

**OUTWOODS MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE
25TH JANUARY 2023**

PRESENT: Councillors Bailey, Fryer (Chair), K Harris, Morgan, Parsons, Smidowicz and GM, RE (Vice-Chair), and DG

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

APOLOGIES: Cllr Campsall, PB, CN, Julie Attard

1. DISCLOSURES OF PECUNIARY AND PERSONAL INTERESTS

Disclosures of personal interests were made as follows:

- (i) Cllr Smidowicz as a member of Charnwood Arts Council.
- (ii) Cllr Bailey as Chair of the Charnwood Forest Regional Park and farms land adjacent to the Outwoods.
- (iii) RE whose wife is a member of ArtsSpace Loughborough.

2. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING & MATTERS ARISING

The minutes of the meeting held on 26th October 2022 were agreed.

3. CHARNWOOD LANDSCAPE PARTNERSHIP

Julie Attard was unable to attend the meeting due to illness. The Committee agreed that the update could be scheduled for the next meeting of the Committee.

AGREED that Julie Attard provides a Charnwood Landscape Partnership update at the meeting of the Committee on 19th April 2023.

4. CARPARKING AT THE OUTWOODS

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

GM joined the meeting.

Increasing Parking Capacity

The Head of Contracts: Leisure, Waste and Environment noted that car parking at the Outwoods had become a long-standing concern. He stated that there were Capital funds available to delineate parking bays and that a quotation had been requested for the installation of a plastic grid infilled with gravel and the use of white lines. As the work would be required to come in within budget a cheaper option could be considered using reflective markers. It was important for the lining of the car park

to be durable as a number of heavy vehicles used the car park to deliver supplies to the café and empty the septic tank.

The Chair of the Committee suggested that Tarmac could be approached to see if they were willing to provide assistance as the company was known to support community projects. As a member of the relevant Liaison Committee she agreed to work with the Head of Contracts: Leisure, Waste and Environment in this matter.

Displaced parking

The Head of Contracts: Leisure, Waste and Environment stated that this referred to parking on the road and did not include parking in the laybys by the side of the woods. He noted that the County Council shared the Borough Council's safety concerns and were willing to install double yellow lines if the Borough Council would share the costs. The statutory consultation period was 12 weeks.

Summary of discussion:

- clarification was sought regarding whether the costs would be a one-off payment or future expenditure would be required. It was essential not to set a precedent.
- that the extent of double yellow lines to be installed had not been determined or whether it would be installed on both sides of the road. A shortened length of double yellow lines could result in simply shifting the parking issues further along the road.
- that this was a highways matter and consideration should be given to the number of visitors to Jubilee Wood. It was possible, depending on where the yellow lines were installed, that visitors to this wood could have to park in the Outwoods car park and walk back to Jubilee Wood along the road.
- that dangerous parking on the brow of the hill had been raised with Leicestershire Police but it was considered to be the responsibility of the Borough Council to enforce any restrictions.
- using informal parking restrictions such as large stones on the verge could be more dangerous.

The Committee considered that the installation of yellow lines was urgent and asked that additional information including the exact costs and length of lines to be installed be circulated to the Committee by email with a deadline to respond. It was also important to emphasise to the County Council that this was a request from the Outwoods Management Committee and not the Borough Council.

Alternative Parking

The Head of Contracts: Leisure, Waste and Environment stated that there were options for the Nanpantan Road Sports ground/cemetery car park and Moat Road car park to be promoted as alternatives to parking at the Outwoods.

Summary of discussion:

- the footpath K58 had been allocated funds by the County Council for improvements and had been applied for through a County scheme. However,

the work had not been initiated and it was suggested that the Outwoods Management Committee could also put in a request for the improvements.

- that the remedial work required at Moat Road Car park and creation of an off-road footpath from Deans Lane to the Lower Beacon was being funded by the Charnwood Forest landscape project and work would be starting this year.
- that renaming of the Nanpantan Road Sports ground/cemetery car park could be beneficial, and that the car parking notices could be updated. It was noted that third parties such as the Sports Club would need to be consulted.

Charging Review

The Head of Contracts: Leisure, Waste and Environment stated that, if agreed, it was necessary for the facility to pay by card to be installed before raising the charges. Unfortunately, there had been a delay to its installation, but the contractor had been contacted. During the discussion he noted that the card reader scheme would be cheaper than cash collection and would not be reliant on a mobile signal as this could be erratic. The increase in the number of car parking spaces obtained by lining the car park would increase the annual revenue and more disabled parking bays would also be created.

Trustees expressed the following views:

- it was important to consider the potential impact of increasing car parking charges. A rise in parking charges could increase the number of local cars parking on verges as these were more likely to be visiting the woods frequently, and that out of town visitors were more likely to use the car park.
- by leaving the Nanpantan Road Sports ground/cemetery car park free to park, this could balance an increase in charges at the Outwoods.
- as the woods had been gifted to the people of the Borough, it was important to ensure all people could access the woods, the importance of health benefits was referenced.
- season tickets for parking in the car park were value for money and could be publicised further. The price could be increased to £60 or the number of cars allowed on one ticket reduced. It was noted that the more season tickets were sold reduced the revenue benefit due to the administrative costs. A cap on numbers could be advantageous but would require a waiting list to be maintained. The season ticket scheme was likened to National Trust membership whereby the cost was balanced against the number of visits.
- whether a 'Friends of the Outwoods' / patronage scheme could be introduced with benefits of membership.
- the parking charge could be changed to £1 for half a day, but it was noted this could be challenging to enforce.
- whether it was possible after the lining of the car park, which was anticipated to increase parking by 20%, that one month's parking could be advertised as free. This could be difficult to resource and monitor, and that if the aim of the Trust was to be financially self-sufficient whether the loss of one month's parking income be afforded.
- the income predicted to be obtained by end 2023 was approximately £50K and this could increase to £60K after the lining of the car park.

- that it could be more appropriate to leave the charges as currently and monitor attendance. If the attendance dropped, then the charge could be increased.
- that any income obtained from an increase in parking charges should be ring fenced and put back into the maintenance of the woods. A board could be erected explaining where the money was being used and visitors might be more accepting of an increase in parking charges if they were informed of where the money was being spent.

It was noted that this matter required careful consideration and that after consultation with the Chair and Vice-chair to determine recommendations, a report would be submitted to the Committee for its consideration at the next meeting.

When agreeing that an annual car parking review report be submitted to the Committee in January, it was suggested that this be titled as a review and did not solely focus on parking charges.

AGREED that:

1. further information regarding the installation of double yellow lines be circulated to the Committee by email with a deadline to respond and that it be made clear to the Borough Council that the request was from the Outwoods Management Committee.
2. line the car park at the earliest opportunity
3. work with Leicestershire County Council to install double yellow lines on Woodhouse Lane.
4. the Outwoods Management Committee request of the County Council that it improves the footpath K58 from the Nanpantan Rd Sports Ground/Cemetery Car Park to the Outwoods.
5. promote the use of Nanpantan Rd Sports Ground/Cemetery Car Park as an alternative to parking at the Outwoods. Consideration should be given to renaming the car park.
6. the Borough Council to consider making remedial repairs to Moat Road Car Park.
7. Moat Road Car Park to be promoted as an alternative to parking at the Outwoods.
8. conduct a review of the parking charges to encourage use of alternative, free, parking locations and report back to the Committee.
9. the Head of Contracts: Leisure, Waste and Environment consult the Chair and Vice-chair of the Outwoods Management Committee to determine recommendations for car parking charges and submit these proposals to the Committee at its next meeting.

10. that the Outwoods Management Committee schedule an annual car parking review at their January meeting

5. OFFICER UPDATE REPORT

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

The Head of Contracts: Leisure, Waste and Environment noted that the Alan Moss Plaque was still in progress and the design would be shared with the Committee when available.

Tree Felling

The Head of Contracts: Leisure, Waste and Environment explained that there had been a development since the publication of the agenda which had proposed to postpone the tree felling for this year until timber prices recovered. It was now possible to complete the tree felling, windrowing and planting within budget by using volunteers to plant the trees in autumn and idverde would manage the aftercare. If the Committee agreed to go ahead with this proposal the car park would need to be closed for two weeks during February which could impact the café takings during half term week. If the Committee wished to postpone the tree felling this could result in the Trust not meeting its income in the budget for this year, although it was acknowledged this gap was likely to be made up by car parking charge income. The money from tree felling would not be lost as the asset would still be available for felling in the future.

Summary of discussion:

- there had been a good price for timber prior to the COVID pandemic but recently high imports of timber had created an oversupply and therefore the price had reduced. It was anticipated that the price would slowly increase again but it was not possible to predict accurately.
- there was a clause in the café lease which allowed for the closure of the car park. The café was accepting of the necessity but was keen to avoid closure during half term week. It was unlikely that this could be avoided as the annual felling license with National Forest England expired on 28th February. The trees would have to be felled, stored in the car park and moved out by that date. The overall arrangement with National Forest England for tree felling did not expire until 2025.
- whether it was possible to close only half of the car park – a risk assessment had determined it would be unsafe to do this.
- it was possible to defer the tree felling until November. However, the price of timber might not have increased by this date, and it could be more challenging to obtain volunteers to help with tree planting.
- whether it was possible to delay the tree planting after felling to ensure more availability of volunteers – trees could be felled before the end of the year with tree planting taking place in February although the ground would be harder. It was possible to delay the tree planting until Spring, but this had been done last

year and resulted in more losses due to the trees not being well enough established to resist the hot weather later in the year.

- whether the delay of tree planting could impact the environment and biodiversity of the woods.

Plans for Workshop to consider strategic direction

The Head of Contracts: Leisure, Waste and Environment introduced this matter and explained that the Democratic Services Officer had approached three companies to provide quotations and a loose outline for the workshop.

Cllr K Harris joined the meeting.

Trustees discussed the need for the workshop to provide a framework for decision making. It was acknowledged that the timing was appropriate for the Committee to review its vision and aims. Aims could include maximising revenue, protecting the environmental or increasing the number of visitors. It was important to seek a balance between these options and for the vision to support the Trust's direction of travel. It was noted that the Trust was almost self-sufficient financially and that it should consider its future in line with the Trust Deeds.

During the discussion it was noted that the bye laws which had been reviewed by the Committee previously had not yet been progressed with the Secretary of State. The Head of Contracts: Leisure, Waste and Environment explained that the aim was to apply the bye laws across other open spaces within the Council's portfolio and this work was ongoing.

AGREED that

1. the Head of Contracts: Leisure, Waste and Environment to share designs for the Alan Moss Plaque with the Committee.
2. the tree felling be deferred until November 2023 and that the tree planting began in November 2024.
3. the Head of Contracts: Leisure, Waste and Environment liaise with the Café in relation to the closure of the car park.
4. the Democratic Services officer proceed with the chosen company to arrange a workshop prior to the local elections (*it was confirmed after the meeting that the purdah period did not apply*).
5. that a copy of the transcribed Trust Deeds including additional information relating to the quorum and bye laws be circulated to the Committee.
6. that 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 7 on the agenda).

The Head of Contracts: Leisure, Waste and Environment presented the report and noted there were no major concerns. Trustees confirmed with the Head of Contracts: Leisure, Waste and Environment that in August 2019 the pay machine had been vandalised and that there had been operating issues with the machine in November 2021.

It was noted that there had been some water pressure issues with the supply to the café which had been resolved and that the Café was interested in expanding its activities to include events. It was suggested that open air marriage ceremonies could be held utilising the Events Barn. The lease for the café had started in November 2021 with the first year set at 50% payment and was for a period of 14 years with a rent review at 5 and 10 years.

AGREED that the report be noted.

6. A.O.B

The response received from the Petitioners after their receipt of the Committee's written response was noted. It was suggested that it could be beneficial to include a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) section on the Council's website on the Outwoods webpage.

The Head of Contracts: Leisure, Waste and Environment explained that the Council wished to charge a small fee for the Bluebell Walk this year which would include a guided walk and a hot or cold drink from the café. He noted that it was not expected to generate income and any money received would be split with the café. Previously the arrangements for the Bluebell Walk had been informal and challenging to manage. People had not registered to attend, and the numbers of attendees had, at times, been too many to supervise. It was suggested that tickets were sold, and that the numbers of attendees be limited. It was possible a car parking space could also be reserved for ticket holders.

AGREED that the Head of Contracts: Leisure, Waste and Environment consider the options for arranging a Bluebell Walk and circulate a proposal to the Committee prior to the next meeting for its agreement.

Date of next meeting was noted (19 April) and that due to the Chair's unavailability the Vice-chair would chair the meeting.

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