

Appendix to Heritage Significance and Impact Assessment MNNTYR207 Installation of Polytunnels, Walled Garden, Wentworth Castle Gardens

Mark Newman NT Archaeological Consultant, North Region (East)
6th December 2021

Introduction

Since completion of HSIA MNNTYR207 it has been realised that the intended functions of the proposed polytunnels require provision of a main electricity supply.

It has been determined that this can be provided from an existing external supply attached to the inside face of the north wall of the walled garden.

This document should be read as an appendix to the original HSIA, considering any additional impacts arising from the works that would be required. It is not considered that this additional work alters any aspect of previous identification or discussion of significance on the site. Original research material has been referred to, to advise this appendix, but no new research was considered necessary or undertaken.

Required additional intervention

Installation of the power cable will require excavation of a trench 0.30m wide, 0.45m deep and c.12m long between the existing junction point just west of the north gate into the gardens across the perimeter roadway and then into the north-east corner of the proposed polytunnels. It will be terminated at post-mounted exterior grade power socket(s) at this point with further onward transmission through surface cables, if required.

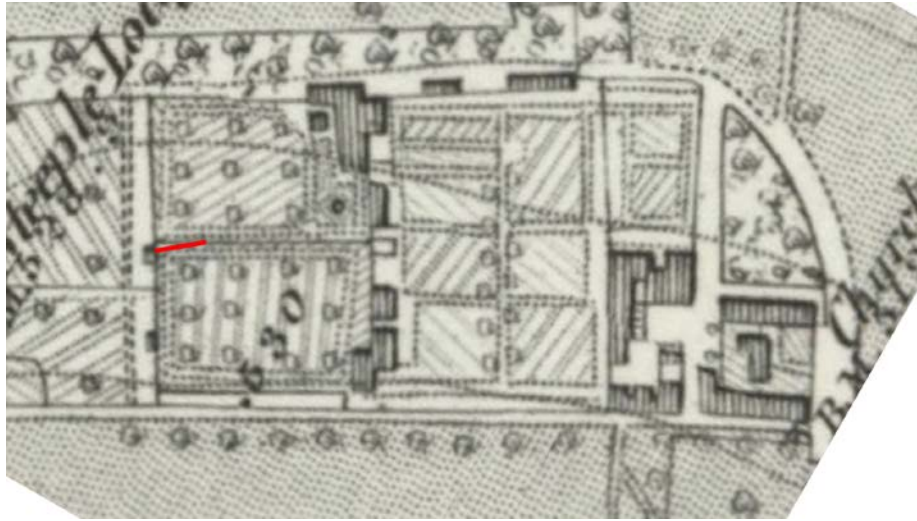
Appraisal of risks and impacts

Excavation of the cable trench would destroy any archaeological remains encountered along its route. If archaeological remains are present (and there has been no previous recorded excavation in this area to test whether any are or not) then this would represent physical impact additional to that already identified.

The trench will cross an in-use perimeter trackway for much of its length. It is anticipated that creation and maintenance of this trackway will already have compromised some archaeological value, especially close to the surface. However, it is unlikely that such disturbance will have reached the full 45cm depth, and certainly not along the full length of the trench.

Historical mapping shows this area to have been productive gardening use from an early date. Prior to 1891 there is no evidence for built structures in this part of the gardens apart from a long north-south subdivision wall. This appears to have been in place by 1824 and is quite possibly a boundary wall installed in the early 18th century as part of the original laying out of the gardens – or a rebuild of that or a related feature. This boundary has been removed by 1891, by which date its former location has been occupied by a long north-south battery of eleven east-west aligned glasshouses, part of a significant later Victorian remaking of the productive gardens. Latterly

those glass houses gave way to longer north-south houses, within whose former footprint it is proposed to raise the new polytunnels.



Extract from the 1855 OS first edition 6" survey with approximate route of trench shown in red



Extract from the 1891 OS first edition 25" survey with approximate route of trench shown in red

The proposed trench is aligned at a slight angle to the preceding historical features. It is possible that the southern end of the trench might cross the line of the original north-south boundary wall. It will also cross the footprint of the two most northerly glass houses of the late Victorian battery.

Given the nature of the boundary wall is it not unlikely that its foundations extended to some depth below surface and could survive here. It is not known how thoroughly the footings of the later Victorian glasshouses were built or removed on demolition – though perhaps removal might have been less thorough where a roadway, rather than a replacement building was planned.

Another factor to consider in predicting archaeological survival is the C18 report of shallow soil depths over a close to surface bedrock causing the head gardener considerable difficulties in setting up the gardens. If bedrock is close to surface here, then the relevant foundations may have been relatively slight in which case they may have been more likely to have been fully removed during earlier alterations to the site.

The nature of the excavation is linear and narrow. In the case of the former glass houses it would cut through any surviving remains transversely leaving the majority of the structure intact. The proposed alignment of the trench is closer to that of the former boundary wall, with the potential for a greater degree of impact: however this was a much longer feature so again the proportion of the feature at risk is relatively minor.

Damage to any aspect of the archaeological resource is never desirable. However, in this instance the intrinsic significance of remains – if present – is likely to only be a Local character. The glasshouses are of later Victorian date and many good examples survive elsewhere – though the potential for specific heating or growing features inside the buildings is certainly present and would raise the interest of any remains. At present nothing is known about the potential for such features in these specific houses. The boundary wall might of greater historic interest, especially if of C18 origin as relatively little fabric of that period is evident onsite today. It has previously been suggested that this could have been a heated wall – such is mentioned in early records - but present thinking is that this refers to a structure elsewhere.

Mitigation

At present very little is understood of the archaeology, presence/absence date or form of the structures potentially at risk from this proposal.

It would therefore be proposed to maintain an archaeological watching brief during excavation works, with the potential to record any structural remains exposed in the course of works.

Impact Assessment

The additional trenching does represent a raised risk of archaeological impact arising from implementation of the proposal.

If archaeological remains were present and if they were impacted then this would represent some detrimental impact to the Evidential heritage value of the site. Such small impacts, in a context where significant previous impact has undoubtedly occurred, is not assessed as representing detriment to historical or aesthetic values, while the project as a whole intends some notable public benefit.

The impact on Evidential value, if it occurs, could be identified as “less than substantial harm”, in NPPF terms, to the significance of the site through loss of part of the archaeological record.

This loss could be offset by archaeological recording of exposed features adding to the currently very spare understanding of the site and its development.

Conclusions

In light of the assessments made previously and now reviewed, it is the view of the National Trust that the proposals are appropriate to this setting, proportionate and overall will have a generally neutral impact on the heritage values of the site the benefits of greater understanding of the archaeological resource largely balancing any potential for detrimental impacts upon it, given their limited character and the nature of the likely resource, if present. The site's overall significance will remain unaltered.

Therefore it is the National Trust's assessment (in response to the test contained in NPPF paragraph 202) that no element of the proposed development constitutes Substantial harm (or for that matter more than slight, potential, less than substantial harm) to a recognised heritage asset. It is also remains satisfied that the proposal is compliant with the relevant local planning policies pertinent to heritage.

The National Trust further maintains that the proposal is consistent with the organisation's published Conservation Principles.