

Mid Sussex District Council
Planning Department
Oaklands Road
Haywards Heath
West Sussex
RH16 1SS

21st May 2025

Dear Officers

Royal Botanic Gardens Kew (Wakehurst), Wakehurst Place, Selsfield Road, Ardingly, RH17 6TN | Proposed interpretation installation within the ground floor of Wakehurst Place

Enclosed is an application for listed building consent, made on behalf of Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew (RBGK), in support of proposed internal interpretation works to the Grade I listed Wakehurst Place ("the Mansion") at Wakehurst in Ardingly, Surrey. The description of development is:

"Proposed interpretation installations and fixings and associated works within the ground floor of Wakehurst Place".

Wakehurst is RBGK's wild botanic garden, home to the UK's largest conservation project, the Millennium Seed Bank and a Grade I listed Elizabethan Mansion – Wakehurst Place. Wakehurst Place is owned by the National Trust but used and managed by RBGK. The expansive gardens, located in the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, include woodlands, ornamental gardens, water gardens and wetlands. Wakehurst is a popular visitor attraction that is open to the public all year around.

The proposals subject to this application are part of RBGK's ongoing commitment to secure the future of the Mansion whilst enhancing the overall visitor experience and public benefit at Wakehurst. The proposals will not introduce a new use but will be ancillary to the wider Wakehurst estate and will support the existing visitor function, enhancing the public education and interpretation on site. The conservation and protection of Wakehurst and its various heritage assets for future generations is a priority for RBGK.

Application content

This application has been submitted to Mid Sussex District Council (MSDC) via the Planning Portal (ref: PP-14010969). This letter provides the planning justification and context. The following also forms part of the application:

- Application form;
- Location plan at scale 1:1250 (ref. 2280-01/00/01)
- Ground floor plan at scale 1:200 (ref. 2280-01/00/04)
- Heritage Impact Assessment, prepared by Martin Ashley Architects;
- Chapel boxing methodology.

There is no fee payable for this listed building consent application.

Wakehurst site

Wakehurst is located approximately 2km north of Ardingly, West Sussex. The principal building within the grounds, Wakehurst Mansion, is a Grade I Listed Building (list entry number 1025764 – see **Appendix 1** for listing description). The building is set in picturesque, landscaped grounds, which cover 535ha and comprise a vast collection of trees and shrubs. A large area of the site is a Grade II* listed Registered Park and Garden. There are other listed buildings in the vicinity of the Mansion, including the Grade II* listed stables to the north-east, as well as the Grade II listed South Lodge and Gateway.

The Mansion is three storeys and is built of Sussex sandstone ashlar with a Horsham slab roof. It was built by Sir Edward Culpeper in 1590, and originally formed a complete courtyard, but the south side was demolished before 1697. The east and west sides were shortened by two-thirds in 1848 and refaced on their south front with old stone. The north-east wing and the single storey wing on the east were added by the Marchioness of Downshire in 1869-70. The Mansion was restored in 1890, and the north porch was added in 1903. Therefore, only part of the original 16th century house remains, but this is considered to be of a high level of significance.

The application site covers a number of rooms on the ground floor of the Mansion, comprising the Chapel, Billiard Room, East Entrance Hall, and Library.

Relevant planning history

As recorded on MSDC's website, the planning history relating to the Mansion is as follows:

- **DM/22/0197 and DM/22/0198** | Re-roofing of the existing Sussex/Wealden sandstone and Horsham stone slate roof of Wakehurst Place, also including external fabric repairs, repairs to rainwater goods, masonry repairs, glazing repairs, temporary works, structural repairs, fire compartmentalisation, fire alarm installation, and co-ordinated maintenance access. Approved 18/05/22.
- **DM/20/0041** | Rationalise, upgrade and relocate the main electrical services from within the basement plant room W-1001-B1-005 to the first floor unused HR Room, involving some removal and later re-instatement of sections of timber wall panelling to access existing risers en-route to the new location. Approved 24/03/20.
- **04/01769/LBC** | Change of use of storage room and 2 no. education rooms to kitchen facility involving two new openings in one wall and new floor, wall and ceiling finishes. Change of use of 3 no. storerooms to an education room involving the part demolition of 3 no. walls. Approved 24/09/04.
- **AR/021/89** | Removal of bathroom, cupboard and related partitions from parts of second floor attic area. Approved 03/08/89.
- **AR/039/88** | New stair between 1st and 2nd floor with removal of present fire screen on 1st floor landing and construction of new fire screens in 1st floor corridor. Approved

There is also extensive planning history for the wider site at Wakehurst, which is not repeated here.

Background

The Mansion was used for public access, educational programmes and events such as weddings until 2020 when it was closed as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. After the 2020 lockdown some staff returned to work in offices on the first floor, but the educational programmes did not resume.

Prior to 2020 there was public access to the main rooms on the ground floor - the Chapel, Billiard room, Library, Boudoir, Drawing room. A small number of interpretation panels were placed around the rooms, but there was no structured narrative to guide visitors around the building. Some pieces of the Price collection of furniture were placed in the ground floor rooms, and in the lobby and staircase area. The dining room was not generally accessible to the public. Public access to the ground floor coexisted with educational activities, weddings and other events which often used the same rooms.

In 2009 a Conservation Management Plan was commissioned, to inform decisions about the future of the Mansion and its subsidiary buildings. The CMP was produced in 2011 by Richard Griffiths Architects, working in association with Wessex Archaeology. The CMP was then updated in 2023-24 to include recent developments and current thinking about the future of Wakehurst.

The 2024 CMP suggested the principles behind decision-making about uses for the Mansion should include:

- Allowing maximum flexibility for Wakehurst's changing needs.
- Avoiding damage to the historic fabric, or a loss of coherence in the appearance or sequences of rooms.
- Interpreting of the complex history of the house and its estate. The Mansion presents evidence of a number of historical episodes from the sixteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries. They are layered and overlapping and this makes possible a density and variety of interpretation that could be a very attractive feature of the experience of visiting the Mansion.

The proposals respond to the Public History and Interpretation section of the CMP. This encourages the public use of the Mansion for historical interpretation by highlighting its rich and varied architectural history. This includes Victorian modernisation, early 20th-century decorative trends, 1930s architectural adaptations, and later 20th-century repurposing, with each phase illustrating broader themes in architectural and social history, offering multiple entry points for engaging storytelling. The CMP argues that the Mansion is well-suited to host diverse forms of public interpretation, such as exhibitions, digital media, and performances, extending beyond botanical themes to celebrate the building's evolving role and significance.

Application proposal

The proposals have been designed by Designmap, a multidisciplinary interpretation design agency who work in cultural environments including museums and historic places. Their work includes exhibitions at Westminster Cathedral, Deal Castle, the Natural History

Museum, the Cutty Sark, as well as for RBG Kew elsewhere at Wakehurst. The proposals are wholly internal, with no external works proposed. This application is therefore for LBC only.

In the Chapel, the new exhibition space telling the story of Kew as a 'living laboratory'. This will include science and horticultural stories, 'Nature Unlocked', with a particular focus on the chapel being the site of the original Seed Bank. The interpretation will cover the 60 years of Royal Botanic Gardens Kew leasing Wakehurst, and the unique origins story of the globally recognised, Millennium Seed Bank.

The Billiard Room will be used to tell the history of the house, key occupants and the gardens through the landscape. It will include the place of the National Trust and Kew in that history. A billiard table will be the central interpretive element

The vision for the Library is to create a welcoming, flexible space for visitors to relax, enjoy, pick up a book, and get the 'flavour' of some Mansion luxury. Light touch interpretation will be used to provide accidental finds, touches of historic stories, and a place to host speakers and guests.

The proposals have been designed to be freestanding and fully reversible. Each element has gone through a process of justifying its necessity, understanding the potential impact to the historic fabric and context, leading to the development of design to either mitigate this through the detailing or eliminating it all together. There are therefore now very few proposals remaining which require Listed Building Consent. These comprise:

Chapel | A false section of wall is proposed to create a larger symmetrical protrusion into the room to provide a surface for projections. The boxing will be constructed with MDF front, side and top panels. New timber skirtings will be constructed to match the existing, installed around the base.

Billiard room | A full size billiard table, referencing the room's historic purpose, will form the exhibition centrepiece. It will contain a topographical model map of Wakehurst that will be animated with video projections housed in a traditional billiard lighting hood. A projector is proposed to project selectable linear animations onto a white relief landscape model set into the billiard table top, which may require fixing into the existing roof truss if it cannot be adequately secured with clamps.

In addition, new adjustable, focusable LED spotlights are proposed to be installed for the exhibition. The tracks require fixings to the top side of the existing beams. A new fuse board and lighting controls will be also be installed to the north end of the Billiard Room under the shelf adjacent to the fireplace, and enclosed in a timber cupboard.

Hallway | Two large pin boards are proposed to be removed to provide a power source for a new illuminated interpretation panel. This requires a hole to be drilled through the wall between the Hall and the Chapel to connect a cable to the Chapel circuit.

Ironmongery | Modern ironmongery within the doors between the East Entrance Hall, Library, Chapel and Billiard Room, and the door between the Library and the North Entrance Hall will be replaced. All original ironmongery will be retained.

Planning framework

The policies within The National Planning Policy Framework 2024 (NPPF) (including the NPPG) form a material consideration in the determination of this application. The proposals are also to be determined in accordance with the Development Plan, which in this case is formed of the adopted Mid Sussex District Plan 2014-31 and associated policy map.

The key primary legislation relevant to the planning process is as set out in the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (the Listed Building Act). S.16 and s.66 of the Listed Building Act impose a statutory duty on planning authorities consider the impact of proposals upon listed buildings and their settings.

Designations | In addition to the Mansion's Grade I listing, the site lies within a Grade II* Registered Park and Garden; the High Weald National Landscape; the Countryside Area of Development Restraint; and the WSCC Archaeological Notification Area. The site is within the Ashdown Forest 7km Zone of Influence. The area approx. 300m to the north is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Wakehurst also lies within the Ardingly Neighbourhood Plan Area.

Planning policy assessment

The primary planning policy consideration in the determination of the enclosed application for the interpretation works to the Mansion is the impact on heritage assets, namely the special architectural and historic character of the Grade I listed building. This is considered in relation to the planning policy framework below.

Principle of development | MSDC Policy states that tourism related development in the countryside (defined as the area outside of the built-up area boundaries on the Policies Map), including extensions to existing facilities, will be permitted provided that it supports the sustainable growth of the rural economy and maintains or where possible enhances the quality of the rural and landscape character of the District. Policy DP24 states that development that provides new and/or enhanced leisure and cultural activities and facilities will be supported.

Ardingly Neighbourhood Plan Policy ARD20 supports development proposals which will enable Wakehurst Place and the Millennium Seed Bank to expand to meet new and changing needs as both a tourist destination and centre of research of international importance, provided that the design is sympathetic to the heritage assets and the important landscape setting.

The proposals will not introduce a new use, but will be ancillary to the wider Wakehurst estate and will support the existing visitor function. The proposals are a return to how the Mansion was used before the Covid-19 pandemic, and no change to opening hours or visitor numbers is proposed as part of this application. The proposals are therefore in line with Policies DP19 and DP24 which support tourism and leisure developments, as well as Ardingly Neighbourhood Plan Policy ARD 20.

Heritage policy summary | Section 16 of the NPPF sets out how the historic environment should be conserved and enhanced. It requires heritage assets to be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance. Specifically, paragraph 207 specifies that in determining applications, local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting. The level of detail should be proportionate to the assets' importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on their significance. Paragraph 210 also confirms that local planning authorities should take account of the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation. Paragraph 212 states that, when considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation (and the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be). Paragraph 215 confirms that, where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use.

MSDC Policy DP12 (Protection and Enhancement of Countryside) seeks to protect the countryside in recognition of its intrinsic character and beauty. *Policy DP16 (High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty)* states that development within the High Weald National Landscape will only be permitted where it conserves or enhances natural beauty and has regard to the High Weald National Landscape Management Plan. *Policy DP26 (Character and Design)* requires all development to be well designed and sensitive to the countryside. *Policy DP34 (Listed Buildings and Other Heritage Assets)* requires development to protect listed buildings and their settings. *Policy DP36 (Historic Parks and Gardens)* confirms that the character, appearance and setting of a registered park, or park or garden of special local historic interest will be protected.

Impact and rationale for works | A consistent design approach has been taken across all elements of the proposals. Where possible, physical intervention has been avoided. Where necessary, any impact has been kept to a minimum and designed to be fully reversible. Fixings have been carefully considered to use areas of existing alteration, concealed locations, or fabric of lower significance. This approach reflects the building's varying levels of heritage significance and aims to meet interpretive objectives while protecting the Mansion's historic character.

The proposals have been designed to have a minimal impact on the fabric and with reversibility as a key consideration. There has been a process of reviewing and revising the proposals to omit as many elements as possible which require alterations to historic fabric, leaving only a small number of essential, minimal interventions. The magnitude of the impact is therefore considered to be very low.

The proposals as a whole will provide the basis for the reopening of the Mansion to Wakehurst's visitors. They will enhance the presentation of the spaces and provide information on the former owners and uses of the building.

The submitted HIA confirms that the content of the interpretation directly addresses what the CMP identified as the most significant issue at Wakehurst Place - the disconnect between the estate as the setting for the historic house and landscape, and the estate as the setting for Kew's Wild Botanic Garden. It responds to the opportunity identified in the CMP for the Mansion to host public interpretation on a range of topics extending beyond RBGK's core themes of botany and sustainability, celebrating the social understanding of architecture and design by telling the stories of the building's owners and its modern uses, allowing visitors to appreciate the historic house as well as the landscape.

The Public Amenity Value will also be enhanced by the proposals as they will provide visitors with information and interest that makes up for the absence of 'authentic' room settings and the feeling that the interior does not live up to the promise of the building's fine south façade.

Policy assessment of impact | The proposed works for the ground floor of Wakehurst Mansion have been designed with regard for the building's historic significance and fabric. All proposed interventions have been developed to minimise physical impact and ensure reversibility, aligning with conservation principles and the guidance set out in the Conservation Management Plan.

The small number of elements requiring Listed Building Consent have been clearly identified, with each assessed individually for potential impact, necessity, and mitigation. These are minor, carefully considered interventions that will not result in any harm to the Mansion's heritage significance, fully according with MSDC Policy DP34.

The proposals will enable the Mansion to be partially reopened to the public with a renewed interpretive offer that supports the objectives of both RBG Kew and the National Trust. The enhancements to public understanding and appreciation of the site's layered history represent a significant positive outcome for the building's future stewardship.

The proposals therefore comply with all NPPF and Mid Sussex District Council's planning policy objectives.

If you have any questions, please contact Henry Brown at henry@theplanninglab.com (0207 257 9363).

Yours faithfully

The Planning Lab

Appendix 1

Official list entry

Heritage Category: **Listed Building**

Grade: **I**

List Entry Number: **1025764**

Date first listed: **28-Oct-1957**

Statutory Address 1: **WAKEHURST PLACE, TURNERS HILL ROAD**

Location

Statutory Address: **WAKEHURST PLACE, TURNERS HILL ROAD**

The building or site itself may lie within the boundary of more than one authority.

County: **West Sussex**

District: **Mid Sussex (District Authority)**

Parish: **Ardingly**

National Grid Reference: **TQ 33950 31418**

Details

ARDINGLY TURNERS HILL ROAD 1. 5405 Wakehurst Place TQ 33 SW 6/437 28.10.57 I

2. The property of the National Trust. Administered by Kew Gardens. This house was built by Sir Edward Culpeper in 1590. It originally formed a complete court-yard, but the south side of this was demolished before 1697. The east and west sides were shortened by two-thirds in 1848 and refaced on their south front with old stone. The house is therefore E-shaped today. It was restored by Sir Aston Webb for Sir William Boord in 1890. The whole of the south front was taken down, the stones numbered and replaced after careful restoration in 1938. The house is built of Sussex sandstone ashlar with a Horsham slab roof. 3-storeys. 7 windows. The wings have gables with kneelers, coping and ball finials at the apex and above the kneelers. In the centre is a smaller projection of 3-storeys surmounted by a similar scrolled gable. On its ground floor is the porch having a round headed doorway with Doric columns on pedestals with a cornice over, and the initials E. C. The first floor window above is flanked by similar Ionic pilasters with a triangular pediment over having a statue on each side of this. Between the porch and the wings are 2 gabled dormers on each side, the outer ones projecting slightly with a bay below them on ground and first floors. The inner face of the wings have similar dormers. Four-light casement windows with stone mullions and transoms. The north-east wing and the 1-storey wing on the east were added by the Marchioness of Downshire in 1869-70; and the north porch by Sir Aston Webb for lord Wakehurst in 1903. The interior has its contemporary staircase; also panelling, fireplaces and over-mantels, but the position of these has been moved in several cases. Manners Sutton, Speaker of the House of Commons, later Viscount Canterbury, and Sir Alexander

Cockburn, Lord Chief Justice, were tenants of the house in the eighteen thirties.

Listing NGR: TQ3395031418

Legacy

The contents of this record have been generated from a legacy data system.

Legacy System number: **302325**

Legacy System: **LBS**

Sources

Other

Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest in England, Part 44 West Sussex,

Legal

This building is listed under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 as amended for its special architectural or historic interest.