

1.1 Howard Park and Gardens 1st Public Consultation 18 October 2006

This event was held to find out and discuss current feelings, issues, uses and memories relating to the Park. It was an opportunity for the project team to understand at first hand what people wanted to see in the future and introduce the idea of improvements in the Park (see Appendix 12 and Photopanel 6 and 7)

Over 500 flyers were distributed to local residents on the streets surrounding the Park and large posters were put up around the Park in the week beforehand to publicise the event. Invitations and flyers were sent to over 70 organisations in Letchworth asking them to attend and have their say and advertisements were placed in the local press and on the NHDC website.

A private consultation exercise was arranged with a local school; Pixmore JM School located only 200m from the Park on the morning of 18 October so we could find out what the young people of Letchworth thought of the Park and what they wanted to see in the future.

The 'Planning for Real' method was adapted for this first public consultation exercise. A large simple foam mounted colour plan of the Park was prepared for the consultation. It clearly showed all the existing features in Howard Park and Gardens. Model trees and card board cut outs and model buildings were used to give the plan a 3D dimension, provide a fun element and help give people a better understanding and orientation to the Plan. The simple model was a focus for people to put forward issues and prioritise ideas on how the Park could be improved. It was a highly visible, hands-on community development and empowerment tool, which people of all ages, abilities and backgrounds found easy and enjoyable to engage in.

All participants were given a brief introduction into what the project was about and then asked to have their say. They were guided through the following process:

- The participants were asked to consider the Park as it is now and place coloured pins in areas and or post it notes with pins in areas where they wanted to comment.
- Three coloured pins were provided to represent how people felt about features in the Park, the pins represented the following;
- Red - indicated an negative/bad feature in the Park which should go/ or needed to be addressed,
- Yellow – indicated a feature in the Park that the participants felt unsure/indifferent about and could stay or go,
- Green – indicated a positive/good feature in the Park which should stay/be improved
- Once participants had considered the Park in its current state they had the opportunity to make their views be known about what they wanted to see in the future by placing pre-written or self-completed suggestion cards onto it with coloured pins. These indicated what and where the issues were and what they wanted to see happen and where (e.g. playground, parking, safe crossing, trees e.t.c).
- These pins built up a clear visual and spatial picture of problem features and areas in the Park as well as participant proposals (see images on Photopanel 6). The participants were asked to leave any additional comments/memories on the flip chart which was provided.
- The model was used at pre-advertised sessions held at the Pixmore School, Garden Square Shopping Centre and two locations in the Park, one located close to the play area and the other on a primary route close to Mrs Howard Hall on Norton Way South.

- Staff from LDA Design (Landscape Architecture) and Alison Millward Associates (Access and Audience Development) and NHDC (Stephen Sears, Ashley Hawkins and Steve Geach) were present throughout the day, talking to participants, recording comments and learning about the Park past and present.
- Separate discussions and comments were provided by users of Howard Gardens Social Centre and the Bowls Club.

We received views from around 180 participants throughout the day which included:

- 51 children aged 8 - 9 from Pixmore School
- 63 shoppers in the Garden Shopping Centre
- 57 people using or passing by the Park
- Views from a number of members of Howard Gardens Social Club

The 1st Public Consultation Outcomes can be seen in Appendix 12.

1.2 Proposals Development

The first public consultation exercise proved very useful and gave the design process direction regarding people's priorities and preferences for key 'restoration' approaches & options. The post it notes, cards and flip chart comments we recorded, sorted and prioritised to establish the key problems and constraints to be addressed through the Proposals these were:

- Lack of planning and vision guiding change within the Park
- Loss, vandalism or lack of awareness of historic features – Statue of Sappho, Memorials and Pix Brook the valley on which the open space is based.
- Subdivision of the Park and unsafe crossing at Hillshott Junction
- Poor condition of Public Conveniences and Paddling Pool
- Loss of facilities, activity and community events in the Park
- Lack of management staff – no point of contact, or visible presence
- Personal safety and Park security/surveillance
- Accessibility – signage, paths, slopes
- Potential loss of Park character/habitats (mature features trees/wooded areas) through lack of appropriate management and maintenance
- The need to reinvigorate the life and economy of the town centre

From this came the Aspirations for the Park, which are to:

- Rediscover the original (Parker and Unwin) Concept – as an important facility for Letchworth, setting for housing, arrival at the town centre and green link
- Conserve, protect and interpret historic features
- Reclaim sections of the Park lost to other uses – Car parks
- Improve the quality of Public Conveniences
- Improve physical, cultural, community connections with the Park and the buildings that stand within it – Mrs. Howard Hall, Social Centre and Bowls Club
- Support volunteer involvement and training within the Park
- Provide facilities to attract park users of all ages from Letchworth and the surrounding area
- Apply a comprehensive management and maintenance regime and improve links between management and community
- Address problems related to anti-social behaviour (vandalism, park security, personal safety)
- Improve access for all

- Conserve and protect the individual and different character of Howard Park and Gardens, to retain the diversity of experience and opportunity
- Enhance biodiversity throughout the Park
- Support the regeneration of Letchworth Town Centre

LDA Design drew up three sketch proposal options, developing the design with these issues and aspiration in mind and other information gathered on access and management, maintenance for example. The proposal options were discussed and the finished proposals were then agreed by the Steering Group in early January 2007.

It was then used to form the plans for the second public consultation.

1.3 Howard Park and Gardens 2nd Public Consultation 27 January 2007

This event was held to find out what people thought of the proposals for the Park. It was an opportunity for the project team to get feedback and comments which would contribute toward the final proposals which would be costed and put forward as part of the Stage 1 Submission. (see Appendix 12 and Photopanel 6 and 7).

The second process was very similar to the first, over 500 flyers were distributed to local residents on the streets surrounding the Park and large posters were put up around the Park in the week beforehand to publicise the event. Invitations and flyers were sent to over 70 organisations in Letchworth asking them to attend and have their say and advertisements' were placed in the local press and on the NHDC website.

The team returned to Pixmore School and held a follow up private consultation exercise with the children so we could find out what they thought to the proposals.

A large mounted colour plan of the Park Proposals was prepared for the consultation. It clearly showed all the existing and proposed features in Howard Park and Gardens with the proposal numbers located close to and identifying each of the proposals on the plan. Model buildings of Mrs Howard Hall, the Social Centre and Bowling Club with proposed extension were added to give the plan a 3D dimension and help give people a better understanding and orientation to the Plan. A board identifying the key issue and aspirations for the Park which are listed above was on display and handouts with each proposal number explained in more detail were provided. The Proposal Plan was intended as a clear and simple reference for people to discuss and ask questions about. Other supplementary plans and images were taken as a reference to support the explanation of the proposals that the project team gave. All participants were asked to fill in Feed Back Forms (although not all did) which listed all the Park proposals as they appeared on the Plan. Participants were asked to record if they agreed or disagreed with the proposal and were given the opportunity to provide extra comments if they so wished

The plan was used at pre-advertised sessions held at the Pixmore School, Howard Gardens Social Centre, Morrison's Shopping Centre and Mrs Howard Hall located in the Park as the weather in January would not allow for us to be outside.

Staff from LDA Design (Landscape Architecture) and Alison Millward Associates (Access and Audience Development) and NHDC (Steve Geach) were present throughout the day, talking to participants and explaining the proposals in more detail.

In addition to this exercise the Key Issue and Aspirations, Park Proposals and Feed back

Forms were displayed on NHDC's website. The public could view an interactive PDF of the Park Proposal (which explained each proposal in more detail when the cursor was moved over the proposal number) and gave their feedback by completing the online form and submitting it directly back to NHDC.

A separate meeting was held on site with four representatives from the newly reformed Disability Group. We discussed access issues and they commented on the proposals.

We saw 150 people and received views from around 128 Feed back Form responses from participants which included:

- Mrs Howard Hall - 27 responses
- Howard Gardens Social Centre and Bowls Club - 8 responses
- Pixmore School - 35 responses
- Morrison's Shopping Centre - 37 responses
- Disability Group - 1 response
- Website - 20 responses.

The 2nd Public Consultation Outcomes can be seen in Appendix 12.

1.4 Other Consultation and meetings

In addition to the extensive public consultation work described above there has been a great deal of discussion and consultation with a wide range of people including external groups/organisations, officers within NHDC (this has strengthened cross departmental links) and other bodies. A list of the topics which the consultation has informed and those that were consulted can be seen below:

Steering Group

Cllr Ian Knighton- Portfolio holder for Leisure
Cllr Lynda Needham - Portfolio holder for Environment
Cllr Patterson. - Chair for Letchworth Committee
John Robinson - Project Champion & Strategic Director, Customer Services
Liz Marten - Conservation Officer
Steve Geach - Parks and Countryside Development Manager
Vaughan Watson - Head of Leisure and Environment Services
Elizabeth Towler - Landscape Designer for Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation
Liz Marten - Conservation Officer

Project Development

Steve Sears - Parks & Open Spaces Officer
Terry Nicolls – Highways Department
Liz Green and Martin Fountain - Equalities Officer / Access
Ashley Hawkins – Consultation Officer
Stuart Izzard - Community Development Officer
Peter Underwood - Community Facilities Manager
Mark Wilson - Senior Planner
Keith Gayner - Finance Support Officer
Simon Ellis - Planner
John Barnacle - GIS team
Mick Larouche - Tree Department
Carl Wilkins - Tree Department
Catherine Wyatt - East Herts Council LBAP Officer

Helen Denton - PROW officer @ Herts CC
Simon Young - NHDC Cycle routes /Highways
Chris Collin - Environment Agency

Community Management

Sheila Barr - Training Officer
Graham Goodhall - Record Centre/ Ecological Consultant
Tony Bradford - Community Management Service
Richard Bowman – Town Councilor
Maria Iredale – Art Centre
Silvia Daintry – Extended Schools Officer
Inspector Geoff Camp – North Herts Police
PC Robert Oldacker – North Herts Police
Alistair Stewert _ heritage Foundation
Robert Lancaster – First Garden City Heritage Museum

Other Groups

Disability Group - once the group was reformed in late January 2007 they were consulted on the proposal as. The Access Officer gave advice on access issues in December 2006 as the Disability group did not exist when the designs were being developed
Tourist Information – provided information on tours and the out of print Heritage Trail Pamphlet
Maintenance Team - meeting held with the grounds maintenance team (John O Conner) to discuss and understand current work carried out in the Park and future proposals
Mrs. Howard Hall – meetings with Rap Aid and New Life Church (these groups will be running the building) to discuss interface between building activity and the park.

Visitor Survey

In order to collect data to help us understand the existing use of the park, and as a basis for measuring the success of the project in the future, a visitor survey was carried out which provided important data to make some of the bold decisions that will improve Howard Park and Gardens.