

## Local Lists of Parks and Gardens of Special Interest in Local Authority Areas

### **The national 'Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Importance in England'**

Historic parks and gardens, perhaps more so than buildings, are a fragile and finite resource: they can easily be damaged beyond repair or lost forever. Today there is a national 'Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Importance in England', compiled by Historic England, which identifies sites of particular historic importance. Registered sites are now included within the 'National Heritage List for England' of all nationally-designated heritage assets and accessible on line at [www.historicengland.org.uk](http://www.historicengland.org.uk). The purpose of the Register is to raise awareness of their value with owners and managers and to safeguard their key features if change is contemplated.

The 'Register' comprises designed landscapes; it is concerned with their more permanent elements such as landform, built structures, walks and rides, water features, structural shrubberies, hedges and trees rather than ephemeral, shorter-lived plantings of herbaceous perennials, annuals, roses, and most shrubs. Sites comprise landscape parks and gardens, other planned open spaces such as town squares, public parks, cemeteries and hospital grounds.

### **The development of local lists of parks and gardens**

Through its advisory body on heritage, Historic England (HE), the government has been in discussion with local authorities over developing the concept of lists of locally important heritage assets. These are defined as sites that are important at a local rather than national level. According to the National Planning Policy Framework (2012), planning authorities must set out 'a positive strategy for the conservation and enjoyment of the historic environment' in their Local Plan. Heritage assets should be conserved 'in a manner appropriate to their significance.' 'Local planning authorities should have up-to-date evidence about the historic environment in their area and use it to assess the significance of heritage assets and the contribution they make to their environment.' [NPPF, para 169]. In the NPPF definition of 'heritage asset' this 'includes designated heritage assets and assets identified by the local planning authority (including local listing).' So, if a site is on the local list, there shouldn't be a technical argument as to whether it is a heritage asset or not.

Lists are non-statutory, i.e. they represent a *voluntary* agreement between local authorities and their communities and therefore, while a good way of achieving greater recognition for local heritage assets, they offer potentially limited protection. Currently lists are building-biased but this has the potential to

change, and could be hugely helped by the influence and input of county gardens trusts at a local level. Government guidance set out in Planning Policy Statement 5 (known as PPS5) is set to change this as it encompasses the full scope of heritage assets - buildings, monuments, special places, and of course parks, gardens and designed spaces and landscapes.

Over 50% of local planning authorities now have some form of local list. The majority of local lists of parks and gardens of historic interest have been prepared by County Garden Trusts although often with assistance and funding from local authorities.

### **Potential benefits of local listing of park and gardens**

Although local parks and gardens generally won't meet criteria for national status they will contribute as much to a district or borough's cultural history as its buildings and archaeology; they are highly valued by their owners, by local communities and by visitors; many owners generously share their heritage through opening to the public through the National Gardens Scheme.

If owners or managers lack the knowledge or understanding of a site's design, the outcome can often be inappropriate change, management and maintenance - or no maintenance at all. Key features will decay or be damaged; views become blocked by self-sown trees, waterworks no longer function and structural surfaces of paths and garden buildings become subject to damp, cracking and even collapse.

At the heart of local listing is a push to improve access to clear, comprehensive and current information about the local historic environment. This will involve ensuring that the information contained on local lists is publicly available, best achieved by migrating information onto the Historic Environment Record for the area.

A local list forms part of what is referred to in the Local Plan as the 'evidence base', which is used to inform planning policy. Under the National Planning Policy Framework, the presence of a heritage asset on a local list signifies that its conservation, and that of its setting, should be a consideration in decisions affecting it.

### **In developing a local list, a local authority will therefore benefit from:**

- An up-to-date and robustly selected list of historic, designed parks, gardens and open spaces which will strengthen the role of local heritage assets as a material consideration in deciding the outcome of planning decisions.
- Site descriptions accompanied by well-researched and accurately-recorded site descriptions with supporting reference material.
- A list that can form part of the schedule of designated sites within a local authority's area for the evidence base of its Local Plan and that is capable of being updated and amended as and when new information becomes available.

- Additional contextual information for informing the selection and/or extent of associated designations such as conservation areas, listed buildings, scheduled monuments and tree preservation orders.
- Information on designed historic parks, gardens and open spaces in an electronic and accessible format to meet E-gov requirements
- A robust methodology for the survey, description and appraisal of sites capable of endorsement by statutory and non-statutory consultees.

### **County Garden Trusts will benefit from:**

- An opportunity for Trust members to have their research acknowledged and put to real, practical use in the planning process
- An opportunity to hone personal knowledge and skills or gain new ones while contributing to something of lasting benefit
- Completed site reports which can be entered on a local authority's Historic Environment Record (HER) and on [www.parksandgardens.org](http://www.parksandgardens.org) to provide a permanent and widely-accessible resource for learning about park and garden heritage both in the local area and nationally.

### **Working with your Local Authority on a local list**

Many local authorities do not yet have local lists, and those that do are probably based on a range of different criteria. The focus of these lists is likely to be buildings and possibly archaeological sites with very few including designed landscapes, parks and gardens, reflecting the low level of knowledge and skills in this area of those compiling the lists. CGTs are therefore in a strong position to influence this to positive effect for the conservation of local designed landscapes.

Talk to your local authority to ask whether they have a local list or not. Approach either your conservation officer or strategic planning officers who are responsible for producing local plans. Conservation officers are likely to be supportive of the idea of local lists but be aware that in the current state of local authority funding, you may have to fight hard to get such an initiative off the ground. Another way in might be to approach your local councilor(s) to see whether they would support officers getting involved in local listing in the light of HE's guidance. Your support might make a considerable difference.

You might find that linking up with other amenity societies with an interest in the historic environment such as a building preservation trust makes a stronger case for developing a list. As described, significant buildings often had a relating designed landscape – there is a case to be made for the whole to be conserved.

Your CGT might wish to develop some suggested draft criteria, based on those in HE's guidance, for local listing of designed landscapes. These could be offered to the local authority as a starting point for discussions but should not be rigidly fought for as local authority officers need to be fully part of the process. However, making an approach with draft criteria demonstrates a pro-active approach and may represent a very welcome 'helping hand' in a process that can seem daunting to time-poor local authority officers for whom designed landscapes may not be their specialism.

If your CGT has developed a priority list of sites for potential local listing then ensure that it is evident from the information you submit why it is locally significant. You may wish to divide your list into 'Definite', 'Probable' and 'Not

sure' or similar and discuss these further once criteria have been firmly agreed. Your local authority is being encouraged to work with volunteers so it would be worth discussing your intentions at an early stage – they may well be able to help with maps and other resources, or possibly even funding.

### **How local lists should work**

HE have published 'Local Heritage Listing Advice Note 7'. This explains how the process of local listing might be managed, including how the public could be involved in selection, what sorts of sites are appropriate and how to get them onto local lists. You can download a copy from the Hub or <https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/local-heritage-listing-advice-note-7/>

Local authorities generally adopt an approach of either developing the list themselves, or inviting anyone to nominate a park or garden, building or structure for inclusion on a local list. There is often a nomination form online. The kind of information required to accompany a site's nomination may include:

- Up-to-date photographs
- Historical photographs/illustrations
- Maps (past and present)
- Information on its historical relationship to the local area
- Information on its architectural merit and design
- Information on any historical association to famous local people, local historic events, strong community or social development. This must be well documented.

You may be asked to set out clearly how you think the asset meets the criteria for local designation (see below), providing evidence in support your view. You may also be asked to provide details of any current substantiated threats (risks) to the asset, such as pre-application planning discussions or intent to demolish, remove or substantially alter. This enables an authority to prioritise any assessment. A local authority is likely to consult an owner whose site is nominated as part of the assessment.

### **Local List Criteria**

Although the criteria used for national designation (*those for designed parks and gardens are attached as an appendix to this handout*) are readily available on the HE website and are adaptable for local list use, it is usually necessary to develop location-specific criteria to ensure heritage assets of community value have been identified.

The HE guidance suggests starting out from the preparation of "an overarching statement setting out local historic distinctiveness" – a local area's "statement of significance". This is an opportunity to tease out specifically local characteristics and influences such as local industries, agricultural practices or trades, or the impact of particular geological formations which have affected how a particular locality has developed. This could be a useful starting point and will help distinguish those heritage assets which are of specifically local significance.

Below are suggested criteria, derived from those already "commonly applied" as proposed in the current HE guidance. The definitions the guidance offers are

somewhat brief so we have suggested some further questions on how to apply them to a potential site (in italics).

### **Local List Selection Criteria**

#### **1. Age**

The age of an asset may be an important criterion, and the age range can be adjusted to take into account distinctive local characteristics or building traditions.

*Does it represent an important element in the development of the area?*

#### **2. Rarity**

Appropriate for all assets, as judged against local characteristics.

*a) Does it remain in a substantial and recognizable form?*

*b) Does it retain its historic features and layouts?*

#### **3. Aesthetic Interest**

The intrinsic design value of an asset relating to local styles, materials or any other distinctive local characteristics.

*a) Does it show qualities of age, style or distinctive characteristics relative to the area?*

#### **4. Group Value**

Groupings of assets with a clear visual design or historic relationship.

*e.g a number of public parks and gardens designed by a local Parks superintendent together might demonstrate his range of work, even though some may not be worth listing in their own right.*

#### **5. Archaeological Interest**

The local heritage asset may provide evidence about past human activity in the locality, which may be archaeological – that is in the form of buried remains – but may also be revealed in the structure of buildings or in a manmade landscape. Heritage assets with archaeological interest are the primary source of evidence about the substance and evolution of places, and of the people and cultures that made them.

*e.g some designed landscapes will have garden archaeology of relevance to their development*

#### **6. Archival Interest**

The significance of a local heritage asset of any kind may be enhanced by a significant contemporary or historic written record.

*e.g. Does a site have an extensive archive, in either private or public ownership?*

*Is it well documented in local travel guides or journals?*

## **7. Historical Association**

The significance of a local heritage asset of any kind may be enhanced by a significant historical association of local or national note, including links to important local figures. Blue Plaque and other similar schemes may be relevant.

- a) Does it relate to an important aspect of local social, cultural, religious, political or economic history?*
- b) Is it historically associated with an important local feature?*
- c) Is it closely associated with: famous local people, local historic events, strong community or social development, significance or people? (Must be well documented)*
- d) Does it relate closely to any statutorily protected structure or site?*

## **8. Designed Landscape Interest**

The interest attached to locally important historic designed landscapes, parks and gardens which may relate to their design or social history. This may complement a local green space designation, which provides special protection against development for green areas of particular importance to local communities for their current use.

- a) Is the surviving building/structure/park or garden the work of a particular architect or designer which illustrates local or regional architectural history or design?*

## **9. Landmark Status**

An asset with strong communal or historical associations, or because it has especially striking aesthetic value, may be singled out as a landmark within the local scene.

- a) Does it provide an important visual amenity locally? For instance, does it make interesting use of visually significant sites and form a landmark?*
- b) Is it a notable building(s) on an important route into the area, which creates a vista or contributes to the skyline? Does it emphasise corner sites or provide focal points in the townscape?*

## **10. Social and Communal Value**

Relating to places perceived as a source of local identity, distinctiveness, social interaction and coherence; often residing in intangible aspects of heritage contributing to the "collective memory" of a place.

Originally written by Virginia Hinze and Verena McCaig for the Historic Landscapes Project 2011, revised July 2012 and February 2017.

## APPENDIX 1

### **National criteria: how sites are selected by Historic England for the national 'Register of Parks and Gardens'**

Historic England already has in place a set of criteria to select parks and gardens for inclusion on the national 'Register' which has been tried and tested over the last 20 years or so. These are applied together with expert and extensive knowledge of the country's historic parks and gardens as a whole, to ensure that decisions are consistent. The criteria are based on the premise that the older the surviving features of a site the rarer that type of site is likely to be, although other factors are considered.

Most local lists of parks and gardens have either used these as they stand or in a slightly adapted form. Below is a summary of HE's nine criteria with some notes on how they are applied.

#### **Age and registration:**

The first 5 criteria are related to the age of a site; they comprise a set of date bands which broadly mirror the main trends in the history of the development of gardening and landscape design. A park or garden where the surviving design and layout is particularly old (early 18th century or older) is rare and therefore likely in itself to be sufficiently 'special' to be registered. Designed landscapes less than 30 years old are unlikely to be considered unless they are of outstanding importance and under threat.

- Sites with a main phase of development before 1750 where at least a proportion of the layout of this date is still evident, even perhaps only as an earthwork.
- Sites with a main phase of development laid out between 1750 and 1820 where enough of this landscaping survives to reflect the original design.
- Sites with a main phase of development between 1820 and 1880 which is of importance and survives intact or relatively intact.
- Sites with a main phase of development between 1880 and 1939 where this is of high importance and survives intact.
- Sites with a main phase of development laid out post-war, but more than 30 years ago, where the work is of exceptional importance.

Broadly, the more recent the structure of a park or garden the more likely it is to have survived. These more common survivors will undergo a more rigorous selection process to be nationally recognised and will have to demonstrate that they have something in particular that makes them 'special'; this is where the last four criteria come into play:

- Sites which were influential in the development of taste whether through reputation or references in literature.
- Sites which are early or representative examples of a style of layout or a type of site or the work of a designer (amateur or professional) of national importance.
- Sites having an association with significant persons or historical events.
- Sites with a strong group value.

**Influential sites, major designers and good standard examples:**

The added 'extra' could be that the park or garden has been laid out by a nationally famous designer, that it became famous or well-regarded in its day, or that it had a strong influence in changing fashions. It could also be that the site is a very good example of its type.

**Associations:**

Close and direct associations with nationally important people or events can make a site more historically interesting than its layout alone suggests. In such a case, we consider the importance of the person or event, and the importance of the park or garden in relation to the person's life and work, or in relation to the event in question. To be eligible for registration, there must be a direct link between a site and a person or event, and this must be reflected in the actual layout of the site itself.

**Group value:**

When a park or garden is of historic interest, but not sufficiently so to merit registration in its own right, it may still be registered if it provides strong group value with buildings, with other land, or with a group of other 'registerable' sites, providing this link is in itself of special historic interest. The setting of a major historic building might, for example, be carefully designed to form a piece with that building; alternatively, one or more gardens might form an important element within a fine example of town planning.

**Other considerations:**

**Multi-phases:** while the '*Register*' criteria might suggest that parks and gardens were laid out within a given date-band, with little change after that time, the reverse is more the case. Most will be multi-phased, having developed as a series of additions or alterations as needs and fashions changed, with each phase of varied impact on the landscape and degree of interest. With such sites, it is the sum of the developments as seen in the landscape today which is considered.

**Documentation:** good surviving documentation – archives and published material – also add to our understanding of a site and can contribute to its special interest.

**Condition:** the Register is concerned with sites as they survive today so no matter how important a site once was, if it no longer exists, having been lost for example to irreversible development such as housing, it will not be registered. However, if a site is in poor condition, provided its overall design or layout remains sufficiently intact, it may still qualify for registration.