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SDNPA
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Stanmer House SDNP/24/01671/LIS | Landscaping alterations to the Fountain Garden

The Gardens Trust (GT) is a Statutory Consultee with regard to proposed development affecting a site listed by Historic England (HE) on their Register of Parks and Garden. Sussex Gardens Trust (SGT) is a member organisation of the GT and works in partnership with it in respect of the protection and conservation of registered and un-registered sites, and is authorised by the GT to respond on GT's behalf.

SGT has commented on several previous applications for various intrusive developments and alterations to the fountain garden (letters dated 12/4/22 Re SDNP/22/01389 and 5/7/18 Re SDNP/18/03034/PRE) which have destroyed both its intrinsic character and its vital relationship with its (grade 1 listed) house.

SGT is pleased to see that this relationship will be to an extent restored through both the removal of the play equipment, benches and the majority of the current 36 car parking spaces and the creation of new garden features of paths, lawns and hedging. While we would prefer to have seen the permanent removal of *all* car parking, the proposal to limit it to the 11 spaces (presumably a geotextile with grassed surfacing?) we appreciate that there are reasons for retaining these to support the commercial viability of the house.

There appears to be very little evidence for the fountain garden having ever been laid out with any significant formal design including enclosure as proposed. In a letter we wrote to your authority regarding a previous application (Disabled parking SDNP/22/01389/FUL, April 2022) we described the fountain garden as being originally laid out in the 18th century as informal parkland (reaching up to the south elevation in a Brownian style) but later in the 19th century [being] remodelled as a more formal garden.

We included (our Fig 3) a photograph of how the garden looked in the early 20th century when still occupied by the Pelham family as a private house.



Early 20th Century Photographs of the Fountain Garden adjacent to the South Elevation

As can be seen, the garden is surprisingly open and unadorned, not, as might be expected in association with a significant stone fountain basin in the mid/late C19, more elaborately planted.

SGT is content with the principle of introducing formal elements of enclosure and associated paths as not out of keeping with how such a garden area might have been developed in, say, the Edwardian period; the proposed hedges have the advantage of screening the cars and of providing a more sheltered environment for public use.

However, there are a number of issues which we think the applicants should be required to address.

Firstly, we consider that the site plan (proposals) is poorly detailed and the planting information inadequate. The key appears to be printed on top of the layout drawing (Site Plan Proposed Revision A) so it is impossible to understand precisely what is intended to be planted where.

We therefore have a number of questions but, most importantly, what precisely is the intended effect of the planting? It appears that the scheme has been drawn up without sufficient knowledge of the proper character either of C18 - or Edwardian revivalist - formal gardening or of plantsmanship per se.

Additionally, we ask:

- What is the difference between an English yew hedge and a native evergreen hedge – the latter seems to refer to an existing hedge (as shown on the topographical survey) – but the Design and Access statement clearly says *that 'The Fountain Garden would also be enclosed once more by a native hedgerow of English yew, re-establishing the historic curtilage of the House* – suggesting the whole garden will be thus enclosed.
- What do the red dots signify?
- What are the robust shrubs selected and why planted in the pattern shown?
- Where is the native wildflower meadow to be sown?
- What is the reason for resurfacing the terrace in slate?
- What width is intended for the paths (we cannot scale from the drawings) – they appear narrow for public circulation, especially the approach path to the fountain.

We strongly suggest that the applicants be requested to engage a landscape architect with the relevant professional qualifications and experience in historic landscape design to prepare fully-detailed planting plans, including 3D visualisations of the main view from the house. We also suggest that consideration be given to whether the staff resources available are sufficient to maintain herbaceous plantings or indeed a wildflower meadow which is difficult to establish, let alone maintain. A simpler pallet of hedges, lawns and bulbs may be more appropriate.

Kind regards

Jim Stockwell
Trustee
On behalf of
Sussex Gardens Trust