



Rock Hall Revival

Supporting Information

Interpretation Designer

September 2024

The purpose of this document is to provide some background information on the project and the NLHF submission responses.

Who are the Partnership?

- Banana Enterprise Network (BEN) – Lead applicant for the Community Ownership Fund elements
- Bolton Council – Lead applicant for the NLHF elements

There is a formal Partnership agreement in place for the Project between the two partners and the Community Asset Transfer process is at an early stage. The intention is that the CAT will be completed once the Capital works are complete and Banana Enterprise will take control of the site once the site becomes operational.

Other informal partnerships have formed with organisations such as the Bolton CVS and other local Community Groups in the Moses Gate and Farnworth area.

What are the main Aims/ Objectives for the project?

- Create a central Community Hub connecting Moses Gate Park heritage to the wider Farnworth history.
- Repair and Restore the Grade II listed Rock Hall.
- Create a long term sustainable commercial offer, which will include a new café and workspaces.
- Create a dynamic Volunteer Offer.
- Deliver an activity/engagement programme underpinned by the following heritage themes:
- A new Interpretation and Collections 'Policy aims to:
 - Create an archive of Local memories recorded on film and as oral histories.
 - A mapping exercise of key heritage stories between Farnworth Town Centre and Rock Hall.
 - Development of a Collections Management Strategy in order to help inform how the collections will be prioritised and managed, as well as how donations of memorabilia, documents, and photographs will be managed.

What are the Key Themes for the Project?

- **The Industrial History of Rock Hall/Moses Gate** - Rock Hall is in poor condition. This project will see restoration work to remedy the deterioration of its fabric and renew internal spaces. New displays of local/natural history, a café, skills training rooms and creative activities will be created. An exhibition space will explore Crompton's paper mill history, the inventions that powered its success and people who worked there. Additional natural history displays will give visitors information on the biodiversity importance and impact of past industrial activity on the land around Rock Hall.
- **Natural Heritage and the Environment of Rock Hall and Park** – Moses Gate is Bolton's largest nature reserve, occupying 750 acres in the Croal valley, 3 miles south of Bolton. This project will investigate how the landscape was shaped by centuries of human/industrial activity. This project will create outdoor displays to help visitors understand the scale of the former industrial works and work completed over the past 50 years to restore nature to the site. Information panels, trails and activities will encourage

people to engage with the natural environment, introducing/connecting them to the ponds, woods and other park habitats.

- **Recreation and Wellbeing in the nature reserve and Rock Hall** - Rock Hall re-opened as a visitor centre in 1982, forming the focus of the park. It's a hugely popular nature reserve with fields, woods and waterside walks enjoyed by many visitors. During the project we'll encourage local people to share their pictures/stories of Moses Gate to chart how the park has changed within living memory. We'll collect oral histories to create a MGCP Archive ensuring people's memories/experiences are captured. A selection of "Moses Gate Memories" will be presented in the hall/park.
- **Craft and Heritage skills associated with the Hall and Park** - Drawing on Crompton's important place in paper production history, we'll have a strong focus on the paper-making craft. We'll work with communities on several paper-based projects including creating a Rock Hall watermark to be used on promotional material/shop merchandise. Participants will learn about sustainable paper-making processes including upcycled paper, inspired by Crompton's own use of cotton waste in his paper mills. A programme of paper craft workshops at the Hall will give visitors the opportunity to try papermaking, print making and create paper sculptures. The project will recruit volunteers to help identify undiscovered industrial features in the parks landscape. Participants will visit Bolton Archives to investigate business records, maps/old photos. This collaborative research project will feed into the creation of new interpretation panels for the hall/park, helping visitors engage with the unique industrial/natural history. Participants will learn research skills while contributing to a growing Rock Hall archive of historical information.
- **Heritage Link to the town of Farnworth** - A community research project, involving local people, will explore his legacy and contribution to Farnworth's growth. The findings will inform interpretation panels in the hall/park and be stored in the new Archive.

What is the Background to the Project and what are the Strategic links?

Rock Hall is a historically significant Grade II listed building standing in a much-loved nature reserve, Moses Gate Country Park (MGCP). It was built in 1807 for Thomas Crompton. In Crompton's time, the Hall was at the heart of an extensive business empire which embraced newspapers and paper/cotton mills. He initiated paper production on a large industrial scale, building a huge paper mill at Moses Gate (now the site of the park). In 1820, he invented a machine for drying/finishing paper which greatly reduced manufacturing costs. He was the first to utilise cotton waste in paper production and supplied paper for London/provincial press, later owning The Morning Post.

As well as Crompton's paper mills, the area was home to bleach works and once they closed down, the site fell into ruin. Industrial buildings were demolished in 1972. Over the next 10 years the area was cleared and transformed into a nature reserve. The ponds that once fed paper mills/bleach works now support a thriving bird population including swans, ducks/kingfishers. The Wildlife Trust says the birds are "the perfect representative of the revival of the valley from industrial dereliction to wildlife haven".

When Crompton died in 1858 a contemporary described him as the "founder of Farnworth", acknowledging his importance to the area as an employer/benefactor. His cotton mills at Prestolee employed 800 people. His Farnworth Paper Mill employed 100's more.

Since the Hall stopped being a dwelling, it operated as a visitor centre and housed council services such as the Park Rangers, however it has been vacant since 2014. It was advertised for lease in 2018 through Bolton Council's Strategic Asset Management Plan (SAMP) A key component of the SAMP is the Community Asset Transfer (CAT) policy [bolton-council-cat-policy-september-2021](#) and in January 2020 BEN approached Bolton Council to express an interest in saving, acquiring, and re-purposing the hall on behalf of the local community.

On the 26th of July 2021 (ECDML/4957) approval was given under Phase 1 of the Strategic Asset Management Plan for work to start to develop a proposal and business case that enabled a Community Asset Transfer of Rock Hall between BEN and Bolton Council.

The Hall requires significant investment to bring it up to a standard for use. The Hall is inaccessible to the public and there is no outdoor interpretation, this significantly limits the opportunity for visitors to the park to engage with their heritage or to access facilities. In 2020 BEN commissioned a feasibility report which was reviewed in 2021/2023. An Options Appraisal was commissioned in 2023

The project positively contributes to Bolton Council's 2030 Vision. It supports Bolton to reform service delivery in collaboration and it significantly contributes to the Clean and Green and Climate Strategy ambition, to protect and improve the environment so that more people can enjoy it, care for it and be active in it. Moses Gate Country Park is in Farnworth, an area which Bolton Council is currently investing in. A new district town centre is being created and Rock Hall Revival naturally links the industrial, natural and social history of Farnworth with other strategic projects within the area.

According to a recent HACT report, Farnworth residents living in health deprivation hotspots total 17,075 (99.0%). The England average is 19.5%. Also, 31% of children live in poverty in Farnworth (17% across England). 40% of children aged 0-19 are in low-income families in Farnworth Ward compared with 19% across England. Farnworth youth unemployment (18-24yrs old) is at 11.2% (England average = 5.2%). Incapacity benefits claimants are 8.6% (England average 4.2%).

Who are the Target Audiences?

- Families:
 - inclusive of local families in Farnworth and wider Borough of Bolton.

- Targeted families from the BME population who live in the Moses Gate area.
- Commercial offer for families from further afield.
- Key Partners: Bolton Hindu Forum, Bolton Council of Mosques, Bolton Youth Services
- Health and Wellbeing:
 - inclusive of Children, young people and adults with SEND or poor mental health.
 - People at risk of loneliness and isolation
 - Older people.
 - Key Partners: Bolton Public Health Team, Local Special Schools, The Sapphire Partnership, Age UK, The Well, Breakdown Bolton
- Community Champions:
 - inclusive of local history societies
 - Environmental and conservation groups
 - Cultural and arts groups
 - The wider VCSE sector.
 - Key partners: Farnworth Local History Society, Bolton Archives, Bolton Conservation Volunteers, Bolton Green Umbrella, Bolton Museum.

The target visitor figures at the time of the NLHF application were 75,000-100,000 visitors to Rock Hall per year.

Environmental and Sustainability Opportunities

Moses Gate Country Park (MGCP) and Crompton Ponds are important breeding and migratory sites for birds, especially waterfowl. It is a valuable habitat and corridor for wildlife. Kingfishers, goosander, trout, minnows, banded demoiselles and even otters can be found using the river, and the partial-collapse and subsequent removal of the weir a decade ago helped with reconnecting populations of many riverine species. There has been investment by United Utilities to manage wastewater, which should help to continue to improve water quality.

The biodiversity of the park is important, and the activity plan includes programmes that focus on the community enjoying, learning about and improving the natural environment. The park and the Hall are in need of some work to clear invasive plant species like Japanese Knotweed and Himalayan Balsam. In some areas around the Hall, trees are over-crowded and competing with each other for light and space. The project will remove a small number of these “seeded trees” to allow a smaller number to grow into strong, healthy specimens. The project will develop a management strategy, working with the “green” partners to improve biodiversity and the quality of the natural environment, whilst protecting species.

Sustainability Statements and Actions:

- ***We will ensure that sustainability is embedded in everything we do.*** In Rock Hall’s gardens we will create perennial wildflower garden areas, increase the number of flowers by planting bulbs, install bat and bird boxes and bee-friendly flowers, make biodiversity improvements to attract bats, gold crests etc. We will develop an unloved area of the gardens into a sustainable food growth area by working with specialists such as Incredible Edibles. We will create a “rain garden” on slopes so that the rain feeds into flowerbeds.
- ***We will set up an energy management strategy*** and reduce energy by insulating the building, efficient heating, LED lighting, introduce controls etc.
- ***We will use renewable energy*** such as solar PV and ground source heat pumps to heat the building.
- ***Write into the Construction Contract*** that they must limit fuel usage by reducing vehicle idling times, minimising haul distances and by using green/alternative fuel resources and hybrid vehicles and equipment.
- ***We will tell people how to get to Rock Hall by public transport*** and encouraging sustainable travel e.g. bus or train, walking or cycling
- ***We will use compostable/biodegradable plates and cutlery for all our catering provision*** and use local suppliers of goods, products and services across the whole project
- ***We will recycle*** and use recycled and/or environmentally friendly materials
- ***We will communicate*** about the environmental measures we have implemented
- ***We will remain members of Fit for the Future*** and utilise their resources
- ***We will reduce water and plastic use***

- ***We will expect our web developer*** to operate on a carbon neutral basis for their provision of services to our project

All the above activities meet the strategic aims of Bolton's climate change strategy 2030

<https://www.bolton.gov.uk/climatechangestrategy>

Project Workstreams

The following are the current workstreams identified for the project:

- **Capital Works**
 - Meanwhile Use/ Urgent Repairs
 - Main Capital Repair and Restoration works
 - Interpretation and Gallery works
- **Activity Planning**
 - Deliver and Pilot Activities for Stage 1
 - Develop the NLHF Stage 2 Activity Plan
 - Work with the teams to dovetail this into Interpretation/ Audience Development work and the Business Plan.
- **Digital Archive**
- **Organisational Resilience and Governance Development**
- **Evaluation**

There are a number of smaller projects which sit within the Rock Hall Revival project but sit outside the main project. It is anticipated that these need to dovetail and compliment the work that consultants do for the NLHF project.

Situation on site.

Rock Hall is at risk physically due to its poor condition and is extremely vulnerable to anti-social behaviour. Roof tiles have been removed, lead stolen, windows smashed, and holes burned in doors through vandalism. It has limited security and no fire protection. As detailed in the Condition Report, the unused building is deteriorating internally and externally. the council maintains at a low level.

Conservation works will include comprehensive conservation repairs to the Listed building. This will include re-roofing works, masonry repair and repointing, repair of existing windows and doors including thermal upgrades wherever possible. Internally, we will ensure that dry rot affected structural elements and decorative joinery are repaired as far as possible, with replacement kept to the absolute minimum and undertaken on a like for like basis. Once the superstructure of the building is weathertight and structurally sound, plaster will be repaired, including decorative ceilings and cornices. Wherever possible, we will sympathetically add thermal performance

improvements, such as insulation to the roof and insulation to the walls where plaster is to be wholly replaced. During the refurbishment process, we will add modern services to ensure the building is comfortable, efficient and ready for its new uses.

Repair and Conservation works will extend into the landscape, where paths and steps will be repaired and adapted for accessibility.

The proposal includes constructing a new extension onto the rear of the existing building to create a cafe and function room on the first floor. Accessibility will include a lift and a Changing Places facility, using a central link to mediate between the complex levels across the site.

Capital Works will also include Interpretation. This will be incorporated through the building and the landscape, bringing to life the heritage themes identified for the project and supporting activity delivery.

Progress to date

The NLHF Stage 1 Development Phase has been in progress for a number of months and due to a number of delays some of the Consultants have been delayed in their appointment. This has meant that a programme of Activity over the summer months has continued without the support of an Activity Planner or an Interpretation Designer to help make best use of this pilot phase.

There has been a successful period of activity. Data and feedback has been gathered which will help the Activity Planner and Interpretation Designer progress their work. Social media has played an important part in communicating the Activity Programme.

The capital works have been progressing, with the exception of the Interpretation Strategy and Design. The meanwhile use of almost ready to start on site, whilst the main Capital works are currently at RIBA 2.

The Project Manager (Naomi Atherton Ltd) was appointed in early June 2024 and has been developing the Project Management Plan, Programme, Reporting requirements and the Cost Plan, whilst also understand Governance, legal and Partnership arrangements.

Main Contacts and Stakeholders

- **Bolton Major Projects Board** – This is the strategic accountable body for the project, providing strategic oversight and layering in the experience and expertise of Bolton Council to the project. It is chaired by Bolton Council's Director of Place, meets quarterly and reports to Cabinet.
- **Project Team** – This will be the operational board, bringing together the project partners and team on a monthly basis. It will report to the Bolton Major Projects Board and will have day-to-day operational responsibility for the project, within delegations agreed by the Bolton Major Projects Board.

- **BEN's Director of Operations (Jayne Allman)** - They will have overall responsibility for the development and management of the project. The role will oversee the whole project, supporting the project team, helping the Project Manager to develop and coordinate the Rock Hall project across the Development and Delivery stages. They will be responsible for project reporting and ensure the project runs smoothly on time and to specification. They will report to the Project Board.
- **Project Manager (Naomi Atherton Limited)** – This role is responsible for Co-ordinating the Development and Delivery of the Capital Works, whilst also advising and assisting with the Activity and other workstreams. This includes monthly reporting, managing the programme and risk registers, assisting with the management of the Budget envelope and providing advice to BEN as required. They report to the Director of Operations.
- **Bolton Council's Libraries and Museums Head of Service (Sam Elliot)** – Responsible for the administration of the NLHF grant and the main point of contact for all project team members at Bolton Council. They will work closely with the Director of Operations and Project Manager and sit on the Project Team and Board.
- **Design Team (led by Buttress Architects)** – manage the wider Design team for the development and delivery of the Capital Works (excluding Interpretation) They report to the Project Manager and the Director of Operations.
- **Legal advice team** - to give advice on the CAT transfer, Governance, health and Safety matters etc.
- **Evaluation Consultant (Linguard Consulting)** - to develop monitoring/evaluation
- **Interpretation Designer (TBC)** – We will appoint a suitably qualified Interpretation Designer to develop plans for interpretation across the project, based on the themes identified.
- **Heritage Project Officer (Dani Gaines – a consultant)** – Working with the Operations Manager, Banana Enterprise, residents, community groups, partner organisations and other staff members to develop a community archive/interpretation idea for Rock Hall. They will report to the Director of Operations/Project Manager.
- **Activity Plan Consultant (TBC)** – They will take the lead on preparing our Activity Plan. They will report to the Director of Operations.

The Director of Operations, Jayne Allman has overall day-to-day responsibility for the Project and will make decisions and approve changes to the project which are in line with delegations and in consultation with the Project Board and project partners.

BEN will procure the services and goods needed during our development phase in line with our procurement strategy and the Public Procurement Regulations. They will manage procurement risks wherever possible by working with established procurement frameworks such as Fusion 21.

The following pages outline the original responses to the NLHF questions in relation Learning, Health & Wellbeing, Volunteering and Interpretation. This may help with context to the project.

Interpretation – Response taken from NLHF Stage 1 Bid

We will develop new physical, virtual and accessible interpretation of the Hall and Park's industrial and social history and significance, to help people make sense of Rock Hall's historical importance and the rich social and industrial history of the park.

We will create:-

- a heritage Trail linking the Hall to Farnworth town centre.
- interpretation boards inside and outside the Hall and create a heritage area with relevant display items.
- a community accessible online archive on our Rock Hall website which will have information about the Hall's past and details of how Moses Gate Country Park was developed, once the Farnworth Paper Mill had been demolished.
- Information leaflets which are accessible to all, giving information about the wildlife and the biodiversity of the park including the geodiversity of the landscape.
- A programme of talks and heritage/wildlife walks in addition to improving current Wikipedia information about Thomas Bonsor Crompton and the industrial heritage of Farnworth Mills for example.

Heritage information will be designed to inform and engage and will be accessible to all. For example it will be available in illustrative media, plain English, other languages, large print and braille. Visitors to the Hall and park will understand the interpretation and information which will be co-developed along with representatives of the local community. We will ensure that information is appropriate for their needs and interests, and that the information helps their understanding, and improves their experience of the heritage. We will also continue the visitor experiences in the proposed retail areas of the Hall too.

We will ensure that that our heritage interpretation is an effective way of engaging people with the past, providing a sense of place and a deeper understanding of the lives of others both past and present. We will help a wide range of people to understand Rock Hall's history, but we will also enrich their lives through emotional connections and experiences. It is a recognised fact that people who engage with heritage have an improved sense of wellbeing.

We will put in place a long-term masterplan for Rock Hall , informed by a new Conservation Management Plan and we will increase the physical accessibility of the Hall which is currently in a very poor state. The Conservation Management Plan will set out the significance of the historic site and help us to understand why the site's history is important and how the landscape and buildings have developed and changed over the years. By researching the site's history and understanding how its developed and changed, more informed decisions about how that significance will be retained, protected and interpreted in any future uses, alterations or repairs can be made. It is the first time that a Conservation Plan will be written for the hall.

Moses Gate Country Park with its historic Rock Hall, is a superb piece of heritage. Its landscape was shaped by industrial mills and coal mine working, transforming into the picturesque park and woodland that can be seen today.

The natural setting, its industrial past, and the creation of new outdoor community focused areas around the Hall will all be researched by a specialist conservation team. Local knowledge and archive material will help give a clearer picture of how life at Farnworth Mills and Rock Hall changed from a privately owned estate to a much loved and visited public park

Volunteering – Response taken from NLHF Stage 1 Bid

Rock Hall and Moses Gate Country Park as “places” will provide an abundance of skills development and health and wellbeing opportunities as our project aims to link the natural and built heritage to health and wellbeing through outdoor activities, audience development, volunteering and training.

We will build upon the significant level of public and stakeholder interest and develop a supported and expanded volunteer network giving a wide range of people, the opportunity to learn new skills or develop existing skills. We will establish an excellent level of education provision within the park and during Rock Hall’s restoration and new build extension work.

We will create the following to enable people to develop various skills: -

- A new Rock Hall Volunteer Hub(once the Hall is open)
- This became the Heritage Project Officer Consultant role
- A new education partnership with Bolton College for construction, catering, events management students (not happening yet – delivery phase – once hall is open)
- A new partnership with Bolton Council’s health and wellbeing team, offering low intensity outdoor activities (not really engaging with us according to Dani at the moment but more will be done in Delivery phase)
- Volunteer horticulture projects
- Adult non accredited learning courses around Nature, wellbeing, arts and crafts for example. (for delivery phase and some happening in Development Phase)
- A flexible space for community activities (delivery phase or hopefully in development meanwhile use phase)
- Volunteer projects to restore overgrown woodland around the Hall and improve access to it (Delivery phase and some in development phase)
- A Marketing and events apprenticeship and construction apprenticeships (delivery phase)
- Befriending skills leading to delivery of walks/talks in the park for those with limited mobility or who are feeling socially isolated

- Outdoor adventure programme including Archery, Forest school, Nature/wildlife walks, pond dipping etc.
- Volunteer project to support new interpretation design
- New partnership with adult SEN specialist providers
- Supported work placements (delivery phase)
- links between the volunteer programme and social prescribing
- Mindfulness and wellbeing skills based activities.
- Not working with an ex tv actress. We did some outdoor theatre with the octagon and story walks as part of our development phase activities this year.
- Digital skills training (e.g. media, photographic, social media) delivery phase

The project will help to enhance the capacity of the heritage industry by equipping people with sustainable training in nature, construction and digital skills for example. The activities will help to provide career pathways into heritage management, construction and conservation roles as well as events management for example. We will work with experts to explore different digital technologies. Volunteers will be trained and share their skills with new members, building knowledge around the capabilities of digital technology among trustees and volunteers.

Learning about Heritage - leading to change in ideas and actions - Response taken from NLHF Stage 1 Bid

Rock Hall Revival has an ambitious and exciting activity plan that encourages people to engage and learn about the heritage of Rock Hall, Moses Gate Country Park and its connection with the wider town of Farnworth.

The project and the activity planning is underpinned by five key heritage themes:

1. The industrial history of Rock Hall and Moses Gate.
2. Natural heritage and the environment of Rock Hall and park.
3. The heritage of recreation and wellbeing in the nature reserve and Rock Hall.
4. Craft and heritage skills associated with the hall and park.
5. Heritage link to the town of Farnworth.

Discovering our Heritage

The project will bring the community together, using Rock Hall as a central heritage hub, to find the missing heritage of Farnworth and found a new archive that tells the whole story. Participants will map the journey from Farnworth town centre to Moses Gate Park and will discover new heritage information about the everyday people of Farnworth who have a connection with Rock Hall through work or recreational activity. Participants will share their learning with other through founding a new archive which will be accessioned into the Bolton Archive collections and displayed at Rock Hall. The archive material will inform talks, tours and interpretive displays, ensuring that the widest possible audience can engage with it.

Showcasing our Heritage

An interpretation strategy will underpin new free to access interpretive displays for inside the hall and for the external grounds which will be created in consultation with audiences. Internally they will tell the story of the Thomas Bonsor Crompton, 'Father of Farnworth' detailing his role in the Industrial Revolution, his relationship with his workforce and the impact he had on the town of Farnworth. Externally the displays will document the change in the environmental landscape, highlighting how industry impacts on nature and the natural history of the current environment.

People will have greater wellbeing - Response taken from NLHF Stage 1 Bid

We will create a unique best practice model of wellbeing delivery set within a heritage asset. Beneficiaries will feel more connected to those around them as a result of our project and feel more connected to Farnworth and the natural environment

Our project is designed to positively impact on wellbeing. Activities have been co-developed with experts and potential beneficiaries to ensure we meet identified needs. Our activities will enable people to be more active and to meet and work together. Our volunteering programme will help forge new friendships in addition to increasing people's skills and knowledge.

Our external evaluator will use recognised evaluation methods to measure wellbeing.

We will ask people how they feel after experiencing our project and beneficiaries will report:

- increased feelings of happiness
- reduced levels of anxiety
- that they feel life is more worthwhile as a result of their involvement in our project
- that they feel more connected to those around them and more connected to the place they live in.

We have a budget for inclusion to ensure there are no barriers to getting involved in our project. These include essential travel costs and refreshments, translation services where required for example.

Our health and wellbeing activities are all "people-centred" and we will continue to consult with the groups we most want to involve. We will use existing resources such as: Heritage Fund resources and guidance on inclusion and evaluation to help us integrate overall best practice into our wellbeing plans.

Our activities use different learning styles such as physical, creative and practical activities.

We will use established impact and wellbeing measurement tools e.g. What Works Centre for Wellbeing.

Our activities will help to build a community and support social cohesion between different cultural communities by bringing them together. This will help in terms of building trust and self-confidence and help to improve a sense of belonging and pride.

We will develop enthusiasm about wellbeing and share the learning through our social media and events. We will ensure that safeguarding of adults and children is embedded throughout.

We will continue to engage the community in our decision making, which can directly impact on wellbeing and improve social cohesion. Our Volunteering programme will have an impact on physical and mental health, as well as a sense of identity and purpose. It will help people to build their social relationships and encourage people to continue to volunteer in their communities.

Our outdoor activities, arts and crafts activities will impact on wellbeing. Research has shown that such activities have been found to have a positive effect on mental health, as well as helping some groups to improve their self-esteem, and others to share their experiences and feel a sense of purpose.

Photos – External Only



Approach from the car park – this fence marks the boundary for the project. The Hall is just peeping through the trees.



View looking up at Rock Hall – taken from the just before the bend in the path.

View with Rock Hall to your right (off photo), looking down the hill



Cobbled Lane/ Path which runs up the right hand side of Rock Hall



View from the rear of Rock Hall, where the proposed extension will be – cobbled lane accesses the local cemetery, so there is footfall in addition to general park footfall.