

Malmesbury Town Council
Town Hall and Facilities Committee meeting 9.9.20
Report No.4

Cloister Gardens Working Group

The overall aim of the group is to make the Cloister Gardens the central recreational feature of the town.

This will be done by enhancing the use and perception of the key town centre assets:-

- Cloister Gardens
- Birdcage Walk
- Market Cross Ancient Monument

(all areas leased and managed by Malmesbury Town Council)

The goals of the Working Group proposed by Gavin Grant were to:

- examine ways of enhancing the public use and enjoyment of these areas in the context of the COVID 19 pandemic **and** beyond
- 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
- 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
- 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
- set out budget and cost impacts of any proposals that result from the above
- report back and make appropriate recommendations to the Town Hall and Facilities Committee

The first decision was to elect a Chair of the working group and I, Cllr. Paul Smith, volunteered for the role. Members are; Cllr Gavin Grant, Cllr Julie Exton, Mayor Campbell Ritchie and Richard Spencer-Williams The Town Clerk.

Initially focus is on the Cloister Gardens. It was decided to consult all local stakeholders to seek initial views and gain support for placing 4 garden picnic tables in the grounds so residents could use the area for town centre picnics, all subject to social distancing and COVID 19 rules. There was total support from everyone concerned and 4 tables were bought from Willis Bros and installed early August, paid for from the High Street Area Board regeneration funds.

Discussion also considered that the open space could be hired out on similar terms to that of room hire in the Town Hall for exercise classes or other activities. So far enquires have been received but no bookings taken.

Concerns have been raised about the state of the paths and the ivy growing over the beams and arbour / south walls. The Town Clerk is consulting with professionals to establish safety and what remedial works are needed and associated costs.

The bank from the Station Yard approach is also considered to be a key part of the regeneration plan.

The Town Clerk is to look at and advise on restrictions in the lease of the land from Abbey House. This will provide a degree of focus as to what we can do, all subject to planning and agreements with all stakeholders.

The primary thought at this early stage is to make the area a secure gated location that is opened and closed daily.

The group want to work with High Street traders and subject to Government COVID 19 Rules to see if anything can be done to support trade over the Christmas period.

Longer term considerations include water and electricity to the area, CCTV, and a new design for the area incorporating some of the features currently present. No thoughts have yet been given on how to do this, we await survey reports and then further discussion with stakeholders and appropriate authorities.

Since the 4 tables have been installed there have been complaints from the staff who clean the area daily that rubbish has increased and there is much more broken glass around. One Monday Graham spent over 2 hours tidying up and then Cllrs Ritchie and Smith spent a couple of hours picking broken glass up off the paths and grass. Later 2 bottles were dug out of the lawn that had been left with an inch protruding.

Barbara Pollard has made several complaints about the tables, their location and the fact they are left overnight in the gardens. Her complaints centre around anti-social behaviour, drug taking and noise along with the smashing of glass. She has previously complained about people kicking footballs in there and has also commented that this behaviour has gone on for the last 26 years at least.

There have been a number of people praising their appearance especially the café. When walking through I have noted that they have been used by all ages and a wide cross section of people.

I propose that this report is adopted and the basis of continuing with developing the Cloister Gardens into an important and desirable asset in the town centre.

Paul Smith
Chair of The Cloister Gardens Working Party
5th September 2020