

Friends of Marple Memorial Park

Response to enquiries received from Suzanne Blair of GT3 Architects on 9 April 2020.

Q1 - What current planned projects do you have? - these are things that you have planned and are certain or fairly certain to happen. ie projects you have funding for (or a plan for how you will get funding) and a plan for when and how they will happen and may be taking place in the next year or two.

Q1 Responses:

Skatepark Development Project Phase II / MUGA

Since the successful completion of our £112k redevelopment of the existing skatepark, completed in 2017, we have been working on a second phase to upgrade the existing top section of the skatepark and to convert the dilapidated basketball court to a Multi-User Games Facility (MUGA). Funded by £85k from formal sports commuted sums, the project has full planning permission and was due to commence on site on 6 April 2020.

Unfortunately the start date is now on hold due to Covid19 restrictions. We currently expect work to start soon after government guidelines permit this and once the council and contractor are in a position to proceed.

Toilet Block refurbishment / re-purpose

In early 2019 we worked with the council to develop a £28k costed plan to refurbish the existing Ladies and Gents Toilet Block and upgrade them to full disabled access. We had anticipated starting to seek funding for this in mid-2019 but while designs were being developed we learned of the potential project to create a Community Hub on the existing built area of the park. So the toilet refurbishment project was placed on hold after the design was agreed pending the outcome of the proposals for a Community Hub, as we would expect any new facilities to provide much better public toilets.

As part of the Community Hub we would wish to see public toilets fully and freely accessible to all park users. We would prefer for the existing Toilet Block building to be re-purposed for the benefit of the park, rather than demolished, and would be pleased to discuss opportunities for this. If a good use for the building could be agreed we would hope that this could be developed and funded alongside the Community Hub.

Drinking water fountain and bottle-filling station

In mid-2019 we picked-up on new countrywide initiatives to reduce the consumption of plastic drinking bottles by seeking to provide a water fountain and bottle-filling station in the park. We developed plans with the council's parks team and obtained prices of £800 to £1,000 for installation of a fountain and filling station on the external wall of the existing Toilet Block. We could afford this from our existing funds.

Although the parks team and local councillors were supportive of the idea we met with initial resistance from the Property Services Group. We discovered that Stockport Council were not up-to-speed with latest developments and have no existing drinking water facilities in any of their parks at this time. With new projects springing up throughout Greater Manchester, and with the support of local councillors, we intended to begin breaking down these barriers. However, after placing the Toilet Block refurbishment on hold due to the proposals for a possible Community Hub, we concluded that it would be wise to do the same with this project until more is known.

We hope that free access to drinking water and bottle-filling for park users can be provided by a new Community Hub facility, and have already raised this as a comment.

Wild-flower Meadow

In 2019 a large area of the park was stoned over and used as construction compound for major repairs to Lock 11 on the Peak Forest Canal adjoining the park. Several mature trees also had to be removed to provide access to the lock. Over time we developed plans to plant new trees in the woodland border and to sow a wild-flower meadow with local volunteers over a large area of the compound once it was reinstated.

We obtained £1,000 funding from the Canal and River Trust to do this. Trees were planted in February 2020 but sowing of the wild-flower meadow has been placed on hold due to Covid19 restrictions. We hope to resume this project in the Autumn of 2020.

We have provisional ideas to create a mown maze in this area too.

Pavilion Art Project

For several years we have been seeking to create an art project at the former Bowling Pavilion in the park that was built by returning WWI soldiers in memory of their comrades who never came home. So the building, now a Mess Room and Tool Store shared by the council and Friends of the Park, is actually a war memorial.

In late 2019 we developed a Community Art Project with a local CIC called Art Stop to build on their successful project at Rose Hill Station in Marple. Our bid for £10k to Awards for All to fund this project was not successful, so we recently broke the project down into two phases of £4,475 and £4,100 with the objective of proceeding with phase 1 while fund-raising was ongoing for phase 2. We have a significant proportion of the phase 1 funds in place and submitted four small grant applications that would cover the balance of phase 1 and part fund phase 2 if all successful.

We were expecting to give Art Stop CIC the go-ahead to start phase 1 in early April but due to Covid19 we have not heard back from the potential funding sources we were expecting to. Also, due to school closures and other restrictions, Art Stop are currently unable to conduct workshops in schools or with art groups as planned for phase 1.

Due to the level of community engagement planned for this project it will be greatly influenced by the changes to Covid19 restrictions and the way forward is unclear at present. It maybe that phase 2, which has engagement with a smaller group of artists than phase 1, would be in a position to start earlier. We will have to wait and see.

Sculpture Trail

One of our most exciting projects for some time is a replacement for our popular tree sculpture created with school children in 2007. Sadly that had to be removed due to decay in 2019. Thanks to the donation of 7 large oak logs by a local tree surgeon we have the potential to create a fantastic Sculpture Trail throughout the park.

Plans developed with a local freelance fund-raiser include engagement with all 6 of our local primary schools to develop designs for their own Wildlife, Nature and Knowledge themed sculpture to go in the park. The 7th sculpture would take the form of a Reading Lectern that will become a central hub for the whole trail and will be used by the library and others for outdoor story-time. This would be on the site of our former sculpture (next to Hollins House). It would be surrounded by mushroom seating that would be carved by our chosen chainsaw artist during demonstrations at each school.

Our £13,600 grant application to the Art Council was rejected in February 2020 with constructive comments and an opportunity to resubmit if we could address these. We were intending to look more closely at this but it has now been placed on hold as we cannot put together a revised bid without being able to engage further with schools.

This is a fantastic project and we WILL find a way to do it in the future. It would a great

way to link the new Community Hub with the wider park too!

The oak logs have been delivered to us and are in safe storage with the council.

Major refurbishment and merging of Junior and Infant Play Areas

This is a major project we've had in mind for some years but since 2011 we have needed to maintain focus on the Skatepark Development Project for fear of spreading ourselves too thinly. With funding in place and the final phase of works due to start when Covid19 restrictions are lifted, we recently started looking at the Play Areas more closely.

We also feel that redevelopment of the existing play areas should be considered as a key part of proposals for a new Community Hub Facility in the park. The reason for this is that the existing play areas are hugely popular and even on non-sunny days are often stretched to capacity. Categorised as a "destination park", during good weather, weekends and school holidays the park's play facilities are best described as "rammed!"

The introduction of a new Community Hub with swimming pool is certain to increase the number of visitors exponentially and existing play facilities will become inadequate.

The Infants Play Area fence in particular is also a key concern. This wooden fence, maintained for many years by Friends of the Park volunteers rather than the council, is reaching the end of its useful life and needs to be replaced.

For these key reasons, towards the end of 2019 we asked the council's Neighbourhood Team to begin working with us to develop new plans for the park's play areas.

At the end of February 2020 the council's Play and Infrastructure Officer put together a draft three phase plan for the merger and refurbishment of the two existing play areas.

We reviewed these plans at our last meeting on Monday 9 March and comments were submitted back to the Officer the following day during a site visit. It was agreed that the plans would be revised to take on board our comments and we would then hold a group meeting with the Officer to discuss and develop them further. Unfortunately this has been overtaken by recent events and Covid19 restrictions, council staff furlough and other priorities and constraints for the council have currently halted proceedings.

The provisional project costs from the initial study are:

- Phase 1: £15,000 new fencing replacing infants and merging the two areas.
- Phase 2: £76,000 new / replacement equipment.
- Phase 3: £45,000 new Interactive Electronic Play equipment.

These costs are very provisional and we believe that a budget of at least £150k to £200k would be necessary for a fully developed scheme covering all 3 phases.

Sources of funding have not yet been investigated in detail. We would expect some significant contributions may come from Section 106 payments from local developments. For example, we are aware of one planning application that may attract a payment of £47k that could potentially be allocated to improvements to play in the park.

We feel strongly that plans for the creation of a Community Hub in the park should fully consider its impact on the wider park and its environs. As already stated, if it does go ahead, we believe that improving the play areas to accommodate increased demand and usage should be included in the scheme's key objectives. We would be pleased to work with the council and its representatives to look at ways to achieve this aim.

Q2 - What future plans / aspirations do you have? - this is your wish list of things you'd like to do in future.

Q2 Responses: (some of these are interchangeable with Q2)

Relocation of Diamond Jubilee Flowerbed in front of Marple Library

The Diamond Jubilee Flowerbed and Metal Art Sculpture in front of Marple Library was created by Friends of Marple Memorial Park and funded by the local community. We were forced to obtain full planning permission to build it in this location too.

In the event of a new Community Hub being built on the site of the existing library and rear portion of Hollins House, we would anticipate that the location of the flowerbed and sculpture will be built over. If proposals were to go ahead, we would wish for the flowerbed, sculpture and lectern display to be relocated to a new site within the park.

In view of the fact that we were forced to submit a planning application to the council to create this feature, we would like the Community Hub Project to include the relocation to a new site within their own full planning application please.

We would also request that as the project was funded by the community, then any costs of undertaking the relocation be included in the Community Hub Project.

We would be pleased to meet with the council and their representatives to discuss the details of the relocation at an appropriate stage prior to a planning submission.

Relocation of Samuel Oldknow's Memorial Plaque

This is a project that has been on our back-burner for many years.

Samuel Oldknow was a major benefactor of Marple, being instrumental in the development of local roads, the canals and waterways, his mill at Mellor, housing and employment for his workers, local farming, the Lime Kilns and other canal buildings.

Samuel's marble memorial stone was originally erected with pride of place inside the old All Saints' Georgian chapel that he was the driving force in building. When the main body of the chapel was demolished in the late 1960s, Samuel's memorial was re-sited with several others inside the old church tower, which was retained to house the church bells. The tower is not accessible to the public and even with special permission to go inside, his plaque cannot be seen properly as it is sited under the stairs. It cannot be viewed head-on and furniture is usually stored in front of it. A very unsatisfactory situation.

In 2003 we approached the Parochial Church Council and obtained permission (subject to approval by the Chester Diocese) to relocate the plaque to the park entrance or other suitable prominent location in the town. However, after looking into the details we discovered that the plaque is made from a non-frost proof material that is not suitable for being situated outdoors. It was not possible to find a suitable indoor location at that time, so the project has been on long-term hold ever since.

We believe that the building of a new Community Hub in the park would present the perfect opportunity to resurrect this project and that Samuel's memorial plaque (and possibly some of the others) could be relocated to Hollins House, putting it on public display, where it deserves to be, for the first time in over 50 years.

We would be delighted to talk to the council and its representatives to examine the feasibility of doing this and to assist in the process should it prove to be viable.

Outdoor Adult Exercise Equipment

This is an addition to the park that we have been asked about many times by park users. We have submitted two grant applications in the past that have been unsuccessful and

during more recent years we have put this idea on the back-burner due to our commitment and focus on the Skatepark Development Project. We would be eager to pursue future opportunities to add outdoor fitness equipment that can be used by all.

Outdoor Table Tennis

This is another great feature that we would like to add to the park. Costs are relatively low for heavy-duty robust tables and we will look at providing these when we have tackled some of the more pressing projects on our list and opportunity allows.

A Bandstand within the park

The Brass Bands of Marple have their home in the former gate keeper's lodge in the park. We believe the addition of a bandstand within the park could be a significant new community asset, although this would need to be investigated further with the bands and the council to determine if it would indeed be a viable and well-used asset.

New display lecterns

We currently have five interpretation panel lecterns in the park. These are now quite old and will need to be progressively refurbished, fitted with new artwork or replaced.

***Q3 - Further feedback?** We've had some feedback from you already, but is there anything in particular that you would like to see in a new hub building that would support the activities in the park. (for example you've already mentioned public toilets and water bottle filling).*

Q3 Responses: (a collection of feedback from the group and individual volunteers)

CCTV: We are aware that there are two existing independent CCTV systems within the current park buildings: one covering the library internally and the other covering the exterior of Hollins House. The Friends group were instrumental in having an additional camera installed to the Hollins House system in 2015 to combat antisocial behaviour at the Bowling Green buildings. More recently we have been campaigning for the relocation of that camera* to the front of the building to combat ASB at the skatepark.

We would be eager that CCTV design for the new building is fully developed during the conceptual and detailed proposals for the new Community Hub and we would like to see increased coverage of the car park, buildings and the wider features of the park as much as possible to increase the deterrent to antisocial behaviour within the whole park.

*For info only: currently instead of relocating the camera as agreed, the contractor has installed a new but inferior camera. We will be pressing for the high quality camera paid for by Marple Area Committee at our instigation to be moved as originally agreed.

Access to Tool Store & Mess Room: Currently we share use of the former Bowling Pavilion with the council as a tool store and mess room. We also have shared access to the canopy area and our own storage room at the far end of the Bowlers Hut.

We are currently able to access the area (next to the Toilet Block) by vehicle to drop-off and pick-up plants, gardening materials and equipment from the store. The TLC workforce also use this area extensively for storage, access and parking of vehicles.

We are concerned that with the new Community Hub being built across the existing access to this area (via the car park between the library and Hollins House), our vehicular access to the store, and that of TLC operatives, will be severely restricted.

Can the council and representatives identify if / how this can be overcome please?

Front of Hollins House: It would be very important to us that the WWI Timeline display on the railings at the front of Hollins House is retained and untouched.

Open air roof top: It is thought that a cafe would be an essential addition and it would be great if this was at roof level to make the most of views across the park.

Woodland wildlife area behind the library: We are keen that the existing woodland wildlife area behind the library should be retained and not built on. Perhaps there would be some way of linking / integrating this area into the new design?

One volunteer's vision:

- Library including computer suite and the usual areas for young children.
- Swimming pool with the 'normal' changing facilities.
- A cafe.
- A gym, ideally one which could also double as a sports hall to be used by young people for basketball etc.
- I envisage a reception area which encompasses a manned desk, information/ tourist centre where visitors could get help and advice on the facilities within the hub, features and activities within Marple and also a link to Council Services.
- CAB Centre within the Hub.
- Meeting Rooms.
- Exhibition area for temporary/changing art exhibitions (separate from the above information boards).
- Multi - use areas to be used as creche, play area for younger children / children's education area (eg what to look for in the park, worksheets) etc.
- Public toilets, separate from the changing rooms and available for people using the park.
- Water bottle filling station, possibly within the cafe.

External Features

- Car parking.
- Cycle Parking / store.
- New / improved children's playground to include painted activities on the floor.
- A maze hopefully created in the long meadow grass further down the park.

An area for Friends of the Park: We will need access to a meeting room for our monthly meetings, which are currently held at the library. Maybe there could be an area for Friends of the Park? Or maybe a noticeboard for our use to engage with hub visitors?

Artefacts in Marple Library: The Marple Website has loaned a number of heritage artefacts that are currently on display in the library. These include: Marple Hall Shutters; framed pictures of Marple Hall Glass; a large framed print of Marple Hall on the stairs; a watercolour of Oldknow's Warehouse and a framed photo of Harold Carver Barlow. If the library is to be demolished to make way for a new Community Hub, these items should be safely returned to Mark Whittaker of the Marple Website to arrange display elsewhere, or their relocation to the new hub agreed. It maybe more appropriate that they are displayed in the Wharf Marple building if that project is successful.

Final thought: We think this is an amazing opportunity to create a wonderful new all purpose Community Hub for Marple. We would like to see the most made of this, even if it takes longer to achieve. If all of the existing old buildings in the park are not replaced by the new facilities then we think this will have been an opportunity missed.

Friends of Marple Memorial Park 20 April 2020