

# Relevant Representations

## Planning Act 2008 (as amended)

### Botley West Solar Farm



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## Quality Assurance

<b>Project Name:</b>	Botley West Solar Farm
<b>Client Name:</b>	Stop Botley West Campaign Limited
<b>Prepared By:</b>	Various
<b>Signed:</b>	Various
<b>Date:</b>	17 <sup>th</sup> February 2025
<b>Reviewer</b>	Various
<b>Signed</b>	Various
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<b>Revision:</b>	2

## List of Appendices

- **Appendix 1** – Oxford Green Belt Study (Extract), October 2015
- **Appendix 2** – Historic Landscape Management Ltd & Nick Cox Architects (2017).  
Blenheim Palace World Heritage Site: World Heritage and National Heritage Management  
Plan Review 2017.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Background

**1.1.1** Marrons is instructed by “Stop Botley West Campaign Group Limited” (hereafter “SBW”) to prepare this “Relevant Representation” in respect of an application for an Order granting development consent made under Section 37(2) of the Planning Act 2008 by Photovolt Development Partners on behalf of SolarFive Limited (“the Applicant”) for the Botley West Solar Farm Project. Specifically, the Applicant seeks development consent for the construction, operation, maintenance and decommissioning of a solar farm and associated infrastructure across a site area of 1,418 hectares (ha) with the proposed area of solar panels spanning approximately 839ha (“the Project”).

**1.1.2** This Representation sets out a summary of SBW’s views on the Application in accordance with Section 102(4) of the Planning Act 2008 and the Infrastructure Planning (Interested Parties) Regulations 2010 and confirms SBW’s wish to register as an Interested Party for the purposes of the forthcoming examination. We outline below SBW’s principal objections to the Application and the reasons behind them. SBW objects to the Project as submitted and advises that the Secretary of State does not make the Order.

- There would be less than substantial harm to heritage assets of up to the highest level of importance;
- There would be significant and extensive impacts upon the landscape character of the area and to visual amenity given the Project’s design and scale;
- The project design and scale has not considered the necessary mitigation;
- There would be a significant harm arising from the loss of a substantial amount of Best and Most Versatile (“BMV”) agricultural land;
- There would be substantial harm to a variety of Public Rights of Way (“PRoW”) which are of particular importance for the local community;



- There would be a significant impact on the local economy because of reduced tourism; and
- There would be substantial harm to the Green Belt because of inappropriateness, conflict with Green Belt purposes and loss of openness.

**1.1.3** SBW notes that consent for the Project is only sought for a temporary period. However, an operational life of 37.5 years (42 years in total including construction and decommissioning) is a substantial period and would be beyond the lifetimes of many of the people alive today and a substantial portion of the lifetimes of the next generation. Accordingly, the effects of the Project are effectively permanent and should be regarded as such.

**1.1.4** The need for renewable energy development in general and utility-grade solar in particular is set out in National Policy Statements (“NPS”). However, The NPS also states that Applicants must apply the mitigation hierarchy and demonstrate that this has been applied and utilise good design, particularly in respect of landscape, visual amenity and heritage. SBW considers that these requirements have not been adequately discharged.

**1.1.5** This Representation has been prepared jointly by Marrons (Heritage and Planning) and Influence Landscape Architects (“Influence”) on behalf of SBW. Marrons and Influence have undertaken a number of site visits between July 2024 and January 2025 which have included a walkover of publicly accessible areas of the site and wider study area.

## 2. General Observations

### 2.1 Reasonable Alternatives

**2.1.1** Chapter 5 of the Environmental Statement (“ES”) relates to alternatives considered. From the information presented, SBW is not convinced that planning and environmental constraints played any substantial role in site-selection. In relation to a grid connection, this is located within the very southern land parcel some distance from the body of the scheme. As such, it is apparent that site selection has been driven almost entirely by land availability and the need to maximise developable area given the distance of most of the scheme from the point of connection into the grid.

**2.1.2** In relation to constraints generally, the ES states that efforts were made to avoid or minimise impacts on the Blenheim Palace World Heritage Site, which is a heritage asset of the greatest importance. It also states that visual effects were dealt with through selecting relatively low-lying land, avoiding Best and Most Versatile Agricultural Land; secure biodiversity net gain, avoiding key landscape and environmental designations and areas of high flood risk.

**2.1.3** To the above points generally, most of the Site is located within an area of high landscape sensitivity. It also comprises a significant proportion of high quality (i.e. Best and Most Versatile Agricultural Land) and would have a significant impact on the setting of Blenheim Palace and surrounding heritage assets. Sources of flood risk other than fluvial (such as surface water) do not appear to have influenced site selection to any material degree, nor is reference made to seeking or developing lower performing Green Belt land in preference to higher performing Green Belt land.

**2.1.4** Even though the Site itself may not be within a National Landscape, it has the potential to impact the setting of the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (“AONB”) and no assessment work has been undertaken in respect of this impact. The same is also true of the numerous heritage assets located near the Site, which would have their rural landscape settings altered for a considerable amount of time for the Project’s lifespan. There would also be permanent setting impacts arising from the retention of the hedgerows proposed to be planted.

**2.1.5** Chapter 5 of the ES does not seriously engage with reasonable alternatives, particularly in respect of advancing a smaller scheme which more appropriately addresses the surrounding environmental sensitivities and given that the original, minimum threshold for site size was 250ha [ES Chapter 5 – Alternatives Considered - paragraph 5.6.12].

## **2.2 Landscape and Visual Effects**

**2.2.1** The assessment methodology adopted, and thus the conclusions of that assessment, are systemically flawed, partly as a consequence of the failure to address, inter alia, four key issues raised by a solar farm of this scale and nature in this location:

- Inadequate consideration of alternative sites;
- The realistic assessment of landscape sensitivity and the capacity to absorb development;
- The scale of the development proposed; and
- The effects of “*within-project*” cumulative impacts arising from the repetitive nature of the development proposed.

**2.2.2** The standard assessment method proposed, whilst applicable to a one off, stand alone, solar farm of say 9 hectares [e.g. the proposed solar farm adjacent to Woodstock Sewage Treatment Works] is inadequate to accurately reflect the magnitude of landscape and visual impacts arising from the cumulative loss equating to 100no x 9 hectare sites which currently comprise 151 historic individual and well managed fields interconnected across a mosaic of high value sensitive landscapes.

**2.2.3** The carrying capacity of the proposed sites’ landscape to accommodate a solar farm of this scale is inadequate, which would result in **long term, severe landscape and visual impacts**.

**2.2.4** The strategic location of solar farms of national scale should focus upon areas of landscape character diametrically opposed to the high value, small scale, well managed, densely settled river valley landscapes which characterise the rural estate farmland setting to Blenheim Palace, i.e. large scale, flat landscapes sited in less populated areas, capable of

accommodating substantial mixed, multilayer, indigenous woodland screen belts in order to effectively envelop consolidated sites and thereby, mitigate landscape, visual, recreational and biodiversity impacts.

**2.2.5** The assertion that only 6 out of the 11 Landscape Character Area/ Types identified in previous landscape studies and which are affected by the Project, are judged to be of Medium /High Sensitivity is not an accurate representation of the value and sensitivity of the 3 proposed development sites landscape in 2025.

**2.2.6** The Site's landscape importance and exceptional sensitivity in their capacity as the setting for, and gateway to, the internationally significant assets of:

- The historic City of Oxford
- The World Heritage Site of Blenheim Palace
- The Cotswolds National Landscape
- The historic market town of Woodstock
- The burial place of Winston Churchill at Bladon
- Numerous Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas

**2.2.7** The LVIA identifies a proliferation of public rights of way throughout the northern, central and southern sites, whilst the assessment states that:

*“The sensitivity of the people using the local PRow network for informal recreation is considered to be High because appreciation of the surrounding environment is a primary concern.”*

**2.2.8** It is, therefore, evident that the industrialisation of the undulating river valley landscape would result in **severe, long term, adverse visual impacts, particularly during winter months**, upon local residents and others walking, cycling, horse riding and cycling on the network of footpaths, bridleways and local roads which traverse the area, many of which would have open

overviews of the solar panels. Again, this aspect does not appear to have been considered in terms of formulating the scheme design and the mitigation measures.

**2.2.9** Whilst the fragmented, elongated and irregular site boundaries within an undulating landform, maximise the exposure of solar arrays to overviews and underviews from adjoining roads, rights of way and housing.

**2.2.10** The assertion that:

*“...no residential properties have the potential to experience a degree of harm over and above substantial...”*

**2.2.11** Is not supported by the following factors:

- The GLVIA defines residents at home as being of **Very High Sensitivity**
- The Residential Visual Amenity Assessment [RVAA] 2019 guidelines state that:

*“.....there are situations where the effect on the outlook/visual amenity of a residential property is so great that it is not generally in the public interest to permit such conditions to occur where they do not exist before.”*
- The proximity of development to residential properties.
- The overwhelming scale and cumulative impact of multiple solar arrays in over 150 adjoining fields upon landscape character and visual amenity.
- The suffocating entrapment/ encircling of individual properties and whole settlements.
- The uncompromising form of development which is unsympathetic to the undulating landform.
- The omission of effective, year-round, mitigation.
- The subliminal awareness of the loss of countryside setting to individual properties and settlements.

- The loss of seasonal awareness as the crop cycle is lost.
- The severe impact upon residents' "...*quality of life and well-being*..." European Landscape Treaty 2004.

### 3. Principal Areas of Concern

#### 3.1 Introduction

**3.1.1** This part of the Representation sets out SBW's principal areas of concern in relation to the submission.

#### 3.2 Green Belt

**3.2.1** Within its Planning Supporting Statement inc. Green Belt Case [EN01047/APP/7.1], the Applicant considers that conflicts with the purposes of the Green Belt and "some" harm to openness would occur, but that these are "limited, temporary and reversible." SBW considers that this fails to capture the substantial impacts on the Green Belt, which would occur by virtue of:

- Urbanising significant areas of Green Belt between settlements resulting in coalescence (e.g. Long Hanborough/Bladon and Bladon/Begbroke);
- Significantly encroaching into the countryside by virtue of the Project's scale; and
- Significantly impacting the setting of historic settlements (see heritage section below for further details)

**3.2.2** The Project's spatial relationship with the Green Belt existing settlements is illustrated at Figure Number **NP12426 GB1 Rev 03** appended to the Planning Supporting Statement. This serves to underline the Project's substantial impact in terms of the above Green Belt purposes set out within paragraph 143 of the National Planning Policy Framework 2024 ("NPPF 2024") and upon the Green Belt's openness, by reason of the Project's substantial spread and scale.

**3.2.3** It is uncontroversial that the Project represents inappropriate development within the Green Belt and therefore it should not be approved other than in very special circumstances ("VSCs"). Paragraph 153 of the NPPF 2024 states that harm arising from a proposed development by reason of inappropriateness should be given **substantial weight** in the Green Belt and should not be approved except where the VSCs **clearly outweigh** both the harm arising to the Green Belt and any other harm arising.

**3.2.4** It is accepted that since the Project represents Critical National Priority (“CNP”) Infrastructure, the **starting point** for decision-making is that such infrastructure needs to be treated as if it has met the VSC test [**NPS EN1 – Paragraph 4.2.17**]. This does not, however, obviate the requirement for good design and to have regard to the purposes and openness of the Green Belt in the formulation of the Project. The matter is given some perfunctory consideration in Environmental Statement Volume 1 Chapter 5: Alternatives Considered [**EN010147/APP.6.3**] and the Planning Supporting Statement (**EN01047/APP/7.1**). These documents simply conclude that a non-Green Belt site was not available to the Applicant. However, not all parts of the Green Belt perform equally well and there is no reference to considering Green Belt purposes or openness in Section 5.7 “Site Layout & Design.”

**3.2.5** It is plain from a review of the evidence base that the Project would adversely impact a particularly high-performing area of Green Belt. We refer to the Oxford Green Belt Study prepared by LUC dated October 2015 (**Appendix 1**). It is noted that a significant proportion of the Site around Cassington, Bladon and Begbroke occupies Broad Area 13. In relation to this area, the Study found that:

- The broad area plays a role in preventing the reduction in the physical and visual gap between Bladon, Begbroke and Kidlington;
- The broad area is rural in character and contains many natural features including the ancient woodlands of Burleigh Wood, Blandon Heath and Begbroke Wood, as well as open agricultural fields with open views of the surrounding countryside; and
- The broad area contributes to the setting and special character of Oxford as a historic city

**3.2.6** The Project would significantly reduce the gap between Bladon and Begbroke as well as Bladon and Long Hanborough. The rural character and natural features which characterise this part of the Green Belt, as well as the open and exposed views of the surrounding countryside, would be significantly encroached upon by the Project and could also affect the character and setting of Oxford (which has not been considered at all within the Application material, as discussed in further detail below).



**3.2.7** NPPF 2024, paragraph 148 sets out that where it is necessary to release Green Belt land for development priority should be given to previously developed land, then “grey belt” which is not previously developed and then other Green Belt locations. There is no indication within the application material that the Applicant considers the Green Belt elements of the Site to be “grey belt” and accordingly, the relevant portions of the Site fall to be considered as “other Green Belt locations.” Site selection has not followed a sequential approach to the Green Belt which the NPPF, para 148 indicates is necessary.

**3.2.8** We consider that the Applicant should not just demonstrate the need for a Green Belt site generally, but also why what are evidently very sensitive parcels of Green Belt host a substantial amount of developable area with substantially harmful consequences in terms of both loss of openness and conflict with Green Belt purposes.

**3.2.9** We are aware of the emerging Government policy in respect of the role of the Green Belt in the planning system. We expect further guidance to be published within the PPG shortly, and we reserve the right to make comments on this during the DCO Examination.

### **3.3 Socioeconomics**

**3.3.1** Volume 1, Chapter 15 of the ES considers Socioeconomics [EN10147/APP/6.4]. Figure 15.2 identifies the Tourism Study Area and a PRoW map identified in a 2km radius from the Site. This figure shows Blenheim Palace via a singular point rather than illustrating its extensive grounds, which are publicly accessible and is therefore misleading.

**3.3.2** The ES chapter considers impacts to the visitor economy across the construction, operation and decommissioning phases. Paragraph 15.9.142 states that landscape is an important part of the tourism offer in the area and, as such, any changes to the natural landscape could impact significantly on its appeal. It is also stated that tourism contributes significantly to the local economy and that walking and cycling are a popular tourist activity in the locale. Despite this assessment, the sensitivity of landscape in terms of the visitor economy is only considered to be **medium**, which appears to be based almost exclusively on the public footpaths around the Site itself and the conclusion that these are not well-used. There is no cross-reference to the significance of landscape effects (albeit these are significantly understated) considered in the relevant chapter of the ES or other receptors.

**3.3.3** Paragraph 1.9.150 states that any impacts on the visitor economy at operational stage would relate to the effect on the visual change in the landscape from agricultural fields to fields with ground mounted solar arrays. Whilst it is agreed this would be the main impact pathway, there is no further substantive assessment of this matter, even though the Project would clearly affect the experience of visitors to Blenheim Palace. As set out in further detail below, the landscape, visual and historic environment impacts upon Blenheim Palace and its environs have been significantly understated within the ES and as a result, the Chapter 15 cannot adequately assess the impact of the Project to Blenheim Place as significant draw of visitors to the area.

**3.3.4** The attractiveness of the landscape, the value of the visitor economy, the significant impact upon landscape/visual respects by virtue of the Project, and the ES's own findings in this respect, indicate there would be a significant impact upon the visitor economy by virtue of the diminished and urbanised character of the area post-development.

### **3.4 Landscape & Visual Impact**

#### **Blenheim Palace**

**3.4.1** It is set out in the ES Chapter 08- Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment ("LVIA") that receptors at Blenheim Palace are potentially sensitive to the proposals and that those visiting the site and using the open access land within the grounds are 'key visual receptors' who should be considered within the assessment. The Zone of Theoretical Visibility ("ZTV") shows that there is the potential for views from within the gardens of Blenheim Palace. It is acknowledged that Blenheim Palace is a Grade I Registered Park and Garden (RP+G) and World Heritage Site (WHS). Within the summary description of the listing, reference is made to the views out from the park towards Woodstock, Bladon and the surrounding and distant countryside.

**3.4.2** Despite the above, there are no representative views recorded from within the WHS/Registered Park and Garden. This is an oversight due to the reference to key views within the Historic England listing referred to above, the description of key views in the 2017 Management Plan (see **Appendix 2**) and the acknowledgement that it is a location for 'key receptors' in the LVIA. In addition, the roof of Blenheim Palace would be open to the public in

Spring 2025 which will offer “breathtaking and wide-ranging views” of the countryside around Blenheim from which the Project will clearly be visible.<sup>1</sup>

### Cotswold Area National Landscape (CNL)

**3.4.3** The effects of the proposed development on the Cotswold Area National Landscape<sup>2</sup> (CNL) are considered without any reference to the Special Qualities as set out in the Management Plan particularly with reference to views into and out from the CNL and the setting of the CNL itself. Although the proposals fall outside of the National Designation, they are in such close proximity (some 300m at the southern point in Bladon) that there should be detailed consideration of the potential indirect impacts on the surrounding landscape which contributes to the setting. Overall, the sensitivity of the landscape setting of the WHS and the Cotswold National Landscape have not been fully considered particularly regarding the value and susceptibility attributed to the landscape, recognising the contribution to the WHS and the CNL.

### Views Towards Oxford

**3.4.4** Views towards Oxford from the surrounding countryside are valued. Policy was introduced in the 1960s and reinforced in 2015 through the ‘Assessment of the Oxford View Cones’. The Project doesn’t lie within a view cone, however the identified view cones do not represent an exhaustive list of viewing points that provide important views of Oxford’s skyline and there are longer views available towards Oxford from within the study area. There is no narrative about the potential impacts of the development on the experience of the views of Oxford from within the study area.

### Impact on Landscape Character

**3.4.5** Overall, the LVIA understates the potential impact on landscape character. The potential for areas of the landscape within the study area to accommodate solar array is limited due to the large potential for adverse effects on a highly valued and particularly scenic landscape. Parts of

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.blenheimpalace.com/whats-on/events/rooftop-view/>

<sup>2</sup> In June 2020 the Cotswolds National Landscape Board decided to replace the term Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) with National Landscape. This plan uses the name Cotswolds National Landscape (CNL) for the area designated as the Cotswolds AONB. At times it is abbreviated to National Landscape.

this landscape have physical, perceptual and experiential links to the most valued landscapes. The proposal and the approach to mitigation are not landscape-led and in some instances the mitigation proposed fundamentally changes the character of the landscape, to the detriment of key features.

**3.4.6** We draw attention to the Renewable Energy and Low Carbon Energy Assessment and Strategy for West Oxfordshire dated October 2016 by LDA Design. This states within the Eastern Parks and Valleys Character Area that the potential to accommodate both solar farms and turbines is very limited within this character area due to the large potential for adverse effects on a highly valued and particularly scenic landscape. If developments are proposed then smaller schemes located in the Limestone Wolds character type and away from the highly susceptible Valleys and Parkland types are likely to result in the lowest potential for adverse effects.

**3.4.7** Of the Eynsham Vale character area it states that the proximity to the Blenheim World Heritage Site could pose a particular constraint. Careful siting and design of schemes within this area are likely to be key to avoiding potentially unacceptable adverse effects and consideration of potential screen planting may be particularly important. The potential for the landscape to accommodate several developments before cumulative effects result in unacceptable change is likely to be limited.

#### **Representative Viewpoints & Visual Amenity**

**3.4.8** Representative views have been recorded across the study area and generally consider the relevant receptor's locations. However there are some locations and receptors where views have been recorded in less-than-optimal locations, for example between Bladon and Begbroke where the views recorded are not truly representative of the experience of those visual receptors, particularly in more sensitive landscapes, where views are sequential or transitional along public routes. Additionally, some visual receptors such as rail users have been excluded from the assessment with no explanation.

**3.4.9** Of the 50 representative views recorded, only 31 have been visualised as AVR3 visualisations and there is no explanation for those selected. SBW consider that some of the views which have the most value to local people and represent a clear understanding of the local

landscape character and the visual experience have not been rendered as a visualisation, for example Viewpoint 24. As previously set out, there are no representative views recorded from the RP+G.

**3.4.10** Overall, the potential impacts on visual amenity are underestimated, particularly at Year 15, when mitigation planting has matured. Although the mitigation limits views of the proposals in many instances, this designed in mitigation alters the whole experience for the user of these routes. The LVIA lacks consideration of the value and intended experience from locations within the study area such as the approach to Bladon by road and public routes. The LVIA appears to find that simply reducing views of the proposal renders the impacts less than significant.

### Methodology

**3.4.11** In August 2024 the Landscape Institute provided additional guidance on the ‘Guidance on Landscape and Visual Impact Assessments’ (GLVIA3) by way of Technical Guidance Note LITGN-2024-01<sup>3</sup> The LVIA does not consider the overlap of heritage and ecology in accordance with this updated guidance. It is agreed that this is a separate specialist topic in ES terms however there are overlaps which are important to consider where relevant. It is also stated in the ES chapter that Green Belt is not specifically a matter for the LVIA (Page 23), however, this is contrary to guidance which sets out that where openness may be one of the aesthetic and perceptual qualities of the landscape it should be documented and addressed through the LVIA.

**3.4.12** For the purposes of this assessment, it is set out that any effects with a significance level of Moderate or less are not considered to be ‘significant’ in terms of the EIA Regulations. However, guidance sets out that this decision should be justified in the methodology or receptor assessment. The assessment of significance is also judged before and after mitigation which allows the assessor to seek to reach a reduction in significance (pre mitigation a significant impact, post mitigation and not significant effect). This is not a recommended process. The mitigation is designed into the scheme and an inherent part of the overall proposals, and therefore the significance should not be judged without it in place.

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<sup>3</sup> Notes and Clarifications on Aspects of Guidance for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment Third Addition (GLVIA3)

**3.4.13** It is set out that the impacts of the cable corridors are discussed at Construction Phase only, however, this section is not included.

**3.4.14** The minimum buffer to residential receptors and properties is 25m and there is no justification for the selection of this distance. 25m is a very limited distance for a project of this nature and there are numerous examples where buffer zones have been provided of materially more than 25m.

**3.4.15** A Residential Amenity Assessment has not been carried out. This is considered in further detail below.

**3.4.16** Overall, the tabulated element of the methodology lacks nuance and variables. For example, the definition of Landscape Sensitivity relies heavily on the formal designation of the landscape. It is agreed that Landscape Value within nationally designated landscapes should be at the highest level (e.g. expressed as high/ very high/ of national value), but this is not a singularly determining factor of landscape value. and for a proposal of this scale it is expected that there would be a more descriptive approach.

**3.4.17** The Applicant at paragraph 8.14.4 states that the proposed planting would have a long-term benefit of reinforcing the landscape character of the local landscape. We disagree with the Applicant's claims.

**3.4.18** At paragraph 8.11.53, with regards to decommissioning the solar farm, an assumption is made that the equipment is fully removed, with the Project Sites restored to agricultural land/improved grasslands (its predeveloped (baseline) condition). However, this is unlikely to be possible as some of the fields will now have hedgerows traversing through them, having associated implications on the useability of the fields for agricultural purposes. We therefore disagree with the Applicant's claims.

#### Public Rights of Way (PRoWs)

**3.4.19** NPS EN-3 sets out that the Secretary of State should assess the potential impact from glint and glare on nearby homes, motorists, public rights of way and aviation. The submitted Glint

and Glare Study [EN010147/APP/6.5] considers impact on road traffic safety only but there is no wider consideration of visual receptors in this study or the LVIA.

### Main Conclusion (Landscape)

**3.4.20** As a result of the above deficiencies, the solar arrays are proposed in locations where the potential impact has not been considered in enough depth and the resulting mitigation is simply to seek to minimise the visibility of the panels. The mitigation proposed fundamentally and adversely changes the physical and perceptual qualities of the landscape and the experience for the visual receptors. The Project design has therefore been inadequately informed by landscape constraints and has not taken approach where the natural landscape and the receptors within it are the framework for shaping the design of the project.

## 3.5 Historic Environment

**3.5.1** The review of the application, in addition to Marrons' own assessments, make it abundantly clear that the heritage sensitivities associated with the Project are extremely high, complex and often overlap with numerous assets as well as other environmental considerations. In untangling these to understand the effects of the Project the historic environment, it is apparent that in many instances it is the collective significance of these heritage assets not just their individual heritage values that would be affected.

**3.5.2** We agree with the Applicant that heritage assets of the highest, international significance have the potential to be affected by the Project in relation to the Blenheim Palace World Heritage Site (WHS) and those heritage assets associated with it. But alongside these are numerous other heritage assets across all grades and types of designation that also require consideration to appropriately manage changes within their settings. Together, these heritage assets contribute to the narrative of the shaping and character of this area of Oxfordshire over centuries and are consequently valued not just for their intrinsic heritage significance but their shared importance.

**3.5.3** National and local policy includes a number of requirements in respect of the historic environment. In addition to the need to identify potentially affected heritage assets and assess their significance and any contribution to this from their setting, emphasis is placed on mitigation with the need to give consideration to steps that can be taken to ensure heritage assets are

conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance, including the impact of proposals on views important to their setting [**NPS EN-3 Paragraph 2.10.117**]. The importance of applicants taking account of the results of historic environment assessments in their design proposals is also required [**NPS EN-3 Paragraph 2.10.116**]. Additionally, the need to take into account possible impacts, including cumulative, on the wider historic environment is a further consideration [**NPS EN-1 Paragraph 5.9.9**].

**3.5.4** SBW considers the approach to the Project is not adequately heritage-led as it fails to address, understand and therefore consequently appropriately mitigate setting impacts on numerous heritage assets. Additionally, in some instances, the mitigation proposed would itself be inherently harmful. As heritage assets of up to the highest international significance would be affected, it follows that mitigation measures should be correspondingly sensitive and respectful. With regard to archaeological remains, where areas of the Site containing significant non-designated buried remains are identified these would be avoided by the permanent developable footprint [**Table 7.14 in ES Chapter 7: Historic Environment**]. In this respect, as made clear from the Application, where setting impacts have the potential to harm the significance of above-ground heritage assets of equal and in many cases much higher significance, they are not afforded a similar approach.

**3.5.5** The proposed scale of the Project and its relationship with heritage assets means that some impacts on heritage assets would be unavoidable. However, it is our view that the Applicant consistently understates the impact of the scheme on the WHS and associated heritage assets. Not only are the links between Blenheim with the traditional English countryside and villages surrounding it inscribed in its Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) as Attribute 7, but there is a wealth of further analysis clearly identifying the contribution of different elements of the WHS's setting.<sup>4</sup> The Project is non-compliant with multiple aspects of the WHS Management Plan and in particular, measures for the protection of its historic farmland setting. The Applicant also acknowledges that the Site contains areas of medium sensitivity in a Sensitivity Heat Map

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<sup>4</sup> Historic Landscape Management Ltd & Nick Cox Architects (2017). *Blenheim Palace World Heritage Site: World Heritage and National Heritage Management Plan Review 2017*.



(Figure 1.3 in ES Appendix 7.4) which would form part of the developable area. It is not clear what criteria was used to ascribe these sensitivities.

**3.5.6** It is worth noting that there is no Buffer Zone to the WHS. The Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention issued by UNESCO recognise the importance of the character of the wider landscape around WHSs and Operation Guidelines seek protection of the immediate setting of WHSs and ‘*of important views and other areas or attributes that are functionally important as a support*’ to the WHS<sup>5</sup>. This is underpinned by UK planning guidance which supports this approach, stating that ‘*however it is intended to protect the setting, it will be essential to explain how this is to be done in the relevant development plan policies*’<sup>6</sup>. In respect of the Blenheim Palace WHS, the Management Plan identifies that existing protections to the landscape surrounding the WHS were deemed sufficient and that a Buffer Zone was not considered necessary. The Management Plan notes that the WHS is in the unusual position of being a WHS in single ownership with an unprecedented ability to conserve the OUV. On this basis and together with the existence of a robust, adopted management plan, and statutory and local plan protections, paragraph 2.11 of the Management Plan notes that:

*‘... it is clear that Blenheim Palace and park WHS is already provided with a very high degree of protection for the attributes that help convey the OUV of the site and thus an additional level of designated protection is unnecessary’.*

**3.5.7** The conclusion of the Applicant is that the Project would result in a negligible adverse significance of effect on the WHS. The significance of effect on other receptors located within the WHS is also assessed as similarly being negligible adverse. As such, no significant effects in EIA terms are alleged to result to heritage assets at Blenheim from the Project; paragraph 7.5.7 of ES Chapter 7 states that effects categorised as Minor or less are not considered to be significant. The discussion of the need for a Buffer Zone to the WHS as summarised above reinforces the importance of the setting of the WHS and highlights that it was only deemed not to be required due to existing protections.

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<sup>5</sup> World Heritage Committee (2024). *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention*

<sup>6</sup> PPG Paragraph: 033 Reference ID: 18a-033-20190723

**3.5.8** As such, the Applicant's conclusion that no impacts would exceed negligible adverse is considered to result from an assessment which consistently undervalues the contribution of areas of the Site to the significance of these heritage assets. Therefore, the proposed mitigation measures are not considered to be based on a robust and holistic understanding of the nature and value of the Site's role as part of their settings. As stated by ICOMOS in their response to the PEIR, they do not agree that the 'overall character of the historic landscape' can be typified as generally low, and go on to say that such a typification cannot be supported when the landscape is seen part of the OUV of the WHS. Given the ascribed importance of the estate farmland setting to the WHS, the Project represents a threat to the loss of Blenheim Palace's WHS status.

**3.5.9** In addition to those heritage assets located at the WHS, it is also considered that the Applicant underplays the extent to which areas of the Site that are proposed to form part of the developable area make to the respective significance of other Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas as well as Scheduled Monuments. Consequently, the level of impact arising from the introduction of extensive areas of solar panels and/or substantial hedge planting is not accurately understood and therefore cannot inform effective mitigation measures. The heritage assets outside of the WHS that have been identified as being affected by the Project include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Roman villa (Sansom's Platt) (Scheduled Monument);
- Church of St Peter & St Paul, Church Hanborough (Grade I Listed Building);
- Burleigh Farmhouse (Grade II Listed Building);
- Bladon Conservation Area;
- Begbrooke Conservation Area;
- Woodstock Conservation Area;
- Cassington Conservation Area;
- Cumnor Conservation Area; and

- Church Hanborough Conservation Area.

**3.5.10** From a review of Annex A of ES Appendix 7.5, the heritage assets scoped in or out for a detailed setting assessment is broadly accepted. However, the Applicant states throughout that no other designated heritage assets outside of the 2km search area were identified as meriting consideration (ES Chapter 7). As ascertained from our site visits, there is a clear – albeit distant – view of the iconic Oxford skyline from publicly accessible locations in the Central and Southern Areas of the Site. The foreground of these views would be changed through the introduction of solar panels and hedgerow planting as currently proposed. Again, this omission in the heritage baseline means that the potential impacts on sensitive heritage assets located in Oxford have not been considered and therefore, effective mitigation has not been formulated as required.

**3.5.11** On the basis of the above, it is clear that impacts on heritage assets of up to international significance are consistently understated, and the heritage baseline contains a number of omissions and inaccuracies in identifying and understanding all of the potentially affected heritage assets. As such, the formulation of effective and appropriate mitigation has not been incorporated into the Project. This is contrary to the requirements of the NPS as well as the methodology set out in accepted Historic England guidance.<sup>7</sup> We will be providing detailed evidence during the Examination which demonstrates that heritage impacts associated with the Proposed Development are higher than those concluded by the Applicant and that the present mitigation measures are not sufficiently effective or proportionate to the assets’ individual or collective significance.

## **3.6 BMV & Agricultural Land**

**3.6.1** NPS EN-1 Indicates that Applicants should seek to minimise impacts on the Best and Most Versatile (“BMV”) agricultural land and preferably use land in areas of poorer quality **[paragraph 5.11.12]**. It further requires that the Secretary of State should ensure that applicants do not site their scheme on BMV land without justification. Where sites do incorporate BMV land, the Secretary of State should consider the economic and other benefits of that land.

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<sup>7</sup> Historic England (2017). *Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 3 (Second Edition): The Setting of Heritage Assets*.

**3.6.2** Chapter 17 of the ES: Agricultural Land Use and Public Rights of Way states that approximately 36.4% of the Site comprises BMV or a total of 490 hectares overall. As a result, the Project could result in the loss of a significant amount of the most valuable and productive agricultural land as both a proportion of the overall site area and in absolute terms. Whilst Chapter 5 of the ES dealing with reasonable alternatives sets out that where practicable the Project has avoided “permanent adverse effects” upon BMV land, there is no actual evidence of what measures have been taken or considered to accomplish this objective in terms of site design or selection beyond the Project’s inherent temporary nature.

**3.6.3** Chapter 17 of the ES considers the potential environmental effects of the Project in respect of agricultural land, but neglects to set fully and clearly assess the effects during the Project’s operation and maintenance phase. We could find no clear statement as to what proportion of BMV land would be unavailable for current farming activities during the Project’s operational lifespan by virtue of installation of the arrays themselves. A review of the Planning Supporting Statement (paragraphs 3.3.83 to 3.3.91) confirms that this aspect has not been assessed. As a result, the decision-taker is unable to fully consider the impact on the economic and other benefits of the BMV land, which would be lost to its current productive arable use for a considerable period.

**3.6.4** SBW contends that the loss of substantial areas of high quality and productive farmland for the operational period would effectively be permanent. Even if the land was brought back into use following the decommissioning of the Project, the soil condition cannot be predicted at that point given disturbances caused during construction, including the laying of cables.

**3.6.5** Various components of the Application refer to the land between and under the arrays being used for the grazing of sheep. This is an agricultural activity of much lower intensity than what previously submitted on the Site – most of it being arable. In addition, paragraph 5.8.2 of ES Chapter 5 – Alternatives Considered states that to avoid adverse landscape impacts the panels across the Site would not be fixed above 2.3m compared to 2.5m previously, a height chosen specifically to allow sheep to graze under the panels. It is not clear whether the lower fixed height would offer the same benefits in terms of maintain agricultural activities.

**3.6.6** For the above reasons, SBW considers that the harm arising from the loss of BMV land from the Project is substantial and weights against the grant of consent in the planning balance.

### **3.7 Residential Amenity**

**3.7.1** Paragraph 2.10.27 of the Planning Supporting Statement recognises that national policy in respect utility-scale solar identifies two principal areas of impact to residential amenity. Firstly, in relation to visual amenity and secondly, in relation to glint and glare. It is stated in the Planning Supporting Statement these matters are considered in the Landscape and Visual chapters of the ES, but this is not the case. A Glint and Glare Study [EN010147/APP/6.5] is included as Appendix 4.4 to the ES sets out that solar reflections are geometrically possible to 632 of the 699 dwellings assessed. Table 7.4.2 contains discussion of impacts but in most cases relies on “existing and/or proposed vegetation” to reach the conclusion that there is no impact or mitigation required.

**3.7.2** Firstly, if proposed vegetation is relied upon to screen the impacts of glint and glare then mitigation is clearly required for more than just the receptors identified in the Table as expressly requiring some sort of additional screening. Secondly, the mitigation measures proposed are vague and lack specificity regarding implementation, effectiveness and maintenance. Where detailed mitigation measures are discussed, it is only vaguely described as a “vegetation or a fence” without any clear specifications on height, density, placement or future maintenance. It is therefore unclear how the recommendations of the Glint and Glare study have been transposed into the landscape design of the Project. For example, there is no detailed implementation plan to provide assurance of the mitigation’s effectiveness nor consideration of the fact that proposed vegetation would clearly take some time to mature.

**3.7.3** Despite the content of the Planning Supporting Statement, Chapter 8 of the Environmental primarily focuses on broader landscape and visual impacts rather than specifically addressing residential amenity. Whilst the LVIA includes assessments of visual effects from various representative viewpoints, it does not provide a detailed analysis of how the proposed development might directly impact the living conditions of nearby residents, such as potential issues related to glint and glare or changes in visual amenity from private properties.

**3.7.4** The lack of a focused evaluation on residential receptors means that potential adverse effects on local inhabitants may not have been fully considered or mitigated. This prevents readers from obtaining a comprehensive understanding of the project's potential impacts on local communities.

### **3.8 Flood Risk**

**3.8.1** Paragraph 5.8.21 of NPS-EN1 sets out that the Sequential Test ensures a sequential, risk-based approach is followed to steer development to areas with the lowest risk of flooding, **taking all sources of flood risk and climate change into account**. Where it is not possible to locate development in low-risk areas, the Sequential Test should go on to compare reasonably available sites within medium risk areas and then, only where there are no reasonably available sites in low or medium risk areas, within high-risk areas. That approach to the Sequential Test is also reflected in development plan policy as well as the National Planning Policy Framework.

**3.8.2** Section 6.2 of the Flood Risk Assessment claims that the Sequential Test is passed at both a strategic level and a site-level. However, Chapter 10 of the ES dealing with hydrology and flood risk makes numerous references to features being within areas of surface water flood risk on the Site. A review of the Development Areas Plan against the recently updated Environment Agency Surface Water Flood Maps indicates numerous areas of operational development within areas of surface water flood risk. Most notably these include:

- Southwest of Bladon Heath stretching down Burleigh Road to the railway line, particularly to the north east of the railway line;
- East of Pinsley Wood and West of Lower Road near Church Hanborough;
- Between Bladon Heath to the East and Begbroke;
- North of Cassington; and
- Various patches of surface water flood risk to the east of Wootton

**3.8.3** It is not clear from the application material how these areas would be dealt with or why they cannot be avoided at the very least within the Site. As such, there is insufficient evidence

that the sequential approach to flood risk has been followed and the Project falls into conflict with NPS-EN1.

## 4. Summary & Conclusion

**4.0.1** The conclusions of the heritage, landscape and visual assessments submitted as part of the application are not credible and, as a consequence, fail to reflect the significance of the World Heritage Site setting; the high quality of the landscape within that setting; the sensitivity of receptors to change that landscape; and inadequate assessment methodologies for a development of this scale.

**4.0.2** The Project has failed to have regard to good design principles and the mitigation hierarchy in its design and in addition to the fundamental landscape and heritage concerns, SBW has also highlighted concerns about the impact on the Green Belt, tourism, agricultural land quality, flood risk and residential amenity.

**4.0.3** SBW objects to the Project as submitted and advises that the Secretary of State does not make the Order.

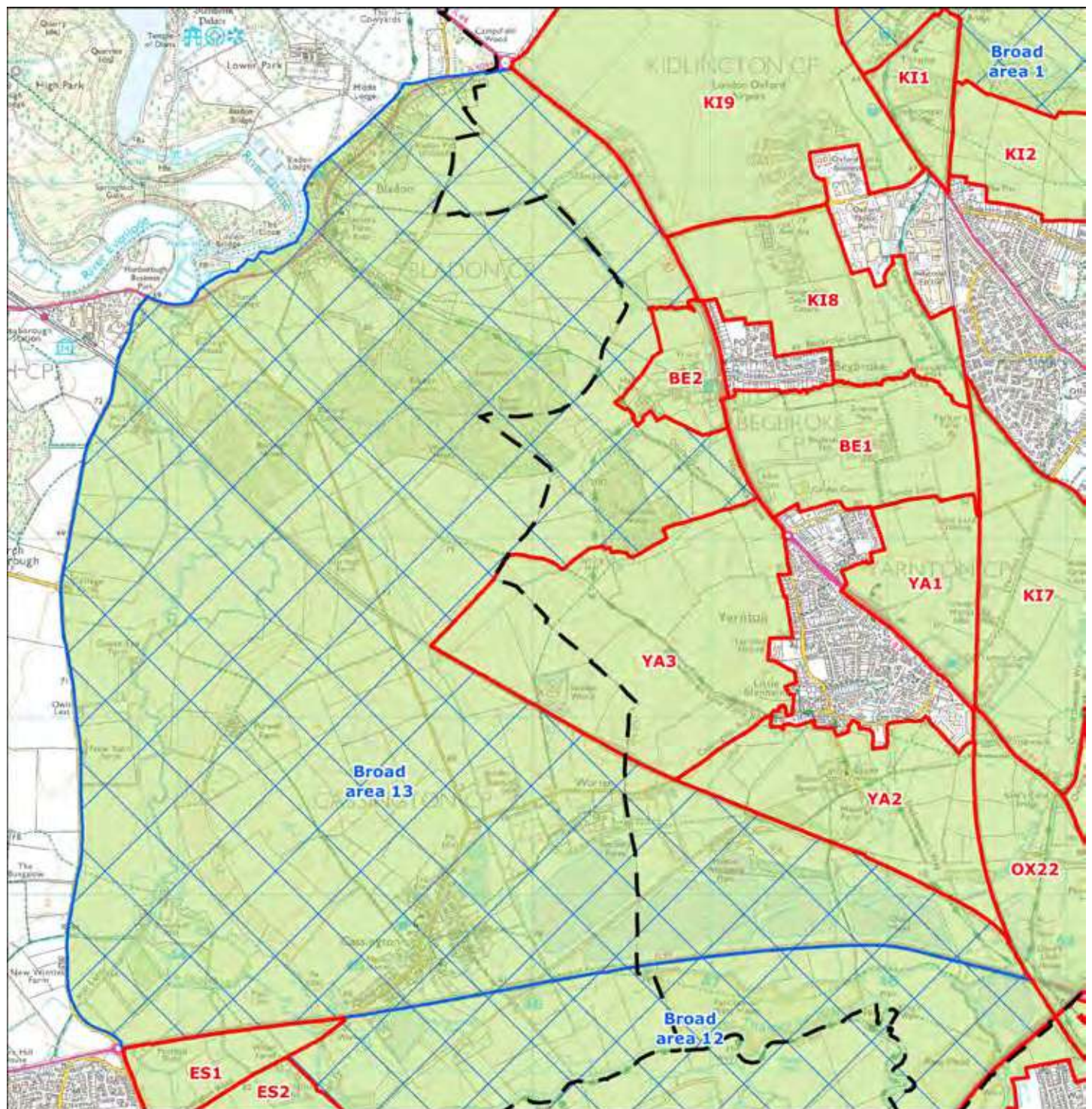




Land Parcel Ref: Broad area 13

Main Authority: West Oxfordshire

Parcel Type: Broad area



--- District boundary     Green belt parcel     Broad area     Green belt    0 0.7 km    

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Main Authority: West Oxfordshire

Other Authorities: Cherwell

**Land Parcel Ref:** Broad area 13

**Main Authority:** West Oxfordshire

**Parcel Type:** Broad area

### **Purpose 1: To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas**

Does the parcel exhibit evidence of urban sprawl and consequent loss of openness?

**Rating:** N/C

The broad area does not lie adjacent to a large built-up area.

### **Purpose 2: To prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another or into neighbouring smaller settlements**

Does the Broad Area prevent the merging or erosion of the visual or physical gap between the following settlements; Abingdon on Thames, Botley, Cumnor, Kennington, Radley, Wooton, Appleton, Eynsham, Oxford (including urban villages and settlements within Oxford), Kidlington (including Oxford Spire Business Park), Begbroke, Yarnton, Wheatley (including Littleworth) and Berinsfield?

**Rating:** Low

The south eastern corner of the Broad Area plays a minor role in preventing the reduction of the physical and visual gap between Yarnton and Oxford, and partially separates land to the southwest of Begbroke and northeast of Yarnton.

The Broad Area also includes villages which aren't assessed against this Green Belt Purpose, such as Cassington to the south of the Broad Area and Bladon to the northern area of the Broad Area.

Cassington is in relatively close proximity to Eynsham and Yarnton, with the land in between being relatively open but with limited views between the settlements. Bladon is in close proximity to the northeast of Begbroke and Kidlington, with the land in between relatively open with views between the settlements. Therefore the Green Belt plays a role in preventing the reduction of the physical and visual gap between these settlements.

### **Purpose 3: To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment**

Does the Broad Area have the characteristics of countryside or has it been significantly affected by encroachment of urbanised built development?

**Rating:** High

The broad area contains the villages of Cassington and Bladon. While both are rural in character, Cassington is larger and denser and therefore represents the greater urbanising influence on the Green Belt. There are no other significant urbanising influences within the broad area. The River Evenlode (a tributary of the River Thames) flows through the western half of the broad area. Other notable features within the countryside include the ancient woodlands of Burleigh Wood, Blandon Heath and Begbroke Wood and the ongoing mineral extraction and restoration work, including reservoirs, north of the A40. The rest of the broad area is made-up of open agricultural fields with open views of the surrounding countryside.

### **Purpose 4: To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns**

Does the Broad Area contribute to the setting and special character of Oxford?

**Rating:** High

The hills above Yarnton and Begbroke, arable farmland with wooded high ground, form part of the green backdrop to Oxford in views from the city and high ground to the east. The steeper western side of the landform slopes down to the River Evenlode, which joins the Thames south of Cassington, so this contributes to Oxford's special character in terms of the connectivity watercourses provide between the wider rural area and the city centre but is less important than the area visible from, or in the context of views towards, the historic centre.

**APPENDIX 2 – Historic Landscape Management Ltd & Nick Cox Architects (2017).  
Blenheim Palace World Heritage Site: World Heritage and National Heritage  
Management Plan Review 2017.**

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# BLENHEIM PALACE WORLD HERITAGE SITE

REVISED MANAGEMENT PLAN 2017



BLENHEIM PALACE



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization



Blenheim Palace  
inscribed on the  
World Heritage List

# BLenheim PALACE WORLD HERITAGE SITE

## World Heritage and National Heritage Management Plan Review 2017

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With specialist input from:  
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representatives from:

Blenheim Palace Senior Management Team  
Department of Culture, Media and Sport  
Historic England  
ICOMOS-UK  
Natural England  
Oxfordshire County Council  
West Oxfordshire District Council

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## PREFACE

BY TRACEY CROUCH, HERITAGE  
MINISTER

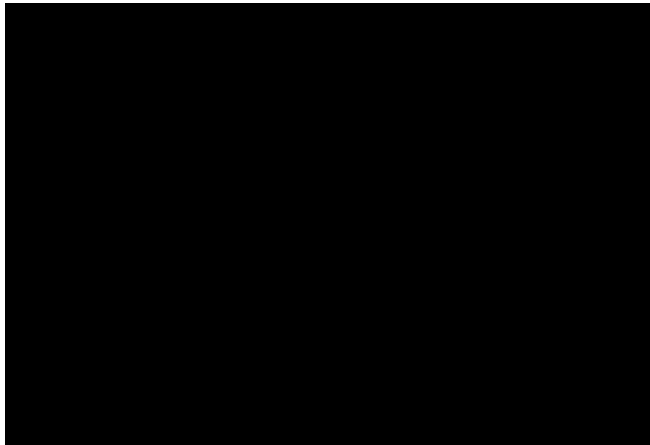
As Heritage Minister I am delighted to present this new Management Plan for Blenheim Palace World Heritage Site. This plan provides a comprehensive vision for the site for its next chapter, and sets out a series of sustainable policies and practices that will help us to cherish and protect its Outstanding Universal Value for future generations.

Blenheim Palace is one of the finest princely residences in the world. Built to honour the first Duke of Marlborough and later closely associated with Sir Winston Churchill, the Palace illustrates the beginnings of the English Romantic movement and had an influential effect on 18th and 19th century architecture in Britain and beyond. The surrounding Lancelot ‘Capability’ Brown landscape is widely acknowledged to be one of the finest examples of naturalistic landscape design, and is also registered as a Grade I Park and Garden.

The UK Government takes its responsibilities under the World Heritage Convention very seriously. As set out in the Culture White Paper published in 2015, we are striving to set a global standard in stewardship of our World Heritage Sites. As part of this we are committed to ensuring that each site has a thorough and up to date Management Plan to assist in its conservation and protection. The diverse set

of objectives for Blenheim Palace in this new Management Plan will help to secure, among other benefits, the conservation of the park and Palace, encouragement for sustainable development, incorporation of world heritage interests into the Local Development Framework, engagement with the local community, enhancement of the visitor experience, and overall protection of the site’s Outstanding Universal Value.

I would like to express my thanks to His Grace the Duke of Marlborough and to the Blenheim Palace World Heritage Site Steering Group for all their hard work in producing this Management Plan. I am confident that it will provide invaluable direction in the ongoing management of the Palace and park, and will enable its guardians to preserve and convey the significance of this internationally celebrated place to current and future generations.



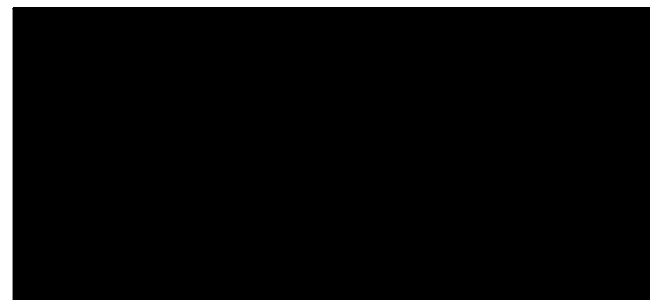
## FOREWORD

### BY HIS GRACE THE DUKE OF MARLBOROUGH

My family have lived at Blenheim Palace since 1719, but the history of the estate stretches back into medieval and Tudor times, when it was the site of a Royal manor to which the monarchs of England frequently resorted. Many centuries of use and development have left their mark on the Palace and park in different ways. In recognition of its outstanding architecture, the national and international historical roles of my ancestor the 1st Duke of Marlborough and his descendant Sir Winston Churchill, and Lancelot 'Capability' Brown's internationally famous work of re-landscaping the Park, Blenheim Palace and

its park became a World Heritage Site in 1987. It is my task to preserve and enhance this great legacy of my ancestors and I do so out of great affection for Blenheim Palace and a determination to keep it going, despite the many pressures we face. This management plan brings together all the strands of activity that we have developed over many years in the course of the day-to-day running of the Palace and Park, including historical preservation, landscape restoration, public access and education, agriculture, fishing, and game and nature conservation. Blenheim Palace is unusual in being not just a World Heritage Site but also the private home of my family, and in supporting this management plan we hope to balance the two by considering and implementing its recommendations wherever possible. The

Trustees and I appreciate that the plan is a living document, and one which we will need to alter, amend and review as circumstances and funding dictate. By doing so I am confident that it will help guide us in our mission to preserve Blenheim Palace's Outstanding Universal Value, which makes the place so special to us all.







# ONE

## UNDERSTANDING AND BACKGROUND

This section provides the background information which is necessary in helping to develop an understanding of the Blenheim Palace and Park World Heritage Site. It explains the need for the document, sets out the achievements of the last 10 years and provides a general overview of historic development, as well as the current state of conservation and condition.

1 INTRODUCTION

2 BACKGROUND CONTEXT

3 HISTORY OF BLENHEIM

4 CHARACTER AND CONDITION OF THE WHS

# ONE

# 1 INTRODUCTION

## STAKEHOLDERS AND CONTRIBUTORS

**1.01** This plan has been prepared under the guidance of a Steering Group which includes representatives from Blenheim Palace, Historic England, Natural England, DCMS, ICOMOS-UK, Oxfordshire County Council and West Oxfordshire District Council. The plan has been written by Historic Landscape Management Ltd with input on the historic properties from Nick Cox Architects.

## WORLD HERITAGE

**1.02** Blenheim Palace was inscribed as a World Heritage Site (WHS) in 1987 by the World Heritage Committee at UNESCO (United National Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation). World Heritage Sites are recognised as being unique and exceptional, and are valued by all the peoples of the world, regardless of location. UNESCO describes world heritage as 'our legacy from the past, what we live with today, and what we pass on to future generations. Our cultural and natural heritage are both irreplaceable sources of life and inspiration'. Nominations for World Heritage Sites are submitted by national governments and must meet certain criteria in order to be approved by the World Heritage Committee. Once selected they are inscribed onto the World Heritage List, which is maintained by UNESCO. By 2016 some 1052 properties had been inscribed, of which 30 lie in the UK. Worldwide, 814 of these are cultural, 203 are natural sites, and 35 are a mixture of the two.

**1.03** The WHS inscription does not provide any specific statutory protection or financial aid from UNESCO or the UK government. It is an internationally recognised designation, which encourages national

governments and site managers to ensure the long-term protection of the site. As part of this process of protection, preparing a management plan for each WHS is now required by UNESCO so that the special qualities which make it important are recognised and policies set for their protection and enhancement. At the same time, a Statement of Outstanding Universal Value (SOUV) is also agreed and adopted by the World Heritage Committee. This Statement sets out what the Committee considers to be of Outstanding Universal Value about the site in relation to the World Heritage Convention and includes statements of integrity and, for cultural sites such as Blenheim Palace, authenticity, in addition to the recording the requirements for protection and management. Statements of Outstanding Universal Value represent key reference documents for the protection and management of each WHS and can only be amended or altered by the World Heritage Committee. In the UK, the cultural heritage described by the Statement of Outstanding Universal Value will be part of the World Heritage Site's heritage significance and National Planning Policy Framework policies will apply to this OUV as they do to any other heritage significance they hold.

## NATIONAL HERITAGE

**1.04** In addition to being designated as a WHS, Blenheim Palace and its parkland is also considered to be part of our national heritage. A National Heritage Landscape is defined by Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) as one which qualifies for conditional exemption from capital taxes for one of these reasons:

- it is land of outstanding scenic, historic or scientific interest;
- its buildings and their amenity land are of outstanding historic or architectural interest;
- its chattels are historically associated with its buildings.





Blenheim Palace is designated as part of our national heritage primarily because the Palace is of outstanding historic and architectural interest, as is its parkland setting, which is essential for the protection of the building.

**1.05** Owners of ‘national heritage property’ are granted exemption from capital taxes provided that they fulfil certain conditions, as follows:

- they maintain outstanding land and preserve its character;
- they maintain, repair and preserve outstanding buildings;
- they provide and publicise reasonable public access.

These are set out in signed undertakings which explain what the owner agrees to do in order to fulfil the conditions. The preparation of a management plan containing the details of the heritage property and the means by which it will be managed and protected, is agreed with HMRC as a condition of the tax exemption.

## PURPOSE OF THE MANAGEMENT PLAN

**1.06** This management plan, therefore, fulfils the dual functions of providing a framework for both the world heritage and national heritage assets at Blenheim Palace. It provides confidence to, and guidance for, those involved in its protection and management and represents a flexible framework within which decisions can be taken. In order to achieve this, the management plan will:

- set out a vision for the sustainable future of the historic, scenic, scientific, cultural and social qualities of Blenheim Palace and Park, such that it will sustain both the OUV of the World

Heritage Site and the significance of the national heritage assets;

- provide guidance to the owners and managers of Blenheim Palace, as well as their advisers, on practical management planning, to help programme and prioritise tasks which will protect and, where appropriate, enhance the attributes of the site, as well as informing annual financial and operational plans and their successful implementation;
- ensure the careful maintenance and conservation (and enhancement where possible) of the Palace and Park, its associated buildings and grounds, informed by continued historical and scientific research;
- adopt an holistic approach to the conservation of the site which balances its many and varied special qualities, as well as recognising any threats or vulnerabilities and considering ways of reducing them;
- encourage high standards in the design of any appropriate new developments, features or landscaped areas which may be proposed in the future.

## THE FIRST MANAGEMENT PLAN

**1.07** The first management plan for the World Heritage Site was published in July 2006. This was the first time a management plan combined the dual aims of protection of both a national and world heritage site, and as such it brought together a considerable information base from which an understanding of its various values and significances were identified. A vision for the future, together with a set of management objectives was agreed with the members of the Steering Group and an implementation plan was set out. At the end of 10 years working with the

management plan, it is an appropriate time to reflect on its achievements and take the protection and care of the World Heritage Site into the next phase of realising the vision for the future. The publication of the revised management plan will also coincide with the 30th anniversary of Blenheim Palace’s inscription on the World Heritage List.

## ACHIEVEMENTS SINCE 2006

**1.08** Much has been achieved in the last ten years, resulting in the fact that today the OUV and heritage values of Blenheim Palace and park are better understood, and are in an improved state of conservation. Features have been enhanced, public access to the heritage assets has increased, key features have been conserved and many of the items on the original Action Plan have been completed. Achievements of particular note include:

- adoption by UNESCO of a new Statement of Outstanding Universal, including descriptions of integrity and authenticity, supported by a list of key attributes;
- completion of two rounds of Periodic Monitoring which show an improving state of conservation;
- further extensive conservation work has been carried out on the Palace including:
  - Repair of Green Writing Room Ceiling.
  - Structural repair and re-leading of the NW Tower lower roof.
  - Repair and redecoration of West Front Windows.
  - Repair of Terracotta Statues on north parapets.
  - Renewal of roof coverings over N portico and others.
  - Re-laying South Front steps and repairs to

- Library steps.
- Conservation of Italian Garden marble statues.
- Repair and re-decoration of East Front windows.
- Repairs to Great Hall high level windows and redecoration.
- Repairs to cornice and cramp damaged masonry.
- Conservation of Italian Garden fountain.
- Repairs to Laundry Yard masonry.
- Repairs to Stables Archway columns & conservation of lions.
- Repairs to Upper Water Terrace basin copings.
- Refinishing of North Front doors.
- Masonry repairs to East and West Lightwell.
- Conservation of lead statues and stone plinth Water Terrace.
- Masonry repairs to Clock Tower and repairing clock dial.
- Joinery and glazing repairs to Clock Tower staircase.
- Masonry repairs to Woodstock Gate.
- Masonry repairs to ha-ha wall east side N forecourt gates.
- Masonry repairs to West Front, including caryatids.
- Masonry repairs to south side of chapel.
- specialists studies on a diverse range of key elements of the World Heritage Site which have helped increase understanding leading to improved directions for management. The subjects covered include:
  - High Wood and its ancient trees;
  - Archaeological features within the park;
  - Current condition of the lakes;

- New research into the history of the development of the landscape;
- Comprehensive survey of all the trees in the park;
- A specific management plan for the historic parkland;
- restoration of the early 18th century Ice House;
- restoration of the 18th century William Chambers gateway into the walled kitchen garden;
- rebuilding the Butterfly House;
- restoration of the 'exedera' or Roundel;
- further extensive conservation work in the park including:
  - restoration of significant sections of ha-ha walls;
  - repair and restoration of the Lancelot Brown Dam on the Great Lake;
  - removal of horse paddocks and sheep fences in the park to restore the character of the Brownian landscape in key areas;
  - reversion of significant areas from arable back to parkland grass;
  - improved management in the Brownian belts and clumps including a major thinning and enhancement programme.

## STRUCTURE AND CONTENT OF THE SECOND MANAGEMENT PLAN

**1.09** The method used to produce the second management plan is based on the guidelines produced by UNESCO, ICOMOS and the UK government through its guidance relating to the National Planning Policy Framework, as well as information produced by its

advisers Historic England and Natural England. This new management plan will also benefit from the increased levels of understanding provided by the work undertaken over the past 10 years to:

- define the detail of key elements of the Outstanding Universal Value of the WHS;
- ensure that the original vision still reflects the right direction for sustaining the OUV and significance;
- understand any current issues that might be affecting OUV and significance;
- revise, where necessary, the management objectives to ensure they accord with current levels of understanding;
- update the Action Plan to reflect the priorities over the coming 10 year period.

**1.10** Section 1 provides the background information which is necessary in helping to develop an understanding of the Blenheim Palace World Heritage Site. It provides a general overview of historic development as well as the current state of conservation and condition, over four chapters, which are: 1. Introduction; 2. Background Context; 3. History of Blenheim Palace and park; and 4. Character and Condition of the WHS.

**1.11** Section 2 is concerned with explaining the significances, challenges and opportunities that currently exist. The section describes the Outstanding Universal Value of the Blenheim Palace World Heritage Site, and sets out the attributes which help convey this value. It also contains Statements of Significance in the national and regional context, and concludes by considering the challenges and opportunities which are likely to arise in the coming 10 years. The chapter headings in this section are: 5. The World Heritage Site;



6. The National Heritage Assets; and 7. Challenges and Opportunities.

**1.12** Section 3 contains the vision for the future of Blenheim Palace and Park, together with a set of 32 management policies. The section also contains details of the way in which the plan will be monitored and reviewed. The four chapter headings are 8. Vision; 9. Management Objectives; and 10. Monitoring and Review.

**1.13** Section 4 contains the implementation and action plan designed to help deliver the vision and to protect the attributes that convey OUV. This is contained in chapter 11: Implementation Plan.





## 2 BACKGROUND CONTEXT

### LOCATION

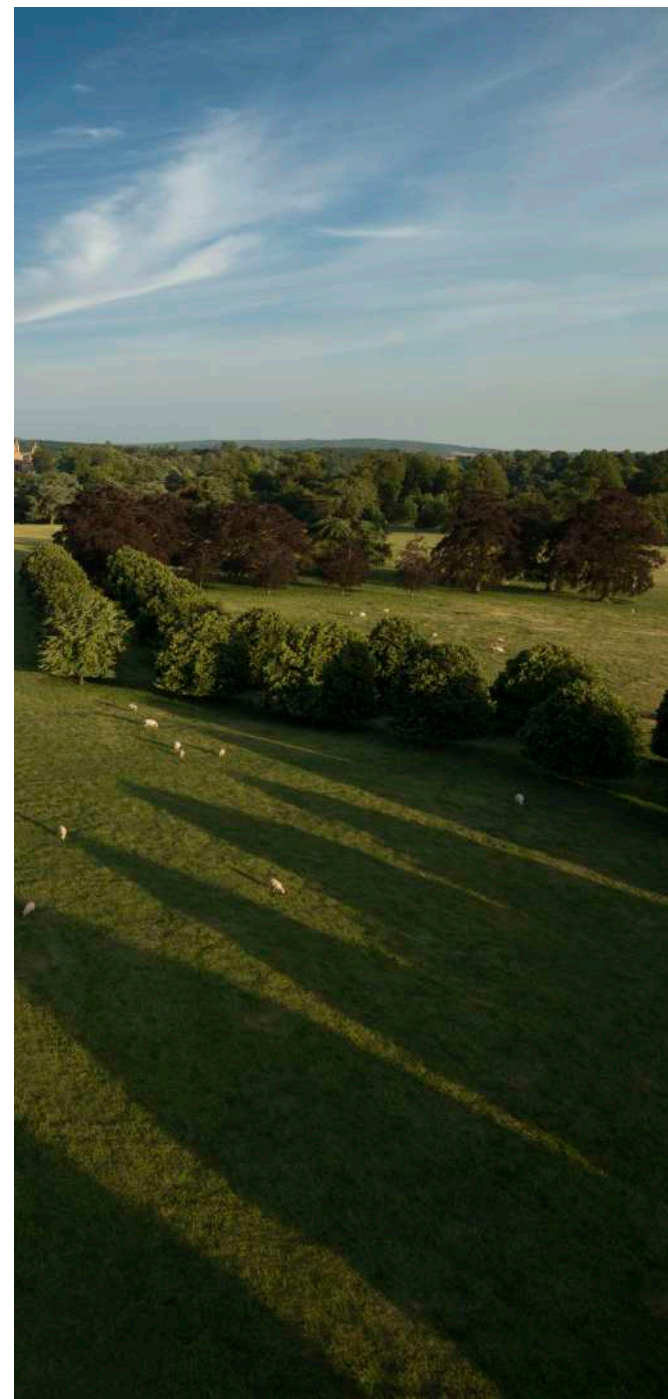
**2.01** Blenheim Palace is situated in the English county of Oxfordshire, c12km to the north-west of Oxford and immediately to the west of the town of Woodstock (see Figure 1: Location map). It lies at the bottom of the dip-slope of the Cotswold escarpment, close to the point where the hills level out into the Thames Valley and its topography is gently sloping, divided by the deep winding valley of the River Glyme which dissects the park from north to south. Boundaries to the WHS are formed by Woodstock and the A44 to the east, by the B4437 to the north, by open country and the village of Combe to the west and by the A4095 together with the village of Bladon to the south (see Figure 2: Boundary of the World Heritage and National Heritage site).

**2.02** The park at Blenheim Palace is a well defined and contained landscape which, following the extensive parkland planting campaigns of the mid 18th and late 19th century which included enclosing boundary plantations, has a limited inter-visibility with its wider setting. However, the WHS stands at the core of an extensive private estate, which has - over the centuries - exerted huge influence over the character and appearance of the wider landscape, and neighbouring landowners. Located immediately to the east of Blenheim Palace, the town of Woodstock is divided by the narrow, shallow valley of the River Glyme with Old Woodstock occupying the gently rising ground to the north of the river and the new township, reportedly built to house the followers of the royal court in the late 12th century, located on the southern valley sides and the level plateau above.

**2.03** Woodstock is surrounded by a landscape

characteristically defined as the open limestone wolds. This is a large-scale, rolling farmland landscape occupying the limestone plateau and dip-slope with the land lying mainly between 95m and 110m A.O.D. A predominantly arable landscape, this agricultural land is intensively farmed and has an open, expansive character to the north and east of Woodstock, but is semi-enclosed by small woodlands to the south. The field pattern is typically large-scale with a rectilinear pattern of dry stone walls and low, species poor hedgerows with few field boundary trees. The low lying wolds landscape to the east of the park is dissected by the valley of the River Glyme where the landscape is characteristically semi-enclosed with a mixed land use pattern defined by a strong structure of hedgerows, trees and small woodlands.

**2.04** The south eastern side of the WHS is bounded by Bladon, a small, linear village strung out along the A4095 road to Witney. South of the village the landscape is typical of the semi-enclosed limestone wolds and rises gently up the slopes to the woodlands on Bladon Heath and Burleigh Wood which crown the low lying hills. To the south and south west of the WHS the landscape is strongly associated with the pastoral valley of the River Evenlode. Here the narrow river winds through flat, floodplain meadows and pasture fields which are sub-divided by drainage ditches and fences. Beyond the valley floor to the south west are the distinctive sloping and typically convex valley sides rising up towards Long Hanborough. To the west, the open limestone wolds landscape again dominates. Between Gorrel Doors and Stonesfield is an open, expansive area of large arable fields, but around the village of Combe the landform is more folded and intimate with narrow country lanes and a series of small woods and copses. North of the WHS the landscape is characterised as estate farmland. This is a well-managed landscape scattered with extensive woodlands, plantations and copses. Lines of oaks along roads and some field boundaries give the





landscape to the north of the park a greater sense of enclosure.

## WIDER SETTING

### *National Character Area Description*

**2.05** The majority of the WHS lies within the Cotswolds National Character Area (No 107) as defined by Natural England, with a very small part of the south park near Bladon falling within the Upper Thames Vale National Character Area (No. 108). The Cotswolds NCA is perhaps the best known area of the oolite Jurassic limestone belt that runs from the Dorset coast in the southwest, through England to Lincolnshire in the northeast. The Cotswolds landscape is characterised, and dominated by, the steep north western facing scarp slope crowned by high, open wolds and the long, rolling dip slope cut by a series of valleys to the south east. Numerous towns and settlements nestle at the foot of the scarp slope or lie within the valleys, especially those broader, shallow valleys of the dip slope. It is a feature of the area that these settlements are linked by a complex network of roads, lanes and rights of way. Parklands and estate landscapes such as that found at Blenheim Palace, are a key characteristic of the Cotswolds and the density of these parks and gardens is a feature of the area. The key characteristics of the Cotswolds NCA are set out below:

- Defined by its underlying geology: a dramatic limestone scarp rising above adjacent lowlands with steep combs illustrating the slow erosion of the escarpments. Prominent limestone outliers within the lowland landscape.
- Open and expansive scarp and high wold plateaux dipping gently to the south-east which is dissected by a series of small, narrow river valleys.
- The majority of the principal rivers flow south-

eastwards forming the headwaters of the Thames.

- The flat, open dip slope landscape is dominated by arable farming while permanent pasture prevails on the steeper ground of the scars and in the river valleys. Some of these permanent pastures contain pockets of internationally important limestone grassland.
- Drystone walls define the pattern of fields on the high ground and dip slopes but give way to hedgerows on the deeper soils and in the river valleys.
- Ancient beech hanging woodlands line stretches of the high ground with oak/ash woodland in the valleys. Regular blocks of coniferous and mixed plantations are scattered across the landscape.
- Large areas of common land are characteristic of the area and were once found more frequently than they are today.
- The landscape has a rich history including Neolithic barrows, Iron Age hill forts and Roman roads, deserted medieval villages, grand country houses, cloth mills and WWII airfields. The field patterns largely reflect both the medieval open field system, with fossilized areas of ridge and furrow, and later planned enclosure landscapes.
- Locally quarried limestone brings a harmony to the built environment of scattered villages and drystone walls. The consistent use of local limestone brings a sense of unity to the landscape, for which the Cotswolds is renowned.
- Parklands, gardens and historic designed landscapes are features particularly of the dip slope and broad lowland with Hidcote, Kiftsgate, Stanway Chastleton and Blenheim Palace all

being good examples.

- Prominent natural and built features in the landscape include the City of Bath, Brailes Hill, Broadway Tower, the Tyndale monument and Blenheim Palace World Heritage Site.

### *Local Landscape Character Assessment*

**2.06** There have been several studies of landscape character at a more local level. These include the Cotswolds AONB Landscape Character, Assessment and guidelines; the Oxfordshire Wildlife and Landscape Study (OWLS) and the Historic Landscape Assessment for Oxfordshire - all of which are considered Appendix 3 as they relate to the WHS. Additionally, the West Oxfordshire District Council landscape character assessment was prepared in 1998 and divides the landscape of West Oxfordshire into 13 areas, each of which share a common identity. Within each character area a number of landscape types have been defined based on the pattern of natural and cultural characteristics. The WHS at Blenheim Palace has been assessed as falling within the Eastern Parklands and Valleys Character Area with the site naturally enough forming a parkland landscape type. The Parklands and Valleys landscape character is defined as an area of rolling limestone landscape which is heavily dissected by the valleys of the Glyme, Dorn and Cherwell. The area is distinguished by a particular concentration of formal parks, designed landscapes and estate farmland which are frequently associated with extensive areas of woodland. The landscape of the area has a well-managed character typical of large estates. The local landscape character assessment goes on to highlight the smooth, elevated and gently rolling landscape of the Parklands and Valleys character area where the underlying geology is reflected in the vegetation cover. Intensive arable farming is supported on the light, loamy soils derived from the limestone, while woodland and pasture occur on the heavier soils of the Oxford Clay or in the wetter valley bottoms. This

natural pattern of vegetation cover has been masked by the parks, gardens and estate landscapes, especially at and around Blenheim Palace, Rousham, Ditchley and a number of other smaller parklands. Surrounding these parkland landscapes the wider estate is often dominated by extensive areas of woodland and tree planting which gives the area a locally well wooded character. A dominant landscape influence is the consistent use of local oolitic limestone as a building and walling material. The use of the limestone lends harmony to the landscape and settlements of the character area.

### *The Setting of the World Heritage Site*

**2.07** The Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention issued by UNESCO recognise the importance of the character of the wider landscape around WHSs. In considering how best to protect the inscribed site the Operational Guidelines suggest that a Buffer Zone should be provided where it is deemed necessary. Such 'protection' relates solely to negative impacts on the sites OUV. UNESCO considers that if the existing protection arrangements for protecting the character of the setting of World Heritage Sites are sufficiently robust, then a special Buffer Zone is not necessary.

**2.08** This position is set out in UK planning guidance, supported by Historic England. The guidance notes that it can be appropriate to protect the setting of a WHS in other ways, for example, by the protection of specific views and viewpoints, whilst other landscape designations may also prove effective in protecting setting (planning circular 07/09). This approach considers how best to recognise and protect the 'settings' of heritage assets, which do not have defined areas but rather are described as 'the surroundings in which a heritage asset is experienced'. The UK Government also protects WHS's and their settings



in two further ways: firstly, through designation of individual buildings, monuments and landscapes under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and the 1979 Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act - Blenheim Palace and its setting is protected by the legal designation of all its principal buildings and monuments, through numerous other designations including SSSI legislation, the Register of Historic Parks and Gardens of Special Interest in England, the ancient woodland register, and through wider designations such as the Oxford Green Belt, the Cotswolds AONB, the Wychwood Project Area, and conservation area legislation. The second level of protection is afforded by the UK Spatial Planning system under the provisions of the Town and Country Planning Acts. As the UNESCO World Heritage Centre website recognises "the West Oxfordshire District Council Local Plan contains policies to protect the property" and in November 2016 the District Council's Economic and Social Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed that these existing protections were adequate in their own right and that the designation of a buffer zone was not considered necessary. All of these national and local spatial planning systems include policies for the protection for the heritage asset and its setting.

**2.09** As a result of strong legal policies, conservation designation and the spatial planning system established in the UK, a significant number of UK and UK territory World Heritage Sites have not considered it necessary to define Buffer Zones. In 2015, and in addition to Blenheim Palace, at least 12 World Heritage Sites in the UK did not have formal Buffer Zones - these sites included Blaenavon Industrial Landscape, Ironbridge Gorge, the Old and New Towns of Edinburgh, the Palace of Westminster, Stonehenge and Avebury, and the Tower of London. Unlike other World Heritage Sites, Blenheim Palace is in the unusual position, both nationally and internationally, of being a WHS in single ownership. As such the property has

very effective control and direct management of the WHS and has an unprecedented ability to conserve the OUV, guided by a robust management plan which is monitored on an annual basis by ICOMOS-UK, Historic England, Natural England and the local planning authorities amongst others. This is supplemented by other comprehensive management plans for visitor management, conservation of the historic park and the SSSI/ancient woodland interests within the setting.

**2.10** As the UNESCO inscription for Blenheim Palace makes clear, the firm implementation of the existing policies in the WHS management plan is important to provide effective protection for Blenheim Palace and its setting. Thus the WHS Management Plan assessed the wider setting and highlighted key views and viewpoints that needed to be conserved. It is clear from the UNESCO inscription together with the results of the subsequent periodic reports, taken alongside the existing protection arrangements for the setting of the WHS that these are sufficiently robust and the extent of success is monitored annually by the Steering Group.

**2.11** Therefore, given the existence of a robust, adopted management plan for the WHS, strong statutory and local plan protections for heritage assets, coupled with the fact that the local authorities have recently produced, or are in the process of producing, new local plans as part of the Local Development Framework, it is clear that Blenheim Palace and park WHS is already provided with a very high degree of protection for the attributes that help convey the OUV of the site and thus an additional level of designated protection is unnecessary. The continuous park wall, together with the historically important boundary tree plantations, provide a clear protection for the WHS and in nearly all cases preclude views into and out of the WHS. It is therefore important that these features continue to be maintained and managed in a way that retains their health and vitality, particularly in relation

to the tree belts, in order that this function continues to protect the WHS. In addition to this, Appendix 3 of this management plan contains the results of a setting study which helps bring together information on the character and understanding of the setting of the Blenheim Palace WHS so that these features are better understood. Figure 5 summarises the key elements of the character of the WHS setting, and defines the important viewlines which form links across the WHS boundary wall.

## DESIGNATIONS AND HERITAGE FEATURES IN THE WHS

### *Landscape*

**2.12** All of the land within the WHS boundary is included on the Historic England Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest in England at Grade I (see Figures 3 and 8). To the west, the park shares a contiguous boundary with the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) while the land to the south of the park and east of Lower Road, Long Hanborough lies within the Oxford Green Belt which was designated in 1997. Although not a landscape designation, the park at Blenheim Palace does also lie within the Wychwood Project Area. Work is also currently underway on the Historic Landscape Assessment for Oxfordshire.

### *Buildings*

**2.13** The WHS contains 37 listed buildings including the grade I listed Blenheim Palace. Nineteen of these listed structures are associated with the Palace, gardens or pleasure grounds while a further 18 listed buildings are located within the wider parkland. In addition the core of Bladon village and parts of Woodstock (both outside the WHS boundary) are designated as Conservation Areas, with very small

parts of the WHS, at the Estate Office and Hensington Gates falling within the Woodstock Conservation Area.

**2.14** The principal listed structures are those which are of exceptional historic or architectural interest, and these are:

#### Grade I:

- Blenheim Palace
- Column of Victory
- Woodstock Gate
- Hensington Gate
- New Bridge
- Grand Bridge
- Bernini Fountain in the Water Terraces

#### Grade II\*

- High Lodge and the attached walls in High Park
- Temple of Diana
- Temple of Health
- Statue of Knife-grinder in Pleasure Gardens
- Statue of the Wrestlers

#### Grade II

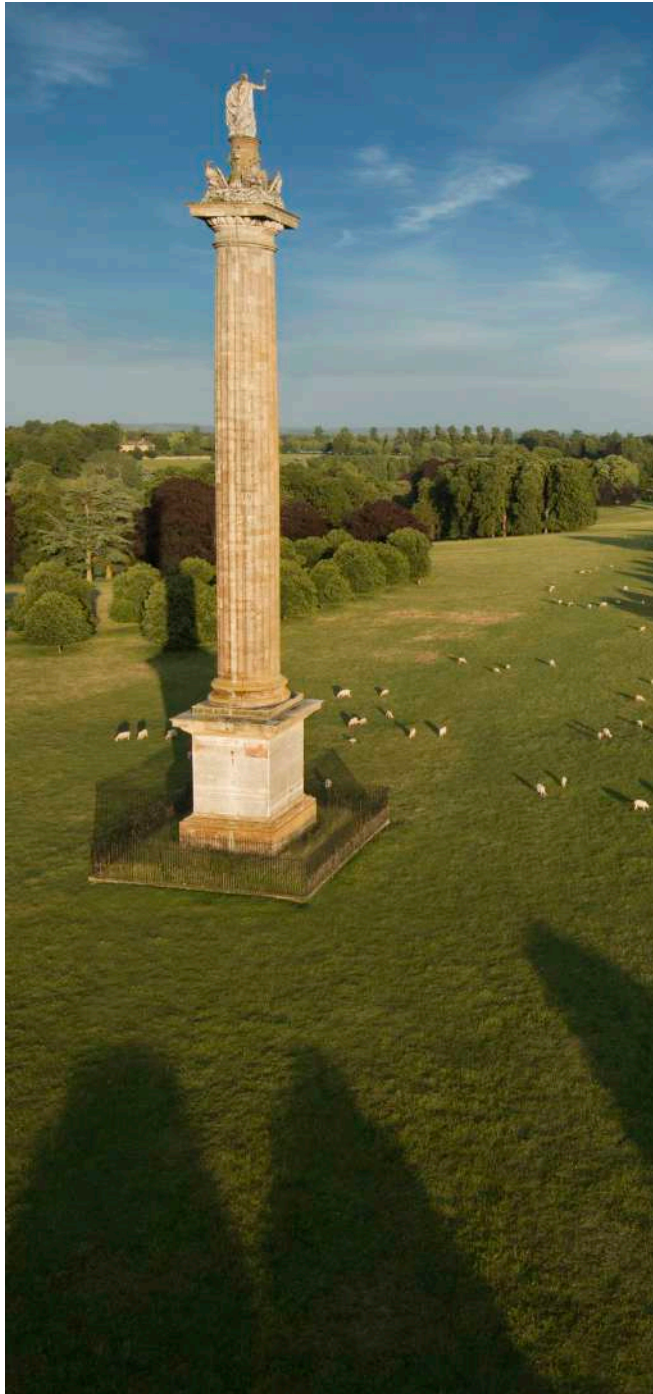
- Sundial in front of Bothy Cottage
- Sundial near Italian garden
- Statue of the Four Putti at the Exedera
- Statue of Hermes in the Walled Garden
- Urn in the Pleasure Grounds
- Central Fountain in the Italian Garden
- Steps to the east of the Italian Garden
- Steps to the NW corner of the Italian Garden
- Steps to the SW corner of the Italian Garden
- Statuary group in the centre of the Rose Garden
- Water Terraces
- Grotto



- Kitchen garden wall
- Wall attached to and east of Woodstock Gate
- Walls attached to and north of Woodstock Gate
- Woodstock Lodge
- China Corner
- Ditchley Lodge
- Ditchley Gate
- Park Farm buildings & Nos. 1 & 2 Park Farm Cottages
- Fishery Cottage (significantly damaged by fire in November 2016)
- Hensington Lodge
- Swiss Bridge
- The Cowyards & Cowyards Cottage
- Park Walls

### *Nature Conservation*

**2.15** The WHS includes a number of sites of nature conservation interest, which are mapped on Figure 9. The principal area of national importance is the Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) known as Blenheim Park, which was first notified in 1956. The Blenheim Park SSSI contains one of the finest areas of ancient oak-dominated wood pasture in the Europe, and represents one of the reasons for Blenheim Palace's inscription as a WHS. At a national level, the area of the SSSI which extends over the lake is important for breeding wildfowl. Additionally, historic parkland and wood pasture are Biodiversity 2020 Priority Habitats of national biodiversity interest. The WHS also contains habitats, mainly associated with woodland, semi-improved lowland calcareous grassland and its large body of veteran trees, mixed and wet woodlands and eutrophic standing water which are of importance regionally for a range of protected species, or are included in the Oxfordshire Conservation Target Areas.



**2.16** A study of the ecology of the WHS, undertaken in 2013, noted the presence of common and soprano pipistrelle bats at multiple locations throughout the park. In addition Daubenton's bat has been recorded over the River Glyme south of the main lake, torpid brown long-eared bat was observed at the Icehouse in Lower Park and the Oxfordshire Bat Group have recorded pipistrelle spp., brown long-eared, Natterer's, Daubenton's and barbastelle roosting and flying around the Grand Bridge. Other protected or rare species found within the WHS include badgers, otter, house sparrow, marsh tit, skylark, song thrush, spotted flycatcher, barn owl and starling. Great crested newts were observed at Mapleton Pond, with the park also supporting a number of other reptiles including grass snake, adder, slow-worm and common lizard. There are records of over 70 species of saproxylic invertebrate for High Park which includes 3 spp. of Red Data Book status and 14 spp. of Nationally Scarce status. Roman snail is also abundant throughout High Park and The Lince. Although not statutory designations, the park does lie within a Nitrate Vulnerable Zone and within a priority Catchment Sensitive Farming target area.

### *Archaeology*

**2.17** The WHS contains a rich archaeological heritage of national, regional and local significance with a high concentration of Scheduled Monuments, all five of which predate the creation of the designed parkland at the start of the 18th century. In addition to the Scheduled Monuments, a 2013 study noted that the site of the former royal palace north east of the Grand Bridge; the feature known as Akeman Street; and the park walls are all considered to be of national importance. Sites of archaeological value are located on Figure 10 Significant Archaeological Earthworks are:

- An 80m section of Grim's Ditch south west of the Ditchley Gate;

- Sections of the Oxfordshire Grim's Ditch and a section of Akeman Street Roman road immediately south of North Lodge;
- A bowl barrow 350m south west of Furze Platt Farm;
- Ten medieval pillow mounds and part of an associated enclosure 300m north west of Combe Lodge; and
- A possible Romano-British earthwork 300m south west of Rosamund's Well.

conditional exemption was renewed. Pursuant to a Court Order made on 22 July 1994, Blenheim Palace, its gardens and the Park surrounding Blenheim Palace (together totalling 2,375 acres) were conveyed on 1 December 1994 by the 11th Duke of Marlborough to the Trustees of the 1994 Blenheim Parliamentary Estates Settlements. The Trustees of this Settlement have ultimate responsibility for managing the property, which is guided by rolling 5-year strategic plans. Under the terms of the Settlement, the incumbent Duke is entitled to a life interest in the trust.

- Head of Estates - WHS co-ordinator and responsible for activities outside the Palace covering farming, forestry, parkland, sporting, formal gardens and outdoor events.

The exemplary nature of the management conducted by the current team is reflected in the number and variety of awards which the WHS have received, some of which are listed in Appendix 2.

## LAND USE AND MANAGEMENT

### *Management structure*

**2.18** The Palace, its park and all the associated buildings that go to make up the WHS, has been the home of the Dukes of Marlborough for almost three hundred years, a fact that contributes to its World Heritage value. The whole of the World Heritage Site is owned by the family supported by Trustees and a management team who have the primary responsibility for its care. It also operates within national planning legislation as delivered by West Oxfordshire District Council. Natural England provide advice on the SSSI management and the Higher Level Stewardship scheme; the Historic Buildings Inspector at Historic England, together with the local planning authority Conservation Officer provide advice on management and conservation of listed buildings, and the National Heritage Unit of Natural England advise on issues relating to the national heritage landscape.

**2.19** In 1984 the Estate Trustees set up a Maintenance Fund which led, in 1985 to the Treasury designating Blenheim Palace, its gardens, grounds and park as conditionally exempt from inheritance tax under Section 31 (c) and (d) of the Inheritance Act 1984. Subsequently, in 2000 and again in 2016, the

**2.20** Conservation funding is supported by two charitable foundations: the Blenheim Foundation which has for some years provided a fund for the conservation of the Palace and its contents in recognition of their value to the general public. In addition to the existing charity, the Blenheim Palace Heritage Foundation was established in 1st January 2017 which will open up new opportunities for donations, gift aid and additional funding. The purpose of these charitable Foundations is to ensure the long-term conservation, enhancement and sharing of the Palace, gardens and park with the public, all of which help to sustain the Outstanding Universal Value of the WHS. However, the majority of support for these conservation activities comes from running the visitor business.

**2.21** Day to day management of Blenheim Palace is overseen by the Chief Executive who is supported by a team of directors and a Senior Management Team. In addition to the Chief Executive, the key World Heritage Site management team comprises:

- Chief Operating Officer and Property Director - responsible for the maintenance of the built environment and wider estate property;
- Operations Director - responsible for the Palace and visitor activities;

### *Land use : Farming, grazing and woodland*

**2.22** All of the farmed area of the park is held in-hand and managed through contractors under the control of the Head of Estates (Figure 7 summarises land use across the WHS). The park is now laid to grass and is currently extensively grazed by a flock of c1600 sheep managed out of Park Farm. The arable areas were removed in 2010 with now only small areas cultivated for game cover crops. The grassland near the Palace and by the lake is managed by mowing, and much of the park is now subject to an Environmental Stewardship agreement with DEFRA to improve, where possible, the ecological value of the grassland (in line with the Higher Level Agri-environment Scheme agreement). All the park woodlands are included in a Woodland Grant Scheme agreement and each year an annual programme of thinning and pruning in the park woodlands is agreed. Much of the parkland restoration planting undertaken up to 1997 has since been the subject of a thinning and management programme from 2003 onwards. Where pure beech stands have been replanted there remains an issue with squirrel damage. High Park is an area of ancient oak wood pasture which is managed in accordance with the SSSI 'Views About Management (2005) document with the aim of retaining the wood pasture character and protecting the many veteran trees. Dead wood is left in the High Park where it falls and bracken is controlled through annual rolling, with rides and grassland areas





being mowed rather than grazed. During the 1950s an area of conifers were planted in High Park which are at odds with its historic character and nature conservation value and, since a specialist report was produced in 2013, a programme of conifer removal has slowly commenced.

#### *Land use : Pheasant shooting and sporting rights*

**2.23** Blenheim Palace run an in-house game shoot of pheasant and partridge. A small amount of duck flighting over Mapleton Pond and Bladon Lake takes place, together with a low level of deer stalking, mainly for control purposes. Fishing is also permitted on the lake. Management of the game requires the planting of game cover crops in parts of the park together with the use of some of the woodlands for game rearing and cover.

#### *Land use : Properties*

**2.24** There are several houses and cottages within the WHS boundary which are either used for staff or to provide an income through residential lettings. Park Farm is a commercial centre, where most of the estate operations are centered. The Cowyards in Low Park have been converted to office use, beyond which lies the Bladon Chains site on the eastern-most point of the park, just outside the Park wall.

### **PUBLIC ACCESS AND EVENTS**

#### *Visitors*

**2.25** Recreational use of the grounds at Blenheim Palace is a long established tradition, with one of the earliest tourist accounts of a visit to the Palace being that of Arthur Young in 1767 (Figure 4 summarises the locations of public access). Today, Blenheim

Palace is a very popular tourist destination attracting c850,000 visitors in 2016. The gardens surrounding the Palace, including the Water Terraces, Rose Garden, Grand Cascade, and the Secret Garden, are currently open to the public every day apart from Christmas Day. A miniature train connects the Palace to the Pleasure Gardens housed in the old walled kitchen garden adjacent to a Butterfly House, antique garden machinery exhibition, maze, mini-golf and adventure play area. Facilities are also offered within Blenheim Palace, and particularly within the eastern courtyard for corporate entertainment, weddings, events, conferences and product launches. In the Palace areas and the Pleasure Grounds there are also catering and shopping facilities on offer for the general visitors to the site. An annual pass can be purchased which has proved very popular and helps spread public visits across a wider part of the year. In addition, local residents enjoy free access to the park at any time, and discounted tickets are available for visitors using certain public transport carriers. Visitors can now also opt to donate their entry fee in exchange for an annual pass redeemable at the Palace - at an early stage this enables the Palace to recover gift aid.

**2.26** The park is open every day of the year, apart from Christmas Day. As well as providing an opportunity for informal recreation in the form of walking and picnicking, it is also used throughout the year to host a series of ticketed activities including sporting events, craft and country fairs, and entertainment events such as music concerts and historical re-enactments, which together bring the estimated number of visitors in 2016 up to c1M. There is a well established events strategy with agreed plans in place with the District Council. In terms of landscape protection, all trees, especially the mature and veteran trees are roped off prior to events and access points off the main metalled roads are well defined.

**2.27** Public access is largely by private cars and

coaches, accessing the site via the county road network. Blenheim Palace also promotes travel via buses, trains and taxi on their website. The main vehicular access is off the A44 Oxford Road in Woodstock via the Hensington Gate. Ticket kiosks are located along the drive with the main visitor car park set immediately to the north of the Hensington Drive. A secondary access comes in at the Woodstock Gate. Blue badge holders with mobility issues are able to park in a small car park adjacent to the Flagstaff Lodge with some coach parking also permitted in this location. A secondary car and coach parking area has been provided at the walled garden. Vehicles exit from the park via the Eagle Lodge gate on to the A4096 Grove Road in Bladon.

**2.28** Further access is provided on foot via a number of public rights of way which run through the park connecting Blenheim Palace with the surrounding villages of Woodstock, Bladon, Combe and Stonesfield. The public rights of way are all public footpaths apart from one short section of public bridleway which links the Grand Avenue to Old Woodstock. They include two locally promoted walks, the Oxfordshire Way which follows the line of Akeman Street, the Grand Avenue and the drive north of the Lake together with the Wychwood Way, a circular walk that runs from the Seven Arches Bridge along the Grand Avenue and east along Akeman Street.

#### *Intellectual access: Research*

**2.29** Archival enquiries are dealt with by the Education Officer. The archive has been moved in recent years, from a location with insufficient storage in the Undercroft to a bespoke storage area in the Clock Tower. Levels of interpretation focus on the Palace and its interiors but in 2016 the opportunity was taken to add interpretation to the park as part of the Lancelot Brown tercentenary celebrations. This has

demonstrated that the landscape also has the potential to significantly increase the public's enjoyment and understanding of this important site.

#### *Local community values*

**2.30** Blenheim Palace has enjoyed a long association with the local communities that surround it, benefiting both the lives of the individuals who live there, and the health of the local economy. It is an important local landowner, generating both jobs and visitors who support local businesses. Responses to consultation with the local town and parish councils show that there is a keen sense of pride and community interest in Blenheim Palace. The numbers of visitors have a positive impact on the local economy (catering, accommodation, shops, transport etc) while at the same time, concern is expressed about the negative impacts caused by large numbers of visitors on event days.

#### *Intellectual access: Education*

**2.31** The Education Service at Blenheim Palace has run for over 30 years, providing a high quality resource for a variety of educational uses. A full time Education Officer runs this enterprise and visits are carefully linked to the National Curriculum at all Key Stages together with GCSE and A level, as well as running sessions on the World Heritage status of the site. The Sandford Award, presented to historic houses by the Heritage Education Trust in recognition of outstanding contributions to education, has been held continuously by the Blenheim Education Service since 1982. In addition, the Duke of Marlborough's Annual Heritage Education prizes are awarded each year to enhance the linkage with schools and to encourage follow-up work.

## MANAGEMENT RESOURCES

### *Financial context*

**2.32** The bulk of the operating income for the WHS comes from:

- visitors through admission fees, catering, retail, filming, corporate use/conferences/weddings and park events;
- bottled water business;
- in-house farming operations;
- income from agriculture and from residential and commercially let properties;
- fishing hire and game shooting days.

It should be noted that the last three of the above items refer to income from the wider estate, most of which is outside the WHS boundary. Thus, the running of the Palace and Park is partly funded by income derived mainly from activities on the wider estate, without which the many conservation activities within the park wall could not take place. The majority of funding for conservation activities within the WHS comes from commercial activities managed by the Trustees of the estate, especially through the new Blenheim Palace Heritage Foundation, with some occasional grant support in the form of:

- Farm subsidies;
- Woodland Grant Scheme;
- Grants from Historic England for specific conservation activities;
- Under the HLS scheme, Natural England has provided considerable funds for habitat management in the parkland and grassland restoration, as well as historic restoration work to Rosamund's Well,

the ice house, Mapleton Pond, the park wall, and section of ha-ha. The Parkland Management Plan and the High Park Management Plan were also funded in this way.

The estate continues to manage the property to a high standard, but there is always more conservation work that could be done, if more funds were available. For example, the survey work undertaken for the 2014 parkland plan highlighted the need to spend very significant sums of money on the Palace alone. Income from recreational use of the WHS varies annually, having an effect on the levels of finance available to spend on conservation work above and beyond annual maintenance operations. Thus major conservation projects are likely to continue to be reliant on estate activities outside the WHS boundary, as well as additional funding from external sources.

### *Human resources*

**2.33** In addition to the directors and Senior Management Team, Blenheim Palace employ a large full-time in-house team who cover all aspects of the running of the property as a whole. These are supplemented by seasonal workers in the visitor areas as well as guides in the Palace, and external contractors who are brought in to carry out specific or specialist tasks as-and-when necessary. Staff working on the conservation of the built fabric are trained as are those who work on the landscape and within the Palace. Heritage consultants, historic landscape consultants, archaeological consultants and historic buildings conservation architects are all commissioned to provide advice on an as-and-when-needed basis. In addition staff work closely with the relevant officers of Historic England, Natural England, the Forestry Commission and the local planning authority, as well as the County Council to seek advice and guidance on conservation matters.



## 3 SUMMARY HISTORY OF BLENHEIM

### THE EARLY LANDSCAPE

**3.01** Blenheim lies in a part of Oxfordshire that is known to have a long and complex history of human interaction with the landscape, resulting in regular land use change. The park contains prehistoric earthworks that indicate human occupation and territorial division of the landscape from the Neolithic/Bronze Age onwards. A system of land management and division developed in Britain during the Iron Age which was to leave a permanent mark on the landscape. By the late Iron Age the land now occupied by the park was located within the territory of the Dobunni, a tribe that resided in the Severn Vale and adjacent Cotswolds Hills. The North Park contains well preserved sections of Grim's Ditch, a series of linear earthworks which demarcate at least one huge segmented circuit between the valleys of the Rivers Evenlode, Glyme and Windrush and indicate the formation of a large scale pseudo-religious hunting ground related to the Dobunni. It is possible that these linear ditches, of which Grim's Ditch is a section, also divided more open countryside from more heavily forested areas.

**3.02** By the Roman period the area that is now occupied by the park must have been reasonably open and was almost certainly in agricultural use with possible scattered settlements. Roman activity is recorded in the park through the earthworks at Akeman Street in the North Park which indicate travel and movement on a large scale through the area, and by the probable Romano-British Temple or enclosure south west of Rosamund's Well. In the Roman period (43 - 410 AD) the territory of the Dobunni was transformed into a civitas, the successor state to which was the Hwicce Kingdom, from which the name Wychwood is thought to derive. After the Romans

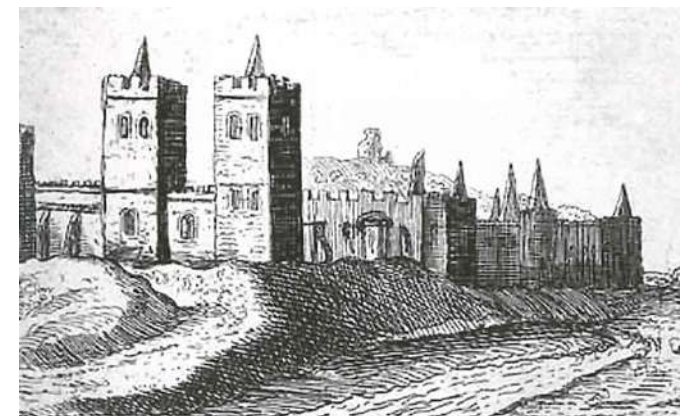
left Britain the landscape around the site of Blenheim Palace appears to have once again become wooded in the late Saxon and early Norman era. The Domesday Book records Woodstock as lying within the king's demesne forests.

### THE MEDIEVAL PERIOD

**3.03** By the late 11th century it is known that a medieval royal forest was established in the Wychwood area with the royal park at Woodstock subsequently founded in the early 12th century. In the Middle Ages 'forest' was primarily a legal concept, an area reserved for the royal hunt, where Forest Law took precedence over Common Law. The establishment of a forest did not necessarily mean an entire area blanketed by dense woodland and in the case of the Wychwood forest around Woodstock this almost certainly included open countryside, cultivated land, farms and villages. Records indicate that a manor house or lodge was developed for hunting parties in Woodstock Park during Henry I's reign (1100 - 1135) and the landscape surrounding this house incorporated a menagerie containing lions, lynxes, camels and other animals. It is highly likely that the park included areas of woodland, wood-pasture, open ground and enclosed paddocks of various sizes for handling the animals. While deer were the *raison d'être* of the medieval park, which is typified by areas of wood-pasture, the retention of other livestock such as pigs and cattle as well as the management of timber, wood, fuel and fodder were also important secondary products. By the early 13th century the park at Woodstock is also known to have included fishponds near to the manor house.

**3.04** Henry II (1154 - 1189) began the expansion of the manor house or lodge into a full-scale royal palace with a range of service buildings in the second half of the 12th century. This redevelopment was accompanied by an expansion of the park. In the

early medieval period the park probably occupied land within Old Woodstock township to the west of the River Glyme, possibly extending into what is now the North Park. To this core Henry II added land to the east to cover the area known as Hensgrove (now effectively Lower Park) as a result of a land exchange with the Knights Templars. It is possible that this area lay outside the original bounds of the Royal Forest of Wychwood. Henry II is also reputed to have constructed buildings and gardens around the spring at Everswell for his lover, Jane Clifford, commonly known as fair Rosamund. In the late 12th century this area contained a labyrinth and gardens including 3 rectangular pools fed by a natural spring, and thus was born the legend of Rosamund's Well, a structure which survives in modified form within the park today. Whatever the mythology surrounding Rosamund's Well, it is known that works at the Everswell spring were taking place in 1155 - 56 and after 1165 Woodstock Park included the 'walled pleasance of Everswell', consisting of 'an orchard with pools fed by a natural spring'. This became known as Rosamund's Bower and gave its name to a whole class of enclosed gardens. Such bowers or pleasaunces, which served to provide an escape from the formality of court life, frequently occur as an adjunct to medieval palaces.



**3.05** Old Woodstock Manor was regularly visited by successive kings and the manorial hall was periodically expanded but had become, by the 17th century, a rambling residence containing several chapels and an imposing gatehouse. It seems that from early Tudor times Woodstock Manor and the associated park began to decline in status. The palace was infrequently used by Henry VIII and was recorded as being in a poor condition by 1551. However, the building was in a fit enough state to house the future Queen Elizabeth I, who was imprisoned at Woodstock for 11 months in 1554/5 for her alleged part in the Wyatt Plot. Elizabeth I's links to Woodstock, and her well known love of the hunt, may have eventually led to the low-key expansion of the park and other works in the 1570s and 1580s. In this period a property known as Gorrel Lodge was



built for one of the park keepers (assumed to have occupied the land where North Lodge now sits) and High Lodge was either built or extensively repaired. An expansion of the park took place in July 1576 when £309 was allocated for building a wall to enclose certain additions to Woodstock Park. By 1609 the park, within the Royal Forest, was recorded as extending to 1,629 acres (c.659 ha) west of the Glyme with a further 452 acres (c.182ha) outside the Forest. Woodstock remained a royal residence after Elizabeth's reign and was infrequently visited by both James I and Charles I. King Charles is known to have stayed at Woodstock Manor in 1642 on his way to Oxford and when civil

war broke out it is unsurprising to find that a royalist garrison was stationed here. In 1646 the royalist forces constructed a palisaded curtain embankment to protect the manor house but it came under attack on 17 April when it was bombarded by forces commanded by Thomas Rainsborough. After another attack on 24 April 1646 the garrison surrendered to parliamentary forces and the damaged manor house was said to have been further ransacked by Cromwell's men.

**3.06** The interregnum initiated a survey of Woodstock Park and the manor house which sheds light on the landscape character in the mid 17th century. For much of this period the park was held by Sir Arthur Hasslerigg and seems to have been let in a number of



sub-divisions. A suggested partition into four, dated 1649 - 50, probably represented long-established subdivisions, each with a lodge. The North Park was divided by Gorrel Road, running from Woodstock to the Gorrel Gate and covered an area of c.583 acres with the keeper's lodge at what is now North Lodge to the one side and a further area of land to the south west with the later New Lodge on the site of the present Park Farm. These two northern divisions of the park were probably the Gorrel ridings, north and south, mentioned in the early 16th century. The other two sub-divisions of the park were Hensgrove (333 acres) to the south east which had long been separately

walled and the Straights Walk (c.255 acres) in the area now known as High Park. Of particular interest is the fact that Hensgrove Park contained Hensgrove Lodge which stood south-west of the present kitchen gardens until demolished in the later 18th century. This lodge was to house Henry Wise during his work on the gardens in the early 18th century and the earthworks of the building and gardens remain visible to this day. Straights Lodge was on the site of the present High Lodge. At the restoration of the monarchy in 1660 the Old Woodstock manor house was recorded as being in an un-repaired and desperate condition. By the time Queen Anne was on the throne (1702), royal visits to Woodstock had ceased. This short period of its history has often been taken to mean that by the late 17th century Woodstock Manor

sat as a romantic ruin in a well wooded, fairy tale landscape. While the main building may have been in a semi-ruinous state the same is probably not true of the landscape. Cartographic images and etchings clearly show the old manor house was set on a low knoll above the river valley with an actively well worked landscape of agricultural land surrounding it. Tracks and roads connected the manor house to Woodstock and Bladon villages with dense woodland only found in the area of what is now High Park. It is this more open and structured landscape that was to become the foundation of the park we see today.



## THE BUILDING OF BLENHEIM (1705-1719)

**3.07** In August 1704 the British army, led by John Churchill, 1st Duke of Marlborough, achieved a significant victory over the French at the Battle of Blenheim. This victory represented a pivotal moment in the War of the Spanish Succession and the returning commander was lauded for his success by Parliament. In 1705 Parliament resolved to consider means of rewarding the Duke, and Queen Anne proposed the grant of the royal manor of Woodstock, which included the c.2,000 acre deer park, to the Duke and his heirs in perpetuity. Shortly afterwards Parliament voted in favour of the public funding of a new building at Woodstock. The Duke of Marlborough was shown several preliminary designs for the new house and is said to have favoured a building similar to Castle Howard, but with some alterations and additions. The architect of Castle Howard was John Vanbrugh (1664 - 1726) who had been made Comptroller of the Office of Works in 1702. Vanbrugh, after obtaining a warrant from Sidney Godolphin authorising him as the architect, worked on designs for Blenheim Palace with his assistant Nicholas Hawksmoor (c.1661 - 1736) and seemingly in collaboration with the Duke. Together, or at Vanbrugh's insistence, the site of the new house was chosen almost directly opposite the ruins of Woodstock Manor to the south of the Glyme

valley. Work on the ground began in 1705 and went hand in hand with the creation of new formal gardens, an extensive wilderness or 'wood-work' and a vast designed parkland landscape. Vanbrugh's concept for the design was to place the new house, originally referred to as a castle, on a long north - south axis leading from the intended ceremonial entrance at what is now Ditchley Gate in the north and running through the new building to extend as far as Bladon church in the south. The initial earthworks for the Palace and gardens were supervised by Henry Wise (1653 - 1738), gardener to Queen Anne. Although Vanbrugh seems to have had a role in the layout of the gardens and their relationship to the Palace, it is probable that Wise designed the formal gardens, wilderness and some of the parkland planting himself. Certainly Wise was responsible for implementing the landscape design and was ably assisted by his employees at the Brompton Park Nursery, mostly notably by Stephen Switzer and to a lesser degree by Charles Bridgeman.

**3.08** Blenheim Palace was designed in baroque fashion with Vanbrugh's characteristic military overtones, with four square corner towers flanked by service ranges to the north east and north west for the kitchen and stable courts respectively. It was adorned with carvings by Grinling Gibbons and was

decorated with interiors by Laguerre and Thornhill amongst others. Its military iconography was displayed everywhere, including its setting which was designed to be as important a statement as the principal building itself. The gardens closest to the Palace were seen as an extension of the architectural design with formal gardens proposed to the east and west, large formal gardens to the south and the grand entrance court to the north. The geometric lines of the main avenues to the north and the east were focussed directly on the principal axes of the Palace. These avenues, planted with 1,600 elms were two to four rows deep with the east avenue dating from 1707 - 08. Vanbrugh's intended design for the park also included a bosquet style design with radiating avenues intersecting circular lawns for Lower Park, mostly formed from new limes and oaks all set within the pre-existing mature oaks of the former Hensgrove deer park. To the west of the formal gardens further avenues extended the walks in the gardens. In High Wood a series of formal walks and rides were proposed south of High Lodge which was itself the focus of a vista along a grass ride from which there were reported views towards Oxford. In the North Park the Grand Avenue was the dominant feature, with only the two large roundels planted by Wise, possibly as tree nurseries to break up the landscape. Interestingly, Walnut or Big Clump roundel is bounded by a ha-ha created by Wise and thought to



be in place by c.1709, which would make it a very early example of this type of feature. The most significant component of the original garden design was the Great Parterre on the south side of the Palace, overlooked by the state rooms, which consisted of parterres closest to the Palace with clipped plants trained into elaborate geometric forms, while further away lawns and topiary gardens were punctuated with statues, sundials and proposed basins of water around which an ornamental wood was to be planted cut through with axial and serpentine walks. The focus of the Great Parterre was the central axial view towards the intended basin and fountain at the end of the garden with the view extending out towards the church at Bladon.

**3.09** The military iconography of the Palace was also incorporated into the garden design most obviously when seen in plan form, through the eight rounded bastions, which echoed the central bays in the east and west fronts of the Palace. The semi-circular design of the bays and bastions is also picked up in the outline of the kitchen garden to the south east of the Palace. The perimeter walk around the Great Parterre no doubt was designed to allow views out into the deer park and, at least until the planting of the ‘wood-work’ or formal wilderness had become established, over the gardens themselves. Along this circuit walk the bastions formed contrived stopping points from which further vistas extended out into the park to east and west, one of which appears to have stretched through the park along a tree lined avenue immediately south of the kitchen garden. How much of the bastion walling was actually completed, and when, is a matter of debate as the Duchess suspended further work on the wall in 1709 only allowing works to proceed when the masons were free and stone was available. Certainly by 1721 the masons Townsend and Peisley were still submitting estimates for extensive lengths of wall on the garden boundary to be finished.

**3.10** The Brompton Park nursery were supplying vast numbers of plants for the formal garden. The wilderness seems to have been lined with yew hedging while hornbeam, privet and sweetbriar formed an inner line. Espaliered trees and ornamental shrubs also lined the walks. Despite this vast supply of plants the areas of lawn were expanded by 1708 to reduce the need for planting. The intended design is shown on a plan of 1709 drawn by Charles Bridgeman. This plan is instructive in understanding the intentions of the landscape design but it must be a proposal drawing, as the slightly later plan of 1719 shows variations in layout and form, so that the 1709 plan includes elements of the design which were never executed. The 1719 plan shows a single serpentine walk through



part of the wilderness, although the straight paths remained the dominant features. The depiction of Lower Park strongly suggests that the new bosquet style landscape was created in and around existing mature trees of the pre-existing landscape. Analysis of the two plans also starts to highlight the difference between what was acceptable in the early 18th century landscape and what we now consider appropriate. For example, both early 18th century plans show a quarry immediately south west of the Great Parterre with a service drive or track cutting through the avenues to the west of the garden. To the south the Gardener's House, thought to be the Hensgrove Lodge used

occasionally by Henry Wise when creating the gardens, must have lain in full view of anyone walking along the southern boundary of the wilderness, while to the north of the stables a house is shown in the park and would similarly have been visible from the main entrance drives.

**3.11** As the scheme for Blenheim Palace advanced there were well known difficulties in the relationship between its architect Vanbrugh and Sarah, Duchess of Marlborough. As well as arguments over elements of the Palace, there were also issues of contention in the park, namely the Grand Bridge and the Old Woodstock manor house. The Grand Bridge, according to Vanbrugh's design, was intended to perform the function of continuing the grand approach route down the Grand Avenue over the valley to the Palace. Vanbrugh conceived a triple arched bridge with four towers and an arcaded superstructure, as part of a design that included a 30m central arch, then the largest in the country. In c1706 an arch was built to take an 'engine-house' for the waterwheel, while in 1710 the mason Bartholomew Peisley placed the central arch keystone. However work was stopped as mounting debts, indifference to funding Blenheim Palace by the Treasury, and the declining political fortunes of the Marlborough's all culminated to beset construction. In June 1712 all work was officially stopped with the debt standing at around £45,000. After Queen Anne's death in 1714, King George sanctioned some additional funds for the Palace but this did not satisfy outstanding debts and the project was all but abandoned for 4 years until the Duke and Duchess decided to complete the Palace and the major landscape works themselves. The resumption of work concentrated on completing the Palace and it was not until September 1721 that work on the bridge resumed. Vanbrugh had been goaded into resigning as architect in 1716 and when work restarted on the bridge the scale of his original design was reduced, omitting the towers and central arcade. If the design



and construction of the bridge over the Glyme was prolonged and contentious, then the circumstances regarding the old ruined manor house were to prove calamitous, at least for Vanbrugh. The Marlboroughs, and indeed many of their friends, had anticipated the demolition of the old manor so that it did not impact on the setting of the new Palace or the character and quality of the formal park design. However, in 1709 Vanbrugh made an impassioned plea for the conservation of the ruin believing it to be ‘...one of the most agreeable objects that the best landskip painters can invent...’. The debate about the future of the old manor rumbled on for some time, but when it was discovered that Vanbrugh had been living in the neglected building on a regular basis since 1713, without permission, in defiance of clear instructions and had in fact been diverting funds for some repairs, the Duke and Duchess were incensed. The fate of the old manor was sealed and the debacle ultimately led to Vanbrugh resigning as architect in 1716. The ruins of the old manor were swept away over the next few years to provide stone for the Grand Bridge. The Duke was to enjoy just two short summers at his Palace before he died in 1722. The task of finishing the great works fell to Sarah but after the 1st Duke’s death she came only sparingly, preferring her other houses on London, St Albans and Windsor. However, during her 22 year long widowhood the Duchess did not completely abandon Blenheim, but instead turned her attention to particular projects in the park.

### THE DUCHESS RECALLS HAWKSMOOR

**3.12** Vanbrugh and the 1st Duke had always seen Blenheim Palace as a ‘...a public edifice, raised for a monument of the Queen’s Glory...’. However, after the Duke’s death his widow, Sarah, directed future works more towards the lasting memory of her husband and was therefore to focus more on other buildings. These included the construction of the Woodstock Gate, the Column of Victory and the formation of the

canals and pond in the valley of the Glyme. Baroque gardens and landscapes were intended to have water as a key element of their design, but problems with water supply and water pressure had limited the ability of Vanbrugh, Wise and others to provide this feature within the gardens. The position of the Palace had also distanced the main house from any water works that might have been created in the wider landscape. It is clear that Vanbrugh made proposals for formal canal schemes in the Glyme valley but none of these had progressed in any significant way by the early 1720s. Indeed one of Vanbrugh’s schemes was derided by the 1st Duchess as ‘a great sea round the house...in spots of dirty stinking water’. Another iteration of his design was shown by Campbell in the 1725 edition of *Vitruvius Britannicus*, a design which in many ways foreshadowed Lancelot Brown’s proposals for a lake in the mid 18th century. Instead the Duchess turned to Colonel John Armstrong for assistance in devising a system of water in the valley. Vanbrugh’s Grand Bridge had an uneasy relationship to the small stream that

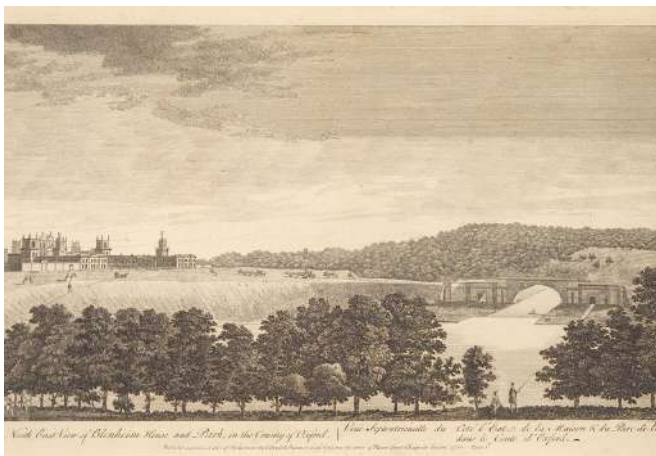
flowed underneath it and the Dowager Duchess with Colonel John Armstrong, an associate of the Duke and Chief Engineer of the English Army, devised grander and more elaborate waterworks. Working with military efficiency Armstrong formed a formal pond on the east side of the bridge dammed by constructing a stone wall against one of the causeways to the old manor house. A broad cascade directed water into a canal that flowed under the bridge and past Rosamund’s Well towards a large circular basin. Two further canals ran down the valley to the west of the Palace before the river was returned to its natural course. At each canal head there was a cascade over which the water tumbled while long walks were established on both sides of the valley meadows. In 1725 the work on the water in the valley was finished, the Duchess writing that the lake, cascade, slopes above the bridge and canals are all complete. These waterworks are recorded on a series of images dated between c.1724 and the 1750s, all of which confirm the formal layout of the water in the valley (indeed modern aerial photographs



still show the outline, beneath the present lake, of Armstrong's canals and basins). What these contemporary images also illustrate is the character of the park at this time. The estate plan of 1719 shows a well wooded landscape south and west of the Palace, but the rest of the park was very open. Indeed William Stukely's view of Blenheim Palace and its setting dated 1724 depicts a stark and barren landscape with young trees to the east of the Palace and only a scatter of planting on the banks between the building and Glyme valley.

**3.13** Although Armstrong's canals were to be submerged by Lancelot Brown in the mid 18th century, two of the Duchess's other projects still remain as key components of the parkland landscape, these being the Woodstock Gate and the Column of Victory. About five years after Vanbrugh had resigned the Duchess recalled Nicholas Hawksmoor (c.1661 - 1736) to Blenheim. In the original design for the park Vanbrugh had intended two entrance routes, one along the straight approach down the Grand Avenue and a second from the east, in anticipation of which, Henry Wise had planted the Mall avenue. However, the Marlborough's were unable to purchase the land for the eastern entrance gates and the scheme was abandoned for a number of years. In the absence of a convenient east approach to the Palace, the Duchess decided to develop an existing entrance (shown on the 1719 survey) through the village of Woodstock. As a result of this decision Vanbrugh's intended formal approach along the Grand Avenue was rendered virtually obsolete. Hawksmoor modelled the design of the Woodstock Gate on the Triumphal Arch of Titus in Rome and it was always intended to show Sarah's regard for her dead husband. The Woodstock Gate was constructed in 1723 by the Oxford mason William Townsend for the sum of £512, the 1789 guide book to Blenheim Palace noting that this entrance provided '...one of the most enchanting prospects...The Palace appears in front, the towers of which rise into the

horizon...'. Contemporary with the Woodstock Gate the Duchess instructed Hawksmoor to develop ideas for a pillar in the park. Vanbrugh had intended the Grand Avenue to contain an obelisk within the central ellipse but the design and the position of the feature was changed. Hawksmoor prepared numerous designs for the pillar, but the Column of Victory would ultimately



be completed to a design by the Earl of Pembroke working with Roger Morris and set at the southern end of the Grand Avenue. Taken together the Woodstock Gate and Column of Victory make strong personal and political statements in the landscape, showing the Duchess's regard for her late husband as well as underlining the victorious military campaigns of the 1st Duke with allegorical reference to the ancient power of Rome. At the death of the 1st Duke, and with no male heir, the title passed to his eldest daughter Henrietta who became the 2nd Duchess of Marlborough. Although Henrietta inherited the title she did not gain control of Blenheim Palace which remained with the Dowager Duchess under an Act of Parliament and the 1st Duke's will. When Henrietta died in 1733 the title passed to her nephew Charles Spencer of Althorp. The 3rd Duke eventually claimed possession of Blenheim after his grandmother's death in 1744 and sweeping changes to the landscape were not long in coming.

## THE 3RD DUKE'S ALTERATIONS

**3.14** The attitudes and fashions for the laying out of grounds was changing rapidly in the early to mid 18th century and there is little doubt that the gardens and park inherited by the 3rd Duke were, for a ducal estate, behind the times for the mid 1740s. The 3rd Duke finally moved to the Palace in 1748 having previously created gardens at Langley Park, Buckinghamshire and at Little Windsor Park. By 1759 the Palace gardens were being described as 'now a very large plot of ground, well contrived by sinking the outer wall into a Foss, to give a view quite round.....It is well adorned with walks, greens, espaliers and vistas to divers remarkable objects that offer themselves in the circumjacent country.' What the 3rd Duke actually achieved is a little uncertain as the 4th Duke may have undertaken some landscape work between inheriting the title in 1758 and the arrival of Lancelot Brown. What is known is that the period between 1748 and 1763 saw some significant developments in the landscape which are likely to have been initiated by the 3rd Duke. A series of etchings of the park surrounding Blenheim Palace were published by Boydell in 1752. These images show a formal, stark landscape typical of the early 18th century with the parkland around the Palace and Glyme valley little changed from that left by Vanbrugh and Wise. But a survey of the parkland carried out in 1763 by John Spyers on the instructions of Lancelot Brown depicts a landscape of change. Significantly the 3rd Duke appears to have added a barn at Furze Platt in the north east park, utilizing a pre-existing triangular area of land. The eastern shelterbelt around the North Park had been established with a ride edged by a solid outer line and a broken inner line and by 1763 a series of parkland clumps had also been established, many of these fringing the combe valleys or providing nursery clumps in the open parkland west of North Lodge. In High Park, the area north of High Lodge, which had been shown as an enclosure on earlier maps, had been thrown into the wider deer park. Additionally, a number of Lombardy poplar were planted in the



grounds, their first known introduction in England. The 1763 survey also indicates that the works undertaken by the 3rd Duke included the removal of the western boundary wall of the Great Parterre and the wilderness, which had been coupled with the removal of the formal gardens less than 50 years after their completion. The 3rd Duke had also moved towards establishing informal shrub planting in the gardens south of the Palace. What might have been achieved by the 3rd Duke in transforming the landscape at Blenheim Palace can only be speculated at as he met a sudden death in 1758 during the Seven Years War.

### LANCELOT BROWN AND THE ENGLISH LANDSCAPE (1761-1774)

**3.15** The 4th Duke inherited at the age of 19, but it was not until after his marriage to Lady Caroline Russell (daughter of the Duke of Bedford) in August 1762 that he is believed to have set about transforming the landscape so that Vanbrugh's monumental Palace was finally to be given a unique and majestic landscape setting. While the 3rd Duke had started a scheme to modernise the landscape in the 1750s it is only after the 4th Duke's accession that the park and gardens were to be reborn in the naturalistic landscape style, effectively combining beauty with the essential utility of the day. At the height of his career Lancelot Brown (1716 - 1783) was invited by the 4th Duke to improve the grounds at Langley Park but was also quickly encouraged to make proposals for Blenheim Palace. In January 1764 Brown paid Spyers for his survey of the existing park which must, therefore, have been undertaken the year before. Spyers was a talented surveyor and there is every reason to believe that the plan he produced is an accurate representation of the landscape in 1763, before Brown commenced work. The survey shows Blenheim Park extending to around 2,000 acres (809 ha) and as such it had not yet expanded to the current park boundary. By 1764 Brown already had





considerable experience of working on large estates such as Alnwick, Chatsworth, Bowood and Longleat and his work at Blenheim Palace is revealing about his approach to design and composition. Brown is known to have often used his surveyors drawings as a base plan for setting out his proposal schemes and on his plan for Blenheim, for example, it is possible to trace the dotted outline of Colonel Armstrong's canals.

**3.16** Brown's work was typically concerned with the careful management of the four main elements of a landscape park - water, trees, buildings and the land. Around the Palace at Blenheim he created sweeping lawns which came right up to the south front and were framed by carefully placed specimen trees and new tree clumps. Here the remnants of the formal gardens and the bastion wall to the east were removed to be replaced by a sinuous ha-ha which allowed seamless views south over the park towards Bladon church and Heath. The gardens and pleasure grounds were also bounded by a further ha-ha extending from the south east corner of the kitchen court through the park to the north western edge of the kitchen

garden. To the north and west of the Palace, and in the middle distance, a naturalistic lake swelled to fill the valley floor while in the far distance the rising ground was planted with trees and the perimeter of the park planted with an irregular tree belt to conceal the boundary wall and imply the infinite possessions of the owner. In his 1789 guidebook, William Mavor described these as containing 'the most enchanting rides.....chiefly shaded towards the boundary..... while on the parkside.....sometimes breaking into groups with large interstices between...open the most brilliant prospects'. To achieve the best design for the lake Brown re-profiled the ground around the new water, though not immediately below the Woodstock Gate where the tree line along the water was retained. Significantly, however, the outline of Colonel Armstrong's pond east of the Grand Bridge was hardly altered. Instead Brown knocked through the old causeway which had been used as the cascade bringing the fish ponds to the north into the main lake. The main engineering work on the lake took place immediately around the Grand Bridge and in the Glyme valley to the west. Brown strengthened the foundations of the bridge (which had been designed to

stand on dry ground) so that its base could be flooded with water. The flooding of the valley in this area was made possible by raising the height of the dam to the south west of the Palace where Col. Armstrong had created the last of his three canals through the valley. Here at the southern end of the main lake the dam construction was elaborate with the ground sloped to the water, a long earthwork bund created on the south east side and a rockwork cascade formed, over which the water flowed. All this work was supervised on site by Brown's foreman Benjamin Read with whom he had worked at Croome Park in the 1750s and early 1760s. By creating the lake Brown achieved multiple design advantages including updating the landscape to the latest fashion; submerging the earlier formal landscape of Colonel Armstrong without the expense of dismantling it; unifying the landscape around Vanbrugh's Grand Bridge; and providing an expansive parkland that was an appropriate setting for the Palace. The cascade and lake took about 4 years to complete and they were universally praised. Tourists flocked to Blenheim Palace at the time to see the new improvements and almost a dozen coaching inns flourished in the neighbourhood in part to cater for the visitors.



**3.17** In 1767 the 4th Duke extended the park to the south taking in land between the early 18th century park boundary and Bladon village, work which was partly achieved as a result of the enclosure of the parish. This southern expansion of the park allowed Brown to create a sinuous lake through Bladon Park between c.1771 - 73. The lake was created by embanking the Glyme just above its confluence with the River Evenlode all along the southern side of the valley. This significant landscape feature was to be further adorned by the so-called New Bridge designed in 1772 - 3 by Sir William Chambers (1723 - 1796), replacing an earlier structure in approximately the same position. The parkland north of the Bladon lake was further embellished in the late 18th century when



a new Lodge was added near the lower cascade and additional planting established along the water with advice provided by Benjamin Read. While the formality and geometry of Wise's planting in Lower Park was retained, Brown's work in the wider park established the parkland at Blenheim Palace as an example of the English Landscape Style. After completing the water Brown added planting around the lake and along the dry valley combs. Views were created from the lakeside drive in High Park across the lake. In 1771 - 72 Brown commenced work on breaking up the Grand Avenue with the intention of incorporating the retained trees into the informal landscape, possibly to create variety and a sequence of views across the North Park. The work of de-formalising the avenue was to continue under Benjamin Read in the later 18th century.

**3.18** Brown's work extended into many aspects of the parks design. Some of these were implemented, possibly including the remodelling of High Lodge in the early 1760s and the addition of the Gothic range at Park Farm, while others were unexecuted like the Hensington Gates and the Woodstock park wall. As was the case on other commissions, Brown's involvement also stretched beyond just design, to the improvement of the land with the culverting of drains especially in the valleys, which ensured that the smooth parkland turf that swept over the landscape was also productive grassland for the sheep and livestock in the park. Brown's involvement, including the payments to Benjamin Read and the other contractors, cost the 4th Duke the extraordinary sum of £21,537. What this working partnership achieved was the complete transformation of the landscape and a lasting legacy that would be admired for the next 250 years. Although Brown's contracts came to an end in 1774 the gradual development of the English Landscape Style did not stop. Benjamin Read, Brown's foreman, remained at Blenheim Palace to supervise works in the gardens and park for another two decades. Thus in the 1780s Read was enclosing or making further changes



to the garden south of the cascade, as well as laying out walks and diverting the main north drive so that it ran past the newly created lake-side landscape. Other works also took place such as the eventual erection of the Hensington Gates in the early to mid 1770s possibly under the direction of William Chambers (1727 - 1796). Given that Brown had redesigned the lake and made proposals for the Hensington entrance there is every possibility that these works were continuing a grand scheme developed by the 4th Duke and implemented by Brown and Chambers. Such development is typical on many Brown sites where work in the park continued long after he was no longer formally employed. It seems likely at Blenheim Palace that the Duke and Benjamin Read also worked together on landscape changes of their own and that some of the later additions and developments were also a result of proposals by Sir William Chambers and his assistant John Yenn (1750 - 1821).

### INTRODUCING CLASSICISM

**3.19** Before Lancelot Brown's departure the 4th Duke had introduced several neo-classical elements into the decoration of the Palace and into the landscape, shunning a few of Brown's proposals for gothic structures. As already noted, to implement these new neo-classical features the Duke turned to Sir William Chambers who was employed from the late 1760s onwards. In addition to carrying out some works to the Palace and designing the New Bridge over the Glyme, Chambers was also responsible for re-erecting the Hensington Gate that had been designed by Hawksmoor and carved by Gibbons in the early 18th century. To the north of the Palace, despite Brown's work to secure the foundations of the Grand Bridge, the structure was further strengthened, with Chambers appointed to supervise the works in the 1770s. The Duke also ordered the ground level along the valley north of the Grand Bridge to be lowered by 6 feet and along the brow curving around to the Woodstock Gate by 15 feet, so that a better view of the lake could be enjoyed. These changes were most likely supervised by Read and altered the view of the lake,



producing the landform we see today. Around 1771 - 2 the 4th Duke created a new flower garden in the pleasure grounds, located between the Palace and the kitchen garden. The garden was based on the plan of Madame de Pompadour's flower basket at Versailles and reportedly had a resemblance to the gardens at Nuneham Courtney. There is also more than a passing resemblance to Lancelot Brown's garden design for Brocklesby Park, in Lincolnshire. From the 1770s onwards Chambers and Yenn dotted the gardens and pleasure grounds with architectural elements. Some of these buildings provided the focus for a view within the gardens but others were clearly positioned to take advantage of the new landscape of the park, such as the Temple of Diana which was erected in 1773 and overlooked the lake. Chambers was also involved in making proposals for a large new greenhouse which was never executed, and instead a more economical structure was placed in the kitchen garden along with pineapple and grape houses. However, the gardener's house, which had been located in the park south west of the kitchen garden, was demolished and a new residence built into the south west wall of the garden. Possibly the most fundamental change to the walled garden was made in 1772 with the addition of a stately Palladian gateway in the west wall which allowed the inclusion of the kitchen garden into the circuit walk of the Palace gardens.

**3.20** By the mid 1770s the 4th Duke was extending the area of the pleasure grounds south west of the Palace. The land south of the cascade was brought into the pleasure grounds and linked by a Chinese bridge set near Brown's cascade. A large fountain, sculpted by Gian Lorenzo Bernini and modelled on the Fountain of the Four Rivers at Piazza Navona was also set in this new extension of the pleasure grounds. In 1775 some of the statues, excepting those on the pediment, were removed from the top of the north elevation of the Palace and placed in the shrubbery around the cascade. Only two of the statues from the roof now survive and

these are located in niches on the east gate, having been placed there by Chambers in an attempt to alleviate the gates martial appearance. In 1789 John Yenn, who subsequently became an independent architect, provided the 4th Duke with designs for the Temple of Health specifically to celebrate King George III's return to good health, which was located within the pleasure grounds and intended to be flanked by tripod vases. Following Benjamin Read's death in 1794 and the personal loss of the Duke's son, Lord Henry, works in the gardens and grounds slowed down. It is probably in this period, between 1794 and 1811 that small areas of the North Park around Furze Platt and North Lodge were first cultivated, the impetus for this being both the Duke's loss of interest in the parkland and the growing concerns of the Napoleonic Wars which were driving up grain prices. The charitable addition of the almshouses north of the Hensington Gates and outside the park did take place but it was not until 1812 that any other significant addition was made, when the Duke purchased a magnificent wire aviary from the estate of Lady Harriet Read and placed it within the oval flower garden near the Temple of Flora. Over half a century the 4th Duke made substantial changes to the landscape surrounding Blenheim Palace, essentially establishing the layout of the park and garden seen today. These works came to an end when the Duke died in 1817 and the fundamental design of the landscape has remained largely unaltered since.

### THE HORTICULTURAL EXTRAVAGANCE OF THE 5TH DUKE

**3.21** The Palace and the title of Duke of Marlborough was inherited by the 4th Duke's eldest son, George in 1817. Born in 1766 when Brown was creating the lake, the 5th Duke must have been keenly aware of his landscape works and it is not too surprising to find that he was to develop a passion for horticulture. The Duke was reportedly strongly influenced by



Humphry Repton's landscape style and adopted many of his ideas not only at Sion Hill and Whiteknights but later at Blenheim Palace where he showed a greater interest in the landscape than in the Palace. Repton had succeeded Brown as the pre-eminent landscape gardener of his age, developing the landscape style and adding more evident ornament to the parks and gardens of the time. There was also a great influx of new species of trees and shrubs flooding into England from the late 18th century onwards and the 5th Duke was determined to develop and enhance his collections. Initially, as the Marquis of Blandford, George lived at Whiteknights near Reading from 1798. There he developed the grounds over a 19 year period to accommodate his interest in horticulture, creating a series of gardens housing botanical collections rather than a harmoniously planned arrangement. It is clear that the Marquis of Blandford's expenditure on gardening, books and the arts far outstripped his income so much so that by the time he became the 5th Duke in 1817 his debts amounted to a staggering £600,000. Such a dire financial situation could only be addressed through radical action and the Duke was forced to sell Whiteknights, Sion Hill and Parkbury Lodge while Marlborough House in London reverted to the Crown. Prior to the sale of Whiteknights the Duke moved much of his horticultural collections to the Palace gardens before they could be sold in a plant auction. He also started to fell trees in the park at Blenheim in order to raise funds. This felling started as early as 1818 and marks the start of the gradual loss of the formal structure from Lower Park and the reduction in clump planting elsewhere in the park.

**3.22** The Duke appears to have made numerous, rather random, landscape changes in order to accommodate his horticultural desires. These changes led Prince Pucker-Muskau to note that Brown's 'rich draperies' had been transformed 'into a harlequin jacket of little clumps and beds'. The lawns to the east of the Palace reverted to flower gardens with 20 oval

beds of flowering shrubs and a number of American plants were introduced near the aviary. Later the aviary would be turned into an arboretum and a large pool garden was also formed. However, the most significant initial changes were made to the pleasure ground to the west. In the 1820s the Duke created a large botanical and flower garden which was closed off to visitors requiring a new link in the circuit walk to be created. A new garden was created on the west front where an octagonal pavilion formed of coloured woods supported by columns of yew was set nearby together with a tent shaped greenhouse. The west front, or Arcade Garden, now seemed to mark the start of the garden circuit and quickly led into the New Holland or Botany Bay Garden and then on to the 8 acre Chinese Garden. The circuit walk then led down to the lakeside from where there were views across the water from the Terrace Garden. Further themed gardens carried on through the western pleasure grounds including the Dahlia Garden to which the Temple of Flora was relocated in the 1830s.



**3.23** The 4th Duke had already created a private garden in the late 18th century near the cascade which contained the Bernini fountain and had rock

seats as a backdrop to Brown's cascade. The 5th Duke further developed this area into a Rock Garden, which by 1835 extended to over an acre and had at its pinnacle an altar of large stone pillars called the Druid's Temple. The Rock Garden led over a rustic bridge to the Garden of Springs containing a curious sequence of fountains. In all, the effect of the 5th Duke on the landscape surrounding Blenheim Palace was to transform the art of gardening and design into the science of horticulture and botanical display. The Duke's work also seems to have started the process of replanting the pleasure grounds, with the gardens becoming more internally focussed. The mania for horticulture also came at a great cost with substantial debts mounting year on year and as the second quarter of the 19th century progressed the strain on the fabric of Blenheim Palace was beginning to show.

### THE MID 19TH CENTURY UNDER THE 6TH, 7TH & 8TH DUKES

**3.24** Almost immediately on succeeding to the estate in 1840, the 6th Duke arranged a loan of £25,000 for repairs and reinstatements. To fund his horticultural pursuits the 5th Duke had felled and sold timber from the park, an action much discouraged by his son and heir. It was, therefore, with some irony that the 6th Duke raised money for the much needed repair of Blenheim Palace through the further sale of timber in the park, initiating the largest tree felling operation ever seen in the designed landscape. This may be seen as a great detriment to the park but it should also be seen within the context of Blenheim's history. By the time the 6th Duke inherited the Palace was in great need of renovation while much of the early planting put in place by Vanbrugh and Wise would have been c.120 years old and possibly in need of thinning. It may be no coincidence that much of the timber came from Lower Park (which had been densely planted, and where the trees were mostly very mature). The Duke was also restricted in only being allowed to fell trees

in 'a state of decay or proper to be cut down'. By 1841 the Duke was in a position to start major repairs to the Palace with the works supervised by the architect Thomas Allason (1790 - 1852). The Grand Bridge was repaired, the masonry restored, new lead supplied for the roofs of the Palace and all the locks, including those on the garden gates, were changed. By the end of his tenure the Duke had spent an estimated £80,000 on these works.



**3.25** It is apparent that the Duke had clear intentions for the park and gardens. His works and proposals for the future are recorded on an estate map of the mid to late 1840s which was surveyed and drawn under the direction of Mr Dean by I Thompson and C Dean. The title on the map notes that it was '... Intended to Convey an Idea of the Magnificent Improvements Designed by His Grace George Duke of Marlborough and now in the Process of Execution'. As the title of the plan implies the map is part survey and part proposal. However, it does show the vestiges of the formal parkland planting in Lower Park, indicating that there was more felling to come in this area. North of The Lince the ha-ha appears to be in place, but the area to the south remains as open ground. In the North Park the planting and land use, with areas of arable, is much the same as that depicted on the

Ordnance Survey map of 1811 but a further small area of arable is shown in New Park. At the Palace the Duke commissioned wrought iron gates with gilded decoration from Bramah, Prestage and Ball of Piccadilly for £1,000 to sit within the east gateway. These massive 6.85m high gates were installed in 1852 and remain a striking feature of the Flagstaff Lodge today. Meanwhile, the old laundry was converted to a new dairy with tiled walls and a fountain while Vanbrugh's greenhouse which had been altered to accommodate a private theatre was again filled with plants.

**3.26** When the 7th Duke took over in 1857 the Palace was on a better footing and he was able, like his predecessors, to focus on making changes to the gardens creating a new circular rose garden (called the Rosary) in the western pleasure grounds on the site of the 5th Duke's Chinese Garden and to the east of this a small menagerie. In the 1860s a new formal garden was laid out on the east side of the Palace, stocked by the then fashionable carpet bedding. The bedding plants were supplied by the head gardener and there was a correspondent increase in the amount of glass and greenhouses around the kitchen garden. On the 5 February 1861 disaster struck the Palace when a large fire broke out in the bakehouse and spread to the adjacent greenhouse in the south east corner of the kitchen court. The bakehouse and the gallery including all the paintings, were destroyed but the main Palace escaped damage and reconstruction work on the kitchen court was completed in 1862. The Duke undertook further building work in the early 1860s adding Ditchley Lodge, Middle Lodge and Eagle Lodge by 1863. In 1876 he was appointed Lord Lieutenant of Ireland for four years, and as a result there was a prolonged family absence from Blenheim Palace and a subsequent lack of significant development in the Palace, gardens and park. The 1870s did however see the addition of the Hensington Lodge (1876) to designs by the architect F B Osburn as well as repairs carried out to the cascade embankment by Smith &

Co. Engineers. Further works were carried out to the cascade embankment in 1879 which resulted in a slight drop in the water level in the lake. Long after the fire damage repairs to Blenheim were concluded the 6th Duke continued to make improvements in the grounds. A new keeper's lodge was built in the late 1840s (now called Springlock Gate Cottage), a cow house was relocated to Home Farm (c.1881), hothouses in the kitchen garden were repaired and a number of coach-houses and an open sided riding school were constructed in the stable court after the 5th Duke's melon house was demolished. The Duke also altered the circuit walk in the gardens and pleasure grounds and in 1852 planted a significant number of new trees. In the park the most ambitious works undertaken were to the lake and dam. The dam, constructed 65 years before, was starting to leak and in 1840 the Duke was forced to carry out repairs which included draining the lake and dredging out the silt. In the reconstruction of the dam the cascade's rock work was remodelled into a more picturesque waterfall, the work being completed in 1843.

**3.27** George Charles, 8th Duke of Marlborough (1844 - 1892) inherited in 1883 and continued the family association with gardening, having a particular passion for orchids as well as being interested in new techniques for agricultural improvement. A palm house (1885), fernery, rose house and several forcing houses were all erected at the kitchen garden around the orchid house. In addition three gardeners' bothies were built facing the north wall of the kitchen garden. These works at the kitchen garden are associated with a small change in the boundary between Lower Park and the pleasure grounds at some stage between 1863 and 1881. To fund many of the improvements the 8th Duke took the unfortunate step of emptying Blenheim Palace of many of its treasures. Financial troubles had already raised their head again under the 7th Duke when falling land values and the agricultural depression of the 1870s had resulted in dwindling income from the



land. His son, the 8th Duke used the monies from the sale of valuable heirlooms to fund work on the Palace but also his own relatively extravagant lifestyle. However, some of the expenditure was offset when the Duke married the rich American widow Lilian Hammersley (nee Price) as his second wife. The 8th Duke also oversaw the rebuilding of the Woodstock Lodge in 1887 and the addition of a boathouse (built 1888) on the eastern side of the lake, reached from the pleasure grounds.

### THE 9TH DUKE RECREATES GRANDEUR (1892 - 1934)

**3.28** Although Blenheim had been partially financially rescued by the 8th Duke's marriage in the late 1880s, the money was mostly spent on utilitarian modifications. Ultimately, it would be another American fortune in the form of a generous settlement granted to Charles, 9th Duke of Marlborough, by his future father-in-law, which would make an immense and lasting difference to the Palace and its landscape. The Duke and his bride, Consuelo Vanderbilt, were married in 1895 and toured Europe while renovation to the private apartments at Blenheim Palace took place. While staying in Italy the couple met Thomas Waldo Story, an American sculptor and friend of the Vanderbilt family. The Marlborough's commissioned several works from Waldo Story including the bronze fountain for the centre of the Italian Garden. The fountain was delivered and installed in 1899 with the surroundings slightly simplified by the removal of the palm trees that flanked the central walk, although the carpet bedding remained. The Duke inherited in 1892 and in the early years of his succession numerous small changes were made in the gardens including replacing the rhododendrons and azaleas in the American Garden with clumps of golden yew, golden privet and purple leaved plum, while topiary was added elsewhere.



**3.29** The head gardener retired in 1902 and as his replacement took up office there was the start of a change in approach to the landscape. The schemes of the Victorian era were to give way to a remodelled gardening style and in this venture towards modernity the Duke was to be assisted by the French garden designer and architect Achille Duchene. Duchene's style of landscape design was based on the rediscovery and reinterpretation of the early formal gardens but adapting the approach to the aesthetics of the modern age. Duchene was inspired by the rules of architecture and sought to return to a tradition that concentrated on the purity of the design and visual coherence rather than the dominance of horticulture. Thus, over the next three decades Duchene worked with the Duke on three major schemes designed to reinstate the grandeur and elegance of the Palace gardens, which was focussed on its architecture and the axial alignments of the building and its landscape setting. In addition the Duke was to undertake significant works in the wider park which would strengthen and reinterpret the landscape planting. In the mid 18th century Brown had extended the lawns right up to the north front of the Palace with a carriage sweep and gravel for access. Now the 9th Duke and Duchene sought to recreate a version of Vanbrugh's north entrance court together with the reconstruction of the formal garden to the east and a new formal garden on the west front. For the north court the work not only included reinstating a scheme of squared setts and gravelled panels but also included re-erecting statuary on the building, providing new entrance gates and a ha-ha. Ultimately this work resulted in the north entrance court we see today with work on levelling the site beginning in March 1904 and continuing for over two years. Designs for the terracotta figures on the Palace were agreed in 1904 and the figures erected into position in 1907. The Duke also commissioned replacement and additional carved pedestals and urns for the courtyard probably using a design of either Chambers or Yenn.

**3.30** In the park beyond the north front the Duke partially reinstated the spirit of Vanbrugh's north drive from Ditchley down the avenue, but kept the diversion which took the route via the lake to the lake, before returning to the Grand Bridge and then to the Palace. This work on the drive was contemporary with the complete replanting of the Grand Avenue, which appears to have taken place in two main phases. Between 1896 and c.1902 the Duke established a double avenue along the north drive as shown on the Ordnance Survey maps published at the turn of the century. Progressing on from this first phase the Duke then added further double rows of trees on the outside of the avenue and formed a large diamond shaped feature (c.1901 - 02) in the central section allowing visitors to look down the sides of the diamond and out into the park as they passed. The Duke also carried out work to the avenues leading up to the Hensington Gate in 1901 where elm and lime were planted, although the limes were to be removed in c.1916 to leave a pure elm avenue. To the east of the Palace the Duke and Duchene worked together to remodel the formal parterre below the east front. Waldo Story's fountain had been installed in 1899 and from 1904 onwards work commenced on creating a circular basin around the fountain and laying out four large parterres de broderie, a scheme that finally swept away the labour intensive carpet bedding of the previous era.

**3.31** With the onset of the First World War all projects ceased. The Long Library in the Palace was converted into a hospital for wounded servicemen while in the park the Duke instructed that about 1,000 acres (405ha) of the North Park was to be ploughed up for wheat. Plantations were felled and thinned for timber and the deer herd was gradually eliminated 'in the interests of food supply'. In truth this expansion of the arable area in the park appears to have been a continuation of a process that had started in the late 19th century so that by c.1922 arable covered most of the northern part of the park either side of the Grand

Avenue. After the war the Duke turned his attentions to the west front of the Palace, an area which had largely remained unaltered by his predecessors. Turning again to Duchene the Duke commissioned plans for water terraces connecting the Palace to Brown's lake, in part inspired by Versailles. Views between the lake and Palace were always important but so was the physical connection and the plans were revised several times before finally being agreed in 1925. Work started on site on October 1925 and on the upper terrace it progressed well, but the sloping ground and geology around the lake continued to pose problems and the design was reworked again. Eventually a scheme was agreed for two terraces with other works to slope and support the ground to the lakes edge. The agreed design, like its precursors, was to be amended and altered but would develop into the grand formal gardens we see today. To complete the lower terrace the Bernini fountain was removed from the gardens near the cascade and placed within the north pool. A second sculpture was then carved to match and placed in the other pool to retain the symmetry of the design. The water terraces were completed in 1932 and finally provided Blenheim Palace with a grand architectural composition on the west front. In addition to the formal garden works the Duke made significant additions to the planting in the park after the turn of the century. Roundels of copper beech and cedar had already been established along the Glyme in Bladon Park and now further roundels were planted in the North Park specifically along the combe valleys north of Fishery Cottage and at the southern end of the Mapleton valley.

## CHANGING TIMES

**3.32** The 9th Duke died in 1934 and John Albert Spencer-Churchill succeeded to the title as 10th Duke. Little activity is recorded between the succession of the 10th Duke and the outbreak of World War II but, as his father had done before him, when the War started



the Duke contributed to the war effort. The Palace was used to house 400 boys from Malvern College, followed by the Intelligence Service and a section of the Ministry of Supply. Areas of the North Park which had reverted to park grassland after the Great War were again ploughed for arable and this time would retain that use until reverted back to grass under the 11th Duke in 2010. The park was used by the Home Guard and a division of Canadian Soldiers around Park Farm and Bladon Park. After the War, like many other owners of country houses, the 10th Duke opened the Palace as a tourist destination on 1 April 1950 and in its first year roughly 100,000 visitors came. During this time the Duke created the Private Garden on a three-acre area south east of the Palace. A programme of maintenance and repair to the Palace, gardens, pleasure grounds and park was also a feature of the 1950s and 60s with works to the fountains, the Italian Garden and the removal of the rustic seat and bridge near the cascade. In the park, beech were planted near Fishery Cottage along with spruce and Douglas fir near North Lodge. Belts of coniferous softwoods were introduced for commercial forestry reasons, while roughly 10 years after the Palace opened to visitors the Model Railway Club requested, and were granted, permission to set out a model railway in the grounds. The current narrow gauge steam railway has been in operation since 1975.

**3.33** The 11th Duke inherited Blenheim Palace in 1972 and worked determinedly to secure its future, often reminding people that ‘although the Battle of Blenheim was won in 1704, the battle for Blenheim continues...’. During the Duke’s 42 year tenure, up to his death in 2014, substantial repairs and restoration schemes took place to the Palace, the gardens and in the park, and in 1987 Blenheim Palace and the Park was recognised through its inscription as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Extensive work to the Palace placed the buildings in a good state of repair with many essential works on upgrading services, utilities



or conservation repairs occurring behind the scenes, often unseen by the general public. In the gardens, to mark European Architectural Heritage Year in 1975, William Chamber’s Temple of Diana was repaired and restored, while in the 1980s conservation repairs were undertaken to Chamber’s New Bridge. In the park the 11th Duke faced the devastating loss of trees through Dutch Elm Disease and beech bark necrosis. The north avenue had to be clear felled and was replanted over a 3 year period from 1977 with 4 rows of limes. Similarly, the east avenue was lost and planted with alternating planes and limes. Elsewhere the Duke strengthened the planting north of the lake, enclosed the Mapleton Valley with a sinuous belt to the east and created belts near The Muds and in Lower Park. In the gardens new Pleasure Gardens and a maze were created for the visitors to enjoy, and the grotto was refurbished. In 2004 the Private Garden set out by the 10th Duke was restored and reinterpreted to improve the visitor experience and access - it is now known as the Secret Garden.

**3.34** In recent years, and in addition to conserving the fabric of the Palace and park, the Duke also improved visitor facilities in the kitchen court which now include a new Visitor Welcome Centre, Oxfordshire Pantry and gift shop. Complete refurbishment and change of use to the Cowyard in Lower Park took place in 2006, and works to refurbish and extend North Lodge were completed. In the park the cascade and dam on the main lake were the subject of a major repair scheme in 2009 and this was followed by similar repairs and improvements to the 800m long earthwork dam at the Lince, as well as foundation repairs to some piers on Lince Bridge in 2010 - 11. Since 2013 Henry Wise’s icehouse has been restored, along with significant lengths of Lancelot Brown’s ha-has. The 12th Duke, Charles James, has continued this commitment to conservation since his succession to the title and the estate in 2014.

## 4 CHARACTER AND CONDITION OF THE WORLD HERITAGE SITE

### INTRODUCTION

**4.01** This chapter records the present character of the WHS in more detail. Its main features and elements are described and a statement of the present condition is given. A detailed condition report on the Palace, its associated buildings and the other key buildings within the WHS are included in Appendix 5. This work was prepared by the Palace's conservation architects and architectural historians Nick Cox Architects, who have worked at the Palace for over 10 years. Appendix 5 also contains detailed condition surveys of the main landscape features. In Appendix 2 over 40 views within the WHS are analysed, set against a detailed collection of historic maps and interpretation overlays, as well as 12 timelines covering both the whole park and its key features, while Appendix 3 provides detail on the character of the setting of the WHS and considers the views into the site. Together these surveys, and the analysis of the results, form a key part of understanding and assessing the importance of the Palace, its associated buildings and landscape. The current character and condition is also the starting point from which an approach to the management of the WHS over the coming 10 years can be set out. For ease of reference the site has been broken down into different character areas which have a broadly similar appearance or historic background. These compartments are essentially the same as those used in the first management plan but have been slightly modified to reflect the current character, variations in management approach and historic development of the WHS so that they now also accord with the 2014 parkland plan areas.

### BLenheim PALACE

#### *Architectural design*

**4.02** Blenheim Palace has a generally symmetrical plan with classical, spatial organisation - essentially a great hall leading into the saloon with suites of state apartments on either side for entertainment and ritual. The model for the Palace derives partly from the Cour d'Honneur at Versailles as all palace architecture of the time tended to do. But the mathematical and rational classicism of Palladio also greatly influenced baroque architects. So in emulation of Palladio's villa planning, the Palace has a tall square hall set on an axis with a rectangular saloon. In addition, as new ideas about comfort and convenience emerged, its architect John Vanbrugh created an east wing set at right angles to the state apartments for the Duke and Duchess, this being balanced by the Long Gallery to the west. Other innovations in the design were the inclusion of a carefully considered water system. In keeping with the Palace, the East Gate was designed to evoke a sense of power, strength and awe, but it also doubled in its vast upper section as a cistern to supply water to the Palace, filled by a paddle-wheel engine housed in one of the arches of the Grand Bridge.

#### *Massing, Scale and Elevations*

**4.03** The grouping of the main block and ancillary buildings gives the Palace a substantial mass while the play of advance and recession adds to the volume. The central block is placed within a powerful architectural setting achieved by the bold but simple notion of making the kitchen and stables courts part of the main composition. The placing of the wings and their relationship to each other is a fine example of Continental baroque planning, and can perhaps be seen to derive from Versailles. The roofline gives the 'castle air' Vanbrugh so much admired and, when seen from a distance, the romantic medieval character of a

true castle. Yet the decorative detail remains classical with the plethora of statues, urns and vases combining with the rustication to impart a Baroque character. Thus the overall arrangement of the front facade with its curved wings, statues, heavy cornice and giant Corinthian portico bears a striking similarity to that of the temple of Mars Ultor as illustrated by Palladio and commented on by Wren. It is perhaps possible to view the original design as a temple of War, with the flanking courts acting like battalions and the columns representing legions. The effect would have been even more powerful when first complete as all the statuary and urns, which topped the columns or pilasters, would have echoed the form of Roman architecture that enjoyed displaying the trophies of War. Uniquely at this time, the dominant military symbolism of the front is also repeated in the garden facade. Again the original Doric columns were replaced with those of the Corinthian order. As built, the south portico is topped by a captured bust of Louis XIV which was taken from the Porte Royale of Tournai in 1709 by the Duke of Marlborough and can perhaps be seen as a comment on English domination over the French.

**4.04** Blenheim Palace is constructed from limestone ashlar with rusticated corner towers and details, lead roofs and stone stacks. Originally it was to have Doric columns as the main order. This was logical for a site with military connotations as the Doric order represents masculinity and solidity. The change of the main order on the central block to Corinthian is surprising, though this was commonly used for the treatment of the main facade in Baroque architecture. The reasons for the change are not entirely clear though a need for more height on the hall and saloon may have practically required Corinthian capitals as the Doric bases were already under construction. Alternatively the use of the Corinthian order, which is more ornate, may have been because its strongly decorative nature was more attractive and acted as an evident display of wealth.



## Symbolism

**4.05** In conceiving the design for Blenheim Palace both Vanbrugh and especially Hawksmoor were conscious of using iconography not just for visual effect but also to convey meaning in the form of military prowess. This symbolism and decoration of the Palace is therefore one of its significant elements, representing one of the attributes which help convey the OUV of the site. On the main block of the Palace the rusticated corner towers project from the main facades and are topped by square towers, full of meaning. These features in particular give Blenheim Palace its castle air, but more directly are topped by huge stone spheres supported by scrolled forms surmounted by ducal coronets widely interpreted as cannon balls crushing the inverted fleurs-de-lis, symbolising English military dominance over the French. Inside the great court on the approach to the Palace the design is flanked by the kitchen and stable courts with their giant Doric columns with rustic bands, recalling Serlio's fortified gates or Romano's citadel in Mantua. Either side of the giant Corinthian portico of the main block, arcades of Doric pilasters sweep out as if in the form of an apse to a Roman forum. On the tympanum of the portico the Duke's heraldry is emblazoned, surmounted by Pallas Athene in war-like guise, with the chained captives on the broken pediment beyond all recalling the iconography of Imperial Rome. Further symbolism is provided on the entrances to the courtyards, which flank the Great Court. On top of the Clock and Stable Towers magnificently carved British lions savage French cocks.

## Context

**4.06** Hawksmoor conceived the entrance from the Woodstock Gate in imperial terms, such that the victorious general arrived through a triumphal arch on his route to the Palace. The gate is in fact another emblem recalling the military success of the Duke

in the cause of 'liberty' and it is no surprise to find that it is modelled on the Arch of Titus from Serlio's *Terzo Libro* (1540). It was originally intended that the Column of Victory would also form part of this triumphal entrance and while the final design was by Lord Herbert and Morris, the original idea was Hawksmoor's. The use of a giant Doric order is at least appropriate for a military man even if under the Duchess's guiding hand it became more of a personal memorial. It has also been suggested that Vanbrugh's Grand Bridge recalls the Duke's crossing of the Nebel as he made his way to Blenheim.

## Craftsmen and Artists

**4.07** The skills and talents of the craftsmen and artists who helped create Blenheim Palace contribute greatly to its outstanding universal and national value. The chief masons were the Edward Strong's (father and son) who carried out the important stone work in the main building. Also employed were John Townsend who probably worked on the Clock Tower and his son William Townsend whose work includes the Woodstock Gates and Column of Victory. The Townsends worked alongside the Bartholomew Peisley's from Oxford who built the Grand Bridge.

**4.07** Grinling Gibbons was a master craftsman par excellence and supplied the ornamental stonework, such as the Corinthian columns in the hall and some of the external sculpture, including the lions and cocks. Sir James Thornhill was also employed for decorative schemes on the ceilings and walls, his involvement being no doubt encouraged by the freemason connections between himself and Hawksmoor. Louis Laguerre, from whom Thornhill learnt, also provided much of the internal decoration. Thornhill was renowned for decorative historical schemes and was one of the few English artists to compete successfully with those from France and Italy. Although Thornhill's



work remains at St Paul's, Greenwich, Hampton Court, Charlborough and Sherbourne House, Blenheim Palace still represents a significant survival of this artist's work. In the State Rooms east and west of the saloon tapestries by Judocus de Vos illustrate Marlborough's victories. The tomb for the first Duke and Duchess of Marlborough was designed by William Kent and carved by John Michael Rysbrack. Other elements of the internal decoration, such as bookcase and fire surrounds were also designed by Kent and should be regarded as nationally significant.

#### *Condition*

The results of a condition survey of all the buildings and built features in the WHS are included in Appendix 5.

## THE LANDSCAPE AND ITS BUILDINGS

### LANCELOT BROWN'S CENTREPIECE - CHARACTER AREA 1

#### *Description*

**4.09** Lancelot Brown's centrepiece lies at the heart of the parkland, focussed on the lakes which were formed in the sinuous valley of the River Glyme that wraps around Blenheim Palace to the north and west. This central core of the park is widely recognised as one of Brown's landscape masterpieces, uniting earlier phases of design into one flowing, romantic English landscape. Although Brown's design was slightly modified, even in the 18th century by the 4th Duke, the basic concept and landscape composition remains intact and is essentially what is seen by the thousands of visitors who come to Blenheim Palace each year. The Palace dominates the scene and is the natural focus for many views across the park and lakes. The characteristics

of the landscape design here can be summarised as a picturesque combination of tree clumps, open water and flowing lawns adorned by monumental classical buildings. The whole composition was intended to, and still does, show the variety in the views and in the landscape. Yet this seemingly natural landscape is in fact highly structured with a 'controlling geometry as complex as that obviously displayed by the grand formal park' created by Vanbrugh and Wise.

**4.10** This centrepiece design was laid out over the original formal landscape of the early 18th century. Vanbrugh's north south axis was retained by Brown and today there is a striking view from Duchene's formal, north forecourt across the Grand Bridge towards the Column of Victory, set in that part of North Park which is today known as Monument Park. From the roof of the Palace this northern view is enhanced as the elevated position of the building permits views along the Grand Avenue up in the direction of the





Ditchley Gate. To the north east of the Palace stands the Triumphal Arch or Woodstock Gate which forms the main entrance from the town and stands as a classical monument to the 1st Duke of Marlborough. From the gate a drive leads south to join the Hensington Drive before turning west towards the Palace and Flagstaff Lodge. Until the late 18th century a curved entrance drive also swept around the southern crest of Queen Pool, taking visitors directly to the north entrance front. This curved drive appears to have been removed by Benjamin Read in the 1770s or early 1780s probably as part of the on-going works agreed with the 4th Duke.

**4.11** To the east of the Palace the essence of the earlier formal design is retained by one of the main drives which enters the park through the Hensington Gate. The gate, which takes its name from the former Hensington House that lay immediately to the east of the Oxford Road, is composed of carved limestone with frosted columns surmounted by vases of flowers which were carved by Grinling Gibbons. Ornate wrought iron gates hang between the columns and are flanked by iron railings set on low curved walls. This grand entrance is thought to have been designed by Nicholas Hawksmoor but was moved to its current location by Sir William Chambers in the early 1770s. Immediately south of the Hensington Gate is Hensington Lodge, a neo-classical building of ashlar limestone with portico and Doric columns to the drive built in 1876 - 7 as an addition of the 7th Duke, to designs by the architect F B Osborn. Avenues, echoing Vanbrugh's formality, link the Palace to the Hensington Gate.

**4.12** The essential and uniting feature of the centrepiece are the lakes in the valley, which are also a significant part of the Blenheim PARK SSSI. These were formed by the massive embankment and ornamental rock work cascade laid out at the southern end of the valley by Brown. Although in reality one

water body, Queen Pool and the Lake are visually divided from one another by Vanbrugh's iconic Grand Bridge. This massive limestone ashlar structure with its central semi-circular archway and flanking square projecting bays is a focus of views across the lake from the surrounding drives in the park. These views are, in part, framed by the four beech clumps that Brown established on the corners of the bridge. Now representing some of the largest eutrophic water bodies in Oxfordshire, the lakes support a regionally important breeding wildfowl population. They are fringed with emergent vegetation with reed swamp and willow carr in the north east of Queen Pool. The inflow of the Glyme near Old Woodstock is marked by Seven Arches Bridge, an ashlar facade topped by iron railings, behind which is a culverted water course under the park wall and Oxford Road. Set within Queen Pool is Queen Elizabeth's Island which originated as a section of the causeway that linked the old Woodstock Manor to the village and was first retained by Colonel Armstrong as part of the dam to his lake, before being incorporated into Brown's landscape scheme as a 'naturalistic' island.

**4.13** The Lake to the west of the Grand Bridge divides the Palace from High Park with a narrow serpentine arm extending up the valley towards Combe Bottom. On the northern bank of the lake sits Rosamund's Well, a feature thought to date from the time of the medieval manor created by Henry II. Today the Well consists of a modest square pond with stone pavement surround, fed by a spring which flows via a pipe from a stone retaining wall and enclosed by 19th century iron railings with an outflow falling into the lake. Set above the main lake and some 300m west of Rosamund's Well is a small rectilinear enclosure interpreted as being a Romano-Celtic temple, designated as a Scheduled Monument. On the northern side of the lake the park contains a number of linear ditches which appear to relate to pre-park boundaries or earlier deer park divisions of Woodstock Park.

### *Significance and Condition*

**4.14** Lancelot Brown's centrepiece is considered to be the most significant area of the park because it forms the setting of the main front of the Palace; it contains the key components of the lakes and the Grand Bridge; and it makes up the 'finest view in England'. Over the past ten years the landscape of the centrepiece has been extremely well maintained, while extensive repairs and restoration work has been completed to the embankment and cascade at the southern end of the main lake. However the Palace architects have confirmed that there are problems with the Grand Bridge that need to be addressed. These include long-term concerns over the impact of the now mature beech trees established by Brown on the corners of the structure. Repairs are also necessary to the Woodstock Gate, Rosamund's Well, Hensington Lodge and Seven Arches Bridge together with the adjacent inflow weir. The Hensington Gate would benefit from conservation repairs and maintenance in the medium to long-term.

**4.15** The condition of the lakes (unit 4 of the SSSI), particularly Queen Pool, is of the greatest concern, both from an ecological and landscape point of view. The ecological status has been assessed by Natural England as being in an 'unfavourable declining' condition due to on-going siltation, water quality issues caused by high phosphate levels and the presence of sporadic algal blooms. From the historic landscape point of view, increasing levels of siltation and the accompanying frequency of algal blooms is of concern and some bankside vegetation especially near Seven Arches Bridge, obscures important views across the water.



## THE NORTH PARK - CHARACTER AREA 2

### *Description*

**4.16** The North or Great Park covers almost the entire northern half of Blenheim Park, occupying land above the 100m AOD contour with the plateau sloping gently to the south and the curved combe valley character areas located to the east and west. The high point lies between North Lodge and Gorrel Doors. It's enclosure is contemporary with the building of the Palace, and despite additions by Lancelot Brown and the 9th Duke, the area retains a strong sense of the monumental scale and vast open parkland that must have been such a feature of Vanbrugh's and Wise's early 18th century parkland design. It also contains a number of important archaeological earthworks which help to explain the early land use and development of the landscape. The most significant archaeological features are the Bronze Age bowl barrow south of Furze Platt; the two Scheduled sections of Grim's Ditch near North Lodge and west of the Ditchley Gate; and the alignment of Akeman Street which survives as a well defined earthwork throughout the North Park. The sinuous shelterbelt plantations on the inside of the enclosing high dry stone wall were originally planted in part by the 3rd Duke (part of the Eastern Beech Belt) and 4th Duke, the whole design and enclosure by these belts being brought together by Lancelot Brown in the 1760s. Dissecting the North Park is the Grand Avenue which stretches for over 2,200m from the Column of Victory in the south to the Ditchley Gate in the north. This was first planted by Vanbrugh and Wise to form a grand arrival at the north front of the Palace and while it has remained a significant feature in the landscape ever since, it has altered its layout and extent more than once over the ensuing centuries. Today the Grand Avenue, replanted by the 11th Duke in late 1970s, consists of a double row of limes with a circular apse around the Column of Victory.



**4.17** The Avenue is set within an area of permanent, mostly improved, pasture that contains a series of pre-park and early parkland archaeological features. Flanking this central area the wider park was reverted back to grassland in 2010, the first time the whole park had been under this land use since the late 18th century. The North Park is essentially very open in character, but there is a scatter of tree roundels of different species and sizes that date from various phases of the parks development including its initial creation in the early 18th century, the mid 18th century, and the additions of the 9th Duke. The clumps break up the vast expanse of this compartment and help to frame views. Of particular interest is Walnut or Big Clump located c.400m south of North Lodge and thought to have been established as a tree nursery by Henry Wise. The clump is encircled by a dry stone walled ha-ha which must date from sometime between c.1705 and 1709 making it one of the earliest such features of its type in the country.

**4.18** Today the important shelterbelts enclose a perimeter ride and consist of mature beech with some lime and oak supplemented by younger planting of ash, larch, western red cedar and Norway spruce together with more beech which is intended to be the dominant canopy species. Historically, they were more diverse with elm, oak, lime and conifers included alongside the beech in the intended canopy planting palette. Brown designed the inner edge of the shelterbelts to be scalloped and clumped to allow views over the expansive park. On the southern edge of the western shelterbelts between Ditchley Gate and Gorrel Doors the plantation is demarcated by a ditch which cuts across Grim's Ditch and was probably also constructed by Brown as both a boundary and a drainage feature.

**4.19** South of the shelterbelt and to the west of the Grand Avenue is the North Lodge. The current

building developed in at least five main phases from a pre 1760s house up to its recent renovation and expansion, but it sits on or near the site of an early park keeper's lodge, screened from the main park by two areas of woodland to the north and south. Although some woodland has always surrounded the North Lodge, the tree cover here expanded significantly under the 9th Duke who noted in his Red Planting Book that the belt to the north, initially planted 1895, was added to enhance the partridge shoot and was not to be considered as ornamental. In the south west of North Park is Park Farm, a farmstead of historic and modern buildings surrounded by shelterbelts.

**4.20** Located in the north east corner of the park is Furze Platt. This small farmstead is set within a roughly triangular piece of land with woodland to the north and south, which has been the subject of much change and alteration over the years. The triangular space has been apparent in the park since the early 18th century and by the mid 18th century had acquired a field barn which remains on site today. In the mid and late 19th century an open fronted cow shed and yard were added while the farmhouse appears to have been redeveloped in the first part of the 20th century. In 2011 the 11th Duke planted an avenue of Princeton elms leading from Furze Platt towards the Grand Avenue. These elms were bred in America and have shown some resistance to Dutch Elm Disease.

#### *Significance and Condition*

**4.21** Perhaps the most significant feature of area 2 is the Grand Avenue which has made a statement through this vast swathe of parkland from the initial birth of the park at the beginning of the 18th century. Also of particular significance are the boundary plantations which not only form part of Brown's design but, along with the wall, provide valuable screening

between the park and the wider landscape. Big Clump is important because it was planted by Henry Wise as a nursery and is surrounded by a very early example of a ha-ha. Today this is a well managed area and the park grassland is in good order. The most significant improvement to the character of the WHS in the last ten years has been the reversion of the last areas of arable back to grassland. The main boundary belts and major clumps are well managed and in good health. The exceptions to this are the roundel clumps that have been managed in recent years following a system which created differential age groups within each clump. It has become clear that trees do not thrive under this management regime: trees replanted in the centre of clumps are slow to establish with those on the outside edge of the inner ring are of poor form. There is now a move towards essentially clear felling and replanting clumps, retaining just a few mature specimens for landscape impact. In these clumps the growth of the replanted trees is much more successful. The condition of the Scheduled Monuments and other archaeological features vary and some minor works related to their protection would be beneficial.

**4.22** In terms of built features, the Furze Platt complex of buildings are in poor condition and an architects report has been prepared on these structures. The Ditchley Gate is missing some decorative detail and corrosion has caused some distortion of the ironwork but one of the principal concerns is the condition of the flanking park wall here. The wall to the east of the gate pier is in a poor condition while that to the west has defective coping and a slight outward bulge. The rest of the park wall around North Park is in a fair condition, although there are sections that require attention.



### THE EAST AND WEST VALLEYS - CHARACTER AREA 3

#### *Description - Combe Bottom & Mapleton Valley*

**4.23** These two separate combe valleys on the east and west side of the park have similar landscape characters and complex landscape histories. The one to the west is known as Combe Bottom and Mapleton Valley, while the one to the east is called Icehouse Valley and Combe. The western valley extends from the north western arm of Brown's lake through Combe Bottom and along the Mapleton Valley as far as Mapleton Pond. Above, and to the south of, Combe Bottom lies part of New Park. In the early 18th century the landscape was open with only the park wall to the west and Mapleton Pond in embryonic form shown on the earliest maps. In the 1720s the Earl of Godolphin is recorded as keeping horses in paddocks in the park and these may be the series of enclosed fields shown on Campbell's 1725 Vitruvius Britannicus, fields that remained in place until the early 19th century. In the mid 18th century Brown and the 4th Duke substantially remodelled Mapleton Pond, culverted the stream in the valley and extended the clump and shelterbelt planting along the valley sides. Brown laid out a carriage drive around the park which ran through the valley and to the east of Mapleton Pond. The terraced earthwork of the 18th century drive can be seen within the woodlands today. Further planting was added along the valley by the 9th Duke but Mapleton Valley was not enclosed by woodland on both sides until the 11th Duke undertook extensive shelterbelt planting in this area in the late 20th century. The high ground on the edges of the valley and at New Park rise to between 100 and 105m AOD with the lowest point on the shores of the lake at c.75m AOD. The landform consists of a narrow, shallow valley or combe with a series of lesser combes cutting into the valley sides. These lateral combes dissect the valley side and provide considerable landscape diversity with an enclosed sheltered character. Lush, semi-improved

grassland covers the valley floor with hanging woodland on the valley sides, especially around Mapleton Pond. Further south the valley is wider, with a series of 18th and 19th century parkland clumps hugging the slopes.

#### *Significance and Condition : Combe Bottom & Mapleton Valley*

**4.24** It is the idealised character of the valley landscape that is important at Combe, where Brown managed the scene carefully by keeping much of the lower slopes free of trees to accentuate the valley slopes. Mapleton Pond also has a long history and was embellished by Brown to create an accent feature along the boundary carriage drive. A very small part of the Combe Bottom/New Park area also lies within the Blenheim Park SSSI. This land falls within Unit 1 of SSSI and is assessed by Natural England as being in a favourable condition. The landscape character of the western valleys is well maintained, although the balance between open park grassland and dense forestry style planting in New Park is moving away from its older historic character. The woodlands are well managed with a programme of maintenance, selective thinning and restocking which will include selective thinning out of the 20th century shelterbelts on the east side of the Mapleton Valley and the opportunity might be taken to pull back the planting line to increase the width of the valley ride thus improving the landscape appearance and the shooting potential of this area. Mapleton Pond is in a poor condition with significant silting at the northern end, encroaching woody scrub and tree vegetation into the water, damage to the outflow in the south dam and evidence of algal blooms in the water.

#### *Description - Icehouse Valley and Combe*

**4.25** On the eastern side of the park the Icehouse



Valley and Combe extends from Fishery Cottage on the northern side of Queen Pool, north as far as the Grand Avenue with a curving, narrow valley branching off to the east to wrap around Target Hill. Grazed park grassland and mature tree clumps north of Fishery Cottage give way to a mixture of grazed and mown grassland flanked by narrow shelterbelts and woods along the combe leading to Furze Platt. The eastern valleys have a long history with the Icehouse Clump possibly containing the remains of a Adulterine motte and bailey castle. The valley to the south contains a prominent linear earthwork that may mark the 12th century boundary of Woodstock Park before its expansion east and the area also contains a number of pillow mounds which formed part of an early post-medieval cunigre. What we see of the Icehouse Valley and Combe today has been part of the park from 1705 onwards. In the early 18th century the valley was open and unplanted but under the 3rd Duke a series of strategically placed clumps, including Icehouse Clump were established. In the mid 18th century Brown and the 4th Duke added to the clump planting and extended the eastern boundary shelterbelt further south to run along the east edge of the combe. By 1772 an ice house is shown within Icehouse Clump, although later quarrying appears to have removed all trace of the feature. Under the 5th and 6th Dukes the landscape of the eastern valleys was gradually denuded of tree clumps until this trend was reversed by the 9th Duke. Further additional tree planting along the combe was undertaken in the 20th century and the area was also used for the deposition of silt when Queen Pool was dredged, hence the lower section of the Combe now being referred to as The Muds.

*Significance and Condition : Icehouse Valley and Combe*

**4.26** The landscape character of Icehouse Valley is significant for the same reasons as Combe and as with Combe Bottom and Mapleton Valley, the

woodlands associated with Icehouse Valley and Combe are well managed and the parkland trees and clumps are generally in a good condition. The ruderal vegetation along the valley north east of The Muds detracts from the extremely high quality of parkland maintenance seen elsewhere. The wooded valley sides encroach significantly in this section, so much so that the visual diversity of the landform is much reduced. In November 2016 Fisheries cottage suffered a devastating fire which has left the building in a very poor state. Along the park wall there is some weathered stone at low level on the exterior elevation and minor areas of repair are necessary elsewhere. The site of what is thought to be the old icehouse in Icehouse Clump is now used as a working area within what is a well screened location.

#### THE LOWER PARK - CHARACTER AREA 4

##### *Description*

**4.27** Lower or Low Park, together with Bladon Chains, is located to the east and south east of Blenheim Palace occupying a low plateau on the east side of the Glyme valley with the ground falling gently to the south and south east. The highest point of Lower Park lies along the Mall avenue east of the Palace at just over 95m AOD with the Eagle Lodge at the lowest point on the southern boundary at c.83m, AOD. The early 18th century design, which incorporated a number of earlier trees from Woodstock Park, consisted of a series of avenues radiating off the bastions of the gardens with intersecting grass glades and 'rond' points. This formal landscape design was retained by Lancelot Brown in the mid 18th century, although the boundary of the gardens was relocated some 50 - 60m east into Lower Park. After 1811 the formal lines of tree planting here were gradually removed and 'deformalised' by the 5th and 6th Dukes. Today there is a typical parkland landscape of open grassland dotted with a scatter of individual trees, a substantial



number of which are ancient and veteran oaks. Along the northern boundary is the lime avenue replanted by the 9th Duke, that extends the vista from the east front of the Palace to the edge of the park. Estate-style metal park fencing connects the Hensington Lodge to the ha-ha near the Palace and divides Lower Park from the Brownian Core. To the east and south east narrow shelterbelts enclose Lower Park screening both the park wall and the 20th century southern extension of Woodstock town. Located near the eastern boundary of the park is the Icehouse, designed by Henry Wise in 1707. This is a brick domed structure with an ashlar stonework entrance facade to the north east, now covered with grass and trees. Within the park are three small roundels, planted by the 11th Duke in order to strengthen the tree planting here and to reflect the planting style of the 9th Duke.

**4.28** The western side of Lower Park abuts the gardens and pleasure grounds. This boundary is formed by a sinuous ha-ha created by Lancelot Brown that linked the south east corner of the kitchen court with the walled garden. Today the ha-ha is mostly hidden by vegetation but the revetted dry stone wall still rises to a height of between 1.4 and 1.7m with the ditch between 6m and 7m wide. On the boundary of the park, and to the south of the Icehouse lies the Cowyards and Cowyards Cottage. Probably developed on the site of an earlier building, the Cowyards was in place by c1860 and was further expanded under the 9th Duke in the late 19th century. This complex of coursed and squared limestone buildings under pitched Welsh slate roofs was completely refurbished in c.2006 and is now used as a suite of offices for a property consultancy company. To the west of the Cowyards a low, curving, linear earthwork may represent a section of the 18th century carriage drive which cut through the formal planting of Wise and was first shown on a map by Thomas Pride in 1772. Today the principal drive through Lower Park is used by visitors as the main exit. The drive

leaves the park through gates next to Eagle Lodge, a cottage of c.1860. Beyond the main park wall and extending all along the Oxford Road, almost as far as the Hensington Lodge, is a narrow strip of woodland enclosed by dry stone walling.

### *Significance and Condition*

**4.29** The significance of Lower Park lies in the fact that it retains some of the character and veteran trees from the extensive formal planting set here by Henry Wise at the start of the 18th century. The ha-ha between the end of the garden and Lower Park is also of significance since it was originally used to extend the view from the east front of the Palace out towards the former Hensington House. The areas of open parkland are well maintained with mown grassland, which in places is causing compaction and physical damage to some of the veteran trees, although in general the tree population is in good health. Some routine maintenance is required to the boundary shelterbelts and to the 11th Duke's clumps in the next 10 years. In the 1980s and 1990s some additional parkland planting was carried out within Lower Park. In recent years there has been a policy of like-for-like replacement when mature trees die or have to be taken down for health and safety reasons. The condition of the buildings in Lower Park have improved considerably since the last management plan was written. The Icehouse has been completely restored, the Cowyards is in excellent condition following its conversion and refurbishment and Eagle Lodge is in a sound condition and requires only routine maintenance and repair. What remains to be done is the ha-ha along the western boundary of Lower Park which is in a variable, but generally poor condition. Sections of retaining wall have collapsed, or show considerable slump in the structure. Woody vegetation has established in the wall and all along the ha-ha ditch. As a result of the vegetation along the ha-ha, both within the gardens and Lower Park, there is now a strong

visual division between the two where historically there would have been open views linking them. The boundary walls enclosing Lower Park are generally in a reasonable condition but do require repairs to the coping and upper courses in some places.

## BLADON PARK - CHARACTER AREA 5

### *Description*

**4.30** Bladon Park is located south of the Palace between the gardens and pleasure grounds to the north and Bladon village to the south. Lower Park and Bladon Chains lie to the east with High Park to the west. The Bladon Park area consists of three distinct land parcels which are: the area known as Bladon Park to the south; Rough Piece and Laurel Bank along the valley of the Glyme; and the Sheepwalk immediately south of the Palace lawn ha-ha. Bladon Park as a character area has a gentle fall from north to south with a high point of c.95m AOD near the ha-ha in the Sheepwalk and a low point of around 75m AOD on the southern boundary with Bladon village. The serpentine lake and valley of the River Glyme curves through the central western side of Bladon Park. The northern part of this compartment originated as part of Hensgrove which was incorporated into Woodstock Park in the second half of the 12th century, but the southern area was not added until 1767 when Lancelot Brown and the 4th Duke extended the park. The division between the two areas is still marked on the ground by the former parish boundary which survives as a low earthwork bank running west from near the Eagle Lodge in the direction of Springlock Gate.

**4.31** The current character of Bladon Park is largely open with a few, scattered parkland trees mostly of oak, lime and beech. The exceptions to this open character are the veteran oaks along the Eagle Lodge drive, the lime avenue east of the walled garden



which was originally planted by Henry Wise, and the valley of the Glyme which has two distinct sub-character areas. South of New Bridge grassland sweeps down to Brown's lake which is flanked on the east bank by alternate clumps of copper beech and blue Atlantic cedar established by the 9th Duke in 1896. Opposite these clumps, lining the west bank, is a more continuous planting of walnut, oak, holly, yew and black pine, planted in the 1980s & 1990s. To the north of New Bridge, Rough Piece and Laurel Bank have a more enclosed and wooded character with sinuous woodlands of oak, ash, cherry and yew planted around mid 20th century Norway Spruce, Douglas Fir and larch plantations. Mature beech, cedar, lime and horse chestnut are scattered through these woods indicating an earlier and more open 18th century planting character. Throughout the open ground of Rough Piece are a number of veteran oaks, remnants of both Woodstock Park and of Henry Wise's planting south west of the gardens. At the western end of Laurel Bank the 4th and 5th Duke developed an extension to the pleasure grounds which was partly enclosed on

the west side by a ha-ha, and some paths, rock work and garden features remain in this area. New Bridge, designed by William Chambers, is a highly decorative addition to Bladon Park with the 3 arches, bracketed and modillioned cornice and balustraded parapet designed to reflect in the still waters of the widened river and be seen as an eye-catcher from Rough Piece and the riverside walks.

**4.32** The Sheepwalk is divided from the woodland of Rough Piece by post and rail fencing. This area is mainly open with a scatter of mature limes fringing the open grassland. In the early 18th century the great gardens and wilderness created by Vanbrugh and Wise extended over much of the Sheepwalk and the earthwork remains of bastions, terraces walks and the central rectangular lawns can still be seen on the ground and on aerial photographs. Just south of the Sheepwalk by the main drive through Bladon Park the earthwork remains of the Gardener's House, shown on the 1709 plan of Blenheim Palace, are also apparent.

The northern boundary of the character area is made up of stone walling around the walled kitchen garden and Brown's ha-ha which encloses the Sheepwalk and the western side of Rough Piece. The mid 18th century ha-ha appears to have a consistency of construction with the retaining wall being between 1.4 and 1.6m tall with the ha-ha ditch being 6.9 to 7.2m wide. The retaining walls have a slight batter and are formed from dry stone walling c.500mm thick. A later and less substantial ha-ha, in place by 1863, divides the Sheepwalk from Bladon Park.

**4.33** Bladon Park is divided from the Lince by a further shallow, late 18th century ha-ha with a low dry stone wall and a short section of post and rail fencing forming the boundary between New Bridge and Springlock Gate. Along the southern boundary a 2.0 - 2.2m high dry stone wall, presumably erected as part of Lancelot Brown's landscape contract, separates the park from Bladon village. This southern boundary is screened by a narrow shelterbelt (Home Farm Belt)



of oak, beech, ash and cherry within which are mature limes, oak and beech. The Home Farm Belt has been substantially strengthened at its eastern end with two phases of planting in c.1990 and 2004. The relatively open character of Bladon Park and the Sheepwalk lend themselves well to event use. Much of this area consists of either improved or species poor, semi-improved grassland with few archaeological features. The Blenheim Park SSSI extends along the river Glyme, including parts of Rough Piece and Laurel Bank.

### *Significance and Condition*

**4.34** The features of significance in Bladon Park are represented by the garden ha-ha; the area of SSSI; the character of the planting along the river Glyme; and William Chamber's New Bridge. The section of parkland is also the one over which the key view from the Palace out towards the top of Bladon Church is still enjoyed. That section of Bladon Park which lies within the SSSI is assessed by Natural England as being in a favourable condition. At New Bridge there is evidence of water penetration through the bridge which requires further study as to how best to resolve it. Some areas of stone erosion have been noted but sections of balustrade have recently been repaired. A weight limit has been imposed on the bridge to prevent vibration damage to the spindles. The boundary walls to the park are in a fair condition requiring only routine maintenance and repair. The ha-ha around the Sheepwalk has recently been extensively restored. While the main southern and most of the eastern sides of the ha-ha allow views out from the gardens, on the west side the increasing line of woody vegetation is having the effect of dividing the park from the pleasure ground.

**4.35** The character of Rough Piece and Laurel Bank has evolved over the centuries. Some judicious thinning of 20th century bank side tree planting to open up historic views of New Bridge would be

desirable. Similarly the selective felling of larch on the northern edge of Rough Piece would reduce the hard visual boundary seen in this direction from the Palace. The park grassland is well managed and it provides appropriate protection for archaeological features, although it will be worth highlighting the location of the former Gardener's House to avoid vehicular damage when mowing. All woodlands are included within the current Forest Plan and are well managed.

## THE LINC - CHARACTER AREA 6

### *Description*

**4.36** The Lince is situated at the southern end of the park covering land on either side of the narrow Glyme valley near the rivers confluence with the Evenlode. It lies outside the WHS boundary but inside the Registered Park and Garden boundary. At its northern the land rises, as part of a narrow ridge, to just over 90m AOD and descends to c.70m AOD immediately north of the park wall at Bladon. Prior to Brown's involvement, this area lay outside the park, but together with the 4th Duke Brown widened a serpentine section of the river. To create this broadwater Brown embanked the southern side of the river and formed a curved cascade dam (Bladon Dam) at the western end which he concealed from most of the adjacent drives by the Lince Bridge. To the south of the river the park is enclosed by a tall stone wall with the former dog kennels located on the western edge of Bladon village. The area between the boundary wall and the river is occupied by a block of wet woodland known as Little London, planted to screen the village and through which a natural stream and man-made ditches run. On the northern bank the gently rising valley side is planted with mixed broadleaved and coniferous woodland, an area of planting that was considerably extended in the early 19th century. Brown's 18th century carriage drive along the edge

of the lake is detectable as an earthwork through the woodland with some of his original tree planting of oak, beech, lime and the occasional ash and cedar lining the route and the lake side. The woodland is enclosed along its northern boundary by a shallow ha-ha formed in the late 18th century probably by Benjamin Read on the instructions of the 4th Duke.

**4.37** In the late 18th century a cottage and pheasantry was added to the Lince north of the water. The exact form of this original building group is not known but by the end of the 18th or very early 19th century the Lince Lodge had been created. This is a two storey building of ashlar stonework under a hipped Welsh slate roof partly hidden by a blocking course parapet, further extended in the 19th century to its current size and plan form. It was intended to have views out across the lake and to be an eye-catcher from the drive or walk on the southern embankment, the view framed by mature cedars. The area falls within Blenheim Park SSSI, although it has a markedly different history and character to High Park. Some areas of the sloping bank north west of Lince Lodge have a moderately diverse species ground flora while part of Little London also had a good woodland ground flora. Roman snail (*Helix pomatia*) is found throughout the woodlands and is abundant on the north side of the river, while the river corridor is known to be used by otter with evidence of a feeding site on the cascade dam.

### *Significance and Condition*

**4.38** Brown's design here forms a distinct and discrete little parkland of its own, with the serpentine water, ha-ha walls, the carriage drive along the edge of the water and the water itself with its dam being the key components. Although lying outside the WHS boundary, the Lince falls within the boundary of the registered park and garden because it forms



part of the work undertaken by Lancelot Brown. Unit 2 of the Blenheim Park SSSI lies in this area and is assessed by Natural England as being in a favourable condition. The park walls are generally in a good condition on the Bladon side of the park with the iron gates at the entrance to Little London also being in a sound condition. There is no gate in the wall on the drive between this character area and High Park. In 2010 - 11 the southern embankment and dam were modified and reinforced in order to comply with the requirements of the Reservoir Act. These features are in a good condition and much of the landscape character along the southern embankment has been retained. In association with the works to the lake, conservation repairs were undertaken to the Lince Bridge which included foundation repairs.

**4.39** The woodland around Lince Lodge is in good order with some selective felling and thinning planned over the next 10 year period. The wet woodland at Little London faces problems of difficult access and permanently wet conditions so is managed on a low input, continuous cover basis with some selective thinning of mature trees needed over the next 5 - 10 years. Little London woodland still currently performs its primary function as a screening belt to the park and has good ecological value. The buildings in this area are in need of conservation work. The historic core of Lince Lodge suffers from weathering and fracturing of the ashlar stonework while the 19th century former kennels to the north are in a poor condition. The ha-ha along the northern boundary is in a very poor condition with the retaining wall losing stone, bulging or covered with invasive woody vegetation. The ha-ha ditch is full of vegetation with hawthorn and ash scrub established along the top of the bank.



## HIGH PARK - CHARACTER AREA 7

### *Description*

**4.40** High Park is a well wooded area derived from ancient wood pasture which is located in the south west of Blenheim Park, with its own distinct character being the most enclosed and wooded part of the parkland. The topography of High Park consists of a low, domed ridge line extending out from Combe village with a high point of c.120m AOD immediately north of High Lodge. From this clay capped ridge the land slopes gently to the north, east and south becoming steeply inclined near the edges of the valleys of the Glyme and Evenlode which bound High Park to the east and south west respectively. Most of the high ground and land to the south show evidence of a wood-pasture structure while the steeply sloping ground to the east and south is characterised by mixed broadleaved plantation woodland established in the 18th and 19th century as part of wider works in the designed landscape. High Park was an important part of the medieval deer park at Woodstock with a park keepers house located in the position now occupied by High Lodge. However, the boundary of this area has gradually expanded throughout the post medieval period and only achieved its current extent by the end of the 18th century. The last major additions to High Park were in 1763 and 1789 when areas north west of High Lodge were emparked near the small settlement of East End in the parish of Combe. This area which is known as New Park, includes a well defined rectilinear enclosure immediately north west of Combe Lodge. The area is enclosed by the park wall and ditch to the south and has a well defined earthwork ditch on the north and east sides. At the western end of this enclosure is a group of ten pillow mounds (part of an artificial rabbit warren) which are designated as a Scheduled Monument. Archaeological features are also present south west of High Lodge, some of which may be associated with the former boundary of the deer park, while on the northern and eastern side of High

Park are a series of small quarries. These features, which are thought to mainly date from the early 18th century when Vanbrugh was looking for stone, skirt the fringes of the clay cap and lower ground.

**4.41** The area has high ecological and landscape value and is a key component of the Blenheim Park SSSI, first designated in 1956. As a landscape feature High Park makes a strong contribution to the character of the WHS. The high plateau and wooded, east facing slopes form a visual contrast to the more open areas in the rest of the park and enclose views from the Palace and elsewhere across Brown's lake. Historic rides and carriage drives cut through High Park and skirt the lower ground around the lake. From these routes there would have been views out to the wider park landscape and across the lake towards the Palace and Grand Bridge. Today the landscape also includes an angled ride cut through the woodland during the 20th century between the edge of High Lodge and the Palace, although many of the other views have been lost.

**4.42** While High Park clearly has high landscape value its overriding significance is derived from its ecological interest because it is one of the finest areas of ancient oak-dominated wood pasture in Europe. Survey work undertaken from 2001 onwards has recorded 977 veteran trees, the vast majority of which are oak (*Quercus robur*) with some estimated to be over 500 years old. The invertebrate fauna within High Park contains several species associated with dead or decaying wood including 3 Red Data Book beetles. The ground flora varies across the site and reflects the underlying geology and soils. Much of the central area is dominated by bracken heath with damp acid grassland around and to the north west of High Lodge. Along the ride east of High Lodge, on the fringes of the character area to the north and in the south there are areas of relatively unimproved calcareous grassland. Some parts of High Park also support species poor

tussock grassland where yellow meadow ant hills are found in local abundance. Until the mid 19th century High Park appears to have retained a strong wood-pasture character so much so that in the late 19th century the 9th Duke recorded in the Red Planting Book his impressions and intentions for High Park, when he wrote '...where the oaks and bracken exist was meant to remain as an example to all time of the imposing effect of a medieval forest'. Between 1893 and 1928 the Duke undertook several phases of tree planting in High Park to fill up gaps along the lake edge and to add specimen oaks. It is from this time onwards, and especially in the early and mid 20th centuries that considerable additional planting together with extensive natural regeneration altered the character of some areas of High Park.

**4.43** In addition to its landscape and ecological features, High Park contains three park buildings. High Lodge and its associated walling (formerly known as Straights Lodge) has early origins with the core of the current building thought to date from 1586 - 87 when it was a hunting lodge. It is said that the 1st Duke and Duchess resided here during the construction of the Palace. The Lodge was remodelled in the 1760s in the Gothick style possibly to designs by Lancelot Brown, with a 3 storey, canted tower that formerly looked out along a grass ride known as the Straights which framed views out of the park towards Oxford (in the 1950s the 10th Duke planted up the Straights with a mixed plantation thus concealing the lodge and obscuring any view). In the 1840s Springlock Gate was added as a lodge cottage at the south east entrance to High Park while along the western boundary of the park is Combe Lodge, a late 18th century or early 19th century cottage located at an historic entrance point into the park. Originally a lodge with a small, square plan form, the cottage has been extended in the 20th century. It has fine dressed stone to the historic core with plinth, plat band and circular first floor windows to the south elevation, all under a hipped clay tile roof with gable

end over the north extension.

### *Significance and Condition*

**4.44** The designation as a SSSI confirms the significance of High Park, most particularly because of its large population of veteran trees. In terms of the landscape it forms a key element in the view west from the Palace and represents a valuable feature in the landscape when viewed from beyond the boundary of the WHS. The majority of the High Park character area falls within Units 1 and 2 of the Blenheim Park SSSI which have been assessed in ecological terms as being in favourable condition. In terms of the WHS the character of High Park is reasonably robust and is not vulnerable to any significant or rapid change. There are a number of secondary views from historic drives and from High Lodge that could be either reinstated or enhanced in order to fully integrate the various character areas of the park. The park boundary wall has been assessed in detail and found to be in a generally good condition, although the low walling sections around East End appear to provide one of the access points for wild deer entering the park, which potentially leads to some damage to the trees. The silvicultural condition of the woodland and wood-pasture is good although there has been signs of Acute Oak decline which was first found in a mature oak north of High Lodge in 2013. This tree was felled and the waste burnt in line with Forestry Commission guidance. Further monitoring for Acute Oak Decline continues.

**4.45** The main buildings within High Park are in a good or stable condition requiring only routine maintenance and repair. The archaeological features were recorded in the 2013 condition survey noted that the pillow mounds in New Park are of national significance. They are considered by Historic England to be at low risk, partly due to works carried out



over the last 10 years to fell birch and other natural regeneration on the mounds.

## THE GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS - CHARACTER AREA 8

### *Description*

**4.46** The formal gardens and ornamental areas close to the Palace contain features from every period of its history and development from the early 18th century onwards. Initially laid out by Henry Wise as an elaborate formal garden with raised walks and bastions, this was - in the fashion of the time - greatly simplified during the second half of the 18th century in order to create flowing lawns, shrubberies and serpentine walks, adorned with temples, statues and other features. There are trees which survive from this period throughout the gardens, including some very fine mature Cedar of Lebanon. Over the course of the 19th century Victorian pleasure gardens were laid out with great extravagance but many of these features lasted only until the start of the 20th century. Together with the remodelling of the north court, the work by Achille Duchene to create the Italian Garden and the Water Terraces stand amongst the finest formal gardens of the early 20th century and can perhaps be considered to be Duchene's masterpiece. Over the later course of the 20th century, new garden features were added by the 11th Duke, including a Secret Garden set between the Palace and the walled kitchen gardens. Additionally a grassy oak-bounded vista from the Palace to High Lodge was created.

### *Significance and Condition*

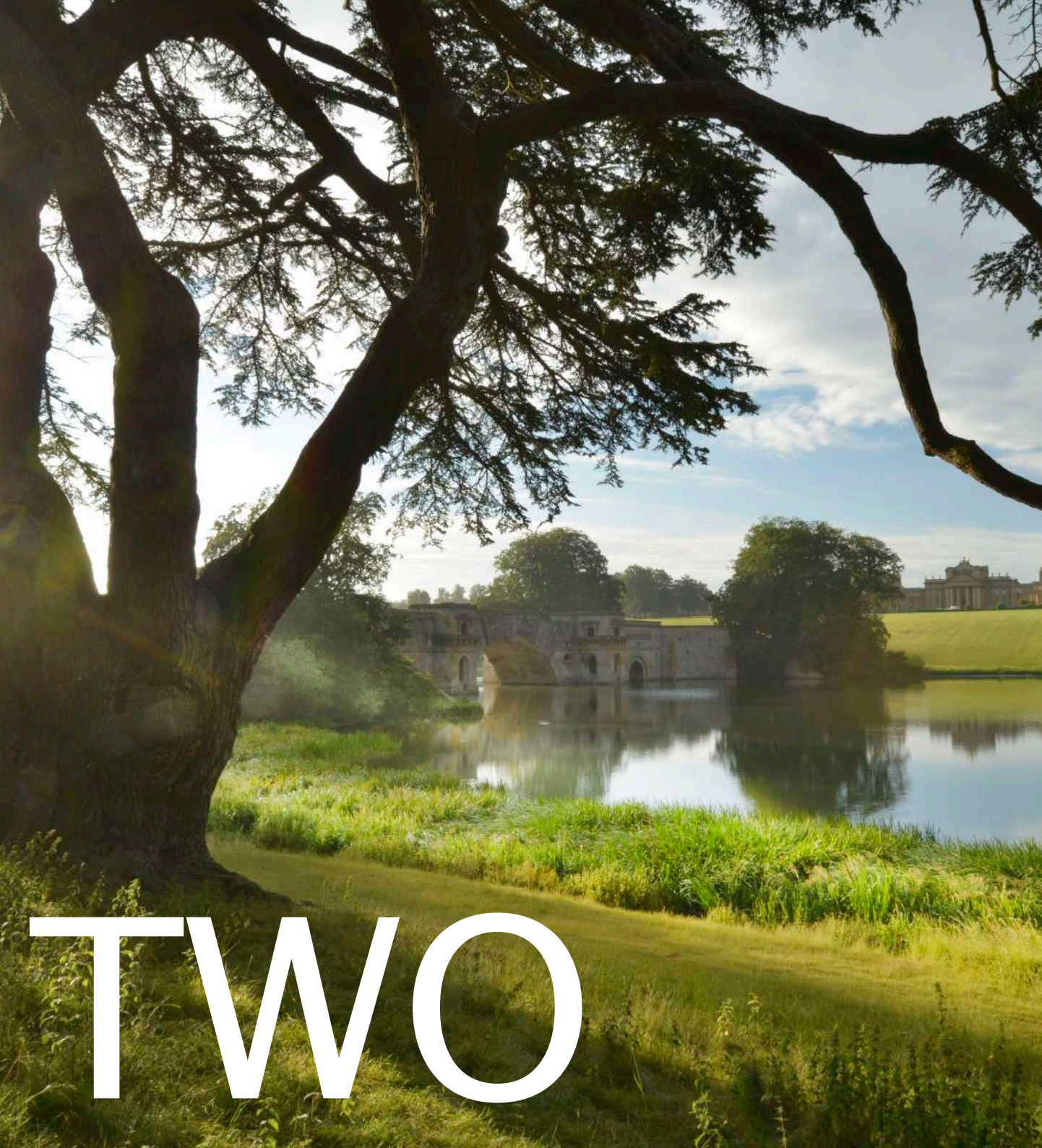
**4.47** The garden structures including fountains, pools and temples (notably by William Chambers) have a significance of their own, while most notable in terms of the WHS is the sunken Italian garden below

the east front, and the spectacular formal terraced Water Garden below the west front. Additionally, the 18th century trees have, through maturity, acquired significance in themselves, in particular the Cedars of Lebanon and some beech, although these are now close to the end of their lives. Maintenance is generally to a very high standard. The gardens are managed by a gardens team of ten, led by the Head Gardener, and together they are responsible for all the formal areas surrounding the Palace, the Secret Garden, the Rose Garden, the lawns and pleasure walks down to the cascade, the walled garden and all its features including the maze, adventure playground and butterfly house. They also supply plants and cut flowers for the Palace and mow the more manicured areas of the park. The original late 1980s landscape restoration plan was commissioned just for the park and was not required to cover the gardens and pleasure grounds, and this was also the case when the 2013 parkland plan was prepared. Nevertheless, the gardens have an equally long and interesting history of development and as this has become better understood through the research which has taken place over the past ten years, new knowledge can be reflected when future projects are being planned.









## TWO

### SIGNIFICANCES, CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

This section describes the Outstanding Universal Value of the Blenheim Palace World Heritage Site, and sets out the attributes which help convey this value. It also contains Statements of Significance in the national and regional context, and concludes by considering the challenges and opportunities which are likely to arise in the coming 10 years.

5 THE WORLD HERITAGE SITE

6 THE NATIONAL HERITAGE ASSETS

7 CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

# TWO



## 5 THE WORLD HERITAGE SITE JUSTIFICATION

### STATEMENT OF OUTSTANDING UNIVERSAL VALUE

**5.01** The official documents relating to the Inscription of Blenheim Palace in 1987 gave only the name of the site and the numbers of the two criteria which were met, but with no accompanying text. During the second half of the 2000s a more detailed Statement of Outstanding Universal Value, including a discussion of the sites integrity and authenticity, as well as a section on its protection and management was prepared. This was formally adopted by UNESCO in 2013. The approved text is reproduced in the text box below.

#### *Brief Synthesis*

Blenheim Palace, in Oxfordshire, was designed by John Vanbrugh. The English nation presented the site to John Churchill, first Duke of Marlborough, in

recognition of his victory in 1704 over French and Bavarian troops, a victory which decided the future of the Empire and, in doing so, made him a figure of international importance. The Palace sits within a large walled landscape park, the structure by Vanbrugh overlaid by the designs of Lancelot “Capability” Brown from 1761 onwards.

#### Adoption of retrospective Statements of Outstanding Universal Value

The design and building of the Palace between 1705 and 1722 represented the beginning of a new style of architecture and its landscaped Park, designed by Lancelot “Capability” Brown, is considered “a naturalistic Versailles”. In tangible form, Blenheim is an outstanding example of the work of John Vanbrugh and Nicholas Hawksmoor, two of England’s most notable architects. It represents a unique architectural achievement celebrating the triumph of the English armies over the French, and the Palace and its associated Park have exerted great influence on the English Romantic movement which was characterised by the eclecticism of its inspiration, its return to

natural sources and its love of nature.

The original landscape set out by John Vanbrugh, who regulated the course of the River Glyme, was later modified by Lancelot “Capability” Brown who created two lakes, seen as one of the greatest examples of naturalistic landscape design.

Blenheim Palace was built by the nation to honour one of its heroes John Churchill, the first Duke of Marlborough, and is also closely associated with Sir Winston Churchill.

#### Criterion (ii):

By their refusal of the French models of classicism, the Palace and Park illustrate the beginnings of the English Romantic movement, which was characterised by the eclecticism of its inspiration, its return to national sources and its love of nature. The influence of Blenheim on the architecture and organisation of space in the 18th and 19th centuries was greatly felt both in England and abroad.

#### Criterion (iv):

Built by the nation to honour one of its heroes,





Blenheim is, above all, the home of an English aristocrat, the 1st Duke of Marlborough, who was also Prince of the Germanic Holy Roman Empire, as we are reminded in the decoration of the Great Drawing Room [the Saloon] by Louis Laguerre (1719-20). Like the World Heritage properties Residence of Würzburg and the Castles of Augustusburg and Falkenlust in Brühl, Blenheim is typical of 18th century European princely residences.

### *Integrity*

The property is enclosed by an 18th century dry stone wall which defines its extent and maintains its physical integrity. Within the wall, the layout of the principal buildings remains unaltered since their construction, and the overall structure of the landscaped park layout remains largely as set out by Vanbrugh and Brown. The buildings and Park were laid out over an earlier Roman and medieval landscape, remnants of which are still visible through the Vanbrugh and Brown landscapes. Changes to the landscape and buildings by their owners have continued to the present day though these have not detracted from the Outstanding Universal Value of the property.

The Park contains important veteran trees. Disease and time have caused some loss of original tree specimens but these have been replanted with the same species where possible and appropriate. Because of climate change and the greater incidence of drought, adjustments have to be made to the mix of species used in conserving the park landscape.

The integrity of the property is well protected by its enclosing wall but important visual links do exist between the gates, the parkland buildings, buildings in the surrounding villages and landscape, and care needs to be taken to ensure these key visual links are protected.

### *Authenticity*

The overall relationship between the Baroque Palace and its Park is still clearly in place and the Outstanding Universal Value of the property can be very readily understood despite the early 20th century changes to the landscape. The form and design of the Palace and Park survive well and there is a high degree of survival of fabric and indeed original fittings and furnishings.

#### Protection and management requirements

The UK Government protects World Heritage properties in England in two ways. Firstly, individual buildings, monuments, gardens and landscapes are designated under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and the 1979 Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act and secondly, through the UK Spatial Planning system under the provisions of the Town and Country Planning Acts. Government guidance on protecting the Historic Environment and World Heritage is set out in the National Planning Policy Framework and Circular 07/09. Policies to protect, promote, conserve and enhance World Heritage properties, their settings and buffer zones are also found in statutory planning documents. World Heritage status is a key material consideration when planning applications are considered by the Local Authority planning authority. The West Oxfordshire Local Plan contains policies to protect the property. The property as a whole is designated as a Grade 1 registered Park and Garden and was given National Heritage tax exemption status in 1999 in recognition of its important architecture, its outstanding scenic, historic landscape, and the outstanding importance of the buildings' contents and their intimate association with the property. Forty five key buildings on the site are Grade 1 and Grade 2\* Listed Buildings, with the park wall designated Grade 2. There are 5 scheduled ancient monuments within the Park. The lakes and High Park are designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and the ancient woodland and hedgerows are both protected. Part of the setting

of the property is within the Conservation Areas of Woodstock and Bladon and part is in the Cotswold's Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. A Management Plan has been in place since 2006 and is monitored on an annual basis by a Steering Group which includes representatives from English Heritage, ICOMOS-UK, DCMS, Natural England, the County Council and the local planning authority. Relevant Management Plan policies carry weight in the planning system. There is a comprehensive and successful visitor management plan. The Steering Group is coordinated by the Blenheim Palace and Estate Chief Executive who has responsibility for implementing the Management Plan Action Plan. There is an ongoing programme of repair and regular maintenance of the buildings and structures. Recent work has included the strengthening and reinstatement of the Blenheim Dam during 2009 to comply with safety legislation. The Park is open through the year and the Palace and Formal Gardens are open from mid-February to mid-December each year. The property has a long tradition of public access (going back to at least Easter 1950) and it provides the setting for informal recreation as well as a series of activities including sporting events, craft and country fairs and entertainment events such as music concerts and historical re-enactments. The property also offers a very high quality resource for a variety of educational uses. Firm implementation of existing policies is important to provide effective protection of the setting of the World Heritage property and it will be important to ensure that the management of the Park prioritises conservation of the elements of the landscape that reflect the work of Vanbrugh and Brown. The Steering Group meets annually to monitor progress and implementation with regard to the 33 stated objectives in the Management Plan and to check awareness with regard to risk preparedness and to monitor any issues regarding the integrity of the property – particularly with regard to the continuous monitoring of the key visual links.



## ATTRIBUTES WHICH HELP CONVEY THE OUV

**5.02** At the same time as developing the Statement of Outstanding Universal Value which was formally adopted by UNESCO, an informal set of attributes for the site were identified. Attributes are aspects or values which help convey or express the OUV and provide some further detail. The attributes identified for Blenheim Palace were:

- *Attribute 1.* It remains the home of the same aristocratic family, the successive Dukes of Marlborough, for whom it was built.
- *Attribute 2.* It still contains the unique early 18th century architecture of the Palace and its associated assemblage of buildings together with an archive of original survey and building documentation
- *Attribute 3.* It is still set within the early 18th century grand Vanbrugh landscape overlaid by Lancelot Brown's masterpiece of English Landscape style design, internationally considered to be the 'English Versailles'.
- *Attribute 4.* The surviving special relationship between the important architectural elements and their landscape setting are an exceptional piece of design and, together are greater than the sum of their parts.
- *Attribute 5.* The UK has by far the greatest concentration of veteran trees in northern Europe and within High Park, which sits in the south-west section of Blenheim Park, is one of the finest areas of ancient oak-dominated woodland in the country. It is partially descended from the ancient Wychwood Forest, a 12th century deer park and an Anglo-Saxon chase.



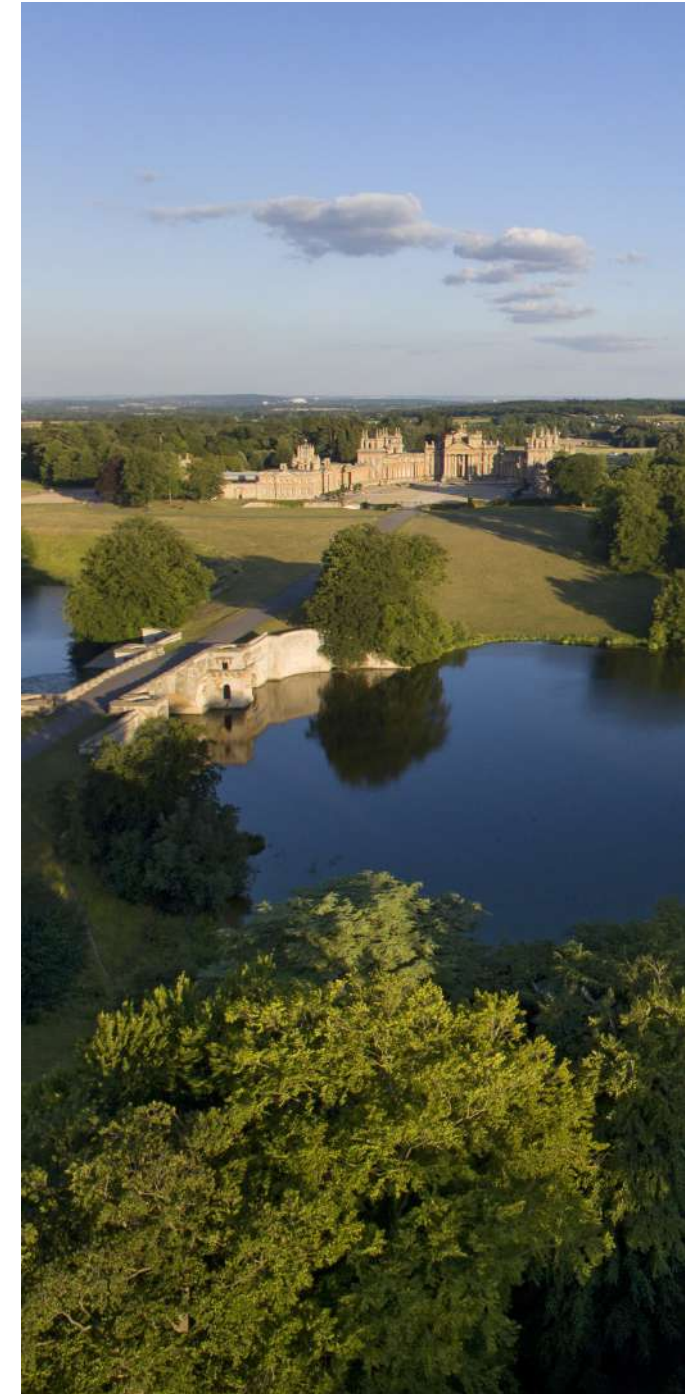
- *Attribute 6.* The gardens and pleasure grounds which surround the Palace were partly designed by Lancelot Brown in the mid 18th century, and partly by the French landscape architect Achille Duchene at the start of the 20th century.
- *Attribute 7.* The park retains a complete, 18th century enclosing stone wall which protects its integrity, but views into and out of the site still provide key linkages between Blenheim Palace and the traditional English countryside and villages surrounding it.

## UNDERSTANDING THE ATTRIBUTES

### *Attributes 1 and 2*

**5.03** John Churchill, 1st Duke of Marlborough, was a figure of international importance. On August 13, 1704, with the help of Prince Eugene, he won a decisive victory over the French and Bavarian troops at Blindheim, near Hochstadt. After a long campaign in the War of the Spanish succession, it was clear that this battle would decide the future of Vienna and the Empire. In England Marlborough's victory was greeted as the greatest since Agincourt, while on the Continent he was revered for all he had done to save Europe from the dictatorship of Louis XIV. As an expression of the English nation's gratitude Queen Anne bestowed on him the royal property of Woodstock, one of the oldest royal properties set in the heart of a forest, and on this site a colossal palace was erected to honour this great hero. The palace at Blenheim is an expression of national power, a symbolic statement of military dominance and a work of art. Certain buildings such as temples, memorials, and centres of government have always been surrounded by material symbols and architectural display. These various types of building can be classified as 'intended monuments' of which Blenheim Palace is clearly one, and their cultural value is made even more prominent by a more recent

disinclination to create similar buildings. They are, in short, works of deliberate 'historic landmark'. It is clear that Vanbrugh, Hawksmoor and Marlborough had in mind the Aristotelian concept of magnificence when Blenheim Palace was conceived, meaning that it was intended as an architecturally distinguished large-scale public building of magnificence (and not for the luxury of the inhabitant). Thus Blenheim Palace is a building which together with the Park and accompanying structures, statuary etc, is intended as a celebratory monument, ultimately to British liberty, and is vested with symbolic significance and manifestly intended to be a permanent memorial. We ascribe intangible values to a place which reminds us of the magnitude of Marlborough's battle victories and this form of historical association can be strong enough to promote any building – whether modest or magnificent – to the status of a revered monument. In Blenheim Palace, however, we have both an extraordinary piece of architecture and one that, because of its associations with the significant military achievements of the 1st Duke, evokes strong passion and becomes a symbol of cultural identity, to be cherished and celebrated. The Palace was also a creation of the Whig dynasty – the dominant political party of the time who believed primarily in civil and political liberty. The party, which rose to dominance in 1688, was supported by many merchants and landowners. Vanbrugh and Hawksmoor saw the opportunity to highlight in architectural form the new 'Golden Age' of the Whigs. There was, at least in some quarters of the country, an expectation of architectural supremacy under Queen Anne, echoing the military domination achieved under Marlborough. Ornamentation and landscape played their role in expressing the Whig cause with Blenheim Palace and its landscape seeking to express freedom and surpass established Tory nobility. Thus the Palace dominates its landscape and was designed to be the focus of all important views and allegorical journeys.





**5.04** The design of Blenheim Palace illustrates the beginnings of the English Romantic Movement, which was characterised by the eclecticism of its inspiration. Its designers rejected the French classical influence and instead returned to national sources and a love of nature from which to inspire the designs for the new Palace. The influence of Blenheim Palace on architecture in the C18 was greatly felt both in England and abroad. The architectural handling of the Palace was intended from the start to convey the magnificence and virtue of its patron. It is a celebration of European Baroque given English expression through its bold square form. Blenheim Palace has what Vanbrugh termed his 'castle air', noble and masculine but with a romantic notion of the medieval past, yet all decorated with classical motif. This style evoked medieval forms, the heavy massing of the building and a romantic silhouette but was combined with baroque advance and recession of forms and a sense of theatre to provide a distinct architectural style. The selection of Vanbrugh as architect probably ensured a scheme which had echoes of Castle Howard. The plan format of this type of design had its origins in the royal and private palaces built in Britain since the 1680s, but at Blenheim Palace Vanbrugh took it to a new level and enhanced the whole building with military symbolism. This overall design is one of the unique elements about the Palace, which gives it outstanding universal value. By combining design sources, including Italian Renaissance, English medieval and Elizabethan influences, but adding a romantic element, Vanbrugh and Hawksmoor created the unique qualities of Blenheim Palace.

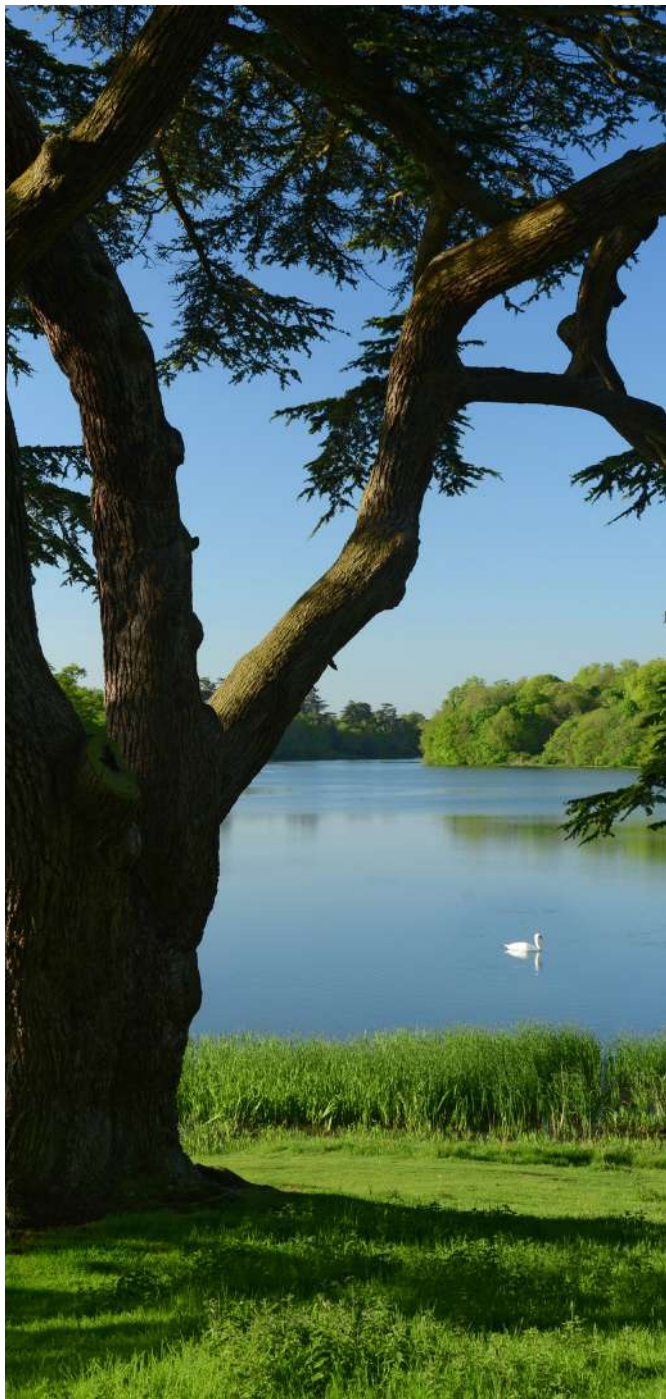
#### *Attributes 3, 4 and 7*

**5.05** For some 30 years between 1753 and his death, Lancelot 'Capability' Brown was unrivalled in the realm of landscape design. He took the foundations for a new naturalistic landscape which had been laid by William Kent and to this he added his own artistic

talents, thus creating the 'English Landscape Style' which spread across the whole country and from there into Europe. It was a form of landscape art which, in its organisation of space, was to stretch in its influence well beyond the shores of Britain in the 18th and 19th century and Blenheim Park is a supreme example. Across the channel, examples of 'English Gardens' began to appear, for example the Englischer Garten created in the heart of Munich in 1789 for the Elector Karl Theodor. The handling of large expanses of water, the creation of dams, the sensitive sculpturing of pastoral landforms and the planting of thousands of trees became Brown's signature and can be seen again and again in the many parks he transformed. Two interlocking qualities give the landscape of Blenheim Palace its outstanding universal value. It is an exemplar of the English Landscape Style, displaying some of Lancelot Brown's most famous devices, including the magnificent artificial river and lake system. Underlying and united by this design, which he began in 1761, are many elements which Brown retained from the original landscape setting of the Palace. Lancelot Brown absorbed both the ancient landscape of veteran oaks, and many elements of the grand early 18th century formal design into his masterpiece. These elements include:

- The tall stone park wall, following a drawing by Townsend and built at the same time as the Palace, which still encloses most of the 14.5km length of the park boundary, along which were planted sinuous and enclosing shelterbelts of trees.
- Avenues east from the Palace, though not the original trees, still follow the original alignment, and there is a short length of a mainly original lime avenue in the south of Lower Park.
- The 2.25km long Grand Avenue still exists although its layout differs from the original.





**5.06** This landscape was achieved in such a seamless totality that its overall significance at Blenheim Palace could be overlooked. As Mavor wrote of Brown in his Preliminary Essay to his 'Guide to Blenheim' "some of his most capital performances have been ascribed to chance" (10th edition 1817). Nonetheless the importance of Blenheim Park as an exemplar of Brown's work has been widely recognised internationally:

- Thomas Jefferson, who found the pleasure grounds uninteresting, wrote "the water here is very beautiful, and very grand, the cascade from the lake a fine one". (Memorandums made on a tour of some of the gardens of England 1786).
- Prince Puckler-Muskau's view was that: "*One cannot help admiring the grandeur of Brown's genius and conceptions, as one wanders through these grounds: he is the Shakespeare of gardening*" (from Tour in Germany, Holland and England 1826-28).
- Dorothy Stroud wrote: "The damming of this little river to form two great lakes in keeping with the vast scale of the house was one of Brown's masterpieces, and its success is in no small measure due to retaining Vanburgh's bridge" and "Contemporary critics were unanimous in their praise of Blenheim". (from Capability Brown, Faber and Faber 1984)

The numerous early 19th century prints and pictures of Blenheim Park, particularly of the surroundings of the lakes north of the Palace, confirm this admiration.

**5.07** Blenheim Park is the setting for Blenheim Palace and a number of outlying structures. These are of intrinsic value in themselves, in addition to their role

as the focal points of the designed parkland. The Palace and Grand Bridge, both designed by Vanbrugh, Hawksmoor's Triumphal Arch from Woodstock town, Hensington Gate and the Column of Victory are an ensemble of English Baroque buildings. Their value derives both from their theatrical splendour and from their association with great European personalities. In addition, the following play a particular role in the parkland landscape: High Lodge, remodelled probably by Brown as a castellated romantic house, originally intervisible from the Palace; the Park Farm complex, also by Brown, now surrounded by other later structures; Bladon or New Bridge, designed by William Chambers who is also responsible for the Temple of Diana in the Pleasure Grounds; the Lince Bridge, probably by Brown together with the elegant Lince House (probably by Chambers); two other temples and a grotto in the Pleasure Ground as well as two early iron bridges above and below the cascade; Fair Rosamund's Well and the ha-ha's.

#### *Attribute 5*

**5.08** The UK has by far the greatest concentration of veteran trees in northern Europe, and within High Park, which sits in the south-west section of Blenheim Park, is one of the finest areas of ancient oak dominated woodland in the country. It is partially descended from the ancient Wychwood Forest, a 12th century deer park, and an Anglo-Saxon chase, and is full of veteran trees, many several centuries old. Such ancient woodland, with so many veteran trees, is now a rare landscape phenomenon in northern Europe. Some of the ancient trees are thought to be over 500 years old. This cultural value is enhanced by the fact that natural regeneration of the veteran oaks has been encouraged by the 11th Duke.



*Attribute 6*

**5.09** The gardens and Pleasure Ground, which also date from the early and mid 18th century phase of landscaping still retains some of the trees which were planted at this time. They have, through maturity, acquired significance in themselves, in particular the Cedars of Lebanon and some of the beech, although these are now close to the end of their lives. The surroundings of the Palace were remodelled in the first third of the 20th century. First, the 9th Duke had the north forecourt splendidly remodelled to a layout believed to have been reflective of Vanbrugh's original intention. He then, also with the help of the French landscape architect, Achille Duchene, designed the formal gardens south-east and south-west of the Palace. These are amongst the finest formal gardens of the early 20th century and perhaps Duchene's masterpiece and together with the mature trees and buildings in the grounds provide us with tangible evidence of World Heritage Site's Outstanding Universal Value.





## 6 NATIONAL HERITAGE DESIGNATION JUSTIFICATION

### INTRODUCTION

**6.01** In addition to its World Heritage status, Blenheim Palace and its parkland are also designated as ‘national heritage’ property. Successive UK governments have recognised that significant buildings, land and objects are important to the cultural life of this country and that these ‘national heritage’ assets should be conserved and protected for the benefit of the community whilst remaining in private hands as far as possible. Inheritance tax of 40% on capital assets could require that such ‘national heritage’ assets be sold or that collections of individual assets be broken up in order for the tax to be paid. This could reduce the nation’s privately owned stock of heritage assets. In order to avoid this as far as possible the current Inheritance Tax legislation provides for Heritage Relief (see Inheritance Tax Act 1984, section 30). Since 1975 there has been a comprehensive system of relief for property of national importance held in private ownership in return for a requirement for reasonable public access to some assets granted Heritage Relief. The ways in which Blenheim Palace and park qualifies for Heritage Relief is set out in section 1.04 of Chapter 1. Thus, the reasons for the world heritage designation are augmented by features and qualities which have value in a national context as well. These enrich the outstanding universal qualities and add to the scenic, historic, architectural and scientific interest (the outstanding universal values also apply to the national ‘heritage’ designation but are not repeated here).

#### *Cultural significance*

**6.02** In more recent times, Blenheim Palace has been associated with one of our national heroes, Sir Winston Churchill, who was born at the Palace in 1874.

As Prime Minister between 1940 and 1945, Winston Churchill played a crucial role in bringing the Second World War to a successful conclusion and thus, like his ancestor some 200 years before him, Churchill helped shape the face of Europe.

**6.03** Academic interest in Blenheim Palace and Park has been evident over a long period and has led to the study of many of its elements and features, including the following cultural aspects:

- interest in the early history of Wychwood Forest and Woodstock Manor;
- the Palace as the subject of conferences, research projects, books and television programmes;
- the location providing the inspiration for the content and setting of literary works. For example, the Palace together with the 1st Duke of Marlborough was the inspiration which led to the writing of Gulliver’s Travels by Jonathan Swift.

#### *Historic and architectural significance*

**6.04** In addition to Blenheim Palace and its associated ‘outstanding’ buildings (those listed grade I or II\*), within the park wall there are 42 grade II listed buildings or structures which are of special architectural or historic interest in a national context and many of these play a significant role in the aesthetic composition of the park landscape.

#### *Historic and scenic significance*

**6.05** The formally planned landscape of Henry Wise, which ranged across the 2000 acres of parkland, were only just taking shape in 1708. The gardens, as

well as the Palace, were part of the Duke’s passion and in contemporary writings appear to achieve as much respect as the Palace itself. Thus in 1706 the Tory Hearne, recorded the gardens as being ‘very extraordinary and to exceed anything of that nature in England’. The completeness of records, both drawings and correspondence, related to this first era of Blenheim Park are significant, because they enlighten and enliven both the people and the design associated with this time. Several features of the early landscape survive and are therefore of national significance: these include the enclosing brick walls of Henry Wise’s early 18th century seven hectare kitchen garden, with four 15cm radius semicircular niches; and a 160m diameter nursery roundel encircled by a ha-ha, shown on a plan of 1709 (Charles Bridgeman) as The Big (Walnut) Clump.

**6.06** The landscape work undertaken during the Brown period has been considered in Chapter 5, and is of international significance, but there are later elements of the landscape which are also of national significance. The 9th Duke who inherited in 1892 and lived at Blenheim Palace until 1935 planted or transplanted 465,037 trees in the park. The significant features of his work are:

- the replanting of the Great Avenue in elm to his own layout but on the same alignment as the original (re-established by the present Duke in lime)
- the large number of oaks north of High Park
- the Edwardian style roundels of blue cedar and purple beech mainly concentrated in the park north of the Palace.

In 1981, the 11th Duke initiated a restoration scheme of the ageing Brownian plantings which, in the 1980s, was one of the earliest examples of developing a

planned approach to the restoration of an historic landscape, and one which is today considered to be an essential process. Because the archive is so well kept, records show that although disease and time have caused some loss of original tree specimens these have been replanted with the same species where possible and appropriate.

#### *Ecological significance*

**6.07** High Park and the lakes have high ecological value which - in addition to the reasons for their OUV - are considered to be nationally significant for the following reasons:

- the rare and valuable habitats associated with the ancient trees.
- the presence of at least twelve species of the vascular plant flora and sixteen species of epiphytic lichens which are found here and which are otherwise confined only to undisturbed ancient woodland sites in southern England.
- the invertebrate fauna which contains several species associated with dead and

decaying wood, including three beetles listed in the British Red Data Book of Invertebrates which documents rare and threatened species.

- the fact that the park is a notable site for pseudoscorpions and supports one of the four known British populations of *Dendrochernes cyrneus*.
- the lakes represent some of the largest areas of open water in Oxfordshire and as such are of regional importance as a site for breeding wintering wildfowl.
- the variety of habitats supported in the park, including areas of heathland, acid and calcareous grassland.
- the park provides the location for research by national experts, particularly Entomologists and veteran tree specialists.

#### *Archaeological significance*

**6.08** Blenheim Park contains a diverse range of monuments dating from the prehistoric, Roman and medieval periods, and these can be identified as

being 'significant', 'important' or 'very important' in a national context. Together they represent long running themes of land division, religious practice and the organisation of country estates. Five of these have been recognised and protected as Scheduled Monuments. These significant monuments have intrinsic value as heritage assets with both amenity and academic value. When considered as a group they add many layers to the historical story of Blenheim Palace and are of interest because of the way in which the parkland landscape has helped them survive. Examples include:

- Grim's Ditch, the remains of a countywide system of ditches and banks;
- the line of the Roman road, Akeman Street, at the northern end of North Park;
- the motte and bailey castle;
- the remains of the old Woodstock Palace;
- the Romano-celtic temple.

**6.09** Some of these have the potential to form additional visitor attractions and destinations either because they can be readily seen and appreciated or because they can be presented by use of on-site interpretation. For example there remains a fragment



of Henry II's (1133-89) gardens at Rosamund's Well on the north bank of the lake and signs of a mill race remain below water level in Queen Pool. The area enclosed within the middle of today's western park boundary and its south-east corner today also represents the north, west and east boundary of the royal hunting park in the middle ages.

### *Social significance*

**6.10 Visitors:** For visitors, Blenheim Palace is one of our most important and well known attractions, and in 2015/16 some 850,000 people with diverse interests visited the site. These include children and families, those with an interest in the history of architecture and landscape design, international travellers, specialist interest groups and the local community. The Palace is well known throughout the UK and abroad and many of its visitors are aware of its World Heritage Site status. The visitor season covers most of the year, and includes a wide variety of events in the park as well as providing a range of visitor facilities that help to maintain this important recreational resource.

**6.11 Local community:** Blenheim Palace has also enjoyed a long association with the local communities that surround it, benefiting both the lives of the individuals who live there, and the health of the local economy. It is an important local landowner, generating jobs for local residents and attracting visitors who support local businesses. The numbers of visitors have a positive impact on the local economy (catering, accommodation, shops, transport etc) and the Palace is a significant employer in the area. A system of walking passes is also currently available to residents of Woodstock and Bladon allowing free access to the park at specified times.

**6.12 Education and research:** The Palace has a very

well established education centre and is a valued resource for many local and regional schools and educational establishments. Blenheim Palace have won the Sandford Award every year since its inception in 1982 for the very high standards of heritage education offered by dedicated education staff. The Palace and Park survive remarkably intact, and are exceptionally well documented. Major interventions, such as the remodelling of the landscape by Brown, are similarly well documented and palimpsests of earlier schemes survive under the remodelling.



## 7 CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

### INTRODUCTION

**7.01** Much has been achieved over the past ten years to improve the state of conservation of the World Heritage Site, and to increase the levels of public enjoyment and understanding of its value. Nevertheless, there is always more that can be done, and more knowledge to be gained. This chapter considers some of the key challenges and opportunities facing the WHS over the coming 10 year period.

### CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES OVER THE NEXT TEN YEARS

#### *Periodic Report 2014*

**7.02** The Second Cycle of Periodic Reporting for the Blenheim Palace WHS was completed in 2013/14 and confirmed that the property is ‘well conserved and maintained’. The existing management plan/system is described as being ‘fully adequate’ to maintain the property’s OUV and notes that it is being ‘fully implemented’ through the delivery of the current action plan. The report also notes that there is a ‘comprehensive, integrated programme of monitoring’ which is relevant to management needs and/or improving understanding of OUV. The conclusion on the State of Conservation of the WHS was that authenticity has been preserved, integrity is intact and the OUV has been maintained.

**7.03** In the assessment of current negative factors, the Periodic Reporting exercise identified the following 7 factors, six of which are considered to be minor and one considered to be significant.

	Spatial Scale	Temporal Scale	Impact	Management Response	Trend
<b>Transportation Infrastructure</b>					
Ground Transport Infrastructure	Restricted	Frequent	Minor	Medium Capacity	Increasing
<b>Pollution</b>					
Surface Water Pollution	Restricted	Intermittent or Sporadic	Minor	Medium Capacity	Static
<b>Physical Resource Extraction</b>					
Water (Extraction)	Restricted	Intermittent or Sporadic	Minor	Medium Capacity	Static
<b>Social/Cultural Uses of Heritage</b>					
Impacts of Tourism/Visitor/Recreation	Localised	Frequent	Significant	Medium Capacity	Increasing
<b>Sudden Ecological or Geological Events</b>					
Erosion and Siltation/Deposition	Restricted	Intermittent or Sporadic	Minor	Low Capacity	Static
<b>Invasive/Alien Species or Hyper-Abundant Species</b>					
Translocated Species	Restricted	Intermittent or Sporadic	Minor	Low Capacity	Static
Invasive/Alien Terrestrial Species	Restricted	Intermittent or Sporadic	Minor	Medium Capacity	Static

The Report concludes that the most significant negative factor that has the potential to impact on the OUV of the WHS is that caused by tourism and recreation, with the associated ground transport impacts being minor but increasing. This, together with other practical conservation challenges are discussed below.

#### *Enjoying the World Heritage Site*

**7.04** Blenheim Palace is one of the most visited heritage sites in the UK, a reflection of its importance and value to the tourist industry nationally, regionally and locally - as well as providing vital income to

help support the upkeep of the property. Showing the Palace to the public is part of its history, while providing the opportunity for education, interpretation and enjoyment is a reflection of one of the site’s attributes - it was given by the nation to honour a great military hero and has always been seen as a national monument and destination for visitors. The many ways in which Blenheim Palace can be accessed by the public allows a very wide range of visitors to find something that interests them, but the challenge - as with any very popular heritage site - is to ensure that visitor numbers are managed in a sensitive and careful way, engaging the relevant authorities in their planning and delivery. The challenges and opportunities which will help to address this are:

- Continuing with the sensitive approach to the management of the events calendar which aims to spread activities across the whole year and across the site, balancing large and small events in order to manage the physical impacts on the fabric.
- Continuing to use temporary fencing where necessary to protect parkland trees from cars during events, while respecting the character of the landscape and balancing the labour demands involved in the use of temporary fencing.
- Looking at ways of encouraging visitors to see more of the park, through improved interpretation and education, thus also spreading the use across the whole site.
- Continuing to monitor the traffic and transport plans for major events, including car parking needs and being alert to the needs of any change should this be required. Setting up further links to public transport networks, particularly in relation to offering combined transport and entry ticket offers, provide an alternative to the car.

### *The Historic Buildings*

**7.05** There are continued challenges and opportunities facing the care and conservation of the Palace and the key historic structures in the park and gardens. These have been identified in the current 10 year management plan, which lists the following as requiring attention.

#### Palace Exterior:

- North Forecourt and North Steps repairs
- West Front paving repairs
- West Colonnade repairs to lead roof, plaster ceiling and statuary
- West Quadrant stone and roof repairs and renewal

- South Portico stone repairs and to flanking elevations including columns
- Various other roof repairs
- Flagstaff Gate Statues and roof repairs
- West Pavilion stone repairs
- North Front window repairs and redecoration
- South West Tower roof
- Stables Tower repairs
- Great Hall stone repairs
- East Colonnade stone repairs.

#### Palace Interior:

- Fire compartmentalisation
- Fire detection
- Stone stair works
- Undercroft wall repairs
- Rooflight repairs
- Roof structure investigation
- Marble fireplace repairs
- Window redecoration
- Iron cramp damage
- Specialist joinery repairs
- Decorative plasterwork repair

Beyond the Palace, the WHS contains many other buildings of varying levels of importance and significance, but almost all of them contribute to the character of the WHS in some way. Work is also required to many of these over the coming 10 year period. These include:

- Grand Bridge - investigation and structural survey after which significant works are likely.
- Fisheries Cottage - significant restoration work now needed following fire in November 2016 - leading to opportunities to determine the best future use for the building.
- Furze Platt - complete architectural assessment leading to agreement of the most appropriate approach to conservation and development of new uses.



- Ditchley Lodge and Gate - urgent masonry repairs.
- Hensington Lodge - external stone and stone chimney repairs, and assessment of wall movement; porch roofs and rainwater goods.
- New Bridge - measured survey and investigations possibly leading to significant works.
- Swiss Bridge - ironwork conservation.
- Column of Victory - plinth dressings, stone and railing repairs.
- Kitchen Garden - stone and brick repairs to wall, following by determination of a new use for the space.
- Water Terraces - paving and obelisk repairs.
- High Lodge - joinery repairs.
- Temple of Flora - lead-work repairs.
- Park Farm Outbuildings - removal of west courtyard sheds and associated repairs to historic fabric; and repairs to other historic ranges.

### *The Historic Parkland*

**7.06** Over the past 3 years the conservation and management of the park has been much improved through the support provided by an Environmental Stewardship agreement. There remain key tasks which need to be completed, the most significant of which, by far, is the need to conserve Queen Pool. This is suffering from silt deposition which appears to have increased in recent years as a result of changes in upstream management and infrastructure. Queen Pool is part of the Blenheim Park SSSI and as such there are complex issues covering designed landscape, ecology, water and visitor management as well as economics to overcome before any works can taken place. Fifty years is a relatively short time frame over which the lake has silted up so a study of the causes of siltation has been undertaken ahead of any plans to de-silt. This includes a study of upstream discharge into the Glyme as well as a survey of adjacent land use, together with

a water chemistry study of the lake including up and downstream areas which is helping to establish the cause of the high phosphate levels and siltation, and to assess if the lake is itself contributing to silting. The challenge of managing a historic park is that the work is always on-going, but the opportunities at Blenheim Palace over the next ten years include:

- Resolving the issues affecting Queen Pool.
- Continuing repairs to park wall and to ha-ha's.
- Restoring the surviving structure and improving the setting of Rosamund's Well.
- Completing work to the Lancelot Brown beech clumps at Grand Bridge in line with advice from a Structural Engineer.
- Carefully managing woods on valley edges to define historic clumps.
- Restoring Mapleton Pond.
- Investigating the archaeology of the Ice House Plantation.
- Completing the thinning and management of Lancelot Brown's boundary plantations and clumps.
- Pruning young trees to create good form for the future.
- Re-opening views from the shoreline line below High Park.

### *The Historic Gardens*

**7.07** The detailed management plan for the park has proved to be a valuable tool in helping to guide its future, and there is now a need for a similar management plan specifically for the gardens, so that new projects - which are the lifeblood of a vibrant garden - can continue within the framework of what needs to be conserved as part of the OUV of the site. The opportunities this might afford would allow the following to be considered:

- Finding a new use for the walled garden and

reopening the connection between it, the Palace gardens and the parkland.

- Improving knowledge and interpretation of the role the walled garden played in Palace life.
- Clearing and re-opening the view of the lake from the West Terrace.
- Continuing to restore the Pleasure Grounds along the lake walk.

### *Landscape and Ecology: High Park*

**7.08** The High Park Management Plan has identified several key challenges and opportunities designed to enhance this internationally important assemblage of ancient and veteran trees. These include:

- Developing four types of management unit: wood-pasture, closed canopy oak woodland, boundary belts, and open grassland.
- Maintaining the minimum intervention approach to deadwood.
- Maintaining and monitoring existing programmes of haloing around veteran trees.
- Locating successor veterans.
- Monitoring the impact of Acute Oak Decline.
- Conserving hawthorn and elder, and other species within the ground flora.
- Planting seed collected from ancient oaks in High Park to germinate and replant, rather than allowing natural regeneration.
- Considering a wider range of species in the boundary belts as a response to predicted climate change.
- Reducing deer browsing levels through long-term management and monitoring of the deer populations.

### *Landscape and Ecology: The Wider Parkland*

**7.09** The management of the wider park also requires



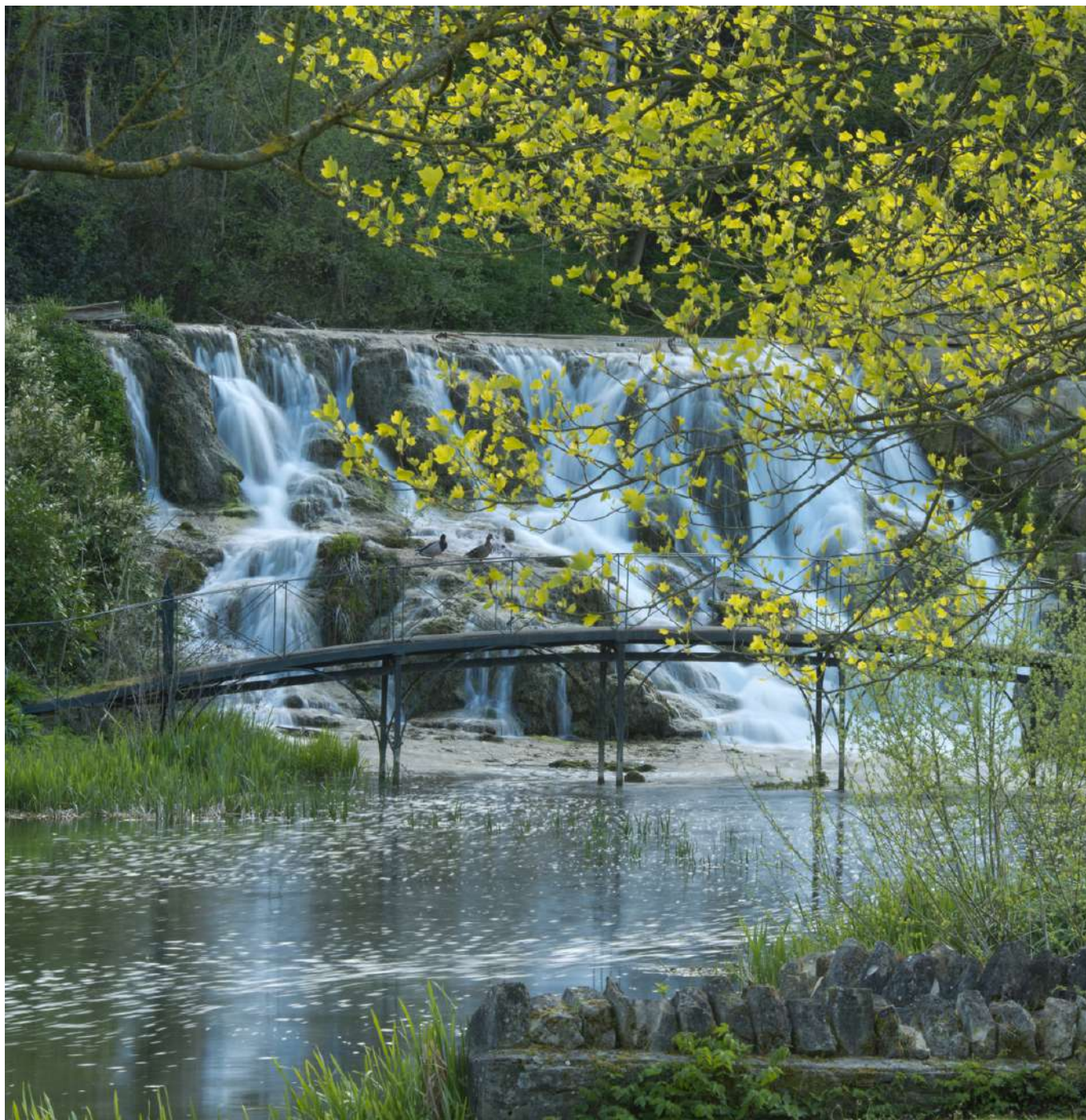
continued attention to key areas in order to protect its OUV. The challenges and opportunities here include:

- Continuing the extensive management of sheep grazed parkland and areas of semi-natural grassland to enhance grassland species diversity.
- Protecting veteran trees, replanting where appropriate for continuity.
- Maintaining woodland ground flora and predominant native/broadleaf content to tree and shrub species.
- Managing waterbodies to ensure a variety of wetland habitats associated with open water, emergent and marginal vegetation.
- Increasing understanding through targeted surveys and management plans for the most significant habitats and species which will help Blenheim Palace's contribution to ecological connectivity and resilience in the wider landscape.

#### *Development Within the World Heritage Site*

**7.10** The World Heritage Site, enclosed within its boundary wall, is over 2000 acres in size. It contains not just the Palace and its ancillary buildings, but also a range of properties from across the centuries of its existence. In order to protect the OUV of the parkland landscape it will be important in looking at future opportunities that managers are:

- Continuing to protect and conserve the vernacular characteristics of the cottage properties.
- Restoring or finding new, appropriate, uses for any unused historic structures in a way that respects the parkland setting. This would be in line with national good conservation practice which recognises that a building is best conserved when it has a use.





- Ensuring that any existing modern buildings do not detract from the historic character and removing any of these detractors when they reach the end of their useful life.

## OPPORTUNITIES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH AND STUDY

**7.11** Blenheim Palace has benefitted from much research and study over many years and, compared to many historic parks, is well understood. This means that there can be confidence in determining the authenticity of the site, its significances and in setting a vision for the future (the bibliography contained in Appendix 2 records those documents consulted during the process of preparing this management plan). However, in a property like Blenheim Palace and Park, which has such a long history of human interaction, there will always be more to uncover which may, as time goes by, provide further clarity to our understanding and appreciation of the place. The following notes suggest some areas where future research or survey work might be undertaken.

### *Historic research*

**7.12** The historical development of the Palace and its landscape is well understood and provides enough information to inform the planning of its future management. In addition, the archive has been moved in recent years, from a location with insufficient storage in the Undercroft to a bespoke storage area in the Clock Tower, which provides a better environment for the documents and easier access to study them. However, a number of the key historic plans, maps, images and other documents are folio sized or larger and could be subject to damage through repeated handling by researchers. The mid 19th century map of the park held in the Estate Office at Woodstock is also very difficult to photograph and reproduce, making close analysis of its contents a challenge.

Many of these plans and maps, including the early 18th century Palace plans and park map, together with Lancelot Brown's proposal map, are extremely valuable documents and should be conserved since they provide vital evidence to support the OUV of the WHS. Consideration should be given to commissioning a professional photographic record of key documents that can then be digitised onto a database. This will allow the protection of the document and potentially greater control of copyright. Digitised historic plans, maps and images would also then be available to use in new education and interpretation materials.

### *Nature conservation*

**7.13** The 2014 parkland plan was informed by a Phase 1 Habitat Survey and protected species study (completed by Wild Frontier Ecology Ltd) which added to our knowledge of the nature conservation value of the park landscape as a whole. The results underpinned that plan and are considered to be sufficient to balance the future management of the historic landscape with the biodiversity interest of the park. Blenheim Palace already permits access to the park for specialist groups to survey and record bats, birds and other species. It has also built up a record of veteran trees in High Park and Lower Park, in addition to which surveys of species associated with veteran trees and the grassland have taken place in High Park. Given the habitats present in other areas of the parkland it is likely that important species of lichen, invertebrates and possibly fungi will be present and further targeted survey work may be beneficial in adding to our knowledge of the ecology of the park. This work will also inform Blenheim Palace's contribution to wider ecological connectivity and resilience in the more intensively managed landscape beyond the WHS.

### *Archaeology*

**7.14** The landscape surrounding Blenheim Palace has been the subject of two archaeological surveys in the last 10 years, with each assessment finding additional sites and features of interest (there are also now detailed studies of specific sites within the park, namely the setting of Rosamunds' Well and the Mapleton Pond by John Moore Heritage Services; and an archaeological assessment and trial trenching at North Lodge by the Oxford Archaeological Unit). Given the history and development of Blenheim Palace it is unsurprising that successive archaeological assessments have continued to add to our knowledge. It is thought highly likely, therefore, that further archaeological features remain to be discovered particularly in areas of woodland such as High Park. Archaeological techniques are continually developing and a combination of remote sensing and new methodologies are likely to help provide additional understanding of the archaeological resource. As such it may be worth considering a LiDAR survey of Blenheim Park at a future point in time when additional archaeological survey work is required. Any such study should be seen as an enhancement for the future as the present archaeology survey is already extensive and very valuable.



# THREE

## THREE

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### VISION AND MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES

This section contains the vision for the future of Blenheim Palace parkland, together with management policies and objectives designed to help deliver that vision and protect the Outstanding Universal Value of the site. The section also contains details of the way in which the plan will be monitored and reviewed.

8 VISION FOR THE FUTURE

9 MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES

10 MONITORING AND REVIEW



## 8 THE VISION

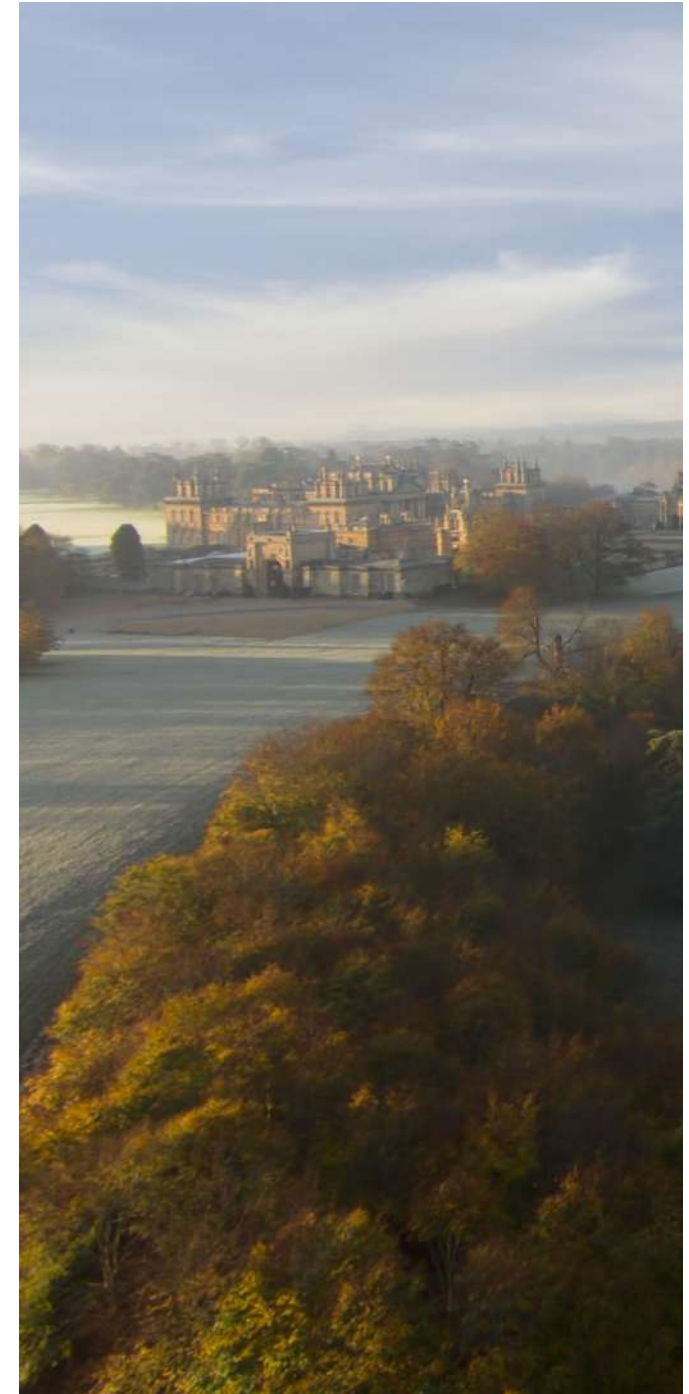
**8.01** To understand, protect, and where possible, enhance the Outstanding Universal Value of the World Heritage Site in a sustainable way, as a great work of art, a landscape of immense cultural significance an appropriate setting for Blenheim Palace and a site of ecological significance. In addition, to protect the use and enjoyment of Blenheim Palace and Park as the ancestral home of the Duke of Marlborough and his successors, and to retain a high quality visitor experience for future generations.

**8.02** To deliver this vision, Blenheim Palace will:

- Maintain and manage the Palace and Park to preserve and enhance their character, and, where necessary repair significant buildings or replant parts of the Park in accordance with the objectives of this plan.
- Use management practices that are consistent with the above and which are designed to conserve the heritage qualities of the plan area and its OUV through appropriate and sustainable policies and practices.
- Protect the existing opportunities for public access including existing public rights of way within the Park and the access arrangements to the Palace and grounds.
- Enhance the qualities of visitor facilities and achieve new levels of excellence in visitor management and related experiences as one of the UK's top tourism destinations.
- Interpret and present the history of Blenheim Palace and Park to a larger and more diverse audience, and continue to promote high quality education programmes.

**8.03** This vision underlies the management of the enterprises on which Blenheim Palace's economic, human, cultural heritage, natural/ecological heritage and infrastructural resources depend, and indicates that a balance must be struck between different interests. Any management plan should be flexible enough to recognise that changes will occur as a result of social, environmental or economic forces, but that by managing the nature, scale and timing of any work, these changes can be done in a way which accords with the aims and objectives of the plan. The need to ensure continued economic viability of farming, forestry, tourism and other commercial activities, and the maintenance of Blenheim Palace as a home for the Spencer-Churchill family, are recognised and encouraged. It is also part of the Blenheim Palace vision that the WHS is accessible and able to be enjoyed by all visitors so public access will be retained, and the quality of visitor facilities enhanced to achieve new levels of excellence in visitor management. The Palace, its gardens and parkland will continue to provide space for a programme of organised events as well as the quiet enjoyment of the landscape, such that it will remain one of the UK's top tourism destinations.

**8.04** In order to achieve this vision it is essential for the business to remain economically viable and it is a key aim of the senior management team to produce sufficient income and enhance capital assets in order to protect and secure the OUV of the World Heritage Site. The aspirations of the management team are to endeavour to direct and foster continued development and enhancement of all aspects of Blenheim Palace as a significant cultural heritage site and as a profitable business, respecting all that their predecessors have achieved. As such, the aim is to maintain and enhance a beautiful, high quality, vibrant place that can be enjoyed by all those who live or work on it, and those who visit it.



## 9 MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES

### OVERARCHING OBJECTIVES

#### 9.01 Objective 1

1a: Maintain, conserve and enhance the OUV of the World Heritage Site.

1b: Maintain, repair and preserve the national heritage property at Blenheim Palace, and maintain and preserve the park, grounds and pleasure grounds occupied with Blenheim Palace as required by the undertakings for the conditionally exempt heritage property.

At Blenheim Palace the OUV has been identified as cultural, historic and aesthetic, the three being interwoven together in the form of the buildings, the landscape, the people who created them and the reasons for their creation. These values also represent the significance of the national heritage property. In addition, the Palace has been both a family home and a very public monument for over 300 years. All future proposals and decisions should be assessed for their contribution to, or impact upon, this objective.

#### 9.02 Objective 2

Adopt the management plan as the framework for all plans, policies and decisions relating to the World Heritage Site.

For this plan to be effective it should be adopted by all stakeholders including His Grace The Duke of Marlborough and by the Trustees and the senior management team at Blenheim Palace as the key document which will guide future strategic planning on the site. This is also true of the following organisations:

- The Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS)
- The Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra)
- The Environment Agency
- Historic England
- Natural England
- Oxfordshire County Council
- West Oxfordshire District Council

Endorsement of this management plan does not affect the statutory obligations under which these bodies operate.

#### 9.03 Objective 3

Ensure that all uses, activities and developments within the WHS are undertaken in a sustainable manner, to the highest possible standard and in a way that conserves the setting of the Palace and other key features.

Natural England defines sustainability as adopting an approach which 'meets the needs of the present without compromising the needs of the future'. It relates to social, economic and environmental considerations, while the cultural WHS status of Blenheim Palace also brings a need to consider cultural sustainability. The idea of sustainability will be embedded in all aspects of the management, promotion and development of Blenheim Palace.

##### *Social Sustainability*

The Palace contributes to social progress and inclusion through its Education Service and through continuing to offer widespread access to the WHS both through paid visits and via the public rights of way network. Through its wide range of events over the course of each season it offers opportunities for many different

interest groups to visit and enjoy the WHS on different levels. It also provides a source of work for the local community.

##### *Economic Sustainability*

If Blenheim Palace is to have a sustainable future it must have a strong and sustainable economic base derived from activities both inside and outside the WHS. Over the past 10 years, business management has become more established and effective under the guidance of the Chief Executive and senior management team.

##### *Environmental Sustainability*

The idea of environmental sustainability is to ensure that what we have today is passed on to future generations in at least the same, if not a better, condition. The impacts of visitors to the Palace, in terms of the type of visit, and the facilities on offer, can affect the ability of the site to absorb the pressures placed upon it. These include, for example, physical damage, noise, visual intrusion, traffic flow and congestion, floodlighting and fireworks. The management team will continue to strive to minimise these impacts on the fabric, wildlife and character of the site by careful planning and communication.

##### *Cultural Sustainability*

It is important to consider the cultural qualities that give Blenheim Palace its OUV in whatever management actions are taken, in order to benefit the present generation and to pass these cultural values on to future generations.





#### 9.04 Objective 4

Promote the need for special treatment and a unified approach by central government departments, agencies, local authorities and other statutory bodies with responsibilities for making and implementing policies and undertaking activities that may affect the World Heritage Site / heritage property.

Decisions on funding, management, and conservation activities is almost entirely undertaken by the Trustees and management team at the Palace. However, the WHS can also be significantly affected by decisions taken by external agencies, particularly in relation to the setting. These include local planning authority decisions, traffic management schemes, water management policies and agricultural / environmental support schemes. To ensure the future success of the WHS and its sustainability it is important that all bodies making decisions that may affect the site appreciate the OUV of the WHS and adopt a co-ordinated approach to their policies and projects. The recognition of this management plan, and its supporting documents, by the statutory authorities will help achieve this.

#### 9.05 Objective 5

Maintain public access to the site in line with the undertakings for the conditionally exempt heritage land and keep open the existing network of public rights of way on the Property in accordance with <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/public-rights-of-way-landowner-responsibilities>. Public Rights of Way structures should be in good condition, meet BS 5709:2006 and with reasonable steps taken to improve accessibility in regard to the 2010 Equality Act, following advice from the local Highways Authority. Where possible, enhance public access and ensure awareness of access opportunities, resources, education programmes and the Outstanding Universal Value.



World Heritage Sites are expected to increase public awareness of the site and its value and ensure that access is available. This is also the case with 'national heritage' property. Thus Blenheim Palace is part of a larger group of UK World Heritage Sites which may collectively benefit from promoting the concept of world heritage. It is also a member of the international community of World Heritage Sites which itself presents opportunities to forge links between similar sites across the world. There is great value in promoting educational and intellectual access to the knowledge and historical resources held at the Palace. Educational access is already very well catered for and needs to continue, while site interpretation for visitors, particularly to the Park, could be improved.

#### 9.06 Objective 6

Continue to identify and monitor potential risks/threats to the World Heritage Site and ensure that appropriate plans and strategies are drawn up, updated and implemented to mitigate for these threats.

##### *Risk Preparedness*

World Heritage Site owners and managers are encouraged by UNESCO to consider issues of risk preparedness at their site, and specific sections of the Operational Guidelines (published July 2015) cover this. Potential risks to Blenheim Palace include biological epidemics (Acute Oak Decline, Beech Bark Necrosis, Ash Dieback for example), flooding, storms, fire, security, health and safety, air pollution, weather conditions, aircraft accident and terrorism. The Palace already works closely with its appropriate partners on developing implementation strategies in the event of some of these.

In the parkland, changes in agricultural use or issues

such as the 2001 Foot and Mouth outbreak may have unexpected but major impacts. It is already clear from recent experience that climate change may also have a profound effect on the character and content of the historic landscape, with newly planted parkland trees being affected by drought, and burgeoning populations of squirrel. The management team at Blenheim Palace will need to monitor climate change indicators and regularly review predictions on possible future patterns for climate change to enable the development of longterm strategies that ensure the OUV of the site is not compromised in this way. It may, for example, be necessary to adjust species choices and increase diversity of planting in the park to minimise the risk, and to regularly review the effectiveness of squirrel control measures.

Disaster prevention measures and emergency procedures have been developed for the Palace and its immediate environs, together with a salvage plan for the important chattels kept at the Palace. Events in the park are planned to include policies for risk preparedness and crisis management and there is an overall joint emergency services response plan for major incidents to cover the Palace and the park. Security procedures for the Palace and its collections are in place and an increased level of staff training for handling historic objects now takes place. It would also be appropriate for the Palace to prepare other risk reduction strategies in relation to planning issues, changes in funding structures (for example in agricultural support), and pandemics or disease spread which may affect the flora and fauna of the WHS.

#### SETTING OF THE WHS

#### 9.07 Objectives 7 - 10

Objective 7: Maintain the park wall and perimeter plantations as the boundary to the World Heritage Site, and as the physical historic boundary to the park.

Objective 8: Ensure that Blenheim Palace is adequately protected from development that is incompatible with the unique status and character of the World Heritage Site and national heritage assets.

Objective 9: Maintain a high quality environment for Blenheim Palace by promoting the highest possible standards of design, materials and execution during restoration and renovation, new development, and alterations to existing buildings, that may impact on the World Heritage Site and its OUV - both within the WHS boundary and within the setting.

Objective 10: Ensure that appropriate policies to protect the World Heritage Site are included in the draft West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2031.

The relationship between a WHS and its setting is internationally and nationally recognised as being important. In cultural heritage planning policy generally in this country, the setting of a WHS is treated as a material consideration when any planning application within the setting of the WHS is being reviewed. The guidance contained in the Historic England publication 'The Setting of Heritage Assets' (Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning: 3) released in 2015, provides useful information on good practice to planning authorities, owners and applicants on how setting may be defined, and offers approaches on how to assess impacts on it. Through the completion of a setting study as part of this management plan review (contained in Appendix 3), all local and national landscape character descriptions have been brought together to help define the character of the setting of Blenheim Palace WHS and to show how the OUV of the WHS is largely defined by what lies within the park wall, rather than by what lies outside it. Figure 5 of this plan identifies particularly sensitive areas outside the park wall and notes the reasons for these. The WHS at Blenheim Palace is enclosed by a park wall and boundary plantations which together create an obvious barrier of protection

between the inside and the outside. The site is also surrounded by a patchwork of protective designations including an AONB and several conservation areas. Given firm implementation, the guidance provided in GPA3 together with the existing local planning policies which are already in place, provide effective protection to the setting of the Blenheim Palace and Park WHS.

## LINKS WITH THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

### 9.08 Objective 11

Continue to positively promote dialogue and exchange with local communities in order to understand how the local community perceive and value Blenheim Palace, whilst offering information on the WHS status and the importance of the site locally.

Over the past ten years, since the publication of the first WHS management plan, the management team at the Palace have continued to develop regular communications with the local community. The public consultation exercise undertaken for the first plan revealed this to be something local residents were keen to see, while the current round of consultation has not found this to be an issue raised by respondents. This suggests that the systems currently in place represent a noticeable improvement on past practice.

## CONSERVING THE ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE

### 9.09 Objective 12-15

Objective 12: Keep the Palace and its associated buildings and structures in a good state of repair by continuation of the present high level of workmanship, through an annual rolling programme of maintenance, supplemented by a five-yearly fabric inspection of the listed buildings. Commission a measured survey and Conservation Plan for Blenheim Palace and associated

buildings.

Objective 13: Continue to adopt conservation techniques with appropriate materials in the care and management of vernacular and listed buildings, carrying out repairs on a 'like-for-like' basis where possible and appropriate. Specifically, windows and doors should remain of painted timber where this is the original material (changes to UPVC or other modern materials must be avoided), and mortars should be lime-based.

Objective 14: Seek advice from Historic England and WODC Conservation Officers on proposals affecting Grade I and II\* listed buildings. Seek advice from Natural England and WODC Conservation Officers on proposals affecting Grade II listed, and unlisted, buildings. Any re-use of existing buildings should be in keeping with the setting and retain the significance of heritage features.

The Palace and the most significant buildings are surveyed, inspected and monitored by conservation architects and architectural historians. Internally, the management team are now supported by a full time conservation surveyor. Both listed and non-listed buildings are included in a rolling programme of maintenance, carried out by a mix of Blenheim Palace staff and contractors.

## CONSERVING THE LANDSCAPE HERITAGE

### 9.10 Objectives 15 - 17

Objective 15: Conserve the character, layout and features of the designed historic parkland landscape, as set out in the 2014 Parkland Management Plan, and where appropriate enhance or restore lost features. Maintain and sustain the landscape restoration operations implemented over the past 30 years, retaining the key views and vistas, together

with the cyclical management regimes on which the conservation and protection of the historic landscape depends.

Objective 16: Consider reducing the impact of game management where it may affect the international significance of both the designed historic landscape and the ancient woodland in High Park.

Objective 17: Conserve the structure, character and fabric of the gardens and pleasure grounds, including re-opening the link to the Walled Garden. Where appropriate, restore important historic features whilst continuing the long tradition of adding appropriate high quality contemporary layouts, artworks and plantings.

The historic parkland now has a dedicated management plan, prepared in 2014, which provides a detailed approach and action plan for the historic parkland. It would be beneficial to produce a similar document for the gardens.

## CONSERVING THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL HERITAGE

### 9.11 Objectives 18 - 19

Objective 18: Continue to maintain Scheduled Ancient Monuments to the satisfaction of Historic England, following a policy of minimising ground disturbance, or tree planting, over sensitive archaeological remains as much as possible. Where appropriate, seek to improve the management of the Scheduled Ancient Monuments to the satisfaction of Historic England and the local authority.

Objective 19: Discuss with the County Archaeologist or a bona fide archaeologist appropriate management of any newly discovered sites and to report all archaeological finds to the County Historic Environment Records or Historic Environment Officer.



In the past 10 years some 34 sites have been surveyed across the whole area and these are mainly retained under grass or in woodland. The presence of trees on some of the sites raises a question of conflict between the needs of the designed historic landscape and those of the remains of earlier historic interest, although in general this is not considered to be a significant issue. At present there is no interpretation of the monuments to the public, an issue would benefit from being addressed.

## CONSERVING THE NATURAL HERITAGE

### 9.12 Objectives 20 - 22

**Objective 20:** Continue to identify the nature conservation interest across the whole site, including European Protected Species and UK Biodiversity 2020 habitats and species priorities, in order to develop policies, management regimes and monitoring practices that ensure their continued conservation, and enhancement where possible. Work with partners to identify how to increase understanding through targeted surveys and management plans for most significant habitats and species, to aid Blenheim's contribution to ecological connectivity and resilience at a landscape scale. Where appropriate, adjust management practices to be compatible with habitats vital to species of nature conservation interest that are in harmony with the OUV of the park landscape.

**Objective 21:** Manage the High Park section of the SSSI in agreement with Natural England. Actions to consider are: (i) conservation of veteran oaks including the maintenance of open glades free from potentially competitive plant growth; (ii) a long-term programme to remove conifer blocks; (iii) maintenance of existing open habitats and ground flora; (iv) retention of some fallen deadwood left lying on the ground; (v) continuing the collection of seed to produce new trees and the promotion of younger oaks as potential





veterans; (vi) rotational cropping; and (vii) the collection of arisings.

Objective 22: Manage the open water sections of the SSSI in agreement with Natural England, with the aim of addressing siltation and high phosphate levels; and managing their marginal habitats by clearing marginal vegetation at the north end and allowing it to develop at the south end, where these activities do not conflict with the character and value of the designed historic landscape.

## ENJOYING THE WORLD HERITAGE SITE

### 9.13 Objectives 23 - 27

Objective 23: Continue to evolve and develop the Tourism Plan working in partnership with local and national stakeholders, taking opportunities to link with other World Heritage Sites internationally.

Objective 24: Continue the new approach to management of the events calendar which aims to spread activities more evenly across the year, balancing large and small events in order to better manage the physical impacts on the fabric. Look at ways of encouraging visitors to see more of the park, through improved interpretation and education, thus also spreading the use across the whole site, including monitoring car parking requirements and being alert to the needs of any change should this be required.

Objective 25: Continue to work with transport providers to improve and promote sustainable transport links, particularly in relation to offering combined transport and entry tickets offers, thus increasing levels of accessibility by providing an alternative to the car.

Objective 26: Continue to maintain and manage all rights of way in accordance with statutory duties and

promote visitor access to the World Heritage Site as widely as possible, at a local, national and international level.

Objective 27: Maintain and continue to support the educational programmes and facilities provided by the Education Service.

Objective 28: Enhance the visitor experience, particularly in terms of increasing understanding of, and appreciation for, the landscape and its structures, through the continued provision of improved orientation, information and interpretation. The charitable Foundation established at the start of 2017 will open new opportunities to seek funding for interpretation projects.

There is a very long history of public access to the Palace and park. Its original conception as a public monument meant that the public showed a high level of interest in it from the very beginning, and from the mid C18 onwards there are many historical accounts of visitor's impressions. Thus visitors are very much a part of the past and present significance of the site so future management policies should respect this and place visitors at the core of its activities. That being said, it is the levels of recreation and tourism, particularly in relation to car use, that have been identified by the recent Periodic Reporting exercise as being the most significant issue that may impact on the OUV of the WHS. While the income provided by tourism is vital to the WHS, this balance between visitors and conservation needs to be kept in mind.

## FUNDING CONSERVATION ACTIVITIES

### 9.14 Objectives 28 - 30

Objective 29: Develop a sustainable financial basis derived from both inside and outside the park with which to support the conservation activities within the

World Heritage Site, thereby ensuring that adequate management resources for restoration, conservation of cultural and natural heritage, maintenance and renovation skills are all available.

Objective 30: Maintain a balance between scenic, ecological, historic and architectural features when preparing budgets to fund conservation activities and prioritise the work in order of most urgent need, without jeopardising the lower priority features or minority interests.

Objective 31: Investigate opportunities for funding, and where appropriate, implement projects which help deliver resources that can support the work identified in this Management Plan. The new charitable Foundation established at the start of 2017 will open new opportunities to seek funding for conservation projects.

Funding the delivery of some of the objectives contained in this plan can be met through the annual budget for maintenance and conservation activities. However, with the buildings survey identifying very significant sums of money needing to be spent on the built heritage assets, there will always be a requirement to raise additional revenue to meet all the objectives and operations contained in the work programme. The key issue is to ensure a steady flow of income for conservation work, and Blenheim Palace will continue to look at a range of ways of generating income from a variety of sources, relating to both visitor and non-visitor income. These currently include revenue from visitors (general entry and special events), property letting, commercial interests, running the game shoot, and support from the two charitable Foundations. In addition, investments will need to be protected and sources of grant aid sought as a means of developing a sustainable financial framework within which conservation work can be carried out. Support of the authorities represented on the Steering Group will be vital in helping identify sources of grant aid,

and in helping promote World Heritage Sites as special cases on a national scale - for example, providing financial support for activities directly related to WHS conservation, and lobbying for fiscal changes such as the removal of VAT on WHS conservation work, would all be positive benefits.

## IMPROVING KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING

### 9.15 Objectives 31 - 32

Objective 32: Facilitate and encourage appropriate research to improve the scenic, ecological/scientific, historic and architectural knowledge and understanding of the site so as to aid implementation of the management plan, and to ensure that the results of such research are disseminated to relevant bodies and individuals.

Objective 33: To complete an up to date catalogue of the archives held at the Palace in their new bespoke location in the Clock Tower in order to include the additions of the 11th Duke's contributions.

To manage and conserve the heritage values at Blenheim Palace, policies should be based on, and supported by, a sound understanding of its scenic, ecological/scientific, historic and architectural resources. Appropriate, on-going research and survey work will help to support this. Understanding of the scenic values of the WHS has been greatly enhanced by additional research over the past ten years and through the preparation of the 2014 Parkland Plan. The ecological/scientific values are now much better understood following more detailed studies of the veteran trees, the completion of the Phase 1 habitat survey, and the current detailed work on the condition of Queen Pool. Blenheim Palace benefits from a number of authoritative histories about the site and also holds a large archive about the WHS and the family estates as a whole, which is augmented by deposits

at the British Library and the County Records Office. It would be desirable to ensure that the restoration work undertaken by the 11th Duke over the past 30 years is mapped and recorded in writing, so that it can become part of the archive for the future.





## 10 MONITORING AND REVIEW

### INTRODUCTION

**10.01** The WHS Co-ordinator together with other members of the senior management team will prepare an annual monitoring report (on a topic-by-topic basis) of activity within the WHS which will be distributed to the Steering Group and submitted to HMRC (as a requirement of the undertakings for the national heritage property). The annual monitoring report will review the implementation of the management plan including compliance with its policies and the Action Plan. It will report on what has been achieved and what is planned for the coming year, as well as including information on the types of public access available. In cases where there has been partial completion of the planned work programme, details will be given of the position together with an explanatory statement setting out whether full completion is anticipated in future years and, if not, what can reasonably be achieved. Any work not completed in its designated year will be carried forward and an appropriate adjustment made to the work programmes.

### MEETINGS AND MONITORING VISITS

**10.02** Meetings between the Blenheim Palace management team and the members of the Steering Group, together with the statutory agencies, will be held as and when necessary, or if requested by any of the agencies involved. It is also a requirement of the undertakings that from time to time HMRC will request its advisory agencies to visit the heritage property at Blenheim Palace for monitoring purposes. The owner therefore agrees that any person authorised by HMRC, Natural England or Historic England, may at all reasonable times and on reasonable notice, enter and inspect the property by appointment to check that the management plan is being implemented and that no



breach has occurred.

### REVIEW OF THE MANAGEMENT PLAN

**10.03** It is not anticipated that rapid or fundamental change to the character and overall structure of the WHS will take place, due to its rural location and the established rate of change in the landscape over the last few decades. As such the main content of this plan, including the objectives, should not need to be reviewed very often. However, the IHT work programmes contained in Appendix 5 are more detailed and help to demonstrate compliance with the signed undertakings (as well as protection of the OUV), as such they should be reviewed every 5 years and revised as necessary.

**10.04** Any and all modifications or additions to the management plan should be checked to ensure they comply with its general objectives. The 5 yearly reviews of the work programme should be prepared by the Blenheim Palace management team and/or its advisers, and subsequently agreed with Natural England and Historic England and, where necessary HMRC, before being implemented. The review process should therefore:

- Check the objectives for historic buildings, key features, and their landscape settings, at the end of each 5 year period and review/revise as necessary.
- Complete quinquennial inspections of the main listed buildings, key non-listed buildings, and features such as the Scheduled Monuments.
- Report the results of the 5 year review to all the relevant key stakeholders, and reissue any updated sections of the plan as appropriate.
- Prepare an updated 5 year programme of work, based on the review of objectives and the Action Plan.





## FOUR

### IMPLEMENTATION

FOUR

## 11 IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

### INTRODUCTION

**10.01** This section of the Plan sets out recommended actions to address the issues and objectives outlined in Chapters 7, 8 and 9. Actions are grouped under headings which reflect the key objectives and in each case show how these relate back to the attributes of the WHS.

**10.02** Actions range from minor operations through to major projects and long-term aspirations. They cover subjects which currently do not have any funding available, as well as those actions which are mandatory requirements of the national heritage status of Blenheim Palace and Park. Including actions which are aspirational as well as those which are mandatory indicates the support of the Steering Group to progress these, which can be important in gaining both funding and political support.

**10.03** Conservation and protection of the WHS is heavily reliant on the good stewardship exercised by the Trustees and senior management team at Blenheim Palace. These actions are also supported by the valuable contributions made by officers of Historic England and Natural England, as well as the local planning authority. Although the Management Plan does not set planning policy, it nevertheless has strengths that other strategies do not, reflecting as it does the aspirations and desires of the owners who have the ability to implement its objectives, subject to resources being available. The influence exerted by the Trustees should not be underestimated.

### ACTIONS

**10.04** There are 33 objectives with associated actions included in this plan. The previous plan (2006-2016) contained a great many more detailed actions, including listing works to individual buildings and landscape areas. In this 2017 plan, the detailed actions associated with individual buildings and features, are contained in Appendix V: National Heritage Undertakings which builds on the broader actions contained in the WHS plan, providing additional guidance on detailed work. Timescales given are Short Term (1-5 years); Medium Term (6-10 years) and Long Term (over 10 years).

### IMPLEMENTATION

**10.05** Actions will be delivered primarily by the staff of Blenheim Palace and park in conjunction with a range of partners, including both Steering Group members themselves and others. Monitoring of achievement against plan actions, as discussed in Chapter 10, will be undertaken on an annual basis with reports presented to the Steering Group.

Abbreviations used in the table:

BP	Blenheim Palace Trustees and/or staff
NE	Natural England
HE	Historic England
WODC	West Oxfordshire District Council
OCC	Oxfordshire County Council
RDP	Rural Development Programme

Topic Heading	Objective	Actions	Timescale	Personnel
OVERARCHING OBJECTIVES (supporting all the attributes of the WHS)	1a: Maintain, conserve and enhance the OUV of the World Heritage Site.  1b: Maintain, repair and preserve the national heritage property at Blenheim Palace, and maintain and preserve the park, grounds and pleasure grounds occupied with Blenheim Palace as required by the undertakings for the conditionally exempt heritage property.	Deliver the detailed operations set out in the 2014 Parkland Plan and the Nick Cox Architects condition survey report (reproduced in Appendix 5).	On-going	BP and all key partners
	2. Adopt the management plan as the framework for all plans, policies and decisions relating to the World Heritage Site.	Launch completed WHS Management Plan in spring 2017	Short	BP and Steering Group
	3. Ensure that all uses, activities and developments within the WHS are undertaken in a sustainable manner, to the highest possible standard and in a way that conserves the setting of the Palace and other key features.	Promote staff awareness and appropriate and regular training.  Define standards of work and ensure all contractors are aware of this and comply with it.  Ensure all new works are sustainable, of the highest standards of design, relate well to their setting and use local materials wherever appropriate.	On-going  On-going  On-going	BP  BP  BP
	4. Promote the need for special treatment and a unified approach by central government departments, agencies, local authorities and other statutory bodies with responsibilities for making and implementing policies and undertaking activities that may affect the World Heritage Site / heritage property.	Maintain contact with members of the Steering Group.	On-going	BP and Steering Group



Topic Heading	Objective	Actions	Timescale	Personnel
	5. Maintain public access to the site in line with the undertakings for the conditionally exempt heritage land and keep open the existing network of public rights of way on the Property in accordance with <a href="https://www.gov.uk/guidance/public-rights-of-way-landowner-responsibilities">https://www.gov.uk/guidance/public-rights-of-way-landowner-responsibilities</a> . Public Rights of Way structures should be in good condition, meet BS 5709:2006 and with reasonable steps taken to improve accessibility in regard to the 2010 Equality Act, following advice from the local Highways Authority. Where possible, enhance public access and ensure awareness of access opportunities, resources, education programmes and the Outstanding Universal Value.	See Actions listed under the sub-section 'Enjoying the World Heritage Site'		
	6. Continue to identify and monitor potential risks/threats to the World Heritage Site and ensure that appropriate plans and strategies are drawn up, updated and implemented to mitigate for these threats.	<p>Regularly review existing crisis management and emergency procedures.</p> <p>Continue programme of staff training, particularly in relation to the care and movement of chattels.</p> <p>Monitor effects of climate change particularly in relation to its effects on landscape planting. Take appropriate action where necessary.</p> <p>Maintain links with national, regional and local tourist organisations and exchange information on 'risk'</p>	<p>On-going</p> <p>On-going</p> <p>On-going</p> <p>Short</p>	<p>BP</p> <p>BP</p> <p>BP</p> <p>BP</p>
THE SETTING OF THE WHS (supporting Attribute 7)	7: Maintain the park wall and perimeter plantations as the boundary to the World Heritage Site, and as the physical historic boundary to the park.	Continue the annual rolling programme of maintenance to the fabric of the park wall, including keeping vegetation away from the bases on both sides.	On-going	BP and Conservation Architect

Topic Heading	Objective	Actions	Timescale	Personnel
	8: Ensure that Blenheim Palace is adequately protected from development that is incompatible with the unique status and character of the World Heritage Site and national heritage assets.	Use the information provided on Figure 5 and in the Setting Study contained in Appendix 3, together with the guidance provided in GPA3 to inform appropriate design and location for development outside the WHS  Review regional plan policies to ensure these provide protection for the OUV of the WHS	On-going  On-going	Planning authority and anyone considering development  WODC/OCC
	9: Maintain a high quality environment for Blenheim Palace by promoting the highest possible standards of design, materials and execution during restoration and renovation, new development, and alterations to existing buildings, that may impact on the World Heritage Site and its OUV - both within the WHS boundary and within the setting.	During future reviews of conservation areas and other designations covering the setting of the WHS ensure that the sensitivity of its setting, as described in the Setting Study, is taken into account  Ensure that policies within the Local Plan that relate to development within the setting of the WHS protect the attributes of its OUV.	Short  On-going	WODC/HE/NE  WODC
	10: Ensure that appropriate policies to protect the WHS are included in the draft West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2031.	Continue to use the WHS management plan as an aid when treating the OUV as a material consideration	On-going	WODC
RELATIONSHIP WITH THE LOCAL COMMUNITY	11: Continue to positively promote dialogue and exchange with local communities in order to understand how the local community perceive and value Blenheim Palace, whilst offering information on the WHS status and the importance of the site locally.	Continue local residents annual pass scheme  Continue participation in local initiatives and events, promoting local services where possible  Ensure information on events programmes are provided well in advance to facilitate ways of minimising impacts on local residents	On-going  On-going  On-going	BP  BP  BP

Topic Heading	Objective	Actions	Timescale	Personnel
CONSERVING THE ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE (supporting Attributes 2 & 4)	12: Keep the Palace and its associated buildings and structures in a good state of repair by continuation of the present high level of workmanship, through an annual rolling programme of maintenance, supplemented by a five-yearly fabric inspection of the listed buildings. Commission a measured survey and Conservation Plan for Blenheim Palace and associated buildings.	Follow the detailed programme of work contained in the Nick Cox Architects report 2016, and reproduced in the Work Programme contained in Appendix 5 - to include assessment and repairs to Grand Bridge; and identification of a new use for the buildings at Furze Platt  Commission a measured survey and Conservation Plan for Blenheim Palace and associated buildings.	Short, Medium and Longterm  Short	BP and Conservation Architect  BP and Conservation Architect
	13: Continue to adopt conservation techniques with appropriate materials in the care and management of vernacular and listed buildings, carrying out repairs on a 'like-for-like' basis where possible and appropriate. Specifically, windows and doors should remain of painted timber where this is the original material (changes to UPVC or other modern materials must be avoided), and mortars should be lime-based.	When undertaking repairs or new works ensure that historic details and vernacular character are conserved, and that any new uses for redundant buildings do not conflict with the heritage status of the site.	On-going	BP and Conservation Architect with HE.
	14: Seek advice from Historic England and WODC Conservation Officers on proposals affecting Grade I and II* listed buildings. Seek advice from Natural England and WODC Conservation Officers on proposals affecting Grade II listed, and unlisted, buildings. Any re-use of existing buildings should be in keeping with the setting and retain the significance of heritage features.	Continue to adopt the current process of close communication and discussions during the development of any project ideas.	On-going	BP / HE / NE / WODC



Topic Heading	Objective	Actions	Timescale	Personnel
CONSERVING THE LANDSCAPE HERITAGE (supporting Attribute 3, 4 & 6)	15: Conserve the character, layout and features of the designed historic parkland landscape, as set out in the 2014 Parkland Management Plan, and where appropriate enhance or restore lost features. Maintain and sustain the landscape restoration operations implemented over the past 30 years, retaining the key views and vistas, together with the cyclical management regimes on which the conservation and protection of the historic landscape depends.	Follow the detailed work programme set out in the 2014 Parkland Management Plan and reproduced in the work programme in Appendix 5.	Short and Medium Term	BP and all key partners
		Complete an annual check of all new plantings to maximise establishment rates.	On-going	BP
		Continue to treat the control of grey squirrel in the WHS as a high priority	On-going	BP
	16: Consider reducing the impact of game management where it may affect the international significance of both the designed historic landscape and the ancient woodland in High Park.	Take account of the scenic qualities of the landscape when locating game crops  Adopt a sensitive approach to the location of temporary rearing pens in the historic park, avoiding key features and views	Short, Medium and Longterm	BP
	17: Conserve the structure, character and fabric of the gardens and pleasure grounds, including re-opening the link to the Walled Garden. Where appropriate, restore important historic features whilst continuing the long tradition of adding appropriate high quality contemporary layouts, artworks and plantings.	Prepare a Conservation Plan for the gardens based on existing research, to set out a focus for development in the future based on allowing the gardens to continue to develop whilst protecting significant features and areas. Improve interpretation, of these areas, including the walled garden	Short	BP and advisers

Topic Heading	Objective	Actions	Timescale	Personnel
CONSERVING THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL HERITAGE (supporting Attributes 1 & 2)	18: Continue to maintain Scheduled Ancient Monuments to the satisfaction of Historic England, following a policy of minimising ground disturbance, or tree planting, over sensitive archaeological remains as much as possible. Where appropriate, seek to improve the management of the Scheduled Ancient Monuments to the satisfaction of Historic England and the local authority.	<p>Ensure all SAMs are in a stable condition, carrying out any works identified in the 2013 John Moores Archaeology survey.</p> <p>Grim's Ditch - maintain surface of track to reduce ruts, manage to prevent scrub development and do not replace trees when they fall.</p> <p>Roman-Celtic Temple: carefully remove more trees on this monument to improve its conservation.</p> <p>Pillow Mounds: continue to inform all relevant members of staff as to location of this monument to protect against vehicle damage.</p>	<p>Short and Medium Term</p> <p>Short and Medium Term</p>	<p>BP and advisers</p> <p>BP</p>
	19: Discuss with the County Archaeologist or a bona fide archaeologist appropriate management of any newly discovered sites and to report all archaeological finds to the County Historic Environment Records or Historic Environment Officer.	Provide a map of location of known archaeological sites for new site managers to ensure these are not damaged by on-going management of the park	Short	BP

Topic Heading	Objective	Actions	Timescale	Personnel
CONSERVING THE NATURAL HERITAGE (supporting Attributes 3 & 5)	20: Continue to identify the nature conservation interest across the whole site, including European Protected Species and UK Biodiversity 2020 habitats and species priorities, in order to develop policies, management regimes and monitoring practices that ensure their continued conservation, and enhancement where possible. Work with partners to identify how to increase understanding through targeted surveys and management plans for most significant habitats and species, to aid Blenheim's contribution to ecological connectivity and resilience at a landscape scale. Where appropriate, adjust management practices to be compatible with habitats vital to species of nature conservation interest that are in harmony with the OUV of the park landscape.	Follow the recommendations contained in the Wild Frontier Ecology report of 2013 and reproduced in the work programme in Appendix 5 for works to protect and enhance the wildlife across the whole site.	Short and Medium Term	BP and NE
	21: Manage the High Park section of the SSSI in agreement with Natural England. Actions to consider are: (i) conservation of veteran oaks including the maintenance of open glades free from potentially competitive plant growth; (ii) a long-term programme to remove conifer blocks; (iii) maintenance of existing open habitats and ground flora; (iv) retention of some fallen deadwood left lying on the ground; (v) continuing the collection of seed to produce new trees and the promotion of younger oaks as potential veterans; (vi) rotational cropping; and (vii) the collection of arisings.	Follow the recommendations contained in the High Park Management Plan completed in 2014. The actions are included in the work programme contained in Appendix 5	On-going	BP and advisers incl NE
	22: Manage the open water sections of the SSSI in agreement with Natural England, with the aim of addressing siltation and high phosphate levels; and managing their marginal habitats by clearing marginal vegetation at the north end and allowing it to develop at the south end, where these activities do not conflict with the character and value of the designed historic landscape.	Develop a strategy for Queen Pool, with the Working Group already established, which balances the need to remove silt with the needs of the SSSI, in order to improve its ecological status and protect its landscape value.  Continue to investigate realistic options for funding the necessary work	Short  Short	BP and all key partners incl NE  BP and its advisers



Topic Heading	Objective	Actions	Timescale	Personnel
ENJOYING THE WORLD HERITAGE SITE	23: Continue to evolve and develop the Tourism Plan working in partnership with local and national stakeholders, taking opportunities to link with other World Heritage Sites internationally.	Continue membership of World Heritage UK and support appropriate activities and events	On-going	BP
	24: Continue the new approach to management of the events calendar which aims to spread activities more evenly across the year, balancing large and small events in order to better manage the physical impacts on the fabric. Look at ways of encouraging visitors to see more of the park, through improved interpretation and education, thus also spreading the use across the whole site, including monitoring car parking requirements and being alert to the needs of any change should this be required.	Continue to set out appropriate management plans and approaches for major events.  Consider alternative route for all lorries to make Park Farm a delivery hub accessed via Gorrell Doors to avoid the key historic structures.	Short  Short to Medium	BP and all key partners  BP, HE and WODC
	25: Continue to work with transport providers to improve and promote sustainable transport links, particularly in relation to offering combined transport and entry tickets offers, thus increasing levels of accessibility by providing an alternative to the car.			
	26: Continue to maintain and manage all rights of way in accordance with statutory duties and promote visitor access to the World Heritage Site as widely as possible, at a local, national and international level.	Carry out regular checks to ensure that all public rights of way are open and clearly waymarked.  Increase the number of cycle racks available in the park for those not arriving by car.  Look at waymarkers on estate land outside the park and update to include average walking times to the WHS.  Continue to work with transport providers to develop the 'travel and tickets' offers that support alternatives to the car.	On-going	BP

Topic Heading	Objective	Actions	Timescale	Personnel
	27: Maintain and continue to support the educational programmes and facilities provided by the Education Service.	Continue to develop and enhance the Education Programme, ensuring close links with the content of the national curriculum	Medium	BP
	28: Enhance the visitor experience, particularly in terms of increasing understanding of, and appreciation for, the landscape and its structures, through the continued provision of improved orientation, information and interpretation. The charitable Foundation established at the start of 2017 will open new opportunities to seek funding for interpretation projects.	Regularly review the interpretation strategy to provide relevant and changing information - such as the Lancelot Brown information boards in the park.	Medium	BP
		Consider use of technology including increased use of website, and phone Apps to add to visitor experience	Medium	BP
		Continue to develop the exhibition programme in the Palace	Medium	BP
		Look at opportunities to include area of website where specialists reports can be posted - subject to existing technology being adaptable	Medium	BP
FUNDING CONSERVATION ACTIVITIES (supporting all Attributes)	29: Develop a sustainable financial basis derived from both inside and outside the park with which to support the conservation activities within the World Heritage Site, thereby ensuring that adequate management resources for restoration, conservation of cultural and natural heritage, maintenance and renovation skills are all available.	The existing longterm business development strategy should be reviewed regularly to ensure that it is delivering the necessary resources to protect the WHS	On-going	BP
	30: Maintain a balance between scenic, ecological, historic and architectural features when preparing budgets to fund conservation activities and prioritise the work in order of most urgent need, without jeopardising the lower priority features or minority interests.	Continue to set an annual budget for conservation activities, a percentage of which will be spent on landscape works not related to building conservation.	On-going	BP

Topic Heading	Objective	Actions	Timescale	Personnel
	31: Investigate opportunities for funding, and where appropriate, implement projects which help deliver resources that can support the work identified in this Management Plan. The new charitable Foundation established at the start of 2017 will open new opportunities to seek funding for conservation projects.	Continue to use grant giving schemes such as Environmental Stewardship (now Countryside Stewardship) to support additional activities in the landscape.  Explore other sources of funding, for example HLF, to support more major and high cost projects (such as Palace fabric repairs and Queen Pool conservation).	Short  Short	BP and advisers  BP and advisers
IMPROVING KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING	32: Facilitate and encourage appropriate research to improve the scenic, ecological/scientific, historic and architectural knowledge and understanding of the site so as to aid implementation of the management plan, and to ensure that the results of such research are disseminated to relevant bodies and individuals.	Provide adequate resources to the Archivist in order to be able to offer appropriate locations for researchers to access the archive.	Medium	BP and advisers
	33: To complete an up to date catalogue of the archives held at the Palace in their new bespoke location in the Clock Tower in order to include the additions of the 11th Duke's contributions.	Identify a suitable person to update the catalogue	Medium	BP





## Blenheim Palace World Heritage Site Management Plan 2017



