

Conservation Officer – Peter Fellows

Site – Havant Thicket, Winter Storage Reservoir, Manor Lodge Road, Rowlands Castle

Proposals - Hybrid application seeking: Full Planning permission for development of a reservoir

Historic context and significance

The proposed reservoir would cover part of a later 19th century Avenue that is part of Leigh Park (Staunton Country Park), a grade II* Registered Park. This avenue is also within the Sir George Staunton Conservation Area.

The registered park and garden and conservation area is centred upon the historic setting of the original pleasure grounds and parkland Estate – Leigh Park, created by Sir George Staunton, during the early years of the 19th century. Today, the Estate (more usually known as Staunton Country Park) is a rare and important example of a landscaped park of the 1820 -1830s and incorporates the trends, styles and influences of that era with a particular association with China, together with some later Victorian features. Comprising of an area of some 63 hectares, the Estate lies to the north of Havant town centre and extends to Rowlands Castle, straddling the boundary between Havant Borough Council and East Hampshire District Council. It was first designated as a Conservation Area in 1978. In 1987, it was established as a Country Park under a Joint Management Committee and in the following year 1988, the Conservation Area was reviewed and extended to include the Upper Lake and Hammond's Lands Copse to the northwest. The conservation area was further reviewed in 2008.

Designation recognises that the Estate, its setting and grounds together with any buildings, is special and warrants additional safeguards and attention. This does not mean that change cannot take place, but that any new development must take into account the area's special qualities.

The heritage statement produced by the applicant and comments by Historic England have addressed the significance of the Parkland (in particular the avenue and north west section of the conservation area) in excellent detail and I will not seek to replicate this further. However, it is important to note that

- The Avenue ran from the northwest corner of the mansion to the county boundary to the northwest and was designed to be a grand feature. Views along the Avenue were channelled along its length, with no views to the surrounding parkland and limited views to the mansion, creating a private and secluded ride and lake.
- The Avenue north of Upper Lake is now lost. Upper Lake itself is largely over grown and has lost its Boat and Bathing House, with its waterfall largely inappreciable. The significance of the remaining half of the Avenue is therefore compromised by its truncation. However, it still makes an important contribution to the significance of the park as the most ambitious element of the later 19th century works to the landscape to survive.
- The north west section of the conservation area (which is proposed to be lost) is understood to have been woodland with walks crossing it. Most of this tree planting has since been removed, although some walking routes remain. This land was included in the conservation area boundary as it forms the backdrop to Leigh Water in key views from the terrace. This pocket of land therefore positively contributes to the understanding and appreciation of the landscape that forms the significance of the conservation area.

Policy

Section 16, 66 and 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires planning authorities, when considering whether to grant planning permission for development which affects a heritage asset to have special regard to the desirability of preserving or enhancing that heritage asset.

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out the policies that the Council must take into account when determining planning applications. The 'Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 2', states at paragraph 4:

'The significance of a heritage asset is the sum of its archaeological, architectural, historic, and artistic interest' and provides at paragraphs 8, 9 and 10 that in order for the Local Planning Authority to make decisions in line with legal requirements, the objectives of the development plan; and, the policy requirements of the NPPF, great importance is placed on understanding the nature, extent and level of the significance of the heritage asset.

The revised NPPF sets out in Chapter 16, the core principles relating to development affecting Heritage Assets that local planning authorities should consider in making planning decisions in the following paragraphs:

'184. Heritage assets range from sites and buildings of local historic value to those of the highest significance, such as World Heritage Sites which are internationally recognised to be of Outstanding Universal Value. These assets are an irreplaceable resource, and should be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance, so that they can be enjoyed for their contribution to the quality of life of existing and future generations.

189. In determining applications, local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting. The level of detail should be proportionate to the assets' importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on their significance. As a minimum the relevant historic environment record should have been consulted and the heritage assets assessed using appropriate expertise where necessary. Where a site on which development is proposed includes, or has the potential to include, heritage assets with archaeological interest, local planning authorities should require developers to submit an appropriate desk-based assessment and, where necessary, a field evaluation.

190. Local planning authorities should identify and assess the particular significance of any heritage asset that may be affected by a proposal (including by development affecting the setting of a heritage asset) taking account of the available evidence and any necessary expertise. They should take this into account when considering the impact of a proposal on a heritage asset, to avoid or minimise any conflict between the heritage asset's conservation and any aspect of the proposal.

191. Where there is evidence of deliberate neglect of, or damage to, a heritage asset, the deteriorated state of the heritage asset should not be taken into account in any decision.

192. In determining applications, local planning authorities should take account of:

- a) the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation;
- b) the positive contribution that conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities including their economic vitality; and

c) the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness.

Considering potential impacts

193. When considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation (and the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be). This is irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm to its significance.

194. Any harm to, or loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset (from its alteration or destruction, or from development within its setting), should require clear and convincing justification. Substantial harm to or loss of:

- a) grade II listed buildings, or grade II registered parks or gardens, should be exceptional;
- b) assets of the highest significance, notably scheduled monuments, protected wreck sites, registered battlefields, grade I and II* listed buildings, grade I and II* registered parks and gardens, and World Heritage Sites, should be wholly exceptional

Local Plan Heritage Policies:

Policy CS18 of the adopted Havant Borough Local Plan 2011 and policy S31 of the draft East Hampshire District Local Plan 2017-2036, which states that planning permission will be granted for a water storage reservoir at Havant Thicket providing it meets a range of tests. This includes stipulating that the natural and rural character of the area should be conserved and that compensation should be provided for the loss of and effects on the registered park and conservation area. Policy also advises that consideration should be given to integrating the reservoir and the new landscape with the historic landscape of the registered park and conservation area

Policy CP29 of the Joint Core Strategy states that proposals should harmonise with the townscape and the general character of the town or village in which it is set and that it easily assimilates into the landscape or is well related to a group of buildings.

Policy CP30 of the Joint Core Strategy states that development proposals must conserve and, where possible, enhance the District's historic environment. This includes point c) which seeks to:

'Conserve, enhance, maintain and manage the district's heritage assets and their setting including listed buildings, conservation areas, Scheduled Ancient Monuments, archaeological sites and Historic Parks and Gardens.'

Assessment

The Avenue

The proposals would see half of Stone's Avenue removed, including the Upper Lake. This would only leave a small section of the avenue in situ. The view down this section of the avenue would also be truncated by the construction of the reservoir embankments. However, it is important to note that the avenue has changed significantly from its original vision with the section north of the upper lake lost. This impacts on the avenue overall historic significance.

A staircase is proposed to climb the embankment of the reservoir, continuing the line of the lost section of the Avenue. It is intended that at the top of this staircase a viewing platform will be

created to afford some understanding of the Avenue feature, providing medium length views along the ride, as well as the surrounding estate and reservoir

The harm caused to the conservation area and registered park and garden would be significant but nonetheless would be less than substantial. Whilst there would be total loss of the upper lake part of the avenue will still be discernible ensuring that it continues to contribute to the significance of the registered park and conservation area. The introduction of the avenue staircase also goes some way to mitigating the harm with the intention of creating integration between the historic landscape and the reservoir.

North western section of the conservation area

The proposal would see the north west section of the conservation area lost to the development of the reservoir. As noted above this is understood to have been woodland with walks crossing it. Most of this tree planting in this area has since been removed, although some walking routes remain. Whilst this area positively contributes to the understanding and appreciation of the landscape that forms the significance of the conservation area it is considered that much of the conservation area will still be unaltered. This is also a later part of the designed parkland and does not have the historic significance of other areas within the parkland.

As with the Avenue the harm would be high but less than substantial.

Terrace

The proposals largely retain key views from the terrace. However, this vista will be slightly altered by seeing a small portion of the reservoir. This would compromise to an extent the experience of looking out over unbroken countryside that the terrace was designed to take advantage of. On this basis the proposals will cause a low level of harm to the significance of the grade II listed terrace, the registered park and conservation area.

Planning obligations

As significant harm is caused to the historic parkland and the conservation area the opportunity should be taken to improve the amenity and interpretation of the conservation area and the registered park.

I would welcome a commitment to a landscape management plan for the wider registered park and garden and conservation area that would assess the condition of those built elements remaining from the 19th century and create and fund a schedule of repair and maintenance, bringing additional heritage benefits to the scheme. There is also scope for improved interpretation within the wider registered park and garden and conservation area of those known lost features of significance, something which should be included within an interpretation strategy. This would contribute to the success of the visitor and recreation attraction which is a proposed outcome of proposals

Conclusion

As the harm by the proposals is less than substantial it is for the planning officer to weigh the benefits of providing the reservoir against the harm to the significance of the registered park as is required by paragraph 196 of the NPPF. However, I recognise that providing a reservoir to secure reliable drinking water for years to come is a public benefit and potentially a very significant one that may outweigh the harm to the park.

Conditions:

- The avenue and north west area of the conservation area is fully recorded before they are lost. This should include a photographic record and a detailed plan showing all features of historical interest.
- A landscaping scheme is devised to integrate the reservoir with the Avenue and the Sir George Staunton Country Park beyond
- Interpretation is provided to explain the purpose and original extent of the Avenue