

HELMINGHAM HALL  
Suffolk  
Proposed New Car Park

Heritage, Design & Access Statement  
To accompany a Planning Application and Application for  
Listed Building Consent  
July 2021

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## Contents

Introduction	3
Economic and Social Context	4
Creating a longer term Masterplan	5-6
Designations	7
Historic Evolution of the Park and Landscape	8-10
Visitor Infrastructure: Context and Needs	11
Shop, Visitor Reception, Lavatories and Catering	12
Proposed Car Park - location	13
Proposed Car Park - detailed commentary	14
Proposed Car Park site - landscape views, impact and planting	15-17
Proposed Planting and Fencing	18
Access	19
Ecology	20
Economic Benefits & Tourism	21
Pre-application Advice	22-23
Conclusion	24

### Appendices: Pre-application documents discussed with Historic England

Appendix A: Pre-application Submission to Historic England, April 2021

Appendix 1: Principal Designations and Listings

Appendix 2: Photographic Commentary, April 2021

Appendix 3: Preliminary drawings and computer modelled sketches, April 2021

## Introduction

Helmingham Hall needs little introduction in Suffolk; it is a handsome and imposing moated house, with fine gardens and a deer park. Privately owned and managed by the Tollemache family, it has an authenticity which has been lost by many substantial country houses in more corporate ownership (including those looked after by conservation charities).

The house, gardens and park are listed (Grade I), along with a number of monuments and statues. The stables are separately listed (Grade II).

The works described in this statement have been prompted by an inter-generational handover of stewardship; Edward and Sophie Tollemache moved into Helmingham three years ago with their young family, taking up the reins from Edward's parents. Inevitably this changeover has prompted a re-thinking of what works well and what doesn't, and how life might be improved at Helmingham for those who live there, work there and visit. The intention is very much that Helmingham will remain as at present:

- a family home (three families live on site, including in 2 flats in the Hall)
- a workplace and business (there is a core team of 20 on the estate including 4 garden volunteers)
- a venue for events and visitors: garden visits are well established for 6 months of the year, and there is a regular succession of outdoor events, weddings and private functions over the whole year.

In all three areas above there is room for improvement, and each one impacts the others.

Improving car parking arrangements is the most pressing need for Helmingham and is the subject of this statement and the accompanying drawings. The planning department of Mid Suffolk DC has not to date been involved in discussions in relation to this proposal as Historic England have taken a lead in providing comment. However Mid Suffolk Council is aware of the proposal and has provided grant funding to assist with the car park, so it is hoped that other departments and officers of the council will be supportive.

Potential future changes are being considered which will affect the outbuilding group (the former coach house/ stables and buildings in the vicinity) and the kitchen area of the house. These potential changes are outside the scope of this application but mentioned as they have been included in initial pre-application discussions with Historic England.

Historic England's feedback on initial proposals is discussed later in this document.



*Helmingham Hall - the South-West Elevation*

## Economic and Social Context

The Helmingham Estate is a business combining farming, land management, and public visits and events. The Hall is also a family home, with the house and two independent flats (both occupied by staff working on the estate).

Helmingham's gardens are much loved by the team of gardeners who care for them (paid staff and volunteers) and by the many visitors and tourists who come to see them. Helmingham is one of the few 'great houses' in Suffolk which welcomes visitors, and it is an area of the country where National Trust presence is limited compared to other parts of England. Helmingham is therefore particularly important as an inland 'heritage day out' for visitors to Suffolk to supplement English Heritage's properties, other less well known sites and the appeal of Ipswich, the market towns and the Suffolk coast. Along with the garden visits, the footpaths in the park are also much walked by visitors and locals.

A changing calendar of events draws more visitors to Helmingham, and these have in recent years increased to include outdoor cinema and winter garden lighting, which have proved very popular, and play an important commercial role in providing income to sustain conservation work in the house, park and gardens.

It is hoped that over time the pattern of visitor events might shift so that the peaks and troughs can be better spread across the year; this will assist the operational side of the business and provide more stable employment and resourcing. It will not necessarily lead to more visitors (or traffic) over the course of the year, but would lead to visitors spending more time while at Helmingham, and mean that during the winter months it is still a place to visit even when there is not a specific event such as winter garden lights.



*Helmingham Hall - The annual festival of classic cars is the largest event in Helmingham's calendar*

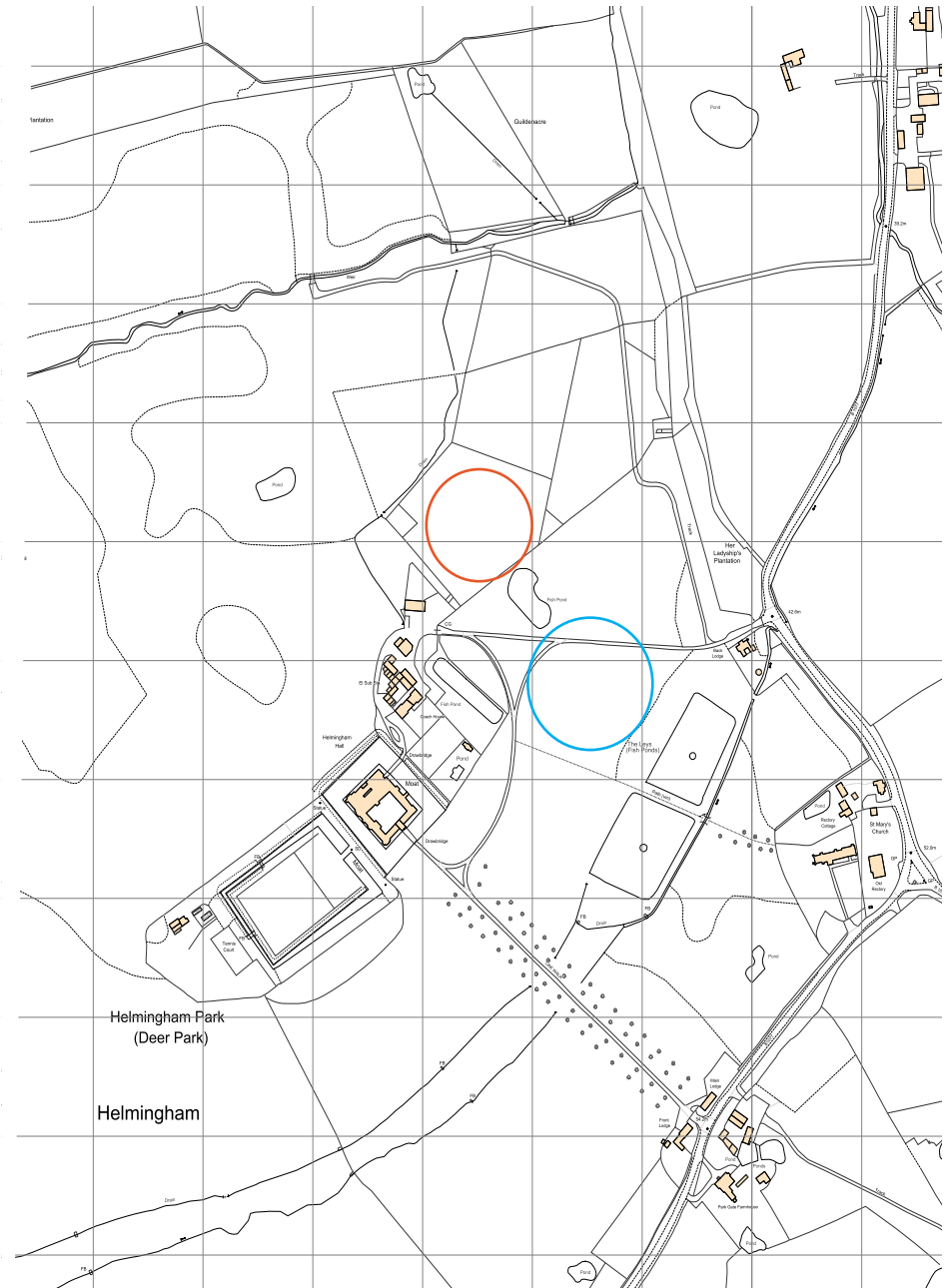
## Creating a longer term Masterplan

The proposals form one of three elements of potential change which are being considered holistically as part of a longer term masterplan for improvements. The three elements are described in our Pre-application Statement (April 2021) which was submitted to Historic England. The April 2021 Pre-application Statement is appended to this document as background information and context.

This document provides context and justification for proposed changes in parking, with the intention to provide more discreet, more usable and more accessible car parking, and to lessen the impact of cars and coaches in important historic landscape views.

The proposals here submitted have developed following pre-application discussions with Historic England in June 2021, and following ecological and arboricultural assessments. Reports on the latter are submitted separately. Historic England's feedback was positive and matters of detail on what further information was needed have been addressed in the application documents.

Historic research into the buildings has been commissioned and is continuing. Given the complexity and importance of Helmingham's history there is more work to do on this - and it has been hampered by the closure of record offices and the accessibility of archives due to Covid 19. Initial findings are summarised in this report but as no changes to any buildings are covered in this application, sufficient information is being included in this document to allow any potential heritage impacts to be understood where relevant to this application.



*Helmingham: the Hall and Park, with the blue circle showing existing normal parking and red circle illustrating the proposed car park site*





Helmingham Hall and Park – the main building group and back drive with preliminary car park overlaid (as discussed with Historic England, June 2021).

## Designations

The principal designations are covered in the appendices with the listing descriptions. In addition there are various individually listed pieces of garden statuary which are not included in the appendix as not material to anything included in this application or the pre-application proposals.

In summary the main house, gardens and park are listed Grade 1, and the stables/Coach house is listed Grade 2. Other buildings regardless of merit or age are assumed to be curtilage listed structures, although it is probably uncontroversial to suggest that demolition of some modern farm buildings might be to the benefit of the historic landscape and the setting of the listed buildings. This will be material to future applications but is not of relevance here.

Despite its apparently unified and timeless appearance, the house, gardens and park at Helmingham are much altered; the Tudor house replaced an earlier house. This in turn was heavily remodelled by John Nash and Anthony Salvin in the 19th Century. The stables area is less well documented but with one small possible exception, the buildings here are from the 1800s or later, with a large portion of the buildings being 20th century in date.

It is not proposed here to re-present the information in the listing descriptions which are well researched and comprehensive. However images of maps and historic views are included to usefully supplement the historic narrative.

The designation most relevant to this application is List Entry 1000270 (Helmingham Hall Park and Garden – listed Grade 1) of which some additional historic background is useful to supplement the listing description, and so is included below.



*Helmingham Hall – the Salvin reworking of the South-West front*



## Historic Evolution of the Park and Landscape

The deer park and house date from 1510 although there was an earlier house on the site and the moated garden enclosure is thought to relate to the earlier house (Creke Hall). The gardens of today are in large part the work of Xa, Lady Tollemache, who is a garden designer well known for her work in addition to that carried out at Helmingham. Lady Tollemache lived and worked at Helmingham for over 40 years and only recently moved out of the main house.

The evolution of the park is well documented in an academic study by Stephen Podd which was published in 2009 in the proceedings of the Suffolk Institute. Earlier work cited there including by Professor Tom Williamson is also helpful in understanding the changes in the landscape over the last 500 years. The summary below is based principally on Podd's research and assessment.

The oldest part of park at Helmingham may have existed as a small park of 40-50 acres detached from the Hall and lying to the west of the house, whereas the park of today covers 400 acres. The 'Old Park' appears 16th century in origin, and subsequent growth has been a stop-start process of enlargement and contraction (emparkment and disparking) which seems partly led by fashion and partly by economic circumstances. The Old Park to the west of the house was enlarged in 1631. 'A new park' was created also in 1631, principally south and south-west of the hall, and this new park was further enlarged in 1648 to encompass the area of land in which the new car park is proposed. In 1647 the area of land north of the current stables was rented out to John Mayhiew for £35 per year including the 'dairy at the Hall, the Conyfergrounds, the woodyard, stable and milking yard, the grounds on both sides of the long wall and the great pasture called Hoxon Bottom' (from Helmingham archive cited Podd. 2009, p45). The buildings referred to here are assumed broadly to relate to the site of the current stable yard and the fields as then existing occupying land to the north and east of this group. These buildings were taken down in 1759 along with a number of cottages and other buildings which were within what is now park. (Podd 2009). Podd surmises that the ancient pollards in the new park probably predate its creation and were part of an earlier landscape of woodpasture and enclosed tree-studded pastures – and that would certainly seem to apply to the older veteran oaks in proximity to the proposed car park site.



Richard Tallemach map of 1729, showing the New Park, with the Old Park to the west.



Slight ground disturbance is evident to the northeast of the proposed car park site which is assumed to be a former hedgerow or ditch line from Mayhew's farm mentioned previously. This line has been respected in the proposed car park layout, with the parking area set to the south-west of it, following its alignment.

The front drive and its avenue were thought formed in 1680 and well established by 1730 (shown in a view thought to be by Edmund Prideaux) and the two fish ponds known as the Leys (near the church) were also formed by then, and appear in that view. They also appear in Hodskinson's map of 1783, although in Richard Tallemach's map of 1729 only one appears. In the Prideaux view of 1730 the older farm building group is still visible, but these buildings do not appear on Hodskinson's map which show a park similar in size to the current area, reflecting further expansion in the 1760s.

18th century fashion led to the sweeping away of many geometric and formal 17th century avenues and fishponds in favour of a more naturalistic approach championed by Capability Brown, but despite the planting of parkland clumps west and north-west of the hall (shown on Isaac Johnson's map of 1810), these formal landscape elements survived. Podd notes that at Helmingham "the ideals of the landscape park were shunned" – with a more practical approach and purpose of supplying meat (rabbit and venison), timber and hay. The park held "horned cattle and black swine" in 1768 – and one can imagine that the keeping of pigs in the claylands would not have led to such a tidy verdure or sward as in the present day.

The north west side of the park was reduced in the 1970s and 80s and areas of arable farming increased, but these areas have recently been returned to park.

The area proposed for the new car park was taken out of the park in the 1980s, fenced and used as paddock (for horses). It is bounded on its northern edge by a gully/ditch, and on its eastern side by disturbed ground which may have been a farm hedgerow prior to the formation of the new park. On its western edge runs a public footpath route which runs to the Debenham bridge – this bridge (known as Constable's bridge) was described as new in 1815. Constable's view of the Dell is of an oak near this bridge, but pre-dating its construction. This bridge and the obelisk at the Mount are the only notable formal features in the park to the north and west of the hall.



*Eighteenth Century view, from the Church towards the Hall and farm buildings*



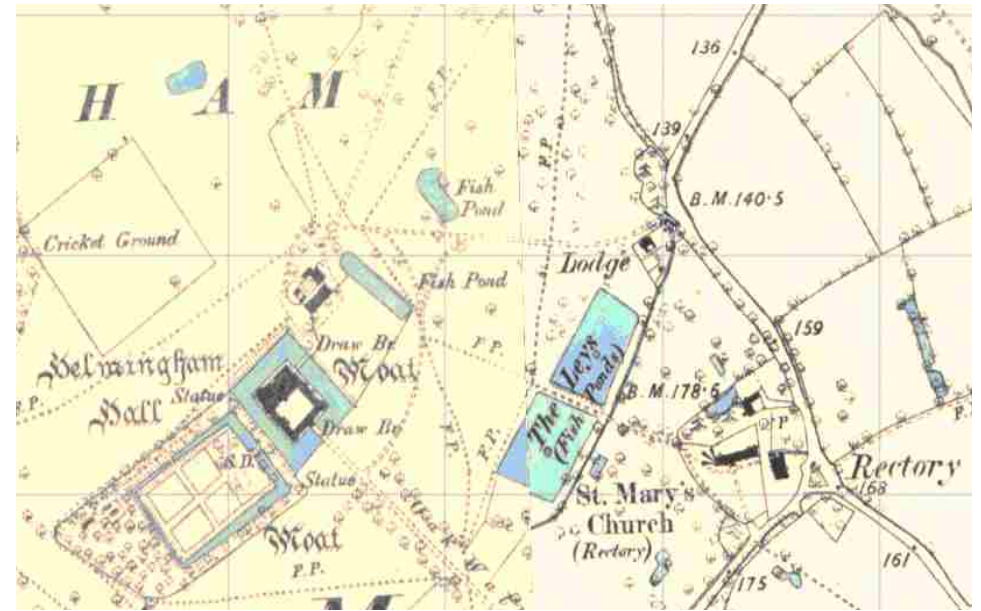
*Helmingham: Isaac Johnson's map of 1803 (misattributed to Isaac Ware in our pre-application documents)*

In the early 19th century Helmingham also included some pleasure grounds, summerhouses and a bowling green, the locations of which have not been identified with certainty; however, Podd suggests they may have been south of the park beyond the road.

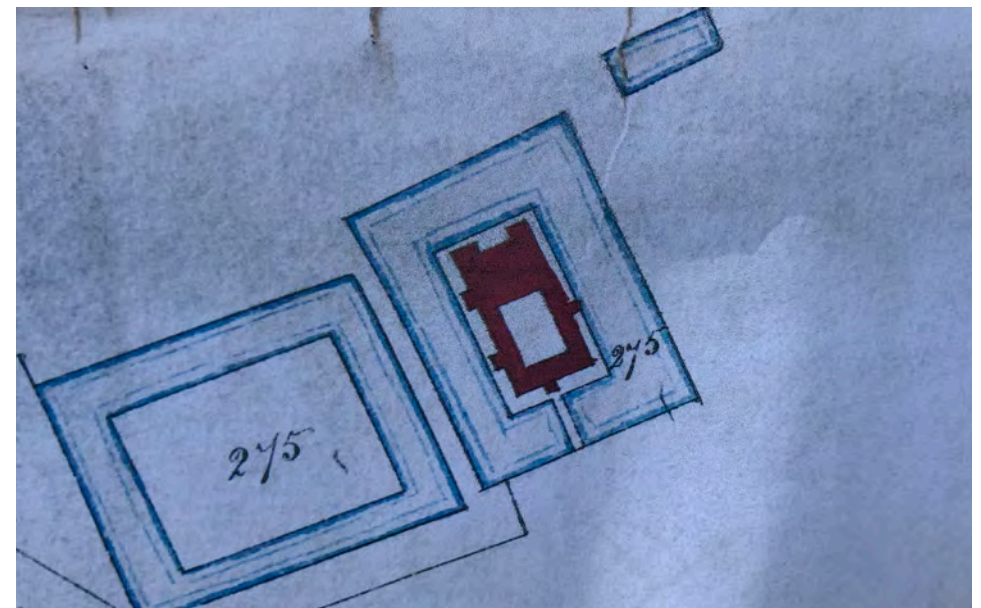
First edition Ordnance Survey maps show a number of tracks running through the area of the proposed car park towards the stable yard and outbuildings, with convergence at this building group; this may have been a principal entry point to the Hall for those living to the north and either working here or delivering goods and produce - and so it feels appropriate to be consolidating this entry point with the new car park and arrival point.



1883 First Edition Ordnance survey: detail of proposed car park area showing the convergence of former tracks leading towards the stable buildings



Helmingham Hall and Park: excerpt of 1883 Ordnance Survey Map



Helmingham: the 1840 Tithe Map which strangely does not show the current stables (assumed built 1801) but shows a water body in its place. This may be an error.



## Visitor Infrastructure: Context and Needs

Helmingham's visitor infrastructure needs the following improvements

### Parking

At present visitors park on the grass in the park in the area east of the Hall. In summer visitors are naturally drawn to park in the shade of the oaks, which is likely to damage the rootplates. In winter cars become stuck and so winter events rely on staff and machinery to push or tow stuck cars – and then to repair damage to rutted grass afterwards. There is no accessible car parking and the visitor entrance is some distance from the current parking area for visitors. Providing a year round accessible car parking solution is essential for the smooth running of events and visits, and will also offer landscape enhancements in terms of better protecting trees and reducing the impact of cars in important views.

The proposed location has been agreed with Historic England as the most suitable place for a car park, removing vehicles from the front park and removing the risks to established oak trees which occur from summer parking under the canopies.

### Arrival

At present visitors are directed up to the stable and outbuilding area from the informal parking in the front park. Having negotiated a cattle grid (and side gate) a visitor is presented with shabby farm buildings, a mess of hardcore, concrete and concrete block paving, and a sharp left hand turn then presents an uninviting arrival at a shop converted from an outbuilding. The route in is awkward, unintuitive and heavily reliant on intrusive signage. This does not reflect the family's aspiration which is that all visitors should feel welcome as they arrive, and that the arrival experience should be one of pleasure and indeed excitement.



*The back drive showing the scars of winter parking problems and potential damage to rootplates (winter).*



*The current visitor entrance (winter).*



## Shop, Visitor Reception, Lavatories and Catering

The shop combines ticketing and a visitor reception. It is a tight space converted from a workshop/stable – uninviting to enter and awkward to negotiate, especially for those reliant on wheelchairs or coping with pushchairs. It feels very tired and needs refreshing. The shop is possibly not in the best location and so the use of this whole building group is being reconsidered holistically along with parking and visitor flow.

Initial ideas for improvement have been discussed with Historic England and historic research into the building group is being undertaken prior to progressing design work. It has been agreed that the site is a good one for visitor facilities and that the proposed car park location is the best available option to support it.

After historic research into the building group has been further progressed, design proposals will be developed for a combined pre-application submission to Historic England and Mid Suffolk DC. A planning/LBC application is expected to follow that.



*The shop – exterior view on arrival. The shop and ticket sales are accessed via the grey door*

## Proposed Car Park Location

Given the size of the park and gardens, off-site parking would not be practical for most visitors.

We have considered whether an alternative arrival point and orientation hub might work, but the area of the current stables/outbuildings is the least sensitive area of the site and indeed the area most capable of being improved. If current arrangements were improved, this building group works well as a stepping stone to the house, park and gardens.

There is no perfect (i.e. completely invisible) location for a car park, but the proposed site is practical, can be well screened by additional planting, has no impact on important or veteran oaks, and is in an area recently used as paddock (i.e. already partly taken out of parkland use). The location will be far less intrusive and allow for a much better organised approach to parking than the current arrangements in the front park.

The new car park would be easily reached from the existing back drive, with only minimal extra carriageway, making good use of the existing drive and an existing track to the east. It would be well placed for visitor arrivals and more discreet than current arrangements in terms of the most important views from the Old Park, the Hall and the gardens. New planting would be introduced to principles agreed with Historic England – not aiming to create a linear block or enclosure, but to screen and filter views with a combination of mixed native species of different heights – and re-establishing a slightly more hedged and enclosed character akin to what would have been expected in the time when Mayhew's farm occupied the area, until the mid eighteenth century expansion of the park.



*Current parking arrangements in the front park (summer)*



*Current parking under oaks is likely damaging rootplates but difficult to prevent due to the lack of a car park*







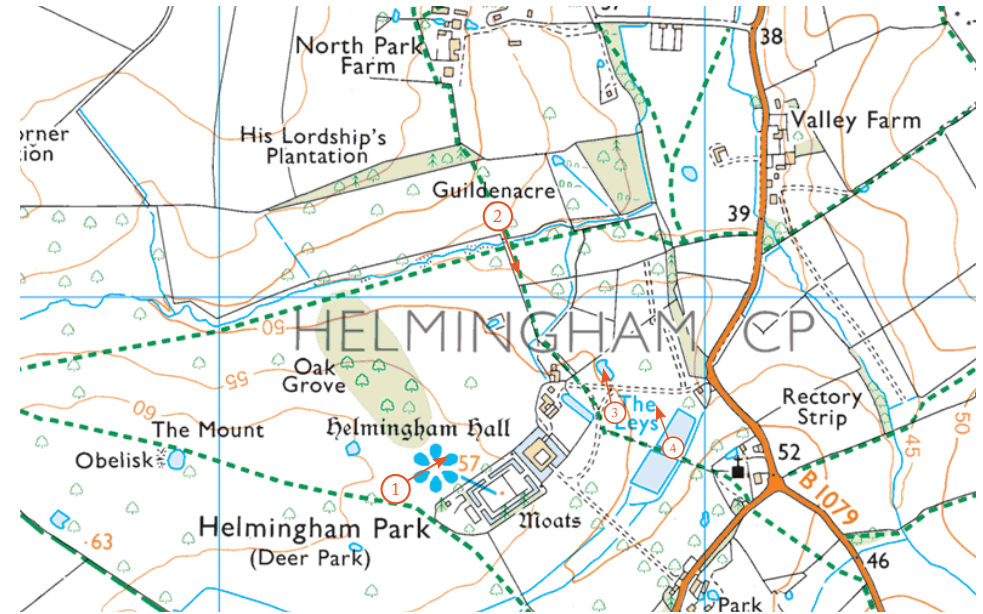
### Proposed Car Park site – landscape views, impact and planting

The proposed car park location is largely screened or filtered by existing trees in views from the front park and the church. In views from the Hall and gardens it is screened by the stables, existing outbuilding group and an oak and outgrown yew hedge on the western side of the stable group and outbuildings. The south-west corner of the car park site would be just visible from the western edge of the orchard (west of the Hall) but this corner is proposed to have planting around it to reduce any impacts.

Longer range views of the site will be seen from the Debenham path which runs from the north on the descent from North Park Farm and crosses the brick and flint bridge at 'The Dell'. There will also be a view if looking north-east from the footpath which crosses the Old Park running from B1077 to Paris Farm. However, proposed planting will substantially screen and filter views of cars from both locations – and it should be noted that cars are already visible in the landscape from both locations due to current visitor and staff parking arrangements. Once the car park is formed, existing parking arrangements can be revised and some decluttering of vehicles carried out – as the new car park will allow staff cars which are currently on the south-west side of the stable yard to be grouped in the new car park where they will be better screened from open landscape views.

The Debenham footpath which runs to the church would run alongside the proposed car park and therefore have a close but partly screened view of new parking arrangements. However, currently this footpath runs alongside the existing car parking in the front park, so those walking this route will be alongside cars as they are at present, albeit in a slightly adjusted location. The experience of walking the footpath from Helmingham Church will be greatly improved as currently cars greatly impact views of the setting of the Hall.

The footpath itself is proposed to be left as grass as at present, with all parking and adjacent planting to the north-east of the footpath.



*Ordnance Survey map - showing footpaths and viewpoints illustrated on following pages*



*View from within the principal bedroom at the west corner of the Hall: the existing buildings and trees would prevent any view of cars from within the Grade 1 building – whereas currently some cars are visible*





*View 1 – from the Pettaugh footpath at the western edge of the gardens, looking towards the proposed car park site. Some cars would be just visible to the left of the grey roof without any mitigation planting. The cars visible near the stables would be relocated to the new car park.*



*View 2 – from the footpath coming south from North Park farm, looking towards the new car park site. Existing trees will have a significant screening effect, to be supplemented by lower planting.*

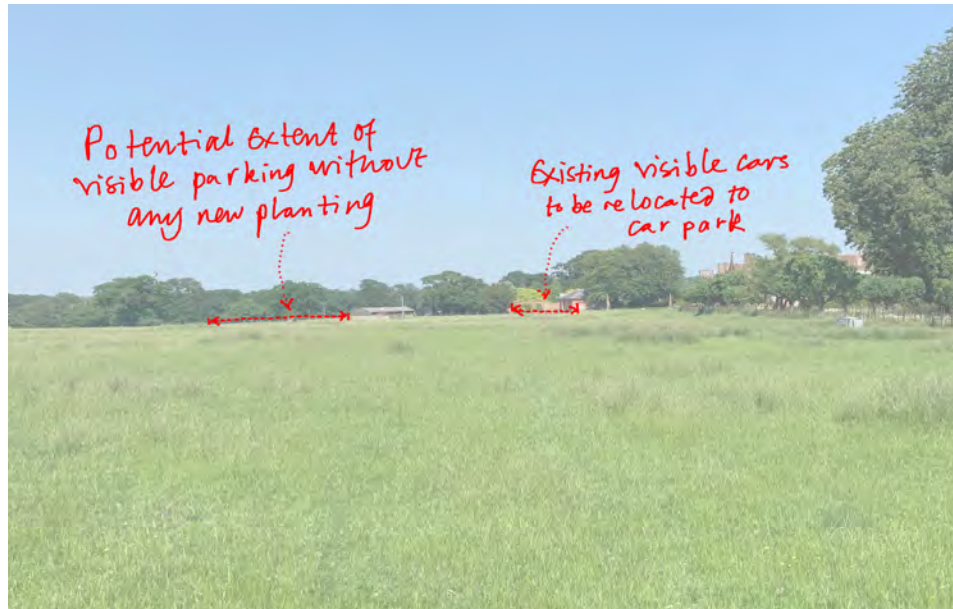


*View 3 – near the entry/exit of the new car park looking towards the new car park site. Cars seen here are current staff cars which would be accommodated in the new car park.*

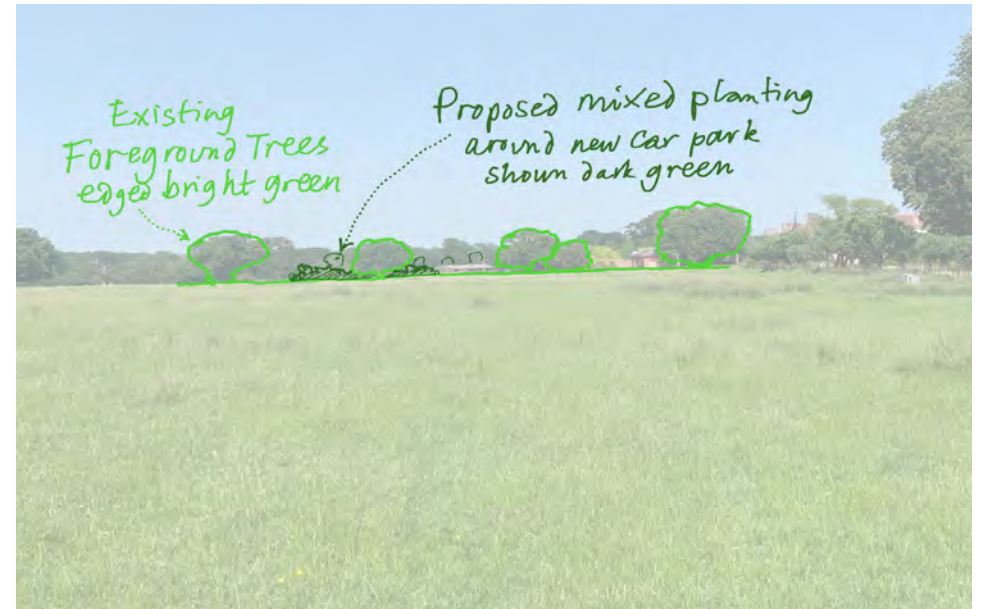


*View 4 – towards the new car park from the Leys (near the Church). Note the current cars parked here would no longer be in the front park but more closely spaced and further away, so better screened. 2-3m high planting will be more effective at concealing cars than open canopy oaks.*





*View 1 - detail (zoomed in) showing potential extent of visible car park without tree planting*



*View 1 - as to the left hand sideshowing approximate impact of mitigation planting*



*View 1 showing location of potentially visible car parking*



*The proposed car park location - open paddock*



## Proposed Planting and Fencing

Planting in between rows and around the perimeter is to be in mixed native species, planted naturalistically and informally, and taking a cue from the loosely planted edges at the southern end of the gardens. Here, where the gardens meet the park there are remnants of orchard tree, thorn, rose, hazel and elder which loosely overhang park fencing and are intermingled with taller trees of which oak is the dominant larger canopy species. The intention is to follow this character and keep the majority of the planting lowish (3m maximum) but allow oaks to rise above – so that the low level plants screen and filter views of cars, but do not break up any longer landscape views across the car park site. Oaks are also to be planted close to the stumps of several former oaks in the vicinity of the proposed car park.

Young sapling oaks are being reared using Helmingham acorns as seedstock for a next generation of trees in the park, and will be used as the source of new oaks shown on proposals, and for new planting elsewhere in the park.

Verges between parking bays are to be left as grass as existing, with any damage caused during the works being made good with a conservation grass mix.

Fencing is to be carried out on the south-western edge and south-eastern edge of the car park enclosure using steel estate railings to match the existing park railings. To the North-west and north-east, fencing is to be in more agricultural deer fencing to the same arrangement as the majority of the deer fencing in the park.

Two cattle grids will be needed at the entry/exit points to the car park. These will be fitted with amphibian/hedgehog escape ramps and with hand-gates adjacent to be formed in the estate railings. The design of cattle grids will match those already present in the park.



*Mature oaks in the park are to be used as parent seed stock for new oaks*



*The looser edges of the west end of the gardens provide a reference for the new planting mix and edge treatment between car park and park: thorn, elder, dogrose, wild pear and occasional oaks.*



## Access

At present there is no easily usable accessible parking at Helmingham; wheelchair users are able to park on a rough stone surface near the compost bins, but this is an area shared by estate and farm vehicles, so not ideal in terms of surface or proximity to working traffic.

The new car park location will allow for properly accessible parking spaces to be formed and will also allow for a safer separation between vehicles and pedestrians. All visitors will be able to park on the 'inside' of cattlegrids whereas at present the route between parking and the shop/tearoom involves negotiating a cattlegrid.

An access path is proposed to connect the new car park across to the visitor arrival area, thus achieving a comfortably accessible route from parking to visitor entry. In due course the route may be adjusted depending on the progress of proposals for improving the stables area and adjacent outbuildings – but any such change to the west of the application site will be the subject of a future application.

## Scale, Use and Layout

The proposed car park site area is including access routes just under 1 hectare.

The number of cars to be accommodated is 215. This is expected to be sufficient for normal day to day parking for staff and visitors. Large events such as Helmingham's well known festival of classic cars (where several thousand visitors come for the day) would continue to take place on the open park – but at these events parking is marshalled by stewards and so it can be well enough organised to keep cars away from trees.

Existing car numbers vary and parking is not in marked bays; for the sake of this application current car numbers are assumed to be the same as proposed. However, current parking sprawls over a larger area than the existing parking due to the lack of defined spaces, so the overall 'land-take' of parking will reduce due to more efficient land use.



*Estate Fencing/ 'Park railings': the existing boundary treatment to the gardens is to be matched on the South side of the new car park. Other boundaries will have agricultural deer fencing either new or existing.*



*Stone clippings within retention grid: to be used for accessible parking spaces (grey granite chips proposed to match main drives).*

## Ecology

An ecological survey has been carried out and proposed works would be in accordance with the recommendations outlined in the report, which is submitted alongside this statement.

The area of the proposed car park and access is 'low quality habitat'. No species of note have been found in the grassland which would be impacted by the works; the grassland is of low ecological value and locally abundant. Enhancements are proposed to improve wildlife habitat in addition to the planting proposed which is partly to screen cars in landscape views and partly to provide additional habitat. The proposed planting mix included is species rich and in addition it is proposed to form 3 log piles and 1 hibernaculum. It is also proposed to insert wildlife ladders into existing cattlegrids and to incorporate them in the new cattlegrids. These measures are explained in more detail in section 6.0 of the ecology report.

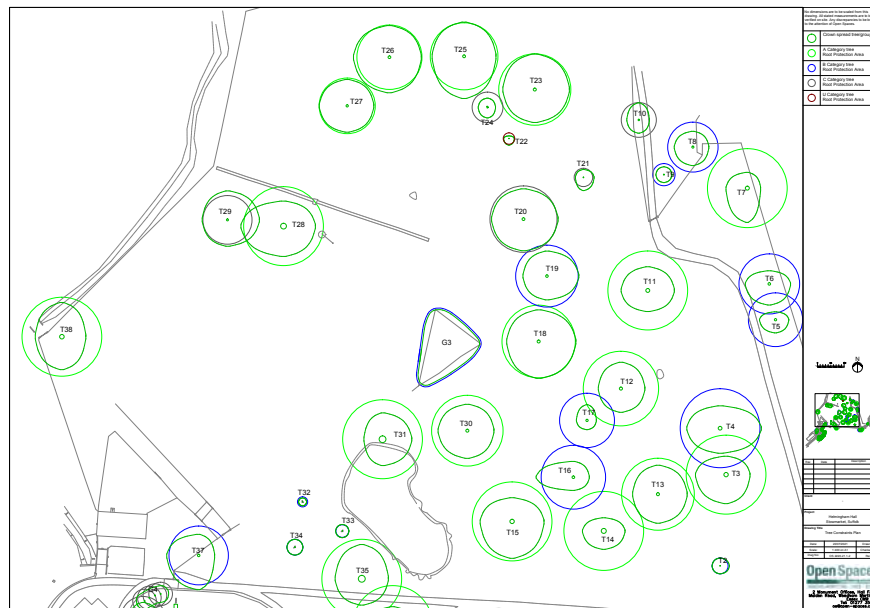
Lighting will be temporary, limited to major events and will not be needed during months when bats are active in the park (winter being hibernation season) so as not to impact on bats which may be roosting in nearby trees.

## Contamination

There is no history of chemical storage, farm landfill or other potentially contaminating activity on the proposed car park site. It is and has been either woodpasture, open grassland, farmland or paddock since prior to the industrial revolution.

## Arboricultural Assessment

A detailed report is included alongside this statement; recommendations of the tree specialist have been used to inform the precise extent and layout of the car park and to avoid any negative impacts on trees, as mentioned earlier in this document.



*Excerpt of Arboricultural Survey showing precise canopies and root protection areas.*



## Economic Benefits and Tourism

The Helmingham Estate is comprised of a series of rural businesses, employing a team of 20 including four garden volunteers. Helmingham Hall Garden Openings [HHGO] is a growing events business that was set up to fund the upkeep of Helmingham's award-winning gardens and to broaden and diversify the income stream for the estate. Income to HHGO comes from visitors to the gardens, as well as multiple annual events and weddings that are held in the Grade 1 listed park. The revenue generated supports the gardens, conservation work in the listed park, and the management of public footpaths and wildlife conservation.

HHGO has 30-40,000 visitors per annum and plays an important role in offering a 'heritage day out' to visitors in mid Suffolk who come to see the gardens or experience the diverse events, drawing tourist footfall from the busier Suffolk coast and commuter areas. In view of this Helmingham Estate's significance is far greater than the headcount of staff and volunteers would suggest, because it is a destination which helps bring visitors to the area and thus also benefits local pubs, hotels, taxi firms, shops and B&Bs.

HHGO employs 105 temporary or freelance staff throughout the year. It also works with over 30 local catering units, and its events provide a platform for over 50 independent plant nurseries and 100 artisan producers. It works with local suppliers across all its events for power, security, stewarding, press and equipment rental, as well as raising thousands of pounds for local charities.

In the long-term HHGO wishes to diversify its offering to increase the length and interest of visits, and increase income for HHGO and all the businesses it works with. The current infrastructure limits potential: at the moment all visitors park on the Grade 1 park itself, causing huge damage especially in the winter months.

A new car park would therefore allow public activities to function much better all year round, increasing the economic benefit well beyond the park gates. This has been recognised by Mid Suffolk District Council in an award of development grants towards the access improvements.



*The tranquil magic of Helmingham in Spring*

## Pre-application Advice

An initial submission to discuss potential works at Helmingham was made to Historic England in April 2021 and a site visit made in mid June. The pre-application submission documents relating to the landscape and outbuilding group are included with this application as useful background and context to those discussions.

Potential changes to part of the house were also discussed but are not relevant to this application and so documents relating to that are not included.

In relation to potential changes to the Estate Office and visitor facilities in the the Coach House and Stables group, it was agreed that there is considerable room for improvement but that historic research ought to be concluded before more design work. It was agreed that a good next step after research and design progress would be then to make a pre-application submission to Historic England and Mid Suffolk District Council, with a view to later moving to a planning and LBC application.

Regarding the proposed car park, which is the subject of this application, Historic England was positive and constructive in its advice, and there was no disagreement about what ought to be acceptable in terms of landscape impact and mitigation, subject to certain details being worked through. Given the pressing timescale for the estate in not wanting to endure another winter of cars being stuck in the park coupled with damaged ground to repair, it was agreed to proceed directly to a submit a planning application without the benefit of pre-application discussion with Mid Suffolk Council – in the hope that the local authority would likely take the same view as Historic England, which is normally the lead in cases involving Grade 1 heritage assets.

Historic England's advice in regard to the preliminary proposals for the proposed new car park was as follows (letter from Lynette Fawkes, 9th July 2021):

## Impact of the proposals

### *a) The proposed car park*

*We understand that this part of the proposal is the most urgent. At present, visitors access the site from the east, entering at Keeper's Cottage and driving along the 19th century east drive (The Leys) to then park informally on the grassland between the gardens and the fishponds east of the Hall. During the winter months, this grassland can become wet and visitors, especially the large numbers for popular events such as the light show, often cause rutting, tyre tracks and compaction that damages the grassland and impacts rooting areas for trees. During the summer and on warm days, visitors often park underneath the shade of tree canopies which can cause damage to trunks, branches and roots as well as compaction within the trees' rooting zones.*

*There was evidence of this observed during our site visit.*

*Having considered a number of sites, including some outside of the registered park and garden which proved too remote, it is proposed to create a new car park to the north east of the Hall on a piece of open parkland used until recently as a horse paddock. The proposed car park will be capable of accommodating approximately 200 vehicles at peak times. It is anticipated that for the average day this car park will be able to cope with visitor and staff parking. There will also be space for a small amount of coach parking. For events, the car park will most likely be used for large vehicle and event participant parking, which will ease the pressure on the parkland, which only see occasional use for visitor parking for Helmingham's largest events.*

*The site of the proposed car park will enable easy access from the dedicated visitor access via a short length of new surfaced road leaving the east drive close to the gardens. Another short length of new surfaced road at the far end of the car park will connect to an existing farm track (to be resurfaced) running just inside the eastern perimeter tree belt between the former deer pens and Keeper's Lodge. This will enable one-way circulation. At the same time, the new lengths of road will be kept sufficiently narrow so that they retain the character of parkland tracks.*



*The layout will make concessions for the existing parkland trees, requiring no tree removals and allowing for further planting of new trees. The layout should be informed by detailed tree survey to BS 5837: 2012 by a suitably qualified arborist, paying particular attention to the existing veteran specimens but including all trees in or immediately adjoining the proposed site as well as any others that might be affected by the work. Such a survey would record the species, age, condition, life expectancy, amenity value, etc., while also mapping the extents of rooting zones and advising on appropriate protection methods. This survey information is also likely to be required by the local planning authority as a validation requirement for any future planning application.*

*This site of the proposed car park is relatively discreet, positioned on land sloping gently to the north, away from views from the east drive and largely screened from the Hall and gardens by existing vegetation and the structures of the stable yard. There are views to parts of the proposed development from a number of locations: the parkland north of the Hall, notably along the Debenham footpath and 'Constable' bridge; the northern side of the main moat and the moated garden; the public footpath that crosses the park to the west of the gardens. It may also be possible to see tops of cars and movement within the car park from the east drive and areas within the eastern parkland. These views should be considered as part of design development, incorporating mitigation as necessary to reduce impacts to the setting of the listed buildings and the character of the registered park and garden.*

*New tree planting within the new car park will do much to help break up the form of the new car park and allow it to blend into the landscape more successfully. Care attention should be paid to the placement of trees, avoiding a regular or rigid layout (more akin to formal areas of the site like the gardens) and opting instead for a more relaxed and informal character replicating a parkland setting. Planting locations should be informed by positions recorded on historic mapping or visible on site as tree stumps or depressions, including in the areas of parkland immediately to the north and south of the proposed car park. Species selection should reflect the tree mix already present within the wider park, likely favouring locally sourced oak. If time allows, consideration should be given to propagating new trees using seed collected from veteran specimens within the parkland in order to ensure continuity of genetic*

*stock and suitability for local conditions. The tree planting can be supplemented by scattered parkland shrubs, such as hawthorn, elder and even the odd crab apple or wild pear – all of which will help to filter and in places screen views to parked and moving vehicles.*

*Any fencing required for security and/or management of Helmingham's deer herd should replicate and tie into existing lengths of metal deer fencing in more visible areas, such as around the car park entrance close to the gardens and in views from the moated garden. Elsewhere, more utilitarian deer fencing can be accommodated within new areas of planting to help screen view of the wire mesh and wooden posts.*

*The proposed new car park will introduce new development within the registered park and garden, resulting in the loss of areas of open grassland and introducing extensive new areas of hard landscaping alongside associated infrastructure and planting. The physical and visual changes will cause a degree of harm to the registered park and garden's significance; however, removing regular vehicle parking from the area of parkland east-south east of the Hall and concentrating visitor vehicles within a dedicated parking area will deliver considerable benefits. This includes removing parked cars from important views between the Hall / gardens and church, enhancing the visual quality of approaches to the Hall and gardens, and removing threats to and improving the condition of trees and grassland making up significant parts of the parkland.*

*In general, Historic England have no objections to a car park in this area subject to suitable mitigation measures being considered as above.*

## Conclusion

Helmingham Hall may to most summer visitors be regarded as largely unspoilt – but it is compromised by current parking arrangements, and the long-term consequences of these will have an adverse impact on the condition and the health of the mature parkland trees. To winter visitors the experience at present is far more mixed: having to have one's car towed out of the mud definitely diminishes the enjoyment of a visit aside from damage to the listed park.

The proposed new car park which is the subject of this application has been sensitively considered to improve the current situation and the setting of the listed park, gardens and buildings. It will provide a good, workable and discreet year-round car park; it will significantly improve accessibility and pave the way for further improvements and investment in other buildings and facilities, which will be to the benefit of visitors, staff, volunteers and local businesses in years to come.



*Helmingham – a view without cars in the foreground on the footpath from the church: this is a rarity in the summer but it can be the norm in future.*