

## *Gardens Masterplans and Management*

The PlantNetwork 'Garden Masterplans and Management' event took place at Trewithen Gardens on 12<sup>th</sup> September 2019. With over 25 participants, the day provided an introduction to garden masterplans – what they are and what purpose they serve – before looking at one case study in detail. The case study was Trewithen Gardens which is about to undergo significant change through the development and implementation of a masterplan.

### *Garden Masterplans – An Introduction*

Judith Teasdale introduced the role and purpose of a masterplan, describing the need for a vision for a garden, determining the budget available for maintenance, development and management, and establishing the need to understand the history or past use of a site. The masterplan also needs basic information about the site: climate and microclimate, topography, aspect and wind direction, views in/out, soil type, existing vegetation, place in the landscape – all the features you would expect when designing a garden. A conservation management plan might be needed first for sensitive areas or sites of historic or heritage interest. It is important to record all thoughts and observations as masterplanning is an iterative process: ideas discarded early on might need to be re-visited later as the situation changes. Record reasons for changes as these factors can be lost as personnel change. It is also important to consider the masterplan as a living document – it is never completed but is continuously evolving.

Important initial considerations:

- Ascertain budget early on and what scope exists for increasing or decreasing available budget in light of different factors. Without a firm budget, the masterplan is built on very unstable ground and could collapse at any stage!
- Visitor numbers – current and predicted. Will local developments lead to increases in visitor numbers? Can the site cope with increased visitor numbers (car parks, visitor facilities etc.)? Are there areas of potential conflict between existing site users and new visitors? Issues of accessibility? Ensure that infrastructure is sufficient for long term use, visitors and other intended functions.
- Is the garden climate resilient? Consider issues of invasive species and their management, P&D management, changing planting plans.

### *Trewithen Gardens – Case Study*

Gary Long, Head of Gardens and Parks at Trewithen, introduced the reasoning behind the development of a masterplan for the gardens – namely the creation of a plan that will direct the development of the gardens and parkland immediately around the house to ensure the

multifunctionality of the site (as family home, visitor attraction, event location, productive pasture etc.). The process started with determining the vision for the site and then looked at the history of the estate, identifying a masterplan from 1747, records of plant introductions as a result of plant hunting expeditions, and even the identification of a rare cultivar (only two plants in existence so plans now to micro-propagate). Key features of the site were then examined, finding a self-supporting Wisteria and unlabelled plants in the Camelliarium which were then identified with the aid of a partial, informal plan. The site has for many years been managed by a very small team concerned more with maintaining what was in existence rather than creating or redesigning aspects. Also the garden had been subject to 'wheelbarrow planting' – finding the right place for a plant but not considering any design aspect. Records of the planting were, however, rare and patchy with no formal system – partly due to the very long employment periods of the head gardeners. In 2017, the Masterplan started to be enacted: with a budget in place, contractors could be brought in to help with scrub removal. As a living document, it is still being revisited and refined but there are now plans for the next 5-10 years.

#### *Important Considerations of a Masterplan*

Matthew Tickner, landscape architect behind the Trewithen masterplan, stressed that collaboration is key to the successful development and delivery of a masterplan. This might involve owners, estate managers, garden and estate teams, advisors and experts from relevant fields. Other aspects include:

- Are there listed buildings or scheduled monuments? Development of the garden might impact on the listed status (e.g. installing a patio next to Grade 1 listed building will affect setting). Are there other important historical considerations? For instance, if have a formal landscape park from 1700-1766, might this be reinstated in the masterplan? The local records offices are useful sources of information as are on-ground assessments: could a tool shed with a highly decorative interior really have been a summerhouse? There is also a real opportunity to carry out plans that were not realised in past plans or schemes.
- What environmental aspects do you need to consider? Flood management is a real issue for most gardens and can be integrated effectively in a garden through the masterplan. This might include creating new ponds to 'slow the flow', rewilding, allowing areas to flood for temporary relief, directing flow from developments outside the site etc.
- Remember to zone development: what area should be developed first? This might not be a high priority area but may make more significant developments easier in the long run.