Sussex Gardens Trust

Parks and gardens of local importance in Sussex

Parks and Gardens of the Sussex Coast
Research and Recording project

BEXHILL SEAFRONT GARDENS



Mid 20C



2022

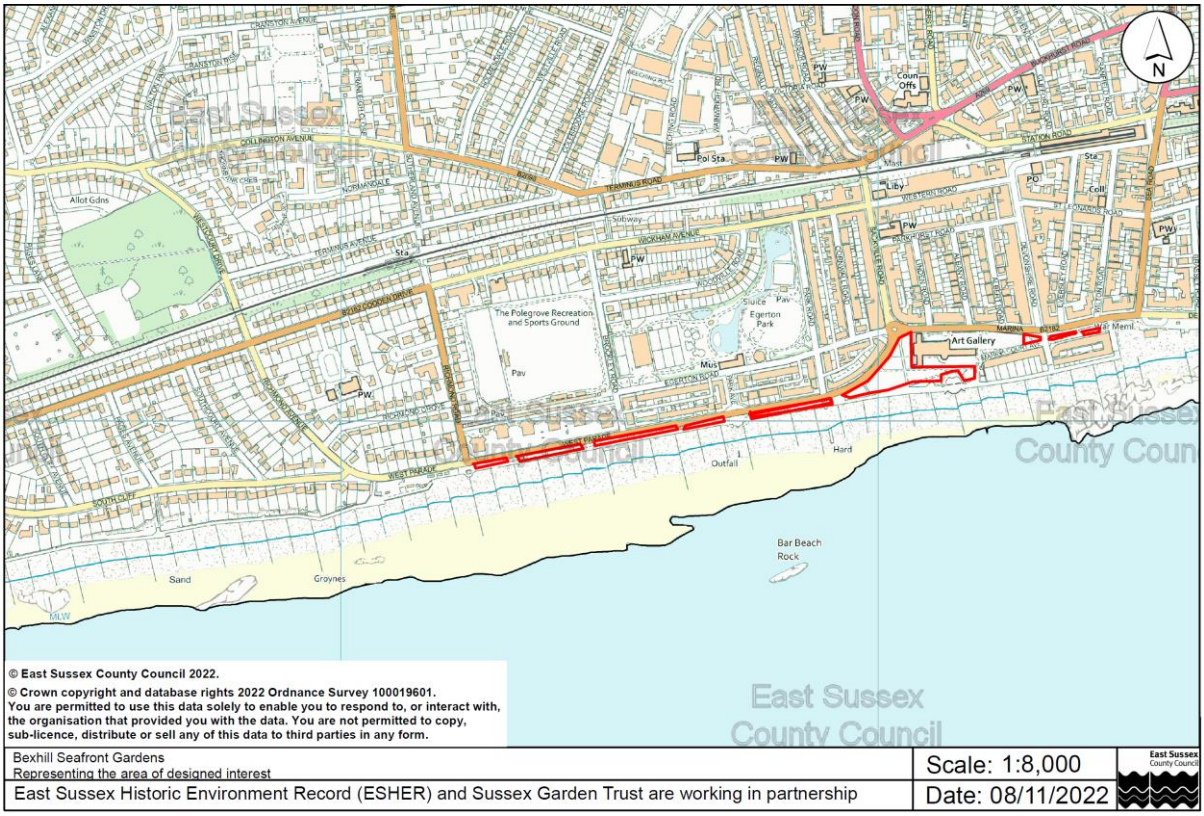
SUSSEX GARDENS TRUST

East Sussex County Council

west sussex county council

THE GARDENS TRUST

SITE BOUNDARY (1)



SITE BOUNDARY (2)



INTRODUCTION

Background to the 'Parks and Gardens of the Sussex Coast' Project

Our project aim, to research and record the parks and gardens of the Sussex coast, began in 2013 and is nearing completion. Most of the sites recorded are now in public i.e. local authority ownership where their special historic development is not necessarily recognised and therefore conserved. We hope our reports will help improve knowledge and guide their future management.

The variety and period of sites is huge, from C19 and early C20 town squares, 'Old English' and Italianate-style gardens with ponds, pergolas and seating, gardens with salt-resistant traditional bedding and C21 ecological planting, to large parks which began life as farmland owned by influential local families and aristocracy and provided the recreation and leisure space for new urban development.

The administrative areas covered are: Worthing and Adur jointly-run DC, Arun DC, Brighton and Hove City Council, Eastbourne and Lewes jointly-run DC, Rother DC and Hastings Borough. Only Brighton and Hove and Hastings hold a list of local heritage assets (see Historic England's guidance for a definition of local heritage assets and how to identify and protect them . https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/local-heritage-listing-advice-note-7/)

Brighton and Hove City Council's list is the most comprehensive (https://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/content/planning/heritage/local-list-heritage-assets) so our project has not addressed their sites although we may select a few of the more major ones for a deeper level of research in the future.

Content

All research – in local and national archives and on site – is undertaken by a team of volunteers who have received training from professionals expert in appraising designed landscapes who have worked extensively for English Heritage (now Historic England) on sites on its National Heritage List for England. All reports are peer-reviewed.

Each report comprises the following:

- A site boundary map drawn on the current Ordnance Survey map.

- The area within the boundary represents the area of designed historic interest; it does not necessarily include all surviving elements of the historical landscape design, which may be fragmented. It takes no account of current ownership.
- A current aerial photograph with the boundary shown.
- An overview and statement of significance based on the guidance set out in the *National Policy Planning Framework* – the government's guidance for local planning authorities in discharging their planning responsibilities.
- A written description, derived from documentary research and a visual site survey, the format following that used by Historic England for sites on the national *Register of Parks & Gardens of special historic interest* 2nd edn.

Supporters and Acknowledgements:

The Trust would like to thank the volunteers, owners, local authority staff (especially the East and West Sussex Historic Environment Records) and the many Friends groups who have participated in this project and given time and effort to completing this challenging task.
Further information is available from: www.sussexgardenstrust.org.uk

BEXHILL SEAFRONT GARDENS:
WEST PARADE,
THE DE LA WARR PAVILION
MARINA GARDENS

COUNTY: East Sussex

ESCC HER REF: MES39083

DISTRICT: Rother

OS REF: TQ 741 071

OVERVIEW

Three garden areas which form a connecting ribbon of green along the seafront represent 3 different periods in Bexhill's history namely the late C19 (Marina Gardens), the 1930s (the lawned setting of the De La Warr Pavilion) and the C21 (the Mediterranean-style planting and shelters along West Parade). The two former areas, which survive largely unchanged from their original concept, result from initiatives of several Earls de La Warr, to create a modern seaside resort while the third is a new piece of civic landscape design reflecting current environmental conditions and public expectations.

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Architectural/artistic: The lawned surrounds of the De La Warr Pavilion survive as the original landscape setting for the grade 1 building with only minor alterations or additions (minor shrub planting, a C21 bandstand). The lawns provide a visual and physical link with the early C20 Colonnade at beach level below.

The West Parade gardens, as a new piece of public landscape design, represent a C21 stage in the development of Bexhill as a resort; they represent specifically a response to existing environmental conditions of the site and contemporary design concepts. Conversely Marine Gardens survive as an example of typical C19 and C20 municipal design with bedding out. Taken together, the ribbon of gardens and lawns forms a connecting thread of designed green space along Bexhill's seafront.

Historic: The late C19 development of Bexhill was achieved, as in Eastbourne, by private enterprise, the land on which the gardens (and the De La Warr Pavilion) are laid out being owned by Sackville family. The 7th and later the 8th Earl De La Warr (Gilbert Sackville) drove the idea of Bexhill (as succeeding Dukes of Devonshire had done in Eastbourne) as a modern seaside resort from the 1880s and 90s while the 9th Earl championed the construction of the De La Warr Pavilion in the 1930s. A further significant player was the builder John Webb who built West Parade and laid out Egerton Park plus much else in the town. The creation of the new gardens in 2010 on West Parade represents a response by the local authority to meeting the changing aspirations of both visitors and the local community to the design of public open space and to current environmental issues.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The sites of West Parade gardens, the De La Warr Pavilion & the Colonnade, and the lawns to the east of the Pavilion were originally foreshore, West Parade being constructed in 1866 by John Webb, who also developed Egerton Park immediately to the north. By 1898 (OS 2nd edition map) a narrow planting strip had been established between the main seafront road and the Promenade, divided into blocks with a kiosk at the eastern end (south of Park Road) and a gap south of Park Avenue where there was a bandstand.

Further eastwards and at the same time (1897) the Metropole Hotel had been built at the junction of Marina and Marine Crescent /West Parade. A 1910 photograph shows an area of lawns and shrub between the Hotel and Marine Crescent down to the Promenade. A later (c1924) photograph shows shrubs and a wall down to the Promenade at the southern end of this area, just west of the Colonnade (which is still enclosed by wooden screens); a further photograph from 1924 shows mature shrubs and/or trees alongside Marine Crescent and the eastern end of West Parade. The Hotel was demolished in 1955 and later photographs (c1980) show this area being simply lawned.

In 1901 West Parade, together with Egerton Park, was bought by the Council from John Webb for £8000 (Bexhill-on-Sea-Coastal-Treasures-Database). In 1911 Bexhill Council erected the Colonnade (listed grade II), immediately to the south of the De La Warr Pavilion, to commemorate the coronation of George V, creating the seafront's earliest sheltered structure for the enjoyment of open-air beachfront concerts and performances.

During the 1920s Bexhill was in a residential boom, with a growing population of people moving in but by the early 1930s the town saw a need to embark on a development that would attract more visitors and expand it as a resort. This initiative was driven by the new mayor, the 9th Earl De La Warr ("Buck") whose family had built the greater part of Victorian Bexhill.

The resulting De La Warr Pavilion (listed grade I) was built in 1935 on the site of a former coastguard station (OS map revised 1897). The Pavilion seems to have been surrounded since by lawns, a 1980 photograph showing no planting alongside Marine Crescent. The narrow ribbon of seafront lawns and bedding extending eastwards from the Pavilion's car park along De La Warr Road as far as Sea Road (c175m) appear be of mid-late C20 origin, as they are not shown on the OS edition of 1950.

From the early 2000s (completed in 2015) the Pavilion was restored and developed as a regional arts and culture centre with a new bandstand with a contemporary design (by Niall McLaughlin and unveiled in 2001). As part of the ongoing work, HTA Landscape Architects were engaged in 2010 to design new planting around the Pavilion and a complete new landscape scheme for the West Parade. The design team comprised HTA landscape designers and architects, Dr Noel Kingsbury as horticultural advisor with colours inspired by artist Allison Turnbull's study of coastal colouration, this last commissioned especially for the project.

SITE DESCRIPTION

Location, Area, Boundaries, Landform, Setting

The areas of gardens and planting are situated along Bexhill's seafront, to the west and south of the Pavilion and westwards for some 660m along West Parade; the mid/late C20 lawns run eastwards from Channel View West for approximately 120m. The level ground occupied by West Parade rises smoothly but quite steeply eastwards from Jubilee Walk (which runs from Marina to the Promenade) to the south side of the De La Warr Pavilion. The eastern lawns are again on level ground.

All are bounded by roads and footways on their northern sides (West Parade, Marina and De La Warr Parade) and by tarmacked footpaths on the southern, seaward sides. The West Parade gardens occupy some 0.5 ha, the lawns and planting around the Pavilion approximately 1.5 ha and the eastern seafront lawns about a further 0.25ha. All the garden areas enjoy panoramic views southwards of the beach and sea and, from the Pavilion's lawns; there is a view over the balustrades into the Colonnade below. The landward setting comprises a built-up townscape of various periods, heights and uses.

Along West Parade the planting is contained and bounded by shrubs on the road (northern) side but spills out on to the Promenade on the other (southern) side.

Entrances and Approaches

The three areas of the gardens are unenclosed by any boundary structures and can be accessed from surrounding roads, footways or footpaths.

Gardens

The gardens are described as three continuous but separate entities.

De La Warr Pavilion lawns
Around the Pavilion there is a lawned area which rises smoothly but quite steeply eastwards to the south side of the Pavilion, it is intersected by a north/south footpath from Marina to the Promenade (Jubilee Walk) and an east/ west one from Marine Crescent which rises to the south side of the Pavilion's forecourt. The western and southern boundaries of the Pavilion (eastern and north-eastern boundaries of the lawned area) are planted with shrubs behind dwarf concrete walls and there is a hedge following the curve of Marine Crescent.

In parts the footpaths are sunk below the level of the lawns; the white concrete margins form an informal seating area with some formal seating incorporated into the margins. There are also steps up onto the lawns in places.

To the west the lawns extend some 117m from Jubilee Walk to where there is a tarmacked area with a kiosk. On the south -western boundary the lawn margins form an informal seating area to the main promenade, again with steps and some formal seating.

Since the ground rises in the south- eastern sector of the lawns the opportunity has been taken to form an embanked seating area, again in white concrete, falling to a level area with a random vertical jet water feature level within the promenade.
To the east the lawns run up to the Pavilion's flagged apron, but are separated from it by a planting margin, and run up to the northern side of the Colonnade.

Marina Gardens

These are described in two sections: (1) at the immediate eastern end of the Pavilion car park is an isolated garden area with 3 formal seats and a cycle rack and sea-tolerant planting which backs o to a small lawned area with further planting adjacent to Channel View West. (2): further east between Channel View West and Channel View East 3 further beds extend some 120m eastwards, parallel to the road on the northern side and with a curvilinear edge on the southern. Their boundaries comprise low hedging enclosing level grass areas enlivened with bedding plants in the summer months.

West Parade Gardens

Westwards from Park Road along West Parade lie the main newly-designed areas of planting and construction. The scheme comprises a 600m long mixed herbaceous border that defines a series of gardens rooms along the entire length of the seafront. The garden rooms are characterised as 'eating', 'playing' and 'relaxing' rooms, each designed and equipped to reflect their intended activity within a floriferous gardenesque setting. In total 31 garden rooms were created" (Bexhill's Next Wave Planting – HTA Landscapes). The plant selection of species and mixes of cultivars "has been carefully crafted to work with the existing environmental conditions of the site i.e. a public realm environment with persistent winds, full sun, occasional salt spray and light, impoverished sandy soils" (Bexhill on Sea's West Parade Promenade, HTA Landscapes).

At intervals throughout the new scheme are four contemporary timber-clad shelters each with a parallelogram floor plan, an asymmetrical, pitched, part open and part solid roof, a part-glazed part enclosed eastern side, and a partly open back. Each shelter is fully open to the southern sea views with a 'cranked' wooden bench. A cafe dating from 1968 (with intangible cultural significance) is incorporated some 285m from the western end of the gardens and a pre-existing public convenience immediately beyond their western extent, pre-dating the new scheme.

REFERENCES

Books, articles and publications

Guilmont, Aylwin, *Bexhill-on- Sea: A Pictorial History* (1982).

HTA Landscapes, *Bexhill on Sea's West Parade Promenade* (2010).

Kaye, Charles, *Old Bexhill*, (2002).

Porter, J., *Bexhill -on -Sea, A Histor*y (2015).

Maps

OS scale 25inches: 1 mile:
1st edition surveyed 1873 pub.1878.
2nd edition revised 1897 pub. 1899.
3rd edition revised 1908 pub. 1910.
4th edition revised 1928 pub. 1930.
5th edition revised 1938 pub. 1947.
6th edition revised 1950 pub.1952.

Images

Postcards and photographs from various websites:

Postcard of the De La Warr Pavilion and Promenade, Bexhill on Sea East Sussex publ. Shoesmith & Etheridge 1936-39, Historic England Images of England https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/photos/

https://www.alamy.com

Photo Marina Gardens 1927 https://www.francisfrith.com/bexhill/photos?page=2 Francis Frick Collection

https://www.bexhillmuseum.org.uk

Websites

Bexhill-on-sea Coastal Treasures Database <https://bexhillheritage.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/docs/Bexhill-on-Sea-Coastal-Treasures-Database.pdf>

Historic England Listing data <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1392998>

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