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Rafa Grosso Macpherson
SDNPA

Submitted online

19th May, 2017

Dear Sir,

Planning application SDNP/17/00983/FUL. Erection of previously dismantled barn, stables and wagon shed. Weald and Downland Open Air Museum

Thank you for notifying the Sussex Gardens Trust (SGT) of the above planning application. SGT is a member of the Gardens Trust, (a national statutory consultee), and works closely with the GT on planning matters; the GT has also brought this application to the SGT's attention.

Background

Sussex Gardens Trust recognises the heritage contribution made by the Weald and Downland Museum and has worked closely with the museum, and other bodies connected to West Dean Park, over many years. In particular, in 2008, the Trust was represented on a stakeholder steering group that helped develop the West Dean Conservation Management Plan. The Plan was written by Nicholas Pearson Associates and adopted by the Edward James Foundation and the Weald and Downland Open Air Museum to guide the future management of the West Dean landscape.

SGT believes all planning applications affecting West Dean Park should be assessed against this Plan.

Process

We understand the application was validated on 15th March 2017 yet the GT (a statutory Consultee) and SGT were not consulted until 27th April and 2nd May respectively; the late consultation makes it difficult for these bodies to properly perform their function in the time available.

Assessment

SGT notes that the Baseline Assessment included with the application makes reference to the Conservation Management Plan. However the Trust does not agree with the interpretation of that Plan used in the current application.

At present the museum buildings are close to the north east corner of the Park and look and feel contained adjacent to the boundary trees. No structures, other than a small shed, currently impinge on the open aspect of the northern area of the Park. The present planning application proposes three structures collectively forming a permanent 'farmyard' unit. The position of this group appears to be dictated by existing field boundaries and justified more by the future use of the buildings as a reception on busy days than as the logical position for such a farming unit. Moreover the buildings proposed are large – the barn is 10 metres by 7.5 metres and slightly over 7 metres high so collectively they would form a significant group. For a 'farmyard' unit, a position either to the north or south closer to the corners of a field and less prominently in the open area would cause less harm by way of visual intrusion. Also, in terms of containing the museum related uses within logical boundaries, a site east of the access track would be visually more comfortable. The Trust is also concerned that development is taking place on the museum site piecemeal with no overall strategy in place to manage future change. It is understood a number of other proposals are likely to come forward in the near future. Without a strategy in place for locating these there is a danger that cumulative damage will be done to this sensitive landscape.

The Trust is also concerned that another closely similar application (SDNP/17/00982/FUL) was very recently approved without the statutory consultee (the GT) or SGT being consulted. The Gardens Trust has recently produced a leaflet to guide LPAs when dealing with planning applications affecting parks and gardens, including the statutory requirement to consult the GT. A copy of the leaflet may be downloaded from this website <http://thegardenstrust.org/conservation/conservation-publications/>

Conclusion

It is for the Planning Authority to judge whether the proposals included in this application adequately balance harm and benefits. In the limited time available, the Trust is not satisfied that the proposed location represents the very best solution, but the Trust is strongly supportive of the objectives of the museum.

For future applications, the Trust would welcome a more strategic approach and more timely consultation.

Yours faithfully

Jim Stockwell

On behalf of the Sussex Gardens Trust.
CC: The Gardens Trust