

The Historic Landscape at Auburn House



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Issue 3

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1.0 Introduction

Auburn House and estate is located off Malahide Road opposite the grounds of Malahide Castle Demesne, 2km south of Malahide, Co. Dublin. The estate extends for 13.3ha. and in addition to Auburn House and stable block, comprises several fields laid out in agricultural use (horse grazing), woodland, walled garden and ancillary structures previously converted to residential use.

Auburn House consists of a 5 bay three storey over basement dwelling with associated stable block to the rear. In Turtle Bunbury's history of Auburn Estate, the author describes the house as being one of the finest residences built in Ireland in the 18th century. He depicts the house as a *'golden-brown three storey mansion located in a wooded demesne adjacent to Malahide Castle'*.

The Rocque's map of County Dublin (1760) identifies buildings on the land at Auburn, on the south side of 'Peas Fields Hill'. The Crawford family had become landowners in the Auburn area, having originated in Fermanagh where they were prosperous merchants. Auburn House was constructed in c. 1779. One of the Crawfords had married into the Vernon family of Clontarf Castle and the house was likely constructed to mark this marriage. The courtyard, stable block and walled gardens were built presumably at the same time as the main building.

The house is approached from Malahide Road opposite the southern gate lodge associated with Malahide Castle Demesne. Rendered convex flank walls in combination with lower pedestrian gate piers with wrought iron pedestrian gates form the entrance. A narrow winding driveway enclosed by mature woodland ensures that views are deliberately contained. A stone bridge over the stream, provides a subtle change of character as views open up northwards providing glimpse views of the estate landscape with the woodland as a pleasant backdrop.

The estate lands while relatively small in size by the standards of that period, still contain similar features to that of larger estates. These features include woodland, a walled garden and orchard and ancillary structures relating to the walled garden previously converted to residential use.



Figure 1: Aerial image of Auburn House and surrounds (Google Earth 2019)

2.0 Landscape Heritage and Design Influence

The architecture of the period was based on a more refrained design style, with straight edges and often square symmetrical shapes predominating, as was the case in the design of Auburn House. Many of the houses were also placed in grand landscapes and the landscape architectural movement of the time, couldn't have been more different. The inspiration for the design of the landscape at Auburn House and many of the large houses throughout Ireland and Britain came from the English landscape garden. The philosophy behind the English landscape garden was Naturalism, favouring curved lines, gentle slopes, lakes and woodlands, moving away from the strict formal geometric gardens of the Baroque period. These gardens were designed to look natural and be a place for meditation and relaxation.

Lancelot 'Capability' Brown was the most successful practitioner of this approach in the second half of the 18th century. He was responsible for the design of over 200 parklands across England. Brown's materials could scarcely have been simpler, utilising earth, water and trees, all of which were employed at Auburn House.

Characteristics of the English landscape garden included:

- Vista
- Drive
- Parkland setting
- Woodland
- Waterways
- Walled garden
- Sculpture, recreational architecture/ruins/follies

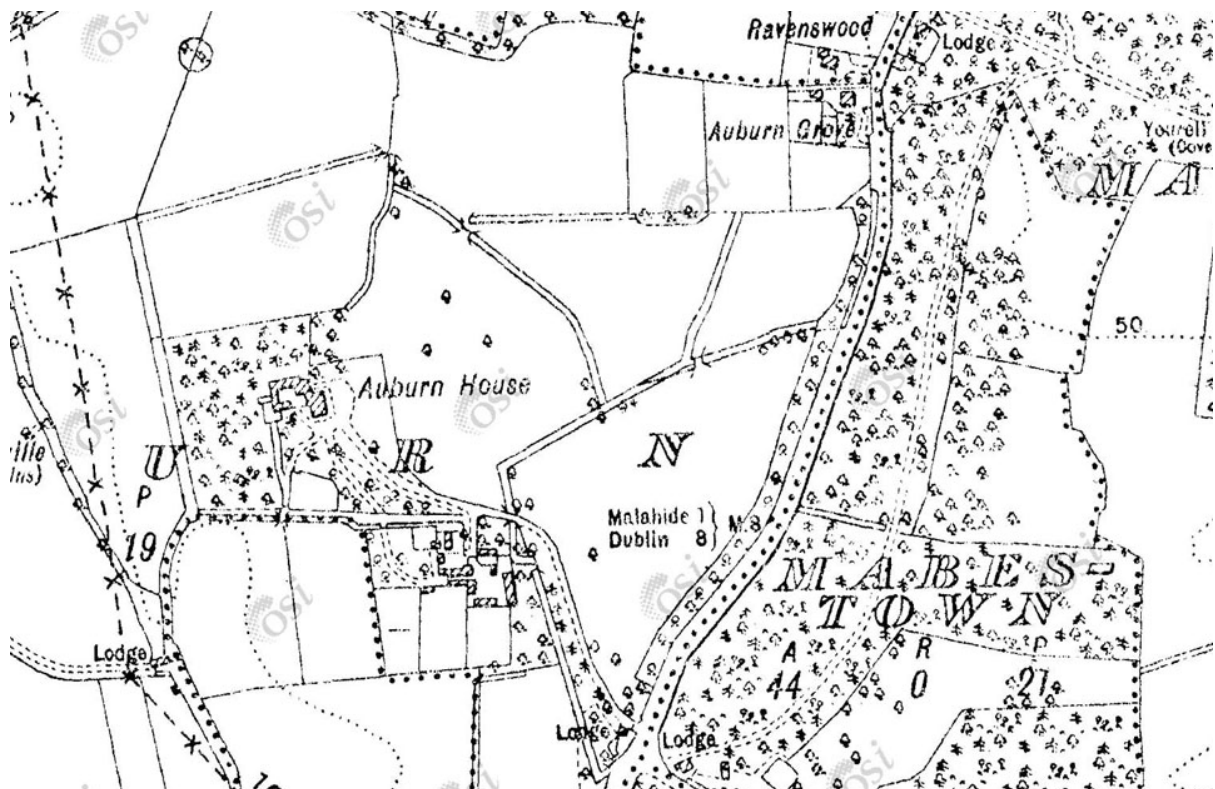


Figure 2: Auburn House and lands – 1837 OSi Historic 6" mapping

The Vista

Many of the above design interventions are present at Auburn House. The house itself was built on lands extending to 13 hectares (32 acres) and at a slight elevation, to capture the vista with views orientated north-eastwards towards Malahide Castle and framed with mature trees and field hedgerows. This visual connection is identified within the Streamstown LAP as being of historical significance.

Visual connections were important within the designed landscapes of the period. Auburn House was designed and orientated north-eastwards towards Malahide Castle. The visual connection towards Malahide Castle was achieved by the framing woodland north and south of Auburn House. In addition, the woodland blocks within the estate landscape were laid out to reinforce this visual connection.



Image 1: view from Auburn House, looking towards Malahide Castle Demesne

The Drive

By the mid 1700's carriages were becoming faster and designers had to take into account the fact that their work would be viewed in these vehicles. To counteract this, design incorporated long winding driveways to increase the length of the approach to the house. The driveway at Auburn House begins with the entrance walls and piers (Malahide Road) and gently curves along its length enclosed by woodland, which restricts views out over the surrounding landscape. This design element enhances the impression of distance for the visitor and assists in creating drama and the sense of anticipation for the visitor. The drive crosses a stone bridge over a stream that identifies a

deliberate change in landscape character as the lands open up towards the parkland landscape, providing glimpse views of the house in the distance. Creating a grand picturesque approach to Auburn House not only highlighted the design of the landscape, but also emphasised the wealth and prestige of the owner.



Image 2: Approaching Auburn House from Malahide Road

Parkland Setting

The location and setting of the house historically appears to have been a pastoral parkland landscape context, typical of the English landscape garden principles at that time. Reference to the historic mapping indicates that Auburn was historically approached by a meandering drive through woodland which brought visitors up to the house, providing only glimpse views along the route and only fully revealing the house at the front forecourt, in order to achieve maximum drama and impact. While the estate was not sufficiently large to allow for the grand gestures of other large houses of that period such as Belcamp Hall located 6km south of Auburn, the estate lands still contained similar features including woodland and a walled garden within a parkland setting. It is likely that the front field contained a number of loose tree groupings to provide a pleasant vista from the front of the house, framing the vista towards Malahide Castle. This view is deliberately observed from the house only.

In addition, the lands to the immediate west of the house are indicated in the 1837 layout as having pathways and were likely laid out as woodland walkways to allow the owners and visitors to take

pleasant walks close to the house. The combination of pastoral open lands and structured woodland assisted in reinforcing the parkland character.

The philosophy behind the English landscape garden was Naturalism, favouring curved lines, gentle slopes, lakes and woodlands, moving away from the strict formal geometric gardens of the Baroque period. These gardens were designed to look natural and be a place for meditation and relaxation.

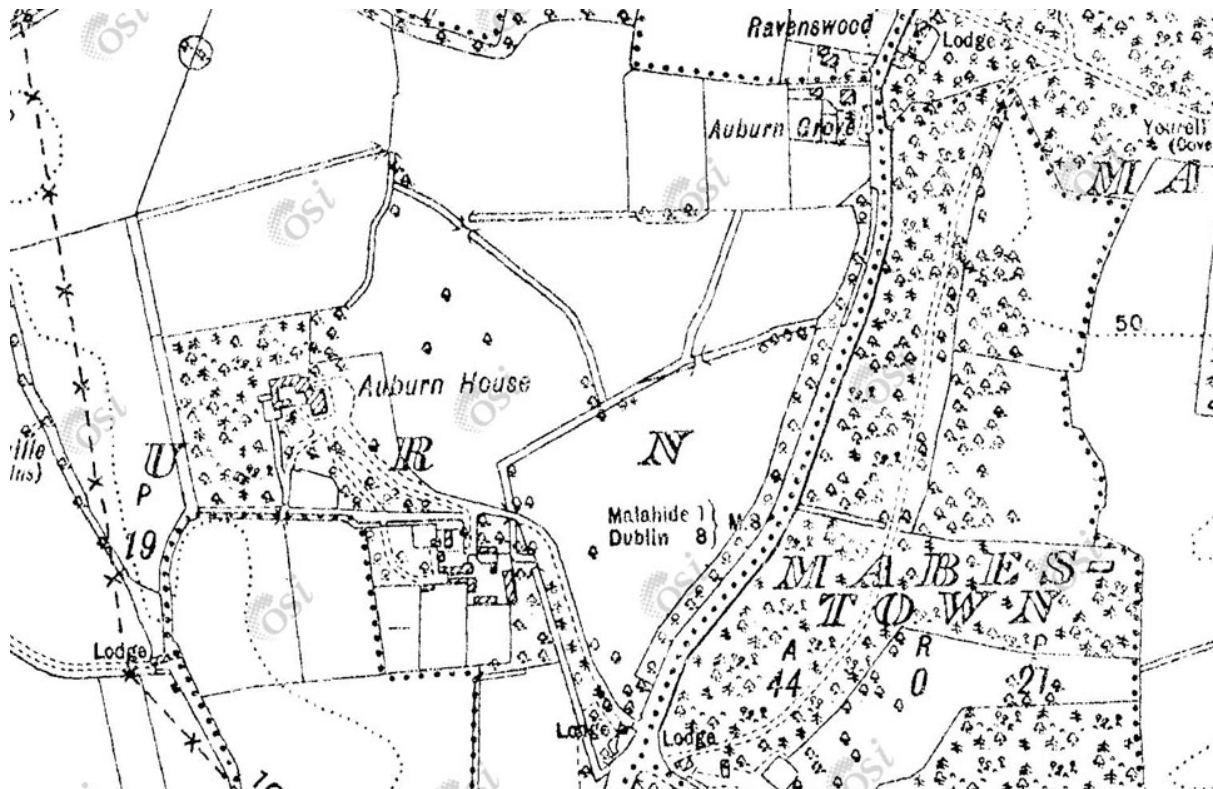


Figure 3: historic map highlighting parkland setting

The Woodland

The woodland setting was both a functional and aesthetic feature in the landscape. The trees served the aesthetic function of framing views from the house and creating a scenic backdrop to the house. Aside from their visual qualities, Brownian landscapes also appealed to landowners on commercial and practical levels. They also reflected changes to upper-class leisure in the 18th century. Lighter guns enable sportsmen to shoot birds on the wing, so landscapes needed to incorporate areas of cover where game such as pheasant could be reared. Given that Auburn is a relatively small estate, game shooting may not have been possible.

The existing woodland around Auburn House varies in age and condition. The original woodland is the most imposing element of the English landscape garden within the Auburn estate. The original woodland would have comprised Oak, Beech Horse Chestnut, Sweet Chestnut and Lime which are now over mature and in decline, with increasing losses over the last 20 years from winter storms. This has resulted in the natural re-generation of primarily Ash and Sycamore replacing the planted woodland and creating an increased proportion of the woodland today.

A small coniferous plantation of sitka spruce and lawson cypress is present north and south of the house. These trees are c. 20 yrs old and appear to have been planted to replace a gap in the existing woodland. They are historically incorrect and inappropriate to the location.



Image 3: Aerial view of southern part of the woodland



Image 4: Framed view of Auburn House from stone bridge

Waterways and ditches

Lakes formed an important component of the English gardens, most were man made but all appeared to replicate natural forming waterbodies. However, Auburn does not contain a lake, possibly due to the relative small size of the estate. Instead, an existing stream that flows through the estate lands was utilised and designed to replicate a meandering water element within the naturalistic landscape, that brings both beauty and sound to the estate. The stone bridge over the stream adds to the picturesque quality of the stream and provides views of the water. Today significant re-generated vegetation obscures views of the stream.

A number of ditches are located with the estate lands, which form field boundaries. These ditches remain predominantly dry and are used as part of the estate drainage system during periods of high rainfall. Today significant vegetation is located either side of the ditches.



Image 5: View of the stream from the stone bridge

The Walled Garden

Walled gardens were a common feature of the historic stately houses of the past. The walled gardens were once known as 'the kitchen garden' as vegetable and fruit trees were grown to keep the family kitchen well stocked. The tall perimeter wall had a strong aesthetic value, but also provided a very valuable function; to raise the temperature of the garden and provide a more protective environment for the plants within. The walls would absorb the heat of the sun during the day and release the heat slowly during the evening and through the night.

The walled garden largely remains intact, although the majority of the original space is not included within the subject application. The remaining area which forms this application, is approximately one third of the original and is located to the west of the walled garden. It is enclosed with limestone coursed walls with no defined capping detail. To the north and west side of this portion of the walled garden there is a wide drainage ditch that is bridged by a metal bridge at its pedestrian access point to the north side. The garden has become overgrown with significant numbers of re-generated trees.

The north and south corners of the west side wall of the walled garden are enlivened by the insertion in the 19th century of corner towers. It is likely that the corner towers were added in 1845 when the house changed ownership to William Donnelly. Indeed, their castellated romanticism owes more to the 19th century love of the gothic and medieval than to the late 18th century adherence to the classical ideal.

A small pet cemetery with two headstones are also present within the garden. Pet cemeteries were typical features of the Irish country house garden.

The eastern walled garden was renovated during the 1990's with a glasshouse and a tennis court incorporated along with a plantation of plum and pear trees.



Image 6: View of the orchard

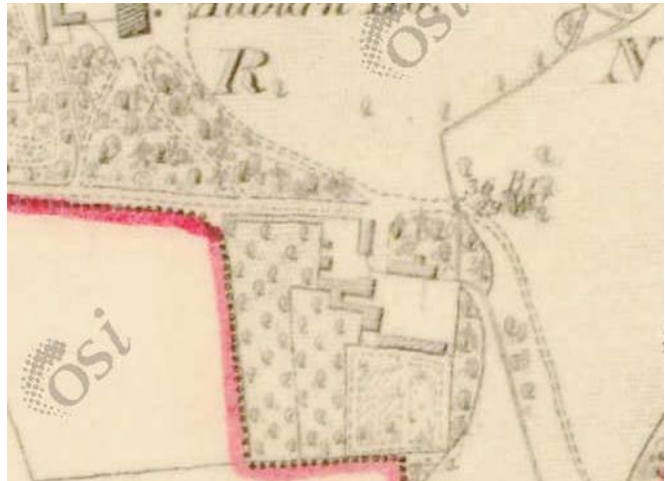


Image 7: Walled Garden OS six-inch map (1829, 1841)

Sculptural elements and recreational architecture

Another architectural feature of the English landscape garden came in the form of sculpture and recreational architecture. Within the estate grounds, several sculptural and architectural elements can be found including statues, stone vases as well as the corner towers within the walled garden.

The use of a ha-ha wall was also employed at Auburn, located north of the main house. The purposes of the ha-ha was to give the viewer of the garden the illusion of an un-broken, continuous rolling lawn, whilst providing a boundary for grazing livestock. It involved digging a deep, dry ditch

the inner side of which would be built up to the level of the surrounding turf with either a dry-stone or brick wall.



Image 7: Lion statues on both sides of the drive



Image 8: Corner tower in the walled garden

3.0 Conservation & Mitigation Measures within the proposed development

The primary design philosophy for the proposed development is based on the principle of retaining and enhancing the historic fabric of the Auburn estate lands and ensure its successful integration within the proposed development.

The proposed development seeks to retain and restore the historic cultural landscape and setting of Auburn House by retaining and enhancing the character of the English landscape garden, allowing the original design principles define the character of the proposed development.

The Vista

Many of the landscape features within Auburn estate will be restored and enhanced. The lands in front of Auburn House will be retained as public space to retain in part the vista towards Malahide Demesne. Proposed courtyard type clusters forms the edge of the vista (north and south) with housing units located along the eastern periphery of the open lands, allowing gentle ground modelling in combination with parkland tree planting to be sensitively inserted between the proposed buildings. A SuDs detention basin is located in the centre of the space. The scale of the tree planting will be such as to provide an element of maturity in the landscape. The overall subtle landscape treatment will allow the buildings to sit into the landscape to minimise the change in the existing landscape character.

The Drive

The original drive and entrance walls and gates that provided access to Auburn House will be retained through the provision of a dedicated pedestrian/cycle path along its length. This will ensure the retention of the existing woodland either side of the drive. The existing character of the drive will be retained and enhanced through the provision of replacement woodland tree planting. A Woodland Management Plan will be prepared for the estate including the drive that will provide detailed objectives and proposals for the short, medium and long term woodland management.

The proposed vehicular traffic will be accommodated through the provision of a new access road located east of the existing drive and woodland edge that allows for the retention of the existing woodland belt at this location.

A new vehicular entrance to the Auburn lands will be formed immediately south of the existing entrance in a location where few existing trees are present. The design of the entrance walls will respect the scale, form and character of the existing entrance. The new access road will quickly sweep northwards to avoid existing trees and cross the existing drive to avoid the existing woodland belt east of the existing drive. The access road will run perpendicular to the drive, cross the existing stream before sweeping north and westwards to provide access to the proposed buildings north of Auburn House.

Parkland Setting

Development is proposed within the existing parkland in the areas indicated on the site layout plan. These are contained on parts of the present lands which are less directly visible from Auburn House and the proposed development is also located primarily within the existing open fields.

The open lands to the east of the house are retained in large part, while it is noted that development is proposed in two courtyard type clusters to the immediate north and south of the open lands in front of the house.

The open land provides space for gentle ground modelling in combination with parkland tree planting to be sensitively inserted between the proposed buildings. The scale of the tree planting will be such as to provide an element of maturity in the landscape. The overall subtle landscape treatment will allow the buildings to sit into the landscape to minimise the change in the existing landscape character.

It is worth noting that the original design intent of the drive was to provide conceal and reveal views to create drama along its length as it approached the house. The stone bridge over the stream currently identifies a deliberate change in landscape character as the lands currently open up towards the parkland landscape and provide glimpse views of the house in the distance. The location of the proposed southerly courtyard cluster will restrict views of the house from the existing drive.

Impacts: the character of the approach to the house along the drive is altered by the intervention of the southerly courtyard cluster and can be characterised as a negative impact.

Development is proposed on the lands north of the original entrance driveway, formerly known as 'Little Auburn'. The approach to Malahide along the Malahide Road is enclosed by the existing woodland belt within Malahide Demesne and the woodland located along the boundary of the subject site. This woodland is a distinguishing feature and contributes to the character of the area.

It is intended that this woodland belt will be retained with the exception of trees highlighted in the tree survey that are in poor health/state of decline that necessitates their removal. The retention of the woodland belt is crucial in protecting the landscape character along the Malahide Road, as well assisting to mitigate the potential impact of the proposed buildings located behind the woodland belt. The tree belt will be further reinforced with new mature tree planting within the proposed parkland between the proposed development and the existing trees.

A Woodland Management Plan will be prepared that will provide guidance on the future maintenance and re-planting of the woodland including the woodland belt fronting the Malahide Road.

The Woodland

A Tree Survey was undertaken during 2019, 2020 and 2021 by The Tree File and accompanies this SHD planning application. The Tree Survey report summary identifies that some trees will be lost due to the proposed development and related infrastructure. However, the significant woodland blocks associated with the estate including the main woodland to the rear of the house and the woodland belt associated with the drive and the Malahide Road boundary site be retained.

In its broadest terms, the Auburn tree population today exists as a deteriorating relic of a once substantial and 'grand design' demesne planting. It appears that many of the larger and more mature trees have been lost over recent decades. Additionally, and as illustrated by the tree survey report, many of the trees that remain are becoming progressively isolated and exposed and accordingly are becoming subject to mechanical failure and damage. Therefore a Woodland Management Plan will be required to provide guidance and a strategy by which the site's existing and future tree population and woodland areas can be managed, maintained, restored and improved in a sustainable manner to accommodate the requirements of the planning authority and all stakeholders.

Impacts: the proposed retention of the woodland blocks associated with the estate is a positive planning gain.

Waterways

Lakes formed an important component of the English gardens, most were man made but all appeared to be natural forming basins. However, Auburn does not contain a lake, possibly due to the relative small size of the estate. Instead an existing stream that runs through the estate lands was utilised and was used a meandering water element within the naturalistic landscape, that brings both beauty and sound to the estate. The stone bridge over the stream adds to the picturesque quality of the stream and provided views of the water. Today significant re-generated vegetation obscures views of the stream.

A number of ditches are located with the estate lands, which form field boundaries. These ditches remain predominantly dry but are used as part of the estate drainage system during periods of high rainfall. Today significant vegetation is located either side of the ditches.

It is proposed that the stream will be retained within the proposed development as it forms an important boundary as identified in the historical mapping and plays an important role in the integration of the proposed development into the existing landscape setting.

The Walled Garden

Traditionally, the walled garden was once known as the 'kitchen garden' as vegetable and fruit trees were grown to keep the family kitchen well stocked, which was also the case at Auburn.

The walled garden largely remains intact, although the majority of the original space is not included within the subject application.

The garden has become overgrown with re-generated scrub material including hazel, holly, sycamore and ash. It is proposed to remove the re-generated material which did not form part of the original design intent and replace it with orchard trees to re-create the original design. The existing large plane tree located in the north-eastern corner of the garden will be retained and enhanced through the provision of a quality lawn area providing an attractive passive amenity. The small pet cemetery within the garden will also be retained.

The garden is currently enclosed with limestone coursed walls and the proposed development will require penetration and removal of part of the wall along the western elevation to provide pedestrian access to southern part of the walled gardens near Apartment Block 7. The provision of new stone piers would assist in defining and mitigating the proposed opening.

Impacts: the character of the walled garden is slightly altered by this intervention and can be characterised as a neutral impact.

Sculptural elements and recreational architecture

It is proposed to retain the existing sculpture and ha-ha within the estate lands.

4.0 Conclusion

The design intent of the proposed development is to ensure the protection of the natural and built heritage through the repair, preservation and improvement of its historic fabric and setting. It is acknowledged that the original expansive fields to the north and east of the house will be replaced with housing. However, the reinstatement of the curtilage at 'Little Auburn' assists in re-instating part of the original demesne, in combination with the elements of the lands that make up the original landscape design principles including the woodland, walled garden and watercourse, will both help preserve the historic identity of the lands and preserve Auburn House as a piece of history for future generations.

