

Pentland Hills Regional Park Consultative Forum

10.00am Friday 20 March 2015 in Bonaly Scout Centre, Bonaly Road, Edinburgh

Present:

Councillors Bill Henderson (Convener) (The City of Edinburgh Council); Ken Knowles (Scottish Wildlife Trust); Alastair McLung (Swanston Farm); Janet Clark (Edinburgh Southern Orienteering Club)

Community Councils – Hugh Watt and Ken Shade (Balerno CC), Constance Newbound (Damhead CC), Tony Anderson (Carlops CC), Peter Gray (Colinton Amenity Association), Neil Ingram (Juniper Green CC), David Brewsey and Nigel Rudd (Colinton Community Council).

In Attendance:

Christine Grahame MSP; Lynn Molleson (Harlaw Hydro); Ross Woodside (ELGT); Margaret Granger (Balerno Ramblers); K Logie, A McGregor, J Hargreaves M Duncan, Gwen Stewart, Victor Partridge (The City of Edinburgh Council); Chris Alcorn (West Lothian Council); and B Ritchie (City of Edinburgh Council).

1. Minutes

Decision

The minutes of the Pentland Hills Regional Park Consultative Forum of 26 September 2014 were submitted and approved as a correct record.

2. Proposal to Extend the Regional Park Boundary - Update

The Consultative Forum had previously considered Christine Grahame's (MSP) proposal to extend the boundaries of the Regional Park to cover the entire range of the Pentland Hills.

Christine Grahame addressed the Forum, outlining her proposals, which included the timeframe and the stages in the Parliamentary process for the Bill. The draft Bill would be accompanied by a policy memorandum and a financial memorandum. It was likely that the southern boundary would be extended automatically following a two year period during which the issues of finding, governance and operations could be addressed and resolved by local authority and other partners.

Christine Graham suggested that an extended boundary had the potential to bring the advantages of integrated management to a wider area of the Pentland Hills including: improved supervision, visitor management and facilities.

Keith Logie gave a presentation on the progress of preliminary discussions to work with existing countryside trusts, to bring in new investment in paths and access infrastructure in the Regional Park. The presentation included the following themes:

- Advantages of a Trust model
 - Specialists in fund-raising
 - Access funding denied to Councils
 - Flexibility
 - Could be orientated to project delivery
 - “Good cause”

- Disadvantages
 - Difficult to replace Council revenue funding
 - Ongoing maintenance may be a challenge
 - Overheads and operating costs

- The Aims of the Trust Model
 - Bring in new resources
 - Engage with new partners
 - Improve the Pentland Hills access network
 - Possibly work over the whole Pentland Hills range – Friends of the Pentlands were already doing this

- Options
 - Creation of a new Trust
 - Work with an existing Trust
 - A local Trust
 - A specialist Trust
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- Possible programmes
 - Path construction
 - Other access improvements
 - Training
 - Other work

- Potential funders
 - European Rural Development Fund
 - European Social Fund
 - Heritage Lottery Fund
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- Next steps
 - Report to Joint Committee of the Pentland Hills Regional Park
 - Recommend working with Edinburgh and Lothian Greenbelt Trust (ELGT) and the Cairngorms Outdoor Access Trust (COAT)

- Seek to provide “pump-priming” funds
- Develop funding bids during 2015-16

Discussion took place and members raised the following points:

- A question was raised about whether the ELGT could work outwith its current area of operation if the boundary extension took place.
- The Friends of the Pentlands had a good track record of project delivery in the southern hill range and could be a key partner.
- If the Heritage Lottery Fund ‘Landscape Partnership’ route was considered, then this would incorporate a wider range of aspects, including culture, history and tourism.
- The project has the potential to contribute to longer term vision of the Central Scotland Green Network. The Central Scotland Green Network Trust has been engaged with preliminary discussions.

Christine Grahame thanked everybody for their contribution and particularly welcomed the early work towards securing new funding. CG indicated that she would continue to work with all interested parties and hoped that the discussion at the Forum has helped move matters forward.

Decision

To thank Christine Grahame, MSP and to note the update.

(Reference – Pentland Hills Regional Park Consultative Forum 26 February 2014 (item 2)).

3. Lothianburn Activity Centre

Alastair McLung gave a presentation on proposals for the Lothianburn Activity Centre, which would provide new public mountain bike trails and adventure activities. The proposed development would incorporate trails for all levels of users. The new facility which would be located on the former Lothianburn golf course might include bike trails a skills loop, a pump track and a zipline. Facilities would include low cost overnight accommodation and camping, a shop and cafe.

It was explained that the application was currently at the pre-application stage, there had been a public consultation and most respondents were in favour of the proposals.

Following the presentation, the following points were made:

- A range of activities could be accommodated on site and it might be necessary to develop and dedicate trails for particular types of use to minimise potential conflict.
- There would be facilities for camping, but earlier proposals for hotel accommodation would not be progressed. It was thought that there was a demand for affordable overnight accommodation in the locality.

- AM indicated that he was supportive of well managed cycling events in the Regional Park.

Decision

To thank the Alastair McClung for the presentation.

4. Recreational Events Concordat

Martin Duncan provided an outline of the Recreational Events Concordat. The process had started two years ago with the intention of developing a framework to support a sustainable programme of well managed recreational events. A working group had been established with representatives from the Consultation Forum. The Group met three times and developed the draft concordat which was consulted upon in 2014.

There were seven key principles within the concordat: (1) Limiting the number of large events; (2) Defining the rest period between events; (3) Defining the lead in time - nine months for large events and three months for small events; (4) Encouraging organisers to produce a contingency plan and a risk assessment ; (5) Minimising vehicle use; (6) Encouraging liaison between event organisers and landowners - especially for larger events; (7) Encouraging event organisers to make a financial contribution. It was explained that a report would be submitted to the Joint Committee in April 2015.

Following the presentation, the following points were made:

- The respective parties should be aware of what was required of them.
- There was a revised administrative process behind the Concordat to improve communications between parties.
- There would be allowances for exceptional circumstances where proposals for specific events fell outwith the principles. These would be considered on a case by case basis.
- Early planning was recognised as being important.
- Effective communication was important, especially for landowners who needed good information, when considering whether or not to give permission.
- A calendar or web-based tool might be useful to illustrate the various stages in the planning process.
- The principles applied to both large and small events.
- Concerns were raised about competitive cycling events specifically, particularly in relation to public safety, liability and impact on other users. It was suggested that good risk assessment, stewarding and route choice might address these concerns.
- The feasibility of separate paths for cyclists and walkers was discussed.
- Under the events planning guidance, organisers had to demonstrate how they would deal with issues of shared path use and risk assessment.
- The feasibility of path closures for events was discussed.

Decision

To note the progress that had been made.

5. Harlaw Hydro Scheme

Lynne Molleson (LM) provided an outline on the proposed Harlaw Hydro Scheme.

The scheme would generate about 260,000 kwh units of green electricity per year and would cost about £313,000.

The funding was fully raised through a share issue and had received significant support from the local community. In addition to a fixed return for investors, the scheme would fund a range of local community projects.

Success to date has been largely down to the significant voluntary input from people within the local community who had the required professional skills to progress key stages of the project. Harlaw Hydro was established as an Industrial and Provident Society.

LM indicated that it had been necessary to contact several different Council departments during the planning and implementation phases which were difficult for a small team of volunteers. LM indicated that a single key contact would be beneficial for future community led projects of this type.

Decision

To thank the presenter and to note the proposals.

Declaration of Interest

Councillor Bill Henderson declared a non-financial interest in the above item, as he was a stakeholder.

6. Woodland Expansion Bonaly Country Park

Ross Woodside provided information on the background to the woodland expansion at Bonaly Country Park. The planting at Bonaly was part of a wider programme identified in a Central Scotland Green Network funded woodland expansion plan covering the entire North East slopes. Both the original study and the current planting was being carried out by the Edinburgh and Lothians Greenspace Trust.

Planting was now taking place at Swanston, Dreghorn and Bonaly Country Park. An outline was then provide on the following themes:

- Woodland Expansion Management Plan
- Project Area Ownerships
- Program - One Masterplan for the North East Slopes
- Individudal Woodland Plans
- Existing Habitat Interest
- Land Capability and Forestry

- Constraints to Woodland Expansion
- Issues and Constraints
- Opportunities
- All Proposals
- Objectives for Woodland Expansion
- Woodland Expansion Proposals
- Objectives for the Management of Existing Woodlands
- Woodland Management Proposals

The plans were not available on-line but further information could be accessed by contacting landowners or the Edinburgh and Lothians Greenspace Trust directly. The focus was currently on the North East slopes but it was proposed to approach landowners in the North/ West to determine whether there was potential for expansion across a larger area.

Decision

To thank the presenter and to note the proposals.

7. Regional Park Operational Update

Jenny Hargreaves provided a verbal report which included the following:

- Redford Wood Path
 - There had been funding from the off-road cycling budget and the path had been upgraded.
- West Rig Path
 - The Ramblers Association Scotland and the Friends of the Pentlands had helped to make improvements to this path.
- Harperrig Reservoir Bird Hide
 - The roof damage had been repaired
 - At the Little Vantage, pot holes had been repaired.
- Pentland Inspirations Art and Photographic Competition
 - This was now on a tour, lasting until May
- Bonaly
 - 20,000 trees had been planted including installation of badger gates and six stiles.
 - Remedial work to damaged paths had been carried out
 - Fencing had been repaired and improved.
- Harlaw
 - 110 metres of hedging had been laid to improve sight lines, habitat value and better separate dogs from agricultural land.
- Anti-Social Behaviour
 - Staff were liaising with the Police Scotland
 - The police would be attending Balerno and Currie High School
- Lambing Initiative
 - Police Scotland would be involved
 - Seasonal Lambing signs would be installed throughout the park

- Posters were being circulated on the effects of sheep worrying
- Flotterstone
 - New dog bins were installed by Midlothian Council
 - The Regional Park assisted with clearing trees and other works following winter storm damage
- Flotterstone Car Park
 - Proposals to improve parking management were being investigated.
 - Pruning of Brambles
 - Working with volunteer groups
- South Pentlands
 - Reviewing of directional signs
 - Liaison with landowners to improve access
 - Recent incidences of fly-tipping
- Path Survey Commissioned including:
 - Green Cleugh
 - Black Springs
 - Ranges Road
 - Maidens Cleugh
 - The survey was funded from the off road cycling budget.

Decision

To thank Jenny Hargreaves and to note the verbal report.

9. Dates for Future Meetings

Dates for future meetings were as follows:

24 April 2015 Joint Committee