

Local list description and map for Byron Recreation Ground and Wealdstone Cemetery

Adopted at Cabinet 23rd September 2021

This area meets the following criteria for local listing:

- (A) Date and rarity.** The older a designed landscape is, and the fewer the surviving examples of its kind, the more likely it is to have special interest. Likely to be designated are:
- i. sites with a main phase of development post-1840 which are of special interest and relatively intact, the degree of required special interest rising as the site becomes closer in time
- (B) Further considerations** which may influence selection, and may exceptionally be sufficient by themselves to merit:
- i. Sites having an association with significant persons or historic events
 - ii. Sites with a strong group value with other heritage assets.

Summary:

Byron Recreation Ground is of special local interest for its locally listed building that is the Skate Park, or 'Solid Surf' designed by Adrian Rolt of G-Force and built in 1978 by Skate Park Construction. It is also of special interest for its association with significant persons being named after Lord Byron who was educated at Harrow School. It was laid out around 1902 and has some of its original layout as highlighted by historic OS maps though this once included a pavilion and bandstand, no longer in existence. There are tarmac paths around its perimeter and various walks, with trees, shrubberies and some formal beds near the entrance. A line of Lombardy poplars marks the eastern boundary of the park along the iron railings abutting Wealdstone Cemetery. Wealdstone Cemetery is of associative interest, being built at the same time with good original stone and brick banded gate piers and entrance gates of the same design as those at the recreation ground entrance. Its Superintendent's house remains and was originally the gatehouse at the entrance to the recreation ground on Stuart Road. It has some interesting early 20th century monuments.

Details:

Byron Recreation Ground

Byron Recreation Ground was probably laid out at around the same time as Wealdstone Cemetery (q.v.), which opened in 1902, since the entrance gates to both

have brick and stone banded gate piers and gates, and the gatehouse at the entrance of the park was originally the Cemetery Superintendent's residence. The station was opened as Harrow Station in 1837 when Wealdstone was still a village, and the area to the west of the recreation ground was developed gradually from the 1850s as Harrow Park estate was laid out. Industrial development began in the late C19th with the suburban housing accelerating from the interwar period. The original layout of the park included a pavilion and bandstand which are no longer in existence. The park has tarmac paths around its perimeter and various walks following the original layout, with trees, shrubberies and some formal beds near the entrance. A line of Lombardy poplars is along the iron railings abutting Wealdstone Cemetery on the eastern boundary of the park.

There is associative interest with Lord Byron who the park is named after. He enjoyed his formative years in Harrow before he became one of England's greatest poets and a European luminary, is commemorated in the naming of Byron Recreation Ground. Lord Byron's lyricality, cultural openness, and flamboyance are qualities embodied by the park. Despite physical ailments, Lord Byron was an enthusiastic participant in a variety of physical activities during his five years at Harrow School, culminating in his selection for the school in its very first cricket match versus Eton at Lord's in 1805.

Skate Park within Byron Recreation Ground

Harrow Skate Park, or 'Solid Surf', is within Byron Recreation Ground. This is a locally listed building within its own right. This was designed by Adrian Rolt of G-Force and built in 1978 by Skate Park Construction. Rolt's designs are still considered to be the best of their kind, constructed of shotcrete (pressurised concrete), and based on the Californian prototypes which themselves derive from elements of the public realm such as empty swimming pools and drainage conduits, common along the Californian coast at the height of the sports popularity. Indeed the pool at Harrow Skatepark was based on the keyhole pool at Skateboard Heaven in Spring Valley, California. *Iain Borden, Skateboarding, Space and the City: Architecture and the Body, (Berg, 2001) p.70-1*

Solid surf is one of the most noted skateparks in the UK, due to its age and design, and is favourably compared to other classic seventies skatepark designs such as Marina del Rey (Los Angeles) and "Pipeline" (Upland, California) in the USA. *The City Cultures Reader (Routledge Urban Reader) by Malcolm Miles and Tim Hall (Routledge 2003), page 43.*

The Harrow Skate Park consists of a number of bowls or hollows of various shapes, scooped out of the level surface of the recreation ground and surfaced using pressurised 'shotcrete' – the latter given a coarse aggregate finish to increase friction. A concrete 'lip' surrounds each bowl. The areas between were all originally grassed, but were concreted over in the eastern part of the site c.2003 to allow a smoother transition between one bowl and the next. The site as a whole forms an east-west rectangle, and is surrounded by a high chain-link fence.

Features include:

- **The Peanut:** near the western edge of the site – a roughly oval bowl comprising two unequal lobes.
- **The Slalom:** along the northern boundary of the site – a long straight runway with a ramp to the west and a double-lobed bowl (known unofficially as ‘the Bollocks’) to the east. Mid-way are two timber and metal ‘grindboxes’, installed c.2010.
- **The Clover:** south of the Slalom – four small bowls of unequal depth, arranged in a clover-leaf formation with a shallow concrete lip separating each from each.
- **The Pool:** east of the Clover – a deep twin-lobed bowl with a ramp at one end and a metal rim, the inside painted blue with mosaic edging to resemble a Californian swimming pool.
- **The Snake:** on the eastern boundary – a serpentine formation, shallow at one end and gradually deepening towards the other.
- **The Half-Pipe:** south of the Snake – a deep capsule-shaped bowl, its sides swept up into freestanding walls.

The remains of a further feature, **The Performance Bowl**, lie beneath the grass to the east of the Peanut. This was a deep, irregularly shaped bowl with an upswept wall (similar to those on the Half-Pipe) at one side. The wall was demolished when the site closed in the early 1980s, and for this reason the Performance Bowl has never been brought back into use and remains infilled.

South of the Peanut is the former **Freestyle Area**, essentially a flat concrete surface with a ramp at one end. Since 2009 this has been submerged beneath a timber structure comprising three semi-cylindrical ramps.

Between the Freestyle Area and the Half-pipe is the former **Shop**, a prefabricated metal kiosk installed by the entrepreneurs who reopened the site in the late 1980s.

The high quality technical design, (developed and advocated by Rolt), relative rarity and intactness of the park has afforded it a privileged status among the sport’s aficionados and it is recognised as one of the two most intact surviving and still operational members of a small national collection. Others include the ‘Barn’ at Brighton, ‘Skatecountry’ in Bristol and the ‘Maddog Bowl’ in London’s Old Kent Road – all constructed of shotcrete and employing a series of standardised elements inspired by Californian prototypes. Their fundamental character, a series of concrete-filled depressions in the ground has made it relatively easy to destroy most skateparks. With this in mind, the protection of ‘Solid Surf’, a rare cultural architectural asset, is felt to be of considerable importance.

While most purpose-built skate parks of the 1970s were the result of a fairly short-lived craze, they represent a unique period of cultural history that should be celebrated regardless. The social and cultural value of the park is exemplified by the fact that it is still in operation, despite various periods of decline and proposals for redevelopment, all of which so far have been successfully stopped.

Since the seventies the park has been the starting ground for a number of professional skaters and BMX users such as Steve Douglas. Furthermore, its significance has been noted by the leading architectural historian Professor Iain Borden who stated it was used in the eighties by "the best-known London skaters and 'H-Boyz' (Harrow regulars)". *Iain Borden, Skateboarding, Space and the City: Architecture and the Body, (Berg, 2001) p.124.*

Harrow Skatepark, also known as 'Solid Surf' was considered by English Heritage for national designation in August 2013. It was turned down, despite the report recognising its significance within the minority culture of skating which was at its height during the late 1970s and has continued to have a cult following since. The report noted that while Harrow Skatepark is of 'undoubted local interest' and 'unusually intact', the best and the most-preserved of the surviving 1970s parks is the 'Rom' at Romford. Also designed by Adrian Rolt, it is roughly contemporary with Harrow, but agreed to be both technically superior and physically more complete.

Since being turned down in August 2013, the 'Rom' in Essex, acknowledged as Harrow's big sister skatepark, and also designed by renowned skatepark designer Adrian Rolt of G-Force, has been designated as a listed building at Grade II (11 September 2014). With this in mind and in advance of the following statement, it would seem only appropriate that Harrow Skatepark be granted local listing protection.

In conjunction with the national listing of the Rom in Hornchurch Essex, English Heritage Sports Historian Simon Inglis conducted the 'Played in London' project, in part resulting in the aforementioned decision. As part of his extensive research Inglis stated "We honed in on 'the Rom' because of the six or seven survivors from the 1970s, it retains more of its original features than any other and is still essentially complete. We were also impressed by the skatepark at Harrow, and many skateboarders will be familiar with the old skateparks at Kennington and Stockwell, plus of course the famous concourse at the South Bank". Another recent article in the Guardian dated 31st October 2014 entitled "After Rom in Essex, other skateparks that deserve heritage status – in pictures". The article notes Harrow is the sister park to the Rom, only emphasising the argument for local listing.

<http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/gallery/2014/oct/31/after-rom-in-essex-other-skateparks-that-deserve-heritage-status-in-pictures>

Harrow Skate Park or Solid Surf is an icon of the British skateboard scene, the sister park to the now nationally listed 'Rom' and thus an important and enduring strand in late-C20 and contemporary youth culture. With this in mind, it is felt that Harrow Skate Park should be locally listed in order to acknowledge and protect its architectural, social, and cultural significance not only in Harrow but also as part of a small national collection of iconic architectural phenomena

Byron Recreation Ground is an important local heritage asset for partly due to the strong synergy and group value it shares with the locally listed Harrow Skate Park; they are both important and historic landscapes to each other by dint of proximity, setting, natural and man-made features, purpose and usage over the past 41 years,

and add to the conservation and enjoyment of the overall historic environment, which includes the pre-First World War Wealdstone Cemetery.

Wealdstone Cemetery

Wealdstone Cemetery is of associative interest, being built at the same time with good original stone and brick banded gate piers and entrance gates of the same design as those at the recreation ground entrance. Its Superintendent's house remains and was originally the gatehouse at the entrance to the recreation ground on Stuart Road. Serpentine tarmaced paths run through the cemetery, which has some scattered trees and a number of flower beds, with gravestones and monuments set in grass. There are some interesting early 20th century gravestones and monuments.

Sources:

London Parks and Gardens Trust, *The London Inventory Historic Green Spaces*, Harrow 2003

London Gardens Online: <http://www.londongardensonline.org.uk/gardens-online-record.php?ID=HRW006>

Bridget Cherry and Nikolaus Pevsner, *The Buildings of England London 3: North West* (Penguin, 1999 ed)

Iain Borden, Skateboarding, Space and the City: Architecture and the Body, (Berg, 2001) <http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/gallery/2014/oct/31/after-rom-in-essex-other-skateparks-that-deserve-heritage-status-in-pictures>

The City Cultures Reader (Routledge Urban Reader) by Malcolm Miles and Tim Hall (Routledge 2003), page 43.

