

Minutes

Pentland Hills Regional Park Joint Committee

12.00 Noon, Tuesday 8 September 2020 – Held by Microsoft Teams

Present:

Voting Members:

City of Edinburgh Council – Councillors Gardiner (Convener), Bruce (items 1-3) and Doran (substituting for Councillor Henderson).

Midlothian Council – Councillor Winchester.

West Lothian Council – Councillor Timson

Non-Voting Members:

National Farmers Union – Bob Barr

Scottish Land and Estates – Clair Stula

Scottish Natural Heritage: Janice Winning

In attendance:

Inspector Murray Tait (Police Scotland), James Kinch (Midlothian Council), Chris Alcorn (West Lothian Council (Planning)) Charlie Cummins (Edinburgh and Lothians Greenspace Trust), David Jamieson, Jessica Morgado, and Blair Ritchie (City of Edinburgh Council).

1. Minute

Decision

To approve the minute of the Pentland Hills Regional Park Joint Committee of 24 February 2020 as a correct record.

2. Operation Boxy

Murray Tait (Police Scotland) provided an update on Operation Boxy. He explained about the situation over the last few months. There had been calls in relation to residents around the Balerno area, where there had been irresponsible parking, with drivers using the area for longer than one hour. The national situation with Covid took the Police off guard, which included people visiting open spaces and anti-social behaviour. This had been quite an issue, especially during the warm weather.

Following on from a multi-agency meeting, the Police worked to prevent further instances of irresponsible use. It was hoped to have a multi-agency response, to educate users and to robustly enforce legalisation. There was a need to increase police visibility, to develop clear lines of communication and for all partners to feed information. It was hoped to make good use of social media, to make the best use of cycle and foot and mountain patrols, and to reduce the carbon footprint. The main bulk of the team was made up of the community team at Oxfords and a group of probationers from Police College. There had also been a request for special constables. Throughout this time, there had been joint patrols and contact had been made with water bailiffs. There was engagement with various campsites, which included six dispersals mostly around campsites. They would be undertaking this operation again next year, when appropriate.

The Convener thanked Murray Tait for his report. This had been a consolidated operation and hopefully the public would be aware that the police and other agencies would act to help prevent antisocial behaviour, to make the hills safe. It might be necessary to scale this up for next year.

Decision

That the Joint Committee would work with the Police in future to ensure that lessons had been learned and there would be progress to ensure peoples' safety in the hills.

3. Managing Increased Vehicular Access and irresponsible Camping in the Pentland Hills Regional Park

David Jamieson (The Parks, Greenspace and Cemeteries Manager) reported on managing increased vehicular access and irresponsible camping in the Pentland Hills Regional Park. He indicated that the recent health crisis had highlighted a range of growing recreational and traffic management pressures on the Pentland Hills Regional Park (PHRP), notably irresponsible wild camping, anti-social behaviour, and a significant rise in the use of car parks, causing overflow onto adjacent access roads.

The report by the Executive Director of Place addressed these issues, proposing a series of actions that if implemented would help limit their impact on the sustainable use of and access to the Regional Park. The specific measures proposed related to the Regional Park were: enhanced traffic and parking controls, creating additional off-road parking provision, development of active travel alternatives, creation of a formal eco-camping facility with toileting provision, enforcement of Park Management Rules, and the introduction of parking charges to raise revenue to pay for these specific measures.

Discussion took place and the following points were made:

(A) ENHANCED TRAFFIC AND PARKING CONTROLS

- There should an appropriate speed limit imposed, considering the narrow twisting road and the range of users.
- There should be feedback from the consultation.
- What were the major challenges in West Lothian caused by traffic?
- How it would be possible to influence the entrance points.
- What could be done to facilitate parking.
- Encouraging walking was important but some people needed cars.
- Balerno should be one of the gateways into the Pentlands.
- Paths/pavements should be provided to facilitate access.
- It was necessary to ensure traffic flow and stop people parking on verges.
- There should be the provision of buses for the elderly and disabled.

Bob Barr indicated that dropping speed limits might not help as it was necessary to help the flow of traffic. People might just ignore an excessive number of double yellow lines, and it might be better to put up signs prohibiting parking on verges and cutting verges. It was also necessary to provide buses for the elderly and disabled.

(B) UPGRADING CAR PARKS

- There were difficulties with access to Bonaly and Harlaw Car Parks.
- Car parking was important.

(C) CREATION OF A FORMAL ECO-CAMPING FACILITY WITH TOILETING PROVISION,

- Excessive camping caused damage to trees.
- The toilet facility at Harlaw should be re-opened or other options considered.
- There would be a council wide decision on the re-opening of toilets made at the Transport and Environment Committee on 6 October.
- Families should be allowed safe access and dangerous activities stopped.
- The campsite presence helped to informally police activities.
- Funding might be generated by introducing mandatory charging for parking. There had to be a certain level of income to make investment.
- Any income would be ring fenced for the park.
- It was necessary to ensure spaces for customers paying an annual levy.
- Consideration could be given to devices such as car counters on phone apps to establish the availability of spaces.
- It might be possible to get input from the universities for this issue.

Decision

- 1) Proposed traffic management measures be referred to the relevant Committees of Midlothian and the City of Edinburgh Councils.
- 2) A business case for the upgrading and expansion of principal car parks be presented at the next Joint Committee meeting.

- 3) A report be submitted to the next Joint Committee meeting exploring sustainable access and active travel opportunities.
- 4) A business case for establishing an eco-campsite be presented at the next Joint Committee meeting.
- 5) A business case for introducing mandatory parking charges be presented at the next Joint Committee meeting.

6) ENHANCED TRAFFIC AND PARKING CONTROLS

- a) For enhanced traffic and parking controls, Jessica Morago (the Senior Natural Heritage Officer) to check out if it was possible to restrict access after certain times, when it would be busy for the farming community and arrange bus shuttles and carry out a consultation on to see if there was an economic case.
- b) The Senior Natural Heritage Officer to liaise with officers to determine what measures were required out with the parks remit to make this work.
- c) Park Management to liaise with Transport Scotland to introduce a clear way along A702.
- d) The Parks, Greenspace and Cemeteries Manager to take the themes of upgrading the car parks (and promoting active travel), to look at these again and come back to the Joint Committee with a business case.
- e) The Parks, Greenspace and Cemeteries Manager to action Bob Barr's comments on this issue (see item 3a)

7) UPGRADING CAR PARKS

The Parks, Greenspace and Cemeteries Manager to consider upgrading car parks through the consultation process, and to ensure that they were fit for purpose for 21st century.

8) CREATION OF A FORMAL ECO-CAMPING FACILITY WITH TOILETING PROVISION.

- a) The Parks, Greenspace and Cemeteries Manager to investigate further the creation of a formal eco-camping facility with toileting provision and come back to the next meeting and then have a consultation exercises.
- b) The Convener to e-mail the link to Janice Winning's comment and get feedback.
- c) To arrange a consultative forum with landowners in October to discuss the various themes and have a "wrap up" committee in November to reflect on the consultation.

4. Update on Heritage Lottery Fund Pentland Path Project

Charlie Cummins (Edinburgh and Lothians Greenspace Trust) gave update on the Heritage Lottery Fund Pentland Path Project. It was necessary to determine the source of funding. Car parking charges was a significant mechanism for generating income. Work was on hold because lottery funding was paused, except for Covid response work. He had held discussions with Scottish Forestry before the Covid Pandemic. They wanted to work in partnership up with other bodies, to make Pentlands a climate park and to look at the potential for biodiversity and improve access. There was the potential to include mitigation approaches which would also incorporate health benefits. Edinburgh Airport might be a sponsor and this was the type of activity that agencies might become involved with. Discussions were taking place with Nature Scotland. He would provide updates at the next meeting of the Joint Committee. Discussions had also been taking place on the Pentlands to Portobello route, involving Sustrans and local authority funding.

Discussion took place and the following points were made.

- The Pentlands were near a large population of about 750,000 people.
- If investment could be generated, this would benefit Edinburgh and the Lothians.
- Forestry restoration and peatland restoration were both important and this should be included in discussions with forestry partners.
- The Council should be committed to provide funding.
- It was necessary to find different match funders
- That peatland restoration and carbon capture was important.
- Nature Scotland had expertise on peatland.
- Work was taking place with landowners.
- Flood prevention was being checked out.
- The generation of revenue could be used to obtain money from other funders.
- There was a strong case for a lottery funding application that investing in the Park would help with peoples wellbeing and save money in the long term.

Decision

To take action for flood prevention and to work with Charlie Cummins and all other partners to maximise what could be achieved.

5. Pentland Hills Regional Park Management Update

The Parks, Greenspace and Cemeteries Manager provided an update on the Pentland Hills Regional Park Management. This included the regional park team and where it stood in the structure, There was formal consultation place function earlier this year, but that was suspended to consider the wider council review. The adaptation and renewal program had been established. This was a council wide review of services, with new structures being planned. The initial proposals would be presented next October and the Regional Park Team would be part of that. There might be changes later this year.

Discussion took place and the following points were made:

- Whether there had been any changes due to Covid in West Lothian and Midlothian Councils.
- That there had been no new developments in West Lothian Council.
- Discussions were taking place regarding restructuring in Midlothian Council.

The Convener indicated that the Ski Centre would be getting substantial investment from the Council. There had been discussions about the possible installation of a Lothian bus route to the Ski Centre, which would benefit visitors. With investment in the Ski Centre, there might be renewed focus on the park.

Decision

When the Parks, Greenspace and Cemeteries Manager had the information on the restructuring and review of council services and the place of the Regional Park Team in the structure, he would share it with the Joint Committee.

6. Strategic Management Plan - Update on the Final Draft

The Senior Natural Heritage Officer reported on the Strategic Management Plan Update. She indicated that the time factor was essential, the team was currently focussing on the Covid lockdown and she would provide a final report at next meeting of the Joint Committee.

The Convener thanked the Officer for her timeous work on the report in relation to camping and would look forward to the update on the Strategic Management Plan at next meeting of the Joint Committee.

He also drew attention to the good work of the Park Team and hoped that any restructuring would increase its ability to work for the park, taking into account the wide use of the park.

Decision

To note the update.

7. Farmers and Landowners – Any Other Items they would like to see in the Consultative Forum Agenda

The Convener indicated that he would consider any items submitted for the Consultative Forum.

Decision

Bob Bar to e-mail Committee Services or the Convener with any matters to be considered at the Consultative Forum.

8. Dates for Future Meetings

To note the timelines required for the consultation and for Committee Services to arrange a meeting of the Consultative forum in October and the Joint Committee in November.

Decision

PHRP Consultation Forum – To be confirmed.

PHRP Joint Committee – To be confirmed