



REINVENTING BORDE HILL

A masterplan designed to connect more people with this important historic landscape in West Sussex, and using light-touch interventions, has won National Lottery Heritage funding. The plan's creator, Marian Boswall MSGD, tells Joanna Fortnam more

BORDE HILL, just north of Haywards Heath in West Sussex, is a Grade II*-listed house and garden known for its legacy of 'champion' trees and rare plants, which date back to the early 1900s. Colonel Robert Stephenson Clarke acquired the property in 1893 and

it was he who first planted the gardens and woodlands, supplied by a roll call of eminent Edwardian plant hunters.

Today, the property's catchment area is a densely populated commuter belt and during the pandemic, visitor numbers rocketed as the locked-in locals sought

space and greenery. Although this new-found appreciation for the outdoors took its toll in wear and tear on the formal gardens, it raised the question, how best to retain and build upon it?

Jay Stephenson Clarke, part of the youngest generation of the Clarke family, thought long and hard about how to make meaningful changes as part of a future strategy for the estate. Her vision, 'Reinventing Borde Hill', focuses on the development of 110 acres of the listed heritage parkland.

'The three cornerstones,' says Jay, 'are to promote wellbeing through the power of nature, to provide outdoor learning to inspire future generations, and to create better public access.' She arrived at her initial brief after extensive consultation with local focus groups, charities and organisations.

Landscape architect Marian Boswall MSGD, along with architects Tate + Co,

Interview: Zia Allaway, masterplan, Marian Boswall, photography, Borde Hill



OPPOSITE: Marian's collage of the proposed Dinosaur Wood where adults and children will be able to immerse themselves in nature and take part in educational activities. **ABOVE:** the South Park aspect of the estate. **BELOW:** a view of the wider estate, seen from the Italian Garden.

were commissioned to come up with a masterplan to be submitted to the National Lottery Heritage Fund, a submission that has recently led to an initial grant of £231,000. The project is expected to cost £2m in total, and the revamped estate, complete with eco-lodge, swimming lake, new path network, community garden and propagation project, should be fully open by 2026.

Opening the space to all

Marian, whose practice is based in Staplehurst, Kent, is known for championing sustainable design and of the Borde Hill site, she says: 'Its horticultural importance is huge. We want to get more people in to share it, but to make it hyper-local. Constraints included the valuable heritage assets and the park. We wanted to make sure we honoured the champion trees and so on, but [the brief was to] involve local people more and to improve public access. Education was also very important.'

The designer was part of a team that included not only the architect Jerry Tate, but also the Borde Hill family, headed by director-owners and Jay's parents, Eleni and Andrewjohn Stephenson Clarke. Borde Hill's management team (including Harry Baldwin, the estate's head of horticulture) was involved, together with its woodlands team, an education specialist, a heritage specialist, surveyors and representatives of Historic England. The National Lottery was also consulted.

Having worked on the estates at Knole and Charleston, Marian is very familiar with the challenges of heritage masterplanning. 'I find that constraints actually help with the design,' she says. 'It produces a tension between what's gone before and what you want to do that is helpful. But,' she concedes, 'there's not much room for the ego.'

Of the technical aspects of creating a masterplan, she continues: 'The challenge is zooming in and zooming out, but Google Earth and drones now make



this so much easier than in the days of Jan Kip's engravings of English country houses. Spatial planning is key and the relationship of the human form to the sky is what I always keep in mind. You want the end result to be comfortable, but not fussy. And I try not to be bossy; I don't dictate.' →

Marian's masterplan addresses the need to marry developed parkland with the formal gardens, and also identifies potential links with local public transport.



Proposed design



There is, however, room for inspiration. As the Borde Hill estate needs to continue earning some of its keep from farming, Marian's masterplan indicates how, by adapting its practices, it can achieve better biodiversity and water management and can lock up carbon in the site at the same time as achieving its public access and education objectives.

'My studio works a lot with regenerative farming principles, which essentially is about how you work with the land in a very gentle way,' comments Marian. For this project, she drew on advice from a local shepherd to suggest changes to grazing regimes that will encourage native flora and fauna. She advised on the management of the lake,

too, to adapt it to wild swimming and even researched compost loos.

Her masterplan also addresses marrying the newly developed parkland to the formal gardens, the main objective being, as Marian puts it, 'to take the pressure off the heritage asset'. Her strategy to disperse people around the site is, therefore, to 'make good focal points; for example, Borde Hill has lots of viewpoints from an amazing ridge that runs east to west through the garden'. She has also identified the potential for a running route, secure dog-walking space and a footpath that links up with the local public transport network.

Marian's work at Borde Hill ended with the masterplan and the next stage of the project will be undertaken by Erect Architecture and Jon Sheaff Landscape Architects. However, she is sanguine about the handover. 'A masterplan is a bit like having children: you get them so far and then have to trust that they will go on to do well under their own steam.' marianboswall.com; bordehill.co.uk

A SECRET GARDEN FOR ICU PATIENTS

Pre-registered SGD member Mark Lane has designed an inspiring garden that allows critical care patients to spend time outside during their treatment at Derriford Hospital, Plymouth

AN ABANDONED COURTYARD has been transformed into a 'secret' garden (pictured) by pre-registered member of the Society of Garden Designers Mark Lane (pictured, bottom right), for use by critical care patients at Derriford Hospital in Plymouth.

The space has been designed so that ICU patients can spend valuable time outside in the fresh air and sunshine and be surrounded by nature while they remain fully connected to specialist equipment which, for some, includes essential ventilation systems.

The design features carefully considered access and resting areas, with room for six members of a medical team per patient at any one time, and slip-resistant, anti-glare and self-binding gravel surfaces. Planting is arranged at various heights around the paths and spaces, some in the ground, some in raised beds with built-in benches.

Trees create dappled shade, while an understorey of herbaceous perennials, ferns, ornamental grasses and some edibles provides colour, texture and movement so that patients on beds and in wheelchairs, as well as using walking frames and sticks can all make use of the garden and see and enjoy the seasons.

The project was inspired by a former



patient of Derriford, Andrew Heveran, who was left paralysed after an attack. He wanted to be able to go outside during his treatment, an impetus that Mark – who spent months in a critical care unit following a serious car crash – understood and was keen to help fulfil with his garden.

'Outdoor, green spaces are enjoyed by many,' Mark comments, 'but when your life turns a different corner and you end up in ICU, like I did after my car accident, you become completely unaware of the changing seasons, whether it's sunny or raining outside. If, like me, you're fortunate enough to be able to go outside again, the first thing that hits you is the sun on your face, the breeze and the colour green.'

'This site is an awkward space, with high walls on all four sides,' he continues, 'but this lent itself to a nurturing woodland-style of garden with pops of colour here and there. I wanted the patients to be able to feel the plants and enjoy the textures, to engage with the garden – whether that be passively or actively getting their hands dirty during rehabilitation – and to have a space in which to improve their physical and mental wellbeing.'

The hospital team – which is part of University Hospitals Plymouth NHS Trust and led by Kate Tantam, Critical



Care Specialist Rehabilitation Sister – raised the £625,000 needed to build the garden with the help of Plymouth Hospital Charity, NHS Charities Together and the Trust's own budget. marklanedesigns.com

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