



Historic England

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Our ref: P01598778

20 October 2025

Dear Mr Cox

**T&CP (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015
& Planning (Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas) Regulations 1990**

**GARDEN LAKE, STOURHEAD, WILTSHIRE, BA12 6QD
Application No. PL/2025/07553**

Thank you for your letter of 2 October 2025 regarding the above application for planning permission. On the basis of the information available to date, we offer the following advice to assist your authority in determining the application.

Historic England Advice

Historic England attended two stakeholder engagement workshops for the Stourhead Garden Pathway Improvement Project on 28/02/24 and 07/11/24. We provided pre-application advice on 22/01/25. This was based on the National Trust's (NT's) research and assessment undertaken since the project's inception and presented during those workshops.

Significance of affected heritage assets

Stourhead is an internationally acclaimed 18th century English landscape garden. The classically inspired design was begun by financier and owner Henry Hoare in the 1740s. It incorporates ever-changing vistas around a central lake, replete with exceptional garden buildings, including The Pantheon, Temple of Apollo, Grotto, Temple of Flora, and Gothic Cottage, which are grade I listed. These together with other garden features depict the historical and political iconography and symbolism reflecting the Hoare family's place and role in 18th century society.

Hoare commissioned pioneering architect Colen Campbell to design the Palladian style country house, Stourhead House (grade I), located on the eastern edge of the gardens. Leading aristocratic architect Henry Flitcroft and sculptor William Privett were commissioned to design the garden buildings and statues.



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The planting structure initiated by Hoare was carefully arranged and managed around the lake and designed walks to create drama, revealing and framing views. The planting and layout were subsequently enhanced by his grandson Richard Colt Hoare.

The gardens became very influential during the English Landscape Movement and, as tourism rose in popularity during the mid to late-18th century, well documented by writers and commentators of the period.

The mansion and gardens were bequeathed to the National Trust who have continued to oversee their conservation and restoration. The property receives up to 500,000 visitors a year.

The research, analysis undertaken for the Pathway Project has been extremely comprehensive and reflects the importance of the designed walks and their contribution to the significance of the grade I registered park and garden. This includes the *Historic Development & Significance* report (2022) and *Conservation Statement* (2024) by Judith Teasdale.

Impact on heritage assets

The Pathway Project has been set up in response to the deteriorating condition of the garden paths resulting from increased visitor footfall and rainfall, the latter which is exacerbated by climate change. The existing surface is a traditional self-binding gravel that is porous and is in keeping with the original character. The naturally steep topography within which the garden is set also exacerbates drainage and erosion issues across the path network.

The Pathway Project aims to identify a long term, sustainable solution restoring and maintaining the path network. It primarily focuses on the 18th century garden circuit established by Henry Hoare, and his predecessor Richard Colt Hoare.

A feasibility study was commissioned by the NT in 2024 and is summarised in the application Design & Access Statement (DAS). It has been rigorous in its assessment of potential, alternative footpath materials and profiles, and strategic options for the network's conservation and repair. This includes drainage and environmental enhancement strategies to help mitigate erosion and flooding.

The principal risk associated with the project is the potential impact a sealed footpath surface may have on the character of the garden and its 'spirit of place', which has remained relatively unchanged since its creation in the 18th century.

Based on the surface options appraisal carried out in the feasibility study, we would concur with the NT that out of the types considered, Breedon Amber Gold would be





the most visually appropriate unsealed surface for tying in with the existing character. We also agree that out of the selection of sealed surfaces being considered, tar spray and chip would be the most visually sympathetic. This is evidenced by the construction of a sample panel in front of the Gothic Cottage during the summer. We understand the latter used Daltex Yellow chippings, which was selected as the preferred mix following a review of ten samples.

Regarding the path profile, a pragmatic strategy is proposed, which is to raise the level of the existing paths to allow water to discharge from their surface. This will also ensure existing tree roots are protected.

Three strategic options have been considered using the two preferred surfaces: Option 1, *Response to Gradient*; Option 2; *Rationalised Approach*; and Option 3, *Full Bound Re-surface*.

Based on the 'Pros and Cons' identified for each option, we agree with the selection of the *Rationalised Approach* as the preferred option, using both bound and unbound surfaces. This limits numerous changes in surface that Option 1 would require thus helps to retain the visual flow of the walks. It also enables sections of the more authentic unbound surface to be retained in flatter parts of the garden.

In our pre-application advice, we considered a key issue was how a sealed surface would successfully interface with more naturalistic features, and work around multiple edge interfaces, such as boulders, tree trunks/ roots. This has been addressed to a degree in the DAS. However, in areas such as the Grotto and Rock Arch, more bespoke detailing and/ or specification is likely to be required to ensure a naturalistic finish and interface is achieved.

We also advised it would be prudent to assess the viability of a fourth option, which would be to implement the drainage and environmental enhancement strategies prior to an alternative surface being introduced. That is, maintaining the self-binding Breedon gravel as the principal surface. This would enable the mitigating impact of the drainage and environmental enhancements to be assessed prior to an alternative sealed surface being introduced. We acknowledge the NT's response in the DAS that in spite of drainage and environmental enhancements, technical advice confirms that unbound Breedon gravel is unsuitable for gradients steeper than 1:15, which aligns with the key problem areas along the pathway.

Policy

We consider that the application meets the requirements of the NPPF. To note, in respect to paras 205 and 206, we advised in our pre-app advice that it would be beneficial for the NT to submit data to evidence the increased, and prolonged rainfall



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being experienced at Stourhead. Also, the increased visitor numbers, and increased resource required for current repair and maintenance. Therefore, it will be for your authority to determine whether this information is required as justification in addition to that outlined within the DAS.

In determining this application you should bear in mind the statutory duty of section 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 to have special regard to the desirability of preserving listed buildings or their setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which they possess.

Historic England's Position

Historic England has no objection to the application on heritage grounds. We support the overall vision and objectives of the Pathway Project and understand the need for a revised approach to conserving and managing the garden's infrastructure. This is particularly considering increased visitor pressures and the impacts of climate change.

Pragmatic and sensitive steps have been taken by the NT through its research, analysis and options appraisals to identify an appropriate strategy for the path network's long-term conservation and maintenance.

It will be for your authority to determine whether further design detail is required for the more complex/ naturalistic sections of footpath, such as the Grotto and Rock Arch (highlighted above), prior to implementation.

Your authority should take these representations into account in determining the application. If there are any material changes to the proposals, or you would like further advice, please contact us. Please advise us of the decision in due course.

Yours sincerely

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Landscape Architect

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