

WYKE BECK WAY COMMUNITY FORUM

Centre Manager's Report to the Forum's Board of Trustees on 11 March 2008.

This report covers issues which the Wyke Beck Way Centre has been involved with since the last Forum and Board of Trustees meeting on 6 November 2007.

1. Progress on Flood Alleviation Appraisal

- 1.1 Discussions with the Environment Agency have confirmed that the consultants appointed by the EA to evaluate the level of flood risk in Leeds and make recommendations of how to address the risk, will report around April 08. We anticipate that soon after this there will be a public consultation; the Centre will advise that the Forum expects to be fully consulted on this crucial issue, either through the EA or the City Council.

2. Aire Valley Area Action Plan

- 2.1 Forum members will recall that we discussed these proposals at the November meeting and agreed that I should submit a detailed response. This was submitted on the 15 November, setting out the following points:

- that the AAP should include Skelton Lake and its environs
- that there is no material reference to the Wyke Beck Valley in the AAP
- (*noting the commitment in the local Development Document to building 'a network of connected green spaces that enhance its environment and distinctiveness'*)

we expressed concern that there was no attempt to translate this objective into the development allocations for Thornes Farm & Skelton Moor Farm, Skelton Grange, Bellwood, Stourton Riverside, Temple Green Development and Skelton Business Park and Skelton Gate.

- that the proposals for Thornes Farm and Skelton Moor Farm failed to identify how the Wyke Beck Valley Green corridor link would be protected and enhanced and ignored the City Council's bio diversity policy.
- that an 'indicative design concept' had been set out for Area 6 - Skelton Grange et al, albeit without any explanation of its purpose; begged the question why this had not been done for the other areas in the AAP?
- we criticised the lack of any indication to 'soften' the landscape on the northern boundary of the AAP, although indication of such an approach had been shown for the southern boundary.
- expressed concern that there were no indicative cycle footpath linkages shown on the AAP although these were mentioned as proposed.
- expressed concern about the lack of flood control references in the AAP for the Thornes Farm area notwithstanding the fact that we understand proposals have been promoted by developers for this area to construct a flood storage pond in the area. (Again this illustrates a lack of a holistic approach to Valley/green corridor perspectives).
- expressed concern that proposals for Skelton Grange (Area 6) suggested cycle and footpath links would only take place if there was not development.

- 2.2 In our letter to the City Development Department enclosing the comments set out above, we reiterated our submission that the City Council commit to a comprehensive landscape appraisal and plan for the whole of the Wyke Beck Valley. We submitted that the City Council appeared to be leaving it to the developers and the City Council's individual development control officers to be the sole arbiters of how this vital part of the lower end of the Valley might be enhanced and protected. We submitted that the City Council was in danger of missing a huge opportunity to create a high quality landscaped gateway to the City. For this reason we insisted that the Forum's concerns be brought to the attention of elected members for their response.

- 2.3 In February 2008. I wrote to the recently appointed Planning Director, Mr Crabtree, drawing his attention to the above concerns and those set out in our response to the EASEL AAP. Having chased this up with his office an email acknowledgement was received at the end of February.

3. Skelton Weir

We submitted objections to RWE nPower's application to remove a planning condition requiring the developer to demolish the weir built on the River Aire to help generate electricity at the former Skelton Grange (Knostrop) Power Station. The removal of the Weir will be a major step in helping salmonid fishing to return to the upper reaches of the River and improve the bio diversity of all the becks feeding into the River Aire, including Wyke Beck.

4. Student Project for Upper Wyke Beck Valley

- 4.1 We have played a very proactive role in persuading Leeds Met University Landscape Department to undertake a student project on the Valley. Some 25 students attended a presentation given by us with help from Philip Thompson (LCC) and Groundwork. Pauline Wright, Brian Waters, David Conboy and myself represented the Forum at the presentation. David and Brian then took the students and lecturers on an extensive, 'question' laden walk through their study area (from Easterly Road to York Road).
- 4.2 We are looking to the students to present their work to members of the Forum in April and will discuss with the Forum and Board members what form that might take.

5. Progress on Groundwork/WBW Centre Employment Initiative

Funding has been given to Groundwork to conduct a feasibility study into how an employment training initiative could be developed in the area. The feasibility study is underway and a verbal report will be given on progress at the Forum Meeting.

6. Skelton Lake and RSPB

Contact has finally been made with Joanne Gilkes, RSPB, to discuss RSPB's 'Aire Valley Vision' and in particular the Skelton Lake area. A meeting is being arranged with Joanne and we hope that she will follow up with a presentation to the Forum on this issue, probably during the summer. Clarification of RSPB's proposals will enable us to assist Rothwell Footpath Group in meeting with FR Evans, developers, concerning their intentions for 'Skelton Gate' development site.

7. EASEL Report - 'Wyke Beck Valley - supporting the Regeneration of East and South East Leeds'

- 7.1 The City Council's Environment and Neighbourhoods Directorate have now produced a report headed as above. Michelle Anderson, Programme Manager for the Directorate has agreed to speak to the Forum about the contents of this report and its implications for our work.
- 7.2 The document is a supportive statement to the EASEL 5 year business plan. It states that the contents have also been informed by and supportive of the wider 'Parks & Green Space Strategy' for Leeds. It sets out key priorities to 2020, for Leeds to achieve a vision *where 'quality, accessible parks and green spaces are at the heart of the community, designed to meet the needs of everyone who lives, works, visits or invests in Leeds, both now and in the future'*.
- 7.3 We look forward to hearing how the above vision will take shape within the EASEL area.
- 7.4 This is, of course, a strategy for the upper half of the Wyke Beck Valley only.
- 7.5 It is understood that Bellways have still not been appointed as the developers for the EASEL project. We haven't been able to ascertain why there should be such a delay on this matter.

8. Friends of Roundhay Park proposals for the Wyke Beck Way to be extended safely to the north

The Friends have contacted us and other supporters to join with them in a campaign to achieve funding to enable the footpath at the top of the gorge to cross Leeds Outer Ring Road safely. At the moment walkers face very fast moving, often heavy, two way traffic between two blind bends. The Forum's views are requested. - Last summer David, Brian and myself met up with John Vogler and Peter Dyson of the 'Friends' for a most interesting and informative recce of the critical aspects of this route.

Eric Cowin
Centre Manager
February 2008