

# VENTNOR TOWN COUNCIL



Ventnor Town Council, Salisbury Gardens, Ventnor

## Grounds Maintenance Review

Report document: 002/maintenance/21

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## **Report authors:**

Nigel Slater-Bishop, Councillor James Toogood

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This report has been written after the working group felt it necessary to confirm that the grounds maintenance contract was indeed giving the council value for money in its delivery. A review of the service being provided was suggested by the assets and services working group, as a means to assess the works carried out under the terms of the contract. The inspection was undertaken over two days by Cllr James Toogood and Nigel Slater-Bishop visiting all of the sites which are covered by the contract.

These are listed below:

1. *Eastern Cliff*
2. *VTC office area, lawns, and planter beds*
3. *Seabreeze play area*
4. *Victoria Street Corner, including planter*
5. *North Street Playground*
6. *Kings bay*
7. *Madeira Road Bank (Donkey Bank)*
8. *Bonchurch Village Green and car park*
9. *Bonchurch Pond area*
10. *Trinity road , large area green*
11. *Bonchurch Triangle*
12. *Smugglers Haven*
13. *Ocean View Road Bank, inc area behind Industrial units*
14. *Lowtherville Play Area (behind free school)*
15. *Flowers Brook*
16. *Cascade Gardens*
17. *Havens Bush*
18. *Western Cliffs*
19. *Ventnor Park , up to weather station and Outfit fitness area*
20. *Judds Walk*
21. *Springhill Gardens*

Each site has been visited and photographs taken of any areas which may have been a concern or indeed to highlight successful management of the area.

These areas were in fact exceedingly rare, indeed the quality of workmanship the contractors produce must be applauded, the teams of local operators we met were very diligent and conscientious in their work.

This made the site visits a very pleasurable and enjoyable task. The diligence by the locally based contractor operatives from John O'Connor on these sites is excellent. There is occasion when praise needs to be given and this is one of those occasions indeed, well done to the local teams from John O'Connor.

Where areas needed attention (which are highlighted in this report) it is not in any way a criticism of the works carried out, but just small detailing which need to be addressed as the seasonal tasks change. Some of these items may well fall under the remit of the IOW council or Island roads, these will be identified prior to publishing the report to the other parties.

The report had been broken down into a numerical listing for ease of identification of the sites concerned, some of these areas are in fact supported by volunteer groups and as such this will be annotated within the report findings.

The conclusion of the report has comments on a number of sites which could benefit from some better utilisation of certain areas within that site for the future and further enjoyment of the visiting public and residents of Ventnor.

## 1. Eastern Cliffs:

This area is in exceptionally good order, kept well and the grass areas are in terrific condition. The overall area has a pleasant feel to it. The small grove which is dealt with by volunteers is a simple colourful area which the O'Connor local team leave as is.

There are a couple of areas which need some winter cutting back attention, these are mainly around the benches. It would seem sensible to have a 1.75m clearance around the benches to keep them clear of overhang and tree intrusion. This will allow easy access for maintenance of the benches and safer approach whilst using the benches for sitting without fear of branches and overgrowth.



This particular bench needs some remedial repairs.

There is another area which could and should be cleared back to allow siting of a number of new remembrance benches to be placed.





It was thought that some of the overhang could be cleared back to tidy up the wall area to be more presentable.

## **2. Ventnor Town Council Office area, lawns, and planters:**

This area has a large lawn scope to it with a number of banks and footpaths. The lawns are in great shape. Some winter trimming back of the hedgerow encroachment is needed. Some of the paths need reinstatement back to the correct size and not allow growth creep to overgrow into the footfall area. This is a hazard for poor mobility users and also wheelchair and infant buggy users. It will also in time break up the footpath resulting in lengthy and expensive repairs.

On the whole the area is well kept and that in turn encourages the full and uninterrupted views of the sea whilst walking or sitting. It is a very well used area indeed.

The larger banked area in the middle needs attention to it and requires a full hard cut back to help eradicate the rat infestation which has become clear recently. This will not in any way discourage growth or indeed destroy any plantings, in fact this will encourage more growth to flourish after the hard cut.

The rat problem is a serious health hazard to the general public and staff alike and so must take preference over any claims of wildflower protection being a matter of any issue to delay doing this. Rats are becoming brazen in their approach to humans and as such have on more than one occasion tried to enter the building. The small mammals that frequent the banks are being themselves decimated by the rat infestation. Rats will eat and consume all types of different animals in their surroundings, and this can include small mammals, birds, lizards, and other protected creatures.





The banked area on the gardens, requiring a cut back



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The Bank, which is infested with rats, needing to be cut back

There are a couple of existing concrete bases which need tidying around and will then again make excellent bases for remembrance benches.



Concrete Bases, ready to refurb for remembrance benches





Overgrown pathway areas. This was in fact once over 900mm wide.



### 3. Seabreeze play area.

The play area is in good condition and as such is taken care of accordingly to the correct standard.

### 4. Victoria Street Corner (inc Planter)

This is not a good site and is not indicative of the standards as to which O'Connor sets around Ventnor. It is in need a of lot of TLC and general tidying; it has an unkempt and unwanted look to it. Not what is nice to look at when entering the route into the centre of the town.

There is a lot of weed growth which needs grubbing out , not spraying. Two buddleia bushes need attention, one edging the steps needs taking right back and managing in its growth. The second need removing altogether as it is destroying the brickwork on the wall at the shelter, bursting through the roof . Most of the bushes and shrubs need a good cut back and thinning out. Any planting or indeed planters at this site need to be managed correctly and not random as it will just detract from the need to have this as a focal point for the corner, presently it appears to look derelict. The flagstones need pressure washing and cleaning.

The shelter itself is the responsibility of the IOW Council. An approach is being made for them to enhance the appearance of the shelter and repair the roof.



The corner area is very unkempt, and requires upgrading



Badly overgrown Buddleia Bush



Buddleia bushes damaging the shelter





## **5. North Street Playground**

This is an area, which needs tidying during the winter period. There is weed growth which needs to be grubbed out prior to the spring grow, it is too late to spray. The boundary onto the play surface is being overgrown and encroached on by the border planting. This in a play area poses a nasty trip and slip hazard and as such need to cut back to be kept withing the edging stones.





These pose a dangerous trip and slip hazard in this present state. The edges must be kept clear in any child's play area including where it encroaches through fencing.

## 6. Kings Bay

This area is in Perfect condition and needs no added works. Well done the local grounds maintenance team.

## 7. Madeira Road Bank

The area known as Madeira Road bank or Donkey Bank is in a well-kept condition. No extra works required .

## 8. Bonchurch Village Green

This is an outstandingly well-kept area, in superb condition. The lawn area is a wonderful place to walk and enjoy the view over the sea. The team have worked hard to keep this in such a wonderful state. Well done to the local team again at O'Connor.

One small item we picked up is the bench seating area, this needs the tree in front of it to have some of the lower branches removed to open up the view once again, and to eliminate any chance of damage to the fencing which protects the General public from the cliff edge. The slight banking behind acts as a natural barrier and as such should just be checked for overgrowth, other than that excellent work indeed.







The obstructed view of the bench area, needing cutting back





### **9. Bonchurch Pond Area**

This area is looked after and supported by volunteers from the Bonchurch area. It is in a well-kept, managed state. An absolute haven for wildlife and fauna. Well done indeed to these hard working volunteers.

### **10. Trinity Road Large Area**

This area is kept in excellent condition indeed. No extra works needed.

### **11. Bonchurch Triangle**

This area is kept in excellent condition. No extra works needed.

### **12. Smugglers Haven**

This is a real success for the local team at O'Connor , with a mix of natural walks, unspoilt wooded areas , a secret grassy grove with which to picnic or rest on and then the area of manicured grass and hedges in front of the small café. These areas are all in superb order and are well and truly a stunning place to sit and enjoy the view. The planting in front of the café is well cared for and compliments the work that the team do.

Fantastically well done the local team O'Connor.





### **13. Ocean View bank, Area behind Industrial Units**

These two areas are indeed professionally managed and maintained. The work done keeps them in a tidy usable state for all to enjoy. It saves them from quickly becoming an overgrown eyesore with no use. Excellent work again by the local team.





Area behind the small Industrial units

#### **14. Lowtherville Play Area**

This small park is kept in perfect condition, as is a true mix of experiences for children to play in, safe and secure, tidy, and immaculately presented. Excellent.

#### **15. Flowers Brook**

This is in an area of very outstanding natural beauty; this is mirrored by the diligence and level of care the team afford it. Fantastic.

One small item of concern was the shrinking width of the paths again. These need to be widened and trimmed back to their correct size, this allows for a much safer walkway for people with mobility issues, wheelchairs, and buggy's. The area around the benches needs to be kept short and tidy to prevent any trip hazards for elderly walkers. Indeed the rewilding areas need carefully managing as these do indeed create dangerous walking conditions along cliff paths and edges, large tufts of grass are very often the cause of many accidents whilst walking. These areas need to be checked properly and not left to become an unkempt problem. It must be remembered that the council hold a duty of care to all who use these open spaces at all times.



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Path shrinkage due to overgrown edges



## 16. Cascade Gardens

An award winning area of such beauty. Kept in a superb state of natural charm, the team really do excel themselves at this level. There are some pointers given at the award notification but having spoken to the local team at O'Connor the work to improve the Cascade is already underway. This must be left to these very capable professional people who go way beyond what is expected on this showcase area in Ventnor.

Some re planting is earmarked with the team eager to just continue with the fantastic work they do.

Again we cannot praise this team enough on this one. Well done, absolutely incredible work.

The planters which are I believe looked after by others , are actually in need of some remedial attention to bring them up to the standard of the Cascade.





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The Cascade Ventnor





Planter areas near the cascade in need of tidying

#### **17. Havens Bush**

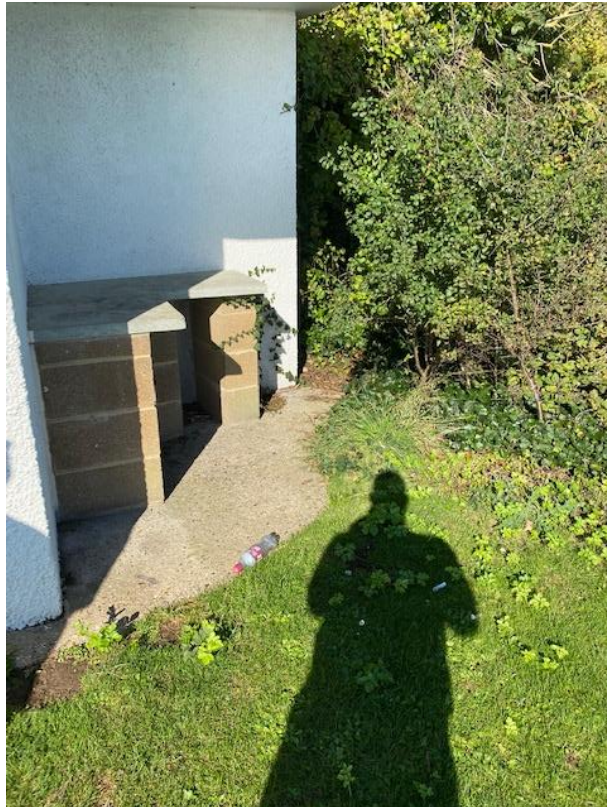
This area is looked after as best it can be done at the present time. No extra works are needed.

## 18. Western Cliffs

This area of the cliffs is maintained and managed very well. Some areas need to be monitored to ensure that they are up to the required needs of the area, including the rewilding areas near to the cliff edge. One note to add again is the shrinkage of the path widths, these need to be retained at the safe size for ease of walking and for people with mobility issues, wheelchair users and buggies. There is an amount of overgrowth around the benches which need to be trimmed back to the 1.75m safe area, along with the area beside the viewing hut side bench and barbeque area, again 1.75m safe area.



1.75m safe clear area needed



Barbeque Area safety area needs cutting



### **19. Ventnor Park, Outfit area, Top grass area**

This really is the jewel in the crown for the council and for the town itself, such an amazing award winning park which is down to the local team of one at O'Connor, truly an outstanding effort is made to keep this park in its fabulous condition. The team again are eager to improve on this year's award with some titivation of certain areas. However it must be agreed that the whole ethos of the park and the quality of the planting and management of the care given to its status must not be compromised in any way. The theme of the park is exemplary and as such must be retained. Some tree management is due to take place, but this should not impact on the beauty of the area. Yes, there are some minor improvements needed, but this should be left in the hands of the experts who care so admirably and passionately for the park full time.

The putting green area is also an example of keeping the park in its true form, a place to enjoy. Well done.

The Outfit fitness area at the top of the park is extensively used and is in excellent condition, a great asset to the local population. There is a need for extra signage to promote this healthy and fitness encouraging area. The top of the park is a haven for dog walkers and gives a stunning view out across the sea from the high vantage point. This area is again kept in tip top condition by the local team at O'Connor.



Outfit Area

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Upper green area



Bandstand Area



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There are a number of volunteer projects which take place and should continue to do so as they help to make the park such an enjoyable peaceful place to be.

To all involved in the care of this wonderful park, well done indeed just an amazing job.

There are certainly no extra works needed from the contractor at this site.



## **20. Judds Walk**

This area is acceptable given the current time of year. No Extra works needed.

## **21. Springhill Gardens**

This small garden is very well kept and is used by many of the people whilst in the town. The local team at O'Connor look after the planting and shrubbery incredibly well and ensure it is always nicely presented all year. There is to be some extra planting of shrubs and some remedial works to reduce the compaction of some traffic way areas which need attention. This action plan has been discussed will be under way shortly.





Springhill Gardens Picnic Seating area

### Conclusion

After the remit to inspect the grounds maintenance service being provided and review the standards, we were fearing a myriad of issues. How wrong we were, the standard of works carried out by the local team from J O'Connor Grounds maintenance Ltd are going beyond what is expected from them. Yes, there are a few minor issues which need addressing but overall the main contract expectation of VTC service levels are entirely up to scratch and give us the value for money that was hoped for.

This exercise in reviewing the sites under the control of VTC has been remarkably successful indeed and shown what is being done and can be done to enhance the towns green spaces. This is such a selling point for the town in so much as it shows we care about our open spaces.

