Planning the Future of St Giles Hill Park

Mike Biden

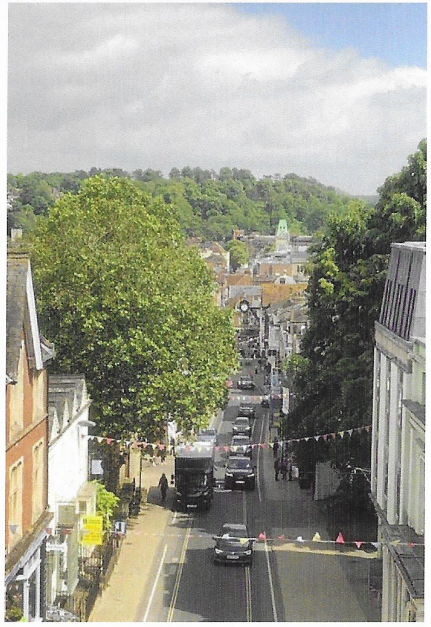


Previous articles explained the need for a long term plan for St. Giles Hill Park. This one explores its strategic location within the context of Winchester's urban landscape.

The view of the City and St. Giles Hill from St. Catherine's Hill shows how the escarpment approaches to within 500m of the Cathedral (*shown in black on the map*).

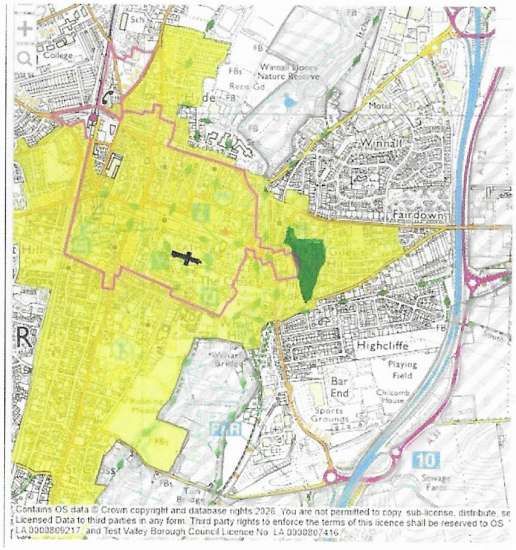
There is a clear line of site from the top of the Westgate to St. Giles Viewpoint along the length of the original Roman High Street. Visually they provide the end stops. From the lower section as it approaches the Broadway the view is dominated by the green backdrop of the park. The viewpoint can be seen in the photo as the light green sliver of light above King Alfred's head.

So close is the park that it borders the Eastern boundary of both the



Winchester Town Centre (outline shown in red) and the Winchester BID areas. The back wall of the Chesil Street multi-storey car park butts up close to the

Top: Cathedral and St Giles Hill from St Catherine's Hill by Mark Rutter
Above: View from the Westgate by Mike Biden



provides a vital link on the insect highway known as a B-Line that runs along the Itchen Valley. On the other it is a highly valued and much loved open green space for the local residents living East of the Itchen including the two large estates of Winnall and Highcliffe.

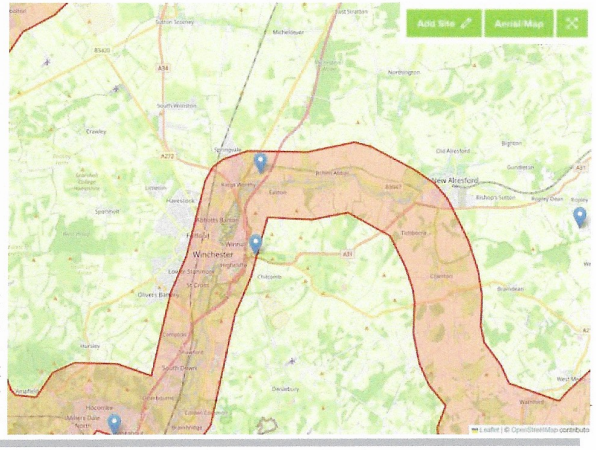
So close to the city centre and adjacent a large car park with views amongst the finest in Britain it should attract many visitors. Instead it has been almost forgotten.

The park offers two very different topological and ecological areas. The summit is an open gently sloping area mainly seeded with utility grass. The slopes are mixed woodland with some specimen trees from the original planting now largely being succeeded by self-sown sycamore and beech. They are steep and criss-crossed by a maze of confusing paths and steps.

viewpoints in the park.

The map shows how the park sits within the Central Winchester Conservation area (marked in yellow) and is embraced by the arms of the South Downs National Park (shown as grey hatched area) that reach around the built up area which stretches from J9 at Winnall to J10 at Bar End, terminating in the Winnall Moor and St. Catherine's Hill nature reserves.

The park lies at a nexus of Town and Country and displays aspects of both in its character. On one hand it



Above:: Derived from WCC Public GIS Mapping System
Black = Cathedral, Green = St Giles Hill Park
Right: Itchen Valley B line—courtesy of Buglife




Above: Couple with small child have to pass man with dog and woman with baby in buggy by Mike Biden

Visitors from the Town Centre must find their way through this to visit the main viewpoint having first crossed the barrier posed by City Bridge over the Itchen. These challenges have led to the park becoming forgotten by most residents of the City.

Yet the Soke has much to offer tourists and residents - in addition to the park and its views it has some of the City's oldest historical buildings: the Chesil Rectory (1450), St. John's church, the Tudor House and old Blue Boar Inn plus an ancient graveyard which was the site of the Saxon Church dedicated to St. Giles and the more recent heritage of the DN&SR (Didcot, Newbury and Southampton Railway) all of which feature regularly in walks by Winchester's Guides.

Studies of location and the fundamental character of the land, the natural biodiversity, heritage and daily usage will provide the framework from which a strategic plan will emerge. Some principles are already clear. Planting and habitats must be consistent with the surrounding nature and walking and wheels routes need to be convenient and encourage local residents and tourists not to use their cars for the short distance to the city centre. Accessible routes need to be better signposted and more seating and social space created to meet the needs of both residents and visitors.

When Kim Wilkie, the renowned local landscape designer visited the park he made three comments; "It's all about the views", "this park needs reconnecting to its City" and "you need a plan". We hope with the help of the City of Winchester Trust we can achieve all three.



Above: View from the lower High Street by Mike Biden

How do you make an historic building more energy efficient and low carbon?

Stuart Mills, WinACC

Winchester Cathedral has many historic buildings within its estate, and few are more significant than Porter's Lodge. Over 500 years old, built in the late 15th century, Porters Lodge is now a historic landmark within the Cathedral Close.

Upgrading the energy efficiency of historic buildings can be challenging and Porter's Lodge is a great example of what can be achieved without damaging historical significance. The entire Cathedral Close is a scheduled ancient monument and Porter's Lodge itself is a Grade I listed building, within the Winchester Conservation Area. The rear of the building is built directly against the historic flint and stone city wall, so that the wall is an integral part of the structure.

The person responsible for making all this happen was Jon Ryan, Director of Works at Winchester Cathedral. His aim was to make the building more comfortable to live in, reduce its carbon emissions and remedy some maintenance issues. He also wanted to reduce the heat lost by the building and replace the heating system. It was important to him that all aspects of the project would provide value for money.

An archaeologist was given a watching brief to monitor the works for remains, though no real groundwork was carried out. Listed building consent was required for most of the works, so Jon liaised closely with Winchester City Council's Historic Environment team. Their priority was to ensure that as much of the building as possible was preserved.

Windows - Porters Lodge has distinctive leadlight casement windows divided by mullions made from both stone and wood. The single glazing was a significant source of heat loss and the frames were also draughty. Replacement of the historic frames or glass was not an option, so secondary glazing was installed. Some of the windows were also removed and adjusted back into true, to reduce the gaps around them that had caused the draughts. A window contractor specialising in historic properties was used to ensure that the