

CENTRAL PARK PETITION – RESPONSE REPORT

CONTEXT

The improvement programme for Central Park is important as it forms part of the growth of the City and aims to deliver significant health and well-being for communities. The Park improvements are specifically identified as part of the Joint Local Plan (PLY 19) to build a 'premier park for the people of Plymouth and outstanding venue of regional and national significance for active recreation and formal sport, culture, art and the natural environment.'

The overall ambition was originally identified in the Masterplan for Central Park that was adopted by the Council in March 2013 and approved by Cabinet on 12th March 2013. Assessments of the Park carried out as part of the Joint Local Plan did however acknowledge the current poor state of the park, stating that 'sports and recreational facilities within the park require upgrading to deal with issues such as drainage, and new facilities developed to ensure the sport and recreational offer in the park is outstanding. Other facilities will also be developed within the park to complement its purpose, such as cafes and play areas. Any new facilities will be in-keeping with the purpose of the park and sensitive to its natural and heritage features.'

The assessment work led to a Business Case being developed and approved in 2017 which set out an ambitious improvement programme that was designed to be delivered in phases. The Ponds project is the last phase to be delivered under the original Business Case. To date the project has delivered the new play area, skate park, café, community sports hub, tennis courts, playing pitch improvements, the events field, access infrastructure and biodiversity benefits across the Park.

The Ponds project has been the most recent project to come forward as part of the Park wide improvements. The project is the third phase of the original Central Park project. The business case for the project was approved on the 21st of January 2022 and signed off by Councillor Nicholson. The Central Park Ponds Project aims to

CENTRAL PARK PETITION – RESPONSE REPORT

transform water from a problem into a resource. The project involves re-landscaping an area of the park to provide a nature-based solution to flooding by using a sustainable drainage system to manage surface water and provide a space for wildlife and people.

The Barn Park corner of Central Park was often prone to flooding after sometimes only moderate rainfall. The project has expanded the previous inaccessible pond and created two others to form a natural, sustainable urban drainage system. The system contains a swale – a shallow channel to capture water run-off – to allow nature to help reduce the localised flooding that occurs in this part of the park.

A number of new trees will be planted this winter to help contribute to improved biodiversity as will the newly vegetated walls which are planted with wildflower seed mixes. All these interventions, when established, will create a space for residents to enjoy the new ponds, with opportunities for education and engagement to learn about water and wildlife.

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

This report responds to the petition submitted to the Council. The ePetition ran from 16/07/2024 to 31/08/2024. The petition sets out four areas:

1. “Understand why this project has left people dissatisfied.”
2. “Communicate with and listen to the park community to plan and agree something better.”
3. “Remove temporary fencing and reinstate access to public spaces.”
4. “Commission an independent review to facilitate improvements.”

This report will respond to each of the points in turn.

1. “Understand why this project has left people dissatisfied.”

At the time the petition signatures were collected it is fully understood why people were dissatisfied with the project and condition of the park. Works were halted on

CENTRAL PARK PETITION – RESPONSE REPORT

site due to the extreme rainfall during the winter of 2023 and had not recommenced. Therefore, the Park contained an unfinished project which is a position nobody wanted including the project team. The timeline for the project to date is as follows:

- 21/11/2022 – Ponds project commenced
- 21/12/2023 – Site works stopped after a major push to open Coronation Avenue and that area of the Park for the Christmas period. By this stage the ponds had been formed, and most of the drainage infrastructure was in place but not complete. This timing coincided with unseasonal amount of rainfall over a prolonged period which prevented progress due to the ground conditions. The construction team therefore left site to ensure costs were managed.
- 26/08/2024 – Work resumed to complete Coronation Avenue drainage, North Pond earthworks, North Pond Bank completed, and Bunds created. The commencement of this phase was delayed due to issues getting the contractors to return to site.
- 21/10/2024 – Work stopped on North Ponds due to deteriorating weather
- 11/11/2024 – Resurfacing works for Coronation Avenue completed.
- 11/11/2024 – Landscaping contractor team on site to complete works to South Pond including; stepping stones handrail, stepping stones wooden exit steps, reduction of wooden fencing on Mawsons Field, metal fencing, tree planting preparation (pits).

Since the recommencement of works on the site the feedback we have received is that people are happy with the works and looking forward to seeing the project finished. Appendix I includes some pictures which shows the current status on site. There is still work to do to complete the project including the tree planting and landscape works, completing the land drainage, levelling, and seeding of the fields.

Summary – In relation to the time the petition was started we understand the dissatisfaction with the project. However, once the project is complete and the

CENTRAL PARK PETITION – RESPONSE REPORT

landscaping has been given time to establish it is hoped that people will really value this part of the park and enjoy being able to use it at all times of year without the access routes being flooded.

2. “Communicate with and listen to the Park community to plan and agree something better.”

Since the inception of the project the proposed improvements to the park have been done with the engagement of the park community. As far back as 2007 during the development of the masterplan the then Central Park Community Forum was established and met regularly to shape the plans for the Park. Since then, the plans have been evolved and developed with more detailed projects being delivered.

The ponds project had a significant level of engagement and listening before the plans were finalised and a film was created to ensure people could see what the site would look like after the works. The film can be found on the project specific web page [Central Park Ponds Project | PLYMOUTH.GOV.UK](https://www.plymouth.gov.uk/central-park-ponds-project). There have been repeated attempts to use signs in the Park to provide some information on the project, but they have been subject to high levels of vandalism and removal. At the request of the residents, we included a FAQs section on the website to enable people to understand what was happening with the project.

The plans for the Ponds project went through the planning permission process which enabled further formal consultation on the plans. Planning permission for the project was initially approved in July 2020 but was revised in early 2022 with measures to further benefit wildlife and give the scheme a more natural aesthetic, while also addressing some comments received during the consultation for the first planning application. The approved plans are the ones being delivered in the Park.

Summary – The ponds project is in its final stages of delivery, and the project will be delivered in line with the plans as approved through the planning process. It is accepted that communication could have been better during the pause period. Since then, the team have been listening, including meeting on site the residents that

CENTRAL PARK PETITION – RESPONSE REPORT

organised the petition and taking on ideas. We also have members of the Green Communities project embedded within the park who are regularly out and about talking to residents and visitors about the project.

3. “Remove temporary fencing and reinstate access to public spaces.”

There is still work to do on the site as detailed above which will require areas of the Park to be partitioned off with temporary fencing. This is either due to there being works still required in that area therefore temporary fences are required for health and safety reasons. Other areas will also remain fenced until the landscaping has established as otherwise it risks being damaged and not delivering the wildlife and landscape benefits.

There are however plans to reduce the amount of land that is within the temporary fence zone. This work has been agreed with the landscape contractors and some areas have been actioned. For example, as the grasslands have established well on Mawson’s Field the temporary fence line has been pulled back to a much smaller area along the route of the swale where landscaping works still need time to grow. This action has enabled public access back to a wide area of the Park.

Summary – Where possible temporary fencing will be reduced to enable public access back on parts of the Park. The remaining temporary fencing will be removed when it is safe, and the landscaping is established in the other areas.

4. “Commission an independent review to facilitate improvements.”

Improvements are continuing in the Park in line with the approved plans. The difficulties earlier in the year with restarting works have been resolved and public enjoyment of this area of the Park seems to be increasing.

Summary – It is not deemed good value for money to commission an independent review of the project as the improvements are now progressing in line with the approved plans. The focus is now on completing the works.

CENTRAL PARK PETITION – RESPONSE REPORT

APPENDIX I – Current Pictures of the Project



Pictures 1 and 2 - The North Pond

CENTRAL PARK PETITION – RESPONSE REPORT



Picture 3 - South Pond – Showing new fencing position close to the pond.

Picture 4 - Swale – showing new fencing position tight to the swale.

