



SUBMITTED VIA EMAIL: james.garside@richmondandwandsworth.gov.uk

28th September 2018

Mr James Garside
Planning Officer
LB Richmond upon Thames
Civic Centre
York Street
Twickenham
TW1 3BZ
Your ref. DC/JAG

Dear Mr Garside

Marble Hill House and Park. Planning Application: 18/2977/FUL

I am writing to express the support of the London Parks & Gardens Trust for the revised proposals made by English Heritage and shown in the application dated 7th September 2018 to carry out works to Marble Hill House and Park which are included at grade I (house) grade II* (park) and grade II (stable block) in the Historic England List and Register.

The history of the estate is set out in the application documents, which include recent archival and archaeological evidence commissioned to shine further light on the development of the house and park. The history is important not only for shaping and explaining the estate as it now stands but also for setting the context in which the proposals need now to be considered.

The house was built and the estate assembled and landscaped for Henrietta Howard, Countess of Suffolk. She was a very remarkable woman if only one of many important characters in the history of Marble Hill, and it is right and laudable that English Heritage should put her at the centre of the picture in their proposals for restoring and re-presenting the house and garden.

The early-to-mid eighteenth century is not currently studied much in popular history, and to that extent may be considered unfashionable, but at the period in which Marble Hill was built and its gardens and park formed, from circa 1724 onwards, Twickenham was the focus for up-to-the-minute developments in literature, architecture and landscape. The poet Alexander Pope moved there in 1719 and started forming his famous grotto and garden, drawing inspiration from the classical poets and contributing to the gradual breaking away from the formality of Renaissance and Baroque gardening, helping to lead towards what has become known as the English landscape garden, as epitomized later by landscape designers such as 'Capability' Brown.

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The banks of the River Thames between Hampton Court and Kew, as is celebrated and documented in the Thames Landscape Strategy, are an open-air textbook of garden design from the seventeenth to the twenty-first centuries, and Marble Hill is central and essential to an understanding of the “Arcadian Thames”. Mavis Batey, one of the principal authors of the Thames Landscape Strategy, calls Marble Hill (in her “Alexander Pope: The Poet and the Landscape” 1999) “the most exquisite Palladian villa in England... as important architecturally as Chiswick... a little Palladian gem to be seen from the river, giving the Thames an air of the River Brenta”.

English Heritage has been assiduous in carrying out documentary and archaeological research to establish the original layout of the gardens and park at Marble Hill, and similarly exemplary in carrying out public consultations and revising their proposals to take representations into account. The creation of a complex work of art like Marble Hill involves inevitably the efforts of many minds and many pairs of hands working towards achieving a harmonious whole.

The London Parks & Gardens Trust agrees with English Heritage that the drawing in the Norfolk Record Office records in its mature mid-century state a garden laid out and planted a quarter of a century or so earlier to a design that was at the time as fashionable as the villa it complements but which was soon to become overtaken by the more “natural” landscape style – what Horace Walpole later in the eighteenth century called the “modern taste in gardening”.

In supporting English Heritage, the Trust recognizes that landscapes evolve over time and need to be adapted to modern taste and interventions. So the solution now put before your committee by English Heritage has had to juggle the demands of multiple stakeholders current needs as well as historical concerns, and can never replicate in pure identical terms what might have been.

Lottery funding, which is dependent upon the granting of planning permission, will enable English Heritage to carry out works that are necessary for the well-being of the house and the park. Successive national governments have withdrawn funding for the upkeep of the historic environment at the same time as reducing rate support to local authorities, and while Marble Hill park serves primarily as an amenity for the local population it is now run at a very considerable financial loss by English Heritage, which is now a charity. The house is of national importance in terms of its architecture and history, and there is now an opportunity to reinstate the park and garden setting that it deserves.

The London Parks & Gardens Trust, which is affiliated to the Gardens Trust and a statutory consultee in respect of planning applications affecting registered historic landscapes, fully supports the current English Heritage planning application and urges your Council to grant consent. We would be happy to discuss any of the aspects in this letter should the Council require further information.

Yours sincerely

Helen Monger
Director
London Parks and Gardens Trust
On behalf of the Planning and Conservation Working Group