Preliminary Interpretation Strategy

Caversham Park

savills

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1. Introduction

1.1. The proposed development at Caversham Park provides an excellent opportunity to enhance public access to an historic asset that has remained private to date. Beechcroft Developments Ltd is keen to provide an opportunity for the local community to not only enjoy walks through the parkland but also learn more about the history and conservation assets of both the house and grounds.

1.2. This statement sets out a preliminary strategy to illustrate how access and interpretation can be incorporated within the grounds of Caversham Park to provide information on the history of the park and wildlife that can be found there. It is anticipated that further detailed information will be provided in response to a planning condition of any consent. This will include the precise design, content and location of interpretation boards for example.

1.3. This strategy has been prepared by a Chartered Landscape Architect, with further input from a Heritage Consultant specialising in Historic Parks and Gardens, employed by Montagu Evans.

2. Interpretation Strategy

2.1. The interpretation strategy will utilise four main tools. These are illustrated on the accompanying plan in Appendix 1.0.

i) The provision of a publicly accessible circular route around the parkland, comprising a loop to the north of the house and a loop within the parkland to the south.
ii) A series of interpretation boards along the public path, including explanatory text, maps, photographs and illustrations relating to the history and wildlife of the site.
iii) A small Interpretation Hub/cafe within the new sports pavilion, with an exhibition providing further information on the history of the house and grounds
iv) Incorporation of the interpretation boards and exhibition material within a website.

Public Access

2.2. Caversham Park has always been a privately owned parkland and during much of the past century public access has been restricted by the relatively high security measures of the BBC occupants. The redevelopment of Caversham Park House provides the opportunity to allow public access to the parkland for informal walking which will be restricted to daylight hours. A clear route will be provided around the parkland to maximise access to both the north and south, whilst retaining the privacy of privacy of residents. This will direct visitors away from the main house and the new residential properties, whilst allowing access to a new Interpretation Hub space adjacent to the existing pavilion. A map will be provided at the entrance to the park, off Peppard Road, to provide visitors with an introduction to parkland and the available routes around it. The new paths will be clearly marked using timber waymarker posts.

2.3. The route will allow access to the parkland to the north of the house, allowing good views back to the northern elevation of the house and veteran trees within the existing park. It will also pass through the restored orchard to the west of the house and the existing woodland to the west and south, providing views through to the existing canal to the south-west of the south. The path will then follow a generous route around the southern parkland, an area which will be managed as a wildflower meadow. This part of the grounds provides attractive views southwards towards Reading as well as back towards the southern elevation of Caversham Park House. New clumps of native tree planting in this area will further restore its parkland character.

Interpretation Boards

2.4. Up to six interpretation boards will be provided around the length of the public path. Indicative locations are shown on the plan in Appendix 1. These boards will include text, photographs and maps, and will cover the history of both buildings and landscape design of the parkland. This varied and long heritage will include background information on the landscape designers Lancelot ‘Capability’ Brown and Stephen Switzer for example, both of whom played an important role in the design evolution of the park.

2.5. Within the southern parkland, the large BBC satellite dish will be retained. This will remain as a link to the twentieth century of the park and will be accompanied by an associated interpretation board setting out the importance of the BBC occupancy.

2.6. The boards will also cover the wildlife value and improvements to the site, including measures taken to create wildflower meadows around the northern boundaries of the site and within the parkland to the south, and the management of existing woodland, veteran trees and the traditional fruit orchard.

2.7. A summary of the suggested content of each of the boards is provided on the drawing in Appendix 1.0.

Interpretation Hub

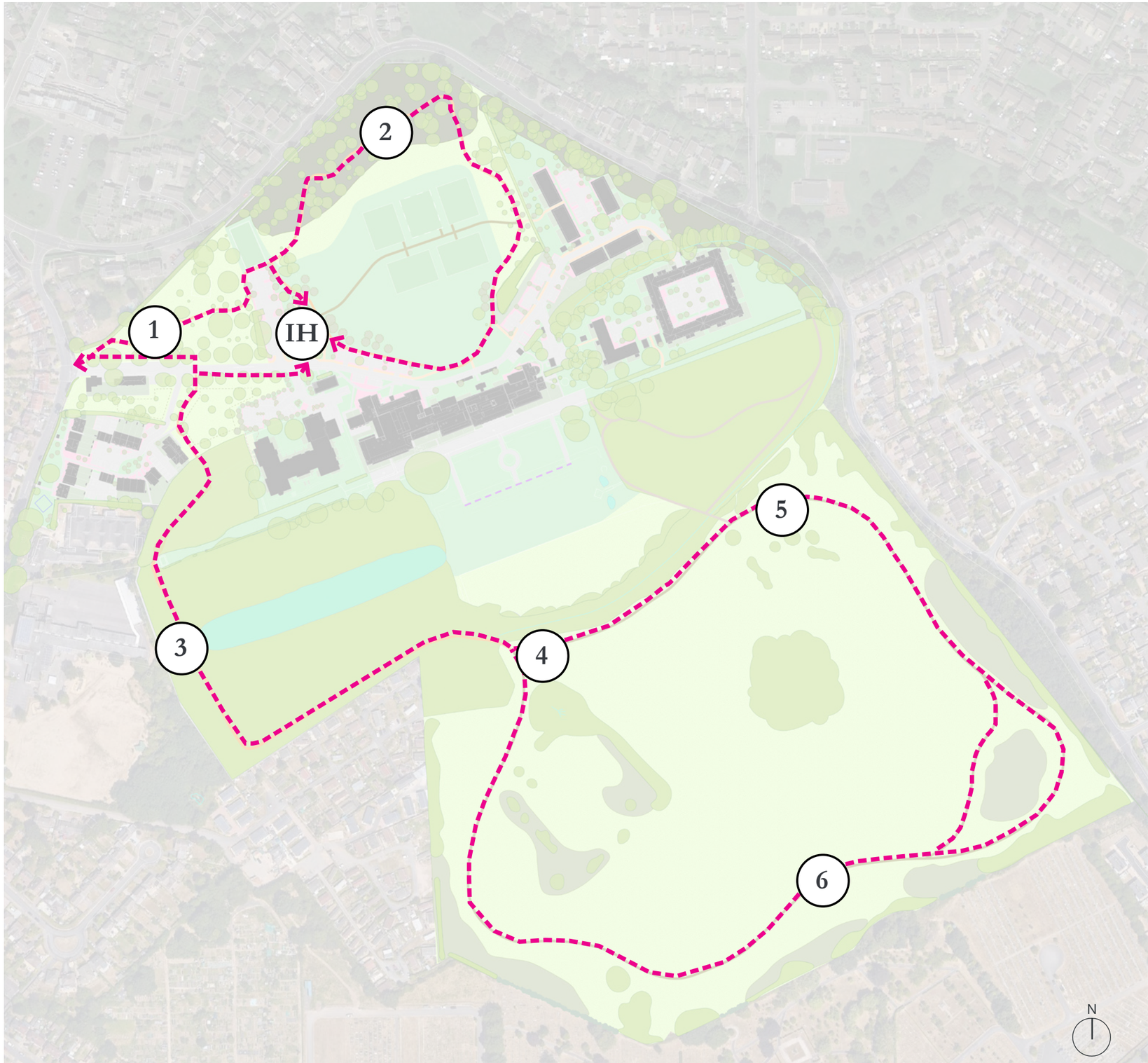
2.8. A small Interpretation Hub will be provided within an extension to the pavilion. This will be accessible to the new footpath link around the park and will also adjacent to an extended car parking area. The Interpretation Hub will provide space for a series of wall-mounted boards. These can cover the history of the house and grounds and will provide an accessible alternative option for accessing the information provided on the interpretation boards provided within the wider parkland. Additional material including photographs, mapping and text can be incorporated within this area. The pavilion extension will also provide space for a small café.

Website/pages

2.9. A website/page will be created to provide information on the history and wildlife associated with Caversham Park and its buildings. This will reflect the content and illustrations provided within the interpretation boards and Interpretation Hub and will be of special benefit to those not able to visit the property.

Appendices

Appendix 1.0
Interpretation Strategy Drawing



IH Interpretation Hub/Cafe

Public Pedestrian Trail (open during daylight hours)

Interpretation Boards: Proposed Themes

1 **Welcome to Caversham House and Park and Importance of Capability Brown landscape design**
Suggested Content of Interpretation Board:
- Plan of parkland and public route
- Early history, including deer park
- Capability Brown
- Changes made by Capability Brown
- Veteran trees and traditional orchards
- Illustration of 19th mapping

2 **History of the Early house**
Suggested Content of Interpretation Board:
- Build history
- Early occupants
- Historic mapping

3 **Importance of Switzer landscape design**
Suggested Content of Interpretation Board:
- Introduction to Switzer
- Switzer's influence on the landscape
- Plan illustrating Switzer's formal lansdcape design.
- Woodland restoration measures

4 **An Evolving Parkland**
Suggested Content of Interpretation Board:
- Relationship of parkland with evolving context of Reading to the south
- Restoration enhancements, including creation of meadows and parkland trees

5 **The BBC Occupancy and Retained Satellite Dish**
Suggested Content of Interpretation Board:
- Importance of role during WWII
- Technological information on retained satellite dish

6 **Parkland Caverhsam Park House as Seen Today**
Suggested Content of Interpretation Board:
- Later history of the house, including:
- 20th century school
- BBC

Caversham Park

on behalf of Beechcroft Developments Ltd

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