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HERITAGE IMPACT ASSESSMENT

In respect of

Main house and landscaping at Strowdes Estate, Culham

On behalf of

Imperium Trust Company

AHC REF: PM/10402

Date: October 2025

www.assetheritage.co.uk

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1.0 INTRODUCTION AND SCOPE OF REPORT

1.1 This report has been prepared and written by Patrick C. Maguire, IHBC, Director at Asset Heritage Consulting Ltd. ('AHC'), on behalf of Imperium Trust Company, in order to assess the impact in heritage terms (excluding below-ground archaeology) of the proposed elevational and landscape changes at Strowdes Estate, Culham, which are being considered as part of a S73 amendment to planning permission ref.213587.

Heritage considerations and relevant planning history

1.2 The site is located within the boundaries of Park Place, a Grade II* Registered Park & Garden (see statutory list entry at **Appendix 1**). Park Place is a substantial designated area, representing the former gardens and parklands associated with Park Place (house), a Grade II listed building located over 900m to the north-west. This large designated area contains several listed buildings and structures.

1.3 The ownership of the parkland has been broken up into several smaller estates and the southern part of it (which does not contain any listed structures) falls within Strowdes Estate (which also incorporates some spaces outside the boundaries of the designated area).

1.4 Indeed, outline planning permission was granted in 2008 (ref. O/2008/1353) for the division of the 220-hectare Park Place Estate into several smaller estates, of which Strowdes comprises 70 hectares. Full planning permission was granted in 2017 for the construction of a new main dwelling in the centre of Strowdes Estate, with associated landscaping (ref.173097). This planning permission was subsequently renewed in September 2023 (ref.213587).

1.5 Existing consents will fundamentally change the character of Strowdes from parkland and woodland on the periphery of a large estate to a self-contained estate, still incorporating parkland but also the other typical elements of a landed estate: a substantial house with associated gardens and pleasure grounds; service buildings; and an entrance drive.

Proposals

- 1.6 This S73 submission relates to a variation to the elevational treatment (with minor changes in massing) of the house granted consent under the extant planning permission ref.213587. Generally, the revised design approach allows for a similar façade design and materiality (except to the second floor) but incorporates more contemporary detailing.
- 1.7 The submission also includes variations to the landscaping proposals, the revised masterplan providing a more naturalistic scheme, more consistent with the 18th-century landscape development of Park Place than the formal layout shown on the approved masterplan.

Summary assessment

- 1.8 For the reasons set out in full in the main body of this report below, I am not of the view that the proposed variation to the consented scheme would result in harm to what is significant about the Park Place Registered Park & Garden. Indeed, I am firmly of the view that the revised landscape masterplan is a material improvement on that approved under the existing consent and, when compared to that, would constitute an enhancement to the character and appearance of the Registered Park & Garden.
- 1.9 As such, the proposals are compliant with both local and national policy on the conservation and enhancement of the historic built environment, including the guidance set out in the NPPF and its accompanying PPG.

2.0 THE APPLICATION PROPOSALS AND THE HERITAGE ISSUES

2.1 The aim of this section of the report is to examine the application proposals in the context of the site's heritage significance.

Historic background and description

2.2 While the implementation of recent consents will fundamentally alter the character of the application site, it historically formed part of parkland first laid out in the late 18th century on the periphery of the Park Place Estate.

2.3 The history and wider character of Park Place is summarised well in the statutory Registered Park & Garden entry (**Appendix 1**). In terms of historic development, this states that:

'In 1719 Mrs Elizabeth Baker sold land called Park's Place, also known as Strowdes, to Lord Archibald Hamilton, who at some time after this erected a Palladian mansion called Park Place on a new site (VCH 1923). In 1738 Park Place was sold to Frederick, Prince of Wales (1707-51) (ibid). Following Frederick's death in 1751 the estate was bought by General the Hon Henry Seymour Conway (1720-95), cousin of Horace Walpole, who enlarged the parkland during the 1760s-80s, embellishing it with various ornamental structures and buildings and developing the area known as Temple Combe. Following Conway's death in 1795, the estate was sold in 1797 to Lord Malmesbury who further expanded the park to the east, and entertained Pitt, Canning and other notable men of the day there. Following its sale in 1816 the estate passed through several hands during the C19. The house was rebuilt c 1871, following a fire, for John Noble of Noble's Paints and Varnishes (who had bought the estate in 1867), together with a new stable block. The grounds were subject to extensive 'landscape gardening' carried out under Robert Marnock (1800-89) c 1869, who planted thousands of specimen trees and shrubs, 'as far as possible every known variety!' (Noble 1905). In 1949 the estate was sold out of the Noble family into divided ownership, the house becoming a school during the later C20, and being now (1998) in private ownership. A golf course has been constructed in the north-east corner of the park, with a second, smaller one in Happy Valley, and the estate remains in divided ownership'.

2.4 The entry goes on to describe the house and the grounds immediately around it, as well as describing how, to the south of the house, lies Happy Valley (converted to use as a golf course in the 20th century) and to the south of this, *'lie the grounds of the former Temple Combe, a house erected during the later C18 at the top of the scarp, enjoying panoramic views of the Thames Valley. The original house, lying 700m south-east of Park Place house, was demolished in the C20, to be replaced in 1963-4 by a low, curvaceous modern house on the same site (Pevsner 1966), known as Happy Valley. This small estate, enclosed within the Park Place estate, is largely composed of woodland surrounding open lawns and paddocks, its principal feature being the Druidic Temple (erected 1787, listed grade II). The Temple stands at the top of the hillside 100m south-west of Happy Valley house, comprising a circular collection of forty-five granite megalithic stones set vertically into the ground with other stones as lintels.. From the Temple views extend south-west across the river to the water meadows and the distant hillside'* (statutory list entry at **Appendix 1**).



Fig.1. Rocque's 1761 map of Berkshire. The approximate location of the approved house has been identified with a red dot

2.5 Strowdes Estate is set still to the south of Temple Combe, the two separated on the western side by a further valley. Indeed, the western part of Strowdes Estate forms part of the extensive parkland first laid out in the later 18th century that lies around

the core of the gardens and pleasure grounds surrounding Park Place and Temple Combe (these continue, outside of Strowdes Estate, to the east of Park Place).

2.6 What is now Strowdes Estate can be seen on Rocque's 1761 map of Berkshire (**Fig.1**) prior to the laying out of this southern area as parkland by General Conway in the 1760-70s and before the construction of Temple Combe to the north. It is depicted as a series of field parcels, enclosed by rural lanes. Compare this with the 1898 1:2500 scale OS map at **Fig.2**, which shows the area between Wargrave Road and Kenton's Farm laid out as parkland, with tree avenues leading into the interior from lodges to the south and west. Notably, this map shows the thick tree belt that lines the northern edge of the Strowdes Estate, separating it from the woodland around Temple Combe (and now Conway Park), presumably a result of Robert Marnock's c.1869 planting scheme. A back drive to Park Place from Kenton's Lane crossed the parkland in the form of an avenue, accessed from the road just to the north of Kenton's Farm.

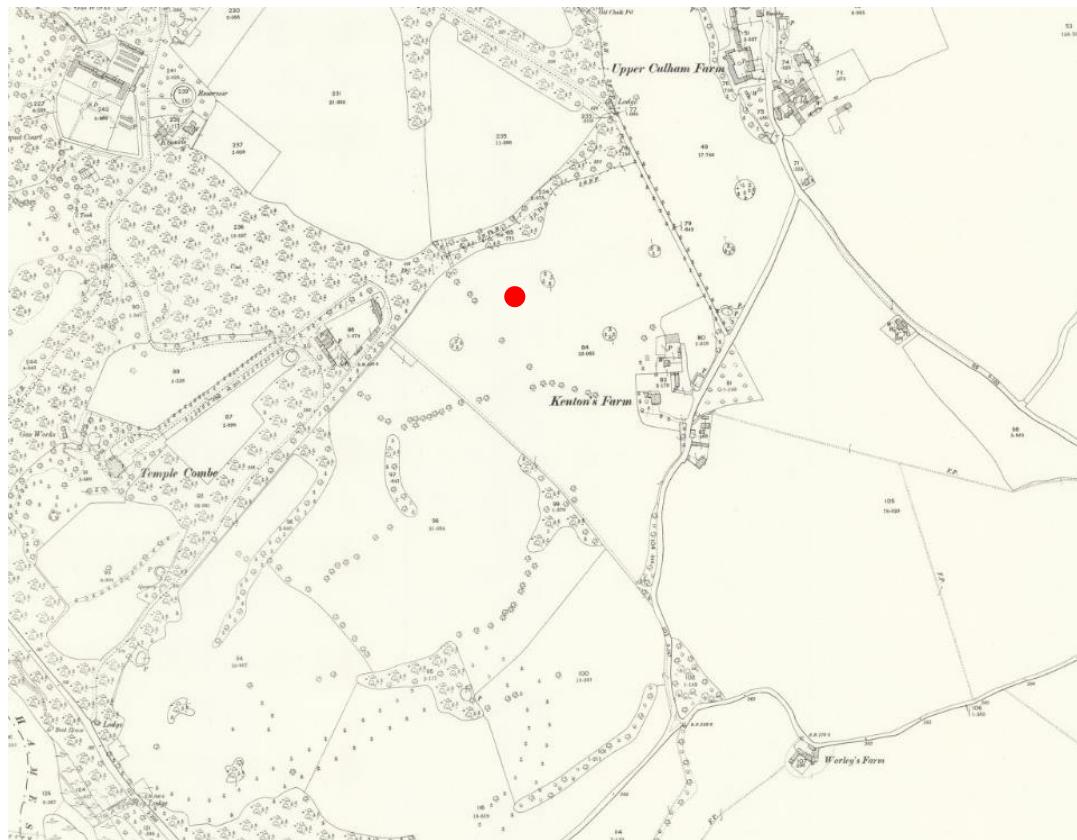


Fig.2. 1898 (revised 1897) 1:2500 scale OS map. The approximate location of the approved house has been identified with a red dot

2.7 As demonstrated by the December 2003 Google Earth image below (**Fig.3**), much of the area to the south of Temple Combe (the house at Temple Coombe was rebuilt in the 1960s) that comprises Strowdes Estate was no longer parkland but was under plough and in arable use by the early 21st century.



Fig.3. Top, December 2003 aerial image. Bottom, February 2022 aerial image.
The approximate location of the approved house has been identified with a red dot

2.8 Indeed, as described in the statutory entry prepared in 1998, '*The extensive park, largely laid out during the later C18 by General Conway, surrounds the inner core of the gardens and pleasure grounds. Areas of open parkland, many containing clumps and specimen trees, are enclosed by belts of trees and woodland, the latter particularly found to the west of the site. The north-east section, incorporated in the C19, has been overlaid by a golf course (late C20), the remainder being a mixture of arable and pasture*' (**Appendix 1** - my emphasis)

2.9 However, as demonstrated by the February 2022 Google Earth image at **Fig.3**, it has since been largely returned to a parkland character, in line with the 21st-century consents for the creation of Strowdes Estate. In this context, it should be highlighted that the character of the north-eastern part of Strowdes, around where the consented house will be constructed, has also changed in this period. Notably, the back drive to Park Place, which can be seen on the 1898 map (**Fig.2**), still remained in place in 2003, accessed from the lane just to the north of Kenton's Farm and cutting across the parkland. This has since been removed, giving a more open character to the north-eastern part of the site than existed historically. The satellite imagery shows the establishment of an allé in the early 2010s, relating to the formal landscaping masterplan that accompanied planning permissions refs. 173097 and 213587.

2.10 The site of the consented house is, in its current form, therefore an area of reinstated parkland set just to south of the thick belt of trees that separates Strowdes from Hamilton Estate (**plates 1-3**). Service buildings related to the Hamilton Estate (and situated on the site of the old Temple Combe Farm) are located on the far side of the tree belt, slightly to the west. The reinstated parkland continues to the east and north-east, leading to the estate entrance (**plates 4-6**). This area would be the subject of a scheme of formal landscaping and planting under the existing masterplan, although, as described below, a more naturalistic landscaping scheme is now proposed.

Assessment of significance

2.11 The application site is set within the Park Place Registered Park & Garden. While I note the presence of listed buildings outside the boundaries of Strowdes Estate (e.g. the Cottage and Old Smithy at Upper Culham Farm or the listed structures around Temple Combe and Park Place – see plan at **Fig.4**), based on my site visits (carried out in

June 2024 and September 2025), these are well separated by distance, changing topography, and long-standing, intervening vegetation to the extent that I am not of the view that these have any potential to be affected through the change to their settings by the S73 proposals now under consideration. As such, the significance of the Park Place Registered Park & Garden as a designated heritage asset is the only relevant heritage consideration in this case.

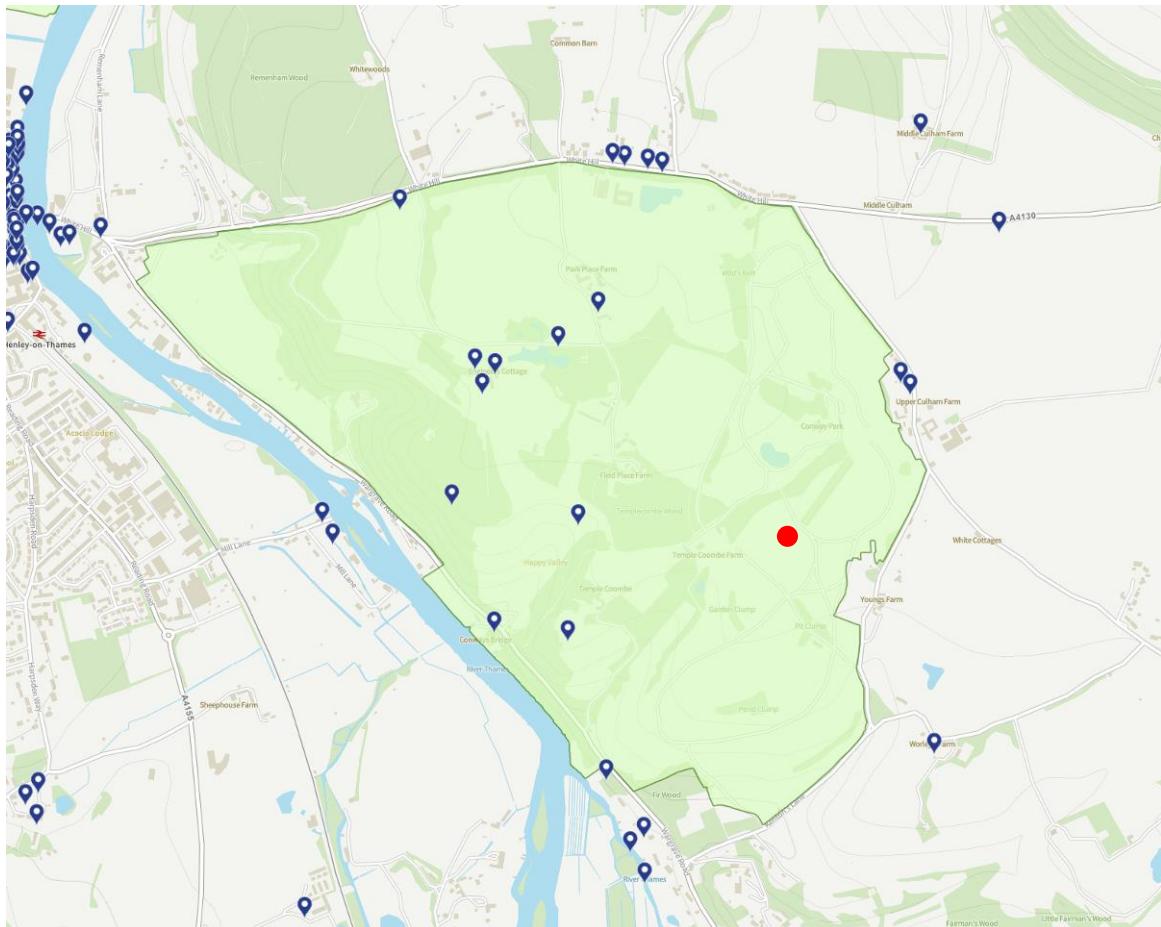


Fig.4. Historic England map showing the Park Place Registered Park & Garden (green shading) and listed buildings in the vicinity (blue pins). The approximate location of the approved house has been identified with a red dot

2.12 The Registered Park & Garden is a large designated area that comprises several distinct elements. As set out in the statutory list entry (**Appendix 1**) this includes gardens and pleasure-grounds around Park Place (house) and Happy Valley (house, on the site of the earlier Temple Combe), as well as wider parkland laid out around the gardens and the predecessors to these houses from the late 18th century.

2.13 The Registered Park & Garden is of architectural interest for its development from the 18th century as a landscape garden and substantial estate around a significant country house (Park Place, rebuilt 1870), later incorporating a sub-estate at Temple Combe. Further landscaping and planting was carried out in the 1860s under Robert Marnock.

2.14 In this context, it incorporates naturalistic features such as lakes and woodland, alongside parkland. The varied topography has influenced the development of the registered park, including views across its constituent valleys and towards the Thames. Common to landscape gardens of the 18th century, built features take advantage of this topography, including the listed "Druid's Temple" (a Neolithic ring of megaliths, transplanted from Jersey) placed prominently within Happy Valley, or subterranean grottos (two listed grottos), and the cyclopean, listed Conway Bridge at the foot of Happy Valley, connecting Temple Combe to the Thames. Such built features were central to the social function of the 18th-century country house, allowing guests to be entertained by a circuit through the grounds (Girouard, M., *Life in the English County House* (London, 1980) 210).

2.15 Indeed, the historic interest of the Registered Park & Garden is derived from its association with its historic owners and their visitors, including Frederick, Prince of Wales (1707-51), General Henry Conway (1720-95), and the guests of Lord Malmesbury (1746-1820), including Prime Ministers William Pitt the Younger (1759-1806) and George Canning (1770-1827). It is also associated with the Scottish garden designer, Robert Marnock (1800-89), who landscaped and planted the grounds c.1869.

2.16 The site of the consented house historically fell within the wider parkland laid around the gardens and pleasure grounds by General Conway in the late 18th century. While, as noted above, this part of the parkland has seen change during the 21st century, reducing its legibility as part of the landscape garden laid out in the 18th century, it clearly still forms part of the wider parkland that girdles the estates to the north (Temple Combe and Park Place).

2.17 That said, the relationship between this area of parkland and the wider Registered Park & Garden is currently in a state of change under existing consents. With the development of the Hamilton Estate to the north and the Strowdes Estate on the

application site, the parkland that once encircled the immediate grounds of Temple Combe and Park Place has been divided into sub-estates, with their own mix of formal gardens/pleasure grounds, estate offices/outbuildings, and more naturalistic parkland.

2.18 With this in mind, the application site must now also be considered as part of the sub-estate of Strowdes, which is how the strip of parkland on the southern edge of the Park Place Registered Park & Garden will be experienced under existing consents. While this will mean only limited change for the south-western part of Strowdes, which will largely remain open parkland, the change around the site of the house will naturally be quite fundamental. Rather than forming part of the wider parkland, this area will form a substantial house with its own associated curtilage, outbuildings, and pleasure grounds, around which the wider retained elements of parkland will sit.

2.19 As this suggests, the role of this part of the site within the wider Registered Park & Garden will be materially altered as a result of existing consents.

The proposals

2.20 The proposals seek an amendment to the scheme permitted under ref.213587 to allow changes to the elevational treatment and massing of the consented house, alongside a revised landscape masterplan.

2.21 The changes in massing and footprint are minimal. Indeed, the principles of the massing are the same, with a main house comprising a single range with slightly-projecting cross-wings to the outer bays of the principal elevations, alongside garden pavilions enclosing an entrance court to the north-east. Within these established principles, the footprint of the house has been increased very slightly (a c.2.4m increase in the overall width of the building), while that of the linked pavilions has been reduced (these reduced in length by over 4m). The height of the garden pavilions has also been materially reduced by c.1.2m.

2.22 In terms of the elevational treatment, the rhythm and composition of the existing consent is largely unchanged. The stylistic treatment of the consented scheme can be characterised as a stripped-down modern take on a classical country house of the formal plan prevalent in the late 17th and 18th century, a projecting porch suggesting

an astylar frontispiece to demarcate the entrance and the atrium and living space behind this playing the traditional part of hall and saloon.

2.23 The revised scheme follows the same approach, but with minor changes to the elevational treatment, principally in terms of detailing generally (in particular the fenestration detailing) and the materiality of the recessed second floor. Indeed, the second floor felt somewhat unresolved in the consented scheme, being set above and back from the main parapet, suggesting its role as part of the roofscape, but finished in solid stone, giving a somewhat heavy, fortress-like appearance in elevation.

2.24 In the amended scheme, the principal parapet height of the building has been slightly reduced by c.0.5m, while the second floor has been treated with a mix of glazing and reflective panels, set back behind perimeter railings. While, like the rest of the building, clearly modern in its approach, this provides a better analogue for the balustrading with roof behind that one might expect to find on the sort of classical country house that this scheme seeks to evoke.

2.25 In that vein, the use of inset bays for the fenestration running from plinth to cornice creates on the principal, north-eastern elevation a sense of the giant order pilasters one might expect to find on outer bays of a classical country house of the late 17th or 18th century, such as a Chatsworth. Considering the relatively short run of windows this is, in my view, a more effective conceit than the punch-hole windows on the consented scheme, which were presumably intended to suggest something like the chamber bays on the south front of Blenheim (more suitable for that rather wider elevation, bookended by taller pavilions).

2.26 The proposals also seek to consolidate an earlier proposed amendment to the design permitted in 2024 under ref.213587 to allow for the formation of a sunken garden located between the northern pavilion of the consented house and the belt of trees that forms the boundary between Strowdes and Hamilton. This will form part of the pleasure grounds of the house, serving as a private garden for the resident family.

2.27 The sunken garden will be gently sloped downwards from north to south as a series of planted terraces, served by shallow steps, leading to a terrace at the base. Rather than a retaining wall, the southern side of the garden will be formed by the wall of the

house's basement, at this point to be a glazed wall lighting the basement swimming pool (the subject of a separate submission regarding the rationalisation of the basement layout).

- 2.28 The sunken nature of the garden, alongside its placement in a discreet position between the house and northern tree belt/boundary mean that it will not be widely experienced within the landscape and, indeed, like the grottos and other features that characterise the wider Registered Park & Garden, will be something of a pleasant surprise, revealed only as one comes across it.
- 2.29 Like the existing consent, the proposals would result in the creation of what is clearly a substantial modern building on the application site, making reference through its design to the sort of classical country houses that have inspired it.
- 2.30 Crucial to the amended design is a revised landscape masterplan. This is a more considered and contextualised scheme than the formal landscaping shown on the permitted proposals. Indeed, rather than the formal allé and recognisably artificial landforms shown in that scheme, the revised proposals seek to provide a more naturalistic landscape, drawing directly on the Landscape Garden principles of the mid-late 18th century, which underpinned the development of the wider Park Place Estate.
- 2.31 The revised landscape proposals recognise the historic role of the site as parkland around the Park Place Estate. While this role has changed over time and will naturally change fundamentally as a result of the consented development, the proposals seek to provide a landscaping solution more in keeping with the historic experience of this part of the parkland and the design principles that informed the creation of the Registered Park & Garden.
- 2.32 The design principles draw on the Landscape Garden movement of the mid-late 18th century, seeking a 'modern day "Capability" Brown' landscape. This approach, of course, takes into account the relationship between the Landscape Garden movement and the concept of the Picturesque, codified in the 18th century by the likes of Kent, Brown, and Repton. For Brown in particular this meant placing buildings within naturalistic landscapes, with views carefully controlled. On this basis, key to the

design has been the creation of strong sightlines to and from the house within the landscape, while roaming wildlife and rolling countryside create a romantic landscape.

2.33 Perhaps the most important change in the revised masterplan is the treatment of the approach to the house. The formal, tree-lined avenues of the consented scheme, including the long allé onto the house, have been replaced with a curving pathway, following a topographical scheme designed, in the best tradition of Landscape Gardening, to appear natural. The distinctive shape of the site, which turns almost a right angle in plan at its north-eastern end creates a great opportunity to provide the sort of controlled reveal of the principal building favoured by Brown. As one moves southwards from the main entrance, a mound masks the house until one turns fully to the west, where it is first revealed across a tree-lined lake (again, Brown at Chatsworth is a clear reference). The path then snakes between the mound and the serpentine lake, bringing visitors slowly around to the house, which is only again seen head-on as one reaches the last stretch of the approach, looking across the entrance yard, enclosed by its pavilions.

2.34 Further mounds and tree-planting hide the estate management buildings to the east from the house, and these are accessed from a separate branch of the drive, consistent with the service drive often found on historic landed estates. The amphitheatre in particular has the potential to take on the role of the sort of structures often constructed within the landscape under historic Landscape Gardening schemes, as exhibited by the grottos and temples within the wider Park Place estate.

Heritage impact assessment

2.35 As set out above, this part of the Registered Park & Garden was historically significant for its architectural interest (i.e. '*interests in the design and general aesthetics of a place*' – PPG Paragraph: 006 Reference ID: 18a-006-20190723) as parkland surrounding the grounds of Park Place. The character of this part of the site will fundamentally change as a result of existing consents, going from parkland on the periphery of a substantial estate to forming part of the core grounds immediately around the principal building of a new, smaller estate.

2.36 This smaller estate, at 70 hectares, will retain the essential features of a landed house and its grounds: a substantial house with associated gardens and pleasure grounds; lodges and service buildings; and an entrance drive. As well as wider parkland, typical features of such estates include lodges, outbuildings, kitchen gardens, and pleasure grounds.

2.37 In the context of the existing consent, the proposed massing and elevational changes to the approved house are of limited importance in heritage terms. That is to say, a substantial house on classical principles is to be constructed in the approved location. While the house will be slightly wider than that consented, this is a minimal change with the two designs in terms of scale and massing clearly being in the same order of magnitude. The elevational changes draw on the existing composition but, in my view, exhibit some improvements in detailing, notably the treatment of the bays and fenestration on the principal, north-eastern elevation.

2.38 The biggest departure from the consented scheme relates to the treatment of the second floor and, particularly, its materiality. The use of glazing and reflective panelling here is clearly a contemporary approach but, in my view, this is consistent with the broad design ethos of the building, which is to create a modern country house; not a pastiche but a building that reflects and develops upon historic precedents. This does not preclude the use of modern materials. Indeed, this is consistent with the tradition of historic building: '*Good architects in the past have...always tried to build in the best way they could at the time*' (Sir Nicholas Grimshaw, BBC Radio 3, 6.30pm on 2 June 1989, reproduced in Amery, C., *Architecture, Industry, & Innovation: The Early Work of Nicholas Grimshaw & Partners* (London, 1995), 246).

2.39 Crucially, in comparison with the consented scheme, the use of lightweight materials succeeds in identifying the second floor as part of the roofscape, creating a more harmonious relationship with the main body of the building.

2.40 In terms of the proposed sunken garden, in my view the formation of pleasure grounds around the house is perfectly in keeping with the change to the function and character of this part of the Registered Park & Garden as established by existing consents.

2.41 On the more detailed design of the garden, I have three observations to make. Firstly, sunken gardens are a historic form of garden often found around larger houses, particularly in the Victorian and Edwardian periods (for instance, Lutyens & Jekyll's sunken garden at Hestercombe House in Somerset). Secondly, changes in topography and the incorporation of interesting built features within these, such as grottos and bridges, are characteristic features of the Park Place Registered Park & Garden. The proposed modern interpretation of a sunken garden leading to a subterranean pool fits well into this established tradition, bearing in mind that the site will necessarily be changing in character from parkland to part of the consented house's pleasure grounds as a result of existing permissions. Thirdly, the proposed use of a sunken garden in this enclosed location between the house and northern boundary means it will be discreet, hidden within the landscape, and would not be widely experienced beyond its immediate surroundings.

2.42 As such, I do not identify any harm to the significance of the Registered Park & Garden through the proposed changes to the massing, elevational treatment, or pleasure grounds around the consented country house.

2.43 In terms of the wider landscaping scheme, this is, in my view and in the context of the Registered Park & Garden, a material improvement on the landscape masterplan submitted with the approved scheme. While the character of this part of the Registered Park & Garden will necessarily change as a result of the existing consent, the landscaping scheme now proposed gives proper consideration to the historic form, character, and development of Park Place and this site's role within that. While through the principle of its development for a country house, the site will no longer have the character of peripheral estate parkland that it historically had, the naturalistic Landscape Garden approach now proposed is far more in keeping with the historic character of the Registered Park & Garden than the previous landscape masterplan.

2.44 On this basis, when compared to the consented scheme, which sought a more formal approach, the revised proposals are a marked enhancement.

2.45 Taken as a whole, therefore, I am not of the view that the proposed amendments to the existing consent would result in any harm to what is significant about the

Registered Park & Garden and, in relation to the landscaping proposals, would represent an enhancement to its significant historic character over the approved scheme.

2.46 As such, I can see no reason in built heritage terms to withhold consent for the proposed amendments.

3.0 CONCLUSION

- 3.1 For the reasons set out in full in the main body of this report below, I am not of the view that the proposed variation to the consented scheme would result in harm to what is significant about the Park Place Registered Park & Garden. Indeed, I am firmly of the view that the revised landscape masterplan is a material improvement on that approved under the existing consent and, when compared to that, would constitute an enhancement to the character and appearance of the Registered Park & Garden.
- 3.2 As such, the proposals are compliant with both local and national policy on the conservation and enhancement of the historic built environment, including the guidance set out in the NPPF and its accompanying PPG.

PLATES



Plate 1. The site of the approved house



Plate 2. The site of the approved house



Plate 3. A thick, long-standing belt of trees to the north/north-west separates the site of the approved house and its immediate grounds from the grounds of the neighbouring Hamilton Estate



Plate 4. The north-eastern portion of Strowdes, close to the existing shared entrance



Plate 5. The north-eastern portion of Strowdes



Plate 6. Looking towards the site of the approved house where the north-eastern portion of the estate meets the main stretch

Appendix 1

Registered Park & Garden entry

Official list entry

Heritage Category:

Park and Garden

Grade:

II*

List Entry Number:

1000588

Date first listed:

30-Sep-1987

The scope of legal protection for listed buildings

This list entry identifies a Park and/or Garden which is registered because of its special historic interest.

[Understanding registered parks and gardens](#)

[Corrections and minor amendments](#)

Location

The building or site itself may lie within the boundary of more than one authority.

District:

Wokingham (Unitary Authority)

Parish:

Remenham

District:

Wokingham (Unitary Authority)

Parish:

Wargrave

National Grid Reference:

SU 77850 81998

Details

Park Place, a C19 country house on the site of an earlier house, surrounded by C18 and C19 gardens and pleasure grounds and landscape park, with work in the mid to late C19 by Robert Marnock. A second, smaller estate, Temple Combe, developed during the late C18, lies enclosed within the Park Place estate.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

In 1719 Mrs Elizabeth Baker sold land called Park's Place, also known as Strowdes, to Lord Archibald Hamilton, who at some time after this erected a Palladian mansion called Park Place

on a new site (VCH 1923). In 1738 Park Place was sold to Frederick, Prince of Wales (1707-51) (*ibid*). Following Frederick's death in 1751 the estate was bought by General the Hon Henry Seymour Conway (1720-95), cousin of Horace Walpole, who enlarged the parkland during the 1760s-80s, embellishing it with various ornamental structures and buildings and developing the area known as Temple Combe. Following Conway's death in 1795, the estate was sold in 1797 to Lord Malmesbury who further expanded the park to the east, and entertained Pitt, Canning and other notable men of the day there. Following its sale in 1816 the estate passed through several hands during the C19. The house was rebuilt c 1871, following a fire, for John Noble of Noble's Paints and Varnishes (who had bought the estate in 1867), together with a new stable block. The grounds were subject to extensive 'landscape gardening' carried out under Robert Marnock (1800-89) c 1869, who planted thousands of specimen trees and shrubs, 'as far as possible every known variety!' (Noble 1905). In 1949 the estate was sold out of the Noble family into divided ownership, the house becoming a school during the later C20, and being now (1998) in private ownership. A golf course has been constructed in the north-east corner of the park, with a second, smaller one in Happy Valley, and the estate remains in divided ownership.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING The Park Place estate lies adjacent to the north bank of the River Thames, east of Henley-on-Thames. The 240ha site is bounded to the south-west partly by the river and partly by the A321 Henley to Wargrave road, to the east by a lane linking the A4130 Henley to London road with the A321, and to the north by the A4130 itself. The site occupies a plateau above the Thames valley lying towards the southern end of the Chiltern Hills, including, to the south-west, the undulating hillside leading down to the adjacent river. The setting is largely rural, with views from the western edge of the site over the river towards Henley to the west, and towards the countryside to the south and west.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The main entrance, standing 800m north-west of the house, is approached off the A4130 half-way up White Hill, and is flanked by two white-painted gate piers. From here the drive curves up the steep hillside through woodland, with views west across the river towards Henley, opening out at the top, 400m north-west of the house, into parkland lying on the plateau. Some 100m from the north front the drive turns south, passing between two pairs of stone obelisks (C18, listed grade II, erected mid C19 having been moved from Stanstead Hall) standing 60m from the house, and beyond this entering a tarmac forecourt leading to a porte-cochère on the north front. A spur leads off the east side of the forecourt to the stable yard entrance, marked by an archway set in the wall.

Several further drives give access to the house, crossing the parkland from the east, south-east and north-east, entering off the A4130 and the lane to the east of the park. Several of these entrances are marked by C18 and C19 lodges at the edge of the park. The drives converge 350m east of Park Place house, continuing west as one east drive to join the west drive where it turns south 100m from the house.

In the mid to late C18 (Rocque, 1761; Pride, 1790) a straight drive flanked by a double avenue of trees gave access to the house directly from the Henley to London road to the north. The entrance off the road was set back in a curved sweep; the present flint and stone Tower Lodge (C18, listed grade II) standing 550m north of the house was possibly associated with that entrance.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING Park Place (Thomas Cundy 1870, listed grade II), built of rendered brick in French Renaissance style, stands on the site of an C18 building which was badly damaged by fire c 1870, possibly incorporating parts of the C18 work. It is entered via a porte-cochère on the north front, with the west front giving access to the gardens via an iron staircase down from the ground floor, and, standing on the east front, the foundations of a former conservatory (demolished mid-late C20).

The stables (c 1871, listed grade II), standing 30m north-east of the house, are also of rendered brick, arranged in three ranges around a yard, with the fourth, west side formed of a closing wall with an entrance archway giving access from the forecourt.

GARDEN AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The gardens surround the house to the west, south and east, with pleasure grounds leading away to the south towards the river.

Below the west front of the house, and reached by steps down from the garden door, lies a formal, rectangular terraced garden, separated from the house by an upper terrace running along the west front bounded at the west edge by stone balustrading. From the upper terrace a double flight of stone steps leads down a stone retaining wall to the centre of the garden terrace below, the steps being flanked by two alcoves set into the retaining wall. A perimeter path encircles the terrace, with two circular panels of lawn at the north and south ends flanking a central panel in which has been placed a tennis court enclosed by chain-link fencing. Formerly (OS 1913; 1938) a ride extended south-east from the south end of the terrace garden through woodland. The terraces overlook a lawn to the west, bounded to the west by mature trees, originally (OS 1913; 1938) with open views west towards Henley and the

hillsides beyond (OS 1883; Harris 1979).

Adjacent to the south front lies a large tarmac rectangle, formerly (OS 1913) laid to lawn and surrounded by a perimeter path. South and east of this feature lie open lawns planted with many specimen trees, including large cedars of Lebanon (reputed to have been planted by Frederick, Prince of Wales) and enclosed by woodland. A path leads east from the tarmac area to the west entrance to the walled kitchen gardens. The lawn east of the house merges into an area of open woodland and shrubbery enclosing an informal pond with two islands, largely surrounded by a grass path. Beyond this to the north, separated by the east drive, lie the remains of further ponds set in woodland.

In the mid C18 the house, set in a garden enclosure, overlooked the scarp edge to the west, with views across the River Thames to the countryside beyond, as shown on a view of the early 1740s, which also shows several formal garden terraces below the west front. At this time the south front of the house led directly into an enclosed wilderness crossed by two intersecting straight paths, one set on an axis with the house (Rocque, 1761; Harris 1979).

The informal and partly wooded pleasure grounds extend south from the lawns around the house. The remains of a sunken feature including dry waterways and a terrace to the east (probably C19) extend south alongside the west wall of the kitchen garden, leading to an overgrown area 300m south-east of the house in which lie several entrances to a network of ruinous C18 caves and tunnels cut into the chalk. Some of these entrances retain their flint archways, but most have lost their architectural features. From here a tunnel leads c 170m south to the Happy Valley hillside, emerging near the top of the valley in the dilapidated Grotto (C18, listed grade II), a long, vaulted gallery with niches for statues cut into and built of chalk beneath the slope at the head of the valley, the outer face having a series of six arches facing down the valley to the river. At each side of the Grotto stand ruinous flanking brick and flint structures originally representing Grecian ruins, reputed to be designed by James Stuart (listed building description). Formerly a gothic or rustic cottage (now gone) stood 400m south-east of Park Place house, above the Grotto at the head of Happy Valley.

The view down the grassy Happy Valley (now, 1998, a golf course) is flanked by mature trees, mostly beeches, with Conway Bridge (architect Thomas Pitt, first Lord Camelford, engineer Rev Humphrey Gainsborough, brother of Thomas Gainsborough, 1763, listed grade II) standing c 375m south of the Grotto, framing a view of the river beyond. This road bridge, carrying the Henley to Wargrave road, is built of cyclopic blocks in imitation of rockwork, and frames the river such that from the Grotto the river appears to lie immediately beyond the bridge,

whereas in reality the river bank separates the bridge from the river by 50m. The bridge gives access to an open riverside lawn to the south, flanked to the north-east by the road, from which it is screened by mature trees, sloping down to the river to the south-west, with an early C19 boathouse by the waterside. From here views extend south-east across the river to water meadows and the hills beyond. Walpole wrote in 1763 'the works at Park Place go on bravely; ... the bridge [will be] sublime, composed of loose rocks that appear to have been tumbled together there, the very wreck of a deluge' (quoted in Jacques 1983).

North-west of Happy Valley lie the remains of a further area of C18/early C19 pleasure grounds, covering an area towards the top, north-east side of Mill Bank. Within this area, 300m south-south-west of the house, lies a south-west-facing, rustic, semicircular flint alcove (mid-C18, listed grade II) set into the hillside within woodland. It stands at the edge of a terraced path running north-west to south-east along the contour of the hillside. Close to the south-east end of the hillside path, 350m south of the house, stands a Chinese-style wooden summerhouse (rebuilt C20). The summerhouse stands on an artificial, south-facing promontory overlooking Happy Valley to the south and east, located at the south end of a path running along the top of a substantial raised bank which emerges from the woodland to the north.

South of Happy Valley lie the grounds of the former Temple Combe, a house erected during the later C18 at the top of the scarp, enjoying panoramic views of the Thames Valley. The original house, lying 700m south-east of Park Place house, was demolished in the C20, to be replaced in 1963-4 by a low, curvaceous modern house on the same site (Pevsner 1966), known as Happy Valley. This small estate, enclosed within the Park Place estate, is largely composed of woodland surrounding open lawns and paddocks, its principal feature being the Druidic Temple (erected 1787, listed grade II). The Temple stands at the top of the hillside 100m south-west of Happy Valley house, comprising a circular collection of forty-five granite megalithic stones set vertically into the ground with other stones as lintels. The Temple, found near St Helier, was presented to General Conway by the inhabitants of Jersey during his period as their Governor. Horace Walpole described the temple as 'very high priestly' (Pevsner 1966) and named it 'Little Master Stonehenge'. From the Temple views extend south-west across the river to the water meadows and the distant hillside.

PARK The extensive park, largely laid out during the later C18 by General Conway, surrounds the inner core of the gardens and pleasure grounds. Areas of open parkland, many containing clumps and specimen trees, are enclosed by belts of trees and woodland, the latter particularly found to the west of the site. The north-east section, incorporated in the C19, has been

overlaid by a golf course (late C20), the remainder being a mixture of arable and pasture. An obelisk (late C17, erected 1837, listed grade II) stands 250m north-east of the house, part of the spire of St Bride's, Fleet Street (London) designed by Sir Christopher Wren, re-erected here by Mr Fuller-Maitland to commemorate Queen Victoria's accession.

KITCHEN GARDEN The 1ha brick-walled kitchen garden, probably dating from the mid C18 (Pride, 1790) lies 300m south-east of the house, on the plateau above Happy Valley, bounded to the west by the northern arm of the pleasure grounds.

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OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1883 2nd edition published 1900 3rd edition published 1938 OS 25" to 1 mile: 2nd edition published 1913

Description written: November 1998 Amended: September 1999 Register Inspector: SR
Edited: April 2000

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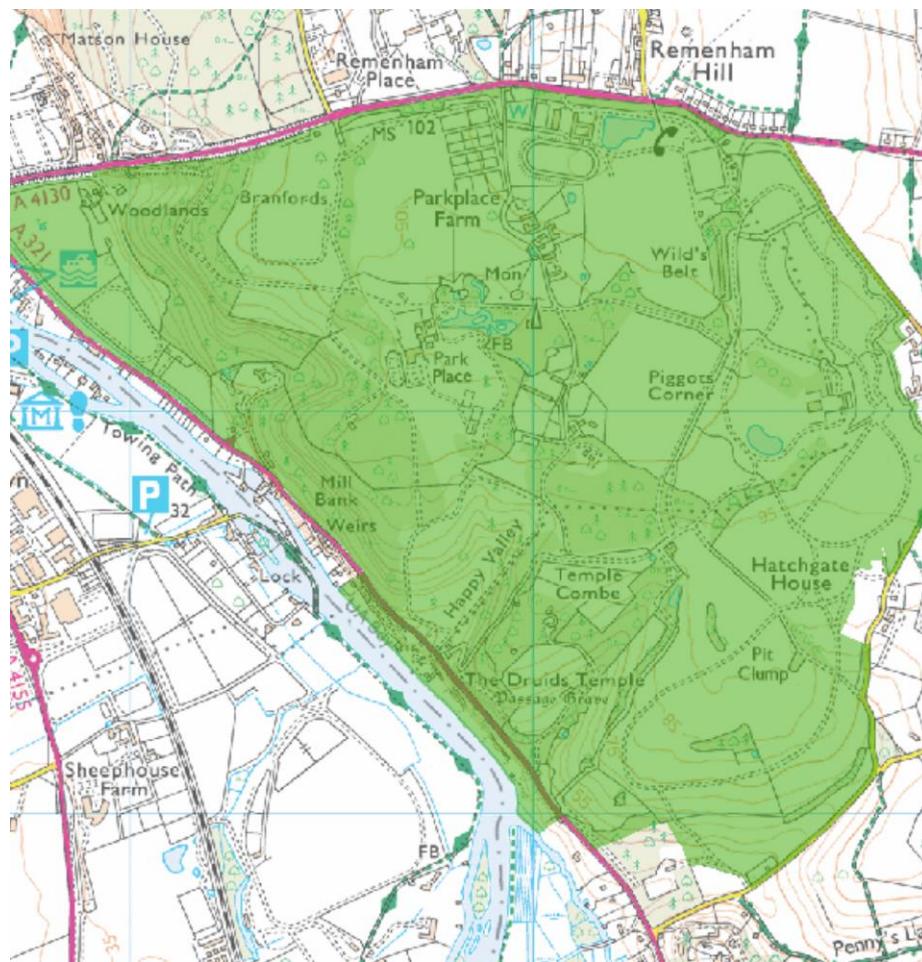
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