

SELECT COMMITTEE ON REGENERATION, CULTURE AND ADULT EDUCATION – 13th SEPTEMBER 2010

Report of the Lead Officer of the Committee

THE LEASOWES RESTORATION

PURPOSE

1. To provide information requested by Members of the Select Committee on the Leasowes Restoration

BACKGROUND

2. The Leasowes is a designed landscape of international standing. It is listed Grade 1 on the English Heritage 'Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest in England' as a result of its cultural status in marking a radical change in the way that landscapes were designed in the mid 18th century.
3. The Leasowes was created by the poet William Shenstone who inherited the land as a working arable farm. Soon after settling at the Leasowes in 1743 he began to transform parts of his farm into a garden which he called his 'ferme ornee', literally meaning an ornamental farm. The garden that Shenstone laid out at the Leasowes worked within the existing landscape, improving the park to blend it in with the rural scenery. Shenstone both used and respected the natural form of the landscape whilst also following the romanticism of the time. He introduced pools, and stone cascades to the natural watercourse that ran through his land and a circuit walk around the park enabled the many visitors to the park to experience the garden as a sequence of views or pictures, described in 1764 by Robert Dodsley's 'A Description of the Leasowes', which gives us a clear picture of how Shenstone's garden would have appeared shortly after his death in 1763.
4. After Shenstone's death the reputation of the Leasowes increased and for a while it became the most visited garden in England. Eminent visitors included Thomas Jefferson, President, Benjamin Franklin and John Wesley.
5. The former Select Committee for Culture and Recreation considered an update report on The Leasowes Restoration project on the 11th March 2004. Following a request made by Halesowen Area Committee at its meeting held on 12th March 2008, this Select Committee considered a detailed investigation of The Leasowes Restoration project at its meeting on the 8th September 2008, which set out a detailed chronology of the events

surrounding the restoration project since Heritage Lottery Funding was secured in 1997. In summary, this investigation reported that of the period from 1997 to date, approximately one and a half year's delay could be attributed to the Council, and beyond that time, delays were attributed to external factors outside of the Council's control. The report also considered that, although there were weaknesses in the management of the project at an early stage, a robust project management regime was in place after 2001. A further report on this project was presented to the Select Committee on the 4th March 2009, providing the Committee with information on the successful completion of the work, and at again on the 20th January 2010 with additional information with further financial information relating to the project

6. The Chairman of this Committee has requested further information relating to the amount of Section 106 monies which have been used on this project. Members will be aware from the previous reports to this Committee on the 8th September 2008, 4th March 2009 and 20th January 2010 that the approved funding for the project included £265,000 of Section 106 receipts. A total of £265,000 of Section 106 funding has been used for the project and given that the Phase 1 work has been complete since February 2009 there is no requirement for any additional funding for this work.

Finance

7. The project has been managed as part of the Culture & Leisure capital programme and has been delivered within the approved budget which includes the Section 106 funding detailed above.

Law

8. 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.
9. 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.
10. 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

11. Access improvements in Leasowes Park have been 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

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



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**LEAD OFFICER OF THE SELECT COMMITTEE ON
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Background Papers

None