

Committee Minutes

Pentland Hills Regional Park Consultative Forum

Bonaly Scout Hall, Edinburgh on 11 February 2011

Present:-

The City of Edinburgh Council – Councillors C Keir (Convener) and Paisley.

Farming – Jeff Stoddart (NFU).

Fairmilehead Community Council – Alison Elfick

Harperrig Management Group – Graeme Hamilton

British Horse Society – Constance Newbold

Friends of the Pentlands – John Stirling.

Ministry of Defence Estates – Major K Torp-Petersen

Balerno Village Trust – Alan Laing.

In Attendance:- Alan McGregor, (Regional Park Manager); Garry Cormack (Midlothian Council), Chris Alcorn (West Lothian Council) and D Emerson (City of Edinburgh Council).

1 Minutes –

- 1.1 **Pentland Hills Regional Park Consultative Forum of 22 October 2010** – the minutes of the meeting were approved as a correct record.
- 1.2 **Pentland Hills Regional Park Joint Committee of 14 January 2011** - the minutes of the meeting were noted.

2 Regional Park – Operational Update

The Regional Park Manager gave an update on matters affecting the Regional Park. Amongst points raised were: Bonaly Country Park – woodland planting;

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Harperrig - possible new car park, footpath on the south shore and new woodland; meeting of chairs of Pentland Hills and Muirshiel Regional Parks, and introduction of charging for special events and activities provided through the Park service.

On the latter point, the Regional Park service was proposing to introduce modest level user charges for certain activities that involved costs for the Regional Park and which would bring in additional income for the service.

Decision

To note the report on operational matters and to approve the proposed list of charges for events.

(Reference – report by the Parks and Greenspace Manager, 14 January 2011, submitted)

3 Access Study – Consultations

The Regional Park Manager had invited representatives of Land Use Consultants (Edinburgh), as appointed to carry out a scoping study into possible access routes into the Regional Park, to give a presentation of their work.

The consultants explained that the intention of the study was to look at a 'long list' of twelve options with a view to reducing to four more definite proposals that would then be scoped out to a stage of preparatory work for making applications for funding. They outlined the existing strategic links to the Pentlands - involving former railway lines, canals, routes based on Roman roads, river-ways, etc - and possible options for development from these bases. They had had regard to both the links within the city of Edinburgh and from the outlying towns and villages.

The Convener suggested that members take the time to consider and comments on the various proposals, as outlined, with the consultants recording the views outlined. Major Torp-Petersen stressed a point that, as regards Ministry of Defence land, the consultants should liaise with the designated Access Officer - some problems were being encountered with the public straying from agreed routes onto the training area at Castlelaw – and any new routes in this area would require careful consideration.

There would be a further period for consultation with the landowners and other interested parties, after which the findings would be reported to the Joint Committee by the end of March.

Decision

To note the points made by members on the various options, and as would be analysed by the consultants, with a view to reporting to the Park authority by the end of March.

4 Charges For Car Parking

The Joint Committee had agreed to consult on the principle of introducing charges for car parking within the Regional Park. The proposal was to introduce charges at four public car parks i.e. Threipmuir, Harlaw, Bonaly and Flotterstone - with a voluntary charge of £1 per visit. It was estimated that it could generate a minimum of £25,000 per annum, after operating costs, and which would be applied to improvements in the Regional Park.

In discussion, the majority of members were in favour of the proposal, considering that charges could be justified, provided the income was to be shown to be applied to necessary improvement works. C Newbold (Horse-riding) suggested that consideration be given to providing a suitable parking bay for a horse box at Flotterstone; she felt the public would be happy to pay the charge. G Hamilton suggested there was perhaps a case for 'mandatory' charging – if the income were clearly to be shown to being applied to Park improvements.

J Stirling (Friends of the Pentlands) said that he was against charging on principle and also on grounds that it could also lead to displacement of cars, either in a local sense or a more general displacement to other areas of the Park where no charges applied (and which themselves were perhaps less able to cope with any increase in visits or traffic).

Decision

To note the points made and that there would be further consultations with the landowners, police, public agencies and also on any scope for 'out-sourcing' the administration of charging, with a view to a further report to the Joint Committee.

(Reference – report by the Parks and Greenspace Manager, 14 January 2011, submitted)

5 Events and Activities

V Partridge (Ranger) gave an update on events carried out in the Regional Park and the programme planned for the coming year. Some specialist two-day courses and the like were to be subject to a charge this year – some of these educational/recreational courses being popular and fully booked.

He explained the ethos behind the programme of events, the objectives of the events, and the types of groups that were becoming more involved in the Regional Park.

Decision

To note the information.

6 Balerno Hydro Micro-Scheme

Mr A Laing (Balerno Village Trust) gave a presentation of the proposals being sponsored by the Balerno Village Trust for a micro hydro scheme at Harlaw and the Water of Leith. The project was progressing and the Trust was currently in discussions with the planning and utility authorities. The general intention was to create electricity to be fed into the National Grid and with any profits accruing to be applied to the local community. It was still at the design stage with a view to a grant application.

Decision

To note the information.

7 Members Updates

Members raised the following points during updates –

7.1 Vandalism Issues –

Major Torp-Petersen spoke in relation to problems of vandalism in the Regional Park, referring to the Steadings at Dreghorn, and others, and said he was pleased to have attended meetings recently with the police and other interests to try to counter such activity. The general wish to develop cooperative initiatives amongst the stakeholders in the Regional Park was to be welcomed. Jeff Stoddart (Farming) also referred to the NFU briefings on initiatives to link up farmers and other people in rural areas through a telephone texting system to allow rapid reporting of suspicious movements - there had been some fair success with the schemes in some parts of the country. Noted.

7.2 Friends of the Pentlands

John Stirling reported on a planned event in May for people with disabilities – to introduce some of the routes in the Regional Park. The event would involve the Blind Ramblers and Riding for the Disabled. It was the first type of event of this kind and could be developed further. It was being supported by the Park Ranger service. Noted.

(End)