

The Kent Compendium of Historic Parks and Gardens for Sevenoaks District



Swanley Park, Sevenoaks



April 2012

Swanley Park

Sevenoaks, Kent

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INTRODUCTION

This site dossier and description has been prepared as part of the **Review of The Kent Compendium of Historic Parks and Gardens for Sevenoaks District 2011 - 2013**. This site is one of many sites that have been researched, visited and written about across the District and as a consequence has been included in the revised list of Historic Parks and Gardens covered by the District Council's Planning Policies. The list is not conclusive and further gardens may be added over time as research continues or information comes to light

The research was carried out by volunteers of the Kent Gardens Trust with support and training from the project consultant Virginia Hinze. The project was supported by English Heritage and Kent County Council.

The extent of the area identified represents the remains of the designed landscape and does not necessarily cover all remaining elements or the historical extent of landscape changes and takes no account of current ownership. Further Information is available from the contacts listed below. The partnership would like to thank the volunteers and owners who have participated in this project and given so much of their time, effort and hospitality to complete this challenging and rewarding task.

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Kent Gardens Trust
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STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Age, rarity: Swanley Park occupies surviving open land of a former market garden typical of the C19 and C20 local horticultural industry supplying vegetables fruit and flowers for the London markets; part of the Park's land are former grounds of the renowned Swanley Horticultural College.

Landmark status: the late C17 lime avenue which links the Park visually, physically and historically with Hextable gardens is a significant local scenic feature. The park offers fine views towards the Thames estuary.

Social and communal value: the Park contributes a significant and well-used local amenity and green space and acts as a buffer between Swanley and the village of Hextable. till to come

SITE DESCRIPTION

KENT
SWANLEY
SWANLEY PARISH

SWANLEY PARK

Landranger sheet 188
TQ 514694

SUMMARY OF HISTORIC INTEREST

A public park opened in 1983 by Swanley Town Council on various plots of land purchased by the Council in the previous 15 years including the former market garden land and buildings of New Barn Farm and a former area of Swanley Horticultural College's grounds (qv Hextable Gardens). Facilities laid out between 1981 and 2000 include amenity parkland, a boating lake, play areas, a wild garden and a café within a former cow shed from New Barn Farm.

CHRONOLOGY OF THE HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Swanley Park was formed in 1983 from five parcels of land acquired by Swanley Town Council over the previous 15 years. At the beginning of the 19C Swanley was a tiny village but with the coming of the railway and the building of Swanley Junction station the area around the village developed a great number of market gardens and orchards supplying vegetables fruit and flowers for the London Markets. The largest parcel of the park's land, New Barn Farm, former market garden land, consisted of 11ha (27 acres) which was purchased, along with New Barn farmhouse, from a Mrs. Gibson, the widow of a farmer in Wilmington. Another portion was part of the former grounds of Swanley Horticultural College, set up in Hextable in 1889 and gaining a high reputation before it was wrecked by bombing in 1944. The College's gardens survive today as Hextable Gardens (qv). A large boating lake was formed in the park following a proposal at Swanley Town Council in November 1981 and had been completed by the time of the park's formal inauguration on 16th July 1983. The New Barn miniature railway with 800m of track was opened in 1986. Since then a former cow shed from New Barn Farm has been turned into a café and a paddling pool and children's play areas have been constructed. In 2000 a wild garden was formed to celebrate the millennium. The park is owned and managed by Swanley Town Council.

SITE DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING.

Swanley Park lies immediately to the north of Swanley, separating the town from the village of Hextable. It is linked to Hextable Gardens by a fine lime tree avenue, said to date back to the C17 (Balls 1961), which runs for 365m in a north-easterly direction from the northern border of the Park to the Gardens. The Park is trapezoidal in shape with a longer northern boundary and a rectangular extension to the west. The total area is 60 acres (24.3 ha.). The

most defined boundary is to the north, formed by New Barn Road with bites taken out of this by a few late C20 houses. The main car park lies within the rectangular extension to the west and beyond this is a field of rough grass forming an auxiliary car park in the summer. Further west still is a rectangular area of scrubland with many brambles, the far edge of which constitutes the western boundary. Beyond the western boundary is the site of a former school. The southern boundary follows an irregular line around a series of small housing developments. The eastern boundary runs down the western edge of scrubby woodland through which there are numerous informal tracks into the park. The site slopes uphill from north-west to south-east. Adjacent to the eastern boundary of the park is an extensive area of largely self-sown woodland traversed by a dense network of ancillary paths. This area is in private ownership and planning permission to develop it for housing has so far (2011) been refused.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES

The main pedestrian entrance to the Park is at the mid-point of the northern boundary on New Barn Road near the former farmhouse of New Barn Farm. 450m further west is the main car park which is also entered via New Barn Road. A secondary car park which can be accessed directly from Swanley town via a short road, The Birches, is situated more southerly at the highest point of the whole Park, approximately 100m north of the south-west corner of the park. From this car park there is an extensive view towards the Dartford crossing and the low hills inland from the Essex shore. The two car parks are linked by a metalled path. There are numerous other informal pedestrian entrances and paths from the housing to the south and the woodland to the east.

BUILDINGS

The only buildings in the Park are grouped around the former New Barn Farmhouse which appears to date from the beginning of the 20C (now, 2011, in separate private ownership and outside the boundary of the site as designated. Some of the former farm buildings together with new shed-like structures have been adapted as a café, lavatories and storage for Swanley Town Council Parks department. The former farmyard is not accessible to the public but provides a base for various local organizations. Other park buildings situated around the farmhouse consist of various sheds for security staff, the miniature railway and boat hire.

PARKLAND

On entering the Park from the northern pedestrian entrance there are wire fences and child safety gates of thick tubular metal. Immediately inside the gates is a play area and paddling pool for small children to the east of the main path and a café area to the west. Further south is a paved area allowing access to the lake and to boat hire as well as to a playground for older children and the station for the miniature railway, which only functions during the summer. The lake is approximately 2.5 ha in size and has an irregular, roughly T-shaped outline. It contains two linked islands covered with shrubby trees

which act as a covert for the many exotic water fowl. To the west of the lake is a large area of open, mown grass around which the railway track follows an oval course. Lines of ornamental trees follow the northern part of the railway track. Beyond this to the west is the main car park and field of rough grass used for auxiliary parking. The car parking area is surrounded by scrubland with many brambles and is traversed by informal paths. Swanley Town Council is currently (2011) in discussion with Kent County Council to acquire the former playing fields of the adjacent Birchwood County primary school as part of the park. From the southern end of the lake the ground rises towards the secondary car park with its views to the Dartford crossing. There are a number of metalled paths particularly in the areas round the lake and the train station. The main path runs between the two car parks via the area around the train station. Along this path are lines of commemorative trees planted by individual people and organizations. Throughout the park there are many scattered trees but very few of them are more than 30 years old. To the south of the secondary car park is the Millennium wild life garden tended by local volunteers. Further south-east is an area given over to allotments within the park boundary.

REFERENCES

Books and articles

Balls, Horace J, *The history of Swanley Village and Hextable*, 1961

Balls, Horace J, Historical notes on Swanley Village. Date uncertain (*possibly same as for Hextable, compiled 1960 revised 1963?*)

Dartford Chronicle 3 May 1968

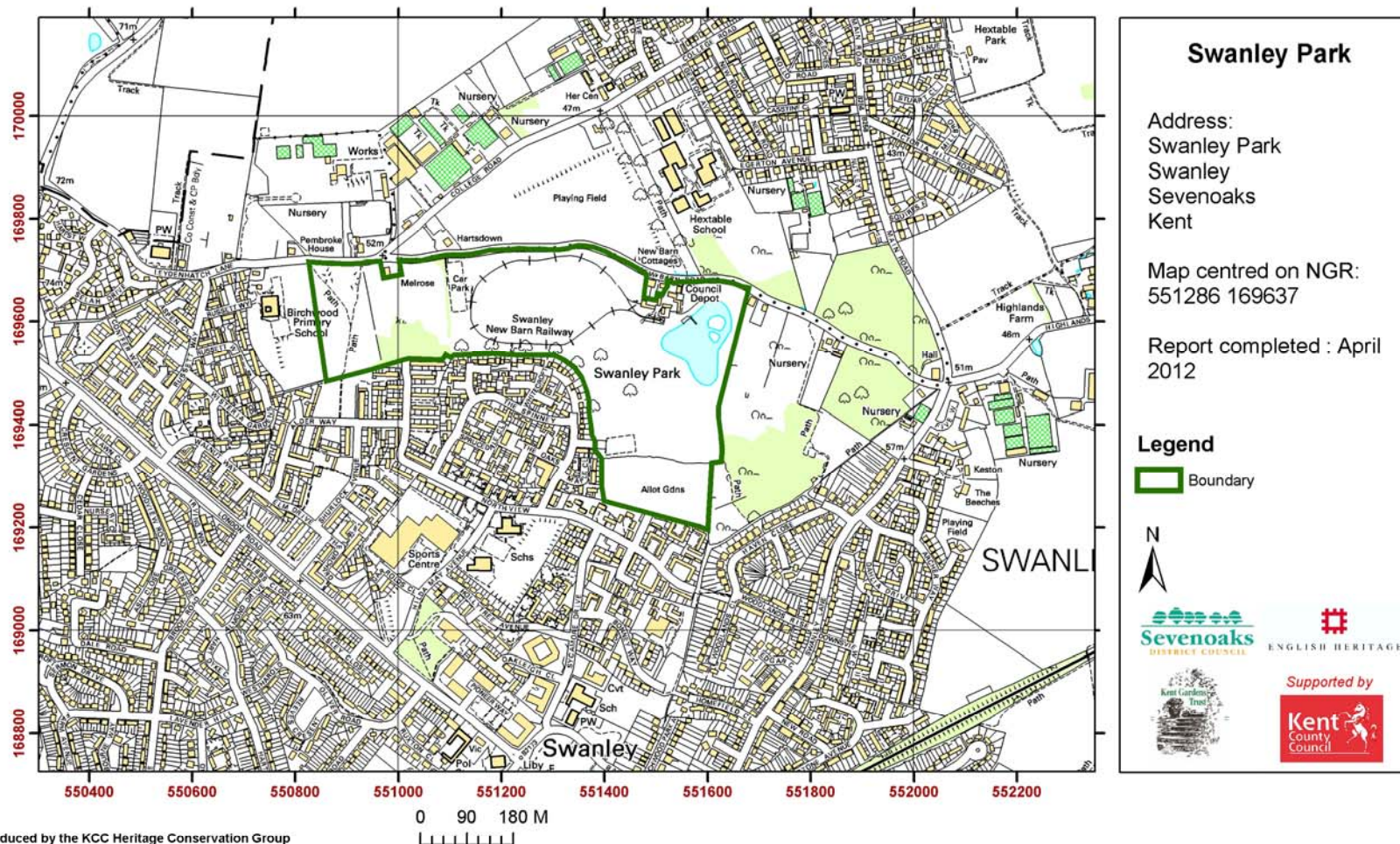
Pers. comm. from Mr Brian Daley, Town Clerk and Chief Executive Swanley Town Council 30 March 2012

Research by Paul Lewis

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Kent Compendium of Historic Parks & Gardens 2011 - 2013 review of Sevenoaks District

Fig. 1 Boundary map



Kent Compendium of Historic Parks & Gardens 2011 - 2013 review of Sevenoaks District

Fig. 2 Aerial photograph (2007)



Produced by the KCC Heritage Conservation Group

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