

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE GREAT NOTLEY COUNTRY PARK
JOINT VENTURE BOARD HELD AT THE VISITOR CENTRE GREAT NOTLEY
COUNTRY PARK ON 28 JULY 2011**

Membership:

Councillors:

- | | |
|---------------------|------------------------------|
| * 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:

- | | |
|-----------------|------------------------------|
| 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, |
| * Mark Wilson | - Braintree District Council |
| * Sophie Campion | - Committee Officer (ECC) |
| * Judith Dignum | - Governance Team Manager (ECC) |

Sophie Campion, Committee Officer, in the Chair

1. Membership

The Board agreed the membership as set out above.

2. Appointment of Chairman for this municipal year (2011/12)

The Committee Officer invited nominations for Chairman of the Board for this municipal year. Councillor Butland proposed Councillor Lucas and this nomination was seconded by Councillor Walsh. There being no further nominations, Councillor Lucas was duly appointed as Chairman for 2011/2012.

Councillor J R Lucas in the Chair

3. Apologies and Substitution Notices

The Committee Officer reported apologies from Councillor Robert Mitchell, named substitute from Braintree District Council (DC) and Nicola Beach, Corporate Director, Braintree DC

4. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 30 March 2010 were approved as a correct record by those present at the meeting and signed by the Chairman.

5. Declarations of Interest

Councillor G Butland declared a personal interest due to being Chairman of Great Notley Parish Council.

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

The Board received a briefing note (GTP/01/11) outlining the Terms of Reference for the Board and the governance arrangements as set out in the Joint Working Agreement. Judith Dignum, Governance Team Manager, introduced the report to Members advising that it was timely to look at the governance arrangements and check that they are still relevant to the working practices of the Board and reflective of other changes such as the disbanding of the Stakeholder Group.

Members were invited to consider the following issues:

- Meeting in public – Following discussion it was generally considered that meetings should be held in public unless there was sensitive information which could be dealt with either through a private pre-meeting or by going into Part 2 of the agenda to exclude the public. Pre-meetings were welcomed in future to be held directly before the formal public meeting.
- Frequency of meetings – Tim Dixon advised the Board that for various reasons a meeting of the Board had not been held for the last 16 months. There was provision for six monthly meetings within the Working Agreement and it was considered by the Board to be worthy of two meetings per year in June/July and January, with the provision for extraordinary meetings to be called where appropriate.
- Quorum – Judith Dignum advised the Board that currently the quorum for each meeting was for both representatives from both Authorities to be present which had produced difficulties in the past. It was suggested that this be amended to one Member from each Authority which was agreed.
- Chairman – It was suggested that a Chairman be nominated for each municipal year. Members were also asked if they wished to give the Chairman a casting vote, however it was noted that the original principle of the Agreement was for the partnership to agree on all matters and it was agreed that this should remain the principle going forward.

It was agreed that:

1. Meetings would be held in public at a frequency of two per year.
2. The Quorum for the meeting would be one Member from each Authority to be present.
3. A Chairman would be elected for each municipal year.

Resolved:

That the Governance Team at Essex County Council, in partnership with Braintree District Council, review the Board's governance arrangements in the light of the discussions at this meeting, with proposals to be presented to the next meeting of the Board.

7. Annual Report from the Senior Ranger Great Notley Country Park and Financial Summary 2010-2011

The Board received the annual report and financial summary for April 2010 – March 2011 (GTP/02/11) from Steve Bunn, Senior Ranger Great Notley Country Park. Tim Dixon, Head of Country Parks, presented the report to Members.

Site Report

The Board was advised the visitor numbers at the Park had been up by 5% this year with a drive to increase numbers even further. Of the visitors around 50% were now staying between 2-4 hours and this was an on-going aim to lengthen the stay of visitors. The aim was to achieve 97% satisfaction and the Park was achieving that already.

The Green Flag had been awarded to the Park for another year. It was explained that this was a quality of service award. The Park had received a complimentary report from the mystery shopper who attended to assess the application for the Green Flag award. The play equipment was one of the main attractions and there was now a maintenance contract with the supplier. Within the Management Plan to 2014 all works were either on target or had been completed and maintenance was being done to the building.

Conference bookings at the Discovery Centre had been declining but availability had been filled with children's parties. Puddleducks had increased the number of mum's and toddlers using the park. There had been a number of good reviews on the website 'net.mums' which was an independent form of marketing for the Country Park. The Chairman welcomed the increase in birthday parties instead of conference bookings as it represented revenue from an external source. Tim Dixon advised the Board that more external groups were also expressing an interest in hiring the venue and as a result charges would need to be considered at the next meeting with regard to the impact of setting up and clearing up and also whether the organisations were private or charitable companies.

Big Screen events were held for the football World Cup in June/July 2010, however although the events were very popular at the start of the tournament, the numbers dropped considerably after England dropped out. It had been a risk as the Park had to commit to hiring the screens. Overall the event was considered to be successful and despite an initial wariness from the Police it had proved to be a family event with the majority of people walking to the Park. The Chairman questioned whether it big screens could be considered for the Olympic events in summer 2012. In response it was advised that it wasn't recommended due to the high cost unless it could be fully sponsored. Members felt that opportunities for sponsorship and funding could be looked at due to the high demand for Olympic tickets. The costs were £6k per day to hire the big screens. Paul Partridge suggested that the Corporate Working Group could look into this. It was also suggested that local sports clubs may consider doing special events in support of a big screen event.

The Halloween events had proved very successful with costs of £7k against takings of £14k. The event was being run again this year at Cressing Temple and the income would be shared between the two parks which were starting to work side by side.

This year had seen an increase in the number of approaches from students for volunteering. This proved beneficial for the Park and encouraged future involvement. The positive relationship with the Friends of the Flitch Way Volunteer Group was recognised and the Board wished to formally thank the Group for its volunteer work with physical aspects of managing the Flitch Way.

It was **Agreed** that a letter of thanks would be sent to the Friends of the Flitch Way Volunteer Group from the Chairman on behalf of the Board.

Financial Summary

Members considered the Financial Summary for 2010-11. The budget for expenditure was being maintained for 2011-12. Spending was being restricted due to costs however some of the revenue was being used for some small improvements.

The summary was showing a shortfall in the meals/snacks and beverages for 2011-12 however it was well above the projected income but had not yet all been banked.

In response to a question regarding the impact of the increase in car parking charges, it was confirmed that people had generally accepted that it was value for money, particularly with the seasonal adjustments. There was an issue for consideration with regard to the footballers who had hired a pitch and were then required to pay car park charges on top of the hire charges. There were some options for consideration in the future for managing the parking at the Park, such as number plate recognition and paying for the length of time spent at the Park

with a system of sending a letter and fine to those who failed to pay. There was potential for raising income through a different system but would need to be balanced against the costs of installing it. A new system could offer better flexibility and security which the current system couldn't deal with. It was commented that with the all day charge there was no pressure on families to leave. An electronic system could offer more records on the length of stays and usage. A system of fines would need to be looked at in detail to ensure reliability. Regular abusers would be identified. The system would need to recognise season ticket holders. The Chairman suggested that a new parking system could be looked at as a package to include some of the other Country Parks in Essex as well. It was pointed out that there are similar systems in place at Stansted Airport, Tesco and McDonald's which recognise over-staying cars.

It was suggested that in line with the Chairman of the County Council's request for Beacons in the Districts in celebration of the Queen's Jubilee, thought could be given to placing one in the Park.

The café was proving successful with a good number of visitors and good income. The five year contract will be reviewed in the autumn and this will tie in with reviews of other concessions across the country parks. The Chairman suggested that this could be tied in with other Country Parks going to tender on the catering contracts as well.

Park issues

A Member asked about the damage being caused by horses diverting off the bridleways and into the Park. The Board was advised that it was not a particular problem at the present time, during busy periods the horses tended to remain on the bridleways but there was an awareness that it happened in the winter. Some extra minimal signage had been put up. Barriers could not be provided as the whole bridleway would need to be fenced off to make the barriers effective. The bridleway users wished for a loop around the Park, rather than re-tracing their steps. It was suggested that leaflets could be handed out by staff to those using the bridleway to raise awareness of the issues.

A Member asked about Vandalism at the Park. It was advised that at the current time there were no specific problems. However the spinning disc had been used as a target and smashed. Although this would be replaced once if it happened again other options would need to be considered. Serious vandalism had taken place at the 'Cursed' Halloween event. However the person had been identified and removed by Police. In general there were very few problems.

It was clarified that bonfire events were not organised at the Park due to the damage they created.

The Board was pleased to see the progress at the Park, the hedgerows and meadows were well managed and the staff generally had an ecologist background.

8. Update on All Weather Football Pitches

The Board received report GTP/03/11 on the Artificial Grass Pitch (AGP) & Multi Use Games Area (MUGA) at Great Notley Country Park. Paul Partridge, Operations Manager, Braintree District Council, introduced the report.

The board was advised that the facilities had been opened in November 2009 having been partly funded by a grant from the Football Foundation and match funded by Essex County Council, Braintree district Council and Great Notley Parish Council. The Grant from the football Foundation was dependent on the delivery of the 5 year Football Development Plan by the key partners, mainly around gradually increasing the usage in peak and off-peak periods. Failure to deliver on the Plan could result in the Football Foundation demanding repayment of the grant. Following a Support Day Visit on 5 May 2011 by the Football Foundation and County Football Association, the written report concluded that currently the partners had not delivered on some of the objectives set out in the Plan and recommended greater emphasis be placed on sports development. Uptake during peak periods had increased and demand sometimes exceeded supply. However off-peak usage was more challenging and there was a need for more dedicated support to market and promote the facilities. Prior to the Support Day Visit the partners had sought advice from Nacro, the leading crime reduction charity in England, dedicated to changing lives and creating opportunities for young people aged 10-19 years. The partners have agreed to engage them in a part-time capacity from 1 September 2011 for a period of 12 months to strengthen performance.

Issues such as the footballers hire fee and use of car parking was causing some frustration and needed to be looked at. It was explained that a number of options were being considered with regard to charging and parking and how this is dealt with in the future to maximise usage.

In response to a question regarding whether the Great Notley Football Club including ladies football used the facilities, it was explained that the ladies team had not been that successful and had merged with Rayne and played there. There was risk with the fact that a significant proportion of the income was dependent on one team. The football club had asked for exclusive use but that had been declined so far as it could be detrimental to the Park.

Meetings took place quarterly with the Football Foundation and County Football Association to ensure that all partners are engaged and on board. It was felt that Nacro had the knowledge and skills to help develop the usage and the Board was asked to note their engagement from the 1 September 2011 to work with all partners to deliver the Football Development Plan over the coming year.

9. Wind Turbines

With the agreement of the Chairman an additional item of business was taken on a project proposing a wind turbine at Great Notley Country Park. The project was introduced by Mark Wilson, Braintree District Council.

The project proposed the installation of a wind turbine at the Park on a similar scale to that of the turbine at Swaffham. The proposed turbine would have a viewing platform, for added value, of which there is only currently three in the world with one being the Swaffham turbine. The viewing platform would be a recreational facility expected to attract visitors to the site. It would comprise of a spiral staircase within the turbine to the viewing platform at the top. The estimated cost was £65-85million.

Currently a number of ecological studies were being developed on site including a wind study. The location of the turbine would be mainly dependent on the outcome of the ecology studies and any electro-magnetic interference from mobile phone masts and TV receptions which was out on consultation at the current time. The suggested location was marked on a map of the Park given out at the meeting. It was the furthest point from housing as possible, being approximately 530 metres from the nearest house. Within a working site it would be important to locate the turbine in the correct position and would also be dependent on the outcomes from the studies being undertaken. Member's views were sought on the preferred location.

The Chairman asked about the financing of the project. It was reported that Braintree District Council would be providing the capital for the turbine project, however the viewing platform was a separate business case looking at viability. It would also be source of three income streams:

- Selling electricity to the Grid
- Government feed in tariff
- Levy Exemption Certificate for green electricity

The extra cost of having the viewing platform was around £200k for the staircase and platform itself. This incorporated the structural changes which were needed for the staircase as opposed to the two man lift which would normal be installed for maintenance. As it was unique it was difficult to fully cost. However the Swaffham site raised £60k a year from visitors but was not publicised as much as it could be, therefore there was potential for further income. The Swaffham site attracted 5000 visits per year of groups/individuals with approximately 20 people being able to use the viewing platform at a time. The visits would need to be accompanied. The visits would be restricted to those who were able to use the spiral staircase. However it was noted that in France there was a viewing platform which rotated up and down the column of a structure making it fully accessible. Members suggested that the engineering of such a scheme might be worth investigating further.

The timescales for the project included:

- Local public consultation – Autumn 2011
- Planning application submission – end of May/June 2012
- Procurement Process - August 2012
- Award contract – October 2012
- There was currently a 10-12 month delay in delivery following an order
- Civil works start – September 2013. The turbine itself would be fairly quick to assemble.
- Grid connection to substation, commission and operating – February 2014

Members were invited to attend a visit to the Swaffham site to see the turbine there. Members from the local Parish and District Councils would also be welcome to attend.

The Board noted that the decision would be for Braintree District Council to make but welcomed updates as the project developed.

10. Date of Next Meeting

It was **Agreed** that the proposed date of the next meeting on Wednesday 9 November 2011 be cancelled and a replacement meeting be scheduled for January 2012. All future meetings would follow the pattern of June/July and January each year.

Additional meetings would be called as necessary and information would be circulated by email if required.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 10.35am.

Chairman