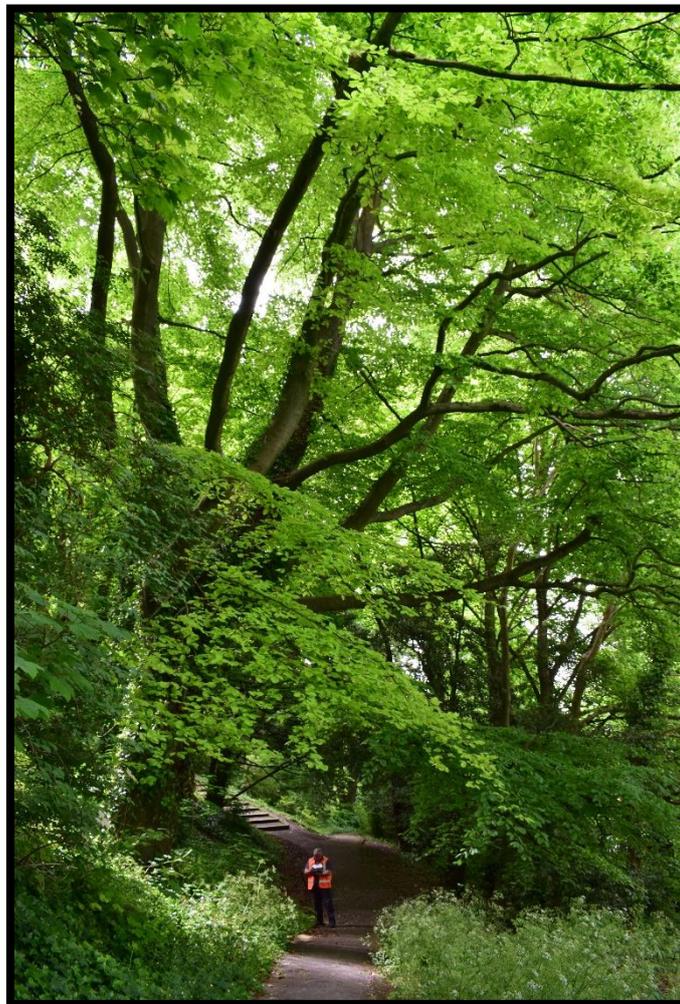


# **St Giles Hill Park Management Plan 2023 – 2028 *[DRAFT]***



Natural Environment & Recreation  
Winchester City Council  
City Offices, Colebrook Street, Winchester SO23 9LJ

## INTRODUCTION

The steep, wooded slopes and grassy summit of St. Giles Hill Park provide a distinctive backdrop to Winchester's city centre. The Park is prized by residents and visitors as a place for recreation, reflection and socialising, as well as for dog-walking and picnicking. It also attracts tourists, many of whom make the climb to the Park's famous viewing point to take in the panorama of the city and watch the sunset.

The flank of the Hill was originally purchased in 1878 by the Winchester Urban Sanitary Authority for the benefit of the people of Winchester and laid out with paths and new planting according to a plan designed by prominent Victorian landscape architect Edward Milner. The crest of the Hill was donated by the Earl of Northbrook in 1894, allowing for an enlargement of the park, and the whole area was then laid out as a Victorian Pleasure Garden for the purpose of promoting public health and wellbeing. The park contains some fine specimen trees from the original planting.

This Park Management Plan has been prepared by Winchester City Council with a view to maintaining and improving the Park for current and future residents, and ensuring the Park continues to serve its original purpose of promoting health and wellbeing for many years to come. The Plan identifies priority areas where work is needed to protect trees, enhance biodiversity, improve access and augment visitors' experience of the Park.

Not all the works described here can be carried out within existing Council resources. Where opportunities arise, the Council will look to tap external sources of funding in order to pay for some of the more major improvements. There is also a potentially important role for voluntary groups in carrying out basic maintenance work.

## MANAGEMENT APPROACH

Sensitive and careful management is essential to protect fragile areas of St Giles Hill, to preserve the historical and cultural significance related to the site and to enable visitors to enjoy this area as an important open space in the heart of Winchester.

This Management Plan considers the land managed by Winchester City Council, however the managed area cannot be seen in isolation as it influences, and is influenced by, the way surrounding land is managed, and how the city's landscape works in terms of recreation, open space, biodiversity and historical significance.

From a landscape point of view, the land at St Giles Hill is of high value in terms of cultural importance and city views with fragments and pockets of valuable ecological habitat mixed into the amenity areas. There are meadow grassland habitats and woodland habitats with a mix of mature native deciduous trees and ornamental planting.

In March 2022, having completed the timeframe specified within the initial Management Plan, it was agreed to update the St Giles Hill Park Management Plan, taking into account the current state of the park, its fauna and flora, tree management requirements and aspirations for future park improvements. The current document is the product of six months of work and reflects the findings of a recent tree survey, bat scoping and other stocktaking exercises as well as input and suggestions provided by local residents, park visitors and ward members.

This Management Plan provides a framework for work across various areas of the site and is broken down into five sections:

1. [Tree management](#)
2. [Day-to-day site management regime](#)
3. [Short-term deliverable improvements](#)
4. [Long-term aspirational projects](#)
5. [A role for volunteers](#)

For further background and detail on the site, please refer to the previous Management Plan, which operated from 2015 – 2020.

## 1. Tree Management

Ash Dieback is a major contributing factor in the need for specific tree management. The whole Park was surveyed in 2022 and a works list compiled and priced. In addition to detailing the existing state of approximately 800 trees on the site, and in accordance with the recently published Council Tree Strategy, the survey identified a need for follow-up surveys to be carried out – in the case of some trees, biennially, in others on a three- or five-year rotation. Works on individual trees have been prescribed on a varying scale of urgency based on the potential risk posed. An approximate schedule of these works is summarised in Table 1, below.

These essential tree works may have an impact on St Giles Hill, affecting views of the park as well as views from the park and, whilst works are undertaken, there will be a minor level of disturbance to the park which will be communicated to all relevant stakeholders.

In line with the Tree Strategy, replacement planting will be pursued in suitable locations on St Giles Hill, potentially on the northern section of compartment 9 – subject to survey.

Action	Operation	No. trees	Year
1.1	Felling	40	2023 – Feb '23 & Nov '23
1.2	Replacement tree planting	40	2023 – Volunteer Group? (Dec '23 – Feb '24)
1.3	Crown reduction	10	2023/24
1.4	Crown lift	2	2023/24
1.5	Remove dead wood	100	2022/23 – Completed Jan '23
1.6	Pollard	5	2023/24
1.7	Monitor	140	
1.8	Remove epicormic growth	70	2023/24 – 9 <sup>th</sup> Dec '23 Volunteer Group?
1.9	Remove hanging/broken limbs	10	2023/24
1.10	Sever climbing plant	220	2023/24
1.11	No work	200	

*Table 1. Tree management prescriptions*

## 2. Day-to-day site management regime

Table 2, below, summarises the proposed day-to-day management regime for St Giles Hill Park over the next five years (essentially covering grassland management). The objectives have been shaped from documents such as the St Giles Hill Neighbourhood Design Statement (2011, revised) and the management contract with IdVerde, as well as survey and input from WCC officers. The objectives and their outcomes will be reviewed and assessed in an ongoing fashion.

This table does not take into account regular maintenance tasks such as litter picking, leaf-blowing and tasks already managed by the contract management/environment team.

Action	ACTIVITY	Cpt	Responsible
2.1	Cut grass on a cut & remove regime (May & Sept).	1	OSO
2.2	Manage as wildflower meadow. G8 grass cut at end of Sept.	6	CMO
2.3	Improved grassland cut on G4 rotation and maintained as an amenity area.	8	CMO
2.4	South-facing bank to be managed as chalk meadow by strimming in September (contractor) raking off the arisings and piling on site out of sight.	8	CMO
2.5	Improved grassland cut on G4 rotation and maintained as an amenity area.	9	CMO
2.6	South-facing bank to be managed as chalk meadow by strimming in September (contractor) raking off the arisings and piling on site out of sight.	9	CMO
2.7	Cut grass and remove arisings in April	16b	EBO
2.8	Cut grass and remove arisings April and Sept.	16b	EBO

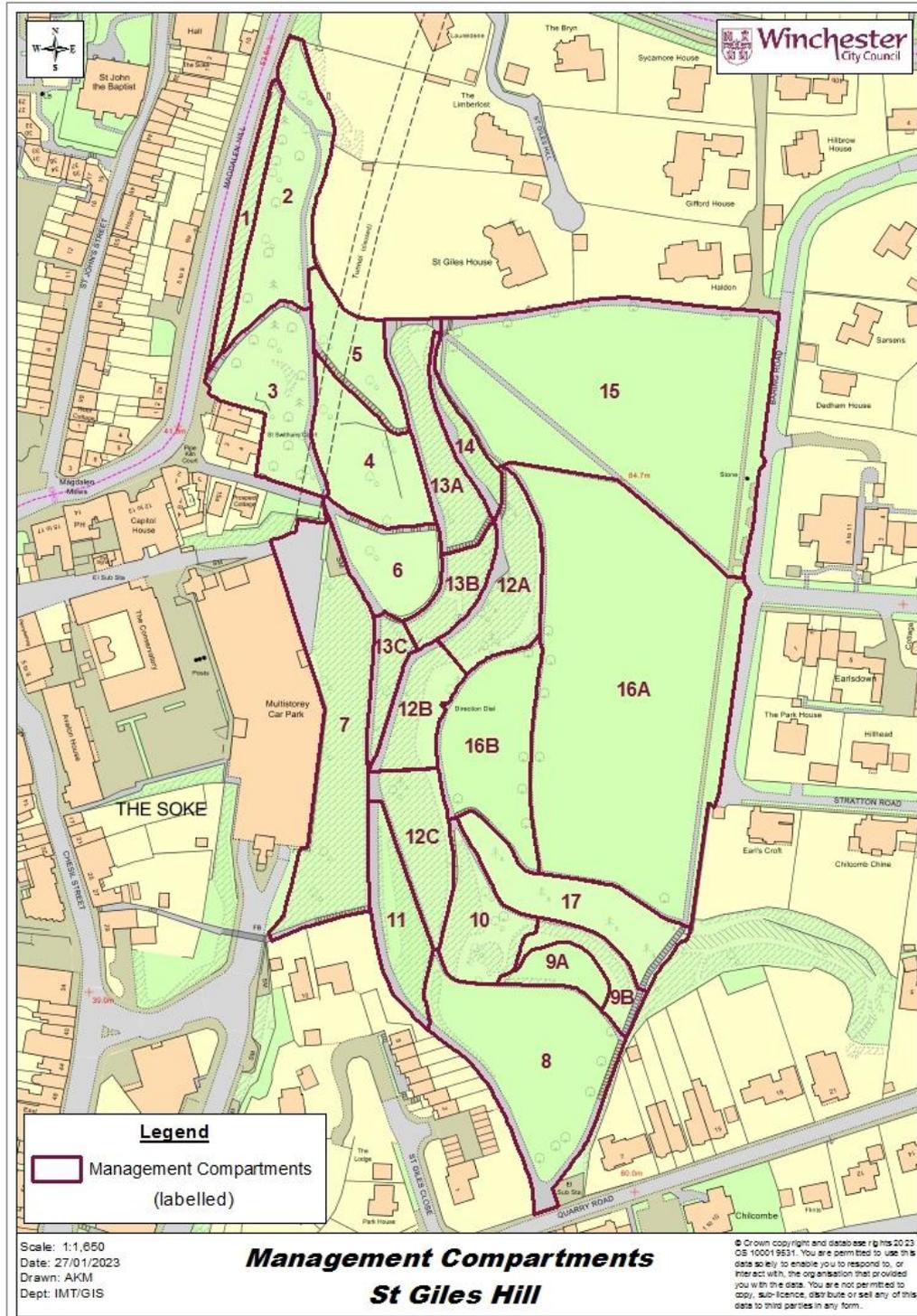
Cpt = Compartment, EBO = Ecologist & Biodiversity Officer, PTO = Principal Tree Officer, OSO = Open Spaces Officer, CMO = Contract Monitoring Officer.

*Table 2. Day-to-day management objectives for the next five years.*

### 3. Short-term deliverable improvements

This section looks at the site broken down in to 18 compartments and describes these compartments with accompanying photographs. It details potential small-scale improvements to the site - works that are currently not included in the maintenance contract with IdVerde. Table 4 summarises these options and Table 3 shows options with the compartment photographs.

Map 1 below illustrates how the site is broken down into management compartments of various habitat types, including woodland, amenity grassland and species-rich grassland.

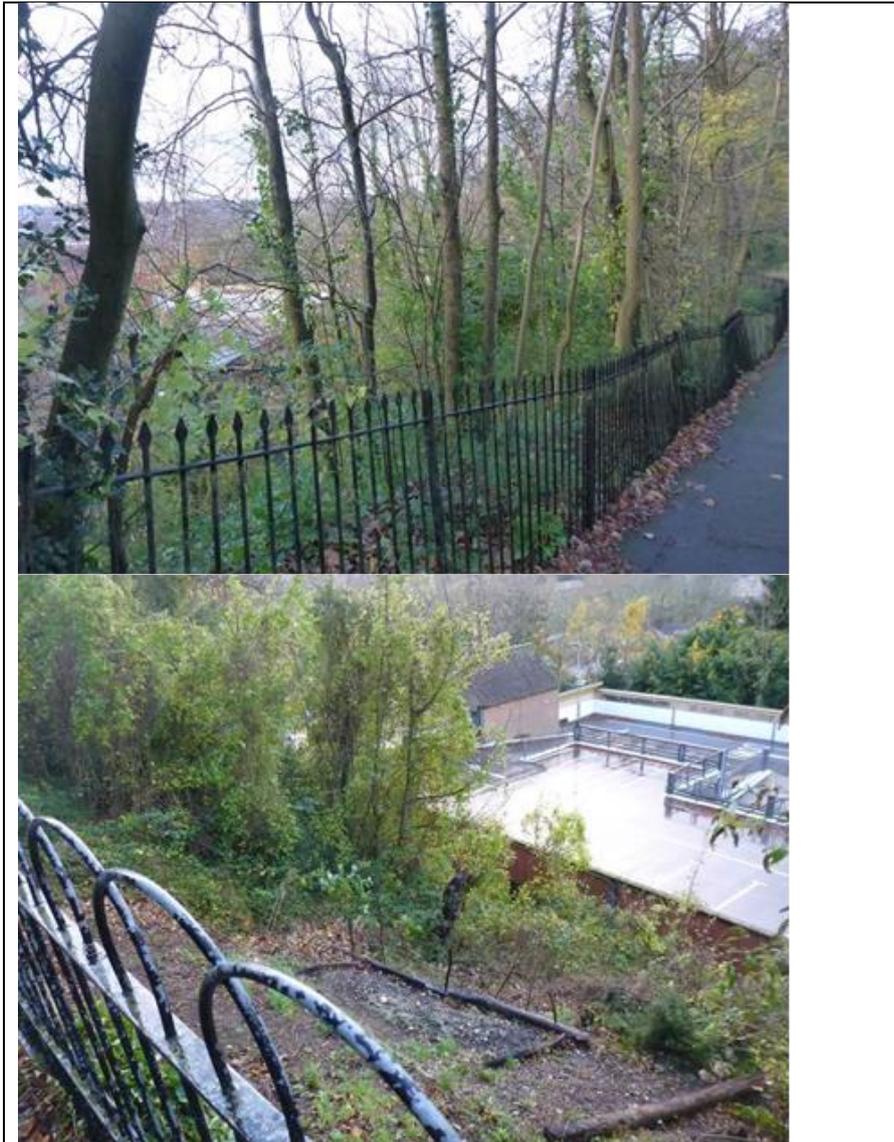


Map 1. Management compartments.

Table 3, below details the actions which are short-term and deliverable but not currently in the management contract with IDv.

	<p><b><u>Compartment 1</u></b>  Verge bordering Magdalen Hill road. Important views on entering the city.</p> <p><b><i>Actions:</i></b>  3.9 Remove buddleia and encroaching scrub, return to grass and remove arisings once cut.</p>
	<p><b><u>Compartment 2</u></b>  Mixed woodland comprised of Yew, Sycamore, Maple, Birch, Ash, Beech and Hazel.</p> <p><b><i>Actions:</i></b>  3.10 Maintain open ground flora by removing self-seeded shrubs and trees (ash and sycamore). Maintain open views through trees.</p>
	<p><b><u>Compartment 3</u></b>  Mixed woodland comprised of the same species as compartment 2 yet more dense. Ground ivy is present.</p> <p><b><i>Actions:</i></b>  3.11 Remove self-seeded sycamore and ash.</p>

	<p><b>Compartment 4</b> Deciduous mixed woodland which has had some management and thinning in the past.</p> <p><b>Actions:</b> 3.13 <i>Clear Laurel – cut back to manageable state as Laurel is dominating.</i> 3.14 <i>Remove young sycamore.</i> 3.12 <i>Open-up the path at the southern-most point between compartment 3 and compartment 4.</i></p>
	
	<p><b>Compartment 5</b> Steep slope with well-spaced mixed woodland including mature Yew and a small stand of young Sycamore.</p> <p><b>Actions</b> 3.15 <i>Leave deadwood on site</i></p>

	<p><b><u>Compartment 7</u></b>  Steep bank sloping east to west acting as border between St Giles Hill and the multi-storey car park. Ash dominates the woodland, and only work required is for public safety if trees are deemed to be unsafe in proximity to footpaths.</p> <p><b><i>Actions:</i></b>  3.16 <i>Removal of Buddleia and retain viewpoint if safe access permits.</i></p>
	<p><b><u>Compartment 8</u></b>  Grassland cut on G4 rotation and maintained as an amenity area.</p> <p><b><i>Actions:</i></b>  2.6 <i>The south-facing bank is managed as chalk meadow with G6 cuts, once in May and once in September. Arisings to be raked off and left on site out of sight.</i></p>

	<p><b>Compartment 9</b> Improved grassland cut on G4 rotation and maintained as an amenity area.</p> <p><b>Actions:</b> <i>2.6 The south-facing bank is managed as chalk meadow with G6 cuts, once in May and once in September. Arisings to be raked off and left on site out of sight. Replacement tree planting</i></p>
	<p><b>Compartment 10</b> Beech tree with bench beneath it and view out over city. Thinning and sympathetic planting has been undertaken on the banks to the west of the mature beech.</p> <p><b>Actions:</b> <i>3.18 Control ash with staggered thinning to maintain view.</i></p>
	<p><b>Compartment 11</b> Mixed woodland on steep bank with well-spaced open woodland comprised of Sycamore, maple and Ash.</p> <p><b>Actions:</b> <i>3.19 Maintain as open grassland / scrub rather than reverting to woodland.</i></p>



**Compartment 12**

Mixed woodland with chalk footpath in need of maintenance work, digging-out and re-setting the steps. On the eastern edge of the compartment (in the centre of the site as a whole) the main viewing platform commands views across the city. There are mature pine trees bordering the main amenity park areas (compartment 16 a). The northern section of compartment 12 is dominated by mature pines and beech.

***Actions:***

*3.23 The bank directly below the viewing platform should be maintained to ensure the view is retained. Maintain the chalk steps.*



**Compartment 13**

Mixed woodland dominated by mature beech trees on the steep banks.

***Actions:***

*4.16 Metal fencing off the footpath by the steep banks should be extended 10-15m from current position (shown in the photo).*

	<p><b>Compartment 17</b> Mixed woodland dominated by mature conifers.</p> <p><b>Actions:</b> 3.23 View to be maintained to the south by ensuring no significant naturally seeded regrowth. Young self-seeded sycamore on the bank below the mature pines should be removed.</p>
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Table 3. Management compartment descriptions and short-term deliverable improvement tasks.

Action	ACTIVITY	Cpt	23/24	24/25	25/26	26/27	27/28	Responsible
3.1	Tree safety inspection of all mature trees in close proximity to footpaths and public access areas.	All						PTO
3.2	Remove dangerous deadwood from trees.	All						PTO
3.3	Retain deadwood in biodiversity piles where possible.	All	#	#	#	#	#	PTO
3.4	Remove epicormic growth from trees.	All	#			#		PTO
3.5	Survey site for bat species utilising area (Hampshire Bat Group/HBIC).	All						EBO
3.6	Install bat and bird boxes on suitable mature trees (survey dependent).	All						EBO
3.7	Control ash.	All						PTO
3.8	<i>This row is left blank intentionally</i>							
3.9	Remove Buddleia and scrub, return to grassland within mowing schedule (Sept – March).	1						OSO
3.10	Maintain open ground flora by removing young self-seeded shrubs and trees (ash and sycamore) in Sept-March.	2						PTO
3.11	Remove self-seeded sycamore and ash (Sept – March).	3						PTO
3.12	Open-up the path at the southern-most point between	4						PTO

Action	ACTIVITY	Cpt	23/24	24/25	25/26	26/27	27/28	Responsible
	cpt 3 and cpt 4 by clearing scrub back.							
3.13	Remove Laurel (Sept – March)	4						PTO
3.14	Remove young sycamore (Sept – March)	4						PTO
3.15	Non intervention. Leave deadwood in piles for biodiversity benefit.	5						EBO
3.16	Removal of Buddleia if safe access permits.	7						OSO
3.17	Tree replacement planting.	9B	#					PTO
3.18	Encourage chalkland flora by managing bramble and scrub and ash.	10						PTO
3.19	Maintain as open grassland/scrub rather than reverting to woodland.	11						OSO
3.20	Maintain view from viewpoint by clearing steep bank below viewpoint.	12						OSO
3.21	Fix bank stability problem and prevent land slip/erosion	12A 13B						OSO
3.22	Paint railings on viewpoint.	16						OSO
3.23	View to be maintained to the south by ensuring no significant naturally seeded regrowth and removal of scrub.	17						OSO
3.24	Young self-seeded sycamore on the bank below the mature pines should be removed	17						OSO

EBO = Ecologist & Biodiversity Officer, PTO = Principal Tree Officer, OSO = Open Spaces Officer, CMO = Contract Monitoring Officer. # = Potential for volunteer group involvement.

*Table 4. Short term deliverable improvements at St Giles Hill for the next five years. (Green = completed, amber = planned, red = unscheduled)*

## 4. Long-term aspirational projects

It is important to be aware of more aspirational and far-reaching improvement options for St Giles Hill. A number of ideas have been raised by local residents and users of the area and these are outlined below in Table 5. These options will need to be reviewed in relation to feasibility, need, local desire, policy fit and cost.

As indicated elsewhere in this document (see Section 5, below), discussions are currently underway to establish a Friends of St Giles Hill Park as a vehicle that would facilitate a range of voluntary work in the Park. If set up, such a group could play an important role in collaboration with the City Council in further scoping out some of the projects identified below and mobilising both the financial and in-kind contributions required to achieve their implementation.

Action	OPTION	EXTERNALS
<b>4.1</b>	<p><b><u>Memorial steps</u></b>            Stone masonry work to include replacement of existing concrete and tile steps with stone steps, featuring carvings and memorial dedications.  <i>The existing long flight of steps that runs along the south eastern edge of the park could be one site for this. Families could be invited to fund new stone steps, which could carry carvings (words or designs) to remember loved ones. The project would grow over time until eventually an entire flight of carved stone steps replaces the existing concrete ones.</i></p>	Winchester Cathedral
<b>4.2</b>	<p><b><u>Nature / heritage trail</u></b>            Depictions of local cultural significance for education and tourism. Consider the use of stone carvings.  <i>The park could incorporate wood or stone carvings throughout the site, either portraying local wildlife or local history. The carvings could be quite small and placed around the park, encouraging people to look for them and connect the dots. The trail could be popular with schools and families, as a fun way for children to learn something about their local context.</i></p>	Winchester Cathedral  Schools
<b>4.3</b>	<p><b><u>Hidden historic features</u></b>            Worth highlighting/restoring?            -- BW stone 1836            -- Fountain (possible to restore as a working fountain/drinking fountain?)            -- Ancient dongle path- top section of accessible route</p>	
<b>4.4</b>	<p><b><u>Memorials</u></b>  <i>There has been significant loss of the open grassy area due to the planting of memorial trees, some of which are inappropriate species for chalkland downs. Memorial contributions should be focused on new and replacement benches, sponsorship of steps or carved way points or memorial plaques set into retaining walls or similar ideas.</i></p>	
<b>4.5</b>	<p><b><u>Access For All path</u></b>            Improvements to provide a safe and usable route through the whole park for all abilities.  <i>The most credible route to provide a stepless, accessible route up and down between the top of SGH and the town starts at the top by the disused water fountain and joins the bottom path at the lower viewpoint that overlooks the Chesil Multi Storey CP from where there is stepless access to exits on to Quarry Road and Magdalen Hill (Alresford Road). The junction of paths and three sets of steps adjacent to the water fountain requires a moderate amount of re-design to replace at least one of the sets</i></p>	HCC Highways

	<p><i>of steps with a gentle gradient.</i></p> <p><i>Related issues:</i>  <i>The proposed accessible route follows the unsurfaced path that winds along the west flank of the hill between the water fountain corner and descends gently to the junction with the lower path. Several observations:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>-- Extensive erosion of the slope both above and below this path caused by children, dogs/wild beasts, and water and in places tree roots are already exposed to the extent that the stability of trees will soon become a serious risk.</i></li> <li><i>-- At several points along path the wooden wall and other measures intended to retain the slope above the path has rotted away and soil has gradually been pushed by feet or water down the slope and large piles are building up on the path. The remedy is to rebuild the retaining walls and replace the soil that has accumulated on the path.</i></li> <li><i>-- On the slope below the path there is similar erosion, and the remedy is to extend existing iron/steel fencing to prevent kids and animals sliding down to paths below.</i></li> <li><i>-- New planting can also be used to help stabilise the soil and prevent future erosion. There are areas along the path wide enough to locate benches/picnic areas.</i></li> </ul> <p><i>[NB -- An area of the slopes could be engineered to provide slides and an adventure area with ropes and swings etc. which will divert youngsters and prevent future damage to other areas.]</i></p>	
<b>4.6</b>	<p><b><u>Reuse of existing materials:</u></b></p> <p><i>The replacement of one set of steps by an accessible gradient will release a fair number of the heritage Victorian grid patterned blocks that may be used to restore the other sets of steps around the park to replace repairs over recent years using incompatible materials.</i></p>	
<b>4.7</b>	<p><b><u>New crossing point on Alresford Road:</u></b></p> <p><i>To enhance pedestrian and accessible access to the park a new crossing is desirable on the Alresford Road. This should be located between the Junction with Baring Rd and the bottom of St Giles Hill, adjacent to the bus stops, and the link path to Furley Close in Winnall and the Imber Road outdoor gym equipment. This would enhance and encourage the use of the traffic free route from Winnall through the park to Highcliffe and the Bar End Sport and Leisure Park. It would also encourage Winnall residents to use the St Giles Hill Park more readily for recreation and exercise. HCC would need to be engaged to advance this.</i></p>	
<b>4.8</b>	<p><b><u>Define 2 main tourist/visitor routes:</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>-- North/South along the Eastern boundary from St. Giles Hill to the top of the steps down to Quarry Road.</i></li> <li><i>-- Accessible route from Bridge Street/ Magdalen Hill and ascending the west flank to the summit grass area at the NW corner by the fountain and then South along the western edge of grass area to the viewpoint with a lower accessible lower link to the Quarry Road entrance.</i></li> </ul>	
<b>4.9</b>	<p><b><u>Biodiversity Enhancements</u></b>  Enhance the current habitats in line with the wildflower meadow</p>	Dave & Anna Stewart

	<p>creation.</p> <p><i>Flower/bulb-planting: There has been planting of crocuses and other bulbs around trees. Consideration should be given for permitting and encouraging such planting and also to the planting of native bluebells and wild garlic in the wooded areas on the western flank. This would help stabilise the soil.</i></p>	
<b>4.10</b>	<p><b><u>Viewing point seats</u></b></p> <p><i>The lookout is one of the most popular spots in the park, along with the benches directly behind it. One idea was to replace the benches with a set of three or four wide steps for sitting on. These could be made of stone or possibly wood, raked up the slope and span the length of the current line of benches. It could be especially popular with the many people who come to the Hill to watch the sunset in summer. But would also provide a useful resting spot for walkers looking to sit down for five minutes. It could be designed so as to look more attractive than the current clutter of un-matched benches sitting on a slightly odd and uneven platform.</i></p>	
<b>4.11</b>	<p><b><u>"Secondary" lower-level viewpoint:</u></b></p> <p><i>The (unofficial) viewpoint on the lower path could be enhanced with addition of benches and a panorama display board as the upper viewpoint.</i></p>	
<b>4.12</b>	<p><b><u>Maintenance of slope below viewpoint</u></b></p> <p><i>The very steep slope below the upper (official) viewpoint currently supports self-seeded saplings that require frequent clearing to maintain the view. Also, these saplings and the associated brambles and ivy trap litter. Access to litter-pick is impossible due to the steepness of the slope and the thick vegetation. The permanent solution is to clear the slope of vegetation completely and to seed it with an appropriate chalk grass and wildflowers mix such that it can be regularly mowed from the platform.</i></p>	
<b>4.13</b>	<p><b><u>Historical Information Board</u></b></p> <p><i>The historian Barry Sherlock suggested welcome boards at the top and bottom of the park where visitors could learn something about the history of the area. This needn't be a major installation but could be presented in an attractive way, with maps and images. Stone or wood plinths could be designed and made to hold any display panels. The board(s) could also direct people to sites within the park, including, possibly, the memorial flight, heritage/nature trail and the look-out.</i></p> <p><i>Include:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-- St Giles Fair</li> <li>-- Execution of Waltheof</li> <li>-- Former mayor and creation of public park</li> <li>-- Nature/Biodiversity</li> <li>-- Board at lower viewpoint</li> </ul>	Barry Sherlock
<b>4.14</b>	<b><u>Redundant fencing</u></b>	

	<i>At the top of the heavily used steps down from top of Stratton Rd to Quarry Rd gate there is an iron/steel fence at the edge of the steps on the quarry side. Behind the iron fence (which is in good condition) there are sections of derelict fences of various types e.g. palings, chicken wire, before fencing or hedging maintained by residents of houses odd numbered from 9 to 21 in Quarry Road. The derelict fencing is an eyesore that serves no useful purpose. It's not clear who owns the strip or who put up the fencing. It would be good to establish ownership and remove all derelict fencing from this strip.</i>	
<b>4.15</b>	<b>Paint railings across the whole site</b>	
<b>4.16</b>	<b>Extend safety railings 10-15metres in compartment 13</b>	
<b>4.17</b>	<b>Step repair between compartments 10 &amp; 12C</b> (Quotes are being obtained by the Estates team).	

*Table 5. Long-term aspirational ideas and wishes submitted to council officers from members, residents and local groups.*

## 5. A role for volunteers

Volunteers have played an important role in managing and maintaining St Giles Hill Park since the mid-2000s, largely through the Green Flag group, which was established by the St Giles Hill Residents Association but also via individuals undertaking litter-picking at their own initiative. Typically, the volunteer group contributed between 40 and 50 hours per month, but ceased activity in 2019 because of complications related to insurance and liability issues.

In the past, volunteers primarily focussed on improving biodiversity by clearing undergrowth and self-seeded saplings and replanting in selected areas with chalk compatible flora.

Winchester City Council is keen to involve volunteers in the future management and maintenance of this site, but this cannot happen until the insurance and liability related issues have been resolved. At the time of writing, a new Friends of St Giles Hill Park group has been proposed, which would, as one of its first tasks, secure the necessary insurance and liability cover to allow work by volunteers to resume in the Park.

Any such group would require Terms of Reference and a constitution as an organisation with charitable status and a clear method statement agreed by the council setting out the group's role in supporting the council's management of the park, but not acting as a decision-making group.

A number of activities that can involve volunteers have been identified in Tables 1 and 3. It is important that these are kept under review, suitable risk assessments carried out and method statements prepared to accompany any task. Depending on the size of the proposed Friends group and the skill sets and capacity of volunteers, the new group might take on additional tasks beyond those previously carried out by volunteers – for example repairing flights of steps, replacing or releveling gravel or loose paths and repainting and maintaining fences. Volunteers could also contribute in other ways, including historical research, producing educational materials, social media and organising events.

Occasionally in the past, volunteers have worked side by side with Community Payback teams which enabled larger areas to be worked within limited time. The proposed new Friends group might explore resuming this practice as well as collaboration with other groups with an interest in the Park, such as Hampshire and the Isle of Wight Trust, to enable larger projects to be undertaken more quickly and efficiently than would otherwise be possible.