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Proposals and Recommendations

These proposals and recommendations are presented in relation to character areas that reflect the history of the site and its current condition, which are set out in section 5.

These character areas are:

1. Kearsney Court / Russell Gardens
2. Kearsney Abbey
3. Kearsney Abbey Parkland
4. Coxhill Mount
5. River Paper Mill

1 Kearsney Court / Russell Gardens

Russell Gardens is what remains of the spectacular terrace gardens of Kearsney Court, designed by Thomas Mawson, for the owner Edward Barlow in 1901. The plan for the gardens, **Figure 3.14**, shows a design that is recognisable today – although it was not implemented in full accordance with the plan, the spirit and principles were followed through and much survives today. No ‘as-built’ drawings for the gardens have survived, but the 1906 OS plan, **Figure 3.11**, shows in outline what was constructed; the upper terraces are reasonably faithful to the original design drawing but the lower gardens were laid out slightly differently, presumably in response to site constraints such as topography, ground conditions and mature trees which we know were integrated into the garden. The orchards were not planted to the south of the walled garden as planned, but on slopes on either side of the semi-circular bastion wall; the layout of the tennis courts and croquet lawns was revised, with a lawn set on each side of the Lily Pond and a further tennis court to the west; and the Lily Pond was less ornate than originally envisaged. However, the main lower garden feature, the canal with its bridges and boathouse, seems to have been constructed as designed in its entirety.

Regardless of these relatively minor adjustments, the essence of the original design was delivered and this still can be seen in what remains today, with the park dominated by the two lower terraces and the canal

and bridge ensemble at the valley bottom.

The upper terraces around Kearsney Court itself are now hidden by trees within the park and on the slopes around the bastion. Re-establishing the strong visual connection between the house and its former gardens, and thereby allowing the elegance and delight of Mawson’s design to be revealed again, is the greatest restoration opportunity within the gardens and achieving this is central to success.

Early photographs add significant detail to our understanding of the gardens that were constructed, particularly the 1930 aerial photograph, **Figure 3.15**. It is a combination of the 1901 plan, the 1906 OS and this 1930s aerial photograph, augmented by detail in other photographs, that provides the basis for the restoration approach set out here.

In describing proposals for Russell Gardens the character area is subdivided into four sub-areas:

- The canal and lower gardens
- The sports terrace
- The orchards
- The woodlands

1a Canal and lower gardens

Historical character

Until the industrial revolution this was a farmed valley landscape with the narrow flood plain of the relatively modest River Dour running along the valley bottom. During the industrial revolution, the water power of the Dour was harnessed with dams and leats channelling the water that drove water wheels of several mills. A dam below Bushy Rough House created a lake immediately upstream from the meadows that were to become part of Kearsney Court gardens.

At the beginning of C20 this landscape was transformed when the meadows and river were incorporated into part of a formal garden. A massive canal was designed by Mawson, taking up much of the valley bottom, framed at either end by covered bridges that acted as weirs to control water flow into and out of the canal. Bypass channels and an

overflow drain were also incorporated to manage excessive water when the river was in spate. This created an immensely formal designed water feature that dominated the valley bottom.

Bordering the canal on the uphill side were a series of terraces, and to the west towards Bushy Rough were informal gardens.

Issues

Poor entrances and circulation:

- Lack of a well-marked and safe connection between Kearsney Abbey and Russell Gardens;
- A number of small, gated, entrances off Alkham Road;
- Unattractive entrance to/from Bushy Rough – narrow concrete path, tortuous route, industrial appearance of railings, etc.;
- Entrance providing sloped access (for disabled use, buggies) is narrow and unpleasant;
- Circulation route avoiding steps is poorly connected particularly from canal level to the terrace above;
- Lack of path on the south side of the canal.

Canal and watercourses:

- Canal may not be watertight (but may not need to be according to hydrologists);
- Condition of the pavilion bridges and boathouse, which are in need of restoration;
- Edging to canal in poor condition;
- Canal overflow needs repair;
- Changes have been made to ground levels adjacent to canal, including re-routing of path;
- Sluices, channel edging and wooden bridge in poor condition.

Gardens:

- Horticultural interest in the gardens has been lost;
- Loss of garden summerhouse;

- Playground is visually intrusive and dominant;
- Hedges have become overgrown;
- Lack of WC facilities;
- Design of the eastern end of gardens has been weakened over time with loss of planting and loss of land to housing.

Car park:

- Limited parking at the Lodge entrance;
- No specific provision for disabled visitors.

Restoration approach

The 1901 set piece design of the canal, bridges and boathouse was the focal point of Mawson's design and should be restored and renovated in its entirety as a set piece. Sufficient information is available within the historical documents to guide restoration designs, and there are opportunities to re-instate elements that have been lost from the original design to support present day use.

The original ground levels around the canal need to be re-established and the addition of a path to link the boathouse with the main path networks is necessary to complete the circular walk around the canal, shown on Mawson's plan but never fully constructed. The path linking the boathouse to the western entrance, shown on the 1906 OS plan, has been lost over time.

A variety of small and large wooden gates give access into the gardens from Alkham Road: there is no sense of arriving at a special or unique place. Access for disabled people, and for pushchairs and buggies, is confusing. A path from the Alkham Road to the eastern pavilion bridge was part of the original Mawson design and this element of the design, including the planting elements, could be interpreted and re-instated to meet current design standards.

At the western end of the area, the link with Bushy Rough Park is similarly uninviting, and needs to be simplified both visually and functionally in order to create a good connection between Russell Gardens and the wilder park to the west. A playground has been installed immediately to the north-west of the canal, which interrupts the purity of the canal's formal design and is very visually intrusive, impacting badly on this impressive historic feature. The play area is also isolated from visitor facilities.

Planting on the slopes and terraces between the canal and tennis courts lacks design coherence, and over time has lost the characteristics of Mawson's work. The summerhouse, which provided

an important focal point to the planted terraces on the north side of the canal, was destroyed by fire in the 1980s and the replacement open pergola structure does not provide the same historical resonance or functionality.

Proposals

Circulation

- Redesign the main entrance to Russell Gardens from Kearsney Abbey, providing a surfaced path from the entrance to the eastern covered bridge, and laying out ornamental planting as shown on the Mawson plan; provide appropriate signage and create a sense of welcome;
- Rationalise the existing four entrances from the Alkham Road, gapping up the hedge where appropriate;
- Revise the design of the route to/from Bushy Rough Park, simplifying the path layout and bridge arrangements, removing inappropriate railings and unnecessary pipe work, widening the path where possible and providing an inviting connecting route;
- Open up the disabled access entrance from the Alkham Road and make it more welcoming; ensure that this entrance is clearly signposted as an easy access point to the park;
- Re-profile and re-align the ramp from the eastern pavilion bridge to the path on terrace above to improve disabled access to the canal side;
- Create footpaths to the boathouse as shown on Mawson's original design, thereby completing a surfaced route around the canal.

Canal and watercourses

- Maintain sufficient silt to ensure the canal is generally watertight but dredge as and when necessary to maintain a decent depth of water;
- Carefully restore the pavilion bridges and the boathouse to good condition using correct materials and finishes, for example, matching the original stone steps and removing the concrete copies;
- Restore the canal's crisp and straight edges, re-levelling the banks where necessary to achieve this;
- Ensure that the overflow system to the canal is operating correctly and is adequate for the river's peak flow rates;
- Carry out repairs and remediation to the banks of the water channel downstream of the eastern pavilion bridge;

- Replace or repair wooden bridge adjacent to Russell Gardens car park;
- Investigate asbestos in culverts and replace and repair as necessary;
- Remove the inappropriate 'display' gardens (including the broken-brick-wall retaining 'rockeries') adjacent to the canal and restore the original ground levels along the canal-side terraces.

Gardens

- Remove the pergola and re-instate the summerhouse pavilion using evidence of the original design to guide the form and finishes for the new structure;
- Remove the playground and return this area to woodland garden and lawns, with yew hedges and ornamental planting beds which more closely reflect the early designs for the garden and public park;
- Examine the feasibility of providing WC facilities in the restored summerhouse; if not, consider alternative options for providing WCs within Russell Gardens / Bushy Rough Park, including the desirability of renovating the existing WC block higher up the slope.

1b Sports Terrace

Historical character

Mawson's design originally proposed a group of tennis courts and croquet lawns, for the terrace above the canal, with a generosity that would have amply accommodated large Edwardian house parties typical of the era. Two tennis courts were to have been cut into the upper slopes and two large croquet lawns were planned, with the Lily Pond between them.

The area to the east, south of the walled garden, was intended to be laid out as orchards, but these were never were never planted in this location. The 1906 plan shows only the lower croquet lawns were built; to the west of them was a flat space for tennis and to the east open grassland defined by paths into relatively rectangular spaces.

Early images of the gardens show that the eastern lawn was used for croquet and the western lawn for tennis. The latter was clearly a poor decision - the courts were originally unfenced and were located next to the Lily Pond! Later photographs show that ball-stop fencing was installed around the tennis court.

When the gardens became a public park, it seems that croquet was

stopped and tennis use was established on both lawns. A pitch and putt course was created on the sloping laws to the east and a payment hut built in the shrubbery between the tennis courts and golf course.

Issues

- Lily pond is now a small planted area; the waterbody has gone and the surviving walls are in a very poor condition;
- Important views of Kearsney Court have been lost in overgrown conifers and secondary tree growth;
- Tennis courts are surrounded by unsightly fencing;
- Payment hut is derelict and unsightly;
- Terrace wall to the north of the Lily Pond has had its upper courses removed, lost its pillars, coping and swags or chains which supported climbers, almost certainly roses;
- Hedges around the pond have lost their shape and definition, and Mawson's distinctive corner benches are missing.
- Pitch and putt use has ceased but the greens remain, disrupting the flow of the landform;
- Mature elms and other large trees, which predated the garden and which separated this area visually from the canal and river channel to the south, have been lost;
- Views across open meadow from the driveway to the house to the eastern pavilion bridge, have been lost to development;
- Remaining tree structure has a random, purposeless character and fails to define the space;
- Lack of path connections and purposeful routes; benches randomly located, and disconnected from paths;
- Overgrown pleached lime walk, where trees are in poor condition and lacks purpose and focus.

Restoration approach

This broad central terrace should retain and conserve the landscape characteristics of the croquet lawns laid out on either side of a restored ornamental Lily Pond.

The tennis courts now receive little use, and there is insufficient demand to justify the continuing expense of maintaining the grass courts; in conservation terms, it is highly desirable to be able to remove the ball-stop fencing.

The lawns could be used as an events space, although this is probably feasible only if basic visitor facilities such as WCs can be provided

somewhere within the gardens. The lawns could also continue to be used for croquet on an informal basis; there may be opportunities for a croquet club to be established, but again, this would need to be supported by provision of basic facilities.

To the east, open lawns on the slopes south of the walled garden should be designed to promote appreciation of the views and vistas southwards, over the lower terraces and valley bottom. If there was evidence of demand, then pitch and putt could perhaps be re-established, but otherwise the greens should be graded out and the flowing contours reinstated.

The pleached lime walk seems to be an embellishment of a functional path, added after Mawson's plan was implemented, and which originally ran straight along the edge of an additional cultivated area extending south from the walled garden. The path led straight up the slope to meet a narrow terrace path running east-west outside the walled garden. The remains of the terrace are still there, although obscured by overgrown planting. The lime avenue path divides the space, which is much smaller now than it was previously due to sale of adjacent land; and it sets up expectations, but at the moment fails to lead anywhere.

Proposals

- Restore the Lily Pond, recreating the original water-body, which is a key feature of the principal axis through the garden.
- Restore the clipped blocks of yew that defined the corners of the Lily Pond and re-instate Mawson's distinctive corner benches;
- Remove outgrown conifers along the northern side of the terrace and replace this with new specimens in accordance with the original design intention;
- Restore the northern terrace wall, reinstating pillars, coping, and the swags or chains between the pillars and re-establish roses.
- Remove ball-stop fencing around the tennis courts and open up the lawn areas;
- Remove the payment hut;
- Re-shape and rejuvenate the hedges, replanting to complete the designed layout where necessary and where known;
- Create attractive parkland, remodelling the landform where appropriate to remove the 'tees and greens'
- Re-establish the original garden paths, including the terrace path immediately south of the walled garden wall and improve

connectivity and circular route opportunities for today's visitors;

- Remove the aging pleached limes and pathway, to open up and unite the spaces on either side of it; establish a path from the Alkham Road entrance, leading up the slope to meet the terrace path and thus connect the walled garden terrace in to the path network.
- Establish new boundary planting on the east boundary, to screen the unsightly close-board fence, re-introduce some of the characteristics of Mawson's planting to these slopes, and direct views towards the pavilion bridge.

1c Orchards

Historical character

This area was originally envisaged by Mawson as open grassy slopes, bordered to the west by woodland and to the east by a walled garden and orchard. The 1906 Ordnance Survey plan shows this was never constructed and instead this whole area was planted as an orchard on a staggered grid pattern.

Old plans and photographs show the main path running east to west linking to the main axial view at an oval feature, planted up with yew. There is also evidence from one of the old photographs that this path was defined by a high trellis or pergola, supporting what appear to be espaliered fruit trees. This fence seems to run from either side of the oval, for the width of the tennis courts below.

Issues

- Secondary woodland and scrub has replaced the orchard planting resulting in total loss of key views and visual connection between Kearsney Court and its gardens;
- Loss of detailed features, such as the pergola and trained fruit trees;
- Bastion walls are in poor condition and need to be surveyed and stabilised;
- Poor circulation network with some of the original paths now lost.

Restoration approach

This area is almost entirely covered in secondary woodland growth and it is desirable to open it up again, reinstating the key axial views, and return the wooded area to lower, more open, orchard planting in order to visually reconnect the house with its landscape. There are issues of privacy and security for the residents of Kearsney Court, which need careful consideration. Careful boundary treatments will be required to separate park visitors from the private terraces.

However, it is envisaged that, once established, the orchard will provide a visual buffer between the public park and private house and upper terraces, whilst allowing a much stronger visual link to be recreated between gardens and building, thus enabling understanding and appreciation of the original design.

Paths and features should also be restored in line with the design intent, which will both enable improved access, and add interest and delight for visitors.

Realisation of these proposals is dependent on Dover District Council reaching agreement with residents of Kearsney Court, to bring half of the wooded area into public ownership; negotiations are currently underway at the time of writing this report (summer 2015).

Proposals

- Remove the scrub woodland and restore slopes as orchards;
- Recreate the oval path arrangement and planting bed, below the bastion;
- Recreate the paths leading east and west from the oval, linking with the walled garden terrace to the east and woodland area to the west;
- Restore the steps leading north and south from the oval to the bastion and the lily pond;
- Incorporate boundary treatments appropriate to the Arts and Crafts period into the restored paths and steps in order to provide privacy and security for the residents of Kearsney Court;
- Ensure that the paths meet present day access standards in terms of gradient, etc.

1d Woodlands

Historical character

The original Mawson design showed the western boundary planted with woodland; this was visible in the 1906 Ordnance Survey plan and early aerial photographs also provide supporting evidence. One of the early photographs across the bastion terrace shows a vista to Bushy Rough House; the woodland today is much denser. The 1906 Ordnance Survey map shows the terrace path above the bastion extending westwards to the woodland edge before turning ninety degrees and dropping down the hillside to the south west entrance from Alkham Road.

The woodland massing to the west of the house is matched by a block of woodland on the east side of Kearsney Court (north of the proposed

eastern orchard area and walled garden); consistent management of the woodland is desirable, to maintain a balanced setting of the house and gardens.

It is probable that a mixed shrubbery originally ran along the boundary with Bushy Rough; this seems to be indicated on Mawson's original drawing, and some remnant border species can be found along the boundary.

Issues

- Western boundary is poorly fenced with chain link
- Shrubbery and woodland understory is overgrown and lacks species interest;
- There is no clear approach to woodland management;
- Poor path network;
- There is open access to and from Palmtree Hill Plantation, which is private land to the north of the park, and nothing to mark the boundary between the public park and the private woodland.

Restoration Approach

Woodland on the western boundary balances the woodland to the east of Kearsney Court, and the tree cover that survives along the original driveway that is now in private ownership. It provides symmetry to the setting, and enables the garden to merge into the wooded backdrop that rises up the slopes from Russell Gardens to Palmtree Hill plantation, Scotland Common, and the woodlands around Bushy Rough. Views from Coxhill Mount show how wooded the backdrop to Kearsney Court is, and also reveal Mawson's use of Copper Beech trees as 'punctuation marks' within his tree and woodland plantings. The woodlands should be actively managed to conserve them, and decisions need to be made about how to manage the woodland understory and whether to enable routes through it for walkers.

Visitors have created a route to and from Palmtree Hill Plantation, which is land owned by residents of Kearsney Court. It may be helpful to define the park boundary with the plantation, and to make any path link 'official'. The boundary of the northern part of the woodlands with Kearsney Court to the east is currently poorly defined and relies on barbed wire; it is not clear at the time of writing whether this boundary is the responsibility of Kearsney Court residents or Dover District Council but it would also be beneficial to define it more clearly.

Proposals

- Put in place a considered programme of woodland management work, including dead-wooding, and under-planting, to diversify

age structure, maintain and diversify species mix, and perpetuate woodland cover;

- Control under-storey of western boundary, clearing inappropriate scrub where necessary; re-juvenate by replanting and maintaining ornamental shrub edge to the boundary woodland;
- Renew boundary fencing along the boundary with Bushy Rough land and with Palmtree Hill plantation; consider renewing fence with along Kearsney Court boundary too;
- Create footpaths that meet the desire lines of users; consider negotiating permissive access to Palmtree Hill Plantation.

2 Kearsney Abbey

The character area defined in this report as Kearsney Abbey embraces the site of the old Abbey mansion, and the lawns and lakes that form the landscape immediately associated with the old house. It includes the site of Kearsney Abbey corn mill (including the ruins of the old Town Mill that were relocated here by the Fector family) and its associated leats and culverts.

The landscape that survives today was created by John Minet Fector, who purchased the site in 1820, and by his son of the same name, who completed the house and garden work, by the middle of the C19. The landscape was set out in Picturesque style; as a movement, the Picturesque aim, in essence, was to improve upon nature through design.

Although the Tithe Map of 1838 records the ownership, it is the 1872 Ordnance Survey map (**Figure 3.8**) which is the first plan that shows details of the landscape setting of Kearsney Abbey house. The plan reveals a landscape with sweeping, open lawns, set against a backdrop of perimeter planting, with a series of walks around the grounds of the house enabling the waterbodies, shrubberies and other garden embellishments to be appreciated.

The lake was the clear focus of the design, created at – presumably – considerable effort and expense - with three fountains adding interest, one on each of the two islands west of the bridge, and a third sited in the lake between them. At the extreme eastern end of the lake, an 'eye catcher' was constructed across the outfall to the lake as an arresting visual feature, which provided a bridge over the weir; this no longer exists.

There were other buildings within the landscape that have been lost, most notably the old corn mill near the western boundary, which was modified to pump water to the house; an entrance lodge near the

present day playground; an aviary to the west near the lake, and an orangery or ornamental glasshouse immediately to the west of the house. The icehouse, located between the house and the lodge, and constructed over one of the mill leats, survives.

Proposals for Kearsney Abbey character area are complex and are therefore set out in three sub-areas:

- Kearsney Abbey café and car parks
- The lawns
- The lake

2a *Kearsney Abbey café and car parks*

Historical character

This character area essentially comprises the footprint of the former house, (almost completely demolished in 1959), its entrance drive and service buildings. The only remnant of the house is the old billiard room which has been retained as the park café, and a small brick hut that was part of an outbuilding abutting the present day toilet block and boundary wall.

Most of the house footprint is now used as the site's main car park. The connection to the original entrance and lodge has been lost, although remnants of route remain; it passed by the lodge and then the ice house, leading to a turning area to the north east of the house. A pedestrian entrance to Kearsney Abbey also existed, immediately north of the house. Trees, including a number of yews and magnificent beech, survive from the planting along the northern boundary.

When the gardens were opened as a public park, the paths laid out for C19 domestic use were never properly appraised or revised, and this has resulted in inadequate entrance arrangements and a path network that fails to meet the needs of today's visitors. In some instances, access arrangements are dangerous.

Issues

- Vehicular circulation within the car park is difficult and conflicts with pedestrian movement particularly between the café and the WCs;
- Number of parking spaces is insufficient on busy days;
- Pedestrian link from the western car park is narrow, twisting, difficult to use especially for those with buggies etc., and does fails to provide a direct link (physical or visual) with visitor facilities in the café area;
- Vehicle circulation within the western car park is poor and the

layout makes poor use of the available space;

- Overflow parking arrangements, which makes use of the historic driveway route, are poor, and control measures to prevent vehicles moving into the park are unsightly;
- Visitor parking and access conflicts with the service yard and maintenance access;
- Large groups arriving, including coach parties, are difficult to accommodate; coaches currently stop on the main Alkham Road and visitors dropped off at the road lack a good path connection to the café and WCs;
- Poor public transport connections; bus stops are inconveniently located for the park entrances. However, Kearsney Station is only a short walk away;
- The former gateway into the former courtyard (at Lower Road north) still serves as a pedestrian entrance, although it is on a dangerous corner with very poor sightlines; unsightly barriers have been installed to address safety issues within the park;
- The entrance to the park near the site of the former orangery (west of the café) is very steep;
- WC facilities are unattractive, and are located across the car park from the café;
- The sense of the mansion location has largely been lost, in spite of the café and other clues such as remnant floor tiles;
- Car park and WC block are located on the elevated former house platform and are thus very prominent within the park landscape;
- Planting that bordered the original drive is now over-mature, shrubbery interest has been lost, with only yews that are now large trees surviving.
- Trees are mature, with some magnificent specimens, but these are now in need of a strategy for replacement;
- The area where the former lodge has been removed is neglected;
- The maintenance facility is unsightly.

Restoration approach

The basis for proposed restoration is drawn from the evidence of the 1872 Ordnance Survey plan, with the layout modified to accommodate the contemporary needs of this much visited urban park. Access and parking is a major issue: proposals seek to constrain vehicles to the line of the former entrance drive, re-opening the former lodge entrance,

and re-using the route to the present-day café car park. General visitor parking in this area will be limited; disabled and service access will be accommodated. Greater use of the western car park will be encouraged by improvements to its layout and path connections both to the café area in Kearsney Abbey and to Russell Gardens. An extension to the western car park will be explored to help meet peak use.

This approach restricts cars and service vehicles to the least visible parts of the park, adjacent to the outer wall; it also enables a one-way traffic system to be implemented, should the council wish.

A café extension and relocation of the existing WCs will help to screen the cars effectively from the wider, open areas of the park. Extension of the café building eastwards will also help to recreate some of the mass of the original mansion, on the original elevated site, and thus help to re-establishing the relationship between building and landscape.

There are also opportunities to re-instate some of the shrubbery planting to the south of the re-opened drive, and thus to both re-introduce planting interest and also to

Proposals

- Open up the former lodge entrance for vehicle and pedestrian use;
- Recreate the former driveway from the re-opened entrance to connect to the existing car park; consider using the current vehicle entrance as an exit only;
- Re-configure existing main car park in relation to new building proposals, to improve pedestrian use, accommodating disabled parking and service access but removing general visitor parking from this area;
- Establish parking along the new drive, restricting this to the north side of the drive alongside the perimeter wall
- Replace and renew planting along the driveway;
- Identify locations for large parkland trees as eventual replacements for aging existing trees;
- Remove lines of stones that act as overflow parking control measure;
- Restore the gateway as a park feature, but discourage pedestrian access to the park at the old gateway at the junction with Lower Road (north);
- Re-emphasise the original elevated location of Kearsney Abbey house, perhaps be retaining the terrace footprint and re-

interpreting the experience of the terrace for today's visitors;

- Create an extension to the café to the east, occupying the original Abbey mansion site and re-creating an impression of the mass and spread of the original building;
- Remove WCs and incorporate new facilities into a new café extension;
- Develop and implement a tree and shrub planting strategy to complement the restored entrance drive;
- Improve, and possibly interpret, the area of the former gate lodge when designing the re-opened entrance;
- Re-design the service yard facilities to be less intrusive visually and to improve operational functionality;
- Revise the layout of the western car park, to make more efficient use of the available space;
- Create a direct path from the western car park to the café, bypassing the mill ruins by installing a new bridge over the neck of the lake;
- Create an overflow parking extension area to the south of the western car park, to accommodate demand at peak times; integrate this into the landscape by use of ground modelling and with new tree planting.

2b The lawns

Historical character

This was an open area of lawns, flowing down the slope to the lakes and across rising ground to the east; specimen trees punctuated the open spaces. The area was originally divided by an open water channel, a leat taking water from Kearsney Pond to the river, but between 1930 and 1937 this was mostly culverted and only two open areas, one near the ice house and one at the exit to the mill pond remain. The culvert is beginning to collapse in places.

The western lawns are open, with relatively few trees, enabling open views southwards to the lake, its islands and fountains, and across the lake, which were controlled by planting on the two lake islands. There may well have been views to the ornamental bridge from the terrace, before the planting on the smaller island was allowed to grow tall.

On the lawns to the west was an aviary, a feature that has been lost and for which no images have been found. A path led from the house, past the orangery located near the northern boundary wall, to the site of Kearsney Abbey Mill. Plans indicate that there was mixed planting

between the path and the boundary wall.

In contrast, the eastern lawns were more planted up, apparently with deciduous and coniferous specimens set out with generous spacings, which may have resulted in arboretum characteristics. The views in this area were more contained, with trees and shrubs along the side of the lake to the south, and with plantations around the boundary to the east and north. A path from the entrance lodge followed the north and eastern boundaries to the lakeside.

The 1872 Ordnance Survey plan shows the path followed an ornamental tree and shrubbery border along the lake side. Other paths ran from the lodge to the lake and from the icehouse to the bridge over the lake, following the line of the open leat from Kearsney Pond.

Issues

- Lake edge is collapsing in places, and is uneven and therefore unsafe;
- Fencing around the lake is unsightly;
- Playground (east of the café) is located at a distance from the WCs and café;
- Play facilities are intensively used and showing signs of wear and tear although relatively recently refurbished;
- Play facilities cater for smaller children but make no provision for older children;
- There is an abundance of potential opportunity to use the water for play and recreation, which is completely missing from the park 'offer';
- Loss of historical path network and consequential lack of path connectivity or purpose;
- Lack of interest in the planting, particularly a lack of shrubberies and mixed planting which has been lost;
- Loss of historical planting layout and structure;
- Spatial planting pattern has been lost over time, particularly with new tree planting at spacings that will not be sufficient to allow specimen trees to grow to maturity;
- Redundant concrete pads remain from war-time outbuildings.

Restoration approach

The distinction between the western and eastern lawns should be drawn out, maintaining the more open character of the western area and carefully managing the planting to the east to create a more

enclosed landscape within which specimen trees are displayed to good effect. The landscape today has lost some of this distinctiveness that defined its character in the past.

There is a play facility, adjacent to the site of the former lodge, which is too small for the use it receives; it is somewhat isolated and distant from the café and WCs.

The leat from Kearnsey Pond is now mostly in culvert but the open part of the channel south of the ice house is marked with a paved area, seating and planting. The planting is now over mature and obscures the view of both the water and sightlines between the café and the play area. The watercourse could be opened up and used as the basis for an expanded play facility.

The icehouse is still clearly discernible; more could be made of this feature and some interpretation would help visitors appreciate what it is and how it was used. Care needs to be taken to create a natural end stop in this area, to the northwards view along the avenue to the fountain, from the far side of the lake. The original view line may well have extended to Kearsney Manor (Kearsney Court Farm) on the north side of Alkham Road, but this view has been cut short by mature trees now; a design feature could be added to provide an end-point to the view within the park.

Parkland trees, including a number of memorial trees, in the eastern lawns have not been planted with careful landscape and arboricultural consideration. An Atlantic Blue Cedar is located too close to the huge ancient Deodar Cedar, although there is a replacement Deodar better positioned to the north. There are other instances of trees planted too close to others, and health and form will be compromised as these trees mature.

The ground profile of the western lawn profile slopes down towards the lake, and in some areas there is now a steep slope dropping to the lake, and / or the lake edge is very uneven. Fencing has been installed to prevent access to the lake edge. It is desirable to restore ground levels around the lake, to provide even ground levels at the lake margins, which would remove the need for the fencing.

Proposals

- Restore the lake edges, levelling the ground around the lake margin and remove fencing from around the lake;
- Open up and expand the play area westwards, and improve play opportunities throughout the park, considering the potential to use the various water features for play and recreation;

- Recreate the perimeter path and tree and shrub plantations along the northern and eastern boundaries;
- Re-align the path approach to the bridge from the café, and provide a connection to the edge of the north-eastern section of the lake; integrate this with re-instatement of some planting and trees along this edge of the lake to re-create a more secluded character;
- Thin out some trees across the lawns, to create balanced spaces and controlled views.

2c The lake

Historical character

The lake was a landscape feature shown on the 1838 Tithe Award map. This map shows three islands and a bridging point; the layout is shown in more detail on the 1872 Ordnance Survey plan. The leat from Russell Gardens was culverted; the culvert has collapsed in places, which have been ornamented with benches and planting. Elsewhere, lower ground shows signs of further potential collapse.

Bridges across the middle of the lake, and at the eyecatcher to the east, connected the mansion with its kitchen garden (now in private ownership and mostly built up), which was sited south-east of the watercourse. A path led along the southern bank, east of the bridge, to the massive garden walls, adjacent to St Peter's Church and River Paper Mill.

The larger islands west of the bridge were reached by footbridges; no details of these have survived. Fountains are indicated on each island and in the lake at a point midway between them. An obelisk survives on the smaller island, nearer the bridge; this is not marked on any of the old maps and although it is dated 1821, its origins and date of installation are uncertain. The lake fountain provides a focus point for the avenues in the parkland to the south.

By 1896, a boathouse had been added to near to the old corn mill on the southern bank of the lake, and a path ran along the south bank of the lake from the bridge to the boathouse and then to the mill yard.

Over time, some of the islands in the lake to the east of the bridge have been lost but otherwise the outline of the lake has remained constant. The eye-catcher has been lost over time, apart from some remnant footings, and there is now no bridge at this point.

The two largest islands have become more and more overgrown, resulting in the loss of views to the south, and the obscuring of the fountains, obelisk and wider parkland.

Issues

- Loss of eye catcher, both as a park feature and as a bridge;
- Lack of paths around both 'arms' of the lake;
- Bridge railings in need of repairs; unsightly extension to provide dog-proof gate;
- Poor condition of sections of the lake edges;
- Fountains are not working, two fountains and the obelisk are obscured;
- Vegetation on the islands is overgrown, screening views of the parkland to the south;
- Culverts are in poor condition and where the channel is open, these areas are generally overgrown with vegetation and surrounded by seating that is difficult to access and in poor condition. One of the culverts may have asbestos issues;
- Sluice elements in poor condition;
- There is a strong desire among many park users to reinstate a short grass, dog-on-lead area to the south of the lakes, which will enable a greater range of use of this area and increase capacity.

Restoration approach

The lake is the main landscape feature. It was carefully designed to harness the River Dour (western arm, sometimes known as the Drellingore); two distinct reaches are divided by an ornamental bridge.

The western reach is now dominated by wooded islands, where uncontrolled tree growth has resulted in loss of views and visual connectivity between the north and south areas of the park. The approach here is to reduce vegetation on the islands so as to restore these views, and to expose the obelisk and fountains. The edges of the western arm of the lake need to be restored.

The eastern reach of the lake is now very open, although it should be more secluded; views in this direction from the mansion were stopped by planting around the bridge landing and along the north-eastern edge of the lake; on arrival at the bridge, there would have been a sense of discovery and surprise, and a clear view from the bridge over the water to the eye-catcher, which served a practical purpose in providing a bridge crossing and secure boundary to the garden, but was also a strong focal point and a feature of the picturesque garden design. So much of the original feature has been lost, and records are far from comprehensive, that is unfeasible to recreate the original feature, but a bridge across the weir that creates a strong focal point at this location is highly desirable.

The area south of the lake is currently underused, and the whole of this southern parkland is currently available for dogs to run off their leads. There is public demand to see some of the land on the south side of the lake managed as shorter grass, to enable greater diversity of visitor use, particularly for families with children; dogs may need to be controlled to achieve this.

Where culverts have already collapsed, the chalk stream is open; other areas of culvert are subsiding, and should be opened up to restore a more natural watercourse; this would bring about habitat improvement, and would provide contrast with the more formal lake. This will also reduce health and safety issues of potential collapse.

In times past, various paths have existed around the lake and it is desirable that a more comprehensive surfaced path system is installed, to link the north-western car park with the bridge and also provide a circular route around the eastern arm of the lake.

Proposals

- Restore the bridge crossing of the lake at the eastern boundary, creating a C21 'eye-catcher' as a focal point;
- Create path along the southern side of the lake, linking the north-western car park with the bridge and the eye-catcher;
- Restore the northern banks of the eastern arm of the lake; provide a path connection from the paved edge to the bridge;
- Carry out planting along the north-eastern side of the lake, to integrate paths and paved lake edge into the landscape and to recreate the sense of enclosure and controlled views from the historical design;
- Restore the ironwork on the bridge to the original pattern and remove unsightly gate structure on the southern bank;
- Repair and re-instate the lake edge, levelling and stabilising ground where necessary;
- Restore the fountain(s) to working order;
- Expose, clean and restore the obelisk as necessary, and provide interpretation;
- Clear and manage vegetation on lake islands to re-instate views;
- Open up culvert and restore watercourse to a more natural chalk stream;
- Investigate asbestos in culvert and replace as necessary;
- Replace sluice elements in at Old Mill and remove unnecessary

- infrastructure around the eye-catcher sluice;
- Undertake programme of maintenance works to lake infrastructure through programme of maintenance;
- Remove sunken paved areas, seating, and over-mature shrubberies along the length of the culvert, relocating memorials where necessary and providing new seating in conjunction with new paths;
- Rationalise access around the western end of the lake, removing the small bridge and bench on the small promontory, downgrading the complicated route around the mill ruins and creating a new, more direct route between north-western car park and café with a new bridge over the western end of the lake;
- Install traditional estate fencing along the southern boundary of character areas 2a and 2c from Abbey Road boundary in the west, to the eastern park boundary at the old garden wall, in order to define different management zones, particularly in relation to dogs on / off leads.

3 Kearsney Abbey Parkland

3a Parkland

Historical character

All the old maps show this as an area of open parkland with lines of trees (in varying numbers) running from the lakeside up the slope of the lower ground and the scarp face of Coxhill Mount. The 1872 Ordnance Survey plan shows three lines of trees aligned south-west and five lines aligned south-east. Fences are shown on the old plans, and the lines of these can be seen today on the ground, providing evidence that the land was grazed. By the end of the C19, only two avenues were indicated on historical maps.

During the Festival of Britain, a stage was created between the diverging lines of avenues, which was used for a production of “A Midsummer Night’s Dream” in 1951. It uses the natural bowl of the landform and the raised ground forming the stage area was framed by hedges, and set between the avenues of trees against the backdrop of the lake.

Issues

- Inappropriate species and inappropriately located trees detract from the consistency of the avenues and the structure and spacing of parkland trees;
- Loss of stock grazing from the wider parkland;

- Performance area is in the long grass, dog off lead, area, and away from short grass, dogs on lead, area;
- Performance area is barely readable in the landscape, due to long grass which obscures landform, and loss of hedges that gave it definition;
- Only a fragment of remnant parkland fencing survives (near the western boundary adjacent to Abbey Road); if grazing stock are to be returned for grassland management then stockproof fences will be required;
- The path network could be better signposted or waymarked; surfacing of the main paths and improvements to other paths in this area would help provide greater accessibility;
- Boundary with Abbey Road is open, with undefined access into the parkland; consideration should be given to providing a secure boundary and defined entrance.

Restoration approach

Today, the clarity of the planting layout of this area has been confused by subsequent planting of trees in the spaces between the avenues, and the lime avenues have been gapped up with other species. The complex avenue layout recorded on the 1872 plans seems to have not established successfully, since by 1896, two dominant double avenues survived and it these two that are the predominant feature today. The avenues progressed physically and visually beyond the boundary ditch and bank at the foot of the scarp, up the steep slopes to the south.

The avenues should be conserved and it is desirable to strengthen the parkland character; the later 1896, pattern, should be the guide, with few other specimen trees placed in carefully chosen clumps so as not to obscure the avenue clarity, view lines, or the re-instatement and use of the performance area.

Currently, this part of the park is valued as an area where dogs can be allowed to run off the lead, in contrast to the area north of the lake where dogs must always be on the lead. However, maintaining the parkland on such an area requires either regular mowing or grazing to be successful. For area 3a, it is recommended that this be fenced from south of the lake to the lower woodland path along the ditch and bank boundary, so that in this area dogs can be allowed to roam free, but within a controlled zone.

Grassland management will need to make provision for shorter mowing of the performance and audience areas, on occasions when the theatre is to be used; and the use of temporary fencing to exclude dogs for

periods when people will be sitting on the grass should be considered.

Proposals

- Remove dead trees and inappropriate species from within and adjacent to the lime avenues;
- Conserve the performance area ground-form; consider the desirability, practicality and cost benefit of installing power supply infrastructure to enable temporary connections for performance use;
- Fence the area with estate fencing to ensure that it is stock proof / dog proof and that park boundaries are clearly defined;
- Make improvements to the main path from Chilton Way into the park to improve accessibility for the majority of users.

3b Scarp Face

Historical character

For hundreds of years, this area would have been open grazing, being part of the wider agricultural estate. More recently, there is evidence that grazing was enclosed with estate fencing, evidenced by old photographs and remnant fencing adjacent to Abbey Road.

The pasture was planted in the mid C19 creating the distinctive avenues that ran up the scarp slope. Some of the avenues failed; it is probably that they proved difficult to establish on the scarp face and so by 1896 only the eastern double avenue remained. It was slightly extended and would have run over the skyline into the distance for those viewing it from the house in the valley.

The western double avenue was reduced; it no longer extended up the scarp face, although it focused on a coniferous copse: these were Scots Pines, of which about fifteen are still present.

Grazing was discontinued when the land became a public park, and over the last seventy years, scrub and trees have invaded the open chalk grassland and the scarp is now fully covered by trees.

Issues

- Secondary woodland growth obscures the pattern of avenues running up the hillside and the clear skyline of Coxhill Mount that would have been framed by the avenues;
- The steepness of the scarp makes woodland management and scrub clearance work difficult;
- The original pines are now mostly dead or in poor condition and need to be replaced.

Restoration approach

Ideally, the woodland would be cleared to reveal the design intention of the avenues. Given that there was a problem with establishing the avenues on the thin soils found over chalk, it is suggested that the restoration period for the scarp face focuses on the 1896 layout.

Creating a clear scarp face and restoring the chalk grassland will be challenging. Firstly, the slope is steep, so clearance of the woodland will not be easy. In addition there is the question of the stumps: all of the species present will coppice from cut stumps so the stumps will either have to be ground out or chemically treated to prevent regrowth. Furthermore, the absence of any cover may well lead to erosion problems until ground cover grassland can be re-established.

Alternative options to be considered include a severe thinning of the lower slopes, retaining selected limes and thus, in effect, extending the parkland up the lower slopes of the scarp face. At the same time, trees could be removed in narrow bands all across the face starting at the top of the slope, for example, a ten metre wide strip every five years. The seed source of the more open area at the top of the slope would thus assist with grassland regeneration and the narrowness of the clearance area should help to mitigate any erosion problems, while also keeping the problems of stump regrowth to a manageable level.

Pedestrian access would have to be confined to selected and controlled narrow paths within the areas where grassland is being regenerated.

Once restored to open grassland, stock grazing will need to be re-instated as this is the most viable means of controlling scrub re-growth. This will mean fencing the scarp to create a boundary, with dogs off lead only to the north in area 3a. A pedestrian link to the open areas of chalk grassland on Coxhill Mount will also be needed and dogs would need to be put on the lead if being taken through the stock area.

When considering woodland clearance it is advisable to undertake more detailed survey work across disciplines. For example, more detailed survey work would be desirable, as suggested in the Bramley Associates Phase I Habitat survey report, to ensure the impact on protected species and ecology generally has been fully assessed and informs the level of clearance proposed.

Proposals

- Over time, gradually restore the open character of the scarp slope, to reveal the avenue design and re-instate the chalk grassland on the upper slopes.
- Over time, expose the remains the south-eastern avenue which

continues to the skyline, gapping up where necessary;

- Clear the secondary woodland around the remnant conifer grouping, and replant with Scots Pines to recreate the focal point at the end of the south-western avenue;
- Install estate fencing to secure the boundary of the scarp, using traditional estate fencing which is designed to be stock proof, and ensuring that the bar spacing is close enough to prevent dogs accessing areas where stock will be grazed.

4 Coxhill Mount

4a Chalk grassland

Historical character

This area was chalk grassland, managed by grazing, until the late C20 when aerial photographs show the pasture beginning to be invaded by scrub. The chalk grassland, a nationally rare and declining habitat, is now unmanaged, and will rapidly be lost unless there is a change in management practice in the near future.

Woodland is encroaching on the grassland, with a central area currently being more open but the edges of this character zone, where the land falls away more steeply, are already effectively wooded up. There are several fine boundary trees and specimens amongst the newer tree growth on the slopes.

Frandham Wood, ancient woodland that runs along the crest of the scarp, is outside the parkland boundary. An ownership boundary no longer exists and the secondary woodland on Coxhill Mount merges into Frandham Wood.

Issues

- The grassland is poorly managed and reverting to scrub;
- There is a significant number of dead ash trees on the edge of the area (and also on the scarp slope);
- The footpaths are not signposted or waymarked and orientation is difficult;
- The area is disconnected from the park and there is no sense of it being part of the Kearsney Parks complex;
- There is no interpretation or information about what can be seen in the long views across the valley;
- There is no park boundary defining the edge of the park, or the change of ownership at the boundary with Frandham Wood;
- There is a lack of woodland management;

- The edge of the wood to the south east is unclear.

Restoration approach

The grassland is now starting to morph from tight, floristically rich, fine chalk grassland into *Brachypodium* dominated tufts of grass; it is in urgent need of grazing or cutting to reverse this trend. Invading scrub is overtaking the grassland; sudden ash die back is rampant and there are many dead and dying trees that need to be removed.

Chalk grassland is best managed by sheep grazing, which promotes the characteristic fine grasses and tight sward, and which enables the floristic species to thrive. Restoration and ongoing management should re-instate grazing, by creating a gated paddock where dogs must be on a lead while grazing animals are present; or by creating a grazed area within a separately fenced path route around the mound.

Clearance of the woodland around the edges of this area and to the south-west towards the boundary with Frandham Wood, and reversion to grassland, is desirable. A similar process to that suggested for the scarp face is advised, although the difficulties will not be as severe since the gradients on the hill crest are less steep. Slightly wider strips, in the order of twenty to twenty-five metres wide, could be cleared, allowing the remnant grassland area to expand outwards from the central area; it would be pragmatic to undertake this and re-establish the grassland here, before starting the scarp clearance in area 3b. The strips should be cut at intervals, though shorter intervals of perhaps three years may be possible on this flatter land. Particularly fine specimen trees could be retained, towards the boundaries of the area and particularly towards Frandham Wood.

Removing timber will be much easier here than in the woodland to the south-east (area 4b) or on the scarp face (in area 3b) as the land is much flatter and reasonably well served by tracks. The issue of timber extraction off Coxhill Mount will still present problems unless the track to the north can be used or an easement obtained through Frandham Wood.

The same approach to survey prior to woodland clearance is suggested here as put forward in area 3b.

Proposals

- Complete the estate fencing in accordance with fence lines shown on the 1872 plan, adapting these where necessary to accommodate public access and use while providing stock-proof areas;
- Re-establish grazing on Coxhill Mount, and manage the pasture for conservation interest of chalk grassland;

- Remove secondary woodland and any dead ash;
- Retain fine specimen trees to the south-west of the area towards Frandham Wood;
- Define the boundaries of the park, particularly where Kearsney Abbey meets Frandham Wood, and create sense of identity and welcome through use of a consistent form of boundary marker.

4b Coxhill Woodland

Historical character

This woodland is a relatively well-established plantation or secondary woodland on the steep southeastern slopes of Coxhill Mount. It appears on the 1872 Ordnance Survey map, so it has definitely been present for some 150 years, perhaps longer, although it does not support the ancient woodland species of Frandham Wood that would indicate a significantly older history.

The woodland lies on a steep bank that falls south-eastwards towards C20 housing at Coxhill Gardens. The woodland provides a useful screen to the diverse boundary treatments of the back gardens.

Issues

- The boundary of the park is open along Coxhill Crescent;
- Access from Coxhill Crescent is difficult due to the density of the vegetation and the steepness of the slopes, yet it is clearly used, evidenced by ‘desire line’ footpaths;
- Regular inspection of the boundary line along the rear of Coxhill Gardens desirable;
- Woodland management operations are difficult on steep slopes;
- There is no sense of entrance to the park from the southwest or from Coxhill Gardens.

Restoration approach

This woodland provides a visual and physical barrier between the housing and open grassland, and should be managed as a multi-aged mixed woodland to maintain its density.

The woodland is growing on a reasonably steep slope, which will make extraction of any timber difficult. It would be possible to winch material up the slope onto the flatter land but removal from this area also needs to be resolved. These difficulties may well explain the lack of any apparent management for many years. Most of the stand is of very poor quality with many trees affected by clematis and ivy and with little market other than firewood, although admittedly the firewood market is booming, with timber commanding high prices, even if sold standing.

However, the extraction difficulties of this site will act as a mitigating factor.

Nearer the housing the line of the south eastern avenue is engulfed in recent regrowth.

Access to the open grassland from the top of Coxhill Crescent is difficult but clearly there are desire lines through the woodland. It may be possible to establish a low-key path to the park from this point.

Proposals

- Put in place a programme of active woodland management, managing the woodland as multi-aged mixed woodland for its screening qualities and habitat value;
- Define the boundaries of the park and create sense of identity and welcome through use of a consistent form of boundary marker;
- Create a woodland path from the top of Coxhill Crescent to the open chalk grassland on the summit.

5 River Paper Mill

Historical character

Historically, this area comprised River paper mill and was dominated by its mill pond. The mill, shown on plans from 1801 onwards, has a long history. Since it ceased operating, the mill building and associated structures have become derelict, and over recent years, the ruins have been less effective in damming the river, so that the millpond has disappeared, leaving a partly silted up wetland area below the weir of Kearsney Abbey lake, and around mill ruins.

As a result, drier land on the north side is now used as a footpath from River into the main body of Kearsney Abbey, although the northern part, particularly, is very wet and all but impassable in winter.

The south boundary is created by the massive brick walls surviving from Kearsney Abbey’s walled garden; their ownership has not been confirmed but is not thought to rest with Dover District Council. To the south-east, is a smaller area of scrub and wet woodland, with a scout hut, accessed from Minns Lane, set against the boundary wall of St Peter’s Churchyard.

Issues

- There is no sense of welcome to the park;
- The ruins of River mill are not interpreted;
- Water flows are undercutting banks around surviving brick work, accelerating the rate of deterioration;

- The footpath is unusable in wet conditions, and does not provide access for people of all abilities, nor for those with buggies or pushchairs;
- The timber fencing along the Lower Road boundary is dilapidated and broken through in places;
- Park entrance on the sharp bend in Lower Road is unsafe;
- There is a poor path connection with the main body of Kearsney Abbey park;
- condition of weir from lake; water channel will silt up over time; undercutting of banks around mill ruins and potential decay of mill ruins; water outflow blocks; deep fast flowing water at outfall with shelf / step affording dangerous access for the public.

Restoration approach

This area is now a wetland, with braided channels and islands with wet woodland, where once there was the millpond. The ruins of the mill itself provide a ‘romantic’ waterfall of a spectacular nature. Survey shows that the mill ruins are basically sound but need some repointing and stabilising works to maintain the feature.

The watercourse itself has a high ecological value, being a good quality chalk stream, and therefore it is recommended that this area is managed as an ecological reserve, with minimal interference.

The path to the main body of the park is in poor condition and to accommodate the level of use it receives, it should be properly surfaced and connected to the improved path network in the main body of the park.

The boundary with Lower Road needs to be maintained as a secure boundary, and the entrance on the blind corner restored as a park feature, but promotion of the continued use of this entrance should be carefully considered in relation to road safety.

Proposals

- Create orientation and welcome at park entrances;
- Stabilise the remnant mill structure;
- Provide a safe viewing point from which the waterfalls over the mill ruins can be enjoyed;
- Interpret the ruins and surviving mill features;
- Create an all-weather path along the northern side of this character area, from River into the main body of the park: a boardwalk over the wettest areas could be considered;

- Repair the broken fence along Lower Road boundary;
- Review use and safety of the entrance from Lower Road on the blind corner; either ensure a safe means of road crossing and access, or close this entrance.