YORKSHIRE GARDENS TRUST

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22nd September 2025

Dear Ms Phillips

61 Standard Trees at Roundhay Park, Connaught Field, Leeds - sent to Yorkshire Gardens Trust by Historic England

Thank you for your e-mails. As I explained, Dr Kristof Fatsar Regional Landscape Architect (North (North West, North East & Yorkshire Regions), **Historic England,** has contacted the Yorkshire Gardens Trust (YGT) about the proposed 61 standard trees to be planted in Roundhay Park.

The Gardens Trust (GT) is the statutory consultee regarding proposed development affecting a site on the Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest in England (RPG) – in this case Roundhay Park, Leeds, registered Grade II. The Yorkshire Gardens Trust (YGT) is a member organisation of the GT and works in partnership with it in respect of the protection and conservation of registered sites in Yorkshire and is authorised by the GT to respond on GT's behalf in respect of such consultations. We understand from Kristof that monument consent is not required but he suggested that we get in touch with you.

Prince's Avenue - the area for the new trees – runs north from Park Avenue which is a main entrance to Roundhay Park. Prince's Avenue bisects the Sports Grounds with 'Military Field' to part of the eastern area.

Having looked at OS 25" : 1mile maps:

Yorkshire CC111.11 Surveyed 1891 to 1892 published 1893 Prince's Avenue is devoid of trees. It seems to have been constructed as a main access route after Leeds City Council purchased the estate to make a public park in the 1870's.

Yorkshire CC111.11 Surveyed 1906, published 1908 Prince's Avenue is a tram line bounded on either side by an avenue of trees. No trees along Park Avenue or West Avenue roadsides. ***

****Note the large clump of native beech and oak trees planted by the Nicholson family at northern end of Park Avenue, exotic Horse chestnuts of similar age planted along adjacent mansion boundaries and the line of trees along Western Avenue in the gardens of adjacent mansions.*

Yorkshire CC111.11 Revised 1919, published 1921. Prince's Avenue still a tramway flanked by an avenue of (sycamore) trees on each side. Park Avenue and West Avenue boundaries planted with (sycamore) trees.

And similarly on Yorkshire CC111.11 Revised 1933, published 1935. Prince's Avenue has the tramway with a public access drive on its eastern flank. The single avenue of (sycamore) trees remain on each side.

We find the aerial photograph with yellow dots for the proposed siting of the standard trees a little difficult to interpret. But thank you for sending the map with the red dots. Kristof has written that he understands that 'this proposal is about doubling the [eastern] avenue to create 4 files of trees.' But having now looked at the map with the red dots, (which he has not seen) am I interpreting it correctly? It also looks as if you intend planting up trees in other small areas of the park? We understand from what you have told us that the project is to fill in places with trees missing and will be planting similar trees to those which are already in the Avenue - Sycamore.

My conservation colleague who lives in Leeds knows the city well and its parks. She has put together brief historical evidence for Roundhay Park and its history of tree planting which is in the Appendix below.

The major reason Leeds City Council purchased the parkland with its mansion was to provide much needed recreational space for its citizens with pure, clean air as evidenced by the many native trees surviving here in 1873 (English Oak - Quercus robur, Wild cherry - Prunus avium, Holly - Ilex aquifolium, Pear - Pyrus domestica, Ash - Fraxinus excelsior), whilst NONE could stand the pollution in the City centre.

Pollution had however carried on increasing over the decades since the Park was purchased and heavy blanketing smogs had become a regular winter event. This, we suggest is why an alien but very pollution tolerant tree species was chosen by the council alongside the cutting through the farmland for the electric tramway in 1897.

<u>Surviving Trees from current evidence in the Park in September 2025</u>

Oak - Quercus robur. Veteran aged specimens from ancient field boundaries carefully preserved by Thomas Nicholson
Beech - Fagus sylvatica - Veteran aged trees at eastern edge of site planted or preserved during Thomas Nicholson's time
Copper Beech - Fagus sylvatica 'Purpurea'
Small leaved Lime - Tilia cordata
Ash - Fraxinus excelsior. Veteran aged specimens
Alder - Alnus glutinosa
Holly - Ilex aquifolium

<u>C20th trees along Prince's Avenue, Park Avenue and Western Avenue:</u>

Sycamore - Acer pseudoplatanus - these are the vast majority, but they are not all flourishing.
Oak - Quercus robur - one ancient and flourishing surviving specimen which is seeding happily down the banking into the cutting of the road.
Hybrid Lime - Tilia europea
Hornbeam – Carpinus betulus
Beech – Fagus sylvatica

In the C21st there is an urgent need to address environmental issues as well as historic ones and as sycamores are associated with a very few wildlife species whilst oaks have around 2,000 associates there is no need to add yet more alien sycamores if circumstances eg The Clean Air Act and our research evidence have altered the situation.

The above lists show what can survive in the Park and we conclude that the native tree species that best fits the archival, pictorial and ecological evidence discussed above is the 'English oak' *Quercus robur*.

In conclusion, we would urge Woodland Creation to plant a line of oaks (as well as other native trees in peripheral areas if desired). *Quercus robur* is much to be preferred both for historic and ecological reasons. We appreciate that planting a line of oaks will be more complex to carry out but the long-term breadth of benefits will be much greater.

Yours sincerely,

Val Hepworth
Trustee Conservation and Planning

cc. Kristof Fatsar, Landscape Architect North of England, Historic England
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APPENDIX

Some Notes on the History of Roundhay Park and its Trees

We think that the "infill along Princes Avenue" misses the ancient importance of this C11th deer park. It was created by digging huge banks and ditches, roughly circular of nearly 6 miles in length and fenced for hunting deer and as such, tree cover must have been extensive as it was vitally important to the animals' wellbeing.

Over the ensuing centuries, the underground minerals (iron and coal) were mined and the forest cropped not only for timber but also coppiced for the necessary charcoal. Since the records mention timber felled for its bark one can safely assume a lot of this was oak as to our knowledge other species such as ash, holly and wild cherry did not contain sufficient tannins to be worthwhile. Timber from the estate was used to supply the Manor of Leeds which had run out of its own fuel source many years beforehand. Sadly, by the early C15th there was virtually no timber or coppicing left. Charles I was so financially insecure that he even had to give the Park to the Corporation of London as part of a debt payment!

In 1797, this 1,300 acre estate, virtually denuded of tree cover was put up for sale and eventually in 1803 it was bought by two Quaker gentleman. Samuel Elam (SE) and Thomas Nicholson (TN) who commissioned a survey by Jonathan Taylor*. TN chose the steeper northern part with its "beautiful tree lined gorge" and proceeded to lay the property out as a gentleman's residence, creating the top lake, the mansion house, what is now Canal Gardens, two follies - ie. the wooden hermitage above a boat house and the sham castle - and also the stable block with its adjacent workers cottages. TN then bought extra land from SE's executors so that he had enough to build the lower, much larger "Waterloo" lake, giving work to all the retired soldiers from the Napoleonic wars. The first known plan of these improvements was included by J.Thorp 1819-1821 in his map of the town of Leeds **

In brief the southern part of TN's land was never replanted with trees and remained as open farm land even after Thomas Barram, a Leeds Councillor bought it for the city in 1871. It was not until

heavy politically motivated criticism of this “unreachable” Park - (its only 4 miles from the centre, so an hours walking!) - motivated the council to finally create direct access that the overhead electric tram way was finally put into action July 1897. This is presumably why the route was made as level as possible hence the cutting through agricultural fields to either side.

It is important to note that at this time, the major reason for purchasing the parkland with its mansion was because trees were surviving here whilst none could stand the pollution in the City centre. This we suggest is why an alien but very pollution tolerant tree species was chosen by the council. In the C21st there is a far far greater need to address environmental issues and as sycamores are associated with a very few wildlife species whilst oaks have around 2,000 associates there is no need to add yet another line of them. As a result, we would urge Woodland Creation to plant native English oaks, where new trees are indicated on the plan as they are much to be preferred both for historic, environmental and aesthetic reasons.

HISTORIC MAP EVIDENCE

The 1803 map, by Jonathan Taylor* has all the field names marked and this shows that the following species are suitable for Roundhay, alluding to its ancient status, barely mentioned today which benefitted not only the lords of the Manor of Roundhay but also the citizens of Leeds and the field names which confirm them.

FROM the 1803 MAP*

Timber trees
English Oak - Quercus robur
Wild cherry - Prunus avium
Holly - Ilex aquifolium
Pear - Pyrus domestica
Ash - Fraxinus excelsior

Under storey and hedges
Hawthorn - Crataegus monogyna
Hazel - Corylus avelana
Whin - Cytisus scoparius

FROM current evidence in the Park

Oak - Quercus robur Veteran aged specimens from ancient field boundaries carefully preserved by TN
Beech - Fagus sylvatica - Veteran aged trees at eastern edge of site planted or preserved during TN’s time
Copper Beech - Fagus sylvatica ‘Purpurea’
Small leaved Lime - Tilia cordata
Ash - Fraxinus excelsior Veteran aged specimens
Alder - Alnus glutinosa
Holly - Ilex aquifolium

C20th trees along Prince’s Avenue and park boundaries along Park Avenue and Western Avenue

Sycamore - Acer pseudoplatanus - these are the vast majority but they are not all flourishing.
Oak - Quercus robur - one ancient and flourishing surviving specimen which is seeding happily down the banking into the cutting of the road.
Hybrid Lime - Tilia europea
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