

# Victoria Park, St Helens, Merseyside

## Historic Assessment



### Document 1

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## **Victoria Park, St Helens**

### **Historic Assessment**

#### **Document 1**

##### **Contents**

##### **Introduction**

##### **Historical Development**

**Background to creation of the park**

**The Site**

**Establishment of the park**

**Development of the park**

**Recreational developments of the 1920's and 30's**

**The Second World War**

**Post war changes**

**Analysis of change**

**Chronology of Principal Events**

##### **Site appraisal**

##### **Assessment of historic significance**

##### **Summary of issues affecting historic significance**

##### **Conservation Principles**

##### **Appendix**

**Appendix 1: Full Chronology**

**Document 2****Plans, Drawings and Photopanel****Plans**

STVP/HD/01	Early Plans
STVP/HD/02	Park Proposals
STVP/HD/03	1894 Ordnance Survey
STVP/HD/04	1908 Ordnance Survey
STVP/HD/05	1927 Ordnance Survey
STVP/HD/06	1945 Aerial Photograph
STVP/HD/07	Site Analysis

**Drawings**

STVP/HD/10	Park Buildings
STVP/HD/11	Bandstand designs

**Photopanel**

Photopanel 1	The pond
Photopanel 2	The grotto
Photopanel 3	The formal garden – 1
Photopanel 4	The formal garden – 2
Photopanel 5	Entrances
Photopanel 6	Park facilities
Photopanel 7	1929 Aerial photograph

## **Introduction**

This report on the Historical Development of Victoria Park, St Helens has been prepared for NPS NW Ltd South Lakeland on behalf of St Helens Council Parks and Open Spaces Department by Barbara Moth Consultant Landscape Architect. It is one of a number of studies undertaken to inform the development of proposals for the regeneration of Victoria Park and in support of St Helens Stage 2 application for funding from the Heritage Lottery's Parks for People Initiative.

The report is presented in two sections. This written document describes the historical development of the park, its origin and changes over time; provides a site appraisal, an assessment of historic significance, and a summary of issues affecting historic significance and conservation principles.

The second section, bound separately, comprises plans, drawings and photographs supporting the written document.

## **Historical Development**

This section of the report outlines the context within which Victoria Park was first established, describes the site prior to development and the design, layout, additions and losses from the park.

### **Background to creation of the park**

The need for a park and choice of site are closely linked to the history and development of the town itself.

Until the early 19<sup>th</sup> century St Helens was little more than a village. The Domesday survey records no settlement in the area. The townships of Eccleston, Windle, Parr and Sutton and 11 others constituted Prescot parish, part of the Lichfield diocese. As these parishes were large, chapels were built as intermediate places of worship between the parish churches. One such chapel within Windle beside the road between Warrington and Ormskirk was dedicated to St Helen. It is shown on John Speed's county map of 1610, see Plan 01.

By 1540 coal had been discovered and was being mined at Sutton Heath. During the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries outcropping coal seams were excavated by hand usually from shallow pits. These were abandoned as they became flooded by ground water and a new pit would be created nearby. By the early 18<sup>th</sup> century a combination of the development of the Cheshire salt industry and growth of Liverpool created a demand for coal and an incentive to overcome the difficulty and cost of transportation. Between 1726 and 1746 the road from Liverpool to Prescot and then to St Helens was turnpiked enabling Windle and Eccleston coal pits to have access to the Liverpool market. In 1757 the Sankey Brook was made navigable by cutting a canal to bypass the most tortuous stretches of the watercourse. By 1771 an estimated 90,000 tons of coal were passing down the canal to Liverpool each year.

Coal and canal became the catalysts for industrial development. John Mackay, a coal proprietor, encouraged furnace industries to his Ravenshead property south of St Helens. This resulted in the establishment of the British Cast Plate Glass Companies Manufactory, England's largest industrial building of the period. The Parys Mine Company from Anglesey came to Ravenshead and set up a

smelting works beside the canal to produce copper. In 1827 the St Helens Crown Glass Company founded by Peter Greenall and William Pilkington, later to become 'Pilkington Brothers', made their first glass, and salt, alkali, textile and brewing industries also thrived.

Workers were attracted to the opportunities for employment and the town spread with limited provision of basic amenities. Residents lived in the smoky smelly atmosphere created by the mines, manufacturing and chemical processes. Peter Greenall, MP, promoted an 'Act for paving, lighting, cleansing, watering and otherwise improving the town of St Helens' in 1845, the need for this demonstrated by cholera epidemics in 1849 and 1854. The 1868 Charter of Incorporation defined St Helens officially as a Municipal Borough and the St Helens Improvement Act of 1869 gave the new borough powers under sections 243-245 to create parks, fund, maintain and use them. It was not until 1886 that St Helens acquired and opened Cowley Hill Park, subsequently renamed Victoria Park.

### The Site

Much of Windle remained a rural area into the 19<sup>th</sup> century when St Helens population grew rapidly from 5,825 in 1831<sup>1</sup> to 45,000 in 1870. Robert Sherbourne's watercolour of 'Cowley House and Billinge Beacon' 1793<sup>2</sup> indicates a rolling landscape of fields bounded by treed hedgerows, with Cowley House set in the summit of a rounded hill and smaller cottages along a lane. Greenwood's Map of Lancashire 1818 (see Plan 01) indicates the early development of St Helens, mainly to the south around Ravenshead, but with Cowley Hill Lane and the route of City Road clearly shown. Windle Tithe Map of 1842, based on a map of 1801 (see Plan 01) and the First Edition Ordnance Survey published in 1849 (see Plan 02) confirm the rural nature of the landscape of Cowley Hill.

The place names and field names are informative. Cowley may be derived from cow's pasture, ley or leah being a clearing in a wood, or, as most places named Cowley are associated with hills, may mean 'a round top'<sup>3</sup>. Land owned by John Speakman included Rye Grassfield (988), Great Marled Hey (991) and Little Marled Hey (993), fields with a cluster of marl pits and a single marl pit on their adjoining boundaries. 'Marl' is the term given to locally occurring areas of clay with a lime content that was used to make ploughed soil less acidic. The practice of marling was widespread, occurring from the 17<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Marl pits were often created in clusters of two or three and almost always respect the enclosure system existing at the time of their excavation, as here. After extraction the clayey subsoil held water so that over the years the pits became permanent ponds with a fringe of trees, typically alder, a characteristic feature of the lowland Lancashire and Cheshire landscape. The field names and ponds here bear witness to this practice and provide evidence of the nature of the subsoil.

Adjacent fields owned by Thomas Caldwell also owe their names to earlier excavations. These include Coal Pit Meadow (984), Marsh Meadow (985), The Delfs (994) and Little Clay Hey (995). Coal mining may not have succeeded in 'Coal Pit Meadow' due to the presence of ground water, indicated by the name of the adjacent field 'Marsh Meadow'. Delf means 'digging, mine, quarry,

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<sup>1</sup> According to the Penny Cyclopaedia, 1839, wikipedia.org/

<sup>2</sup> Presland, M. *St Helens a pictorial history*, Phillemore, 1995 includes an image of the watercolour at Manchester Central Library

<sup>3</sup> Ekwall, E, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Place-names*, Oxford Clarendon Press, 1991

ditch'<sup>4</sup> inferring that 'The Delfs' was also a place of excavation, perhaps exploratory for clay, coal or marl.

The First Edition 6 inch Ordnance Survey published in 1849 indicates some change in the agricultural land belonging to John Speakman. The marl pits are now linked by a belt of woodland and the profile of the marl pit cluster has been altered to create a single large pond with an island. A summerhouse is indicated south of the pond and the fields each side are shown as parkland, with 'Great Marled Hey' to the east having parkland trees. John Speakman died in 1847 about the time that the survey for the First Edition recording these changes was completed. John Ansdell, a local solicitor who had married the widow of John Speakman's brother Richard Speakman, acquired part of the Cowley Hill estate and built Cowley House in 1849- 1850. One interpretation of this sequence of events is that John Speakman began the creation of a park, and that John Ansdell, a relation by marriage, acquired the property after his death with the intention of completing the park and house.

At this time Cowley Hill lay outside the town and was being colonised by a better class of housing of which John Ansdell's Italianate villa by Charles Read was the grandest<sup>5</sup>. Of two and three storeys with a four storey tower it was situated south of the large pond with views to north west, south west and south east; stabling and service buildings lay to the north east. John Ansdell must have added to the area of the land acquired from John Speakman for when he died in 1885 his executors offered Cowley House and the estate of 31 acres to St Helens Corporation for a park. The council acquired the property in January 1886 for £11,000 and placed a protective restriction on the site so that it could only ever be used as a park or recreation ground.

### **Establishment of the park**

As there are no plans of John Ansdell's park much has to be deduced from council records, early photographs and a plan of the proposed park produced in the local paper to coincide with the opening of the park on June 14<sup>th</sup> 1886<sup>6</sup>, see Plan 02. The principal approach to the house was from Cowley Hill Lane. From Windlehurst Gate the drive swept uphill to a forecourt on the north- west facade and thence into a service court with stabling adjacent to a walled garden. A formal garden lay south west of the house, enclosed on three sides by the house, a conservatory and garden wall with the fourth side open to the park. A planted mound screened the house and formal garden from new villas on Rutland Street, and it seems probable that other belts and groups of trees were planted to soften or screen the park boundaries, some of which were walled<sup>7</sup>. The First Edition Ordnance Survey and plan of the proposed park both show an 'old footpath' from Cowley Hill Lane to Rutland Street. It is evident from the disposition of planting groups on the eastern side of the footpath that Ansdell sought to screen users of the path from the house. Paths from the house circumscribed the pleasure grounds focused on a large pond, and crossing a bridge near a small building presumed to be a boathouse. The structure shown as a summerhouse on the First Edition Ordnance Survey is still

<sup>4</sup> Ekwall, E, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Place-names*, Oxford Clarendon Press, 1991

<sup>5</sup> Pevsner, N and Pollard, R *The Buildings of England Lancashire: Liverpool and the south-west*, Yale University Press 2006, p564. Presley, M in *St Helens a Pictorial History* states that the house was designed by George Harris.

<sup>6</sup> St Helens Local History and Archives Library, A78.2 (P) *Supplement to the St Helens Newspaper and Advertiser, Saturday, June 19<sup>th</sup> 1886*

<sup>7</sup> Minutes of 16.6.1886 refer to 'rebuilding old wall' in connection with J. and T. Yearsley's tender for erecting a dwarf wall for the park.

present though not named, and is consistent with the location of the surviving grotto.

On 2<sup>nd</sup> April 1886 the Parliamentary, Improvement, and General Purposes Committee met at Cowley House:

1. *To arrange with the Executors of the late John Ansdell for immediate possession of the premises.*
2. *To obtain and accept tenders for external cement work of the mansion and for the painting of the outside woodwork of the mansion and conservatories*
3. *To purchase all or any of the plant, garden seats and implements on the premises, suitable for the proposed Park*
4. *To purchase trees and shrubs to the value of £50*
5. *To engage men to remove any decayed trees; plant new ones, and put the grounds in order*

The report indicates that in the latter years of Ansdell's life or since his death the property had suffered a degree of neglect which the councillors were keen to address in order to open the park. Later in April the surveyor submitted a plan and estimates for laying out Cowley Park which was generally approved and it was resolved "that tenders be invited for the wall and railings between points A and B, Entrance gates and Pillars, also that the Surveyor be instructed to proceed with the laying out of the walks, and that he obtain patterns and estimates for garden seats."<sup>8</sup> The Surveyor also invited tenders for 1400 trees for the park. The Committee engaged a Supernumerary Park Constable who was allowed to live in the Windlehurst Lodge and accepted the application of E. Pye for the situation of Head Gardener and Park Keeper.

On 1<sup>st</sup> June the Surveyor reported the following estimate of expenditure:

<i>Lodge</i>	<i>£450.0.0</i>
<i>Railings, Walls and Entrance gates</i>	<i>£1200.0.0</i>
<i>Urinals</i>	<i>£100.0.0</i>
<i>Seats and Notices</i>	<i>£122.0.0</i>
<i>Walks and Drains</i>	<i>£860.0.0</i>

The following week the footpath from Rutland Street had been conveyed to the Corporation, Messrs Doulton's offer of "terracotta work to value of £20 as per catalogue" had been accepted, and John Finch of Dudley was "to supply 20 gander seats (design 64) 5' 6" long @ 12/6d each and 20 (design 46) 5' 6" long at 32/6d each with 5/d discount."<sup>9</sup> A tiered fountain thought to be the one given by Doulton is shown on an early photograph of the formal garden, see Photopanel 3.

Cowley Hill Park was formally opened by the Mayor on 14<sup>th</sup> June 1886, after the grounds had been put in order but before the proposed work was carried out. Expenditure on the park was criticised by an article in the St Helens News and it was perhaps to balance this criticism and celebrate the park's opening that a plan of the park was published. It seems probable that the published "Plan shewing proposed mode of laying out the Cowley Hill Estate as a Public Park"<sup>10</sup> (Plan 02) was based on the

<sup>8</sup> 12.04.1886 Parliamentary, Improvement, and General Purposes Committee Minutes

<sup>9</sup> 07.06.1886 Parliamentary, Improvement, and General Purposes Committee Minutes

<sup>10</sup> St Helens Local History and Archives Library, A78.2 (P) *Supplement to the St Helens Newspaper and Advertiser, Saturday, June 19<sup>th</sup> 1886*

Surveyor's plan mentioned in the minutes. The plan indicates the extent of wall and railings between points A, on Cowley Hill Lane at the park boundary with the houses on Rutland Street, and B, towards the southern corner of the park on City Road. Yearsley's tender for erecting a dwarf wall, four pillars, rebuilding old wall and three entrance pillars (stone) for main entrance and railings was accepted together with "Francis Morton and Co's revised tender for palisading 5' high and 8' gates"<sup>11</sup>. The plan also shows the proposed sinuous path around the whole park which was modified by a link west to Cowley Hill Road and had a turnstile at a pedestrian entrance on the north boundary. The large lake and bandstand were never built though a drawing of a MacFarlane bandstand surviving in St Helens Local History and Archives Library may have been obtained for Cowley Hill Park, see Drawing 11. The proposals plan also identifies a triangle of land at the junction of Rutland Street and City Road which was given to the Council by Colonel David Gamble.

So by the end of 1886 the original layout had been supplemented by the planting of trees, some new paths and entrances, and the boundaries enclosed by dwarf walls and palings. No use had yet been confirmed for the house though Mr B. A. Dromgoole had proposed the establishment of a Museum, Art Gallery and School of Art and offered £100 in support.

### **Development of the park**

In 1887 a portion of Colonel Gamble's land was added to the park and Yearsley's tender for erection of a lodge and premises at the North Road entrance was accepted<sup>12</sup>. Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee was celebrated with a fireworks display and the renaming of the park 'Victoria Park' by the Mayor Colonel Gamble. Development focused on facilities for visitors with a MacFarlane drinking fountain installed near the large pond, see Photopanel 6, four rooms with seating opened at the Mansion House, and the provision of additional park seats, stalls selling tea and coffee, and the greenhouses which opened each Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday from 2 – 4pm. Councillor R Pilkington donated ferns and palms for the conservatory, trees and shrubs were purchased for around the "wicket gate" on Cowley Hill Lane, and the first of many applications to use the park for sport was received by the committee.

Improvements continued through 1888 with the planting of 150 rhododendrons, installation of kerb channels and edging tiles, the path from North Road entrance extended from 7'6" to 12 feet, agricultural drains laid under land donated by Colonel Gamble and the painting of "conservatories and roofs of greenhouses". A tender was received for the fencing of ponds but the work does not seem to have been carried out<sup>13</sup>. In 1889 it was "resolved that a band Platform with music stands, be erected in Victoria Park in accordance with plans now submitted by Surveyor, at an estimated cost of £25"<sup>14</sup>. Band performances started the following year. The band platform does not appear to be recorded on the 1894 Ordnance Survey. The ground floor of the Mansion House was used for the sale of refreshments.

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<sup>11</sup> 16.06.1886 Parliamentary, Improvement, and General Purposes Committee Minutes

<sup>12</sup> The listing text for the Lodge, listed Grade II, gives a date of c.1840's for the lodge. This seems unlikely given the council minutes recording receipt of tenders for its construction in 1887, and the fact that the land on which it was built was only added to the parkland about this date.

<sup>13</sup> According to the 1894 Ordnance Survey

<sup>14</sup> 15.05.1889 Parks, Markets and General Purposes Committee Minutes



In 1890 “following a committee visit to the park it was resolved that 12 swings be erected, 6 for girls and 6 for boys, and that the Children’s Sand heap be extended” and an additional walk was made on the City Road side. This is thought to be the sinuous path parallel to the road.

In 1892 following considerable debate and consultation, three ground floor rooms in the Mansion opened as a Museum. The rooms “were connected by open doorways” to facilitate use as a Picture Gallery and Museum. The opening exhibition sold 206 Season tickets and 2,097 day tickets between 5<sup>th</sup> May and 12<sup>th</sup> June. Thereafter the committee minutes frequently report the receipt of gifts enabling the museum to build a permanent collection. Numerous surviving photographs and postcards of the Mansion House record the museum and formal garden. Other early images focus on the pond with its folly or grotto, islands with a rustic duck house, bridge and boathouse, and, partly hidden by vegetation, a small hexagonal gazebo.

In 1892 a shelter was erected in the park situated north of the large pond, see Drawing 10 and photopanel 1, the first of a number of park buildings providing accommodation for park users. In 1897 Doulton donated a second more elaborate fountain that replaced his earlier gift in the formal garden, see Photopanel 3 and 4. Children were allowed to pass through the ornamental grounds near the fountain, but not allowed to play or loiter there<sup>15</sup>. The semi circular Doulton seat appears to have been added to the garden at about the same time, facing the fountain and with its back to the park.

In 1899 a Meteorological Station was built by Boulton and Paul Ltd on the higher ground in the south of the park. In 1901 there was correspondence between the Borough Engineer and Pilkington Brothers regarding the escape of gases from Cowley Hill Works into Victoria Park. Later reports record damage to trees caused by the fumes. A 1904 account describes the popularity of the park noting the elms and the difficulties in maintaining displays due to pollution. In 1905 there were requests for permission to hold Open Air Concerts for Children in Victoria and other parks during the summer for the ‘Fresh Air Fund’.

In 1905 the Borough Engineer submitted a plan showing suggested improvement of City Road in connection with additions to the Works of Pilkington Bros Ltd. The road improvements involved taking a strip of land from Victoria Park, the loss of the splayed entrance on City Road and the demolition of some cottages, see Plan 05.

In 1908 the committee considered providing bowling greens but it was decided that it would be better to create a 3<sup>rd</sup> bowling green at the Queen’s Recreation Ground instead. In 1909 Cowley Girls School was granted the right to use park twice a week for games and a Charity Cricket match was held during which the Park was closed to public, both evidence of increasing demands to use the park for sport and fund raising events. Tennis courts were provided on the easterly side of the walk from the St Mark’s Gate in 1911.

By 1911 the conservatories were becoming dilapidated and the committee paid a visit to inspect their condition. A drawing for a replacement conservatory was prepared and sent out to a number of firms whose names are noted on the drawing, see drawing 1. The tender of Messenger and Co of Loughborough was to be accepted but clearly the Council considered the expenditure excessive and

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<sup>15</sup> 13.12.1907 Parks and Public Buildings Committee

asked for proposals not exceeding £400, but then deferred the matter altogether until the following year. In February 1913 severe gales partially destroyed the conservatory. Tenders were invited again and the contract to repair and rebuild the conservatory was awarded to Messenger and Co for £625. A comparison of early photographs and Ordnance Survey plans indicate that the new conservatory had a different profile and a reduced footprint, stopping short of the house at one end and the garden wall at the other.

On 8<sup>th</sup> July 1913 King George V and Queen Mary visited St Helens. Their tour passed through Pilkington's Cowley Hill Works, leaving at the north end of City Road and entered Victoria Park where all the schoolchildren were assembled between "the entrance on Cowley Hill Lane at Windle City and near Windlehurst Lodge with a view to their Majesties driving through the park"<sup>16</sup>. The Borough Engineer was instructed to widen the gates at Windle City entrance and to erect permanent gates and pillars, the entrance thereafter to be called Kings Gate in commemoration of the visit.

During the First World War Belgian refugees were accommodated in the Mansion House, four women gardening students were trained in the park and allotments laid out in the grounds. St Helens Allotment Holders Association applied for exclusive use of Victoria Park on 18<sup>th</sup> August 1917 for holding a Horticultural Show and Garden Fete, proceeds to go to local War Charities. The object of the show was to encourage enthusiasm among allotment holders. The allotments remained for some years after the war but no new tenancies were let after 1921.

### **Recreational development in the 1920's and 30's**

In 1924 the Parks and Cemeteries committee decided to lay out 2 bowling greens and tennis courts on the western side of the park, see drawing 10. It appears that these facilities were accompanied by a bowls house of some description because tenders for the sale of refreshments from the bowls house were let in 1926. The accommodation was perhaps temporary or inadequate because in 1928 the Borough Engineer was requested to prepare proposals and estimates for a refreshment room, bowls house and public conveniences, and a bandstand. Drawings of the bowls house show a brick building with a steeply pitched tile roof overhanging sheltered verandas to all sides, see drawing 10. In 1929 an application was made to the Unemployment Grants Commission to fund the projects. The commission supported public works schemes as a means of relieving unemployment in areas of the country worst hit by the Great Depression. A grant was awarded to support construction of the refreshment room, bowls house and public conveniences, but the £2,500 requested for the bandstand was not forthcoming because "due economy in the design had not been exercised, and a modification of the design on a more economical scale should be considered by the Council."<sup>17</sup>

Officers had visited other towns for inspiration for the new bandstand recording examples from Harrogate, Southport, Manchester and Shipley<sup>18</sup>. It is unclear which bandstand proposal was submitted to the commission as several different undated designs survive, but it may have been the proposal for a circular bandstand in Beaux Arts style, based on designs of a bandstand for the Municipal Gardens Southport. This drawing has the same presentation and colouring as that produced for the bowls house which was approved, see drawings 10 and 11. The Borough Engineer

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<sup>16</sup> St Helens Local History and Archives Library, flat plan 3807

<sup>17</sup> Parks and Cemetery (Mansion House) Sub-Committee, 12.11.1929

<sup>18</sup> Drawings held in St Helens Local History and Archives Library

was requested to prepare a revised bandstand proposal and estimate but in April 1930 the Unemployment Grants Committee wrote to say that they could not regard the construction of a bandstand as suitable for state assistance. The undated designs, some of which are shown on drawing 11, are evidence of the Council trying to achieve economy and ultimately having to fund the bandstand locally. A simple scheme was approved for construction in the north western park, see drawing 11. A schedule of band concerts and proposal to enclose the area for band performances and charge admission suggests that the band concerts were very popular. An aerial photo of the park shows a raised platform enclosed by a rail surrounded by rows of chairs, see Photopanel 7. This is the only evidence that has been found for a bandstand, though this structure is without covering or roof, even simpler than the scheme that was approved.

In the 1930's Notre Dame School were granted use of an area for hockey and there were male and female bowling clubs based in the park. In 1935 there was a proposal to erect an Old Men's Shelter. This came to fruition in 1938/9 when a pavilion for aged and infirm men was erected beside the bowls house in memory of Alfred Griffin, paid for by his family<sup>19</sup>.

### **The Second World War**

During 1938 and 1939 Pilkington Brothers worked closely with the Borough to train Air Raid wardens, put in place air raid precautions, install camouflage and construct shelters within their works<sup>20</sup> but it appears that it was not until 1940 that a public air raid shelter was approved for Victoria Park. The shelter was constructed near the main City Road entrance, close to the terrace houses of roads around Windle Street. Disturbance of the ground can be seen on a 1945 aerial photograph, see plan xxx, and current park staff recollect tales of entrances to the shelter being blocked up.

During the war extensive boundary areas of the park were given over to allotments and a larger area appear to have been cultivated mechanically, perhaps for growing the potatoes recorded in minutes of 1942. Iron railings were scrapped for the war effort and hedges were planted to fill the gaps created by loss of railings. Fuel restrictions meant that only 10% of glasshouse areas could be used for ornamental plants, the rest being put to productive use for growing food.

### **Post war change**

After the war areas used for allotments were gradually restored and the park with its museum, recreation facilities and planting displays continued to provide a good place to visit. At this time there appears to have been a rectangular ornamental pool in the sunken garden. In 1965 a decision was taken to move the museum to the Gamble Institute in the centre of St Helens, vacating the Mansion House. Subsequently the Parks department moved from their base in the cemetery to occupy the house as offices and use the outbuildings for the storage of machinery; the glass houses supplied all the Borough Parks and the conservatory contained plants that were loaned out for displays and events. The parks department entered local horticultural shows, enabled St Helens to win a Britain in Bloom award and produced colourful bedding displays.

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<sup>19</sup> Alfred Griffin, son of George William Griffin proprietor of a local photography business, was elected an auditor for St Helens in 1898.

<sup>20</sup> Pilkington's staff magazine, *The Cullet*, nos. 41, 43, 44, 46 and 47

In the 1970's Dutch Elm disease resulted in the loss of about 200 trees from the park, one falling on the only mulberry tree near the mansion. The shelter was converted to changing rooms, the last cottages on City Road were demolished and walling round the park was removed but it was the introduction of Compulsory Competitive Tendering (CCT)<sup>21</sup> in the 1980s that resulted in the greatest series of changes including the loss of site based staff, planting beds and borders and the sale of glasshouses and collections. Vandalism increased; the Griffin Memorial Pavilion was burnt down, the Bowling pavilion was first damaged and then burnt in 1987/8, and the shelter and meteorological station were also lost due to arson. Toilets were closed due to problems of drug abuse. The condition of the conservatory declined and it was replaced by a modern structure in 1983; the formal garden was enclosed by a wall with panels of railings, which necessitated the relocation of the semi circular Doulton seat. Stone retaining walls replacing the grass banks may have been constructed at this time. More recently railings have been installed all round the house. The clay tennis courts ceased to be maintained in 1997/8, the bowlers left around 2002 and maintenance of the greens ceased in 2006/7. The boathouse was removed, the path levelled and the grotto has been subject to repeated vandalism in recent years losing its large tower and much of the fabric.

In 1992 a decision was taken to sell the Mansion House and associated buildings together with the walled and formal gardens; various leisure businesses were suggested as potential users. The property was acquired by Age Concern UK who undertook some restoration work and developed the property to provide day care facilities. Beside the pond there is a stone step with an inscription, possibly a mounting block, that may have been relocated from the courtyard at the time of sale. Windlehurst Lodge was sold off as a private residence in about 2000. The lodge by City Road has been empty for some years and attempts to sell it in 2007 met with strong opposition as did a recent planning application to construct sports pitches in the park.

In the past ten years the play area has been refurbished and a ball court and skate park installed. In 2010 a new teen play area was added adjacent to the skate park. Due to fears over personal security and drug dealing shrubs are 'coppiced twice annually'.

### **Analysis of change**

The original house at Cowley Hill took advantage of the prospect and elevation of the site. The location of Ansdell's Italianate Mansion, lower down the hill, was governed by land ownership but still enjoyed rural views and the advantage of being distanced from industrial development at Ravenshead. The park begun by John Speakman utilised the existing marl pit ponds to create new features and incorporated local waste materials to construct a summerhouse, later known as the folly or grotto. The development of the park attracted other local businessmen to live in the neighbourhood, their villas taking advantage of views over Cowley Hill Park.

In 1876 the Cowley Hill Plate Glass Works on City Road opened. It is not known what impact this and other associated development had, but the close proximity of the works must have diminished the original attractions of Ansdell's property. Following Ansdell's death in 1885 the sale of Cowley Hill to

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<sup>21</sup> CCT was introduced in an attempt to bring greater efficiency to local government through the use of competition.

St Helens Corporation for a public park solved the problems of both parties; for the trustees of John Ansdell's will it disposed of a grand house and park in a neighbourhood that was becoming increasingly dominated by the glassworks and worker housing and therefore less attractive to a gentleman able to afford such a property; and for the Corporation it provided them with a park, provision for which had been encompassed in the St Helens Improvement Act of 1869, and was sorely needed as the town expanded making the green space of open countryside inaccessible to most people.

The development of Cowley Hill as a public park was put in the hands of the Borough Surveyor. It is not known what experience or knowledge of park design he brought to the task but his proposed layout contains elements common to parks of the period. These include:

- Entrance gateways with lodges providing accommodation for gardeners and park keepers
- Sinuous paths around the park linked to principal entrances
- Tree and shrub planting, particularly to boundaries
- A bandstand
- A lake, probably intended for boating
- A gymnasium contained within the walled garden

The design did not include areas for games or cricket possibly because it was considered that the undulating landscape did not lend itself to formal sports. The Borough Engineer's path layout appears to have served users well and remains respected.

Although the surveyor's proposals appear to have retained most of the existing layout, his scheme included costly elements such as the lake that were never realised. Initial work involved the removal of "decayed trees", possibly older picturesque specimens from former hedgerows retained in the private parkland but deemed unsafe and unsuitable for a public park. The ponds and associated features including the romantic summerhouse were kept, and the formal garden which appears to have been very plain (see Photopanel 3) was embellished with planting and a fountain. It is clear from the wealth of photographic evidence and records of generous donations including artefacts, paintings and plants that St Helens took great pride in its new museum and art gallery set in the park.

After the laying out of paths, boundary walls and entrances, additions such as the drinking fountain and shelter contributed to the comfort of visitors and more planting was carried out to embellish the park. The construction of the Meteorological Station is perhaps an indication of concerns for air quality as land east of City Road became fully developed. Early photographs of St Helens show a townscape devoid of trees, demonstrating the need for a public park but also suggesting that vegetation struggled to grow due to industrial pollution. The Victoria Park Tree Survey<sup>22</sup> indicates a limited number of mature trees, most of these being sycamore, a species tolerant of atmospheric pollution. The species list may be indicative of what was planted, but it is likely that a more diverse range of species were introduced but failed to thrive. It is evident from the records that the glasshouses and conservatory required a lot of upkeep and even replacement, but they did enable bedding plants to be grown for displays in the park, planting that could survive for a short time and

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<sup>22</sup> TEP, Victoria Park Tree Survey Report, June 2010

was then changed, and for a more exotic range of species to be maintained for the enjoyment of visitors.

In common with other public parks St Helens developed recreation facilities in the park during the 1920's and 1930's and sought the support of unemployment grants. This correlates with the general decrease in working hours, increase in leisure time and enthusiasm for outdoor activities and sports seen during that period. The creation of tennis courts and bowling greens resulted in terracing. On the western side of the park this was accommodated within the existing layout and partly dictated by the line of the earlier public footpath and Ansdell's planting to conceal it. At the southern end of the park the terracing for the tennis courts is aligned with the slope but accentuated by the beech hedge which once separated the courts from the Meteorological Station. The hedge was embellished by a herbaceous border but now simply divides the space without apparent purpose. The variety of recreation available, number of events and requests for use confirm that the park was enjoyed and appreciated by a wide range of people. The park continued to be a popular destination into the 1960's and 70's. Photographs record immaculate floral displays, well maintained paths and buildings, and manicured lawns.

Use of the park for wartime food production has not resulted in permanent change, but the removal of railings has left a minor legacy of privet hedgerows. Construction of the air raid shelter has resulted in a grass platform near the southern entrance, a further man made terrace in the gently sloping landscape.

The decision to transfer the museum and art gallery to the Gamble Institute was unfortunate for Victoria Park and its users. It removed a function, focus and attraction, and left buildings that needed a new use. Occupied by the parks department it provided a good base for operations but use of a historic house for offices and flats cannot have generated the income necessary for upkeep or provided revenue for the council.

Dutch elm disease must have had a devastating impact for a time with felled trees lying about the park and a great loss of tree cover. The impact has been diminished over the years by additional planting and the increasing maturity and growth of other species.

The introduction of CCT in the 1980s resulted in a series of changes, some planned and others the consequence of management change. Tendering for services with an emphasis on competitive pricing rather than quality caused a reduction in service evident in standards of maintenance, loss of planting displays and the absence of staff from the park for many hours each day. This set in train a spiral of decline with vandalism discouraging use and arson destroying facilities that supported users. Lacking accommodation, shelter, toilets, and refreshment facilities, bowling groups left and use of the park declined, providing greater opportunity for antisocial abuse to thrive.

Sale of the Mansion House has in effect privatised a feature that was once the heart of the park and made the area inaccessible to park users. Subsequent measures to improve security have increased the sense of division between house and park.

Recent developments have provided play facilities for children and young people in the south eastern area of the park but these have been placed without consideration of the designed layout and have no relationship with existing features.

## Chronology of Principal events

For a full Chronology see Appendix 1

<b>Date</b>	<b>Event</b>
1842	Windle Tithe Award
1845/7	First Edition Ordnance Survey published 1849 (6"=1mile)
1847	John Ansdell acquired part of the Cowley Hill estate after the death of John Speakman in 1849 – 50
1849-50	John Ansdell built Cowley House
1869	St Helens Improvement Act gave the new borough powers to create parks, fund them, maintain and regulate their use
1885	John Ansdell's executors offered Cowley Estate to Corporation for a park.
1886	20 <sup>th</sup> January - Cowley House and 31 acres of land acquired by council for £11,000
1886	Saturday 5 <sup>th</sup> June – Article expressing concern at the expenditure on the park, to the potential detriment of other proposed schemes and parks
1886	14 <sup>th</sup> June - Opening of Cowley Park by the mayor and on 19 <sup>th</sup> June a plan of proposals for the park is printed in the local paper. Works progress to construct boundary walls and railings, paths and fountain in the formal garden.
1887	June 21 <sup>st</sup> Celebration of Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee with re naming of the park by Mayor Colonel David Gamble A Macfarland drinking fountain and seats are installed, and additional land purchased from Col. Gamble enabling completion of the southern entrance to the park.
1888	Rhododendrons and trees are planted, and refreshments provided
1890	Swings installed, 6 for girls and 6 for boys
1892	Mansion House opened as free public museum and art gallery. A shelter and additional toilets are erected in the park
1897	Fountain presented by Sir Henry Doulton
1899	Meteorological Station built by Boulton and Paul Ltd
1901	19 <sup>th</sup> June Correspondence between Borough Engineer and Pilkington Brothers re escape of gases from Cowley Hill Works into Victoria Park. Reported damage to trees from fumes
1902	21 <sup>st</sup> May Mayor Gamble planted a tree to celebrate the coronation of Edward VII

- 1904 Permission granted for Cowley Girls School to use greenhouses one afternoon per week for Botany and Nature study classes.
- 1909 Cowley girls granted right to use park twice a week for games
- 1911 Two new tennis courts opened on lawns in front of Mansion House  
Conservatories becoming dilapidated and dangerous
- 1913 Conservatory partially blown down and destroyed in gales. Messenger and Co of Loughborough to repair/rebuild conservatory@£625  
July 8<sup>th</sup> Royal visit, children line route through Victoria Park
- 1914 New Gate at Windle City entrance to be called Kings Gate in commemoration of Royal visit
- 1914 Mansion House used for Belgian refugees  
4 women gardening students begin training in the park
- 1917 St Helens Allotment Holders Association Horticultural Show and Garden Fete  
Engineer instructed to continue model Allotments in Victoria Park
- 1924 Land near Cowley Lane laid out with 2 bowling greens, 2 hard tennis courts and grass tennis courts
- 1929 Committee apply to borrow £11,500 for various projects in the park  
Bands allowed to play in park
- 1930 Bowls House, Shelter and Conveniences erected  
Unemployment Grants Committee do not consider construction of a bandstand suitable for state assistance
- 1934 8<sup>th</sup> June. Greenhouses to be repaired at cost of £30
- 1937 Commemorative tree planted by Mayor to mark Coronation  
Alfred Griffin Memorial Pavilion to be built
- 1940 Public shelter approved
- 1941 Park land to be used for allotments  
Iron railings salvaged for war effort
- 1942 Hedges planted to replace railings  
Area made available to grow potatoes
- 1965 Museum moved from Mansion House to Gamble Institute
- 1972 Cottages adjoining City Road demolished
- 1983 Original Victorian Conservatory replaced by modern structure
- 1985 Lodge, Grotto and Mansion House all individually listed Grade II



- 1992 Tenders for Mansion house sought. Property acquired by Age Concern UK
- 1997 Children petition for improved play facilities, particularly for older children
- 2007 New skate park and playground
- 2007 Petition to prevent sale of park Lodge at St Mark's Gate
- 2010 Young people's play area installed

## Site appraisal

### Location and boundaries

Victoria Park is situated 1 km north of the town centre and 1km south of the A580 East Lancashire Road. The westbound carriageway of the A580 connects directly with City Road which forms the eastern boundary of the park. To the east of City Road is Pilkington's Glass Works enclosed by high brick and stone walls. Rutland Street forms part of the southern boundary abutting an area of 19<sup>th</sup> century red brick terrace houses some of which overlook the park. The other part of the southern boundary is defined by Balker Drive with former Victorian villas now in business and health authority ownership. Cowley Hill Lane with a mixture of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century housing forms the south western boundary while Bishop Road on the north western boundary provides access to an interwar council housing estate facing the park.

With the exception of the southern boundary, there is no enclosure of the park, the grassland flowing down to back of pavement. Along Rutland Street there are railings on a low brick wall with stone coping while along Balker Drive there is a low wall parapet with hedging, and a brick boundary wall to the eastern side of the last property on the drive.

### Topography

The ground falls gently from St Mark's Gate to Bishop Road, an average fall of 18m. The Mansion House is situated part way down the slope approximately 7m below St Mark's Gate. The natural slope of the ground has been modified to south east and south west of the Mansion House for the provision of tennis courts, bowling greens and through construction of a wartime air raid shelter. Between the southernmost corner of the formal garden and Balker Drive is a tree covered mound that provides an element of screening and separation between the north western and southern areas of the park. North-west of the mound is a relatively flat area of ground, an extension of the plateau created for the Mansion House complex. North and west of the Mansion House the undulating ground falls away towards the park boundaries.

### Views

Ascending North Road from the town centre and arriving at St Mark's Gate there is a sense of elevation and openness after the dense urban character of the approach. From the entrance and adjacent park there are filtered views down towards the Mansion House whose upper storeys and tower are visible between the trees. From the eastern boundary path parallel to City Road there are some views over Windlehurst and towards Moss Bank. West of the Mansion House views out of the park are restricted by tree growth though there are occasional glimpses towards Cowley School on the opposite hill. Easterly views out of the park are dominated by the large buildings and chimneys of Pilkingtons while to the west views are limited by neighbouring housing development.

### Buildings

Within the park boundaries are the Mansion House and associated buildings now belonging to Age Concern UK, Windlehurst Gate Lodge in private ownership and St Mark's Gate Lodge belonging to St Helens Council. The Mansion House and its immediate curtilage are defined by walls and railings. They comprise the formal garden and derelict glasshouse, the stable block, courtyard, walled

garden, three single storey buildings, a glass enclosed corridor and two outer areas for car parking. St Mark's Gate Lodge is disused and derelict.

#### Entrances

The park has three principal entrances – Windlehurst Gate, City Road and St Mark's Gate, all of which are accessible to vehicles. Windlehurst Gate has stone entrance walls set back to create a semi circular forecourt with central gateway providing access to the adjacent lodge and into the park. The entrance from City Road provides access to the Mansion House complex; it is a simple entrance, undefined by gate pillars, walls or signage. St Mark's Gate is a well defined public park entrance with direct and closest access to the town centre. It has gate pillars flanked by low walls, the lodge, and an enclosed formal bedding display facing the gateway.

Victoria Park's three secondary entrances for pedestrians are at Balker Gate between Balker Drive and Cowley Hill Lane, Kings Gate near the junction of Bishop and City Roads, and from Rutland Street. Balker Gate is defined by gate pillars similar to those at St Marks Gate; Kings Gate has bollards though the metal runners of former gates remain, and the gate on Rutland Street is kept locked at the behest of local residents.

Character areas            see Plan 07

The park forms one large green space around the Mansion House with limited variation in terms of planting. Planting comprises mature and semi mature trees, shrub beds and borders and swathes of long grass to park perimeters, though not beside City Road. Subtle differences arising from the original layout and subsequent development for recreation distinguish different the character areas which are:

- The southern park
- The western park
- The Mansion House plateau
- The north western park
- The pleasure grounds
- The northern park

#### The southern park

This area lies between St Mark's Gate and the Mansion House where the boundary to the area comprises privet hedging, garden walls and the tree planted mound between the formal garden and Balker Street. The southern park comprises a semi enclosed garden space associated with the entrance, dense shrubbery along Rutland Street to Balker Drive and open grass spaces containing a teen play area, skate park and mature trees along City Road. The entrance garden is defined by a low mound. To the north of this is a grass platform created by the Second World War shelter and to the west other terraces created for the early 20<sup>th</sup> century tennis courts are sheltered by a beech hedge. South of the formal garden by the Mansion House is an area of unkempt shrubbery. From St Mark's gate boundary paths provide access to and through the park while a secondary path from the entrance leads towards the Mansion; this crosses another secondary path between City Road and Balker Drive.

The southern park has well defined boundaries and a sense of openness. Past uses are indicated by terracing, hedging and sections of redundant path. The space lies very much at the back of the Mansion with which there is no direct physical relationship. The skate park and teen play area now occupy part of the space. They have no relationship with the designed layout.

#### The western park

The western park is defined by the path between St Mark's Gate and Windlehurst Gate. Together with a boundary path these paths circumscribe a space occupied by former tennis courts, bowling greens, the bowling pavilion and the Alfred Griffin Memorial Pavilion from which the terraced spaces, hedges and shrubberies remain. The park boundaries have mature trees and swathes of long grass.

#### The Mansion House plateau

This area lies immediately south west of the Mansion and formal garden, defined by the drive to the mansion, main path between St Mark's Gate and Windlehurst Gate and the mound between the formal garden and Balker Drive. The mound has many mature trees and shrubbery planting near the formal garden. The space has a parkland character provided by the scattered mature trees in grassland, those trees nearest the Mansion tending to screen the house and formal garden.

#### The north western park

This area, defined by the drive to the Mansion and planting associated with the pond, has the character of open parkland, the grassland falling towards the road, the space defined by mature trees.

#### The pleasure grounds

The pond and associated spaces, paths and planting formed the core of pleasure grounds associated with the house. The area retains remnants of this character though much of the detail and interest has gone. It comprises the sunken garden, the pond and grotto, associated paths and planting, and the tree fringed dry valley to the north.

#### The northern park

This area has a similar character to the north western park of open parkland, the grassland falling to Bishop Road and the space defined by mature trees. The difference is that here the chimneys and buildings of Pilkington's intrude on views. These and play areas laid out in the space both diminish the parkland character.

## Assessment of historic significance

This assessment considers the significance of Victoria Park based upon time limited research and consultation with park officers. It does not encompass an assessment of who values the park and why, factors necessary for a full assessment of historic significance.

Victoria Park is not included on the English Heritage Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest because it is not deemed to be of national significance though it is of considerable local importance. Victoria Park has overall local historic significance:

- As St Helens second public park and the first of three parks based on a large house and grounds acquired by the Corporation from which the pond, grotto, and formal garden with entrance porch survive from the private park of John Ansdell
- As the only public park in St Helens where the original house survives
- For its listed buildings and structures – the Mansion House, lodge by City Road and grotto by the lake, all listed Grade II, and historic gate pillars
- For its Doulton fountain (and seat), historic features and evidence of local patronage and pride in the park
- For its association with local entrepreneurs who contributed to civic leadership – Colonel David Gamble and the Pilkington family
- As the site of St Helens Meteorological Station
- As the location of St Helens first museum and art gallery
- For its pond whose origins lie in agricultural practice predating development of the park
- For the presence of materials produced by local industry and evidence of carved stonework from older buildings in the grotto

It is apparent that Victoria Park also had historic community significance:

- As a place of recreation for school sports, charity cricket matches, bowling and band concerts
- As a local destination providing a good offer - floral displays, sport for the participant and spectator, band concerts, a museum and refreshments
- As a place of food production and shelter in wartime

## Summary of issues affecting historic significance

Issues that have affected the historical significance of Victoria Park in the past, do so now, or may do so in the future include:

### The poor physical condition of listed and historic structures

The Mansion House remains an imposing building but alterations and additions to secure and adapt the building to new uses have been inappropriately and insensitively carried out detracting from the building's significance and without regard for its listed status. These alterations include new extensions and covered walkways, a ramped access and railings into the formal gardens, and steel

roller shutters fitted to downstairs windows. The derelict 1980's conservatory, together with the poor condition of related spaces and the fabric of the formal garden convey an air of sad decline and lack of care.

The lodge at the southern entrance, the main entrance into the park from the town, is in an appalling state; boarded up with gaping roof, sprouting vegetation and crumbling plaster, its poor condition threatens its very survival. The condition of the lodge reflects badly on St Helens, detracts from the presentation on the park, and is a discouragement to visitors. The lodge is a potential asset and resource, the only building left in the ownership of the corporation that could be used to provide facilities for park users.

Windlehurst Lodge is now privately owned. Extensions and adaptations have been permitted that degrade the historic property and detract from this the original and historic entrance to Ansdell's park. These works include have erection of a 1.8m high garden fence of concrete posts and timber panels to ensure privacy, and crude wall piers and timber panels to the roadside boundary. The Lodge has been extended along the drive creating a frontage with car parking that lacks any sense of place and provides a poor introduction to the park from the northern approach.

The grotto is the oldest structure on the site and has been subject to continued vandalism in recent years so that what remains is probably less than half the original feature and in very poor condition. It has been subject to very poor past repair and warrants a full survey and assessment to inform proposals for repair in relation to its setting.

#### Loss of historic fabric – walls, gates and park buildings

In common with many parks, Victoria Park lost most of its railings during the war. The fragment of railing that remains near Balker Drive is of fine quality. Some boundary walls were removed to present a more open park in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. Gate pillars that remain lack their original gates and lanterns, and are in need of repair.

Several modest garden buildings of a relatively ephemeral nature inherited from Ansdell's park have been lost over time. These include a rustic duck house, boat house and small pavilion adjacent to the lake. Buildings erected to serve visitors – the shelter, bowls house and Griffin Memorial Pavilion – together with the Meteorological Station have been burnt down, resulting in loss of part of the history of the park as well as loss of historic fabric and amenity.

The conservatory and glass houses were sold, demolished or left to decay when there was no longer use or finance for them to provide plants for St Helens Parks or for events, or to open as an attraction. All the historic fabric of the conservatory has been lost diminishing the number of features of interest in the formal garden, though the framework of walls, entrance porch, layout of steps, paths and fountain all remain.

#### Divided ownership

Due to separate ownership and the physical barrier of walls and railings accentuated by planting, the Mansion House and its immediate environs are now divorced from the park. The owners, Age Concern UK, function completely separately, a unit defended and turning its back on the green space

and deriving limited benefit from it. The Mansion House was the focus of Ansdell's park; his home from which paths radiated, views were designed and to which people came. The house remained the focus of the public park as refreshment rooms, museum and art gallery, and stayed in relationship when occupied by the parks department. Although shrouded by trees, the Mansion House is still the visual focus of the park landscape and the building that makes sense of the park and explains its origins. However loss of ownership and lack of alternative premises limit use of the park, and the lack of relationship and access combined with the defensive demeanour of alterations have a negative impact. The future of this property, its use and ownership, are of paramount importance to the park.

The loss of Windlehurst Lodge to private ownership has had a detrimental impact with unsympathetic and poor quality alterations affecting the historic entrance and approach.

### Management

The introduction of CCT has had a severe and significant negative impact on the park from which it has never recovered. It has resulted in a lack of site based staff with a sense of ownership, pride, local knowledge and skill providing a sense of care, security and quality. The outcome has been a decline in facilities, horticulture and use leaving the park open to misuse and abuse. Aspirations and resources have been low, so that now the crude practice of twice yearly coppicing of vegetation is expected and accepted, and the remnants of former facilities are a dismal and depressing reminder of the park's decline.

### Public and community expectations

The gradual loss of many facilities and attractions has resulted in a park that offers little to many potential users and contributes to a low sense of community ownership. Consultations used to make an initial bid for funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund's Parks for People programme have raised unrealistic and unsustainable expectations. These aspirations need to be balanced by an objective assessment of need so that proposals are based on conservation, that is the management of change, and are sustainable.

### Limited understanding of the park and its significance

Limited understanding and awareness of the history of the park by the authority have resulted in a lack of appreciation of its importance to the town, to past users and its potential for the future. This has contributed to decision making that has had a negative impact on the health of the park and for which mitigation will be a challenge, and could remain an issue in the future without improved skills, training and management.

### Consideration of the park as a whole

Failure to consider the park as a whole when making individual decisions and to appreciate the impact of these decisions has had a negative impact on the historic layout of the park. An instance of this is the recent investment focused on the provision of facilities to meet the needs of children and young people. The facilities have been sited without regard for the historic layout allowing areas of

formerly open land to be developed while previously developed recreation areas lie derelict. The justification for these decisions may be security, visibility, pragmatism, but a failure to make decisions within the context of an overall vision and sustainable management plan mean that the long term outcome is likely to be further loss and degradation.

### Security

Lack of security has resulted in increased vandalism damaging historic artefacts and new facilities, consuming scarce resources, discouraging staff and leading to defensive design and maintenance solutions. There are no visible site staff providing a sense of care and the general condition of the park does not encourage respect.

### Water features

The cost and challenge of maintaining water features has not been met. The pond is silted up, shaded, full of debris and has an unattractive concrete edge, worn margins and decayed islands making it thoroughly degraded. It is of little interest and makes a limited visual contribution to the park. All these factors diminish the historic and ecological significance of the only remaining pond.

The Doulton Fountain, a gift to the park, has not been in working order for many years. Failure to repair and maintain the fountain has diminished its significance so that with its dry pool filled with slate chippings it fails to provide a meaningful feature at the centre of the garden and is a disappointment, adding to the air of neglect in the formal garden.

### External factors

Loss and damage to vegetation caused through air pollution and Dutch elm disease has had an impact on the park in the past but should not do so in the future. Loss and decline of local industries, reduced employment and lack of revenue are all having an impact on St Helens and thus on the park, and the current economic situation is likely to exacerbate these problems. These external factors present the park with a challenging series of issues and opportunities that appropriately addressed could help to fulfil local policies and meet individual needs.



## Proposed Principles for Conservation

Victoria Park is a historic asset that should be sustained for the benefit of present and future generations. It is apparent that past interventions which have resulted in loss and degradation of the historic fabric have compromised the heritage value of the park and diminished its public benefit.

The following conservation principles have been developed from analysis of park history, site information and issues. They do not address user needs, training, volunteering, management, resources and finance which are to be addressed elsewhere, all project proposals stemming from an overarching vision for the park agreed by the client and principal stakeholders.

### Principles

1. Develop a comprehensive management plan
  - Reflecting local aspirations
  - Providing a sustainable vision for the park and a clear programme of measures to be taken to achieve the vision over time
  - Addressing the loss of views and sight lines to and from the Mansion due to the growth of trees
  - Including the rejuvenation of historic planting, the creation of new plantings in appropriate areas of the park and the regaining of horticultural excellence.
2. Improve the setting of the Mansion House and restore its relationship with the park
  - Identify principal views
  - Undertake selective removal of trees and shrubs
  - Review and address access and security arrangements
  - Improve standards of management and maintenance
3. Restore the formal garden and enable public access
  - Repair boundary wall and porch
  - Remove derelict glasshouse and most existing vegetation
  - Consider appropriate re use of space formerly occupied by conservatory
  - Restore steps and banks
  - Restore the fountain to working order
  - Undertake new planting guided by historic evidence
4. Rejuvenate the former pleasure grounds as a focus of interest in the park
  - Restore pond
  - Stabilise and repair grotto
  - Repair hard landscape
  - Undertake tree and shrub management including selective removal and replanting
  - Provide seating to enable views and spaces to be enjoyed

5. Manage vegetation to enhance character
  - Identify function and importance of different plantings
  - Prioritise management
  - Identify skills and resources necessary to sustain management
  
6. Use opportunities provided through intervention and management to enhance biodiversity
  - Restoration of pond
  - Management of planting
  - Diversification of plant species
  - Extending flowering and fruiting seasons
  - Grassland management
  
7. Enhance the sense of care for the site
  - Repair St Marks Gate Lodge for park use
  - Provide information at principal park entrances
  - Improve standards of management
  - Have site based staff seen to be working in the park and able to interact with users
  
8. Consider appropriate re use of redundant sports areas
  - Retain for potential future refurbishment and re use
  - Re develop to meet user needs
  
9. Enable greater understanding and appreciation of the park's heritage
  - Develop an interpretation strategy
  - Provide guided walks
  - Link with town trails and educational projects
  - Host a community archaeology project
  
10. Learning from best practice elsewhere
  - In conservation and sustainable re use of historic buildings
  - Community engagement in heritage
  - Raising awareness, understanding and support among members
  - Improving standards of care
  - Preparation of management plans for historic environments
  - Training and resources to sustain quality in planting and maintenance of hard landscape

Proposals should follow best conservation practice. English Heritage's 'Conservation Principles: Policies and Guidance for the Sustainable Management of the Historic Environment' is recommended for guidance. Planning Policy Statements 5: Planning for the Historic Environment and the associated Historic Environment Planning Practice Guide provide the policy framework for sustainable development within the historic environment and should be followed.

## Appendix 1

### Full Chronology

Unless otherwise stated, information obtained from Council Minutes, St Helens Local History and Archives Library.

Date	Event	Source
1716	Sarah Cowley's last will and testament leaving one message of tenement containing 6 acres to Joseph Gillibourn of Windle	St Helens Local History and Archives Library
1842	Tithe Award based on 1808 Map of Windle	St Helens Local History and Archives Library
1845/7	6" First Edition Ordnance Survey published 1849	St Helens Local History and Archives Library
1847	John Ansdell acquired part of the Cowley Hill estate after the death of John Speakman – he himself married the widow of John's brother, Richard Speakman – and built Cowley House 1849 – 50	Book? – St Helens 1750 - 1900
1869	St Helens Improvement Act gave powers under sections 243-245 for the new borough to create parks, fund them, maintain and regulate their use	An outline History of the Acquisition by the town of its major parks and recreation grounds
1885	Letter to Council from John Ansdell's executors offering Cowley Estate to Corporation for a park. Offer accepted 16 <sup>th</sup> December 1885.	
1886	20 <sup>th</sup> January - Cowley House and 31 acres of land acquired by council for £11,000 from James Galloway and John Hammill, trustees of the will of John Ansdell. A protective restriction was placed on the park so that future use could only be as a park or recreation ground	
	2 <sup>nd</sup> April - Meeting held in Cowley House chaired by Councillor Bishop:	
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>To arrange with the Executors of the late John Ansdell for immediate possession of the premises.</i></li> <li>2. <i>To obtain and accept tenders for external cement work of the mansion and for the painting of the outside woodwork of the mansion and conservatories</i></li> <li>3. <i>To purchase all or any of the plant, garden seats and implements on the premises, suitable for the proposed Park</i></li> <li>4. <i>To purchase trees and shrubs to the value of £50</i></li> <li>5. <i>To engage men to remove any decayed trees; plant new ones, and put the grounds in order</i></li> </ol>	
	12 <sup>th</sup> April - Resolved that Deacey be engaged to attend to the grounds and carry out the instructions of the Surveyor. Labourer to be employed to assist Deacey Chairman authorised to offer £40 for the purchase of plants in the	

Conservatories specified in the list submitted to him.

19<sup>th</sup> May - Agreed to let NW Lodge to Supernumerary Park Constable for 2s a week free of rates

1<sup>st</sup> June- Estimate of work

*Lodge* £450.0.0

*Railings, Walls and Entrance gates* £1200.0.0

*Urinals* £100.0.0

*Seats and Notices* £122.0.0

*Walks and Drains* £860.0.0

*With contingencies total = £3,000*

Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> June – Article expressing concern at the expenditure on the park, to the potential detriment of other proposed schemes and parks

7<sup>th</sup> June - Footpath from Rutland Street conveyed to Corporation.

On completion of road from North Road to Cowley Hill Lane, path from Cowley Hill Lane Lodge to be closed. Messrs Doulton offered terracotta work to value of £20 as per catalogue – offer accepted.

John Finch of Dudley to supply 20 gander seats (design 64)5' 6" long @ 12/6d each and 20 (design 46 5' 6" long at 32/6d each with 5/d discount. Surveyor instructed about paths

14<sup>th</sup> June - Opening of Cowley Park by the Mayor.

16<sup>th</sup> June - J & T Yearsleys tender accepted for dwarf wall, 4 pillars, rebuilding old wall and 3 entrance pillars (stone) for main entrance Francis Morton and Co's revised tender for palisading 5' high and 8' gates accepted

Saturday June 19<sup>th</sup> - Plan of park includes a lake along NW side of estate and Bandstand SW of house + gymnasium or public baths on site of kitchen garden.

4<sup>th</sup> August - Plans submitted for boundary wall round park

19<sup>th</sup> November - Fountain in flower garden to be completed @£15

Critchley Bros. to paint extension to Vinery

Surveyors to submit drawing for drinking fountain – site to be decided

Walk to be made from main road on W side towards Mansion House

30 tons of lime and 50 tons of manure to be delivered

Walk facing park near Balken to be painted.

Vines and peach trees in No 1 Vinery to be disposed of

1887 19<sup>th</sup> January- James MCBryde to construct doorway and wall dividing Cowley Park from 'Balken' for 1 shilling/annum – to be removed on 3 months' notice from Corporation. Yearsleys tender for erection for lodge and premises at North Road entrance to Cowley Park to be accepted

16<sup>th</sup> March - Application from Angling Club for Park pond Cowley Hill.

Four rooms to be opened to public and furnished with seats. Supply of light refreshments for 6 months to be advertised for tender

1887 20<sup>th</sup> April - One of Macfarland's drinking fountains to be purchased (no.6) and erected near to Boat House. Tender for exit gate at 'city'

Supplement to the  
St Helens  
Newspaper and  
Advertiser

- end of park accepted. Flag pole to be enclosed at North Road entrance at not exceeding £15. Twenty seats of plain wood @8 shillings each to be erected. Until further notice greenhouses to be opened each Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday from 2 – 4pm
- 20<sup>th</sup> July – Alderman McBryde donated a pair of swans.
- 21<sup>st</sup> September – trees and shrubs to be purchased, “as per list submitted at a cost not exceeding £18.”
- 15<sup>th</sup> June- Draft bye-laws considered.
- Two pail closets to be erected.
- St Helens Cafe and Recreation Co. To have two stalls for tea and coffee. Stand to be erected for ceremony and public naming on 21<sup>st</sup> June 1887. Union Jack Royal Standard White Ensign and Victoria Flags to be purchased, also bunting
- Edward Pye, Head Gardener to be allowed to use lodge at North Road entrance and to have venetian blinds
- June 21<sup>st</sup> Celebration of Queen Victoria’s Golden Jubilee with re naming of the park by Mayor Colonel David Gamble and firework display
- August – extra piece of Roadway land purchased and further area of 7,200 square yards acquired from Col Gamble, area a corner of the park on North Road and Rutland Street at St Mark’s Gate
- 23<sup>rd</sup> August- Workmen acting as watchmen after regular hours to be paid extra 3p/hour
- 21<sup>st</sup> September - 6ft wall to be erected to fence off cottages belonging to Corporation in City Road from Victoria Park.
- Trees and shrubs to be purchased at not more than £18
- Wicket gate on Cowley Hill side mentioned
- Iron Fence to be erected round Random Hall gardens at Victoria park
- Councillor R Pilkington thanked for gift of ferns and palms
- Water Engineer instructed to lay 3” main from City Road to stable yard in Victoria Park
- 1888
- 18<sup>th</sup> January - Line purchased for grass
- 15<sup>th</sup> February- 150 rhododendrons to be purchased (with proper compost) @1/6d each
- 3<sup>rd</sup> May- Kerb channelling to be laid from park gates North Road to end of palisading
- Footpath to be flagged for 15 yards
- 16<sup>th</sup> May- Request to play cricket in park – decision deferred. Border tiles for new beds to be bought for £3-£4
- 26<sup>th</sup> May- one load of red sandstone chippings to be tried - as an experiment
- Right to supply tea, coffee etc at Cowley House to be advertised for tender
- Decided not to allow cricket
- 20<sup>th</sup> June - Mr L Weisiker’s tender for refreshments accepted
- Sunday opening allowed
- Tender received for 56ft of fencing for ponds in park rec’d
- Wall to be built behind houses in park – Waizbom and Son tender accepted

- Mr Pye's wages to be raised from 28 to 30s per week  
 Width of footpath from North Road entrance to be extended from 7'6" to 12 feet  
 19<sup>th</sup> September - Trees to be purchased @ no more than £12.  
 Painting of conservatories and roofs of greenhouses to be carried out  
 19<sup>th</sup> December - Land presented by Col. Gamble: C.B. to be under drained with agricultural tiles. Footpath from North Road entrance to wicket gate in Cowley Hill Lane and back to City Road to be remade with limestone and with asphalt gutters where required – cost £40
- 1889 15<sup>th</sup> May- Resolved that a band platform with music stands, be erected in Victoria Park in accordance with plans now submitted by Surveyor, at an estimated cost of £25
- 1890 15<sup>th</sup> March - Following a committee visit to the park resolved that 12 swings be erected, 6 for girls and 6 for boys, and that the Children's Sand heap be extended  
 19<sup>th</sup> March- Plants to be bought – Tenders for refreshments obtained
- 1890 16<sup>th</sup> April - Ald. Pilkington and Mr W Thomason thanked for plants. Mr Pye, Head Gardener to have wages raised by 3 shillings a week. By permission of Col. W Pilkington and officers, Band of 2<sup>nd</sup> Volunteer Battalion, South Lancs Rgt. to play in park for 2 hrs on alternate Thursdays in May, June, July and August starting 15<sup>th</sup>
- 1890 21<sup>st</sup> May- Tender of W Glover for 2 sets of swings accepted. Tender of L Weisker to supply refreshments accepted
- 1890 20<sup>th</sup> August- Existing boys swings to be turned into ordinary wire rope and board swings
- 1890 17<sup>th</sup> December - Additional walk to be made in Victoria Park on City Road side
- 1892 Mansion House opened as free public museum
- 1892 30<sup>th</sup> March- Erection of shelter approved  
 14<sup>th</sup> May - Tender for erection of shelter Waizbom and Son accepted  
 17<sup>th</sup> August- Additional privy accommodation to be erected on NE side of park
- 1893 June 3<sup>rd</sup> Exhibition of pictures, books etc opened in Victoria park. St Helens News  
 Visited by scholars from St Thomas's Schools
- 1890 – Proposal for park aviary recorded  
 1900  
 1894 21<sup>st</sup> February – paths from policeman's lodge to lake asphalted

- 1896 Fencing put around the park
- 1897 20<sup>th</sup> May - Girls swings to be moved to east side of garden. Fountain presented by Sir Henry Doulton erected  
15<sup>th</sup> July- Boys swings to be moved next to girls swings
- 1897 Goldfish put in fountain
- 1898 2<sup>nd</sup> June- Shelter house to be screened on SE side. Summer House near lake to be re located. Camellias to be moved from centre of conservatory and staging erected for large palms.  
21<sup>st</sup> September – Health Committee suggests a Meteorological Station
- 1899 15<sup>th</sup> February – Meteorological Station approved and built by Boulton and Paul Ltd  
16<sup>th</sup> August - Two new boilers for conservatories to be purchased
- 1900 14<sup>th</sup> June- Shelter to be re roofed  
14<sup>th</sup> September -Alderman Pilkington presented 5 palms  
9<sup>th</sup> November- Gates at north entrance broken by runaway vehicle to be replaced
- 1901 15<sup>th</sup> March- Park inspected. As a result: Wall on S side of Mansion House to be pointed and cement repaired.  
Boundary wall on Cowley Hill Lane from Bishops Road to gates near Windlehurst Lodge and in City Road from NE corner to cottage belonging to Committee (No.162 City Road) be pointed. Brookfield Foundry to repair gates Railings to be painted  
15<sup>th</sup> May- Woodwork of greenhouse and railings to be painted  
13<sup>th</sup> June- Wire supports and wind pressure gauges of meteorological house to be painted and weathercock placed on top of wind recorder  
19<sup>th</sup> June-Correspondence between Borough Engineer and Pilkington Brothers re escape of gases from Cowley Hill Works into Victoria Park  
21<sup>st</sup> June Weather Clock added to Meteorological Station  
16<sup>th</sup> July - Reported damage to trees from fumes
- 1902 15<sup>th</sup> January - Mayor gave 3 large palms  
21<sup>st</sup> May -Mayor Gamble planted a tree to celebrate the coronation of Edward VII
- 1903 St Helens Fountain Soap advertisement featuring terracotta fountain presented to park by Sir Henry Doulton *Presley, M.St Helens a Pictorial History*
- 1904 16<sup>th</sup> June- Miss Walker Headmistress of Cowley Girls School requested permission to use greenhouses one afternoon per week for Botany and Nature study classes. Granted  
August 19<sup>th</sup> -An account of the popularity of the park noting the

- 1905 elms and difficulties in maintaining displays due to pollution  
 15<sup>th</sup> February - Instructions to Treasurer in respect of accidents on swings  
 15<sup>th</sup> March - Chairmen and Deputy Chairmen requested to arrange for band performances during summer months  
 Mrs Gamble Haresfinch requested use of park on a Thursday in June for an Open Air fete for NSPCC  
 Pennington requested permission to hold Open Air Concerts for Children in Victoria and other parks during summer for Fresh Air Fund  
 22<sup>nd</sup> June- Boat to be purchased for use on the lake  
 6.9. Lancashire band permitted to play selection of Sacred music on Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> and collection in aid of Local Hospitals.  
 In connection with additions to the Works of Pilkington Bros Ltd in City Road, the Borough Engineer submitted a plan showing suggested improvement of City Road involving taking a strip of land from park. Meeting in Victoria Park to consider the matter
- 1906 21<sup>st</sup> February - Plants donated by Ald. W W Pilkington  
 18th April - Request for cricket facilities for Cowley School – deferred
- 1907 15<sup>th</sup> May- Two see saws, a horizontal ladder, 30 feet long and parallel bars for boys and two see saws for girls  
 13<sup>th</sup> December - Children be allowed to pass through the ornamental grounds near the fountain, but that they be not allowed to play or loiter there
- 1908 11.9 Resolved that 2 bowling greens be provided on the easterly side of the central walk leading from the North Road entrance  
 Sub Committee considered the question of providing a Bowling Green at Victoria Park  
 Decided not desirable at Victoria Park and Committee recommended provide 3<sup>rd</sup> BG at the Queen's Recreation Ground  
 11<sup>th</sup> September - Borough Engineer submitted tender for horizontal ladder for gymnastic purposes  
 11<sup>th</sup> December - 2 cottages to be demolished for widening City Road
- 1909 17<sup>th</sup> February - Death of Mr Pye, Park Keeper of Victoria, Sutton, Gaskell Parks, Queen's and Parr Recreation Ground.  
 19<sup>th</sup> Mary -Charity Cricket match to be held from 12 noon till dusk  
 Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup> July. Park closed to public.  
 Licence to sell intoxicating liquors applied for above match  
 10<sup>th</sup> June -Borough Engineer submitted plans of the public urinal proposed to be erected by the Health Committee in City Road on the Victoria Park land. Resolved that the urinal be erected near the site of the existing urinal  
 15<sup>th</sup> June- Girls swings to be taken down  
 Tender for 35' ladder for gymnastics accepted  
 New urinal to be erected near present one in City Road  
 14<sup>th</sup> September-Cowley girls granted right to use park twice a week for games



- 1911 1<sup>st</sup> June - Two new tennis courts to be opened in VP on lawns in front of Mansion House  
9<sup>th</sup> November - Conservatories becoming dilapidated and dangerous. Committee to visit
- 1912 17<sup>th</sup> January - Plans of new conservatories at VP submitted  
Permission to hold hockey matches  
15<sup>th</sup> March- Notre Dame Secondary School given permission free use of the tennis lawn at VP for one hour on 2 afternoons per week  
17<sup>th</sup> April - Tender of Messenger and Co of Loughborough to be accepted for conservatory – but on 15.5 Town Clerk reported that resolution referred back – new plan to be prepared for cost not exceeding £400.  
13.6 decision on Conservatory deferred to next year  
5 privies to be converted to water closets
- 1913 19<sup>th</sup> February- Conservatory partially blown down and destroyed in gales. Firms tendering in 1912 invited to tender for new conservatory  
13<sup>th</sup> March- Council to apply to Local Government Board for sanction to borrow for conservatory  
16<sup>th</sup> April- All schoolchildren to be assembled in park between entrance on Cowley Hill Lane at Windle City and the near Windlehust Lodge with a view to their Majesties driving through park on July 8<sup>th</sup>. Borough engineer instructed to widen gates at Windle City entrance and to erect permanent gates and pillars  
Collins Green Colliery presented Corporation with Fossil Tree found in Bold Colliery at depth 700 yards – sent to VP  
18<sup>th</sup> June- Messenger and Co of Loughborough to repair/rebuild conservatory@£625  
8<sup>th</sup> July- Visit of King and Queen  
19<sup>th</sup> November- Permission granted temporarily for playing of football – Cowley Secondary School  
11.12.Conservatory complete
- 1914 4<sup>th</sup> February- New Gate at Windle City entrance to be called Kings Gate in commemoration of the fact that the king entered there  
7<sup>th</sup> February- Severe gale. Large Palm house partially wrecked and plants damaged  
12<sup>th</sup> March resolved that a number of rooks in Victoria Park be destroyed  
21<sup>st</sup> October- Permission to use Mansion House for Belgian refugees granted
- 1915 Annual inspection of parks and gardens
- 1916 31<sup>st</sup> January- Two women students of gardening commenced training at VP  
15<sup>th</sup> March- Two more women students of gardening commenced training, 4 in all  
20<sup>th</sup> September- Greenhouse painted

- 1917 21<sup>st</sup> February- 57 allotments in gardens  
18<sup>th</sup> July- St Helens Allotment holders Association applied for exclusive use of VP on 18<sup>th</sup> August for holding a Horticultural Show and Garden Fete, proceeds to local War Charities, object to encourage enthusiasm among allotment holders  
19<sup>th</sup> December- Borough Engineer instructed to continue model Allotments in VP and Sutton parks
- 1919 12<sup>th</sup> June- Drinking fountain to be repaired  
2 swans to be purchased for lake
- 1920 11<sup>th</sup> March - Use of plants - charges to be made for use with various entertainments  
15<sup>th</sup> December- Allotment holders in parks to be allowed to remain in occupation
- 1921 23<sup>rd</sup> November- Allotment holders to be allowed to remain at present  
21<sup>st</sup> December - No new tenancies to be allowed on allotments when they are vacated
- 1923 24<sup>th</sup> July- one of old greenhouses at rear of premises to be re erected and enlarged, and that 6 dozen new lights for frames to be purchased
- 1924 20.2 Plot of land on Cowley Lane side to be laid out with 2 bowling greens, 2 land tennis courts and grass tennis courts
- 1926 6<sup>th</sup> January- Tenders for refreshments to be sold in bowls house invited  
30.3. Season tickets for band performances  
Damage to flower beds. Committee interviewed and reprimanded offenders and their parents
- 1927 15<sup>th</sup> June- damage to flower beds  
21<sup>st</sup> June- Cleaning of small lake in VP left =to Parks and Cemetery Sub Committee with power to act
- 1928 16<sup>th</sup> May- Estimate required for erection of refreshment room, bowls house and public conveniences and bandstand  
1<sup>st</sup> August - Tender accepted for boiler for greenhouse – Messrs Geo Scott &Co
- 1929 14<sup>th</sup> October - Sanction applied to borrow £11,500 for various projects in park
- 1930 22<sup>nd</sup> January- Revised estimate for construction of bandstand approved for submission to Ministry of Health  
4<sup>th</sup> March- Tender of John Lucas & Son of Prescott for erection of Bowls House, Shelter and Conveniences accepted  
19<sup>th</sup> February- Bands to be allowed in park as in 1929 – admission to

- enclosure on Sundays to be 3d
- 1932 16<sup>th</sup> April- Unemployment Grants Committee do not consider construction of bandstand suitable for state assistance  
20<sup>th</sup> April - Male and female bowling clubs in existence  
1<sup>st</sup> June- Field at Windle City end and North Road entrance to be reserved for scholars when Notre Dame not using it. Children to wear rubber shoes  
21<sup>st</sup> September - Random Cottage to be demolished  
24<sup>th</sup> November- Prince of Wales visit
- 1933 27<sup>th</sup> October- Mr G L Pilkington presented 150 hothouse plants  
6<sup>th</sup> December- Owner agreed to accept Corporations' offer for 2 houses at corner of Bishop Road and City Road (for Street Improvement)  
20<sup>th</sup> December- Electricity Kiosk to be allowed in Cowley Garden
- 1934 8<sup>th</sup> June- Greenhouses to be repaired at cost of £30
- 1935 18<sup>th</sup> July- Old Men's Shelter to be erected
- 1936 Combined wind velocity and direction recorder to be installed at the observatory station - £120
- 1937 17<sup>th</sup> March- Trees to be felled in park  
26<sup>th</sup> May- Coronation commemorative trees to be planted by Mayor  
20<sup>th</sup> October - Pavilion for aged and infirm men, in memory of late Alfred Griffin(financed by his family) to be built
- 1938 Mr Hopkin Park Foreman takes Observatory reading and is paid an Honorarium of £5 per annum
- 1940 22<sup>nd</sup> February- Public all round shelter approved
- 1941 Parks and Cemetery Salvage Committee – Position of fence, Balker Drive, Committee decided that this fence on Park side be removed subject to the erection of a gate across entrance to Balker Drive which would require approval of Health and Highways Committee  
25<sup>th</sup> March - Land in park to be used for allotment purposes  
Fencing of allotment sites, Ministry of Agriculture stressed vital and urgent need for cultivation of additional production of food  
29<sup>th</sup> April- Land approved for allotments. Fencing deferred for present  
8<sup>th</sup> May salvage f iron railings – all to be scrapped apart for Ornamental entrance gates
- 1942 18<sup>th</sup> November-.Hedges to be provided to fill gaps left by railings  
Area to be made available to grow potatoes
- 1943 Fuel permitted for non-edible plants in 10% of glass house provided remaining capacity used for food

1948	8 <sup>th</sup> July- Proposed fencing round flower beds and replacement of temporary gates	
1950	1 <sup>st</sup> November- Proposed dressing room for tennis court users	
1954	19 <sup>th</sup> October - New boiler for greenhouse £160 Water tower to be erected	
1965	Museum transferred to Gamble building	History of St Helens Parks 1940
1972	February – cottages adjoining City Road demolished	Town Guide
1972	March - An outline History of the Acquisition by the town of its major parks and recreation grounds	
1983	Original Victorian Conservatory replaced by modern structure	Sale particulars for the Mansion House EST/P/V
1985	23 <sup>rd</sup> August- Lodge, Grotto and Mansion House all individually listed Grade II	EH listed buildings on line
1990	12 <sup>th</sup> January -Edward Pye, former head gardener pictured at the popular sun dial landmark. Article about proposed hotel development of Mansion House and activities of PPP – Public Parks Preservers – to retain park	St Helens Reporter
1992	Tenders for Mansion house sought	Sale particulars for the Mansion House EST/P/V
1993	11 <sup>th</sup> August article on commencement of restoration work by Age Concern UK to Mansion House	St Helens Reporter EST/P/V
1993	11 <sup>th</sup> November – local primary school children plant 20,000 daffodils. Funding of £3,800 provided by St Helens Inner Wheel for St Helens and Knowsley Hospice Fund	Free Newspaper
1994	July -Article about Mansion house records that conservatory is first part of the site to be completed, work on landscaping hardwork and courtyards to commence in July and plans for kitchen garden being prepared with help of Ground work Trust	Age Concern St Helens
1997	27 <sup>th</sup> August – children’s petition to improve play facilities in park, particularly for older children	St Helens Reporter
2007	2 <sup>nd</sup> March – new skate park and playground under construction	EH advisers report on Listing
2007	7 <sup>th</sup> March – Friends petition to prevent sale of park Lodge at St Mark’s Gate	St Helens Star, St Helens Reporter
2007	6 <sup>th</sup> November – English Heritage decide not to register the park	Correspondence