

# FRIENDS OF THE TRIANGLE - SUB-GROUP PROSPECTUS

## INTRODUCTION

This document provides information on the history, objectives, current status, and risks associated with the Aldcliffe Rd Triangle project, to enable Fairfield Association (FA) members and trustees to make a fully informed decision about whether to accept Friends of the Triangle (FOTT) as a formalised sub-group of the FA, and by implication agree to take on a lease for the land and buildings at Aldcliffe Rd Triangle.

## HISTORY

Friends of the Triangle, Aldcliffe Rd was established in June 2012 as an entity through which a group of local residents could take forward outline plans to maintain and enhance a semi-derelict triangular plot of land between Aldcliffe Rd and the Lancaster Canal, for the benefit of the local community and the general public. The Triangle sits in a Conservation Area and has some heritage value, with the towpath wall and the listed Basin Bridge forming two of its boundaries, but has been allowed to become overgrown, and the three small buildings on the land have fallen into disrepair.

The site is owned by the Canal & River Trust (formerly British Waterways) and leased to Lancaster City Council (LCC) until 2070, but has been unoccupied since 2004, when a long standing small business making and repairing punts for use on the canal ceased trading. Since this time the site has been intermittently used by rough sleepers, who in many cases have caused significant disturbance to local residents, damage to cars and thefts from the local shop, left all sorts of rubbish behind including used needles, and have vandalised the buildings. Trees have been allowed to push over one section of the towpath wall, which has been left in this damaged state for many years, and another section of the wall is leaning badly.

## Activity Timeline

April 2011	Complaints received from residents who are being disturbed nightly by campers shouting, fighting, smashing bottles etc well into the early hours. Police and LCC intervention deals with this.
February 2012	Street letter put round approx 350 houses, public meeting held on site with approx 25 people attending, outline plans discussed, email addresses collected, email group established
March 2012	Discussions start with LCC Property Services & British Waterways, campers on site but not causing disturbance
April 2012	Second street letter reporting on Feb public meeting, joint meeting with Property Services & British Waterways, meeting with LCC Conservation Officer, first volunteer session with approx 15 people attending
May 2012	Article in Lancaster Guardian, second volunteer session
June 2012	Third volunteer session, street letter advertising meeting, inaugural meeting of FOTT with 12 people attending where it is agreed to act as a subgroup of the FA in the short term

July 2012	Fourth & fifth volunteer sessions
August 2012	More campers but police move them on following thefts from Aldcliffe Stores, sixth and seventh volunteer sessions, draft lease agreement received from Property Services
September 2012	Second FOTT meeting, Property Services let us into workshop building for inspection, visit with structural engineers, visit with tree surgeon, cake & consultation event very well attended and makes £250.
October 2012	Eight & ninth volunteer session, Heritage Assessment received from Canal & River Trust, site meeting with C&RT, Take Pride funding application for repairs to workshop building + legal costs of lease, more quiet campers (now gone)
November 2012	FOTT notified that funding application is successful

## OBJECTIVES

Friends of the Triangle plan to take on responsibility for the site via a sub-lease, work up designs to improve it and carry out public consultation on these, secure grant funding, obtain planning permission for change of use to public green space, implement the agreed improvements and maintain the site for the duration of the lease.

Specific plans include repairing the towpath wall and reinstating gated openings, reducing the height of the towpath wall to provide increased visibility over the site, demolishing the former toilet and lean-to buildings that are in poor condition, retaining the best building and bringing it back into use as workshop space or similar, using the existing timber structure as a pergola for vine planting, and improving the green areas as amenity space including planting bulbs, fruit bushes, fruit trees, raised beds etc; all to be maintained by volunteers.

## CURRENT STATUS

**Lease** - Property Services have issued draft terms to FOTT for a lease based on a peppercorn rent asking for a 'commitment to lease' signature. Property Services are proceeding with obtaining an Individual Cabinet Member Decision (ICMD) on the principle of leasing the site to the Fairfield Association (or another group) for a 30 year term. Our understanding is that Property Services will allow us to proceed with works on site to deliver the Take Pride funding once the ICMD is in place and we have signed a commitment to lease. Information recently received appears to suggest that any lease needs to be signed by a registered charity as other voluntary groups (even if constituted) do not have sufficient legal status to hold land.

**C&RT** - Permission is required from the C&RT (as landowner) to undertake any works to the buildings or boundary walls. Their Heritage Assessment asks for a Conservation Consultant to produce a more detailed report and Conservation Architects to be involved in design work. At a site meeting with their Heritage Officer it was agreed that these standard requirements were excessive for the Triangle site and could be removed, although we have not yet got this in writing. It was agreed that details of proposed

repairs to the workshop building would be submitted to them for approval. The C&RT appear to be generally very supportive, have provided a letter of support for funding bids, and have offered the assistance of one of their project managers.

**Design & Consultation** - Outline plans are fairly well established, but we are not particularly far on with detailed design, partly because this relies to some extent on further site investigation. We had two different landscape designs produced for free by visiting French masters students, but these were far more formal and ornamental than FOTT members desired. A number of interesting ideas came out of our consultation event, and we need to work to boil these down to those that are practical and well supported. The plan in the short term is to use the repaired workshop building as a shed/workshop space including eg for woodcraft type events to raise money.

**Funding** - We have secured £9975 Take Pride grant funding to repair the workshop building and take out a lease. The terms of the funding are that 75% of the money needs to be spent by end of March 2012, hence an urgency in sorting out the lease and therefore FOTT's status. We are about to apply for £150 for a tree survey to Cllr Chris Coates Local Members Grant. We will be looking for at least £20,000 of additional funding to complete the project, although a piecemeal approach is feasible.

**Planning Permission** - Is required for change of use of the site to 'public amenity land with ancillary building(s)' or similar. The cost of the application itself is likely to be £355, but because of the history of the site a contamination survey will be required at a cost of approx £2400, plus an arboricultural survey (£150), and possibly a bat survey (£200?). We have established that neither planning permission or conservation area consent is required for repairs to the workshop building assuming that they are like for like - we will agree proposals with the Conservation Officer.

**Implement & Maintain** - We are holding regular volunteer sessions to tidy up the land and remove unsuitable vegetation, and have already made a huge difference to the site, which is beginning to feel like an inviting space.

## RISKS

**Personnel** - I.e. FOTT fails to maintain momentum leaving FA personnel to take over. FOTT is a well-established group with typically 12-15 people attending meetings and volunteer sessions from a solid core of circa 25, and an ever-growing email list currently with circa 60 members. Most of the members live very close to the site and have a vested interest in its improvement.

**Future Funding** - I.e. FOTT fails to secure further funding to improve the site. The project ticks a lot of boxes for funders in terms of a demonstrable need (derelict site, antisocial behaviour problems), community involvement, heritage, delivery of a public/community asset, environmental improvements. The main risk here is conflict with the FA's other funding objectives. A staged approach to improving the site, showing stand-alone benefits at each stage, should be feasible.

**Campers** - The site seems to be a known spot for campers, and liability for dealing with them would fall to the leaseholder. Whilst some campers appear to know the law and decline to be moved on by the police, Property Services have reported they have never had to go further than a notice threatening eviction. Works to improve the site have the

express aim of deterring campers by increasing visibility over the land and using it on a regular basis. This risk is no different to that faced in eg the orchard or the FLORA copse.

**Bats** - The workshop building and one of the lean-to buildings have holes in the roof, so it is possible that bats may be resident. It is an offence to disturb bats, although they can be relocated by specialists, which will involve delay and expense. The C&RT's bat survey for its development on the other side of the canal found bats in the modern house scheduled for demolition but not in the packet boathouse. We are looking to get some advice from a bat specialist as soon as possible.

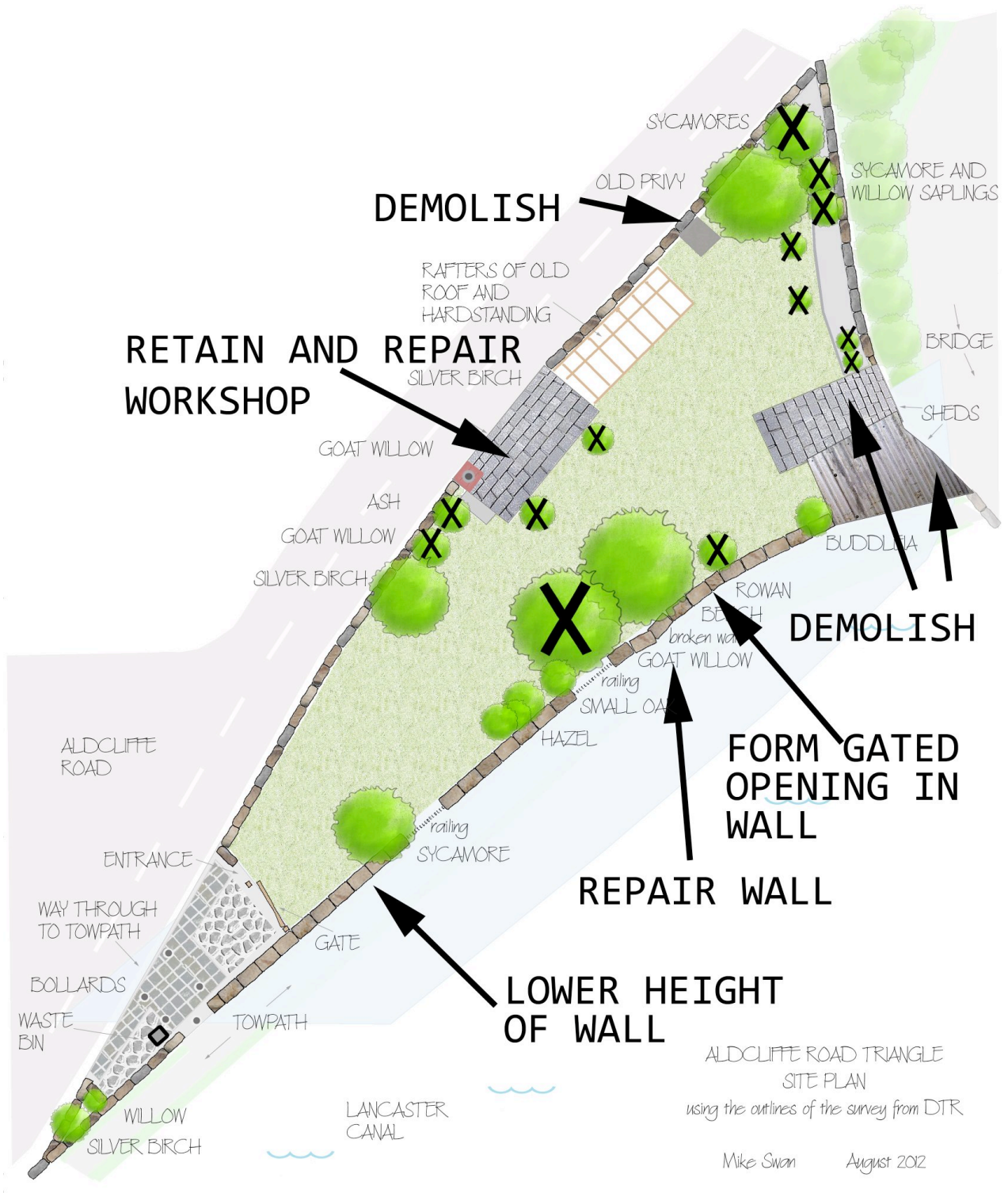
**Structures** - The buildings on the site and the towpath boundary wall are in poor condition (indeed the wall has already partially collapsed). Whilst nothing appears to be in an immediately unsafe condition, it will be necessary to deal with these issues in the near term. It is the intention to repair the workshop building, demolish the lean-to buildings, and reduce the height of the wall (thereby reducing the likelihood of it overturning). We have been given a figure for insuring the buildings on the Council's insurance of less than £10 (yes, ten)/per annum. This risk therefore really relates to obtaining further funding.

**Contamination** - The site has a light industrial history and it is possible that contaminated ground might be found. This can be very expensive to deal with and if not removed or capped, could preclude the use of the site as public green space. We do know that some areas of the site have tarmac type material under the soil cover, which would need to be removed, but much of the site is cobbled. It is likely in any case that any growing of edibles would be in tubs or raised beds rather than the ground, so it should be possible to find an acceptable solution.

Dave Brookes, November 2012

Site Plan on following page by Mike Swan

**SITE PLAN WITH OUTLINE PROPOSALS**



ALDCLIFFE ROAD TRIANGLE  
SITE PLAN  
using the outlines of the survey from DTR

Mike Swan August 2012