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L 231204 JG - further request for information for CBA_Final



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Dear Matt,

Response to Chris Blandford Associates (CBA) report following our meeting on the 15th November, application ref 220409 & 220410

We agreed at the meeting on the 15th that we would provide additional information in order to clarify the position for CBA so that they can finalise their report.

CBA Table on pages 16-21 of the Report dated September 2023

On the subject of *Table 1 – Response to assessment for RPG* we would make the following observations:-

Item 1 – “*The proposals will secure a long-term viable use for the RPG which is consistent with its conservation*”

- What degree of weight should be applied to securing the long-term viable use of the RPG?
- Why should the weight of the benefit be different whether the owner is public or private sector?

Item 2 – “*Introduction of public access*”

- What degree of weight should be applied to the introduction of public access for the first time in the site's history? Note that the public access is across the entirety of the RPG and not “for a limited and managed degree of public access”.

Item 11 – “*Delivery of an interpretation centre in the pavilion...*”

- An interpretation centre does not exist and the use of the building will meaningfully change. The interpretation strategy for the landscape is a separate consideration to the establishment of a new specialist building with curated content explaining the history of the site. We invite CBA to comment on the weight to be attributed to this benefit.

Other Clarification / Commentary

We note CBA's assessment of harm to the setting and significance of the main house and Doric Temple. We reiterate our concern that the CBA have undertaken an assessment of the harm to the setting and significance of the main house without the benefit of understanding the special interest of the main house as a whole (including the interior). Indeed, the main house was not part of the original scope for CBA's instruction.

We question how CBA can form their judgements on impact to the listed house (and Temple) without the benefit of a detailed assessment of the significance of the two assets and, in turn, the contributions that their setting make to their significance. This approach is required by Historic England's GPA2: *Managing Significance in Decision-Taking in the Historic Environment* (2015) and GPA3 guidance: *Setting of Heritage Assets* (2017)



To assist we refer to the called-in “Summerskill House” appeal decision (PINS Reference: APP/H390/V/3277137) which states at paragraph 12.50 of the Inspector’s recommendation:

“In cases where the impact is on the setting of a designated heritage asset, it is only the significance that asset derives from its setting that is affected. All the significance embodied in the asset itself would remain intact. In such a case, unless the asset concerned derives a major proportion of its significance from its setting, then it is very difficult to see how an impact on its setting can advance a long way along the scale toward substantial harm to significance”.

Paragraph 3.4.3 of the report states: *“In addition, it is important to note that the park and garden is the fundamental component of the setting of the Grade II Caversham Park House”.* This statement might well be accurate, but it belies a lack of overall assessment of the intrinsic interest of the house, the other components that form the setting of the house, and the relative contributions that they (and the component parts of the RPG) make to the overall significance of that asset. Such an assessment is crucial because it allows the decision maker to calibrate the overall level of harm to the significance of the asset and, in turn, the level of countervailing public benefit required to offset that harm.

To conclude, without the benefit of the analysis described above, we cannot see how CBA can robustly form a judgement on the harm to the main house and Temple.

Draft heads of terms for a future Conservation Management Plan (CMP)

Andrew was at pains to make it clear that he could not attribute weight to an unknown future CMP until he was shown details of what this might entail. Whilst we disagree that details of a CMP are required at this stage, as such details are often conditioned and the LPA will need to approve any future submission sought by condition, we have agreed to provide outline details of a CMP.

We suggest that a phased approach over the first several years of occupation is appropriate as this is realistic given the scope of works proposed and the delivery of the scheme overall in parallel with these works. A plan accompanies this letter showing the location of the proposals and their locations within the park as a whole.

Phase 1

- Reinstatement of footpath to the south of the bedding area below the southern terrace. This path is evident on historic mapping and the work will therefore restore the structure of this part of the garden. It will also provide a missing link to a circular route connecting with the terrace along the southern side of the house at both ends, thereby enhancing access to new residents to enjoy the views available from this area.
- Condition survey of the oversized urn to the west of the canal and delivery of associated remedial works. This is a landmark feature which will benefit from retention and ongoing management to ensure its longevity. Similarly a condition survey of a statue of Proserpine would be undertaken and associated remedial works undertaken as required. In both cases further research is needed to fully ascertain their date and significance.
- Edwardian summerhouse to be refurbished. This will restore an attractive asset within the woodland area to the south-east of the house enabling it to be enjoyed by the new residents –
- Woodland survey and management plan of woodlands to the south of the house, together with preliminary understorey clearance to remove invasive species such as rhododendrons. This will help to reveal the historic terraces remaining from the Switzer period of the garden design, which will form part of a longer term process of woodland management.

Phase 2

- Restoration of orchard to the north-west of house, including pruning and planting. This will particularly provide ecological benefits as well as maintaining the longevity of the orchard. It will provide opportunities for food growing for both the new residents and wider community. This can be

accompanied by associated community activities such as 'orchard days' and associated cookery, cultural and arts events for example.

- Woodland clearance as part of longer term management strategy for woodlands to the south of the house. This will form a continuation of the work identified under point 4 above, enabling the two areas of woodland to be thinned as required, to reveal the Switzer terracing and managing the woodland for wildlife. It will also identify any pruning/felling necessary for health and safety purposes.
- Restoration of 'ha ha' wall, including the removal of hedgerow species. This will ensure the long-term retention of the wall as well as opening up views to the south. A condition survey will be carried out in order to determine the extent of the works required.
- Detailed interpretation strategy, including design and erection of interpretation boards, heritage trail (with signage), interpretation hub and satellite dishes.
- Parkland and Meadow planting within the farmland to the south of the house. This will help replicate the previous Capability Brown character of the landscape here, with trees, native grassland and mown footpaths. This will also form part of a wider Heritage Trail around the park, which includes information on the retained BBC satellite dish. This southern parkland will afford attractive open views to the south as well as back up towards Caversham Park House to the north. It will be open to public during daylight hours, thereby providing access to a recreational and heritage asset that is currently closed to the public.—

Phase 3

- Enhancements to the 20th century pond garden to the south-east of the house. This area was implemented during the occupation by the BBC, appearing to date from the mid-20th century, and is a more intimate example of a garden area in the wider open parkland. This area can be enjoyed by the new residents with improvements including new planting, seating and management. This would retain the existing structure of the garden but also introduce new plant species, with particular wildlife and sensory characteristics for example.

Yours sincerely



John Gale
Senior Planner

cc. Ruth Bailey, Beechcroft