

BOLD VISION

As the Society continues to develop its four gardens, **Elizabeth Balmforth** outlines some of the substantial changes that visitors will start to see at RHS Garden Harlow Carr during the coming years

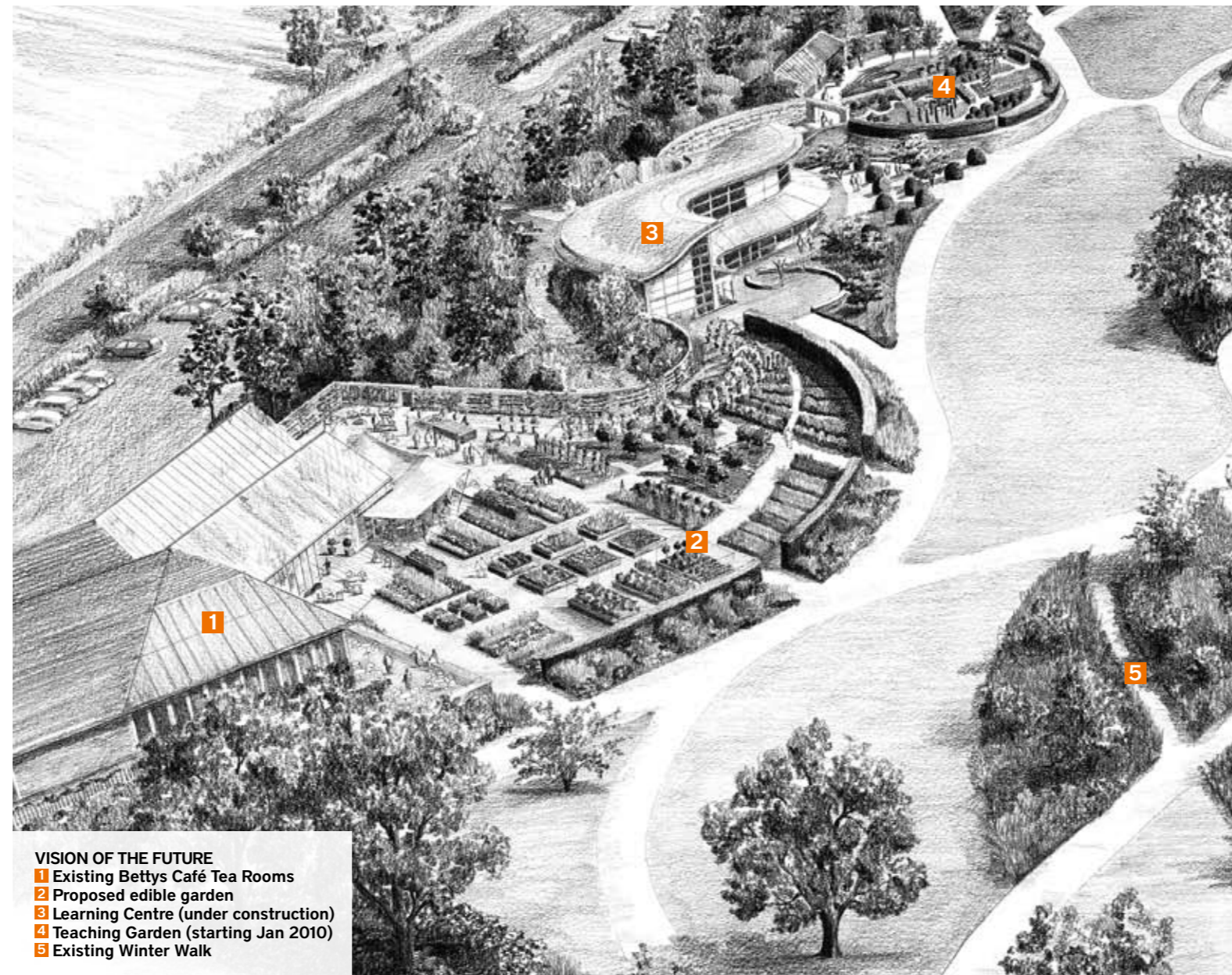
Learning Centre and its landscaping

The Learning Centre, currently under construction and due for completion in spring 2010, will encompass an area of 650sq m (7,000sq ft). The building is thought to be one of the 'greenest' being built in Britain, employing low-energy design and construction methods; it will be carbon neutral in use (by using super-insulating materials, passive solar gain and natural ventilation) and will generate the equivalent of its own energy needs. It will also blend into the slope of the site (below right) and the earth-bermed construction will reduce the visual appearance from the car-park road.

This new addition will allow more than 10,000 children (and adults) a year to be welcomed to the garden. There will be three practical teaching areas, a library, office space and an external teaching garden.

Andrew Yeats, Principal Architect at Ecoarc (responsible for the Learning Centre), says, 'By developing a curvilinear form the building follows the land contours but curls at both ends – it opens the building up to the south providing solar gain, and framing panoramic views to the gardens and landscape beyond.' It will also incorporate a ground-source heat pump, rainwater recycling, sedum roof, solar water-heating and a wind turbine.

The area surrounding the Learning Centre is currently in detailed planning by Harlow Carr's in-house landscape group. Behind the building, a native woodland mix will replace the belt of plantation pines which previously formed a screen along the car park edge.



VISION OF THE FUTURE

- 1 Existing Betty's Café Tea Rooms
- 2 Proposed edible garden
- 3 Learning Centre (under construction)
- 4 Teaching Garden (starting Jan 2010)
- 5 Existing Winter Walk



IDRIS WALTERS / ECO ARC ARCHITECTS

Teaching Garden

The new Teaching Garden will form part of the Learning Centre landscaping and serve as an outdoor teaching space. The aim is to provide a suitable area for teaching practical gardening skills to adults and children alike. Teachers will also use the garden as part of their continuing professional development.

Pathways link it to the Learning Centre (left) and the garden beyond. In plan, the garden is the shape of a seed, symbolising its role in learning and teaching. A group of beech (*Fagus sylvatica*) pillars will form a boundary around the Teaching Garden giving

a sense of enclosure. Beech will also be used across the front of the Learning Centre to visually link the two areas. These will work as playful, slightly out-of-scale punctuations to the composition and to filter movement through. They will be interplanted with small trees such as *Prunus* species and *Cornus kousa*.

Although still in the design stages, the garden is likely to incorporate composting and recycling systems, raised beds for productive horticulture, sensory elements and birdfeeding areas. The foreground to the Teaching Garden will become much more ornamental in character – akin to the Main Borders (right, seen in summer).

A new look for Harlow Carr

When, in 1948, the offer of a lease on a dished valley woodland of 27.5ha (68 acres) was made by Mr Bishop, Superintendent at the Harrogate Parks Corporation, to the Northern Horticultural Society (NHS), it was no wonder they were quick to accept.

The site, now RHS Garden Harlow Carr, just outside the spa town of Harrogate, North Yorkshire, has a varied topography that helped realise the NHS ambition of 'promoting and developing the science, art and practice of horticulture with special reference to conditions pertaining to the North of England'. The RHS merged with the NHS in 2001, and has since worked hard to develop the role of this garden.

However, plans are under way to escalate this garden's attraction even more, as per the master plan formulated by The Landscape Agency (see *The Garden*, Nov 2008, pp726–729), and based on a concept devised by landscape designer Tom Stuart-Smith (main illustration). Over the coming years visitors will see a new Learning Centre welcoming thousands of adults and children; a Teaching Garden that will aid people's understanding of horticultural matters; and inspiring landscaping.

These next steps will build on Harlow Carr's celebrated history and identity, and will, the Society hopes, enhance a dynamic garden that is hugely popular with so many members.



PHOTOGRAPH: ELIZABETH BALMORTH / RHS



Alpine Zone

The new Alpine House (top) sits in the northern corner of the garden. More than 1,500 alpine plants are included (above), such as selections of *Androsace*, *Dionysia* and *Saxifraga*, as well as 'punctuations' of *Pinus parviflora* 'Gyok-ke-sen' and dwarf *Rhododendron*. The interior landscape (completed in May) features natural sandstone raised beds, as well as large, 2.5m (8ft) high stone monoliths.

Work has now moved on to the exterior, which will involve the creation of further raised beds, crevice-planting displays and 2.5m (8ft) high stone spheres by local craftsman and art teacher Simon Brooke.

A planting plan for the back retaining walls – acting as a soft screen to the front of a 36,000 litre (8,000 gal) water harvesting tank and stock house – will include *Arbutus unedo*, *Ballota pseudodictamnus*, *Acanthus spinosus* and *Cistus ladanifer*. ■

Elizabeth Balmforth is Garden Manager at RHS Garden Harlow Carr

Visit www.rhs.org.uk/harlowcarr for more about developments at the garden, and to see what events will be taking place this summer. ● Funding for the Learning Centre continues to be requested; to donate, call 0845 062 1111. ● With thanks to Matthew Wilson, Alistair Baldwin and Andrew Yeats

ILLUSTRATION BY TOM STUART-SMITH

