BATH
PRESERVATION
TRUST

Royal Victoria Park improvements

26 November 2026

1. Introduction

Bath Preservation Trust (BPT) has been contacted by a few residents, concerned about the potential risk of harm to the heritage of Royal Victoria Park caused by the introduction of new cycling facilities.

The facilities being introduced include:

- Resurfacing of some pavements, including re-setting of historic kerb stones
- Loss or relocation of parking spaces
- A contraflow system to formalise the ability for cyclists to travel in two directions, whilst maintaining the one-way system for motorists
- Wildlife considerate lighting
- New raised pedestrian crossings

The works are being undertaken as part of a wider initiative to increase cycle friendly infrastructure in Bath. A particular focus has been east-west transit, and these proposals provide one of five broadly parallel routes. The contraflow route facilitates a more direct connection between Weston Road and Queen Square and the western side of the city centre.

The scheme is being wholly funded by the West of England Combined Authority and implemented by Bath and North-East Somerset Council.

Our evaluation does not offer a determination or view on the process or need for the scheme. This scheme has attracted significant public interest and our response is provided as an informed and impartial technical assessment of the design of the proposals and any potential impact to heritage.

2. Heritage and significance

Royal Victoria Park is a Grade I listed Registered Park and Garden. It is an outstanding early example of a municipal park, created by the city architect in 1830. There is an historic correlation with the wider Walcot Commons and collective green space south of Royal Crescent.

A description of the park's origin and history is provided in the Historic Environment Record (HER): https://www.somersetheritage.org.uk/record/60553#

The Historic England listing states the following:

Royal Victoria Park, Bath, opened in 1830 to a design by Edward Davis, is designated at Grade I for the following principal reasons:

- Date: the park is an especially early example of a municipal park;
- Design: although enhanced, the park's design is essentially unchanged from its original layout of 1830;

- Designer: Edward Davis, who planned the park in 1829, was the City Architect and thus closely associated with Bath;
- Historic interest: an important new component of early C19 Bath, and the first park in England to be named after the then Princess Victoria;
- Structures and features: the park has numerous listed structures;
- Planting: beginning with the founders' ambition for this to be a major arboretum, and via the creation of a Horticultural and Botanical Garden in 1839 (extended 1887 and later), Victoria Park is richly planted;
- Group value: the park lies centrally within the Bath World Heritage Site and is overlooked by the Royal Crescent.

3. Design

BPT has reviewed the potential impact of the five interventions identified in terms of potential impact to heritage and design compliance with "Local Transport Note 1/20, Cycle Infrastructure Design, July 2020".

3.1 Resurfacing of some pavements, including re-setting of historic kerb stones

Existing pavements are made up of asphalt, with historic stone kerbs evident throughout. The asphalt has been repaired in places, presumably through the periodic installation of service media. The faded asphalt has slumped in places.

The proposals indicate the existing asphalt will be lifted, to be replaced by new asphalt (colloquially known as 'black top'). Historic kerb stones will be re-set as the traditional edge to the pavements.

The replacement of asphalt is common in Bath and it can be an effective management tool to protect historic cobbles and pennant stone. Similarly, the re-setting of kerb stones is commonly undertaken.

3.2 Loss or relocation of a number of parking spaces

There is no implied harm to the property through the loss of parking spaces. When the park opened in 1830, the circular carriage drive was two-way. Parking spaces were facilitated by the introduction of a one-way system in the 20th century.

The loss of 'public benefit' of parking spaces is offset in part by the recent introduction of controlled parking on Weston Road, to the north. For the purposes of balance, it is noted that in her survey of Royal Victoria Park in 1984, Myna Trustram recorded that enjoyment of the park was spoilt as the avenues were open to traffic and used for parking.

Proposals indicate an increase in the number of disabled parking bays close to the various amenities in the park.

3.3 A contraflow system to formalise the ability for cyclists to travel in two directions, whilst maintaining the one-way system for motorists

The installation of the contraflow system does not appear to introduce any damage or harm to the historic fabric of the park. The introduction of a contraflow system would appear to be in line with central government policy, which advocates use on roads which can experience more than 1,000 vehicle movements in a day. Our evaluation is that the scheme is compliant with "Local Transport Note 1/20, Cycle Infrastructure Design, July 2020".

The selection of Tulip Cycle Wands is specific to this scheme, and these have been effective in application in London, but they present the opportunity to introduce some incongruity to the context of the historic environment. On balance, as a reversible intervention, these introduce a similar level of intrusion as street

bollards or the statutory signage and markers for the existing 'chicane' system, which would be considered less than significant. It would be preferable however for the scheme to follow the Bath Pattern Book.

3.4 Wildlife considerate lighting

Royal Victoria Park is a haven for wildlife and is home to many species of bat.

The proposed lighting scheme is a sensitive intervention in a sensitive location and provides an enhancement to lighting, and public safety, without introducing significant potential harm to wildlife. BPT published its own guidance about appropriate lighting to safeguard dark skies in 2023: https://www.bath-preservation-trust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/v2-Condensed-Lighting-Advice-Dark-Skies-pdf-3-1.pdf

We are pleased to see the lighting scheme aligns with many of the recommendations in the leaflet and also the more detailed position statement issued in September 2023: https://www.bath-preservation-trust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/BPT-Dark-Skies-Position-Statement-September-2023.pdf

Subject to post installation analysis this lighting scheme may provide an exemplar solution to limit light spill and harm relating to wildlife populations in other locations.

Recognising that the lights will, to some degree, improve safety and a sense of security for cyclists, particularly in winter months and during early evening rush hour, the introduction is positive. What is important is that there are a variety of options for east-west cycle routes to the west of the city centre. This lighting solution adds Royal Victoria Park to those options, and we would urge greater and more persistent introduction of additional lighting infrastructure which is as considerate to wildlife at other sensitive sites throughout Bath.

Our conclusion is that whilst the lighting enhancement is welcomed to some degree, it is also recognised that at best this only partially responds to the need to adequately plan for and mitigate risk of violence against women and girls.

3.5 New raised pedestrian crossings

The introduction of more pedestrian crossings is welcomed for public safety, particularly at key crossing points. The introduction of more of these crossings throughout the city, has helped with traffic calming and the prioritisation of pedestrians.

4. Conclusion

Following a review of information which is available in the public domain, our conclusion is that the changes proposed for Royal Victoria Park do not introduce any effect or impact on the asset's significance. There does not appear to be any loss of historic fabric. None of the interventions have any impact on the principal reasons cited by Historic England for designation. The park's design continues to be "essentially unchanged from its original layout of 1830".

The proposals appear to be consistent with government policy and should provide an improved public experience.

We would urge the council to reinstate the historic gateposts at the north-eastern entrance to Royal Victoria Park as part of these enhancements. The gateposts are a significant visual reference point and are conspicuous by their poor state of repair. This is a request BPT has been persistently repeating since they were damaged more than three years ago.