

**Friends of Marple Memorial Park Meeting  
Thursday 8 February 2024  
Marple Library**

**Present:** Mick Thompson, Lorraine Thompson, Joyce Reed, Diane Jackson, Mark Whittaker.

**1.0 Apologies:** Bob Wilson, Micaela Wood, Terry Wood, Patrick O'Herlihy.

**2.0 Minutes of Meeting 9 November 2023:** Agreed.

**3.0 Matters Arising:**

**3.1 Park Toilets**

The park toilets were vandalised just before Christmas. Someone came to the park armed to break in and deliberately trash them, doing extensive damage.

The council has taken far longer than necessary to repair them but the toilets have at last been reopened this week. The ladies could have reopened weeks ago.

An expensive SS toilet pan has been fitted in the gents. We are not sure why as the block will eventually be demolished as part of the Community Hub Project.

The electric hand-dryer in the gents has still to be repaired.

**3.2 Outdoor Exercise Equipment**

The quality of installation of the equipment coupled with extensive delays has been a huge disappointment that has seriously damaged the sense of achievement for us.

Matters are finally nearing conclusion and the equipment is operational.

The Combi 5 carpet has been completely replaced and all missing caps and covers have been fitted. The following items remain outstanding:

- Resin coating of the City Bike tarmac due to poor quality.
- Resin coating of the Mag Bells tarmac to match the City Bike.
- We have also requested several times that the Combi 5 tarmac is resin coated too, so they all match, but so far had no response from the council.
- Laying of tarmac to the Mag Bells unit revealed that the ground buffers under the bells were installed too deep in the ground. The solution to this is that the council have arranged for the fabrication and installation of some retro-fit ground buffers, the cost of which will be deducted from the installation contractor because it is their error. We understand fabrication is ongoing.
- The instruction board on the Mag Bells has scratches to be touched up.
- There is a misaligned / cross-threaded bolt on the sit-up board.
- We have asked several times why there are no security caps on the bolts on the City Bike base, as fitted on the bikes at Werneth Park, but no response so far.
- We await confirmation that RoSPA inspections have been completed.

**Final demand and threat of court action!**

As if all the issues we've had on this project weren't enough, on 17 December we received an incredibly aggressive and unjustified final demand invoice threatening debt collection and court action against us for failure to pay for the equipment supply.

The warning, sent by the Deputy Chief Executive and Corporate Director Michael J Cullen no less, even made reference to a previous reminder that was not true.

The truth of the matter is that the invoice for £19,808.88 issued on 1 August 2023 was placed on hold after Mark asked to see the delivered equipment in storage before we made such a large payment. The council decided it was easier to place it on hold until the equipment was on site and Mark (thankfully with hindsight) agreed to this.

When the installation issues came to light it was at first uncertain if they were caused by supply errors or just installation contractor incompetence, so it was left on hold.

Mark met on site with Richard Booker on 7 December to review progress. As it was now clear there was no fault with the equipment supply, all issues were down to the contractor, he agreed that the hold could be lifted and we would pay the invoice.

Richard has advised retrospectively that he gave clear instruction to the council's accounts team that the invoice should be reset to the standard 30 day payment cycle. It appears that the accounts team could not, or would not, do this and their (perhaps not fit for purpose) system went straight to issuing these horrendous threats.

After explaining the correct situation to all concerned suitable apologies were received, including one from Mr Cullen, and the invoice was paid on 19 December.

The warning notice was addressed to Mark personally as well as the Friends Group, so he followed up by asking the council to ensure there were no flags or records set within their system or elsewhere about the spurious warning. A reply is still awaited.

Mark also asked the council to ensure we are NOT invoiced for our contribution toward the installation until everything is fully completed and they are sure we are happy.

### **3.3 Community Hub**

#### **Meeting with Marple Pool representatives Friday 2<sup>nd</sup> February**

Last Friday Mick, Di, Gill and Mark attended a meeting with two representatives of the Marple Pool team. We had asked to go through our consultation comments in detail with them and received a reply to confirm they would be able to do that but at the meeting they refused to give us any information or discuss any details with us.

It was very frustrating and we are bemused as to why they agreed to the meeting rather than tell us that they were not in a position to discuss any details with us prior to the Stakeholder Meeting today. We have registered our disappointment with them.

#### **Key Stakeholder Meeting Thursday 8<sup>th</sup> February**

Mick, Di and Mark attended this presentation and Q&A session today. It went much better than we expected and we were relieved to find that many of our suggestions have been taken on board and the design has changed significantly.

Key items for us are that the entrance has been moved to the east end of the building, the Police Station is to go but police vehicles will enter / exit via Parkfield Avenue, which addresses our concerns about "blue light" traffic on the main drive.

Paths are greatly improved and generally follow desire lines as suggested.

The back of the building will be fenced to stop shortcuts through the woodland.

Unfortunately the ugly extension on Hollins House will not be removed.

The site layout used during the presentation is not yet available online but once it is we can have a more detailed look at the changes, especially around the play area.

We need to respond to an enquiry about our vehicular access for task days and park maintenance and will include any further comments on the latest scheme too.

The library will be closed 29<sup>th</sup> February until 3<sup>rd</sup> March for ground investigations.

There is still no news on the temporary library location.

### **3.4 Change of leadership for Friends of the Park**

Mark was sad to announce that he and Gill will need to wind down their involvement in the group over the next two to three months. This is primarily driven by family and health issues necessitating a reassessment of priorities, but a number of other frustrating park-related issues have influenced this decision too:

- Council choosing to stop engaging with us as stakeholders in the park over CCTV when it was us who instigated improvements in the first place.
- Refusal to treat us as we believe key stakeholders in the park, who have dedicated over 20 years of effort to maintain it and brought in nearly half a million pounds of investment in projects to improve it, should be.
- Ordering and installation of the wrong commemorative benches by the council despite a clear written specification being provided. Difficulties throughout the whole process also fuelled our refusal to facilitate any more new benches.
- Frustration and disappointment at exercise equipment problems.
- Stress caused by unwarranted and aggressive threat of court action.
- Trashing of toilet bed and denial of responsibility until proved by us.
- Jobsworth attitude on use of Rec toilet block for storage of an anvil.

Mark advised that he and Gill hope to find ways for others to take over between now and March / April and hope the committee will support us as we try to do this in a positive way. They will need to consider their own wishes too of course.

Committee members and volunteers present understood the background and reasons for this decision and were very supportive in response to this difficult news.

All being well Mark and Gill will lead task days at end of February and March and hope new and existing volunteers may consider getting more involved during this time.

Towards the end of this period we will need to assess if the group remains viable with new and existing volunteers involved, or if the group will have to be dissolved.

Everyone hopes that a way to avoid that final course of action can be found.

The situation was discussed at length and everyone felt it would be impossible, certainly in the short term, for anyone to pick up all the work that Mark has been doing, which is almost a full-time job. The general consensus was that a workable approach would be to downsize the group's activities and focus on the core aspect of task days for garden and park maintenance – especially the main flowerbeds.

This would mean that larger park projects and fundraising could be down-sized, giving the time for new people to pick up the reins without too much pressure. The group could then re-evolve gradually to whatever level its volunteers wanted to take it.

If it is viable for the group to continue under new leadership Mark and Gill will do their best to advise and support. If dissolution is the only option then they will help to steer this to a conclusion in accordance with the group's governing documents.

### **3.5 Ongoing / Final Projects**

#### **Outdoor Exercise Equipment Project**

As covered earlier, this project has become very difficult and frustrating for us. It hasn't really been possible for us to celebrate our achievements as we'd hoped.

With the outstanding works finally nearing completion Mark should be able to see the project out. Once all remaining work and snags are resolved to our satisfaction we can agree to receive the invoice and pay our contribution of £8,619.96 towards the installation works. The council will no doubt wish to close out before the FY end.

### **Covid Commemoration Project: Flag Pole & Memorial**

We've received and paid the invoice for the £400 contribution to the Covid Memorial generously provided by Marple Mutual Aid, and also our £200 for flagpole repair.

This project is now fully completed and closed out.

### **Remedial works to French Boules Court**

Mark has asked the council for prices covering straightforward refurbishment of the Boules Court with new sleepers and a top dressing, and also for refurbishment plus extending the court by 5m so that it would be easier to hold two games.

They have recently provided the following estimates from a Petanque specialist:

#### **Option 1: £5,727**

##### **Replace sleepers and make good playing material as existing 15.1mx4.2m**

Works will include the break out of the existing timbers; Supply and lay of concrete base for the new timber edges; Supply and install new timber sleepers; Perimeter edge repair; and Supply and Lay of 50mm re-dress of the existing surface.

#### **Option 2: £6,887**

##### **Replace the sleepers, make good the playing material and extend the playing area by 5mx4.2m (lengthways).**

As above with additional works and materials to extend (inc additional base works).

Mark felt these prices were high, possibly due to the concrete base. He has asked the council to get quotes from ordinary landscape contractors so that we can compare.

Mick agreed prices seemed high and alternative quotes should be sought.

If things can be agreed quickly Mark will oversee this project to a conclusion.

### **New moveable goalposts**

The cost for supply only of new goalposts and two sets of sockets so that they can be moved to allow the ground to recover is in the region of £1,500.

Mark has asked the council to provide a confirmed price for supply and installation.

If things can be agreed quickly Mark will oversee this project to a conclusion.

### **3.6 Task Days**

The latest approved application covers Task Days until the end of June 2024.

Task Days can be held on any day during the approved period covered by the application but the normal calendar of dates would be Saturdays: 27 January, 24 February, 16 & 30 March, 13 & 27 April, 11 & 25 May, 15 & 29 June 2024.

Free parking is approved on all the above dates for the normal vehicles.

Parking would not be covered on any additional ad-hoc task days.

Mark and Gill will lead task days on Saturday 24 February and Saturday 30 March if personal matters allow. After those dates others will need to lead and take ownership of risk assessments, inductions, task day notifications and applications etc.

Other volunteers who have done the Task Leader training are: Mick, Larry, Bernard, Patrick, Terry, Micaela and Bob. Not all will feel able or wish to step up and lead.

Training is available again from the council, subject to a waiting list, so Mark will ask other existing volunteers if they are interested in receiving this too.

Some may feel they need a refresher as it is quite a few years since last training.

#### **4.0 Funding - Status of Funds**

2023 Year End accounts are prepared and Mark will submit to McInnes for review.

##### **Income since 9 December 2023 Update**

£127.32 Local Giving

£25.00 Donation from Bowling Club

£502.00 50-50 Club (December & January)

£30.00 Band Room

£61.00 Collection boxes / park bucket

**£745.32 Total**

##### **Expenditure since 9 December 2023 Update**

£19,808.88 SMBC (Exercise Equipment supply)

£400.00 SMBC (MMA contribution to Covid Memorial)

£200.00 SMBC (War Memorial Flagpole repair)

**£20,404.88 Total**

Balance in main account: £17,413.42

##### **Committed future spends: £9,019.96**

£8,619.96 Outdoor Exercise Equipment.

£400.00 Ring-fenced for Skatepark (from Marple Hall School).

##### **Unallocated working balance: £8,393.46**

Provisionally proposed projects are Boules Court Refurbishment and Goalposts.

We have cheques of £100 from Marple Carnival + £50 from an anon donor to pay in.

We also have an amount of mixed change in partly filled cash bags.

##### **Financial issues going forward:**

The following financial matters will need to be consider in the coming period:

##### **50-50 Club Small Lottery**

This is an IT challenge to operate and will need a new "Promoter" to be registered with Stockport Council's licencing team to manage it and submit monthly returns.

If the group is to downsize and focus more on gardening and less on projects then we must consider if it is appropriate to continue or if the club should be wound down.

We need to keep subscribers informed so they can make their own choices too.

##### **Local Giving**

This currently brings in an income of around £1,000 a year and costs £180 PA.

It also gives access to Local Giving's Magic Little Grant scheme.

It is less onerous than the 50-50 Club but needs IT skills to manage online.

It is due for annual renewal in April, so we need to decide whether to continue.

##### **Band Room Garden monthly payments**

As long as we can carry on maintaining the garden then this should be fine to continue as is, but if not we will need to notify the Band Room team.

## **Public Liability insurance**

We only need PLI for our own events and to attend others, such as the Carnival and Food and Drink Festival. Task Days are covered by the council's insurance.

The policy renewal is due 24 April, so we must decide if we need it by that time.

PLI could be allowed to lapse and taken out again in the future if it became necessary.

### **4.1 Continue, become dormant or dissolve the group**

The constitution specifies a minimum of five committee members, including those fulfilling the roles of Chairman, Treasurer and Secretary. This should be possible and is what we would like to achieve. Other options include winding the group down into a dormant state so that others can pick-up in the future but if there is no support for doing one of these it may be necessary to dissolve the group as per the constitution:

*'The Friends' may be dissolved by a resolution passed by a 2/3 majority of those present and voting at an AGM. This resolution may give instructions for the disposal of any assets held by or in the name of the group provided that if any property remains after the payment of all debts and liabilities, such property shall not be given or distributed among the members but shall be given to other organisations having similar conservation objectives as 'The Friends'.*

The current expectation of those present is that it should be possible to continue the activities of the group, albeit at a reduced level that is focused on core activities.

We now need to allow some time for all the issues to be discussed and considered by everyone concerned before implementing the best way forward.

## **5.0 Any Other Business**

### **5.1 Civic Society Woodland scheme**

We're pleased the Community Hub Team have agreed to our requests to support this scheme as a good way to compensate for any trees that have to be removed.

The Civic Society has arranged a meeting with the council on Friday 29 February to discuss the scheme in more detail. The society has requested we join them but Mark is not prepared to engage with the officer involved and no one else wished to do so either. Mark will reiterate our support to the society and send our apologies.

## **6.0 Next Meeting**

6pm Thursday 14 March 2024 in Marple Library.