



## **The Norton Bridge Play Area and Community Café**

### **Community Aspiration**

The community of Norton Bridge (@ 75 houses and 150 residents) to the North West of Stafford had long held a desire to have a fully functioning play area, citing promises made twenty years previously to fit out a much larger area. This for some reason had never happened and instead there were two pieces of play equipment – a swing and a climbing frame. Due to the low play value, the play area was poorly used and not valued as a piece of open space by the local community.



Norton Bridge Play Area – July 2016 – with two pieces of play equipment a double swing with a small single climbing frame, with a bench for people to sit on.

The grass was often too long to play football satisfactorily with high and unkempt hedges.

### **Borough Council Aspiration**

The Borough Council's policy for play areas is to create large destination play areas like at Victoria Park, Wildwood and Charnley Road, offering much more to engage children of all age, with small play areas unlikely to receive significant investment to keep them running.

The Borough Council due to changes in funding regimes has looked at reducing ongoing maintenance costs for all Borough owned land, including play areas.

So the prospect of the Norton Bridge Play Area ever receiving investment from a Borough Council perspective was extremely low.

### **Local Context**

Norton Bridge is the point on the West Coast mainline where the lines split with one branch going to Crewe and another going to Manchester Piccadilly. This area had seen £250m of railway infrastructure investment by Network Rail to upgrade the junction and line capacities over the previous three years, leading to a fragmented and divided community, split by the physical railway lines themselves.

### **Norton Bridge Family Recreation Area – The Plan**

For Chebsey Parish Council to :-

1. Secure a long term (twenty five years) lease from the Borough Council to be able to raise grant moneys against.

2. Set up a community group – the Friends of Norton Bridge
3. Consult the local community to understand their specific aspirations and requirements. Out of this consultation came an understanding that there were pockets of lonely and isolated people, which led to a further development. Equally there was a severely disabled child in the community who would have to travel to Trentham (10 miles away) if they wanted to use any suitable play equipment.
4. Understand the budget costs of delivering the scheme, fine tuning it to secure best value for money whilst still delivering what the local community wanted.
5. Create a funding plan to raise the £55,000 required and then delivering it with the local community, including :-

- The Co-operative Society Community Grants - £3,000
- Local County Councillors Community Grants scheme
- Sita Environmental Fund
- Barclays match funding
- Tesco’s Bags for Life moneys



- Monthly Afternoon cream teas and ‘Winter Warmers’ – this generated many new volunteers of all ages who bought into the journey
- Stone Farmers market – selling raffle tickets
- Individual local residents private donations
- Local businesses donating in kind including Network Rail, Dawkes, etc.



6. Project managing the delivery and not accepting individual delivery until it was perfectly delivered.
7. Coming back to the community need to address the local loneliness and isolation by setting up a community café running weekly on a Thursday, supported by a full programme of events (including bringing in old photographs, the Great War Poppy project, etc.).

### **Norton Bridge Family Recreation Area – The Result**

The project, led by Chebsey Parish Council and Friends of Norton Bridge, raised in excess of £50,000 in a little over two years, proving what can be achieved when a community comes together with a common objective.

The area was formally opened by reigning Olympic Gold Medal canoeist Joe Clarke MBE, supported by The High Sheriff for Staffordshire, Pippa Gee, and the Mayor and Lady Mayoress of Stafford Borough, Councillors Ray and Jenny Barron in June 2018.



*At the Community Opening of Norton Bridge Recreation Area*



The project was led by Parish Council Chair and Vice Chair, Councillors Marg Ainsworth-Hickman and Mark Wilson respectively.

And involved lots of members of the community across Chebsey Parish, young and older, including many people who had not volunteered before and succeeded in bringing the whole community together, meeting the aspirations of all in the community with much of the play equipment being suitable for able bodied as well as disabled use.



*Aerial Shots of the new Norton Bridge Family Recreation Area*

*Photographs Courtesy of Councillor Mark Wilson*

## **Norton Bridge Family Recreation Area – If You Want to Visit The Result**

The family recreation area has seen young people getting up early and using the area before the school bus departed from Norton Bridge, until dark after the school bus had dropped children back in Norton Bridge and consistently during the weekend, where family members have also joined their children.

If you want to visit the Recreation Area, it is found off Station Road / St. Lukes Close in Norton Bridge – St. Lukes Close, Norton Bridge, Staffordshire ST15 0PD.

For more information on this paper – please contact – County and Borough Councillor Jeremy Pert on 07740 924659 or at [jeremyp@jeremypert.co.uk](mailto:jeremyp@jeremypert.co.uk).