

**Halesowen Area Committee – 22nd March 2006**

**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 since the 9th October 2001, the most recent of which was on the 25<sup>th</sup> January 2006.
3. The Committee has been advised on a number of previous occasions of complicating and unforeseen factors which have arisen during the detailed design of the scheme and which had led to delays in the delivery of the scheme.
4. The most pressing of these has been the need to submit applications to the Environment Agency for Impounding and Drainage Licences, and the difficulty in obtaining a firm date for approvals of these licences from this Agency. The Council was advised that its applications, which were submitted in December 2004, were due to be determined by the 20<sup>th</sup> April 2005. This date was not achieved due to the complexities of balancing 18<sup>th</sup> century heritage requirements with 21<sup>st</sup> century engineering needs. Despite reaching agreement with the Environment Agency and the Council's heritage advisors on a solution in July 2005 the first of these Licences was not issued until October 2005. The Environment Agency subsequently advised that the second was due for issue by the end of November 2005; however officers were advised in January 2006 that the issue of this has been deferred until March 2006.
5. Whereas preparation of tender documents is underway it is not intended to invite tenders until the final approval referred to in paragraph 4 is received, given that the restoration may not proceed without this approval. Officers and the Council's Consultant Engineers have been in regular contact with the

Environment Agency to try and expedite these approvals. In addition Officers have requested the support of the Heritage Lottery Fund to assist in this aim.

6. Representatives at the Heritage Lottery Fund, which is funding the restoration, continue to be kept closely informed of progress and are entirely understanding of the situation and are happy with the steps we are taking to deal with it
7. The Committee was advised on the 25<sup>th</sup> January 2006 that tenders had been invited for the preparation of a 10 year management and maintenance plan for the site. This document is intended to guide the way the Council looks after and promotes the site, and the preparation of the consultant's brief follows careful and detailed consultation with the site's stakeholders. Following assessment of quality and cost tenders the contract has been awarded to Landscape Design Associates who have extensive experience of such work and have prepared management and maintenance plans for sites of similar heritage and ecological value. The plan is due to be complete and available for use in October 2006
8. Members were advised at the 25<sup>th</sup> January Committee of the allocation of £80,000 of Liveability funding to implement the first stages of the prioritised action plan for the site which will consist of improvements to the wildlife area on the northern edge of Priory Pool, path improvements outside of the Phase 1 restoration area, and site signage
9. A site meeting took place between the Council's Landscape Architects and representatives of the Friends of The Leasowes on the 2nd February to identify the priority paths for improvements and another has been convened for the 9th March. Design work is currently underway and this work, which is not subject to the same degree of constraints as the restoration project, is timetabled as follows (assuming that the works proposed are simple path upgrades and do not require planning permission)
  - Design complete - end March 2006
  - Start on site - early April 2006
  - Completion – mid June 2006

## **Finance**

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

## **Law**

11. 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.
12. 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.

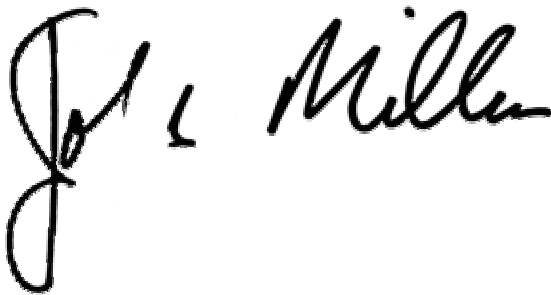
13. Section 111 of the Local Government Act 1972 enables the Council to do anything that is calculated to facilitate or is conducive to or incidental to the discharge of its functions

### **Equality Impact**

14. 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**

15. It is proposed that the contents of this report be noted and that further reports to update the Committee on the progress of the restoration be submitted in due course



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