

Bute Parks: **from 1939 to 2009**

Time to stop, think, plan for the future

40 tonne lorries in Bute
Park, 30th May 2009
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This document is produced by the Bute Parks Alliance in support of a moratorium on developments in Bute Park, Pontcanna and Llandaff Fields and Sophia Gardens

Incremental intrusion: 70 years, bit by bit



The four central parks of Cardiff Bute Park, Sophia Gardens, Pontcanna Fields and Llandaff Fields, are fundamental to the character of the city and a huge asset to Wales. We owe them to a combination of luck, aristocratic generosity, public campaigning, and foresight by past city councillors and officers; for without these the whole area would have been built on in the 19th century. According to CADW, *'The whole complex is an asset to the city of incomparable historic visual and amenity value'*.

However since the 1920's there has been a process of increasing developmental erosion cutting into this green space. The creation of Western Avenue sliced through the top of the Fields and much of the area to the north became UWIC; the Welsh Joint Education Council was given a slice of Llandaff Fields and is now building a massive new office block; HTV was allowed to build on Pontcanna Fields – subsequently sold for housing; the Welsh Institute for Sport, the Bowling Club and Glamorgan Cricket Club were all given

chunks of Sophia Gardens. Now GCCC has increased its ground capacity to 17,000 and Sophia Gardens sees more car use every day as the GCCC council-subsidised complex is used as a conference centre. Most of Bute Park was intact until recently although the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama was given a major site on North Road and now is expanding on parkland.

In the last 10 years the pace of development has changed and we're seeing incremental destruction and accelerating inappropriate use.

The GCCC wanted more parking so senior council officers steamrolled plans for over 90 more car parking spaces in Sophia Gardens which were to be 'managed' by GCCC. This expanded parking requires the demolition of floodlight tennis courts to allow parking for Sky TV vans. The 2008 Eisteddfod resulted in a huge area of Pontcanna Fields being fenced off from May 2008 for a one week event in August that year.

Now the Council, seemingly led by its senior officers, proposes to drive a massive new bridge into Bute Park and replace footpaths with 4-6 metre wide roadways although the initial proposal produced widespread public opposition, condemnation from CADW and was refused by Cardiff's own planning officers in January 2008.

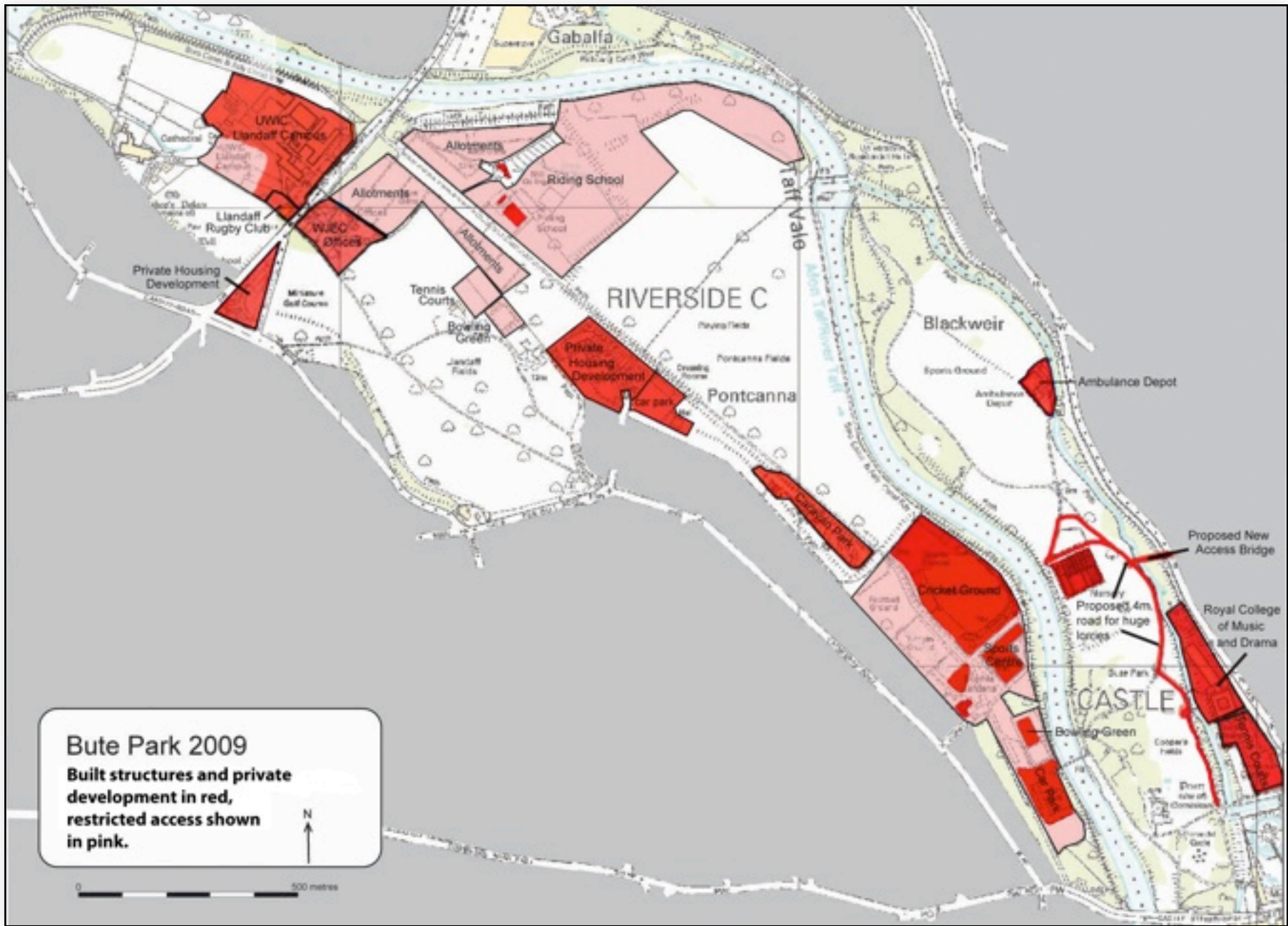
Some of these developments may be individually justified, and in some cases are institutions that may be of national importance, but viewed in its entirety the effect is devastating. ***Roughly half of the area that belongs to the people of Cardiff has been fenced off or built on and effectively or actually privatised.***

How has this happened? Each proposal for development has been looked at piecemeal and the Council and councillors of all parties, who should have been protecting Cardiff's future, have been swayed by short term gain and illusory promises of profit from development.

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Quotes and key facts

September 2007: Tom Morgan told the council executive *'the Heritage Lottery Fund view the position of a new bridge over the docks feeder to provide access into the park from North Road as an essential element of the Bute Park Restoration Project.'*

March 2009: Jennifer Stewart, chief executive of Heritage Lottery Fund Wales, has informed us, and the Council officers, that **HLF is not insisting on a bridge in this location** and that they *'are not wedded to any particular access solution'*; rather they want to improve *'intellectual and physical access'* and would *not want anything which would damage 'the heritage asset'*.

November 2007: Current events... *'carry with them the risk of long term damage to the landscape over and above that which can be addressed through post-event reinstatement'*. *'There is a real danger that the appeal of Bute Parkwill be damaged by degradation due to over use'* (Council document November 2007).

December 2007: CADW wrote, *'This area of the park is at present tranquil woodland and lawn dotted with specimen trees. The dock feeder canal runs quietly through it, flanked by an unsurfaced path*

and wider tarmacked path/roadway. There are no modern intrusions and the nursery enclosure to the west is well screened from the area.... The introduction of a wide modern road and bridge into this unspoilt area would in our view be unsympathetic and highly visible.'

February 2008: Chief Strategic Planning and Environment officer Sean Hannaby wrote to Tom Morgan, the Council Corporate Director, 'I have a copy of the Committee report that is due to go out tomorrow, **recommending refusal for the bridge**. I have considered the matter carefully and am satisfied that *I have no credible alternative.... We have a legal duty to protect or enhance the character of the park and cannot use highway issues as a reason to set that aside.'*

October 2008: CADW said *'It is not in question that the proposals would have adverse effects on the character of the park* in several ways. They would impact *on the boundary woodland area; require alteration to and removal of some trees, including one rare arboretum tree; bring visual intrusion from North Road into the park; change the character of the park in this area and disrupt the dock feeder path.'*

October 2008 Council planning report: says *'The proposed new access and bridge are undoubtedly a radical intervention into this quiet area of the park. The access will affect the linear woodland area; require the removal and facilitating works to trees; bring visual intrusion from North Road into the park; and change the character of the park in its immediate environment.'*... 'Concern remains, that even with such compensatory measures as are proposed that **the character of the parkland will be changed in this location, by virtue of the increase in traffic movements in this currently tranquil area of the park.'**

The costs/value

Cost of bridge: £1.4 million

Income from events in Bute park: 2007-8 source Cardiff Council - **£30,602**

Value of Bute Park to Cardiff: source Cardiff Council - **£2.8 million per annum**

Value of whole park complex to Cardiff in terms of property values, improved health, attractiveness to business: based on American Philadelphia study **>£500 million – estimate.**