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The Gardens Trust urges UK Government to reconsider proposal to remove statutory consultee status

The Gardens Trust is urging the UK Government to reconsider removing its status as a statutory consultee within the English planning system.

The UK Government announced plans on 10 March to remove the role of the Gardens Trust as a statutory consultee on planning applications. If enacted this will remove the ability to help safeguard the nation's historic parks and gardens and will put these irreplaceable cultural assets at greater risk of loss or destruction.

Local Planning Authorities are currently required to consult the Gardens Trust on planning applications that might affect sites on the statutory Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest. This ensures an appropriate level of protection alongside positive development. The Gardens Trust receives an annual grant, currently £42,000, from the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) to fulfil its role. This funding ensures that expert, technical advice is provided to decision makers across England.

Linden Groves, Head of Operations & Strategy at the Gardens Trust said:

"We are deeply concerned by the Government's plans to remove our role as a statutory consultee. If enacted, this reform will threaten significant and well-loved historic parks and gardens across the UK. Our nation is famous and envied across the world for our rich living legacy of historic parks and gardens created over many centuries".

Historic parks and gardens include: globally iconic 'English Landscapes' such as Stowe, Buckinghamshire, Painshill, Surrey and Stourhead, Wiltshire, internationally acclaimed gardens such as Great Dixter, Sussex, or Sissinghurst, Kent; public parks like Wicksteed Park, Northamptonshire, Birkenhead Park, Merseyside and Hyde Park, London; community hubs such as Blaise Castle, Bristol and Stoney Road Allotments, Coventry; places of remembrance such as Highgate Cemetery, London; institutional landscapes such as the Royal Hospital, Chelsea and seaside gardens such as the Marine Gardens, Clacton. More recent additions to the Register include post-war colleges, housing developments, office complexes and greenspace within New Towns. Many are 'everyday' places to come together, exercise and celebrate, including local parks and playgrounds.

The Gardens Trust is consulted on around 1800 planning applications per year and provide positive and constructive advice – typically, over 90% of its responses do not object to proposed development. Far from being a 'blocker' in the planning system, it is eager to support sustainable development. The Gardens Trust's work ensures nature, heritage and local communities are considered in the planning of new developments, and it urges the Government to reconsider plans which would remove this essential scrutiny from the process.

President Dominic Cole BA DipLA. CMLI. FI Hort. RHS VMM. OBE, said:

"Historic parks and gardens are for all of us - they bring delight, beauty, joy and peace. They are repositories of stories, places of discovery and inspiration and they unite people from any background. These beloved places are constantly at risk because everyone thinks they will be

here, unchanged, forever. Should the government succeed in removing our statutory consultee status, special parks and gardens throughout the country would be at risk of damage and loss through lack of understanding. It takes expertise and experience to recognise the qualities and sensitivities of these places and to help mitigate potential damage and irreversible loss.”

The Gardens Trust is engaging with stakeholders to discuss the implications of the Government’s proposal. It has been deluged with expressions of concern and support from the general public and organisations with whom it works on a day-to-day basis. The Gardens Trust remains committed to working collaboratively with decision-makers to ensure that historic parks and gardens continue to thrive amid new homes and necessary infrastructure.

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About The Gardens Trust

The Gardens Trust is the only UK national charity dedicated to protecting and conserving our heritage of designed landscapes. We campaign on their behalf, undertake research and conservation work, and encourage public appreciation and involvement. We provide specialist knowledge to guide conservation efforts, supports local volunteer groups across 36 County Gardens Trusts, and offers expert advice to developers and planners.