An Chomhairle Oidhreachta
The Heritage Council

Submission of the Heritage Council to An Bord Pleanála

Re: Ashbourne House, Johnstown, Glounthane, Co. Cork,
94 residential units, provision of 1 no. café and revisions to existing vehicular entrance.
Ashbourne House is a Protected Structure

For which permission was granted by Cork County Council on 16th June 2022 for 53 no. residential units comprising 7 no. 1-bed apartments, 38 no. 2-bed apartments, 1 no. 2-bed detached house, 1 no. 3-bed apartment, 2 no. 3-bed semi-detached houses and 4 no. 3-bed detached houses.

Cork County Council ref. No. 215072

An Bord Pleanála ref. No. 313739 - 22

Introduction

The Heritage Council has been asked to comment on the above application by An Bord Pleanála, by letter dated 23rd June 2022.

This submission sets out to establish the heritage significance of the garden of Ashbourne House Hotel. Gardens are an often misunderstood and overlooked aspect of the heritage. The Heritage Council wishes to make the case for its protection as heritage in the planning system, at a time when the Irish government has declared a Climate and Biodiversity emergency. An Appendix sets out more reflective observations about the inclusion of gardens in the national heritage.

The submission does not examine the potential effects of the development on the Great Island Channel SAC, or Cork Harbour SPA[1]; however, Council wishes to note that it has supported local community groups in the protection of a nearby habitat at Harpur's Island, which is also in the Great Island Channel SAC, Great Island Channel proposed Natural Heritage Area (pNHA), and Cork Harbour SPA.

Nor does the submission examine the impact of the proposed development on the Protected Structure, Ashbourne House. Council defers to the expert opinions of Cork County Council's Architectural Conservation Officer in her three reports on this development which form part of the application documentation presumed to be before the board in its consideration of this application, and it supports the conditions Cork County Council attached to its grant of permission.

It is noted that since the decision on this application was made by Cork County Council, it has adopted a new Development Plan, with modified policies. One reference is nonetheless made to a specific policy in the now-superceded plan which remains relevant.

The Garden of Ashbourne House, Glounthane, Co. Cork

[1] The reference to the Glanmore Bog SAC (which appears to be in Co. Kerry) in the referral letter is taken to be a mistake.

In 1990, the garden at Ashbourne House Hotel was identified as one of 90 'Gardens in Ireland … with plant collections of outstanding significance'[2]. It had a collection (botanical and labelled as well as general and unlabelled) of national significance. It was open to the public (as well as hotel residents) from the 1960s to the 1990s and thus has social value in the collective memory of the local community as a recreation asset.

Ashbourne House is the last survivor of a trio of gardens belonging to Cork merchant princes who, at the start of the twentieth century, were enthusiastic and competitive plantsmen – William Gumbleton at Belgrove on Great Island, the Crawford family at Lakelands, Mahon, and Richard Henrick Beamish at Ashbourne House. Belgrove has now reverted to farmland, and Lakelands is under the Mahon Point shopping centre. These three gardens, along with others in Glanmire, were satellites to the great Fota House Garden, described in the *Irish Arts Review* of Summer 2005, as the collections of plantsmen engaged in experimental horticulture (as well as agriculture and forestry) to coax 'tender plants' from other parts of the world into existence in the hospitable soils, aspect and climate of the Cork Harbour area.

[2] In a letter, dated 12th June 1990 on the subject of gardens of outstanding importance in Ireland, from Dr. E. Charles Nelson, of An Taisce's Heritage Gardens Committee, to Lord Killanin, then Chairman of the (non-statutory) Heritage Council.

The Mountain Gum tree in the lawn to the South-west of Ashbourne House, An Irish Champion in terms of both girth and height (Photo: The Heritage Council, June 2022)

While Ashbourne is now in poor condition, many special flowers, trees and shrubs survive within the development site, and, in the right conditions, the garden is restorable. The proof that this is possible is provided by Ashbourne itself, which was restored after a period of mid-century neglect, by Mrs. Garde and her gardener Paddy Grandon, from 1945 to the mid-1960s. A nation-wide *Great Gardens of Ireland* restoration programme, funded by Fáilte Ireland from 1994 through until the early 2000s, set 25 or so exemplars on a course to provide delight to local, national and international visitors.

Gardens as heritage

Gardens have been defined as '*a purposeful arrangement of natural objects … with exposure to the sky or open air, in which the form is not fully accounted for by purely practical considerations such as*

convenience'[3]*.* This open definition emphasises the five key aspects of gardens that make them comprehensible as heritage:

- Spatial design (landscape architecture)
- Plantsmanship (horticulture, the creation of ecological niches)
- Maintenance and evolution to maturity (patience, futurity, inter-generational sharing)
- Repository of living species, safeguarded for what might be termed botanical purpose: a 'plant zoo' or reservation where collected species are curated when their natural habitats might be threatened.
- The specific characteristic of gardens as living matter, developing slowly and changing cyclically, which permits certain distinctive forms of interpretations of the passage of time, that can embody or convey meanings in ways that enduring monuments or ruins cannot.[4]

Relevant Development Plan policies

We note that Cork County Council's development plan at the time of application (Cork County Council Development Plan 2014 – 2020) had a policy to protect elements of the built heritage that are not structures in the strict meaning of the Act. This include *'designed gardens/garden features'* (Policy HE 4-3: Protection of Non-Structural Elements of Built Heritage).

The current Development Plan (adopted June 2022) also recognises the tourism potential of such places:

> *10.5.2 Tourism in County Cork is based on its rich natural and built heritage. The principle features of the area's tourism product include mountains and upland habitats; rivers and lakes, over 1100 km's of scenic rugged coastline and peninsulas with long stretches of sandy beaches, fertile agricultural land and many upland peatlands and forest/woodland areas. These natural assets combined with a rich heritage of archaeological and historical sites, built environment including manor homes and gardens, attractive towns and villages offer a unique tourism product.* (Cork County Council Development Plan 2022 – 2028, Vol. 1, p. 215)

The Heritage Council supported Cork County Council in the publication of *Guidance Notes for the Appraisal of Historic Gardens, Demesnes, Estates and their Settings*[5]*,* in 2007 in order to avoid the conflicts between development and the protection of these important heritage assets. This guidance is referenced in the current Development Plan under the section on ***Tourism Potential of Demesnes and Estates***:

> *10.17.1 Any development proposal sited within or adjacent to a historic or culturally significant garden, a demesne or a landscaped estate should include a detailed appraisal of the site. Details on the methodology for preparing an appropriate site appraisal can be found in the "Guidance Notes for the Appraisals of Historic Gardens, Demesnes, Estates*

[3] Miller, Mara, 1993. *The Garden as Art,* SUNY Press:15, quoted in Cooper, David, 2006, *A Philosophy of Gardens,* OUP.
[4] See Chapter 1 of Christopher Woodward, *In Ruins,* (2002, Vintage, London)
[5] https://www.yumpu.com/en/document/read/21789697/guidance-notes-for-the-appraisal-of-historic-gardens/10

and their Settings" prepared by Cork County Council in 2005 [recte 2007]. (Cork County Council Development Plan 2022 – 2028, Vol. 1, p. 222)

The *Architectural Heritage and Historical Landscape Impact Assessment, Ashbourne House, Glounthane, Co. Cork,* dated April 2021 by Louise M. Harrington partially meets the guidance in this document. It contains a statement as to the *Significance of the* Site (p. 13), in line with these guidlines:

Ashbourne House and Gardens are considered to be of special interest for:

1. *The horticultural importance of the historic planting from c.1890 – 1930*
2. *The designed landscape interest of a Robinsonian-style wooded garden, with bog garden, yew walk and rock garden,*
3. *The association of Richard Hendrik Beamish who was a member o the Linnean Society, London, but also an important figure in the business, civic and political life of Cork City in the early 20th Century*
4. *The architectural interest of the Edwardian renovations to the ground floor reception areas of the main house.'*

However, key aspects of the recommended stage 3 in the methodology of this document — assessing development proposals — have not been followed. The *Guidance* (2007, p. 16) suggests that 'those areas and features of the designed landscape' should be identified which

1. *'Should not be developed in order to protect heritage;*
2. *Could be developed within certain clearly defined parameters;*
3. *Could be developed if clearly defined mitigation is provided that is compatible with heritage conservation;*
4. *Could be developed with no impact on heritage.'*

The ACO in her reports on this development proposal has indicated that the second and/or third approach is possible in relation to Ashbourne House's gardens, and repeatedly guided the applicant towards such an approach.

Location, ecology, climate, biodiversity

The garden at Ashbourne House, only metres from the foreshore of an inner reach of Cork Harbour, where the River Lee becomes tidal at Lough Mahon, is situated in a micro-climate of temperate, sea-influenced absence of frost (relative warmth), augmented by the southern inclination of the land, sheltered from the prevailing Atlantic winter gales by the landmass of 50 km of low hills to the south-west towards Clonakilty. Cork gardeners at Fota, Lakelands, and Belgrove in the immediate vicinity exploited such conditions to create botanical collections that tested their plantsmanship, brought specimen plants from four continents, to be grown for their beauty, variety and composition. The Robinsonian garden layout and aesthetic at Ashbourne provided a setting to highlight the original horticultural virtuosity of R.H. Beamish, coaxing into growth the recalcitrant and fragile seeds and shoots of plants from markedly different climates.

Each such garden is a micro-ecology of site-specific factors that create the conditions for plants to survive outside of their natural habitat or range. The intensive care and cultivation of specific places can enrich the environment of humans, and create ecological niches where previously there were

extensive undifferentiated tracts of sameness[6]. All gardens require water (in the correct form) and shelter. They also require patience and time to come to fruition, and are thus inter-generational gifts, the embodiment of durability through time, of sustainability. Through the successive generations of visitors who experience these time-stilling places, they become an inheritance made public: heritage.

The labelling and documentation of the origin and species of such plants make them a living archive. The Heritage Council foresees that botanical collections will have increasing significance for world biodiversity, and food security, as climate impacts deepen along the lines predicted by the International Panel on Climate Change.

Horticultural and botanical recognition of the garden at Ashbourne House

Edward Malins and Patrick Bowe describe Ashbourne as situated 'On a Red Sandstone hill that overlooks Cork Harbour [where] Mr. R.H. Beamish began [in] 1900 an Alpine and subtropical garden [with] masses of exotic vegetation — cordyline palms, bamboos, drifts of Ghent azaleas and embothriums — standing out against the dark background of pines.'[7]. Malins and Bowe refer to plants from Mexico, New Zealand and China.

> *'The paramount impression made upon the visitor is that this is no ordinary garden. A natural wildness prevails everywhere, yet perfect harmony in colours has been achieved (where) the gardener … Mr. Williamson … places the healthy and general success of his plants above everything else.'*[8]

The 1898 Ordnance Survey map shows the grounds associated with Ashbourne House immediately before Richard Beamish began the planting and cultivating that brought the garden to international notice. On this map, the garden associated with the house were in Johnstown townland, at its western boundary, and appear to have been conventional in layout. The Alpine rock garden, developed by Richard Beamish from 1900 onwards in the former quarry, lies in Lackenroe td. Although the development site straddles the townland boundary, with Blocks D and E in Lackenroe td., it is acknowledged that at least this historically-significant portion of the garden now lies outside the development site.

The garden survived a period of neglect in the mid-Twentieth century, but was restored. It featured in Keith Lamb and Patrick Bowe's 1995 book, *A History of Gardening in Ireland*:

> '… at Ashbourne House, Glountahne, near Cork, Richard Beamish had a splendid garden which included a rock garden, described by W.H. Paine[9] as one of the finest examples of modern alpine gardening in the British Isles, and certainly the best in Ireland. It was landscaped on a large scale, with hills, valleys and a waterfall. Many more alpines grew well there, such as *Chananthus incanus, Aethionema kotschyana,* the delicate *Lithospermum rosmarinifolium,* and colonies of the hardy ladies slipper orchids *Cypripedium spectabile* and *C. macranthum.* The origin of an especially fine saxifrage,

[6] Illnacullin off Glengariff, Co. Cork, is a salient example of such positive transformation: see Appendix.
[7] *Irish Gardens and Demesnes from 1830,* 1980, Rozzoli, New York, p. 116
[8] *The Gardner's Chronicle* 4th November 1911
[9] *The Gardner's Chronicle* (1911): 315, 322.

> *Saxifraga callosa* 'Albertii'[10] is attributed to Ashbourne House[11]. Richard Beamish cultivated Hymalayan poppies (*Meconpsis*) and was the first to raise *Meconpsis x beamishii*, a hybrid he produced by crossing the blue *M. grandis* with the yellow *M. integrifolia*[12]. Paine's description of Ashbourne included photographs of the rock garden and plants, as well as some of the sub-tropical plants grown elsewhere in the garden. Though the rock garden has gone, many fine trees and shrubs still grow in Ashbourne, including *Acacia, Camellia, Sciadopitys, Pittosporum, Corokia, Cornus, Osmanthus, Magnolia, Eucalyptus, Drimys* and a fine yew walk. Various bulbs are naturalised about the grounds.'[13]

The Gardens of Ashbourne House by the head gardener, Sheila Miller, was published in 1997, a celebration of the work to maintain and restore it since the 1950s, and a guide to what had survived of the early plantings to that time.

Currently, the garden in the immediate vicinity of the buildings is in good condition, with several specimen trees well presented in lawns and clearings. Much of the garden beyond these lawns is in poor condition and inaccessible due to neglect and the overgrowth of briars, etc., but 15 to 25 specimen and 'Champion' trees are concealed in the unmaintained parts, including, it is understood, the yew walk, and many of the notable plants referred to in Miller's 1997 guide. These are described in the *Arboricultural Champion and Heritage Tree Report* by Tree Management Services, dated 12th January 2022, submitted as part of a request for further information. This states *'A large percentage of the trees on the Tree Council of Ireland list* [i.e. of 'champion trees'] *are still present on the site.'* Unfortunately this report does not go on to assert how a development might be laid out or modified in order to secure the protection of these heritage assets.

The 'special interest' of this garden

Gardens as such are not protected by the specific legislative provisions of the Planning and Development Acts, except insofar as they might contain structures and be within the curtilage of a protected structure. Even then, works to plants do not constitute development and are not in any consistent way subject to development control. Gardens, however, form part of the *setting* of buildings (whether protected or not) and planners often consider **amenity** and **setting** as material considerations in planning decisions[14]. The care and conservation of historic gardens is, in these broader terms, an important part of the 'proper planning and sustainable development' of a place.

The Planning and Development Acts does provide at Section 205, for Tree Preservation Orders, but these, unfortunately are rarely used, perhaps because of the difficulty of enforcing the provisions. Cork County Council's current Development Plan states:

> *'15.7.5 Development can, if not sensitively designed, located and built, result in loss of or damage to important trees. The Council has a presumption in favour of retaining existing trees as a first preference in the formulation and assessment of development proposals. Where trees or groups of trees are of particular value and may be at risk from development*

[10] Formerly called *Saxifraga lingulate* 'Albertii', also known as *Saxifraga lingulate* 'Albida' - Keith Index hortensis gives these as separate plants.
[11] Ingwersen, W. [c.1949] *Handbook No. 1* East Grimstead.
[12] Taylor, G. 1934. *An account of the genus Meconopsis,* London, p. 1.
[13] Lamb and Bowe, 1995, *A History of Gardening in Ireland,* National Botanic Gardens, Glasnevin. p. 197-8
[14] … even in the absence of a statutory basis for consideration using these terms or concepts.

or other activities, consideration should be given to the making of tree preservation orders in accordance with the Tree Preservation Guidelines.' (Vol. 1, p. 342)

It goes on to assert:

County Development Plan Objective BE 15-8: Trees and Woodlands
a) Protect trees the subject of Tree Preservation Orders.
b) Make use of Tree Preservation Orders to protect important trees or groups of trees which may be at risk or any tree(s) that warrants an order given its important amenity or historic value.
c) Encourage the provision of trees for urban shading and cooling in developments in urban environments and as an integral part of the public realm.
d Preserve and enhance the general level of tree cover in both town and country. Ensure that development proposals do not compromise important trees and include an appropriate level of new tree planting.
e) Where appropriate, to protect mature trees/groups of mature trees and mature hedgerows that are not formally protected under Tree Preservation Orders' (Vol. 1, p. 343)

It is understood that there are only two such orders are currently in place in Cork County Council's functional area, and that they do not relate to Ashbourne House. Objective BE 15-8 (e) is relevant to this planning decision.

The Planning and Development Acts provides a wide range of terms to describe structures or areas that could be of special interest: Archaeological, Architectural, Artistic, Cultural, Historic, Social Scientific and Technical. All of these terms could be applied to gardens, even though they are made of living elements that are not buildings.

Designed gardens modify space in the way that buildings do, and can create *architectural* effects, as when an avenue of yew trees are planted. In some settings, even a dead tree can be retained to signify the antiquity of the demesne (for example, in the Ashbourne House Garden there is a dead Blue Atlas Cedar (tag 1088, *Arboricultural Report*, p 11), which may signify in this way).

Knowledge of soil and climate is manifestation of *scientific* interest, as when Alpine plants are cultivated on thin acidic soils, on quarried rock faces, or aqueous plants are presented in waterlogged spots such as a 'bog garden'.

The management of water, a crucial element in any horticulture, often used ingenious *technical* measures.

Plants are grown for colour, the form and texture of their foliage, their overall sculptural shape, and scale, all of which can generate aesthetic or *artistic* interest. The placement of trees, their size and shape, and the colour, scale and texture of their leaves and branches, catching the light of the sky in all its moods, in breeze and stillness, in both winter and summer, can be carefully composed for effect.

The management of a garden and its presentation choreographs *social* relations, as between visitors and hosts, plant collectors and botanists. People are the vectors for the international connections linking the original habitats to this location, also a form of social significance.

The root meaning of 'culture' is 'cultivation', and gardening, even with the most modest ambitions, thus has *cultural* value.

Gardens can exemplify a *historical* way of life, and a geographical network of connections to places and habitats across the world. The style of gardening represents a *zeitgeist,* and is a historical fact.

More fundamentally, the different time scales that it takes for plants to reach maturity provide a thread of time-depth that make the past vivid not by the re-presentation of former state of a place, but by demonstrating time passing, cyclically through the year, and from year to year through maturation. John Ruskin's observation (quoted in the appendix) emphasises how gardens are essentially gifts to future people. One could say that planting a garden is planning at its most generous-spirited.

Even though a garden is made of plant matter that cannot be defined as a human-made 'structure' within the meaning of the Planning and Development Acts, the terms used to protect the heritage value of places can be applied to them. Council submits that this analysis is a material consideration in making a decision about the development (or protection from development) of this property.

The Impact of the development on the garden heritage

Council asserts that the full extent of the historical garden is the curtilage of Ashbourne House. Case law in the UK affirms that a curtilage, the area immediately associated with a building for its enjoyment and use, can be extensive[15], and can vary over time[16]. The concept of curtilage is not clearly defined in Irish or in UK law[17] and rarely differentiates between the use of the concept in relation to buildings in general, and demands made of it by consideration of the character, atmosphere, context or setting which it is generally felt a building of historic or artistic importance deserves. For this reason, the Heritage Council has recommended to the Planning Advisory Forum of the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage that a legally defined concept of 'heritage curtilage' be inserted into the forthcoming revision of the Planning and Development Acts. Whilst it is not the duty of An Bord Pleanála to make policy decisions, the case of the gardens of Ashbourne House Hotel is moot.

Any new buildings (which will come with graded vehicular access for fire engines, etc.) in the extended garden area will bring physical and horticultural disruption to the micro-eco-system of the garden. The construction phase of the building project will cause widespread damage or disruption, impacting on vegetation groups, and root spreads, no matter what construction risk mitigation measures are taken. Ultimately constructing buildings in the garden cannot but alter its character or atmosphere. If the garden is deserving of an equivalent level of protection as a protected structure, it is its *character* that the provisions of Part IV of the Planning and Development Acts would set out to maintain.

Cunnane Stratton Reynolds Drawing 20423—150, dated December 2021, references Article 12 of the ICOMOS *Florence Charter*[18] as the guide for the post-development treatment of the Bog Garden area. This states:

> *Those species of trees, shrubs, plants and flowers to be replaced periodically must be selected with regard for established and recognised practice in each botanical and*

15 Dyer v Dorset County Council [1989] QB 346; see Mynors, Charles. *Listed Buildings Conservation Areas and Monuments,* Fourth Edition, London Sweet and Maxwell, 2006.

16 [2007] EWHC 2776 (Admin), Sumption and London Borough of Greenwich Hillside House in Crooms Hill, Greenwich. See Moffat, Stuart, *Journal of Planning and Environmental Law*, Issue 12, 2008.

17 A review of Part IV of the Planning and Development Acts has made recommendations on changes to this aspect of the Irish legislation. In the interim, most legal *dicta* made in the UK could be taken as precedent for Ireland on the basis of the similarity of the legal jurisdictions.

18 http://www.international.icomos.org/charters/gardens_e.pdf

horticultural region, and with the aim to determine the species initially grown and to preserve them.

This is a selective use from the Charter. The article immediately preceding states:

Continuous maintenance of historic gardens is of paramount importance. Since the principal material is vegetal, the preservation of the garden in an unchanged condition requires both prompt replacements when required and a long-term programme of periodic renewal (clear felling and replanting with mature specimens).

The historic significance and integrity of this garden as an intact whole, outlined in detail in the *Arboricultural Champion and Heritage Tree Report* referenced above, is what adherence to the ICOMOS *Florence Charter* would advocate.

The following are some impacts that can be foreseen if the development proposals were approved:

- The Revised Arboricultural Assessment by Tree Management Services, dated 12th January 2022, states on p. 6 that *Ehretia Dicksonii* 'a very rare tree' (item 34 on the map and text) is in existence at the south-western corner of the tennis court area; it is proposed to develop this area as Block E, a 4- and 5-storey block of 23 apartments.
- There are substantial and significant planting survivals in the area called the 'Bog Garden' to the east end of the development site which will be impacted on by the semi-detached houses identified as F2 in the development proposal.

  Sheila Miller was head gardener at Ashbourne House in the 1980s and 1990s, and subsequently worked briefly in a voluntary capacity with refugee residents of the hotel to maintain the garden. In her appeal submission to An Bord Pleanála dated 2nd June 2022, she refers to the former Bog Garden ('pool area') to the east of the site as 'the most intact area', *'valuable in a botanical sense, intensely planted with a higher density of extant Heritage and Champion trees …* [an] *almost complete microcosm of the Robinsonian garden.'* Her claim is that the hydrogeology of this area, and therefore the micro-eco-system which sustains the champion and heritage trees, is threatened by the proposed semi-detached housing at the southern boundary of the site. A stream flows into this area from the north, and the constructed or natural drainage features of the area maintains constant undisturbed waterlogged conditions essential for the roots of the species flourishing here. Even if a hydrogeological design could be created to retain these conditions, the risks of destabilising the hydrogeology and creating an accidental impact inherent in the construction phase represent a direct threat to this valuable ecosystem. This should be given consideration as a material impact on the horticultural heritage of the site.

Any 'enabling development'[19] should be the minimum necessary to repair, maintain and sustain the heritage value of the place, and should take the conservation of the horticultural and heritage value of the garden as its principal objective. A heritage-led approach is possible for the adaptive re-use, and presentation of this heritage site of national importance.

What future for this garden?

[19] See Historic England, 2020, *Enabling Development and Heritage Assets Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning: 4.*

Many gardens fall into disrepair. Plants (trees, shrubs and flowers) can be lost in overgrowth, but survive and be re-found. The proof that this is possible was provided by the 25 or so exemplars in *Great Gardens of Ireland* restoration programme of the 1990s. A garden needs many years of constant attention to be restored, and this cannot be gainsaid in the nexus of a planning decision. However, restoration cannot happen if a place that has reached the ecological poise of a rich plant succession and ensemble is destroyed; this can only be secured by a decision to protect the garden and not develop it.

In the face of the Climate and Biodiversity Emergency, the conservation of gardens with exemplary individual plants or trees, or groups of plants, will become a climate adaptation and resilience strategy internationally. The South coast of Ireland, and, in particular, the sheltered climate of Cork Harbour, with ocean waters practically guaranteeing freedom from prolonged or severe frost, are strategically important for global biodiversity. The scientific management of a network of local, national and international gardens as botanical gardens, sheltering and propagating rare and endangered plant life, will be recognised as an important part of a climate biodiversity strategy, as well as providing local amenity value.

Conclusion

> 'Ashbourne House, whose limited size forbids its ever ranking as a major Irish garden, is nevertheless of considerable historical importance in both the quality and derivation of its plants, not to mention its attractions for less scientifically minded gardeners who will greatly enjoy the beauty of its considerable range of trees and shrubs.' (Jack Whaley, 1990, *The Gardens of Ireland: A Visitor's Guide,* Poolbeg, Swords. p. 23-4)

The garden of Ashbourne House Hotel is an important national heritage place that deserves to be protected for its heritage values. These depend on its intactness as a micro-eco-system which supports rare and exotic plant species, and has historical and aesthetic dimensions.

It is also of local value as an amenity to residents of Glounthane and its surroundings. This is attested to by the submissions to Cork County Council of local residents and interested parties. It has the potential to be more significant as a place to visit for more widespread groups of people.

Although not a structure within the meaning of the Act, this submission has outlined how a garden could be considered to have many of the same characteristic of 'special interest', outlined in S.50 of the Act that a structure could have. The case for protection, and against any building work in the grounds or curtilage, is made on the basis that these characteristics are present in the living plant elements in the garden.

For these reasons, the Heritage Council recommends refusal of permission to develop any of the buildings on the site in the current proposals. It agrees with the decision of Cork County Council that the Protected Structure could be developed in accordance with that aspect of the application.

A decision of An Bord Pleanála to refuse permission to develop the grounds cannot guarantee the future restoration of this important garden, but a decision to grant will significantly compromise its special interest, character and public value. A heritage-led approach to the development of this special place is possible.

Colm Murray

Remnants of the arched Yew Walk in the grounds of Ashbourne House Hotel (Photo: The Heritage Council, June 2022)

Tasmanian Blue Gum tree (Tag 196, 1997 publication ref.45) *to the west of Ashbourne House (Photo: The Heritage Council, June 2022)*

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Appendix

Cultural characteristics of gardens

Gardens are important intermediate zones between the interior human-dominated space of buildings and the wider natural world. They are the zone in which human co-operation with nature is exemplified to the greatest extent, and with an extended cultural history in all human societies. It is in gardens that people observe, coax and augment the power of plants to grow: that 'nature will give the increase', to paraphrase gardener Gertrude Jekyll. In '*Ireland …* [plants] *will flourish better, generally speaking, than almost anywhere else in the world. … It is the wide range of excellent garden plants which is the most notable feature of the gardens of Ireland.*' (p. 6 of undated (1970s) An Taisce *Survey of Great Houses and Gardens in Ireland: Gardens*).

Gardens create microclimates to facilitate the flourishing of special plants. They are places created by humans to accommodate the needs of other species to flourish

The time taken for a garden to reach maturity places this class of places in a special relationship with the future and prompts an ethic of respect for the efforts made by predecessors. John Ruskin put this most eloquently:

> *'The idea of self denial for the sake of posterity, of practicing present economy for the sake of debtors yet unborn, of planting forests that our descendants may live under their shade, or of raising cities for future nations to inhabit, never, I suppose, efficiently takes place among the publicly recognised motives of exertion. Yet these are not the less our duties; nor is our part fitly sustained upon the earth, unless the range of our intended and deliberate usefulness include, not only our companions but the successors of our pilgrimage. God has lent us the earth for our life; it is a great entail. It belongs as much to those who are to come after us, and whose names are already written on the book of creation, as to us: and we are no right, by any thing that we do or neglect, to involve them in unnecessary penalties, or deprive them of the benefits which it was in our power to bequeath'.*[20]

What makes a garden a part of the heritage?

Four key aspects of garden heritage:

- Spatial design (landscape architecture)
- Plantsmanship (ecology, horticulture, collecting)
- Maintenance and evolution to maturity (patience, futurity, inter-generational sharing)
- The botanical garden ('plant zoo' or reservation where species threatened in their natural habitats find refuge), living genetic repository.
- Living heritage: the specific materiality of gardens can embody or convey meanings that other forms of durable heritage cannot.

Gardens can have symbolic, metaphorical, and utilitarian meanings, sometimes all at the same time. They exemplify ways of life, relations with the natural world, and the virtues of care and attentiveness

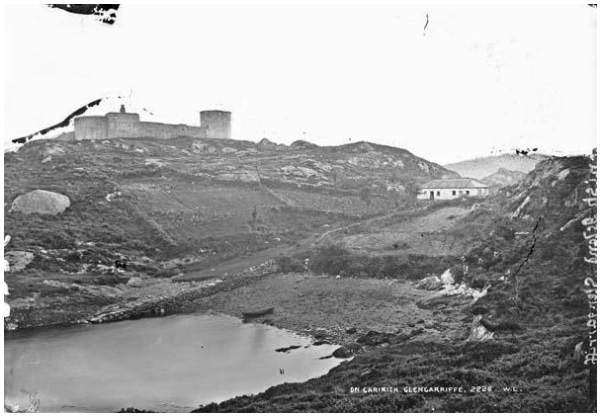
[20] John Ruskin, *The seven lamps of architecture,* 1848.

to other living things. They can provide succour, refuge and peace to humans and wildlife. For these reasons they integrate into the social and cultural life of a place, larger than the boundaries of property ownership, its history and heritage.

Most especially, a garden is a habitat can provide the conditions for plants to live outside the biomes in which they were originally found. Gardens can create micro-environments, modifying the conditions of their prevailing context, in which more fragile plants can grow than is the norm in a given climate zone. This cultivation has important genetic conservation possibilities, as 'native' habitats the world over are threatened with erasure through climate change or development[21]. This sense is captured by the concept of a 'botanical garden', curated to consciously collect diverse species. The case has been made that a network of botanical gardens should be put in place to conserve genetic diversity, maintain living exemplars of rare or threatened plants.

Climate Change, Designed Landscapes, Gardens and Plant Collections

Demesnes and Gardens are part of our cultural as well as our natural inheritance, the result of intensive cultivation and stewardship of the grounds around dwellings. They can be a work of art as much as a scene of cultivation. The very idea of gardening – '*a purposeful arrangement of natural objects … with exposure to the sky or open air, in which the form is not fully accounted for by purely practical considerations such as convenience'*[22] – defines the garden as the primary observatory of natural processes, which should now, of necessity, include the changing climate. Ireland's gardens are esteemed for the botanic breadth and variety of their collections, exploiting the mildness of the climate and the variety of micro-climatic opportunities presented by the varied landforms of the island. Alongside the introduction of plants of practical purpose, non-native species, from potato and tobacco crop plants, to Beech trees, the last several hundred years have seen the introduction of exotic species and the nurturing of non-native plant colonies for aesthetic or scientific purposes. The question of the ability of a plant import to survive in its new environment is primarily a litmus test of the host climate (all other factors being equal).



Garnish (Illnacullin), Gelngariff, Co. Cork, c.1900, before gardening was commenced

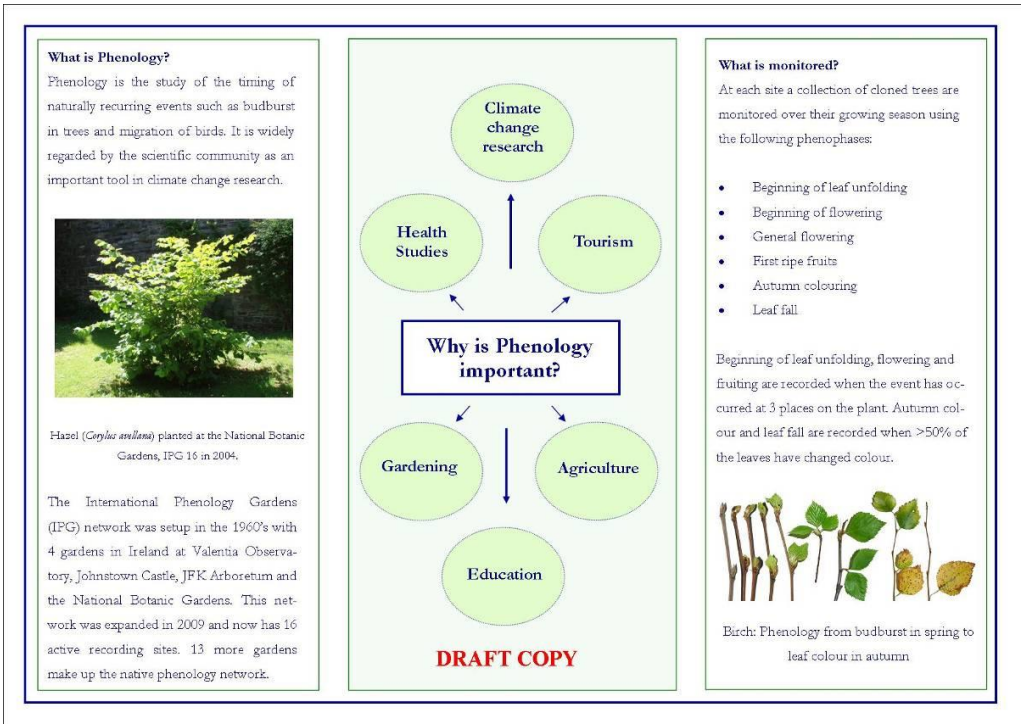
Garnish (Illnacullin) as a mature 'Italianate' garden

[21] Acknowledging, nonetheless, that plant escapes can lead to unwanted invasions of rampant alien species without natural predators or ecosystem constraints.

[22] Miller, Mara, 1993. *The Garden as Art,* SUNY Press:15, quoted in Cooper, David, 2006, *A Philosophy of Gardens,* OUP

The intensive care and cultivation of specific places can enrich the environment of man, and create ecological niches where previously there were extensive undifferentiated tracts of sameness. Illnacullin off Glengariff, Co. Cork, is a salient example of such positive transformation. This in itself represents a tradition and inheritance as much as Georgian Lafranchini Brothers plasterwork in a house. The assemblage of plants in a collection in a particular place can, in itself, represent a unique aesthetic experience, scientific achievement or success of husbandry and an inheritance that deserves to be maintained. The heritage value of these designed landscapes has been overlooked.

In these places of interaction between the cultural and the natural realms, we pay attention to the responses of living things to environmental change. Phenology (the study of the timing of developmental changes in plants, such as the expansion of first leaves, opening of flowers, leaf fall) is providing clear indications of the reality of climate change, which is almost starker than the meteorological evidence. Growing seasons can be seen to lengthen significantly, with Spring arriving six days earlier each decade, and Autumn being delayed two days each decade in the UK and Ireland. And these changes are registered directly in the trees and plants that constitute the garden. Phenology provides substantive and demonstrable evidence of climate change.



Whilst extreme weather events should, in the short term, be considered to lie within the range of the natural variability of a climate, and should not be confused with global climate change, these events are likely to become more common with the increasing instability of the world's climate systems. In terms of inevitable impact on heritage exposed to the elements, the distinction is ultimately not significant. It matters not to a fallen tree whether the wind that caused it can be blamed on climate change or a statistically-predictable one-in-a-hundred year return period event.

The remnants of Hurricane Charley that crossed Ireland in August 1986 had a major effect on Irish gardens. Mount Ussher Garden in Co. Wicklow was flooded by the Vartry River as a result of high levels

of rainfall in the catchments upstream in the Wicklow mountains.[23] At Creagh Gardens, Skibbereen Co. Cork, a length of about 200 metres of shoreline to the estuary of the River Ilen was breached by sea water, overrunning the garden and leading to repair and defence at the shoreline with gabions. Fota House lost the Atlantic Cedar tree that was the central feature of the lawn to the rear of the house to the high winds. The winds felled trees across the country, in particular along the Cork and Kerry coasts. Anecdotal evidence suggests that a key issue in protecting gardens from damage due to high winds is the presence and maintenance of shelterbelts, emphasising the importance of good stewardship and the preventative approach. Climate change will lead to an increased frequency for such events.

Phenophases

BO Beginning of leaf unfolding
M May shoot
B Beginning of flowering
AB General flowering
J St. John's sprout
F First ripe fruits
LV Autumn colouring
BF Leaf Fall

	BO	M	B	AB	J	F	LV	BF
Betula pubescens								

'…the lessons offered by long established garden maintenance techniques are being recognised increasingly as analogous to techniques which could be required in the wider aspects of landscape and nature conservation, if fragile habitats … are to survive and adapt to climate change.' (Bisgrove & Hadley, 2002)

[23] http://www.ukweatherworld.co.uk/forum/forums/thread-view.asp?tid=4173&posts=6