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Introduction

The Town Centre Strategy identifies Druitt Gardens and its environs as an opportunity to create a cultural focus for the town. It suggests that a Planning Brief be prepared for the area including a reconsideration of the proposed Lanes development and how this could be used to support the new cultural emphasis being recommended for this part of the town (see *Action Plans 4, 7 and 8, Town Centre Strategy*).

Furthermore, the Strategy identifies the redevelopment / townscape-mending opportunities offered by such sites as the Post Office site and the Wick Lane and Bank Close car parks, i.e. can these areas be used more effectively to increase parking capacity in the town. While this is to be considered separately through a Parking, Access and Signage Strategy and the redevelopment of the Post Office site is likely to be a longer-term ambition, it is considered necessary to prepare a development framework for the remainder of the area to:-

1. Indicate and consult upon the Council's proposals for improving and managing Druitt Gardens as a town centre woodland.
2. Indicate and consult upon the Council's proposals for creating an outdoor performance area within the Gardens.
3. Indicate and consult upon the Council's proposals for creating better pedestrian linkages through and around the Gardens.
4. Provide a framework for the development of The Lanes, the Cornfactor site and the Library and to provide incentives for development, ensuring that proposals conform to local planning and other policies while meeting the needs and aspirations of residents.
5. Provide a framework within which improvement to Druitt Gardens and development of The Lanes, the Cornfactor site and the Library, can proceed without prejudicing other longer-term redevelopment opportunities within and around the area.

In order to elaborate, the following is a quote from the Leader, Councillor Alan Griffiths, when he addressed Council on the 22 July 04 ...

"The main objective of this document will be to take forward those aspects of the Town Centre Strategy centred upon establishing and maintaining the Gardens as the celebrated centre-piece of the town. The Garden with its direct relationship to the Library and the Regent Centre, offer the opportunity to create a cultural centre for the town ... This proposal was warmly welcomed when the Town Centre Strategy went out to public consultation last year ... the original bequeath of Miss Druitt ... to establish a Museum, Library and Art Gallery in Christchurch was to improve the cultural facilities of the town. It is these intentions and this vision that we intend to see succeed ... It is quite evident that the present state of the Gardens bares very little resemblance to what Miss Druitt intended when she made the gift to the County Council in 1946. The gift was made to the County because the primary intention of Miss Druitt was to establish a Library and possibly later, a Welfare Centre for the town; and of course, it was and still is the responsibility of the County to provide these facilities. However, if she could see the Gardens today, I am sure while being pleased by the establishment of the Library and Druitt Hall, Miss Druitt would be disappointed and dismayed by the state of the Gardens themselves. Unfortunately, I am sure most of us can agree that the past and present management arrangements of the Gardens have failed miserably to develop and enhance Miss Druitt's vision ...

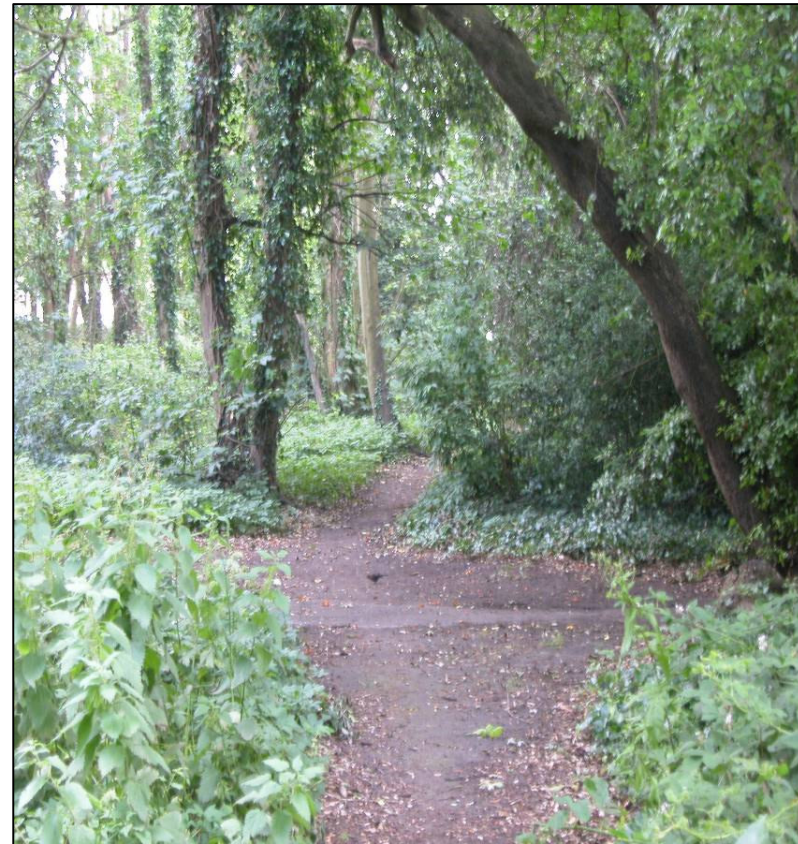
... I can promise ... that the future Gardens will be larger than they are today; they will be more pleasant and safer to walk through, more pleasant to meet friends in and to sit in and chat; they will be better managed to attract wild birds and other fauna; the trees and flora will be better cared for; and furthermore, the Gardens will be kept in public ownership, as Miss Druitt intended, for the enjoyment and benefit of residents and visitors alike, in perpetuity ...

... The framework document presently being prepared will be firmly based on protecting and enhancing the Gardens as a Public Open Space and site of a Scheduled Ancient Monument. The area's designation as part of the town centre conservation area and the sitting / setting of several important adjacent listed buildings, will form the context for the future management and enhancement of the area. The advice of English Heritage is being sought with respect to how best manage the S.A.M. while the advice of the RSPB will be sort with respect to how best the Gardens should be managed to attract wild birds so that Miss Druiitt's intention of establishing a Bird Sanctuary can be realized ...

... Following on ... a detailed management plan will be drawn up, in collaboration with all interested parties and extensively consulted upon, to ensure the Gardens are kept and managed as Miss Druiitt intended. Furthermore, a management advisory board will be established, made up of key interested parties, to steer and oversee future management arrangements and plans. In the longer-term, it is our intention to submit the Gardens for green flag designation ...

... With respect to consultation, I can clearly state that there will be full and proper consultation on our proposals involving the broadest range of stakeholders and interests. The Council has established a robust consultation strategy and methodology and this will be used to consult upon the draft framework presently being prepared. The framework will establish the 'big picture' so that everyone is clear about the totality of what is being proposed".

**Councillor Alan Griffiths, Leader of the Council.
Council meeting, 22 June 2004.**



Pic. 01 Druiitt Gardens: "Under-managed open space with dense stand of over-mature coppiced Holm Oak and mixed ground flora and grass. Random mix of surfaced and un-surfaced mud paths and desire-lines cut through the area. Poor visibility along routes makes the place unattractive and insecure" (Source – Borough Character Assessment.)

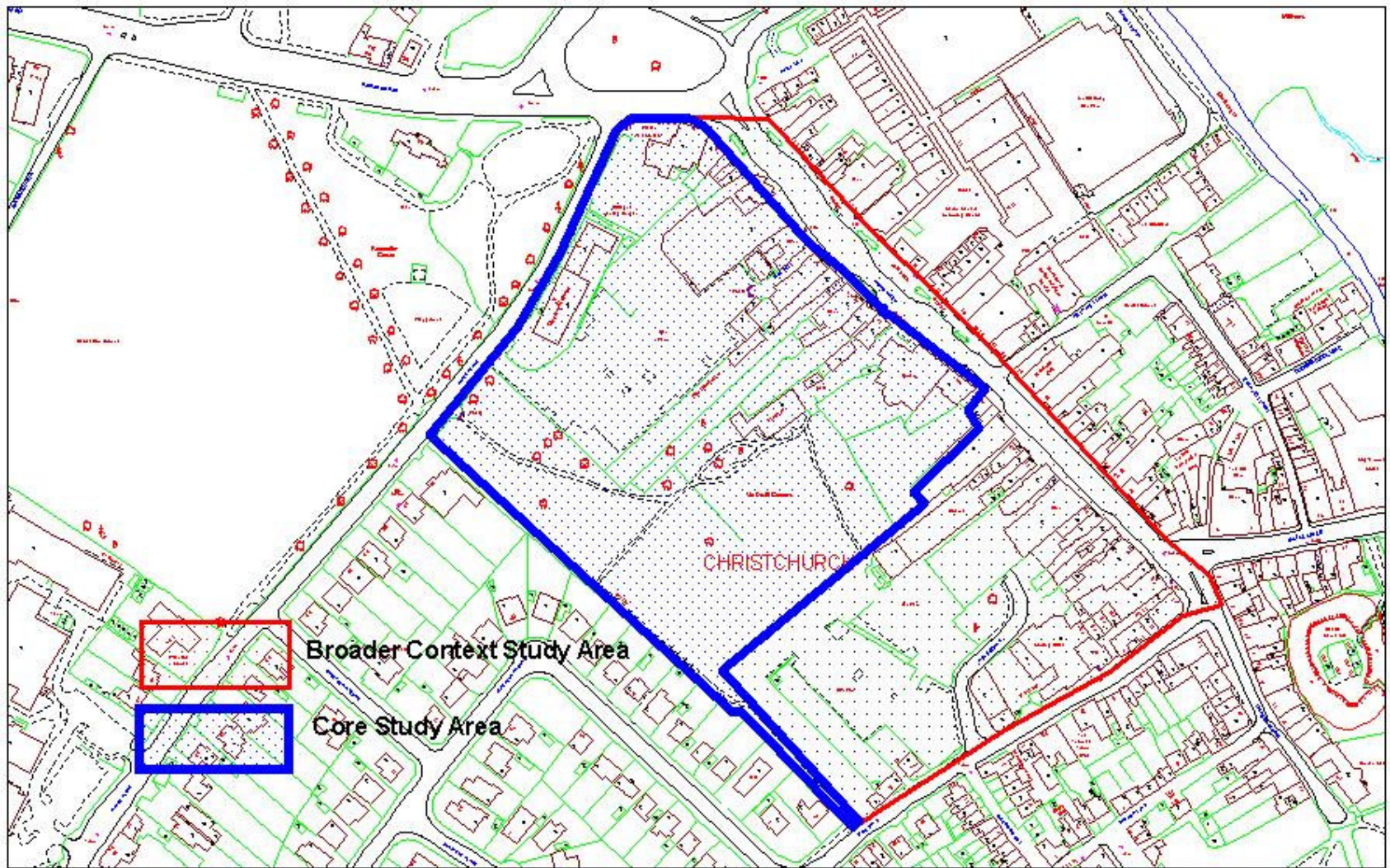


Fig. 01 The Study Area