

Pentland Hills Regional Park - Review of Governance and Consultative Mechanisms

Pentland Hills Regional Park Joint Committee

26th July 2012

Purpose of report

- 1 To recommend that the Joint Committee approves in principle a number of proposed changes intended to streamline the governance and consultative mechanisms for the Regional Park and refers the proposals to the Consultative Forum for comment.

Main report

- 2 At its meeting of 16th March 2012, the Joint Committee requested that proposals to streamline the governance and consultative mechanisms for the Regional Park be brought forward for consideration. This report makes a number of recommendations to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the existing arrangements.
- 3 There are four groups involved with the governance of and provision of advice to the Regional Park which are described below.

The Joint Committee

- 4 The Joint Committee is the primary decision making body and comprises of elected members from each of the partner local authorities: the City of Edinburgh Council (3 members); Midlothian Council (3 members) and West Lothian Council (1 member). Additionally, Scottish Water and Scottish Natural Heritage have one representative each, but in a non-voting capacity. The Joint Committee currently meets 3 to 4 times per year.
- 5 The Joint Committee was set up following local government re-organisation in 1996, as a means to enable the three local separate authorities responsible for the area of the Regional Park to combine to jointly fund and discharge their responsibilities. A Minute of Agreement as signed in 1996, and amended in 2004, provided for the funding and governance of the Regional Park. The Joint Committee was provided with certain delegated powers and was to make recommendations to the three authorities on the operation of the Regional Park.

- 6 The management and funding of the Regional Park has altered significantly over the years, with the City of Edinburgh Council now being the 'managing authority', providing the majority of the funding, and being employer of the Ranger Service staff. The experience of recent years suggests that the existing minute of agreement requires to be adjusted to better reflect the current operation and administration of the Regional Park.

The Management Group

- 7 The Management Group comprises of officers from the three partner local authorities with representation from Scottish Natural Heritage, Scottish Water, and local Neighbourhood Service Teams. It serves to guide operational matters and prepare the business for the Joint Committee. The Management Group is currently chaired by a senior officer from the Managing Authority. The Management Group meets some weeks in advance of the Joint Committee and at a similar frequency.

The Consultative Forum

- 8 The Consultative Forum is a larger group of stakeholders with the role of advising the Joint Committee (see membership at Appendix 1). The Consultative Forum has no executive decision making authority and acts in a purely advisory capacity. Under the existing arrangements, membership of the Consultative Forum is by invitation from the Joint Committee. Other interested parties can attend meetings and request to speak on approval from the Chair. The Consultative Forum meets up to 4 times per year, usually about 3-4 weeks following the Joint Committee.

Farmers and Landowners' Meeting

- 9 A separate meeting for farmers and landowners is held periodically, usually annually. These meeting are less formal and the agenda covers topics that are of particular relevance and interest to land managers. This meeting, unlike the Joint Committee and Consultative Forum has no formal role and is not prescribed in the Minute of Agreement for the Regional Park. The last farmers and land owners' meeting was held in December 2010.

The Case for Review

- 10 The current cycle and frequency of meetings goes beyond that needed for sound governance and requires a level of administrative activity that cannot be sustained in light of increasing pressure on service resources.
- 11 The agendas for the Joint Committee and the Consultative Forum are often very similar leading to similar business being covered twice in close succession.
- 12 The Joint Committee will routinely refer matters to the Consultative Forum before making a considered decision. This introduces delays into the decision making process.

- 13 The existing Consultative Forum does not at this stage represent the full range of interests. For example, water based recreation and mountain biking interests are under-represented. Several organisations who have a place on the Forum (see Appendix 1) have not sent a representative for some time. The current arrangement provides for one community council representative from each of the partner local authority area. There are other community groups who have a strong local interest in the Regional Park who have been unable to participate fully under the existing arrangements.
- 14 Farmers and landowners are key stakeholders in the Regional Park and have for some time, expressed an interest in being closer to the decision making process.

Proposals

- 15 To address these issues and improve the governance and consultative arrangements, the following measures are proposed.
- 16 The Joint Committee and Consultative Form meets together in partnership. The benefits of this arrangement are that the Joint Committee has immediate and direct access to advice from stakeholders and that there is a significant reduction in administration and duplication of business. Stakeholders would benefit from being able to communicate their views directly to the Joint Committee.
- 17 This new joint working between the Joint Committee and the Consultative Forum might usefully be referred to as the 'Pentland Hills Regional Park Partnership'. This would better reflect the collaborative approach of joint working. However only elected members on the Joint Committee would have voting authority and the Joint Committee would retain the flexibility to 'retire' and discuss matters separately if necessary. The underlying governance structure would remain unchanged.
- 18 It is proposed that the membership of the Consultative Forum be reviewed and if necessary changes approved by the Joint Committee. The review would aim to make the Consultative Forum more inclusive and representative of the full range of interests in the Regional Park. The existing Consultative Forum would have a key advisory role when reviewing membership.
- 19 Farming and Landowner participation at the Pentland Hills Regional Park Partnership would take the place of the annual farmers and landowners meeting. The opportunity for farming and landowning interests to attend the Partnership as part of the Consultative Forum would improve engagement with the decision making process and make the consultative arrangements more effective. One-off farmers and landowners meetings can still be arranged if required, but would not be held annually as matter of routine. Farmers and landowners have an ongoing relationship with Regional Park staff throughout the year and can contact staff at any time.

Frequency of meetings

- 20 It is proposed that the Pentland Hills Regional Park Partnership meets twice a year. This will ensure a fuller agenda at each meeting and reduce the current administrative burden. Additional meetings could be convened if necessary. Meeting dates will be set well in advance to help promote good attendance levels.
- 21 It is proposed that the Management Group meets at least twice a year in advance of Partnership meetings and at other times as required to allow the preparation of Committee business and make more efficient use of the officer time available to support the Regional Park.

Financial Implications

- 22 By holding the Joint Committee and Consultative Forum meetings together under the combined format of the Pentland Hills Regional Park Partnership, the total number of annual meetings will be reduced from eight to two. Whilst not resulting in direct savings this represents a significant reduction in elected member, officer and stakeholder time required to administer the Regional Park while promoting closer partnership working at the same time.

Equalities Impact

- 23 In reviewing the membership of the Consultative Forum, there is an opportunity to involve currently under represented interests. This will assist in the consideration of the Regional Park's role and effectiveness in dealing with inequalities allowing improvements to be made.

Environmental Impact

- 24 The review proposals will improve the governance and consultative mechanisms for the Regional Park and strengthen its ability to provide effective and efficient visitor and environmental management services in the Pentland Hills.

Recommendations

- 25 It is recommended that the Joint Committee:
- a) approves the proposals in principle;
 - b) requests that the Consultative Forum is consulted on the proposals and engaged in the review of Forum membership; and
 - c) calls for a further paper to be presented to the next Joint Committee meeting setting out the finalised governance proposals for approval including any revisions required to the current Minute of Agreement, for the approval of the local authorities and funding partners.

Appendices	Appendix 1: Existing Membership of the Consultative Forum
Contact/tel/Email	David Jamieson (Parks and Greenspace Manager, 0131 529 7055) Keith Logie (Parks Development Manager, 0131 529 7916) Alan McGregor (Regional Park Manager, 0131 445 3383)
Wards affected	All
Single Outcome Agreement	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Edinburgh's economy delivers increased investment, jobs, and opportunities for all2. Edinburgh's citizens experience improved health and wellbeing, with reduced inequalities in health3. Edinburgh's children and young people enjoy their childhood and fulfil their potential4. Edinburgh's communities are safer and have improved physical and social fabric
Background Papers	None

Appendix 1: Existing Pentland Hills Regional Park Consultative Forum

City of Edinburgh Council	2 x Elected Members
Midlothian Council	1x Elected member
West Lothian Council	1x Elected Member
Farming	National Farmers Union
Pentland Produce	Scottish Agricultural College
Landowning	Scottish Rural Property and Business Association.
Ministry of Defence Estates	1 representative
Scottish Wildlife Trust	1 representative
Friends of the Pentlands	1 representative
Fairmilehead Community Council	1 representative
Kirknewton Community Council	1 representative
Damhead Community Council	1 representative
Harperrig Management Group	1 representative
Walkers	Ramblers Association
British Horse Society	1 representative
Scottish Hill Runners	1 representative
Mountain Biking	Cycling Scotland
Disabled Users	Thistle Foundation
Scottish Angling Society	1 representative
Water Sports	Scottish Canoe Association
Orienteering	Edinburgh Southern Orienteering Club
Scottish Water	1 representative
Scottish Natural Heritage	1 representative
Sport Scotland	1 representative
Historic Scotland (Archaeology)	1 representative
Economic/Rural Development (Scottish Government)	1 representative
Edinburgh and Lothians Tourist Board	1 representative
Balerno Village Trust	1 representative
Regional Park Manager	1 representative
City of Edinburgh Council	1 officer
Midlothian Council	1 officer
West Lothian Council	1 officer

