

# MAIDSTONE GREEN SPACES STRATEGY

improving our parks  
and open spaces

## PARKS AND RECREATION GROUNDS

# MANAGEMENT PLANS

### BRENCHLEY GARDENS

WARD: HIGH STREET

MP 0604

**JULY 2006**



## **CONTENTS:**

- 1. INTRODUCTION**
- 2. RELATIONSHIP TO COUNCIL AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**
- 3. VISION AND OBJECTIVES FOR THE SITE**
- 4. THE SITE AND ITS FACILITIES**
  - 4.1 Boundaries and entrances**
  - 4.2 Roads, paths, cycleways and car parks**
  - 4.3 Lighting**
  - 4.4 Grass areas**
  - 4.5 Trees and other vegetation**
  - 4.6 Biodiversity assessment**
  - 4.7 Provision of seats and bins**
  - 4.8 Signage**
  - 4.9 Provision of recreational and other facilities**
- 5. MANAGEMENT AND MAINTENANCE**
  - 5.1 Cleanliness**
  - 5.2 Safety and security**
  - 5.3 Infrastructure maintenance**
  - 5.4 Horticultural management regimes**
- 6. FORTHCOMING IMPROVEMENTS**
- 7. FUNDING**
- 8. RESULTS OF QUALITY AUDITS**

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The Management Plan for Brenchley Gardens describes the site and outlines the adopted maintenance regime. It also lists the further improvements to the site that will be carried out in the next 10 years or so, using mainly external funding.

Brenchley Gardens are situated between the Maidstone East railway station and the main shopping area of the town centre. To the south they lie adjacent to the Maidstone Museum and Baintliff Gallery, to the building of the Adult Education Centre and to St Faith's church. The site is crossed by popular pedestrian routes, for example one leading from the town centre to the other side of the river Medway, over a footbridge.

The area of the Gardens is about 1.8 hectares with a distinct south-west facing slope falling from a level plateau in the north-east.

Brenchley Gardens is a traditional small urban park with trees of varying ages and species, ornamental shrubberies, rose beds and annual bedding. There is also a Memorial and a Bandstand. It is a place for socialising or quiet relaxation, and a venue for events like open air concerts.

The Gardens are an important part of Maidstone's heritage and are strongly linked with the adjacent Maidstone Museum. Until the Victorian times the site of the Gardens was an orchard behind Chillington House within the Manor of Chillington. The Museum, set up in Chillington House, was opened to the public in 1858 and in 1870 Julius Brenchley, a traveller and a collector, purchased the orchard and commissioned a reputable landscape designer Alexander McKenzie to draw plans for a public park. The park was opened in 1872, the first public park in Maidstone.

It had a bandstand. Later other features were added (and some removed): a small lily pond and a rockery, a statue of Daphne and Apollo, a drinking fountain, a war memorial, a finial from the House of Commons, a greenhouse, toilets.

During the last war the main entrance, an imposing gatehouse by the Museum, was destroyed by a German bomb and wrought iron fence along Station Road was removed and melted down to help the war effort.

Currently, a three storey apartment block is being constructed west of the Gardens. The residents will have direct access to the Gardens through three entrances along the boundary. Behind the northern boundary the East Station is due to undergo extensive development in the near future.

In 1999 Land Use Consultants produced a Conservation Plan for Brenchley Gardens. It contains information on the site's history, the present condition and uses, and has suggestions for improvements.

The Plan needs to be updated in view of the development work nearby, as the work will affect the site in many ways. Once updated, the Council will be able to use the Plan in a bid for the Heritage Lottery funding needed to restore the Gardens and to help them fit better into their new surroundings.

## **2. RELATIONSHIP TO COUNCIL AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

There are a number of Council strategy and policy documents that are relevant to Brenchley Gardens:

- Green Spaces Strategy (2005)
- “Play for Today” Towards a Strategy for Outdoor Equipped Play Areas 2004-08 (2005)
- Sports and Play Facilities Strategy (2003)
- Maidstone Matters: Community Strategy for Maidstone Borough (2003)
- Best Value Review: A Clean and Tidy Borough (2002)
- The Local Cultural Strategy for Maidstone
- The Landscape Character Assessment and Landscape Guidance (2005)

Those documents recognise that public green open spaces are an important part of the environment in which we live. The quality and quantity of those open spaces have an effect on our quality of life. They are valuable and free resources for recreation and education. There is need in Maidstone to further improve the access, infrastructure, facilities and the biodiversity of public green spaces. The Green Spaces Strategy (2005) has set the way forward with a plan of improvements for years 2005-10.

## **3. VISION AND OBJECTIVES FOR THE SITE**

### **3.1 The overall vision for Brenchley Gardens is:**

**“To create and maintain a public green space which provides opportunities for outdoor contemplation, recreation and education, in keeping with its town centre location, its size and its heritage value.”**

### **3.2 The key objectives for the Gardens are to:**

- Provide an interesting landscape feature for this part of Maidstone.
- Interpret the history and the heritage value of the site through careful design, good signage, literature and publicity.
- Ensure that the site is clean and well-maintained.
- Ensure that it is safe to use at all times.
- Develop and maintain links with the local stakeholders in order to consult on the management and maintenance of the site.

## **4. THE SITE AND ITS FACILITIES**

### **4.1 Entrances and boundaries**

The Gardens have clearly defined boundaries. To the north and south there are ragstone walls, which give the air of permanence and solidity. To the east along Station Road only the brick retaining wall remains as the iron fencing, that used to run along its top, has been removed.

There are four public entrances into the Gardens, all without gates. The entrance by the side of the Museum is also a vehicle entrance, for authorised personnel only. These are the grounds maintenance contractor, staff of the Museum and of the Adult Education Centre and a dustcart. Unfortunately this also enables unauthorised vehicles to enter the grounds and to park on the wide drive by the Museum.

### **4.2 Roads, paths, cycleways and car parks**

Authorised vehicles can access the Gardens off St Faith's Street, where there is a wide tarmac drive.

The Gardens have a network of paths: a peripheral one and several paths criss-crossing the site, all curved in outline and mostly following the original McKenzie's design. The surface is tarmac with concrete edgings. In some places this surface has suffered damage by the dustcart which collects refuse from the Adult Education Centre.

The paths would benefit from bounded gravel surface, resembling the original C.19 one.

There is one short flight of steps in the entrance by the toilets.

There are desire lines across the lawn: one by the Bandstand and another one near the toilets.

For motorised visitors there is parking in the nearby Fremlin Walk and a small number of disabled parking bays in Station Road.

### **4.3 Lighting**

There are several lighting columns that make the Gardens accessible after dark.

### **4.4 Grass areas**

There are several areas of well established lawn, with a couple of unfortunate desire lines.

### **4.5 Trees and other vegetation**

The Gardens contain many trees of varying ages: London plane, lime, robinia, Norway maple, horse chestnut and a few exotics like a large eucalyptus. They form a welcome

oasis of green in the centre of town, close to the main shopping area, important both visually and for their shade and air cooling properties.

A hedge of *Cupressocyparis leylandii* separates the public space from a small Gardeners' Yard in the north-west corner of the site.

Ornamental shrubberies are located along some of the boundaries and in several places in the main part of the Gardens. They consist of a large number of species. Generally, the shrubberies are now over mature and in need of replanting.

There are beds of tea and floribunda roses and annuals are used extensively, planted in beds cut out of the lawn. Thanks to them this is the most colourful of the Maidstone parks.

#### **4.6 Biodiversity assessment**

The mature trees are of considerable biodiversity value, providing food and shelter for a variety of creatures. The hedgerow and the shrubberies provide some hiding places for wildlife, and the ragstone walls provide specific habitats.

#### **4.7 Provision of seats and bins**

There are numerous seats along the paths, of more than one design. In due course they should be replaced with a repro-Victorian design.

There are several litter bins. The 'tulip' bins with open tops allow squirrels to pull litter out and to scatter it on the ground. Some of those bins are not upright as a result of collisions with vehicles. All those bins should be replaced.

There is a number of dog litter bins in the Gardens.

#### **4.8 Signage**

There is an interpretation board about the Gardens by the Museum. There is no other signage in or around the Gardens. This should be remedied with directional signs in the nearby streets and a 'welcome board' or a display case with the Council contact details and byelaws.

#### **4.9 Provision of recreational and other facilities**

The Gardens are an oasis of green calm in the centre of town. As such they contain facilities for socialising and quiet relaxation: seats, clean lawns, tree shade, and attractive views.

There is a toilet block by the north-east entrance, recently (2005) refurbished and containing toilet facilities for the disabled and a baby changing room. On the outside, the building does not look in keeping with the Gardens and gives a poor first impression of the Gardens to visitors.

The Bandstand is an early surviving feature of the Gardens, and a popular attraction. It is in good condition. It is a venue for Sunday afternoon (3-4:30 pm) concerts that take place from end of June till end of August, as well as for other events throughout the year. The concerts are free to the public, but there is a charge of £1 for a hire of a deck chair or garden chair. The chairs are stored in a container placed near the Bandstand for the summer.

There is a War Memorial designed by Edwin Lutyens, constructed of Portland stone and erected between 1920-1936. It is an important focus for Remembrance Day and a meeting spot where people can sit on the steps at its base. It is a Grade II listed feature.

Another stone ornament, The Finial, used to be in a part of the House of Commons destroyed in the Blitz. It was given to Maidstone in 1948 by an MP who represented Maidstone at that time.

Conduit Head from 1891 consists of a stone base within an attractive brick alcove. The iron waterspout has been removed so the water fountain no longer works.

Raised beds have been constructed with dry stone retaining walls, on the site of the former Edwardian lily pond in the 1960/70s. The walls provide additional seating around a fairly enclosed space. The planting consists mainly of shrubs which are past their best. This feature is not working well and provides opportunity for antisocial behaviour, e.g. drug using, and should be totally refurbished or removed.

Another area of raised beds is in the corner by the main entrance. It has a stone and brick built wishing well at the centre crowned with decorative wrought iron work salvaged from the Lower Brewery following its demolition. The well was erected in 1972 by Maidstone Rotary Club.

## **5. MANAGEMENT AND MAINTENANCE**

The Gardens are owned and managed by Maidstone Borough Council.

They are maintained by a grounds contractor (Glendale). There is one permanent member of staff at the site, operating from a depot area in the north-west corner. The depot contains a now defunct greenhouse which the Council would like to re-instate.

### **5.1 Cleanliness**

Litter is collected and litter bins are emptied every day.

Dog litter bins are emptied twice every week.

### **5.2 Safety and security**

The site is fairly secluded but it does not feel unsafe during day time. Some security is provided by the groundsman and by the people using the Gardens or just passing through.

The Gardens are covered by four CCTV cameras.

Visitors can report problems:

- general – to the park's staff or to MBC parks hotline on 01622 602747
- anti-social behaviour – to the park's staff or to Community Safety Officer on 01622 602598
- any crime should be reported to the police.

## **5.2 Maintenance of infrastructure and facilities**

The toilet block and the ragstone walls are maintained by the Property Section of the MBC.

The historic features are the responsibility of.....?

The paths and drives, the lighting columns as well as trees and other planting, are the responsibility of the Parks Section of the MBC.

## **5.4 Horticultural management regimes**

The lawns are maintained to an 'ornamental' specification, i.e. the grass clippings are collected and lawn fertiliser is applied every year.

The lawn clippings are composted in the depot area.

The hedgerow is trimmed every summer.

In the autumn leaves are collected and taken to the depot area to turn into leaf mould.

The trees require special attention with regards to health and safety of visitors. Tree work is done as and when required. MBC has a rolling programme of tree work on the council managed sites. Trees are inspected and work is scheduled according to its priority. Top priority for work are trees which may be dangerous to the public.

The ornamental plantings are weeded regularly. Mulch of leaf mould is used in the rose beds in order to reduce the number of weeds and to reduce moisture loss from the soil.

The annual bedding displays are changed twice a year. The plants are purchased from Grafty Green Garden Centre at a considerable discount, in exchange for displaying the Centre's sponsorship signs.

## **6. FORTHCOMING IMPROVEMENTS**

The council is in the process of obtaining funds for the restoration of the Gardens from the Heritage Lottery Fund. If successful, a large number of repairs and enhancement measures will be carried out. If not successful, a more limited program of repairs will be carried out using other sources of funding. These are medium and long term projects, i.e. for the next ten years or more.

The projects considered (but not officially adopted):

- visually incorporate the new entrances in the western boundary, with appropriate planting,
- redesign the entrance off St Faith's Street in conjunction with an extension to the Museum,
- turn the car park at the back of the Museum into a traditional formal garden,
- refurbish the greenhouse for use by a community group,
- renew the old system of water pipes throughout the site,
- rationalise entrances off Station Road and address the problem of desire lines,
- redesign the outside of the toilet block (or possibly rebuild it so that it looks more in-keeping and provides better facilities),
- remove or refurbish raised beds by St Faith's church,
- repair and resurface the paths with a resin bound gravel finish,
- re-instate metal railing along Station road, secure all boundaries, introduce lockable gates,
- install matching park furniture,
- following detailed survey, remove and plant trees,
- refurbish shrubberies and redesign annual beds following McKenzie's design and plants lists.

## **7. FUNDING**

Apart from the Heritage Lottery Fund (Parks for People), there are a number of sources of funding, both internal and external, for further improvements to the facilities and the maintenance regimes, which can be considered for this site.

Green Spaces Strategy – improvements to the value of £500,000 are being implemented in Maidstone's main green open spaces during 2005-2008.

Planning obligations – Section 106 agreements on new residential developments can generate funds to improve existing public green spaces directly related to those developments.

Awards for All – give grants towards projects aimed at improving quality of life of local communities. Grants of £500-5,000 are available to community groups, parish/town councils, schools and health bodies.

Safer and Stronger Communities government funding stream – is aimed at tackling crime and anti-social behaviour through improving the condition of streets and other public spaces.

Landfill Tax Credit Scheme – for projects within 10 miles of a landfill or extraction site, aimed at provision and maintenance of public amenities. Grants £250- 25,000.

Local Heritage Initiatives – assist local communities in the preservation of their environment, landmarks and traditions, including archaeological, natural, built and

industrial heritage. Projects like an exhibition on the history of the site, or a repair of a feature; funding up to 100% for project costs of £3,000 to £25,000.

English Heritage offers grants for historic parks and gardens.

Private sector funding – for specific projects to be sponsored in exchange for a plaque or local media publicity.

## **9. RESULTS OF QUALITY AUDITS**

Quality audits are carried out in parks and open spaces at regular intervals. Various attributes of each site are given points between 1 and 5, where 5 is the maximum score.

<b>BRENCHLEY GARDENS</b>					
<b>ATTRIBUTE</b>	<b>AUDIT DATE AND SCORE</b>				
	2003	2004	2008	2010	
Main entrance	3	3			
Boundaries including hedges, gates etc	5	5			
Roads, paths, cycleways and access points	5	3			
Parking	1	-			
Availability of public transport	-	-			
Lighting	2	5			
Cleanliness	4	3			
Planted areas (trees, shrubs, floral displays)	4	3			
Grass areas	4	4			
Litter and dog litter bins	5	4			
Seats	5	5			
Toilets	4	-			
Health and safety	-	4			
Nature conservation value	-	-			
Access for disabled	-	3			
Information	2	2			
Sustainability	-	-			