

Swadlincote Woodlands Scrutiny Committee Report February 2011

The previous report submitted to Scrutiny Committee in September 2010 suggested the following actions for further exploration. These are listed below, with the findings outlined.

As part of the original vision for the site, an exit strategy was said to have been produced. However, no records of this document have been found and given that it would have been produced around 10 years ago, is likely to be out of date with the current context.

1. Explore Site Management Options & costs

A review of staffing levels and subsequent reduction in on-site staff was actioned, following the permanent appointment of former Woodlands Warden as Tree Officer. The removal of this post and reduced hours for remaining Park Keeper to 20/week has effected the following saving:

| 2010/11 Budget | Current spend | Projected year end actual spend 2010/11 | Projected saving |
|----------------|---------------|---|------------------|
| £66978.25 | £24265.75 | £30,000 (estimated) | £36,978.25 |
| | | | |

The income to cover 2010/11 revenue expenditure is profiled thus:

| | |
|--------------|----------------|
| SDDC | £11,500 |
| SDDC (CEC's) | £11,126 |
| S106 | £7,374 |
| TOTAL | £30,000 |

Future years:

Remaining s106 funding £50,459.55 (£57,833.55 less £7374).

Assuming that future operational (revenue) costs from 2011/12 onwards would remain at same level, and therefore that draw down is approximately the same each year, the remaining s106 funds will last for a further 6 years, with SDDC picking up the bill in Year 7 (2018/19).

Enquiries have been made to partner organisations with a view to 'contracting out' the management of the site but to date no interest has been received.

2. Explore Forestry Commission grant opportunities

The site is eligible for funding for capital works to improve access and interpretation, and the National Forest Company have offered their consultants' support in helping us pursue this.

In order to apply, the site must be registered on the Rural Land register (application can be made through SDDC Legal team for a management fee) and must be owned in title by the applicant.

As part of the application a Site Management Plan must be submitted, including details of proposed site works and costs.

If successful, the grant would pay for 80% of the cost of eligible capital works, with the remaining 20% being matched by the applicant.

Suggested action:

- Check that the grant funding is still available pending CSR10.

If yes, then:

- Register the site on Rural Land Register
- Management Plan to be produced (see below)
- Schedule of works & costs to be produced
- Application could be ready by summer 2011.

If no, then:

- Undertake a funding search to identify potential grants to carry out the work identified in the management plan

3. Develop a 10 year Site Management & Development Plan

The original vision for the site was to create:

- A naturalistic park with wild and semi formal areas
- Multi use public areas and trails
- Woodland planting
- Management and creation of nature conservation habitats
- Recreation areas and spaces for outdoor events

Swadlincote Woodlands has developed as such, but the site is complex and is comprised of a number of 'zones' which require different approaches to management, according to their primary functions.

If a strategic approach to management and development of the site was taken, the site could be divided into 4 key zones (see also attached map):

1. Natural Woodland

Key characteristics/assets

- Wildflower Meadow
- Wetland
- Mature woodland
- Network of surfaced paths
- Listed on the Local Wildlife Site register

2. Active Woodland

Key characteristics/assets

- Main visitor entrance
- Car park, building & toilets
- Adventure Play area for all ages
- Network of surfaced paths

3. Sporting Woodland

Key characteristics/assets

- Skate Park and Youth facilities
- Football pitches (2)
- Changing rooms
- Ski Centre (privately managed)

4. Amenity Woodland

Key characteristics/assets

- Plantation woodland
- Network of informal paths
- Common land

With this in mind, a Management Action Plan would seek to identify key management objectives and subsequent actions for each, to guide decision making and future site development. The proposed Action Plan is detailed below.

1. Natural Woodland

| Key Management Objectives | Action | Resources | Timescale |
|--|---|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manage for wildlife and education • Enhance the natural biodiversity of the site through positive land management • Generate opportunities for community engagement and education • Increased opportunities for grant funding | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Declare as Local Nature Reserve • Programme of educational visits • Work with partners (DWT and others) to develop site management plan • Improve interpretation and signage • Regular (annual) programme of conservation management – volunteer groups e.g. BTCV | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff time – existing resources • Partners time • Groundwork SLA to arrange visits • Open Space Development budget for interpretation panels, signage and materials | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LNR declaration 2011 • Ongoing programme from summer 2011 onwards |

2. Active Woodland

| Key Management Objectives | Action | Resources | Timescale |
|--|--|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raise the profile of the site • Improve the visitor experience • Provide excellent play experience • Focal point of the site for visitors - information & facilities • Network of waymarked trails & activities • Reduce maintenance/repair costs | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve play area with robust equipment • Provide information point, more seating & better signage • Create waymarked trails – different levels of ability and distance • Create Orienteering course • Redesign 'Gallery Grid' area • Continue with programme of woodland management – thinning and coppicing | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff time – existing resources • Open Space Development budget for interpretation panels, signage and materials (£5k annually) • Financial: £20k for new play equipment (s106 capital budget) £3500 for BTCV volunteer taskdays (revenue budget) £1150 to set up orienteering course (Open Space Development budget Capital funding required for Gallery Grid area – potential for community project?) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Procure new equipment for summer 2011 • Orienteering course set up for July 2011 • Capital grant funding sought for improved signage, access and interpretation. |

3. Sporting Woodland

| Key Management Objectives | Action | Resources | Timescale |
|--|--|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brand and manage as a Sport Ground – suggest Woodhouse Sports Ground • Enhance Youth Facilities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with young people & Youth Service to develop youth facilities – possible bike trail • Work with local football clubs to improve facilities – changing rooms and pitches • Seek a decision on future of the Winding Sheds • Install signage at entrance | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff time – Sport & Health Team • Partner resources – DCC Youth Service • Apply for capital grant if new facilities identified • Identify potential work in Facilities Strategy | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consultation with clubs and young people during 2011/12 to form site development plan • Future of Winding Sheds to be decided during 2011/12 |

4. Amenity Woodland

| Key Management Objectives | Action | Resources | Timescale |
|---|--|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhance the natural biodiversity of the site through positive land management • Potential for revenue income from sale of timber • Contribution to the woodland economy | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual woodland management programme • Investigate markets for timber sales and implications on staffing • Undertake feasibility study on use of timber as a resource for Wood Fuel boilers at Depot and Rosliston | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BTCV costs • Staff time – existing resources | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing woodland management • Feasibility study complete by June 2011. |

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. That Scrutiny Committee approve the revised staffing arrangements, which result in reduced operating costs for the site and the extended duration of the remaining s106 funding.
2. That Scrutiny Committee approve the Management Action Plan and recommend it's adoption to Housing & Community Services Committee

Working towards achieving the action plan will help to raise the profile of the site, provide increased opportunities for community engagement and ensure the future sustainability of the site as an asset to The Council.