

# The Rockeries and Hillside Park Landscape Study

## Public Consultation Report

February 2006

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## **1. Project**

The National Capital Commission (NCC) recently undertook a landscape rehabilitation study for The Rockeries and Hillsdale Park. This area plays an important role in the character of the Rockcliffe Parkway corridor, the Capital Pathway network and the Capital Region's green space system. The objective of the study is to enhance the user experience of these sites, as well as improving site amenities, while maintaining current uses.

This study will guide the long term management and improvement for this area. The major considerations of this study include:

- Re-establishing lost vistas or views of the Ottawa River;
- Continuing restoration of the formal rockeries area and planting trees to replace those that have been lost over the years;
- Addressing the existing service building in the former greenhouse in terms of access, space requirements and integration with the Parkway;
- Providing more site amenities including historical and geographical interpretation of the site and the eventual provision of washrooms for visitors and park users;
- Improving site recognition and orientation; and
- Improving tour bus circulation and parking arrangements in order to minimize access via Acacia Avenue.

Also, the NCC has recently completed reconstruction of a 10 km section of the Ottawa River and the Rockcliffe Parkway pathways from the New Edinburgh Boathouse to Orleans, as well as an extensive section through Rockcliffe Park, from Lisgar Road to Princess Avenue. This pathway represents the only pathway providing access to and from the eastern suburbs and the core area of the Capital. Also, it provides an important link for visitors along the Ottawa River, access to the eastern trailhead of the Greenbelt Pathway and to the Canadian Aviation Museum. A short section of pathway from Lisgar Road to the New Edinburgh Boathouse is a key missing link in the completion of a secure pathway, therefore improving pathway circulation and addressing missing links in this area is an important objective of the Study.

## **2. Public consultation**

Three consultation initiatives were organised in order to obtain feedback from the community members and the broader public on the proposed Study enhancements.

### ***2.1 Meetings with Interest Groups***

The NCC met on two occasions with community representatives, namely members of the Rockcliffe Park Residents Association, New Edinburgh Community Association, dog walkers and residents of the area. The first meeting took place on May 5, 2004 at the NCC headquarters and the second on-site on May 25, 2004. Various Study enhancements were discussed as well as alternatives for the alignment of the proposed pathway link. On both occasions the Study enhancements proposed were refined to better suit the community interests and needs.

### ***2.2 Public meeting, spring 2005***

A public open house was organized on May 26, 2005, at the Rockcliffe Park Library , aimed at gathering broader public input. The information was made available on the NCC Web site and the public consultation period took place from May 20 to June 24, 2005.

The notification of the public meeting was published in the May edition of the Rockcliffe News, on the NCC Web site and was sent by e-mail and letter to various interest groups and individuals related to this project.

The objective of the meeting was to seek views and comments on the various Study enhancements and on the proposed alignment for the Capital Pathway missing link in this area.

Approximately 50 persons participated in the public meeting, to share ideas and visions for the future of this cultural landscape. The Rockcliffe Park Residents Association also borrowed the presentation material available prepared for the public meeting to inform the members of its Association and obtain their feedback during one of their regular meetings.

A total of 20 comments were received, among them a letter from the Rockcliffe Park Residents Association and a petition submitted by an individual and signed by close to 200 persons.

### ***2.3 Public meetings, fall 2005***

A third public consultation phase took place in the month of October 2005. Public meetings were organized on October 13 and 20, at the Rockcliffe Park Public School and NCC Headquarters, and comments were accepted until November 18. Notification of the public meeting was available on the NCC Web site and was sent by e-mail and letter to various interest groups and individuals related to this project and all participants to the previous public meeting. Approximately 25 persons participated.

In response to the comments received as a result of the spring 2005 consultation, the NCC examined several additional alignment options for the recreational pathway missing link. Therefore, the objective of the second phase of consultation was specifically focused on the pathway link. An analysis was completed of 4 pathway alignment options, including a summary of their respective constraints, opportunities and costs.

A total of 10 comments were received, among them a letter from the Rockcliffe Park Residents Association, a comment from Heritage Ottawa and one from City Centre Coalition.

### **3. Comments**

While most of the enhancements proposed in the spring 2005 presentation of The Rockeries and Hillside Park Landscape Study were well accepted by the public, concerns were expressed regarding the proposed missing link to the Capital Pathway Network that was proposed to an existing asphalt & stonedust path through Hillside Park.

#### ***3.1 Summary of the comments received during the spring 2005 public consultation process, grouped by theme***

##### **Proposed pathway a concern**

The Rockeries path should not become part of the Capital Pathway Network.

The existing stonedust path is a route for quiet walking, and it is used by elderly people.

Converting this path into a section of the Capital Pathway will bring more cyclists.

Do not want cyclist that will disturb the quiet setting.

The whole bicycle route will impact on pedestrians.

Paving the road will prevent pedestrians and many elderly from enjoying a walk in a safe setting.

The slope of the proposed path is a concern – cyclists will pick-up speed and there is a sharp turn at the end. It is not safe.

Proposed extension is not safe because will oblige crossing the Parkway at both ends of the Rockeries – difficult during rush hours and for the young and elderly.

Cantilever a wooden path to the side of the road or as you enter the Rockeries, turn north and within 30 m where currently another path joins the main one (in front of the large fountain) construct a series of switchbacks to the tennis club.

Against the idea of paving the service road from the former greenhouse, but it is wide enough that it could be marked one side for the cyclists.

An alternative to enter the Rockeries is to use Britannia Village roads to reach Capital Pathway Network at Buena Vista and Lisgar roads.

Make Parkway from canoe club to Lisgar road safe for cyclists by widening the sidewalk or paint a bike lane on the road.

Have the path on the road, and reduce speed limit for vehicles.

Have the path go through Rockcliffe Park, where users expect all kind of traffic.

Do nothing and live with the missing link.

If it is not broke don't fix it.

Not a good idea to mix cyclists with the pedestrians – young and old – we will loose the calm oasis.

This proposal does not provide a safer environment but rather introduce hazards.

If the new path is built as proposed, there should be street lights where the path crosses the Parkway.

Walkers, dogs and cyclists don't mix together.

Signage is key if cyclists cross Parkway.

Need good signage for a multi-use pathway.

Yellow lines on pathways should be removed – not safe and does not encourage to share.

Gravel paths are the best recreational paths ie shared paths.

Too much paving is proposed.

Should prohibit bicycles, rollerblades and skateboards on the steep path by the daffodils.

The proposed pathway is three times the distance of the actual route.

### **Vegetation management and views protection**

Support the idea of selective tree cutting to reinstate views of the Ottawa River.

Support the idea of higher level of maintenance of rock gardens.

Should remove invasive Buckthorn.

There is a decline in the vegetation in the Rockeries.

Keep grass cut, better care for trees.

Rockeries and Park could use more skilled gardening.

The plantation of daffodils and tulips are very successful as well as the crabapple trees and lilacs.

Would like to see an iris garden in the ravine.

Good idea to remove Buckthorn and Manitoba and Norway Maple – could involve high school students as volunteer work.

### **Tour buses management**

Support the idea to use paved roads at former greenhouse for tour buses.

Creating a bus turning and parking is a good idea.

Buses close to tennis court is not a good idea.

Should not have more buses.

Should put signs to ask tour buses to stop their engines when parked for long periods.

Good idea to get buses away from Acacia Avenue.

Should have more parking space for cars and buses so more people can enjoy the Park.

### **Other**

Panels at the public consultation should have been more specific on the study content.

Should not proceed until further consultation with the community occurs.

Cars and buses should be allowed only during the week, and close circulation on Sunday.

Should have an arboretum.

Should organize historical tours and clean-up days.

Would like the NCC to open the lower path to dog-walkers for off-leash use.

Some dogs off-leash are not well controlled and some owners do not clean up.

If washrooms are built, they must be clean and safe.

Should have signs asking cyclists to use their bell when passing pedestrians.

Consider opening-up the creek in the ravine that is currently underground.

The various uses of the Park seem to be planned in isolation – should plan compatible uses.

### **Comments from the Rockcliffe Park Residents Association**

- Not in favour of having a bicycle path through the Rockeries – it is a traditional walking path.
- Should consider extending the path along the north side of the Parkway east of the canoe club around the cliff corner.



- Potential conflict between walkers and cyclists.
- Should maintain the treasured heritage, a quiet place away from traffic, a place to sit and walk in peace.

### **Comments from the petition**

- Against the idea to designate the Rockeries as an official bicycle path and paving it to connect up with the bottom of the Rockeries at Hillsade Road.
- The existing pathway is primarily used by babyboomers, senior citizens and parents of young children for leisurely contemplative strolls, power walking and jogging.
- Extensive cycling and roller blading activities are known to be incompatible with the current use of the pathway and put at risk the current users.

### ***3.2 Summary of the comments received during the fall 2005 public consultation process***

Magenta alignment is the preferred option.

Magenta alignment is the shortest route.

Magenta alignment gives a nice point of view on the River and Gatineau Hills.

Red option is the preferred option, it is safer than the magenta one and gives good access to tennis courts and canoe club (**Heritage Ottawa**).

Don't destroy the Walden Pond environment of the Rockeries.

Other than the magenta alignment, the options are not suitable with the Rockeries and Hillsdale Park (High-speed cycling, quiet setting).

Don't cut any tree.

Magenta alignment's cost is the same as the yellow (don't count the retaining wall in it).

Magenta alignment with a safer crossing at the east end would be the best option.

Red and yellow options will not be used by cyclists, too steep or too long.

Spending a bit more for the magenta alignment is ok.

Reduce speed limit on the parkway and trace a path on the road in the meantime of implementing the magenta slowly over the years with the retaining walls (would integrate the walls cost).

Do nothing or the magenta alignment.

Fisheries Act is a concern with the magenta alignment.

Traffic of the parkway makes the magenta alignment safer.

You potentially destroy one amenity (quiet of the Rockeries) to build a new one (pathway).

Quiet feature of the Rockeries is also a feature for cyclists.

Consider to complete the cinder path along the River West of the Boat House.

Level the elevated pathway, incorporate it into parkway and designate bike path on both side.

Don't turn the Rockeries in a transit area.

Any intrusion of cyclists into this area should be designed so as not to encourage speed.

It would be great if we had a restaurant at the Boat House, and turn the area in a tourist destination.

Preferred option is magenta, second is red.

There is a need for a master plan for the area.

Fountain should be turned off earlier (leaves block the water flow).

A pathway is required to separate the cyclists from the pedestrians.

Similar attention to downtown area is recommended (area of LeBreton Flats) (**City Centre Coalition**).

Consider the idea of widening the parkway right-of-way and build the pathway along the road.

Consider extending the lower, river edge pathway westward from the New Edinburgh Boathouse by fill placement within the Ottawa River.

#### **Comments from the Rockcliffe Park Residents Association**

- Support magenta route that follows the Rockcliffe Parkway and does not go through the Rockeries.
- The Association is not opposed to bicycle pathways and supports the use of bicycles for commuting and recreation. It is their support for the special character of the Rockeries that leads them to oppose the inclusion of the Rockeries in the Capital Pathway Network.

#### **4. Comments Analysis and Response to Comments**

On May 26, 2005 the NCC presented a proposed alignment (green) for the completion of the missing link through the Rockcliffe Rockeries. This alignment was the result of the May 2004 workshops with community groups and dog walkers. The most commonly stated written and verbal concerns related to the proposed pathway link were the impact of a recreational pathway on a quiet, contemplative passive park, anticipated user conflicts along the existing pathway, and the need to separate passive and active uses.

In response we undertook to identify additional pathway routing (yellow, magenta and red) options which would address these concerns. An analysis was then completed for these three new options, along with the green option, which was proposed at the consultation in May 2005.

As a result of this analysis, taking into account the public comments, the safety of users, the topography, the environmental impacts as well as universally accessible standards and the cost, the NCC identified the red option as the most viable option.

This option travels through the northwest corner of the Rockeries, an area consisting of approximately 10% of the 20 hectares Rockeries and associated open space lands. This option uses approximately 300 metres of an existing 2.5 metre wide asphalt pathway, before veering off and making use of an old road bed along the rock embankment and the roadside edge of the tennis courts. This option bypasses entirely the upper rock garden area, addressing any potential environmental impacts to the Rockeries area. See master plan in Appendix 1.

While many participants at the October 13<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> public meetings preferred the magenta option, a number of participants were supportive of the red option. There are some safety concerns with the magenta option, which would still require pathway users to travel a steep sloped, curving pathway beside a sloped, narrow and curving parkway. They would also be forced to cross the parkway in an area that is unsafe at the top of a hill. The construction of a pathway at this location would also have a considerable impact on the heritage character of the parkway, an important cultural landscape in the Capital, and would be the most costly solution because it requires the complete reconstruction of the retaining walls along the parkway.

The idea of building the pathway adjacent to the parkway by widening the right-of-way was also considered. This option would be impossible to realize because of land ownership, cost and environmental reasons.

The Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) was also contacted regarding an option that was raised by members of the public during the October public consultation period, that being the potential extension of the lower, river edge pathway westward from the New Edinburgh Boathouse by fill placement within the Ottawa River. DFO's response was that it would typically consider such an alternative only if no other viable alternative could be found to meet the project objectives. Such an undertaking would result in a Harmful Alteration, Disruption or Destruction of fish habitat. Due to the fact that other feasible options exist which satisfy the main project objectives, DFO would not likely authorize such conditions, requiring considerable remediation and compensation by the NCC.

As a result, in February 2006, the NCC adopted the red option as being the alternative that responds to the main concerns expressed during the public consultations and that satisfies the NCC's objectives for completion of a key missing pathway link, enhanced user safety, and offers an enjoyable experience to all users of the Rockcliffe Rockeries Park, a desirable destination for passive recreational purposes.

## **5. Next steps**

### **5.1 Pathway Link**

Implementation is anticipated to begin in late spring/ early summer of 2006. The new pathway will be designed and built to ensure universal accessibility. The intersection of the Capital Pathway with the existing Rockeries pathways will be carefully designed to mitigate any potential user conflicts.

## **5.2 Other Rockeries Work**

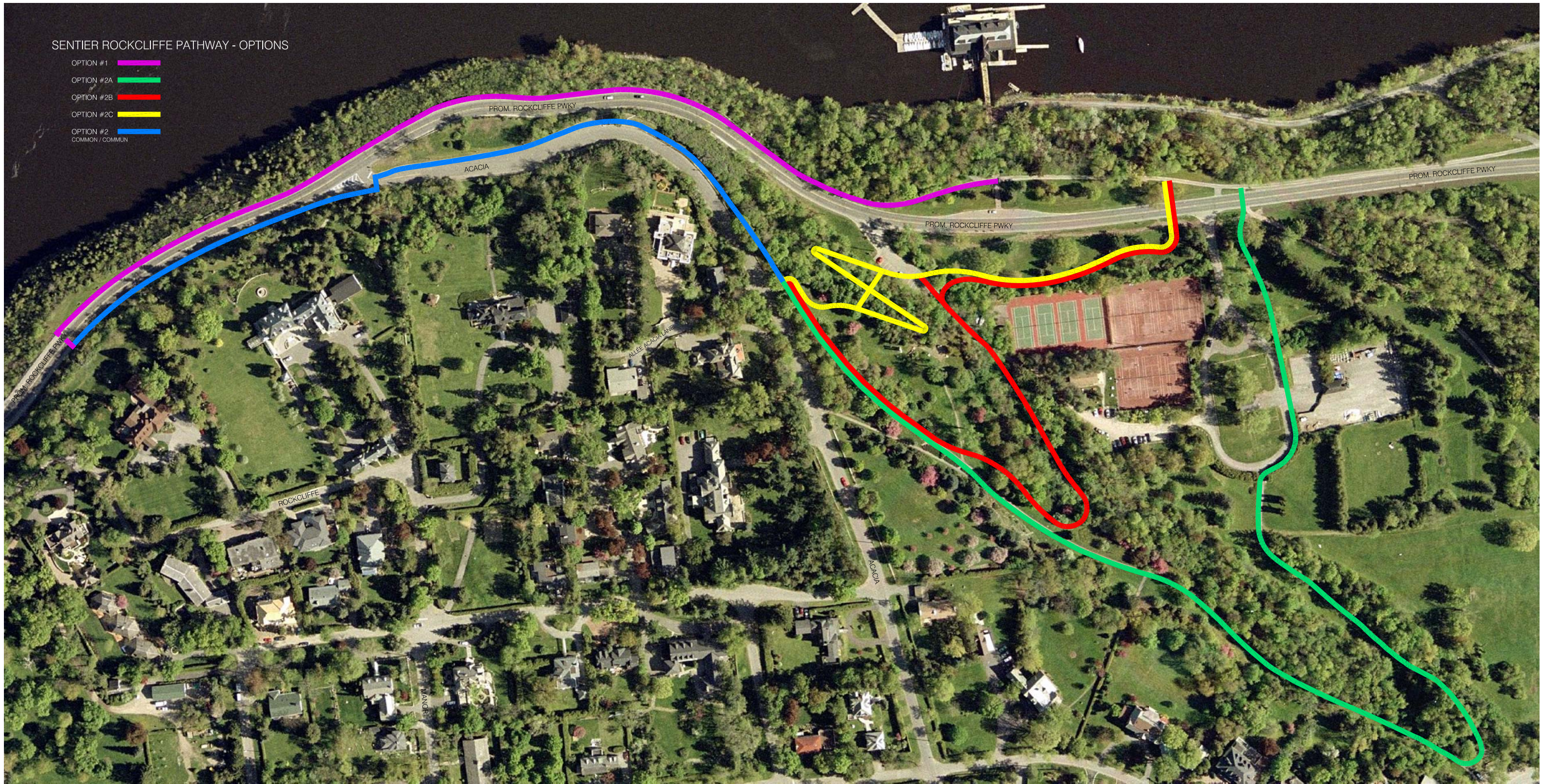
The NCC also anticipates proceeding over the next two years with rehabilitation work outlined in the May 2005 public meetings. Priority is being given to several popular initiatives, namely:

- Selective cutting and thinning of invasive trees and shrubs and vegetation in poor condition to begin to open up views of the Ottawa River, with reforestation in other areas.
- Establishment of stairway/ ramp access from the local Rockeries pathway to the upper triangular meadow area adjacent to Acacia, providing an additional passive public area adjacent to the Rockeries. This is where the best opportunities exist for more open views of the Ottawa River.
- Assessment of the condition and species of vegetation within the existing rock garden area, with a view to selective removal and replacement of plants more appropriate to existing maintenance resources. This may include the use of more flowering shrubs and low maintenance perennials.

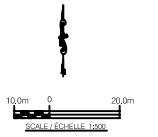
## Appendix 1

SENTIER ROCKCLIFFE PATHWAY - OPTIONS

- OPTION #1 █
- OPTION #2A █
- OPTION #2B █
- OPTION #2C █
- OPTION #2 █
- COMMON / COMMUN █



SENTIER ROCKCLIFFE PATHWAY  
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