

## APPENDIX IV

### DRUITT GARDENS – A TOWN CENTRE WOODLAND DRAFT MANAGEMENT PLAN

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<b>Location:</b>	SZ 926157	<b>Area:</b>	1.5 hectares (3 acres)
<b>Main Habitats:</b>	Mixed Woodland Scrub Grassland Scheduled Ancient Monument Town Conservation Area	<b>Status:</b>	Public Open Space (POS)
<b>Description</b>	Druitt Gardens is a 1.2 hectare (3 acre) amenity woodland situated on the northwest side of Christchurch Town Centre to the rear of Christchurch (Druitt) Library and premises fronting the High Street. It is a mature mixed woodland dominated by the non native Holm Oak <i>Quercus ilex</i> and Sycamore <i>Acer pseudoplatanus</i> together with English Oak <i>Quercus sp</i> , Ash <i>Fraxinus excelsior</i> , Sweet Chestnut <i>Castanea sativa</i> , Horse Chestnut <i>Aesculus hippocastanum</i> , Hawthorn <i>Crataegus monogyna</i> , Hazel <i>Corylus avellana</i> . The shrub layer is dominated by Bramble <i>Rubus fruticosus</i> . The woodland contains a number of archaeological features which are together protected as a Scheduled Ancient Monument. Footpaths and desire lines provide links with the surrounding area to different parts of the town centre. These links also serve different areas within the wood itself		
<b>Key features</b>	Mixed Woodland Key Species (Stag Beetles, other?) Archaeology Site boundaries Access Adjacent Land		
<b>Legal Constraints</b>	Freehold ownership Public Open Space Terms and conditions laid out in the covenant from Miss Charlotte Druitt CBC responsibility for boundary fencing, particularly alongside public road and car parks Definitive Right of Way (The Creedy) Scheduled Ancient Monument Stag Beetle (priority BAP species) Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 Conservation Area Listed buildings and walls		

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**Previous Land Use** The land was bequeathed to Hampshire County Council in 1946 by Miss Charlotte Druitt with the aim that the gardens be used as “a garden of rest and a bird sanctuary”. The gardens were subsequently transferred to Dorset County Council following the 1974 local government reorganisation.

Christchurch Borough Council’s Planning Policy has, over the years, recognised Druitt Gardens as Public Open Space and, in 1995, the Christchurch Town Centre Local Plan designated the land as such (Policy RT8). The plan also included the woodland within an area proposed for a mix of land uses including shopping, residential, public open space, community facilities and car parking (Policy SH2). The Plan made it clear that the woodland was not under threat from development.

**Existing State** Poorly perceived by the public. Various described as: unfriendly and untidy, municipal, and neglected. The area is shaded by tired old trees, contains inappropriate and poorly maintained street furniture while archaeological features remain an unused asset. Druitt Woodland is perceived as unsafe, unpleasant, undesirable, a thoroughfare rather than a destination.

The boundary fencing is in poor condition and the entrances, which give the visitors their first impression of the site, are untidy and cluttered with unsightly signage, bollards and litter bins. The standard of lighting is perceived as inappropriate and inadequate.

The woodland itself is poorly managed: on the one hand, the trees have been neglected and under managed and, on the other hand, grassland and recreational open space is sterile, municipal and over managed.

The woodland is dominated by two non native and invasive species: Holm Oak and Sycamore. These species have a low wildlife value compared to native trees. They prevent sufficient light from penetrating to the shrub and field layers and inhibit flowering and the regeneration of native species. The Holm Oak, although evergreen, continuously sheds its leaves which, being sterile, has a particularly detrimental effect on the ground flora. As a result, the shrub and field layers are in poor condition and are dominated by plants such as bramble.

The mowing regime has resulted in sterile pockets of amenity grassland rather than the potential for woodland glades and wildlife friendly picnic areas that would be so much more welcoming and interesting for the visitor and wildlife alike.

The close-mown and compacted municipal grassland has little value for wildlife. Consequently, the open spaces are uninteresting and unwelcoming for people. Instead of creating a gradual ecotone between the formal and informal parts of the woodland, the current management of the gardens has created harsh and artificial delineation between public and wildlife areas.

### Management Objectives

1. To develop and manage Druitt Gardens as a well structured native broad leaved woodland where it is comprised and dominated by native species, such as Pendunculate Oak, with a rotationally coppiced understorey dominated by native species such as Hazel, Hawthorn, and ground flora/herb layer typical of a bluebell wood.
2. To maintain the woodland in a favourable condition where:-

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- the extent of the gardens is 1.5 hectares
  - the composition of the canopy represents a range of local native trees and shrub species
  - the age range of trees and shrubs is uneven
  - non native species make up no more than x% of the canopy and shrub layer
  - conditions for target species such as Stag Beetle as well as the range of common and other wildlife species are maintained and improved
3. To protect and enhance the wildlife value and, in particular, scarce and declining species such as bats, stag beetles and other invertebrates.
  4. To restore and retain boundary and other selected areas of scrub and woodland edge plants where they are comprised of mixed native species of varied age structure. Where necessary, reduce the overall burden of scrub to favour increased areas of open grassland habitat.
  5. To preserve and restore historical features and protect existing and hidden archaeology.
  6. To halt damaging traditional horticultural practices that conflict with the improved management of the open spaces of the wood whereby grass is no longer cut beneath trees but instead managed as woodland glades to sustain woodland wildflowers such as daisies, bluebells, primrose, dog violet, lesser celandine, snow drops and wild daffodils, etc.
  7. To retain standing and dead fallen wood wherever possible for the provision of invertebrates (in particular the stag beetle BAP species), fungi, nesting and roosting birds and bats.
  8. To retain pockets of the woodland that are free of public disturbance where more timid creatures such as wood mice, slow worms etc. can survive
  9. To provide safe and managed public access, to manage public pressure in order to limit damaging activities through suitable provision and maintenance of infrastructure (such as appropriate woodland seating, 'nature reserve' style signage, footpaths, fences etc.)
  10. To implement access for all policies in relation to above infrastructure
  11. To initiate regular patrolling and wardening to protect and enhance the wildlife value, character and landscape quality of the site
  12. To renew people's familiarity with Druitt Gardens, its local history and common wildlife through sensitively placed interpretative signage, community involvement and community action. To encourage and foster pride and respect for Druitt Gardens within the local community and promote an understanding of its historical and nature conservation value
  13. To provide occasional guided walks and other events for the public and specialist groups and to promote healthy attitudes towards the wider environment through community action
  14. To create and develop more opportunities for people to enjoy the woodland, through partnerships related to nature conservation, appreciating the environment, arts, education, health, tourism;

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15. To consider the creation of an a wild space 'outdoor performance area' to better link the environment of the woodland to local arts and cultural identity of the town
16. To liaise with neighbouring landowners to promote the sympathetic management of adjoining habitats, car parks, gardens, verges and wildlife corridors
17. To carry out habitat and key species monitoring

### **Proposed Actions**

1. Site safety inspection
2. Comprehensive habitat survey
3. Comprehensive archaeological survey
4. Compile full management plan, to include:-
  - identify the all key features of the site
  - embrace all the interests (wildlife, landscape, historical, local community, etc.)
  - identify directions of change from existing state through proposed management to desired state
  - protect key features (target species, fragile archaeology, etc.)
  - portray vision in pictures as well as in words
  - provide a schedule of works
  - identify funding sources
5. Establishment of community links
  - short term: public meeting to explain potential and aims of the management plan and conservation importance and establishment of steering group/reserves committee/advisory panel
  - longer term: voluntary wardening scheme, 'friends of' group, links with local school, library, arts/culture providers
6. Restoration of the habitat
7. Interpretation of key features (natural history, history)
8. Establish events and activities