



YORKSHIRE GARDENS TRUST

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Mrs Val Hepworth
Trustee
Conservation and Planning

19th September 2023

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Dear Ms Murray

23/01551/FULM Redevelopment of Owston Hall, including demolition of existing conservatory, new single storey side extension and internal alterations forming bar and dining area. Relocation of existing WC's/ Kitchen/ bar. New external patios including raised terrace over spa extension and internal alterations to spa. New spa entrance lobby to ground floor level. New sunken swimming pool patio and retaining wall. New single storey side extension forming increased internal swimming pool area, plant room and storage. Proposed three storey rear extension forming 23 additional hotel bedrooms. External hard and soft landscaping including new car park. Owston Hall Stockbridge Lane Owston Doncaster.

ALSO 23/01552/LBCM

Thank you for consulting The Gardens Trust (GT) in its role as Statutory Consultee with regard to any proposed development that could affect a site included by Historic England (HE) on their Register of Parks & Gardens. The Yorkshire Gardens Trust (YGT) 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.

The historic designed landscape, Owston Park, is not on the Register but is designated as a Park or Garden of Local Historic Interest by the City of Doncaster Council. The parkland of Owston Hall, although much altered in the mid-19th century, is still legible today as the setting for Owston Hall and its associated buildings. Owston Hall is Listed Grade II* with the church of All Saints Listed Grade I immediately to the north-east. The estate is within the Owston Conservation Area

Our colleagues at the YGT have researched Owston Hall park and garden and the report is currently in draft before being made publicly accessible. The Summary is at the end of this response.

Bryan Cooke (1756-1821) inherited Owston from his father, Anthony, in 1763 when he was still a small child. In 1785 Cooke consulted the landscape designer Thomas White (c.1736-1811). White's plan is extant and shows a substantial mansion was planned on a new site, a little distance from the house existing at that time, set within a landscape of plantations, sunk fences, rides and shrubberies (following the English Landscape Style of Brown). Later in 1793 Humphry Repton (1752-1818) visited Cooke and also gave advice producing one of his signature Red Books *Oulton Hall*, in 1793. This ambitious scheme in Repton's Picturesque form was not fully executed. The Red Book is now held by Doncaster Heritage Services, (copy in Eyres and Lynch 2018, 35-47). See references below.

The 1st Edition OS 6 inch :1 mile map of 1854, sheet 264 shows the more Picturesque nature of the designed landscape.

Whilst we understand about investment in Owston Hall and its curtilage and ancillary buildings to make it viable and accessible to clients, we have serious concerns about some of the proposals which we think will be harmful to the Grade II* Listed house and its significant setting.

In terms of the setting/landscape we have serious concerns about the car parking particularly the parking to the south- east of the Hall (1-67) as this will interrupt views to and from the Hall and be a distracting modern impact on the historic formal entrance that is a key part of the historic landscape design. In this context we also have concerns about the new access ramp and support the advice from Historic England and your Authority's Conservation Officer.

We also have some concerns about the proposed car parking area to the east (68-178) that has recently been cleared and we agree with the Conservation Report from City of Doncaster Council that the proposals might be acceptable if amended in various ways. We suggest that the whole scheme for the parking of cars needs to be looked at again and ameliorated. It should be part of an overall plan for conserving the landscape and garden setting of the house, ancillary buildings and church. This plan should, if possible, also include the walled garden.

We also note and agree with the advice from Historic England regarding the replacement of the existing conservatory. This forms a visual link between the historic hall and the recent wing, and whilst we welcome the re-use of the 19th century metal frame, we note and agree with Historic England and the Victorian Society regarding the proposed replacement structure and recommend that the applicant works with your Authority to ensure a more sympathetic design.

Owston Hall has an interesting landscape design history which could be used to underpin future landscaping proposals rather than the somewhat formulaic nature of the plans submitted. In our view this would add to the unique qualities of the hotel, spa and golf course(s) and make it an even more special destination that stands out from others. We advise that a proper conservation plan for the landscape setting of the Hall/hotel is needed. The setting is an important consideration and something the architects should be aware of and able to respond to. We recommend a specialist in garden and landscape conservation is required since we are dealing with a Grade II* Listed Building.

In summary the Gardens Trust and Yorkshire Gardens Trust have concerns about the current proposals as outlined above and do not consider that those proposals meet the requirements of NPPF para. 199, 200 and 202. We therefore submit an objection.

Yours sincerely

Val Hepworth
Trustee Conservation and Planning

Cc Historic England, e-yorks@historicengland.org.uk; Conservation@ the Gardens Trust

REF:

1. Eyres, Patrick, Lynch, Karen; *On The Spot: The Yorkshire Red Books of Humphry Repton, Landscape Gardener*, New Arcadian Press 2018. P31-47.
2. Turnbull, Deborah, Wickham, Louise; Thomas White (C.1736-1811) *Redesigning the northern British landscape*, Windgather Press, 2022. P222-224 and other pages.
3. Klemperer, *Style and Social Competition in the Large Scale Ornamental Landscapes of the Doncaster District of South Yorkshire, c. 1680-1840*, BAR British Series 511 (Oxford, 2010).

1. SUMMARY OF HISTORIC INTEREST from YGT Draft Report.

The historic designed landscape around Owston Hall was shaped by Bryan Cooke and his son, Philip Davies-Cooke, between 1785 and 1853. Bryan consulted the landscape designers Thomas White in 1785 and Humphry Repton in 1792, after making plans to build a new hall in the centre of his landholdings in Owston. These had been consolidated through enclosure and purchase since the Cooke family acquired the estate in 1698. While positioning the new hall there would have given him space to create a large park and gardens, he decided instead to put the building next to the existing hall to the east. Although this partly negated White's and Repton's proposals, some of their suggestions for improvement were adopted by Cooke over the next thirty years. These included a new kitchen garden, parkland, pleasure grounds, flower garden and extensive plantations.

Philip Davies-Cooke had plans to remodel the hall in the Grecian style on inheriting in 1821 but he too abandoned this project probably due to the cost. However, he continued his father's work in developing the grounds, adding four entrance lodges so that the hall could be accessed from five directions west to east. He turned the pleasure grounds around the hall into an arboretum, reflecting his scientific interest and planted a vineyard. With Philip's death, his successors inherited the estate but also many debts, so there were neither the resources nor the will to continue expanding Owston's designed landscape. The Davies-Cooke family concentrated on their estate in Wales instead.

When coal reserves were finally found on the estate in the early 1900s, it provided much needed revenue, but the family invested the funds in their other estate. By the early 1930s, the hall had been converted to a golf club house with most of the parkland turned into a golf course. Large parts of the estate were sold off to cover death duties in 1946 and the remainder including the hall and former parkland were sold in 1979. Its new owner kept the golf course and turned the hall into a hotel, which remains to this day. Although much altered the mid-19th century designed landscape is still legible today as a setting for Owston Hall and its associated buildings.