

Halesowen Area Committee – 12th March 2008

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 22nd March 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. In summary, these have included:
 - Revised requirements from the Environment Agency for the removal of silt dredgings from the site, which has led to the need to identify alternative sites and obtain planning permission for the preferred site at the Earls High Playing Fields.
 - Design revisions following archaeological investigations and sewer surveys.
 - Design revisions following the discovery of hitherto unseen archive material leading to an improved understanding of the appearance of the High Cascade
4. However, the most significant delay has been as a result of the need to submit applications to the Environment Agency for Impounding and Drainage Licences. The Council was advised that its applications, which were submitted in December 2004, were due to be determined by the 20th April 2005, however, after repeated reassurance from the Environment Agency that approvals would be forthcoming, the last of these was not issued until the 1st June 2006.
5. One of the licences granted by the Environment Agency included the requirement that no construction work take place in the watercourses between the months of October and April, therefore reducing the time available for the Council to carry out the restoration work.

6. Tenders for the restoration work were returned in May 2007 and a preferred tenderer has been identified following a robust quality:price assessment. The preferred tenderer has suggested a number of design amendments to the proposals which officers believe will offer a number of advantages to the project, and these have been assessed in detail. Given this, and the need to source alternative materials and carry out engineering and heritage assessments on the alternative proposals, it has not been possible to award a contract in time to complete the construction work in the watercourses within the seasonal restrictions applied by the Environment Agency referred to in paragraph 5.
7. These assessments are now complete and, subject to the completion of tender negotiations, it is proposed to start on site in May with completion by December 2008.
8. At the Committee's meeting on the 24th January 2008 a member of the public raised a question regarding the monies spent to date on the restoration and the amount left. The Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) are providing a grant of up to £1,306,500 and the Council are providing the required match funding of up to £435,520 by the provision of grounds maintenance and wardens services.
9. The project is split into defined activities, each of which has an eligible cost approved by the HLF at the time of the award of the grant. In the event of the need for any variances in these budget limits the approval of the HLF is required for which robust justification is required, and this has been sought and obtained for this project on a number of occasions.
10. The approved eligible amounts for these activities, the amount spent to date and the estimated amounts at the completion of the restoration project are set out below:

Activity	Eligible costs approved by the HLF	Cost to date	Estimated final cost
Restoration works (woodland management, water features restoration, footpaths, temporary wardens base and restoration of structures)	£737,147	£92,730	£584,569
Grounds Maintenance	£140,513	£140,513	£140,513
Wardens	£295,000	£295,000	£295,000
Land Survey	£4,138	£24,759	£24,815
Archaeology	£29,125	£23,576	£23,576
Historic Landscape Consultant	£60,161	£43,528	£48,000
Design and contract management fees	£213,848	£368,999	£391,549
Project Management	£247,186	£226,147	£226,147
Planning application, feasibility studies & signage	£14,958	£7,911	£7,911
Totals	£1,742,080	£1,223,166	£1,742,080

11. The HLF grant is claimed against eligible items of expenditure for which clear and robust evidence of expenditure is required.
12. So far the expenditure totals £1,223,166.16 and this has been spent on restoration work completed (Wardens base, Beechwater Pool, Woodland restoration), Grounds Maintenance, Wardens service, Surveys/Archaeology and Project Management, with the balance available for the final phase of the restoration.
13. The complicating and unforeseen factors referred to in paragraphs 3 and 4 have had the result of leading to increased survey and design costs, although it should be noted that the costs of the Historic Landscape Consultant and Project Management are projected to be below the approved cost limits. In order to accommodate these cost increases it has been necessary to transfer funding from the restoration works budget, and as a result, the proposal to restore Leasowes Lane Dam has, in consultation with the HLF, been removed from this phase of the restoration project.
14. From the figures shown in paragraph 10 it can be seen that despite the complicated history to this project, the finances available for the restoration work have been reduced by a relatively modest amount and as a result of unavoidable circumstances, and certainly without the impact that recent press coverage has indicated.
15. In addition to the HLF funding referred to above, The Leasowes has benefited from £79,500 of Liveability funding which has provided footpath and wildlife habitat improvements, and upon completion of the restoration works, will provide additional improvements to the main entrance to the site. The Friends of the Leasowes have also secured £5,000 from this Committee's delegated capital budget to carry out improvements to the wardens base, and have submitted a further application for an additional £5,000 to support additional wildlife habitat enhancements at Priory Pool.

Finance

16. There are no direct financial implications arising from this report "The forecast cost of the capital works relating to the scheme are currently covered by HLF grant".

Law

17. 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.
18. 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.

19. 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

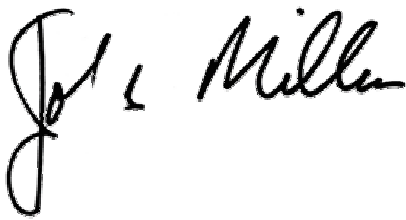
20. Access improvements in Leasowes Park are being carried out with regard to the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and in accordance with best practice in improving access to open space.

Recommendation

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

Background Papers

None



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