

THE GARDENS TRUST
BUSINESS STRATEGY
2022 - 2025

Executive Summary

November 2022



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Vision and Mission

The Vision of the Gardens Trust is to conserve England's diverse and valuable collection of historic gardens, designed landscapes and green spaces for the discovery and enjoyment of all our communities. The Mission is to conserve, educate, campaign and communicate the significance and benefits of historic gardens, designed landscape and green spaces to a wider audience.

Over the next three years the Gardens Trust will continue its commitment to strategic themes that are inherent in its charitable aims and ensure long term financial sustainability. It will manage the current range of core activities of conservation, planning, engagement and volunteer support, events provision, research and learning. It will also continue to develop these activities through support and collaboration, sharing, communication, championing and influencing.

The Strategic Aims

Conservation and Planning

- As statutory consultee provide **correct and proportionate responses** to relevant planning applications in collaboration with the County Gardens Trusts.
- Strive to influence planning policy and decision makers at all levels to ensure effective protection of historic parks, gardens, and designed landscapes.
- Record and deliver conservation information, and use to contribute to engagement, training, advice and support to community stakeholders and partners including the County Gardens Trusts.

Engagement and Volunteer Support

- Engage with local communities and wide range of stakeholders for the **raising awareness** of the values and vulnerabilities of historic parks, gardens, and designed landscapes and to encourage voluntary involvement in their protection and conservation.
- Expand engagement and support activities to a **wider and more diverse audience** and potential stakeholders.
- Provide a **volunteer support and training programmes** to strengthen the capacity of County Gardens Trusts to assist them in undertaking local site record and research and other initiatives and to contribute to the Gardens Trust's planning case work.
- Promote and provide a range of **networking events** for the County Gardens Trusts to share knowledge and facilitate improvement of membership numbers and viability.

Education and Research

- Build up and **share knowledge** of the history of gardens, designed landscapes and greenspaces so that they can be better appreciated and enjoyed by all.
- Working in **partnership** with professional bodies and through **research, recording and archiving** share and disseminate the values and significance of historic gardens, designed landscapes and green spaces so that they can be better understood and conserved.

- Contribute to the establishment of the Gardens Trust as the respected and acknowledged **leading authority and source of knowledge** in the conservation planning of historic gardens, designed landscapes and green spaces.

The Key Challenges

The global situation and the economic and financial situations are uncertain, it is therefore essential to plan prudently for the years ahead and to seek to provide a resilient and sound basis in which the Gardens Trust can pursue its strategic aims. The key challenges ahead include:

- The potential loss or reduction of core and project funding in short to medium term and inability or time not available to generate alternative funding.
- Supporting the Gardens Trusts in their work.
- Maintaining and strengthening the Gardens Trust's planning work and the services it provides for Historic England, other agencies, the County Gardens Trusts and local authorities.
- Reducing the dependence on volunteer time for delivery and development of the Gardens Trusts core and supporting activities.

Strategic Directions

- The Strategy prioritises what can be reasonably achieved in the 'short term' ie during 2023 while current core grant funding levels are available. In this period there is an opportunity to implement some core activity development within existing funding.
- In addition, it is vital that 2023 is used to invest in and build the Gardens Trusts capability and capacity to fundraise. At the end of 2023 a review of fundraising achievements and potential for the years 2024/2025 will indicate operational investment priorities for these years.

A Cautious and Incremental Approach in 2023

- The Gardens Trust will need to generate £280k-£290k in 2023 to meet the status quo with some incremental development from the end of 2022 onwards.
- The above assumes that public funding for planning casework is maintained at 2022 levels (ie the continued need by Historic England to maintain Statutory Consultee duties through the Gardens Trust). It also assumes that public funding for the engagement and volunteer support work could be significantly reduced from March 2024.
- An immediate priority in 2023 will be the implementation of the fundraising strategy and recruitment of a fund raising officer. This is essential for the Gardens Trust to realise its strategic aims and ensure that it has the financial resources to do so.
- The audience development strategy completed in 2022 will be implemented and enhance existing membership levels providing some additional income.
- Support for selected County Gardens Trusts will be maintained but will be focused on those most in need of support and able to benefit from it.
- The structure and work of the Conservation and Education and Training Committees will be reviewed with existing staff resources and volunteer support.
- The Gardens Trust's lecture series which provides a significant contribution to overall annual income will be maintained and developed to meet demand and attract new audiences.

- Other selected incremental actions and improvements to core and support activities and administrative infrastructure will be prioritised and implemented within available resources.

Looking Ahead to 2024/2025

At the end of 2023 a review of fundraising achievements and income potential for 2024 will guide investment focus for the following years. There are a wide range of 'business as usual' and incremental strategic moves and actions set out in more detail in the Strategy. Subject to continued availability of funding, these will be needed to further enhance and develop the organisation. At this stage priorities for 2024/2025 investment should be given to (i) the resourcing for fundraising as a core activity and (ii) development of the strength and authority of the Gardens Trust to undertake statutory conservation planning casework and policy advice.