

FINAL DRAFT

BEST VALUE REVIEW

FOR

VENTNOR BOTANIC GARDEN

**EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
DIRECTORATE**

ISLE OF WIGHT COUNCIL

FEBRUARY 2003

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VENTNOR BOTANIC GARDEN

1.1 INTRODUCTION

1.1.1 Aims and Objectives of Ventnor Botanic Garden

- 1 ***Ventnor Botanic Garden exists to provide a public amenity for recreation, education and plant conservation, for the benefit of present and future generations.***

(Ventnor Botanic Garden's Mission Statement issued in 1986).

The Botanic Garden aims:

- To establish a plant collection that is documented and has scientific integrity such that it will benefit present and future generations.
 - To provide a plant collection for the enlightenment, education and recreation of the Island Community and Island Visitors.
 - To deliver an educational programme, offering opportunities to the widest audience for a better understanding of the plant kingdom.
 - To foster an appreciation and interest in the quality and distinctiveness of the Island's horticultural heritage.
 - To respond to public needs in making this horticultural heritage available to all.
- 2 These aims meet in particular the Council's Corporate Objectives in the areas of improving the quality of life (1); raising education standards and promoting lifelong learning (3); and protecting the Island's environment (6)
 - 3 The above aims are developed in the objectives of the Garden Service Plan and in the Improvement Plan of this review.

1.1.2 Recommendations

It is recommended that:

- 1 The Council continues to provide the Botanic Garden facility.
- 2 The failure of the lift in the Visitor Centre is resolved.
- 3 A continued improvement to path surfaces on a rolling programme is implemented.
- 4 Serious consideration is given to the relationship and role that the Botanic Garden may have in an Island-wide strategy for Parks, Gardens and Open Spaces.
- 5 Serious consideration is given to the development of a training programme for horticulturists.
- 6 With expanding use of the Visitor Centre, identify improvements to be made, obtain approval and seek financial resources to implement them.
- 7 Partnerships are identified for the development of (5).
- 8 Improved IT for public access and for the cataloguing of the plant collections.
- 9 Potential interaction with museums and their Exhibitions Officer in the development of the Visitor Centre Exhibition spaces.
- 10 A forum of special interest groups in horticulture, parks and gardens, historic landscapes is explored with a view to further using the Gardens facilities.
- 11 The Botanic Garden expands its presence on the Councils website.
- 12 Increased advertising of the Botanic Garden (Gardens generally) as a tourist attraction.

1.1.3 Improvement Plan and Corporate Objectives

From the review there have been numerous issues identified that need to be discussed further Recommendations 4, 5, 6, 7 above require considerable investigation and research. The other recommendations are clearly identified and relate to many of the on going improvements shown in the plan below. The Improvement Plan identifies where improvements meet Corporate Objectives and for ease of reference these are outlined here.

Corporate Objectives

1. Improving health, housing and the quality of life
2. Encouraging job creation and economic prosperity
3. Raising education standards & promoting lifelong learning
4. Creating safe and crime-free communities
5. Improving public transport and the highways infrastructure
6. Protecting the Island's physical environment

1.1.3 IMPROVEMENT PLAN – VENTNOR BOTANIC GARDEN

Priority Levels Key - 1 High, 2 Medium, 3 Low

No.	Actions and Priority Level	Responsible Person	Target Date	Cost Implications		Outcome Measures	Corporate Objectives
				Capital	Revenue		
1	To develop an additional learning resource by redeveloping the Temperate House. Exploring potential of external funding and increasing national role of collections. Priority Level 1	Simon Goodenough Curator	Landscape and plant house by January 2003 Prepare interpretation materials for use in 2003 tourist season	£10K External funds from Friends' Society	Service and Revenue Positive	Increased customer satisfaction 20,000 fee paying visitors March 2004 Improved educational resource 20 School visits March 2004	1, 2, 3
2	Establishing Accredited Training Schemes at VBG. Priority Level 2	Simon Goodenough Curator Irene Fletcher Education Officer	City and Guilds 9383 Accreditation gained seeking further participants for 2003 RHS General Course 2 enrolment Sept 2003	N/A	Service and Revenue Positive	Promotion of personal development by providing opportunities to realise potential 95% pass rate looked for in RHS exam 2004	1, 2, 3

3	<p>To develop a computerised database for the reference library and a plant record database for public use.</p> <p>Priority Level 2</p>	Simon Goodenough Curator	Database as live and ongoing facility not yet available to the public	£6K	N/A	<p>Increased customer satisfaction and improved educational resource</p> <p>Library database live for public June 2003</p> <p>Plant database 2005</p>	3
4	<p>Resolve the problem of the lift failure and thereby improve physical access to the Garden</p> <p>Priority Level 1</p>	Simon Goodenough Curator	Modification and repair to be completed by November 2002	To be identified	£13K minibus hire and staffing	Compliance with DDA and improved physical access by April 2003	1, 6

5	<p>Ensure that a rolling programme of building maintenance is in place and that all outstanding works are completed</p> <p>Priority Level 1</p>	<p>Simon Goodenough Curator Dick Sedgley IWC Property Services</p>	<p>Building Maintenance Programme in place by May 2003. Outstanding works completed April 2004 A three year programme to be identified by July 2003 as a continuation of 2003/4 programme</p>	<p>To be identified</p>		<p>Improved facilities and improved customer satisfaction. Outstanding works identified and completed by April 2004. Identified programme of works for 2005/6</p>	<p>6</p>
6	<p>Repair and improve path systems in Garden</p> <p>Priority Level 1</p>	<p>Simon Goodenough Curator</p>	<p>Make Capital bid for 2003/4 Re open closed paths June 2003 and identify further works required for 2004/5 financial year</p>	<p>£35K</p>	<p>N/A</p>	<p>Worst affected paths reopened for June 2003 Improved physical access and Health and Safety improvement</p>	<p>6</p>

7	<p>Review Children's Playground Equipment Seek to upgrade static play equipment</p> <p>Priority Level 2</p>	<p>Simon Goodenough Curator</p>	<p>Make Capital Bid for 2004/5 Financial year</p>	<p>£40K</p>		<p>Review report by June 2003 Seek funding for April 2004 Undertake works to open improved facility by June 2004</p>	<p>1, 4</p>
8	<p>Install art gallery hanging system in the Echium Terrace Room of the Visitor Centre</p> <p>Priority Level 2</p>	<p>Simon Goodenough Curator & Maria Wilkinson Arts Development Officer</p>	<p>Identify system and cost of installation by May 2003</p>	<p>To be identified</p>	<p>Revenue and service positive</p>	<p>Find system and cost of installation by May 2003 Seek funding for the installation to provide improved facilities and affordable gallery space for local artists</p>	<p>1, 2, 3</p>

9	<p>Review partnerships for development of educational and training programmes development at the Botanic Garden</p> <p>Priority Level 2</p>	<p>Simon Goodenough Curator Irene Fletcher Education Officer</p>	<p>Produce report by August 2003</p>	<p>N/A</p>	<p>Report to identify future strategy for education and training delivery. Costed and funded and implement in 2004 Academic year.</p>	<p>1, 2, 3</p>
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1.1.4 Scope of the Review

- 1 This Review has been conducted as one of a series of service reviews of the Community Development arm of the Education, Community Development and Tourism Directorate, defined under a Best Value Scoping Document.
- 2 This Review is concerned with the provision of a Botanic Garden. The provision of other public parks and gardens has been reviewed separately. Whilst the two are not directly connected the process of consultation has clearly identified overlap in the delivery of these services. The Review of Parks and Gardens includes some common areas for discussion.

1.1.5 Stakeholders

- 1 The range of stakeholders is very broad as the Botanic Garden has extensive community outreach and national importance.
- 2 Consultation has therefore been targeted at key stakeholders such as other Council departments, other botanic gardens and special interest groups. Open invitation public consultation has provided at best a limited response.
- 3 National Agencies have given considerable input into this review largely because of the Botanic Garden's relationship/membership with these Agencies. No specific comment has been made in some instances, where those approached considered a neutral response the best policy.
- 4 Appendix 1 lists documents recording stakeholder responses used in the compilation of the Review

1.2 OUTCOMES

1.2.1 Main Findings

- 1 **Performance.** There has been a marked and substantial growth in the service performance of the Botanic Garden, principally a result of the opening of the Visitor Centre in 2000. In particular the area of education has been boosted by the appointment of an Education Officer.
- 2 **Resources.** With the development of the Visitor Centre and growth in educational provision an imbalance has been created whereby the Garden (plant collection) is suffering from a reduction of resource both human and financial.
- 3 **User Perception.** Satisfaction levels for the Garden have remained high rising from 90% in 2001 to 90.5% in 2002 rating the Garden very good or excellent. Satisfaction with the Visitor Centre has fallen dramatically in the same period reducing from 94% to 78% this is directly attributable to the failure of the lift. Satisfaction with the catering franchise has fallen in the same period from 70% to 53%.
- 4 **Education.** There is a great deal to offer across a wide age range. A greater focus of strategy is required and exploration of joint activity across subject disciplines and across a number of Council sections needs to be examined. Nationally it has been recognised that there is a skills shortage in horticulture the Botanic Garden, if suitably resourced could provide training to address this.
- 5 **Fragmented Services.** The fragmentation and disconnection of a range of Council services in relation to parks, gardens, open spaces, school grounds, etc, has led to public confusion and indicates that there is abundant potential to work together more closely.
- 6 **Collections care.** The provision of well-documented collections is a problem identified in several of the heritage activities within Council services, particularly in relation to cataloguing. It is certainly an issue for the Botanic Collection and IT Support as well as human resources are limiting factors.
- 7 **Community relationships.** The Botanic Garden has strong community links, in particular through the Friends Society but also

through other special interest user groups. The further exploration of user needs can build upon success.

- 8 **Service provider.** The Botanic Garden is one aspect of a number of Council services delivering the management of open spaces. Whilst the Council is best placed to deliver these services integration could provide greater efficiency and more effective service.

1.2.2 Options

- 1 **Service provision.** The Council can either look to continue providing the service or look for an alternative provider. Considerable research into alternative provision has been undertaken, a trust being the most obvious. As it currently stands the asset base of the Botanic Garden could not support a self-financing trust. The relationship with other parks and gardens provided by Council could be explored further but the scientific integrity of the Botanic Garden could be threatened by such a move.
- 2 **Service integration.** To leave the Botanic Garden as a stand alone service identifies the differing priorities of the Garden from other parks, gardens and open spaces provided by Council. The integration of Parks and Gardens with the Botanic Garden would be a return to the organisation of Parks and Gardens during the early years of South Wight Borough Council. During this period it was identified that the Botanic Garden would be better serviced and have greater control as a separate entity. In the face of a lack of parks, gardens and open spaces strategy for the Island as a whole this may still be the case. The Council lacks a proper Parks and Landscape department and has been shown in the outcomes of this review to be a serious issue.
- 3 **Botanic Garden Development.** Without improvement the Botanic Garden will loose ground and stagnate, the living collections will dwindle and a tourism asset will be lost. The role of the Garden and the “sphere of influence” that it may have over the services provided by Council needs to be fully explored. Horticultural training and partnerships in education could lead to greater income to assist in the development of the Garden. The provision of plants (not bedding) for parks and gardens could assist in enhancing the overall appearance of the “Garden Isle”

- 4 **Collections.** Options to address the lack of cataloguing of the collections are few and require input of human resources and improved IT. This situation will worsen unless addressed and will threaten our status nationally as part of the National Plant Collection Network whose Policies we are signed up to. A commitment to making our plant collection data available on the Internet will be a benefit of this.
- 5 **Human Resources.** The identified shortfall in trained horticulturists nationally and the need for quality work placements for students could provide the Garden with an option for improved staffing levels this would only be possible with some financial commitment. The utilisation of the Friends of the Garden to provide volunteer labour has potential for expansion into other areas of work. As with training and work placements there would need to be supervision from the Garden staff.
- 6 **Access and the local community.** An already well established engagement with the local community has given the Garden a number of options in the improvement of the services offered. Special interest groups having input into specific displays at the Garden can and have provided funds for their development. Engagement of special interest user groups through meetings and clubs increase local awareness and use of the Garden. Interaction with such groups has encouraged greater social inclusion and will continue to be explored. Improved routing, the repair of the lift, resurfacing of paths and provision of more aids for those individuals with disabilities such as sight and hearing impairment, should be increasingly catered for.

2.1 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

2.1.1 Ventnor Botanic Garden

Historical Background

At its inception in 1970, the Botanic Garden was perceived as a public open space with a plant collection of botanical interest. It was part of the Parks Department of South Wight Borough Council. As the significance of the collection of plants grew it was decided that it would be best for the Botanic Garden to be managed separately from the general parks. This was achieved in 1986 and has remained in the management of a direct labour force ever since. The Parks Department on the other hand has been contracted out.

From the time that the Botanic Garden became independent of the Parks Department, it was seen as a Garden that could be used for training purposes. During the life of SWBC 4 horticultural trainees were employed on day release schemes. Other youngsters (up to 8) were taken on for landscaping and general building/labouring tasks under a youth training scheme with a Supervisor. 6 Full Time staff were employed for the Garden, nursery and show house. At the start of Unitary Authority the Horticultural Trainees were dispensed with and the work experience group reduced and eventually stopped. The nurseries expanded and staff levels in the Garden have increased to 7.

2.1.2 Resources

Currently the Garden has a staff of 8 F/T and 1 P/T Coupled to this the development of a Visitor Centre has created the posts of Head of Visitor Services, Education Officer and an Administration Assistant. 3 P/T Shop Assistants and 2 P/T Cleaners (see enclosed structure plan)

Budgetary provision is shown in Appendix – Overall the service covers about 50% of its expenditure with earned income.

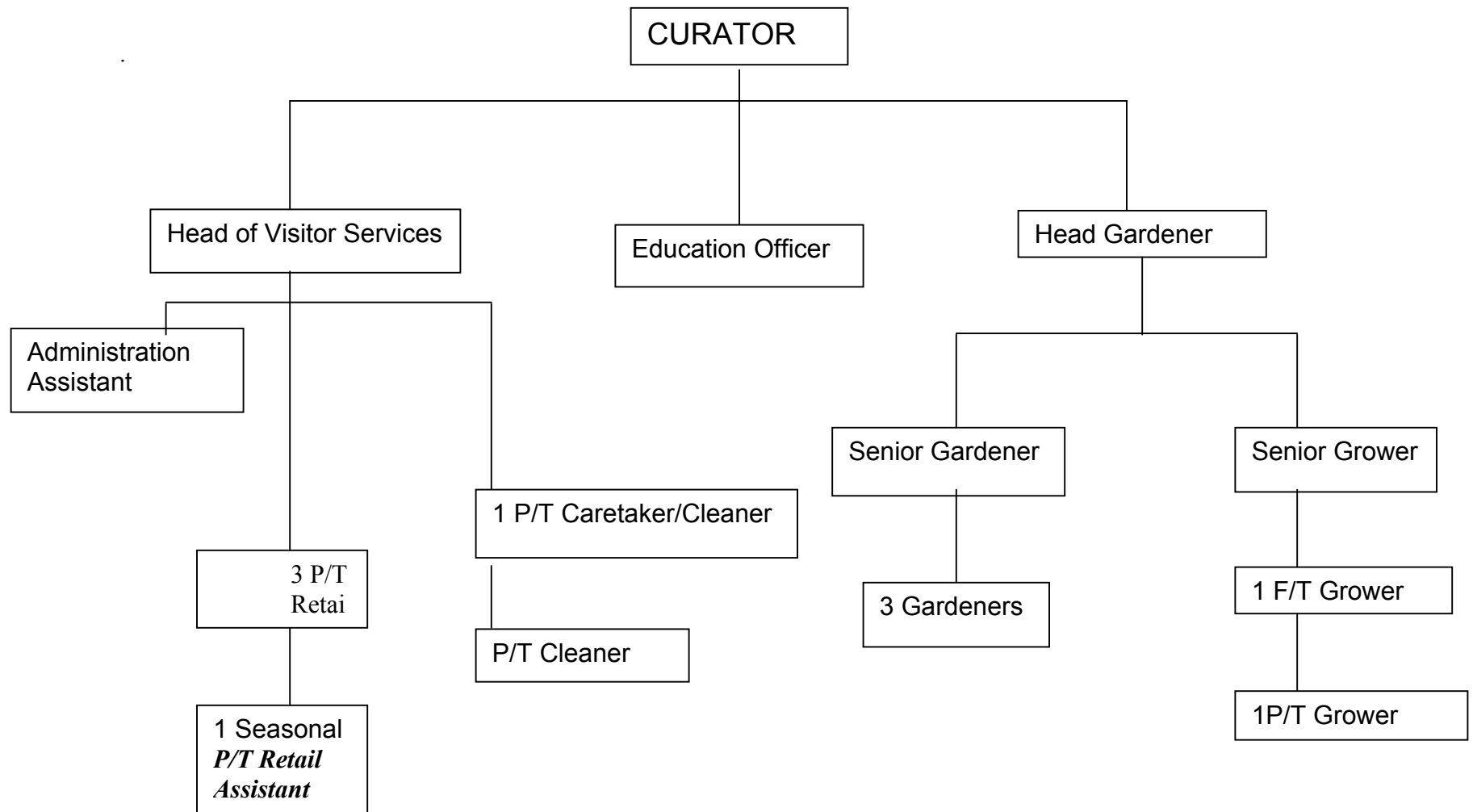
The Garden comprises of 22 acres, includes a playground, a Visitor Centre with Exhibition space, gift shop, café, meeting rooms, and reference library, a Show House display and two nursery units. A fee-paying car park for 138 cars and 5 coaches is part of the site. A full guide to the facilities offered may be found at www.botanic.co.uk where a virtual guide is available.

2.1.2 Budgetary Provision as per Service Plan

A brief overview of the Botanic Garden budget is given here for a full breakdown see appendix -

Staff Costs	£284,564	
Operational Costs	£140,170	
Central Costs	£ 91,446	
Revenue		£215,030
TOTALS	£516,180	£215,030
BUDGET	£301,150	

2.1.2 STRUCTURE PLAN – VENTNOR BOTANIC GARDEN



2.1.3 Framework and Professional Guidance

- 1 Local Authority expenditure on the Botanic Garden is discretionary there are no Acts governing such although the site is Public Open Space with all that entails.
- 2 There are the usual pieces of legislation that govern activities at the Botanic Garden particularly in respect to Health and Safety to staff and public etc.
- 3 The UK has signed up to the Convention on Biodiversity and as a founder member of the Plant Collection Network of Britain and Ireland; Ventnor Botanic Garden aspires to the principles laid down in this.
- 4 Professional guidance is provided by a number of organisations to which Ventnor has membership, in particular the Plant Collection Network, Botanic Gardens Conservation International and the European Consortium of Botanic Gardens (Eurogard).

2.1.4 Quality Initiatives

- 1 Ventnor Botanic Garden as a member of the Plant Collection Network is required to meet an acceptable standard to be a designated member. This is a code of standards that includes, quality of horticulture, level of record keeping, delivery of training of staff, public education, scientific integrity of plant collections and sharing of resources with like minded institutions and organisations. The adherence to this code is achieved and is maintained.
- 2 The Directorate including the Botanic Garden gained IIP status in 2002.

2.1.5 Other Providers and Partnerships

- 1 Ventnor Botanic Garden is the only botanical collection on the Island.
- 2 There are a number of private gardens open to the public with good plant collections in them. English Heritage at Osborne House provides a major garden of interest and to a lesser extent The National Trust at Mottistone. Morton Manor and Nunwell House provide visitor attractions. There is no formal relationship between these providers and the Botanic Garden.
- 3 The Service has worked closely with a number of organisations and groups on the Island in particular The IW Gardens Trust, the IW Botanic Garden Society and a range of local horticultural societies.
- 4 The Botanic Garden has a well established Friends Society that are a major source of funding for development of the Garden and the providers of a voluntary workforce.
- 5 At a strategic level, the Botanic Garden has worked closely with the Institute of Horticulture, and the Plant Collection Network of Britain and Ireland. The Curator having been a founder member and served a 5-year term on the Board of Directors of the latter.
- 6 The Botanic Garden has worked closely with several Universities in the UK and abroad, in the provision of plant material and knowledge. This is for the furtherance of understanding of the plant kingdom and issues that affect it.

2.1.6 Performance Management

To undertake a review of the Botanic Garden it has been necessary to establish quantifiable and measurable indicators. The current facility including the Visitor Centre has been operational since Spring 2000 a collation of data has enabled the identification of Key Performance Indicators these are outlined below.

Key Performance Indicators

KPI (Local)	2000/01	2001/02	2002/03
Total Visitor No.	246,735	234,602	243,719
Education Visits	3	66	85
Spend per Head (Total Visitor No.)	70p	84p	74p
Spend per Head Gift Shop	92p	78p	77p
Cost per Head for IW Citizens for delivery of service	£2.27	£2.39	£2.32
% Costs met by Revenue	45%	37%	41.3%
Dwell Time (those spending an hour or more)	72.6%	78.1%	92%

2.1.7 Review Methodology

- 1 This review was undertaken as part of a series of reviews of services within the Community Development arm of the Education and Community Development Directorate.
- 2 Community Development took a common approach in consulting with the local community, convening public meetings and distributing Best Value and Cultural Strategy Questionnaires. Other local consultation has been undertaken through MORI surveys 5 and 6 being relevant to Community Development.
- 3 The Botanic Garden consulted with key stakeholders, compared with other botanic gardens and invited others to look critically at our service. Seasonal Visitor surveys, a Visitor Book has also been utilised, and therefore the user survey has been undertaken throughout the main season of May to September. The collation of data is shown at Appendix 1
- 4 Internally the Review Team for the Botanic Garden has been Simon Goodenough, Curator; Alison Ellsbury, Head of Visitor Services; Chris Kidd, Head Gardener.
- 5 A comparison visit made to Belfast City Botanic Garden was made by Simon Goodenough, Mary Scott-Jackson, Community Development Officer; and Councillors: John Howe, Chair of Select Committee; Barbara Clough

2.1.8 Links to Corporate aims and objectives

- 1 The Council's Corporate Objectives are :
 1. **Improving health, housing and the quality of life**
 2. **Encouraging job creation and economic prosperity**
 3. **Raising education standards & promoting lifelong learning**
 4. **Creating safe and crime-free communities**
 5. **Improving public transport and the highways infrastructure**
 6. **Protecting the Island's physical environment**
- 2 Ventnor Botanic Garden links to the objectives 1,2,3 and 6

- Improving health and quality of life through the provision of a highly desirable, restful and pleasing environment to visit and enjoy.
 - Encouraging job creation and economic prosperity by being a net employer of people which has steadily increased in staff levels as a result of expanding facilities and services. By encouraging an increased income in to the market economy of the Island through merchandising of gifts and plants and there by meeting some 50% of the running costs of the facility.
 - Raising education standards and promoting lifelong learning by the provision of courses, both formal and informal, the display of informative material in exhibitions, the dissemination of information through clubs and societies and the expansion of a reference library service.
- 3 The Directorate of Education and Community Development Strategic Plan sets out 30 objectives, from which the Botanic Garden service links are set out in the Annual Service Plan.

2.2 THE REVIEW

The principal of Best Value requires that the 4C's are addressed i.e. Challenge, Compare, Consult and Compete. Many of the users of the Botanic Garden are non-resident. For the consultation to be significantly weighted it has meant that the process has been somewhat protracted to cover a full period of seasonal visitors. With the aims of the Garden being to provide a facility that provides a recreational and educational amenity that also aspires to being a bona fide scientific plant collection the review has incorporated the views of widely disparate user groups.

2.2.1 CHALLENGE

- 1 Challenge raises the question as to whether the Council should provide the Botanic Garden. The challenge element of the 4 C's incorporated results from two challenge events that were held at Ryde Theatre and Ventnor Botanic Garden (results shown in Appendix 1). Further questions were asked in MORI 5 and 6 these gave the following results:

- 2 The general perception of the public is that the Council should provide the service of the Botanic Garden. A significant number of people were unaware that the Botanic Garden was a service of the IWC. It is also seen as a facility that provides a strong although under utilised educational resource. The Garden is also seen as a botanic place of interest and excellence on an Island, National and to a lesser degree International level. Along with the parks and open spaces of the island Ventnor Botanic Garden was seen as a resource that was undervalued and not marketed. The general consensus being that the Garden was one of the best assets that the Council had in their ownership that directly encouraged tourism.

- 3 There is no other botanical collection on the Island, Ventnor Botanic Garden makes a significant contribution to the corporate objectives of the Council. (2.1.7 Above)

- 4 The obvious links with Parks and Garden need to be developed and public consultation has expressed a desire to see a greater horticultural input into the landscape.

The above items have identified the following recommendations:

- The Botanic Garden is only likely to continue with full Council support and that the Council should continue to provide this because of the Gardens contribution to the Corporate Objectives.

- As a key Tourist attraction in the ownership of the Council, the facility should be more widely marketed.

2.2.2 CONSULT

- 1 Consultation with the public, Council members, officers and user groups has been undertaken throughout 2002. This has been done through Challenge Events, individual consultations and public survey. Annual visitor surveys and continuous monitoring of a Visitor Comment book are undertaken
 - User satisfaction of the Garden has shown a slight increase to 90.5% (source Visitor Survey and Visitor Book)
 - Satisfaction with the Visitor Centre has fallen dramatically from 94% to 78% this is directly attributable to the failure of the lift. (Source Visitor Surveys 2001, 2002 and Visitor Book)
 - Satisfaction with the catering franchise has fallen from 70% to 53% (Source Visitor Surveys 2001, 2002)
 - Pleasure (recreation) was the main motivation for utilising the facility although along with parks and open spaces there are user aspirations for the resource to be educational, social and healthy, a community asset providing quality of life and tourism enhancing. (Source Challenge events and Stakeholder interviews).
- 2 Another key message that consultation highlighted was that the green assets of the island the botanic garden, parks, gardens, open spaces, urban landscape and countryside should be managed as a whole. Each area performing a purpose or series of purposes. There should be a vision of our green areas with an integrated and island wide strategy. (Source Key Stakeholder responses).
- 3 Critical Friend – Consultation. As part of the review process, an external professional reviewed Ventnor Botanic Garden. In this instance, the Secretary of the Professional Gardeners Guild undertook a critique of the services offered at Ventnor. The consultation was wholly defined by the Aims and Objectives set out in **1.1.1**.
 - The Plant Collection – This is extensive and unusual and provides a diversity of plants found in few gardens in the UK. The collection optimises the available microclimate and topography of the site and provides dynamic and novel displays. The plant collections are undoubtedly rich and varied offering visitors to the Garden a beneficial

resource. Against the stated aims of the Garden however considerable work needs to be done in the following areas:

- (a) Whilst the records of the collection are adequate as a management tool for the Garden itself these records are not available to the general public in any form. The displays are poorly labelled and consequently frustrating for people who wish to identify plants. In defence of this situation, to label a collection of this size would be hugely expensive and probably beyond the budget of the Garden. It is noted that attempts to label the plant collection struggle to cope with petty vandalism and theft that is prevalent in public open spaces. Future labelling should concentrate on high profile plants and areas of the Garden that receive heavy visitor use. To provide a well documented collection with scientific integrity requires dedicated staff such as a full time record keeper. As this is unlikely to occur at Ventnor Botanic Garden, a trained volunteer may be of use here. This would however require considerable staff time in the first instance to provide the necessary training. It is noted from the Improvement Plan that a computerised database is being looked at; this will certainly come a long way to meeting the aim of producing a well documented plant collection.
- (b) The actual quality of the horticulture that is provided within the Garden is highly variable from extremely good to somewhat neglected. Looking at the level of staffing it is obvious that much of the horticulture is too intensive for the permanent staff to manage. It is noted that a great deal of basic maintenance is undertaken by voluntary labour. This is excellent for community involvement and offers a real sense of “ownership and pride of place”. It does however indicate a lack of resources that inevitably will reduce the potential for the highest quality horticultural display that is undoubtedly possible at this site. It is laudable that such intense levels of horticulture are undertaken and this is only possible with dedicated single focused staff. However to maintain and improve, more staff in one form or another are needed.
- (c) To foster an appreciation of distinctive horticulture for the Island is one of the recommendations of this report. The Botanic garden certainly has a broad, diverse and different collection of plants displayed in innovative ways. The benefit of these displays to Island gardeners appears quite obvious by the diversity of plants to be found in peoples gardens. The provision of plants for sale from the Botanic Garden is a value added experience for visitors and does create interest and is having an effect on the public perception of Gardening on the Island. This is not reflected in the horticultural displays of the public parks and gardens and it seems that there is little or no acknowledgement of the expertise to be found at the Botanic Garden from within the Council.

There needs to be a review of parks and gardens on the Island and what if any role the Botanic Garden may have in their development. The Botanic Garden must retain dedicated staff to maintain the current quality of horticulture there. The nursery of the Botanic Garden may have a role in providing “unique” plants for the Islands Parks and Gardens this would need to be carefully researched.

- Education and Training – The Botanic Garden is untapped and poorly resourced yet potentially an important provider for horticultural training. In their recent publication “Green Spaces Better Places” the DTLR identified that within the amenity horticulture sector there is a crisis of lack of trained personnel. The Botanic Garden does not have sufficient human resources to undertake major training but as a resource for experience for trainees it could be invaluable. It would be sensible to look for partnership arrangements to maximise the use of this resource and expand the training undertaken at the Garden. Recommendations within this report suggest a number of areas that may be looked at such as:
 - (a) Identification of partnerships for education and training development at the Garden should be a priority. The use of trainees in parks and gardens in the past were a major asset and enabled high levels of maintenance, a return to this system could be a boon to the Botanic Garden. The benefit to the Island in the provision of well trained and experienced gardeners could feed into the maintenance and development of the Islands parks and gardens. Either through direct labour or from contractors employing more able staff. (Report Recommendation 5)
 - (b) The development of recreational learning (lifelong learning) is noted and there is an encouraging uptake in courses offered. However, one education officer cannot possibly do this alone. It is necessary to seek partnerships, increased funding and staffing.
 - (c) The Visitor Centre has the potential for a great deal of educational and training use but it is noted that there is a very diverse range of users and seasonal highs and lows in availability of room space. The developing library is an excellent and well used facility but the level of enquire is becoming burdensome on the staff in the Visitor Centre. Public self –help mechanisms are required and one area that is totally under utilised is the IT set up. The building has huge potential here. The hardware available namely the server is extremely low specification and requires considerable upgrading to be useful. This could go a long way towards the targets set for e-

government. This should be a priority development issue. (Report Recommendation 8)

- The Built Environment at Ventnor Botanic Garden is not short of a disgrace, with the exception of the Visitor Centre which is of course a new building most all of the other buildings are poorly maintained. Public shelters are rotten and paintwork on the doors to stores and toilets has completely gone. This gives an air of neglect, which cannot be ignored. The path infrastructure in places within the Garden is in a poor state of maintenance and represents a potential hazard. The Children's Play Area is showing signs of heavy use and will soon require a major renewal. As understood from the visit to the Garden the playground is inspected by the Garden staff but very basic maintenance comes from the parks and gardens contract. The Botanic Garden has no identified budget to look after the play equipment and yet it appears to have ultimate responsibility for the safety of the playground. This seems to be very fragmented thinking. Property maintenance generally seems poorly funded and inadequate.
- Overall the Botanic Garden is providing a good service, although it is poorly funded and inadequately marketed it is unlikely to be better catered for if externalised. The staff at the Garden shows initiative and is excellent at recycling and maximising use of materials. There is a high degree of pride in the job but not some little frustration in lack of resources. The potential use the Authority can make of horticultural expertise and plants from the Botanic Garden could prove beneficial in the internal market. However the Botanic Garden is not currently resourced sufficiently to meet any such demands. A new staff structure would be required to enable this.

From these consultations the following can be recommended :

- Serious consideration be given to the relationship and role that the Botanic Garden may have in an Island-wide strategy for Parks, Gardens and Open-spaces. To further advance this a cross cutting review team should look at the issues.
- Identified need for horticultural training to fill skills shortage and provide future workforce, should be met using expertise and resources of Botanic Garden.

- That the Botanic Garden should provide a forum for special interest groups interested in horticulture, parks and gardens, historic landscapes and botany; thus acting as an umbrella organisation and improve the utilisation of the Visitor Centre facility.

2.2.3 COMPARE

- 1 It was ascertained at the beginning of this review that there are no Nationally set Best Value Performance Indicators for the provision of a Local Authority Botanic Garden. Much emphasis has therefore been placed on local performance indicators identified in the objectives of the Service Plan of the Botanic Garden. Thus a realistic outcome of this review is the comparison of the Botanic Garden's own performance over time. As the Visitor Centre opened in 2000 and the Temperate House has been closed throughout 2002 there are limited figures to draw on in developing performance indicators
- 2 A comparison visit to Belfast City Council Botanic Garden identified that Ventnor Botanic Garden is very successful at generating income. 50% of expenditure being met by income at Ventnor as opposed to 2.3% of expenditure being met by income at Belfast Appendix -
- 3 User numbers at the Botanic Garden can only be estimated, as the Garden is public open space. Surveys and statistical analysis over several seasons however have indicate a steady increase in Visitor numbers to an approximate 250,000 visitors per annum. Further research is required to be able to analyse visitor profiles. This compares very favourably with similar gardens elsewhere in the country.
- 4 A decrease in users in the year 2001 from previous years can be directly attributed to the Foot and Mouth outbreak and the road closure caused by landslip on the Undercliff.
5. Comparison with Belfast indicated that the built environment at Ventnor (excluding the Visitor Centre), was showing signs of neglect and under resourcing. There has been a marked decline in the buildings, paths, boundary walls and fence line of the Garden. Whilst some capital money had been allocated it has been insufficient to meet the need.
6. Comparison with Swansea, Sheffield and Belfast indicates that with more than a third of the population of the Island utilising the Botanic Garden we are at the top of Local Authorities with botanic collections when it comes to community usage.
7. Marketing budgets for the Botanic Garden are amongst the lowest in the country it is an inevitable conclusion to draw that the limited marketing at Ventnor does little to promote the tourism market. Indeed in a succession of

visitor surveys many non-residents to the Island had found the Garden by “accident”

8. Belfast, Sheffield, Ness (University of Liverpool), Oxford, Birmingham botanic gardens all have excellent public transport links. Ventnor Botanic Garden is poorly served by public transport.

From these comparisons it can be recommended :

- Increased marketing of the facility should be funded to encourage greater tourism.
- A rolling programme of maintenance is implemented to encourage improvement of the built environment of the Botanic Garden particularly in the light of its recent adoption as a Grade 2 listed Landscape on the English Heritage Register.
- To encourage tourism and to enable the Island community to access the services provided by the Botanic Garden there is a need to much improve the public transport system or seek alternatives.

2.2.4 COMPETE

- 1 In consideration of the best means of delivering services it must be remembered that Ventnor Botanic Garden is the only botanic collection in the public domain on the Island. It performs a number of functions –
 - it is a scientific collection held for the benefit of the public.
 - the collections are freely available through display and interpretation.
 - The staff offer a value added experience by being a source of knowledge and information.
 - The Botanic Garden with its Millennium Visitor Centre is a flagship tourist attraction in the ownership of the Council.
 - it is a centre for the dissemination of information and the promotion of lifelong learning.

Alternative methods of service delivery for the Botanic Garden may treat these functions very differently, for example not giving the emphasis on issues that are inherently part of the Corporate Objectives of the Local Authority.

- 2 The Botanic Garden as a service could be delivered in three ways:

- 1. Private Sector Contractor**, in this the collections and assets remain the property of the Council but the provision of service and the care of the collections are in the hands of private contractors. Commercial viability is the key to this method of delivery. There are a number of negative aspects against such a method of delivery these being:

 - Few if any contractors would be prepared to employ a professional Curator and the single focused staff required for the scientific collections held within such a garden.
 - The private sector on the Island is ill placed to perform such a function due to limited expertise and trained personnel.
 - There is no model of such a system in the country to draw on.
 - The multi faceted role of the Botanic Garden in relation to the Island Community particularly in relation to special interest groups is highly unlikely to be serviced by the private sector who require profit.

- 2. A Trust**, in this model the assets and the collections remain the property of the Council but their care and the provision of services is in the hands of a Charitable Trust. The Garden being run as a “not for profit” organisation. A number of gardens are run on this basis and usually as a Company Limited by Guarantee. Whilst there are numerous advantages to Trust status such as grant interception, tax concessions and potentially less bureaucracy with a single focused body of Trustees; they are not money saving options for a Local Authority. All successful Trusts receive substantial long-term endowment from their parent Local Authority. There are a number of aspects that while not negative in themselves may prove obstacles to such a Trust forming the following need to be taken into account:

 - there has to be maximisation of potential income streams from assets this could potentially require considerable inward investment from the outset.
 - there has to be a strong board of Trustees with a wide range of experiences to aid in the set up of the Trust, it is unlikely that this can be found within the Island Community.
 - the asset base of most gardens cannot sustain the collections and services provided without substantial endowment. The built environment at Ventnor is in need of considerable and costly maintenance, repair and renewal. If the current management is

unable to meet these costs it is unlikely that a Trust will be in any stronger position.

One alternative may be the setting up of a Development Trust with several partners to look not only at the Botanic Garden but the environs of Ventnor Town. This may provide a long term strategy but similar issues as those raised above will be encountered.

3. Local Authority, it seems that this remains the best option for the delivery of this service. However the fragmentation of like-services, (as identified in consultation), within the Authority requires closer inspection. Some reorganisation of Community Development is mooted with the proposal that Parks and Gardens and the Botanic Garden are headed up by a manager reporting to the Assistant Director of Community Development and Tourism. Whilst this may reduce the fragmentation within the Directorate some fundamental operational issues need to be addressed.

- Highways, school grounds, countryside management, parks and gardens and the Botanic Garden are all in different Directorates many core activities are duplicated.
- Expertise is diluted and there is not an all Island overview for our open spaces, landscapes, parks and trees.

Recommendation from this is that it would be worthwhile to set up a Project Team To draw up proposals for the Island and look to maximise the resources available to us and consider a way forward.

3.1 LIST OF APPENDICES

- 1. Summary of Stakeholder Responses**
- 2. Budgetary Provision Summary**

- 3. Visitor Survey/Visitor Book Analysis**
- 4. Challenge Event Reports**
- 5. Belfast Budget Comparison Figures**
- 6. Plant Collection Network Strategy Plan**
- 7. Botanic Garden Conservation International Action Plan for European Botanic Gardens**
- 8. English Heritage Landscape Register Entry for VBG Grade 2 listing**