

From: Emily Wade <Emily.Wade@midsussex.gov.uk>
Sent: 09 September 2026 11:05:07 UTC+01:00
To: "Katherine Williams" <Katherine.Williams@midsussex.gov.uk>
Subject: DM/26/1792 Land SW of Havelock Farm, Wakehurst

Hi Katherine

Comments on the above planning application.

The application site is part of the Registered Park and Garden (RPG) at Wakehurst. This II* listed garden was laid out by plantsman and collector Gerald Loder during the early-mid 20th century, and has been further enlarged and developed since its acquisition by the Royal Botanic Gardens Kew in 1965. At the centre of the gardens is Wakehurst Mansion, which is Grade I listed, and an associated stables block, which is listed Grade II. The submitted heritage statement notes that the significance of the Wakehurst and the assets within it is not as a static entity, but a layered estate and building complex shaped by successive owners, uses and interventions. The significance of the Grade II* Registered Park and Garden derives from its long historic development as an estate landscape, its relationship to the Mansion and associated buildings, its designed and evolving garden character, and its broader contribution to Wakehurst as Kew's Wild Botanic Gardens as a place of national botanical, educational and public interest. I see no reason to disagree with this assessment.

The site is an area at the northern side of the RPG some distance to the west of the house which is currently laid to grass, with surrounding and interspersed trees and shrubs. It has a transitional nature between the more formal gardens, the 'back of house' activities formerly associated with Havelock Farm, and the wider landscape, and was apparently formerly used as a woodyard, although it is now publicly accessible as part of the gardens. It is considered to be of limited heritage significance.

Immediately to the north and northeast and outside of the RPG is Havelock Farm, the former home farm of the estate, which is partly under redevelopment to form a new conservation and research nursery. The retained historic farm buildings, which are currently the subject of a separate planning application, are regarded as non-designated heritage assets (NDHAs).

The current proposal is for the creation of an extensive Wild Play facility incorporating a grass amphitheatre, natural and adventure play areas for different ages including play towers and associated climbing equipment, a sensory and quiet play area, a lookout, and a number of hammocks. Associated hard and soft landscaping is also proposed, including new pathways to link the various play features.

The proposal includes the removal of a number of existing trees and shrubs, and stumps. I would defer to the Council's Tree Officer and the Gardens Trust regarding the loss of these specimens, but if their removal is acceptable in principle, we would expect

that suitable replacement planting which reinstates the verdant character of this part of the gardens should form part of the scheme, both to retain or enhance the botanical interest of this part of the gardens, and to provide appropriate softening and screening of the play area and nursery development.

The submitted supporting statements describe the proposed soft landscaping associated with the scheme as a transitional landscape strategy, blending botanical planting, reflecting the gardens, with native woodland and meadow, echoing the wider landscape beyond the RPG. Subject to the opinions of our Tree Officer and of the Gardens Trust, this would appear in principle a well-considered response to the transitional, edge of gardens location of the site.

The proposal is intended to respond to the existing landscape character and framework of the site, so that it sits seamlessly within the existing context, rather than creating a distinct area with boundaries around it. Notwithstanding this ambition, the proposed new play structures are numerous and in respect of the play towers and the lookout in particular are significant in height. These are clustered towards the northwest corner of the site, where the ground drops away to an extent, and may be partially or totally screened in some views, including from the mansion itself, by existing and new planting. There is however still likely to be some impact on views across lawns to the south, which will include impact on vistas from positions across these lawns which also include the mansion house, which is a short distance to the east. This will potentially affect both the currently undeveloped character of this part of the RPG and the context within which the Grade I listed building is appreciated.

I note that this issue has been raised by Historic England, who have also pointed out that the associated removal of mature trees and other vegetation has the potential to allow greater visibility of the greenhouses associated with the nursery development to the north of the site- the existence of screening by this vegetation was part of the reason that the development was deemed acceptable in its impact on the setting of the RPG, so this does raise some potential concerns.

For these reasons, I would agree with Historic England's recommendation that further information be provided in respect of the rationale behind the height and prominence of these features, verified visualisations as set out in their response, and consideration of the impact on the visibility of the nursery development. I also note that HE have requested further information in respect of the extent of the adjacent historic Southern Hemispheres Garden, and the impact on this.

In addition to the above, a further area of potential concern in my opinion is the existing blockwork wall to the northern boundary of the site, between it and the new conservation nursery. This is an unattractive and incongruous feature which detracts from the character of this part of the RPG. Unfortunately (in my opinion), this wall is shown retained as part of the current scheme, and although it is proposed to paint it and introduce screening planting, I would strongly encourage applicant to seek a better solution than this, with more longevity, which involves the appropriate replacement of

the wall. This will be particularly important given the removal of some of the existing screening vegetation to south which currently blocks views towards this feature, and the twin developments of the nursery and proposed play area, both of which are likely to draw significantly more visitors to the area, on both sides of the wall.

In summary, although in my opinion the proposal has the potential to enhance the manner in which the gardens are experienced, particularly by younger visitors, I would agree with Historic England that further information is required in some respects, and would suggest that reconsideration of the treatment of the blockwork wall to the northern boundary of the site would be beneficial.

Thanks,

Emily

Please note that this advice is given at Officer level only and is without prejudice to the formal decision of the District Council.

Submit your planning application online.
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