

## ***Draft Letter to Somerset Council regarding Blenheim Gardens Minehead***

In 2025, Blenheim gardens will celebrate its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

In 1911 Minehead Urban District Council purchased a parcel of land called Blenheim Meadows from Alexander Fownes Luttrell of Dunster Castle, for the creation of a public park or pleasure ground. The park known as Blenheim Gardens opened to the public in 1925.

When the Minehead Urban District Council ceased to exist in 1974, the gardens passed to the newly created West Somerset District Council (WSDC) and remained in WSDC's ownership until 2019 when WSDC merged with Taunton Deane to create SW&T, as we know, SW&T ceased to exist in April 2023 and all its assets, including Blenheim Gardens, were absorbed by the newly created Somerset Council (SC).

Sadly, the past decade has seen Blenheim Gardens become a shadow of its former self. On the surface, the garden still looks pretty and inviting, the plantings are beautiful and well kept but, looking beyond the superficial decoration, the site is suffering from years of financial neglect resulting in a chronic lack of maintenance of the fabric of the gardens.

### **The following list of maintenance requirements is by no means exhaustive:**

The gardens were once surrounded on all sides by wrought iron fencing, they are now surrounded on all sides by a chain link fence on a combination of wood and ageing concrete posts with internal hedging, all of which have long since seen better days; large gaps in sections of the fencing and hedge have created easy access for rough sleepers, bored youth and vandals to gain regularly night time entry.

The bandstand has also seen far better days: part of it fell apart two years ago only to be rudimentarily patched-up. It is regularly frequented at night by the aforementioned rough sleepers, bored youth and vandals, with regular, ongoing damage caused by all of these groups; it's also used as a late night public toilet by the aforementioned.

The main lawn is so compacted it now consist mostly of bare patches of dry earth in summer and mud or standing water in winter; there are a number of trees which are in dire need of attention, some for safety reasons, others aesthetically; many of the shrubs are at, or have passed, their useful life expectancy.

The 1920s shelter at the northern end of the garden is in a dreadful condition: the roof, which we believe was once cedar shingle, is now covered in a thin layer of bitumen felt which is disintegrating. The wooden benches and wall cladding inside the shelter have been completely destroyed by vandalism in recent years, and the structure is now used as a makeshift public toilet.

The tarmac footpaths are in a poor state of repair, various small patches were replaced approximately two years ago but this by no means addressed the ongoing condition of these paths; the garden is regularly frequented by people at greater risk of fall injuries, such as the elderly, (many of whom live in nearby care homes) those with reduced mobility, parents with small children.

Blenheim Gardens is the jewel in Minehead's crown, it's where residents go for a peaceful walk; to meet friends; for an ice-cream on a warm day; to listen to local bands play at weekends in summer; to enjoy the floral plantings; or just to sit: it is the heart of the town.

In the last few years MTC built up a good working relationship with a number of SW&T officers and councillors, which we look forward to continuing with Somerset Council.

July is a perfect time to visit Minehead therefore, Minehead Town Council would like to extend an invitation to all recipients of this email to visit Blenheim Gardens with us, with a view to taking forward the desperately needed refurbishment and revitalization of these very important gardens, in time for the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary.