



Sussex Gardens Trust

Encouraging the protection,
conservation and evolution of
the local garden heritage

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Via e-mail to: WSCC

FAO: Jane Moseley

11th May 2020

PLANNING APPLICATION WSCC/019/20

Knepp Castle: Proposed construction of landscape enhancement features

Dear Sir,

Thank you for consulting the Sussex Gardens Trust (SGT) and also the Gardens Trust (GT) about the above application. The Gardens Trust is the statutory consultee on matters concerning registered parks and gardens, and is now working closely with County Garden Trusts such as SGT regarding commenting on planning policy and planning applications.

Summary

Representatives of SGT have studied the submitted documents. The Trust does not object and is minded to support the application if it is confirmed that the design of the amphitheatre has smooth slopes rather than terraced steps.

Argument

The site lies partly within Knepp Castle, a Grade II Registered Park and Garden. Moreover, the proposed features will be clearly visible from viewpoints within the Park, indeed the Buck Farm enhancement feature is designed to be seen as an Eye Catcher when viewed from the Park. Thus, the visual impact of the features is of fundamental importance to the assessment of the proposals on the significance of the Park.

As required by the NPPF, the application includes detailed documents describing the significance of the Park and the impact of the proposals on that significance. These identify a number of harmful impacts during the construction phase but for the completed project conclude *"The final landscape forms can be regarded as a +ve addition to the Registered Park and the setting of*

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grade II listed Knepp Castle as its axial point.*" (quote from p.25 of A02 Heritage Impact Assessment)

The main focus for SGT has been to consider whether this conclusion is justified. The Trust agrees with the use of the term 'engineered landform' (P.21 of D&AS) to describe what was approved in an earlier application. Unlike the present proposals, this did not integrate the area of farm landscape '*in style and quality, with the adjoining parkland, and visually connect it to the wider historic, man-made landscape*' – which is indeed a picturesque design reflecting Repton's principles. However it is unclear whether the amphitheatre will have terraced steps (the word 'amphitheatre' is always in parenthesis) – hopefully not, since it is designed as an eye-catcher, to be viewed from the Castle from a distance (the scale of the landscape is much greater than at Claremont) and, as a picturesque Reptonian feature, it should meet the requisites described by Repton in his book "Observations on Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening" including: "*...it must studiously conceal every interference of art, however expensive, by which the nature scenery's improved, making a whole appear the production of nature only*" (quote on p.16 of D&AS).

The Trust has a slight concern regarding the impact of the additional height on the surrounding pretty flat rural landscape – the spot height on the A24 immediately outside the northern boundary is c18m, so the highest point of the top of the new landform will be some 13m above that.

Conclusion

Provided it is confirmed the amphitheatre will have smooth slopes rather than terraced steps, the Trust considers the present proposals would turn a rather pedestrian and utilitarian arrangement of landform and trees into a piece of new landscape which complements and extends the aesthetic of the existing park to its long-term benefit.

Yours sincerely

Jim Stockwell.
On behalf of the Sussex Garden Trust.

CC: The Gardens Trust