

Committee:	Executive	Agenda Item No.:	6
Date:	14 th May 2013	Category	2
Subject:	Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Committee Review of Pleasley Vale Mills	Status	Open
Report by:	Councillor Karl Reid, Chair of the Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Committee		
Other Officers involved:	Scrutiny Officer		
Directors	Director of Development and Director of Health and Wellbeing		
Relevant Portfolio Holders	Councillor A Tomlinson, Portfolio Member for Regeneration Councillor A Syrett, Portfolio Member for Social Inclusion		

RELEVANT CORPORATE AIMS

Make the District a more attractive place to live, work and visit.

TARGETS

N/A

VALUE FOR MONEY

It is anticipated that the recommendations detailed within the report will provide simplification, a clear direction and a better overall management of the Pleasley Vale site.

THE REPORT

The Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Committee has completed its review on the future of Pleasley Vale Mills.

The aims and objectives of the review were to understand how the site was currently used including take up of rental space, take up of leisure activities/facilities, income and expenditure to the Authority and to understand the historical importance of the site.

A review of Pleasley Vale was suggested at the 2012 Annual Scrutiny Conference.

ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

The Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Committee has made seven recommendations based on evidence gathered during the review. The comments of the relevant Portfolio Holders and Directors were sought prior to the final report being approved by the Scrutiny Management Board.

IMPLICATIONS

Financial: None identified
Legal: None identified
Human Resources: None identified

RECOMMENDATION(S)

- 1. That the Executive consider the Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Committee recommendations set out in the report of The Future of Pleasley Vale Mills Scrutiny Review.**
- 2. That the Executive provide a response on the review recommendations within 6 weeks in accordance with the Scrutiny Procedure Rules in order that an improvement plan can be drawn up to monitor implementation of the recommendations.**

ATTACHMENT: Y
FILE REFERENCE:
SOURCE DOCUMENT: ***The future of Pleasley Vale Mills Scrutiny Review Report***

**BOLSOVER DISTRICT
COUNCIL**

**SUSTAINABLE
COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE**

**THE FUTURE OF
PLEASLEY VALE MILLS
SCRUTINY REVIEW**

April 2013

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Foreword by Councillor Karl Reid Chair of the Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Committee

I am pleased to present this report which concludes the Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Committee's review of Pleasley Vale Mills.

Firstly I would like to thank all officers involved from both the Leisure and Regeneration Departments who have attended meetings at short notice and granted our requests for meetings and site visits at Pleasley Vale.

My thanks also go to our Scrutiny Officer and Democratic Services Officer for their support to the Committee throughout the review.

Finally my thanks to the Members of the Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Committee who have dedicated their time and travelled around for meetings where required to ensure that we could gather the evidence required to make our recommendations.

1. Introduction

Pleasley Vale has been the location for industry since at least 1797 and up until 1987 the mills were still in operation.

Bolsover District Council bought the mill buildings in 1992, using compulsory purchase powers. Grant funding was received to convert for use as offices and by light industry. There is 340,000 square feet of floor space across the three mills and provides rental accommodation for a variety of businesses ranging from a call centre, air craft parts and furniture manufacture.

In 2001 the Pleasley Vale Outdoor Activity Centre opened. Using grant funding and sponsorship, the Boathouse was opened in 2002 and was the Centres main operational base until 2009 when the former Greaseworks building was brought back into use using £250,000 funding secured from the New Opportunities Fund and the Coalfields Regeneration Trust. The Greaseworks became the new operational base for the Activity Centre offering a large multi-functional classroom area, changing rooms, office accommodation and storage space. The Outdoor Activity Centre boasts 174 acres of outdoor space.

Prior to this project, the former Greaseworks was an antisocial behaviour hub with drug misuse and vandalism in and around the building. In addition, the building and land posed a very serious contaminated land threat to the Authority. This project meant both of these serious issues would be addressed.

It was for these reasons and the obvious benefits that the centre could deliver on behalf of the Authority that it was agreed that the Greaseworks, pond and boathouse fall outside the remit of the business park and that it would not be included in the parks business planning.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Encourage a charity or charities to take up some available space within the Mill complex which will remove the business rate burden on the space that they occupy and result in some savings to the budget.**
- 2.2 A new set of legal documents be drafted which will speed up the process of tenancy agreements to assist tenants in signing up and moving into their accommodation quicker.**
- 2.3 The Regeneration Department be responsible for the management and upkeep of the whole Pleasley Vale site and the Asset Management Plan be updated to add the assets which are not currently included within the Plan, namely the former Greaseworks building and the mill pond.**
- 2.4 When the current security contract expires, the Authority considers whether costs can be saved by bringing the function in-house for future contracts.**
- 2.5 The suggestion of moving security to Mill 1 in order to free up the two lodges for sale be seriously considered, ensuring a security presence closer to the mills and potential income for the authority from the sale of the lodges.**
- 2.6 Marketing and advertising of the Outdoor Activity Centre must be improved in order to maximise participation and income.**
- 2.7 That the provision of residential accommodation within Bolsover District be thoroughly considered in order to attract tourism to the area.**

3. Scope of the review

The aims and objectives of the review were to consider the Business, Leisure and Tourism aspects of the site, to include the historical importance together with the income and expenditure to the Authority.

Members carried out the review with the following key issues in mind,

- Rental space – occupancy levels
- Usage and take up of leisure activities and facilities
- Income and expenditure to the Authority, bills/upkeep, etc

The Committee comprised the following Members,

Councillor Karl Reid (Chair)

Councillor Clare Munks (Vice Chair)

Councillor Toni Bennett

Councillor Rose Bowler

Councillor Steve Fritchley

Councillor Graham Parkin

Councillor Deborah Watson

Councillor Sue Wallis

Councillor George Webster

Councillor Jennifer Wilson

Support to the Committee was provided by the Scrutiny Officer and the Democratic Services Officer.

4. Method of review

The Committee met on five occasions to consider the scope of the review, key issues they wanted to discuss and the people they wished to interview.

The Committee sought written evidence by way of officer presentations, questioning and a site visit to the Mills to consider the business aspects of the site. A meeting was also held at the Greaseworks to consider the leisure aspect of the business together with future plans.

Attached at **Appendix 1** is a list of stakeholders involved in the review.

Equality and Diversity

Within the process of the review, the committee has taken into account the impact of equalities.

No adverse impacts have been identified.

5. Evidence

The following evidence was considered as part of the review:

- Pleasley Park and Vale Conservation area appraisal and management plan
- Site visit - Mills 1, 2 and 3
- Pleasley Vale Outdoor Activity Centre briefing paper
- Report to Executive – 28th May 2012 – repairs to Pleasley Vale Pond
- Site visit/meeting held at the Greaseworks
- Leisure presentation – Business Plan proposals
- Pleasley Vale Outdoor Activity Centre Draft Development plan 2012 to 2017

6. Key findings

General Findings

- There are five Grade II listed buildings within the Conservation Area of Pleasley Vale which include the two lodges at the entrance to the mill complex. The mill buildings are unlisted.

Pleasley Vale Business Centre

- The management of the business centre was brought in house in April 2011 which has resulted in £100k saving for the Authority.
- The business centre creates approximately 400 jobs and provides cheap rental accommodation at a cost of £2 per square foot. Alternative business centres across Derbyshire charge in the region of £15 per square foot.
- As at August 2012, the mills were 85% occupied which, in the current climate was a good achievement.
- The rental accommodation is advertised via an agent on a no win, no fee basis. This ensures that the business centre is advertised in places where the District Council wouldn't be able to advertise such as 'rightmove'. The Director of Development advised that a fee had been negotiated with the agents for 8% of the first years letting for a tenant or £500 for a very small unit. (The average commission would usually be 10%). Rental units are also advertised through the Councils own website, Business Bolsover.
- Tenants on the site are satisfied with the business centre and this is demonstrated by the fact that most of the new business that comes through is existing businesses expanding and requiring additional space.
- Some of the unoccupied space in the mills is used for storage by other council departments including the storage of ballot boxes which would otherwise incur charges for storage elsewhere. The relevant department is recharged for this service.
- Leisure Services have over the years occupied space in the mills that has been previously unlettable and have moved locations as and when new tenants have been sourced. Historically, rent has not been charged for the use of this space but rates have been paid by Leisure.
- In the past, a number of activities have taken place on the site including paintballing and ghost tours. The Authority has listened to the concerns raised by the Pleasley Park and Area Conservation

Committee regarding damage to the conservation area and these activities have stopped.

- The Business Centre is not fully accessible due to the layout of the mill buildings.

Pleasley Vale Outdoor Activity Centre

- The outdoor activity centre is only one of a few facilities in the Country that is fully accessible for disabled people. The former pump house has been transformed into a boat house with a £35,000.00 investment. The refurbishment included a wet room floor and specialised disabled facilities. A new jetty has also been built at a cost of £93,000.00. The new jetty was larger and wider than the previous one with a floating pontoon to enable safe operation with a disabled ramp and hoist.
- The former Greaseworks building was brought back into use in 2009 following a £250,000.00 funding grant and now serves as the operational base of the outdoor activity centre. The Greaseworks provides a venue for meetings and classroom activities is fully internet enabled and has ten laptops. There is a ground source heat pump in the car park which provides heat for the building. Projects taking place include;
 - History and Archaeology
 - Ecology
 - Nature Trails Network
 - Conservation
 - Outdoor Pursuits education
 - Live projects with Chesterfield College which includes repairs to the dry stone walls around the Activity Centre.
- The outdoor activity centre operates and maintains an AALA License (Adventurous Activities Licensing Authority) which only a handful of Local Authorities in the Country have. In order to obtain and retain such a license there are rigorous measures in place that need to be demonstrated including strict operating codes and procedures. This is audited regularly.
- Safety and operation is second to none and every session works on a strict instructor to pupil ratio. Activities are thoroughly risk assessed and the Outdoor Activity Centre is used as an example of best practice across the region.
- The activity areas are managed with rigid systems and procedures. The pond in outdoor recreation terms is a low risk, similarly with the climbing crags and both of these are at opposite ends of the Mill complex away from the businesses. Classroom activities are all

undertaken at the Greaseworks which again is well away from the business centre.

- The outdoor activity centre is largely self financing by generating income through fees and charges which cover the operating costs.
- The activity centre makes use of the woodland surrounding the Greaseworks that would otherwise incur maintenance costs to the Authority.

Areas and Opportunities for Improvement

Pleasley Vale Business Centre

- The mills will require some investment in future in order to keep the assets up to scratch. Members of the Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Committee commented during the site visit that the mills looked in good condition internally but not externally. The Committee was advised that the layout of the buildings caused some difficulties and would never be compliant with the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA). The Council's Asset Management Plan includes a survey of the mills.
- Business rates are still payable on unoccupied units and it was suggested that the Council should identify a Charities to occupy some of this space in order to remove the business rate burden on the Authority.
- Members were advised that the current set of documents used to sign up new tenants could be more efficient and it was suggested that a new set of legal documents be drafted which will speed up the process of tenancy agreements to assist tenants in signing up and moving into their accommodation sooner, resulting in the rental income being received by the Authority quicker.
- Security is provided by an external supplier twenty four hours a day, seven days a week at a cost of approximately £90,000.00 per annum. The contract expired in September 2012 and a new contractor was put in place in April 2013 at a cost of approximately £80,000.00. Members of the Committee questioned whether consideration should be given to bringing this function in house and whether this would create additional savings in future when the new contract expired. All tenants of the business centre pay a service charge which includes the services of maintenance and security.
- In the past, Leisure have offered up labour to clear vacated units in exchange for rent of available units which has resulted in savings to the Authority in clearance by an external company. There is no audit trail for the work undertaken in exchange for rent and Members stressed

the necessity for an audit trail for any future agreements. However, the fact that the teams had come to a mutual agreement and saved money for the Authority was commended.

It was suggested to the Committee that in future, it would be more appropriate for Leisure to lease an appropriate unit with rent payable. This way, Leisure is the same as any other tenant and is protected by a lease agreement.

- Members were advised of a suggestion to move security to Mill 1 and sell the two lodges. This would ensure that there is a security presence closer to the mills and provide an income for the authority with the sale of the lodges.

Pleasley Vale Outdoor Activity Centre

- Marketing and advertising of the Centre needs to be improved in order to maximise participation and income.
- Liaison with School Governors and linking programmes with the National Curriculum were suggested as ways to promote the activity centre. The Youth Council could also be utilised to promote the Centre through schools.
- Future options for the outdoor activity centre include proposals for expanding the business with the purchase of three yurts which would provide residential accommodation for groups. There are also proposals for the extension of activities with the purchase of a linear rope course.

Regeneration staff have raised some concerns regarding children being present on the site twenty four hours a day and the large number of HGV movements during the day.

Leisure staff advised that visitors are transported to the mill pond in the mini bus and the Greaseworks and trails are on the other end of the site away from the business centre. Groups supervised on foot used the top trail which was a public footpath and had no vehicular access. Where possible, leisure activities were kept on the perimeter of the site as far from the business centre as possible.

Although there are some concerns about the safety of people accessing the site for leisure activities, there are public trails running through the site which are used by local people day and night which cannot be closed.

- Leisure on site increases the demand for the area and an extension of leisure activities would be encouraged.

- Presently, the Greaseworks building does not feature on the Council's Asset Management Plan and the Committee expressed concerns on how costs would be covered should anything major happen to the building. It was suggested that the building should be included within the Asset Management Plan and that Regeneration be responsible for the management of the whole site. This would provide Leisure and their facilities with the same protection as any other tenant and ensure appropriate governance of the site.
- Clearly, paying rent on the leisure facilities will affect the income generated from the outdoor activity centre, which is paid directly to the general fund.

7. Conclusions

Throughout the review, Members have received positive comments about the achievement for Bolsover District Council, rescuing the Pleasley Vale site, restoring the historic buildings and bringing back into use the former Greaseworks. This work has raised the profile of the area, created employment opportunities and saved an eyesore. The site is an asset to the Authority and now has the best management of the business centre that it has ever had. The outdoor activity centre provides a unique natural setting for outdoor pursuits and is an ideal venue for people wanting to undertake outdoor activities. The Committee congratulates the departments involved for the successes so far.

The business centre and outdoor activity centre can and do 'co-exist' and by continuing to co-operate and work together, they can build on and improve the outputs that the whole site generates.

There does need to remain some flexibility as eventually the Council will be able to consider the longer term aspirations for Pleasley Vale after the grant payback period has expired. It is difficult for the Scrutiny Committee at this time to make any assumptions on the future of the site and elected Members will need to consider the options available at that time.

It is anticipated that the recommendations detailed within this report will provide simplification, a clear direction and better management of the Pleasley Vale site.

Appendix 1

Stakeholders and Consultees

Councillor Alan Tomlinson	Portfolio Holder for Regeneration
Councillor Ann Syrett	Portfolio Holder for Social Inclusion And Elected Member representative on Pleasley Park and Conservation Area Advisory Committee
Councillor Brian Murray-Carr	Elected Member representative on Pleasley Park and Conservation Area Advisory Committee
Paul Hackett	Director of Health and Well Being
Kevin Hopkinson	Director of Development
David Eccles	Assistant Director of Regeneration
Lee Hicken	Assistant Director of Leisure and Culture
Matt Broughton	Commercial Property and Developments Manager
Colin Matchett	Pleasley Vale Outdoor Activity Centre Manager
Jonathon Tipton	Outdoor Recreation Officer