



YORKSHIRE GARDENS TRUST

President: The Countess of Harewood

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www.yorkshiregardenstrust.org.uk

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Chris Webb
Chair, YGT

To whom it may concern

This is a collective letter from the County Gardens Trusts (CGTs) in support of the Gardens Trust (GT) retaining status as a statutory planning consultee. Many of the CGTs (there is an independent volunteer gardens trust charity for nearly every county and Wales) have existed for more than 25 years. From the start, we worked together as the Association of Gardens Trusts, supporting the Garden History Society as statutory planning consultee. In the last ten years, after the founding of the national Gardens Trust, CGTs and the GT have worked jointly in many areas across our mutual specialist interests, not least in responding effectively and successfully to planning applications that might affect Registered Parks and Gardens and other significant designed landscapes, whether Registered or not.

Designed landscapes, parks and gardens are unique components of Britain's heritage. They sit alongside stately homes, sometimes surviving when the homes they were designed for have been demolished; they are in the hearts of our great cities as parks and cemeteries, still providing us with space, light and air, as continuing and vital parts of our struggles against the consequences of poverty and ill health. They are a key component of our green infrastructure and, as Covid showed us, they provide a refuge against despair and disillusion; and they are everywhere, close to us in urban environments, and distinctly different to our farmed and wild landscapes.

But they are fragile, vulnerable and easily damaged. Despite being places that are beloved, well visited, critical to sense of place and community whether you have lived in a place for decades or are a newcomer; despite being commonly popular places to volunteer, to change careers, to escape from workaday drudgery, to gain new interests at the end of a working life, few people have the knowledge and skill to preserve their key characteristics and significance, and to develop them to meet people's needs for the present and future. *This* is why the partnership and mutual support between the eight thousand members of the County Gardens Trusts and the Gardens Trust, which has operated successfully for a decade, has been so important.

We work together to make sure that, when a planning application is approved, it is the best application it can be within the constraints of resources (including time) of all stakeholders, from developers to the community of users. Often, we work with developers in the pre-

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application stage, giving them freely our unique knowledge of the site and our wider knowledge of its regional, national and international context, so the application that comes to the planning authority contains few surprises. For larger designed landscapes we commonly have long-established relationships with owners (such as YGT with Harewood House Trust – there are similar examples all over the country, including with National Trust estates). Sometimes this leads to new collaborative research that uncovers new information that then informs and improves the development proposals.

Nearly all the applications we deal with, large and small, proceed smoothly through the application process. We add value that is not available elsewhere. Planning authorities themselves generally do not have the particular knowledge and skills (they recognise this, and value our input), nor do they have the time to devote to the meticulous appraisal of detailed elements of a registered park or garden. Historic England has the resources to deal only with Grade I and II* sites, leaving aside Grade IIs and non-registered sites, including those on local lists and in the Historic Environment Record, to the GT and CGTs. Even with the sites it does respond to, HE can lack the in-depth local knowledge, developed over decades, and the deep links into local communities, that make such a difference to planning proposals and subsequent developments. CGTs, rooted locally, can smooth over and advocate for proposals that might otherwise raise the strong local opposition that can obstruct legitimate and acceptable proposals. And as more Grade II landscapes are registered the gap between need and the resource to satisfy it will widen without the help of GT and CGT local volunteers.

Statutory consultee status is the key that unlocks this expertise. Without it, planning authorities would not alert us routinely to relevant applications and many would be missed as a result. Consequently, the quality and timeliness of our responses would diminish, and the whole planning system would suffer. It would mean poorer applications, leading to poorer, less sustainable developments and could open the doors to more objections, with their attendant needless added cost and loss of time. Statutory consultee status for the Gardens Trust is, by some way, a net benefit to the public now and in the future, to developers and to planners. Working together as statutory consultees, the Gardens Trust and the County Gardens Trusts save money in the planning process, and help to produce better, longer lasting outcomes for everyone.

It is in everyone's interest that this status is retained.

With best wishes

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