



LONDON OFFICE

Ms Katherine Williams
Mid Sussex District Council
Oaklands
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RH16 1SS

Direct Dial: 0207 973 3627

Our ref: P10003731

9th September 2026

Dear Ms Williams

**T&CP (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015
& Planning (Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas) Regulations 1990**

**LAND SOUTH WEST OF HAVELOCK FARM, SELSFIELD ROAD, ARDINGLY,
HAYWARDS HEATH, WEST SUSSEX, RH17 6TN
Application No DM/26/1792**

Thank you for your letter of 20th August 2026 regarding the above application for planning permission. On the basis of the information available to date, we offer the following advice to assist your authority in determining the application.

Summary

The proposals would create a nature-based play area within the Old Wood Yard at Wakehurst, including a cluster of fungi-inspired play towers up to 9 metres high. Existing operational structures would be removed, and some substantial conifer screening would be removed and overtime replaced by native deciduous planting.

Historic England's main concern is that the play towers and changes to screening and boundaries could harm the character and appreciation of the grade II* Registered Park and Garden. In particular, there is insufficient information to assess:

- The design justification for the scale and prominence of the play towers.
- The effectiveness of replacement planting and views from the Paddock.
- The visibility of the large greenhouses in the adjacent Lansdown Conservation Research Nursery.
- The impact of the proposals on the significance of Gerald Loder's Southern Hemisphere Garden.

While the proposals could deliver public benefits through improved visitor facilities and engagement with nature, Historic England considers that the level of heritage



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harm cannot currently be determined and recommends that further information is sought before a decision is made.

Historic England Advice

Description of the Proposals

The proposal seeks to enhance the visitor experience and increase revenue in line with the Wakehurst Strategic Plan 2026-2030.

The development would create an outdoor, nature-based wild play area for children and families within the Old Wood Yard, located within the northern edge of the Registered Park and Garden at Wakehurst, between the formal gardens and the wider woodland and parkland.

Historically, the Old Wood Yard served a range of estate functions, including timber storage and milling, and more recently has been used as a gathering space for school groups. Although centrally located within the estate, it is naturally enclosed by a mature tree belt, lies outside the principal setting of Wakehurst Mansion and thereby has no intervisibility with it or the wider Registered Park and Garden.

The play area would extend beyond the existing site boundary into the parkland of the Paddock. No formal boundary treatments are proposed; however, several mature conifer trees that currently provide year-round screening between the Old Wood Yard, the Paddock and the Research Nursery would be removed and replaced with native deciduous species.

To reduce views of the nursery glasshouses from the newly publicly accessible Old Wood Yard, the existing modern perimeter block wall would be softened through climbing plants and additional tree planting along its southern boundary. However, a direct pedestrian connection would be created between the play area and the research nurseries, following the historic alignment of the former Wood Yard entrance.

The proposals would remove several unsympathetic utilitarian features, including hardstanding and operational structures, replacing them with a series of interconnected spaces for active play, imaginative exploration and informal gathering. The play equipment would draw inspiration from the surrounding landscape, utilise the site's natural topography and be constructed predominantly from sustainably sourced natural materials with muted finishes.

At key feature would be a central cluster of interconnected fungi-inspired play towers, reaching approximately 9 metres in height, which would serve as both a focal point and a landmark play attraction.



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Significance of the Site

Extending across approximately 500 acres of historic parkland, gardens and woodland, Wakehurst's significance derives predominantly from the survival of a remarkably coherent designed landscape and its strong relationship with the surrounding High Weald countryside.

At the heart of the estate stands the grade I listed mansion, a notable example of Elizabethan domestic architecture, constructed for Sir Edward Culpeper in the late 16th century. The house possesses considerable evidential, historic and aesthetic value, reflecting over four centuries successive phases of occupation and change.

The mansion sits within the grade II* Registered Park and Garden characterised by a combination of formal gardens, ornamental lakes, woodland, parkland, specimen tree collections and designed vistas. Together, these features create a landscape of exceptional historic interest that illustrates changing approaches to horticulture, landscape design and estate management.

Visual and functional connections between the mansion, the surrounding parkland and the wider High Weald landscape are integral to Wakehurst's significance. Historic views, circulation routes and the estate's integration within its rural setting contribute to an understanding of its planned development and evolving character.

A particularly important period in Wakehurst's history occurred during the early 20th century under Gerald Loder, later Lord Wakehurst, whose extensive horticultural and landscape interventions established many of the estate's defining features. His work transformed Wakehurst into one of the High Weald's foremost woodland gardens and created internationally significant plant collections, particularly from East Asia and the Southern Hemisphere.

Since 1965, Wakehurst has been managed by the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, adding further significance through its role in scientific research, horticulture and plant conservation. The Millennium Seed Bank has given the estate an internationally important scientific and educational function, while complementing its historic character.

Impact of the Proposals on Significance

The Old Wood Yard has historically served a functional role and, together with other working areas such as the Home Farm, is effectively screened from the main manor house and the designed park and gardens.

The principal potential heritage impact arises from the proposed fungi-inspired play towers. At approximately 9 metres in height, they would introduce prominent contemporary vertical structures into a part of the Registered Park and Garden that currently retains a relatively undeveloped, wooded character.



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Related to this, the proposed removal of the conifer belt and the bleeding of the play area into the lawned Paddock are significant considerations. The existing dense evergreen planting provides effective screening between the Old Wood Yard, the Paddock and the Lansdown Conservation Research Nursery. Replacement with deciduous species would alter the nature of this screening, allowing more open views into the play area and nursery during establishment and seasonal leaf loss.

This raises questions regarding the effect of the proposals on the experience of the Paddock, which contributes to the perception of a coherent landscape surrounding Wakehurst manor. The introduction of highly visible, dominant, contemporary play structures would alter the tranquil and naturalistic character currently experienced from this area.

Further consideration should also be given to the relationship between the proposals and the Southern Hemisphere Garden established by Gerald Loder. As this phase of development makes an important contribution to Wakehurst's significance, it is important to understand how the proposals would impact on this heritage value. The submitted information does not clearly identify the extent and boundaries of the Southern Hemisphere Garden, making it difficult to assess the potential impact of the proposals on its character, spatial qualities or historic legibility.

Historic England's Position on the Proposals

We consider that the proposal, as currently designed, has the potential to cause harm to the significance of the Registered Park and Garden through changes to its historical character. However, the level of this harm cannot be conclusively determined on the basis of the information provided.

In particular, further explanation is required regarding the design rationale for the play towers. While the use of natural materials is welcomed and helps limit visual intrusion, the scale and prominence of the structures appear at odds with the informal, landscape-led character of this part of the estate. Additional justification is needed to demonstrate how the design responds to the significance of the Registered Park and Garden and why structures of this scale are necessary.

Further information is also required regarding the effectiveness of the proposed replacement planting. Verified visualisations should demonstrate the development at five-year intervals and under different seasonal conditions to illustrate the long-term screening effects.

The proposals should also be assessed in relation to the Lansdown Conservation Research Nursery. Previous assessments relied partly on the fact that the nursery glasshouses would not be visible from the Registered Park and Garden due to existing vegetation. As the current proposals involve the removal of some screening and increased public access, clarification is required on whether views of the nursery



would become more apparent and whether this would alter previous conclusions regarding heritage impact. The effectiveness of proposed mitigation measures, including additional planting and greening of the perimeter wall, should also be demonstrated.

In conclusion, while the proposals offer potential public benefits through improved visitor facilities, increased engagement with nature and the enhancement of a previously utilitarian area, further information is required to fully understand their impact on the character and appreciation of the Registered Park and Garden.

Recommendation

Historic England advises that your Council should seek further information on this application in order to determine the level of heritage harm that the proposals may cause to the significance of Wakehurst Registered Park and Garden. Additional information should include the following:

- The design rationale for the scale and prominence of the proposed play towers.
- Verified visualisations demonstrating replacement screening from the Paddock at 5-, 10- and 15-year intervals.
- Assessment of visibility of the adjacent research nursery following removal of the conifer screening and establishment of replacement planting.
- Identification of the extent and boundaries of the Southern Hemisphere Garden and assessment of the proposals' effect on its significance.

We would be pleased to be reconsulted once you have received this further information.

Should you decide to determine this application without this information, it will be for your Council to assess whether the harm to Wakehurst Place Registered Park and Garden's significance would be outweighed by public benefits secured by the development. In doing so, it should give great weight to the conservation of this designated heritage asset.

Yours sincerely

Luciana Gallo

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