

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

BROADWAY, LETCHWORTH

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Name:	BROADWAY, LETCHWORTH
County:	Hertfordshire
District:	North Hertfordshire (District Authority)
Parish:	Non Civil Parish
label.localisation:	Latitude: 51.973848 Longitude: -0.23163090 National Grid Reference: TL 21566 32074 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1000908 Date first listed: 11-Jun-1987

Details

Early C20 central town gardens and square approached by a formal tree-lined boulevard, forming the approach to the heart of the first garden city.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

In 1904 the architects Barry Parker (1867-1947) and Raymond Unwin (1863-1940) prepared a plan for the First Garden City Limited, at Letchworth, which, although modified, was largely implemented as the overall layout of Letchworth Garden City. The City was designed around a broad spinal approach road from the south and north (originally intended for tramway provision which was never carried out) which opened into a formal square, around which it was intended to range the main religious and civic buildings. These in turn were to be flanked by a geometrical grid of shops and residential development. The garden city idea came from the social improver Ebenezer Howard (1850-1928) who had pioneered the concept of an ideal city made practicable, and was one of the main forces behind the new settlement at Letchworth, which was the first of its kind. Howard saw it as combining the best characteristics of town and country, with great social benefits arising from thoughtfully designed and beautiful landscape surroundings.

The green spinal approach, named Broadway, was made up as a road in discrete lengths over twenty years from c 1906, it being planted with an avenue of trees leading from south and north to the Town Square. It had been intended to place a group of grand civic buildings in the Square, but this never materialised, leaving the open space which was instead surrounded by Lombardy poplars, planted in 1914 to indicate the outline of the planned buildings. The Square was subsequently enclosed piecemeal by civic and other public buildings, the erection of which began before the First World War, but was largely completed during the 1920s and 1930s. The site remains (1999) in public use and ownership.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Broadway runs roughly north/south for 1.5km, forming the main spinal approach to the centre of Letchworth Garden City. The c 8ha site is bounded by the Hitchin Road to the south and Station Place to the north, and is flanked to the west and east by the central urban development of the garden city. Towards its northern end, Broadway opens out into the Town Square, renamed John F Kennedy Gardens in the mid 1960s. The site is

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largely level, set within the urban heart of the garden city. The early C20 Howard Park (qv) lies c 450m east of Broadway, also part of the early C20 garden city layout.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES Broadway is entered off the north side of the A505 Hitchin Road linking Luton, to the south-west, with Royston, to the north-east. The road at the centre of Broadway leads north-north-east through the residential heart of the garden city, forming the main axis of the whole development. It is flanked by broad grass verges, behind which stand large, detached houses (1905-12). Broadway opens out 300m north of the Hitchin Road to encircle a roundabout situated at the convergence of several other major residential roads, forming a focal point for views along these. From here it continues north, flanked by a double avenue set in broad grass verges, beyond which stand largely detached houses within their own grounds. Some 850m north of the Hitchin Road, Broadway opens out to encircle John F Kennedy Gardens, a level, rectangular town square laid largely to lawn with two paths set in cruciform pattern, at the centre of which lies a raised hexagonal bed. The southern lawns are laid out with a geometric pattern of rose beds. The north/south path through the centre of the Gardens continues the line of Broadway northwards to where the encircling road rejoins, continuing northwards as Broadway through the civic and commercial centre of the town.

The southern half of the Gardens, south of the west to east cross path, is enclosed by a line of mature Lombardy poplars around the west, south and east sides. These were planted c 1914 to indicate the outline of the proposed civic buildings which were intended to encircle the Town Square, as it was called at that time, but which were never built. The northern half of the Gardens is flanked to west and east by lime trees, the north side being closed by four cedars. The Gardens are overlooked by several civic buildings, including the Town Hall (Bennett and Bidwell 1935), the library (C M Crickmer 1938) and the town museum (Barry Parker 1914-20, listed grade II), all at the north-east corner, and the former Grammar School (Barry Parker 1931) along the west side. Several other roads converge on the Gardens.

Broadway extends c 300m further north from the Gardens. The carriageway is divided by a central boulevard planted with an avenue of mature trees inter-planted with shrubs, flanking a central walk, intended in the early C20 for a tramway which was never executed. The carriageway is bounded by shops and offices. Broadway terminates 1.5km north of the Hitchin Road, at Station Place, the railway station's open forecourt. Here the Arts and Crafts-style railway station (1912, listed grade II) terminates the vista, set at the north side of Station Place. The former Garden City Corporation Offices (Parker and Unwin 1913, listed grade II) stand at the north end of Broadway on the east side, at the junction with Station Place, together with several other notable office buildings of c 1908 and the 1920s.

Broadway was made up in sections from c 1906, beginning with the section between Hitchin Road and the roundabout junction with Spring Lane and the Sollershotts, and flanked by the houses built 1905-12, which are among the most prestigious in the garden city. The road was shown as 'Main Avenue' on a 1906 plan, but was renamed Broadway by 1908. The roundabout was one of the first purpose-built traffic gyratories in the country, being opened in 1910, when many of the waiting cars overheated in the summer sun during the formal speeches. It was known as Sollershott Circus for some years. The length between Sollershott Circus and Town Square remained unmade until 1924, and the adjoining land was farmed until after the First World War. A broad cinder path ran along the centre, and the double avenue of lime trees was planted in advance of highway construction in 1924. The perimeter road around Town Square was not made up until the mid 1920s, although the landscaping had been in position since 1914 (M Miller pers comm, 1999).

REFERENCES

Country Life, 164 (1 March 1979), pp 562-3 N T Newton, Design on the Land (1981), pp 453-60 Landscape Design, (February 1987), pp 60-1 M Miller, Letchworth The First Garden City (1989), pp 128-30 M Miller, The Town Centre and Broadway, guidebook, (nd, c 1990s) Letchworth, the World's First Garden City, guidebook, (Letchworth Garden City Corporation nd, 1990s)

Maps [Copies of the maps listed below are held at the First Garden City Museum, Letchworth.] Garden City Estate Office, Site plan of proposed town, 1903 Parker & Unwin, Plan of Estate, showing proposed town and agricultural belt, c 1904 Garden City Estate Office, Plan of present development ..., 1908 Parker & Unwin, Plan of proposed layout of Town Square, nd, c 1910

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Garden City Estate Office, Plan of present development ..., 1918 Garden City Estate Office, Plan of present development ..., 1922

OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1884 2nd edition published 1899 3rd edition published 1925 OS 25" to 1 mile: 3rd edition published 1922 1938 edition

Description written: April 1999 Register Inspector: SR Edited: October 2000

Legal

This garden or other land is registered under the Historic Buildings and Ancient Monuments Act 1953 within the Register of Historic Parks and Gardens by Historic England for its special historic interest.