

North Street Gardens, York
Preliminary Landscape Assessment

1. The Site Generally

We have examined the site via the photographs and we have studied the North Street Gardens tree survey carried out by the Council between the 23 November 2007 and 26 November 2007.

As we have not visited the site, we have determined that the gardens must have been planted just about 40 years ago, but because we have no detail about the historical evidence/dates, this is an informed guess.

The initial concept of a public garden next to the river was clearly an appropriate and valuable decision/donation to the city at the time.

The design seemed to have been based on providing a public garden centred on paths that wound through raised brick beds of various shapes and sizes.

The site is bounded by the river along the north-east edge and a boundary wall with matching brick pillars along the south western boundary and which runs along the back of the pavement along North Street and Wellington Row.

In its heyday, the gardens must have been accessed by a set of ornamental gates (now gone) between pillars in the south-west corner of the site adjacent to the pumping station building. This now seems to have been blocked off with a wooden gate.

2. The appearance of the gardens today

Because much of the planting in the raised beds has over matured, the shrub planting have little or no aesthetic nor horticultural value.

There are Mahonias which have not been maintained, Buddlias growing out of some of the raised planters, and ground covers such as 'Euonymus fortunei' and others which have become 'leggy' and unkept.

The overgrown shrubs/bushes are interspersed with areas of unkept grass.

The over mature shrubs are not pruned and they 'overwhelm' the footpaths creating an impression of neglect and which would make visitors to the gardens feel insecure.

The site is divided from the main streets North Street and Wellington Row by a brick wall and pillars with a stone coping. The raised planting bed on the inside of the wall is overgrown restricting views in, which does not allow or contribute to public policing of the gardens, which adds to the feelings of 'lack of security'.

We have studied the tree survey and generally agreed with most of the observations made in that survey carried out between 23rd November 2007 and 26 November 2007.

However, there has clearly been a deterioration in the condition of some of the trees, particularly some of the cherries and Malus species especially tree number 17 (Malus) which seems to be dying.

Generally, one would say that of all the trees on the site, tree numbers 7, 8 and 9 are worth keeping as their 'visual presence or impact' is important and should be retained if possible (tree numbers 1, 2, 3 and 4 are also not affected by the development and should be retained).

The trees (numbers 18, 20, 21 and 22) in the large raised bed have no particular horticultural or aesthetic value – however the tree number 19 (young Carpinus) could be moved/relocated in the site in a position to suit any new proposals. The remaining trees in this area (numbers 18, 20, 21 and 22) Cherries, Laburnum and Plums are not important street trees and could be removed or thinned.

It would also have to be said that the trees along the promenade frontage to the river (10-14 in the survey) are generally in poor condition and would it be better if they were replaced in any new design with more 'significant' trees that would enhance an important river frontage location.

3. Brief Summary

The site or gardens which are neglected and uninviting needs to be 're-connected' to the street and river frontage, by removing unwanted unmaintained and overgrown shrubs as well as some thinning/removal of some trees.

The trees (numbers 1-4) in the survey are relatively young and should be retained and maintained as part of any future development.

The trees (numbers 5-9) could be retained, but they would benefit as a group if the Birdcherry was removed and the dead wood was pruned away from the other trees.

Any new development should include the planting of new 'street trees' that would enhance this important river location. If there are proposals to plant new trees then the size, spacing and the species should be agreed with the Local Authority.