



THE BARR BEACON TRUST MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE



Annual Report – 2017/18

Council – 9 April 2018

1.0 Summary of report

- 1.1 This report presents the work of the Management Committee for 2017/18. The Committee has formally met on 5 occasions and apart from general site maintenance matters, has overseen a number of projects on the site.
- 1.2 The Committee has ensured that all activities on Trust land have been provided in accordance with the purposes of the Trust and have fulfilled Charity Commission Public Benefit requirements.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 That the work of the Management Committee be noted.
- 2.2 That the Trust recognises the hard work of Council officers to manage Unauthorised Encampments on the site and extends its thanks to all those involved.

3.0 Background:

- 3.1 Barr Beacon is an easily recognised and well used landmark in Walsall and the Black Country, has strong local heritage significance and is a site of ecological importance for nature conservation due to its range of habitats and the wide variety of species that it supports. The land was conveyed to trustees in 1918 essentially to provide and maintain open space for the benefit of the local community and to keep in repair the War Memorial. Walsall Council became trustee following Local Government reorganisation in 1972.
- 3.2 A Management Committee was established in February 2007 in order to deal with the regular administration of the Trusts affairs subject to the Trust being kept informed of the work of the committee by way of an annual report.
- 3.3 The Committee comprises the Councillors for the Pheasey Park Farm, Streetly and Aldridge Central and South Wards, being the areas where the site is located together with the Cabinet Members whose portfolio includes Leisure and Regeneration. The Committee is now in its 11th year and has met regularly during that time, being open to and supporting and overseeing many new exciting and innovative opportunities for the development and promotion of the site for the benefit of local residents and as a wider visitor attraction.

4.0 Site Management

- 4.1 **Site maintenance:** The Council's Clean and Green service continues to focus its resources on essential maintenance to ensure that the Council as Trustee fulfils its purposes, its obligations for the site as a Local Nature Reserve; and keeps the momentum on the conditions relating to the Heritage Lottery funding which include the promotion of the Beacon and community engagement.

There has been some vandalism to the memorial balustrade which will require new spindles to be cast. The Committee has approved a sum from the Trust's cash balance to make these repairs in time for this year's Remembrance Service.

As a result of an Environmental Stewardship grant from Natural England, work has also been carried out on heath land, hedgerow and grassland management.

The 4 Black Country local authorities, with the backing of the UNESCO National Commission and the UK's 7 other geoparks, submitted an application to become part of the UNESCO Global Geopark family. UNESCO has recognised the Black Country as globally important, with world class geological and related cultural heritage. Barr Beacon is one of the identified sites and therefore Members of the UNESCO Geopark committee will be visiting Barr Beacon on Friday 27 April as part of a tour to determine whether the Black Country sites will get recognition as a UNESCO Global Geopark.

- 4.2 **Site Security:** Vehicles are still attempting to negotiate the flow plates at the Beacon Lodge exit during night-time closure. A number of options for CCTV cameras are being considered together with other security measures such as illuminated signs and rising barriers at the exit point by the lodge.
- 4.3 **Unauthorised Encampments (UEs):** There were four UEs on the site in 2017 which has resulted in significant clean up costs and need for repair works. Council Officers worked hard to manage the UEs and in November 2017, the Council, on behalf of the Trust, obtained a County Court injunction prohibiting any persons setting up an encampment on the land at Barr Beacon. This was a complicated process and together with other aspects of managing the encampments was resource intensive. The Council has met the enforcement, clean-up and legal costs associated with the injunction and has not recharged the Trust. The Committee has agreed a sum out of the Trust's cash balance to fund a number of immediate repair and prevention works.
- 4.4 **Friends of Barr Beacon:** Volunteers are continuing to provide valuable support to open and close the car park barriers and inform Clean and Green officers of any issues or problems. The Committee has considered a suggestion to combine the Friends group with other nearby Friends groups to lessen the officer resource needed to support them. The Groups are to be consulted upon this in due course.
- 4.5 **Other Activities:** Smaller scale events and activities continue to take place, with the Beacon being a destination for a weekly Health Walk. 30,000 leaflet guides to the site were distributed across Walsall and the surrounding area updating the nature trail guide and healthy walking route. It now contains details of the Heritage Lottery Fund restoration project and how to obtain a Smartphone app showing details of the site.

5.0 Events

- 5.1 The Committee has for some time considered providing more events on Barr Beacon and has been looking to formulate a long term programme of events, however, the resources of Clean and Green staff are limited and therefore future events will be provided by external organisers, who are already experienced in running such events on the site, at no cost to the Trust. The Committee has stressed that the objectives of these events must be relative to the purposes of the Trust, its obligations for the site as a Local Nature Reserve, Heritage Lottery funding conditions; and charity Public Benefit requirements.
- 5.2 As such, the event should fulfil general criteria arising out of those obligations which includes promoting positive use of the Beacon, promoting health and wellbeing, education and learning, skills, training, work experience, community engagement, volunteering opportunities, inclusion and community cohesion, benefitting habitats and wildlife and heritage and history.
- 5.3 A formal agreement is currently being drawn up with event organisers to provide a programme of events over the next few years, at no further expense to the Trust, but with a percentage return of any profits to the Trust
- 5.4 **“Ale-fest on the Beacon”:**
In order to inform this future programme, to develop the model of working with the external organisers and to demonstrate viability of new events, the Committee agreed to fund the infrastructure to stage a trial event, “Ale-fest on the Beacon”, from a budget which has been set aside by the Committee to be used to support events on the site. The event consisted of live music throughout the day with a ‘pie and real ale’ theme. External organisers ran and marketed the event and the profits were donated to military charities. As a trial event, Alefest was considered to be a success with over 500 visitors despite the limited time to market the event, the time of the year and the very heavy rain on the day. The evening finished with a Last Night of the Proms performance by Enigma Brass Ensemble which was very well received. Given the type of event, there were no incidents or issues for the security staff to deal with and event-goers were complementary. The Trust also benefitted from a significant promotional campaign. The organisers are keen to repeat this event which the Committee supports as part of the agreement for the future programme of events.
- 5.5 **“Christmas on the Beacon”**
As the 2016 event had been very successful, attracting around 9,000 visitors, the Committee gave approval for the same event to take place in December 2017. However, whilst a new layout and design worked well, and there had been a widespread promotional campaign with anticipated numbers around 15,000, the extreme weather conditions over the period of the event meant that the event made a substantial loss with visitor numbers reduced to around 3,500. The event was funded entirely by the organiser. Despite the reduced numbers the Committee considered that there had still been a benefit to the Trust as the number of visitors over that period was still significant for the time of year.

5.6 “Bands on the Beacon” (BOTB)

The 2017 event was the first that had not received funding through the Heritage Lottery Fund project. As such, the ticket sales needed to cover the costs of the event. The Trust had agreed to fund the event and the Walsall Studio School agreed to organise the event as a learning experience for students however, poor ticket sales meant that the event would have made a loss and therefore the event was cancelled. The Committee decided to use the funding which it had set aside for this event to support the funding of the Alefest. The live music which would have played at BOTB was also incorporated into the Alefest event. The future of the BOTB event is currently being reviewed alongside the programme of events for the future.

5.7 Remembrance Services

The Barr Beacon War Memorial Remembrance Ceremony took place on Friday 10 November 2017. The event went well with over 50 people attending including representatives from the Trust, Mercian Volunteers, staff and pupils from local schools including Barr Beacon, Pheasey Park Farm primary, Blackwood primary, Lindens primary and Meadow View JMI; and the bugler, Lesley Jenkins from the West Midlands Police band.

The 2018 event is currently scheduled to take place on Friday 9 November. The Committee is particularly keen to mark this year as the Centenary of the end of World War One bearing in mind that the Barr Beacon War Memorial was originally erected to commemorate local men and women “who gave their lives in the Great War 1914-1918”. The Committee will be considering appropriate activities to recognise this.

5.8 Barr Beacon Centenary Year 2019

During 2018, the Committee will be looking at activities to celebrate Barr Beacon’s centenary year in 2019 – marking 100 years since the site was officially opened to the public.

6.0 The Lodge

6.1 The Lodge is now in use regularly as a base for events and activities, a meeting place for the Friends Group and accommodation for staff working on the site.

6.2 In addition, the Committee last year approved the use of the lodge by Care First Ltd as a base to provide programmes of activities for adult learners focussing on general site maintenance, habitat management and developing conservation skills. The organisation has been using the lodge for almost 12 months and is considered to be successful, with activities starting to make a difference not only for the long term sustainability of the site but also for the adult learners who can gain City & Guilds qualifications. The use of the lodge is covered by a formal agreement between the Trust and Care First Ltd which has been drawn up by the Council’s legal and estates services. Because of the success of the initiative, the Council is looking to expand similar initiatives across other sites in the Borough.

11.0 Accounts

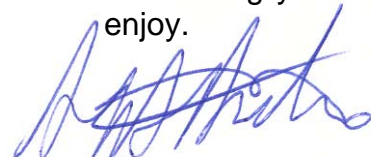
- 11.1 The committee continues to be content for the Council's Finance officers to manage the accounts on behalf of the Trust and accordingly, a finance report has been received at each meeting.
- 11.2 The Trust currently holds 22,496.15 COIF income shares (a specialist charity Common Investment Fund) with a current market value of around £327,500 which are held as a long term investment. COIF charities investment fund has a highly diversified and well-balanced portfolio of investments designed to help meet growth and income requirements of charities.
- 11.3 Having a healthy investment balance provides an annual return of approximately £10,000 based on current dividends being paid. This income is used to fund day to day maintenance of the site. The level of investments also helps to attract significant external funding for major projects on the Beacon. The Trust is holding around £38,000 available cash which is being used to fund repairs and prevention works to the site and an 'events' budget of around £16,000 for commemorative and celebratory events of significance as described elsewhere in the report.
- 11.4 The committee has authorised expenditure for specialist insurance cover, which includes public liability, property damage and trustee indemnity, to ensure that the Trust is adequately protected. This has been arranged through the Councils Risk and Insurance Team on behalf of the Trust.

12.0 Annual Return

The annual return required by the Charity Commission has been completed.

13.0 Conclusion

Over the past year, the committee has worked closely with Council officers to make and plan improvements to the site and has recognised the significant contribution that the Council makes to maintain the open space and to support its future development. The activities on the site not only further the Trusts purposes but are also consistent with the Council's Corporate Plan priorities for Communities and for People, enabling access and use of green spaces to improve health and wellbeing and reduce social isolation, helping to ensure that all children are a healthy weight, and supporting people to have increased independence. The contribution of the members of the Friends Group is also appreciated and the committee looks forward to continuing this relationship in the coming year to ensure that the site remains an asset for the community to enjoy.



Councillor A. Andrew
Chair, Barr Beacon Trust Management Committee
26 March 2018

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