

## Pentland Hills Regional Park Consultative Forum

10.00 am, Friday, 30 August 2013 in Swanston Golf Club, Edinburgh

### Present

#### Members:-

Councillors Bill Henderson (Convener); and Dominic Heslop (The City of Edinburgh Council); Midlothian Council: Councillor Lisa Beattie (Midlothian Council); Scottish Natural Heritage: Janice Winning; Farming: Robert Barr (NFU); Ministry of Defence Estates: Scott Ashworth; Scottish Wildlife Trust: Ken Knowles; Friends of the Pentlands: John Stirling; Landowning: Scott Patterson; Walkers: Hamish Clarke; British Horse Society: Sarah Fleming; Scottish Hill Runners: Dr John Blair; Mountain Biking: Jim Hunter; Sports Scotland: Campbell Gerard; Scottish Angling/ Mallyen Angling Association: J Tait; Orienteering: Janet Clarke, and Scottish Government: Helen Jones.

Community Councils - Balerno CC: Ken Shade; Carlops CC: Tony Anderson; Colinton Amenity Association: Andrew Rushworth; Fairmilehead CC: Alison Elphick; Juniper Green CC: Rob Meikle.

#### In Attendance:-

K Logie, S Falconer, J Hargreaves and M Duncan (for Regional Park Manager); G Cormack (Midlothian Council), E Hopwood (West Lothian Council) and D Emerson (City of Edinburgh Council).

## 1. Minutes

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### 1.1 Pentland Hills Regional Park Consultative Forum of 22 February 2013

The minutes were approved as a correct record.

## 2. Extension of Boundaries of Regional Park – Proposal by Christine Grahame MSP

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The Convener invited Christine Grahame, MSP, to speak to the Forum about her proposal to extend the boundaries of the Regional Park to cover the whole range of the Pentland Hills. Mrs Grahame explained that at this stage she was attempting only to engage with stakeholders to try to ascertain their views, for or against, on an extension of the Regional Park to cover the whole range of the Pentland Hills. She believed it was in the long term interests of the Pentland Hills to extend the designation as a Regional Park and intended to proceed to a Members Bill for consideration by the Scottish Parliament – if there were to be clear support for the proposal. At this stage, she was collating information and was keen to hear from interested parties and to open up a

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general discussion. She was inviting comment through her office in the Scottish Parliament.

The matter of funding would be a key issue. At the moment, the Regional Park was dependent on funding (and governance) from local authorities and was at risk of variance as a result of more general budgetary pressures on the local councils. She saw scope to consider whether to move away from the current system and instead have a separate and independent body responsible for the Park. As such it might be better positioned to access funds from wider afield. She cited examples of successful Trusts from elsewhere including Abbotsford House in her own parliamentary constituency.

Bob Barr (NFU) said that the original setting up of the Regional Park had been accompanied by promises from the authorities that there would always be sufficient funding available for its management, however the reality was that the funding had dwindled over time. The farmers had been left to take on much of the work themselves, and acting as unpaid caretakers. There should be a mechanism that recognised their contribution. He was unclear as to where funding was likely to come from for any extension. At the time of establishment, landowning and farming interest in Scottish Borders and Lanarkshire had voted against the Regional Park – and unless there was new money available an agreement to extend was unlikely.

Other interests supported the view that funding was the key issue if support was to be gathered from landowning interests. Some members felt that an extension would assist in restoring the status and necessary designation of the Pentland Hills, to give greater protection against unwelcome development. The issue of a consistent designation in planning terms across the range of the Hills was to be supported.

In conclusion, Christine Grahame thanked the members for the views expressed. She intended to hold an event in the Scottish Parliament on 8 October 2013 to garner support for the proposal. She would welcome comments to be submitted by email from representative interests.

## **Decision**

To note the proposal and that any views should be submitted to Christine Grahame MSP.

## **3. Annual Report 2012-13**

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The Annual Report for the Regional Park 2012-13 had been circulated to members, and also distributed more widely to the public.

## **Decision**

To note the Annual Report for the Pentland Hills Regional Park for 2012-13.

(Reference – Annual Report 2012-13, submitted)

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#### **4. City of Edinburgh Sports Strategy**

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David Wardrope, Sports and Strategy Manager, gave a presentation of the City of Edinburgh Council's new sports strategy, aimed essentially at getting people to be more active and to promote the opportunities afforded by Edinburgh, both for outdoor activities and sporting facilities. The Council was investing resources in inspiring 'active living', with more emphasis on this than sport itself, in line with broader objectives on health and wellbeing.

In reply to questions, he said that the Council was lending support to the proposed 'mountain biking marathon' to be held in the Regional Park in 2013, in line with the aim of raising the profile of Edinburgh as an active and sporting city, but there was not any long term policy to promote the use of the Pentland Hills as a venue for sporting events.

#### **Decision**

To note the presentation.

#### **5. Proposed Mountain Biking Marathon – Rare Events Presentation**

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The Convener invited representatives of Rare Events Management Ltd to give a presentation on the proposed Mountain Biking Marathon to be held in 2013 over a course running through the Pentland Hills. The event was to be sponsored in part by the City of Edinburgh Council. This was a first trial and an ambition would be to hold it on annual basis. The event was to start from Swanston.

They explained that it was now to be a two-day event and aimed at encouraging family participation. It was not to be a 'race' but would be a challenge for the riders. The aim was to have between 400 and 800 riders in the event over a challenging course. Consultations were taking place with the landowners, with 30 having been contacted so far. The event was planned for a weekend at the end of September 2013. It was a tight schedule and if it did not prove possible to secure the permissions and agreement from the landowners, then the event would not go ahead. The final route had not been published as it was dependent on the necessary agreements being in place. The company had set aside a budget of £10-15,000 to effect trail repairs/improvements in connection with the event. The City of Edinburgh Council was prepared to support the event with £40,000.

Ken Shade (Balerno CC) indicated his opposition to the event as a landowner; he considered it inappropriate on grounds of damage to footpaths and incompatibility with other users in the Regional Park. He said that the problems with mountain biking were an ongoing issue in the Regional Park. This event was promoting mountain biking to a wide audience of users who themselves were likely to have trial runs or practice over the route and worsen the situation. At some points there clearly need to be two tracks in order to separate bikers from pedestrians, etc.

Other members articulated similar concerns about path damage, in sensitive areas, and incompatibility with other uses. Alison Elphick (Fairmilehead CC) was concerned

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about using Swanston as the base and starting point, considering that there had been no prior consultation with local residents, and that there were insufficient facilities for parking and the like.

Bob Barr (NFU) said that he was pleased at the organiser's attempts to set aside monies for path re-instatement and the consultations being carried out by them; on the other hand there were sensitive areas, such as Maidens Cleugh, where to put down hardcore as a path would spoil the look of the Hills. It did offer perhaps an opportunity to engage with the bikers and to educate them as to the sensitivity of the paths in the Hills.

Other members considered that the organisers had not allowed sufficient time for consultation with landowners, given the sensitivities involved, the process having been begun in April 2013. The organisers in reply agreed that the process had taken longer than expected and re-iterated that the event would go ahead only if the necessary agreements could be obtained.

### **Decision**

To thank the organisers for the presentation and to note the points made.

## **6. Events Planning**

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Susan Falconer, Senior Ranger, gave a presentation on events planning in the Regional Park. The Ranger service was currently working with the landowners and farmers and organisers to try to come forward with a 'concordat' on how permissions should be obtained and protocols to be followed. The Regional Park authority was willing to try to manage the overall process and offer advice to potential event organisers but was not in a position to be the final arbiter where there was conflict or to give any final permission. There was some guidance on the matter at a national level from Scottish National Heritage on the interpretation of the national Access Code and the rights of landowners.

Campbell Gerard (SportScotland) said that, on the question of charging for events, most sports bodies were accepting of the need for this, for example for re-instatement work etc, but there was disagreement amongst the various bodies as to what level these should be set at, and his organisation would not wish to see charges being set at levels that would dissuade an event from being held. It was noted that if charges had been levied before the new legislation had come into effect, then they could continue.

### **Decision**

To note the presentation and the points made.

## **7. Paths Improvements and Access Management**

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Jenny Hargreaves and Martin Duncan, Senior Rangers, gave a presentation on path improvements and access management, describing the projects carried out over the year in Regional Park, with capital expenditure of £31,000 on the 4 main projects.

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With regard to the recently approved procedure for a trial of advisory path closures in inclement weather, to avoid damage in sensitive areas, there had been no necessity to use the authority to close this far, but the mechanisms were in place to do should the weather require later in the year.

## Decision

To note the presentation.

## 8. Members Updates

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Members gave updates as follows-

- 8.1 Friends of the Pentlands – John Stirling gave an update on the areas of small path maintenance including at Phantoms Cleuch, Hillend and Silverburn. The latter was in line with the aim of developing footpath links from local communities into the Pentlands; they were now similarly intending to work on re-establishing an old path from Selm Muir to Little Vantage, in West Lothian, with support from the Council. Noted.
- 8.2 R Barr (Farming) – re-iterated his view that he would like to see a mechanism for the farmers to be able to quote for carrying out small works in the Regional Park on a sub-contractor basis. The Regional Park Manager was asked to look into this matter.
- 8.3 SportScotland – Campbell Gerard reported on their submission to the Scottish Government on the consultation on the review of Scottish planning policy – SportScotland having asked that the definition of ‘Regional Park’ was weak and needed to be strengthened. Noted.
- 8.4 Scottish Natural Heritage – Janice Winning reported on the Year of Natural Scotland and other events being promoted by SNH. Noted.

## 9. Dates for Future Meetings

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Dates for future meetings were as follows –

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