

Committee Minutes

Pentland Hills Regional Park Consultative Forum

Bonaly Scout Hall, Edinburgh on 18 November 2011

Present:-

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

West Lothian Council – Councillor Carl John.

Farming – Bob Barr.

Damhead Community Council – Natalie Frankish.

Kirknewton Community Council – Caroline Gerrard.

Harperrig Management Group – Graeme Hamilton.

Friends of the Pentlands – John Stirling.

Ministry of Defence Estates – Major K Torp-Petersen

Balerno Village Trust – Alan Laing.

Sportscotland – Campbell Gerrard.

Scottish Wildlife Trust – Ken Knowles.

Landowning – Scott Patterson.

In Attendance:- Alan McGregor, (Regional Park Manager); Susan Falconer, Martin Duncan, Sara Rasmussen (Volunteer) (Pentland Hills RP Ranger Service); Ogo Onwuchekwa, Janice Long and Grant Ballantyne (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 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 Midlothian Snowsport Centre – Draft Proposals

Midlothian Council had prepared a 'stage one planning brief' to allow development of a 'Snowsport centre' at Hillend Ski Centre, the project being eligible for capital funding of £553,000 from SportsScotland and further monies through the Scottish Government's 'active schools programme'. The Council wished to consult on how this might impact on the Ski Centre and the Hillend Country Park. They were proposing to allow complementary commercial development, in order to make the scheme economically viable.

Olga Onwuchekwa, Commercial Services, explained the vision for improving the sports facility centre in terms of upgrading the sports facilities. It was intended to develop the centre to a wider extent, including provision for overnight accommodation, and to develop it as a 'sports destination'. She hoped that it would attract people to the region and that it would perhaps build upon other attractions of the Pentland Hills.

Janice Long, Planning Manager, explained the areas of the park under consideration for additional development (which could include an hotel and/or chalet type accommodation) and the planning principles and policies to apply. The sensitivity of the site was already recognised in existing planning designations, some of the land being Green Belt, but the Local Plan at the same time also recognised a need for potential development to improve Hillend Ski Centre which otherwise was unlikely to be economic to maintain. Studies had been made relative to 'screening' – the local authority had still to determine whether a strategic environmental assessment was required for the site.

During discussion, Bob Barr (Farming) indicated his reservations regarding the Pentland Hills being promoted for recreation purposes at a time when the park authority support to manage visitor use was in decline; the concept of the Regional Park, when established, always envisaged an appropriate level of support through the Ranger Service. He would be concerned were visitor use of the wider area to be encouraged or promoted by the local authority in connection with this development without any corresponding increase in their support for the Regional Park. Olga Onwuchekwa, in reply, indicated that she was conscious of this and that the whole issue of management of visitors, and whether additional pressure would be brought to other areas of the Regional Park, would need to be considered carefully once any development intentions were better known.

Campbell Gerrard (SportScotland) hoped that any ancillary development to be considered would be seen to encourage use of the Ski centre facilities and draw in visitors for activity that was related to sports use of the facilities: other development such as mountain biking, BMX and curling, could perhaps be considered. Officers of Midlothian Council asked questions from other members

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regarding the extent of additional development to be allowed; any additional provisions of retail, restaurant, etc, development were to be ancillary to the Snowsport centre use.

Decision

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

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

3 Paths Condition and Use

Bob Barr (Farming) had asked that the condition of footpaths be raised, he being concerned that in some places these were being badly cut up or eroded. He was concerned in particular at the effects of mountain biking and horse-riding on the ground in wet weather.

The Regional Park Manager gave a presentation to illustrate some of the areas of concern on footpaths, and the types of damage that could occur from use by walkers, bikers, horse riding, and also that from standard agricultural use e.g. movements of cattle. The Rangers explained ongoing footpath maintenance work and educational activity directed at park users (leaflets, way-marking, information boards and contact with user groups). Some good progress was being made via the enlisting of help from user groups such as the mountain bikers, plus the established help on hand from Friends of the Pentlands. Whilst there was scope for more volunteer assistance, it could sometimes be expensive work, requiring major funding.

Members discussed the question of whether there should be restrictions on pathway use at certain time of the year or in certain weather conditions – a lot of the damage, as noted by the farmers, occurred during wet spells or in winter type conditions. There was currently a debate, nationally, about the intentions of the Outdoor Access Code and rights of landowners to protect property from damage: there was some evidence now to suggest that landowners were within their rights to take reasonable measures to safeguard land from damage.

Major Torp Petersen reported on a request, currently under consideration by the MoD, from the British Horse-riding Society for further access to routes at Dreghorn. He had some concerns about the matter in general i.e. the pressures to allow access against operational needs on Ministry of Defence land; the MoD Access Officer would be in consultation with the Regional Park on this matter.

Decision

To note that the Regional Park Manager would report further what action the park authority might be able to take, consistent with Access Rights, with a view to reducing damage or inappropriate use of paths in sensitive areas.

(Reference – Regional Park Manager’s operational report, 18 November 2011, submitted)

4 Car Parking Charges

Following the Joint Committee’s decision in principle to impose car parking charges at Threipmuir, Harlaw, Bonaly and Flotterstone, reports were being submitted to Edinburgh and Midlothian Council’s for permission to commence Traffic Regulation Orders to advertise the fact. There would be provision for objections, meaning that, if approved, the charges could not be introduced until 2013 at the earliest.

Decision

The information was noted.

(Reference – Regional Park Manager’s operational report, 18 November 2011, submitted)

5 Dog Fouling Initiative/Green Dog Walkers Scheme

The Ranger Service gave a presentation on initiatives being trialled at Harlaw, particularly around the car park area, to curb the nuisance of dog fouling. The scheme was based on more publicity being given to incidents of dog fouling and encouragement to owners to clean up behind their dogs. The exercise was being supported by the Environmental Warden Service.

As a longer term approach, a Green Dog Walkers Scheme was being introduced with the Rangers working with regular dog walkers to encourage responsible dog walking through peer group pressure and positive role model. Balerno Community Council was also keen to help out with the initiative. The Regional Park Manager also reported that the City of Edinburgh Council was reviewing its rules in regard to public park areas, with a tougher line to be taken.

Major Torp Petersen said that commercial dog walking was becoming an issue on MoD land: he felt that legislation was now necessary in order to be able to regulate the activity. Councillor Carl John suggested that the local ‘Connect’ magazine be used to publicise the measures.

Decision

To note the initiatives being taken by the Ranger Service.

(Reference – Regional Park Manager’s operational report, 18 November 2011, submitted)

6 Access Routes to the Regional Park

Under the study of improvement of access routes into the Pentlands, as carried out under the Central Scotland Green Network Development, four routes had been identified as having the potential for development i.e.

- Water of Leith to Bonaly Country Park
- Redford Road to Bonaly Country Park
- Bush Estate to Flotterstone
- Penicuik to Kirk Road End
- Selm Muir Wood to Little Vantage

The Regional Park authority was not responsible for funding or implementation of any of these plans – rather it would be up to any community group or organisation to apply – but the authority would be prepared to give support so far as was possible.

Decision

To note the progress on the study.

(Reference – Regional Park Manager's operational report, 18 November 2011, submitted)

7 Memorial Request – Black Springs

In regard to permissions for memorial requests, the Regional Park Manager asked for the Committee's views on 'seating perches' proposed to be sited near to the Black Springs footpath.

Members were in agreement that suitably designed perches would be consistent with policy at this location in the Pentland Hills. **Noted.**

8 Protected Areas Review

The criteria for International Union of Nature Conservation category 5 'Protected Area Status' was being altered. The Regional Park Manager reported that, in association with other Regional Parks, he was working to put forward a case to try to retain the status for the Pentland Hills. The criteria was now tilted more towards 'nature conservation' than landscape protection.

Ken Knowles (Scottish Wildlife Trust) indicated his willingness to assist in this matter.

Decision

To note the information.

(Reference – Regional Park Manager’s operational report, 18 November 2011, submitted)

9 Regional Park Funding and Service Review

Keith Logie (Parks Development Manager) gave a resume of expected reductions in the budget available for parks in Edinburgh, against a background of decreased public sector funding.

The City of Edinburgh Council was now meeting the majority of the funding of the Regional Park, its proportion of spending having been increased greatly over the last three years to 73.6%, as a result of the loss of SNH funding support and Midlothian Council having reduced its contribution. It was inevitable that there would be a reduction in the service available through the Regional Park. At the moment, a post of senior Ranger, was not being filled. He would work with the Regional Park Manager on a service review.

Mr R Barr said that he noted the constraints but felt that the Regional Park needed to acknowledge its responsibilities in terms of the impact of its activities on landowners and farmers and the support implicit in the decision by public authorities to designate the area as a Regional Park in 1984.

Decision

To note the position.

(Reference – Regional Park Manager’s operational report, 18 November 2011, submitted)

10 Wind Farm Proposals in the Pentlands

John Stirling (Friends of the Pentlands) said that he was currently attending a public inquiry into the proposals for a wind farm at Harlawhead, as had been refused planning permission by West Lothian Council. Friends of the Pentlands were opposed to the proposals. He said that he had found it surprising that the Regional Park authority had not offered any objections, yet West Lothian Council had decided to refuse planning permission.

Officers responded to the question raised: essentially the Park Authority was a consultee in such matters and could only offer a view to the planning authority, as channelled through the Regional Park Manager. In general, however, officers could review the matter of how best a co-ordinated approach of planning advice could be supplied to the Joint Committee from the separate planning authorities that were responsible for the Regional Park.

Decision

To note the information.

(Reference – Regional Park Manager’s operational report, 18 novemebr 2011, submitted)

11 Members Updates

11.1 Balerno Village Trust – Micro-Hydro Scheme

Alan Laing gave an update on the micro-hydro scheme being progressed by the Trust; it was now at the stage of application for planning permission. Noted.

11.2 Sportscotland – Mountain Biking Trail

Campbell Gerrard reported on exploratory talks by the organisers to hold a for a World Cup mountain bike marathon event in the Regional Park. Sportscotland could be interested in support if it led to a more long term trail for mountain biking. The Regional Park Manager confirmed that he had had initial discussions with the organisers; whether the matter progressed would depend on funding for trail upgradings, and further consultations – the matter was still at a very provisional stage. Noted.

12 Date of Next Meeting

Provisional date set for Friday 17 February 2012, at 10.00 a.m.