Sussex Gardens Trust
Encouraging the protection, conservation and evolution of the local garden heritage

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Rother District Council
Town Hall, Bexhill, TN39 3JX
FAO Miss C York

29th October 2021

Dear Sirs

RR/2021/1649/L: Ashburnham Place: Conversion and Change of use of a Bothy and Greenhouse into a Restaurant

Sussex Gardens Trust (SGT) is a member of the Gardens Trust (GT) (a national statutory consultee), and works closely with the GT on planning matters; the GT has brought this application to the SGT's attention.

Representatives of SGT have carefully studied the documents submitted with the application. The site of these buildings is located within Ashburnham Place which is included on the register of historic parks and gardens maintained by Historic England with a Grade II designation.

The very brief Heritage report submitted with the application correctly states that the buildings were shown on Lancelot 'Capability' Brown's plans for the site. An extract from Brown's plan is shown in the Appendix attached. The Lean-to green house is located in area F (described on the plan as a 'Melon Ground and Stoves') while the Bothy is located on the other side of the wall in area G (described on the plan as a Rickyard). Although the walled garden doesn't have a separate listing, the design is definitively attributed to Brown, the whole complex is very large, survives intact and generally in a good state of repair. It is very rare to find all these features together and loss of even part of the walls would be significant. Moreover, the current design of the garden in the section where the lean-to greenhouse lies mirrors that of the garden in the courtyard of immediately adjacent Grade II* listed Former Stables (see Google Earth image in the Appendix). This group of Heritage Assets thus share a common setting.

Members of SGT visited this site in April 2016 and at that time the garden in front of the lean-to greenhouse was very well maintained (see photos on Appendix). However, the Bothy is in a very poor state of repair, so the proposals would help remedy this issue. Less welcome is the opening up of a section of the garden wall between the greenhouse and the bothy. The section of wall to be removed is described as "*being kept to the minimum*"; however, the length removed appears

to be approximately 8.5m which is substantial and will cause harm to the significance of the structures and their setting.

Under para 189 of the National Planning Policy Framework, it is the responsibility of the applicant to describe the significance of the site and assess the impact of proposals on that significance. The Heritage Statement included with this application concludes that "*New internal openings have been kept to a minimum, with little of any architectural merit being lost*". This fails to reflect the points made in the preceding paragraphs. Such a large opening in the historic wall will undoubtedly result in a degree of harm. SGT suggests the harm could possibly be reduced by limiting the opening to a much smaller size, although even this could threaten the structural integrity of the top level of the wall, which will need to be properly supported (no drawings have been included showing how this would be achieved).

Even with a reduced opening, the Planning Authority should only approve the application is there are sufficient achievable public benefits. The ambition described in the last section of the Design and Access Statement is in many ways to be commended. However, it is exceedingly brief and not supported by any detail. These proposals envisage the greenhouse will be used as the main dining area with the structure largely unchanged. However, the lean-to greenhouse was specifically sited on a south facing wall to capture the heat of the sun, making it uncomfortably hot during daylight and uncomfortably cold at night. Is it realistic to use it in the manner described?

Conclusion

Sussex Gardens Trust objects to the application being approved as submitted for the reasons outlined above.

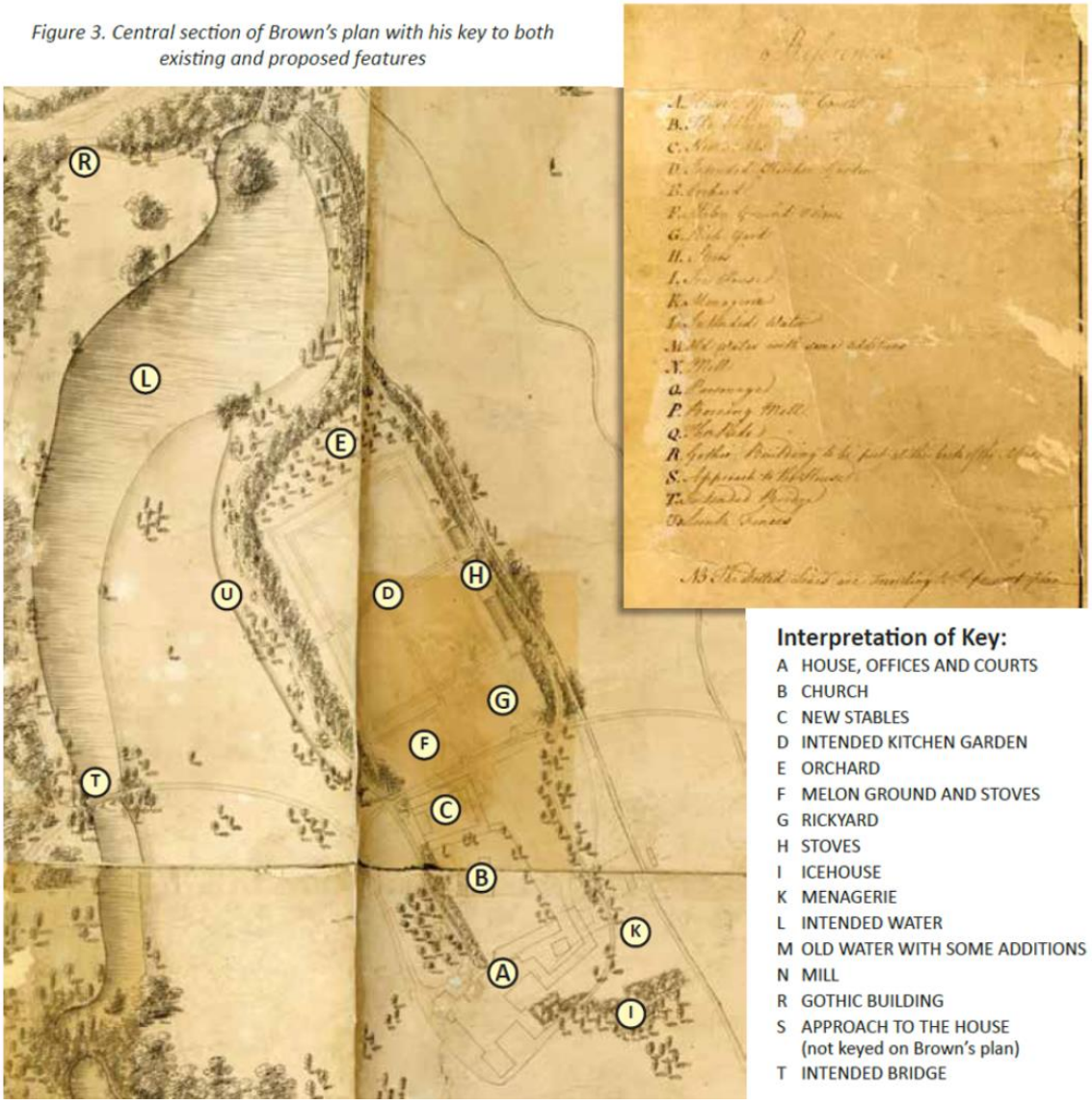
Yours faithfully

Jim Stockwell.
On behalf of the Sussex Garden Trust.

Copy to: The Gardens Trust

Extract From Brown Plan c1767

Figure 3. Central section of Brown's plan with his key to both existing and proposed features



Interpretation of Key:

A HOUSE, OFFICES AND COURTS
B CHURCH
C NEW STABLES
D INTENDED KITCHEN GARDEN
E ORCHARD
F MELON GROUND AND STOVES
G RICKYARD
H STOVES
I ICEHOUSE
K MENAGERIE
L INTENDED WATER
M OLD WATER WITH SOME ADDITIONS
N MILL
R GOTHIC BUILDING
S APPROACH TO THE HOUSE (not keyed on Brown's plan)
T INTENDED BRIDGE

Appendix

Google Earth image of Ashburnham Walled Garden and the Former Stables to the NE



Photographs from April 2016 (© J Stockwell)



The Grade II* Listed Former Stables are shown behind the wall on the bottom right photo