

Note of 26 April 2005 meeting to discuss FBC's latest

## **Masterplan for Ashton Gardens**

### **Present:**

*For FBC:* Paul Norris - Cultural Services Officer  
Darren Bell - Parks Manager  
Councillor Mrs Barbara Pagett

*For SOAG* Fred Moor

*For CoT* Arnold Sumner and Jill Sumner

Mr Norris began by saying his hope was that we could look at the Council's proposals from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) perspective, irrespective of how such a scheme might be funded.

The Masterplan is a long term objective. The scheme has been re-prioritised to £2 million to keep it within limits that are both affordable to the Council and most especially, because schemes of less than £2 million are determined by the northwest regional HLF offices, and he believes such a bid has more chance of success than one that is over 2 million and would have to be determined nationally.

So this part is called Phase I, and it is for £2 million. A subsequent phase (Phase II) costing less than £1 million and requiring only 10% funding from the Council is envisaged in the future.

The purpose of the masterplan is to outline the broad direction, the "ultimate vision" and is required by HLF.

### **PHASE I**

Mr Norris said that the £2 million would be spent on both hard and soft landscaping

The key item is the re-siting of the Ashton Institute on [*or close to: fm*] the old Ashton Theatre site. This would give a 360-degree view of the building and most especially it will create a vista from Garden Street. It is planned to develop a York stone paved entertainment area between the new building and the entrance gates. The new Ashton Institute building is to be used as a tearoom/cafe with public lavatories included.

The existing cafe is to be demolished, and the site temporarily landscaped. Ultimately, it is planned to have a "Winter garden" building on the site of the present cafe, but there are no firm plans for the nature and the use of this proposed building at the present time. Mr Bell commented that it would need to have a "*sound business case*" attached to it.

The two lodges would not require much external restoration work according to their expert historic building consultants Donald Insall. No internal works would be charged to the lottery bid, but Mr Bell would like to see one of the lodges as a "front of house" for the gardens, and an office for him and his staff when they are removed from the offices they presently occupy in the Town Hall.

The War Memorial is to be pointed, have the stone cleaned, and most of the plaques "treated". One plaque is not of the same quality as the others and it is planned to re-cast this in the same style as the remainder. The monument is also to be floodlit.

Lighting is planned to extend throughout the gardens, although the plan showing the lighting points is only indicative, and should not be regarded as the actual position of the lighting points.

It is planned to spend £100,000 to improve the play area

It is planned to spend £100,000 on path improvements, though this will not do all the pathways. *[When I pointed out that the present scheme anticipates a cost of £350,000, Mr Bell suggested that was partly because the recommended surface at present was resin-bonded aggregate to give a modern technological version of the original gravel paths, but this was not now thought necessary, and as tarmac had been used satisfactorily, there was no real reason why it should not continue to be used in the future: fm]*

The soft landscaping would provide an element of re-stocking and diversification of the plant species.

The trees would be thinned

The aim was to make the landscaping more interesting horticulturally, but the work would be very selective.

Information panels and directional signage is to be provided, and Mr Bell hoped SOAG might be able to help with costs in this regard.

The railings on the St George's Road and Clifton Drive facade are to be re-instated and the gates to be re-furbished. There are to be no railings along the gardens side of the footpath that leads to the Ashton Institute.

There is to be "further work" in the Rose Garden and the Nymph and cherub are to be reinstated if possible.

This work completes the £2 million that will be available in Phase I

Mr Bell then added some of his own thoughts

The approach is to create *"a sustainable investment in the longer term"* and this will require the introduction of commercial uses that can *"add value to the visitor experience"*

He regards the Institute as the second most important building on the site. He has several reasons for this, but key to them is the fact that in its new position it would become a focal point flanked by the lodge buildings.

Donald Insall Associates have done a detailed study of how to dismantle and store the Institute. In response to my question about storage, he said it would be stored in the lean-to structure at the top of the yard where the greenhouse potting shed is currently located. He said it is not to be put into commercial secure storage.

Mr Bell and Mr Norris also gave an assurance that the presence of asbestos in the building would not cause its demise. When I pressed them on this they confirmed they knew of the presence of asbestos in the floor and had planned to deal with this, but even if it were found elsewhere in the building it would not cause the abandonment of the preservation.

He confirmed it would be the same size when re-erected, but noted that the brick infill would be removed and the kitchen extension would also not be re-created.

When asked how listing of the building would affect such plans, they replied that listing per se would not necessarily alter them, but listing in-situ might.

Mr Bell believes the move to demolish the existing cafe and replace it with the Institute as a tea room will be popular with people, and the plan to develop the frontage to the gates will link the gardens into the same surface and style of regeneration as the Square.

He also hopes to extend the use of the gardens into the early evening, bringing more people in, and thus making the gardens safer.

He said all work has to be to the highest possible standard, so they can't do everything, but having done this scheme as a start, they will be able to build on it in the future.

Fundamentally, he sees the gardens as a resident's park, but it is also for visitors and he wants to develop it as an educational resource for school visits.

He believes as now prepared, it is a balanced, sustainable bid.

He sees Phase II to include the glasshouse (Winter gardens, the redevelopment of the bowls pavilion [*note: the plans show separate ladies and gents bowls pavilions but following discussion with the men's bowling club, it is envisaged that the men's pavilion will be extended in a sympathetic style, to accommodate the ladies club as well: fm*]) The St Georges club would have a new pavilion on the "back" (No 2) Green, set into the banking that adjoins the back street of St Andrews Road North, though the latter may be a later phase than phase II)

Mr Bell wants to spend the resources in key areas with quality materials.

He outlined the anticipated timescale, which is:

- Bid completed in about 8 weeks from the end of April 2005
- Stage I which is the long list of proposals and concept costing will then be complete
- The decision by HLF will take about six months, so by Christmas 2005 a yes or no should be given.

Assuming a "yes" work will then start on a detailed version of the scheme.

- These normally take 12 months, but Mr Bell believes it can be done in 6 months.
- It will include a 10-year management plan, and there are additional revenue implications.
- HLF will then take a further six months to determine the application, so by Christmas 2006, a full yes or no should be given.

Assuming a yes, work to prepare the detailed tender and contract documentation begins and it is expected that work could begin on site in the summer of 2007.

Concluding the presentation, he said that there had to be a community context for the 'park'. Parks were for people, and they wanted it to be a park that was used, not a preserved, pickled, park. He sees it as a community park, and bringing money into it is a key aspect of the development, whilst keeping heritage aspects. He believed SOAG should wholeheartedly support the scheme.

He said they couldn't afford to do much work that "*wouldn't be seen*" because they wanted to create the "*wow*" factor. This is why they could only do "*some of the footpaths*"

FM said that to make progress and offer meaningful comments on the proposals, SOAG would require further information to enable them to compare what was being proposed in this plan with what had been proposed previously - what was being added, deleted, increased or decreased in scale and scope. I said that to enable properly informed comment to be made, we would require to know either (and preferably) the budget sum that was accorded to each aspect of the work as now proposed, but we could make do with the percentage of the overall budget allocated to each aspect.

Subject to timely receipt of this information I undertook to ask SOAG to consider the merits and demerits of the Councils masterplan for the gardens irrespective of how they might be funded.

Mr Norris undertook to see if the information could be made available, and I undertook to provide him with a list of the headings for which we have figures for all of the schemes to date.