

Bucks Gardens Trust Designed Landscape Report

STOCKGROVE PARK, SOULBURY

November 2021

INTRODUCTION

Background to the Project

This site report has been prepared as part of The Buckinghamshire Gardens Trust (BGT) Research and Recording Project, begun in 2014. This site is one of several hundred designed landscapes county-wide identified by Bucks County Council (BCC) in 1998 (including Milton Keynes District) as potentially retaining evidence of historic interest, as part of the Historic Parks and Gardens Register Review project carried out for English Heritage (now Historic England) (BCC Report No. 508). The list is not conclusive and further parks and gardens have been identified as research continues and further information comes to light.

Content

BGT has taken the Register Review list as a sound basis from which to select sites for appraisal as part of its Research and Recording Project for designed landscapes in the historic county of Bucks (pre-1974 boundaries). For each site a report is prepared by volunteers trained on behalf of BGT by experts in appraising designed landscapes who have worked extensively for English Heritage (now Historic England) on its Register Upgrade Project.

Each report includes the following for the site:

- A site boundary mapped on the current Ordnance Survey to indicate the extent of the main part of the surviving designed landscape, also a current aerial photograph.
- A statement of historic significance based on the four Interests outlined in the National Policy Planning Framework and including an overview.
- A written description, derived from documentary research and a site visit, based on the format of the English Heritage/ Historic England *Register of Parks & Gardens of special historic interest* 2nd edn.

The area within the site boundary represents the significant coherent remains of the designed landscape.

It does not necessarily include all surviving elements of the historical landscape design, which may be fragmented. It takes no account of current ownership.

NOTE: Sites are not open to the public unless advertised elsewhere.

Supporters and Acknowledgements

The project is supported by The Gardens Trust and funded by BGT with a significant grant from the Finnis Scott Foundation, Roland Callingham Foundation and other donors. Buckinghamshire Council generously provided funding, current and historic mapping and access to the Historic Environment Record.

The Trust thanks the volunteers who have participated in this project and given so much time and effort to this challenging and rewarding task.

Further information is available from: www.bucksgardenstrust.org.uk

BASELINE INFORMATION	Date & Authors: November 2021 Mary Buckle, Sheila Meekums		
Site Name	Stockgrove Park, Soulbury		
BCC Register Review 'A' or 'B' list	A	HER Number	1054905000
Type of Site (Period, country house estate, cemetery, public park)	Country house grounds, developed c. 1790s and in the C19, with a major remodelling and development of the buildings and landscape in the 1930s.		
Address	Stockgrove, Leighton Buzzard LU7 0BB; east section in Bedfordshire		
Ownership (single or divided)	Divided; Private multiple (core of site); Beds and Bucks Councils (park)		
Parish	Soulbury (Bucks); Heath & Reach (Beds)		
Authority	Buckinghamshire Council North Area, formerly Aylesbury Vale District; Central Bedfordshire		
Grid Reference	SP 916 294		
Prompt for Assessment	Register review list; garden Registered by HE, but equally important wider landscape omitted and required analysis.		
Type of Assessment	Full Assessment; see also Historic England Register Description for terraces around house.		

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Overview

The formal 1930s gardens and extensive wooded park for a large 1930s neo-Georgian country house and associated buildings including clock tower and former stable block, and approached through an extensive park between either of two pairs of lodges, gate piers and ornamental gates. The park has an ornamental lake which contains the remains of an unusual 1930s boating pavilion and C19 ornamental walks and planting including rhododendrons and specimen Wellingtonias. The house and ancillary buildings were designed and the gardens re-landscaped between 1929 and 1939 by the architect William Curtis Green, replacing a mid-C19 house by Decimus Burton and were set in an extensive park which was also developed. The principal components of the gardens survive intact and include the upper garden terrace with its garden temple and the lower garden terrace, pool and pergola. The park survives intact and is now a country park. The park was formed from heathland including a former warren and farmland from the amalgamation of two estates in the late C18 and by further purchases during the C19.

Archaeological interest

Several archaeological features have varying degrees of significance. The most important include linear earthworks such as historic wood banks and ditches and the remains of a dry sandstone wall and depression associated with the site of Rushmere Lodge. Another linear feature which is a steep sided gully in places, denotes the parish boundary between Great Brickhill and Soulbury. Irregular depressions mark the site of former quarries several of which are quite large and were used for the extraction of sandstone, sand or clay. The remains of a brick-lined well-type structure also survive. Early mapping shows the sites of brick kilns.

Architectural interest

Stockgrove Park is one of the largest country houses built between the two World Wars. It was built for Ferdinand

Michael Kroyer-Kielberg who purchased the estate in 1928 and developed it from 1929-39. He commissioned the renowned architect William Curtis Green (1875-1960) to design a new house and ancillary buildings and to redesign the gardens in a geometric design to both complement and create a suitable setting for his new home. He also built an unusual and substantial boating pavilion on a new site in the lake as a focal point of the park (derelict).

Significant works by this architect include the Dorchester Hotel, Wolseley House, New Scotland Yard, and the buildings, including the former Manor House, in Stockgrove Country Park. He was based in London for much of his career.

Artistic interest

The historic landscape as part of a complex and high quality ensemble is one of the finest final flowerings of the country house estate immediately before World War II. The core group of buildings, the two sets of lodges and entrances and the boating pavilion were created as a coherent whole for one man in the 1930s who also landscaped the formal gardens to enhance his design continuing the links with the wider park landscape.

The structures and garden by Curtis Green complement and form the setting for his Stockgrove House. The principal components of the gardens survive substantially intact. The whole landscape has group value with the garden terraces, temple, pool and pergola; Stockgrove House and its attached (former) swimming pool, walls, gates and gatepiers; the clock tower and former stable block; the two pairs of lodges, gates and gatepiers and the boating pavilion.

Within the extensive C19 park, including the long south drive and ornamental walks, significant alterations were made in the 1930s including the enlarged lake with an unusual focal boating pavilion (now derelict) by Curtis Green and further planting in similar ornamental style.

Historic interest

Stockgrove Park was occupied by the politician Henry Hanmer MP for Aylesbury who held the seat until he retired in 1837. In 1854 he became the High Sheriff of Buckinghamshire. He built a new house by Decimus Borton and landscaped the park including ornamental planted walks and a new south drive.

Sir Ferdinand Michael Kroyer-Kielberg K.B.E. (1882-1958). In 1928 Kroyer-Kielberg, a Danish industrialist, purchased Stockgrove and remodelled much of the estate between 1929 and 1939. He demolished the Burton house, replacing it with a grand country mansion to a design by William Curtis Green R.A. who designed other estate buildings, including the South and North Lodges. Geometric formal gardens were laid out close to the House to which was added a 25m wide formal avenue running south-west to north-east across the northern part of The Bomes in the park. An existing pool was enlarged, to form the serpentine lake that is such a feature in the present Park. To this was added a spectacular thatched boating pavilion in the lake reached by a bridge (Curtis Green, now partially destroyed), and further planting undertaken.

SITE DESCRIPTION

Location, Area, Setting. Stockgrove Park is in a rural area in the parish of Soulbury, 1km south-east of Bow Brickhill and 1km north-east of Heath and Reach. Situated near the county boundary with Bedfordshire in the extreme east of Buckinghamshire, the nearest large urban area to the 128ha. site is Leighton-Linslade in Bedfordshire. Stockgrove Park occupies a ridge of gently undulating land which is at a height of 150m around the house. It lies on the Woburn Sands formation of the Greensand Ridge which runs from south-west to north-east mainly across Bedfordshire with small areas, including this part, in Buckinghamshire.

Parts of the historic Stockgrove Park Estate were opened to the public in 1972 when it became a Country Park. More recently Kings Wood, Bakers Wood, Oak Wood and Rammamere Heath were added to the Country Park and since 2010 has been known as Rushmere Park including semi-natural ancient woodland, open meadows and extensive heathland. It is managed as a Country Park and Nature Reserve but is not part of the registered garden.

The lodges, entrances, approaches and drives are easily viewed from the minor roads which surround the estate or may be viewed from the public footpaths and bridleways.

Historic Development

1293; Manor of Smewnes-Grange property of Woburn Abbey granted to Edward Stanton (KH)

1770 Jefferys' county map: Stockgrove is not named. 'Park' noted but seems too far north to be this one.

1792; Purchased from Stanton family by Edward Hanmer of Stockgrove. Comprised Manor of Smewnes and Stock Grove Farm. New house built. (KH)

1825 Bryant's county map: a small park surrounding the house at the core of the site reached via a long route from the south through The Warren approximating to today's south gateway and drive.

1833/34; Old house demolished by Col. Henry Hanmer, new house built by Decimus Burton. (KH)

1844; The Bomes added to Park by purchase. Part of Rammamere Heath taken in after re-alignment of Brickhill Road. (SC)

1852; Part of the Warren, Gladly Wood and The Heath (all south of Stockgrove House connecting the house to Bragenham Lane and Linslade Road where the South Lodges are now situated) added following purchase of Leigh Estates. South Drive laid out after this on line of former route across The Warren (SC; Oldakre)

1888; Estate put up for sale. 1786 acres, 385 acres were Park, Mansion, Pleasure grounds and stabling.

1897 Bought by Joseph Truman Mills JP DL. (KH)

1924; Put up for sale. Sale particulars in Buckinghamshire Archive.

1928 Bought by Ferdinand Kroyer-Kielberg. Developed whole estate 1929-39. Commissioned William Curtis Green to replace the House with a neo-Georgian design, replacement pairs of lodges, stables, clock tower and boating pavilion. Garden laid out in geometrical fashion. (KH)

1930s Serpentine lake formed by extending existing lake by Kroyer-Kielberg (Oldakre p47)

WWII; Requisitioned for the army. Head Gardener and another retained to maintain the estate.

1940s The Bomes turned over to commercial scale pine plantation (Oldakre p47)

1949; Leslie Neville Long Of Stockgrove Dower House bought the estate in May and sold the mansion to London County Council for £27,500. Under the GLC it became a school for special needs children. (Oldakre p22 and KH)

1970s; The mansion school became property of Camden Borough Council.

1971 Sale of land now forming Country Park to Beds and Bucks Councils (Oldakre p34) (KH)

1996; House and gardens sold for conversion to luxury flats. Rest of estate divided and now privately and severally owned. 74 acres of park and woods acquired by Beds and Bucks County Councils as Stockgrove Country Park. (KH)

2010: Country Park renamed Rushmere Country Park

Principal Building

The core buildings, erected 1929-38, replaced a former house designed by Decimus Burton c.1835 for Col. Henry Hanmer (Pevsner). The house is sited at 142m AOD on a high point in the north-west corner of the park.

Stockgrove Park (listed Grade II), designed by W Curtis Green for F M Kroyer-Kielberg between 1929 and 1938, is a country house built of red brick with limestone dressings in a free Georgian style. It has a hipped, pantiled roof with dormers. The house forms a U plan around three sides of a courtyard, the fourth side is closed by a wrought-iron screen by the *Birmingham Guild* (Pevsner). The main outward facing south-east and south-west elevations create a backdrop to the contemporary formal gardens.

At the north-west end of the south-west elevation is the former swimming pool, with a single-storey parapeted brick façade, behind which is a tiled and glazed roof with dormer windows. Immediately to the east of this is the south elevation of the house; this is of two storeys, and is asymmetrical, divided into two planes, with square, canted and semi-circular bays. In contrast, the south-east elevation is symmetrical, of two storeys with attics. The parapeted façade is of five bays to either side of a canted bay, the outer bays set back (HE listing 2016)

The clock tower and stable block, (listed Grade II Curtis Green) are of red brick with limestone dressings and pantile roofs. Low stone-coped walls connect tower to former stable and garage blocks enclosing stable yard. 2-storey stable and garage wings flank yard with hipped pantile roof; now converted into dwellings. Taller, 2-storey outer corner pavilions with single storey wings flank the archway to stable court with round-arched head and key block. Pavilions and wings have hipped pantile roofs (*Country Life*, Sept 30 1939, HE listing)

The secondary buildings (stable block, clock tower, lodges, Dower House etc) are in separate ownership and five new houses have been built since 1996 in the pleasure grounds and kitchen gardens.

The Garden

The gardens are in divided ownership and the following is from the Historic England Register description (2016).

“The formal gardens form four main compartments, the most ornamental of which are the three on the south-east side of the house. These include the main garden structures: the lower garden terrace, pool and pergolas; and the upper garden terrace and garden temple. These were designed by W Curtis Green and form two separate listings at Grade II.

The lower terrace is reached down steps from doors to either side of the central canted bay of the south-east elevation, which meet at a raised stone paved platform, from where a short flight of steps descends to ground level, to an area of paving which forms part of the pergola walk that links the three south-east compartments. There are three pergolas, two of which form the north-west side of the largest compartment on this side. The other three sides of this compartment are defined by square-cut yew hedges about 1m wide, which have openings to the north-east and south-west sides, flanked by tightly clipped rounded yew piers. On the south-east side are two semi-circular paved alcoves. The south-west opening gives access to steps down to the sunken long pool, and also allows a view across the pool to the geometric rose garden beyond, also enclosed by a yew hedge. This is crossed by two paths at right angles, subdividing the garden into four, each square of which is further divided geometrically, with each bed surrounded by low hedges. From the north-west end of the pool, stone steps with a stone capped brick balustrade rise to the upper terrace, retained by a brick wall. The pergola walk continues to the south-east of the steps. The garden temple is at the south corner of the upper terrace, overlooking the park. There is also an upper terrace at the north-east corner of the house, the retaining wall of which turns south-east to enclose the north-east end of lower garden terrace, curving out to form a semi-circular alcove at this end of the pergola.

To the south-west, the garden forms a rectangle, truncated at the west corner, and is on two levels, with upper and

lower lawns. The former is divided into two parts, but defined only by size: the upper lawn that serves the drawing room, sitting room and library is both wider and longer than the lawn accessible from the swimming pool, but both parts are connected by a paved path that bisects their full length. The larger lawn is subdivided by other paths, forming square and rectangular compartments. One of these paths leads to steps down to the lower lawn. Low hedges and gates have been inserted to subdivide the lawn into three, according to ownership. The south-west boundary, between the formal gardens and parkland, is defined by a yew hedge similar to those on the south-east side of the house. The rectangle is cut across at the west corner by a square garden with semi-circular corners, the shape again defined by wide, square-cut yew hedges. The enclosed space is bisected from north to south by an inserted, slighter hedge: in the north-west corner of the west side is a small building, a garage, and the whole of the ground surface is covered in tarmac; the east side is laid to grass and the hedge to the south, which by 1977 had been removed, has now been replanted". (HE listing 2016)

THE PARK (excluded from HE Register boundary)

The house and gardens lie at the heart of the small park established by 1825 (Bryant) to which the considerably larger of The Bomes and The Warren to the south and were added in the mid-late C19 from heathland and laid out with plantations and the south drive was laid out. Two grand entrances were added in the 1930s and the lake was developed and the boating pavilion built.

North Drive

The drive from the north entrance lodges on Brickhill Road is now the only access to Stockgrove Park House and its associated properties in the pleasure grounds. Before 1852, the main entrance was also from the North past a single Lodge on the east side of the drive.

The two north lodges (listed Grade II Curtis Green) stand 270m north of the house. They symmetrically flank the gates and were built with the house, stables, south lodges etc in the 1930s. The lodges are linked in a formal composition by curved walls to wrought-iron gates (Pevsner). The gable ends face the road with the long front facades facing the drive. The lodges are red brick with limestone dressings, of one storey and attic, with double-depth plan. Half-hipped plain-tile roofs have single tall brick ridge stack with stone caps (HE Listing).

The 300 m long north drive from the lodges to the courtyard is over flat ground at about 140m AOD. The drive forks c.100m south of Brickhill Road, the left fork leading south-east 220m to the main house and the right fork south-west for 120m as a service drive to the stables.

South Drive

The purchase of the Leigh Estates which included the Warren, Gladly Wood and The Heath in 1852 enabled the construction of an entrance from the south into the park from the Rushmere crossroads opposite Plantation Road (SC). Between 1852 and 1900 the 2km long carriage drive was laid through the new park including the former Warren and along the west edge of The Bomes (which had been bought in 1844), following the course of an earlier track present by 1825 (Bryant; Oldakre report).

The former single C19 south Picket Lodge was an ornate Victorian gothic 2-storey property with a tall, pointed roof akin to a church spire over the entrance door. Terracotta or brick banding, windows tall and thin in pairs with ogee tops. Painted white railings and gate (possibly metal) gave access to the south drive (Living Archive, Milton Keynes, ref; BOD/002/027). The north lodge which predated the present lodges was probably of a similar design as the 1896 sales particulars state that 'each of the entrances' (north and south) is 'guarded by a picturesque and well-built lodge' (BLARS: KK401).

Picket Lodge was replaced in c.1930 with the present south lodges, of red brick with limestone dressings and of similar

design to the north lodges. The long sides face the road and the gatescreen has central double-leaf wrought-iron gates flanked by tall ashlar stone gatepiers with moulded stone caps and wrought-iron pedestrian gates either side of the main gates. Pedestrian gates at either end of the gatescreen beside the lodges are flanked by plain stone piers with moulded stone lintels over gates. Wrought-iron gatescreens on lower stone walls. (HE listing)

The 2km drive climbs steadily from 90m AOD towards the mansion (140m AOD) through a recent avenue of young trees replacing an avenue of Horse Chestnuts which had become unsafe. The carriage drive is interrupted by later divisions into paddocks.

The mid-C19 south drive was a key feature of the park designed to take advantage of views and features through two valley openings, features included the tree planting and water features introduced by Colonel Hanmer after 1852. Upon arrival at the house the drive sweeps from a north-west direction between the house and stables, and is therefore hidden from view from the principal rooms of the house.

The south drive incorporated areas of coniferous tree planting and involved the reshaping of other tree cover in the central part of The Warren. The historic name for the area occupied by the present day Rushmere Park was 'The Warren', an area of heathland incorporated into his park when Colonel Hanmer purchased the Leigh Estate in 1852. It was bordered for its greater distance by specimen conifers (largely Redwoods), Araucaria and clumps of Rhododendrons. The vegetation allowed glimpsed views to the west, across the valley and open farmland, and down lateral valleys into the steeper valley formed by the stream which flows southwards from The Bomes, on the eastern side of the ridge. He partially felled larch and scotch fir plantations previously established in the central part of The Warren by the Leigh family during the early C19.

Hanmer included a pool of water (of about the same dimensions as that by Baker's Wood) lower down the stream c.half a mile north of the south entrance. Several fine Wellingtonias stand just beyond the lodges. This species was introduced in 1853 and the specimens standing at the south lodge entrance (as well as those higher up the south drive) may be early plantings in this country (Oldakre). A path off the Carriage Drive and leads along the valley to the west of the pool and past the site of the former 'Shire Oak' before re-joining the drive higher up. This may have formed an ornamental walk, or alternative drive, for use when ground conditions allowed. Surviving rhododendron along part of this path suggest that it was a key feature in the mid-C19 landscape (Oldakre).

The Serpentine Lake and its Environs

The main alteration by Kroyer-Kielberg in the 1930s was the creation of the Serpentine Lake in the 1930s when the pool on the south-east side of The Bomes, abutting Baker's Wood, was extended north to double its length. The late-C19 boathouse east of the lake (mentioned in the 1926 sales details) was replaced by a pavilion in the lake of an unusual design by Curtis Green near the west bank where a shallow valley forms a natural bowl in the slope of the heath. It comprised a white single-storey square summerhouse, with a steeply pitched thatched roof rising above substantial brick arches providing access to the boathouse and attached to the shore via a bridge. The superstructure has gone, leaving the brick arch and the base. Photographs show the structure in some detail (Oldakre report). It was an important focal point, especially when viewed from the track by the lakeside on the east bank (Oldakre).

The pool originated in the earlier heathland landscape possibly as a water source for livestock by damming the stream running south from the King's Wood to the north-east along the west edge of Baker's Wood (Bryant, 1825; Heath and Reach Enclosure Map 1841). By 1971 (Sale Particulars) the lake was, 'picturesque' ... 'in complete seclusion amongst undulating Park and Woodland' (1947 AP). Remains of Kroyer-Kielberg avenue of trees. A 25m wide avenue of lime trees running south west to north east across the northern part of the Bomes' was planted as part of Kroyer-Kielberg's new design (Oldakre p20). 'The conifer plantation (predominantly Scots Pine) in the south west corner of the Country Park was planted in the mid 1940s as a commercial enterprise'. (Oldakre p20).

Parkland

A major part of the park forms part of Rushmere Country Park (74 acres. Rushmere totals 400 acres). The west section (Oak Wood) and north-west part are in Bucks, the rest in Beds. A small section of the original Bomes south of the mansion remains in private hands as part of the House grounds. The conifer (predominantly Scots Pine) in the south-west corner of the Country Park was planted in the mid-1940s as a commercial enterprise (Oldakre report).

Kitchen Garden

The former one-acre kitchen garden lies c.35m north of the mansion. It is an irregular, roughly rectangular shape and contains a pair of large semi-detached modern barn-style houses in the north half. It is not possible to see any evidence of the garden wall, and the buildings have gone.

The area was present by 1881 (OS) behind a stable courtyard and adjoining kennels fronting the carriage drive. In 1896 it was described as: "At the rear of the stabling is a highly productive and well-stocked kitchen and fruit garden, enclosed by high walls and containing 3 greenhouses, stove house, store rooms and several potting and tool sheds" (Sales Particulars BLARS KK401). Kroyer-Kielberg built a new stable courtyard west of the kitchen garden and the old stables and kennels were demolished. The 1971 sales particulars described greenhouses and various sheds (BLARS CCE2694/7; Kate Harwood, 2006).

CONCLUSIONS & REFERENCES

Key Sources [Documentary, Maps, APs, incl refs from Bucks Archive where applicable]

Maps

Jeffery's map 1770; Bryant's map 1825;

Ordnance Survey:

1812 Surveyor's 2" drawing; 1881 1st edn 25"; 1884 1st edn 6"; 1901 25"; 1950 6"; 1990s National Grid 1:10,000

Books and journals

Oswald, A, 'Stockgrove Park, Leighton Buzzard' *Country Life*, Vol. 86, (1939), 334-38

Pevsner N. and Williamson E., *The Buildings of England; Buckinghamshire* (1994), 646-7

Sales Catalogue 1896 (Beds Archive 401)

Websites

Photos of earlier house <http://www.shindles.co.uk/stockgrove>

Other

Central Bedfordshire Council, 'Rushmere Park, Oak Wood and Stockgrove Country Park Archaeological Survey'.

Harwood, Kate, 'Report on the historic landscape at Stockgrove Park' (2006).

Oldakre Associates, 'Stockgrove Country Park, Historic Landscape Analysis' (August 2009).

1947 RAF AP

Reason for Interest (i.e., type of site, age, named designer)

An extensive C19 country house estate elevated on the Greensand Ridge straddling the Bucks/Bedfordshire boundary. The core and parts of the park were remodelled and developed in the 1930s with many new structures by W Curtis Green. This work included a fine geometric garden close to the house, and an enlarged park lake with an unusual focal boating pavilion (now derelict), incorporating and supplementing ornamental park planting in similar style. The complex and high quality ensemble is one of the finest final flowerings of the country house estate immediately before World War II.

CONSERVATION STATUS (e.g., LBs, Conservation Area, Scheduled Monument)

Listed buildings; All Grade II; Principal building, attached Swimming Pool, North Lodges, South Lodges, gateway Wall, Gates and Gatepiers, Upper Garden Terrace and Garden | Temple, Formal Gardens. Garden on HE Register of Parks and Gardens but not park.

Survival - What percentage of historic site?

100%

Condition

Largely good, although lake pavilion derelict/ruinous

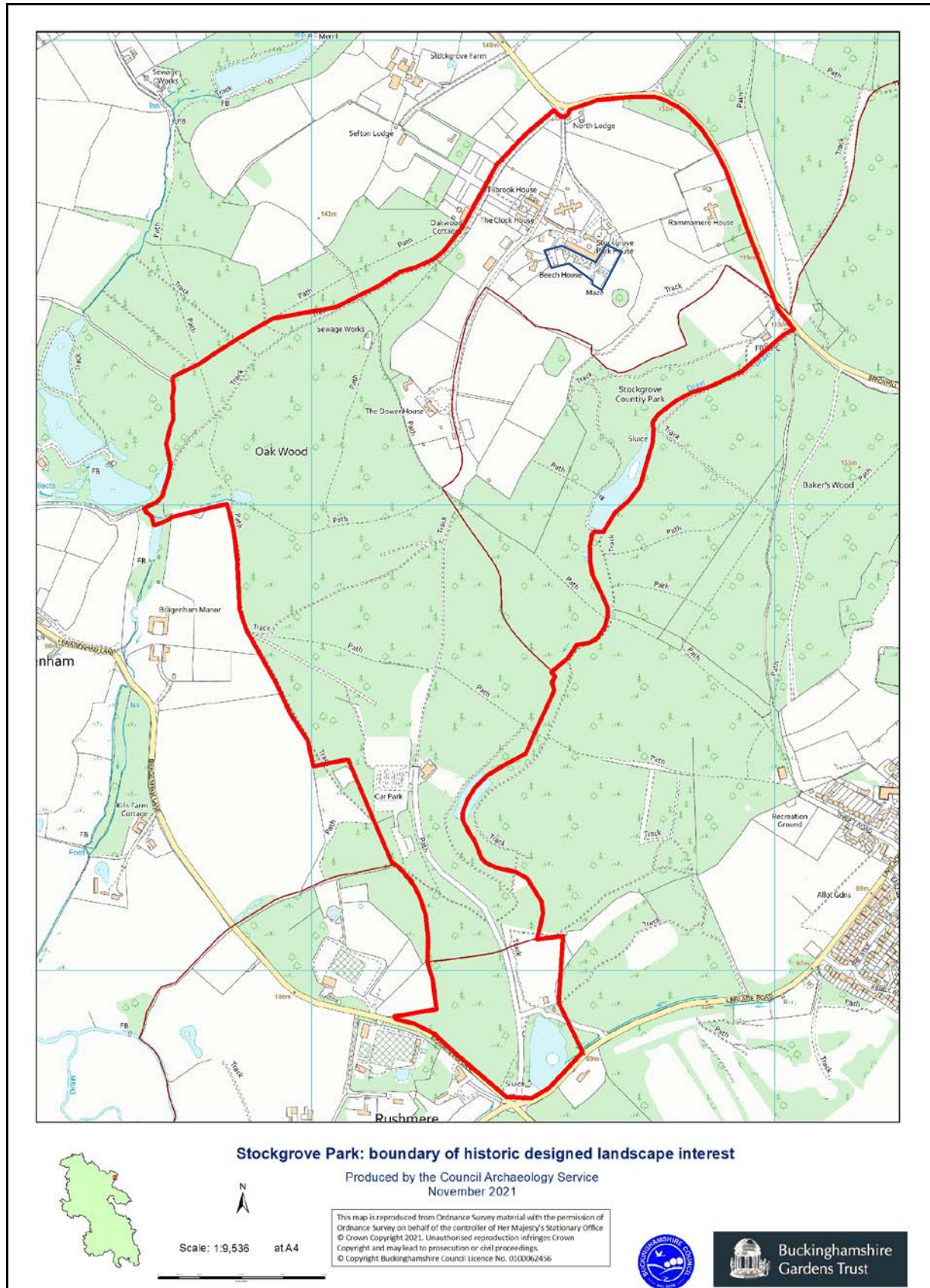
RECOMMENDATION

The designed landscape outside the Registered area is of sufficient quality to be considered for the Local Lists of Bucks and Bedfordshire (the terraces around the house are currently on the HE Register). The designed landscape around the terraces is of sufficient quality to be included in the Registered site and forms a key part of the overall design with the Registered garden.

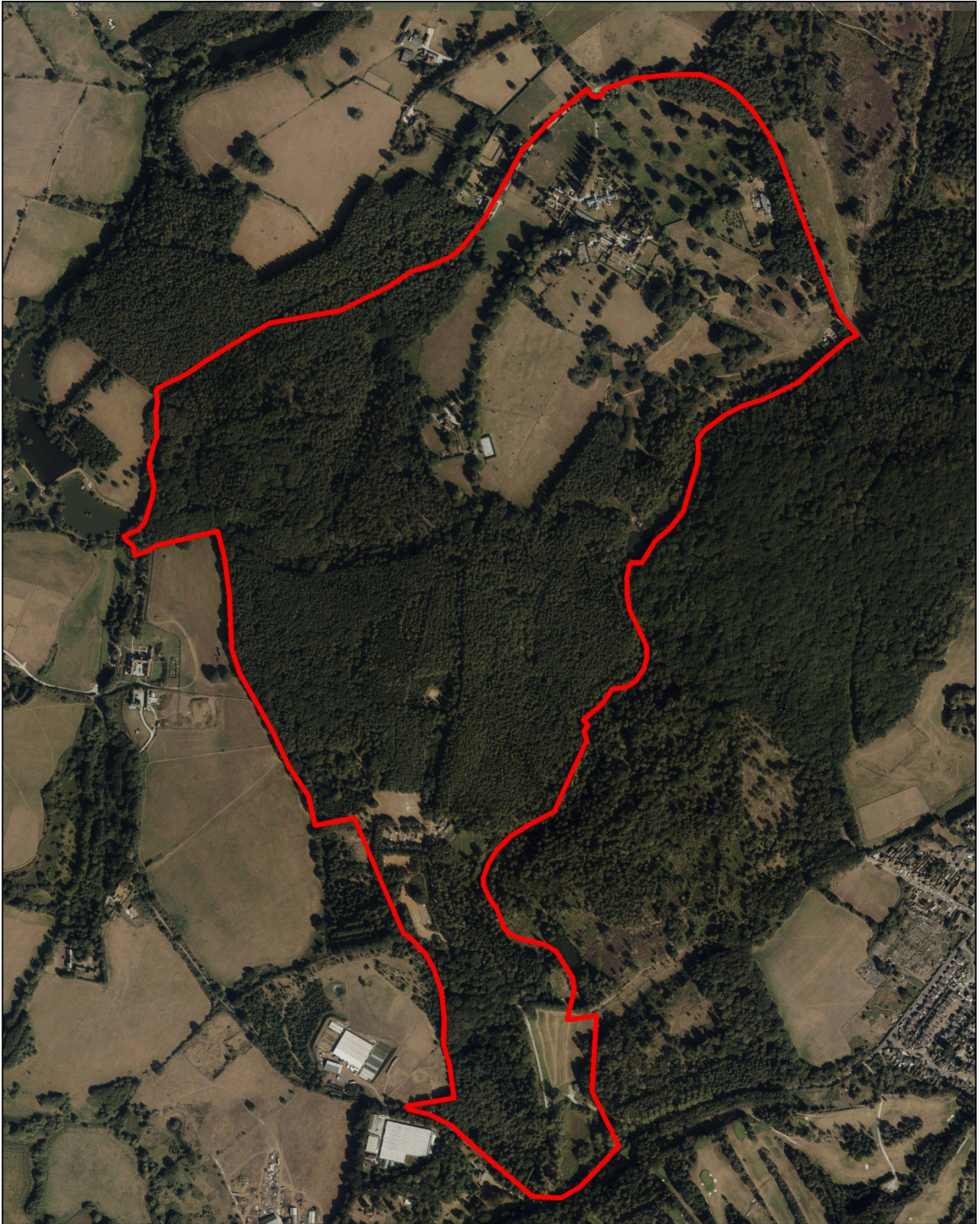
PRIORITY [High/standard, based on threats/issues]: Standard

Sheila Meekums, Mary Buckle Sept 2021, edited SR October 21

HISTORIC BOUNDARY: MAP & AERIAL PHOTOGRAPH



Approximate boundary of Register of Historic Parks and Gardens site outlined in blue. This omits the wider parkland which is integral to the design. The county boundary is shown as a narrow red line.



Scale: 1:9,536 at A4



Stockgrove Park: 2019 aerial photograph

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