

Heritage Statement Proposed Refurbishment Vista Shelter Devonshire Road, Rock Gardens

FY2 ORE

Introduction

Bispham Rock Gardens, also known as Devonshire Road Rock Gardens or the Rock Gardens, is a municipal park located in Bispham, Blackpool on the Fylde coast in Lancashire, England. The gardens are an important wildlife resource because of its unique fauna and contains a number of rare species in particular the rare white-letter hairstreak butterfly which is presently being monitored by The Lancashire Wildlife Trust.

The main entrance to the gardens is at the top of Knowle Hill on Devonshire Road. Built upon the site of Beryl Hill (A Celtic name meaning Hill) which allegedly was the site of a cairn and a beacon to warn of a Napoleonic invasion. The gardens run downhill toward Inver Road. Views from the top of the gardens can be seen toward Pendle Hill, Beacon Fell and the Bowland fells.

The gardens were founded in the early 1900s, and were opened to the public in 1925. Devonshire Road Rock Gardens are also important locally because of the unique environment created through the naturalised rockeries and unusual rock forms found around the park and its ponds and rock water features. The Rock Gardens became a part of horticulture in Great Britain in the 1920's.

There is also a social value connected to this park which is important locally. Its unique landscape is both interesting and visually stimulating when walking in its varied contoured footpaths and green open spaces. From the raised garden terrace on the east facing elevation of the Vista Shelter pleasant views can be taken in overlooking the parks varied tree lined foreground which forms a back drop to views of the Pennines and Bowland Fells.

Over the many decades local people and Blackpool visitors have precious memories of the gardens, whether going for relaxing walks, or for newly married couples having their wedding photos taken within the varied natural settings of the Rock Gardens.

The gardens are now listed on the Blackpool Local Listed Building register.

Back Ground & Reasoning behind the Proposed Alterations to Vista Shelter Building 2021

Over the years the gardens have fallen into disrepair in a number of areas has local council funding has been reduced, this has provided the opportunity for local community groups to get involved in the running of parks and in 2002 the Friends of the Rock Gardens was formed to improve community recognition and use of the park; and to restore the park's amenities.

The gardens had public toilets close to the main entrance on Devonshire Road (Knowle Hill) but they were demolished and removed in early 2000's.

The park has undergone important restoration works and in 2007 the parks footpaths were completely relayed to improve surface finishes and widening, making them accessible friendly. This also included the creation of a number of grassed footpaths for joggers and runners.

The real gem in the park though is The 'Vista Shelter', a small Italian style symmetrically built rustic pavilion which overlooks a simple rectangular terrace garden overlooking the hills to the east, below with a two level pond and waterfall system at its heart.

The Vista Shelter has been subjected to vandalism for many years and had become a roofless ruin, partly overgrown in the early 2000's. In 2013 the Friends of Devonshire Rock Gardens had raised

funding through events, and from generous contributions from Ward Funding, work began to restore the building in 2014.

The restoration work involved fitting a new hipped pitched vandal proof metal clad roofs above the square turret building structures situated to the north and south end of the building, restoring the existing windows and fitting metal timber clad bi-folding doors, which are situated to the inside the existing simple rustic masonry arches. These arches formed the original open entrances to the shelter to the end turrets overlooking the garden terrace.

A full height opening was formed centrally within the west facing external masonry wall also in 2014 allowing access through the central raised area of the Vista Shelter building to the open green park space that runs back to Devonshire Road. Accompanying this alteration the Friends of Devonshire Road Rock Gardens created long narrow random paved area that linked the building through trees and shrubs to green space on the west elevation of the building.

The east facing set of steps running the length of the raised open terrace were repaired and replaced. An open timber pagoda was fit above this central area at roof eaves level.

The Friends of Devonshire Rock Gardens now use the renovated Vista Shelter building has a location for fundraising events mainly during the summer months, but lack of park public amenities such as toilets and a covered permanent indoor space often means that the events have to be cancelled or postponed because of inclement weather.

To provide a more certain future for fund raising evens the Friends Group have proposed to totally enclose the central part of the Vista building this will mean linking the two end turret roofs with a new duo pitched roof, matching the existing roof covering finishes.

The east facing centrally raised stepped open terrace part of the shelter will be enclosed totally with a new cavity wall linking the east facing end turret facades. Within this new facade there will be a centrally located double door entrance, positioned between the existing rustic pillars, and on either side symmetrically laid out artificial stone surrounds and windows. The existing stone step feature along the length of the centrally raised area will be removed, with the cavity wall and foundations replacing them.

An accessible ramp will be created to the right of the centre of the building (when looking at the building east elevation and facing west), this will be simply laid out and without handrails due the fact the floor level of the central terrace will be lowered to below 300mm of the existing external ground level, meeting the requirements of Building Regulations under Part M.

The central vista building elevation wall opening in the west the facing elevation will be infilled with a full width artificial stone surround and window, and below a cavity wall blockwork infill. Both blockwork wall elevation infills will be finished in a cement render with a masonry paint finish.

To complete the vista shelter alterations the right hand turret building will house both an ambulant toilet and a small galley kitchen. Two new doorway openings will be cut out in the dividing wall between the stepped raised central area of the building and the north turret south facing inner wall.

Measures taken in the Vista Shelter Alterations to mitigate the visual effect on the Surrounding Rocks Gardens

The alterations to the Vista shelter are to be completed sympathetically and in keeping with the existing building materials and its immediate surroundings and the connecting terrace garden within the Rock Gardens.

The changes to east facing elevation facade of the building will have a greater impact aesthetically with the immediate terrace gardens forming part of the setting for the existing Vista Shelter.

The forming of the new enclosing external cavity wall on the east central facing facade of the vista shelter will make its central shelter open aspect disappear but to mitigate this change the centrally located original rustic stone support columns are to be retained within the new wall construction which maintains the buildings architectural symmetrically designed features and also maintains a sense of proportion that has direct link to the centrally laid footpath that divides equally the lawn areas within the garden terrace. Approximately just under half of the outer surface of the rustic stone pillar will remain exposed.

The retained pillars will also help to frame centrally the new external entry point into the building, which in this case will be one pair of metal framed timber clad polycarbonate glazed doors to be set back within the new masonry wall reveal. The timber matchboard cladding finish to the internal door shutters help reduce the visual impact and they match the face cladding finish to the existing doors formed in the end turrets on the same elevation.

New windows and artificial stone window lintel surrounds are to be positioned in symmetrically located positions either side of the existing rustic stone columns. Both window and exposed artificial stone surrounds are to match the existing end elevation turret windows. This maintains the strong symmetrical theme used in the layout of the terrace gardens.

The new external masonry blockwork wall will be finished in a plain sand & cement render with a masonry paint finish. This helps to retain part of the visual aspect of the original open wall construction featured within the shelter which was finished in a masonry painted cement render finish.

The same wall and window infill details are to be used to in west facing centrally located opening formed in 2014. This elevation has less of an impact on the immediate park surroundings, but will maintain a use of matching existing materials.

The construction of the new cavity wall will require that the original masonry stone steps are to be removed because of the placing of new foundations. Also if they were retained in the same location they may invite health and safety issues for public using the park.

The central concrete floor area of the building is to be broken out and a new concrete floor level is to be cast at a lower level. This in turn reduces the access ramp height and mitigates the use of metal safety handrails.

The original stone steps are to be re-used in the construction of the proposed ramp landing and step to give level access into the building. The re-use of these materials maintains and re-uses feature of the original façade but now in a new form maintaining a connection with the surrounding terrace surface path materials used.

The proposed ramp to the entrance is to be located to the right hand side of the building from the new landing central location. Its plan footprint will require that the existing crazy paved finish to the

area of the terrace footpath to be uplifted and re-laid, to fit to the new building cavity wall pavement abutment in-filling these areas where the stone steps were originally located.

The ramp upper sloped face is to be finished in a buff coloured concrete flag. The visual effect of the new ramp and landing/step within the terrace garden footpath is minimal because of its low profile form, shape and height, it also uses similar matching materials.

The existing Pagoda timber structure presently forming a flat open frame structure is to be removed and replaced with a timber constructed flat roof, with liquid water proofing covering finished in a dark grey colour, consisting of a smooth texture appearance. The proposed flat central roof outer water proof covering does not match that in shape or texture of the existing roof covering over the square end turret buildings.

Historically the Vista Shelter had a pitched tiled roof across the whole length of the building, so a new flat roof addition to the central area of the shelter will not be of a similar visual profile shape to that of the original. The majority of the profile thickness of the new flat roof construction will fall within the thickness of the existing fascia depths and will form a straight line connection visually with both the north and south pitched roof turrets.

The impact of providing a slim visual flat roof outline can be seen as a form that is less suited to this building, but the existing traditional roof outlines set out symmetrically and connecting at both the north and south end of the building should minimise the effect of a low flat symmetrical outline from views taken on the front elevation facing the terrace gardens.

The addition of the new water and drainage services already located on site will be extended and brought to the building from both the original location of the toilets which were located close to the main park entrance adjacent to Devonshire Road. Both these services will have no impact on the park's visual aesthetics or surroundings as they are to be extended and laid to the vista building below ground.

The conversion of the north facing turret building into both an ambulant toilet and galley kitchen will have no visual impact on the park because no additional external windows or features are to be added to the external elevations of that part of the building.