

Responding to Planning Applications affecting Historic Designed Landscapes: What could County Gardens Trusts do to Be Prepared?

The following are practical ideas that could help your CGT be better prepared to regularly address issues of planning control. You don't need to rush to do them all at once! Do prioritise according to your CGT resources - you might need to start with a tight focus and gradually build on this. Remember - you can divide tasks down to be a very small part of the whole process and this might mean that other volunteers might pick up these small, specific tasks. These are just some of the ways you might tackle this, to get you started - you might well think of others.

1. Things to do straightaway, even if you do nothing else!

- i. Talk to your CGT Committee about this issue. Make them aware you are interested and want to take it forward.
- ii. Make contact with the Gardens Trust's Conservation Officer, Margie Hoffnung, via margiehoffnung@thegardenstrust.org. She is working closely with CGTs on planning applications.
- iii. Make sure that your CGT is receiving the weekly list from the Gardens Trust (it lists planning applications relating to historic landscapes, mainly but not exclusively Registered ones) and that it is being forwarded on to the right contacts in your CGT - it is not definitive but is nevertheless a good starting point for your work commenting on applications. This is sent out by Alison Allighan, the GT's Conservation Casework Manager - you can contact her at conservation@thegardenstrust.org.
- iv. With the help or support of your CGT Committee, compose a suitable generic paragraph on the work of your CGT and the capacity in which the letter is submitted - this can then be used for each letter sent. You could even draft a template for the whole letter, indicating what should be included in each paragraph and ensuring that details such as dates and reference numbers aren't missed out. There are suggested template letters for this on the HLP Resource Hub at www.thegardenstrust.org. You may also wish to refer to the GT's *The Planning System in England and the Protection of Historic Parks and Gardens* (2016) for a wording on CGTs' relationship with the GT as a statutory consultee.
- v. Become familiar with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) document. If it seems daunting, focus on definitions and Section 12 which particularly addresses the historic environment, picking out the key paragraphs to reference in your responses to applications. Refer to the HLP Handout of NPPF extracts, at the Resource Hub on www.thegardenstrust.org.



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- vi. Ask the Gardens Trust to send you copies of its publication *The Planning System in England and the Protection of Historic Parks and Gardens* (2016), and forward these on to planning and conservation staff in your local planning authority, with a letter introducing your CGT. This is also available electronically at www.thegardenstrust.org.

2. Things you could do as an individual

- i. Start to compile a folder of national, county and Local Planning Authority (LPA) level **resources** and information that could be useful in responding to applications – the foyers of council offices usually have an excellent range of information leaflets on such topics as conservation areas, tree preservation orders etc which have been written specifically to be digestible by non-planning professionals and reflect local approaches where applicable. There are also excellent resources on the web for downloading.
- ii. **Bookmark useful interactive planning websites** as you find them so that you don't waste time hunting for that elusive but very useful tip, including your LPAs' planning web pages.
- iii. Spend an hour or so **browsing through past and current applications online** getting an idea of the papers that developers submit, the content of responses that planning officers give (crucial in getting an idea of the basis of planning decisions), and, particularly, the responses given by other consultees – this latter is often brief and reflects a particular interest group – it can give you an idea of how others approach managing their responses.
- iv. Register to receive **Planning Portal** news updates – these are fast to scan for potentially relevant news and also report on significant cases – you really don't have to read the whole thing! <https://www.planningportal.co.uk/>
- v. Get to know the main areas of **designation** in your county e.g. AONBs, National Parks, Conservation Areas, Registered Parks and Gardens (especially Grade II and those considered At Risk). You could use the DEFRA MAGIC website to do this - <http://magic.defra.gov.uk/>
- vi. Make sure you have access to **modern OS maps** (Landranger or similar) of your geographic areas of interest to give you a wider view of development areas. You can access these on line adequately for this purpose via <http://maps.nls.uk/os/>.
- vii. Build your own **jargon-busting** sheet for easy reference.
- viii. Keep an eye on **Planning Aid** (<http://www.rtpi.org.uk/planning-aid>) to see if they maintain their training events diary for interesting update seminars delivered by planning professionals, aimed at opening up the planning process to a wider audience.
- ix. Also keep an eye on the **Campaign to Protect Rural England** (CPRE) website - <http://www.cpre.org.uk/> - as they are funded well to produce resources for non-planning professionals and their information is clearly laid out. You might want to undertake their 'on-line' training course in responding to planning – it takes about half an hour.

3. Things that you could do with support from your CGT (Committee level or similar)

- i. Have a copy of the list of actual and *potential* **historic designed landscapes in your county**, either as prepared by your CGT or as part of the Historic Landscape Project. It is easier to use if the entries are sorted according to LPA for this purpose.
- ii. If at all possible, make sure sites are making their way on to the **Parks & Gardens UK** database (www.parksandgardens.org), even in skeletal form, as this has had implications in planning decisions in the past as to whether a landscape is considered important or not.
- iii. Continue, or indeed start, to work with your CGT's researchers to identify sites for potential local listing or to submit them to the **Historic Environment Record (HER)** – make sure they know the importance for conservation purposes of having good quality information available on the HER and significant features of the landscape highlighted.
- iv. Consider moving towards the inclusion of a **statement of significance** as part of researchers' reports – there is guidance for this on the HLP Resource Hub at www.thegardenstrust.org – this can make a big difference when considering whether a planning application will impact on the significance of a site. See also Historic England Register entries on the Heritage List from 2011 which include a version of this (<https://www.historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list>).
- v. Talk to your CGT researchers about ensuring that **site maps include key vistas and views**.
- vi. Ask your CGT researchers whether the existence of a **Conservation Management Plan or Historic Landscape Assessment** has arisen in the course of their research.
- vii. Consider whether to build an **e-mail circulation list** that could support those responding to planning applications by quickly checking whether there are members of your CGT who know the site in question and could then highlight issues quite quickly.
- viii. Find out who in your CGT membership are also members of **Parish Councils**. This could be done via a CGT newsletter or similar. This will help in flagging up important planning applications as the Parish Council are informed by the LPA. Also, they might get involved in Neighbourhood Plans which you will want to ensure include information on the historic environment.
- ix. If your CGT doesn't already have a **Conservation Sub-group** or similar to consider planning applications, consider setting one up, or moving towards that – even if you start with 2 people this can be the seed to draw other volunteers in, and can act as a focus to increase your profile with, and support from, planning officers and conservation officers. Make sure you inform your LPAs of your group's existence over time – they might be prepared to help more.
- x. If you have existing knowledgeable volunteers working to respond to planning applications, make sure that **new members** have the opportunity to be mentored by these members to ensure that skills are passed on and that the group is sustainable. Remember: new members don't have to be ex-professionals

in the field; new members could learn new skills from existing members and training courses.

- xi. Make meetings accessible by **avoiding jargon** unless explained at the outset – or have jargon-busting sheets readily available – and ensure that references to past cases and LPA officers are explained rather than assumptions made that everyone there knows the ‘whats’, ‘whys’ and ‘whos’.
- xii. **Talk to other CGTs** in your region to see how they have tackled these issues and how, if at all, they have managed to engage with their LPAs, and involved CGT volunteers – you could use the HLP’s email group, or Meet Ups for this purpose.
- xiii. If necessary, **identify the barriers** that are preventing your CGT from fully addressing this area and raise these with the main Committee for discussion – it might take time to address these but it is better to be clear about what the issues are that need to be addressed and plan accordingly.
- xiv. Keep planning issues as a regular item in your **CGT’s newsletter** (the GHS does this effectively for its members through their newsletters – have a look at these – and there are examples on the CGT Web Forum), demonstrating what can be addressed and continuing to highlight large and small ways in which volunteers can support this area of the CGT’s work. For example, if you have CGT volunteers covering 4 out of 7 LPAs, ask specifically for members to come forward in LPA areas not covered.
- xv. If you manage to ferret out a **planning officer** who appears to be able to make planning issues dynamic and interesting, invite them to speak to your CGT (but ask them to avoid too much jargon!).
- xvi. Make contact with the **National Amenity Societies** listed at www.heritagehelp.org.uk and let them know that you are interested in working with them on planning applications and other conservation matters.
- xvii. Develop a list of **local amenity societies** who might have similar conservation interests and let them know that your CGT is interested in responding to planning applications – consider ways in which you can exchange information more easily or flag up potentially worrisome applications. You do not, of course, always have to agree with their view of an application.
- xviii. Keep a **log of applications** investigated by your CGT, whether the outcome was to object fully or partially, to support the application, *or to choose not to respond*. Send your ‘log’ entries to the GT for their Casework Log, via conservation@thegardenstrust.org. This will then feed into the annual national Heritage Counts survey, provide statistics as to the level of CGTs’ input to the planning system, and in future provide a useful record of the approaches we have taken to development proposals.

4. **Approaching Planning at a Local Planning Authority Level (with the support of your CGT Committee or similar)**

- i. **Contact each LPA** in your county and ask to meet a planning officer/manager (you can of course do this gradually and prioritise the ones you know to be most user-friendly and engaged). Make sure you give them a copy of the GT's publication *The Planning System in England and the Protection of Historic Parks and Gardens* (2016) – the Gardens Trust can send you printed copies, or it is available online at www.thegardenstrust.org
- ii. Draw up a priority list to target LPAs (e.g. perhaps according to already having a foot in the door; perhaps on the basis of clusters of historic landscapes) – don't forget National Park authorities and AONBs too
- iii. Ask for your CGT to be added to the list of consultees – discuss under what criteria for applications this might be appropriate e.g. locally listed sites, in-garden developments, non-designated country estates etc
- iv. See if your LPAs offer any support to help get communities involved with planning consultations
- v. Ask if there are any Neighbourhood Plans being developed in the area and explain the importance of ensuring that your CGT is consulted to make sure historic designed landscapes are included
- vi. Discuss the process of getting more involved e.g. this might take time to build up so some forbearance from the LPA would help - not replying to every application shouldn't denote a lack of CGT interest!
- vii. Check that you are working with the current approved planning policy documents for your LPA i.e. do they now have an approved Local Plan?
- viii. Discuss which might be the key planning documents and clauses that they think you could rely on in responding to planning applications
- ix. Ask for feedback on the consultation response letters from your CGT as you get started, and even if your CGT has been responding for a while – do they contain the sort of information that your planning officer finds useful? Are they succinct enough?
- x. As your CGT experience in planning develops, you could request to be involved in pre-application discussions where appropriate, particularly on major developments.
- xi. Join the **LPA's Local Plan** mailing list for updates on the status of your Local Plan (usually straight-forward via your LPA's website) so that you can monitor progress more easily and prepare to respond when documents come up for further consultation.
- xii. **Comment on your LPA's Local Plan** when consultation opportunities arise to make sure that it contains the level of focus that you want on landscapes, giving you the sort of clauses you want to be able to rely on when considering planning applications in the future – you can take advice on this by talking to your local planning officers and conservation officers. Whilst this might take some investment of time now, it could save anguish in the future. There is guidance on

this in the CPRE booklet *Planning Explained* (November 2011), available as a free online download at <http://www.cpre.org.uk/resources/housing-and-planning/planning/item/2654-planning-explained>.

- xiii. Consider **'sharing out' the lead on your LPAs** with other CGT conservation volunteers so that the responsibility for checking planning lists isn't quite so onerous

Remember – you don't have to know everything about the planning system in order to respond to planning applications – keep it in perspective and build your experience gradually.

Historic Landscape Project
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