

## BATTLE FOR THE IRON BRIDGE

Stockport Council and the local community in Marple are celebrating after securing over £550,000 to restore the historic Georgian cast iron bridge in Brabyns Park.

The Marple Website, Marple's community website at [www.marple-uk.com](http://www.marple-uk.com), Marple Local History Society and the Council joined forces in 2002 to work with the local community to campaign and fundraise for the restoration of the 194 year old bridge.

Over the last five years the Iron Bridge Restoration Group raised an impressive £71,500 but needed around half a million pounds of additional funding to fully restore the bridge and improve surrounding access. The battle for the bridge was finally won this week as the Group was awarded over £400,000 from the Heritage Lottery Fund following a submission earlier this year.

Councillor Dave Goddard, Leader of Stockport Council, said: "This is excellent news for a project that has generated so much local interest. The Iron Bridge is such an important piece of our local heritage and I am delighted that the grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund, along with the funding raised through the generosity of the local community, will mean that the bridge will now be saved from further decay.

"Despite some technical difficulties, the project has gone tremendously well and the success of this project so far demonstrates what can be achieved when partnerships between the Council and the local community work to the benefit of all concerned."

Mark Whittaker, founder of the Marple Website said: "My first reaction to the news was one of enormous relief! We have been so well supported by local residents, businesses and local groups over such a long period of time that the thought of what we would do if the application failed was unbearable."

"Now I'm just really excited that we can begin the real work of restoring the bridge. As always, the website will be heavily involved in keeping the public informed. We have plans to install a web cam so that people can see the restoration on-line and our diary on the site at [www.marple-uk.com/ironbridge](http://www.marple-uk.com/ironbridge) will be regularly updated."

Peter Clarke, landlord of the Ring o' Bells Public House where much of the group's match funding was raised during regular quiz nights, was equally euphoric: "I was so excited I nearly bought a round! Marple's record of losing its most significant historical features is well documented; to have helped save this gem is fantastic news! In the six years since we began the campaign we have been overwhelmed by the massive support we have received from the public, this is a victory for all those people."

Ann Hearle, Chairman of the Marple Local History Society added: "I am having great difficulty in believing that after six years hard work we will actually be seeing the bridge restored. It has been a long haul involving many organisations and people and a great deal of hard work. Sometimes we felt we would never make it but now we can celebrate. The bridge will be there to be admired and used by generations to come."

Peter Fellows, Heritage Lottery Fund Casework Manager for the North West, said: "Historic structures shape our environment and stand as a tangible reminder of our shared history. We are passionate about ensuring they are saved for future generations, so it's great to be able to help bring this nationally important bridge back into use. However, the real heroes are the people who have worked so hard to realise their dream of saving the bridge - congratulations to everyone involved."

Work is expected to commence in July 2007 and will take approximately six months to complete. Following the bridge restoration there will be environmental and access improvements carried out in the park, culminating in a number of local activities and events leading up to the bridge's bicentenary in 2013.

## ENDS

### Notes to Editors

The Marple Website is the community website for Marple, Stockport, which takes great pride in its heritage, the canals that run through it and its local parks. Its purpose, in addition to providing a useful service to local people and potential visitors, was to try and contribute to the community spirit. It has been incredibly successful in this aim, interacting with interested web users from all around the world and gaining huge feedback and support from the local community.

In partnership with the Iron Bridge Group, an award winning local film production company, Fusion Films, will produce two unique films to document the restoration and attract prospective visitors to the Iron Bridge site. The films will be in the form of a twenty-minute corporate documentary and an original short film drama written especially for the project by local professional scriptwriter Aidan Magrath. Aidan will be giving his services free of charge and Fusion Films have greatly reduced their fees, making a significant contribution to the match funding for the project.