

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE GREAT NOTLEY COUNTRY PARK
JOINT VENTURE BOARD HELD AT THE DISCOVERY CENTRE, GREAT
NOTLEY ON 29 April 2015**

Present:

Councillors:

Roger Hirst	- Essex County Council (ECC)
Simon Walsh	- Essex County Council (ECC)
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	ECC/Head of Delivery Transition
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
Alan Massow	- Braintree District Council/Senior Planning Policy Officer
Lisa Siggins	- Committee Officer (ECC)

1. Apologies and Substitution Notices

There were no apologies reported.

2. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made.

3. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 23 January 2015 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

With regards to Minute 9, Tim Dixon advised that North Essex Astronomical Society had submitted their "wish list" which did not present any difficulties. Their last meeting occurred recently and their relationship with the Great Notley Country Park was ongoing.

With regards to Minute 9 concerning the Wilderness Foundation, Tim Dixon advised that a visit had been arranged but unfortunately the location could not be found. He confirmed that he will liaise with the Foundation regarding a new visit in the near future.

4. Site Activity and Project Report

The Board received and noted the site and activity report (GTP/05/15) from Tim Dixon, Head of Country Parks, ECC and Nick Day, Parks and Open Spaces Manager, Braintree District Council.

Infrastructure Update

There have been some major resurfacing works taking place within the country park in the first section of the year, totalling an investment of over £60,000. A number of footpaths have been resurfaced around the country park to improve access during the wetter months.

ECC will be investing a further £250,000 into improving the sewage system at the park in 2015/16. Work towards this is in progress, with the aim to commence on site in late June to complete works by mid-September, subject to a successful tender process

Sports Facilities Update

The sports facilities at the Country Park (the AGP and MUGA) continue to be well used with the total number of bookings received during the 1st quarter of 2015 – January to April – amounting to 735 hours of activity resulting in income of £16,178 being received during this period.

If this level of income is maintained throughout the coming year the annual income figure would be over £64k which compares well with the projected figure of £45k of total annual income for 2014-15 reported at the last meeting in January 2015.

In addition to the regular football sessions a Soccability Festival for disabled children was held at the AGP on 26th March, this was a joint venture with the Essex section of the FA which saw about 50 children turning up all with varying disabilities and having a very good day of fun and physical activity. The next one is planned for 14th May when a similar or even larger turn out of young people is hoped for. There was also a Soccer Camp held in February in aid of the Farleigh Hospice.

Staff Changes

Jenny Russell, the new ranger, started in early February replacing Duncan Fisher's role. Jenny has been settling in well and is keen to work a busy summer season at the park.

Equipment Updates

A bid for a new tractor and flail has been accepted and a new on-site utility vehicle has been purchased. These vehicles will be essential for the maintenance of the country park and the Flitch Way.

Activities

The Friends of the Flitch Way volunteers have completed clearance work along the Felsted to Little Dunmow section of the Flitch. This clearance work benefits visitors and wildlife alike.

The Country Park saw a number of 10k and 5k races and school cross country runs at the start of the year. Park Run organisers are looking to set up a junior park run on the site, this will be a completely separate event from the adult's park run.

Project Update

Following the consultation around new car parking charges, works for the new car parking equipment to enable payment on exit is planned to commence 11 May to be in place for use on 1 June, subject to approval by the Joint Venture Partnership Board.

The High Ropes project is progressing well, with the structure in the process of being built off site. Installation of the structure is on track to be in place by the end of June. A slight variation to the planning permission was required and has been submitted and stakeholders have been notified. This will not affect the delivery of the project.

Work on the lease for the Country Park is nearing completion; aiming for signature at the beginning of May. The course is scheduled to be open to the Public at the beginning of July, with recruitment of staff to run the course about to commence.

In addition to a unit for equipping and preparing users of the course, the old cycle hire room will be renovated to create a new reception and refreshment space for the High Ropes course.

A discussion followed which included:

- The Board pointed out that there was lots of “good news” and that this should be shared with both Great Notley and Rayne Parish Councils.
It was **Agreed** that Tim Dixon would liaise with the press offices at ECC and Braintree DC to arrange for this to be done.
- Clarification regarding the bridle ways was provided with confirmation given that this is hoped that the situation will be resolved by the end of the year.
- Various options for publicity for the High Ropes Course were discussed.

5. Car Parking Charges Consultation

The Board received and noted report (GTP/0/15) from Tim Dixon, Head of Country Parks, Essex County Council

Mr Dixon explained that car parking has been reviewed in Essex Country Parks to provide convenience and flexibility for visitors. Variable charging models, based on the length of stay, have been proposed to benefit short stay visitors and create a fairer system for all users.

Essex Country Parks introduced variable charging across all the parks (except Great Notley and Hadleigh Farm and Country Park Olympic Mountain Bike Venue) in early March 2015. This replaced the previous flat rate charge at the parks and removed the reduced flat rate winter charge that applied to Thorndon and Great Notley to reflect the shorter time visitors stay. There has been very little impact on the ground since the new charges have been implemented with positive feedback relating to the short term charges.

Mr Dixon advised that part of the Pay on Exit solution will include a 15 minute drop off period which will be available free of charge. After 15 minutes car park tariffs will apply. For those who visit the park regularly, it is not proposed to increase the charges for car parking season tickets for local residents to reduce the impact of change for customers.

A period of consultation from 2nd February to 16th March 2015 has been completed. The aim of the consultation was to inform visitors of the proposed charging model and gain their views on the proposed charging bands. Posters were displayed within Great Notley Country Park inviting visitors to e-mail or write their views on the proposals from early February with the 6 week consultation finishing on 16th March. Key stakeholders were contacted individually.

In addition, details on the consultation were provided on the Country Parks website <http://www.visitparks.co.uk/>, Twitter, Facebook and on the ECC intranet.

The Board's attention was drawn to the summary of responses contained in the Appendix to the Report.

It was noted that there was a low response received and that there had been very little negative impact following the price increases already implemented in the other ECC run Country Parks.

The Board **Agreed** to the car parking charges being adopted at Great Notley Country Park with the installation of the new charge parking equipment that will enable visitors to pay on exit on 1 June 2015, with the impact to be reviewed by the Board in six months.

6. Presentation on the Local Plan

The Board received a PowerPoint Presentation from Alan Massow, Senior Planning Policy Officer Braintree District Council.

Paul Partridge, Head of Operations Braintree District Council introduced the presentation explaining that there would a forthcoming period of growth in the Braintree District within the next 10 years and how Great Notley Country Park may need to adapt in order to support this.

The presentation covered

- A description of the Local Plan
- The period covered by the plan 2017-2033
- Details of the new dwellings that were planned
- The Local Plan Process
- Ethos are the consultants employed by Braintree District Council working on the open space element of the Plan
- Next steps/timetable.

A discussion followed and the Board **Agreed that**

- Local Plan consultants Ethos are approached to explore how they could contribute to the longer term strategy for Great Notley Country Park.
- A sub commission of this piece of work is undertaken to conduct a survey of park users with a view to gaining a better understanding of them.

10. Date of Next Meeting

It was **Agreed** that the next meeting of the Board would be arranged for 27 July 2015 at 2 pm. It was however noted that this could be subject to change following the forthcoming local elections at Braintree District Council.

11 Urgent Business

With the agreement of the Chairman Councillor Schmitt expressed her thanks to all the officers who have been involved with the Country Park and this was echoed by the remainder of the Board.

The meeting closed at 11.15 am.

Chairman