

LEECHWELL GARDEN ASSOCIATION - POOL PROJECT

Minutes of meeting held on Wednesday 17th July 2013 at Totnes Fire Station.

1. Present; David Mitchell; Shirley Prendergast; Liz Warnes; Jim Carfrae

Apologies: David Martin, Keith Rennells, Susan Taylor; Roma Church, Jeannette Willington;

2. Minutes of the previous meeting: the minutes of the last Pool Group meeting (held on 29th May 2013) were agreed.

3. Matters Arising

Sebastian Kelly has emailed a revised quote (omitting the stonework at the bottom of the pool).

SHDC have treated the knotweed very effectively, though it will need further treatment in the Autumn (see Keith's email, attached).

4. Visit by Keith Miller of English Heritage

In Shirley's absence, Jim and Dave met with Keith Miller (Inspector of Ancient Monuments for English Heritage in the South West) on Friday July 5th (see attached report). The meeting discussed his suggestions:

- a. that the Peter Randall-Page spout was too strong an artistic statement in close proximity to the pool - it would distract from the vernacular feel of the pool
- b. that unless seepage from the pool made the ground soggy and muddy, he would prefer that the area at the bottom of the pool (closest to the bridge and waterfall) be left as earth
- c. that the earth on the south side of the pool be graded back from the exposed stone surround (so that earth would not be washed into the pool?)
- d. that we should investigate whether the leat that originally fed the pool (shown in 19th century maps) was still present under the earth, and if so consider exposing and repairing it as the way water entered the pool
- e. that the path down to the pool might be better if it ran closer to the fence (he felt the pool should be more of a surprise)
- f. that we should proceed in a series of investigations, deciding what needed to be done as it became clear how the pool walls was constructed and what they were made of (under the cracked cement and mortar)

There was considerable support for items a and d, some for b and c, but it was felt that the planned path (desire line) was preferable to Keith's idea.

Shirley agreed to draft a letter to Keith outlining our thoughts and emphasising our need for official consent as a pre-requisite for fund-raising. She would also mention the delay that the knotweed infestation would cause (neither Jim nor Dave had mentioned the problem to Keith). The draft would be circulated to the LGA committee for agreement before being sent to Keith.

5. What next for the pool

The meeting discussed the issue of the £1500 grant from Paula Black/DCC (raised at the last LGA Committee meeting). It was felt than one possible way of spending the money was:

- a. to fence/screen off the area contaminated by knotweed to prevent public access
- b. to put up display boards describing what was planned to be done when the knotweed problem had been solved
- c. to buy a bench to be located above the path (as shown on the current design) and install it
- d. to begin some of the planting of trees and shrubs (in the safe area outside the inner fence)

6. AOB

Nothing to report.

NEXT MEETING: 6pm, Wednesday 11th September, Totnes Fire Station (LGA Committee)

6pm, Wednesday 18th September, Totnes Fire Station (Pool Project Meeting)

Email from Keith Rennells

Apologies I cannot join you tonight, as ever!

With regards knotweed and the potential excavation of the leat. As you know, we are having to play the long game in eradicating it from the site completely. Tim has been monitoring and is pleased to report that the last application of chemicals from Mark seems to have knocked it back pretty well. However, we are expecting to have to make further applications before it is completely eradicated.

So you are correct in being cautious - this certainly presents us with a challenge in the planning of the pool area. Some considerations now:

1. disturbance of the soil by excavating the leat in the area the knotweed is currently growing will no doubt cause the kind of agitation to the plant that will encourage it to spread ... it responds positively to soil disturbance!
2. there are of course implications with the watercourse, and the danger of material spreading through being waterborne to other sites lower down.
3. and of course, the removal and disposal of material from the excavations is another matter of concern. SHDC has a duty of care and is legally bound by Section 14 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act to cause the spread of knotweed into the wild. There will be rhizomes in the excavated soil, and as all parts of the plant are classified as 'controlled waste', it would need to be disposed of correctly.

So whilst there are some good positive signs that knotweed at the pool has taken a good hit this year, we have been gradually taking it back over a number of years, and will probably need to monitor for a while longer. This does make it difficult to put timescales on the proposed pool improvement works, but if a two-stage scheme were to be implemented, that might be the way forward.

Thanks for keeping me in the loop.

Regards

Keith

Meeting With Keith Millar, English Heritage.

Friday July 5th 2013
Jim's meeting notes.

General points

Keith encouraged us to investigate more about the history of the pool by digging in selected spots around the perimeter. He didn't seem as 'precious' as we thought EH might be. He didn't seem to think we had to keep the pool as is, but could remove 'later' additions and restore what might have been, based on the construction of the pool generally. He emphasised the 'vernacular' construction and feel of the pool. Thought Andrew's plans looked a bit formal.

Restoration could be tied in with a grant application to Heritage Lottery Fund - He seemed to think that this was 'right up their street' especially if there was community involvement - an archaeologist could lead children in an investigation for instance

We showed him the Leechwell and he agreed that improving that should be part of the same HLF application.

Note though that HLF don't give grants to repair things, they will however pay for costs (such as paying an archaeologist to oversee volunteers) if there is community involvement.

Keith Millar spoke as if permission was a fluid process. The consent could list stages/tasks - we could ask confirmation at various stages as we uncovered more information on the pool. This might be done by emailing photos - Important to record accurately all that is uncovered.

There are two potentially major issues:

Keith didn't like the path as drawn. He thought it should be further away from the pool, closer to the line of the hedge. He would like a less 'constructed' look for the access, maybe bark.

He said that the PRP spout would be too strong a statement in close proximity to the pool - it would distract from the vernacular feel of the pool.

Specific areas discussed

We looked at the existing sluice/overflow at bottom corner. Keith suggested an adjustable sluice gate to control level in pool - if it had had horticultural use, it could have been a feature at some point.

We should remove some of the render on far side of pool - is there stone behind it? Would prefer restoring stone with hydraulic lime render to making good faulty cement.

We would probably have to remove the cement capping along the bottom edge, and replace with stone slabs as the rest of the perimeter. This was cited as another potential volunteer project - as in Heritage fund application.

Keith didn't like the paving at the bottom of the pool. Said that if restoration of interior of pool was successful, and sluice worked properly, then the ground would not be boggy so wouldn't need hard standing.

We should grade the ground back from the edges of the pool so that it comes in level with the stone coping.

We should investigate the top end of the pool. Dig behind the wall at the top end to see if the culvert that is illustrated in the old maps is still there. Implication is that it could also be restored. He also suggested we dig down at the bottom end - perhaps there is some stone there and in any case it would be good to see what is behind the wall of the pool (eg what the wall(s) are made of.