

Friends of The Leasowes
‘Annual General Meeting 2023’

Presented by David Chaffey

25th October 2023

Welcome



Agenda

- About the Friends Group in 2022/3
- Footpath changes
- The 'Green Gateway' Project
- Financial Statement
- Election of Committee
- AOB
- Drinks & General Discussion

Please ask questions as we go. Your thoughts and feedback are important.

The Friends Group

Who are we:-

We are an independent voluntary local user group, *made up of residents and other interested people who volunteer their time to improve 'The Leasowes'. Our group is the principle forum for discussing views about the park and promoting more effective, beneficial usage of the park to the wider community. We can express park users opinions and suggest ideas for improving The Leasowes to Dudley council.*

Our Constitution,

- **Protect** (The Leasowes) – *Ensure it is preserved as a Historic Landscape and Nature reserve for future generations to enjoy*
- **Promote** (The Leasowes) – *Attract a healthy number of visitors to ensure its long term future*
- **Improve** (The Leasowes) – *Develop & improve for the community*

We hold monthly meetings to discuss and progress our plans and issues

The Committee

- **David Chaffey** – *Chair*
- **Phil Baldwin** – *Treasurer and Quiz master extraordinaire*
- **Mike Kimmings Field** – *Secretary*
- *Plus*
 - **Celia Burton**
 - **Denise Smith**
 - **Maike Williams**
 - **Nigel Sadler**
 - **Rob Thomas**

2022 -> 2023

Our Main Activities this year

- We produced a promotional leaflet/handout to be used at promotional events and to be distributed to tourist information displays around the area.
- Celia resurrected the dog waste bin on the 'Links view' path 
- We have attended 2 events to interact with the public, promoting & raising awareness and interest in The Leasowes
 - Somers square, 25th May
 - Coombeswood Canal Open Weekend 2nd & 3rd September
- We have held 2 Quiz nights to raise funds to support our activities
(our next is on the 29th November)
- We hosted a social, non profit, 'Tea on the Terrace' event at the 18th century Golf clubhouse to enjoy company & views (26th August)

Our **On-line** Presence/interaction

- We maintain 2 on-line sites
 - Friends of the Leasowes Web Site 
www.the.leasowes.co.uk
 - Our Facebook page 
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/FriendsoftheLeasowes>
 - Members (*growth to ~3K, +25% in 12 months*)
 - Major contributors (*primarily keen amateur/capable photographers (Alec Longhurst, Emma Byrne, Lisa Jayne Reynolds to name but a few etc...)*)
- We hold an email distribution list 
- We now use the 'Eventbrite' booking system 

Footpath Changes

Back ground



- There is a long history of local people walking from the Manor Lane entrance across the Golf course to Leasowes Lane.
- Most of these routes crossed the line of Golf Play on either the 15th or 16th hole

Footpath Changes

Back ground

- During the lock down period, more people started using areas of the golf course for exercise and leisure (*from 23rd March 2020*).
- When golf play restarted, there were a number of incidents (near misses) where people were at risk of injury from golf balls and also greens were being damaged



Enjoying
the fine
weather
24th April
2020

Footpath Changes

Back ground

- As a result, and in the cause of Health and Safety, some of the access points to the area of the 15th and 16th holes were blocked and a small bridge over a ditch removed in June/July 2021



Footpath Changes

Back ground



- This led to many complaints from the local population and organised walking groups who had been regularly using these routes
- Discussions have since taken place between the Golf Club, DMBC and the Friends Group to try to find an agreed route which is safe, does not interrupt golf play and maintains access from Manor Lane to Leasowes Lane.

Footpath Changes



Leasowes footpaths Proposed new ROW linking Manor Lane to Leasowes Lane

— Proposed new ROW

Existing routes

— Bridleway

— Permissive Path

— Footpath

Scale: 1:4000

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2023 Ordnance Survey 100019566

Created by: Perry Adams

Date: 21 August 2023

Street & Green Care -

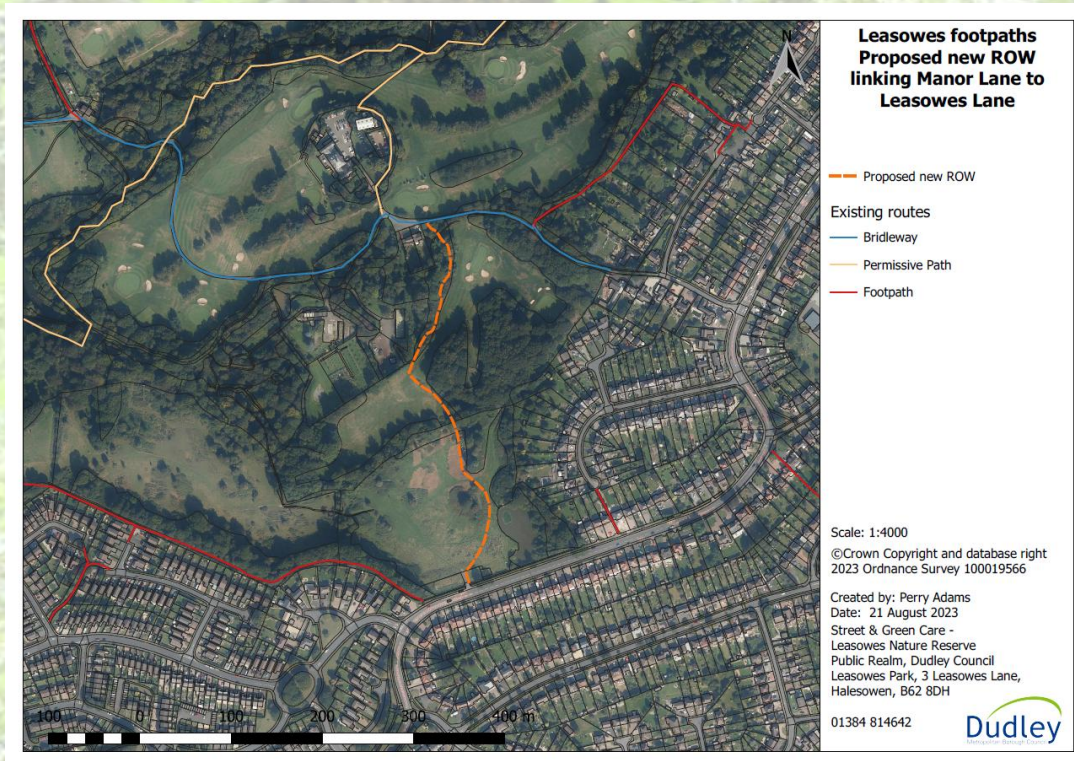
Leasowes Nature Reserve

Public Realm, Dudley Council

Leasowes Park, 3 Leasowes Lane,
Halesowen, B62 8DH

01384 814642

Footpath Changes



- The route will become a 'Public Right of Way'
- It will be marked with footpath signs
- As Stennels field, with its 'Fungi', is an important SSSI site, a hard surface path will NOT be laid
- The current gap into the top of Golf Practice area will need to remain 'Cattle Proof' but will be improved for general public use

The 'Green Gateway Project'

- Project introduction
- Proposed Changes
- Current status
- Next Steps

In partnership with:

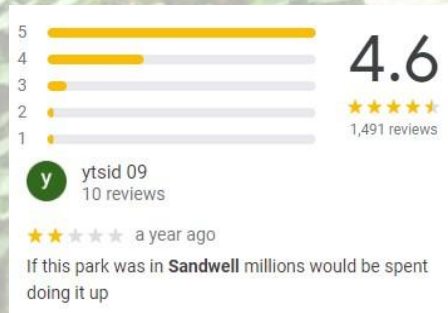
- Halesowen Abbey Trust/Walled Garden
- Friends of Coombeswood Wedge
- Halesowen Golf Club
- Lapal Canal Trust
- Coombeswood Canal Trust

What makes 'The Leasowes' different?

- Few Green spaces offer the same variety of landscape
- Fewer provide this within an Urban environment
- Even fewer can claim to be based on a listed Historic landscape created in the 18th Century

The Leasowes is Unique

Google Maps
4.6
1584 reviews



Tripadvisor 4.5
95 Reviews
#1 of 7 things to do
in Halesowen



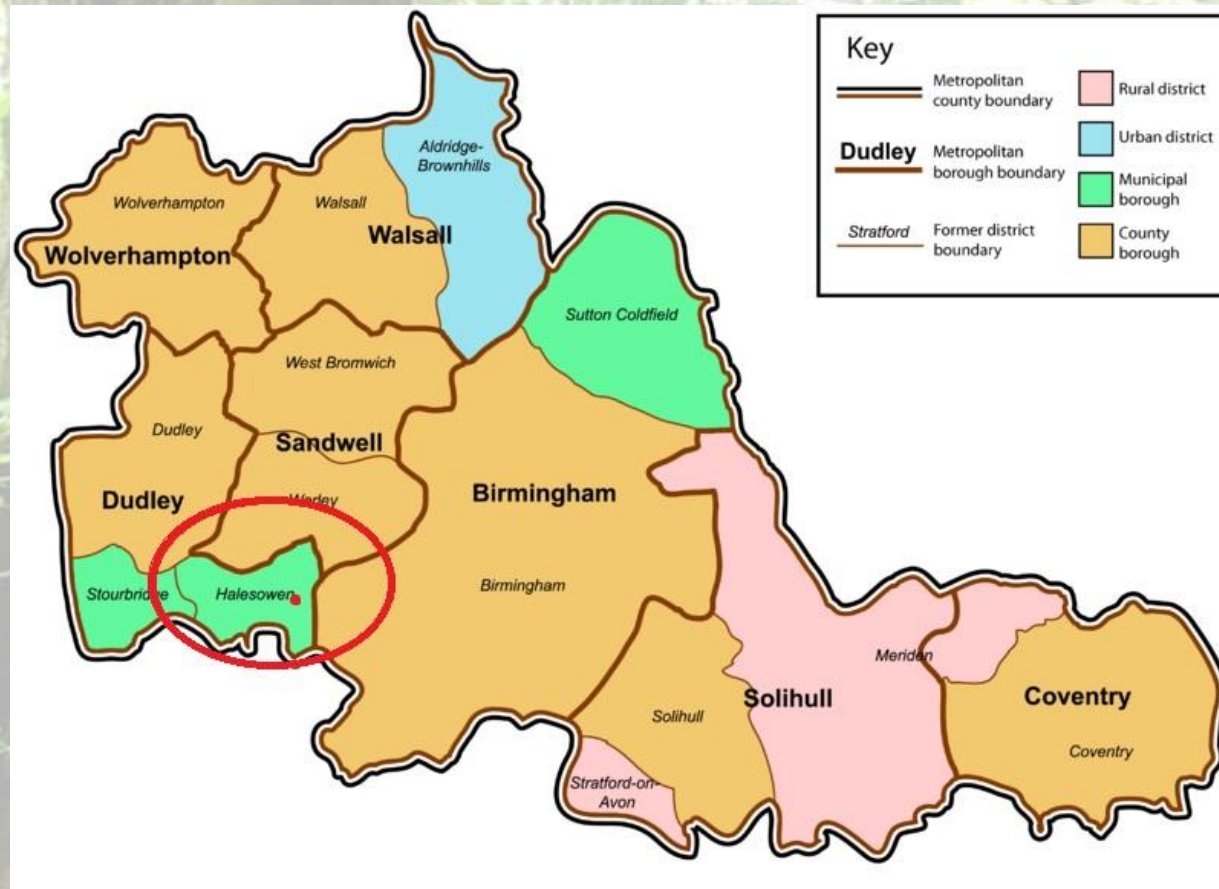
The Vision

In a Council held event on the 20th April 2007, it was agreed that the vision statement for *The Leasowes* should be:

“An internationally significant designed landscape at the heart of the community, managed sustainably as one of Dudley’s premier cultural assets”.

Catchment area

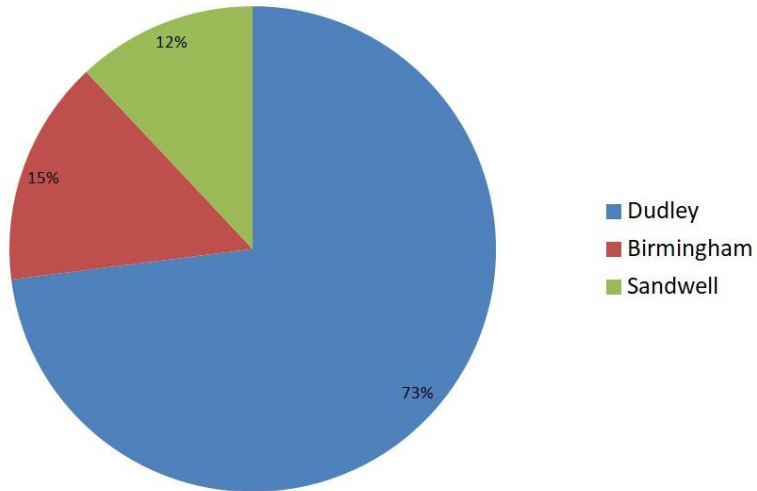
- Most visitors from within a 2 mile radius (Local people)
- Over 90% from within 5 mile radius
- Outside of the immediate catchment area, it remains largely unknown
(we are working to address that)



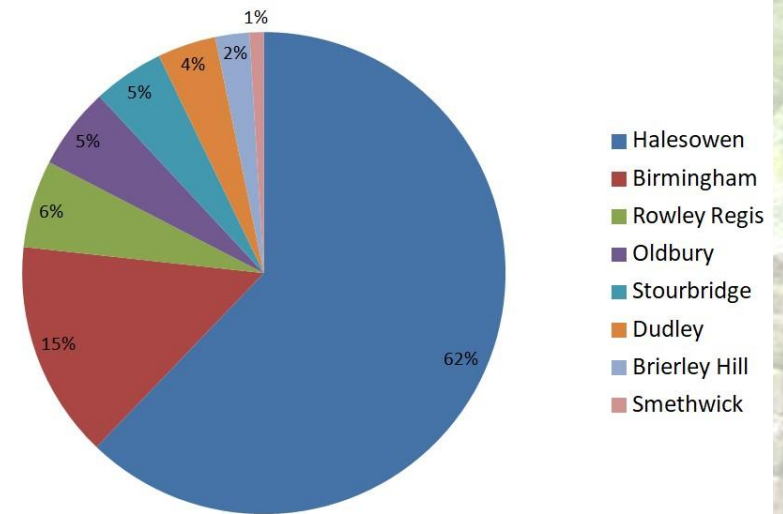
Visitor Demographics

Indicative, based on Facebook Membership (Sample ≈ 3000)

Members by Borough



Members by Town



Potential for Expanding the number of 'Visitors'

- **Close to dense areas of population** (figures *ukpopulation.org*, millions)

2012

- Black Country **1.15**
- Birmingham **1.03**
- West Midlands **2.46**

2022

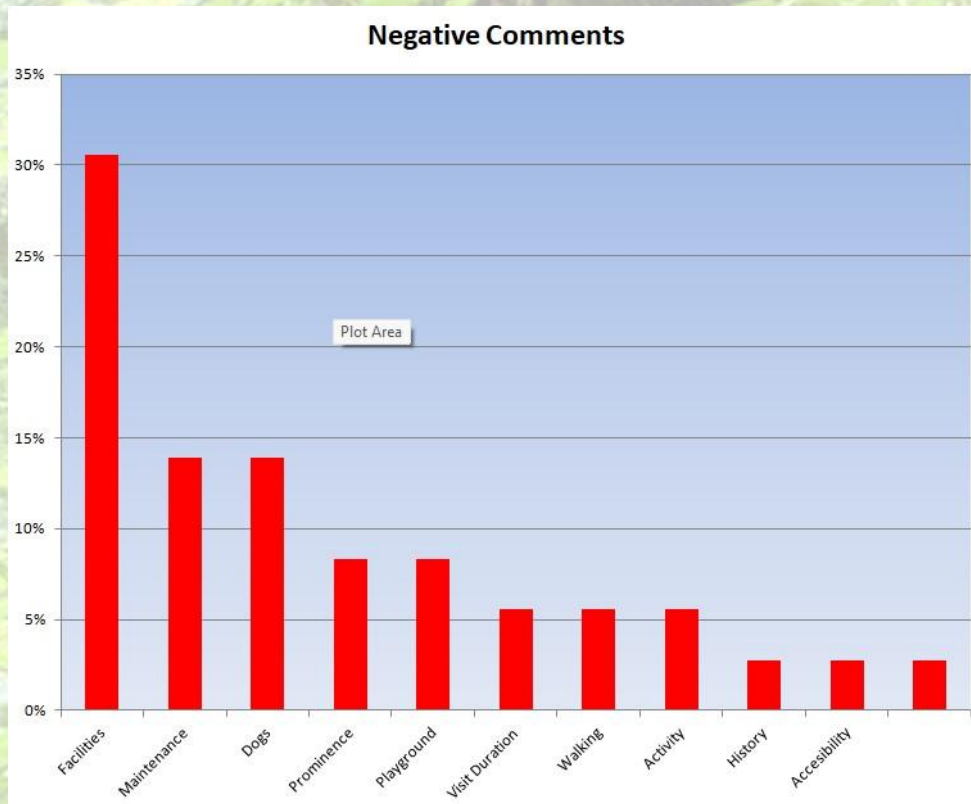
- Black Country **1.21**
- Birmingham **1.3**
- West Midlands **2.65**

- **Expansion from**

- Increased visitor numbers from Birmingham and Sandwell
- Create a destination for visitors from Worcestershire and surrounding counties



Visitor Feedback (Tripadvisor)



- **1st Top of the list is the lack of 'Facilities', primarily catering and toilets.**



User Needs

User types have varying requirements

- **Local People/Community**

(The majority of current users)

- Feel a degree of 'ownership'
- Use 'The Leasowes' regularly
- It can be a place to:
 - Meet their friends
 - To exercise (especially their dogs)
 - To have fun
- Improved facilities, accommodation (community room) and improved presentation should benefit the community

- **Visitors** (A Visitor attraction for 'Those not from around here')

(A small percentage of current users)

- Visit occasionally
- Interested in exploring a new location
- Interested in the History (Interpretation)
- Must have access to facilities 'away from home'
- It must meet the needs of a 'Visitor attraction'

- **The Leasowes is an Important an Asset for the whole community which can be made more accessible to public groups**

What makes a good 'visitor' attraction?

- **Attraction** *(a place and/or experiences that attract visitors who value what those attractions represent)*
 - **'Scenery/Nature' and 'History'** are great features for a visitor attraction. 'The Leasowes' really delivers here. It is large enough for good length, interesting walks. A navigable canal would be a major bonus.
- **Access and presentation**
 - Signposting to the attraction,
 - **Appearance (Clean, well maintained, no litter),**
 - Parking and cost (Free parking & entry?),
- **Amenities and staff** *(basic facilities and services that help a visitor feel comfortable and secure. The "pleasantness" of a place.)*
 - **A quality Visitor centre/Café** (& shop?), (Overall, 64-70% of 'visitors' use café and shop facilities at Visitor Attractions)
 - **Interpretation** - present a clear story (History & Nature). Visitors may like official tour or multimedia options
- **Activities/Something to do**
 - **Walking** (currently the primary activity)
 - **Photography** (Flora & Fauna), The Leasowes has a lot to offer
 - **A place to meet family & friends**
 - **Other possibilities** (Dependent on organisational input)
 - **Health walks & Exercise classes**
 - **Nature (Fungi forays, Pond dipping, Tree walks, Bat walks etc...)**
 - **Guided history walks,**
 - **Craft workshops – Art in the park**
 - **Treasure hunts,**
 - **Open air theatre**

The Proposed Changes

Enhancing 'The Leasowes' for everyone

- **The Leasowes should:**
 - **Be easy to find** *(Signage improvements)*
 - **Look the part** – *A Grade I listed attraction*
 - *Well signed and attractive entrance (First impressions)*
 - *Clean, tidy presentable parking*
 - **Have a good & secure visitor centre & café:**
 - *Leased with management conditions, toilets, car park security etc...?*
 - **Have a play area for children (2 – 12 years)** *Close to visitors centre & ideally natural & themed*
 - **Have a restored and navigable canal** *This would raise the bar in terms of presentation and interest*
 - **Have well marked routes for walkers around the site**
'Waymarked' paths and/or directional finger posts. Suitable for a range of abilities. A primary aim is to enhance the original Shenstone circular walk as documented in 'A Description of The Leasowes' written by Robert Dodsley.

Note: A weather-proof area outside the visitors center for a map and/or visitor guides would provide a welcome to visitors that arrive outside of business hours.

12 months on ->>>

Everything is subject to change at this point, and funding has yet to be identified or agreed but:-

- **There is high level interest in the project** *with regular meetings being held involving our local MP, James Morris, and Senior representation of DMBC (Since June 2023)*
- **We have support from our local councillors**
- **A 'Business Plan' is being developed** *to assess the potential of the visitor facilities and its social and economic benefits.*
 - *Consultancy expertise in the area of 'green space' heritage sites is being used as part of this process.*
 - *A tender process has been used to identify a suitable Consultancy*
 - *A Consultancy (Focus consultants) was appointed from a large number of applications earlier this month and startup activities have commenced*
 - *The Business Plan is likely to take around 3-4 months to complete*
- **The current focus is the visitor centre and play ground**
 - *The other topics, car park, entrance/site presentation and canal are still in play*
- **A building design is being developed** *and costed with 'Pre-application' planning*
 - *We have been told that architectural drawings exist & costing is in process*
 - *This may provide a basis on which the existing building can be removed*

Car Park and Visitor centre



Even when the building was in use it was not great, but now fenced and near dereliction.....

Not a very welcoming sight for visitors



Proposed Visitor centre location



1. Building re-located to existing Play Ground site with outside seating/picnic area & workspace
2. Frees up a few extra parking spaces
3. It avoids possible planning issues with SSSI site
4. New Play Ground on site of existing Picnic Area

New Visitor Centre



- Building type, size and layout to be determined but the style could be similar to this picture
- A new building will significantly improve presentation
- A re-located building provides better views and ambience (off car park)
- Security & Control of ASB is important

Main Features: An Eco friendly building providing

- * **A café** *with outside seating /picnic area & views*
- * **Toilets** *(inc baby changing facilities & externally accessed disabled toilet)*
- * **Interpretation space**
- * **Storage** *(for walking/exercise equipment)*
- * **Community space** *(Children's parties, social meetings, community activities etc..)*
- * **A check in point for site wardens & local PCSO's**

The Children's Play area



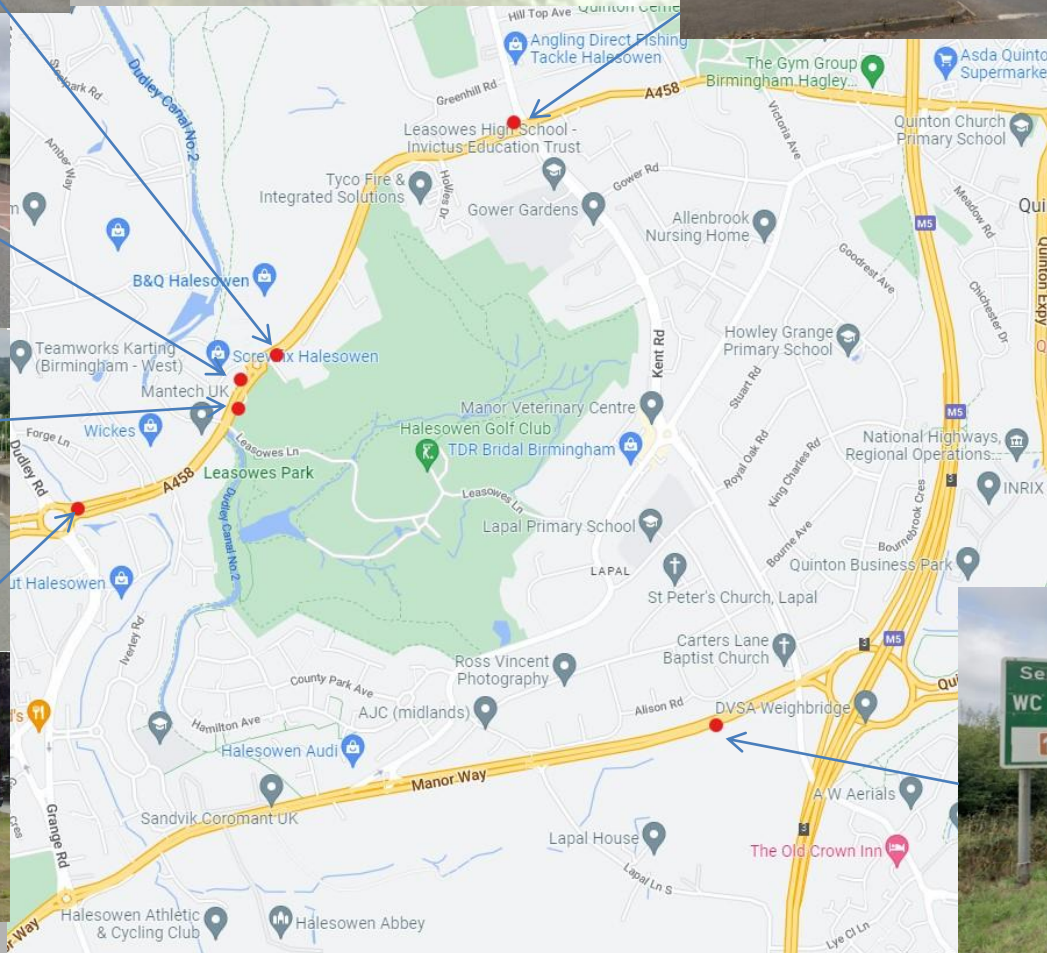
Public criticism of current play ground

- Too small
- Surrounding parks, all have better facilities. Even a slide would be a great addition to Leasowes for now.
- Equipment is not suitable for under 5's
- Little remains of a proper play area (compared to 1983 installation) [Oliver & Caroline at Leasowes Park 1983](#)

A new area should be sympathetic to the environment. Natural and possibly themed.



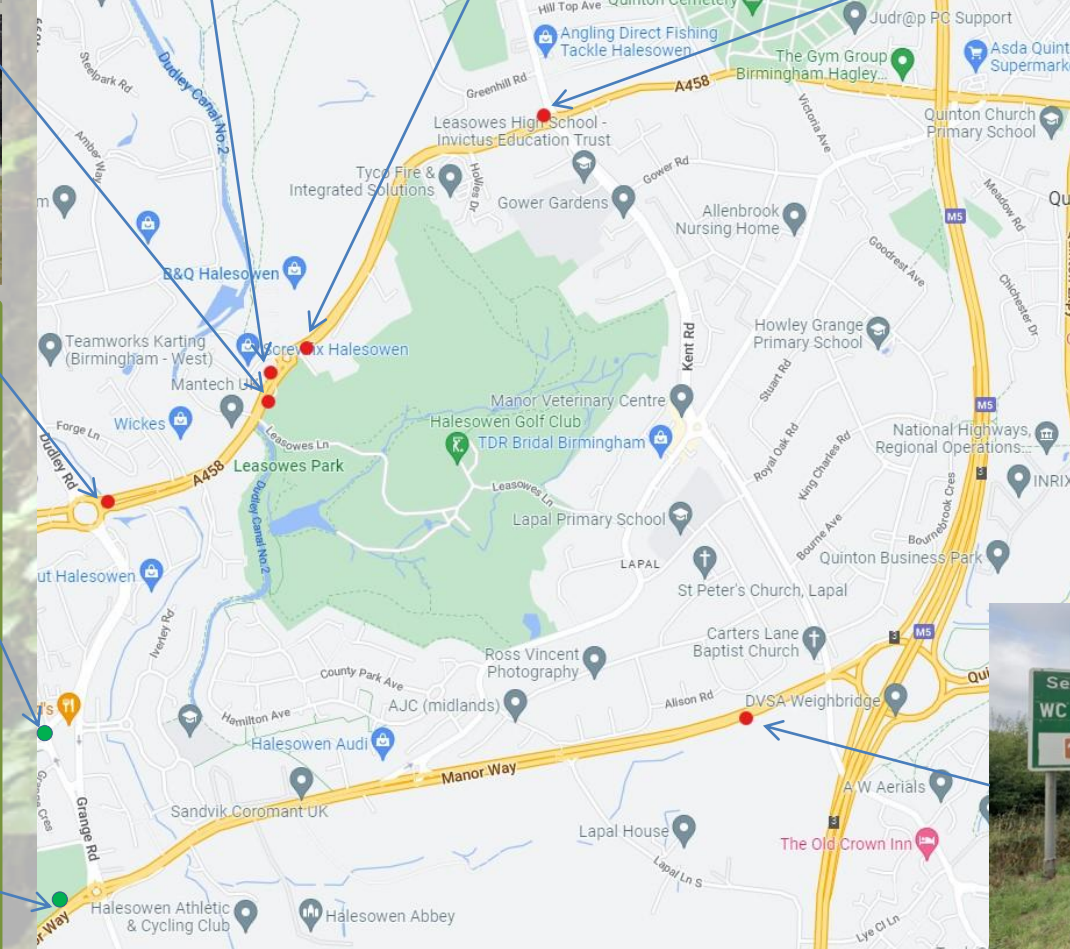
Road Directions to The Leasowes (2022)



Brown road signs mark or give directions towards historical sites, parks, picnic areas, and other recreational areas or points of cultural interest.



Road Directions to The Leasowes (Oct 2023)



Two new signs have been erected to help with directions from Manor Way (A456) through to Mucklow Hill



Signage Issues

'Stourbridge College Leasowes Park Centre' closed August 2012



Kent Road

Outside of the Royal Oak



'SSSI Signage

THE LEASOWES GEOSITE 26

historic landscape, nature reserve and geosite

Black Country Global Geopark

Welcome to The Leasowes



Transformed by the poet and landscape gardener William Shenstone in the mid-eighteenth century, The Leasowes is an example of the "English Picturesque" garden movement with pools, cascades, and follies, all connected by a circuit walk with benches, poetry and views.

The pasture, meadow and woodland of Shenstone's estate remain untouched to this day. It is the age and continuation of traditional management which has enabled many rare plants and fungi to colonise and thrive. In autumn the meadows are dotted with up to 29 species of brightly coloured waxcap mushrooms including some internationally rare species.

For further information call The Leasowes warden service on 01384 814642

This nature reserve has been notified as a Site of Special Scientific Interest under Section 28 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). It is an offence, without reasonable excuse, intentionally or recklessly to destroy or damage any of the flora, fauna, or geological or physiographical features by reason of which the land is of special interest, or intentionally or recklessly to disturb any of those fauna.

A person found guilty of any such offence may be prosecuted and liable to a fine not exceeding £20,000.

Please respect the reserve and keep dogs under control. Keep to the designated footpaths when crossing the golf course. Byelaws apply.

Warning: Please be aware of flying golf balls



A Navigable Canal



The Next Steps

- **Complete the consultancy and submit business plan and proposals for cabinet approval** *(2nd/3rd qtr 2024?)*
- **Explore funding options including DMBC funding** *(2024/5 budget?)*
- **Finalise building design and obtain outline planning** *(as of last year (21/09/2022) these were expected by 4th qtr 2022),*
- **When planning in place, arrange for old building to be removed,**
- **Finalise funding arrangements,**
- **Implementation is likely to be phased, each phase being part of a long term vision,**
- **Timescale tba but community support through the whole process is vital,**

Questions



Hanging Wood



Stennels Pool



Stennels East



Stennels West

Financial Statement

Income and Expenditure Account from 19th October 2022 to 25th October 2023							
Bank		Income	Expense	Petty Cash		Income	Expense
Date	Description	£	£	Date	Description	£	£
				19/10/2022	AGM		
					Raffle & donations	67.13	
					Room hire		30.00
					Tea, coffee, milk etc		6.86
28/11/2022	Autumn Quiz			23/11/2022	Autumn Quiz		
	Eventbrite				Raffle	60.80	
	Ticket sales	220.00			Raffle prizes		17.50
	Expenses		40.24		Quiz prizes		11.85
11/02/2023	20i			09/03/2023	Donation -		
	WordPress				Tree walk	30.00	
	Personal Hosting		79.07				
20/04/2023	Spring Quiz			20/04/2023	Spring Quiz		
	Eventbrite				Raffle	75.00	
	Ticket sales	250.00			Prizes		36.89
	Expenses		35.12		Cash entry fee	20.00	
19/07/2023	Petty cash	100.00		12/05/2023	Helloprint		
					Leaflets		78.38
24/08/2023	Helloprint						
	Leaflets		63.99	12/05/2023	Amazon		
					Lollipops		15.00
01/09/2023	Eventbrite						
	Tea on the Terrace	280.00	280.00				
	Total	850.00	498.42		Total	252.93	196.48
	Net	351.58			Net	56.45	

Financial Statement

Opening Balance 19/10/2022				Current Assets 25/10/2023			
			£				£
	Bank Balance		2,752.15		Bank Balance		3,103.73
	Petty Cash		15.11		Petty Cash		71.56
	Total		<u>2,767.26</u>		Total		<u>3,175.29</u>
					Variance		408.03

Election of Committee

Confirmation of existing or new committee members



Drinks and General Discussion

