



Historic England

Sir/Madam Planning - Wokingham
Wokingham Borough Council
Shute End
Wokingham
Berkshire
RG40 1BN

Direct Dial: 0207 973 3700

Our ref: P01586988

28 January 2025

Dear Sir/Madam Planning - Wokingham

**T&CP (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015
& Planning (Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas) Regulations 1990**

**REDDAM HOUSE BEARWOOD ROAD SINDLESHAM WOKINGHAM RG41 5BG
Application No. 243228**

Thank you for your letter of 8 January 2025 regarding the above application for planning permission. On the basis of the information available to date, we offer the following advice to assist your authority in determining the application.

Summary

Bearwood Mansion and Park (the historical names of Reddam House and park) are primarily significant as an illustration of how an incredibly grand gentleman's residence and designed landscape were laid out and functioned, including entrance lodges, drives, working areas, and grand expanse of parkland and lake to show of the wealth and status of the Walter family (founders of The Times newspaper).

Proposed new building within an historical area of planting would, notwithstanding that it may be the least harmful location for a new boarding building, result in some harm to the registered landscape through introduction of a new building in an historically designed natural area.

The proposed landscaping and layout of routes could, we feel, do much more to reinforce the sinuous qualities of historical pathways through the site because as currently proposed are rectilinear, which fails to reinforce historical qualities of the garden design. Furthermore, the proposals appear to result in a net loss of trees within the area, which weakens its historical character as part of the garden. We recommend the Council seeks a more sensitive landscaping scheme that helps to reinforces historical character through seeking greater tree cover.



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Historic England Advice

Reddam House (Bearwood Park) has a Conservation, Landscape and Ecology Management Plan (CLEMP) 2017 drafted as part of work with Reading Football Club who own part of the designated area of the Registered Park and Garden. In this document, which we believe the school has a copy of, it sets out a detailed understanding of the historical and architectural history of the building and the gardens and sets out clear ways that the landscape can be improved. As the registered park and garden is on the Heritage at Risk Register it is crucial that owners (including Reddam School) take into account relevant information and use this to inform masterplanning and designs for specific developments within its control.

Whilst a masterplan is not a prerequisite for making a planning application, in our experience it is an immensely useful exercise in very sensitive heritage contexts such as this, because it allows for detailed thinking and planning of future needs and how best to accommodate it, and allows for stakeholder engagement (including with bodies such as Historic England). The risk of not undertaking this type of exercise is that it will often result in a lack of cohesion across a site and in clear missed opportunities for conservation, repairs and enhancement of the historic environment, and weaker planning applications.

In this case, we offered brief general guidance at pre-application that encouraged the applicant to consider the CLEMP, to take into account the 'at risk' registered park and to explain within any application how it had understood and taken into account the poor condition of the landscape and explain how proposals had responded sensitively to that. This application fails to explain how it responds to the Grade II* landscape following on from a sufficiently detailed understanding of it, and fails to illustrate how it has taken opportunities to address its poor condition.

Furthermore, we feel the application provides insufficient comment on the proposed future of the remaining boarding building (Drake House), and how opportunities would be taken (once the use is displaced into the new block) for that area of the garden to be improved. Whilst not required for a planning application this background information would help build the case for the scheme and could provide greater opportunities for improvements to the historical landscape. For example, the CLEMP 2017 sets out that opportunities exist for improvements to the eastern entrance route in which sit adjacent to (north of) the application site and soon to be redundant Drake House).

Coming to the designs of the proposed boarding house, we are content that the designs are suitably sensitive to the mansion house setting in scale, form and materials.



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However, the proposed landscaping and layout of routes could, we feel, do much more to reinforce the sinuous qualities of historical pathways through the site because as currently proposed are rectilinear, which fails to reinforce qualities of the historical garden designs. Furthermore, the proposals appear to result in a net loss of trees within the area, which weakens its historical character as part of the garden. We recommend the Council seeks a more sensitive landscaping scheme that helps to reinforces historical character through seeking greater tree cover.

Relevant National Planning Policy

The NPPF sets out at paragraph 212 that great weight should be given to conservation of heritage assets, with more weight given to more significant assets (including those at grade II* and grade I). Paragraph 213 makes clear that any harm should require clear and convincing justification. Paragraph 215 details that where proposals that lead to less than substantial harm this should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposals.

Conclusions

Whilst we accept that the proposed location of the accommodation block is likely to be the least sensitive within the school's landholding, and that the designs of the proposed building are sensitive in scale, form and materials to the main mansion and other historical buildings within the mansion area of the site, the proposals would still result in some harm to the setting of the Grade II* mansion and the Grade II* registered park and garden (on the Heritage at Risk Register) by being located within an historical garden area.

There is a missed opportunity for the proposals to clearly acknowledge and respond to the 2017 CLEMP document (which provides helpful steer for new proposals), to clearly identify and seek ways to enhance the registered park and garden. We recommend in response to this proposal that the Council should seek amended landscaping to incorporate more sinuous paths and routeways and a some replacement trees for those lost.

We would also encourage, as good practice, reassurances about the future of the boarding house area. This latter point is relevant in response to the park and garden being on the national Historic England Heritage at Risk Register and as responsible custodians of this important historical site the school is encouraged to seek ways to help improve the park and garden, and help it to be removed from the register.



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Recommendation

Historic England has concerns regarding the application on heritage grounds.

We consider that the issues and safeguards outlined in our advice need to be addressed in order for the application to meet the requirements of the NPPF.

Your authority should take these representations into account and seek amendments, safeguards or further information as set out in our advice. If there are any material changes to the proposals, or you would like further advice, please contact us.

Yours sincerely

Rachel Fletcher

Inspector of Historic Buildings and Areas

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