

OUTWOODS MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

WEDNESDAY, 31ST JANUARY 2024 AT 5.00PM

Committee Room 2, Council Offices

To: Councillors Campsall, Fryer, A Gray, B Gray, Infield, Smidowicz, D Taylor,
Worrall

RB, RE, DG, GM, CN,

AGENDA

1. APOLOGIES
2. DISCLOSURES OF PECUNIARY AND PERSONAL INTERESTS
3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING & MATTERS ARISING pages 2 - 9
To confirm as a correct record the minutes of the meeting held on 18th October 2023.
4. WOODLAND RESTORATION pages 10 - 13
To review the Outwoods Restoration Project.
5. OFFICER UPDATE REPORT
An update from the Head of Contracts, Leisure, Waste & Environment pages 14 - 15
6. FINANCE UPDATE pages 16 - 17
An update regarding finance.
7. RANGERS REPORT pages 18 - 28
Report from the Ranger for Oct-Dec 2023.
8. A.O.B

DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

Dates for 2023-24 are: 10th April 2024

Proposed dates for 2024-25 are:

24th July 2024, 16th October 2024, 29th January 2025, 16 April 2025,

**OUTWOODS MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE
18TH OCTOBER 2023**

ITEM 3

PRESENT: Councillors Campsall, Fryer (Chair), A Gray, B Gray, Smidowicz, D Taylor, Worrall and PB, CN and DG

Head of Contracts: Leisure, Waste and Environment
Contracts Manager
Charnwood Forest Programme Manager
Democratic Services Officer (NC)

APOLOGIES: Cllr Infield, RE, GM

1. DISCLOSURES OF PECUNIARY AND PERSONAL INTERESTS

Disclosures of personal interests were made as follows:

- (i) Cllr Taylor as a Trustee of Bradgate Park Trust (for item 4 on the agenda)
- (ii) PB who farms land adjacent to the Outwoods (noted at end of the meeting)

2. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING & MATTERS ARISING

The minutes of the meeting held on 9th August 2023 were agreed.

A Trustee queried whether the biggest loss of income to the Outwoods budget had been the postponement of the tree felling for this financial year, they considered it was more likely to be the carparking charges and café that would have the bigger impact. The Head of Contacts, Leisure, Waste and Environment explained that the discussion under the budget item had been about variances and that the carparking charges and café income were both on track. He had been drawing the Committee's attention to two items on the budget that were under risk of not being achieved – the tree felling income and the payment from Natural England which would be paid in line with the agreement to fell trees.

Post meeting note: It was noticed that Cllr Tillotson had been recorded as in attendance at the meeting held on 9th August in error. She was no longer a Trustee of the Committee.

3. GEOPARK / LANDSCAPE PARTNERSHIP UPDATE

Jule Attard attended the meeting to present a slide show updating the Committee on the Landscape Partnership. She provided a history of the scheme so far and explained that the Outwoods was one of the honeypot sites within the scheme, and that the area was of international geological significance.

PB joined at the meeting.

There were three themes - Explore, Public Engagement and Understand. She explained what events and activities had taken place during the last three years since

the start of the scheme under these themes and highlighted activities that involved the Outwoods.

Cllr Smidowicz joined the meeting.

In conclusion she updated the Committee on the progress and the process to follow to apply for UNESCO global GeoPark status.

In response to questions it was noted that:

- although some graffiti might be of historical interest, the importance of the geology and site would be assessed to determine if it was necessary to remove the graffiti. It would be possible to record the text, but it was likely to be removed so as to not encourage further defacement.
- whether there were implications for the GeoPark and surrounding areas if housing developments or solar farms were planned - it was accepted by UNESCO that GeoParks were a living breathing landscape and the needs of the overall site would be taken into consideration. Housing developments would need to be sensitive to any significant geology in the area. The Charnwood Forest Delivery team did not participate in objecting to or supporting housing applications but could provide advice. Planning officers were included in the Partnership and it was up to the Planning Authority to make decisions. The Head of Contracts, Leisure, Waste and Environment clarified that the Council's Planning Strategies and Local Plan included the proposed application to UNESCO.
- the importance of public transport and sustainable transport methods were recognised and funding was being investigated to create sustainable routes within the park.

Trustees thanked Julie for her presentation and agreed it had been very informative.

AGREED that:

1. The link to a talk about a Spider Survey (with particular reference to the Charnwood spider) be circulated to Trustees.
2. The presentation be circulated to Trustees after the meeting.

4. OFFICER UPDATE REPORT (a) – HEAD OF CONTRACTS, LEISURE, WASTE AND ENVIROMENT

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

The Head of Contracts: Leisure, Waste and Environment highlighted the key points in the report as follows:

- the kissing gate near the Nanpantan footpath had been removed to improve accessibility and other gates would be reviewed and adjusted to ensure they didn't restrict access.
- an update was not available regarding the upgrade to the footpath from Nanpantan Sports Ground at present but this would be followed up after the meeting.
- some drystone walling had been repaired by the Green Gym group. An apprentice had been employed by the Landscape Partnership and could help with training volunteers going forward.
- an assessment of tree losses would be circulated to the Committee after the meeting. Noted that some compartments had a three-year aftercare plan in place which included replacing any dead saplings.
- due to the short period between the last meeting and this meeting and workload, it had not been possible to update the Outwoods Management Plan. It had been included on this agenda for Trustees to review and that the Committee could provide feedback prior to the next meeting.

A Trustee noted that it was important to include a longer vision going forward with particular reference to the proposed application for a UNESCO World Heritage Site

AGREED that:

1. the Head of Contracts, Leisure, Waste and Environment drafts the Outwoods Management Plan for five years but also includes a vision going forward to support the potential for obtaining future grant funding for projects.
2. the Outwoods Management Committee forward any questions, comments and/or suggested amendments to the Outwoods Management Plan to the Committee Clerk prior to the publication of the agenda for the next meeting for officer consideration.
3. that the report be noted.

5. OFFICER UPDATE REPORT (b) – CORRESPONDENCE FROM THE PUBLIC

A report of the Head of Governance and Human Resources was submitted (item 5b on the agenda).

The Chair explained that the recommended route for sending in comments, compliments or complaints was via the Council's website or direct to the Chair of the Committee, noting that if sent direct to the officers it could get lost if that officer was ill. It was clarified that the process to follow was clear on the Council's website and that Council officers act on behalf of the Committee, providing advice and implementing any decisions it may make.

Since the publication of the agenda further comments had been received resulting in a total of 16 separate emails received regarding tree felling.

The Head of Contracts, Leisure, Waste and Environment explained that the tree felling programme was supported by the Woodland Trust, the Forestry Commission and Wildlife Trusts, and funded by Natural England. He drew the Committee's attention to a statement by Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust in the Outwoods Management Plan on page 59 (appendix 3) of the agenda:

“Remove non-native species, in particular conifer. Staged removal of conifers followed by natural regeneration of native broadleaved species would be of most benefit to wildlife. If planting is required this should be of tree species native to the Charnwood Forest area and of local provenance. If a block of conifer is not being cleared, priority should be given to removal of conifer from the compartment edges (10m minimum) to allow the natural regeneration of a scrubby woodland edge composed of native species with the associated wildlife benefits described in Section 4.1.2. Additionally, where native trees are present amongst conifer plantation such as in Compartment 1, priority should be given to remove conifer from their surroundings to allow them to flourish.”

He noted that he considered there had been some misunderstandings, in particular, there were no plans to enlarge the car park and urged the Committee to consider all documents in the agenda pack to formulate an informed view.

Summary of Trustee views:

- the Committee had agreed to the tree felling programme previously and that it was beneficial to the woods and wildlife.
- the Committee's purpose was to manage the woods to ensure its longevity and to support wildlife.
- the conifers had been planted by the original donors as a plantation crop.
- it was appropriate to cut down unsafe trees and, in view of climate change and high winds, suitable to manage the woods in accordance with this.
- the bracken was not being well managed and was restricting growth of new saplings. However, paths and signage were being well maintained, it could be beneficial to consider reviewing the priorities of activities undertaken by the Rangers/Council in the woods.
- Donor Trustees on the Committee were appointed to the Committee for life and were very knowledgeable. Noted that the Corporation Trustee membership could change yearly.

As there were differing views, the Head of Contracts, Leisure, Waste and Environment proposed that a response be provided to the members of the public who had sent the correspondence correcting any misunderstandings and that the decision to undertake a tree felling programme had been agreed by the Committee under the current Outwoods Management Plan. This plan would be shortly renewed, and the views of the public would be taken into consideration.

AGREED that the Head of Contracts, Leisure, Waste and Environment in consultation with the Chair and Vice-chair of the Committee respond to the correspondence from members of the public as proposed above.

5. FINANCE UPDATE

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

The Head of Contracts, Leisure, Waste and Environment presented the report, stated that he had included more detail as requested at the previous meeting and noted the following:

- it was likely that the cesspit emptying would cost more than anticipated.
- if the tree felling programme was not completed, the grant contribution and estimated £10K for sale of timber would be removed from the budget, which could result in an overspend.
- the cafe was on a graduated rent scheme and the Council also had a turnover share. As the audited accounts were not currently available this income was currently not known.
- the Council had started its budgeting process for the next financial year. This would be scrutinised and agreed at a Cabinet meeting in January 2024. It could be beneficial to obtain Trustee views on raising car parking charges alongside this process with a report being submitted to the Committee at its January meeting stating the Council's proposal.

Trustees mentioned the visitor survey (on the agenda under Any Other Business) and wished to include it as part of this discussion.

Summary of discussion:

- season tickets should be included in the review of charges. Noted that the current season ticket scheme was generous when compared with other local sites. The process required time and money to administrate, and it could be necessary to either remove the scheme or raise the price.
- there currently wasn't sufficient resources in the Council to manage and enforce a staggered charge scheme. The Council's preference was to have a flat rate. The Committee could decide a price rise at this meeting to ensure it was submitted as a proposal in the Council's budgeting process.
- evidence of cars not paying the parking charge could be season ticket holders.
- the budget wasn't set until January so detailed proposals could be submitted to the Committee at its next meeting and this would align with changing the parking order.
- whether the survey was required and would provide the information the Committee wished to obtain regarding visitor numbers.

- the survey could be launched online via social media only, utilising QR code methods and run for six months. The QR code could be located in the café and on noticeboards in the car park and at entrances to the woods.
- the delineation of spaces in the Outwoods car park would create more parking spaces. Quotes had been received for marking the ground. A Trustee provided an example of where posts had been used and marked to delineate spaces. The Head of Contracts, Leisure, Waste and Environment agreed to review outside of the meeting with the individual Trustee.

AGREED that:

1. the car parking charges for the Outwoods be raised from £1 to £2 flat rate.
2. the Head of Contracts, Leisure, Waste and Environment submit a report to the Committee at its meeting in January 2024 regarding proposals for the season tickets scheme and any amendments to the budget affecting the Outwoods.
3. the Democratic Services Officer liaise with the Comms team to create an online survey and a QR code using questions agreed for the paper version to determine visitor use of the Outwoods and share via the Council's social media channels.
4. the report be noted.

6. RANGERS REPORT

A report of the Head of Contracts: Leisure, Waste and Environment was submitted (item 7 on the agenda). The Committee welcomed the report from the new Head Ranger and wished to thank him for the content and photos, which it appreciated.

AGREED that the report be noted and be circulated to all councillors after the meeting.

7. A.O.B

Trustees raised the following queries:

- if the Council was considering S106 monies from housing developments in the area to improve footpaths and cycle ways and that it was important to look at active travel networks. The Head of Contracts, Leisure, Waste and Environment stated he would liaise with the trustee outside of the meeting and arrange to put them into contact with relevant Planning Officers.
- if a link between Garendon Park and the Outwoods was being considered.
- whether it was possible for the Council to obtain Jubilee Wood and Nanpantan Reservoir to manage alongside the Outwoods.

- that a link between the Priory Public House and the Outwoods would be a welcome addition to access routes.

The Head of Contracts, Leisure, Waste and Environment explained that strategic links to the Outwoods were included in the Outwoods Management Plan, referencing page 15, and requested that Trustees reviewed the plan prior to the next meeting.

Resignation of Trustee

PB resigned as a Trustee from the Committee and explained that it had been a difficult decision, particularly as they had enjoyed being a donor trustee of the Committee. The Committee noted that it had greatly appreciated their work on the Committee and the Chair stated she was sorry to lose their contribution.

In accordance with the Trust Deeds it was noted that PB had been an Alan Moss Trustee and it was the responsibility of the remaining Alan Moss Trustees to nominate a new appointee. CN as the Alan Moss Trustee present at the meeting explained that they and GM had agreed to nominate RB to the Committee, who farmed land adjacent to the Outwoods. GM who was not present had emailed their agreement to the clerk prior to the meeting.

AGREED that:

1. RB be appointed to the Outwoods Management Committee as an Alan Moss Donor Trustee.
2. Trustees review the Outwoods Management Plan before the next meeting of the Committee.

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).

5. **FINANCE UPDATE**

It was proposed and seconded that the Committee agreed to raising the car parking charges from £1 to £2 flat rate.

10 voted in favour
None abstained
None voted against

The Proposal was carried.

AGREED that:

1. the car parking charges for the Outwoods be raised from £1 to £2 flat rate.

OUTWOODS MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE –31ST JANUARY 2024

Report of the Head of Contracts (Leisure, Waste and Environment)

ITEM 4 WOODLAND RESTORATION

Purpose of Report

To consider issues relating to the Outwoods Restoration Project.

Background

The 10-year restoration programme started in 2018/19 and is approximately 50% complete. There is an income allocation of £10k in the budget for the sale of timber during the project.

The restoration of the Outwoods is supported by Natural England, Forestry England, The Woodland Trust and Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust. The project is being completed as part of the Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS) – a restoration and maintenance programme promoted by Natural England. Natural England recently stated that they are glad to see the project continuing.

The restoration will increase the biodiversity at the site by increasing the number of woodland plants, insects and small mammals.

There has been some local opposition to the project and there has been support from some residents.

Felled areas are restocked through planting whips (young trees) and natural regeneration. The compartments are restocked at a density recommended by Forestry Commission. The density is higher than that which is sustainable for mature trees, therefore, after a period of approx. 10 to 15 years the area is selectively thinned. This leaves a sustainable density going forwards. This process is commonplace in Forestry Management.

Compartments 1B, 1C, 7A, 9B, 9C, 12A, 12B and 12C are still to be completed, (see appendix for compartment map).

Proposed Next Steps

Compartment **12A** is mixed broadleaf/conifer. The Sitka spruce near to the car park could be left as this is forming a good wind shield from the car park as there is some concern that removing these could lead to storm damage into the car park. To remove the conifer here is arguably thinning rather than clear-felling, due to the nature of this compartment. It is suggested that this compartment is now left in place.

12B is the solid block recommended for complete felling and restoring with native species. To remove 50% or thin this compartment, would affect the viability of new plantings as they will be under the canopy of the remaining conifer. It would be impossible to remove the remaining 50% without damaging the young oaks or natural regeneration as this would also result in further ground damage by the machinery. This should be felled in late 2024 and replanted asap.

50% of compartment **7A** is remaining (50% was cleared approx. 10-12 years ago). This should be felled in late 2024 and replanted asap.

This leaves **1B** and **1C** to complete the project. These compartments would be completed by 2026/27 or 27/28.

12C has only a strip of Scots pine along the ridge down towards the lower Woodhouse Lane/Brook Lane entrance, covering approximately 25% of the compartment. This could be left in situ.

As **9B** and **9C** are very small compartments located deep within the woods and amidst mature oaks; to remove these would result in too much collateral damage on extraction. It is recommended that these are left out of the programme.

The above would mean that the project would be completed either 1 or 2 years early, but we would leave 4 compartments out of the programme.

Community Use/Accessibility

Accessibility to some locations in the woods will be restricted during forestry operations. The car park will also be out of use for a period to allow for timber extraction.

Some visitors may feel that the site is less attractive due to the felling of some compartments.

Conservation & Environment

The restoration of the woods is supported by Natural England, Forestry England, the Woodland Trust and Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust. This is due to the habitat and biodiversity improvements that the restoration will bring.

Financial Viability

Felling of the non-native species is supported by the OMC Trust Deeds to contribute to the upkeep of the woods. Each felling operation is expected to contribute at least £10k to the budget for maintaining the woods.

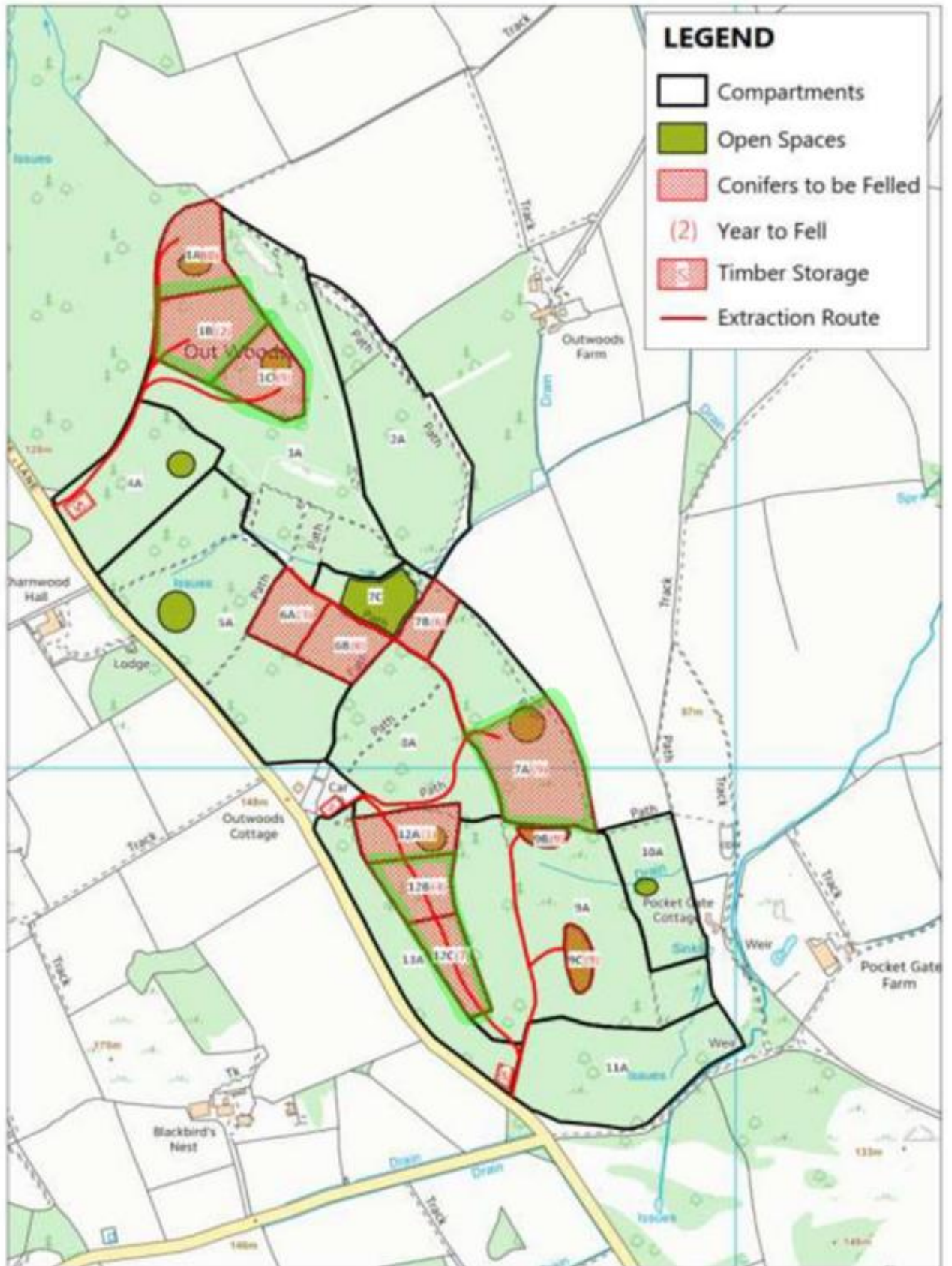
Recommendations

1. Compartments **12B** and **7A** should be put out to tender for felling and replanted over the autumn/winter 2024/25.
2. Compartments **1B** and **1C** should be put out to tender for felling and replanted over the autumn/winter 2025/26 or 2026/27 (depending on timber prices).
3. Compartments **12A** and **12C** should be left in situ.
4. Compartments **9B** and **9C** should be left in situ.

Officers to contact: Matt Bradford
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APPENDIX



OUTWOODS MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE –31st JANUARY 2024

Report of the Head of Contracts (Leisure, Waste and Environment)

ITEM 5 OFFICER UPDATE REPORT

Purpose of Report

To update the Outwoods Management Committee on issues raised at previous meetings of the Committee and to bring new issues to the attention of the Committee.

Nanpantan Sports Ground Footpath

This project is being delivered by LCC through a member's highways grant scheme. At the time of writing the report, CBC officers do not have any details regarding the project. It is hoped that a verbal update can be provided as part of the meeting.

Community Use/Accessibility: These improvements to the footpath will improve access to the site and (hopefully) relieve some pressure on the car park at peak times.

Conservation & Environment: Community use of the footpath from Nanpantan Road Sports Grounds may reduce the amount people driving and relieve the congestion in the car park at peak times.

Financial Viability: Upgrading the path and encouraging people to walk to the site may have a minor negative impact on the car park revenues.

Management Plan Update

Trustees were asked to forward comments on the Draft Management Plan to officers at the last meeting. No comments have been received to date.

Work on the Draft Management Plan has not progressed as expected in the last quarter and the final draft is not ready for approval. There are a number of reasons for this including:

1. The officers drafting the report have been required to respond to a number of unexpected events which has impacted on their ability to complete the necessary arrangements.
2. The approach to tree felling in the woods needs to be confirmed by the Committee. This will be written into the plan for the forthcoming period.

The final draft of the Management Plan will be completed and presented to members at a forthcoming meeting. It is hoped that this will be in April or July 2024.

Community Use/Accessibility: The revised plan will outline the Committee's approach to access and community use.

Conservation & Environment: Conservation activities will be included in the Management Plan.

Financial Viability: The Plan will include the Committee's approach to improving financial viability.

Car Parking and Budget

Charnwood Borough Council has included an increase in car parking fees from £1 per day to £2 at the Outwoods in its draft budget for 2024/25. Preparatory work to implement this proposal (subject to approval) has begun. It is hoped that the increase will reduce the amount of revenue subsidy that the Council provides to the Outwoods by £35k per annum (excl. contractual increases).

The proposal from the Head of Service is that Season Tickets should also increase to £100 per annum. The season ticket will offer a saving to anyone using the car park more than 50 times per year (less than once a week over the period).

Work to improve the layout of the car park will progress over the next few months (timescales tbc) which will improve the overall capacity of the car park.

The Head of Service hopes to give a verbal update on the status of the proposed double yellow lines on Woodhouse Lane at the meeting.

Community Use/Accessibility: The increase in charges may deter some users from coming to the car park, however, free parking is available within a reasonable walking distance (Moat Rd and Nanpantan Rd Sports Ground/Cemetery). Blue Badge holders can still park for free.

Conservation & Environment: No major impacts. Increased access by foot may improve congestion in the car park area. Some users may decide to park on Woodhouse Lane, but this should be deterred by the installation of double yellow lines.

Financial Viability: The proposal will decrease the amount of Council subsidy by £35k.

Online Survey

The Head of Service to provide a verbal update at the meeting.

Recommendations

1. that the Committee approves the increase to £100 per annum for Season Tickets.
2. that the Outwoods Management Plan is submitted to the Committee at a future meeting.

Officer to contact: Matthew Bradford
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(01509) 634695
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OUTWOODS MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE – 31st JANUARY 2024

Report of the Head of Contracts (Leisure, Waste and Environment)

ITEM 6 FINANCE UPDATE

Purpose of the Report

To update Trustees on finance issues relating to the Outwoods.

2023/24 Year to Date (22/01/24)

Account (T)	Total Spend Inc Commits	Current Orig Budget	Variance	Notes
Buildings-R & M	3,612.00	5,000.00	1,388.00	
Car Park Machine P/R&M	705.96	1,900.00	1,194.04	
Grounds General Maint	0.00	6,600.00	6,600.00	
Fencing/Gates	0.00	400.00	400.00	
Seats	1,080.82	400.00	-680.82	
Mtc of Trees, Shrubs	500.00	4,800.00	4,300.00	
Electricity	390.54	500.00	109.46	
Metered Water Charge	117.08	500.00	382.92	
Unmeasured Water Charges	0.00	300.00	300.00	
Equipment Etc P/R&M	14.67	1,000.00	985.33	
Signs	0.00	800.00	800.00	
Printing, Stat& Copying	291.20	300.00	8.80	
Security Services & Charges	844.94	800.00	-44.94	Emptying parking machines
Promotional Activities	941.88	400.00	-541.88	
Cesspit Emptying	0.00	6,900.00	6,900.00	Potential for overspend
MOS Contract - Basic	99,105.84	132,100.00	32,994.16	
MOS Contract - Variations	1,135.80	1,500.00	364.20	
Grant Contribution	0.00	-4,000.00	-4,000.00	HLS grant for woodland restoration
Fees & Charges Misc	0.00	-10,000.00	-10,000.00	Income expected from timber sales
Car Parking Charges	-27,870.48	-35,000.00	-7,129.52	
Rent - General	-16,225.00	-14,000.00	2,225.00	Income from café lease
Controllable	64,645.25	101,200.00	36,554.75	

Car Parking Income

Please find below the car parking income up until 31st Dec 2023

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
April	2,763.25	3,503.00	Covid19	3,918.10	4,012.60	3,766.20
May	3,200.60	4,407.00	Covid19	2,790.95	4,143.10	3,612.90
June	2,376.85	2,403.50	Covid19	2,405.40	3,835.80	3,341.65
July	2,265.05	1,763.10	Covid19	2,423.40	4,663.30	2,818.45
August	2,738.10	Machine out of order	2,956.40	2,588.35	4,146.80	3,123.85
September	1,879.70	973.20	3,177.30	1,880.10	4,253.80	2,890.45
October	2,097.60	2,170.35	3,106.30	1,991.60	3,192.14	3,303.00
November	1,655.85	1,814.40	3,761.90	351.10	2,455.55	2,632.70
December	1,715.70	1,820.50	3,192.85	3,139.80	3,086.05	2,426.90
January	2,980.70	2,268.25	2,533.35	3,445.20	2,370.90	
February	1,559.20	1,164.80	2,364.40	2,656.90	3,289.70	
March	2,199.05	1,650.60	3,039.75	2,973.65	1,941.40	
TOTAL (£)	27,431.65	23,938.70	24,132.25	30,564.55	41,391.14	27,916.10

There are approx. 80 active season tickets, accounting for £3,200.

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(01509) 634695
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Outwoods Quarterly Report

October – December 2023



Autumn leading into winter has provided some challenging weather for us in the outdoors. Weather has been fairly wet to be consistent with the rest of the year causing wet ground conditions in the woods. This has led to a fair bit of culvert clearance work to keep the drainage flowing and the paths clear. We have also been faced with a lot of wind, storm pia just before christmas, having the worst impact, with 12 trees lost in outdoors alone.

We began the quarter with a fantastic willow tit habitat creation project, spearheaded by our RSPB partnership community & biodiversity officer Ross Bray. Willow tits, which are a red listed species, have been sighted in a field next to the outdoors. So we selected an area that best suited their habitat needs and worked to improve it. We ran all sessions as volunteer sessions, beginning with the idverde business development team on their annual volunteer day. The willow tits favoured habitat is wet woodland with rotting birch trees and a structured understory. The area we selected was dense with birch and one of the lower lying areas making it one of the wetter areas, perfect for improvement. We worked to thin the birch in the area by felling them as high as possible to leave a tall deadwood pole, which will in future rot down and provide perfect habitat, several trees have also been “ring-barked” which kills the tree whole leaving the best standing deadwood habitat. For now we have installed custom made willow tit boxes to provide instant habitat. We also built a dead hedge along the side of neighboring board walk in order to keep people and dogs out of the area, hopefully giving the birds peace to move in. This project ended up running for a further 3 sessions with the green gym finishing the work.



A fungi foray was undertaken in October, a local expert lead the walk accompanied by Ross & Sam. The weather was fortunatley dry for the day leading to a well attended session. We also invited the green gym volunteers along as a well earned day off the tools.





The Steph Woolridge memorial bench was installed near the nanpantan footpath gate. The oak bench has a lovely view of loughborough and surrounding countryside. We later planted a memorial oak just behind the bench.

New signs for the tramper route have now been installed, these make things a bit more straightforward as some people were not aware of what a tramper actually was. Now all mobility scooter users are clear on where it is not safe to travel.



In November, we did a full round of pothole filling in the car park, including the entrance apron. Although with the weather we have had over the past few months the potholes have mainly returned. More pothole maintenance is scheduled for early 2024 alongside some track maintenance to repair damage done by the rain and flooding.

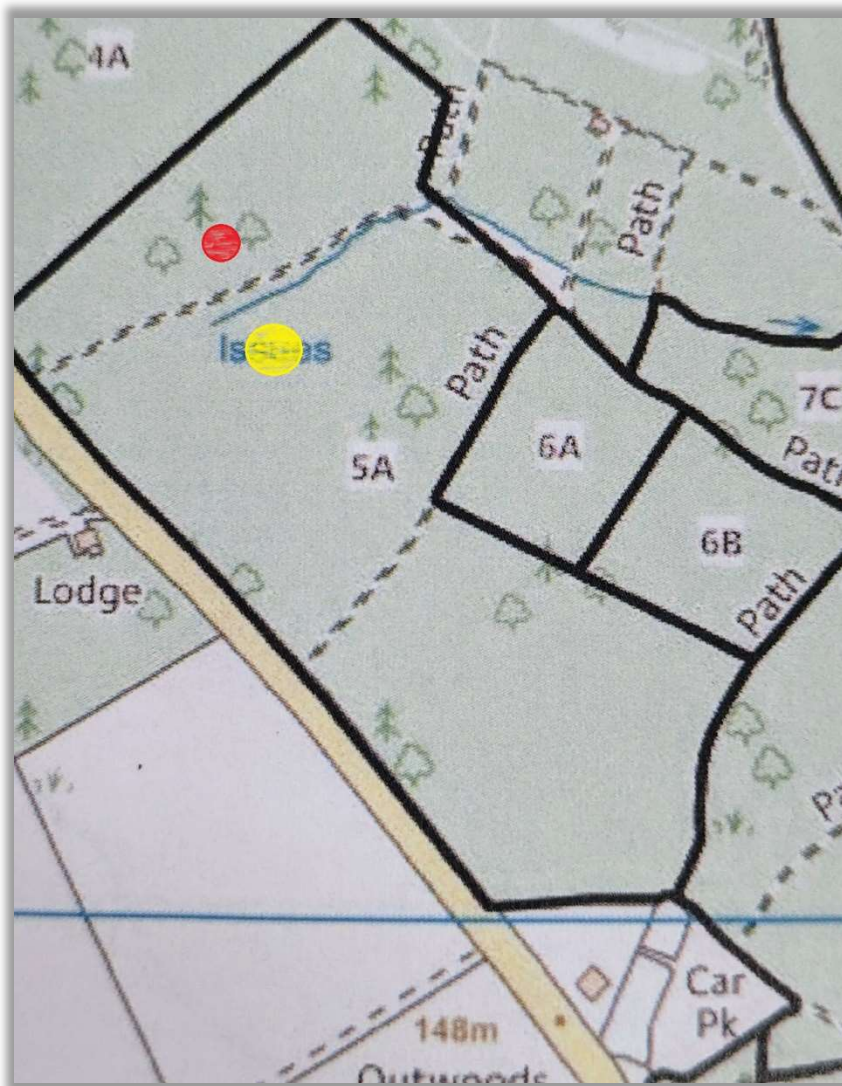


In December, we began forestry season in the outwoods. 2 areas in section 5a have been marked for birch thinning with an aim to create small glades and halo-thin around any oaks to reduce birch competition, allowing them the space to flourish.

Holly within the glades will also be removed, leaving the boundary holly as a screen to hopefully keep people away and reduce trampling. Any rhododendron found will be dug out and burned to prevent any risk of re-growth.

Glade 1 (yellow on map) is created as a bluebell glade, we are working to allow more dappled light to the floor to create ideal bluebell habitat.

Glade 2 (Red on the map) is smaller and created as a hazel coupe, we will be thinning birch, especially around oaks and then planting hazel whips to create a “crop” of hazel to provide future hedge laying materials. These hazel coupes also provide great habitat variety in the understory especially when managed on a coppice cycle.



Enstruct training have also been drafted to undertake rhododendron removal across the site and also to do bluebell enhancement bramble bashing along the route of the guided walk.

We have made a start to glade 1 in december with the help of the green gym, who will be helping for each subsequent session.



Timber will be extracted and stacked next to the charcoal kiln to season and will be used for a future charcoal making session.



Finally, 1 mature sycamore has been felled in section 1A as outlined in the management plan. We are yet to fell the second at the time of writing.



The relentless stormy weather over autumn caused us to lose many trees, fortunately only a small handful fell over paths.



Culvert clearing was also fairly common practice over the autumnal months



Regular work in the Outwoods October-December:

- Daily cleaning of toilets and replenishment of soap / toilet roll
- Daily playground checks
- Twice – weekly emptying of bins
- Daily Primary route inspections
- Twice – weekly litter picks of carpark and primary route
- Closing of the woods during high wind events
- Checks of all paths after high wind events and removal of fallen branches / unsafe trees.
- Removal of sycamore saplings
- Removal of rhododendron
- Removing encroachment around paths