

Dear Community Hub Team,

Comments on updated Community Hub Scheme

The attached file includes a response to your questions concerning access.

This is part of a wider set of comments we have on the updated scheme now that we've had the opportunity to look more closely at it.

We encourage the council to take these onboard before making the planning application.

Failure to treat Friends of the Park in the way we deserve

Friends of the Park's disappointment at the council's failure to engage with us on the Community Hub scheme after March 2021, despite our persistent efforts to get them to do so, is well documented.

Of particular disappointment is the council's failure to discuss with us the alternative location for the Community Hub building that we suggested way back in March 2021, and still believe could be a better option. We've lost count of the number of times we asked the council to discuss this with us and of course now it is far too late.

In September 2023 we sat around the table with council representatives who led us to believe that this would all change and going forward we would be treated as "Key Stakeholders" in the park.

Unfortunately this did not happen in anything like the way we expected. We have been treated in exactly the same way as all other Marple Community "stakeholders" and kept at arms-length again.

As a group that has invested 20+ years caring for the park, with more than 35,000 volunteer hours worked and almost half a million pounds of investment in projects to improve it, we believe we had earned the right to expect far better treatment than we've received throughout this whole process.

Friends of the Park made extensive comments on the scheme presented for consultation in September 2023. Throughout our comments we asked (and were expecting) the council to discuss and engage with us, to talk options through and find the best solutions for the park.

Although we are thankful that many of our comments have been incorporated into the updated scheme (and it is now far better for that) sadly the detailed engagement we hoped for just hasn't happened. As if intent on making matters worse the council unwisely agreed to meet us on 2nd February to discuss our comments in detail, only to stonewall at the meeting and refuse to discuss anything with us.

If you have read the minutes of the last Friends Group meeting I shared with you recently you will be aware that my wife and I have decided to wind down our involvement in Friends of the Park after 20+ years at the helm. The way the group has been treated over the Community Hub engagement since March 2021 is a key factor in this decision, although not the only one.

I hope there is some learning in all this for the council about how to engage properly with well established community groups and to treat committed volunteers, although I suspect nothing will change.

I will continue in my role as Chairman for the next couple of months while the group works out how it can continue. I and other committee members will remain available for discussions during that time if required.

Kind regards,

Mark Whittaker

Chairman, Friends of Marple Memorial Park.

19 February 2024.