

An attractive open common on the edge of the city centre, which was the birthplace of association football and remains well used for recreation, particularly cricket.

Parker's Piece gained its name from Edward Parker, a cook who leased the land from Trinity College. The land was part of the Middle Field in Medieval Cambridge. In 1612, the Cambridge Corporation acquired most of the piece from the college and the land became pasture, which at that time was well outside the city centre. As residential development grew to the east and north and the city expanded south along Regent Street the park became a more formal public open space within the city. In the 1830s the land

was levelled to allow cricket to be played; the space was also used for grazing, horse-racing and events, including a great feast to celebrate the coronation of Queen Victoria. It was the location where the Cambridge University Football Club Laws were first used, which in 1863 were largely adopted by the Football Association, making it the birthplace of Association Football. Today, it remains an important green open space providing recreational facilities for the city centre described by some as the 'city's beach'.



Parker's Piece

SIGNIFICANCE - HIGH

General Overview

Parker's Piece is one of the ring of green spaces surrounding the city centre that make a distinctive contribution to the approaches to the city. It helps to preserve some understanding of the limits of the city and its agricultural setting up to the early C19 and makes an important contribution to the attractive quality of the surrounding streets as well as being an attractive space in its own right. The right of public access for the people of Cambridge can now be traced back for four centuries.

The green space is broad and relatively featureless allowing the variety of both organised and informal games that is part of its character. The crux of the paths (known informally as 'Reality Checkpoint') is marked by a tall lantern installed in 1893 and recently redecorated. This has a recognisably Victorian character including a heavily sculpted base with stylised dolphins wrapping around the tall column with four lanterns suspended from arching brackets with scrolled suspensions. The iron post-and-rail fence [of the 'hot-cross-bun'-type] that bounds the park to Gonville Place was first installed in 1878 and also adds to the park's Victorian character. The boundary to Regent Terrace is of a timber post-



Reality Checkpoint



Long lines of trees

and-rail which is more generally used in less urban locations in the city.

The north, east and south long lines of mature trees provide definition to the boundaries of the park and are an attractive feature in the views across it. Their regular spacing helps to provide some rhythm to the views whilst the swaying treetops

provide constant movement. The trees along Parkside, in particular, catch the sunlight streaming across the park and are attractively illuminated.

Views of the park are bounded by the tree line and depend on the activity of sports within it to draw out the interest of the green space although a number focus on key buildings in the surroundings making the green space an attractive open foreground. These include the views to the University Arms Hotel to the west, the tall spire of Our Lady and the English Martyrs Roman Catholic Church to the south and the Fire Station tower [upper floors to the tower and adjacent blocks are flats called Parkside Place] to the north, all of which rise well above the more general low scale roof level and surrounding tree lines. Views to the terraced townhouses and villas on Park Terrace and Parkside are also attractive and reflect the



University Arms Hotel



Spire of the Roman Catholic Church



The Fire Station tower

significance of the green open space to the builders and early occupiers of these residential developments, which formalised its role as a green space on the edge of the city centre.

Buildings that support the use of the park include the Jack Hobbs Pavilion, a cricket pavilion named after Cambridgeshire's most famous cricketer and opened by him in 1930, which now provides changing rooms for cricketers, as well as the recently built (2004) colourful public conveniences that stand at the entrance to the park from the south east. The design of the latter is intended to evoke the colour of the fairground.

Parker's Piece is often filled with people simply relaxing during the summer, but its paths are also an important part of the foot and cycle network connecting the city to housing areas throughout the year. The space is now used for



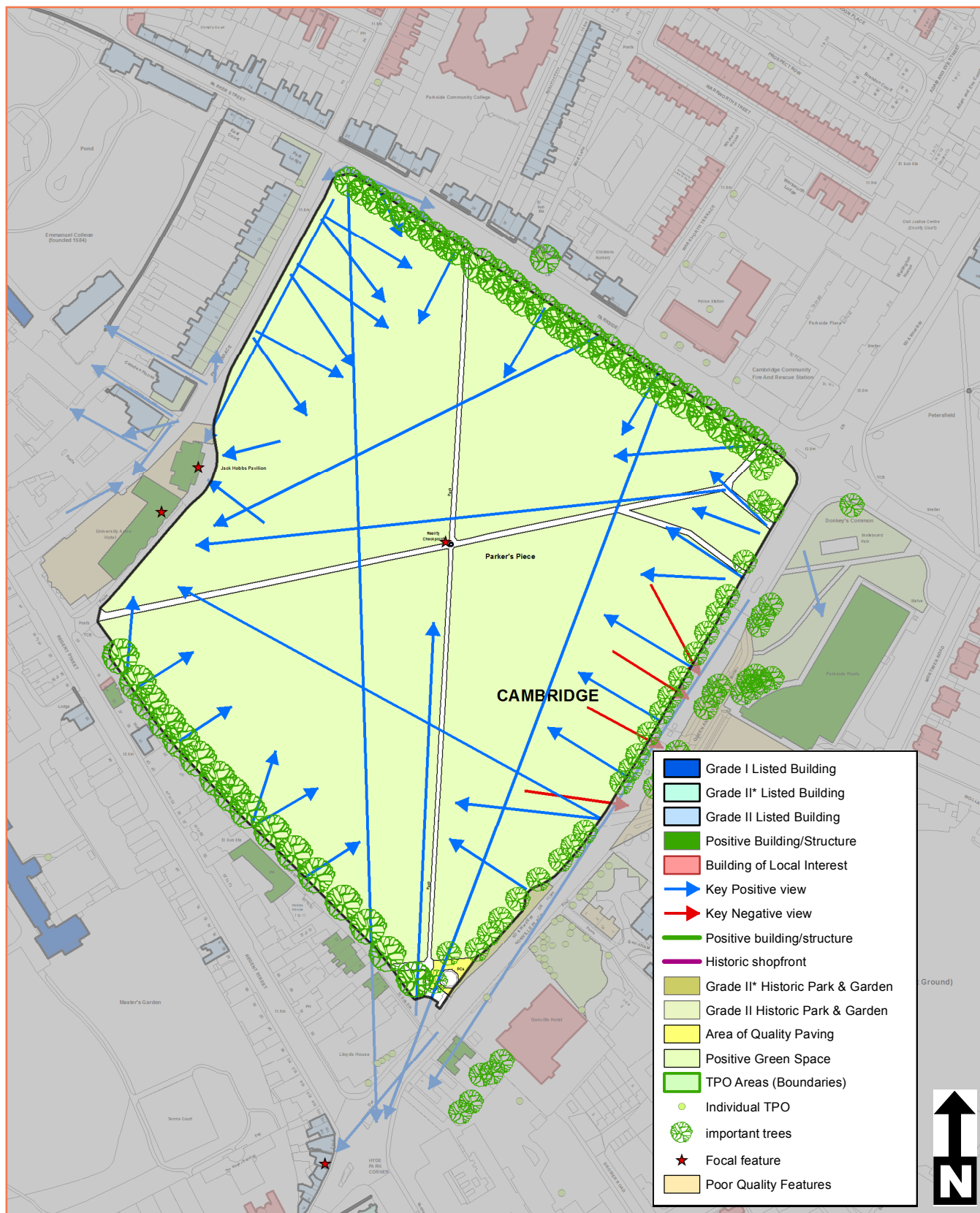
Jack Hobbs Pavilion



Athletics tracks in the grass



Public conveniences



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formal games of cricket, football and athletics, but informal kickabouts and games of volleyball are also common in the summer months. Concerts, fun fairs and large events [such as open air cinema and ice skating] are also regularly held here and Hobbs Pavilion is now a restaurant.

Landscape Features

- The space is broad and open with little sense



Views to Park Terrace

of enclosure. Its limits are mainly set by surrounding roads and marked by tall trees on its edges.

- Buildings on surrounding streets are glimpsed through gaps between trees. Park Terrace is more clearly visible, whilst the University Arms Hotel stands forward encroaching on the green space and providing a landmark on its edge.
- Structures are located on the edges of the space leaving it open and uncluttered, except for the central light column.

Enhancement Opportunities

Parker's Piece has some famous associations with sporting events - in 1848 hosting the first game played under what are now the official rules of Association Football and being the pitch where the

famous English cricketer, Jack Hobbs, learned his trade. The importance of the space to the city and to the development of sports nationally could be emphasised by improving interpretation facilities. This should be low key and might include a simple information point (board or totem at one entrance to the park. Maintaining and promoting the use of the space for these sports is, perhaps, the most suitable means of commemorating its historic associations.

The need to maintain the level, open quality of the Piece means the space has little ecological value, but the space is very important to the character of the core area by providing a setting for the large C19 houses and acting as a breathing space, contrasting with the dense housing areas surrounding it (the Kite area in particular). The management regimes need to be maintained to ensure that the quality of the space is not eroded through vandalism, litter and general wear and tear.

The central lamp column needs to be protected or more regularly maintained.

Following a period of high crime, including a rape in 2011, the council determined to install some additional lighting on the paths crossing Parker's Piece to improve night-time conditions on the Piece. This is now in place utilising reproduction Victorian-style columns and lanterns. One has been cluttered with CCTV apparatus and aerials.

Note: For further details on this area please refer to Cambridge City Council's "Parker's Piece Conservation Plan" (2001).

Feature / Structure	Age	Notes
Victorian lamp standard	1894	at intersection of diagonal paths in centre of open space, Grade II Listed
footway lighting	2014	reproduction Victorian columns & lanterns to both diagonal paths
lime trees	1868	north east side
Hobbs Pavilion	1930s, extended 1960s	single storey, brown brick building with tiled roof and clock tower. A positive building due to its associations with Jack Hobbs and the traditional sporting use of the Piece.
London & oriental plane trees	C19 & post 1980s	all boundaries, except north east. Generally more modern planting, mostly replacements for elms lost in 1980s
public conveniences	2004	south corner, designed by Freeland Rees Roberts
iron post-and-rail boundary	1878	north east (Parkside) & south east (Gonville Place) sides
timber post-and-rail boundary	C20	south west side (Regent Terrace)
Tarmacadam pathways	C19 / C20	perimeter & diagonal paths