

Polvellan Grounds: Integrating the woodlands and garden landscape

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1. Report Purpose

This report has been produced to pull together issues addressed in more detail in separate landscape designs and the arboricultural report. The arboricultural report itself includes a detailed woodland management plan previously approved by the Forestry Commission. Land and Heritage have led on all the ecology and woodland aspects of the current proposals but have worked closely with Mei Loci on the integration of these into the landscaping proposals, including the new planting associated with the development.

This short report brings together both aspects of the development in a summary form, to demonstrate the connections between the two, and also highlights priorities for work beyond the immediate development, and the management company that will deliver the necessary outcomes.

The following documents relate to and support this report:

- Arboricultural Report for Polvellan House, Land and Heritage 2018
- Polvellan Landscape Strategy, MeiLoci 2018
- Ecological Appraisal, Polvellan House, Land and Heritage 2018

2. Polvellan History

Polvellan Manor dates back to the eighteenth century and there are anecdotal references to important gardens having once existed on the site. (Looe Conservation Area draft management plan 2009 – not referenced). The heritage report for Polvellan has found no specific archived material pertaining to the trees or gardens.

John Lemon built a cottage-style house on this site in 1787 after his election as Member of Parliament for West Looe in 1784. The house was later leased to the Buller family of Morval. This indicates a possible link with the much grander Downes House near Crediton, managed by another branch of the Buller family. The house was enlarged and embellished, probably in the 1840s and 1850s, and a rear wing was added at the end of the 19th century. Plans were produced in 1881 to alter the house, it was eventually altered by Liskeard architect John Sansom in 1898.

The 1882 Ordnance Survey map of Looe shows the manor facing out over the mill pool which at that time extended over most of the existing car park area. (See figure 3 below) There was no road along the eastern side of the property or entrance from this side. Apart from a small area immediately around the house all the surrounding area is shown supporting mature broadleaf trees.

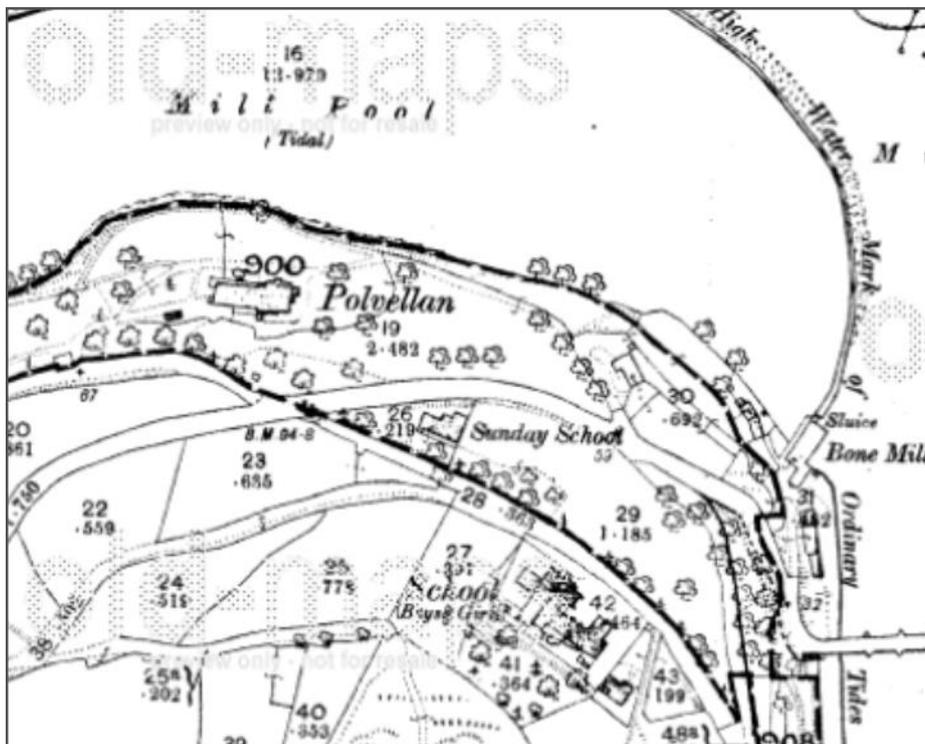


Figure 1: Map of Polvellan, 1882

Polvellan Manor would certainly have had access to the river and the lower woodland path may well have led to moorings at the western end of Millpool. More recent construction work at Polvellan has created a large retaining wall at the rear and side of the property and extensive areas of the site have been crudely levelled to create car parking areas.

The current survey was unable to locate any significant garden features except for a middle and lower path route through the western woodlands. A single Western Red Cedar and two magnolias appear to be remnants of early to mid-twentieth century planting. *Rhododendron ponticum* has spread through large areas of the western woodland suggesting some former planting but there are no other surviving shrubs and no exotic or unusual trees. There is a small area of recent shrub and tree planting immediately in front of the house.

Most trees at Polvellan are even aged. Mature beech oak and sweet chestnut trees in the woodland would appear to be 120 -130 years in age, suggesting extensive woodland planting in the mid to late Victorian period. A single sweet chestnut tree, close to the Mill Pool road, is older and is likely to be contemporary with the house. Unlike the nearby oak woodlands at Kilminorth and Trenant, Polvellan is not on the Natural England register of Ancient Woodlands.

A fuller historical appraisal has been undertaken by South West Archaeology and was updated in 2018.

3. The Current State

The grounds and woodland have both been neglected for the past years, since the closure of Polvellan House as a residential home in the late twentieth century. Since then the formal gardens have become overgrown, and there has been a steady loss of trees from storm damage. Nevertheless, the remnant grounds remain visible beneath the neglect.

The formal gardens are more apparent in the eastern half of the site, with significant areas of open ground to the front and east of the manor house. The land to the east was however itself used in recent years for overflow public parking. The western half of the site is closer to planted woodland, but nevertheless designed in a semi-formal way, with old paths cut into the hillside. Individual trees that indicate the planted and designed aspects include the occasional presence of lime, Norway maple, and Sweet Chestnut. Closer to the manor Scots Pine and Western Red Cedar are found, along with Kohuhu and Pacific Dogwood.

Tree surveys over the last five years show a steady loss of individual specimens, mainly through storm damage, but also to a Council road widening scheme. The lack of management in recent years, indeed probably since changing from a private residence, gives rise to very even aged stands, trees too close together and a woodland vulnerable to storm damage. The dense crown allows little light to the woodland floor, which reduces opportunities for shrubs, and understorey, reducing the potential ecological value of the site. Storm damage along the woodland margins also creates safety issues, which have recently been dealt with by reactive measures only.



Figure 2: Storm damage below the proposed apartments

4. Objectives for Woodland Management

While some woodland area will be lost to the proposed apartments, the objectives are to manage the remaining woodland to high standards, to maintain the woodland setting and to enhance the biodiversity of the woodland. The objectives can be summarised as:

1. Retain woodland cover following the site development
2. Manage woodlands to achieve improved standards of safety
3. Work towards a more diverse age structure by early group selection thinning and replanting
4. Clear areas of rhododendron and encourage a more diverse understorey, composed primarily of native species
5. Re-open some historic paths through the woodland, to enable residents to enjoy and value the woodland setting.

To complement the woodland management, the MeiLoc landscape and garden design proposals have sought to reflect the spirit and history of the site. The planting proposals retain the woodland framework and reintroduce an element of exotic understorey trees and shrubs that are believed to have been lost on the last fifty years, in the areas around the house and apartments. The old path network within the woodlands will be retained and updated in a sympathetic way with full regard to tree and root protection. The woodlands are an integral part of the setting for the apartments and the quality of life for the residents; enhancing foot access will contribute to achieving this objective.

5. Woodland and Landscaping Proposals (Development)

The main proposals for the development can be summarised as:

1. A number of trees are proposed for removal, to enable the development to proceed. The overall total planned for complete removal or coppicing to ground level is 18 individual trees and parts of four small groups. Some other trees are proposed for felling as part of the wider sustainable woodland management.
2. Landscaping proposals include the planting of twenty-six large feathered whips, up to 2.4 metres high, 225 trees and shrubs as small whips.
3. The planting will be designed to provide a stepped edge to the woodlands, allowing some light to the residents and also filtering the wind. This stepped edge will provide lower shrubs that are typically favoured by nesting birds and is often recommended for woodland rides in nature reserves.

4. The landscaping continues under the planned apartments, which are partly elevated on stilts, and the sheltered shaded planting will contain a major element of ferns, typical of woodland understorey. Native groundflora plants are also included in the nearby woodland edge planting.
5. Close to the apartments, more formal garden planting will feature. Two notable Magnolia trees from the current garden will be retained.
6. Two other areas will have landscaping linked to the woodland setting. Above the main parking area the storm damaged woodland will be cleared and some garden shrubs planted to supplement young natural regeneration of beech. Below the manor recently seeding willow and sycamore scrub will be coppiced, and additional planting of native shrubs will be added.

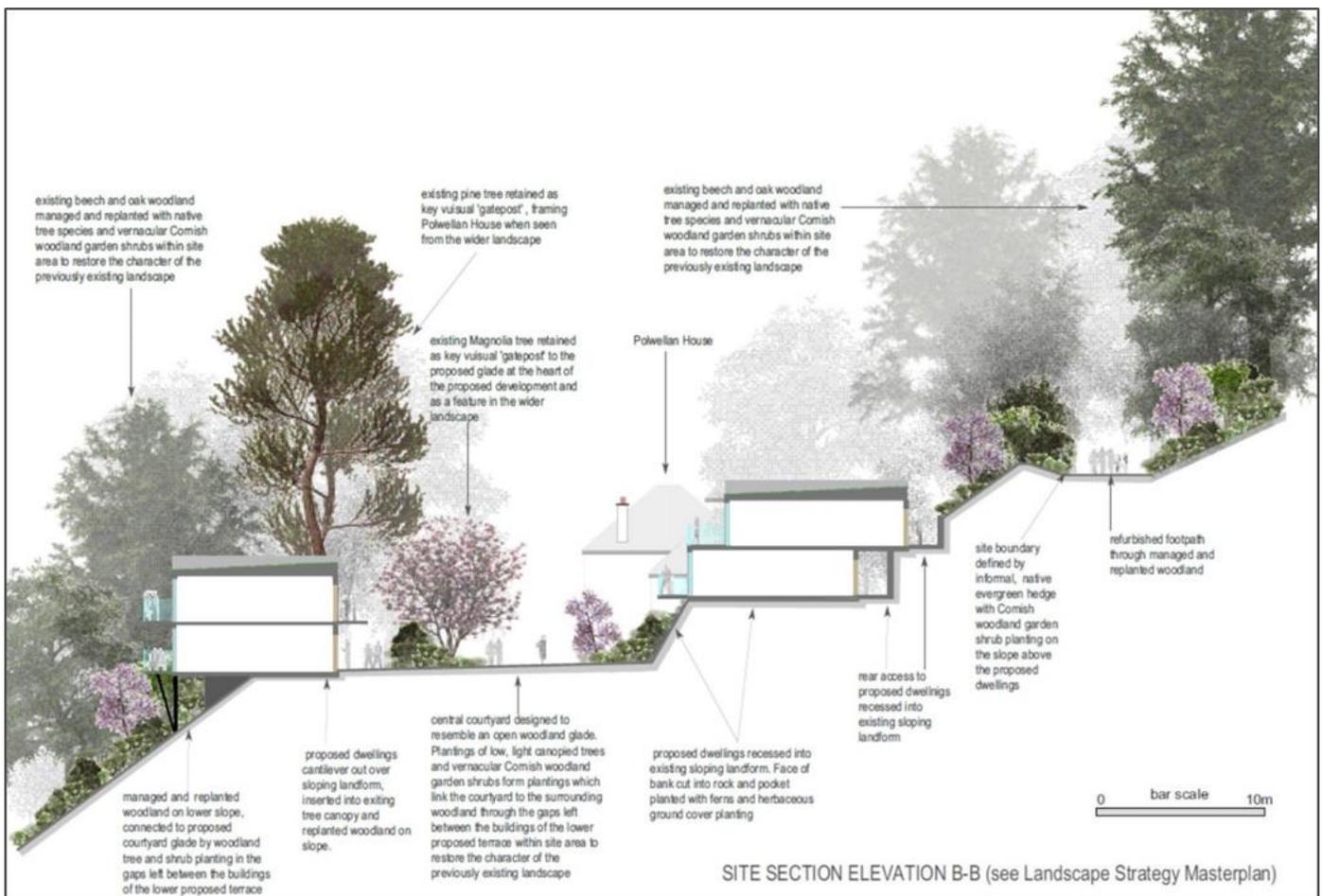


Figure 3: Cross section of main landscaping proposals

7. There will be reinstatement and adaptation of the old path system to re-open the woodland garden to residents.

8. Wind-blown trees and *Rhododendron ponticum* will be cleared from woodland areas, enabling replanting with a first phase of replacement trees and shrubs. These will be ornamental particularly in those areas close to the house and more native woodland character in areas further to the west.
9. Tree safety will be addressed. Along the bottom car park access road, tree canopies need to be raised, to give a 16 feet height clearance, to reduce damage by passing lorries. Occasional leaning trees will also be prioritised for removal during the thinning programme (see below).

There are also some safety issues along Polean Lane, with woodland edge trees having leaning canopies, and some larger trees having shed major branches in recent years. Some of these have been identified for removal in the tree survey and this will be a priority, subject to tree preservation order (TPO) consent. Note that works along Polean Lane must always be planned to protect the long term future of the woodland and respect the TPO.



Figure 4: Old woodland garden path



Figure 5: Tree canopies over car park access road



Figure 6: 2017 Storm damage over Polean Lane (1)



Figure 7: 2017 Storm damage over Polean Lane (2)

5. Woodland and Landscaping Proposals (Medium and Long Term)

Beyond the immediate landscape works, the woodland will require medium and long-term management. There are two major elements to this work: implementing the approved Forestry Commission Woodland Management Plan and taking a more proactive approach to tree safety. The Tree Preservation order means that all works will require consent from Cornwall Council.

Looking ahead in five year intervals, the woodland management plan requires a series of interventions to thin the wood, to open up the canopy in a careful and controlled manner. Thinning out trees will create more opportunities for regeneration of beech and other species and help to develop more a uneven aged woodland. More detail is provided in the approved woodland management plan (see appendix F of the Arboricultural Report). Clearings created will provide opportunities for planting other species, including oak, native shrubs (e.g. hazel) and perhaps reintroducing more exotic garden species lost since the 19th century.



6. Management Company

The grounds require managing as an integrated whole. They will be communal grounds, with access for all residents, managed through a site management company and financed via leasehold charges. The site management company will employ suitable horticultural staff to maintain the gardens and an arboricultural professional to advise and oversee woodland and tree maintenance. The apartments will be of high quality and require a well maintained landscape to complement the buildings. The woodland setting is an integral part of the landscape and will be valued and managed as such.

This document and the more technical Forestry Commission approved woodland management plan will form the brief for the management company to work from.

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