National Trust

TACP Architects Ltd

Biddulph Grange Garden



Proposed extension to existing visitor reception/shop

Design and Access Statement

February 20129

1. Introduction

1.1 This Design and Access Statement accompanies an application for the extension to the property's shop/ visitor reception for the National Trust at Biddulph Grange Garden. The new extension would be a small addition on the west side of the existing building, set into a shrub-covered bank

2. Background

2.1 The Government's 2010 *Guidance on Information Requirements and Validation* states, "A design and access statement is a short report accompanying and supporting a planning application to illustrate the process that has led to the development proposal, and to explain and justify the proposal in a structured way." The guidance also states that Design and Access Statements should be proportionate to the complexity of the application and need not be long.

2.2 The National Planning Policy Framework requires applicants to provide sufficient information to enable planning authorities to assess impacts on heritage assets. The PPS5 Historic Environment Planning Practice Guide suggests that this information should be included in the design and access statement.

3. Planning history

3.1 Staffordshire Moorlands Council granted approval for the application to erect the current visitor reception/shop building in October 2012 (SMD/2012/0401).

4. Environmental Context

4.1 The site is adjacent to the current VR/shop on the edge of the existing tarmac car park for Biddulph Grange Garden. Part of the site is occupied by cycle parking. There are also some 20th century railings and an area of shrubs on a bank that slopes up from the car park.



4.2 The car park slopes up to the east rising 0.4m across the width of the building. The bank rises to between 1.1m and 1.5m above the car park. The drive to the east of the application site continues the slope of the car park, eventually reaching the level of the top of the bank.



4.3 The main visitor route from the car park is through the metal gates on the edge of the application site, along the drive immediately to its east, through the plant sales area and up the steps into the garden.

4.4 Biddulph Grange Garden was bought by the Trust in 1988 and opened to the public in 1991. Since then it has welcomed between 57,000 and 100,000 visitors per year. Opening days and times vary throughout the year. We are open 7 days per week from February to November and from Fridays to Mondays in November and December.

5. Designations

5.1 Biddulph Grange is a grade II* listed building. It is set in a grade I registered historic park and garden. It lies within the North Staffordshire Green Belt, the Biddulph Grange Conservation Area and the Staffordshire Moorlands Special Landscape Area.

6. Heritage assets

a) Biddulph Grange

6.1 Biddulph Grange is a grand Victorian country house (listed grade II*). The style of Biddulph Grange is a revised English Baroque. It mostly replaced an Italianate building of 1848-60 following a fire in 1897. This in turn overlays an earlier farmhouse.

6.2 The house has historical as well as architectural interest as the home of James Bateman, the well-known horticulturalist who created the gardens in collaboration with Edward Cooke.

6.3 The house is set at an elevated level above the car park. The west end of the house is covered by late 20th century rendering and is a mixture of the earlier Italianate house and 1897 rebuilt sections. The original house had a big greenhouse on this side elevation. Although the west elevation is not the most grandiose part of the building it provides an imposing backdrop to the car park.

6.4 Most of the Grange has been converted to apartments, which are in private ownership. The Trust uses part of the building as visitor reception, shop, tea room, exhibition space and offices.

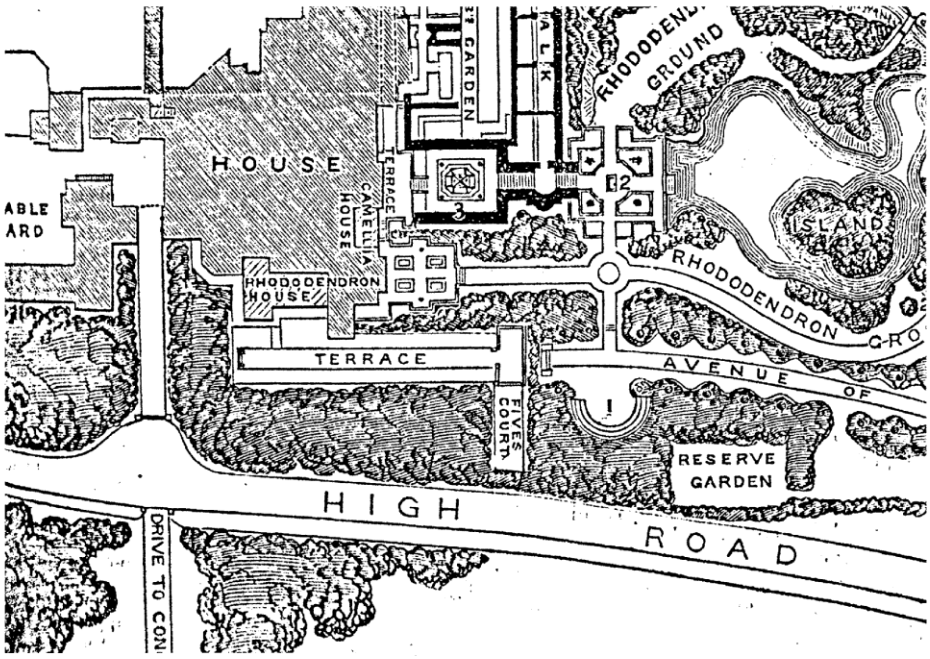
b) Biddulph Grange Garden

6.5 The registered area of Biddulph Grange Garden (grade I) is some 42ha, including the park and grounds. The garden's inspired design was the vision of one man, James Bateman, who created the garden from 1841 to 1868. He was assisted in this by Edward Cooke, a well respected, marine painter, who designed the buildings and rockwork. James' wife Maria was also influential and an active gardener; who had a particular interest in herbaceous plants, bulbs, Fuchsias and Lilies.

6.6 James Bateman was a distinguished botanist, plant collector and garden designer, but above all a horticulturist, with a great knowledge of plants and the conditions they require to grow in. He was also a part of the horticultural world, and being a fellow of the Royal Society, he would have had numerous contacts and influences. He created a series of garden rooms, many based on individual countries and with unique features, each with their own character and micro-climate in which he grew an exceptionally wide range of plants which were being introduced from all over the world.

6.7 The imaginative series of garden spaces are linked with considerable ingenuity and provide surprises at every turn. Terracing, hedging, stumps, roots, rockwork and earth mounding create a unified layout ingeniously separating these spaces. To retain a natural feel to the garden native Ivy, Yew and Holly have been used to screen each area and provide shelter, the contemporary critic Kemp said, "They alone contribute very largely to impart a natural and furnished appearance to the place."

6.8 The drive eastwards of the proposed reception building is a former toll road shown as "High Road" in Kemp's 1862 plan of the garden. The road/drive marked the historic western boundary between the gardens and the grounds. The area west of the road, including the application site, was not part of the formal gardens. It is also an area that has been heavily modified when the Grange was a hospital and afterwards with the creation of the car park and sewage works.



Kemp's plan of 1862

c) Biddulph Grange Conservation Area

6.9 The Conservation Area Appraisal published by Staffordshire Moorlands District Council shows that the conservation interest is focused on Biddulph Grange, its garden, pleasure grounds and related buildings.

d) Other heritage assets

6.10 The development will only result in ground disturbance in areas that have already been disturbed by the creation of the car park and by previous infrastructure associated with the former hospital use of the site. The Trust's archaeologist has advised that nothing of interest is likely to be affected by the development.

6.11 Biddulph Grange Garden contains numerous listed buildings but other than the Grange none has its setting potentially affected by the proposed reception building. St Lawrence's church is listed grade II* with related buildings and structures listed grade II. The proposed reception extension building will not have any affect on their setting.

7. Nature conservation

7.1 Ponds near Biddulph Grange Garden are known to support populations of Great Crested Newts. The application site comprises an existing tarmac car park, hedge and shrub covered bank. The Trust's Nature Conservation Adviser has advised that the development is unlikely to have any effect on the newt population or any other nature conservation interest.

8. Landscape

8.1 Biddulph Grange Garden lies entirely within the North Staffordshire Green Belt. The Garden also falls within a Special Landscape Area defined in the Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan. The site is visually self-contained from the surrounding landscape and experienced as an area already modified by development.

9. Planning policy context

9.1 The development plan for the area comprises the West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy and saved policies of the Structure Plan and Local Plan. National planning policy is also an important consideration. The government has signalled its intention to abolish regional spatial strategies.

a) West Midlands RSS

9.2 Policy QE1 urges Local authorities to protect and where possible enhance irreplaceable assets such as historic landscape features.

9.3 Policy QE5 seeks to protect, conserve and enhance the Region's diverse historic environment and manage change in such a way that respects local character and distinctiveness.

b) Staffordshire and Stoke Structure Plan adopted 2001

9.4 Policy D1 seeks sustainable forms of development that re-use existing sites and minimise the use of resources.

9.5 Policy D2 seeks a high quality of design responsive to the local environment.

9.6 Policy D5B sets out an approach to development in the green belt similar to local plan policy N2.

9.7 Policy E11A supports the development of tourist attractions and facilities, subject to certain safeguards including that they reflect the inherent character of their location.

9.8 Policy NC13 seeks to protect trees and hedgerows.

9.9 Policy NC17A protects registered historic parks and gardens and their settings. Policy NC18 protects listed buildings and their settings and policy NC19 protects conservation areas.

c) Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan adopted 1998

9.10 Policy N2 protects the Green Belt from "inappropriate development" except in exceptional circumstances.

9.11 Policy N7 protects the greenbelt from development that would injure its visual amenity.

9.12 Policy N8 protects the Special Landscape Area from development that would detract from the high quality of the landscape. Policy N9

requires especially high standards of design in the Special Landscape Area.

9.13 Policy B13 seeks a high standard of design including making adequate provision for people with restricted mobility.

10. National planning policy

10.1 National planning policies are contained in the National Planning Policy Framework published in 2012. Paragraph 14 sets out the presumption in favour of sustainable development. It states:

For decision-taking this means:

- approving development proposals that accord with the development plan without delay; and
- where the development plan is absent, silent or relevant policies are out-of-date, granting permission unless:
  - any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole; or
  - specific policies in this Framework indicate development should be restricted.

10.2 Paragraph 17 lists twelve core planning principles. These include:

- supporting sustainable economic development
- seeking high quality design
- taking account of the different roles and character of different areas, including protecting green belts
- conserving heritage assets

10.3 Chapter 9 of the NPPF addresses green belt in more detail. Paragraph 80 lists the five purposes of including land in the green belt. Paragraph 81 encourages positive planning to enhance the beneficial use of green belt. Paragraph 87 states that inappropriate development should not be approved except in very special circumstances. Paragraph 88 requires local authorities to give substantial weight to any harm to the green belt and states that very special circumstances will not exist unless the potential harm to the green belt is clearly outweighed by other considerations. Paragraph 89 states that the construction of most new buildings in the green belt is inappropriate development.

10.4 Chapter 12 addresses the historic environment in more detail. Paragraph 128 sets out a requirement for applicants to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected. Paragraph 129 requires local authorities to identify and assess the significance of any heritage asset affected and to take this assessment into account when consideration the impact of a proposal. Paragraph 131 requires local authorities to take account of the desirability of sustaining and enhance the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable

uses; the positive contribution that conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities including their economic vitality; and the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness. Paragraph 132 requires great weight to be given to the conservation of heritage assets.

11. Justification for development in the Green Belt

11.1 The proposed development is a new building in the green belt. This is defined as inappropriate development in the NPPF and should only take place in very special circumstances.

11.2 Biddulph Grange Garden is in important tourist attraction and heritage asset. It contributes to the local economy, employing some 13 permanent staff and 26 seasonal staff.

11.3 Opening the garden to visitors provides a valuable opportunity for public appreciation of the heritage asset and contributes to outdoor recreation.

11.4 Visitors provide much of the income needed to support the maintenance of the heritage asset.

11.5 The proposed extension will improve visitor reception facilities. It will provide much needed toilets facilities on entry to the property and with the long term project plans also allow for further improvement works within the house to allow for the better presentation of the Camelia and garden room in the future.

11.6 The proposed building will also ensure better facilities for disabled visitors with ambulant cubicles as well as slight improvement to the current accessible toilet. Although the design of the garden means that not all parts of it can be made accessible to all visitors, parts can be reached with a wheelchair.

11.7 The proposed building does not conflict with the purposes of including land in the green belt. It supports the beneficial uses of the green belt that are set out in the NPPF: providing access; providing outdoor recreation and retaining and enhancing landscapes.

11.8 The reduction in the openness of the green belt arising from the construction of the building will be minimised by keeping its size to the minimum that would meet the needs of the Trust and its visitors, and by locating it as an extension to the current building on the edge of a car park in an area that is screened from the wider landscape.

11.9 Having regard to the contribution that the visitor reception will make to recreational activities and conservation work at Biddulph Grange, its lack of conflict with green belt purposes and its minimal impact on the openness of the green belt, we consider that there are very special circumstances that justify development in the green belt.

12. Consultation

The proposals have been developed to match in with the current building following suggestions of the Council's Conservation Officer during a site visit. The Conservation Officer was also asked to comment on the draft design. Gill Bayliss (SMDC) commented, "In principle it looks OK but any pre-app or application will need a heritage statement to assess significance of the area and explain how the scheme has been designed to take account of this significance." (email 14/02/2019).

13. Design Objectives

13.1 The Trust's design objectives have been:

- to improve visitor reception and shop facilities
- to improve facilities for people with disabilities;
- to locate toilet facilities where all visitors can easily find and access them and where they cannot be bypassed;
- to safeguard the special qualities of the heritage assets;
- to ensure good environmental performance;
- to keep the cost of construction proportionate to the contribution to our charitable purpose.

14. The amount, layout, scale, landscaping and appearance of development

14.1 The development proposed is a single-storey building with a footprint measuring 5m by 4.2m, an eaves height of 2.1m above the car park and a ridge height of 4.2m and above the car park.

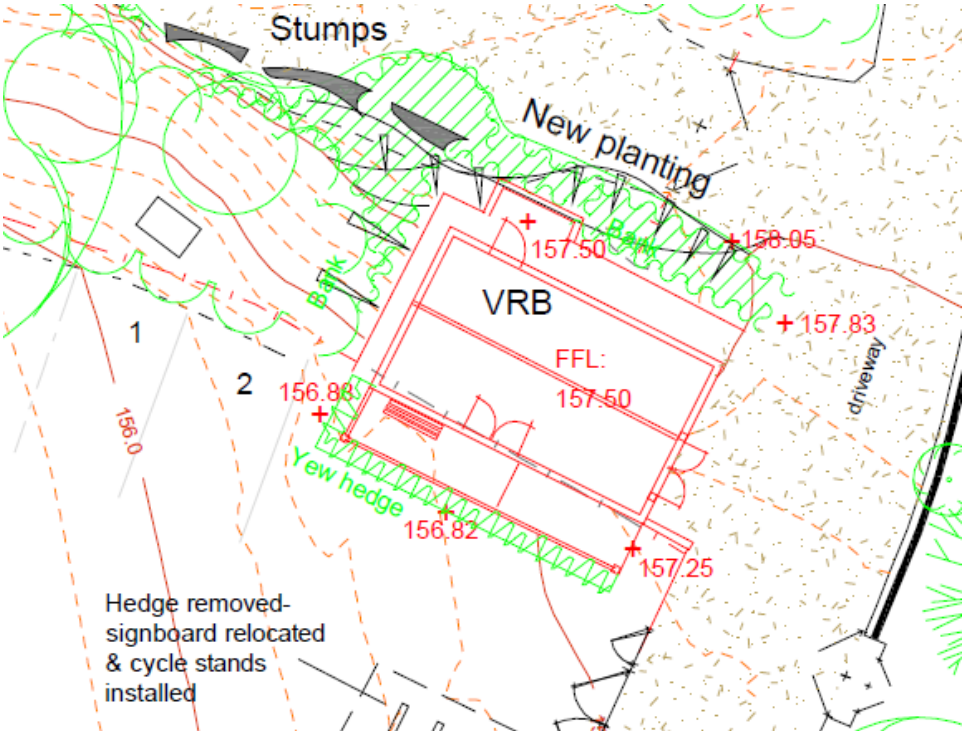
14.2 Of the total floor area of 21m^2. The internal floor area comprises:

9m^2 Visitor's toilets
9m^2 Shop store

14.3 The toilet facilities need to be located on a reasonable route from the car park to the gardens and in a position where it cannot be bypassed by people trying to avoid paying for entry. Within the limits of this operational requirement, we consider this to be the least obtrusive location possible for the building.

14.4 The building extension is set on the edge of the car park on a bank covered with evergreen shrubs to the west elevation of the current VR/shop building. The building's entrance faces onto the garden and plant sale area.

14.5 A small retaining wall is proposed to the south of the extension. The west bank will be excavated and re-graded at the side of the extension. Shrub planting will be planted to the car park side of the extension to soften the join with the car park.



14.6 The cycle parking displaced by the new building will be re-located to a suitable position in the car park

14.7 Good natural light and ventilation will be provided by conservation rooflights on the rear, north-facing, roof slope to match the current.

15. Heritage statement

15.1 The proposed works involve the extension to a recently constructed building within Biddulph Grange Gardens. As the proposed works are minor in nature and match the current design to the building, they would have very little impact on the historic gardens, the conservation area, the setting of any other listed building or any below ground archaeology.

15.2 Biddulph Grange has aesthetic value through the quality of its design and construction as well as its relationship with Biddulph Grange Garden. It has historic value through its associations with the horticulturalist James Bateman and the geological gallery (elsewhere in the Grange) is particularly significant in its demonstration of his support for theories that combined contemporary geological finds with the Christian story of creation. These are considered to be the primary significances of the building. A secondary degree of historic value derives from associations with Robert Heath and John Bower and the use of the Grange as a hospital from 1924-1988. The hospital use and subsequent public use enabled by the National Trust have created communal value. There is also evidential value relating to the various phases of construction, use and adaptation of the building, some of which can be linked to documentary evidence.

15.3 The proposed expansion project at BGG is primarily driven by the need to better utilise the historic Drawing Room, one of the few remaining elements of the Italianate building that pre-dates the destructive 1897 fire. This room is currently in use as an overflow seating space for catering, but efforts to conserve, better present, and more effectively communicate the space require it to be supported by an additional catering outlet located in the adjacent former Camelia House (current shop). To assist in the development of these heritage assets the expansion of the current "visitor reception" building is needed to generate the required space that will allow the wider project to be achieved. By relocating retail away from the house and locating it within the visitor reception building and providing additional toilets in this more accessible location this will allow the shop to be relocated and also remove the catering element form the Garden room.

15.4 The Camelia House is a former glass roofed room that overlooked the Italian Garden, it is also part of the pre-fire Italianate villa. Later alterations to the building saw a second story room installed above it, but it continues to be a very prominent room, with south facing French doors. Removal of the shop from this space results in the opportunity to better present the space and emphasise its former use to visitors, whilst also providing a catering outlet for the adjacent Drawing Room.

15.5 We consider that these proposals would not harm the heritage significance of Biddulph Grange. If any harm was considered to arise, we consider that it would be outweighed by the public benefits of the proposal in supporting better operation of the National Trust with more accessible toilet facilities and the contribution it makes to local employment and the conservation and presentation of Biddulph Grange Garden.

16. Access

16.1 The National Trust is committed to enabling increased access to its historic built and countryside environments, and to developing and promoting inclusive access solutions that are creative and sensitive to the surroundings. Our approach to enabling inclusive access is set out in our Disability Access Position Statement 2005. We also publish a regularly updated book of information for visitors with disabilities.

16.2 The proposed building will have level thresholds to the WCs and with a level access to the side staff door. It will be accessible to all.

16.3 The proposed development would improve the current facilities for those with disabilities and enhance the welcome that the Trust is able to give them.