

A New Children's Play Area at Prospect Park, Reading

Heritage Statement

April 2021

A New Children's Play Area at Prospect Park, Reading Heritage Statement

Client	Reading Borough Council]
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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Project Background

- 1.1.1 This Heritage Statement has been prepared on behalf of Reading Borough Council, to accompany an application for a new children's play area at Prospect Park, Liebenrood Road, Tilehurst, Reading RG30 2ND. Prospect Park was set out in the 19th century and is now used as a public recreation ground.
- 1.1.2 In accordance with the requirements of paragraph 189 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) this statement describes the significance of the heritage assets affected by the proposals and provides an assessment of their impacts on that significance. The assessment methodology is in accordance with Historic England's *Conservation Principles* (2008), the *Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 3: The Setting of Heritage Assets* (2017) and *Advice Note 12 Statements of Heritage Significance: Analysing Significance in Heritage Assets* (2019).
- 1.1.3 The statement is structured as follows:
- Section 2 describes the site and its history
 - Section 3 summarises the statutory and policy requirements for the site
 - Section 4 describes the significance of the assets which would be affected by the proposals
 - Section 5 describes the proposals and provides an assessment of impact, and
 - Section 6 provides conclusions
- 1.1.4 This Heritage Statement should be read in conjunction with the accompanying application drawings by Reading Borough Council Property Services.

1.2 Site Location and Description

- 1.2.1 The site is located within Prospect Park, a Grade II Registered Park comprising 46ha of parkland laid out around the Grade II Listed Mansion House, in the Tilehurst area of Reading, Berkshire. The park's boundaries are Liebenrood Road to the east, Tilehurst Road to the North, Honey end lane to the west and the A4, Bath Road to the South. The centre of Reading is around 2km to the east and the park is surrounded by urban, mainly residential development. The park is laid out on the south side of Prospect Hill with the Grade II Listed 'Mansion House' facing south on this hillside.
- 1.2.2 The application site lies c. 355m to the east of the Mansion House and to the north of a tarmacked route extending across the park from Liebenrood Road to the main house. The site covers an area of c. 0.3 Hectares and is currently level ground under grass. A small patchwork of tennis courts lie c. 65m to the west of the site, a pavilion building is situated opposite the site to the south and an existing children's playground lies c. 70m to the northwest of the site. The site is screened from the main house by topography, intervening vegetation and existing sports facilities.



Plate 1: Site Location in red

1.3 Overview of Proposed Development

- 1.3.1 The proposed scheme is for the relocation of existing children's playground facilities from their current location to a proposed new site located to the northeast of the pavilion building (see site location image above). The works will comprise: the reinstatement of the existing children's playground to informal open space; retention of all existing trees; installation of a 1m high fence, safety surfacing and new play equipment within the application site; and link paths to existing pathways.

1.4 Limitations

- 1.4.1 This report has been prepared under instruction and solely for the use of Reading Borough Council, and any associated parties they elect to share this information with.
- 1.4.2 Measurements and distances in this report are approximations only and should not be used for detailed design purposes.
- 1.4.3 All work undertaken is based upon the professional knowledge of Avalon Planning & Heritage and relevant standards, technology and legislation at the time of writing. Changes in these areas may occur in the future, causing changes to the conclusions, recommendations or advice given. Avalon Planning & Heritage is not responsible for advising any parties on the implications of such changes.
- 1.4.4 This report utilises information obtained from third party sources. Avalon Planning & Heritage takes no responsibility for the accuracy of such information.

2. HISTORY AND PHASING

2.1 Historical development of Prospect Park

- 2.1.1 Reading, as a settlement, has existed at least since the 7th century, but was known at this time as 'Readingas' according to historian Barbara Yorke. Yorke further explains in her book 'Wessex in the Early Middle Ages' that Reading, or 'Readingas', served an administrative role as one of the 'hundreds'. The University of Cambridge Department of Geography describe the use of hundreds as the principal and most enduring units of administration in England.
- 2.1.2 The settlement is mentioned in the Domesday Book as being owned by King William, containing 55 villagers, 30 smallholders, 40 ploughlands, one Lord's plough teams and 55 men's plough teams, meadows, woodland, four mills and three fisheries.
- 2.1.3 The area of Reading in which Prospect Park lies is Tilehurst, a parish which according to parish history, was originally part of the Diocese of Lincoln, but over time was transferred to the Diocese of Salisbury before being transferred to the Diocese of Oxford in 1542. The manorial seat for Tilehurst was Calcot Manor.
- 2.1.4 Prospect Park was probably originally part of the Calcot Estate as recorded by local historian David Nash Ford. The Calcot Estate was owned and occupied by Benjamin and Frances Child according to papers relating to the management of the estate in the early 1700s. A legend survives which tells of the unusual marriage of Frances and Benjamin, which provides a theory for the origin of Prospect Park.
- 2.1.5 The legend is recounted in a number of versions by local historians and through romantic literature such as a poem 'The Berkshire Lady's Garland: in four parts', and in Coaching Ways and Coaching Days published 1888. The tale is that Frances Kendrick, heiress to the Calcot estate, and poor lawyer Benjamin Child, met at a mutual acquaintance's wedding and fell in love, but, due to false rumours, Benjamin abandoned his pursuit of her hand in marriage. A few days after the wedding Benjamin received an invitation to a duel. To Benjamin's surprise, when he arrived, he found that his opponent was a masked woman. She demanded that he must fight or marry her. Deciding that gambling his marriage prospects was far safer than risking his life, he agreed to marry her. Once married, the lady revealed herself to be the very same Frances Kendrick he fell in love with, and he became the owner of Calcot Estate. The legend carries that 15 years after their marriage, Frances died, and

Benjamin sold the Calcot Estate except for the land upon which the dual was supposed to have happened, renaming it 'Prospect Park'.

- 2.1.6 Whilst there is no evidence for the dual, there are archives available which detail the marriage between Benjamin Child and Frances Kendrick, and their ownership of Calcot Park. There are also estate papers which confirm that the Blagrove family bought the estate in 1754, which can be found in the Berkshire Record Office. The listing description for Prospect Park also confirms that the mansion was built in the late 18th century.
- 2.1.7 John Rocque's Map of Berkshire, made in 1761 (Plate 2 left), provides an approximate idea of what the park would have looked like at this time. It labels the area 'Pegs Green' and shows the park surrounded by roads with a wooded hill in the centre. Honey End Farm occupies the south west corner and there are buildings also occupying the north east corner. As this map covers the whole of Berkshire, the scale of the park is probably not accurately depicted but the map does give some idea of the layout at the time.



Plate 2: (Left) Rocque's map of Berkshire 1761 (right) Pride's map of Reading 1790

- 2.1.8 A later map of 1790 by Pride (Plate 2 right) shows another view of the park, this time called 'Prospect Hill'. The hill is clearly marked in the centre of the park and the dense appearance of trees implies the wooded nature of the south side of the hill. Honey End Farm still occupies the south west end and the buildings to the north east still exist, but this map more clearly shows that there are buildings set on the south side of the hill. This is presumably the Mansion House and perhaps outbuildings. The park on this map and Rocque's map implies the park was much smaller at this time – however again these maps are of a much wider area and the proportions may not be accurately depicted.
- 2.1.9 Local newspapers St. James's Chronicle and the British Evening Post (London) advertised the site for sale in 1791 describing Prospect Park as follows: 'PROSPECT HILL in Berkshire...to be SOLD and immediate possession had, that truly desirable FREEHOLD ESTATE called PROSPECT HILL: most delightfully situate on the Bath Road, within two miles of Reading; and well known to all persons travelling from London to Bath.' The listing description confirms that Bath road would have been the original entrance way. Bath road (now the A4) would have been part of the principal road from London to Bath which highlights the importance of this main entranceway into Prospect Park and up to the main house from Bath Road.
- 2.1.10 By 1800, Prospect Park was in the ownership of J E Liebenrood, perhaps he had bought it in the 1790s, referencing the aforementioned advertisement. The Prospect Park Mansion House listing mentions that Liebenrood enlarged and redesigned the house in the Regency style with the assistance of James Wright Sanderson, an architect and former pupil of James Wyatt (according to Parks and Gardens UK). At broadly the same time Liebenrood laid out the park, as recorded by the listing description.
- 2.1.11 The tithe map of Tilehurst, from the mid-1800s (Plate 3) shows an early plan of Prospect Park after it was laid out. Although the landowner at this time is Liebenrood, the occupier is William Stephens. It seems as though the park has been extended south and eastwards since the 1791 map, but this could be due to inaccurate proportions of the plots and roads on the older maps. However, on the Tithe Map, Liebenrood owns much of the land surrounding the park so it is possible he also extended it.
- 2.1.12 It was, at this time, surrounded by rural land and enclosed by roads, except eastwards, including the principal road to Bath passing south of the park. There are three entrances to the park shown on the tithe map. Two from Bath Road at the southwest and southeast corners of the park, marked by lodges positioned at their junctions with Bath Road, and a third from the north side of the park. The entrance at the southwest corner is via a road which is now named Honey End Lane that extends almost

directly west of the main house. The route to the main house from the southeast of the park begins on Bath Road and curves in a north-westerly fashion, approaching the house from the east. It also forks halfway through the park to extend to the third entrance on the north side of the park. The curved nature of this road perhaps indicates that the park was purposefully laid out so that the house had a sweeping, unbroken view of the park, with no interruption save for the pond to the south east of the house.



Plate 3: Tilehurst tithe map, 1844

2.1.13 The house itself sits to the north west of the centre of the park, with a semi-circular boundary in front and walled and kitchen gardens to the north, immediately behind and to the west of the house. There are more buildings north of the house, which,

on later maps is shown as an area called the Rookery, but in the tithe apportionments is referenced as 'The Wood'. These areas are enclosed from the rest of the park implying that they could be semi-formal gardens as described by the listing description. Other than in these areas and small areas on the east, west and south perimeter of the park, the main park remains open without trees or features.

- 2.1.14 The front of the house would have enjoyed an uninterrupted, Arcadian parkland panorama. Natural landscape views were a popular design of garden particularly in the mid-late 18th century, emulating the ideas and designs of the landscape garden, made popular by garden designers such as Capability Brown.
- 2.1.15 Throughout the 19th century, Prospect Park remained within the ownership of the Liebenrood family. These records also offer a description of the site. A record of Tilehurst from Kelly's Directory in 1877 states that 'Prospect House, one mile from Reading, the property of Capt. Liebenrood and residence of William Banbury Esq. is a large brick building standing in a fine undulating park of 120 acres and commanding extensive views of the surrounding country.' This emphasises the historic significance of the views from the house. The directory goes on to describe Captain Liebenrood as one of the principal landowners in Tilehurst. There was also a tenancy agreement 'made in 1882 between Captain J E Liebenrood and W C Minchin for five acres at the back of the wood, Prospect Hill Park' which is available via the Berkshire Record Office.
- 2.1.16 The OS map of 1879 (Plate 4) shows how the park developed throughout the late 19th century. It shows the park with what appear to be several field boundary divisions that are absent from the earlier tithe map. The park retains its open character and apparent informal tree planting. A rough alignment of trees crosses the park from north to south without apparent purpose. It may relate to an earlier boundary predating the establishment of the park. The route to the Mansion House from Bath road has been altered to curve further to the north rather than crossing the park sinuously as shown on the tithe map. A road still extends from the fork of this route to the northern perimeter of the park. Additional paths have also appeared leading from this road to the Rookery (previously 'The Wood') and from the Rookery diagonally to the northern entrance.
- 2.1.17 An additional lodge appears on the 1879 map at the northernmost entrance to the park. A small group of buildings within an enclosure on the western perimeter of the park is labelled as Prospect hill Cottage. Access into the park from this western side, passing the kitchen gardens and orchards, appears, from cartographic evidence, to be the main route to Mansion House, being more clearly depicted.

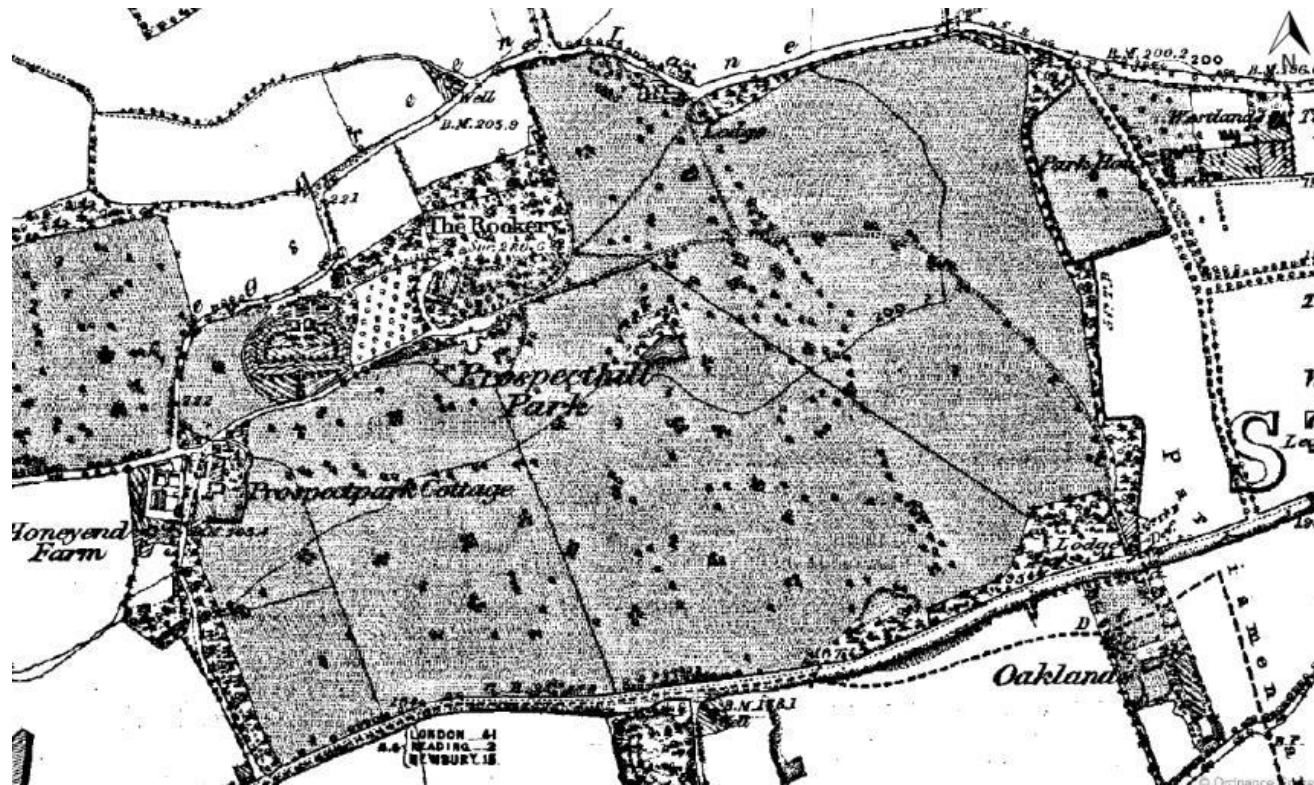


Plate 4: OS Map of 1880

2.1.18 Plate 5 shows the OS Map of 1899. On its eastern side the park has been truncated by the construction of Liebenrood Road. This also removed the southeast entrance to the park and part of the curving route to the Mansion House. The park Lodge, however, has survived at the location of this former entrance to the park on Bath Road and is a Grade II Listed building. Instead of an entrance from Bath road into the Park from the south east corner, the entrance point is now situated on Liebenrood Road almost level with the house and runs directly west towards the house. The application site lies to the north of this route. The depiction of the route to the Mansion House from the west suggests even more emphatically that this was the principal entrance.

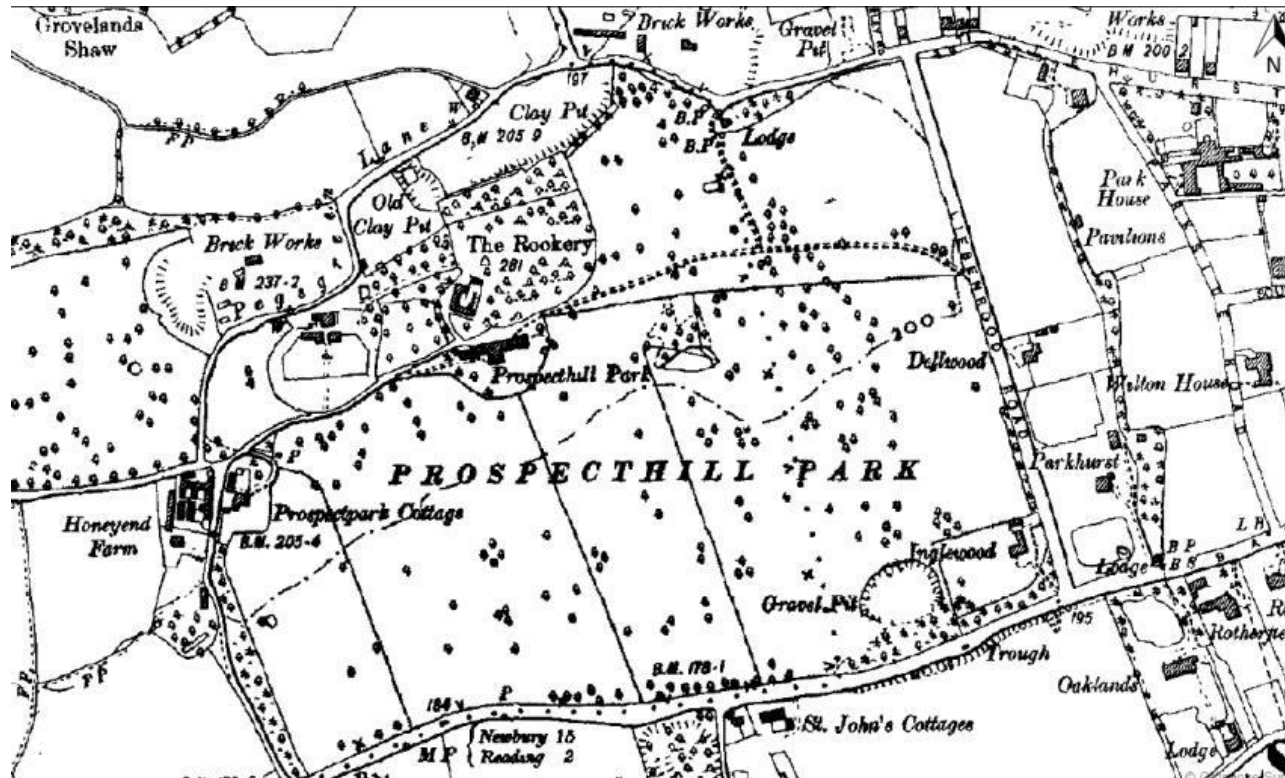


Plate 5: OS map of 1900

2.1.19 In 1902 according to the Berkshire Archaeology Designation Full Report, Prospect Park was obtained by the Reading Corporation. They developed the park to make it more suitable as a civic amenity. The Mansion House later became a refreshments room for the public and can be seen in early photographs of the park. Below (Plate 6) are photographs from The Reading Chronical Collection within the Reading Museum Online Collections which are captioned: *Prospect Park and the refreshments room Berkshire c1900s* and accompanied by other photos of public activity in the Park throughout the 20th century.



Plate 6: Historic Images of Prospect Park

- 2.1.20 Once Prospect Park became a public park, changes were made to its layout. The open views enjoyed at the front of the main house were maintained and the service buildings and semi-formal gardens also still exist north of the house, as does the Rookery. However, the route into the park via Honey End Lane from the west was interrupted by the construction of Park Hospital, which removed the walled kitchen garden as well as limiting access to Prospect Park House from the West.
- 2.1.21 This alteration will have increased the prominence of entrance points from Tilehurst Road to the north and Liebenrood Road to the east and the routes from these entrance points to the house. During this time the route from Liebenrood Road to the house was lined with an avenue of trees, creating greater apparent prominence to these routes than was originally intended.
- 2.1.22 Facilities were added for the enjoyment of the public, such as the bowling green in the view south west of the house, and the pond was reshaped. An additional path was established from the centre of the southern Bath Road perimeter which extends north eastwards across to the north east corner of the park, avoiding the house, but undermining the original design intent of the park.

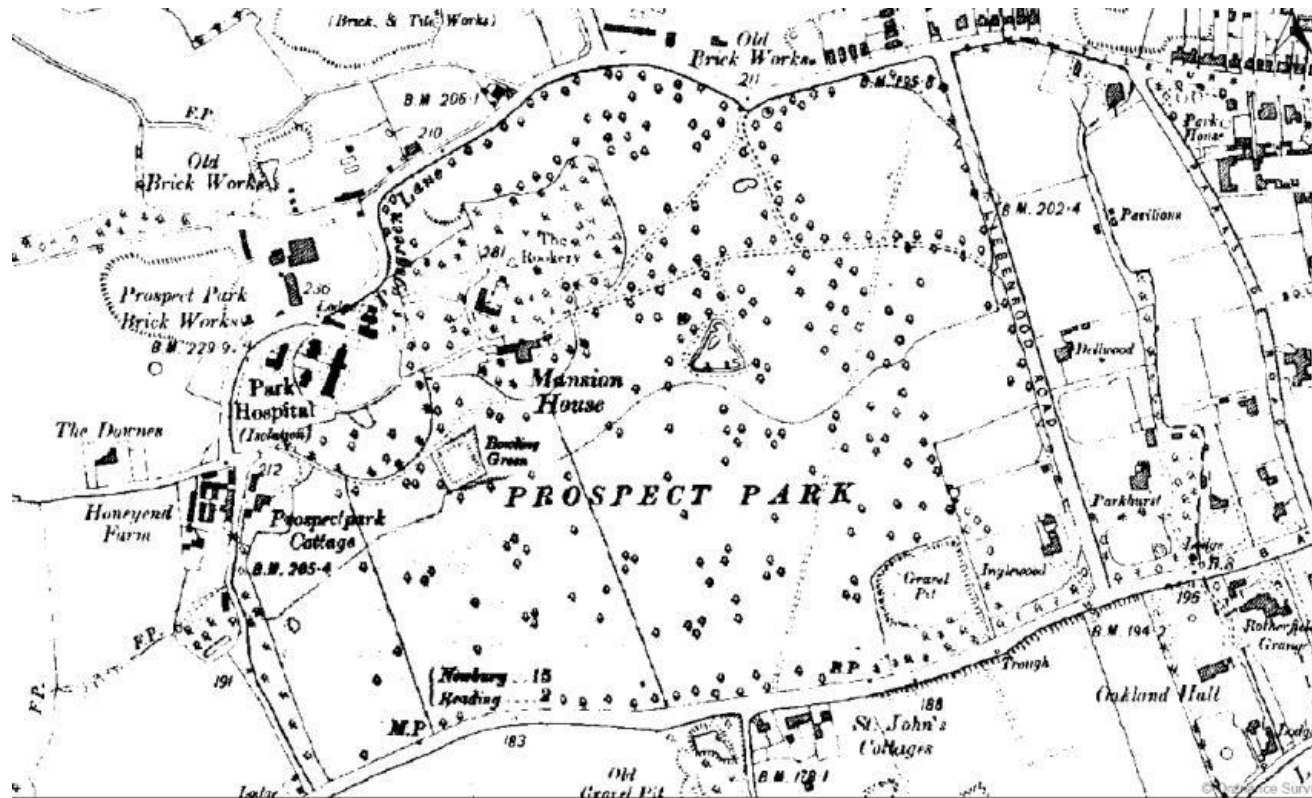


Plate 7: OS map, 1915

2.1.23 By the 1930s, a group of tennis courts were added immediately north and south of the route from Lienbenrood Road to the main house. These correspond to the development of the area around the application site. The avenue of trees on this route has also become more established. The northern boundary of the park has also been developed with house plots facing the park from the north side of Tilehurst Road.

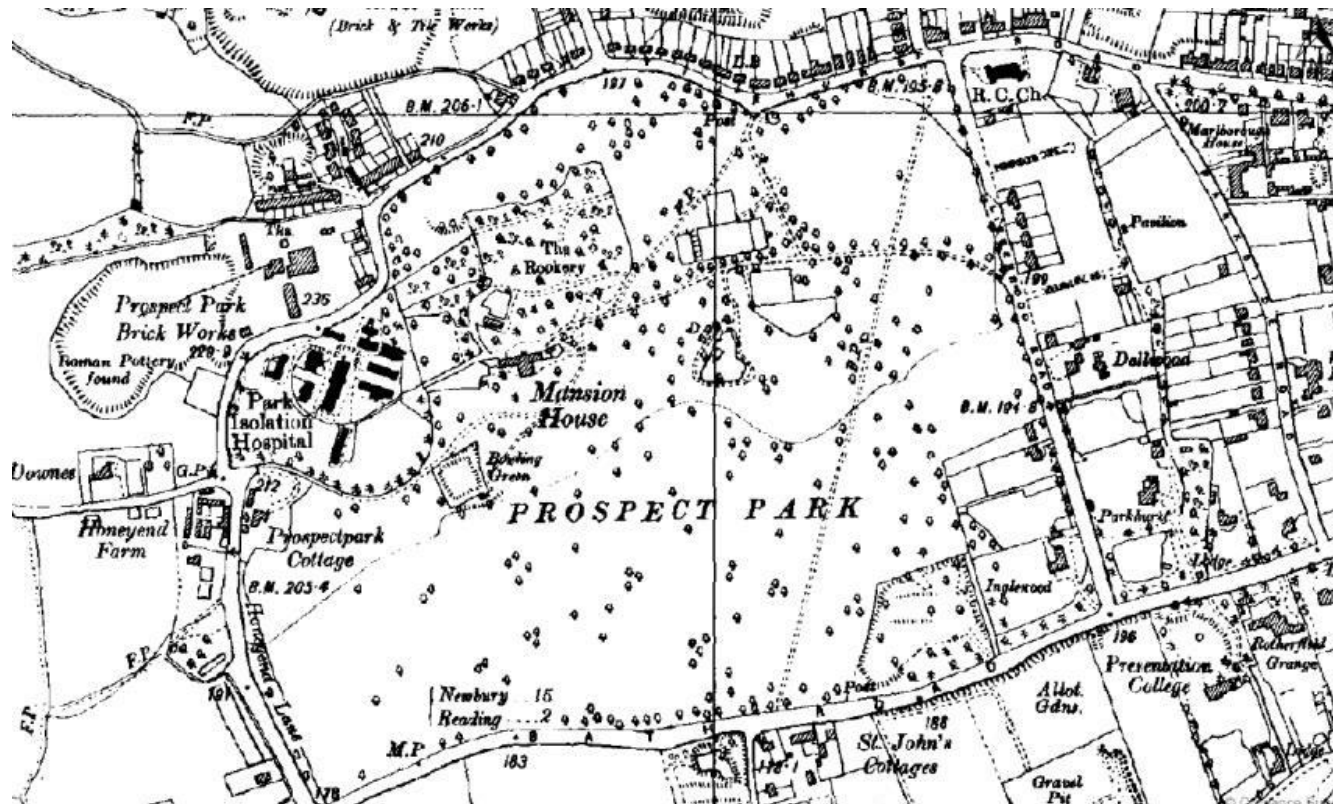


Plate 8: OS map, 1930

2.1.24 By 1960, the OS Map shows more development near the application site, including the playground and public toilets. This makes the northern and eastern routes to the house more important to the public as they include destination points and facilities to cater to the public's needs. A golf course occupies the north of the park behind the House and Rookery. The listing description also mentions the addition of buildings accompanying the new sports facilities.

2.1.25 The paths are much more established and there are additional paths extending from the path east of the house and around the southern front to reach the bowling green. Also only in the 1960s map is an alignment of trees extending southwards from the front of the house, which corresponds to an earlier boundary depicted on earlier OS mapping (Plates 4-6).



Plate 9: OS map 1960

2.1.26 Today Prospect Park is still used as a public park for sports and recreation. It is largely managed as mowed lawn with sporadic tree planting and patchworks of sports facilities. It is still surrounded by perimeter roads, but beyond is an urban setting. Mansion House is now a Harvester Restaurant and the area behind the house is still wooded, with the Rookery having been

maintained. The former Park Hospital site remains in the north west corner. The views of the park to the south of the house have not changed much over time, save for the changing number of trees in the area and lack of semi-formal gardens mentioned in the listing description history.

- 2.1.27 Between 2016 and 2018 Reading Borough Council undertook necessary works to replace the trees lining the driveway to the Mansion House. They have described these works as follows:

'During December 2015, several of the mature horse chestnuts that line the driveway to the Mansion House in Prospect Park shed large limbs. A full inspection showed that these were dying. On the south side of the driveway, all but two of the trees had canker, fungal brackets and cavities, and even the two that were in reasonable condition had defects. On the north side of the driveway, many trees had significant defects. Given their location on the driveway and adjacent to a football pitch, they were a health and safety risk and needed to be felled.

Work started in February 2016 to fell all trees on the south side of the driveway, and plant replacement trees. This would expose the trees on the north side to wind and weather, and would be likely to hasten their decline. Two years later, in 2018, once the trees on the south side had established, those on the north side were felled and replaced.

Horse chestnuts are subject to a range of diseases, including canker, chestnut blight and leaf miner. We replanted chestnut-leaved oak, which is fast-growing, with a mature height of over 20m. This species is not widely planted in this country, which makes it interesting. The National Trust replaced the horse chestnut avenue at Barrington Court with chestnut-leaved oaks, which is more tolerant to disease.' (Reading Borough Council 2021)

2.2 Current condition of the site and Prospect Park

- 2.2.1 The application site (Photo1) is an area of informal grass and trees lying to the north of the path leading from Liebenrood Road to Mansion House.



Photo 1: The application site, looking west

2.2.2 Prior to the mid-19th century the route of this path was further to the south. It was altered by 1879 to its present route seemingly to avoid encroachment on views from the Mansion House. The path (Photo 2) has been modernised in the 20th century to include a tarmac road providing modern vehicular access to the park. The application site lies opposite the carpark visible in the background of Photo 2. Trees lining this driveway are chestnut-leaved oaks planted between 2016 and 2018 replacing the original chestnut trees which had become diseased.



Photo 2: Path leading into the park from Liebenrood Road

- 2.2.3 Adjacent to the application site and flanking the path to both north and south are public amenities, sport and recreation facilities (including a car park), pavilion building, and tennis courts (Photo 3). These facilities give the immediate area a modern municipal feel.



Photo 3: Modernised farmac road and fenced tennis courts

2.2.4 The entrance to the park from the north (Photo 4) immediately encounters the existing children's play area. Historic pedestrian routes pass to either side of this play area. The park lodge which once stood at this entrance is no longer present.



Photo 4: View into the park from the north entrance

2.2.5 The Mansion House presents its principal elevation to the south (Photo 5) with expansive views of the park and landscape beyond (Photo 6). The path from Liebenrood Road approaches the rear of the house which is well screened by trees from views to the east towards the application site.



Photo 5: Mansion House, south elevation



Photo 6: View to the south from the Mansion House

3. SUMMARY OF STATUTORY AND POLICY REQUIREMENTS

- 3.1.1 Section 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires the Local Planning Authority to have special regard to the desirability of preserving (i.e. not harming) listed buildings and their settings. Listed buildings and Registered Parks are termed 'designated heritage assets' (NPPF glossary) and paragraph 189 requires the applicant to establish the significance of any assets affected by proposals. Paragraphs 193 to 196 deal with impacts on heritage assets and requires the Local Planning Authority (LPA) to give great weight to an asset's conservation. Any harm must be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal but requires 'clear and convincing' justification.
- 3.1.2 Proposals that preserve elements of setting that make a positive contribution to an asset or better reveal its significance should be treated favourably (paragraph 200) and loss of elements which contribute positively should be treated as harmful. Significance is defined in the NPPF as 'The value of a heritage asset to this and future generations because of its heritage interest. That interest may be archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic.'
- 3.1.3 Relevant local planning policies are contained in the Reading Borough Local Plan – adopted November 2019. In Paragraph 4.2.7 this document highlights the importance of the heritage of Prospect Park as one of the country houses which once surrounded Reading. The following policies are relevant to this planning application:
- EN1 - Protection and enhancement of the historic environment.
 - EN4 - Locally important heritage assets.
 - EN6 - New development in a historic context.

4. SIGNIFICANCE

Prospect Park

- 4.1.1 Prospect Park is a designed landscape with considerable artistic and aesthetic interest. Mansion House lies at the centre of its design, taking advantage of the south facing slope of Prospect Hill to create a layered panorama across the naturalistic parkland and into the landscape beyond. Working areas of the park, including service buildings, kitchen garden and orchards lay to the rear of the house away from this view and paths across the park were routed to the east, west and from the north avoiding crossing the park to the south of Mansion House.
- 4.1.2 The park's Historical Interest is also a contributor to its heritage significance. The park is a surviving element of the historic manorial estate of Calcot and the story of its origins, and in particular the naming of Prospect Hill, is a legend which has been immortalised in literary works of poetry, albeit by an unknown author.
- 4.1.3 Since the late 19th century, the significance of the park has been impacted by the loss of land on its eastern side and by the encroachment of the hospital complex on its west side. A consequence of these changes has been to increase the use and prominence of the path from Liebenrood Road to Mansion House. This path, which once appears to have been a meandering way through parkland, has become a main thoroughfare, expanded to accommodate modern traffic. Use of this path has been encouraged by the addition of public facilities.

Mansion House

- 4.1.4 Mansion House is a late 18th century house surrounded by parkland. It has Historical Interest as a grand house with association to the Calcot Estate and to the architectural tastes of the gentry in the late 18th century. As a country manor house with a clear design intention linked to the landscape it also has considerable architectural and artistic interest. The surrounding landscape setting is integral to its design which presents a grand elevation to the south overlooking sweeping parkland views. However, views to the west are restricted by flatter topography and vegetation and make a more limited contribution to the setting.

5. ASSESSMENT OF IMPACT

5.1 The proposed development

- 5.1.1 The proposed development will comprise the removal of play equipment from the existing children's play area (Shown in blue on Plate 10) and the installation of a new children's play area in the area identified as the application site (shown in red on Plate 10)



Plate 10: Location of existing and proposed play areas

- 5.1.2 The existing play area will be reinstated to informal grassland. The new children's play area will not cover the whole of the application area but will be sited within it with linking paths to existing pathways.
- 5.1.3 Specific details of the new play are not yet available. However, it will comprise a 1m high fenced area with safety surface and play equipment of a maximum of 9m in height. Further information on the proposed playground is available on Reading Borough Councils website www.reading.gov.uk/ProspectPlayground

5.2 Assessment of Impact

- 5.2.1 Reading Borough Council has undertaken a careful assessment of potential sites for the new playground. The proposed location has been chosen for the following reasons:
- Close proximity to the existing pavilion, carpark and toilets
 - Proximity to proposed new Play service facilities;
 - Ease of access from tarmac paths;
 - Good ground conditions and no mature trees at risk;
 - Not impacting on sports and other activities in the park;
 - Not impacting on the visual sight lines of the Mansion House.
- 5.2.2 When considering the impact of moving the playground it is important to note that the path from the east has become the principal route into the park only in modern times and by virtue of previous impacts to the park. The historical role of this path and the paths which cross the park from the north entrance, place neither one above the other in importance.
- 5.2.3 By amalgamating public sports and play facilities around the path from Liebenrood Road, the scheme will open up the north entrance and better reveal the park from the north.
- 5.2.4 It is recognised that there will be an impact to the experience of the park when entering and passing through the park from Liebenrood Road, resulting from the intensification of public facilities adjacent to the path here. However, this route through

the park already has the character of a modern municipal amenity and the impact is to be balanced against an anticipated improvement at the northern entrance.

- 5.2.5 The proposed new playground will lie within views looking across the park from the northeast quarter. It is considered that these views are already impacted by modern facilities flanking the path including the carpark and pavilion. Topography and vegetation also limit views of the park from this location.
- 5.2.6 It is considered that, overall, there will be no intensification of facilities within the park as a result of the works. It is also considered that no important designed views within the park will be affected by the scheme.
- 5.2.7 The proposals to move the children's playground are expected to have a neutral effect on the heritage significance of the Park and Mansion House.

6. SUMMARY & CONCLUSION

- 6.1.1 This planning application is for works for a new children's playground within Prospect Park in Reading, Berkshire. Prospect Park is a Grade II Registered historic park. The proposed scheme has the potential to affect the heritage interests of the park as well as the setting of the Grade II Listed Building Mansion House, which lies within the park c. 350m to the west of the application site.
- 6.1.2 The works will re-locate children's play facilities from their existing location, close to the north entrance to the park, to a location within the application site. The site for new facilities has been chosen following a selection process undertaken by Reading Borough Council.
- 6.1.3 Prospect Park and Mansion House derive considerable heritage significance from the designed views across the park to the south. The routes into and across the park from the north and east contribute to this significance in that they have been routed around and away from the sweeping views from Mansion House. Since the early 20th century the Prospect Park has been a public park. The path from the east entrance on Liebenrood Road has been modernised and is flanked by modern park facilities. It is predicted that the proposal to move the children's playground will have a neutral effect of the significance of the park.
- 6.1.4 It is considered, therefore, that the proposals will preserve the heritage significance of Prospect Park and Mansion House and that the works comply with statutory, national and local policy requirements.

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