

Heritage Impact Assessment

Effect of Annual Events in

Brockwell Park, Lambeth



Early C19 pleasure ground shelter, Listed Grade II

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1. Introduction

This report sets out the effects of the annual events Brockwell Live and Lambeth Country Show and their predecessors, run for Lambeth Council in the historic environment of Brockwell Park in May and June. This is a nationally significant historic park as identified by its inclusion by Historic England on its *Register of Parks and Gardens of special historic interest* (RPG) at Grade II, one of only 1700 such sites countrywide. The report has been commissioned by local residents to identify the effects of these events on the historic environment of the park.

The contents were updated in mid-March 2025 to report that the area of parkland covered by the events had still not recovered from the 2024 Brockwell Live and Lambeth Country Show events and harm was still evident. At this point neither the fabric nor character of widespread parts of the area were appropriately reinstated or remediated particularly the sward and the compaction of the ground. This is less than two months before the setting up of the next projected round of similar intensive events starting on 11 May 2025, for which Lambeth Council is in the process of obtaining planning permission through two applications for a total of 39 days on site.¹

This further confirms that the effect of the events and associated works on the historic environment and particularly designated heritage assets is not temporary and is certainly harmful.

2. The Author

The author, Dr Sarah Rutherford, is an expert historic environment consultant. She has specialised for over 30 years in the assessment and conservation of all types of designed landscapes, particularly via conservation plans, statements of significance, heritage impact assessments and setting studies, and appears as an expert witness in planning enquiries. She is a former Head of the English Heritage *Register of Parks and Gardens* with an expertise in designed landscapes country-wide.

3. Sources Informing the Report

For this report the author inspected the current condition of the park on site (January 2025), reviewed the extensive historic material relating to the park and Brockwell Hall presented in the 2020 Brockwell Hall Conservation Plan and other documents submitted for Listed Building Consent for the current Hall restoration project,² and reviewed reports produced by Lambeth Council on the running of the events and post-event debriefings. She has also discussed the effects of the events on the park with local residents. The assessment of the landscape significance is

¹ 25/00003/LDCP Application for Certificate of Lawfulness (Proposed) with respect to Brockwell Live 2025 (the 'Events') from Friday 23 May 2025 to Sunday 1 June 2025. The build period for the Events will commence on May 11 until the first event on 23 May. 25/00693/RG3 Temporary use of Brockwell Park for Lambeth Country Show event taking place in 2025 for a total of 17 Event Days, involving the installation and de-installation of temporary infrastructure including fencing, lighting, Public Address (PA) systems, stages, fun fair rides and other temporary structures and ancillary works. (2– 18 June 2025 inc.).

² Available online at <https://planning.lambeth.gov.uk/online-applications/applicationDetails.do?activeTab=documents&keyVal=QHDB5XBO09400>

based on analysis of the extensive and rigorous historic analysis material submitted in 2020 as part of the Listed Building Consent application for restoration of the Hall in particular the Conservation Plan and Heritage Statement.

The following sections set out the key significances of the park and summarises and discusses the effects that the events are having on the historic fabric and character of the nationally significant RPG.

4. Significance of the Designed Landscape

The heritage significance of Brockwell Park derives from its designed landscape, which forms the essential and immediate setting for four listed structures within it, the most important of which is the Grade II* listed Regency villa, Brockwell Hall, associated with the renowned architect J.B. Papworth. This typical Regency villa landscape originated around 1813 as the setting for the fine Hall. The apparently simple external design of the villa is intended to emphasize the prominence of the hall panoramically from within and beyond the park, while at the same time affording spectacular views from the three principal fronts, including north towards the City and St Paul's.

The landscape designer expertly used the topography and layout to achieve this. The main drive was designed to emphasize the prominence of the pale-coloured villa, the line following a gentle serpentine up the slope from Herne Hill to the north-east to arrive at the imposing porticoed entrance on the north-west front, overlooking the park and north towards the City. This survives intact as the main approach, set in parkland with scattered specimen trees and clumps, and is in turn overlooked by the tall French windows of the drawing rooms on the east front of the villa.

The villa enjoys a dramatic double aspect over the park along the main axis, to the north-west through the porticoed main entrance and hall, and to the south-east through the impressive bow window and over the curved balcony towards Dulwich Woods and Sydenham Hill. The third key viewpoint from the villa is north-east over the main drive towards the gateway and Herne Hill beyond, and, as noted above, the view is framed by the three full height French windows of the two linked ground floor drawing rooms. Key views of this early phase are mapped in Figures 1 and 2.



Left: Brockwell Hall, main entrance on the north-west front, by Tommy 2000.

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Right: *Brockwell Hall, Brockwell Park* by Stephen Richards. South-east and north-east fronts, prominent in the park.

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Main drive and approach to the villa from the north-east.

As the 2020 Statement of Significance for the Hall notes 'The ground floor of the main house comprises a complete neo-classical arrangement of spaces, symmetrically disposed with their original detailing largely intact.' (para 5.7.2) and that 'The basic landscape setting of a grand house on a landscaped hill is largely intact ... [with] Its setting including its sweeping views across central London.' (paras 5.8.1-2) ³

The villa is complemented by the detached and secluded walled garden and integral shelter in the form of an open Classical portico (Grade II) standing 200m to the north-west (see photograph on report cover). The villa and shelter are linked by a pleasure ground path across a former paddock. The elegant temple-style structure enjoys views of the impressive villa entrance to the south-west.

The Regency layout and its structures survive largely intact and comprise the most significant aspect of Brockwell Park. The Regency villa composition as laid out by the 1840s (approximate area shown in Figure 1) is redolent of the sophisticated style of Humphry Repton (1753-1818), the foremost landscape designer of the late C18 and early C19. It is comparable with other surviving rural villa landscapes on which he advised, such as nearby the Casina, Dulwich, and further afield, Armley House (late C18, now Gott's Park), overlooking the city of Leeds, and Sheringham Park beside the Norfolk coast (c.1813). It is also comparable in scale and style with a number of other villa parks ringing London, laid out in formerly rural areas for newly wealthy merchants, bankers, etc. such as the nearby late-C18 Belair in East Dulwich.

From the 1890s the public park managers retained the villa layout at the core of the area which was enlarged seamlessly with typical municipal park recreation features, paths and drives, to complement the existing design which largely reached its current extent and layout by the mid-C20 (see Figure 1). The villa landscape character dominates the 51.6 ha. Registered park which largely reads as a whole, with modern additions in places which are localised in their effects.

³ Heritage Statement, Pringle Richards, 2020.

5. Area of the Brockwell Live/ Lambeth Country Show Events in the Historic Environment of Brockwell Park

The main event site covers 17 ha., 43% of the open parkland (area shown in Figure 2) for around 39 days a year in May-June during the peak of the growing season for grass and trees. In 2024 a steel fence was erected for about 37 days between May 13 and June 19. Heras fencing was then erected during the largely ineffectual restoration works to the ground for another 31 days.

The event area is intensively used for heavy vehicles and equipment for this period during the most important part of the growing season. The site encloses not only the main approach to the villa but also a number of the key C19 trees as specimens and clumps that relate to its essential views and the ornamentation of the flanking parkland. The events site extends south-west to cover the paddock which links the Grade II* villa and the Grade II temple portico.

The 17 ha. event site therefore covers two of the three most significant historic parts of Brockwell Park in the immediate environs of the villa: the main villa approach through the park to the north, and the pleasure ground paddock to the west. The third key area is less affected physically; it lies below the south-east front of the villa overlooked by the bow window (see Figure 2) but contains three peripheral scattered areas of associated parking and camping, each covering up to c. 1 ha. The total area of the 51.6 ha. RPG used for these events is 19 ha. or 36%.

6. Assessing the Effect of Temporary Events on Heritage Assets

Whilst the events structures present on site physically affect the heritage assets for a limited amount of time, this still causes both temporary and long term harm of a form recognized by Historic England.

Current Historic England guidance 'Temporary Structures in Historic Places' (English Heritage 2010) is relevant, in particular two paragraphs that relate to the length of time of the development being in place and the cumulative effect of multiple temporary events over a period of years.

Para. 6.10 notes that in relation to duration:

'The length of time for which a structure is erected is an important factor in assessing its impact.'

Furthermore, Para. 2.3 notes that:

'The cumulative impact of temporary structures at sites which hold multiple or repeated events can be much greater than structures for one-off events. These repeated events may vary in size and duration from year to year, or assume a more permanent character over time ...'

This is certainly the case with the annual events held here, as demonstrated below.

The events and associated activities damage both the fabric of the Registered Park and the setting of the designated structures within the park which are most important to the ornamental designed landscape and form part of the original Regency layout.

7. Effects of the Brockwell Live/Lambeth Country Show Events on the Historic Fabric of Brockwell Park RPG

The extensive directly damaging effects of the 2024 event site on 33% of the historic fabric of the 51.6 ha. RPG remain evident in March 2025. The ground in a large area of the c.17 ha. events site is waterlogged almost continuously in winter, and in some places ground damage caused by vehicles and coverage of the ground by tracking is not properly reinstated. Some types of effects resulting from the 2024 events are shown in photographs at the end of this report. The increasing extreme weather events associated with climate change, including drought and intensive and prolonged rainfall, make it difficult on an annual basis to reinstate the extensive area of lost grass effectively and drain and decompact the surface adequately after the events.⁴

Regular monitoring photographs taken by residents show that the ground remains in poor condition in large areas, without full recovery, until the next events overlie it a year later. The break for Covid allowed two years between these events during which time it was clear that the ground recovered more fully. Even so the long term effects of this high degree of annual ground compaction on the site cannot be fully mitigated.

It was observed during the events that the root protection zones (RPZ) of important historic trees within the events site were encroached upon. RPZ avoidance measures were not enforced. Branches were damaged by vehicles, removed and others were cut off solely to accommodate event equipment and access in an unplanned manner, damaging these key historic assets. Lambeth Trees Service in a letter referring specifically to Tree Work In Brockwell Park acknowledges that unplanned and unnecessary damage to trees is accepted as an inevitable result of the events.⁵ Such cumulative effects of the annual events are unsustainable.

The paths, restored to a high standard for amenity use as part of the landscape restoration completed in 2011, are increasingly damaged by high volumes of movements of HGVs as part of the events and not adequately repaired.

⁴ E.g. as noted in the 2023 Post-Event Report: 'Post event the initial programme was to verti-drain all areas, level out tire tracks, trackway edges and other ruts by hand and then fill depressions with soil and overseed. Areas of more extensive damage were fenced off, to allow the reseeding to take.' It was noted in 2024 in the Post-Event Debriefing Community Presentation that immediate re-seeding did not succeed due to high rainfall. Seeding could not occur until September leaving the area barren until at least November.

⁵ Lambeth Trees Service in a letter ref. Member enquiry UFN26660913 - Tree Work In Brockwell Park. 'The branches of the oak tree near Herne Hill Gate ... were lightly pruned on 20th May to facilitate the safe passage of HGVs along these paths during the event setup and operations. ... Regarding the tree branches that were cut, we acknowledge that this action has raised concerns and this decision was taken following detailed internal review and approval processes. Unfortunately, alternative routes posed various challenges, including a higher risk of damage to ground and a greater number of trees. This decision was made to prevent potential damage to the overhanging branches.'

Cumulatively these intensive annual events cause short-term damage to the historic fabric that might be partially mitigated given adequate resources and favourable weather, together with long term damage to the fabric and character of the villa landscape.

The fabric of the park is sensitive and vulnerable, particularly the Regency landscape but also the municipal extensions. This landscape was designed for quiet, pedestrian recreation, and was never designed for this type of intensive, industrialised and sustained use.

The tranquillity and peaceful use of the rest of the park, which is part of the designed historic character of both the Regency and municipal phases, are considerably damaged during the five weeks of occupation of the events site.

8. Effects of the Events on the Setting of Listed Structures Relating to the Park Layout

The events and associated activities harm the setting of the structures which are most important to the ornamental designed landscape and form part of the original Regency layout. Historic England places great weight upon the setting of heritage assets as set out in its Advice Note on the subject (2nd Edition, 2017, HEAN No. 3).⁶ In this document (p.11) it sets out key experiential aspects of setting, several of which during the events at Brockwell Park are affected.

The events damage the following key historic aspects of the setting of heritage assets during the 45 days of physical disruption to the 30% of parkland comprising the site and for more than six months after this mitigation works in the following ways:

1. The visual dominance, prominence and role as a focal point of the villa (II*) set in sweeping parkland.
2. The visual and physical relationship between the villa (II*) and the pleasure ground portico (II) across the pleasure ground paddock.
3. The visual and physical relationship between the villa (II*), its main approach and the main park entrance.
4. The visual relationship of the main approach to the villa with the intended naturalistic parkland flanking it, including the sensitive and vulnerable C19 trees.
5. The tranquillity of the environs of the villa (II*) and its walled gardens and portico (II).
6. The sense of seclusion of the walled gardens and portico (II).

⁶ <https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/gpa3-setting-of-heritage-assets/heag180-gpa3-setting-heritage-assets/>

9. Conclusions

1. The annual rota of events including Brockwell Live and Lambeth Country Show, the four areas covering in total 19 ha. including the 17 ha. main event site, causes unacceptable long-term harm to 36% of the historic fabric and character of the 51.6 ha., nationally significant Brockwell Park RPG. These in turn harm the visitor experience.
2. This harm arises from the inappropriately intensive use of a large proportion of the parkland, particularly in key areas of the Regency villa landscape, the most significant phase of the park's history, which survives largely intact. The whole park is sensitive and vulnerable to over-use with heavy equipment.
3. Great temporary harm occurs during the 39 days of the events and their associated works, such as the impact of barrier fencing on the setting of the Listed Buildings, loss of sward, ground compaction and disruption to the whole park. This includes to the setting of the five Listed Buildings in the park, one listed at Grade II*, and wider parkland, particularly the effect on key experiential qualities of both.
4. Even more harmful is the serious cumulative long-term harm caused by these events to a large area of the vulnerable and nationally significant fabric of the RPG, particularly the ground and the historic trees, from the intensity of use and the frequency of the events over successive years, which cannot adequately be repaired and mitigated with the intensity and frequency of the events.

10. Main References

Brockwell Hall Heritage Statement, Pringle Richards, 2020.

Brockwell Hall Conservation Management Plan including Appendices, Ignus Froneman, 2020

Brockwell Live. Post Event Assessment Report, Lambeth Council, 2023

Brockwell Live 2024. Post Event Assessment Community Presentation, Lambeth Council, 2024.

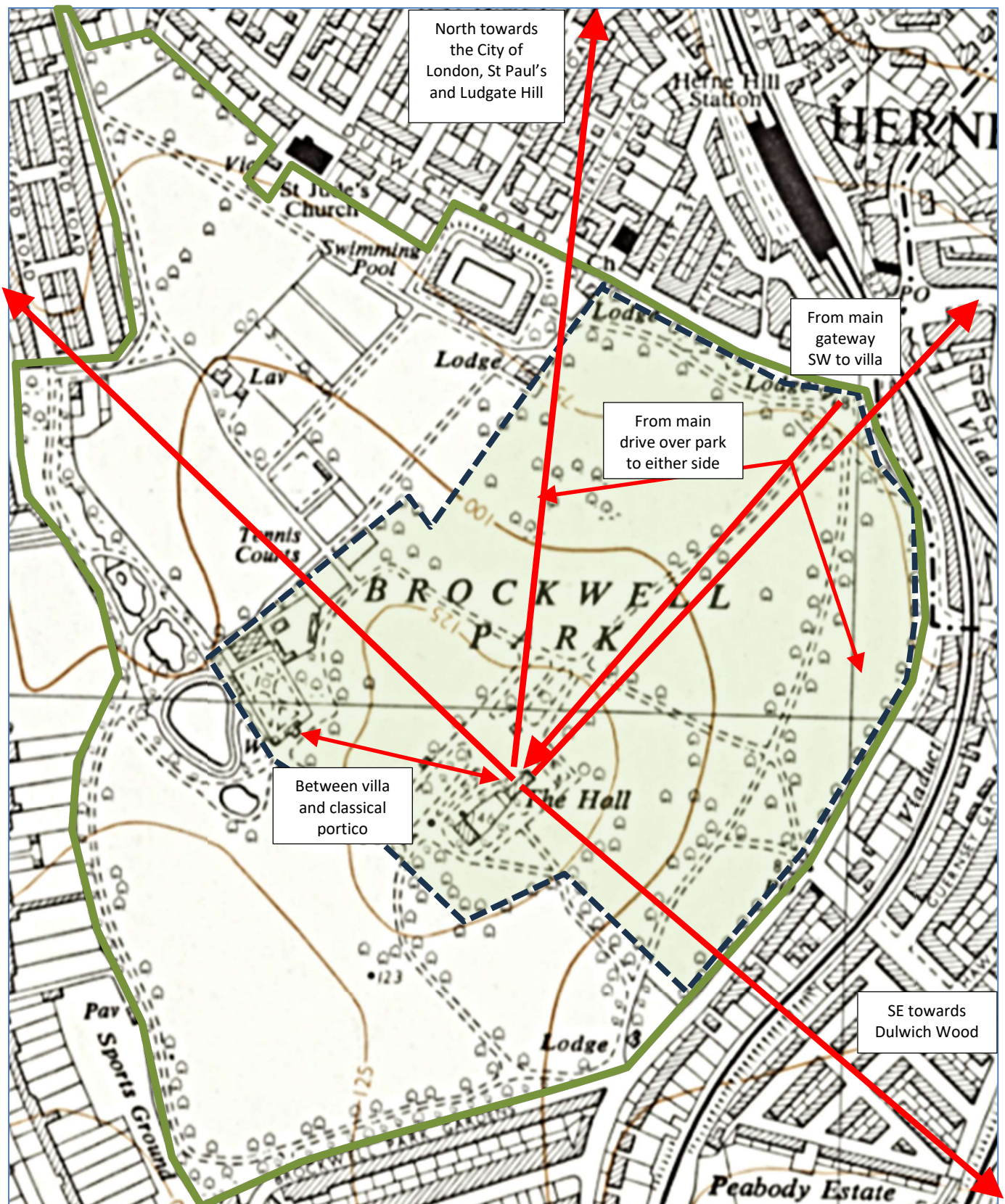


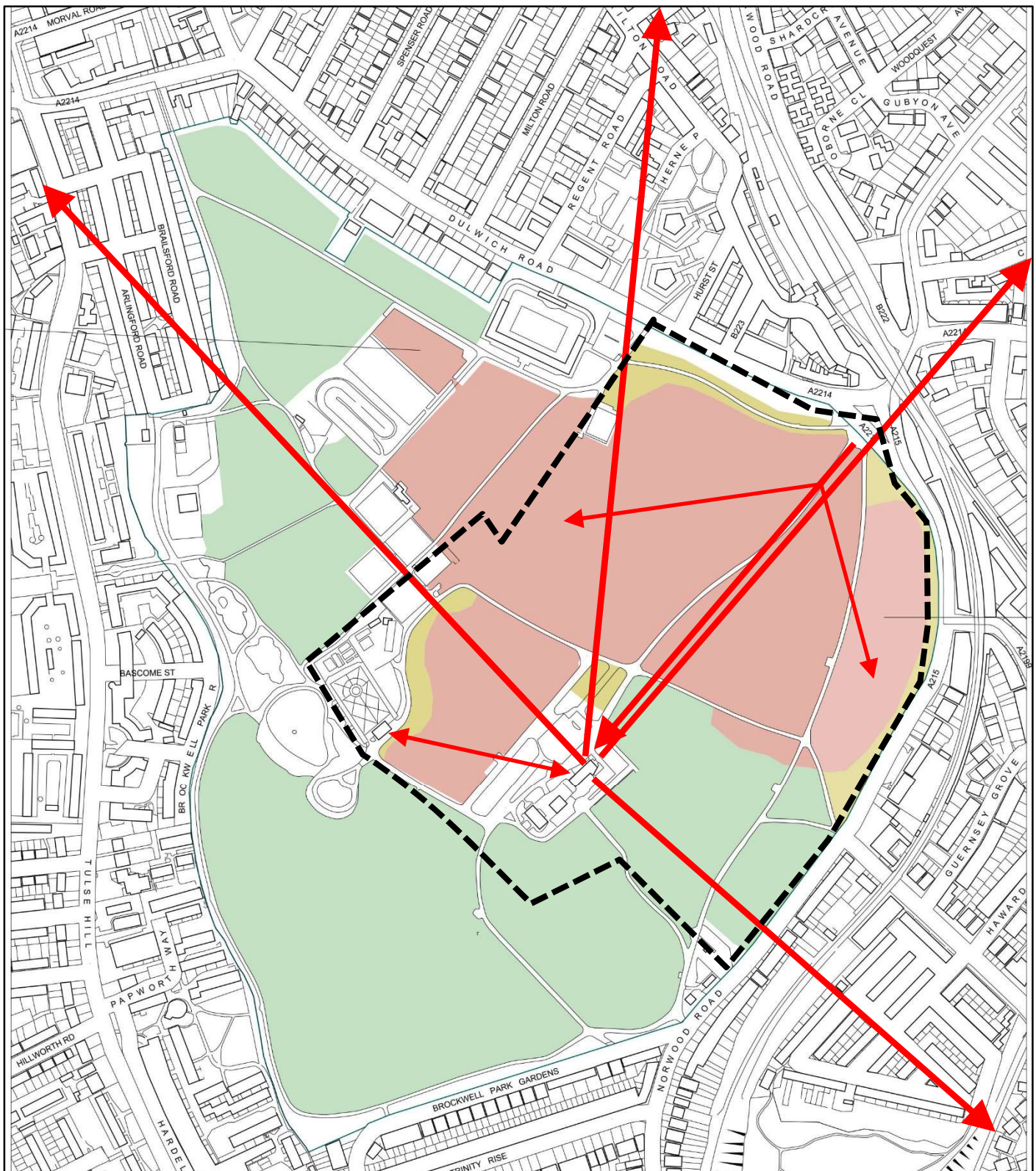
Figure 1 Ordnance Survey 1: 10,000 scale, surveyed c.1950.

Red arrows = Key views within the park relating to the most significant phase, the early C19 Regency phase.

Thickest lines are the most important.

51.6 ha. Registered site outlined green, comprising the full extent of the municipal park design.

Approximate area of core Regency landscape shaded green. This is based on boundaries on a map of the *Parish of Lambeth Divided into Ecclesiastical Districts* (1824), and a *Map of St Mary, Lambeth* (1841), at Lambeth Archives (reproduced in Brockwell Hall Conservation Plan, 2020, Appendix 4).



Ordnance Survey, (c) Crown Copyright 2024. All rights reserved. Licence number 100022432

Figure 2 Current Ordnance Survey Map of Brockwell Park.

Red arrows = Key views within the park relating to the most significant phase, the early C19 Regency phase.

Thickest view lines are the most important.

Black dotted line = approximate area of the early C19 Regency landscape.

Key to shading

Key to shading	
% of ACCESSIBLE AREAS OF GRASS AND TREES	
41%	Within Brockwell Live Events boundary (15.38 ha)
4%	Unusable strips adjacent to boundary (1.64 ha)
55%	Areas remaining (20.55 ha)

Photographs of damage before reinstatement, June 2024
These show a sample of the types of damage occurring.



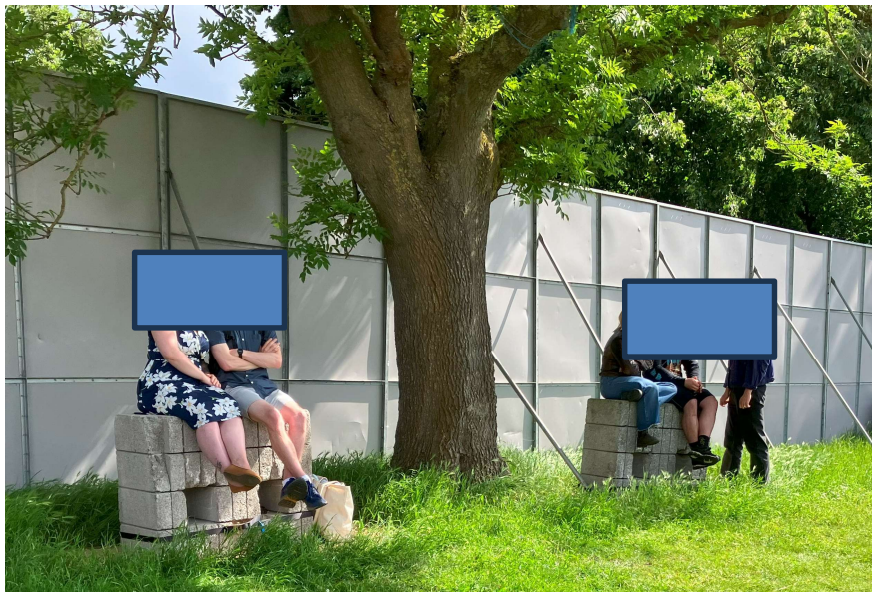
Damage to ground immediately after events.



The extent of the area covered by the events and universal damage to ground surface.
Hall and Pleasure Ground Shelter ringed.



The intensity of damage to the parkland surface.



Evidence of damage to Root Protection Zones of one of the historic trees.

These large concrete blocks are used extensively to stabilise the perimeter fence. They are sited well within the Root Protection Zone of many trees for the full time the fence is present.



Damage to tree structure caused by an HGV and poor remedial works.

Photographs of a representative selection of areas of ground damage after reinstatement, January 2025



Near the main drive to the Hall



In the wider parkland



In the wider parkland (Hall ringed in background on LH photo)