

**OUTWOODS MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE
7TH OCTOBER 2020**

PRESENT: Councillors Bailey, Campsall (Vice-chair), Fryer (Chair), K. Harris, Morgan, Parsons and Poland.
PB, GM, and CN.

Head of Cleansing and Open Spaces
Democratic Services Officer (NC)

APOLOGIES: RE, JN

1. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR AND VICE-CHAIR

In accordance with the Trust Deeds, the Mayor of Charnwood had been asked, and declined to be appointed as the Chair of the Outwoods Management Committee.

AGREED that Councillor Fryer be appointed as the Chair of the Outwoods Management Committee for the period of 2020-21.

AGREED that Councillor Campsall be appointed as the Vice-Chair of the Outwoods management Committee for the period of 2020-21.

2. DISCLOSURES OF PECUNIARY AND PERSONAL INTERESTS

Disclosures of personal interests were made as follows:

- (i) by PB who farmed land adjacent to the Outwoods.
- (ii) by Councillor Bailey who farmed land adjacent to the Outwoods and was the Chair of Charnwood Forest Regional Park.

3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 29th January 2020 were agreed.

Councillor Campsall joined the meeting and at this point was appointed as the Vice-chair of the Outwoods Management Committee 2020-21.

4. OFFICER UPDATE REPORT

A report of the Head of Cleansing and Open Spaces was submitted and shared on screen with the Committee (item 5 on the agenda). The Head of Cleansing and Open Spaces drew the Committee's attention to the following:

- (i) Impact of COVID-19

The Outwoods had been closed from 22nd March 2020 to 13th May 2020 in line with other local attractions, Beacon Hill and Bradgate Park. Signage had been placed around the woods reminding visitors to socially distance and would

be updated to comply with new government guidance as required. There had been an increased Ranger presence in the first few days and at weekends to support this message. The extension of season tickets had nearly been completed.

In response to a question from a Trustee, it was noted that using the pay and display machines was not dissimilar to using ATM cash machines which had not been barred from use during the pandemic. There was a risk associated with virus transmission and precautions to reduce the risk were in place, including cleaning the pay and display machines and other touch points. The implementation of contactless payment machines was under review and their installation would be welcomed.

(ii) Charnwood Forest Regional Park – Lottery Funding

The bid had been successful, with £2.78million being awarded for projects to be delivered over the next five years. Projects affecting the Outwoods included an accessible footpath from the car park, improvements to the layout of the car park, surface improvements to the 'Mile Lane' footpath from Moat Road to the Outwoods and the introduction of an 'off road' footpath to link the Outwoods with the lower car park of Beacon Hill.

In response to questions from Trustees, it was explained that 5 members of staff had been appointed by the National Forest Company to support the Partnership and would be paid from Lottery funding. The team included Julie Attard and other team members from the development phase but also included new appointments.

(iii) The Outwoods Visitor Centre Café

The work to secure a contractor had been suspended in March due to the Open Spaces team prioritising other work in relation to the pandemic and a reduction in staff, with both Council and Contractor employees having to self-isolate or shield.

The Council had undertaken a review of its Capital programme and revenue expenditure and it was possible that some projects, including the Outwoods Visitor Centre Café, could be deferred. The soft market testing exercise had been completed, the number of responses had been pleasing and the exercise had given a high degree of confidence that the project would be financially viable. This would assist to justify retaining the project in the Capital programme.

£139K had been allocated to the project, (an additional £50K from outside sources had not been forthcoming). It was anticipated that the whole scheme could be delivered within budget although it was acknowledged that once the full tendering exercise had been completed it could result in higher build costs. If the costs were higher, certain elements could be removed from the project, such as the open-air canopy or extension to ensure it was delivered within budget but still honouring the vision of the project.

Trustees discussed whether the project could provide an opportunity to work with young people to develop skills or to use apprenticeships. It was explained that the local college did not include construction apprenticeships on its curriculum, and by using the project for skills learning it could slow the delivery times of the project further. It was possible to include a condition in the contract to include a certain number of apprenticeship hours but this would be challenging as the local college did not have the skill sets within their student cohort.

In considering the costs of the project and how the capital would be repaid over 10 years, the Head of Cleansing and Open Spaces stated that the soft market testing exercise had given indications of the level of rent that could be achieved. It was expected that between £12-18K p.a would be a reasonable expectation and that the revenue would be added to the Outwoods 'income pot'. This would, alongside the timber sales and carparking charges, help to reduce the financial burden on the Council for maintenance of the woods.

(iv) Tree Felling / Planting Programme

A review was underway to reprofile the number of compartments over the remaining years to complete the felling. As previously agreed, to reduce the destructive impact on the woods, this would be over a period of 5-6 years.

The Head of Cleansing and Open Spaces brought to the Committee's attention the following:

- that ArtSpace had contacted the Council to seek views of the Committee and the Council regarding the installation of a Sculpture Trail spanning several years with both temporary and permanent sculptures.
- that an event had been promoted over social media to take place in the Outwoods without either the Council's or the Committee's approval being sought. The event did not provide any COVID safe information, risk assessments or liability insurance and had been requested to cancel the event. If the request was not complied with enforcement action would be taken. There would be an increased Ranger presence in the woods on the scheduled day of the event.

(v) Finance

It was noted that the figures in red text indicated income received, rather than expenditure. A refund of £96.16 had been received on the metered water charge, and the refund for signs of £521.00 was as a result of external funding received as part of the Countryside Stewardship scheme.

(vi) Car parking income

It was noted that the car park income was regaining its previous revenue levels.

AGREED

1. an update regarding the Tree Felling / Planting programme to be submitted to the Committee at its next meeting;
2. a detailed proposal of the Sculpture Trail be submitted to the Committee at its next meeting.

5. ACTIVITIES AND OPERATIONAL MANAGEMENT AT THE OUTWOODS SINCE THE LAST MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE

An update regarding activities and operational management at the Outwoods was submitted (item 6 on the agenda). It was noted that this report had been circulated to Trustees previously, and that an updated report had recently been drafted for the Committee, to be circulated after this meeting.

Trustees discussed the following:

- the increase in vandalism in the Outwoods and theft from the Rangers Store - CCTV would be included as part of the Café project. To improve security, the entrance had been widened to accommodate a barrier that would be closed at night.
- the prominence of signage warning visitors not to leave valuables in their cars in view of recent car thefts of handbags – there were signs in the car park but more would be placed around the pay and display machines.

AGREED

1. that the contents of the report be noted.
2. that the most recent Ranger's report be circulated to the Committee after this meeting.

6. A.O.B

Thanks were given to the Head of Cleansing and Open Spaces for keeping the Committee updated during the pandemic lockdown.

The Head of Cleansing and Open Spaces sought Trustees' views on arranging another socially distanced walk around the Outwoods. It was agreed that dates in November would be circulated to the Committee to determine the best date for six people to meet (staying within current government guidelines).

The dates of the future proposed meetings were noted.

ADDENDUM - DECISIONS WHEREBY A VOTE WAS TAKEN

At the meeting of the Committee held on 6th September 2017 it was agreed that when the Committee voted by a show of hands on decisions made by the Committee that this information was documented as an addendum to the minutes (minute 2.2 refers).

NONE