

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE GREAT NOTLEY COUNTRY PARK JOINT
VENTURE PARTNERSHIP BOARD, DISCOVERY CENTRE, GREAT NOTLEY,
WEDNESDAY 20 JULY 2016 AT 10.00AM**

Present

Councillors:

S Walsh (Chairman)
G Butland
W Schmitt

Essex County Council
Braintree District Council
Braintree District Council

The following Officers were present in support of the meeting:

Tim Dixon	Head of Country Parks, Essex County Council
Nick Day	Parks and Open Spaces Manager, Braintree District Council
Paul Frainer	Natural Environment Manger, Essex County Council
Jennie Duffy	Area Manager, Country Parks, Essex County Council
Sophie Campion	Committee Officer

1. Appointment of Chairman

The Committee Officer opened the meeting and invited nominations for Chairman of the Board. Councillor Butland proposed Councillor Simon Walsh as Chairman. This proposal was seconded by Councillor Schmitt. There being no other proposals Councillor Walsh was duly elected as Chairman.

2. Appointment of Vice-Chairman

The Chairman invited nominations for a Vice-Chairman of the Board. Councillor Butland proposed Councillor Wendy Schmitt as Vice-Chairman. This proposal was seconded by Councillor Walsh. There being no other proposals Councillor Schmitt was duly elected as Vice-Chairman.

3. Apologies and Substitution Notices

The Committee Officer reported apologies for absence from Councillor Kay Twitchen, Paul Partridge, Head of Operations, Braintree District Council and Andy Wright, Corporate Director, Braintree District Council.

The Board wished to pass on its thanks to the Committee Officers who had been supporting the Board on an interim basis over the past few meetings.

4. Declarations of Interest

The Chairman declared a personal interest as a Member from the Uttlesford Division under item 8 – Strategic Park Review.

5. Minutes

The draft minutes of the meeting held on 3 February 2016 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

6. Country Park Site Report

The Committee considered the Site Report (GTP/05/16) presented by Tim Dixon, Head of Country Parks, Essex County Council.

Staffing

The Board was advised that the senior site ranger was currently on maternity leave and a ranger to cover this period had been appointed and was due to commence in the next two weeks. The Board wished to pass on its congratulations and best wishes to Claire Bunn the senior site ranger on the birth of her baby.

Changing Places Facility

This new facility comprising of a disabled toilet and changing area complete with hoists is now complete and Members were offered an opportunity to view the facility after the meeting. The official opening was due to take place at the end of July.

Discovery Cafe

The Café opened in April and had received good feedback so far.

Car Parking

A software update had been installed and this had improved the system. Future upgrades were likely to include contactless or pay by phone options.

Maintenance

- Some hedge laying had taken place and more was due to take place later in the year.
- Replacement of some bridges around the park had taken place.
- Most signs around the park had now been repainted.
- Volunteers were helping to clear and replace two fishing swims.
- The play equipment maintenance had been completed in time for the summer holidays.

Green Flag

The Park had been entered for a Green Flag award after a period of not entering due to the cost involved. Following a question from the Chairman it was confirmed that the cost was £350 plus the time and effort of the staff at the Park to prepare for it.

[Post Meeting Note: It was confirmed after the meeting that Great Notley Country Park had received Green Flag status and the Members wished to pass on their congratulations to the team on achieving this]

Budget Costs

Last year the budget had been subsidising the revenue cost for Sky Ropes. Within the controllable budget there was comfortably a net zero cost, despite a

reducing contribution from Braintree District Council and maternity cover of the ranger post.

Potential Investment

- £175k for footpath maintenance from capital money for all Essex County Council Country Parks
- £50k to refresh the play trail

The Head of Country Parks requested support from the Board to pursue these options. Following a question regarding the capital fund programme, it was confirmed that this could be managed as a service.

It was **Agreed** that the Board supported pursuing the options listed above for potential investment at the Park.

Ariel Runway

Subject to the 5 year Strategy Plan there was potential to consider the option of an ariel runway at the Park. The cost of this would be around £100k with the potential of £20k a year payback. This idea had been flagged up on the capital programme as it was an obvious next step at the Park following trends and due to Sky Ropes there was the on-site expertise to manage it. The equipment would complement the existing equipment offer at the Park and would be physically the longest ariel runway in the region. However the viability, cost and demand for the equipment would need to be looked at and it would be subject to planning permission. The staff to operate it, the booking system and marketing were already in place due to the current offer at the Park. A business case for feasibility could start to be looked at ahead of the 5 year plan.

Members raised the issue of the current landscape where the ariel runway would go, which included the Bird of Freedom at the top of the hill. It was suggested that this would need to be carefully looked at so the tower for the ariel runway would not obstruct the bird feature. Members considered that the option of an ariel runway was worth investigating and would welcome further information on the viability of the facility to tie in with the 5 year strategy.

It was **Agreed** that the Board welcomed investigation into the feasibility of an ariel runway at the Park.

Councillor Schmitt wished to feedback on a member of the team, Jenny, who had collected saplings for the Park from her on two occasions, had worked really hard and was an asset to the Park. Having been advised that Jenny was currently on sick leave, the Board wished to pass on their best wishes to her.

7. All Weather Football Pitches

The Board received a report (GTP/06/16) and update on the Artificial Grass Pitch (AGP) and Multi Use Games Area (MUGA) from Nick Day, Parks and Open Spaces Manager, Braintree District Council.

There have been 19 sports organisations booking the facilities on a regular basis over the past 6 months. The income received for the year 2015/16 was £43k which was almost a break even position.

Due to the grant funding provided by the Football Foundation in 2009, Braintree District Council was required to fill in an annual Monitoring and Evaluation survey with detailed data by the end of July. This report would be brought to the next meeting of the Board for information.

Braintree District Council has continued to work with Braintree Town Football Academy (BTFA) in providing free coaching for children working towards BTEC Level 3 qualifications in Sports Management, organising Soccability festivals each year aimed at young people from local schools with disabilities and also soccer camps in the school holidays.

For the future it was explained that as the facility is not full size there are some limitations on future development. However having liaised with the Football Association, whilst a full size facility would not be supported at this site, it may be supported on another site in the Braintree area.

In response to Members' questions the following points were made:

- The Monitoring and Evaluation from the Football Foundation would continue for up to 25 years and within the Terms of Deed the facility could be reclaimed if the criteria are not met. However the Council has a good working relationship with the Football Foundation with interaction and feedback and the facility is well used and profitable.
- Concern was raised that if a full size facility were to be sited somewhere else in the District could it affect the usage at Great Notley, but it was considered that whilst this may be the case there was hidden demand around the area.
- With regard to capacity it was reported that the facility was used 90% during peak periods and around 35-40% during off-peak times. The school holidays were fairly well booked out and there needed to be some down time to carry out maintenance of the facility but there was capacity during off-peak times. The BTFA were concentrating on promoting these times.

The Board noted the report.

8. Update on Great Notley Country Park Strategic Review

The Board received a report (GTP/07/16) and update from Paul Frainer, Natural Environment Manager, ECC on the Great Notley Country Park Strategic Review.

It was explained that the purpose of the review was to look at baseline data to produce a strategy vision for the next 15 years. This would take into account new development in the area and planning for the future.

A steering group had been established between Essex County Council, Place Services and Braintree District Council who had held their first meeting in July.

The work streams forming the basis of the project were:

- Physical Constraints
- Stakeholder Analysis
- Market Information
- Operational Analysis

- Finances
- Options

Collation of data would commence over the autumn once the strategy for stakeholder engagement has been agreed by the respective marketing leads from both BDC and ECC Country Parks. A Member Briefing was then planned for September. The options would then be considered based on the information collected.

During the discussion the following points were raised:

- The Chairman requested that for Member engagement in September a date be set as soon as possible.
- Members welcomed this review and were keen to see the Country Park promoted as part of a wider offer of leisure facilities in the area. A query was raised regarding options for linking promotion and advertising with other facilities such as the Racecourse at Great Leighs and Braintree Freeport. In response it was advised that there had been some promotion already relating to the Sky Ropes course and it was noted that with new development in the area this was a good time to be proactive with promotion of these facilities.
- The Chairman also asked how bordering Districts such as Uttlesford were being engaged in the project. It was confirmed that from a planning perspective there was cross boundary engagement and it was also acknowledged that there were facilities such as Hatfield Forest in Uttlesford to consider as part of the offer in the wider area.

The Board noted the update and wished the officers well in taking the review forward.

9. Update on Proposal for Car Parking Improvements

The Board received a tabled report (GTP/08/16) and update from Nick Day, Parks and Open Spaces Manager, Braintree District Council on car parking improvements.

A local business, Tamdown Engineering Group, close to the Country Park had been considering the need to relocate due to a lack of parking. However as a way forward the business had offered to fund a re-design of the public car park at the country park and provide an additional 100 spaces. In return for this investment their staff would be permitted to use the car park free of charge.

Planning permission had been granted for a reduced number of 70 parking spaces.

A meeting had been held on 17 June between Essex County Council, Braintree District Council and Tamdown to agree actions for the way forward. Tamdown would be providing method statements for the landscaping works, construction plans and a programme of works. A legal agreement was to be drawn up between Tamdown and the two Councils.

Both Councils were keen to ensure that the needs of the Country Park are not compromised, but it was considered that the improvements would have no overall detrimental effect and would be beneficial for visitors and increase usage of the facility.

The following points were made during the discussion:

- It was confirmed that the decrease to 70 parking spaces was acceptable.
- It was reported that the work was likely to commence in September, following the completed method statements being submitted, and only take a few weeks to complete. The process would be strictly monitored and the Country Park would not take on any risk associated with the project. A quality finished product was expected.
- It was confirmed that the parking spaces used by the staff of Tamdown would be for their cars and not any large company trucks.
- It was clarified that the extra spaces would be for the full use of the Country Park visitors at weekends and there would be no specific reserved spaces during the working week.

The Board noted the report.

10. **Date of Next Meeting**

The Board **agreed** that the next meeting be held in early December 2016 to consider the outcomes from the Strategic Park Review. The Committee Officer would schedule a date in consultation with the Members.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 11am.

Chairman