



# **THE BARR BEACON TRUST MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE**



## **ANNUAL REPORT 2008/09**

### **Council – 21 April 2008**

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

This report sets out the work of the management committee for 2008/09 and includes details of significant external funding bids, improvement works to date and future plans.

#### **2.0 Recommendation**

- 2.1 That the Council congratulates the significant progress made in relation to the management of the Trusts affairs and of the site since the establishment of the management committee,
- 2.2 That the bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund for improvements to both the site and specifically, for the refurbishment of the Memorial, be supported.
- 2.3 That the proposal for the Trust to enter into a lease agreement between the Trust and the Council in respect of the "lodge", be supported; that negotiations be entered into accordingly, and that a further report be submitted in due course.

#### **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, received a report last year which advised that in order to take advantage of a number of external funding opportunities for improvements to the site, the Trust would need to meet regularly to discuss details and to decide day to day management issues. This would be cumbersome and impractical if the whole Council had to convene and accordingly, with the approval of the charity commission, a management committee was established 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 of the Ward Councillors for the Pheasey Park Farm and Streetly Wards, being the Wards where the site is located; and the Cabinet member whose portfolio includes Leisure. Local interest groups were invited to be co-opted onto the committee in a non-voting capacity and a representative of the Walsall Civic Society has so far been co-opted. A representative of South Staffordshire Water Company, having an interest in the site and Aldridge Rotary Club because of their support for a previous landfill bid have also been invited to join.
- 3.4 A relative of the late Colonel Wilkinson (who originally donated the land and memorial in 1918), has contacted the Council and expressed an interest in the improvements to the site. Arrangements are being made for him to meet with the Committee and visit the site sometime in the summer.

#### 4.0 **The work of the Management Committee**

- 4.1 During this year, the management committee has met on eight occasions and has made decisions on a number of improvement works to the site.

**Access and Security Improvements:** Vandalism at the site, and particularly the memorial, has caused the committee some concern and accordingly approvals have been given for the improvement works including the provision of barriers and flow plates. Consultation has been undertaken with South Staffordshire Water Co, in relation to security and maintenance responsibilities at the reservoir.

**Opening / Closing Signs:** New opening and closing signs were commissioned and following external grant funding, have been installed.

**Community Custodian:** The committee is keen to engage someone to help conserve and enhance Barr Beacon by ensuring that it remains safe, clean and secure for all visitors and to engage the local community with the care, protection, enjoyment and development of the site. Advice has been sought from the Councils Human Resources Officers on the proposal and external funding is being sought to finance the post.

**Archaeological Digs:** Following results of geophysical surveys, the committee approved further research and test pits by Birmingham University in conjunction with their post graduate student programme. The archaeologist has given feedback which has identified areas of historical interest. Further research could be funded via a bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund.

**Flagpole:** In view of the health and safety implications in relation to the poor condition of the flagpole, the committee authorised its removal and commissioned a survey as to its condition and listed status. It has been found to be a rare example of its type and should be restored. This will form part of an overall bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund.

**Charity Commission Consultation:** The comments of the Charity Commission are sought on all significant proposals for the site. A consultation document from the Charity Commission in respect of proposed changes to the regulations relating to financial thresholds has been responded to.

4.2 In addition, the committee has made significant decisions in respect of:-

**The Big Lottery Bid – Green Bridge Project:** The committee was disappointed with the outcome of the public vote as this would have meant improvements to the War Memorial and the provision of an inspirational visitor centre. Despite the failure of the overall bid, the provision of a visitor centre remains a priority for the Council and the Trust and does have the power to attract funding as a discrete project from the Big Lottery Fund and the Heritage Lottery Fund which will be pursued. The Committee has written to the leaders of Sandwell and Dudley Councils and Advantage West Midlands expressing their support for joint working between Local Authorities on this project.

#### **External Funding Bids**

**Heritage Lottery Fund:** The committee has, over the past 6 months discussed the submission of bids to external grant bodies to facilitate the refurbishment of the War memorial and other improvements. The Heritage Lottery Fund Regional Manager has briefed the committee on a new grants scheme and consequently, officers have met with the Heritage Lottery Fund to discuss the detail. The meeting was extremely positive and an application was encouraged. Accordingly a stage 1 application is being developed with a view to submission in September 2008, being the earliest it will be considered. If the bid is successful, voluntary organisations, schools and the wider community would be involved in the project.

The submission is likely to be in the region of £700k and will include amongst other improvement schemes, funding for a community liaison officer post; major refurbishment of the War Memorial, the historic flagpole and plantation fencing; and archaeological excavations. The outcome would be known in December this year with a stage 2 bid being developed for final decisions in late 2009.

**Ibstock Corey Environmental Trust:** The committee has signed an agreement leading to an award of a grant from the ICET in the sum of £24,000 for a project aimed at improving public access, facilities, information provision, nature trail leaflets, bins and benches provided by 'Links to Work', wildlife habitat work etc. The bid, which the Trust has match funded was instigated by Countryside Services Officers in partnership with Aldridge Rotary Club and the committee has thanked officers for their work on this .

**Others:** The committee is also looking to apply to other external funding streams to support the match funding of the Heritage Lottery Fund application, as the Heritage Lottery Fund cannot be the sole funder of the project, and for the possible post of community custodian.

#### **4.3 Declaration of Local Nature Reserve**

The committee has been working closely with council officers and the Wildlife Trust to declare the land at Barr Beacon as a Local Nature Reserve. This will involve the Trust entering into a legal agreement with the Council for the management of the site. The Committee is seeking independent legal advice in respect of the agreement, to accommodate comments of the Charity Commission and to avoid conflict of interest.

The declaration of Barr Beacon as a Local Nature Reserve will see Walsall reaching the 1 hectare per 1000 of population National Indicator set by the Government (the first in the county). The management agreement will be monitored by the Wildlife Trust and Natural England. A conservation management plan for 2008-2012 has been drawn up by the Wildlife Trust, working in partnership with the Council and has been agreed by the committee.

#### **4.4 Barr Beacon Master Plan**

As part of a 2 year Local Area Agreement Project which ended in March 2008, consultants were engaged to work on a master plan consultation document setting out options for the future management of Barr Beacon. The committee has now received this document and has supported the proposals in principle as a basis for future development of the site.

#### **4.5 Ownership of the “lodge”**

The lodge is currently occupied by the Council as a base for Walsall Countryside Services, however, the lodge is owned by the Trust and the use has never been formalised. This has meant a lack of clarity in respect of responsibility for maintenance of the building. In order to address this, the committee is looking into the possibility of Trust entering into a lease agreement with the Council which will clarify responsibilities. The Trust has received some initial advice from the Councils legal services however, specialist independent legal advice will need to be engaged where necessary for this matter. The Charity Commission has advised that technically this amounts to “disposal” of land and would require their approval. The management committee does not have the delegations to agree the lease and a report would need to be considered by the Trust as a whole. The Committee and Council officers consider this to be the best way forward.

#### **4.6 Revised Scheme**

The Charity Commission has pointed out that the Trust scheme needs to be updated, particularly in view of the proposals for the site and have offered to produce a revised scheme. Officers will be liaising with the Charity Commission in this respect.

#### 4.7 **Byelaws**

The committee has considered the existing byelaws for the control of the open space at Barr Beacon and feel that they are adequate for the time being.

#### 5.0 **Accounts**

5.1 The Trust has a capital sum from previous sales of land, which has been invested over a number of years by the Council on behalf of the Trust and which generates a reasonable interest. The interest is being used to support external funding proposals, to support the work of Countryside Services in the maintenance of the site and in particular, to support the additional maintenance required for the Local Nature Reserve. The Committee has welcomed advice from finance officers on the Trust's finances and has consequently undertaken a review to ensure that the Trust makes best use of its funds.

The committee has also researched the rental agreements, wayleaves and easements on the site to ensure their currency.

#### 5.2 **Annual Return**

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

#### 6.0 **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 committee looks forward to continuing this partnership in the coming year to ensure that the site remains asset for the community to enjoy.

Signed:



Chairman

On behalf of the committee:

Councillors Andrew; Bird; Clarke (Vice-Chairman); Douglas-Maul; Harrison; Hughes; Towe

Contact officer: Helen Owen, Constitutional Services Officer  
01922 652017 [owenh@walsall.gov.uk](mailto:owenh@walsall.gov.uk)