



Historic England

Ms Eleanor Morris
The Planning Inspectorate
Temple Quay House
2 The Square
Bristol
BS1 6PN

Direct Dial: 0121 625 6870

Our ref: P01448788

17 December 2021

Dear Ms Morris

**TOWN & COUNTRY PLANNING ACT 1990
NOTIFICATION OF ENFORCEMENT APPEAL**

**LAND AT THORNBRIDGE HALL, BASLOW ROAD, ASHFORD-IN-THE-WATER,
DE45 1NZ
ERECTION OF BUILDING, CONSTRUCTION OF DRIVEWAY AND CAR PARK**

PI Reference: APP/M9496/C/21/3279072

We have been informed by the Peak District National Park Authority, on 1 December 2021, of an enforcement notice at the above property, which is now the subject of an appeal to be decided by public inquiry. We understand that there is a deadline of 29 December 2021 for Historic England to provide any comments that we might have in relation to the matter. We offer the following advice to assist the Planning Inspectorate in determining the appeal.

Summary

Thornbridge Hall is a highly significant late 19th and 20th century country house, surrounded by distinctive gardens and parkland, in the heart of the Peak District National Park. The works to create an access drive, car park and new building have caused a high level of serious, less than substantial harm to the significance of the Thornbridge Hall Registered Park and Garden (Grade II) . They have also caused a high level of serious, less than substantial harm to the significance, derived from their setting, of Grade II listed buildings within the registered park and garden and conservation area, in particular Thornbridge Hall, Four Hermes in Gardens at



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Thornbridge Hall, Fountain and Urns in Gardens at Thornbridge Hall, Two Garden Temples in Gardens of Thornbridge Hall, and Gardens at Thornbridge Hall.

The decision maker will need to give consideration as to whether there is a clear and convincing justification for the development, and whether any public benefits outweigh the harm. Historic England would object to this development on heritage grounds if we were consulted on a planning application for the scheme.

Historic England Advice

Significance of Thornbridge Hall and its designed landscape

The 19th and 20th century park and gardens at Thornbridge Hall are of high historic, architectural and artistic interest. Their design takes great advantage of the dramatic Peak District setting, knitting seamlessly into the surrounding landscape and providing a theatrical set piece for the Hall.

Early history

Thornbridge Hall was part of the Longsdon family estate until the late 18th century, when it was purchased by a Manchester merchant, Andrew Morewood. Morewood and his son rebuilt the house and created a modest park. It later passed back into the ownership of the Longsdons again, and then John Sleigh, a Leek manufacturer.

The late 19th century and early 20th centuries – George Marples' Thornbridge

It was when Frederick Craven purchased the estate in 1871 that the distinctive surviving character of Thornbridge was born. Architect JB Mitchell-Withers was commissioned to rebuild the Hall in the Jacobean style. Stained-glass windows by William Morris and Edward Burne-Jones survive from this period.

Thornbridge was sold again in 1896, to George 'Jobson' Marples, to whom much of the surviving character of Thornbridge can be attributed. He enlarged the estate to over 400 acres (161ha), removing stone walls south of the Hall to create a new park. Charles Hadfield of Sheffield was commissioned to enlarge the Hall, add stables and build lodges on the boundary of the park. Formal gardens around the Hall were added, to designs by Simeon Marshall of James Backhouse and Son's prominent York nursery. In 1903 a private railway station, 'Woodlands', was added to the park.

The 1922 Ordnance Survey map shows Marples' Thornbridge, which largely survives today. The topography of the site was used to great effect, with the Hall overlooking the new park and gardens, and enjoying views out into the dramatic scenery of the Peak District. An existing watercourse was used to create cascades in the gardens and a series of ponds, also featuring cascades, in the park.



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The historic principal approach drive to the Hall from East Lodge entrance takes the visitor past a lively cascade and between two new fishponds. The south front of the Hall captures the eye in prominent views across the park to the north, with sweeping parkland to the east and west completing the scene. The series of theatrical individual gardens, with their terraces, rustic grottoes, and seats, are reminiscent of influential 19th century gardens such as those at Elvaston Castle, Derbyshire, and Biddulph Grange, Staffordshire.

The parkland has been laid out as a middle ground for views from the terraces to the south of the Hall, viewpoints from the gardens, with the surround hills providing a dramatic backdrop. The park also provides the setting for an unfolding view of the Hall as the visitor travels along the historic principal drive from the south. There is a marked contrast between the openness of the parkland and the enclosure of the wooded pleasure grounds around the hall prior to arrival at the west front of the Hall. In the east part of the park, a gated entrance, a tunnel under the railway line, and the footpath across the park all afforded secondary access and vantage points from which to enjoy views across the park.

The 1930s to 1945 – Charles Boot’s Thornbridge

Charles Boot, of the construction firm Henry Boot, purchased the estate in 1930 following Marples’ death in 1929. Boot’s firm was involved in demolition and other construction works around the world, and he drew together an extensive and varied collection of garden buildings, statuary and other garden ornaments at Thornbridge. This included garden temples, urns and balustrading from Clumber Park, Nottinghamshire, part of a fountain from Sydnop Hall, Derbyshire, and marble statues from Greece.

Boot embellished the Hall and gardens with his collection, adding to the existing theatrical quality of the designed landscape, made more interesting perhaps by his association with another business interest, the Pinewood Film Company. A notable addition to the gardens by Boot was an arrangement of a grouping of his acquisitions in the north-east area of the gardens. This included two of the Clumber temples, the partial fountain from Sydnop, and the Four Hermes (allegorical statues representing the four seasons) gifted to him by the Greek government. This created a new, Arcadian character in this area of the gardens, which previously featured a hedged vegetable garden to the north, with an area of trees and shrubs to the south.

Post-war change

Sheffield City Council purchased the estate in 1945, after which the Hall was used as a teacher training college, and later a conference and education centre. Its condition declined until it passed into private ownership. The Hall and a number of features, particularly those in the gardens, have been repaired and restored under successive owners.



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The registered park and garden is listed at Grade II in recognition of its special historic interest. There are a number of listed buildings within the registered park, in particular Thornbridge Hall, Four Hermes in Gardens at Thornbridge Hall, Fountain and Urns in Gardens at Thornbridge Hall, Two Garden Temples in Gardens of Thornbridge Hall, and Gardens at Thornbridge Hall all of which are listed at Grade II in recognition of their special historic interest. Thornbridge Hall has also been designated as a conservation area with the boundary of the conservation area largely the same as the registered park and garden.

Impact of the development

The construction of a new driveway, car park and building in the registered park and gardens at Thornbridge Hall has subdivided an area of formerly open parkland and introduced new development in the ornamental gardens. The registered park and garden had previously retained much of its late 19th and early 20th century historic character. The new development has had a physical impact on the integrity of the designed landscape of the park and garden, and does not appear to reflect the design and character of the historic landscape. This has harmed the significance of the registered park and garden, and conservation area.

The works have also caused consequent harm to the significance, derived from their designed landscape setting, of Thornbridge Hall, Gardens at Thornbridge Hall, Four Hermes in Gardens at Thornbridge Hall, Fountain and Urns in Gardens at Thornbridge Hall, and Two Garden Temples in Gardens of Thornbridge Hall, due to the negative impact of the development on the ability for the listed buildings to be appreciated in the designed setting in which they were intended to be experienced. In our view the harm is less than substantial, but nonetheless serious in its impact on the significance of these nationally important heritage assets.

Physical impact on the registered park and garden, conservation area and their integrity

The most important part of the parkland to the designed views and appreciation of the Hall and Gardens in their designed setting, and hence their significance, has been subdivided along its length by the drive, bunds and fencing. This is harmful due to the introduction of physical interruptions to the previously uninterrupted landscape and causing a loss of openness. The series of ponds, which took artful advantage of the topography, are now separated from the rest of the parkland, which formerly ran uninterrupted to their edge.

The construction of the car park and link route to the new building, currently used for the purposes of a café and retail sales, has had a harmful physical impact through loss of an area of open parkland, removal of part of the intact historic gardens and causing potential damage to parkland trees. The new building itself and associated hard standing has resulted in a loss of the historic layout and legibility of this area of



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the gardens, making it contiguous with structures extending east from the glasshouse range.

The works have therefore caused a direct harm to the significance of the registered park and garden, and conservation area arising from the nature of the physical harm and loss of integrity of the designed landscape of the park and gardens.

There may also have been damage or destruction to earthworks, including a lynchet (earth terrace formed through ploughing) recorded in a 1995 archaeological survey, and potential subsurface archaeological features related to the development of the gardens and earlier occupation of the site. The absence of a desk-based assessment and heritage impact assessment makes the potential impact difficult to assess.

Appearance of the development

The new driveway branches off from the principal, historic drive approximately 166m north-west of the East Lodge entrance, at a key point where the historic drive crosses between the two fishponds. The very wide splay at the junction where the new driveway meets the historic drive, and the c.6m width of the new driveway, dwarf the historic drive, making it appear secondary to the new driveway. The new driveway is surfaced with asphalt, and marked out with a central white line, which conveys the impression of a public highway and is therefore out of keeping with the historic parkland character. The car park has also been surfaced with asphalt, with bays marked out with white lines.

Bunds constructed along the north side of the new driveway and adjacent to the car park, are jarring intrusions in the landscape. The bunds associated with the car park, of up to c.3m in height, are particularly out of character in the parkland landscape.

The fences that run along both sides of the drive, with associated gates and stiles, are also highly visually intrusive. They contribute to the harmful impact of the new driveway on designed views by further emphasising the division of the parkland landscape and interrupting historic views across the park and result in a loss of openness.

Hard standing adjacent to the new building has also been laid in asphalt, resulting in the loss of part of the garden landscape, which was most recently lawn. Surviving lengths of historic boundary hedges have been surrounded and isolated within the asphalt surfacing, further disrupting the historic layout. The new building, currently used as a café and for retail sales, is timber clad with UPVc windows and doors. The building adjacent asphalt surfacing and fencing are highly visually intrusive and not in keeping with the historic character of the gardens.

Impact on the approach and the significance of the Hall

The design of the park and the principal approach to the Hall, via the historic drive, is centred on the dramatic reveal of the Hall at the top of the hill, as the visitor enters



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from the East Lodge entrance. Formerly the historic drive swept northwards towards the house, flanked on either side by uninterrupted, open parkland featuring a variety of trees. However, the construction of the new driveway has disrupted the theatricality and charm of this approach, due primarily to the visual impact of the new driveway, but also to the loss of prominence of the historic drive within the landscape.

The very wide splay at the junction between the historic drive and the new driveway gives primacy to the new driveway. It is also substantially wider and more prominent than the historic drive and appears to supersede it as the principal access in the park. Historic estate railings and gate posts have been removed and damaged, and ad hoc signage creates a cluttered appearance detracting from the historic view, sense of arrival and ability to appreciate the Hall in its designed landscape setting.

Views from the Hall and gardens

The principal designed view from the Hall across the park, including towards the ponds, and views from the listed Gardens at Thornbridge Hall, are notably disrupted by the new driveway, associated bunds, fences, gates and stiles. The bund to the north side of the drive conceals the drive surface, but the bund itself and fencing are highly visually intrusive. Vehicles moving along the new driveway are still visible and distract from the tranquillity of the formerly open parkland landscape.

There are also some partial views of the new building from the east terrace of the Hall, and from the east part of the Gardens at Thornbridge Hall. The bright colour of the timber cladding and reflective nature of the glazing to windows and doors makes the new building highly visible. The presence of the new building therefore has a negative impact on views from the east terrace of the Hall across the terraced fruit garden, glass house and wider garden.

It is also highly intrusive in designed views to the east from the glass house terrace toward the northernmost of the Two Garden Temples in Gardens of Thornbridge Hall, intended to terminate this axial walk as an eyecatcher, and from within the fruit garden. Views from the northernmost of the two Temples, looking west along the axial walk, are also negatively impacted by the presence of the new building in the foreground.

There is a very high degree of physical impact from the construction and installation of the surfacing, new building and associated fencing and other structures in the north east area of the gardens. The new building now dominates the views to the north from axial walk along which the Four Hermes are displayed. This has had a particularly harmful impact on the 'Arcadian' landscape associated with Boot's remodelling of this part of the garden, which forms the setting for the Grade II listed Four Hermes in Gardens at Thornbridge Hall, Fountain and Urns in Gardens at Thornbridge Hall, and Two Garden Temples in Gardens of Thornbridge Hall.



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The result has been harm to the significance, derived from their setting, of these listed buildings, which are key features of the registered park and gardens.

Policy and guidance considerations

National Planning Policy Framework

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) should be looked at as a whole, but there are particular issues with reference to the historic environment and achieving well-designed places to which we would like to draw your attention. We refer you to section 16 of the NPPF, 'Conserving and enhancing the historic environment', specifically paragraphs 194, 195, 197, 199, 200, 202 and 205.

In particular, paragraph 200 requires clear and convincing justification for 'any harm to, or loss of, the significance of a designated asset (from its alteration or destruction, or from development within its setting)'. Paragraph 202 requires that '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'.

We also refer you to section 12 of the NPPF, 'Achieving well-designed places'. Paragraph 130 states that planning decisions should ensure that developments are 'visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping' and 'are sympathetic to local character and history'. Paragraph 134 states that 'development that is not well-designed should be refused'.

Local Plan policies

The Local Planning Authority would be best placed to advise regarding Local Plan policies.

Historic England's Good Practice Advice in Planning

Historic England has published a series of Good Practice Advice notes (GPAs) to support owners, developers and local planning authorities when considering proposed changes to heritage assets.

'Managing Significance in Decision Taking in the Historic Environment' (GPA2) provides advice on assessing the significance of heritage assets, using appropriate expertise, recording and furthering understanding, neglect and unauthorised works.

'The Setting of Heritage Assets' (GPA3) provides advice on understanding setting, and how it may contribute to the significance of heritage assets and allow that significance to be appreciated, as well as advice on how views contribute to setting. GPA3 sets out a staged approach to taking decisions on setting, which also can be used to assess the contribution of views to the significance of heritage assets.



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Historic England's position

The registered park and gardens at Thornbridge Hall are of high historic, architectural and artistic interest, particularly for a key phase of development in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, much of which survives.

Paragraph 53 of Historic England's GPA2 provides further advice on factors that should be taken into account in achieving good design with relation to the historic environment. Historic England's GPA3 sets out a broad, staged approach to the assessment of development affecting the setting of heritage assets, which supports the exploration of ways to maximise enhancement and avoid or minimise harm.

We would expect that an appropriately designed scheme would take account of the significance, historic character and distinctiveness, and seek to maximise enhancement and avoid or minimise harm.

We would also expect that proposals would have been designed in such a way as to effectively deliver and secure benefits so that there is conservation of the heritage asset.

This is in line with paragraph 130 of the NPPF, which requires development to be sympathetic to local character and history and landscape setting.

The construction of an access drive, car park and new building does not appear to have taken account of the design and character of the registered park and therefore has had a harmful impact on the significance on the Grade II registered park and garden, listed for its special historic interest and the associated conservation area.

It has also caused consequent harm to the significance, derived from their designed landscape setting, of Grade II listed buildings located within the registered park and garden, and conservation area, in particular Thornbridge Hall, Gardens at Thornbridge Hall, Four Hermes in Gardens at Thornbridge Hall, Fountain and Urns in Gardens at Thornbridge Hall, and Two Garden Temples in Gardens of Thornbridge Hall, listed for their special historic interest.

The harm to heritage significance is serious, although 'less than substantial' in the language of the Framework. The decision maker will need to give consideration as to whether there is a clear and convincing justification for the very high level of harm, as set out in paragraph 200 of the NPPF, and whether there are any public benefits to outweigh the harm, as set out in paragraph 202 of the NPPF.

Recommendation

Historic England would object to this development on heritage grounds if we were consulted on a planning application for the scheme.



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Thornbridge Hall is a highly significant late 19th and 20th century country house, surrounded by distinctive gardens and parkland, in the heart of the Peak District National Park. The works to create an access drive, car park and new building have caused a high level of serious, less than substantial harm to the significance of the Thornbridge Hall registered park and garden, and the significance, derived from their setting, of Thornbridge Hall, Gardens at Thornbridge Hall, Four Hermes in Gardens at Thornbridge Hall, Fountain and Urns in Gardens at Thornbridge Hall, and Two Garden Temples in Gardens of Thornbridge Hall. The decision maker will need to give consideration as to whether there is a clear and convincing justification for the unauthorised development, and whether any public benefits outweigh the harm.

In determining this application you should bear in mind the statutory duty of section 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 to have special regard to the desirability of preserving listed buildings or their setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which they possess. In addition, you should bear in mind the statutory duty of section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of conservation areas.

We trust this is of assistance.

Yours sincerely



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