

Stafford Orchard

A Park for People

This is the third in a series of articles in *The Quorndon* about the refurbishment of Stafford Orchard with a Parks for People grant from the National Lottery.

Remedial work on the existing trees in the park was completed in January and landscaping, reconstruction and planting will take place in the summer and autumn.

This article is about the play, games and leisure areas planned for the Stafford. These are essential facilities in any public park which need to cater for all ages and abilities.

Conversations with young people in the village produced the usual complaint about ‘nothing for us to do in Quorn’. Although sporadic attempts to provide some facilities in Stafford Orchard for this age group have been made in recent years - for example the skateboard ramp proved very popular (albeit now well past its sell-by date) – it is true that overall the provision has been ad-hoc, mostly through lack of money. As a result Stafford Orchard does not have a comprehensive range of play facilities for all age groups and the lottery funding provides an opportunity for some new provision and refurbishment.

Two designated playground areas are planned: an enhanced and enclosed play-space for younger children (aged approximately 2 to 8); and larger, more rugged and challenging facilities for those aged 8 to late teens.

As the only practical locations, these areas will be sited roughly where they are at present in the park. Unfortunately, much of the Stafford lies in the Environment Agency designated flood plain for the river Soar, but this has been taken into account. In particular the younger children’s play area adjacent to the main footpath across the park could flood in extreme conditions.

In common with the rest of the Stafford project, consultation enabled the team to focus on what the community, in this case young people, actually wanted. Children and teenagers were asked what sort of play equipment and facilities they would most like to have in the park. Playgroups, toddler groups, St Bartholomew’s primary school, Rawlins’ students, parents, and children playing in the park were consulted, surveys and graffiti boards were used at village events, and the team visited other parks to see the equipment in action (testing a zip wire was great fun).

Young children voted for their favourite play equipment from pictures; teenagers talked enthusiastically about fun-boxes, quarter-pipes and grind-rails; and the project team had to get to grips with things called LEAPs, NEAPs, MUGAs and SKATEs. Eventually, all this led to a final selection of play equipment for both playgrounds, an enclosed multi-use games area for soccer, basketball and other team ball games, and the specification and design of a skateboarding street section by students from Rawlins.

For safety and security, and to deter vandalism, the play areas will be covered by CCTV, and the evening-only floodlighting will be infra-red controlled using low-energy lamps.

The main grassed area of the park is to be retained for casual ball games and as an events arena. It will be levelled and re-seeded to accommodate a minimum adult FA size football pitch with permanent sockets installed for removable goal posts. Overlooking it will be a raised piece of ground, part hard-surfaced with implanted sockets to facilitate the erection of a temporary canopy or stage when needed. This area will be available for theatrical performances, music concerts, brass bands and other entertainments. When not in use for performances or events, removable bench seats will provide a meeting area, a vantage point for games on the grass, and a resting place for people walking or running around the newly-created perimeter path.

A social and family area is also being created by the brook side (recently acquired by the Parish Council as an extension to Stafford Orchard). Because the area floods regularly, and because it is an area of natural beauty with wildlife habitats, introducing park furniture or structures into it is neither practical nor desirable, but a few permanent flood-proof picnic tables and benches will be provided to enable people to enjoy this peaceful and attractive part of the expanded park in good weather.

Adjacent to Station Road, well away from the play areas and behind a hedgerow, will be a more formal garden with seating for people to relax and contemplate how peaceful it would be if Station Road was closed! Jane Hollingworth, a village volunteer and horticultural expert, has designed the garden to complement her widely acclaimed Memorial Garden in The Cross, and will be organising other volunteers to prepare the ground and undertake planting in the autumn.

If you can help with planting or any aspect of managing or maintaining the park, organising or helping with events, or being a volunteer park warden, please contact the parish clerk on 01509 414491, email parishclerk@quorndon.com, or drop into the parish office in the High Street.

Enjoy Stafford Orchard and help to make it flourish.



