



## Chester Terrace Landscape and Arboricultural Heritage Report

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Report

This Landscape and Arboricultural Heritage Report has been commissioned by the Crown Estate Paving Commission (CEPC) from Todd Longstaffe-Gowan Ltd. (TLG) in response to proposed building works to the balustrade and low parapet wall that form the eastern edge of the communal garden at Chester Terrace. The balustrade is in a poor state of repair and requires urgent attention.

Todd Longstaffe-Gowan Landscape Design Ltd. (TLG) has since 2015 collaborated with the Crown Estate Paving Commission (CEPC) in the development and implementation of a comprehensive strategy for the long-term management of its London estate. This has resulted in the production of a series of 'vision documents', the aims of which include: to promote a greater understanding of what makes Regent's Park such a special place; to make clear the importance of John Nash's original, unified scheme; and to put forward recommendations for each of the terrace gardens within the CEPC's charge that will ensure the park as a whole retains its unique role as part of the metropolitan landscape.

The present report sets out Nash's original vision for Regent's Park and its surrounding terraces, as well as the historic development of Chester Terrace as a part of this remarkable ensemble. It also supplies an introduction to the CEPC's tree planting principles that are intended to guide the long-term maintenance of the terraces in line with their historically sensitive vision for the estate. Finally, it examines the existing conditions of Chester Terrace and puts forward proposals for the re-presentation of the gardens in line with Nash's original design principles.

Please note that this report covers the key points of the management vision developed with the CEPC. For more a more comprehensive overview and detailed insights into the CEPC's management strategy please refer to the appended suite of documents, which include: *'A Total Work of Architectural and Landscape Art' A Vision for Regent's Park* (CEPC/TLG February 2017); *Tree Management Strategy* (CEPC/TLG August 2019); and *Chester Terrace Management Vision* (CEPC/TLG August 2019)



Aerial view showing location of CEPC Gardens and illustrating the route of the Prince Regent's New Road, running north to south via Oxford Circus and terminating at Regent's Park



# 2 Historic Context

## 2.1 Regent's Park

Regent's Park is a special place, a planned urban enclave where buildings and landscape were conceived as a single entity, neither one before or without the other. The buildings were designed to benefit from their landscape setting, while the park was designed to benefit from the palace-like buildings around it. The park is, as the architectural historian Sir John Summerson remarks, 'A total work of architectural and landscape art.'

John Nash's plans for Regent's Park embodied some simple design principles. Whereas in the early nineteenth century upmarket urban development generally focused on the tested formula of terraces and garden squares, Nash's approach was pioneering in terms of town planning: his new metropolitan aesthetic was informed by the principles of 'modern Decorative Landscape Gardening', and very unusually for the time, assimilated domesticity and individual idiosyncrasy within a framework of public magnificence. As applied to this new urban estate, those principles can be summarised as follows: that, like a country house and its park, the interior parkland and the residential development were fundamentally related and connected; that the Outer Circle, a carriage drive, far from being a dividing line, served to link the interior parkland and the surrounding terraces and

articulate their relationship; and that planting should frame a series of deliberately composed views from the road, from the buildings and from the parkland.

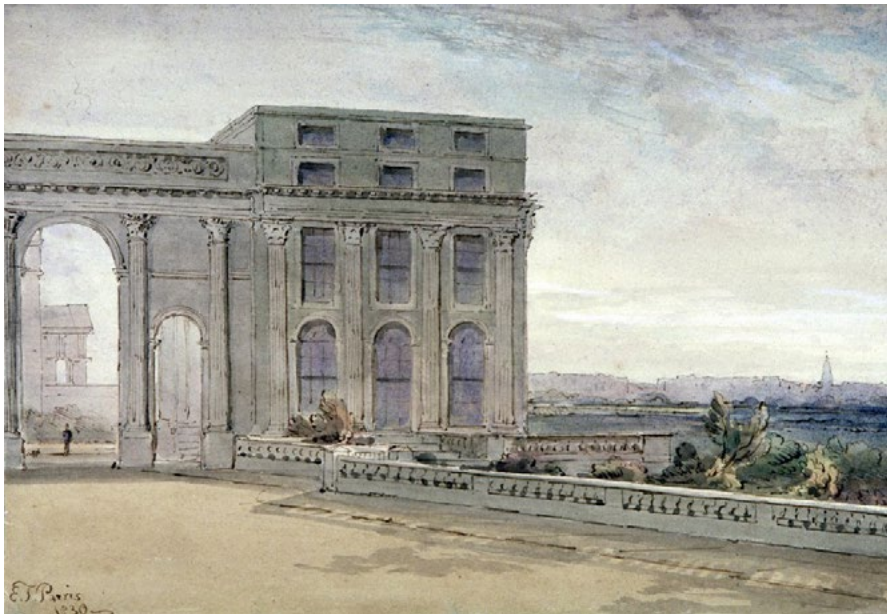
In a letter of 1832, Nash described the process of crafting picturesque vistas from the Broad Walk. 'Seen together as [the terraces] now are,' he wrote, '[they] detract from the beauty and consequence of each'. By introducing plantations between them, 'no two masses of building shall be seen from any one point at the same time'. When the visitor, moving along the Walk, 'arrives opposite the middle of each range of buildings he will have a distinct view of its Architecture framed by the Plantations on either hand which Plantations will shut out every other building, creating so many distinct pictures'. Visitors 'will see a succession of views distinct from each other'.<sup>1</sup> The buildings and the planting which framed them were designed to create the illusion of a sequence of individual palaces.

This notion of the picturesque underpins the relationship between Regent's Park and the surrounding terraces and should form a key consideration of all future management.

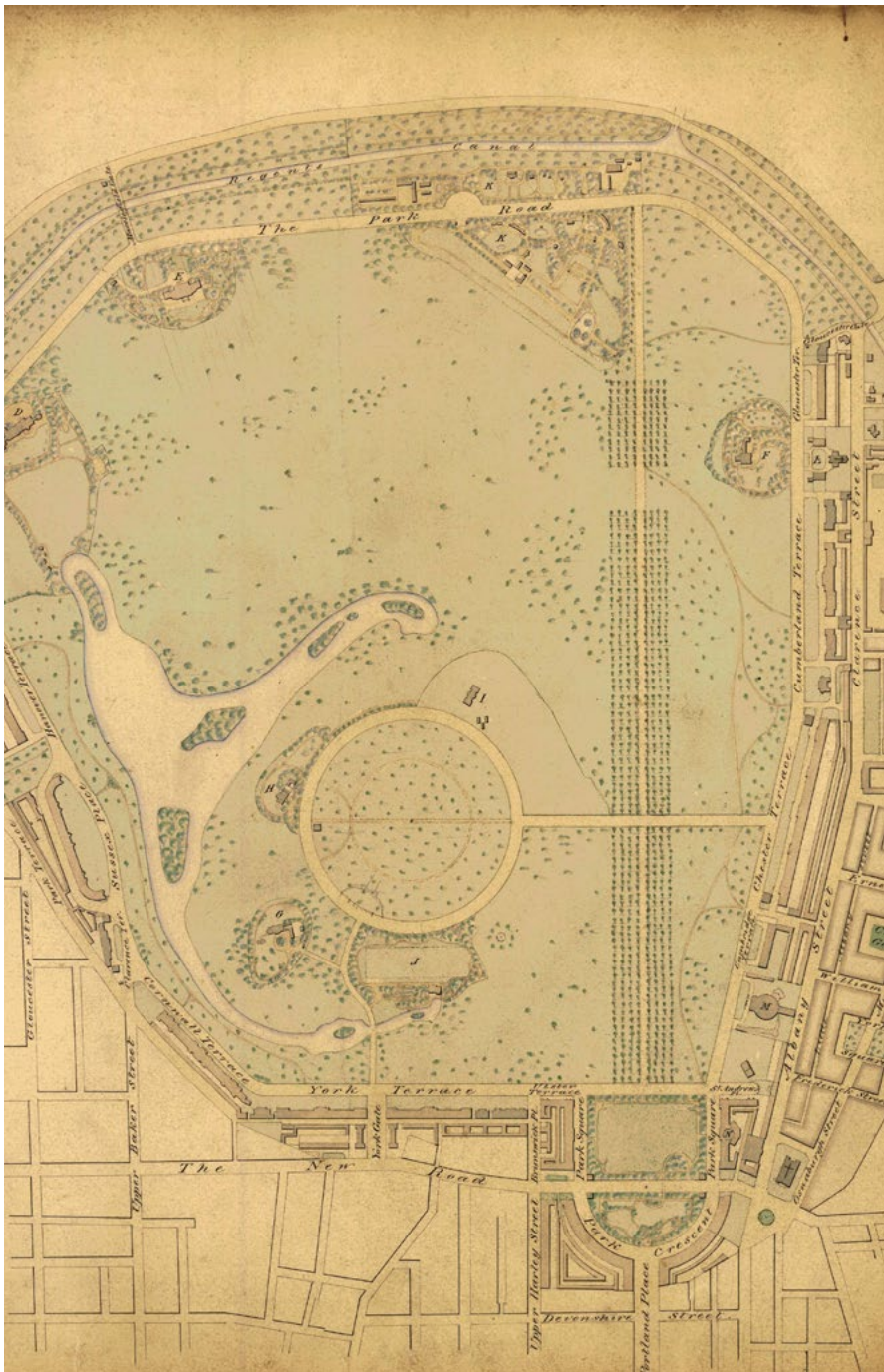
1. The National Archive, CRES 2 742 (letter from John Nash; u.d.).



Views from the park to surrounding terraces in the 1820s were largely unrestricted - William Harvey, Sussex Place and Hanover Terrace (1827)



Low planting in the garden of Chester Terrace meant the entirety of the facade could be enjoyed by those passing by, whilst residents enjoyed open views of the park - View of Chester Terrace by Edmund Thomas Parris, 1830



Charles Mayhew's survey, made in the years 1834 and 1835 shows the Jurisdiction of the Commissioners for Paving the Regent's Park, and captures the considered placement of plantation areas to frame key views across the estate



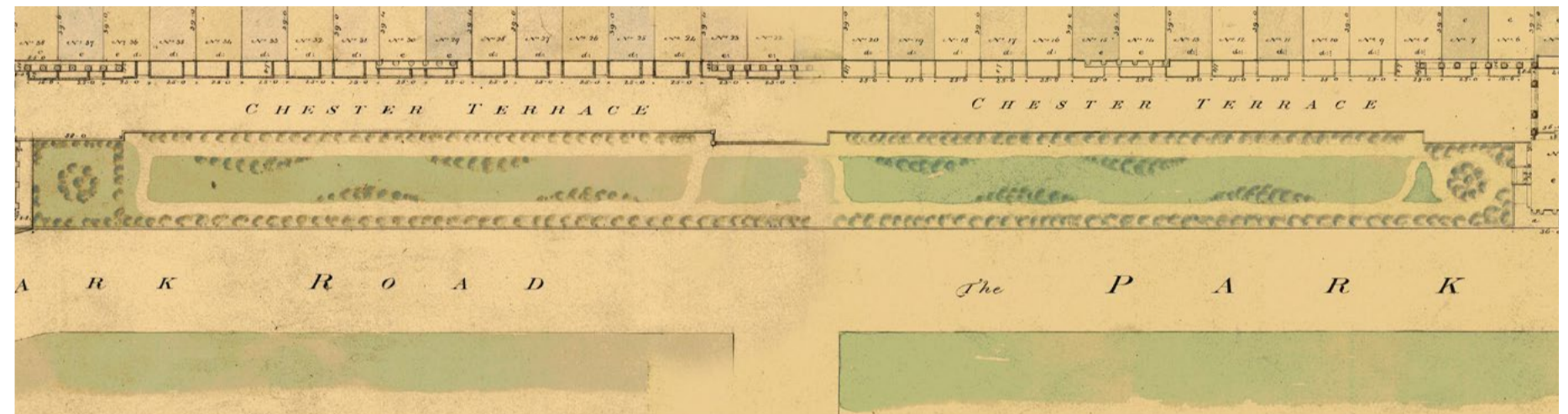
## 2.2 Chester Terrace

The original planting layout for Chester Terrace celebrated the longest unbroken facade of Regent's Park, with restrained planting and an open character. Alternating crescent-shaped beds formed an undulating lawn in their negative space, with middle section of the garden given over entirely to lawn (with the exception of a slim strip of boundary planting within the railing). Notable plantations feature at the north and south of the terrace that would help frame the view to the building.

The rhythmic shape of the beds would have facilitated a series of framed oblique views to the facade from the outer circle, with the general impression from the park (as evidenced in Richard Morris's early etchings) being an expansive and unhindered view.

Early records indicative that residents of Chester Terrace took an interest in the maintenance of the gardens, requesting removal of trees that became too large or overbearing in the landscape. This indicated an understanding and protective attitude to Nash's vision, and a desire to retain open views from the upper floors of the building to the park beyond. With passing traffic being generally confined to horse and carriage, or those on foot, the overall affect of the view from the upper floors of the building would have been of a largely unbroken pastoral landscape, stretching away into the distance.

By the 1920s, with the growth in popularity of the motorcar, and therefore increased traffic on the outer circle, the attitude of the residents appeared to shift, with requests for tree removals met with resistance. The trees and shrubs installed when the building was completed would have matured, with some of them becoming large features within the garden. Coupled with residents' desire to ensure privacy from the increasingly busy Outer Circle traffic, the original open character of the garden would have become less important. This paradigm shift would have been exacerbated by the growth of trees within Regent's Park, and changes to their maintenance and management. Over time, the quality of key views would have been diminished, and with it the priority of preserving them in line with Nash's vision.



The 1834 layout of the gardens was restrained and ordered, with simple offset crescent beds throughout the gardens. This particular layout would have helped facilitate oblique long views from across Regent's Park. The central block is the only section of the garden free of planting - 1834 Mayhew Plan



Elevation drawings of Chester Terrace from around the same time as Mayhew's plan show the scale of planting in the gardens, none of which was taller than the first floor balconies - Chester Terrace from S.H. Hughes, after Richard Morris, Panoramic View Round the Regent's Park, London, 1831



### 3 Landscape Vision - Tree Planting Principles

#### 3.1 The Role of The CEPC

As provider of cleaning and maintenance functions and as custodian of the circuit drive between the terraces and the parkland, the CEPC has a key role in the conservation of Nash's 'total work'. Likewise, the maintenance of the communal gardens in such a manner that they provide a setting for the terraces in long views across and from the landscape is also fundamental to the Nash vision and hence was enshrined in the remit of the CEPC. From its earliest days, the CEPC has had to balance the lease-holders' desire for privacy and the public role of those gardens in the overall design. With its secure and independent core-funding and wide remit, the CEPC has been in a position to establish and maintain consistent, high-quality design. The CEPC thus has a key role in the stewardship of Nash's legacy.

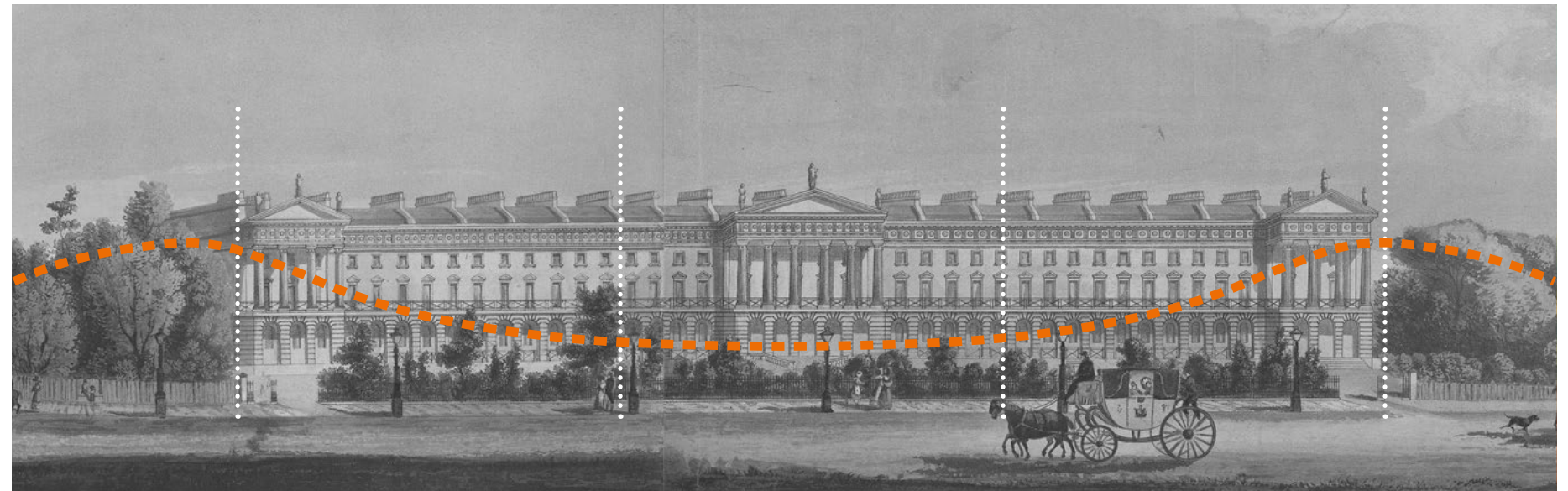
#### 3.2 Canopy Profile

The long-term aim for the terrace gardens should be to evoke the original Nash vision, with planting framing the buildings so that their palatial facades are more legible and can be better appreciated from both Regent's Park and the Outer Circle.

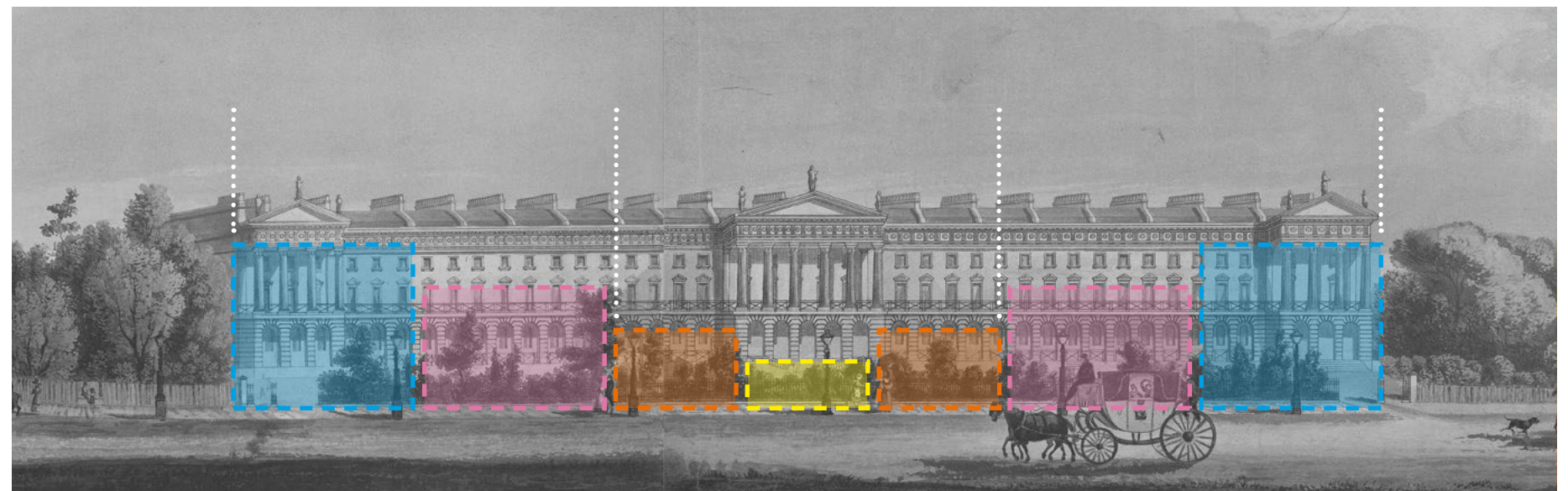
An approximate profile for the tree and shrub canopy should reflect the Canopy Profile Diagram adjacent. These suggest that the planting profiles resemble valleys that rise gradually toward the edges of the buildings, the centres of which are roughly on axis with the central axes of the terraces so as to ensure that the finest aspects of the architecture are visible. At their lowest points the foliage should remain level with the boundary railings which will ensure that privacy is maintained between residents and pedestrians on the Outer Circle pavement.

#### 3.3 Tree Planting Zones

Future replacement tree planting should be in accordance with the Tree Planting Zones outlined opposite. Each terrace facade can be divided into visual thirds, and those thirds further subdivided into halves and thirds respectively. The central section is limited to shrubs and small trees (on the outer segments), to carefully frame the central block without obscuring it. The outer thirds can be planted with medium and large specimen trees, roughly graduating in height to replicate the original planted buffers that framed the views to the terraces.



Tree Canopy Diagram (taken from the CEPC *Tree Management Strategy*) - the wave-form profile represents the ideal aspirations for the tree canopy within the terrace gardens, which balances privacy for residents and open views to the architecture



Tree Planting Zone Diagram (taken from the CEPC *Tree Management Strategy*) - as a guide to future tree planting, the coloured zones in the diagram inform the size of planting that is appropriate; yellow - shrubs only; orange - small trees (max. 4m mature height); pink - small to medium trees (max. 8m mature height); blue - medium to large trees



# 4 Existing Conditions

## 4.1 Overview

Over the years, the management of Regent’s Park and surrounding terraces, as a composition of interdependent parts, has been pragmatic, shared by different agencies with different agendas and different resources. While in many ways successful, this has failed to reflect the comprehensiveness of the original design.

Chester Terrace today shows the evidence of that pragmatism and that lack of coordination with agencies beyond the CEPC’s administrative boundaries. The gardens are in tired condition, and it is clear that the relationship between Chester Terrace and Regent’s Park has become fragmented.

The extent to which the terrace has been allowed to withdraw visually from the communal landscape is a result partly of allowing trees to grow up by accident, partly of deliberate decisions on planting new trees, and partly of the changing demands of lease-holders.

## 4.2 Layout

The current layout of the gardens is only broadly reminiscent of the original

scheme, with the experience at ground level being largely shaded and enclosed. The original crescent beds have sprawled with time, expanding and supplanting the undulating lawn. Notably, the central lawn panel from Nash’s original scheme has been entirely in-filled with planting. Around the beginning of the C20th, the north and south ends of the garden were demised to the detached properties adjacent to each end of the garden. In the existing condition, these areas are now separated from the communal garden by hard boundaries and legally owned by the adjacent properties.

The once rational treatment of the paths (in both position and materiality), has been lost through piecemeal alterations over time. The gardens now feature an inconsistent mix of gravel and modern crazy-paving, which is both incongruous and unsympathetic. New paths have been introduced, including the large section of gravel in the southern half of the garden, and widths adjusted in an ad-hoc fashion as broader changes to the terrace (such as the two additional bays along the drive) were implemented.

## 4.3 Shrub and Herbaceous Planting

The originally open character of Chester Terrace has been transformed over

the years into a shady retreat. Unchecked growth of trees and shrubs has caused significant horticultural challenges, with the dense canopy layer increasingly excluding sunlight from ground-level. Mature shrubs often appear etiolated, with only a few species thriving in shaded areas. Herbaceous planting has also suffered from the competitive conditions, with large areas blanketed in single-species ground cover.

Some areas of the garden feature a more sunny aspect, which would typically allow for a greater diversity of planting, however, the benefits of these conditions are generally under-utilised, with an uncoordinated selection of uninspiring plants and shrubs. The overall impression is of tired mature planting that in many cases would benefit from removal and replacement.

In summary, Chester Terrace is very much a victim of piecemeal alteration - of paths, surfaces and planting - all of which were no-doubt well intentioned, but have produced a landscape that is poles apart from what should be expected of a building of such significance. With the repair works to the balustrade now an absolute necessity for the health of the building and terrace, the opportunity arises for a considered strategic replenishment of the gardens as a whole.



The view east from Chester road shows only partial views to the central set of Corinthian columns, flanked by mature trees



Shady conditions caused by mature trees have resulted in “leggy” shrubs, with planting beds carpeted in single-species ground cover



Areas of the garden with a sunny aspect feature tired planting that would benefit from supplement planting to increase seasonal interest and enhance diversity



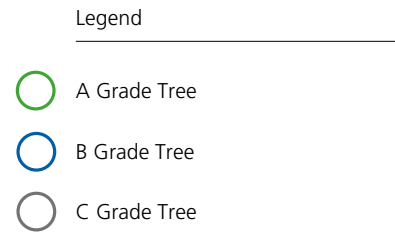
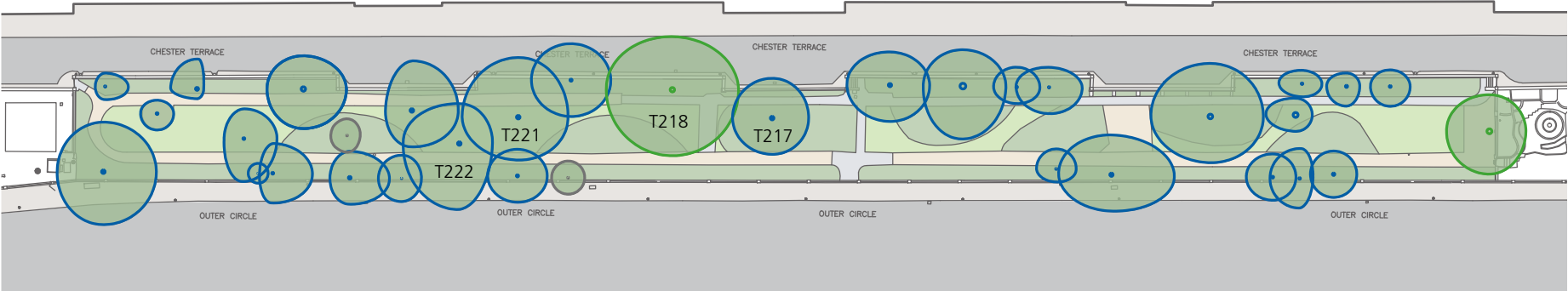
4.4 Trees

A survey of the trees in Chester Terrace was carried out in November 2022, by Tim Moya Associates (TMA). As part of the survey process, an objective assessment was made of the individual tree quality to BS5837. The majority of the trees are category B, or moderate quality, with two category A trees (high quality), and two category C trees (low quality). The report notes that the trees are considered to have more value as a group, as they form a linear green feature.

In heritage terms, specifically with respect to the original Nash concept of visually connected palatial terraces set within an open and permeable landscape, the mature trees are a significant impediment to views. The tree and shrub canopy during the summer months is sufficiently dense that it affords only glimpsed views to the building from the Outer Circle, with almost total screening from the eastern footpath.

The trees throughout Chester Terrace have been allowed to grow too large, with species such as Ilex aquifolium (holly), Prunus lusitanica (Portuguese laurel) and Buxus sempervirens (common box), likely originally intended to be maintained as shrubs. Furthermore, particular trees, for instance T217, T218, T221 and T222, are large species trees and therefore should never have been planted in their central location - all now contribute significantly to obscuring views to the facade.

In addition to their visual impact, many of the trees along the eastern boundary of the garden have been planted too closely to the balustrade. This is evidenced by tree root damage to the foundations of the balustrade, which is among the reasons for its structural deterioration.



The view north along the elevation of Chester Terrace, showing the extent to which mature trees are encroaching toward the building



The existing view northeast from the Outer Circle footpath



## 5 Landscape Proposals

### 5.1 Tree Removals

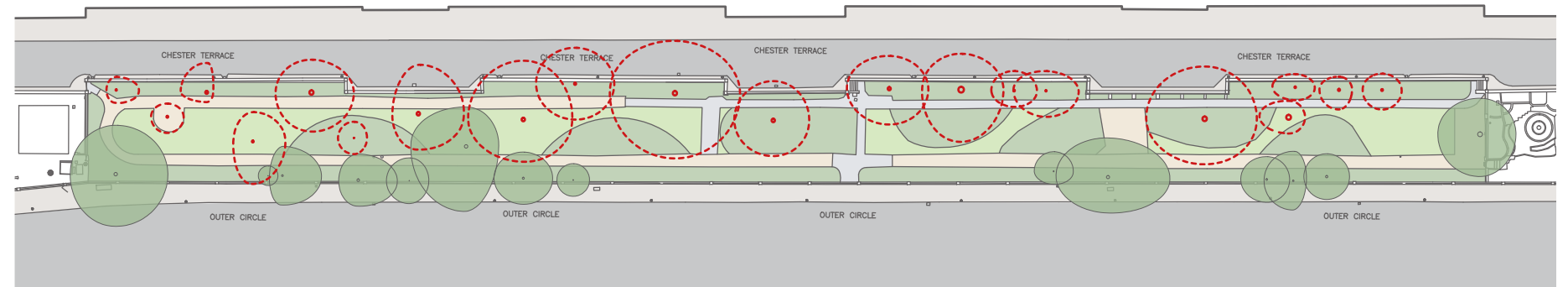
The design team has explored various options for repairing the wall, including underpinning the existing footings in combination with ground anchors to prevent horizontal movement. This option would have reduced the impact on existing trees, however, has been deemed inviable due to the location of the vaults adjoining Chester Terrace, and the presence of underground services beneath the road.

The works will therefore require new foundations to be installed, which will necessitate major excavations along the eastern boundary of the garden. The construction methodology acknowledges the potential root disturbance this will cause, and as such proposes the use of screw piles to support the replacement wall. Screw piles will reduce the level of root disturbance, relative to traditional full-depth concrete footings. Despite these measures to minimise disturbance to trees closest to the wall, twenty trees will be required to be removed, as well as canopy pruning across the terrace to allow clearance for heavy plant. These tree removals are considered to be the minimum required to permit the works and have required a coordinated approach from the design team in order to minimise further potential tree removal. The removal of these trees should be seen as an opportunity to review the tree planting strategy within the terrace, and incorporate proposed trees in a manner that is sympathetic to the long-term management vision for the CEPC estate.

### 5.2 Tree Replacements

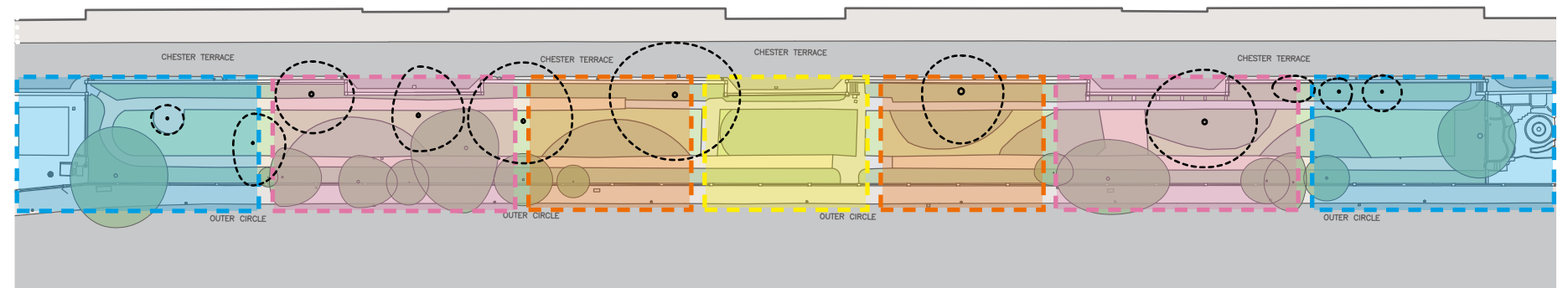
The *Chester Terrace Management Vision* (CEPC/TLG August 2019) set out the future tree management aspirations for Chester Terrace, including the scope of trees to be replaced (and approximate sizing). Our proposals for replacing the trees requiring removal are in accordance with this document, and therefore do not include like-for-like replacement of trees in either species or quantity. The aim of the replacements is to reinstate and safe-guard views to and from Chester Terrace, whilst balancing the privacy needs of the residents, as well as improving the quality of the planting in the garden. For these reasons, proposed trees have been chosen based on their expected mature height (small, medium or large), and from a palette of agreed trees set out in the *Tree Management Strategy* (CEPC/TLG August 2019).

The adjacent diagram has been used as a tool to determine the appropriate size of proposed trees, with the approximate location and number of replacements commensurate with the *Chester Terrace Management Vision*.




Legend

 Existing Tree to be Removed



Legend

 Trees scheduled for replacement as part of Chester Terrace tree management strategy



5.3 Proposed Layout

Repair works to the balustrade will require access for a 21 ton tracked excavator across the length of the terrace. The construction works will inevitably require a wholesale reinstatement of the garden following their completion, which provides an opportunity to refine the layout of the gardens and paths.

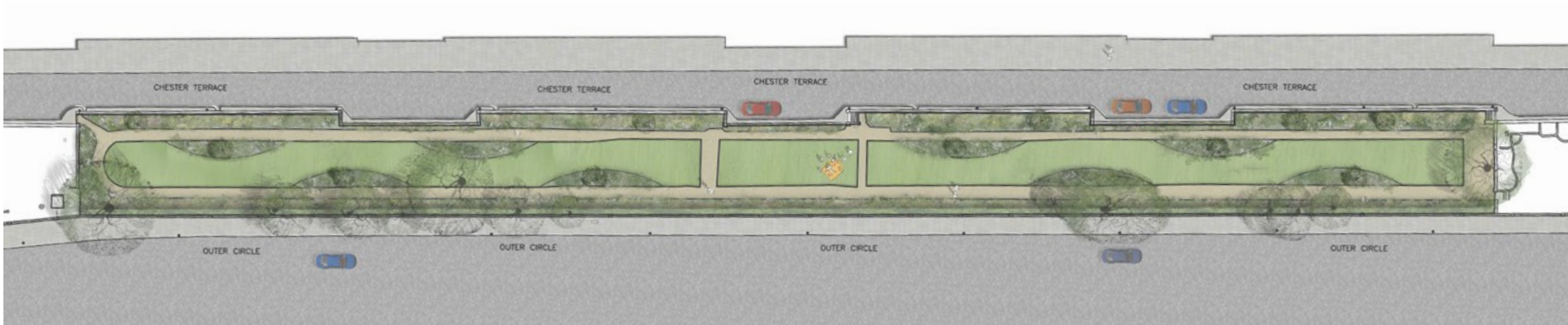
The adjacent proposed layout reinstates the planting beds from the 1834 plan, in both scale and location, and redefines the central ribbon of lawn that had been lost over time. The paths have been rationalised, with a uniform gravel surface that is more sympathetic to the historic condition. Gravel will provide a more appropriate permeable surface for existing and establishing tree roots to thrive, and will aid surface drainage and reduce the likelihood of localised flooding.

5.4 Proposed Tree Planting

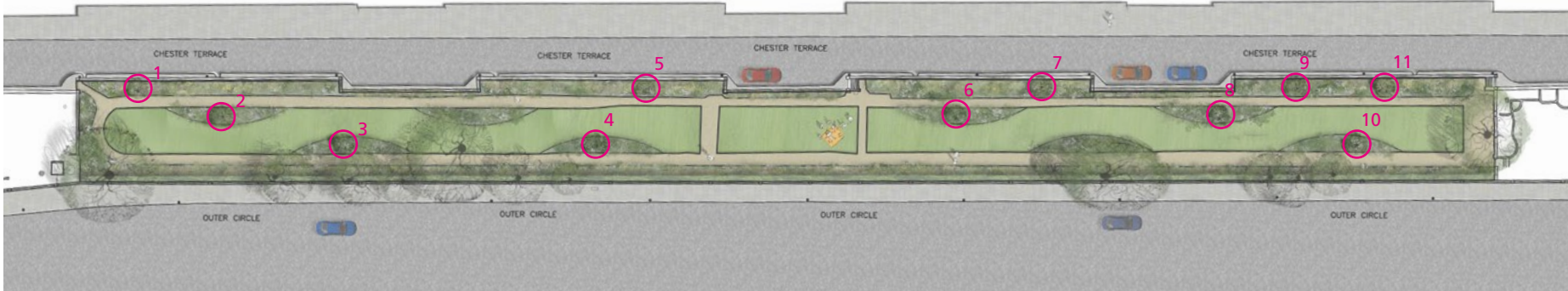
Early panoramic views of Chester Terrace show a varied canopy profile which was likely comprised of a range of small trees and shrubs, with a mixture of deciduous and evergreen planting. The trees proposed below have been chosen to provide a range of interest and planting structure, with varieties selected to add seasonal colour and flowers/fruit. The choice of evergreen or deciduous has been made in order to offset surrounding loses.

To prevent future structural problems due to tree roots, all larger specimens have been placed away from the balustrade, with the eastern border containing only small trees.

- 1. Malus ‘Evereste’ (multistem) - 200/250cm
- 2. Catalpa bignonioides (multistem) - 250/300cm
- 3. Crataegus monogyna (multistem) - 200/250cm
- 4. Laurus nobilis f. angustifolia - 250/300cm
- 5. Rhus typhina ‘Dissecta’ - 175/200cm
- 6. Amelanchier lamarkii (multistem) - 200/250cm
- 7. Rhus typhina ‘Bailtiger’ - 175/200cm
- 8. Catalpa bignonioides (multistem) - 250/300cm
- 9. Malus ‘Evereste’ - 200/250cm (multistem)
- 10. Ilex aquifolium - 250/300cm
- 11. Osmanthus x burkwoodii (multistem) - 175/200cm



Proposed Landscape Plan



Legend

○ Proposed Trees



## 6 Planting Proposals

### 6.1 Tree Planting Palette



Malus 'Evereste' (mutlistem)



Catalpa bignonioides (mutlistem)



Crataegus monogyna (multistem)





*Laurus nobilis* f. *angustifolia*



*Rhus typhina* 'Dissecta'



*Amelanchier lamarkii* (multistem)





Rhus typhina 'Baltiger'



Ilex aquifolium



Osmanthus x burkwoodii



## 7 Summary

### 7.1 Executive Summary

John Nash conceived of Regent's Park and the surrounding terraces as a single vision - a series of palatial buildings set within an open and pastoral landscape. Historically, visitors to the park would have benefitted from framed picturesque views, which included a carefully orchestrated arrangement of architecture and landscape. Over the years, this relationship has been dissolved through administrative changes that have divided the responsibility for the total vision into a number of different organisations, as well as general lack of public knowledge around Nash's original concept. Internal pressure from residents to maintain privacy to Chester Terrace, has also created a reluctance to remove or manage planting in order to encourage open views of the building.

The works proposed to replace the Chester Terrace balustrade will resolve problems attributable, in part, to unsympathetic past restoration. Existing mature trees in the garden have contributed to this deterioration, with their roots damaging the underlying foundations of the retaining structure. Long-term proposals for the management of Chester Terrace's trees have previously been developed by the CEPC, which would see a gradual reduction in tree canopy across all terraces, with a view to opening up long views in an approach coordinated with The Royal Parks. The necessity to remove a number of mature trees in order to facilitate the repairs to Chester Terrace balustrade present a tremendous opportunity to fast-track the implementation of this management vision.

Proposals seek to remove only the trees necessary to enable the work, and include arboricultural works that will open the tree canopy and promote better conditions at ground-level for herbaceous and shrub planting. The garden will be reinstated with a layout closer to the original Nash vision, with trees replaced in accordance with the CEPC's suite of management documents: *'A Total Work of Architectural and Landscape Art' A Vision for Regent's Park* (CEPC/TLG February 2017); *Tree Management Strategy* (CEPC/TLG August 2019); and *Chester Terrace Management Vision* (CEPC/TLG August 2019). The proposals therefore represent a positive contribution to the heritage asset, and will promote its long-term enjoyment by the wider public.