

OUTWOODS MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE
16TH OCTOBER 2024

PRESENT: Councillors Campsall, Fryer, A Gray, B Gray, Infield, Smidowicz, D Taylor, Worrall,
GM and CN

Head of Contracts: Leisure, Waste and Environment
Senior Green Spaces Officer
Democratic Services Officer (NC)

APOLOGIES: RB, RE (vice-chair)

1. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING & MATTERS ARISING

The minutes of the meeting held on 24th July 2024 were agreed.

Matters arising:

The Head of Contracts: Leisure, Waste and Environment noted that he would contact Julie Attard to invite her to attend the next meeting of the Committee to provide an update about the GeoPark.

2. DISCLOSURES OF PECUNIARY AND PERSONAL INTERESTS

Disclosures of personal interests were made as follows before relevant items:

- (i) Cllr Fryer and Taylor as Leicestershire County Councillors.
- (ii) Cllr Taylor as a Trustee of Bradgate Park Trust.

3. OFFICER UPDATE REPORT

A report of the Head of Contracts: Leisure, Waste and Environment was submitted (item 4 on the agenda).

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

- the advice from the Health & Safety Officer with respect to the High Winds Policy was to keep the limit at 40mph. Noted that the car park was currently left open at night when there were high winds.
- he was discussing with the relevant council officers about quotes for the installation of the gates at the entrance to the woods.
- the garage had been broken into recently and equipment stolen. It was in very poor repair and the installation of a gate could improve management of access to the woods at night.

Summary of discussion – Management plan (*changes made since the last meeting review had been highlighted in red*)

- it was hoped to update the Wildlife Survey appended to the Plan before 2029. Noted a shortage of wildlife recorders for Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust, it was challenging to recruit volunteers, but the survey could be added to their waiting list.
- the interlinking footpath to the east of the car park where the gradient of the footpath would be decreased, taking a zigzag arc, would be funded by the GeoPark. It could involve the thinning of some trees and removal of any diseased specimens, but it was hoped to avoid the removal of healthy trees. A consultant would be employed to determine the route of the path.
- the Forestry and Woodland Policy seeking to expand the woods could be included as a firm statement in the Management Plan - expansion would only be possible through the acquisition of adjacent land, the Nanpantan Reservoir and Jubilee Wood. Discussions were progressing with Severn Trent to obtain the reservoir for flood mitigation; the Environment Agency were required to arrange biodiversity offsetting. Due to the cost of maintaining Jubilee Wood it was unlikely that this would be progressed by the Borough Council. Other adjacent land was in private ownership and unlikely to be available for purchase and discussions to develop public footpaths linking the Outwoods to the reservoir were unproductive. A non-binding aspirational statement could be included in the Plan in future.
- whether management aims could be reviewed in year 1/2 rather than year 3/4. The felling programme would start this winter, and areas felled would be monitored for regeneration over the following years. Other areas of the woods could be reviewed earlier but it might not be beneficial to do so. Noted that the Management Plan could be updated at any point during its five-year period and regular reviews would be submitted to the Committee. Trustees could review work carried out during the 'walk arounds' arranged before meetings of the Committee.
- concern over the management of bracken particularly in areas not subject to clear felling. It was impractical to hand clear the bracken from felled areas so limited use of sprays would be required. Other non-felled areas had not been maintained as well as expected but noted that there had been a rapid change of Head Rangers over the last 12 months, so this was hoped to improve with the new rangers in post. In addition, a checklist could be supplied to the contractor so it would be clear where bracken had been managed.
- concern that primary paths would be maintained with similar sized stone - noted that the path adjacent to Jubilee Wood consisted of large rocks which was difficult to walk on. The larger rocks had been added by the contractor during the previous felling period to improve path strength for lorries removing the timber. This would be required for this year's planned tree felling, but after the work had

been completed the rocks were anticipated to bed down and not be used again in any future tree felling operations.

- secondary paths would be improved as they fell into disrepair. Work carried out on paths was reactive, dependant on footfall and difficult to predict when required. A footpath survey could be carried out every two years and included in the Management Plan. Drainage improvements were identified by the Ranger team and flood drainage work carried out by the Canal & Rivers Trust would support this.
- plans to fell certain compartments had been previously agreed by the Committee to finish in 2026 – 2027 with certain sections being left in situ, but the Management Plan suggested a completion date of 2026 and there was a discrepancy of the number of compartments to be left in situ. It was confirmed that compartments 7A and 7B would be clear felled during this winter season, with 1B and 1C being felled the following winter season and that compartments 12A, 12C, 9B and 9C would be left in situ – the Management Plan would be updated accordingly.
- a drystone wall builder had been employed by the GeoPark to train volunteers in drystone walling across the National Forest area and was currently working at Bradgate Park. Some walls in the Outwoods were falling into disrepair so the builder could be asked to work in the woods and teach volunteers. Noted that it was complex to support volunteers due to the resources required (equipment, safety gear, supervision), that Bradgate Park was a popular volunteer destination and although funding could be obtained through community grants it was difficult to recruit volunteers to commit to working in the Outwoods.
- social media could be used to advertise for volunteers. It was necessary to understand how many volunteers could be sustained by the contractor and what skills gaps there was before using this platform.

AGREED that

1. the Head of Contracts, Leisure, Waste and Environment submit a brief 6 month and full annual report to the Committee on progress of 1 year and 5 year maintenance programmes as detailed in the Management Plan. The first 6-monthly report would be submitted to the Committee's meeting on 16th April 2025.
2. the Head of Contracts, Leisure, Waste and Environment agree wording of an aspirational statement to obtain land in future with the Chair and Vice-chair of the Outwoods Management Committee for inclusion in the Outwoods Management Plan.
3. the Head of Contracts, Leisure, Waste and Environment agree wording of completing a footpath survey every two years with the Chair and Vice-chair of the Outwoods Management Committee for inclusion in the Outwoods Management Plan.
4. the Outwoods Management Plan be updated to reflect the Committee's decisions regarding felling at its meeting on 31st January 2024 that compartments 7A and

7B to be clear felled during this winter season, with 1B and 1C being felled the following winter season and that compartments 12A, 12C, 9B and 9C would be left in situ.

5. the management aims included in the Outwoods Management Plan would be reviewed in year 3/4 in order to inform future planning.
6. the Outwoods Management Plan be approved, subject to the inclusion of amendments agreed during this item and recirculated to the Committee.
7. the Head of Contracts, Leisure, Waste and Environment investigate the use of signs to indicate that the Outwoods was closed in the evenings when high winds.
8. the report be noted.

4. FINANCE UPDATE

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

The Head of Contracts: Leisure, Waste and Environment provided a brief overview, noting that the financial situation was as expected at this point in the year. He noted that the car parking charge had increased in April and that there had been a slight drop in income which was likely to be due to wet weather. With the sale of season tickets the income generated was anticipated to be around £70k.

Members clarified that £10k for 'fee and charges miscellaneous' related to expected income from sale of timber this season and that the cesspit emptying had been completed but the Council had not yet been charged for the work.

AGREED that

1. the Head of Contracts, Leisure, Waste and Environment clarifies to the Committee (by email) details of expenditure for the following:
 - a. printing, stationery and copying – what this referred to
 - b. security services and charges - related to collection of cash from the car park machines and whether the overspend was due to the frequency of collection.
2. the Head of Contracts, Leisure, Waste and Environment includes season tickets income in future 'Finance Update' reports submitted to the Outwoods Management Committee.
3. the report be noted.

5. RANGERS REPORT

A report of the Head Ranger was submitted (item 6 on the agenda). Members welcomed the update and inclusion of pictures.

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

6. A.O.B

Trustees raised the following business in relation to information received from members of the public.

a) Kissing Gate – discussion

Issue raised with motorcycles entering the Outwoods through the gate. The gate had been modified to allow visitors with pushchairs to enter the woods.

- it was a balancing act between enabling access and managing access, but safety of visitors was paramount. Other access gates to the Outwoods were under consideration for being modified.
- the gate could be changed to an open/shut style which would prevent dogs running out and motorcycles entering easily but this would also limit access for wheelchair users. Noted that the footpath from Nanpantan Road was virtually impassable. Examples given of motorcycle barriers being installed but not preventing access in some cases.
- law enforcement options could be considered. Under the existing byelaws dogs should be under control and fines could be levied but this would not be a top priority for the Police.
- CCTV could be implemented. This would require justification that it was proportionate, would be challenging to act on evidence obtained and was not considered appropriate for the Outwoods.
- it was necessary to understand the frequency that this was occurring before considering a resolution.

AGREED that the Rangers be asked to monitor motorcycle access in the Outwoods and that Trustees to collate and share any further reports received from members of the public.

b) Car parking on Woodhouse Lane – discussion

Issue raised of cars parking on the verges and double yellow lines outside the car park on Woodhouse Lane hill.

- it was still a parking infringement if cars parked on verges inside the double yellow lines.
- more enforcement was necessary. This task had been delegated by the County Council to the Borough Council; wardens could be requested to patrol the area, particularly at busy times and issue parking fines, and this could be highlighted on the Council's social media channels.

AGREED that

1. the Wardens be requested to patrol the area more frequently, particularly at busy times and issue parking fines.

2. the Head of Contracts, Leisure, Waste and Environment ask the Communications team to use the Council's social media channels to publicise that parking fines had been issued and to ask visitors to park responsibly.

c) Art Classes – use of the covered outdoor space – discussion

A local artist had asked if they could provide art lessons using the covered outdoor shelter (Barn).

- the outdoor space had been funded by the EU and, as part of its contract, the Council was not allowed to charge for its use in the first five years. It did not have a scheme of charges currently available. It had originally been intended for use as a wedding venue.
- further information was required from the artist as to whether they would be charging for lessons, whether it was a commercial enterprise and what expenses they would incur.

AGREED that

1. the Chair to follow up with the local artist regarding their intentions as detailed above and to circulate the information to the Committee for agreement.
2. the Head of Contracts, Leisure, Waste and Environment to consider a scheme of charges with the possibility of exemptions and to submit options to the Committee at its meeting on 29th January 2025 for agreement.

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 2017 refers).

OFFICER UPDATE REPORT

A. It was proposed that the management aims of the Outwoods Management Plan continue to be reviewed in year 3/4 in order to inform future planning.

7 voted in favour
3 voted against
None abstained

AGREED that the management aims of the Outwoods Management Plan be reviewed in year 3/4 in order to inform future planning.

B. It was proposed that the Outwoods Management Plan be approved subject to the inclusion of amendments agreed during this item and recirculated to the Committee.

10 voted in favour
None voted against
None abstained

AGREED that the Outwoods Management Plan be approved, subject to the inclusion of amendments agreed during this item and recirculated to the Committee.