

Committee Minutes

Pentland Hills Regional Park Consultative Forum

Midlothian House, Dalkeith, 15 January 2010

Present:-

The City of Edinburgh Council – Councillor A Paisley (in the Chair).

Farming – Robert Barr (NFU).

Pentland Produce – Alex Moir.

Scottish Wildlife Trust – Ken Knowles.

Friends of the Pentlands – John Stirling.

Damhead Community Council – Mrs H McKay.

SportScotland – Campbell Gerrard.

Balerno Conservation and Development Group – Alan Laing.

In Attendance:- Alan MacGregor, Susan Falconer and Nigel Franklin (Regional Park Service); L Denholm (Midlothian Council), C Alcorn (West Lothian Council) and D Emerson (Committee Services, City of Edinburgh Council).

1 Minutes

1.1 Pentland Hill Regional Park Consultative Forum

The minutes of the meeting of the Consultative Forum of 4 September 2009 were approved as a correct record.

1.2 Pentland Hills Regional Park Joint Committee

The minutes of the meeting of the Joint Committee of 18 December 2009 were noted.

2 Midlothian Council – Notice of Intention to Withdraw from Minute of Agreement

Linn Denholm (Midlothian Council) gave an update in regard to Midlothian Council's decision to withdraw from the Minute of Agreement with effect from 31 March 2010. In essence, he said that the matter had not yet been resolved but that some progress was being made in regard to budgetary issues. Further meetings at both officer and member level were due to be held within the next two weeks. Scottish Natural Heritage were also due to meet with himself and the Director of the department. The matter would be resolved within the next weeks and he was hopeful that there could be a positive outcome.

Decision

To note the position.

3 Operational Report 2009/10

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

With regard to staffing, the park service currently had a full establishment and an appointment had recently been made to post of Regional Park Manager – Mr A McGregor. On accommodation and property, it was to be noted that the Currie shed had been vacated and was due to be disposed of by the City of Edinburgh Council; he was hopeful that a percentage of the capital value realised from the sale could be ring-fenced for use towards projects within the Regional Park (an estimate in the order of £25,000).

With regard to donations, a pilot scheme was being developed and would be launched in the spring 2010 – to allow individuals and groups to donate to environmental projects within the Regional Park. If successful, the intention would be to include larger more ambitious projects. The volunteer ranger service continued to work well with a steady flow of new applicants – the service continued to provide a major supplement to the Park's patrolling capacity particularly at weekends, there now being some 40 volunteer rangers.

With regard to budgets, the removal of SNH grant constrained the funds available for projects and the park authority was trying to find new ways to deliver projects through partnership with third parties such as Friends of the Pentlands, Central Scotland Forest Trust and voluntary and conservation groups. As an example, the Pentland Hills Neighbourhood Partnership had recently made a grant of £5,000 to Balerno Community Council and which was being applied to footpath work within the Regional Park, through the Regional Park Service.

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Decision

To note the summary of recent operational matters.

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

4 Managing Mountain Bike Trails

S Falconer (Senior Ranger) gave a presentation on measures being taken by the parks service to manage a mountain bike trail within Bonaly Country Park. The ranger service was working with the group representing the mountain bikers to try to develop a suitable mounting biking trail. Bonaly had been popular with mountain bikers for some time and had reached the stage where management action was required – the approach was to try to work with the users, with a self-regulating code on practice.

A steering group had been set up to develop a trail and had obtained helpful advice from the Forestry Commission which had experience of similar trails elsewhere in Scotland – particularly as regards “duty of care” and the general issue of liability for users and the park authority. Mounting biking was regarded as a “dangerous sport” but the aim was to try to strike a balance between a suitably challenging trail (and which itself helped to take pressure away from most sensitive areas of the Regional Park) and issues of user safety.

Decision

To note the information, members generally welcoming the efforts being made to provide a mountain bike trail in association with a users’ group.

5 Harperrig Reservoir – Local Nature Reserve Designation

West Lothian Council was proposing to designate Harperrig Reservoir as a local nature reserve. Mr C Alcorn (West Lothian Council) gave an update on progress, the process being at the stage of legal agreements being drawn up.

In terms of some of the access and woodland improvements that should follow the designation, the Management Group was currently working with the Central Scotland Forestry Trust and the local landowner on access and planting improvements along the south side of the loch. The Council itself was making some footpath improvement works on the nearby Cauldstane Slap route.

The formal designation should help solidify the protection of the area on account of its special natural interest and educational value. The process also

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encouraged community involvement in the conservation and enhancement of an important open space area.

Decision

To note the progress with designation of Harperrig Reservoir as a local nature reserve.

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

6 Regional Park Contribution to Single Outcome Agreements and National Outcomes

The Regional Park Manager submitted a proposed action plan for strengthening the Regional Park contribution to “single outcome agreements” and the “15 national outcomes”. This followed up on a SWOT analysis of the Regional Park’s strengths and weaknesses. With regard to the single outcome agreements with the three local authorities, it was felt that the Regional Park made a strong contribution to 35% of local outcomes (health and wellbeing, learning and education, environmental quality, community participation, bio-diversity and provision of responsive services) but that the Regional Park could strengthen its contribution relative to economic development, health for older people and people with disabilities, crime and anti-social behaviour, skills development, social inclusion and environmental sustainability.

In terms of national outcomes, the Regional Park would strengthen its contribution relative to: crime and anti-social behaviour; young people’s work and life skills, equalities, and empowering communities.

The Regional Park Manager had drawn up an action plan to try to address some of these areas with an indication of targets for the forthcoming years.

Decision

To note the action plan for 2010/11 on areas that the Regional Park Service would wish to develop over the forthcoming year, subject to budget provision.

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

7 Heather Moorland Management – Bonaly Country Park

N Franklin (Ranger Service) gave a presentation on heather moorland management, with particular reference to Bonaly Country Park.

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An area of moorland within Bonaly extending to 216 hectares, of which 136 hectares were heather moorland, was currently being managed by the Regional Park. Over the last year, the area had been marked out and studied in terms of bio-diversity and nature conservation interest. The aim of the study was to produce a detailed plan of how to best manage this particular area of moorland and as a guide to managing moorland more generally within the Regional Park.

As part of the exercise, it had been necessary to erect a fence to segregate the main part of the heather moorland and to protect it from grazing pressure. There had been one complaint from a member of the public about the erection of the fence but otherwise the landowner was very supportive of the study.

Decision

To note the information.

8 Farmers and Landowners Meeting 9 December 2009

The Regional Park Manager reported on the Farmers and Landowners meeting which had been held on 9 December 2009. A theme of the meeting had been 'economic and business use within the Regional Park' and how to encourage this within the agricultural sector. There had also been input in regard to the "paths for all" partnership.

Mr R Barr (Farming) said that the attendance at the meeting had been slightly disappointing, and the issues of developing business use had not been particularly well explored, perhaps as a result of farmers currently being in a situation where they were having to consolidate their interest in the face of a recession and with less scope for investment.

As a whole, the meetings were very constructive in terms of allowing the farmers an opportunity to meet the Regional Park staff in person and discuss local issues.

Decision

To note the points made in regard to the format for future meetings of the annual Farmers and Landowners meeting.

9 Charging for Car Parks

The Joint Committee, at its last meeting, had suggested that the Regional Park Manager should investigate the possibility of charging for car parks within the Regional Park.

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In general, members of the Consultative Forum were in favour of an initial investigation being done – one of the main points mentioned being a need to consult with neighbours or landowners with land adjacent to car parks, in view of the possibility that charges could displace public parking and create a nuisance on land that was unaffected at the present time.

Members, in general, were supportive of the principle of a survey being carried out and drawing upon the experience of similar developments elsewhere.

Decision

To note the Regional Park Manager would investigate and report further on this matter.

10 Themes for Future Meetings

Members suggested that the following items might be considered as themes for discussion at future meetings -

Micro-renewables – with an expert from the Bush Estate being perhaps being invited to speak at the meeting.

Woodland and forestry within the Regional Park.

Community engagement – with particular regard to equality and diversity matters.

Funding – external sources of funding such as the LEADER programme and possibly issues associated with income that might accrue from wind farms and their application for community benefit.

Public art projects.

Decision

To note the above points for consideration at future meetings of the Consultative Forum.

11 Date of Next Meeting

Friday, 11 June 2010 at 1.30 pm in Midlothian House.