

**Dr. Kate Feluś**  
**Historic Landscapes**  
**Orchard House, Fittleworth, RH20 1JE**

6th August 2024

Re: Planning Application: PL/2024/00373 and Listed Building Consent PL/2024/00720

Dear Mrs Jones,

On the recommendation of the Georgian Group I have been approached by the Salisbury Cathedral Close Preservation Society to advise them on the evolution and significance of the garden of Leaden Hall, against the background of concern about the current plans for Leaden Hall submitted in the above applications. The Salisbury Cathedral Close Preservation Society (founded over 30 years ago, in 1991) ‘exists to protect buildings and environment alike through education and activism, not just for today, but for future generations’. The mission of the SCCPS is to support ‘Excellence in Heritage Estate Management’ for this special place with its exceptional richness of environment and heritage assets.

Leaden Hall and its garden forms part of an exceptional site – the Cathedral Close – which is remarkably rich in listed buildings. The garden itself forms the essential setting of the Grade I Listed Leaden Hall, originally one of the series of canons’ houses built as part of the suite of buildings associated with the Cathedral – significantly, at the time of the building of the Cathedral. (Grade I buildings make up the top 2.5% of listed buildings in the country). The house and garden were subject to improvements in around 1720 and then again at the very end of the 18th century. Despite inevitable change over eight centuries, the site has a great legibility and aspects of various phases of its history are immediately legible to anyone who cares to look for them: the Regency facade and forecourt, the stub of the medieval wing of the house and reuse of medieval architectural fragments in later features, including in the wall to the south-east of the house, and the superb trees, dating from the end of the 18th century – including landmark trees which can be seen in the landscape for a considerable distance around.

I have carried out a preliminary review of the site and, in my opinion, there is sufficient interest and evidence to submit an application to Historic England requesting the garden be reviewed for inclusion on the *Register of Parks and Gardens of Historic Interest*. Despite

modern interventions the site meets numerous criteria as laid out in Historic England's guidance documents for the *Register*. I therefore request that Wiltshire Council pause consideration of the active planning application while this process is underway – and the national significance of the site is investigated and assessed by Historic England.

In the first part of this letter I give a some more detail on my initial findings with regard to the potential for the garden to be registered. In the second part I make some observations on the documentation and proposals submitted for this planning application – with specific regard to the historic garden of Leaden Hall.

### Historic Significance of the garden at Leaden Hall as candidate for the Register

It is my opinion that the garden of Leaden Hall is indeed worthy of consideration for inclusion on Historic England's *Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest* for a variety of reasons. It meets numerous criteria as set out in Historic England's guidance documents. Accordingly a dossier of research and historic sources is now being prepared to accompany an application to Historic England asking that they review the site for the *Register*.

Although, clearly, the garden at Leaden Hall has undergone a number of changes during the later 20th and early 21st century, significant elements are still extant. Historic England's own guidance documents on criteria for the Register state that 'if a site is in poor condition, it will nevertheless remain a candidate for designation where its overall design or layout remains sufficiently intact.'

The garden of Leaden Hall, its history and survival, is explained in clear detail by Tim Tatton-Brown in his article of 2015, published in *The Sarum Chronicle*. As former consultant archaeologist for Salisbury Cathedral he has a detailed and long-standing knowledge of the site and was involved in works to the building and garden between 1990 and 2011. His article makes clear the degree of survival of a significant number of historic trees and shrubs, which form the structure of the planting of the garden and, despite modern interventions, render it legible still as, essentially, a high status, middle-class, town garden of the late 18th century – with the added interest of its association with the Cathedral.

This baseline interest is augmented by the great cultural importance of the site because of the connection with the artist John Constable. Tatton-Brown points out that the

garden in 2015 compared closely with the layout as plotted on the large scale Ordnance Survey map published in 1880 (1:500) – which itself plots a distribution of features that correlate with those seen in Constable’s views and also the copy of the painting of *Salisbury Cathedral and Leaden Hall from the River Avon* by his assistant, John Dunthorne. This latter is a particularly useful piece of evidence, as it shows more detail. Thus, the paintings of this great artist both confer a cultural significance on the garden – and also increase its significance and potential for inclusion in the *Register* as they add to the rich vein of evidence for the history of the garden, helping to render it very well-documented.

It is clear that a significant number of important historic trees still survive – a particularly significant number given the relatively modest scale of the site. These include an impressive London plane in the forecourt. This is a tree which relates to both the setting of Leaden Hall and also the wider Cathedral Close. Behind the house an important grouping of a copper beech and another plane can be seen. These – as species individually and as a specific group – are characteristic of a later 18th or early 19th century date. Both species are also to be seen elsewhere in the Cathedral precinct including in other domestic gardens of the Close. Aerial photographs from the 1940s prove that there was (typically) a third tree in this group, possibly an elm (hence it not surviving). A group of such divergent colour foliage is typical of the late 18th century and would have been known as ‘a cheerful clump’. The account of the Cathedral and Cathedral Close by Dodsworth, published in 1814, makes references to ‘picturesque groups of trees’ to the south-west of the cathedral: ‘the prospects towards the south-west are marked by similar features; but they acquire additional beauty from picturesque groups of trees, of which the foliage is contrasted with the mellow hue of the stone.’

The association with John Constable is not the only historic and cultural association of importance to the site. The connection with George IV, who visited when he was Prince Regent, has left a lasting legacy in the form of the layout of the carriage sweep to the east side of the house. It was laid out in this form, specifically for the arrival of the Prince. This sweep has remained the same for 200 years and is still legible today.

### Comments on the Proposals:

While my principal task is to compile an application to Historic England to review the site for the *Register*, I offer some additional observations on the current planning application for Leaden Hall with reference to the historic garden.

Overall there is a crude level of detail and planning in the associated proposed landscape works, symptomatic of a lack of analysis of the degree of survival and significance. First and foremost I note that the documentation submitted with this application offers no analysis of the garden (including the walled garden proposed as the site of the new archive building) as a historic designed landscape in its own right. Given the fact that the garden forms the setting to the Grade I listed house, that it is clearly still garden in character and that there are significant historic trees that are visible from the Cathedral Close and across the water meadows on the far side of the Avon, I find this lack of appreciation and understanding incomprehensible – regardless of the currently undesignated status of the garden.

The garden is completely omitted from discussion by the Heritage Statement. In the *Design and Access Statement* (December 2023) it is discussed in less than 500 words in the ‘Landscape and Ecology’ section (p. 58). The relevant passage is almost entirely dedicated to a description of one single historic map, the 1880 Ordnance Survey (1:500) town map. It does however note: ‘the current layout on site, despite the intervening use as a school with its associated new classroom and hall buildings constructed in the gardens, still shows a remarkable similarity overall to the detailed 1880 layout.’

One single historic map and less than 500 words of text in the Design and Access Statement – and no analysis whatsoever in the Heritage Statement – is not a sufficient level of analysis of the clearly defined, immediate setting of a Grade I building. Nor is it a sufficient level of analysis of what is essentially a relatively well-preserved example of a late 18th / early 19th century town garden of the professional class. And that is without the immense cultural importance of the garden, due to the association with John Constable. Without such an analysis any proposals for its future, including design and potential use, cannot have been thought through in a manner commensurate to the significance of the site. This is evident in, for example, the proposals to change the forecourt, the planned landscaping around Stephenson Hall and the planting suggested for the river bank.

With regard to both the immediate setting of Leaden Hall, the wider Cathedral Close and the surrounding landscape, including the water meadows on the other side of the Avon, the lack of a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment for the intervention of the archive building is likewise surprising. The visual receptors are myriad and include designed vistas across and around the open space of the Cathedral Close, the view points of Constable’s paintings and sketches, and views from current public rights of

way, unofficial footpaths and surrounding roads. The landscape surrounding Salisbury Cathedral Close is remarkably sensitive visually, because the Cathedral spire draws one's eye – from almost everywhere. Significantly I note that in her letter of 26 July 2023 (over a year ago now), Jacqueline Smith of Historic England made precisely this point, stating the need for a 'visual impact assessment from inside and outside the site', continuing: 'this information should provide verified views with an appropriately scaled model of the archive building'. I do not understand why this exercise has therefore not been carried out.

The paper dealing with Constable's views that was recently submitted as part of the application (8<sup>th</sup> July 2024) includes a photograph from the window looking towards the garden of the South Canonry, as a parallel to Constable's own view from the library window showing the walled kitchen garden. This photograph, intended to show the impact on this view of the archive building, is disingenuous, as it only marks up the outline of the proposed building and, crucially, does not fill in the space that the volume of the block will, in reality, fill – thus rendering this historic view impossible in the future. Though the construction of West Walk House here is regrettable, it does not render this view illegible. The walled garden can still be seen and clearly recognised, as can the trees in the garden of the South Canonry and the atmosphere of the view is akin to that shown by Constable. I note that in their submission of 29<sup>th</sup> February 2024 Historic England, commenting on the previous proposals for an archive building, stated that the then-proposed building 'could be visually intrusive in such a highly sensitive and renowned historic context.'

The documentation accompanying this planning application appears not to include any discussion of the essentially intact walled kitchen garden – nor assessment of its rarity in terms of similar survivals elsewhere and consequent importance. Exactly how rare it is as a walled kitchen garden of a high status, middle-class, town garden should be assessed before the level of loss through the intervention of a new building here is calculated. A new archive building is far less reversible an intervention than the present tennis courts and swimming pool, which could be easily removed and the space restored as a productive garden. I note too that the surviving fruit trees here seem to have been condemned with no attempt to understand whether they have historic significance or not – for example, what varieties are they?.

Finally, I am extremely concerned about the root protection proposed for the significant trees. Given the huge size and age of the plane tree in the forecourt of Leaden Hall, it is possible that the roots have been suppressed on the Marsh Close side by the tarmac of

the road and therefore extend further towards the house itself. The construction of the archive building may impact this tree both as a result of construction traffic and because it is possible a new structure here would alter the drainage of the site. The importance of this tree as a piece of living archaeology cannot be overstated.

### Summary and Conclusion

The garden at Leaden Hall has not been fully considered in the proposals submitted under this planning application. Despite its condition after years of disuse it is a remarkable survival and good example of a garden of its date, scale and social status. Added to that it has rich cultural associations with John Constable, whose paintings also add to the documentation of the garden. In the words of Tim Tatton-Brown in the garden of Leaden Hall we are ‘exceptionally fortunate to have... a rare, if not unique, opportunity to see the relationship between the artist and his subject’.

This cultural and historic richness warrants far deeper thought and consideration when planning the future of this site – and justifies an application to Historic England to review it for designation. To reiterate my request above, I ask Wiltshire Council to postpone any decision on this application until a thorough assessment of the historic designed landscape can be carried out.

Yours sincerely,

Kate Feluś.

Cc Andrew Minting  
Sven Hocking  
Alessandra Perrone