

INTERCHANGE PARK UPDATE

Report of the Director of Place Management

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 This report updates the Scrutiny Committee as to progress made in the design, construction and plans to animate the park on top of the new Interchange to gauge the views of members and to facilitate contribution to the final development stage prior to the grand opening in Spring 2024

2. BACKGROUND & CURRENT PICTURE

Background

- 2.1 As part of the transformation of the borough's transport hub, plans were proposed and agreed in 2018 for an innovative, 2-acre, rooftop park and connecting walking/cycling bridge. The Interchange project is being delivered alongside Transport for Greater Manchester (TfGM), and the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA), in conjunction with contractor Willmott Dixon. This is an exceptional transformation piece, a thriving greenspace in the very heart of the town centre and borough, the development of which we have been able to fund as part of the wider TfGM interchange project, providing a fantastic new amenity for residents and visitors.
- 2.2 Since the park project was signed off through the planning process, officers have overseen design and construction and worked on the concept, community engagement and animation of the space.

Current picture

- 2.3 Physical works on the new Interchange are now nearing completion and the details around the park are being worked through with the final plans for the park to be approved under the conditions of the planning application. An officer working group from across the council has been set up in order to drive this ambitious project forward.
- 2.4 The park is an integral park of the scheme and a visible example of the Council's ambitious regeneration plans and as such it is essential that it is a well-used and loved space by all residents of the Borough. There are a number initiatives in its design and use aimed to achieve this but one of these will be a programme of activities to animate the park and make it a place to visit.
- 2.5 The borough is rich in parks, countryside and open spaces which provide heritage, play, sport, and unique and diverse opportunities for visitors, including Reddish Vale Country Park, the borough's largest park, indoor and outdoor archery ranges and competition-level BMX track at Bruntwood Park, Vernon Park which opened in 1858 and is Stockport's oldest public park lying just east of the town centre through to

Hopes Carr Memorial Park, which opened in 2022. The new park has been an exciting opportunity to provide an ambitious greenspace with bold planted borders, horticulture features and a variety of trees that will provide colour and interest throughout the year.

2.6 The provision of the park delivers against a number of our key strategies, particularly Neighbourhoods and Prevention (Thriving Places pillar), Health and Well-being and the Active Communities strategy with the addition of new walking and cycling routes and space for reflection and relaxation alongside Climate Action Now in terms of biodiversity, habitat, carbon targets, and the whole park forming a Sustainable Urban Drainage System to combat adverse weather. At a time when the cost of living crisis is affecting many of our residents, the park will provide an intergenerational inclusive space with a free animation and events programme for generations to come together and enjoy.

2.7 The vision for the park is:

“a central, connecting space in our borough; a place where everyone wants to go to enjoy the best urban greenspace”

Key Themes in the development of the space are:

- Town of Culture Legacy: *Makes, Moves, Sounds, Tastes*
- Inclusivity, accessibility, well-being and cohesion
- Community Engagement
- Links to local heritage; Hatworks, Stockroom
- Connectivity – to key spaces in MDC/ Town Centre/ across our neighbourhoods, transport links, walking and cycling, viaduct and waterways, past present and future
- Nature, greenspace, biodiversity, climate action
- Design themes- natural materials, engaging lighting

2.8 The team have been working to a project plan to ensure the park achieves its vision and delivers against the themes. Key work streams include:

3. CONSTRUCTION/DESIGN SCHEME (INC. COMMUNITY SAFETY, LIGHTING ETC)

3.1 SMBC are responsible for the park (above waterproof membrane) and have worked with the designers to create a multiuse space which will be inclusive and accessible to all our residents and visitors.

3.2 **Planting** has been carefully planned to create interest and colour all year round, to facilitate a natural walk around the central oculus and to create a natural, lush green space, rich in biodiversity with planting for pollinators as well as growing spaces for occupants of the residential block to grow fruit and vegetables.

3.3 **Play equipment** has been incorporated throughout the park to complement different areas of the space including natural play such as low balance beams,

inclusive play including wheelchair accessible trampoline, roundabout and interactive, intergenerational, and electronic games.

- 3.4 **Street furniture** is being installed to complement the natural planting, with wooden seating and steel planters.
- 3.5 **Event space** is planned for the area next to the A6 and will provide a space for creative activities. This could be used for school children to learn about the nature in the park, workshops with voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise (VCFSE) groups, intimate musical sessions, wellbeing activities such as open air yoga or garden parties.
- 3.6 **Lighting** is key to the look and feel of the park but must also support the safety of the users. As such, column lighting has been used around the paths to create a modern, soft feel whilst ensuring that the Lumen level of brightness is carefully calculated to ensure the rich and varied wildlife which includes bats, otters and many varieties of insects in and around the Mersey next to the park can continue to thrive.
- 3.7 LED strip lighting is being installed around the inner barrier of the oculus, colours can be changed to support events and activities. Festoon lighting will create an intimate feel for evenings around the event space and fairy lights will be installed in the tree clusters as they mature.
- 3.8 Seasonal lights can be added, for example at Christmas time, and provision is being made to light up the arches of the viaduct.
- 3.9 **Businesses** at the bottom of the residential block provide opportunities for collaboration around events, involvement in a friends of the park group, sponsorship of events and more.

4. COMMUNICATIONS, COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND TRAILERS

- 4.1 A detailed communications plan and timeline will be developed that includes the pre-opening engagement alongside media and photo opportunities. We will continue to profile the park as part of our messaging about place and regeneration, linking this, Town of Culture, Stockroom and Merseyway redevelopment to demonstrate how we are delivering on our ambitious plans for Stockport. We will focus on local media for the pre-engagement elements and build up to regional media for launch with the hope of securing broadcast coverage for the opening or exclusive pre-launch interviews. We will also develop a trade media press plan showcasing how the park delivers against our key strategies. We will also develop communication collateral including dedicated web presence, images and material to share via digital and print.
- 4.2 **Pre-opening Community Engagement** has begun in the form of social media around the progress in the park including the planting of the first tree by the Leader of the council. Town of Culture key events will be used to trail the park. Officers are starting conversations with local groups to secure their involvement in the animation of the park and to enlist their support in building excitement around its opening.

- 4.3 In Autumn we will reach out to local members and involve all those interested in the engagement programme. Local colleges will be contacted to enlist young people to act as Stockport influencers and use their creative and social media skills to create excitement around the park.
- 4.4 The engagement programme will continue through Winter with outreach workshops and mini events in the park, again working through local community organisations and leaders to ensure we are reaching the widest audience possible. Workshops will include making pennants/ flags for the opening of the park using recycled fabrics and making bird boxes from the trees felled at the start of the project. First-look tours and sneak previews to highlight different elements of the park such as the walking and cycling route will be planned for members and specific groups (e.g. care leavers).
- 4.5 A “Friends Of” group will be created by reaching out to local businesses, residents and VCFSE groups who will have opportunities to suggest ideas for animation activities in the park as well as enlisting support for the care of the green space. Youth groups will be particularly welcome to foster a positive relationship with the park and to develop a sense of ownership.
- 4.6 **Naming of the park**, also in Autumn we will engage local communities through a consortia of art-based groups holding workshops around the themes and what the park means to local people. This process will create a shortlist of names which will be followed by a Trailer event to take place at a central location to incorporate a blind token vote. A big reveal of the name will take place at a follow-up naming ceremony event.
- 4.7 **Grand Opening** will take place in spring to coincide with a Town of Culture Showcase across the town centre in a choreographed programme of events, activities and excitement to bring animation. A ribbon cutting with dignitaries & partners will start proceedings followed by activities based around the 4 Town of Culture themes, Moves, Makes, Sounds and Tastes. These might include children’s craft and nature workshops plus displaying of the flags made in the run-up, taster fitness sessions, bicycle maintenance, pop-up musical performances and local food tasters.
- 4.8 **A Festival of Events** is then planned to animate the space for the first year and beyond to include a large event per season, Summer would see the park as the focal point for Stockport Moves, Autumn would see a celebration of traditional harvest time activities and nature-based trails around the changing colours in the park and Winter a festive, winter-themed light extravaganza.
- 4.9 **Animation** of the park is key to its continued use status amongst visitors and residents as a destination of choice. In between the large events will be animation weekends where several activities and makers workshops will be offered to engage communities.
- 4.10 Installation of Public Art will play a key role in providing interest and spectacle. It is intended that a cultural commissioning approach will be taken with a consortia of local art groups. This consortia will be tasked with a central artwork commission demonstrating connectivity and the position of the park as central to the borough.

There are a number of plinths around the park which will be treated as short-term residencies for local artists or groups, creating an ongoing programme of interest. Events such as an art battle are being explored and there is the possibility of light projections on the viaduct- lighting up the arches in different colours for occasions and celebrations.

- 4.11 **Connectivity** is an important theme for the park, representing a central point for communities across the borough. Walking and Cycling routes through the park will be promoted through digital activity packs, schools' outreach through CAN and Public Health. In the vicinity of the park, it is anticipated that small mosaics could create an art trail. The park and surrounding areas will be added to national and local trails where possible such as the National Trust's blossom trail in spring.

5. CONSIDERATIONS

- 5.1 **Ongoing maintenance**, upkeep, events and animation programme and utilities costs will need to be covered through existing funds (structure and hard landscaping of the park has been covered as part of the wider interchange development). Additional officer resource will be needed to service this work.
- 5.2 **Community safety** in the park is of upmost importance and the design of the features and zones has been developed with the minimisation of antisocial behaviour wherever possible, for example consideration has been given to the height of festoon lighting, the sighting of benches and number and position of litter bins and the height of the barriers around the park.
- 5.3 **Traffic management** during events and animation activities will be considered along the busy A6.

6. OPPORTUNITIES

- 6.1 **Inclusivity** is a key measure for this project and through careful planning of events and activities and targeted engagement there is a real opportunity to ensure all of our communities are able to access the park. We have worked with colleagues to ensure accessibility is integral in planning the of the park and will reach out across all networks, including elected members to make sure the park is somewhere everyone feels welcome. A thriving friends of group will support this.
- 6.2 **Funding** from external sources will be sought to support some of the one-off projects and activities that are planned.
- 6.3 **Future-proofing** the park by working with partner tech businesses and colleges to use digital innovation wherever possible, thinking intuitive public realm.
- 6.4 **Monitoring and reviewing usage** being agile and flexible to understand how the spaces in the park are used, how they differ from the intended use and where we can adapt and improve will keep the space fresh and interesting.

7. CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

- 7.1 This project is unique in that it is a new build park, accessible to all the borough's residents right in the heart of our borough and it's transport system and waterways. It connects our neighbourhoods and communities, symbolising past, present and future through the surrounding Stockport heritage, current town centre offer and future legacy. The park promotes and supports improved mental and physical wellbeing as a central, focal point and valuable green asset.

Recommendations

- 7.2 The Scrutiny Committee is recommended to:-
- (1) Note the report and progress in the park
 - (2) Support the use of existing funding to maintain and develop the space

BACKGROUND PAPERS

There are none.

Anyone wishing to inspect the above background papers or requiring further information should contact Emma Stubbs on 07811591429 or by email on emma.stubbs@stockport.gov.uk