

8.7 ARCHAEOLOGICAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Brian Dix
09.02.2017
MARBLE HILL HOUSE

ARCHAEOLOGICAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Summary of recommended mitigation measures

The recommendations seek to balance the requirements for increasing public accessibility and improving visitor facilities through better site presentation and interpretation with appropriate care for archaeology, historical character and architectural importance of the site.

Prior archaeological excavation

Ice House Seat

Ninepin Alley

Palisade/Arcade and nearby building

Grotto

Archaeological supervision

Realignment of 'cross avenue'

Lawn terrace profiling

Archaeological monitoring during contractor's groundwork (Watching Brief)

Stable Block café

Marquee site anchorage points and services installation

New excavation for paths within woodland quarters and Sweet Walk

General considerations

Provision should be made to respond to unexpected discoveries within all parts of the site.

Individual strategies should be reviewed as arising, in particular where significant or complex remains are encountered.

1.

Development Description:

New commercial hub at the Stable Block

Ground works required:

- Removal of existing courtyard and terrace surfaces prior to releveling and being re-laid
- Excavation for new wall footings and support for suspended floor slabs

Potential impact to known archaeological features/heritage assets:

- Exposure of surviving areas of previous cobbled surface and underlying made ground, including potential construction levels in addition to deposits from later alterations

Recommended mitigation measures:

- Improvements to the setting of the existing café and enhancement of visitor facilities provide an opportunity to add to understanding of the site's development
- All ground work required for the construction of the new build, including the removal of existing surfaces, creation of footings, pipe-laying and other service installation, should be closely monitored in order to augment the results from previous trial pits. Further evidence of the extent and nature of historic levels and the relationship between individual deposits and features should be recorded as arising, with all relevant information drawn together in a single report.
- The strategy may need to be reviewed in the light of unexpectedly significant or complex discovery.

2.

Development Description:

Improvements to the wider park

Ground works required:

- Grass sward improvements involving spiking and decompaction to 25mm using a power harrow, with localised tine-cut sand grooves 150mm deep.
- Localised infilling and regrading to improve micro relief of playing surfaces and 'hotspots', e.g. football goal mouths, centre circles etc.
- Field drainage across the riverward part of West Meadow.
- Replacement fencing and installation of other park furniture may require small localised excavation for concrete bases.

Potential impact to known archaeological features/heritage assets:

- There is currently no evidence from the site for activity earlier than medieval agriculture, with the northern area continuing as open arable until 1635, by which time meadowland to the south was already enclosed. Evidence from AP/LiDAR mapping, geophysical surveys and ground observation suggests a complicated later history, with a palimpsest of features created when boundaries and other divisions, together with associated trackways and quarries, were abandoned, altered or removed. Some traces correlate with the pattern of development shown by historical maps, but also include buried remains of the aborted early 20C housing project across Great Lawn. Throughout its subsequent life as a public park, the grounds have been used for a range of summer and winter sports. The present arrangement of pitches is only the latest configuration, with previous layouts attested by former APs. Such aerial views also trace the evolution and removal of WW2 allotment gardens in East and West Meadows, in the area now proposed for drainage works.

Recommended mitigation measures:

- Most proposed works are superficial and confined to topsoil.
- High usage of some winter sports pitches has resulted in deterioration of the playing surface, which can be improved by localised infilling and selective regrading, together with decompaction and better drainage to encourage a resilient grass sward. The existing topsoil depth is sufficiently thick that it is unlikely that the topsoil will need to be stripped.
- Deeper drainage is required in the SW part of the park which is susceptible to flooding. In the event of unforeseen discoveries, provision should be made for appropriate recording. Any remains uncovered during installation of park furniture or by planting to improve biodiversity should be similarly treated.

3.

Development Description:

New play offers for children

Ground works required:

- Installation of safety surfacing and digging foundations for individual play features and benches within the current dog-free area.
- Trail circuit incorporates shallowly founded log features
- Foundation digging for wooden structure, bench and interpretation table at Ice House Seat
- Topsoil stripping and excavation of tree planting pits and bench foundation for restoration of the Ninepin Alley.

Potential impact to known archaeological features/heritage assets:

- No features of archaeological interest were observed during hand-augering within the existing dog-free area and none is recorded from proposed locations of elements along the play trail around the fringes of the park.
- Both features are depicted on the 1752 map of the Pleasure Grounds but whilst the Ninepin Alley may still partly survive in earthwork the potential for buried physical remains is largely unknown, together with their exact nature and condition.

Recommended mitigation measures:

- Provision should be made for the preservation by record of unforeseen significant finds that might otherwise be disturbed or destroyed.
- The 18C Pleasure Grounds are an important focus of the redevelopment plans for the property.
- Prior archaeological excavation with concomitant recording, analysis, archiving and reporting will be carried out in each location in order to assess vulnerability and investigate historical construction techniques and materials, together with details of original dimension and planting. In addition to informing accurate reconstruction this may also identify how best to preserve and protect such remains or integrate them using geotextile membrane or some other form of separation.

4.

Development Description:

Restoration of 18C landscape

Ground works required:

- Restoration of semi-circular court north of the house together with 'cross avenue' along garden front
- Reinstatement of former terracing profiles and replanting stepped avenues.
- Construction of pergola/arcade around Oval Lawn.
- New tree, shrub and flower planting, including excavation of gravel paths, in woodland quarters and along Sweet Walk.
- Installation of anchor points and services for connection with temporary marquee site east of house.
- Improved setting for the grotto.
- N.B – Works in connection with the Ice House Seat and Ninepin Alley are considered under 'Play' offers for children'

Potential impact to known archaeological features/heritage assets:

- Topsoil stripping could affect earthwork survival, particularly lesser scarps, low platforms and ridges. Whilst some may represent disconnected remnants of earlier walks and paths, others more clearly denote tree hollows (both old and recent) or are products of dumping and other disturbance. Deeper excavation for new planting and structural works increases potential harm.

Recommended mitigation measures:

- Restoration of the Pleasure Grounds represents an outstanding opportunity to rediscover and interpret the former relationship between Marble Hill and the River Thames, revealing house and garden as a single entity that communicated grace and beauty as well as pride and social standing. In addition to recreating the diversity of spatial character, it is also an occasion to arrest deterioration and extend the range of habitats offered by the park.
- Works to re-establish the alignment of 'cross avenue' and careful regrading of the outlines of the stepped terraces should be carried out under archaeological supervision to ensure historical accuracy and in order to avoid unnecessary damage to the original fabric.
- The site of the former palisade is marked by earthworks, which will be investigated by pre-emptive excavation to determine precise location and any surviving details of the position and spacing of former openings, together with identifying suitable measures to safeguard any remains or sustain their value, depending on nature and condition. Similar investigation of the privy or other building nearby could also be carried out. Preliminary excavation will also be undertaken in the grotto vicinity to obtain path and structural evidence, together with information concerning levels, earth mounding and other made ground.
- Despite the limitation of much earthwork evidence to yield detailed information about the former path layout, individual features may still be a useful indicator of historical precedent. Close monitoring during groundwork in preparation for the laying out of paths would therefore enable any forthcoming archaeological evidence to be recorded and taken into account in accurately re-forming the area.
- The small, localised excavation of individual anchorage points at the marquee site, together with associated ground levelling and services installation should be monitored for information concerning the former Service Wing and Chinese Room.

Brian Dix
09.02.2017
MARBLE HILL HOUSE

- More general digging of tree pits and other planting holes need not be specifically monitored but in the event of significant archaeological or historical remains being exposed, appropriate provision should be made for investigation, recording, analysis and subsequent dissemination. In so far that the construction works affect them, the remains should be investigated sufficiently to determine their nature and possible function but otherwise left intact and preserved in situ.