

THE GUEST ROOM

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Tottenham House and grounds in a derelict state

Conserving, researching and campaigning for historic designed landscapes

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The Gardens Trust is dedicated to the conservation of historic designed landscapes, to researching them and to campaigning on their behalf. Although many people are aware of Historic England's registration system for historic houses comprising Grades I, II* and II, many fewer people are aware that Historic England maintains a similar system for historic parks and gardens.

Its register of parks and gardens of special historic significance was established in 1983 and currently includes over 1,600 sites.

In considering a proposed development, a local planning authority is obliged to consider the significance of a registered site and whether the development will harm its significance as a heritage asset to be enjoyed by current and future generations.

The Gardens Trust is a statutory consultee in relation to applications affecting registered sites, a role that it

and its predecessor organisation, the Garden History Society, has held since 1995.

In that capacity, local planning authorities are required to send relevant applications to us for comment. In this respect, the Gardens Trust has a role similar to other statutory consultees, like the Georgian Group or the Victorian Society, but we are the only such body fulfilling this role in relation to parks and gardens rather than houses or monuments.

Historic parks and gardens take many forms, including public parks, the grounds of historic houses, cemeteries and town squares, but they share in common that they are all designed, not natural, landscapes.

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The consultation requirement is triggered by any development proposal that affects a registered site; this may be at some distance and have no physical connection to the site. Each application is therefore considered carefully for its potential impact on designed views into, as well as from, the landscape and setting, for instance, the effect of a wind turbine at some remove. We do not, however, take conservation to mean preserving sites in aspic. Conservation is a dynamic concept, and in many cases change that is not harmful to the significance of a site will be appropriate.

We have a small professional staff, and we work closely with, and rely on, volunteers in 36 County Gardens Trusts (CGTs) to help fulfil our statutory role. The CGTs are all members of the Gardens Trust. Whilst the Gardens Trust may respond to a consultation, CGTs may also respond, in consultation with the Gardens Trust or individually. Many local authorities maintain lists of sites of local significance not on the Historic England register, and consultations with

regard to these sites would also be undertaken by CGTs. Both the Gardens Trust and CGTs can also provide pre-planning advice in appropriate cases.

Tottenham House in Wiltshire (see picture) was a recent case of a derelict house in a Grade II* Capability Brown landscape that was the subject of an application to create accommodation in the house as well as new family houses on the estate and to create a new lake. In this case, after extensive discussions with the landscape architects and with Historic England, and after various iterations to the design, we were able to support the application, both with regard to the positioning and access for the new houses and also the creation of the new lake, based on our research into Brown's practices with regard to water.

At another Grade II* site, Ickworth in Suffolk, owned by the National Trust, we successfully objected to the construction of a permanent cycle path that would have run through a particularly sensitive part of the landscape.

In addition to planning applications, we also respond to government consultations on national policy issues. For instance, we recently made a written submission to the government inquiry into public parks regarding reduced local authority budgets and highlighted this issue in a new publication: *Paradise Lost: the new crisis in historic urban parks*.

We have an individual membership that through subscriptions and participation in events help support our roles in conservation, in research and in campaigns. Members also receive our journal, *Garden History*, and Newsletter. Anyone interested in historic houses might also be interested in the work of the Gardens Trust, and I urge you to have a look at our website. **Visit** thegardenstrust.org. 