

# A VISION FOR MARPLE

A Presentation to Stockport MBC  
by  
Marple Civic Society  
January 2010



CARING FOR  
MARPLE'S  
PAST PRESENT  
& FUTURE

**Marple**  
CIVIC SOCIETY

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## **INTRODUCTION**

As the *Visit Marple* pamphlet prepared by the Marple Business Forum so rightly says:

*“Increasingly, Marple is attracting visitors from a wider area, drawn by the colourful array of canal boats, opportunities for countryside walks and the thriving shopping centre.*

*What other town in the region has more to offer than Marple? We cannot think of one that can boast two railway stations, its own theatre, a cinema, swimming pool, bustling pubs, café bars and restaurants (and even two brass bands). Add to that its countryside setting (5,000 of Marple’s 7,000 acres are in the Green Belt), the network of picturesque canals and its huge variety of independent shops and we believe we have something special to shout about.”*

However, the Marple Civic Society and many other local stakeholders and members of the community believe that Marple could and should be improved even further.

Many places of interest in Marple are under-exploited and need developing for **tourism, recreation and community purposes**.

The town was very much shaped by 18<sup>th</sup> century entrepreneurs Samuel Oldknow and Richard Arkwright. During this time Oldknow changed the face of Marple beyond all recognition, being the chief architect and driving force in the development and industrialisation of the area. Along with his mill at Mellor he was responsible for the building of roads, bridges, coal mines and housing for his workers. He was also instrumental in the construction of the Peak Forest Canal.

Notable engineers of the time, namely Benjamin Outram and Nicholas Brown, also played an important role in the making of Marple.

Their story and the history of the construction of the canals, tramways and railways needs to be told and their many legacies need to be protected and enhanced. This is important not only for local residents but would also attract visitors from outside Marple.

Marple needs a museum to present its history. An abundance of historical artefacts are held locally but none of them are on display, due to the lack of suitable facilities.

The potential for recreational activities in the area also needs to be exploited. The canals and the nearby River Goyt are ideal for canoeing & kayaking. The Peak Forest and Macclesfield Canals are an integral part of the Cheshire Ring cruising circuit and considered one of the most attractive in Britain. There is considerable potential for cycling activities, of all types and at all

levels and wonderful walks can be enjoyed in any direction!! There is a rich network of 12 bridleways in Marple (a third of the bridleways in Stockport) linking to designated local and national bridleway routes, making it a perfect destination for horse riding holidays. Two local livery stables have recently provided accommodation for both horses and riders.

This report describes the places of interest in Marple which the Civic Society believes should be improved/developed and suggestions are made for suitable interventions.

A key factor in the overall vision for Marple is the Wharf: the hub of the canal system in the town. Full advantage should be taken of the opportunities arising from British Waterways no longer needing its facilities at the Wharf by developing the site for tourism, recreation and community purposes.

A description is given below of Marple Civic Society's proposals for development of the Wharf and the canal system in Marple.

The purpose of this *report* is to describe the enormous potential in Marple for presenting and exploiting the part played by canals in the development of this canal town, with the aim of developing a “**Day Out in Marple**” which would encompass all its places of interest, and be important for local residents and visitors alike.

## **Where better to start “A Day Out in Marple” than at Marple Wharf**

Marple Wharf lies at the junction of the **Lower Peak Forest Canal** (which runs to Ashton), the **Upper Peak Forest Canal** (which heads off to Whaley Bridge and Bugsworth Basin) and the **Macclesfield Canal** (which leads to Poynton and beyond).

The Upper Peak Forest Canal was recently included in a canal boating magazine under “10 great escapes”, and referred to its “magical journey as the canal clings precariously to the side of the Goyt Valley” (Waterways World, June 2009)

Heading off from the Wharf along the Lower Peak Forest Canal, one immediately encounters a flight of 16 locks, dropping the canal 209 feet (63 m). Each lock is between 13 and 14 feet (3.9 – 4.2 m) deep and these are the second deepest locks in the country.

The Macclesfield Canal was one of the last narrow canals to be built, and was actually nearly built as a railway! Its route was surveyed by Thomas Telford.

Add in the colourful sight of traditional canal boats and these canals provide a unique attraction, all for free! The canals can be enjoyed on foot or by bike from the towpath, or by boat or canoe.

The three stretches of canal which meet at the Marple Wharf Junction and which are to be considered in this report are:

- 1 - Marple Wharf to Brickbridge (Upper Peak Forest Canal)
- 2 - Marple Wharf to Aqueduct (Lower Peak Forest Canal – Cheshire Ring)
- 3 - Marple Wharf to Goyt Mill (Macclesfield Canal – Cheshire Ring)

Brickbridge, the Aqueduct and Goyt Mill form the three gateways to Marple with Marple Wharf at the Centre.

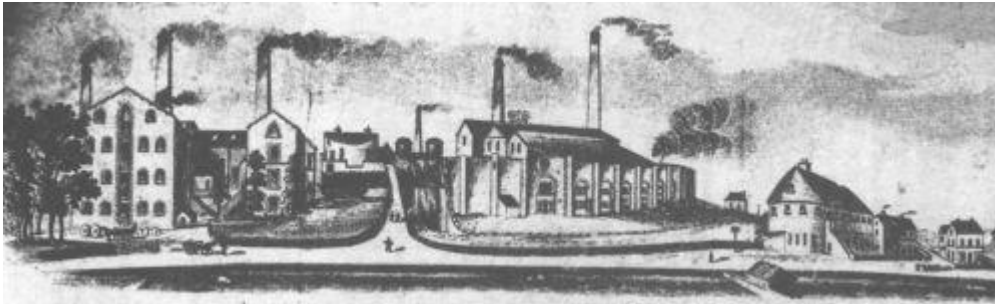
## CANALS

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### **1. Marple Wharf – Brickbridge** (Upper Peak Forest Canal)

#### **Lime Kilns**

The site and remains of Marple's Lime Kilns is a scheduled ancient monument of national importance but there is little to see today since it was bricked up in the 1970s. It is one of only 6 scheduled ancient monuments in the Stockport borough (4 being located in the Marple area). The Lime Kilns themselves were part of a huge industrial complex with a canal arm that has since been filled in and numerous buildings, some that have been demolished but several that have been turned into unique private dwellings. The drawing below shows how busy this area once was.



A full history of the Lime Kilns is available at: [www.marple-uk.com/limekilns.htm](http://www.marple-uk.com/limekilns.htm)

Photographs, including some taken shortly before the bricking up, are featured on the Marple Website Virtual Tour at:  
<http://visitmarple.co.uk/photos/thumbnails.php?album=22>



The photo above left is from a glass slide owned by the Marple Website dated around 1900 and the photo on the right was taken in 2009. The open feature on the left in the new picture can be seen in the centre of the older photo, showing just how much of the original structure has been lost.

Without careful investigation it will be difficult to determine what can be done with the remains of the Lime Kilns and due to its scheduled ancient monument status any work will have to be conducted with great care and control and will need to be approved by English Heritage. It could be expected to last several years.

In the 1970s the Limekilns were bricked up and the area landscaped. The buildings had become unsafe - we now have an opportunity to think again and do something more appropriate with them.

Suggestions:

- The Lime Kilns should become the site of a formal archaeological investigation, similar to that conducted at Mellor Church, to ensure maximum recovery of historical artefacts and minimum damage and disruption to the historic fabric.
- The dig should extend to the land surrounding the kilns as far as practicable.
- The archaeological investigations should have the objective of establishing the best way to maximise safe access to the public, both during the work and after it is completed.
- Historical artefacts discovered should be exhibited locally.

A short heritage trail guide around the site of the Lime Kilns between Lock 13 (where the start of the old canal arm can still be seen) and Lock 16 (Top Lock) could be created using old photographs and artistic interpretation. This would enable people to visualise the present day buildings in their original settings

### **Roman Lakes – Brickbridge – All Saints’ Church**

This historic route was followed by the apprentices from Samuel Oldknow’s Mellor Mill when they attended Sunday services at All Saint’s Church.

The route starts at Bottoms Hall and crossed the Goyt close to the site of the mill. From there the path winds up the hillside to Strines Road and on to Brickbridge.

Just over the bridge there is a capped-off coal mine shaft and the famous ‘pee stones’ where, it is said, the boys had a final toilet stop before climbing the final stretch to the church.

Suggestions:

- Provide signposting and information boards
- Prepare leaflet guided walk

## **2. Marple Wharf – Aqueduct** (Lower Peak Forest Canal – Cheshire Ring)

### **Memorial Park**

The land for Marple's "War Memorial Park" was given to the community in 1922, in memory of the local men who fell in the Great War 1914 – 1918. Although the "War" in its name has fallen out of use in recent times the park has remained true to its original purpose whilst also taking its place at the heart of the local community. The park now plays host to the annual Carnival and bi-annual Locks Festival celebrations, which are both attended by large numbers of visitors.



The park provides a wide range of outdoor leisure facilities for all ages, but is also an oasis of calm for those who wish to relax and explore nature. The park has been awarded the prestigious Green Flag Award for the last six years, demonstrating that it already reaches the high standards required by the Civic Trust, yet there are still many opportunities for further improvements too.

The Peak Forest Canal runs the full length of its boundary forming an excellent backdrop to this fine park. The park once had even stronger links with the canal than it does today, as there was a canal arm running through it to the local mill. Although this was filled in some years ago the land used is still available and there would be an opportunity to bring the canal back into the park and create additional moorings for narrow boats at the heart of Marple's central shopping area.



The photo on the left shows the bridge along the Lower Peak Forest Canal at the start of the canal arm leading to Hollins Mill. Looking at the picture on the right there is no sign of the canal arm today. Possett Bridge at Stockport Road is situated just before the bend in the canal.

The park is already home to the town's library, health clinic, senior citizens hall, scout hut and police station with plans afoot to add Marple's Brass Band to its list of residents by converting an original park lodge into a band practice room. It is also the obvious site for a Community Hall and Museum with the council owned Hollins House providing the ideal central location for such a development.

Friends of Marple Memorial Park are an active group that have made many improvements since their formation in 2004 and would be keen to support suitable developments in the park. To learn more visit: [www.marplememorialpark.org.uk](http://www.marplememorialpark.org.uk)



#### Suggestions:

- Reinststate the old canal arm into the park and create additional moorings with access to Marple's shopping centre.
- Convert some or all of Hollins House into a Community Hall and Museum.
- Add disabled toilets and increase accessibility.
- Add a bandstand to create a focal point for concerts and entertainment and to link with Marple's Brass Bands' new home in the park.
- Create a significant monument to Samuel Oldknow, the industrialist who built the canals and transformed the area. (Bronze statue or similar).
- Extend and upgrade the small but well used skate park and ramp.

- Add teen “assault course” type adventure play equipment.
- Provide outdoor fitness equipment.
- Resurface the basketball court.

### **Brabyns Park - Iron Bridge**

The grade II listed Iron Bridge in Brabyns Park has recently been restored by a Community led / Council partnership with Heritage Lottery funding to secure its future. This included 3D and audio-visual exhibits in the Stockport Story Museum.



Alongside the Iron Bridge is a former gatekeeper’s cottage that is privately owned but currently empty and up for sale. The cottage has limited potential as a residential property due to its location and access and is rapidly becoming derelict.

The Iron Bridge provides a well-used link between Marple and Compstall for walkers, cyclists and horse riders as part of the Multi-Modal Trail and the park itself is very popular with dog walkers and has easily accessible links with the canal. The river is also well used for fishing and canoeing.

The park currently has no facilities for refreshments or public toilets.

The purchase and restoration of Iron Bridge Cottage would present an ideal opportunity to create a small visitor information centre with a café that could include similar exhibits to the Stockport Story Museum. The cottage includes a stone patio with exceptional views of the historic Iron Bridge and would provide a very attractive outdoor setting for taking refreshments for much of the year.

To read more about the Iron Bridge and Brabyns Park visit:  
[www.marple-uk.com/ironbridge](http://www.marple-uk.com/ironbridge)

Suggestions:

- Purchase and restore Iron Bridge Cottage to provide public toilets with access for all, refreshments and visitor information and heritage displays about the Iron Bridge and other features within the park.

Note: with the cottage currently for sale it would be advantageous for Marple if the Council would secure this opportunity now.

### **Marple Aqueduct**

Marple Aqueduct was described as “a wonder of the age” by author George Borrow as long ago as 1862. Today it is a grade I listed structure and one of only 6 scheduled ancient monuments in the Stockport borough (4 being located in the Marple area.)



The view on the left is from 1803, just three years after it was built, and shows what a magnificent structure it is. Today the aqueduct can only be viewed properly from above due to the overgrown and unmanaged woodland. The photo on the right was taken in the winter, when a partial view is still possible, but as soon as the leaves appear on the trees it vanishes altogether. The idyllic view of 1803 could be recovered at relatively low cost and with minimal landscape management and disruption to the woodland, turning the aqueduct into a major attraction in its own right as well as being part of a much larger canal heritage trail.

There are footpaths running from Brabyns Park to the base of the aqueduct on the right bank (as seen above) and a path from the top of the aqueduct running down and then underneath it to the 1865 viaduct behind, and on towards Etherow Country Park.

To read more about the Marple Aqueduct visit:  
[www.marple-uk.com/aqueduct.htm](http://www.marple-uk.com/aqueduct.htm)

Suggestions:

- Clear a section of woodland local to the aqueduct sufficient to recreate the original views and include a picnic / viewing area with safe access for all.
- Create a new section of footpath alongside the river running from the aqueduct to Marple Dale. This would tie in with the proposed new SEMMMs link bridge at Chadkirk and increase significantly the opportunities for circular walks.
- Install interpretation explaining the historical significance of the aqueduct and viaduct to canal and rail travel and the development of the area.

A locks trail produced by the Marple Website / Marple Locks Heritage Society is available at: [www.marplelocks.org.uk](http://www.marplelocks.org.uk)

### **3. Marple Wharf - Goyt Mill** (Macclesfield Canal – Cheshire Ring)

#### **Ring o’Bells Community Pub**

This attractive canal pub, situated along side the canal adjacent to Marple wharf, is ideally suited for visitors to the wharf. It won the North West Community Pub of the Year Award in 2008 and 2009.

#### **Towpath and Moorings**

British Waterways are currently improving the towpath and moorings from the Ring O’ Bells Pub for 200 yards southwards towards Goyt Mill.

Suggestion:

- Provide signage to alert boaters of the approach to Marple Wharf and access to Marple town centre.

#### **Play Area for Ecclesbridge Estate**

There is a small play area adjacent to the canal behind the Ecclesbridge Estate.

Suggestion:

- Improve play facilities for children

#### **Goyt Mill**

Goyt Mill is the sentinel to the southern gateway to Marple. It was built in 1905 by Jonathan Partington of Middleton as a cotton mill for the Goyt Spinning Company. At its heart was a giant steam engine that powered the mill, which comprises 260,000 sq.ft. on its 6 floors. Coal was supplied by canal – hence the location of the mill – from the Poynton and Staffordshire coalfield right up to 1956, shortly before it closed as a spinning mill.

The mill complex is on 4 acres and is owned by a family company – Peak Group of Companies - based at Goyt Mill, who have other property interests in the area. It comprises incubator and leisure units and is currently 80% full.

Suggestions:

- Residential units
- Additional moorings
- Marina
- Improve/renovate external elevations

The owner is willing to explore ways of improving this gateway site.

## **MARPLE WHARF** – The Hub of the Canal System in Marple

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### **Visitors Centre**

The Toll House at the end of the Wharf was originally used as an office to collect tolls from canal users as they passed through this junction of the Peak Forest and Macclesfield Canals. It still retains many original and interesting features and could easily be converted into a very attractive Visitors Centre, with its wonderful position overlooking the canal junction.

The Visitors Centre would be full of maps and information to help visitors and local residents get out and enjoy Marple and its canals.

Marple Civic Society has already received considerable support from local residents offering to run the centre on a voluntary basis.

### **Holiday Cottage**

In the past, the 3 bedroom cottage adjacent to the Toll House has been used as residential accommodation. Its attractive location at the Wharf, adjacent to Bridge No. 1 and the warehouse, would make it ideal for use as a holiday cottage: the perfect base for visitors not only to Marple and the nearby area, but allowing easy access to Stockport and Manchester, in one direction, and the Peak District in the other.

One of the upstairs bedrooms actually adjoins the above-mentioned Toll House, to which there is evidence of an access door. Consequently, this bedroom could be used to extend the visitors centre – still leaving two double bedrooms for the holiday cottage.

Safer Stockport would be interested in involving young offenders who have been ordered to perform community work to be part of a hands-on community project for renovation of the Toll House and Cottage

### **Visitors Centre/Holiday Cottage**

It is envisaged that the visitors centre and cottage will be managed by a charitable trust (having approximately 8-10 trustees) supported by Stockport MBC.

The following have agreed in principle to act as trustees:

- Craig Wright – Local Councillor
- Sue Ingham – Local Councillor
- Peter Clarke – Marple Locks Heritage Society
- Ian Edgar – Chairman of Inland Waterways Protection Society
- John Hearle – Chairman of Mellor Archaeological Trust
- Alan Postill – Chairman of Marple Civic Society

- Gillian Postill – Marple Civic Society Committee member
- Graham Clarke – Marple Civic Society member
- Hilary Atkinson – Chairperson of Local History Society
- Malcolm Allcard – Marple Locks Heritage Society
- Allison Allcard – Marple Locks Heritage Society
- James Dunlop – Chairman of New Horizons
- Mark Whittaker – Marple Website Administrator
- David Bluff – Chairman of Marple Business Forum

### **Canal Heritage Education Centre**

The upper floor of the warehouse would be the perfect location for a Canal Heritage Education Centre. The Centre, which would be open to the public, could also be used by Stockport primary schools to teach pupils the history of the canals and the associated industries, skills and crafts, which have played such an important part in the development of the town and surrounding villages.

Education packs have already been prepared and are available for teaching the history of Marple Locks and the Iron Bridge. Similar packs could be prepared for other aspects of local history and exhibits could be set up to make it an interactive, hands-on experience for children, and adults!!

Several schools in Stockport already study canals but their visits are made to Ashton-under-Lyne Portland Basin Museum.

The Centre could:

- display photos (from Civic Society, Marple Website archives, etc)
- store archives from Local History Society (with some exhibits, to be changed regularly, on display in glass cabinets)
- house local history and canal related artefacts etc, which are either donated or on loan (e.g. Oldknow “statue” from All Saints’ Church, etc)
- display local paintings of Marple (which may be on sale) on loan from members of Marple Arts Society and other local artists and photographers
- have displays by local schools (primary, secondary and Cheadle & Marple College), on a rotation basis

### **Café**

The ground floor of the warehouse could also be home to a café. The café would be the perfect destination to end a day out in Marple to enjoy refreshments after a guided walk (by leaflet) or cycle ride, or as a stopping point for boaters and holiday makers on the Cheshire Ring, or even just for the residents of Marple whilst they enjoy the beauty of the area.

### **New Horizons**

The site must continue to provide moorings for the purpose built “New Horizons” narrow boat run by the Stockport Canal Boat Trust which offers day trips for the disabled. This boat was launched in 1981 by Prince Charles and it runs trips for people with disabilities, seven days a week between April and October, having carried over 2,000 passengers in 2008.

### **Boating facilities**

Facilities for boaters (water supply point, rubbish disposal/recycling point, and a sanitary station) must not only be retained but improved and added to. These facilities are required independently of a marina (see option below) to encourage boaters to stop in Marple.

### **Car Parking & Toilets**

Provision may be made at the wharf for a small number of parking spaces, including disabled parking, and ample car parking is available at the Chadwick Street car park (recently redesigned by SMBC), which is only a five minute walk away from Marple Wharf. Toilet facilities should also be provided.

### **Outdoor sports & recreational facilities** (option)

Marple Wharf would be the perfect location for canoe & kayak coaching and training on the Peak Forest and Macclesfield Canals. The facility would also be close to the River Goyt for river coaching and recreation.

The location also offers an ideal base for circular mountain bike rides in the area, as well as for other sporting disciplines, such as fell running.

The centre could provide boat and bike storage as well as changing room facilities, and possibly a small kitchen. A bunk house could be provided for about 10 people to offer accommodation when taking part in canoeing courses or whilst on holiday.

Services could be provided which until recently were offered by SMBC Children and Young People’s Directorate.

These facilities would be housed in a new build on the vacant site at Marple Wharf.

### **New Marina** (option)

The British Waterways yards at Marple Wharf could also be transformed into a small marina, offering permanent moorings. This would add to the overall attractiveness of the Wharf, again encouraging visitors. The area could accommodate a marina for 8 narrow boats.

**Nursery** (option)

There is currently need for additional childcare facilities in the Marple area and the site at Marple Wharf could accommodate a new building to meet such a need. This would be an excellent community use for part of the site and it is currently being looked into by Sure Start.

The possibility of “sharing” the facilities with other local community requirements could also be investigated.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

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This report clearly demonstrates the potential of Marple to improve its tourism, recreation and community facilities and opportunities.

The Wharf is the ideal destination to start and finish a visit to Marple and its surrounding countryside and perfect for a weekend break or water based activity holiday. It is superbly situated because of its location in the canal system at the junction of the Peak Forest and Macclesfield Canals, its stunning countryside views, its easy access to the town centre and because it is steeped in history and heritage.

There is considerable support for this Vision for Marple not only by the Civic Society but also by other stakeholders and the local community.

Viewed in this light it would be a tragic waste of an opportunity to build houses on Marple Wharf and not undertake a comprehensive review of the proposals presented in this Vision for Marple.

A time scale could clearly be prepared for implementation of the various projects, but it is essential that attention be immediately paid to the Marple Wharf aspect since if British Waterway's development proposals go ahead this iconic site would be lost forever.

## **NEXT STEPS**

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Form a partnership of interested organisations, principally Stockport MBC, British Waterways and Marple Civic Society to set up a Regeneration Committee to design, promote and deliver a Vision for Marple.

The committee would co-op interested parties as required and would seek Heritage Lottery Funds and other sources of finance to assist in regenerating Marple to make it the 'Jewel in the Crown' of Stockport MBC.

## **Appendix 1 – Acknowledgements**

Marple Civic Society would like to acknowledge the support, advice and ideas received from the following societies in the preparation of this “Vision for Marple”

Friends of Marple Memorial Park

Marple Website

Marple History Society

Marple Locks Heritage Society

Marple Business Forum

Safer Stockport Partnership – Community Safety Unit SMBC

The Peak Group of Companies (Goyt Mill)

New Horizons Canal Boat for the Disabled

Inland Waterways Association

North East Cheshire Cruising Club

Macclesfield Canal Society

Stockport Heritage Trust

Society of Marple Artists

## **Appendix 2            Summary of objections and ideas for Marple Wharf from members of the community – January 2010**

### **Objections**

	no. of objections
Housing inappropriate for site	71
Conservation and heritage issues for this historic site and listed building	58
Loss of mooring for New Horizon which belongs to Marple	51
Loss of facilities for boaters	42
Traffic and parking problems	17
Marple's beauty is reflected in:	
Book "Treasures of Britain" Marple Locks are featured.	
Marple canals are the subject of many guides and postcards	
This area has been used for two recent films/TV projects	
Housing on this site will damage the beauty of Marple which should be preserved for the future	17
Marple canals unique to Marple, housing would destroy uniqueness	15
Loss of trade from boaters and visitors - Marple attracts many visitors.	19
Overcrowding – too many houses	13
Loss of character	12
Present plan does not reflect canal heritage	8
Loss of outdoor activity amenity/facility	8
Poor consultation – few people informed	6
Reconsider proposal taking a collaborative approach	5
Objections from nearby residents overlooked	4

### **Ideas for Warehouse/Toll House**

	no. of suggestions
Café	15
Heritage/local history centre	14
Tourist information centre	11
Community centre	10
Extra mooring/marina	10
Summer facilities e.g. cycle, canoe hire etc, toilet facilities	7
Holiday/tourist centre	5
Landscaped area	5
Modern waterways requirements	4
Museum	4
Undercover facility/moorings for New Horizons	3
Canal related project	2
Public meeting room	2
Craft centre	1
Art Gallery	1
Affordable housing with access to canal bank	1