

Managed campsite set for Harlaw Reservoir

A managed eco campsite will be created at Harlaw Reservoir in the Pentland Hills if funding can be found. That's the outcome of a meeting of the Pentland Hills Regional Park Joint Committee which includes representatives from City of Edinburgh, Midlothian and West Lothian councils.

The committee is currently looking for grants and committee convener, Neil Gardiner, said a similar project at Loch Lomond, which had also experienced disruptive wild camping issues, had proved a success.

An area adjacent to Harlaw House at Harlaw Reservoir has been earmarked for the project and the site which would include showers and toilets.

Consideration is being given to the site being run by the council or an outside body.

The motion went through on the casting vote of the convenor after a 3-3 split and it follows a summer of disruptive wild camping which saw trees cut down for fire wood, unsightly litter left along with human waste, particularly at Harlaw.

Parking charges are to be introduced at venues including Flotterstone, Bonaly, Harlaw, Threipmuir and Harperrigg and City of Edinburgh Council officials are speaking to companies to find the best system as there are a number of stakeholders, including anglers, dog walkers, cyclists and campers, some of them overnight.

Number plate recognition and card machines are being considered and councillors are committed to see all money, excluding running costs, ring fenced to be used for improvements in the hills area.

No price for parking was mentioned during the meeting which heard that nearly 2,000 hills users replied positively to a recent request to complete a survey.

Parking issues have caused real problems during the summer and Christmas holidays and Bob Barr, representing the National Farmers' Union, who is also a local farmer, said poor parking was prohibiting some of his large machinery gaining access to fields. It was a real concern.

Jessica Morgado, senior natural heritage officer, City of Edinburgh Council, said she had identified changes to existing car parks which could increase capacity. The changes would include blue badge spaces.

She also revealed that an application had been received to run a concession outlet at Harlaw,

Midlothian Councillor Russell Imrie stressed the need for money raised from parking to remain in the area and the committee agreed that yellow lines should be introduced at the same time as the ticket machines are switched on.

Coin operated machines are not being considered for the sites as donation boxes already in the car parks had, said an official, been raided.

The committee is also exploring creating pathways for walkers and cyclists from local areas like Balerno direct to the hills to increase safety and to encourage locals to walk to the hills instead of getting in their cars.

That, they heard, may require purchase of land, meanwhile, the recent survey indicated that a park-and-ride bus facility was not currently favoured by Pentland Hills users. The idea is, however, to be investigated to understand if it could be viable in the future