People’s Park Alive: Masterplan report
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The 1935 Vision for the People’s Park -
‘An open space of trees and grass...without railings... for people to walk and children to play upon’
People’s Park Alive

1.0 Introduction

The importance of Parsloes Park for the communities of Barking and Dagenham has long been recognised. Over the years since the Park’s most recent heyday as a People’s Park in the 1930s, Parsloes Park has suffered from cuts to resourcing, although it is a park of real quality and potential.

There is growing recognition for the role that parks and green spaces can play in quality of life and creating attractive places to live. Although Parsloes Park makes an important contribution to the green and open space network of Barking and Dagenham and beyond, the open space is not reaching the audience that it should as a Metropolitan Park. The significant growth planned for the borough means that parks and green spaces should meet the needs of the existing community as well as addressing the pressures of an increasing population. Reviving Parsloes Park has the potential to address a number of the borough’s challenges including improving health and wellbeing, inclusive access and recreation, active and sustainable travel, adapting to climate change, and conserving and enhancing its biodiversity and heritage. Importantly the regeneration of the park also has the potential to deliver upon the three key aspects of the borough’s strategic vision and priorities which are: Encouraging civic pride, enabling social responsibility and growing the borough. These are discussed further in section 6.

New funding opportunities present an opportunity to re-imagine and reinvigorate the Park in a financially sustainable way. Funding for a new youth zone, football facilities, a reinstated Gores Brook and interventions to reveal the heritage potential of the Park could make a significant contribution to bringing it back into community use and promoting a sense of ownership.

The masterplan and management plan commissioned by the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham takes stock of these opportunities so that proposals can be integrated and delivered in a coherent way to optimise the benefits to the Council and the community.

This Report sets out the context, characteristics and significance of Parsloes Park in the following sections:

- Parsloes Park in context
- From Passelewe’s to People’s Park
- Identity, community and memories
- Landscape, historic and natural character;
- Why now?
- Towards the masterplan
- Statement of significance
- Masterplan vision and concept
- Detail areas
- Proposals: Risks, issues and opportunities:
  - Assessment of potential impacts
- Delivery Plan
- Management Strategy
- Appendices
2.0 Parsloes in context

Parsloes Park is a 59 hectare Metropolitan Park at the centre of the borough of Barking and Dagenham, to the north of Becontree and Dagenham Heathway neighbourhood centres.

Parsloes Park plays an important role in a network of public open space for the borough and East London; the Park forms part of the All London Green Grid. It is one of 25 parks and green spaces in the borough and one of three Metropolitan Open Land designations, together with Barking Park and Mayesbrook Park to the west, with relationships with Goresbrook Park and Beam Parklands to the east, Eastbrook Country Park, the Green Belt to the east and Valence Park to the north.

Parsloes Park is the largest of the formal parks created during the 1930s as public amenity space for the London County Council’s inter-war housing developments in and around Dagenham. The Park formed the green lung of the Becontree Estate which today provides half of the borough’s council housing stock and characterises the post 1900 residential terraces that surround and give onto the Park.

The park was laid out on the greater part of the former historic Fanshawe family estate of Parsloes (medieval and later), which was gradually broken up from 1900-17, with the great house demolished in 1925. As such, Parsloes Park and other surviving greenspaces such as Valence Park represent the surviving ‘fragments’ of an ancient network of parklands and landed estates once held by the Fanshawes in the area.

The Park is served by two tube stations at Becontree and Dagenham Heathway as well as bus routes along Gale Street and Parsloes Avenue to the west. The Park is bordered by quieter residential roads to the south, east and north. The Sydney Russell Secondary School and Porters Avenue Health Centre are located to the north of the Park and there are a range of other facilities in the surrounding area including Parsloes, Southwood, Valence and Roding primary schools, the Adult college of Barking and Dagenham, the Sydney Russell Leisure Centre, Fanshawe Hall Community Centre and Markyate, Dagenham and Fanshawe Libraries.

More information on the landscape, natural and historic character of the site is set out in the following sections of this report.
The London Borough of Barking and Dagenham is the 9th most deprived London borough, with 35% local authority/shared ownership housing, and the lowest average London house prices (£288,809 in November 2015). The borough has the lowest life expectancy in London at 77.6 years for men and 82 years for women. The borough has 34% green space coverage, with 492.4 hectares of public open space. Parsloes Park represents almost 12% of the total public open space of the borough. 186,000 people live in the borough, of these around 45% participate in 30 minutes or more of exercise per week. 7% are unemployed, 28% of 16+ year olds have no qualifications. 81% have English as their main language, 50% are white British, 56% are Christian. Just 42% of people are satisfied with their parks and open spaces.

c.1250: 13 acres of land in Dagenham is conveyed to Hugh Passelewe

1330: Now extending to 277 acres, the estate is settled upon Simon de Merk, and passing to the Barnardistons, who own it through the 15th century

1380: Manor is sold to Sir Edward Osborne, who builds a large house in the closing years of the 16th century

1644: Parsloes is temporarily sequestrated due to the Fanshawe family’s support of the Royalists in the Civil War

1814: Parsloes is a substantial landed estate of 270 acres, although the increasing debts of the Fanshawes would soon spell the end for the estate

1619: Parsloes is sold to William Fanshawe, who is said to have extended the house by 1634

1814: Revd John Fanshawe remodels the mansion house in ‘Gothick’ style

1844: Parsloes is a substantial landed estate of 270 acres, although the increasing debts of the Fanshawes would soon spell the end for the estate

1858: The Fanshawes cease to live at Parsloes and the estate is let to a succession of tenants, notably the Denman family, descendants of Lord Chief Justice Thomas Denman, a prominent anti-slavery campaigner

1903: Evelyn John Fanshawe inherits Parsloes. The house is now derelict

1913: The first tranche of the estate is sold off to Essex County Council, with William Buckley buying more land including the house in 1917

1921-3: The whole estate is acquired by London County Council to build the Becontree Estate with 107 acres of Parsloes retained as a ‘People’s Park

1925: Parsloes House is demolished. The People’s Park is laid out, completed in 1935. Despite later 20th century decline many of the features of the People’s Park survive to this day

Above: John Fanshawe, who inherited Parsloes in 1803

Above: Thomas, Lord Denman, Lord Chief Justice
3.0
From Passelewes to People’s Park - A chronology

A summary chronology of the park, outlining its main stages and periods of evolution, is set out opposite and below (drawing from the Victoria County History1 and the entry on the London Parks and Gardens register):

c.1250: Gervase le Halleward and his wife Maud convey 13 acres of land in Dagenham to Hugh Passelewe, from which the manor takes its name (later adapted to Parsloes) - a manorial name referencing me Adelaide or meadow. Cf Passelewe from the old French ‘to cross the water’, relating to merchants/travellers.

1330 An estate of 277 acres in Barking, Ilford and Dagenham was settled upon Simon de Merk and his wife Margery. The estate subsequently passes to the Barnadiston family by marriage.

1402-3: Parsloes is held by Roger de Barnardiston.

1561: The manor is sold by John Barnadiston to Sir Martin Bowes, a City MP and former Lord Mayor of London.

1568: Parsloes is sold by Sir Martin’s son Martin to Sir Rowland Hayward (Lord Mayor of London in 1570) and Thomas Wilbraham.

After 1570: The manor is acquired by Sir Edward Osborne (d.1591), a London merchant, politician and later Lord Mayor (1583). The manor house was reconstructed in the 16th century – a rectangular building of two storeys with a central hall.

1619: Parsloes is sold to William Fanshawe (d.1634). Fanshawe is said to have added a new north wing to the house.

1644: Due to the Fanshawe family’s support of the Royalist cause in the Civil War, the estate is sequestrated. Sir Hugh Kingsmill, father in law of John Fanshawe, William’s son, applies for a lease of the estate, of which part had been sold by Fanshawe and his mother prior to the sequestration. The claim is granted in 1645.

1700s: The house is further remodelled (as shown in a painting of 1800).

1814: Reverend John Fanshawe adds a new south wing and has the whole house encased in new brick, the whole being improved in the then fashionable ‘gothick’ style with gothic sash windows and castellated details and battlements. It is now a substantial dwelling of 24 rooms with the oak library floor brought from Eastbury Manor House, Barking.

1844: Parsloes is recorded as a substantial landed estate of 270 acres, although it would soon become heavily mortgaged, due to the increasing debts of the Fanshawe family.

1858: The Fanshawe family cease to live at Parsloes following the death of Reverend Thomas Fanshawe and the estate is let to a succession of tenants, notably including the Denman family, descendants of Lord Denman, Lord Chief Justice and a figure within the slavery abolition movement.

1.http://www.victoriacountyhistory.ac.uk/counties/essex
1901: Part of the park, including some of the pleasure grounds near the house, is leased to the National Trotting Horse Breeders Association, who lay out an American style pony trotting ground in the central part of the park, a use which continues until 1923.

1903: Evelyn John Fanshawe inherits Parsloes. By this time Parsloes House is derelict.

1913: The Fanshawe family sell the first tranche of the estate to Essex County Council.

1917: The remainder of the site, including the house, is sold to William Buckley.

1921-23: The whole estate is acquired by the London County Council, earmarked for the Becontree Housing Estate, with 107 acres to be retained as a ‘Peoples’ Park’, as centrepiece of the estate.

1925: Parsloes House is demolished. Some of its bricks are used to build two small houses in Stevens Road. The grand approach to the house and associated lime/sweet chestnut avenue are woven into the design for the Peoples’ Park and survive to this day, albeit increasingly fragmented. Nearby parkland clumps of elms, contemporary with the avenue and the 18th-19th century landscape park of the former house survived until the 1960s.

1925-1935: The Peoples’ Park is laid out, with the ‘northern end to consist of playing fields, and in the south west large public gardens, the remainder to be levelled as an open space of trees and grass without railings partly for football, cricket and tennis but mostly free for people to walk and children to play upon’. Aspects of the Peoples’ Park included an ornamental lake with flamingos, a rose garden and shrubbery with formal paths, pavilions, paddling pools and bowling green. Most of these features survive to some degree to this day.

1980: Ownership of the park is vested in the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham.
Sandwiched between the District line and Ivyhouse Road was where I lived in a small 2 bedroom council house built for £200 quid...across the road was the **Parsloes Park**. It was the **best thing a young boy could wish for** - Apart from the swings and the paddling pool they had Punch and Judy magic shows, mobile film vans, pantomimes, mobile zoos..., then there was bird egging, tadpoles down the drains, tree climbing, football... **In the summer we lived in the park**. I remember the pink flamingos that had their wings clipped so they could not fly away, I also remember them turning white and vanishing overnight. The flower beds around the lake were beautiful looking, although at the time I didn’t care I just wanted a flamingo egg for my up and coming bird egg collection - ignorance was bliss’.

*A local resident remembers Parsloes in its People’s Park heyday*
4.0
Identity, community and memory

Parsloes Park was once one of the most popular Parks in Barking and Dagenham. Fond memories have been voiced in the community about its popular play offer and one o’clock club, formal gardens, horticulture and lake and family events in the Park.

For a time the London County Council and later the Greater London Council were responsible for the management of the Park until it was dissolved in the 1980s and responsibility fell to the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham. Since then, like many London and UK Parks, Parsloes Park has suffered from the challenges of on-going resourcing cuts to capital works, maintenance and management. Although the Park is well kept, its facilities and spaces have gradually fallen into a dilapidated state and the Park is not as it used to be. Barking and Dagenham was one of the first boroughs to produce a parks strategy in 2003 (London Borough of Barking and Dagenham, May 2003, Parks and Green Spaces Strategy) and there is a positive legacy and strong green space network to build upon.
Above: Existing landscape elements, landscape character areas

(Ordnance Survey base mapping: Crown copyright and database right, 2015)
5.0 Landscape, historic and natural character

This section sets out the landscape characterisation of Parsloes Park which has been defined to understand current character and assets, as well as condition and management issues, plus aspects of significance in relation to the park’s design and heritage.

The present day Parsloes Park is a greenspace of significant scale formed from the surviving remnants and the greater part of the old Parsloes Manor Estate which was extant from the 13th century to the 1920s, plus outlying remnant farmland which may have related to the parkland core and now lost manor house. Much of the park is overlaid with features associated with the development of the Peoples’ Park, laid out from 1925-35 as centrepiece of the 1930s Becontree Housing Estate, which now surrounds the site.

As such, the setting of the park has changed entirely as it is now completely surrounded by built development, with the southern part of the Gores Brook tributary to the south and the Beam Parklands toward the Thames Foreshore now forming the only other substantial areas of greenspace in this locality.

The site comprises a formal landscape of boating lake, pavilions and rose gardens/shrubberies linked by an intertwined network of paths in the south west, the remnants of an ancient lime and sweet chestnut avenue which once formed the grand approach to the destroyed manor house and which is now interplanted with the remains of an ornamental Cherry avenue of the Peoples’ Park era (the latter being much damaged in the storms of 1987).

Immediately north is a ‘wilderness’ area of long grassland and heath, known as ‘The Squatts’ Local Nature Reserve (LNR), and to the east an extensive, flat open area of ground given over to football pitches, served by a long low, 1970s changing room block and pavilion, which appears highly prominent in this open, exposed landscape. The easternmost parts of the site were once marked by the Gores Brook, a tributary of the River Roding, although this was culverted in the earlier 20th century. Save for the odd shallow depression and occasional mature riverbank poplar and willow, plus seasonally wet and boggy ground, the brook is invisible today.

For the purposes of the masterplan the site has been classified into a series of historic landscape character areas (described overleaf), in which the salient characteristics and qualities of the landscape are described, with condition and management issues noted. The significance of each area, whether in the context of design, heritage or recreational/amenity value, is also noted.
Area 1: People’s Park and the Lake

Description, condition and management issues

Covering the south western quadrant of the site including a large and deep ornamental lake (LNR) which was the legacy of past gravel extraction during the course of the construction of the Becontree Estate. The lake is on the site of a much earlier pit (which included palaeolithic archaeology) and is approached via a formal path and the remains of an arts and crafts style geometric rose garden to the south west. A sinuous path layout encircles the lake which is now heavily planted and overgrown in places, obscures the view towards the ornamental 1930s pavilion and shelter on the opposite side of the water, near the site of the former Home Farm of Parsloes Manor.

This pavilion is surrounded by mature shrubberies (*Rhododendron ponticum*) and is associated with a now disused bowling green immediately north. A diverse range of mature tree species defines the ornamental grounds surrounding the lake. East of the lake is a relatively recent play area (2006), catering for older children. Nearby is the site of a former drinking fountain which appears to date from the Peoples’ Park era, plus a former paddling pool now used as a small skate park with the paddling pool structure intact. This is faced by another characteristic 1930s rusticated pavilion, which appears to have been the mirror image of the one by the bowling green. Behind lies a large and rather stark play area, with a disused park depot immediately north, surrounded by security fencing.

The wider area is surrounded by spiked railings, with much of the character area sub divided by a proliferation of fencing types. This includes a distinctive design of low bow top fences which surrounds the former paddling pool (allied to dense mixed shrub planting), the lake area and the lawns and Rhododendron beds near the bowling green and pavilion.

Significance

This area is significant as the largely intact and greater surviving part of the People’s Park of 1935. It has a strong and distinctive character which could be enhanced through view management and restoration, to reveal vistas across the lake and to the 1930s pavilion, to draw people into the Park. The Arts and Crafts style landscape layout is notable and could provide a framework for more flexible, sustainable landscape planting and management set within a formal framework - a contemporary celebration of the People’s Park’s past horticultural excellence.
Above: The flamingos which once inhabited the People’s Park Lake are commemorated in this mural by Tom Berry opposite the Gale Street Entrance
Area 2: Park Core

Description, condition and management issues

This area includes the remnant east-west avenue which formerly marked the grand approach to the manor house, which occupied the full width of the avenue and stood at its eastern end, immediately west of the present disused tennis courts. The avenue appears to have been a double avenue of lime and sweet chestnut of strong formal design, terminated by a now lost lodge house to the western boundary with Gale Street. A number of over mature/veteran tree specimens survive, although the carriage drive itself has been re-routed south as part of the Peoples’ Park path network. Traces of both the manor and the lodge house can be faintly discerned in the ornamental lawn. The avenue was infill planted with much smaller ornamental trees including flowering and double cherry during the Peoples’ Park era, although many of these were lost in the storms of 1987, giving the avenue a truncated, disjointed appearance.

Immediately north of the avenue at the western entrance is a shallow depression which marks the site of a former pond visible on the 1871 and 1895 Ordnance Survey. Immediately east and forming the western edge of the expansive, open and historic heathland and grasslands now known as The Squatts LNR, later the site of Ministry of Defence (MOD) activity in the Second World War, can be faintly discerned the old course of Gale Street. This road is also visible on the old OS mapping and was re-aligned to form the western boundary of the Peoples’ Park on the breakup of the old estate.

The scruffy hedgerow forming the southern boundary of The Squatts appears to be a historic feature, having been visible on the old OS mapping and includes a number of old, multi stemmed coppiced sycamore.

A combination of railings and small ornamental trees defines the boundary with the busy Gale Street, although most of the park gates are either missing or permanently open. To the north, the boundaries with adjoining residential gardens are defined by mature fencing although palisade fencing also features, which, along with some incidental ‘cut through’ type entrances from the housing estate, contribute to an unwelcoming appearance. Parts of this area are again defined by a proliferation of discontinuous fencing and bollards, including a line that separates The Squatts from the remains of the formal avenue.
Significance

This area is significant as the surviving fragment of the 18th-19th century landscape park and the approach to the lost mansion, overlaid upon a much older planned and designed estate landscape. The surviving veteran limes and sweet chestnuts clearly mark out the extents of the former avenue, and could be made more legible by appropriate new parkland planting to reinforce these elements for future generations. The Squatts LNR is locally significant for its biodiversity interest, and has considerable enhancement potential. Its local historic associations with the MOD and World War II air raids also add to its value.

Above and above left: The remnant east west avenue and The Squatts Local Nature Reserve
Left: The Squatts Local Nature Reserve
**Area 3: Sports Park**

**Description, condition and management issues**

This forms the large central part of the park, given over to senior and junior football pitches (16No total), with a long, low central changing room and shower/toilet block occupying a prominent position in the centre of the park, with a similarly large tarmac surfaced car park (85 spaces plus 6 blue badge holder spaces), plus informal overflow parking within the low timber bollards alongside the long, wide access road serving the same from the northern site boundary. The football pitches host three Sunday football leagues and parking need is greatest at this peak time.

Immediately north west is the palisade fenced boundary of the Sydney Russell Secondary School and playing fields. To the north and south, single block depth cul-de-sacs jut into the park edges, where street parking is an issue for residents and commuters, with boundaries defined by low timber bollards set in to the park to the north and by a mismatched range of trip rails and knee rails of various periods to the south.

The central pavilion/changing block is in a poor state of repair and is subject to anti social activity and vandalism (people accessing the roof to smash skylights, graffitti). It is also a building of low efficiency and functionality, and is poorly sited.

**Left:** The mural on the roof of the central sports pavilion and changing block

**Significance**

This area is significant as the dominant use of the central part of the People’s Park and is a key part of the 1935 layout. It bears little relationship to other landscape layers, although it incorporates relics of the pre-20th century agricultural field pattern which once characterised this part of the site.

**Above left:** Football pitches  
**Above right:** Football parking  
**Left:** Access road to car parking
**Area 4: Gores Brook**

**Description, condition and management issues**

The eastern part of the site is formed by the course of the Gores Brook tributary of the River Roding which is now culverted. Only a shallow depression along its alignment and one on the site of the old estate pond and sluice now mark its presence, although loose groupings of very mature willow and poplar trees hint at former river bank vegetation. Much of this area is otherwise defined by intensively managed grassland associated with sports pitches, and which is poorly drained in places. Review of Environment Agency mapped data shows that the area falls within an area at risk of surface water flooding and ground water flooding.

Boundaries to this part of the site are largely ‘open’ – low bollards and knee rails. Pitch markings partly extend over the course of the brook.

**Significance**

This area is significant in terms of its remnant historic landscape pattern and legacy - the course of the Gores Brook can still be traced as can remnant structural landscape features associated with it. Much of this character area’s significance is more associated with its opportunity in terms of multi-functional green infrastructure and water storage and in creating a new aesthetic and visual focus for the site through restoration and de-culverting of the Gores Brook.
Barking and Dagenham has been identified as a priority area for new homes and jobs to allow London to grow.

Land availability, good location and green space network are strengths of the borough making it well suited to housing delivery. Significant potential has been identified at London Riverside, which would see 25,000 new homes and 14,000 jobs created along the Thames, with key sites at Barking Riverside, which could accommodate 10,000 new homes. Barking Town Centre has also been identified as a Housing Zone, with potential for 2,295 homes and supporting facilities. Supported by potential new transport links including an extension of the Overground to Barking Riverside and a new High Speed 1 station at Beam Park, these interventions could see the borough’s relatively stable population grow by 60,000 people by 2025.

The borough has objectives to create attractive and sustainable places to live. At this important point of change, it is the ideal time to consider and address the needs of the existing population and the potential pressures of a new population to address low satisfaction for parks and green spaces, build community ownership and use of the Park and create places that promote a pride and sense of belonging, as well as spaces with greater resilience to change.

Key aspects of the borough’s Strategic Vision and Priorities are also highly relevant: **Encouraging civic pride**, specifically through protecting, promoting and investing in green spaces and reaching high aspirations for every child, plus encouraging the local community to take pride in their green spaces.

**Enabling social responsibility**, specifically through ensuring that children reach their potential. The educational and play value of green spaces such as Parsloes Park is key here.

**Growing the borough.** Investment in green space to create attractive environments is a key part of this.

Furthermore the site has been identified as a priority green space project in the All London Green Grid. Enhancements to sports provision on site have been identified in the latest edition of the borough’s *Playing Pitch Strategy* (London Borough of Barking and Dagenham, 2015), specifically a football hub and cricket provision.

*Above: An existing image from Parsloes Park where the old paddling pool used to be located.*
7.0
Towards a masterplan

New funding opportunities have recently been identified that present the potential to improve Parsloes Park and distinguish its offer as a destination park in the borough.

These include:

**Community sports hub** – The borough’s recently adopted Playing Pitch Strategy sets the vision for a modern, sustainable and well-used community sports facility. A Football Foundation bid for £1m funding is being prepared and progressed. This presents an opportunity to deliver high quality pitches and facilities that reach and provide for a wider audience.

**Youth Zone** – The borough are in negotiations with OnSide, a charity that provides inspiring, safe and affordable places for young people to go. The proposals for approximately £3m investment in a youth zone facility would contribute to a greater range of facilities in the Park and expand user groups. The proposals are at an early pre-planning stage.

**Heritage Lottery Funding** – early discussions have identified interest in a ‘Parks for People’ bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund, possibly in 2016. This would potentially provide capital and revenue funding for the Park’s heritage (as part of the Passelewe and Fanshawe family estates and the later People’s Park heritage) to be revealed and reinterpreted.

There is an opportunity to integrate all of these proposals to enhance the benefits to be secured from the scheme in a coordinated and sustainable way, to respond to, conserve, enhance and interpret the best of the park’s heritage and make the site’s history relevant to modern users. This masterplan approach will also enable a comprehensive consideration of the park in the context of future growth, pressures and demands, to ensure it is resilient, adapted and capable of being managed in sustainable ways. Many of these objectives are consistent with a conservation and landscape led approach and with the principles of sympathetic landscape management. The masterplan therefore occurs at a very timely point in the life of Parsloes Park.

The masterplan proposals set out in the following sections have been informed by engagement with a wide range of professional and community stakeholders, whose contribution is gratefully acknowledged.
Above: Initial conceptual masterplan visions for the park
(Ordnance Survey base mapping: Crown copyright and database right, 2015)
8.0
Statement of Significance

Through masterplan development, stakeholder and community engagement, the following qualities and aspects of Parsloes Park have been identified as significant in framing proposals for the park’s restoration and regeneration. This statement of significance considers historic, evidential, aesthetic and community values.

Heritage, memory and local associations:

- “… In the summer we lived in the park.” (A local resident)
- The importance of the site in terms of its architectural and design evolution - Parsloes House was at the forefront of design tastes and fashion for over 300 years in successive evolutions from Tudor to English Gothic and its surrounding landscape reflected this, evolving from functional Deer Park to picturesque landscape parkland.
- The associations with prominent local families such as the Fanshawes, with Parsloes having formed the centrepiece of their estates in the area, and latterly with the Denman family, descended from Thomas Denman, Lord Chief Justice and a prominent figure in the early 19th century Abolitionist movement.
- The bold vision for the People’s Park in the 1920s and 1930s and the progressive approach advocated by the London County Council in securing much of the site as a vital green lung for the Becontree Housing Estate when the old landed estate of Parsloes had fallen into irrevocable decline.
- A key memory of members of the local community is the presence of the flamingos in the lake, today commemorated in the Tom Berry mural opposite the Gale Street entrance to the park. Other aspects of the site such as the One o’Clock Club, old paddling pool and play facilities, the lake and the tea pavilions/huts were noted as valued features of the People’s Park.
- Other local associations include the lost Gores Brook which runs through the site, now culverted and existing only in memory.
8.0  
Statement of Significance

Aesthetic and experiential quality:
- The site has provided inspiration for artists at numerous stages in its evolution, notably the picturesque painting from the Gores Brook of 1867 and a series of ‘naïve’ paintings of the then new People’s Park by Henry James Taylor in 1938.
- In the People’s Park era the formal flowerbed area at Gale Street and the rose gardens made a fitting entrance to the park greeting and delighting visitors with a blaze of colour. These, the lake and the cherry tree avenue overlaid upon the ancient parkland ride to the lost house and the wilderness expanse of The Squatts created a rich and varied landscape experience.

Wildspace and living landscapes:
- The Squatts LNR has considerable ecological interest and the lake continues to support a great diversity of bird species, whilst the ornamental grounds of the People’s Park are characterised by an eclectic range of tree species, some of which are rare in the Greater London context, and which have bat potential.
- The site today reads as a landscape ‘palimpsest’ of many layers, with no one layer completely erased – old field boundaries including ancient multi stemmed coppiced trees near The Squatts, remnants of the 18th and 19th century landscape park and avenue, the buried heritage associated with the mansion and its pleasure grounds, home farm, carriage drive and the lodge house, plus the surviving and partly lost features of the People’s Park itself. The site bears witness to almost every stage of the last 400 years of its long evolution.

Above: Parsloes in 1867

Above: Flamingos, mural by Tom Berry
9.0 Masterplan vision and concept

The masterplan vision for Parsloes Park seeks to embody many of the best aspects of the 1935 design intention for the site as a park for play and a green space to walk upon. It is based on the idea of creative conservation – conserving and finding viable futures for the best surviving aspects of the park’s heritage and interpreting the rest. The five key aspects of the masterplan concept are shown in the images above.

Key aspects of the masterplan vision and supporting aims and objectives are as follows:

**To conserve, enhance and restore**

- The landscape legacy of the 17th-18th century avenue and the surviving features of the 18th and 19th century landscape park.

- The wildspace quality and the landscape experience and biological diversity of The Squatts Local Nature Reserve, seeking to restore lost aspects of this once diverse London heathland mosaic, such as ponds and scrapes.

- The ‘lost’ Gores Brook which runs through the site, as an informal recreational/amenity and ecology focus for the eastern part of the site.
Above: Parsloes Park, Masterplan

9.1 Masterplan vision and concept

Creation of an appropriately naturalistic riverine environment of meanders, riffles and offline ponded areas, to create multi-functional space for water and to minimise the possibility of extreme flooding events.

• The horticultural excellence, colour and diversity of the original People’s Park, in a modern idiom which is financially sustainable and appropriately adapted to modern management and resource availability/resilience whilst responding to the original layout.

• The design intent for the People’s Park, bringing this up to date for the needs of 21st century users – restoring the formal approaches and gardens from Gale Street with more modern, climate change adapted planting which responds to fewer available management resources, restoring and creating safe access to the lake and restoring designed vistas to the original pavilion.

• The 1930s cottage ornee style pavilions, bringing these back into active and viable use as part of the park hub/exhibition space and as café/tea pavilion for the restored water play area.

To improve and create

• A much improved sense of welcome and arrival - Legible, interesting and relevant interpretation and way finding of a unified and harmonious design, both within the site and from nearby points of arrival such as the London underground stations, to promote walkable routes to and around the park, and to bring the site’s heritage to life in ways meaningful to modern users.

• A visually and physically connected series of landscape experiences, through re-wilded areas, new and sensitively sited copses and woodlands and appropriate low-level landshaping to create visual interest and new vantage points.

• Increased resilience and flexibility – lower intensity landscape management to create more interesting/rich landscape experiences; adapted spaces with greater microclimate variation and shading and cooling to address climate change.

• A series of incidental destinations and points to stop off along the way – seats and street furniture to take advantage of prospects/restored views, essential park infrastructure such as cycle parking, bins etc, safe, clearly marked (and where appropriate lit) hierarchy of park paths.
9.2 Masterplan vision and concept

• A much more appealing environment for a range of different user groups, matched to the essential facilities to increase footfall and make people stay longer, so that Parsloes becomes a ‘destination park’. As part of this a rethink of the approach to play – incidental and natural/wild play to maximise play value so that the whole park becomes playful/a place for play.

• Linked to the above, essential facilities for a visit to the park for a range of user groups – a new park hub which consolidates existing facilities and addresses notable gaps in existing provision – sports changing, toilets, showers, café, exhibition and lettable events space/revenue generation potential.

• Opportunities for community and volunteer involvement, such as community archaeology/big dig to reveal buried heritage, a community garden to provide a potential supply chain of local produce for an on site café. This could also be used to develop partnerships with Dagenham Farm Growing Communities and local organisations such as Company Drinks.

• A consolidated, higher quality and more flexible formal sports offer, which link to reconfigured and more flexible arrangements for parking, will help address peaks and troughs in the park’s use.

• A series of flexible external events spaces, linked to variations in landscape management (meadow grass cuts) to create a hierarchy of spaces for a range of programmed and pop up events.

To recognise and value

• The landscape palimpsest of the site which displays its evolution from the 17th to 20th centuries.

• The significance of Parsloes Park as a bold and visionary People’s Park, ensuring that all design interventions contribute to this and the original 1935 design intention of the park for play so that it once again forms the centre piece of the Becontree community.
10.0 Detail areas

- Historic Parkland
- Sports Park
- Gores Brook
- People’s Park
Detail areas

The masterplan has been designed to respond to, conserve and enhance aspects of the site’s significance described in the previous sections, as well as to address operational and site quality issues revealed through survey and consultation. Detail of the design proposals and rationale are provided in relation to the specific character areas of the site, in the rest of this section.
11.0 Historic Park Core

Replanting to reinforce formal avenue

Interpret and reveal archaeology of mansion site

New paved surface to restore formal carriage drive

Above left: Woodland rides and avenues
Above: Revealing buried heritage. St Paul’s Cathedral

Left: Potential landscape experience of the avenue
Key aspects/rationale:

- Replacement of disparate, discontinuous and varied boundary fencing with open boundaries reinforced with gentle landshaping and copse/clump tree planting to control inappropriate uses/access. Mark historic entrance off Gale Street with combination of parkland rail to recall parkland heritage and new paved feature as well as marking and interpreting footprint of the former lodge.

- Re-alignment of path on the original carriage drive route and top dressing, with an appropriate parkland/countryside style surface treatment, plus provision of benches and bins at appropriate intervals in a style recalling those of the originals (O’Brien Thomas or similar). Interpret and reveal footprint of the lost mansion as part of the works (option to create subtle landform variation and ‘boardwalk’ areas over the archaeology).

- Creation of new meadow and seeded areas to mimic the colour and diversity of the old cherry avenue, whilst considerably extending the season of interest, plus low level landshaping to define spaces.

- New larger grade native tree planting using historically appropriate species (small leaved lime *Tilia cordata* or sweet chestnut *Castanea sativa*) to create two new outer rows to the avenue, to reinforce the formal feature and to secure the feature for the longer term.

- Conservation and enhancement of The Squatts LNR to increase its diversity and ecological/amenity interest, including reinstatement of some of the former ponds in their historic locations. Whilst such ponds are likely to be perched/of puddled construction due to the level of the water table, which creates water flow issues, they also bring ecological benefits (dragonflies/insects).

- Creation of active frontages with Gale Street and Porters Avenue, including an appropriate site for the proposed Youth Zone which meets OnSide’s objectives and also creates a gateway that integrates well with the park.
12.0
People’s Park

Above: Enlivening the People’s Park
Safe access to water’s edge: boardwalks & sediment

Restored view & space between pavilion & lake

Community garden and orchard: Wildlife and educational resource

Park hub

Expanded and enlarged play provision: Natural play

Section A-A
People’s Park
Lake
Pavilion
Hub
Carpark

Above: Regents Park Hub

Above: Waterlow Park Community Garden

Above: Managed, safe access to the lake
Key aspects/rationale:

• Restored gateway and approach from Gale Street main entrance with new signage and way marking, restoration of former Rose Garden with new meadow and herbaceous drift areas to extend season of interest, reduce intensity of management and to increase resilience to drought/climate change.

• Repair and top dressing of primary path network, with a key path to the hub and to the northern boundary to be lit to provide safe after hours access (low level LED lighting or similar).

• Restore vistas to lake and create managed physical access at safe points to the lake through shallows/scrapes, new areas of boardwalk and beach areas, with appropriately detailed knee/trip rail and use of dense reed/rush planting to warn of hazards in relation to deep water, supported by appropriately placed signage. Pull back fencing in all other areas to the lake perimeter to increase connection with water/reclaim usable space within the park.

• Restoration of the 1930s pavilion – flexible configuration - a lake facing tea hut/shelter as per its original use, or exhibition space/shelter for school visits to adjoining community garden, reinstating the original façade and roof detailing and removing the unsympathetic extensions and making good.

Creation of access to the new park hub behind via a new community garden on the sheltered former bowling green site – orchard, apiary, flower meadow and raised bed areas (potential school groups/outdoor classroom)

• Creation of a multi-functional park hub as central focus for the site and as focus for restored historic designed views, to face onto both the People’s Park and the sports park/pitches.

• Restoration and re interpretation of the 1930s former paddling pool as a natural water play garden, creating more flexible and multi-functional, interactive play opportunities. Restore and reinstate the 1930s tea pavilion and its external detailing as tea/cold drinks/ices kiosk and sheltered seating plus toilets/baby changing, plus Wifi and external sheltered terrace seating (trees/shade sail) to provide essential facilities for families to visit.

• Extension and enhancement of the existing older childrens’ play area to create an expanded suite of natural play provision to maximise play value (replacing existing kit with natural play pieces as it wears out) to create a continuous trail or swathe of play from the water play to the hub via the lake and supported by bespoke/incidental play pieces throughout the park. Restoration of the existing play area behind the pavilion to parkland, along with the former depot site.

• Restoration and reinstatement of the two former drinking fountains to the lake perimeter path, to adapt these to modern use (wheelchair accessible, filling water bottles for runners etc).