



Historic England

Mr Lewis Oliver
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Our ref: P01307990

10 December 2020

Dear Mr Oliver

**T&CP (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015
& Planning (Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas) Regulations 1990**

**HAVANT THICKET, ADJACENT TO SIR GEORGE STAUNTON COUNTRY PARK,
MIDDLE PARK WAY, HAVANT
Application No. APP/20/00990**

Thank you for your letter of 16 November 2020 regarding the above application for planning permission. On the basis of the information available to date, we offer the following advice to assist your authority in determining the application.

Summary

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 would cause a high, but less than substantial, level of harm to the significance of the parkland. We accept that there is a justification for this harm, as it would not be possible to build a reservoir on this site without truncating the Avenue and suitable alternative sites for the reservoir are limited. We also acknowledge that the level of wider public benefit is likely to be assessed as high. We therefore do not object to this application and are content for it to be determined in its current form.

Historic England Advice

The proposed reservoir would lie within a shallow valley located between the residential settlements of Leigh Park and Rowlands Castle. This would entail the truncation of a later 19th century Avenue that forms part of Leigh Park, which is a designated grade II* landscape on the Register of Parks and Gardens. A substantial earth dam would be created to contain the water.



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The significance of Leigh Park and the Sir George Staunton conservation area

Leigh Park is primarily of significance as a good example of an informal 19th century landscaped garden. Historically the gardens were particularly unusual in the way that they reflected the Chinese and botanical interests of their principal creator, Sir George Staunton. The gardens incorporated plants newly introduced from China, themed garden areas, follies and garden buildings. Staunton also created a large ornamental lake, Leigh Water. Staunton's pleasure gardens were focused around Leigh Water, and are surrounded by parkland that predates this and was later altered by subsequent 19th century owners. This parkland provides an attractive context for the gardens, greatly enhancing their attractiveness and grandeur.

The Avenue was created by William Stone, who bought the park in 1861 following Staunton's death. He moved the residential focus of the estate north to the highest part of the site, overlooking Leigh Water, where he built a Gothic mansion. All that remains of this is an arcaded terrace (listed grade II) which utilised the topography of the park to have a key view down to Leigh Water and over the surrounding parkland and land beyond.

Stone carved the Avenue out of existing woodland as a green ride with a new lake half way along its distance. Called Upper Lake, it had a waterfall as well as Boat and Bathing Houses. 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. This contrasted the open parkland views from the mansion, overlooking Leigh Water.

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.

As well as being a Registered Park and Garden the site is also a conservation area. The boundary of this is almost identical to the registered park with the exception of the northwest corner, where more of the country park is included. From historic maps it is understood this was once woodland with walks crossing it. Most of this tree planting has since been removed, although walking routes remain. This land was probably 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.

The impact of the proposals on the significance of this highly designated site

The Avenue

We identify harm in proposals to curtail the Avenue. As discussed above, only half of Stone's Avenue remains discernible. The proposals would see roughly half of what remains removed, including the Upper Lake, leaving only a quarter of the historic avenue. The view down the Avenue from the southeast would be truncated by the construction of the reservoirs tall embankment.

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.

Harm is therefore caused by the total loss of Upper Lake and part of the remaining Avenue, as well as through the change to the view when on the Avenue near the reservoir, diminishing the ability to appreciate and understand the extensive and enclosed nature of the historic ride. We consider this harm to be less than substantial, as a remaining section of Avenue will be retained and appreciable, continuing to contribute to the significance of the registered park.

We note the Avenue staircase is being introduced to mitigate this harm, with the intention being to integrate the historic landscape with the reservoir, supported by increased interpretation.

The Terrace

While the proposals largely retain key views from the terrace 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, in our view, proposals will cause a low level of harm to the significance of the grade II listed terrace, the registered park and conservation area.

Heritage benefits

We note the commitment in HE4 of the Outline Environment Management Plan for interpretation of the site to 'compensate' for the physical loss of the Avenue. While interpretation is welcome we do not think this can compensate for the removal of heritage assets or reduce the level of harm entailed by the proposals.

Legislative and planning policy considerations

Local Policy

The proposed reservoir site straddles Havant Borough and East Hampshire District Council Areas.

We note site location 2 of 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.

National Policy

The proposals need to be considered against the policies of the National Planning Policy Framework which apply to designated heritage assets, including Conservation Areas and Registered Parks and Gardens. In particular, your Council should be clear that proposals meet the tests set out in paragraphs 194 and 196 of the Framework.

Paragraph 194 of the NPPF advises 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. Paragraph 196 advises where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use.

Historic England's position regarding this application

In our view proposals meet the tests set out in Local plan policy. The impact of the reservoir on the registered park and conservation area has been limited to the loss of part of the Avenue and a small change to long views over Leigh Water from the listed terrace, impact which Local plan policy implicitly acknowledges is likely if the reservoir is to be constructed.

We also accept that there is a strong justification for the harm entailed that could meet the requirements of paragraph 194 of the NPPF. We accept that there is an unmet need to provide resilient water supplies for the areas covered by Portsmouth Water and Southern Water over the next 25 years, enabling Southern Water to meet its



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legal obligations to reduce water abstraction from the River Itchen. We acknowledge that there are few other locations that this need can be met other than at Havant Thicket.

It is for your Council 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. We 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.

Should your Council grant planning permission we suggest that this is conditional on the following issues being addressed:

- The full extent of the Avenue is fully recorded before it is further truncated. This should include a photographic record and a detailed plan showing all features of historical interest.
- Interpretation is provided to explain the purpose and original extent of the Avenue
- A landscaping scheme is devised to integrate the reservoir with the Avenue. We suggest that the proposed Avenue staircase is designed to be as green as possible, allowing it to blend into the landscape
- Works should be undertaken in such a way that they do not impinge on the successful operation of Staunton Farm which is focussed on the historic nucleus of the former Leigh Park estate.

The Sir George Staunton Conservation Area Management Plan 2008 sets out a series of opportunities for enhancement. We suggest your Council discuss these with the applicant and explore if they can be incorporated into proposals and secured by condition or obligation. The improved amenity and interpretation of the conservation area and therefore registered park, would contribute to the success of the visitor and recreation attraction which is a proposed outcome of proposals.

Recommendations

Historic England has no objection to the application on heritage grounds.

While the proposals involve a level of harm to a Registered Park and Garden and conservation area we accept that this is justified as is required by paragraph 194 of the NPPF. It is for your Council to weigh the public benefit of proposals against the harm we have identified as required by paragraph 196 of the Framework.

Your authority should take these representations into account in determining the application. If there are any material changes to the proposals, or you would like further advice, please contact us. Please advise us of the decision in due course.



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Historic England

Yours sincerely

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