



THE BARR BEACON TRUST MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE



Annual Report May 2023 – April 2024

Council – 15 April 2024

1.0 Purpose of report

To present the work of the Management Committee for the period May 2023 to April 2024.

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 for the purposes of physical exercise, recreation and leisure time to improve the conditions of life for the beneficiaries; and to keep in repair the War Memorial. Walsall Council became trustee following Local Government reorganisation in 1972.

3.2 The Council as Trustee established a Management Committee 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. The membership comprises the local ward councillors and relevant cabinet members

4.0 Site Management

4.1 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.

4.2 **Security:** As part of the major investment by the Trust and the Council, work is in progress to implement measures to prevent unauthorised access by installing power feeds across the site to enable provision of CCTV and electronic gates. The location of the site has meant some logistics delays requiring rerouting of the planned cabling and which may mean additional costs. Your committee will be updated on this at its next meeting.

4.3 **Site maintenance**

Potholes: The Council's infrastructure team has arranged for repairs to be made to at the entrance and exits to the sites following the appearance of a number of large potholes. Because of the associated risks and urgency to the repairs, the Council as Local Authority has funded the significant costs on this occasion, however in future, costs on this scale will need to be funded in a different way. This is currently being considered and a report will be submitted to your committee in due course.

Topography Disc: Following further damage to the war memorial topography disc as a result of the lighting of fireworks and disposable barbeques, your committee has funded a new disc made of robust damage resistant materials. This has now been installed.

Bollards: Your committee has funded replacements for the missing bollards near the memorial to prevent off road vehicles gaining access and churning the grass into mud.

Additional bins: Your committee enabled the installation of a number of larger sized bins in an attempt to combat indiscriminate littering. Installation will take place imminently in consultation with the Council's operations team regarding locations.

4.4 **Site improvements, events and activities**

During the year, your 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.

Your 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 visitors, these include:

Purple Horizons Habitat Restoration Project: The project is a collaboration between Walsall Council, Lichfield Council and the University of Birmingham with funding from natural England to conserve vulnerable species of bee and wasp in the West Midlands. This includes exposing sandy soils (Bee Beaches), as an experimental habitat for ground nesting bees, and enhancing wildflower availability on the site. The project has gained some positive media attention for Barr Beacon.

Tiny Forest: On 14 September, the Healthy Spaces team in partnership with Severn Trent ran an event to maintain the tiny forest installed last year. In total 25 people attended (including horticultural students who use the Lodge as a base) to care and nurture the forest and learn about wildlife the forest can support and environmental benefits.

Rewilding project: As part of the boroughs Rewilding Project, a seed gathering event was held on 27 September, to collect seeds which will be nurtured until ready for replanting as part of rewilding plans in Walsall. This is part of a boroughwide programme of Woodland Creation and Rewilding.

Remembrance event: The annual Wreath Laying Remembrance Ceremony this year took place on 10 November 2023. The event was well attended as usual by Committee members, the Mayor, the Council's Armed Forces Champion, local veterans, representatives of the local Combined Cadet Forces and local school children. The West Midlands Mayor also attended this year's event.

Potential food festival: An expression of interest has been made to the Council's Safety Advisory Group to hold a food festival on the Beacon sometime in July. Your committee has agreed to the use of Trust land in principle and is awaiting further detail from the Group.

5.0 **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 continues to work well for both the organisation and the Trust. Your committee has previously authorised essential interior refurbishment to be carried out to ensure that the building remains fit for purpose and the organisation occupying the lodge have additionally indicated their commitment to the arrangement by also undertaking a significant amount of internal refurbishment at their expense. Your committee has clarified the responsibilities regarding the payments for services to the building.

6.0 **Accounts**

6.1 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 Trust accounts are kept entirely separate from the accounts of the Council as local authority. The accounts are also independently examined.

6.2 The Trust currently holds COIF income shares (a specialist charity Common Investment Fund) via CCLA as the investment provider. This investment fund has a highly diversified and well-balanced portfolio designed to help meet growth and income requirements of charities.

At the request of the committee this year, the Council's finance officers have reviewed the performance of CCLA against other providers. The committee has received this information and has determined that the current provider remains the best value investment vehicle for the Trust monies.

- 6.3 The Trust's investments have a current market value of around £455,000. These are held as long term investments which helps to attract significant external funding for major projects on the Beacon and which provides an annual return, ordinarily around £12,000, which is used to fund day to day maintenance and activities on the site. The Trust holds some cash in hand which is carefully managed by the committee to be used for Trust purposes including maintenance of the lodge, site security and various community and commemorative events this year.
- 6.4 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.

7.0 Annual Return

The annual return required by the Charity Commission for the period of this report has been completed.

8.0 Conclusion

The committee continues 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 so that the site remains an asset for the community to enjoy.

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 create safe and healthy spaces whilst building a strong sense of community. In addition, they align with the We Are Walsall 2040 vision to be a safe, healthy and green borough.



Councillor A. Andrew 3 April 2024
Chair, Barr Beacon Trust Management Committee

Contact Officer: Helen Owen, Democratic Services on behalf of the Clerk to the Trust:
helen.owen@walsall.gov.uk