BLENHEIM ESTATE

HOMES

Land East of Park View Woodstock

Environmental Statement Technical Appendix C: Cultural Heritage

London
Birmingham
Bournemouth
Bristol

0203 664 6755

enquiries@torandco.com
torandco.com

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C3

Assessment of effects on Blenheim Palace World Heritage Site, based on the ICOMOS guidance (2011)

Technical appendix C3: Assessment of effects on Blenheim Palace World Heritage Site

Introduction

C1. This technical appendix presents an assessment of the potential effects of the proposed development on the outstanding universal value (OUV) of the Blenheim Palace WHS.

C2. The assessment takes the conclusions of ES chapter 5: cultural heritage of the potential effects of the proposed development on the site and the heritage assets within the 1km study area and relates them directly to the international significance of Blenheim Palace WHS, as defined in the Statement of Outstanding Universal Value (SOUV) adopted in 2013 and the set of seven attributes that convey OUV, in order to define the overall effect. This is presented in tabular form.

C3. The assessment makes reference where relevant to the *Guidance and toolkit for impact assessments in a world heritage context* (UNESCO, 2022), which was published as one of the series of resource manuals produced by the three advisory bodies to the World Heritage Committee (ICCROM, ICOMOS and IUCN). However, some aspects of the toolkit differ from the established methodologies used in this EIA, particularly in relation to effects on the setting of a WHS, where the toolkit is less specific than the Historic England GPA3 guidance on the need to assess how the setting contributes to the OUV.

Methodology

C4. The following assessment covers the study area used in chapter 5 and the associated figures that extends to a 1km radius from the edge of the site. The south east part of the WHS that falls within the study area includes three of the character areas identified in the adopted WHS management plan; character area 4, Lower Park, character area 5, Bladon Park, and character area 8, the gardens and pleasure grounds, and a number of individually listed structures.

C5. The methodology used for the overall ES (see chapter 3) and specific to effects on cultural heritage (chapter 5) uses a staged approach based on scales to define the importance/sensitivity, magnitude of change as a result of the proposed development and the overall effect, either adverse or beneficial.

Baseline information

C6. Chapter 5 of the ES gives a narrative of the development of the designed landscape at Blenheim and of the sections of the parkland that fall within the 1km study area.

C7. Blenheim Palace WHS is inscribed as an outstanding example of an 18th century European princely residence, unique in England, set within a monumental landscape park of c.10 square kilometres, that was central to the development of the naturalistic English landscape garden style in the later 18th century. The full SOUV that was adopted by UNESCO in 2013 is reproduced below.

Brief Synthesis

Blenheim Palace, in Oxfordshire, was designed by John Vanbrugh. The English nation presented the site to John Churchill, first Duke of Marlborough, in recognition of his victory in 1704 over French and Bavarian troops, a victory which decided the

future of the Empire and, in doing so, made him a figure of international importance. The Palace sits within a large walled landscape park, the structure by Vanbrugh overlaid by the designs of Lancelot “Capability” Brown from 1761 onwards.

The design and building of the Palace between 1705 and 1722 represented the beginning of a new style of architecture and its landscaped Park, designed by Lancelot “Capability” Brown, is considered “a naturalistic Versailles”. In tangible form, Blenheim is an outstanding example of the work of John Vanbrugh and Nicholas Hawksmoor, two of England’s most notable architects. It represents a unique architectural achievement celebrating the triumph of the English armies over the French, and the Palace and its associated Park have exerted great influence on the English Romantic movement which was characterised by the eclecticism of its inspiration, its return to natural sources and its love of nature.

The original landscape set out by John Vanbrugh, who regulated the course of the River Glyme, was later modified by Lancelot “Capability” Brown who created two lakes, seen as one of the greatest examples of naturalistic landscape design.

Blenheim Palace was built by the nation to honour one of its heroes John Churchill, the first Duke of Marlborough, and is also closely associated with Sir Winston Churchill.

Criterion (ii):

By their refusal of the French models of classicism, the Palace and Park illustrate the beginnings of the English Romantic movement, which was characterised by the eclecticism of its inspiration, its return to national sources and its love of nature. The influence of Blenheim on the architecture and organisation of space in the 18th and 19th centuries was greatly felt both in England and abroad.

Criterion (iv):

Built by the nation to honour one of its heroes, Blenheim is, above all, the home of an English aristocrat, the 1st Duke of Marlborough, who was also Prince of the Germanic Holy Roman Empire, as we are reminded in the decoration of the Great Drawing Room [the Saloon] by Louis Laguerre (1719-20). Like the World Heritage properties Residence of Würzburg and the Castles of Augustusburg and Falkenlust in Brühl, Blenheim is typical of 18th century European princely residences.

Integrity

The property is enclosed by an 18th century dry stone wall which defines its extent and maintains its physical integrity. Within the wall, the layout of the principal buildings remains unaltered since their construction, and the overall structure of the landscaped park layout remains largely as set out by Vanbrugh and Brown. The buildings and Park were laid out over an earlier Roman and medieval landscape, remnants of which are still visible through the Vanbrugh and Brown landscapes. Changes to the landscape and buildings by their owners have continued to the present day though these have not detracted from the Outstanding Universal Value of the property.

The Park contains important veteran trees. Disease and time have caused some loss of original tree specimens but these have been replanted with the same species where possible and appropriate. Because of climate change and the greater

incidence of drought, adjustments have to be made to the mix of species used in conserving the park landscape.

The integrity of the property is well protected by its enclosing wall but important visual links do exist between the gates, the parkland buildings, buildings in the surrounding villages and landscape, and care needs to be taken to ensure these key visual links are protected.

Authenticity

The overall relationship between the Baroque Palace and its Park is still clearly in place and the Outstanding Universal Value of the property can be very readily understood despite the early 20th century changes to the landscape. The form and design of the Palace and Park survive well and there is a high degree of survival of fabric and indeed original fittings and furnishings.

Protection and management requirements

The UK Government protects World Heritage properties in England in two ways. Firstly, individual buildings, monuments, gardens and landscapes are designated under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and the 1979 Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act and secondly, through the UK Spatial Planning system under the provisions of the Town and Country Planning Acts. Government guidance on protecting the Historic Environment and World Heritage is set out in the National Planning Policy Framework and Circular 07/09. Policies to protect, promote, conserve and enhance World Heritage properties, their settings and buffer zones are also found in statutory planning documents. World Heritage status is a key material consideration when planning applications are considered by the Local Authority planning authority. The West Oxfordshire Local Plan contains policies to protect the property. The property as a whole is designated as a Grade I registered Park and Garden and was given National Heritage tax exemption status in 1999 in recognition of its important architecture, its outstanding scenic, historic landscape, and the outstanding importance of the buildings' contents and their intimate association with the property. Forty five key buildings on the site are Grade 1 and Grade 2* Listed Buildings, with the park wall designated Grade 2. There are 5 scheduled ancient monuments within the Park. The lakes and High Park are designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and the ancient woodland and hedgerows are both protected. Part of the setting of the property is within the Conservation Areas of Woodstock and Bladon and part is in the Cotswold's Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. A Management Plan has been in place since 2006 and is monitored on an annual basis by a Steering Group which includes representatives from English Heritage, ICOMOS-UK, DCMS, Natural England, the County Council and the local planning authority.

Relevant Management Plan policies carry weight in the planning system. There is a comprehensive and successful visitor management plan. The Steering Group is coordinated by the Blenheim Palace and Estate Chief Executive who has responsibility for implementing the Management Plan Action Plan. There is an ongoing programme of repair and regular maintenance of the buildings and structures. Recent work has included the strengthening and reinstatement of the Blenheim Dam during 2009 to comply with safety legislation. The Park is open through the year and the Palace and Formal Gardens are open from mid-February to mid-December each year. The property has a long tradition of public access (going back to at least Easter 1950) and it provides the setting for informal recreation as well as a series of activities including sporting events, craft and

country fairs and entertainment events such as music concerts and historical re-enactments. The property also offers a very high quality resource for a variety of educational uses. Firm implementation of existing policies is important to provide effective protection of the setting of the World Heritage property and it will be important to ensure that the management of the Park prioritises conservation of the elements of the landscape that reflect the work of Vanbrugh and Brown. The Steering Group meets annually to monitor progress and implementation with regard to the 33 stated objectives in the Management Plan and to check awareness with regard to risk preparedness and to monitor any issues regarding the integrity of the property – particularly with regard to the continuous monitoring of the key visual links.

C8. An informal set of seven attributes which help to convey the OUV were adopted at the same time and are described in greater detail in the 2017 WHS management plan. They are:

Attribute 1. It remains the home of the same aristocratic family, the successive Dukes of Marlborough, for whom it was built.

Attribute 2. It still contains the unique early 18th century architecture of the Palace and its associated assemblage of buildings together with an archive of original survey and building documentation.

Attribute 3. It is still set within the early 18th century grand Vanbrugh landscape overlaid by Lancelot Brown's masterpiece of English Landscape style design, internationally considered to be the 'English Versailles'.

Attribute 4. The surviving special relationship between the important architectural elements and their landscape setting are an exceptional piece of design and, together are greater than the sum of their parts.

Attribute 5. The UK has by far the greatest concentration of veteran trees in northern Europe and within High Park, which sits in the south-west section of Blenheim Park, is one of the finest areas of ancient oak-dominated woodland in the country. It is partially descended from the ancient Wychwood Forest, a 12th century deer park and an Anglo- Saxon chase.

Attribute 6. The gardens and pleasure grounds which surround the Palace were partly designed by Lancelot Brown in the mid 18th century, and partly by the French landscape architect Achille Duchene at the start of the 20th century.

Attribute 7. The park retains a complete, 18th century enclosing stone wall which protects its integrity, but views into and out of the site still provide key linkages between Blenheim Palace and the traditional English countryside and villages surrounding it.

C9. In relation to the attributes, several of the *"associated assemblage of buildings"*, including a section of the *"enclosing stone wall"* and three character areas of *"the early 18th century grand Vanbrugh landscape overlaid by Lancelot Brown's masterpiece of English Landscape style design"* fall within the study area.

C10. For the site itself any contribution to the OUV would relate only to attribute 7, and the *"key linkages"* that define the relationship of the WHS to buildings or areas of *"traditional"* countryside beyond the park boundary. The site is not part of either of the

two designed views beyond the park boundary, which are identified in the management plan as the viewcones extending south from the Palace towards Bladon and east from the Column of Victory, and potential visual connections to and from the WHS are limited to Lower Park beyond the A44. The site is a single field parcel that retains little character and identified features of value relate to the longer approach to Woodstock and the WHS, specifically some of the tree belts on the site boundaries.

Assessment of effects

C11. The table below relates the assets in the study area that are considered in the assessment of effects in chapter 5 directly to these attributes. These are shown on figure 5.2 of the main ES.

Assets in the 1km study area	**Relevant attributes that convey OUV**
The site, boundary tree belts (part of WHS setting)	7
The park wall LB1	2, 4, 7
The Cowyards LB2	2, 4
Eagle Lodge LB3	2, 4
The walled gardens LB4, LB5	2, 3, 4
Hensington Gate and related group LB6, LB7, LB8	2, 4
Woodstock conservation area	7
The registered park and garden (RPG) within the 1km study area: character area 4, Lower Park, character area 5, Bladon Park and character area 8, the gardens and pleasure grounds	3, 4

C12. The table below relates the conclusions of the assessment of the magnitude of change to the significance of the assets in the ES chapter 5 directly to the attributes that convey the OUV of the WHS.

Adopted attributes that convey OUV	Conclusions of ES chapter 5
Attribute 2. It still contains the unique early 18th century architecture of the Palace and its associated assemblage of buildings together with an archive of original survey and building documentation.	*Negligible change* LB1, LB6 *No change* LB2, LB3, LB4, LB5, LB7, LB8
Attribute 3. It is still set within the early 18th century grand Vanbrugh landscape overlaid by Lancelot Brown's masterpiece of English Landscape style design, internationally considered to be the 'English Versailles'.	*Negligible change* RPG within the 1km study area: character area 4, Lower Park *No change* LB4, LB5 RPG within the 1km study area: character area 5, Bladon Park and character area 8, the gardens and pleasure grounds *Negligible change* (beneficial) RPG within the 1km study area: character area 4, Lower Park, character area 5, Bladon Park and character area 8, the gardens and pleasure grounds
Attribute 4. The surviving special relationship between the important architectural elements and their landscape setting are an exceptional piece of design and, together are greater than the sum of their parts.	*Negligible change* LB1, LB6, LB7, LB8 RPG within the 1km study area: character area 4, Lower Park *No change* LB2, LB3, LB4, LB5 RPG within the 1km study area: character area 5, Bladon Park and character area 8, the gardens and pleasure grounds
Attribute 7. The park retains a complete, 18th century enclosing stone wall which protects its integrity, but views into and out of the site still provide key linkages between Blenheim Palace and the traditional English countryside and villages surrounding it.	*Negligible change* The site, boundary tree belts (part of WHS setting) LB1 Woodstock conservation area

C13. The assets within the study area can be related to four of the seven attributes that convey the OUV of the WHS. For those attributes that relate to buildings or features within the WHS (attributes 2, 3 and 4) the assessment predicts either no change as a result of the proposed development or a negligible change. For attribute 7 and the contribution of the setting beyond the park boundary, a negligible change is predicted, including one beneficial effect. The ES also considers in the category of induced effects the financial contribution of the proposed development to the conservation, maintenance and restoration of the Blenheim Palace WHS via the Blenheim Heritage Foundation, which is assessed as a negligible to small change.

C14. Using the assessment matrix used throughout this ES, the WHS is a receptor of high importance. The proposed development is predicted to result in a slight adverse effect on the OUV of the Blenheim Palace WHS which is not significant and a slight / moderate beneficial induced effect.