

Minutes

Pentland Hills Regional Park Consultative Forum

3.30 pm on Tuesday 27 October 2020 - Held by Microsoft Teams

Present:

Councillors Gardiner (in the chair), Henderson, (The City of Edinburgh Council), Winchester (Midlothian Council), Timson (West Lothian Council); Robert Barr (SNFU), Graham Barr (Easter Bavelaw Farm), Hamish Clark (Friends of the Pentlands), Charlie Cummins, (Edinburgh and Lothians Greenspace Trust) Clare Sturla, (Scottish Land Estates), Alastair Salveson (Landowner), Norman Tinlin (Fairmilehead Community Council Secretary), John Wright, and Jim McComb (Malleny Angling).

Michael Rummey and Jenny Cowan, (East Side Farm), Mark Hartrey, (Carnethy Bowling Club), Patricia Kennedy (Spittal Farm), Emma Galloway (Balerno Village Trust), Lyndsay Brown (NFU Scotland), Susan and Alistair Cowan (East Side Farm), John Bruce (Bonaly Scout Centre), Ian Gotts (Colinton Amenity Association).

In Attendance:

Chris Alcorn (West Lothian Council), David Jamieson, Jessica Morgado, Victor Partridge, Tommy McManmon, Justin Venton, Meryl Norris, and Blair Ritchie (City of Edinburgh Council).

1. Minutes

Decision

The minutes of the Pentland Hills Regional Park Consultative Forum of 22 February 2019 were submitted and approved as a correct record.

2. Operational update

Jessica Morgado (the Senior Natural Heritage Officer) provided a short introduction to the service. She outlined the structure, indicating that the team was funded by 3 Local Authorities: The City of Edinburgh, Midlothian and West Lothian Councils. This comprised of a Regional Park Manager (post vacant), a 1 Senior Natural Heritage Officer and 3.5 FTE Natural Heritage Officers.

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Their role was to guide and assist all stakeholders in the sustainable management of the PHRP's changing environment in a way which supported communities living and working within the PHRP, promoting responsible access, developing public understanding of the mixed land use resource and conserving and enhancing the PHRP's landscape, cultural, historic and natural heritage.

Donation scheme

- The PHRP covered an area of 10,000 hectares, with over 100km (62 miles) of waymarked paths.
- There were approximately 600,000 visitors/year, with walking, cycling, horse riding and fishing as just a few of the recreational activities.
- The funds raised via the Donation scheme were used only for new 'added value' projects on the ground, and not for the day-to-day running of the Service. These included:
 - Path construction and maintenance
 - Signage and waymarking
 - Installation of access gates
 - Habitat improvements for wildlife
 - Improvement of facilities at Harlaw visitor centre and other popular sites

Before Covid-19

- New PHRP website & regular Facebook posts via PHRP page
- Seasonal signage such as "ground nesting birds", "lambing" etc
- PHRP Green Flag (new flag coming soon)
- Volunteer Ranger Service
- Wildlife surveys and public events program
- Access and habitat improvement projects
- Harlaw: Doors Open Day 2019 / Annual Livestock Worrying campaign / Responsible access event / Operation Owl / Hooked on Harlaw
- Flotterstone Glen: livestock awareness events in association with Penicuik Police

Since Covid-19

- Pictures of long lines of traffic, messy campsite and fly-tipping were illustrated

The Convener thanked the Senior Natural Heritage Officer for her overview. This showed how important the Regional Park was to peoples' physical and mental wellbeing. He congratulated the Park Rangers and all the partners including the police Scotland for their work.

Discussion took place and the following points were made:

- The Park Rangers were overrun and were not capable of doing their work, because of the lack of staff and resources. This was impacting on the service provided and placing an additional burden on the police and land managers.
- More funding would be beneficial, but council budgets were under even more pressure, with the current Covid crisis, and difficult choices had to be made. The Police and staff had limited resources and it was necessary to work with other partners to address the situation pragmatically.

Decision

To note the update.

3. Pentlands Woodland, Habitat and Access Proposals

Charlie Cummins (Edinburgh and Lothians Greenspace Trust) provided a verbal update on the Pentlands Woodland, Habitat and Access Proposals. He gave an update on the work of the Edinburgh and Lothian Greenspace Trust (ELGBT). It was hoped that there would soon be some funding available. Some funding was awarded in 2010 and work was undertaken. They had considered 5 priorities and focused on 10 projects.

There was further funding to produce a detailed proposal for the northeast slopes, part of that was identified for woodland expansion and four areas were being considered. As a result of this work, planting was undertaken in various sites. However, since then, there was not a large amount of new woodland created in that vicinity. Scottish Forestry (SF) wanted to support the ELGBT to try to look at new sites and to promote the grant funding that was available. National targets for the SF had been increased and they had only three years to increase their planting by 5%. He had a proposal with SF to work with a consultant, to carry out projects that might have been neglected. He was working on that piece of work at present and was hoping that they would soon get the funding confirmed. He had held discussions with Chris Alcorn (West Lothian Council) and he needed further discussions to take place.

He then provided an update on the Pentlands to Portobello Access Feasibility Study that the ELGBT undertook in the previous year. This route comprised of Swanston to Portobello and was mainly off road. There was also the proposal with NatureScot to identify areas of green network, (for that) and would probably prioritise the southern end of the route.

The last topic was access and other issues there were within the Pentlands, including the lack of investment and the number of people using routes. They undertook an access audit and identified £2-3m of work that was required. They were considering the Heritage Lottery Fund, but a number of schemes had been delayed, because of Covid. He had a meeting arranged with the Outdoor Access Trust for Scotland. Their

priority was on employability and training. Previously, the East of Scotland did have much youth unemployment, therefore, opportunities had been quite limited. But, unfortunately, this had changed and it would be now possible to take forward that piece of work.

The Convener thanked Charlie Cummins for the update. It was a concern that youth unemployment might rise because of Covid and looked forward to a further update.

Discussion took place and the following points were made:

- That liaison took place with landowners when planting trees through a consultant.
- That planning permission was not required for woodland planting, although sometimes, problems had been experienced.
- Planning authorities would be consulted as part of the process

Decision

Farmers/landowners to liaise with Charlie Cummins through the ELGBT and he could put them in contact with a consultant, for the purpose of tree planting.

4. Car parks upgrade grant application to Visit Scotland

The Natural Heritage Officers provided a presentation on the Car Parks upgrade grant application to Visit Scotland. These proposals formed one of the grant applications to the Visit Scotland Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund. A fund for Local Authorities and National Park Authorities to make improvements at popular visitor locations to meet community and visitor needs. This included the following:

Parking Issues

- Demand regularly exceeded availability
- Poor parking within the car parks
- Displacement occurred onto access tracks and neighbouring roads:
 - Impeded access for emergency vehicles and farm machinery
 - Created unsafe access for non-motorised users e.g. pedestrians/cyclists/horse riders
 - Put pressure on residential access
 - Damaged road verges

Proposed Solutions

- Improve car park layout/bay marking at: Harlaw, Threipmuir, Bonaly and Flotterstone

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- Improve signage and one-way traffic flow
- Provide more blue badge spaces
- Install electronic barrier to prevent misuse of Flotterstone Glen road.
- Some potential to expand capacity:
 - BONALY– surface the overflow parking area
 - HARLAW – remove parking on the access track and provide spaces in an extended car park area. Provide passing places and a segregated path for non-motorised users on access track.
 - FLOTTERSTONE – Provide segregated access path for non-motorised users on access road to car park.
 - THREIPMUIR – extend current car parking area.

Parking: CONSULTATION HUB

YOUR VIEWS

“Do you think there is adequate parking provision at the four principle car parks in the Pentland Hills Regional Park? YES /NO / NOT SURE

- Harlaw
- Threipmuir
- Bonaly
- Flotterstone

Do you support the proposal to improve parking at the four principle car parks in the Pentland Hills Regional park? YES / NO / NOT SURE

- Please give your comments on this proposal”

Path links: ISSUES

- Access roads were narrow with no pavements and heavily used by vehicular traffic
- Limited accessible paths to the busiest sites
- Existing paths were informal and not maintained
- Existing paths not signposted and not well known by visitors

Path links: PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

- RTIF criteria: path upgrades up to 500m to/from car parks and scenic areas
- Offered the opportunity to upgrade the following:
 - Harlaw - through trees along Bavelaw burn to Harlaw road
 - Bonaly Country Park – through trees alongside access road at top car park
 - Flotterstone –through trees from car park towards reservoir

Path upgrades: CONSULTATION HUB

“YOUR VIEWS

- Would you like to see more path links into the Regional Park? YES / NO / NOT SURE
- Would you use a path instead of a vehicle to access the Regional Park? YES /NO / NOT SURE
- Please give your comments on this proposal.”

Signage: ISSUES

- Recreational use of reservoirs had increased significantly in recent years and could result in conflict between user groups
- Lack of signage on site explaining Scottish Outdoor Access Code (SOAC) responsibilities in relation to use of open water
- Lack of signage highlighting water safety

Signage: PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

- Produce new information panels that illustrate responsible access rights to open water
- Produce new water safety signage

Decision

See decisions after item 6.

5. Toilets and Eco-Campsite Proposals and Grant Application to Visit Scotland

The Natural Heritage Officers provided a presentation non-Toilets and Eco-Campsite Proposals and Grant Application to Visit Scotland. It was explained that these proposals formed one of the grant applications to the Visit Scotland Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund. This included the following:

Camping

- ISSUES
 - There had been increasing problems in recent months and years with antisocial camping behaviour. This had resulted in extensive littering, unattended woodland fires, toileting mess and underage drinking, especially at Harlaw, Bonaly, Clubbiedean and Glencorse reservoirs.

- PROPOSED SOLUTION
 - The creation of a small eco-campsite on the shore of Harlaw Reservoir with dedicated fire bowls and toilets. No more than 8-10 camping areas.
 - The creation of a Warden or Ranger position to staff campsite and enforce Park Management Rules around rest of reservoir (no camping, no fires)
- CONSULTATION HUB
 - “YOUR VIEWS - Do you see the proposed eco-campsite with new Warden position as a viable solution to anti-social camping behaviour? YES / NO / NOT SURE - Please also give us your comments on this proposal.”

Toilets

- ISSUES
 - There had been problems with toileting mess increasing over the past few months and years at Harlaw, Threipmuir, Bonaly and Flotterstone Glen. This had resulted in human excrement and toilet paper being visible from woodland paths, posing a danger to visitors, their children and dogs, and wildlife.
- PROPOSED SOLUTION
 - The installation of 8 new toilets at the above four car parks, plus 2 toilets at the proposed eco campsite.
 - These would be zero-discharge waterless toilets requiring pump-outs approximately every six months.
 - There would be a proposed charge of approximately 50p per use, using hands-free card payment.
 - Takings from toilets would pay for pump-outs and a daily cleaning regime.
- CONSULTATION HUB
 - “YOUR VIEWS - Do you agree with the proposal to install two toilets at each of four car parks, with a charge to pay for cleaning and maintenance? YES / NO / NOT SURE - Please let us know any comments you have.”

Decision

See decisions after item 6.

6. Introducing Car Parking Charges at the Principal Car Parks

The Natural Heritage Officers gave a presentation on the proposal for introducing car parking charges at the principal car parks. The background to the proposed scheme of introducing car parking was outlined.

- PHRP car parks were currently free to park in, unlike most other similar destinations
- There had been proposals in the past to charge which had been rejected due to fears of displacement parking on main roads such as the A702
- The Regional Park was struggling to make ends meet following years of Council cut-backs.
- **SOLUTIONS**
 - Displacement parking could be minimised by creation of Clearway on A702 (DONE) and double-yellow lines around other car parks (currently lobbying for this)
 - Charging should be done in such a way that it did not disrupt traffic flow at entrances to car parks, and allowed essential vehicles access without charging them
 - Funds could be used for maintenance of car parks and Regional Park footpaths and infrastructure
 - investigate the creation of a permit scheme for regular visitors such as anglers
 - Investigate use of a third-party contractor to collect parking charges would minimise set-up costs. This contractor would keep monies from parking fines only
- **CONSULTATION HUB**
 - “YOUR VIEWS - Do you support the Regional Park charging a small amount for car parks (roughly £2 per visit)? YES / NO / NOT SURE - Would you support the introduction of an annual charging scheme similar to a residents’ permit? YES / NO / NOT SURE - Would you support monies from such a scheme being used to support the infrastructure of the Regional Park? YES / NO / NOT SURE - Please let us know any comments you have on proposals COMMENTS”

The Convener thanked the officers for the three presentations, which showed good teamwork. Following the presentations, discussion took place and the following points were made:

The effect of increasing the size of car parks.

- Increased traffic and pressure on roads.

- The possible ruination of natural habitats.

The Consultation process

- More input was required from people who worked in the Regional Park.
- This exercise was meant to ascertain opinion to inform the Council.
- It was not the case that all visitors wanted unlimited parking
- The service had limited funding and was trying to progress matters.

Current parking issues

- The negative impact of there being insufficient parking.
- The need to consider the views of visitors.
- To reduce the number of cars by measures such as improved paths.
- Double yellow lines were ineffective and clear ways might be better.

Current facilities inadequate were inadequate

- The approach to solve issues creatively was welcomed.
- The service understood the frustration of the farmers and the public.
- The present situation was not sustainable, and progress was necessary.

The needs of Balerno Residents

- A parking fee might deter some of them from visiting the Pentlands.
- A pass for these residents should be considered.
- Other local residents might also want special parking permits.

Measures to improve situation

- Recommendations to the Transport and Environment Committee.
- These would include the creation of pavements and speed restrictions.
- These would have to be within the park boundaries.
- Speed limits would impede farm traffic.
- Landowners would not want unauthorised barriers on private roads.

Contractor levies

- Contractors managing the car park might be encouraged to levy fines.
- Contractors might be the most practical way of managing the car park.
- Any money raised from charges would go into the park.
- Various options were being considered.

Parking fees

- Residents might pay an annual fee and might not have access.
- People could be informed in advance when the car park was full.
- It would be advantageous to impose a greater charge for the whole day.

- An “app” for car parking would be beneficial.

More support from rangers required

- It was beneficial to encourage people into the Regional Park.
- Greater numbers required more support from rangers over the weekend.
- The service did not have the numbers to make a rota work effectively.
- Greater access should not be encouraged without more ranger support.
- Landowners needed the service to help to manage the ecology of park.

Funding issues

- The regional park would be part of operational restructuring.
- Over the next few years, there would be probably less funding.
- Additional revenue and car parking revenue would help with this.
- There were other options to consider as well as car park charges.
- There could be match funding from Visit Scotland.
- They would provide 70% of funding, with the Service providing 30%.

The effect of greater visitor numbers

- The service was not encouraging more access.
- It was trying to manage the visitor numbers.
- They were trying to work with landowners to manage these.
- It was claimed that visitors were not being encouraged.
- A recent a mass cycle event, seemed contrary to this assertion.
- Farmers were having to deal with the public more and neglecting farming.

Response to consultation

- There should be more clarity when responses were received.

The Convener indicated that as the current situation was untenable, it was necessary to carry out a consultation and find solutions. The Council had to take all views into consideration. They did not want more cars in the Regional Park, but it was necessary to generate more income and to avoid a “rutted paths” situation. Therefore, an adequate level of car parking and active routes was required. He was aware of the impact of traffic on farmers, when they were moving machinery. Farmers should take part in the consultation hub, or through address provided by the Senior Natural Heritage Officer. He wanted to thank officers for their hard work and everyone who had contributed to the work of the Regional Park, during such a difficult time.

Decision

- 1) David Jamieson (Parks, Greenspace and Cemeteries Manager) to identify people’s location who were responding to the consultation.

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- 2) To note that some of respondents might be from outside Edinburgh and it would be helpful to capture that when making a decision.
- 3) To note that some of the revenue from parking fees, that could be used to police anti-social behaviour in the Pentlands.
- 4) Members to e-mail the Convener and the Parks, Greenspace and Cemeteries Manager and the Natural Heritage Officer directly, on their views on the introduction of parking charges.
- 5) To consider having signage to instruct dog walkers not to permit their dogs to foul land.
- 6) To consider having new water safety signage along reservoirs on code of conduct.
- 7) Members to e-mail Natural Heritage directly, at their website address, to lend their support for the Clearway on A702. The Senior Natural Heritage Officer provided the e-mail address.
- 8) The Senior Natural Heritage Officer to get the responses to the consultation for the next meeting of the Joint Committee.
- 9) Tommy McMahon (Natural Heritage Officer) to check out the possible introduction of an app for parking charges.

7. Dates for Future Meetings

Dates for future meetings were as follows:

Joint Committee T.B.C.

Consultative Forum T.B.C.