

**MAIDSTONE GREEN SPACES STRATEGY**

improving our parks  
and open spaces

**PARKS AND RECREATION GROUNDS**

**MANAGEMENT PLANS**

**THE RIVERSIDE GARDENS**

**WARDS: HIGH STREET AND FANT**

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The Management Plan for the Riverside Gardens describes the site and outlines the adopted maintenance regime. It also lists the improvements to the site that will be carried out during 2007 and 2008, as part of the process of implementing the Green Spaces Strategy.

For the purpose of this Management Plan, the Riverside Gardens are defined as the area in the ownership of the MBC, although some of it is maintained by tenants.

This area stretches either side of the river Medway, in two narrow bands of amenity land. On the east side of the river it runs from the Amphitheatre to the last pedestrian passage under Fairmeadow. On the west side it covers the open space from David Lloyd Health Club (Lockmeadow) to the River Bar.

A modern pedestrian bridge joins both sides at Lockmeadow.

The Riverside Gardens contain several areas of differing character.

The Heritage Millennium Amphitheatre – an open air stage by the river, with seating and low planting combined, surrounded by a ‘horseshoe’ of attractive shrubbery and trees.

The Rose Garden – a collection of roses funded by public donations, arranged around a rectangle of lawn.

The shrubberies and rose beds by the main Medway bridges – mixture of amenity shrubs, some in raised beds; roses forming part of the Rose Trail running through the Riverside and the Archbishops’ Palace Gardens. This side of the Riverside has public toilets and the mooring place for pleasure boats, as well as a kiosk selling refreshments and tickets for boat trips.

The Lockmeadow side – an amenity area with lawns, shrubberies and trees. It has been made more attractive with the addition of a large statue of The Stag and with the planting of herbaceous perennials which add colour all through the summer.

Footpaths run along both sides of the river. They follow the lines of the old towpaths dating back to the times when Maidstone had a river port. The port was located within the Riverside Gardens area.

A designated long-distance walk: Medway Valley Walk (from Tonbridge to Rochester) also includes these paths.

The Riverside Gardens are a component of the Millenium River Park, a 10 km long linear ‘park’ following the river from Teston Picnic Site to Allington Lock, and created around the year 2000.

The Riverside Gardens also form an integral part of the River Medway Green Corridor.

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

There are a number of Council strategy and policy documents that are relevant to the Riverside 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)

These 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 the Riverside 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 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 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**

There is a variety of boundary treatments and a large number of entrances into the Gardens as a whole. All the entrances are open at all times and the area is a popular shortcut for people walking to and from the town centre using the Lockmeadow Bridge. This has its own problems of undesirable activities taking place, mostly drug using and alcohol drinking, but also occasional sleeping under the stars by homeless people.

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

A single hard footpath runs along the eastern side of the River. The Lockmeadow side has two hard paths: the old towpath and another path further up the river bank by the County Court building. These paths are joined together by two flights of steps and a ramp.

Both sides of the river are joined by a pedestrian bridge known as the Lockmeadow Bridge. It was constructed as part of the Millennium River Park project and was opened in 1999. It has received a Civic trust Award for “an outstanding contribution to the quality and appearance of the environment”.

There is a variety of path surfaces. The paved path by the Courts appears most affected by roots of trees growing close to it and lifting some of the slabs.

There is no easy parking east of the river, but in the Lockmeadow area there is a large pay-and-display car park by the David Lloyd Health Club.

#### **4.3 Lighting**

There is a good lighting scheme that makes the Gardens accessible after dark.

#### **4.4 Grass areas**

There are several relatively small areas of grass within the gardens. The quality of the maintenance varies between the MBC grounds contractor and the various tenants.

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

A line of mature lime trees grows by the river bank in the Amphitheatre and in the Rose Garden. A few more mature trees grow on the opposite bank. A row of medium size London planes separates the Courts from the river bank.

Apart from that there are quite a few younger (5-10 years old) trees scattered on the Lockmeadow side and around the periphery of the Amphitheatre.

Amenity-type shrubberies break up the lawn by the statue of the Stag. Another shrubbery and an herbaceous border grow on the river bank below the Courts building.

The Lockmeadow side also has beds of herbaceous perennials. These are rather labour-intensive and can sometimes be seen full of weeds, but when tidy they look quite impressive.

Across the river, the Amphitheatre has a carefully designed planting scheme of trees, and shrubs of varying heights, down to the lowest of thymes planted on the seating terraces for 'sensory' experience.

The Rose Garden has many varieties of roses that were once labelled with the names of their varieties and their donors.

#### **4.6 Biodiversity assessment**

The mature trees are of considerable biodiversity value. The shrubberies and the other ornamental plantings provide some hiding places and food (nectar, berries) for wildlife.

Apart from that, this is mainly an amenity area which needs to look controlled and tidy, therefore scope for any further biodiversity enhancement is limited.

With one exception, perhaps: the bank of the river by the Lockmeadow bridge needs to be kept inaccessible for safety and for the bank's stability. It has already developed into a weedy mini riverside meadow. This could be enhanced.

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

There are numerous seats along the paths on both sides of the river, unfortunately in a variety of styles. Some of them have been sponsored.

A specific style of slatted bench has been used by the Millennium River Park Project. these can be sourced from Factory Furniture (type: Louvre). The modern stainless steel seats and bins installed in the Amphitheatre come from Architectural Street Furnishings Ltd (type ASF6003 seat, type ASF3001 litter bin). These are durable and easy to clean.

There are numerous litter bins in a variety of styles, and a small number of dog litter bins, along both sides of the river.

#### **4.8 Signage**

There are information boards explaining the history of the Riverside, and a couple of directional signs for the river walk.

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

The Gardens are an oasis of green calm in the middle of a busy town. As such, they contain facilities for socialising and for quiet relaxation: seats, clean lawns, tree shade, attractive views, especially those of the river Medway and of the All Saints Historic Conservation Area.

Public toilets, situated by the Fairmeadow, are open every day dawn to dusk.

By the Archbishops' Palace Gardens there is a kiosk selling refreshments and tickets for trips on the pleasure boats: 'Kentish Lady' and 'Allington Belle'. The boats run as a shuttle service between the Archbishops' Palace Gardens and Allington Lock, from Easter till mid October.

The Riverside Bar serves meals and drinks every day.

The Lockmeadow side lies adjacent to a large sports and entertainment complex with a health club, cinemas and restaurants. The Maidstone market takes place nearby.

## **5. MANAGEMENT AND MAINTENANCE**

Some parts of the Riverside are owned by Kent County Council, others by Maidstone Borough Council. Of the latter, some are leased and their tenants are responsible for their upkeep. The day-to-day maintenance of the MBC and KCC-owned parcels of land is carried out by a grounds contractor Glendale.

The Environment Agency is consulted on any issues related to the river Medway.

### **5.1 Cleanliness**

Litter is collected and litter bins are emptied every day.

Dog litter bins are emptied twice a week by a specialist contractor.

### **5.2 Safety and security**

The Lockmeadow side is fairly open, although it contains shrubberies: potential hiding places. A degree of surveillance is provided from all directions by passers by.

The Amphitheatre and the Rose Garden are quite enclosed, therefore have the potential for antisocial behaviour.

A CCTV camera installed by one of the main bridges can see some of the parts of the Riverside Gardens.

Visitors can report problems:

- general – 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 maintenance of the buildings is the responsibility of the tenants.

The KCC is responsible for the maintenance of the towpath.

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

### **5.4 Horticultural management regimes**

The maintenance of grass areas varies in frequency and quality, depending on who is responsible for them. Unfortunately, some of the areas remain unattended for months.

The grounds contractor Glendale follows the 'amenity' routine of grass cutting. They also collect the leaves in the autumn, trim the shrubberies and keep the floral plantings looking tidy.

## **6. FORTHCOMING IMPROVEMENTS**

Following audits of green spaces and a public consultation in summer 2005, a list of improvements has been drawn up. Most of this work will be carried out by a specialist landscape contractor between autumn 2006 and spring 2008. This is part of the Green Spaces Strategy work aimed at enhancing the quality of public green spaces.

The following projects are planned for the Riverside:

- Resurface the 'terrace' and the paved path towards Baker Road and towards the River Bar.
- Install a seat and a litter bin in front of the Music School

## **7. FUNDING**

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.

Big Lottery Breathing Spaces Programme – starting in summer 2006, aimed at community groups involved in creating and maintaining wildlife-friendly green spaces in their local area. Grants of £300-10,000 available to voluntary groups and to parish/town councils.

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.

Esmee Fairbairn Foundation (Environment Programme) – promotes environmental improvements which balance the needs of people and wildlife, especially those aiming to conserve 'hard-to-fund', or lower profile, UK native species and habitats under demonstrable threat of loss or decline in urban, rural or marine areas.

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.

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