

RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL REPORT TO COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE

meeting date: 5 JANUARY 2021
title: CASTLE GROUNDS
submitted by: DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY SERVICES
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1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To provide an overview of recent and planned work in the Castle Grounds.
- 1.2 Relevance to the Council's ambitions and priorities
- Community Objectives - To help makes people's lives safer and healthier
 - Corporate Priorities - To be a well-managed Council providing efficient services based on identified customer needs

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Castle Grounds as Committee members will know, were bought by public subscription in 1920 by Clitheroe Town Council, as a memorial to the fallen in WW1. Ownership of the site transferred to RVBC in 1974, following local government re-organisation.
- 2.2 The Castle is unquestionably important, even at a national scale. The Keep was originally Norman. The Castle itself sits on an unusual geological formation creating an abrupt landform, ideal for defence, but now affording a perfect view point across the Borough.
- 2.2 The area has been developed in stages since 1920, with new facilities built and others removed during the 100 period that has elapsed.
- 2.3 The grounds were laid out as a formal park, based around the focal point of the Castle remains. Although as decades past and ideas changed the style of planting and maintenance has changed. This has been either by design or through necessity due to budgets being reduced.
- 2.4 Today the Castle Grounds are a popular place for people to wander through and spend time. There are a number of scheduled events such band concerts and the annual fireworks display.

3 ISSUES

- 3.1 The issue of vandalism and anti-social behaviour have become more prominent as they have in society generally. However, minutes of meetings in the 1970s refer to the issue, so it cannot be seen as simply a recent scourge.
- 3.2 The bandstand has been sprayed with paint numerous times in the recent past, each time Council staff have painted over the sometimes-offensive daubing.

- 3.3 In the past year the Keep itself has been vandalised twice with paint, this has had to be removed under the guidance issued by Historic England. Simply applying paint remover or using a high-pressure washer is not an option, because of the Heritage listing of the site and potential for damage. Therefore, a specialist company has been used, obviously not without considerable expense for their services.
- 3.4 Over the past few years, the types of anti-social behaviour have changed. With concerns raised regarding sites lines, with some people commenting upon, how, in certain areas the shrubs and bushes have become overgrown and become a playground for unacceptable behaviour or litter collectors. Consequently, recently there has been some deliberate thinning out of areas. For example, last year the banking above the labyrinth saw a lot of poor-quality bushes and shrubs removed, with a lot of positive comments on the improvements that has made. This year, a similar process has been undertaken alongside the fence line on the banking above the main field. This will open up the views across the field and also from the field towards the town. Some selective replanting of specimen trees and shrubs will be carried out to enhance the landscape, as well purchasing and locating a number of bird and bat boxes throughout the grounds.
- 3.5 There are several kilometres of tarmac paths running through the grounds. As with roads, these deteriorate over time and although ideally a complete resurfacing of the infrastructure would remedy this, with ongoing and adequate maintenance, in practice this is not going to happen. The Council recently undertook approximately £6k of repairs to some of the worst sections of paths. That was the entirety of the budget allocation, plus some additional moved from another budget. It has improved those areas and it is planned to carry out a similar amount of work in the next financial year.
- 3.6 The play area will be developed and enhanced in time, with funds earmarked from housing developers, as part of the planning process. However, this will take some time to reach fruition, because it is dependent upon the developer both completing their housing allocation and the stock being sold.
- 3.7 The rock face of the Castle facing the main entrance is periodically cleaned of self-seeded shrubs such as blackberries and trees such as sycamore. This has to be undertaken to prevent the rock itself from becoming unstable, a unfortunate consequence if the vegetation were left unmanaged. In addition, directly below the curtain wall of the Keep, it is sadly a popular area for people to drop bottles, cans and other pieces of litter. Obviously, historically the rock face would have been kept clear from a security perspective for the occupants of the Castle itself, enabling them to see any potential foe scaling it.

4 RISK ASSESSMENT

- 4.1 The approval of this report may have the following implications
- Resources – The budget for maintaining the Council Parks and open spaces has to cover all aspects of their operation. If the amount of vandalism is high in any one year, it simply limits the amount of development and improvement work that can be carried out.
 - Technical, Environmental and Legal – Any changes to the landscape which are taken are done in consultation with one or other of Historic England, our grounds maintenance staff or our countryside officers, or all combined.

- Political – None in the context of the report
- Reputation – The Castle grounds are rightly seen as an important historical and cultural asset of the area and many people have keen interest in them. The Council as owners have a responsibility to help ensure the site is maintained as well as possible, though mindful of the budget constraints that it has to operate under.
- Equality & Diversity – The main entrances to the grounds are fully accessible, however the historical layout does make accessing certain areas which necessitate using steps unavoidable, limiting where some people can reach.

5 RECOMMENDED THAT COMMITTEE

5.1 Note the report

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BACKGROUND PAPERS – None

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