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Research - Conserve - Campaign

11th April 2017

Lee Cook Esq
Norwich City Council
City Hall
St Peter's Street
Norwich NR21 1NH

Dear Mr Cook,

**Ref : 17/00485/NF3 : 3 No. all-weather hard courts with floodlighting.
Heigham Park, The Avenues, Norwich.**

Thank you for consulting The Gardens Trust in its role as Statutory Consultee with regard to proposed development affecting a site included by Historic England on their Register of Parks & Gardens, as per the above application.

I have read the documentation online and the aim of providing affordable and up-to-date tennis facilities for Norwich is entirely laudable. The related Planning Statement (PS) for this application informs us that there are several additional sites within Norwich with tennis facilities available for upgrading. The Historic England register entry for Heigham states that the park was the first of five purpose-built public parks created in the 1920s/30s within Norwich, designed by Captain A. Sandys-Winch, a protégé of Thomas Mawson, which included tennis courts and bowling greens for public use. The Institute of Landscape Architects awarded him a special fellowship (apparently one of only 30 at the time), in recognition of his achievements in laying out the Norwich Parks, so it is clear that his work was held in extremely high esteem by his contemporaries. However, contrary to Simon Meek's statement (PS para 4, p4) the Gardens Trust considers that the proposals for Heigham Park do not respect the historic status of this Grade II registered park. The Heritage Statement does not convince the Gardens Trust that the design intent of the original park was considered in any way when the new plans were drawn up. The most important feature of Sandys-Winch's design is the long vista along the central westward path from the former rose garden, leading through gates (the decorative sunflower gates¹ mentioned in the HE Register entry are now unfortunately no longer in situ) by the grass tennis courts, culminating in the pavilion as the focal point at the far end. The three north/south oriented proposed hard tennis courts are to be built directly over this central path/vista, totally obliterating it and at one stroke, destroying the design intent and significance/setting of the whole park. If this scheme goes ahead, the Garden Trust

¹ The sunflower gates would not have been there from the beginning: they were part of an extraordinary iron pagoda that was erected in Chapel Field Gardens in the Nineteenth Century and demolished after the Second World War, c.1948.

considers it would result in substantial harm to the registered heritage asset. The addition of 7m lighting masts for night-time use, further detracts from the original intent. The current grass tennis courts contribute substantially to the sense of tranquility of Heigham Park, an oasis within an urban area. All-weather courts, fencing and lighting would alter the character of the park when viewed from the Avenues, changing its character considerably. Any additional requirement for parking would exacerbate this, as Heigham lacks a car park. The grass verges beneath the trees are already eroded by car parking. This not only affects the tree root zones but the verges will deteriorate further if parking levels increase. The public toilet provision is inadequate and greater usage of the park will necessitate additional facilities, further affecting the settling and significance of this important heritage asset.

Since there are other sites within the city which also have tennis facilities, would it perhaps be possible to reduce the number of courts at Heigham to two and rotate the orientation of the courts east/west, retain the central vista and have one on either side of the central pathway instead? It would be preferable if a border of grass could be retained between the two new courts, so that grass continues to lead the eye up to the pavilion and grass surrounds to the courts. The Gardens Trust appreciates that sporting facilities such as these do need upgrading to be suitable for today's environment, but the proposals online as they stand would in our view be entirely detrimental. A compromise in which the historic design intent is recognized whilst adapting the tennis facilities for the 21st century, might be a better solution? It is unfortunate that if the current grass courts are swept away, there will be no grass tennis left in Norwich at all, and therefore the historic link would be severed for good. At one stage Norwich had over ninety grass tennis courts and Heigham Park, and before the park, Heigham Playing Fields, contained some of the earliest public courts. I could not find anything on the Lawn Tennis Association's website about their policies for new tennis courts within historic landscapes but from the evidence of this application, the heritage aspect has not been considered at all in the drawing up of plans.

There are several paragraphs within NPPF which this application completely ignores. No account seems to have been taken of Para 129 which relates to the impact of a proposal upon a heritage asset, Para 132 where weight should be given to the conservation of a heritage asset and also Para 133 which requires that where a proposed development will lead to substantial harm to a designated heritage asset, LPAs should refuse consent.

The Gardens Trust **OBJECTS** to the above application for the reasons stated. We would be glad to be kept informed of the outcome.

Yours sincerely,

Margie Hoffnung
Conservation Officer