

LEEK TOWN COUNCIL - WAR MEMORIALS COMMITTEE
MINUTES OF THE MEETING ON TUESDAY 14 NOVEMBER 2023

Present: Cllrs Hilyer (Chair), Nicholls (Vice-Chair), Cawley, Swindlehurst M, Webster and Young

In attendance: Victoria Johnson (Administrative Assistant)

Apologies: Denise Wheat (Town Clerk)

MEMORIALS

1 Leekbrook War Memorial

It was reported that Ash Lovatt, with James Corbishley (who gave their services freely), had made great progress in improving the Leekbrook memorial and replacing the framework that holds the wreaths, with attendant silhouette soldiers and poppies. Further planting/tree work would be undertaken, possibly with real poppies. The trees and shrubs would then be re-balanced.

It was agreed that

- the wording on the memorial (being almost indecipherable) should be repeated on a modest sign near-by;
- the lamp standard should be cleaned;
- James Corbishley should be warmly thanked for his generosity;
- local firms (11 wreaths were provided at Remembrance Day) should be invited to support high-quality paving of the verge between the memorial and the road, providing a barrier at the road-side, and placing a chatty bench in the paved area behind the memorial – the names of contributing firms would be added to the notice mentioned above;
- rocks should be positioned to prevent parking adjacent to the memorial;
- with the agreement of the Cheddleton RBL the Council should take responsibility for flag-raising and for replacing the associated rope.

It was noted that

- recent estimates for paving and chatty benches were available to inform an appeal for support (and an estimate of the cost of the railing would also be needed);
- permission from the County Council would be needed for the envisaged roadside work.

2 Nicholson War Memorial

It was reported that a risk assessment prepared by the Town Clerk prompted the following:

- the interior had been thoroughly cleaned;
- fire extinguishers had been installed;
- the electrical wiring had been checked (and a smart meter fitted);
- emergency lighting was being addressed;
- the paving and steps had been grouted and repaired by Nixon and Reeves;
- fire and evacuation signs had been installed;
- a physical barrier had been put in place to stop visitors from climbing above the first floor.

Alongside this work the floral display around the Monument has been much improved, as have the planters in Sparrow Park, the lights on the trees at the rear are being attended to (as are the pavement level lights), and the benches and railings have been painted; pavement/step cleaning will now be addressed.

It was noted that the work undertaken this year, and the lessons we learn from the 24-door initiative, will put us in a good position to determine how much work should be undertaken on the Monument during 2024-25, in preparation for the centenary in August 2025.

3 PUBLICITY

It was agreed that

- a tabled draft document should form the basis of a publicity brochure celebrating the external war memorials in Leek (that is NWM, Leekbrook, Ball Haye Green, Merryton Low and St Edwards, All Saints and St Mary's churches);
- the brochure should be professionally designed and printed (possibly in an A5, 4-page folded format)
- members should suggest to the chairman additional material that could be included (eg the public subscription to the BHG memorial, the civilian casualty in Leek etc);
- the material in the brochure should be replicated on the webs-site (with amplification).

EVENTS

4 Advent – 24 Doors in Leek

It was reported that progress was being made with the Advent project - 24 Doors: Leek's Live Advent Calendar, 1 to 24 December'; the NWM contribution is to be called 'Silent Night' and will be held on **20 December 2023 from 4:00 to 7:00 pm**; this initiative is organised by OUTSIDE who are working with SMDC on arts projects.

Community groups, schools, artists, organisations and businesses are co-creating a Live Advent Calendar in Leek this year. Every morning in December on the run up to Christmas Day there will a clue to find a door in the town. If you can find the door, and open it between 4pm and 7pm, you will be treated to a surprising festive moment.

Callers will be invited inside for a short film and sound presentation of the 1925 dedication (background music 'Abide with Me') plus some First War footage, accompanied by 'Silent Night' to refer to the 1914 Christmas truce. We will have other effects, making a poignant counterpoint to the more jolly and Christmassy doors on offer. There will be a gazebo outside to control entry, to provide information, and to hand out a leaflet about Leek's monuments. Cllr Hilyer will be inside the Monument and Cllr Nicholls will help visitors in the gazebo. Councillors will be invited to assist in welcoming and informing visitors.

5 Remembrance Day

It was reported that the Remembrance Day ceremonies at the NWM, Ball Haye Green and Leekbrook had been largely successful, given the weather conditions: further reports on the first two were made to the meeting of the Tourism, Events and Community Committee. The relatively modest Leekbrook event had been an opportunity for the community to see the much-improved memorial – and comments were favourable. Having Cllr Nicholls representing Leek Town Council was appreciated and marked the renewed commitment noted above.

6 Tours of the MWM

It was reported that regular tours of the Monument had been suspended until spring 2024 but, following completion of safety-critical work,

- guides had been written to asking if they were willing to resume in Spring 2024 – they have been invited to see inside the Monument, and to offer any ideas about improvements that could be made.
- a tour of the Monument was laid on for a group of cub scouts on 6 November,
The Town Clerk reported that it went well: they were split into two groups of seven children and two leaders in each group. Richard Benefer did the tour inside and Denise Wheat did a brief tour outside. The scouts were well behaved, all got a poppy badge, and would like more information on the Leek Crest. It was not a problem that the tour was after dark.

It was agreed that

- scheduled ours of the Monument should resume in the spring of 2024;
- group tours (ie, pre-arranged as distinct from the scheduled open days) should be encouraged but they should be asked to accede to rules of conduct in the Memorial and to have their own risk assessment and insurance.
- That the Council's insurance policies should be checked to ensure that there is coverage for both group and scheduled tour parties.

CENTENARY

7 Centenary of NWM

It was agreed that,

- the event in August 2025 should commemorate the NWM Centenary and celebrate Leek (its heritage, its development, and its future) – and the opportunity should be taken to make further improvements to the area around the Monument/Sparrow Park;
- the material prepared for the Brough Park Centenary in July 2024, which is to have as its theme the industrial heritage of the Moorlands – silk, railways, canals (and perhaps building societies) - should be adapted for the 2025 event;
- the event will need to be professionally organized, taking into account both local considerations and experience of such events elsewhere – it should combine local relevance with a level of quality which will enhance and widen Leek's reputation and regard;
- a three-stage process towards August 2025 should be adopted
 - inviting bids from arts advisors, with a proven record of organizing high quality events, that would satisfy our ambitions for both commemoration and celebration;
 - with advice, bidding for funding for such an event from
 - National Lottery Heritage Fund - <https://www.heritagefund.org.uk/> and
 - War Memorial Trust - <https://www.war memorials.org/grants/>;
 - ensuring that the community and the council play a full part in contributing to the 2025 event.
- to secure funding for a high-quality event, we will need to demonstrate that its organization and content will be of a professional standard;
- a sub-group would be established to oversee the event, working with an equivalent group set up by the Tourism, Events and Community Committee.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT AND DATE OF NEXT MEETING

8 The work of Denise Wheat, Victoria Johnson and Ash Lovatt in helping to improve the memorials was gratefully noted.

9 The next meeting would be at **6:15 on 9 January 2023.**