

**SHREWSBURY TOWN COUNCIL  
FINANCE & GENERAL PURPOSE COMMITTEE  
4 OCTOBER 2021**

**Officer:** Helen Ball – Town Clerk

**MOSTON ROAD RECREATION GROUND**

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## **Purpose of Report**

**To consider extending the use of Moston Road Recreation Ground to the Shrewsbury Academy**

### **Introduction**

The Marches Academy Trust is a multi-academy trust based in Shropshire providing primary and secondary education across the county. The Shrewsbury Academy and the Grange Primary School have been part of the trust since 2019.

The Shrewsbury Academy's catchment has traditionally been from the Sundorne, Battlefield, Bagley, Harlescott and Castlefields & Ditherington Wards though of late it has attracted students from across the whole of the town as well as the rural areas to the east. The school has become more popular with more students placing it as their first option and the Year 7 Roll has increased from 132 in 2019 to 184 for this September intake. This has been down to the change in ethos of the school and the fact that students are proud of their school.

The Academy has been working to secure Department for Education funding to expand the Sundorne site and it was announced on 15<sup>th</sup> July 2021 that it had been successful. Developments will allow the old Sundorne Infant School to be refurbished and incorporated into the Academy once students vacate to the Featherbed Lane site in 2022, a new teaching block and other ancillary facilities. Whilst not everything the Academy had requested, it does present itself as the biggest investment in education in northern Shrewsbury in a generation. The development will allow the school to cater for 1127 students.

Outside space on the site is a premium and will become more so once the school development takes place. Open space includes:

- Half size rugby pitch
- 9 v 9 football pitch (caters for U12/13s)
- All weather pitch made up of 3 netball courts
- Tennis courts are out of action as the site is being used for demountable classrooms
- Infant school playing field has a mysterious mound in the middle which would restrict usage. The site isn't big enough for any senior school football, though has the potential for 2 rounders pitches

The School has in the past used the site. It was last laid out for summer Athletics about 5 years ago and the school paid for additional works to facilitate use.

The School has investigated the use of the Sports Village; this is a facility that is commercially rented out and of late being used by the football club. The logistics of transporting students to and from the Sports Village means that actual time of the sports lesson is extremely restricted.

## Moston Road Recreation Ground

Adjacent to the Academy site off Meadow Farm Road is the Moston Road Recreation Ground, owned by the Town Council. Measuring 2.7 hectares the site is flat with poor drainage potential, minimal landscaping and has Infant and Junior Play Areas and a Multi-Use Games Area. The Lantern Community Centre was built on part of the Moston Road Recreation Ground by the Borough Council prior to local government reorganisation.

During the Town Council's tenure of the site, pathways were installed to connect play areas to the main highway. The site is currently maintained by the Recreation & Formal Greenspace team.

In October 2018 Dan Wrench & Richard Hammerton Shropshire Council presented to the Recreation & Leisure Committee the findings of their Open Space Mapping Project. The project is designed to ensure that everyone has access to natural greenspace within a 15-minute walk of their homes. At the time members were surprised that Moston Road did not meet the Natural England Standards on Accessible Natural Greenspace, but it was classed as mown amenity grassland. These criteria are ever more essential in the current climate. Given the Climate Emergency Agenda creating more naturalised areas supports the need to reduce carbon and create area to capture existing carbon.

The site given the geology of the area is poorly drained which means for a significant part of the year is unusable. Staff have looked at the potential for improving drainage with either primary or secondary drainage facilities being installed.



In preparation for the 2021/22 Capital Programme, discussions took place with the local member regarding additions to that programme, including:

- Creation of a BMX Track
- Circular footpaths to improve active use of the site
- Tree planting and wildflower planting to create naturalised areas

A sum of £80k has been set aside from the Neighbourhood Fund to develop these ideas.

## Academy use of Moston Road

Initial enquiries about the potential of the Shrewsbury Academy using the Moston Road Recreation Ground was made by the Education Department at Shropshire Council. At that time there wasn't any discussions about the exact usage required; more the in principle creation of a partnership to develop mixed usage. This was incorporated into the bid to the Department for Education.

Periodically over the last 18 months, senior officers have either met at the school or on Teams to keep updated on the expansion plans from the school and the Town Council's aspirations for the recreation ground. No agreements have been made on usage; the discussion was more around the art of the possible. The message has been clear from the School that they see themselves at the heart of the community. Any new development of the school will be open to community use and equally any ways that the students can be involved in community life, the better.

The last meeting at the school on the 15<sup>th</sup> September provided an opportunity for officers to understand the extent of what the Department for Education funding will facilitate. Please note there are no plans that can be shared with Council at this stage, though the Head Teacher is happy to circulate them once they are made available by the Department for Education. The Town Clerk, Head of Operations and Recreation & Formal Space Team Manager visited the site and were given a tour by Julie Johnson (Head Teacher) and Nick Parkin (Operations Manager). Our Team Manager was able to give the Schools Operations Manager some advice on how best to maximise use of recreational facilities and what could feasibly be fitted onto new parcels of space that are due to become part of the school curtilage; these included laying out sports pitches in a certain way, taking down fencing and obstacles to maximise size of pitches, drainage options and industry best practice.

Discussions have taken place with the Town Council Officers about the potential for utilising the Moston Road site for sport and well-being of their students. It should be noted that a significant number of students live in flats and do not have access to personal green space.

Ideas discussed include:

- Creating footpath routes around the site which could be used for both the wider community in supporting a healthier and active lifestyle but also the school for orienteering and cross country. We already have defined routes laid out in the Quarry for Park Run and we have been exploring how route and website technology might provide a better experience in some of our countryside sites
- Creating areas for Outside Classrooms and Forest Schools, teaching students to care for their surroundings; this has the potential of reduction in ASB and vandalism seen on our sites. The school is keen to create "peace gardens"; areas of reflection for their students within their grounds. There is no reason why something similar could not be created on the recreation ground
- Creating a wheeled sports track, a single use tarmac track that caters for all wheeled sports including bikes, scooters and skateboards similar to the ones at Shorncliffe, Little Harlescote Lane and Meole. The school would be a perfect place to rather the specification for such a project.
- Creating areas for tree planting and wildflower planting. The Countryside Team have done some great work with students across the town in developing similar schemes
- Potentially laying out part of the site for temporary informal team games including football, rounders and athletics. It has been ascertained that formal fencing would only be required for formal team games; this would not apply for games lessons. Grounds staff have looked at locations that pitches could be marked out to reduce the risk of damage to vehicles

Staff have also discussed broader areas in which the Town Council and School might be involved:

- The Council operates a 4000 sq metre greenhouse and has in the past facilitated school visits to show students have to grown and care for plants. Students have also helped plant hanging baskets
- The Council has developed a Tree Nursery with funding from DEFRA. This facility could be used to help students understand about treestock, plant on trees, take cuttings for shrub propagation. Staff could also help students plant both in the school grounds and at Moston Road
- The Council is developing a programme of volunteering opportunities with Shrewsbury School. Shrewsbury Academy already has links with Shrewsbury School and the potential for students from the two schools to work on plans to improve Moston Road provides benefits for both schools.
- The Council has provided schools with the opportunity of work experience placements and staff could be made available to visit the school to tell their personal experiences of being a work experience apprentice and growing with the organisation.
- The Council has had a number of apprentice gardeners in the past and this route could provide students with good meaningful employment

There are also benefits that the school can bring to the Council:

- The School has an active School Council and an active Eco-Council and students are keen to help to design, consult and create areas for the wider community
- The School can help to broaden any community consultation. They already have an active electronic newsletter network and the latest briefing about Moston Road is appended to this report.
- The School might assist in the development of a Friends of Moston Road Recreation Ground to look at the wider continued community usage of the site and greater public involvement
- The School already have close links with the Town Council's Youth Service as a number of their students access various sessions that Young Shrewsbury provide. This is further work that can be done to provide collaborative activity.

Throughout these discussions, there has never been any suggestion that the Moston Road Recreation Ground would be handed over to the Shrewsbury Academy; it will continue to be a Council owned facility

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- (i) That the report is noted;
- (ii) That the Council supports the proposals of greater collaboration with and use of Moston Road Recreation Ground by the Shrewsbury Academy;
- (iii) That the Ward member actively works with Officers of the Town Council and School to develop proposals that can be consulted on by the public