

**Grounds and Environmental Services Committee**

---

**Date:** 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2019

**Title:** Interpretation panels in the parks and open spaces

**Purpose of the Report:** To provide Members with an update to the Interpretation panels in the parks and open spaces project.

**Contact Officer:** Ian Haynes, Head of Grounds and Environmental Services

---

<b>Corporate Objective/s</b>		<b>LLTC Three Year Plan – Aim 3. Objective #40</b>
<b>Implications:</b>		
<b>Financial</b>	√	Up to £50,000
<b>Human Resources</b>		
<b>Operational/Service delivery</b>	√	
<b>Procedural/Legal</b>	√	
<b>Risk/Health and Safety</b>		

**1. RECOMMENDATION/S**

Should members be minded, the proposals are:

- 1.1 To note the report.
- 1.2 To consider and endorse one concept design to be under going forward.

**2. BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 The development of a strategic interpretation scheme for Town Council's parks and open spaces will create a high quality, strategic and coherent scheme grounded in the stories and heritage relevant to local communities yet pertinent to visitors to the town and which will conserve and enhance the local distinctiveness and the heritage of the Town's Parks and Open Spaces.
- 2.2 The background for this project includes:

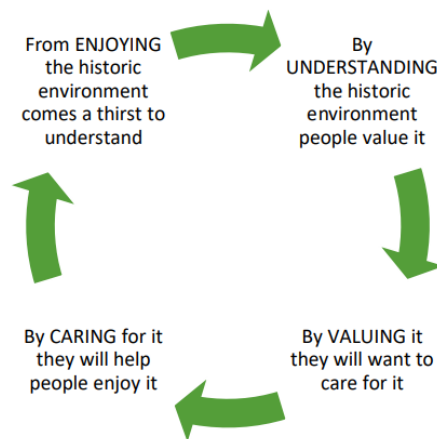
- Criteria and principles to be used in developing the scheme
- Examples of best practice and inspirational solutions from other places
- Summary of existing, other local activity that might be relevant (e.g. Children's trail, the living history trail)
- Outline proposal for key elements of the scheme together with indicative costings

2.3 The Association for Heritage Interpretation states that "Interpretation enriches our lives through engaging emotions, enhancing experiences and deepening understanding of people, places, events and objects from past and present."

2.4 Interpretation refers to all the ways in which information is communicated to visitors. In the context of parks and green spaces, it is a communication process that helps people make sense of and understand more about a place.

2.5 It can bring meaning, enhance visitor appreciation and promote better understanding. Enhancing the visitor experience can result in longer stays and repeat visits. This in turn will lead to increased income and potentially create employment opportunities. Interpretation can also be key to the management and maintenance of sites.

2.6 In 2005, English Heritage created the "virtuous circle of conservation" as a way to describe how people's attitude to heritage changes as their engagement with it increases. Although focussed on the historic environment, the principles can equally well be applied to parks and green spaces.



2.7 In summary, interpretation is the means of creating meaningful, intellectual, emotional and lasting connections between people and place. For interpretation to be effective, the message must be coherent and consistent. Each location should have complementary themes which link together in an overarching narrative which addresses visitors' needs, information requirements and interpretation content. Within this narrative each location should have the opportunity to focus on the key themes relevant to their location and present their interpretation according to the locally distinct characteristics of the place.

2.8 In order to develop interpretation across a number of diverse spaces, agreeing

an overarching interpretation strategy is a good starting point to:

- Identify and articulate the agreed vision of stakeholders
- Create a consistent methodology for messaging
- Agree parameters and guidelines for the implementation and presentation of interpretation
- Identify opportunities for making strategic use of grants and other messaging-related funding.

### **3. CURRENT SITUATION**

3.1 In order to inform future activities and identify potential projects for the improvement of interpretation across the Town Council owned green spaces, an initial assessment of current provision was undertaken. Assessment has been split into three sections that each offer potential for improvement. These are:

1. Physical interpretation panels
2. Signage
3. Street furniture and infrastructure (including benches, railings, litter bins etc)

3.2 There are currently a small number of physical interpretation panels across green spaces in the town, but these vary significantly in content, quality and design. There is also an inconsistency in placement of interpretation both across the town and in specific locations.

3.3 Walking around the main parks and open spaces there was a good signage on many key routes. However, entrances to smaller green spaces need improvement as there is no indication that you have entered Town Council managed sites. In some places it was unclear whether public access was even permissible despite indicated footpaths on maps.

3.4 Parks and green spaces necessarily have a quantity of street furniture and signage including:

- Benches
- Picnic tables
- Fences, railing and gates
- Bike racks
- Litter bins
- Dog waste bins
- Shelters

3.5 At present there is a good standard of coherence across the various green spaces. All items tend to be 'off the shelf' and replaced on an ad hoc basis as and when required, to ensure best value and are considered in good order.

## **4. FINANCIAL**

- 4.1 There is a real opportunity for a holistic approach which will position parks and green spaces as a unifying element of the town. Better interpretation can lead to more and a wider range of people using, understanding and valuing parks and green spaces. Improving these spaces will positively impact the presentation and perception of the town, a process which, in other places, has led to tangible improvements in health, wellbeing and local economic prosperity.
- 4.2 It is believed that the first phase will require a maximum of £50,000. This will fund the implementation, design, manufacture and installation of a number of key interpretation panels in the parks and open spaces, as well as new welcome signage for:
- Parson's Close Recreation Ground
  - Pages Park
  - Mentmore Park and Memorial Gardens, Linslade.
  - Linslade Recreation Ground
- 4.3 Also included will be new welcome signage for all town council maintained and managed play areas and neighbourhood parks.

## **5. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 5.1 Good interpretation engages visitors, encourages them to look, explore and discover new things that they take away from their experience. Interpretation should be relevant to people of all ages and backgrounds. It needs to be accessible both physically (so thinking about those with particular needs) and intellectually.
- 5.2 Most importantly, interpretation needs to enhance and complement the space to which it relates. Attached are some examples of interpretation in green spaces.
- 5.3 If the decision is to have a focal interpretation area in a green space, traditional information boards are one option. Alternatively, or perhaps in addition to this, incorporating an element of interactivity can encourage the sense of discovery for visitors to take forward into their experience of the green space.
- 5.4 This approach works well with all ages, giving small chunks of information that as a whole can cover a wide number of topics and themes. Design, having activities at different heights to cater for all ages/sizes and choice of materials is an important consideration so that interpretation 'sits' well within the natural environment.
- 5.5 More traditional approaches can be brought to life by incorporating tactile

elements or simple moveable options. Interest and local distinctiveness can be created through design, for example, using materials found in the natural environment as the information 'board'.

## **6. CONCLUSIONS**

- 6.1 Interpretive solutions need to be mindful of their setting, respecting and reflecting place. Physical intervention should not conflict with the historic integrity of landscapes, structures and buildings or impact on their ecological characteristics. This means careful consideration of material choices, colour schemes, dimensions, impact on critical sight lines and methods of installation.
- 6.2 Interpretation should provide both challenge and incentive for people. As best practice, interpretation should adopt the principles of inclusive design (also called universal design) to ensure that places are usable by everyone, regardless of age, ability and circumstance.
- 6.3 It is based on the simple principle that designing for the widest range of people creates better designs and benefits everyone. In practice this means the careful consideration of siting of interventions, good colour contrasts on graphics, accessible text and writing style, and the use of a range of interpretive media. In this way the needs of both people with disabilities and impairments, and other visitors, can equally be considered.