

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

HOWARD PARK AND GARDENS, LETCHWORTH

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Name: HOWARD PARK AND GARDENS, LETCHWORTH

County: Hertfordshire

District: North Hertfordshire (District Authority)

Parish: Non Civil Parish

label.localisation: Latitude: 51.978240
Longitude: -0.22295448
National Grid Reference: TL 22150 32577
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden
Grade: II
List Entry Number: 1000913
Date first listed: 11-Jun-1987

Details

Early C20 public park and gardens, laid out in informal style as an integral part 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 and formal town square, in turn flanked by a geometrical grid of shops and residential development. The garden city idea came from the social improver Ebenezer Howard (1850-1928), after whom the park is named. Howard had pioneered the concept of an ideal city made practicable, and was one of the main forces behind the new settlement at Letchworth. He saw it as combining the best characteristics of town and country, with great social benefits arising from thoughtfully designed and beautiful landscape surroundings.

In Parker and Unwin's 1904 plan, a corridor of green space within a residential area, which became Howard Park, ran parallel to the north end of the central, spinal Broadway. The northern half of the park was shown with a formal arrangement of cruciform paths leading to a central circular path. The layout of Howard Gardens, to the south of Hillshott Road, was not shown with as much detail. The Park and Gardens were laid out 1904-11 to an informal design, and remain a public open space.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Howard Park and Howard Gardens lie on the east side of central Letchworth. The c 3ha site is bounded to the west by Norton Way South, which is flanked by a lime avenue, to the north by Bird's Hill, to the south by Pixmore Way, and on most of the east boundary by Rushby Mead. The curving east boundary marks the former course of the Pix Brook before it was culverted in the early C20. The site is generally level. The northern half, Howard Park, is divided by Hillshott Road from the southern half, Howard Gardens. The setting is urban, of early C20 garden city character. John F Kennedy Gardens and Broadway (qv), the early C20 central town square and spinal approach to the city centre, lie c 450m west of Howard Park and Gardens, and also form part of the early garden city layout.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The site is entered from several points on the boundary, giving access to various paths within the park.

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PARK/PLEASURE GROUNDS The north and south halves of the site are split into discreet sections by Hillshott Road. Howard Park to the north contains the Mrs Howard Memorial Hall (B Parker, R Unwin 1905(6, listed grade II), standing at the south-west corner. This, the first public building in the Garden City, is built of two storeys, in Arts and Crafts style, and was named after Ebenezer Howard's first wife, Lizzie. It housed the first Council meetings in the early C20.

From the Memorial Hall a swathe of mature trees runs north-east to the south end of the paddling pool, the trees continuing north between the east side of the pool and the east boundary. The sinuously curving paddling pool (opened 1930), containing a fountain at the south end, runs north-west through open lawn which extends west to a path along the west boundary. East of the paddling pool, within a late C20 playground, stands the 1930 memorial to Ebenezer Howard, a stone plaque in a classical pilaster frame, inscribed 'Ebenezer Howard founded this town in 1903', flanked by curving, brick screen walls. At the north end of the lawn a car park stands among mature trees, with a small sunken rose garden adjacent to the north, at the north-west tip of the Park.

Howard Gardens, lying south of Hillshott Road, contains a bowling green and putting green at the north end, with a single-storey clubhouse/offices standing adjacent to the north boundary. Paths extend south along the west and east boundaries to an informal area laid out with mature trees and maintained as a wild flower area. The C F Ball Memorial Garden (c 1936) lies towards the south boundary, a sunken rose garden with stone retaining walls which during the early C20 contained the town's first swimming pool, opened in 1908. When the Ball Garden was opened a small statue of Sappho was placed in the Garden (stolen late 1990s). A path leads south from the Ball Garden through mown grass to the entrance on the southern boundary off Pixmore Way.

The First Garden City Heritage Museum (Barry Parker 1907, extended 1937, listed grade II*) stands within its own mature garden adjacent to the west boundary of Howard Gardens, outside the area here registered. It is housed in Parker and Unwin's former Letchworth Office, built in the style of a medieval hall house, with a thatched roof, and an attached cottage added in 1937 as living accommodation. When the Ball Garden was created, the architect Barry Parker donated land at the bottom of his garden to enlarge the area.

REFERENCES

Letchworth in Pictures, guidebook, (c 1951) M Miller, Letchworth The First Garden City (1989), pp 31, 133-4, 143, 161 M Miller, Howard Park, Rushby Mead & First Garden City Heritage Museum, guidebook, (nd 1990s) Letchworth the World's First Garden City, guidebook, (Letchworth Garden City Corporation 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 Garden City Estate Office, Plan of present development ..., 1918 Garden City Estate Office, Plan of present development ..., 1922 Design Plan of C F Ball Memorial Gardens, 1936 OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1884 2nd edition published 1899/1901 3rd edition published 1925 OS 25" to 1 mile: 3rd edition published 1922 revised edition 1938

Description written: May 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.