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Public Realm Landscaping and Planting

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12995

Project Team
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1. The Brief

Leonardslee Lakes and Gardens

The Masterplan

1.1 Leonardslee Lakes and Gardens proposes to provide improvements to the central area of the estate by improving access routes from a newly created ticketing office nearest the car park down to the cafe areas and into the gardens.

1.2 The central area of buildings will be available for use by the paying public, which includes the rock gardens, the redeveloped Generator Hall and the Stables.

1.3 A new landscape area will provide a central focal and meeting point for visitors in front of the former generator hall, main house and stables block.

1.4 The intention is to increase and improve the areas that will be open and accessible to the public and access to the available facilities.

1.5 These areas have associated landscape plantings and this report provides the planting strategy.

LUC

1.6 LUC is a leading environmental consultancy firm renowned for its multi-disciplinary expertise in landscape design, planning, and management. The firm specializes in landscape architecture, ecology, environmental planning, and heritage services, providing comprehensive support from initial concept through to project completion.

1.7 LUC has been commissioned by Leonardslee gardens to provide consultative input to the landscape designs by Purcell UK and to provide a planting strategy to complement this work.

1.8 The purpose of this report is to provide a planting strategy for the different parts of the proposal called the zones.

1.9 The planting strategy works relate to the Central areas as illustrated by the red line boundary (RLB) in Figure 1. This strategy excludes the works relating to the rock garden and works related to other projects at Leonardslee such as the buffer zone to the A281, car parks, rock garden and the new attenuation pond.

1.10 The aims are to:

- enhance the appearance of the landscape;
- contextualise the plantings;
- provide an opportunity to continue the history and legacy of plantings by the owners of Leonardslee;
- enhance the Grade 1 Historic Gardens listing of Leonardslee Lakes and Gardens;
- complement the existing landscape design by Purcell UK;
- conserve and perpetuate the historically important historic plant collections:and.
- provide increased resilience to the new landscape design.



Fig. 1 Plan of proposed public realm area with red line boundary

2. Introduction

Leonardslee Lakes and Gardens

Context

2.1 The gardens at Leonardslee are recognised to be nationally important. The site is 86ha in size and comprises of 32ha of ornamental gardens and a further 54ha of parkland and woodland.

2.2 The existing pattern of this historic landscape is shown to be established on the OS 1st edition surveyed in 1874.

2.3 The Gardens are registered as Grade 1 under the Historic Buildings and Ancient Monuments Act 1953 within the Register of Historic Parks and Gardens by Historic England for their special historic interest. It is particularly significant for its spring displays of Rhododendrons, Azaleas, Camellias, Magnolias and Bluebells.

2.4 The Loderi Rhododendrons collection is the most complete in the UK and was awarded the National Plant Collection by Plant Heritage in 2022. The species and varieties have been grown at Leonardslee Gardens, starting with Sir Edmund Loder to the present day. They have either been collected from the wild or hybridised on site and includes endangered cultivars such as *R. 'Leonardslee Primrose'* which was chosen as the Plant Heritage Public Choice Winner 2024.

2.5 Leonardslee Lakes and Gardens have restored the collections and added missing specimens where possible to conserve this important collection.

2.6 A Conservation Management Plan (CMP) was prepared in 2023 and is referred to throughout this document in setting the context for the ongoing development of Leonardslee Gardens and Lakes. The CMP includes a Gazetteer for the specific areas covered by these proposals. This CMP has now been updated (March 2025) to include an addendum providing detail on areas considered after consultations not to have been included in the earlier CMP.

2.7 Historic England's Statement of Heritage Significance, *Analysing Significance in Heritage Assets* (2019), provides the framework for the analysis of the different parts of the gardens.

2.8 The landscape surrounding the house at Leonardslee are of highest significance with the water bodies, rock garden and gardens with their historic plant collections providing the key elements.

2.9 Other important historic gardens in the vicinity include High Beeches, Nymans and Wakehurst Place. These gardens all have contemporaneous historical connections with the collecting and distribution of plant material.

The Site

2.10 The gardens, as illustrated in Figure 2, are approached on the western side via the A281 and via the Round House entrance. This drive provides access to the main visitors car park. The driveway continues down south past the visitors centre and ticketed garden access, an overflow car park and then back to the main road.

2.11 The western edge to the A281 is currently bounded by an intermittent tree fringe. The understorey to the tree fringe has been cleared and is in the process of being re-established.

2.12 The main house, which is Grade 2 listed, has extensive views east to Hogstolt Hill and south over to the South Downs.

2.13 The property has passed through different owners over the recent period. Extensive works have been carried out since 2017 to provide restoration and maintenance and manage a large increase in visitor numbers. These works have included the installation of both regular and overflow parking for cars, coaches, new fencing for animal enclosures and the removal of hedges.

2.14 In association with these works, a series of public realm improvements are now proposed. These include both to the fabric and the interiors of existing buildings, new structures and landscaping with new areas of planting.

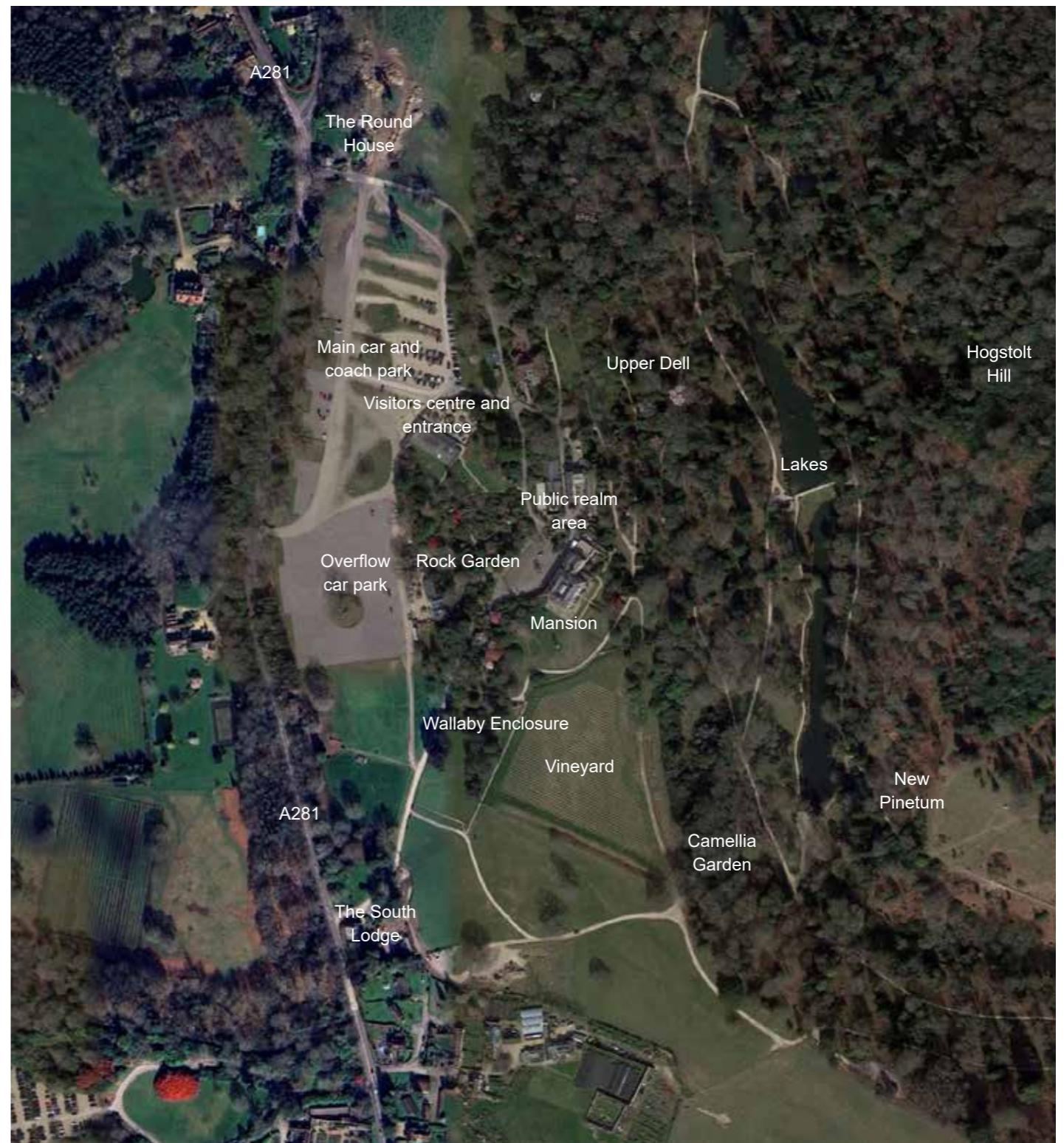


Fig. 2 Aerial of Leonardslee Gardens © 2022 Google

3. The site plantings

Leonardslee Lakes and Gardens

The Gardens and plantings

3.1 Leonardslee Lakes and Gardens lies on a seam of loam overlaying the local Horsham sandstone (the Greensand Ridge). The resulting pH, due to the lack of lime, is low and allows the establishment of acid (ericaceous) growing plant communities.

3.2 The valley illustrated in Figure 2, which runs in a north south direction with surrounding typical mature woodland comprising of Oak, Beech, Hazel and Birch with Conifers is sheltered providing ideal conditions for the collections. A series of lakes and pond extend along the bottom of the valley (Figure 3).

3.3 The main ornamental gardens with its important Rhododendron, Azalea, Magnolia and Camellia collections extend mainly to the north, east and south east of the Mansion with smaller sections close by.

3.4 The Rhododendron collections are one of the world's oldest and largest and the gardens are often dubbed 'one of the finest woodland gardens in England'.

3.5 Original collections were established in the early 1800's including Rhododendron arboreum hybrids in the Upper Dell. Subsequent important acquisitions include those made from 1888 onwards by Sir Edmund Loder with many new UK introductions including new Loderi hybrids from *R.fortunei* and *R.griffithianum*.

3.6 The Loderi rhododendron collection is registered with Plant Heritage. The Plant Heritage Peoples Choice 2024 is Rhododendron 'Leonardslee Primrose' (Figure 5)

3.7 The Rock Gardens, including those in the Wallaby Enclosure, were created and constructed by James Pulham & Son using 'Pulhamite' for Sir Edmund Loder's alpine collection. These consist of natural rocks overlain with a minimum of 10cm thick pulhamite material with planting pockets. These are now intensively planted and are mature gardens with a network of paths interweaving between rock outcrops and a small pool.

3.8 The Pinetum was subsequently created in 1902 with a Camellia Grove with cultivars of *Camellia japonica* added in 1957-1958.

3.9 The Great Storm of 1987 resulted in the loss of a good number of large specimen trees including much of the original Pinetum. A subsequent new Pinetum was established in the 'Deer Park' by Robin Loder in 1992.

3.10 Replacement planting has been carried out but with careful adjustment in order to keep the views and preserve some sight lines that were opened up.

3.11 The garden also contains many large and significant trees, some of which qualify as Champion Trees on the Tree Register of Britain and Ireland (TROBI). It has 25 British and Irish Champions, a further 3 English Champions and over 70 trees with county Champion status. These include *Prunus serrulata* 'Albi-plena' (Japanese Cherry), *Abies nebrodensis* (Sicilian Fir) and *Rhododendron 'Ivery's Scarlet'*. As a result of these unique conditions, the gardens present a spectacular woodland and one of the finest ornamental planting collections in the UK.

3.12 Along the eastern flank of the Former Generator Building is a historically important collection of Japanese *Camellia sasanqua* species and varieties.

3.13 The ornamental shrub collections include varieties of Hydrangeas including Panicle, Oakleaf and Bigleaf types such as Mophead and Lacecaps. These together with mature *Cornus* vars. (Dogwood) provide a seasonal extension and structure to the beds.

3.14 Other garden areas at Leonardslee, as defined by the CMP, include:

- The Dells;
- The Loderi Garden;
- The Walks; and
- The Lawns.



Fig. 3 Typical view south along Leucathoe Pond in valley ©LUC



Fig. 4 Camellia japonica var. along Camellia Grove



Fig. 5 Rhododendron 'Leonardslee Primrose' ©Leonardslee

4. Context

Public realm area plantings - existing

The sequence of gardens

4.1 The public realm masterplan extends from the new ticketing kiosk into the central complex of buildings at the heart of the estate. Each of these zones as illustrated in Figure 6 has particular planting features that are a combination of historic and recent additions.

4.2 Zone A (Figure 7)

The areas immediately after exiting the Glasshouse provide two different routes to enter the public parts of the gardens. The steeper more direct route goes through a lawn with deciduous ornamental tree and shrubs edges and the longer more accessible route passes the rock garden (Zone B) and through mature and densely planted shrubs and trees pressing up against the path down to Zone D.

4.3 Zone B (Figure 8)

The Rock Garden was created in the early 1900 by the use of Pulhamite material and consists of clipped Azaleas, Acer and rockery type planting with a small pool.

4.4 Zone C (Figure 9 / 10)

The car park and entrance route to the Mansion. This contains a feature water fountain sculpture and long strips of lawn.

4.5 Zone D (Figure 11)

The planting in the central public space consists of a series of beds with a mix of herbaceous perennials and ornamental shrubs such as specimen Rhododendrons, Mexican Orange Blossom (Choisya), Spindle (Euonymus) and Camellia japonica varieties. There is a notable mature Japanese Cedar (Cryptomeria japonica) in a raised container, Rhododendrons and a number of mature Chusan palms (Tracycarpus fortunei). The front beds to the Mansion have a mix of low growing herbaceous planting with shrubs. There is a section of raised planting along the edge to the services and bins shed with mature and rare Camellias.

4.6 Zone E (Figure 12)

The east facing wall to the former Generator Block has a collection of early flowering Japanese Camellia sasanqua varieties. These have grown to fully cover most of the side of the building. Mixed shrub borders face the sides of the stable block.



Fig. 6 All zones plan



Fig. 7 Zone A - View from path due west and looking up to the glasshouse



Fig. 8 Zone B - Rock gardens with Azaleas and path



Fig. 9 Zone C - Planting in central public area near cafe



Fig. 10 Zone D - Planting in central public area near cafe



Fig. 11 Zone D - Planting in central public area near cafe



Fig. 12 Zone E - Camellias on Engine House with shrubs to east side

5. Images

Planting



Fig.13 Rhododendrons flowering in May



Fig.14 Pool in the rock garden



Fig.15 Azalea mollis along path and in clearings



Fig.16 View east across valley to Hogstolt Hill



Fig.17 Camellia sasanqua © Wikimedia Commons



Fig.18 Camellia sasanqua varieties on Engine House



Fig.19 Nothofagus sp. - Champion Tree



Fig.20 Rhododendron var. (unknown) © Leonardslee