

**Friends of Marple Memorial Park Meeting
Monday 12th December 2011
Marple Library**

Present: Terry Wood, Micaela Wood, Joyce Reed, Bob Wilson, Gavin Eyquem, Lorraine Thompson, Mick Thompson, Patrick O'Herlihy, Mark Whittaker.

1.0 Apologies: Adrian Ellis.

2.0 Minutes of the last meeting: Mac's bench is no. 7 not 6, otherwise agreed.

3.0 Matters Arising.

3.1 Park Benches

Preservatives and Sanding Materials

It was not clear if the sanding materials have been delivered yet so Mark will check with Adrian. *(Post meeting note: sanding materials are available.)*

Replacement of bench near Junior Play Area (No. 17 on survey)

An invoice for £660 has been received and paid. Mark has contacted the Yarwood family to make sure they are happy with their new commemorative bench. *(Post meeting note: The family have confirmed that they are very pleased.)*

Refurbishment of second bench near Junior Play Area (No. 16 on survey)

Terry presented an invoice for £250 to cover the materials ordered through the David Lewis Centre and a cheque for this was signed during the meeting.

Replacement of bench near to the Bowling Green (No. 2 on survey)

The new bench paid for by the Kay family was delivered to Brabyns on 6 December.

Mark will review with Adrian how to modify the base to suit the ground fixings.

Refurbishment of bench SE of Bowling Green (No. 6 on survey)

Patrick has successfully obtained a donation of £300 towards the refurbishment of this bench from Marple Business Forum. Mark will write to thank them.

Terry has ordered the hardwood through the David Lewis Centre at a cost of £216.

A plaque will be needed to acknowledge the MBF sponsorship of the bench refurbishment. Terry and Mark will investigate a suitable size / design.

Refurbishment of Mac's Bench (No. 7 on survey)

The McFall family have made a generous donation of £150 towards maintenance work in the park and have thanked the group for their efforts.

The slats have been removed from Mac's bench and Terry has made good progress re-surfacing and treating them. He advised that they are solid Oak and the grain is really good. He will need to trial fit them to identify if the bolts need to be shortened but otherwise they are ready to be reinstalled.

The base and steel uprights were jet washed during the November task day and the uprights need to be painted. Unfortunately the weather has not been suitable recently but it is hoped that an opportunity will arise soon.

This type of bench is used throughout the park and the group have been impressed with the design of the stainless steel bolting system that allows them to be dismantled easily even after many years in service. Mark has contacted Streetmaster, the supplier, for a list of prices for replacement parts.

Refurbishment of seat/benches on driveway into the Park

These comprise a seat formed from two brick columns that used to have a wooden plank across them and two concrete and timber benches in very poor condition.

Alan Proctor of Marple Civic Society has asked if the Friends of the Park can cover the cost of materials to refurbish the brick column seat if he organises the labour.

Mark has asked David Myers of Myers Tree Care if he has a suitable piece of timber for this purpose and it sounds promising that he does.

Alan has also expressed an interest in refurbishing the two concrete and timber benches near to the Co-Op / park entrance. Terry has already obtained timber to repair these but it was felt his time would be better spent on the sponsored benches and it was agreed to welcome and support Alan's efforts to restore these other seats.

Mark will liaise between the various parties.

3.2 Picnic Bench made by the David Lewis Centre

The £80 cost of this bench was included on the David Lewis Centre invoice presented by Terry and was also paid during the meeting.

Mark will chase Adrian up about the installation. *(Post meeting note: It has been agreed to postpone the installation until the spring. This is a practical decision, as the bench will not receive much use over the winter, but frustrating that it has taken so long to overcome the council's issues over its supply and it is still not installed.)*

3.3 Diamond Jubilee Project

Design

The group reviewed the concept board design provided by Rebecca Knowles of Cheadle and Marple Sixth Form College. Rebecca's design is inspired by the 1952 Coronation and brings together items such as the giant illuminations on the Mall, the ceremonial orb, the crown jewels used during the coronation ceremony and the Cosmati Pavement inside Westminster Abbey.

The key elements of the design include a hard landscape raised border with details hinting at the Cosmati Pavement, an orb mounted above an elevated metal sculpture inspired by the Mall illuminations and a planted area featuring the colours and shapes of the crown jewels and Cosmati Pavement.

The group agreed that the design concept was inspirational and whilst some of the ideas and features may be difficult to achieve within a realistic budget, it provides a very good basis to go forward and develop a practical and affordable scheme appropriate to the level of funding that can be raised.

Patrick will review his contacts and get in touch with anyone who may be able to help with the ground works and hard landscaping or materials.

Mark will talk further with Rebecca about ordering of plants, which needs to be done in February, about growing them on, the cost of the hard landscape works and also about involving Wayne Chaisty for the metal sculpture element of the project.

Funding

Funding will be a key issue if we are to achieve success with this project. It is expected that we will need a minimum of £5,000 and this may be on the low side!

The Macnair trust has already donated £600 and the group have pledged £1,000 of their existing funds. It is hoped that the concept design will now help to inspire contributions from a variety of other sources to turn this into a community project.

Mark advised that The Marple Website would donate the year-to-date income of £1,000 from advertising banners on the web site if it was acceptable to publicise this to try and encourage more advertising. Those present agreed to this.

Patrick will approach the Co-Op and ask them to consider making a contribution.

Patrick and Mark have recently met with David Sumner, Chair of Marple Festival Committee, to discuss them making a contribution to this project or refurbishment of benches. The committee do not have a large amount of funds available so this may not be possible but they will consider and discuss this in the New Year.

Patrick has made contact with Adrian Taylor, Chair of the Senior Citizens and Marple Community Council and it is hoped that Mark can meet up with him soon to discuss opportunities for funding projects in the park.

Mark will approach Marple Business Forum, although it is acknowledged that they have only just made a donation for a bench refurbishment and may not be in a position to contribute more. He will also contact other local community groups and potential contributors to a community project such as this.

The Marple Bridge and Mellor U3A have sent a donation of £25 towards plants in the park and have asked to be informed how we decide to spend it. Mark will write to thank them and advise that we will put it towards the plants for this project.

Refurbishment of Notice Board

There is a disused notice board on the wall of the library near to the flowerbed site and it is hoped that we can bring this back into service to keep people informed about the project. Terry has had a quick look at this and will investigate further over the coming weekend. Mick offered his help with this too.

(Post meeting note: Terry has managed to get into the board using the keys from the library and now just needs to source replacement Perspex.)

Mural on library wall

Mick asked if anyone had thought of putting a mural on the library wall near to the flowerbed, as it seemed to be an ideal location.

By coincidence this was also suggested by David Sumner during his visit and last Thursday Mark discussed it with Steve Abbott, who is an art tutor at CAMSFC and a member of the Society of Marple Artists. Steve was quite enthusiastic about the idea and agreed to talk to his colleagues and contacts in the local art community. His initial suggestion was a mural featuring the historic buildings of Marple, which has been mooted in the past and seems like a great theme.

3.4 Infants Play Area Fence

Jet washing and cleaning the fence will continue as and when possible through the winter with a view to starting to re-paint it in the spring. Ordering of the paint by the council can be arranged nearer to the time.

3.5 Treatment of Sculptures

It was agreed that most of the wooden features in the park were in good condition and it was not practical to give them any further treatment until the spring.

3.6 Wildflowers for Breathing Places Area

Bob reviewed the wildflower seed catalogue and suggested that the most appropriate would be the country lane mix, however, he stressed that the amount of work needed to clear a suitable area was significant. It would need a strip around 2m wide cleared across the front of the woodland area and he was concerned that we may be taking on too much work in the short term with the other projects we are trying to achieve too.

These concerns were acknowledged and it was agreed that perhaps we might have to defer this for a year in order to keep our other efforts focussed.

3.7 Skate Park

The grant application to the Hilton Foundation 10k Giveaway for match funding towards this project was not successful and a standard reply has been received.

The skate park contractors' tenders were due at the end of last week. No details have been received from Tim Boylan the council's Landscape Officer yet but hopefully there will be something to review in the New Year.

Feedback is still awaited from Parks Development Manager Kath Hughes about possible funding opportunities via Sport England. The council is investigating the possibility of leasing parts of their parks to community groups like ours to allow us to tap into funding that is only available to landowners or leaseholders. It remains to be seen if the conditions are suitable for a small volunteer organisation such as FOMMP. *(Post meeting note: Kath has been in touch to say that a lease guidance document should be available soon and if this were a route that is desired for the skate park then it would have to be considered as an individual request.)*

3.8 Park Cottage

There is no more news since the update provided by Sue Emery last month.

3.9 Toilets in the Park

The gents' toilets have been repaired and reopened.

As agreed at the last meeting, Mark has replied to Megan Black's email urging her to ensure that the opening of the toilets on Sundays is included in the Service Level Contract with SSK and to stress that there are several other Marple stakeholders interested in this issue whose views should also continue to be considered by the council. Mark has also asked when the draft SLC will be available for review as it was suggested at recent meetings that it would be in December this year.

3.10 Dog Waste Bins

Megan Black has replied to our letter of concerns about the phasing out of the Dog Waste Bins in the park and a copy of this is attached to the minutes. It was agreed to accept the reassurances given in Megan's reply and monitor the situation.

3.11 Green Space Forum – Thursday 24 November

The Green Space Forum declined our nomination of Bob for a Hero Award because he is not a volunteer. The group were disappointed at this as they feel that Bob's efforts in the park often go beyond the call of duty and this should be recognised. His care for the park, positive involvement with the Friends group and his support of our task days has made a significant contribution to the successful improvement of our park.

Mark attended the Green Space Forum on behalf of the group. A panel comprising of Ian Warmesley, Megan Black, Barry Brockbank (SSK) and Cllr. John Smith answered questions from the various groups present.

The full set of questions and answers are appended to these minutes.

Mark asked questions 22, 23 and 24, which were similar to those asked at the Town Hall Meeting on 18 October. The panel had seen the questions in advance this time and their answers were generally more positive and encouraging. However, it is clear that answers only apply to the first year of SSK's service contract and no one has any idea what future budget cuts, changes and cost saving initiatives will bring.

With regard to our specific questions, it was confirmed that for the first year at least there are no plans to stop having a fulltime Community Parks Officer in the park.

It was also stated that groups would continue to receive the level of support that they currently get, which is one of our key concerns. This can be interpreted positively but it was caveated by saying that "every hour spent in a meeting is an hour they are not working." This shows a lack of insight into the value of spending an hour or two each month with a community group and could be a sign of what is to come.

The panel made all the right noises about the importance of community groups, about not wanting to lose them and about how they will become even more important.

Through the Green Space Forum we will be given opportunity to review and comment on the draft Service Level Contracts being developed to specify how SSK will work.

It remains to be seen what the real long-term impact of the proposed changes will be. All the questions have been asked – we will just have to wait and see.

3.12 Task Days

Previous Task Days

Saturday 26 November

A lower turnout of volunteers than usual due to the weather and the run-up to Christmas but a significant amount of work was still achieved.

The border alongside the car park was weeded by Joyce in advance of the task day and then cleared and filled with gravel on the day. Although Bob has not had any

complaints this has been a bit of an issue with people kicking the gravel all over the paths and he has had to clear it up several times. We will perhaps need to lower the levels a little to alleviate this from continuing to be a problem.

More gravel was also added to the Sensory Garden and placed around the small memorial stone where people leave the wooden crosses with poppies.

The borders between the council offices and the tree sculpture were tidied.

The slats were removed from Mac's Bench for machining in Terry's workshop and the base and up-stands were jet washed.

There was an issue with the free parking during the task day – the vehicles were not registered on the attendant's machine and he was going to book Gill's car until Mark intervened. Mark has asked the Administrator who registers the cars to look into what went wrong and advised everyone to ensure that they use the laminated notices because the attendant did not recognise these even though they are not "official".

(Post meeting note: The parking admin team have confirmed that this was due to a processing error and have amended their procedures to stop it happening again.)

Next Task Day – 31 December 2011

We do not normally hold a task day in December but Lorraine and Mick were keen to do so and enthused everyone else too – a good way to work-off the mince pies.

So a task day will go ahead on New Year's Eve. The jobs we tackle will depend on the weather and the number of volunteers.

Mark will send out the parking request for specified vehicles and the task day email.

4.0 Funding

Status of Funds

Current bank balance is £4,839. Income since the last meeting includes £150 from the McFall family, £25 from Marple Bridge & Mellor U3A and £600 from the Macnair Trust.

Expenditure in the same period includes £660 paid to the council for the Yarwood family bench and £6 for the cement and trowel to repair the War Memorial.

Previously committed funds are £2,743, including £1,600 allocated to the Jubilee Project, £250 for the Tait family bench (paid today), £813 for the Kay family bench and £80 for the Infants Play Area picnic bench (paid today). This leaves an uncommitted working balance of £2,096.

Income this year to date is £5,391 and expenditure £4,718. Total income to date is £31,337 and total expenditure to date £26,828.

The above figures do not include £300 received from Marple Business Forum today, £1,000 pledged by The Marple Website and £9 expenditure on Hammerite from Alan the Painter. Patrick will obtain a receipt for the latter item so it can be reimbursed.

Mark advised that the next two Quiz Nights at the Ring o' Bells would raise money for the park and asked everyone to attend if they could.

5.0 Any Other Business

5.1 National Gardening Week

Reminder: National Gardening Week starts on 13 March next year.

5.2 Puddle at main entrance

Patrick believes that the large puddle at the main entrance caused by poor drainage could be resolved cheaply by creating an improved soak-a-way. He has a contact with expertise in this area and will seek advice.

5.3 Vandalism / Littering in the park

Bob advised that there had been some vandalism to one of the metal boards on the entrance sign structure – he has removed it for repair. Bob added that he is concerned about the amount of vandalism and littering in the park and even though it is reported to the police nothing happens and it doesn't seem to make any difference.

Mark feels one of the difficulties is that the vandalism and littering is usually cleared up quickly after it occurs and is not seen by many people, often only by Bob himself. This is like what happened with the damage to the War Memorial. Most people did not see the handrails pulled over and we did not get any photographs of it in this state because we were so keen to fix the damage, so the impact on others was reduced.

Mark would like to take a new approach to this and build up a dossier of photographs of any damage or extreme littering in the park before it is repaired or cleared up. This way we would have concrete evidence to present to people about what is going on and we could try and get something done about it.

Bob does not have a camera-phone but agreed that he could take photographs as evidence if he could be provided with a camera. The group will see what they can do about supplying one. *(Post meeting note: Gavin has been able to provide a spare compact digital camera that can be used by Bob for this purpose.)*

5.4 Christmas Dinner

The Christmas Dinner was confirmed as Saturday 14 January 2012.

After considering a number of venues it was agreed to book the Royal Oak in Strines. Start will be 12.30pm for 1pm. Mark will send out a general invite to all volunteers by email asking them to get in touch with Micaela and Terry if they would like to attend.

It was agreed that Patrick would invite Ian Hilton with the proviso that everyone would chip in to pay for his meal this year in return for his generosity last year when he paid the entire bill and asked everyone else to donate their money to the park.

6.0 Date of next Meeting

Monday 13 February 2012 at 6pm in Marple Library.

Future meeting dates booked in 2012: 12 March, 16 April, 21 May, 18 June, 9 July, 13 August, 10 September, 8 October, 12 November, 10 December.

From: Megan Black
To: Mark Whittaker
Subject: RE: Dog Waste Bins in Marple Memorial Park

Thank you for your letter dated 11th November in which you raised a number of points regarding litter and dog waste bins at Marple Memorial Park.

As you may be aware, the waste from dog bins is currently collected and treated separately than the waste collected from litter bins. The proposal to remove dog waste bins and to make a financial saving is based on collecting 'mixed' waste i.e. the dog waste is mixed in with general litter. To make this saving, we need to move from dog waste bins to litter bins. Depositing dog waste into litter bins (as mixed waste) is a more efficient use of Council resources.

Thank you for advising me that during busy weekends the existing litter bins at the park can become over full. The proposal to move operational activities to Solutions SK (SSK) should resolve this problem. SSK will have a combined larger workforce, a greater number of vehicles and are operational 24/7. This should allow a more flexible approach to bin emptying, rather than limiting such duties to weekdays.

I understand your concerns that should dog waste bins be removed without additional bins being installed there will be greater pressure on those bins that remain. In the majority of instances dog waste bins are adjacent to litter bins. The location and frequency of emptying litter bins will be reviewed to ensure that they allow for the inclusion of dog waste.

I can assure you though that where a dog bin is removed, and there is not a sufficient number of litter bins situated close by, then a new bin will be installed. Furthermore even if there are a good number of bins situated close to a dog bin but those bins are within a play area then that dog bin will be replaced. Open topped bins these will be replaced, on a phased basis, however our priority will be to replace those where there is not sufficient number of litter bins situated close by.

Finally, this proposal would not have been put forward if this acceptance of this mixed waste was an issue at our disposal point.

I trust the above provides sufficient reassurance for you, however should you wish to discuss this matter further please do not hesitate to contact me.

Regards

Megan Black
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**QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION AT
STOCKPORT GREENSPACE FORUM AGM
24 NOVEMBER 2011**

Panel: Councillor John Smith, Megan Black (SMBC), Barry Brockbank (SSK),

The Panel, with the exception of Cllr Smith, had all had sight of these questions before the meeting.

1 Can Friends groups have sight of the SLA before the agreement is signed and also be allowed to make observations and comments regarding its contents and be allowed direct input to the document?

The service level agreement drawn up between SMBC and Solutions SK will be an important document in terms of setting out the detail of service to be delivered within our parks. It needs to be accepted that Friends of Groups often have very specific knowledge of the issues relating to their park/greenspace and also have a keen interest in ensuring the standards set for service delivery are appropriate, realistic and achievable.

Answer: Yes they will. A draft SLA will be drawn up before the end of the year and SMBC will use Forum as the main consultee.

2 Will Friends groups be able to meet with representatives from Solutions SK on a regular basis to discuss service delivery issues?

Currently there is very positive interaction between SMBC Parks staff, both between front line workers in the parks and greenspaces, team leaders and local managers. If this level of contact and cooperation is lost, I feel Friends groups will struggle to continue and maintain their enthusiasm. Currently our Community Parks Officers, team leaders and senior rangers attend our monthly Friend's meetings where they have vital input when we discuss Park Management issues, event planning, planting and specific problems that have arisen during the preceding month. To lose this interaction would be significantly detrimental.

Answer – They are not changing the current working arrangements and so the present situation will not change.

3 Can a clear statement be made by the Council regarding the level and nature of support that will be given to the Friends of Groups? Will the present level of support and access to vehicles and equipment continue?

The Friends groups hold workdays each year. These workdays help to maintain and improve the infrastructure of the park and include, planting, pruning and repair and maintenance.

Volunteers have in the past been supported by a member of SMBC staff, usually the parks officer. He has assisted in providing advice, tools and equipment and in particular has had access to an SMBC vehicle to remove green waste, or to collect soil and wood chippings, etc.

Answer – Will support groups on task days.

4 Who will have responsibility for rectifying problems and incidents in the parks? Will present procedure change? Serious concerns which the present park staff deal with include:

- Removing broken glass on a daily basis
- Removing offensive graffiti in the parks
- A recent incident in one park required the Community Parks Office to remove smeared faeces from a child's slide in the toddlers play area, and then clean and sterilise the equipment
- Incidents involving failure to control dogs and clean up after dogs
- Health and safety issues in the park

Answer – No plan to change the way this is done at present. The same people who do it now will continue to do this.

5 Who will be in charge of standards control in the parks and greenspaces – will it stay in Public Realm or go to SSK? What will happen if standards fall, will the maintenance go out to tender?

Question omitted

6 How can the present level of service for natural green spaces be guaranteed with the proposed reduction of experienced staff and will a designated person, with the expertise of green space management, oversee standard control to ensure the ecology of the areas are safeguarded?"

A different type of expertise is needed in the management of formal parks and natural green spaces, which is why Stockport's Parks' Department has a Ranger Service to manage

our natural green spaces. Under the proposed plan, the Ranger Service will stay within the Public Realm, but will lose their manager and half of their Senior Rangers.

Answer – In the Public Realm the Nature Development Office will be retained. The expertise in the staff will be retained. There will be a reduction in number of senior rangers but the majority of experience will be retained.

7 If the Senior Rangers are reducing from 6 to 3 and if Etherow, Chadkirk and Reddish retain their rangers, does that mean that all the other areas (about 14 as each ranger had about five sites) will be split equally between the 3 remaining senior rangers? Will these sites be visited on a regular weekly basis?

Answer – There is anxiety about the bigger spaces and the amount of work that will be done. They couldn't answer this.

They said there will be 3 senior rangers, 9 rangers and 2 assistants who will be deployed across the Borough. They will let the Friends know what the regime will be.

8 Will groups still be covered by Stockport's insurance as at present?

Currently if someone from the group has done a risk assessment course and completed the required risk assessment form and logged it with Stockport they are covered by Stockport's insurance.

Answer – Yes. Arrangements won't change.

Additional question – Insurance at present depends on Friends doing a Risk Assessment Course. The course has not been done for a while. The person who does the Risk Assessment needs to have done the course to cover SMBC with the insurance.

Terry Brockbank answered. Said SSK were exceptionally good on Health and Safety. He said SSK could add value here and groups could do the same Risk Assessment training that SSK do. He also said that they could put SSK people in for task days.

TB also said that a Risk Assessment course could be offered if the transfer to SSK was approved.

9 In terms of contact with Solutions SK, what do you mean by a 'one stop shop'? How will it be able to deal with the demands of 82 Friends of Parks and green space groups when this service was previously run by 4 office staff, 8 area team leaders, 6 senior rangers and 2 facilities managers?

How can you assure us that the service will continue with the same level of support and goodwill as there is now?

Answer – Area Team Leaders will move to SSK. There will be three greenspace project officers. Maintenance will be done by SSK. Public Real will deal with development. Some things will be reported to Stockport Direct. If more urgent matters occur groups will be given a more appropriate point of contact.

10 Will the people working in the one-stop shop have sufficient local knowledge and experience to be able to help? Will they be able to react quickly to emergencies?

At the moment if there is a problem, we tell the Parks Department and Iain Bate, Richard Booker or Kath Hughes will get back to us.

Answer – They will go through the Greenspace Forum and will e-mail the information out, to make sure groups know who the contacts are.

Emergency cover – SSK already providing 24 hour cover, so can cover parks in this cover.

11 Despite the whole Public Realm Review involving cost cutting and the great changes to be made by SMBC, the Leader of the Council, Cllr Dave Goddard, told us that parks and green spaces will be better. Can you clarify how this improvement will be made?

Answer – As far as SSK are concerned, Terry Brockbank will take this on board. Not much has been done yet as until agreement ratified it is not appropriate.

They are getting to know the parks and staff. There is no changed agenda as yet. Has noticed that highways mowing vehicles pass parks mowing vehicles and it would make more sense for parks to do verges outside their parks. SSK have a fleet of mechanical sweepers. Leaf clearing is labour intensive at present but these machines could be used in parks.

Going through an equipment profile at present. Bring the work together means they can negotiate from a better position.

They are looking at weekend working because this is when parks are busier.

If work seems irrational or stupid they will either explain why it is being done that way or work to improve.

SSK have a track record of significant improvement with the same resources.

12 What will be the incentive to ex-Parks staff to maintain the current high standards?

Once the park staff are working for SSK, will they still have the same interest and pride in their parks as they do now, when they may not be working in the same park or even the same area?

Answer – Stockport people already working at SSK. Will have the same commitment to delivering the service.

Only making nominal 1% profit on this contract.

SSK have met with staff who are moving. SSK feel that the rumours will dissipate. Of their present staff, 96% feel they are respected, motivated and listened to.

SSK feel they are firm but fair. Staff motivation has never been a problem.

Cllr Smith said that he had worked for Barry previously and that each department Barry had been in charge of had seen a vast improvement.

13 Who will be responsible for ensuring standards don't fall in parks which don't have Friends groups?

Question omitted

14 Summer and winter bedding was removed on a temporary basis. Will this be reinstated?

Answer – Seasonal bedding was removed on a permanent basis because of the savings Council had to make.

15 Will the locking of parks at night be reviewed?

Answer – This will be reviewed. Only done first year of four years saving programme.

16 At present Stockport and SSK are only promising same standards for one year. What is going to happen after that year?

Answer – Preparing for 2012/13 now. It is not known what the situation will be in the future.

They said they were sure that all the Friends group would be watching this closely.

17 Will Solutions SK staff have to adhere to a strict schedule of work, regardless of whether the work is necessary, ie cutting grass whether it is soaking wet, cutting grass on the bowling greens without paying any heed to the timing of matches being held there.

Answer – This will be covered in the SLA which will be performance based.

TB said that there will be schedules and a programme but it won't be on strict lines. He hopes it will be more area focussed. He said the Client doesn't bother with details as long as the result is right.

18 Why did the Park Maintenance contract not go out to Tender and can Solutions SK prove that they can give 'Value for Money' when their remit will be much wider than at present?

Answer – When you tender you have to use European Guidelines. This takes a long time and they did not have that time available.

The Tender option is not off the table. At the moment everything seems to be going OK.

Value for Money is very difficult to quantify. Value for Money will continually be tested. Not sure what the tests will be. Issues will be raised by the Clients and Parks and 12 months down the line there will be a review.

19 Do Solutions SK have the expertise and experience to deal with the wide range of parks and greenspaces in Stockport?

At present the Parks Department maintains 1698 hectares of land in Stockport, ranging from formal parks, through community parks to country parks and including play areas, recreation grounds, sports grounds, woodlands and grass verges. These areas all need different management.

Answer – Council and SSK will have the expertise.

20 Where will the Friends group be able to store equipment they have purchased for the group through grant money?

This equipment, which is often kept by the Parks Department, needs to be sorted and returned to the various groups but will they have somewhere to keep this equipment. Keeping equipment at their houses could cause problems with their household insurance.

Answer – No change to present situation. Somebody will be there (Chadkirk).

Does that apply to other parks too.

Yes.

21 I have heard this new 'department' refer to themselves as 'Greenspace'. I trust this will not happen. The friends groups will not differentiate between the Greenspace Forum and Greenspace.

Question moved to end

22 What will happen to the parks that had full time keepers, ie Marple Memorial?

Answer – Don't have plans to change how it is presently done.

The Friends of Marple Memorial Park have developed a strong working relationship with our local Area Team and the Community Parks Officer resident in our park. Both the Team Leader and Community Parks Officer attend all our meetings and we deal with them directly on all matters to do with the park. If necessary the Area Manager also attends our meetings.

23 Can the panel confirm that these personnel will continue to attend our meetings and work with us to improve the park, or will their direct involvement with us be replaced by a share of 3 Green Space Project Officers amongst 70+ volunteer groups? If the latter, can the panel explain how they envisage that a share of 3 Green Space Project Officers will achieve the same results? Or do they accept that they will not?

Answer – Each group needs a different level of support. Will continue to provide that support. Will try to get somebody to go to meetings but every hour spent in a meeting is an hour they are not working.

24 Do the panel understand that if volunteers groups become frustrated, unfulfilled and feel our efforts are not recognised they will find something else to do with their time? Do the panel feel that losing volunteer groups is an acceptable cost of the savings they are attempting to make? Has this been considered and factored in? How many groups do the panel expect to lose as a result of the changes?

Answer – We don't want to lose any friends of groups. Any groups having problems should get in touch directly with Megan Black. Don't want any groups lost.

JS – Loss of any group would be unacceptable. Groups can contact JS direct. Without Friends groups we wouldn't have the standard of parks that we have.

BB – It is often said that Council have to do more with less. Contribution of Friends groups is even more important than in past. Team will be Council – Providers – Volunteers.

The contribution of the Friends groups is important and it will become more important.

25 The Friends of Chadkirk Chapel Country Park & Nature Reserve have a number of concerns as to how the proposed changes to SMBC's Rangers Service will affect the running and maintenance of the estate.

- Who will conserve the pastures, meadows, wild-life ponds and scrapes, maintain the woodlands, hedges control the weeds on the river and stream banks?
- Who will liaise with the various Wild Life and childrens' groups?
- Will the borders and gardens continue to be maintained by a dedicated council employee with the 'Friends' help, or will they just be grassed over so they can be mowed by the Solutions SK staff when they mow the main lawns?
- Has thought been given as to what effect the lack of maintenance to the borders etc., will have on weddings booked for 2012 and the prospect for future wedding bookings at Chadkirk?
- Who can the 'Friends' liaise with on their bi-monthly 'Task Days', their 2 monthly meetings and the various events they organize?

By far our over-riding concern, however, is that in a few years time there will be no Country Park and Nature Reserve for us to be 'Friends' of! For the past 8 years or so it has been rumoured that a local business man has been adversely commenting on the way the Estate is being run and putting forward suggestions as to how he could take it over, develop it and run it on commercial lines. He has also been said to be building up contacts with SMBC officials and Councillors to get them 'on-side'. In the current financial climate we feel that, if these widely reported rumours are true, there are real concerns that this gentleman's persistence, contacts and 'money' will 'bear fruit' denying this 'oasis of calm' to Stockport

and to the tens of thousands of people, local and visitors, who currently use this facility each year for ever.

The proposal that Chadkirk lose its 'live-in' Ranger, leaving an empty 18th century farmhouse open to dereliction and prey to vandalism could only serve to give this astute businessman ammunition for his plans. It would also leave the Chapel prey to the same risk of vandalism and arson.

The Friends Group has been active for over 12 years and we would not like to see the result of all the time and effort that has been put into improving the Chadkirk Chapel Gardens, Country Park and Nature Reserve destroyed with the stroke of an accountant's pen!

Answer – Cllr Smith said there is no chance of the Council selling to a commercial organisation.

MB - Activities that Friends groups do now will be supported whether it is by Senior Range or SSK staff.

Pat Baker – Need to be able to talk to someone who knows about gardens. Both staff at present have horticultural background.

Answer – Too early to say who will be in this area but there will be a clear point of contact.

26 What will happen to equipment (play equipment, outdoor furniture, outdoor sports equipment, etc.) purchased by the Friends groups for the parks with grant money?

Much of the equipment in the various Stockport parks has been purchased through grant money and conditions on those grants are that they will be maintained by the Council. In London, the Big Lottery has requested that grant money be repaid to them if equipment will not be maintained due to the cuts.

Answer – Will be maintained as they are now. If groups have made bid for money for equipment the equipment will be maintained.

Playground maintenance will go to SSK.

Additional question – Will playground staff still be at Torkington.

Answer – The land (for the yard) has been sold. They will be moved.

27 Can the Council outline who will have responsibility for the direct management of issues of misuse of our parks and greenspaces?

Currently, staff employed within the parks, assume some direct responsibility for responding to incidents in the parks.

Answer – Situation will not change. Responsibilities will be on dog wardens, police, Public Real, SSK staff, etc.

28 Can a clear outline be given of the roles and responsibility of different persons working for/on behalf of SMBC particularly relating to enforcement under the following headings:

- Misconduct within the park, ie riding cycles on bowling greens, lighting fires and barbecues, furious cycling within the park causing significant risk to pedestrians, both young and old.
- Issues relating to control of dogs, including dog fouling, dangerous uncontrolled dogs
- Reporting of criminal damage to buildings, play equipment, etc.

Additional question as Question 28 already answered.

Park Byelaws – There is a lack of clear rules for park users. Unclear if byelaws were every withdrawn. John Yeomans told 10 years ago that the byelaws would be re-written.

Answer – Issue of byelaws needs to be looked at. Could interact with Greenspace Forum in future.

Question 21 moved to end

21 I have heard this new ‘department’ refer to themselves as ‘Greenspace’. I trust this will not happen. The friends groups will not differentiate between the Greenspace Forum and Greenspace.

Sue Colman – The new department has been referred to as ‘Grenspace’ We think it would be a good idea if the powers that be think of another name. We (the Greenspace Forum) are totally independent and we have claimed the name already.

General applause.

Sue Colman then thanked all the Friends groups for attending and sending in the questions. She went on to thank the Panel for attending and answering the questions.

She went on to say that there will be an active response from the Friends groups, because as residents we feel that we are the clients.

Answer - MB said that she sees us as the client and that by working together we will make things better.

The Department name will be Public Realm and within that department there will be a Greenspace Manager working with the green spaces.

Perhaps a competition could be run to come up with a new name.