

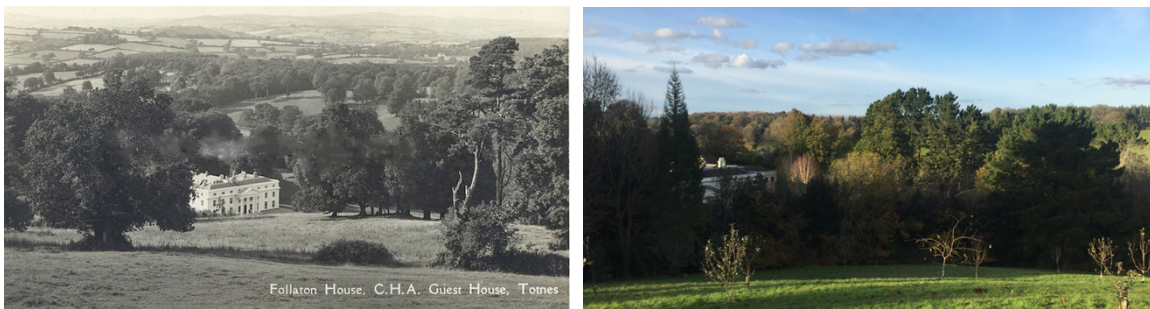
The time has come for a new strategic vision for the Arboretum, delivering a high quality landscape and thriving community space. A relatively small investment by the Council, matched by external funding, could result in potentially massive benefits in terms of community health and wellbeing, offsetting climate change, and aiding biodiversity.

PHASE 1 – Planning the priority restoration works

A lack of capital investment over recent years has led to a reduction in quality of key elements:

- Specimen trees are in need of urgent pruning works
- Wooded shelter belts require active management
- Meadow grassland is being invaded by ‘scrub’ from the margins
- The ‘all access’ path has eroded and is unusable for those with disabilities
- Signage, benches and other furniture have decayed and need replacing

Although there is a limited grounds maintenance and repairs programme, the overall feel is of an area in decline, which has lost sight of its original vision, and isn’t fulfilling its potential as a community asset. Indeed, it would be fair to say that the Arboretum is currently only serving a small proportion of the general public.



Then and now – views have been lost as the site has become overgrown

Moving forward – a strategic vision and 3 year action plan

The Arboretum should be a wonderful natural asset, both to the Council and people working at Follaton House, as well as for the local community and visitors from further afield. A mixture of specimen trees, meadow grassland, woodland and wetland areas makes it a potentially a very special place for people and wildlife.

The decline in the site, the loss of its impressive views – both close and distant – and reduction in quality of its natural features, cries out for a new vision, faithful to the Arboretum’s origins, but modernised to reflect current issues and interests. This can be captured in a new masterplan, implemented over 3 years, which sets out measures to bring new life to the area:

- **Landscape and biodiversity enhancement** – a programme of tree restoration, woodland management, meadow enhancement and wetland conservation, whilst opening up the original vistas, including views towards Dartmoor

- **Access and recreation improvements** – an upgrade to the Arboretum infrastructure, new signs, information boards, benches and bins, and repairs and improvements to the path network
- **Community and education development** – improved partnership working with the existing community groups, the creation of arts and educational trails and an outdoor events space, a broader appeal to a broader cross section of the community

Climate and biodiversity

In July 2019, the Council declared both a Climate Change and Biodiversity Emergency. Capturing and storing carbon from the atmosphere is vital, and wooded sites absorb and lock up many tonnes each year, in trees, shrubs and soils. The Arboretum will already make some contribution to offsetting the effects of climate change, and will have some value for biodiversity.

This could be enhanced through an active conservation programme focusing on trees, wildflower and wetland habitats, these being central themes in the new vision for the Arboretum.



Woodland, grassland and wetland habitats could be improved to aid biodiversity

2 - Engagement

A stakeholder meeting was convened in July 2019, with broad representation of Town and District Councillors and community groups engaged in activities at the site. Issues of concern were discussed, and feedback received on current management and maintenance procedures. There was strong support for a programme of restoration and enhancement at the Arboretum, and community groups were keen to take part and buy in to a new vision.

The contributors to this meeting identified the new vision should include:-

- i. A strategic management plan that reflected wider community; education and biodiversity themes as well as developing a long term plan for the Arboretum.
- ii. Better control of activities such as tree planting to ensure this fitted the broader objectives.
- iii. Review of hard landscaping including boundary fences; paths; new seating and bins etc.
- iv. New signage, information boards and labelling of significant trees and memorial trees

- v. Clearance of bramble and scrub where this has encroached and overgrown areas around the House to open up views of the property
- vi. Creating space for organised events, education facilities and visits
- vii. Walking, running or biking trails and/or other recreation activities for people of mixed abilities to appreciate and enjoy the Arboretum
- viii. Assessment of the impact of the tree planting as a carbon sink to offset emissions created through other activities.

Following this meeting the Council engaged Keith Rennells of ParkLife South West to develop proposals to enhance the Arboretum as a Public Open Space, prepare some budget costings and to liaise with the active gardening groups and wider community interests in the area.

Community partnerships

Groups who are, or have been, involved in managing areas of the Arboretum include:-

- **Incredible Edibles** – manage the community orchard trees and nut trees planted in areas of the Arboretum; they recognise the benefits of a wider improvement programme
- **SANDS** – the Stillbirth and Neonatal Death Society (SANDS) maintain the Littlefootprints Babyloss Memorial Garden; interested in entering a longer term licence agreement with the Council to maintain this area
- **Forest Garden Group** – manage the forest garden area, and keen to join forces with the Council and its partners in enhancing the setting
- **Trees for Health** – no longer active, but keen to ensure that the plantation is maintained as part of the Arboretum landscape
- **International Tree Foundation** – involved in the original planting plan; no longer active, but keen to be involved in restoration and enhancement programme

Memorial Trees

It is also recognised that a number of trees have been planted in the Arboretum in memory of those who have now passed away. In many cases these trees have lost their identity tags and records need to be brought up to date.



Community volunteering has been popular at the Arboretum

The Plan will bring forward the vision of the Arboretum as a thriving community space be it for quiet relaxation, being physically active, for gardening, horticulture or wildlife conservation, or education.

The community will have an opportunity to engage with the consultation process early in 2020, giving time for feedback to be taken into account in the final masterplan for implementation from April 2020.

Consultation timescale

March/April 2020 – Funding applications and second stakeholders meeting.

May 2020 – collation and assessment of feedback, updates to the enhancement plan

From May 2020 – delivery of the enhancement plan in partnership with the community

3 - Improvement works plan 2020-2023

A budget has been identified for a three-year programme of works from April 2020 to March 2023 in order to restore and enhance the Arboretum. It is proposed that the works budget, in the order of £50,000 as set out below, would be made up in part from Capital Grant from the Council and in part by external grant funding.

Project	Elements	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	Total
		£	£	£	£
Signage and furniture	Visitor welcome signs, benches, bins, gates, fencing, gazebo, information and interpretation boards	8500	1800	1800	12100
Access for All path	Repairs to existing path and extension to complete circuit and access to viewpoint	16000			16000
Events, recreation activities	Create event space, linking paths, arts trail, bbq area etc.	3800			3800
Specimen and memorial trees	Restoration, enhancement works, inc. tree information and education	3200	1500	1500	6200
Woodland biodiversity	Including educational trail and habitat management	3500	1700	1700	6900
Meadow grassland restoration	Enhancement of grassland areas as wildflower meadows	1000	1000	1000	3000
Viewpoints and amenity works	Opening up of views of house frontage and distant views; hedge management	2000			2000
		38000	6000	6000	50000

4 - Funding options

Works to the Arboretum could potentially attract funding from a variety of sources. As Public Open Space it will meet the eligibility criteria for funders seeking to support health and wellbeing, landscape and biodiversity improvements, access for people with sensory and mobility impairments, educational activities and measures to offset climate change.

For wellbeing programmes like walking and gardening for health, every £1 invested can lead to a £5 saving for the NHS, by way of reduction in treatments and drugs, so encouraging people to be physically active at the Arboretum has much wider benefits to society.

The value of well-maintained trees and woodland, and of habitats that support bees and other pollinating insects, is being increasingly recognised in helping to offset the effects of the climate and biodiversity emergencies.

Grants may be typically awarded at 50% of the total project cost, and the working assumption is that a capital allocation of £25,000 would be a catalyst to attract external funding to deliver this programme. Potential sources of external funding might include:-

Grant Fund/Source	Purpose and award	Timescale
National Lottery Awards for All	Up to £10k for improving the places and spaces that matter to communities	Rolling programme – up to 18 weeks for a decision
Naturesave Trust (based Totnes)	Environmental conservation projects up to £5k	Rolling programme – 6 to 8 weeks for decision
Claire Milne Trust (Devon)	Unspecified grants for disabled access projects (ie path)	Applications received quarterly by trustees
Elmgrant Trust (Dartington base)	Unspecified grants for welfare projects through education, arts	Trustees review 3 times/year
Totnes Trust (Totnes based)	Unspecified grants for environmental regeneration	Ongoing application process
David Gibbons Foundation (Devon)	Typically up to £1.5k for projects benefitting physical disability	Applications received quarterly by trustees
Devon Community Foundation	Up to £5k for helping to strengthen communities	Under review – relaunch Autumn 2020

5 - Outcomes: a new vision for the Arboretum

It is clear that the Arboretum is a community asset that isn't currently as good as it could be. Much of the infrastructure has become time expired, and its natural assets, the trees and other wildlife habitats, are in need of some urgent work to restore their value. In addition, the piecemeal and uncoordinated community activity, whilst generally a force for the good, has at times been at odds with the Arboretum landscape.

The plan now is to change this; to bring all activity into a single vision for the Arboretum. Going back to the original 1990s plan, a place where specimen trees from around the world sit together in an attractive collection with trees labelled with information about their natural history and place of origin.

Lost vistas should be opened up, including distant views to Dartmoor, views towards the Castle, and more closely to open up views of the front of Follaton House. And reopening views around the Arboretum will make it a more enjoyable place to visit.

Woodland, wetland and grassland habitats should be better managed for biodiversity. Visitors, especially those with mobility difficulties will once more be able to use the zig zag path to the top, and signs, information boards, benches and bins will all be upgraded to a quality worthy of the impressive parkland setting.

