

**OUTWOODS MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE
29TH JANUARY 2020**

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

Rita Gries, Community Nature Engagement Officer, Idverde & RSPB

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

APOLOGIES: Tony Thory and Nita Rao, ArtSpace Loughborough

1. 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 JN who lived on land adjacent to the Outwoods.
- (iii) by RE whose wife was a member of ArtSpace Loughborough.
- (iii) by Councillor Bailey who farmed land adjacent to the Outwoods.

2. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 9th October 2019 were agreed.

3. SCULPTURE TRAIL 2020 PROPOSALS

An evaluation report regarding the Sculpture Trail 2020 proposals was submitted (item 4 on the agenda).

Tony Thory and Nita Rao were unable to attend and did not send their apologies in time for the meeting.

The Committee considered the information contained in the report after items 5 and 6 on the agenda and was assisted by the Head of Cleansing and Open Spaces. It was noted that the 2020 event was proposed to be of longer duration and that there had been carparking and signage issues last year which Trustees wished to be resolved.

The Head of Cleansing and Open Spaces explained that there were a few logistical issues to discuss regarding the parking and the possibility of work being carried out in the car park at the same time as the event.

AGREED

1. that the detailed proposals for the Sculpture Trail event to be held in 2020 as submitted to the Committee at this meeting be supported in principle;
2. that the Head of Cleansing and Open Spaces liaise with the Chair and Vice - chair of the Committee, and ArtSpace Loughborough with respect to resolving logistical issues;
3. that the Head of Cleansing and Open Spaces circulate information by email to the Committee during the progress of this project, in particular, regarding any decisions that are made in consultation with the Chair and Vice-chair.

4. GUEST SPEAKER – WILDLIFE OF THE OUTWOODS

Rita Gries, the Community Nature Engagement Officer (Idverde & RSPB) attended the meeting to give a presentation about the wildlife of the Outwoods.

Key highlights of the presentation are as follows:

- the Outwoods was a unique ancient woodland that provided habitat for both generalist and woodland specific bird species. As it was located amongst farmland and other woodland this provided additional habitats for other species such as redwings and house sparrows. There had been a sharp decline between 1970s to 2018 in woodland species in the UK, with some bird species being 'red-listed' by the RSPB.
- the Outwoods provided habitat for 10 generalist bird species and 9 woodland bird species. It would be advantageous to encourage other bird species to use the Outwoods, (see item 6).
- historical recording of bird species observed in the Outwoods had been limited, but two volunteers were now completing bird surveys once a month. There were several websites or apps that could be used by the public to record bird sightings and a woodland tool kit that provided information about managing woods for wildlife.

Trustees discussed ways in which birds spotted in the woods could be recorded, examples included locating a chalk board in the car park, using the Council's social media to publicise wildlife recording or putting information in the Charnwood Newsletter and on the existing noticeboard in the car park.

AGREED

1. that the presentation slides are circulated to the Committee;
2. that the Head of Cleansing and Open Spaces investigates options to encourage the recording of bird species in the Outwoods by visitors.

5. NESTBOXES IN THE OUTWOODS

A report regarding the provision of nest boxes for two bird species was submitted (item 6 on the agenda).

Rita Gries, the Community Nature Engagement Officer (Idverde & RSPB) attended the meeting to give an update. She explained that six of each of the two models (made from durable woodstone) would be purchased and installed in March. The Head of Open Spaces stated that with the Committee's confirmation the Borough Council would pay for the installation. This was agreed as acceptable.

AGREED that Rita Gries be invited to the meeting of the Committee in January 2021 to present an update on the success of the project.

6. OUTWOODS CONIFER FELLING PROGRAMME PHASE 1 UPDATE

A report providing an update of the conifer felling programme was submitted (item 7 on the agenda).

The Head of Cleansing and Open Spaces stated that there had been no significant issues during the initiation of the felling programme. He wished to pass on his thanks to the officers, the Council's Comms team and Idverde for the high volume of work they had put into the programme to make it happen. He and the Senior Green Spaces Officer explained that the brash had been windrowed and the ground would be restocked primarily with oak in the next six weeks. One compartment would be contract planted, the other planted by volunteers. He referred to the income / expenditure in Appendix 2 of the report explaining there had been some preparatory work and unexpected costs not included in the original estimate.

Trustees discussed the following:

- that some of the costs appeared to relate to maintenance and planting – a three year after care service had been included, which would involve two visits for weeding and replanting for a potential 10% loss rate of trees. This cost had been paid in advance.
- whether some of the costs were not unexpected as stated in the appendix and that costs should be monitored - the brash raking had required additional management as it had been difficult to plant through what had been left on the ground, contrary to expectations. The Council had also felt it was important to restock the compartments this winter to give confidence to the public that the Council were committed to completing the project. The tonnage of timber obtained had been an estimate and the total estimated had not been realised.
- whether to condense the felling programme duration from 8 years to 4 years (this period of felling had covered two years' work) which would enable compartments to be planted with slow growing oak sooner and provide benefit to birdlife - there had been a lot of disruption for visitors during this initial felling period and it had required significant resource commitment. This impact could be reduced by shortening the programme. Natural England and the Forestry Commission would require consulting and the countryside stewardship agreement would require amendment.

- concerns about the differences between the projected expenditure and income in the report submitted to the Committee at its last meeting and the actual figures reported to the Committee at this meeting and whether the costs should have been known – it had been a learning experience for officers, some upfront costs had been expected, others had not. Preparatory work completed during this year would be in place for the next period of tree felling.

The Committee wished to pass on its thanks to Council officers, the Comms team and idverde staff for their hard work.

AGREED

1. that the Senior Green Spaces Officer check the accuracy of the restocking specification figures on page 19 of the report (Appendix 1), and circulate the correct figures to the Committee;
2. that the Committee supports in principle that the Head of Cleansing and Open Spaces initiates discussions with Natural England and the Forestry Commission regarding the reduction of the duration of the felling programme;
3. that the Head of Open Spaces and Cleansing submits a report providing more details of expenditure and income projections for the next round of tree felling to the Committee at its meeting scheduled on 22nd July 2020.

7. COTTAGE CONVERSION PROJECT

A report of the Head of Cleansing and Open Spaces providing an update about the ranger's cottage was submitted (item 8 on the agenda).

The Head of Cleansing and Open Spaces stated that a donor trustee and a ward councillor had registered to speak at the Plans Committee meeting on 30th January 2020 in favour of the application being approved. All Trustees were welcome to attend the meeting and if successful a press notice would be released on behalf of the Committee.

Trustees discussed the following, taking into consideration that the application had not yet been approved:

- how the kitchen area would be invested – the kitchen would be installed by the successful operator and it was likely to be a full repair and insurance lease, although the area to be leased required careful consideration in respect of the visitor centre space and its decoration.
- how the visitor centre/café would operate, its terms of lease and how the visitor centre would be designed – it was anticipated that the cafe would be let on commercial terms, and the visitor centre would have wall panels explaining the history of the Woods and its wildlife, the Committee and its benefactors.

AGREED

1. that if the planning application was approved, a subcommittee of the Outwoods Management Committee be created to review the proposals submitted by catering operators for the café when the Council goes out to tender;
2. that if the planning application was approved, the Head of Cleansing and Open Spaces submits a report to the Committee at its next meeting on 15th April 2020 providing the details of the future lease, what it will cover and the designs for the café / visitor centre for the Committee's consideration;
3. that if the planning application was approved, the Head of Cleansing and Open Spaces and the Chair and Vice-chair of the Committee be given delegated powers by the Committee to discharge the conditions of the application if required prior to the next meeting of the Committee, ensuring that Trustees are kept informed of such decisions.

8. OFFICER UPDATE / FINANCE REPORT

A report of the Head of Cleansing and Open Spaces was submitted (item 9 on the agenda). The Head of Cleansing and Open Spaces drew the Committee's attention to the following:

- (i) Charnwood Forest Regional Park – the bid had been submitted; inspectors were scheduled to visit the site in February with a decision being made in March.
- (ii) the bus lease had expired and the bus had been removed from site – there was an opportunity to have a smart refreshments concession at weekends on a simple contract, this could be in place to support the Sculpture Trail event. Trustees thought this was a good idea and would be beneficial for visitors.
- (iii) Car Park Charging – a ticket machine that accepted contactless and chip and pin payments had been sourced and would be installed into the car park at the earliest convenience.

Trustees discussed the following:

- the budget information and that the rent of land deficit included the carryover of rental income from the bus.
- the season ticket sales for the car park – that numbers of sales were holding steady.
- that the car parking income in the report for this month was low as it included income up to 15th January 2020 only.

AGREED

1. that the Head of Cleansing and Open Spaces keeps the Committee informed of the progress with the Charnwood Forest Regional Park landscape bid;

2. that the Committee supports the proposal to arrange for a refreshments concession to be sited in the Outwoods car park at weekends on a short-term contract;
3. that the Head of Cleansing and Open Spaces circulates by email to the Committee a guide specification of the type of refreshments concession being suggested and obtains the Trustees' views.

9. 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 10 on the agenda).

The Head of Cleansing and Open Spaces stated that it had been a busy period for the rangers.

Trustees were disappointed that a camp had been found including BBQs and considered whether there would be a risk to the new trees being damaged. This was considered to be low risk, particularly once the carpark security measures had been implemented.

AGREED that the contents of the report be noted.

10. A.O.B

A Trustee was concerned that the Temporary Traffic Regulation Order (TTRO) had been double accounted for in the budget and also in the expenditure for the felling programme. The Head of Cleansing and Open Spaces agreed to check the figures and report back to the Committee.

The dates of the future proposed meetings were considered and found to be acceptable.

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).

Item 7. COTTAGE CONVERSION UPDATE

It was proposed that the Committee gives delegated powers to the Head of Cleansing and Open Spaces and the Chair and Vice-chair of the Committee to discharge conditions of the planning application, if approved.

11 voted in favour
None voted against or abstained.

The proposal was carried.

AGREED

3. that if the planning application was approved, the Head of Cleansing and Open Spaces and the Chair and Vice-chair of the Committee be given delegated powers by the Committee to discharge the conditions of the application if required prior to the next meeting of the Committee, ensuring that Trustees are kept informed of such decisions.

Item 8. OFFICER UPDATE / FINANCE REPORT

3. It was proposed that the Committee supports, in principle, the proposal to arrange for a refreshments concession to be sited in the Outwoods car park at weekends on a short-term contract.

11 voted in favour
None voted against or abstained.

The proposal was carried.

AGREED

2. that the Committee supports the proposal to arrange for a refreshments concession to be sited in the Outwoods car park at weekends on a short-term contract.