

21. PENTLAND HILLS REGIONAL PARK - A PROPOSAL TO EXTEND THE REGIONAL PARK BOUNDARY

The Council Executive considered a report (copies of which had been circulated) by the Head of Planning and Economic Development providing information on the recent proposal by an MSP for a Bill to extend the existing Pentland Hills Regional Park (PHRP) boundary.

The report advised that West Lothian Council co-operated with City of Edinburgh and Mid Lothian Councils in the management of the Pentland Hills Regional Park. The area of the park in West Lothian was only around 10% of the designated area. The Pentland Hills Regional Park Ranger Service was managed by City of Edinburgh Council.

The Head of Planning and Economic development explained that the aims of the Pentland Regional Park as set out in its designation order were:-

- To retain the essential character of the hills as a place for the peaceful enjoyment of the countryside;
- Caring for the hills so that the landscape and the habitat was protected and enhanced;
- Within this caring framework to encourage responsible public enjoyment of the hill; and
- Co-ordination of these aims to co-exist with farming and other land uses within the Pentland Hills Park.

To sustain the management of the park, following local government reorganisation, a Minute of Agreement was entered into by the three local authorities in 1997, and 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.

The Regional Park management was overseen by a Joint Committee made up of elected members from City of Edinburgh, Midlothian and West Lothian councils.

The Joint Committee recently agreed to rationalise its meetings from four to two per year and realign the Consultative Forum meeting to which elected members were invited to attend. It was at the most recent forum in February 2014 that Christine Grahame, MSP set out her extension proposal.

The report went on to provide details on the proposed extension to the park, and the existing characteristics of the proposed park extension area. The proposed response to the consultation was attached as Appendix 2 to the report. Details of the following three main issues identified for West Lothian were contained in the report:-

- Financial
- Elected Representation
- Landscape Protection

In conclusion the report advised that land managers and residents within the park area benefited from the involvement of the Pentland Hills Regional Park Ranger Service in a wide range of management and recreational and ecological issues. The Pentland Hills remained an important visual backdrop and open landscape for the whole district.

While it was the view of officers that West Lothian Council should in principle, embrace the proposed Regional Park extension for landscape protection, recreational and habitat protection reasons there remained concerns about the future funding and representation.

However, organisational support from West Lothian Council would only be forthcoming if there was a sound business case for any additional management resources required, as they were not currently available from the council and also that arrangements for local authority representation on any potential future charitable trust formed to manage the park, were safeguarded.

The report recommended that the Council Executive:-

1. Note the proposal for a Bill from Christine Grahame, MSP to extend the area covered by the existing Pentland Hills Regional Park designation;
2. Note that the extended area proposed would cover a greater area of West Lothian than presently covered by the regional park and extend over the whole Pentland Hills range and into South Lanarkshire and Scottish Borders;
3. Note that there was still insufficient detail to fully assess the financial impact which any extension would have and any extension of the park that required additional financial support from West Lothian was unlikely to be supported;
4. Note that, notwithstanding the lack of detail available at the moment, there were, in principle; landscape, recreational and nature conservation issues that would support the extension of the regional park within West Lothian and over the whole Pentland Hills range;
5. Agree the proposed responses to the boundary extension consultation questions outlined in Appendix 2, as the council's formal response to the consultation; and
6. Note that a further report on the extension to the park would be presented to the Environment PDSP and Council Executive if the Bill was submitted to Parliament.

## Decision

To approve the terms of the report.