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Beach House Park in Worthing was opened to the public in 1924 DEREK MARTIN

Campaigners secure future of park, 100 year

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Doggedly determined campaigners have secured the future of Worthing's premier park, 100 years after it was first opened to the public.

The history of Beach House and its extensive grounds, including what is now Beach House Park and Denton Gardens, dates back to Regency times.

Beach House Park's heritage has been celebrated for the centenary throughout 2024 by Creative Waves, which cares for the BugCycle Community Garden there.

The story brings together two formidable women - Worthing Society founder Pat Baring and current chair Susan Belton, both of them passionate about saving architectural gems from developers.

Pat founded Worthing Civic Society, now known as the Worthing Society, in 1973 and became known as 'the battle-axe conservationist', as she was in constant battle with Worthing Borough Council, contesting planning applications with stamina and determination.

Pat's determination was best illustrated when she staged a sit-in by the elegant Victorian lamppost in Farncombe Road to prevent it being demolished. It was this that earned her the nickname - and her efforts mean the lamppost remains there to this day.

Pat continued to be a thorn in the side of Worthing's planning department, campaigning to preserve the town's historic buildings throughout the 1960s and 1970s, and playing a major role in saving Beach House, Marine Parade and Bedford Row.

The main aim of the society she founded remains, to provide a watchful eye on the architectural urban environment of the area, protecting the character and life of the town while seeking to ensure new developments are in harmony with existing buildings.

And it is thanks to the efforts of Susan and the society's heritage team this year that Beach House Park, Beach House Grounds and Denton Gardens have finally been included in a Conservation Area, for the first time, helping to protect them for the future.

The society has also been instrumental in the blue plaques scheme, which commemorates notable people, buildings and events in the town's history, including one unveiled in 2018 for Pat Baring at 2 Church Walk, the house where she lived.

Susan said at the time: "I think 2018 is a very apt year to remember Mrs Baring. It is a year when we celebrate the Suffragette movement, and what women have achieved in the last century since getting the right to vote.

"From what I have learned about her, her character, strength, and courage in standing up to the planning department and councillors of the day, Mrs Baring was very much in that mould."

Susan gave a talk on Pat Baring and the history of Beach House Park in November, as part of centenary celebrations organised by Creative Waves during 2024.

Worthing's premier park, with entrances from Brighton Road in the south and Lyndhurst Road to the north, it was purchased from the Beach House Estate in 1922 and opened to the public in spring 1924.

The Grade II listed villa with which the park is associated, Beach House, dates back to the Regency period. It was built in 1820 to designs by well-known local architect John Biagio Rebecca.

The property was originally known as Marino Mansion, a home for Mr Robert Carey Elwes. The house was then sold to Sir Frederick Adair Roe, chief magistrate and head of the Bow Street Runners, in 1846.

Conveyancing details held at West Sussex Record Office show the layout of the grounds with four plots in 1873. Plot 1 comprised Beach House and the carriage approach to the north of the building, with a croquet lawn, a rosary, large area of lawn to the south and a flower garden to the west. A kitchen garden, laundry, stable and coach house are shown on the western boundary of this plot.

Plots 2 and 3 are described as building land, and plot four as the park. Together, these plots show the extensive original grounds belonging to the house, including what is now Denton Gardens.

Sir Robert Loder, MP for New Shoreham, bought the property in 1876, then his eldest son sold Beach House in 1917, after it had been empty and neglected for six years.

American playwright Edward Knoblock restored the property and then offered the house to Worthing Council for £16,000 but the sale was not completed. During the