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The Gardens of Rothamsted Manor - Management Plan

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A5 Recent Development Proposals

Rothamsted Research

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A5 Recent development proposals

This section sets out some recent and/or current development ideas. They show the sorts of issues and opportunities that are already on the agenda.

House

There are no firm proposals for development to alter its use. The following have been discussed:

- Upmarket hotel - It is likely that the structure would not be well-suited to this use, or would require more alteration than the Grade I listing would allow. A hotel may generate revenue, but the Manor House and its surroundings would be effectively lost to the institute. All existing accommodation would have to be relocated at a cost.
- Museum/Library/Conference Centre - a high quality environment and resource for researchers, with possibly an educational and public role. The Manor House site would make an ideal setting for presenting the history of the site and the experiments, especially in combination with parallel development in the outbuildings and walled garden. Bennet Lawes' earliest experiments were, after all, carried out in the walled garden and in a laboratory in the house, and the manor is located close to the most celebrated classical experiments. Some or all of the existing accommodation would have to be relocated. There is already a conference centre on the site, so it would be important for any new facility to have a very clearly defined and different character.
- Extend and improve existing residential accommodation - this provision on site is extremely valuable to the institute. It would be possible to create extra rooms in the outbuildings, and generally provisions could be enhanced.

Soil Store

The 'soil archive' is located in an outbuilding adjacent to the Manor House. It contains soil samples, records and scientific material, methodically collected from the mid-19th Century onwards, and is of unique international significance. However, it has no public profile. It is accommodated in a basic and un-staffed storeroom, with little security. It is occasionally visited by researchers, but is generally inaccessible and 'hidden away'. Various possibilities to make more of it have been discussed:

- Relocation to the lower floor of the conference centre on the main research campus. This would greatly increase accessibility, visibility and recognition. Potential drawbacks would be that the proposed accommodation was not designed for this purpose, that it might encourage public access to a working area of the institute not geared up to deal with it, and that the Manor House would lose one of the key assets that might supply the key to its future use. This proposal was the subject of an unsuccessful Heritage Lottery Fund bid.
- Consolidate and improve facilities on the Manor House site, and integrate the future of the soil store with a new use for the house.

Walled garden

Proposals have been made to re-establish horticultural use:

- A local councillor suggested the recreation of a 'Victorian Kitchen Garden'. This would be historically appropriate, but it is unclear what purpose it would serve in the existing context. It would be costly to maintain, but may have potential to attract considerable voluntary interest.
- An outline scheme has been drawn up to create a garden of herbs, medicinal plants, dye-plants, and other chemically useful or interesting plants. This would be used as a resource for research purposes, supplying a richer variety of 'raw materials' on site. It would also make an attractive garden that could

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be integrated with the other development proposals discussed above. A commercial company would operate it, with Lawes Agricultural Trust funding the initial hard landscaping costs.

- The future of the walled garden (and the gardens in general) is intimately tied up with the future of both the House and Soil Store.

Ornamental Gardens

There are no plans for development or for alteration of existing management. This area is already well kept and fulfils its role of serving the needs of the house in its current condition. As things stand there appears to be no pressing reason for major changes in management.

Surrounding Landscape

- Replanting of Front Avenue - until recently Professor Roger Plumb (a senior fellow of Rothamsted) was co-ordinating a project to replant an avenue in front of the house to replace the 1721 elm avenue. The favoured tree (in July 2002) was horse chestnut (Aesculus hippocastanum). The spacing and extent of the replanting was still to be decided. It was hoped that the cost could be met through sponsorship. The project has been temporarily suspended because the trees would interfere with a radar-tracking experiment on the flight paths of bees.
- Experimental Fields - there are long-running but unresolved ideas about having some level of public access to the classical field experiments (Broadbalk, Park Grass etc). The fields lack glamour at first sight, and there are few if any similar sites to learn from. Public access would require some imagination and careful thought, particularly in establishing appropriate methods of presentation and interpretation. Suggestions have included raised viewing platforms to enable visitors (and scientists) to appreciate the differences in the plots. Security would need to be addressed if public access was increased.
- Manor Wood - following a period in which this formerly ornamental woodland received comparatively low levels of management, a new approach put forward by the Woodland Advisory Group was adopted, and has been followed for a number of years. This is to manage as native woodland, with natural regeneration and the planting and encouragement of native species. This approach is gradually transforming the Manor Wood.