

SHREWSBURY TOWN COUNCIL

QUARRY WORKING GROUP

Meeting held at Livesey House, St Johns Hill, Shrewsbury

9th May 2023

PRESENT – Councillor Rob Wilson

IN ATTENDANCE – Helen Ball (Town Clerk), Amanda Spencer (Deputy Town Clerk) & Gary Farmer (Head of Operations)

APOLOGIES – Councillors Green & Mosley

INQUORATE MEETING

Whilst recognising that the meeting wasn't quorate, Councillor Wilson welcomed the opportunity to chat with senior officers about the history behind the park, the challenges faced and the likely direction of travel for its ongoing development and maintenance.

HISTORY & CHALLENGES

The Quarry has been in public sector ownership since the Municipal Corporations Act in 1835 saw the land transferred from the freemen to the Council.

In 2000 a sizeable grant application was submitted to the Heritage Lottery Fund to provide enhancements to the park. This together with additional funding secured from the Shropshire Horticultural Society saw all the pathways and roadways improved, with trunking to allow for power and water supplies to facilitate events. All pathways were laid with the chipped surface that albeit worn in places is still there today.

The challenges faced are ones which relate to significant usage, aging underground infrastructure and the fact that a large area of the park is often out of action due to flooding.

The park attracts some 1.5m visits a year; these ranging from one-off visits to events or tourists, to those who use the park for daily recreation or even to commute through between home and the town centre. It was recognised that Victoria Avenue was part of Route 81 National Cycling Network.

There is an events programme which includes activity between April and October ranging from bands in the Bandstand to larger events like the Flower Show and Lets Rock which can see over 10,000 people enjoying activity at any one time.

Services to the park users are in need of upgrade. All the drains from toilet facilities are no-longer fit for purpose for a number of reasons including backing up in the drains during flooding and high river levels, damage to drains probably due to subsidence and tree root damage, but also the modern-day toilet facilities that don't require the level of water to flush thereby not assisting to flush materials through the pipes. Usage is also a contributory factor with people insisting on flushing bulky items like nappies down the toilet.

The Park also lacks any indoor space which would allow a more all year-round interest in the facility, which in turn had the potential to generate income. Notwithstanding the concessions already received for refreshments, any new offer would need to be pitched in the best way.

Mention was also made about the riverbanks and the need to investigate the structural integrity of some of the areas which were held back by sleepers.

Operationally, there is always a need for some operational base, but the existing facilities which were built around the back yard of Quarry Lodge do not provide the necessary modern-day facilities needed to maintain a safe depot but also provide necessary welfare. The greenhouses were no-longer fit for use and all planting had relocated to the Weeping Cross facility. It wasn't however just a matter for demolition. The Park is Grade II Listed and within the Shrewsbury Conservation Area and given proximity to the Grade Listed Quarry Lodge were curtilage listed. Therefore, a plan for redevelopment was required before an application for conservation area consent to demolish could be made.

Notwithstanding the challenges, there had been some good initiatives of late that had been developed in the park. The refurbishment of the Play Area and incorporation of the old Paddling Pool into a Splash Park in 2016 had proved hugely popular. That said it was now showing signs of wear and tear and it was often closed due to flood water.

Additionally, the solar lights along Victoria Avenue had opened up the area as a night-time transport corridor but one that could now delineate where the river was and together with the lighting of Lifebuoy Stations and Throwline Boards there was greater awareness of public safety.

QUARRY OF THE FUTURE

Councillor Wilson returned to the suggestion of some kind of indoor space as he did not think there was no real appetite for a contemporary garden to replace the depot as the park was a big enough garden, and the Queen Mother Garden is relatively unknown. A facility which incorporated depot facilities, an indoor community space and modern toilets could resolve a number of issues. Suggestions were made that this could be known as the Queen Elizabeth Pavilion as a lasting legacy to the late Queen.

It was recognised that continual usage and in the case of COVID, exceptional usage has taken its toll on the fabric of the roads and pathways.

Discussion took place around the future of the pool and its integration; the Town Clerk & Head of Operations had previously met with both the Architects and the Landscape Architects about what a new facility and its environs could look like and how it might best be incorporated into park life. Were this site not to have recreational facilities on it and it became a development site, any Masterplan for the site would need to have cognisance of the park environs. It was therefore crucial that were the Town Council to look at developing something in the park, the setting of a "design code for the park" should be in the hands of the Town Council and not something forced upon them by a code from outside sources. Reference was made to the Shrewsbury Test and on-going design coding work for the town centre.

It was clear that the Quarry needs to be a park for everyone and although it sits in a single ward it is a facility for the whole of the town and beyond. The case in point being the Play Area and Splash Park which is viewed as a tourist destination in its own right.

This wasn't something that could be solely left to Group Leaders or the Councillors to make a decision on and there was a need for some outside professional feasibility work. The Town Clerk spoke about previous discussions with LDA Design who were the creators of the Shrewsbury Big Town Plan Vision and whether, given their long experience of reviewing the town centre through

that Vision as well as the Design Code, they could be a starting point to developing a Management Plan and Development Strategy for the park.

WAY FORWARD

The Quarry had been flagged as a key priority in the evolving Shrewsbury Town Council Visioning Exercise and there would need to be much further debate. The Town Clerk was asked to explore the discussion with LDA Design further as to what a Management Plan might look like and how the Council would go about undertaking such a project with a view to adding an item on both future Recreation & Leisure and Finance & General Purposes Committee Meetings.