

## **Land off Oakhurst Rise, Charlton Kings – Cheltenham Plan Housing Allocation**

This rebuttal statement should be read in conjunction with the Heritage Statement prepared for the site by AHC Consultants (November 2017). It relates to a report prepared by ECUS Ltd for Cheltenham Borough Council (December 2017) for Local Plan Housing on a series of sites including that off Oakhurst Rise. The ECUS report also includes a Tabulated Historic Environment Appraisal, which is germane to the interpretation of the historic site at St Edward's Junior School, originally a Regency villa known as Woodlands, built in 1832, and subsequently renamed The Oaklands and, later, Ashley Manor. Any proposed development of the land off Oakhurst Rise, which is adjacent to St Edward's School on the west and to the north, must take account of the original pleasure grounds around the villa and seek to have the least harmful impact upon the listed asset, which is listed Grade II\*. It should be noted, however, that the parkland around the house is not registered.

The site in question is covered in Table 2 and Figures 2a and 2b of the ECUS report. The site is 1 kilometre north of the Cudnall Conservation Area, and does not fall, therefore, within a CA. It lies 1 kilometre south west of the scheduled ancient monument of Battledown Camp. The ECUS report records 121 listed buildings within 1 kilometre of the site, while, in fact, the only listed assets in close proximity and liable, therefore, to any degree of harm from a proposed housing development, are Charlton Manor (Grade II) to the east, and the 'Grade II\* Regency Block of St Edward's Junior School'. CBC has expressed concern about the possible impact upon Charlton Manor, which has already been addressed in the CgMs Built Heritage Statement (April 2017, 4.2.6, page 21) and will not be revisited here.

The built heritage appraisal in the ECUS report continues: *'The Site therefore may have historically contributed to the significance of the house. Now however this significance has been diminished, with the Site and the asset being functionally and physically separated. The Site still contributes to the significance of the asset through providing a large area of open space surrounding the asset, contributing to its sense of isolation and importance and through allowing for some views of the aesthetic value of the asset'*. As a consequence of this interpretation, the assessment concludes that *'There appears [appear] to be visual and historic links with the site and the II\* listed buildings which contributes [contribute] to its appreciation and [the] experience of its significance'*.

This interpretation is flawed and fails to take into account the particular style of landscape gardening prevalent in the Regency period and of which the pleasure grounds of St Edward's School are a prime example. This contemporary style, known as 'Ornamental Gardening', was created by the landscape gardener Humphry Repton and further developed in the 1820s and 1830s by John Buonarotti Papworth, who was an architect and landscape designer working in Cheltenham and who wrote a seminal book on landscape and garden design – *Hints on Ornamental Gardening* – which was published in 1823. His contribution, via the architect of The Oaklands, Charles Baker, is discussed in detail in Section 3 of the Heritage Statement.

It is clear from Baker's practice, and from an analysis of the early maps of The Oaklands, that the pleasure grounds were intended to conform closely to Repton and Papworth's prescribed notion of laying out grounds in close proximity to a parent villa. The tree-lined and shelter-belted drive from the south arrived at the turning circle and the highly artificial ornamental grounds then extended below the house in a narrow corridor to the east as far as the glasshouses and the flower garden. There would have been some contrived views through the southern belt of mature trees across the open fields to the south towards Leckhampton Hill, but at no point would views of the fields to the north of the house be encouraged, as they were not part of the designed landscape and would have undermined, by their utilitarian nature, the polite '*ornamental improvement*' (HS, 3.4). The presence of an icehouse in this area confirms this. These Regency ornamental grounds were intended to be intimate spaces, tree-sheltered and shrubbery-threaded; their views were essentially internal not external, and this is how they should be understood (HS, 3.5).

All the principal rooms of the villa command views of the grounds – the hall to the west; the drawing room to the south; the dining room to the east (HS, 2.7). There would have been no consciously planned views to the north, towards the development site, due to the rise in the terrain and the siting of the service areas and ancillary offices to the rear of the house. The fields beyond would always have been for agricultural use rather than for ornamental pleasure. There was a northern line of separation between the pleasure grounds and the open fields and this would have been defined by a shelterbelt of trees under-planted with evergreen shrubs. This horticultural barrier survives, in part, to the west of the house and is in need of replanting to screen the listed asset from the western area of the development site at that juncture. It would also be prudent to introduce similar planting on the southern boundary of the site where it connects with the Kindergarten.

It is concluded, therefore, that the majority of the site to the north of St Edward's School could be developed with housing without any harm to the listed asset and that, furthermore, it would cause no harm to an area that has always been open fields and not part of the designed landscape around the house. The '*large open space surrounding the asset*' noted above never contributed to the villa's '*sense of isolation and importance*'; it was merely an area of agricultural land that was consciously screened from the ornamental grounds rather than acting as a contributing part of them. It should also be noted, as expounded in the Heritage Statement, that the close environs of the house have already been severely compromised by the introduction of modern buildings of little or no architectural merit (HS, Section 4 – Heritage Impact Assessment). The western sector of the site is more sensitive, being closer to the entrance front of the listed villa and its approach drive, and should be screened with appropriate planting of deciduous and evergreen trees and an under-storey of historically appropriate shrubs to re-instate the sense of shadowy enclosure that would have characterised the original grounds.