

## **EDEN PROJECT FOUNDER EXPRESSES CONCERN** **OVER GOVERNMENT'S PROPOSED CHANGES TO** **PLANNING SYSTEM**

The founder of the Eden Project has said he is “disturbed and extremely concerned” by Government proposals to change the planning system, which he says will threaten England’s “green and pleasant land”.

Sir Tim Smit spoke out after the Ministry of Housing, Communities, and Local Government launched a consultation on removing a number of statutory consultees from the planning process.

They include the Gardens Trust, founded in 1966 as the Garden History Society, and the only national charity with a statutory responsibility to protect and conserve our heritage of designed landscapes.

The Trust, of which Sir Tim is vice-president, has now issued its response to the consultation and says the proposals, aimed at speeding up the UK planning system, are putting England’s green “crown jewels” at risk.

The sites, many of which are on the Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest in England, include the gardens at Hampton Court Palace, the venue for the RHS Hampton Court Palace Garden Festival – the world's largest flower show.

Sites on the register also include urban public parks such as internationally famous Birkenhead Park in Merseyside, globally iconic English gardens such as Chatsworth in Derbyshire or Sissinghurst in Kent, places of remembrance such as Highgate Cemetery in London, institutional

landscapes such as the Royal Hospital, Chelsea, - the venue for the RHS Chelsea Flower Show - community hubs such as Stoney Road Allotments, Coventry, and seaside gardens such as the Marine Gardens in Clacton.

Sir Tim said: *"I am both disturbed and extremely concerned by the Government's proposal to remove the Gardens Trust as a statutory consultee in the English planning system.*

*"As founder of the Eden Project, rescuer of the Lost Gardens of Heligan, and a Vice-President of the Gardens Trust, I am proud we have been able to champion the parks and gardens that are in many ways central to Brand UK, forming the stage on which so many of the memories of our "green and pleasant land" have been formed. They are also a core ingredient of health and happiness for everyone across our communities.*

*"We fully support a national agenda for creating affordable housing and want to help ensure that this happens while protecting the green spaces and their character which are so important to us all. By sharing our expertise in understanding what makes parks and gardens so special, we can continue to make an invaluable contribution both protecting these national treasures while being allied to the aspiration of creating homes in places people want to live.*

*"We therefore suggest that our continued contribution is needed in the national interest, not as a policeman acting as a brake on progress, but as a guide to support and inform it.*

*"Without the specialist advice of the Gardens Trust and its members, hard-pressed planners would be left to make important development decisions without being fully-informed. Before you know it, iconic views that we have come to love could have inappropriate buildings in them, wildlife could be*

*deprived of the homes they have enjoyed for hundreds of years, and people could be deprived of the green spaces that they have grown up in."*

The Gardens Trust says that designed landscapes are the crown jewels of our towns and countryside and are at threat from housebuilders, developers and highways construction if Local Planning Authorities no longer have to consult the Trust when considering applications that may affect sites on the Register.

In 2024-25 the Gardens Trust only made 69 critical objections to planning applications on a variety of issues, including schemes that would have seen a total of 1,135 new dwellings built on or affecting the sites it protects.

The cost of the Gardens Trust's statutory consultee role to the taxpayer is currently £43,963 a year. If it did not carry out this work, the Trust estimates that the cost to Local Planning Authorities to plug the gap would be almost £3,700,000 per annum or just under £8million if they used consultants.

Gardens Trust Chair John Watkins said: "We will robustly contest the proposal to remove our statutory consultee role and strongly disagree that it would improve the planning system.

"Instead, precious parks and gardens, which have both grown and developed over many centuries, would be lost to communities both now and in future.

"We are passionate about the role that the UK's world-famous historic parks and gardens can play in supporting positive economic growth and healthy cohesive societies, and eager to continue to protect them.

"The Gardens Trust's strong performance as a statutory consultee already meets the government's stated objectives: its advice is constructive, timely, and expert, and very highly regarded by stakeholders.

"The Gardens Trust is also pro-growth. Neither the Gardens Trust nor registered parks and gardens are barriers to the development the country needs.

"We are pleased to see that there is already a significant groundswell of opposition to this proposal across the political spectrum in Parliament and encourage supporters to further increase that opposition by responding to the consultation."

Details of the Gardens Trust response on how to respond to the consultation  
[www.thegardenstrust.org/support-us/consultation](http://www.thegardenstrust.org/support-us/consultation)

"It is also incredibly frustrating and disappointing that after intimating that the launch of this consultation was imminent back in March, the Government has delayed, delayed and delayed again, creating a huge amount of uncertainty and distraction.

"We are passionate about the role that the UK's world-famous historic parks and gardens can play in supporting positive economic growth and healthy cohesive societies, and eager to continue to protect them.

"We are pleased to see that there is already a significant groundswell of opposition to this proposal across the political spectrum in Parliament and encourage supporters to further increase that opposition by responding to the consultation."

Details on how to respond to the consultation are at [Government Consultation on Removal of the Gardens Trust as a Statutory Consultee - The Gardens Trust](#)

The Gardens Trust represents and supports 35 local volunteer County Garden Trusts (CGTs) in England and the Welsh Historic Gardens Trust.

It is now encouraging more people to join the Gardens Trust and County Gardens Trusts throughout England and help protect the country's historic parks and gardens.

Established in 1984 under the National Heritage Act 1983, the Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest in England comprises more than 1,700 designed landscapes and includes gardens, public parks, parkland, cemeteries, and other designed landscapes representing our country's garden history over time.

Along with Historic England, it must be consulted on applications concerning Grade I and II \* registered sites but the Gardens Trust is also a statutory consultee for Grade II sites, which make up 65 per cent of the sites on the register.

Visit Britain estimates that in 2022, 11.4 million overseas visitors to the UK included a visit to a garden or park destination as part of their itinerary - 30% of the total 38 million overseas visitors.

For further information on the Gardens Trust and information on how to join its campaign to conserve and protect England's Registered Parks and Gardens go to [www.thegardenstrust.org](http://www.thegardenstrust.org)

## **NOTES:**

Further information and downloadable images to accompany this press release are available [HERE](#)

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**Issued on behalf of the Gardens Trust**

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