



Draft Strategic Direction 2015 (v0.2)

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Sussex Gardens Trust Draft Strategic Direction 2015

Background

In 2011 a new strategy for the Trust was developed, agreed with members and used as a basis for our plans over the past three years.

In November 2014 the Council and other SGT members met to review strategy and agree priorities for the next few years. The outcome is summarised in this document. After agreement by the SGT Council, it to be sent to all members for discussion at the AGM in April 2015.

However the strategic direction is still a draft document: we need to reflect comments from all members and assess how far and how fast we should go – which depends in turn on the support and energy members have to offer.

Summary

In support of the above objectives, SGT operates across 5 main areas (see summaries on pages 3 to 7).

- **Research and Recording** – this is central to the work of the Trust and, following a recent resurgence, more work has been completed in the past three years. However R&R would be more effective if there is a clearer focus. It would help to have an agreed strategy which identifies the main objectives of SGT research, sets priorities, adopts a consistent approach across the Trust and both reflects and contributes to recording work promoted nationally by the AGT.
- **Conservation: Influencing Local Authority Planning Policies and Planning Decisions** – The Conservation Committee has worked well over the past 3 years. However, it is desirable to develop and strengthen links with Local Planning Authorities, to input past and current SGT research reports to the two (East and West Sussex) County Heritage Environment Records (HERs) and to improve liaison between the Trust's R&R and Conservation areas of work. Also, due to retirements, new members are required (with appropriate training provided) and new Terms of Reference for the Committee and training.
- **Advice and Small Grants** – generally working well but is re-active. Priorities would benefit from regular re- assessment in the light of local needs – and of the Trusts' priorities in other areas of its work.
- **Training, Garden Visits, Study Days and Lecture** – Garden visits and Lectures are well attended. It would be beneficial to organise a winter lecture series on garden history and possibly link garden visits to these – and possibly also to the Trust's R&R and conservation work in specific sites. Excellent training have been organised by SGT and AGT but take up of places is often low. Training might benefit from a different approach to provision and delivery
- **Newsletters, Publications and Website** – the Newsletter, website and e-mail updates work well. It would be helpful to find ways to support the Newsletter editor and appoint a publicity officer and extend communications to include press releases, magazine articles and blogs/e-mail updates and generally to link SGT more robustly into regional & national activities and profiles.

In addition the Trust manages its affairs as a Charity and Company Limited by Guarantee – see “Governance” at Page 8. To remain effective, Council will need to find fresh recruits to fill key roles as existing terms of office expire.

J A Stockwell 5th December, 2014



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Research and Recording

<p style="text-align: center;">Objectives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SGT’s vision is to encourage the understanding, protection, conservation and evolution of our local garden heritage including public and private parks, gardens and other designed spaces. The Trust aims to research, record and understand these sites, in order to provide material for use in their conservation and evolution. 	<p style="text-align: center;">Present arrangements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Support Group meets regularly under the chairmanship of an experienced former Chairman of SGT. This group aims to “allow active researchers to meet, discuss successes and difficulties, give help to those who are less experienced ...” • An active group of volunteers from around Hastings has been recruited, trained and supported by experienced SGT members
<p style="text-align: center;">Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Although training support is limited there seems to be personal satisfaction among researchers • A number of research projects have been completed in the past two years (Hastings Group and for Crawley Parks) • In most cases information in SGT research reports has been added to the PGUK database (mainly by PGUK) 	<p style="text-align: center;">Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An absence of a process within the Trust to establish and plan our purpose, aims, priorities and format for researching and recording sites and little liaison with the conservation committee • Research Support Group reasonably well attended but feedback indicates significant concerns over its lack of focus. • Lack of well-planned and focussed training for volunteers
<p style="text-align: center;">Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish clear objectives for R&R work including purpose, priorities, and standard format for core content of reports. • In line with AGT guidance, adopt LPA/ national processes for protecting heritage assets, i.e. through partnership working with LPAs on Local Listing (including statements of significance) and adding R& R reports the Heritage Environment Records (HERs) 	<p style="text-align: center;">Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Competing pressures limiting the amount of time existing experienced SGT members are able to devote • Loss of opportunity to establish a robust and accessible knowledge base (of use to both LPAs and the general public) • Previous research reports could be lost
<p style="text-align: center;">Conclusions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is a fundamental area of activity which underpins much of the work of the Trust; it is also one of national importance which is promoted and supported nationally by the AGT 	<p style="text-align: center;">Proposed Actions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agree objectives, strategy, standard procedures, and priorities. • Plan research over the next 1-2 years informed by an assessment of the range, quality and location of all past research reports • Plan recruitment, training and support of volunteers and as part of this to re-examine the role of the Research Support Group • Continue to scan old reports to make them secure and accessible



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Conservation: Influencing Local Authority Planning Policies and Planning Decisions

<p align="center">Objectives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> SGT’s vision is to encourage the understanding, protection, conservation and evolution of our local garden heritage including public and private parks, gardens and other designed open spaces. The Conservation Committee supports this by seeking to influence planning policies and decisions affecting Sussex’s garden heritage 	<p align="center">Present arrangements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Until early 2014 SGT had a strong Conservation Committee with an experienced chair supported by some 8 members Several members have recently stood down and others recruited. The previous chairman continues to provide expert advice but he no longer chairs the committee and, as a temporary measure a senior member of SGT is co-ordinating the work
<p align="center">Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hitherto the Committee had strong membership with specialist knowledge of planning regulations and historic landscape conservation Committee has commented on a wide range of planning applications across all parts of the county. 	<p align="center">Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The number of volunteers is now insufficient and while some newer members have brought valuable technical knowledge, further training is required and procedures need to be clarified Few research reports have been input (for use by planners) into the Heritage Environment Records or a Statement of Significance as recommended in EH’s local listing guidance and the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)
<p align="center">Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthen the membership of the Committee To link past and present SGT research to broader planning policies in addition to individual planning applications To establish links with Local Planning Authorities 	<p align="center">Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduction in government funding affecting the GHS as the current Statutory Amenity Society increases the risk that planning policies and individual planning decisions will fail to protect garden and designed open spaces heritage
<p align="center">Conclusions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Current arrangements are no longer working well to achieve our objectives 	<p align="center">Proposed Actions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agree purpose statement, procedures for responding to planning applications and new Terms of Ref for Conservation Committee Recruit and train new members (especially those with knowledge of planning system) Forge links with LPAs; ensure new SGT research added to HER’s; review past research and where feasible add to HERs

Advice and Small Grants

<p style="text-align: center;">Objectives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SGT’s vision is to encourage the understanding, protection, conservation and evolution of our local garden heritage including public and private parks, gardens and other designed open spaces. SGT seeks to support this by engaging with organisations undertaking conservation, restoration or development projects – using the expertise of SGT members to provide advice and making grants where policy criteria are met (subject to availability of funds) 	<p style="text-align: center;">Present arrangements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In February 2012 Council agreed a strategy for Small Grants to focus on particular projects; currently this focus is on publically or community owned or managed parks and gardens especially in urban areas. • Applications are considered by the Small Grants Committee which largely operates via e-mail and recommendations made to Council for approval
<p style="text-align: center;">Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SGT membership includes much expertise in planning, landscape architecture, and garden history • SGT endorsement regarded as a “seal of quality”, making a grant from SGT significant to the recipient and to their other funders even if the financial contribution is small 	<p style="text-align: center;">Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SGT has no external source of funding and reserves are limited; the Trust has also never actively sought such sources
<p style="text-align: center;">Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SGT could seek additional funding e.g. from members through a specific appeal if an attractive project were identified; a general approach to members to establish a fund; external sources such as commercial donation and sponsorship, other charitable trusts, HLF, or in partnership with other bodies • Consider developing themes/areas for potential grant and then actively seek recipients/projects 	<p style="text-align: center;">Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public funding for projects that SGT might contribute to is likely to fall
<p style="text-align: center;">Conclusions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Available funding is very limited, but nevertheless, the area of work makes a contribution to the Trust’s objectives and is worth continuing with a review of its focus from time to time (e.g. grant might focus on CB300 in 2016). • It may be possible to use the time and extensive expertise of Trust members to assist projects with advice rather than money 	<p style="text-align: center;">Proposed Actions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore ways of utilising expertise of SGT members to extend the work of the Small Grants Committee. • Review focus of grant-aid from time to time



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Training, Garden Visits, Study Days and Lectures

<p align="center">Objectives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SGT’s vision is to encourage the understanding, protection, conservation and evolution of our local garden heritage including public and private parks, gardens and other designed open spaces. The Events programme supports this by providing an interesting programme of lectures and visits. Training and Study Days are arranged to support volunteers working on research& conservation. 	<p align="center">Present arrangements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each year a programme of visits and lectures is arranged by the Council, with most of the organisation being co-ordinated via an ad-hoc group (mainly via e-mail). Occasional training and study days are also arranged.
<p align="center">Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Events programme is generally well regarded, well attended and self-financing (sometimes generating a small surplus) and is of particular interest to members who don’t have specialist knowledge – helping support a stronger membership base and a source of volunteers who may become interested in other aspects of SGT • Training organised by SGT/ AGT well regarded by those attending 	<p align="center">Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research, lectures and garden visits are not generally planned to reflect or exploit any specific relationship with each other – hence missed opportunity for increasing/deepening knowledge? • Some of the garden visited are open via the NGS • Sussex is a large county, making it difficult for membership to join visits at the far end of the county • Relatively low take up of places at training events
<p align="center">Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arrange a winter lecture series on garden history which could also be linked to garden visits in the summer to support the lectures • More frequent training to support research and conservation • Design some visits as informal training & explore how SGT can provide ‘added-value’ to sites been visited before 	<p align="center">Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing difficulty in finding gardens and other sites not previously visited by SGT that aren’t open to the public
<p align="center">Conclusions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current arrangements for Events working well – they are popular and help recruit new members • New members event appears to be popular and is an opportunity for Council to meet new members personally 	<p align="center">Proposed Actions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider planning a winter lecture series • Co-ordinate garden visits programme with lectures and research • Organise more training and encourage members to attend • Arrange joint events with other organisations



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Newsletters, Publications and Website

<p align="center">Objectives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SGT’s vision is to encourage the understanding, protection, conservation and evolution of our local garden heritage including public and private parks, gardens and other designed open spaces. SGT uses a range of Communication media to support this vision. 	<p align="center">Present arrangements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Members Newsletter published (in colour) 3 time a year • Website updated in 2013 • E-mail updates to members sent as and when required • Experienced members give occasional talks to local groups • Project to publish a journal recently started
<p align="center">Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Newsletter is a quality product that includes a range of articles supporting the vision • E-mail updates to members timely, easy to prepare and free • Web site is visually attractive and feedback has been positive. Recently a private password controlled <i>area for research work purposes</i> has been created and could be extended 	<p align="center">Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No volunteer currently available with publicity and marketing skills. As a result press releases, magazine articles, website/e-mail blogs and liaison with other related organisations relatively weak • Newsletter time consuming to prepare and expensive to print • E-mail updates only reach about 75% of membership (some members don’t have access to e-mail)
<p align="center">Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find (or train) a volunteer with marketing/publicity skills • Support Newsletter editor - e.g. with editorial group and by planning ahead for series of articles on themes etc. • Extend the private area of website and/or set up forums to help SGT members working on projects 	<p align="center">Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reliance on the dedication of the Newsletter editor • Members don’t always inform SGT of change of e-mail address • Reliance on limited IT skills within the Trust to manage the website
<p align="center">Conclusions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We invest a lot of time and money producing a high quality Newsletter – this our flagship and continuing support is required • The new website and E-mail updates have improved communications with members. These should continue and be possibly extended to support discreet projects 	<p align="center">Proposed Actions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify (or train) someone with marketing/publicity skills • Consider how better to support the Newsletter editor • Continue to develop a Journal • Develop the website and/or a forum to provide a shared environment to support SGT volunteers working on projects

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Governance

<p style="text-align: center;">Objectives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SGT’s vision is to encourage the understanding, protection, conservation and evolution of our local garden heritage including public and private parks, gardens and other designed open spaces. SGT governance arrangements are organised to support the achievement of this vision. 	<p style="text-align: center;">Present arrangements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SGT is constituted both as a Charity and a Company limited by Guarantee – this means we need to follow procedures laid down in the Charities Acts and Companies Acts • Key responsibilities are managed through the SGT Council
<p style="text-align: center;">Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recently several people with a range of administrative, managerial and specialist skills have joined Council • Trust membership has risen in the past few years from 188 in Feb 2011 to 244 in Aug 2014 • Financial reserves adequate • Strategy reviewed at appropriate intervals to underpin activities 	<p style="text-align: center;">Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Several volunteers in administrative roles have indicated a desire to step down or <i>change role</i> • Newer Council members are still on a learning curve • Retention of members - new members recruited on “Special Offers” often leave at the end of the offer period
<p style="text-align: center;">Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seek new members of Council • Provide mentoring to new Council members • Plan ahead using knowledge of rotation of Council members’ service 	<p style="text-align: center;">Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council members are volunteers and generally plan to serve limited terms, so new Council members will continue to be required • Council’s work – and hence trust activities - are dependent on skills being available • Financial reserves could quickly fall if membership drops or expenditure increases
<p style="text-align: center;">Conclusions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good governance is fundamental to the continuance of SGT • The Trust as a whole needs to foster a strong Council with sufficient members with the time and capabilities to fulfil this essential role • Need to continue to review strategy on a regular basis 	<p style="text-align: center;">Proposed Actions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review roles and responsibilities of Council members • Seek new members of Council • Update strategy and prepare forward plan for 2015/7

Moving Forward: Consulting Our Membership

Questionnaire for SGT Members to Complete

Please complete the questionnaire below and hand in at AGM or return to:

Jim Stockwell, 47 Denmans Lane, Lindfield, Haywards Heath, W Sussex, RH16 2JN or e-mail to jamesastockwell@aol.com

Your name	
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	Research & Recording	Conservation	Advice and Small Grants	Training, garden visits, lectures	Newsletters, Publications, Website	Governance
Q1 Which areas do you believe are important for SGT overall? Score: 0 = not at all; 1 = important; 2= very important						

	Research & Recording	Conservation	Advice and Small Grants	Training, garden visits, lectures	Newsletters, Publications, Website	Governance
Q 2 Which areas are of personal interest to you? Score: 0 = not at all; 1 = some interest ; 2= strong interest						

		Comment
Q 3 Would you like to be more closely involved with SGT activities?	Yes/No	

	Observations
Q 4 Do you have any other observations on our strategy any other aspect of SGT?	