

CRYSTAL PALACE PARK MASTERPLAN

Interpretation themes¹

Central theme:

The Park of the People

Crystal Palace Park is a contemporary showcase for the ideals of the Great Exhibition and Joseph Paxton's vision – a place of discovery, cultural exchange, innovation, engineering, technology, learning and recreation.

Continuing the legacy of the original cultural model – bringing together education, recreation and entertainment with various arts forms set within a formal unified landscape – the Park will once again feature a broad range of cultural, sporting and recreational activities, setting them within a stunning managed and interpreted landscape, as awe inspiring as the Palace of the People itself.

Six sub-themes:

1. The Story of the Park

Crystal Palace Park is more than just a setting for the Crystal Palace; it's a theme park, a sports park, a show ground, a performance venue, an example to the world and a catalyst for the development of the surrounding area.

The site has a varied history of use, and can therefore appeal to visitors with many different interests. Some visitors will be interested in the geological phenomena that have created its spectacular topography; some the work of John Logie Baird; others fascinated with the range of music performances hosted in the Park – the triennial Handel Festivals, through to Bob Marley, Pink Floyd and Coldplay. It is important that the Park's history is contextualised, touching on all aspects of its past.

Visitors will benefit from experiencing an overview of the history of the Park from before the Palace was relocated to the present day. In particular, they should be equipped with the knowledge of why the Park is here, why the Palace was here, why the Palace is no longer here, and why this site is so significant.

2. The Story of the Crystal Palace and Paxton's vision

Paxton created a new home for his Palace following the Great Exhibition of 1851, it was to be positioned at the pinnacle of an awe-inspiring visionary integrated landscape, unprecedented in size and concept, a physical and metaphorical beacon to the world.

The Palace and Paxton's vision are the reason the Park exists today, yet there is little evidence within the landscape of their great significance and achievements. The story of the Palace is so popular and Paxton's work has been so influential around the globe, that this theme requires an in-depth interpretive facility.

3. The Story of the Park's Influence on Horticulture and Landscape Design

¹ Extract from Crystal Palace Park Masterplan Interpretation Strategy 2007 (Produced on behalf of the LDA by Laura Samuels)

The inspirational scale, horticultural practice and design led the Park to become an influential example of a mid 19th Century Victorian park. This, coupled with the onsite training of gardeners and landscape designers, has led principles of Paxton's design to be visible in parks across the globe.

This aspect of the Park is rated one of its greatest significances yet is the least well known. Through the introduction of the Masterplan, the Park will once again be an exemplar of landscape design, providing a context to promote the Park's horticultural past to a growing audience group.

4. *The Story of the Dinosaur Models and Geological Illustrations*

The first attempt in the world to interpret the life size appearance of extinct prehistoric animals in their natural habitats, these dramatic models offer great insight into the history of our understanding of the past.

In addition to being a very popular attraction, the dinosaur models at Crystal Palace are highly significant and have a great story to tell, however, their true importance is lost to the majority of visitors. If the models are viewed with no explanation, they merely appear to the visitor as slightly inaccurate sculptures of dinosaurs. However, when visitors are informed of how these models are the first life-size three-dimensional representations of dinosaurs, that they predated Darwin's Origin of Species and would have dramatically changed the perspective of the Park's earliest visitors, they are viewed in an entirely different light, with the awe that they deserve.

5. *The Story of the Park's Nature, Ecology and Environmental Sustainability*

Crystal Palace Park is a place to understand and appreciate nature, and be inspired and informed by seeing environmental sustainability in action.

The location and size of the Park offers a wonderful insight into nature and ecology within an urban context. It is one of the largest green spaces in the region and already popular with urban schools looking for green spaces for nature investigation. With the advent of health and wellbeing initiatives, such as Healthy Schools, the increase in teaching of responsibility and environmental sustainability through the citizenship curriculum, and the increase in nature and environment being a leading factor in tourism choices – this is an area where the Park can provide a much needed resource for the region.

6. *The Story of Sport and Crystal Palace Park*

Crystal Palace Park has a vibrant record of sports use and strong connections to a number of sporting occasions, events and personalities.

Since the 1860's the Park has been a venue for a whole host of sporting events from motor racing to cricket to aquatic sports and outboard motor boat racing. For many people Crystal Palace is synonymous with the football club of the same name, and the Athletics Grand Prix, both of which have their roots in the Park. The site also hosted 21 FA Cup Finals and WG Grace regularly played on the first class cricket ground. The story of the sporting legacy must be told as a fundamental element of the Park past, present and future.