Newly renovated Barking Park is officially open

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Barking Park has been transformed thanks to a £7.5m two-year project funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) and Barking and Dagenham Council. Work began in August 2010 and was finished earlier this year.

An official opening ceremony was held on Friday 1 June. Cllr Tony Ramsay, Mayor of Barking and Dagenham, cut the red ribbon to declare the park open. Also present was Wesley Kerr, Chairman of the Heritage Lottery Fund Committee for London, and Cllr Bert Collins, Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure and Sport, Barking and Dagenham Council.

The Victorian park, opened in 1898, now has a new visitor centre and café at its centre. The 910 metre-long lake has been drained and de-silted, and pond dipping platforms installed around the edges. A new boating pontoon has been built, with pleasure boating returning to the park later this year.

The old Lido, which has been derelict since 1988, has been re-opened as a wet play facility called Barking Splash Park. It features the original fountains which have been restored to full working order.

Some of the silt from the lake was cleaned and used to create new wildflower beds elsewhere in the park. The ornamental flower beds, an original feature of the park, have been re-planted with 45,000 new plants - a job which took five people 60 days to complete, and needed 560 cubic metres of bark mulch.

Other improvements to the park include a new playground, two new car parks and boundary fence, extra benches, toilets, better footpaths and improved signage. Old favourites like the miniature railway, skate park and tennis courts are still there for people to enjoy.

In February 2008 Barking and Dagenham Council secured a £3.5m grant from the HLF’s Public Parks initiative (a precursor to HLF's current Parks for People scheme). This was brought up to £7.5million with contributions from the council and other sources.

Cllr Bert Collins, Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure and Sport, said: “Barking Park is the borough’s oldest park, and with more than 700,000 visits per year it’s also one of the most popular. There was a need for some new facilities to keep the park up to date, so we were delighted to be able to secure the help of the Heritage Lottery Fund.

“It’s a real pleasure to see the completed park. The new facilities all look fantastic, and with summer coming up I’m sure that local people will come down in their droves to see what Barking Park now has to offer. The park is there for residents and their families to enjoy, so I hope to see many new faces in the years to come.”

Wesley Kerr, Chairman of the Heritage Lottery Fund London Committee, said: “It’s great to celebrate the renaissance of Barking Park during this exceptional summer of the Queen’s Diamond Jubilee and the London Olympics. This regeneration is one of eight major schemes across London completing this year - the biggest investment in the city’s open spaces since Victorian times.

The local community and visitors can now benefit from the transformed Lido, the handsome cafe and visitor centre, the lake, and the beautifully reinvigorated planting in one of East London’s premier parks. Gardens, trees and public parks are the green lung of our city - essential for healthy, happy communities; and we should cherish and sustain them.”

Notes for editors

The aims of the Barking Park renovation project were as follows:

- To provide a revitalised park to better meet the needs of the 21st century.
- To reflect the heritage of the borough and the importance of the park in people's lives.
- To create a 'heart of the park' where the majority of facilities and activities are focussed.
- To provide improved facilities with a better range of things to do, refreshments and toilets.
- To provide facilities to help families feel safe, so they visit more often, and stay longer.
- To provide a visible staffing presence offering a range of events, activities and education.

Further information

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