

Overflow questions for Candide

Parallel Session 2: Curation and Cultivation in the 21st Century

“Visitor feedback often says they visit gardens, particularly as a family, to escape using screens, how do we balance this?”

Candide allows garden visitors to optionally use different features at their own leisure. For digital ticketing and memberships, for example, visitors are required to show their day ticket or membership code only at entry to the garden. The plant identification tool can be used swiftly as part of their journey through the garden when the visitor may wish to know the species or cultivar that interests them, similar to taking a photograph. Our audio tours provide a hands-free experience, which many listen to ahead of their visit; however, Candide are also working on making the activation of audio tour points very precise, based on the visitor’s location in the garden much as museum tours do. Allowing visitors to enjoy the garden without distractions and having different layers of interactive, yet optional, features is key to balancing screen time with green time.

“What do you think plant labels could look like in a 5G digital world?”

It may open up a number of exciting opportunities for plant labelling in gardens. The higher speed, lower latency, and increased device connectivity could mean more precise plant record mapping, more complex 2D and 3D representations of garden features and, coupled with Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML) processes, could mean faster pipelines for accessing information associated with plant labels.

“How reliable is the plant id tool? Does it also provide cultivar information?”

The current focus for our Plant ID tool is on genus and species-level identifications, but we are working with plant record keepers and the public to build a larger database of plant imagery, which includes cultivated plants and more specialist taxa. We regularly train the model with new additions and welcome feedback from people using the feature to make improvements. The more photographs we can train the ‘machine’ against, the better the model becomes for the public to use – like all of us, it’s always learning!

“Will it be possible to have one virtual label with multiple access levels for visitors, staff and others?”

Staff members are likely to access plant records for a different purpose than visitors, and we’ll likely end up with different solutions to better assist the different groups. Either way, we believe virtual labels provide very useful technology for both sets of users and, with the launch of Botanical Software as part of Candide, a lot more is possible for public gardens.



“Do garden visitors have to pay to access the info?”

It's completely free for anyone to access plant information, use plant identification, access editorial coverage and find and learn about gardens to visit. The only paid elements are buying tickets for entry to gardens and purchasing plants from our Marketplace.

For gardens in 2020, we developed digital and analogue marketing strategies for those which have signed up to ticketing, broadening their reach to the millions we have visiting our app and website, for free. We have also provided our machine-learning powered insights to partner gardens, allowing them to better predict visitor footfall and commit staff where needed. Additionally, we've included audio tour usage, heat maps of garden visitor locations, and mutual connections of visitors with other Candide-ticketed gardens.

While this has been completely free for 2020, we have completed the testing phase and just announced our competitive digital ticketing pricing structure for 2021: 5% of the ticket cost per transaction for tickets costing over £6, and 3.9% +20p per transaction when tickets are less than £6 if Candide is the sole ticketing provider. Where Candide acts as an independent third party to sell tickets for a garden, the fee will be 11% of the ticket cost per transaction. We also offer free marketing assets and promotion across all pricing brackets. We also work with a number of gardens to run trials for enhanced visitor experience through digital solutions, and particularly enjoy developing these collaborative, problem-solving relationships.

“How are you making the technology inclusive - i.e. currently seems very visual whereas our visitors include sight challenges”

We are working on making our digital experience in gardens more inclusive and accessible to all visitors. Our audio tours provide one such a mechanism, and something that increased during periods of lockdown and the closing of gardens. It has allowed people to listen to gardens' stories during very challenging times. We are in continuous discussion with other gardens with whom we are developing new solutions to accommodate a greater number of garden visitors.

“Has Candide got a tool to measure impact of collections on visitors?”

Though Candide does not yet have a specific tool to measure the impact of collections on visitors, we are exploring gardens' plant data and visitor interactions (through experiences such as Plant ID) to build fascinating digital insights. These are informing gardens about previously-unknown behaviours of visitors and how such data can be utilised for planning the growth and expansion of garden facilities, routes for the public, and ultimately support grant requests and development funding. Beyond visitor-focussed gardens, we are also exploring institutional approaches to scoring plant collections based on their “importance”. This will help to better monitor plant collections over time and assist staff on how they may approach their curatorial work.



“I have recently tried to use the Candide virtual garden tour at Tatton Park. Despite having a medium-high 4G connection on my smartphone, the signal was far from coping with the app. I kindly suggest either partner with the host gardens to offer reliable wifi for a small fee or ‘lightening’ up the data load to make it more accessible”

Thank you for your feedback. We’re continually lightening the data load for devices and testing ways of enabling features that are on the device itself, rather than requiring the cellular data or WiFi. For example, we are looking into solutions where users have the option to pre-load data to enhance the experience in gardens with problematic coverage. We use this approach with our plant collection app (Floria) used by staff members, which is designed to work without network connectivity. We will therefore be exploring a similar approach for other app features.

