

## A TALE FROM TABLEY

Users of Chester Road (A556) between Knutsford and Northwich may be familiar with the White Lodge set back from the road across the Waterless Brook. The lodge is situated where the former Knutsford Road entered and then crossed the park. Once the new house was complete in 1767 the Leicesters no longer wanted to see the Knutsford traffic passing their door and had the road diverted to its present course. The White Lodge was built c1770 to mark the entrance of what then became a drive, and ever since has announced the house and parkland which are screened by a boundary belt of trees.



**The White Lodge in 1998**

Tabley House has belonged to the University of Manchester since about 1976 following the death of the last owner Lieutenant - Colonel John Leicester-Warren. Crown Estates have owned the 1,460 hectares (3,608 acres) estate since 2007. In the past few years Crown Estates have been selling off outlying properties including the gamekeeper's cottage, farmhouses and farm buildings. The White Lodge was also sold, a Grade II listed building of 1770, thought to be by John Carr who designed Tabley House. The lodge had been empty and was in a state of disrepair. In order to make a viable dwelling, the new owners applied for planning permission to extend in 2013. The proposal for additional accommodation to the rear was designed to minimise the visual impact on the historic building and retain the lodge's character.

Building work became protracted and the lodge was sold again in January 2016. Work recommenced and changes began to take place in the surrounding landscape. In recent months these changes have included construction of a crude subsoil mound to the site boundary which degrades the historic landscape and destroys the setting and meaning of the lodge. Having watched with interest and concern for some time it was time to investigate.



**The White Lodge September 2017**

First – a quick search of Historic England’s website confirmed that the lodge and associated ground with mound lie within the registered parkland (Grade II) of Tabley House <https://www.historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1320422> . Next an email to our Gardens Trust colleagues to check whether we had received notice of this planning application. Answer – no, despite the fact that Local Authorities have a statutory duty to notify the Gardens Trust (and previously the Garden History Society) of any application affecting a registered landscape. Then a search of Cheshire East’s planning applications produced the application for work to White Lodge, including the planning officer’s report and the Notice of Decision. <http://planning.cheshireeast.gov.uk/applicationdetails.aspx?pr=13/1417M>

Neither the applicant nor the planning officer (who has since left) mentioned that the lodge lay within the registered parkland, and the condition regarding boundary treatment was not specified. After an initial ‘phone call to Cheshire East planning I was advised to report a suspected breach of planning online [http://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/planning/planning\\_enforcement/planning\\_enforcement.aspx](http://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/planning/planning_enforcement/planning_enforcement.aspx)

Having reported online, Cheshire East promptly confirmed that *“the Local Planning Authority are already investigating the matter along with other issues found at the time of the officers site visit.”* In response to a further email the Conservation Officer replied expressing her concern regarding the Tabley estate; she is investigating the failure to pick up the designation and follow statutory procedures, and has stated that a new application will be required and that all parties will be consulted. Wait and see.

**The moral of this Tabley tale is that if you see something that looks quite wrong, do check;**

it is quite likely that it doesn’t have planning permission. Local Authority planning, enforcement and particularly conservation officers are all stretched. A recent report by Historic England has noted a further decline in conservation officer numbers. Consequently this makes our contribution as Cheshire Gardens Trust all the more important – contributing to planning policy and consultations, responding to planning applications and in this case, seeing that the law is enforced. At times it seems a thankless task but, gradually, the Trust is gaining influence, raising awareness, and helping to ensure that changes to our historic landscapes respect significance.