

WAKEHURST WILD PLAY HERITAGE IMPACT STATEMENT

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Rev. A



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1 Introduction and Scope

- 1.1 This Heritage Impact Statement has been commissioned by Royal Botanic Gardens Kew, to accompany the Full Planning Permission Application to Mid Sussex District Council for the proposed Wakehurst Wild Play Area. Its purpose is to identify the relevant heritage assets, assess their significance, describe the contribution made by the application site to that significance, and evaluate the effect of the proposed development on the significance and setting of those assets. The document also considers archaeological interest, mitigation measures, and the public benefits that may arise from the proposals.
- 1.2 This document is concerned primarily with heritage effects arising from the location of the proposal within the Grade II* Registered Park and Garden at Wakehurst Place, and with potential effects on the settings of nearby listed buildings, in particular Wakehurst Mansion, the Stables and South Lodge.

2 Authorship

- 2.1 The overall Heritage Impact Statement and conclusions have been drafted by James Campen RIBA AABC, a conservation architect at Martin Ashley Architects.
- 2.2 Significant parts of Sections 8-10, providing information on landscape character, intended design approach, visibility, mitigation and public benefit, have been drafted with Kew Wakehurst's Head of Landscape and Horticulture, Iain Parkinson.
- 2.3 This document has been informed by a range of supporting documents, including the 2026 Landscape Conservation Management Plan by Sally Prothero Architects Ltd, the 2026 archaeological desk-based assessment for Wild Play by Compass Archaeology, the 2024 Richard Griffiths Architects Conservation Management Plan for the Mansion and Core of the Estate and the Wakehurst Designed Landscape Plan 2025, and Wakehurst Strategic Plan 2026 - 2030.

3 Policy

- 3.1 This statement should be read in the context of national and local planning policy for the historic environment.
- 3.2 At national level, the National Planning Policy Framework requires decision-makers to identify and assess the significance of heritage assets that may be affected by a proposal, including any contribution made by setting. It also requires account to be taken of the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and of putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation. Where harm is identified, that harm must be clearly justified and weighed against public benefits, where relevant.
- 3.3 The Compass Archaeology archaeological desk-based assessment notes that the report conforms to the requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework, updated in February 2025, and identifies Section 16 as the relevant section dealing with heritage assets and their significance.
- 3.4 Reference is also made to The Setting of Heritage Assets: Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 3 (GPA3). This defines setting as "the surroundings in which a heritage asset is experienced". It states that the "extent is not fixed and may change as the asset and its surroundings evolve. Elements of a setting may make a positive or negative contribution to the significance of an asset, may affect the ability to appreciate that significance or may be neutral".
- 3.5 At local level, the Mid Sussex District Plan policies cited in the archaeological desk-based assessment are relevant, including:

- Policy DP34: Listed Buildings and Other Heritage Assets;
 - Policy DP36: Historic Parks and Gardens.
- 3.6 The desk-based assessment also identifies Ardingly Neighbourhood Plan Policy ARD20, which supports development proposals enabling Wakehurst Place and the Millennium Seed Bank to expand, provided the design is sympathetic to heritage assets and the important landscape setting.
- 3.7 In addition to policy, the assessment should be informed by available conservation management evidence for Wakehurst, including the Richard Griffiths Architects CMP and the 2026 Landscape CMP.

4 Methodology

- 4.1 The approach taken has been:
- to identify the designated and non-designated heritage interests relevant to the application site
 - to summarise the significance of those assets, drawing from the CMP and archaeological evidence
 - to assess the contribution made by the application site, including its landscape, functional, visual and evidential characteristics, to the significance of those assets
 - to consider the likely effect of the proposed Wild Play development on that significance;
 - to consider mitigation and public benefits.
- 4.2 A site visit was undertaken with RGB Kew's Senior Project Manager Tracy Simmons on 1st July 2026.
- 4.3 The assessment is based on the information currently available. It should be read alongside the application drawings and any supporting landscape, arboricultural and design information.

5 Historic Development

- 5.1 Wakehurst's gardens were initially laid out as a plantsman's and collector's garden by Gerald Loder (later Lord Wakehurst) during the early to mid-20th century. Loder was responsible for establishing many of the present plant collections, particularly those from Eastern Asia and the southern continents. The significance arises from the combination of designed and natural landscapes. The historic core features ornamental gardens and woodland.
- 5.2 The Richard Griffiths Architects CMP records that Wakehurst Place originated as a late sixteenth-century gentry house, later reduced in size and repeatedly altered in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The same document stresses that the present place should not be understood as a static survival of one date, but as a layered estate and building complex shaped by successive owners, uses and interventions.
- 5.3 The estate core includes not only the Mansion but also associated service and operational areas. The CMP explains that the wider study area includes the spaces connected with kitchen gardens, nurseries, storage and staff functions, which is directly relevant to understanding the application site.
- 5.4 The Richard Griffiths Architects CMP states that Wakehurst should not be understood as a static survival of one date, but as a layered estate and building complex shaped by successive owners, uses and interventions.
- 5.5 The archaeological desk-based assessment suggests that the application site itself remained open land for much of its known history, rather than being an intensively developed part of the estate. It states that the site was likely situated across arable or pasture land during the medieval period and that there is no evidence that it has ever been developed beyond current paths and modern structures. The modern function of the site is largely as an external school gathering/lunch space and back of house gardeners area, separated from the publicly accessible areas.
- 5.6 A concise site-specific chronology based on historic map evidence is included in Compass Archaeology's desk top study.
- 5.7 This historical research supports the view that the site forms part of the estate's functional and transitional landscape rather than a formal or designed compartment.

6 Heritage Assets and Significance

Heritage Assets Affected

- 6.1 The application site lies just inside the northern boundary of the Grade II* Registered Park and Garden (List Entry 1000189) at Wakehurst Place and forms part of the historically significant Wakehurst Estate. Within the registered park and garden are three listed structures:
 - the late sixteenth-century Wakehurst Mansion - Grade I (List Entry 1025764)
 - the late seventeenth-century Stables Grade II* (List Entry 1354792)
 - the 1820s South Lodge and Gateway Grade II (List Entry 1025765).

Full Listing descriptions are included in the appendices.

- 6.2 Wakehurst is located within the High Weald National Landscape (formerly Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, AONB) which is considered to be the most coherent and best-preserved post Medieval landscape in Northern Europe.
- 6.3 The site is located outside of the Wakehurst and Chiddingly Woods Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

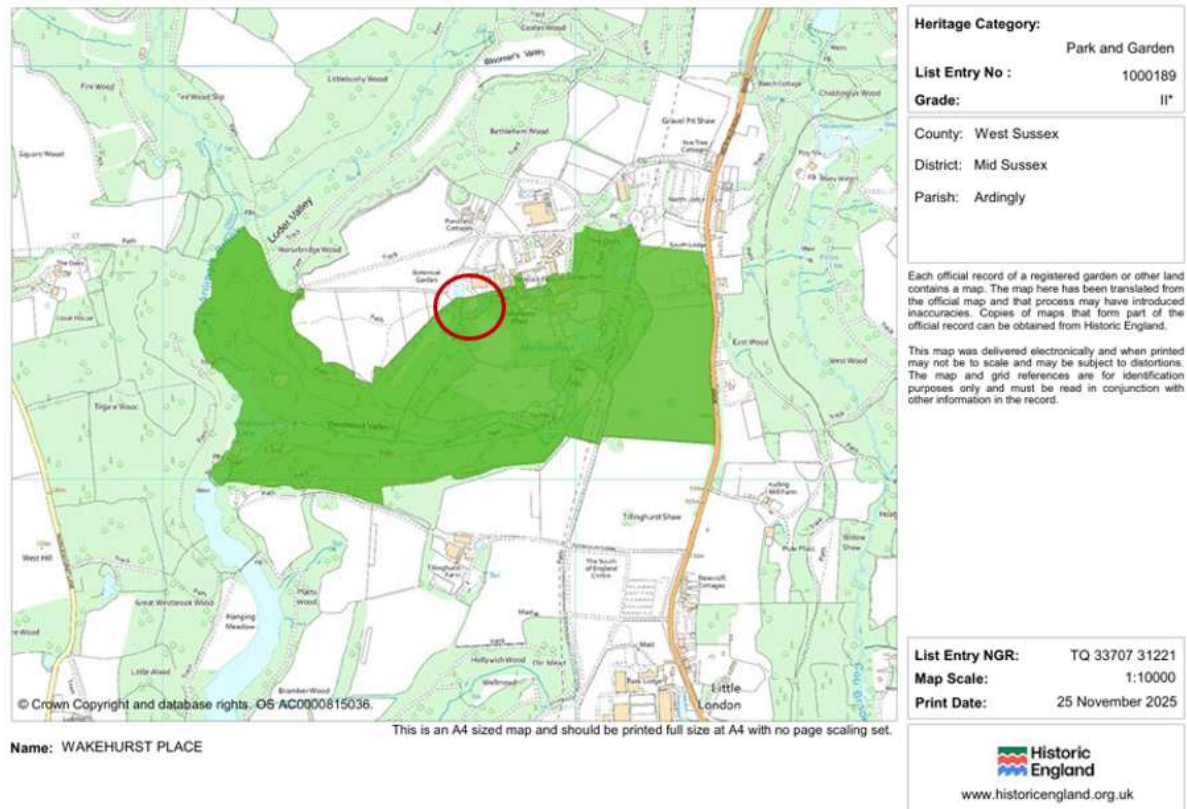


Figure--1 Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest (RPG) at Grade II*

Significance of the Registered Park and Garden

- 6.4 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 a place of national botanical, educational and public interest.
- 6.5 The Wakehurst RPG holds substantial significance due to its development as Kew's Wild Botanic Garden. The gardens have been enlarged and developed since 1965 as part of the Living Collections of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew (RBG Kew). The site serves as Kew's center for ecology, conservation, and seed research.
- 6.6 The estate possesses a particularly biodiverse landscape of European significance. Its rich natural assets, combined with Kew's scientific expertise, make it ideal for robust, place-based science. Research focuses on testing hypotheses related to ecosystem services, climate monitoring, and understanding how weather drives ecosystem dynamics.
- 6.7 The sites horticultural tradition contributes to significance. This is rooted in the tradition of exotic plant introduction and botanic collection over the last century, enhancing its relevance for science. It contains specialist groups, such as a fine Rhododendron collection.
- 6.8 The estate comprises of gardens, historic parkland, ornamental woodlands and natural woodlands. The landscape is characterised by dramatic topography of plateau, steep-sided valleys, ancient woodlands and fantastical geological formations of sandstone outcrops. It represents many of the characteristics of the High Weald landscape, one of the best-preserved medieval landscapes in north-west Europe.
- 6.9 According to the Richard Griffiths Architects (RGA) CMP, the significance of the registered landscape also lies in the way different areas of the estate express different historic functions and relationships,

including the principal house setting, gardens, transitional spaces, operational/service areas, and links to the wider estate landscape.

Significance of Wakehurst Mansion and associated listed buildings

- 6.10 The RGA CMP identifies the Mansion as a highly significant building of late sixteenth-century origin, later reduced and repeatedly altered, but still of major architectural and historical interest. It also emphasises that the Mansion's significance is inseparable from the wider estate core and the history of use, adaptation and management around it.



Figure -2 Wakehurst Mansion with the Stables in the background

- 6.11 The CMP also makes clear that the historic core of the estate includes more than the principal buildings alone. It includes garden walls and areas associated with kitchen gardens, nurseries, storage buildings, staff accommodation and related functions.
- 6.12 This is important in understanding the heritage role of the application site. While it may not be part of the formal designed foreground of the Mansion, it forms part of the wider historic service and transitional landscape associated with the estate core.

Significance of the Application Site

- 6.13 The application site is not a historic compartment and it has never historically contained any formal design. It appears to be of relatively limited significance, but it is not devoid of heritage interest. The Landscape CMP makes the following assessment of the significance of the Wood Yard and adjacent Paddock: "the Paddock provides a vital functional role, as the open space setting for the Southern Hemisphere, and enables views toward the Mansion, it is also a vital bridge between the designed and wider, wilder, landscape. However, it has little significance in terms of individual design or associative values. The woodyard has a historically functional role and does not contribute to the designed landscape."

AREA 7	RELATIVE ASSESSMENT LEVELS (NT DEFINITION)					
Heritage values	Exceptional (A)	Considerable (B)	Moderate (C)	Some (D)	Unknown (E)	Detrimental (F)
Evidential					•	
Historic				•		
Aesthetic				•		Woodyard
Communal/people					•	

Figure--3 Extract from Landscape CMP

- 6.14 The sites position at the interface between the more formal designed gardens, the operational and nursery service areas, and the wider naturalistic landscape of the estate. Its heritage value may therefore lie in its contribution to the structure of the estate. It contributes to the legibility of Wakehurst as a layered historic estate composed not only of principal set-piece spaces, but also of the service-edge and transitional areas that support, mediate and give meaning to those spaces.
- 6.15 The Richard Griffiths Architects CMP is explicit that the significance of the registered landscape lies in the way different areas of the estate express different historic functions and relationships, including the principal house setting, gardens, transitional spaces, operational and service areas, and links to the wider estate landscape. The application site is a piece of that transitional and service-edge condition.
- 6.16 That contribution is, however, presently expressed in a muted and fragmented way. The site's character as a threshold between designed and working landscape has been partly obscured by later utilitarian change, including areas of hardstanding, block walling, operational structures, concrete surfacing and incongruous evergreen screening. These features may not amount to substantial heritage harm in themselves, but they do reduce the clarity with which this part of the estate can be understood as a purposeful and coherent transitional zone. The proposals offer a direct opportunity to improve coherence. By removing or softening unsympathetic elements and replacing them with a more consistent, landscape-led treatment, the scheme would improve the legibility of the site as a meaningful threshold within the wider historic estate.

7 Archaeology Summary

- 7.1 The Compass Archaeology archaeological desk-based assessment identifies the site as lying within a historically significant landscape with low to moderate prehistoric potential, but little potential for Roman, Saxon, medieval or early post-medieval remains beyond residual or redeposited material.
- 7.2 Archaeological significance is therefore present but appears limited and manageable, subject to appropriate mitigation if required.

8 Context and Setting

Background

- 8.1 Wakehurst is one of the most significant as well as most visited botanical gardens in the country, where ornamental planting and exotic tree and shrub collections of international importance sit within native High Weald woodland/garden. RBGK preserves and enhances the legacy of botanical horticulture established by Gerald Loder, the creator of the C20th gardens, whilst following a conservation agenda. The gardens are a showcase of Kew's horticultural skills. The 'honey pot' of seasonal, high quality, visually attractive gardens form the basis of a unique visitor attraction which in combination of the Millenium Seed Bank (MSB) delivers Kew's mission.

- 8.2 The estate comprises of gardens, historic parkland, ornamental woodlands and natural woodlands. The landscape is characterised by dramatic topography of plateau, steep-sided valleys, ancient woodlands and fantastical geological formations of sandstone outcrops. It represents many of the characteristics of the High Weald landscape, one of the best-preserved medieval landscapes in north-west Europe.
- 8.3 Requirements to conserve the natural landscape and historic plantings is combined with new initiatives; increasing visitor revenue, improving the visitor offer, modernising nursery facilities and developing a more integrated use of Wakehurst Mansion. These are incorporated in the Wakehurst Strategic Plan 2026-2030.
- 8.4 The proposed Wild Play Area is located in a former working area that sits between the formal gardens and the wider natural landscape.

Wild Play Vision and Design Principles

- 8.5 The proposed Wild Play Area is a nature-based play space designed for children and families that encourages exploration, imagination and discovery through interactive play. Located at the heart of Wakehurst, the proposal creates a unique destination where outdoor recreation, learning and the natural environment come together, supporting the role of Wakehurst as Kew's wild botanic garden.
- 8.6 Wild Play is designed to reconnect children with nature through adventurous, inclusive play while bringing Wakehurst's world-leading science, conservation and horticulture to life. By encouraging curiosity, creativity and exploration, it aims to inspire the next generation of environmental stewards and support children's wellbeing and development.

The Site

- 8.7 Wakehurst Place lies 1 mile north of Ardingly, West Sussex in the parish of Ardingly, towards the west end of the High Weald Natural Character Area. ¹ Latitude: 51° 06' 60" N, Longitude: 0° 08' 73" W. The OS grid reference is: TQ340314 + TQ340315.
- 8.8 The proposed site of the Wild Play Area is located within the Old Wood Yard OS Grid Reference TQ33743142 (Coordinates 533748,131422), on the eastern side of the Wakehurst estate. The site occupies a former operational area that has historically supported the back of house operations of the Gardens and Education Programme.
- 8.9 While the site sits within the registered landscape, it does not appear to form part of the principal designed foreground to the Mansion. Instead, it occupies an intermediate zone between more managed visitor landscape, nursery/service functions, and the wider landscape setting. It is a naturally enclosed position at a lower level than the Mansion, surrounded by mature trees within a tranquil and visually contained setting.
- 8.10 Historically, the Old Wood Yard has been used for practical estate purposes, including timber storage, milling and more recently as a gathering space for school groups. As a back of house working part of the estate, it has not formed an important visual or designed element of the historic landscape.
- 8.11 By transforming a former operational space into a wild play area, the proposal offers an opportunity to bring this back of house area into the visitor designed landscape linking the gardens, the wider landscape and the Lansdown Conservation Research Nursery.

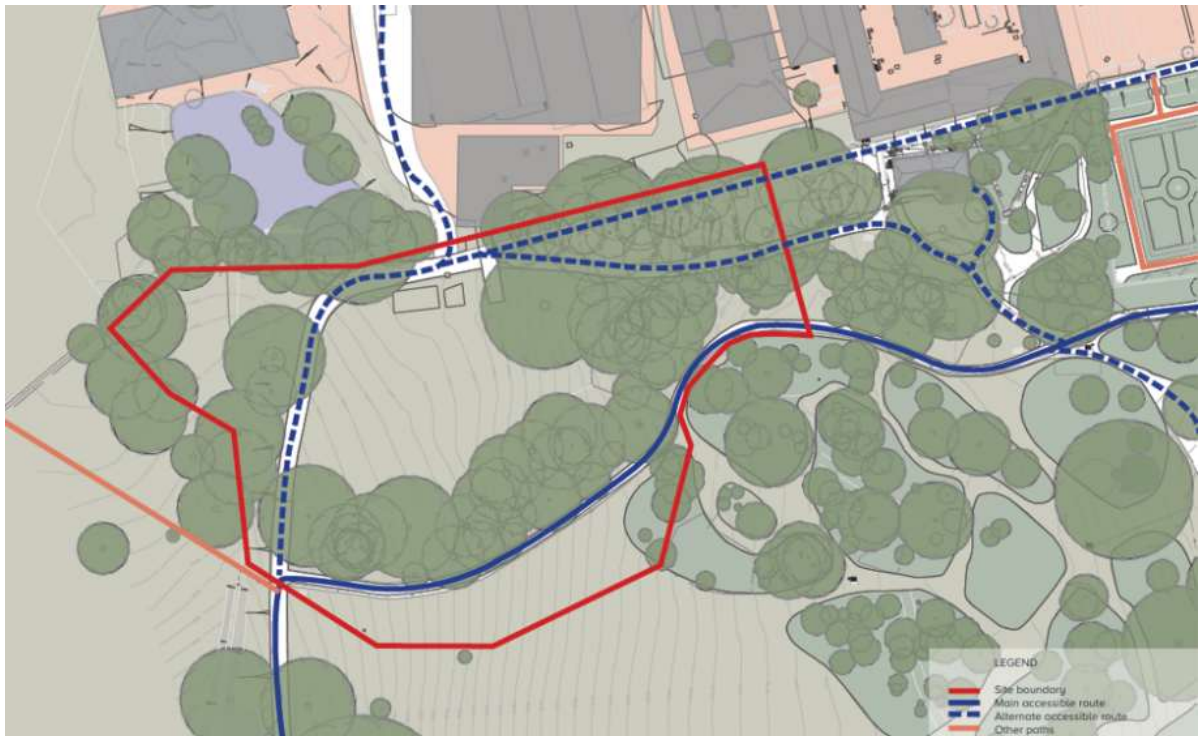


Figure -4 Site Boundary Plan

9 Site character

- 9.1 The Old Wood Yard is a small-scale, enclosed former working area whose present character reflects adaptation and operational use over time, rather than the survival of an intact designed landscape compartment. The site contains a mixture of operational structures, storage areas and areas of hardstanding associated with its historic use as a working yard and current use as a congregating area for school children. The site is accessed via established pedestrian routes and the road that already serves the Lansdown Conservation Research Nursery.
- 9.2 The site is currently partially open and partially wooded, containing existing paths and a concrete platform for a semi-permanent tent structure. This supports the view that the site is already altered and operational in character, rather than pristine or highly formalised.
- 9.3 While it sits within the registered landscape, it does not contribute principally through formal composition or through direct visual association with the Mansion. Instead, its character derives from its position at the meeting point of the managed visitor landscape, the service and nursery edge, and the wider enclosing woodland landscape.
- 9.4 This helps explain how Wakehurst has historically functioned as a complex and evolving estate, in which ornamental, practical, scientific and educational uses have long co-existed. However, the current appearance of the site does not communicate that role clearly. The accumulation of utilitarian elements - hardstanding, block walling, operational structures and incongruous evergreen screening – reads as residual back-of-house area rather than as a legible and purposeful transitional landscape. The site's potential to express the relationship between the estate's designed, service and naturalistic components is therefore currently unrealised.
- 9.5 The proposals directly address this situation. By replacing or softening unsympathetic features and introducing restrained landform, natural materials and native planting, the scheme would give this part of the estate a more coherent and understandable identity as a transitional zone. The design objective to create "a landscape before a playground", is consistent with a heritage-led approach that

prioritises landscape coherence. In heritage terms, the scheme can therefore be understood not simply as a change of use, but as a positive re-ordering of an already altered former working area that improves the readability of this part of the estate.

10 Views analysis

General Approach

- 10.1 The proposed Wild Play Area is located within a central part of the gardens and wider Wakehurst estate. Although centrally positioned, the site is naturally enclosed and has not been judged to form part of any important designed views or visual relationships that contribute to the significance of the Grade II Registered Park and Garden.

Views from the Paddock

- 10.2 Existing View - The view from the Paddock area of the Gardens is screened by a row of mature and dense conifer trees. A number of these specimens are marked for removal, but the landscape design plan identifies native tree species as replacements which are deemed more suitable.
- 10.3 Seasonal Visibility - Currently, the conifer trees provide year-round screening of the site. Their replacement with native deciduous trees will result in greater seasonal variation, with the play area largely screened in summer and more filtered views possible during winter.
- 10.4 Impact of Proposed Development - The proposal includes the removal of a number of mature conifer trees which would temporarily open views of the play area and the Lansdown Conservation Research Nursery from the Paddock.
- 10.5 Mitigation - Replacement trees, selected from species identified in Wakehurst's Living Collections Succession Plan for their climate resilience, will be planted along the ridgeline of the Paddock. This planting will restore screening of the Nursery glasshouses while allowing filtered views of the play area, creating a more natural, resilient and well-integrated landscape.
- 10.6 Overall Impact – The proposals will result in a short-term visual change, but that the long-term effect is intended to remain modest and sympathetic in character. Once the replacement planting has become established, the proposal is expected to have a very low visual impact on the setting of the Grade II* Registered Park and Garden. The play area will remain well integrated within the surrounding woodland and wider landscape.



Figure -5 View from Paddock (Image: RGB Wakehurst)

View of the Lansdown Conservation Research Nursery

- 10.7 Existing View - The existing view of the Lansdown CRN is separated by an unsightly block constructed wall and partially obscured by a row of mature trees.
- 10.8 Seasonal Visibility - The trees are deciduous so in winter the Nursery glass houses will become more prominent.
- 10.9 Impact of Proposed Development - By allowing visitors access to the back of house nature of the Old Wood Yard, the wild play feature will bring the Nursery glasshouses into public view.
- 10.10 Mitigation - The landscape design proposes to soften the existing block wall with climbing plants. Additional tree planting along its southern side will further screen the Nursery glasshouses and strengthen the landscape setting.
- 10.11 Overall Impact - The proposed planting will soften views of the Nursery glasshouses and improve the visual quality of this part of the estate, resulting in a low visual impact on the setting. The proposals will also manage the changed relationship between visitor space and operational 'back of house' spaces.



Figure-6 View of the Lansdown Conservation Research Nursery (Image: RGB Wakehurst)

View from and towards the Coronation Meadow

- 10.12 Existing View - Existing views to the west, towards and from the Coronation Meadow and across the High Weald landscape, are largely screened by mature trees and a dense shrub layer.
- 10.13 Seasonal Visibility - The surrounding trees provide effective screening throughout the year. During winter, when the deciduous canopy is absent, filtered views through the woodland become possible, although the dense shrub layer continues to provide a strong visual buffer which maintains the site's sense of enclosure.
- 10.14 Impact of Proposed Development - The proposed Wild Play Area is considered unlikely to affect views from or towards the Coronation Meadow or the wider High Weald landscape. The existing woodland belt will be retained, ensuring that the play area remains visually contained and that the tranquil setting and separation between the two areas are preserved.
- 10.15 Mitigation - The proposal recommends maintaining the screening of the views towards and from the West.
- 10.16 Overall Impact - The proposal will have low impact on views towards the Coronation Meadow or the wider High Weald landscape. Existing woodland and shrub planting will continue to provide effective screening throughout the year, ensuring the Wild Play Area remains visually contained.



Figure -7 View from and towards the Coronation Meadow (Image: RGB Wakehurst)

View from the Mansion and formal Gardens

- 10.17 Existing View - The view from and towards the Mansion is obscured by an immediate shelter belt of trees and shrubs with the Winter Garden providing another buffer.
- 10.18 Seasonal Visibility - Throughout the year, the surrounding trees and shrubs provide effective screening of the site. During winter, when the deciduous canopy is reduced, limited filtered views may be possible through the woodland, but the Wild Play Area will remain largely concealed by the retained vegetation and surrounding landform.
- 10.19 Impact of Proposed Development - The existing shelter belt, the Winter Garden and the site's lower-lying position ensure that the development remains visually contained. As a result, the character and setting of the Mansion and its relationship with the surrounding designed landscape will be preserved.
- 10.20 Mitigation - Screening will be maintained to maintain a sense of enclosure.
- 10.21 Overall Impact - The overall impact of the development on views to and from the Mansion is low due to the retention of trees and shrub layer coupled with the site's lower elevation in relation to the upper Gardens. The visual effect on the settings of the principal listed buildings therefore appears limited.
- 10.22 The play area will preserve the visual rural setting of Wakehurst and appears unlikely to affect important views of the Mansion or formal gardens. By transforming a former operational space into a wild play area, the proposal offers an opportunity to bring this back of house area into the visitor designed landscape linking the gardens, the wider landscape and the Lansdown Conservation Research Nursery.



Figure -8 View towards the Mansion (Image: RGB Wakehurst)



Figure-9 View from the second floor of the Mansion towards the Wild Play Site

11 Mitigation

- 11.1 The proposal has been carefully designed to reflect the character of the High Weald through the use of natural materials, gentle earth shaping, native planting and low-key play structures that sit comfortably within the surrounding woodland. Some of the existing natural screening will be maintained and new planting will ensure the development remains well integrated into the landscape.
- 11.2 The proposed mitigation measures are predominantly landscape-based and are appropriate to the identified effects. As described in the previous section, these include:
- retention of existing woodland belts and shrub layers where they provide visual containment;
 - replacement planting where conifers are removed;
 - softening of boundary walling with climbing plants;
 - additional planting to screen or soften views toward the nursery;
 - use of natural materials and a recessive design language;
 - working with existing topography and enclosure.

- 11.3 The play equipment will be constructed predominantly from sustainably sourced natural materials, using locally inspired craftsmanship and a simple, robust design language. The structures will utilise subdued natural finishes and are intended to sit quietly within the landscape, reflecting the local vernacular and minimising their visual impact. The D&A statement states that the design objective being to create “a landscape before a playground.”
- 11.4 The scale of the new play structures ensures that they are low-key, subordinate structures which will appear modest and subordinate to the existing and proposed trees and planting.
- 11.5 No external lighting is proposed. This will ensure that the existing character of the landscape is retained.
- 11.6 The design seeks to avoid formal boundaries and instead uses existing walls and vegetation along with new soft landscaping to provide screening. This will mitigate the risk of the site reading as an enclosed modern playground inserted into the historic landscape. The selective thinning of incongruous evergreen screening is balanced by phased replacement planting, ensuring that screening is maintained while more appropriate long-term vegetation establishes.
- 11.7 Additional mitigation arises from the site itself. The lower-lying and enclosed character of the site appears to reduce visibility from the Mansion and the wider formal gardens.

12 Public benefits

- 12.1 The proposed Wild Play Area is a nature-based play space designed for children and families that encourages exploration, imagination and discovery through interactive play. Wild Play is designed to reconnect children with nature through adventurous, inclusive play while bringing Wakehurst's world-leading science, conservation and horticulture to life.
- 12.2 Wakehurst's projected impact is forecasted at a 6% year-on-year increase in visitor numbers following opening, bringing thousands more children and families into meaningful contact with nature. Wakehurst welcomed 439,398 visitors in 2025/26, including approximately 70,000 children, providing a strong baseline for growth. Wakehurst's accessibility model, including £1 tickets for recipients of Universal and Pension Credit, discounted youth entry, and free admission for young children and carers, ensures that this growth will be inclusive and equitable.
- 12.3 Wakehurst's existing Community and Access partnerships, spanning over 130 organisations, provide a ready-made delivery network to extend reach to underserved audiences. Currently, 4,675 participants engage through these programmes annually, alongside 13,992 through formal Learning and Education activity and additional SEN school visits. Wild Play will significantly amplify this impact by providing a dedicated, permanent resource that supports repeat engagement.
- 12.4 The project also delivers sector leadership and wider legacy value. Wild Play will act as a national exemplar of inclusive, nature-based play rooted in science and research, providing a model that can inform future play and engagement spaces for wider organisations. Its design and delivery will generate insight into how play can support engagement, wellbeing and environmental awareness at scale, extending its impact beyond Wakehurst.
- 12.5 To date, the project has been developed through direct engagement across different Wakehurst programme participants. As development continues, we will run Focus Groups with members of our 130 Community Access Scheme partners, ensuring strong alignment with community need and long-term relevance. This co-design approach reduces delivery risk and strengthens impact by ensuring the space reflects real user experience.
- 12.6 Volunteers will play a critical role in maximising engagement and sustaining impact. Wakehurst's 165 volunteers already support a wide range of activity, and a new Volunteer Explainers programme will use Wild Play as a focal point to deepen visitor engagement with science and nature.
- 12.7 Wild Play represents a meaningful investment in the wellbeing and education of young people and the wider community, whilst responding to a growing need for accessible, nature rich experiences. It will position Wakehurst at the forefront of inclusive, science-led public engagement while inspiring a new generation to explore, value and protect the natural world.

13 Asset-By-Asset Heritage Impact Assessment

Grade II* Registered Park and Garden

- 13.1 The application site lies within the registered landscape and any intervention therefore has the potential to affect its significance.
- 13.2 The proposal would introduce a new visitor use into a currently functional and transitional part of the estate, rather than into one of its principal designed spaces. The site is relatively low in design significance, although it contributes to the legibility of the estate as a place composed of designed, operational and transitional areas.
- 13.3 In terms of Historic England GPA3, the principal effects on the setting of the Registered Park and Garden are:
- change in use and character of the application site from operational/service landscape to visitor play landscape
 - local visual change arising from structures, path works and planting adjustments
 - increased public exposure to an area formerly experienced more as back-of-house landscape
 - limited potential archaeological disturbance from associated works.
- 13.4 These effects are moderated by the enclosed character of the site, its lower sensitivity relative to the principal designed landscape, and the proposed mitigation. In visual terms, the impact on the wider registered landscape is likely to be low.
- 13.5 In functional and experiential terms, there is some alteration to estate character. However the existing setting already includes a mixture of positive, neutral and negative elements, including mature landscape structure, operational features, hardstanding, block walling and incongruous evergreen screening trees. The proposals seek to replace or soften the less sympathetic elements through restrained landform, natural materials, native planting and phased landscape integration.
- 13.6 The proposals therefore cause a modest change to setting, but it appears contained and not fundamentally harmful to the significance of the registered park and garden as a whole. By replacing or softening these visually discordant and utilitarian elements and introducing a more consistent landscape language appropriate to this service-edge setting, the scheme would improve the coherence of a part of the estate that is presently fragmented in character. The proposals could therefore reasonably be considered as making a positive contribution to the appreciation of the registered landscape.

Wakehurst Mansion (Grade I)

- 13.7 The significance of Wakehurst Mansion derives principally from its architectural, historical and evidential interest. The application proposals do not affect its fabric directly.
- 13.8 Potential effects arise only through setting. The site is screened from the Mansion and formal gardens by landform, vegetation and intervening landscape compartments, with only limited filtered visibility at most.
- 13.9 On that basis, the proposal is not considered likely to materially affect the significance of the Mansion through visual intrusion into its principal setting.
- 13.10 The proposal extends active visitor use within the wider estate core. In this case that effect appears sufficiently distant, screened and secondary that it would not result in appreciable heritage harm to the Mansion.

13.11 The impact on the Mansion is therefore considered neutral or negligible.

Stables (Grade II*)

13.12 No direct effect on the Stables is identified. The proposals do not appear to materially affect the significance or appreciation of the Stables.

South Lodge and Gateway (Grade II)

13.13 The South Lodge and Gateway are identified as listed structures within the registered landscape, but no evidence to suggest a direct visual, functional or experiential effect arising from the proposal.

13.14 The proposal is therefore considered to have no material effect on the significance or setting of the South Lodge and Gateway.

Archaeological interest

13.15 The archaeological desk-based assessment indicates low to moderate prehistoric potential and limited potential for later periods, with any impact likely to be manageable through a planning condition if required.

13.16 Subject to an appropriate conditioned mitigation strategy, the proposal is not considered likely to cause unacceptable harm to archaeological significance.

Wider estate core and service landscape character

13.17 This is the most nuanced heritage issue raised by the project. The proposal changes the use of a formerly operational and service area and draws it into the public experience of the estate. However, that change should not be understood solely as diluting the service character. The heritage value of this area lies in its role as a threshold between the formal and the functional within the layered estate. The proposals have the capacity to make that threshold more legible by giving the area a clearer and more coherent identity as a transitional landscape.

13.18 The site as it currently stands does not express its transitional role clearly. The accumulation of hardstanding, block walling, operational structures and incongruous evergreen screening obscures the relationship between the designed gardens, the nursery and service edge, and the wider naturalistic landscape. The proposals address this directly by removing or softening these unsympathetic elements and replacing them with a restrained, planting-led treatment. The scheme would clarify the site's position within the estate's spatial hierarchy and so could improve the coherence of its historic character.

13.19 Increased public access may therefore be seen as a heritage benefit as well as an operational change. It would allow visitors to encounter and understand a part of Wakehurst that speaks of the estate's broader historic evolution where designed, operational, scientific and educational functions have continually interacted, layered and evolved. Subject to the detailed design remaining restrained and planting-led, by improving the coherence of the estate's historic character, the change could be considered to be positively beneficial to the legibility of the wider estate core.

14 Conclusions

- 14.1 The application site lies within the Grade II* Registered Park and Garden, and therefore requires careful consideration. However, the site is a relatively low-sensitivity, historically functional and visually contained part of the estate rather than a principal designed space or direct architectural setting of the Mansion.
- 14.2 The proposals will introduce public benefits, to widen access, promote outdoor activity and learning, support inclusion, and strengthen Wakehurst's public and educational role. While these do not eliminate the need for careful heritage assessment, they should be a consideration in the planning balance, particularly where any heritage effect is limited in scale.
- 14.3 The heritage significance of the specific site derives from its role within the wider spatial and historic structure of the registered landscape, rather than for the survival of any designed fabric. It forms an interface between the formal garden, service areas and wider naturalistic setting. That interface has been partly obscured by later utilitarian change that has reduced the clarity of this part of the estate as a transitional zone.
- 14.4 The Wild Play proposals should be understood not simply as the introduction of a new use into a sensitive historic landscape, but as a carefully judged re-ordering of an already modified former working area. By replacing or softening unsympathetic features, using a restrained and landscape-led design language and allowing this part of the estate to be publicly accessible, the scheme has the potential to enhance the legibility and coherence of the site as a transitional and service-edge zone within the wider historic landscape of Wakehurst, while also preserving its principal designed and architectural heritage assets.
- 14.5 The proposals can be accommodated within the Wakehurst estate without harm to the significance of the identified heritage assets and the introduction of this new use is justified not only by the limited scale of effect and the public benefits claimed, but by the positive contribution the scheme makes to the coherence and legibility of the registered landscape as a whole.
- 14.6 The resulting heritage effect to the significance of the Grade II* Registered Park and Garden is best described as neutral to positive. No material harm has been identified to the Grade I Mansion, the Grade II* Stables, the Grade II South Lodge and Gateway, or to archaeological interest, subject to appropriate condition.

15 Sources

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Ardingly Neighbourhood Plan, 2014.

West Sussex County Council Historic Environment Record.

Historic England, National Heritage List for England.

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Historic maps and estate plans as reproduced in the CMP, DBA and Design and Access Statement.

16 Appendices

Statutory Listings

16.1 Wakehurst Place

Heritage Category: Park and Garden

Grade: II*

List Entry Number: 1000189

Date first listed: 01-Jun-1984

Details

An early to mid C20 plantsman's and collector's garden laid out by Gerald Loder, which has subsequently been enlarged and developed since 1965 as part of the Living Collections of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The manor of Wakehurst probably dates from the mid C13, when its connection with the Wakehurst family was established. It passed by marriage to the Culpepers in 1454 with whom it remained for two hundred years, Sir Edward Culpeper building the present house in 1590. The estate was sold in 1694 to the Lydall family and then passed by inheritance to the Clarkes who sold it in 1776 to Admiral Peyton. The Peytons let Wakehurst to tenants from 1816 and sold off portions of the estate including, in the mid C19, land to the north of the mansion, before selling Wakehurst Place and the remaining land in 1869 to the Dowager Duchess of Downshire. She repurchased some of the former estate land and carried out considerable additions and alterations to the house and gardens. Although sale particulars were prepared in 1878, it was not until 1890 that she sold the estate to Sir William Boord. In 1903 he sold to Gerald Loder, younger brother of Sir Edmund Loder of Leonardslee (qv) and later created first Lord Wakehurst, who established many of the present plant collections, particularly those from Eastern Asia and the southern continents. On Loder's death in 1936, the estate was bought by Sir Henry Price who continued to develop Loder's work in the gardens, bequeathing them, with the estate, to the National Trust. In 1965, the Trust leased Wakehurst to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, the estate being managed through the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew. In 1984, management of the estate was passed to the Board of Trustees of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, who have developed the gardens and plant collections further and who now (1998), in conjunction with the National Trust, manage the site.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING

Wakehurst Place lies on the west side of the B2028, 1.5km north of Ardingly village and 3.5km south of Turners Hill. The c 40ha registered site comprises some 12ha of parkland, 9ha of ornamental gardens and 20ha of mixed native and ornamental woodland. The eastern third lies on a level plateau, the ground falling away to the south and west and then descending into a deep, east/west ravine-like stream valley. The B2028, largely lined with post and rail fencing, forms the east boundary, while to the north the site is enclosed by agricultural (deer) fencing and adjacent deer pasture with, towards the eastern end, scientific and estate administration yards and buildings and the public car park. Beyond these and also to the west and south-west of the site are further wooded stream valleys (also National Trust property), the valley running south from the south-west corner of the site

forming the northern arm of Ardingly reservoir. To the south, the site is largely enclosed by internal shelter belts (replanted after the 1987 storm) and is abutted by farmland.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES

The public entrance to Wakehurst Place is on the east side, gates leading from the B2028 into the car park (which lies outside the registered area). A path leads south-westwards through light, mixed native and ornamental woodland to the carriage courtyard south of the stable block on the east side of the house, its entrance flanked by a pair of giant redwoods. The principal, formal entrance to Wakehurst is at South Lodge, on the B2028 some 200m further south of the public entrance, the drive entering through wrought-iron gates flanked by stone piers and iron railings (lodge and gateway listed grade II). The lodge was probably built between 1825 and 1830 (CBA 1992), although an entrance from this point, with an avenue leading due west to the house, is shown on Thomas Attree's map of 1727. From the lodge the drive, realigned slightly northwards to its present course between 1874 (OS 1st edition) and 1878 (sale particulars), follows a gentle S to arrive at the turning circle in the carriage courtyard.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING

Wakehurst Place (listed grade I) stands on level ground towards the northern boundary of the registered site and on the eastern edge of the gardens. The three-storey, E-shaped house, its principal, south front featuring a three-storey projection and porch, is built of sandstone ashlar with a Horsham slab roof. Built originally in the form of a complete courtyard by Sir Edward Culpeper in 1590, the south side had been demolished before 1697. The east and west sides were shortened by two-thirds in 1848 and between 1869 and 1870; the north-east wing and the chapel on the east side were added by the Duchess of Downshire. The whole house was restored for Sir William Boord by the architect Sir Aston Webb in 1890, who also added the north porch for Lord Wakehurst in 1903. The entire south front was taken down, restored and rebuilt in 1938. To the north-east of the house and facing south into the carriage court is the two-storey, ashlar stable block (listed grade II*), with an octagonal bell turret and cupola.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS

The south or garden front of the house opens onto a paved apron and a large, rectangular open lawn quartered by gravel paths, the present layout established by 1874 (OS 1st edition) on the site of formal gardens shown on Thomas Attree's map of 1727. On its south-east side, the lawn slopes gently down to the roughly circular Mansion Pond (shown on Attree's map), which is fringed with shrubby clumps and small trees, its former surrounding tree cover largely destroyed in the storm of 1987. Enclosing the pond on its east side are the Tony Schilling Asian Heath Beds, developed after the storm on the site of the former Rhododendron Walk as large islands with dwarf and slow-growing mountainous vegetation. South-west of the lawn, and south of the former croquet lawn which adjoins it to the west, are the island Specimen beds, planted for summer colour around a central, iron-work pergola frame. West of the croquet lawn further sinuous island tree and shrub beds, separated by winding grass paths, are planted as the Southern Hemisphere Garden. These were originally laid out by Gerald Loder, on former open parkland, from 1903 to 1936. The north side of the croquet lawn is enclosed by the island bed of the Winter Garden, laid out since 1965 and planted with shrubs and perennials for winter colour. On its north side, and extending c 100m westwards from the west elevation of the mansion is the rectangular Walled Garden, built between 1869 and 1874 to replace former kitchen gardens and estate yards on the mansion's east side. Entered through

an arch at the east end of the south wall, the larger of the two compartments, laid out in 1973 and known as the Sir Henry Price Garden, is quartered by gravel paths with its four beds and perimeter borders planted as 'a modern cottage garden' (guidebook). An arch in the west wall leads into The Pleasaunce which is laid out with an inner square compartment of yew hedges (planted between 1890 and 1903) enclosing a small, quartered lawn with a central fountain basin and statue.

Beyond the main lawn, the path axial on the south front extends c 50m further southwards to the head of the valley, terminating at a bastion enclosed by a balustrade (built since 1965) and with a central sundial, the latter formerly sited (in 1909) on the main lawn. The bastion overlooks a steep, rocky waterfall and the south-west-flowing stream and pools of The Slips garden, the grassy banks of which are dotted with ornamental trees and shrubs. Developed on the line of a former north to south chain of ponds (Attree, 1727; Tithe map, 1841), both Black Pond, at the south-west end of The Slips, and the Bog Garden pond to its west, are surviving remnants of this chain. South-westwards beyond Black Pond are the Water Gardens, laid out around a series of informal pools and water courses with board walks and stone weirs and planted with colourful aquatic and moisture-loving plants including, as an addition in 1998, an iris dell.

South-west of the Water Garden, paths follow the stream course along both sides of the steep, ravine-like Westwood Valley beneath a canopy of mature oak trees (the woodland established between 1727 (Attree) and 1823-4 (Greenwood)) mixed with the exotic trees and shrubs, including rhododendrons, which form the Asian collection. On the north side of the valley, within and above a deep cleft in massive sandstone outcrops, is the Himalayan Glade which, planted largely with shrubby mountainous species, is reached from the valley by steep flights of steps. Northwards, on the gentler slopes above the valley and extending towards the northern site boundary is the Pinetum, the northern half of which is shown established on the OS map of 1909. It was extended south to cover its present area from 1965 and the whole was extensively replanted after the storm of 1987.

Two main, east to west paths, which follow routes established by 1874, run along the upper, southern slopes of Westwood Valley, passing through further collections of rhododendrons and, at the western end, affording extensive views southwards to Ardingly Reservoir and the distant South Downs. At the extreme western end of the valley, the stream flows into Westwood Lake, established between 1727 and 1823-4 and fringed with marsh plants and a backdrop of woodland. North of the lake is Horsebridge Wood, which appears to have been planted during the same period and which contains the North American tree collection, many individuals from which were destroyed in the 1987 storm.

PARK

The parkland lies east of the mansion and gardens, to the north and south of the South Drive. It is open in character with only an intermittent scatter of trees, of varying ages, surviving from the pattern of clumps shown on the OS editions of 1874 and 1909. Maps dating from the 1790s (OS preliminary drawing) up to 1909 (OS 3rd edition), show this eastern parkland extending further south-westwards as far as the present Pinetum, over the area now covered by the gardens. Also by 1909, the area south of the registered site, now known as the South Park, is shown as parkland but appears never to have been extensively planted.

REFERENCES

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P Coats, Great Gardens of Britain (1963), pp 52-5

I Nairn and N Pevsner, The Buildings of England: Sussex (1965), p 398

Country Life, 151 (13 April 1972), pp 906-8

T Wright, Gardens of Britain 4, (1978), pp 196-201

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Wakehurst Place, guidebooks, (nd; 1990; c 1997)

Maps

Thomas Attree, A map of several farms and lands of Ric. Lyddel Esq. lying in Ardingly ... in Sussex ..., 1727 (West Sussex Record Office)

C and J Greenwood, A map of Sussex from an Actual Survey ..., surveyed 1823-4

Tithe map of Ardingly, 1841 (West Sussex Record Office)

OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition surveyed 1874, published 1879

3rd edition surveyed 1909, published 1912

1952 edition

OS 25" to 1 mile: 3rd edition published 1910

Archival items

Sale particulars, Wakehurst Place (SP533, 1869; SP531, 1878), (West Sussex Record Office)

Description written: January 1998

Amended: January 2000

Register Inspector: VCH

Edited: June 2000

16.2 Wakehurst Place (Mansion)

Heritage Category: Listed Building

Grade: I

List Entry Number: 1025764

Date first listed: 28-Oct-1957

List Entry Name: Wakehurst Place

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

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

16.3 Stables to the North East of Wakehurst Place

Heritage Category: Listed Building

Grade: II*

List Entry Number:1354792

Date first listed:28-Oct-1957

List Entry Name: Stables to the North East of Wakehurst Place

Statutory Address 1:STABLES TO THE NORTH EAST OF WAKEHURST PLACE, TURNERS HILL ROAD

Details

ARDINGLY TURNERS HILL ROAD 1. 5405 Stables to the north east of Wakehurst Place TQ 33 SW 6/437A 28.10.57 II*

2. C18. Two storeys. Five windows. Ashlar. Stringcourse, cornice and parapet. Long and short quoins. The centre window-bay projects with similar quoins and a pediment over in the parapet. Horsham slab roof. Octagonal bell-turret with cupola. Large round-headed doorway.

Listing NGR: TQ3397031461

Legacy

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

Legacy System number:302326

Legacy System:LBS

Sources

Other

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

16.4 The South Lodge and Gateway, Wakehurst Place

Heritage Category: Listed Building

Grade: II

List Entry Number: 1025765

Date first listed: 11-May-1983

List Entry Name:The South Lodge and Gateway, Wakehurst Place

Statutory Address 1:THE SOUTH LODGE AND GATEWAY, WAKEHURST PLACE, TURNERS HILL ROAD

The scope of legal protection for listed buildings

This List entry helps identify the building designated at this address for its special architectural or historic interest.

Unless the List entry states otherwise, it includes both the structure itself and any object or structure fixed to it (whether inside or outside) as well as any object or structure within the curtilage of the building.

For these purposes, to be included within the curtilage of the building, the object or structure must have formed part of the land since before 1st July 1948.

Understanding list entries

Corrections and minor amendments

Location

Statutory Address: THE SOUTH LODGE AND GATEWAY, 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 34313 31467

Details

ARDINGLY TURNERS HILL ROAD 1. 5405 The South Lodge and Gateway, Wakehurst Place TQ 33 SW6/437B II

2. Mid C19. One storey. Two windows. Ashlar. Hipped slate roof. Gables to east and west with finials at apex and above the angles. Casement windows. Small gable porch. To the south of the Lodge are wrought iron double gates to the carriage-drive, set in octagonal stone piers with ball caps over, the piers flanked by iron railings on a stone base leading to further octagonal piers with ball caps.

Listing NGR: TQ3431331467

Legacy

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

Legacy System number:302327

Legacy System:LBS

Sources

Other

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