



# **THE BARR BEACON TRUST MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE**



## **Annual Report May 2019 – April 2022**

### **Council – 25 April 2022**

#### **1.0 Summary of report**

- 1.1 This report presents the work of the Management Committee for the period May 2019 to April 2022 which takes into account the period of the Covid-19 pandemic, the consequent national lockdown and ongoing Covid restrictions from March 2020 to February 2022.
- 1.2 The Committee has met on eight occasions, less than normal due to the pandemic, however, the Trust can be assured that all necessary site maintenance matters and projects were overseen by the Chair and Vice-chair of the committee during that time to ensure that the site remained open for public exercise whilst adhering to the Covid restrictions and social distancing requirements at the time.
- 1.3 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 Recommendation**

That the work of the Management Committee be noted.

#### **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 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.

3.4 A regular group of volunteers have continued to provide valuable support to open and close the car park barriers and inform Council officers of any issues or problems.

#### 4.0 **Site Management**

4.1 **Site maintenance:** The Council's Healthy Spaces and Countryside operations teams continue to focus resources on essential maintenance to ensure that the Council as Trustee fulfils its purposes and its obligations for the site as a Local Nature Reserve. During the pandemic, the Beacon remained open, having regard to government restrictions, and was maintained at the same levels as other Council parks at that time. The importance of open green spaces for health and wellbeing was emphasised during this difficult time and, anecdotally, increased the numbers of people using the site.

The Arboricultural work recently undertaken on site was the final phase of the work approved by the committee in August 2018 to reinstate the view looking west from the memorial which had gradually been obscured by the increasing tree canopy growth. This view is significant as it takes in the majority of the Black Country, south Birmingham, Shropshire and across to Wales. To restore the view, the arboricultural work affected a line of Birch trees, a common species across the site, which has been mitigated via woodland management.

4.2 **Site Security:** The Trust will be aware that there has been an increase in anti-social behaviour on site and the committee has therefore recently authorised a major investment, in conjunction with the Council, to implement measures to prevent unauthorised access to the site. This has been funded by a combination of Council Capital Programme monies and a £61,000 match fund contribution from the Trust. The security measures include providing power feeds to both sides of the site to enable CCTV and electrical gates to be installed. The installation and maintenance of security measures on the site is a legitimate spend of Trust funds as it is to preserve and protect the site and comply with the Trust's Duty under Health and Safety legislation and Occupiers Liability to enable people to access the site safely. In turn this will enable more use of the site for recreational use according to the Trusts purposes.

#### 4.3 **Other Site Improvement Initiatives:**

The committee has supported the council's Healthy Spaces team to introduce a number of significant and exciting initiatives and opportunities for the development and promotion of the site for the benefit of local residents and as a wider visitor attraction, these include:

**Green Flag Status:** Barr Beacon has been submitted for Green Flag assessment. The Green Flag Award is an accreditation given to publicly accessible parks and open spaces, primarily in the UK, to promote standards

of good management and best practice amongst the green space sector. Although the site still has its challenges, the ongoing work to address these shows that it is being managed, and maintains good community perception and use. A long term management plan for the site is being prepared. Judging is expected to take place in the next month.

**Purple Horizons:** This is a significant long term project which, working with Natural England, has restored heathland on the site and will enable more habitat creation and restoration work to be carried out to create regional stepping stones of property habitat between Sutton Park and Cannock Chase. Barr Beacon is instrumental in acting as an important stepping stone for species to move between these two larger areas of heathland. This is a 20 year project which is nationally recognised and is one of only five in the country.

**“10 Tiny forests”:** This is an initiative promoted by the environmental charity Earth Watch which had funds available in the West Midlands Combined Authority area to create 70 tiny forests, with up to 10 in the Walsall area. Tiny Forests provide a publicly accessible place for people to relax, enjoy and appreciate nature in the built environment. They can support health and wellbeing through simple aesthetic value, actively watching wildlife, personal involvement in the project and as an educational resource or skills-building experience. Tiny forests are approximately the size of a tennis court. Planting took place on Barr Beacon on 10 January 2022 with committee members and approximately 20 volunteers attending the planting day. A “Keeper Team” is being created which will maintain and monitor its growth and collect environmental and social data to help assess the benefits that these forests provide over time.

## 5.0 **Events and Activities:**

- 5.1 **Annual Wreath Laying Remembrance Ceremony:** Ceremonies took place on 8 November 2019, 12 November 2020 and 6 November 2021. Both the 2019 and 2021 events were well attended as usual by Committee members, the Mayor, local veterans and local school children. The 2020 service, given the circumstances, was attended by a limited number of invited guests with wreaths being laid by the Chair of the committee on behalf of the Trust and by the Councils Armed Forces Champion on behalf of veterans. Covid restrictions regarding face coverings and social distancing were adhered to throughout the ceremony.
- 5.2 **The Queen’s Platinum Jubilee – Beacon Lighting event:** The Committee is keen for Barr Beacon to be part of the national beacon lighting event on 2 June 2022 and therefore options for the lighting of a beacon on the site and associated activities at national lighting up time of 9.45pm are being discussed. The scale of the event will have to have regard to the need to ensure the safety of attendees at that time of night, the open nature of the site and the unknown weather conditions.

5.3 **Love Exploring:** As part of digital developments across the borough, the committee has supported the introduction of Love Exploring to interact with sites in a very different way. Love Exploring provides a range of discovery games and guided tours that are fun to do and free to use. The first game is a dinosaur safari – using augmented reality to search for and take photos with dinosaurs on the site as well as answering questions. Plans will be to introduce a heritage trail, to interact and learn about heritage features on the site, as well as tree and habitat trails to explore, see and learn about what is on the site in an interactive educational way with smart phones.

## 6.0 **The Lodge**

The Lodge is used regularly by an adult learning organisation whose students and staff have been participating in horticultural activities based at the Lodge. The arrangement works well for both the organisation and the Trust and therefore the committee has agreed to essential interior maintenance and decoration to be carried out to ensure that it remains fit for purpose. Quotes for the work are being obtained to enable the work start soon.

## 7.0 **Accounts**

7.1 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. The accounts are independently examined.

7.2 The Trust currently holds COIF income shares (a specialist charity Common Investment Fund) with a current market value of around £420,000 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. In the light of recent events in the Ukraine, the current investment portfolio has been reviewed and has shown no exposure to equity based in Russia.

7.3 The level of investments helps to attract significant external funding for major projects on the Beacon. Having this healthy investment balance also provides an annual return, ordinarily around £11,000, which is used to fund day to day maintenance and activities on the site. The losses as a result of the Covid pandemic have recovered however, the return is decreasing at the moment given the situation in the Ukraine. The Trust is holding around £33,000 available cash which is carefully managed by the committee to be used for Trust purposes. Some of this will be used to fund the renovation of the lodge and the various commemorative and celebratory events of significance this year.

7.4 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.

## 8.0 Annual Return

The annual returns required by the Charity Commission for the period of this report have been completed.

## 9.0 Conclusion

Over the past year, the committee has continued to work 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 priorities to encourage people to lead active lives to maintain or improve their health and wellbeing; and to build a strong sense of community.

The contribution of the volunteers 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  
13 April 2022

**Contact Officer:** Helen Owen, Democratic Services on behalf of the Clerk to the Trust ☎ 01922 654522 ✉ [helen.owen@walsall.gov.uk](mailto:helen.owen@walsall.gov.uk)