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RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL
PLANNING SECTION
COUNCIL OFFICES
CHURCH WALK
CLITHEROE
LANCASHIRE
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APPLICATION: 3/2022/0988 - RESPONSE TO LANCASHIRE GARDENS TRUST (LGT) COMMENT

We thank the Lancashire Gardens Trust for their comments and respond directly to their letter (noted in blue italics) as follows;

“Although the listing description gives no indication of the designer, there is a remarkable likeness to other sites laid out by John Webb (1754-1828). However, further research is required to substantiate this. The listing description for the RPG attributes design of the mansion to Charles McNiven, and the Character Study which supports the current application suggests the parkland also by this designer. We are not aware of any evidence for the suggestion.”

There are no known records of the designer of either park or the house. Charles McNiven is known to have been one of the ‘agents’ as prospective contractors were to direct all enquiries to him or Thomas Eccles as advertised in the Blackburn Mail, 26th October 1796 (see page 24 of Shaw & Jagger Architects Design and Access Statement (DAS)). Being a successful and forward-thinking engineer/landscaper he was well-placed to have laid out the grounds at Woodfold. We suggest that he may not have had the breadth of knowledge to come up with the designs for the house and they bear the hallmark of the Wyatt family (Giles Worsley, Architectural Drawings of the Regency Period 1991). This is discussed in the DAS (page 25).

“The Park is on Historic England’s At Risk Register, which notes the impact of the changes in ownership and subdivision over the last twenty years: ‘the progressive redevelopment has impacted significantly on the historic character of the designed landscape in the immediate vicinity of the principal buildings’ and that agricultural land use of the parkland ‘is further diminishing the character of the landscape’.

The assessment concludes that there are significant localised problems, and that the Park has high vulnerability and is on a declining trend. There is a need to address the decline of the RPG. The recent series of planning applications within the RPG, prior to the current one provide a continuing negative trajectory for the significance of the RPG as a whole.”

To be clear, we do agree that the park is in decline but our proposals are not in the park; we have no prospect of reversing the decline within, and nor can our designs have any direct impact on the RPG.

"We have fundamental concerns about the current application and its supporting documentation. Some confusion arises from an enlargement of the application site boundary, such that there are two versions of the site boundary interchangeably used throughout the various documents."

The application site previously comprised only a part of Shorrock Green. We were convinced by the design panel that the objective of repairing the setting could not be achieved without work on the entire green. Both boundaries are represented in the DAS as this illustrates the development of the scheme and the proposed benefits it offers. We would be happy to clarify any specific anomalies that are raised with us. Though on balance there do not appear to be any, we regard such comments by the LGT as obfuscation.

"Assumptions in the Character Study

This application includes a Character Study which is intended to address heritage matters. However, this long document makes selective use of facts and descriptions and contains erroneous and unproven historic conclusions. For example, reference is made to Shorrock 'Hall' previously occupying the position of Huntsman's Cottages. There is no map evidence of any named Hall or principal building in this location which is more likely that of a hamlet or cluster of agricultural buildings."

Regarding Shorrock Green Hall, *A History of the County of Lancaster: Volume 6*. London: Victoria County History, 1911 says, "David Crossley, the Baptist minister at Bacup, preached at Shorrock Green Hall about 1736 and probably at Mellor also, this being the beginning of Baptist work near Blackburn." It is also clear that the Huntsman's cottages are not the building shown on the earliest maps. They replace an earlier structure which we believe to be Shorrock Hall.

"As a result of discussions with local residents we understand there is evidence that Further Lane was diverted northwards to its present line at a date following Yates Map of 1786, and our review of map evidence suggests that this is a tenable premise. The suggestion of an axial 'avenue' described in the Character Study crossing the application site towards Shorrock is most likely the former line of Further Lane, relict features of which are indicated on the 1840s OS map. Therefore this route is rather the earlier alignment prior to its diversion as part of the 1790s emparkment. The narrative in the Character Study places much weight on these features in order to support the concept and placing of a new dwelling on the proposed site, however these arguments are questionable and should not be relied upon."

We can't agree with this speculation. Yates shows the line of the old road towards Stanley and this is roughly along the northern wall of the current park south of Woodfold Farm. Shorrock Green avenue is to the north of the farm. Crosby in the only landscape history of Woodfold confirms, "It crossed the area of the later Woodfold Park in an indirect alignment which ran along the top of the slope behind Woodfold Hall - where its course is marked by the private lane running westwards from Woodfold Park Farm - then towards the Deer House, where it is still clear, and on to the site of the lodges at GR644296, before passing Arley Farm and heading for Beardwood." The narrative in the Character Study places weight on all aspects of the site's history and development, topography and social interest to try and understand the importance of this area. It should also be noted, for the avoidance of doubt, that LiDar mapping clearly shows the outline of the old road.

"We concur with the preapplication conclusions that harm will arise to the setting of the RPG Woodfold Park, an C18th Palladian mansion in a park in the English Landscape style together with complimentary estate buildings. It is largely unaltered and surrounded by an agricultural landscape beyond its stone boundary wall."

This is plainly untrue. The park has been much altered and broken up. The farm is not contemporary with the hall. It is a later addition onto the north wall. Modern houses have been built in the walled garden and the farm buildings extended beyond their intended scale or importance, causing great harm to the character, significance and setting of the original 'stables' listed buildings. The agricultural land has been given over to horsiculture. The park and its setting are not stuck in 1796. There is evidence that Sudell would have built further had he not gone bust. Apart from the farm, he added new lodges to the east when the new Preston Road was created. Subsequent owners also made changes to and planned changes to the layout of the Park.

In 1831 Rickmann and Hutchinson were engaged to provide designs for two lodges to be sited near the proposed site for the new house, this clearly indicates an evolution of the park which has continued across the preceding two centuries.

“The proposed building is adjacent to the northern entrance drive and to Huntsman’s Cottages, an estate building in Regency style which accommodated employees. The application dwelling is therefore an intrusive incursion in terms of style, size and use.”

HE research indicates that Huntsman’s cottage date to 1868; they aren’t close to Regency. This statement says nothing about the alignment and evolution of the north drive and the buildings on it and has no connexion whatever with the scale, size or use of the proposed dwelling.

“The application has not satisfied NPPF paragraph 200 that clear and convincing justification is required, if there is any harm to heritage assets. Past and present harm should not be compounded by more harm to the park, its estate buildings and their setting. The significance of the RPG is not fully covered in the RPG HE listing description which is very brief and does not address the categories Rarity/Aesthetic Value/Historic Value/Group Value. These should be explained and developed in a supporting thorough heritage assessment.”

The significance of Woodfold and its park is explained in the Character Study and DAS and is explored with a fine-toothed comb in Crosby’s landscape study. No one should be in any doubt as to their significance but neither should they be in any doubt as to how the proposed dwelling would interact with the northern edge of the RPG. The analysis is lengthy, LGT complain it is too long.

“This site has high rarity value, as it is a remarkable survivor in an industrialised area.”

Several houses and designed landscapes survive in this area. This was the zone of the “cotton mansion.” This is noted in Fig. 3 of the Character Study which records it as an interesting phenomenon in itself.

“The conservation of the park and its constituents as a whole is a necessary public benefit, both as a heritage asset and as an educational asset since it demonstrates a period of history in a very graphic way. The English Landscape Park is a recognised art form, valued in the civilised world. Public benefit does not necessarily mean free access to the general public; and can include the conservation of artistic or industrial heritage. There is an interesting collection of industrial heritage in the park’s woodlands.”

The client does not own any part of the RPG thus it is unreasonable to look to these proposals to repair the park which is now in multiple ownership.

“The standards of design embodied in the RPG are impeccable, in that the Palladian mansion is complemented by estate buildings which fulfil the role of usefulness with beauty, a Georgian principle, because they are in harmony with the design of the house and are subservient to it in size, mass and distribution. They act as focal points in views to and from the house.”

The design takes its cue from the architecture of the Wyatt/Wyatville design and Reptonian influenced Mc Niven original and an essay in high quality contemporary classical design which has undergone intensive peer review.

“In summary, the immediate setting of the park is completely as intended, that is to say pastoral. Therefore, there is no justification for the introduction at close proximity of the visually significant element which is proposed in the current application.”

The immediate setting of the park is not as intended by Henry Sudell nor we would suggest what one would want to see at the entrance to a landscaped park. It has been eroded by piecemeal development and horsiculture, neither of which are true to the site’s history or original aesthetic.