

CHURCH WESTCOTE MANOR – DESIGN & ACCESS STATEMENT

CONSTRUCTION OF NEW HARD TENNIS COURT & ASSOCIATED LANDSCAPING CHURCH WESTCOTE MANOR, CHURCH WESTCOTE, OX7 6SG

INTRODUCTION

Church Westcote Manor is a Grade II listed building in the village of Church Westcote, approximately 7 miles southeast of Chipping Norton.

The Manor dates back to the 15th century and is thought to have originated as a Medieval Hall House. The building we see today is the result of multiple phases of evolution, stemming from the early hall house, to a high-status farmstead in the 18th and 19th century, and then to the restoration of the 21st century. A detailed Historic Building Assessment has been produced by Cotswold Archaeology. This was submitted as part of Planning Application 22/01067/LBC and has also informed this application.

The construction of a hard tennis court and associated landscaping forms the subject of this planning request. The Manor house is within the Conservation Area of Church Westcote, but the location of the proposed tennis court sits outside of the Conservation Area boundary. The tennis court has been designed to ensure it would be visually discreet, with screening provided by hedge and tree planting, along with drystone walling in the local vernacular.

DEVELOPMENT AREA

The proposed hard standing for the tennis court would be 36m by 17m and would therefore cover an area of 612sqm.

LOCATION & DETAILS

The existing site currently contains a working area enclosed by a Cotswold drystone boundary wall. To the east is an area of grass with a cricket net.



Image: Existing garden – as viewed from the north



Image: Existing garden – side view



Image: Existing garden – view from the top of the walled area



Image: Existing garden - cricket net

The proposal is to construct a hard surface tennis court (width 17m x length 36m), with a green painted finish. To the north this would be enclosed with a chain link fence (height 2.6m) with a dropped section (height 0.9m), which would sit behind a newly planted hornbeam hedge. The fencing would be based on a high specification post and chain link system, with all steel work galvanised and painted black. It would not be visible from outside of the tennis court as a result of the hornbeam hedge.

The existing Cotswold drystone wall on the roadside boundary would be retained, with the entrance opening filled in with a new section of wall to tie in with the existing in terms of style and materials. The same natural stone would be used, in the same drystone style, the same cock and hen capping, and to the same 2m height. Hawthorn (*Crataegus x lavalleei* 'Carrierei') trees would be planted on the inside of the wall to soften the boundary and provide further screening.

To the east and west a new Cotswold drystone wall would be built, following the ground level, with the height therefore ranging from 1.25m to 2.6m. This would be built in the same drystone style as the roadside boundary wall, which is also consistent with other walls across the site. The walls would include a hardwood gate on each side. This would be in a traditional design, in keeping with other gates in the garden.

Stone steps would lead to a viewing area to the south side of the tennis court, with Cotswold natural stone risers and riven natural stone treads. These same materials would be replicated in the steps leading down to the court itself, with a Cotswold drystone retaining wall with a riven natural stone coping mirroring the boundary walls. An evergreen yew hedge would be planted along the top of the wall.

Outside of the tennis court area to the north, the existing orchard would be consolidated with the planting of additional fruit trees.

For the landscaping described above, the design and materials have been selected to complement the Manor House and its setting, thereby preserving its integrity and upholding its significance within the surrounding landscape – see Heritage Statement below for further detail.

HERITAGE STATEMENT

The Manor House is listed Grade II, which defines its heritage interest as special. The Historic Building Assessment produced by Cotswold Archaeology identifies this heritage value as of historical, architectural and evidential interest.

This Assessment has informed analysis of the impact of the proposed works. It refers to the differing architectural styles of the early and later changes to the Manor House, which are indicative of their time, with the garden setting complementing the overall ensemble.

The proposed works are modest in nature. They are intended to improve the functional use of the garden. There would also be a visual improvement through the removal of the cricket

net and additional planting. The changes would be implemented in a way that is appropriate and sympathetic to the main house and its setting. The tennis court would sit within a discreet and well screened part of the property, away from the immediate setting of the listed building.

The court has been sensitively designed to ensure that it would be as inconspicuous as possible. Existing materials would be reused. Where new materials are needed, these would be selected to link aesthetically in colour and style to the Manor House and other existing features across the site. These materials include Cotswold drystone for the walls and steps.

In summary, it is considered that the proposed tennis court would have no material impact on the setting of the listed building. This Heritage Statement accords with Paragraph 189 of the National Planning Policy Framework (July 2018) in describing the significance of the potential impact on the heritage assets.

PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

The tennis court has been designed to ensure it would be as discreet as possible, with screening provided by hedge and tree planting, along with hard landscaping that is traditional in style and in keeping with the local vernacular. The proposed location for the tennis court is away from the immediate setting of the listed building and outside of the Conservation Area of Church Westcote.

This application complies with the Government's National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). The NPPF introduced a general presumption in favour of sustainable development, which was reaffirmed in the revised version dated July 2018. Paragraph 10 states "So that sustainable development is pursued in a positive way, at the heart of the Framework is a presumption in favour of sustainable development..."

In looking at the detail of the Framework, there are a number of statements within the document which are of direct relevance to the determination of this application:

(i) Paragraph 91 emphasises the importance of the planning system promoting healthy communities and includes reference to the benefits of sports facilities. The proposed development of a new tennis court would provide a sports facility which would help to enhance the health and well-being of the users.

(ii) Paragraph 96 also refers to the need to provide opportunities for sport and physical activity. The proposed development would provide a sports facility and thus accords with this policy objective.

(iii) Paragraph 127 sets out the need for high quality and appropriate design that is sympathetic to the surrounding built environment and landscape setting. The proposed development would incorporate high quality design that would minimise the visual impact and help the tennis court blend in with the surroundings.

In the period since the Government introduced the NPPF, there is very significant evidence to show that domestic tennis courts are an accepted form of development in the countryside (including AONB and Green Belt locations).

EFFECT ON AMENITY OF NEIGHBOURS

The proposed changes have been designed to improve the visual appearance of the property as seen from the public highway, with the additional tree planting softening the boundary between the property and road.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

The tennis court and associated landscaping are designed to be as discreet as possible and integrate well into the surroundings. The green court surface is inconspicuous, and the proposed walls and soft landscaping would help to screen the court area and ensure no visual impact on the setting of the house. The proposed tree planting along the south boundary provides additional screening from the roadside and the hornbeam hedge would help soften the north boundary. The sensitively designed court would have no impact on longer distance views.

BIODIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

The existing garden work area does not have any value in terms of providing a wildlife habitat, so there are no adverse biodiversity implications from the development of the proposed tennis court in its place. Biodiversity benefits would also be provided by the proposed additional hedges and tree planting.

TRANSPORT ASSESSMENT

The proposed tennis court would be for private domestic use and would have no impact on traffic generation or car parking demand at the property. One of the benefits that the tennis court would bring would be to reduce the need for the applicant's family to travel away from the property in order to play tennis. This reduction in car travel would help to reduce CO2 emissions.

FLOOD RISK ASSESSMENT

Reference to the Environment Agency's Flood Map shows that no part of the proposed tennis court site or adjacent land is within Flood Zone 2 or 3. The Environment Agency's online assessment confirms that there are no flood risk implications and that it is not necessary to provide a flood risk assessment.

CONCLUSION

This statement demonstrates that the proposed tennis court, and associated landscaping works, would be carried out as sympathetically as possible. The sensitive design would ensure that the court area is inconspicuous and that there is no adverse impact on the local

setting or the wider landscape. The design and choice of materials have been carefully considered as part of the overall garden design and would contribute positively to the character of the setting.

The NPPF provides support for recreational and sporting development in countryside areas, as long as the development is designed sensitively and does not harm the local setting or character of the open countryside. Recent precedent since the introduction of the NPPF confirms that a tennis court is an acceptable form of development within the countryside.

It is assessed that the proposed works will preserve and not harm the significance of the Grade II listed building. This aligns with the duty under The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and the National Planning Policy Framework to preserve the special architectural and historic interest of the listed building.

In conclusion, the proposed development would bring benefits and have no material adverse impacts and is consistent with the policy framework.