

Isle of Wight Gardens Trust – Comment on Uavend Masterplan for Norris Castle and Springhill Estates April 2018.

In its capacity as statutory consultee, on behalf of the Gardens Trust, The Isle of Wight Garden Trust plays a key conservation role in the protection and conservation of designated landscapes on the Isle of Wight. Registered Park and Gardens of Special Historic Interest are subject to a statutory designation and have the same weight in policy terms under the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) as scheduled monuments and listed buildings. In NPPF terms, they are 'designated heritage assets', with those registered at Grade I or Grade II* identified as being 'of the highest significance'.

In this role, the Isle of Wight Gardens Trust offers feedback to the LPA and developers on the initial proposals for Norris Castle and Springhill, which were presented at the public consultation on 29 March 2018. Our remit and the basis of our comments is specifically focused on the Grade I Registered Park and Garden of Norris Castle, and the locally listed Springhill Estate.

1. Significance of asset

As a starting point we would like to re-emphasise the importance of the landscape at both Norris and Springhill. These are outlined in turn (underlining has been added for additional emphasis)

Norris Castle

The description in the National Heritage List for England states that Norris Castle, a landscaped park and pleasure grounds laid out from c1799, is registered at Grade I for the following principal reasons

- Rarity: as an exemplar of a Regency marine villa estate;
- Architecture: as the contemporary landscaped setting for an architectural ensemble of outstanding significance, including a Gothic Revival castle, castellated model farm and lodge by one of England's most notable architects, James Wyatt;
- Authenticity: as a well-preserved, essentially single-phase, designed landscape;
- Degree of survival: the overall layout remains largely in its entirety and there have been few changes or alterations;
- Designer: Humphry Repton, one of England's greatest late C18th and early C19th landscape designers, is likely to have been involved in the design of the landscaped park;
- Walled garden: as one of the grandest examples of a late C18 castellated walled garden in England;
- Vistas and external views: for the manner in which the landscape appropriates the natural topography, and for the controlled views along the approaches, as well as the commanding view of the Castle, in its setting, from the sea;
- Historic interest: as a landscape laid out according to picturesque principles, which also encapsulates late C18 agricultural improvements during the Napoleonic Wars;
- Historic association: as an estate closely linked to the C19 royal family in which The Prince Regent, Queen Victoria, Kaiser Wilhelm and the King of the Netherlands visited;
- Group value: with the Grade I-listed house and model farm, Grade II-listed lodge, Pump House, Bathing House, sea wall (a 50m length), two cattle shelters and four stone-lined ponds, as well as the adjacent Grade II* registered park and Grade I-listed house at Osborne.

Springhill (locally listed):

- Situated in elevated position. Norris Castle to East. Views over Cowes Harbour and

Solent beyond. Significant views into the Springhill estate from West Cowes, particularly from The Parade and from the Royal Yacht Squadron

- Estate developed from 1794 with an area of parkland marked on early 20th century Ordnance Survey maps.
- The former parkland and surrounding fields are now pasture with some mature oaks. Woodland adjoining Solent shore was part of Springhill estate. Lawns to West and North of house are terraced above surrounding parkland.
- Individual trees in open ground. Clumps. Wooded area surrounding house.
- Site of long, narrow kitchen garden and orchard abutting Norris Castle, the east boundary of the kitchen garden being formed by the 2.5 high boundary wall of the Norris Castle estate.

2. Areas of support

- We support the developer's intention to sympathetically restore the parkland at Norris Castle and Springhill and wish to offer our support and expertise where relevant, to work with the developer and their consultants to realise this.
- We welcome the removal of secondary woodland regrowth to open up important vistas to and from the house.

3. Areas of concern

- The 'Masterplan' for the site should not be seen as an amalgamation of both the Springhill and Norris estates. Since at least 1794 these have always been in separate ownership and as a result have distinct landscape characteristics. Development proposals need to acknowledge this. The proposed new uses for the Norris and Springhill estates should not prevent the 'reading' of these estates as two separate historic landscapes.
- We are concerned by what appears to be a considerable overdevelopment of the parkland at Norris, given its national importance. The Masterplan presented by the developers at the public consultation of 29th March 2018 acknowledges that the amount of enabling development is must be "*the minimum necessary to secure the long-term future of the Norris Estate*", they go on to assert "*that the form of development proposed minimises the 'harm' to the historic value of the heritage assets*". Currently we believe the extent of enabling development shown in the Masterplan would lead to harm, outweighing the benefit, particularly in light of the fact that any harm would be irreversible and the historic parkland would be lost forever. Given the national importance of Norris, we would prefer to see its parkland protected, with a "minimum necessary" sensitive enabling development occurring within the adjacent Springhill Estate, given its lesser importance, but with sensitive landscaping to protect views into the Springhill landscape
- Norris Castle Farm, the bailiff's house, cottage and walled kitchen garden is listed at Grade I as a rare example of a late-C18 model farm in a Gothic Revival style; as a design by James Wyatt, one of England's most important late C18 and early C19 architects and for other reasons cited on the National Heritage List Entry. The incorporation of a walled garden within the design of the model farm is highly unusual. The model farm and walled kitchen garden at Norris Castle are an integral part of the designed landscape. We are therefore concerned that proposals for the considerable development of accommodation within the area of the model farm and of a spa within the walled garden may seriously compromise the great historic, architectural and design interest of the farm and garden. The justification for the 5 'sentinel' houses located in prominent sea-side locations as a precursor to reinstating the sea wall seems weak. The Isle of Wight Shoreline Management Plan shows this area as Policy Development Zone 2 and indicates 'No Active Intervention'. The proposal to redevelop the seawall is contrary to this policy. It is also unclear as to

how the proposed gabion basket defences would relate to the remaining elements of the historic seawall. The national listing for the Bathing House includes a 50 metre stretch of remaining seawall. We are concerned about the visual impact of that these large properties in prominent sea-side locations and a new gabion sea wall would have on the parkland setting of Norris Castle and the wooded shoreline landscape character.

4. Further comments

- We assume that the developer has undertaken a preliminary Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA). We would like to know which key viewpoints were selected for this assessment and how these have been influenced by stakeholder discussion. We would like to be able to suggest additional viewpoints for assessment if once we have seen the list of selected viewpoints we feel that any particularly significant viewpoints have been omitted. We would also like to see the inclusion of a consideration of visual impact with no tree leaf cover as there will be significant differences between winter and summer visibility. Finally, we would also like to see some assessment of night time views and the impact of light pollution from the proposed development in what is currently an area with little if any such impacts.
- As part of the planning application, we would wish to see a landscape management plan covering all areas of land within the developers' ownership (including woodland in the southeast corner of the Norris Estate which is not mentioned in the Masterplan).
- We wonder whether the developer would consider additional opportunities for public access to the Estate as part of their approach. This could include taking part in the Heritage Open Day events to allow guided walks through the Estate once a year and/or partnering with a local heritage group for similar opportunities.
- We would welcome the opportunity to revisit the site prior to the submission of the planning application and to contribute to discussions with the developers on further modifications to the Masterplan to overcome the concerns that we have listed above.