

Tottenham House, Wiltshire. Proposed landscape treatment of the walled garden.

The eighteenth century trapezium-shaped walled kitchen garden of c.2ha was divided into 'North' and 'South' gardens by an internal wall. It is attributed to Lancelot Brown. The garden lies near the Grade II* listed stable block and to the north of the Grade I listed house. The walls and surviving internal fabric can be considered curtilage listed to those heritage assets, the walled garden itself being a key feature of the Grade II* Registered Historic Park and Garden (RPG). Outside areas of consented work, the walled garden is presently laid to grass with much of its historic fabric requiring repair or rebuild. It is essentially a blank canvas.

The principle of redevelopment within the walled garden has been accepted wherein new landscaping will act as a foil to new built development. The historic spine walls will be rebuilt as part of these proposals.

A landscape layout was approved in 2026 (ref. PL/2024/09312). This proposed a geometric and formal internal arrangement centred on key buildings such as a pool house, spa, studio and gardening facilities. The footprints of historic service buildings such as glasshouses are to be respected with the structures being rebuilt to use. Four principal garden areas are proposed, separated by key north/south and west/east axes reflecting the internal late nineteenth century garden layout and circulation. This will also sustain the original northern and southern garden areas separated by the internal spine wall. In the southeast, two lawns with perimeter tree and hedgerow planting are proposed while behind the spine wall in the southwest, the pool house and spa are self-contained within a simple and similar landscape of lawns, perimeter planting and an area of hard standing around the outdoor pool. To the north of this area, the restored glasshouses and a repaired historic water basin provide a more utilitarian area, while further to the north a combined area of leisure and produce is proposed. Here, two tennis courts will be located close to the west wall with an octagonal tennis court pavilion located centre east and in front of a small, formal potager. This whole area will be well-planted with these features screened within and outside the garden with additional screening provided by more perimeter planting.

A new landscape layout is now proposed (BLDA Architects Dwg 210, May 2026). This refines the consented scheme by offering a greater celebration of the garden's history embedded in its layout and intended historic and future purpose for leisure and display. The fundamental ordering of Lancelot Brown's garden as recorded in 1786 is still retained by the exterior and interior walls and location of the internal west/east cross path which dictate the overall quartered arrangement underpinning the new layout. The internal perimeter path, recorded from at least 1814, is also retained albeit in a serpentine style in the garden's southwest to sit more comfortably with the organic form of the spa. The glasshouses, similarly, recorded from at least 1814 remain in their original locations. Furthermore, the proposed subdivision of the northern area into four areas as shown c.1880, to take maximum advantage of different aspects to provide a variety of growing conditions, directly informs the new layout and proposed planning palettes. Internal perimeter tree planting, green boundaries and an additional circular feature in that area are also retained and reinterpreted. Within the southern area, the central division of the southern plot as recorded c.1880 is rotated to continue this sense of internal subdivision between the pool house, the outdoor pool and the spa. Most of the gateways into the walled garden as recorded in 1880 are retained with the associated paths reflecting historic dimensions. Where accesses will be lost, such as from the stable court into the garden, this is justified through the new use of the respective areas and the provision of alternate access into the walled garden such as that proposed at the west end of the central cross-axis.

In 1880, another pleasure ground was recorded to the east of the walled garden. This area with its serpentine paths, ornamental planting, areas of lawn, water features and garden buildings has been lost to other development. The accommodation of its spirit within the main garden area now proposed partly compensates for its loss and increases the value of the walled garden in the site overall.

The new landscape layout acknowledges other rare survivals of eighteenth-century gardens such as Painswick Rococo gardens, Gloucestershire with its contained but highly ornamental pleasure and productive grounds peppered by garden buildings, water features and lush planting. The recent reimagining of the Georgian walled garden at Houghton Hall, Norfolk with its William Kent inspired buildings, Edwardian herbaceous borders and contemporary art collection, which all sustain a late nineteenth century internal layout, is another useful comparator.

The notable changes in the new layout from the consented scheme are the reduction of the tennis courts to one court, but in the same location, and the substitution of the octagonal tennis pavilion for a larger Chinese-inspired building (BLDA Architects Dwg. 221.A) also in the same location. A link to the external studio has also evolved into a larger circular area to balance the other historic and proposed circular features found at the intersections of the main paths. Elsewhere, the linear historic circulation has been augmented by more playful and predominantly secondary serpentine paths in a variety of materials such as brick, reclaimed York stone, wood chip and even mown grass to provide greater access through planted areas now proposed and a richer experience of the garden overall. The introduction of these serpentine paths, together with the Chinese pavilion, evoke the Rococo spirit introduced by the spa and record the early eighteenth century, a key period of development of the RPG overall.

Proposed planting within the garden has developed to provide a greater richness in form and detail reminiscent of the Georgian and High Victorian periods of the gardens, which included the additional pleasure ground with its serpentine paths and specimen planting in the east slip. The new planting also acknowledges contemporary concerns such as climate change and long-term maintenance. While a strong framework of trees, shrubs, hedges is still proposed, areas previously presented as lawn will be planted as perennial meadows, while rich herbaceous planting will respond to the internal site conditions of the gardens to ensure year-round display. One area of gently sculptured lawn will remain, to provide counterpoint to the abundance around and reflect the topography found within the walls. Topiary will also be used to extend the ornamental theme with lengths of cloud hedge, a row of living arches and a massed display of mounded evergreens reminiscent of a Royal Chinese garden beside the new pavilion. Planting will similarly be concentrated in the north and west of the garden to block out views of the eastern service slip and to enclose the garden from views from the west.

The proposed landscape treatment of the walled garden is extensive, ambitious and encapsulates the significance and character of the wider RPG conveyed by the consented layout in the use of formal tree planting, discrete areas of ornamental planting, axial views, landscape buildings, eye catchers and ornamental water. More directly, it safeguards and partly replicates the fundamental ordering of the Lancelot Brown's kitchen garden and the later nineteenth century layout recorded by the Ordnance Survey and now reinterpreted for modern requirements. The internal layout will evoke the 'spirit of place' of Tottenham House, combining the order and symmetry of the Palladium movement with its lighter, playful cousin, Rococo. It will stand beside other initiatives to restore or embellish the wider RPG such as the reinstatement of a banqueting house to conclude the Great Walk, a new pool and ornate parterre on the south front of the house and new ornamental buildings including a grotto, a boathouse and a temple on the lake.

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