



Historic England

**Inquiry to explore how gardens contribute to UK tourism,
the economy and to our national heritage**

DCMS Select Committee

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Looking After Parks, Gardens and Landscapes

<https://historicengland.org.uk/advice/technical-advice/parks-gardens-and-landscapes/>

Registered Parks and Gardens <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/what-is-designation/registered-parks-and-gardens/>

1. Introduction

1.1 Historic England is the Government's statutory adviser on all matters relating to the historic environment in England. We are a non-departmental public body sponsored by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). We champion and protect England's historic places, providing expert advice to local planning authorities, developers, owners and communities to help ensure our historic environment is properly understood, enjoyed and cared for.

1.2 Economically, England's historic environment is world-renowned, drawing tourists from across the globe. The maintenance and restoration of our iconic historic buildings is a major source of employment and its beauty attracts people, businesses and investment, meaning it has a vital role in the regeneration of our towns and cities. In addition to advising on proposals affecting the historic environment and supporting conservation through grants and other initiatives, Historic England also carries out social and economic research to build the evidence base demonstrating the value of heritage and to help make the case for heritage.

1.3 Historic England welcomes the inquiry to explore how gardens contribute to UK tourism, the economy and to our national heritage. Known as a nation of gardeners, we have inherited a rich cannon of designed landscapes from town gardens to great country estates. As well as places to enjoy, parks and gardens add to and shape our townscapes and landscapes, they are wildlife habitats, botanical collections, and they are increasingly important in tempering heat island effects of climate change.

2. Summary of Historic England's key points

- The Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest in England¹ was set up by statute 35 years ago. The Register has been an important tool in raising awareness of the significance of our designed landscape heritage. It would be timely to review whether protective statutory controls should now be introduced for these special sites.
- Many of the registered sites record layers of garden design over generations and present a fascinating story. There is often scope to add new gardens and features however these need to be designed and integrated sensitively.
- As well as the benefits generated by gardens as tourist attractions, the vast array of public parks and green spaces offer even more for local communities. As public spaces designed for all, they provide a wide range of outdoor recreation, relaxation, exercise and sport opportunities, and importantly places for children to play and people to spend time together. Designed as 'People's Parks', they are now facing funding crises and the pressure to generate income is leading to clashes with their primary purposes, their care and upkeep, heritage and cultural importance, and in turn their vital climate change adaptation role.
- Climate change will impact garden tourism in many ways. Stewardship of historic sites will become more demanding. We need to ensure parks and gardens are in good care and adequately resourced. Options to support the long term sustainability of historic parks and gardens could be trialled in the design of Defra's new Environmental Land Management Scheme.

¹ <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/what-is-designation/registered-parks-and-gardens/>

3. Heritage and the economy

3.1 From the cultural strategies of twelve major cities, *The World Cities Culture Report*² demonstrated that culture, leisure and tourism are as important as finance and trade as a source of employment, exports and tax revenue. Our own report *Heritage and the economy 2018*³ shows that the historic environment is intrinsically linked to economic activity, with a large number of economic activities occurring within it, dependent on it or attracted to it. Heritage plays an important part in shaping people's perceptions and authentic experiences of a place. The unique character of heritage assets and historic places – including parks, gardens and green spaces - creates the desire amongst members of the public to conserve and protect heritage for current and future generations. Places that are aesthetically pleasing have an attractive power that encourages people to congregate there. The social impact of participation on culture and sport was considered by the DCMS Committee in 2018 and Historic England submitted evidence⁴.

3.2 In 2017⁵ the top 10 paid attractions list in England included two historic gardens. Royal Botanic Garden Kew (registered Grade I and a World Heritage Site) was visited by 1.5m people, which is as many as Westminster Abbey. The Royal Horticultural Society's Wisley gardens (registered Grade II*) had 1.1m visitors. However these statistics are dwarfed by the total of 77.7m visits to the Royal Parks (all registered), and 34m of us regularly visit our own local parks each year (HLF 2014 'State of UK Public Parks'⁶) – some 300 of which are registered for their national importance.

3.3 As well as destination parks and gardens, many historic sites are also settings for hotels and spas like Thorpe Hall in Essex. Indeed many city museums, art galleries, libraries and parks were designed together as cultural infrastructure, and this relationship could be re-explored in the Museum Action Plan (Mendoza Review)⁷.

4. Our park and garden heritage and designation

4.1 The National Heritage List of England (NHLE)⁸ now includes 1,669 registered parks, gardens and other designed landscapes of special historic interest in England. In addition there are thousands of garden buildings, structures and archaeology that are also designated through listing and scheduling. Other parks, gardens, and green features are protected by being part of Conservation Areas, and thousands more parks and green spaces such as commons, heaths and greens are also of historic interest.

4.2 The Register of Parks & Gardens was set up 35 years ago (National Heritage Act 1983-4) and continues to be developed and new sites added as a record of our national heritage. Many registered sites are of international cultural and historic significance. The seven new additions over the last year illustrate the diversity of ornamental and recreational landscapes

² <http://www.worldcitiescultureforum.com/publications/world-cities-culture-report-2014>

³ <https://historicengland.org.uk/content/heritage-counts/pub/2018/heritage-and-the-economy-2018/>

⁴ <http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/digital-culture-media-and-sport-committee/the-social-impact-of-participation-in-culture-and-sport/written/78901.html>

⁵ https://www.visitbritain.org/sites/default/files/vb-corporate/Documents-Library/documents/foresight_165_regional_activities.pdf

⁶ <https://www.heritagefund.org.uk/publications/state-uk-public-parks-2014>

⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/museums-action-plan-2018>

⁸ <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/>

captured by the Register: the Pearl Centre offices in Peterborough; a Jewish Burial Ground in Nottingham; the residential block' Dolphin Square Gardens in Westminster; two private gardens in the Cotswolds; a historic asylum hospital garden in York; and the University of York's campus landscape.

4.3 The role of the Register is to raise awareness of the value of these sites and to encourage their protection.

4.4 Historic England has supported initiatives such as the Capability Brown Festival⁹ in 2016 and Celebrating Repton¹⁰ in 2018 activities aimed to raising awareness of our unique cultural heritage. The 2016 Festival was also supported by VisitBritain and VisitEngland and Capability Brown sites continue to benefit from the uplift in visitor numbers generated by their marketing campaigns. This year we are working with landscape architects to celebrate their chartered Landscape Institute's 90th birthday¹¹ and 20th century design and management.

5. Contemporary garden and landscape design

5.1 As a record of landscape design across the centuries, Historic England is just as interested in contemporary design as future candidates for the Register of Parks and Gardens. As with other historic sites, we would be looking for examples of landscape design which have proved to be influential in the development of taste, represent the work of leading designers, have important associations, represent great examples of design types, or are important as a group. Generally sites need to stand the test of time and are not usually considered for registration until they are at least 30 years old. A possible candidate for future registration is the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park which is still evolving as an important landscape design.

6. Tourism pressures

6.1 As shown in the VisitBritain report¹², garden visits are popular, and often part of history and heritage site, or city visits. Many parks and gardens are also part of the draw for rural scenery visits, sightseeing, outdoor leisure and events, and as settings for hotels and restaurants. VisitEngland's¹³ top gardens to visit reads as a roll call of Grade I registered sites, and many of the top city parks like London's Royal Parks, Battersea Park and Kenwood/Hampstead Heath are free to all enjoy.

6.2 Income generated from visitors (whether entrance fees for paid attractions or money spent in cafés) is a vital contribution to conserving these sites. Events are also important in introducing new visitors to sites and encouraging further visits. Some of our most important parks and gardens are also renowned as venues for major events such as flower shows, horse trials, concerts and festivals. The home of the Chelsea Flower Show, the Royal Hospital, is a Grade II registered park and garden.

⁹ <http://www.capabilitybrown.org>

¹⁰ <http://thegardenstrust.org/celebrating-humphry-repton-2018/>

¹¹ <https://www.landscapeinstitute.org/news/celebrating-li90/>

¹² https://www.visitbritain.org/sites/default/files/vb-corporate/Documents-Library/documents/foresight_165_regional_activities.pdf

¹³ <https://www.visitengland.com/short-breaks-england/english-gardens/selection-englands-best-gardens>

6.3 However historic parks and gardens are a fragile and finite resource: they can easily be damaged beyond repair.

6.4 Opening sites to visitors usually requires new developments such as cafés and children's play facilities and perhaps even additional attractions like a new garden. With a good understanding of the significance of a site, such developments can usually be sensitively integrated and add to the enjoyment of visits.

6.5 Over 20+ years of 'Parks for People' programme funding, the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) led a renaissance of many public parks and revitalised parks as visitor destinations. For example, Mowbray Park in Sunderland (and the associated museum) was one of the early lottery projects, and at Easter 2019 crowds joined in the reopening of the restored Grade II registered Great Yarmouth Venetian Waterways Gardens dating from 1928. The sector will want to ensure that momentum of public park applications will be sustained under the new NLHF framework approach now there is no dedicated grant programme.

6.6 More problematic is the re-development of historic houses into hotels or other new uses with additional development spilling into the park and new large scale facilities such as golf courses re-moulding the designed landscape. By the peak of golf course developments 15 years ago, we estimated that one in twelve of the registered parks included a course.

6.7 Parks have always played an important role as venues for fetes, fun fairs and local celebrations. However, over the last 15 years there has been a huge growth in major events in large parks, and increasingly in public parks too as local authorities try to make up short falls in budgets. Some sites are running busy annual programmes of commercial events as well as community events. Individual events may run for several days and attract 100,000+ visitors. Events have become elaborate and extensive affairs taking days to set up and strike. Temporary structures include marquees; kiosks, cafés and buildings; toilets; ice rinks; inflatable structures and fun fairs; stages and seating; cinema/TV screens; sculpture and art installations; associated services, plant, machinery and stores; and fencing and barriers.

6.8 The cumulative impact of frequent large scale events is beginning to take its toll in individual parks: new or modified entrances; new access tracks; additional car parking, wide-scale compaction from infrastructure, cars, people; and damage to trees. Even with good event organisation and controls, historic fabric inevitably gets eroded or damaged. Clashes of interests are emerging. Local residents are facing regular noise and disruption, and local communities finding themselves barred from using their own parks, and the visitor appeal of sites undermined due to crowds or perhaps settings undermined and views obscured. Increasingly parks seem to be managed as event venues rather than special green spaces to visit and enjoy.

7. Protective controls and funding support for public goods

7.1 Although the Register of Parks and Gardens is a statutory designation, unlike listed buildings and scheduled monuments there are no associated statutory controls. Registration brings an additional degree of protection under national planning policy (as set out in the National Planning Policy Framework¹⁴) but, if changes do not require planning consent, this

¹⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-planning-policy-framework--2>

policy is not applied, and the impact of the proposal on the registered site's significance is not assessed. There are many potentially damaging activities which lie beyond planning control for example farming and forestry operations and related development, changes in land management, and temporary developments such as event car parks. It would be timely to review protection for historic parks and gardens.

7.2 We also need to ensure adequate funding for historic parks, and in particular public parks. Cuts in local authority budgets threatens to undermine Lottery investment in these sites and unravel the organisation and stewardship of our urban green spaces and Green Infrastructure, even though we know these sites are critical to the health and well-being of communities and the liveability of cities. A senior parks manager¹⁵ has made the point that although the public may assume there are still parks departments, 'it is now a rarity to find an authority that retains its distinct 'parks service', and we are losing skills. The National Lottery Fund and National Trust's Future Accelerator Fund¹⁶ to develop and implement bold and innovative funding and management solutions for public parks is welcomed; and we look forward to Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government's (MHCLG) initial £13m investment¹⁷ in public parks being developed further through the Parks Action Group. To help champion historic public parks and other conservation projects, Historic England contributes funding towards the MHCLG's Green Flag Award¹⁸ benchmarking scheme run by Keep Britain Tidy, and has supported the Landscape Institute's Heritage and Conservation award¹⁹. The 'jewel in the crown' registered Grade II seafront gardens at Clacton is one example of a Green Flag Award site, and Tendring Council promote a Clacton Seafront and Garden healthwalk. We are also working with local authorities on the eight public parks included in our Heritage at Risk Register²⁰.

7.3 The development of Defra's new Environmental Land Management Scheme²¹ offers the opportunity to trial new options for the conservation of historic parks and gardens and to help ensure the long term sustainability of sites.

8. Climate change challenges

8.1 In towns and cities, our historic parks, green spaces and other features like avenues are part of the Green Infrastructure and we need to ensure they are well maintained. The functionality of infrastructure will be vital to the liveability of urban areas as climate change effects intensify. Our urban parks and green spaces will be increasingly important places to escape the heat and pollution. Well-maintained green spaces can help modify urban temperatures, and also absorb rainfall water run-off. Intensive use for events potentially impacts on and hinders this Green Infrastructure functionality. Loss of park areas for visitor development facilities such as car parks is a questionable strategy in the 21st century as parks, especially large parks, are precious and irreplaceable resources.

¹⁵ <https://www.paulrabbitts.co.uk/apps/blog/show/46650289-representing-parks-professionals-representing-the-profession>

¹⁶ <http://www.futureparks.org/toolkit/future-parks-accelerator>

¹⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/brokenshire-champions-parks-with-over-13-million-new-funding>

¹⁸ <http://www.greenflagaward.org.uk/>

¹⁹ <https://www.landscapeinstitute.org/awards/about-the-li-awards/>

²⁰ <https://historicengland.org.uk/advice/heritage-at-risk/>

²¹ publications.naturalengland.org.uk/file/4764267014520832

8.2 We also face the challenge of conserving these important heritage assets as the climate changes. Potentially these sites are under threat from new pests and diseases, droughts, and storms. Good stewardship with skilled horticulture and landscape management teams and adequate budgets can help protect these sites and ensure they can continue to be enjoyed for more decades. Visitor patterns are also likely to change over time. The garden tourism season is likely to extend well into the autumn but numbers may drop off in very hot or wet weather. (There are also questions about how visitors get to sites if they don't come by car). Sites may also have to close sites to deal with flash floods and storms damage, and biosecurity. The horticultural profession is very alive to the challenges ahead and the PlantNetwork conference May 2019²² is on climate change and gardens and will look at resilience and adaptation.

9. Training the next generation of historic parks and gardens specialists

9.1 The sector continues to be concerned about the lack of specialist training and degree courses, and the numbers of new entrants into the profession. Initiatives such as #chooselandscape²³, English Heritage Trust's Historic and Botanic Garden Trainee Programmes²⁴ and the Gardens Trust/Grapevine²⁵ aim to tackle some of these issues but all these need sustained funding. Tourism, conservation and climate change need to be part of this training.

²² <https://plantnetwork.org/news/plantnetwork-conference-2019/>

²³ www.chooselandscape.org/

²⁴ <http://hbgtp.org.uk/>

²⁵ <http://thegardenstrust.org/learning/courses/>