



The Way Forward?

The Moor Pool Estate

Harborne

Birmingham. B17 9DY.

This document is based on the original proposals submitted to Grainger plc who are landlords of Moor Pools community facilities in the document 'An Alternative Way Forward'.. It is a constructive attempt to find a way to retain a Moor Pool, which reflects and enhances its important architectural arts and crafts origins and history whilst enabling continued use of its community facilities by residents and local people.

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Photograph of 'improved' back-to-back housing (i.e. with the front of the court removed for better ventilation), known locally as 'Nettlefold Courts' after the chair of the Housing Committee, John Sutton Nettlefold, in Princip Street, off Loveday Street, adjoining the Gun Quarter. The photograph was taken in early 1960.



Open spaces at East Pathway, the Moor Pool Estate.

Extract from Practical Housing 1908.

"It is fortunately becoming more and more recognised every day that open spaces are as necessary to the health of a town, as streets are to its traffic. The provision of allotments, as a counter-attraction to the public house, could also be arranged for, if only these things were thought of beforehand. Under our present system, these boons to the self-respecting working-man and his wife and children are never thought of until it is too late to provide them at a price within the means of the ratepayers or the rent-payers of our large towns."

John Sutton Nettlefold. Practical Housing 1908



THE BIRMINGHAM CIVIC SOCIETY
Founded 1918

The Harborne Tenants Estate

The Harborne Tenants Estate, Moor Pool, is an early example of Arts and Crafts suburban planning in Birmingham. Initiated by the local Unitarian industrialist and philanthropist, J.S. Nettlefold in 1907 and opened on 5th November 1910, the estate provided affordable housing in a garden city setting. Local tenants contributed to the planning, financing and management of the estate, and received a dividend from rental income.

This co-partnership venture created homes with gardens, allotments, shops, a club building and sports facilities to provide a healthy and spacious community, different from the unplanned, uniform and overcrowded housing estates which were common in British towns.

LOCAL HISTORY PLATE No 3 5th NOVEMBER 2010

A little early history.

As the first Chairman of the Housing Committee of Birmingham City Council, John Sutton Nettlefold took a stance against slum clearance and municipal house building, and instead repaired unsanitary houses in the city centre under Part II of the Housing of Working Classes Act, 1890. At the same time, he advocated the introduction of a German-style town extension plan under the influence of T.C. Horsfall's book and from his own experience from visits to German towns. In the report to the city council in 1906, Nettlefold proposed town planning and municipal land purchase in the suburbs to prevent the creation of future slums. Enthused by what they had seen, the Housing Committee recommended that there should be powers to control development in new areas to ensure a better distribution of houses and provision of roads, and to buy land in the suburbs where private enterprise could be encouraged to build working men's houses at moderate rents. By moving in this direction, Birmingham was emerging as one of the first British local authorities to espouse Town Planning ideas, which have since been taken as basic principles influencing the type and direction of development.

It was Nettlefold who popularised the term 'town planning' in Britain. Thus Nettlefold, in collaboration with the garden city movement, played a unique role in British town planning until the enactment of the Housing and Town Planning Act, 1909.

Nettlefold, intent on proving that these radical ideas for town planning could work, took up an option on 36 and subsequently a further 18 acres of land to the north of Harborne. A Committee was set up for

the formation of a Society on Co-partnership lines, which became Harborne Tenants Ltd. The company was founded to promote the erection, co-operative ownership and administration of houses on the lands at Moor Pool. Substantially built houses would be constructed and let at ordinary rents to pay a moderate amount of interest on the capital investment and to divide the surplus profits after expenses amongst the tenant members in proportion to the rents paid by them. Profits would be divided in shares.

As an example of community planning in Birmingham, Moor Pool was indeed radical, contrasting starkly with the grim back-to-back housing prevalent in the City.

The Harborne Tenants co-partnership scheme was an illustration of a garden suburb undertaking on a small scale and it was predicted that in three years it would come to bankruptcy. Instead it was in precisely three years that it achieved financial success. There are 2 important points I would ask you to bear in mind.

Firstly, Moor Pool is an almost complete example of the original Estate. Harborne Tenants, despite what must have been considerable cost in maintaining the tenanted properties, kept the Estate remarkably intact. English Heritage's (Michael Taylor) said: ***'There appears to be every reason to regard Moor Pool as very significant historically and architecturally on at least a regional level'*** and Kim (Auston) called it ***an 'exceptional survival'***. The quality of the open space network is such that English Heritage have proposed that it should be included in the Parks and Gardens Register.

Secondly, we have come full circle. Many of the values put forward by Nettlefold are now considered significant features of present day ecological and sustainable communities. No one is suggesting we should now be building Arts and Craft style houses in new communities elsewhere. The Town and Country Planning Association, however, does think there are important lessons to be learned from garden suburbs such as Moor Pool, and garden cities such as Welwyn.

Various possibilities exist to improve Moor Pool to give better facilities for residents and Club members but also provide potential future additional income. These are described as follows and provide a starting point for debate.

Community Garden

Moor Pool lacks an open space for residents to meet or gather. There is nowhere for mothers and toddlers to go which is either suitable or secure. This is a serious shortcoming for a garden suburb in which provision for children was one of Nettlefold's desires. Neither does Moor Pool have an open space suitable for occasional open-air events or gatherings. This was apparent at last year's Moor Pool Festival. The Tennis Courts and Bowling Green are unsuitable for large numbers of people to walk on them without causing damage. Site B has the potential to be re-developed as a formal communal garden with flower borders and some seating. If the Valley Site allotments are restored, the area known as Site B could be turned to this purpose. It would be important to ensure its proper use and security. As such it would be securely enclosed with access only during daylight hours. Hedges would be cut back to proper height and overgrown trees and saplings properly pruned or removed. Areas unusable as a garden would be secured as a wildlife area.



An early plan for the Estate by Martin & Martin shows a park, playing space and allotments. Site B is now a potential area for an enclosed community garden. Below is one of Hampstead Garden Suburbs community gardens.



Site B in 1909 used for the May Day Festivities. Margaret Grove houses can be seen in the background.



Proposals for a Community Garden ready for public consultation.

In 1909, the area was used for the May Day Festivities. We would be keen to work with the Moorpool Players to provide a small outdoor stage area for occasional outdoor theatre. Residents have concerns about over use and noise if a specific children's play area is created. This is not the intention but rather a meeting place, which retains the tranquillity characteristic of Moor Pool. Because Moor Pool does not have such an open space there are various opportunities for funding. Clearance could be a project supported by 'Moor Pool in Bloom' whilst the major expense would be securing the garden with unobtrusive fencing behind the boundary hedging. We are moving forward with plans for this area.

Valley Allotments Restoration.



Site A, Allotment Restoration Proposal. Early plans always showed this as open space.

The Valley Site was originally all allotments and part of an open space leading from the east of the Estate all the way to the Hall at the centre. This is why it is so significant. As such, the restoration of Nettlefold's vision of open space and community allotments would form an important justification for a major Heritage Lottery Fund application, as well as to other grant bodies. These allotments led down from the backs of gardens to the stream which flowed naturally down the centre and which is one of the reasons for the frequent flooding. From Carless Avenue to the bottom of the Valley Site there are many instances of underground springs and wetland exacerbated by the road system which channels water towards these areas. Not only would restoration of allotments be of great value but also natural flood alleviation would be incorporated. A lane would be retained running down through the allotments



to service the garages at the properties down by the cottages. This would form a natural walkway up from the community garden to the Moor Pool. Allotments would be hedged and the layout would be optimised to discourage anti-social use.

Moor Pool's threatened Valley site allotments.

Incorporated within Site A would be sensitively sited parking and garage areas necessary to preserve the local streetscape from the visually damaging effect of intensive parking. In addition provision for parking would be retained at Site C which is nearby.

Site A's remaining allotments have extremely good growing conditions and the location allows one resident to grow grapes in profusion on the south facing side.



North facing Valley site threatened allotment and hedges.

Moor Pools threatened allotments.



Overlooking the Valley Site.



Another threatened Valley Site allotment.



Site A Flooding and the proposed location for new houses.

Restoration of Moor Pool

We are committed to restoration of the Estate. Through our 'Moor Pool in Bloom' project, many residents have already formed work parties to clear areas, which have fallen into disrepair under local management, and in 2010 Moor Pool was entered in 'Britain in Bloom'. This restoration is to the credit of the residents who carry out the work and who are keen to maintain the open spaces and the fabric of the Estate. We intend to continue our programme with a further entry next year and beyond. Restoration of Moor Pool could be a great opportunity for residents to partner with local user groups including schools and training support organisations.



The Builders Yard

Harborne Tenants not only managed, but also maintained the Estate with their own employees based at the Builders Yard. This was built to serve the Estate. It is a basically sound building and any prospect of demolition would be vigorously opposed. We propose that this building is

turned into a satellite 'outdoor' classroom as a cross-curricular education resource for Harborne Primary School, the local community, and any other schools that may wish to use it. The 'classroom' will be located in the refurbished Builders Yard Offices. Nearby Harborne Primary School has negligible green space and this is an opportunity to provide a resource, which will not only help deliver the national curriculum, but also educate children (and adults) about their environment and how they can help safeguard it for future generations. Harborne Primary School is only a short walking distance away and the ground currently covered with abandoned building materials would be cleared for allotment use and outdoor projects. The classroom would also be used for community and Club meeting purposes. Such use has the support of the school and would be highly likely to attract varied grant funding. The room would also serve as an area to display historical information on the development of the Estate and its origins in the garden suburb and city movement.



The Builders Yard. The foreground shown covered in abandoned building materials would be cleared and turned into an allotment and greenhouse area.

Below is an impression of the refitted building with a terraced area to one side and growing facilities on the other.



The building would be fitted out to include a meeting room/classroom, toilet facilities, storeroom and office. The storage would provide space for tools used to maintain the Estate and a greenhouse for growing plants for open spaces and sale as well as forming part of the study facility.

The Orchard.

The Orchard, which is situated between Wentworth Gate and West Pathway, is proposed as a wildlife area. This has some merits, but a wildlife area without any management plan will end up as an overgrown dumping ground. Already this is happening and we have had to take action to get dumped waste materials removed. The original apple and pear trees which give the orchard its name still exist and indeed these trees are of a size rarely seen elsewhere. The undergrowth and saplings, which conceal them and threaten their survival, need clearing away as part of a properly conceived plan. Restoration of the adjacent allotments and boundary hedging will open up the Orchard to view and revive this forgotten part of Moor Pool. Harborne Primary School also see this as an ideal location for Forest School studies with the nearby new classroom acting as a base.

The Moor Pool Hall.



The use of the hall forms a crucial income stream for any future Trust. It needs to be maintained so that use can be maximised in a manner appropriate to its location. Minimal work has so far been carried out and there will be considerable future expenditure required. This will include the roof, ceilings, access and toilet facilities and well as sound proofing for the benefit of nearby residents. All these have to be done in a way befitting a grade 11 listed building. The stage used by the Moor Pool Players and the skittle alley, which is deteriorating rapidly, are also key items to be addressed. The kitchen facilities need considerable upgrading and damp is a severe issue in the basement areas. The Hall has below it what is believed to be a unique wooden skittle alley with both a flat and crowned alley side by side.



The Garages.

As residents here well know, Moor Pool suffers from particularly narrow roads. This was agreed as a concession when the Estate was constructed and fundamental parking issues now ensue. The garages, which have been built on former allotments over the years, are deteriorating badly and

need replacing and upgrading. We have passed from the days of a single car family being a novelty to 3 car families being a reality. This has to be addressed and could consist of secured parking areas. Of course, not everyone uses a car and secure provision for both bikes and motorbikes should be considered too. The severely reduced parking provision agreed as part of the development approval reduces off road parking dramatically in the east side of the Estate, on the unlikely assumption residents can or will walk to garages retained in the Carless Avenue area. It is an important principle of a conservation area that front gardens are retained and the reduction in garage space puts a severe strain on this aspect, which should have been an important consideration. Parking areas which are secure and with adequate lighting will become attractive to use. A Trust would ensure that all garages are used to reduce the congestion on the Estates roads.

The Estate's Viability.

The only way a Trust which can take over the community facilities of Moor Pool can be considered is if the restoration ideas put forward for the Estate are attractive and can be proved viable to grant bodies such as the Heritage Lottery Fund. These have to be of lasting benefit so that revenue income continues.

Only a Trust formed to benefit the people of Moor Pool would want to take over the community facilities. Suggestions that the Moor Pool Hall might be converted to residential use are a non starter but of course there is always the possibility of it being closed and boarded up to attempt to influence a favourable response to an alternative use and planning application.

The Moor Pool Residents Association has secured substantial funding towards a viability study for a trust to which Grainger are now providing supporting information. This viability study is being overseen by Bournville Village Trust who are eminently experienced in the issues which affect Moor Pool from experience with their own Bournville Estate. The study will examine the complete infrastructure of Moor Pool and look at potential future cost liabilities. This information will be key in putting forward a business plan, which would be attractive to grant bodies.

Planning and Conservation.

A Trust would have an important role to play in ensuring the fabric of the Estate is conserved in line with its conservation area status. Maintaining the quality of the Estate gives significantly enhanced property values to owner occupiers and a higher quality environment for tenants. Improved facilities will benefit residents and the many users from outside Moor Pool. The Estate has until recently been a poorly promoted part of Birmingham architectural history which is something the residents association has attempted to address with some success. Most recently the Moor Pool Festival became part of English Heritages Heritage Open Days.

The Constitution of a Trust.

A Trust could be modelled on the Hampstead Garden Suburb Trust. (www.hgstrust.org) There the Trustees consist of a proportion elected from residents and the remainder with specific experience in Trust and conservation area matters. The exact legal composition would need careful consideration but a Trust would have overall responsibility to maintain and preserve the present character and

amenities particularly the landscape and architecture of the Estate. A Trust would provide a stable future for management of the Estate.

And finally.

In his opening address at the sod cutting ceremony on the 26th October 1907, Dr William Gore said:

“They were perfectly conscious that the housing problem lay at the very root of social reform. There must be better houses, more room, more gardens and more open spaces for the children. The Harborne Tenants aspired to provide houses under these conditions within the means of workmen and artisans.....These houses were to be suitable for bringing up healthy children and healthy men and women. It would be an example of town-planning.....They had set an example of what could be done in the way of town planning on a voluntary basis. They were going to make an Edgbaston for the less wealthy class on that spot”.

Mr Henry Vivian, M.P. Chairman of Co Partnership Tenants Ltd said:

“They would watch this experiment in Birmingham with interest for it would have its influence all over this great district.”

The Right Hon William Kenrick had the following comment:

“They wanted the City Councillors and urban district councils to have the power to say to building speculators:’ “You shall not crowd houses irrespective of decency and the health of the children and the inhabitants of the houses.”

