

Astley 2020

Outline Development Plan

‘Working together with our heritage partners to maximise the visitor experience and to create a sustainable centre of regional importance’



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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Astley Hall and Park is situated adjacent to the thriving market town of Chorley in the heart of Lancashire, North-West England. At the heart of the park is Astley Hall, a Grade I listed Jacobean house, which is one of the borough's most iconic landmarks. It has great historical interest and is one of the borough's main tourist attractions, giving the park a sense of grandeur and importance. Astley Hall is set in 43 hectares of landscaped parkland and includes a coach house, farmhouse, outbuildings and walled garden. Although there is evidence of human occupation on the site since the Bronze Age, the main hall building originated as a timber-framed manor house in the 1580s. Its exterior and interior were radically remodelled over the next 100 years, with an additional wing added in the 1820s. Remarkable features include gravity-defying plaster ceilings, painted panelling in the Great Hall and a collection of early English furniture of the highest quality. The adjacent Coach House is a Grade II listed building which underwent extensive £3m HLF-funded renovations in 2007–9 and now houses a cafe, exhibition gallery and events spaces.
- 1.2 Astley Hall and its contents were donated to Chorley and its people by Reginald Arthur Tatton in 1922, with the remit to preserve the Hall and its collections for the people of the town. This remit is still very much at the centre of everything we do at Astley Hall, in addition to fitting into the strategic vision of the Council.
- 1.3 From woodland walking to sunbathing in the gardens, the beautiful surroundings of Astley Park are the perfect place for people to relax. Just a short walk from the town centre and home to the River Chor, there are footpaths to enjoy the woodland, glorious gardens in which to relax and a beautiful lake enjoyed by local residents and visitors.
- 1.4 It is also the place where the town's fallen are remembered, with the cenotaph and grand memorial arch at the entrance, reminding us of the great sacrifices the people of Chorley have made.
- 1.5 Astley Park is also host to major sports, arts and cultural events in the town, including the annual Picnic in the Park. Described as 'the jewel in Chorley's crown', the hall and park is enjoyed throughout the year by people of all ages.

2. RECENT DEVELOPMENTS AND SUCCESSES

- 2.1 Astley Park recently gained Green Flag status in 2012. Whilst developing a long term development plan for Astley Hall and Park, the Council has been running in parallel to this a number of improvements to address immediate issues and also support the longer term development of the site. This has involved close working and collaboration with other partner organisations such as Chorley Remembers and the Astley Advisory Committee. Projects recently delivered and currently in progress include:
 - New exhibition space in Farmhouse.
 - Destination play area.
 - Restoration of the Memorial Arch.
 - New Chorley Remembers exhibition.
 - Improvements to Cenotaph including new footpath.
- 2.2 The Council's commitment to developing the parkland around the hall combined with a greater understanding for the need to work in partnership with other heritage groups has led to a greater awareness for the need to consolidate a cultural hub that is reactive to the needs of the community.

The Council has invested £380K during 2013-14 to develop the projects outlined and there is also a commitment to the long term investment needed to conserve the hall for accessibility now and longer term preservation.

- 2.3 Astley Hall, Museum and Art Gallery has become registered as part of a successful museum accreditation process through the Arts Council England. This process recognises that Astley Hall adheres to recognised standards in relation to accessibility, management and collection care and also entitles eligibility for public funding.

The Council's recent commitment to its cultural offer includes:

- 22% increase in opening hours to the hall, museum and art gallery.
- A newer, more vibrant temporary exhibitions and events programme.
- New commemorative Chorley Remembers exhibition.
- Investment in arts development throughout the borough.
- Parkland developments.

3. CONSULTATION

- 3.1 During August 2013 the Council undertook consultation on the future improvement of Astley Hall and Park. The purpose of this consultation was to update the community on the areas where improvement was being considered and canvas opinion in relation to some proposals for development.
- 3.2 Residents and visitors were invited to have their say on a range of issues such as lighting in the park, a new play area, mini golf provision, events car parking and the type of events which are run in the park.
- 3.3 The consultation was also communicated through the Councils website, social media and directly with stakeholder groups such as the Astley Advisory Committee. During the consultation, the progress and plans to further develop and restore the Hall, Coach House and Farmhouse complex were discussed.
- 3.4 The consultation received 176 responses from a diverse audience consisting of residents, visitors, local councillors and key stakeholders including Astley Advisory Group, Friends of Astley Park, Chorley Natural Society and the Town Centre Forum. The results are detailed in Table 1 and clearly demonstrate support for a number of the proposals with strong support for events infrastructure, destination play area, sensory garden, fountain feature and temporary events car parking.

Table 1 – Astley Hall & Park Consultation

	Supportive	Partially supportive	Unsure	Not supportive
Footpath Lighting	56%	14%	15%	15%
Temporary Events Staging	69%	26%	0%	5%
Proposed fountain	66%	13%	0%	21%
Proposed Mini Golf	45%	35%	0%	20%
Events car parking off Southport Rd	61%	26%	0%	13%
Destination Play Area	74%	20%	0%	6%
Sensory Garden & Sensory Trail	78%	20%	0%	2%

3.5 The consultation was structured using open questions to capture additional information and reasons supporting the preferences expressed. This information will be considered when developing these proposals and where possible concerns raised will be designed out or mitigated.

4. FORWARD PLAN

4.1 VISION

Our vision is:

‘Working together with our heritage partners to maximise the visitor experience and to create a sustainable centre of regional importance’

4.2 AIMS

Chorley has a proud and rich heritage and cultural history. There has been a steady and progressive realisation that Chorley’s cultural assets should be seen as a whole and have greater synergy in order to create a unified and sustainable cultural offer. Combined with this is the ever increasing necessity to have a sustainable and financially viable cultural offer that is:

- Accessible, relevant and identifiable to all citizens of Chorley borough.
- Attractive to those wishing to settle in the Chorley area.
- Appealing to those visiting the area.
- Responsive to what people want to see and experience.
- Promoting the philosophy of cultural pride, identity and diversity.

4.3 OBJECTIVES

To secure a long term sustainable future that meets the needs of local residents and visitors a number of objectives have been identified as follows:

- Develop an Astley Hall conservation and maintenance plan and programme.
- Meet the visitor expectation and improve the general visitor offer and experience.
- Develop the cultural offer to support a sustainable business model.
- Lead and nurture partnership working.
- Conserve and enhance the ecological value of Astley Park.
- Commemorate World War I in an emotive, compassionate and inclusive manner.

The objectives outlined above fall into five key areas for development:

1. Astley Hall and Park conservation.
2. Improving the visitor offer and experience.
3. Business development to support a sustainable business model.
4. Heritage partnership development.
5. World War I Commemoration.

4.4 ASTLEY HALL AND PARK CONSERVATION

4.4.1 Initial exploratory work is needed to determine and progress with the long term conservation and maintenance of Astley Hall itself so that it remains the jewel in the crown of Chorley's cultural offer. There are several serious problems with the building that need to be identified

and addressed over the course of the next ten years. A conservation and maintenance plan will highlight the major problems facing the building. These include:-

- Subsidence of the Great Hall.
- Misuse of materials during previous restoration work.
- Structural repairs to floors and ceilings.
- Front window and render restoration.

4.4.2 The key actions needed to address these issues include:

- Exploratory works to determine long term problems and way forward.
- Produce conservation plan to clearly identify and prioritise works.
- Discussions with English Heritage on approach, methods and materials.
- Long term 10 year plan of works and cyclical maintenance schedule.

4.4.3 Astley Park has a rich and varied environmental and ecological heritage. The woods are a designated biological heritage site and they are remnant ancient woodland. The woodland requires a maintenance plan to provide a structured programme to manage the woods and tree stock.

4.4.4 The river Chor flows through the park and it needs conserving and protecting through partnership working. Future areas for development include a reed bed scheme to improve water quality and river wall / bank improvements.

4.4.5 The other various ecological features such as ponds, lake and grasslands need to be included in an overall conservation plan for the whole Astley site.

4.5 IMPROVING THE VISITOR OFFER AND EXPERIENCE

Astley Hall and Park currently offers a good visitor experience, however there are a number of areas where this could be improved. To significantly increase visitor numbers and to support a sustainable business model, improvements need to be made across the hall, parkland and wider heritage offer. The areas that require further improvement include:

4.5.1 **Astley Hall** – to make the hall a destination of regional importance by:

- Development of a comprehensive and exciting events and exhibitions programme to appeal to a diverse audience.
- Development of an Astley marketing strategy.
- New and improved educational programme and facilities.
- Creation of children's activity offer using modern interpretation methods for engagement.
- Structured storylines with interactive displays for people of all ages.
- Modern interpretation methods including up to date ICT and media facilities that use audio, visual and sensory technology.
- Produce a quantitative survey to determine what customers would like to see as part of their Astley visit.
- Invest in the interpretation and story of the hall, its owners and its staff.
- Create dedicated museum spaces, allowing our objects and artefacts to tell stories and reach a greater audience.

4.5.2 **Astley Park** - as indicated through the consultation a number of areas for improvement have been identified including:

- Developing appropriate and fit for purpose infrastructure to support small, medium and large scale events e.g. event parking, lighting and stage / event areas.
- Improving play provision to provide a destination level attraction for children of all ages
- Restoration of existing features such as the sensory garden and footpaths.
- Development of a comprehensive and co-ordinated outdoor events programme together within a signature event to create profile of regional significance.
- Promotion of healthy living through increased leisure and play activities.

4.5.3 Meeting the overall visitor expectation

- Embracing and promoting a Customer Service Excellence environment and approach.
- Improving general facilities for visitors – parking, access, orientation, toilets *etc.*
- Working closely with the Visitor Attraction Quality Assured Scheme (VAQAS) to ensure that we are providing a good level of service.
- Investing in the re-use of spaces across Astley including refurbishment of spaces within the Hall.

4.6 BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT TO SUPPORT A SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS MODEL

Astley currently attracts a limited amount of income (£50K) from wedding hire and tenancy agreements. In order to develop a more sustainable business model a number of potential income generation options have been scoped as follows:

4.6.1 **Weddings and other ceremonies** - As it stands, the wedding offer at Astley is good but there are many things that we can do to improve the offer including:

- Improve facilities for guests – toilet facilities and the Wattle and Daub Room.
- Create wider variety of wedding packages that will appeal to different clients.
- Consider having a nominated wedding and ceremonies planner for all Council venues.
- Strongly market the venue for weddings, baby naming ceremonies and civil partnerships.

4.6.2 **Museum shop** - There is a significant need and demand to seriously consider a museum shop at Astley Hall. A shop could be located in the ground floor of the Coach House and would be open in conjunction with the Café and could sell high end quality gifts fitting to the site. A good quality shop would need investment, including an adequate supply of standing stock, staffing and refurbishment. An average museum receiving 30,000 visitors per annum should expect to see a profit in the region of £10-15K per year. An alternative proposal would be to franchise out the Astley Hall sub-brand. Consideration for a smaller 'pop-up' retail area within the Hall to pick up extra sales.

4.6.3 **Guide book** - Although often sold through a museum shop, guidebooks can generate a significant income. Even if the Council were to franchise out a shop, it might be best to maintain control the sales of guidebooks through the hall itself (at the point of entry).

4.6.4 **Admissions and Family Memberships** - Surprisingly, many visitors to Astley Hall from outside the borough expect to pay for entry. Although we would continue to have free entry for local residents, a charge for non-residents could be introduced.

For visitors from outside the borough, average prices for visiting a House and/or Museum of this size would be as follows:-

Adults £6.00; Children 6-16 £3.00; Concessions £5.00; Family Day Tickets £14.00. Children under 6 would be FREE entry. We could also introduce an annual membership scheme available to visitors from outside the borough with saving incentives. In addition to this, all visitors could be charged for controlled entry event days.

4.6.5 **Other Tenancy** - As well as Café Ambio and a possible shop in the activity space, the Farmhouse upstairs could accommodate at least two or three small retail areas for other retailers.

Ackhurst Lodge could become another area for tenancy, bringing in approximately £800 to £1000 per month or as high quality honeymoon accommodation to fit in with our wedding package (similar to Samlesbury Hall).

4.6.6 **Events and exhibitions** - Events and temporary exhibitions are an ideal opportunity to increase admissions. Many controlled events, concerts, lectures *etc.* have the potential to draw large audiences and generate income. Similarly, high profile/quality temporary exhibitions can demand an entrance fee and commission of sales.

4.6.7 **Other areas of growth requiring further research include:-**

- Research fees (for family and local enquiries)
- Conferencing – improve marketing of existing offer
- Film location / facility fees (general) – third party renting spaces *etc.*

4.6.8 **Opportunities to improve environmental sustainability such as:**

- Consider installing a biomass boiler system and solar panels.
- Increasing energy efficiency such as insulation and LED lighting.
- Waste minimisation and recycling.
- Community food growing in the Walled Garden.

4.7 HERITAGE PARTNERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

4.7.1 There is an opportunity to develop a heritage hub bringing together various partners from across Chorley. This would bring together those individuals and groups who are passionate about Chorley's diverse heritage through an accessible and effective visitor facility for heritage, arts and local culture.

4.7.2 The heritage hub would provide a facility that is dedicated to the presentation and interpretation of historical and cultural information about Chorley, its people, buildings and natural features.

4.7.3 Develop a hub of partners working across Astley the Chorley area, with the aim of strengthening the visitor experience and expectation and highlighting the varied cultural offer across the borough.

4.7.4 With our partners, research people and places whose lives shaped the Chorley of today.

4.8 WORLD WAR I COMMEMORATION

4.8.1 Develop educational activities and facilities within the Chorley Remembers experience.

4.8.2 Work together with Chorley Remembers to develop and deliver a temporary exhibitions programme to commemorate the different stages and aspects of World War I.

4.8.3 Work with external partners to provide a range of events and activities to commemorate World War I.

5. FUNDING REQUIREMENTS

- 5.1 Many of the options for development will require investment in Astley to ensure the long term sustainability of the site. There are two major areas that require capital investment. First is a 10 year maintenance and conservation programme for the Hall. Second is the investment required for increasing the visitor offer and experience together with business development.
- 5.2 If the Council looks to fund the first element, the conservation of the building, there is an opportunity to seek funding from the HLF for the investment required for increasing our audience and the long term sustainability of the site. The HLF are more likely to fund projects where the Council are committed to assisting above and beyond operational costs. The current investment in the park and conservation of the hall would certainly assist an application.

6. ACTION PLAN

- 6.1 An outline action plan detailing proposed actions over a five year period from 2014-2019 is included in Appendix 2.

7. NEXT STEPS

- 7.1 Formal approval of the five year development plan by Executive Cabinet.
- 7.2 Implement actions outlined in the development plan that are currently funded.
- 7.3 Implement capital works that are currently funded / proposed for future budget investment.
- 7.4 Submit a Heritage Lottery Fund bid to support the delivery of the remaining unfunded development.

Appendix 1 – Development Plan



Appendix 2 – Outline Action Plan 2014-19

Action	Start	Complete	Cost	Funding
ASTLEY HALL AND PARK CONSERVATION				
Scope works and conservation plan	Mar-14	Sep-14	TBC	CBC
Procurement (Specification / Tendering / Evaluation)	Oct-14	Mar-15	TBC	CBC
10 year maintenance and conservation plan starts (exploratory work completed)	Apr-15	2025	TBC	CBC
New environmental monitoring system	Apr-18	Mar-19	TBC	HLF
New lift	Apr-18	Mar-19	TBC	HLF
New boiler & solar panels	Apr-18	Mar-19	TBC	HLF
Develop an Astley Park conservation plan	Sep-14	Mar-15	-	CBC
VISITOR OFFER AND EXPERIENCE				
Destination play area – Phase 1	Jan-14	Mar-15	£175K	CBC
Destination play area – Phase 2	Apr-17	Mar-18	TBC	HLF
Lodge fountain	Jan-14	May-15	£30K	CBC
Events car parking	Apr-14	Mar-15	£200K	CBC
Footpath lighting	Apr-15	Mar-16	£125K	CBC
Temporary events staging infrastructure	Apr-15	Mar-16	£25K	CBC
Steps, bridge & footpath improvements	Apr-15	Mar-16	£50K	CBC
Sensory Garden and Trail	Apr-14	Sep-14	£31K	CBC
Produce and develop comprehensive and integrated events and exhibitions programme including a signature event	Apr-15	Dec-15	-	CBC
Develop Astley marketing plan including publicity and advertising strategy	Sep-14	Mar-15	-	CBC
Develop new and improved educational programme and facilities	Sep-14	Mar-15	-	CBC
Quantitative analysis of visitor needs and expectations	Sep-14	Mar-15	-	CBC
Additional toilets to support events in the park	Apr-17	Mar-18	TBC	HLF
Creating dedicated spaces: Improvement to Townley Parker room	Apr-18	Mar-19	TBC	HLF
Creating dedicated spaces: New permanent exhibition in the servants wing	Apr-18	Mar-19	TBC	HLF
New interpretation throughout the Hall - structured storylines and interactive displays	Apr-18	Mar-19	TBC	HLF
Orientation in the anti-room	Apr-18	Mar-19	TBC	HLF
Childrens interactive area	Apr-17	Mar-18	TBC	HLF
ICT & Media interpretation – embracing new technology for successful interpretation	Apr-18	Mar-19	TBC	HLF

Action	Start	Complete	Cost	Funding
BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT TO SUPPORT A SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS MODEL				
Review wedding offer	Jan-14	Apr-14	N/A	CBC
Museum shop / retail offer	Apr-17	Mar-18	TBC	HLF
Introduce admission fees for non-residents	Apr-15	Apr-15	TBC	CBC
Review other tenancies	Apr-15	Sep15	TBC	CBC
Refurbishment of Ackhurst Lodge	Apr-17	Mar-18	TBC	HLF
Explore option for biomass boiler, solar panels and energy efficiency measures	Apr-17	Mar-18	TBC	HLF
Develop waste minimisation and recycling initiatives	Sep-14	Mar-15	-	CBC
Develop community food growing in Walled Garden	Sep-14	Mar-15	-	CBC
HERITAGE PARTNERSHIP DEVELOPMENT				
Farmhouse Exhibition Space development	Jan-13	Apr-14	£128K	CBC
Develop Heritage Hub	Apr-17	Mar-18	TBC	HLF
Develop shared approach to heritage delivery across Astley and the Chorley area	Jul-14	Apr-16	-	CBC
WORLD WAR I COMMEMORATION				
Develop educational activities in line with WWI commemorations	Jan-14	Dec-15	-	CBC
Work with Chorley Remembers on temporary exhibitions during WWI commemorations	Jan-14	Dec-15	TBC	CBC / CR
Work with external partners on event programming during commemorations	Jan-14	Dec-15	TBC	CBC
ADDITIONAL FUNDING (HLF BID)				
Potential Museum Development NW funding for options appraisal for development of spaces at Astley Hall complex	Mar-14	Jun-14	-	-
Further consultation with partners	Feb-14	Jun-14	-	-
Project enquiry to HLF	Feb-14	Mar-14	-	-
Round One application to examine feasibility (3 months)	Jun-14	Sep-14	-	-
Round Two and Project Development Stage (up to 24 months)	Oct-14	Sep-16	-	-
Final Stage HLF (meet every 2 months for projects £2m-£5m)	Oct-16	Dec-16	-	-