

# Priory Park, Reigate - Project Aims and Proposals

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## PROJECT AIMS

- ❖ In October 2003 RBBC submitted an application to the HLF, which set out the underlying aims of the scheme of restoration and improvement proposals developed for Priory Park, Reigate.

The Stage I HLF application recognised that the structure and fabric of the park have been eroded over time due to a number of reasons including:

- Insertion of new features and functions without a full understanding of the historic landscape structure and function of the park.
- Lack of investment in maintenance and repair of major items such as the lake, historic structures, planting schemes, woodland areas.
- Vandalism and misuse.
- The standard Borough-wide specification which takes no account of the special nature of the park and which was difficult to monitor constantly.

The application concluded that these issues can be resolved by:

- Developing a master plan, which recognises the designed landscape and the functions it must house.
  - Employing appropriately skilled staff and providing training so that the park's essential qualities are understood.
  - Changes to site management to improve understanding and to promote greater security on site.
  - Carry out major items of repair and plan for ongoing maintenance.
  - Developing a site-specific maintenance programme and secure adequate resources.
- ❖ This Stage Two HLF application of October 2005 carefully combines the improvement and provision of new community facilities with the restoration of key park features and horticultural highlights, with essential works to conserve the physical and original park design structure, whilst also respecting and enhancing the park's ecological wealth.
  - ❖ The scheme also looks to widen the park's existing audience, by improving both the physical and intellectual access to the open space.

## THE CURRENT RESTORATION PROPOSALS

- ❖ The proposed philosophy behind the park's renaissance is to preserve and restore existing remnants of the 18<sup>th</sup> century landscape whilst reintroducing appropriate 'lost' features from this period. At the same time it is proposed to restore those elements of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century gardens forming the immediate setting for the Priory, which are appropriate to early 21<sup>st</sup> century use, to delight contemporary park users.

- ❖ The overall layout of the formal gardens has been reviewed with the aim of accommodating more sensitively the range of 21<sup>st</sup> century uses and facilities, all within a framework which is recognisably late 19<sup>th</sup> century in style; those elements of the gardens which do not contribute to a more coherent whole should be removed.

## KEY PRINCIPLES OF THE MASTERPLAN

- Reinstating primary elements of the **C18th and C19th landscape**.
- **Simplifying geometry** of paths and open spaces.
- Providing a clear setting for the new **Café Pavilion**.
- Integrating **modern play** and **recreation facilities** harmoniously within the historic core.
- Enhancing primary features of the **19<sup>th</sup> century garden**.
- Providing a clear and realistic vision for **future management**.
- Restoring the **lake**.

## RESTORATION PROPOSALS AND MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES BY CHARACTER AREA

- ❖ In the October 2005 application the Park is divided into into seven character areas. The following text provides a description of each area, followed by an outline of the restoration proposals and maintenance objectives following restoration. The character areas are:

Character Area A: The Priory Environs/Pleasure Ground (inc. Bell Street Car Park)  
Character Area B: Recreation Core  
Character Area C: South & West Lawns  
Character Area D: Priory Lake  
Character Area E: North & East Perimeter Woodlands  
Character Area F: Main Entrances  
Character Area G: Reigate Park

### Character Area A - The Priory Environs/Pleasure Ground

- ❖ This area is the setting for the Priory which originated as a 13<sup>th</sup> Century Priory and was remodelled in the 18<sup>th</sup> century as a classical country house with additions made in the late Victorian period. The gardens were developed by Lady Henry Somerset in the late Victorian period and later altered by the Local Authority for public use. The Grade I listed Priory building dominates the area.

The Priory and Gardens can be further divided into a series of sub-character areas in order to describe restoration proposals:

Priory Lawns

- A large formal quadrangle within a simplified path structure, the restored grass tennis lawn, will replace the existing hard court facilities and other C20th remnants, including the in-filled pool and Italian Garden.
- It will form the setting for the new café/pavilion and picnic lawn.
- The rotunda shape of the building will be echoed in a series of mixed grassland management regimes (bulbs in grass – spring flowering) linked to the architectural concept.
- The formal lawns will transform the heart of Priory Park and restore the sensibility of the Priory's setting.

#### Monk's Walk & Tea Garden

- Monk's Walk and the Tea Garden are an important addition to the Priory Gardens and are first recorded in the 1914 Ordnance Survey.
- They will be refurbished to mirror their original state using photographic records for guidance.
- The proposals will include renovation of the stone seat at the terminus of Monk's Walk and replacement of the existing etiolated conifers with clipped Yew hedges.

#### Priory Garden & Sunken Garden

- The existing plum yew (*Podocarpus andinus*) topiaries will be retained and new standard topiary trees will line the central path running between the Priory and Sunken Gardens.
- A parterre will be created in the sunken garden, using a geometric planting pattern and topiary.
- The hedge creates a barrier that separates the space and interrupts views towards and away from the Priory. It also makes the space inside the sunken lawn feel unsafe. The proposal is to remove the hedge, but retain the Irish yews at the rear of the two stone seats, thus restoring the garden's appearance in the late C19th.
- The stone seats and central pool are to be fully restored. The pool will have a new fountain display.
- The Priory will have climbing plants reinstated and vine wires will be reconditioned to provide support for the new plants.

#### Wilderness Garden

- The remnants of the early C20th arboretum will be harnessed to create a new wilderness garden, planted with unusual trees and flowering shrubs to complement existing specimen trees.
- The garden will not only provide an alternative entrance experience, but also plays an important role in the restructuring of the tree cover within the Priory setting.

#### Car Park

- Revised layout of spaces within rows of box-headed hornbeams.
- Improved layout, with pedestrian entrance separated from carriageway.
- The air raid shelter and some adjacent trees will be removed so that the car park can be extended southwards to compensate for loss of parking spaces caused by the introduction of a pedestrian entrance.

#### East Wing Shrubberies

- A new footpath will be installed to line through with the symmetry of the paths in the Priory Lawns.
- The Cornus mas trees (cornelian cherries) will be retained and undergrowth cluttering the spaces around these and other retained specimens will be removed and replaced with low-growing shrub and herbaceous plants.
- A new hornbeam hedge will replace the existing low hedge backing onto the car park. The beech hedge around the croquet lawn is to be preserved and gaps replanted.

## **Character Area B – Recreation Core**

### Cherry Orchard – Teenage Area

- This space will accommodate a multi-use games area (MUGA), a skating and BMX bowl and shelter for spectators.
- These facilities will be integrated amongst a grove of flowering cherries.
- A new approach from the supermarket will be developed to signal this major approach to Priory Park.
- The open grass area north of the orchard will be preserved for informal recreation

### Junior Playground

- The existing playground will be relocated adjacent to the new Priory Lawns/café and other recreational facilities to the north.
- The new play area will have modern, un-intrusive play equipment set within temperate garden style planting, including hardy palms, ferns and grasses.
- The main feature of the play area will be a shipwreck scene with a water play feature running alongside.

## **Character Area C - South & West Lawns**

- ❖ This area formed part of the deer park before the Priory was established. Early mapping records an area that was divided into fields and lawns defined by ditches. By 1762 tree clumps had been established and boundaries became less marked over time. The planted knoll appears on historic maps dating to the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century and remains an important visual feature. Avenues and tree clumps were a particular feature of the 18<sup>th</sup> century park, with some tree clumps still remaining in the landscape today.

### Reinstatement of C18th Broadwalk and Causeway

- Together these additions will form the “backbone” of the park refurbishment:
- The raised Causeway, formerly the carriage drive, planted with limes at 10m intervals will define the edge between Priory Park’s core and the fields.
- The new Broadwalk, planted with limes also at 10m intervals will follow the line indicated on the C18th survey and will line through to a Petanque square as its terminus. The restored avenue will be 5m wide and surfaced in Fibredec.
- The existing lime avenue trees will be transplanted and grassed over.
- Carry out replacement tree planting on the Knoll.
- Relocate playing pitches and install subsoil drainage and outfall to the lake for the pitch west of the proposed relocated tennis courts.

### Boundaries

- The hedgerow on Park Lane is to be gapped up under the existing Countryside Stewardship Scheme along the Park Lane Boundary.

### Service access

- A new 4m wide service access from the existing entrance off Park Lane will be constructed using a reinforced grass system. A gap in the avenue will enable service / events vehicles to access the park and the Broadwalk crossing will be marked and reinforced.

## **Character Area D - Priory Lake**

- ❖ Ponds have been recorded in this area of the park throughout its history. The current lake appears to have been formed from a large fish pond and a thermometer shaped pond recorded in the c.1770 map. This map also records a number of small ponds to the west of the area which had disappeared by the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The woodland grove was established by 1770 and contains some fine specimens of this period. An ornamental bridge once existed over the sluice which is now a concrete and metal structure. The lake and associated planting were important elements of the mature late 18<sup>th</sup> century park.

### The Lake

- The silt will be removed from the lake to restore the water depth, enhance biodiversity and eliminate the odour nuisance during summer months.
- Formal bank protection using options including hazel faggots and pre-planted coir fibre rolls are proposed.

### Picnic Area

- The existing inlet will be abandoned, filled in and paved over. New inlet pipes connecting to the surface water sewer will be constructed and will discharge into a new inlet structure formed as an elongated reed bed.
- A new masonry stone wall will redefine the realigned edge of the lake.
- The picnic/feeding area will be extended and resurfaced in gravel.
- New seating and interpretation will be provided, including signage to discourage feeding the water fowl.

### North Bank

- The lake edge will have a combination of masonry and soft edge reinforcement.
- Marginal planting shelves will be constructed at regular intervals to be divided by seating platforms.
- The existing area of meadow will be expanded.

### Lake outfall

- A new timber decked walkway with timber handrails will be placed over the existing metal and concrete structure.
- Marginal planting shelves will be constructed in the lake at either end of the walkway to frame views back to the lake.

### Islands and woodland edge

- New marginal planting shelves will be constructed to protect against further erosion and as a haven for nesting birds.

- The lower track that runs adjacent to the lake edge will be fenced off to enable regeneration of bank side ground cover plants as a natural means of erosion control.
- The upper track will be surfaced in self-binding gravel.
- Tree canopies close to the water's edge will be lifted to allow greater light penetration to the woodland floor.
- A marginal shelf will be created along the line of the former 18<sup>th</sup> century promenade and planted with reeds.

#### Eastern lake edge

- Fallen trees and scrub will be cleared and a new meadow established which will be graded down towards the waters edge.
- A new footpath will be installed to connect with the upper track to the south of the lake.

### **Character Area E - The North and East Perimeter Woodlands**

- ❖ The northern woodland belt originally formed part of the kitchen garden in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century and by 1871 the southern strip was planted as woodland. By 1914 the northern strip of woodland was planted and the current path layout established. The original function was as a perimeter belt to the landscape park and it now provides an effective screen to the town to its north and also provides an attractive walking route. The eastern perimeter belt was established as an ornamental wilderness/woodland belt with walks by 1762. The function was as a perimeter belt to the landscape park and it now provides a screen to the traffic of Bell Street and it contains well-used paths.
- The restoration proposal is limited to the introduction of new tree planting to fill existing gaps in the tree canopy and to add diversity to the age structure of the woodland belts. Minor tree works are also proposed to ensure the longevity of the existing trees.

### **Character Area F – Main Entrances**

#### Entrance Improvements

- Improved layout of pedestrian entrance from Bell Street (see above).
- New gateway and boulevard linking park and supermarket route.
- Interpretation and new directional signs provided at major park entrances and other primary locations.

### **Character Area G - Reigate Park**

- ❖ The steeply sloping ground and ridge to the south were part of the ancient deer park and probably comprised woodland with open rides. Boundary banks and ditches appear throughout the area, which was well wooded during the Tudor period. In later periods the landscape was made up of a matrix of rough grass, scrub and woodland resulting in a more open landscape that afforded some fine views. There remain a number of 'champion' or veteran trees within this area, which was subject to much replanting in the 1950's. Since that time gradual succession of self sown trees and scrub has further encroached upon the ridge, paths and valleys. The

Ridge itself is an elevated, open heathy area that affords some fine views, although these would have been more numerous historically.

- The restoration proposal includes limited tree works to ensure the longevity of the existing woodland. There are also access improvements in the form of improved path surfaces in a limited number of locations and signage, seats and bins in selected locations. Finally essential repairs are proposed for the Vogan monument on the Greensand Ridge.