47 Denmans Lane
Lindfield
Haywards Heath
West Sussex
RH16 2JN

By e-mail to Horsham District Council
planning@horsham.gov.uk

2nd August 2024

Dear Sirs

Re DISC/24/0184. Application for Approval of Details Reserved by Condition 11 to approved application DC/22/2229 Leonardslee Gardens, Lower Beeding, West Sussex

Thank you for consulting the Gardens Trust (GT) in its role as Statutory Consultee with regard to proposed development affecting a site listed by Historic England (HE) on their Register of Parks and Garden. SGT is a member organisation of the GT and works in partnership with it in respect of the protection and conservation of registered sites, and is authorised by the GT to respond on GT's behalf in respect of such consultations.

SGT has been concerned about developments in Leonardslee Gardens in recent years and we have commented on several planning application.

We were particularly pleased to be invited to a meeting with representatives of Leonardslee on 25th June when we discussed plans for further developments which have not yet been submitted for planning approval; we also explained and discussed our comments on earlier planning applications, including DC/22/2229, and walked the site to discuss various matters, including planting plans. The Appendix to this letter reflects out feedback on all these matters.

We are very pleased that the documents submitted with the current application, DISC/24/0184 reflect what we said regarding the approach to both the car park and the roadside frontage. We welcome the good selection of rhododendrons on the frontage (but we do not have any knowledge of the particular varieties chosen).

Given climate change is real and developing, we still feel more could be done to choose trees to provide serious shade in the extensive car park: the choice of trees within the rows of hedging, apart from Prunus avium Plena, are only modest height or columnar (Acer campestre Streetwise to c7m and Corylus Colurna to c12m), so will not cast shade very far. They are quite far apart too – one stretch of hedging without a tree is 18m long. If roots from larger trees is perceived to be a problem, this could be managed by adjusting spacing.

Conservation Management Plan

The planting plans submitted with this discharge application should be linked to the Conservation Garden Management Plan. Such a plan was submitted with DC/22/2229. However, both Sussex Gardens Trust and Historic England advised at the time that this document should be developed further (see SGT letter dated 14th March 2024 and HE letter dated 3rd March 2024). This issue was discussed with representatives of Leonardslee at our meeting held on 25th June (see Appendix attached) when we asked Leonardslee specifically that the consultants brief (currently with LUC) be extended to include a further review and development of the Conservation Garden Management Plan to address the issues raised by SGT and HE. We also suggested that specific professional advice be sought on visitor management which should be integrated with, and used to inform, landscape proposals and management and an interpretation and signage plan. We suggest these issues might be addressed by including conditions to the approval of this application.

Yours faithfully

Jim Stockwell.

On behalf of the Sussex Garden Trust

Copy to: The Gardens Trust

Appendix

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By e-mail to Neil McLaughlin
Purcell

1st July 2024

Dear Neil

Leonardslee Gardens Pre-App Consultation - Sussex Gardens Trust

Many thanks for the meeting last Tuesday, it was a pleasure for Virginia Hinze and myself to meet Adam Streeter, Leonardslee staff, consultants from Land Use Consultants and your team from Purcell.

As you know, the Gardens Trust (GT) is a statutory consultee regarding planning applications affecting all sites included on the Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest in England maintained by Historic England. Sussex Gardens Trust (SGT) works closely with the GT and is authorised to comment on cases on behalf of the GT.

We started the meeting by referring to the publicly available accounts for Leonardslee which, on our reading, indicates some £15m has already been invested over the past few years. This is most welcome and has enabled the gardens to be brought back to a better state of repair following a decade of neglect. However, some changes have had a harmful effect on the site, particularly the car park and planting along the main A281 road. SGT recognises the need to develop commercial activities to provide a funding stream to support the conservation and management of the gardens. SGT is not opposed in principle to such commercial developments; our comments on recent planning applications, and on the present consultation, seek to guide the evolution of the gardens in a manner that protects their heritage significance.

It was extremely useful and timely for SGT to meet together with all the management and consultancy team members involved in this critical planning stage of Leonardslee's major development. We were especially pleased – and reassured - that Land Use Consultants have been appointed as landscape consultants as we feel keenly that this has long been a missing skill. We were also delighted to see the Head Gardener at the meeting as it acknowledges his essential contribution to both the planning and implementation stages and the long-term success of all the landscape actions and proposals.

CONSERVATION GARDEN MANAGEMENT PLAN

As you are aware, SGT had significant concerns that the Conservation Garden Management plan, even in its revised form (combined with the overall CMP), and following views expressed by us and by Historic England (letters of 12th and 11th of March respectively) did not provide the robust vision statement or analysis of how the various parts and features contribute to this. Without this work it is not possible to assess whether or how new proposals could be measured as having a positive or negative impact on the gardens and collections. HE additionally raised a number of other points, specifically an action plan (management plan) for conserving the national collection and other historic plantings and features over time, recognising and exploiting the potential for partnerships with other High Weald gardens, climate change (including water management), and, a key one, managing visitor pressure on the whole site. Both parties raised various aspects of the above around the table which the Team acknowledged as vital.

- SGT therefore asked Leonardslee specifically that LUC's brief should be extended to include a further review and development of the Conservation Garden Management Plan to address them. We also suggested that specific professional advice be sought on visitor management which should be integrated with, and used to inform, landscape proposals and management and an interpretation and signage plan.

DEVELOPMENT PROPOSALS FOR NEW ENTRANCES AND BUILDINGS AS CONTAINED IN THE LEONARDSLEE LAKES AND GARDENS PRE-APPLICATION DOCUMENT (MARCH 2024)

- SGT is content with the proposals, including the landscape and external works, to repair, restore and/or convert to new use the Stable Courtyard, former Generator Halls, cottages, new garden entrance kiosk, engine house and revised circulation routes. Including the rock garden within the non-pay zone may put more pressure on the Pulhamite and therefore we would ask for a specific conservation programme to be prepared for managing its (in parts) poor condition.

CAR PARKS AND FRONTAGE TO A281

Although an outline layout is shown on drawings included within the *Leonardslee Lakes and Gardens Pre-application* document (new boundary and access layout para. 2.6 and zoning layout 2.7), fully-detailed proposals to meet planning conditions (application Horsham DC_22_2229) for the planting of the car park, treatment of the overspill area and the roadside frontage onto the A281 are still outstanding. Potential details were discussed on the site with LUC and the Head Gardener on planting strip widths, varieties of hedging and trees (medium sized trees e.g. Acer campestre and Prunus avium but with the addition of at least one or two large trees such as Tilia cordata). The overspill area has been graded satisfactorily and seeded but will take time without events to establish.

The character of the roadside planting was discussed; SGT's view is that it should ideally reflect the ornamental and exotic character of Leonardslee's Gardens, to 'announce it' to arriving (and passing potential) visitors, i.e. with restoration of former rhododendrons plus perhaps associated species such as deciduous azaleas, camellias, hydrangeas and perhaps some new conifer trees, planted informally but still screening the car park.

- SGT is content with the principle of planting the main carpark as shown on the outline layout and would like to see detailed planting plans for it and the roadside area worked up as described above. SGT would welcome a copy of any submission to Horsham DC.

BALANCING POND

Sketch visualisations were shown for the balancing pond which has been extended to form a small lake east of the gardeners' compound building. SGT understands that this is 'work in progress' and will provide an additional visitor attraction.

- SGT is content with the principle of the balancing lake as a new landscape feature in keeping with the existing lakes and its potential to be managed to relieve visitor pressure on other parts of the grade 1 registered garden.

FINALLY

If we can be of assistance as these plans are developed, we would be happy to help. Please let us know when any planning application is submitted in case we aren't notified, as can be the case with applications related to conditions of approved planning applications.

Yours faithfully

Jim Stockwell.

On behalf of the Sussex Garden Trust

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