

Chandlers Way Park Environmental Enhancements Project

– Steyning's very own 'Secret Garden'

This is a large space (approximately 26m by 53m long) and currently contains some rather dated play equipment at one end (which will soon need to be replaced or removed), a large area of grass and some small shrubs and trees. The space is enclosed by fences, with houses on three sides and the track which runs from Newham Lane to Ingram Road on the fourth.

The aim of this project was to design a public garden that was not only aesthetically pleasing, but would also provide recreational facilities (for play and socialising), be attractive to wildlife and also be sustainable going forward in a changing climate.

According to the Royal Horticultural Society, creating a wildlife garden can have a huge impact and is critical in a changing climate:

- Gardens help control temperatures, mitigating the effects of extreme heat and cold.
- They prevent flooding by absorbing rainwater that would otherwise overload drainage systems (as opposed to hard landscaping).
- They provide a habitat for wildlife (something that is under threat as more and more land is being used for housing).
- They support human health by easing stress and providing physical exercise.

Furthermore, studies have shown that the management of greenspace, to ensure it is of a high standard, can help to reduce the prevalence of crime and vandalism and improve the aesthetic quality of an area (Forest Research 2020).

Proposal 1

Proposal 1 is an enhancement to the existing space, retaining a similar layout.

Play area: The play equipment is updated with attractive, natural looking woodland play equipment.

Nectar bar: To the south of the play area a nectar rich hedge is planted. Suggestions include *Lavandula Angustifolia*, *Hebe 'Autumn Glory'*, *Salvia Rosmarinus*, *Cistus x purpureus*. This will provide food for pollinating insects.

Pebble stream: A feature of inset pebbles has been added to the garden to simulate water. This will also hold water after rainfall allowing wildlife to drink and bathe. Water is one of the best ways of attracting wildlife into the garden, however as it is anticipated that the garden will be used by small children, water has been simulated by pebbles. These will also be a good habitat for a range of insects and invertebrates.

Hedge: A native hedge (*Hazel*, *Hawthorne*, *Blackthorn*, *Field Maple* etc.) is planted along the east fence. This will provide roosting and nesting sites for birds and insects, as well as being a source of food providing pollen, nuts, and berries for wildlife. Hedges also create cool, shady places in what otherwise might be a hot, exposed site. The soil under hedges and around trees should be mulched with organic matter. Mulch provides cover for small animals and, as it breaks down, it enriches the soil and provides nourishment for plants. These in turn encourage more wildlife into the garden. It also helps to trap moisture in the ground, which reduces the need for watering.

A 1m wide wood chip path separates the fence and the hedge to enable easy access for maintenance. The hedge should be maintained at the level of the fence to ensure that it does not impact on residents bordering the garden.

Trees: A selection of small trees are planted at the southern end of the garden. These, again, will be friendly to wildlife providing food and shelter. Bird boxes can be installed here. Suggestions include Cherry Plum, Crab Apple, Mountain Ash. The trees will also offer shade for those using the space for relaxation or picnicking.

Willow Dome: A large living willow dome is planted in the south west corner. This will also provide shade as well as an additional play area for children.

Fence: The west fence is painted a natural wood colour and has a series of small bug hotels mounted on it. This would be a great opportunity to involve the local schools in their design and construction.

Benches: Benches are sited to enable visitors to the garden to rest and relax.

Grass: A large central area of grass is retained.

Proposal 2

Proposal 2 is a complete redesign of the area and utilises a circular theme to connect the different areas of the garden.

Play area: There are three play areas. The first is a large semi-circle of woodchip at the northern entrance. This contains a spiral of log stepping stones. Two further circles containing woodland play equipment are sited along the eastern side.

Benches: Log benches are sited at the north west corner of the garden.

Hedge: A native hedge (Hazel, Hawthorne, Blackthorn, Field Maple etc.) is planted along the eastern and southern borders. This will provide roosting and nesting sites for birds and insects, as well as being a source of food providing pollen, nuts, and berries for wildlife. Hedges also create cool, shady places in what otherwise might be a hot, exposed site. The soil under hedges and around trees should be mulched with organic matter. Mulch provides cover for small animals and, as it breaks down, it enriches the soil and provides nourishment for plants. These in turn encourage more wildlife into the garden. It also helps to trap moisture in the ground, which reduces the need for watering.

Hollies: A small stand of 3 Hollies are planted between the hedge and the path. As these are evergreen, they will provide year-round interest, as well as berries for birds. Bird boxes can be installed here. They will add height to the garden, balancing out the willow dome which is planted diagonally opposite.

Mixed shrubs: A mixed shrub border is planted in the north east corner. These are a mix of evergreens and winter interest shrubs so will be pleasing all year round. They will also provide berries for birds and nectar for early pollinators. Suggestions include *Choisya ternata*, *Cornus sanguinea* 'Midwinter Fire', *Mahonia s media* 'Charity', *Euonymus fortune* 'Emerald 'n Gold'.

Willow Dome: A large living willow dome is planted in the south west corner. Tunnels leading in and out of the dome enclose part of the woodchip path. This will also provide shade as well as an additional play area for children.

Fence: The west fence is painted a natural wood colour and has a series of small bug hotels mounted on it. This would be a great opportunity to involve the local schools in their design and construction.

Pebble stream: A feature of inset pebbles has been added to the garden to simulate water. This will also hold water after rainfall allowing wildlife to drink and bathe. Water is one of the best ways of attracting wildlife into the garden, however as it is anticipated that the Garden will be used by small children, water has been simulated by pebbles. These will also be a good habitat for a range of insects and invertebrates.

Nectar bar: To the south of the play area a nectar rich border is planted. Suggestions include *Lavandula Angustifolia*, *Hebe 'Autumn Glory'*, *Salvia Rosmarinus*, *Cistus x purpureus*. This will provide food for pollinating insects.

Path: A woodchip path runs in an oval around the garden connecting the different areas.

Grass: A large central area of grass is retained.

Installation and Maintenance

As Proposal 1 is simply an enhancement of the existing garden layout, installation costs and timings would be lower.

Both proposals would require ongoing maintenance.

Regular mowing would be required, and the nectar bar would need weeding and pruning, as would the shrub border in Proposal 2. Species for both borders have been chosen to be relatively low maintenance. Native hedging is usually cut once a year. Small trees would require winter pruning. Once established the willow dome would need pruning once or twice a year.

Woodchip paths and play areas would need to be kept weed free. As the aim of this garden is to take into account climate change and encourage wildlife, it would be preferable if weed killer was avoided. Lay permeable membrane under the wood chip will reduce weed infestations but not completely prevent them.

In order to extend the life time of the fence, preservation should be applied annually.