

Pentland Hills Regional Park Consultative Forum

10.00 am, Friday, 28 February 2014 in Flotterstone Inn, Penicuik, Midlothian

Present

Members:-

Councillors Bill Henderson (Convener) and Walker; (The City of Edinburgh Council); Councillor Joe Wallace (Midlothian Council), Janice Winning (Scottish Natural Heritage); Bob Barr (NFU Scotland); Ken Knowles (Scottish Wildlife Trust); Mike White and Phil Rowsley (Friends of the Pentlands); Alastair McClung (Swanston Farm); Paul Caban (Scottish Orienteering); Janice Winning (Scottish Natural Heritage); Arthur Howes (Malleny Angling Association and Threipmuir Angling Association); Euan Scroggie (Walkers); Colin Kilpatrick, Roger Oats, Graham Hunter (Quarries Action Group) and Neil Wishart (Rosebery Estate)

Community Councils – Hugh Watt (Balerno CC), Peter Raine (Carlops CC), Tony Anderson (Colinton Amenity Association), Andrew Rushworth (Fairmilehead CC), Neil Ingram (Juniper Green CC)

In Attendance:-

Christine Grahame MSP; Mark Michael (The University of Edinburgh); Katya Smidt (The University of Potsdam; K Logie, A McGregor, S Falconer, Victor Partridge, and M Duncan, D Kyles, P Newton (The City of Edinburgh Council); G Cormack (Midlothian Council), Chris Alcom, E Hopwood (West Lothian Council) and B Ritchie (City of Edinburgh Council).

1. Minutes

1.1 Pentland Hills Regional Park Consultative Forum of 30 August 2013

Decision

The minutes were approved as a correct record.

2. New Area Based Responsibilities – Presentation by Regional Park Manager

The Regional Park Manager explained the new management structure for the Natural Heritage Service. He explained how the officers now operated and how they had their own specific area based responsibility.

The individual Natural Heritage Officers then explained their respective roles and their areas of responsibility.

Decision

- 1) To thank the staff who dealt with parks and for all their contribution to the work of the Natural Heritage Service.
- 2) The areas of responsibility of the new Natural Heritage Service to be circulated with the minutes.

3. Proposal to Extend the Pentland Hills Regional Park Boundary – Presentation by Christine Graham MSP

The Consultative Forum had previously considered Christine Grahame's proposal to extend the boundaries of the Regional Park to cover the entire range of the Pentland Hills.

The Convener invited Christine Graham, MSP, to speak to the Forum about her proposal. Mrs Graham explained that on 28 February she had formally launched a proposal to extend the boundary of the Pentland Hills Regional Park. There was a mandatory twelve weeks consultation period, after the responses were submitted, they were then collated by Government Bills Unit. She would then decide if she wished to proceed with the proposed Bill and then explained the various stages whereby the Bill would proceed through Parliament.

The rationale for the proposals was explained. The Regional Park would face future difficulties, due to budgetary pressures on local authorities. Public attitudes had changed since the 1970, when regional parks were first proposed and people were being encouraged to go to the countryside for health and wellbeing.

The proposed Bill did not involve any changes to the current planning regime and took into account pressures on local authorities and peoples' needs. The proposals did not intend to change the park. Details were provided of the two proposed options for boundary extensions. The three councils had performed very well to keep the Regional Park functioning, but there were future budgetary constraints to consider. By extending the boundary, this would bring into potential funding the Scottish Borders and South Lanarkshire Councils.

A "Pentlands Forum Development Trust" could potentially access different sources of funding, which was not possible at present, as it was not legally constituted. The Bill should be a catalyst for this process.

Farmers had concerns about inappropriate use of their land and hopefully, they would benefit from the proposals. The entire process could take 18 months, so there was sufficient time to consider another constitution, if necessary.

In response to questions from members of the Forum, the following points were made:

- The section of the proposed extension, which included Balerno was covered by Rural West Edinburgh Local Plan. However, regional park designation was not

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a planning designation. Regional park status offered some protection from development.

- Some people were unaware of the regional parks. The proposed extension would stimulate public interest, especially as the Pentland Hills was such a landmark.
- Farmers had concerns about the lack of good access tracks, signage and fences and had some reservations about the proposals. It was therefore important to fully explain to them the potential benefits.
- Lack of information might be a potential barrier to the extension, such as a knowledge of how new legislation, affected access rights, therefore, it was necessary to explain the purpose of the proposals.
- The designation of the park would not change, but there had to be responsible access. Quad bikes, for example, would have no access rights as they were motorised vehicles.
- Charitable trust status was unrelated to regional park designation. Additionally, the funding status was a separate issue from the proposed Bill.
- A charitable trust would be broadened to include a broad range of people. This would protect farmers' interests and should allay their concerns that a trust would be unsympathetic to the needs of farmers.
- Issues such as funding would be dealt with during the passage of the Bill. The present financial arrangements would not continue as there would probably be financial cuts in future.
- The new structure would permit both recreational and quiet activities.

Decision

To request members of the Pentland Hills Regional Park Consultative Forum to respond to the proposed boundary consultation.

(Reference – Pentland Hills Regional Park Consultative Forum 30 August 2013 (item 2)).

4. Events Concordat - Presentation

Susan Falconer gave a presentation on the Events Concordat. There had been constructive discussions on the first and second drafts and the Concordat would be considered by the Joint Regional Park Committee. The Concordat would then be widely circulated for public consultation and the document would be available to members of the public by the summer.

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It was important to progress the Concordat in a way that was correct and sustainable. There was a good access structure and some of the money generated would be fed back to benefit the parks. The Concordat belonged to everybody and people should put their views forward on the proposals.

Discussion then took place and it was suggested that events should be properly funded and run, not all events were feasible, and volunteer sports should not be charged excessive rates. It was explained that consideration would be given to larger events rather than smaller events. Further discussion took place and it was suggested that the use of the area, as well as the events, caused damage, and big companies should pay for events that they were running for other bodies. Additionally, event holders should be informed that some of their activities were damaging the ecosystem.

Decision

To note that the consultation on the Draft Concordat would be progressed.

5. Ecosystem Services in Edinburgh and the Lothians – Presentation

Katja Smidt gave a presentation on Ecosystem Services in Edinburgh and the Lothians, and explained ecosystems services concept, outlining the gap between ecosystems and actual practice. The provision of a service would give a range of benefits. The ecosystem service would provide a knowledge of social/cultural value of ecosystem services, for which the following steps would be undertaken:

- Identifying key ecosystems.
- Identifying social/cultural values.
- Explaining how social/cultural values varied across interest groups

The next stage in the process was then outlined:

- Step 1 – Visitor survey
- Step 2 – Stakeholder interviews
- Step 3 – Focus groups
- Step 4 – Presentation of results

In response to questions from the Forum, Ms Smidt explained that there were similar studies in other areas, such as the Pentland Hills, East Lothian and Edinburgh. There were also discussions with a group in Switzerland regarding similar studies, but nothing had been established yet.

Members then made the following points.

- The clearest way to present the results of the survey would be in the same format as the presentation. This was an opportunity to build on the existing visitor survey.
- Complementary output would be advantageous to the Natural Heritage Service.

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- Data could be made available in respect of interest in cultural/service values in the Pentlands.
- The summer months were the best time of year to undertake the survey as they were the busiest months.

Details were then given of the method for distributing the information, such the distribution of leaflets and by a survey monkey.

Decision

- 1) To thank Katya Smidt for the presentation
- 2) To note that the Friends of the Pentlands would provide Ms Smidt with a calendar of events.
- 3) To note that the Natural Heritage Service would provide Ms Smidt with information for her survey.

6. Swanston Farm - Development Proposals - Presentation

Alistair McLung gave a presentation on development proposals at Swanston Farm, explaining that over a 30 year period, the business had expanded. In addition to cattle and sheep farming, this included included horse livery, a golf course and the conversion of farmhouse buildings into offices and holiday homes.

There had been discussions with stakeholders regarding proposals for a Swanston Events Centre at Swanston, near Lothianburn Golf Course. This would involve public access, with activities such as walking, habitat management and motorbike trails.

Swanston Farm was an integral part of the local community. There was good public access, a woodland project, a path network and farm produce was consumed in the restaurant. The proposals would help both farming activity and the recreational business of the farm. It was hoped to get funding to enable development. The proposals would be considered by Planning.

Members of the Forum asked about the proposals and the following responses were given:

- There would be some enabling development which would include a cafe, shops and some accommodation based development.
- Planning permission had been granted for a travel lodge hotel, opposite the Hillend Ski Centre. But the planning process for the hotel was still ongoing, however, the park and ride had been shelved.
- A feasibility study was being undertaken regarding mountain biking.

Decision

To thank the presenter and to note the proposals.

7. Pentland Rocks – New Geology Leaflet

Victor Partridge reported on the New Geology Leaflet for Pentland Rocks, which outlined the geology of the Pentland Hills. There was wide public interest in geology, however, geology was a complex topic and should be made readable for members of the public.

Standard Life had been helpful and had printed off 2000 copies of the leaflets, which were now available in the Visitor Centre. Geology groups had also provided photos and maps.

Decision

To note the New Geology Leaflet for Pentland Rocks.

8. Friends of Pentlands – Update on Recent Activities - Presentation

Mike White explained that John Stirling was unable to attend the meeting. He referred to the Friends of Pentlands leaflet and planned activities for 2014, indicating that the Friends were trying to cover the entire area of the Pentlands. They were hoping to develop the network of paths into a “Pentlands Way” and had adopted certain paths. Details were provided of vegetation, access events, the promotion of educational activity, annual path surveys and of a training program for volunteers.

Phil Rowsley reported on the work being done by the Friends in disposing of rubbish, the prevention of fly-tipping and the work of volunteers. He explained that there was a national debate on litter, with a pledge to “clean up” Scotland.

Discussion took place about the increasing amount of litter which was being picked up by volunteers, possible ways to improve the situation, the increasing number of campsites and anti-social behaviour. It was concluded that the Friends had made a significant improvement to the Pentlands.

Decision

- 1) To thank the Friends of Pentlands for their assistance.
- 2) The Natural Heritage Service to progress a scheme to help farmers with disposal of rubbish.

8. Members Updates

Members gave updates as follows-

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- 8.1 Scottish Natural Heritage – Janice Winning indicated that there was an initiative to reduce carbon emissions, for which funding was available from the Green Stimulus Restoration Fund. She would send a link to Committee Services to be circulated with the minutes. Noted.
- 8.2 Edinburgh South Orienteering Club indicated that they were looking for a replacement member. Noted.
- 8.3 NFU Scotland - Bob Barr raised the issue of crime in the countryside and asked members to report this, when it occurred. It was explained that the Council was trying to cut down on anti-social behaviour. Noted.

9. Any Other Business

9.1 Maiden's Cleugh

Alan McGregor gave details on work carried out by a nearby landowner at Maiden's Cleugh. This had improved the road for land management, however, there had been some complaints from recreational users about the state of the path, which was used by walkers. The Heritage Park Service had engaged with the landowner and some survey work was being carried out, which it is hoped would improve the situation.

It was explained that the path was used extensively by walkers and required funding. Hill tracks were permissible under permitted development, however, it was necessary to work together to attain a positive outcome.

Decision

To note the position.

9. Dates for Future Meetings

Dates for future meetings were as follows –

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Joint Committee