

**WARDS:**

**Halesowen South, Halesowen North & Belle Vale**

**AGENDA ITEM NO 16**

**DUDLEY METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**AREA COMMITTEE – HALESOWEN**

**2<sup>nd</sup> February 2005**

**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE URBAN ENVIRONMENT**

**THE LEASOWES RESTORATION**

**1.0 PURPOSE**

1.1 To advise the Committee on the progress of the historic restoration of Leasowes Park

**2.0 BACKGROUND**

2.1 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 15<sup>th</sup> September 2004. On the latter date the Committee were advised that in December 2003 the Heritage Lottery Fund had approved details of a revised restoration which could be achieved for the original grant of £1,306,500 and the Council's match funding of £435,520, and that detailed proposals were being prepared by a design team comprising of officers and specialist advisors.

2.2 At the Committee referred to in paragraph 2.1, members were advised that the revised restoration proposals covered the following phases;

- All works & costs to date
- Beechwater Dam
- Virgil's Grove
- Leasowes Lane Dam & Lower Pool
- One further phase (which might include improvements to the car park, minor footpath improvements and woodland management elsewhere on the site, as well as further survey, archaeological investigations and design works which could permit elements of restoration using alternative grant sources, the Wardens' service,

or volunteers), the content of which would be determined when the final cost of the preceding 3 phases is established

2.3 The location of these phases is shown on the plan in Appendix A to this report .

2.4 Since the last report, all detailed design has been completed for the works listed in paragraph 2.2, and tender documents have been prepared. Following advertisements for expressions of interest, 26 companies have applied to be considered to tender for the restoration work. Following an appraisal exercise based on references, the firms' relevant experience and health and safety and financial criteria, a tender list of 6 firms has been prepared.

2.5 The Committee was advised at their meeting on the 15<sup>th</sup> September 2004 that the estimated completion of these works would be in July 2005. However, due to a number of complicating and unforeseen factors which have arisen during the detailed design of the scheme, the estimated completion date is now October 2005. This change is due to the following issues;

- As changes in legislation have ruled out the disposal of pool dredgings on the land known as Crown Tip, land at the Earls High School playing fields has been identified as a suitable site for the reuse of these dredgings, to the benefit of environmental improvements proposed to the playing fields. Planning applications were submitted in September 2004 for both this element of the works and for the detailed proposals for Leasowes Lane Dam; however, these applications had not been determined at the date of preparing this report. A number of the conditions expected to be attached to any planning permissions granted will need be considered by firms preparing tenders for the restoration works, and as a result tenders may not be invited until the planning permission is given.
- Investigations have revealed that a sewer which passes under the Lower Pool in Virgil's Grove runs at a far shallower depth than was anticipated, to the extent that the proposed reduction in the restored pool would leave the sewer above the new water level. As a result, a series of small cascades have had to be included to accommodate this sewer rather than provide an alternative and costly sewer diversion.

- Impounding and Drainage Licences have needed to be sought from the Environment Agency for the restoration. Information for these licences has been required from the investigations referred to above, and despite close liaison with the Environment Agency to minimise the time taken to seek approval of these licences, approval is not expected until early March 2005. Whereas tenders are expected to be returned before these approvals are granted, it is considered that awarding a contract in advance of these licenses would expose the Council to an unacceptable risk.
- 2.6 In advance of the restoration work commencing, a full ecological survey has been carried out, and as a result, many woodland plants and bulbs which would otherwise be lost during the restoration work have been lifted and securely stored in partnership with Leasowes Wardens and Stourbridge College. Suitable sites for their replanting upon completion of the work have been identified.
- 2.7 The grant contract between the HLF and the Council requires the Council to maintain photographic records of the restoration in progress. In addition, it is considered appropriate to maintain a video record of the work for the benefit of future generations. After approaching a number of Colleges, an agreement is being prepared with Leasowes Community College for their media students to carry out this work as part of their curriculum, thereby bringing benefits both to the project and the community.
- 2.8 Feasibility funding has been secured to develop proposals for a more fitting permanent centre to house the wardens and provide visitor facilities than is currently offered by the temporary building on the site. This study, which is expected to be complete in April 2005, will provide a vision of what the centre should be like, budget costs, an outline business plan and funding sources.
- 2.9 To date the project remains within budget, and estimated costs continue to be closely monitored as the project develops.

**3.0 PROPOSAL**

3.1 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.

**4.0 FINANCE**

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

**5.0 LAW**

5.1 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.

5.2 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.

5.3 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.

**6.0 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES**

6.1 The proposals in this report accord with the Council's Equal Opportunities Policy.

6.2 The proposals include restoration of path routes which have been designed to permit a high level of disabled access.

**7.0 RECOMMENDATION**

7.1 That the proposals set out in paragraph 3.1 of this report be approved

*Bernard Meade*

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**Director of the Urban Environment - John B. Millar**

Contact Officer: Rupert Dugdale ext 5538

**Background documents used in the preparation of this report:-**

1. Report to Halesowen Area Committee – The Leasowes Restoration, 9th October 2001
2. Report to Halesowen Area Committee - The Leasowes Restoration 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2002
3. Report to Halesowen Area Committee - The Leasowes Restoration 10<sup>th</sup> March 2004
4. Report to Halesowen Area Committee - The Leasowes Restoration 16<sup>th</sup> July 2004
5. Report to Halesowen Area Committee - The Leasowes Restoration 15<sup>th</sup> September 2004