



Victoria Park Update



From recent discussions in the press it has become apparent that there is a great deal of misunderstanding with regard to the future of Victoria Park. Newbury Town Council has issued various press releases and announcements over the last couple of years, but the current situation has become confused, because of the complexities. This statement is designed to dispel rumours and clarify the true present status.

Newbury Town Council leases Victoria Park from West Berkshire Council. Newbury Town Council is responsible for the park's maintenance and is proud of the praise that is so frequently given on its general upkeep. However, there has been no significant capital investment in the infrastructure of the park for many years and so as part of Vision 2025, Newbury Town Council were tasked to find ways to improve the park for the good of all its users. A lot of preparation, consultation and analysis has happened over the last three years, including the winning of a £50,000 project planning grant which has enabled Newbury Town Council to employ professional consultants who have worked on similar park improvement schemes throughout the country. In late 2005 work was well advanced towards preparing a Heritage Lottery Bid for in the region of £750,000 to improve the park based, on responses to the consultation.

Using the money from this original bid, Newbury Town Council intended to give the park a sympathetic overhaul, including additional tree planting; new herbaceous borders; improved paths, lighting and security; enhanced seating; new play equipment and skateboard park; better signage; interpretation boards outlining the history of the park; improved sports facilities (e.g. enhancing the existing tennis courts to include basketball, volleyball, 5-a-side football); improved drainage; a sculpture garden; an ecology / nature conservation area; enhancement of the historic core including the bowls club and band stand; as well as provision for a park warden. It was also recognised that the existing toilets, kiosk and boat store were in a very poor state of repair and needed to be completely replaced. The overall aim was to ensure a park that respects its history and provides facilities for the 21st century.

Meanwhile, the possibility of some kind of community pavilion in the park continued to be discussed as a part of the Wharf project under West Berkshire Council control. Newbury Town Council welcomed this, as it would provide the building elements of the park improvement (toilets, café, changing rooms, park warden's office, boat store), leaving the bid to concentrate on improving the rest of the park. As part of the lease, West Berkshire Council retained control of part of the park, which is the area in which the proposed pavilion would be built.

There was then a delay while the Wharf consultation was itself delayed by the need of a supporting car parking strategy. In the meantime there have been further complexities introduced, including decisions on the retention of the park railings between the new Parkway development and the park (they will stay!) and the extent of additional funding for Victoria Park related to the Parkway development. The results of the Wharf consultation were finally published in March this year. However, although there was strong support for the pavilion, there is still, even today, no guarantee that the full pavilion will go ahead. West Berkshire Council decided at a recent Executive Meeting to go ahead with a detailed

feasibility study into the Wharf scheme, part of which will cover the proposed pavilion. The final size and composition of this community building have yet to be decided.

These uncertainties and delays have continued to delay the Newbury Town Council bid. If a bid is not submitted by 31 December 2007, Newbury Town Council will have to repay the (already spent!) project planning grant. All current park grants from the Lottery Fund now come under the new Parks for People scheme. This emphasises positive social and environmental benefits and the contribution of parks to biodiversity, recreation and learning, rather than the simple restoration and refurbishment of existing facilities.

Newbury Town Council will therefore be submitting a new Parks for People bid in December. As well as including all the improvements proposed in the originally planned bid, this bid will also show a modestly sized building containing critical and useful community facilities such as replacement toilets, café with indoor and outdoor seating, changing rooms, boat store, park warden's office and community/education space. This building will initially be a much smaller building than the proposed pavilion and is likely to be placed near the existing boating pond. It will be able to stand alone or become the first module of the proposed larger pavilion of West Berkshire's recent Wharf Consultation.

Newbury Town Council is planning a public exhibition for October / November in the Town Hall to give everyone the opportunity to review the outline of what is proposed in the lottery fund bid. Once the bid is submitted in December 2007, there will be an opportunity for further refinements until March 2008, before the lottery decision making process from March to September 2008. If successful, lottery money would then be ring-fenced, but still not released. Newbury Town Council would then employ a Project Development Officer for between 3 and 12 months to work the plans further into detailed implementation plans, for further lottery funding decisions (to release the ring-fenced money) during 2009. The earliest that work would start, if fully funded by lottery money, would be early 2010.

Newbury Town Council will continue to work closely with West Berkshire Council and others to ensure that the Wharf and Parkway developments dovetail into its own plans for the park.

Newbury Town Council would like to assure everyone of its intention to maximise the possible external funding sources, to make Victoria Park as attractive and accessible to everyone, while also doing all it can to ensure the safety and security of park users. The park will remain the green lung in the centre of Newbury, with its heritage protected.

Victoria Park has a great future.

If anyone has any questions, the Victoria Park Working Group would be pleased to answer them.

END

Cllr Ian Grose – Leader of Newbury Town Council (grose.ian9@btinternet.com 01635 36816)
Cllr Gabrielle McGarvey – Chair of Victoria Park Working Group
(gabrielle.mcgarvey@btinternet.com 01635 550824)
Graham Hunt – Chief Executive Officer (chiefexec@newbury.gov.uk 01635 35486)

Newbury Town Council

Town Hall, Market Place, Newbury, Berkshire. RG14 5AA
Telephone: (01635) 35486 Fax: (01635 40484)
E-Mail: towncouncil@newbury.gov.uk

Website designed & hosted by [Newbury Internet Services](#) and managed by Newbury Town Council
Site photography Jo Andreae
© Copyright 2002-2007 Newbury Town Council