



West Lothian Council

COUNCIL EXECUTIVE

PENTLAND HILLS REGIONAL PARK SERVICE WORK PLAN 2011/12 AND CONSULTATION BY THE REGIONAL PARK JOINT COMMITTEE ON CAR PARKING CHARGES WITHIN THE REGIONAL PARK.

REPORT BY PLANNING SERVICES MANAGER

A. PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of this report is to inform the executive of the Pentland Hills Regional Park (PHRP) Service Plan for 2011/12 and a consultation from the Regional Park Joint Committee on charging for car parking in the Regional Park.

B. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the executive notes:

- the Pentland Hills Regional Park Service Plan for 2011/12; and
- PHRP proposals for charging for car parking in several larger car parks within the Regional Park in Edinburgh Council and Midlothian areas.

C. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS

I Council Values	Working in partnership, focusing on our customers' needs and making best use of our resources.
II Policy and Legal (including SEA, Equality Issues, Health or Risk Assessment)	Policy: West Lothian Local Plan policies ENV 29 & ENV 30 support the Pentland Hills Regional Park.
III Resources - Financial Staffing and Property	Core contribution of £10,760 contained within 2011/12 Planning Revenue Budget.
IV Consultations	Countryside Services. Environment Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel 2 June 2011.

D. TERMS OF REPORT

1.0 Background

- 1.1 The council co-operates with City of Edinburgh Council and Midlothian Council, along with Scottish Natural Heritage and Scottish Water, in the management of the Pentland Hills Regional Park. The area of the regional park in West Lothian covers around 10% of the designated park area.
- 1.2 Following local government reorganisation, to sustain the management of the park a Minute of Agreement was entered into by the three local authorities in 1997. In 2004 this agreement was amended to enable the City of Edinburgh Council to become the lead authority through its management of a single ranger service previously shared with Midlothian Council.

2.0 West Lothian's current contribution to the Regional Park Budget

- 2.1 West Lothian's previously agreed core contribution of £10,760 to the operation of the Pentland Hills Regional Park is already accounted for in the Planning & Economic Development budget for 2011/12.
- 2.2 Over the last two years, West Lothian Council and Midlothian Council has each contributed £14,697 per annum for the two transitional years 2009/10 and 2010/11 due to the transfer of Scottish Natural Heritage funding from City of Edinburgh Council to the individual councils under the Single Outcome Agreement process. This transitional funding is now at an end.

3.0. Pentland Hills Regional Park Service Work Plan 2011/12

- 3.1 A Pentland Hills Regional Park Plan was prepared in 2007 for a 10 year period until 2017. It is based on a vision: *to guide and assist all stakeholders in the sustainable development of the Pentland Hills Regional Park's changing environment in a way which supports communities living and working within the park, promotes responsible access for all, develops public understanding of the mixed land use resource and conserves and enhances the park's landscape, cultural and natural heritage features.*
- 3.2 The plan addresses five themes:
- responsible enjoyment and understanding of the hills;
 - the local economy of the hills;
 - conservation and enhancement of the landscape, natural heritage and cultural heritage of the hills;
 - partnership and participation; and
 - managing the Pentland Hills Regional Park Plan.
- 3.3 Each theme has a number of aims and these are implemented by a series of criteria according to short, medium, long term or ongoing needs over a ten year time frame. This is based on an initial three year operational plan, but with subsequent reviews.
- 3.4 While the PHRP Service does not anticipate a full blown review as a priority, they have prepared a Service Work Plan for 2011/12 to guide their work across the regional park. This is attached in Appendix 1, with an extract related to West Lothian as Appendix 2.

4.0 **PHRP Ranger Activity within West Lothian**

4.1 Meetings were held in 2010/11 between the PHRP Manager and his ranger staff and West Lothian council officers as follows:

- Countryside Services Manager to explore shared services and both services working outwith their formal park boundaries to raise WL residents awareness of the PHRP facilities;
- Economic Development and Tourism Officer : to explore support for businesses within WL to take advantage of the regional park e.g.; “Pentland Produce” scheme; the PHRP manager now attends the West Lothian Tourism Forum;
- Locality Planning Manager and Equalities Officer to link with the community planning partnership and target the harder to reach Black & Ethnic Minorities (BEM) community; and
- Arts Unit: to consider various possible collaborations for the benefit of West Lothian residents.

4.2 In addition, the PHRP Park Manager has attended the East Livingston & East Calder Local Area Committee that covers the part of the Regional Park in West Lothian to outline the role of the Regional Park Service.

4.3 The Regional Park is also represented on the West Lothian Outdoor Access Forum and the rangers have led various walks as part of the West Lothian Walking Week that occurs each September.

4.4 As has been reported to previous panels and the council executive, Pentland Hills Regional Park Staff have played a key role in establishing Harperrig Reservoir as a Local Nature Reserve and continue to chair and administer the local management group that consists of local residents, farmers and landowners.

4.5 They have assisted the Friends of the Pentlands volunteer group in undertaking repairs to the Gala Ford Bridge on the Cauldstane Slap right of way.

4.6 The PHRP Area Ranger patrols the car parks at Little Vantage and West Harperrig.

4.7 The ranger’s staff have designed new interpretation boards for Harperrig Reservoir and overseen the implementation of a new access route along the south shore of the reservoir to link to the Cauldstane Slap and worked with students from Oatridge College to design and build two birds hides near the wildlife refuge on the reservoir.

5.0 **Consultation on charging for car parking in the Pentland Hills Regional Park.**

5.1 In February 2011, the Pentland Hills Regional Park Joint Committee, of which West Lothian is a member (currently Cllr John), agreed a consultation on the potential introduction of car parking charges within the Regional Park. This is due to the financial pressures facing the Park operational budget and new sources of income are sought to maintain services such as those provided by the Regional Park.

- 5.2 Many countryside services such as car parks on public land and private estates throughout the UK operate parking charges. It is proposed to ask visitors to pay a small charge for parking at selected existing sites in the Pentlands. The income would be used solely to support the environmental and visitor management service within the Regional Park that includes path maintenance, habitat management, interpretation and signage and assistance to visitors and land managers/ owners.
- 5.3 Four car parks at Threipmuir, Harlaw, Bonaly, within City of Edinburgh Council area, and Flotterstone, in Midlothian, are currently being proposed as they are all within local authority ownership, are in a reasonable condition due to recent upgrading and are popular with relatively high visitor numbers.
- 5.4 The Regional Park recognises that there is a history of free parking in the Pentland Hills and that charging would represent a significant change for visitors. However, any charge would be “ring-fenced” to sustain services and improvements over future years.
- 5.5 The consultation outlines various questions in relation to: public acceptability, whether the scheme should be compulsory or discretionary; the risk of displacement; security; and outsourcing parking management.

6.0 **West Lothian considerations**

- 6.1 Both the Regional Park car parks within West Lothian, located at Little Vantage and West Harperrig, are small with around 10 parking spaces each. While the council own the former, it is currently in negotiation with the owner of the latter to carry out environmental improvements to the site.
- 6.2 It is considered that both sites would be too small to generate sufficient revenue to justify the cost of installing and monitoring car parking charge equipment, and that due to their highly remote locations, this equipment could be susceptible to vandalism.

E. **CONCLUSION**

There has been long well established co-operation between West Lothian, Midlothian and City of Edinburgh Council's to support the aims of the Pentland Hills Regional Park that covers a unique area of countryside in the Lothians used by West Lothian residents.

The Service Plan for 2011/12 outlines the wide range of task that the ranger staff will carry out across the regional park area in the coming year to continue to progress the aims within the 207-2017 Regional Park Plan.

Proposals by the PHRP Joint Committee for charging at three of the larger car parks within the Regional Park in Edinburgh are noted, but it is suggested that West Lothian has no specific comments to raise at this stage.

F. **BACKGROUND REFERENCES**

- Report to council executive 29 January 2008 on Pentland Hills Regional Park: Regional Park Plan 2007-2010 and proposed new headquarters.
- Report to Environment Policy Development & Scrutiny Panel 23 April 2009.
- Report to council executive 22 December 2009 on PHRP Service budget, the proposed withdrawal of Midlothian Council from involvement with the Regional Park and the arrangement for funding in the two year transitional period following the transfer of Scottish Natural Heritage funds.

Appendices / Attachments: two:

- 1) Pentland Hills Regional Park Service Work Plan 2011/12.
- 2) Work Plan extract related to West Lothian.

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