

# Minutes

## Pentland Hills Regional Park Joint Committee

2.00 pm, Wednesday 20 January 2021 – Held by Microsoft Teams

Present:

### Voting Members:

**City of Edinburgh Council** – Councillors Gardiner (Convener), Bruce, and Henderson.

**Midlothian Council** – Councillors Imrie and Winchester.

**West Lothian Council** – Councillor Timson.

### Non-Voting Members:

**National Farmers Union** – Bob Barr

**Scottish Land and Estates** – Clare Sturla

**Scottish Natural Heritage:** Janice Winning

### In attendance:

Justin Venton (Midlothian Council), Chris Alcorn (West Lothian Council), Charlie Cumming (Edinburgh and Lothians Greenspace Trust), David Jamieson, Jessica Morgado, and Blair Ritchie (City of Edinburgh Council).

## 1. Minutes

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### Decision

- (a) To approve the minute of the Pentland Hills Regional Park Joint Committee of 8 September 2020 as a correct record.
- (b) To approve the minute of the Pentland Hills Regional Park Consultative Forum of 27 October 2020 as a correct record.

## 2. Operational Update

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Jessica Morgado (The Senior Natural Heritage Officer) provided a verbal operational update. She indicated that since September 2020, the Pentland Hills Regional Park (PHRP) team was tasked to deliver a piece of public engagement on the following:

- Options to improve sustainable access to the regional park
- Explore eco-campsite at Harlaw to mitigate anti-social issues

- Expansion/ improvement of 4 principal car parks
- Introduction of compulsory car parking charges

To do so, the team presented their proposals to a Consultative Forum in October 2020. They widened the invitation to include more stakeholder groups and landowners/farmers and fishery managers to ensure information that they had to present was as widely spread as normal. With Covid-19, the annual landowners/farmers meetings never took place in 2020, so the team took the opportunity for the Consultative Forum, to widen the audience.

This team delivered more than was requested by the Joint Committee: A funding opportunity was presented and the decision was made to pull all the resources available to not miss out on substantial funds.

The Rural and Tourism Infrastructure Fund (RTIF) was designed to address issues of sites with scenic areas/ sites experiencing pressure on infrastructure and negative impacts on local communities.

The PHRP team submitted 2 applications to upgrade/expand the 4 principal car parks and to install toilet facilities at 4 car parks and set up the Harlaw Eco-Campsite.

An application for a total of £426k was made, including £28k in kind elements. Potentially, RTIF contribution of 70% would mean a capital investment from PHRP of £90k over 2 years to deliver these projects.

There was, unfortunately, not a successful outcome to the 2 bids. In total, 36 applications were submitted and the final grant request total was £8M for the £3M fund pot available. This team would continue to improve on these applications for a “round four” of funding.

A condition for submission of these grants was to submit planning applications. The team had applied for separate planning applications for the extension of the car park at Harlaw and the creation of the Eco-Campsite, a certificate of lawfulness for the expansion of Threipmuir Car Park and an another one for the creation of new parking spaces at Flotterstone Car Park.

All this was explained at the Consultative Forum during the Officer’s presentation on the various proposals and also explained in the Pentland Beacon Newsletter. The team were waiting to hear the outcome.

The public engagement exercise was held online on the CEC Consultation hub and ran from 06/11/20 to 04/12/20. It received 1,872 responses and 18 separate comments from various organisations. The overall results were used to help draft the reports which would be presented to this meeting of the Joint Committee.

It should be noted that progress on the drafting of the PHRP Strategic plan had to be postponed to achieve all that had been reported.

The Convener thanked the Senior Natural Heritage Officer for that update and the team for their efforts over the period. They had received support from the police and he looked forward to building on that relationship. It was important to recognise the funding sources, to target this and to fund the projects.

Discussion took place and the following points were made:

- That the increased use of social media over the last months had been beneficial.
- There had been parking problems at Flotterston and the Heritage Service had been helpful in addressing this.
- Visitors parking was causing problems for local residents in some areas.
- More people were checking the websites.
- It might be beneficial for increased monitoring of social media, although some had taken place.
- The Council had only limited resources for this type of activity.

## **Decision**

To note the update

**Note:** All parties needed to comply with responsible access.

### **3. Managing Irresponsible Wild Camping and Associated Anti-Social Behaviours at Harlaw**

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David Jamieson (The Parks, Greenspace and Cemeteries Manager) reported on Managing Irresponsible Wild Camping and Associated Anti-Social Behaviours at Harlaw.

He indicated that the recent health crisis has highlighted a range of growing recreational and traffic management pressures on the Pentland Hills Regional Park (PHRP), notably irresponsible wild camping and with it a rise in anti-social behaviour at reservoir sites including Harlaw reservoir. The report by the Executive Director of Place addressed the impact of irresponsible wild camping and outlined the process of creating a formal eco-camping facility with toileting provision and enforcement of Park Management Rules to manage this growing issue at Harlaw reservoir.

Discussion took place and the following points were made:

- Which body would run the echo campsite.
- How would possible problems be addressed.
- How to manage the number of potential campers effectively.
- The need to have good public engagement.
- Whether there was support for the proposal from local landowners and from local residents.
- Whether the survey demonstrated support for the proposals.
- That the campsite would allow some control over campers.
- How to address the issue of irresponsible campers.
- The need to work with landowners and the police to resolve the issue of displacement.
- Possible ways to fund the echo campsite.

- Methods which were available to generate income if unable to access funds through other sources.
- That there were proposals for cafes with potential bidders.
- The possible use of Harlaw House.
- Once approval was given in principle, then progress could be made to pursue the options available.

## **1 Motion**

To agree engagement, enforcement and eco-campsite measures to reduce the impact of antisocial activities caused by irresponsible camping at Harlaw.

- moved by Councillor Gardiner, seconded by Councillor Henderson.

### **Amendment**

To agree the principle of the report, on addressing the impact of irresponsible wild camping and outlining the process of creating a formal eco-camping facility, but before the report was submitted to the Joint Committee, the report to be forwarded by e-mail, to the elected members to allow them to scrutinise it, especially with respect to funding.

- moved by Councillor Imrie, seconded by Councillor Gardiner.

In accordance with Standing Order 21(12), the amendment was accepted as an addendum to the motion.

## **2 Adjusted Motion**

- 1) To agree engagement, enforcement and eco-campsite measures to reduce the impact of antisocial activities caused by irresponsible camping at Harlaw.
- 2) To agree the principle of the report, on addressing the impact of irresponsible wild camping and outlining the process of creating a formal eco-camping facility, but before the report was submitted to the Joint Committee, the report to be forwarded by e-mail, to the elected members to allow them to scrutinise it, especially with respect to funding.

- moved by Councillor Gardiner, seconded by Councillor Henderson.

### **Amendment**

- 1) To express regret that the landowners and those that manage the land were excluded from the decision-making process on a matter that impacted them directly, their livestock and crops.
- 2) To progress with the following recommended facilities outlined in the report at 4.7 but not to extend as far as the formation of an eco-campsite.

- Increased Ranger presence,
  - Installation of Fire pits installed with wood made available for purchase during the day and emergency fire / water buckets available next to each fire site
  - Construction of a waterless toilet system
  - Provision of a water supply for dishwashing/drinking purposes
- moved by Councillor Bruce, seconded by Councillor Timson.

### **Voting**

For the adjusted motion - 3  
 For the amendment - 3

(For the adjusted motion – (Councillors Henderson, Gardiner and Imrie.)

(For the amendment – (Councillors Bruce, Timson and Winchester.)

### **Casting Vote**

The voting being equal, the Convener used his casting vote in favour of the adjusted motion.

### **Decision**

- 1) To agree engagement, enforcement and eco-campsite measures to reduce the impact of antisocial activities caused by irresponsible camping at Harlaw.
- 2) To agree the principle of the report, on addressing the impact of irresponsible wild camping and outlining the process of creating a formal eco-camping facility, but before the report was submitted to the Joint Committee, the report to be forwarded by e-mail, to the elected members to allow them to scrutinise it, especially with respect to funding.

(Reference- report by the Executive Director of Place)

## **4. Report on Sustainable Transport and Active Travel to the Pentland Hills Regional Park**

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The Senior Natural Heritage Officer reported on the report on Sustainable Transport and Active Travel to the Pentland Hills Regional Park.

She explained that the recent health crisis had highlighted a range of growing traffic management pressures on the Pentland Hills Regional Park (PHRP), notably a significant rise in the use of car parks, causing overflow onto adjacent access roads. The report by the Executive Director of Place addressed this issue, proposing a series of actions that, if implemented, would help limit the impact by improving sustainable access to the regional park.

Discussion took place and the following points were made.

- The community needed safe, walkable paths and cycle lanes.
- Engagement was taking place with the relevant groups to help achieve this.

- Various options for funding were being pursued, including Nature Scot.
- It was hoped that the Transport and Environment Committee would be supportive as they were promoting active travel.
- A variety of solutions were required.
- There were potential difficulties with cycle lanes on narrow roads.
- The proposed shuttle bus service would be too expensive.
- It was necessary to investigate the need for a shuttle bus service.
- At present, people were wary of using public transport because of the Pandemic.
- If yellow lines and clearways were being considered, then Transport should consider access issues.

### **Decision**

- 1) To support the measures proposed to improve sustainable access to the regional park and mitigate the impact of car parking displacement in the surrounding area. These were improving paths from local communities to the regional park.
- 2) The Committee did not support the introduction of a shuttle bus service at this time and would reassess once the restrictions due to the pandemic were over.

(Reference- report by the Executive Director of Place)

## **5. Report on Upgrading and Expansion Options of the Principal Car parks in the Pentland Hills Regional Park**

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The Senior Natural Heritage Officer reported on upgrading and expansion options of the principal car parks in the Pentland Hills Regional Park.

She 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 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:

- How the extra parking spaces at Threipmuir was being achieved.
- That the improvements to the car park layout was covered in the report.
- That officers should investigate the potential for signage, one way traffic and more blue badge spaces.

- Discussions would take place with Roseberry Estate.
- It should be ensured that there were sufficient spaces for blue badge holders.

### **Motion**

To agree the level of investment required for the improvement and upgrade of the four principal car parks.

### **Amendment**

That officers investigate one-way traffic layout where appropriate

- moved by Councillor Gardiner, seconded by Councillor Bruce.

In accordance with Standing Order 21(12), the amendment was accepted as an addendum to the motion.

### **Decision**

- 1) To agree the level of investment required for the improvement and upgrade of the four principal car parks.
- 2) That officers investigate one-way traffic layout where appropriate

(Reference- report by the Executive Director of Place)

## **6. Introduction of Mandatory Parking Charges at the Pentland Hills Regional Park Principal Car Parks**

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The Parks, Greenspace and Cemeteries Manager reported on the introduction of mandatory parking charges at the Pentland Hills Regional Park Principal Car Parks.

He explained that recent years had witnessed a range of growing traffic management pressures on the Pentland Hills Regional Park, exacerbated during the current Coronavirus pandemic. The report by the Executive Director of Place report considered the opportunity of charging for car parking at the principal car parks, making recommendations based in part on an engagement exercise carried out with the public in late November / early December 2020.

Discussion took place and the following points were made:

- Discussions had taken place with Parking Eye regarding automated number plate recognition systems.
- That the income generated should remain in the Regional Park and the role of each council in the management of this had to be addressed.
- There were issues regarding how the charges would be imposed and collecting the revenue.
- That it would be beneficial for the charging system to be run by the Regional Park to ensure public support.

- The way that revenue might be collected if a contractor was employed, should be considered.
- That there has been community engagement regarding the fees, recognising the need to keep the charges at a reasonable level.
- That there needed to be agreement between the three councils on the level of charging.

### **Decision**

- 1) To support the introduction of charging for the use of the Regional Park's principal car parks.
- 2) That Committee determined whether this report should be referred to the relevant Transport/Roads Committee in each of those local authorities where car parking charging was proposed.

(Reference- report by the Executive Director of Place)

## **7. Farmers and Landowners – Any Other Urgent Items for Consideration**

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### **(a) Proposal to Extend Membership of the Committee**

The Convener indicated that he was considering extending the membership of the Joint Committee to the Land Managers' Association. Officers were required to report on this, on what basis they could attend and whether they might have voting rights.

#### **Decision**

To report to the next meeting of the Joint Committee on the possible extension of membership to the Pentland Land Managers Association.

### **(b) Greater Involvement of Farmers and Landowners**

It would be beneficial to consider ways of there being greater involvement of farmers and landowners as these were people who worked in the hills and might help with raising funds.

#### **Decision**

Natural Heritage to liaise with Bob Barr (NFU) to explore possible ways of farmers and other landowners getting more input in the Joint Committee.

## **8. Dates for Future Meetings**

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Committee Services to liaise with the Natural Heritage Service to arrange dates for the next meetings of the Consultative Forum and the Joint Committee.

### **Decision**

PHRP Consultation Forum – To be confirmed.

PHRP Joint Committee – To be confirmed.