

DRUITT GARDENS

LANDSCAPE MASTERPLAN REPORT



Christchurch Borough Council

November 2008

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1. INTRODUCTION

- a. Hilary Martin - Integrated Design has been commissioned by Christchurch Borough Council to produce a landscape masterplan for Druitt Gardens. The masterplan will form the starting point for public consultation, which will then lead to a detailed design process resulting in implementation of the approved detailed proposals.
- b. The brief for the landscape masterplan is centred on three aims:
 - To address the concerns and aspirations highlighted in the 2005 “Town Centre Strategy” document, and “Borough-wide Character Assessment”.
 - To fulfil the desires of Miss Charlotte Druitt when she gifted her house and gardens to the public in 1946.
 - To incorporate the management objectives set out in the approved Christchurch Borough Council, “Druitt Gardens - A Town Centre Woodland - Draft Management Plan 2007-2010”.
- c. This report sets out to describe the process of survey and analysis required to formulate the masterplan and a description of the proposals which have evolved. The report is divided into the following sections:
 - Background
 - Landscape Masterplan Aims
 - Constraints and Opportunities
 - The Landscape Masterplan

2. BACKGROUND

a. Site Location

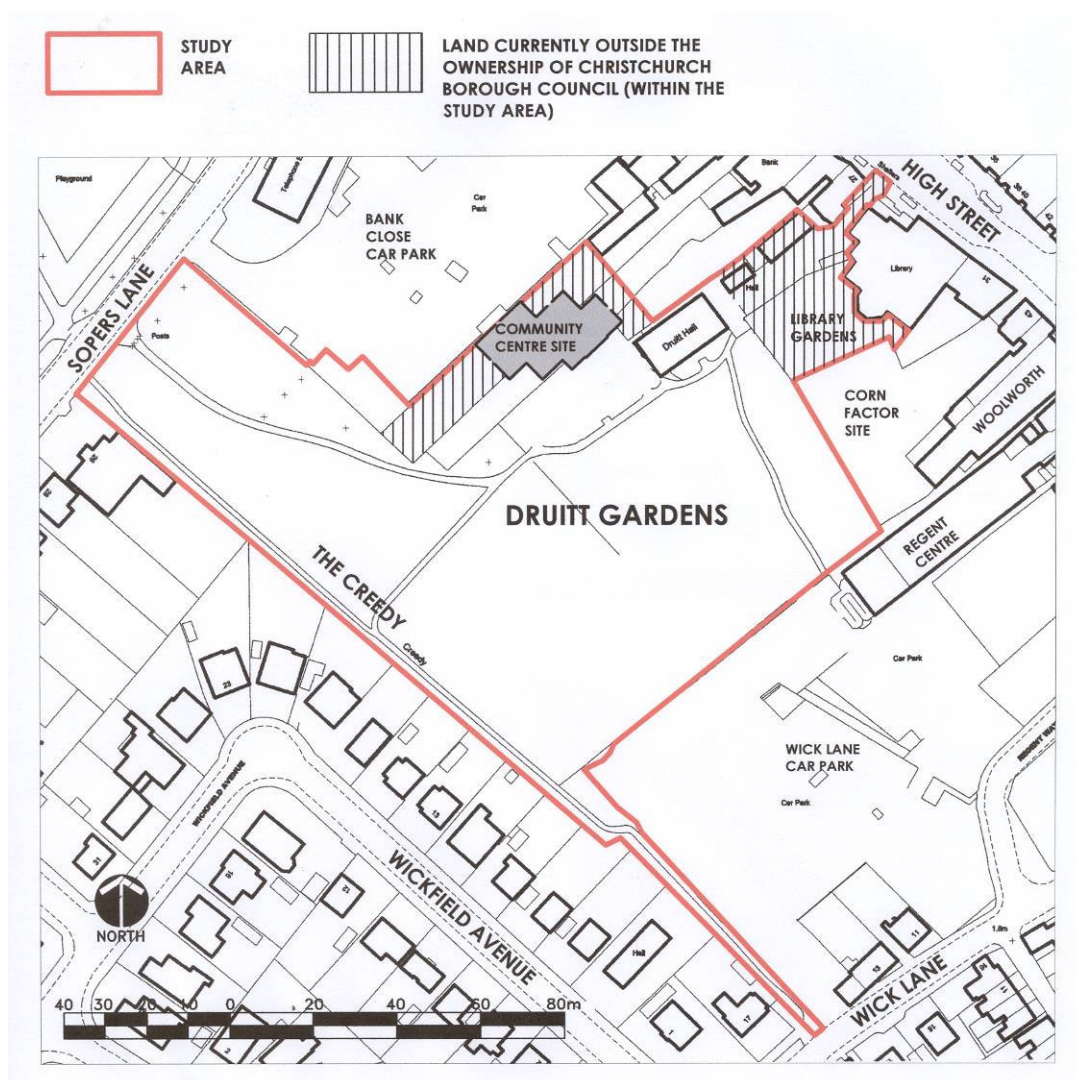


Figure 1 - Druitt Gardens Study Area

Druitt Gardens is an irregular shaped parcel of land of 1.33 hectares (3.29 acres) situated on the northwest side of Christchurch town centre. The gardens are situated at the rear of Christchurch Library and other premises fronting the High Street. In addition to the existing activities of the High Street, the gardens have boundaries with presently vacant areas allocated in the Local Plan for commercial and residential development known as The Lanes and The Corn Factor site.

Behind the High Street the land is sandwiched between the Wick Lane and Bank Close car parks. The long southwest boundary is formed by the footpath known as The Creedy which runs along the rear garden boundaries of houses on Wickfield Avenue.

The north corner of the gardens is the site for the recently approved new Druitt Community Centre. The new building will have its main access from Bank Close car park but there will be rear access to and from the gardens. Close by is the existing Druitt Hall, a small community facility intended for demolition once the new Community Centre development has been completed. There are no other buildings in the gardens.

b. Study Area

The study area includes the main body of the gardens, the site for the new Community Centre and the extension of The Creedy outside the gardens up to Wick Lane. It also includes the library gardens and the access from the High Street. Although these areas are not owned by Christchurch Borough Council they have significance for the future success of the gardens project.

c. Description



The gardens consist of a mature mixed woodland dominated by Holm Oaks and Sycamores. There are small areas of open grass but the overriding impression is of large mature trees and heavy shade. The site is

laced with a network of both tarmac and mud footpaths. The site also contains a number of archaeological features which are protected as part of a Scheduled Ancient Monument.

d. History of the gardens

The site was once the gardens to the Druitt family house which is now Christchurch Library. The house and gardens were gifted to Christchurch by Miss Charlotte Druitt in 1946. The family intention was that the house and gardens should be used for the community, the house for a library and reading room, and the grounds as a “garden of rest and bird sanctuary”. Dorset County Council who took over responsibility for the gardens in 1974, sold them to Christchurch Borough Council in 2006. The gardens have been largely unmanaged for the last 50 years.

e. Planning and Legal Designations

Druitt Gardens are covered by several planning and legal constraints.

- The Local Plan allocates the site as Public Open Space, and places it within the Central Conservation Area.
- Part of the site is a Scheduled Ancient Monument. (*See Appendix A - Bournemouth University, Desk-based Archaeological Assessment.*)
- There are listed walls both within and on the boundaries of the site. (*See Appendix B for details*)
- The Creedy is an ancient footpath and Definitive Right of Way with a bylaw restriction on cycling.

3. LANDSCAPE MASTERPLAN AIMS

- a. In 2005, two documents highlighted the plight of Druitt Gardens. In the intervening years up to 2008 there have been some minor improvements to the condition of the gardens, but substantially the situation remains as stated below.

The “Town Centre Strategy” document stated:

“Druitt Gardens ... is an environment with many lurking spaces. It is becoming a no-go area at night and an area that is increasingly avoided at certain times of the day”.

However, the document also identified the potential of Druitt Gardens as a centre piece for the town centre, as a setting for the commercial, cultural and community activities around it, and as a pleasant site for important pedestrian links across the town.

- b. The “Borough-wide Character Assessment” stated:

“Druitt Gardens has not been effectively managed over the past 50 years. Stands of over-mature Holm Oaks, some dead, dying and dangerous, together with thick unkempt ground cover and poorly maintained footpaths characterise the woodland. Paths and desire-lines are blocked by fallen branches. Visibility along paths and around the Gardens is generally poor reinforcing the “hostile” nature of the place.”

- c. In such condition and with a negative public perception, the present state of Druitt Gardens cannot fully satisfy Charlotte Druitt’s desire for the gardens to be a garden of rest and a bird sanctuary.
- d. On a positive note, the draft Management Plan for the gardens identifies detailed management objectives to improve the biodiversity of the woodland and to encourage people to re-connect with the gardens.
- e. Therefore, the aims for the refurbishment of Druitt Gardens are:
To create a town centre woodland with enhanced wildlife value; a landscape and visual asset to the character of the Central Conservation Area and town centre; and a valuable element in the pedestrian links throughout the town centre.

4. CONSTRAINTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Knowing and understanding the existing constraints and opportunities within Druitt Gardens, is vital to being able to formulate objectives which will fulfil the aims.

a. Trees

The most significant features of Druitt Gardens are the trees. They dominate the experience when you are in the gardens and they create a visual backcloth to the car parks and the areas at the rear of the High Street.

Approximately 300 trees exist in Druitt Gardens. A Tree Survey has been undertaken by Scott Tree Services Ltd which is appended to this report. (See *Appendix C*). The survey shows a mixed, mature, woodland of predominantly Sycamore and Holm Oak with lesser numbers of Ash, Holly, Horse Chestnut, Lime, Sweet Chestnut, Oak, some fruit trees and Hawthorn and one or two Yew, Alder, Hornbeam, Norway Maple, Dogwood, Bay and Elder.

The survey shows that there are 65 trees, including trees on the proposed Community Centre site, that are dead, dying or have major defects reducing their future life. The Arboriculturalist recommends that these trees are removed.

The remaining trees in the gardens range from 17 high quality and high value trees, 78 moderate quality and value trees and 118 low quality and value trees. Quality and value relate to health, future potential and visual contribution to the wider landscape.

The categorisation of the trees indicates that many trees in the woodland are not in prime condition. There are many individual trees which have little future potential either because they are old or they are being suppressed by other trees. However, the survey does indicate where tree surgery could raise the quality and value of some individual trees which are to be retained. The removal of some trees will result in the creation of light open spaces where young replacement trees can be planted. Without improved light, young trees

cannot thrive and contribute to the future woodland. It also provides the opportunity to replace the existing trees with native species which are more valuable to a healthy woodland.

b. Ecology

The value of the gardens for wildlife relates not only to the quality of the trees, but also to the habitats which can be supported by the trees and the areas underneath them. Native trees such as Oak, Ash, Lime, Alder, Hornbeam and Hawthorn support a greater number of insects, which in turn attract birds, than introduced species such as Sycamore and Holm Oak. In addition, Holm Oak in particular, cast deep shade which prevents smaller plants from growing underneath. A stronger and more diverse understorey would add to the future biodiversity of the gardens.

An ecological appraisal of the present gardens was undertaken by Dorset Environmental Records Centre in June 2008. (See Appendix D) This identifies problems with deep shade and a lack of diversity in the areas under the trees. It agrees with some tree removal but also suggests that some old, “veteran”, trees are retained or tall stumps are left because they provide such good habitats for birds and insects.

The trees and brambles in Druitt Gardens are good for nesting birds and the report suggests that if brambles are removed in some areas that they should be replaced in other areas.

The gardens are a known site for two protected species, Bats and Stag Beetles. Bats like open areas within woodlands to feed and Stag Beetles need the old tree stumps to thrive. The proposals will need to take these requirements into account both at masterplan and detailed design level.

The ecology report also identifies the real opportunities to increase the ecological value of Druitt Gardens through sensitive management of trees, understorey and grass areas.

c. Spatial Analysis and Boundaries

The trees have a particularly significant impact on the variety of spaces in Druitt Gardens.

These are the experiences gained from inside the site.



Figure 2 - Spatial Analysis and Boundaries

There are 4 spatial experiences :



- Open grass spaces - light sunny welcoming.
Limited in size.



- Heavily shaded linear spaces with footpaths running through
dark, gloomy, tunnel like.



- Heavily shaded grassland spaces - functionless, gloomy



- Mature trees with some understorey - impenetrable mass in contrast to space.

Boundaries contribute to the perception and understanding of the site from outside, as well as inside.



Boundaries are strong along The Creedy and the boundary with Wick Lane car park where a mature Privet hedge defines the site. The boundary is positive and clearly defines the gardens.

However, the boundary is much weaker on Sopers Lane and the boundary with Bank Close car park where it consists of an old chestnut pale fence and sections of fallen stone wall. The boundary is poorly defined and the poor quality adds to the unloved character of the site.



The same problem occurs on the north east boundary where the gardens meet the rear of the High Street properties with a poor chainlink fence along the boundary with the library garden, and a heavy canopy of trees.

d. Access and Circulation

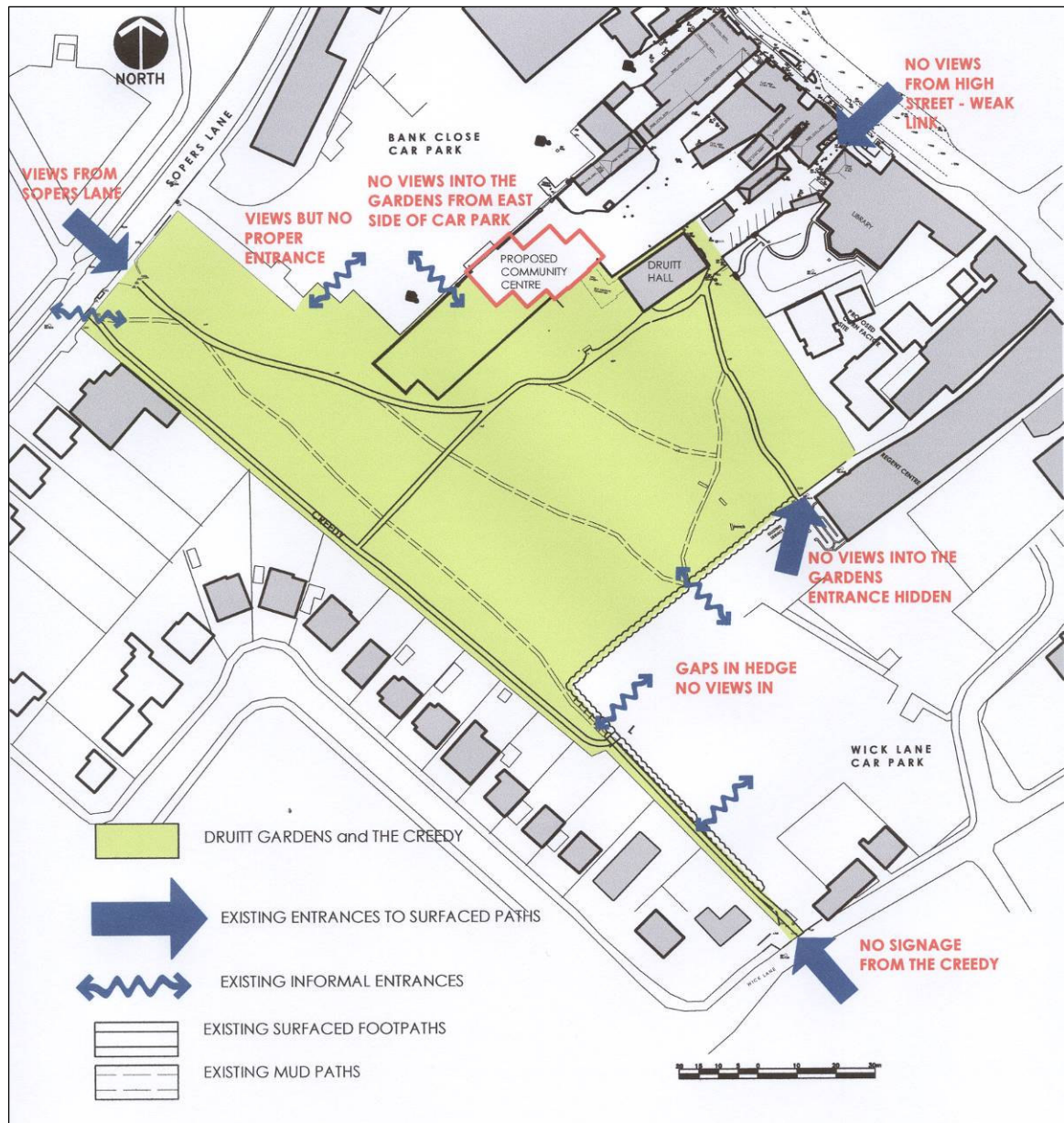


Figure 3 - Access, Circulation, Connectivity

There are many points of access to Druitt Gardens, from each end of The Creedy, from Sopers Lane, from both car parks, and from the High Street.

But, only the Soper's Lane entrance is obvious from outside the gardens and gives any indication of the nature of the space within.

All the other access points require the visitor to take a leap of faith into an unknown experience. There is no signage to announce Druitt Gardens at the access points and no directional signage to tell you where you can get to if you enter the unknown. As a result the gardens are unwelcoming and intimidating to those who are unfamiliar with the town or the gardens themselves.

Druitt Gardens is laced with an unstructured network of tarmac and mud footpaths. The tarmac paths have been created on the main desire lines linking Sopers Lane with the High Street and the High Street with Wick Lane car park. However, the mud paths pick up on incidental access points into the gardens, divide and weaken the woodland mass and reduce the wildlife value through disturbance of potentially quiet and tranquil areas.

The Creedy is a separate entity running along the southwest boundary of the site. It is a definitive right of way with a by-law prohibiting cycling. The Creedy is a narrow footpath of natural stone crazy paving, forming a direct and historic link between Sopers Lane and Wick Lane. The path is well used, particularly by parents delivering and picking up children at the Primary School on Wick Lane.

It is separated from the gardens by the mass of woodland and mature trees, with only a little used tarmac path link into the gardens proper, about half way along its length. It would appear that The Creedy does not need a strong link with the gardens to fulfil its function.

e. Views and Connectivity

Views and connectivity are perhaps the weakest elements of the existing Druitt Gardens. In particular, the gardens have a poor visual and physical connection with Christchurch town centre because they cannot be seen from the High Street.



Druitt Hall completely blocks any potential views of the gardens and the alley way leading past the library is narrow and cluttered with cars and small buildings. It is not clear whether the space is public or private, or whether it leads anywhere beyond Druitt Hall.

The mature trees within the gardens can be seen from both Wick Lane and Bank Close car parks.



But the neglected state of the woodland adjoining Bank Close and the lack of official entrances makes the gardens' accessibility unclear.

A similar situation occurs in Wick Lane car park where the single official entrance is hidden behind the Regent Centre and the dark interior is unwelcoming.



Sopers Lane gives the best views into the gardens from the wide, open boundary. Unfortunately, the view itself of rather sterile grass, heavily shaded by trees, with a footpath leading around a dark corner, and in consequence, does not invite the unfamiliar visitor.

Lack of signage at any of the entrances leads to uncertainty. Is it public or private? Is it safe? Where does it lead? Why should I go there?

f. Facilities



Facilities within the site are minimal. The lighting is a very limited scattering of lamp posts along the main footpaths. Seating is limited to three benches in the open grass area and one behind Druitt Hall.

There is one dog bin near Sopers Lane entrance but no litter bins. The facilities offer very little to the visitor and their additional poor quality adds to the uninviting character.

g. Archaeology

(Refer to Appendix A)

Part of Druitt Gardens sits within the boundaries of a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM No. 831) following the discovery of possible Saxon “burh” related features. The “burh” was a defensive structure which defined the Saxon settlement. The Scheduled Ancient Monument status means that any works in that part of the gardens will require consent from English Heritage.

Elsewhere, there is evidence of a Medieval Ditch and there are listed walls both inside and on the boundaries of the site. Details can be found in Appendix B. Bournemouth University who have undertaken the desk based archaeological assessment have stated that the site will require further evaluation through a geophysical investigation and that any excavations or root removal will require an archaeological watching brief.

As an undeveloped site, Druitt Gardens represents a rare opportunity to preserve the archaeology of early Christchurch. The refurbishment of the gardens offers a further opportunity to provide imaginative interpretation of that archaeology which will add value to the experience of any visitor.

5. THE LANDSCAPE MASTERPLAN

(See Appendix E - Landscape Master plan drawing ID374.03F)

The constraints and opportunities have been interpreted to see how the aims for Druitt Gardens can be achieved. The result is a set of objectives for all aspects of the gardens which are illustrated on the Masterplan drawing.

OBJECTIVES:

a. **Habitat management to improve the biodiversity of the gardens to benefit flora and fauna.** To create Charlotte Druitt's "bird sanctuary" and much more.

- Removal of some trees to allow for replanting with native species of trees and shrubs. Native trees such as Oak, Ash, Lime, and Field Maple - approximately 86no new trees planted between 4.5 and 6m high and 750no further new trees planted at 60-80cm high.
- Native shrubs to form an understorey to the trees or as areas of pure scrub such as Hawthorn, Hazel, Blackthorn and Bramble - approximately 2600no native shrubs.
- Retention of some veteran trees with tree surgery to make them safe, or felling but leaving wildlife friendly tall stumps and fallen timber.
- Fencing the woodland areas for a temporary period of perhaps 5 years to allow the new planting to establish and the woodland to regenerate over the mud paths.
- Crown lifting some of the trees which stand in grass to allow more light to the ground. This will encourage species rich grass, bulbs and groundflora and increase the areas of grassland habitat.
- Changing the mowing regime to allow the grass to grow longer and when cut the cuttings to be removed. This will gradually reduce the fertility of the soil which is beneficial for the development of wildflowers in grass.
- Add to existing hedges or plant new mixed native hedges of Hawthorn, Blackthorn and Hazel and Holly. This will provide useful additional sites for nesting birds and other wildlife.

b. Vegetation management to add variety to the spatial experiences for people in the gardens.

- Variety increases the attractiveness of the gardens and encourages more people to use them.
- Achieved through the habitat management techniques above. Rather than an all over dark shaded experience, the woodland will become a stronger visual feature, the sunny grass areas will be increased and given vitality, the hedges will define the spaces better.

c. Vegetation management and lighting to bring openness and light to create a sense of wellbeing and safety to the gardens experience.

- Vegetation changes achieved through the habitat management techniques above. Plus some further tree removal to open up very dark corners, particularly along the footpaths.
- Bollard lighting to all the footpaths including The Creedy. The lighting will be sufficient to give a sense of wellbeing to those walking through the gardens, but not intrusive for neighbouring properties or wildlife.
- Feature lighting around focal points on the paths which will clearly identify the next stage of the footpath and reduce uncertainty about the route.
- Entrance lighting to identify access points and make the gardens more welcoming.

d. Rationalisation of existing footpaths and desire lines to maximise undisturbed areas for wildlife. This will also add structure and reduce uncertainty about the purpose and access to different areas.

- Circulation surveys identified the most used footpaths. These have been retained whilst the lesser used paths will be removed or allowed to grow over in the fenced woodland areas.

e. Upgrading of the retained footpaths to provide high quality pedestrian access through the gardens and controlled cycle facilities.

- The retained footpaths will be upgraded with an attractive resin bound gravel finish to a tarmac base. The main routes will be 2.5m wide to create a shared surface for both pedestrians and cyclists. This will be formed on the link from Sopers Lane to the High Street.
- The Creedy will also be resurfaced but not widened and cycling will remain prohibited. Drainage and localised flooding problems will be, if possible, mitigated through the reconstruction of The Creedy.

f. Improved connectivity through rationalisation of the existing entrances and enhancement of those retained.

- Some incidental gaps in the boundaries with the car parks will be blocked up.
- Other incidental gaps will be enlarged and made into proper new entrances.
- The two entrances on Sopers Lane will be rationalised into one and the new entrance located more logically to fit with a new road crossing.
- The existing entrance off Wick Lane car park will be moved to a more visible location which also gives wonderful views to the Priory Church, from just within the gardens.
- The new Community Centre offers opportunities to provide an accessible ramped access into the gardens from the Bank Close car park together with access to a new viewing area at the top of the listed retaining wall on site.
- The Creedy entrance at Wick Lane will also be enhanced.
- The main entrance way from the High Street is owned by Dorset County Council. Any proposals to improve the connection between Druitt Gardens and the High Street would have to be agreed with the County Council. The alley way should become pedestrianised. This would then provide an opportunity to erect a gateway feature on the High Street, and put in place some directional high quality paving and lighting to draw visitors into the site. The removal of the

existing Druitt Hall will also improve views into the gardens, which are presently completely blocked. The site of Druitt Hall is the perfect location for a large piece of public art which announces the gardens from outside the site. The piece would have to be at least 5m high to reach views from the High Street and themed on the character and “feel” of Druitt Gardens.

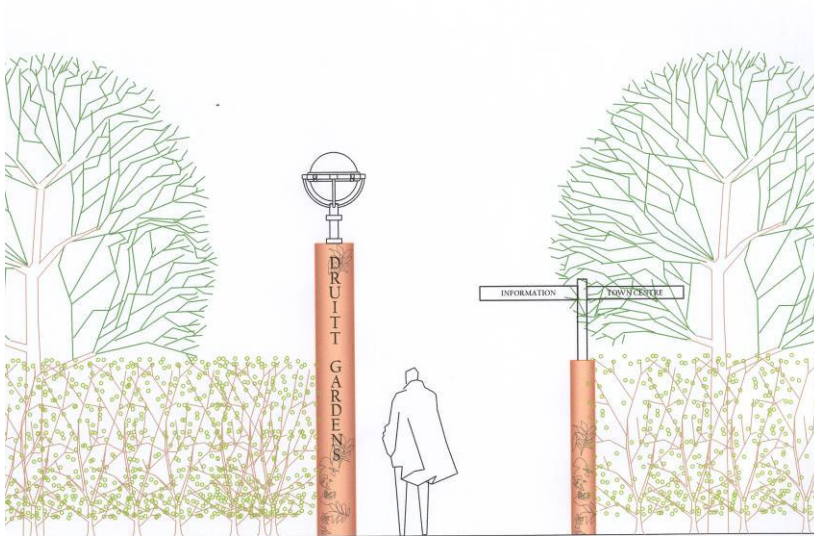
- Entrances will be announced with gateway features and lighting. Each entrance is different in width and importance but a theme representing the name and “feel” of Druitt Gardens could be used throughout.
- Signage is also essential to improve connectivity. Each entrance will incorporate directional signage to provide that vital encouragement for people to enter the site knowing where they are and where they can get to from the gardens.

g. Street furniture, focal points, interpretation and artwork to encourage the gardens to be seen as both a recreational destination and an attractive link to other places.

- To become a destination the gardens need to include reasons for people to stop. This will come predominantly from the improvements to the vegetation and spaces, which will be much more inviting. However, other features add to the interest. There will be information in the form of interpretation of the archaeology and ecology. The lines of both the Saxon “burh” and the Medieval boundary can be identified and information boards erected at suitable accessible places. There will be pieces of public art at focal points. And, there will be more and better seating areas located in sunny attractive locations.

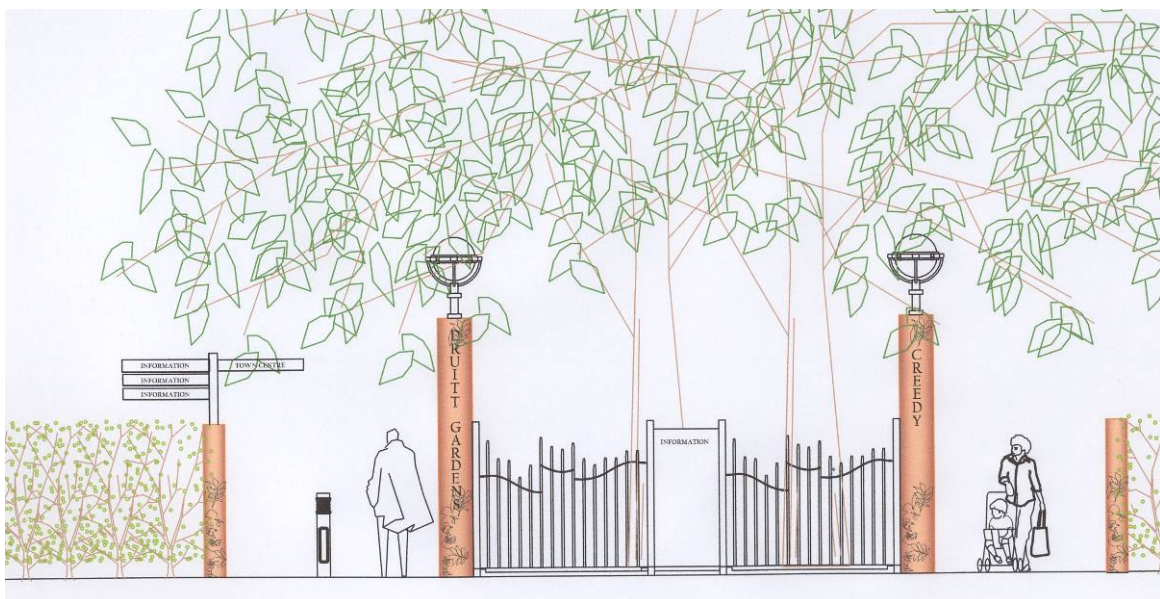
THEMED DESIGN IDEAS

Gateways



Concept design for large gateway features constructed from Timber and Steel. The idea can be used at each entrance.

Sandblasting the timber can create decoration and interpretation. Entrance lighting at high level and bollard lighting along footpaths.



Sopers Lane entrance ideas. Information and direction.

Public Art



Art from natural materials.

Art as interpretation.

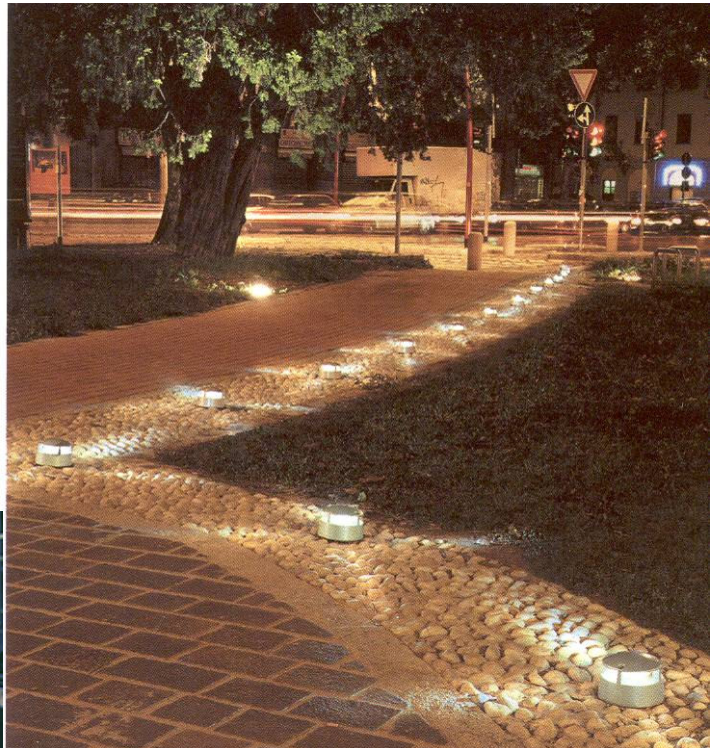
Art to create focal points and seating areas. Art with light. Art with stature.

Light



Lighting as fun

Subtle lighting to paths.



Lighting to give direction and focus



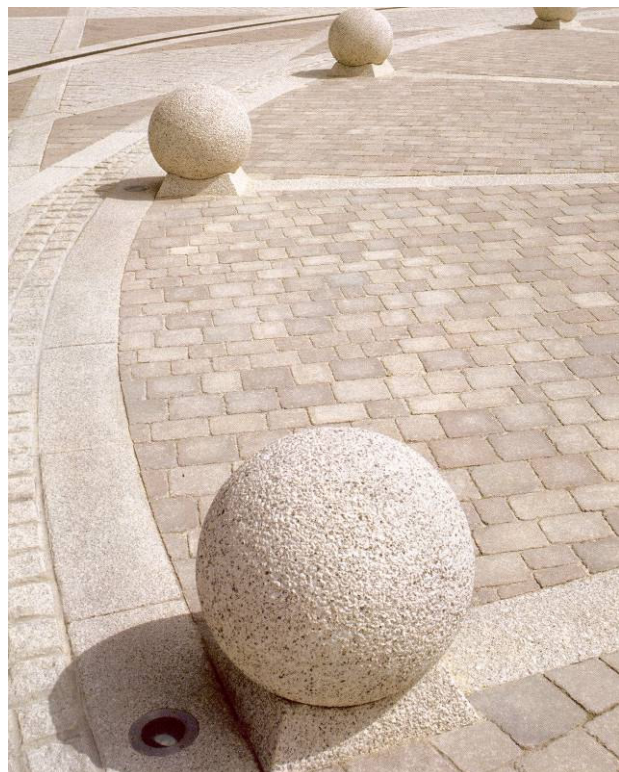
Robust, interesting and informative interpretation for both the wildlife and the archaeology.

Subtle finish to paving surfaces

Furniture



Co-ordinated street furniture - seats, bins, signs. Modern, robust, simple to maintain. Middle armrests can be added to prevent people lying on the seats.



Directional signage



High quality paving at entrances and focal points.

The Woodland

Upgrading Druitt Gardens is fundamentally about improving an unique town centre woodland. Improved footpaths, lighting and signage are only part of the story. They will provide an attractive and functional structure to the gardens which will be combined with long term improvements to the health of the woodland to secure its future for generations to come.



The landscape management will involve large areas of planting to develop the woodland so that it is richer in species and contains more valuable habitats.

Areas of sterile shade will be given light to encourage a wide variety of plants below.



Grass areas will be expanded and planted with native bulbs. Fallen timber will be retained as habitats for insects and small mammals.

CONCLUSION

The landscape masterplan proposals add up to the potential for a comprehensive refurbishment of Druitt Gardens. They acknowledge its unique qualities as a town centre woodland, an important network of linking footpaths and the value of its historic past.

Following the public consultation, the agreed Masterplan will become a detailed design with implementation commencing following the bird breeding season in Autumn 2009.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX - A

Desk-based Archaeological Assessment
Bournemouth University, 2008.

APPENDIX - B

HER Listed features

APPENDIX - C

Tree Survey - Scott Tree Services Ltd, 2008.

Hilary Martin-Integrated Design drawing ID374.04 - Existing Trees and Hard Landscape
Proposals. Sept 2008.

APPENDIX - D

An Ecological Appraisal of Druitt Gardens - Bryan Edwards, Dorset Environmental Records Centre, June 2008.

APPENDIX - E

Landscape Masterplan drawing ID374.03F

Hilary Martin-Integrated Design, November 2008