

Trust buy will open up park

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by Jo Barber

THE National Trust has announced it expects to finalise its purchase of the secret Woodchester Park valley near Stroud next month.

The conservation charity said it had now exchanged contracts to buy the 500 unique acres of heavily wooded land, between Stroud and Nailsworth, and would complete the deal at the end of April.

Limited public access to the four hidden man-made lakes and tranquil, unspoiled countryside of the valley has already been promised by the trust.

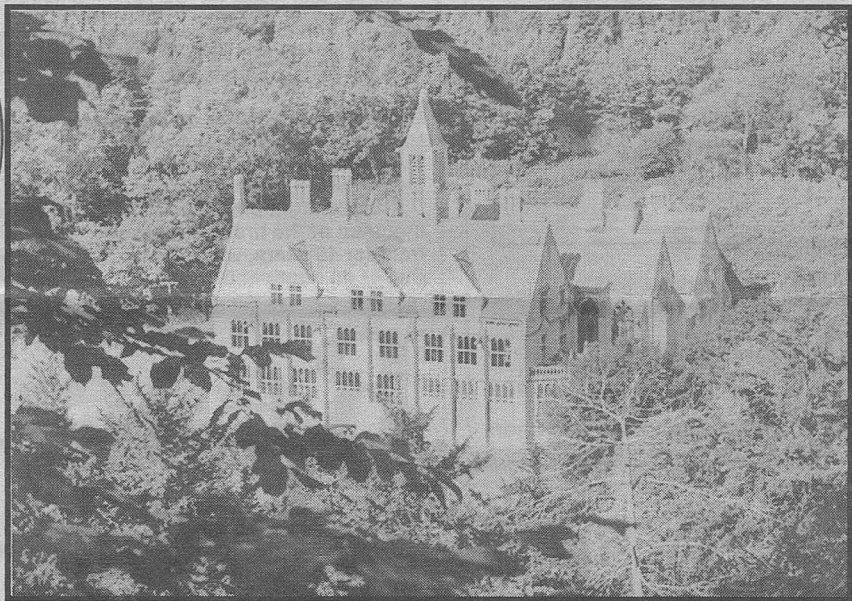
Protected

But no immediate changes were planned at Woodchester, stressed the charity's regional director Cecil Pearse.

"We are delighted we have been able to go ahead with the acquisition of this beautiful valley," he said.

"But we intend to make careful plans before allowing low-key public access."

The trust was thought to have paid around £500,000 for the valley, where there are no public rights of way



■ Secret garden...Woodchester Mansion and its surrounding land.

and its private owners have for generations discouraged trespassers.

Stroud District Council agreed to plough £100,000 into the purchase, so that the woods and walks could be enjoyed by local people in future.

Mr Pearse added that during the next six months various surveys would be carried out for

the preparation of a draft management plan for consultation.

Only then would landscaping work be carried out.

He thought the whole process might take up to two years before the park would be open to the public.

The Countryside Commission, along with private bequests, also helped

raise the asking price.

Woodchester Park has at its heart the unfinished Woodchester Park Mansion, now run by an independent conservation trust.

Rare protected bats live in the mansion and fly over the park, which boasts untouched flowers and plants and is home to badgers and other creatures.