

The National Trust

Planning Statement

Stourhead Garden Pathway Improvement Project

Final report

Prepared by LUC

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The National Trust

Planning Statement

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250 Waterloo Road
London SE1 8RD

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Chapter 1

Introduction and Background

1.1 This Planning Statement has been prepared by LUC on behalf of the National Trust (“the Applicant”) to accompany a full planning application for the following development at Stourhead, Wiltshire, within Wiltshire Council:

“Footpath improvement works including associated engineering and landscaping works and new benches.”

Stourhead

1.2 Stourhead is a Grade I Listed world famous 18th-century landscape garden which has at its centrepiece a magnificent lake reflecting classical temples, mystical grottoes, and rare and exotic trees. Stourhead is managed by the National Trust and is one of the UK’s most visited National Trust properties and in the top 20 most visited attractions in England.

1.3 Designed 300 years ago by three generations of the Hoare banking family, the garden now welcomes 400,000 to 500,000 visitors annually, with up to 6,000 visitors in a single day during peak season. The Georgian Circuit Path, which provides a circular walking route around the lake, is a foundational element of the garden since the 1740s and is central to the visitor experience.

Need for Development

1.4 In recent years, the Georgian Circuit Path has been progressively deteriorating due to both natural and physical factors. The Garden’s pronounced topography and the effects of climate change make the Garden increasingly vulnerable to flash flooding and severe weather, which has contributed to significant wear and tear on the pathways. Blocked gullies and drains contribute to poor drainage throughout the garden leading to excessive rilling on sloped sections and pooling in flatter areas of the path where water cannot shed. As the surface deteriorates, erosion of the wearing course has occurred, exposing the sub-base and creating an uneven and hazardous surface. The raised gullies and drains have become a particular trip hazard, further hindering safe access for visitors.

1.5 Excessive foot traffic and erosion has reduced the overall level of the pathway, causing the path edges to become higher than the centre. The lowered surface traps water, further exacerbating the drainage issues. Visitors are forced onto the path verges to avoid the resulting pools which

has caused the paths to widen in places, ultimately, to the detriment of the Garden's character.

1.6 The poor condition of the paths now restricts access, requiring constant repair and maintenance and forces closures that detract from the visitor experience. Short term repair works have been implemented on sections of the path, however, a long term sustainable solution is required. The proposal therefore aims to conserve and future-proof this significant path by implementing a thoughtfully designed solution to address its continued degradation.

Pre-application Consultation

1.7 A series of consultation events have been undertaken by the National Trust and these sessions have enabled discussions around on-site issues, the design process, site constraints, potential concept designs and emerging proposals.

1.8 The consultation events have included:

- Access Audit - April 2024
- Internal National Trust Stakeholder Meeting – July 2024
- Pre Application Meeting with Wiltshire Council Planning and Conservation Officers – October 2024
- National Trust Specialist Volunteer Advice Network – October 2024
- Stakeholder Consultation with Gardens Trust and Historic England – November 2024
- Access Focus Group – March 2025
- Consultation with local residents, business owners and tenants – April 2025

1.9 Generally, feedback received during the consultation events has been extremely positive. A summary of the events is provided on pages 49 – 51 of the DAS.

Application Submission

1.10 Alongside this Planning Statement, the following documents are submitted in support of the application:

- Application Form
- CIL Additional Information Form
- Copy of Article 13 Notice
- Design and Access Statement
- Site Location Plan (ref: 13000-LUC-XX-XX-DR-L-01200)
- Landscape Drawings Package:
 - Existing Topographical Survey Sheet 1 of 2 (ref: 13000-LUC-XX-XX-DR-L-01201)
 - Existing Topographical Survey Sheet 2 of 2 (ref: 13000-LUC-XX-XX-DR-L-01202)
 - Landscape General Arrangement Plan – Sheet 1 of 2 (ref: 13000-LUC-XX-XX-DR-L-01203)
 - Landscape General Arrangement Plan – Sheet 2 of 2 (ref: 13000-LUC-XX-XX-DR-L-01204)
 - Landscape Sections – Pantheon and Temple of Flora (ref: 13000-LUC-XX-XX-DR-L-01205)
- Engineering Drawings Package:
 - Path Alignment Key Plan (ref: 24058-SFK-XX-XX-DR-C-0100 Rev P3)
 - Pathway Alignment Proposed Plan – Sheet 1 (ref: 24058-0101 Rev P2)
 - Pathway Alignment Proposed Plan – Sheet 2 (ref: 24058-SFK-XX-XX-DR-C-0102 Rev P2)
 - Pathway Alignment Proposed Plan – Sheet 3 (ref: 24058-SFK-XX-XX-DR-C-0103 Rev P2)
 - Pathway Alignment Proposed Plan – Sheet 4 (ref: 24058-SFK-XX-XX-DR-C-0104 Rev P2)
 - Pathway Alignment Proposed Plan – Sheet 5 (ref: 24058-SFK-XX-XX-DR-C-0105 Rev P2)
 - Pathway Alignment Proposed Plan – Sheet 6 (ref: 24058-SFK-XX-XX-DR-C-0106 Rev P2)
 - Pathway Alignment Profile View – Sheet 1 (ref: 24058-SFK-XX-XX-DR-C-0120 Rev P2)
 - Pathway Alignment Profile View – Sheet 2 (ref: 24058-SFK-XX-XX-DR-C-0121 Rev P2)
 - Pathway Alignment Profile View – Sheet 3 (ref: 24058-SFK-XX-XX-DR-C-0122 Rev P2)
 - Pathway Alignment Profile View – Sheet 4 (ref: 24058-SFK-XX-XX-DR-C-0123 Rev P2)
 - Pathway Alignment Profile View – Sheet 5 (ref: 24058-SFK-XX-XX-DR-C-0124 Rev P2)
 - Pathway Alignment Profile View – Sheet 6 (ref: 24058-SFK-XX-XX-DR-C-0125 Rev P2)
 - Proposed Footpath Pantheon (24058-SFK-XX-XX-DR-C-0210 Rev P1)
- Heritage Impact Assessment
- Tree Constraints Plan

- Arboricultural Impact Assessment and Tree Protection Plan
- Ecological Impact Assessment
- Biodiversity Net Gain Report
- Biodiversity Net Gain Metric

Chapter 2

Application Site and Context

Site Location

- 2.1** Stourhead is located in Stourton, in Wiltshire, close to the border with Somerset.
- 2.2** The application site includes the Georgian Circuit Path, surrounding the lake.

Site Access

- 2.3** The main access to the Georgian Circuit Path is from the High Street, to the south east of the lake.

Application Site

- 2.4** The application site measures 1.79ha and comprises the existing footpath network surrounding the lake.
- 2.5** Stourhead is a Grade I Registered Park and Garden. There are a number of listed buildings surrounding the lake, including:
- Grade I listed Grotto and the River God's Cave
 - Grade I listed Gothic Cottage
 - Grade I listed Pantheon
 - Grade I listed Rockwork Bridge
 - Grade I listed Palladian Bridge
 - Grade I listed Temple of Flora
 - Grade I listed Paradise Well
 - Grade II listed Iron Bridge
 - Grade II listed Horse Trough in Lake on South Side of Garden Lake Dam
 - Grade II listed Small Grotto Below Temple of Flora
 - Grade II Rockwork Boathouse
- 2.6** The site is located in the Stourton Conservation Area.
- 2.7** The site is located within the Cranborne Chase National Landscape (formerly Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty).
- 2.8** The path network is located in Flood Zone 1 and has a low probability of flooding from rivers and the sea.

2.9 The site is located within the Impact Risk Zone in relation to the Heath Hill Farm Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

2.10 An area to the north west of the lake is ancient woodland. The majority of the land surrounding the lake (excluding the existing path network) is priority habitat - deciduous woodland.

Planning History

2.11 The key planning applications relating to Stourhead from the last five years are included in the table below:

Application ref	Description	Decision & Date
PL/2025/04975	Temporary use of Stourhead park for Summer of Play creative outdoor play space, including three temporary tent structures, a strawbale climbing structure and a mobile catering vehicle.	Under consideration.
PL/2025/01634	Installation of gravity fed drainage infrastructure to connect main house to mains sewer network.	Approved 29/04/2025
PL/2024/07030	Temporary use of land to facilitate Christmas at Stourhead events 2024, 2025, and 2026.	Approved 11/11/2024
PL/2023/07415	Proposed building that will securely house the National Trust Stourhead mobility equipment and access aids and accommodate the associated personnel to staff and administer the mobility equipment demonstration and free hire.	Approved 11/10/2023
PL/2023/07038	Temporary use of land for Christmas at Stourhead event 2023.	Approved 10/10/2023
PL/2022/06290	Temporary use of land for Christmas at Stourhead event 2022.	Approved 10/11/2022

PL/2022/05337	Use of land for creative play during summer months, including siting of pavilion structure (temporary 3 year consent)	Approved 05/09/2022
PL/2021/07567	Temporary use of land (including catering kiosks and fairground rides) for Christmas at Stourhead event.	Approved 05/10/2021
20/03347/FUL	Re-surfacing of existing car parking to provide all weather surface.	Approved 21/07/2020
20/08377/FUL	Temporary use of land (including catering kiosks and fairground rides) for Christmas at Stourhead 2020 event.	Approved 24/11/2020
19/09861/FUL	To erect temporary food kiosks to courtyard of the shop entrance to the Stourhead gardens including an area for the placement of funfair rides; to erect temporary food kiosks in the courtyard of the spread eagle inn/village hall.	Approved 29/11/2019

Chapter 3

Proposed Development

3.1 The Design and Access Statement provides further detail on the design of the scheme, however, a summary of the key points is set out below.

Path Width

3.2 The proposal includes standardising the path width surrounding the lake. Generally, the paths will maintain a consistent 2.5m width, with adjustments only where constraints intervene or where a narrowed section or broader viewpoint is intentional.

Pantheon Frontage

3.3 One area where the existing path width is inadequate is the section directly in front of the Pantheon Temple - arguably the most popular stopping point on the lake circuit and therefore most prone to congestion. Here, it is proposed that a locally widened, sensitively hard-surfaced apron is added to alleviate congestion and improve visitor flow.

3.4 The proposal includes expanding the hardstanding apron in front of the Pantheon. It will span 7.5m at its widest point.

Materials

3.5 To determine the most suitable surface finish for the path, a number of unsealed and sealed options were reviewed. A number of principles were established, to inform the final choice, these are set out below:

- Be respectful of Stourhead's unique 'spirit of place'
- Have a tactile element, informally known as a "crunch factor"
- Require minimal maintenance
- Have minimal wash-off / transfer of material
- Be easy to repair in the event of failure
- Be compatible with drainage features
- Respond well to tree root uplift
- Be a sustainable choice, ideally containing no plastic
- Provenance of gravel selection

3.6 A detailed assessment of the options was made against the above criteria and the process highlighted two materials as

being suitable for use at Stourhead. One bound surface, Tar Spray & Chip, and one unbound surface, Breedon Amber Gold. A combination of both Breedon Gravel and Tar Spray and Chip is proposed. The extended path in front of the Pantheon will be surfaced with tar spray and chip and a simple flush metal edge.

Benches

3.7 There are a number of existing benches along the path circuit. The proposal includes the installation of hard-surfaced pads for fixed benches along the accessible path circuit. Two pad details are proposed, one for a standard bench and a wider version with an adjacent clear space to accommodate wheelchairs and buggies alongside the timber seating, to ensure unobstructed path flow.

3.8 Benches will be spaced at regular intervals along the accessible route, featuring the new National Trust signature design and marked on visitor maps.

Drainage Strategy

3.9 The proposed drainage strategy adopts a simple, sustainable, and low-impact approach. It responds sensitively to tree constraints, ground conditions, and topography, while avoiding traditional 'active' drainage infrastructure such as gullies, open channels and pipework. These features have contributed to current issues including:

- Blocked systems that are difficult to inspect and maintain.
- Erosion around drainage features, creating trip hazards and exposed edges.
- Visual intrusion within the historic garden setting.

3.10 To overcome the above issues, a passive drainage system is proposed, working with natural topography and vegetation to manage surface water more effectively. Key components include:

- Gentle cross-fall and natural drainage: Paths will generally be constructed with a consistent mono-pitch fall (1:40) towards the lake, allowing water to run off evenly. Flush edges on both sides will enable surface water to dissipate gradually into adjacent vegetation and towards the lake.
- Subtly reprofiled verges and no-dig construction: Where needed, path verges will be gently shaped to support smooth runoff, while a no-dig construction method will protect existing tree roots and address the heavily eroded existing path surfacing.
- Durable surfacing: Paths will be resurfaced using robust, best-practice techniques to create a hardwearing finish,

reduce erosion, and limit the movement of silt, gravel or aggregate into the lake.

3.11 The overall drainage design aims to slow surface water movement across the site. On steeper slopes, the garden team will also be trialling low-impact natural additions such as brash baffles to further reduce overland flow and surface erosion. Together, these measures will improve drainage performance, enhance accessibility, and support the long-term resilience of the path network in this historically sensitive landscape.

Biodiversity Enhancements

3.12 Soft landscaping works will be straightforward, comprising only the reinstatement of soft verges adjacent to re-levelled and resurfaced path sections.

3.13 Where verges have been locally disturbed - or where the path is narrowed - existing soil will be decompacted, gently graded, and supplemented with either on-site (preferable not least to make use of the existing seed bank) or imported topsoil to create a smooth rolling profile. Verges will then be seeded with a suitable Parkland grassland mix developed in coordination with the project ecologists; shadier areas will be additionally planted with containerised evergreen groundcovers such as native ivy (*Hedera helix*).

3.14 The proposal will achieve a net gain of 12.27% (0.42 units) in biodiversity.

Chapter 4

Planning Policy Context

4.1 Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires planning applications to be determined in accordance with the statutory development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

4.2 This section outlines the relevant planning policy and guidance, identifying the key considerations which should be taken into account when determining the application.

Statutory Development Plan

4.3 The statutory development plan for the application comprises:

- The Wiltshire Core Strategy (2015); and
- Saved policies from the Salisbury District Local Plan (2003).

Wiltshire Core Strategy

4.4 The Wiltshire Core Strategy Development Plan Document was adopted in January 2015. The following policies from the Wiltshire Core Strategy are considered relevant to this application:

- **Core Policy 1: Settlement Strategy** – identifies four tiers of settlements and their different strategic roles.
- **Core Policy 2: Delivery Strategy** – sets out more detail on how homes and employment land will be delivered.
- **Core Policy 17: Spatial Strategy for the Mere Community Area** – sets out how core policies 1 and 2 relate to the Mere Community Area (a Local Service Centre). The supporting text acknowledges the importance of Stourhead to the local economy.
- **Core Policy 39: Tourist Development** – states outside of the Principal Settlements and Market Towns, proposals relating to tourist development need to carefully consider the need to protect landscapes and environmentally sensitive sites with the objective of providing adequate facilities, enhancing enjoyment and improving the financial viability of the attraction.
- **Core Policy 50: Biodiversity and Geodiversity** – states development proposals must demonstrate how they protect features of nature conservation and geological value as part of the design rationale and avoid direct and indirect impacts on local sites. Impacts

should be mitigated through appropriate measures. Major development must include measures to deliver biodiversity gains.

- **Core Policy 51: Landscape** – states development should protect, conserve and where possible enhance landscape character and must not have a harmful impact upon landscape character while any negative impacts must be mitigated as far as possible through sensitive design and landscape measures. Proposals for development within or affecting the AONB shall demonstrate that they have taken account of the objectives, policies and actions set out in the relevant Management Plans for these areas.
- **Core Policy 57: Ensuring High Quality Design and Place Shaping** – states a high standard of design is required in all new developments.
- **Core Policy 58: Ensuring the Conservation of the Historic Environment** – states development should protect, conserve and where possible enhance the historic environment.
- **Core Policy 67: Flood Risk** – states all new development will include measures to reduce the rate of rainwater run-off and improve rainwater infiltration to soil and ground (sustainable urban drainage) unless site or environmental conditions make these measures unsuitable.

Saved Policies from the Salisbury District Local Plan

4.5 The Salisbury District Local Plan was adopted in June 2003. In September 2007, the Secretary of State issued a direction setting out the policies within the Salisbury District Local Plan that can be 'saved' beyond 26 September 2007. The Wiltshire Core Strategy was adopted in January 2015 and replaced many of the saved policies. None of the saved policies from the Salisbury District Local Plan are considered relevant to this application.

Neighbourhood Plan

4.6 The application site falls within the Stourton and Gasper neighbourhood plan area. However, there is no adopted neighbourhood plan covering this area.

Other Material Considerations

National Planning Policy Framework

4.7 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out the national planning policies for England. The NPPF was originally published in 2012 and was subsequently amended, most recently in December 2024. The following chapters of the NPPF are considered relevant to the application:

- Chapter 8 – Promoting healthy and safe communities
- Chapter 12 – Achieving well-designed places
- Chapter 16 – Conserving and enhancing the historic environment

Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Area) Act 1990 (as amended)

4.8 The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Area) Act 1990 (as amended) provides statutory protection for listed buildings and conservation areas. Section 72(1) requires special attention to be paid to the preservation or enhancement of conservation areas.

Environment Act

4.9 Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) became mandatory on 12 February 2024 under Schedule 7A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as inserted by Schedule 14 of the Environment Act 2021). Developers must deliver a BNG of 10%. This means a development will result in more or better-quality natural habitat than there was before development.

Draft Wiltshire Local Plan

4.10 The draft Wiltshire Local Plan was submitted for examination in November 2024. At present, the draft policies are afforded no weight.

Cranborne Chase National Landscape Management Plan 2019-2024

4.11 The Cranborne Chase National Landscape Management Plan presents the special qualities and features of the AONB and determines what actions are required to ensure their conservation and enhancement. It explains the significance of this AONB and describes its outstanding landscapes, focussing on conserving and enhancing them, sustaining living and working landscapes, and the special landscapes to enjoy.

Chapter 5

Planning Assessment

Principle of Development

5.1 Core policy 39 of the Wiltshire Core Strategy states tourist development needs to carefully consider the need to protect landscapes and environmentally sensitive sites with the objective of providing adequate facilities, enhancing enjoyment and improving the financial viability of the attraction.

5.2 Core policy 51 of the Wiltshire Core Strategy states development should protect, conserve and where possible enhance landscape character. Any negative impacts must be mitigated as far as possible. Proposals for development within or affecting AONBs (now National Landscapes) shall demonstrate that they have taken account of the objectives, policies and actions set out in the relevant management plans for these areas.

5.3 The proposed re-surfacing of the path network surrounding the lake will address the existing safety, maintenance and drainage issues. The key benefits of the proposal are set out below:

- Improved safety - replacing the path surface will remove trip hazards for all visitors and improve accessibility for wheelchair users and parents with strollers. The proposal will reduce the risk of injuries for visitors.
- Enhanced visitor experience – the re-surfaced path will provide a smoother and more comfortable experience for visitors and improve the overall appearance of the area surrounding the lake.
- Reduced maintenance costs – the poor condition of the existing path network results in the need to regularly repair the uneven surfaces. A re-surfaced path will reduce the frequency of repairs and provide a long term cost saving for the National Trust.
- Maintaining visitor numbers – the improved path network will help ensure the lake continues to be an appealing attraction for visitors. Stourhead is one of the National Trust's most visited sites and improving the experience for visitors will help maintain the current visitor numbers and enable the National Trust to continue delivering the benefits which they deliver.

5.4 Overall, the proposal will sensitively enhance the existing tourist facilities at Stourhead which will enhance the

enjoyment of the attraction for visitors. The proposal will enhance the appearance of the lake and will therefore not result in any harmful impacts upon the landscape character of the Cranborne Chase National Landscape (formerly Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty). The proposal is therefore in accordance with core policies 39 and 51 of the Wiltshire Core Strategy.

Heritage

5.5 Core policy 58 of the Wiltshire Core Strategy states development should protect, conserve and where possible enhance the historic environment. Section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Area) Act 1990 (as amended) provides statutory protection for listed buildings and conservation areas. The Act requires special attention to be paid to the preservation or enhancement of conservation areas.

5.6 A Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA) has been prepared by Purcell.

5.7 The HIA concludes that the proposed works within the Grade I registered park and garden will have a minor positive impact on the historic and aesthetic interest of the historic designated landscape.

5.8 The proposed works seek to ensure that Stourhead can continue to be a visitor attraction in the future by adapting and enhancing the existing historic network of paths to be sustainable and resilient to changes in weather due to climate change. The proposed resurfacing and realignment of the paths with new edging to prevent erosion and natural stone thresholds will improve the overall accessibility of the estate for a wide range of visitors. The addition of regular fixed bench positions (including those that can accommodate a wheelchair alongside) around the 'accessible' lake path loop, and the proposed extension of the hardstanding in front of the Pantheon will all enhance the visitor experience at Stourhead with improved opportunities to appreciate the dramatic landscape as it was designed and intended to be viewed historically.

5.9 The works have been carefully considered to ensure that the character of Stourhead as an 18th century designed landscape with later 19th and 20th century adaptations is preserved and enhanced for future generations of visitors to the National Trust estate. Together, this suite of proposed improvements will ensure that Stourhead remains a flagship visitor attraction in the southwest of national importance.

5.10 The proposal therefore complies with the NPPF, core policy 58 of the Wiltshire Core Strategy and the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Area) Act 1990 (as amended).

Design

5.11 Core policy 57 of the Wiltshire Core Strategy requires development to be of a high quality design. The proposed path re-surfacing works will ensure a more consistent appearance to the path network. The materials have been carefully selected to ensure they are appropriate in this setting and do not result in harm to the character of site. Further details of the design of the proposal are set out in the DAS. However, overall, the appearance of the path network surrounding the lake will be improved and the materials will be of high quality to ensure an appropriate finish. The proposal therefore complies with policy 57 of the Wiltshire Core Strategy.

Trees

5.12 Core policy 50 of the Wiltshire Core Strategy states development proposals must demonstrate how they protect features of nature conservation and geological value.

5.13 An Arboricultural Impact Assessment and Tree Protection Plan have been prepared by Bosky Trees.

5.14 The lake is surrounded by a large number of trees, all of which are protected as they fall within the conservation area. Some sections of woodland surrounding the lake are also designated as ancient woodland / priority habitat. The proposal includes the re-surfacing of the path network surrounding the lake only, no trees are proposed to be removed. Some crown lifting works have been specified to a small number of trees but such works are minor and will not adversely impact their health or longevity.

5.15 The development proposal includes resurfacing footpaths adjacent to numerous trees. These trees are likely to be rooting in soil beneath the area to be surfaced, so a low-impact installation method has been devised for this project. Ground preparation works will be carried out with due care and all construction works will be carried out in accordance with the forthcoming Arboricultural Method Statement.

5.16 During construction, temporary fencing will be used to protect retained trees situated near works areas. For effective tree protection, fencing must be installed before any heavy plant machinery is used on the site and must remain in place until the construction works have been completed. Vehicle use will be restricted to agreed transit routes and rigid ground guards will be laid down to when vehicles need to turn over soft ground.

5.17 All trees will be retained and the methods which will be used to undertake the re-surfacing works will not result in any impact on trees surrounding the site. The proposal therefore complies with core policy 50 of the Wiltshire Core Strategy in relation to trees.

Ecology and Biodiversity

5.18 Core policy 50 of the Wiltshire Core Strategy states all development proposals shall incorporate appropriate measures to avoid and reduce disturbance of sensitive wildlife species and habitats throughout the lifetime of the development.

5.19 The Environment Act requires development proposals to deliver 10% Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG).

5.20 An Ecological Impact Assessment (EIA) and Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment have been prepared by Johns Associates.

5.21 The assessment covered the path network and a 10m buffer either side, recording habitat type, condition and plant species present. A badger survey was also undertaken to determine the presence of setts and field signs. No evidence of badgers was found. Most of the habitat was unsuitable for common reptiles but small areas of longer grassland adjacent to scrub could support slow worm and common lizard. The vegetated ends of the lakes and connecting channels could support grass snake. These areas and the scrub and woodland near the lakes are also likely to support amphibians. The specific habitat areas potentially affected are unlikely to support dormouse, but scrub and woodland will offer a range of features that are typically used by a range of bird species, as well as invertebrates. The path is flanked by trees for the majority of its length, some of which have features that could be used by roosting bats, which will also forage in and around the areas associated with the works.

5.22 Taking all of the above into account, reflecting on the nature of the proposals, the likely phasing of the works, methods that will avoid affecting the root protection areas of the trees and the overall limited net change in vegetated ground, it is considered reasonable to conclude that the project can progress successfully under a suitably prepared Precautionary Ecological Method of Works and use of a suitably experienced Ecological Clerk of Works.

5.23 Mitigation measures are set out in the EA to ensure no unacceptable impacts on species.

5.24 The site is located within the impact risk zone in relation to the Heath Hill Farm SSSI. However, based on the Natural England SSSI impact risk zone guidance, given the nature of the proposal, the development is unlikely to have a harmful effect on the SSSI.

5.25 Provided the recommendations for creation and management of habitats are adhered to, it is predicted that the proposed development will achieve a net gain of 12.27% (0.42 units). The trading rules have been met.

5.26 The proposal therefore complies with the NPPF, core policy 50 of the Wiltshire Core Strategy and the Environment Act.

Drainage

5.27 Core policy 67 of the Wiltshire Core Strategy states all new development will include measures to reduce the rate of rainwater run-off and improve rainwater infiltration to soil and ground (sustainable urban drainage) unless site or environmental conditions make these measures unsuitable.

5.28 One of the main aims of the proposal is to improve drainage at the site. The proposed drainage strategy has therefore been designed to slow surface water movement across the site. On steeper slopes, the garden team will also be trialling low-impact natural additions such as brash baffles to further reduce overland flow and surface erosion. Together, these measures will improve drainage performance, enhance accessibility, and support the long-term resilience of the path network in this historically sensitive landscape.

5.29 The proposal will improve the drainage at the site and therefore complies with core policy 67 of the Wiltshire Core Strategy.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

6.1 This Planning Statement supports an application for footpath improvement works at Stourhead in Wiltshire. As outlined in this Statement, the proposed development complies with current legislation, planning policy and guidance, including that provided by:

- The National Planning Policy Framework (2024);
- The Wiltshire Core Strategy (2015);
- The Environment Act; and
- Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Area) Act 1990 (as amended).

6.2 The proposed re-surfacing of the path network surrounding the lake will address the existing safety, maintenance and drainage issues. The proposal will enhance this important tourist attraction and will not result in a detrimental impact on the National Landscape. Overall, the principle of the development is acceptable.

6.3 The proposed materials and finish will be of high quality, the works will not result in any unacceptable impacts in relation to heritage assets, ecology, biodiversity, trees or drainage. The proposal will deliver a number of benefits, including improving safety and accessibility, enhancing the visitor experience, reducing maintenance costs and helping maintain visitor numbers. The proposal will also deliver 12.27% Biodiversity Net Gain.

6.4 In light of the significant benefits of the proposed development, and lack of significant detrimental impacts, we recommend that the proposed development is approved.