

Parliament Hill Fields Lido

Heritage Statement



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July 2020

1 Purpose and approach

This Statement has been commissioned by the City of London Corporation and is submitted in support of a planning application for a temporary security fence to the rear of Parliament Hill Fields Lido.

Parliament Hill Fields Lido is a grade II listed building. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2019 sets out the requirements for proposals affecting heritage assets:

In determining applications, local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting. The level of detail should be proportionate to the assets' importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on their significance. As a minimum the relevant historic environment record should have been consulted and the heritage assets assessed using appropriate expertise where necessary.¹

In line with advice from Historic England, this Statement analyses the significance of the designated heritage asset, considers the impact of the proposals on that significance, and weighs it against adopted and emerging planning policy.

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The site was visited in June 2020 and observations about the building's appearance and setting have been underpinned by historical research. This has been informed by the author's studies of other lidos, in particular Brockwell Park, Herne Hill and Broomhill Pool, Ipswich.

Because of COVID-19 restrictions, the main libraries and archives are closed to visitors, including London Metropolitan Archives, the National Archives, British Library and Camden Local Studies and Archives. New documentary research has thus been restricted.

¹ NPPF 2019 para 189

2 History

Parliament Hill is an area of open parkland south of Hampstead Heath. For centuries this was mainly common land, but in 1875 the Hill and the wider Heath were protected from encroaching development when the land was purchased by the Metropolitan Board of Works. Since 1989 the Heath and Parliament Hill have been managed by the City of London Corporation.

The Parliament Hill Fields Lido was one of thirteen open-air pools built by the London County Council between the wars on parkland sites. Designed by the LCC Parks Department architects Harry Rowbotham and T.L. Smithson, it was the most expensive of the Council's lidos. By 1930 and 1939 at least 180 open air pools and lidos were built in Britain, mostly by local authorities. They followed an interest in competitive sports and athletics, combined with a belief in the health-giving properties of sunbathing.



Swimming training in 1961 (Parliament Hill Lido Users' Group)

The Lido opened 20 August 1938 around a very large pool of approximately 60m x 27m, with changing facilities either side of a main entrance to the south, plantroom to the east, and staff facilities to the west. The café on the north side was originally only accessed from the poolside and thus not in use to Park users, or out of season. Unlike other lidos of the period such as Hampton Pool, Parliament Hill Fields Lido has never been heated.

The low rise buildings were designed (to reduce shade and trap the heat. Terraces were provided, mainly for sunbathing but also for spectators for diving events and galas. There was a 5m diving board and 3m and 1m fixed and spring boards, plus chutes for adults and children. The pool, 200ft x 90 ft (61m x 27m), held 650,000 gallons of water and was designed to handle over 2000 bathers. A modern filtration system cleaned the entire pool in

*five hours; the ornamental 'wedding cake' cascade at the west end aerated the water. The symmetrical design ensured equality of changing room provision between the sexes.*²

At its post-war peak the Lido attracted over 100,000 visitors a year, but attendance fell steeply after the 1960s, following the Wolfenden Report on Sport and the Community and the growth of all-purpose sports and leisure centres. By 1986 visitor numbers at Parliament Hill Fields had dropped to below 13,000. The Greater London Council (owners of the Lido since 1965) considered a roof cover and a wave machine, but also contemplated closure. After the abolition of the GLC in 1986 the City Corporation of London took on the responsibility for Hampstead Heath and the Lido.

In 1999 the Lido was listed grade II, in recognition of its special architectural and historic interest.

In 2004-5 the City Corporation undertook a £2.8m. refurbishment programme that included a new filtration system, a stainless steel lining for the pool and improved disabled access. The last of the diving boards was removed in 2003.

In 2014-5 the café was renovated and opened onto the Heath, entailing changes to the north elevation to create new doors. Following storm damage to the perimeter security fence, the steel palisades were replaced with a system of stainless steel fins.

3 Significance

Historic England has published its criteria for listing leisure and sports buildings, which includes a reference to open air pools:

A handful of open-air lidos date from the late nineteenth century, but most have been altered and extended so many times that they have lost their special interest. Degree of survival, and the quality of the later buildings, are key considerations. For early- to mid-twentieth century examples, it is the ancillary buildings that normally give a lido its special quality: changing rooms, perhaps a grandstand and a café, diving boards and Art Deco aerators rather than the pool itself. (Historic England Selection Guide p.21)

The list entry (January 1999) is as follows:

TQ2885NW GORDON HOUSE ROAD 798-1/30/1866 (North West side)
Parliament Hill Fields Lido

Grade II

Open air swimming baths. 1937-8. By Harry Arnold Rowbotham. For the London County Council Parks Department. Patterned stock brick, flat roofs concealed behind parapets. Rectangular plan, with entrance to south flanked by changing rooms, filtration plant to east and offices to west, all in a single-storey U-shaped building. This form continued as walls

² <http://parliamenthilllido.org/the-construction-of-the-lido>

shielding sun-bathing terraces to north, set either side of single-storey cafe with curved moderne-style front. In the centre is the pool, 60m by 27m, with fountains or aerators to either side. All buildings with small metal windows, except for the cafe which has large glazed panels with horizontal metal glazing bars continued across double doors at centre. HISTORICAL NOTE: included as the most sophisticated of the thirteen lidos constructed by the LCC between 1909 and 1939. No other British city attempted so comprehensive a programme, and Parliament Hill Fields is considered the best representative example of the rectangular pools enclosed by high walls found in urban locations. (The Twentieth Century Society: Farewell My Lido: London: -1990).



The symmetrical façade and restrained modernity is characteristic of the best LCC work of the period



The rear elevation is plain and functional. It has recently been altered to allow the café to open onto the park.



English Bond brickwork and fine tile creasing are a subtle adaptation to vernacular traditions.



The green backdrop is an important part of the Lido's ambience. The walltop fins are barely noticed

Heritage values

Artistic – The simple proportions, restrained modern movement detailing, quality of the lettering (restored by the City Corporation) all contribute to the visual appeal of the Lido. The dimensions of the buildings in relation to sun terrace and the pool are well considered. Symmetry, coherence and the sense of enclosure are the main qualities from within, whilst enjoying views of the crowns of the trees in the park. The architectural qualities are concentrated on the main entrance and the pool-facing frontages, where the simple, streamlined profiles and warm brickwork (in English bond) have their maximum effect.

The Lido has **historical significance** as one of the few open-air swimming baths built by the LCC still in use and is remarkably intact, with only modest alterations. The original ‘wedding cake’ aerating fountain is preserved, albeit enclosed for safety reasons.

The rear external wall of the pool has been somewhat altered with the introduction of new openings, but this elevation makes relatively little contribution to the architectural or historic appreciation of the building.

The Lido is of **community significance** as a longstanding popular amenity from before the Second World War. Its continuity of use in its original purpose is of note. The Lido also has some communal association with the nearby Parliament Hill Fields athletic pavilion and café, also probably by LCC architects Rowbotham and Smithson.³

4 The proposed works

The current walltop fins installed in 2016 are 750mm high and mounted on north wall. They replace a set of pointed galvanised steel fencing panels, and which had previously contributed to the collapse of part of the wall during a storm.



The pre-2016 fence prior to collapse



The green backdrop is an important part of the Lido's character



The fins are elegant but have proved easy to climb over



The border of shrubs has been an insufficient deterrent

³ Played in London” A Directory of Sporting Assets in London , English Heritage 2014 p.21

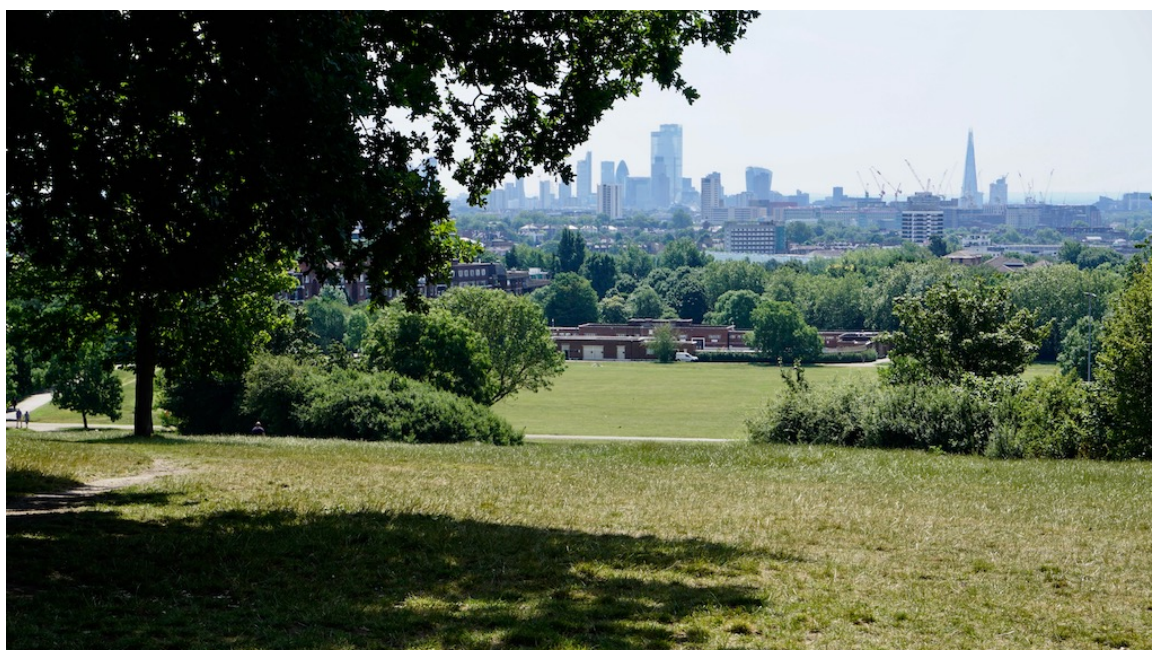
The stainless steel fins are visually elegant, but have proved wholly inadequate in deterring intruders. The use of anti-climb paint on the fins has also proved ineffective.

The proposed temporary fence has been chosen as the simplest, least obtrusive expedient for ensuring that visitors and Lido staff can be kept safe, especially at a time when visitor numbers have to be strictly controlled. The fence is 2.4 m high, 0.5 m deep at its maximum, and dark green in colour. Its perforate form means that it will be barely visible from any distance in the park and from within the pool (if it is glimpsed at all) it will be camouflaged by the verdant backdrop.

The Mosquito alarm system and security lighting will be discreetly positioned on the rear wall.

Effect on significance

The Lido is not in a conservation area, but it is midway between the Dartmouth Park and Mansfield Road conservation areas. The settings of the two conservation areas are unaffected by the proposals and there is no impact on their significance.



One of the panoramas across central London from near the summit of Parliament Hill. The Lido is in the middle distance

Parliament Hill Fields is not a Registered Historic Park or Garden but as Metropolitan Open Land there is a strong planning presumption on maintaining its openness and character. The current proposal will have no effect on the appearance or enjoyment of the park.

The works will be temporary in duration, will have no impact on the fabric of the listed building and will have only a negligible visual effect. The ability to appreciate the heritage significance of the Lido, whether from within it or outside, will be unchanged.

The London Views Management Framework, part of the London Plan, was adopted in 2012. View 2b (Panorama from Parliament Hill to Central London, east of the summit) provides one of the few

publicly available views of the principal towers of the Palace of Westminster. The panorama is unaffected by the proposed development.

5 Consideration against planning policy

Legislation

Section 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires the local planning authority to have special regard to the desirability of preserving listed buildings or their setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which they possess.

National planning policy

The NPPF sets out the basis on which applications affecting heritage assets should be handled.

In determining applications, local planning authorities should take account of:

- a) the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation;
- b) the positive contribution that conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities including their economic vitality; and
- c) the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness.⁴

When considering potential impacts, any harm to, or loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset (from its alteration or destruction, or from development within its setting), should require clear and convincing justification.⁵

Camden Plan

The Camden Local Plan was adopted in 2017.

Policy D2 Heritage

The Council will preserve and, where appropriate, enhance Camden's rich and diverse heritage assets and their settings, including conservation areas, listed buildings, archaeological remains, scheduled ancient monuments and historic parks and gardens and locally listed heritage assets.

Designated heritage assets

Designated heritage assets include conservation areas and listed buildings.

The Council will not permit the loss of or substantial harm to a designated heritage asset, including conservation areas and Listed Buildings, unless it can be demonstrated that the substantial harm or

⁴ NPPF para 192

⁵ NPPF para 194.

loss is necessary to achieve substantial public benefits that outweigh that harm or loss, or all of the following apply:

- a) the nature of the heritage asset prevents all reasonable uses of the site;
- b) no viable use of the heritage asset itself can be found in the medium term through appropriate marketing that will enable its conservation;
- c) conservation by grant-funding or some form of charitable or public ownership is demonstrably not possible; and
- d) the harm or loss is outweighed by the benefit of bringing the site back into use.

The Council will not permit development that results in harm that is less than substantial to the significance of a designated heritage asset unless the public benefits of the proposal convincingly outweigh that harm.

Camden's Plan is supported by Planning Guidance on design (2019) It quotes Historic England's definition of harm

*Change for the worse, here primarily referring to the effect of inappropriate interventions on the heritage value of a place.*⁶

The Guidance also includes (at Section 7) relevant policies on designing safer environments, linked to Local Plan Policy C5 Safety and Security.

London Plan 2016

The current London Plan (Further Alterations) was adopted in 2016 and contains policies for safeguarding London's heritage (Policy 7.8). Its successor Plan (Intend to Publish Version 2019) is at an advanced stage and contains equivalent policies for safeguarding the historic environment.

The assessment of this Statement appropriately identifies the heritage assets that will be affected by the proposals, and describes how they will be valued, conserved, re-used and or incorporated where appropriate. This is in accordance with Policy 7.8 of the current plan (heritage assets and their settings) and with the equivalent policies of the draft plan.

The proposed development complies with the policies of the NPPF, the London Plan and the Camden Local Plan.

⁶ Conservation Principles English Heritage (Historic England) 2008

6 Conclusion

There is no intention, or need, for the fence to become a permanent feature and it will be limited to the summer months (May to September) when the pool is in operation and when the surrounding trees are in leaf. The work is unobtrusive, and its visual impact has been minimised by its perforate form and green colour. The fence will be hard to perceive from any distance, including from the poolside of the Lido.

The temporary fence will have negligible effect on setting of the and no bearing on ability to appreciate significance of the listed building. In the opinion of this assessment, no harm will be caused; but even if this was considered to be the case, any such harm would be so minor that it would be comprehensively outweighed by the benefits of keeping the Lido in its original use and of maintaining public safety. Furthermore, any such harm caused by the presence of a seasonal security fence would have been mitigated by minimum by transparency and dark green colour.

By their nature, the works are temporary and wholly reversible. No loss of fabric, no effect on the experience of using the Lido. The shrubs that currently screen the back wall will be unaffected. No other designated heritage assets are affected by the proposal.

In the opinion of this assessor, the work will cause no harm to the setting of the Lido and will have no effect on the enjoyment of its users, or those of Parliament Hill Fields. The proposed works are the minimum necessary to allow the facility to function properly in the use for which it is intended, namely a public swimming pool.

Even if a contrary opinion was reached, any harm would be minimal and temporary, being confined to minor visual distraction when the back of the Lido is viewed from close-up. This negligible harm – in NPPF terms, very much “less than substantial” - would be amply outweighed by the public benefits of ensuring the safety of the Lido’s users, and those of its staff.

The proposal thus conforms with national and local heritage policies and can be fully supported.

Sources

Smith, Janet *Liquid Assets: The Lidos and Open-Air Swimming Pools of Britain* (2005)

The Thirties Society, *Farewell My Lido* (1991)

Reviving Lidos – Conference Proceedings March 2006

Historic England *Listing Selection Guide – Sports and Recreation Buildings* (2017)

Parliament Hill Lido Users’ Group <http://parliamenthilllido.org/>