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01 December 2009

Peter Hawkrige
Secretary
Rotherham District Civic Society
43 Scholes Lane
Rotherham
S61 2RG

Dear Mr. Hawkrige

Wentworth Woodhouse

Thank you for your letter of 9th November, 2009, and for your excellent appraisal of the 20th century history of Wentworth Woodhouse mansion house; the members of our Conservation Section were also very grateful for this information as well as they were unaware of parts of its history.

Obviously, a great house such as this is indeed "the jewel in the crown" of the local authority, especially where the public has free access to walk on a footpath past the house so as to see its magnificent long front, and through its grounds, and to visit various 18th century monuments; clearly its tourism potential is enormous.

I have spoken with my Conservation staff on these matters who have contacted English Heritage's Regional Director for Yorkshire & Humber Trevor Mitchell in York about your concerns, as this is a higher graded building, being Grade 1. Mr Mitchell in his reply to Peter Thornborrow, RMBC's Conservation & Urban Design Officer, points out that "As you know, a conservation management plan is in place for the gardens and nearing completion for the house and stables. A master plan for the site is under development. We took the house off our HAR register a few years ago because it was our impression that it was being maintained appropriately. If you have seen evidence of active decay not being addressed, then do let us know. We have visited recently, re. coal mining subsidence. Neither EH nor the council has a 'statutory duty' towards listed buildings. I think that it is fair to say that the owners are actively engaged in maintaining their property and seeking a long-term sustainable use of it".

Apparently, Mr Thornborrow in early discussions with the owners, the Newbold family, following his appointment in 2005 encouraged them to prepare a conservation management plan for the house and grounds and to consider its long term future. Following this the Newbold's employed specialist consultants Rural Solutions (based at Broughton Hall near Skipton) who facilitated a seminar at the house to discuss its possible future uses permitting those attending a tour of the house and its grounds. After the production of their report, which provided a detailed history of the house and its owner's, further meetings and discussions were held. This was followed by the commissioning of first a Landscape Conservation Plan from Historic Landscape Management (Norfolk) that resulted in a comprehensive 2 volume report dated April 2008, and more recently the commissioning of a similar Conservation Management plan for the house by the distinguished national firm of architects Purcell Miller Tritton, appointing Mr Christopher Cotton RIBA as their consulting architect; he is based at PMT's York office. Their draft report has been produced but is still under consultation; the final report we believe is nearing completion.

We have contacted PMT to see if they would be willing to provide a copy of this management plan for your society. Mr Thornborrow is hopeful to be able to give you a copy of this together with some spare early drafts of the landscape plan at your next quarterly meeting with the planning department, scheduled for Friday 4th December at Bailey House. He feels that this document in many ways will address your immediate concerns, as it demonstrates a long-term commitment on behalf of the owners to the future preservation of the house. He is also aware that PMT are currently undertaking a comprehensive survey of every part of the mansion, including its roof to draw up a schedule of prioritised repairs.

Three officers from the Forward Planning Section of RMBC's planning department recently held a meeting with the owners and their consultant architect at the house on the 6th November last; and the architect Chris Cotton is in regular e-mail contact with Mr Thornborrow on a range of matters associated with the mansion, its landscape and wider setting.

While appreciating your concerns as a representative of a local amenity society you may have been unaware of the comprehensive management plans that have been, and are currently being prepared to seek the long-term future of this important building and its associated monuments, and of the close involvement of the planning department with the owners. Indeed English Heritage's final comment "I think that it is fair to say that the owners are actively engaged in maintaining their property and seeking a long-term sustainable use of it" seems to adequately summarise the current position.

I hope this information is useful to you.

Yours sincerely

Martin Kimber
Chief Executive