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Stanley Park conservation area appraisal

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Stanley Park Conservation Area Appraisal

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1. Introduction

The Stanley Park Conservation Area is centred on Stanley Park itself. The Park is listed as Grade II* on the [Historic England Register](#) of Parks and Gardens and was constructed between 1924 and 1926 to designs by Thomas Mawson. The park and surrounding streets were designated a conservation area in January 1984. The Park is a superb example of an early 20th Century public park with contemporary integral sports and leisure facilities. The Park is relatively untouched with few changes to the overall layout, and little change to the built structures within it.

The streets around the Park contain intact and well preserved examples of high quality interwar housing, many on a large scale with attendant gardens, boundary treatments and public realm features such as wide grass verges and street trees, all laid out to a street plan specified by Mawson. All are contemporary with, and complementary to, the park.

These streets represent all that was good in town planning in the interwar period, demonstrating new thought in how recreation and open space were intrinsically linked with residential development and the creation of holistic environments for health and well-being.

Stanley Park is an important resource within the town. It provides a large number of recreational and cultural facilities for residents of the town and is widely used by residents of the whole Fylde coast. Public support for the Park is strong, with an active Friends group organising entertainment and events throughout the year, as well as allowing the public an important channel of input into the day-to-day running of the park.

In 2005 a £5.5m Heritage Lottery Fund-aided programme of repair, conservation and enhancement was undertaken to help restore the park to its former glory. In addition it enhanced the appeal of the facilities (sport and leisure) within it, bringing an increased number of visitors and a wider appreciation of the beauty, historic and recreational value of this key open space in the town.

The following document is an update of the 2006 Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan. It is supported by a number of key documents that have relevance to the historical development of the town and park, and the strategies adopted by the local authority in order to manage change in the conservation area.

2. Context - Historical Development of Blackpool

Blackpool as a town is first recorded by cartographer Emmanuel Bowen in 1751, and at this time consisted mainly of cottages and Fox Hall. By the end of 1770 the town was becoming fashionable as a sea bathing location for the wealthy. This new ‘craze’ resulted in the building of the first visitor accommodation.

A growing number of visitors were making the twelve hour horse-drawn coach ride from Manchester to bathe in (and to drink!) the health giving sea waters of Blackpool. Bailey’s Hotel opened on the seafront in 1776 and was the first purpose-built hotel in the town.

By the 1840s Blackpool consisted of a small collection of buildings spread along the seafront between Chapel Street and Cocker Square. The majority of the hotels occupied seafront positions, and Blackpool began to grow in a linear fashion with new development following the seafront.

In 1844 the Talbot-Clifton family purchased land from the site of the soon-to-be North Station to the seafront, and laid out the new Talbot Road. This culminated in a grand square (Talbot Square) which was bequeathed to the town in perpetuity. Talbot Square was at the heart of the town from the 1840s onwards. The square survives today, although it is very much dominated by highway infrastructure.

During the 1840s, the town continued to develop along genteel lines catering for the wealthy and privileged. By the time of the opening of the Railway Station in 1846, Blackpool was attracting several thousand well-to-do visitors per year.

The fabric of the town centre as we know it developed from the 1850s onwards, functioning as Blackpool’s civic, retail and tourism heart. Today there are a diverse range of buildings within the Town Centre Conservation Area. Amongst them are several listed and locally listed buildings and structures including the Grade I Blackpool Tower, Grade II* Grand Theatre, Winter Gardens and Sacred Heart Church, and Grade II North Pier, Central Library and Grundy Art Gallery, War Memorial and former Post Office.

The development of the railway served to fuel the development of Blackpool which became progressively more accessible to the mill workers of Lancashire and Manchester. The opening of the Winter Gardens in 1878 was almost certainly the town’s last attempt at catering for a ‘sophisticated’ audience.

By 1893 the street grid and layout of the town centre had been largely completed, and is little different from that which survives today. The 1912 plan shows that Talbot Square, Clifton Street, Talbot Road and Abingdon Street had all been converted to accommodate trams. Other major changes from the 1893 plan included the addition of the Post Office and Town Hall.

From the 1890s through to the 1950s Blackpool developed rapidly, and increasingly catered for the quickly expanding mass holiday market. Much of what we know now as the Unitary Authority area of Blackpool Borough was farmland until the interwar period, when there was a huge development boom in the town. Blackpool at this time was one of the fastest growing towns in the UK, with huge areas under development. After the end of the War in 1918, pressure for new housing and recreational facilities was mounting, and the local authority began to seriously consider the provision of a major public open space and recreational facility. There were few public open green spaces in Blackpool until the development of Stanley Park in 1921, and a lack of recreational facilities which were not aimed at tourists.

3. Brief History of Stanley Park

The park and its surrounding urban context were laid out during this interwar phase of Blackpool’s development. It was always seen as an antidote to the hustle and bustle of the Golden Mile on the Promenade.

There had been discussion about the provision of open space for residents in the town from the early 1900’s to meet the demands of a rapidly growing population. Between 1870 and 1900, the population of Blackpool rose from around 5,000 to 48,000, putting pressure on infrastructure and housing. The great interwar housing boom was therefore the culmination of an existing growth trend.

A number of pieces of land had been offered to the Council, and there was a proposal to extend the Raikes Hall Pleasure Gardens lying to the west of Whitegate Drive for public use (the land there was later to be developed for housing). The issue came to a head at the end of the Great War, when Alderman Sir Albert Lindsay Parkinson purchased a large plot of land on what is now the park site, and persuaded the Council to buy it off him at the same price he had paid. The Council added to this through compulsory purchase and also received gifts of land from, amongst others, Sir John Bickerstaffe, T.M. Watson and William Lawson. This left the Council with a total of 288 acres.

In 1922 the Council commissioned architects TH Mawson and Sons of London and Lancaster to prepare plans for a major public park and supporting housing development. The Mawson practice was well established for landscape architecture, but they were also

practising town planners. (They advised the government of Greece on the re-planning of Athens). Thomas Mawson, the head of the practice, was President of the Town Planning Institute at the time he was designing the Park, and was intensely active in the Town Planning Movement.

Stanley Park was perhaps the most ambitious public park project of its time to be developed by an English municipality, ranking in importance with contemporary public parks across Europe and America. The park and surrounding housing were planned to complement each other. This technique, known as 'site planning', had been used on several other public schemes such as Regents Park and Sefton Park.

The site originally consisted of agricultural land and was devoid of trees and landscaping. There were few buildings on the site, just a few small houses, dilapidated farm buildings and a brickworks on its western edge. Archive OS maps showing the disposition of the land before the park development, and the new layout of the Park area after development are included at appendix 2.

When looking at the development of the park, the landscape architects felt it was critical that local residents and visitors should be able to access the extensive facilities within the park with minimal difficulty. To facilitate this, the Park's access points and gates were all chosen carefully to correspond with existing or planned pedestrian and vehicular routes.

A key part of the scheme was the development of housing at the periphery of the Park estate. The encircling tree-lined boulevards and roads, and the building plots lining them, were seen as an integral part of the Park's development. The funds from the sale of the building plots were used to offset the considerable expenditure undertaken by the Council in laying out the Park and urban environment.

The Park was officially opened by Lord Stanley, Earl of Derby, in 1926, and remains one of the largest public parks in the country being approximately 256 acres.

4. Character of the Conservation Area

The Conservation Area is large but, consisting mostly of the Park, is relatively simple in character. Character falls into two distinct areas:

i) Character Area 1: The Park

The park's key significance lies in its completeness as an early 20th Century designed landscape. The original design utilized the natural contours of the land, a shallow bowl shape with undulating edges, to create vistas into and out of the park. Strategically placed buildings and landscape features around these contours make clever use of the topography.

Key Buildings, Features and Facilities

Italian Garden

The Italian Garden is the centrepiece of Stanley Park. Thomas Mawson stated in his report to the Blackpool Corporation that "for scenic effect, an Italian Garden is to be placed at the very heart of the park".

The proposed pavilion (now café), its terrace, the Italian Garden and promenade fronting the lake, result in a complete design concept following the traditions of the most important continental parks.

The Italian Garden has, at its centre, an Italian marble fountain with four seahorses. This was donated in October 1926 by John Magee of the Bolton brewing company Magee Marshall and Co Ltd. Trees, shrubbery, lawns and bedding planting contribute to the colour and formality of this garden.

Where the steps from the terrace meet the Italian Garden there are two lion statues. The 18th century copies of the Medici Lions at the Palazzo Pitti in Florence, sculpted by John Cheere of London, were also donated by John Magee, but were first sited at Stowe House in Buckinghamshire. They have now been returned under a long-term loan agreement with the Council, and the replacement statues here have been cast by Cheere expert Rupert Harris, Her Majesty's Conservator of Sculpture for the Royal Collections.

Boating Lake and Lake Terrace/Promenade



The lake terrace lies alongside the easterly side of the Italian Garden and contains formal bedding areas, lawns and a viewing area. A series of steps links the Italian Garden to the lakeside ‘promenade’ which in turn meets the water’s edge which is complete with landing stages.

Arguably, this is one of the most attractive parts of the park as it provides an interface between gardens, promenade and water and provides attractive views towards the peripheral woodland areas of the park from the lakeside terrace or, at the lower level, from the promenade.

Important elements of the lakeside scene are the boathouses and bandstand, both locally listed, located opposite each other at the head of the lake, and both adjoining the lakeside promenade.

In the report of Thomas Mawson and Sons to Blackpool Corporation in 1922 it states:

“No park of such aptitude is complete without a sheet of water for scenic effect and recreation. Fortunately, the lie of the land in this case is such that it will be easy to obtain a lake great both in size and beauty and interest in its surroundings”.

Comparison of the master plan for Stanley Park in 1922 and the map of the park as it is today, illustrates how the two are almost identical. The lake, which covers an area of approximately 22 acres, utilises a natural depression which is fed by a dyke. The location of the lake forms a backdrop to the golf course to the north, and provides equally attractive views over it from the East Park Drive Boulevard. Surface soil stripped to create the lake basin was subsequently used to raise, or in some cases completely create, mounded areas around the periphery of the water.

Bandstand and Auditorium

The bandstand and its auditorium occupy a prominent position adjoining the lakeside promenade. The auditorium provides the viewing public with entertainment set against a backdrop of the lake and the green spaces of the park beyond, and is constructed of graduated rustic sandstone steps forming a semi-circle around the bandstand facing the lake.

The bandstand is based on a ‘classical temple’ design and was designed by E.P. Mawson. It was first used on 1st July 1929. Its architectural features include stylised Corinthian columns, the architrave, frieze and cornice (entablature). The bandstand has a copper roof and finial, and the columns sit on a circular podium.

Bowling Greens and Pavilions

The laying out of recreational facilities was a compromise between convenience, in terms of location, and a need for economical use of landform, thereby helping to keep down the costs of construction. The site chosen for the bowling green had been an old brickworks, and the land was generally level where clay excavation had produced a ‘shelf’. The surrounding embankments were planted to provide protection from north-easterly winds whilst allowing the greens to be fully open to the sun.

The shelters spaced around the greens are designed in the Classical style to match other buildings in the park. Many of the buildings within the Park were designed by the Park architects, with some additions designed by the Council’s own architects working closely with Mawson throughout. The use of an overall uniform style of design makes them complementary to the whole character of the Park development both internally and to its external surroundings.



View of Lake from terrace



Bandstand and auditorium



Embankment to the north east of the bowling greens



Gates and Gate Lodges – Mawson Drive

The main gates were carefully chosen by Thomas Mawson to be situated on the axis of Mere Road, which continues in the form of Mawson Drive. The lodges

flank the entrance to the park and are rustically styled to look like cottages, faced in roughcast render with sweeping Westmorland slate roofs. The gates themselves are of fine wrought and cast iron and consist of a screen frame containing two pedestrian gates and a pair of full height leaves across the vehicular access drive. The over-gate section of the screen incorporates the name of the park in bold lettering.

Cocker Clock Tower

The clock tower occupies a strategic position within the park, situated on the north-south axis linking the South gate with the Italian Garden. Being some 26

metres high, the tower stands above the tree plantations of the park and is visible over a wide area, thereby providing a point of reference.

In 1926, the Corporation of Blackpool invited architects to submit designs for a monument for this site. Lionel Budden, who, at the time, was Assistant Professor of Architecture at Liverpool University, submitted the winning entry for this design competition.

The clock tower not only has a practical use, it has a civic stature. The clock face is over 2 metres in diameter and the viewing platform beneath offers extensive views over the park and beyond.

The clock tower design is based on a classical design incorporating pilasters, segmental pediments around the doors, rusticated stonework, gabled pediments, consoles, cornices and a finial. There are two bronze lion head drinking fountains at the base of the clock tower, which is dedicated to Dr William Cocker who was the first mayor of Blackpool following its Incorporation in 1876.



Cocker memorial from Garden of Remembrance



Gates and gatehouses from end of Mere Road



Cocker memorial clock

Café Building

Mawsons' plan for Stanley Park proposed, at its very centre, an Italian Garden and social centre which were conceived as a composite piece of design. The four

storey social centre, proposed on the site of the present café, would stand in its elevated position overlooking the Italian Garden and linked to it by a broad staircase, or steps, reminiscent of a country mansion, thereby enjoying a commanding presence over its terraces and formal garden.

Perhaps regrettably, the proposed social centre was one aspect of the park scheme never to materialise due to escalating costs. However, in view of the growing popularity of the park, the Corporation came to the conclusion that the site should be developed as a café. The building was designed by Chief Architectural Assistant J.C. Robinson, in an art deco style, and was opened in 1937.

Stanley Park café is symmetrical in design and, despite being only single storey, the giant stone entrance feature and pronounced vertical windows increase the sense of height and scale. This is demonstrated by comparing the height of the door to the height of the windows on each wing of the building.

Blackpool Model Village

The Model Village was opened in 1968 and is located on a two and a half acre landscaped garden site on East Park Drive. The village is a classic example of its genre, with models ranging from a Scottish castle to a complete Cornish fishing village.



View of Stanley Park Café from Italian Gardens

Blackpool Cricket Club

Blackpool Cricket Club was the first officially to use a town name in their title (Blackpool Cricket Club was originally the Victoria Cricket Club until 1878) and had always played on a ground on this site.

The development of the Park saw the re-laying out of the ground and a new Cricket Pavilion, opened by Lancashire President Sir Edwin Stockton on 5 August 1925 before the rest of the park was complete. The site also includes a ladies pavilion, erected on the site of the old wooden striped pavilion in 1933.

Stanley Park Golf Course

The 96 acre golf course was designed by renowned course designers [Colt and Mackenzie](#) who designed over 300 courses all over the world. When the course was being planned, Mawson advised the Council that to create a course of any real quality the Council needed to purchase a further 50 acres, which it duly did.

The course also contains the Woodland Garden, designed as a shelter-belt, but now with mature trees used as a wildlife habitat and a quiet oasis. The edge of the Woodland walk area offers good views across the north end of the Park.

ii) Character Area 2: Residential perimeter

The immediate setting of the park consists principally of its residential perimeter: North Park Drive, East Park Drive, West Park Drive, South Park Drive and the northern end of Whinney Heys Road. The latter includes the Conservation Area's only listed building, the Grade II* Chapel of Our Lady of Lourdes.

It was originally intended that the park be entirely surrounded by housing but, due to the increased development of residential property along the borough's coast, East Park Drive saw only partial development at its southern end. All of the roads are generally wide, and all of the buildings benefit from front gardens. These factors, together with the wide grass verges and street trees, give the conservation area a distinct suburban leafy character.

North Park Drive

The houses on North Park Drive are the best of all the residential development in the area around the park. They tend on the whole to be larger (mainly detached) and, whilst they vary in general style, are all tied together with a unified palette of materials typified by the use of mullioned windows, soft or

textured brick, varied roof silhouettes, often with attractively curved roof profiles clad in Westmorland Slate, and interesting chimney forms.

It is in these houses most of all that a contemporary interpretation of the Arts and Crafts style is in evidence, along with a quality of construction typical of the inter war period in Blackpool. Many are clearly adapted from Norman Shaw and Lutyens models.

The houses are generally elevated above road level, and the low boundary treatments and landscaped front gardens give the road an open aspect which makes a significant contribution to the leafy character of the conservation area. Some of the driveway entrances have been widened to allow easier vehicular access, but where this has been handled sensitively it has had a low impact on the character. However, where widening of the driveway has been undertaken with increasing the hardstanding to maximise off-road parking, this has had led to a loss of greenery from front gardens, which has had a negative impact on character.



Stanley Park Cricket Club



Clubhouse, Stanley Park Golf Club



Shrine of Our Lady of Lourdes



Grass verges and trees on North Park Drive

West Park Drive

West Park Drive consists of large semi-detached pairs of houses in a wide variety of styles from Swiss Cottage to Sussex Arts and Crafts. There are also short terraces of 4-8 houses in groups along the road, following similar styling groups and all using the construction palette in evidence on North Park Drive.

The sheer variety of styles on West Park Drive makes the development architecturally interesting, and provides a streetscape with a character unique in Blackpool.

These buildings have shorter front gardens than the other perimeter streets, and the majority of the boundary walls at the northern end of the street are intact giving the street a more enclosed feel than in other parts of the conservation area. However, where there are double yellow lines on each side of West Park Drive there is a marked increase in the widening of driveways with associated loss of front garden greenery.

South Park Drive

South Park Drive brings together East and West Park Drive, with the boundary being at the junction of Preston Old Road. The buildings are a mix of detached and semi-detached housing and continue the established material and stylistic palettes used in the rest of the conservation area. The busy transport route and lack of on-street parking has also contributed to some driveway widening and loss of front garden greenery. This is mitigated to a large extent, however, by the presence of street trees.

East Park Drive

East Park Drive is the least developed of the Park's peripheral streets. It divides the Park from the Zoo, Golf Course and the Herons Reach Hotel and Golf Course. The houses on the Drive are akin to those on West Park Drive, tending to be semi-detached. These all follow the established material and stylistic

palettes used on North and West Park Drives, and also benefit from long front gardens. Again, driveway widening is a feature on this busy main road although most gardens have retained planting to some degree.



North end of West Park Drive



South end of West Park Drive



East side of South Park Drive



Junction of South Park Drive, East Park Drive and West Park Drive



South east side of East Park Drive

Zoo

Blackpool Zoo opened on the 6th July 1972 on the site of the old Blackpool Aerodrome. Some of the original buildings survive including an interesting art deco style hangar. The Zoo now houses a nationally important collection of animals including lions, tigers and elephants as well as a new Dinosaur Safari.

Public Open Spaces

The park is the main public open space in the Conservation Area, and by its nature provides varied and extensive facilities for events and activities. Key areas in this respect are the Bandstand (where regular summer concerts are still held) and the wide terrace in front of the Art Deco Café, overlooking the Italian Garden.

There is a small open space on the corner of East Park Drive and Weymouth Road which is managed for wildlife by volunteers and the Park's Service.

Vistas Within the Conservation Area

The regular street pattern and the central location of the Park create a series of views through the surrounding residential development to the park. The rise of the land towards the coast prevents views of the sea, but the Tower is visible in a virtually straight line along Mere Road from the main gates of the Park (to the west), and is seen in glimpses from other points in the surrounding streets. Views of the park effectively dominate all axial approach roads, which were laid out under Mawson's guidance to achieve maximum effect.

The Park itself contains a number of important landscape vistas. It is designed in the classic manner, with vistas, views and buildings around every corner. There are few areas within the Park that do not have a view of one of the key features within it.



Housing on East Park Drive with wide grass verges

Landmark Buildings

Landmark buildings within the Conservation Area are almost exclusively in the Park itself. These include: Stanley Park Bandstand, The Art Deco Café, and the Cocker Clock Tower. The exception to this is the grade II* listed Chapel of Our Lady of Lourdes on Whinney Heys Road.

Soft Landscaping

In addition to the park itself, many streets are tree-lined and soft verge treatments are common. Streets are generally wide, but not so wide as to undermine the sense of neighbourhood.



Soft landscaping opposite houses on East Park Drive

5. Improvement Potential

The residential properties within the Conservation Area are generally very well maintained. Development has occurred mainly to the side and rear of properties in the form of extensions, although some properties have widened their driveways and added railings to the tops of boundary walls. Most still retain

their original plot layout and key features such as garden walls, gateposts and external design form. The majority of windows are now upvc, and many of the front doors have also have been replaced with modern alternatives, although some good examples of original doors remain. These should be used to inform designs for replacing inappropriate modern designs when the opportunity arises.

The relatively high level of intactness is due to the [Article 4 direction order](#) in force since the conservation area was designated which has removed permitted development rights for certain works to visible elevations. Details of the [Notice of confirmation of the Article 4 Direction](#) can be found on the Council's website.



Example of an original door in the Conservation Area

Nevertheless, changes in permitted development legislation have led to some loss of character, and a [new article 4 direction order](#) was introduced in 2014 in order to respond to these changes to prevent development which could undermine the character and appearance of the conservation area.



Example of an original door in the Conservation Area

The most intrusive features in the townscape are the heavy traffic and associated traffic management signage and road markings, which may prove difficult to remedy.

Day-to-day management and future development of the park itself needs to be balanced with responsible stewardship. The [Stanley Park Conservation Area Management Plan](#) sets out how this can be achieved.



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