

Pentland Hills Regional Park Consultative Forum

10.00am Friday 4 May 2018 in the Currie RFC, Mallyen Park, Balerno, Midlothian

Present:

Councillors Gardiner (in the chair) (The City of Edinburgh Council), Timpson (West Lothian Council), Councillor Winchester (Midlothian Council), Catherine Barr and Robert Barr (SNFU), Andrew Barr ((Harlaw Farm) John Surtees (Friends of the Pentlands), Sonia Valcarcel (VistScotland), Janice Winning (Scottish Natural Heritage), Rod Dalitz (SHRA), Karen Ramoo (SLE), Rhona Matthews (British Horse Society, Scotland), Ken Knowles (Scottish Wildlife Trust) and Margaret Granger (Balerno Ramblers),

Community Councils – Libby Campbell (Colinton Amenity Association) and Johanna Carrie (Fairmilehead Community Council).

In Attendance:

Charlie Cumming and Ross Woodside (Edinburgh and Lothian Greenspace Trust), Chris Alcorn (West Lothian Council), Steven Webley, Jenny Hargreaves, Victor Partridge, Tommy McManmon, and Blair Ritchie (City of Edinburgh Council).

1. Minutes

Decision

The minutes of the Pentland Hills Regional Park Consultative Forum of 14 October 2016 were submitted and approved as a correct record.

2. Review of the New Management Plan

The Regional Park Manager provided an update on the Review of the New Management Plan. This included the options of a full re-write of the existing Park Plan or a redraft of the existing plan. As the staff resources were not available for a full re-draft of the plan, a re-draft was the best option. The Regional Park Plan Review Questions included the following:

- “Were we happy with the existing vision?”
- Should the vision mention the financial stability of the park?

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- Should there be a priority set for income generation to support increased use of PHRP and its required maintenance, such as car parking and footpaths be included in the new plan?
- Should there be a priority set around engagement with volunteers and community groups highlighting people base element of the parks management?
- Were there any other priorities or direction points that should be included in the new parks plan?

Trends in land-users' examples – Mountain biking, horse riding, dog walkers, events and how they would be managed.

- Could the Consultative Forum members provide evidence for these?
- Could the Consultative Forum members' evidence trends in – biosecurity, wind farms and land owners' diversification?

Current Park Plan Vision

- The Regional Park Manager asked if everyone was happy with the vision and asked for feedback.

With regard to proposed additional themes of the Pentland Hills Regional Park, there might be room for climate change.

Discussion took place and the following points were made:

- Was biodiversity covered in any of these themes?
- The themes in the handout were referred to, which probably covered this.
- There was potential for Heritage Lottery Funding (HLF) and the sooner this was progressed, the better.
- The HLF were changing their funding themes this year. Therefore, something should be submitted before October, as they would not fund anything unless there was strategic vision.
- The Forum had asked for review of the Access Code, but had not received this and there should be a review of the code.
- Was the Access Code set at Scottish Government level?
- The Regional Park could have its own bylaws, but only on the land that they owned and this could apply to dog walkers.

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- It should be possible to ask the Scottish Government to provide an access code.
- It might be advantageous to look at some of the initiatives that other local authorities were doing in East Lothian and Fife.
- Many dog walkers were disregarding the guidelines.
- It was necessary to have proper enforcement of regulations and resourcing for this.
- People had been fined, but this was not pursued, because of the small amounts involved.
- Every local authority had a code of practice that professional dog walkers signed up for, however, the difficulty was catching the ones who ignored the regulations.
- When moving forward with the Mission Statement, in applying for HLF funding, it was necessary to emphasise the health benefits.
- Increased usage could be detrimental to farmers, however, if there was funding through the bid, this could help increase funding for management.
- The Volunteer Ranger Service was the largest in Scotland, which was commendable, and should be encouraged.
- Because of increased visitor usage, wildlife was decreasing and the paths were degenerating.
- It was imperative to get the Management Plan progressed.
- Were people comfortable with income generation and charging people for using the car park?
- Voluntary car charging had been introduced.
- It was necessary to generate the improvement to park. Car parking charges could be built in to the plan.
- It should be possible to have annual charges imposed, as East Lothian Council had done.

Decision

- 1) To note the update.

- 2) The Regional Park Manager would e-mail information on the Vision Statement to members of the Forum who wanted the information.
- 3) The Regional Park Manager to check out the issue of bi-laws for professional dog walkers with the Access Officer and liaise with Bob Barr of the NFU.

3. Trends and Themes in the Pentland Hills Regional Park

It was noted that this had been covered in the previous item.

4. Bonaly Woodland Management WIAT

Ross Woodside (Edinburgh and Lothian Greenbelt Trust - ELGT) indicated that there was progress on Bonaly Woodland Management WIAT (Woodland in and Around Towns). He was hoping to get funding for the Management Plan and then for the project itself. When giving a brief history of the project, he indicated that they were considering woodland management in five areas and then provided an outline on various themes, which included the following:

- The North East Slopes.
- Dreghorn and Swanston Farm and Lothianburn Golf Course.
- North East Slope – Landscape Plan.
- There had not been much woodland management in this area.
- Bonaly Country Park carried out some woodland management.
 - Application for SRDP
 - Additional grant support allowed them to employ a consultant to work on the plan.
- Bonaly Country Park – there had been community consultation for WIAT.
- A “snapshot” of woodland management proposals was provided.
- It was proposed to remove trees at the top of the hill to improve landscape and views.
- To improve access, they were targeting major paths to do an upgrade.

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- Next Steps
 - The Management Plan had been approved.
 - Application to SRDP
 - Delivery of woodland management
 - To hopefully deliver works in 2019.

Discussion took place and the following points were made:

- Was there anything in the Management Plan for protecting deer?
- There was nothing so far, but nothing would be done that adversely affected wildlife.
- It was hoped to improve biodiversity.
- What was the mix between Broad Leaf and Spruce?
- The trees planted were native species.
- What percentage had been lost?
- Did the ELGT work with the Friends of Pentlands?
- It was confirmed that the ELGT worked with the Friends of the Pentlands and tried to engage with the local community.
- There was funding for the ELGT to engage with the local primary schools.
- There should be scope to investigate if there was good engagement with the local schools.
- Some work had been carried out with the Scouts.
- It would be appreciated by farmers if people were informed how to preserve the countryside.
- Work had been undertaken with some schools – to get children to help stop people damaging the countryside.
- Was there scope to attend to the other four areas?

Decision

The Edinburgh and Lothians Greenbelt Trust to re-visit four of the areas for their action plan.

5. Operational Report

The Senior Natural Heritage Officer presented the Operational Report. Amongst other issues, she referred to the current staffing levels. The Operational Report included the following:

- Support was provided by:
 - The City Team
 - Estate Team
 - Volunteer Ranger Service
 - Friends of the Pentlands
- Officers were covering certain areas.
- Area Report
 - Bonaly – tree planting had taken place.
 - Harperrig to Threpmuir – there had been some anti-social behaviour.
 - “Hot Spot” areas.
- Issues
 - Adverse weather conditions.
 - Scrambler Bikes/4x4
 - There had been some illegal bikes trying to access the park.
 - Measures had been taken – some vehicles impounded.
 - People should phone the police, if they saw anything illegal.
- Parking
 - There had been a considerable amount of illegal parking taking place.
 - An on-site survey was being undertaken.
- Highlights
 - Infrastructure
 - Donation boxes at Harlaw and Threpmuir

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- Flotterstone Café
- Nature Conservation

It was also reported that a biodiversity survey had been carried out in the previous year and there had been a number of participants for external, unofficial events. She referred to the number of hours that volunteers worked and if this was paid work, then over £21,000 amount of work was being carried out. In respect of the Duke of Edinburgh Award, there were approximately 1,700 young people involved.

- Interpretation Update from 2016-18
 - The website had 8000 users per month
 - There had been an onsite survey
 - Had to get message to people
 - The Pentlands Beacon was used
 - There were also contributions to Balerno and Currie News to get the message of responsible access.
- Going Forward
 - Expand the Voluntary Ranger Service
 - Progress the work of corporate groups.
 - Continue with partnership working
 - Continue survey regarding parking and access.
 - New interpretation panels.
 - Donation boxes.

Discussion took place and the following points were made:

- Would it be advantageous to impose car parking charges?
- It might be difficult to enforce and the cost might outweigh the benefits, therefore, it would be better to have voluntary contributions.
- The leaflets at Bonaly Park were only put there this year on a trial basis.
- There could be no further update on the proposal from Balerno Village Trust on the potential change of use at Harlaw House, until there was information from the Estate Team.

Decision

To note the update

To commend the team for the work on the Bridge at West Lothian.

6. Volunteer Ranger Service

The Natural Heritage Officer reported on the Volunteer Ranger Service and their activities. This included patrolling the park at the weekend, repairing infrastructure, helping at the weekend with the Biodiversity Survey, attending to Juniper Trees, helping with guided walks, with the Visitor Service and with conservation work. There were 27 active volunteers, 7 trainees and 39 helping with other activities. He then outlined the work involved with the Biodiversity Survey.

Decision

To note the update.

7. Pentland Inspiration Competition

The Natural Heritage Officer reported on the Pentland Inspiration Competition, explaining the history of it and how it had been launched in 2004. He asked for ideas for the 2018 competition.

Decision

To note the update.

8. Friends of the Pentland Hills Regional Park

John Surtees (Chair of Friends of the Pentlands) indicated that the Friends of the Pentlands had 400 members and outlined the activities that they carried out. This included litter picking and gardening, helping with Interpretation Boards, planting apple trees and path maintenance. (They had previously won a competition and received a grant of £5,000). Other activities included being involved with "Access for All", which helped people with disabilities to access the Regional Park. In the previous year, they were given a mobility scooter which would be based at Harlaw. There would also be access for special schools.

He indicated that shortly, he would be standing down as Chair of the Friends of Pentlands.

Decision

The Convener thanked John Surtees for chairing the Friends of the Pentlands and wished him well.

9. Any Other Urgent Business

9.1 Date of Consultative Forum

It was reported that the NFU was not happy with the dates of the Spring Consultation meeting and the date should be amended to meet the needs of farmers and landowners.

The Convener expressed regret for this and suggested that holding the meeting in February might be more suitable for farmers.

Decision

Committee Services to get potential date from the farming representative for the spring meeting of the Consultative Forum.

10. Dates for Future Meetings

Dates for future meetings were as follows:

30 November 2018 Joint Committee