

Borough council chief: Why we can't change Cenotaph decision

In an email from his Leek office, Simon Baker, chief executive of the linked councils - High Peak Borough and Staffordshire Moorlands District - said:

DURING 2012, important initial restoration work was carried out to re-stabilise, the War Memorial. These initial improvements also included re-enamelling the name plaques, carving the dates 1939-1945 on to the memorial and painstakingly cleaning the entire memorial by hand.

It has been said that the Memorial was closed to the public last year however this is incorrect. The protective boarding around the memorial was removed to allow full access on Remembrance Day.

The improvement work to the area around the War Memorial, due to commence in October, forms part of the major restoration project currently being undertaken throughout the park. The planned work programme for the park (a period of 32 weeks) is divided into 2 phases, the 1st phase being the works to the play area side of the park. At the pre-start meeting, the project team agreed that this programme of works was the most practicable, ensuring that the extensive soft landscaping elements of the works in the play area would be undertaken as early as possible to achieve the best chance of the establishment of grass sward before the autumn / winter period.

It was recognised that this decision would inevitably necessitate the closure of the memorial area, prior to and including Remembrance Day. However, the restoration and improvement works in this area of the park are integral to the proposed Heritage works for the park and form a significant part of the overall design and layout for the refurbished park.

Whilst these works are being undertaken it is of paramount importance that we ensure that the memorial is adequately protected to ensure that it is not damaged. Consequently it is our intention to scaffold and board the memorial throughout the period of works in this area of the park. In addition to the concentrated works that are planned in the Memorial area, the contractors will also be carrying out extensive works to existing path structures and both the Wheatsheaf Road and Goyt Road entrances to the park. This effectively means that this area of the park will be a construction site, with the installation of container storage and compounds for materials.

It is important to note that to delay these works, until after Remembrance Day could effectively delay the work programme for a period of up to 5 weeks. This delay could have serious financial implications to the project costs and impact on the planned work for this phase of the project.

We are also mindful that work is being conducted at a time of year when working days are shorter and the weather is unpredictable. It is therefore of the utmost importance that we ensure continuity of the project to meet the timescales and achieve the completion of the project on time.

We do have a very tight schedule to meet to ensure the work is completed on time. The programme of works has been drawn up to make the best use of resources and weather conditions, which would allow the restoration to be completed to the programme agreed with the Heritage Lottery, our contractors and suppliers.

The importance of the Memorial to the community is well recognised by the Council and the decision to close the Memorial area has not been taken lightly. I am therefore sorry if any members of the community are genuinely upset at the inability to access the memorial this year.

The project team will continue to work with the Whaley Bridge branch of the British Legion to organise a ceremony in 2014 around the War Memorial, timed to coincide with the centenary of the outbreak of the First World War and the date of the original War Memorial unveiling ceremony held in May 1921. The team are also involved in an educational activities project with the local primary schools, helping to ensure that the significance of the War Memorial is not lost on future generations.

I hope that it will be understood that the work we are carrying out will ensure that the memorial stands for many more years and will provide a fitting place of remembrance for future generations.

Regards, Simon

Simon Baker - Chief Executive

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