New Inn

Restoration of New Inn to provide visitor facilities

February 2012

Building design guide

- major repair programme
- securing the future of a Building at Risk
- transforming the visitor experience
- spirit of place
Stowe Landscape Gardens in Buckinghamshire is renowned as one of the most important designed landscapes in the history of English gardening. Created in three main phases from 1715 to the 1750s, they show the development of eighteenth century garden design from English Baroque to a landscape park. The main garden, which is enclosed by a ha-ha, covers an area of over 400 acres and contains over 40 temples and monuments.

The National Trust acquired the grounds at Stowe in the late 1980s. At this time visitors would enter the gardens through the Oxford Lodge, continuing towards the rear elevation of the former mansion house.

Car parking was located in the north-eastern extremities of the gardens adjacent to the Grecian Valley. Visitors accessed the gardens from the car park via a purpose built timber kiosk. Toilet and refreshment facilities were contained in portacabins inside the grounds. Improved visitor facilities were much needed.
Background

The creation of the new visitor facilities at New Inn was a significant project encompassing the reconfiguration and improvements of the entrance facilities at Stowe generally. When New Inn was acquired by the National Trust in January 2005, the property was in a derelict state and had to be made safe and watertight. This interim intervention was not enough to prevent continuing deterioration which led to the condition of the fabric becoming very fragile. The site had been acquired by the Trust with the view of turning it into new visitor facilities – realigning the entrance to Stowe gardens with help from Aylesbury Vale District Council (AVDC) and English Heritage.

English Heritage had always maintained that the location of the temporary facilities, so close to the Temples and the ‘Ha Ha’, was unsuitable for a permanent set of visitor facilities. In addition, Visitor and Access surveys had confirmed that this was an inappropriate starting point and introduction for a proper interpretation of the landscape gardens. The gardens had originally been approached from the historic Bell Gate entrance, by guests staying at the New Inn which was built for that purpose. The modern visitor route brought visitors into Stowe by the ‘back door’, offering no immediate vistas of the garden, and failing to display the property to its best advantage. This route also created health, safety and security problems by mixing visitors, pupils and staff to Stowe School, with visitors to the landscape gardens.

Visitors now approach the gardens towards the Corinthian Arch, through which they are able to view the front elevation of Stowe School, thus recreating the visual experience of the eighteenth century visitor. The new car park, reached by a narrow track, is a short walk from New Inn where facilities include ticket sales, a range of recreated eighteenth century interiors, shop, plant sales, restaurant, conference facilities and offices. From here, visitors travel to the Lodge at Bell Gate. On stepping through the gate, the visitor is presented with views across the Octagon Lake to the principal elevation of Stowe School.
New Inn presented the most appropriate development site for the new visitor facilities, with minimal damage to the historic landscape of Stowe, or to the surviving elements of the inn itself.

The project gave the Trust the opportunity to conserve a fascinating part of the history of Stowe. The buildings had been in a state of near-collapse. If remedial work was not undertaken, this wonderful and original gateway to Stowe could have been lost forever.

New Inn would provide a unified entrance for all Stowe’s heritage visitors. An application for Full Planning Permission comprised of the following:

- The restoration of the New Inn, listed Grade II* and featuring on the ‘Buildings at Risk’ register. Most of the core inn building survived, but was in danger of imminent collapse.

- The rebuilding of the inn yard. Most of these buildings did not survive with the exception of a nineteenth century pump house, and a small area against the southern corner of the New Inn.

- A new build commercial outlet, positioned broadly on the site of the original barn and outbuildings that formed the lower farmyard.

- A re-arrangement of the Chackmore road junction, with the entrance to the new visitor facility along the Buckingham Avenue.

- A new car and coach park within a former quarry area near to the New Inn.

- A reconfiguring of the roads around the site to return to the layout shown in the 1881 Ordnance Survey map (the most informative surviving document). Including the refurbishment of the Bell Gate Drive as a route for the ‘land train’ taking visitors to the Bell Gate.

- The installation of a small ‘sentry’ type ticket office at the Bell Gate.

- The restoration and reinstatement of landscape areas around New Inn and the new parking areas.

There would be three distinct areas of work involved in the rebuilding of the inn complex:

- The restoration of the inn itself, most of which survives.

- The rebuilding of the inn yard ranges.

- The new build elements, the shop, the restaurant and the kitchen, which are broadly located on the site of the original barn and outbuildings that defined the lower farmyard. (See separate New Inn case study)

The reconstructed inn yard would contain:

- General public facilities
- Toilets and cloakrooms
- Visitor reception
- Recruitment space
- Interpretation area
- Open plan office

Above left The dairy pump house now forms the entrance lobby to the reception in the inn yard

Above right New Inn courtyard taken from where reception now stands
The project aimed to:
- Preserve, safeguard, enhance and maintain the cultural assets of Stowe for future generations.
- Restore the extant buildings following the principles of English Heritage, SPAB, the Burra Charter and others, with the minimum of intervention and change from the original.
- Use and develop the existing space of the New Inn buildings as the main visitor facility.
- Balance renovation and conservation with the requirements of visitors and users.
- Bring the greatest extent of historic fabric as economically feasible back into use.
- Make delicate and informed decisions on the balance between restoration and reconstruction.
- Rebuild the Carriage House to restore the intimacy and feel of the courtyard of the New Inn.
- Restore New Inn to its character and structure at its zenith c. 1809 whilst retaining any later features and character where these do not compromise the eighteenth century composition.

Key factors
New Inn would provide a new visitor route and entry point, enabling visitors to enter the gardens at Bell Gate. All visitor facilities would be relocated to the New Inn site, replacing the former visitor facilities whose temporary Planning Permission had expired.

An exemplar project of environmental good practice with all design solutions, choice of materials and services reflecting this.

By providing the correct level and quality of facilities eg. enough restaurant covers, retail space, education, interpretation and reception facilities to justify the investment of £8.4 million, the Trust intended to secure the future of the New Inn, as well as the on-going upkeep of the parks, gardens, temples and the buildings of Stowe itself.
The Trust had undertaken stabilisation and emergency repairs to the buildings since obtaining ownership, but decay and incremental collapse although slowed, inevitably continued.

The buildings required interim repairs, propping and use of tarpaulins as a priority to protect them.

Before the contractors could arrive on site, a lot of clearing had to be done by hand. For this the team relied on volunteers, who spent several months clearing rusty bits of metal and cutting down deep-rooted vegetation to make way for the plant machinery. The dedicated volunteers also helped to move old wooden beams, shift several thousand old roof tiles, cobbles and other salvageable materials, most of which were then re-used on site.

Access to the site was crossed by two private rights of way to the neighbouring owners’ land. This meant that farmers and their visitors were also using the main access route to the building works. The mixed ownership of the land meant that more time and money was spent to achieve overall agreements relating to easements and the installation of services.

Designations
- Grade II* listed building
- Building At Risk
- Registered Grade I Historic Landscape
- Stowe Park Conservation Area

Design approach

The Conservation Plan emphasised the need to use the heyday period of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as a reference for the restoration. An 1881 Ordnance Survey map was interpreted to recreate the character of the ‘environs’ of New Inn.

It was decided that the sketch by Jean-Claude Nattes from 1809, of the view of the New Inn yard should be used as the model for the refurbishment project; it was at this time that the building was at the height of its importance as an inn. All subsequent decisions and amendments to the scheme were generally informed by this policy.

The condition of the existing buildings at the New Inn was very poor. However many of the surviving buildings had changed little, and consideration had to be given to which parts of the buildings could be feasibly preserved. However, as a general policy it was agreed that the ancillary buildings forming the core inn yard should be rebuilt or restored. The original location and arrangement of the farm buildings around the lower yard would also be re-used for the new build options, although not on their exact footprint.
Design approach

In the New Inn building itself:
■ Parlour rooms would be recreated in the main front rooms and old Kitchen.
■ The ground floor rooms in the southern wing would become meeting rooms.
■ The Laundry and Dairy would be restored as they would have been in the hey-day of the inn, as examples of their type.
■ The first and second floors of the inn would be made into a self-contained flat and offices, with minimal intervention into the historic fabric.
■ The main room on the first floor would be restored to its original function as an Assembly room, to be used for pre-booked meetings.
■ The areas over the Dairy would be used as an office, accessed from the restored external staircase.

The restoration of the New Inn yard would be key to the understanding of place. The natural entrance into the visitor facilities would be through the carriageway and from within the yard. However, the actual entrance with all the necessary electronic aids for disabled access would need to be carefully controlled to avoid compromises to the historic scale, intimacy and detail of the yard and the inn. It was important to preserve the appearance of the elevations of the inn, as these will define the setting for the visitor as they first arrive on their way from the car park.

As much of the building fabric would be maintained as possible, preserving the many layers of history. It was accepted however that there would need to be some radical areas of reconstruction due to the perilous state of the fabric, including taking up some of the heavily damaged ground floors (in the Kitchen areas), stripping some of the ground floor plaster walls, where absolutely necessary, and re-plastering with lime plaster.

The design specified a light touch on the landscape and the buildings, avoiding the tendency to tidy up too much. Keeping the rough edges to the roads and paths, the hedges slightly unkempt in their style, and maintaining the many changes to the buildings' form and materials both legible and preserved.

It was important to preserve the present romantic, if perilous state of New Inn itself. To do so each detail and choice of material needed to be selected with great care. In its restoration the inn should not be sanitised, and as much of the original function should be restored as is compatible with sustainable conservation of the building.
Design approach

Accessibility
As a listed Grade II* building, built in 1717, consideration had to be given to how access could be achieved in sensitive ways without drastic removal of historic fabric or compromising the spirit of place.

- A lost ‘porch’, shown on the Nattes drawing of 1809, was reconstructed to provide both shelter and an increased turning area in the otherwise cramped entrance to the Parlour rooms. Doors open into the Laundry and the Kitchen. The external door was moved out to create sufficient space to allow wheelchair access to the lower Parlour room, although not to Part M standards.
- There is a level change of two steps between the old Kitchen and the Parlour rooms. A detachable ramp now allows access up the Kitchen steps. Once at the higher level, the main corridor is 1.0m wide, allowing sufficient manoeuvrability.
- Of the two external doors into the wing of the inn containing the Parlour rooms, one has a level threshold. A detachable ramp can be used to overcome the 300mm change in height, at the main arch door as and when required, to provide assisted wheelchair access.
- The southern wing of the New Inn is also 300mm above the yard. The detachable ramp will provide access to these areas, which are to be made available for pre-booked meetings. Access to the first floor Assembly room will be available to the ambulant disabled, although the staircases do not totally comply with Part M. The education room is fully compliant and can be used as an alternative meeting room if required.

- The Laundry can be visited in a wheelchair with assistance. The doors are narrow at slightly less than 800mm.
- The Dairy may be viewed from the level lobby off the Kitchen. It is not possible for wheelchair users to descend to the low level of the main Dairy 450mm below however.
- Where steps occur, short handrails are provided where they do not conflict with conservation issues to restore and maintain the historic fabric of the New Inn.

Adaptation and re-use
Old timbers taken from demolished buildings were stored to be re-used – with careful spliced repairs where possible. All of the clay roof tiles were re-used, although damaged tiles were replaced with reclaimed ones. The roof timbers were repaired using oak reclaimed from the old collapsed barns on site.
- Glass was cleaned and reinstated;
- Cobbles were re-laid in the yard;
- Many bricks and engineering sets were re-used;
- Floorboards were reinstated;
- Ironmongery was refurbished;
- Fireplaces were refurbished and reinstated and
- Furniture was repaired for use within the ‘museum’ rooms.
Design approach

Archaeology

Surveys
An Archaeological and Vernacular Building Survey was carried out in addition to a detailed building survey.

The Conservation Plan was informed by an archaeological survey of New Inn carried out by Northamptonshire Archaeology and finalised by Inskip & Jenkins. This confirmed the original informal assessments of the date of the building and the relative sensitivity of different areas. The findings did not raise any issues for using New Inn as a location for visitor facilities.

An archaeological Watching Brief ran throughout the project. It only partially helped with the understanding of the building. It did not provide all of the information to solve the puzzle though.

Discoveries
During the project 63 different fragments of wallpapers that date from the early eighteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries were discovered. Most of the inn’s walls had long been stripped bare. But fragments of wallpaper were found in cupboards and under additions made to the 300 year old building. Some are smaller than a fingernail and leave little clue to their original age or design; but others offer more evidence.

One of the most important finds has also been one of the smallest. Discovered under the floorboards in an attic room, was probably the earliest printed wallpaper of its type in the Trust; dating from around 1715, it was no bigger than a postcard.

The most prestigious room was the Assembly room on the first floor, where traces of an expensive hand-printed paper, complete with a flock border, were found. The border was made in eight stages and each stage had to be dried for 24 hours before the next block could be printed. The paper was printed on ‘pre-joined’ paper - a process that dates it to before 1830-40.

One of the more frustrating finds, from the Assembly room, can be dated by its George I or II tax stamp. Unfortunately the eighteenth century decorators were so thorough in rubbing down its surface for a new scheme that only a few square centimetres of the design survive.

Other unusual discoveries include a rare maker’s stamp on a bedroom paper, dating the paper between 1798 and 1820, and copies of the Daily Herald from 20 May 1950 and the News of the World from 21 May 1950, used as lining papers.

Other items that were uncovered included:
- Coins
- A pigs trotter
- A draining bowl and
- Hidden tiles with bawdy words scrawled on them by past builders

Engagement

Engagement runs throughout the life of the project and beyond.

During the early stage of the project, engagement focused on consulting, taking advice from and informing key stakeholders about the project. The process was aimed at people directly involved with Stowe likely to be affected by the plans, and those with a key role in approving the project. There was a broadly supportive response and some of their ideas were reflected in the developing plans.

Working with local communities in a twenty mile or so radius proved very important and has helped with bringing the property to life.

Three groups of 10 were shown around each month from May 2010 (30 people each month). Many other tours eg. University students, SPAB, Trust staff etc also took place. In total well over a thousand people were shown around the site.

There was an ‘Adopt a Tile’ fundraising exercise: For £1.00 each contributors could leave a personal message on the back of a tile – to remain on the roof for another 300 years.
Design approach

Environmental
The environmental rationale running throughout the project was to make the facilities operationally sustainable. An environmental assessment looked into how to get as close to carbon neutral as possible. The wood chip boiler played a key role in this.

Nature conservation
A detailed Ecological Assessment of the development site and adjacent habitat was undertaken. Desktop surveys and field surveys were used to provide a description of the habitats and presence or absence of protected species in and adjacent to the proposed development site.

Protected species confirmed on the site and surrounding area include:
- Brown long eared, Noctule, Common Pipistrelle and Daubenton’s bats
- Grass snake
- Badgers
- Great crested and Smooth newts
- Tree Sparrow, House Sparrow, Bullfinch, Song Thrush and Green Woodpecker
- Small heath butterfly
- A small number of notable invertebrate species were also recorded on the site including the mining bees Lasioglossum pavoilum, L. malachurum and Melitta tricincta, plus hoverflies Chelostia barbatum and Volucella inanus.

Above: Temporary stabilisation of rare decorative scheme over the fireplace in one of the Parlour rooms

Project team
The project team comprised people and companies providing internal and external expertise including:

- Project Manager
- Project administration
- Curators
- Environmental Advisors
- Main Contractors: ISG
- Lead Architects: Cowper Griffith Architects
- Landscape Architects: Colvin and Muggeridge
- Landscape Contractor: Stowe Garden and Volunteer teams
- Services consultants
- Highway planning
- CDM coordinator
- Quantity Surveyor
- Structural & civil engineers
- Environmental consultant
Construction

The building was built in 1717, designed by Thomas Harris, Vanbrugh’s Clerk of Works. It originally accommodated the men working on the House and Gardens, and later, the early visitors to Stowe. Many accounts exist of the early visitors to Stowe staying at New Inn and finding it an uncomfortable experience – complete with fleas and gnats. The site had a dual use as an inn and a farm. In 1923 the farm was sold for the first time since the Temple family came to Stowe in the sixteenth century. It was purchased and let to the Tompkins family, who later bought it in 1947. The building had undergone very little alteration in essential layout since the eighteenth century.

The condition of the buildings varied from the inn, which retained internal fittings and fixtures (more or less) protected under a clay tile roof, to roofless outbuildings which were rapidly deteriorating and vulnerable to the elements. There were also fallen structures, such as the Threshing Barn which existed in footprint only.

A gentle and gradual post-war decline had led to the collapse of the barn in the lower farmyard (1970s-80) and the removal of a number of smaller buildings, which became irreparable. The principal building was listed Grade II* in 1983 and by the 1990s was recorded on the Buildings at Risk Register.

The buildings are of a regional character, with the exception of the ironstone on one elevation of the lower farmyard. The bricks and tiles were probably produced near to the site of the inn. The handful of bills submitted for the building of the inn came from the same sawyers, masons and plasterers that were working on the building of the new House and Garden structures.

The inn ranges generally survived in a dilapidated state, some areas had only part of their roof structure and varying degrees of their external walls intact. The position of the Carriage House was evident as a footprint of concrete and floor bricks at the northwest end of the site. Its timber frame has been partly recorded photographically and there were fragments of the original structure stored and labelled. The reinstatement of the Carriage House was considered essential for the interpretation of the Inn Yard.

With the exception of the Kitchen, the Laundry and the Dairy – which relate to the functions of the inn, the Milking Parlour/Feed Store, Pig house, the Dairy Pump House, the Stables and Carriage House required a complete change of use to support the needs of the visitor facilities.

Reconstructed New Inn yard

Demolition

■ Two single-storey twentieth/mid-nineteenth century additions, a wash room and a slaughter house, were removed to benefit the external elevations.

■ A bricked-in window was re-opened to provide greater natural light and ventilation to one of the Parlour rooms. This led to a better visual and physical link with the external areas.

Stabilisation

■ The brickwork to the extended southern stair tower was not properly supported or bonded into the original brickwork. Additional support from ground level was required to stabilise the structure. The external wall of the inn was a mixture of timber frame and brick noggin and needed to be conserved. An area of new masonry was built alongside the existing wall.

Reconstruction

■ The porch in the Nattes drawing was shown to be constructed on the south-west elevation of the north range. This has been reconstructed in timber with lath and plaster.

■ The restoration of the inn building itself presented particular challenges with regard to conservation. Some areas, particularly the stair towers to the rear were in a perilous state, needing to be taken down and carefully rebuilt.

■ Elements of the original eighteenth century stair existed underneath a 1920’s stair. This later stair was removed and replaced. The tower stair was reconstructed with a slight variation, allowing the visitor to understand the original configuration, up to the Assembly room on the first floor.

■ Strengthening and rebuilding works were carried out as necessary – for example on the two staircase towers, which were in a very bad structural condition.
Roofs

- The roof of New Inn itself was in quite good condition compared to those on some of the outbuildings.
- The roofs have been reconstructed with the main structure in green oak. The main green oak frame comprises tie beams, main wall frames, primary rafters and engaged purlins. It has been finished with a treated softwood rafter structure above.
- Surviving structural elements show that parts of the range had a flat ceiling; however, this has been repeated in the toilets and office areas only.
- For architectural reasons, the roofs over the learning room and the reception have been rebuilt with the internal space rising into the pitched roof. The plastered areas are of lime plaster on lath between elements of the main frame. Having restored the historic volume, the finishes and fittings within the reconstructed spaces are contemporary, avoiding any form of pastiche.
- Unlike the original structures which had flat ceilings with attic spaces above, only the offices now have a flat ceiling, elsewhere ceilings will follow the pitch line of the roof structure.
- There were some hand-made clay tiles on site but not enough to re-roof the entire complex. Priority was given to the inn and the buildings enclosing the inn yard. The numbers were made up by using reclaimed tiles and new hand-made tiles selected to match the existing. These were all mixed with the old for a homogenous finish.
- The eaves line is an important part of the roof. This was reinstated to match the original detailing as closely as practical. This involved commissioning bespoke ironwork.

- The chimneys were repaired and some of the roof structures strengthened.
- The roofs of the outbuildings were returned to their original hipped configuration as shown in the Nattes drawing.

Ceilings

- The first floor and ground floor ceiling structures have been substantially rebuilt and reinforced. Principal members were dismantled and repaired off-site. Steel reinforcements were concealed above the ceiling using fitch plate techniques. Insulation was added to the ceiling/first floor construction to assist with thermal and acoustic requirements.
- The floor had been boarded over with plywood and required major repair work/replacement pending opening up works. Beams were required within the ceiling zone to support the masonry of the stair turret directly above. The ceiling also needed significant plaster repairs.

Walls

- A Telling lime product was used for plastering, to stabilise the salts within the wall. Despite the need for intervention it was most important to safeguard the existing historic fabric without losing the patina of age or its historic character.
- In order to express the main green oak framing of the rebuilt structures, particularly the box framing of the walls, the buildings have been reconstructed using larger sections of timber in depth so that full insulation can be achieved.
- External sprocketed eaves and edge details have been carefully reinstated.
- Failed brickwork was repaired using Helifix and re-pointed.
- Unlike the inn building, the masonry walls to the outbuildings were of poor quality with inadequate foundations and single skin brickwork. These required masonry repairs including underpinning and the renewal of plasterwork to the walls.
- A lime plaster was applied to the base of walls to deal with salt migration as the damp masonry slowly dried out.
- Walls were finished with appropriate decorative schemes for each room.
Joinery
- All joinery was repaired on a piece by piece basis.
- Like for like repairs were carried out where pieces were badly damaged, mostly through water ingress.
- The Joiner removed most of the windows to repair them individually by hand.
- All joinery was carefully restored, and spliced in, rather than replaced.
- Where possible original glass was reinstated, some ‘conservation’ grade and ‘horticultural’ glass was mixed in.
- The early Crittall windows and glazing were repaired as early examples of a modern reinterpretation of flat strap casements.

Floors
- An insulated limecrete solid floor construction was selected for the new floors in the structures other than the Kitchen, Dairy and Laundry. This allows the pipework and cabling to be concealed and for under-floor heating to the more heavily serviced areas (recruitment area, offices, toilets, learning room).
- The other floors were retained as found with the exception of a suspended boarded floor, which had been lost. This was reinstated with oak boarding.
- The Kitchen, Laundry and Dairy have been retained as part of the ‘interpretation’ of the inn. Their internal finishes and fittings have been repaired. The flagstones in the kitchen were re-laid on a bed of lime mortar.

Wiring
- Generally the wiring had been surface mounted with the exception of the wiring for pendant light fittings.
- New wiring to light fittings, switches and sockets has been concealed. The impact of new services was carefully planned to be as minimal as possible. Where possible, cabling runs in ceiling areas have been accessed by lifting floor boards in the upper rooms, or behind skirting boards at ground floor level, which have been carefully removed, modified and replaced. The re-roofing works have allowed services to be run within roof voids.
- Services were introduced – heating, lighting, fire and security systems.
- A lightning protection system has been concealed below the tiles.

Heating
- The only form of heating had previously been from open fires in various rooms.
- Victorian/traditional-style radiators have been installed in the Kitchen and Laundry, whilst the Dairy is unheated.
- Fireplaces in two of the rooms date from the mid-nineteenth century and so were retained and repaired with a view to reinstating their original use. The flues to the four fireplaces were re-lined to meet current Building Regulation requirements.
Construction

Restored rooms
- The original Assembly room on the first floor of the south-west wing has been restored.
- A three bedroom flat was created in the northern wing. One of the rooms had been fitted out as a bathroom in the late-nineteenth century, meaning that the insertion of replacement pipe work for a new bathroom had minimal impact on the historic fabric.
- The attic rooms have remained close to their original configuration.
- The Kitchen, Laundry and Dairy have been retained as part of the ‘interpretation’ of the inn. Their internal finishes and fittings have been repaired.
- The space directly above the Dairy now provides accommodation for the volunteers. This room was formerly run as a café for the Stowe boys in the 1920’s and 30’s.

Associated work
- The wallpapers were conserved, archived and are available to view.
- Cobbles were removed and re-laid in specific areas around the yard.
Funding

The total project cost was around £6.5 billion with a cost per m² of £5,845.

The project was funded by the National Trust with generous external funding from:
- Heritage Lottery Fund: £1.5 million
- Private donations: £1 million
- Smaller grants and fundraising: £0.5 million

Procurement
- OJEU procurement route with five contractors bidding.
- Having selected the New Inn site a detailed design brief was drawn up by the National Trust. This formed the basis of the OJEU competition, through which Cowper Griffith Architects were appointed.
- JCT traditional plus Bill of Quantities

Project duration
- Application for Planning Permission: April 2009
- Planning Permission and Listed Building Consent received: September 2009
- Completion of tender packages including OJEU advert: November 2009
- Tenders received: January 2010
- Contractors on site: February 2010
- Project completion: February 2012
- Time on site was 6 months longer than an initial estimate.

Top left Tap room and Innkeeper’s office
Bottom left Restored entrance to the Laundry and Kitchen
The environmental performance of the visitor facilities at Stowe has vastly improved. The former facilities were very wasteful of energy. Improvements have been made to the sewerage systems and water consumption has reduced. The BREEAM (Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method) rating and score was Very Good, 62.88%.

The visitor route into Stowe has been improved and access for people with disabilities upgraded.

In restoring the New Inn, the National Trust has created a social and economic asset for the local community which has become a fully accessible resource for learning and recreation for years to come.

The New Inn has once again become the threshold between the rural and formal landscapes for the visitor to Stowe. The restoration and rebuilding works have allowed it to be opened up and made accessible for the first time to many people.

The Dairy, the Laundry and the Kitchen contain interpretative exhibitions that explain the significance of the New Inn and its relationship with the broader landscape including gardens, the monuments and the mansion house.

There are critical facilities that need to be planned with care to achieve a good experience for visitors. These include the car park, the journey to reception, reception, toilets, catering, plus all of the things and people that support these functions.

**End-user feedback**

**Visitors**

“Loads of money been spent on doing up the New Inn and courtyard etc. the gardens and follies are in prime condition. With the lovely weather lately it is a beautiful location to wander around. Lots of history and brilliant staff to help with any queries you may have. The newly updated courtyard is ideal for morning coffee or a lovely afternoon tea. Spectacular.”

“Stowe Gardens is now accessed through the ‘New Inn’ which has recently been restored. Only two rooms are accessible but as it is hundreds of years old, one cannot complain! The new entrance area is outstanding and the lift, involving some disappearing stairs are fun. A lift is then provided on a ‘land train’ to the garden entrance. The paths are mainly okay but some are perilous for a wheelchair, as they are either very steep and/or the surfaces are very loose – always a problem. In summary, go to Stowe, it’s worth a visit.”

September 2012

**Best practices**

A Volunteer Site Manager was able to stand in and give guided tours when the Project Manager was not around.

Advice from relevant heritage advisors was essential to the project research.

A very careful study of material available such as drawings, photographic evidence and site materials enabled the architect and archaeologist to come up with the best approach for restoration.

**Lessons learnt**

It is important to think through IT requirements carefully. Sales desks contain a lot of IT equipment from tills and card readers to polling equipment, phones and more.
Further information

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