

History of the Bandstand

Celebrating the Queen's Platinum Jubilee

On 8th November 2021 St Ives Town Council held a meeting with local organisations to seek proposals to celebrate the Queen's Platinum Jubilee in 2022.

In discussing options, two likely projects emerged from the Town Team. One was to hold a concert featuring songs from each decade of the Queen's reign. The second idea was to install a bandstand on The Waits, which could be used for the summer concerts there and for other events held by organisations in the town. It was also felt that the bandstand would be an appropriate addition to the town's historical buildings and monuments and as a memorial to the long reign of Queen Elizabeth II.

Building a business plan for the bandstand

The Bandstand proposals were discussed further by the Town Team, which held an open meeting in St Ives Corn Exchange on Tuesday 18th January 2022, to gauge if the community would support the project. The response was positive and so it was decided to take the project further by researching the availability of bandstands and the likely costs.

Town Team members spoke with, and visited, businesses in Derbyshire and Shropshire and it became apparent that a sum in excess of £30k would be needed to purchase a 4-metre diameter bandstand plus at least another £10k would be required to complete installation.

Further discussions took place with local groups and it was agreed that a 4-metre bandstand would be too small to accommodate most bands. So enquiries were made about a 6-metre diameter version without plinth.

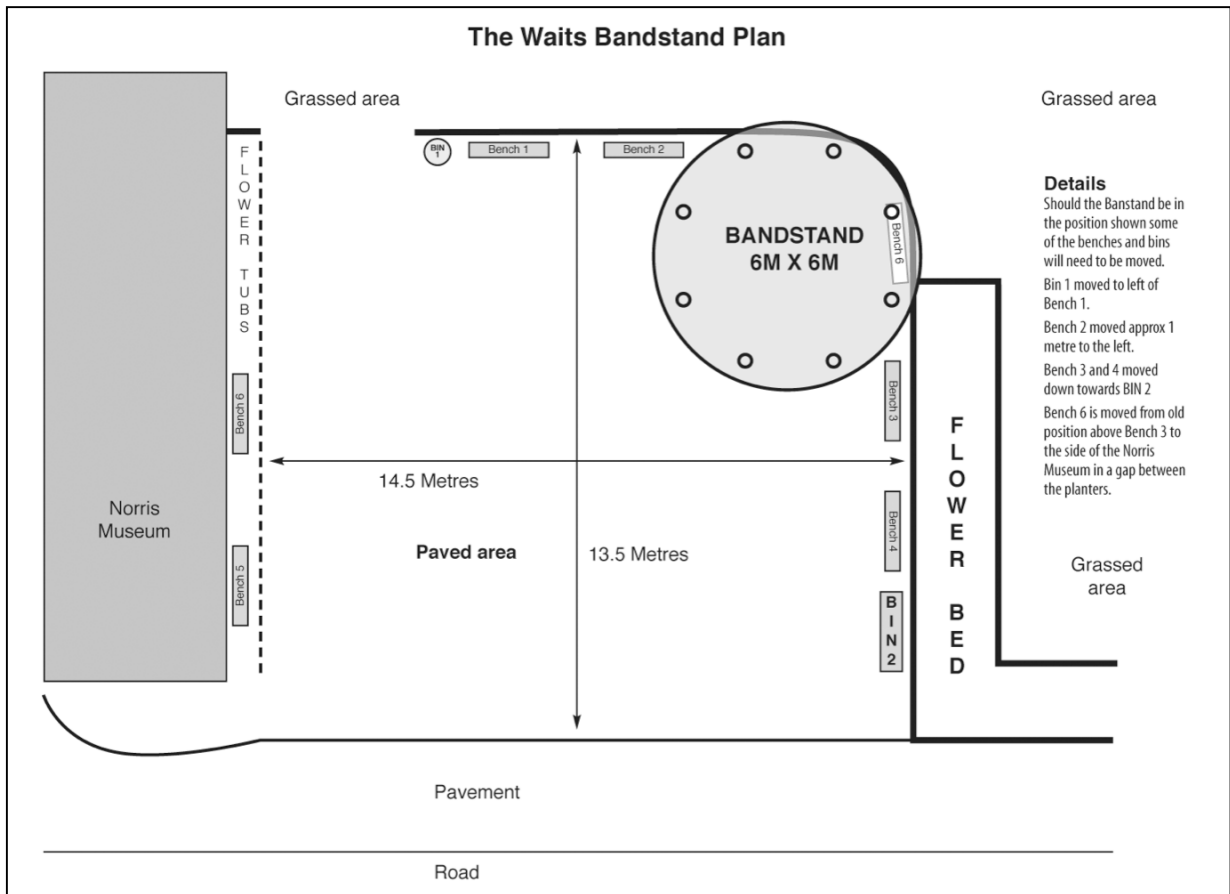
A document was prepared to promote the project titled:

'Proposal for a Bandstand on The Waits in the Old Riverport of St Ives to commemorate the Reign of Queen Elizabeth II during her Platinum Jubilee Year'

It contained a plan of where the bandstand might be sited and several reasons for supporting the installation, which included:

1. It would be a fitting memorial to mark the reign of Queen Elizabeth II, the nations longest serving Monarch.
2. This area frequently sees concerts and a bandstand would provide a permanent shelter for performers, reducing the amount of work organisers have to do.
3. With an electric supply it will allow music and light to be used without the need to install a temporary cable.
4. The structure should visually enhance the area.
5. It could encourage greater use of this attractive riverside setting, encouraging more people to visit this part of the town and aid the businesses in The Broadway.
6. The cost of erecting a bandstand here is relatively low as it will not need a raised floor (plinth). The paved area is higher than the grass area and the flower bed would not obstruct the view of performers under the bandstand. A plinth looks attractive but it would add considerable cost and create areas that rubbish could collect, making maintenance and cleaning more difficult than at present.
7. The bandstand could be customised with images that have links with St Ives. For example the legs could have the St Ives Town Council Bull motive on them. A frieze around the top could incorporate images such as the Seven Wives, historic cattle, willow baskets etc.

8. It would be possible to also provide recognition for those people and companies that might contribute to the funding of the bandstand. The bandstand should last for many years and the recognition of those who contributed will also be a lasting legacy of their generosity.
9. Whilst the location of the bandstand could be anywhere in the paved area, the location shown has three advantages. Firstly it leaves the maximum paved area undisturbed, allowing it to be used for many other uses, such as Morris Dancing. Secondly the bandstand and performers will be more visible from the grass area as well as from the paved area. Thirdly it is well away from the Norris Museum a significant and historical town building.



Fundraising begins

The idea that pledges could be made for the project, where the names of everyone who contributed would be inscribed on the bandstand, was promoted. By February 2022 a sum in excess of £9,000 was available, which came from individual donations, a grant from the Town Council and Town Team funds, now available because some projects had been cancelled during the pandemic.

Requests for Pledges were advertised in two local publications, the bi-monthly *NOW magazine* and the fortnightly newspaper *The Riverporter*.

A letter was printed and delivered to most of the Town's businesses and pledges continued to be made. One of the first pledges was made by Mrs Sanders, who offered £5,000. She longed to see a bandstand in the town ever since an earlier proposal for a bandstand had failed. She never said when that earlier proposal had been made, but it was likely to have been several decades ago.

A bit of luck

One of the main problems remaining was locating a supplier and conversations were had with several manufacturers. It became clear that there were few companies capable of manufacturing a traditional bandstand of the required specification, at a price within our budget or relatively quickly. One Scottish firm quoted a cost of £90k.

There was a moment of good fortune when Gareth Roberts of Leander Architectural, near Buxton, told the Team that he had a bandstand of the correct size in his yard. It had recently been returned to Leander by the owner, a town in North West England, which had decided not to install it.

John and Sandra Souter, from the Team made arrangements to visit Leander the following weekend and see if the bandstand was suitable. It transpired that the bandstand had originally been made by Leander for an exhibition at Earls Court, probably for an Ideal Home Exhibition, and the town which acquired it decided after several years not to install it and had offered it back to Leander.

Although painted red, rather than black and gold as desired, the bandstand would be totally refurbished including repainting. Despite its age it fitted the specification required almost perfectly and would, according to Gareth be refurbished and offered 'as good as new'. Being made of aluminium it would be robust and rust free. The Town Team decided to agree to purchase the bandstand, subject to getting planning consent, and an affordable price was agreed.

An application for a grant from the Mick George Fund was made in March and by then £20,000 had been pledged. It was agreed by the Town Team to offer the bandstand, when completed, to the Town Council as they would be the most likely body that would be able to look after it long term. By April the total pledges had exceeded £22,000, however the Mick George Fund grant application failed leaving the campaign short.

Along with the bandstand project the Team decided to organise a singalong during the Jubilee celebrations on Friday evening 3rd June in the Corn Exchange, including songs from each decade of the Queens reign and also to show a film of the coronation in 1952 the previous evening.

Planning permission becomes vital

By May, due to the contribution of Peter Townsend, who prepared the plans for the bandstand pro bono, they had been submitted to HDC's Planning Department. It became clear in October that although there was no issue with the structure from planners, the Environment Officer wished to restrict the use of the bandstand to less than 5 times per month and not on consecutive days.

The Team considered this totally unacceptable and engaged with HDC to ensure no such restrictions would be made. Eventually the plans were approved and the restrictions altered to an acceptable level.

By mid January 2023 with planning consent finally approved, the bandstand order was confirmed. Sadly the 8-month delay caused by the planning process meant that refurbishment costs had risen. Partly due to the economic crisis total costs had risen to £60,000. This was still acceptable, as a newly built bandstand of this size would likely cost in excess of £80,000.

Fortunately several St Ives companies worked either pro bono or for a much reduced fee to install the bandstand. These included Kevin Page Groundworks, St Ives Electrical Contractors Ltd and QVS Electrical Supplies. Installation was quite a difficult task with groundwork including: removing paving blocks, preparing large concrete pads of sufficient depth to support the 6 legs, mounting the legs, assembling the frame and roof, installing an electrical supply box and finally replacing the paving and repositioning the street furniture.

A June deadline and a September opening

A deadline of completion by the end of June 2024 was set so that the bandstand could be used for the 'Music On The Waits' concerts during July and August 2023. Once the bandstand was in place and the electrical installation had taken place it was ready for use just in time.

Nine concerts were held over the next two months and an official opening was planned for Sunday 10 September. The Lord Lieutenant of Cambridgeshire, Mrs Julie Spence, OBE CStJ QPM, agreed to perform the opening ceremony along with contributions from the High Sheriff, Dr Bharatkumar N Khetani, the Mayor of St Ives, Councillor Philip Pope, and Chair of St Ives Town Team, Sheila Stones.

A request had been made for a member of the Royal Family to perform the opening ceremony, but the Team were informed that such an invitation would have been needed over six months in advance and that 'Royals' rarely perform such duties on a Sunday.

The ceremony was well attended, and as it turned out, took place on one of the hottest days of the year with temperatures in excess of 30°. The names of all contributors were installed inside the top frieze just before the ceremony. Sadly Mrs Sanders, who had given such a large donation early on, was unable to attend the ceremony. The Team had decided to ask Mrs Sanders to take part in the opening ceremony but shortly before the installation was completed Mrs Sanders died.

The ceremony included performances from Thorndown School Choir, directed by Agi Peach, the Over Community Singers and Drummers, The Lightwaves and Split Whiskers.

A video of the construction and opening ceremony of the bandstand has been compiled by David Farnell and copies given to the Norris Museum and St Ives Town Council.



Above: *The Mayor of St Ives, Councillor Philip Pope, addresses the public at the opening of the bandstand on Sunday 10 September 2023.*

Town Council takes ownership

The bandstand was again used during the Old Riverport Jazz & Blues Festival and in early October by ukulele players attending the Old Riverport Ukulele Festival. What has proved interesting is that it is also well used by the public. Playgroups often sit in the shade of the bandstand on trips into town and during the summer months groups of teenagers have been meeting under the bandstand, presumably to keep out of the sun or rain.

The final balance sheet shows that the total costs paid out amounted to £60,000. Half of that money came from pledges from individuals and local businesses. The remaining funds came from the Town Team, the Town Council and Huntingdonshire District Council. This does not include the contributions 'in kind' made by the businesses that gave services for free or at cost.

The bandstand is now under the ownership of St Ives Town Council and is available to be used by groups and organisations. Bookings to use the bandstand, particularly where access to the electric supply is needed, can be made by contacting:

St Ives Town Council,
Town Hall, Market Hill,
The Old Riverport, St Ives,
Cambridgeshire PE27 5AL.

Telephone 01480 388929

Email: clerk@stivestowncouncil.gov.uk