

Committee Minutes

Pentland Hills Regional Park Joint Committee

**Regional Park Headquarters, Biggar Road, Edinburgh
16 December 2011**

Present:-

Members –

City of Edinburgh Council – Councillors Keir and Paisley.

West Lothian Council – Councillor John.

Scottish Natural Heritage – J Winning.

In Attendance:-

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

1 Minutes

1.1 Pentland Hills Regional Park Joint Committee of 22 July 2011

The minute of meeting of the Pentland Hills Regional Park Joint Committee of 22 July 2011 was approved as a correct record.

1.2 Pentland Hills Regional Park Consultative Forum of 18 November 2011

The minute of meeting of the Pentland Hills Regional Park Consultative Forum of 18 November was noted.

2 Fauch Hill – Forthcoming Planning Application for Wind Farm

The Committee agreed to hear a presentation on behalf of Fauch Hill Sustainable Energy regarding their intention to apply to the Scottish Government for planning permission to construct a wind farm at Fauch Hill, near Harperrig Reservoir, within West Lothian, the site being close to the Regional Park boundary. The company was in the process of consulting on the pre-application proposals. The application was of such a scale that it required to be considered by the Scottish Government under 'Section 36' procedures; West Lothian Council would be a statutory consultee; the Regional Park authority was also likely to be formally consulted, either directly by the planning authority or through West Lothian Council.

The representatives explained that the proposals as originally envisaged were for 43 turbines but which, after consultations, had been reduced to 23 turbines. The heights of turbines had also been reduced, to 125 metres. The plan represented a major investment of £200 million. They saw the site being developed as a 'gateway' to the Pentland Hills, with a hub of core paths, and involving facilities for visitors and including some retail elements. It was to be a recreational facility, based on principles of community involvement and sustainability. A Liaison Group had been set up with local interests and there was a good deal of local support from Community Councils for the concept. The company planned to work with Oatridge College in terms of realising skills development for young people. Following completion, they intended to establish a Community Trust which would realise in the order of £276,000 per annum over 25 years, to be applied as local community benefit for the area.

The company was now at the stage of submitting a formal application, having carried out initial consultations with interest groups. The application would require a strategic environmental assessment, and other extensive consultations with statutory consultees and other agencies.

The representatives answered a number of questions from members. Mr C Norman, Head of Development Control, West Lothian Council, was present and explained procedures likely to be required once a formal application had been submitted. The proposals would involve a fairly major examination of issues by the local authority and other statutory consultees. The plans were likely to have a major impact on the Regional Park, the site lying on or close to the boundaries, and the Joint Committee would be consulted.

Decision

To note the presentation and the company's intention to submit an application for planning permission and on which the Regional Park authority would be consulted.

(Reference – publicity brochure by FESE, submitted; previous report by Regional Park Manager, submitted.)

3 International Union for the Conservation of Nature – UK Protected Area Review

An update was given of the implications for the Pentland Hills Regional Park of an International Union for the Conservation of Nature review of 'protected area designations'. Currently, the Regional Park was listed with Category 5 protected area status but there was a risk that this could be lost under the new criteria which were now to be tilted towards 'nature conservation'. Any loss of designation could affect the perception of the general status of a Regional Park, as a protected area.

The Regional Park Manager was therefore working with officers in Scotland's other regional parks and Scottish Natural Heritage, in order to make a case to the International Union for retention of the protected area status.

Decision

To note the report and receive a further update once the outcome of the Regional Park's submission was known.

(Reference – report by Parks and Greenspace Manager, submitted.)

4 Scottish Borders Council – Landscapes Designation Review

Since the 1960s, the entire Pentland Hills range had been designated as an Area of Great Landscape Value. Following new national guidance, Scottish local authorities were to review their landscape designations to achieve a greater consistency in approach and all five authorities involved in the Park were currently at different stages of that process.

Scottish Borders Council was of the initial view, in its consultation paper, that the Pentland Hills would not qualify, raising the possibility that different parts of the Pentlands might have different levels of landscape protection over the range. As the Scottish Borders area adjoined the Regional Park, there could be implications for the status of the landscape protections within the Park. The Regional Park Manager had prepared a draft response on behalf of the

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authority, arguing the need for a consistency of approach and the cross-boundary issues (allowance for which was included in the planning guidance); the other planning authorities were supportive and taking a similar approach.

Decision

- 1) To note the response by the Regional Park Manager.
- 2) To request an updated report once the outcome of the consultation exercise was known.

(Reference – report by the Parks and Greenspace Manager, submitted.)

5 Car Park Charges – Update

The Regional Park Manager reported on progress with the proposal to introduce car parking charges at four car parks in the Regional Park.

The Transport Infrastructure and Environment Committee had initially considered a report on the need for Traffic Regulation Orders to be promoted but had asked that the report should be referred to the full Council for decision, there having been some concerns raised regarding parking over-spill issues and other matters: the matter was due to be considered by the Council at its meeting in December 2011. Midlothian Council was also due to consider a report from its officers on the principle (in respect of Flotterstone car park).

The effect was that, were the scheme was approved by the Councils, it would not be possible to introduce in 2012, given the times allowed for public consultations on the Traffic Regulation Orders, and it would be 2013 or later before introduced.

Decision

To note the position.

(Reference – report by the Regional Park Manager, submitted.)

6 Regional Park Budget 2012/13

The Parks and Greenspace Manager, City of Edinburgh Council, gave a verbal update on the budget for 2012/13 and the negotiations held with the partner authorities. The proportion of support for the Regional Park being provided by the City of Edinburgh had increased greatly in recent years and could not be sustained by the Council in future years; against this background, negotiations were continuing with the partner authorities. The level of spending also perhaps

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under-estimated the level of support provided in officer time not accounted for in the budget figure, and other 'below the line' costs in supporting the Regional Park.

As an aid to budget modelling and service for 2012/13, the Regional Park Manager had analysed the current service level agreements for the local authorities, identifying in detail the items of work and time commitments by the Park authority and with proposals for what could be provided by the authority next year. This would provide greater transparency and help the partners to focus on the service being given to their particular local authority areas. Next year would require reductions in certain areas, and therefore discussions would be needed on what levels of support could be sustained; indications were given in his paper in areas where cut-backs or increased local authority contributions necessary.

Mrs J Winning (SNH) referred to their being scope for possible access to grants for special project work in the Regional Park, for instance involving the use of volunteers.

Decision

To note the position and that officers were continuing to negotiate on the budget for 2012/13.

7 Date of Next Meeting

Friday 9 March 2012, at 10.00 am.

The Clerk was also asked to draw up a possible schedule of meetings for the next 12-month period.