

BRAMHAM PARK

WET HERBY

REPORT ON PUBLIC OPENING

October 1972

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## 1 . I N T R O D U C T I O N

Since we received our instructions from Messrs. Withers to give outline advice on the opening to the public of Bramham Park, we have had the opportunity of visiting the house and meeting Mr. and Mrs. Lane Fox. We were shown both the house and gardens in detail, and also certain nearby parts of the Estate.

We understand that it is the wish of the Trustees that the house should be maintained as the home of the Lane Fox family, and that their aim is that the income received from the public opening operation should not only pay for the maintenance repair and running of the house and gardens, which at present amount to about £7,000 per annum, but should also make a substantial contribution towards the finances of the Estate as a whole. It is also a requirement of the Historic Buildings Council that the house should remain open to the public, following payment of grant towards the cost of restoring the house and outbuildings.

## 2 . L O C A T I O N

In its position between Wetherby, Tadcaster, York, Leeds and Harrogate, with direct access from the A1, a district with a vast, largely urban population, we are convinced that Bramham Park could attract very much greater numbers of the public, as the general level of mobility, affluence and leisure time rises.

## 3 . O W N E R S H I P

Bramham Park - the house itself - is owned by a private discretionary Trust, of whom two of the Trustees are Mr. Jeremy Leech of Messrs. Smiths Gore; and *Mr.* Arthur Collins of Messrs. Withers. The Trust also owns a large proportion of the contents of the house, and about two fifths of the agricultural estate. The balance of the property is owned partly by Mr. George Lane Fox and partly by his mother.

#### 4 . M A N A G E M E N T

Management of the estate is carried out by Messrs. Smiths Gore, the partner in charge being *Mr.* Jeremy Leech. The farm in hand is managed by *Mr.* Brian Robinson, and the house opening operation by *Mr.* Arthur Tindall. Both *Mr.* and *Mrs.* Lane Fox take a close interest in the management of the property, particularly the house and grounds.

#### 5 . D E S C R I P T I O N

The house was originally built around 1700. In 1828 it was severely damaged by fire, but was reconstructed at the turn of the century. It was eventually reoccupied in 1906. An attractive stable complex adjoins the south side of the house. The 70 acre gardens are a magnificent example of a French design of about the time of Louis XIV. In 1962 many of the mature trees were devastated by a freak storm, and its effects will take many years to be obliterated.

#### 6 . P R E S E N T O P E N I N G A R R A N G E M E N T S

The gardens were first opened to the public in 1952. In the follow; ng years the house also was opened for three days each week from Easter to the end of September. In 1969 this was reduced to Sundays only.

Access to and from Bramham Park for the public, is by both the long and narrow driveway from the A1 trunk road, and via the west drive to the public road. Cars park on an area of parkland to the east of the walled garden. Tickets are sold by the path to the east front of the house. A choice of tickets is available, either to the garden only, or to the house and garden. The present prices are, for the combined ticket 17-p. for adults and 71p. for children; for the gardens only the charges are 10p. and 5p. respectively.

No specific circulation route is laid out in the garden, for visitors. Within the house six rooms only on the ground floor are opened for viewing in a predetermined order.

Visitors' lavatories are provided in a small outbuilding. A small

cafeteria beneath the gallery provides a limited range of refreshments for visitors in restricted numbers. Some souvenirs as well as postcards and guide books are sold from a desk in the hall.

## 7. RECOMMENDATIONS

### General

We have divided our recommendations into two sections which may either be treated as alternatives, or as two complementary operations which could be set up separated both in time and location, but which should be managed as one commercial operation.

We would also point out the importance of the adoption of a long term plan, to ensure that any interim developments can be designed to fit within its overall framework.

We have borne in mind during the preparation of this scheme, the importance of avoiding the dangers of the creation of a medium sized business having the overheads of a large operation and the income of a small business.

It goes without saying that we have assumed throughout our recommendations that the highest standards of quality and design will be achieved.

## 7. SCHEME 1

### CONCEPT

Expanding the existing operation to a more commercial basis with public access to the immediate vicinity of the house and grounds only.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- (1) Maintain the existing opening season from Easter to the end of September.

- (2) Increase advertising - both paid, and by publicity generating operations.
- (3) Extend opening of the gardens to five days per week, being closed on Saturdays and Mondays.
- (4) Increase admission charges to:  
combined ticket 30p adult, 15p. child;  
gardens only 20p adult, 10p. child;  
and to keep the price structure under constant review.
- (5) Continue to restrict access to the house to Sundays only.
- (6) To standardize signposting and captioning throughout the entire operation.
- (7) To position the paypoint near the entrance to the park, to prevent the current free access to the agricultural section of the park.
- (8) Introduce one way traffic circulation: Entrance from AI , exit via West drive.
- (9) Construct new gravel surfaced car park within existing walled garden.
- (10) Construct formal Information Centre and gift shop adjacent to the main pedestrian circulation route both for arrival and departure; preferably within the stable block near the new catering facility.
- (11) Provide adventure playground, consisting of natural features, obstacles and challenging amusements for children, between the car•park and Information point.
- (12) Provide collection of small and young animals within the farmstead and stable block area, as a specific attraction to children.
- (13) Upgrade the pleasure gardens by the employment of one additional gardener and the provision of further low maintenance, high quality shrub borders.
- (14) Retain the existing one way circulation route through the house.

- (15) Construct new catering facility within the stable block.
- (16) Provide facilities for conferences, gourmet dinners and medieval banquets either within the house itself, or in the disused cowshed, to be converted for this use, to seat about 100 people.
- (17) Let the entire catering operation on a concession basis to a professional catering organisation, who in turn will put up a proportion of the capital required.
- (18) To hold special events throughout the season to boost the overall seasons attendance figures, such as Bramham Horse Trials, Skydiving Displays, Brass Band Conventions, Traction engine rallies, Vintage Car rallies and other appropriate crowd-drawing events.

Financial Note:

Including the conversion of the cowshed for the holding of medieval banquets, we would anticipate that the works involved in Scheme 1 could be carried out within a ceiling figure of £45,000.

7. SCHEME II

CONCEPT

Maintenance of the existing arrangements for opening the house and gardens one day per week, as a 'special attraction'. Provision of a self contained 'Country Park' within the meaning of the Countryside Act, in the Black Fen Pleasure Grounds, around the existing temples and obelisk.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- (1) To provide an improved access, from the public road, along the existing track to the South East of the woodland area known as Black Fen.
- (2) To create an entirely new Country Park, with strong emphasis on the educational aspects, to attract large numbers at a comparatively low entrance charge.

(3) The Country Park to contain such features as:

Arboretum

Childrens jungle playground

Bicycle routes

Camping and Caravan facilities

Schools forest plots

Riding facilities

Ornamental walks

Nature trails

Photographic trails

Picnic area

Monkey jungle

Observation tower.

Services in the form of:

Information Centre

Restaurant

Lavatories

Gift selling point

Landscaped car park.

(4) To provide an amusing form of transport between the Country Park and the House.

Financial Note:

The total cost of this type of scheme is likely to be in the region of £150,000, but this figure depends very much on the scale of the development.

## 8. SCALE OF DEVELOPMENT AND FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

We stated earlier in our report that we were satisfied that Bramham could become a very popular and successful attraction to the public. We consider that either scheme would be financially viable, showing a return in the region of 20% on the total capital investment. If it is decided to proceed with either scheme, we are confident that on preparation of detailed figures this estimate will be confirmed.

In the case of the adoption of Stage 1, we would expect the annual attendance level to reach 50,000. However if it were decided to proceed with Stage 2, it would be necessary for the level to reach 150,000 visitors per annum.

Stage 2, would in several of its components be eligible for grant of up to 75% of capital and some running costs, from the Countryside Commission. The provision of car parks, picnic areas, nature trails, and similar facilities would fall within this category.

Further grant may also be forthcoming at a later stage from the Historic Buildings Council, for works to Bramham Park Hall, and also to the obelisks, temples and buildings within the grounds and park.

The taxation advantages to be gained also have a considerable bearing on the financial success of either operation. With particular reference to the house itself, provided that it can be shown that it is "being managed on a commercial basis with a view to realisation of profits", deductions may be made from gross income for the cost of upkeep of areas, buildings and contents which refer to the trading activity, in order to calculate the profit. The apparent level at which the property is considered commercial, is on opening for 100 days or more per year. These allowances would relate to such items as heating, electricity, insurance, cleaning, repairs and maintenance. However, although we would envisage this level of opening as being acceptable within the grounds, and perhaps the gardens, we have assumed that it would prevent any possibility of the house being maintained as a home. We have not therefore recommended that the opening of the house should be extended.

## 9. TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING

Whichever scheme is adopted, we would anticipate that planning permission would be required for certain aspects of the proposals. For example, permission would be required for the construction of new access roads, car parks, buildings, lavatories and sewage works, as well as for the general change of use of the land.



## 1 0 . M A N A G E M E N T

We would stress the vital importance in the development of a commercial operation as envisaged by either of these schemes, of employing business management staff of the calibre appropriate to the scale of the business for its organisation and success.

## 1 1 . P R O M O T I O N A N D A D V E R T I S I N G

This is a vitally important aspect, without which financial success on the scale envisaged cannot be assured. On either stage it may be prudent to employ professional public relations consultants in the early years, although later this work should be carried out by the management organisation.

## 1 2 . C O N C L U S I O N S

Although we would like to end this report by reaching a firm conclusion on one or other of the schemes put forward, we do not consider ourselves to be in a position to judge the personal feelings of the owners, or to assess the effects of such a development on the overall financial structure of the estate. However we have seen over the past few years the steadily reducing acreage of unspoilt countryside, and the ever increasing demands of the population for access to these areas, for their leisure and recreation. We also appreciate that Mr. and Mrs. Lane Fox enjoy their privacy and home life at Bramham Park which has been their family home for many generations. Therefore if both considerations are to be satisfied, in the long term, to the overall financial benefit of the estate, we would recommend the adoption of the type of development outlined as Scheme 11 of this report.