

Friends of Marple Memorial Park
Thursday 13 July 2023
Marple Library

Present: Mick Thompson, Micaela Wood, Terry Wood, Joyce Reed, Diane Jackson, Mark Whittaker.

1.0 Apologies: Lorraine Thompson, Bob Wilson, Malcolm Allan, Cllr Becky Senior, Alan Darnell.

2.0 Minutes of Meeting 11 May 2023: Agreed.

3.0 Matters Arising:

3.1 Antisocial Behaviour / CCTV / Police

ASB Update

ASB issues have continued to be low, although we did have an off-road motorbike roar through the park on Sunday just after the Werneth Band finished playing. The rider did a "wheelie" all the way along the main path putting park users' safety at risk.

The incident was reported to police, councillors and council officers and we asked for CCTV to be investigated. The bike entered the park next to the chained Hollins House entrance, so if the cameras are now working then footage should be available.

Email communications with police have continued following departure of PC Matthew Mayers and PCSO Simon Carr was in the park during the concert on Sunday but unfortunately left before the off-road biker incident.

There has been some very offensive graffiti at the skatepark that the council asked us to paint over and this has been dealt with promptly.

CCTV Update

In April Cllr Allan advised that work was ongoing to restore the links from the CCTV cameras to the main control room. Mark asked for an update when reporting the off-road bike incident and has also emailed Cllr. Senior asking for support on this matter, clarifying that we would like to view what the cameras can see and witness the cycle of the pan-tilt-zoom camera that was relocated in 2018.

Jon Headlam indicated in his response to the off-road bike incident that the cameras are now said to be working. (***Post Meeting Note:** this was followed up on 24 July asking for feedback on the investigation, who was conducting it, and a request to Marple North Councillors to please take the CCTV issues up on our behalf.*)

Actions ongoing from Crime Survey recommendations

Artwork to Bowlers' Hut: Installation of the artwork has now been fully completed. This also completes all our actions raised during the Crime Survey conducted with police, councillors and council officers in March 2022.

3.2 Buildings and Infrastructure

Pavilion Art Project Phase II:

This is the next task to look at now the artwork to the Bowlers Hut is finished.

Skatepark Jump-box repair:

New Hubba is installed and looks great. We hope it skates as well as it looks. We're really pleased the council listened and dealt with this before it became a problem.

Long grass areas, reduced weedkiller usage, log seating

TLC has messed up by mowing some of the long-grass areas – especially the one in the centre of the park. This is despite clear written and verbal instructions with maps that were also displayed in the Mess Room. We hope they do better going forward.

The areas left are growing at very different rates.

We've had feedback from a child-minder that dog mess left in the long grass is an issue. We will need to keep an eye on this and take it into consideration.

We have learned that the tractor spotted in the park mowing grass is not the same one as used for emptying the green waste area, or was to be used for transporting the oak logs to the park. The one able to do those jobs is still awaiting repair.

In view of this we engaged with the community and Drew Collett, owner of Shelby Landscapes Ltd, came to our aid and transported the logs to the park for us.

The logs have now been installed in the centre of the park and we hope the young people who have been displaced from near lock 11 will make good use of them.

We need to consider whether to raise the emptying of the green waste area as a safety matter – both in respect of it being set on fire during the summer holidays and also in relation to our own volunteers' manual handling of green waste bins.

It was noted that the park looks much better for the reduction in use of weedkiller on grassed areas but the main entrance and hard standing areas need doing.

It was reported that horse muck has been dumped near to the vandalised silver birch tree near to lock 11. This will be investigated during our next task day.

Park Benches

New Commemorative Benches

Good news is that the four new benches were installed in the correct locations and all donors appear to be satisfied. **The bad news is they are the wrong benches.**

We very clearly specified seats with extended legs for concreting in, as per the existing benches we were matching, and as provided as standard by the supplier.

Instead, the benches installed are the "optional" version with pedestal legs.

The specification sheets sent to the council for each bench were very very clear but someone has changed them and not checked or questioned this with us.

The council has also claimed in an email that the benches are as specified by us, which is absolutely and totally untrue, and quite appalling really.

While most of the benches currently look reasonable, we're very uncertain about the longevity of the way they've been attached directly to the slabs instead of concreting into the ground. We don't believe these will be as trouble free as the ones installed correctly that have been in for 25 years, and one is rocking already. Two of them are also not level due to the way this design has been used on non-level ground.

On 30 June Mark made it clear to the council officer concerned just how disappointing this is from our point of view, especially on top of all the other issues we've had. So far there has been no response or acknowledgement whatsoever from the council.

We've also made it clear that we will no longer facilitate between potential donors and the council with regard to installing any future new benches in the park.

A potential donor who has been in regular contact has been referred to the council and all existing and new enquiries will be redirected for the council to deal with.

The council is expected to invoice donors directly and we will not be involved in that.

This has been a hugely negative experience for us at so many steps along the way.

McFall family Bench

The plaque on the McFall family bench has been updated in accordance with their wishes. The cost of this was £148.80, which the family paid plus a £100 donation.

Rainbow Bench Trial

Patrick has declined to take on the mini-project to paint one of the brown metal benches on the main path in rainbow colours. Mark will look into this instead.

Town Centre Benches

It's proving a challenge to find the time to tackle these so far this year. We may have to consider whether we can continue to do this or if we need to hand over to others.

Community Hub

No change, we're still waiting for the council to consult with us as stakeholders.

In March the council's update said they will shortly be announcing timescales for pre-planning engagement with stakeholders and this is still the current message on the council web site. Shortly obviously means something different in council world.

We hear the library closes in September and the swimming pool will be demolished.

We have repeatedly expressed our wishes to discuss the possible location to councillors, particularly to former Cllr. Allan in these meetings. Now that Malcolm is no longer a councillor we are worried all that dialogue will be water under the bridge.

Early engagement was good but since submitting our location ideas in March 2021 and asking for them to be discussed with us we have been kept at arms length and our repeated requests for discussions since then have been refused.

We're concerned whatever is planned now will be steamrolled through whether we like it or not and there will be no time to have a properly considered debate.

We are also concerned at the impact on the park during construction, especially with regard to access restrictions and availability of play areas.

We're disappointed the council has refused to keep us in the loop for so long but look forward to the promised engagement. We hope it won't just be a box-ticking exercise and we will be given the opportunity to properly consider what is best for the park.

Roundabout in infants play area

The roundabout has at last been repaired and reinstalled.

Pirate Ship in infants play area

The Ship is again missing its drumsticks. This equipment has proved a poor investment as there have been problems ever since it was new. First the drums failed and after that the drumsticks have had to be replaced over and over again.

This was raised with Richard Booker for an update. (**Post Meeting Note:** *Richard has advised that a new set of drumsticks has now been placed on order.*)

Swinging basket in junior play area

The basket was taken away for repairs some time ago. This has been followed up with Richard, who advised that they have been waiting for advice from the manufacturer and the basket should be refitted before the start of the school holidays.

Play area accessibility (new volunteer)

Mark met with a lady called Mary on Monday who wishes to ensure that accessible play equipment is available within the park. She has engaged with one of our local councillors and was advised to wait for the community hub development.

Mary decided to speak with us after learning about our Exercise Equipment Project.

Mark explained the situation with regard to the community hub to Mary, and that despite the lack of recent engagement with us, we hope to be fully involved and have a big influence on what equipment eventually goes into the new play area.

With that in mind, Mary agreed to join us as a new volunteer with a special interest in accessible play equipment. While we're waiting for developments on the community hub to become clearer, Mary will focus on researching what accessible equipment is available and, more importantly, what actually works well and what doesn't. This will probably involve visiting other local parks, the way we did for the exercise equipment, and hopefully engaging with parents of local children with accessibility needs too.

This was felt to be really positive and we look forward to Mary's involvement.

3.3 Projects

Outdoor Exercise Equipment Project

The installation costs came in at £13,119.96. This was almost £1,500 more than we had allowed, on top of almost £1,500 extra cost on the equipment supply too.

We had already covered the extra equipment costs, so asked the council if they could find another £1,000 towards the increased installation costs and they agreed to this.

So the total project cost is almost £33,000 and our total contribution will be £28,428.84. This is £1,928.84 more than we had set-aside but we are able to cover the increase thanks to the success of this year's Family Treasure Hunt in May.

Total funding is made up as follows:

£25,328.84	Raised directly by Friends of the Park.
£1,500.00	Macnair Trust Grant award (received).
£1,000.00	Marple Area Committee Flexibility Fund Grant (received).
£600.00	Donation from Marple Hall School (received).
£4,500.00	Stockport Council contributions.

£32,928.84 Grand total for supply and install.

Good news on project progress is that the equipment is now manufactured and delivered. Slightly disappointing news is that due to the contractor's existing workload the installation start is only pencilled in to begin on Monday 4th September, so we will not have the equipment in the park for the summer holidays as we'd hoped.

We look forward to completing this new addition to the park. We hope it will be well used and popular with the local community. After it's installed we will be able to assess the level of support for raising funds for a Cross-Trainer and Arm Bike.

Skatepark Art Mural

Helen has completed transfer of the artwork to the ramps. It seems to be popular and we are very pleased. It appears to be respected too and has been left alone so far.

There has been offensive graffiti elsewhere that we have painted over at the council's request. We've agreed with the council and Helen to leave the Mickey Mouse mural on the back of the ramps, although the council don't like the "finger". A couple of attempts by Helen to cover this up with a smiley face sticker have not lasted.

We've been asked to leave another item said to be a tribute to a young person who has died. As it isn't offensive have been able to do that. (**Post Meeting Note:** *this has now been painted over with a large tag, presumably by other young users*).

We've listened to advice from Helen, who has engaged with some of the users while she painted the top ramps. She suggested limiting over-painting at the bottom of the skatepark to offensive material and giving leeway to users to make it their own.

Allotment beds

The beds are proving successful and we've had some good radishes and pak-choy so far with onions, beetroot and potatoes nearly ready.

We may have a new volunteer interested in looking after the bed.

Infants Play Area picnic benches

The synthetic surfaces under the picnic benches have now been installed. They look great and seem to be performing much better than the loose gravel replaced.

Thanks to Marple Area Committee for funding this from their delegated budget.

We should now be able to get the second bench top installed.

Refurbishment of the stocks

Terry has now completed this project and it looks great. He has not attempted to age the wood as it will happen over time and would not have been done back in the day.

Vintage style locks in marine stainless were purchased at a cost of £35.17.

Mark will source a new plaque recording the history of refurbishments.

Covid Commemoration Project: Flag Pole & Memorial

The price for the monument element of the memorial came in at £4,634.95. This took the full project £1,059,64 over the original £5k budget allocated to Marple North.

We've received a £400 contribution from Marple Mutual Aid Group and we have agreed to fund the £200 cost of refurbishment works to the war memorial flagpole ourselves. These contributions reduced the budget shortfall to £459.64.

All projects across the borough were called in by the Exec Member responsible in May and this has worked to our advantage as extra funding to cover the budget shortfall has been approved and we now have the full go-ahead to proceed.

Placing of the order is currently held pending feedback requested by officers from Marple North Ward Councillors. We've also issued a report to them advising that we need to move forward with the order while the quote remains valid and encouraged them to respond to requests for comments or questions.

(Post Meeting Note: after further requests for feedback from councillors without any responses, the order on Maysand for the monument was placed on 25 July 2023.)

We've agreed that the date on the monument inscription will be JULY 2023, reflecting the month that the project was given full approval to go ahead.

The next key stages will be to receive order confirmation from Maysand with installation timescales and a to-scale proof of the stone inscription for approval.

War Memorial Flag Pole

The maintenance work on the flagpole has now been completed successfully.

As the overall budget for the COVID memorial was so tight we have agreed to fund the £200 cost of this element of the work from our own reserves.

We now need to ensure that plants are kept clear from around the flagpole base to minimise the need for further maintenance in the future.

Moving the goalposts

The council has agreed to provide a bag of topsoil to fill in the existing goal mouths and pot holes as part of this but we've decided to wait for details of how the community hub will impact the park before doing it as the work may be abortive.

Wildflower areas

We recently agreed to take back the flowerbed adopted by the Scouts then cleared and prepared it during the Treasure Hunt task day. We then planted Yellow Rattle plugs grown by Joyce and Gill and sowed wildflower seed, including some provided by Cheshire Wildlife Trust. The area has also been staked and roped off to protect it and the bed has been watered regularly during the hot dry weather.

So far there doesn't seem to be much happening, apart from "weeds" and some tiny green shoots. We may have to try again in the autumn but at least this area will be easier to experiment on a smaller scale and hopefully discover what does work.

Basketball Nets

We were contacted on 13 June by a user asking if we could replace the basketball nets. We hadn't realised there were any nets as the council don't usually fit them.

The user explained that it is a much better experience playing with nets and after speaking with Richard Booker we concluded that some users must have fitted them.

The existing hoops don't have hooks for attaching nets and it is quite awkward to fit them using tape or cable-ties. Richard suggested that he could order some new hoops with hooks but it would take two to three weeks for them to arrive and be fitted.

We asked Richard to go ahead with that and in the meantime we ordered a pair of nets plus Velcro ties and fitted them on 19 June. The user who contacted us was delighted and donated £20 via Local Giving, which more than covered our costs.

Richard also provided details of a scheme called Project Swish, which is operated by Sport England to provide free nets for free to use courts. We applied for a set.

(Post Meeting Note: New hoops have now been fitted by the council, including a new set of nets. We've received our free nets from Project Swish and these can be fitted once the current ones are worn out. It will be interesting to discover how long a set of nets last but hopefully we can work with users to keep them supplied.)

Magic Little Grant

No change – we still need to identify a small project costing around £500 that would be suitable for us to make a Magic Little Grant application to Local Giving in 2023.

3.4 Task Days

Task Days since the last meeting were held on 13 & 27 May, 3, 10 & 24 June.

Our 6-monthly Task Day application for 1 July to 31 December 2023 has been submitted and approved by the council.

Parking is arranged until end of July. (*PMN: Now arranged until end November*).

4.0 Funding - Status of Funds

Some amazing and unexpected news is that Marple Hall School has made an unsolicited donation of £1,000. They advised that this was raised by the school for local causes and they wanted to donate £600 to Friends of the Park and £400 for the Marple Skatepark Development Project. Mark explained to them that this is effectively the same thing but advised that we would ring-fence the £400 to be spent on the skatepark only. Initial thoughts are this could support activities by Earl and Helen.

Income since last meeting:

- £1,610.00 Treasure Hunt Sponsorship since 9 May 2023.
- £1,000.00 Donation from Marple Hall School.
- £602.58 Treasure Hunt Cash: Raffle, donations, cake sale etc.

£482.00	50-50 Club (including donations).
£400.00	Marple Mutual Aid (Covid Memorial contribution).
£364.64	Local Giving.
£248.80	McFall family.
£134.99	Park collection bucket.
£89.50	Gill's cards.
£50.00	Donation from K. Burgess.
£47.00	Di's Jewellery.
£30.00	Band Room SO.
£15.93	Shop collection boxes.
£5,075.44	Total

Expenditure since last meeting:

£162.53	Refurbishment of stocks.
£148.80	New plaque for McFall bench.
£108.00	12 Hi-vis vests.
£93.94	Cable-ties, basketball nets, stakes for logs & watering cans.
£83.13	Materials for fixing Artwork on Bowlers Hut.
£71.88	Stakes and rope for wildflower bed.
£35.17	Padlocks for stocks.
£703.45	Total

Balance in main account: £33,330.21

Committed future spends:

£28,428.84	Outdoor Exercise Equipment.
£400.00	Covid Memorial (from MMA).
£400.00	Ring-fenced for Skatepark (from Marple Hall School).
£200.00	War memorial flagpole maintenance.
£29,428.84	Total

Unallocated working balance: £3,901.37

Note: We have a fair amount of cash to pay in including nearly £200 from Benji's Pet Food & Accessories and £175 from Marple Carnival. (*PMN: Now done.*)

5.0 Any Other Business

5.1 Family Treasure Hunt: 27 May 2023

A great success, with £3,575 raised for the park. The outcome has enabled us to proceed with the Outdoor Exercise Equipment Project despite escalating costs.

The money raised included record sponsorship from local businesses of £2,867.

Sadly one business, Bridgfords, has not paid their sponsorship and has not responded to requests to resolve, even when letters have been delivered by hand. They were included in the programme as sponsors because we took it on trust that they would pay. This is very disappointing and obviously we will not include them again.

Diane will follow-up the photo frame idea with Tracy and Pete at Art Stop CIC.

5.2 Little Growers

This was done at the Treasure Hunt and Marple Carnival using Wall Flower seeds. It is much better than doing it in March and April and seemed popular with the children. It will be interesting to see how many come back to be planted in the park.

Joyce has sown the surplus seeds at home now and they are growing well.

5.3 Carnival Saturday 17 June 2023

The Carnival location next to our allotment beds was a little quieter for us than we expected but a total of £175.81 was raised for the park, which is a good result. This was made up of £60 on Jewellery, £24.50 on cards, £15 on books and skatepark tee-shirts, £40 on Splat the Rat (well done Neil) and £36 in donations.

5.4 Open Gardens in Marple

Mark and Gill raised £432 in their garden and we understand the total for CRUK has reached £10k and still counting. It was quiet in the park on the Saturday but Sunday was better and the weather held for the concert by Werneth Concert Band.

Thank you to everyone who helped out over the weekend!

5.5 Makers Market / Food and Drink Festival

We have a stall booked for this on Saturday 16 September 2023.

We will sell cards and jewellery and anything else thought suitable.

5.6 Hiroshima Survivor Tree

We awaiting news of a decision from the council.

5.7 External changes to Hollins House Fire Escape

No news. We have kept this on our agenda so we can monitor progress. Mark will write to Paul Hartley asking for an update. (*PMN: email sent 24 July 2023.*)

5.8 Marple Civic Society's idea for an accessible woodland

After speaking with us at our last meeting and gaining our support in principle, MCS contacted the council's Tree Officer Anthony Crook. He responded as follows:

Whilst I appreciate your enthusiasm to this project and for trees in Marple I am unable to agree to anything on this site currently until the sites overall masterplan is known and agreed. I feel for now it would be prudent to look at alternative sites.

5.9 Crazy Golf?

Micaela suggested a new project to include Crazy Golf in the park. We're not sure this could be made to work and certainly couldn't consider it until after the Community Hub is resolved and built. Maybe it is something we can look at after that?

6.0 Next Meeting

Thursday 10 August 2023 at around 5.50pm for 6pm start in Marple Library.

Future dates for 2023 (library bookings all confirmed BUT closing in September?):
Thursdays: 10 August, 14 September, 12 October, 9 November, 14 December.