



Scotland's Garden & Landscape Heritage

Chief Executive
Fife Council
Kingdom House
Kingdom Avenue
Glenrothes
KY7 5LY

19 June 2020

Dear Steven Grimmond,

VALLEYFIELD WOODLAND PARK

I am writing on behalf of Scotland's Garden and Landscape Heritage (SGLH) to express alarm at recent developments which have occurred at Valleyfield, which we believe threaten the character of this nationally important historic landscape.

Although a number of local organisations have an interest in Valleyfield Woodland Park, I understand that the greater part of it is still owned by Fife Council. I am writing as someone who is very familiar with the park and its history, having visited it often with groups and having used it for teaching purposes on a number of occasions. With 2018 being the 200th anniversary of Repton's death in 1818, SGLH organised what proved to be a very successful and well-attended day conference hosted by Lord Charles Bruce at Broomhall, including a guided walk around the Valleyfield landscape, as part of a UK-wide series of events. As the only landscape in Scotland designed by Repton, Valleyfield is included in Historic Environment Scotland's *Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes in Scotland*, so is deemed to be of national significance, seen to have 'outstanding' historical and artistic significance and to have 'high' scenic and natural history value, in spite of its degraded condition – see weblink < <https://portal.historicenvironment.scot/designation/GDL00381> >.

I am fortunate to have a photographic copy of the so-called Red Book prepared by landscape designer Humphry Repton for Sir Robert Preston c.1800, which proposal led to the creation of the Valleyfield designed landscape, substantial remnants of which are still clearly visible on the ground today. Among the watercolour views in Repton's Red Book is a panoramic view of the so-called Pleasure Ground comprising the East Park, Cow Park and Flagstaff Park (see below). Although the mansion house was demolished several decades ago, it is still possible to stand on its site and look down over the Pleasure Ground and imagine it in its heyday, in spite of the southern part of the parkland having been built over by High Valleyfield.



VIEW OF PLEASURE GROUND FROM VALLEYFIELD HOUSE C.1800 FROM REPTON'S RED BOOK -

The restoration of features of the Valleyfield estate was the subject of a report by Peter McGowan Associates entitled *Valleyfield Wood : Repton Landscape – Restoration Management Plan*, commissioned jointly by Dunfermline District Council, Fife Regional Council and the Countryside Commission for Scotland in 1992. Among other things this envisaged new planting in the Pleasure Ground to re-create the parkland in the style of Repton. Sadly, this visionary report was not acted on at the time. 2013 saw a bid being made by Fife Council to the Heritage Lottery Fund for restoration works, but this, too, proved unsuccessful. As a result, the tranquil wooded character of the landscape has remained largely unaltered, as a recreational space for walkers and horse riders, until now.

SGLH believes that there still exists the potential for surviving elements of the Valleyfield landscape – the flower garden, canal pond, rustic bridges and burnside walks on the Bluther Burn – to be restored so as to rival the much-admired landscape at Endsleigh in Devon, another of Repton's designs.



VIEWS OF PARKLAND AND BURNSIDE WALK AT ENDSLEIGH, DEVON

However, it has been brought to our attention that trespassers with earth-moving vehicles have broken through one of the entrance gates, and have set about forming a motorbike track with extensive excavation and mounding, destroying the character of the Pleasure Ground. We are not aware of permission having been sought for this development, which matter would appear to involve a breach of planning law. Although this may not appear to be a straightforward planning matter, we should like to draw particular attention to Policy 14 in the adopted *FIFEplan 2017*, under the heading 'Designated Sites and Buildings' which states that the Council will not approve development that is considered '...to harm or damage sites recorded in the *Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes* in Scotland and other non-*Inventory* gardens and designed landscapes of cultural and historic value'.

We understand, too, that the noise created by the motorbikes is seen as a significant detractor from the quality of life for many residents in High Valleyfield, and for users of the woodland park. It is worth recalling that in the *Fife Greenspace Audit 2010, Appendix 4 – Open Spaces and Woods*, concern was expressed by members of the public about the negative aspect of ‘bicycles, motorbikes and quadbikes’.

Scotland’s Garden and Landscape Heritage is gravely concerned by this latest harmful incursion into the Valleyfield estate, and is fearful that if nothing is done to stop and reverse the damage done by the creation of the new motorbike track, this will serve to encourage further destructive activities within this nationally important heritage site. This will make a nonsense of any future plans to restore the landscape. Accordingly, we urge the Council to work with the Police and other interested parties to identify and prosecute those responsible for the recent incursions, to strengthen the boundaries of the estate by making secure the entrance points, and to take measures to restore the ground damaged by recent earth movement.

Yours faithfully,

Christopher Dingwall
*Vice Chairman & Honorary Research Adviser
Scotland’s Garden & Landscape Heritage*



<https://www.sglh.org>

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