



***Knowsley Council***

***In Partnership with  
Cronton Parish Council***

**THE CRONTON PASTURE  
'ACCESS IMPROVEMENT PROJECT'**

**Viridor Credits Grant Application  
Evidence of Need and Consultation Report**

***April 2022***

## **Contents: -**

### **Background: -**

- Knowsley Council and Partners 3
- The Pasture 5
- Access Improvement Project 7

### **Evidence of Need: -**

- Population Demographics 10
- Community Consultation (November 2021) 13
- School Consultation (December 2021) 14
- Letters of Support 15
  - Cronton Parish Council
  - Cronton Gala Committee
  - Cronton CofE Primary School
  - Pex Hill Junior Football Club
  - Cronton Community Centre
- Appendix 1 (Consultation Summary Data – Please refer to accompanying document)

## **Background: Knowsley Council and Partners**

### **KNOWSLEY METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL: -**

Knowsley MBC is the Local Authority for Knowsley, which includes Cronton Village. The Council works closely alongside Cronton Parish Council in the delivery of public services for the community of Cronton. Specifically, Knowsley Council is the landowner of many of the public areas within Cronton including, the Pasture, which is leased by Cronton Parish Council.

The operation of Cronton Parish Council's managing role of these public green spaces as leaseholder is overseen by the Environmental Sustainability Service within Knowsley Council. This service is responsible for delivery the Borough Green Space Strategy, which provides a context to the purpose and function that public green spaces across the Borough achieve and the quality standards that should be reached.

The Council has a long-standing relationship with the Parish Council, Cronton Gala Committee and other stakeholders in the delivery of improvements to the Pasture, which secured a Green Flag Award over a decade ago through the efforts of this partnership. Our partnership is now focused on making further improvements to this vital resource for the village of Cronton.

### **CRONTON PARISH COUNCIL: -**

Cronton Parish Council is the only Parish Council in the Borough of Knowsley. It is situated in the South East corner of the borough and borders St Helens and Halton. The village is located in a rural setting and has 13 public rights of way passing through the green belt area adjacent to the village. Cronton has a long history and is named in the Domesday Book. There is a conservation area near to Cronton Hall.

There are eight councillors supported by a part time Parish Clerk. The council has an annual precept below £25,000. The Parish Council does not limit its ambitions due to the small amount of money available. It strives to serve the residents of Cronton to the best of its ability whilst balancing its budget.

The council liaises with Knowsley Borough Council and other agencies in order to ensure the best provision of services to the community.

The key priorities are: -

- To keep residents well informed and provide access to all council meetings
- To listen to residents' views and to take all comments seriously
- To continue to take all action necessary to protect the green belt
- To maintain the unique identity of Cronton Village
- To carefully monitor all planning applications including those adjacent to the village
- To seek to improve village amenities ,environment and security

The Parish Council organises the annual remembrance service. It also works with the two village schools in organising the Nativity Play and Christmas celebrations which includes raising money for local charities.

There is a recreation area known as 'The Pasture'. The Parish Council pays for the maintenance of The Pasture and the expenditure involved is the biggest after salary and council administrative costs.

In 2016 the Parish Council jointly with Knowsley Borough Council signed a deed of dedication which established The Pasture as a Centenary Field in Trust. In perpetuity the Pasture was dedicated for use as a " public playing field and recreation ground to include ancillary public events." The Parish Council seeks to continually improve the environment, access and play equipment provided at The Pasture.

### **OTHER STAKEHOLDERS: -**

Our partnership working extends to other local voluntary and community organisations, as well as schools and other establishments operating in the village and with an interest in the Pasture. These key stakeholders include: -

- **Cronton Gala Committee:** hosting the village's cornerstone annual community Gala at the Pasture, this committee is also active throughout the year as a supportive volunteer group for the Pasture. They have supported consultation and engagement work and advocated for residents in the shaping of priorities for the Pasture's improvements.
- **Pex Hill Junior Football Club:** the primary sporting user of the site, this club has raised the agenda for ensuring the quality and function of the Pasture is maximised for community sports, recreation and fitness.
- **Local Primary Schools:** both regular users of the Pasture for educational visits and also cross country activities, the schools have supported consultation work associated with the Improvement Master Plan and actively engaged their pupils in the planning.

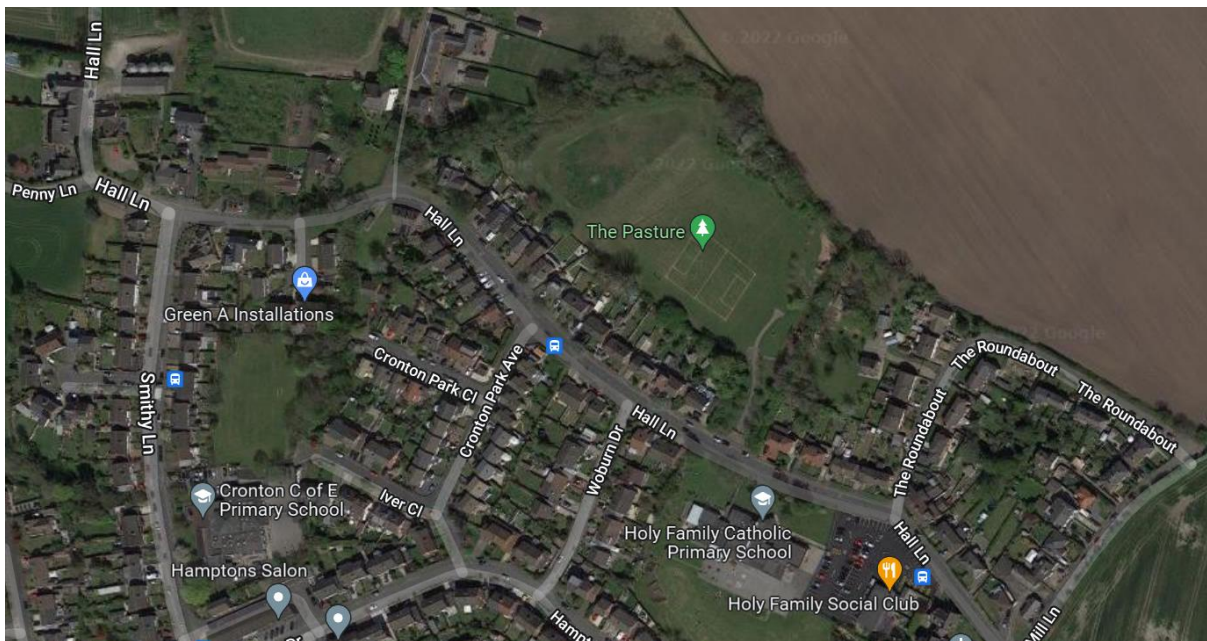
### **Working Together: -**

The above partnership has come together to shape and implement a renewed Improvement Master Plan for The Pasture, drawing on the respective experiences and perspectives on what this vital public asset should achieve for the community. We have also directly gained insight from the community on local needs and aspirations through the pooling of our resources and networks to maximise engagement of local residents in what improvements they want to see.

## Background: The Pasture, Cronton

Hall Lane Park, or The Pasture, as it is commonly known, is a 1.6 hectare site and Cronton Village's main local public green space, catering for the local community through the provision of key recreational facilities and spaces including: -

- Younger Children's Play Area
- Play Pathfinder Facility (8-13 year olds)
- Playing Fields (used for Football Pitches and Community Events)
- Open Amenity Grassland for informal walking/recreation
- Meadowland and woodland habitats



As well as its general open space function, the site plays host to a range of activities serving the community including: -

- **Annual Cronton Gala** – the major event in the site's calendar attracting around 2,000 visitors. This scale of event is only possible because of The Pasture's availability to bring the community together in this way.
- **Local Community and Family Events** – hosted by the Gala Committee, as well as Knowsley Council 'Ranger Service' and local Schools these include Easter Egg Hunt, Educational Visits, Cross Country runs, plus many other volunteer-led activities. It is hoped with further engagement these activities will increase and diversify.
- **Pex Hill Junior Football Club** - this season Pex Hill JFC have approx 400 players in 29 teams. They have a further 8 new teams for next season to take them to 37, which will be the most teams in their history, and should take us to around 450 players. These teams range from u7s - u17s. 10 of these teams are girls teams. In the past, the club have used the Pasture for training - usually for their academy, which is their Reception and Year 1 kids. They have also used the Pasture for friendlies and league games at u7s - u10s (where they

play 5aside and 7aside). On at least one occasion, they also played an exhibition game between two of our u7s teams at the Cronton Gala.

As the partnership between Cronton Parish Council, Knowsley Council and wider stakeholders has developed, a Park Management Plan has been created and along with it a Master Plan proposing improvements to the site. A process of consultation was instigated on the back of a draft Master Plan to establish local community priorities for the improvement for the Park, which has shaped this Master Plan further and provided a brief for our partnership to move forward with. The installation of a perimeter path and other measures to improve drainage and access on the site was a clear priority that came from this consultation process; an issue that this Access Improvement Project is now aiming to address.

## **Background: The Cronton Pasture ‘Access Improvement Project’**

The Pasture is the primary public open space serving the rural Village of Cronton. Situated to the north of the village, the park contains play areas for toddlers and younger children, as well as those aged 8-13 years. The main feature of the Park, however, is the open playing fields, which have hosted community events, most notably the Annual Cronton Gala, as well as being the base for community football currently hosted by Pex Hill Junior Football Club.

Surrounding the playing fields, about a decade ago, a tree planting project was carried out that helped to diversify and naturalise the playing fields, setting the site perfectly in the wider surrounding rural landscape and framing vistas from the Park. A meadowland area was also created at the rear of the site on an area of undulating ground not suitable for sports. A wood sculpture trail was also installed around the site.

These features served to increase interest in the full extent of the site, as it was identified that most use of the site was limited to the play areas near the entrance. The value of the open space became fully apparent during the Covid-19 lockdowns of 2020 and 2021, when the Park became the focus of use by the Village to counteract the effects of self-isolation.

However, despite the diversity of natural and amenity features on the site, feedback from the community to the Parish Council identified that there was a significant number of people that could not make fully use of the site due to there being no surfaced paths aiding access around the site. Coupled with reported poor drainage of the site in winter and in wet conditions, this served to limit the usability of the Pasture at this crucial time.

Consultation with the community connected with the establishment of a new Improvement Master Plan for the Park in 2022, further consolidated the need for our partnership to focus on the delivery of a perimeter path as a priority, as not only did the Park user profile have a strong older people’s emphasis, but consultation responses all pointed towards these facilities being the priority for improvement within the Park.

On this basis, our partnership has devised an Access Improvement Project that focuses on the following aims: -

- 1. Improvement of Cronton’s freely accessible public open space provision and living environment through investment in the quality of the community’s primary parkland space.***

This project will maximise the quality and function of the Pasture to better serve the needs of the rural community of Cronton Village, including those with particularly mobility and access needs, as well as generating greater opportunity for more diverse activities on the site by a range of people within our community. The proposals will ensure more people can make full use of the whole park space by extending access for all to areas previously less well used due to lack of surfaced routes.

## ***2. Addressing social isolation and equality of access.***

The legacy from the Covid-19 Lockdowns is the crucial role played by the Pasture as a freely accessible local outdoor space for the community. However, this experience also highlighted that the site could not be maximised by those with mobility issues such as older people and those with disabilities; something that our partnership wishes to address to raise the equality of full access around the site and the associated benefits of exploring Cronton village's parkland space.

## ***3. Building Community Ownership and Cultural Celebration in Cronton***

This project will work to help the community embrace and celebrate their local park, whilst also strengthening community pride and cohesion within the village. Local children will be engaged in the creation of the renewed wood sculpture trail on the site, helping to design the pieces through the two primary schools within the site. Likewise, the project will aid the viable use of the site for key events such as the Annual Cronton Gala, ensuring that the ground conditions are well drained to avoid cancellation or limitation of use for these activities. With Knowsley being 'Borough of Culture 2022', the timing of this work will be particularly poignant.

## ***4. Promoting participation in Sport and Fitness for health & wellbeing***

The improvements proposed in this project will create a perimeter path that will be ideal for sports, fitness and recreational activities, including walking, running and cycling (including learning to ride) activities. Likewise, the improved drainage to the playing fields will ensure that the whole field will be viable for use for sports such as football, as well as other recreational activities to promote health & wellbeing.

## ***5. Providing greater Access to Nature***

The Pasture has growing natural habitat setting with the boundary tree planting and meadowlands established about a decade ago around the perimeter of the site. This project will serve to allow these naturalised areas to be explored by a greater number of people, especially those most vulnerable that could not reach these areas due to poor ground conditions and lack of surfaced paths.

### **Proposed Designs: -**

Working with Knowsley Council's Senior Landscape Architect within the Environmental Sustainability Service, the above brief has been converted into a new Improvement Master Plan for the Pasture that will maximise the usability of the site for a wider section of the community.



The primary improvement will be the installation of a 2m wide crushed stone path that will meet Equalities Act standards for disability access, whilst also allow for a range of possible activities both by individuals and groups. A further path loop 1.8m wide around the meadowland area of the Pasture will be installed with flexipave surfacing given the undulating nature and relatively wetter conditions at the far end of the site.

The investment will also promote access in other ways, by generating interest in the wider site through creation of a new wood sculpture trail, involving local children in the design process. These will be set within the existing naturalised setting of the Park that will be more accessible via the new path.

Finally, this project will tackle the inaccessibility of the site in the form of the main playing fields being poorly draining and often unusable by the public. With improved drainage and condition of the ground, the main playing fields area will be able to host sports and football once more, as well as host community events such as the Cronton Gala, both of which have been unduly cancelled previously due to the poor ground conditions.

The investment in the Pasture will bring about renewal of the Park's ability to engage and benefit a wider section of our community in a diversity of ways.

## Evidence of Need: Population Demographics

Knowsley as a borough has consistently been ranked the 2<sup>nd</sup> most deprived borough within the UK in overall terms. The table below provides an analysis of the individual domain scores and shows that Knowsley's comparative ranking has worsened in four domains (Education Skills and Training, Health Deprivation and Disability, Crime, and Barriers to Housing and Services). It has improved in three domains (Income, Employment, and Living Environment).

Domain	Rank of Average Score		
	Knowsley 2010	Knowsley 2015	Knowsley 2019
Income	11	1	2
Employment	1	1	2
Education, Skills and Training	7	7	3
Health Deprivation and Disability	10	3	2
Crime	85	96	83
Barriers to Housing and Services	202	260	229
Living Environment	106	41	62

The Income (22.5%) and Employment (22.5%) domains account for the largest weighting when the overall score is calculated. The fact that Knowsley is ranked second for both of those domains goes some way to explaining why Knowsley is ranked second in England overall.

Two additional indices have been published in 2019 - *Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI)* and *Income Deprivation Affecting Older People's Index (IDAOPI)*. The ranking for Knowsley has worsened by four places (now ranked 3<sup>rd</sup>) for Children.

Local Authority	Rank of Average Score			Rank of Average Score		
	IDACI 2015 (Out of 326)	IDACI 2019 (out of 317)	Change 2019 from 2015	IDAOPI 2015 (Out of 326)	IDAOPI 2019 (out of 317)	Change 2019 from 2015
Liverpool	8	4	-4	8	8	-
Wirral	60	54	-6	75	76	+1
Halton	36	30	-6	55	58	+3
St Helens	45	33	-12	68	73	+5
Sefton	99	89	-10	69	72	+3
Knowsley	7	3	-4	9	11	+2

Knowsley is the lowest scoring local authority in the Liverpool City Region in terms of deprivation affecting children and the second lowest for older people.

## **Cronton Statistics: -**

Cronton Parish has a population of 1,324 individuals. In the context of wider deprivation statistics within the borough of Knowsley, the village sits moderately within the Index of Multiple Deprivation statistics.

<b>Domain</b>	<b>LSOA</b> Decile (where 1 is 10% most deprived)
IMD overall	6
Crime	3
Health	3
Employment	4
Living Environment	5
Income	7
Education, Skills and Training	8
Barriers to Housing and Services	10

However, Cronton is particularly notable statistically in relation to its older people's population, with those aged over 65 years being nearly double the proportion of that of the wider borough. Additionally, the Whiston & Cronton Ward that the village sits within has a higher proportion of older people living alone than Knowsley borough, which is, in turn, higher than England as a whole.

### **Age (Cronton, Parish):**

	Cronton (Parish)	Knowsley
0 - 15	184	31,200
16 - 64	717	94,900
65+	423	26,400

### **Age as a proportion of the population:**

	Cronton (Parish)	Knowsley
0 - 15	13.9%	20.4%
16 - 64	54.2%	62.2%
65+	31.9%	17.3%

The village also has a number of notable health statistics beyond the focus of older people, including child obesity levels, which are above the borough average and well above that of England as a whole. Cancer and Lung Cancer rates are also notably higher than the England average.

**Level: Whiston and Cronton  
(Ward)**

Indicator		<b>Cronton (Ward)</b>	Knowsley	England
<b>Older people living alone (%) (Census 2011)</b>		34.9	34.5	31.5
<b>Reception: Prevalence of obesity (including severe obesity), 3-years data combined (2017/18 - 19/20)</b>	Value	13.3%	13.2%	9.7%
	Count	30	670	155,469
<b>Year 6: Prevalence of obesity (including severe obesity), 3-years data combined (2017/18 - 19/20)</b>	Value	26.4%	26.2%	20.4%
	Count	70	1,230	340,905
<b>Incidence of all cancer (SIR per 100) (2012 - 16)</b>		113.2	115.7	100
<b>Incidence of lung cancer (SIR per 100) (2012 - 16)</b>		173.1	184.3	100

Coupled with the Village's rural setting, which can bring increased issues of access to local services, the high population of older people, as well as the significant health statistics profiling the community point towards a clear role for the Pasture as an important resource for tackling social isolation, obesity and wider health & wellbeing of the Cronton community through access to outdoor space and increased physical activity.

## **Evidence of Need: Community Consultation**

Linked to the Master Planning process for The Pasture, the following community consultation exercises have been carried out to inform this project. These are as follows: -

### **The Pasture Park Master Plan/Play Area Online Consultation (Nov 2021): -**

Following the formulation of a draft Park Master Plan for The Pasture, an online consultation was carried out to provide our Partnership with a further understanding of the users of The Pasture, their views on the Park at present and their main priorities for improvement for the future. Due to its clear priority status, specific focus was also given to the Perimeter Path and greater detail was sought from the consultation on what people would like to see as a result of the improvements. Below outlines the outcome of this consultation that further consolidates the need for this Access Project: -

- The consultation secured 89 responses from the local community
- After play facilities, the main reason for visiting the park was to walk or walk the dog
- 88% reported using the park with their family
- Ratings of the quality of park facilities for people with disabilities are particularly low
- Ratings of the quality of existing park facilities for young people and adults were low
- Ratings of the walking/path routes provision on the site were particularly low
- Poor path provision and muddy/wet ground conditions were outlined as key barriers to using the site by a significant number of respondents.
- Highest scoring support in the Master Plan proposals was the perimeter path (93%)
- Main functions the path should have were walking (95%) and disability access (84%)
- Highest activities/events requests were for children/family activities (63%) followed by Walks & Talks (55%) and School Holiday activities (54%)

Appendix 1 provides the results from the Online Consultation for the relevant questions relating to the above.

## School Consultation (December 2021): -

Working with the School Council from Cronton CoE Primary School, a site visit was arranged to carry out an assessment of The Pasture using the Green Flag Award criteria as a basis for the children to assess the quality of the Park and come up with ideas for the priorities for improvement of the Park for the community.

The children were asked to score the park against the following questions: -

Question	Average Score (1 = low score and 5 = high score)
1. How Welcoming is the Pasture?	4
2. How Good are the Signs and Information for park users?	4
3. How easy is it to get around the Pasture (e.g. paths, etc.)	3
4. How good are the facilities in the Park (bins, seats, etc.)	4
5. How clean and well-maintained do you think the Park is?	4
6. What do you think of the main playing field area?	4
7. What do you think of the toddler play area?	3
8. What do you think of the older children's play area?	4
9. How safe do you feel in the park?	4/5
10. Do you think the park is good for wildlife?	4/5
11. What do you think of the range of facilities & activities?	3

Most notably, the children pointed out that the access around the Pasture was limited due to the lack of paths, noting the following in some of their comments: -

"If there are elderly or disabled need more seats and paths"

"Because it is hard for people in wheelchairs"

"I think we should have more paths"

"People with wheelchairs might not be able to travel"

"Because people who need a seat need to sit down and more paths"

"Because there is a lot of grass"

"My grandad is disabled"

"Poor because you have to go on the grass"

## **Partner and Stakeholder Letters of Support: -**

Accompanying this document and the Viridor Credits Application are a number of letters of support from our partners and other wider stakeholders in the project. These are summarised below: -

- ***Cronton Parish Council (Leaseholder of The Pasture): -***
  - In line with the Knowsley Green Space Strategy, Cronton Parish Council recognises the importance of this project for achieving the spatial and quality standards public open space provision for Cronton village.
  - As leaseholder of the site, the Council gives permission to the Borough Council to deliver this play area improvement scheme as in partnership with them.
  - The Council is committed to supporting improved access into and around the Park, having understood the important role the site played during the pandemic, but also recognising the limitations the site had for access to vulnerable groups.
  - The Parish Council will support voluntary and community activity development associated with the improved accessibility of the Park, as well as the improved condition and drainage of the main playing fields area.
  
- ***Cronton Gala Committee: -***
  - The Gala Committee are a cornerstone user of the Park, hosting the Annual Gala event that is the pinnacle of the village events calendar.
  - As local residents, the committee observed the role the Pasture played in the lockdowns and also recognised the limitations of the site to vulnerable groups with access issues.
  - This issue echoes the Gala's own needs and limitations from the site in terms of their ability deliver a significant community event on at site that has increasingly suffered from poor drainage issues.
  
- ***Cronton CofE Primary School: -***
  - As a representation of the local educational providers in the area, Cronton CofE Primary School's Headteacher has offered their letter of support to this scheme.
  - It is outlined as to the educational value the Pasture has for the local primary schools in terms of access to the environment and other learning opportunities.
  - The School has actively engaged the children of village in the consultation work associated with this project, as mentioned elsewhere in this document.

- ***Pex Hill Junior Football Club: -***

- As a significant community sports club in the local area, the Pasture provides an excellent opportunity for Pex Hill JFC to generate participation in football within the Village.
- However, their use of the site has been limited by the issues of drainage affecting the site, which they observe can be easily rectified by the measures proposed in this project.
- This will, in-turn, present the opportunity to build a renewed level of formal sporting activity on the site again, which has unfortunately been lost in recent times.

- ***Cranton Community Centre: -***

- The Community Centre is another key public resource for the Village. They support the improvements to the Pasture as the equivalent outdoor resource for community benefit in the village.

## **Conclusion: -**

Knowsley Council's partnership with Cranton Parish Council and the wider stakeholders with an interest in the Pasture have drawn on the feedback from the residents of Cranton following the increased use and importance of the Village's park during the last 2 years of Covid-19 lockdowns.

Despite the strong value placed on the Pasture by the community during this time, the need for further investment in the Pasture to consolidate its important role for the most vulnerable members of the Cranton community was raised. This has been confirmed in the consultation work carried out and also reflects the character and make-up of the Cranton Community based on the statistical analysis of the local population.

Investment is needed to ensure that the Pasture can be a fully accessible public open space for our community through the installation of a Perimeter Path, which will facilitate access for all, whilst also generating a new diversity of uses for individuals and groups to get active in the outdoor environment.

By additionally carrying out the installation of a new wood sculpture trail, as well as addressing the wider drainage of the playing fields themselves, for the benefit of sports and community events, the Pasture will play a much more enhanced role for this community for the coming years to help this community recover from the effects of the last 2 years.