

Working with Local Planning Authorities

Many local planning authorities have cut their conservation staff in recent years, and those Conservation Officers who remain are often part-time and under-resourced and will really appreciate your support. Many will not necessarily have specialist knowledge of historic designed landscapes and will rely on research and site-specific information which can be provided by County Gardens Trusts (CGTs). The planning teams also have a crucial role to play in protecting historic parks and gardens but do not have specialist knowledge of these heritage assets.

Many LPAs may be unaware of the existence of a CGT in their area, so it's up to you to let them know who you are, what you do and how you can help in the planning system. Make yourselves as visible as you can and get to know your Local Planning Authority – the Gardens Trust's (GT) 'The Planning System in England and the Protection of Historic Parks and Gardens' leaflet will give you a good excuse to introduce yourselves!

What you can do:

Get on LPA mailing lists

As the Gardens Trust is a statutory consultee in the planning system, LPAs are obliged to notify it of planning applications affecting Registered landscapes on the National Heritage List, and these consultations are then passed on to the CGTs via a weekly list. If you wish to be added to this list, or to add a CGT colleague, please contact the Gardens Trust at conservation@thegardenstrust.org. In addition to notifying the GT, it would be expedient if LPAs also notified a named conservation contact at their local CGT, allowing you maximum time to assess any planning applications in your area. This could also apply to non-registered landscapes and landscapes identified on Local Lists that CGTs may have an interest in. CGTs have a unique and crucial role to play in the protection of historic parks and gardens that are not nationally designated, as these will not be looked at by either Historic England or the Gardens Trust. Your local authority website should have details of how to sign up for planning notifications by email, or contact the planning department to enquire. To promote a professional image, allow for succession in your conservation committee and to protect your personal data, it is good practice to set up a generic email address to which these notifications can be sent, which can also be the address used to submit planning responses, e.g. conservation@xxxgardenstrust.org.uk.

Contribute research to Historic Environment Records

By ensuring your research reports are available on the Historic Environment Record (HER), your research will have a real conservation value. Developers need to consult the HER before making a planning application and will therefore be aware of the significance of the landscape they are dealing with, as will LA conservation officers. The Historic Landscape Project Officers (HLPOs) are in regular contact with HER Officers through the regional and national HER forums, so HER Officers understand the role of CGTs and are aware of the research being carried out and of how CGTs can contribute to the HER. If you have not already contacted your local HER Officer, contact details are available on the Heritage Gateway (<http://www.heritagegateway.org.uk/gateway/chr/default.aspx>) and HLPOs can provide additional support to CGTs to arrange a meeting if required.



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Provide Statements of Significance

Significance is defined as the 'value of a heritage asset to this and future generations because of its heritage interest' (National Planning Policy Framework), and takes into account historic, archaeological, artistic and architectural interest. The relative importance of these interests is determined both within a site and by comparing it with other parks and gardens, and a conclusion drawn as to the site's significance, which is written up as a Statement of Significance. This is what Conservation Officers are looking for to help in decision-making, particularly if they do not have the time to read a full research report to extract the significance of a site for themselves. Statements of Significance are also useful when composing responses to planning applications and it is helpful to have gone through the process of writing them in advance. Training on Significance is provided by the HLP and training materials are available on the HLP Resource Hub, together with other useful information, including examples of Statements of Significance (<http://thegardenstrust.org/conservation/hlp-hub/>).

Compile Local Lists

Local lists play an essential role in building and reinforcing a sense of local character and distinctiveness in the historic environment by identifying heritage assets of local value that have not necessarily been awarded national designation. They ensure the proper validation and recording of local heritage assets and enable the significance of any site on the list to be better taken into account in planning applications affecting the heritage asset or its setting. CGTs can offer to assist in drawing up a Local List if one does not already exist, or make sure that the landscapes you know to be significant are included on existing Local Lists, which can then be fed into the Local Plan and included in local policy.

Know your Local Plan

Familiarising yourself with the policy that decisions are based on and being able to relate your comments/objections directly to the Local Plan and National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) will add weight to your planning responses. Keep an eye on the process for drafting new Local Plans, as you should be able to comment on them and ensure that they include robust policies for protecting historic designed landscapes in the context of local development opportunities and constraints. Information on Local Plans will be available on your local authority website.

Provide pre-application advice

By developing a good relationship with your LPA you are more likely to be consulted pre-application and can intervene before any detrimental proposals are submitted. You may also get a brilliant opportunity to get to know other expert practitioners through collaborating at a meeting or site visit. This could involve Historic England representatives, Natural England staff, Conservation Officers, Arboriculturalists, Ecology Consultants and Architects, who could well prove to be valuable contacts in the future. By signing up to receive planning notifications from your local authority, you may get the opportunity to get involved in the pre-application process, but it is much better to develop contacts within the planning department who are aware of the value of your CGT's contribution and will want you on board.

Lobby your Heritage Champion

Many local authorities have a nominated Heritage Champion, who is an elected member. It could be of great benefit to make contact and raise awareness with him/her of the threats facing historic designed landscapes, of the importance of identifying a local list of heritage assets, and of the work carried out by CGTs. Consult your local authority website to establish who is the named Heritage Champion for your area and make contact. There is more information on the role of the Heritage Champion on the HLP Resource Hub (<http://thegardenstrust.org/conservation/hlp-hub/>).

Contribute to Neighbourhood Plans

Neighbourhood planning is a way for communities to decide the future of the places where they live. Once adopted, a neighbourhood plan becomes part of the local statutory development plan and forms the basis for determining planning applications in that area. Get involved with the Parish Council, or get to know someone else who is already involved, so that you can keep up-to-date with local issues and ensure that landscape issues are not overlooked.

Attend a HELM event

The Historic Environment Local Management (HELM) training programme is run by Historic England and provides training on managing the historic environment for local authorities, regional agencies and national organisations, free of charge. The 'Management of Historic Parks, Gardens and Cemeteries' HELM event, which takes place at various locations around the country, is a great opportunity to meet LA staff and others involved in the conservation of historic designed landscapes and to explore subjects including assessing significance and the impact of local and national designation on the management of designed landscapes. (<https://historicengland.org.uk/services-skills/training-skills/helmtraining>)

Make friends!

Invite Conservation Officers and other LPA staff to HLP events, or plan your own get-together and invite interested parties from LPAs and other organisations. This will provide a great opportunity for everyone to network, get to know each other and build effective working relationships. In some circumstances, the HLP may be able to help by brokering or attending meetings to set up such relationships.

Remember there is lots of further information relating to conservation and planning available on the HLP Resource Hub including training material, handouts and published guidance from Historic England (<http://thegardenstrust.org/conservation/hlp-hub/>).

Historic Landscape Project
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