



THE BARR BEACON TRUST MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE



REPORT TO COUNCIL 2014/15

Council – 13 April 2015

1.0 Summary of report

- 1.1 This report sets out the work of the management committee for 2014/15. The committee has met on 4 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.
- 1.2 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

- 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 and the Wildlife Trust to maintain and promote Barr Beacon 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 Councillors for the Pheasey Park Farm, Streetly and Aldridge Central and South Wards, being the Wards where the site is located together with the Cabinet members whose portfolio includes Leisure and Regeneration. A representative of the Wildlife Trust has been invited to become a co-opted member.

4.0 **The Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) Application – “Raising the Barr”**

4.1 ***Current position***

4.1.1 As a result of the Community Liaison Officer, Martin Harrison, leaving to take up other employment, additional time was required to deliver the remaining outputs and therefore HLF officers have agreed an extension to the project to March 2016. The committee was disappointed with Mr Harrison’s departure as he was valued as a key member of the team delivering community activities on the site.

4.1.2 The Community Liaison Officer post was funded by HLF monies in partnership with the Birmingham and Black Country Wildlife Trust and the committee is pleased that representatives of the Wildlife Trust are continuing to provide a valuable contribution to the activities on the Beacon and have a regular presence on site. The committee has recognised this by inviting a representative to become a co-opted member.

4.2 ***War Memorial - Rededication***

A Rededication Ceremony for the newly refurbished War Memorial was held on Friday 7 November 2014 in conjunction with the Remembrance Service and was considered to be an excellent event despite poor weather.

4.2.1 The event served as an example of how the community can work together to provide events and activities. Over the course of almost a year local schools, church representatives, military organisations and the Council worked hand-in-hand to plan and deliver the ceremony. Ultimately over forty organisations, businesses and individuals came together to provide services, staff, equipment and materials. The ceremony was attended by over a thousand people the majority of which were school children.

4.2.2 The ceremony was led by Rev Mandy Walker and Father Gwilym Lloyd, and was attended by the Lord and Deputy Lieutenant for the West Midlands, The Mayor, representatives from local and regional Armed Forces organisations, representative of the Barr Beacon Trust Committee and a joint school choir made up of pupils from local primary schools. The event was videoed and photographed for archive purposes.

4.2.3. The memorial’s central plinth has two remaining blank panels. Following discussions with representatives from the Mercian Volunteer Regimental Association, they have suggested that one could feature the emblems of the Staffordshire & Warwickshire regiments with the view to the site being adopted by them for ceremonial occasions or any other appropriate activity they may wish to undertake. This could also contribute to Walsall’s commitment to the Armed Forces Covenant.

4.2.4. It is currently proposed that the fourth plaque identifies those organisations that have contributed to the restoration and rededication of the memorial – i.e. the Heritage Lottery Fund, the Barr Beacon Trust, Walsall Council, and the Wildlife Trust.

5.0 **Events and Activities**

5.1 ***“Bands on the Beacon”***

5.1.1 In view of the success of the event in previous years, with a capacity attendance in 2014, the committee was keen to make this an annual event however, the Heritage Lottery Funding which had been used to fund previous events has now finished. A task group, which includes representatives of the committee, has therefore been formed to look at how this event could be provided in future years and, consequently, a business case has been produced to deliver the Bands on the Beacon as a self-funded event for 2015.

5.1.2 The business case was considered by the committee and trustees were pleased to allow the use of the site for a two day event, scheduled for Saturday 4th and Sunday 5th July which will feature local established acts and showcase new artists. The event will also feature additional stalls including a craft fair, bar and food concessions. As a result of crowd control measures introduced at last year's event, health and safety officers have advised that the capacity can be increased to 5,000 visitors per day.

5.1.3 A cost of approximately £25,000 has been identified to deliver the event and the committee has agreed to contribute £5,000 from the Barr Beacon Trust, with the rest being covered by donations, ticket sales, sponsorship, advertising and concessions. Given the high profile of the event, the committee has agreed for the Trust to underwrite any unmet costs. Although it is considered that this is unlikely to be needed, the Treasurer to the Trust has advised that to minimise the risk of the event not meeting its costs, the committee should be involved in the preparations for the event at all stages to ensure that the income potential is maximised. This role will be actively undertaken by the task group and reported to the committee.

5.2 ***Community Activities***

5.2.1 The Trust permits the use of its land by Council officers to provide an extensive range of community activities aimed at encouraging the proactive use of the site.

5.2.2 During the last year, excluding the Rededication and Remembrance services, over 900 school children were involved in various activities. In addition, there have been regular botanical and wildlife events and activities together with a number of highly successful astronomical events with over 500 people attending to watch the Solar Eclipse.

5.3 ***Friends Group***

The committee has supported the establishment of a “Friends Group” which has met on a number of occasions and is proving successful with valuable input from local residents and businesses.

6.0 **Site Management**

The committee has recognised the work of the Council’s Clean and Green services in the general management of the site including habitat management programmes.

6.1 ***Site Security***

The committee has agreed to a number of measures to try and address antisocial behaviour and vandalism on the site which has included the presence of extremely offensive graffiti, the destruction of the panoramic disc on the memorial and damage to the CCTV cameras. This is a continual problem which the committee regularly has to address. The local police have indicated that they will increase patrols of the site. The committee is also considering other options to prevent night time access to the site.

6.2 ***The Lodge***

6.2.1 Over the last year, the committee became increasingly concerned about the future of the lodge and considered at length a range of options. The preferred option was restated as being for use as a community facility with a view to use as a visitor centre in the future subject to funding. The trustees have very much appreciated the council’s Clean and Green services’ contribution to this by way of the funding and carrying out of the refurbishment of the lodge so that it can once again be used as a base for events and activities, including a meeting place for the Friends of the Beacon and to provide accommodation for Council officers and Wildlife Trust staff working on the site. This facility should be ready by the summer. This contribution has provided a substantial saving to the Trust to be used for other activities. The expenditure could also contribute towards a match funding element of future funding bids.

6.2.1 A significant amount of European funding is soon to become available for delivering projects which create green corridors and improve the quality of open space infrastructure, contributing to economic, quality of life and general health benefits. This criteria matches the objectives of previous funding bids which had featured improvements to the rights of way infrastructure and a new visitor centre for Barr Beacon. The Committee was keen to seize this opportunity and has therefore agreed to the development of a funding bid, in conjunction with the Black Country Consortium’s External Funding Team for the creation of a new visitor centre. There are a number of design options for the centre which includes conversion of the Lodge and also the design previously approved for the 2009 ‘people’s millions’ bid which was supported by the Trust as a whole.

6.2.2 Reports in relation to this bid will be submitted to the Trust as appropriate in due course.

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.

7.2 The Trust currently holds 22,496.15 COIF income shares (a specialist charity Common Investment Fund) with a current market value of around £283,555 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.

7.3 Having a healthy investment balance provides an annual return of approximately £9,000 based on current dividends being paid and this income is used to fund the day to day maintenance of the site. The level of investments also helps to attract significant external funding for major projects on the Beacon such as the Heritage Lottery fund and possible future European funding.

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.

7.5 Specialist insurance cover has been arranged through the Councils Risk and Insurance Team on behalf of the Trust to cover the lodge, including public and products Liability to ensure that Trustees are adequately protected.

8.0 **Annual Return**

The annual return required by the Charity Commission has been completed

9.0 **Charity Commission**

9.1 The committee is kept informed of developments in Charity administration through news letters from the Charity Commission.

9.2 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 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 contribution of the Wildlife Trust is also appreciated and the committee looks forward to continuing these partnerships in the coming year to ensure that the site remains an asset for the community to enjoy.



Councillor Adrian Andrew, Chairman
On behalf of the Management Committee

27 March 2015

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