

Committee Minutes

Pentland Hills Regional Park Consultative Forum

24 August 2012 at Swanston Golf Club, Edinburgh

Present:-

The City of Edinburgh Council – Councillor David Walker (in the Chair).

Farming – Bob Barr.

Fairmilehead Community Council – Alison Elfick.

Orienteering – Janet Clark

Harperrig Management Group – Caroline Hamilton.

Friends of the Pentlands – John Stirling.

Ministry of Defence Estates – Major K Torp-Petersen

Walkers – Ewen Scroggie

Sportscotland – Campbell Gerrard.

Scottish Wildlife Trust – Ken Knowles.

Landowning – Scott Patterson.

Scottish Natural Heritage – Janice Winning

Scottish Government – Helen Jones

In Attendance:- Alan McGregor, (Regional Park Manager); Martin Duncan (Access Officer/Ranger Service); James Kinch (Midlothian Council), Chris Alcorn (West Lothian Council), Keith Logie (City of Edinburgh Council) and David Emerson (City of Edinburgh Council).

1 Minutes –

- 1.1 Pentland Hills Regional Park Consultative Forum of 18 November 2011 –** the minutes of the meeting were approved as a correct record subject to –

Item 11.2 – Sportscotland – Mountain Biking Trail

Cambell Gerrard pointed out that the minutes erred in recording his comments and asked that the second sentence in the paragraph be deleted from the record.

- 1.2 Pentland Hills Regional Park Joint Committee of 16 December 2011 –**
the minutes of the meeting were noted.

Matter Arising:- Item 8 – Scottish Borders Council – Landscape Designation Review

The Regional Park Manager reported that, following their public consultations, Borders Regional Council had revised the original proposal to remove from the 'Area of Great Landscape Value' designation of the Pentland Hills within their draft local development plan. Therefore the AGVL designation would remain in place and therefore in effect be constant over the range of the Pentland Hills. Noted.

- 1.3 Pentland Hills Regional Park Joint Committee of 16 March 2012 –**
the minutes of the meeting were noted.

- 1.4 Pentland Hills Regional Park Joint Committee of 26 July 2012 –**
the minutes of the meeting were noted.

2 Regional Park Annual Report 2011/12

The Regional Park Manager had prepared and published the Annual Report 2011/12. The Annual Report described the main areas of work undertaken over the year and had been circulated to stakeholders and interested parties and available to view on the Regional Park website.

Decision

To note the Annual Report.

(Reference – Pentland Hills Regional Park Annual Report 2011/12.)

3 Regional Park Funding and Operational Arrangements

Keith Logie (Parks Development Manager) gave an outline of funding arrangements for the Regional Park against reductions in the budget available for all parks in Edinburgh. The City of Edinburgh Council was now meeting the majority of the funding of the Regional Park, its share of expenditure having increased considerably over the last three years to 73.6%, as a result of the loss of SNH funding support and reductions in Midlothian Council's contribution. It was unavoidable that there would be a reduction in the service available through the Regional Park.

The Council's intention was that front line services were to be protected. It had merged the Regional Park Ranger Service with its other Ranger Services to form one 'Natural Heritage Ranger Service' to work under a single work-plan. This would allow a flexibility of staff cover. Also, the Boghall Farmhouse, which formed the Regional Park headquarters, was to be vacated by November 2012 and the service re-located to The Hermitage of Braid, Edinburgh.

Bob Barr (Farming) said that he was disappointed at the service reductions, against a continuing background of increases in the number of visits to the Regional Park. The original designation order had been imposed on the farmers and proprietors against their wishes but there had been assurances given at the time that its management would be adequately supported by the public authority. Over the years, the land owners had provided thousands of pounds worth of indirect assistance to the Park, through the management of visitors on their lands, but this was not being recognised.

Caroline Hamilton expressed similar views on behalf of the landowners who felt they were being let down by the Park authority through the reductions in service.

Decision

- (1) To note the views expressed by the farmers and landowners at the reductions in service.
- (2) To note the merger of Ranger Services by the City of Edinburgh Council and that the Regional Park Manager would arrange an introduction meeting with the farmers and landowners for the Ranger staff new to the Regional Park.

(Reference – report by Parks and Greenspace Manager, 15 March 2012, submitted)

4 Social Return on Investment Study

The City of Edinburgh Council intended to undertake a 'Social Return on Investment' study relative to the Regional Park. The exercise was to attempt to quantify and value the contribution to social welfare of the services provided through the Regional Park. The Council had allocated £6000 towards the cost of the study.

The Convener now invited Karen Carrick, from Greenspace Scotland, as consultant, to explain further the methodology of the study and the exercises involved, including the methods of attributing monetary value to the social benefits, to arrive at a 'ratio' of investment to return. Consultations were to involve landowners, farmers, community and user groups and visitors to the Park, to ascertain their expectations and views as to what had been realised through the Regional Park designation.

(The Convener invited the meeting to break into workgroups to comment further on some of the issues raised – the views were recorded by K Carrick.)

Decision

To note the study and that the outcome would be reported to the Joint Committee in due course.

(Reference – report by the Parks and Greenspace Manager, 26 July 2012, submitted)

5 Events Management

Martin Duncan (Access Officer/Ranger) gave a presentation on how the management of events was handled within the Regional Park. The number of events was increasing, there having been 35 requests to hold organised events this year. He explained the criteria used by the Service to help manage the situation. The Ranger Service was pleased to offer advice to organisers on general responsibilities, however they could not be expected to give an arbitrary decision or approval as most of the events took place on private land. The event organisers required to satisfy the landowner and any public agencies involved that they had the necessary permissions and cover in place for any event.

Major Torp Petersen explained the procedures for Ministry of Defence land, in particular their insistence on a risk appraisal being required of the operators. Also, in accordance with MOD policy, a charge was levied. It was important that organisers understood their responsibilities - the process of risk assessment provided some assurance that the event had been 'thought through'. He welcomed the recent meeting to do with the Pentlands Push event - where all the landowners and agencies had been brought together by the organisers – as a good model of how organisers should approach their responsibilities.

Campbell Gerard (Sportscotland) referred to discussions at national level relative to charging and risk assessments: Sportscotland's position was that whilst recognising the requirement for regulation, they would not wish to see charges imposed at such a level that it would discourage events from being held altogether. There was a working group looking at the issue at the current time.

Decision

To note the role of the Ranger Service in events planning in the Regional Park and the criteria for their involvement, and that the points made by members would be taken on board.

6 Review of Governance and Consultative Mechanisms

The Parks and Greenspace Manager had submitted a report to the last meeting of the Joint Committee proposing that the governance arrangements for the

Regional Park be streamlined, in keeping with changes in the operation and funding of the Regional Park over recent years.

The Joint Committee had agreed that in total the number of meetings should be reduced, commensurate with reduced resources. They also agreed that all members of the Joint Committee should attend meetings of the Consultative Forum to discuss items together; however the Joint Committee should remain as a separate body of elected members and partner funders, as currently constituted. It was intended that there should be two meetings of the Consultative Forum per annum, these to be held in advance of Joint Committee meetings.

The Consultative Forum was also being asked for its views on representation on the Forum – and whether additional or changed representation was required.

Bob Barr reiterated his views that the contribution of landowners and farmers to the working of the Regional Park was not being adequately recognised by the Park authority; he did not see that these proposals, coupled with reductions in funding, were any recognition of farmers and landowners' legitimate interests in the land. He was supported by the other representatives of landowners who expressed similar views. They would like to see a better attendance from the statutory agencies with interests in the park area. Otherwise, the reduction in meetings to two per annum could be accepted.

Alison Elfick (Fairmilehead Community Council) expressed the view that all community councils on the fringe of the Regional Park should be invited to be represented on the Forum. Campbell Gerard suggested that some of the more general sports interests could be looked at again to see whether there existed more local groups with knowledge of the Pentlands and able to make a more specific contribution. Other members suggested user groups such as dog walkers, mountain bikers and others should be approached.

(The Convener invited Mr K Shade, Balerno Community Council, to speak to the meeting. Ken Shade asked that the Community Council be allowed representation in view of the village's close links to Harlaw/Threipmuir etc and their work in developing footpath links, etc..)

Decision

- (1) To note the arrangements regarding reductions in meetings and the intention for the Joint Committee to meet alongside the Consultative Forum, with two meetings per annum.
- (2) To agree that membership of the Consultative Forum should be reviewed, with existing members asked to confirm their interests, and the Regional Park Manager approaching other likely interested parties and recreational user groups regarding representation. All community councils with areas abutting the Regional Park to be asked whether they wished to be represented.

(Reference – report by Parks and Greenspace Manager, 26 July 2012, submitted)

7 Member Updates

- 7.1 Bonaly Safety Partnership** – Bob Barr expressed his appreciation for the work done in trying to combat vandalism and anti-social behaviour by the Partnership.
- 7.2 Footpaths in Wet Weather** – Bob Barr referred to the problems with certain footpaths and erosion in winter or wet weather and asked whether these might not be closed to walkers and other users in unfavourable conditions. The Regional Park Manager reported the matter was being considered for the winter, the Park authority having received advice that closure could be justified in such circumstances without conflicting with public rights under the Access Code.
- 7.3 Friends of the Pentlands** – John Stirling reported on work being done by the volunteers from Friends of the Pentlands on a number of major footpath repairs, including a replacement for the Garvald Bridge (helped by the Ministry of Defence), and tree planting. Also, he gave a resume of the 'Access for All Day', for people with disabilities, which had been very well received and was being established now as an annual event, and on which he thanked the Ranger Service for their support.
- 7.4 Scottish Natural Heritage** – Janice Winning referred to (a) the UK Landscape Award of the European Landscape Convention, as open for entries until 19 October 2012; (b) Scottish Natural Heritage Conference 2012 'Managing Species in a Challenging Climate: Scotland's Species Action Framework' on 22-23 November 2012, at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Edinburgh, and (c) a grants update - with Natural Project Grants having a deadline of 30 November 2012 and community action grants (no deadline). SNH were particularly keen to support projects that would help deliver their priorities for the Year of Natural Scotland i.e. celebrating John Muir; helping young people to engage with nature and landscapes; supporting events and festivals contributing to the Year of Natural Scotland, and making the links between nature, culture and creativity.

8 Date of Next Meeting

It was agreed that the date for the next meeting be arranged by the Convener, with attempts made to avoid busy periods for farmers and landowners, etc.