

**OUTWOODS MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE
18TH OCTOBER 2023**

PRESENT: Councillors Campsall, Fryer (Chair), A Gray, B Gray, Smidowicz, D Taylor, Worrall and PB, CN and DG

Head of Contracts: Leisure, Waste and Environment
Contracts Manager
Charnwood Forest Programme Manager
Democratic Services Officer (NC)

APOLOGIES: Cllr Infield, RE, GM

1. DISCLOSURES OF PECUNIARY AND PERSONAL INTERESTS

Disclosures of personal interests were made as follows:

- (i) Cllr Taylor as a Trustee of Bradgate Park Trust (for item 4 on the agenda)
- (ii) PB who farms land adjacent to the Outwoods (noted at end of the meeting)

2. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING & MATTERS ARISING

The minutes of the meeting held on 9th August 2023 were agreed.

A Trustee queried whether the biggest loss of income to the Outwoods budget had been the postponement of the tree felling for this financial year, they considered it was more likely to be the carparking charges and café that would have the bigger impact. The Head of Contacts, Leisure, Waste and Environment explained that the discussion under the budget item had been about variances and that the carparking charges and café income were both on track. He had been drawing the Committee's attention to two items on the budget that were under risk of not being achieved – the tree felling income and the payment from Natural England which would be paid in line with the agreement to fell trees.

Post meeting note: It was noticed that Cllr Tillotson had been recorded as in attendance at the meeting held on 9th August in error. She was no longer a Trustee of the Committee.

3. GEOPARK / LANDSCAPE PARTNERSHIP UPDATE

Jule Attard attended the meeting to present a slide show updating the Committee on the Landscape Partnership. She provided a history of the scheme so far and explained that the Outwoods was one of the honeypot sites within the scheme, and that the area was of international geological significance.

PB joined at the meeting.

There were three themes - Explore, Public Engagement and Understand. She explained what events and activities had taken place during the last three years since

the start of the scheme under these themes and highlighted activities that involved the Outwoods.

Cllr Smidowicz joined the meeting.

In conclusion she updated the Committee on the progress and the process to follow to apply for UNESCO global GeoPark status.

In response to questions it was noted that:

- although some graffiti might be of historical interest, the importance of the geology and site would be assessed to determine if it was necessary to remove the graffiti. It would be possible to record the text, but it was likely to be removed so as to not encourage further defacement.
- whether there were implications for the GeoPark and surrounding areas if housing developments or solar farms were planned - it was accepted by UNESCO that GeoParks were a living breathing landscape and the needs of the overall site would be taken into consideration. Housing developments would need to be sensitive to any significant geology in the area. The Charnwood Forest Delivery team did not participate in objecting to or supporting housing applications but could provide advice. Planning officers were included in the Partnership and it was up to the Planning Authority to make decisions. The Head of Contracts, Leisure, Waste and Environment clarified that the Council's Planning Strategies and Local Plan included the proposed application to UNESCO.
- the importance of public transport and sustainable transport methods were recognised and funding was being investigated to create sustainable routes within the park.

Trustees thanked Julie for her presentation and agreed it had been very informative.

AGREED that:

1. The link to a talk about a Spider Survey (with particular reference to the Charnwood spider) be circulated to Trustees.
2. The presentation be circulated to Trustees after the meeting.

4. OFFICER UPDATE REPORT (a) – HEAD OF CONTRACTS, LEISURE, WASTE AND ENVIROMENT

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

The Head of Contracts: Leisure, Waste and Environment highlighted the key points in the report as follows:

- the kissing gate near the Nanpantan footpath had been removed to improve accessibility and other gates would be reviewed and adjusted to ensure they didn't restrict access.
- an update was not available regarding the upgrade to the footpath from Nanpantan Sports Ground at present but this would be followed up after the meeting.
- some drystone walling had been repaired by the Green Gym group. An apprentice had been employed by the Landscape Partnership and could help with training volunteers going forward.
- an assessment of tree losses would be circulated to the Committee after the meeting. Noted that some compartments had a three-year aftercare plan in place which included replacing any dead saplings.
- due to the short period between the last meeting and this meeting and workload, it had not been possible to update the Outwoods Management Plan. It had been included on this agenda for Trustees to review and that the Committee could provide feedback prior to the next meeting.

A Trustee noted that it was important to include a longer vision going forward with particular reference to the proposed application for a UNESCO World Heritage Site

AGREED that:

1. the Head of Contracts, Leisure, Waste and Environment drafts the Outwoods Management Plan for five years but also includes a vision going forward to support the potential for obtaining future grant funding for projects.
2. the Outwoods Management Committee forward any questions, comments and/or suggested amendments to the Outwoods Management Plan to the Committee Clerk prior to the publication of the agenda for the next meeting for officer consideration.
3. that the report be noted.

5. OFFICER UPDATE REPORT (b) – CORRESPONDENCE FROM THE PUBLIC

A report of the Head of Governance and Human Resources was submitted (item 5b on the agenda).

The Chair explained that the recommended route for sending in comments, compliments or complaints was via the Council's website or direct to the Chair of the Committee, noting that if sent direct to the officers it could get lost if that officer was ill. It was clarified that the process to follow was clear on the Council's website and that Council officers act on behalf of the Committee, providing advice and implementing any decisions it may make.

Since the publication of the agenda further comments had been received resulting in a total of 16 separate emails received regarding tree felling.

The Head of Contracts, Leisure, Waste and Environment explained that the tree felling programme was supported by the Woodland Trust, the Forestry Commission and Wildlife Trusts, and funded by Natural England. He drew the Committee's attention to a statement by Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust in the Outwoods Management Plan on page 59 (appendix 3) of the agenda:

“Remove non-native species, in particular conifer. Staged removal of conifers followed by natural regeneration of native broadleaved species would be of most benefit to wildlife. If planting is required this should be of tree species native to the Charnwood Forest area and of local provenance. If a block of conifer is not being cleared, priority should be given to removal of conifer from the compartment edges (10m minimum) to allow the natural regeneration of a scrubby woodland edge composed of native species with the associated wildlife benefits described in Section 4.1.2. Additionally, where native trees are present amongst conifer plantation such as in Compartment 1, priority should be given to remove conifer from their surroundings to allow them to flourish.”

He noted that he considered there had been some misunderstandings, in particular, there were no plans to enlarge the car park and urged the Committee to consider all documents in the agenda pack to formulate an informed view.

Summary of Trustee views:

- the Committee had agreed to the tree felling programme previously and that it was beneficial to the woods and wildlife.
- the Committee's purpose was to manage the woods to ensure its longevity and to support wildlife.
- the conifers had been planted by the original donors as a plantation crop.
- it was appropriate to cut down unsafe trees and, in view of climate change and high winds, suitable to manage the woods in accordance with this.
- the bracken was not being well managed and was restricting growth of new saplings. However, paths and signage were being well maintained, it could be beneficial to consider reviewing the priorities of activities undertaken by the Rangers/Council in the woods.
- Donor Trustees on the Committee were appointed to the Committee for life and were very knowledgeable. Noted that the Corporation Trustee membership could change yearly.

As there were differing views, the Head of Contracts, Leisure, Waste and Environment proposed that a response be provided to the members of the public who had sent the correspondence correcting any misunderstandings and that the decision to undertake a tree felling programme had been agreed by the Committee under the current Outwoods Management Plan. This plan would be shortly renewed, and the views of the public would be taken into consideration.

AGREED that the Head of Contracts, Leisure, Waste and Environment in consultation with the Chair and Vice-chair of the Committee respond to the correspondence from members of the public as proposed above.

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, stated that he had included more detail as requested at the previous meeting and noted the following:

- it was likely that the cesspit emptying would cost more than anticipated.
- if the tree felling programme was not completed, the grant contribution and estimated £10K for sale of timber would be removed from the budget, which could result in an overspend.
- the cafe was on a graduated rent scheme and the Council also had a turnover share. As the audited accounts were not currently available this income was currently not known.
- the Council had started its budgeting process for the next financial year. This would be scrutinised and agreed at a Cabinet meeting in January 2024. It could be beneficial to obtain Trustee views on raising car parking charges alongside this process with a report being submitted to the Committee at its January meeting stating the Council's proposal.

Trustees mentioned the visitor survey (on the agenda under Any Other Business) and wished to include it as part of this discussion.

Summary of discussion:

- season tickets should be included in the review of charges. Noted that the current season ticket scheme was generous when compared with other local sites. The process required time and money to administrate, and it could be necessary to either remove the scheme or raise the price.
- there currently wasn't sufficient resources in the Council to manage and enforce a staggered charge scheme. The Council's preference was to have a flat rate. The Committee could decide a price rise at this meeting to ensure it was submitted as a proposal in the Council's budgeting process.
- evidence of cars not paying the parking charge could be season ticket holders.
- the budget wasn't set until January so detailed proposals could be submitted to the Committee at its next meeting and this would align with changing the parking order.
- whether the survey was required and would provide the information the Committee wished to obtain regarding visitor numbers.

- the survey could be launched online via social media only, utilising QR code methods and run for six months. The QR code could be located in the café and on noticeboards in the car park and at entrances to the woods.
- the delineation of spaces in the Outwoods car park would create more parking spaces. Quotes had been received for marking the ground. A Trustee provided an example of where posts had been used and marked to delineate spaces. The Head of Contracts, Leisure, Waste and Environment agreed to review outside of the meeting with the individual Trustee.

AGREED that:

1. the car parking charges for the Outwoods be raised from £1 to £2 flat rate.
2. the Head of Contracts, Leisure, Waste and Environment submit a report to the Committee at its meeting in January 2024 regarding proposals for the season tickets scheme and any amendments to the budget affecting the Outwoods.
3. the Democratic Services Officer liaise with the Comms team to create an online survey and a QR code using questions agreed for the paper version to determine visitor use of the Outwoods and share via the Council's social media channels.
4. the report be noted.

6. RANGERS REPORT

A report of the Head of Contracts: Leisure, Waste and Environment was submitted (item 7 on the agenda). The Committee welcomed the report from the new Head Ranger and wished to thank him for the content and photos, which it appreciated.

AGREED that the report be noted and be circulated to all councillors after the meeting.

7. A.O.B

Trustees raised the following queries:

- if the Council was considering S106 monies from housing developments in the area to improve footpaths and cycle ways and that it was important to look at active travel networks. The Head of Contracts, Leisure, Waste and Environment stated he would liaise with the trustee outside of the meeting and arrange to put them into contact with relevant Planning Officers.
- if a link between Garendon Park and the Outwoods was being considered.
- whether it was possible for the Council to obtain Jubilee Wood and Nanpantan Reservoir to manage alongside the Outwoods.

- that a link between the Priory Public House and the Outwoods would be a welcome addition to access routes.

The Head of Contracts, Leisure, Waste and Environment explained that strategic links to the Outwoods were included in the Outwoods Management Plan, referencing page 15, and requested that Trustees reviewed the plan prior to the next meeting.

Resignation of Trustee

PB resigned as a Trustee from the Committee and explained that it had been a difficult decision, particularly as they had enjoyed being a donor trustee of the Committee. The Committee noted that it had greatly appreciated their work on the Committee and the Chair stated she was sorry to lose their contribution.

In accordance with the Trust Deeds it was noted that PB had been an Alan Moss Trustee and it was the responsibility of the remaining Alan Moss Trustees to nominate a new appointee. CN as the Alan Moss Trustee present at the meeting explained that they and GM had agreed to nominate RB to the Committee, who farmed land adjacent to the Outwoods. GM who was not present had emailed their agreement to the clerk prior to the meeting.

AGREED that:

1. RB be appointed to the Outwoods Management Committee as an Alan Moss Donor Trustee.
2. Trustees review the Outwoods Management Plan before the next meeting of the Committee.

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).

5. **FINANCE UPDATE**

It was proposed and seconded that the Committee agreed to raising the car parking charges from £1 to £2 flat rate.

10 voted in favour
None abstained
None voted against

The Proposal was carried.

AGREED that:

1. the car parking charges for the Outwoods be raised from £1 to £2 flat rate.