

Malmesbury Town Council
Town Hall & Facilities Meeting 24th November 2020

Report 1 Cloister Gardens Working Group

Current members:

Cllr Paul Smith (Chair), Mayor Campbell Ritchie, Cllr Gavin Grant & Cllr Julie Exton

- 1. The overall aim of the group is to make the Cloister Gardens the central recreational feature of the town.**
2. This will be done by enhancing the use and perception of all the key town centre assets.
3. The goals of the Working Group:
 - 3.1 examine ways of enhancing the public use and enjoyment of these areas in the context of the COVID 19 pandemic **and** beyond
 - 3.2 discuss and agree with land owners, and other stakeholders in these areas, ways of working and engagement to enhance public use and enjoyment of these spaces
 - 3.3 review and discuss any restrictions on the use of these areas set by the landowner and Historic England and that these terms and conditions set for future use are acceptable to the stakeholders and Land Owners concerned
 - 3.4 review, or where appropriate create, the terms and conditions for the private hire of all or part of these areas that are acceptable to Malmesbury Town Council, the landowners and stakeholders
 - 3.5 set out budget and cost impacts of any proposals that result from the above
 - 3.6 report back and make appropriate recommendations to the Town Hall and Facilities Committee

- 4 As background information the area has been blighted with behaviour issues for a number of years and in 2020 after lockdown one ended we received complaints about a range of anti-social behaviours. Councillors and Council staff were spending more time cleaning the area and picking up a great deal of broken glass, as well as digging glass bottles out of the lawn that had been buried by someone. Police have been very involved in the town this summer and they expressed serious concerns about the area. We would like to see it as a key recreational feature at the heart of town and this behaviour does not fit with these aims.
- 5 As part of the Government promotion to get people out into the fresh air and picnic this summer there were 4 new picnic tables installed in the area and they were well received by visitors and residents. Abbey Café used them as extra seating and it was noted by councillors that they were well used. We received one complaint about them as it encouraged young people to sit at them in the evening and they exhibited anti-social behaviours. When councillors had visited in the evenings it had not been observed by them. It was agreed the tables would stay until the end of October when they were relocated to St Aldhems Mead.
- 6 Entertainment was considered for the area however due to COVID 19 and Government guidance it was decided not to encourage or allow it this year.
- 7 The area is subject to no alcohol regulations and these are currently being renewed.
- 8 The primary concern is public safety in the Cloister Gardens area and it has been noted by several people that the path stones in the area are slippery when wet in places, the pointing between stones is in a poor condition and could be a potential trip hazard. The arbour is in a poor state of repair with the ivy having become out of control on top of the rotting timbers of the arbour.
- 9 The Town Clerk sought tenders to report on the state of the arbour and pathways and costs to repair them. Only 1 person responded and has had several on site meetings with the Town Clerk and Paul Smith to look at the problems and potential solutions.
- 10 One initially favoured solution was to rebuild it in oak so it would last much longer than softwood however the major problem is in the strength testing and suitability for the area. Soft wood comes ready tested and approved (stamped to the side of each beam) and costs 20% of the Oak cost.
- 11 If we wanted to change the appearance of the area and improve it then planning permission would be needed and this could take considerable time. It would also cost to have plans etc drawn up. Action is needed now to make the arbour safe.
- 12 With the structure in poor condition and desire to keep it as originally designed the decision was made to investigate the safety of the entire structure once all the ivy and timbers were removed. This task will take about a week and will be done in the New Year.

- 13 Some additional work we know will be needed as cracks are visible in the wall and a wooden lintel above an archers window is rotten.
- 14 As long as the wall and stone pillars are safe a soft wood frame, as currently on site, will be installed to bring it back to its original 1980's condition.
- 15 At this stage no lighting or power is being installed. They might feature in future plans and will probably be necessary for CCTV.
- 16 There are currently 4 benches under the arbour and are used daily by residents and tourists. One is missing an arm and the other three are in very poor condition and they will all be destroyed, however the plaques currently on them will be retained. Four new seats will be made. More can be added at a later date if required.
- 17 The next steps are dependant on planning permission and permissions from Highways and being able to partially restrict a public right of way.
- 18 Plans at the moment are to fit a gate by the Old Bell where it enters the gardens.
- 19 A new metal fence to be in keeping with other railings in the area to be installed from the top of the steps up from Station Car Park alongside the path between Abbey House and the Cloisters. There would be a small gate at the top of the steps and a large double gate fitted opposite the Abbey House Gardens gates to allow access to the gardens.
- 20 The Cloister Gardens would become an improved recreational area that is opened daily and closed at night, similar to John Cole Gardens in Chippenham.
- 21 The walk up from Station Yard Car Park would have new panels fitted between the current supports on the handrails to stop people and animals getting on the bank behind the back of the arbour. Design and materials to achieve this has not yet been decided.
- 22 This area would then be cleared and made into an attractive area. No discussions have taken place about landscaping it yet.
- 23 The subject of design of the gardens has not been discussed.
- 24 No decision or discussion has taken place about electricity or water.
- 25 The area would need to be lit and would be part of the towns CCTV plans.
- 26 Emails regarding initial thoughts of introducing a gated garden have been sent to:
 - Barbara Pollard
 - Rufus Pollard, Abbey House
 - Oliver Ross, Malmesbury Abbey
 - Christophe Dumeige, The Old Bell
 - Inspector Doug Downing, Wiltshire Police

- 27 Wider communication and discussion will take place further down the line along side applications to restrict a public right of way.
- 28 Costs of the options to repair the area are being prepared by The Town Clerk and are subject to his reporting.

Paul Smith
17th November 2020