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The Gardens of Rothamsted Manor - Management Plan

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B5 'no-change' Scenario

Rothamsted Research

Rothamsted Research (2003) *B5 'no-change' Scenario ;* The Gardens Of Rothamsted Manor - Management Plan, pp 26 - 26

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B5 'No-change' scenario

These are likely results of continuing with current management.

- 'No change' will by definition not arrest the slow but continual decline of the gardens and landscape.
- It is in the nature of gardens and landscapes to change and develop. Active management and intervention is therefore required to achieve the stated objective to 'maintain the status quo'. In the short term this may be grass-cutting or weeding, but longer term programmes of (for example) planting renewal, tree replacement, and fabric repair are equally important. Existing funds and priorities allow insufficient scope for this long term maintenance and renewal, and this contributes to a gradual decline.
- Erosion of fabric - if adequate funds are not secured for the capital and repair budgets, many of the key features of the gardens will continue to decay and may be lost. Examples include kitchen garden walls (leaning dangerously at north-western corner), the ornamental terracotta ha-ha walls (one section has already been lost), the summerhouse, the entrance gates and screen, and some of the garden ornaments. The cost of replacement is usually higher than regular maintenance. If items are lost it is therefore tempting not to replace them, and the general decline continues.
- Any attempts at renewal (eg. of trees/shrubs) require an understanding of the wider context and of overall objectives for the landscape if they are not to be disconnected and ad-hoc. A certain amount of time and funding is required to allow those responsible to develop and maintain this understanding. At present levels of funding there is little scope to pursue this kind of strategic thinking, and it is therefore hard for decisions to fit into an overall coherent pattern.
- Without a concerted effort to develop and implement a coherent and well-considered strategy (and high-level support for this process), it is inevitable that general management understanding of the needs of the gardens will decline.
- There is a danger that the gardens will increasingly be considered as a 'white elephant' by the institute. The case needs to be more powerfully made for their intrinsic value, its importance to the site and the institute, and its considerable unlocked potential.
- The Manor House is increasingly being required to pay its way and compete for business. The gardens play a key role in the strength of the 'product' and are a real asset in this respect. However, this value will tend to decline if current trends continue, at a time when the 'product' will need to be improved.
- There is a general cultural tendency towards increasing public access to heritage and to institutions like Rothamsted. The gardens would be eminently suitable for increased access but will not be able to meet the challenge without changes in management.
- Current woodland management policies are intended to return much of the previously semi-ornamental Manor Wood to 'native' woodland habitat. This, in addition to a long-term lack of funds to look after paths and woodland planting, has changed the character of the wood to the point where it hardly feels like part of the garden. This process will continue if active steps are not taken.
- A lack of active tree-care (eg. formative pruning and thinning) will continue to reduce the overall quality of tree stock on the site. Many of the trees planted in the last 20 years are now twisted, forked, overcrowded, etiolated and drawn, leaning, smothered by undergrowth, or stunted - in ways that would not have been considered acceptable in the past. In the precinct of a fine garden and house this will not produce tree-stock of a standard to be enjoyed in the future as today's mature trees may be now.
- Over many years, in the interest of the field experiments, hedgerow and parkland trees have generally not been replaced when lost. This policy, while scientifically understandable, has greatly reduced the landscape character (and bio-diversity) of the estate. A continuation of the policy will denude the landscape further.