

Manifesto for **Green Heritage**

Linking the living world and cultural heritage

This manifesto for **Green Heritage** has developed from a series of conversations in the city of Canterbury*, UK. While much of our discussion has been focused on the context of our own historic city, which includes a UNESCO World Heritage Site, the concept of **Green Heritage** recognises its application to diverse locations varying in scale from intimate sites within towns and cities (e.g., a single house and garden, or even section of wall) to extensive cultural landscapes (e.g. a prehistoric field system). It also recognises that Green Heritage, with the linked concept of sustainability, will have various manifestations in different parts of our world.

**Canterbury BID (Business Improvement District), Canterbury Cathedral, Canterbury Christ Church University (CCCU), University of Kent, and other contributing organisations to Canterbury in Bloom (see [Bloom partners list in the 2021 Portfolio](#)).*

Definition and vision

‘Green heritage’ is an approach to heritage sites that values the living world or ‘nature’ (the wild, semi-natural and cultivated elements of these environments) and seeks to provide a distinctive place for it that improves both human wellbeing and the health of the planet. Green heritage involves nurturing or restoring sympathetically and appropriately the living element within heritage spaces (although it is recognised that there can be conflicts between protecting heritage assets and allowing organisms to thrive). It also involves interpretation of these sites via reference to the living world in the broadest sense, both in the past and the present.

While some definitions of heritage include biodiversity (see ICOMOS definition in Appendix 1) we believe the Green Heritage concept embodies a more overt approach to linking the living world and cultural heritage, examples from Canterbury include:

Solly’s Orchard, on the site of a medieval Dominican priory - apple trees have been planted on the site with varieties chosen to have a religious theme: Chorister boy, Christmas Pearmain, Easter orange, Eden, Harvest festival and Ten commandments. The trees are managed by artisan cidery Rough Old Wife Cider through a licence with the City Council, the first of its kind in the country. The initiative ensures that the fruit is used to production of natural cider from unsprayed trees. A percentage of the profits from the cider is returned to the Council’s environmental funds.

Canterbury Cathedral’s herb garden project - Interactive labels using Near Field Communication enable visitors (using their smartphone) to see the image of a particular plant in Gerrarde’s herbal of 1597, held in the Cathedral library - normally available to study by appointment only, this system opens the herbal to a much wider audience. Other recent projects include creating a woodland area within the grounds; log piles are left to encourage insect life, including stag beetles, now found regularly. The cathedral has bumblebee nests located within a wildflower area to introduce more queens to the city and increase the population.

The *Bioversity* initiative at Canterbury Christ Church University that celebrates its unique sense of place within the Canterbury World Heritage Site (St Augustine’s Abbey outer

precinct) by nurturing of a number of pocket-habitats that do not mimic but do connect with the site's past as a monastery and later as a Tudor period garden managed by John Tradescant the elder. Sites include an orchard and nuttury, a physic garden, wildflower banks, and a hop garden (which provides hops for an annual green hop ale, brewed in association with a local artisan brewer)

Green Heritage is a way of thinking - it recognises that we are bound by our responsibility for present and future generations, but also for the legacy and remains of past people, as well as for the living world. Many key Green Heritage sites are located close to or within human settlements, and thereby provide places, often freely accessible, which enable people to develop a deep sense of being and of place within both cultural heritage and the living world; burial grounds and churchyards as encapsulated countryside are a good example within the context of a city like Canterbury.

Other sites include the nature area at Abbot's Mill (at six storeys the second tallest structure in Canterbury, after the cathedral's Bell Harry Tower, until it burned down in 1933); mills are natural historic centres where human activity, waterside habitats, food chain and landscape meet. As well as grain mills, there is a tradition of scholarship, printing and bookmaking that in turn links to activities such as papermaking, tanning and such like, with their origins in landscape, trade and pilgrimage.

The word 'nature' is used throughout this document. It is recognised that most cultural heritage sites do not contain wilderness, and most are managed to some degree or other. Nature is used as a shorthand for the living elements of a site, the vegetation, fungi and animal life (including people).

Many in the heritage and environment community in Canterbury have adopted the term Green Heritage. The Canterbury Connected Business Improvement District (CID) ran an interdisciplinary conference in 2018 called 'Growing Canterbury's Green Heritage' with speakers from across academia and business contributing. This conference provided the momentum for our further conversations around the concept.

Objective

We must recognise the synergies between protection of heritage and the protection of the living world. By creating interconnected thinking, we can improve the environment for both local communities and for nature/wildlife – implemented through participatory action of individuals, non-governmental organisations, educational institutions, businesses and government. This will support human health and wellbeing by creating greener environments that also support various ecosystems services, such as carbon capture, pollution control, and pollinators.

The alignment of nature-rich environments and habitats with heritage sites presents multiple opportunities to support local communities, gain wisdom from the knowledge and practices of a wide variety of agents, respond to climate change and habitat loss, and sustain biodiversity beyond protected areas.

Context and principles for Green Heritage

Green Heritage emerges from the wider debate on sustainability and the building of resilient communities. The Brundtland Report 'Our Common Future' (World Commission on Environment and

Development (WCED), published 1987) defined sustainable development as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” This view of sustainability focuses on the interconnections between social, economic and environmental security and sustainability.

The United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted by United Nations member states in 2015 now provides a framework for consideration of sustainability more generally and contains many targets relevant to the management of heritage sites as a community asset. While we do not accept the SDGs uncritically, Green Heritage does acknowledge their role as a stimulus to thinking and action. Canterbury Christ Church University is a signatory to the international SDG Accord.

Biodiversity enhancement is an element of a Green Heritage approach, but with an eye to cultural heritage connections and acknowledging the fact that we still do not totally understand how ecosystems work and our possible impacts, however well meaning. Much has been done to enhance biodiversity at heritage sites, but many are isolated and inadequately managed; for example, some burial grounds and parks suffer from overzealous grass cutting regimes and removal of ivy, an important autumn provider of pollen and nectar, and winter berries.

Key principles

Key principles of Green Heritage include:

Taking the long view and recalling ecological histories

Green heritage, by definition, is concerned with the long view, with past, present and future communities as well as the long-term stewardship of built heritage and its living landscape. Green heritage should be informed by a deep knowledge and understanding of the environmental and cultural histories of places.

Green heritage is based on relationships and local context

Greening our understanding of heritage sites is fundamental. It is a critical step toward embracing a green heritage approach where some of the myths concerning damage to heritage from wildlife are addressed and where different stakeholders understand each other’s position and concerns. Green Heritage should work within the socio-cultural and bio-physical realities of a place.

Creating appropriate narratives

Green heritage involves telling stories of heritage and landscapes and stimulating appropriate projects that empower people to support and join initiatives. There is an important place for arts and crafts in Green Heritage; the literary, musical, performing and visual arts all have a part to play as the means of creating narratives. Green heritage should contest as well as affirm, for example challenge the ‘plant blindness’ so pervasive in western society.

Embracing both natural and technological evidence-based solutions creatively

Green heritage can help to solve social, economic, and environmental issues. Green heritage initiatives should be designed and be ambitious, strategic, and entrepreneurial. It should share, learn, and use the best-available evidence, while having the confidence to learn from mistakes and develop institutional capacities to support this learning.

Preserving and conserving

Green heritage should be concerned with protecting intact sites as well as working to sensitively recover nature at sites that have become neglected or damaged. Standard heritage preservation should be complemented by new understanding and novel ideas concerning the value of nature. It must also be recognised that sometimes it is best to 'do nothing' – the living world has prodigious self-righting powers and well-intentioned attempts at a helping hand can just get in the way. All forms of conservation management should be underpinned by the best available ecological, heritage, sociological, and other appropriate research.

Working at nature's scale

Natural systems operate at a variety of spatial and temporal scales. Green heritage should work to the pace of specific sites and their living elements to nurture or build biodiversity and other ecosystem benefits. Trees, for example, provide lessons for humans in terms of 'long-life learning' and persistence in the landscape. Natural processes such as disturbance and dispersal should be understood and valued and even used to create resilient environments.

Call to action

In a spirit of hope for the future of communities and the living systems this manifesto calls on individuals, government and non-government agencies, businesses, and other institutions to adopt and advance a Green Heritage approach to protect and enhance cultural heritage sites. Green Heritage should be a global concern, embraced by a wide spectrum of communities and constituencies to provide a better future and habitat for all. Green heritage principles should be formally built into planning processes and factored into economic evaluations of project viability.

Acknowledgements and disclaimer

This document was produced by Peter Vujakovic, Emeritus Professor of Geography at Canterbury Christ Church University (CCCU) and former Chair of the university's Sustainable Heritage Working Group (SHWG), (on-line publication date: 5th Oct 2022). The ideas and concepts discussed here are the result of various conversations following the 2018 'Growing Canterbury's Green Heritage' conference hosted by The Canterbury Connected Business Improvement District (BID) and a follow-up workshop at CCCU, but any errors are the author's own. Peter thanks the following people in particular, Lisa Carson (BID) and other members of the Canterbury in Bloom Committee, Professor Karen Jones (Univ. of Kent), Professor Emeritus Howard Thomas (Univ. of Aberystwyth), Dr Ellie Williams, Dr Sheila Sweetinburgh, and Dr Diane Heath (CCCU), and acknowledges the support of Dr Peter Rands (Director of Sustainability Development, CCCU) and his team.

Appendix 1: Heritage Definitions

From Historic England

<https://historicengland.org.uk/advice/hpg/hpr-definitions/#:~:text=Definition%3A%20Heritage,well%20as%20the%20cultural%20environment>

accessed 13/07/2020

Heritage

"All inherited resources which people value for reasons beyond mere utility."

Conservation Principles, English Heritage, 2008

“Heritage is a broad concept and includes the natural as well as the cultural environment. It encompasses landscapes, historic places, sites and built environments, as well as bio-diversity, collections, past and continuing cultural practices, knowledge and living experiences. It records and expresses the long processes of historic development, forming the essence of diverse national, regional, indigenous and local identities and is an integral part of modern life. It is a social dynamic reference point and positive instrument for growth and change. The particular heritage and collective memory of each locality or community is irreplaceable and an important foundation for development, both now and into the future.”

International Cultural Tourism Charter, ICOMOS (International Council on Monuments and Sites), 2002, <http://icomos-ictc.org/>

Heritage Asset

“A building, monument, site, place, area or landscape identified as having a degree of significance meriting consideration in planning decisions, because of its heritage interest. Heritage asset includes designated heritage assets and assets identified by the local planning authority (including local listing).”

Annex 2: Glossary, National Planning Policy Framework, Department for Communities and Local Government, 2012