

# Caversham Court Gardens - Historic Design Scheme

Property Services

Special Award for Conservation at the Bali National Landscape Awards 2011  
Green Heritage Flag Award 2011



**Location:**

Caversham, Reading, Hampshire

**Client:**

Reading Borough Council

**Value:** £1.6m

**Completed:** August 2009

**Specialist teams:**

Building Conservation: HCC  
Property Services Historic Buildings Group;  
Landscape Architects,  
QS, Structural, Mechanical &  
Electrical Engineers:  
HCC Property Services

The site is the only public garden fronting the Thames in the Reading area. From medieval times it was the rectory of the adjacent church of St Peter, and later a private house belonging to a series of prominent local families. The house was substantially enlarged by the Simonds banking and brewing family in the early 19th century in a Gothic Revival style. It fell into decline during the 1920s and was bought by Reading Borough Council. The house was demolished and the grounds opened as a public garden in 1934. In recent years the popular gardens had become run down and suffered periodic vandalism.

The brief for the restoration was to work with the Reading Parks department on planned landscape improvements and repair all the listed garden buildings and features. A thorough condition survey of the structures on the site was undertaken and this, together with historical research, became the basis of a successful HLF grant application for the restoration project.

The stone and flint boundary walls were repaired and the lost entrance gateway reinstated. The footings of the house were excavated and extended up to ground level as a paved footprint with appropriate interpretation. The gravel walks were restored and the virtually buried causeway crossing the falling ground to the upper floor of the 17th century riverside gazebo was painstakingly excavated and restored, retaining all the surviving original brickwork. The gazebo itself was repaired structurally and re-fitted with leaded light windows and railings. A gingerbread house style public convenience dating from the 1930s was re fitted as a kiosk.

## Key Benefits

- Restoration of an exceptional landscape garden in the public domain.
- Rediscovery and reinstatement of previously hidden features – the house footprint and gazebo causeway.
- Significant improvement to lighting and site security.
- Incorporation of interpretation and educational features.

“ *It is a real jewel in the crown of the Thameside parks.* ”

Tom Stanway,  
Lead Councilor for Culture and Sport Reading Borough Council



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