

COMMITTEE REPORT

BY THE DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENT CULTURE & SPORT
READING BOROUGH COUNCIL
PLANNING APPLICATIONS COMMITTEE: 5th March 2008

ITEM NO.

Ward: Caversham

App No.: 07/00687/REG3

Address: Caversham Court, Church Road, Caversham, Reading

Proposal: Restoration of the Grade 2 Listed Garden and its structures, including repair and re-building of replicas and new disabled access ramp. Refurbishment of toilet to kiosk and toilets, and soft landscaping

Applicant: Reading Borough Council

Date received: 26/05/2007

Minor Application: 8 week target expiry date: 20 September 2007

RECOMMENDATION

Subject to an acceptable parking layout and parking management plan GRANT planning permission

Conditions to include:

Standard

TL1 - Full 3 years

L2 - Landscaping - implementation of works

L3 - Landscaping - maintenance

C1 - Construction / demolition standard hours

C5 - Construction Method Statement

M2 - details to be submitted

L8 - Tree Location/Protection

Non standard

Parking Layout and Management Plan - submitted prior to works commencing

Develop continuous strip in advance of works to enhance biodiversity

Final bat survey not more than 1 month prior to works

Removal of ridge tiles, soffits and lead flashing to be done under supervision of bat ecologist

No vegetation clearance to be carried out in the bird-nesting season

Erection of bird and bat boxes

Creation of bat roosts

External lighting strategy

Arboricultural supervision for tree works

Informatives to include:

Policies

Approved Plans

Building Regulations

Terms and Conditions

Environment agency Consent

1. INTRODUCTION

Caversham Court comprises of a 1.3 ha grade II listed park, gardens and allotments, situated on the north bank of the River Thames close to Caversham Bridge. The park is adjacent to St. Peter's Church and churchyard and the residential area of The Warren. The park is owned by Reading Borough Council and forms a public park and allotments throughout the year.

The gardens are laid out in three terraces; the lower two consisting of lawn with mature trees while the upper terrace forms the allotments (previously the kitchen garden for the house) and was the site of the now demolished house. The park contains a number of grade II listed buildings and features including a 17th Century gazebo, retaining walls including a crinkle-crankle wall and the stables.

2. PLANNING HISTORY

07/00625/LBC - Restore replica of Weather Vane on the Gazebo - permitted 26th June 2007

07/00686/LBC - Restoration of the Grade 2 Listed Garden and its structures, including repair and re-building of replicas and new disabled access ramp. Change of use and refurbishment of toilet to kiosk and toilets, and soft landscaping - pending, this report can be found elsewhere on the agenda

3. PROPOSAL AND SUPPORTING INFORMATION

The proposal is for the restoration of the Grade II listed garden and its structures (excluding the stable block) as follows:

Structures to be repaired -

The Crinkle-crankle wall

All other retaining walls

The perimeter garden walls

The Gazebo and its access causeway

The entrance gateway in the north wall

The paths, ramps and steps

Structures to be built -

A replica of the main gateway designed by AW Pugin

Low walls picking out the footprint of the houses that stood on the top terrace of the gardens

A new ramp for disabled access

Refurbishment and reuse of structures -

The Change of use and refurbishment of the toilet block (to include two toilets with disabled access and a kiosk serving tea and cake)

Soft landscaping -

Some works to trees

New mixed borders on the same location as the historic borders

A lavender bank

A new winter walk

Bulb planting

Ecological areas

4. CONSULTATIONS

(i) Statutory consultation

English Heritage - No comments, the application should be determined in accordance with national and local policy guidance and on the basis of the Council's specialist conservation advice

Council's specialist conservation advice - No objections, the proposals would protect and enhance the listed gardens and features within

Environment Agency - No objection subject to informatives, part of the site falls within Flood Zone 3 however it is not considered that the proposed works to be carried out within the floodplain would alter the flood regime or result in a loss of floodplain.

(ii) Non statutory consultation

Archaeology - No comments

Transport - No objections, subject to receipt of an acceptable parking layout and management plan

Planning Support (Trees) - No objection subject to conditions and receipt of revised plans and documents

Planning Support (Ecology) - No objection subject to conditions and receipt of revised plans and documents

(iii) Public/local consultation and comments received

Neighbour Consultations: 2,4, 6, 8, 10, 12, 14, 16, 18, 20, 22, 24, 26, 28, 30, 32, 34, 36, 38, 40, 42 Auburn Court; 20, 27, 29, 31, 31A Church Road; 1 - 3, Bucks Eyot, Buckside Cottage Buckside; 1 - 28 Woodrow Court; The Reading Canoe Club The Warren; Blewgarth and Summer Hill The Warren; 1, 9, 11 and 13 St Peter's Hill; 1, 3, 5 and 7 St. Peter's Avenue; Flats 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 and 12 Treetops, The Mount; 18, 18A, 33, 35, 37, 43, 43A, 47 Church Road and St. Peter's Church, Church Road were notified by letter on the 29 June 2007, and a site notice posted on site with the comments deadline of 20 July 2007.

Two letters were received from neighbours; both letters largely support the proposals but raise some issues of concern. These are the lack of parking spaces and the parking of cars on the pavement blocking the footpath; concerns regarding the proposed low wall laid over the footprint of the previous house and its potential to cause problems for disabled visitors to the park; and the security of the park and potential problems with vandalism.

No further comments have been received from neighbouring properties at the time of writing this report.

5. RELEVANT PLANNING POLICY AND GUIDANCE

The application is assessed against Policies CUD 1 (Works affecting Listed Buildings), CUD 3 (Maintenance of Listed Buildings), CUD 4 (Setting of Listed

Buildings), CUD 7 (New Development in Conservation Areas), CUD 10 (Historic Parks and Gardens), CUD12 (Development impact on Archaeological remains), CUD13 (Preservation of Archaeological sites), LEI 4 (Neighbourhood Recreation Areas) and WAT10 (Waterways specific proposals) of the Reading Borough Local Plan and policies CS5 (Inclusive Access), CS7 (Design and Public Realm), CS8 (Waterspaces), CS24 (Car/Cycle Parking), CS33 (Protection and Enhancement of the Historic Environment), CS36 (Biodiversity and Geology) and CS38 (Trees, Hedges and Woodlands) of the Reading Borough Core Strategy.

6. APPRAISAL

Design and appearance

The majority of the works are for repairs, soft landscaping and the change of use of one building. The only new works would be:

A replica of the main gateway designed by AW Pugin which would be installed at the main entrance - it is considered that this would be in keeping with the character of the gardens and would enhance the external appearance of the gardens

Low walls picking out the footprint of the houses that stood on the top terrace of the gardens - it is considered that the walls would provide a point of interest within the gardens enhancing the historic context, and their design and the materials to be used would be in keeping with the character of the gardens

A new ramp for disabled access - the ramp would not be visible from outside the gardens and would fit in with the existing walkways

It is considered that the proposed new works would be in keeping with the character of the listed gardens, and would enhance the appearance and access to the gardens.

The proposed repair works and landscaping would also enhance the gardens and improve the accessibility of the gardens for all users. The proposed change of use to the toilet block would provide a better service for users of the gardens and would provide a presence in the gardens, which would deter any anti-social behaviour.

As such it is considered that the proposals would improve and enhance the gardens in terms of appearance, maintenance of the historic gardens and building and access to the gardens for all users in accordance with policy CUD10 of the Reading Borough Local Plan and policies CS7 and CS36 of the Reading Borough Core Strategy; therefore the proposals are considered to be acceptable in design terms.

Refurbishment and reuse

The toilet block was built c.1930's of a 'romantic' design and would be completely refurbished. The building would be divided internally to provide:

- Two unisex disabled access toilets to be accessed via doors on the north elevation; and
- A small outlet serving cream teas and sandwiches accessed via a service door on the east elevation and a serving window on the south elevation. The kiosk would only serve pre-prepared food and no food would be prepared on site (other than hot drinks).

The toilet block itself is not listed although it is sited within the listed garden. The refurbishment would maintain and improve the appearance of the outside of the building, there would be changes to window and door locations and sizes and new fittings would be installed. It is considered that the proposed refurbishment and reuse would improve and enhance the existing toilet block, which is largely unused being vandalised and unattractive in accordance with policies CS5 and CS7 of the Reading Borough Core Strategy.

Trees and landscaping

A variety of tree works are proposed to a number of trees within Caversham Court, some trees would be felled or relocated in order to allow the reinstatement of the character of the historic landscape. In addition, there is a significant level of planting and soft landscaping proposed. This would include the reinstatement of traditional herbaceous borders, a lavender bank and various bulb planting.

All tree and landscaping works are shown on the site master plan, these works have been agreed in conjunction with Planning Support Tree Officer's advice and comments. Therefore the proposal would improve and enhance the trees and landscaping on the site in accordance with policy CS38 (Trees, Hedges and Woodlands) of the Reading Borough Core Strategy.

Ecology

A number of ecological enhancements have been proposed - these include a proposal to develop a continuous strip in advance of works to enhance biodiversity, including a nectar bank, existing hedgerow, a mini meadow, a wildlife pond, orchard and nuttery in long grass and a loggery. Other measures include the creation of bat roosts and additional bat surveys to be carried out (to be secured by condition). As such it is considered that the proposal would retain, protect and incorporate features of biodiversity into the scheme in accordance with policy CS36 (Biodiversity and Geology) of the Reading Borough Core Strategy.

Vehicular access and parking

At present an informal parking area inside the main entrance gate is utilised by allotment holders. The proposal rebuilds the stone archway over the main gate and includes a low wall 'maze' laid over the footprint of the former house, both of which restrict access to this area. The proposal would restrict access to the site to maintenance and delivery vehicles; and would involve the loss of vehicular access to the site and parking provision for allotment holders. However, it is considered that the majority of people using the site would arrive on foot, and the site is close to a major bus route.

One parking space for the use of allotment holders would be provided on the Warren, with a waiting area and a chain to ensure that the space is only used by allotment holders. A management plan would also be submitted, detailing how the use of the space would be managed.

In addition, the Council's Parks section have stated that they will assist allotment holders to move things to and from their allotments using the Council's maintenance vehicles, by prior arrangement.

The Council's Transport section considers that the proposed parking provision to be acceptable, subject to receipt of an acceptable parking layout. Therefore the proposed parking layout is considered to be acceptable.

Streetscene

The majority of the proposed works would not be visible from the street, however some repairs to retaining walls and the replica gateway would be visible from St Peter's Hill. However it is considered that the proposals (where visible from the street) would enhance the streetscene by improving the appearance of the gardens.

Riverscene

The site runs down to the River Thames, adjacent to Caversham Bridge. The works involved in the proposal would be unlikely to have a unduly significant impact on the appearance of the gardens from the River and indeed they are likely to enhance the views from the River. As such it is considered that the proposal would enhance the relationship of buildings, spaces and routes to create a high quality public realm; and would make a positive contribution to the distinct character, appearance, landscape and amenity of the River Thames in accordance with policy CS8 (Waterspaces) of the Reading Borough Core Strategy.

The site is also identified in policy WAT10 (Site Specific proposals) of the Reading Borough Local Plan, which identifies waterside sites as priorities for improvement, and states that Caversham Court is identified for the restoration of the Gazebo as part of ongoing improvements. While other works to the gardens are not specifically mentioned, the restoration of the gazebo is part of the project, and it is considered that the proposal as a whole is in line with the broad principles of WAT10.

Neighbours

The site is immediately adjacent to St. Peter's Church and Rectory and Reading Canoe club. It is considered that the proposed works would be unlikely to have a detrimental impact on these properties as they largely consist of repairs or works to existing structures and landscaping works. The only new works, which would not be wholly contained within the gardens, would be the new gateway. However, it is considered that the proposed gateway would be an enhancement to the appearance of the gardens, and would not have a significant impact on these neighbouring properties. Therefore it is considered that the proposal would be unlikely to have a detrimental impact on St. Peter's Church and Rectory and Reading Canoe Club.

In terms of concerns raised in the letters from neighbours:

The lack of parking spaces cannot be addressed (other than the provision for allotment holders) as there is no practical location for parking (other than inside the gardens which not feasible or acceptable). However, it is considered that, due

to the location of the gardens, near to a good bus link and close Caversham Town centre, the lack of parking spaces is acceptable.

The proposed low wall may not be navigable by wheelchair users, however it would not prevent access for wheelchair users to the rest of the site. Therefore it is considered that the proposal would not prevent the access and enjoyment of the site by wheelchair users.

There is concern regarding the security of the park and potential vandalism, however it is considered that the proposals would not worsen the existing situation. In addition, it is considered that the proposed kiosk would provide a presence on-site, which should help to deter anti-social behaviour.

As such it is considered that the proposals would be unlikely to have a detrimental impact on neighbouring properties or the surrounding area, and likely to enhance the area.

7. CONCLUSION

The proposed development is considered to be acceptable in planning terms and accords with development policies as discussed above.

Case Officer: Louisa Johnson