



BANCROFT GARDENS

Heritage Lottery Bid

Round 1 Proposal

North Hertfordshire District Council

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INTRODUCTION

Bancroft Gardens urban park is located within the centre of the historic market town of Hitchin.

The primary aim of the project is to realise the park's potential by creating a greener place for people to play, learn, work and enjoy. To design a park that encourages more residents of Hitchin and especially more facilities for families and children.

A key element of the project will be to better reveal and preserve the site's heritage for future generations, including Bancroft Pavilion, the Bandstand, the front gates and pillars. There is also an emphasis on retaining and enhancing elements of the natural landscape which are of historical significance and contribute to communicating the history of Bancroft Gardens and Hitchin, such as the River Hiz, the orchard and the osier beds.

The project will also ensure the park is better managed and maintains excellence for years to come by putting in place new locally employed staff and volunteering programmes.



THE CONTEXT

Hitchin is a medieval market town with narrow streets and lanes, and a large market square surrounded by Tudor and Georgian buildings.

Originally a Saxon burgh (A.D. 758 King Offa) then a Norman town, the settlement developed next to a small stream (the River Hiz). This position benefited its wool and malting trade and subsequent prosperity in early times. It accounts for the fact that Hitchin is one of the oldest continuously occupied urban centres in Hertfordshire.

The ancient Icknield Way passes immediately to the north and there is evidence of Roman activity (for example the Roman villa at Purwell). The origins of the settlement itself, however, probably start later with the Hicca, a Saxon tribe whose name is related both to that of the town and to the River Hiz.

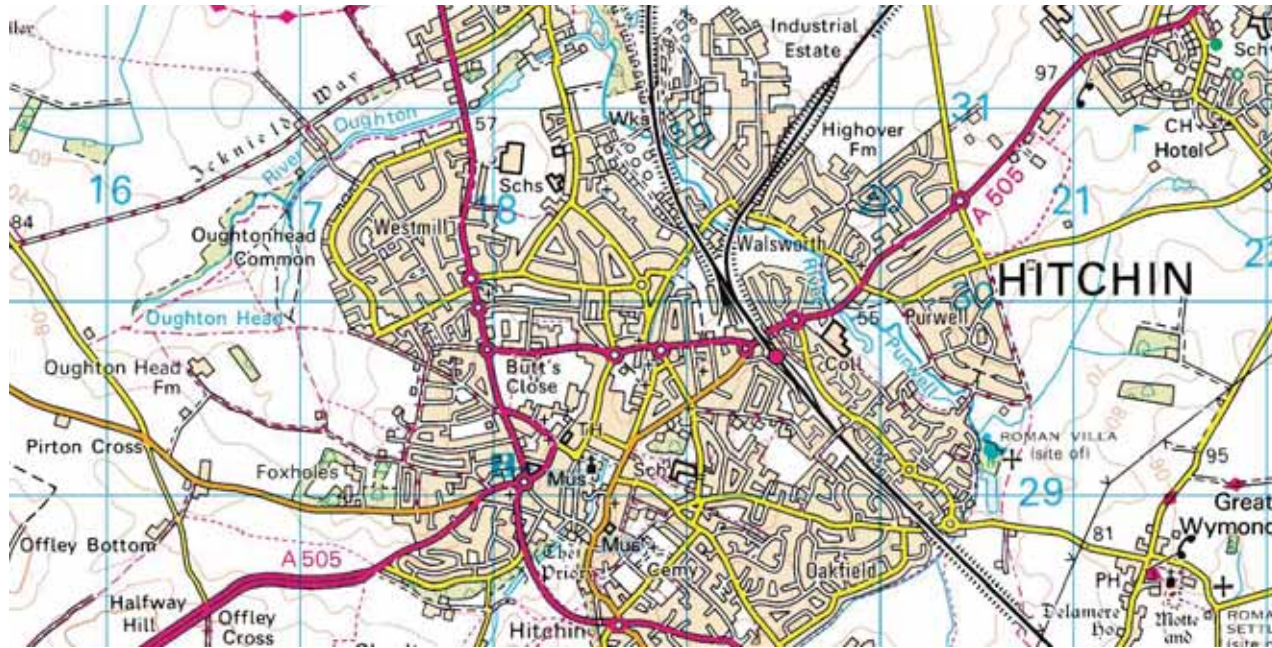
The original plan of Hitchin is typical of country market towns, as it clusters around a large triangular market-place formed by the widening of the road.



Hertfordshire Map 1787



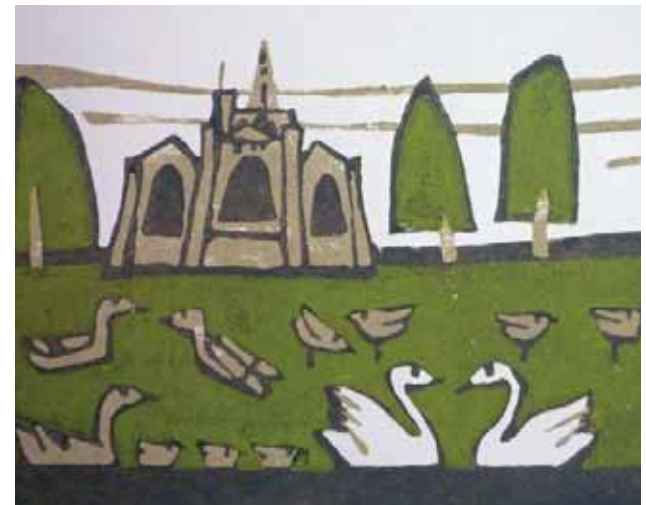
Aerial of Hitchin and Bancroft Gardens



View from Windmill Hill



Hitchin Market Place



St. Mary's Church by Cathy Smale

THE SITE

Bancroft Recreation Ground is an urban park of 3.5 hectares located in the centre of the historic market town of Hitchin.

It is a designated public open space and lies in a conservation area. The park is owned and maintained by North Herts District Council and is the main green space within the town centre.

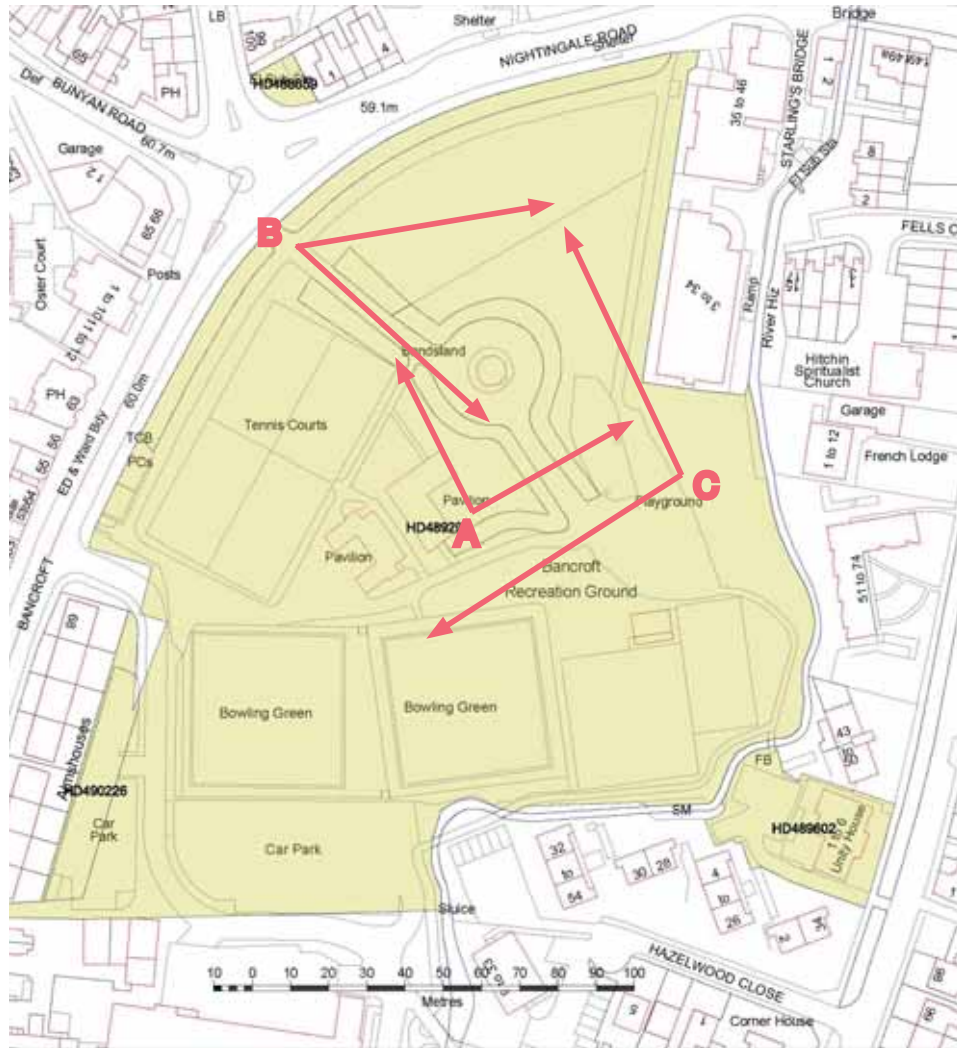
It is identified as an important green space in the Conservation Area Character Assessment and NHDC's Green Spaces Strategy has identified it as a site in need of improvements. It has a variety of trees and formal garden areas, a children's playground, a bandstand, a river walk and facilities for sport (tennis courts, bowling greens and the pavilion currently used by the Bowls Club).



Hitchin Map with area of Bancroft Gardens



Aerial of Hitchin and Bancroft Gardens



Bancroft Gardens OS Map with views



View A: Overlooking the Bandstand and Central Greenspace



View B: Overlooking the Park Entrance



View C: Overlooking the Play Area and Pavilion

HISTORY & HERITAGE

The site of Bancroft Gardens was first used as semi-formal open space in the seventeenth century connected with the tenancies of the now Grade II Listed Skynners Almshouses.

In the second half of the nineteenth century basket making was one of Hitchin's main industries and the willow grown in the osier beds on the banks of the River Hiz, were a contributory factor in its success. The osier beds at Bancroft Gardens were known for providing the raw material to the town's basket makers. Hitchin's strong past of basket making, and Bancroft Garden's role within this, is key to the heritage of the town.

Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century the park was in use as a functioning orchard, osier beds, and a nursery. By 1922 the whole site was covered in orchards with the nursery only present at the Almshouses.

The land for Bancroft Gardens was purchased by Hitchin Urban District Council in 1924 for recreational purposes.

The Gardens have seen changes throughout their history: there was formerly a woodland walk along the River Hiz; the original pond became a paddling pool and then in the 1960s a skate park; and a putting green has come and gone.

Signals of World War II are also visible in the western entrance, where two concrete pillars in a low wall mark the entrance of a former air raid shelter. These features form part of the narrative of the parks rich and interesting history and should be better revealed to enhance the park as a place of learning.

The park is a counterbalance to the Garden City movement that arose at the start of the 20th century, with Letchworth (1904) and Welwyn (1919) the first of their kind.



Wading Pool 1931



Bowls Green 1962



Play Area 1995



Wading Pool 1931



MAP KEY

- Conservation Area Boundary
- Listed Building: Grade II
- Buildings of Local Interest (BLI)
- Positive Building
- Important boundary wall, gates and piers (also a BLI)
- Landmark
- Important views (detailed in text)
- Trees with landscape amenity value (not necessarily Tree Preservation Orders [TPOs] and not inclusive of all TPOs)*
- Important tree group
- Important green space

* It should be emphasised that the trees marked on the conservation area plan are shown in their approximate positions, crown spread is not necessarily taken into account. The plan does not constitute a tree survey but simply highlights those trees which are considered to have more significant visual amenity value than others.



Plan of the town of Hitchin, by Drapentier (after Chauncy's History of Hertfordshire, 1704)



Aerial reconnaissance from English Heritage: Date unknown

Conservation Area Appraisal Map

HOW THE PARK HAS CHANGED OVER TIME



1840

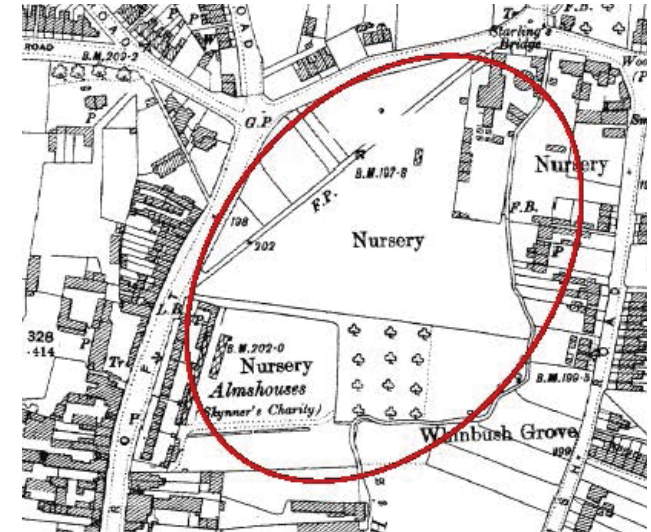
The 1840 Tithe map shows the triangular shape of the land clearly named as Bennis Mead, with orchards to the south and gas works to the north. It is enclosed on the east side by the River Hiz. Bennis Mead is known to have been connected with the charitable organisation established through the building of Skynners almshouses in 4 June 1666.

The eight almshouses in Silver Street were erected on land known as Benn's Mead when they were given in 1670 by Sir Thomas Byde for charitable purposes. The land was consequently connected with endowments and tenancies of the almshouses.



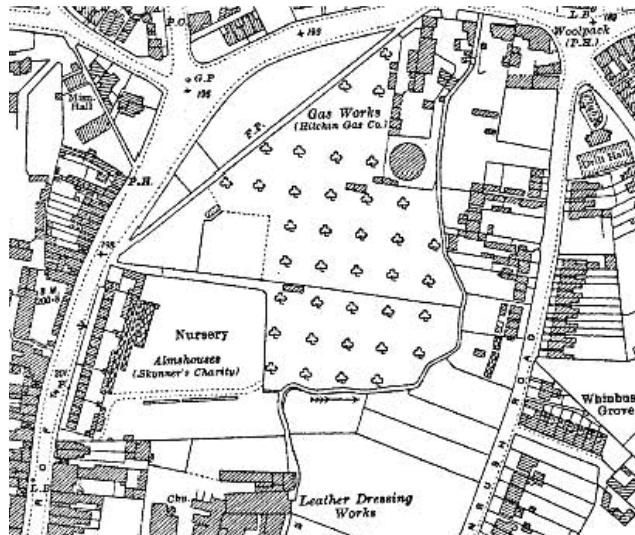
1881

The 19th century maps (1881, 1898) show the site of the Recreation Ground as being osier beds and nurseries, diagonally crossed by a path known as 'Gas Path' which led to the Gas Works at Starling Bridge, where the River Hiz flows under Nightingale Road. Frythe Cottages, Starlings Bridge and Skynners Almshouses provide the built context at this time.



1898

Part of the orchard areas where later turned into a nursery.



1922

In 1922 the adjacent lands were developed and a connection established to the river Hiz by the Leather Dressing Works. Orchards are shown to the side of Skynners.

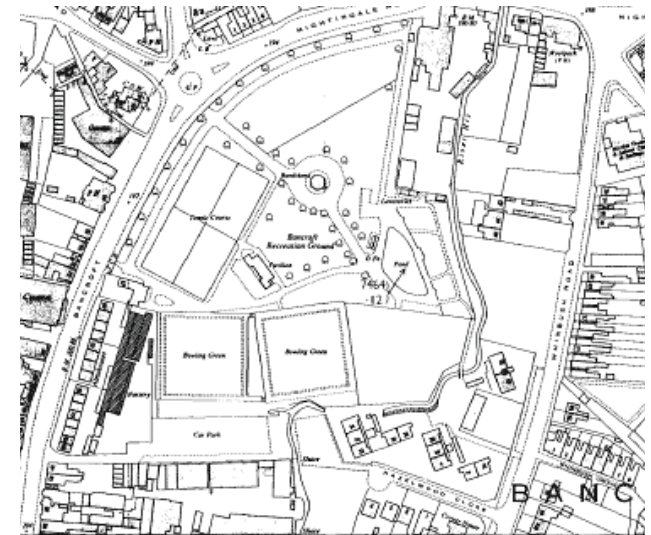
Almshouses and Hitchin Gas Company is given as the named operator of the gas works. The land was purchased in 1924, when the council was also beginning work on the Queen Street area. The presence of two large complexes (Lavender and Leather works) of buildings by the river to the south of the grounds is a well recorded illustration of the area's previous uses.



1927

The Survey drawing by the county in 1927 shows the paddling pool, bowling green and the singularly important path leading in a diagonal direction from the pool to the Bancroft entrance. It became Bancroft Recreation Ground by 1929 (date given by Reginald Hine in his 'History of Hitchin').

The pavilion was also built in 1929 and the bandstand, which was in regular use in the summer by the Hitchin Town Silver Band.



1966

The 1966 map shows the site laid out as present.

THE RIVER HIZ

The River Hiz flows in an approximately south west to north east direction, and the early settlement used it as a boundary to the burgage plots on the east side of what is now Sun Street, High Street and Bancroft.

To provide both water and power, over the years the river has been culverted, dammed, and diverted, as well as serving as a general drain to Hitchin, before the provision of a proper drainage system in the 19th century. The Carmelite monastery (now The Priory Conference Centre) was sited to take advantage of the location next to the Hiz, and the present form of the river dates from c1770 when a fashionable natural-looking lake was formed by the landscape designer Nathaniel Richmond (1724- 1784) using a dam which was hidden by a listed flint bridge.

The Hicca Way is a footpath that follows the Hiz from Wellhead in Charlton to Arlesey, passing along the riverside path on the east edge of the Grounds. It is a reminder of the history of the river where Danish invaders once occupied and gives links between Bancroft and the Priory.

In the second half of the 19th century, basket making was one of Hitchin's main industries and the willow grown in the osier beds would have been a contributory factor in its success at the time, providing the raw material for Hitchin's basket making shops.

The man in 1870 photo is William Beaver who is known to have owned the osier beds in the 1860's/ 70's. Basket making survived in Hitchin for a long time and the last survivor carried on in practice until after the Second War.



Map of the Hicca Way



Basket Maker 1870



William Beaver, basket maker 1870

THE ECOLOGY

A Phase One Habitat Analysis was carried out to analyse the existing flora and fauna. The findings presented a very low level of ecology but stated that there was scope for new and rich biodiversity to be reinstated.

The River Hiz has a very unusual habitat. This wetland habitat has been highlighted as being of high biodiversity status and ecological importance by the Hertfordshire Biodiversity Action Plan.

Many sections of the original river remain, supporting a diversity of water plants and a rich variety of wild flowers are found including Cowslip, Knapweed, Marsh Orchid, Marsh Valerian, Tussock Sedge, Yellow Flag Iris, and Watercress which used to be grown commercially at Ickleford. Willow, Poplar, Ash and Hawthorn trees are common along the bank. Fauna includes water rail, kingfisher, water vole and water shrew and the nationally notable musk beetle.

The section which runs through the park is unfortunately of lower value which can be enhanced and transformed in line with other sections of the river through this HLF project.



Primula veris



Centaurea nigra



Valeriana dioica



Nasturtium officinale



Iris pseudacorus



Salix caprea



Key Plan



Views of the River Hiz near River Oughton



Views of the River Hiz

THE PAVILION

The Pavilion is a single storey building with a raised ground floor level. It is constructed in traditional materials comprising a brick plinth, approximately 750mm high, below rendered painted solid walls, timber windows, red brickwork around the entrance, an open eaves, and clay tiled roofs. The roofs are a strong feature of the building, with hipped ends and gables above the hipped ends.

The original building is dated 1929, designed in a traditional style of the period. The central main part has a steep pitched roof, and is intersected on the south west side with the full height gable elevation. This forms the entrance to the building. It is in red brickwork and render with clerestory windows above the entrance doors. As part of the main building, there are abutting rooms on both sides, with hipped roofs, which intersect with the main roof.

The Pavilion has been extended in recent years with wings on the north west and south east sides. The extensions are symmetrical about the main building, and may have been built in the last twenty years. These additions are at ground level and the floor level will be approximately 500mms below the floor in the main building. There are no internal door openings between the old building and the new wings.



Key Plan



SIDE ELEVATION



FRONT ELEVATION



REAR ELEVATION



GROUND FLOOR



THE BANDSTAND

The bandstand has a tiled roof supported on eight pillars enclosing a central circular covered space. The Park's pavilion, bandstand and boundary walls have group value.

The bandstand is a later reflection of the many in the UK that originated in the Victorian era as the British brass band movement gained popularity. The architectural style is clearly influenced by the late Victorian circular structure that was considered a necessity in parks by the end of the 19th century.

Most bandstands were created in response to the Industrial Revolution, when local authorities realised worsening conditions in urban areas meant there was an increasing need for green, open spaces. Although later than many urban parks the Grounds played an important part in the expansion of the suburbs that followed the First War.

With the loss and through neglect or vandalism between 1979 and 2001 of more than half of the 438 bandstands in historic parks across the country, the significance of a later surviving bandstand cannot be underestimated.



Bandstand 1955



No date



Key Plan



No date



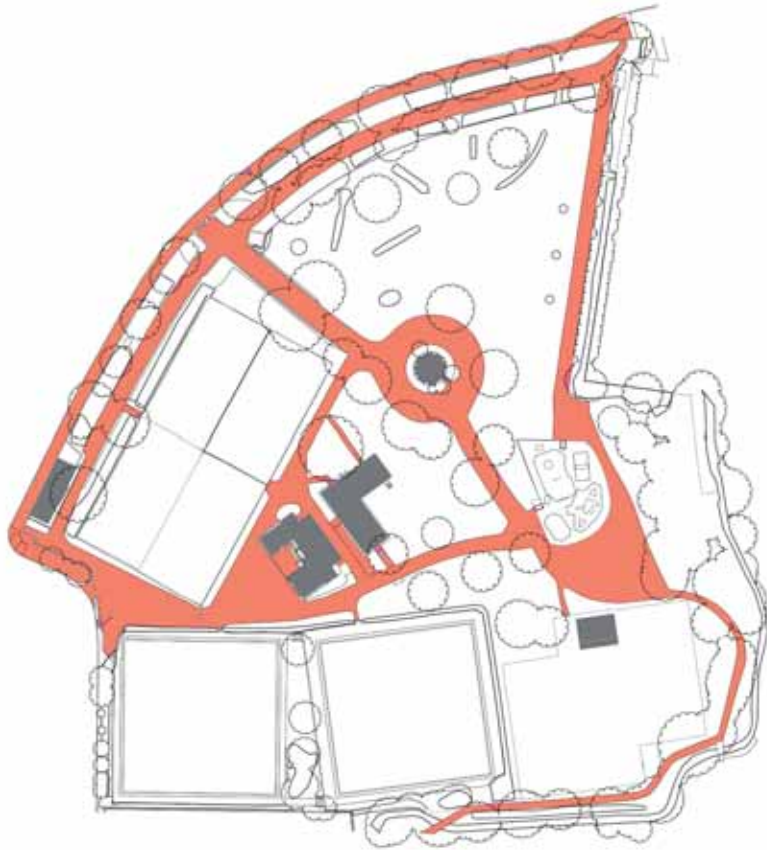
Bandstand Present

SITE ANALYSIS

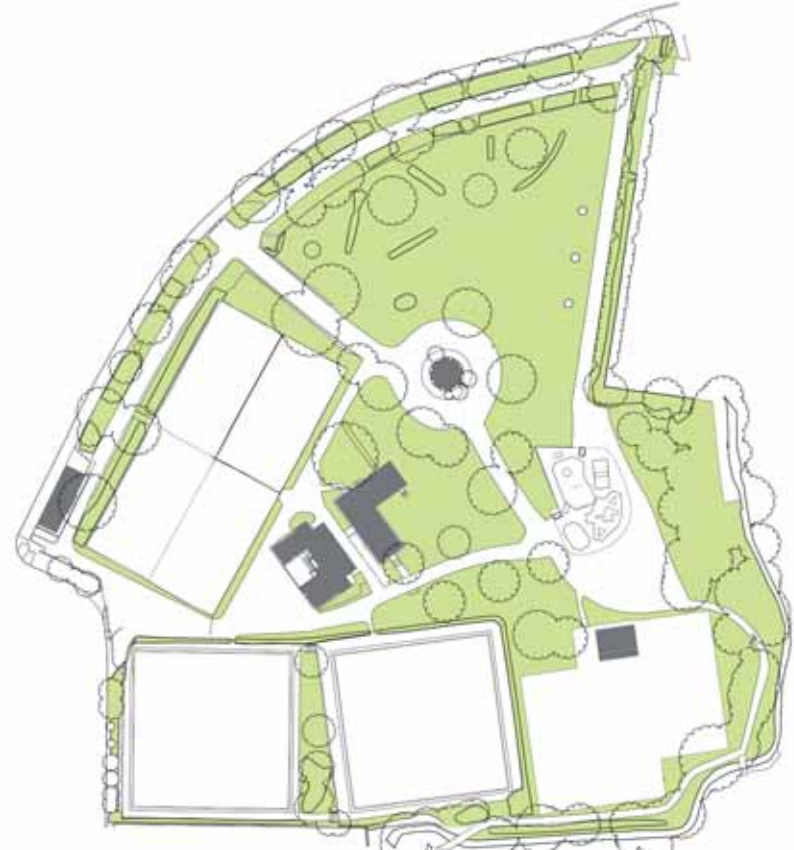


- Buildings
- Pedestrian Pathways
- Green Space
- Existing Trees
- The River
- Play
- Formal Sport

CIRCULATION



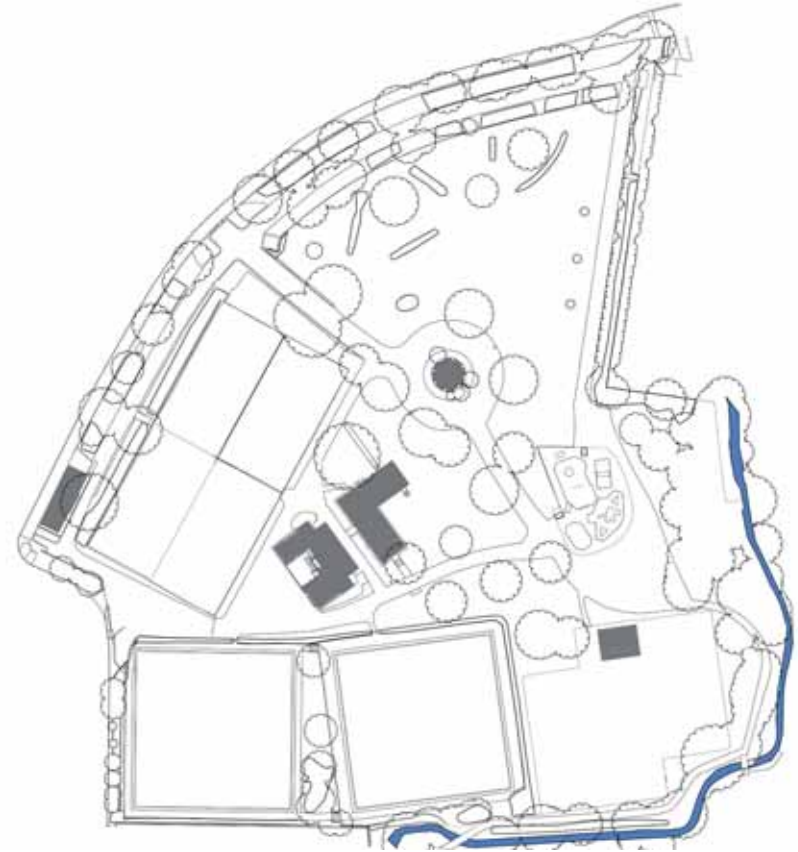
GREEN SPACE



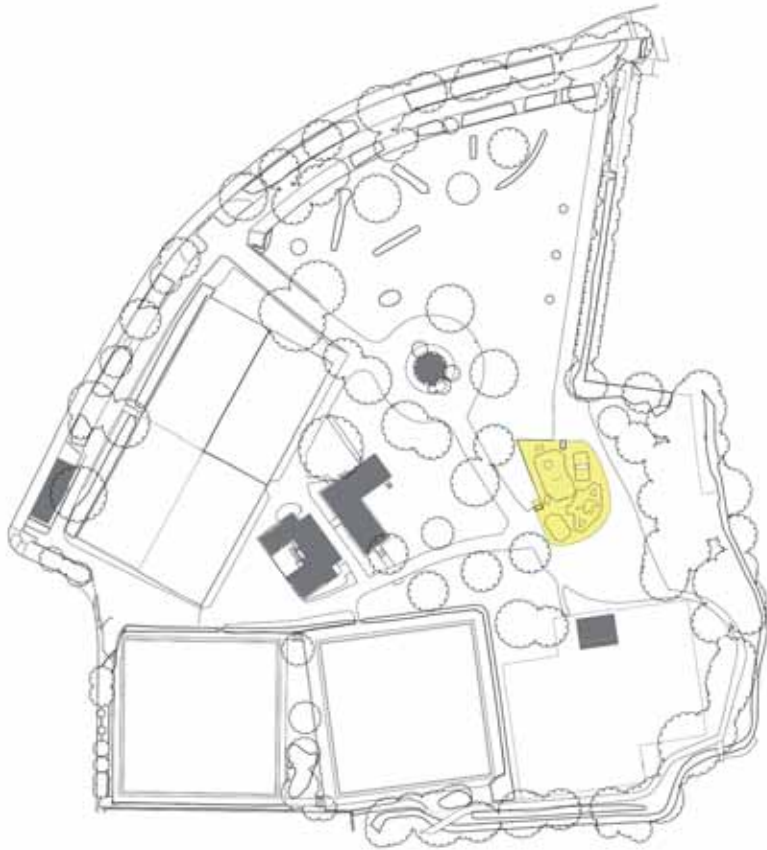
TREES



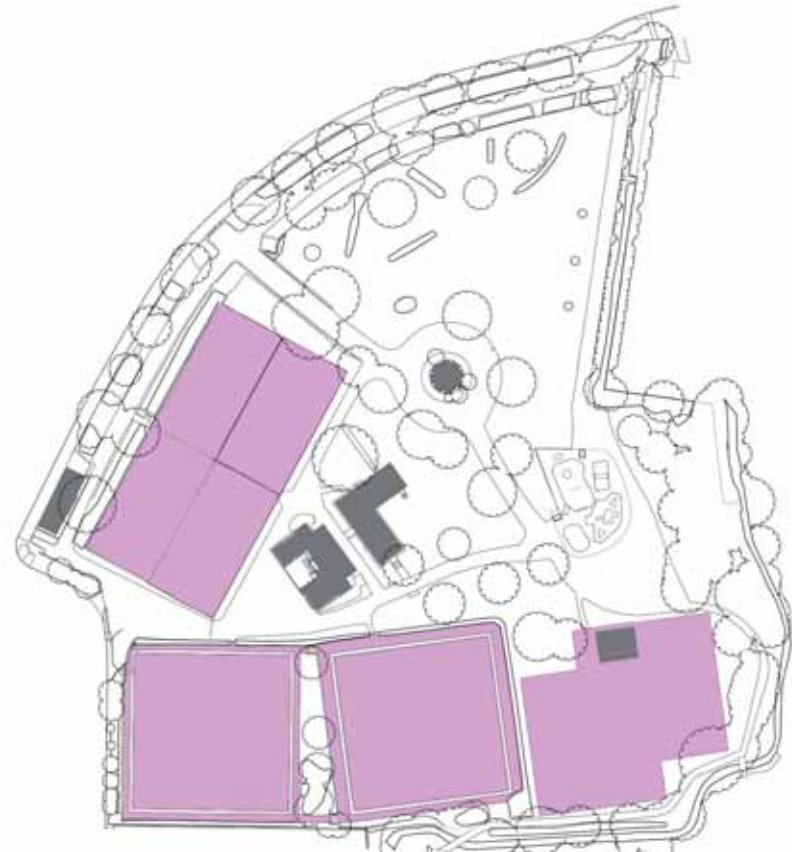
THE RIVER



PLAY AREA



FORMAL RECREATION



CONDITION SURVEY

In preparation for this HLF Round 1 Bid, a detailed survey was carried out to assess the current condition of elements within the park and identify what elements within the park need to be repaired or replaced.

This survey also aimed to identify the probable cause of the faults and issues, so as to recommend the most appropriate course of action to rectify any problems.

The condition survey has been provided as a separate document.

BANCROFT GARDENS
CONDITION SURVEY

Prepared by BDP
(BDRPT001) Job no. F5000031 Dec 20

Overall Location Plan

Item
Stone Pillars and Steel Gate

Proposal
Refurbish pillars and gates as part of heritage value.

Comments

- Pillars are bowing over
- In places the pillars heavily covered in ivy, moss and lichens
- Steel gates are bowing where paint has been weathered away
- Evident that there has been limited maintenance of pillars and gate
- Gate at south-west entrance does not open due to forges being rusted over

Condition Rating

Fair - Element is still usable but is in a state where it will continue to degrade at a rapid rate if not repaired.

Photos

BDP BANCROFT GARDENS
CONDITION SURVEY

BDP BANCROFT GARDENS
CONDITION SURVEY 11

SUMMARY



i. Entrances and Gates

The boundary wall running along Bancroft and Nightingale Road is of significant heritage value, dating from the 1920s. The wall is currently unsafe and in a poor state of repair. Urgent works are required to restore the wall. The iron gates and gate piers are in a fair condition although without repair the gates and gate piers will continue to degrade at a rapid rate, posing the threat of losing these valuable heritage assets.



ii. Bancroft Pavilion

The Bancroft Pavilion is a single storey building dating from 1929 constructed in traditional materials comprising painted rendered brick walls, timber windows, red brickwork and a clay tiled roof. The building has now reached a stage where it is in urgent need of refurbishment, with numerous exterior walls suffering from cracked render. Without restoration works the poor condition could impact on the functionality of the pavilion.



iii. The Bandstand

The central bandstand is constructed of timber cladding with stone pillars and is currently in a poor state of repair with damage to the ceiling and drainage pipes, and graffiti evident on the paintwork. It is in need of care and attention so that it can be used by the community once again.



iv. Greenspace, Planting and Trees

Bancroft Gardens has a rich history as a functional 'garden' growing produce or raw materials for trade and industry. Today the presence of the orchards, nurseries, and osier beds are no longer apparent, resulting in a part of the park and Hitchin's history remaining hidden. The project provides an important opportunity to reflect back upon these elements of the park's history and echo them through the planting and play and providing opportunities to learn and develop skills in the local community.



v. The River

The River Hiz has been denaturalised, over the years with the introduction of concrete and paved river banks, which have greatly reduced the river's ecological value. The extension of the tennis courts along the edge of the riverbank has exacerbated this problem by further reducing the amount of waterside habitat. As there is evidence of native species of animal, birds, amphibians, bats, reptiles, terrestrial mammals, and native plant species along the corridor, it is very important that the river is naturalised to restore its original habitat and ensure the ecological heritage of the park.



vi. Footpaths and Access

Most of the pathways are in disrepair. Access within and through the park is difficult for users to understand the layout of the park as there is a lack of structure. Links need to be improved between all the vital elements, such as the Bandstand, Pavilion and Play area.



vii. Play

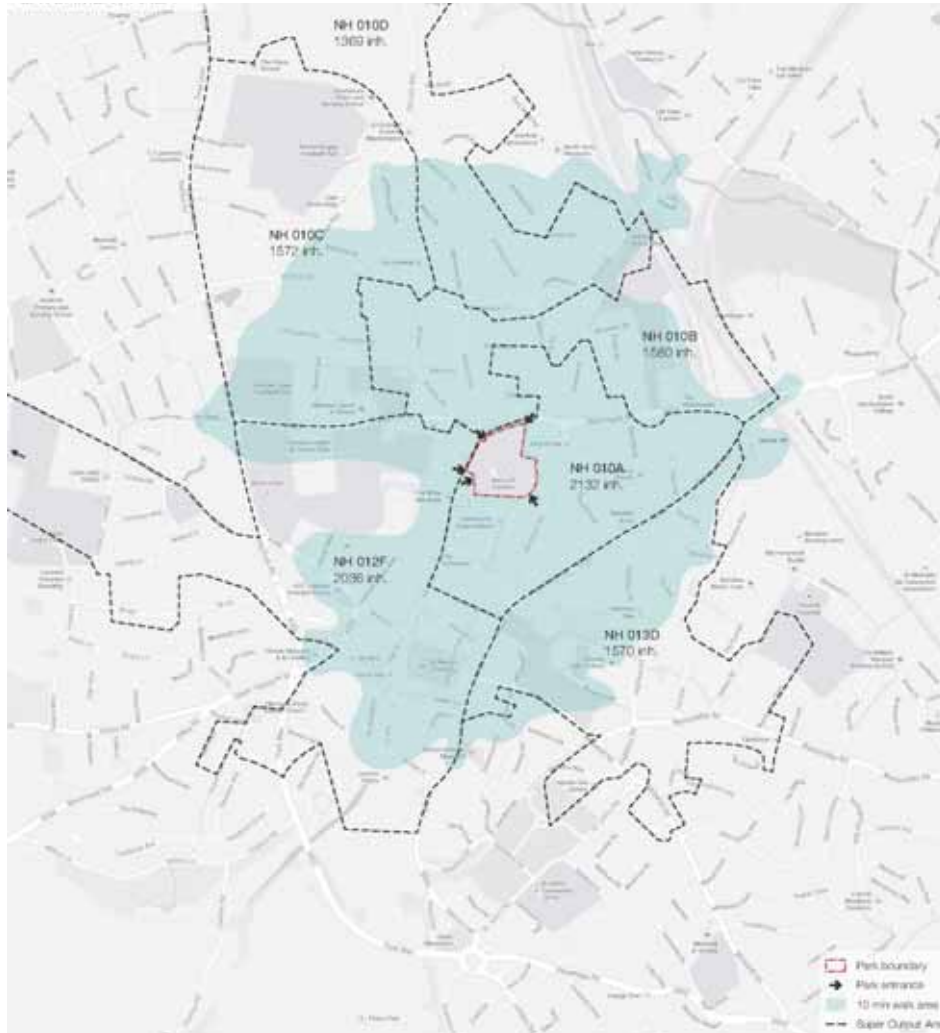
The toddler play equipment is in good condition but is limited in scope for older children. The play area needs to be extended and redesigned to create a wider more holistic play area for a greater number of children.



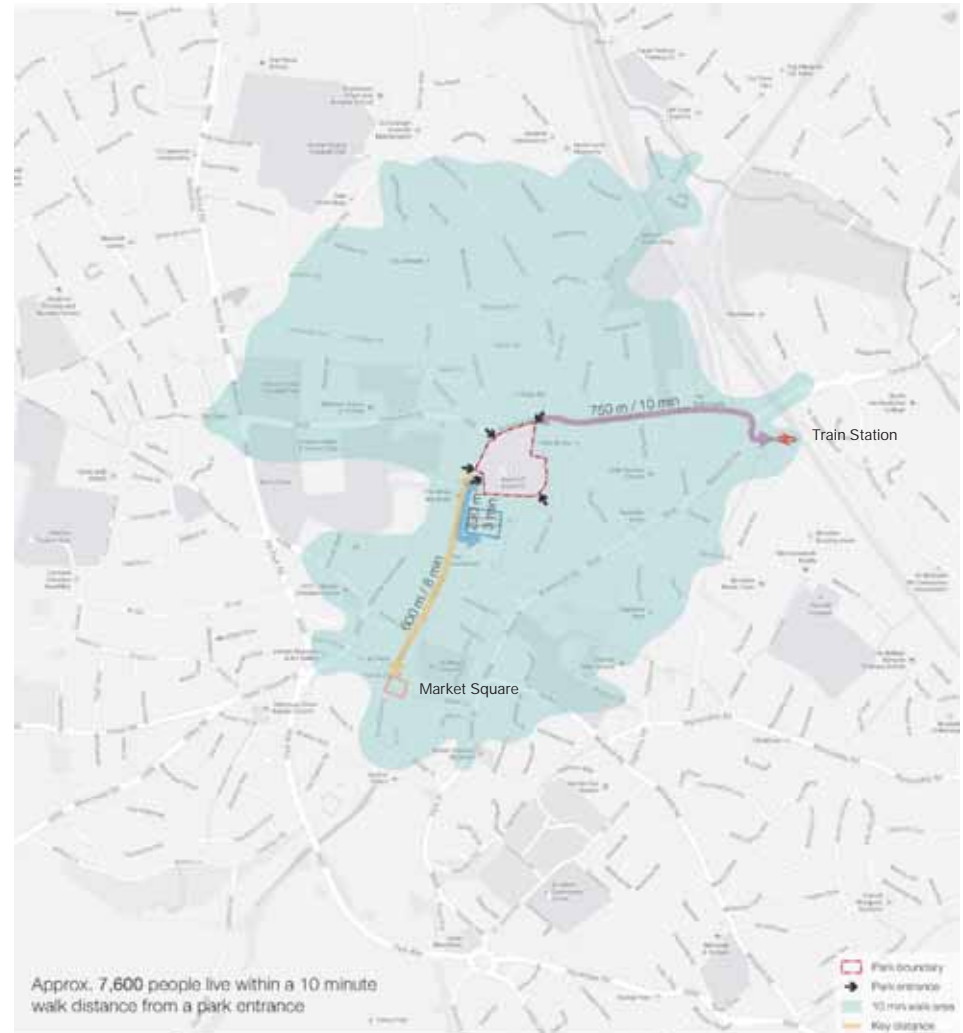
viii. Tennis Courts

The public tennis courts have come to the end of their serviceable life. The total number of tennis courts needs to be reduced as they overwhelm the park as they are too dominant for the space. We need to provide a better balance of activities within the park, at the same time reintroducing valuable green space.

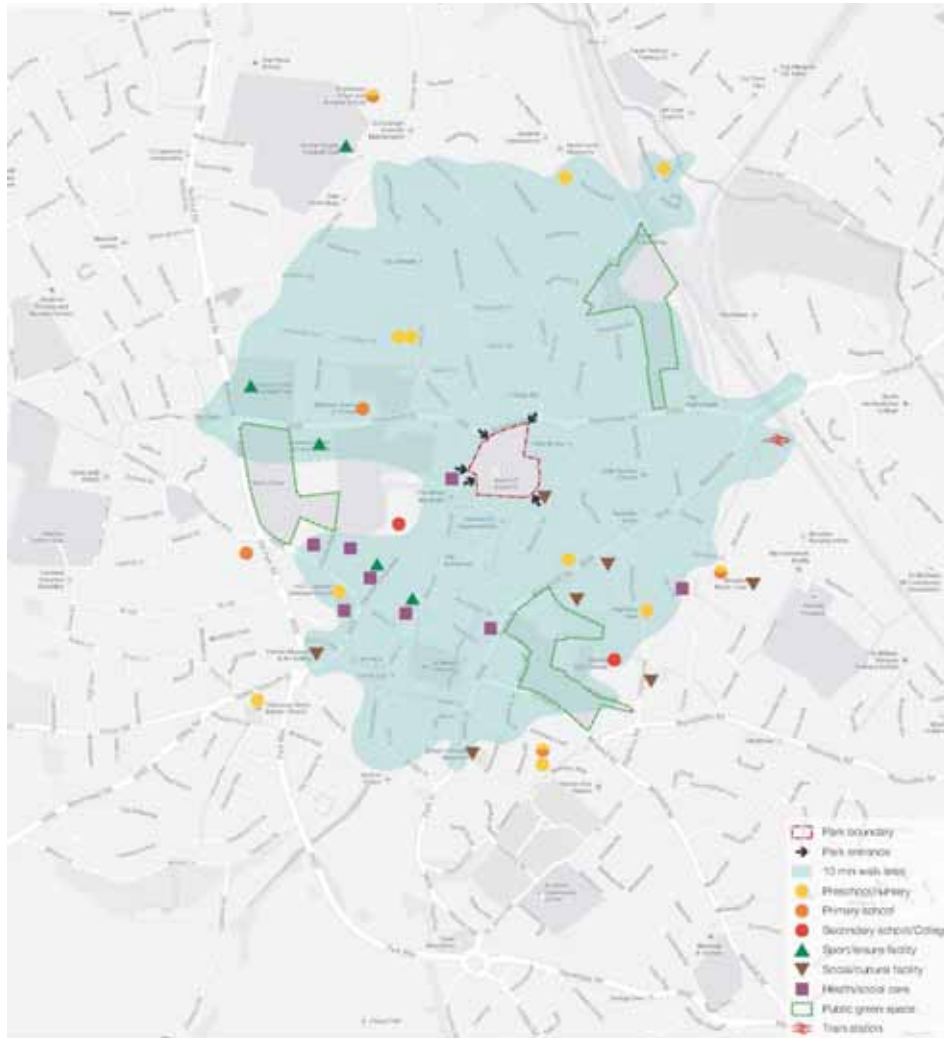
THE COMMUNITY AND PARK SURROUNDINGS



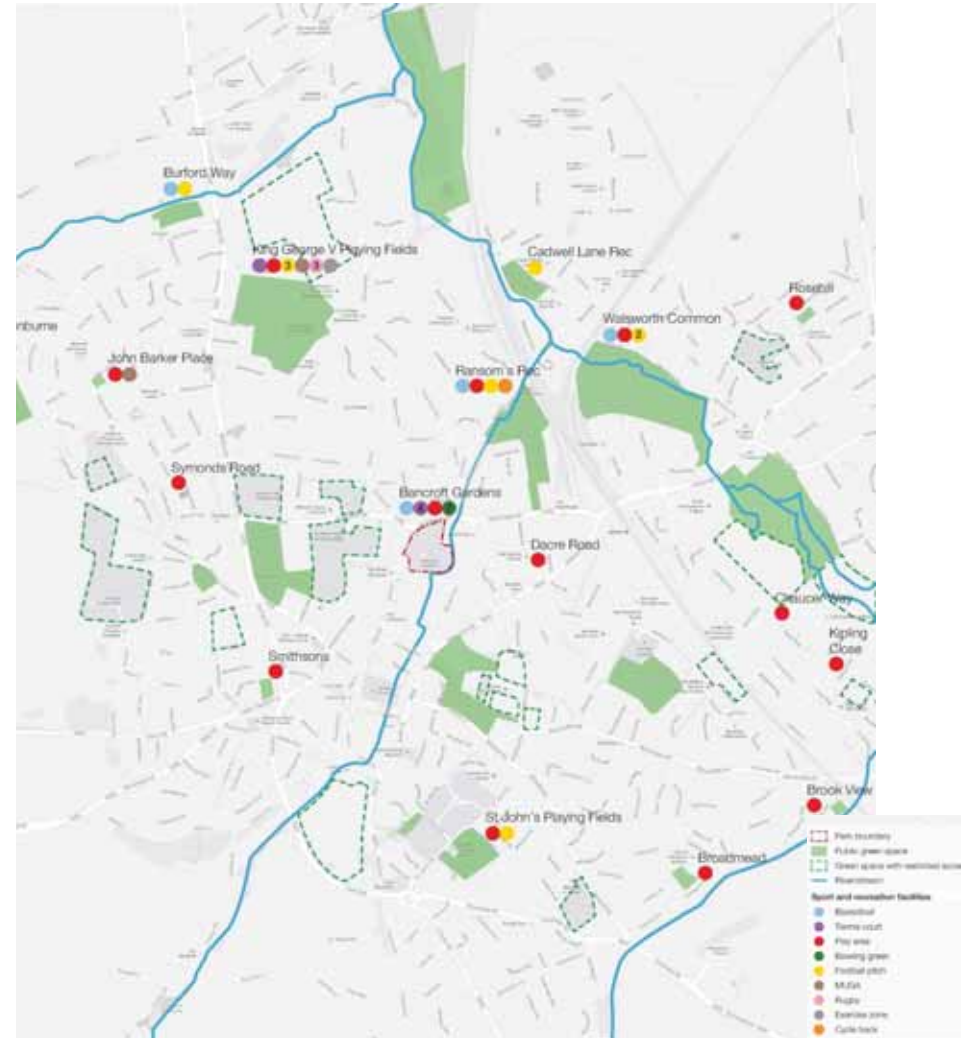
Bancroft Gardens Catchment Area



Bancroft Gardens Catchment Area with walking distances.



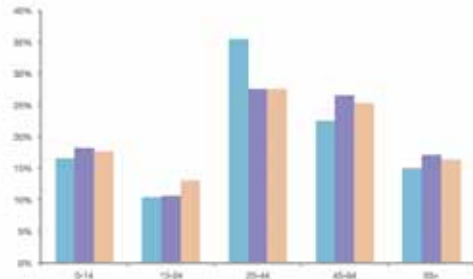
Bancroft Gardens Catchment Area with Public Facilities



Bancroft Gardens Catchment Area with Public Sport and Recreational Facilities

THE PEOPLE OF HITCHIN

AGE STRUCTURE

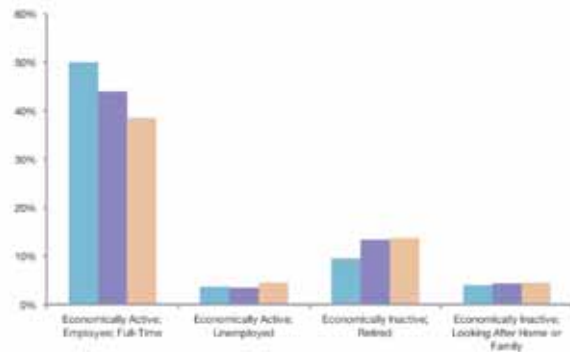


- Overall, high percentage of full-time working individuals (50%, over the national average for each LSOA) and low level of retired individuals (under the district and national average for each LSOA).
- The level of full-time working people is significantly high in the LSOA 010A and 010B (55.5 and 52%). Likewise, those two areas have very low percentage of retired individuals (under 7%).



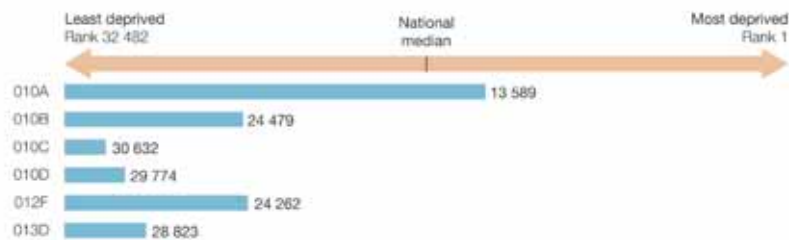
■ All 6 Super Output Areas
 ■ North Hertfordshire
 ■ England

ECONOMIC ACTIVITY



- Over-representation of young adults (age group 25-44) in the local area, compare to typical district and national rates
- No other major difference with the district and national age structure.
- The areas 010A and 010B have a significantly younger population (70% of their residents are under 45) than the other neighbourhoods.

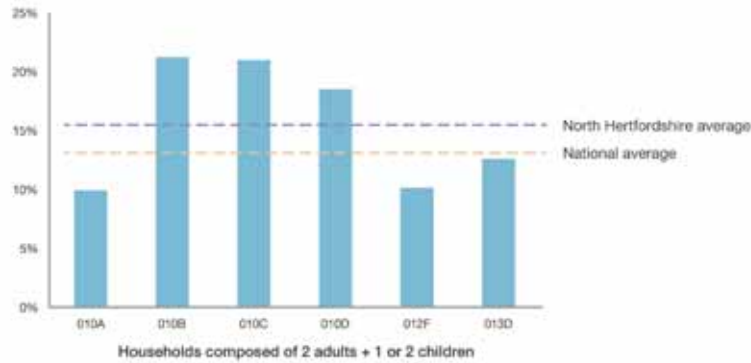
LEVEL OF DEPRIVATION



- A privileged local community overall:
 - 2 neighbourhoods are in the least deprived 10% nationally.
 - 5 neighbourhoods in the least deprived 30%.
- But, the LSOA 010A is ranked below the national median, with poor performance in respect of income, employment, crime and living environment.

Note: The Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) is an official relative measure of concentrations of deprivation at the small area level. It combines a number of indicators, chosen to cover a range of economic, social, housing, health, education/skills, environment and crime issues, into a single deprivation score for individual neighbourhoods (LSOA). There are 32 482 Super Output Areas in England. The most deprived is ranked 1 and the least deprived 32 482.

HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION

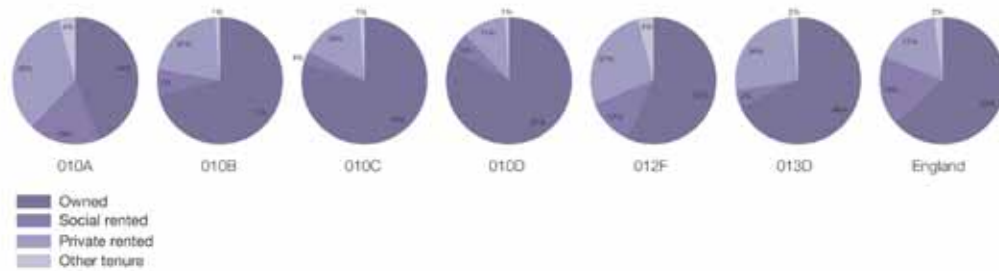


- Overall, the neighbourhoods have very similar household compositions than in North Hertfordshire and England, except the level of one person household aged under 65 (higher in the local area).
- Individually, the LSOA have very different profile:
 - The areas 010B, 010C and 010D have very high rate of households composed of 2 adults and 1 or 2 children, combined with low level of single person households.
 - The area 010A have an extremely high level of single person aged under 65 households (36% of the households, 16% in North Hertfordshire).
 - The area 012F have very high number of single person aged over 65 households.
 - The area 013D has a more balanced profile.



Legend:
■ All 8 Super Output Areas
■ North Hertfordshire
■ England

HOUSEHOLD TENURE



- High local disparities in the household tenure:
 - high percentage of owned properties in the Super Output Areas 010B, 010C, 010D and 013D, combined with very low percentages of rented accommodations (especially social rented).
 - Opposite trend in the area 010A, with unusually high levels of social rented and private rented accommodations.
 - More balanced profile in the area 012F.

CONSULTATION PROCESS

Our approach

Over the past 2 years North Hertfordshire District Council has carried out a number of consultation processes directly associated with implementing improvements to Bancroft Gardens. The process expanded in November 2013 and has been invaluable in gaining a better understanding of the relevant issues that are fundamental to ensuring the success of any of the initiatives that are to be undertaken.

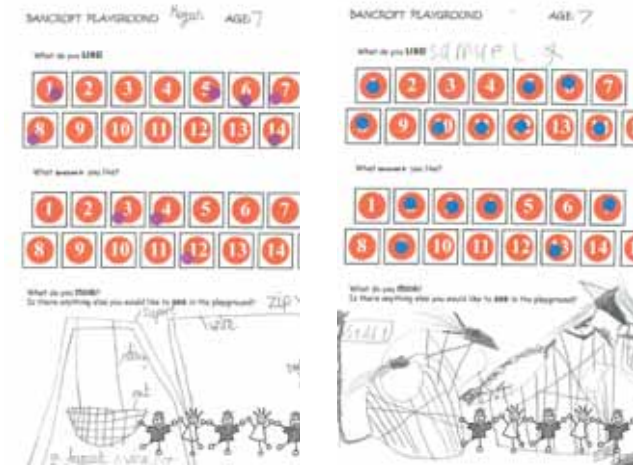
What we have done

- Lots of consultation and engagement with local people and the community
- Surveys of the park to understand condition, heritage, ecology, trees and layout
- Understood the background, previous studies, previous plans for the park, demographics of the area
- Developed concepts and prepared a revised design for the park based on our findings
- Built a website to gain an understanding of peoples thoughts.
- Met with over 100 children
- Carried out questionnaires, in person and through online surveys, with over 100 respondents

Who we met

As of November 2013, several consultation exercises have been undertaken with the general public and key stakeholders from within the Borough:

- Bancroft User Groups
- Local Primary Schools and Pre Schools
- Mums Groups and Toddlers Groups
- Elderly People Home Groups
- Shopkeepers and Local Businesses
- Public- Market users, Resident and Neighbours
- Hitchin Forum
- Regal Courts Home Group
- Wrigglers and Tiddlers
- Existing management and maintenance
- Hitchin Market Square
- People in the park
- We personally met over 250 people



What they said

We talked to lots of different people and groups, all of whom had their own perspective on Bancroft Gardens. Their comments built a picture of the park and how they use the space. Below is a summary of their main likes and dislikes:

Likes:

- Green space as a place in Hitchin
- Tennis courts
- Play for toddlers
- The trees and open lawn space
- The bandstand and Bancroft Pavilion

Dislikes:

- No seating
- Bad lighting
- Poor maintenance
- Not enough play for older children
- No public toilets
- Feels unsafe
- Railings and enclosure
- Lack of care and disrepair



What we've been told....

Tennis: there is a passion for the existing tennis club, there is also a view that public tennis courts should be made available.

Bowling: dedicated parking in close proximity is required.

Play area: could be a lot better, mixed views on railings and enclosures.

The buildings: disappointed to see that the Hall was to be removed.

Toilets: much needed in the park.

Maintenance of the park: considered to be not currently good enough.

Trees: mature trees considered an asset to the park.

The River Hiz: would like to see it as a part of the park.

Safety: lighting is needed, feels unsafe at night, antisocial behaviour a problem.

Vegetation and shrubs: could be improved, separation needed from the road.

Our response.....

Tennis

Agreement needs to be made regarding the club and public court provision – we believe that there are too many courts in total for this park – recommended that NHDC continue talks with Hitchin Tennis Club to find an amicable solution for public as well as club use.

Bowls

Agreement needs to be made regarding car parking spaces – we do not agree with car parking within the park, recommended that NHDC review how this can be accommodated.

Play Area

This needs to cater for all ages and be more inclusive including water play, natural play and traditional play. This should be a focal point in the park and needs to be a larger area than present. We don't think a formal multi use games area is appropriate and are considering an integrated informal balls area.

The Buildings

The Pavilion building needs to become a more useable space for the users of the park and those groups who would benefit from a facility in the park – this includes extending it. This should include a cafe facility and ideally the space would be designed as a multiuse building for existing and new users (e.g. bowls and tennis).

Toilets

Need to be incorporated in the Pavilion

Maintenance of the park

A long term plan will need to be in place to satisfy the HLF, therefore this will be improved including potentially a park keeper.

Trees

Unfortunately a lot of the mature trees are coming to the end of their life, we therefore need to sensitively plan for the next 100 years.

The River Hiz

Lots can be done to improve and integrate the river into the park, this will require removing some of the lower value trees to open out the area and re-grade the banks.

Safety

We need to improve the entrances, make the sightlines into the park better, improve the layout of the paths, add lighting and ensure the spaces are designed to discourage antisocial behaviour.

Vegetation and shrubs

We need to sensitively review the planting along the road – on one side we need to open up the space to improve visibility, on the other we need to protect the park against the road and make it an enjoyable place to be.

CONCEPTS



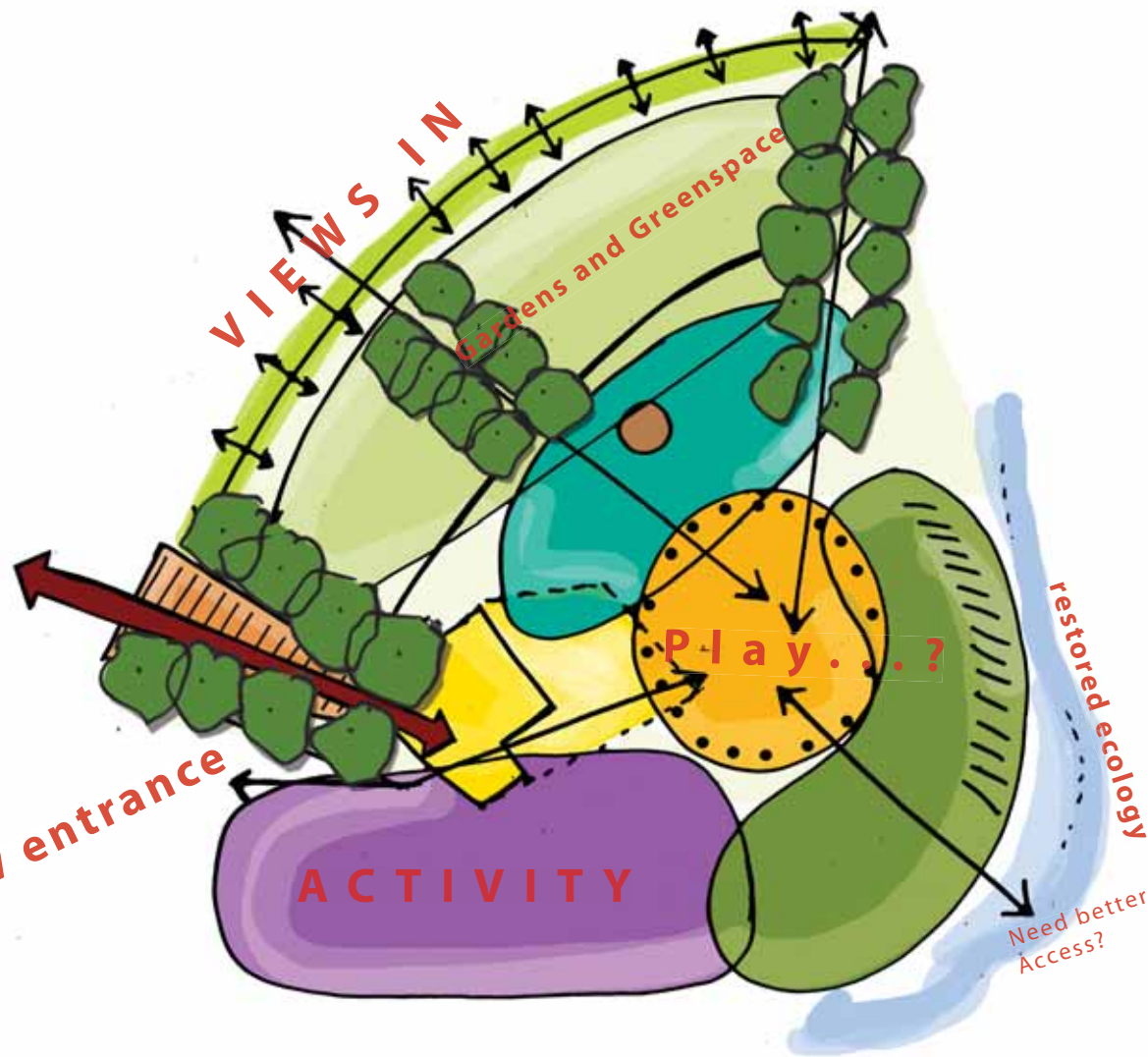
Community + Green Space



History + Engagement



Habitats + Gathering Spaces



Memory + Culture



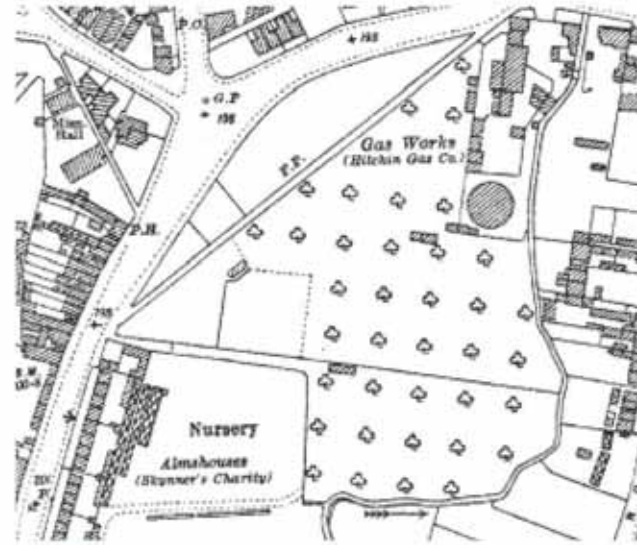
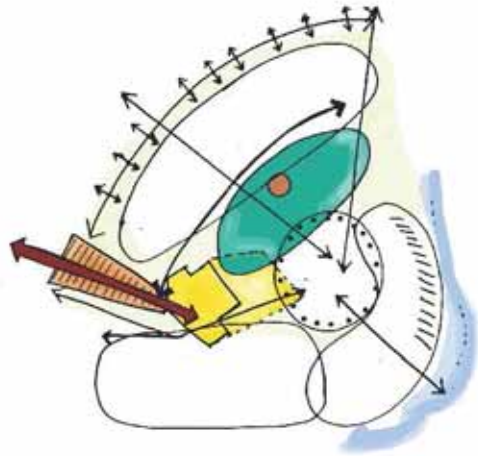
Play + Recreation



Ecology + Heritage

I.

HERITAGE | MEMORY | HISTORY

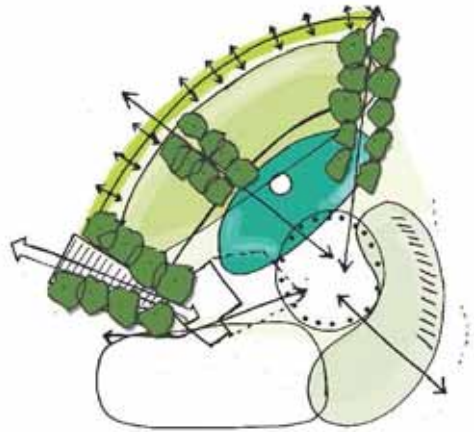


HERITAGE
 history & CONTEXT
 CONNECTIVITY
 belonging
 LOCATION
 Victorian & Tradition
 pattern
 classical structure
 MEMORIES



II.

GREEN SPACE | HABITATS | ECOLOGY

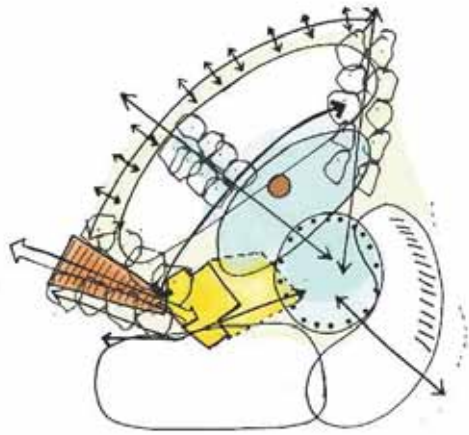


PLANTING
natural flow
MOVEMENT
meandering
journey
RESTORATION
wanderings
ecology
WILD
biodiversity
colourful



III.

GATHERING | COMMUNITY | CULTURE

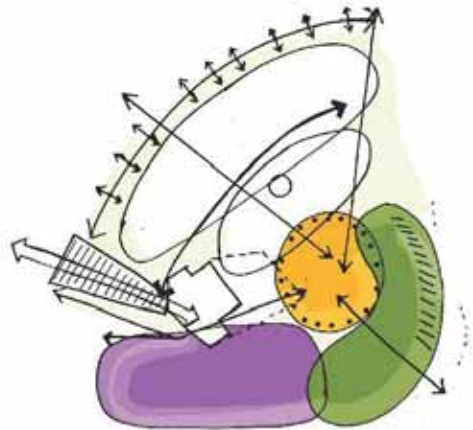


HUMAN SCALE
function
intimate spaces
QUALITY
connectivity
harmony
COMMUNITY
meeting and
socialising
HAPPENINGS



IV.

RECREATION | PLAY | ENGAGEMENT



fun experiences
exploration
LEARNING
development
AFFORDANCE
interactive spaces
engagement
CREATIVE PLAY
SPORT



VISION + OBJECTIVES

To restore a historic park for local communities and to provide a welcoming and vibrant green space offering a range of facilities which meet the objectives laid out by the Parks for People Lottery programme.



i. Heritage Reinstated

The historical features of the park, which provide a link to the past and future legacy, are in disrepair and are in need of restoration. The design seeks to refurbish and restore, Bancroft Pavilion, the Bandstand, the front gates and pillars, and the River Hiz. Historic orchards, a water feature, willow (osier) and perennial planting will also be re-instated and re-interpreted within the new design.



v. Connections and Structure Improved

To encourage people to engage with and appreciate the full range of park features the design will make creative use of open vistas and clear connections. Newly surfaced pathways and avenues of trees that are well lit provide clearly defined areas for navigation. A park that is in wide use will be safer and will be well kept.



ii. Green Space Refurbished

Bancroft Park is a green space of central importance to the town of Hitchin. The design seeks to bring out its full potential by incorporating old and new elements, and by preserving the historical legacy and planning for the future generations. Old species of trees are to be retained and new avenues reinstated. Restored perennial beds create fresh and lively seasonal colour, while the refurbished lawn afford resident's areas for relaxation and informal recreation.



vi. Formal Sport Enhanced

Tennis and bowling are key activities within the park. Tennis courts need to be provided but reduced in number to allow a more balanced use of the park for other activities. The top Bowls Green being the oldest and in best condition will remain as a key feature.



iii. The River Hiz Restored

Throughout its history, Hitchin has been defined in many ways by the River Hiz. King Offa recognized its value when he settled the Hicca tribe along the banks on the present site of the town. This small enclave of Saxons defended their territory by paying off the marauding Vikings. In succeeding generations the river has shaped the life of the town. Therefore the design will restore this vital corridor to its rightful place by enhancing the biodiversity along its banks and by encouraging greater interaction between the Hiz and the people of Hitchin.



vii. Community Space Created

Bancroft Pavilion is a key architectural feature in the park, but currently has limited use. There is an opportunity for additional use in particular, catering, public toilets and other park based activities.



iv. Play Expanded for Mixed Age Groups

Children and families make up over 60% of Hitchin's population. To reflect this demographic the design aims to increase the range of recreational activities for all age groups. These would include improved access to formal sport elements such as tennis and an informal games area and natural play features within an extended activity area. The design aims to provide a safe and holistic environment for children that encourages play and exploration.



viii. Bringing People Together

The design and redevelopment of Bancroft Gardens is a unique opportunity. By working together everyone benefits. The prospect is exciting and the potential great but first a consensus has to be reached. Everyone can have a say. The design process will respect this diversity of opinion while keeping the main objectives in view; it will be diplomatic and effective so that the momentum and good will generated by the process results in the best outcome for the widest group of users.

MASTER PLAN



- 1 Reconditioned Bandstand with lawn and enhanced setting.
- 2 Re-furbished Bancroft Pavilion with an extension for a cafe, community space, public toilets and sports club house.
- 3 Water Play/feature as a heritage focal feature that attracts visitors and allow kids to engage and play.
- 4 The River Hiz re-stored with carved out natural banks and planted with rich native species.
- 5 Natural Play Area integrated with the River Hiz. Enhanced and reclaimed ecology and biodiversity bring a new sense of character back to the site. Willow structures designed into the space as a heritage and play feature.
- 6 Removal of public toilets allow for new entrance creates a promenade which opens the sites visibility and leads one to Bancroft Pavilions and the heart of the Gardens.
- 7 Improved entrances and re-instated accesses to allow for visibility and pedestrian flow.
- 8 Refurbished gates at all entrances establish these important heritage features creating a fresh feel to the park.
- 9 Reconditioned lawn spaces open up the area with new plantings and trees.
- 10 Reconditioned, realigned and new pathways allow for well connected routes and links through the park.
- 11 Perennial planting beds re conditioned and enhanced with seasonal planting.
- 12 Removal of Tennis courts provide more green space for trees, perennial beds and lawn. Orchard trees planted in groves to tie back into heritage feel.
- 13 Bow's Green.
- 14 Realigned Tennis Courts with new fencing and connection to Bancroft Pavilion.
- 15 Informal Play Area.
- 16 Courtyard space for cafe with seating and enhanced perennial beds allowing views to all activity areas.
- 17 Potentially repositioned Tennis Club pavilion.

- Other improvement will include:
- New lighting along paths for increased safety
 - Increased maintenance
 - Training for individuals and volunteer programmes
 - New tree planting
 - Heritage interpretation throughout the park
 - Improved pedestrian routes
 - Better inclusion and facilities for formal sports

ENTRANCES AND ACCESS

The masterplan proposes to enhance the park entrances. Wider paths provide ease of access and visual links to the space and create a positive and inviting start to the park experience.

Design Aims:

Utilitarian barriers and general clutter are to be removed and perennial beds reconfigured for ease of flow and movement from the street. This will allow for visual sight-lines while preventing vandalism.

Enlarged tree lined avenues and re-surfaced pathways provide a clear structure and a line of movement. These promenades create an open space for people to enjoy as well as directing them through the site.

The restored heritage pillars create markers that highlight the entrance. Signs and interpretation will also provide park information, maps and local context, including the biodiversity of the area and the history of the gardens.

The gates will be restored and their setting enhanced.

The old toilet block will also be removed to improve the entrance from the town centre.

Seating is to be installed under the trees to provide areas of rest and relaxation.

Lighting will highlight the avenue of trees and help to make the park a safe place to visit.





GREEN SPACE

The masterplan proposes to create a unified green space with enhanced plantings, new trees and a refurbished bandstand for events.

Design Aims:

The green space is vital to the whole atmosphere of the park. The lawns are to be reconditioned with a new greenspace wrapping around the re-conditioned bandstand. This will create areas for people to gather for future events.

Unsuitably planting is to be removed and new perennial beds established. These planting beds will bring seasonal colour, texture and variety back to the park. Species will be chosen for their heritage value as well as enhanced biodiversity and seasonal interest.

Fruit trees are to be reinstated in the open grassy areas. This will provide a historic link to the past and a protective element from the street. The design creates a modern interpretation of the orchard with a loose and informal tree planting structure as well as areas of naturalised meadows.

Robinia trees are to be replanted to plan for the legacy of this existing species which has a low life expectancy.

New seating will be established with a number of benches in and around the green for people to relax and enjoy the greenspace as well as public events.



RECREATION

The masterplan proposes to create an activity zone with formal recreation for all ages, thus grouping together these uses and creating space to help redefine other uses within the park.

Design Aims:

The existing upper bowls green is in good condition and will be retained and enhanced for the Bowls Club. The lower green, currently unused will be removed.

Four old tennis courts are to be removed and three hard courts are to be rebuilt in a more appropriate location adjacent to the retained bowls green to accommodate both public and private users.

An informal ball games informal and recreation area is to be built that allows all ages to engage and play group activities. This hard surface with a ball net will encourage flexible play and movement, built using the former tennis courts surfacing.

This activity space in a concentrated area will allow for people to gather and watch the games and sport, linking to the adjacent Pavilion.

Views and access will be opened up to these spaces to allow and improve the general setting of the park.

Benches are to be placed under the tree canopies for people to rest and enjoy the activities.

Lighting is key to provide use of the spaces for longer hours during the year.



PLAY

The masterplan seeks to enhance the existing playground by creating an inclusive natural play environment that inspires and stimulates safe, holistic, creative and imaginative play.

Design Aims:

Retain existing traditional equipment that is in good condition and install new equipment as well as natural elements. These would include tree trunks, boulders, interesting landforms, planting, discovery trails, slides, climbing frames etc.

Equipment will be selected to provide a wide range of activities and for all age groups and abilities: swinging, climbing, jumping, spinning, rocking, balancing, hanging, etc.

A central water/ play feature will be installed that reinterprets the historic wading pool. This will be a dished area with pulsating jets which can be used in different ways all year round.

The playground will provide interest through colour, textures, smell, and shapes in the form of play features and natural elements.

A clear open series of pathways and associated seating will allow for easy circulation and routes in and around the play.





PAVILION AND CAFE

The masterplan proposes to restore and extend the historic Pavilion. This extension will create a larger, more open and flexible space for a wider group of park users to use the space as well as provide a wider link to the park and its surroundings.

Design Aims:

A cafe and catering facility will be designed within into the space with a terrace that extends out into the park allowing people to sit and watch the various activities of the park including tennis, bowls, the play area and bandstand events.

The Bowls Club's needs will be retained and improved. The feasibility to incorporate other groups such as tennis within the building will be studied during Round 2

Public toilets are to be provided that will be open year round for all the users of the park.

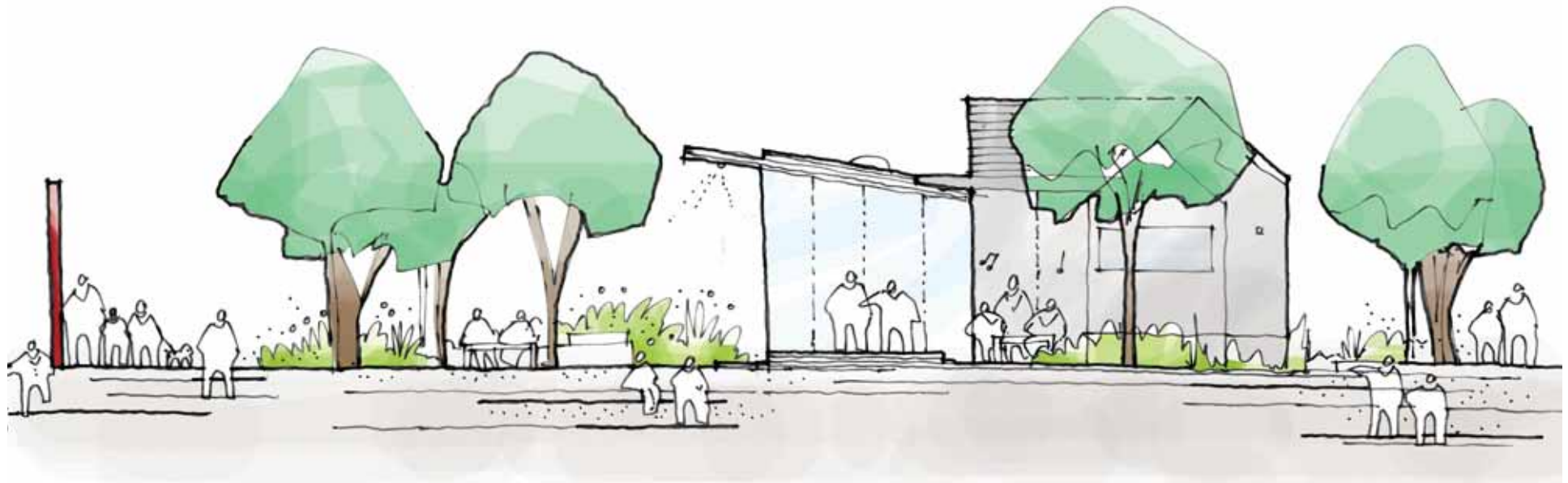
A pump room will house the facilities necessary for the water feature in the children's play area.

The restoration of the Pavilion will take into account all the historic architectural features, while a new contemporary, light and open space will be designed to complement the building.



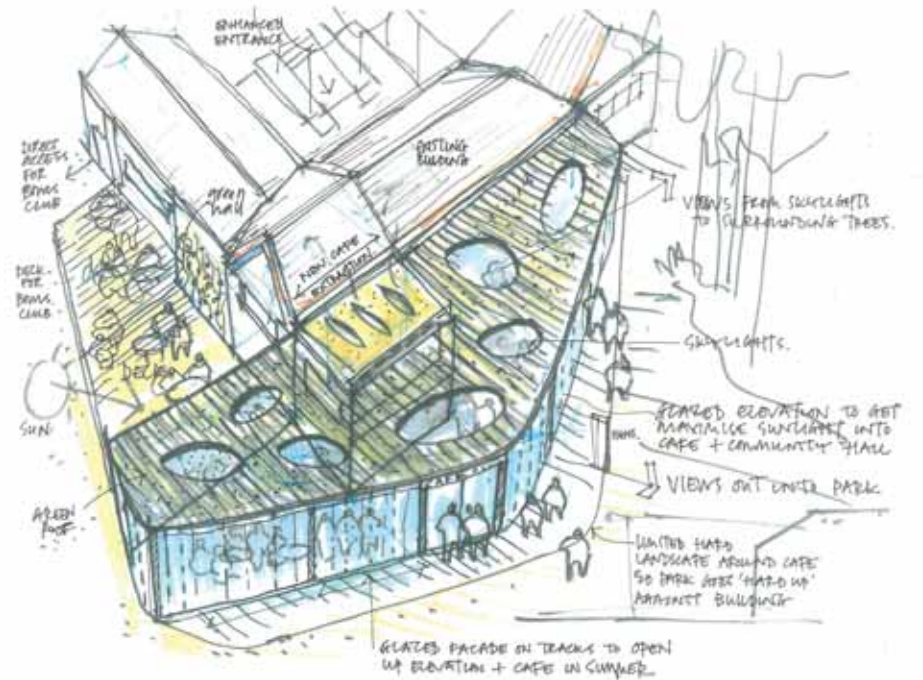
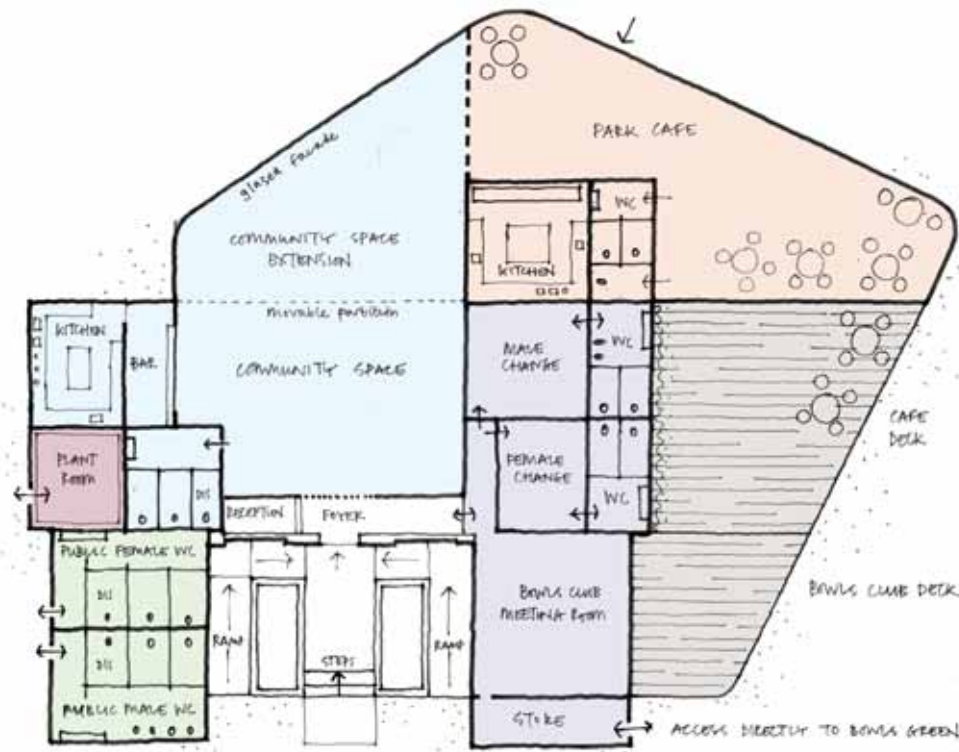
a pavillion for people using the park



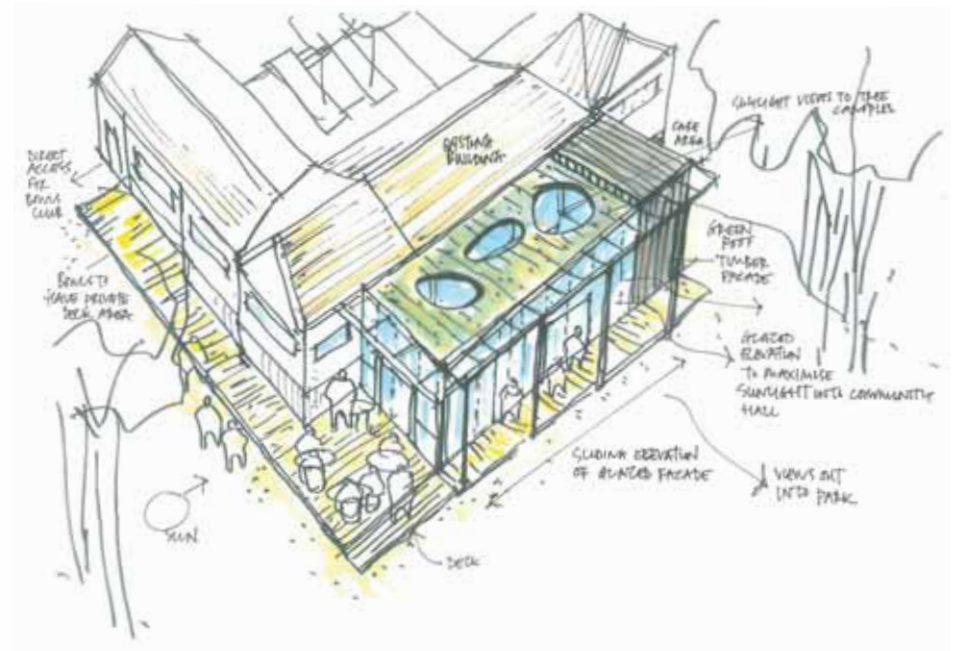
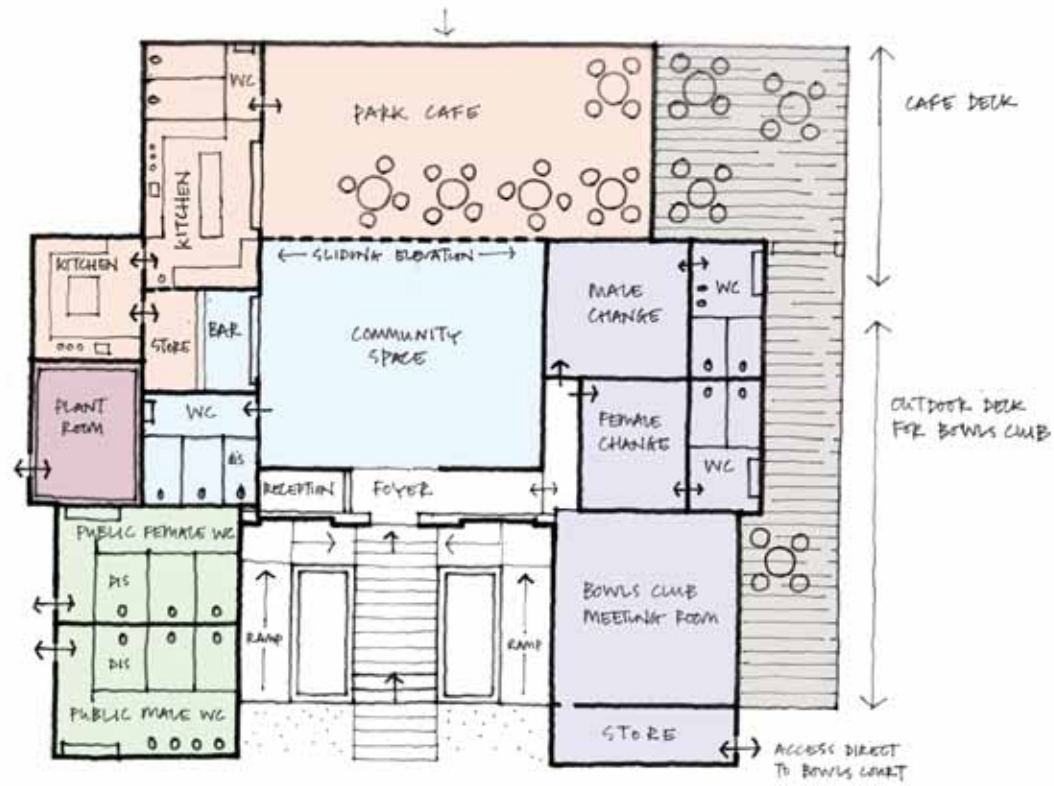


people travel through and use the park, then have a **Social hub** with **facilities** and a variety of **amenities** for all which attracts visitors all year round

OPTION 1



OPTION 2



THE RIVER HIZ

The River Hiz which lies to the north east of the site is not only a vital ecological corridor but also a prominent historic feature. The design opens up the river and brings it back into the park as a prominent feature.

Design Aims:

The adjustment of the location of the tennis courts allows better access to the park and the river. The removal of some vegetation will allow light to penetrate to the river and bring it back into the park.

The hard concrete edges will be removed and the banks will be opened up to provide gentle slopes which will reinstate and re naturalise the local biodiversity and ecology of the region. Native plants will be replanted including willow which is a key tree to the park's heritage.

The river will provide a holistic and natural place for children and the residents of Hitchin to play, explore and learn about their local environment and ecology. Rocks, logs and sand will all provide elements for people to engage with this natural environment.

Naturalising the historic river will help to reinstate the Hicca Way trail and re-establish this ancient foot path and trail.





DESIGN ELEMENTS

WILLOW STRUCTURES

There are lots of interesting ways that willow can be reintroduced into the park. Structures within the play area and next to the river can help reinterpret the heritage of the park



SEATING

Opportunities for seating can be found throughout the park - at entrances, within the green spaces, next to the sports, play and river environs. New seating will also be created with the Pavilion and Cafe building but inside and on the new terrace areas.



LIGHTING

From speaking with lots of users it seems evident that lighting will be a key improvement in encouraging more use of the park, changing the perception of safety and reducing anti-social behaviour.

Lighting standards will be used along the paths and there is an opportunity for feature lighting to the built components and the main focal areas.



SUMMARY OF DESIGN PROCESS

BDP were commissioned in November 2013 to prepare a series of surveys and design studies to formulate our round one HLF bid. These tasks included:

- Public Consultation
- Condition Survey
- Conservation Survey
- Arboriculture Survey
- Phase 1 Ecological Habitat Survey
- Site Appraisal and Analysis
- Initial Master Plan

The Council are therefore fully committed to this project and have invested significant funds to help secure the bid.

NEXT STEPS: ROUND 2

Following the successful award of funding for the development stage the following tasks in addition to those set out within our application form will be completed:

- Continue talks with Hitchin Tennis Club to find an amicable solution that provides public access
- Further studies to identify the full potential of the Pavilion
- Continue talks with the Bowls Club regards alternative parking and their use of the Pavilion.
- Carry out more user surveys in the summer
- Continue to gather historic records of the park
- Develop a balanced Friends Group for the park
- Develop the design towards a round 2 HLF submission