

AGENDA ITEM

REPORT TO CABINET

12th OCTOBER 2017

**REPORT OF SENIOR
MANAGEMENT TEAM**

CABINET DECISION

Arts, Culture & Leisure – Cabinet Lead – Councillor Mrs Wilburn

PRESTON PARK MASTER PLAN UPDATE

1. Summary

Following previous reports setting out the Council's intention to define a framework for the continued improvement of Preston Park Museum and Grounds (PPMG), this report presents the medium and long term priorities for development. If approved they would form the basis of detailed work and future funding bids as appropriate.

2. Recommendations

1. To approve the Preston Park Museum & Grounds Master Plan 2018 – 2028 as a basis for the ongoing development of the visitor attraction.
2. To approve detailed further work on possible traffic flow and car parking solutions and café and toilet improvements as a matter of priority.

3. Reasons for the Recommendation(s)/Decision(s)

To agree a set of priorities for the future development of Preston Park Museum & Grounds which will provide the basis for medium and long-term funding bids and investment to meet the growing needs of visitors to the attraction.

4. Members' Interests

Members (including co-opted Members) should consider whether they have a personal interest in any item, as defined in **paragraphs 9 and 11** of the Council's code of conduct and, if so, declare the existence and nature of that interest in accordance with and/or taking account of **paragraphs 12 - 17** of the code.

Where a Member regards him/herself as having a personal interest, as described in **paragraph 16** of the code, in any business of the Council he/she must then, **in accordance with paragraph 18** of the code, consider whether that interest is one which a member of the public, with knowledge of the relevant facts, would reasonably regard as so significant that it is likely to prejudice the Member's judgement of the public interest and the business:-

- affects the members financial position or the financial position of a person or body described in **paragraph 17** of the code, or
- relates to the determining of any approval, consent, licence, permission or registration in relation to the member or any person or body described in **paragraph 17** of the code.

A Member with a personal interest, as described in **paragraph 18** of the code, may attend the meeting but must not take part in the consideration and voting upon the relevant item of business. However, a member with such an interest may make representations, answer questions or give evidence relating to that business before the business is considered or voted on, provided the public are also allowed to attend the meeting for the same purpose whether under a statutory right or otherwise (**paragraph 19** of the code)

Members may participate in any discussion and vote on a matter in which they have an interest, as described in **paragraph 18** of the code, where that interest relates to functions of the Council detailed in **paragraph 20** of the code.

Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

It is a criminal offence for a member to participate in any discussion or vote on a matter in which he/she has a disclosable pecuniary interest (and where an appropriate dispensation has not been granted) **paragraph 21** of the code.

Members are required to comply with any procedural rule adopted by the Council which requires a member to leave the meeting room whilst the meeting is discussing a matter in which that member has a disclosable pecuniary interest (**paragraph 22** of the code)

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SUMMARY

Following previous reports setting out the Council's intention to define a framework for the continued improvement of Preston Park Museum and Grounds (PPMG), this report presents the medium and long term priorities for development. If approved they would form the basis of detailed work and future funding bids as appropriate.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. To approve the Preston Park Museum & Grounds Master Plan 2018 – 2028 as a basis for the ongoing development of the visitor attraction.
2. To approve detailed further work on possible traffic flow and car parking solutions and café and toilet improvements as a matter of priority.

DETAIL

Background

1. In December 2015 Cabinet approved a report recommending further exploration of potential improvements to Preston Park Museums & Grounds (PPMG) and the development of a master plan as a basis of a bid for Heritage Lottery 'Parks for People' funding.
2. Whilst resources at the time of the 2015 report were constrained, the availability of capital was greater than it has subsequently become. The HLF Parks for People opportunity offered a prospect of enhancing the heritage character of the Park as well as improving the customer experience.
3. In response to the Council's ongoing financial challenges, work on the master plan was refined. The aim of outlining key areas of development to enrich the visitor experience remains, but the search for measures that might boost income or reduce revenue pressures has become more important. Those measures include any which alleviate the considerable strains on the infrastructure, especially with traffic and parking.
4. The aim of a master plan in this context is to provide a coherent framework within which developments can take place over time, to ensure that best use of resources and contribute to the achievement of overarching objectives. The plan contains medium and longer term aspirations rather than immediate operational matters.

5. PPMG continues to attract more than 750,000 visitors annually. Recent popular investments have included a skate-park and play areas, driving further 'free' visits to the park. Extensive and well attended promotions such as 'Teesside Seaside' and 'Theatre in the Park' have demonstrated the appetite for more public outdoor events. With the marked growth in numbers ultimately comes the added pressure on resource, facilities and the current infrastructure. Areas that have received limited investment, such as the toilet block, café, signage and pedestrian surfacing are now showing the strain. Often these elements are not at the standard of the overall offer or desired brand for the visitor attraction.
6. Despite some investment to improve capacity in the car parks there is still a need to extend it further and improve access and egress. On a dry day in school holidays, without any special event or promotion, the car parks typically appear to be full and cars waiting for spaces or entering and exiting the main gate will create traffic delays and displace visitors to park in neighbouring residential streets, generating frequent complaints. Recent modest increases in staffing in the park will enable us to make better use of the parking spaces that are available, but this will reduce rather than remove the problem.
7. The café is subject to similar pressures with huge visitor demand which cannot be served in the existing spaces, ultimately resulting in lost income opportunities and/or disgruntled visitors. The toilets are also now insufficient, unappealing, difficult to maintain and are subject to regular vandalism which worsens the situation.
8. The independently run attractions within the park like Butterfly World contribute to the parking demand and pressure on infrastructure without making any proportionate contribution to costs or supporting efforts to manage demand. A whole strategic plan would need to be developed to review the independently run operations on the site and ensure fair contributions are being made and that the offer fits with the overall aim of PPMG.
9. The master plan attached as **Appendix A** as presented for Cabinet approval in this report sets out a number of medium and long term proposals that cannot currently be resourced but which are still critical to understanding the context of the shorter term measures we may be able to fund. The plan is annotated to show those developments which are likely to be eligible to be funded by the Heritage Lottery, however, the match funding required to supporting these improvements may not be a priority at this time.
10. It is also worth noting that following a restructure this year, the Council has new staff and management arrangements in place, bringing the different Council teams within the attraction together under a new PPMG Development and Operations Manager. The new management team will be responsible for scoping and investigating the detail of any developments proposed within the plan, utilising their experience and knowledge of parks and heritage attractions.
11. The approach to future developments within the Park and any detailed work undertaken on proposals set out in the attached Master Plan will be informed by the findings of the currently ongoing Scrutiny Committee investigation into Anti-social Behaviour in the park.

Master Plan key elements

12. The current master plan outlines 28 areas for improvement, development or creation. These range from restoring boundary fencing, improving signage to investigating the feasibility of introducing new catering opportunities within PPMG.
13. As set out in preceding paragraphs the most important work in the medium term is likely to be the modification of the car parking and traffic flow systems and the improvement of the central café, toilets and pedestrian area. Shorter term work on pathways and signage are also a priority to encourage better use of the 110 acre site and to ensure the safety of visitors. Overarching this entire plan is always the vision to establish PPMG as a major

visitor destination under one brand, rather than the current disjointed feel the site has developed over time.

Heritage and Conservation Features

14. PPMG is valued as a local and regional destination with recognition as an important asset for the Tees Valley. Currently the museum element of the attraction is perceived as having the strong cultural and heritage value, whereas the park is often regarded simply for its recreational uses, leading to it being undervalued or misused. Investing and promoting the park for its strong historical features and endorsing conservation will unify the site more, attract new audiences and also enable the council to access funding opportunities.
15. Proposed landscaping on the site will be sympathetic to the historical integrity and will also open up views, improve access opportunities and ultimately improve visitor safety. The medium term plan would be to reinstate the avenue of trees on the main field whilst creating screening through planting in the current main car parks, encouraging movement to the extended parking behind Butterfly World. Through careful landscaping it will shift the focus of visitors on arrival from the 'free' areas of the park to the main focus of the museum and walled gardens.
16. Reinstating historic vistas from the museum across the river will transform the space, recreating the original historic setting. New picnic benches will develop the area further with the idea of spreading out visitors from the current congested areas around the play area and café.
17. With the creation of new posts to work in the park there will be growing emphasis on conservation, biodiversity and volunteering opportunities to enhance the outdoor space. Longer term aims are to develop a conservation and biodiversity plan for the site to enrich habitats and improve the visitor experience through wildflower meadows and improvements to quarry woods, all which will run alongside a focussed outdoor community and engagement strategy. This increased presence in the park will ultimately reduce ASB and increase the sense of local pride and ownership of the site.
18. A conservation and biodiversity plan will incorporate a planned approach for tackling the growing conflict between dog walkers and general visitors. Although clearly a sensitive issue, many parks through education and community engagement have managed to enforce 'dogs on lead' policies to reduce dog fouling and ASB. Introduction of a purpose built dog exercise area and careful zoning should be explored.
19. Longer term plans are for the interpretation of the Stockton & Darlington Railway (S&DR) track bed through archaeological investigation, clearance of the woodland and new information for visitors to understand the connection. Through interpretation of the S&DR there will be a clearer links to the current small gauge railway. Although currently a popular attraction run by a local hobby club there is the opportunity to make a better feature of it through careful planting and landscaping and historical re-enactments and interpretation to bring it to life more, linking it to the wider offer.
20. Ultimate aims for the PPMG should be to apply and achieve nationally significant awards such as Green Flag and Natural England Accreditations.

Traffic flow and parking

21. Traffic flow and parking around the site is an area where investment and development is essential to ensure safe access and egress, accommodating more paying visitors and reduce disruption.

22. The medium term plan is to get the vast majority of traffic more effectively around the back of Butterfly World, through widening the access route and opening up views. This would create a more formalised and welcoming route. Reconfiguration of the current main car park, closest to the cafe, to become a coach drop off and accessible parking will move the main congestion away from the central area of the park. Consideration for a more suitable and hardwearing surface on the south field car parks, as well as full car park resurfacing and white lining would probably be required.
23. Longer term plans offer a potential one way system utilising an exit via Preston Lane, subject to junction works on Yarm Road. There is also the potential to explore the use of an 'event day route' through to Queen Elizabeth Way via proposed new housing development on the adjacent field.
24. Subject to approval of the Master Plan, detailed further work will be required to explore short and medium term options to improve car parking and traffic flow in and around the attraction, including giving consideration to the impact on nearby roads.

Central area

25. Currently the most densely populated area of the attraction is focussed around the café and toilet block which has remained relatively underdeveloped. This area is surrounded by new play areas, skate-park and mini golf, therefore hugely popular as the 'free' attraction.
26. The café has a large footfall and is at the centre of the busiest part of the park. It has limited opportunities for development due to its current size and configuration. Plans to improve this area visually would include new paving and improved signage for the site to become the visitor hub. This will enable visitors to orientate themselves and understand the wider offer of the attraction.
27. Medium term plans would be to offer a visitors hub through a new purpose built café and toilet block. This would be fit for purpose for the site and offer adequate facilities and scope for future growth. Combining the public toilets within the café would provide a central point where visitors can go for information about the site and reduce the opportunity for ASB on an evening as it can be locked with the café. Smaller scale external improvements of the café could be achieved through the extension of covered seating and a new fascia.
28. Subject to approval of the Master Plan, detailed further work will be required to explore short and medium term options for the café and toilets.

Extending the paid-for attraction

29. Extending the paid for attraction elements of the site will be important to increase visitor satisfaction, dwell time and secondary spend opportunities. Currently the most underutilised area of the attraction is the walled garden. This is likely to be due to the poor appearance on approach, inadequate signage, lack of in-depth interpretation and clear link to the rest of the offer.
30. Recent trends and evidence around day visit to similar attractions demonstrate that outdoor spaces, including parks and gardens are better attended with a higher spend per person than museums and art galleries. Therefore it makes commercial sense to put investment in these areas of the business to boost the other offers.
31. Currently the walled garden feels disjointed and separate from the museum with poor access and unclear interpretation and identity. The medium plan would be to relocate the staff car park and bin store and improve signage and interpretation.

32. The longer term plan would be enhance the garden experience through the creation of an ornamental garden adjacent to the site and removal of the bandstand which has no historical importance. The walled garden would then focus more on growing vegetables and fruits with a real “plot to plate” and historical focus around allotments, home front efforts, and Victorian gardening techniques.
33. Opportunities to introduce small holdings could be explored in the future to really create an exciting and engaging experience, as well as enabling the sale of the produce and utilising what is grown in our catering offer. Within the walled garden a new greenhouse could be created on the footprint of the original structure, along with refurbishment of the potting shed building providing a location for new trading activity. This would enable the garden to become more functional for growing our own plants and also allow the space to become more useable for events.
34. Management of the increased gardens and park offer would require suitable compound facilities to accommodate the volunteer opportunities, providing welfare facilities and secure storage of tools and equipment. A purpose built compound building could be created near the new proposed staff car parking area - out of the public route. A good example of this successfully working is at Hardwick Park in Sedgfield through Durham County Council, where they have a large volunteer workforce maintaining the park alongside a team of 2 countryside rangers.
35. Longer term consideration for improvements should include the Victorian Street within the museum and opportunities for more nationally significant and higher profile exhibitions as this will only raise the profile of the site and increase visitor numbers.
36. Currently there are several ad-hoc external agencies operating out of the street with little commercial gain for the site. Re-evaluating the streets function, historical interpretation and identifying which shops should be used as commercial opportunities will need exploring. Improving the look and experience of the street will only reaffirm the museums status as a top visitor attraction. Currently, displays are very static and temporary exhibitions are typically localised and smaller scale.
37. The recent granting of National Portfolio Organisation status from the Arts Council will help support a move to larger exhibitions and increased activity across the paid for area of the attraction. Additional costs and implications around loans and insurance will need exploring however opportunities such as government indemnity status may need exploring to alleviate costs and risks.

Areas for new/improved commercial concessions

38. There are several opportunities to improve the commercial offer within the park that would require initial investment for future return.
39. The catering offer within the park and museum is an area that presents an opportunity for further development. SBC Catering Services currently run two catering outlets within the site. The current lay out and size of the catering outlets mean customer demand regularly outstrips current capacity . Council teams will work together to understand the demand and audience and our capacity to maximise the potential of this aspect of the attraction. In addition some covered seating should also be considered to provide for those visitors that wish to consume their own food without reducing the capacity in the Cafés for paying customers
40. The master plan currently outlines longer term plans for reinstating the Victorian conservatory to the rear of the museum, offering a larger café area with views across the river. Another option to explore would be the creation of an orangery within the walled garden that could offer catering, focusing on the plot to plate ethos. Excellent local

examples of this working successfully are the walled garden and glasshouse at Wynyard Hall and Bradley Gardens in Northumberland. Both options would need full feasibility carrying out.

41. Improving the use of the events fields by incorporating power, water and anchor points will provide opportunities to increase income through external companies leasing the site for additional uses such as bouncy castle and small fairground rides. Not only will this bring income but will spread out the visitors from the centralised area and improve the overall offer. However, such developments would need to be linked to improvements to traffic flows and parking to ensure that any extra demand can be safely accommodated.

COMMUNITY IMPACT IMPLICATIONS

42. Potential impact on different communities arising from any element of the Park development will be assessed on a case by case basis. In particular there may be an effect on disabled users if improvements are made to car park controls and impacts on local residential communities if the site can accommodate more visitor cars without disruptions to traffic and nearby streets.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

43. This report does not make any commitments that require additional funding beyond budgets already agreed. However, it is expected that selected elements of the Plan will be refined and detailed as set out in recommendation 2 and be the subject of a future resource allocation request. Consideration of potential match funding for a larger programme of redevelopment has been given by Cabinet in response to previous reports to Cabinet on this subject.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

44. There are no legal issues arising from this report. It is expected that any developments within the Park and any ramifications beyond the Park boundary will fall within the Councils normal powers and rights.

RISK ASSESSMENT

45. The development of the Preston Hall Museum & Grounds master plan is categorised as low to medium risk. Existing management systems and daily routine activities are sufficient to control and reduce risk.
46. There is a risk that publication of the Master Plan will lead to expectations that all or most of the long term proposals can be realised in the short term. For this reason there will not be widespread dissemination of the Master Plan to the general public except where that is provided as the context for specific elements that are being brought forward such as the options for improved café and toilet facilities.

COUNCIL PLAN POLICY PRINCIPLES AND PRIORITIES

Policy Principles:

Protecting the vulnerable through targeted intervention

47. The master plan and continued development of PPMG will drive continued improvements of safety on the site for all users, but particularly the most vulnerable.

Promoting equality of opportunity through targeted intervention

48. Activities, programmes of work and pricing policies will contribute to the creation of equal opportunities for the very large and diverse community of users of the attraction.

Developing strong and healthy communities

49. PPMG brings diverse communities together, promotes pride and fosters a greater awareness of local history and shared heritage. Activities in the Park and the general availability of open green space for recreational activity encourages healthy active leisure. PPMG makes a positive contribution to strong and healthy communities.

Creating economic prosperity

50. PPMG attracts significant numbers of visitors to the area and promotes a positive image of the place which contributes to our efforts to attract and retain talent and investment.

CORPORATE PARENTING IMPLICATIONS

51. The facilities provided at PPMG make a positive contribution to the education and inspiration of young people, including our looked after children. Many activities in the park and hall target or cater directly for our looked after children.

CONSULTATION INCLUDING WARD/COUNCILLORS

52. The development of the draft PPMG master plan has involved stakeholders in the attraction, including the Friends of Preston Park, Rivershack, and local Ward Councillors.
53. Consultation on any elements that are developed into detailed proposals, such as those for the café and toilets, will involve those stakeholders and a wider public of users and interested parties, including any local residents who may be directly affected by changes to the attraction.

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Education related

No

Background Papers

Previous Cabinet reports, in particular those of 3rd December 2015, and 14th July 2016.

Ward(s) and Ward Councillors:

PPMG falls within the Eaglescliffe Ward and is represented by Cllrs Houghton, Tunney, and Dennis.

Property

Preston Park and Hall are the property of Stockton Council and developments considered within the master plan will, if approved, become part of the fut5ure Capital Programme.