

Route to the Hills: Development Plan Final Report October 2010



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Executive Summary

The Route to the Hills Development Plan forms the first stage in the continuing lifecycle of two primary open spaces and the wider community and tourism opportunities within Malvern. The Development Plan has considered background information, site appraisals, community aspirations and stakeholder views to formulate an integrated approach to help prioritise investment and provide a focus for long term activity. In essence the Development Plan is a framework with the emphasis on setting priorities based on:

Priority 1: Start With the Parks

Getting the basics right, enhancing maintenance and ensuring general health and safety.

Priority 2: Introducing New Concepts and Ideas

Formulating community action and long term planning to help secure additional funding and focus on specific development projects related to the town, open spaces and links to the Malvern Hills.

Priority 3: Realising the Vision

Completing long term infrastructure projects and providing a sense of “Well Being” for Malvern.

During the process of developing the plan, a number of issues were highlighted, which related to both maintenance and the strategic / management development, these elements have been highlighted as specific actions. Both issues do however share the same vision: “Well Being Malvern” and will seek to enhance the wider aspirations for all stakeholders.

Underlying the vision are the design concepts of water and light. These two components will be used to inform all aspects of future initiatives and will form the cross cutting themes for the future. Within the framework of the plan it is anticipated that actions will be pursued through a partnership approach and that the estimated investment costs are as follows:

Priority		Investment Cost
Priority One	Start With the Parks	£255,700.00
Priority Two	Introducing New Concepts and Ideas	£1,337,000.00
Priority Three	Realising the Vision	£2,856,500.00
TOTAL		£4,449,200.00

The plan has been designed to be delivered using a phased approach; each phase being developed in line with the funding available at the time. Some aspects of the plan will be able to be delivered using available funds, as a part of the Council or one of the partner organisation’s core work programmes (eg. park maintenance) or through the development of projects by voluntary sector organisations (eg. the development of signage and interpretation to indicate a “route to the hills”).

1.1 Background

- 1.1.1 Priory Park and Rose Bank Gardens form two of the principal public open spaces located in Malvern Town Centre. Both parks have a long history associated with their former uses as gardens of large houses, the origins of Malvern as an ecclesiastical settlement and the birth of the major spa town during the 19th century.
- 1.1.2 Malvern and the Malvern Hills form a significant tourist venue for over 1m visitors per year. The majority of visitors enjoy a wide breadth of attractions including the Malvern Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, The Malvern Theatres and activities such as the regular Malvern Well dressings and the history associated with the famous composer, Edward Elgar.
- 1.1.3 The importance of tourism to Malvern is well recognised and the existing parks have the potential to strengthen the economic regeneration of the Town. The Route to the Malvern Hills Project Group has been established to explore the linkages between the Town and the Malvern Hills and examine how wider landscape improvements can create a new dynamic; linking the Town and the Hills together for the betterment of the community, local businesses and visitors alike.
- 1.1.4 This report has been commissioned by the Route to the Hills Project Group with the specific intention of pulling together current thinking and ideas and providing a framework for the enhancement of both Priory Park and Rose Bank Gardens to encourage visitors the Malvern Hills via the Town. Pleydell Smithyman Limited was commissioned by Malvern Hills District Council in late March 2010. Our work has included consultation with various stakeholder groups, open sessions with the community, site analysis and project meetings and has been completed in accordance with the 'Project Brief for Landscape Consultants (March 2010)'.
- 1.15 In general terms the information contained within this report has been completed to address the following outputs specified within the Project Brief:
- Completion of a project report and action plan covering both Parks, with clear priorities and phases suitable for any application for funding;
 - A visual scheme plan of the proposed schemes for both parks and integration with the surrounding areas;

- A priced budget of the proposed scheme;
- Recommendations of potential funding sources linked to specific aspects of the scheme.

1.2 Methodology

- 1.2.1 Pleydell Smithyman Limited has conducted research, consultation and site evaluation based on the following methodology:
1. Baseline Review. Initial site appraisal, understanding local strategic context, informal consultation with stakeholders and desk top research of relevant documents.
 2. Analysis. Analysis of physical constraints and opportunities, assessment of visitor flow and movement and evaluation based on the Green Flag Award criteria.
 3. Consultation. Review of previous consultation data, open day within the park, one to one stakeholder interviews and assimilation of consultation feedback from sessions held with young people using the parks.
 4. Development plan. Interim reports and strategy for project group and visualisation of concepts. Cost summary and external funding strategy.
- 1.2.2 The scope of the work to produce the Development Plan has focused on ensuring that any proposals are realistic, sustainable and in line with the objectives of the original brief. It is anticipated that the report will be used by the Route to the Hills Project Group and Council Officers to prioritise capital expenditure and plan external funding applications.

2.1 The Route to the Hills Project Group

2.1.1 The Project Group is being led by Malvern Hills District Council to coordinate proposals and ideas related to the Route to the Hills Project. The Project Group has a range of interests and reflects a broad spectrum of stakeholders. Stakeholders within the group include:

- High Street Great Malvern;
- Malvern Civic Society;
- Malvern Hills Conservators;
- Malvern Town Council;
- Malvern Hills District Council, Environmental Services;
- Malvern Hills District Council, Community and Economic Development;
- Malvern Hills District Council, Planning

2.2 Priory Park

2.2.1 Priory Park is located between the Council offices to the North, Splash Leisure Centre to the East, Malvern Theatres to the West and the extended green infrastructure to the South. The park forms a major facility for the local community and visitors alike. The 2.98 hectare venue hosts:

- Children's play area;
- Ornamental lake;
- Bandstand;
- Promenade/seating area and network of walkways;
- Large specimen trees;
- Small garden and shrub planting areas;
- Water features and memorials.



2.2.2 Local residents and visitors consider Priory Park to be the Town Park for Malvern and this is manifest in the many community events and activities that are held there during the year, including the Malvern Fringe and live music held in the Bandstand.

2.2.3 A key feature of Priory Park is the interesting and diverse collection of mature trees, many of which have been planted to commemorate visits by high profile people or civic events.

2.3 Rose Bank Gardens

2.3.1 Rose Bank Gardens forms the site of the former Rose Bank House, which was demolished in 1900. The area was donated to the Town by C.W. Perrins (he of Worcester Sauce fame) in 1918 and has since been managed by Malvern Hills District Council. The gardens extend to approximately 1.52 hectares and are formed of open areas of amenity grassland, impressive terraced walkways and stone retaining features, shrub planting and mature trees. Rose Bank Gardens underwent some refurbishment in 1998 with the completion of new hard surfacing, entrance point, interpretation and a seating area completed adjacent to the main entrance off the Wells Road.



2.3.2 In more recent times, the Council have sought to complete a fundamental refurbishment of the gardens and commenced work on a Heritage Lottery Fund application for Parks for People in 2005. Since 2005, the Council has continued where possible with restoring views and recreating vistas through the removal of mature Yew trees adjacent to the western boundary parallel with Foley Terrace.

2.4 Priory Churchyard and Belle Vue Island

Within the context of the Route to the Hills project, the proposed route and project encompasses elements outside the boundaries of the two parks and include the Churchyard of Great Malvern Priory and Belle Vue Island. The two areas form the physical link between Priory Park and Rose Bank Gardens and transport links and the Hills.

2.5 Tourism and Malvern

2.5.1 The Route to the Hills Project has been established primarily (but not exclusively) to encourage visitors coming to the Malvern Hills to use the town centre and local facilities. The Malvern Hills Tourism Impact Assessment (2007) outlines the following summary:

- In 2007, 1.7 million visitors came to the Malvern Hills District;
- 1.5 million visitors are day trippers with 0.2 million classed as overnight visitors;
- Approximately £80 million was spent by tourists in 2007;
- On average approximately £7 million was spent by tourists each month;
- It is estimated that approximately 1661 jobs are directly related to tourism in the Malvern Hills District.

2.5.2 The Route to the Hills Project Group recognises that the majority of day trippers and visitors tend to focus their visit on the Malvern Hills rather than exploring the wider Town. The Project Group is keen to exploit the potential of the tourism market and envisage that the Development Plan will form the focus for stimulating regeneration and further tourism based activity.

2.6 Management and Maintenance

2.6.1 Various locations including both Priory Park and Rose Bank Gardens are managed and maintained by Malvern Hills District Council. The operations team within the Environmental Services Department has the day to day responsibility for overseeing grounds maintenance and litter collection with an estimated budget of £165,980. The budget enables the Council to maintain grassed areas and central open spaces such as Priory Park, Rose Bank Gardens, Belle Vue Terrace, Priory Church Yard, Council Buildings and various other nominated areas across the District. During the course of 2008/09 and 2009/10 a further £30,000 was spent on additional enhancements and improvements particularly in Rose Bank Gardens and Priory Park.

2.6.2 Events, community involvement and projects outside of grounds maintenance are undertaken by a range of personnel from Malvern Hills District Council, including the Community Development Team.

2.7 Green Flag Award Assessment

2.7.1 In considering the form, function and maintenance of Priory Park and Rose Bank Gardens, Pleydell Smithyman Limited conducted an assessment of both spaces using the Green Flag Award criteria. The Green Flag Award is the national standard for managing publicly accessible green spaces and is based on the following criteria:

- A welcoming place;
- Healthy, safe and secure;
- Clean and well maintained;
- Sustainability;
- Conservation of heritage and natural features;
- Community involvement;
- Marketing;
- Overall management.

2.7.2 In summary both spaces have many strengths and opportunities for improvement. Based on the assessment, the following key issues have been identified in relation to the current position of the both parks.

2.7.3 A Welcoming Place

“When approaching or entering the park / green space, the overall impression for any member of the community - regardless of the purpose of their visit - should be positive and inviting.”

- Opportunities to improve hierarchy of signage and information.
- Restrictive access for disabled and elderly visitors.
- Steps a barrier to existing / potential visitors.
- Orientation of Splash with Priory Park entrances.
- Sense of arrival at all entrances to Rose Bank Gardens.



2.7.4 Healthy, Safe and Secure

"The park/green space must be a healthy, safe and secure place for all members of the community to use. Any issues that have come to light must be addressed in the management plan and implemented on the ground. New issues that arise must be addressed promptly and appropriately."



- Actual and perceived anti-social behaviour.
- Priory Park used as through-route to the theatres but lighting is insufficient.
- Steps and footpaths.
- Infrastructure maintenance e.g. walls.

2.7.5 Clean and Well Maintained

"For aesthetic as well as health and safety reasons, issues of cleanliness and maintenance must be adequately addressed."



- Public perception of Rose Bank Gardens being "a bit of a mess".
- Poor quality footpaths and curbs.
- Evidence of anti-social behaviour such as graffiti.
- Horticultural maintenance and management needs to be consistent.

2.7.6 Sustainability

"Methods used in maintaining the park/green space and its facilities should be environmentally sound, relying on best practices available according to current knowledge. Management should be aware of the range of techniques available to them, and demonstrate that informed choices have been made and are regularly reviewed."

- Changes in maintenance to reduce costs and improve impact.
- Potential for community engagement and learning about sustainability.
- Management of mature trees and planning for the future.

2.7.7 Conservation and heritage

"Particular attention should be paid to the conservation and appropriate management of: natural features, wildlife and fauna, landscapes, buildings and structural features."



- Understand the heritage and the significance of parks.
- Listed status of features such as the bridge and band stand in Priory Park.
- Opportunities to provide information about the park's heritage.
- Connect with the heritage of the wider town.
- Protection and enhancement of landscape views / vistas.

2.7.8 Community Involvement

"The park/green space management should actively pursue the involvement of members of the community who represent as many park/green space user groups as possible."



- Understanding the existing and potential audience.
- Plan events and activities.
- Mechanism for involving people and groups in the decision making process.

2.7.9 Marketing

"The park/green space management should actively pursue the involvement of members of the community who represent as many park/green space user groups as possible."

- Tools for communication.
- Mechanism for customer feedback.
- "Joined up" strategy with train station / theatres / the Hills.

**2.7.10 Management**

"A management plan or strategy should be in place which reflects the aspirations of Local Agenda 21. This should clearly and adequately address all of the above criteria and any other relevant aspects of the park/green space's management."

- Development of management plans for both sites.
- Action plan and phased approach linked to budget.
- Engage the community in the management of the parks.
- Consider the development of a management plan for the route.
- Monitoring and performance.
- Lack of a single identified point of contact.

2.8

2.8.1

What does the community think?

To help understand the current management of both spaces, Pleydell Smithyman Limited, along with the support of Malvern Hills District Council, invited members of the local community to attend an open session in the park on 4th June 2010. Detailed information regarding the issues raised is provided within Appendix A. Headline issues include:

- Access for all. Making sure the parks can be used and enjoyed by everyone.
- Children and young people. Making sure young people are represented and catered for.
- Signage and linkages. Providing clear signs and interpretative media to show the route to the hills.
- Facilities and equipment. Upgrading, replacing and providing new facilities for users.
- Events. Allowing and encouraging groups, clubs and individuals to hold events.
- Management. Having an understanding of the bigger picture and the priorities for the park.

2.9

2.9.1

What do stakeholders think?

As part of the research base for the Development Plan, seventeen stakeholder groups were invited to attend face to face discussion sessions. Key themes arising from the discussions are provided within Appendix A and include:

- Funding. Long term funding of both sites to raise quality.
- Sustainability. Making sure projects have community support and do not increase overall liabilities.
- Access. Addressing access issues within the park and major crossing points.
- Lighting. Considering and installing directional lighting / bollards.
- Signage. Improving external and internal signage and having a consistent approach.
- Community engagement. Having a more formalised approach to community involvement and a vehicle for getting involved.

3.1 Evaluation

In considering the future direction of Priory Park, Rose Bank Gardens and the wider Route to the Hills initiative, a number of core themes have emerged from the site assessment, consultation and stakeholder interviews. Themes are based around opportunities and challenges for the future. Principal drivers for change include:

3.2 Communication and Information

The site assessment and feedback from people highlighted the need to address how both parks and their managers communicate with all users and visitors. This ranges from having a consistent approach to signage through to considering how marketing of the sites should be resourced and targeted. In the future, given the pressure on resources, there needs to be an overall framework and plan to address the general welcome and appeal of the parks through replacement and introduction of a standard approach to information. This can be achieved through practical steps such as agreeing a design brief for signage and rationalising and introducing new signage over a period of time. In addition, the management team should also consider a marketing plan that takes into consideration target audiences and puts in place events, activities and facilities for those groups. For example, family groups do tend to use the parks but there is no incentive to go and explore the hills. A simple “explorer pack” could be developed to encourage groups to explore the Town and hills from the family friendly base at Priory Park.



3.3 Management Planning

It is reasonable to state that resources for both parks and the proposed Route to the Hills Project are currently limited and this has an impact on the level and standard of maintenance. However there is an enthusiasm and willingness to try and move things forward and the Project Group and support from the Council is clear evidence of this drive.

Both parks have suffered from a lack of structured maintenance during recent years, primarily due to the heavy infrastructure of water features, retaining walls, terraces and network of footpaths, all of which require long term capital investment. A long term management plan, linked to available resources will be needed to address issues over an agreed period of time.



3.4 The Bigger Picture

Malvern, the Malvern Hills, the legacy of the spa and community facilities such as the theatres give Malvern a unique heritage and appeal to visitors. Strategically, the Route to the Hills Project can bring all these elements together and act as vehicle and focus for achieving many of the Council’s and community’s ambitions. For example, car parking was cited as a major concern within the Town. If the Town does need to address this then there is a role for the wider Route to the Hills

Project to contribute to more sustainable forms of transport. A key initiative and project could therefore be to encourage and facilitate the use of the train station in partnership with rail providers and the project group. There are no doubt historical and anecdotal barriers to progressing this as a potential project but the focus should at least be on formulating a more strategic plan for transport and making this a key theme locally.



3.5 Partnerships and Delivery

The Route to the Hills project is an ambitious initiative and this report forms the first step in taking the ideas for the project forward. Much of the feedback from the community and stakeholder sessions centred on the ability of partners to achieve and deliver proposals. A critical component of the project will therefore be to determine the role, function and governance of delivery partners and examine how initiatives can be realised.

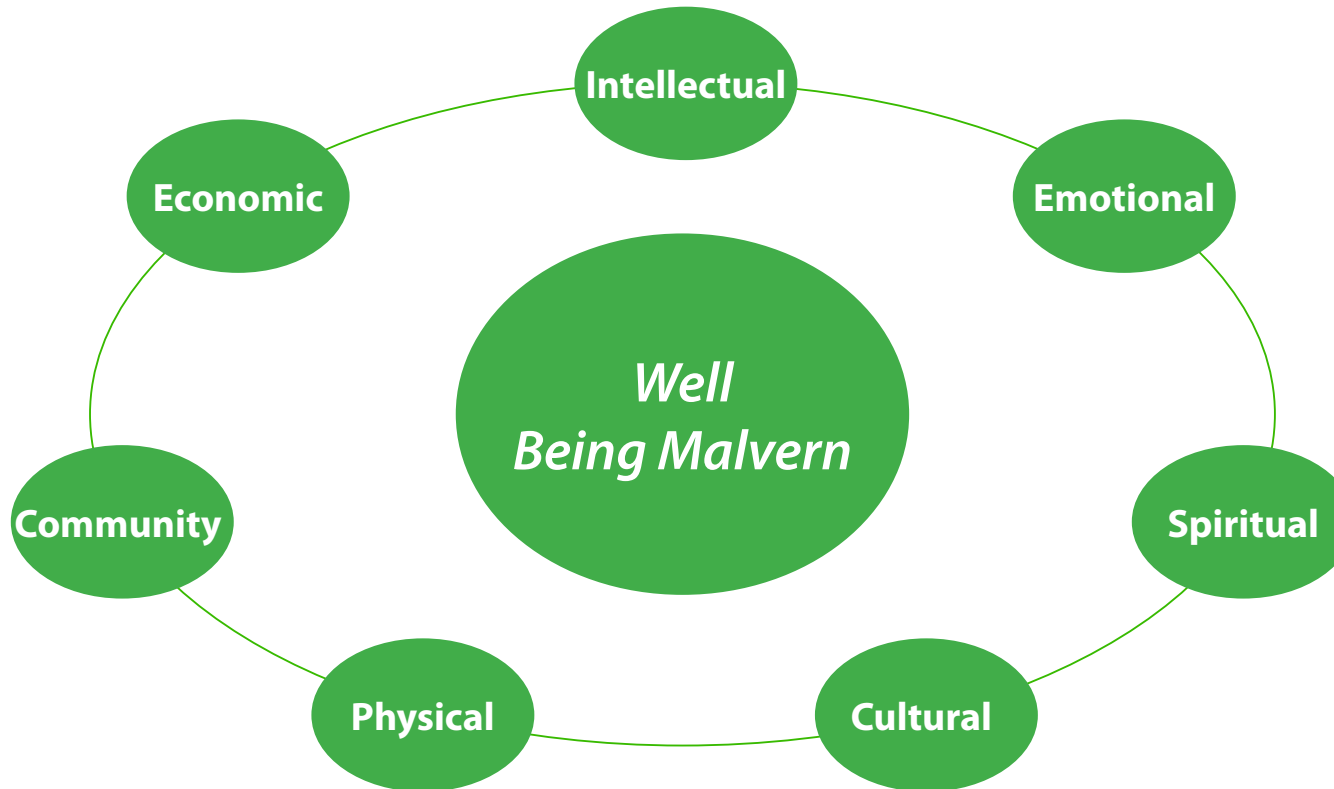
Despite the presence of the Project Group, new relationships and partnerships will need to be formed to help achieve the long term vision. This may for example, include establishing a trust or formulating a constituted community group, which will allow access to improved funding opportunities. In addition, new ways of implementing projects need to be assessed and evaluated. For instance, the use of volunteers or the parks as a training venue for young people is a good way of achieving enhanced standards through the voluntary sector rather than sole reliance on the local authority.



4.1 Vision

4.1.1 The vision for the Route to the Hills Project brings together a range of strategic aims, the aspirations of the community and the long term requirements for Priory Park and Rose Bank Gardens.

4.1.2 The vision of “Well Being Malvern” encapsulates how we interact with the environment on a range of levels, desires, aspirations and interests. The vision sets out to provide a framework for future regeneration activity and defines the cornerstone of potential projects. The project aims of the Route to the Hills Project have the potential to enhance:



Economic well being through the creation of new business opportunities and entrepreneurial activity;

Intellectual well being by stimulating the mind through lifelong learning and education;

Emotional well being by providing a stimulating environment for all the senses;

Spiritual well being by connecting with people and embracing a range of faiths, ideas and beliefs;

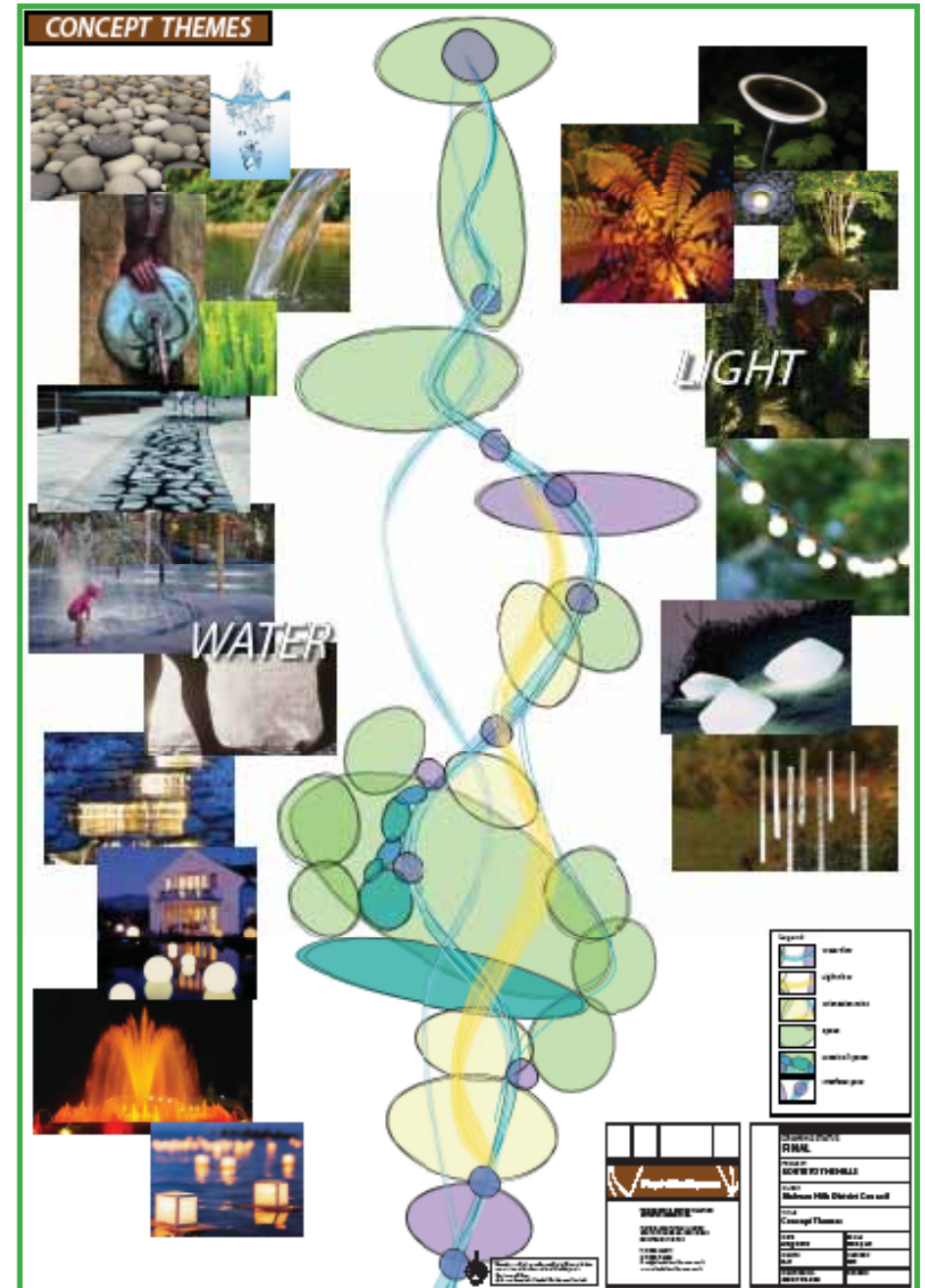
Cultural well being by being a venue for the rich arts, heritage and history of Malvern;

Physical well being by providing safe and diverse opportunities for sport, play and recreation;

Community well being by helping people of all ages and abilities become involved and represented in their local town.

4.2 Concept

- 4.2.1 Underlying the “Well Being Malvern” vision are the dual concepts of water and light; the basic building blocks of life.
- 4.2.2 Malvern is synonymous with water. The town is world famous for the spa and water treatments are culturally ingrained with the people who live and work in Malvern. The waters of Malvern act as connecting thread through the “Well Being Malvern” vision and will inform design philosophies, define projects parameters and create the themes for all activities related to the Route to the Hills Project.
- 4.2.3 Whether it is sunlight to help plants grow or illumination to guide us safely in the dark, light is essential for life. To complement the water concept, light will also be used as unifying theme to bring projects to life and create a sense of well being within the two parks. This could take the form of simply repairing gas lamps as part of a heritage restoration project or making bold design statements through the introduction of contemporary light sculptures. See Appendix B.



4.3 Management Strategy

4.3.1 From the outset of compiling the Development Plan, it has been recognised that any proposals have to, of course, have some ambition but also need to be realistic and sustainable. Pleydell Smithyman Limited has therefore proposed a three stage management strategy for both Priory Park and Rose Bank Gardens. This focuses on taking the vision forward in a meaningful way based on essential and desirable priorities, available resources and timescales for developing projects and securing external funding.

4.3.2 Priority 1- Start with the parks

This will form the first phase of work and will focus on planning changes, organising projects and addressing immediate and priority actions to improve standards and address compliance with health and safety legislation. Objectives will include:

- Establishing a project leader or manager for the project;
- Agreeing a terms of reference for the Project Group;
- Developing a marketing plan to drive communication;
- Development of management / maintenance plan;
- Investment and improvements to access;
- Investment and improvements to signage and interpretation;
- Investment and improvements to reduce maintenance liabilities;
- Investment and improvements to address health and safety issues;
- Seeking and securing external funding;
- Working towards and achieving a Green Flag Award for either park.

4.3.3 Priority 2- New Concepts and Ideas

The next phase of the lifecycle of the project will be to widen community involvement and improve general well being through new design areas, devolving management where possible and developing the physical route to the hills. During this phase, the priority will be to work with users, the community and visitors to develop new concepts and different ways of working to achieve the long term vision.

Key objectives will be to:

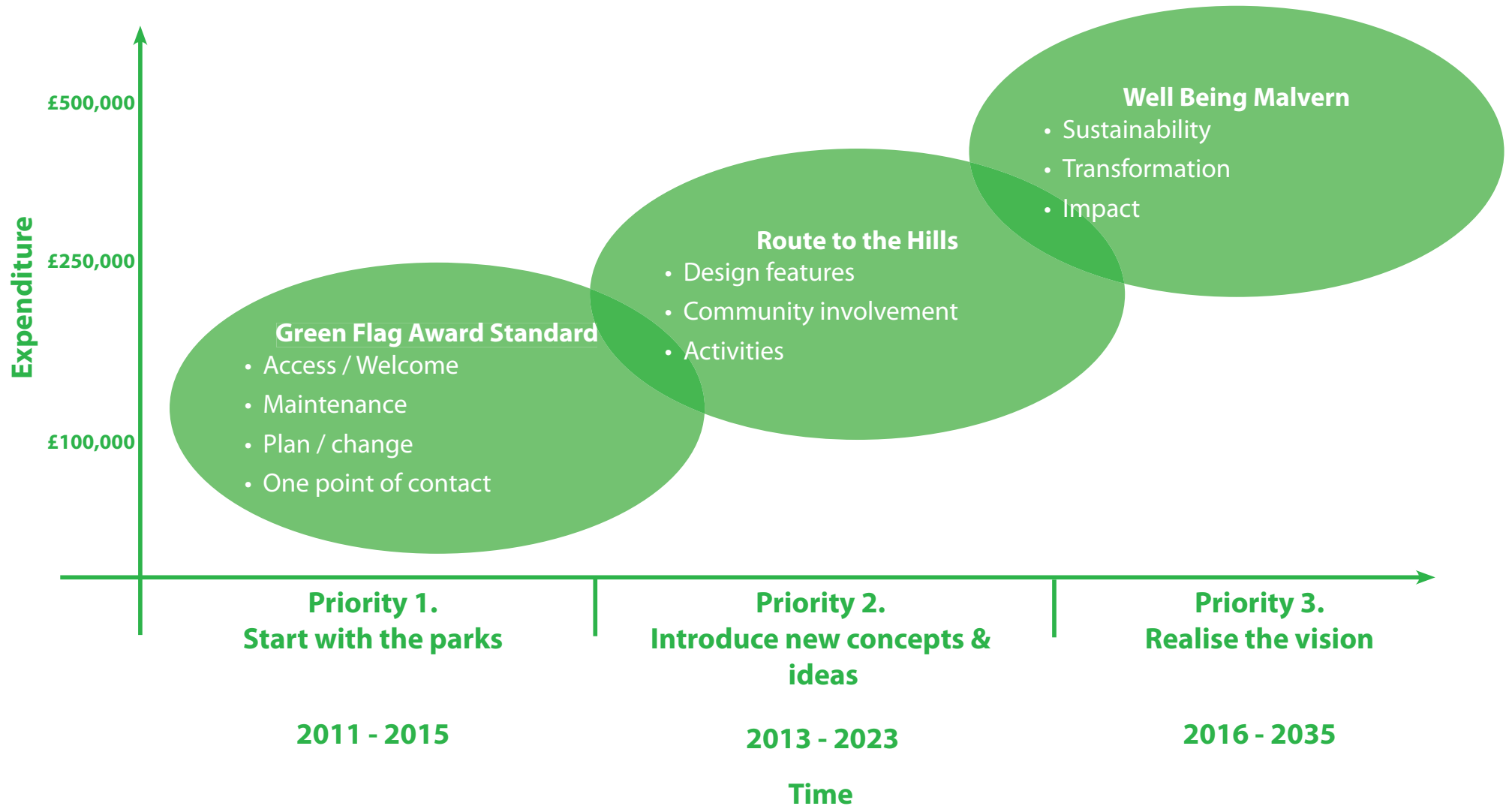
- Introduce new elements such as water features and play space linked to the concept and vision;
- Establishing a local liaison or Friends Group for both parks and working with them to achieve community based funding;
- Raising awareness amongst key partners e.g. rail providers to develop new projects;
- Launching the Route to the Hills and making new physical improvements;
- Developing marketing themes, creating new audiences introducing new events and activities;
- Creating new volunteer opportunities and helping people / groups to become involved.

4.3.4 Priority 3- Realising the Vision

Following the introduction of new themes and ideas the focus of the project will be to widen influence away from just the physical improvements to the parks and explore relationships with the economic regeneration of the Town. This will involve working with the business community to stimulate new opportunities and contribute areas such as large scale urban design or masterplanning projects. Key objectives will include:

- Directly increasing visitor spend within the context of the Town;
- Creating one or two new business ventures or opportunities linked to the park and the proposed route to the hills;
- Working with other service providers such as Splash on joint initiatives to enhance the visitor experience;
- Large scale restoration / refurbishment schemes.

4.4 Project Implementation Plan



4.5 Proposed Development Costs Summary

- 4.5.1 The proposed development costs provide a budget estimate for specific zones / compartments within the Parks. Costs are based on provisional estimates and it is recommended that more detailed specifications and plans are sought prior to finalising specific proposals.
- 4.5.2 The costs proposals should be read in conjunction with the proposed Development Plan drawing numbers M09.139.003 (see Appendix B). Full details in relation to proposed costs are outlined in Appendix C and a summary for each compartment is provided below.

Landscape Compartment N°	Ownership	Priority 1. (£)	Priority 2. (£)	Priority 3. (£)
1	Malvern Hills District Council	£1,500.00	£15,000.00	£-
2	Worcestershire County Council Highways	£-	£-	£45,000.00
3	Malvern Hills District Council	£3,000.00	£35,000.00	£-
4	Malvern Hills District Council	£10,000.00	£10,500.00	£8,000.00
5	Malvern Hills District Council	£24,600.00	£7,500.00	£-
6	Malvern Hills District Council	£73,000.00	£110,000.00	£230,000.00
7	Malvern Hills District Council	£15,500.00	£5,000.00	£-
8	Malvern Hills District Council	£5,000.00	£95,000.00	£8,500.00
9	Malvern Hills District Council	£3,000.00	£250,000.00	£-
10	Malvern Hills District Council	£6,000.00	£150,000.00	£-
11	Malvern Hills District Council	£14,500.00	£-	£50,000.00
12	Malvern Hills District Council	£3,500.00	£15,000.00	£-
13	Malvern Hills District Council	£-	£-	£35,000.00
14	Malvern Hills District Council	£12,500.00	£-	£45,000.00
15	Malvern Hills District Council	£5,250.00	£9,000.00	£-
16	Highways	£8,000.00	£35,000.00	£-
17	Priory Parochial Parish Council	£3,600.00	£17,500.00	£-
18	Priory Parochial Parish Council	£4,000.00	£65,000.00	£-
19	Priory Parochial Parish Council	£2,000.00	£45,000.00	£-
20	Malvern Hills District Council	£2,000.00	£-	£-
21	Malvern Hills District Council	£7,250.00	£-	£535,000.00
22	Malvern Hills District Council	£12,000.00	£-	£550,000.00
23	Malvern Hills District Council	£10,500.00	£85,000.00	£500,000.00
24	Malvern Hills District Council	£8,500.00	£62,500.00	£500,000.00
25	Malvern Hills District Council	£3,500.00	£-	£350,000.00
26	Malvern Hills District Council	£5,500.00	£300,000.00	£-
27	Malvern Hills Conservators	£2,000.00	£-	£-
28	Malvern Hills Conservators	£5,000.00	£15,000.00	£-
29	Malvern Hills Conservators	£4,500.00	£10,000.00	£-
Total (ex VAT)		£255,700.00	£1,337,000.00	£2,856,500.00