

# **Pentland Hills Regional Park Joint Committee**

**Regional Park Headquarters, Biggar Road, Edinburgh**

**4 November 2005**

**Present:-**

**The City of Edinburgh Council** – Councillors O'Donnell (Chair) and Laing.

**Midlothian Council** – Councillors Fletcher and Mackintosh.

**Scottish Water** – G Brown.

**Scottish Natural Heritage** – Nial Corbett.

**In Attendance** – C Houston (Acting Regional Park Manager); Dr J Sheldon (West Lothian Council); L Denholm (Midlothian Council); S Harris, I Park and D Emerson (City of Edinburgh Council)

## **1 Minutes**

### **Decision**

- 1) To approve the minutes of the meeting of the Pentland Hills Regional Park Joint Committee of 15 April 2005 as a correct record.
- 2) To note the minutes of the meeting of the Regional Park Consultative Forum of 20 June 2005.

## **2 Regional Park – Finance Report 2004/05**

The Director of Culture and Leisure (City of Edinburgh Council) reported on the financing of the Regional Park for the year ended 31 March 2005, and in particular in regard to variances in the contributions by the local authority partners as against the figures indicated by the Minute of Agreement.

The contributions specified in the Minute of Agreement were as follows:-

The City of Edinburgh Council	£138,700
Midlothian Council	£75,000
West Lothian Council	£10,760

Pentland Hill Regional Park Joint Committee  
4 November 2005

For financial year ending 31 March 2005, the contributions of the authorities, towards net expenditure of £204,067, had been as follows:-

The City of Edinburgh Council	-	£118,307
Midlothian Council	-	£75,000
West Lothian Council – Service Level Agreement	-	£10,760

The Director of Culture and Leisure explained that the original contributions had been based on estimated costs for operation of the Regional Park during the year that the Minute of Agreement had been approved. It had been envisaged that whilst the contributions of Midlothian and West Lothian would be constant (reflecting Service Level Agreements), the contribution from the City of Edinburgh Council as managing authority could vary. In financial year 2003/04, Edinburgh's contribution had been higher than stated in the Agreement and in 2004/05 it had been less due principally to an increase in grant income. It was also to be noted that the City of Edinburgh Council did not make a charge for its support costs to the management of the Regional Park, the whole cost of finance and human resource functions being met through the Department of Culture and Leisure.

During discussion, elected members indicated that they were satisfied with the explanations for the differences in the contributions in 2004/05. Dr J Sheldon indicated his view that as there was no obvious provision in the Minute of Agreement for variances in contributions, the wording of it needed to be reviewed. Also, he made a point that the report on this item had only been tabled this day and that there ought always be an opportunity for officers of the partner authorities to comment in advance on financial matters, as was normal protocol.

#### **Decision**

- 1) To note the report on the financial statements and the explanations for the variances in contributions of the local authorities in 2004/05.
- 2) To ask the Regional Park Manager to arrange to submit regular financial statements on the funding of the Regional Park to the Joint Committee.
- 3) To note that the budget for 2006/07 for the Regional Park would be submitted to a future meeting of the Joint Committee.

(Reference – report by the Director of Culture and Leisure 3 November 2005, submitted.)

### **3 Park Headquarters and Visitor Centre Proposal – Progress**

The Director of Culture and Leisure (City of Edinburgh Council) submitted a progress report on the proposal to develop a new visitor centre and park headquarters at Flotterstone. It had been agreed that Midlothian Council would provide professional services such as quantity surveying and architecture in

order to prepare a plan and design of the building. The Council would also instigate a land search of the area to provide clarity over the land ownership issues.

**Decision**

- 1) To note the intention to consult with the Pentland Hills Regional Park Consultative Forum and other parties on production of a draft plan and design for the visitor centre and headquarters.
- 2) To note that a brief was to be prepared and tenders issued for a consultant's report on the feasibility and business plan for the proposal.
- 3) To note that, upon agreement of a lease, plan and design, tenders for the construction of the development would be prepared.

(Reference – report by the Director of Culture and Leisure 28 October 2005, submitted.)

**4 Regional Park Manager's Interim Report**

The Director of Culture and Leisure submitted an interim report on the activities of the Regional Park over the period April to September 2005.

The Rangers team was now at full strength, this comprising one senior ranger and five main grade rangers. A number of projects had been initiated over the period including a comprehensive visitor survey - an interim report on which was expected in February 2006.

Recruitment of volunteer rangers was ongoing, with an additional six people undertaking training to complement the existing 21 members of the team.

The Acting Park Manager reported on various other items and issues undertaken during the six months period.

**Decision**

To note the Acting Park Manager's Interim Report on the Regional Park for the period April to September 2005.

(Reference – report by the Director of Culture and Leisure 28 October 2005, submitted.)

## 5 Integrated Management Strategy Review

Guidance on the management of the Regional Park was currently provided through an integrated management strategy, as approved to cover the five-year period 2000 to 2005. The strategy now required to be reviewed to provide a plan for the Regional Park for the next five-year period.

The officers had prepared an outline paper on the need for the review of the issues proposed to be covered. In particular it was suggested that there be five key themes for Action Plans, as follows:-

Landscape and Natural Heritage Plan  
Infrastructure and Access Plan  
Partnership and Communities Plan  
Communication and Development Plan  
Service Delivery Plan.

It was envisaged that all of the existing themes (enjoyment of the hills, economy of the hills, landscape, cultural and natural heritage, etc) would continue to be addressed within the proposed new subject areas. Additionally, policies adopted by the three local authorities would be identified within the various action plans and include economic development, social inclusion, health and lifelong learning.

On the issue of whether or not a strategic environmental assessment would be required under the terms of the proposed Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes (Scotland) Regulations, advice was being sought from the Scottish Executive. In the meantime, a 'scoping' report was to be prepared in tandem with the review and submitted to the Scottish Executive. The general question of a strategic environmental assessment was complex and would have important implications for the form of the new plan and for the Regional Park Authority itself given that, if necessary, the authority would need to engage external consultants, at considerable cost.

(During discussion it was suggested that the issues of economic development and sustainability should be given high priority within the themed action plans.)

### Decision

- 1) To approve the review of integrated management strategy 2000-2005 and the draft outline for the proposed new Park Plan, as outlined in the review report, subject to further consultation with the Consultative Forum.
- 2) To agree that the officers' group should request a meeting with the planning officials of the constituent authorities, Historic Scotland, and SEPA, with a view to assistance on any overlapping issues in relation to any need for a strategic environmental assessment.

(Reference – report by the Director of Culture and Leisure 28 October 2005, submitted.)

## **6 Date of Next Meeting**

The Joint Committee agreed to set a provisional date of Friday 3 March 2006 for its next meeting. It was also agreed, in view of ongoing issues regarding the production of a new Park Plan, that it be left to the Convener's discretion to call an earlier meeting if necessary.

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