



Subject: Gracie Fields strategy

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Cabinet Member:

Cabinet Member for Regeneration – Councillor

Richard Farnell

Cabinet Member for Public Health and Regulation

– Councillor Cecile Biant

Cabinet Member for Community, Culture and

Tourism – Councillor Daalat Ali

Report of: Head of Planning

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**Comments from Statutory
Officers:**

Key Decision:

1 Purpose of Report

1.1 To inform the Rochdale Township Committee of the work being undertaken, within Rochdale Town Centre with, and on behalf of interested stakeholders, to develop a Gracie Fields strategy to commemorate the Rochdale-born singer and actress.

2 Recommendations

2.1 Township notes the work being carried out to develop the Gracie Fields Strategy in Rochdale town centre which includes: new blue plaques, the installation of a Gracie Fields statue, and enhancements to the existing Gracie Fields memorial stone; linked by a heritage trail.

2.2. Township Committee notes that further report(s) will be brought before Members for consideration and your approval to update Township on progress in particular the identification of funding opportunities to implement proposals within the strategy.

Reason for recommendation

3 Background

3.1 Gracie Fields was born in Rochdale in 1898 and became an internationally recognised actress and singer. She performed all around the world and died in Italy in 1979. She is well cherished by Rochdale residents and is an important figure for the town.

3.2. A memorial stone to Gracie Fields is currently located on Molesworth Street, on the site of the house where she was born (since demolished). The commemorative stone is located in an unattractive industrial area and is in need of enhancement and to give it much greater prominence. Whilst the site may be redeveloped in future and as part of this there may be opportunities to refurbish the site and make more of its legacy, it does not presently provide an adequate memorial to Gracie Fields. The landowner has expressed support for this work and options will exist to consider an enhanced design in this area. In the short term parts of the frontage of the site are safeguarded as the land will be required to enable the safe passage of construction vehicles taking turbines from the M62 through this junction and onwards to the approved Crook Hill wind farm in the spring of 2015. Discussions have taken place, both with the landowner and the developer of the wind farm and further meetings to consider options will take place. It is hoped these can be expanded to include all interested parties.

3.3. The Rotary Club of Rochdale East contacted the Council to discuss proposals for a new monument within the town centre. A representative of the Rotary Club attended a previous Township meeting and a £3,000 contribution towards this work was secured from Township funds. Through the Blue Plaque strategy for Rochdale, Officers are aware of a number of requests for blue plaques to commemorate Gracie Fields and it is felt timely and appropriate to pull these various community requests together into a coherent programme of work, in conjunction and with the agreement of these community groups and the Township Committee. The Gracie Fields Strategy combines these initiatives to create a coherent and complementary strategy. It has been developed with The Rotary Club of Rochdale, The Rotary Club of Rochdale East, Rochdale Cultural Heritage Group (RoCH) and the Gracie Fields Appreciation Society.

3.4 Officers are now working with these groups to explore design options and contact artists and funders to explore costs and potential funding options.

Alternatives considered

3.5. Combining initiatives into a Gracie Fields strategy allows more efficient working; combining meetings, promotion and consultation as well as ensuring initiatives are complementary. There is therefore no logic in not following this approach. The strategy would ideally be implemented in one phase, however if funding was not forthcoming the strategy could be implemented piecemeal.

Gracie Fields Statue:

3.6. Different options for the location of a Gracie Fields Statue were discussed with the consulted groups identified above:

Location	Reason for rejection
Outside Rochdale Town Hall	Potential to detract for the Grade I listed

	building. Uncertainty about the future layout of Town Hall Square.
Memorial Gardens	Not deemed appropriate with the Gardens being a space to honour service men and women.
Wet Rake Gardens	Connection with Gracie not as strong as location in the Town Centre.
Broadfield Park	No connection with Gracie and not sufficiently prominent.

3.7. The preferred central location is around the Smith Street/The Butts area which forms a gateway and arrival point for people coming to Rochdale. Since the opening of the Transport Interchange, the area has high footfall and is a prominent area of the town centre. The siting of a Gracie Fields Statue in this central location would have the potential to become a positive symbol of the town and have a positive regenerative impact in combination with other heritage-led regeneration initiatives in the town centre.

3.8. The Rotary Club of Rochdale East initially approached the Council with the proposal of an obelisk and applied to Rochdale Township for a grant of £3,000 towards the costs. It was felt that a statue would be more engaging and a grander tribute to Gracie Fields. They have agreed to work with the Council to explore the option of a Statue but if funding cannot be found would like to revisit the original obelisk option.

Blue plaque trail:

3.9. Blue plaques commemorate people and events connected to buildings and structures. The Borough has a number of existing blue plaques and Edgar Wood plaques (buildings designed by the local architect) primarily being a result of local civic group projects or one-off plaques supported by the Council or interest groups.

3.10. A survey of existing plaques commenced within Rochdale Town Centre and has been successful. Funding through the Council's Capital Programme for Drake Street enhancements and supportive property owners in that area has provided an opportunity for a pilot project and an additional 11 plaques have been erected including one at Bull Brow as part of the Ginnels improvement Strategy. A Blue Plaque Trail was designed by Planning with Link4Life funding its printing and this was launched at the Feel Good Festival 2013. The trail proved so popular that an update and re-print is currently underway, funded by the '5 Ways to wellbeing' Public Health funding. At the time of writing it is expected that 21 blue plaques have been installed within Rochdale Town Centre with the support of property owners.

Gracie Fields trail:

3.11. In line with the above work, discussions have taken place with the community groups to consider a Gracie Fields trail to commemorate the life and career of Gracie Fields. A draft trail has been developed to link a number of blue plaques and sites across the Town Centre. The attached document summarises their significance. This document has been developed in conjunction with the Gracie Fields Appreciation Society, both Rotary groups of Rochdale and Friends of Rochdale Town Hall (FoRTH). All are supportive of these proposals.

3.12 Officers are exploring funding options available to implement the strategy which is likely to be phased. Opportunities to secure financial support will be taken. A further report to Township will explore options to fund the Gracie Fields Strategy.

4 Financial Implications

4.1 This report is for information only. A further report will be submitted to Township which will detail the options to fund the Gracie Fields Strategy.

5 Legal Implications

5.1 There are no implications arising from this report at this stage.

6 Personnel Implications

6.1 There are no personnel implications arising from this report.

7 Corporate Priorities

7.1 The Corporate plan priorities are prosperity, people and places. The proposal contributes to the heritage-led regeneration of Rochdale Town Centre; improving place and engaging with people.

7.2. One of the outcomes which the council is working to is to increase people's healthy life and well-being. The development of the 'Gracie Field Trail' complies with the Five Ways to Wellbeing, which is a public health strategy supported by the Public health service of the Council:

- **Connect:** with other people by walking the trail
- **Be active:** by walking the Gracie Fields trail
- **Take Notice:** of the environment
- **Keep Learning:** on the local history
- **Give:** your time to people when walking the trail

8. Risk Assessment Implications

8.1 This report is for information only. There is no risk implications associated with the content.

9. Equalities Impacts

9.1 Workforce Equality Impacts Assessment

There are no (*significant*) workforce equality issues arising from this report.

Background Papers	
Document	Place of Inspection
Gracie Fields Strategy	Appended to report

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