



Historic England

EAST OF ENGLAND OFFICE

Mr Matt Bargery
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Direct Dial: -

Our ref: PA01197649

Your ref:

03 May 2024

By email to:

mb@maw.design

Dear Mr Bargery,

Pre-application advice

**PRINCESS HELENA COLLEGE, SCHOOL LANE, PRESTON, HITCHIN,
HERTFORDSHIRE SG4 7RT**

Thank you for continuing to engage Historic England in seeking extended pre-application advice on your proposals for residential development within the disused walled garden within the grade II* registered park and garden at Temple Dinsley in Preston, Hertfordshire.

On the basis of discussions and information shared during virtual meetings on 18 & 26 January 2024, a site visit to discuss the walled garden walls on 08 March 2024, a virtual meeting on 04 March 2024, and landscape and heritage reports circulated on 03 April 2024, we can offer the following advice.

Historic England advice

The significance of the Temple Dinsley site and the walled garden within it has been summarised already in our letter dated 07 July 2023 and in Bourne Heritage's report (as revised April 2nd, 2024).

Since July 2023, the design team has undertaken further work on the proposals for development within the walled garden, amending the design and providing further assessments and supporting information to address many of our comments to date.



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Walled Garden Walls

We have agreed that *“the significance of the walled garden derives not so much from its inherent fabric as from its design, scale, form, extent and historical function”*, as stated in the Bourne Heritage report.

The 08 March 2024 site visit allowed for more detailed discussion on the approach to the walled garden walls in the context of Priory Heritage’s condition inspection report. There was broad agreement that the existing wall is beyond the point of repair and that a case could be made for a faithful rebuild following existing dimensions, design details, and alignment using a suitable modern replica of the brick that matches the existing as closely as possible. This would include removing the section of recently implemented brick wall around the substation and rebuilding to match the rest of the replacement boundary wall. The lost section of wall on the Dower House side of the garden would be replaced with estate fencing and new planting to complete the enclosure.

Regardless, demolition of the existing walls would result in loss of historic fabric. Any forthcoming planning application will require justification for this harm to significance by demonstrating why taking down and rebuilding is the preferred option rather than retention and repair. This justification would need to include the Priory Heritage report outlining condition, the Bourne Heritage report establishing the significance of the wall as a heritage asset, and also a section in your Design & Access statement setting out the other conservation options considered and discounted. You should also demonstrate recording sufficient to ensure the detailed designs for the new wall construction incorporate all of the characteristic features of the existing walls.

New Dwelling

Much more detail is now available about the proposed new dwelling’s structure, massing and materiality. The new dwelling would form a substantial freestanding structure occupying a large part of the walled garden; however, the potential visual impacts have been reduced by excavating into the sloping ground within the walled garden to sink the new structure into the hillside, lowering its height in relation to the walled garden walls along the Preston Road. New planting within the surrounding domestic garden would further break up the form of the new structure.

Visual appraisal of the proposed development have been carried out and are presented in the Pegasus Group’s landscape report and Bourne Heritage’s revised heritage report. These help to demonstrate how the proposed development has evolved in response to potential impacts to the setting of the grade II listed Dower House and conservation area, assessing public viewpoints (especially along the Preston Road) as well as both designed and incidental views at locations within the registered park and garden.



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The considerable earthmoving required to sink the new dwelling remains unclear. Any forthcoming planning application should be accompanied by details for the proposed cut-and-fill and disposal or re-use of any volumes of arising spoil, especially how any of the arising spoil that must remain on site would be sensitively incorporated into the design.

New Domestic Garden

The latest proposals for the domestic garden around the new structure have reduced the amount of organic and curvaceous forms while incorporating a clear line strongly evoking the former path aligned with the arched pedestrian access point on the north-eastern wall. In all, these amendments better reflect the ordered character typical of a walled kitchen garden, referring to the historic layout as recorded in historic mapping and aerial photos and including areas of fruit a vegetable production.

Historic England position

Historic England recognises the effort that has gone into working up the proposals. We welcome the additional information, which has helped us better understand the details of the proposed development and how the design has evolved in response to our advice to date.

Clearly, the proposed development would still result in direct physical and visual impacts to the walled garden as set out in our letter dated 07 July 2023, causing a low level of harm to the overall significance of the registered park and garden. Impacts to the settings of other designated heritage assets would be limited, causing low-to-negligible levels of harm to their significance. Impacts to the non-designated walled garden itself would cause a higher level of harm from the change of use and character as well as the loss of historic fabric arising from demolition of the surviving garden walls.

For the purposes of the NPPF, we assess the harm as being located towards the lower end of the range of less than substantial harm. Nevertheless, any level of harm requires clear and convincing justification and should be accepted only if the local planning authority concludes that there is such justification and that the harm would be outweighed by the public benefits the proposals would secure (NPPF paragraphs 206 and 208). This includes the '*balanced judgement*' required in relation to non-designated heritage assets (NPPF paragraph 209).

With this in mind, the conservation-led approach adopted in the designs for the proposed development would, in our opinion, deliver meaningful heritage benefits. This includes securing a positive function and future for the walled garden, restoring



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its enclosed form, sensitively rebuilding the surviving lengths of brick wall, and reflecting historic horticultural activity and interest via the new domestic garden with productive elements.

Overall, if this scheme as now proposed were to form the basis of a planning application, we would not expect to raise any objection on heritage grounds at application stage; however, we recommend that you provide comprehensive supporting information as required by the NPPF before any statutory approval is sought – particularly regarding the approach to and any impacts arising from the required earthmoving.

Next Steps

Thank you for involving us at the pre-application stage. We are broadly content with your proposals and feel that the information shared to date clearly demonstrates how your design has evolved with detailed consideration of the unique heritage of the walled garden at Temple Dinsley and its setting.

We hope that you will find this advice constructive and that it will enable you to proceed with engaging North Hertfordshire Council in pre-application discussions.

Please feel free to contact us if you have any questions or wish to discuss the content of our letter in more detail.

If you would like to receive further pre-application advice, we would continue under the existing agreement for extended pre-application advice.

Yours sincerely

Christopher Laine CMLI

Landscape Architect

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Cc – Neville Doe, Historic England

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Information provided:

1. Walled Garden, Princess Helena College, Preston, Hitchin: Location, Description, History & Development, Heritage Significance & Impacts of Current Development Proposals (Adrian Parry, Bourne Heritage, November 3rd, 2022; revised April 2nd, 2024)



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2. The Walled Garden, Preston, Hertfordshire: Concept Design Report – Proposed House and Landscape – RIBA Stage 2 (Modern Architecture Workshop / Angus Thompson, January 2024)
3. Associated architectural and landscape drawings, incl. longitudinal cross sections
4. Condition Inspection Report: Brickwork to Former Kitchen Garden Walls at Dower House, Preston (Priory Heritage, April 2023)
5. Notes of walled garden site visit circulated 09/02/2024
6. Pre-Application Landscape & Visual Appraisal: Walled Garden, Preston, Hertfordshire (Pegasus Group, 22/03/2024)



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