This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

Thank you for using eradoc, a platform to publish electronic copies of the Rothamsted Documents. Your requested document has been scanned from original documents. If you find this document is not readible, or you suspect there are some problems, please let us know and we will correct that.

The Gardens of Rothamsted Manor - Management Plan

Full Table of Content

B6 Key Issues

Rothamsted Research

Rothamsted Research (2003) *B6 Key Issues ;* The Gardens Of Rothamsted Manor - Management Plan, pp 27 - 30

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

B6 Key Issues

It is a central part of the management planning process to identify the key issues and questions faced by the site, and to identify ways to address them. Ideally this requires the involvement of all 'stakeholders' and a period of discussion and review. For the purposes of the present exercise an extended process involving Rothamsted staff time was not feasible. Instead, a series of visits and one-to-one discussions were undertaken over a period, and it is hoped that this was sufficient to bring out most of the major issues.

a) Strategic policies

- Should the management objective remain to retain the status quo? What does this mean in an ever-changing environment?
- If some form of change is inevitable, what would be desirable changes?
- How should change be managed?
- Is there any benefit to be gained from an increased commitment to the gardens?
- Should the aim be to restore and enhance the gardens?
- Should the aim be to reduce maintenance and expenditure?
- Are there particular features, areas or functions of the garden that should receive more attention than others?

b) Future of the Manor House

- The future of the gardens is inextricably linked to the future of the Manor House. The gardens have a vital role as the setting for the House, and provide a valuable resource and amenity. However, the potential that the House and Gardens have to complement and mutually benefit each other has not yet been realised. Key questions about the future of the Manor House include:
- Will its function change?
- Will it be required to generate more revenue?
- What role can the gardens play in the future of the House?
- Will increased public access be required?

c) Value to the Institute

- Neither the Lawes Agricultural Trust nor Rothamsted Research were set up to run a historic site. Their core interest is agricultural research. The Manor House plays an important role in the life of the Institute, but when this is set against the cost of its upkeep its value is difficult to justify in purely financial terms. Even if it can pay its day-to-day expenses from its own revenue generation, its long-term maintenance seems set to remain a drain on the Institute's resources. Seen from this perspective, the gardens seem even more of an extravagance than the House. Despite this, it is clear that the gardens have a value to the Institute beyond financial and practical considerations (see B2 - Key Values above). They also have a value that extends beyond the Institute, and a value in themselves, simply for what they are.
- Is the full value of the gardens being realised?
- How should the value be maintained?
- Could it be enhanced?

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

d) Funding / Revenue

- The gardens must compete for priority within a site-wide budget that covers all grounds maintenance and horticultural work. This budget is itself in competition with funding for the core activities of the Institute, in a period when research funding is not available in abundance. There has been a long period of gradually dwindling resources for the gardens, and there is still downward pressure. There is no 'ring-fenced' budget, and there is therefore always an increased risk of resources being nibbled away, however sympathetic the budget-holders may be. Despite this, a good standard of horticulture is still maintained in the areas of the gardens around the House, but cutbacks cannot continue indefinitely without posing major threats. As with the House, long-term maintenance will require extra resources if the value of the gardens is to be maintained or enhanced.
- What is the appropriate level of funding and priority for the Institute to devote to the gardens?
- If the level of funding is appropriate at present, will it remain so for the next 20 years?
- Can funding be sought from elsewhere?
- What is the potential of the gardens to raise revenue in their own right, or combined with the House?
- What is the potential to 'add value' to the other activities on the estate?

e) Management Structure

- The management of the gardens is principally the responsibility of Horticultural and Controlled Environment Services (HCES). Their work is overseen by the Trust and Research Institute, and is carried out in liaison with other interested parties, such as the Manor House management and the Woodland Advisory Group. The Head Gardener and the Head of HCES take an active interest in the gardens and, within their remit, have maintained them well. They are not in a position however to do the work that would be required to develop a new long-term strategy for the gardens. This is partly due to restrictions on time and resources, but it is also because the process would require the active commitment of all parties at all levels at Rothamsted. It is not something that can be done in isolation; it requires an integrated approach, with all facets considered, all possibilities aired and all voices heard.
- Are existing management arrangements meeting current needs?
- How able is the structure to draw on all interests and views, and to tap into the wider energies and enthusiasms of the Rothamsted staff?
- Is the existing structure able to develop and sustain a plan and a strategic overview for the gardens, and is it able to take a long view (eg 20 years)?
- Might there be benefit in a more widely-based group, temporary or permanent, devoting attention specifically to the gardens (and/or the whole Manor site) and their future?

f) Public Access

- This has already become an issue for the House, due to the requirements for access attached to public grants for repair and restoration. The House is likely to need more grants, and the access requirements are likely to be extended. If a decision was taken to seek grant funding for work to the gardens, similar rules would apply.
- Is more public access desirable? Would it hinder the work of the institute? Would it cost money?
- Would it be desirable to adopt a policy of increased openness and to present the history, work and significance of Rothamsted to the wider public? Would they be interested? Is the educational emphasis currently favoured within government and funding bodies compatible with the remit of the Trust?
- The extension of public access to the Manor site or elsewhere on the estate could involve substantial expenditure. This would include capital expenditure on new facilities and car-parking, and revenue costs such as additional staff. If this were to be pursued, what would be the return?
- What would be an appropriate level of access to aim for?

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

g) Connection to the Institute

- The Manor House and gardens are physically distant from the main research campus. They are accessible, but it would not be easy to regularly stroll across in a lunch break. In addition to this physical separation, there are few reasons for non-resident staff to visit. There are occasional functions and conferences, but many staff may never have visited, or may feel that the Manor is 'not for them'. For most purposes, the House and gardens are peripheral and cut off from the life of the institute.
- Would there be benefits in encouraging greater connections between the Manor and the rest of the institute?
- How might this be achieved?

h) Management Policies

- Good garden management depends to a great extent on having the necessary skills and resources in place, but it also depends on developing clear policies and principles. Some of these will be arrived at fairly straightforwardly by developing a thorough understanding of concrete issues such as the demands of the site, design intentions, and horticultural good practice. Others will prove more elusive and complex to resolve and may reveal apparently deep philosophical differences of opinion. In such cases there may seem to be several equally valid approaches to a problem It may sometimes be possible to successfully steer a middle course or to find a compromise, but at other times a 'fudge' will not suffice, and it is important to take a clear line. This may satisfy all points of view, or it may please only some. Sometimes no-one will be entirely happy. Even if it proves impossible to reconcile all interests, experience shows that the attempt brings benefits.
- When management policies have been set, they must still be subject to change and review. Garden management is a dynamic process, often referred to as 'managing change'. Thus, if an ideal and universally accepted set of policies could be adopted today, they would still need to be monitored and adapted for tomorrow.
- During the preparation of this document certain issues emerged that appeared to demand attention at a policy level. This is inevitable for any large garden. Some of these issues emerged simply through observation of the site, while others became apparent through observation of differing views between interested parties. The following are examples that will need to be considered when developing new management policies:
- Manor Wood - Should it be part of the gardens or not? What is the appropriate level of management? Should the priority be to manage it as 'natural' woodland or as part of a garden, or can these objectives be balanced to their mutual benefit?
- Bedding - Are labour-intensive bedding displays a waste of time and money? Or is their appearance and appreciation justification enough? Are they essential to the character of the gardens? If so, where are they best to be deployed?
- Grass cutting - What is the appropriate frequency of cuts for different areas? Is time and money being needlessly expended in certain areas?
- Ecology and wildlife - Is gardening incompatible with a respect for nature? Do human interventions always have negative effects on ecology, or can they help to enhance and maintain habitats and diversity?

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

i) Landscape Policies

- It is understandable that, for over a century, land management policies on the site have primarily served the needs of the experiments. This has served the interests of the experiments well, but it has had major deleterious effects on the designed landscape surrounding the Manor.
- The most obvious example is that the parkland to the south and east has been completely lost to agricultural/experimental use. Apart from the limes lining the roads to the east of the Manor, virtually all the parkland trees have disappeared, either purposely removed or not replaced when lost. Losses include the 18th Century elm avenue and the 19th Century 'clumps', both designed to enhance the view to the south of the House. This prospect, from the entrance and principal front of the House, was arguably as critical to its setting as the gardens, shrubbery and woodlands on the other sides. The garden design still sets the stage for appreciation of the view, with the ha-ha, the broad southern lawn as foreground, and the framing shrubbery and trees. The current prospect is a great disappointment. It lacks any sense of design or conscious intention, and might be any undistinguished bit of farmland [Fig.10]. There are signs that this problem is being recognised; grazing sheep have been reintroduced, and a replacement avenue has been proposed.
- There are other cases where management decisions have affected landscape value, such as the policy of not replacing hedgerow trees.
- It would clearly be inappropriate to alter the priority given to the experiments in favour of landscape aesthetics, but is there any reason why a new balance might not be achieved in certain areas?
- Through the Countryside Stewardship scheme, certain policies have begun to change. For example, grass headlands are being left in fields. Are there further opportunities for developing policies that may enhance biodiversity and landscape value?
- If national and international farming policy develops towards greater emphasis on diversity and environmental improvements, will this affect Rothamsted's landscape policies in the future?

j) Hidden Assets

There are a number of underused 'assets' in and around the gardens and Manor site. Some have been largely abandoned as their original purpose was lost or resources were reduced. Others are 'off the beaten track' or inaccessible to most people, and there is little information or encouragement to support a visit. Is it realistic or desirable to try to realise more of their potential and significance? Does it matter if they remain largely 'hidden'? Would their value be compromised if they received more attention?

The following are the principal examples:

- Walled Garden - A fundamental part of the Manor's life for centuries, and great potential for the future.
- Pond - Largely obscured, with no path to explore it.
- Soil Store - Hidden away, rarely visited, and apparently dull and 'dusty' to the uninitiated. With imagination, it could hold the seed for an important and fascinating educational centre.
- Manor Wood - Rarely visited by visitors to the House, and apparently disconnected from the formal gardens. Full of hidden features, interest and potential.
- Park Grass & Broadbalk - Highly significant and historic fields, that would be fascinating to anyone with an interest in plants, farming, ecology and the soil - if well presented and explained.
- Roman Temple - Off the beaten track, especially for the public.