

**OUTWOODS MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE
27TH JANUARY 2021**

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

T. Thory and N. Rao (Artspace Loughborough)

Head of Cleansing and Open Spaces
Democratic Services Officer (LS)

APOLOGIES: None

1. DISCLOSURES OF PECUNIARY AND PERSONAL INTERESTS

The Chair outlined ongoing interests as follows:

- (i) PB farmed land adjacent to the Outwoods;
- (ii) Councillor Bailey farmed land adjacent to the Outwoods and was the Chair of Charnwood Forest Regional Park;
- (iii) JN lived on land adjacent to the Outwoods.

RE stated an interest in that his wife was a member of Artspace Loughborough.

2. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING AND MATTERS ARISING

The minutes of the meeting held on 7th October 2020 were agreed.

There were no matter arising.

JN joined the meeting at 6.09pm.

3. SCULPTURE TRAIL PROJECT PROPOSALS 2021

A report setting out proposals for a Sculpture Trail 2021 was submitted (item 4 on the agenda).

T. Thory and N. Rao attended to assist the Committee with its consideration of the matter.

Summary of discussion:

- (i) Regarding uncertainty caused by the Coronavirus pandemic and possible continued social distancing requirements, given popularity of project, how was it planned to manage that? In response, no opening event or public drop-in workshops planned. In previous years, those been the times when the project had been busy. The workshops that were planned would be by invite or require

pre-booking, so that numbers could be controlled. Subject to the Outwoods remaining open to public, the project would adhere to all social distancing requirements in place at the time. Reference to woods being the best environment to be in in current times.

- (ii) Although it would need to be different in 2021, the project had been a popular one and was likely to be especially welcomed given recent times. Reference to likely positive effects for vulnerable groups of the Coronavirus vaccination programme by the time the project was up and running. Would it be possible to postpone start date if position with Coronavirus made that necessary? T. Thory confirmed that the project was reasonably flexible, the start could be delayed, it would just mean that the Sculpture Trail would be in place for a shorter period. Important that it did not conflict with forestry/tree felling work, but that was unlikely to start before November.

Councillor Campsall joined the meeting at 6.16pm.

- (iii) The issue of car parking was raised. T. Thory stated that there had been parking congestion at the event previously, usually at the peak of the bluebells and at the opening and sculpture in the woods days. Those days were not part of the project for 2021 and the project would commence after the bluebell season, so parking was less likely to be an issue. As stated above, there would also be no drop-in activities. However, in terms of contingency, it was hoped to make better use of the Nanpantan Sports Ground car park, including improved signage for that with help from the Council. In response to a question, the Head of Cleansing and Open Spaces confirmed that works planned at the Sports Ground car park (cemetery development) would be at a time so as not to prevent its use during the Sculpture Trail (although capacity might be slightly reduced) and that the Moat Road car park could also be promoted. The number of visitors to the Outwoods themselves was not something that the project could control.
- (iv) Although a suitable Sculpture Trail project for 2021 was much welcomed, the view was expressed that an overflow car park was not something that should be offered or promoted as it suggested that numbers might be greater than ought to be encouraged in current circumstances.
- (v) Further clarification was sought in respect of the notice that would be needed should it prove necessary to reschedule to a later date. T. Thory assured the Committee that, although artists would be undertaking some preparatory work, the project could be flexible at short notice in terms of delaying either/or the install/opening. N. Rao added that that flexibility would be assisted by the plan to largely use social media for marketing.
- (vi) It was stated that the four-month length of the project would also assist with managing the spread of visitors.

AGREED

1. that the proposals for the Sculpture Trail Project 2021 set out in the report be agreed in principle;
2. that authority be granted to the Head of Cleansing and Open Spaces, in consultation with the Chair/Vice-chair of the Committee and the Cabinet Lead Member, to make any further decisions required in relation to the Sculpture Trail

Project 2021, but that the Trustees/Committee be kept informed in respect of the matter;

3. that T. Thory and N. Rao be invited to the Committee's April 2021 meeting to provide a further update on the project, should they so wish.

Note: Councillor Tillotson's agreement to 1. above was subject to her view that an overflow car park should not be promoted for the reason set out in (iv) above. The Chair stated that whether to promote an overflow car park was a matter that could be decided under the delegated authority agreed in 2. above.

4. ACTIVITIES AND OPERATIONAL MANAGEMENT AT THE OUTWOODS SINCE THE LAST MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE

An update setting out activities and operational management at the Outwoods since the last meeting of the Committee was submitted (item 5 on the agenda).

The Head of Cleansing and Open Spaces highlighted the following:

- Judging by car park takings, the last quarter of 2020 had been very busy/involved record numbers of visitors.
- A small group of volunteers had done fantastic work as set out in the report and in a covid-secure manner.
- There had been some vandalism. However, it was hoped that the car park gate to be installed as part of the visitor centre project would mean less unwanted visitors in the evening.

Summary of discussion:

- (i) The report was always an interesting one, thanks were extended to all involved. Sadly, there had been some vandalism. It might be useful to circulate the report to all Charnwood Borough Councillors, an edited version if necessary. They may be able to assist with keeping an eye on that.
- (ii) In response to a question, it was stated that the new bin lid trial had worked well and that those would be kept.
- (iii) In response to a question, it was confirmed that the Council would consider requests for a memorial tree in respect of all its open spaces. Trees were preferred to memorial benches as the number of the latter was currently sufficient. Guidance would always be provided on siting/species.
- (iv) The photographs in the report were stunning. It was confirmed that those were taken by the Rangers. Idverde held an annual photographic competition for its employees, producing a calendar using the 12 winning photographs taken across the sites it maintained. The view was expressed that it would be nice to see the calendar.

AGREED

1. that the report be noted;

2. that the Head of Cleansing and Open Spaces be asked to pass on the Committee's thanks to all involved in undertaking the work set out, including the volunteers, and in producing the report and photographs;
3. that a suitably edited version of the report (that may be further shared) be sent to all Charnwood Borough Councillors and to the Trustees.

5. OFFICER UPDATE REPORT

An update report regarding issues raised at previous meetings and to bring new issues to the attention of the Committee was submitted (item 6 on the agenda).

The Head of Cleansing and Open Spaces outlined the position in relation to the following, detailed in the report:

- Covid-19 - Impact and measures taken.
- Visitor Centre Café - Current position, plans and timetable, dedication of building.
- Tree Felling/Planting – Delay due to Covid-19, plans to recommence.

Summary of discussion:

- (i) It was noted that a report on the proposed tree felling/planting programme from Autumn 2021 would be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee.
- (ii) In respect of the proposal to dedicate the completed Visitor Centre Café building to the late Charnwood Borough Councillor David Slater and to install a plaque to indicate that, the view was expressed that the benefactors who had provided the Outwoods should be also mentioned appropriately. It was confirmed that that could be achieved through the display in an appropriate place of the brass plaque previously located on the old gates and which mentioned the gifting of the Outwoods to the people of Loughborough and those who had donated it. Information on that history and the benefactors would also be displayed in a comfortable environment inside the building, alongside regular updates from the Rangers. Reference was made to roads in Loughborough that had been named after the benefactors. The view was expressed that dedication to Councillor Slater was appropriate given his support for the project and his work to secure Council funding.
- (iii) In response to a question, it was confirmed that the contractor for work on the Visitor Centre had been made aware of previous thefts and was clear that it had liability for its equipment. It was confident that it could secure that.
- (iv) As it was a relatively safe task from a Covid-19 perspective, it was unclear why tree felling had not been undertaken in the current season. In response, it was confirmed that a programme would take place from Autumn 2021 (two compartments), with reference made to income expected in the Council's forthcoming budget for that. The Chair stated that the first tranche of works had been quicker and more effective than expected.
- (v) Regarding safety of the public during work on the Visitor Centre, it was confirmed that there would be a full site risk assessment and a secure compound and work area. Footings work may require the closure of the play area for a short period. The safety elements were all in hand, including in respect of contractor vehicle movements. Regarding hours of work, it was not known for certain at the

meeting what those would be, that information could be sent to members of the Committee following the meeting. The Chair stated that hours of work had been a condition in the planning permission.

- (vi) There was further discussion of the opportunity that the Visitor Centre would provide to explain the history and other aspects of the Outwoods, including how that might be effectively achieved and sources of such information. The Outwoods was an asset for Loughborough and Charnwood and all involved wished to take good care of it. It was confirmed that a further update on the Visitor Centre would be included in the Officer Update report to the Committee at its next meeting, in the meantime, any questions could be directed to the Head of Cleansing and Open Spaces.
- (vii) In response to a question regarding timescales for the Visitor Centre, it was stated that it was planned to finish construction in May 2021 and begin operating in time for the school summer holidays.

AGREED

1. that the report be noted;
2. that a report on the proposed tree felling/planting programme from Autumn 2021 be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee;
3. that the hours of work that will apply in respect of construction work on the Visitor Centre be confirmed to members of the Committee.

6. FINANCE UPDATE REPORT

An update report regarding finance issues was submitted (item 7 on the agenda).

The Head of Cleansing and Open Spaces had no concerns to report in respect of finance. He referred to how busy the car park had been in the period and the income from that, detailed in the report. That was encouraging, particularly as it had been necessary to close it at the start of the current financial year, followed by a period of not charging. It was hoped that pre-pandemic budget would be met.

Summary of discussion:

- (i) Options for a contactless payment machine were still being investigated. The link to a SIM card referred to in the report enabled remote monitoring of the ticket machine.
- (ii) In response to a question, it was confirmed that the Council would look to mark spaces in the car park more effectively, indeed that was a condition of the planning permission for the Visitor Centre. Suitable options for the surface were being considered. The view was expressed that visitors generally parked more courteously if spaces were clearly set out.
- (iii) The Head of Cleansing and Open Spaces was thanked for a useful report and for all his work in respect of the Outwoods.
- (iv) Reference was made to different amounts stated for total car park income by end December 2020 from the ticket machine (£16,194.75) and income from car parking charges to 18 January 2021 in the account (-£15,545.01). This was a

timing issue and the Head of Cleansing and Open Spaces would try to ensure the amounts corresponded in future.

AGREED

that the report be noted.

Note: Although separate minutes have been provided above for ease of reference, at the meeting the Committee took a single decision to note the reports for both items 6 and 7 on the agenda.

7. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Head of Cleansing and Open Spaces apologised that two reports for this meeting had followed the agenda, this was due to urgent work that had been required in respect of flooding issues. The Committee confirmed that it understood it had been necessary to prioritise that.

The Chair stated the following:

- This meeting had been recorded by the clerk only for the purposes of preparing the minutes, if needed.
- The next meeting of the Committee would be held on 14th April 2021 at 6pm.
- Any urgent decisions required were delegated to the Head of Cleansing and Open Spaces, in consultation with the Chair/Vice-chair of the Committee and the Cabinet Lead Member, but Trustees would be kept informed by email.

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 be documented as an addendum to the minutes (Minute 2.2 refers).

None at this meeting.