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By e-mail to Horsham District Council
Matthew Porter
Parkside,
Chart Way, Horsham,
West Sussex RH12 1RL

17 January 2023

Dear Sir

DC/22/2229 Partly retrospective application for the construction of enlarged and rationalised existing car park and grassed enclosure for overflow car parking at Leonardslee, Horsham West Sussex RH13 6PP

Sussex Gardens Trust (SGT) works closely with the Gardens Trust (GT) on matters concerning registered parks and gardens. However, as the statutory consultee on applications affecting all Registered Parks and Gardens, the GT should be consulted directly on this application (via consult@thegardenstrust.org); similarly, given this is a Grade I listed site, Historic England should be consulted, if that has not already happened.

Representatives of SGT have recently visited the site and carefully studied the documents submitted with the application. Compared with the earlier application (DC/21/1603), it is helpful to see many improvements to the landscaping with: the southern car park now designated as an overflow car park (presumably any approval would restrict use of this to a specified number of days each year); gravel removed from this area and grass sown over the "TruckPave" system to return the area to a green parkland character; removal of parking on the eastern side; new tree planting to help screen the main road and break up the current vast area of unrelieved car parking.

Nevertheless, the improvements offered by the new layout are quite modest and the approach lacks ambition. For instance, the few trees that are shown within the body of the primary car park will hardly relieve the still-expansive mass of hard surface, and by planting large tree species visitors could be catered for more sympathetically with a much greater degree of shaded parking, such as the three large trees that stood in this area as recently as Sept 2015 (see image below). Also, the allocation of the second area of parking as overspill appears to have no planting at all.



The removal of parking alongside the main road and planting of a screening belt is welcome, but no planting plan has been included to justify the proposals. The screening belt could be designed to reflect the character of the roadside landscape, or be informed by the design, character and plant choices of the rest of the gardens. Or alternatively the opportunity could be taken to give the area its own distinctive character, perhaps using drought resistant plants tolerant of our warming climate.

Possible Horticultural Harm Associated with Higher Visitor Numbers

The documents submitted identify plans for a very large increase in visitors and envisage some 350,000 visitors to special events in addition to normal visitors to the gardens. This commercial activity would bring in additional income but the additional footfall would also put pressure on the trees and shrubs in the gardens and on its infrastructure. Unless measures are taken to manage these issues, substantial horticultural harm could be caused to the trees and shrubs throughout the gardens, and hence substantial harm to the significance of the Grade I listed Gardens.

Under the NPPF it is the responsibility of the applicant to describe the significance of Heritage assets and also the impact of proposals on that significance. The Heritage Statement submitted with the application does, briefly, describe the significance of the Grade I Gardens (see pa 021), but the impact of the proposals on the Gardens looks only at the car park site itself (see 023 and 024) and there is no assessment of the horticultural harm to the wider Gardens that could be caused by a large increase in visitor numbers. The best way to do this is via a **Conservation Management Plan** identifying these issues and setting out how they will be managed.

Conclusion

While Sussex Gardens Trust welcomes these changes and recognises the need for additional carparking, the documents submitted do not provide sufficient evidence to justify approval. In particular there is still no **Conservation Management Plan** as advised by Historic England in their letter of 16th Sept 2021 nor a detailed **planting plan**. For these reasons, Sussex Gardens Trust continues to object to the application in its present form.

Yours faithfully

Jim Stockwell.

On behalf of the Sussex Garden Trust.

Copy to: The Gardens Trust