

DATE: 14 January 2011

OUR REF:GS/MH/CountryParksCampaign

YOUR REF:

To: all service users of Country Parks in Nottinghamshire

Campaign to Protect our Country Parks

We are writing to you on behalf of the Nottinghamshire Branch of UNISON, Britain's biggest public sector trade union, and our members who work at the country parks throughout Nottinghamshire, such as Bestwood, Sherwood and Rufford. These and many other green areas are managed by County Council employees, providing a wide range of leisure and educational activities, protecting the environment and maintaining a unique part of the county's heritage. The pleasure these parks and green spaces have given to the million plus who visit them every year is immeasurable.

However, their existence is under threat. Notts County Council claims it has to cut £186 million from its budget over the next four years. They plan to make over three thousand County Council employees redundant – a huge blow not only to those individuals who stand to lose their livelihood, but to the services they provide and to the Nottinghamshire economy as a whole.

The country parks' budget is being particularly badly affected. Amongst the County Council's proposals for the future of this service are:

- A cut of 47%, nearly half, of the current budget
- The abolition of the park rangers' service entirely
- Their replacement with a reduced number of unskilled park wardens

The implications of these cuts will be devastating if allowed to go ahead. Many of the activities at the parks will simply have to end. Health and safety will be greatly compromised, and an increase in anti-social behaviour is inevitable with such vastly reduced staffing levels. Staff who work at the parks have queried whether or not the council will even manage to meet basic legal obligations in some areas. Workers at Bestwood Country Park have told us that the Council's proposed axing of the budget will mean that Bestwood will effectively be "mothballed".

The claim that the Council has no option other than to make these cuts is simply not true. Notts County Council is sitting on £159 million of reserves, yet it refuses to use any of this money to protect the people it claims to represent from the most vicious public sector cuts Nottinghamshire has ever seen.

Thanks to the people who work at the country parks and their supporters in the community, the threat posed by the Council's budget proposals has been brought to the public's attention. We want councillors to re-consider their budget proposals, and we want your continued help to achieve this.

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If you haven't done so already, please consider doing the following:

- Take part in Nottinghamshire County Council's online budget consultation **which closes Friday 21 January 2011**. The section including the budget proposals for country parks can be found at <http://www3.nottinghamshire.gov.uk/thecouncil/budget-proposals/communities/?assetdetesctl1980952=55856>.
- Contact your local County Councillor and/or MP with your objections. You can find your County Councillor at http://www.nottinghamshire.gov.uk/home/your_council/councillorsandtheirrole/councillors/whoisyourcouncillor.htm. Alternatively, 'phone the Council on (0115) 9823823 and say you want to know your local County Councillor's details.
- Contact the following Councillors, too, irrespective of where you live; Cllr John Cottee (Cabinet Member for Culture and Community), Cllr Richard Butler (Cabinet Member for Environment and Sustainability) and Cllr Keith Girling (Deputy Cabinet Member for Culture and Community). Their contact details can be found here: http://www.nottinghamshire.gov.uk/home/your_council/councillorsandtheirrole/councillors/councillorskeyroles.htm#portfolioholders, or 'phone as above.
- Copy Dr Patrick Candler, Service Director for Communities, into your correspondence. He is currently the senior manager responsible for country parks. You could also copy Anthony May, who will be the Corporate Director for the new Children, Families and Cultural Services Department (including country parks) as from 1 April this year. They can both be reached at County Hall, West Bridgford, Nottingham NG2 7QP, or e-mailed at patrick.candler@nottscc.gov.uk and anthony.may@nottscc.gov.uk respectively.
- Write to your local newspaper. Papers such as the Nottingham Evening Post have already featured articles about the proposed cuts at the parks.
- Come to the demonstration UNISON is planning on 24 February to coincide with the council meeting which sets the budget for the next financial year (please see attached leaflet). Further details will be available nearer the time from the Notts UNISON website (see header).

If you do write to any of these people, please send UNISON a copy (address and e-mail as on the header above), and mark "for the attention of Gail Squires".

Many thanks for your support and time. We hope that together we can stop this vandalism to our public services and keep the country parks as they should be - a well-maintained natural facility for everyone to enjoy.

Best wishes,

GAIL SQUIRES
UNISON Steward, Communities

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