

1 CUMBERLAND PLACE, REGENT'S PARK

RE-LANDSCAPING OF GARDEN

**Heritage Statement
and Impact Assessment**

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1. INTRODUCTION, SOURCES, AND QUALIFICATIONS

1.1 Introduction and Sources Consulted

- 1.1.1 This statement examines the historical context of 1 Cumberland Place, Regent's Park – a Grade I listed house of c.1826 designed by John Nash and executed by John Thomson – and assesses the impact on its special architectural or historic interest of proposals to re-landscape the south garden.
- 1.1.2 Section 2 notes the policy context, whilst Section 3 outlines the historical context and Section 4 discusses the impact of the proposals on the heritage significance. The historical account is based upon published histories of Regent's Park, standard topographical sources, street directories, and the building's planning history.

1.2 Statement of Qualifications

- 1.2.1 My qualifications for undertaking this analysis and assessment are based on my work as a professional building and topographical historian who researches, documents, and assesses historic buildings. I hold a B.A. from the University of Ottawa (1974) and an M.Sc. in urban and regional planning from the University of Toronto (1976), and since my first involvement with architectural and urban history as a post-graduate student (where I studied criteria for designating historic buildings and sites) I have spent over 35 years in the fields of building preservation and historical research.
- 1.2.2 For the past 30 years I have worked as a consulting researcher in support of professionals and companies dealing with historic buildings and sites. My work has included documenting topographical and building history, professional assessments of the historical significance and listability of buildings and building elements, providing specialist input to policy plans, and

writing policies and explanatory text for conservation management plans. The latter commissions have included the buildings of the former Royal Naval College at Greenwich and parts of the College and Chapel of St George at Windsor Castle, and I have drafted similar policy plans for the Royal Household's occupied palaces. I have also held consultancy appointments with the Crown Estate Commissioners and the Royal Household Property Section, and have provided expert witness testimony on historical property issues in the Chancery Division and at the Lands Tribunal.

2. PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

- 2.1 This analysis and impact assessment supports applications for relevant consents in relation to re-landscaping the garden of 1 Cumberland Place, Regent's Park. The assessment is in line with the policies and guidelines of Section 12 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).
- 2.2 NPPF provides a framework for development which impacts on the historic environment, which it largely defines by its heritage assets. These include designated assets (such as listed buildings, conservation areas, and archaeological sites) as well as locally-identified elements which have not been formally designated.
- 2.3 Applicants and Local Planning Authorities are required under the NPPF to identify relevant designated and undesignated heritage assets, and to establish the degree and nature of their significance. The level of detail "*should be proportionate to the assets' importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on their significance*" (para. 128). The evidence base for this process is set out in paras. 128 and 129 of the NPPF, and it is on the basis of this evidence that an appraisal of the buildings and the proposed landscape scheme has been made.

- 2.4 1 Cumberland Place is a designated heritage asset, statutorily listed Grade I in 1974. The listing was consolidated in 1999 with that of the stone balustrades and iron garden railings, with the following description:

Block of 4 houses giving impression of 1 large house. c1828. By John Nash and possibly J Thomson. Stucco with brick rear elevation. Slated mansard roof with dormers.

EXTERIOR: symmetrical block with main elevation to Regent's Park but entrances on rear to Cumberland Place. 4 storeys, attics and basements. 7 window range. Returns with 3 windows and projecting semicircular bays rising to main cornice. Main elevation with projecting end bays and central projecting tetrastyle pedimented Corinthian portico, columns rising through 1st and 2nd floors, ground floor forming a podium. Corinthian pilasters to other bays, paired at projecting bays, supporting the main entablature with projecting cornice at 3rd floor level. Recessed sashes to ground, 2nd and 3rd floors. 1st floor with casements and cast-iron balconies. Cornice and blocking course above 3rd floor. Rear elevation with projecting end bays of 3 windows each, mostly blind. Entrances in projecting stucco porticoes with pilasters carrying entablature and blocking course; fanlights and panelled doors. Nos 2 & 3 with attached cast-iron railings to areas and steps flanking entrances. INTERIORS: not inspected. SUBSIDIARY FEATURES: attached stone balustrades and plain wrought-iron geometrical railings on low wall to garden forecourt.

- 2.5 The building lies within and contributes fundamentally to the character of the Regent's Park Conservation Area, a designated heritage asset in its own right since 1 July, 1969. The houses are described as follows in the Regent's Park Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Strategy (Conservation Area Appraisal) of 11 July, 2011:

Cumberland Place

Located between Chester Terrace and Cumberland Terrace, this short terrace of four houses within a seven-bay frontage faces the park, with a Corinthian portico at first floor level, but has entrances at the rear facing onto Chester Place. The space formed between Cumberland Place, Chester Terrace and Chester Place is a complex arrangement. The levels slope down from the Outer Circle towards Albany Street. Cumberland Place is elevated while Chester Place is set down at the lower level of Albany Street. This is used to effect, to emphasise the grandeur of the Cumberland Place houses.

The prominent bay on the south elevation of Cumberland Place terminates the view along Chester Terrace through its northern triumphal arch. The spire of St George's Cathedral (formerly Christ Church) is glimpsed in the gap between Chester Terrace and Place. This unique space between the three elements of Chester Terrace, Chester Place and Cumberland Place is the point at which the alignment of the terraces turns from north to north-north-west. Nash used this brilliantly by designing this theatrical composition.

3. HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND SIGNIFICANCE

3.1 Historical Background

3.1.1 The detailed development history of Regent's Park has been recited in so many national and local policy documents – a summary history by Richard Simpson, for example, is provided as an appendix to the Regent's Park Conservation Area Appraisal – that a full reiteration of the history in this statement would be relatively pointless. It should suffice to note that Cumberland Place, designed by John Nash and (almost certainly) executed by John Thomson in 1826-27, dates to the park's primary development phase, and continues to be a significant and important element in the design, layout, and character of the park.

3.1.2 The 20th century reversal of Nash's artistic and professional reputation is an exemplary case of reputational reassessment. His work was sufficiently derided in the 19th century that the settled national judgement of the *Dictionary of National Biography*, (written in 1894 by the art historian Lionel Henry Cust), confidently dismissed his talents:

Never original in his ideas, Nash seemed devoid of any sense of grandeur or freedom in his style. No one of the buildings designed by him qualifies him to rank as a great architect; and where an effect of solidity and massive repose is produced, it is marred by his persistent use of stucco in the same monotonous tint.

In 2004, however, the revised entry (written by Geoffrey Tyack) expressed the reassessed view:

He was nevertheless much criticized by the Victorians for the alleged shoddiness, slapdash detailing, and structural 'dishonesty' of his work, and the low reputation in which he was held for more than a century after his death accounts for the unfortunate demolition of many of his buildings, including all three of the houses he built for his own occupation in London and the Isle of Wight. He also suffered in the eyes of posterity from his close identification with George IV and from the financial and sexual scandals with which he was, however unjustifiably, associated. But, largely through the efforts of John Summerson, his reputation recovered in the second half of the twentieth century, and today Nash is widely recognized as one of the most creative and influential of all British architects.

- 3.1.3 Taken solely on their own merits, Nash's buildings are not particularly remarkable – a number of his contemporaries could claim to be more talented architectural designers. Nash's indisputable mastery of picturesque design, however – evidenced in numerous projects, but epitomised by Regent's Park – was unmatched, and was undoubtedly the driving force behind his reputational reappraisal: it was clearly untenable to dismiss the park's designer as a second-rate talent who was "devoid of any sense of grandeur or freedom in his style".
- 3.1.4 As was the case with all of the park's terraces, the physical condition of Cumberland Place hit a low point after World War I, when the original 99-year leases fell in and the building reached its expected life. The houses were very nearly demolished after World War II for comprehensive redevelopment, but the decision in the 1950s to retain the terraces led to a 30-year programme of repair, renovation, and selected cases of rebuilding in replica.
- 3.1.5 It was in this context that approvals were granted in 1991 to extend the basement to the south to house a swimming pool. This extension was altered under approvals of 2005 as a family room, whilst the current landscaping scheme was approved in June, 2007.

3.2 Discussion of Significance

- 3.2.1 Cumberland Place's Grade I status is due primarily to its position and its group value role in the ensemble of Regent's Park terraces. That position and role greatly heightens the potential impact of changes to its setting, as it affects both the character of the building itself and its central contribution to the character and significance of the Regent's Park Conservation Area.
- 3.2.2 A significant element of the park's plan is the hierarchy of garden spaces, described in the Conservation Area Appraisal as creating a "layered effect" in the landscape:

The landscape of the park in the proximity of the terraces is a wide open parkland setting. The private ornamental gardens on the perimeter contain more exotic and colourful trees and shrubs and are raised to the level of the terrace to

which they relate. This creates a layered effect when viewed from the park, and an added sense of privacy when viewed from the terraces.

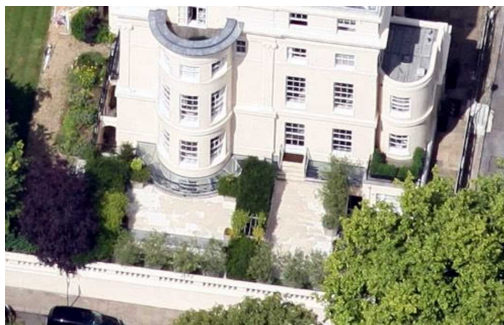
3.2.3 The Conservation Area Appraisal also notes that Cumberland Place occupies a critical position between the three elements of Chester Terrace, Chester Place and Cumberland Place – the point at which the alignment of the terraces turns from north to north-north-west. The bay on the south elevation of 1 Cumberland Place is particularly important, as it terminates the view at the north end of Chester Terrace and is visible through that terrace's northern triumphal arch.

3.2.4 Whilst the view from Chester Terrace continues to be critical, the visual presence of Cumberland Place from the park has been diminished by the extent to which trees in the communal garden have been allowed to obscure the building. In light of this, the primary concern with regards to the proposals is their potential impact on the character of the conservation area in general, and the view from Chester Terrace in particular.



View from Outer Circle, 1938 (Survey of London), and 2014

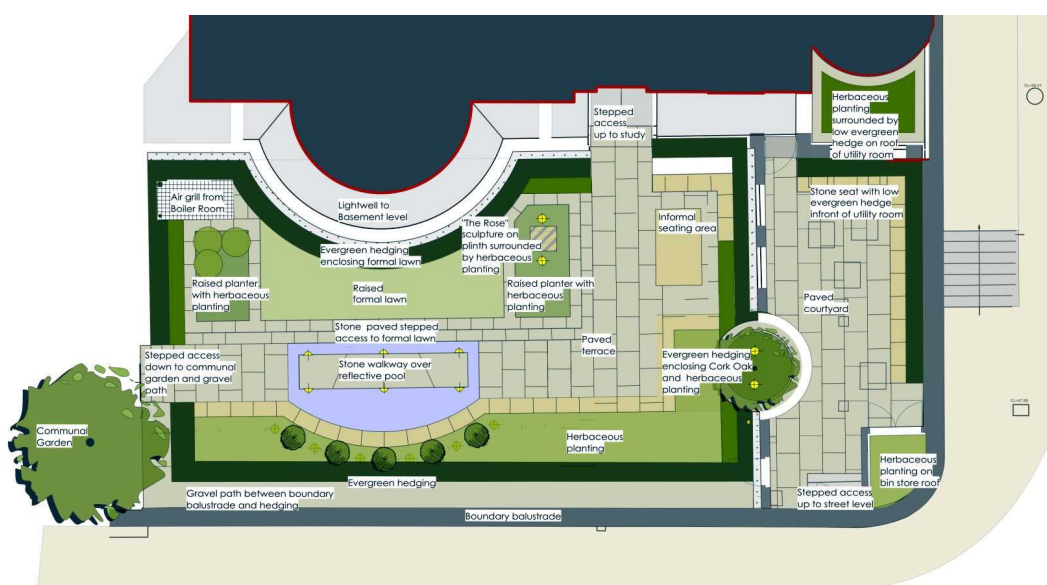
- 3.2.5 Planting in the existing garden is minimal, as the space largely comprises two paved patios with few hedges and glazing over the bay window lightwell.



Aerial view of existing garden.
(Bing maps)

4. IMPACT ASSESSMENT OF PROPOSED WORKS

- 4.1 As explained in detail in the Design and Access Statement, the existing gardens are on two levels – an upper garden on the roof of the early 1990s' extension, and a lower garden/service courtyard at street level. The proposals are to re-landscape the upper garden and to embellish the lower courtyard with Portland stone paving, a stone seat, and evergreen hedging.



Proposed landscape plan.



View from North West.

4.2 The proposals have no direct impact upon the communal garden facing the Outer Circle, but by distinguishing between the aesthetics of this garden on the one hand, and the private garden of 1 Cumberland Place on the other, they positively reinforce the “layered effect” of the landscape described in the 2011 Conservation Area Appraisal.

4.3 At plan level, the proposals for planting and a water feature have at most a neutral impact on the significance of the relevant heritage assets, as the hard-landscaped garden which it replaces is a modern scheme which is hidden from public view. Three-dimensionally, the impact when seen from the Outer Circle is minor, as the trees of the communal garden largely mask views of this side of the house.



View from Outer Circle, existing and proposed.

- 4.4 The proposals have a greater potential impact upon the views from Chester Terrace and Chester Place, as any planting which appears above the balustrade is inevitably prominent. The main changes are (a) replacement of the existing landscape scheme with a Portland stone water feature, significantly increased planting, and Portland stone paving; (b) the replacement of existing soft-shaped trees with five Cypress trees positioned to echo and frame the shape of the bay window; (c) the removal of planting which currently obscures the bow-ended entrance on the east side of the house; and (d) the addition of an evergreen hedge behind the balustrade.



View from Chester Terrace, existing and proposed.

- 4.5 The impact of these proposals is summarised below.

Replacement of existing hard landscaping scheme with a Portland stone water feature with stone seat and fountains, significantly increased planting (much of which echoes the geometry of the house), and Portland stone paving.

- The overall effect of the proposals will result in a positive and significant greening of the garden which is more in keeping with the context and character of the park than the existing scheme.
- The water feature has limited visibility from outside the garden, and has no impact on the views from the conservation area in general, or Chester Terrace and Chester Place in particular.
- The use of Portland stone is in keeping with the traditional colouring of Nash's terraces, and is more appropriate for private spaces than would be other stone.

Replacement of existing trees with five Cypress trees positioned to echo and frame the shape of the bay window.

- The masking of the ground-floor bay window by the existing trees will increase as these mature, and their replacement with more formally-sited and controlled trees will enhance the appreciation of Nash's composition in this critically important view.
- The introduction of a formally-planned scheme in the private garden differentiates this realm from that of the communal garden, reinforcing and enhancing the "layered effect" of the park's landscape as described in the Conservation Area Appraisal.

Removal of planting which currently obscures the bow-ended entrance on the east side of the house.

- The exposure of the ground-floor level of the porch wing is highly desirable, as it encourages a greater appreciation of the Picturesque nature of Nash's building.

Addition of an evergreen hedge behind the balustrade.

- Whilst the balustrade is an important element of the composition, it is its form as a permeable feature that is critical rather than any possibility of views through it.
- A previous proposal for a solid masonry planter and hedge behind and above the balustrade has been superseded by the current proposal for an appropriately-scaled evergreen hedge extending approximately 0.5 metres above the balustrade. The balustrade thus retains its character and appearance as a permeable rather than a solid feature, and as noted in the Design and Access Statement the hedging will if anything emphasise and enhance this aspect of the architectural composition.

- 4.6 In conclusion, the proposed landscape scheme appropriately complements 1 Cumberland Place as a Grade I heritage asset; enhances the character of the Regent's Park Conservation Area by reinforcing the "layered effect" of the landscape; and by introducing additional greenery and carefully altering visible planting, enhances the appreciation of Nash's composition in the critically important views of the house from the surrounding roads.