



LEONARDSLEE LAKES AND GARDENS
DESIGN AND ACCESS STATEMENT
REV 1 - DECEMBER 2025

PURCELL



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Revisions - December 2025	
Pages 31, 40, 37, 98, 99, 136	Red Application Boundary Updated to Reduced Footprint
Sections 7.2, 7.4, 7.5	Updated with reference to new consultant information

PREAMBLE

Purcell are Architects, Masterplanners and Heritage Consultants with extensive experience delivering award-winning design and conservation projects to the world's most significant listed buildings and historic places, including cultural visitor attractions, historic houses, luxury hotels and country estates.

We were delighted to be commissioned by Leonardslee Ltd in August 2023 to work creatively and collaboratively with them and their team of consultants to envisage, evolve and establish a new and inspiring proposition for Leonardslee Gardens, which puts visitor experience at its core.

The following document outlines a new vision for the Estate, including analysis of the existing buildings, spaces, functions and visitor experience to the Gardens, and proposes a series of sensitive interventions informed by the rich and diverse history of Leonardslee.

The Conservation Management Plans have been used as a roadmap for the designs, and the team has worked closely with the Client, Head Gardener and LUC as Landscape Consultant to ensure that the latest addendum for the Garden Conservation Management Plan is aligned with the Masterplan proposals.

The client and wider design team is formed by the following consultants:

Client	Leonardslee Ltd
Architect	Purcell
Heritage Consultant	Purcell
Ecologist	Temple
Arboriculturalist	Temple
Transport Consultant	GTA Civils
Planning Consultant	Walsingham Planning
Planting Concept & Design	LUC
Water Neutrality Consultant	EAS Ltd



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I.0 INTRODUCTION

I.1 A NEW CHAPTER FOR LEONARDSLEE

Following an initial period of investment, reinstating the gardens and opening them back up to the public, the current custodians of Leonardslee Gardens have worked to create a new, holistic vision for the Estate's future.

This vision has been a collaborative effort, with key stakeholders to the gardens consulted, to ensure that the long term future of Leonardslee is secured.

The key principles of this vision are:

- I. Enhancing accessibility across the site, through the use of signage and wayfinding, and reviewing pathways into the site;
2. Remaining attractive to a new generation of visitor to keep the estate relevant for years to come;
3. Embedding Leonardslee within the heart of the local community with continued dialogue and volunteer programme;
4. Creating a series of distinctive individual food and beverage (F+B) offerings which can be enjoyed throughout the year to reduce economic reliance on seasonal demand and stand alone events;
5. Ensuring a coherent entrance sequence for visitors to the gardens, restaurant and hotel; respecting historic usage patterns;
6. Prioritising the re-use and conservation of existing structures within the gardens over the creation new buildings;
7. Balancing uses across the site following the recent completion of key back of house infrastructure;
8. Building economic resilience via sustainable income streams, with a focus on increasing visitor spend as opposed to visitor numbers;
9. Implement the recommendations of the Conservation Management Plan (CMP) and Garden Conservation Management Plan (GCMP) including recent addendum policies.

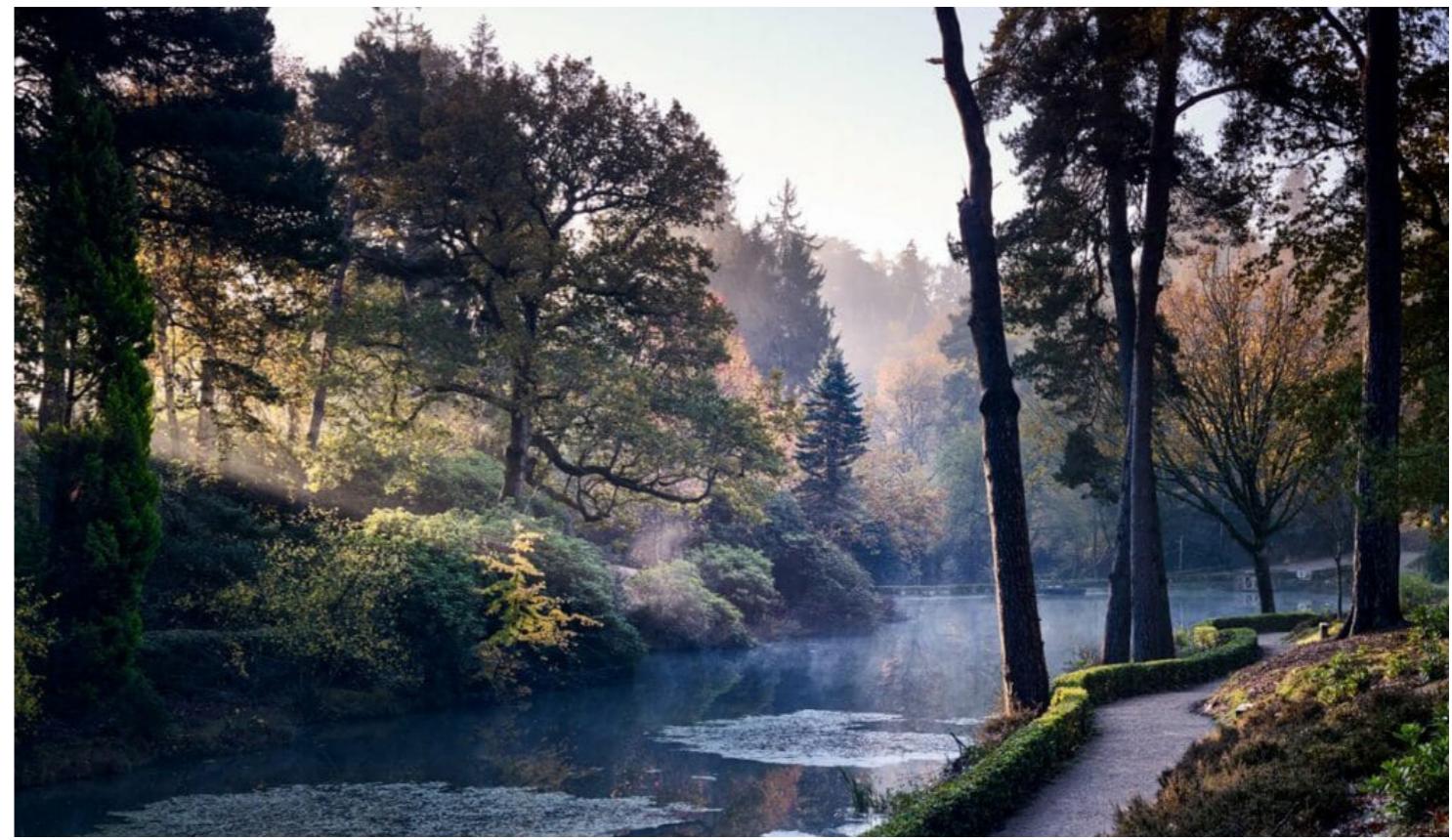
This Estate Masterplan for Leonardslee Gardens and subsequent proposals supports the further definition and achievement of that vision by:

- Appraising and exploring the existing buildings in and around the Leonardslee Gardens Estate.
- Identifying the best future use of each area in line with the Conservation Management Plan (CMP) and Garden Conservation Management Plan (GCMP).
- Developing a suite of design proposals to establish that use within the buildings and areas, while considering the listed and curtilage nature of the buildings, gardens and surrounding parkland.
- Bringing this together to create one coherent masterplan.

Together, the design proposals outlined within this Design and Access Statement (DAS) comprise the improved proposition at Leonardslee which will secure the long term sustainable future of the estate for generations to come.



Leonardslee House viewed from the South



Engine Pond

2.0 UNDERSTANDING THE SITE



2.1 HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

2.1 HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT AND CHARACTERISTICS

It is essential to understand the historic development of the main estate and how it has evolved over time and become what it is today. Leonardslee Gardens, has seen a substantial amount of change. The heritage impact assessment (HIA) prepared by Purcell contains a full history of the site and discusses the impact of the proposals in heritage terms.

There is limited evidence relating to the prehistory of the land later to become the Leonardslee Estate. However, a couple of stray finds have been identified. A Neolithic flint arrowhead (HER number: MWS629) was ploughed up at Leonardslee in the former parkland and current car park and a Bronze Age axe head (HER number: MWS641) to the south of Crabtree, in an area formerly part of the estate.

From the late 16th century, the valley to the east and south-east of the current Leonardslee House contained a series of hammer ponds, excavated to support the Wealden iron industry. The ponds, which served Gosden Furnace operated by Roger Gratwick, stored water, which provided the power for hammers and other machinery.

In the late 17th century, King Charles II gifted St Leonard's Forest, later to become the Leonardslee Estate, to his physician, Sir Edward Greaves. St Leonard's Lodge was built on the site in 1801 for Charles George Beauclerk to the designs of John Johnson (shown in blue on the adjacent overlay map). Beauclerk began to lay out gardens in c.1810. Some of the oldest plants in the garden date to this period, including in the American garden, now the Upper Dell.

In 1852, the St Leonard's Forest Estate, which comprised 1,919 acres, was sold at auction. Accompanying sales particulars include a map, which show the earlier arrangement of buildings and landscape prior to the construction of the current house and the development of the grounds. Whilst it has previously been assumed that the former lodge building was on the site of the current Leonardslee House, the map shows the former lodge to the south-west of the current site with a number of outbuildings to the west. St Leonard's Lodge sat within the densely wooded setting of St Leonard's Forest, with parkland laid out between the house and the main road.

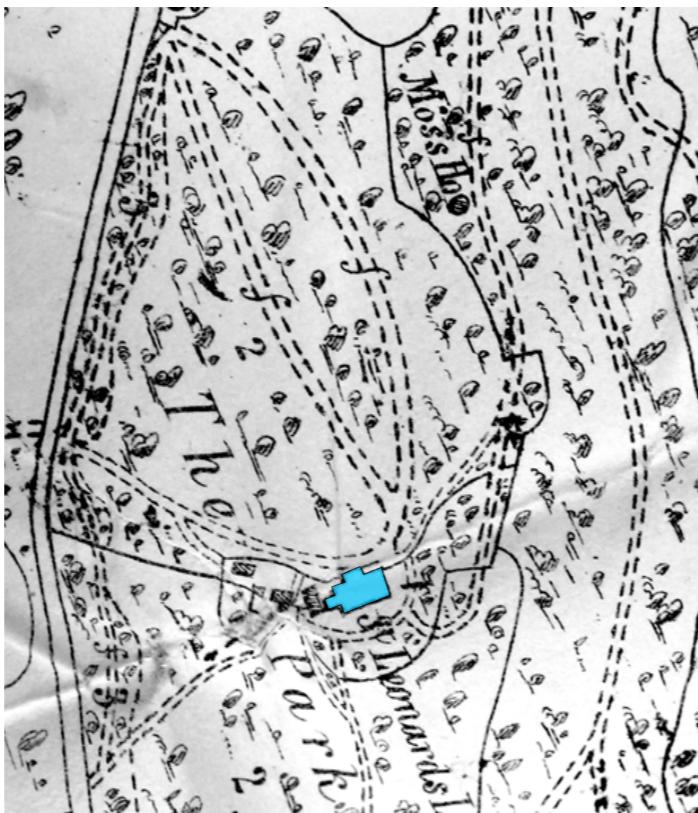
The main approach to St Leonards Lodge was to the north-west of the park via the gate lodge or now known as the Round House, with additional approaches further to the south along the main road. A further drive accessed the house via the walled garden to the south. A number of paths and walkways were laid out connecting the house with its gardens, with key landscape features including the Moss House and the American Gardens to the north. The latter survives today. New Pond, a former Hammer Pond, was shown in place to the south-east of the house, whilst none of the other ponds later created to the north were yet laid out.

The estate was bought by William Egerton Hubbard who built the present Leonardslee House, replacing the earlier stone St Leonard's Lodge. The new house, designed by T. L. Donaldson, in the Italianate style was constructed from 1853 to 1855.

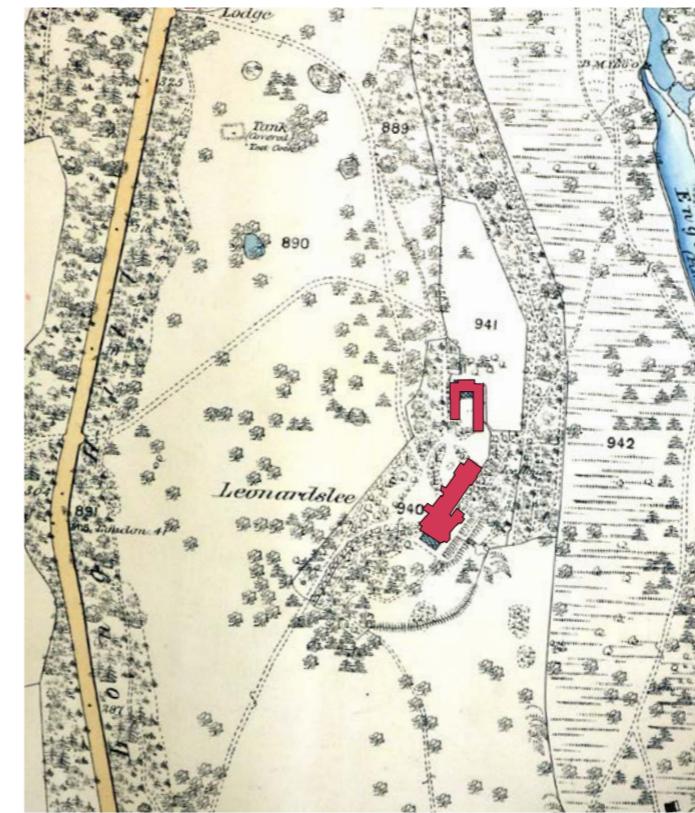
The Carriage House and Stables surmounted by a clock tower were built in 1856. The Engine Pond, sluice weir and adjacent brick building known today as the Engine House, which housed pumps to deliver water to the main house were constructed in the period intervening 1852 and 1896.

The new Leonardslee House and outbuildings are shown on the OS map of 1874. The house is shown positioned to the north-east of the former St Leonard's Lodge, with outbuildings to the north rather than to the west. The main drive still approached via the Round House, but on a more circuitous, arcing alignment. The other drives to the south were also shown on different alignments to those shown in 1852.

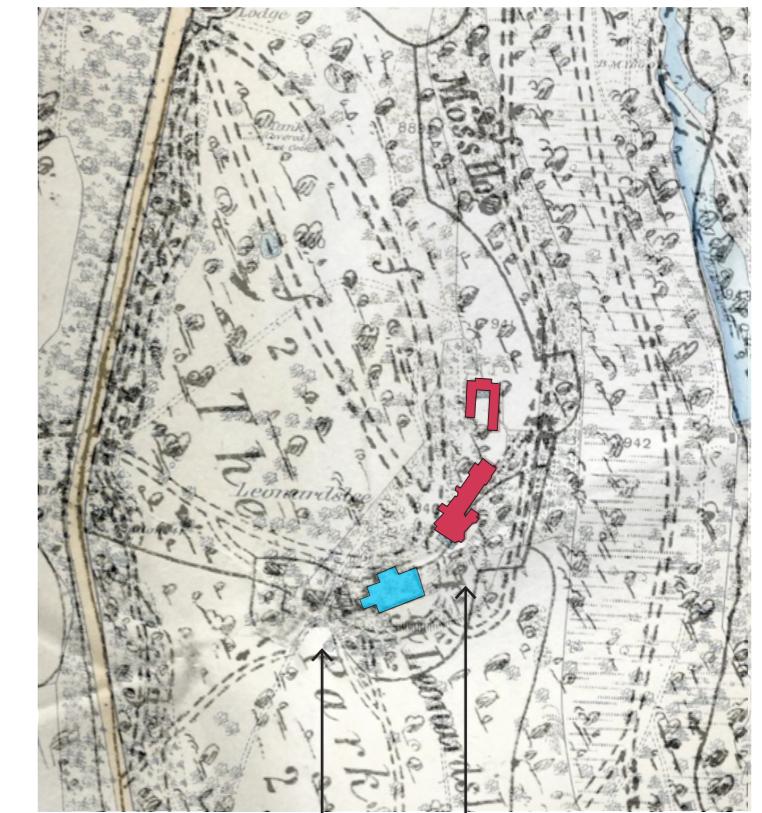
In 1888, the estate was sold to Hubbard's future son-in-law, Sir Edmund Loder, under whose keen attention the gardens developed and were shaped into the landscape that largely remains today.



1852 Sales particulars map



1874 OS Map of Leonardslee (West Sussex Record Office)



Overlay Map

The current house at Leonardslee

Location of former St Leonard's Lodge, to the south-west of the current building

2.1 HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

2.1 HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT AND CHARACTERISTICS

Sir Edmund Loder came from a long line of passionate horticulturists who had a big impact on the surrounding gardens throughout Sussex. He developed woodland gardens of a type popular in the late 19th century.

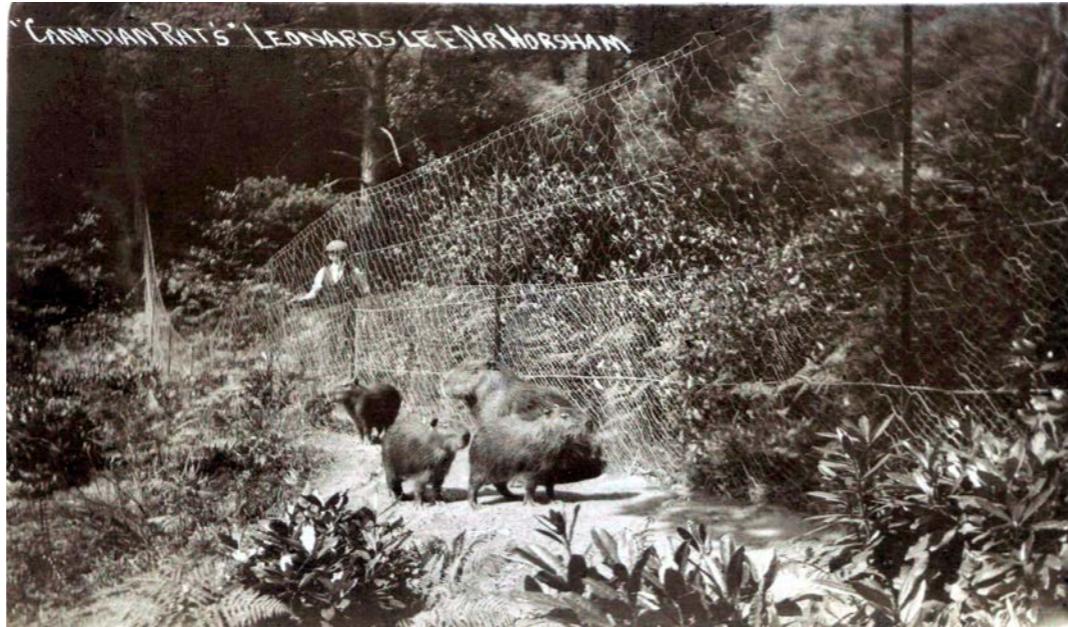
Sir Edmund Loder planted rhododendrons, hybrids, and specimen trees in the valley east of Leonardslee House, integrating natural features and existing forest trees. He also designed the valley's three upper lakes in the late 19th century.

As a horticulturist, Loder developed the Loderi rhododendron hybrids in 1901, earning the Royal Horticultural Society's Award of Garden Merit. He was part of a key group of hybridizers, including his brother Gerald and Lionel de Rothschild, who worked together on rhododendron development, such as the 1926 Dame Nellie Melba hybrid.

Loder also collected rare and exotic animals from the early 1890s including Indian antelope and other unusual species of deer, kangaroos, wallabies from Tasmania and later, American coyotes, capybara, beavers, emu and prairie dogs.

The animals adapted and acclimated very well. Descendants of the deer and wallabies remain at Leonardslee Gardens today. Whilst the introduction of exotic species on country estates was relatively unusual, it had been pioneered by Walter Rothschild, who introduced herds of kangaroos and wallabies into the grounds of the museum at Tring Park in Hertfordshire in 1885.

Sir Edmund re-landscaped and expanded the formal gardens, creating an ornamental rock garden for alpine plants and ferns in 1890. Built by James Pulham and Sons, the garden featured two central mounds surrounded by conifers for shelter. A Pulhamite enclosure for goats was also introduced, similar to features at Waddesdon Manor in Buckinghamshire created for the Rothschilds.



Capybaras or 'Canadian rats' at Leonardslee (Horsham Museum)



ROCK GARDENS AT LEONARDSLEE NEAR HORSHAM SUSSEX
A PHOTOGRAPH FROM THE TIMES



Kangaroos at Leonardslee (Horsham Museum)



The Alpine Gardens (No. 2), Leonardslee, Sussex.
Historic photograph of the rock garden or 'alpine garden', 1908 (Leonardslee Estate)

2.1 HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

2.1 HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT AND CHARACTERISTICS

Progression between the 1870 OS map and the 1896 edition show a new group of buildings to the west of the stables. During this time Sir Edmund Loder introduced electricity to the estate with the generators thought to have been housed within this new group of buildings, today known as the Generator Block. From the turn of the 20th century at least, the Generator Block also accommodated Sir Edmund's collection of hunting trophies, including animal heads, skins and antlers.

Photographs from the turn of the century and early to mid- 20th century show the main house in relationship to the woodland landscape to the east. These images show considerably less grown up valley slopes, with the house visible from the woodland walks and from the lakes. Intervisibility between the house and the woodland walks and lakes is more limited today, owing to the mature tree canopies and dense shrubbery plantings.

An aerial photograph taken in 1949 shows the house, Stable Complex, Generator Block, and southern lawn in 1949. This image shows the extent of the house prior to the demolition of the service wing and Billiard room in the 1960s, visible to the right of the main core of the house. It also shows the mature tree coverage across the estate, however with comparatively less dense vegetation to the east of the house than today.

In 1981, Robin Loder inherited the estate and the family moved out, selling the house and retaining the gardens. In 1984, the house was converted into office accommodation for Eurotherm International, at which time the gardens were registered as a Grade I Registered Park and Garden. In 1986, Robin Loder built the Red House within the gardens as a family home, with a tearoom incorporated for visitors to the gardens.

The gardens were sold by the Loder family to the Leonardslee Estate Ltd in 2010, and the gardens were left to grow wild until 2017, when the estate was sold to Penny Streeter OBE, who began the restoration and reunification of the house and garden. The house was converted into a restaurant at ground level in 2018, with the first floor converted into a hotel in 2020. During this period, the ancillary buildings were also iteratively converted into visitor facilities; the Engine House into a café, parts of the Stable into a café and restaurant, and the late 20th century extension to the Generator Block into an additional café. In 2019, the gardens were re-opened to the public.



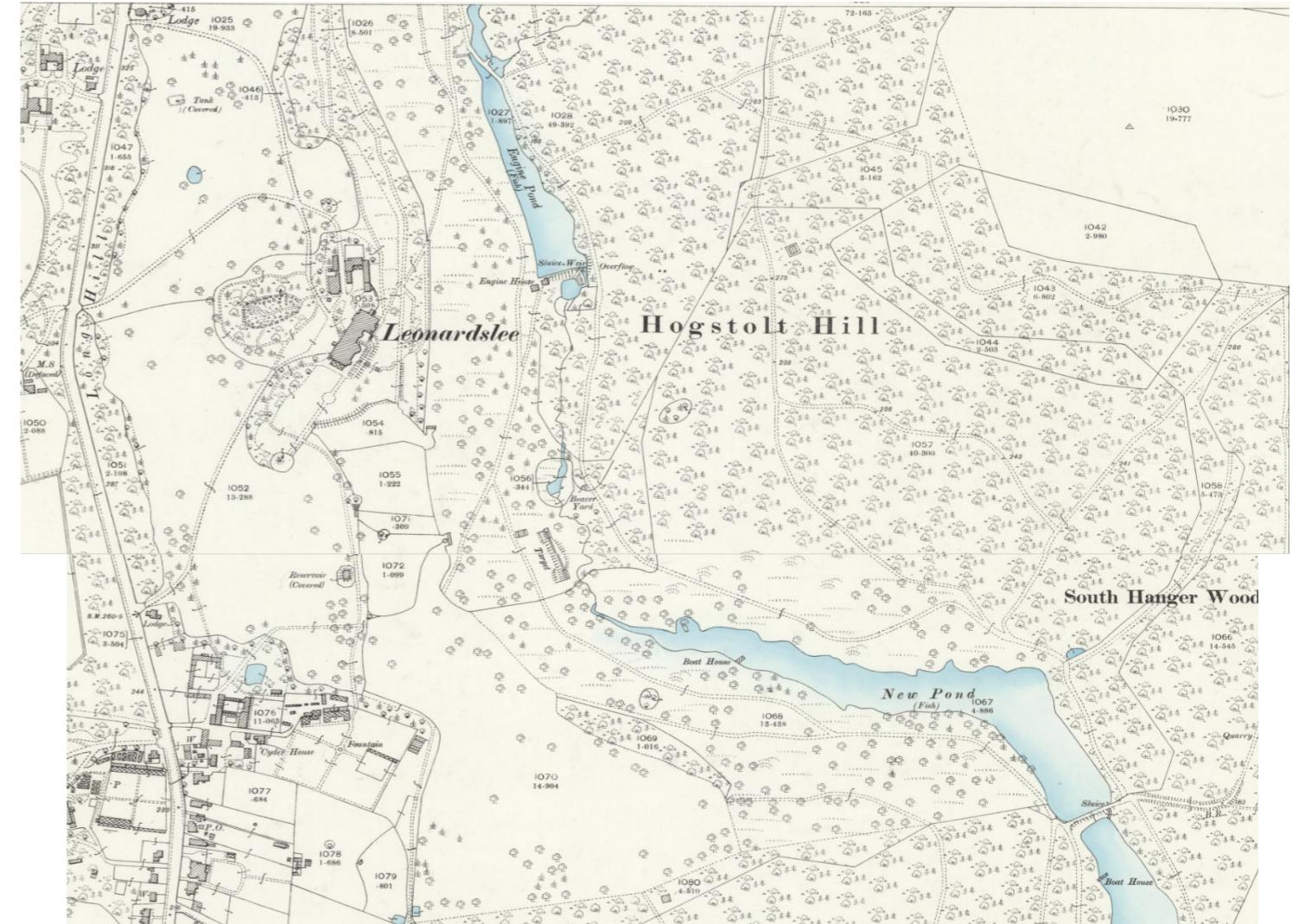
Historic England, Aerial photo 1949



Historic photograph, 1906, showing clear views of the house from the lakes



Undated 20th century photograph showing Leonardslee House from the woodland gardens



1896 OS Map. National Library of Scotland (National Library of Scotland)

2.2 THE ESTATE TODAY

2.2.1 SUMMARY OF KEY HERITAGE ASSETS

The Lakes and Garden

The ornamental gardens lie largely on the east- and west-facing slopes of the valley, to the north, east and south-east of Leonardslee House and with further smaller areas to its immediate west and south-west. On the east side, the garden front of the mansion opens onto a series of steep, grassed terraces with a central flight of steps leading down to a lower lawn, enclosed on its south-east side by shrubbery and along its south side by a ha-ha (the line of which is shown on historic maps).

The Rock Garden

Constructed in approximately 1900 by Messrs Pulham and roughly oval in shape, it is laid out as a series of stratified, rocky outcrops which combine natural sandstone with artificial Pulhamite rock and which are intensively planted with hummocks of azaleas, dwarf rhododendrons and dwarf conifers. Paths weave around the outcrops and set within them on the west side end of the garden is a small pool, adjacent to which is the site of a former Fernery (Garden Hist 1989), now demolished.

Leonardslee House

Leonardslee House is the principle building within the Estate, and is Grade II listed. It sits on a natural terrace above the steep west side of the valley, commanding extensive views east and south over the gardens to Hogstolt Hill and to the South Downs some 15-25km distant.

The two-storey Italianate house, built in ashlar with a slate roof, sash windows and an entrance porch supported on four rusticated Tuscan columns, was designed and built from 1853 to 1855 by T L Donaldson. It replaced an earlier, stone-built house on the same site, designed by John Johnson c 1801 for Charles Beauclerk and known as St Leonards Lodge, the name soon being changed to Leonardslee with Donaldson's new house. The present house was reduced in size c 1971 and then renovated and converted to office accommodation in 1984.

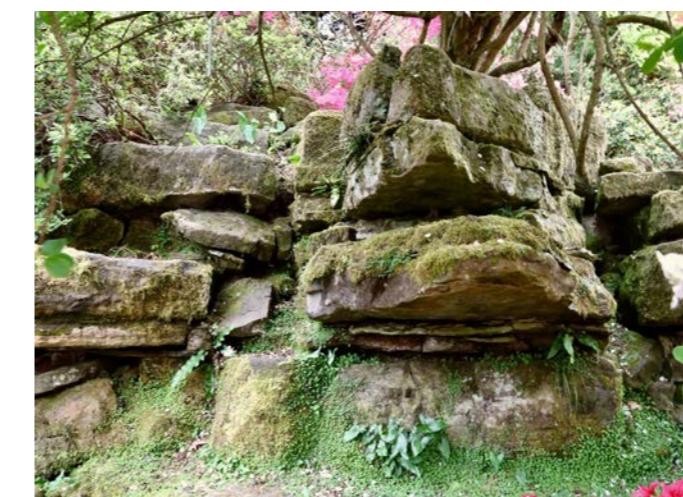
The house was converted to restaurant use on the ground floor in 2018, whilst the first floor was converted to hotel accommodation in 2020.



Leonardslee House



Rhododendron at Leonardslee Gardens



Pulhamite Rock Garden

2.2 THE ESTATE TODAY

The Stable Block and Courtyard

The U-shaped range of the carriage house and stables surmounted by a clock tower, built during the 1850s and converted to a restaurant in 1988. The extended stable building also contains a redundant office, plus a cottage and flat for estate staff use. The Stable Block is deemed curtilage listed.

The Former Generator Halls

To the west of the Stable Block is a brick outbuilding, formerly housing generators for the electrical supply to the house, contained a bonsai collection and a collection of Victorian motor cars. The main former generator hall is now roofless and is used for overflow cafe seating, whilst the lean to building has recently been refurbished with a new insulated roof. This building is also considered curtilage listed.

The Alpine House

The Alpine House is a modern glass house structure built and opened in 1992 to replicate Alpine conditions for growing plants. The structure with plastic transparent panels is still used today as a greenhouse with a dog friendly covered seating area. The Alpine House is not listed.

The Engine House

Situated south of the Mossy Ghyll Pond is the Engine Pond, the Engine House was formerly a pumping station, and previously housed pumps to supply the estate's water, as seen on maps in 1896. The structure now contains a small cafe and a modest terrace and is deemed as curtilage listed.

The Red House

Private residential use with a wing used as staff welfare and now vacant offices. Constructed as a dwelling to and a cafe, the 20th Century building is not listed.



The Stable Block and Courtyard



The Engine House



The Alpine House



The Former Generator Hall



The Red House

2.2 THE ESTATE TODAY

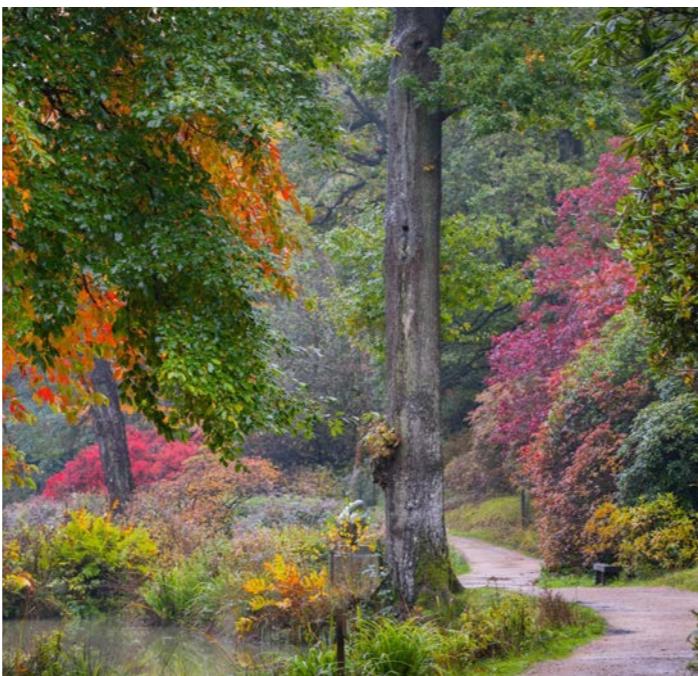
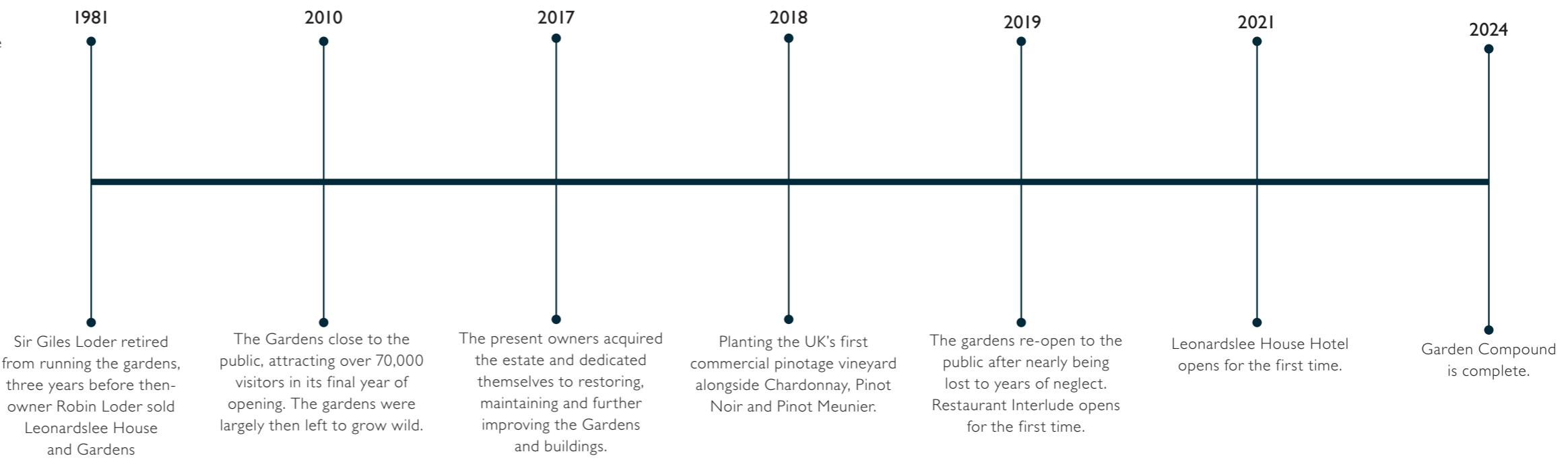
2.2.2 MODERN OWNERSHIP

In 1981, Robin Loder inherited the estate, and the family moved out, selling the house but keeping the gardens. In 1984, the house was converted into office space for Eurotherm International, while the gardens were officially registered as a Grade I Registered Park and Garden.

In 2010 the Loder family sold the gardens to a private individual, the estate was closed to the public and the gardens were left to grow wild. It wasn't until 2017, when Penny Streeter OBE purchased the estate, that restoration efforts began, aiming to restore the house and gardens. In 2018 Leonardslee's vineyard was planted, becoming the UK's first pinotage vineyard.

As part of the refurbishment, Restaurant Interlude opened within the ground floor of the House in 2019. Leonardslee House Hotel, encompassing ten hotel rooms opened in 2021.

As the Lakes and Gardens continued to flourish and attract a number of visitors with events such as the Open Air Cinema and Leonardslee Illuminated, new infrastructure was required to support this. In summer 2024 a new compound was built to the east of the site to house areas for staff offices and welfare.



The restored Gardens



Leonardslee House and pinotage vineyard



Leonardslee House Hotel bedroom interior

2.2 THE ESTATE TODAY

2.2.3 KEY SITE CHALLENGES AND CONSTRAINTS

The key challenges of the site are summarised below:

- The garden visitor entrance experience is poor, with vast amounts of unsympathetic hard landscaping and confusing wayfinding to the gardens from the initial entry point.
- Retaining the legibility of the Main House within the gardens, given the it operates as an independent hotel and restaurant.
- Accessibility to the gardens; Stepped access as primary entrance points, poorly defined route into the gardens and a challenge will be to keep the magic of exploration throughout gardens whilst improving access and legibility.
- The existing food and beverage offering to the site is small in comparison to comparable gardens, with not enough indoor or covered seats to service the existing demand.
- Poor quality cafe overspill offerings are harder to maintain staff and cater for visitors.
- Leonardslee has historically struggled to appeal to different generations of visitors and needs to be encouraged to slowly transition from a traditionally older target audience. The introduction of the play area has attracted a younger audience.
- Finding sustainable uses for existing buildings which require ongoing maintenance and are situated in the heart of the site, which currently are underutilised and in desperate need of repair.
- There is a limited choice of on site accommodation for visitors and the price point of Leonardslee House Hotel remains a barrier for many visitors.
- Lack of larger indoor spaces which could house groups such as schools, community groups, and visitor groups arriving by coach.



Unsympathetic hard landscaping to the front of the Main House



Existing condition of the Former Generator Block Courtyard



Limited seating at the Engine House



Steep access steps to the Gardens

2.3 THE FUTURE OF LEONARDSLEE

2.3.1 EXISTING VISITOR PATTERNS

Figure 1 illustrates the visitor numbers throughout the year to Leonardslee Gardens. These figures were taken from August 2023 to August 2024 and shows the numbers for the event visitor and for garden visitors. The data highlights Leonardslee's reliance on events, namely the winter illuminations and summer events. These events account for substantial revenue which helps conserve and maintain the Gardens and buildings, and introduce the Gardens to a younger audience. The events do however add additional strain on the Garden infrastructure which needs to be carefully managed.

General Garden visitors have a more even distribution, with highest numbers recorded in April and May for the rhododendron blooming and lower numbers through September to February.

In order to reduce the reliance on events, the existing infrastructure associated with the Gardens is in need of upgrading to both cope with existing demand at peak periods and to draw visitors in at off peak months, to allow Leonardslee to reduce the amount of larger events held.

2.3.2 TARGET VISITOR PATTERNS

Figure 2 illustrates the anticipated visitor numbers throughout the year at Leonardslee Gardens. These figures were based on the existing visitor numbers with a 5% increase of Garden visitors during the summer months, 10% increase during the winter months and a 5% decrease of event visitors, across a 5 year period.

The intention is to increase visitor numbers during the winter months, allowing the Garden to be experienced during different seasons. Anticipated low and shoulder season visitor numbers will still be lower than the current peak seasons which the Gardens can comfortably manage.

Figure 1 - Existing Visitor Numbers
August 2023 - August 2024

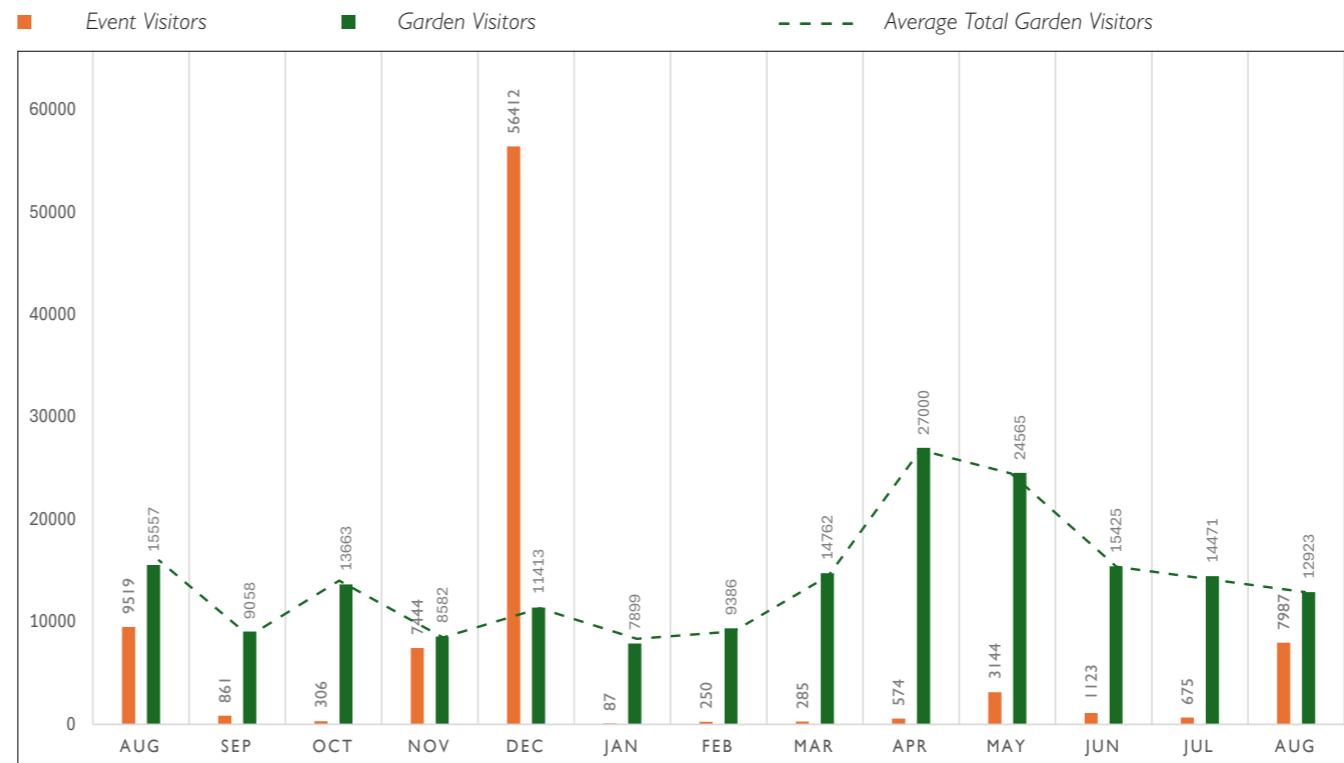
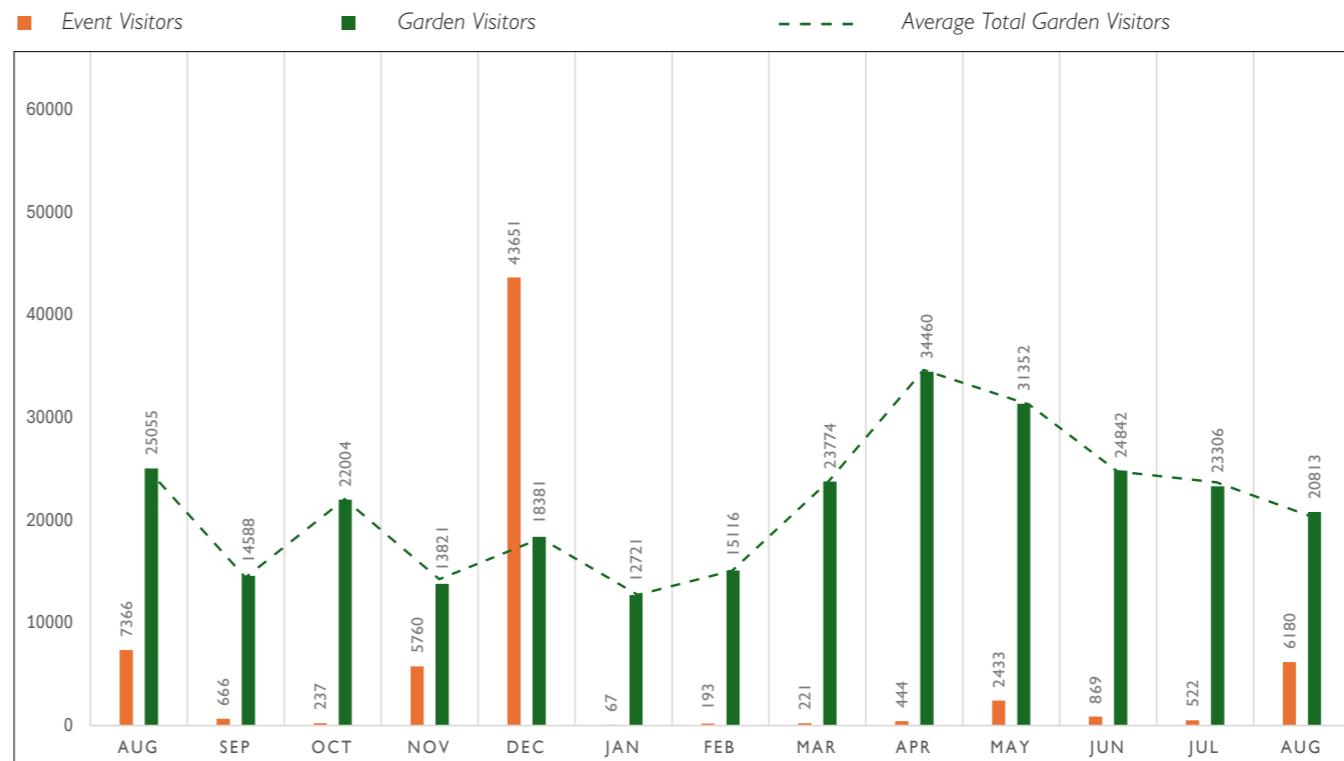


Figure 2 - Target Visitor Numbers in Five Years Time
Anticipated August 2028 - August 2029



2.3 THE FUTURE OF LEONARDSLEE

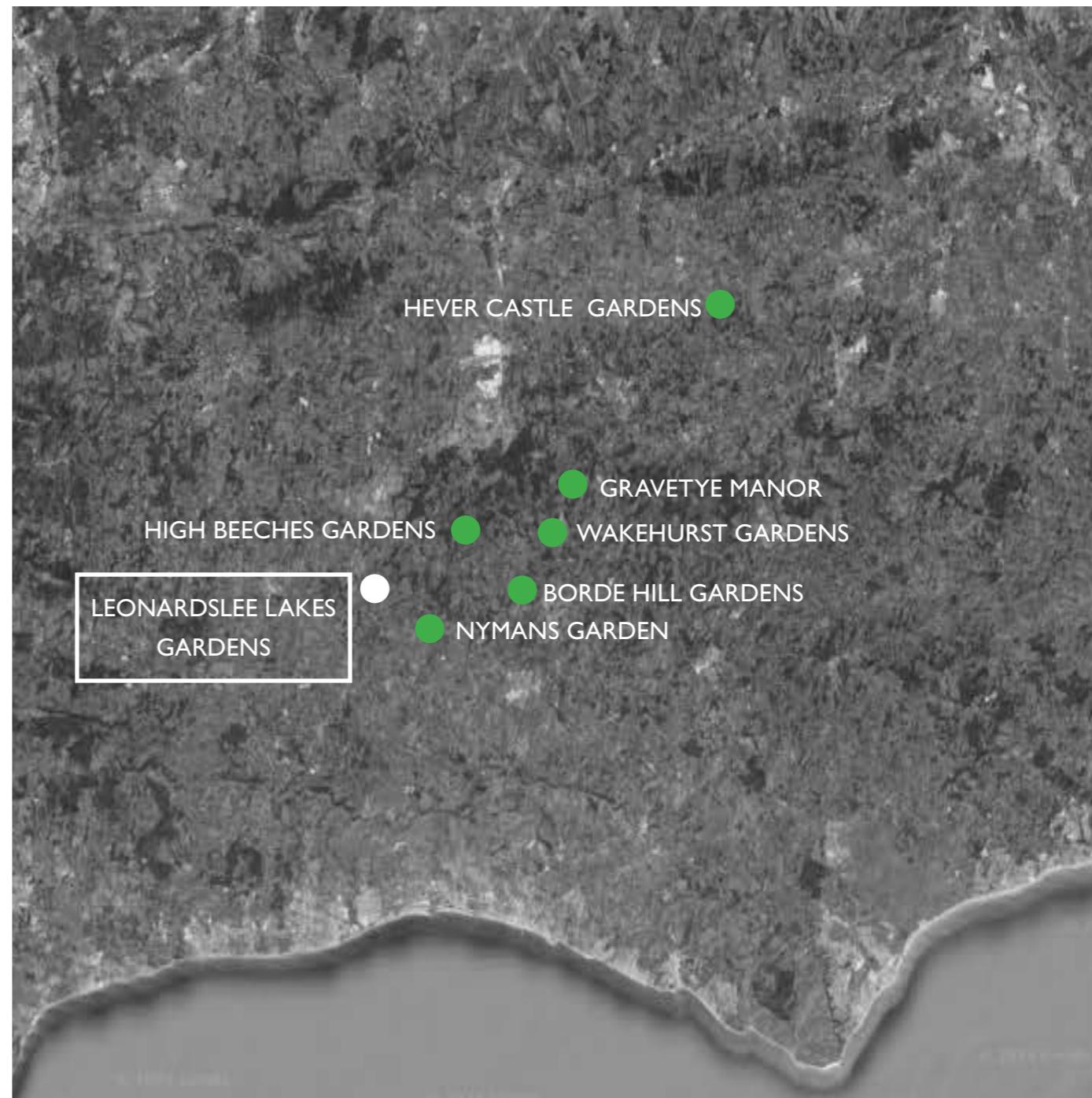
2.3.3 COMPARABLE GARDENS IN SUSSEX

The Leonardslee Estate is fortunate to sit amongst some of the highest quality gardens in the country. An analysis has been made with neighbouring gardens which have comparable significance and existing visitor infrastructure to that proposed at Leonardslee, notably a welcome cafe and a cafe in the gardens.

Furthermore, Leonardslee Gardens has associative value with various members of the Loder family throughout the generations and other Loder connected gardens nearby, reflecting the family's strong horticultural dynasty.

The Loder family were notably involved with a number of other successful gardens across Sussex. Many of which also form part of a wider group of High Weald plantman's gardens laid out from the late 19th to the early 20th century. Their collective significance stems from their shared design principles, characteristics, horticultural and botanical values. The location of these gardens in relation to Leonardslee is highlighted on the adjacent map.

The following pages describe the history of each garden along with their facilities.



Map of Sussex illustrating location of Leonardslee in relation to other notable gardens

2.3 THE FUTURE OF LEONARDSLEE



WAKEHURST GARDENS

Edmund Loder's brother, Gerald Loder, past president of the Royal Horticultural Society, owned Wakehurst Place (Grade II* RPG). Gerald Loder was a keen gardener and collector who sponsored plant hunting expeditions abroad and transformed the grounds into a botanic collection of rhododendrons at the turn of the 20th century. Wakehurst is now part of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew and, combined with Kew, forms the most important conservation collection in a botanic garden in the world.

FACILITIES

Opening:
All year
10:00 - 16:00

Manor House, Grade II* Listed

Stables Kitchen, Stables Pantry, Seeds Cafe'

Visitor Centre with Shop and Plant Centre

Parking

Organised events



HIGH BEECHES GARDEN

Sir Robert Loder, Sir Edmund's Father, owned High Beeches (where Edmund was born) (Grade II*), and developed outstanding early 20th century woodland gardens, gathering specimens from around the world during plant hunting expeditions.

FACILITIES

Opening:
April - November
13:00 - 17:00
Approx visitor numbers in 2024:

No manor house

Cafe'

Parking

Organised events



BORDE HILL GARDENS

This gardens forms part of a wider group of other, non-Loder, High Weald plantsman's gardens and this Grade II* RPG at Borde Hill was laid out by Colonel Ralph Stevenson Clarke.

Much like Leonardslee, the garden was contributed to by three generations of the Stephenson Clarke's family.

FACILITIES

Opening:
Feb - November (Cafe / Restaurant All Year Round)

Manor House, Grade II Listed

Two Cafes, Restaurant and third Cafe opening 2025

Planning permission for rooms within the Stables Eco-lodge

Visitor Centre with Shop Plant Centre

Parking

Organised events



Stables Kitchen Restaurant at Wakehurst



Tea Rooms at High Beeches



Former stable block at Borde Hill - soon to become a new Restaurant