Heritage Statement for Step-Free Access Works at the Highgate High Street Entrance to Waterlow Park

# Introduction

This heritage statement is submitted to support the planning application and listed building consent for step-free access improvements at the Highgate High Street entrance to Waterlow Park, a Grade II\* Registered Park and Garden in the London Borough of Camden (list entry number **1000849**). The proposed works aim to enhance accessibility while respecting and preserving the site’s historic significance.

The Highgate High Street entrance features Grade II listed gate piers, gates, and boundary walls, situated within a highly sensitive heritage context. The park encompasses the Grade I listed Lauderdale House, and lies within the Highgate Conservation Area.

# Heritage Significance

Waterlow Park
Waterlow Park has been a public park since 1889, gifted by Sir Sydney Waterlow, a former Lord Mayor of London. A Grade II-listed stone sculpture of Waterlow commemorates him. The park can be accessed from Highgate Hill, Dartmouth Park Hill, and Swain’s Lane. Its boundaries are defined by Bisham Gardens to the north, Highgate High Street and Dartmouth Park Road to the east, Highgate East Cemetery to the south, and a timber fence to the west.

Set on a steep hillside, the park features three ponds, terraces, tennis courts, and mature trees. Its landscaped design contrasts with the more naturalistic character of nearby cemeteries.

Historic features from Lauderdale House's former gardens, such as the parterre wall and upper terrace (Grade II-listed), remain. Recent landscaping around the house has been sensitively restored. Lauderdale House (Grade I), built in 1582, is located on the park's east side. It now serves as a café, gallery, concert venue, and educational space.

Other park buildings include The Lodge (Grade II), a mid-19th-century Gothic building near Swain's Lane, and a second, more restrained Lodge near Dartmouth Park Hill. Former 19th-century park-keeper outbuildings in the southern park area have been converted into an arts centre, retaining an aviary as part of the development

Highgate High Street Entrance
The entrance from Highgate High Street, located at the park's northeastern boundary, features wrought-iron gates, and low boundary walls that support railings. These features frame a key access point to the park and contribute to its historic character and legibility. Downhill from this entrance is the Lauderdale House entrance, with 18th Century gate piers with entrance gates (together with walls listed Grade II).

The entrance is paved with Yorkstone. This access point, while historic, currently poses accessibility challenges due to the presence of a step that disrupts access for those with visual impairments, mobility issues, or parents with prams or buggies. Camden is committed to reducing inequitable access to parks and green spaces and has conducted an accessibility audit which highlighted this site.

Surrounding Heritage Context
The park forms part of a broader heritage setting, including the Grade I listed Lauderdale House, which stands on a 17th-century terrace overlooking the park. The Highgate Conservation Area is characterized by its historic village feel, elevated position, and green surroundings. Highgate, a popular settlement since the 14th century, retains its central high street featuring small-scale houses, shops, and a historic square. Surrounding the village core are grand historic houses from the 17th to 20th centuries, often set in landscaped gardens and offering wide-reaching views of London. The area includes significant open spaces such as Hampstead Heath, Highgate Cemetery, Waterlow Park, and Fitzroy Park allotments, which contribute to its informal, rural atmosphere. Highgate Cemetery, a major feature, dates to 1839 and is recognized for its listed monuments and inclusion in the Register of Historic Parks and Gardens.

The Conservation Area blends varied architectural styles, topography, and open spaces, creating a unique character. It was designated in 1968, with extensions in 1978 and 1992, and includes archaeological priority areas and strategic view

# Proposed Works

The specification submitted in support of this application provided detail on the proposed work. To summarise, the proposed changes are:

* Removing the existing step at the Highgate High Street entrance to provide step-free access.
* Lifting, carefully re-grading, and re-laying the existing Yorkstone pavers to create a shallow, compliant slope.
* Fabricating gate extensions to reduce the gap underneath the gates when closed.
* Cleaning, sanding and repainting of perimeter railings.
* Retaining and re-using all existing boundary materials to preserve the entrance’s historic character and fabric.

The works aim to achieve a balance between modern accessibility requirements and the conservation of the site’s heritage significance.

# Assessment of Impact on Designated Heritage Assets

Grade II\* Listed Gates and Boundary Walls:
The proposed works are designed to retain the current gates and boundary walls in situ, ensuring the preservation of their architectural and historical integrity. The gates will have to be removed in order to be cleaned and to have the extensions added to the base, however they will then be reinstated where they were originally. The only materials being removed/demolished are the concrete footings of the gate piers, that are currently encasing historic ironwork spirals that form the base of the piers. These are exposed at other entrances to the park, so this work will have a positive impact on the heritage assets. The re-laying of Yorkstone paving will maintain the visual and material continuity of the entrance, while the removal of the step will improve functionality without compromising the significance of the listed features. The extant flagstones will be retained and re-laid once groundworks have been completed. More York flagstones will be added, and these will be reclaimed, ensuring that they maintain the existing historic character.

Grade II\* Registered Park and Garden:
The step-free access improvements will have a negligible physical impact on the park's overall layout and historic character. The re-use of Yorkstone paving and the sensitive integration of the new slope will ensure that the visual unity and historic setting of the park are preserved. The enhancements align with the park’s historic purpose as a welcoming public space for all.

Grade I Listed Lauderdale House:
The visual and functional relationship between the entrance and Lauderdale House will remain unchanged. The proposed improvements do not introduce any visual intrusions or alterations to the setting of this heritage asset. The only impact may be increased footfall through the Lauderdale House entrances to the park while the upper entrance is closed for the works.

Highgate Conservation Area:
The sensitive design and minimal interventions proposed ensure that the works will respect the character and appearance of the Highgate Conservation Area. By improving accessibility while retaining the site’s historic features, the proposal contributes positively to the conservation area’s communal and aesthetic value.

# Conclusion

The proposed works to introduce step-free access at the Highgate High Street entrance to Waterlow Park have been carefully designed to preserve and enhance the significance of the Grade II listed gates, piers, and boundary walls, as well as the wider heritage context of the Grade II\* Registered Park and Garden, Grade I listed Lauderdale House, and the Highgate Conservation Area.

The proposals ensure that the park’s historic fabric and character are protected, while meeting contemporary standards for accessibility. By retaining and re-using traditional materials, the works maintain the historic authenticity of the site, ensuring that the entrance remains an integral part of Waterlow Park’s historic landscape.

It is respectfully submitted that the application meets the requirements of local and national heritage policy and supports the continued use and enjoyment of this exceptional historic environment.