

PROPOSED ALTERATION TO OPERATING DAYS OF THE OVERFLOW CARPARK AT WENTWORTH CASTLE GARDENS

COVERING STATEMENT

BACKGROUND

Wentworth Castle Gardens is a Grade I listed landscape, the only one of its kind in South Yorkshire. There are over 26 individually listed buildings and structures in the grounds and parkland. The site consists of over 60 acres of formal gardens and 500 acres of wider parkland. The main house and some of the surrounding buildings are owned by Northern College, which provides residential and community education for adults.

The gardens, which were previously run by the Wentworth Castle and Stainborough Park Heritage Trust, closed in 2017 as they were unable to make the business financially viable. The National Trust have entered into a 25-year lease agreement with Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council and have run the site since June 2019 in partnership with Barnsley MBC and Northern College.

This application relates to the overflow car park adjacent to the main visitor car park (see below plan).



The formation of the overspill car park was granted consent on 3rd April 2013 (Application Number: 2013/0078). Condition 4 of the consent states the following;

“The use of the application site as a car park hereby permitted shall be utilised as such for a maximum of 28 days in any calendar year.”

Between the National Trust opening the property in June 2019 and the start of the first lockdown in March 2020, Wentworth Castle Gardens welcomed

over 82,000 visitors, since reopening in June 2020 we have a further 67,000 visitors (this is an under-estimate as it does not include under 5s from June to September) and there has been an increase in need for more car parking spaces.

Our aspirations, with our partners, are to offer a wide range of opportunities for people to get involved in the gardens and to increase participation among audiences who might not have previously felt a heritage site was relevant to them. For example, we are already piloting a Community Partners Scheme with local groups and the gardens are one of the sites offered to schools for visits under the umbrella of Barnsley Museums.

Consequently, we are seeking permission to increase the amount of days that the overflow car park can be used in any calendar year to enable it to be used for a specific time-period from 1st March to 30th September. This proposal still limits the use of the car park but provides more flexibility to use the car park over the drier months when the property is also busier. As such, we are submitting a Section 73 planning application to vary condition 4 of planning permission 2013/0078 to state the following;

“The use of the application site as a car park hereby permitted shall only be utilised as such from 1st March to 30th September each calendar year.”

PROPOSAL

The current permission allows the use of the overflow car park on 28 days of the year. We are now seeking to vary the condition to allow the field to be used as an overflow car park between 1st March and 30th September each calendar year.

Since opening on June 8th 2019, Wentworth Castle Gardens has welcomed a significant number of visitors. During school holidays and bank holidays, the property saw an increase in visitor numbers. During August 2019, the property welcomed 19,337 visitors. During a sunny day on Sunday 19th January 2020 there were 812 visitors. This has shown that when the weather is good, people are keen to visit.

Wentworth Castle Gardens was open for only 7 months of 2019, using the overflow car park on 27 days in total. The property is now open all year round from January to December (364 days). There was a need during 2019 for more car park space on many other days during the summer. The property had to make difficult operational decisions not to open the overflow car park and in turn cause visitors some frustration due to lack of available space.

As the car park is the first point of call for 99% of visitors it creates a pinch point and during busy times a negative first impression. In terms of customer service, there has been a number of complaints from visitors regarding the lack of parking. This makes it increasingly difficult for members of the visitor experience team to carry out their role which is to help visitors engage, support, feel part of and enjoy what we do.

The Covid pandemic obviously had an impact on visitor numbers during 2020 and the property was closed between March and June. However, since the property has re-opened visitor numbers have been steadily increasing with many local people choosing the site as the place to take exercise with their family. This has meant that we have been even busier than normal over the winter with 20,000 visitors in the Oct-Dec period alone and many people have discovered the gardens who weren't previously aware of them. We anticipate that as more restrictions are lifted and the weather improves, visitor numbers will increase further and visitors will stay on site longer. The importance of access to local outdoor green space has become clearer than ever and we feel that the pressure on visitor facilities including car parking space will only increase further.

The aim is to grow visitor numbers over the next few years and in 2021 we are likely to exceed 100,000 based on recent visits, as more local people and national trust members make use of what the property offers. In order to grow visitor numbers and be successful at meeting our aims and ambition, giving our supporters more reason to return, we need to exceed visitor expectations and provide adequate facilities for them to enjoy. By increasing the number of days we can use the overflow car park and provide more flexibility, we can hopefully prevent visitor frustrations over parking and make the visitor experience better from the outset.

GREEN BELT

The overflow car park currently has consent to operate 28 days of the calendar year. We are not proposing to physically extend or alter the existing car park, only increase the period of operating days. The existing overflow car park is located adjacent to the main visitor car park and is an agricultural field subject to grazing. The overflow car park is largely surrounded by trees which aims to screen the car park. We do not consider that extending the period in which the car park can be used will have any detrimental impact on the openness of the Green Belt.

We are not seeking permanent use of the car park, just an increase in the time period in order to facilitate improved visitor enjoyment of this outdoor recreation site. Examples from the 2019 operating year, have shown that there were a number of issues with car parking on site, as well as creating some issues with people parking in Stainborough village causing access issues and general highway safety concerns. Therefore, it is hoped that by increasing the use of the overflow car park we will be able to improve visitor enjoyment and reduce potential impacts on local communities.

We consider that the proposal is consistent with paragraph 83 of the NPPF to support a prosperous rural economy. In particular, planning policies and decisions should enable *a) the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of businesses in rural areas (...)* and *c) sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments which respect the character of the countryside*.

The proposal is also in accordance with Policy E5 (Promoting Tourism and encouraging Cultural Provision) of the Barnsley Local Plan (adopted January 2019). This policy seeks to promote tourism and encourage the growth and

development of cultural provision. In accordance with this policy, the proposal seeks to promote the existing cultural provision and tourism offer and encourage the growth of the tourism business sector.

HERITAGE IMPACTS

Wentworth Castle Gardens is a Grade I Registered Park & Garden (RPG). However, we consider that a longer period of use of the overflow car park will have no greater impact on the RPG. The use is reversible and does not involve any new surfaces. The car park is also screened in an area which is already in use.

We therefore consider that the proposal is in accordance with Policy HE1 (The Historic Environment) of the Barnsley Local Plan (adopted January 2019). This policy seeks to positively encourage developments which will help in the management, conservation, understanding and enjoyment of Barnsley's historic environment. Wentworth Castle parkland is specifically referenced within this policy.

SUSTAINABLE TRAVEL

The site is accessible via train, cycle and bus. Dodworth railway station is 1.5 miles from Wentworth Castle Gardens, while Barnsley Interchange railway station is around 3 miles away. The Trans-Pennine trail is around ¼ mile from Wentworth Castle's Stainborough gateway. Bus services from Barnsley Interchange to Penistone, Stocksbridge and Denby Dale run along Lowe Lane. There is a bus stop for Wentworth Castle Gardens on Gilroyd Lane near the Strafford Arms pub, where the 23a, 24, 24a and 410 services stop.

This information is available on the National Trust website and the use of sustainable means of transport is actively promoted. However, given the rural location of the property, it is accepted that a large proportion of visitors will continue to arrive by car which is shown by the need to extend the time limit of the overflow car park.

CONCLUSION

This application seeks to vary condition 4 of planning permission 2013/0078 to alter the time period that the overflow car park can be used at Wentworth Castle Gardens from 28 days per year to being used between 1st March and 30th September each calendar year.

The proposals are part of the wider improvements to Wentworth Castle Gardens which is now operated by the National Trust as a visitor attraction. We consider that this application will seek to enhance the visitor experience and provide further opportunities for visitors to enjoy this outdoor recreation facility.