

# BUCKINGHAMSHIRE GARDENS TRUST

## RESEARCH AND RECORDING PROJECT

### WOLVERTON PARK

#### IDENTIFICATION STAGE

|  |  |            |   |
|--|--|------------|---|
| <b>BASELINE INFORMATION</b>  | Date and author: March 2022, Ann Birch                   |            |   |
| <b>Address (including post code)</b>   | Wolverton Park, Wolverton Park Road, Wolverton, MK12 5FJ |            |   |
| <b>Prompt for assessment;<br/>BC Register Review</b>   |  | HER Number | - |
| <b>Type of Site</b>  | Late C19 company sports ground                           |            |   |
| <b>Ownership (single or divided)</b>   | Local authority  |            |   |
| <b>Parish</b>  | Wolverton and Greenleys Town Council                     |            |   |
| <b>District, current planning area</b>   | Milton Keynes  |            |   |
| <b>Grid Reference</b>  | SP 81919 41571   |            |   |
| <b>Type of Assessment Desktop/<br/>Desktop and archival research/<br/>Full Assessment incl. site visit</b> | Desktop and site visit                                   |            |   |

#### STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

This is the remaining half of a Victorian company sports ground which opened in 1885 with great fanfare. It was reckoned one of the finest surviving in England along with other examples at Bournville (1887) and Port Sunlight (1889) (Inglis) (Historic England). However, only 1.5ha. (3.5 acres) less than 50% of the 8 acre layout by 1898 (OS) survives. Losses include to a new road which has sliced off the east side, the south section which contained a bandstand and tennis courts and led to the station has been lost to flats, and the original grandstand and the cycle track, banking and structures.

The surviving northern half comprises the area in and partly around the former cycle track and the circuit path echoes (but does not follow) its oval route and includes a small section of banking. The area is laid to grass and trees. The fine lodge in the Old English style (1885, listed Grade II) at the north entrance is the main surviving structure. Much of the industrial and railway setting survives with great sheds to the north and west (that to the west the immense Royal Train Shed) and the mainline embanked to the east but the loss of the south section of the park to flats has cut off the key connection with the canal and Wolverton Station at the former south-east corner.

## SITE DESCRIPTION

### Location, Area, Setting

Wolverton Park lies at the north-east edge of Wolverton, a town within the new city of Milton Keynes. Wolverton is a traditional railway town lying mid-way between London and Birmingham on the main west coast railway line. For over 150 years it was the site of major railway works whose buildings dominate the town on the west side of the mainline. Since the closure of the works in recent years many of these buildings have been regenerated and converted into flats. Wolverton Park lies c.700 m from the town centre in the heart of the old industrial area of Wolverton and is bounded on to the west and north sides by huge works sheds and by modern flats leading to the Grand Union Canal on the south side.

### Historic Development

#### Chronology

1838 – London and Birmingham Railway Company established its works in Wolverton

1880s – the works employed 2,000 people which doubled over the next 20 years

1885 – the London and Northwest Railway Company provided 7 acres on the north-east edge of Wolverton for a permanent sports ground for the health and welfare of their employees. Facilities included a football pitch, cinder cycle track, lawn tennis courts, bowling and quoits greens.

1885 – 3<sup>rd</sup> August, the Park opened in front of a crowd of 15,000 people with the ceremony including marching bands, sports demonstrations, fireworks and an evening ball. The Bucks Herald report of the opening ceremony describes the south, canal end of the Park where “there are other smaller lawns and a band stand raised above the principal lawn, and round the sides of the ground are borders for flowers and shrubs, the whole promising to present a very pleasing appearance when time has been allowed to get all the details finished.”

1899 – a wooden, three-gabled football stand built to accommodate 100 spectators.

1913 – a Grand Military Tournament held with an audience of 6,000

Up to WW2 – heyday of Wolverton Park with the bowling, athletics and cycling clubs regularly winning local leagues and cup trophies. The cycle racing track, with banking at the north end, was renowned throughout the country for being an excellent track and it attracted top riders from all around the country, including Olympic cyclists. The annual Whitsuntide festival drew runners and cyclists from all around the country with large crowds of spectators.

Post WW2 – the Park declined and was mainly used by the bowls club and Wolverton Town FC.

2006 – the Bowls Club moved to a new location

2008 – the wooden football stand dismantled

2009 – following a campaign to save the stand, a grandstand feature built in the style of the original and placed on the footprint of the old stand.

2010s – industrial areas of Wolverton regenerated and the old railway works around Wolverton Park converted into flats.

#### History of Wolverton and the Railway Works

Wolverton began to grow close to an existing canalside village after the London & Birmingham Railway (incorporated in the London & North Western Railway in 1846) established its works here in 1838, at a midway point between the two cities where engines could conveniently be changed. Locomotives were

made here until 1861; thereafter carriage building largely took its place. In 1886 the works covered 37 acres and employed 2,000; by 1907 both figures had more than doubled, staying at these levels until the early 1960s. In 1986 the workforce was reduced to under 1,000. By 2005 the works were largely vacant and some demolition had occurred. Wolverton was incorporated in the New Town of Milton Keynes in 1967, and although the town has retained its individual identity there has been substantial redevelopment. (Historic England Listing Description)

### History of the Park

The London and North West Railway Company, in common with many other large organisations in the C19, considered that they had a moral obligation to look after the health and welfare of their employees, so in 1885 they provided seven acres of land on the north-east edge of Wolverton for a sports ground. The facilities included a football pitch, a cinder cycle track, lawn tennis courts, bowling and quoits greens. The *Bucks Herald* report of the opening ceremony describes the canal end of the Park where “there are other smaller lawns and a band stand raised above the principal lawn, and round the sides of the ground are borders for flowers and shrubs, the whole promising to present a very pleasing appearance when time has been allowed to get all the details finished.” This south half of the park has been lost beneath modern flats. In 1899 a wooden, three-gabled football stand was built against the huge railway works building to the west to accommodate 100 spectators.

The heyday of Wolverton Park was the period up to World War II, with the bowling, athletics and cycling clubs regularly winning local leagues and cup trophies. The cycle racing track, with banking at the north end, was renowned throughout the country for being an excellent track and it attracted top riders from all around the country, including Olympic cyclists. The annual Whitsuntide festival drew runners and cyclists from all around the country with large crowds of spectators.

After World War II the Park declined and was mainly used by the bowls club and Wolverton Town FC. The bowls club moved to a new location in 2006 and the wooden grandstand, one of the oldest in the country, was used until 1987 after which it fell into disrepair and was dismantled in 2008. Following a campaign to save the stand, in 2009 a grandstand feature was built in the style of the original with its distinctive three gables and placed on the footprint of the old stand.

In the 2010s the former industrial areas of Wolverton were regenerated and the old railway works around Wolverton Park have been converted into flats. Flats were also built over the south section of the park cutting it off from the canal and station.

### Principal Building

At the north entrance, off Old Wolverton Road, stands the former Park Keeper’s Lodge (Listed grade II), built in 1885. It is built of brick, timber framing and some tile-hanging on the first floor with a red tiled roof. It has two storeys with projecting gabled front facade and bay window on the ground floor. To the left is a further timber-framed gable with a single-storey porch between the two gabled ends. It is ornamented by two prominent brick chimney stacks in the centre and rear of the building. It has a low brick wall in front; iron railings to the side.

The lodge (listed grade II), in the Old English style, is comparable with examples at Queen's Park, Crewe (another LNWR town). Although the ground floor which was probably originally bare brick is now part-

painted, and there is an extension to one side, in general the lodge is little altered. Along with examples of 1887 and 1889 at Bournville and Port Sunlight, Wolverton's is reckoned one of the finest surviving Victorian company sports grounds in England (Inglis), and the lodge is an integral part of that.

### Description

The 1.3 ha. Park is laid to grass and trees surrounded by a metal post and netting fence. The entrance is at the south-east corner, off Wolverton Park Road, through a gateway in the boundary fence.

A short path leads to the main oval circuit path which runs for 330m around the Park, in part following the line of the former cycle track, and which is planted with maples around the inside of the path. South of the circuit path an area of grass and shrubs and a small pond at the south-western corner, occupies the site of the former tennis courts and bowling green. The east section of the park including the cycle track on that side has been cut through by a modern road, Wolverton Park Road, parallel to the east boundary.

As the circuit path curves north the grandstand feature is to the west against the huge works building, situated on the footprint of the original three-gabled stand. A paved area in front has a shadow pattern of the gables. The circuit path on the line of the old cycle track runs north, parallel with the huge old railway works which bound the west side of the Park. Where the path curves to the right towards the north boundary is a short area of banking to the left, a surviving section of the former cycle track. Around 25m north of the path, outside the fenced area, stands the Park Keeper's Lodge, entered off Old Wolverton Road. The path then curves south along the east side of the Park, adjacent to the modern Wolverton Park Road, beyond which is the former embankment of the park returning to the Wolverton Park entrance.

Wolverton Park is dominated by the former railway works along the west edge and further works north of Old Wolverton Road. East of Wolverton Park Road, is the west coast mainline on an embankment and to the south the Park is overlooked by new flats built on the site of further railway works. These flats overlie the former south section of the park which was bounded to the south by the canal and was strongly connected with Wolverton Station which overlooked it. This section included a band stand and tennis courts with paths and mixed deciduous trees and conifers along the boundary (OS, 1898, 1938).

### CONCLUSIONS AND REFERENCES

#### Key Sources

*History of Milton Keynes and District, Volume 2*, Sir Frank Markham

wolvertonparkbc.com

Information plaque in Wolverton Park

*Bucks Herald* (8<sup>th</sup> August 1885)

Simmons, *The Victorian Railway* (1995);

N. Pevsner and E. Williamson, *The Buildings of England: Buckinghamshire* (1994);

S. Inglis, 'Because We're Worth It', *The Observer* (21 Sept 2003)

OS 25" map 1900, 1926 and 1941

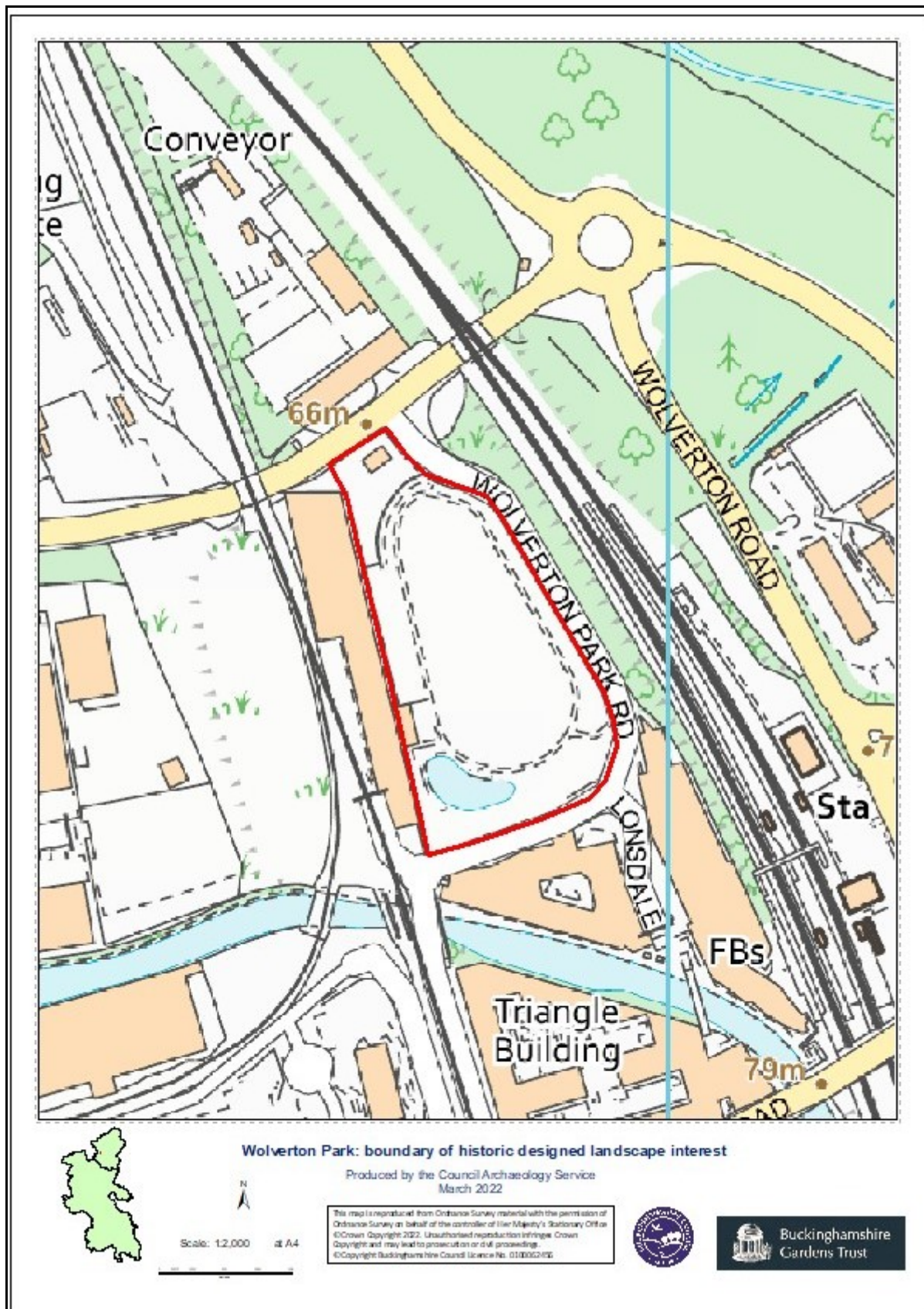
Britain from Above AP EPW022487

Buckinghamshire Archive postcard images (Wol/8) (Wol/78).

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>Reason for Interest (i.e., type of site, age, named designer)</b><br>The remains of a fine example of a Victorian company sports ground associated with the railway industry of north Bucks.   |   |
| <b>CONSERVATION STATUS (e.g., LBs, Conservation Area, Scheduled Monument)</b><br>The lodge is Listed Grade II.  |   |
| <b>Survival - What percentage of historic site?</b><br>50 % of the layout survives, in the north section of the site. The east side has been lost to a modern road and the ornamental south section is replaced with flats. The focal grandstand has gone, though replaced by another structure evoking it. | <b>Condition</b><br>Good condition but sadly altered. |
| <b>RECOMMENDATION</b><br>Potential for Local Listing as some significant features survive along with the relationship with the works and railway, but borderline as so much of the original layout by 1898 has been lost.   |   |
| <b>PRIORITY [High/standard, based on threats/issues]</b><br>Medium  |   |
| <b>Report by: Ann Birch</b> <b>Date: February 2022</b><br><b>Edited by: SR</b> <b>Date: March 2022</b>  |   |

**BOUNDARY MAP** [to be provided by Bucks Council HER]

March 2022 (A Birch, edited SR April 2022)





Scale: 1:1,330 at A4

**Wolverton Park: 2020 aerial photograph**

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Produced by the Council Archaeology Service  
March 2022



**Buckinghamshire  
Gardens Trust**



Entrance lodge looking south



Grandstand feature and old works (Royal Train Shed) along west side of Park



Grandstand feature, evoking the original



Looking north towards Entrance Lodge with Works buildings behind



Looking north-west. Grey banding is section of cycle track banking.



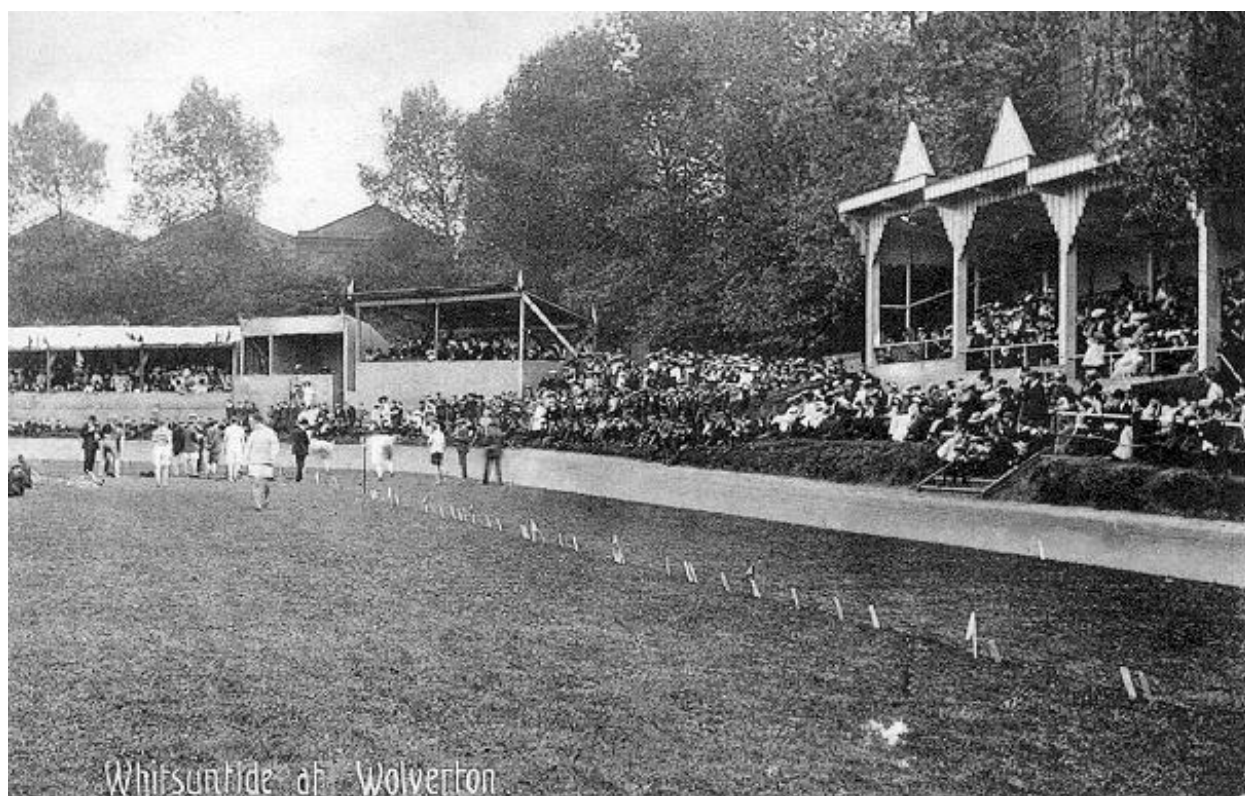
Looking south to recent development in south half of park



Royal Train Shed along the western side of the Park



Historic view north. Source: Buckinghamshire Archive reference WOL/78



View south-west with the grandstand. Source: Buckinghamshire Archive reference WOL/8