



Planning the perfect family home

Even with two decades of planning and heritage permissions under our belts, it's still a complete thrill each time we get to tell a client that consent has been granted, especially when that permission will unlock plans already dreamt of for decades.

Kye and Nick contacted Avalon in 2017. They had been planning their perfect family home for a long time and were already four years into advanced design work and pre-application negotiations with the Council. An architecturally striking timber building, their proposed 'Autarkic House' was to be technologically cutting-edge; as Europe's first fully off-grid solar-Hydrogen House it would be able to generate and indefinitely store its own solar power; it was also the world's first Certified Hydrogen Fuel Cell Passivhaus. Alongside this impressive technological innovation, Kye and Nick's house was also a highly personal venture, as they hoped to build it in the same woodland clearing where they had married.

While there was strong interest in this exemplar building being located within South Devon, and its design and technological innovation fulfilled the planning requirements for allowing an exceptional new house in the countryside (a so called 'paragraph 55' house – now para. 79(e)), progress had now halted because of strong objections from Historic England, and landscape and conservation officers.

The proposed site of Autarkic House lay within the historic Oxton Mere Estate, near Exeter; a hidden gem of an 18th century

garden and valley landscape, all designed by the picturesque landscape designer John Swete. Although now owned by several private individuals, the national importance of this landscape is notable, as one of the first Registered Parks and Gardens, containing five Grade II* and II listed buildings.

We quickly identified that two core heritage issues needed to be addressed. The first was the lack of agreement between parties about which features in the Registered Park were authentic or not, and which were of higher or lower significance. To move forward, Avalon therefore began extensive archival research and on the ground analysis to prepare a detailed Heritage Assessment for Oxton Mere. This was welcomed by heritage stakeholders and served as a key reference document for pre-application discussions, as well as an asset towards the future management of the Estate.

The second stage of Avalon's heritage strategy was to identify a 'wish list' of heritage improvement works of all scales needed within the Registered Park. Through meetings and site visits we then sensitively advocated these heritage benefit works with both Historic England and the council on behalf of the applicants, framing these as demonstration of the passion and commitment of the

applicants themselves to their historic landscape.

A package of heritage benefit works was ultimately agreed, which allowed heritage objections to be either notably downgraded or removed entirely. The applicants were thrilled to be able to move forward positively and with a good degree of certainty to formal submission, and happily planning permission was granted in July 2019 for their innovative new Autarkic House. The agreed package of heritage benefits includes: replanting key areas of historic woodland within the Park with more authentic species; revealing several important lost pathways and roads from Swete's design using new wildflower paths; and establishing a new woodland school at Oxton Mere, to offer local schools the opportunity to visit and appreciate Swete's previously private valley gardens. 🌿

To see more of our current heritage projects, or to find out more about the Autarkic House, visit www.avalonplanning.co.uk. Or to speak to us about making your own dream heritage development a reality, please contact our Heritage Planning Director, Nick Bishop, at Nick@avalongplanning.co.uk.

