



Historic England

SOUTH EAST OFFICE

Mr Paul Drury

Direct Dial: 01483 252032

The Drury McPherson Partnership

114 Shacklegate Lane

Our ref: PA00399027

TEDDINGTON

Middlesex

TW11 8SH

20 March 2017

Dear Paul

### **Pre-application Advice - Otford Palace, Sevenoaks**

During our visit to Otford Palace on the 21<sup>st</sup> February I agreed to write to you to summarise our initial advice and position with regard to the proposals for conservation and potential development that we discussed then.

The archaeological remains and historic buildings of Otford Palace are extensive, complex and vulnerable to degradation and therefore we agree that they require proactive management. We would welcome the establishment of a Trust that has responsibility to manage them with the aim of sustaining their heritage significance.

Re-use of the tower and gatehouse would be a means of conveying the heritage significance of the place to visitors as well as potentially providing community facilities and providing an income that might make future conservation more sustainable. We welcome your proposal to assess the options that might be available and will look forward to discussing them with you in due course. As we said at our meeting, we have an open mind about proposals to install floors in the tower and re-purpose it for other uses. We are also open to proposals to make changes to the gatehouse. Our aim will be the conservation of what is historically significant about the place. This will



EASTGATE COURT 195-205 HIGH STREET GUILDFORD SURREY GU1 3EH

Telephone 01483 252020  
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mean seeking development and management options that are based on a good understanding of heritage significance so that informed choices can be made. It could be possible to make substantial changes to elements of the site that are of less significance in order to sustainably conserve the most important elements.

Detailed heritage assessment to enable critical appraisal of development and management options will be needed. This should include assessment of the buildings and areas that might offer development opportunities, such as the gatehouse and tower, but should also include assessment of other elements that are in need of repair and management, such as the remains of the conduit, water features, south curtain wall, cloister, garden and inner court buildings.

It would be highly desirable to provide interpretation facilities that convey the scale and grandeur of the palace to visitors. This might include museum exhibits and interpretive signage, but it could also be helped by landscaping and grounds maintenance that better reveals the history of the place.

Financial viability will also be a vital consideration, which should be considered alongside heritage significance. We think it will be necessary to identify an optimum scheme that can both preserve significance but also be financially viable. This would mean that ambitious schemes will need to demonstrate both that they can be achieved without causing harm to heritage significance, but also that they have a realistic business model that is likely to succeed. Scheme options for development that would cause great harm to important buried archaeological remains will not be sustainable in conservation terms and therefore will not be acceptable to us.

I hope that this provides some useful advice about our approach and initial position with respect to current ideas for developing and managing the palace. We will be pleased to advise further as you undertake your assessment and consider options for conservation and development.

Yours sincerely

Paul Roberts MCIfA  
Inspector of Ancient Monuments  
E-mail: Paul.roberts@HistoricEngland.org.uk

cc: Simon McCormack, Thomas Ford and Partners



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