

Pentland Hills Regional Park Consultative Forum

10.00am Friday 14 October 2016 in the Midlothian Snowsports Centre, Hillend, Midlothian

Present:

Councillors Dominic Heslop (in the chair) (The City of Edinburgh Council), Imrie and Peter de Vink (substituting for Councillor Bryant) (Midlothian Council), Neville Makan, (Scottish Natural Heritage), Alistair Cowan (Eastside Farm), Robert Barr (SNFU), Graham Barr (Easter Bavelaw Farm), John Stirling and John Surtees (Friends of the Pentlands), Amy Grove (Scottish Water), Constance Newbound (British Horse Society), Sonia Valcarcel (VistScotland), Janice Winning (Scottish Natural Heritage), Eddie Banks (CAA), Caroline Hamilton (Cairns Farm),

Community Councils – Hugh Watt and Jack Kerr (Balerno CC).

In Attendance:

Mark Metzger (University of Edinburgh), Katya Schmidt (University of Potsdam),-Peter Philips (Collingwood Environmental Planning), Charlie Cumming and Ross Woodside (Edinburgh and Lothian Greenspace Trust), Margaret Granger (Balerno Ramblers), Clare Flenley and Gina Galloway (Balerno Village Trust), Steven Webley, Jenny Hargreaves, Paula Newton and Blair Ritchie (City of Edinburgh Council).

1. Minutes

Decision

The minutes of the Pentland Hills Regional Park Consultative Forum of 11 March were submitted and approved as a correct record.

2. Woodland Management

Ross Woodside (Edinburgh and Lothians Greenspace Trust) provided an update on Woodland Management, which had previously been considered by the Consultative Forum. This covered the following themes:

- **Pentland Hills Woodland Establishment**
 - Woodland cover in the Lothians was significantly less than the national average figure of 17%.
 - Despite recent improvements in grant assistance, the rate of woodland creation remained considerably less than other targeted areas in the Central Belt.

- In 2012 Edinburgh and Lothians Greenspace Trust (ELGT) commissioned the production of a Feasibility Study into woodland creation opportunities on the North-East Slopes of the Pentlands.
- The study covered an area of 820 ha, with landownership split between the Ministry of Defence (at Dreghorn), City of Edinburgh Council (at Bonaly Country Park, including tenanted farmland), Midlothian Council (at Hillend Country Park), and a private agricultural enterprise (at Swanston Farm).
- Woodland cover for this area was currently around 11%.
- The owners of Swanston Farm, with ELGT assistance, successfully applied for grant support, and four individual woodlands were planted in spring 2014, with a total area of 11 ha.
- The MOD, working with the Woodland Trust Scotland, had obtained grant approval for 44 ha of woodland creation at Dreghorn, with community woodland planted as part of the commemoration of the advent of WWI, with numerous schools and community organisations participating.
- Similarly, woodland planting on 3 sites at Bonaly, covering total of 11 ha, had been planted by ELGT on behalf of the City of Edinburgh Council, including woodland planting on the visually imposing face of Whitehill.
- **Next Steps**
 - Application to SRDP for a WIAT Management Plan.
 - Bonaly Country Park Woodland Management Plan.
 - Potential Woodland Management works at BCP.
 - Further development of woodland expansion in the Pentland Hills area.

Decision

To note the update.

(Reference – Pentland Hills Regional Park Consultative Forum 20 March 2015 (item 6).

3. Pentland Path Project

Charlie Cumming (Edinburgh and Lothian Greenspace Trust) gave an update on the Pentland Path Project, which had been previously considered by the Consultative Forum. This included the following:

- Pentland Hills Regional Park - Upland Path Audit 2016
 - The intention was to provide a full picture of the current state of the network, and provide outline costs and data on what would be required to bring the network up to a good standard that would sustain and encourage recreation in the Pentland Hills Regional Park.
 - A report recommending options for future project development, including funding options, potential for volunteering, skills training and wider engagement with the public.
- Upland Path Survey Techniques
 - The path condition survey was designed to provide an overall assessment of the current condition of the mountain paths.

- The audit used established Upland Path Advisory Group approved techniques as used by the Cairngorms Outdoor Access Trust.
- PRP 12 Coll to Kirk Road Junction
- Key Findings
 - 30 paths surveyed.
 - Indicative costs.
 - Path Erosion and Poor Condition.
 - Infrastructure: attempts had been made to improve path damage using dated and difficult to defend techniques.
 - There was also evidence of bridge work to non-standard design and in poor condition.
- Summary of Survey Results
- Overall Project Costs
 - The scope of a full project to include Capital, Training and Activity was likely to be of considerable size.
 - A rough estimate building on the Capital costs derived from this audit.
- Sources of Funding included
 - Heritage Lottery Fund – Landscape Partnership Project or Heritage Grant.
 - EU Structural Funding 2014-2020 – ERDF and ESF.
 - SNH / Local Authorities / Windfarm contributions.
 - Charitable Trusts.
 - Direct income through car parking charges.

Discussion took place regarding charges for car parking, the need to involve local people in the project, funding issues and the need for a managed approach.

In relation to charges for car parking, it was explained that the proposed charge would be for existing car parks and would be of a small cost. Other bodies such as East Lothian and the Forestry Commission were now imposing charges. In the past, Scotland had a culture of free car parking, but this was now changing.

In respect of the involvement of local people, it was thought that it would be advantageous to use local people for training projects and to involve local businesses, which would bring money back into the area.

With regard to funding, there was some uncertainty. This was only the first phase of the project, the remaining 50% of match funding was going to be difficult to achieve and it was hoped that some funding was still available. There were potential sources such as the Heritage Lottery Fund, the EU Structural Funding and charitable trusts. A key element was packaging and delivery.

It was necessary to prioritise, share information, have a more managed approach to the project and to ensure that landowners were supportive.

Decision

To note the update.

(Reference – Pentland Hills Regional Park Consultative Forum 11 March 2016 (item 3).

4. Ecosystems Approach

The Consultative Forum had previously considered collaborative land use and management in the Pentland Hills Regional Park.

Dr Peter Phillips (Collingwood Environmental Planning Ltd.) and Neville Makan (Scottish Natural Heritage) gave a presentation on the Ecosystems Approach in the Regional Park. It was explained that the feedback from the Forum would be noted down and included in the Consultative Forum report. The presentation included the following themes:

- Overview
- Recap on the Purpose of the Project
 - The overall aim was to support the Pentland Hills Regional Park Joint Committee and the Consultative Forum (CF) to develop a collaborative approach to land use and management in the Park.
 - Some key objectives:
 - Support the CF to identify and assess the benefits they received from the Park and the possible implications for these benefits of key drivers of change.
 - Support the CF to identify, discuss and as far as possible agree land use management opportunities that aimed to sustain the Park's key benefits in an equitable way over the long-term.
- Recap on the May CF Workshop
 - Objectives.
 - Identify the natural environment benefits that were currently provided by the Park.
 - Assess the value of the natural environment benefits that were currently provided by the Park.
 - Identify potential land use management changes and possible implications for natural environment benefits in the Park.
- Key Results from the May CF Workshop, relating to:
 - Cultural Services.
 - Provisioning Services.
 - Regulating Services.
 - Services identified by CF in mapping and voting percentages.
- Discuss/Agree on how the CG Report would be used.
 - Any general comments on how far the report met the expectations of CF members and did it give them what they were looking for.
 - How could the static "snapshot" nature of the report be addressed. Could it be used for a tool for ongoing monitoring/assessment/prioritisation of natural environment benefits in the Park and if so, would anything need to be changed.

- In order to provide an easy way into the report for CF members and other users, what would be the most useful information to include in an executive summary.
- Discuss/Refine/Agree the CF Report draft recommendations.
 - Did CF members have any comments for improving the recommendations?
 - Were there any additional recommendations that should be included.
 - Were there any recommendations that should be removed.
- Next steps for the CF Report
 - What were the key next steps that the members saw for the delivery of the recommendations in the report.

Dr Phillips explained that it was important how the CF member used the report correctly as this was practical report that could be used. He then summarised the report:

1. The work that was undertaken in the report.
2. The benefits identified in the mapping exercise.
3. Valuation - looking at the perspective of landscaping and habitat.
4. Building on the evidence.

Following the presentation, the following points were made:

- Climate regulations and water purification were low down on the priorities as culture and productive services were more popular.
- It would be useful to look at spatial mappings and to look at where the priorities were for access and recreation.
- There were a lot of paths round the periphery that were under-utilised. This could be solution to “hot spots” activity.
- There should be discussions on all benefits of the park.
- There should be a background matrix system to check against objectives in management plan.
- Could the proposals stop landowners carrying out their activities?
- Landowners were possibly not well represented, especially in hotspots.
- The largest public landowner was the MOD, which had a significant interest.
- The report could be used to attract more funding.
- The report demonstrated the need for greater management.
- There should be a mechanism to determine how the report could influence other aspects, such as the Management Plan.
- The way in which bio-mass development would proceed.

Members were then invited to discuss the following:

Recommendations

- There were four categories of recommendations:
- Hot Spot Areas, Access and Recreation, Habitat and Landscape and links with other plans and policies.

Next Steps

Dr Phillips and Neville Makan then compiled the comments from the feedback into the following points:

- Mapping work to be considered.
- Would the Ecosystems Approach be a constraint on landowners?
- How did the approach feed into local authority planning policies?
- Did hotspots put a constraint on landowners?
- As one of the largest public landowners, the MOD should be engaged.
- The role of farmers to be considered.
- The executive summary should be a summary of everything.
- There should be communication with the wider public in a way that would be understood.
- Horse riders should be added to users groups.
- There should be an audit of existing infrastructure for disabled users.
- There should be specific person invited from Visit Scotland, such as a quantity surveyor.
- The responsible dog user's countryside access code should be used.
- Rules and regulations should feed into the Management Plan.
- There was opportunity for further support, such as from Scottish Natural Heritage.
- The Consultative Forum report should be circulated to all the relevant bodies.

Dr Phillips thanked everyone for their participation and indicated that these recommendations would be taken back to the Management Plan.

Decision

To thank Dr Phillips and Neville Makan and to note the presentation.

(Reference – Pentland Hills Regional Park Consultative Forum 11 March 2016 (item 7).

5. Balerno Village Trust (Harlaw Visitors Centre)

Claire Fleney and Emma Galloway gave a presentation on the Balerno Village Trust (BVT). This included the following:

- Who were BVT?
 - Balerno Village Trust was a volunteer-led charity and development trust working for a sustainable and resilient community in Balerno.
- What did BVT do?
 - Monthly Balerno Farmers Market.
 - Friends of Main Street - village centre gardening.
 - 2G pitch – renovated through community fundraising, now to be managed by BVT for the community.
 - Gardening at NTS Malleny Gardens.
- What did they want to offer at Harlaw?

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- Toilets, basic shelter and a cafe for visitors.
- Activities and exhibitions to engage visitors, and provide information and advice.
- A point of sale and information for Pentland Hills Produce.
- A flexible space for workshops, events and meetings to support groups already working in the Pentlands.
- Opportunities for visitors with disabilities to enjoy access.
- Promoting public transport
 - A low carbon minibus service which would run between the 44 bus stop in Balerno village, Harlaw and potentially other areas around the Park.
 - Funding might be available from the Climate Challenge Fund for such a project.
- Who had been consulted?
 - PHRP Rangers.
 - Friends of the Pentlands.
 - Mallyen Anglers Association.
 - Pentland Hills Produce.
 - Water of Leith Visitors Centre.
 - Youth Vision.
 - Consulted the PHRP website and visitor surveys from 2005/6 and 2014.
- Sources of Funding
 - Income from the cafe and events.
 - Figures were being sought on running costs from CEC to develop a business plan.
 - Income from funders would be sought for renovation and development of the House.
- The Consultative Forum was invited to give their views.

Discussion took place about the reservoir, outside interest, education, consultation, the use of space and transport.

Regarding the reservoir, it was explained that there was a substantial history of building round the reservoirs. Additionally, there was an active angling society in the area engaged in fishing activities.

In respect of outside interest, it would be preferable to have interested parties who were community rather than commercially focused. Legislation had been passed, giving communities the “right to buy”. With regard to education, the Regional Park had two visitor centres, Flotterston and Harlaw.

In relation to consultation, it was explained that there had not yet been a chance to contact farmers/landowners, but it was hoped that this would be an opportunity to meet them and get contact details. Regarding space, there was potential additional space, but it might be beneficial to have a short-term lease and to try to make this successful, before making a significant investment.

With respect to the proposed minibus, the intention was to help manage existing users, rather than increase the numbers and place an additional burden on landowners.

Decision

To thank the Clare Flenley and Gina Galloway and to note the presentation.

6. Operational Report

Jenny Hargreaves (Senior Natural Heritage Officer) gave a verbal update on the Operational Report, which included the following themes:

- Threipmuir, Hillend & Harperrig
 - Work of the Conservation Volunteers.
 - Attempts to get a grant to carry out some major improvements to the car park at the west end of the reservoir.
 - Improvements to bridge, paths, steps and stiles.
 - A Corporate Group from the Financial Conduct Authority had worked at Hillend Country Park.
 - A Corporate Group from Lloyds Bank worked at Boghall Farm.
 - Work with a landowner to replace a boundary fence at Redford Wood
- South Pentlands
 - Monitoring raptor nest sites and habitat box locations with Raptor Study Group.
 - Enquiries regarding appropriate signage and quality of access provision.
 - Activities maintaining and re-building path drainage infrastructure on Carnethy Hill, Scald Law and the Kirk Road utilising corporate volunteers.
- Bonaly, Castlelow and Dreghorn to Harlaw
 - New metal “kissing gate” installed at Buckie Brae.
 - Approximately two hectares of moorland burned at Bonaly.
 - Bonaly and Harlaw Rural Crime Partnership implemented.
 - Installation of three resting perches around Harlaw Reservoir by Friends of the Pentlands (FotP).
- Flotterstone
 - Resurfacing pedestrian pathway on woodland walk.
 - Car park refurbishment of bays at Flotterstone.
 - Gate repairs - Bridge repair.
 - Routine maintenance and condition of Flotterstone building.
 - Improvements to facilities at Flotterstone.
 - Remedial health and safety repair of Green Cleugh pathway.
 - Planting up of two new stone planters / cairns.
 - Volunteer group from Lloyds and Penicuik HS for 2 days at Flotterstone.
 - Volunteer group at Martyrs Monument.
 - Visit Scotland Accreditation scheme – Visitor Attraction 4 ****
- Events
 - Took part in the Penicuik High School “Big Day”.

- Spartan Race 2016 which attracted huge numbers of competitors again this year.
- Rural crime event held at Harlaw in June.
- Nature Conservation
 - Biodiversity - the usual species monitoring had been carried out for a range of wildlife and wildflower surveys on meadows.
 - Work undertaken with the Wildlife Crime Officer on three occasions to do with incidents regarding badgers.
 - Attempted to create wildflower verge at Harlaw.
 - Laid hedge at Harlaw had fully survived after first year of laying.
- Interpretation/Communication
 - Pentland Inspirations – 7th competition, including photos and art.
 - “Discover Pentlands” leaflet redesigned, pentland paths map was now displaying surface type to help visitors decide on appropriate paths.
 - Website undergoing a refresh with new design and layout.
- Community and Volunteer Work
 - Weekly Forest School programme facilitated by Green Team continued at Bonaly.
 - Weekly John Muir Award group from Woodlands High School at Harlaw.
 - Friends of the Pentlands (Fotp) garden squad attend fortnightly to weed Harlaw Wildlife Garden.
 - Fotp litter squad continued monthly litter picks of Dreghorn and Bonaly
 - £8000 funding won from Tesco Bag Scheme – joint project with FotP who applied for funding – biodiversity improvements at Harlaw.

Decision

To thank the Senior Natural Heritage Officer and to note the report.

7. Any Other Business

7.1 Friends of Pentlands

John Surtees (Friends of the Pentlands) gave an update on the work of the organisation. This included the following:

- Kirburn Path
 - Part of the Pentlands Way – work had carried on with the help of local volunteers.
 - Small bridge created.
- Annual Access
 - Based in Harlaw in May.
 - Mobility Scooters.
- Juniper Project
 - Hoped to grow large numbers of Juniper Trees.
 - Process for planting described.
- Funding from Tesco Bag Scheme

- The Friends were in the final.
- The local primary schools would be involved:
 - Engage with nature.
 - Build stone planter.
 - Camera in pond at Harlaw to be installed.

In response to a question, it was explained how shopping at Tesco would help with the grant for the Friends.

Decision

To thank the Friends of the Pentlands for their ongoing work and to note the update.

7.2 Introduction

Steven Webley, the new Forestry and Natural Heritage Manager, introduced himself and explained his role and the new structure for the service. He explained that there would be a dedicated team looking after the Pentlands, which meant more presence on the ground. He then invited people to contact him, if they had any questions.

8. Dates for Future Meetings

Dates for future meetings were as follows:

11 November 2016 Joint Committee