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Iron Bridge Restoration Project

NEWS RELEASE

Grant Success for Marple's Iron Bridge

A significant milestone has been achieved in the campaign to save the historic cast iron bridge in Brabyns Park, Marple, Stockport.

The Iron Bridge Restoration Project Group, a partnership between Stockport Council, The Marple Website and Marple Local History Society, submitted a successful application to the Heritage Lottery Fund.

The Heritage Lottery Fund awarded the Group a grant of just over £30,000, which represents 90% of the funds required during the project's first phase. The grant will pay for detailed investigations into the bridge's condition and enable a scheme to be developed and costed to tackle the restoration work identified. An application can then be made for a full grant towards the cost of the final phase, which, if also approved, would fund the work to return the bridge near to its original condition.

Councillor Ingrid Shaw, the Council's Executive Member for Leisure and Culture, said: "I am very pleased that the Iron Bridge Restoration Group, in partnership with the Council, has been successful in their application to the Heritage Lottery Fund. It is a good example of how a community led initiative can give a substantial boost to the borough's heritage and environment.

"I would encourage as many people as possible to take part in this exciting project – for more information contact The Marple Website at ironbridge@marple-uk.com or Council officers on 0161 474 4418," she added.

The bridge was built in 1813 for Nathaniel Wright, then owner of the Brabyns Estate, and is now a grade II listed structure. It was made by the Salford Ironworks and is of cast iron construction in the style of several bridges from the same period by the famous architect Thomas Telford. Its purpose was to provide Wright with access to his estate by carriage from Compstall, across the River Goyt.

The Council purchased Brabyns Estate from Wright's descendants, the Hudson family, in 1941, and the grounds were opened as a public park in 1949. The condition of Brabyns Hall, used as a military hospital during the wars, deteriorated and it was demolished in 1952. The Iron Bridge survived until 1991, when it was declared unsafe after the wooden decking began to give way. As the funds needed to carry out a proper repair were not available, a bailey bridge was erected across it as a temporary measure until sufficient money could be found.

The grant will also contribute towards the cost of developing proposals for access, conservation and on site interpretation to increase understanding of the bridge's heritage. This will involve consultation with the local community and ensure that physical access to the bridge and awareness of its importance is brought to the widest audience possible.

The award of the grant is the culmination of two years of effort for the Group's members. The Marple Website, run by local history enthusiasts Mark Whittaker and Peter Clarke, began campaigning for the restoration of the bridge two years ago. Ann Hearle, of Marple Local History Society, joined the web site team in their campaign and during 2002 the group was

formed with Stockport Council to find ways to fund the work required.

Growing public support for the campaign was demonstrated by the collection of 2000 signatures and more than 120 individual letters of support from the local community and last year, the Council's Marple Area Committee awarded the Group a £1,500 'Kick Start' Grant.

Campaigner Mark Whittaker said: "The support we received through the web site from the local community in the early stages of our campaign was fantastic and I think this convinced the Council that inviting us to work in partnership with them could bring success. We're really looking forward to continuing our work together to ensure that the bridge is restored to its former glory and its long term future is secured."

Further successful fund raising efforts were ongoing to raise the rest of the money that the Group would need in order to contribute 10% of the project's first phase costs. Money was raised in a variety of different ways, including an auction of paintings donated by members of the Society of Marple Artists and regular fun quiz nights held at the Ring o' Bells pub on Church Lane.

The Project has been well supported by other local community groups and businesses. The McNair Trust, Marple Carnival Committee, The Rotary Club of New Mills, Marple and District, an anonymous benefactor and Helen Winterson Fashions of Market Street all made substantial donations towards the first phase of work.

Other local businesses offered support to the project in different ways. Local Tree Surgeon David Myers, of Myers Treecare Ltd., has offered his professional services free of charge; Lee Battersby of Romiley, technical sales manager for E Wood Ltd, a company that supplies paint for rail bridges, has offered to provide any paint required; and local engraving and sign company 1A-Sign? has provided a notice board to be erected near the bridge to keep visitors to the park informed of how the project is progressing.

"This is tremendous news," explains Peter Clarke "but we must now focus on building upon our success. Once the first phase is underway we'll begin to get some idea of the amount of money we need to raise to complete our goal, which is the next great challenge. We've already been approached by one local company pledging financial aid, but we'll need further help, and shall be asking other businesses to look for ways of supporting this worthy appeal."

The first phase of work will commence once permission to start has been received from the Heritage Lottery Fund. For the latest news on the Project's progress visit the Group's Campaign Diary on the Marple Website at www.marple-uk.com

The Iron Bridge Restoration Project Group is grateful to the following organisations and individuals for the help and support they've provided, or offered, so far:

The Heritage Lottery Fund
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Helen Winterson Fashions
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Marple Area Committee
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Marple Conservative Club and Ray Noble
Marple Local History Society
Myers Treecare Ltd.
The McNair Trust
The Ring o' Bells Public House
The Rotary Club of New Mills, Marple & District
The Society of Marple Artists, especially Malcolm Melia
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