

**OUTWOODS MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE
WEDNESDAY, 27TH JANUARY 2021 AT 6.00PM
BY VIRTUAL MEETING**

To: Councillors Bailey, Campsall (Vice-chair), Fryer (Chair), K. Harris, Morgan, Parsons, Poland, and Tillotson

PB, RE, GM, CN, JN

AGENDA

1. APOLOGIES
2. DISCLOSURES OF PECUNIARY AND PERSONAL INTERESTS
3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING & MATTERS ARISING Pages 2 - 6

To confirm as a correct record the minutes of the meeting held on 7th October 2020.
4. SCUPLTURE TRAIL PROJECT PROPOSALS 2021 Pages 7 - 8

A report regarding proposals for a Sculpture Trail 2021
5. ACTIVITIES AND OPERATIONAL MANAGEMENT AT THE OUTWOODS SINCE THE LAST MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE Pages 9 - 19

An update regarding activities and operational management at the Outwoods.
6. OFFICER UPDATE REPORT

An update regarding issues raised at previous meetings and information concerning new issues – **TO FOLLOW**.
7. FINANCE UPDATE REPORT

An update on financial matters – **TO FOLLOW**.
8. A.O.B

DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

Dates for 2020-21 are:

14th April 2021

**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



Into The Outwoods Sculpture Trail 2021 – Project Proposal.

Following on from the success of the 6 week long Sculpture Trail in 2019, ArtSpace would like to propose an expanded project for 2021, with a sculpture trail open from 31 May to 5 Sept. including the school summer holidays. Art work will be installed between 10 May and 31 May. All artwork and signage etc. will be removed from the woods between 6 Sept and 19 Sept. All artwork installations will be suitable, safe and installed to an acceptable standard, as judged by the Outwoods Rangers/Management Committee and Charnwood Borough Council. We are aware of the scheduled café development in the spring and the tree felling programme in the autumn/winter. We do not see any conflict here and will make sure our work does not interfere with these in any way. We are also aware that the immediate future is unpredictable in terms of the Covid-19 pandemic and that new restrictions that may come into force at any time. We will modify our plans as necessary if any conflict arises and we will make sure all our activities conform to the relevant rules at the time.

We have made applications to Arts Council England and to The National Forest to fund the project. We hope to know whether we have been successful in this by the end of Feb or the first week of March.

During 2020 people have been confronted by two major global issues, covid-19 and the climate crisis, and 2021 needs to be a time for reflection, healing and hope, and we want to create a space for this to occur. This year's sculpture trail theme, **'Harmony and Healing for Planet and People'**, aims to promote personal and community well-being and increase awareness of environmental sustainability and draw links between the two. We will achieve this through creativity in the natural landscape with a varied programme of arts activities which will revolve around the 1.5-mile sculpture trail. The trail will take a similar route to that in 2019 and will include a similar number of works. As a celebration of the woodland landscape and critique of the climate crisis, the trail will provide inspiration for visitors and participants, allowing them to engage with the woods in an active way to promote a sense of connection to, and understanding of, the natural world. Nita Rao, the projects lead artist, will act as a mentor and workshop leader as part of her artist residency in which she will develop ideas and make artworks from natural materials to be installed in the woods. Alongside the lead artist's work, ArtSpace members' commissions will be exhibited, forming a large part of the trail. Additionally, some commissions will be reserved for early career artists, as well as offering a week-long student internship to work alongside the lead artist in the woods and in schools focusing on socially engaged practice which will result in a trail installation. We have

devised an outreach programme to enable those who do not have easy access to the arts or the woods to take part. This consists of a series of community workshops to co-produce artworks for the trail, with specific groups from a variety of social and cultural backgrounds and a range of abilities. We also hope to run a series of workshops for the general public sited amongst the trail with appropriate safety measures in place (e.g. pre-booking, small groups, and socially distanced). We intend to have a greater online presence to engage with the public in a variety of ways. We will utilise blogs and social media platforms including photography and film from the trail and promote a series of art challenges for the public; for example making leaves for a multi-media installation, or making and photographing ephemeral art to be shared online to create a virtual community.

Based on the popularity of 2019's trail we expect to attract a diverse audience to the sculpture trail, largely from the East Midlands region. In developing a stronger online presence this year, we expect to attract a wider, possibly global, audience.

Additionally, there will be incidental spectators, who will come across the work in progress whilst walking in the woods. However, we are keen to develop the diversity and accessibility of our audience further, working with specific groups/schools, whose members need additional support to access both arts activities and the rural environment. These include: Maplewell Hall School for pupils with specific learning disabilities; Cobden Primary School situated in an ethnically diverse area and one of the highest areas of multiple deprivation in the borough; After 18, a Leicester-based charity supporting young adult asylum seekers, and Loughborough Well-being Café arts project which supports people with mental health needs.

We will inspire people's creativity and offer alternative ways of being in the landscape, encouraging interaction and engagement with their environment from a different perspective to create the circumstances for wellbeing. At the same time, we aim to raise awareness of climate emergency and encourage people to think about our place in the natural world, thus increasing eco-literacy. This will be achieved through the specific and public workshop programmes, engagement with artwork and encounters with artists as they work in the woods. We want to make the natural environment more accessible to people so they look on it as a sanctuary in difficult times, and where through art, we can make connections with our social and environmental context, with other people and with the planet, and do so safely. An online presence will enable us to further facilitate and extend people's engagement with the trail and provide the public with a space to share creative experiences.



The Outwoods Management Committee Rangers Report

1st October-31st December 2020

As we all continue to push forward through this pandemic, the Outwoods has been, more than ever, a welcome sanctuary to many people seeking to temporarily escape the bustle of the town. Feedback from visitors has been hugely positive and the Outwoods is being probably appreciated and valued more now than at any other time during its more recent history under the care of Charnwood Borough Council and the Outwoods Management Committee.



During October, the volunteers worked overtime as we increased the number of sessions to 3 times per week in order to accommodate our bank of volunteers that were keen to get outdoors and be proactive. As we worked in line with government guidance of the rule of 6, groups were limited to 5 volunteers and 1 Ranger leading.

With woodland management work able to start, we focused on clearing the holly to the rear of the Events barn.

The Rangers and volunteers have



been focusing on this area to enhance the safety of the children playing in the Green Play area as the log and rock trail leads towards dense woodland, away from supervising parents who may be seated on the other side of the bungalow in the picnic area, and could lead to them becoming lost in the woodland.

This work also exposes the barn from the woodland. Some visitors commented that they were not even aware that the barn was there despite regular visits.



The holly which has been growing in this area has been left unmanaged for some time, due to more pressing management requirements such as rhododendron removal. The dense growth is now being thinned by 75% whilst still leaving a sound and wind break on the road side.

Much of the holly has been burnt in the woods to prevent it from re-rooting.

The Rangers carried out routine daily maintenance each morning in the Outwoods. The play area, Events barn, paying machine, disabled parking spot and toilet area have been cleared of leaves and acorns. The toilets were cleaned and the parking machine is also being sprayed with disinfectant twice daily.



In an attempt to reduce COVID transmission within the Outwoods, the Rangers worked on designing new bin tops that will allow for the bin lids to be removed whilst still preventing squirrels and crows raiding the contents. The new tops also needed to be light and cheap to construct. The first 2 shown here are the prototype and being trialled before committing to construct the tops on the remaining bins.

Signs provided by CBC were placed around the site to remind visitors to follow government guidelines.



Bark, created by chippings of fallen hardwood trees in the Outwoods, has been used to top up the surroundings of the disabled picnic area.

It has been recognised, during our daily playground inspections of the Outwoods Green Play area, that there are fungal growths on the logs. This is not unexpected as the logs are untreated and exposed to the elements. Unfortunately, this does mean that the logs will need to be removed from the play area.



Outwoods Fungus Observations

Fly Agaric



Chicken in the Woods



Stinkhorn



October is a great month for fungus hunting and there are few places with more fascinating fungi than the Outwoods. Other recent observations, though not photographed, were:

Amethyst deceiver (*Laccaria amethystina*)

Sulphur tuft (*Hypholoma fasciculare*)

King Alfred's Cake (*Daldinia concentrica*)

Purple Jellydisc (*Ascocoryne sarcoides*)

Candlesnuff fungus (*Xylaria hypoxylon*)

Black Bulgar (*Bulgaria inquinans*)



On the 2nd October, the Rangers arranged to meet a lady who wished to plant an English oak in the Outwoods in memorial to her mother who had recently departed.

The decision was made to plant the tree in the area where there have been a number of semi-mature oak trees have recently been lost due to the high winds since February. The winds were particularly harsh in this area due to the removal of the wind break provided by the pine sp. The oaks would have been a little complacent with their root growth as they were reliant on the pine for wind support. This area is also of shallow soils before hitting the granite bedrock so oaks will always struggle to ensure that their tap root is set deeply into the ground.

Hopefully, the new oak will find its way and root well. It will certainly have the space to spread its branches as it has been planted in an area set away from the 'crowd'. It's 'sister', a silver birch, was also planted at the same time and will provide some moral support in its growth.

The lady later also donated a silver birch which has been planted close-by.



We were allowed very little time during November as England were subjected to stricter social interaction guidelines. All volunteering was paused again on the 5th November for a period of 4 weeks of further lockdown restrictions. However, all of the allowed 4 days of November were used to engage in volunteering activities following the 'rule of 6'.

The Green Gym continued to thin and burn the holly on the 2nd, 3rd and 4th of the month and impressive progress was made by the small groups that attended.



The Outwoods

November 6th 2020. A misty morning patrol





The Rangers carried out daily blowing of the car park and Events space to keep it clear of the heavy drop of leaves. The leaves can become slippery when wet, especially as they break down quickly into mud in wet weather. This can be a hazard in the car park as there are some that enter the car park a little too quickly off the 60mph road. The planned crocodile teeth at the entrance will make a difference to this trend.

The leaves can also cause slips or cover hazards in the play area, although we also want to make sure that the area looks well kempt for the many visitors that have been attending the site of late. It seems that there have been a surge in people that have recently discovered the site since the pandemic.



The car park has been extremely busy during this reporting period. To the point that on more than one occasion, the Rangers found that they were blocked from accessing the yard. We have now put a bigger sign on the gate to indicate that access is required at all times.

Unfortunately, we have suffered some anti-social behaviour. There has been regular high levels of litter from night-time visitors and the destruction of one of the oak picnic benches.



Coppicing

There are stands of hazel in the Outwoods that are long overdue coppice management. Hazel is a plant that strongly benefits from being coppiced as it is invigorated when cut, and this ancient management technique can prolong the plants lifespan threefold.

The hazel in the Outwoods has been left too long between coppice cycles. Upon cutting, we have learned that some of the plants had been left growing for 50 years. To keep hazel healthy, recommended cycles run from 5-25 years, dependant on the requirements of the yield.

Hazel was coppiced many years ago to provide mainly fencing materials and this is the vision that we have for our material gain from hazel coppicing within Charnwood's wildlife areas. We have already used sustainably sourced hazel for our previous hedge-laying tasks at Gorse Covert. We have plans to use some of our hazel stands to construct hurdles to retain the Events area to restrict access where we have thinned the holly as this 'invites' roaming away from the footpaths.

Once plants have been coppiced, we can select straight stems which will come from the plants to make hurdles. We hope to run volunteer sessions and possibly workshops open to the public. This could possibly be tied in with the Outwoods Sculpture Trail.

DECEMBER



Whip Planting (Beating Up)

As social restrictions were eased on December 2nd, the volunteers were able to return in our groups of 6. Every year in the later autumn months, we return to our planting areas to 'beat up', replacing any lost whips with live ones. This year, we replaced 120 losses in the central planting area. Till Hill Forestry are contracted to beat up the 2 areas that were most recently cleared and planted so our focus is on this area for now.



More holly thinning was able to be carried out before Christmas. Our last session of the year was on the 20th December. We were hoping to continue this work in January, but for obvious reasons, this will now be completed by the Rangers.

We have been able to introduce 5 new volunteers to our cohort in December following the 3 new starters in early November. Some of these people are currently furloughed from their jobs, so it's great to see that they are keeping their minds and bodies active whilst carrying out valuable conservation work whilst their places of work are closed.



In the summer months the Rangers marked out parking bays with chalk paint. This was due to the very high volume of visitors and trying to keep as many cars within the car park and off the fast road as possible. As more people returned to their workplaces and the cooler weather came, we stopped marking out the bays as we felt it no longer necessary. The process is quite time consuming, costs approx. £8 per application in marker paint and is quite quickly rubbed away. However, the level of activity in the Outwoods again rose, possibly due to the stone paths in wet weather making walks less muddy. We were left quite bemused by some peoples parking and hoped that some of the people parked in the middle here weren't in a rush to get anywhere!



One of the oak trees near to the cottage was felled in preparation for the building renovations in early 2021. The Rangers removed the timber into the Rangers yard to remove the hazard from children playing in the area.



Sadly, there has been more anti-social behaviour in and around the car park overnight. This is the remnants of a fire in the Events Barn. Some slabs have been cracked due to the heat of the fire. *Idverde* Engineers attended to assess that there had been no structural damage to the construction and make repairs to the slabs. Fortunately, there is only light scorching to the roof timbers and the benches were unaffected.



Further work undertaken during this reporting period includes:

- Facilities cleaned and disinfected x2 per day
- Pay machine disinfected x 2 per day
- Green Play equipment safety checked and disinfected every morning
- Ditch clearance where most required
- Litter bins emptied x2 weekly
- Car park litter picked daily
- Social distancing signs placed at key locations and replaced when vandalised