

REPORTS FROM REPRESENTATIVES ON OUTSIDE BODIES

A. CHARNWOOD FOREST STEERING GROUP

The steering group agreed changes to the make up of the group with the creation of four working sub groups with the steering group sitting above them as the strategic body. This main group will now probably only meet twice a year and there will still be a stakeholders meeting annually. I advised we saw a role for us on the Environment Working Group and the Tourism Working Group which will include sport and recreation. I also advised them that John Howells is my new deputy.

They decided who would be acting as lead for each working group and for Tourism and Economy, LeicesterShire Promotions, Martin Peters - Social and Historic, Charnwood Roots, Julie Attard – Environment, LRWT, Michael Jeeves and Development, Sam Lattaway of the National Forest Company.

Working groups could meet as required at Charnwood BC and County Hall or the meeting rooms at Bradgate Park.

Roy Denney Representative

B. NATIONAL FOREST ACCESS & RECREATION GROUP

It is hard to imagine how much this landscape has been transformed in such a comparatively short time. The growing forest is creating vital habitats for a wide range of wildlife, and is being managed in a sustainable way making the new forested landscape a great place for people to enjoy.

The Director left the NFC when his term of office ended at the end of March coinciding with a change in status in hand for the NFC which is moving towards a new charitable status enabling them to qualify for new funding arrangements. They would remain under the umbrella of DEFRA and the three year funding agreement would remain, but a period of uncertainty was looming

NFC was now working with Sport England with some new projects in mind and with a view to securing funding from them for a pilot project to encourage more physical activity and walking in particular.

There was a request that Burbage Common & Woods be added to the National Forest but whilst there might be some slight boundary changes to the designated Forest area nothing some miles from the existing boundary could be considered.

Concerns were raised at the scale of developments and increasing pace of urbanisation in North West Leicestershire - housing schemes, quarrying, solar farms etc.

It was reported that restoration work was continuing well on the old Ashby canal and the entry into Measham. The opening up of a tow path before further watering was in hand.

The permissive route from Moira to Hicks Lodge was to be on a seasonal access basis because of the wet and muddy conditions.

During the year the NFC had considered eight new applications under the Changing Landscape Scheme of which seven were approved. The total area of the new applications was 32.6 ha. These sites included Measham Lodge Farm, Shuttlewood Clarke Grange at Ulverscroft, Lower Broombriggs Farm in Charnwood and a site near Morrison's in Coalville.

NFC acquired Maybury Wood and Feanedock Covert some time ago and have since bought and planted all the area linking them between Hanging Hill Farm and Boothorpe. This gives a substantial area about to get bigger. The good news is they have now bought Hanging Hill Farm itself. They have not yet decided what to do with it though as it is the first time they have actually bought land with buildings on it. The area may well end up with toilet facilities, meeting rooms and a visitor centre and parking. There is also an adjoining massive restoration scheme being agreed at the moment for an area of old extraction workings which will add a sizeable further area with one or more lakes included. It was hoped there would be a new link into the area from Moira but development of the Albion Hill site where it was to be created, was not yet finalised.

The NFC was also starting a pilot scheme to provide volunteer rangers for the National Forest Way directly organised by the NFC. An initial 26 volunteers had come forward. They would receive appropriate training and hopefully start work in May. They would undertake survey work and possibly carry out small repair work/clearance etc.

There was an update on the Black to Green Project which is funded by £1.1 million from the Heritage Lottery Fund and will apply to a 10 square mile area mainly in North West Leicestershire. It will be used for more access provision, recreational activities and wild life habitats etc. There was some discussion at this stage about way marking and signage. It was felt that there was a need to de-clutter signs and way marking in some places. It was also felt that clear and standardised signs denoting the legal status of a route were the first priority

The delivery of the Heart of the Forest Interpretation and Orientation Plan will bring a sense of place to the area by promoting integrated interpretation across multiple sites helping people to engage with and learn about the story of landscape change in the Heart of the Forest Area. It will include a range of new orientation signage, a new leaflet / map, interpretation hubs, an app with an augmented reality experience and a dedicated website.

In addition a comprehensive programme of community engagement, education and training, under the Black to Green project it will bring landowners and local communities together to increase understanding, appreciation and stewardship of the Heart of the Forest's natural and industrial heritage. This will include a programme of conservation activities, the construction of a bird-hide and sand martin wall for a new bird watching group, a BioBlitz and a range of activities to celebrate the industrial heritage, There will be group development training, a youth forum and work programme and a schools teacher and community group leaders training programme.

On the conservation front, landowners and communities will collaborate to manage the natural heritage of the Heart of the Forest to deliver the best gains for biodiversity, making the most of the landscape change and the rapid greening and reforestation that has taken place over the last 20 years. This will involve identification and recording of wildlife species, co-ordinated storage and management of ecological records and interpretation of data by specialist ecologists to plan for future enhancement. This should provide an up to date picture of the area's wildlife and a new habitat catalyst fund will be set up to help groups demonstrate habitat management on the ground.

It is intended that there will be a programme of guided walks across the Heart of the Forest to create a greater understanding of the natural & industrial heritage led by a network of Walk Leaders trained to deliver the walks.

The Woodland Trust is to create a new circular route around Willesley Wood to try and address the muddy and boggy areas, but also suitable for wheel chair users.

Roy Denney Representative

C. NATURAL & HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT PARTNERSHIP / LOCAL NATURE PARTNERSHIP

There is some question as to whether the NHEP will continue in its present form as LCC and the Districts are discussing different ways of working together. The LNP was one and the same group in a different role but there have been no meetings since our last meeting. A large group of LNPs are engaged with DEFRA discussing the future of these bodies.

Roy Denney Representative