

VISION STATEMENT FOR THE FRIENDS OF WILLIAM CHAMPION'S GARDEN

TO ESTABLISH A NEW FRIENDS GROUP TO BOTH CONSERVE & MAINTAIN THE UNIQUE 18TH CENTURY GARDEN & TO OPEN IT UP TO ALL AS A RECREATIONAL AND EDUCATIONAL GREEN SPACE

INTRODUCTION

The Garden in Warmley, South Gloucestershire, was originally created by the 18th century industrialist William Champion. It is designated Grade II on the UK Parks & Gardens Register and is a Scheduled Ancient Monument, together with Champion's brass mill, which houses Kingswood Heritage Museum, and the his original pin factory, known as the Clock Tower,. The Garden contains a number of historic 18th century features that are all listed Grade II: The Grotto, Statue of Neptune, Snail Viewing Mound, Boat House, Echo Pond, Summer House and Ice House. It also forms part of a Conservation Area together with the Brass Mill, Clock Tower and Champion's Grade II* house, now a residential home. The Conservation Area is currently (2019) on the Historic England At Risk Register and described as in a 'very bad' condition and 'deteriorating'.

Conservation and maintenance of the Garden has been impacted by Local Authority spending cuts over the last 10 years. The Council carries out mowing and general garden maintenance, together with the occasional repair of the listed historic structures. The Grotto, however, has been largely conserved and restored by the Museum, who periodically open it to the public, at the same time encouraging visitors to explore the entire Garden site. An external generator is required to power essential lighting on these occasions as earlier attempts to install an electricity supply were vandalised. The provision of a permanent electricity supply and security features is essential for the increased opening of the Grotto to the public in the future.

The Garden's historic structures, including a number of stone walls, have been inundated by encroaching trees, shrubs and other vegetation. Saplings, including a number of holly trees, have taken root on the snail viewing mound, which already has a crown of established oak trees, presumably planted during the 19th century. The Grotto is similarly inundated, a large yew tree in particular growing on the roof. Other structures are covered with ivy and other climbing vegetation. In some cases tree roots are causing stonework to crack. The undergrowth in the Echo Pond is cut back by the Council once or twice a year but remains full of unsightly weeds. Some of the repairs carried out by the now defunct Manpower Services used inappropriate materials, in particular concrete mortar, which is now failing and presenting safety issues.

The Garden remains largely unknown by the local and wider community. This is due both to the lack of any obvious entrance and its concealment on all sides by unsightly post war commercial development, a large 1960s caravan park on the former 13 acre lake (stranding the 7 metre high Statue of Neptune which once stood on an island in the centre of the lake) and neglected undeveloped areas such as the former site of Champion's Home Close and of his Rank of 1740s workers' housing (demolished 1960s).

The official entrance currently has two metal gates, one either side of the proposed development site for 5 static caravans (on the site of the easternmost section of the 18th century lake). These gates provide access for the Council to mow and carry out maintenance and for visitors to the Gardens on some Museum Open Days. Otherwise entry is via the neighbouring commercial premises through a hole in the fence, despite the Garden being a public Green Space. It is currently (2019) unclear what access the developer proposes to leave for the public. However, the Desk Based Archaeological Assessment carried out on behalf of the developer recommends a number of improvements to enhance access and screen the development from the Garden, including creating '*two visible public rights of way across the site, one connecting Kingswood Heritage Museum to Warmley gardens and the second along the eastern site boundary, between Tower Lane and Warmley gardens. Improving links between the windmill, icehouse, museum and gardens, along with increase public access to and awareness of the gardens and heritage assets are desired enhancement strategies proposed by South Gloucestershire Council to improve Warmley Conservation Area and registered garden (SGC 1997a; SGC 1997b). Should the suggested additional*

*footpaths be established, the development would have a beneficial impact on Warmley gardens, Warmley Conservation Area, the icehouse and windmill tower.*¹

The green spaces in this community have been systematically lost to commercial enterprises and other developments. The once thriving village which lay beside the main Oxford to Bristol Turnpike Road (A420) is now impacted by the Bristol Ring Road and Longwell Green developments, and primarily used as a rat run rather than a destination.

Kingswood Heritage Museum, formed by volunteers during the 1980s, has ensured that the Gardens and Grotto are maintained and open to visitors, although they are owned by South Gloucestershire Council rather than the museum itself. The Museum doesn't have the resources to carry out large scale conservation project on the Garden. A Friends of Warmley Museum & Gardens group was established in the 1980s, but for the last few years they have principally been occupied with the Museum.

OUR VISION

The William Champions Gardens will sustain a rich heritage experience for the wider community, offering opportunities for relaxation and education in an ecologically diverse setting.

THE AIMS OF THE FRIENDS GROUP

1. To conserve and sustain this unique historic Garden and its Heritage Assets for future generations
2. To maintain and revive the landscape
3. To encourage and protect the Biodiversity of the site
4. To make the Garden accessible to all where the local and wider community can both participate and take pleasure in it
5. To provide an educational and recreational platform for the community

THE OBJECTIVES OF THE FRIENDS GROUP

In order to achieve our aims we will:

1.
 - Carry out the repair and conservation of all the Heritage Assets:
 - Survey and assess each Heritage Asset and prepare a programme of repair and conservation
 - Appoint conservation professionals to both carry out work
 - Organise workshops for the community to be trained by the professionals in various skills, working alongside them e.g. stone conservation, lime mortar work
2.
 - Carry out the maintenance of the trees and vegetation, creating community events e.g. Green Gyms, bulb planting, hedge laying
 - Create appropriate and accessible paths and walkways
 - Provide appropriate, well signed access, together with fencing and gateways
 - Survey all the trees and plants and identify their age and significance
3.
 - Identify both the wildlife and plants in the Garden
 - Create areas for wildlife e.g. a wildflower meadow and log piles for hibernating animals, bug hotels, bat and bird boxes etc.
 - Create wildlife trails connecting the Garden via the Elm Walk to the woodland beyond the Statue of Neptune

¹ Worcestershire Archaeology, Desk-based assessment at Kingsway Mobile Park, Warmley, April 2017, p. 21

4.
 - Create appropriate, well signed entrances to the Garden in order to generate public awareness of the largely obscured Garden and attract both the local and wider community with volunteers to help maintain it
 - Address access for people with very young children and for people with mobility issues and provide well maintained and easily navigated pathways for all
 - Remove existing unsightly and inappropriate signage and fencing and create hedging or more attractive and appropriate fencing along some of the boundaries
 - Provide accessible links to the Garden from the Museum, Clock Tower and from the Council Car Park
 - Provide appropriate, simple seating
5.
 - Carry out conservation workshops for all e.g. stone repair, lime mortar, dry stone walling
 - Carry out nature trails and educational events for all e.g. bat and bird walks, tree trails, making bat and bird boxes, bug hotels etc.
 - Encourage the local community to use the Green Space for exercise e.g. Green Gym, Tai Chi, Circuit Training, Parents with Strollers
 - Encourage local schools and groups to use the space for educational trips e.g. Heritage and nature trails and making bat and bird boxes, bug hotels etc. using the Museum workshop facilities
 - Create tree identification trails, bat watch evenings in summer, early morning chorus walk etc.

FIVE YEAR PROGRAMME

Phase I

Having created an appropriate and accessible entrance to the Garden, volunteers, with the guidance and support of various South Gloucestershire Officers e.g. Conservation & Landscape Officers, will set up a programme to clear the encroaching vegetation and trees. Once cleared, a proper survey of the standing structures can be carried out to assess damage and conservation needs. Fundraising will be carried out in order to engage professionals to carry out the conservation. It is envisaged that they will concurrently carry out on the job skill training workshops for the local and wider community.

Phase II

Engage a landscape historian, possibly already a volunteer, to understand how the original gardens were laid out and together with the local community plan a new garden landscape for all. This will involve creating various areas of garden, including a wild flower meadow with mown paths and encourage wildlife, with nature trails, bug houses, beehives, log piles for insects, plants for butterflies, bat boxes, pond dipping etc.

Phase III

Liaise with the Community and Community groups e.g. theatre group, garden group, local history, youth group, nursery, senior citizens, parents/grandparents and toddlers to create a programme of activities and establish appropriate areas for some of these activities. Open the space as a teaching aid for students in heritage, conservation, history, archaeology, garden and landscape design etc. and involving them in the conservation, design and restoration.

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