

Chapel-en-le-Frith Memorial Park

Community Engagement Report

September 2021



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Section 1:

Background



Chapel-en-le-Frith Memorial Park

The Park was established in 1921 as 'a place for public recreation and pleasure and public walks'. The Memorial Arch at the main gate was built in 1953 to commemorate those who gave their lives in both world wars. A time capsule was placed under the structure.

In 2000 a Memorial Garden was created to celebrate the Millennium, using stone from the old Target Wall which was used by Bowden Volunteers.

Many trees have been planted over the years and are now mature. The large Chestnut tree was planted in 1953 to mark the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II.

In the Memorial Park there is a football pitch, children's play, Skatepark, MUGA as well as quiet areas and seats.

Parks and Green Space in a Pandemic

In the autumn of 2020, the 'Covid Snake' of painted stones was sunk into the ground and a tree planted to mark the Coronavirus Pandemic. Data collected during the pandemic reveals that parks, nature and open green spaces have been a big comfort during periods of lockdown. According to the government's advisor for the natural environment, Natural England, more than 40% of people say nature, wildlife and visiting local green spaces have been even more important to their wellbeing since the coronavirus restrictions began and percentages have remained stable throughout.

In a review of surveys and data on the role of nature and green spaces in the past year, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) said that shifts in personal behaviour and corporate attitudes could mean that the UK, post lockdown, will value and interact with nature on a much greater scale than before the pandemic." (Helen Briggs, BBC Environment Correspondent, April 2021)

"According to a study by Cardiff University and Cardiff Metropolitan University, people with green space on their doorstep or access to a private garden reported better health and well being during and after the first lockdown in the UK. Researchers have also shown that people with a garden and a park nearby were more likely to say they were feeling calm, peaceful and had a lot of energy compared to those with no access to a garden or living further away from green space.



Chapel-en-le-Frith Parish Council

The Parish Council owns and manages the Memorial Park. Following council elections in May 2021, a new Chair and several new Councillors were elected, providing a fresh, proactive approach to matters which had pervaded the area for some time. A review into use of the park was commissioned in order to inform future decisions and develop a plan based on authentic community voices.



Section 106 funding

As a result of a new development taking place in the area, Under Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, contributions can be sought from developers towards the costs of providing community and social infrastructure such as leisure and recreation. This is an ideal opportunity to connect with locals and improve the parks and green open space.

Funding currently available in Chapel-en-le-Frith amounts to £97,472 and in Dove Holes £43,440, totalling over £140,000. This presents a superb opportunity to work with High Peak Borough Council and Shift and their professional networks to leverage in further funding to multiply this initial amount.





Section 2:

Methodology

It was agreed that during the months of July and August 2021, a comprehensive community engagement approach would be undertaken involving several techniques to allow for maximum input and rich, two-way conversation to understand how the park could be improved to enhance quality of living in the area.

This approach was favoured over a traditional questionnaire survey as it also created relationships and capacity which could be used to develop use of the park in the future.

Online Survey

Using the 'Survey Monkey' tool, a series of questions were made available online and shared on social media by many local groups. For example, local parent and childminding groups, Chapel Town Football Club, Chapel Youth Movement, the Primary School, High School, Little Cherubs Community, Chapel Good Neighbour Charity and the Town Hall. Many local residents also shared the online survey using their personal social media accounts.

A QR code (Quick Response Code) was created linked to the survey which could be scanned by a phone or tablet at various places throughout the park. The questions were short and simple as follows:

What is your best memory of the park?

What would it take to make the park a better place for you/everyone?

What could you do to support the long-term future of the park?

171 responses were received in reference to the Memorial Park.

Postcards

A colourful, A5, double-sided postcard was designed and printed, inviting responses to the questions above. Postcards were distributed to surrounding residential areas, and made available in local shops, cafes, hairdressers and social spaces.

103 postcards have been completed and returned, either by hand to the Town Hall or scanned and emailed in.

Group Conversations

A small working group was established in early July to ensure engagement across the wider community. The group involved Parish Councillors, the Clerk to the Council, the Police Community Youth Engagement Officer, the Parks Manager and the High Peak Community Builder from Shift, the appointed Community Interest Company who are supporting this work.

Working Group members held conversations in the park throughout July and August involving children, families, dog walkers, local residents and visitors. Postcards were completed and participants were encouraged to complete the online survey.

Activity

In addition to the survey, a programme of activity in the park was developed over the summer months including the following:

Nature day

Rounders

Family Mile

Nordic Walking

Calisthenics

Funding was secured from Derbyshire County Council to deliver a Holiday Activities and Food Programme which engaged 40 young people in a sports camp for three weeks. Food was provided by Rem's Cafe Bar and Restaurant.



Section 3:

Findings



Best Memory or Feeling about the Park

The survey revealed that the park is most often thought of as a place for having fun with family and friends, with over a third of people quoting this as their best memory or feeling about the park.

“Picnics in the park, playing hide and seek, chasing my girls up and down the hills”

The Carnival, ball sports, dog walks and a place to meet people also featured as strong memories of the park when locals were reminiscing.

In addition, many talked about the peace and calm, of early morning walks in the snow, of birdsong and being in nature. The open space, freedom, views, greenery, fresh air and quietness all registered and helped with mental as well as physical health, especially during lockdown.

“A green oasis in a small, over developed town”

“I love the open space and trees and that it is a mainly untouched by time area of Chapel”

“Sitting under a tree on a beautiful evening last summer”

Interestingly, the old play equipment was referenced by many as a ‘best memory’ with the high slide and the roundabout featuring regularly.

“Taking our children to the park after school. The long slide was very exciting – removed many years ago! (Health and Safety!!)”

What would it take to make the park a better place for you/everyone?

Full details of the responses can be found in the appendix and the main themes emerging are summarised below:

Events

Over 30% of respondents suggested that more events and activities in the park would make it a better place for themselves and others, for example:



“Organised activities for kids to do especially in the holidays , picnics , football , rounders”

“Much more community interaction and ALL residents feeling the benefit”

Anti-social behaviour

A reduction in anti-social behaviour was a frequent comment with over 47% of respondents siting this as an area for improvement. Littering, dog mess and broken glass appear to be the main causes of anti-social behaviour alongside young people drinking alcohol, swearing and 'hanging around' causing distress to other park users.

"Stop the evening drinking there and leaving the glass and rubbish"

"I have challenged groups of lads to put their litter in bins to be verbally abused or intimidated."

"Stop the youths breaking glass and making a mess – cost me £150 vet bill last week"

"Preventing large gatherings of youths around the benches which can be intimidating especially at night."

Security / Safety

Further to comments regarding anti-social behaviour, many respondents made suggestions to improve security and tackle a perceived threat to safety. Suggestions include introducing CCTV (3%), wardens (3%), police presence (3%) locking the park at night (3%) and controlling teenagers.

"Lock the park at dusk"

"Someone having control over young kids ruining the park"

"People need to be held responsible for their actions"

Play/fitness equipment

Improved equipment for all ages was another popular comment with just under 13% suggesting an outdoor gym and 20% suggesting increased age-appropriate play equipment, especially for children aged 3-8.

Users of the baby/toddler area reported being hit by balls flying over the fencing from the MUGA as well as exposure to bad language from older children.

“Better play equipment for children aged 3-8 years. My daughter is five and the only thing she is able to play in that is age appropriate for her is the large blue slide.”

“Move children’s play area away from skateboard ramp and multi use area as there is so much swearing from older children. It is hard to stop a small child from hearing this”

“Protection from flying footballs for toddler area”

Suggestions were made regarding zoning of the park to allow for a variety of uses eg a picnic area/quiet zone, a nature/wilding zone, and potentially a dog walking zone. The skate park received mixed reviews with 10 comments supporting a revamp, one for removal and two for moving the location. Many referred to the skatepark in their best memory or feeling. Several respondents suggested a shelter and 11 suggested a BMX/pump track.

“Good all the children’s play equipment is together with other areas quiet for contemplation”

“I like the skate Park and small football ball pitch”

“More play equipment. Maybe some adult gym equipment put into place”

Natural Environment

20% of respondents referenced developing nature in the park for example wilding areas, less mowing, flowers, nature trails, scented flowers, more trees, and a community garden.



“More homes for nature: insect homes, bird/bat boxes”

“I wondered about some apple or fruit trees or maybe a herb garden”

“I love the park, I would like to see more flowers, even wild flowers. I also enjoy walking on the paths and would like more paths through the big space”

“More planting for biodiversity like a wild flower part or bug hotels for insects. Use of mulch to prevent weeds and protect soil. Permanent planting that does not need to be replanted every year, to save on cost and soil erosion”

Dogs

Walking of dogs in the park provoked a varied response with dog owners valuing the space to walk everyday and let their dog off the lead in a safe environment. However, this appears to cause others distress and 11% of respondents suggested either an enclosed area for dogs off the lead or a policy of dogs on leads. Three respondents suggested the park was a 'no dogs' area. Dog mess was a common complaint which could be addressed by more bins.

“Fenced dog exercise area, where dog can have off lead exercise safely”

Football Pitch

Many of the young people engaged in the conversations about the park commented on the grass football pitch, suggesting better drainage, levelling and football nets. Several suggested a 3G or 4G pitch involving resurfacing the MUGA rather than replacing the grass pitch.

What could you do to support the long-term future of the park?

The majority of respondents said that they would continue to use the park as a way of supporting its long-term future, respect the space and support events. In addition, 25 people said they would help with litter picking either in organised groups or informally when they walk round.

“I already do a litter pick with the kids and will continue to do so”

“Volunteer clean ups”

In addition, 30 people offered to help with volunteering, joining a ‘Friends of the Park’ group and fundraising.

“I would help in the community to make Chapel Park an amazing place for families”

Reporting of good and bad behaviour was suggested by nine people and paying more tax was explicitly suggested by four.



Section 4:

Case studies



Terri-Louise Waterhouse

Terri-Louise Waterhouse from Chapel-en-le-Frith is a mum-of-five and a special education teaching assistant. Chapel Memorial Park has many meanings for her. It's a place for reflection and remembering, learning and socialising.

She explains, "My brother passed away nine years ago and we wanted somewhere we could go as a family. Inside the entrance there's a tree for him with a plaque. His anniversary's in June and we go for a picnic so it's not morbid."



As well as a positive space to remember her brother, it's a place for socialising.

She said: "It's more the social side we go to the park for. The children see their friends outside school where they're a bit more free. It's nice in the summer holidays because it's a social life for the parents too."

The park is also appreciated by the school children Terri works with.

She said: "Lots of the children live further afield. Often the parents don't have the opportunity to take them out. So being able to experience big open spaces and different sights and sounds, you can see they really enjoy it."

"We do topics on the natural world so it's a safe environment to collect resources like leaves and conkers. It's the first time a lot of them have experienced anything like that. I think it's just amazing."

For the future, Terri would like to see separate courts for other activities like tennis, somewhere for younger children with bikes and scooters and picnic tables. She's also keen to see links between the park and local schools.

She said: "I think this is something which can go hand in hand with schools, because they access the park quite a lot."

"You could get clean teams from the park to talk about keeping their area tidy and having recycling bins. I think a little bit of signage would be better for making sure they pick up after themselves and making sure those bins are readily available all round the park."

They are quite lacking, especially away from the equipment where teenagers might sit on the benches. If there was one nearby, more dotted around they might be more likely to do it."

Finnlay

Finnlay is 17-years-old and has lived in Chapel-en-le-Frith for the past 10 years. He enjoys the Memorial Park as a place to play football with his friends but isn't a regular visitor and sees it as a place used more by younger children.



He said: "I go and play football at the park with my friends maybe once every two weeks and for what we use it for I think it's fine for us. I like playing football and I like being with my friends so it's somewhere I can do both together. There are other places we could play football but the park just works for us all and encourages us to do it more often."

"It could always be improved in terms of the surface and stuff but it's good. I think the park allows for all ages groups. If you're not into football or skating then maybe not but those things allow people who aren't necessarily of the same age to play together."

Through the pandemic and lockdowns, Finnlay was pleased to be able to use the park to meet up with friends.

He said: "When you were allowed to meet up with one friend to exercise we went there more. I used it a lot more to play football. The park was a lot busier then."

Finnlay is keen to see litter dealt with and is happy to actively take part in making the park a cleaner place for others.

He said: "In the concrete places there's sometimes quite a lot of glass and I think someone younger than me could fall into that and it wouldn't be great. If there's two or three bottles left there I'd just put them in the bin. Most likely I'd be going to the bin anyway."

"I also thought a water fountain would be a good idea as it would stop people buying plastic bottles from the shop. But that could easily get trashed. Most people wouldn't go out of their way to trash a water fountain but it only takes one or two."

Finnlay thinks asking younger children to get involved in the development of the park would be a good idea.

He said: "I think if you got more year 6 or year 7 kids involved I'm sure they would as they're going to be using it for another 3 or 4 years."

Susie Gloster

Susie Gloster is 81 and her home overlooks Chapel Memorial Park. She uses the park to walk the dog and has a passion for wildlife and nature. It also holds a special place in her heart as her and her husband's fathers fought in the war.

She said: "We love looking out on the park, we feel very lucky. We love the trees and we walk our dog in it everyday. We walk further afield as well but it's convenient having it on the doorstep. It's nice to chat to people. It's just a very sociable place really."

"We have very little problems with balls coming over or anything like that but I think our neighbours have a problem with it."

One of the main things Susie would like is to create areas where wildlife can thrive.

She explained: "Wildlife is very important. There's a little woodland patch which has bluebells, wild garlic and snowdrops so why not let it be more wild and extend it. I just think it's a balance isn't it."

"It's also part of climate change. It's part of trying to reverse what's happening. It's a beautiful area and we need to keep it but we all need to play our part in that."

Having used the park with their grandchildren when they were younger, Susie thinks it's important to involve young people in decisions.

She said: "I like hearing the kids and I think it's very well used by young people. I think it would be useful if the youngsters could be a bit involved so they felt some sort of ownership of the park and so they didn't feel excluded."

"There's a bit of anti-social behaviour and I'm sure it's because they're not consulted. Sometimes there's some bottle smashing so we've been out with a dustpan and brush a few times. It's obviously not good for a dog's feet aside from anything else."

Lockdown saw the park come to life and it was important to Susie as a place for socialising safely.

She said: "I think the effect on mental health became even more important during the lockdowns. During lockdown it was great to be able to talk to people at a safe distance. Seeing families picnicing under the trees or on the steps."

"I think the main thing is it's a beautiful space that's used by all age groups and whatever can be done to make that continue, happily, should be done."

Section 5:

Summary & Conclusions



It is important to note that whilst the majority of respondents made suggestions for improving the park, as was the purpose of the exercise, there was an overwhelming sense of pleasure reported with people emphasising the benefits they and their families gain from the Memorial Park. Many also commented positively about the current state of the park and 14 people said they liked it just the way it was. There was praise and gratitude for the work of the park keeper:



“I gave 4 nest boxes to Memorial Park which have been put up by Phil, the current park keeper who has improved the Memorial Park considerably”

“Please encourage and support our present hard working, enthusiastic park staff”

“Staff continue to keep up the high standards .eg grass cutting and clearing of footpaths”



Anti-Social Behaviour

The key issue seems to be of addressing anti-social behaviour, especially litter, dog mess and broken glass. More bins and offers of help with litter picks would improve the situation but there is perhaps a requirement to go further to improve general standards of behaviour and respect/personal responsibility.

The issue of teenagers gathering in the park in the evenings seems to be a major cause concern for many and deters use after dark. Whilst some suggest CCTV and heavy policing to stop this, others are keen for more activities to engage young people and several respondents commented on the need for tolerance in the park, for example:

“Engagement of young people to reduce anti-social behaviour”

“More tolerance / acceptance of people who use the park – people don’t need to be scared of teenagers (even in black hoodies) they aren’t there to mug you, they are just socialising and pushing them out of the park will only push them to other places (which may be less safe and have less natural supervision). Let’s have a pro-teenager approach – one that doesn’t demonise or pander to negative stereotypes.”

“People stopping moaning about teenagers and starting using the park themselves more as it is beautiful”

Addressing anti-social behaviour in parks and open spaces is not unique to Chapel-en-le-Frith, indeed, in a report by CABE Space, 2004 (Decent Parks? Decent Behaviour? The Link Between the Quality of Parks and User Behaviour) suggests that a combination of good design, management and maintenance has transformed no-go areas back into popular community spaces. The report recommends the following.

- 1. Restore original designs where possible at sites of heritage importance**
- 2. Ensure all designs are of a high standard, involving relevant professionals (landscape architects and designers) and valuing the contribution of users.**
- 3. Manage risk sensibly and retain positive features that attract people to parks: the paddling pool, play area and shrub beds.**
- 4. Take advantage of the potential for buildings within parks for natural surveillance, e.g. from cafés, flats and offices.**
- 5. Involve the community early the process and continually.**
- 6. Involve 'problem' groups as part of the solution where possible and work hard to avoid single-group dominance in the park.**
- 7. Build a relationship with community groups that can lead to their achieving external funding and exerting a legitimate authority.**
- 8. Provide activities and facilities to ensure young people feel a sense of ownership. Address young people's fear of crime as well as that of adults.**
- 9. Use publicity to let people know that management believes in the place. Send a clear message to vandals and criminals: 'your time is up, you are no longer welcome, things are about to change'.**
- 10. Ensure that people know how to report damage and incidents.**
- 11. Make sure maintenance budgets are adequate to support after-care.**
- 12. Employ 'target hardening' measures sensitively as part of overall improvements**
- 13. Respond rapidly to vandalism and antisocial behaviour, but bear in mind it is highly localised and caused by a minority.**
- 14. Work in partnership. Others may be trying to manage similar problems and be willing to get involved and share resources.**
- 15. Research the range of tools and powers available and use appropriate enforcement where necessary to tackle problems.**
- 16. Reintroduce staff and gardeners, who provide a level of authority and a point of community interaction. Ensure they are provided with back up.**
- 17. Ensure that initiatives are part of a coordinated approach.**

Infrastructure

The message from the community regarding infrastructure is consistent and clear; toilets, more bins, more benches, more picnic areas, lighting, wider paths, and a kiosk would all improve the experience of the park and potentially lead to more people enjoying the space more often. This is also likely to improve standards of behaviour with more people around providing natural surveillance.

Play and exercise equipment

Whilst there were three suggestions to move the MUGA and Skate Park, the majority of respondents were happy with the current positioning of the play areas and appreciate the 'zoning' approach to allow for quiet areas within the park. Several people expressed concern over bad language and balls escaping onto the toddler area, both of which could be addressed with minimal effort.

There was support for increased provision for children aged 3-8, particularly climbing frames and apparatus and there was significant support for adult gym equipment throughout the park.

Events and activities

Again, there was resounding support for more activities and events at the park to grow a sense of community spirit, particularly after a period of isolation.

Accountability

Several respondents encouraged the Council to follow through on this engagement exercise and take action in response to the findings.

Volunteers

The engagement exercise has proved very productive in encouraging local people to step forward to take action to support the park. Residents are most keen to support developments around nature (A Wilding Group?), litter picking and events.

"For the council to take on board what residents have said in this surgery and make it happen"

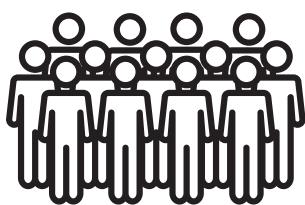
Section 6:

Recommendations



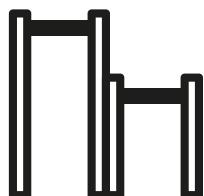
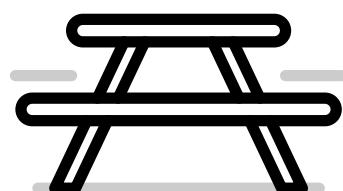
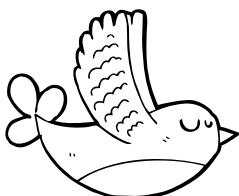
For Chapel-en-le-Frith Parish Council to acknowledge and endorse in full the findings of the community conversations.

To develop a 'Friends of Chapel Memorial Park' group, with sub-groups, to contribute to the implementation of key developments. To ensure a range of ages and interests are represented on the group, including young people.



To develop an annual events programme featuring a range of cultural, music, arts and sporting events and opportunities to bring the community and visitors together in the park.

To create regular activities in the park led by local groups and organisations e.g. fitness classes, nature trails, holiday programmes, mini park run.



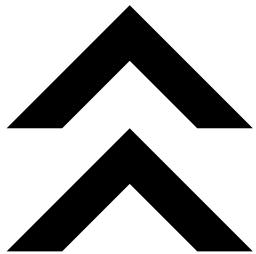
To form a nature group to lead on increasing the biodiversity of the park, in particular wilding areas, nesting boxes and education opportunities.

To invest in improved infrastructure in the park, in particular toilets, recycling bins, litter bins, low level lighting, picnic benches and path widening.

To invest in improved play/fitness equipment for young people aged 3-11 and outdoor gym equipment for adults.

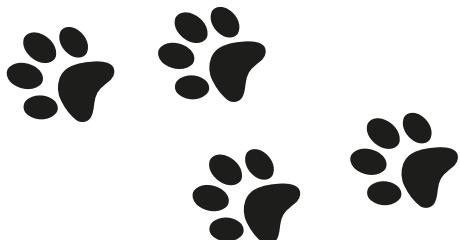
To increase the height of the fence between the MUGA and the playground.

To invite local partners to contribute to the development of the park, for example the Youth Engagement Officer, Chapel Primary School, Chapel High School, Chapel Town Football Club.



To explore the suggestion of zoned areas, particularly allowing for quiet, sensory spaces, areas for dogs to be exercised off the lead, a picnic area and a sheltered space.

To create a communications plan involving the Friends Group and local partners to create clear messaging to residents about activities, events, developments and particularly behaviour in the park.



To feedback to residents and users on the findings of the community conversations.

For Chapel-en-le-Frith Parish Council Amenities Group to resource and lead the development and implementation of the recommendations of this report by creating a transparent, time limited action plan.



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