



Conservation work begins on the Beacon tower at Burton Dassett Hills Country Park

Conservation work has started to repair the Beacon tower located within Warwickshire County Council's Burton Dassett Hills Country Park, following delays to the project after bats were identified to be hibernating inside the tower's domed roof.

The Beacon tower is one of only two historical monuments found in Warwickshire (the other being Chesterton windmill) and since 1952 has been a Grade II listed building. This project will see the tower restored as sympathetically as possible to its original state to preserve it for future generations.

Cllr Heather Timms, portfolio holder for Environment, Climate and Culture, said:

“The Burton Dassett Hills area has been a great county park since 1971, and this 100-acre site contains a wealth of historical interest including ironstone quarry remains from the late 19th century, the 15th century Beacon tower, and a nearby 12th Century All Saints Church.

As one of only two historic monuments in Warwickshire, the Beacon is a small but important part of our county's history to restore to its former state; not only as a point of interest within the country park, but as a focal point with fabulous views across the Stratford-on-Avon District that can be enjoyed by the people of Warwickshire for now and future generations.”

The Beacon in the Burton Dassett Hills was likely built by Lord of the Manor Sir Edward Belknap in the late 15th century, and there are three main theories as to its original use:

- A beacon to pass important fire signals to other beacons in the surrounding area
- A windmill/tower mill, or a look-out tower
- A Warrener's lodge, the home of a man who protected the local rabbit population from poachers, as rabbits were valuable in medieval times for their meat and fur.

The beacon was first inspected by Warwickshire County Council in August 2020 to understand the full extent of the repair work required and to identify any structural defects. Conservation work to the tower was due to start in December 2020, however the project was postponed due to the confirmed presence of two brown long-eared bats found hibernating inside the tower's domed roof. All species of bats, including their breeding sites and resting places, are fully protected by law. This meant that repair work had to wait until the bats had left the tower of their own accord. The most

recent bat inspection in May 2021 confirmed that any roosting bats had now safely vacated the site and that repair work could proceed.

Martin Lewis, Property Services - Service Manager of this conservation project, said:

“The site inspection last summer highlighted several key areas for us to focus on in order to restore the tower as sympathetically as possible to its original state.

The windy conditions of the Beacon’s hilltop position have created some erosion to the Southeast side which we will put right, and any cracks will be fixed using a technique called Helibar stitching, or by applying grouting.

At least seven different layers of mortar have been identified in-between the brick work, including some hard mortar layers added over time that are not breathable. If left these would accelerate the process of the tower’s decay. As you cannot use power tools for this type of conservation work, we will remove the hard mortar by hand and replace it with a new mortar in keeping with the colour and texture of the tower.

Our team will infill any open joints to the domed roof to ensure it is watertight, rebuild any bulged sections, and apply a new limed-based render capping to the dome.

It is important that the original window outlines and door outline can still be identified, and the doorway will be sealed with a thin layer of stone to protect the tower’s interior. The base of the dome, called a concrete collar, will be covered with a new resin bound gravel to improve the tower’s overall presentation.

Finally, we look forward to removing the current temporary bracing and fencing that has been around the tower whilst waiting for the work to start, so that the general public can once again enjoy this wonderful piece of Warwickshire’s history.”

For more information about Burton Dassett Hills County Park, visit

<https://countryparks.warwickshire.gov.uk/burtondassett>

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