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Research - Conserve - Campaign

26th October 2016

Matthew Pearson Esq
Wiltshire Council
Monkton Park
Chippenham
SN15 1ER

Dear Mr Pearson,

Ref : Ref 16/06978/FUL - Taylor Wimpey Development at Lydiard Park

The above application has been drawn to the attention of The Gardens Trust, formerly The Garden History Society, within the last few days. As the proposal site directly adjoins the boundary of the Registered Park & Garden at Lydiard Park (Grade II), as Statutory Consultee for all sites on the Historic England Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest, The Gardens Trust would have expected to be included in the consultation process. We are surprised and extremely disappointed to have been left off the consultee list shown on Wiltshire Council's website. I am attaching a copy of our recently published leaflet *The Planning System in England and the Protection of Historic Parks & Gardens – Guidance for Local Planning Authorities* for your information. We would very much appreciate it if in future you could make sure that The Gardens Trust is not omitted.

It is particularly unfortunate to have heard about the application at such a late stage as it gives us very little time to research this important site with the thoroughness it deserves. It is clear from the close proximity of the site to the RPG that new houses only 40m away (D&A 4.2 p.16) from its boundary will unavoidably have a significant impact on the setting of this heritage asset. It is proposed that detailed planting proposals for impact mitigation upon the RPG is deferred as a future planning condition. The Gardens Trust feels that this is not acceptable for a site of this importance. The developer claims that due to the site being lower than Lydiard Park and the Grade I St Mary's Church and its numerous listed tombs, it will reduce the impact upon the larger landscape. The Gardens Trust disagrees with this statement. If anything it will have precisely the opposite effect. I visited the site yesterday, and the field for which the housing is proposed is not just very clearly visible from all along the main east entrance drive and when standing by the church, but is in fact the culmination of the view from these areas. The convergence of multiple public footpaths just to the south of the site (LVIA 2.16) leading directly to the Park and church exacerbates the problem. The Gardens Trust also understands that the lime avenue along the eastern main entrance drive which the developer states will screen the new housing, is due soon to be crown lifted, opening up even more than at present, the prospect from the church and car park and giving an even clearer view of the housing to the many visitors to Lydiard Park. The developer makes numerous references to the group value of the mansion, medieval church and garden structures. It follows therefore that harm to any aspect of these will inevitably affect the significance of the whole. In particular it is extremely unfortunate that this application has come at the same time that the church is undergoing a major conservation project and is applying for HLF funding. Any impact on the significance of the church by an ill-conceived application such as this, will have a

correspondingly detrimental effect on the possible success of the lottery bid. Pevsner described the church as "richer than any other of similar size in the county"¹ and having seen the exquisite wall decorations, tombs and 15th century glass, anything that might prevent the conservation of this unique and special place, would constitute cultural vandalism.

We concur with our colleagues at Historic England that 'The development would cause harm to the overall heritage significance of these assets by urbanising the rural context and open landscape that was chosen to identify these buildings as holding high status and important communal value. The development would further harm the historic association between the historic assets and land purchased in the 19th century, which provided an opportunity for ornamental grazing and extending the perceived extent of estate ownership towards the horizon.' The field boundaries in the area to the north of the RPG appear unchanged since at least 1700 and represent historic pasture. Even though they are a later addition to the estate, they were obtained specifically to give the 4th Lord Bolingbroke greater control over these fields and add to the expansive rural setting of his estate. They are crucial to the significance of Lydiard Park and its setting, and not a C19th afterthought as the developer seeks to imply.

Looking at local policies, what is immediately apparent is that this application directly conflicts with Wiltshire's Core Strategy (p.5): 'Due to the levels of growth being proposed for Swindon through Swindon Borough Council's emerging Core Strategy there is no longer a need to provide growth on land to the west of Swindon within Wiltshire due to alternative proposals.' Paragraph 4.15 is also relevant "...Development outside the settlement boundary will be strictly controlled. Relaxation of the boundaries will only be supported where it has been formally reviewed through a subsequent DPD or a community-led neighbourhood plan, which includes a review of the settlement boundary to identify new developable land to help meet the housing and employment needs of that community.' NPPF para 129 with regard to the significance and setting of a heritage asset is also relevant here. Should this development in any way affect the HLF bid, then it would also be contrary to NPPF para 132 adversely affecting the conservation of a heritage asset, and finally, the application seems directly contrary to NPPF para.134.

I was struck when reading the documentation online by the absolutely enormous correspondence from members of the public. No other application I have looked at over the past few years has generated such a huge volume of comments. It speaks volumes about the great regard the local community holds for this designated Country Park. Despite Taylor Wimpey asserting that the neighbouring fields would be gifted to Lydiard Tregoze they have in fact chosen the most sensitive field out of this group to build on, and should the development go ahead, it will set a precedent for other development right up to the boundaries of the RPG at Lydiard Park elsewhere which is a sobering and unwelcome prospect. It was also unclear whether this 'gift' would have any covenants or limitations.

The Gardens Trust strongly **OBJECTS** to this proposal that would clearly harm heritage assets with very strong community value locally. We would be grateful if Wiltshire Council would please notify us of all developments regarding this site so that we may make further comments.

Yours sincerely,

Margie Hoffnung
Conservation Officer

¹ The Buildings of Wiltshire, 1981, p31