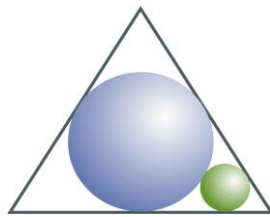


COBTREE MANOR PARK

MAIDSTONE

DESIGN SPECIFICATIONS

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A park for the community and beyond

Cobtree Manor Park is a landscape of diverse character, part open 'county park', part arboretum and part woodland. It is this rich combination of landscape forms which gives the park its perhaps unique nature, being set on a gently sloping hillside with some wonderful views to the south-west. With such potential as an enjoyable, safe green environment for locals and visitors from further afield it is ever more important in this age of ever decreasing green space that the park is appreciated by as broad a spectrum of people as possible and is managed both for the benefit of the people who visit it and just as importantly for heritage of the wildlife and trees within it.

The park currently attracts a range of different visitors, all with varying needs and requirements. It is of key importance that the new design encompasses these needs and encourages a greater number of visitors for the future. The key visitor types to the park are: families with children, horse riders, joggers, elderly, disabled and periodic business / tradespeople who visit the cafe at key times of the day.

It is expected that when the park has been fully developed, events could be held around the lake particularly if the new ground modelling provided amphitheatre-style banks for outdoor seating. Educational weekends would also be an ideal scenario, perhaps with forestry guides taking visitors round the park at key times of the year.

The key emphasis for the design from the start has been to attract visitors to explore and enjoy the full extent of the park at all times of the year. This requires the design to draw visitors up through the park on a series of routes designed with different users in mind, whilst offering a range of attractions which are both sympathetic to the feel of the park and to its past history as a private zoo.

Any heavy bias towards seeing the park as having a zoo 'theme' has been avoided as it is felt that this would not sit well with the natural feel of the park and instead the design draws in more subtle elements which are intended to educate and stimulate children and adults of all ages.

Another major consideration has been the necessity to retain and manage the existing impressive tree collection, effectively reducing the impact of the new design on the existing trees by weaving the design around them rather than requiring their extensive removal in order to install the new scheme.

Main benefits of the new design

The new design will aim to increase the number of visitors to the park by a number of key proposals. These proposals will also seek to remedy a number of on-site problems which currently detract from the quality of the park. The major key benefit of the whole scheme is that the new design has a minimal impact on the existing tree stock and wildlife habitats, enhancing and improving rather than removing long-established features in order to install the new scheme.

1) New pathway network.

By installing an extensive network of new paths and resurfacing existing ones, access to all parts of the park has been improved. Circulation is part of the key strategy to making the park more useable, especially during the winter months when certain parts of the park e.g. woodland and upper arboretum are inaccessible without suitable footwear. Access for wheelchair users has been improved by using a granular material for the main pathways. The bridle path has also be rerouted to further separate horse riders from pedestrians and cyclists.

By improving access to all areas of the park, including the woodland areas, not only does it increase enjoyment of the park but it also actively discourages anti-social behaviour by increasing visibility and reducing the potential for hidden areas.

2) New cafe and exhibition space

The existing cafe and toilet facilities will be removed and replace with a larger building to include indoor cafe seating, exhibition space and staff facilities (inc office and equipment storage). This will effectively become the new 'hub' of the park where visitors can collect information, maps and educational leaflets before going on to explore the park.

3) Increased car parking facilities

The existing car park is capable of accommodating the majority of current visitors to the park although with the expected increase in numbers a new 'overflow' car park has been created to the south of the new cafe building, with disabled parking taking into consideration with larger parking bays near the entrance.

4) New play areas and fitness activities

As a family-oriented park the new play and fitness structures have been selected to cater for a wide range of ages, with the younger play area located conveniently close to the main car park for ease of use and clear sight lines from the cafe, lake and car park for added safety and security. For adults a trim trail has been introduced along a woodland route. All structures have been carefully chosen to have an organic feel, avoiding the use of metal or plastic materials where possible.

5) New lake and circulatory walk

A new, shallow lake has been introduced, with complete circumnavigatory route to allow it be seen all the way round even in wet weather. This lake isn't intended for boating or play activities but more as a wildlife habitat that can be appreciated by visitors, complete with educational signage. Marginal planting at the edge of the lake will soften the outline and also provide enhanced habitats for local wildlife. A viewing platform will provide the opportunity to see wildlife in the lake at close up.

6) Enhanced teaching areas

As part of the overall strategy for encouraging visitors to the park, it is expected to offer educational facilities for children in supervised, small groups. In order to achieve this the Elephant House will be renovated and opened up as an activity room, complete with lighting, washroom facilities and new windows. Heating will be achieved by photovoltaic cells located near the building to provide a green form of energy during colder months.

To accompany the Elephant House a new teaching area will be created in the grassland opposite, with attractive all-weather shade sails and outdoor seating. This will allow several parties to visit the park at one time, alternating between indoor and outdoor activities dependent on weather conditions. The location for the new educational areas have good access to both the arboretum and woodland, whilst also being on the main pedestrian path from the car park.

7) Dog agility area

One of the larger proportion of existing users of the park is dog owners and with their needs in mind a new dedicated area has been given over to agility equipment and seating designed for dog-owners needs. This is not to say owners are excluded from the rest of the park but rather this area is an additional benefit. An elliptical walk around the agility equipment will allow access to the area in wet weather whilst doubling as an obedience training route.

8) Viewing platform

One of the best views from the park is to be seen at the east end of the main drive up from the Memorial Gates. A viewing area with outdoor seating and timber shelter will be introduced into this area to allow the view to be appreciated.

9) Improved enjoyment of the woodland and arboretum

By improving the path network around the park the woodland and arboretum can be far better appreciated. Selective thinning of vegetation above waist height in the woodland will improve visibility, increase a feeling of safety and discourage anti-social behaviour which is present in the woodland area at the moment, particularly in the west corner. Introducing organic sculptures throughout the woodland will also encourage visitors to explore the more central points within the wood rather than just staying on the main paths. These sculptures are intended to be sourced from local artists and set in individual clearings which can be 'discovered' if visitors choose any of the smaller network or paths running through the wood.

10) Key signage

With such a diverse landscape and past zoological history it is important to present clear information to the park's visitors. By introducing information points at key locations such as the lake, arboretum and woodland the story of the park's history and wildlife can be told. By allowing visitors to better understand the park they are in it is hoped that they will be afforded a greater sense of ownership and care of what is essentially a park for the community and beyond.

Design Specifications

1. Car park and entrance

The existing car park has been recently resurfaced by the entrance and whilst there are a number of minor surface repairs to be carried out to the rest of the car park surface the majority is of reasonable quality to be retained in its present state.

The existing vegetation between the car parking areas does require some thinning however and it is recommended that vegetation between a height of 0.5m and 2m is cleared to allow open sight lines. Existing ivy in these existing planting beds should be maintained by thinning and replanting with native shrubs and herbaceous plants to provide greater planting character through the year.

The overflow car park covers an area of 1320m² and provides an extra 27 standard parking bays together with 4 larger parking bays for disabled parking. The surface will be finished with the same road stone material as the rest of the car park and surrounded on the northern sides by a beech hedge which will help to screen the car park from the lake area. Just outside the new car park 9 new cycle racks have been allocated for securing visitors bicycles whilst in the cafe / exhibition area.

2. Paths and trails



New pathways will be constructed with different grades of granular granite material, 0-6mm for the paths around the lake area, Secondary teaching area and in the Lower Park area, with 12mm material used for all paths in the arboretum, main drive up from the Memorial Gates, viewing platform area, Elephant House forecourt and Dog Agility area pathways.

All surface materials will be required to be finished over a 150mm roadstone sub base. The rerouted bridleways will be finished with a hardwood mulch which can be topped up with woodchip recycled from tree works carried out within the park.



Granite 12mm pathway material



Granite 0-6mm pathway material

3. New cafe, exhibition space and staff facilities

The existing building footprint is 88m². The new footprint will occupy an area of 249m², offering improved facilities for indoor dining, toilet facilities, an exhibition area for presenting a history of the park and staff facilities to include a park ranger's office and storage area for tools and work equipment. Subject to the final architect's design, the new building could also include a room which could be hired out for local groups, lectures and school activities.

It is proposed that the final design also be constructed from materials such as oak (which is a key species within the park) and Kent Rag stone which is naturally sourced at a nearby quarry. By installing large open windows to the north and east sides of the building, clear sight lines can also be achieved across to the play area and lake area which improves the visitor experience.

Architect required for design

4. Arboretum and features

The existing arboretum has a superb collection of trees, both native and ornamental species. However, there are a number of planted areas which have been previously planted with predominantly shrubs and which have become neglected over the years. It is proposed to rejuvenate these shrub areas by removing overcrowded specimens, thinning unwanted vegetation like bramble and replanting with a greater variety of new shrubs and herbaceous.

Where existing trees have died they should be replaced and material cut down chipped and recycled as pathway material or surface mulch for the new planting beds.

A new, curvaceous pathway has also been introduced into the arboretum to allow all year access to the Llama house and upper woodland area. This has been supplemented with a number of new trees (native species) along the new walk.

In addition to the new pathways a 'discovery element' has been introduced for children in the form of paved footprints (FP on the Masterplan) of the various animals which used to live within the park e.g. lion, elephant, llama, wolf, zebra and monkey. Each of these footprints will be stone-cut, over-scaled at about 1m long, and placed in alternating treads, set flush with the ground.



wolf



zebra



monkey



elephant

The idea is that some of the footprints will be located close to the main pathways, whilst others will be set further into the grassed areas, encouraging children to explore away from the main paths in order to find the footprints (which can be listed on a children's activity sheet).

5. Woodland routes and sculpture

The woodland routes will consist of major (finished with woodchip and shown as main pathways on the Masterplan) and minor (simple, cleared paths through the existing vegetation, shown as blue routes on the Masterplan).



Examples of woodland sculptures which could be introduced into the woodland, featuring the work of local artists.

This idea has been used very successfully at locations such as Goodwood Sculpture Park where the individual pieces of artwork are located in separate clearings, waiting to be discovered. By showing these locations on a visitor map, there is a greater encouragement to explore the woodland whilst seeing the diverse nature of the wood at the same time.

An elevated cycle route is also located within the woodland area and will be signed for cycle use only. It is expected that the rest of the park's paths will be used by cyclists as well. Dedicated cycle routes, although more ideal in a park setting, are substantially more expensive to install and as the path network material consists of granite chipping anyway, this is a suitable surface for cycles.

6. Lake and circular walk

The lake is one of the major new features of the design and is intended as an attractive open source of water rather than any form of boating lake. A central island will act as a wildlife refuge, with marginal planting to improve wildlife habitats and provide seasonal colour.



Artists impression – new lake

Circumnavigating the lake will be an elliptical walk, with timber seating and key signage. A timber, elevated viewing platform will be constructed just above the surface of the lake, measuring 45.m x 6.5m, complete with timber hand rails (see construction detail cross section). Lifebuoys will be located at two key points for safety.

7. Elephant House and secondary teaching area

The existing Elephant House will be renovated and converted into an activity room for educational activities. The previously-removed windows will be replaced with modern glass or (subject to budget) could be fitted with photo-voltaic glass which generates power which can then be used for lighting.

Heating can be achieved by solar panels which store power for cold spells by introducing power to under floor heating. Washroom facilities will be installed with drainage taken out to a separate septic tank which can be serviced via the main drive up from the Memorial gates. The existing elephant bars within the buildings provide good structures for sub-dividing the room into smaller spaces, allowing different activities to be carried out.

An exterior gravel area (approx 88m²) and low retaining wall (height 0.6m), will provide room for seating.



The secondary teaching area is a gravelled, levelled area 1100m², with outdoor seating and three all-weather 'Aurora' shade sails to provide shade and wet-weather protection.

(example left)

This area can be used in combination with the Elephant House for schools parties and is ideally located with good access for the arboretum and woodland. A simple beech hedge surrounds the area on three sides to improve wind protection.

This area also provides a good seating area for other visitors to the park, including dog walkers and families who can use the area for picnics at weekends.

8. Llama house

The Llama house is ideal as a stop-point along the arboretum trail especially during wet weather due to its low tiled roof. This area will also be complimented with more historical information about the park. Although too far from the car park to be used practically as an eating area, it can be used as an informal seating area.

9. Bridle path

The existing bridle path isn't particularly heavily used although horse riders do use the park (though somewhat limited due to the height-restriction barrier on the main gate. However, in order to separate pedestrians and horse riders as far as practically possible, the route has been redirected along the southern boundary of the park, reusing the existing timber rails (with new posts).

10. Children's play area equipment

The play area in the lower park has been carefully located to allow it to be viewed from the lake, the new cafe building and the car park. With good sight lines this makes it easier for parents to monitor children whilst using the equipment. The play surface is finished to BS EN 1176 and BS EN 1177 standards, to a maintained depth of 250mm.

The equipment includes the following:



Handmade Places 'Andover' climbing frame



Timberplay climbing wall



Handmade Places 'Sea Monster'



Timberplay 'Windpump'



Timberplay sound cushions



Handmade Places 'Dragonfly'



Handmade Places 'Bee'

The play area will be surrounded with a 1.2m post and rail timber fence with infill wire mesh and timber latch gate. To the north-west of the area four grass banks (approx 0.6m elevated above surrounding ground level) will be located with timber seating backed by a beech hedge maintained at a height of 1m. These soil mounds are partly for increasing the visibility for parents but also for taking up some of the extracted soil from the new lake.

11. Dog agility area



Four pieces of dog agility equipment to include weaving poles, tunnel, seesaw and hurdle.

Example left Canine Concepts 'seesaw'

The dog area will be circumnavigated with an elliptical walk and accompanied by dog bins and outdoor seating.

12. Viewing platform

At the upper end of the long drive up from the Memorial Gates a spectacular view can be seen across the landscape to the west. This view is presently partly blocked by an existing unmaintained Leylandii hedge which will be removed. This will improve the view to the finer specimens of trees in the park. To encourage visitors to this viewing point a circular, levelled, gravel area 15m (50ft) across will be complimented by an open-sided timber shelter complete with timber seating.



Leylandii hedge to be removed

13. Trim trail

The woodland routes will be complimented by a number of fitness items which are spaced along the pathways.

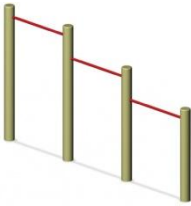
These include:



TT1 – Balance beam



TT2 - Trim ladder walk



TT3 – Trim swing bars



TT4 - Hurdles



TT5 – Twin V-bridge



TT6 – Balance weaver



TT7 – Swing steps

14. Features being removed

There are a number of trees to be removed (marked in red on the plan). These have been replaced with new trees planted elsewhere in the park so that there is no net loss of tree stock overall. As mentioned previously the key feature of the new design is that it utilises the existing feature of the park and enhances the park's character by improving elements already there, rather than removing features just to install the new scheme. This not only helps to reduce overall project cost but also retains the vast majority of the park's character.