National Trust

Wentworth Castle Gardens

Union Jack gardens path restoration: Ecology Statement

The project was assessed on 12 June 2023 by Stephen Morley, Nature Conservation Adviser (Ecologist) for the National Trust, who undertook a desktop scoping assessment of the proposed path restoration in the Union Jack gardens at Wentworth Castle Gardens. The gardens are well known to the assessor, who has walked through the Union Jack gardens many times.

The proposal is to resurface the path in the Union Jack garden. The proposal will involve the scraping of the existing paths surface to a depth of around 25 mm, then resurfacing with a spray and chip finish, with renewal of wooden edging boards. The work is proposed for October 2023.

Habitats present and impacts

The habitats present include a worn hardcore path network lined with species-poor hedges. In the centre the union jack garden is a medium sized sweet chestnut tree of 20-30 cm DBH; the tree is relatively young with no veteran features.

Negative impacts on the habitats are likely to be negligible from an ecological point of view. The paths are well traversed and of negligible value in ecological terms. The hedges will not be impacted negatively by resurfacing due to minimal interference with the top dressing currently present (25mm depth); the hedges should benefit from better surface water management and improved health in the long-term. The medium-sized tree at the centre of the garden will be unlikely to be impacted by any disturbance due to the very shallow working depth of path restoration (25mm), and the better surface should protect roots going forward.

Species present and impacts

The nature of the restoration project did not lend itself to survey for species, as works are restricted to the current path surface, and a desktop assessment was considered adequate.

Wentworth Castle Gardens support a reasonably diverse woodland and garden **bird fauna**, and various bird species are likely to be present and using the current hedges for shelter and nesting. No hedges will be removed as part of the project, and hedge health may indeed improve long-term due to better proposed surface water management. The timing of the path works out with of the bird nesting season should ensure that no damage or disturbance to birds or nests takes place.

A number of **bat** species are present at Wentworth Castle Gardens. The hedgerows and medium-sized tree in the Union Jack garden are unlikely to provide suitable habitat for roosting bats, and therefore any potential impact on bats is considered negligible.

Amphibians including **great crested newts** are known from some of the ponds at Wentworth Castle Gardens, and the nearest pond with confirmed great crested newts is approximately 215 m away (Keepers Pond), although there is a garden wall and Ha-

Ha between that pond and the gardens, which would limit the possibility of newts travelling as far as the Union Jack garden from this pond. The current path network is also extremely unsuitable habitat for great crested newts in terms of habitat type. Due to the nature of the works, it is extremely unlikely that great crested newts would be encountered during works. There is a low possibility that newts may be encountered towards the edge of paths whilst renewal of wooden boarding is taking place, and contractors should be made aware of the potential of encountering great crested newts.

Mammals including **badgers** have been recorded from the gardens at Wentworth Castle Gardens in the past. There is a potential that badgers may feed within the Union Jack garden, however the path restoration is unlikely to have any measurable impact on badger activity due to the nature of the path habitat being restored, as well as temporal separation of works and badgers.

Proposed mitigation

Contractors should be made aware of the low possibility of great crested newts being encountered during works to the edges of the paths, and wooden boards should be removed carefully by hand. If any great crested newts are encountered during the works, work on that area should stop and contractors should contact the National Trust Nature Conservation Adviser (or other suitably qualified ecologist) for advice.

Conclusion

Any impacts on important habitats or species as a result of this development are considered likely to be low to negligible due to the nature, scale and timings of the works.

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