



THE BARR BEACON TRUST MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE



REPORT TO COUNCIL 2013/14

Council – 14 April 2014

1.0 Summary of report

This report sets out the work of the management committee for 2013/14. The committee has met on 7 occasions and apart from general site maintenance matters, has overseen a number of projects on the site, particularly the ongoing Heritage Lottery Funded “Raising the Barr” project; and has made significant decisions on the management of the Trust accounts.

The committee has ensured that all activities have been provided in accordance with the purposes of the Trust and have fulfilled Charity Commission Public Benefit requirements.

2.0 Recommendation

- 2.1 That the report be noted.
- 2.2 That the Trust recognises the work of Council officers from the Council’s Clean and Green Services and Financial Services to support the Trust this year and extends its thanks to those officers.

3.0 Background information

- 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 The Council, as trustee, has established a Management committee in order to deal with the regular administration of the Trusts affairs subject to the Trust being kept informed of the work of the management committee by way of an annual report.
- 3.3 The Management committee comprises the Ward Councillors for the Pheasey Park Farm and Streetly Wards, being the Wards where the site is located; and Cabinet Members whose portfolio includes Leisure and Regeneration.

4.0 The Heritage Lottery Fund Application – “Raising the Barr”

4.1 *War Memorial Restoration*

The committee has overseen the completion of the restoration works and a number of maintenance issues arising therefrom have been resolved. In addition, the committee has also supported the creation of a pathway to improve access to the memorial.

4.2 *Rededication Ceremony*

The committee has agreed to a rededication ceremony for the newly refurbished war memorial and this has been arranged to be held on Friday 7 November 2014. A meeting will be taking place with representatives from the local community to discuss preparations. The Deputy Lord Lieutenant is also keen to support this event and will provide a valuable contribution.

4.3 *HLF Project – Financial position*

Both the HLF representatives and the Council's Finance Officers have identified a potential underspend and consequently an extension of time has been agreed in order to deliver additional projects. The committee was keen to use the full allocation and has accordingly supported a number of ideas for additional projects which are referenced to elsewhere in this report.

5.0 Events and Activities

5.1 *“Bands on the Beacon”*

Following last year's popular event which was attended by over 5,000 people, the committee has approved the use of Trust land again this year to hold the event. This has been arranged for 6 July 2014.

5.2 *Remembrance Service*

As the reinstatement of Services of Remembrance is one of the objectives of the HLF project, the committee agreed to the use of its land for a Remembrance Service which took place on 8 November 2013. The event was organised in partnership with representatives from the local community, including schools, faith groups and military organisations and was attended by over 600 school children who sang hymns, wartime songs, read poems and lay poppy wreaths.

5.3 *Community Activities*

The Trust permits the use of its land by Council officers to provide a variety of community activities. During the last year the Community Liaison Officer has worked with schools and the public providing an extensive range of activities aimed at engaging them in the site and encouraging its proactive use. Over 13 public events have been held including over 900 school children and over 7,000 participants. In addition, there have been highly successful “Stargazing Live” events to coincide with the BBC Live Broadcasts with over 200 people taking part.

Given the success of the community involvement activities, the committee has supported the use of HLF funding to extend the post of Community Liaison Officer in partnership with the Wildlife Trust for Birmingham and the Black Country. The post is key to sustaining the long term community engagement and interest in the site.

5.4 *Friends Group*

The committee has supported the establishment of a “Friends Group”. A consultation process is currently underway which includes a request for anyone interested in becoming a member of the group to submit their contact details.

5.5 *“Dig the Beacon”*

The committee authorised a community archaeological exploration of the Beacon. This took place over seven days in July. Although no significant finds were made, over 200 people attended a public open day and individual sessions were held for local schools throughout the activity. All participants had an opportunity to experience firsthand an archaeological dig in action.

5.6 *WW1 Commemorations*

Apart from the rededication ceremony, other activities are being planned to commemorate the outbreak of WW1, the committee has approved the sowing of poppy seeds around the memorial mound in the shape of “1914 – 2014”. This took place on Friday 28 March and received positive media attention.

6.0 *Site Management*

The committee has supported the Council's Clean & Green Services in the general management of the site including:- regular litter picking patrols, grass cutting and edging of car park and roadside kerbing and habitat management programmes.

6.1 *The Lodge*

The committee has considered, at length the future of the lodge and is keen to resolve this quickly to avoid the ongoing expenditure for repairs and temporary security measures and to prevent the deterioration of the asset. A wide range of options have been discussed in the context of significant environmental, conservation, accessibility and planning issues and prohibitive costs. The preferred approach is to use the lodge as a community facility. This would also support the Council's Walsall Country Park initiative which aims to highlight the virtually unbroken green open space stretching from Doe Bank Park and Barr Beacon through to the Arboretum. As well as creating a tourist destination, there are a wealth of opportunities for delivering initiatives that produce healthy lifestyle and educational benefits which also aligns with the Trust purposes.

There is also a possibility of allocating a proportion of surplus funds from the HLF grant to the refurbishment of Beacon Lodge. Although this cannot be for direct repairs it may be possible to use it to contribute to the creation of an

interpretation facility. This could be something that links to the wildlife or heritage of the site. Additional sources of funding will be explored which may support this initiative. Preliminary discussions have already taken place with Walsall College and Walsall Adult and Community College around the possibility of providing practical learning opportunities as part of this proposal. This will not only support training and education provision within the borough, but also reduce labour costs of any development.

6.2 *Flagpole*

The historic flagpole has been reinstated. However, it has been necessary to make adaptations to the pole to prevent the flag from being stolen.

6.3 *Site Security*

The committee has agreed to a number of measures to try and address unauthorised night time vehicular access. This is a continual problem which the committee regularly has to address.

In addition the Council has supported the Trust by providing emergency security measures for particularly vulnerable areas of the site. These have included the erection of security fencing and gating around Beacon Lodge to prevent unauthorised access and reduce any health and safety risks with the immediate vicinity of the building. Security grills and doors have been installed within the Lodge, which will also be a key feature should further development take place with regard to creating a community facility.

6.4 *Plantation Railings*

Following completion of essential Health & Safety tree works, the committee agreed to the removal of the metal railings surrounding the Scott Plantation and has donated them to support the development of an allotment site and community garden elsewhere in the borough.

7.0 *Accounts*

7.1 The Management committee has received a finance report at each meeting and can report as follows.

7.2 The Trust currently holds 23,348 COIF income shares (a specialist charity Common Investment Fund) with a current market value of around £271,494 which are held as a long term investment. COIF charities investment fund has a highly diversified and well-balanced spread of investment designed to help meet growth and income requirements of charities. Current market conditions have seen the value of the shares stabilise and gradually increase. The Investment provides an annual income of approximately £11,000 based on current dividends being paid.

7.3 The Committee has approved the sale of investments of £10,500 during the year in order to provide the match funding for the Heritage Lottery Fund project thereby freeing up the cash in hand for the maintenance of the site.

7.4 The Barr Beacon Trust funds have always been managed by the Council on behalf of the Trust and whilst this has been transparent in all reporting, the Charity Regulations state that all charities are required to have an independent bank account. The committee therefore authorised the opening of an independent bank account which is now in place. The committee are content for the Council's Finance Officers to continue to manage the accounts on behalf of the Trust.

7.5 The committee has also authorised the Council, on the Trusts behalf, to arrange for specialist insurance cover to ensure that Trustees are sufficiently protected. The committee was reassured that the Council's Risk and Insurance Team were very experienced in this respect and would look at a number of providers to ensure best value for the Trust.

8.0 Annual Return

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

9.0 Charity Commission

The committee has been kept informed of developments in Charity administration through regular updates from the Charity Commission.

The committee seeks advice from the Charity Commission on plans involving the Trust's land and buildings.

10.0 Conclusion

Over the past year, the committee has worked closely with Council officersto 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 committee looks forward to continuing this partnership in the coming year to ensure that the site remains an asset for the community to enjoy.



Signed: Councillor Adrian Andrew
Chairman

On behalf of the committee:
Councillors Andrew; Bird; Clarke; Douglas-Maul; Harris; E. Hughes; Towe

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