



THE BARR BEACON TRUST MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE



REPORT TO COUNCIL 2009/10

Council – 19 April 2010

1.0 Summary of report

This report sets out the work of the management committee for 2009/10 and includes details of significant external funding bids and improvement works to date.

2.0 Recommendation

That the report be noted.

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. 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, other co-optative trustees are being sought.

4.0 The work of the Management Committee

4.1 *Public Benefit – new annual reporting requirements*

The Committee has received a copy of the Charity Commission guidance on 'Charities and Public Benefit' which was discussed. It was noted that charities, when planning activities, must have regard to the guidance so that it is clear

that the aims of the charity have been carried out, through the activities undertaken, for the public benefit. The Committee is confident that the activities of the Trust have complied with this guidance.

4.2 *Heritage Lottery Fund Application*

Notification was received in September 2009 of a successful outcome for the stage 1 application for a programme worth around £3/4million which will result in the restoration of the war memorial, historic flagpole and scott plantation fencing. Following discussions with the Heritage Lottery Fund around the grant agreement, the Fund acknowledged that the agreement could be with the Council for ease of day to day administration of the project and to avoid the need to revise costings as the Trust would be liable for VAT payments.

A schedule of works for the historic features is currently being drawn up.

The Trust has match funded an initial £8,650 towards the development of the stage 2 bid which would be due for submission in March 2011.

A regular programme of events and activities are planned throughout the development phase which will address a number of aspects of the stage 2 applications including: promotion of the bid; demonstration of community engagement and involvement; gathering qualitative and quantitative data; and examples of the type of activities the Beacon could host – with a view to re-establishing remembrance ceremonies.

There are licensing requirements for the provision of some events and the Committee has agreed for the trust to fund the cost of maintaining a premises licence.

The Committee has made suggestions in respect of the above and in particular, a competition with a prize for the postcard sent from the furthest location. Postcards depicting Barr Beacon have already been produced.

4.3 *Vandalism to the Memorial*

Trustees will be aware from recent press coverage that the roof of the memorial has sustained significant damage as a result of the theft of copper sheeting. Following a combined effort from a number of Council services, emergency protection was quickly installed to minimise any further damage to the internal roof structure. A firm of historic building consultants who were already familiar with the structure were commissioned to undertake a condition survey and advise on temporary repairs in advance of the full Heritage Lottery Fund project repair programme in 2011.

A meeting of the Management Committee was called to discuss the implications of the above both in terms of costs and in respect of the implications for the development of the Heritage Lottery Fund bid.

The costs of the repair work are as yet unknown, however, in order to ensure that the repair work commences without delay the Management Committee has agreed to bear the costs from the trust funds, within certain parameters, and has delegated authority to the Chairman and Vice-Chairman accordingly.

The Committee also agreed to cover the costs already incurred in relation to security; equipment hire; the roofer; and half the cost of the condition survey (the other half being set against the Heritage Lottery Fund development grant).

The Committee has agreed an option for the replacement of the roof material and also for the provision of future security following advice from the Councils risk and insurance officer.

In view of the damage to the memorial, there will be some slippage to the community engagement aspect of the development stage of the Heritage Lottery Fund bid however, the Heritage Lottery Fund has been informed of all recent developments and is happy with the management of the issues.

4.4 Other Work

The committee has supported countryside services in the management of the site and has approved funding for a number of maintenance and repair costs. These include the replacement of flowplates to a higher specification.

In order to provide value for money for the trust, the Committee has also asked for officers to look at contracting out various regular works rather than relying on call-outs.

The future of the lodge which is currently occupied by Green Spaces Urban Forestry Service has also been discussed and is being considered on an ongoing basis.

At the request of the Committee, officers undertook an initial investigation into the possibility of including Doe Bank Park within the remit of the trust in order to improve the site and support the long term sustainability of Barr Beacon and the surrounding green area. Following these initial investigations, the Committee considered that the proposal was not in the best interests of the Trust or be of public benefit at this stage in view of the complex legal arrangements necessary and potential liabilities to the trust.

5.0 Ibstock Corey Environmental Trust

A bid by Countryside Services in conjunction with Aldridge Rotary Club, and match funded by the Barr Beacon Trust, was successful in securing £24,000 from ICET. This was used for improving public access, facilities, information provision, including a new panoramic disc, nature trail leaflets, bins and benches & picnic tables provided by 'links to Work', wildlife habitat work etc.

The project has now been successfully completed and to round up the project, a public guided walk was undertaken. There was also a historical research element of the project and a local historical researcher was commissioned to produce a summary of the history – geographical and human – of Barr Beacon and its immediate surroundings. Many individuals contributed to the research, and the final document has been published.

The document provides, not only a factual history but also includes personal accounts offering a valuable insight in the history and community memory of the area. All trustees on the management committee have received a copy of the document. Any other trustee wishing to receive a copy may do so upon request as it is quite a lengthy document.

6.0 Accounts

- 6.1 The Management Committee has received a finance report at each meeting and can report as follows.
- 6.2 The Trust currently holds 24,251.44 COIF income shares with a current market value of around £239,000 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 £10,000 based on current dividends being paid.
- 6.3 Whilst retaining a capital balance to provide an annual income, the Trust will be allocating the majority of its funds to the Heritage Lottery Fund project and will be supporting bids to other external funding streams.
- 6.4 The annual income is used to support the day to day maintenance of the site.

7.0 Annual Return

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

8.0 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 an asset for the community to enjoy.



Signed: Councillor Adrian Andrew
Chairman

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

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