

Minutes

Pentland Hills Regional Park Consultative Forum

10.00 am, Friday, 22 February 2013 in the Bonaly Scout Centre, Edinburgh

Present

Members:-

Councillors Bill Henderson (Convener); and Dominic Heslop (The City of Edinburgh Council); Midlothian Council: Councillor Lisa Beattie (Midlothian Council); Councillor Frank Tonner (West Lothian Council); Scottish Water: Alan Fail (Scottish Water); Scottish Natural Heritage: Janice Winning (SNH); Farming: Robert Barr (NFU); Ministry of Defence Estates: Maj. (Ret.) K Torp-Petersen; Scottish Wildlife Trust: Ken Knowles; Friends of the Pentlands: John Stirling; Harperrig Management Group: Graham Hamilton; Landowning: Scott Patterson; Walkers: Euan Scroggie; British Horse Society: Constance Newbould; Scottish Hill Runners: Dr John Blair Fish; Mountain Biking: Jim Hunter; and Scottish Angling Society: Arthur Howes.

Community Councils - Balerno CC: Hugh Watt; Colinton Amenity Association: Andrew Rushworth; Fairmilehead CC: Norman Tinlin; Juniper Green CC: Neil Ingram; West Calder and Harburn CC: John Smith.

In Attendance:-

A McGregor (Regional Park Manager); Jo Cooke (Midlothian Council), C Alcorn (West Lothian Council) and D Emerson (City of Edinburgh Council).

1. Minutes

1.1 Pentland Hills Regional Park Consultative Forum of 24 August 2012

Minutes approved as a correct record, subject to adjustment of the sederunt to note that Ken Knowles was not present.

1.2 Pentland Hills Regional Park Joint Committee of 25 January 2013. Noted.

2. Membership of Joint Committee and Consultative Forum

The Joint Committee on 26 January 2013 had agreed a report with recommendations for amending the governance and consultative mechanisms for the Regional Park.

With regard to membership of the Joint Committee, it had been agreed that the National Farmers Union and Scottish Land and Estates should each be represented on the Joint Committee in a non-voting capacity.

22 February 2013

With regard to the Consultative Forum, a number of membership adjustments had been agreed:

- all Community Councils on the periphery of the Park expressing an interest to be invited to be represented on the Consultative Forum;
- representation from the following interests and organisations to be reviewed and the Regional Park Manager authorised to amend accordingly: Cycling (membership to better represent mountain biking interests); Angling (secure representation of angling interests); Farmers and land managers (identify opportunities to strengthen representation); Dog walking (currently un-represented) and recreational visitors with Disability (currently un-represented), and
- where possible, user group representation should be secured locally, to better reflect the actual activities and interests in the Park.

(The Convener now welcomed the new members and members of the Community Councils who were now attending the Consultative Forum for the first time.)

Bob Barr, on behalf of Farming, said that he appreciated the decision to allow farmers and landowners a greater say in the matter of the Regional Park, and as they had been pressing for some time.

The Regional Park Manager added that from now on meetings of the Consultative Forum would be held in advance of the Joint Committee, to allow the stakeholders to comment on any proposals affecting the Regional Park in advance of any decisions being taken by the Joint Committee. Members of the Joint Committee would also attend meetings of the Consultative Forum.

Decision

To note the changes made to representation and governance arrangements.

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

3. Social Return on Investment Study

The City of Edinburgh Council had previously agreed to undertake a 'Social Return on Investment' study relative to the Regional Park. The exercise was intended to quantify and value the contribution to social welfare of local communities and stakeholders of the services provided through the Regional Park authority.

The Convener now invited Karen Carrick, from Greenspace Scotland, as consultant commissioned by the Council to give a presentation on the findings of the study. The study had attempted to provide a forecast of the social return from the collective investment of partner authorities in providing countryside and visitor management services. The benefits measured were those that were made possible by the provision of a management service and had been identified as such following consultation with those directly affected. The predictions were based on a one year period from 2011 to 2012.

22 February 2013

K Carrick gave an outline of the analysis for the various stakeholder groups – visitors, members of community groups, visitors, community organisations, schools, landowners, statutory organisations such as the police, Voluntary Rangers, and local economy/businesses – the outcome and value perceived. The outcomes had each been assigned a value, together with a quantity, and total value of services projected. In summary, the study had forecast that every £1 of investment would generate around £9 in benefits – or, by applying a sensitivity analysis, the value of benefits derived could vary from £7 to £13.

During discussion: the Regional Park Manager considered it would be useful information to bring to the attention of the Scottish Parliament – both for the Pentland Hills and the more general lobbying on the importance of Regional Parks to Scotland. Bob Barr said that it was a challenge to manage the numbers of visitors coming in to the Park; the last two summers had been wet and the pressures put on farmers land by the park activity had to be recognised. Major Torp Petersen was concerned about ‘organised events’, not being clear that the study had managed to cover this point – a balance required to be struck between recreational access and the potential for damage to infrastructure. Janice Winning (SNH) referred to a recent SNH study across Scotland which would appear to back up the data from this study on returns on investment – the findings for the Regional Park appeared consistent with results from elsewhere. Chris Alcorn added that the latest visitor study had been carried out 7 years ago and perhaps the data required to be updated with a further study.

Decision

To note the results of the study which would be used by the Regional Park to inform future policy.

4. Regional Park Manager’s Operational Report

The Regional Park Manager gave an operational report on activities over the past six months. As of 10 October 2012, the Park headquarters had been relocated from Boghall Farm to the Hermitage of Braid, with all staff and administrative functions transferred. Operational equipment was now stored at the Hermitage of Braid with supplementary storage at the City of Edinburgh Council’s Inverleith depot. This had freed the former storage facility at Hillend for use by the Friends of the Pentlands.

Since 1 April 2012, visitor management services in the Regional Park had been provided by the City of Edinburgh Council’s Natural Heritage Service on behalf of the three partner local authorities. This measure had provided flexible access to a wider pool of staff to operate in the Regional Park.

He reported in further detail on ongoing activities, including:

- staffing
- visit by Members of the Scottish Parliament
- twenty-five years of the Regional Park celebration
- Voluntary Ranger Service

22 February 2013

- Green Flag award
- Pentland Inspirations
- community engagement and participation
- Friends of the Pentlands – fly tipping initiative at Dreghorn
- access infrastructure
- Harperrig Reservoir - proposed Local Nature Reserve

He added that the Park authority was hoping to have an ‘estates worker’ on the staff on a full-time basis, the experience of a part-time work over the summer to carry out minor works on the ground having been of great benefit. The relationship with the Volunteer Rangers and Friends of the Pentlands had been paying dividends and again he was hoping to further engage with volunteers, and look at how the Ranger Service could support their needs and maximise the potential of volunteer support. There were other groups such as the mountain bikers who had indicated a willingness to help out with pathway repairs and similar.

Jim Hunter (Mountain Biking) and John Stirling (Friends of the Pentlands) spoke in relation to volunteer assistance and how they might best be supported by the Ranger Service

Decision

1. To note the operational report.
2. To note the willingness of user groups to be involved in footpath repairs.
3. The Regional Park Manager to look at insurance and risks for volunteers working for the Park authority.

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

5. Fly-Tipping at Dreghorn – Prevention Initiative – Friends of the Pentlands

John Stirling reported that Friends of the Pentlands had been awarded £3,850 from Keep Scotland Beautiful, through Zero Waste Scotland, to help transform the car parking area at Dreghorn, Edinburgh, by clearing illegally dumped material and implementing new measures to prevent flytipping. The car park, next to the City bypass at Dreghorn, provided an important access point to the Pentland Hills but had a long history of fly-tipping. Household and commercial waste was being dumped by the roadside.

With assistance from the MOD, the roadside had been cleaned and large boulders placed to prevent vehicles from tipping. This had been followed up with publicity, including banners and a printed leaflet explaining the issues. The roadside had been clear since November 2012.

Decision

To note the excellent work and thank Friends of the Pentlands for their initiative in tackling this particular problem.

6. Fauch Hill – Proposals for Wind Farm – Public Inquiry

As previously reported, an application had been submitted to Scottish Ministers for the development of a wind farm consisting of 23 turbines with a generating capacity of 69MW at Fauch Hill, lying 8km. south-west of East Calder. The Joint Committee on 16 March 2012, had agreed a consultation response stating that the Regional Park was not in favour of the proposed development on grounds of being contrary to the aims of the Regional Park.

The Parks and Greenspace Manager now reported that the Regional Park had received confirmation from the Directorate for Planning and Environmental Appeals confirming that a public inquiry would be held and that there was an opportunity to give evidence to the Inquiry Reporter.

The Joint Committee had agreed to be represented and give evidence during the inquiry process, with the Regional Park Manager to give evidence.

Decision

To note the information.

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

7. Sustainable Management of Recreational Events

The Parks and Greenspace Manager had carried out a review of arrangements for managing recreational events in the Pentland Hills Regional Park. In addition to informal recreation, the Regional Park was a popular location for recreational 'events'. In 2011, a total of 26 events were held with 1880 participants which had risen in 2012 to 36 events with 3,356 participants.

An analysis of the events indicated that :

- the majority involved walking, hill running or orienteering (68%);
- the proportion of cycling events was relatively low (5%);
- there was a significant demand for water based events (18%);
- a significant proportion of events were run for charitable purposes (42%);
- few event organisers currently made a financial contribution towards the maintenance of the Park (3%); and
- hill running and orienteering events took place all year round, while other events were primarily staged between spring and autumn.

The Parks and Greenspace Manager suggested that a review of existing procedures was needed in order to:

- regulate events such that the annual programme was measured and sustainable;

22 February 2013

- provide a clear and robust framework to help event organisers hold successful, high quality and well supported events;
- mitigate the impact on paths, land management activities, and informal recreation;
- encourage event organisers to contribute to the maintenance and upkeep of the facilities they use; and
- develop a co-operative partnership between the Regional Park and land managers regarding recreational events.

It was proposed to develop a concordat between the Regional Park and the land managers which would serve to better regulate recreational events in the Pentland Hills Regional Park. The concordat would support the provision of clear and consistent advice to event managers, provide an agreed basis on which to grant or withhold permission, and establish a clear protocol for agreeing a contribution towards the provision and maintenance of facilities.

Members expressed agreement with the proposal. It was noted that SNH had recently published a paper on the issue, there being a lot of interest across the country on how such events should be managed. Janice Winning agreed to participate in the working group for the Pentland Hills, to feed in the SNH research.

Major Torp Petersen referred to there being only a limited number of venues where organised events could feasibly use as starting points - noting the need for car parking etc. These places and starting routes were most likely to come under pressure. The question of whether to charge would need to be considered, or some form of donation to assist with re-instatement.

Decision

To agree to set up a sub-group to draw up a draft concordat with landowners, with the Regional Park Manager to write to members with further details, and with a view to a further report to the Consultative Forum.

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

8. Temporary Path Closures - Pilot

Martin Duncan, Ranger, reported on issues of paths erosion and the question of whether the Park authority should have the power to close routes in times of bad weather in order to prevent damage to the pathway. There was an issue perhaps of whether all routes within a specified geographical area should be closed or whether it should be confined to a specific route or path only.

Members expressed general agreement with the Regional Park being responsible for closing a particular route when necessary; it was not felt this would contradict Access Rights to any great extent, there now being some evidence to support closures where a reasoned justification could be provided. Mr R Barr had agreed that a trial project could be arranged on his land, which last year had been affected by people taking off-route access in wet weather.

22 February 2013

Members agreed that it would be necessary for the Park authority to keep user groups informed and up-to-date with likely closures, making use of new technology such as Facebook, website or tweets, with the Regional Park Manager to look at ways by which this might be done.

Decision

To note the information and the intention to trial a path closure initiative as described.

9. Members Updates

Members gave updates as follows-

9.1 Friends of the Pentlands – John Stirling updated on the following items:

- (a) Arboretums – Swanston and West Linton, trees of Scotland – with a grant from SNH, Year of Natural Scotland 2013. Three sites were to be found, one each in Midlothian (Silverburn), West Lothian(Harperrig) and South Lanarkshire (Carnwath);
- (b) Penicuik to Silverburn path completed, worked with the Midlothian Rangers and the Midlothian Path Group;
- (c) West Lothian Council had approached Friends of the Pentlands with a proposal for a path from Kirknewton to Little Vantage – providing a new route to the Pentland Hills, and
- (d) A donation of a container from Scottish Water to be stored at Swanston Farm, for storage of tools; and Midlothian Council had given the use of Hillend Workshop to store tools and materials.

9.2 **Farmers - Sheep Lambing issues** –a special meeting of landowners/farmers was being arranged by the Regional Park Manager to discuss problems of management during sheep lambing periods.

10. Dates for Future Meetings

Dates for future meetings were as follows –

30 August 2013	Consultative Forum
27 September 2013	Joint Committee
28 February 2014	Consultative Forum
28 March 2014	Joint Committee

(All meetings to commence at 10.00 am, venues to be agreed.)