

Planning Application No. 2016/1479/P

To whom it may concern:

I have been asked to comment on the potential impact of the proposed new garden in Chester Gate on the character and appearance of the surrounding Conservation Area.

Chester Gate (originally called Cambridge Place) separates two of the terraces built to the designs of John Nash on the eastern side of Regent's Park in the 1820s: Chester Terrace (1825) and Cambridge Terrace (1824-5). The street gives access to the Park from Albany Street, the service road running behind the terraces along the perimeter of the park which separated the terraces from the market and artisan area designed by Nash to the south of Cumberland Basin. The entrance from Albany Street is narrow – 5.25m from kerb to kerb – but it broadens out at its western end to provide a vista of the Park, creating a sense of release from plain brick terraces of Albany Street and supplying a first vision of the arcadian landscape that has captivated Londoners and visitors ever since it was created. The narrowing of this route at its western end, as envisaged in this application, would destroy this sense of release, while at the same time significantly encroaching on public space.

The proposals under consideration claim to reinstate 'a private garden designed by John Nash'. As I and others have already pointed out, this is a distortion of the true history of the site. A letter by Nash dated 30 June 1825 (National Archives, Cres 2/700) mentions the intention to plant the ground at the western end of Chester Gate 'with a thick plantation', and a plan by him of Cambridge Terrace and its surroundings, dated 30 June 1825 (National Archives, MPI 1/585/2), shows the ground with the words 'intended as a plantation'. The builder of the Terrace, Richard Mott, undertook on 7 February 1826 to lay out the site, and another to the south of the Terrace, with a 'Shrubbery, lawn, Ornamental Garden & Pleasure Ground' for the occupants of the end houses (National Archives, Cres 2/700). But there is no evidence that Nash designed these gardens himself, or that a detailed design was ever prepared, and the first views of the terraces, in James Elmes, *Metropolitan Improvements* (1829) and in Richard Morris's panorama of the Park and terraces, published by Rudolph Ackermann in 1831 (see Geoffrey Tyack, *Two Early Panoramas of the Regent's Park*, London Topographical Society, 2015, pp. 26-7), make it clear that the garden at the western end of Chester Gate was not created in Nash's lifetime.

A garden on the part of the site proposed had indeed been created by 1875, when the first edition of the 25 inch to the mile Ordnance Survey map was prepared, and is shown in an undated stereoscopic late 19<sup>th</sup>-century photograph reproduced by the proponents of the scheme under consideration. A 'block plan of the Chester Gate area about 1870', based on the Ordnance Survey map, was later drawn by Michael Mansbridge and included in his *John Nash, a Complete Catalogue* (1991), p. 270, but he was incorrect in implying (p. 271) that the garden was designed by Nash. It had in any case been removed by the time of the next (1895) Ordnance Survey map of the area.

What is being proposed now is not a reinstatement of a garden designed by John Nash, or even of the Victorian garden indicated in the 1875 Ordnance Survey map – which was significantly narrower than the garden now proposed – but the creation of a new private garden through the appropriation of space that has been within the public domain for all but a few of the past 190 years. Far from enhancing the appearance of Chester and Cambridge Terraces, and the eastern side of Regents Park, it would detract from it by imposing a spurious version of a garden that never existed on a historic and much-valued urban landscape that has been preserved and maintained over many generations by the Crown Estate and by the occupiers of the houses. Taken together, Regent's Park, together with its terraces, represents one of the greatest achievements of English town planning – the forerunner of urban parks and their surrounding environment throughout the world – and interference with the external appearance of the terraces and their immediate surroundings should be kept at an absolute minimum. On the grounds both of conservation and public amenity I therefore urge the rejection of these proposals in the strongest terms.

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