

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE GREAT NOTLEY COUNTRY PARK JOINT VENTURE BOARD HELD AT THE VISITOR CENTRE GREAT NOTLEY COUNTRY PARK ON 11 JANUARY 2012

Membership:

Councillors:

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

Named Substitutes:

- | | |
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| TBC | - Essex County Council |
| Robert Mitchell | - Braintree District Council |

Officers in attendance:

- | | |
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| * 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, |
| * Tim Shepherd | - External Communications (ECC) |
| * Sophie Campion | - Committee Officer (ECC) |
| * Judith Dignum | - Governance Team Manager (ECC) |

1. Apologies and Substitution Notices

There were none received.

2. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 28 July 2011 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

3. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest made.

4. Terms of Reference, Governance Arrangements and the Joint Working Agreement

The Board received report (GTP/01/12) from the Committee Officer outlining the proposed variations to the Governance Arrangements within the Joint Working Agreement which had been agreed at the previous meeting.

The Committee Officer advised the Board on how the changes to the Joint Working Agreement could be made as set out in Paragraph 17 of the Agreement which states that formal variations may be made by an agreement in writing signed by duly authorised representatives of both parties. Legal advice as to the appropriate signatories was being sought and the Committee Officer would advise on this once it had been received.

Resolved:

That the proposed variations as set out in the Appendix to report GTP/01/12 be accepted and the Joint Working Agreement amended to reflect these changes.

5. Annual Report from the Senior Ranger Great Notley Country Park

The Board received the annual report April 2011 – December 2011 (GTP/02/12) from Steve Bunn, Senior Ranger Great Notley Country Park. The Board discussed various aspects of the report.

Visitor numbers and Parking

Steve Bunn advised the Board that there had been some peaks in visitor numbers during the school holidays at Easter and in the summer, with one particularly busy day. Members asked what the process was for dealing with busy days when the car park was full. In response it was explained that the park gates would be closed and the Police informed due to any implications that the closure may have upon the highway. As such occurrences were likely to be infrequent further scenario planning was not being undertaken at this time. Members suggested that speaking to Essex Police in advance of peak times may be beneficial in planning for particularly busy days.

It was confirmed that staff assisted in finding spaces during peak times and the car park design assisted with the flow of traffic if people were looking for spaces. It was also suggested by Members that future development at the other end of the park may provide some extra capacity at peak times if required.

The Board discussed the parking arrangement with a business in the industrial area adjacent to the Park whereby some of their staff had purchased season tickets in order to use the car park from Monday to Friday. It was not currently possible to accommodate their visitor parking as season tickets were issued to a specific car for the purpose of managing the system effectively.

A Member asked whether the parking charges were likely to increase this year and in response it was reported that although they were reviewed annually they would usually be raised on a bi-annual basis.

Green Flag status

Members were pleased to note that the Park had successfully gained Green Flag status for the third year running. The team had also made an application for the current year 2012/13.

Use of the facilities by third parties

The Race for Life had been held at the Country Park last year but due to the number of races being cut would not be held there this year. There had been an issue with parking for the race due to the charges in place. The issue of charging for parking for future charity events was being discussed with a view to co-ordinating the approach taken across all the country parks.

There was also an issue currently with car parking charges when hiring the multi-use games area, in particular relating to the requirement to pay car parking charges on top of hiring charges especially for the home football team. Options for resolving this were being considered although certain difficulties were presented by the current parking system. It was agreed to consider a report on the issue of the multi-use games area at a future meeting of the Board in approximately six months time.

Working with Cressing Temple

The Board was advised that there was a close working relationship between the Park and Cressing Temple. The 'Cursed' event which had, in previous years, been held at the Country Park but had been subject to some vandalism had been held at Cressing Temple this year along with 'Spooky Fun' and a Christmas event and had proved very successful. In 2012 the events were being planned over an extended period due to the success.

North Essex Astronomy Group

The Board was advised that a partnership had been formed last year with the North Essex Astronomy Group holding a free public event on astronomy which had proved highly successful. This year a number of events were being planned. The aim was to improve marketing of these events to encourage even higher attendance as had been achieved at similar events held at Hadleigh Park.

Work was currently in hand to resolve issues caused by outside lights on buildings adjacent to the Country Park which had a negative impact on astronomy events.

Volunteer Groups

It was explained that the number of volunteers from Writtle College compared to the amount of conservation work required had proved challenging as less conservation work was done during the summer months. The work that had been achieved had been very successful.

Friends of Flitch Way (FOFW)

The Board was advised that regular meetings were held with the FOFW. The Group had recently obtained planning permission to site a railway carriage on the Flitch Way at Rayne Station.

Other Events

Members were advised that, although consideration had been given to hosting an event in connection with the Queen's Diamond Jubilee, this would not be progressed. Councillor Butland (as Chairman of Great Notley Parish Council) advised that an event was to be held in Great Notley village on Sunday 3 June as part of the national Big Jubilee Lunch.

Officers from the County Council and Braintree District Council were working together to look at improvements for the access and approach to the Visitor Centre and the outside seating area adjoining the café. This would be achieved through Section 106 funding. The Chairman clarified that as the County Council was very tight on funds available for capital expenditure for next year, the opportunity to carry out this work through developer funding was welcome.

6. Stakeholder Feedback

The Board was informed that various meetings were held with interested users and stakeholders and, following the disbanding of the Stakeholder Group, these meetings were being used to collect stakeholder views to feed into the Board.

7. Other Issues

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

- **All Weather Football Pitches** – Feedback would be reported on the football related objectives and actions at the next meeting.
- **Fishing Licences & Charging** – Currently fishing at the Country Park was free for all visitors. However in most other places and other Country Parks around Essex there was a charge made along with a closed season to give the fish stock a rest. There was a proposal for this to extend to Great Notley Country Park. The regular fishing community were mostly expecting that this would happen at some point and the Country Park was attracting additional people to fish because there was no charge. The introduction of a charge and a possible closed season would assist with more effective management of the facilities and would bring the Country Park in line with the other Country Parks within Essex. In preparation for this proposal the fishing platforms had been improved and options for encouraging families and local people to participate were being looked at including the potential for the Environment Agency to be invited to the Country Park.

Councillor Butland suggested that details of the proposal should be included in the April edition of the Great Notley parish newsletter.

8. Date of Next Meeting

It was **Agreed** that the next meeting of the Board would take place on Wednesday 18 July 2012 at 2.30pm at the Visitor Centre, Great Notley Country Park.

The meeting would be preceded at 2.00pm by a walk around the site for members of the Board.

9. Appointment of Chairman for the Municipal Year 2012-13

Councillor Butland moved a proposal for Councillor Jeremy Lucas to be appointed Chairman of the Board for the next municipal year 2012-13. This proposal was seconded by Councillor Mrs Schmitt and Councillor Lucas was duly appointed as Chairman for 2012-13.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 3.15pm.

Chairman