The Courts Garden – planning statement

Change of use of ground floor rooms of mansion house to visitor use

November 2023



The Courts house, located within The Courts Garden, Holt BA14 6RR.

1. **Introduction**

   The National Trust is applying for planning permission to change the use of part of the ground floor of the mansion house at The Courts Garden in Holt. The proposal is to change the use of the Dining Hall and Drawing Room from residential use to visitor reception and visitor experience associated with the Garden. The previously consented tea-room use on the ground floor would continue.

2. **Site**

   The house (Grade II*) sits within the Grade II registered The Courts Garden. The whole property in National Trust ownership, is part of the Holt Conservation Area and sits within the Conservation Area boundary.

3. **Existing use**

   The Courts Garden is open to the public as a visitor attraction. Until recently most of the house has been a residential dwelling, let to a tenant. The last tenant left in 2020. Change of use was granted c2004 for the creation of a tea-room in part of the ground floor (planning ref. W/02/01146/FUL). The tea-room was operational until the most recent commercial tenancy ended in 2021. The plan is to re-open this as a National Trust food and beverage operation. Currently the house is empty and is only accessed by staff for maintenance and meetings.

4. **Proposed use**

- The National Trust has been reviewing the potential use of the house and concluded that there is wider public benefit to be gained by not re-letting to a private tenant and extending a change of use to the whole of the house. Plans for how a public offer will

be delivered are still to be determined but the first phase will be to test using the Dining Hall and Drawing room on the ground floor as a visitor reception space, where visitors to the garden will be welcomed. This would both improve visitor experience and provide better working conditions for staff (currently operating from a wooden hut).

- Consultation with the community in Holt is a key aspect of decision making. To date, initial ideas have been shared with both the Parish Council and residents who have been overwhelmingly positive. This conversation will continue as use of the upper floors is considered - initial thinking is that it could be a combination of office space, visitor/community access areas and education (garden design).

- The National Trust is starting a process of master planning for the site to make these decisions. The feasibility stage of re-opening the tea-room which closed when the commercial tenant left in 2021, is underway. A tea-room and Visitor Welcome space would be the first step and would open a majority of the ground floor for public access (as per our submitted ground floor plan).

5. Key planning issues

- **Expansion of Garden-related use of house / loss of residential space.** The reasons for the change have already been covered in 4 above. The change would mean the building offers greater public benefit potential than before. The proposal will provide the continued sustainable economic use of a building that is difficult to let as a single occupancy tenancy.

- **Highways and parking.** The property has room for up to two parked cars at the side, that have previously been offered to the tenant. With the proposed change of use and the intention not to re-let the residential part of the mansion, there would be no need to park cars adjacent to the house. The National Trust has arrangements with Holt Village Hall and The Glove Factory for visitor parking that serves the Garden. Vehicular access could be limited to deliveries only.

- **Historic Environment.** The property is in a very sensitive location in terms of the historic environment, yet the application only seeks a change of use rather than any extension or external alteration of the property.

6. Conclusion

The proposed change of ground floor rooms to visitor use would begin to re-connect the mansion and garden as they have historically been. The garden was designed to be seen from the house and, by offering access to more people, the property will be serving more of its purpose and meeting the wider National Trust strategic aim of its places being for everyone.

The Courts Garden is a local community amenity, and a free pass to visit the garden is available to all Holt residents. It is the Trust's intention to consider potential community use/access when developing future plans for the mansion house. Once our plans for the remaining parts of the mansion are clearer, we intend to apply for permission to cover the remaining floorspace.