

SELECT COMMITTEE ON REGENERATION, CULTURE AND ADULT EDUCATION – 20th JANUARY 2010

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE URBAN ENVIRONMENT

THE LEASOWES RESTORATION

PURPOSE

1. To provide information requested by the Select Committee on the Leasowes Restoration

BACKGROUND

2. The Leasowes is a designed landscape of international standing. It is listed Grade 1 on the English Heritage 'Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest in England' as a result of its cultural status in marking a radical change in the way that landscapes were designed in the mid 18th century.
3. The Leasowes was created by the poet William Shenstone who inherited the land as a working arable farm. Soon after settling at the Leasowes in 1743 he began to transform parts of his farm into a garden which he called his 'ferme ornee', literally meaning an ornamental farm. The garden that Shenstone laid out at the Leasowes worked within the existing landscape, improving the park to blend it in with the rural scenery. Shenstone both used and respected the natural form of the landscape whilst also following the romanticism of the time. He introduced pools, and stone cascades to the natural watercourse that ran through his land and a circuit walk around the park enabled the many visitors to the park to experience the garden as a sequence of views or pictures, described in 1764 by Robert Dodsley's 'A Description of the Leasowes', which gives us a clear picture of how Shenstone's garden would have appeared shortly after his death in 1763.
4. After Shenstone's death the reputation of the Leasowes increased and for a while it became the most visited garden in England. Eminent visitors included Thomas Jefferson, President, Benjamin Franklin and John Wesley.
5. The former Select Committee for Culture and Recreation considered an update report on The Leasowes Restoration project on the 11th March 2004. Following a request made by Halesowen Area Committee at its meeting held on 12th March 2008, this Select Committee considered a detailed investigation of The Leasowes Restoration project at its meeting on the 8th September 2008, which set out a detailed chronology of the events surrounding the restoration project since Heritage Lottery Funding was

secured in 1997. In summary, this investigation reported 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.

Restoration work

6. The contract for the remaining restoration work under what is referred to as Phase 1 was awarded to Alun Griffiths Contractors in April 2008, following a robust quality:price procurement exercise. Members may wish to note that the methodology used to appoint Alun Griffiths Contractors has been upheld as an exemplar by the Heritage Lottery Fund. This contractor was chosen as a result of their significant experience of carrying out civil engineering and landscape works on environmentally sensitive sites where archaeological and heritage matters have to be considered. This contract 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.
7. Work started on site on the 12th May 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.
8. A further report on this project was presented to the Select Committee on the 4th March 2009, and this report set out information on the successful completion of the work referred to in paragraphs 6 and 7
9. All project costs at completion have been contained within approved funding. A summary of the project costs and budgets was provided to the Select Committee as part of the March 2009 report, however, following a request from members of the Committee at its meeting on the 7th September 2009, a more detailed breakdown is provided below.

	£'000	£'000
<u>Project Costs</u>		
Restoration work	828	
Surveys (topographic, ecological & geotechnical)	28	
Historic Landscape Consultant	45	
Landscape Architect	56	
Project Management	226	
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Archaeologist & archaeological investigations	24
CDM Planning Supervision	8
Structural Engineer	301
Feasibility study for visitor facilities	7
Other Costs (including contingency)	70
	1,593
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<u>Council Spend Used as Matchfunding</u>	
Wardens Costs (over 6 years)	295
Maintenance Costs (over 6 years)	140
	436
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Total Costs	2,029
<u>Funded by:-</u>	
HLF Grant	1,307
Section 106 Contribution	265
Liveability	21
Council Matchfunding	436
	<hr/>
	2,029

10. Concern was expressed by members at the meeting of this Committee on 7th September 2009 over the proportion of administration costs to works costs. In making comparisons the following points should to be considered
- This project has proven to be demanding in its delivery. The project team has had to prepare design solutions which are faithful to a protected 18th century landscape but which are also acceptable to 21st century engineering, flood risk, health and safety and accessibility standards. In addition these proposals have had to pass the scrutiny of the Heritage Lottery Fund's restoration standards and take account of the site's rich archaeological, ecological and cultural constraints. As a consequence extensive research and survey work has been required as well as considerable input from the Council's Historic Landscape Consultant
 - In addition to the above, given the at times limited evidence available upon which to base restoration proposals (William Shenstone left no plans or designs for his work at the Leasowes), the project team has had to react in number of instances to unforeseen discoveries of archive or archaeological evidence during the design process. In order to deliver a restoration based upon the best information available this has led to redesign and additional costs for a number of members of the project team
 - It has been widely reported that this project took longer than expected to deliver. However, the report to this Committee on the 8th September 2008 following the investigation into the project reported that, of the period from 1997 to September 2008 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. These delays outside of the Council's control have had an inevitable and unavoidable consequence on project costs. Although all design services have been

procured on a lump sum or percentage based fee basis, thereby bringing greater cost certainty to the Council and transferring risk to the consultant, a number of services, such as the Historic Landscape Consultant and Project Management, have had to be procured on a time basis and therefore any delays have had a direct impact on costs. In addition, there have been particular demands on fee time resulting from external factors. An example of this would be the need to secure land drainage and impounding consents from the Environment Agency, which in spite of early advice that this could be expected to be secured in 3 to 4 months, took 18 months to secure and significant fee costs in order to satisfy the Agency's requirements

11. In addition, the above cost elements have been negotiated and agreed with the Heritage Lottery Fund, both as part of the project renegotiation that was approved in 2002, and via the quarterly project monitoring regime

Finance

12. The project has been managed as part of the Culture & Leisure capital programme and as detailed in paragraph 9 has been delivered within the approved budget

Law

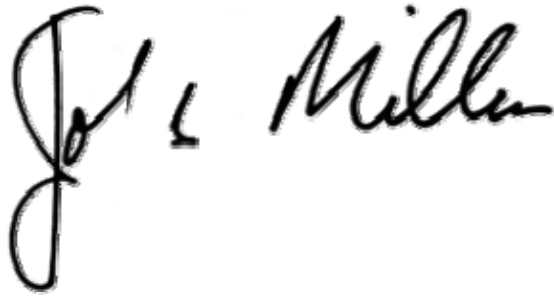
13. Under Section 9 & 10 of the Open Spaces Act 1906 the Council is empowered to acquire and maintain land for the purposes of Public Open Space.
14. Section 19 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976 enables the Council to provide recreation facilities within, or outside of its area, with or without a charge.
15. 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

16. Access improvements in Leasowes Park have been 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

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

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "John Millar". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial 'J'.

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John Millar
Director of the Urban Environment

Contact Officers: Rupert Dugdale
Telephone: 01384 815538
Email: rupert.dugdale@dudley.gov.uk

Background Papers

None