

**OUTWOODS MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE
26TH JANUARY 2022**

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

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

APOLOGIES: JN

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 Charnwood Forest Regional Park and farms land adjacent to the Outwoods.
- (iii) PB who farms land adjacent to the Outwoods.
- (iv) RE whose wife is a member of ArtsSpace Loughborough.

2. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 13th October 2021 were agreed.

4. OFFICER UPDATE REPORT

A report of the Head of Cleansing and Open Spaces was submitted (item 4 on the agenda). The Head of Cleansing and Open Spaces highlighted salient points in the report as follows:

- the Visitor Centre and Café had opened on 27th November, it appeared to be popular with visitors and was encouraging new visitors to the Outwoods. The conversion had cost £140K, would provide an annual lease income of £20K which would offset costs of maintaining the woods and further revenue was expected through increased car parking charges.
- the interpretation panels had been installed in the Visitor Centre. It was intended to arrange for a cast of the Charnia fossil with specialist lighting as a long-term option and Officers were working with the GeoPark project to provide this.
- the tree felling programme for 2021 had been completed in December. The car park had been closed for three weeks to ensure safety of the public whilst the work was being carried out. All had gone smoothly and there had been no official complaints although some visitors had challenged the process informally. The replanting of the cleared areas was expected to begin at the start of February. Although £10K had been forecast in the budget, £29K had been raised as income, however there was £6K costs for preparing, planting and after care to account for.

Summary of discussion:

- the Council had been cautious in its estimation of the potential income raised from the felling of the trees, particularly as it had overestimated the potential income for the first felling programme. It was complex to determine the weight of the trees to be felled and therefore its sale price, as this was completed whilst they were in situ. Also the price of timber had been better than expected.
- the views of Loughborough from the spaces created were spectacular and it was hoped that one area would not be replanted to provide a small viewing platform.
- despite the increased timber prices, the Council had no plans to accelerate the timber felling programme. There was always a delay in going out to tender for these contracts and tree felling was best completed during the Autumn and Winter months when footfall was less. It was anticipated that the timber prices would not significantly fall during the year.
- the contractor was known and well recommended and the Council was pleased with its work.
- the after care from the first felling programme required further inspection before it was possible to update the Committee. Some work had been carried out but it was expected that the Rangers team would need to complete further tasks such as clearing bracken prior to planting. Further information could be circulated to Trustees after the meeting.

Trustees noted that the tree felling programme and sale of timber was in keeping with the Trust Deeds and income received helped to maintain the woods.

The Head of Cleansing and Open Spaces brought to the Committee's attention an email that had been received after the agenda had been published from Tony Thory (ArtSpace Loughborough) regarding the proposed Sculpture Trail in 2022 which had been circulated to Trustees prior to the meeting. He noted that ArtSpace had been unsuccessful in its bid for the larger part of its funding including a refusal from the Borough Council through its Grants Scheme. ArtSpace had explained that the Sculpture Trail could still be arranged, with some funded outreach work taking place, but that it would be on a reduced scale to its original proposal. It had asked if the Committee was able to contribute financially to the project.

The Head of Cleansing and Open Spaces recommended that it would be inadvisable for the Committee to contribute financially, particularly as the Council had decided not to allocate a grant, but that the Committee could reiterate its support for the Trail to be progressed. ArtSpace could seek donations from visitors to the Outwoods during the project.

Trustees suggested that ArtSpace should seek feedback as to why it had not received a grant from the Borough Council, although it was believed that this was generally provided. It was agreed that the Sculpture Trail was worthwhile and should continue but it was difficult for the Committee to contribute financially.

AGREED

1. that an update regarding the after care completed after the first felling programme be circulated to the Committee before the next meeting;

2. that the Committee does not contribute financially to the proposed Sculpture Trail 2022 but continues to support it taking place in the Outwoods;
3. that the report be noted.

5. FINANCE UPDATE REPORT

A report of the Head of Cleansing and Open Spaces was submitted that covered the revenue budget as at 14th January 2022 (item 5 on the agenda).

The Head of Cleansing and Open Spaces noted the following:

- there had been some overspend on 'grounds and general maintenance' but this was mainly associated with additional work carried out during the Visitor Centre project which had not been covered by the contract.
- since the issuing of the report there was approximately £32K in contract costs and £6K for tree felling after care to include but it was expected that the finance would come in under budget for year end.
- going forward he wished to provide the Committee with an annual update on the net revenue position year on year.
- with respect to car parking charges, November had been lower due to the closing of the car park during tree felling and that December 2020/21 had been significantly higher than the previous year, likely due to COVID restrictions. The increase in car parking income in December this year was likely to be due to the opening of the café.
- An update regarding parking enforcement action could be circulated to the Committee after the meeting. It was proposed to serve warning notices initially with follow up fines notices if necessary. The Council was looking into the provision of a card reader for the car parking machine.

Summary of discussion:

- the Outwoods Management Committee Accounts were not filed separately as a Trust but were managed by the Council on its behalf. The Council met any shortfall in expenditure and the Account was audited as part of the Council's annual financial audit; this was considered to be operating within the spirit of the Trust Deeds. It was noted that the Finance Update report was welcome and longer serving Trustees remembered when updates had not been provided.
- the car park was very busy at peak times and would benefit from the planned marking out of car parking spaces to be completed. This had not yet started due to additional work carried out on the Visitor Centre. It was hoped to provide temporary markings before using the funding received from the Charnwood Landscape Partnership to create more permanently delineated parking bays.
- Officers were in consultation with the Council's Communications team to consider ways to promote other car parking venues such as near the Nanpantan Sports Ground and Moat Road.
- the County Council had been petitioned to repair the Right of Way footpath to the Outwoods from the sports ground as it was difficult to navigate in wintry weather and was impacting the surrounding fields. The path from Moat Road was

scheduled to be resurfaced and a provisional date of May 2022 had been given for creating the off road path between the Outwoods and the Beacon.

It was requested that the 'Fees & Charges Misc' category in the budget information be itemised separately so that the income from the tree felling could be clearly identified in the accounts. Officers clarified that at present the headings were taken from the Council's accounting system but further detail could be provided.

AGREED

1. that the 'Fees & Charges Misc' category in the budget information be itemised separately in future Finance Update reports to clearly identify the tree felling income in the accounts;
2. that a parking enforcement update be circulated to the Committee before the next meeting;
3. that the report be noted.

6. 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) and the Head of Cleansing and Open Spaces drew the Committee's attention to the salient points.

Summary of discussion:

- the Charcoal burner was being prepared for operation in the Summer. Charcoal experts had offered to make charcoal for free which could be sold in the café. It was hoped to turn the session into a weekend event with activities and possibly a BBQ. Once details had been finalised, approval for the proposed plans would be sought from Trustees by email as it could require confirmation prior to the next Committee meeting.
- whether the fungi identified in the Outwoods could be harmful to the trees. Most fungi tended to live in symbiosis with the trees and not all native species were susceptible. Honey fungus could be aggressive, but it tended to react to changes in conditions and was part of natural woodland processes. Pictures of fungi including warnings could be installed in the Visitor Centre and it was possible a Fungi walk could be arranged (although advance planning would be required).
- it was intended to re-start the Bluebell walks, which had not occurred due to the recent pandemic, and to organise a number of walks, meeting outside the café.

The Committee wished to thank the Rangers for their hard work.

AGREED

1. That delegated authority be given to the Head of Cleansing and Open Spaces to progress plans for a Charcoal Burning event and keeps the Committee informed of plans;

2. that the contents of the report be noted.

7. A.O.B

The dates of future meetings were reviewed, and Trustees were happy to continue with the quarterly meetings in the identified months.

It was hoped to hold the next meeting at the Visitor Centre with a walk around the woods arranged before 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