

Halesowen Area Committee – 11th March 2009

Report of the Director of the Urban Environment

THE LEASOWES RESTORATION

Purpose of Report

1. To advise the Committee on the progress of the restoration of the historic landscape at Leasowes Park

Background

2. This Committee has considered a number of reports on the status of the Leasowes Restoration, the most recent of which was on the 2nd July 2008.
3. Since the last report to this Committee, the restoration work being carried out by Alun Griffiths Contractors has progressed well. The current work, referred to as Phase 1, includes;
 - The restoration of Beechwater Dam and cascade
 - The restoration of the High Cascade, footpaths, bridges, and smaller cascades in Virgil's Grove,
 - The dredging and restoration of Lower Pool
 - Improvements to the main entrance to the park.
 - Tree, shrub, herbaceous and aquatic planting to restore the historic woodland structure and provide ecological benefits
4. Work started on site on the 12th May 2008 with a contractual completion date of the 6th February 2009; however, despite an adversely wet autumn which caused delay to elements of the work, completion was achieved 6 weeks early on the 17th December 2008. In addition, a separate contract was let in December 2008 to carry out the tree, shrub and aquatic planting, and this work was completed in February 2009.
5. The final account has now been agreed with the contractor, and as a result all project costs at completion have been contained within the approved funding
6. During the contract period, considerable efforts were made to ensure that users of and visitors to the park were kept informed of progress, and that the restoration work be used as an opportunity for residents and visitors to learn about its history and value. A regular update which included current

construction activity, any path closures and forthcoming events was updated on a weekly basis via site notice boards erected both at entrances to the park and at Halesowen Golf Club, Stourbridge College, Leasowes Park Centre and in the Council's Grounds Maintenance depot. In addition, information notices were posted in the vicinity of construction work so that park users were aware of the purpose of work currently underway.

7. A series of monthly 'open afternoons' with guided walks have been held so that visitors may see the work in progress in an informed and safe manner, and ask questions of the restoration team, wardens and contractor, and these have been very successful. In particular, these tours have effectively demonstrated the scale of the civil engineering works involved and the very real challenges of access, environmental sensitivity and application of 21st century engineering solutions to the recreation of an 18th century landscape. Over 250 visitors have attended these along with other organised tours of the work.
8. In addition, a number of guided schools visits have taken place; the restoration has attracted widespread and positive publicity from both the local press and national professional/trade publications, and has benefited from live radio coverage on 2 occasions. Students from Leasowes Business and Enterprise College have based a project around the production of a DVD and have filmed interviews with visitors, and representatives from the restoration team as part of its production.
9. The contractor, Alun Griffiths, has registered the site under the Considerate Constructors Scheme, a construction industry initiative aimed at improving the image of construction work. Following two audits the site has been classed as '*a very good site that is considerate*' with high scores received in particular for community liaison activities.
10. Taking account of the heritage significance of the site, an archaeological watching brief has been carried out during the construction work, to ensure that any important archaeological remains are identified and appropriate action taken, however, to date, no archaeological remains of significance have been found.
11. Considerable attention has been given to the protection of the natural environment of the site; working methods have been evolved to protect fish and bird life in the pools and watercourses, and plants have been lifted in advance of clearance work and replanting in and around restored features.
12. The Leasowes Operations Team meetings have recommenced with a renewed focus now that the restoration work has commenced. These meetings have in the past been used as a stakeholder group to engage those with an interest in the park, and are currently being held monthly to ensure that the impact of the construction work is minimised and that communication with park users is working effectively. The group is attended by officers from the Directorate of the Urban Environment and representatives from the Friends of The Leasowes, Halesowen Golf Club, Stourbridge College and Alun Griffiths Contractors.

13. At its meeting on the 4th June 2008 the Select Committee on Regeneration, Culture and Adult Education resolved to undertake a detailed investigation of The Leasowes Restoration project, in the light of the concerns expressed by this Area Committee and for a report to be submitted to the Select Committee.
14. This report was considered by the Select Committee on the 8th September 2008. In essence, the investigations presented to the Committee considered that of the period from 1997 to date, approximately one and a half year's delay could be attributed to the Council, and beyond that time, delays were attributed to external factors outside of the Council's control. The report also considered that, although there were weaknesses in the management of the project at an early stage, a robust project management regime was in place after 2001.
15. A number of members of both the Select Committee and this Area Committee have been accompanied on site visits during the construction period to see the work underway.
16. A ceremony to mark the completion of the work took place on the 25th February, attended by Members, officers, and representatives from the Friends of the Leasowes, the project team, Heritage Lottery Fund and other stakeholders. The event consisted of a guided walk followed by presentations at Halesowen Golf Club.
17. Members will be aware from previous reports that, whereas the work carried out under the Phase 1 project has delivered a full and faithful restoration of a significant part of The Leasowes, there are additional works to the full restoration project for which additional funding now has to be identified and secured, and it is proposed that this be carried out as and when resources become available. The Leasowes would be in a favourable position for further development proposals to be prepared, given the extensive survey, design and cost estimate work undertaken for the whole site as part of the renegotiation of the HLF grant in 2001/2.

Finance

18. There are no direct financial implications arising from this report

Law

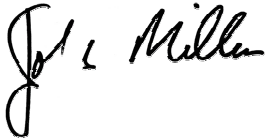
19. Under Section 9 & 10 of the Open Spaces Act 1906 the Council is empowered to acquire and maintain land for the purposes of Public Open Space.
20. Section 19 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976 enables the Council to provide recreation facilities within, or outside of its area, with or without a charge.
21. Section 111 of the Local Government Act 1972 enables the Council to do anything that is calculated to facilitate or is conducive to or incidental to the discharge of its functions.

Equality Impact

22. Access improvements in Leasowes Park are being carried out with regard to the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act and in accordance with best practice in improving access to open space.

Recommendation

23. It is proposed that the contents of this report be noted.



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Background Papers

None