year.

Councillor Keir indicated that he was intending to resign as Chair of the Joint Committee at a later stage to allow him to concentrate on duties as an MSP. He would give advance notice once he had consulted colleagues in the City of Edinburgh Council. Noted.

1 Minutes –

- 1.1 **Pentland Hills Regional Park Joint Committee of 14 January 2011** - the minutes of the meeting were approved as a correct record.

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1.2 Pentland Hills Regional Park Consultative Forum of 11 February 2011 – the minutes of the meeting were noted.

2 Midlothian Snowsport Centre – Draft Planning Brief

Midlothian Council had asked its officers to draw up a stage one planning brief for the proposed development of a 'Snowsport centre' at Hillend Ski Centre, after confirmation of capital funding of £553,000 from SportsScotland to improve infrastructure and facilities and a further £400,00 available through the Scottish Government's 'active schools programme' to support use by schools. The Council was proposing to allow complementary commercial development on land within Hillend Country Park in order to support the Snowsport centre. The Council was now consulting the Joint Committee, prior to a wider consultation exercise.

Olga Shenka, Commercial Services, and Janice Long, Planning Manager, Midlothian Council, gave a presentation of the draft proposals for a planning brief for the site. The aim was to create the 'Snowsports Centre' that would be regarded as a 'tourist destination' with the intention to allow accommodation for visitor stays of 3 days or more, possibly including a small hotel. They outlined the areas in the country park that could come under consideration for development and the type of development that could be allowed. The sensitivity of the site was already recognised in the existing planning designations, some land being Green Belt, but the Local Plan also recognised a need for potential development to improve the Hillend Ski Centre. The Local Plan otherwise reflected the aims and objectives of the Regional Park.

During discussion, members indicated general acceptance of the need for new, complementary, development in order to improve the Hillend Ski Centre and that sensitive new development could be compatible with the aims of the Regional Park and modern approaches to countryside recreation. Areas for concern would relate to visual impact and impact on the landscape and biodiversity. There was an opportunity presented perhaps to soften the impact of the existing ski slopes and their associated lighting and structures, with substitution of new, less intrusive, materials on the hill sides. The level of development in terms of visitor accommodation and replacement buildings that could be accommodated would be for the planning authorities to consider. It was noted that Environmental Impact Assessments were likely to be required in connection with any planning applications.

Decision

To note the points made in connection with the stage-one draft development brief, these to be taken into consideration by Midlothian Council.

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(Reference – report by Parks and Greenspace Manager, with draft stage one Planning Brief by Midlothian Council, 22 July 2011, submitted.)

3 Regional Park – Operations Update

The Regional Park Manager gave an update on operational matters. He referred in particular to the ongoing access study into development of new pedestrian links from local communities into the Regional Park (which was now the subject of considerations with the Edinburgh and Lothians Greenspace Trust); new path on the south of Harlaw Reservoir; Ranger initiatives on camping/dog fouling/open-water swimming (Threipmuir) and support for visitors and farmers during the lambing season. Other items reported included the Local Nature Reserve designation at Harperigg and tree planting and access improvements at the reservoir. Also, work being done by the Mountain Bikers group and Friends of the Pentlands on some upland repairs.

Decision

1. To note the report on operational matters by the Regional Manager.
2. To thank Nigel Franklin, who had recently left his post with the Ranger Service and had been instrumental in the realisation of the Local Nature Reserve and associated work at Harperigg Reservoir, for his service to the authority.

(Reference – report by the Parks and Greenspace Manager, 22 July 2011, submitted)

4 Charges For Car Parking

The Joint Committee had previously agreed to consult on the principle of introducing charges for car parking within the Regional Park, either on a voluntary or compulsory basis, and including the option of out-sourcing the management of the charging arrangements. The scheme was to be based on four public car parks within the Regional Park i.e. Threipmuir, Harlaw, Bonaly and Flotterstone. The car parks attracted between 60,000 and 77,000 visitors per annum.

The consultation exercise had elicited 115 responses, the content of which was now summarised by the Parks and Greenspace Manager. There appeared to be fairly strong support for a voluntary approach but some doubt over whether it would raise sufficient income on its own; there was lesser support for a compulsory system and particularly if it was to be backed up by strict enforcement measures. Issues of concern over displacement parking were frequently raised during the consultations.

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The Regional Park Manager gave his views on the findings and possible options for a way forward either on a voluntary or compulsory basis. He gave an outline of number of possible scenarios and the issues involved, including possible income streams using either a £1 or £2 charge under various take-up rates. The capital costs for start-up were estimated at £25,000 but possibly lower if using surplus stock from the local authorities. Estimates of income to be realised over various scenarios varied from a loss-making position up to £60,000 per annum.

In summary, he suggested that there were three possible options -

- Compulsory charging – which would require Traffic Regulation Orders to be promoted by the local authorities, issues of management of the collections, and possibly not be in place until September 2012.
- Voluntary Contributions – involving a trial project at one car park, with either £1 or £2 charge, on a basis of voluntary contributions from the public.
- To suspend the parking charges proposal and retain the status quo.

Members were of a view that a voluntary scheme was unlikely to be successful and that adoption of a compulsory scheme in some form was required, if any significant sums of money were to be raised. In terms of communicating with the public, it was essential to stress the point that the monies were to be applied solely to the Regional Park.

The Convener suggested that the Committee make a recommendation to the City of Edinburgh and Midlothian Councils to the effect that a system of compulsory charging be introduced and with the necessary Traffic Regulation Orders to be promulgated: if any related issues were to arise during the process, then the matter should be reported back to the Joint Committee. The actual level for any charges to be applied could be agreed by the Councils.

Decision

To recommend to the City of Edinburgh Council, in respect of the land at Threipmuir, Harlaw and Bonaly car parks, and to Midlothian Council in respect of Flotterstone, that compulsory charging for car parking should be applied, with the monies realised to be applied to the Regional Park budget, and with the officials asked to report and promote appropriate Traffic Regulation Orders for such schemes.

(Reference – report by Parks and Greenspace Manager, 22 July 2011, submitted)

5 Regional Park Budget 2011/12

The Parks and Greenspace Manager gave an outline of expenditure incurred last year and forecast for 2011/12. In total, expenditure in 2010/11, at £391,007, was down slightly on the 2009/10 level of £393,930. The forecast expenditure for 2011/12 was £392,230.

With regard to grant support from Scottish Natural Heritage, the two-year transitional measures had now ended and therefore there was no funding forthcoming from this source. In terms of local authority funding for 2011/12, West Lothian Council's contribution remained at the level set in the Minute of Agreement and unchanged at £10,760; Midlothian's contribution was £52,600 (with index-linking), and with the City of Edinburgh Council contribution set to rise to £313,135 (or 82.57% of the total).

The Parks and Greenspace Manager said that there had been an increasing burden on the City of Edinburgh Council over the last three years as it had picked up the shortfall in funding from the other partners and that the Council was unable to sustain the trend. He was recommending that the funding basis of the Regional Park be reviewed with a further report to the Joint Committee, and with an associated review of the terms of the Minute of Agreement.

Councillor Carl John said that, having noted that the percentage share of the total expenditure by West Lothian Council had fallen from 4.8 % to 2.84%, he would take the matter up with his Council to try to return expenditure to the original percentage levels.

Decision

1. To agree on the necessity to review the funding basis for the Regional Park and, in consequence, the Minute of Agreement which set out the contributions for the local authority funding.
2. To note the forecast expenditure for the Regional Park for 2011/12.

(Reference – report by the Parks and Greenspace Manager 22 July 2011, submitted)

6 Date of Next Meeting

Friday 23 September 2011 at 10.00 a.m., with the possibility of arranging the meeting in the Kirknewton Village Hall, and followed by an opening ceremony for Harperigg Local Nature Reserve.