

**OUTWOODS MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE**  
**10TH APRIL 2024**

PRESENT: Councillors Campsall, Fryer (Chair), A Gray, B Gray, Infield, D Taylor, Worrall, and RB, RE (Vice chair), DG, and CN

Head of Contracts: Leisure, Waste and Environment  
Senior Green Spaces Officer  
Democratic Services Officer (NC)

APOLOGIES: Cllr Smidowicz, GM

1. DISCLOSURES OF PECUNIARY AND PERSONAL INTERESTS

Disclosures of personal interests were made as follows:

- (i) RB who farms land adjacent to the Outwoods (noted at end of the meeting)
- (ii) Cllr Taylor and Fryer as County Councillors in relation to item 4 on the agenda.

2. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING & MATTERS ARISING

The minutes of the meeting held on 10th April 2023 were agreed as a correct record.

Matters Arising: It was noted that the Wind Policy had not been submitted for consideration by the Committee at this meeting. The Head of Contracts; Leisure, Waste and Environment would clarify the position later in the meeting (under A.O.B).

3. BIODIVERSITY UPGRADE UNITS

Cllr Infield explained that he had recently attended some training on legislation around planning and biodiversity upgrade units and had discussed opportunities with council officers prior to the meeting. He noted that developers who wished to buy biodiversity upgrade units could purchase units from landowners and local authorities, which could provide an income for the sellers. He noted that once the units were established, they required monitoring for increased biodiversity and maintaining for 30 years. He considered whether land surrounding the Outwoods could be purchased to increase the biodiversity in the area and improve visitor experience. Although some existing s106 monies were linked to specific areas requiring biodiversity upgrades, he understood that there was some flexibility to improve biodiversity away from housing developments.

The Head of Contracts; Leisure, Waste and Environment stated that this was an exciting opportunity which he had investigated with relevant officers. He explained that developers would pay a fee to offset any biodiversity loss of their new building developments and it was usually linked to the local area. After calculating costs, it was apparent that the net gain payments were insufficient to pay for the land purchase and to maintain the units' biodiversity for 30 years. The Council outsourced its open spaces maintenance to a contractor who managed seven different typological landscapes and increasing this to include woodland areas was likely to require subsidising by the Council.

Discussion, summary of key points:

- management of the Outwoods was already subsidised by the Council and had not yet broken even financially.
- the Outwoods was a triple SI landscape so improving its biodiversity would be challenging. It could be possible to install bird boxes for particular species within the existing budget to support the wildlife.
- it was a great opportunity, but local knowledge of surrounding landowners suggested they would not be willing to sell any adjoining land and the purchase of it would be expensive as it was prime agricultural land.
- there had been discussions between the Council and relevant landowners about purchasing Jubilee Wood and Nanpantan Reservoir, but progress had been limited and matters were not likely to advance further at present.
- the Council and its open spaces contractor had considered setting up their own biodiversity banks, but both had concluded it was not financially viable. The Council was considering ways in which it could increase biodiversity across its existing open spaces portfolio, it could enter into partnership with a charity to support the maintenance of the unit once purchased, but this would also require a consultant to measure the biodiversity improvements which could be costly.
- it was important to encourage developers to offset its biodiversity loss on the site of the building development. By using other land away from the development, more housing was likely to be built on the original site.
- as the legislation was relatively new, the situation was likely to evolve. Costs could reduce as the scheme was established, with more commercial suppliers taking part. There were differences between commercial suppliers and the Borough Council: - the council provided toilet facilities and had health and safety obligations which would not be required by commercial suppliers.
- Leicestershire County Council's Local Nature Recovery Strategy was currently out for consultation and could be considered in conjunction with this topic.

**AGREED** that:

1. the County Council's Local Nature Recovery Strategy, once finalised, be added to the agenda of a future meeting of the Outwoods Management Committee for its consideration;
2. the topic of Biodiversity Upgrade Units be added to the same agenda as the Local Nature Recovery Strategy for the Committee's consideration.

#### 4. OFFICER UPDATE REPORT

A report of the Head of Contracts: Leisure, Waste and Environment was submitted (item 5 on the agenda).

The Head of Contracts: Leisure, Waste and Environment highlighted the key points in the report regarding the installation of a defibrillator, the upgrade to the footpath from Nanpantan Sports Ground, the Outwoods Management Plan and car parking charges. He noted that a photo opportunity for the installation of the defibrillator had been arranged the following day and that further details would be confirmed with donor trustees who were available to attend.

The Chair asked for an update regarding the trampers. The Senior Green Spaces Officer and Head of Contracts; Leisure, Waste and Environment explained that there were currently two trampers available. One was quite new and had been part-purchased with a grant from the National Forest. There was only space for two trampers in the existing garage which required significant repair and possibly replacing, this had not been included in the Council's capital programme. It was noted that standard mobility scooters were not suitable for use in the Outwoods due to the terrain.

**AGREED** that:

1. the Head of Contracts, Leisure, Waste and Environment submit a report on the position with trampers and the garage at the scheduled meeting of the Committee on 24th July 2024.
2. the report be noted.

5. FINANCE UPDATE

A report of the Head of Contracts, Leisure, Waste and Environment was submitted that covered the revenue budget (item 6 on the agenda).

The Head of Contracts, Leisure, Waste and Environment presented the report and stated that it was almost a year end report. He highlighted that the budget had been underspent by £2760.26 this financial year, and a breakdown of promotional activities, as requested at the last meeting, had been included. In considering the year-on-year net spend by the Council he noted that it had decreased in the last year, and it was expected to be approximately £35K less in the next financial year.

In response to Trustee queries, he stated that:

- any savings made would contribute to the Council's overall savings and was not necessarily funds available to the Outwoods Management Committee.
- obtaining grants from mobility charities to replace old or purchase new trampers could be challenging, a grant could be applied for from the National Forest. As new Trustees were not familiar with the trampers they could be demonstrated before the next meeting.
- the tree felling which would be one-off income and the rental lease with the Outwoods café which included a turnover share, could help reduce the following year's subsidy by the Council towards the maintenance of the Outwoods.

- the expenditure for the maintenance of trees and shrubs included additional work carried out near the cafe and the playground under a variance contract with Idverde.
- Capital funds to replace the garage would be required to be approved by the Council's Cabinet. As the garage had been vandalised on several occasions a wood frame building would not be suitable.

**AGREED** that the report be noted.

6. A.O.B

Wind Policy Update

The Head of Contracts: Leisure, Waste and Environment explained that the Council was required to take reasonable precautions at the Outwoods for the safety of visitors when high winds were forecast. Currently the policy required the Outwoods to close if gusts over 40mph were forecast for a period of three hours or more and the car park would stay open. He stated that the policy was under review as the car park was potentially a higher risk as it was located on the hill and had higher footfall. He was proposing that the policy be amended to close the woods and the car park if gusts above 45mph were forecast for a period of three hours or more.

Discussion, summary of key points:

- the Council used metrological forecasts to predict wind speeds and determine if the woods were required to close. It was not possible to close the woods once the threshold had been met as getting people to leave the area could be challenging.
- it could be advantageous to locate an anemometer in the car park to obtain trends.
- by changing the threshold to 45mph it was likely that the woods would be closed slightly less frequently, minimising the impact on café business.
- a meeting with the Council's Health & Safety Manager had taken place and a council wide policy was being considered which would include the Outwoods and other council owned green spaces.

Car Park gates

A Trustee sought an update on the position with installing gates to the car park. The Head of Contracts: Leisure, Waste and Environment stated that it could be beneficial to review costs of installing a gate on the 'in' side of the car park with crocodile teeth on the 'out' side which would then support the closure of the car park on occasions of strong winds. Although it would be desirable to be able to close the Outwoods, he noted it would add a cost of £20 per day to the maintenance costs for a ranger to close the gates.

### Replanting of Compartment 1A

A Trustee requested an update on saplings that were dying / struggling in compartment 1A.

The Senior Green Spaces Officer and Head of Contracts: Leisure, Waste and Environment stated that compartment 1A had been felled during 2018/19 and had been restocked for three years following the felling. If saplings had been replaced three times and were not surviving it was not considered viable to continue. The bracken in the area was being maintained and it was noted that the soil was very light in this compartment with a stony under layer. The compartment had been planted at a density recommended by the Forestry Commission and in 10-15 years the area was likely to require thinning.

### Bluebell Walk

Noted that the bluebell walk would be arranged with the head ranger week commencing 22nd April.

**AGREED** that;

1. a draft revised Wind Policy including Health and Safety recommendations be submitted to the Committee at its next meeting scheduled on 24th July 2024.
2. the Head of Contracts: Leisure, Waste and Environment investigate the costs of installing gates at the Outwoods car park.
3. Trustees be notified of the date of the Bluebell Walk.

## **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