

Pentland Hills Regional Park Joint Committee

10am, Friday 25th January 2013

Pentland Hills Regional Park Operational Report

Item number	
Report number	
Wards	Pentland Hills, Colinton/Fairmilehead

Links

Coalition pledges	P32, P33, P42, P45 and P48
Council outcomes	CO5, CO10, CO15, CO7, CO17, CO18, CO19, CO21 and CO22.
Single Outcome Agreement	SO2, SO3, SO4

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Executive summary

Pentland Hills Regional Park Operational Report

Summary

This report provides a summary update for Joint Committee about recent operational matters in the Pentland Hills Regional Park.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the Joint Committee notes the contents of this report.

Measures of success

Outputs and outcomes for Pentland Hills Regional Park are presented in an annual report to the Joint Committee. Success is measured against criteria relating to: health & well-being; recreation & access; climate change and biodiversity; and community partnership and participation.

Financial impact

The service re-organisation and vacation of Boghall Farmhouse will realise circa. £24,000 of annual revenue savings.

Equalities impact

The contents and recommendations of this report do not detract from the delivery of the general public sector equality duties. The work of the Regional Park as described in this report does not infringe upon the ten areas of rights and makes a positive contribution to 'age' (facilities, information and resources are provided to help people of all ages learn about and enjoy the Regional Park) and 'disability' (access infrastructure and other amenities are designed to be accessible to people of all abilities).

Sustainability impact

The Pentland Hills Regional Park supports sustainability objectives by: 1) providing a managed resource for non-motorised recreation and physical activity; 2) acting as a carbon sink through the protection and enhancement of woodland, wetland and moorland; 3) enhancing the biodiversity of Edinburgh and the Lothians; 4) protecting the landscape and environmental quality of the Pentland Hills; and 5) supporting sustainable economic development of the rural economy.

Consultation and engagement

The Pentland Hills Regional Park is governed by a Joint Committee comprising of elected members from all three partner local authorities: the City of Edinburgh Council, Midlothian Council, and West Lothian Council.

The Regional Park is advised by a Consultative Forum comprising of a wide range of interests including: farmers and land owners; recreational users; community councils; wildlife interests; Friends and other voluntary groups; sporting interests; public agencies; and national governing bodies. The Forum acts as the primary consultative mechanism for Regional Park matters

Background reading / external references

Further background information about the Regional Park is available at www.pentlandhills.org

'The Electricity Works (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2000. Section 36 Application for the Proposed Fauch Hill Wind Farm, 8km South West of East Calder' – Report to the Pentland Hills Regional Park Joint Committee 16th March 2012.

Pentland Hills Regional Park Operational Report

1. Background

- 1.1 This report provides a summary update for Joint Committee about recent operational matters in the Pentland Hills Regional Park

2. Main report

Service Re-organisation

- 2.1 As of the 10th October 2012, the Regional Park HQ has been relocated from Boghall Farm to the Hermitage of Braid.
- 2.2 All staff and administrative functions are now based at the Hermitage of Braid. Broadband has been installed in the Flotterstone and Harlaw Visitor Centres to enable regular usage during the working day and improve contact between customers and Regional Park staff.
- 2.3 Operational equipment is now stored at the Hermitage of Braid with supplementary storage at the City of Edinburgh Council's Inverleith Depot. This has allowed the former storage facility at Hillend to be occupied by the Friends of the Pentlands and further support their practical conservation activities within the Park.
- 2.4 Since 1st April 2012, visitor management services in the Regional Park have been provided by the City of Edinburgh Council's 'Natural Heritage Service' on behalf of the three partner local authorities. This measure has provided flexible access to a wider pool of staff to operate the Regional Park. It offers an effective method of maintaining front line services within tight financial constraints. The Park continues to be managed as an integrated unit and in a consistent manner across all three local authority boundaries.

Staffing

- 2.5 As part of the service re-organisation and modernisation, staff roles and titles have been amended. The former 'Senior Countryside Ranger' role has been replaced with that of 'Senior Natural Heritage Officer'. This new role retains many of the characteristics of the Senior Ranger role, but has greater focus on

operational management and service development. There are 2.5 full time-equivalent Senior Natural Heritage Officers to support the Regional Park.

- 2.6 Similarly, the 'Countryside Ranger' title has been changed to 'Natural Heritage Officer'. This better reflects the contemporary demands on the role which is one of Estate Management, partnership building and project delivery. Two full-time Officer appointments have been made to replace existing vacancies bringing the total number of Natural Heritage Officers to 8. Under the revised arrangements all staff are available to support Regional Park service delivery, but not exclusively. This flexibility is key to maintaining a good level of service within the challenging economic climate.

Over the summer and autumn of 2012, a temporary 'Estate Worker' was appointed. The role provided support for routine and less skilled tasks such as daily servicing of visitor centres and manual estate maintenance. The shape of the Service will continue to evolve and similar roles may form a permanent part of the staff establishment in due course.

Visit by Members of the Scottish Parliament

- 2.7 On 12th November 2012, the Regional Park hosted a visit by MSPs Christine Grahame, Colin Beattie and Gordon MacDonald. Members were given an overview of the current governance and funding arrangements for the Regional Park and took the opportunity to visit some of the sites and discuss current visitor management activities with staff.

Twenty-five Years of the Regional Park Celebration

- 2.8 On the 8th December 2012, an event was held to mark the 25th anniversary of the Regional Park. People closely involved with the Regional Park past and present were invited to plant 25 native trees at Hillend Country Park. Those attending included current and past members of the Regional Park Joint Committee, local councillors, farmers and landowners, Friends, volunteers and colleagues. As well as looking back over the experiences of the previous 25 years, the event served to discuss the challenges and opportunities as the Park looks to the future.

Voluntary Ranger Service

- 2.9 Since vacating Boghall the Pentland Hills Voluntary Ranger Service has continued to provide valuable additional support, particularly with advising visitors and assisting with patrolling and monitoring of the 100km of Pentland Paths. The Service currently operates from Midlothian Ski Centre where Regional Park Staff brief and debrief the voluntary rangers at the beginning and end of each weekend day. The Pentland Hills Voluntary Ranger Service currently has 40 members.

Green Flag Award

- 2.10 The Regional Park retained its Green Flag Award in 2012/2013. The Green Flag award is a nationally recognised award for quality parks and is assessed by external assessors. The Pentland Hills is the largest Green Flag Park in the UK. The Green Flag Award Scheme is now operated nationally by Keep Britain Tidy and in Scotland by Keep Scotland Beautiful. The Regional Park first achieved a Green Flag Award in 2008/9. The 2012/13 assessment was based on a mystery shop principally based around the two main visitor centres at Harlaw and Flotterstone.

Pentland Inspirations

- 2.11 The Pentland Inspirations bi-annual art and photography competition took place in autumn 2012. This year 61 photographs and 3 pieces of art were received. The Regional Park Chair, Cllr Bill Henderson hosted the award ceremony in the Edinburgh City Chambers on 20th November. Judging was supported by Fiona Dew from Mount Parnassus Picture Framing and Philip Archer from the Leith School of Art. Sponsors included: Tisos; Cicerone Publishing; Stenlake Publishing; and Mount Parnassus Picture Framing. Pentland Inspirations is a joint project between The Pentland Hills Regional Park and the Friends of the Pentlands.

Community Engagement and Participation

- 2.12 Between spring and autumn 2012 the Regional Park Service provided a targeted programme of activities and events. This programme is aimed to strengthen the relationship between the Regional Park and local communities, promote the principles of responsible access and give people an opportunity to support the Park. Recent activities included: 12 wildlife and habitat surveys to help collect data for local biodiversity action plans; hosting the Pentland Walking Festival between 19th-21st July; 5 conservation volunteer days to help maintain paths and access infrastructure, woodland and other habitats; 2 events aimed at engaging children and their parents; and 3 map and compass courses.
- 2.13 The Regional Park Service has worked with outdoor learning providers to enable the use of the Pentland Hills as an educational resource. Organisations supported include: the Forest Education Initiative, the Green Team, local authority schools and further education colleges and universities.

Friends of the Pentlands – Fly tipping Initiative at Dreghorn

- 2.14 In partnership with the Regional Park, the City of Edinburgh Council SW Neighbourhood, the Ministry of Defence and the Friends of the Pentlands have launched a new project to tackle persistent littering and fly tipping at Dreghorn. The project uses a combination of measures to tackle this long standing problem. Measures include: vehicular control, vegetation management,

information and signage, voluntary litter clearance, and regular waste management operations. The scheme was initiated in November 2012 and early indications are that it is already making a real difference to the cleanliness of this popular access point.

Access Infrastructure

2.15 Maintaining and improving the paths within the Regional Park is a significant challenge, particularly following the recent high rainfall experiences and continued popularity of the hills for walking, cycling and horse-riding. The following refurbishment projects are underway and due for completion before the end of March 2012:

- refurbishment of Bonaly to Torduff footpath; resurfacing of Clubbiedean to Easter Kinleith track;
- upgrade of Bonaly reservoir track; and
- drainage and surface improvements on the Maiden's Cleugh Path.

2.16 These works are fully funded through a combination of additional capital and revenue funding, the revenue being secured from the City of Edinburgh Council's 5% allocation of the Transport budget for off-road cycling routes.

Harperrigg Reservoir - Proposed Local Nature Reserve

2.17 A meeting of the Harperrigg Reservoir Local Management group was held in October.

2.18 Further signage and interpretation has been installed with financial support from West Lothian Council and the LEADER Programme. This completes a package of works delivered over the previous 3 years which included: 10 ha of new woodland planting; creation of a new path and bird hide on the south shore of the reservoir; new interpretation and directional signage; Gala Ford bridge repairs; and drainage improvements on the Little Vantage to Cauldstane Slap right of way. These works were a collaborative initiative between the Regional Park, West Lothian Council, Scottish Natural Heritage, The Central Scotland Forest Trust (CSFT) and local land managers. CSFT have a further 17ha of woodland creation to the west and north of Harperrigg under consideration by landowners.

2.19 Public consultation has been carried out, and formal agreement reached between West Lothian Council and the City of Edinburgh Council for the proposed Local Nature Reserve (LNR) Designation.

Windfarms

- 2.20 As reported to the Joint Committee on 16th March 2012, on the 26th January 2012, Sustainable Energy (FHSE) submitted an application to Scottish Ministers under Section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989 to construct and operate a wind farm at Fauch Hill consisting of 23 turbines with a generating capacity of 69MW. The site abuts the Regional Park Boundary.
- 2.21 In June 2012, West Lothian Council raised a formal objection. Following consideration by the Committee in 16th March 2012, The Pentland Hills Regional Park responded to the consultation as being 'not in favour' of the development on the grounds of it being contrary to local planning policy and the aims of the Regional Park (see background reading).
- 2.22 The Government's Energy Consents Unit sent the objections material to Scottish Ministers and the West Lothian Council and other statutory objectors including the City of Edinburgh Council.
- 2.23 In December 2012, the application was passed to the Scottish Government's Directorate for Planning and Environmental Appeals (DPEA) for examination. A reporter, Mr Dan Jackman BA(Hons) MRTPI, has been appointed to hold a public inquiry and to report his findings and recommendations to Scottish Ministers. Timescales when available and progress updates are available via the DEPA website at www.dpea.scotland.gov.uk. The outcome of appeal when known will be reported to the Joint Committee at the earliest opportunity.
- 2.24 A similar situation pertains to the adjacent Harburnhead wind turbine application that is also near, but not immediately abutting the Park boundary.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 It is recommended that the Joint Committee:
- 3.11 notes the recent matters pertaining to the Pentland Hills Regional Park outlined in this report.

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Links

Coalition pledges

- P32** - Develop and strengthen local community links with the police
- P33** - Strengthen Neighbourhood Partnerships and further involve local people in decisions about how Council resources are used.
- P42** - Continue to support and invest in our sporting infrastructure.
- P45** - Spend 5% of the transport budget on provision for cyclists
- P48** - Use Green Flag and other strategies to preserve our green spaces.

Council outcomes

- CO5** - Our children and young people are safe from harm or fear of harm, and do not harm others within their communities
- CO10** - Improved health and reduced inequalities
- CO15** - The public is protected
- CO7** - Edinburgh draws new investment in development and regeneration
- CO17** - Clean – Edinburgh’s streets and open spaces are clean and free of litter and graffiti
- CO18** - Green – We reduce the local environmental impact of our consumption and production
- CO19** - Attractive Places and Well Maintained – Edinburgh remains an attractive city through the development of high quality buildings and places and the delivery of high standards.
- CO21**- Safe – Residents, visitors and businesses feel that Edinburgh is a safe city
- CO22** - Moving efficiently – Edinburgh has a transport system that improves connectivity and is green, healthy and accessible

Single Outcome Agreement

- SO2** - Edinburgh’s citizens experience improved health and wellbeing, with reduced inequalities in health
- SO3** - Edinburgh’s children and young people enjoy their childhood and fulfil their potential
- SO4** - Edinburgh’s communities are safer and have improved physical and social fabric

Appendices

None