



# GWR Park

## Conservation Management Plan

Final Report October 2021



COOKSON & TICKNER  
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE

# Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the steering group for sharing their knowledge, time and enthusiasm throughout the production of this Plan, including: Karen Phimister (HAZ project officer); Cllr Janine Howarth; Cllr John Firmin; Cllr Abdul Hamid; Cllr Neil Hopkins; Cllr Jamal Miah; Rob Core (PC chief executive officer) and Jo McAllister, Historic England Landscape Architect SW.

We are also grateful to the following individuals who kindly spent time sharing their knowledge, insight and images for this plan: Helen George; Kevin Leaky; Martha Parry; Angela Atkinson; Martin Hambidge; Andy Binks; Darryl Moody (Swindon local Studies) and Ian Surtees (STEAM).

We would also like to thank the residents of Swindon for their enthusiasm and active participation in this project.

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# Executive Summary

Great Western Railway (GWR) Park forms part of Swindon's Railway Conservation Area which includes the former GWR works, Swindon Railway Station and the Railway Village.

The site of GWR Park was purchased in 1844 for use as a cricket pitch and is an exceptionally early example of a public park with an emphasis on 'active' recreation. Its location in one of the first ever industrial model villages, built for railway workers, underlines its unique status within both the Public Parks Movement and the history of planned settlements in Britain. The park was developed in the 1870s when formal gardens, a lodge, glasshouse and other features were added. Today the 3.95 hectare park is a well used public open space that continues to serve the local community.

In 2019, Swindon's Railway Conservation Area was included in a Heritage Action Zone (HAZ). Heritage Action Zones are an initiative by Historic England designed to revitalise under-used historic areas in order to bring about wider economic and social growth. This Conservation Management Plan (CMP) has been funded by Historic England as part of the HAZ initiative.

A GWR Park Steering Group was set up to oversee the production of the Plan to ensure that the policies and actions meets its, and the community's, needs. The group comprises South Swindon Parish Council (SSPC), the GWR Working Party, Historic England and Swindon Borough Council (SBC).

Two phases of consultation and engagement were undertaken to involve the community in the CMP process. The first took place in May 2021 to inform the draft Plan and involved an online questionnaire

completed by 403 people. The second was completed in July 2021 to invite feedback on the draft Plan and involved a mix of an online questionnaire and a number of face-to-face interviews with the total number of respondents amounting to 134 people. The sizable number of responses and levels of engagement reflects the high degree of importance that the local community places on GWR Park as an open space which performs multiple functions, and as a space that has the potential to further improve quality of life for residents and visitors.

The Plan describes the historic development of the park; it provides information on the current management context and describes how it is currently maintained; it goes on to explain why the park is important and to whom, before setting out a vision and series of management actions for the park.

The overall vision is to conserve, enhance and restore the most important aspects of GWR Park's historic and contemporary significance.

The park will be managed to reflect its importance as an exceptionally early example of a public park, set within 'an almost complete planned railway settlement of the 1840s and early 1850s, unrivalled in its state of preservation by Crewe, Wolverton and Derby, England's other surviving railway company settlements.'<sup>1</sup>

The eastern side of the park will be transformed to reflect its historic importance and character and the park will be an inclusive space that serves the local community with rejuvenated facilities and a programme of engaging events and activities.

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<sup>1</sup> John Cattell & Keith Falconer, *Swindon: the Legacy of a Railway Town* (Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England, 1995) as quoted in Purcell (2020) *Swindon's Railway Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan*





# 1. Introduction

- 1.2 Great Western Railway (GWR) Park forms part of Swindon's Railway Conservation Area which includes the former GWR works, Swindon Railway Station and the Railway Village.
- 1.3 The site of GWR Park was purchased in 1844 for use as a cricket pitch and is an exceptionally early example of a public park with an emphasis on 'active' recreation. Its location in one of the first ever industrial model villages, built for railway workers, underlines its unique status within both the Public Parks Movement and the history of planned settlements in Britain. The park was developed in the 1870s when formal gardens, a lodge, glasshouse and other features were added.
- 1.4 Today the 3.95 hectare park is a well used public open space that continues to serve the local community.

## Background to the Conservation Management Plan

- 1.5 In 2019, Swindon's Railway Conservation Area was included in a Heritage Action Zone (HAZ). Heritage Action Zones are an initiative by Historic England designed to revitalise under-used historic areas in order to bring about wider economic and social growth. This Conservation Management Plan (CMP) has been funded by Historic England as part of the HAZ initiative.
- 1.6 A GWR Park Steering Group was set up to oversee the production of this Conservation Management Plan to ensure that the policies and actions meets its, and the community's, needs. The group comprises South Swindon Parish Council (SSPC),

the GWR Working Party, Historic England and Swindon Borough Council (SBC).

- 1.7 The CMP was prepared by the following team:
  - Cookson & Tickner Ltd Landscape Architecture – lead consultants
  - Kim Auston – historic landscape consultant
  - Tree Maintenance Ltd – arboricultural consultants
  - Geckoella Ltd – ecologists
  - Brunel Surveys Ltd – topographical surveyors
  - Map It Out Ltd - GIS and online survey design and hosting

## Purpose of the Conservation Management Plan

- 1.8 The purpose of the Plan is to:
  - inform the day-to-day conservation and management of the park;
  - establish a set of proposals for its conservation and possible restoration;
  - highlight the rich heritage of the site and communicate this history to the community;
  - ensure the park receives due consideration in any development plans and policies for the immediate area that may affect its setting and context;
  - the CMP also aims to support the overarching aims of the HAZ, for example, to contribute to improving the health and wellbeing of residents in the HAZ area;
  - to build capacity within the community to take an active role in the future management of heritage assets; and
  - support future grant applications and funding bids as appropriate.



## Structure of the CMP

- 1.9 The CMP is divided into a series of chapters that present an understanding of the park and its significance, followed by an analysis of the main issues facing the various features of significance, before outlining how the park should be managed in the future.

**Chapter 2 The GWR Park Story:** describes the historic development of the park.

**Chapter 3 GWR Park today:** provides information on the current management context and describes how the park is maintained.

**Chapter 4 Character and condition of the park:** provides an analysis of the park and an assessment of its condition.

**Chapter 5 Significance of GWR Park:** explains why the park is important and to whom.

**Chapter 6 Managing GWR Park in the future:** outlines a management vision for the park and identifies a series of management actions to conserve, restore and enhance the park.



## 2. The G.W.R Park Story

2.1 This chapter explores:

- The broad historic context for the main phases of the development of GWR Park;
- The development of the design, sports and other interest of the park (referencing the loss and arrival of specific features);
- The role of GWR Park in the social history of Swindon;
- Changing land use and management through time; and
- Recent history, including lease by South Swindon Parish Council and designation as a HAZ.

### *Key sources*

- 2.2 As far as is known, there has been no previous attempt to develop a conservation management plan for GWR Park.
- 2.3 The park has enjoyed the attention of local historians and local interest groups<sup>2</sup>, but it is thought that this is the first time that its history, condition and a vision for the park have been brought together in one place.
- 2.4 Where possible, the original source material has been reviewed. Documents in the collection at the Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre, Swindon Library, Steam (the Museum of the Great Western Railway), Swindon Museum and Art Gallery, the records of the Mechanics' Institute and the Historic England Archive have all been examined, together with papers held by Swindon

<sup>2</sup> A number of local historians and organisations have also generously shared their time and knowledge to inform this account (see acknowledgements).

Borough Council and South Swindon Parish (Central Swindon South Parish).

- 2.5 A number of published works have been reviewed, including A History of the Great Western Railway by Colin Maggs, 2009, the Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan (CAAMP) for Swindon's Railway Conservation Area by Purcell, 2020 and a dissertation by Brownlee, Mike (2010) The railway works at Swindon and Stratford in the 19th century...Masters thesis, Institute of Historical Research.

### Phase One: Before the park

- 2.6 In 1773 Andrews and Dury's map of the county of Wiltshire was



Figure 2.1: Andrew's and Dury's map of Wiltshire, 1773. The approximate site of GWR Park is circled

published (Figure 2.1). At this time, the site that was later to become the Railway Village and GWR Park was unaffected by development and occupied what must have been farmland, north-east of Westcott farm.

- 2.7 The Ordnance Survey 'Old Series' of 1828 continues to show the site of the park as undeveloped, agricultural land (Figure 2.2). However, the town of Swindon had grown, stimulated in part by the construction of the Wiltshire & Berkshire Canal and 'Swindon Wharf', which had opened in 1810.



Figure 2.2: Ordnance Survey, 1828. The approximate site of the future park is circled.

## Phase Two: The creation of the Railway Village and the park

- 2.8 In 1841 the Directors of the Great Western Railway agreed to build a factory at Swindon, not just to maintain trains but to bring their manufacture in-house (previously trains had been purchased from independent manufacturers). Swindon was selected for several reasons, one of them being its more or less equidistant location between the two main termini at Paddington and Bristol<sup>3</sup>. Swindon was also chosen because of its favourable topography as it is near the point on the GWR line from London to Bristol where the gradient of the line changes from the relatively flat London side to steeper ground towards Bristol. It had been anticipated that there would be a need for trains to change locomotives at this point to one more powerful to deal with the increased gradient and therefore Swindon was also a suitable location to make repairs to waiting locomotives.
- 2.9 The tithe map for the parish of Swindon was produced in 1841 (Figure 2.3). This is the first map identified to record the site of the future park in any detail.
- 2.10 Although the line of the Great Western Railway is already in place, the land either side - soon to be occupied by the GWR works, the Railway Village and the park - was still agricultural. The fields were managed as pasture and were known as Rodbourne Lane Ground (68) and Part of Great Ground (67).

<sup>3</sup> Maggs, 2009







Figure 2.3: Tithe map, 1841, GWR Park is now located on fields 68 & 67

- 2.11 In January 1843 the new railway works opened for regular operation<sup>4</sup>, with over 400 men being employed initially<sup>5</sup>.
- 2.12 At the same time, because insufficient accommodation was available in the existing small settlement of Swindon, some 300 cottages, the 'Railway Village', were built south of the line to a design probably by Sir Matthew Digby Wyatt. Each cottage had a small garden in the front and a yard at the back with a privy and wash house.
- 2.13 Communal facilities were not part of the initial phase of building. It was a bequest of £500 in the will of a GWR director, G. H. Gibbs, who died in 1842, which greatly helped towards the building of a school and a church in the Railway Village. The

<sup>4</sup> Maggs, 2009

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

balance had to be raised by public subscription. The church, by Sir George Gilbert Scott, cost £6000<sup>6</sup> and was consecrated in 1845. <sup>7</sup>



Figure 2.4: This idealised view of St Mark's Church, the 'parsonage' and National School is believed to date from 1844. A caption in a version of this image in the collection of the RIBA, describes the complex as 'now erecting'. In this view, the cricket field would have been behind the church, completing the sense of a rural idyll.

- 2.14 On the 8th June 1844, 18 months after the works had opened, the Great Western Railway purchased just over seven acres of land from a Colonel Villet for the sum of £1,487-15s -0d<sup>8</sup>. These can be identified as parcels 67 and 68 on the tithe map (1841), above.
- 2.15 It is understood that the primary intention behind the purchase of the land was to provide the workers with a cricket field and,

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

<sup>7</sup> [https://www.swindon.gov.uk/downloads/file/6322/history\\_of\\_faringdon\\_road\\_park](https://www.swindon.gov.uk/downloads/file/6322/history_of_faringdon_road_park).

<sup>8</sup> Swindon Advertiser and North Wilts Chronicle, 16th June, 1877



appropriately enough, the park was known as the 'cricket field' in the first few decades of its existence.

- 2.16 These parcels, although owned by the Villets were, in 1841, tenanted by a William Reynolds and managed as pasture. When the tithe map is overlaid onto a modern map, as illustrated in Figure 2.3, it is worth noting that the cricket field does not occupy the full extent of these parcels. Nearly half of parcel 68 is occupied by St Mark's Church and the adjacent vicarage, while part of its eastern side was shaved off for the Railway Village (the west ends of Bristol, Bathampton, Exeter and Taunton streets). Similarly, a portion of parcel 67 to the south was also given over to development.
- 2.17 It is usually said that the Great Western Railway purchased the land for the express purpose of creating a park. The fact that roads and residential development occupy some of the historic land parcels suggests otherwise.
- 2.18 In 1845 the GWR opened a school, adjacent to the church. Fees were between two and four pence a week for the children of railway employees. Others had to pay a shilling. In 1881 the school was handed over to the local authority school board<sup>9</sup>.
- 2.19 By around 1847 the workforce in the railway works had grown to more than 1,800. As there were only about 300 cottages in the Railway Village, tenants were encouraged to take in lodgers. Even so, many workers had to find accommodation elsewhere. Overcrowding in the Railway Village became a serious issue and in 1851, for example, there were 20 people living in one two-bedroom cottage in Reading Street. Effluent from the

<sup>9</sup> Maggs, 2009

overcrowded village ran in drainage pipes in the back allies to the lowest point, 'where a cess pit existed near the present public conveniences at the corner of the park'<sup>10</sup>.

- 2.20 A somewhat sanitised view of the Great Western Works, the Railway Village, St Mark's Church and a corner of the cricket field/park was painted by Edward Snell in 1846 (see below). The vegetation, both in the park and the village, is rendered with an eye to the future. A photograph of c.1860 (see Figure 2.7) reveals that the planting was, in fact, much more immature than Snell has depicted it.

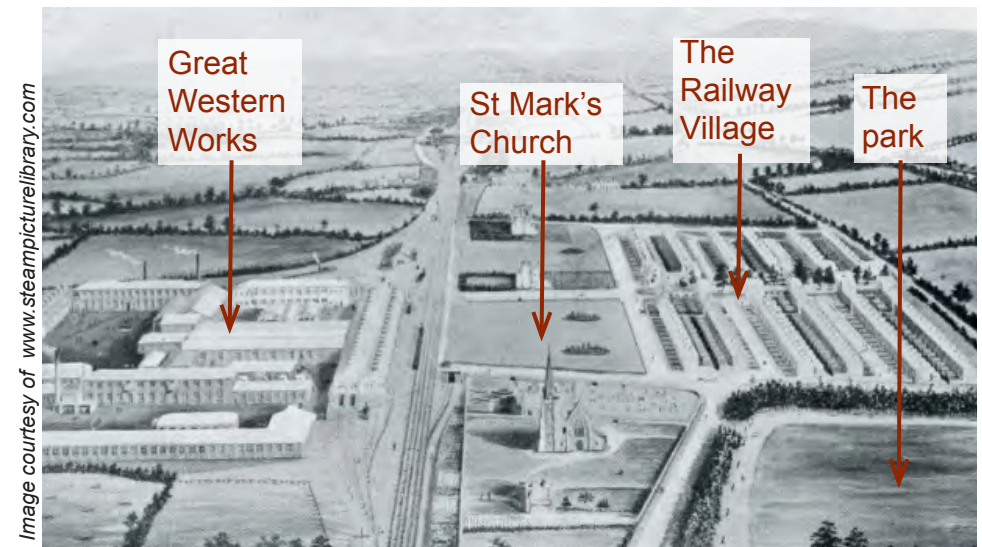


Figure 2.5: A view of the Great Western Works, the Railway Village, St Mark's Church and a corner of the cricket field (bottom right). Edward Snell, 1846.

- 2.21 Plans by Frederick Hawksworth show the Great Western Railway works in 1846 (Figure 2.6). Hawksworth drew up a series of plans to show the growth of the works until 1910. Hawksworth was the

<sup>10</sup> Cockbill, 1997



chief mechanical engineer for the Great Western Railway from 1941-49, so the plans are retrospective. The 1846 plan replicates the layout recorded by Edward Snell but also shows the cricket field virtually in its entirety. Clearly, at this time, it was a very simple space, devoid of ornament or buildings. Surprisingly, given its primary function, no cricket pavilion is shown.

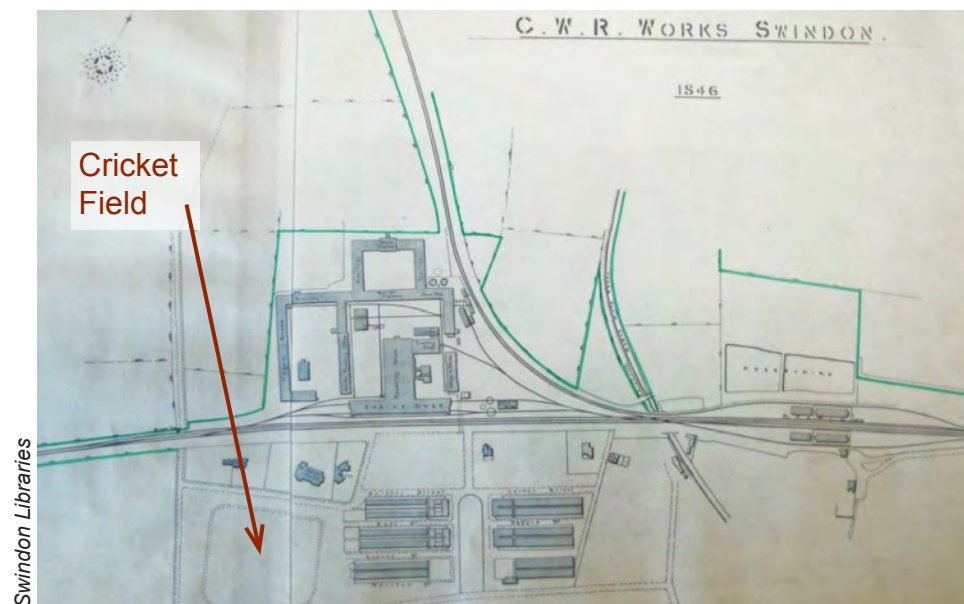


Figure 2.6: A retrospective plan of the works, the village and the cricket field (bottom left) in 1846 by Frederick Hawksworth, probably drawn up in the 1930s or 40s.

- 2.22 In 1847, the New Swindon cricket team began playing regularly in the park. It is said that there was a fierce rivalry with the team based in the Old Town<sup>11</sup>.
- 2.23 From 1853, an annual *soiree* was devised by Mr Minard Rea (Vice President and Treasurer of the nascent Mechanics' Institute), perhaps building on an earlier social evening.

<sup>11</sup> [https://www.swindon.gov.uk/downloads/file/6322/history\\_of\\_faringdon\\_road\\_park](https://www.swindon.gov.uk/downloads/file/6322/history_of_faringdon_road_park)

The *soiree*, held on a Friday evening, included dancing, variety turns and fireworks. The Saturday afternoon was devoted to entertaining the children, with jugglers, clowns and conjurors.

- 2.24 In 1854 the foundation stone of the Mechanics' Institute was laid<sup>12</sup>. Funds to build the Institute had been raised by selling shares in the enterprise. An investment income was to be generated by developing a market on the southern part of the plot on which the Institute was to be constructed. Before this time there were no shops in the New Town and so the opening of the market proved to be not only a commercial success but is associated with improving the diet and health of the whole community<sup>13</sup>.
- 2.25 In 1856, the Institute Council organised a special day to commemorate both the birthday of Queen Victoria and the end of the Crimean War. This was to have included a 'treat' for youngsters in the cricket field, but the event had to be abandoned because of torrential rain. Undaunted, Mr Rea organised a replacement event, paying for lemonade, buns and prizes for races from his own pocket<sup>14</sup>.
- 2.26 The children's entertainment (on the day after the adults' *soiree* at the Institute) rapidly outgrew the Institute's premises. Perhaps inspired by the eventual success of the 'treat' for youngsters in 1856, a decision was taken to move the entertainment permanently out of the Institute and into the park, which was still

<sup>12</sup> Cockbill, 1997

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*





known as the cricket field<sup>15</sup>. Swindon's first 'Juvenile Fête' (also called 'The Pete') was held in 1866. Every child under the age of 14 was admitted free and given a slab of fruitcake and a cup of tea, as well as one free ride on the roundabouts. In addition to roundabouts, there were swingboats, coconut shies and a wide variety of sideshows. The fête concluded with a great fireworks display<sup>16</sup>.

2.27 For a sense of what the park or cricket field looked like at this time, we are fortunate (figure 2.7, top) to have an early photograph, c.1860, looking from the south across the park towards St Mark's Church. This shows a large open space, but with planting around the perimeter already in place. It is unclear if a path yet encircled the park, but a path does appear to be shown on the east side (corroborating the evidence in Edward Snell's painting of 1846). However, the lodge and the ornamental planting associated with it, the walls and railings are still not present.



Image courtesy of [www.steampicturelibrary.com](http://www.steampicturelibrary.com).

*Figure 2.7: The top image, dating from c.1860, shows the Railway Village to the east and St Mark's Church to the north, with the cricket field in the middle distance. It is something of a contrast to the rural setting suggested by the 1844 engraving, figure 2.5. Although most authorities state that the park was landscaped c.1871, it is clear from this photograph that at least some planting had already been put in around the perimeter of the field. The bottom image shows the same view today.*

<sup>15</sup> Cockbill, 1997

<sup>16</sup> <https://swindonstory.uk/stories/gwr-park/>





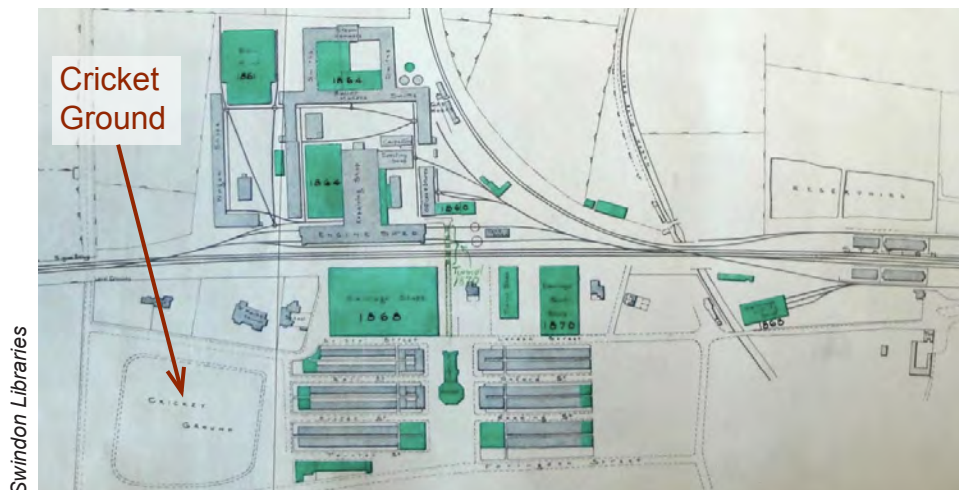


Figure 2.8 A retrospective plan of the works, the village and the cricket field or ground (bottom left) in 1870 by Frederick Hawksworth, probably drawn up in the 1930s or 40s.

## Phase Three: A designed park

2.28 It is generally held that the park was landscaped in 1871<sup>17</sup>. While no detail of this undertaking has been found, there are several references in the documentary record to money, time and effort being expended at this time. For example, on the occasion of a celebration to mark the advent of a nine-hour day in the Great Western Railway works, one of the speeches refers to *'the labor [sic] and time Mr. Carlton was expending on the Park would next year make it a place of which they might be proud (renewed cheering)'*<sup>18</sup>.

2.29 No 'named' designer is known to have been involved, but the layout – which seems to have been part of a process of

<sup>17</sup> <https://swindonstory.uk/stories/gwr-park/>

<sup>18</sup> *The North Wilts Herald*, November 25th, 1871

transformation of the cricket field into a civic park - was evidently given careful consideration. The centre of the park remained open, to allow continued use for cricket. Around the perimeter, however, a path for promenading was put in and on the east side, a park keeper's lodge was built and formal gardens laid out. These gardens were developed either side of the main Exeter Street entrance and occupied most of the east side of the park. There was at least one fountain, probably two, and glasshouses.

2.30 Around the same time, a Drill Hall was constructed in the north-west corner of the park for the 190 men of the 11th (Wilts) New Swindon Rifle Corps.



Figure 2.9 A retrospective plan of the works, the village and the cricket ground, (now labelled as The Park) in 1880 by Frederick Hawksworth, probably drawn up in the 1930s or 40s. Structures highlighted in green are those built between 1870 and 1880, and include the Drill Hall and the pavilion. Oddly, the lodge and glasshouses on the Exeter Street entrance, said to have been built c.1871, and mentioned in a local newspaper report in 1872 (below) are not shown.

2.31 In 1872, a report appeared in a local newspaper, describing the newly-built pavilion: *'This handsome structure has just been completed, having been designed and carried out under the direction of Mr. Carlton. It is erected on the site formerly occupied by the previous pavilion. The floor is raised some four or five feet from the ground...A platform, about nine feet wide, extending round the whole front and adjoining sides of the building is covered by a verandah...The pavilion consists of a dining-room thirty feet long by twenty feet wide, on each side of which are dressing rooms...with ante-rooms and other offices'*. Moving on to consider the setting of the new pavilion, the correspondent noted that *'There is a small enclosed garden in front containing roses and flower beds which, when the season permits, will, we expect, be stocked with flowers. On either side of the pavilion the trees and other shrubs which have recently been planted extend round the Park, meeting the gardens adjoining the lodge. On the whole the new pavilion gives to the Park a very pleasing appearance which the former one failed to do...Slowly but surely what was known as the cricket field is assuming the character and appearance of a public park which many a larger town might enjoy'*<sup>19</sup>.

<sup>19</sup> The North Wilts Herald, April 27th, 1872



Figure 2.10: A postcard view of the pavilion. Undated but probably late 19th century.



Figure 2.11: The lodge and formal gardens were in place by 1872 and are thought to have been constructed in about 1871.





- 2.32 Evidence of the planting of new trees in about 1871 is also attested by a report of the arrest of a young man who had climbed a tree to get a better view of the athletics being held in the park. A branch broke and he was taken into custody: *'Having made an attempt to escape, Sergeant Stephens used the handcuffs'*<sup>20</sup>.
- 2.33 Whilst it has not been possible to identify an exact sum spent on the park improvements at this time, a contemporary report suggests a figure of somewhere between one and two thousand pounds<sup>21</sup>. It is difficult to give the equivalent sum today, because different methods are used, but it seems possible that this sum equates to somewhere between £500,000 and £750,000 in today's values<sup>22</sup>.
- 2.34 In May 1874, an annual Athletic Sports was held in the park, in aid of *'the improvement of the New Swindon Park'*<sup>23</sup>.
- 2.35 In addition to athletics and cricket (for which purpose, of course, the 'cricket field' had originally been acquired), there are occasional reports of rugby being played in the park. For example, in 1876, the 2nd fifteen of the New Swindon Wanderers played Weston School. The home side had the satisfaction of winning by one goal and two tries to nil<sup>24</sup>.
- 2.36 Between 1876 and 1877, the skyline was altered by the construction of the imposing Park House, opposite the south-

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<sup>20</sup> *The North Wilts Herald*, September 2nd, 1872

<sup>21</sup> *Reading Observer*, May 30th, 1874

<sup>22</sup> Roderick Floud, *An Economic History of the English Garden*, Allen Lane, 2019

<sup>23</sup> *The North Wilts Herald*, May 4th, 1874

<sup>24</sup> *The North Wilts Herald*, 13th March, 1876

east corner of the park. This building is listed grade II (list entry 1355897).

- 2.37 The park continued to be home to the GWR Cricket Club. In a review of the season just concluded, the cricketing correspondent of *The Swindon Advertiser*, while praising the team's performance and the general ambience of the park, suggested that *'if the Park Improvement Committee can only contrive to raise a new refreshment pavilion, there will be nothing wanted for the entertainment of visitors'*<sup>25</sup>.
- 2.38 In 1879 St Mark's Church announced it would be holding its annual garden party *'under distinguished patronage'* in New Swindon Park<sup>26</sup>.
- 2.39 In 1881 the total attendance at the Children's Fete was 6,371<sup>27</sup>.
- 2.40 In 1882 a horticultural society for Swindon was established, with the vicar as its president. It was reported that *'It has been decided to hold an exhibition in New Swindon park'*<sup>28</sup>.
- 2.41 Music had become an established feature of the park. A contemporary report stated *'That grand military band, the 11th Rifles, can always be heard in New Swindon Park, on Wednesday evenings, during summer, excepting on the third Wednesday of each month, when the good folks of Swindon Town are favoured by the presence of those favourites, in the Square....We could but think how such gatherings tend even to draw men from places*

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<sup>25</sup> *The Swindon Advertiser*, December 1st, 1877

<sup>26</sup> *Swindon Advertiser & North Wilts Chronicle*, 15th September 1879

<sup>27</sup> *Cockbill*, 1997

<sup>28</sup> *Frome Times*, 3rd May, 1882



and pursuits they have drifted into for want of something better to do'<sup>29</sup>.

- 2.42 The first historical mapping to record the park after it had acquired the accoutrements of a public park (and was no longer simply a, or 'the' cricket field) is the Ordnance Survey map of 1886, the survey for which had taken place between 1883 and 1884. The 1:25 inch version (there is also a version at 1:6 inches), is reproduced in Figure 2.12.

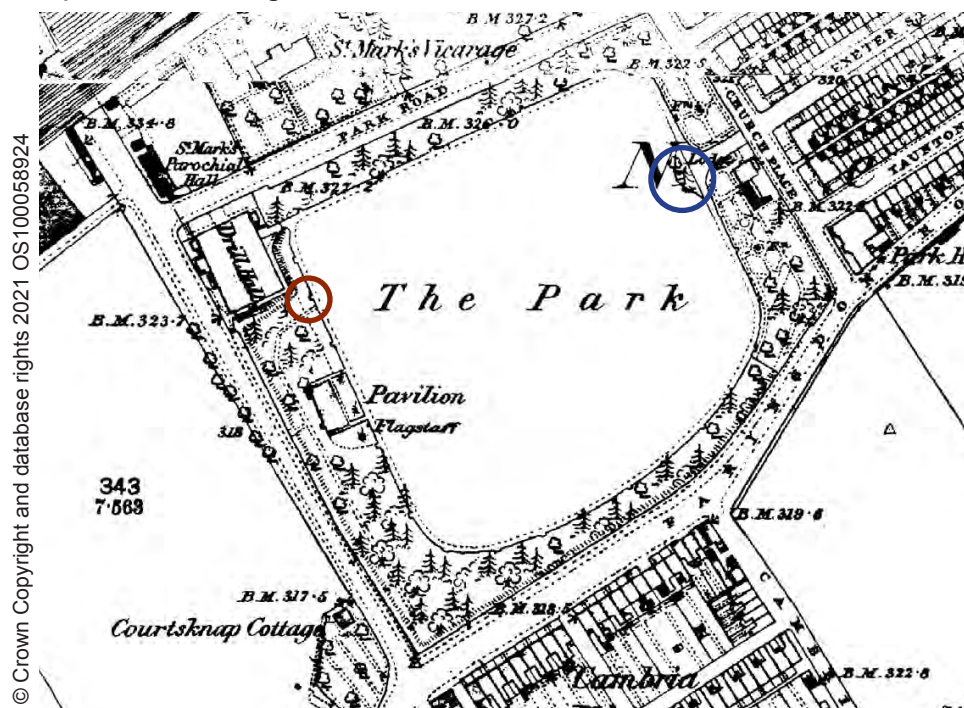


Figure 2.12: The Ordnance Survey, 1:25 inches, surveyed 1883 – 1884, published 1886. A red circle has been added to draw attention to the presence of seating bays around the perimeter path and a blue circle highlights a planting bed, which would have baffled direct views into the park from the main entrance.

<sup>29</sup> Wilts and Gloucestershire Standard, July 21st, 1883

- 2.43 The simple but effective layout, described at the start of this section, is clear to see. Two buildings are to be found within the park: the cricket pavilion and the lodge with its associated glasshouses. Just outside the park and equally conspicuous were the Drill Hall (to the north-west), Park House (to the south-east) and the imposing spire of St Mark's Church (to the north). The perimeter belt appears to be well-treed, with a significant proportion of conifers. Postcard views show the formal gardens to the east being protected behind an iron fence and the map notation *Fn* confirms there were two fountains. Another detail of the design recorded on the Ordnance Survey is the embayments around the perimeter walk, each one – there appear to be at least 20 – believed to have contained a seat. A small but distinctive feature of the design is the decision not to allow an axial view along Exeter Street, through the main (Church Place) entrance across the park, but to conceal, or at least baffle, the open space of the park on arrival, by creating a small planting bed on the inner side of the perimeter path.

- 2.44 Another interesting feature of the park at this time is that, despite the density of dwellings in the Railway Village itself, farmland still abutted the park to the west and south-east.

- 2.45 The park was not immune to the problem of anti-social behaviour. In 1885 a man was brought before the magistrates, charged with stealing a cloth coat and a meerscham pipe from the pavilion. 'The Bench inflicted a fine of £1 and 13s costs, or in default 14 days' imprisonment, expressing regret that they could not order a flogging'<sup>30</sup>.

<sup>30</sup> (The Witney Express, September 10th, 1885)





- 2.46 Queen Victoria celebrated her diamond jubilee in 1887, an occasion for nationwide celebration. Among the events put on in Swindon, a large procession was organised through the town, its starting point being the park<sup>31</sup>.
- 2.47 In the 1890s the famous cricketer W.G. Grace played several times at the park. It is said that he was bowled out for a 'double duck' by a local man, the only time in his career that this had happened<sup>32</sup>.
- 2.48 Some 6000 turned out to watch the annual athletics match in the park, promoted by the committee of the GWR Cricket Club.<sup>33</sup>
- 2.49 In 1892, a temperance march, accompanied by *'half a dozen brass bands'*, wound its way through the town, its destination being *'the New Swindon park'*, where a fête was held<sup>34</sup>.
- 2.50 In 1893, the attendance at the Children's Fête had leapt to 20,345, almost equally divided between adults (10,102) and children (10,243)<sup>35</sup>.
- 2.51 The park also hosted cycling events, although the course did not meet with the approval of everyone; *'One well-known local cyclist told me that he believed the course down at the park gets more hilly every year; anyhow, it is quite as bumpy now for riders of pneumatic-tyred machines as it used to be for the old solid-tyred ordinaries'*<sup>36</sup>.

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<sup>31</sup> *Swindon Advertiser and North Wilts Chronicle*, 25th June, 1887

<sup>32</sup> <https://swindonstory.uk/stories/gwr-park/>

<sup>33</sup> *The Citizen*, June 1st, 1891

<sup>34</sup> *Wilts and Gloucestershire Standard*, August 27th, 1892)

<sup>35</sup> *Cockbill*, 1997

<sup>36</sup> *The Swindon Advertiser*, June 16th, 1894

- 2.52 In 1895 the annual athletics held in the park was a disappointment to partisan locals. A newspaper reporter wrote *'I am afraid I cannot offer my congratulations to local runners for last Saturday's doings at the New Swindon Park. The "foreigners" (referring to the opposing away team) carried everything before them...'*<sup>37</sup>.
- 2.53 In 1897 the GWR Cricket Club celebrated its 50th anniversary<sup>38</sup>. The same article referred to the cricket club as *'tenants of the New Swindon Park'*. Music continued to be a draw, particularly in the summer months, where crowds, sometimes numbered in their thousands, would come to listen to the bands<sup>39</sup>. Despite this, as far as we can deduce, the park still had no bandstand.
- 2.54 Also in 1897, work was carried out on the boundary wall (it has not proved possible to determine if the work was merely repairs or a complete build). The manufacturer's name, Joseph Hamblet and the date 1897 are stamped on some of the coping bricks. Although seemingly black, this type of finish is known as 'blue' and it was a speciality of the Joseph Hamblet company.

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<sup>37</sup> *The Swindon Advertiser*, June 22nd, 1895

<sup>38</sup> *The Swindon Advertiser* May 1st, 1897

<sup>39</sup> *The Swindon Advertiser*, August 7th, 1897





Figure 2.13: A number of the 'blue' coping stones to the boundary wall are stamped Joseph Hamblet, West Bromwich, 1897.

- 2.55 In 1899 the Ordnance Survey was revised. The revision, published in 1900 (Figure 2.14), indicates that, fundamentally, the layout of the park remained the same as in the 1880s. However, some changes are discernible. Perhaps the biggest change is to the number of entrances into the park. New ones have appeared next to the Drill Hall, on Park Lane (near the south-west corner of the park), and opposite Cambria Bridge Road on the southern boundary. The single flagstaff (labelled as such) on the 1886 Ordnance Survey is now complemented by another (the notation *FS*) on the east side of the park, aligned on the Exeter Street entrance. Next to the Exeter Street flagstaff is a further fountain (*Fn*), bringing the total in the park at this time to three. The planting bed opposite the Exeter Street entrance appears to

have been enlarged to accommodate the flagstaff and the third fountain.



Figure 2.14: The Ordnance Survey, 1:25 inches, revised 1899, published 1900. The layout on the Ordnance Survey 1886 remains substantially intact. The greatest changes are three new entrances and the development of former fields around the park.

- 2.56 A change in use, or at least in the perception, of the park is implied by the title Recreation Ground, suggesting a recognition that the primary purpose of the park was no longer just the playing of cricket but as much, and perhaps more, for general exercise.
- 2.57 Finally, it will be noted that the Ordnance Survey shows that the remaining agricultural land had been built over. The newer





housing was significantly more spacious and offered larger gardens than the housing in the Railway Village, to the east. Nevertheless, on three of its sides the park was now entirely urban in outlook. To the north, however, the park retained a sylvan, almost rural, outlook towards the vicarage and St Mark's Church, a leafy aspect that bounds the north of the park to this day.

- 2.58 In 1902, a local newspaper reported on the annual Hospital Saturday, which took the form of demonstration and fête, in the park. The object was to raise funds for the Swindon Victoria Hospital<sup>40</sup>.
- 2.59 Although it has not been possible to determine the precise year when the bandstand was put up, we consider it likely to have been in the early 1900s, possibly as early as 1902. The evidence is both 'hard' and circumstantial. Firstly, the bandstand is not shown on the Ordnance Survey 1899/1900, so it must have been erected after that date. Second, stylistically the bandstand appears to be late Victorian or Edwardian. Third, music was a regular attraction in the park, and the absence of a bandstand would have been seen as an omission by 1900, if not before. As Hazel Conway has commented, *'by the end of the nineteenth century bandstands had become so popular that no park was considered complete without one'*<sup>41</sup>. The Park Improvement Committee would have been acutely aware of the lack of bandstand and no doubt keen to rectify the situation.
- The bandstand was certainly in place by the time the Ordnance

Survey was revised in 1923.



Figure 2.15: The bandstand may have been in place as early as 1902. Top, a historic postcard view. Bottom, a later (possibly 1930s) view.

- 2.60 In 1903 The Children's Fête was described as a *'monster'* fête and *'the event of the year'*, with attendance estimated to have

<sup>40</sup> Wilts and Gloucestershire Standard, June 21st, 1902

<sup>41</sup> Hazel Conway, Public Parks, Shire, 1996



risen from 26,000 the year before to around 30,000<sup>42</sup>.

2.61 The annual summer show of the Swindon Horticultural Society, held a few weeks later was, it must be assumed, a quieter event<sup>43</sup>.

2.62 In 1904, numbers at the Children's Fête increased again with an estimated 38,000 people attending<sup>44</sup>.

2.63 The postcard view (Figure 2.16) of the formal gardens near the lodge, has a postmark of 1905. Apart from the lodge and glasshouses, it is interesting to see a fountain, stone ornaments and the elegant railings separating the gardens from the main body of the park.

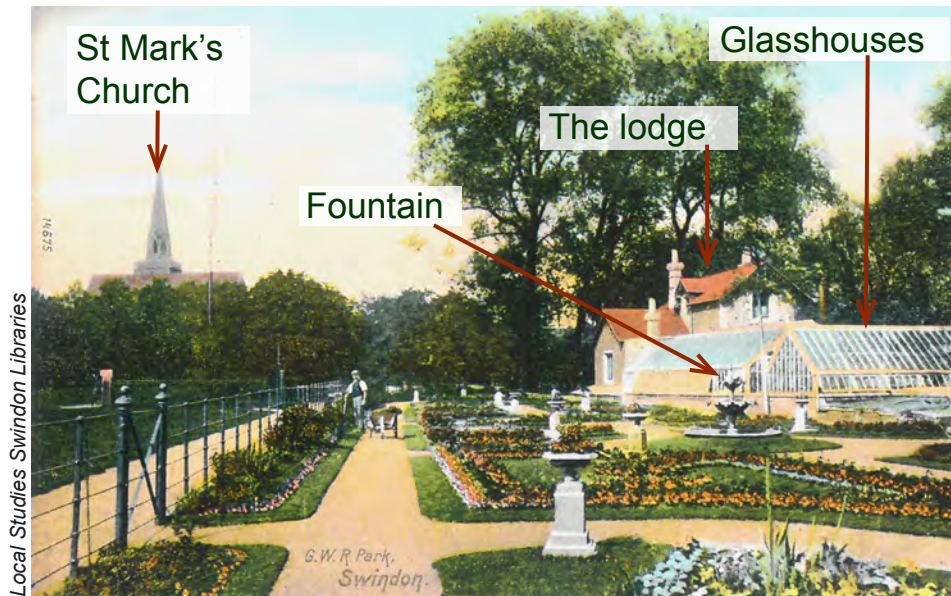


Figure 2.16: This postcard view has a postmark of 1905.

2.64 In 1907, attendance at the Children's Fête was said to have

<sup>42</sup> *The Citizen*, August 10th, 1903

<sup>43</sup> *Wilts and Gloucestershire Standard*, August 22nd, 1903

<sup>44</sup> <https://swindonstory.uk/stories/gwr-park/>

reached 40,000<sup>45</sup>.



Figure 2.17: At its peak in the Edwardian era, the Children's Fête attracted a crowd of up to 40,000.

2.65 The logistics of providing free cake and tea to such unprecedented numbers at the fête meant that the whole operation had to be put on a quasi-industrial footing and there was even a special cake-cutting machine. Photographs of the cake and tea teams have survived and are reproduced below.

2.66 A number of other, perhaps more modest, fêtes continued to be held in the park at this time. One such was the fête given by the Band of the 4th Battalion, Wiltshire Regiment. In 1908 this event was reported as being in its sixth year<sup>46</sup>.

<sup>45</sup> *The Midland Daily Telegraph*, August 12th, 1907

<sup>46</sup> *The Swindon Advertiser* May 15th 1908)







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Figure 2.18: Above, the cake cutters and baggers. Below, the tea servers. No date but c.1900.



Figure 2.19: Fête announcement in *The Swindon Advertiser*, 1908

2.67 In 1910, a Scout Inspection was conducted in the park by the Chief Scout, Sir Robert Baden-Powell. The events included bridge building, mattress making and an Indian attack on a scouts' camp<sup>47</sup>.



© William Hooper

Figure 2.20: General Baden-Powell inspecting scouts in the park, 1910.  
Courtesy Swindon Central Library.

<sup>47</sup> *The North Wilts Herald*, June 17th, 1910



- 2.68 The last Children's Fête to be held in the park before the Great War took place in 1912. In 1913 and 1914 it was held in Gorse Hill, before being dropped altogether for the duration of the war<sup>48</sup>.
- 2.69 However, events including smaller-scale fêtes, continued to be held in the park. For example, in 1916 there was a Grand Fête and Flag Day, the proceeds of which would go towards *'Local Belgian Refugee Funds'*<sup>49</sup>. In a similar vein, in August 1918, two ambulance cars *'were presented and dedicated for service in the theatre of war.'* This same report contains the first reference to a bandstand: *'The band-stand had been profusely decorated with flags'* and a small concert was given<sup>50</sup>.
- 2.70 In 1919, the Children's Fête was revived in its traditional home of GWR Park. In the war years, many children had grown up with no memory of the fête and it was noted that, for them, *'this great open-air carnival of healthful enjoyment was something to wonder and marvel at'*<sup>51</sup>.
- 2.71 An aerial view of the park (figure 2.22), taken from the south-west in 1920, shows the bandstand as a prominent feature, roughly half-way between the centre of the park and the Exeter Street entrance. Other features to note are the perimeter path, the lodge, formal gardens and glasshouses and the dense canopy of the trees – now some fifty years old – enclosing the park.

<sup>48</sup> North Wilts Herald, August 15th, 1919

<sup>49</sup> North Wilts Herald, September 1st, 1916

<sup>50</sup> The North Wilts Herald, August 23rd, 1918

<sup>51</sup> North Wilts Herald, August 15th, 1919



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Figure 2.21: The Children's Fête in 1919. It marked a return to the park for the first time since 1912. Looking south-west, with the pavilion just visible on the right.



Britainfromabove, EPW000925, Copyright, Historic England

Figure 2.22: The park seen from the south-west in 1920. The bandstand is the most prominent feature, together with the lodge, glasshouses and formal gardens. Note too, the maturing trees on the boundary.





2.72 The scouts were back at the park in 1921, holding a jamboree. The crowd was entertained with displays of bridge building, signalling and gymnastics, and music was supplied by the Comrades' Military Band<sup>52</sup>.

2.73 The Railways Act of 1921 forced the 120 railway companies then operating to merge into just four. One of the 'big four' was the Great Western Railway. This grouping officially took place on 1 January 1923. The background to this change was a significant decline in the number of railway journeys taken in Great Britain. These had fallen by about a third between the 1910s and the mid-1930s and meant that railway companies were under increasing financial pressure.

2.74 In 1922 the Ordnance Survey was revised again and was published in 1923. This captures the park just before it was handed over to the local authority (Figure 2.23). The structure of the layout first recorded in 1886 is, once again, fundamentally unchanged: a large open space and a perimeter belt of trees with a circular path on its inner (field) side. The pavilion, the lodge, the glasshouses, fountains are all still present. However, there are three notable changes since the previous Ordnance Survey mapping of 1900. Most obvious is the arrival of a bandstand, not quite aligned on the Exeter Street entrance, and located far out into the park. At the same time, lawn tennis grounds have appeared in the north-west corner of the park, between the Drill Hall and the pavilion. Taken together, the locations of the bandstand and tennis grounds would have precluded the playing of cricket in the park, other than on an amateur basis. A further

change is the construction of a lavatory in the south-west corner of the park.



Figure 2.23: The Ordnance Survey, 1:25 inches, revised 1922, published 1923. Key changes since the previous Ordnance Survey of 1900 are the arrival of a bandstand, lawn tennis courts in front of the pavilion and a lavatory in the south-west corner.

2.75 The setting of the park would also have undergone some change by the development, since 1900, of a tram route along Park Lane and Faringdon Road.

2.76 In 1925 the annual May Fête, under the auspices of the Swindon Trades and Labour Council, was held and 'several thousand passed through the gates'<sup>53</sup>. In June of the same year there was a competition organised by the National Fire Brigade Association<sup>54</sup>. More significantly, this was the year in which

<sup>52</sup> The Faringdon Advertiser, June 4th, 1921

<sup>53</sup> North Wilts Herald, May 22nd, 1925

<sup>54</sup> The Wiltshire Times, June 27th, 1925





management of the park passed from the Mechanic's Institute Park Improvement Committee to Swindon Corporation. In exchange, the Great Western Railway was allowed to build a further carriage workshop on the north side of the town. Despite the change of ownership, the traditional events for which the park was noted, continued as before.

- 2.77 The Children's Fête was by now well enough known and employed so many 'turns' that it earned its own report in the actors' and performers' magazine, *The Stage*<sup>55</sup>.

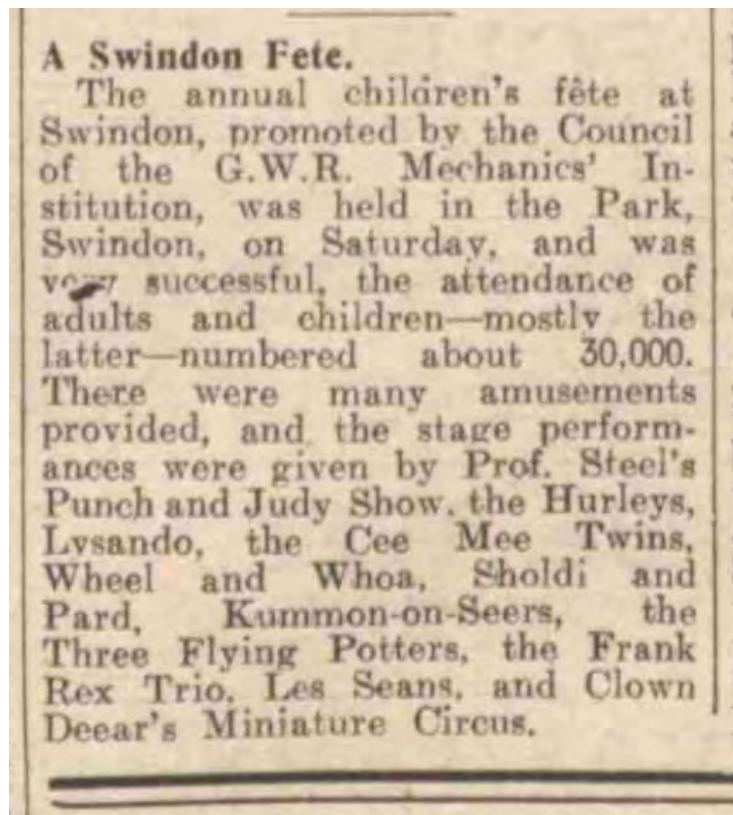


Figure 2.24: An extract from *The Stage*, August 16th, 1934.

<sup>55</sup> *The Stage*, August 16th, 1934

- 2.78 In 1936, the park hosted a slightly different kind of event: motorcycle racing: 'A score of crash-helmeted motorcyclists provided excitement for a small crowd at the GWR Park, Swindon, on Wednesday night. It was the annual grass track race meeting in aid of the Swindon Victoria Hospital. The inclement weather kept the crowd down to small proportions, although it was noticeable that large numbers of people watched the proceedings through the railings'<sup>56</sup>.
- 2.79 An aerial photo from 1938 (below) shows the well-treed perimeter of the park, the bandstand on its 'island' and the cricket pavilion with its distinctive roof.



Britainfromabove, EPW059046,  
Copyright, Historic England

Figure 2.25: The park in 1938. The red arrow indicates the location of the cricket pavilion with its distinctive roof.

- 2.80 Because of the outbreak of the Second World War, the last children's fête was held that summer. It was to be more than 60 years before the event was revived by the Mechanics' Institution Trust.

<sup>56</sup>

*North Wilts Herald*, August 21st, 1936





Figure 2.26: Ordnance Survey, 1:25 inches, revised 1942, published 1947. The lawn tennis Courts, shown in 1923, have gone. The lavatory in the south-west corner is no longer labelled.

2.81 The above Ordnance Survey was revised in 1942 but not published until 1947. The lawn tennis courts have disappeared. The lavatory constructed in the south-west corner of the park between 1900 and 1923 is present but is no longer labelled as such. Possibly it had become redundant because another lavatory had been built in the south-east corner of the park. The fountain on the island bed aligned on Exeter Street seems to have been lost by this time.

2.82 An aerial photograph from 1946 shows the entire northern edge of the park given over to trenches and/or shelters. The park was

also heavily used for drill practice during the Second World War<sup>57</sup>.



Figure 2.27: The northernmost section of the park (demarcated with a red line in 1946. Trenches or shelters can be seen inside the perimeter path.)



Figure 2.28: A vertical aerial view of the park dated 14th April 1946 depicts the trenches or shelters along with what maybe a visiting circus or fairground

<sup>57</sup> <https://swindonstory.uk/stories/gwr-park/>





2.83 A second vertical aerial photograph (Figure 2.28) shows the rows of trenches/shelters along with what appears to be a visiting circus or fairground. The internal railings that once separated the formal gardens from the central open space (as seen on many of the photographs and postcard views) appear to have been removed, presumably for the 'war effort' as there are desire lines through these once enclosed areas.



Figure 2.29: The site of the trenches is identified in this Lidar map of the park. The topographical survey undertaken for this study corroborates the presence of 'humps and bumps' in this area.

2.84 The government's Holidays at Home programme was introduced in 1941 & 42 to restrict travel and prioritise military transportation. The programme recommended '*...making maximum use of local parks.*'<sup>58</sup> The programme was able to draw on experience of

<sup>58</sup> Sladen, C. (2002). *Holidays at Home in the Second World War*. *Journal of Contemporary History*, 37(1), 67-89. Retrieved May 26, 2021, from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3180746>

*'experienced organisers from traditional events linked to major employers – in the case of Swindon, the annual GWR fete and carnival.'*<sup>59</sup> Swindon actively participated in the programme, which included events and musical performances and GWR Park would have provided a ready made venue. It is said that fairground rides were set up in the park throughout wartime summers, presumably along the lines of that shown in the aerial photo Figure 2.28.



Figure 2.30: Undated view of the water fountain and flag staff which had been removed by 1956/7

2.85 The generally accepted view, which we have not been able to corroborate, is that the original park railings were 'lost' during the war. If so, this was not unusual: '*During the Second World War the gates and railings of many parks were removed as*

[org/stable/3180746](http://www.jstor.org/stable/3180746)

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid*





*a contribution to the war effort. While this may have made a psychological contribution, it did not apparently make a practical one, for they are reputed to have been dumped in the Atlantic Ocean*<sup>60</sup>.

## Phase Four: Decline in the aftermath of the second world war

- 2.86 The history of the park in the aftermath of the Second World War has been difficult to follow, despite the fact that this period is within the living memory of many citizens. Oral history might fill in some gaps. For example, it is not known how long after the war the trenches and/or buildings on the north side of the park remained in situ. It has not been possible to uncover a precise date for the removal of the bandstand; we only know that it is still recorded on the Ordnance Survey of 1942 but is not shown on the Ordnance Survey of 1956/7. Similarly, the cricket pavilion is extant in 1942 but gone by 1956. It is possible that these features were removed to help the war effort in some way, akin to the removal of the park railings, or perhaps they had they reached a state of dilapidation or lack of use that necessitated their removal.
- 2.87 The cumulative effect of the loss of the three most important built features in the park inevitably affected its character and interest.
- 2.88 An electricity sub-station was constructed in c.1953 in the south west corner of the park and appears on the Ordnance Survey map of 1956/7.



*Figure 2.31: Ordnance Survey dated 1956/7. Note the curious subdivision of the park on its east side. The change of name from Drill Hall to TA centre suggests that the current building (stylistically 1950s) had by this time replaced the old Drill Hall.*

- 2.89 The 1956/7 Ordnance Survey map records a barrier/boundary running roughly north to south across the open space of the park, towards its east side. The purpose of this boundary is unclear. This might have been a move to 'hive off' part of the park, a proposal that found a less extensive, but still damaging, expression in the decision to demolish the lodge and build garages on the site. Alternatively it might reflect a move to re-enclose the more formal part of the park for horticultural purposes.

<sup>60</sup> Hazel Conway, *Public Parks, Shire*, 1996







Figure 2.32: Late 19th century (probably) view of the cricket pavilion, with the same view today. The arrows have been added for purposes of orientation.

- 2.90 A large sub-circular enclosure is shown to take the place of the cricket pavilion on the 1956/7 Ordnance survey. The purpose of this area is unknown, but may have been another enclosed area for planting. A circular paved area was added to the path at the centre of the enclosed area.

- 2.91 The lodge and the glasshouses continue to be recorded into the 1960s, appearing on the Ordnance Survey map dated 1967 – 71.



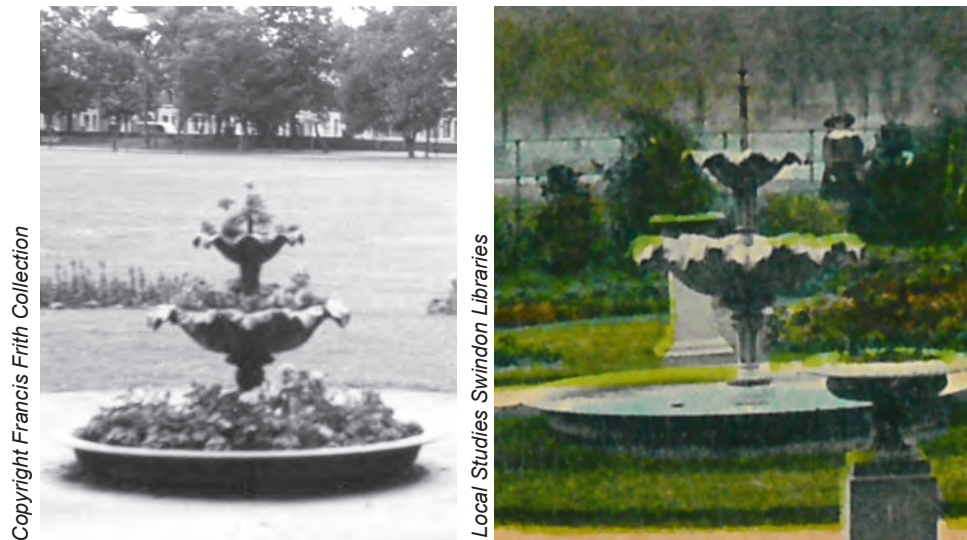
Figure 2.33: Ordnance Survey dated 1967 - 71.



Figure 2.34: This view from 1965 appears to be taken from the site of the formal gardens, looking west across the park, indicating that the gardens had been lost by this time.



2.92 A postcard view of 1965 appears to show a remnant of the former formal gardens. A tiered planter bears a strong resemblance to the fountain stand in the postcard view of 1905 (fountains were often adapted as planters, because they were less costly to maintain). This suggests that the formal gardens around the lodge were no longer intact and the lodge itself, together with its associated glasshouses, may also have been removed by this time. The site of the gardens was redeveloped to provide garages for residents of the Railway Village.



*Figure 2.35: The planter photographed in 1965 (left) bears a close resemblance to the planter (or possible fountain base) shown in the postcard view of 1905 (right).*

2.93 The Railway Village, including GWR Park, was designated as a conservation area in 1975<sup>61</sup>. The Railway Works closed in March 1986<sup>62</sup>.

<sup>61</sup> <https://inkandcompass.wordpress.com/tag/swindon/>

<sup>62</sup> [https://www.swindon.gov.uk/downloads/file/5249/conservation\\_area\\_appraisal\\_-\\_](https://www.swindon.gov.uk/downloads/file/5249/conservation_area_appraisal_-_)

2.94 During the 1980s a lavatory was constructed in the south-east corner of the park with an entrance off Faringdon Road. However, anti-social behaviour led to its closure and the lavatory building currently (2021) remains boarded up and closed.



*Figure 2.36: Closed lavatory in the south-east corner of the park*

2.95 In 1996, the Heritage Lottery Fund (now known as the National Heritage Memorial Fund) launched the Urban Parks initiative, with many millions of pounds potentially being made available for capital works in public parks. This was a response to decades of under-investment in public parks and signalled, if not a revival, at least a greater awareness of their plight. In Swindon, a successful bid was made to the lottery on behalf of Lydiard Park.





## Phase Five: The Millennium and the beginnings of a revival?

- 2.96 In 2003, after a gap of more than 60 years, the Mechanic's Institution Trust (MIT) revived the tradition of the Children's Fête in the park.<sup>63</sup>
- 2.97 Some of the railings and associated walls and piers were replaced in the early 2000s by Swindon Borough Council using Section 106 funding from the planning system.
- 2.98 In around 2002 a volunteer group known as the Grassroots Gardeners was established as a sub-committee to the Mechanics Institution Trust to help maintain the park and they are still active in and around the Railway Village today.
- 2.99 The Railway Village Conservation Area appraisal and management plan was adopted in 2006.
- 2.100 By 2008 a Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) project to replace benches and bins and install a play area had been completed. Some of the funding was used to support the Children's Summer Fête with the purchase of a marquee and chairs. Around the same time a grant was secured by MIT from Tesco to convert the closed lavatory into a base for the Grassroots Gardeners, which is a scheme which has not been fully realised due to health and safety fears relating to drug taking in the park.
- 2.101 An olive tree was planted in the north-east of the park to commemorate Veterans' Awareness Week in June, 2008. A number of personal memorials have also been attached to trees and benches since 2000.

<sup>63</sup> <https://swindonian.me/2017/06/01/the-childrens-fete/>



*Figure 2.37: The olive tree planted in June 2008*

- 2.102 The Children's Fête began to grow, and more than 8,000 people attended the event in 2016<sup>64</sup>.



*Figure 2.38: The 150th Anniversary of The Children's Fête, organised by Mechanics' Institution Trust and Fandangos*

<sup>64</sup> <https://swindonian.me/2017/06/01/the-childrens-fete/>



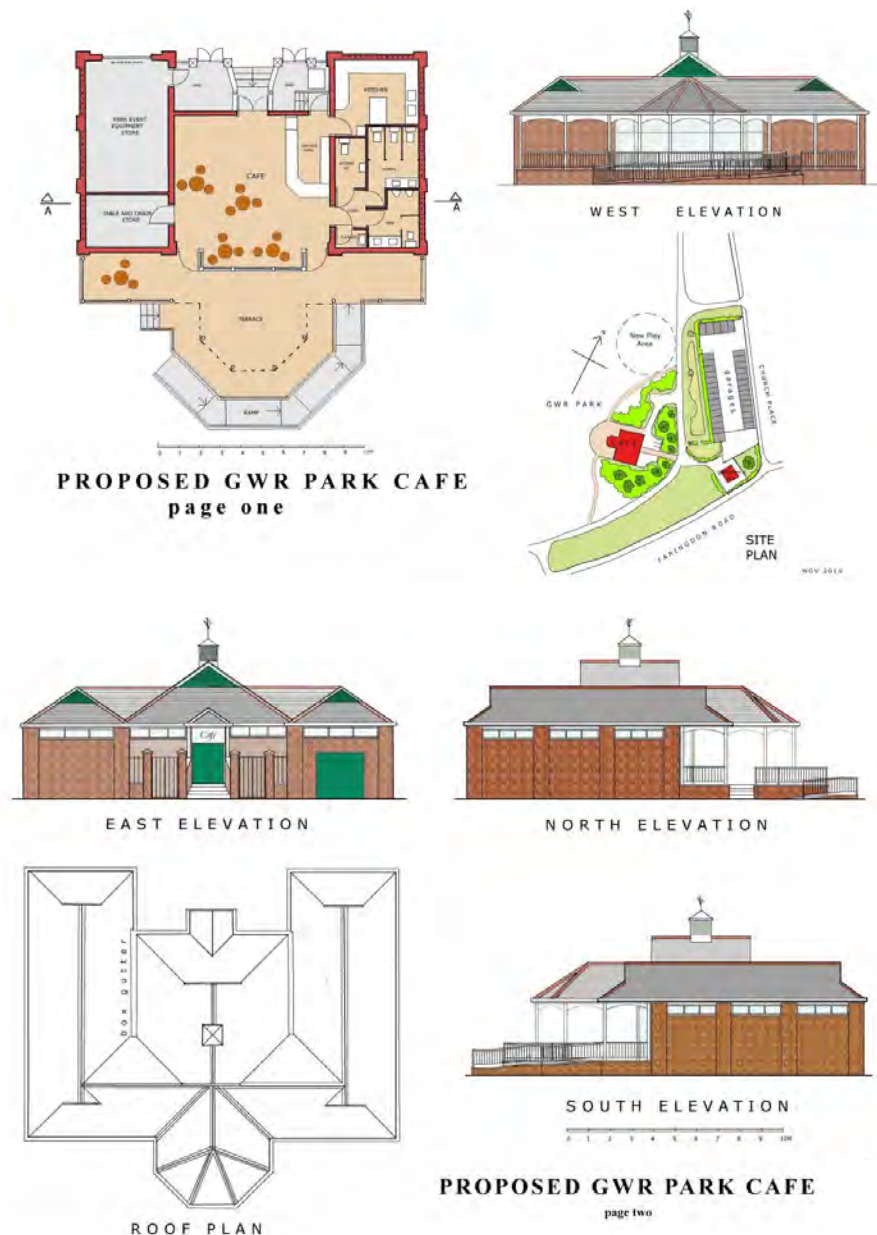


Figure 2.39: A proposal for the development of a pavilion to incorporate a café and toilets in the south eastern corner of the park.

2.103 A proposal for a new pavilion was developed by the Mechanics Institution Trust and Swindon Civic Voice based on work by Martha Parry and Donald Brunwin (retired architect), circa 2019/20, to house a café and toilets (See Figure 2.39).

2.104 In 2018, in a nationwide poll, the Railway Village in Swindon was named as Britain's favourite conservation area<sup>65</sup>. On a more sombre note, a memorial was established in the north-west corner of the park, close to the Territorial Army Centre, commemorating the centenary of the end of the First World War.



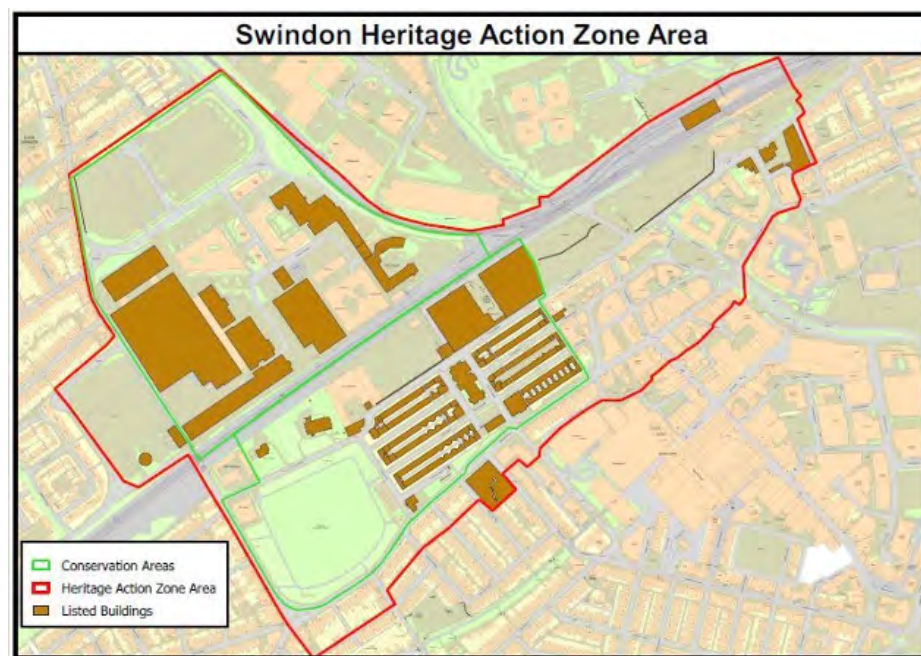
Figure 2.40: Memorial to the end of the First World War, erected in 2018

<sup>65</sup> <https://www.swindoncivicvoice.org.uk/>





2.105 In 2019, Historic England declared the area around Swindon's Railway Village a Heritage Action Zone. Historic England are providing much needed funding and expertise and are supporting the Council and other local organisations for five years to deliver a range of projects. GWR Park is one of the projects to receive funding which has enabled the production of this Conservation Management Plan.



2.106 Also in 2019, a monument was put up on the south side of the park to mark International Mother Language Day. This was an initiative of the Bangladesh Association, Swindon.

2.107 In 2020, to mark World Polio Day, the Rotary club of Swindon Thamesdown planted thousands of crocus bulbs on the south side of the park.



*Figure 2.41: Left, monument to International Mother Language Day, 2019, funded by the Bangladesh Association, Swindon. Right, bulb planting by the Rotary Club of Swindon Thamesdown, 2020.*

2.108 In March 2020 the Parish Council opened a new play area which replaced one previously installed as part of the HLF project mentioned above.

2.109 Also in 2020 the Railway Village and Adjacent Railway Works Conservation Areas were combined to form a single larger area named Swindon's Railway Conservation Area and a Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan was prepared.





### 3. G.W.R Park today

- 3.1 This chapter describes the park today, explains how it is managed and outlines the wider policy context.

#### Natural characteristics

##### *Topography and hydrology*

- 3.2 The area surrounding the park is relatively flat, which was part of the reason why it was chosen for the locomotive works.
- 3.3 The land within the park is also relatively flat, falling from the north to south from a height of 98 – 99m AOD in the north to its lowest point of around 95.5 m AOD at the park's south western corner. A full topographic survey of the park has been commissioned as part of this plan and is included in Appendix 2.
- 3.4 There are localised raised areas of ground in the form of bunds along the western Park Lane boundary and a shorter section along the eastern end of the southern Faringdon Road boundary. The origin of these earthworks is not known, but it is possible that they were formed following construction of the roundabout that removed the southern tip of the park and following the construction of the hard-standing and garages to the east of the park, although this is unconfirmed.
- 3.5 The southernmost area of the park is prone to flooding and the park has been subjected to severe flooding, notably in 1954 (see Figure 3.1). Swindon's preliminary flood risk assessment maps show that this part of the park is a localised flooding point. The

risk assessment provides a model of a 1 in 200 year flood, which shows that the south western area of the park would be affected with the potential for the modelled flood depth to be more than 0.3m.



Local Studies Swindon Libraries

Figure 3.1: A photograph dated 1954 showing severe flooding in the park .

##### *Geology and soils*

- 3.6 The underlying bedrock geology is formed of the Kimmeridge Clay Formation - Mudstone. This sedimentary Bedrock was formed approximately 152 to 157 million years ago in the Jurassic Period. The local environment was previously dominated by shallow seas.<sup>66</sup>

<sup>66</sup> <https://mapapps.bgs.ac.uk/geologyofbritain/home.html> accessed 24/05/2021



- 3.7 The underlying clay geology is topped with slowly permeable seasonally wet, slightly acid, but base rich loamy and clayey soils.<sup>67</sup>

## Local context

- 3.8 GWR Park is located within South Swindon Parish (Central Swindon South Parish), between Swindon's town centre to the south east and the Rodbourne residential suburb to the north west.

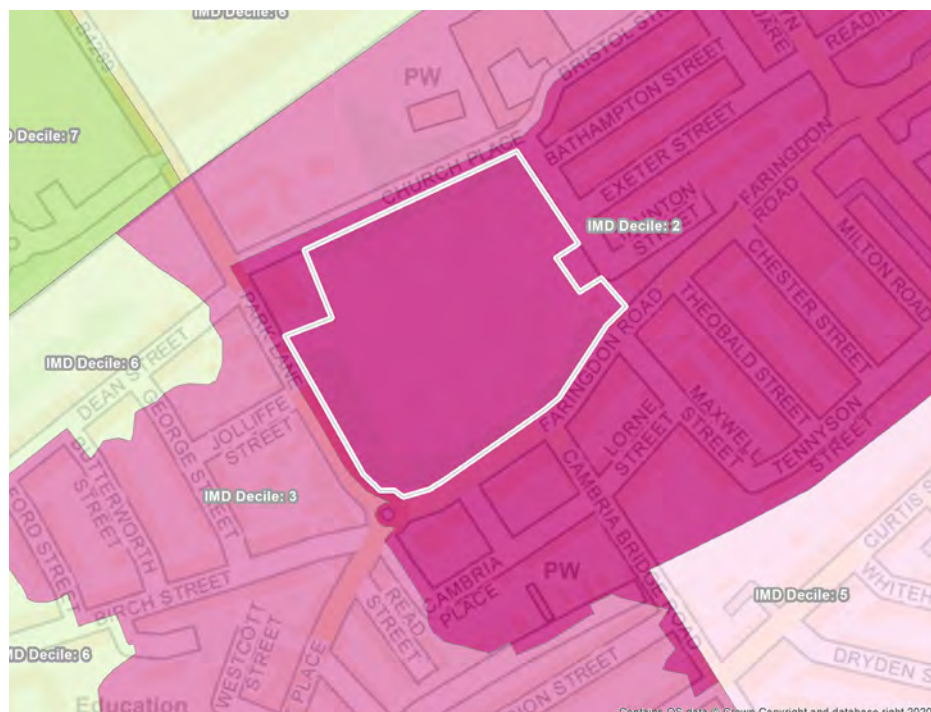


Figure 3.2: Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) 2019 by Lower Super Output Area (LSOA) in nationwide deciles. GWR Park is in an area defined as Decile 2 which is in the bottom 20% of national indices of social deprivation.

- 3.9 The park is located in an area of Swindon recorded in the bottom 20% of national indices of social deprivation, but as the largest green space in the neighbourhood, it is a valuable asset in the urban environment. It plays a vital part in local life as an important amenity for residents of the Railway Village and residents further afield, workers from nearby businesses and visitors to the town.
- 3.10 The park lies within the Great Western Community Forest (GWCF) which is a long-term programme to enrich landscapes in and around Swindon, with a primary aim to increase tree cover to an average of 30% across the project area.

## Ownership

- 3.11 The majority of the Freehold is owned by Swindon Borough Council (SBC), whilst a small section along the western boundary adjoining Park Lane is subject to a conveyance dated 16 July 1896 between the Great Western Railway Company and the Urban District Council of Swindon New Town. A copy of the Land Registry Title is included at Appendix 3.

<sup>67</sup> <https://magic.defra.gov.uk/MagicMap.aspx> accessed 24/05/2021







Figure 3.3: Plan dated 1952 showing the proposed location of the electricity sub-station

- 3.12 The electricity sub-station is not included in the title as the land was sold to the Southern Electricity Board in 1953.<sup>68</sup> The Electricity Board is responsible for maintaining a 6ft wide paved access to the sub-station (see Figure 3.3).
- 3.13 The title excludes the land occupied by car parking spaces that lies between the Church Place park entrance and the Territorial Army (TA) building. The TA use land owned by SBC to access the parking spaces and it appears that there is no lease or other agreement to regulate or permit this activity. It appears that car parking is also taking place on land owned by SBC rather than the TA to the east of the Church Place entrance
- 3.14 The area now occupied by 33 garages to the east of the park is owned by Swindon Borough Council but no longer forms part of the park. Swindon Borough Council Housing issue licences for the use of these garages.

<sup>68</sup> Deed Packet R56, agreement dated 24th June 1953.

## Managing and maintaining the park

- 3.15 The park is leased to South Swindon Parish (Central Swindon South Parish) on a 99 year lease, see Figure 3.4.



Figure 3.4: The area leased to South Swindon Parish (Central Swindon South Parish)

- 3.16 The lease area is shown in Figure 3.4 and excludes the Territorial Army site with associated car parking spaces, the electricity sub-station and the garages.
- 3.17 The Parish Council is now responsible for the management and maintenance of the park and employs a direct labour force to maintain the landscape.
- 3.18 The park is maintained under three broad regimes as shown in Figure 3.5 including grass and hedge cutting and shrub maintenance.





Figure 3.5: Map showing the broad maintenance regimes as defined on Swindon.gov.uk. Orange indicates shrubs, light green longer grass, mid green short mown grass and dark green lines are hedges.

## Emergency access

- 3.19 The park is used for emergency helicopter access as it provides a large flat, open expanse of ground. It is understood that the central area of the park should be maintained for this purpose.

## Designations and Policy context

*Heritage designations (see also Appendix 8)*

### Conservation Area

- 3.20 The Railway Village, including GWR Park, was designated a Conservation Area in 1975 as ‘an almost complete planned railway settlement of the 1840s and early 1850s, unrivalled in its state of preservation by Crewe, Wolverton and Derby, England’s other surviving railway company settlements.’<sup>69</sup> The Railway Works was designated in 1987 as ‘one of Britain’s finest monuments to the early days of the railway age’<sup>70</sup>
- 3.21 In 2020 the two Conservation Areas were combined to form a single larger area named Swindon’s Railway Conservation Area.
- 3.22 The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 defines a conservation area as an ‘*area of special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance.*’
- 3.23 Through the Heritage Action Zone a Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan (CAAMP) for Swindon’s Railway Conservation Area was prepared in 2020 by Purcell for Swindon Borough Council and Historic England. The CAAMP recognises the importance of public open spaces to the character of the Conservation Area ‘*the largest and most historically significant being GWR Park.*’

<sup>69</sup> John Cattell & Keith Falconer, *Swindon: the Legacy of a Railway Town* (Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England, 1995) as quoted in Purcell (2020) *Swindon’s Railway Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan*

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid*





3.24 The CAAMP also identifies the park as a positive landmark in the Conservation Area describing it as *'the largest green and public space in the Conservation Area and is an important amenity and destination for those living in the railway village and the wider town. The Park was an early and essential feature of the railway village, the land being purchased by the GWR company as a cricket ground for its workers in 1844. It has continued to play a central role in community life hosting events and providing much needed open space as the town grew around it.'*

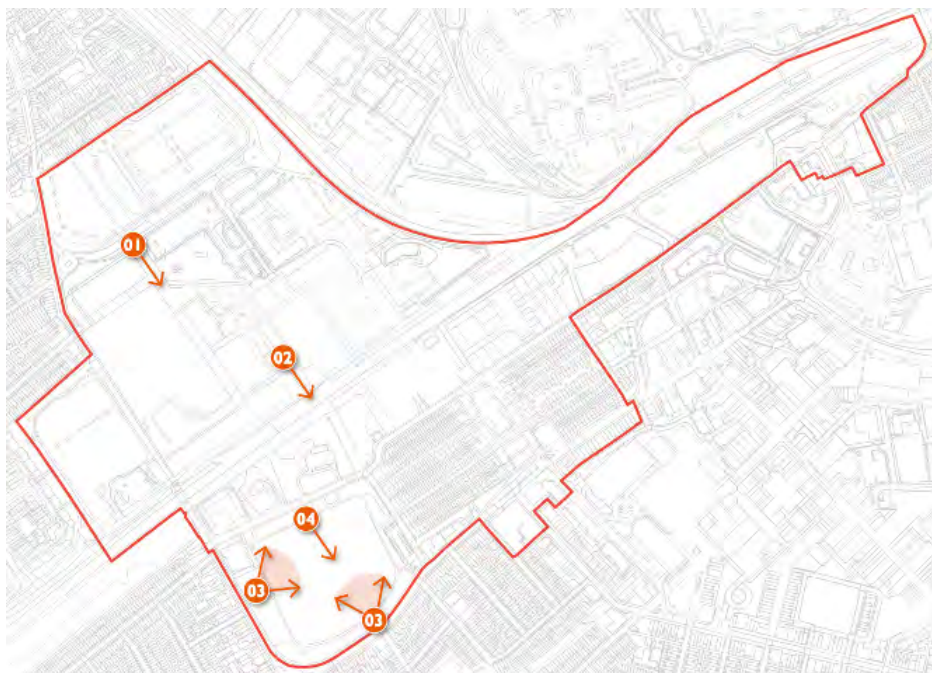


Figure 3.6: Defined views as identified in the Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan © Purcell, 2020. Views 03 are views towards St Mark's Church and Railway Village across GWR Park and View 04 is a view from GWR Park to Radnor Street Cemetery.

3.25 The CAAMP identifies several defined views that make a specific contribution to the special interest of the Conservation Area as

depicted in Figure 3.6 which shows that two of these are located within the park.

3.26 The CAAMP identifies issues and opportunities and GWR Park is described as Theme 4 as follows:

*'GWR Park has always been an important amenity for residents of the railway village and wider urban population of Swindon. It is the largest green public space in the Conservation Area and is a destination for a wide range of people including families, young people, dog walkers and joggers. The park has evolved from an open field used for cricket matches to the more planned space it is today. However, it has also lost many of its historic features, such as its ornamental planting and bandstand. There are relatively few facilities within the park; the public conveniences are closed and no refreshment offering. There are children's play facilities. Furthermore, parts of the park are suffering from erosion and waterlogging and there are concerns about anti-social behaviour, particularly at night.'*

*The park has the potential to play a more central role in raising awareness and increasing both residents and visitor's enjoyment of Swindon's railway legacy. This could be through new interpretative signage and reinstating or reinterpreting some of the lost historic features, such as formal planting or a new pavilion. A café or refreshment kiosk and new public conveniences would improve the experience of those using the park and encourage new users, whilst also bringing in revenue. Building on the reinstatement of the Children's Fête, there is also the opportunity to host external events (such as food/music festivals, fireworks etc.) within the park, capitalising on its central location*



*and proximity to public transport and car parks. Should this be considered, it will need to be developed in tandem with improving wayfinding and pedestrian connectivity*

*The CMP could also consider the maintenance and accessibility issues facing the park, including the potential for new and improved entrances and strategies for reducing anti-social behaviour. It would be beneficial for the TA Centre and the garages of the railway village to be included to ensure a holistic approach to improving this part of the Conservation Area.'*

- 3.27 The resulting recommendations for Theme 4 GWR Park in the short – medium term are to commission a CMP for the park; improve the amenities within the park (public conveniences and refreshment offer); look for opportunities to host external events in the park and in the long term, consider the reinstatement or reinterpretation of lost historic features.

## Local planning context

- 3.28 Swindon Borough Local Plan 2026 Swindon: Planning for our Future (Adopted 26th March 2015) identifies several policies that apply to and protect the park including:

### *Conservation Areas EN10*

- 3.29 *The Local Plan states that the 'Historic Environment Topic Paper provides the baseline on the issues, challenges and opportunities facing the Borough's cultural heritage, its historical landscape, townscape, local distinctiveness and heritage assets... In particular it **highlights the opportunity for the heritage led regeneration of the GWR railway area and the role of the***

***historic environment in support of the Plan's place making ambitions, ensuring the past informs and inspires future local distinctive development.'***

- 3.30 Of relevance in the context of this CMP are the following statements of intent that the Council will:
- Encourage heritage led regeneration, particularly within the historic railway area, and support the conservation of heritage assets to strengthen the Borough's distinctive identity and attractiveness;
  - Work with the Local Highways Authority and infrastructure providers to ensure historic streets, townscapes and the public realm will be designed to conserve and enhance the historic environment having particular regard to the Borough's 28 Conservation Areas Appraisals and related management proposals;
  - Undertake a rapid survey of grade II listed buildings and other local heritage assets to determine their condition and provide an opportunity to improve monitoring, management and conservation initiatives;
  - Seek to complete an updated 'Local List' of significant local heritage assets; and
  - Support the maintenance of a publicly accessible Historic Environment Record to manage the identification and conservation of heritage assets.

### *Central Area Action Plan SD2*

- 3.31 The Borough Council adopted the Swindon Central Area Action





Plan (2009), which provides the planning framework to facilitate the delivery of the regeneration of Central Swindon. Policy SD2 is the Sustainable Development Strategy that supports the Action Plan.

### *Open Space EN3*

- 3.32 Policy EN3 provides protection to GWR Park as a public open space asset. The Local Plan makes reference to the Swindon Borough Open Space Audit and Assessment Report (2004) and a review/update of that study in 2014.
- 3.33 The March 2014 Open Space Audit and Assessment Update Part B: Ward Profiles, March 2014 suggests that GWR Park (named Faringdon Road Park in the study) and separately its play area (classified as a LEAP) are above standard in the quality assessment. It states that *'Faringdon Park is a key and historic feature of this area and contributes significantly to the character of the area.'*
- 3.34 The study reports the following potential opportunities:

#### **Generation Recreation**

- Promote biodiversity opportunities;
- Improve access for all;
- Improvements to enhance the attractiveness of spaces; consider the layout and design of potential development to ensure greater accessibility to open spaces;
- Encourage the use of key open spaces for community events to encourage community cohesion and participation; and
- To support green links within the existing strategic green network

#### **Playspace**

- Improve access for all; and
- Review playspace opportunities to reflect community needs; ensuring flexibility and ease of maintenance.

#### **Outdoor sports facilities**

- Promote and improve open spaces to encourage physical activity.

#### **Allotments**

- Support opportunities to improve connectivity; and
- Promote and improve to encourage physical activity.

#### **Trees**

- 3.35 All trees over 100mm diameter within the Park were subject to a ground level, condition and safety inspection in March 2021 by a qualified and experienced arboriculturalist (Tree Maintenance Ltd) as part of this Plan. All trees were inspected and recorded as either individual trees or as small groups. The full tree survey report, survey schedule and tree location plan is provided at Appendix 4.
- 3.36 The tree stock consists of a broad mix of native and introduced exotic species and has a balanced mix of age classes including young, middle aged and mature specimens. Overall, the tree stock is in fair condition having been reasonably maintained over recent years but has the capacity to improve considerably with structured future management including the introduction of new planting to vary the age range of the tree stock.



- 3.37 157 individual trees and eight groups of trees were inspected. There were no trees in such poor condition and which require immediate attention because they pose a significant risk to users of the park. Tree works required within three and six – twelve months time frames have been identified.

## Ecology

- 3.38 An ecological assessment was completed in April 2021 to provide a summary of wildlife interest of the site and any potential constraints and opportunities, particularly in line with current wildlife legislation, to inform this Plan.
- 3.39 A desk study was undertaken using data from MAGIC as well as biological records from the Wiltshire and Swindon Biological Records Centre to screen for statutory and non- statutory sites within or near to the site and to check for historical records of notable and protected species and habitats. Fieldwork included a habitat survey with the main habitats described and mapped. A bat roost survey was also undertaken to establish the potential for roosting bats in built features and trees within the park.
- 3.40 Overall, the nature conservation value of the park was considered limited, primarily comprising the trees and shrubs offering habitat for breeding birds and bats. Nonetheless, as an area of accessible green space within an urban area, the park does offer local value for wildlife as well as the opportunity for communities to enjoy a relatively natural area. Suggestions for enhancements for wildlife include areas of longer grass to boost invertebrate populations, and, if practicable, a water feature.

- 3.41 The full ecological survey report is provided in Appendix 5.

## Public Consultation

- 3.42 A public engagement survey was available online for completion between Monday 10th May 2021 and Friday 28th May 2021. Publicity was achieved via a variety of social media accounts, a local flyer drop and display boards in the park and in the windows of local shops. The survey was completed by 403 local residents and park users, a summary analysis of the online questionnaire is included in Appendix 6.
- 3.43 A further survey to gather feedback on the draft Conservation Management Plan was available online for completion between Wednesday 14th July and Friday 30th July 2021. This survey was publicised with information boards in the park and posters in local venues. Socially distanced in-person surveys were also conducted with park users on a few occasions during the survey period and paper copies were made available on request. 134 people completed the survey and a summary of their responses is included in Appendix 6.





## 4. Character and condition of the park

- 4.1 A series of character areas has been identified for ease of analysis and description of the park (see Figure 4.1). A character area is a geographically discrete area that shares a number of distinct features or characteristics, enabling it to be classified as an entity with an identifiable character when compared to surrounding areas.
- 4.2 The main factors that have been used to define these character areas include vegetation, built fabric and historic associations. There are clear similarities between some of the character areas at GWR Park, but the divisions also provide a useful framework in setting out an approach to future management in the final chapter of this Plan.
- 4.3 For each character area there is a summary of the historic development, a list of built features, a summary of trees, ecology and planting, followed by a concluding analysis of the area today. A detailed description of each built feature is included at Appendix 7.

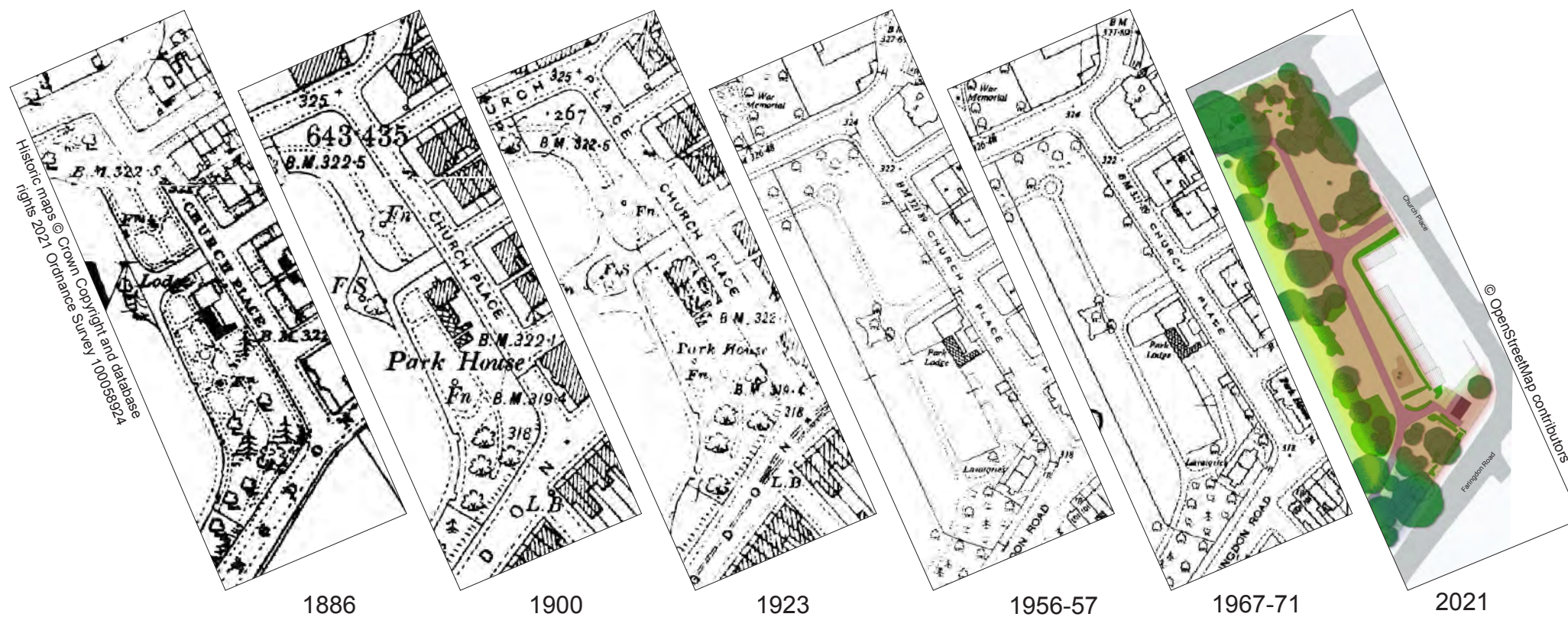


Figure 4.1: Character areas of the park



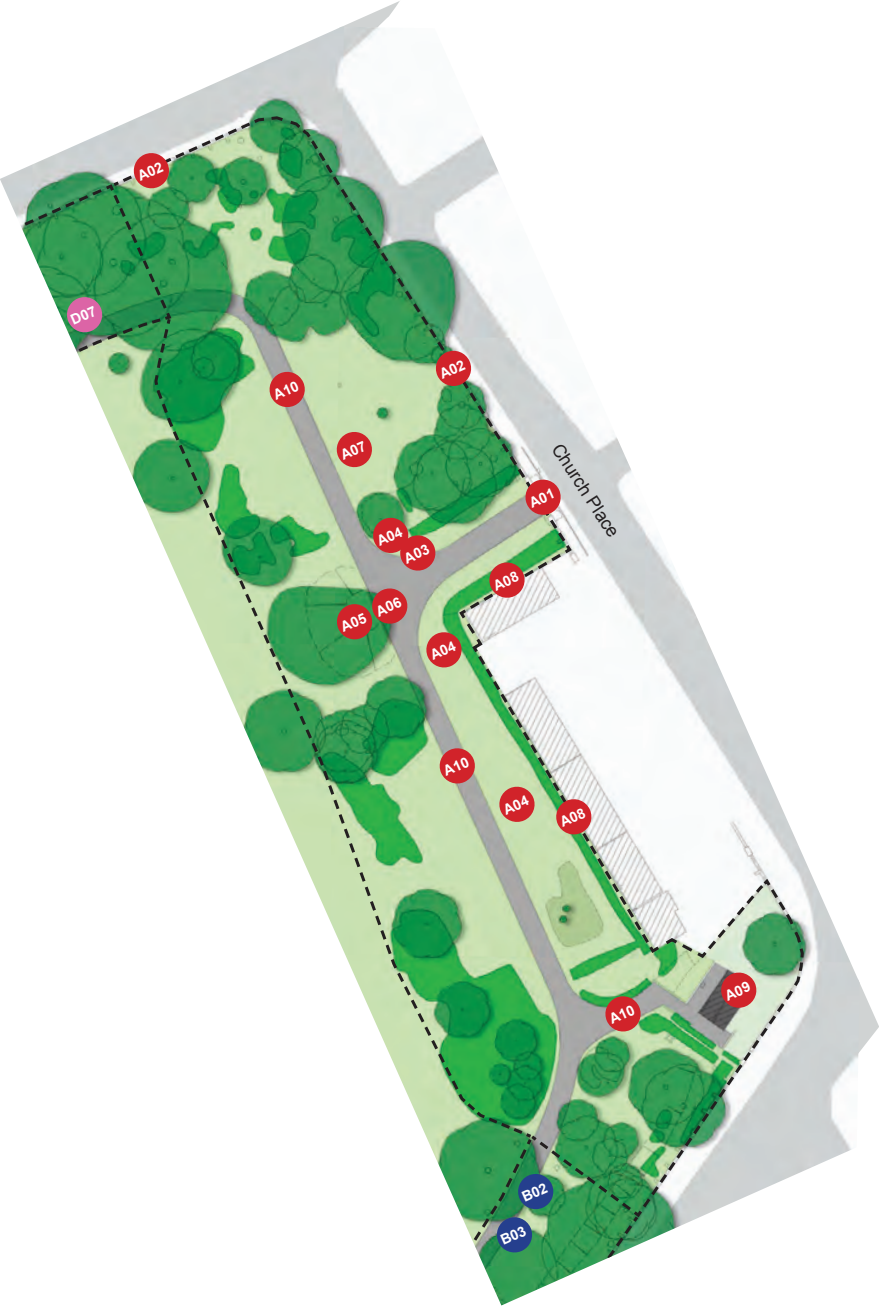
## A. Church Place/Exeter St. Boundary

### Historic Development





# Built Features



Map reference	Name
A01	Church Place / Exeter St Gates (including bollards)
A02	Boundary railings and wall
A03	Brick plinth with sign
A04	Boulders
A05	Raised area to the west of Church Place gates
A06	Noticeboard
A07	Bins
A08	Boundary between garages and the park
A09	Public lavatories and associated fencing
A10	Footpath



### *Trees, ecology and planting*

- 4.6 There is a diverse mix of trees in this area including ash (some mature), beech, birch, cherry (one mature), crab apple, cypress, dogwood, a mature hazel, horse chestnut, holly, oak (some mature), an olive tree (planted to commemorate Veterans' Day 27th June 2008), maple (one mature), maidenhair tree, thorn, poplar, mature and early mature sycamore, western red cedar and a mature weeping willow.
- 4.7 A number of the trees have high, moderate and low bat roost potential.
- 4.8 The main entrance from Church Place is lined either side by Cypress hedges that have recently been rigorously cut back; the hedge becomes yew (also recently heavily pruned) where it defines the boundary between the park and the garages. Additional sections of hedge line paths to the south of the area including short sections of cypress and box.
- 4.9 The area contains several shrub beds (e.g. holly, viburnum, laurel and a clump of bamboo amongst others) that have been pruned to form horizontal tops and heavy weed growth was evident at the time of survey in May 2021. The shrub bed edges were not cut, leaving an untidy band of long grass to the perimeter.
- 4.10 A single mixed shrub/herbaceous bed contains a variety of plants including lavender, lady's mantle, spurge, columbine and peony. Weeds were also present in this bed at the time of survey.
- 4.11 To the north of the area the grassland is managed as meadow with cow parsley and hybrid bluebells appearing in the longer grass which enhances the character of the area. A pile of stones

to the south of the area near the lavatory building may provide a suitable habitat for reptile species.

### *Current character and condition*

- 4.12 The entrance opposite Exeter Street retains an impressive presence as the main entrance to the park with its imposing brick piers and gates. However, condition of site furniture such as notice boards, the current planting, loss of ground to modern intrusive garages and standards of maintenance result in a space that barely reflects its historic character and importance.
- 4.13 The tall wall along Church Place is no longer visible from the park, yet from outside the park provides a tantalising hint at an area that was once afforded a greater level of protection – for the lodge, glasshouses and ornamental gardens.
- 4.14 This historic boundary wall and the 20th century replacement railings are in a poor condition.
- 4.15 The park's historic and visual relationship with the Grade II listed Park House (1876 – 1877), which was built at the same time as the park was being transformed into a civic park, is completely denuded by the presence of the modern garages.





### *Significances*

- The historic main entrance to the park.
- Historic boundary.
- Historic path.
- The former site of the ornamental gardens.
- Mature trees perpetuating the historic character of the boundary planting.
- A number of the trees have bat roost potential.

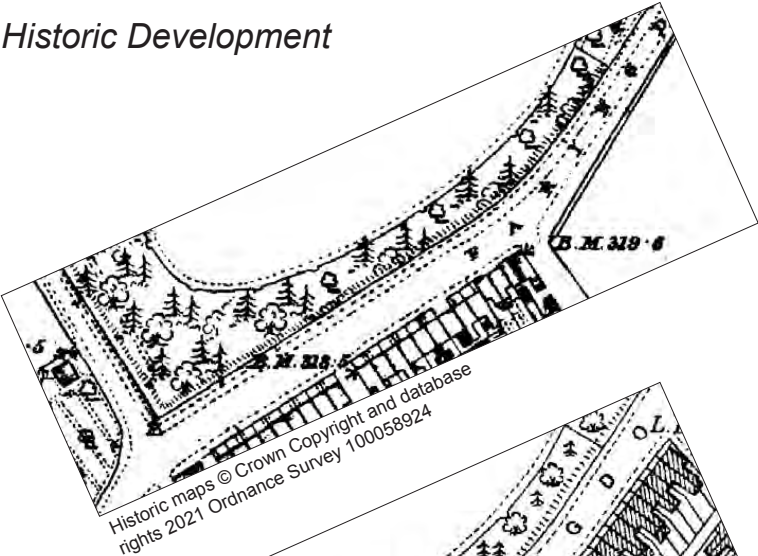
### *Management issues*

- Loss of a highly significant area of the park to modern, intrusive development (the garages) and the lack of screening provided by the current hedge boundary, noting that this was cut to reduce hiding spaces for anti-social behaviour.
- Condition of built fabric (e.g. boundaries and gates) and backlog of repair works required.
- Incremental additions to the park leading to a fragmented character.
- Unclear purpose of the raised area and retaining wall west of the main entrance.
- Poor condition site furniture and lack of consistent design/ materials (e.g. bins).
- The layout and maintenance of shrub and herbaceous planting detracts from the historic character of the park.
- Graffiti on built fabric.
- The unused public lavatories that give the impression of neglect.

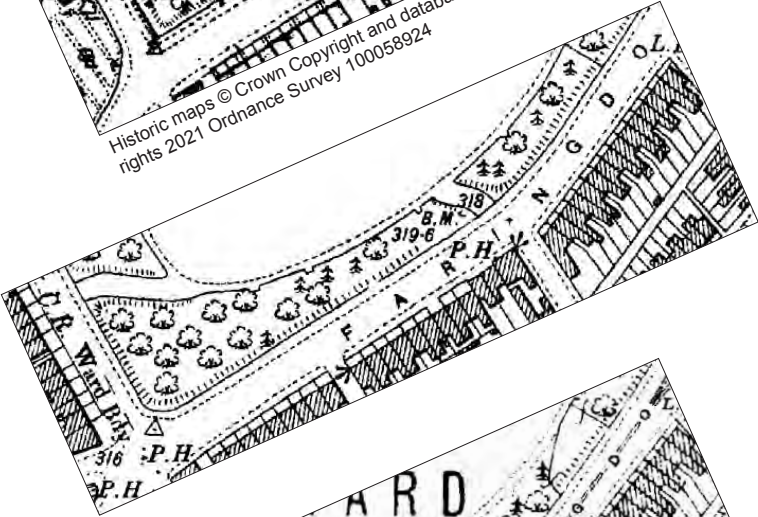


# B. Faringdon Road Boundary

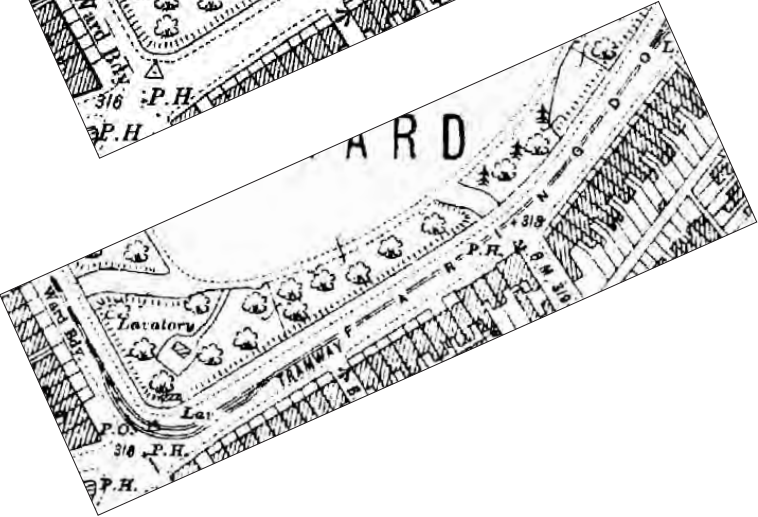
## Historic Development



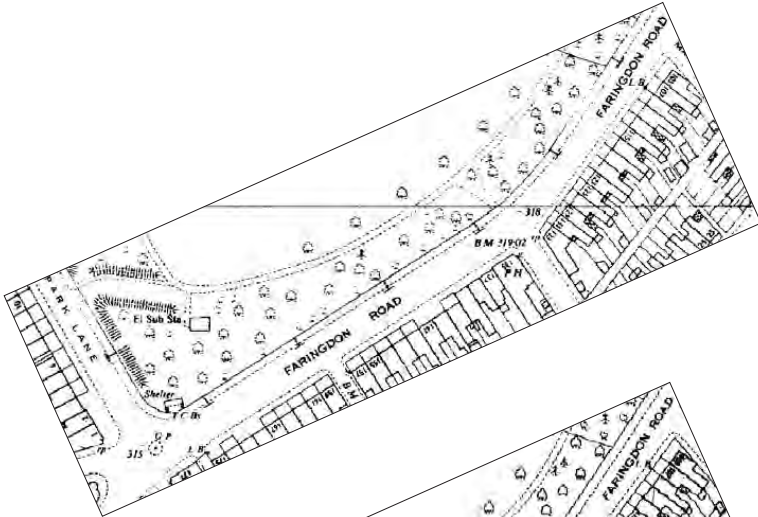
1886



1900



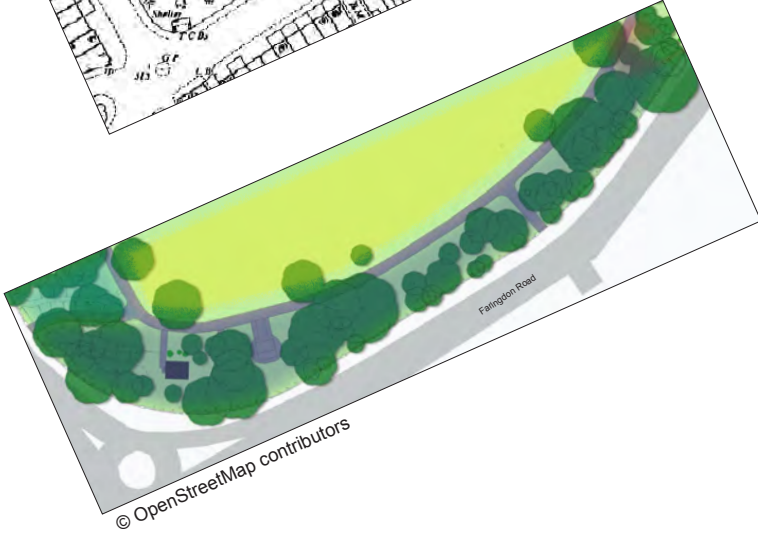
1923



1956-57



1967-71



2021





Map reference	Name
B01	Boundary railings and wall
B02	Bins
B03	Benches
B04	Faringdon Road gate
B05	Brick plinths with signs (two items)
B06	Footpath
B07	International Mother Language Day Monument
B08	Electricity sub-station



### *Trees, ecology and planting*

- 4.18 The mix of trees in this area includes mature ash, a mature Austrian pine, beech, birch, elm, groups of hawthorn, mature hawthorn, horse chestnut, lime, maple (one mature), oak (some mature), poplar, sycamore and a walnut.
- 4.19 A number of the trees have high, moderate and low bat roost potential.
- 4.20 The grassland is managed as meadow with cow parsley and buttercups appearing in the longer grass. Daffodils and crocuses provide seasonal colour in this area. There are occasional shrubs set in the long grass.

### *Current character and condition*

- 4.21 The area has a cohesive character created by mature trees that perpetuate the historic design intention of a planted boundary. The decision to manage the grass as meadow enhances the character of the area and provides additional ecological values.
- 4.22 There are impressive views to the north towards St Mark's Church and the water tower.
- 4.23 The International Mother Language Day monument was installed in 2019 by the Bangladesh Association of Swindon. The monument is not currently very well integrated with its immediate surroundings.
- 4.24 A 1950s brick built electricity sub-station is located at the western end of the area and is covered in graffiti.

### *Significances*

- Historic boundary.
- Historic path.
- C.1900 historic Faringdon Road entrance.
- Mature trees perpetuating the historic character of the boundary planting.
- A number of the trees have bat roost potential.
- Views from the path to the north towards St. Mark's Church and the water tower.

### *Management issues*

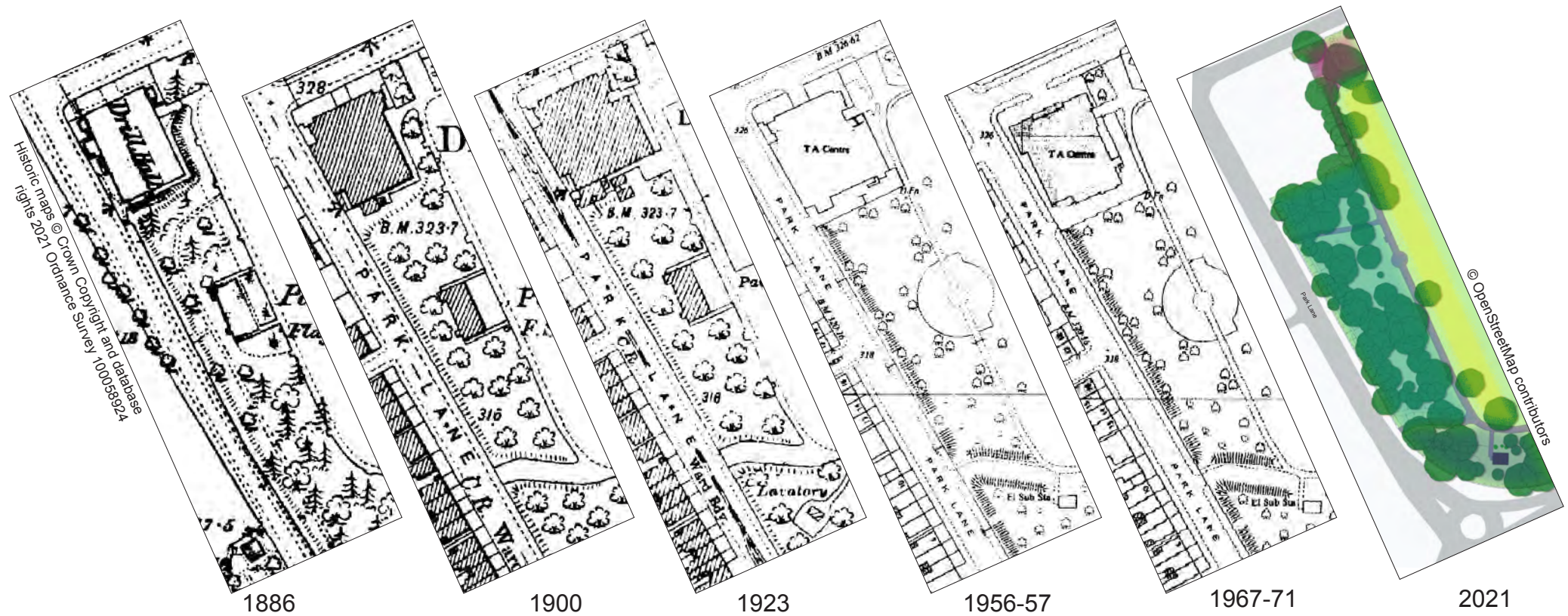
- Poor condition site furniture and lack of consistent design/ materials (e.g. bins).
- Graffiti on built fabric.
- Opportunity to enhance the setting of the International Mother Language Day monument.

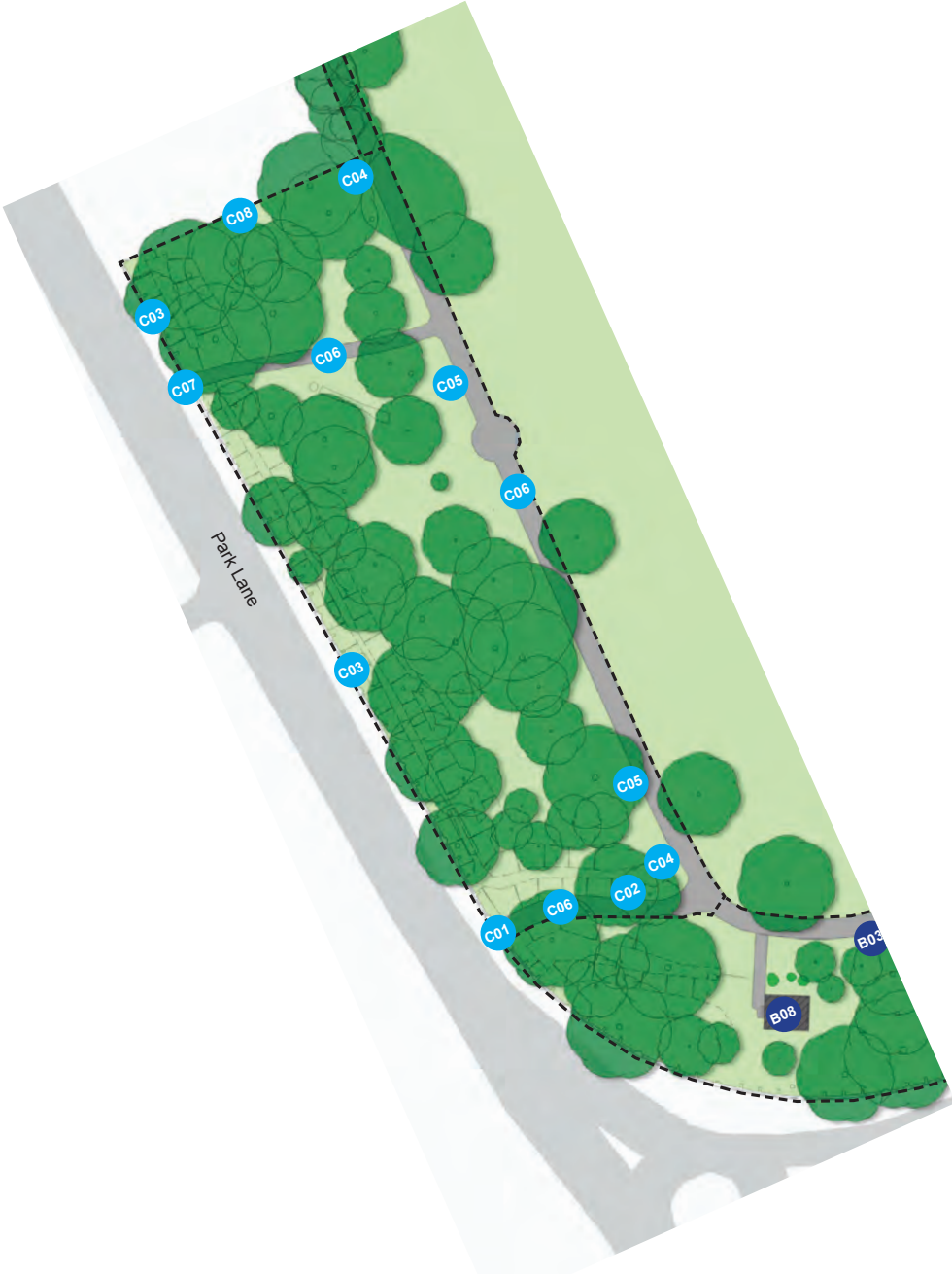




## C. Park Lane Boundary

### *Historic Development*





Map reference	Name
C01	Park Lane gate south
C02	Brick plinth with sign
C03	Boundary railings and wall
C04	Bins
C05	Benches
C06	Footpath
C07	Park Lane gate north
C08	Chain link fence





### *Trees, ecology and planting*

- 4.27 This area contains a mix of mature ash, beech, hawthorn (one mature), mature horse chestnut, lime (some mature), mature maple, mature oak, London plane, sycamore.
- 4.28 A number of the trees have high and moderate bat roost potential. A felled tree has been retained in this area providing deadwood habitat.
- 4.29 The grassland is managed as meadow with cow parsley appearing in the longer grass. Daffodils provide seasonal colour in this area.

### *Current character and condition*

- 4.30 The mature trees perpetuate the historic design intention of a planted boundary and the decision to manage the grass as meadow enhances the character of the area and provides additional ecological values.
- 4.31 A number of elements of the built fabric detract from the character of this area including the modern chain link fence boundary to the Army Reserve Centre, the circular tarmac area on the path and the untidy finish to the modern gate threshold. Both of the entrances to the park in this area do not contain a gate.
- 4.32 There are two desire lines cutting through this area that link the main path with each of the two entrances.
- 4.33 There are attractive views to the east across the park towards the Railway Village from the main circuit path.

### *Significances*

- Historic boundary.
- Historic paths.
- C.1900 historic Park Lane entrance.
- Mature trees perpetuating the historic character of the boundary planting.
- A number of the trees have bat roost potential.
- Views from the paths to the east towards the Railway Village.
- Site of the former pavilion.

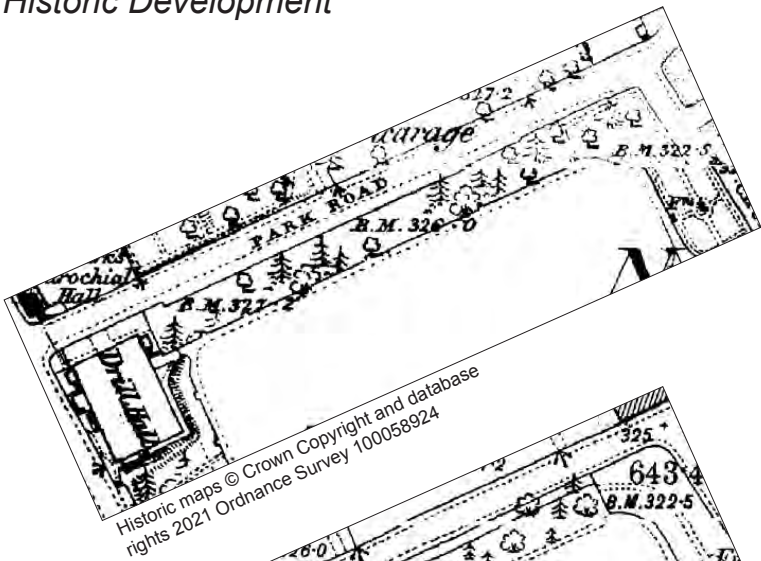
### *Management issues*

- Poor condition site furniture and lack of consistent design/materials (e.g. bins).
- Elements of built fabric that detract from the character of the area.
- The two desire lines that cut across the area.
- The entrances do not contain gates.

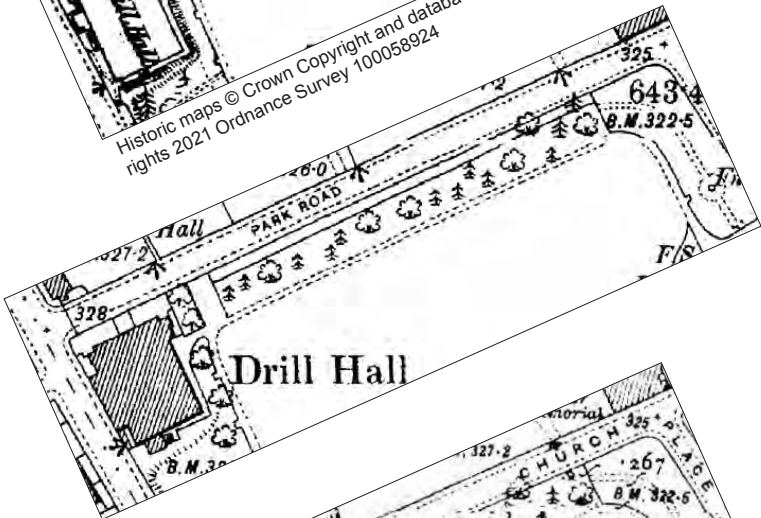


D. Church Place Boundary

Historic Development



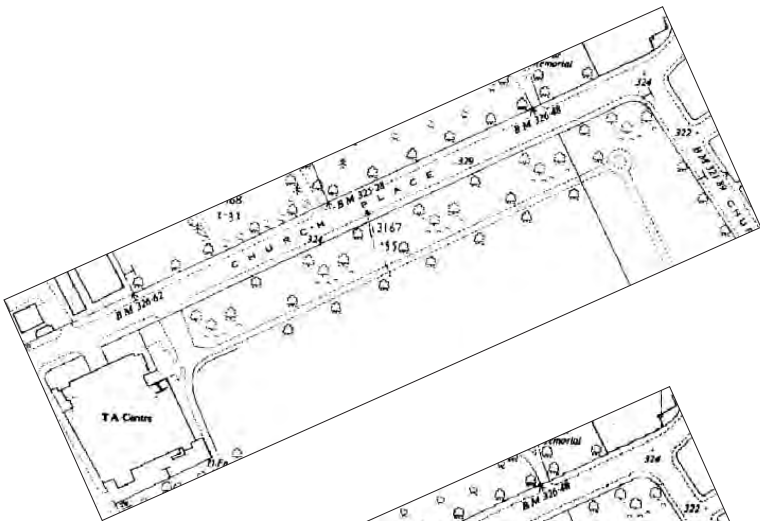
1886



1900



1923



1956-57

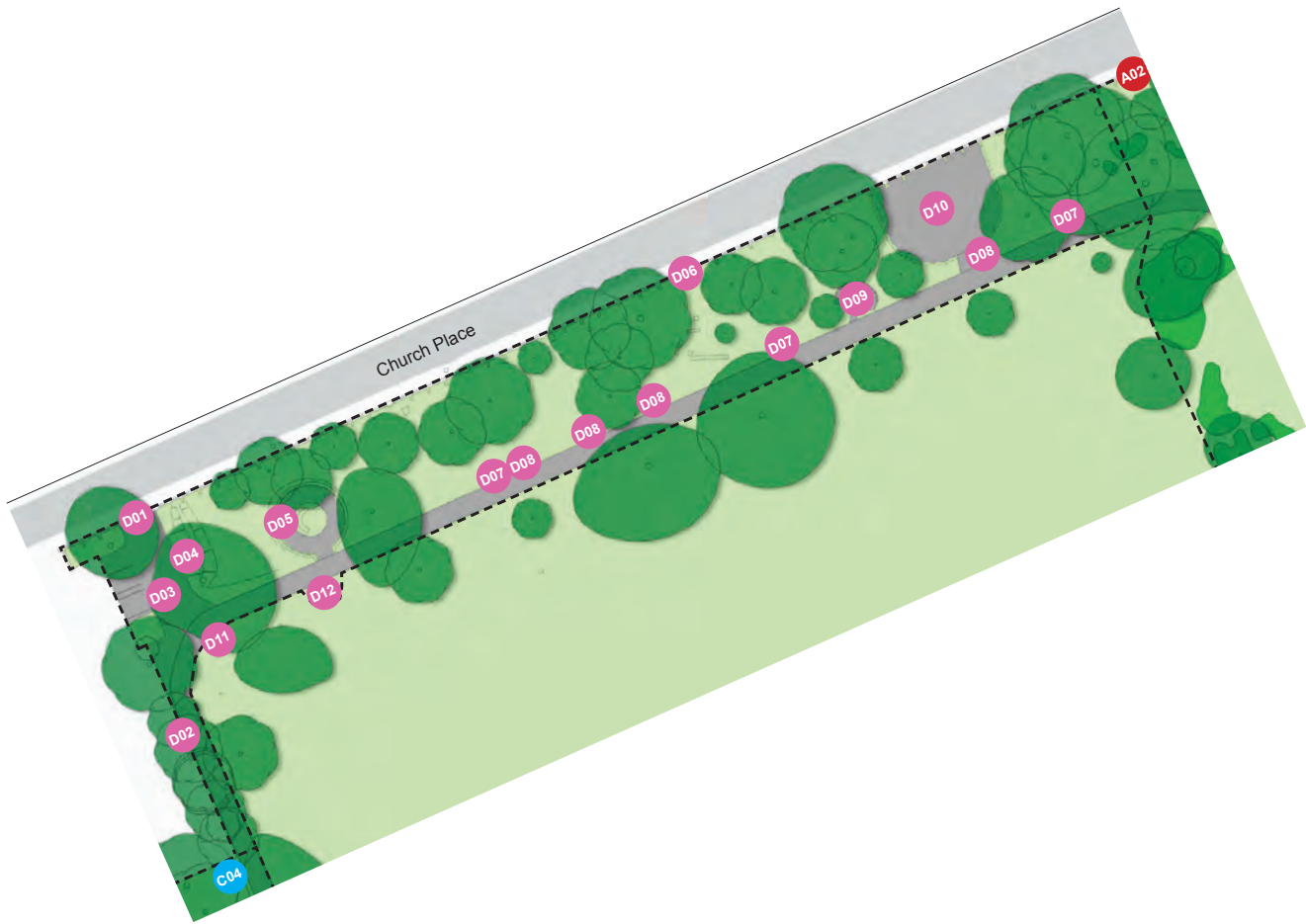


1967-71



2021





Map reference	Name
D01	Church Place entrance
D02	Chain link fence
D03	Car park
D04	Brick plinth with sign
D05	War memorial (including information board)
D06	Boundary railings and wall
D07	Benches
D08	Bins
D09	Human sundial
D10	Playground
D11	Noticeboard
D12	Boulder



### *Trees, ecology and planting*

- 4.36 This area contains a mix of a mature ash, beech, elm, mature horse chestnut and one newly planted horse chestnut, maple, London plane, lime, sycamore (some mature) and cherry.
- 4.37 A number of the trees have high bat roost potential.
- 4.38 The grassland is managed as meadow with cow parsley appearing in the longer grass.

### *Current character and condition*

- 4.39 Consistent with the other boundary areas, the Church Place Boundary has a cohesive character created by mature trees that perpetuate the historic design intention of a planted boundary. The decision to manage the grass as meadow enhances the character of the area and provides additional ecological values.
- 4.40 The Church Place entrance does not contain a gate and graffiti on the brick piers detract from its historic character. The use of this entrance by vehicles accessing the Army Reserve Centre car park is unsafe due to the conflict between vehicular and pedestrian access in an area that is designated as a public open space.
- 4.41 There is a designated parking area and ad-hoc parking over a rough and broken surface with various bollard types, presenting a visually incoherent entrance to park. Some parking is occurring very close to existing trees and within root protection zones causing compaction and affecting the health of the trees. The use of an area of the park for car parking detracts from the character of the park and suggests a lack of care and consideration.
- 4.42 A war memorial was recently commissioned by South Swindon

Parish Council to mark the centenary of the end of World War I and lies to the west of the area. Other new facilities and features in this area include a playground and a human sundial.

- 4.43 There are longer range views to the south from the footpath towards Radnor Street Cemetery.
- 4.44 The poor condition of site furniture including the noticeboard, benches and bins detracts from the character of this area.
- 4.45 The modern chain link fence and a double layer of fencing forming the boundary to the Army Reserve Centre is of a poor quality.

### *Significances*

- C. 1900 historic Church Place entrance.
- Historic boundary.
- Historic path.
- Mature trees perpetuating the historic character of the boundary planting.
- Views towards Radnor Street Cemetery.
- A number of the trees have bat roost potential.



### *Management issues*

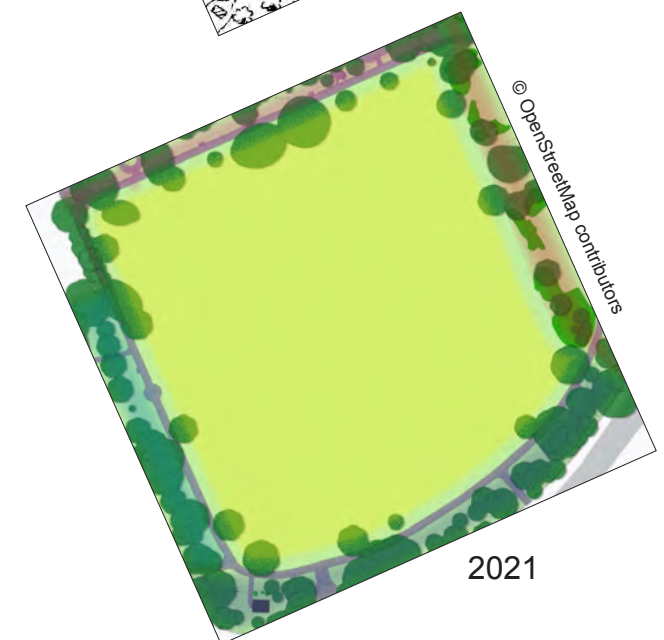
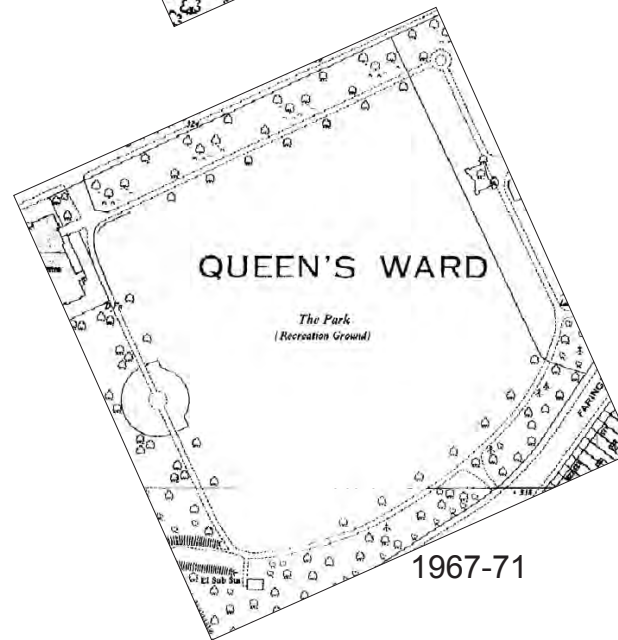
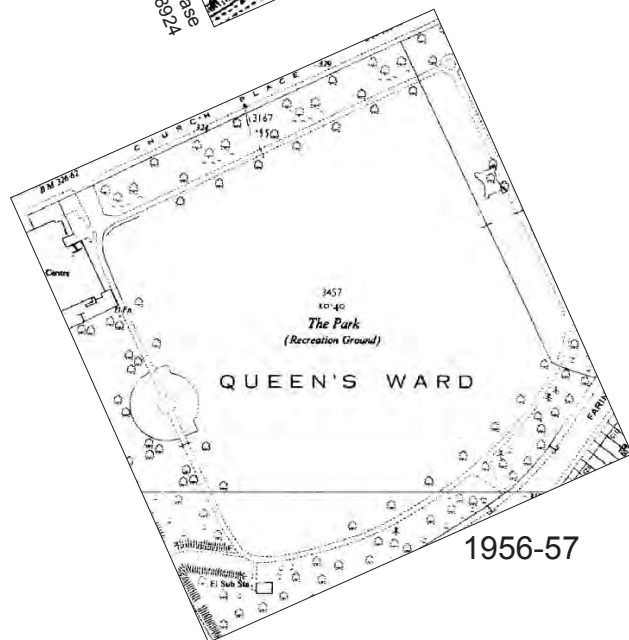
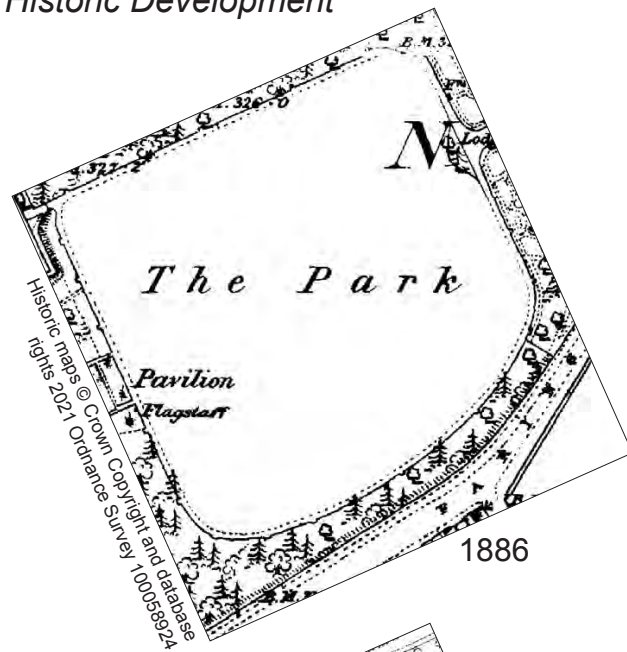
- Conflict between vehicular and pedestrian access at the park entrance.
- Visual impact of car parking in a public open space.
- Poor condition site furniture and lack of consistent design/ materials (e.g. bins).
- Graffiti on brick piers.
- Poor quality of modern fencing forming the boundary to the Army Reserve Centre.





## E. The Park Lawn

### Historic Development



### *Built Features*

4.48 There are no built features in this character area.

### *Trees, ecology and planting*

4.49 This area contains ash, birch, cherry, holly, horse chestnut, characterful Indian bean tree, maple (some mature), mature whitebeam and mature sycamore.

4.50 The area is dominated by regularly mown grassland that forms the body of the park. A small area of bulbs in the grass is located to the south of the area, adjacent to the Faringdon Road Boundary character area.

### *Current character and condition*

4.51 The area is characterised by the wide open grassland which provides space for informal recreation and larger gatherings associated with community events.

4.52 There are two desire lines apparent through this area which links the Church Place entrance with both the Faringdon Road and Exeter Street entrances.

### *Significances*

- Historic open space which was once a cricket ground and that has a long tradition of providing a venue for community events.
- Trees that enhance the character of the park.
- Views through the area.

### *Management issues*

- Desire lines through the area.
- Need to maintain open space for emergency helicopter landings.



## 5. Significance of GWR Park

- 5.1 This chapter explains why the GWR Park is important and to whom
- 5.2 A number of themes have emerged from the analysis of the history of the park (Chapter 2) including:
- The association of the park with the railway and the Railway Village. The need for a park or, in its earliest form, a cricket ground, demonstrates a recognition of the benefit of open space provision as a requirement of a new settlement, a recognition that found fuller expression in other 'industrial' villages and, later, in the Garden City and New Towns movements.
  - The extraordinary level of community engagement: while, exceptionally, crowds of up to 40,000 attended the famous Children's Fête, many thousands also turned out for other, less well-publicised events held in the park throughout the year.
  - Community fund-raising. A distinct aspect of the level of community engagement was the existence of a Park Improvement Committee, which ensured that a proportion of the money raised from events was reinvested into the park.
  - The sheer range of events held in the park. These included scout jamborees, temperance marches, cycle races, motorcycle races, church garden parties, horticultural exhibitions, hospital fêtes, cricket matches, rugby matches, athletics meetings, fire brigade displays and concerts.
  - The loss, in the second half of the 20th century, of all the built features, including the pavilion, the lodge and glasshouses,

the bandstand, fountains, garden ornaments and the original railings. The historical review suggests that the loss began with the (assumed) removal of the railings during the Second World War, with both the bandstand and pavilion gone by 1956. The lodge clung on but is believed to have been demolished in the 1960s; the manicured formal gardens near the lodge probably disappeared before the lodge itself.

- Survival of the basic structure of the park. Apart from the loss of land early on (c.1871) to facilitate the construction of the Drill Hall, the fundamental structure of the park, comprising an enclosing wall and railings, a boundary belt of trees, a perimeter path forming a circuit of the entire park and an open space in the middle, initially functioning as a cricket field but which was also ideally suited to events, has remained unchanged. The biggest exception to this, as noted above, is the loss of historic structures and formal gardens.

- 5.3 Concerned about the diverse range of criteria that practitioners were calling upon in their attempts to define the significance of heritage (in whatever form that heritage takes), in 2008 Historic England produced guidance in the form of *Conservation Principles*, which remains the industry standard.

- 5.4 *Conservation Principles* is an attempt to add rigour and consistency to assessments of significance by encouraging practitioners to have regard to four types of value. These values, when aggregated, were anticipated to capture all of the principal qualities of a place that might have a bearing on its significance. The values are: evidential value; historical value; aesthetic value; and communal value.





- 5.5 GWR Park will now be examined with reference to each of these values. At the conclusion of this exercise, an attempt will be made to refine what has been learnt to arrive at a Statement of Significance.

### *Evidential Value*

Definition: *Evidential value derives from the potential of a place to yield evidence of past human activity.*

- 5.6 Generally, evidential value is taken to mean the physical remains of past human activity. While this is typically expressed in the archaeology and buildings of a place, it may also be expressed in *'geology, landforms, species and habitats' in their role in providing us with evidence of the past*<sup>71</sup>.
- 5.7 The evidential value of the park is to be found in the plinth wall of the boundary, in the wrought iron park gates on the east side of the park and in a section of railings in the north-east corner, although these are thought to be mid-20th century replacements. The circuit path survives as a feature but it has been resurfaced and the historic embayments for park benches have largely been lost. We could find no visual evidence of fabric from lost park buildings, such as footings for the cricket pavilion, bandstand and lodge, although no below-ground investigation was undertaken as part of this study. However, the topographical survey found surface anomalies along the north side of the park that may represent the location of features dating from the Second World War. Mature trees are also evidence of the past, although the majority of those that were surveyed are no more than about 80

years old, and may therefore be replanting dating from either just before or just after the Second World War. However, the majority of trees in the park date from the second half of the 20th century.

### *Historical Value*

Definition: *Historical value derives from the way in which past people, events and aspects of life can be connected through a place to the present. It tends to be illustrative or associative.*

- 5.8 Of great historical significance is the park's associative relationship with the Railway Village. Model villages were by no means unknown before the 19th century but the construction of new villages for factory workers was something new. It had its origins in the Industrial Revolution when large-scale manufacturing was frequently established on a greenfield site without either a ready supply of labour or, crucially, cheap accommodation in which to house that labour. The majority of the better-known industrial villages were built after the Railway Village. For example, Saltaire, near Bradford, was established in 1851; the Hartley's jam company began construction of a model village at Aintree in 1888; and Port Sunlight, on the Wirral, was begun in 1899. The model village movement continued into the new century with Bournville, Birmingham, in 1900 and New Earswick, York, founded by the rival Rowntree company in 1902. Historians make a direct link between these model villages and the later Garden City and New Towns movements. The Railway Village, the first phase of which had been built by 1842, was therefore a particularly early example of this kind of model village.
- 5.9 The park is also an early recognition and expression of the need

<sup>71</sup> *Conservation Principles, paragraph 37*



for fresh air and exercise in an industrial village. Public open space was not always included as part of the design of such planned settlements and the fact that the Great Western Railway decided to purchase land for this purpose soon after the first phase of the Railway Village had been completed, is of historic interest.

- 5.10 As Hazel Conway (1996) has shown, in the design of the first public parks, sports provision was often omitted and therefore had to be retro-fitted. By contrast, for the first few decades of its existence, GWR Park functioned as, and was known by the name, The Cricket Field. It was only c.1871 that a concerted effort was made to emulate other public parks by constructing an entrance lodge, grand pavilion and ornamental flower beds. In this, intriguingly, the park pursued the reverse course of most other contemporary public parks by putting sport first and only giving thought to ornamenting the park some decades later.
- 5.11 The wartime use of the park adds to its historic significance with trenches/shelter being shown on aerial photographs and the park being used as part of the government's Holidays at Home Programme.

### *Aesthetic Value*

Definition: Aesthetic value derives from the ways in which people draw sensory and intellectual stimulation from a place.

- 5.12 Historically the park's aesthetic value was far greater than it is today. A well-treed perimeter gave it the sense of an oasis, particularly when looking north towards the rectory and church, redolent of an English village rather than a busy industrial town.

The elegant wrought iron entrance gates and accompanying railings, the immaculate bedding out with its fountains and ornaments, the commanding pavilion, ornamental bandstand and slatted park benches were all individually striking, but collectively must have conveyed a strong sense of a well-designed, well-cared for place.

- 5.13 The aesthetic value of the park today is much reduced, with almost all of the historic structures having been lost. The newer structures do little to address this: the domestic garages on the site of the lodge and glasshouse are an eyesore; the late 20th century toilets are boarded up; and the electricity substation is covered in graffiti. The increasingly sparse tree cover means that the former sense of enclosure is much reduced.

### *Communal Value*

Definition: Communal value derives from the meanings of a place for the people who relate to it, or for whom it figures in their collective experience or memory.

- 5.14 The Railway Village was funded and constructed by the Great Western Railway. However, the community facilities which supported it were often established and maintained by community effort. The Mechanics' Institute was opened in the 1850s to provide opportunities for further education and housed the UK's first lending library. The Medical Fund, set up in 1871, offered health care in its own hospital. Although the land for the park was purchased by the Great Western Railway, responsibility for the management and embellishment of the park – particularly its transition from a cricket field to a public park – involved



public fund raising and the oversight of the Park Improvement Committee, an offshoot of the Mechanics' Institute.

- 5.15 The Children's Fête was without doubt the biggest communal gathering in the Swindon year but this enormous event was only the most well publicised of a plethora of community events, including scout jamborees, athletics matches, flower shows and, of course, cricket matches.
- 5.16 The park's role as a place of memory and meaning for the local community continues, for example in the memorial marking one hundred years since the end of the First World War, the monument to International Mother Tongue Day and bulb planting by the Rotary Club.
- 5.17 The great value that the community places on the park has been evident through the impressive 403 individual responses received in reaction to the online questionnaire set up as part of this Plan. Participants wrote passionately about why the park is important to them, with the park being described as a 'green sanctuary in the heart of Swindon' and a 'green oasis in an urban area.' The park provides a place for families to play, to walk the dog, to get fresh air, have a lunchtime walk and enjoy nature. It is notable that nearly 60% of responses stated that the park has become more important during the Covid 19 pandemic.

## Statement of Significance

- 5.18 GWR Park is not only significant as an example of the early provision of open space in a model village. It is also a very early example of the Public Parks Movement in early Victorian Britain.

Although the park was acquired by the Great Western Railway for its workers, it has always been open to all.

- 5.19 The park came into being just over a decade after a Select Committee on Public Walks presented its 1833 report to Parliament, arguing that there was a great need for public parks which, it was thought, would provide fresh air, a place to exercise and an alternative to the tavern. There was an instinct that parks could contribute to the moral improvement of the population. Public parks would provide an opportunity for different classes to mix, the assumption being that the poorer classes would be 'civilised' by exposure to their betters. There was, too, a belief that by providing attractive open spaces, property would command higher returns, and so self-interest and moral improvement went hand-in-hand.
- 5.20 Possibly the first truly public park was Moor Park in Preston in 1833 and this was soon followed by, among others, Derby Arboretum in 1840, Prince's Park, Liverpool, 1842, Victoria Park (London) in 1845, three public parks in Manchester in 1846 and Birkenhead Park in 1847. As the land for the GWR Park was purchased in 1844, it must therefore be numbered among the earliest of these pioneering parks. A particularly interesting facet of the GWR Park is that active sport (cricket) was at the heart of the park from the very beginning unlike, say, Paxton's Birkenhead Park, which failed to identify any areas for sports, which therefore had to be incorporated subsequently in an ad hoc manner. In its provision for sport, consequently, the GWR Park was ahead of its time.
- 5.21 In design terms, the emerging issue of how to accommodate





the 'passive' amenities the public increasingly wanted, such as bedding out, fountains and paths to stroll along, alongside 'active' recreation in the form of the cricket field, was skilfully solved (as it was to be by Joshua Major in the Manchester and Salford parks), by providing an open space in the centre and positioning the other activities and features around the periphery. Interestingly, this was achieved in the reverse order to most other early Victorian parks, where the 'passive' amenities came first.

- 5.22 GWR Park is therefore an exceptionally early example of a public park with an emphasis on 'active' recreation. Its location in one of the first ever industrial model villages underlines its unique status within both the Public Parks Movement and the history of planned settlements in Britain.
- 5.23 Finally, the park was an exceptional community asset. Its open space design made it ideally suited to hosting a great variety of gatherings and, as we have seen, its Children's Fête became one of the biggest annual events in the region, possibly in the country.
- 5.24 The park continues to be a well-loved and important community open space today.



## 6. Managing GWR Park in the future

- 6.1 This chapter sets out the overall conservation strategy or vision to guide the management of the park. The vision draws directly on the understanding of significance set out in Chapter 5 and upon the results of the online questionnaire. The vision is supported by a series of principles which address the full range of significances found at GWR Park. Finally, a series of management actions have been identified and are arranged by character area as defined in Chapter 4. Figure 6.1 provides a summary of the main management actions.

### Vision

The overall vision is to conserve, enhance and restore the most important aspects of GWR Park's historic and contemporary significance.

The park will be managed to reflect its importance as an exceptionally early example of a public park, set within *'an almost complete planned railway settlement of the 1840s and early 1850s, unrivalled in its state of preservation by Crewe, Wolverton and Derby, England's other surviving railway company settlements.'*<sup>72</sup>

The eastern side of the park will be transformed to reflect its historic importance and character and the park will be an inclusive space that serves the local community with rejuvenated facilities and a programme of engaging events and activities.

<sup>72</sup> John Cattell & Keith Falconer, *Swindon: the Legacy of a Railway Town* (Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England, 1995) as quoted in Purcell (2020) *Swindon's Railway Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan*

## Delivering the vision

- 6.2 Given that much of the park's evidential value has been removed over time (e.g. the lodge, glasshouses, the ornamental horticulture and associated paths and railings, fountains, flag-poles and the pavilion) it is unlikely that a full restoration of the landscape would be appropriate. Such a full restoration is also likely to be prohibitively costly to implement and maintain.
- 6.3 The extent of change and the approach to delivering the vision will also be dependent on several factors including the amount of available funding, community feedback and the feasibility of returning former areas of park to its historic land use.
- 6.4 The significances outlined in this CMP should be referred to and inform any further proposals for change and there is a great opportunity at GWR to celebrate its rich history, whilst interpreting and reflecting that significance through high quality, contemporary design.
- 6.5 Equally, where there is sufficient information available it would also be possible to restore or recreate discrete features or elements of the landscape (e.g. the bandstand, railings and pathways, depending on the extent of land that might be returned to the park).
- 6.6 The emphasis should be on the highest quality design, management, and maintenance to reflect the historic and contemporary significance of the park and its location within Swindon's Railway Conservation Area.



## Management Actions to be delivered over the next 5-10 years

- 1 Explore opportunities to restore or reinterpret a bandstand for music events
- 2 Review and improve the planting and design throughout the eastern side of the park (next to the Railway Village) in a way that references the historic layout
- 3 Return all or part of the area occupied by modern intrusive garages to the park
- 4 Establish a park hub to include:
  - Reinstatement of toilet facilities
  - A catering offer such as a kiosk
  - A base for volunteer gardeners and wardens
  - Activities such as table tennis/chess/nature school
  - A low key busking area
- 5 Explore opportunities to establish a graffiti wall for local artists
- 6 Conserve and enhance the tree belts for the benefit of historic landscape character, nature conservation and screening
- 7 Stop vehicle access to the park to reduce risk to the public, conserve historic trees and improve presentation of the park



- 8 Complete restoration of the railings

### Park wide actions

- A Tell the GWR Park Story and its role in Swindon Railway Village through new signage and digital media
- B Improve safety and security by establishing a volunteer warden group, installation of CCTV/lighting and lockable gates at all entrances
- C Establish a programme of events to reflect community interest including craft fairs, festivals and the Children's Fête
- D Develop the use of the park for organised sport including football, children's sports days, tai chi, yoga and other outdoor exercise
- E Establish a cohesive approach to site furniture and replace all items in a poor condition

Figure 6.1: summary of main management actions for GWR Park





## Management principles

### *The designed landscape*

Conserve, restore and enhance the designed landscape of the park to reflect the spirit of the late 19th century park:

- Conserve the network of historic footpaths and explore opportunities to reinstate the seating bays.
- Conserve the historic boundary wall and complete the programme of railings restoration.
- Conserve and enhance the historic tree belt through management and targeted replanting.
- Establish a cohesive approach to site furniture to enhance standards of presentation and historic character (see historic bench design in figure 2.15). Consideration should also be given to reinstatement of the historic embayments and increasing the number of benches from the current 8 up to a maximum of 20 as shown in the 1886 OS map.
- Enhance the planting to the eastern side of the park to reflect the historic horticultural importance of the area.
- Explore opportunities to return historic features to the park (e.g. the fountain base that was removed to another Swindon park) and/or reinstate features that are known to have previously existed (e.g. flagstaff/bandstand).
- Interpret the GWR Park story using a series of methods including digital and static displays.

### *Community use, events and activities*

Maintain and expand the series of events and broaden the range of activities that take place in the park for the benefit of the community:

- Invite representatives of other local community organisations onto the GWR Park Working Group to expand community involvement and opportunities to engage with volunteers (e.g. Grassroots Gardeners).
- Develop the use of the park for local community use with consideration of event suggestions emerging from the consultation process including music events/a busking area, craft fairs and festivals that represent the whole community.
- Develop the use of the park for organised sport including consideration of suggestions emerging from the consultation process for example football, children's sports day, tai chi, yoga and other outdoor exercise classes. Other activities could include outdoor table tennis, chess and a nature school.
- Establish a positive use for the currently unused lavatory building, including reinstatement of the toilet facilities.
- Develop a catering offer, perhaps in the form of a kiosk.
- Explore opportunities to establish a graffiti wall on the electricity sub-station for use by local artists through discussion with the electricity board.



### *Safety and security*

Address the significant safety and security concerns raised by the local community:

- Liaise with the local police force and explore opportunities to improve security.
- Consider establishing CCTV throughout the park to deter anti-social behaviour and improve security.
- Consider reinstating the missing gates to close the park after dark or installing lighting to improve security.
- Establish a volunteer warden group to improve the sense of security throughout the park and oversee an increased programme of events and activities.

### *Adjacent land and setting*

Conserve and enhance GWR Park's unique Railway Conservation Area setting and the visual, historic and contemporary interrelationship between the park and the Railway Village and beyond:

- Seek to return former areas of the park that are subject to intrusive and inappropriate land uses.
- Explore opportunities to relocate intrusive highways signage where practical.
- Maintain good communication with neighbouring landowners to understand aspirations and keep informed of any developments that may affect the park.
- Interpret and emphasise the role that GWR Park plays in the

wider Conservation Area and beyond including views to local landmarks.

### *Nature conservation*

Conserve and enhance the nature conservation values at the park:

- Adhere to any statutory legislation concerning protected species and habitats encountered through project work or maintenance.
- Continue to conserve and enhance wildlife habitats including careful management of the mature trees for birds and bats and the areas of long grass for the benefit of invertebrates.
- Continue the policy of retaining dead wood where practical.
- Actively explore opportunities for ecological enhancements and habitat creation as part of any future work in the park.
- Interpret the nature conservation values and interest of the park.



## Management Actions to be delivered over the next 5-10 years

- 6.7 A series of management actions are set out below to address specific issues in each of the character areas that affect significances as identified in earlier chapters of this Plan.

### A. Church Place/Exeter St. Boundary

*The vision for this area is to remove the garages beyond the current park boundary and return it to the park. The whole area will be substantially re-imagined and enhanced with new planting, paths and features to celebrate and reflect its historic horticultural importance. The former public lavatories will become part of a park hub area for community activity.*

Replace site furniture with a consistent design and materials appropriate to GWR Park.	High priority
Improve the maintenance and presentation of the shrub and herbaceous beds through additional weeding and appropriate pruning techniques.	High priority
Explore options for the unused public lavatories and the surrounding area to enhance presentation, make the area more welcoming and realise a use for a dormant building. The overall aim should be to establish a park hub to include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reinstatement of toilet facilities.</li> <li>• A catering offer such as a kiosk.</li> <li>• A base for volunteer gardeners and wardens.</li> <li>• Activities such as table tennis/chess/a nature school.</li> <li>• A low key busking area.</li> </ul>	High priority





<p>Conserve in situ. and enhance the historic main entrance to the park:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Remove graffiti.</li> <li>• Carry out repair works to the gate piers including pointing.</li> <li>• Clean and repaint gates. Even though these gates are of a different design to the others in the park, they could be retained as a record of the post WWII changes to the park.</li> <li>• Replace mis-matching bollards.</li> <li>• Replace concrete capping to gate piers to match the Hamblet blue style on adjacent piers (long term aspiration).</li> </ul>	Medium priority
<p>The section of railings along this boundary require repair (as a record of the post-WWII changes to the park) or replacement (to match the other boundary restoration work that has been completed throughout the park) to enhance the historic boundary to the park. The decision to repair or replace should be informed by the investigation and proposals work that would have preceded the other railing replacement works, but which has not become available during this study.</p>	Medium priority

<p>The following measures should be carried out if replacement works are not proposed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Remove vegetation e.g. ivy to enable a thorough inspection and enable repairs.</li> <li>• Generally maintain the ground directly adjacent to the wall free of trees and shrubs.</li> <li>• Carry out repair works to the wall and piers including pointing and piecing in of brickwork using Hamblet blue brick or red matching red brick as required.</li> <li>• Tidy and replace copings where required.</li> <li>• Clean and repaint railings.</li> </ul>	Medium priority
<p>Redesign the planting throughout the area including the hedges to the entrance, the boundary to the garages, and the shrub and herbaceous beds. This should include exploring opportunities to reinstate a fountain base removed from GWR Park that is currently in St Mark's Recreation Ground.</p>	Medium priority
<p>Restore or re-design of the raised area and retaining wall west of the main entrance to reflect its historic purpose/function and enhance presentation.</p>	Medium priority



## B. Faringdon Road Boundary

*The vision for this area is to conserve and enhance its historic function as a tree planted boundary with gateway, boundary wall and path with benches set within embayments. The International Mother Language Day Monument will be well integrated with its surroundings within attractive planting.*

Replace site furniture with a consistent design and materials appropriate to GWR Park.	High priority
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<p>Conserve in situ and maintain the historic boundary to the park:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Generally maintain the ground directly adjacent to the wall free of trees and shrubs.</li> <li>• Carry out repair works to the wall and piers including pointing and piecing in of brickwork using Hambleton blue brick to replace concrete copings and blue engineering brick to wall as required.</li> <li>• Maintain the railings through cleaning and painting as required.</li> </ul>	High priority
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Maintain/repair existing benches and install additional benches along the path as shown on historic mapping with the embayments.	High priority
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Conserve and enhance the Faringdon Road Gate historic entrance to the park: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clean and repaint gates as required.</li> <li>• Replace bollards in a consistent style when others in the park are replaced.</li> <li>• Replace concrete capping to gate piers to match the Hambleton blue style on adjacent piers (long term aspiration).</li> </ul>	High priority
Consider planting a hedge or shrubs to enhance the setting of the International Mother Language Day monument and its integration within the landscape.	High priority
Given the graffiti present on the electricity sub-station building, explore opportunities to establish managed graffiti walls for local graffiti artists. Consider removing shrubs in front of the building which add little to the presentation of this area.	High priority
Liaise with Highways to explore opportunities to move traffic sign to a less intrusive location.	Medium priority



### C. Park Lane Boundary

*The vision for this area is to conserve and enhance its historic function as a tree planted boundary with its gateways, boundary wall and path with benches set within embayments.*

Conserve and maintain the historic boundary to the park: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Generally maintain the ground directly adjacent to the wall free of trees and shrubs.</li> <li>• Carry out repair works to the wall and piers including pointing and piecing in of brickwork using blue engineering brick to wall as required.</li> <li>• Maintain the railings through cleaning and painting as required.</li> </ul>	High priority
Replace site furniture with a consistent design and materials appropriate to GWR Park.	High priority
Maintain/repair existing benches and install additional benches along the path as shown on historic mapping with the embayments.	High priority

Conserve and enhance the historic Park Lane Gate South entrance to the park: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider reinstating gates to match others.</li> <li>• Replace bollards in a consistent style when others in the park are replaced.</li> <li>• Replace concrete capping to gate piers to match the Hamblet blue style on adjacent piers (long term aspiration).</li> </ul>	Medium priority
Maintain the Park Lane Gate north as a well-constructed entrance that matches the historic design approach: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider reinstating gates to match others.</li> <li>• Remove lower wall courses and re-surface in macadam to tie in with footpath.</li> </ul>	Medium priority
Replace modern poor quality fencing with a more appropriate design to match the boundary railings.	Medium priority
Consider formalising the desire lines with carefully designed paths.	Medium priority





#### D. Church Place Boundary

*The vision for this area is to conserve and enhance its historic function as a tree planted boundary with its gateway, boundary wall and path with benches set within embayments. Car parking will be removed from the area, whilst the War Memorial, Human Sundial and play area will be maintained for use by the community.*

Maintain/repair existing benches and install additional benches along the path as shown on historic mapping with the embayments.	High priority
Replace site furniture with a consistent design and materials appropriate to GWR Park.	High priority
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Conserve and enhance a historic entrance to the park.</li><li>• Establish legal position and liaise with the Army Reserve Centre to stop vehicular access through the park gate and car parking to address health and safety issue, conserve historic trees and improve presentation of the park.</li><li>• Consider reinstating gates to match others.</li><li>• Replace bollards in a consistent style when others in the park are replaced.</li><li>• Replace concrete capping to gate piers to match the Hambleton blue style on adjacent piers (long term aspiration).</li></ul>	Medium priority

Remove car parking to address health and safety issue, conserve historic trees and improve presentation of the park.	Medium priority
Replace modern poor quality fencing with a more appropriate design to match the boundary railings.	Medium priority
<p>The ideal approach would be to replace the poor condition railings to enhance the historic boundary to the park. If this is not possible the following measures should be carried out:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Generally maintain the ground directly adjacent to the wall free of trees and shrubs.</li><li>• Carry out repair works to the wall and piers including pointing and piecing in of brickwork using Hambleton blue brick or red matching red brick as required.</li><li>• Clean and repaint railings.</li></ul>	Medium priority

#### E. The Park Lawn

*The vision for this area is to conserve its historic function as an open space for use by the community for recreation, appropriate sports and events. The bandstand will be restored or reinterpreted to host musical performances and the area will continue to serve its modern purpose as an emergency helicopter landing area.*

Explore opportunities to restore or reinterpret the bandstand for music events.	Medium priority
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Swindon Society

### *Websites and other sources*

[https://www.swindon.gov.uk/downloads/file/6322/history\\_of\\_faringdon\\_road\\_park](https://www.swindon.gov.uk/downloads/file/6322/history_of_faringdon_road_park).

<https://swindonstory.uk/stories/gwr-park/>

<https://swindonian.me/2017/06/01/the-childrens-fete/>

<https://inkandcompass.wordpress.com/tag/swindon/>

A number of local historians and organisations have also generously shared their time and knowledge to inform this account (please see acknowledgements).

