

# Fernhill Park & Gardens - Have Your Say



# Introduction

## Overview

Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council (DLRCC) has recently acquired Fernhill Park and Gardens and intends to develop the property as a Regional public park. Fernhill is a former substantial family residence with ancillary buildings on 34 hectares of land (gardens, parkland, woodland and agricultural land) just south of the Enniskerry Road at Stepside, County Dublin.

Fernhill House and Gardens form an important component of the historic landscape on the fringe of Dublin City and an impressive example of a small estate dating back to around 1723. The former substantial family residence with ancillary buildings is surrounded by gardens, parkland, woodland and agricultural land in an elevated location overlooking Dublin Bay. In addition to the main house, which requires considerable refurbishment, there are three further residential units in the grounds - a period gate lodge, situated at the main entrance, a Garden cottage located adjacent to the walled garden which was converted from a small barn into a residential unit, currently occupied on a life tenancy basis by a member of the Walker family, and a modern system built single storey house situated in the old farm yard.

Historic records indicate that the estate gardens and an arboretum were established in the 1860's, and extended towards the turn of the 19th century with the inclusion of a number of water features, rockeries and a collection of many unusual Rhododendron varieties. The general design is said to have been strongly influenced by the Irish 'naturalist' gardener William Robinson (1838-1935), who spurred the movement that evolved into the English Cottage Garden style. Further improvements during the mid-20th century to the walks, additional topographical features and upgrading of the information on the plant collections, facilitated the opening of the gardens to the general public.

The historic natural character of the site presents the opportunity for developing a unique public amenity, not only to serve the residents of DLRCC and surrounding region, but also as a prime visitor attraction in close proximity to Dublin and the Wicklow Mountains National Park.

## Project Aims & Objectives:

The following are considered to be the current principal aims and objectives of the development of Fernhill Park & Gardens;

To develop Fernhill Park and Gardens as a high quality sustainable regional public park.

- To conserve and restore Fernhill House and relevant ancillary buildings and provide suitable and sustainable uses associated with the properties in the setting of the public park.
- To conserve and restore (where appropriate) the gardens and woodlands in a sustainable manner.
- To conserve and restore (where appropriate) the landscape heritage features and retain the historic natural character of the site.
- To ensure the agricultural and sylvan character of the site is retained and enhanced where possible.
- To strike a balance between the heritage, people and wildlife while also providing opportunities for active and passive recreation.
- To ensure sustainable innovative proposals and green principles are at the core of the project.
- To provide a suitable range of visitor facilities.
- To develop aesthetically pleasing and functional spaces while protecting and enhancing heritage features, views and site characteristics in a manner that will facilitate sustainable maintenance.
- Provide safe and secure access to the park for pedestrians and a moderate number of vehicles.

- Provide for a modest number of car parking spaces in the most suitable location(s) designed to be incorporated in with the character of the site.
- Provide a safe and secure circulation network.
- Provide opportunities for informal and or formal play.
- Provide a strong link to Barnacullia Road and to the Three Rock Mountain.
- Ensure the right of way is maintained, enhanced and developed as an integral part of the park.

## Public Consultation – Call for Ideas:

Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council are in the process of completing a Feasibility Study for Fernhill and intend to commence the design process in early 2017. Prior to commencing this, Dun laoghaire Rathdown County Council would like to invite submissions from interested parties to have their say on the design and development of Fernhill. The submissions can also include ideas for the use of the house and the other buildings on the site.

Those interested parties should upload their submissions at the following location <https://dlrcoco.citizenspace.com/>. This is a non-statutory public consultation process and will be followed by the statutory process upon completing the Masterplan. All submissions received will be considered in the development of the Masterplan. All submissions will be treated with confidentiality.

The closing date for receipt of submissions or observations is Tuesday the 31st January 2016.

## Supplementary Information:

Enclosed with this document is the following supplementary background information which should inform any opinions and ideas;

- Existing Site Features
- History of the Estate
- Fernhill Gardens
- Fernhill House
- Built & Natural Heritage
- Landscape Sensitivity
- Development – Key Influences

## Proposed Public Visits to Fernhill:

Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council intend to allow access for members of the public where interested parties will be facilitated in visiting the estate in a controlled manner. There is limited car parking available so those interested in attending are encouraged to arrive on foot or by bicycle. Access will be via the existing gated entrance on the Enniskerry Road. These visits will take place on Thursday the 19th and Friday the 20th January 2017 both at 10:00. Suitable walking shoes should be worn.

## Proposed Presentation by Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council:

In addition, Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council will hold an informal presentation followed by questions and answers in Sandyford Community Centre (Lambcross) on Wednesday the 18th and 25th January 2017 at 20:30.

# Existing Site Features



The main existing uses and features of the Fernhill Estate as identified on the adjoining plan include:

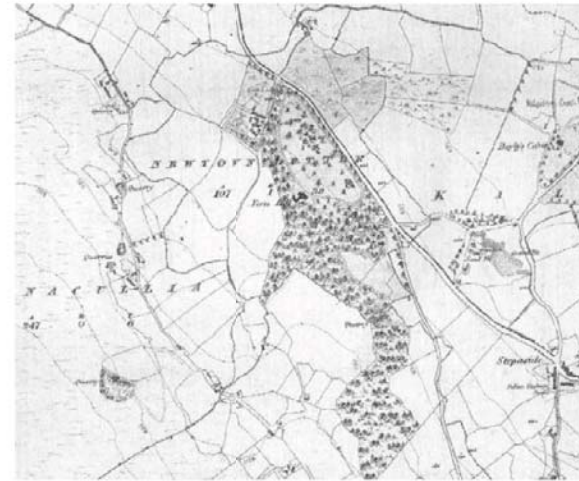
1. Main House
2. Stable Yard
3. Kitchen Garden
4. Gate Lodge
5. Car park
6. The Avenue
7. Meadow
8. The Broadwalk
9. Sweet Chestnut
10. Stream and waterfall
11. Laurel Lawn
12. Midway plantation
13. Public Right-of-Way
14. Tunnel
15. Quarry Walk
16. Top Walk
17. Herd Field
18. Wood Field
19. Nine Acre Field
20. Road Field
21. Private residences

# History of the Estate

## National Inventory of Architectural Heritage (NIAH) Garden Survey Fern Hill (DU-50-0-185244) Fact Sheet

Site Status: Main features substantially present - some loss of integrity.

Initial Overview	
Site Footprint Visible	Yes
Boundary Defined	Yes
Significant Development	No
Feature Richness Index	7
Architectural Features	
Principal Building	Yes
Garden Structures	No
Gateways and Gatehouses	Yes
Comments	Gate lodge.
Buildings of Indeterminate Purpose	Yes
Movement Within Site	
Entrances have changed	No
Drive position has changed	No
Avenues	No
Woodland Drives or Walks	Yes
Landscape Features	
Woodlands	Yes
Woodland Footprint Changed	Yes
Comments	Area enlarged by natural infill.
Orchards	No
Parkland	Yes
Formal Garden	Yes
Comments	Small area near house.
Kitchen / Walled and Productive Gardens	Yes
Vistas	No
Allees	No
Natural and Naturalistic Water Features	No
Artificial Water Features	No
Other Features	No



Fernhill Estate - Ordnance Survey First Edition 6" Series

## Evolution of the Estate

Fernhill is an impressive example of a small country estate, comprising a former substantial family residence with ancillary buildings, surrounded by gardens, parkland, woodland and agricultural land in an elevated location overlooking Dublin Bay.

The original house was built by Alderman Frederick Darley during the early part of the 19th century - he acquired the lease of the Newtown Little townland in 1815. The land had previously been farmed, and there are records indicating that the original single-storey house (possibly a hunting lodge) dated to around 1723. The Darleys held and managed the land as tenants of the Verner family, who were based in County Armagh. They were actively involved with the construction industry, both as builders and architects, and opened-up stone quarries on the hill slopes above the house.

Between 1821-1837 two old roads running through the estate were closed, and a new road between Woodside and Stepside constructed "...to pass conveniently close to Fernhill but slightly removed so as to enhance the privacy of the house"<sup>(3)</sup>. A 'private road' from Barnacullia to Stepside was opened-up through the western part of the estate, so that Judge Darley and his tenants might have a short cut to the high road, which in 1860 was altered in order to assist the building of a tunnel under the Broadwalk.

The sunken pass-way was the subject of a court case in 1861, but the court held that no right-of-way existed - "...this had been the only road from Barnacullia to Stepside as late as 1825 but even then it was described as a private road"<sup>(3)</sup>. Although the pass-way was stopped for several years, it was later opened up again subject to it being closed for one day each year, and the route is now defined as a Public Right of Way.

The gardens were further extended towards the turn of the 19th century with the inclusion of a number of water features, rockeries and a collection of many unusual rhododendron varieties.

Whereas the original estate would have extended to around 110 acres, in the mid-19th century 26 acres were sold to form the lands for Rosemount School.

Following almost 100 years occupation, the Darley's sold the estate in 1934 to the Walker family who, during the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, undertook further improvement works to the walks, as well as additional topographical features and restoring the water features. In recognition of their more informal nature, this is now considered to be in the style of a Robinsonian garden (after the Irish 'naturalist' gardener William Robinson 1838-1935, who spurred the movement that evolved into the English Cottage Garden style). These improvements, combined with the upgrading of the information on the plant collections, facilitated the opening of the gardens to the general public.

Fernhill is recognised as a designed landscape of special quality. Both the Darley's and the Walker's followed in this long tradition of garden design, adapting the grounds at Fernhill to suit their personal circumstances and according to the fashions of the time.

Fernhill Garden is now included in the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS)<sup>(4)</sup> List for Ireland of Gardens and Parks of National and International Importance.

The house and gardens are also entered on the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage (NIAH)<sup>(5)</sup>, Survey of Historic Gardens and Designed Landscapes.

## NOTE:

The history of Fernhill House and Gardens is well documented, for further details see References.

# Fernhill Gardens



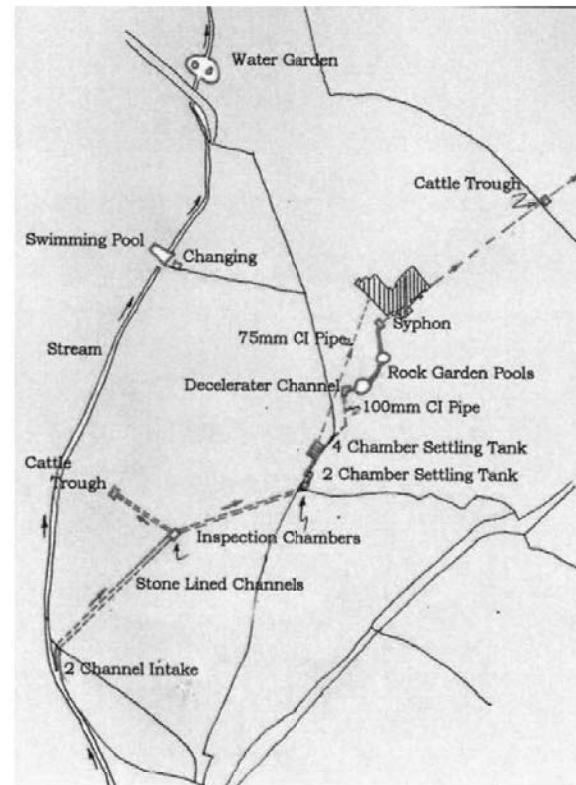
The Broadwalk at the bridge crossing



Ornamental planting within the arboretum



The former water gardens



Fernhill garden water supply arrangements <sup>(3)</sup>

## Garden Development

The Darley's first planted a shelter belt of Scots pine and larch around the estate to break up the prevailing wind from the southwest. The estate gardens and an arboretum were laid out in 1860's, but the main contribution of the Darley's to the ornamental garden was a broadwalk - a flat terraced walk "...extremely wide, so that a group of three ladies in their wide skirts could walk side by side, conversing while they took the afternoon air"<sup>(3)</sup>. They also created a formal kitchen garden, some distance from the house, with box-hedged borders of flowers and vegetables. These features, along with the typically Irish laurel lawn and planting of conifers, are reminders of a more formal era.

Towards the end of the 19th century, the Darley's built a rock garden and a water garden, as well as a swimming pool, requiring complex waterworks for diverting water from the local stream:

"A mountain stream was split into two channels and water was directed across a wide field through sunken stone-lined channels with a feed to a cattle trough. Inspection chambers and settling tanks were introduced to deal with sand and grit flowing down in times of flood."<sup>(3)</sup>

Water from the swimming pool was channeled back into the stream and continued onto the water garden where artificial ponds were formed. Whereas the waterworks system has continued to operate, it has required constant attention to clear the flow of grit and the leaves and debris from surrounding vegetation. The grit from the settling has been used on a regular basis to replenish the surface of the pathways through the estate.

The gardens were initially sub-divided into a number of specialist areas - trees in the arboretum, shrubs in the shrubberies, roses in the rose garden, and herbaceous plants in the borders. By the time the Walkers had taken over the estate, many of these features had become overgrown and the structured layout largely subsumed by a more naturalist style.

Whereas the Darley's were greatly influenced by the 'near natural' look, as promoted by William Robinson, the Walkers continued the tradition of an informal landscape with layers of planting from all over the world in a seemingly random mix.

The gardens were opened to the public in 1981, as a means for contributing to their up-keep. They were also used for many cultural activities, and as a setting for several films. In 1985 a sculpture trail was developed. Annual exhibitions were held in the grounds for almost ten years, at which many notable sculptors took part. In 1997 another exhibition was hosted in the farmyard and nursery area.

As described in the Irish Gardens (Appletree Pocket Guides)<sup>(12)</sup>, Fernhill is "...a garden where the plants come first, not the architecture. Covering some forty acres in a superb location overlooking Dublin Bay, it contains a comprehensive collection of trees and shrubs in an informal 'Robinsonian' layout that adapts the plants to the terrain. The camellias, magnolias and rhododendrons are particularly fine, as are the large drifts of spring bulbs, but there is something for everyone amongst the many excellent plants that thrive in the light wood lands, water garden, rockery, heather bank, fernery and kitchen garden of this enchanted place".



Mature conifers around the Meadow

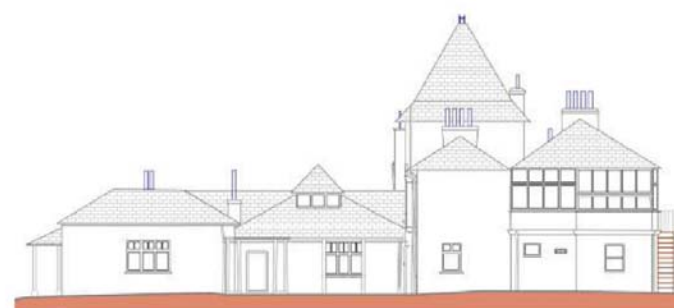
# Fernhill House



West elevation



East elevation



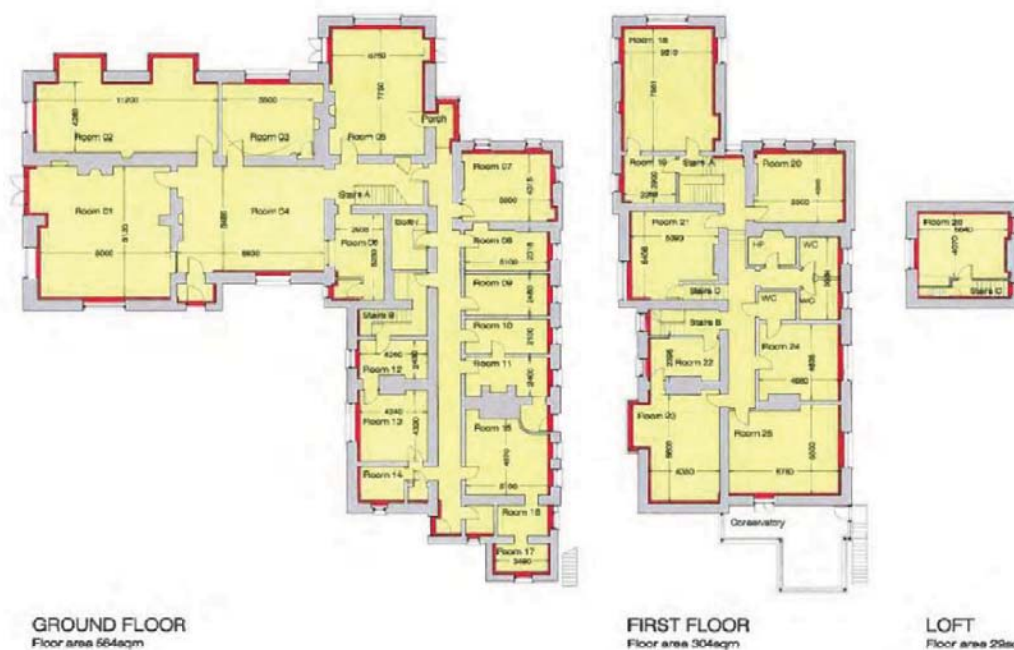
North elevation



South elevation



Aerial view of the house from the east



GROUND FLOOR  
Floor area 664sqm

FIRST FLOOR  
Floor area 304sqm

LOFT  
Floor area 25sqm

Existing floor plans

## The Main House

Although considered to have evolved originally from a single storey hunting lodge (c. 1723) to a rambling family home over 120 years, the history of Fernhill House as a building is inconclusive as there are no historic plans or records available to date.

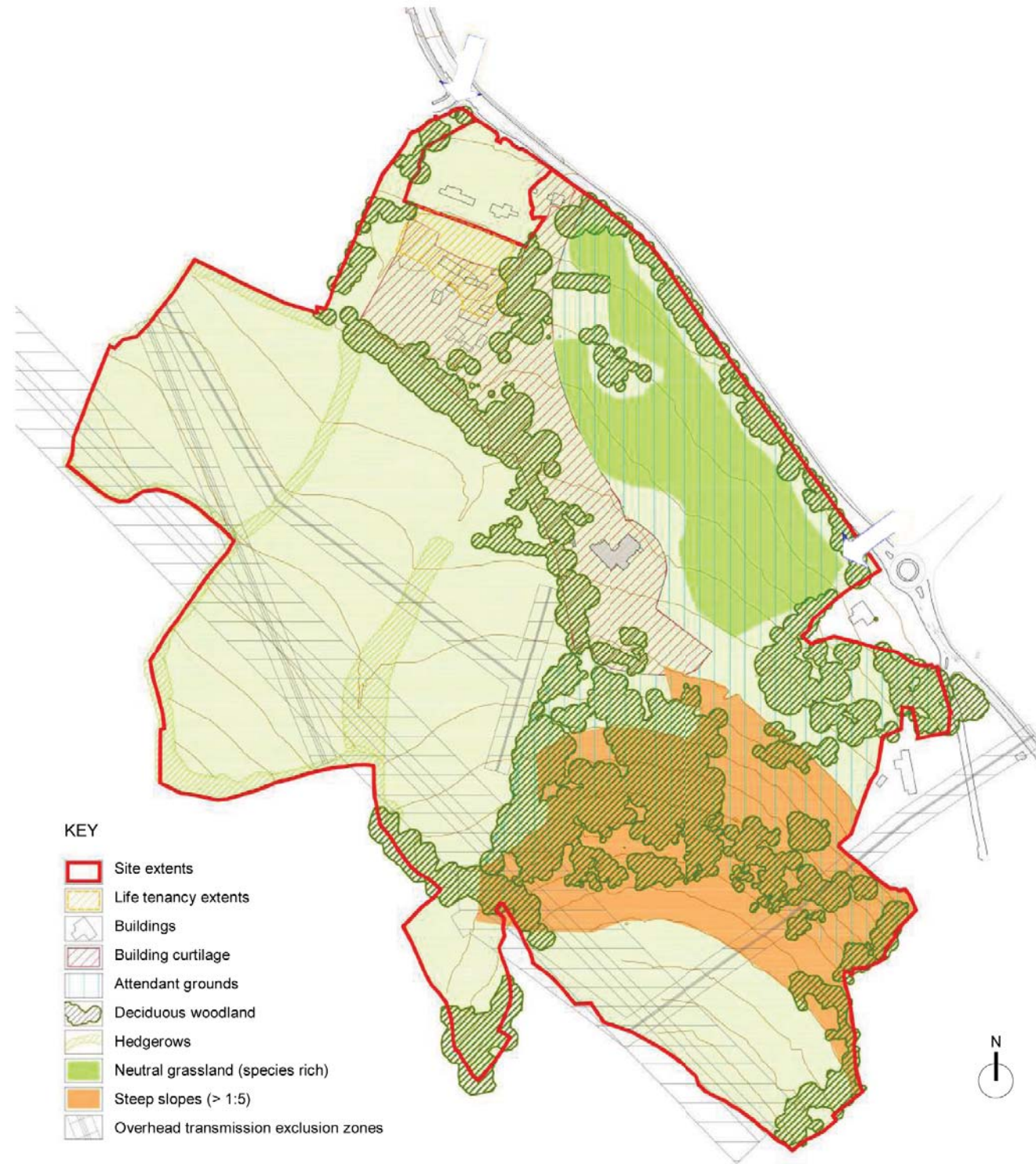
The current house probably dates to around 1893 when Edmund Darley's father purchased the land in 1893 and pulled down the original house and rebuilt it. The main structure essentially remains unchanged since the early 20th century except for the addition of the conservatory (reconstructed in 2002), the east facing gazebo and the changes associated with the crèche.

The house offers extensive accommodation, comprising a total of 26 various rooms. It has an interesting floor plan with interconnecting blocks of one and two stories surmounted by a three storey tower, presenting a unique and attractive presence in the wooded landscape. The principal rooms are distinguished by the quality of light, over-looking and framing views of the renowned gardens.

Whereas parts of the building features are Victorian in form, such as the internal joinery and some of the ground floor windows to the kitchen and stores, the main rooms and entrance have an Arts & Crafts flavour with leaded lights over casement windows, very detailed carved oak overmantles and fireplaces to the main rooms.

Internally the house is in reasonably good condition with significant original features intact throughout. Recent repairs to the roof and other services have been timely.

# Built & Natural Heritage



Site constraints

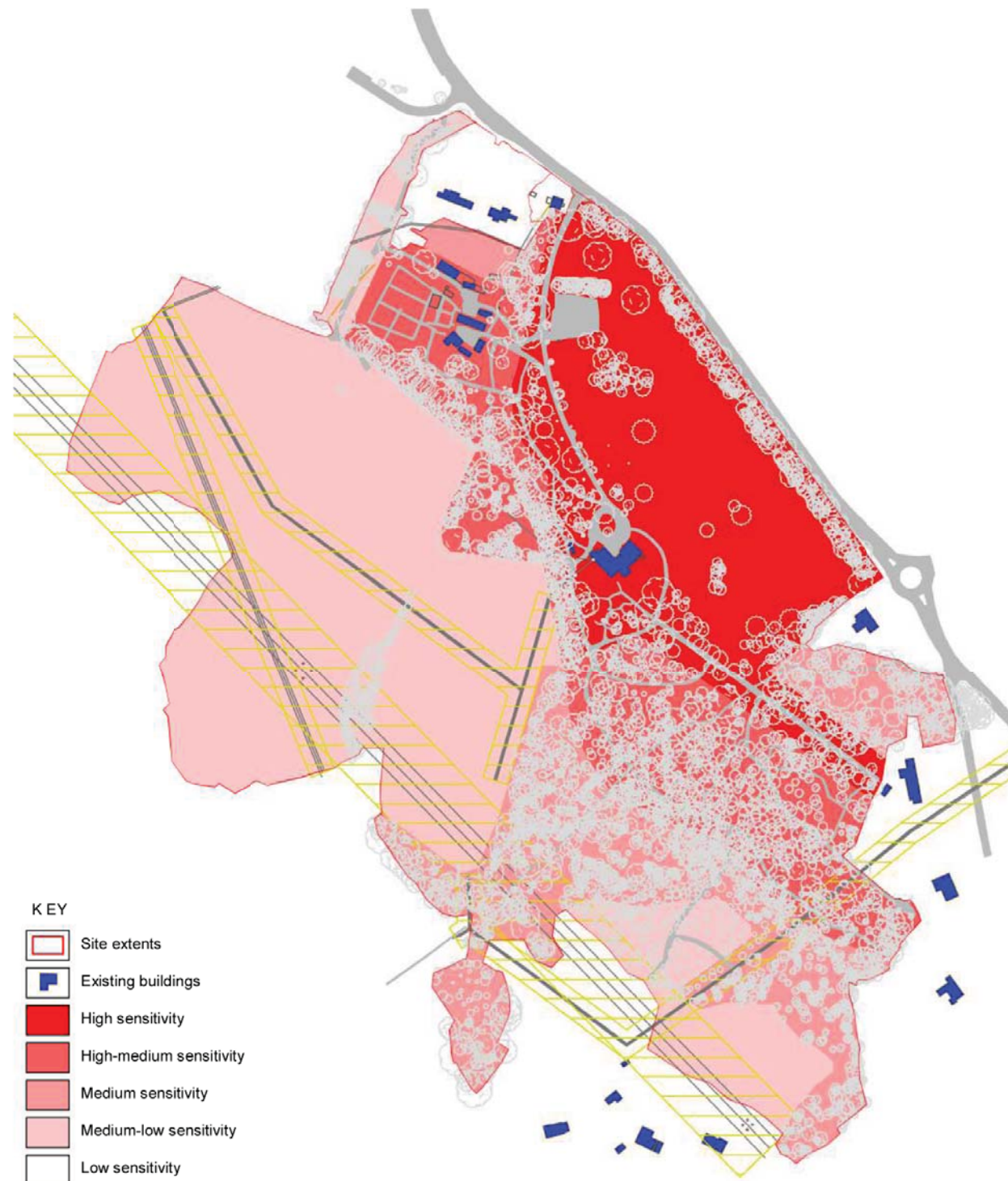
The special character of Fernhill House and Gardens is defined by its appearance as a small country estate, with its former substantial and unusual family residence and ancillary buildings set within an informally designed landscape of woodlands and meadows. Protecting and enhancing the heritage features, the views and other special characteristics of the site is an essential consideration for its development as a Regional Park.

As the main house is a Protected Structure, the land lying within its curtilage which was of use for the purposes of the building, as well as other structures within that curtilage, are of special importance in terms of protection. As the house, farmyard and immediate grounds have developed together, they are considered to form an integral part of the curtilage. Much of the woodland and the outlying fields are also intrinsic to the setting and/or appreciation of the site and therefore determined as the attendant grounds of Fernhill House.

Although Fernhill is not currently designated for any nature conservation purposes, there is a varied mosaic of habitats present which reinforce its natural heritage qualities, including mature trees and woodland, the watercourses and ponds, a variety of grassland habitats, scrub and the buildings. Fernhill is also of importance for a variety of fauna, such as bats, badgers, deer and other mammals.

# Landscape Sensitivity

Sensitivity	Definition
<b>High</b>	Landscape and/or visual characteristics of the zone are very vulnerable to change and/or its intrinsic values are high and the zone is unable to accommodate the relevant type of development without significant character change or adverse effects. Thresholds for significant change are very low.
<b>High-medium</b>	Landscape and/or visual characteristics of the zone are vulnerable to change and/or its intrinsic values are medium/high and the zone can accommodate the relevant type of development only in limited situations without significant character change or adverse effects. Thresholds for significant change are low.
<b>Medium</b>	Landscape and/or visual characteristics of the zone are susceptible to change and/or its intrinsic values are moderate but the zone has some potential to accommodate the relevant type of development only in some situations without significant character change or adverse effects. Thresholds for significant change are intermediate.
<b>Medium-low</b>	Landscape and/or visual characteristics of the zone are resilient to change and/or its intrinsic values are medium/low and the zone can accommodate the relevant type of development only in many situations without significant character change or adverse effects. Thresholds for significant change are high.
<b>Low</b> (none identified)	Landscape and/or visual characteristics of the zone are robust or degraded and/or its intrinsic values are low and the zone can accommodate the relevant type of development only in many situations without significant character change or adverse effects. Thresholds for significant change are very high.



**KEY**

	Site extents
	Existing buildings
	High sensitivity
	High-medium sensitivity
	Medium sensitivity
	Medium-low sensitivity
	Low sensitivity

Sensitivity analysis plan

For the purpose of this study, sensitivity is taken to mean the susceptibility of the landscape to a particular type of change or development. It is defined in terms of the interactions between the components of the landscape itself, the way it is perceived and the nature of the development.

Landscape sensitivity combines the sensitivity of the landscape resource (including its historical and ecological features) and visual sensitivity (such as views and visibility). In the context of Fernhill, sensitivity also includes values that contribute to the landscape (such as designations and constraints, i.e. Protected Structure and inclusion on NIAH List of Historic Gardens).

The relative sensitivity of a particular landscape can also play an important role in helping to determine the relative capacity of a site for different forms of development. Landscape capacity is defined as:

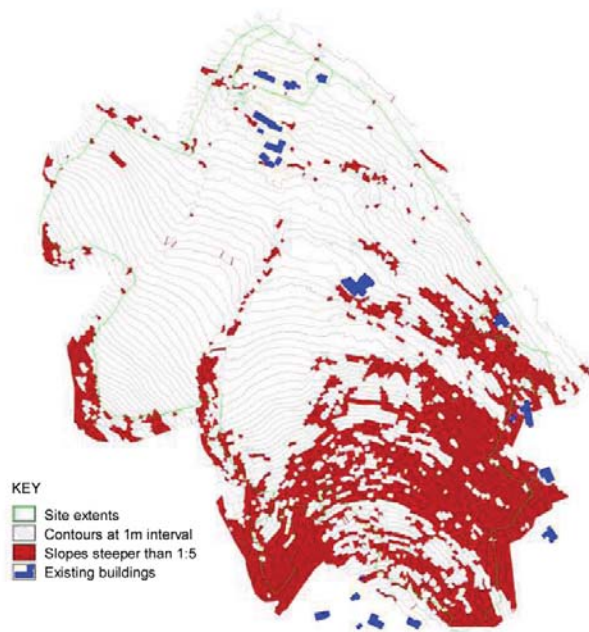
*"The degree to which a particular landscape character type or area is able to accommodate change without significant effects on its character, or overall change of landscape character type. Capacity is likely to vary according to the type and nature of change being proposed"<sup>(16)</sup>.*

Landscape capacity is therefore generally concerned with comparative assessments of potential large scale development across extensive areas or landscape types, such as new settlements, wind farms or aquaculture. As Fernhill is concerned with a specific form of development on an identified site, there are no capacity comparisons to be made with other sites, so the emphasis for this study is on the sensitivity of the receiving environment in relation to the type of change proposed, based on the site appraisals and recognised designations.

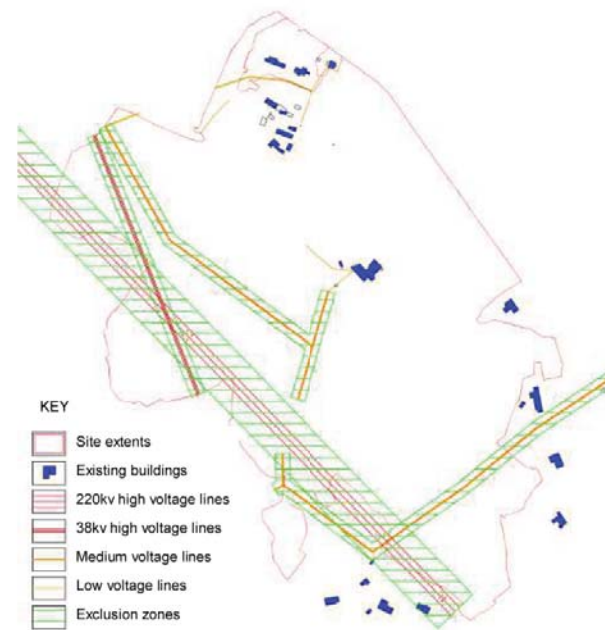
The definitions used for different areas (or zones) of the Fernhill estate are given on the adjoining table.



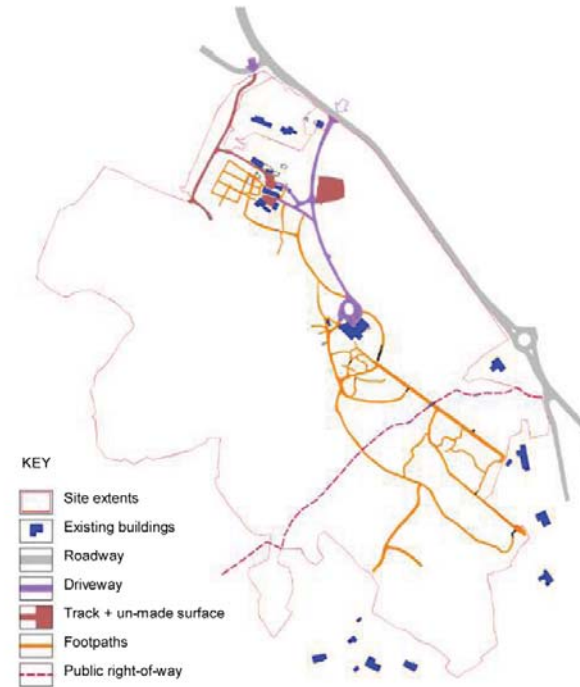
# Development - Key Influences



Gradients



Overhead transmission lines



Access and Circulation

The main physical features that influence the suitable development of Fernhill as a Regional Park can be summarised as:

## Gradients

The site slopes steadily from south-west to south-east, with especially steep gradients (up to 1:5) across most of the southern heavily-wooded parts.

## Overhead Transmission Lines

The 220kv and 38kv (HV) and medium voltage (MV) overhead lines that extend across the south-western parts of the site will require substantial exclusion zones or costly under-grounding.

## Access and Circulation

Vehicle access is limited due to the physical form of Enniskerry Road and its heritage boundary features. Whereas there is a well-developed network of internal pedestrian routes, these are incomplete or have become neglected.

## Ecological Significance

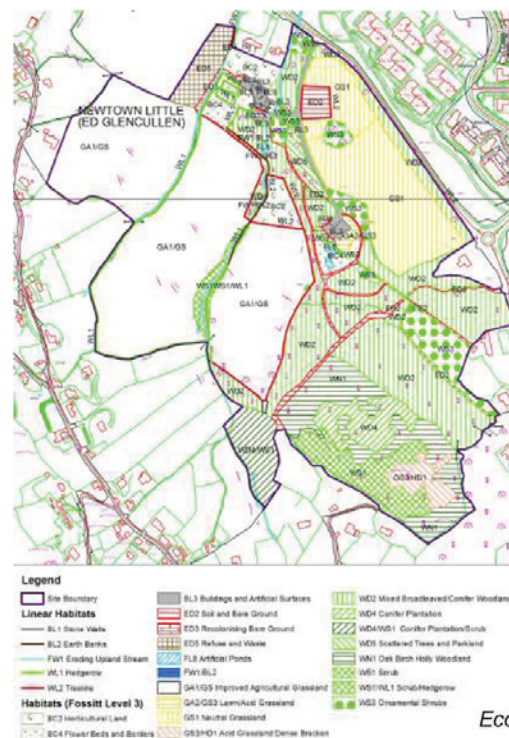
The Ecology Survey identifies that the main interest in Fernhill is the mosaic of habitats present, including mature trees and woodland, watercourses and ponds, variety of grassland habitats and scrub. The estate is also of importance for a variety of fauna, such as bats, badgers, deer and other mammals.

## Woodland

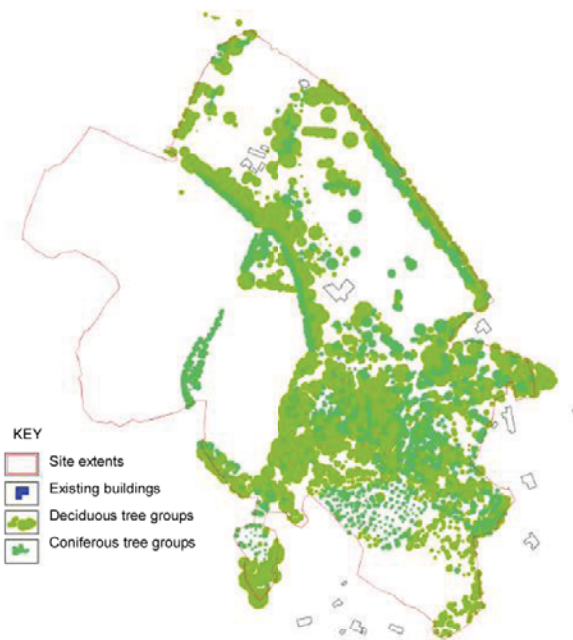
The mature trees and woodland, with a variety of native and ornamental species, are a particular feature of Fernhill that need protection and careful management to ensure their special value is retained and enhanced.

## Heritage

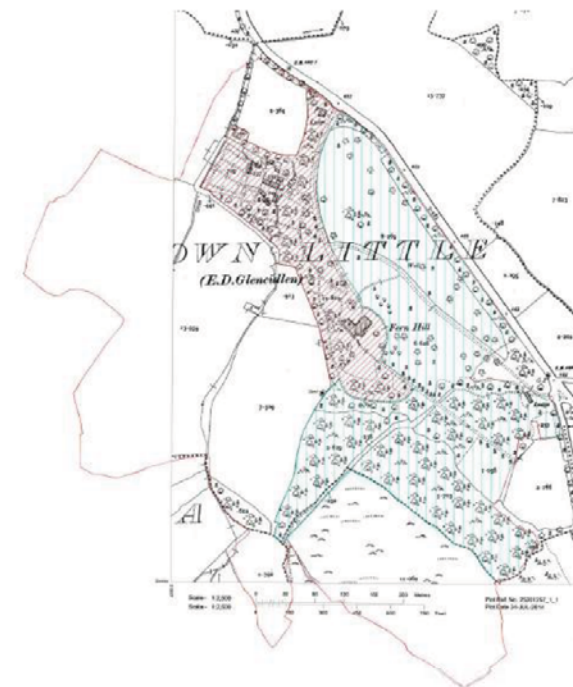
Fernhill House is a Protected Structure, and the gardens are included on the NIAH Garden Survey. The proposed curtilage of the house encompasses the connections between the main house and the ancillary buildings and the associated designed landscape, while the woodland and the meadow are defined as attendant grounds.



Ecology



Woodland



Heritage