

Committee Minutes

Pentland Hills Regional Park Joint Committee

**Regional Park Headquarters, Biggar Road, Edinburgh,
18 December 2009**

Present:

Members:-

Midlothian Council – Councillors Thomson (Chair) and Thacker.

West Lothian Council – Councillor Carl John.

Scottish Natural Heritage – J Winning.

In Attendance:-

A McGregor (Regional Park Manager), K Logie (City of Edinburgh Council), L Denholm (Midlothian Council) and C Alcorn (West Lothian Council) and D Emerson (City of Edinburgh Council).

1 Minutes

Decision

- 1) To approve the minute of the meeting of the Pentland Hills Regional Joint Committee held on 21 August 2009 as a correct record.
- 2) To note the minute of the meeting of the Pentland Hills Regional Park Consultative Forum of 4 September 2009.

2 Midlothian Council – Notice of Intention to Withdraw

The Joint Committee had previously noted that Midlothian Council's had given notice of Intention to withdraw from the Minute of Agreement with effect from 31 March 2010. Officers of Midlothian Council and the managing authority had been discussing the issues involved.

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Mr. L Denholm, Midlothian Council, gave a very brief update, indicating that it had been expected that the matter would have been considered again by Midlothian Council's Budget Review Group in December but that, for various reasons, it had not been considered and was now due to be on the agenda for their meeting in January. A number of matters were being considered, not only issues of cost, but also wider matters of the Minute of Agreement. The Council was aware of the urgency of the matter, and the pressures on the Regional Park staff, and also on the City of Edinburgh Council, as managing authority, and partners, in regards to budget considerations. It was the intention to try to resolve the matter by the end of January.

Councillor O Thomson indicated his intention to push for a decision by his Council on the matter. He hoped that a special meeting of the Joint Committee could be called for the end of January or early February, once Midlothian Council had confirmed its position.

Mrs. J Winning (Scottish Natural Heritage) indicated that SNH had made representations to the Midlothian Council and a meeting was being arranged with the Chief Executive for January 2010 at which SNH would make known their concerns.

Mr K Logie (City of Edinburgh Council) expressed the managing authority's concerns on this matter, particularly in regard to budgeting issues. It was to be hoped that the matter could be satisfactorily resolved but it was giving rise to considerable uncertainty for staff. Also, the terms of the Minute of Agreement would need to be revised.

Decision

- 1) To ask the officers and member of Midlothian Council to pursue the matter within the authority.
- 2) To note the representations being made by SNH to Midlothian Council.
- 3) To agree that a special meeting of the Joint Committee be called, for a date in January or early February, to consider the matter.

3 Central Scotland Green Network

The Regional Park Manager reported on the launch of the 'Central Scotland Green Network' by the Environment Minister on 30 September 2009. The initiative was one of the 14 'National Developments' being supported by the government. The aim was that "... by 2050, the environment of Central Scotland would have been transformed through the creation of a high quality green network, enhancing people's lives, supporting economy, allowing nature to flourish and addressing climate change".

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He said that the Pentland Hills Regional Park, with its substantial area of countryside, could help support the delivery of the network objectives. It would be the intention that projects within the Regional Park complement those being delivered beyond the Park boundaries. He had recently met with the Edinburgh and Lothians forest habitat network and local authority partners to explore how a more strategic approach could be taken to woodland planting. The Network had agreed to enter into discussions with the Forestry Commission about the development of a specific "Pentland Hills Woodland Action Plan" which would serve to identify specific projects and support their implementation on the ground.

Decision

- 1) To note the background relating to the establishment of the Central Scotland Green Network.
- 2) To note that the aims of the Regional Park were complementary to the aims of the Central Scotland's Green Network's vision in Edinburgh and Lothians.
- 3) To invite a representative of the Central Scotland Green Network to attend a future meeting of the Joint Committee.

(Reference – report by Parks and Greenspace Manager 18 December 2009, submitted.)

4 Operational and Budget Update 2009/10

The Regional Park Manager gave an update on recent operations within the Regional Park and the current budget position.

With regard to accommodation, it was expected that the Park authority would be offered an extension of the lease at Boghall Farm until 31 March 2011 - which would provide stability in the interim. With regard to property disposals, the former Currie Shed was being disposed of and it was hoped that the Regional Park would be able to secure a proportion of the capital receipt for application to investment in visitor facilities in the Regional Park.

With regard to the budgetary position, the majority of funding for 2009/10 had been received and which included contributions from Scottish Water (£10,000); City of Edinburgh Council: City Development Department (£10,000); Midlothian Council (Minute of Agreement contribution of £75,000 plus original SNH funding of £14,697), and West Lothian Council (Minute of Agreement contribution of £10,760). West Lothian Council was expected to confirm that it would be in a position to contribute its original SNH funding of £14,697.

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The removal of direct SNH grant had constrained the funding available for projects but this had been offset by initiatives to find new ways of delivering projects in partnership with third parties, including Friends of the Pentlands, voluntary conservation groups and others.

The Regional Park Manager gave a summary of the major work issues in train or planned for 2010/11.

Decision

- 1) To note the summary of operational matters within the Regional Park over the last year and the current budgetary position.
- 3) To note the request for ring-fencing for an element of any future capital receipt from disposal of the Currie Shed being made to the City of Edinburgh Council's property strategy group.

(Reference – report by Parks and Greenspace Manager 18 December 2009, submitted.)

5 Protecting Scotland's Regional Parks Bill – Update

With regard to the proposed private member's bill in the Scottish Parliament "Proposed Protecting Scotland's Regional Parks Bill", on which the Joint Committee had previously commented, it was understood that the Bill was now being taken to the next stage in the Parliament to ascertain the level of support from members.

The Scottish Government was also establishing a National Parks Strategy Group, to be chaired by the Environment Minister, and which would involve discussions with regional and national parks. There were proposals to consider designation of the "Campsie Fells" as a new regional park in Scotland.

The Regional Park Manager said that the current debate had served to raise the profile of the regional parks and to assist the wider debate about national and regional park designation. There was also an intention that the elected members responsible for regional and national parks should meet in a conference to be held in the spring/summer of next year.

Decision

- 1) To note the consultation on the proposed "Protecting Scotland's Regional Parks Bill" and that a final proposal and consultation report was likely to be lodged in the Scottish Parliament.

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- 2) To note that discussions were now being held with national and regional park managers and Scottish Natural Heritage on the concept of a 'parks system for Scotland'.
- 3) To note that regional park designation was being considered as one possible model for providing integration of countryside services in the Campsie Fells.
- 4) To consider a further report on the progress of the bill in due course.

(Reference – report by the Parks and Greenspace Manager 18 December 2009, submitted.)

6 Regional Park's Contribution to Single Outcome Agreements and National Outcomes

The Regional Park Manager reported on how the Regional Park might contribute to national and local outcomes, particularly the 15 national outcomes specified by the Scottish Government. An action plan had been drawn up to indicate the areas to be addressed and to better align objectives of the Regional Park with the outcome agreements required either by the partner authorities or the Scottish Government.

In general terms the Regional Park made a strong contribution to about 35% of local outcomes including: health and wellbeing, learning and education, environmental quality, community participation, biodiversity and provision of responsive services. Areas for the Regional Park to strengthen its contribution were outlined in the report.

During the discussion, members referred to the specific issue of car parking and whether there might be a policy to develop a charging system for some of the car parks with a view to any income being applied to projects in the Regional Park. It was agreed that the Regional Park Manager should investigate this matter further, drawing upon examples being developed by partner authorities, and to report.

Decision

- 1) To note the key findings in the study.
- 2) To note the action proposed for inclusion in the 2010/11 work-plan subject to budget provision.
- 3) To ask the Regional Park Manager to investigate the possibilities of charging for car parks in the Regional Park.

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(Reference – report by the Parks and Greenspace Manager 18 December 2009, submitted.)

7 Water of Leith Flood Prevention Scheme – Access Restrictions at Harlaw and Threipmuir Reservoirs

As a result of major civil engineering works at Harlaw and Threipmuir Reservoirs, for flood prevention, there had been temporary restrictions on public access. The Regional Park Authority was assisting the contractors in the process of distributing information through the Ranger service.

The works were expected to be finished by April 2010. As part of the project, there would be a number of quite significant improvements for access for the public, including a new timber bridge at Harlaw and a new path for horseways at Threipmuir.

Decision

- 1) To note the access management arrangements being put in place at Harlaw and Threipmuir during the period of the Water of Leith flood prevention works.
- 2) To note the anticipated improvements to amenity and habitat following completion of the works.

(Reference – report by Parks and Greenspace Manager 18 December 2009, submitted.)

8 Harperrig Reservoir – Proposed Local Nature Reserve Designation

A report was submitted on progress with regard to the proposed designation of Harperrig Reservoir as a local nature reserve. Mr C Alcorn, West Lothian Council, gave an update on progress, the key elements of the nature reserve designation, and access and woodland improvements that should follow. In general, the designation was a reflection of the high quality environment of Harperrig Reservoir and would provide the mechanisms by which to carry out further improvements to the benefit of wildlife, visitors and residents.

Decision

- 1) To note the outcome of the public consultations on the Harperrig Reservoir finalised management plan that was to accompany the proposed local nature reserve designation.

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- 2) To note the intention of West Lothian Council to progress the formal declaration of a Local Nature Reserve Order.

(Reference – report by the Parks and Greenspace Manager 18 December 2009, submitted.)

9 Date of Next Meeting

It was agreed that the Clerk, in consultation with the Convener, be asked to call a special meeting of the Joint Committee towards the end of January or early February, as might be required to consider the specific matter of Midlothian Council's notice of intention to withdraw from the minute of agreement.