

Minutes

Pentland Hills Regional Park Consultative Forum

12.00 noon Friday 22 February 2019 in the Currie RFC, Malleny Park, Balerno, Midlothian

Present:

Councillors Gardiner (in the chair) (The City of Edinburgh Council), Robert Barr (SNFU), Becci Barr (Easter Bavelaw Farm), Alastair McClung (Swanston Farm), Hamish Clark (Friends of the Pentlands), Janice Winning (Scottish Natural Heritage), Rod Dalitz (SHRA).

Community Councils – Johanna Carrie (Fairmilehead Community Council), Hugh Watt (Balerno Community Council).

In Attendance:

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).

Stuart Wright (Hillend Leisure) and Richard Slipper (MRTPI)

1. Minutes

Decision

The minutes of the Pentland Hills Regional Park Consultative Forum of 4 May 2018 were submitted and approved as a correct record.

2. Update on the New Management Plan

The Regional Park Manager provided an update on the New Management Plan. He indicated that he was working on the new draft and officers were working on the strategic framework section of the document, which involved a considerable amount of work. At the meeting of the Officers Group on 7 February, actions had been allocated for officers to carry out. After that, it was hoped there would be collaboration with the partnership organisations to draw together all the relevant information to update the draft plan. He would then pull the draft together.

The Convener noted that the officers were going forward with their bid for the first stage of funding. They had received money from the three councils, which was most welcome. This then was work in progress.

Decision

To note the update.

3. Livestock Attacks (Sheep Worrying)

The Natural Heritage Officer gave an update on livestock attacks, which included the following:

Livestock Attacks in the Pentland Hills

- Eleven reported sheep attacks (“worrying”) in PHRP in 2018
- 2019 started off with one on New Year’s Day (Flotterstone Glen)
- Edinburgh official stats: 4 attacks
- Midlothian stats: 8 attacks
- Actual numbers higher due to lack of reporting to Park or police
- Two dedicated events at Visitor Information Points, to be repeated in 2019
- Police presence on quad bikes throughout year
- Launch of SPARC livestock attacks campaign

Scottish Partnership Against Rural Crime

- Launched 8th January 2019 at Penicuik Estate
- Attended by various press (TV, radio, and newspapers)
- Representatives of British Horse Society, Kennel Club, Police Scotland, PHRP, NFU Scotland, NFU Mutual, Scottish Land and Estates, as well as Emma Harper MSP (South Scotland)
- Some discussion at this event of the need to alter language (“worried?!”), as well as look again at current legislation such as the “1953 Act”

Protection of Livestock (Scotland) Bill

- Launched 21st Feb 2019 (yesterday) at the Scottish Parliament
- Discussed the appropriateness of the term “Worrying” (p18 and 19)
- Discusses NFU requests to alter SOAC so all dogs have to be on leads in vicinity of sheep (“vicinity” not defined)
- Proposed adding alpacas, llamas, deer and ostriches to definition of livestock (1953 Act: cattle, sheep, goats, swine, horses and poultry)
- Proposed the following:
- Increase of penalties for the offence of livestock attack (up to £5000 / six months imprisonment / community penalty, and / or dog ownership life-ban)
- Provision of powers to police officers to require dog owners to take their animal to a vet for evidence gathering purposes
- Enable Scottish Ministers to delegate powers to organisations such as SSPCA to undertake investigations and enforcement

Discussion took place and the following points were made:

- The Scottish Natural Heritage was involved in the livestock campaign. It was intended to lengthen the campaign to allow more awareness. They were trying to target the audience through different methods, including social media. The National Access Forum recently had a meeting with Dog Trust Scotland who wanted to help promote responsible ownership.
- The Senior Natural Heritage Officer had been in touch with the NFU and Radio Scotland had broadcasted a chat show about dogs on leads in public places.
- It was necessary to clarify what was responsible behaviour and “worrying” should be replaced with “dog attacks” or “attacks on livestock”.
- The Dog Trust did not train dogs, as there was limit to how much training could be provided. However, not letting dogs unaccompanied outdoors was important, as there were a large number of attacks resulting from this.
- The NFU was making some representation to the campaign. There was concern that dogs ranging loose in wild areas had an adverse effect on wildlife and people should be made aware of this and be more mindful.
- To try help the situation, the Natural Heritage staff tried to explain to dog owners how to behave properly.

Decision

Members to give feedback on any ideas on dealing with livestock attacks to the Regional Park Manager and the Senior Natural Heritage Officer.

4. Harlaw Visitors Centre (Current Position)

The Convener indicated that BVT was hoping to take this on. They were looking for HLF funding, but the criteria had changed so it was harder to achieve this. So he would take this “off-line” and liaise with officers and BVT in order to seek progress. He had welcomed the initial proposals from BVT and end result would have been “win win” but the timescale had now changed.

Discussion took place and the following points were made:

- The visitor centre was still open and was being well-used, especially by the Friends of the Pentlands (FoP).

Pentland Hills Regional Park Consultative Forum
22 February 2019

- Was there any progress about parking?
- A meeting would be arranged with Lord Roseberry and other stakeholders in due course to discuss parking, paths, tracks and other issues. The result of these discussions would be circulated.
- The FoP supported any progress towards creating the visitor centre.
- If there were paths “off road”, it might encourage people to walk rather than drive. There had been number of potential routes that had been checked out.
- The FoP had identified one path which was usable now and was off the road.

The Convener indicated that there some good suggestions had been made, such as the reduction of traffic and the creation of more paths from Balerno Village. However, more funding was required for the park, with funding from the Council was constrained, therefore, it might be necessary to look at other ways of getting funding streams.

Funding Issues

The Convener explained that officers had suggested it was necessary to consider alternative ways of raising revenue and there would be discussions at the landowners meeting in March, to this end. There would have to be a dialogue with stakeholders to find ways to fund the activities. There might be something to do that landowners were willing to undertake, such as hosting events in the park.

If suitable events were to take place the Natural Heritage Service would provide the service such as ensuring the presence of wardens to prevent damage. It would be necessary to agree how the revenue could be distributed between landowner and council. There was activity in the area already and the service had to be in control to in order to help protect the park.

Discussion took place and the following points were raised:

- At this stage, it was not known what the events would look like. The service would input into how these should be managed.
- Any Council revenue raised by events would be put back into the park.
- It was some difficulty to plan events that took place across various landownerships in the park as it was necessary to first get the permission from all the landowners.
- The first stage could be to discuss at the Landowners Forum, to determine the level of interest and to ensure that it was not detrimental to the park.

Pentland Hills Regional Park Consultative Forum
22 February 2019

- There was an events policy in place, which meant that the Council did not currently charge for events. There was a process in place that could be developed, which also meant identifying an event organizer.
- It might be possible for the Natural Heritage Service to provide wardens and manage events.
- It was necessary to get landowners to communicate and to get written agreement for access across the Pentlands.
- There was at present an ongoing bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), which meant that there was potential funding to upgrade the paths. With the upgrade of the paths, there would be some management mechanism to pay for the ongoing management of that through events.
- It was necessary to agree a date for the landowners meeting, which might take place the second week in March.
- There had previously been guarantees to upgrade paths, but this had not taken place. Unless there was a guarantee that the paths would be upgraded and maintained by an outside body, there would not be sustainable use.
- There were budgetary constraints and it was necessary to find alternative ways of funding, such as the HFL bid. This would be discussed at the Landowners Forum in March.

Decision

- 1) The Convener to circulate the workshop output report on parking, paths and tracks.
- 2) The Friends of the Pentlands to e-mail Jenny Hargreaves/Convener with suggestions on how to progress Matters.
- 3) To note that the Friends of the Pentlands would wish to attend a meeting with Lord Roseberry in due course.
- 4) The Regional Park Manger to update the Forum about the HLF bid.

5. Pentland Trail Centre

Alistair McLung gave an outline of the proposed Pentland Trail Centre. He explained the process of how the developers intended to make use of the land and he thought that LothianBurn was a good location for that. He explained how they worked through the pre-application process and the purpose of the trail centre. There was a need more funding. The developers had put in place a more professional team and were now trying to move things forward. Conversations were now taking place with Hillend Ski

Pentland Hills Regional Park Consultative Forum
22 February 2019

Slope, they were trying to come together to create something that worked for everybody. So now the emphasis was to move closer to Hillend Ski slope to a better facility.

Richard Slipper presented the report. He was aware of the planning context. The proposed development would be mostly within Edinburgh Council, but partly in Midlothian. He had made the initial proposal for planning application. It was intended to develop mountain biking in Scotland and this was a major initiative to promote this sport. There were already excellent facilities for mountain bikers, but he wanted to get people initially interested in the sport. It was necessary to decide how best to use this land next to the City, which involved constraints and challenges.

He then provided details of the proposals and the surrounding area:

- The ongoing successful business at the Brasserie and at Swanston.
- The story of Lothian Burn etc.
- Trails across the large acreage, running up to the “T” shaped wood, and a trail head.
- There had been consultations in 2015 on the Hub concept.
- The overall cycle catchment had very big urban catchment.
- The survey of 5 years ago indicated that most people travelled by bike to the Pentland venues and less by car.
- Pentlands was most popular for quick “whiz out” of an evening or during the week.
- The age of riders was mostly in the 35-44 category.
- This was an opportunity to get fresh participants into the sport early and older participants who had not been on a mountain bike for a while.
- Female participants represented only 20% of those questioned.
- There was overwhelming approval of proposals of the facilities.
- A team had been appointed to look in more detail at the land quality and character.
- That was the first analysis of where best to install the trails and where to locate the built facilities.

He then outlined the planning application.

- The neighbouring Destination Hillend had proposals for an upgrade for a much enhanced winter sports facility. They had worked to accommodate this.
- Hotel approval was being progressed for the Lothianburn Site.
- They were aware of neighbouring sites and activities and were in active discussions. There was some early work of what work requirements there were for the site.
- The ski slopes were very visible.

Pentland Hills Regional Park Consultative Forum
22 February 2019

- The plan denoted the different challenges of the site.
- Some of the features of the site, included accommodation for “glamping”.
- The trail centres worked in a similar way to skiing in that there would be various grades of difficulty for different users. The footpaths access trails doubled up as access points to other areas
- It was necessary to use the woodland to create an environment and to help to hide the trails.
- With the PPP, a point would be reached where the application was acceptable. There would be approximately 10km of cycling trails, including a facility for walking.
- A planning condition would probably require a method statement stipulating how the paths would be designed. When the PPP stage was complete, the next stage of the planning process would begin.
- The way in which sustainable trails was being built was changing, there was the challenge of wild biking and these trails would help to manage this.
- This would be expensive to build and maintain, had to be sustainable and it was necessary to decide how to raise the revenue.
- The Trail Centre required facilities, such as a clubhouse and it was necessary to get finance to work this facility. The generation of revenue would help with this.

Following the presentation, discussion took place and the following points were made:

- There was a plan for free car parking and this would help provide access to the Commercial Hub.
- The shops and cafes would provide the revenue, it was not intended to charge for car parking.
- Was it anywhere near the ski lift? Was there an option to use the ski lift for uplift?
- It was hoped to make the facility attractive and charging parking fees might diminish this.
- It was necessary to be astute about the proposals. This was a free outdoor recreational sport that to be made sustainable and there had to be an element in the proposals that permitted this. It was hoped to generate the income from the retail element. The developers were looking to get feedback to make this work.
- At a previous meeting of the Joint Committee, as part of the proposed new ski centre, there had been proposals, for routing the bus to see if it was possible to go higher up to the ski centre.

Pentland Hills Regional Park Consultative Forum
22 February 2019

The Convener indicated that the developers should have discussions with the Natural Heritage Service. In the past there had been mountain bikes whose use had been detrimental to the landscape. These proposals potentially could have some impact on the park. The Council was applying for funding from the HLF for the Regional Park. The developers might want to consider this. Other points raised included:

- There was an issue with illegal trail building and the proposed trail centre, would help to manage this.
- There were concerns that the creation of footpaths might lead to more mountain bikes, however, any planning approval would be hedged with conditions and would be linked to the aims of the Regional Park.
- Policing the paths might prove difficult, however, there were various measures that might be implemented such as pedestrian gate or signage to mitigate any damage.
- It would be difficult to stop mountain bikes, however, the facility could be used to educate cyclists to use the paths responsibly.
- It might be the case that illegal bike trails was partly due to a lack of education, opportunity and facilities.
- There were both potential benefits and challenges, which had to be carefully navigated. It had to be decided how to build the design code, ensure that there were safeguards on the site that generated the income and to harness the income to maintain the landscape.
- The developers were keen to speak to the community council and the FoP regarding the planning contributions that were related to this policy.
- A license was not required for a sporting organisation. However, there might need to be one for a bar within the complex.
- The idea of the trails seemed positive, but it was not clear how much more building would be required on the main road.
- The topography of the land would mean that the new buildings would not be visible until people were close to them.
- There was a great deal of tourist activity in the city centre and it would be beneficial to take it to the edges of the city and reduce the number of cars.

- This was a key site in the green belt. There were opportunities to tie the proposed development in to woodland round the Pentland and contribute to the greenbelt.
- The Scottish Forrest Strategy aimed to increase the capacity of the woodland through planting. There might be a case for cross collaboration for woodland planting in the Pentlands.
- The developers should ensure that the development accorded the with aims of the park and was sensitive to woodland policy and considered the impact on wildlife.

The Convener thanked the developers for their presentation.

Decision

Discussions to take place between the developers and the Natural Heritage Service regarding the proposed development.

6. 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:

Biodiversity

- 10 surveys took place, 34 members of public attended (most ever)
- Bavelaw Marsh – wildflower meadow surveyed, cut and raked
- Wildflower meadow at Hillend was enlarged by cutting a bigger area 1700m² to 2440m²

Interpretation

- Pentland Inspirations
- Website
- Facebook posts via Edinburgh Outdoors
- Guided walks and activities
- Seasonal signage
- Doors Open Day 2018
- 50th Pentland Beacon in production, bigger edition due to it being the 50th

Community Groups and Education

- Volunteer Rangers
- Friends of the Pentlands
- Dean Park Primary involved in wildflower planting
- FoP and Malleny Anglers planted trees around the reservoir.
- Woodlands School involved in general conservation jobs.
- Duke of Edinburgh Award: (NO DATA FOR 2018 YET) but

Donation Scheme

- RINGGO active throughout the Park
- Boxes now installed at:
 - Swanston
 - Threipmuir
 - Flotterstone
 - Harlaw
 - Bonaly

Harlaw Area

- In addition to the annual Livestock Worrying campaign event at Harlaw PHRP held a 'Responsible Access' event.
- Wildlife Garden Mgt
- Camping litter and fires
- Hooked on Harlaw ran again in July, very successful at engaging people with angling and access.
- Pond dipping for public held at the wildlife garden pond.
- FoP Tea and Cakes – successful fundraising at Harlaw June, Sept, and Oct.
- Drystone dyking association continue to use Harlaw dykes for training and have repaired several fallen sections.

Harlaw and Threiomuir Water level

- Water level in Harlaw and Threiomuir reservoirs drastically low due to lack of rain all summer. Notices erected to warn of risk of slipping on steep muddy banks and getting stuck in mud.

Bonaly Area

- Tree Management

- Car Park Ownership
- Fires
- Vandalism
- Storm damage
- Deer Rescue

Harperrig, Threipmuir, Swanston, Hillend and Boghall

- Boghall Farm - bridge and set of steps at had been replaced
- Bike racks at Swanston and Threipmuir
- Hillend Country Park – a stile replaced with a self-closing gate at the top of the Ski slope.
- Leithhead - steps and a stile repaired
- Little Vantage Car Park - pot-holes filled in and grass cut
- Harperrig Reservoir
 - field gate replaced and fence and drystone wall repairs.
 - tree planting
 - Completed a successful grant application for a defibrillator to be installed on the outside of Anglers Hut and available for all to use.
- Tree planting Green Cleugh

Dreghorn, Castlelaw and Flotterstone to Carlops

- Car parking- Dreghorn closure
- Filming requests
- Vandalism – fence cutting
- Eastside logging and replanting

The Senior Natural Heritage Officer thanked the Friends of Pentlands for their work which included a considerable amount of litter picking, throughout the entire length of Pentlands.

Decision

To note the update.

9. Dates for Future Meetings

Dates for future meetings were as follows:

31 May 2019 Joint Committee