

## Operational and Budget Update 2009/2010

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### Pentland Hills Regional Park Joint Committee

18<sup>th</sup> December 2009

#### Purpose of report

- 1 To provide the Joint Committee with an update on recent Regional Park operations and the current budget position.

#### Main report

##### Staffing

- 2 The Regional Park Service has the full establishment of staff: Regional Park Manager; Admin Officer; Senior Ranger and five main-grade countryside rangers. There are currently no unfilled vacancies.
- 3 In October, interviews were held for the post of Regional Park Manager. An appointment has now been made subject to completion of contractual documentation.

##### Accommodation and Property

- 4 Subject to satisfactory conclusion, it is likely that the Regional Park will be offered a lease on the Boghall farm HQ until 31<sup>st</sup> March 2011. This will provide the service with interim stability while longer term options are identified.
- 5 The Regional Park has been offered additional support from City of Edinburgh Councils Economic Development service to identify suitable future HQ accommodation. This support initially involves carrying out a further property search and assistance with future negotiations. The lease for the current HQ building costs £12,000 per annum and the building is exempt from non-domestic rates because of its use as an educational facility. The current lease represents excellent value. Relocation is likely to involve additional property costs depending on the option selected.
- 6 The storage building at Currie is no longer being used. It will be cleared of all remaining materials in the early part of 2010 prior to handing control of the building back to City of Edinburgh Council's Property Management service. In January 2010, a paper will be presented to the Property Strategy Group requesting that a proportion of any future capital receipt be secured to support investment in visitor facilities in the Regional Park. It is understood that retention of 20% may be possible in the circumstances. Due to planning

restrictions that would apply to the site however, the value of any capital receipt is likely to be low. A current valuation is being carried out.

- 7 As part of the preparation for the 2009/10 Green Flag award, improvements were carried out to the Visitor Centre at Flotterstone. These included: exterior painting; clearance of encroaching woodland, deep cleaning and painting of the public toilets, upgrading the interpretation and maintenance of the adjacent paths and access infrastructure.

### **Donations Scheme**

- 8 A pilot donations scheme is being developed and will be launched by spring 2010. The scheme will allow individuals and groups to donate to environmental projects within Regional Park. Initially, small projects to which donations can be made will be promoted via the website. Examples of suitable projects might include: new seating and picnic benches; amenity planting; and habitat improvements. The projects will be delivered as soon as sufficient funds have been donated. A key aspect of the scheme is that the Regional Park will identify and manage the projects directly to ensure that they are consistent with the aims of the Regional Park and offer genuine added value. The scheme is intended to support additional work that the Park service would ordinarily not be able to fund, rather than to support core funding for the service. If successful, the intention is to 'scale up' to include larger, more ambitious projects. Appropriate accounting procedures have been put in place to allow donations to carry over between financial years, ensuring that funds retained and only used for the promoted projects.

### **Green Flag**

- 9 The Regional Park was successful in winning another Green Flag Award for 2009/10. A launch event was held at Flotterstone on 30<sup>th</sup> October. The Regional Park will be resubmitted for assessment in 2010/2011.

### **Europarc Atlantic Isles Conference**

- 10 On the 3<sup>rd</sup> November, the Regional Park hosted a field study for visiting delegates at the Europarc Atlantic Isles Conference held on 4<sup>th</sup> November at Dynamic Earth. The conference, entitled 'Managing landscapes: more outcomes, less outputs?' attracted over 100 managers of protected areas throughout Europe. The field study included: presentations from the Pentland Hills Regional Park Service, lunch at Midlothian Ski Centre, a chairlift ride to the top of Hillend Country Park and visiting demonstration sites of nearby habitat management projects. The study ended with a visit to Flotterstone Glen and a lively discussion session over coffee at the Flotterstone Inn. At an evening reception on 3<sup>rd</sup> November, the organisers and speakers were welcomed to Edinburgh on behalf of both the City of Edinburgh Council and the Pentland Hills Regional Park by Cllr. Paisley in his capacity as Vice Chair of the Joint Committee. The visit to the Regional Park was well received with several speakers at the main conference reflecting on what they had seen in the Pentland Hills.

## **Community Planning**

- 11 The Regional Park is now represented on City of Edinburgh Council's Pentlands Neighbourhood Partnership Transport and Environment Group. The intention is to extend this approach and to engage with community planning groups from all three partner local authorities.

## **Access Infrastructure**

- 12 Extensive dry stone dyke repairs have been carried out at Harlaw reservoir. Drainage and surfacing works have been carried out on the Hillend to Boghall path in partnership with the Friends of the Pentlands. Waymarking has been repaired and improved throughout the Park. With funding from West Lothian Council's outdoor access budget, further improvements were carried out on the path from Little Vantage to Cauldstane Slap. In a new type of partnership working the Regional Park service is planning to repair a section of path at the start of the Green Cleugh using funds raised by Balerno Community Council from the local Neighbourhood Partnership. This is a good example of how working within a community planning framework can enable additional projects.

## **Interpretation**

- 13 The displays at both Harlaw and Flotterstone Visitor Centres have been upgraded. New panels for the Bavelaw bird hide are being designed following a questionnaire based survey about what sort of interpretation visitors to the bird hide would like to see. New panels are being designed for Harlaw and Threipmuir Car Parks. Three editions of the Pentland Beacon have been published this year focussing on the topical issues of: control of dogs, game shooting, and horse access.

## **Education and Events**

- 14 A full programme of community events and educational activities has been provided over the summer. The 'Bonaly Challenge' was aimed at giving cyclist an enjoyable activity and imparting positive messages about responsible access. Similarly, the dog event held at Hillend provided the Regional Park service with the opportunity to engage with dog walkers and raise awareness of the Scottish Outdoor Access Code. The 'bat walk' and 'bird event', both held at Harlaw were particularly successful attracting 50 and 80 participants respectively.

## **Voluntary Ranger Service**

- 15 Interest in the Voluntary Ranger Service (VR) continues to be high with a steady flow of new applicants coming forward. The Service continues to provide a major supplement to the Park's patrolling capacity, particularly at the weekends. The Service now has some 40 voluntary rangers, providing over 200 voluntary ranger days of support throughout the year. The VR service was recently featured on BBC Radio Scotland's Out of Doors programme and aired on 28<sup>th</sup> November.

## **Biodiversity**

- 16 A significant new section of fencing has been erected on the Heather moorland at Bonaly Country Park. This will allow effective control over the grazing regime and combined with careful monitoring, allow the heather to be better managed as an upland habitat. The fencing and proposed grazing regime has been agreed with the agricultural tenant and sufficient access gates have been incorporated to allow movement of livestock and people.

## **Work planning for 2010/2011**

- 17 The Regional Park Service is currently preparing a work plan for 2010 /2011. The plan is being prepared with reference to: the Regional Park Plan 2007-2017; site based management plans; the Green Flag assessors feedback; national and local priorities identified in the Fit for Future study; and progress against this year's workplan.

## **Budget Position (Current Year: 2009/2010)**

- 18 The decision of Midlothian Council to withdraw from the current Minute of Agreement does not affect the Regional Park budget for 2009/2010. The majority of the expected funding contributions for 2009/2010 have been received. These include: Scottish Water (£10,000); City of Edinburgh Council City Development Department (£10,000); Midlothian Council (Minute of Agreement £75,000 and former SNH funding £14,697); and West Lothian Council (Minute of Agreement £10,760). Shortly after considering the matter on the 22<sup>nd</sup> December 2009, West Lothian Council is expected to confirm that it will be in a position to contribute the additional £14,697 of former SNH funding.
- 19 Some unbudgeted property maintenance expenditure has been incurred, including emergency replacement of the heating boiler at the Regional Park HQ. A part contribution has been agreed with the landlord and it is expected that pressures will be contained within the overall Regional Park budget.
- 20 The removal of SNH grant has constrained the funds available for projects. This has however been offset by finding new ways of delivering projects in partnership with third parties such as: the Friends of the Pentlands; voluntary conservation groups; other departments of the managing authority; and the Central Scotland Forest Trust. West Lothian Council has provided some minor additional funding to improve visitor facilities in the Haperrig area in advance of the local nature reserve designation.

## **Financial Implications**

- 21 There are no financial implications other than those described in paragraphs 18-20 above.

## Environmental Impact

- 22 The work carried out by the Regional Park Service makes a strong contribution to protecting and enhancing the natural environment within the Pentland Hills Regional Park.

## Recommendations

- 23 It is recommended that the Joint Committee:
- a) notes the summary of recent operational matters; and
  - b) notes the current budget position; and
  - c) notes that the vacation of Currie Shed and the request for ring fencing for an element of any future capital receipt will be made to CEC's Property Strategy Group.



**David Jamieson**  
Parks & Greenspace Manager

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Appendices	Appendix I: 'Central Scotland Green Network' – Interim Steering Group. Appendix II: 'Central Scotland Green Network' – The Wider Partnership.
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Wards affected	All
Single Outcome Agreement	Relevant to the following National Outcomes: 1 We live in a Scotland that is the most attractive place for doing business in Europe 2 We realise our full economic potential with more and better employment opportunities for our people 6 We live longer, healthier lives 10 We live in well-designed, sustainable places where we are able to access the amenities and services we need 11 We have strong, resilient and supportive communities where people take responsibility for their own actions and how they affect others 12 We value and enjoy our built and natural environment and protect it and enhance it for future generations 13 We take pride in a strong, fair and inclusive national identity 14 We reduce the local and global environmental impact of our consumption and production 15 Our public services are high quality, continually improving, efficient and responsive to local people's needs
Background Papers	N.A