

## Lottery Project: View of Chiswick House Friends

We have divided our views on the bid into 9 topics, which are addressed in turn below.

### 1. Overall context of the bid

*Is the tone and set-up of the project properly balanced between conservation, restoration and the need to raise money? Should we be concerned about the House – as the Georgian Group is – or only about Phase I?*

Our members strongly support our view that there should be a fundamental emphasis in the project on retaining the essential peace and tranquillity of the site. We have emphasised to the Trust over the months the need to both affirm the value of the quality of peace and tranquillity, and to make an explicit commitment to maintain it as far as possible.

We have noticed recently that the 'peace and tranquillity' phrase is now being used a good deal more by members of the Trust in what they say and write. We appreciate this, and shall continue maintain our emphasis. We will also encourage clarification of what it means, though this appears to be happening anyway at the consultation meetings. For instance, people are now looking at issues such as traffic, commercial events, weddings and parties, concerts and so on from the point of view of 'how much loss of the peaceful atmosphere is tolerable for this event...?' – this is the angle we want.

Regarding developments of the House (mainly next phase), our members believe we should watch these carefully and, with our Advisory Group, press for appropriateness and sensitivity.

### 2. Restoration: are the right things being restored and in the right way?

a. **Conservatory** – do we support total rebuild or is there some lesser practicable repair? We have been convinced that total rebuild is the only realistic option. Obviously, great care around the camellias is paramount.

b. **N Wilderness** – do we want full proposed restoration, i.e. restored and gravelled paths, re-aligned left hand allée, replanting etc .... or do we want it to be left wild and largely as it is?

We support the present proposal, eg path tidy, re-aligned allées, tree and plant work, with the exceptions that:

- the **northern perimeter path** can become a vehicle-way for **small site vehicles only**, but should be gravelled not tarmacked
- **path restoration** should not be done with a view to always keeping people to paths; the woodland area should allow and encourage free-ranging everywhere

c. **Trees, paths, terrace, rosary etc** – we understand that having removed unsafe, diseased and scrub trees, the additional major trees to be removed will be equalled by additional trees to be planted. **Our position is to agree this provisionally.** One of our trustees is keeping a particular eye on detailed proposals.

3. **Management** (security, presence, flow of funds between HLF, Trust and contractors). Nothing obviously contentious here, so **we support the plan as it is.**

With regard to commercial events, many people (including our members) feel uneasy about the frequency and degree of intrusion of such events, but it is difficult at the moment to quantify this or put forward controls.

We would like to suggest – which is supported by our members – that **we should sit on the Trust management review meetings on a regular basis**, perhaps every 2 - 3 months. Such meetings could replace our present regular meetings with CIP / Hounslow and with EH, and would become the appropriate forum for dealing with most of our ongoing concerns.

### 4. Access, vehicle-ways and traffic

This topic was aired at the February 27<sup>th</sup> consultation meeting, in considerable detail.

a. **Access** – it now seems unlikely that the new Park Road gate will go ahead. Two other options for back lawn access were offered at the meeting – access as at present (no ha-ha extension), and making a new entrance through the yard and along the path by the Deer House. **We support whichever option will minimise the intrusion of traffic into the central area.** For instance, if the café is to be supported by small park vehicles that use routes other than past the Italian Garden, then it is probably best to have back lawn access via the Deer House path, and keep the Italian Garden area free of all traffic. On the other hand, if café service traffic needs to go past the Italian Garden, then it would make sense to send back lawn traffic along the same route and preserve the Deer House path. **Extension of the ha-ha for historical reasons should not take priority over the minimisation of traffic impact.**

b. **Traffic** – in general the plan is to keep all but disabled visitor cars out, which we applaud. Park service vehicles would have access all over the site, but would be small (electric?) and controlled. Deliveries would be mostly to the yard, but café deliveries might need to be direct. Emergency and back-lawn events vehicles as in a. above. Full complement of speed dips needed in the main driveway.

c. **Vehicle-ways** – the only contentious new vehicle-way is the proposed through-way from the new hospitality area, routing House and marquee service/delivery vehicles past the café and out along Dukes Avenue. **We believe that bringing traffic into the front-of-café area, which is the social heart of the Gardens and the location for the new toddler’s playground, is not acceptable.** We have heard the Trust’s assurances that this new through-way would be protected and controlled to out-of-hours use with staff supervision. We are not convinced that this would ensure adequate safeguards for the future: once this roadway has been built, it would be all too easy to take economy measures with staffing. There are, we believe, better ways to arrange café and marquee deliveries as well as provide disabled access, without incursion into the front-of-café area; for instance there is plenty of space between the east side of the House, the pleached lime rows and the proposed hospitality area. We would like the Trust to reconsider the use of this latter space to accommodate deliveries, vehicle turning and necessary service parking.

**With this exception, we support the Trust’s plans for traffic.**

## 5. Car-parking

The strong feelings around the proposed option of using the northern half of the walled gardens seem to have dissipated since the Trust re-presented at the Feb 27<sup>th</sup> meeting the appearance as being ‘of a grassy orchard’. Even if 100% grass cover proved impractical, some kind of grass-woven slab solution would probably work. Given the need for more parking, this seems a good compromise. **Our position is to support the Trust’s proposal for ‘a grassy orchard’.**

## 6. Use of walled garden

The Trust’s current proposal is for about three-quarters of the southern half of the walled gardens to be under cultivation. This is an improvement on previous plans showing only half under cultivation. It is important that the area under cultivation is properly planned and managed, and the Kitchen Garden Association have been most impressive here, showing themselves to be effective, popular and able to mobilise community support. **We encourage the Trust to come to workable & sustainable agreements with the KGA and other interested groups for the best use of this space.**

## 7. New Café

Our mandate from our members, from the Autumn consultation, was to press for the new café **‘to continue to serve local customers in the same informal and inexpensive way that the present one does’.**

With our Spring 2006 newsletter, we distributed to our members the Trust’s café questionnaire, with a few additional questions of our own. The results show the following points strongly made:

- a. **General ambiance** – preference was expressed for natural and contextual architecture, and for keeping the café informal in atmosphere as well as special to the site. There was opposition to any kind of chain style or ownership, wi-fi connection, pizza-style or fast food.
- b. **Price** – modest increases could be allowed for improvements in quality or range of food, although what is on offer now was generally approved.
- c. **Dogs in café** – strong support for keeping dogs outside the café in a sheltered area (with heaters in winter for owners who need to stay with their dogs, eg as in St James Park)
- d. Opinion divided between keeping old café in addition to replacement one, so no clear view here.

## 8. Dogs

Plans to add new dog restrictions, such as on-lead rules around the House, are opposed by our trustees and the majority of members. Of the problems stated, we believe that a) dog-mess and sticks on lawns are hardly likely to be eased by the use of leads, and b) harassment by dogs of young families are rare events that could be addressed through better awareness by owners. Dog-walkers have served the gardens well, and should not be discouraged. The present areas of restriction are accepted, but **these should not be extended, except in temporary cases such as special planting.**

## 9. Other

- a. **Sports facilities** – we should encourage appropriate sporting activities, e.g. cricket, football and track events on the hockey pitch
- b. **Toilets** – many members have mentioned this, but renovation is already part of the bid
- c. **Cycle ways** – it is proposed to allow cycling on tarmacked and gravelled roads & larger paths – we tend to agree, as some use is already de facto.