

MANCHESTER CITY COUNCIL REPORT FOR INFORMATION

TO: Community Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee

DATE: 7th February 2007.

SUBJECT: Debdale Outdoor Centre – Gorton Upper & Lower Reservoirs
Construction Work

REPORT OF: Head of Leisure

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT:

To provide information on the United Utilities improvement work to Gorton Upper and Lower Reservoirs and the arrangements that have been put in place to continue with the Leisure activities taking place whilst the scheme is in operation.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That the report be noted.

FINANCIAL CONSEQUENCES FOR THE REVENUE BUDGET:

There will be a cost incurred for the temporary arrangements that have been put in place to keep the waterbased activities ongoing at Audenshaw Reservoir. This will be covered within the existing Leisure budget.

FINANCIAL CONSEQUENCES FOR THE CAPITAL BUDGET:

The Council are currently discussing with United Utilities a possible capital contribution to the launching apron, which would keep Debdale Outdoor Centre operational in the longer term.

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WARDS AFFECTED:

Gorton North

Gorton South

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND.

Gorton Upper and Lower Reservoirs have been used for leisure and recreational purposes for a number of years by agreement more recently with United Utilities and formerly with the Waterworks Department; this use has been based on a peppercorn rental by Manchester City Council to United Utilities for use of the water and does not include any responsibility for the reservoir operation. United Utilities are responsible for the reservoirs. However, they have no operational need for them and the reservoirs do not form part of the drinking water supply network.

The use of the upper reservoir is currently restricted to fishing where the Bulls Head Fishing Club has a license for use.

The Lower Reservoir is used by the Debdale Outdoor Centre and the Trafalgar Sea Cadets Training Centre who have a building on the site and agreed use of the reservoir.

2. Manchester Trafalgar Sea Cadets:

This organisation is a nationwide voluntary uniformed youth organisation, open to young people aged 12 to 18 and with junior sections open to those of 10 – 12 years of age, which is accessible to anyone and operated by a group of enthusiastic adult volunteers.

There is a rank structure modelled on that of the Royal Navy, giving Cadets and opportunity to progress and take up positions of responsibility as they acquire skills and seniority. On reaching 18, many Cadets choose to stay on as adult instructors, when their training and talents become invaluable. The aim is to help young people towards responsible adulthood by encouraging valuable personal attributes and high standards of conduct using a nautical theme based on Naval customs.

Many Sea Cadet units – known as Training Ships – are based in inner city areas where they continue to promote the origins of the movement, providing worthwhile activities for young people who might otherwise not have the opportunity to develop their life skills, in addition to this Cadets can also study mechanical and electrical engineering, cooker, computers, band musician, Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme, and a host of associated subjects to help prepare them for adult life.

3. Debdale Outdoor Centre:

Debdale Outdoor Centre has operated since the late 70's then called Debdale Sailing Centre. It offered water based activities only Sailing, Windsurfing and Canoeing and was operated by Manchester City Council Education Department, bringing school children and teachers to the Centre for training and adults during the evening, from a Portacabin on the Gorton Lower Reservoirs.

The modern purpose built Centre was completed by 1987. In 1989 the Centre moved into the Recreational Services Department who developed the use of the

Centre during the early 1990's to incorporate the education Department outdoor Pursuit unit and now offer's a full range of outdoor activities including climbing, walking, problem solving etc. Manchester Leisure now operates the Centre, which provides an exciting range of activities in Greater Manchester and further a field in the Peak District, North Wales, and North West England.

The Centre caters for a wide variety of clients of all ages and educational abilities, with the emphasis being on practical learning with appropriate theory lessons integrated into the courses.

Activities available include dinghy sailing, windsurfing, canoeing and kayaking, powerboating, rock climbing, abseiling, hill walking, gorge scrambling, and orienteering, camping, navigation, multi-activity and team-building activities. All staff are fully qualified and the Centre has a Regional and National reputation for quality tuition and coaching.

The Centre is fully licensed for all training courses with the Adventure Activities Licensing Authority, and is recognised by the National Governing Bodies as a Royal Yachting Association Training Centre and a British Canoe Union Approved Centre.

The Centre attracts high percentages of use by Manchester residents especially amongst young people with approximately 85% of the Centre's users being under the age of 18. The Centre is heavily used by Manchester Schools and Youth Organisations and not only encourages young people to participate in outdoor activities and learn outdoor skills, but also to progress in their personal and social development. This benefits young people in many areas including health, and the development of confidence and self esteem in an environment that fosters teamwork, co-operation, and a positive attitude towards learning and achievement in general. The Activities also assist in diverting vulnerable groups from crime and disorder.

4. Improvement Work on the Reservoirs:

The scheme is principally about reducing the risk posed by high flows due to excessive rainfall and will help to secure the long-term future of the reservoirs.

United Utilities will present the full details of the scheme to the Committee with Officers present for questions. However, a shortened summary of the scheme is that work will start in Spring 2007 for an estimated eighteen-month period which will carry out the following:

- Providing new overflow channels for both reservoirs
- Abandoning the existing overflow channel and weir in the Upper Reservoir
- Setting the new weir level 1.5m lower than the existing
- Abandoning the existing overflow channel, tunnel and weir in the Lower Reservoir
- Setting the new weir level 1.2m lower than the existing

The project will require planning permission and an application has now been submitted and United Utilities held a drop in for the public to explain the scheme at the Centre on the 17th January, 2006.

5. Leisure Activities on the above site and elsewhere:

- a. United Utilities have worked with the Council on trying to keep Debdale Outdoor Centre, Manchester Trafalgar Sea Cadets and Bulls Head Fishing Club operational, in both the interim period and after the work has finished.
- b. This has resulted in an agreement that the Bulls Head Fishing Club carry out an adaptation to the top reservoir which will keep the water available for fishing throughout the scheme.
- c. An agreement that both Debdale Outdoor Centre building and the Manchester Trafalgar Sea Cadet building will remain outside of the footprint for the project site and remain operational.
- d. An agreement that waterbased activities can continue on the nearby Audenshaw Reservoir for the full period of the project including whilst the water is lowered from the reservoir in preparation for the scheme.

Audenshaw is an excellent stretch of water, which will provide a more than suitable temporary replacement for the duration of the scheme.

6. Summary and Conclusion:

The requirement to do the work is essentially a responsibility and legal right of United Utilities and the Council will support them in this scheme.

Although some of the temporary use of Audenshaw will present the Centre staff with operational challenges the situation and agreement to keep the buildings at the site open throughout the project period will enable both Manchester Leisure and the Sea Cadets to minimise any inconvenience to its clients and customers and will allow all the good work that both centres carry out to continue.

