

MOTION FOR THE MEETING OF THE GROUNDS AND ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES COMMITTEE 6 DECEMBER 2021

Proposed by Cllr C Palmer and Seconded by Cllr V Harvey:

That, in view of its importance to the history and heritage of Linslade, and its maintenance being the responsibility of the Leighton-Linslade Town Council, priority be given in 2022-23 to the improvement of the state of the Henry Finch Memorial Fountain in the Linslade Recreation Ground and enhancement of its immediate environment to include:

- Cleaning
- Re-highlighting of the inscriptions
- Restoration of the missing lion's head
- Planting to both sides of the fountain
- Seating (if practicable)

Background

The pink granite Henry Finch Memorial Fountain occupies a central position in Linslade Recreation Ground with the pedestrian path bifurcating to go around it (see copy of old photograph below).



The Recreation Ground itself occupies a central position in the Linslade Conservation Area and was initially saved from development by the local benefactor Henry Finch who bought the fields next to the Railway Station, giving them to Linslade as a permanent recreation ground, as he wished for the local children to have somewhere to play other than in the streets. The purchase price was apparently £3500, which, allowing for inflation since 1899, equates to not far short of £½ million.

A landmark and focal point in the park is the 1903 drinking fountain, erected to commemorate Henry Finch. This was financed by public subscription in gratitude for the donation of the park. It, therefore, is a legacy not only commemorating Henry Finch but also the ordinary people of Linslade. There remain residents of Linslade who recall the fountain when it was in a much better state of preservation than today and, indeed, drinking from the pewter cups which used to hang from the fountain. An appraisal of the Linslade Conservation Area by Central Bedfordshire as long ago as December 2009, in looking at the opportunities for enhancement, cited “Protection and repair of the 1903 drinking fountain on the recreation ground”. Little has, however, been done to respond to this appraisal since that time, other than some cleaning work.

Justification

The pink granite drinking fountain is an important part of Linslade’s heritage dating back to the time when the “new” settlement (having moved some years previously from Old Linslade) was still experiencing growth with its close proximity to both the railway and canal. The origins of the Recreation Ground and the public involvement in the provision of the memorial fountain are powerful reasons for the current Leighton-Linslade Town Council to ensure that this item of the town’s history, for which it is responsible, is maintained to a reasonable standard in recognition of those who, over a century ago, were instrumental in the establishment of the park and fountain.

While the Council’s responsibility to maintain the heritage with which it has been endowed is a powerful argument in itself, many Linslade residents who visit the park have indicated that they would be supportive of “their” fountain being refurbished. There is significant public/resident support for such action by the Town Council.

Scope of Potential Work

It is not proposed that the fountain should be restored to its original state having drinking water (or any other water) piped to it once more. This would both be extremely costly and create logistical and maintenance issues without serving a public-good purpose as it would have done over a century ago when it provided a source of clean drinking water. The fountain also had a cross-like ornament on its top which is no longer there but the replacement of which, it is understood, would be very costly.

A more modest restoration including:

- Cleaning
- Re-highlighting the inscriptions on the fountain
- Restoration of the missing lion's head

should not only be possible at a relatively small cost but would return the monument to being an attractive focal point. In addition, the provision of flower beds or planters (with seasonal planting) on both sides of the path as it arcs around the fountain, perhaps combined with seating would further enhance the monument and overall park environment. It is understood that the Friends of Leighton-Linslade in Bloom who have developed and maintain the Community Garden by St Barnabas Church would be prepared to look after a modest planted area around the monument. The water receptacles below the lions' heads would need to be filled with an appropriate material to prevent litter etc being pushed down them.