



CHISWICK HOUSE AND GARDENS CONSERVATORY

Frequently asked questions

How old is the Chiswick House Conservatory? The current Conservatory occupies the site of an early 19th century Conservatory, built in 1812-13. The 'back sheds' of this early building have survived from this period and have recently been renovated and refurbished as Artists' Studios. This work has preserved historic details cited in Historic England's extended listing of the Grade I building, such as the original boiler pit, water tanks and gardeners' 'behind-the-scenes' working areas including a head gardener's office. Recent research has proved that the glazed structures of the 19th century building were completely replaced in 1933. It is this 1933 structure that has now reached the end of its life, despite three rounds of maintenance repairs in the last decade.

Who is responsible for the Chiswick House Conservatory? Hounslow Council owns the Conservatory and is responsible for it. Chiswick House & Gardens Trust operates the Conservatory on a day-to-day basis.

Why is the conservatory currently closed? The timber and glass part of the building needs specialist conservation repairs due to its age and historic design. Hounslow Council and the Trust have been advised by conservation architects that the building is unsafe for public and regular use.

Why have the repairs carried out in 2010 not lasted? The building is a unique design and previous maintenance repairs have not proved a permanent solution to protecting the building from the weathering effects of wind and rain. Knowledge of the bespoke system, designed by the Messenger Brothers, did not exist when the repairs were last carried out. This system is now back in production.

How long will it take to repair the building? We do not know. The building is unique and previous maintenance repairs have not proved a permanent solution to protecting the building from the weathering effects of wind and rain.

When will you know and how much will it cost? Hounslow Council is taking expert advice from a range of specialists to find the best solution. Once there is a clearer view then there will be an update on the proposals and the funding needed to carry out the works. The scope of works has been estimated at £5-8.8m.

What do we know about the Camellia collection? In 2023 Chiswick House & Gardens Trust commissioned a detailed report into the historic origins of the current camellia collection and established duplicate collections at RBG Kew and in the adjacent shrubbery in the gardens. This report concluded that their provenance was uncertain:

'It is clear from our research that the current planting contains a range of camellias of differing significance; the earliest thought to have been planted in 1828. It then seems that the planting has continued to be added to, up



until at least the early-mid 20th Century. At this stage, it appears almost impossible to ascertain the exact dates of any of the plantings.'

Nevertheless, the ongoing care of the camellias is undertaken with safety in mind, and the plants are healthy and thriving.

Why are community, learning, volunteering and creative impact important? The Trust has set out a 10-year vision outlining projects to secure our long-term future. We have prioritised three strategic projects that will improve facilities for the local community and school groups, plus the creation of a brand-new cultural hub for designers and makers in our 'back-of-house' spaces which are currently under-used. We have delivered the first phase, the Artists' Studios, and are now working on securing the funds for the new Learning Hub and Community Garden. These are our priorities because they deliver expanded services to our local communities and generate new income. These projects will reinforce the financial sustainability of the Trust, giving it a stronger basis on which to fundraise for the significant sum needed to renew the glass and timber frontage of the conservatory. Projected costs for this work run into millions of pounds, so we are also working with Hounslow Council to explore grant funding options to help cover the expense.

Working with the Council, the Trust has invested over £100,000 in three rounds of repairs and the Council has invested a further £36,000 in annual repairs since 2020. This enabled us to keep the Conservatory open for visitors and events until 2024.

In 2021, the Trust also secured funds from the Government's Culture Recovery Fund, managed by Historic England and the National Lottery Heritage Fund, to pay a team of experts to explore the options for the future of the Conservatory and this has provided a valuable basis for planning how best to move forward.

We value the Conservatory's historic importance and so it will form the next phase in the Trust's 10-year vision.

We are working with Hounslow Council, the owners of the Conservatory, to plan a partnership project that will secure this iconic building for future generations to enjoy.

What works have been undertaken to protect the conservatory?

Over the last decade, the Trust has invested over £100,000 in repairs to the Conservatory to keep it safe, wind and watertight. The Council has also invested £36,000 in emergency repairs and £6,000 for a Designation Review to update the Conservatory's national listed building description. However, a 1930s structure of wood and glass can only be maintained for a finite period and with the scale of the current deterioration of the Conservatory it means that the requirement for major capital repairs is now beyond the Trust's resources. This is why the Trust is working with the Council, as the owner of the Conservatory, and with Historic England on a plan to complete the work that began this year (2025) with the renewal of the Victorian back sheds.



How and when will the full renovation of the remaining parts of the Conservatory be done?

In 2023, the Council allocated £423,000 funding to be used for:

- i. Emergency repairs;
- ii. A feasibility study to assess potential uses of the building and possible architectural solutions;
- iii. Professional fees; and
- iv. Hiring a Project Manager to oversee the project.

Items (i) and (ii) were completed in 2023 with some funds kept back for ongoing emergency repairs. In 2024, the Trust, Hounslow Council and English Heritage agreed to pause the conservatory project temporarily while the Council focused on recruiting a project manager for this work. The remaining funds have been held by the Council, pending the re-start of the project. These funds were never envisaged to be sufficient to complete the whole project and work so far has been planned in such a way as not to prejudice future applications for the more substantial funding required for this extensive work. Projected costs for this work run into millions of pounds, so the Trust is working with the Council to explore grant funding options to help cover the expense.