



Historic England

Ms Alice Johnson  
Horsham District Council  
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Chart Way  
Horsham  
West Sussex  
RH12 1RL

Direct Dial: 0207 973 3627

Our ref: P01598390

2 October 2025

Dear Ms Johnson

**T&CP (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015  
& Planning (Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas) Regulations 1990**

**LEONARDSLEE GARDENS BRIGHTON ROAD LOWER BEEDING WEST SUSSEX  
RH13 6PP  
Application No. DC/25/1146**

Thank you for your letter of 16 September 2025 regarding the above application for planning permission. On the basis of the information available to date, we offer the following advice to assist your authority in determining the application.

**Summary**

Leonardslee Gardens is of exceptional interest and included on the Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest in England at grade I.

We welcome the preparation of the masterplan to enable the proposals to be considered in a holistic manner and the way in which the applicant has responded to our pre-application advice.

We also welcome the preparation of a Conservation Management Plan, with its vision and series of actions to help conserve and enhance the gardens, while delivering it with a viable and sustainable future.

As a garden needing a high degree of conservation maintenance, public presentation and which is also a highly seasonal asset, we also recognise the need for sufficient levels of revenue to secure a well-managed, sustainable future of the fabric of the surviving historic features of Leonardslee across the year.

While the new visitor facilities and infrastructure would cause some harm to the



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significance of the park and garden, we consider that, in the main, efforts have been made to minimise this harm as much as possible, in line with paragraph 208 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

In addition, the proposed heritage benefits, which will restore some lost historic elements can be weighed against any remaining harm, in the manner set out in paragraph 212 of the NPPF.

## **Historic England Advice**

### Significance

#### a) Leonardslee Park and Garden

The highlight of Leonardslee Gardens is the valley with its chain of lakes, all man made, in which specimen trees and plants were laid out in a gardenesque manner to display them to full advantage.

The gardens are mostly associated with Sir Edmund Loder who was a keen plant breeder, collector, and grower and notable for the development of new hybrid cultivars of rhododendron in England from plants collected across different continents. The setting, microclimate and soils at Leonardslee are comparable to the natural typology and geography of the other fine gardens in the High Weald.

The varying areas of the gardens, from the early American Garden to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century Pulhamite rockery and rhododendrons, and the 20<sup>th</sup> century Coronation Garden and Camellia Grove, are truly spectacular. The garden's aesthetic value and public interest peak in the Spring and Autumn seasons when the collections of Rhododendrons, Azaleas and Camellias provide garden visitors with spectacular displays of banks of spring blooms and colourful autumnal foliage.

The Rock Garden was laid out at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century by the firm of James Pulham and Son. Roughly oval in shape, it combines large natural rocks with artificial ones in Pulhamite which contain planting pockets to accommodate the dwarf rhododendrons, evergreen azaleas, dwarf palm trees and conifers. There are numerous side paths around the artificial dell which allow the plants to be seen up close. On the west side end of the garden is a small pool, adjacent to which is the site of a former fernery, now demolished.



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A brick based Pulhamite animal shelter was also created at the same time as the Rock Garden and lies at the end of the ornamental gardens reached by a formal gravel walk across the lawn from the mansion. First introduced in 1889, the present group of wallabies still reside within this enclosure and are descendants of the original illustrating the historical value associated with Loder's collections of animals to visitors of the gardens today. The creation of a Pulhamite animal enclosure appears to be relatively rare and further investigation into its significance should be undertaken.

The gardens and house are both sited within and held by a wider framework of historic parkland. At Leonardslee, the areas that have now become parking were part of the New Deer Parks. These were historically open in character and laid to pasture dotted with occasional mature individual trees or small clumps. This pattern of landscape is shown established on the OS 1st edition surveyed in 1874.

In common with many historic country houses, the approaches to the estate are an important part of the overall design, setting up the visitor to appreciate views and vistas across parkland and glimpses of the house which formed the centrepiece of the estate.

#### b) The Mansion House and ancillary garden buildings

The grade II listed Mansion was built in local Wealden sandstone, in an Italianate style, in 1853. It sits within the centre of the site, superbly located on a natural terrace with far ranging views afforded from the garden front of the house over the wooded valley.

The house was designed to be approached from the west through a series of sweeping drives across open parkland. Kinetic views of the parkland were created along the gentle downhill course of the drive to the principal west front of the Mansion. Lodges are located at the entrances to two of these drives to signal arrival at the estate.

Near to the west of house are a series of out buildings of varying dates and alteration. These include former stables surmounted by a clock tower, generator building (originally built to provide electricity to the house), Dolls House Museum, Alpine House and estate worker cottages. They form an attractive ensemble of ancillary buildings that have a vernacular and utilitarian character.

Further down in the valley is the brick engine house that housed the pumps that



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supplied water for the estate. The associated Engine Pond was constructed between 1852 and 1874. In 1896, there were two buildings, only one of which remains.

### Impact of the proposals

#### a) Extension to the existing Garden Shop/Visitor Entrance Building

In order to create a more even spread of visitors and infrastructure, it is proposed to extend the existing garden shop/visitor entrance building to provide ticketing, toilets and café facilities. It is considered that this new extension would have a relatively low level of impact on the significance of the park and garden given its discrete location away from the historic core, and within an area that has undergone modern change.

The proposals also respond to our pre-application comments about pressure for outside seating in this area and has been designed to allow for flexibility for a larger internal café area if needed. Our concerns with external seating in this location were that it would create a busy and cluttered approach to the gardens and a visual intrusion at the start of where the more intimate pleasure gardens are first experienced by visitors.

#### b) Car parking in front of the main house

While it is still proposed to retain a relatively large area of parking at the front of the house, it is explained that this is needed for the operations and use of the hotel and restaurant and as a wedding venue. For these reasons it would be impractical to solely use the main visitor car park, especially at night.

To mitigate the visual impact of the large area of tarmac, a much-improved landscaping scheme is proposed that references the historic landscaping layout. This would provide a buffer between the main house and service area as was historically intended. It is also proposed to improve the surfacing of this area.

In addition, a new accessible crossing between the two Pulhamite rockwork enclosures is also proposed to help visitors appreciate the connection between these historic landscape features and restore a historic pathway. These proposals would be an enhancement to the current situation.

### Planning Policy and Guidance



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#### a) National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

Section 16 of the NPPF sets out policies for decisions governing change in the historic environment. Of particular relevance are:

- Paragraph 203, which states that local authorities should take into account ‘the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation, and ‘the wider social, cultural, economic and environmental benefits that conservation of the historic environment can bring.’
- Paragraph 208, which requires consideration of the impact of a proposal on a heritage asset, and that any conflict should be avoided or minimised.
- Paragraph 212, which requires that when considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset’s conservation.
- Paragraph 213, which requires that any harm to heritage significance should require clear and convincing justification.
- The level of harm associated with the current proposals is low, and efforts have been made to avoid or minimise any harm through careful design.
- As required by paragraph 215 of the NPPF, any remaining harm should be weighed against the public benefits, which include the heritage benefits included as part of the proposals.

#### b) Horsham Development Plan

The proposals will also need to be in compliance with your Authority’s District Planning Framework and in particular Policy 34 - Heritage Assets and Managing Change within the Historic Environment.

#### Historic England’s position on the proposals

We welcome the way the applicant and his team has responded positively to our pre-application advice as well the preparation of the Conservation Management Plan to



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guide the proposals.

We also recognise the recent and on-going investment that has been made by the current owners, head gardeners, garden staff and volunteers in the restoration and maintenance of the gardens.

While some certain elements would cause some low level, less than substantial harm to the significance of the park and garden, we appreciate the efforts that have been made to reduce this as required by paragraph 208 of the NPPF.

We also welcome the proposed heritage benefits which can be weighed against any harm and which include:

- the re-instatement of the top of the chimney on the small engine house, which is a key element of its significance and would provide a visual marker in the gardens;
- improvements to landscaping at the front of the house and a reinstated pathway between the Pulhamite features;
- enhanced woodland/heathland management on the east side of lakes which could be supported by grant funding from the Countryside Stewardship Scheme; and
- wayfinding pathways on the east side of lakes, as well as viewpoints, seating and interpretation boards.

## Recommendation

Historic England has no objection to the application on heritage grounds as they will help provide the gardens with a viable and sustainable future as well delivering a number of heritage benefits for the long-term conservation of Leonardslee.

Yours sincerely

Alma Howell

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Inspector of Historic Buildings and Areas

[Redacted signature]

cc: Nicola Mason - Conservation Officer



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