

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE GREAT NOTLEY COUNTRY PARK
JOINT VENTURE BOARD HELD AT THE VISITOR CENTRE GREAT NOTLEY
COUNTRY PARK ON 18 JULY 2012**

Attendance:

Councillors:

Jeremy Lucas	- Essex County Council (ECC)
Graham Butland	- Braintree District Council
Mrs Wendy Schmitt	- Braintree District Council

Officers in attendance:

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,
Sophie Champion	- Committee Officer (ECC)

1. Apologies and Substitution Notices

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Simon Walsh, ECC.

2. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 11 January 2012 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

3. Declarations of Interest

Councillor G Butland declared a personal interest in item 5 as a Member of Great Notley Parish Council who contributed to funding the Artificial Grass Pitch and Multi-use Games Area.

4. Site Report from the Senior Ranger Great Notley Country Park

The Board received the site report January to June 2012 (GTP/03/12) from Steve Bunn, Senior Ranger Great Notley Country Park. The Board discussed various aspects of the report.

Visitor numbers

Steve Bunn advised the Board that 2011/12 had been a good year with visitor numbers totalling 126,448. This figure was worked out using the car park numbers multiplied by 2.7, however it was believed that the true figure was likely to be much higher. The figures for this year would be worked out in the same way for continuity.

Staff

The staffing was up to six full time members of staff. The business case showed the funding for these posts and the net budget had remained the same. One member of staff from Braintree District Council had retired.

Staff training with the tractor and trailer had also taken place to help with the management of parks.

Events and User Groups

The Board was informed about the events taking place at the Country Park, including the evening events run by The North Essex Astronomy Group.

Services

The conference room bookings had been declining in the last few years and the staff were looking at how this service could be promoted to the private sector. Some of the options included making local businesses aware of the facilities and exploring options such as mum and toddler groups, crèche and fitness groups. Members discussed these options and the advantages of events such as Puddleducks which increase the awareness of the park for young families.

It was also noted that the Park will be receiving two mobility scooters in the near future for use free of charge around the Park.

In response to a question regarding the success of the cycle hire, it was reported that it was available once a week on a week day and at weekends and school holidays, provided by an external organisation. It had been quite quiet this year. However there were organised health rides and last year had been a good year.

Maintenance

The Board was updated on the maintenance which had been undertaken around the Park including three new bridges, fishing platforms and tree surgery.

The maintenance of the play equipment had been brought back in house.

Volunteers

There had been a Duke of Edinburgh volunteer working towards his bronze award, three work experience students from local schools and 37 volunteer days with the Friends of the Flitch Way.

Green Flag

The Park had achieved Green Flag status for the fourth year in a row.

Issues

Two car park machines were stolen at the beginning of the year. New machines with a new system of entering a registration number had been installed.

At the beginning of the year snow had caused access issues resulting in cars parked along the carriageway. The staff had contacted the Police and been told they could put tickets on those cars, however there were issues of staff safety.

The number of visitors was substantially less this year with 23,000 last April and 5,400 this April. The visitor numbers were roughly down by a third. It was hoped that the number of visitors would increase during the school holidays particularly if the weather improved.

A Member asked if there were continuing problems with the horse riders using the Park. In response it was explained that they had been told to keep to the bridleway but they continue to divert from it and during wet weather the damage was particularly bad.

5. Artificial Grass Pitch and Multi-Use Games Area

The Board received report GTP/04/12 presented by Nick Day updating Members on the progress and performance with the Artificial Grass Pitch (AGP) and Multi Use Games Area (MUGA) from 1 September 2011 to 30 June 2012 under the management and operation of Braintree District Council (BDC).

NACRO (National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders) had been engaged to help deliver the objectives of the Sports Development Plan and in addition undertook to engage members of the community to participate in sports activities at the AGP and MUGA.

The Service Level Agreement expired on 30 March 2012 and had been extended for a further 12 months funded by BDC. The report set out the progress to date.

Paul Partridge informed Members that since the report had been written NACRO had notified BDC that the organisation was withdrawing from their work on the Braintree Community Sports Development Braintree District as it been running at a financial loss. A meeting had been requested with NACRO to discuss the future. In response to questions it was explained that the NACRO rely heavily on grants which haven't met the costs. It was suggested by Members that there may be other organisations doing similar work which could be looked at for the future.

Braintree District Council had also worked on raising the profile and public awareness of the facilities, with achievements to date set out in the report. A small grant had also been applied for from the Football Foundation to support other marketing activities.

Income had increased and profiling suggested that by year end it would have risen to £40K with full year operating costs of £50K leaving a £10K short fall which would be absorbed by BDC within existing budget. It was explained that due to the location of the facilities and travel times for schools who could use the facilities meant that increasing usage and income was challenging. The aim was to target local businesses for off-peak periods.

Great Notley Football Club was still the biggest single user, however their participation in the partnership continued to diminish and the Council was not getting sustainable support to take options forward. The Council was persevering with discussions but if that failed would be looking for another partner.

Councillor Butland as a Parish Councillor suggested that there may be opportunities for the Parish Council to assist with taking this forward.

Overall there had been good progress and there was a need for partners to commit on-going resources and time to deliver the objectives of the Football Development Plan. BDC also planned to consider whether there was any merit in having a joined up approach with Fusion, BDC's new leisure operator.

6. Stakeholder Feedback

The Board was informed that the Flitch Way Liaison Group was still meeting and no issues had been raised at the last meeting.

Tim Dixon advised the Board that the catering contractor at the park had given 6 months notice, so there would be a leasing/concession opportunity for the future. There were some interested parties and the team was currently looking at how this could be done in the future.

7. Other Issues

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

- **Great Notley Scout Group**

Paul Partridge advised the Board that BDC had been approached by Great Notley Scout Group to find land for a permanent home/facility. The land at the back of the AGP which had originally been ear-marked for allotments had been suggested. This would be subject to planning permission from BDC as the landowner. Currently a feasibility study was being put together followed by a business case for a building and small car park with access from the industrial estate. The plan would be to lease the land to the Group and they would manage and provide their own facility. Whilst this would not be income for the Council it would be advantageous to the Park, potentially increasing the use of the facilities and provide the Scout Group with a permanent home.

- **Future expansion of the Park**

Steve Bunn suggested that going forward options for expanding the Park needed to be considered.

- **School Holiday discounts**

There was a proposal to offer 50% discounts for use of the AGP and MUGA during off-peak times 9am-4pm during the school holidays to increase income. The Chairman suggested that this be considered for other groups.

8. Date of Next Meeting

It was **Agreed** that the next meeting of the Board would take place on Wednesday 9 January 2012 at 2.00pm at the Visitor Centre, Great Notley Country Park.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 3.55pm.

Chairman