

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE GREAT NOTLEY COUNTRY PARK
JOINT VENTURE BOARD HELD AT THE DISCOVERY CENTRE, GREAT
NOTLEY ON 23 January 2015**

Present:

Councillors:

Roger Hirst	- Essex County Council (ECC)
Simon Walsh	- Essex County Council (ECC)
Tom Cunningham (in Substitution for Graham Butland)	- Braintree District Council (BDC)
Mrs Wendy Schmitt	- Braintree District Council (BDC)

Officers in attendance:

Steve Bunn	- ECC/Northern Area Manager, Country Parks
Anna Lambert	Head of Delivery Transition ECC
Tim Dixon	- ECC/Head of Country Parks
Paul Partridge	- Braintree District Council/Head of Operations
Nick Day	- Braintree District Council/Parks and Open Spaces Manager
Andy Wright	Braintree District Council/Corporate Director
Lisa Siggins	- Committee Officer (ECC)
Judith Dignum	Committee Services Manager (ECC)

1. Apologies and Substitution Notices

Councillor Butland sent his apologies and Councillor Cunningham attended as his substitute.

2. Appointment of Chairman for this municipal year

The Committee Officer invited nominations for Chairman of the Board. Councillor Walsh proposed Councillor Hirst as Chairman and this nomination was seconded by Councillor Schmitt. There were no other nominations and Councillor Hirst was duly elected as Chairman for this municipal year.

3. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 12 March 2014 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

4. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made.

5. Site operational report, including a financial report by Steve Bunn, Head Ranger

The Board received and noted the site report (GTP/01/15) from Steve Bunn, Head Ranger Great Notley Country Park.

Tim Dixon, Head of Country Parks, introduced the report to the Board and advised that copies of the Financial Report would be handed to them at the end of the presentation of the Site Operational Report.

Activities

A variety of events took place over the summer at Great Notley Country Park including, the Greyhound Show and parking for the Tour De France. "Park Run" started over the summer months and has proved to be very successful. On average around 100 runners per week used the Park. The park also hosted a New Year's Eve Marathon which started at the Bird of freedom and incorporated the Flitch Way. The site is becoming very popular with green gym type exercise, such as Boot Camps with three different Boot Camp groups using the site.

Café

A new catering operator (Essex Outdoors Team) is now in place on a trial basis, with the previous operator having left on 4 Jan 2015. So far the the café has received very good feedback and the new arrangement may become a permanent one after the trial period has ended.

Maintenance

Work on the play equipment safety surfaces was completed ready for the summer holidays. The new safety surface, Tiger Bark is a cost effective solution due to its durability and low maintenance requirements, representing a good investment for long term management. There is commitment to the regrading and resurfacing of the existing surfaces and continuing drainage works around the site totalling up to £10,000.

The frontage of the Discovery Centre has been resurfaced ready for the summer period and this has been well received by visitors. Further to the new frontage, additional ground works around the Discovery Centre were completed, as new gabions were constructed and installed by the rangers.

The annual play inspection took place with the inspector being impressed with the improvements that have made around the play trail and to the individual items of play equipment. However, as the play equipment is now six years old and parts are starting to need to be replaced. The likely cost of the remedial work will be in the region of £10,000 -£20,000, which will be taken forward by Easter subject to part availability.

Works continue with the sewage management project at the Park, which will total around £250,000 in 2015/16.

Staff

Following the departure of one of the rangers a new ranger has been appointed and will commence employment at the end of January.

Financial Report

Tim Dixon handed copies of the Financial Report to the Board and gave an explanation of the contents therein including the relevant contributions from ECC and Braintree District Council.

A discussion took place regarding the Bridle Ways with a Member commenting on the poor state of repair of the pathways as a result of damage by horses. It was confirmed that the Bridle Ways were being looked at with a view to introducing a “loop system” following the success of one at South Weald Country Park. A meeting had taken place with the local stables to address the issue. Various options for addressing this problem were discussed but no firm time frames could be confirmed at the present time.

6. Sports Update

The Board received and noted report (GTP/02/15) providing an update on the Artificial Grass Pitch (AGP) and Multi Use Games Area (MUGA) at Great Notley Country Park. Paul Partridge, Head of Operations, BDC and Nick Day, Parks and Open Spaces Manager, BDC were in attendance for this item.

Progress

Over the past year a total of 42 different football teams representing 19 different sports organisations have used the facility on a regular basis. This equates to over 900 players regularly using the facility through their football club, with an additional 451 hours of casual bookings being made by individual players over the last 12 months.

Budget Update

Income received during the 8-month period from April 2014 – November 2014 was £28k compared to £22.4k for the same period in the previous year, representing an increase of just over 24%.

Total annual income for 2014-15 is projected to be around £45k, with the full year's operating costs also expected to come in around the £45k mark. The facility is therefore expected to reach the break-even point for the first time since its first full year of operation in 2010/11.

Future/Ongoing Development

Various areas of development were outlined to the Board, which included the continued involvement of Braintree Town FC and securing support of The Football Conference Community Trust.

Conclusion

Excellent progress has continued to be made over the past 8 months. In addition to increased use of the off-peak sessions by local clubs and community groups, Gt. Notley Football Club (which is the single largest user) has continued to take a more pro-active

role in our monthly management meetings and has committed resources to help develop and deliver the Football Development Plan.

Looking ahead over the longer term, there is confidence that the partnership with BTFC will result in greater promotion and increased use of the facility which will contribute towards the future vision and aspirations for the development and management of the Country Park as a major visitor attraction in the Braintree District and County of Essex over the next 5 to 10 years.

The Board expressed their pleasure in the progress that has been made and offered their thanks to the officers involved.

7. Joint report on: Developing Great Notley Country Park further as a 'Destination Park'

The Board received (GTP/03/15) from Paul Partridge, Head of Operations Braintree District Council and Tim Dixon, Head of Country Parks Essex County Council.

Car parking capacity and proposed charges

All of the income generated from car parking goes directly towards offsetting the costs staff and operating the parks.

Car parking is being reviewed in Essex Country Parks with the aim of offering even better value and greater convenience and flexibility for visitors. It is therefore proposed that the current flat rate charge and reduced flat rate winter charge be replaced with variable charging models based on the length of stay.

Alongside the new charging tariff it is proposed to introduce a pay on foot/exit operating system. Payment will be collected through cash, credit/debit card and contactless as well as remote payment over mobile phone. The cost of installation will be fully funded by ECC.

Current capacity is 200/250 hard standing and 400 overflow car parking spaces. The maximum number of cars parking at the park on any day this year has reached two thirds of the capacity available, including the overflow. There is a further overflow area capable of holding another 200 cars in an adjacent field, should it be required.

A discussion followed which included the timing of the review and public consultation. It was confirmed that posters would be clearly displayed within the park giving full details of the proposals. It was confirmed that Communications Teams at ECC and Braintree District Council would liaise on this matter.

Sky Trail Course

Building on the existing successful Joint Venture Partnership with BDC, ECC is seeking to invest circa £390k (Capital) in a 'pay to use' new adventure activity installation. This will deliver additional annual net revenue of over £250,000. It will enable the Partnership to move the park towards being cost neutral, whilst improving customers' experience of the recreational and play value the park has to offer

In order to build the new facility it is proposed that BDC agrees a new land lease for the proposed location, car parking and access, incorporating the existing café in the Discovery Centre. This would be for a ground rent of £15k from 2015/16 and increasing to £30k in 2016/17, which equates to around a 50% reduction in BDC's current revenue contribution of £65k p.a. to ECC by April 2016 over two years.

Tim Dixon handed detailed pictures of the proposed course to the Board and outlined how the system would operate.

As discussion followed which included:

- Security of the course and the various options available.
- The timing of the opening of the course and the car parking issues involved.
- The proposed opening times of the course 10am- 5pm.

Solar Panels

BDC is seeking funding as part of its 2015/16 capital programme to remove the existing faulty solar thermal panels and replace them with an 18kW 72 panel solar photovoltaic array on the south facing roof elevation of the Discovery Centre, which will generate 17,000kWh/yr. The green electricity generated will be consumed on site. The cost of the system is £30k and offers a 7-8 year payback on the investment.

Replacement Wind Turbine

In addition, it is proposed to remove the faulty 6kW turbine and replace it with a 20kW turbine on a 20m mast in the same location. This would generate an estimated 45,000kWh/yr. The original 6kW Proven wind turbine has not been in operation for at least 2 years and to repair the turbine would not be cost effective.

The cost of the system is £76,000 which should be recouped within 7-8 years. Both these projects are being led by BDC and funding is included in the 2015/16 budget.

The Partnership Board **Agreed to:**

1. Approve that the proposed parking tariff outlined within the report goes out to consultation, and it would be discussed with the Partnership at a later date;
2. Confirm that Essex County Council and Braintree District Council may proceed with the land lease and the construction of the Sky Trail & Little Tykes courses (funded by ECC),; and
3. To the installation of PV Panels on the roof of the Discovery Centre and the replacement of the Wind Turbine at the Country Park as outlined within the report.

8. Joint report on Joint Partnership and long-term vision for Great Notley Country Park

The Board received report (GTP/04/15) from Paul Partridge, Head of Operations Braintree District Council and Tim Dixon, Head of Country Parks, Essex County Council on developing a new joint vision for the site.

It was explained that the current partnership between Braintree District Council and Essex County Council for the management and operation of the GNCP was established back in 2008. Over the past 6 years, the Partnership has seen the park transform into an important visitor attraction in the Braintree District.

A discussion took place regarding the need for a strategic review of the Park and the Board stressed the importance of Joint Partnership and the need for communication between ECC and Braintree District Council.

Before any decisions are made on commissioning an external review, the Board requested that Officers from both authorities to pull together all the information and ideas they currently have. A summary report is then to be brought back to the June Board meeting outlining the officer findings, as well as identifying any gaps in information and solutions for filling those gaps. It was stressed that this piece of work needed to take account of the potential growth for the District and surrounding area as the Local Plan is developed'

9 Stakeholder Feedback

The North Essex Astronomical Society regularly meet at the Country Park has a "wish list" and it was agreed that this would be looked at by officers with a view to offering assistance where possible.

10. Date of Next Meeting

The Board agreed the following future meeting dates for 2015:

Thursday 12 March
Thursday 18 June
Thursday 17 September
Thursday 10 December

All meetings to begin at 2pm

11 Urgent Business

With the agreement of the Chairman two further issues were discussed:

Councillor Schmitt brought the Board's attention the existence of the Wilderness Foundation, who are located 2 miles from Great Notley Country Park in Chatham Green. The Foundation provides personalised development programmes for young people who are finding it difficult to engage in mainstream education and it was felt that Great Notley CP would be an ideal environment to assist in their programme. They will shortly be hosting a Breakfast event and it was agreed that a representative from ECC would try to attend.

Tim Dixon advised that there had been a very successful "take over day" involving Great Notley Primary School in 2014.

The meeting closed at 4.20pm.

Chairman