

Marple Wharf Toll House Visitor Centre Business Plan



for presentation to British Waterways

by

Marple Civic Society

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1. RATIONALE FOR TOLL HOUSE PROJECT

Marple is a canal town with an enormous untapped tourism potential. This potential has been recognised by Stockport MBC and it is developing plans to regenerate the area for tourism, leisure and community purposes. The Toll House - a Grade II listed building situated at the head of Marple Lock Flight and at the junction of 3 canals - is an important part of Marple's canal heritage, yet it is boarded up, out of use and prey to vandalism and decay.

Despite the history and heritage associated with Marple and its canal system, there is no visitor centre to guide and inform visitors, school children or local residents of its important and fascinating local history. Indeed, Stockport school children are taken to the Portland Basin Canal Museum in Ashton (some 10 miles away) to learn about canals, whilst we have a rich canal history on our own doorstep. Quite simply, our story is not told. We aim to change that with this proposal to British Waterways, who own the Toll Cottage, by proposing that a local community trust be formed by Marple Civic Society to raise funds to set up and run a Visitor Centre at the Toll House. This would provide a much needed community resource and put an important Grade II listed building of national importance back into use.

Many Stockport people are unaware of the delights that Marple has to offer; for example the incredible flight of 16 locks which are the second deepest in the country, and Marple Aqueduct and the Lime Kilns, 2 of only 6 scheduled ancient monuments in Stockport. The Visitor Centre would help people find out where to go and what to see.

The project will involve local societies and compliment other heritage attractions in the area which will feed into the borough wide council initiative to promote Stockport and attract tourists. It will provide the opportunity to learn about our rich history, enjoy an excellent day out and bring life and revenue to Marple.

English Heritage advises that listed buildings should be brought back into use and our proposal would do that. Both the Government and English Heritage recognise the importance of historic environment in developing a stronger sense of place. We intend to build on this sense of place by enlisting local people to man the toll House and becoming directly involved. 70 volunteers have so far offered their support and 15 local stakeholders, including 2 councillors, have agreed to act as trustees.

We have the full support and involvement of Stockport MBC who have offered to help us with funding and fund applications and we have a range of ideas for raising money for both setting-up and running costs.

In conclusion, we have a project which ticks many boxes: heritage, tourism, community, regeneration and education and we are enthusiastic and motivated to take this community project forward.

2. LOCATION AND DESCRIPTION OF TOLL HOUSE

The Toll House is located in Marple at the top end of Lockside. It is situated adjacent to Bridge No. 1 on the Macclesfield Canal, at the junction of the Macclesfield and Peak Forest Canals, and opposite Lock No. 16 (the top lock of the Marple flight).

It is believed that the building dates back to the middle of the 19th Century. The location of this building would have allowed the recording of tolls to be carried out for both canals from a single building.

The Toll House consists of a single room, reached by 4 steps from road level. The room is trapezoidal in shape with a floor area of approximately 11m². The floor to ceiling height in the room is approx. 2.5 m.

It is stated in the Heritage Assessment (2008) prepared by British Waterways that *“the building has great importance in the evolution of the canal, as such an unspoilt example is invaluable in helping to tell the story of the canal affected by the site. Its siting and orientation relates well to both canals and makes a strong contribution to their character. It is therefore considered to be of **High Significance**”*.

It should be noted that the Toll House is a listed building (Grade II) and thus of national interest. Consequently, façades and remaining features must be retained or repaired where possible.

(Note: Reference should also be made to Appendix 5 which describes a proposed alternative for the Toll House Visitor Centre)

3. AIMS OF TOLL HOUSE VISITORS CENTRE

The Toll House is not currently used and the proposal is to renovate it and open it to the general public as a Visitor Centre. It still retains many original and interesting features and could easily be converted into a very attractive Visitor Centre, with its wonderful position overlooking the canal junction. The Toll House would decay and deteriorate if left unused.

The aims of the Visitor Centre would be to:

- provide information for local residents and visitors to the area
- encourage visitors to explore Marple’s canals and local heritage
- act as a focus for expanding the tourist potential of Marple
- act as a base for educational talks for schools and education centres
- encourage boaters to stop in Marple

- act as a starting point for guided/leafleted walks
- add further life to the Wharf
- raise awareness of the heritage value of Marple's canal and lock system
- help promote and protect Marple's canal system and local heritage/history
- become part of the Stockport's borough wide regeneration scheme to promote tourism and leisure

4 ESTIMATED NUMBER OF VISITORS

SMBC plan to regenerate/develop Marple to encourage tourism to the area and this would obviously increase the number of potential visitors to Marple Wharf and the Visitor Centre

An initial conservative estimate for the no. of visitors to the Toll House Visitor Centre could be:

April – May /Sept. –Oct. (16 weeks) – 25/week	= 400
June – Aug. (12 weeks) – 40/week	= 480
November – March (24 weeks) – 15/week	= 360

The main sources of visitors would be:

- local residents
- day trippers
- boat users on the Cheshire Ring
- local schools
- interest groups

Additional visitors or more per year could be expected during the local festivals, carnivals, fairs etc

Total visitors/year = 2,000 (approx)

5. PARTNERSHIPS AND LINKS

Partnerships will be set up with local societies and organisations. Marple Locks Heritage Society and Marple Local History Society will be involved in writing leaflets explaining the history of Marple and its canals. Links will be set up to exchange and display leaflets at local beauty spots, such as the Roman Lakes, Chadkirk Chapel, Marple Memorial Park and Mellor Archaeological site. The Visitor Centre will be promoted by SMBC as part of its borough-wide plan to encourage tourism. Leaflets will be displayed in major heritage sites throughout the borough e.g. Staircase House, Bramall Hall, Stockport Hat Works and Vernon Park Museum. A leafleted

tour of 'Marple Highlights' will be set up for schools, starting at the Visitor Centre and including Marple Memorial Park and the Iron Bridge in Brabyns Park, which has been recently restored by a joint community and Stockport MBC project.

6. COSTS & FUNDING

6.1 Trust Setting-Up Costs

The Toll House Trust setting-up and administration costs would include legal expenses, stationery, etc.

SMBC would be asked for a small contribution towards these setting-up costs and Marple Area Committee would be asked to provide a start-up grant.

6.2 Initial Restoration/Renovation Costs

SMBC Curatorial Services experts would provide guidance and supervision for renovating/decorating the Toll House – with careful regard for the historic aspects of the interior, such as the original Victorian fireplace, partition wall with hatch for paying tolls, décor, gas lamp bracket, sash windows, etc.

BW would be requested to carry out any major repair works to the Toll House (e.g. roofing) and provide a metered electricity supply.

SMBC has expressed its willingness to provide support in terms of planning/renovation/management expertise, supply of furniture & fittings, leaflets, maps, promotion at other SMBC sites, etc.

Safer Stockport has expressed interest in involving young offenders, who will be engaged in community work, to be part of a hands-on community project for renovating/decorating the Toll House.

Local shops would be requested to provide decorating/building materials at cost price, and a plaque would be displayed inside the Toll House acknowledging the support provided for setting up the Visitor Centre.

Phase 1 - Proposed Restoration/Renovation Activities:

- outdoor signage (opening times, description etc) - £800
- "reproduction" boards with the original toll prices to be fitted to the positions on the outside wall of the Toll House which are still there - £600
- glass inner door, to allow outer wooden door to be left ajar when Visitor Centre is open - £300
- working models e.g. locks, roving bridge demonstrating horse crossing tow path, computer/plasma flat screen displays - £2,800
- overall model of locks (from Top Lock/Marple Wharf Junction down to Aqueduct and Tunnel) - £1,200
- vandal-proof "sound & vision" unit fitted externally -£1,000
- security, including CCTV camera - £5,000
- framing for wall displays and pictures - £1,000
- counter and cash till for volunteers, folding seat in entrance lobby - £1,500

Phase 1 - Approximate Restoration/Renovation Costs £ 13,200

A bid would be made in conjunction with SMBC to an appropriate fund.

The following items could be added at a later date (Phase 2) when the project is up and running:

- paving outside to replace grassed area - £1,000
- outdoor bench and flower tubs etc - £500
- period costumes for volunteers - £800
- information boards that are elsewhere in Marple (Memorial Park, Brabyns etc) to be installed near the Toll House, on the grass verge just before Bridge No. 1, describing the canal history etc - £900
- sign indicating direction of Flight of 16 Locks, Aqueduct etc -£800

Phase 2 - Approximate Restoration/Renovation Costs £ 4,000

6.3 Running Costs

The Toll House Trust would ask BW to provide Toll House peppercorn rent of £1 per year, with a lease of 10 years

Council Tax would be low, as it would be run by a Charity

Public liability insurance (for approx. £3 million)

General running costs (lighting, heating, etc)

General maintenance costs (paint + misc.)

Total running costs (approx.): £1,500/year

6.4 Funding Sources

Initially it is envisaged that the project will target Lottery funding such as the small grants from the Heritage Lottery (e.g. Your Heritage and Access to Heritage Funds) as well as a potential bid to the Big Lottery Fund under the Awards for All scheme.

Funding to support this project will be secured in conjunction with SMBC who will target relevant funding opportunities using the Council's Funding Team, as well as support any application for funding and offer guidance on future funding strategies and links with existing and related projects. Initially this will cover the first two years renovation and running costs of around £16,000. SMBC and British Waterways will also look to provide funders with any necessary letters of support.

6.5 Income

- a "Toll House Friends Club" would be set up:
 - "Friends" would set up an annual £3 Standing Order – with the aim of obtaining 300 + friends (total £1,000/year)
 - Societies (Civic, Local History, Locks, Art etc) would be asked to make a slightly larger contribution (£50 each; total £200/year)
 - Marple/Stockport Schools etc could become associated (total £100/year)
 - join **FROTH** (Friends of Toll House) !!!
 - become a **MOTH** (Member of Toll House) !!!
- "sponsorship" by local businesses, on an annual basis (£50)
- additional grants etc would be sought
- fund raising events would be held (£50)
- guides/maps/postcards/souvenirs would be sold in Toll House and at outside events (£100/year); install machine dispensing/selling historic-looking "toll receipts"!!

- participation in local events (i.e. Marple Carnival, Marple Locks Festival, etc) to raise awareness/members/funds
- canal/local history related talks could be held in Stockport schools for a small fee (£25 each; total £100/year) – Brabyns Park Iron Bridge Education Pack and Marple Locks Heritage Society Education Pack already available
- as the Toll House Trust will be set up as a registered charity and a non-profit making organisation, no tax liability will exist on its activities.
- **Total income: £1,600/year**

6.6 Day Boat hire scheme

This proposal, to sustain and potentially expand community services, could increase the earning potential of Toll House Trust and could be considered in a future plan for the project.

The Toll House Trust would raise funds and bid for grants to buy a Canal Day Boat and set up a day hire business, based at Marple Wharf

Conservative estimate of no. of hire days/year:

- May-September - most weekends: 30 days
- weekdays during August 15 days
- other weekdays/Easter/Bank Holidays 20 days

£80-100/day hire charge

Total turnover/year

£5,000-£6,500

7. MANAGEMENT

The Visitor Centre would be managed by a charitable trust (“Toll House Trust”) consisting of 8-10 trustees, supported by Stockport MBC.

Advice will be sought from:

- Stockport Community and Voluntary Services, Russell Morley House
(www.stockportcvs.org.uk)
- Community Foundation for Greater Manchester
(www.communityfoundation.co.uk)
- Charity Commission (www.charity-commission.gov.uk)

The following people have agreed in principle to act as trustees:

- Craig Wright – Local Councillor
- Sue Ingham – Local Councillor
- 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
- Peter Clarke – Chairman of Marple Locks Heritage Society
- Malcolm Allcard – Marple Locks Heritage Society
- Allison Allcard – Marple Locks Heritage Society
- Hilary Atkinson – Chairperson of Local History Society
- James Dunlop – Chairman of New Horizons
- Mark Whittaker – Marple Website Administrator
- David Bluff – Chairman of Marple Business Forum

The Toll House Trust would work in partnership with British Waterways, Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council and other interested parties.

8. OPERATION

- opening times: weekends, Bank holidays and some weekdays during school holidays, and by appointment (e.g. for schools and educational groups)
- entrance free of charge (with donation box inside)
- manned by volunteers at busy times and, possibly, unmanned at other times. Marple Civic Society has already received considerable support from local residents offering to run the Visitor Centre on a voluntary basis.
- vandal-proof “sound & vision” unit fitted externally, to overcome disabled access problems and provide information when closed
- the Toll House would hold:
 - leaflets, maps and information to help visitors and local residents enjoy Marple and its canals/heritage
 - photos/local paintings/small displays explaining history of Marple
 - mini shop
- direction signs would be installed alongside Wharf/in town centre/at car parks etc
- parking available at Chadwick Street car park – 5 minute walk

- toilet at boaters' facilities would be available for use by volunteers

9. PROJECT EVALUATION

The objectives of this plan would be audited by the Trust after 1 and 2 years to evaluate effectiveness and provide feedback to our fund providers. The Trust would be prepared to share its experience and evaluation with prospective fund seekers if requested by the fund providers.

Should an independent evaluation be required by the funder this could be factored into any potential bid.

The evaluation will take the form of quantitative and qualitative data collection in order to measure not only outputs for the project but also show that the overall projects (ref. Section 3) have been achieved)

Quantitative data to be collected:

- Number of borough wide and local centres stocking leaflets
- Number of Toll House leaflets picked up by the general public
- Number of visitors to the centre, as seen from a visitors book
- Comparison of number of visitors with other similar visitor centres
- Number of days open throughout the year
- Analysis and comparison of visitors and days open to highlight the most popular opening days and times
- Number of volunteers manning the centre
- Analysis of volunteers, repeat sessions and hours provided to build up a reliable register of volunteer help
- Trust/trustees activities – number of meetings, actions and outcomes
- Popularity of items/maps for sale based on number of items sold
- Number of Educational opportunities accessed both on site and at satellite venues
- External audit of funds and breakdown of expenditure

Qualitative data

As this is a community led project aimed at increasing visitors to the area and providing educational information about Marple and the canals the Trust would want to test the quality of its activities by collecting some qualitative data. This would be done in two ways:

- 5% of visitors would be requested to complete an open question questionnaire with volunteer assistance where necessary
- 5% sample of schools and educational groups who have either visited the centre, used the educational packs, or followed the Marple Highlights Tour will be interviewed using a semi-structured questionnaire

An analysis of the information obtained from the audit and evaluation will be used to reset the Trust's objectives for the following year.

APPENDIX 1 – PLAN OF TOLL HOUSE AND ADJOINING COTTAGE

APPENDIX 2 – VIEWS OF TOLL HOUSE

APPENDIX 3- SCHEMATIC PLAN SHOWING MARPLE, TOLL HOUSE AND PLACES OF INTEREST

APPENDIX 4 - VIEWS OF SOME OF MARPLE'S PLACES OF INTEREST

APPENDIX 5 - TOLL HOUSE + ADJOINING ROOMS OPTION

The original Toll House consisted of the front office plus the adjoining upstairs room and the downstairs room immediately below it. From a heritage point of view the original building would be best kept as a single unit. Stockport Council are very interested in this option and would support Marple Civic Society in searching for and securing the necessary funding.

The addition of the adjoining and downstairs rooms would obviously increase the potential for the Visitor Centre to provide a better service, with more space to display information, exhibits, displays etc. There is also a window in the southern side of the room which overlooks Bridge No. 1 and the basin at Top Lock, and it is felt that these views would form a very attractive addition to the Visitor Centre.

MCS believes that this could significantly increase the number of visitors to the Centre.

There would obviously be greater initial restoration/renovation costs and running costs, but there would also be a greater potential income.

Whilst MCS recognises that the addition of the rooms to the Visitor Centre reduces the facilities available in the Cottage, BW will, no doubt, itself recognise the advantages gained from this proposal in improving the facilities provided for visitors to Marple Wharf, in particular, and the wider area, in general. This will fit in not only with SMBC's vision for the redevelopment of the canals in Marple but also improve the awareness of the public regarding BW's activities.

MCS therefore trusts that BW will consider favourably the inclusion of these rooms.

Upon BW's acceptance to this proposal, MCS and BW should then enter into discussions with SMBC to revise the Business Plan in order for it to form the basis for preparation of bids for grants.