

## Worthing Aquarena

Appendix:  
Heritage Statement

June 2010

# CONTENTS

## List of Figures

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Understanding the Place
  - 2.1 The Aquarena Site
  - 2.2 Beach House
  - 2.3 Beach House grounds
- 3.0 Assessment of Significance
- 4.0 Summary of Current Proposals
- 5.0 Impact Assessment
  - 5.1 Demolitions
  - 5.2 The effect of the proposals on the setting of Beach House
  - 5.3 Possible mitigation
  - 5.4 The effect on the setting of the Farncombe Road Conservation Area
- 6.0 Conclusion
- Appendix

## **List of Figures**

Fig.1 detail from the O/S of 1875, 25" LXIV.15

Fig.2 details from the O/S of 1898 25" LXIV.15

Fig.3 detail from the O/S of 1912 25" LXIV.15

Fig.4 O/S 1932 25" LXIV.15

Fig.5 details from the O/S of 1952 TQ 1502 NW

Fig.6 The south front and south lawn of Beach House circa 1920

Fig.7 The north front and entrance court of Beach House in 1923

Fig.8 Plans of Beach House. as altered in 1917, with the new forecourt

Fig.9 The east side of Beach House in 1946

Fig.10 The south front of Beach House in 1945

Fig.11 The Animal Memorial in the grounds of Beach House

Fig.12 The Animal Memorial today

Fig.13 The southern boundary of the south lawn as it was in the 1920s

Fig.14 The pavilion at the south east corner of the Beach House grounds in the 1920s

Figs. 15-17 The 1938 Promenade and Pools in the mid- 1950s

Fig.17 A plan showing the proposed new building and landscape

Fig.18 A perspective view of the Brighton Road front of the proposed Aquarena building with Beach House on the extreme right

Fig.19 A perspective view of the proposed Aquarena building looking east across the south lawn of Beach House

Fig.20 A view eastwards across the south lawn of Beach House from the raised promenade looking towards the present Aquarena building.

## **1.0 Introduction**

This Heritage Report was commissioned by Worthing Borough Council in May 2010 in connection with proposal to build a new swimming pool complex on the sea-front at Worthing to the designs of the architects Wilkinson Eyre. The new complex would occupy a site presently occupied by an inter-war leisure development adjoining the grounds of Beach House, a grade II\* listed building. This report considers the significance of the structures already on the site and assesses the impact of the proposed new pool building on the existing built heritage and its setting. The report was prepared by Neil Burton BA FSA IHBC, a director of the Architectural History Practice Ltd.

## **2.0 Understanding the Place**

### **2.1 The Aquarena site**

The site for the new Aquarena building is a rectangle of land between the Brighton Road and the beach. It is shown as open ground enclosed by a wall on the north east and west sides on all Ordnance Survey maps from 1875 to 1932 (figs. 1-5) and was presumably used as a paddock. In 1938 the land was laid out by Worthing Council, presumably to designs by the Borough Engineer, as part of a leisure facility with a large oval splash pool linked by a channel at the south end to a boating lake extending eastwards along the sea front. The channel was crossed by a pedestrian bridge with an ornamental iron handrail. At the western end of the boating lake were built small single-storey lavatory buildings with shaped fronts reflecting the curved border of the lake. At the south end of the site overlooking the sea were built two short rows of single-storey beach huts. At the present time all the elements of the 1938 are still present, although the boating lake has been filled-in.

### **2.2 Beach House**

Beach House, which stands to the west of the Acquarena site, is a late Georgian stucco-faced villa built in 1820 for Mr Robert Carey Elwes to the designs of John Biagio Rebecca, who was himself a Worthing resident and designed several other

buildings in the town including the Royal Hotel (now demolished) and St Paul's Church. Elwes sold the house in 1846 to Sir Frederick Adair Roe and after his death his widow continued to live in the house until her own death in 1876. Beach House was then acquired by Sir Robert Loder. He died in 1888 and the property passed to his son Edward Giles Loder who was well-connected at Court and entertained King Edward VII at Beach House several times in the decade after 1900.

This royal entertaining may have overstretched Edward Loder's finances because he put some of the furniture of Beach House up for sale in 1911 and vacated the house itself the same year. In 1914 he offered the entire property to Worthing Council for the sum of £16,000, with the intention that the house and park should be used for public benefit. Although an Act of Parliament to permit the acquisition from public funds was prepared, the offer was eventually rejected on a ratepayers' vote and the house remained empty. During the First World War it was used as a doll-making factory for the employment of refugees.

In 1917 Beach House was purchased by Edward Knoblock (1874-1945) who had changed his name from Knoblaugh at the beginning of the War. Knoblock was a successful playwright and it was the proceeds from his play *Kismet* which enabled him to purchase and refurbish Beach House, with the professional assistance of the architect Maxwell Ayrton, who had been a pupil of Lutyens. Knoblock had lived for a while in France and he redecorated the interior of his new property in the French Empire taste to provide a suitable setting for a quantity of Thomas Hope furniture which he purchased at the 1917 sale of The Deepdene, Hope's own house in Surrey. Professor David Watkin, the biographer of Thomas Hope, credits Knoblock with initiating the Regency Revival of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in England by saving and publicising this furniture.

On the entrance side of the house Knoblock's architect Maxwell Ayrton provided a new enclosed forecourt (figs. 7 & 8) stretching to the Brighton Road. The frontage of the house was then separated from the road by a substantial flint wall into which Ayrton inserted handsome iron gates, apparently brought from Phoenix Park in Dublin.

After a relatively short tenancy Knoblock sold the house and grounds in 1923 and went to live in Brighton. Beach House passed through the hands of two more private owners until in 1927 it was purchased by Worthing Corporation, principally for the grounds. The building served as a temporary Town Hall in 1929-33 but plans for its subsequent conversion into a tea room did not materialise and the building remained without a beneficial use until the Second World War, when it became the headquarters of the Air Raid Patrol.

After the War, Worthing Corporation made a determined attempt to pull down Beach House on the grounds that it was in poor condition and served no function. There was a good deal of opposition to demolition, both locally and nationally and because of the strength of this opposition a Public Inquiry was held in 1948, which resulted in the Secretary of State serving a Preservation Order on the house under the new Town & Country Planning Act of 1947. Beach House was probably among the first buildings in England to receive such protection. Unfortunately the Preservation Order did not prevent the continuing neglect of the building and Beach House became something of a preservation scandal, especially during the 1960s and 1970s when it was empty and decaying. Eventually in 1982 the house was sold to a private developer, who converted the building into flats. By this time the flight of steps from the south front of the house down to the south lawn had disappeared and was not renewed. Instead the south front was completely enclosed by shrub planting which has helped to destroy the original visual connection between the house and its setting.

### **2.3 Beach House grounds**

The grounds of Beach House originally stretched in a long strip from the sea front to the Brighton Road, and also for a considerable distance north of the road. The layout of the southern part of the grounds between the south front of the house and the beach changed little between the time of the first ordnance survey map of 1875 and the early 1930s (figs.1-4). A broad open lawn was flanked by plantations of trees including elm, ilex and sycamore which framed the view of the house and also served to conceal the boundaries of the garden and the buildings beyond (fig.6).

Immediately behind the trees to the east lay the rectangular paddock already described. Behind the trees to the west lay a narrow slip of ground containing at its north end a lodge cottage, stables and coach house with a kitchen garden further south.

Within the plantation were ornamental pathways and mounds which are clearly shown on the Ordnance maps. There do not appear to have been any garden ornaments, with the exception of a memorial erected by Sir Frederick and Lady Roe in the 1850s to commemorate several of their pets (figs 11 & 12). The memorial originally consisted of a stone plinth with a Latin inscription *Servata Fides Cineri* (the ashes of faithful servants) a relief carving of a dog on the north side, and inscriptions on the other sides. The plinth was originally topped by an urn. All that now survives is the stone plinth, re-set on a concrete footing to the north of the playground enclosure. It is not known if the memorial is in its original position.

At its southern end the lawn was enclosed by a low flint wall with an octagonal pavilion at its eastern end containing a boathouse below with a room above (where Mr Knoblock apparently wrote several of his plays).

The north side of the house was originally hidden from the Brighton Road by a tall flint-faced wall and behind it was a carriage sweep, entered from the Brighton Road by gates at the north west corner of the plot where there was an entrance lodge. In 1917 the entrance sweep was done away with and a new entrance forecourt made, enclosed by solid walls. (fig.7)

Major changes were made to the grounds of Beach House in 1938 as part of the programme of seaside amenity improvements already mentioned. That part of the grounds north of the Brighton Road was laid out as a public park, a function which it still serves. The old flint boundary wall on the south side of the Brighton Road, which had hitherto sheltered Beach House and its immediate surroundings was demolished together with the old entrance lodge and the northern half of the 1917 entrance courtyard. The main reason for this alteration was to allow the widening of the Brighton Road. It is possible that the space south of the road was laid out as a

car park at the same time. There was certainly a car park here by 1952 which extended part way down the western boundary of the Beach House site.

The main lawn to the south of the house was left untouched in these alterations of the late 1930s but an elevated promenade was constructed along the whole of the southern boundary, with chalets beneath and a central open loggia allowing direct access from the beach to the grounds of the house. At either end of the new promenade was small flint-faced pavilion and it appears that the east pavilion was more or less on the site of the earlier building where Mr Knoblock wrote his plays.

On the strip of land to the west, which formerly contained the stables and kitchen garden, new tennis courts were laid out. A new section was inserted into the western boundary wall of the former kitchen garden with rounded headed arches to make a communication with the Denton Gardens, which had been laid out in 1924. The end result of all these changes was a very large public amenity.

It was probably during the Second World War that the plantations on either side of the south lawn of Beach House were considerably thinned, perhaps to provide timber for the war-effort. After the War a permanent children's playground, originally called 'Peter Pan's Playground', was constructed on a large site behind the elevated promenade on the south eastern portion of the front lawn of Beach House. When first built this playground had several substantial structures, including a toy fort and a helter-skelter. At the same time a clock was placed on the eastern of pavilion of the promenade. A plaque records that it was given by war-time children.

The raised promenade at the south end of the Beach House Grounds survives more or less intact, though it has obviously been repaired and refurbished from time to time. Peter Pan's playground also survives, but the original structures have gone.



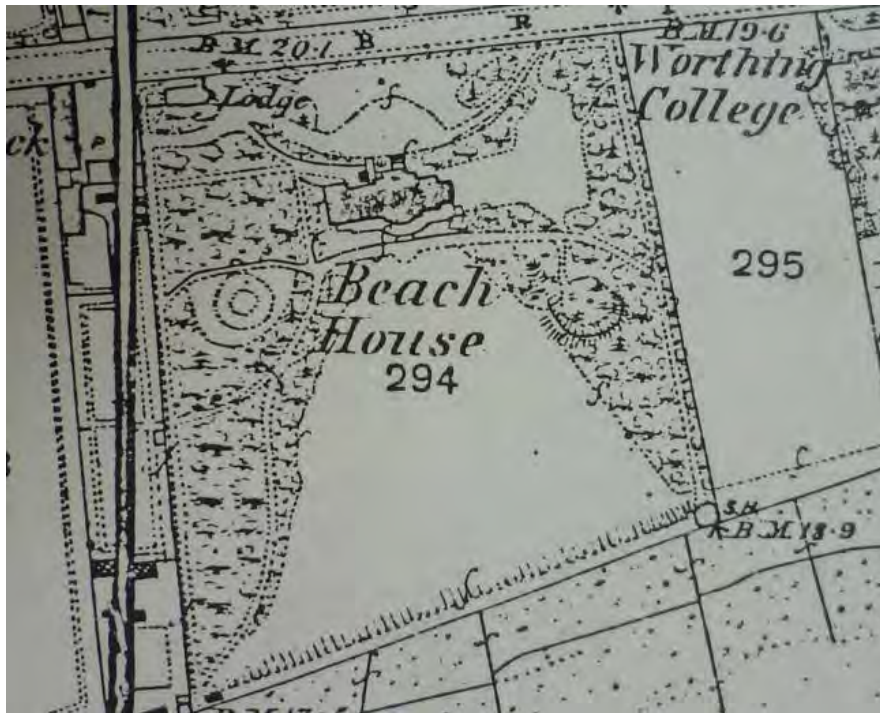


Fig.1 detail from the O/S of 1875, 25" LXIV.15



Fig.2 details from the O/S of 1898 25" LXIV.15



Fig.3 detail from the O/S of 1912 25" LXIV.15

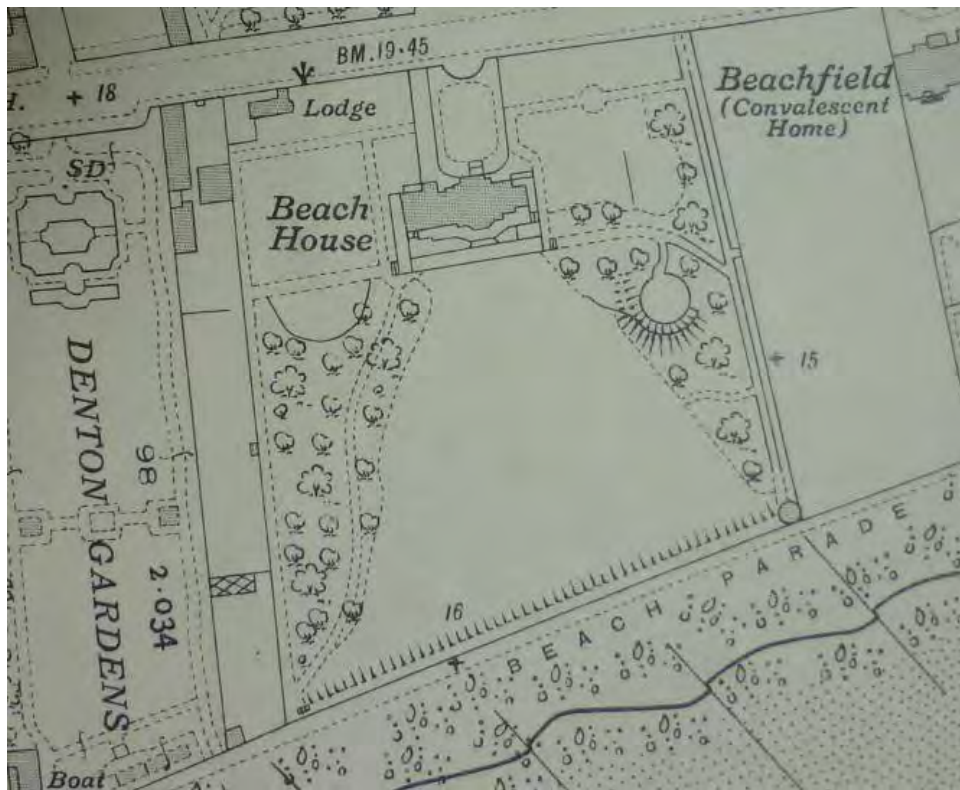


Fig.4 detail from the O/S of 1932 25" LXIV.15

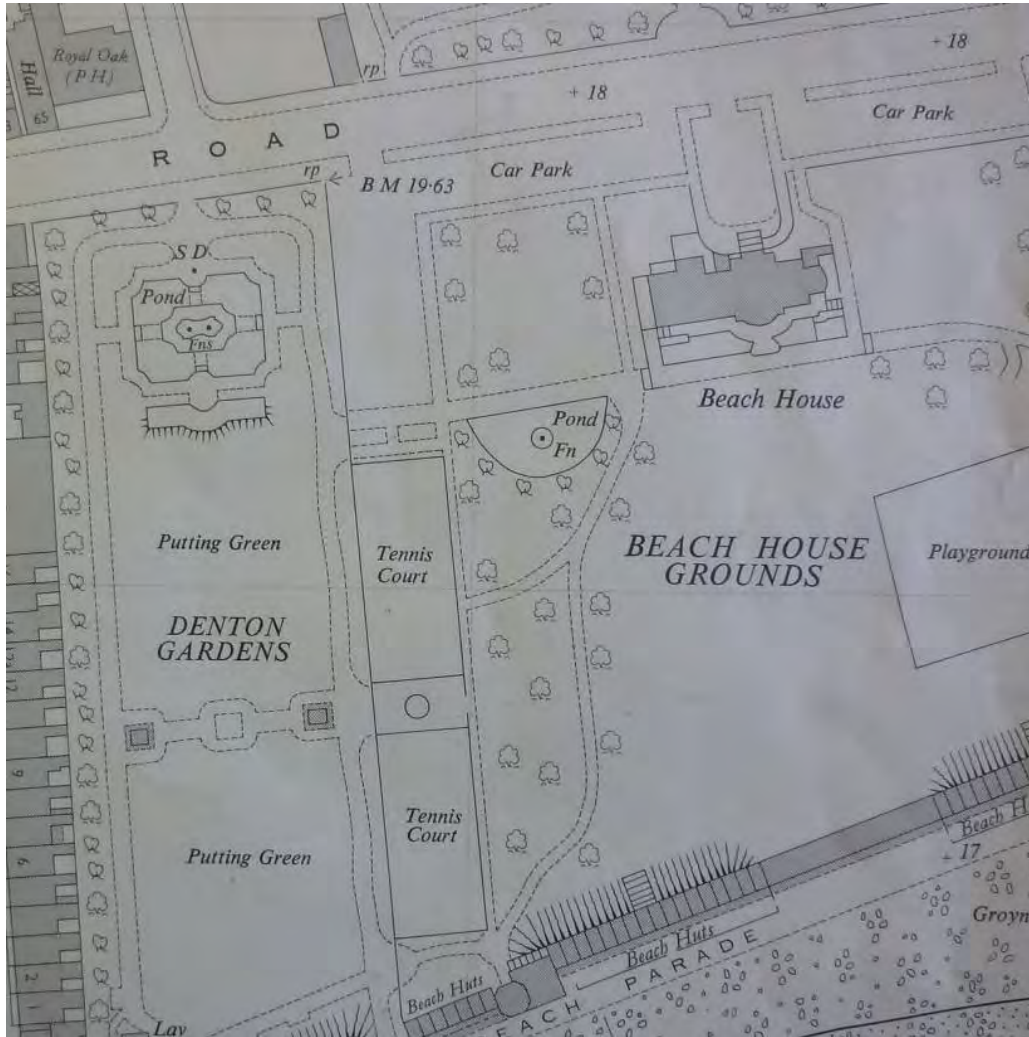


Fig.5 details from the O/S of 1952 TQ 1502 NW



**Fig.6 The south front and south lawn of Beach House circa 1920**



**Fig.7 The north front and entrance court of Beach House in 1923**

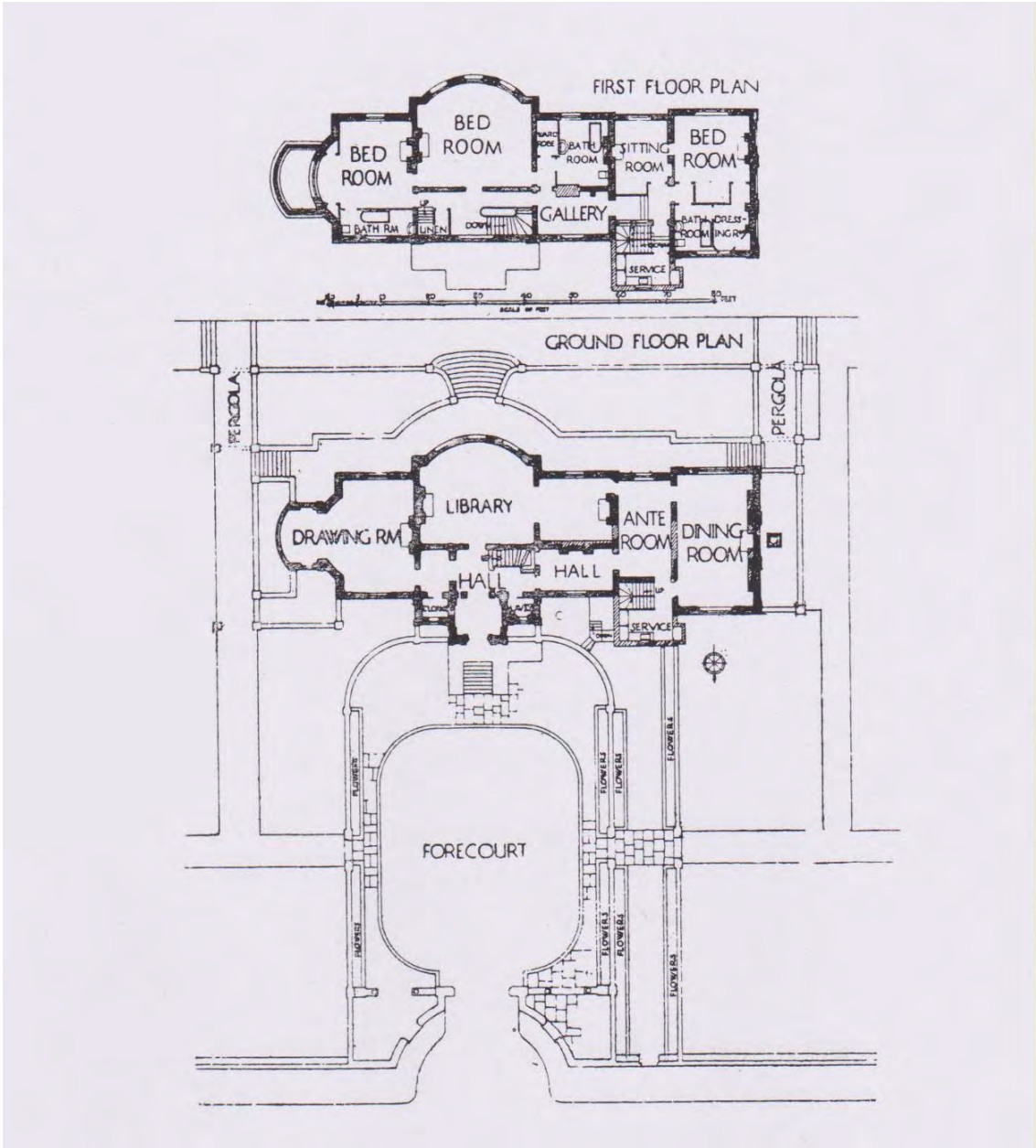


Fig.8 Plans of Beach House. as altered in 1917, with the new forecourt



**Fig.9 The east side of Beach House in 1946**



**Fig.10 The south front of Beach House in 1945**



**Fig.11 The Animal Memorial in the grounds of Beach House in 1947**



**Fig.12 The Animal Memorial today**



**Fig.13 The southern boundary of the south lawn as it was in the 1920s**



**Fig.14 The pavilion at the south east corner of the Beach House grounds in the 1920s**





**Figs. 15-17 The 1938 Promenade and Pools in the mid-1950s**

### **3.0 Assessment of Significance**

At the present time Beach House is listed grade II\*. The two beach chalets with the raised promenade between them which form the southern boundary of the Beach House grounds were included in the Worthing Local Interest Study (effectively a local list ) prepared by Saville Jones architects in 2003 and accepted by the Council. No other structures on the development site or in the grounds of Beach House are separately designated. The list description for Beach House is given at Appendix 1. Neither the development site nor the grounds of Beach House are in a Conservation Area.

Beach House itself is clearly of considerable architectural and historical significance. It was designed by John Biagio Rebecca, who was a local resident and is a good example of a small Regency villa. The association with Edward Knoblock, a pioneer of the Regency Revival in England gives the building additional historical interest, although the elaborately-decorated interiors created by Knoblock after the First World War have been lost. The successful public campaign to preserve the building after the Second World War and the serving of a Preservation Notice in 1948, at a time when the systematic protection of historic buildings was in its infancy, give the building additional historical significance.

The grounds immediately surrounding Beach house were originally very simply laid out with open lawns and plantations of trees and were not in themselves of special significance, except as a setting for the house. The grounds have been considerably altered since they came into public ownership in 1927. The area north of the house has been completely changed in character with the introduction of car parking off the Brighton Road, and although part of the forecourt added for Edward Knoblock in 1917 survives it has also been altered. The relationship of the house to the lawn stretching southwards to the beach has also been changed. The most conspicuous alterations have been the thinning and reduction of the tree plantations on either side of the house which originally stretched forward to frame the northern part of the lawn, the creation of the large and unsightly children's playground area on the south eastern section of the lawn and the building of a raised promenade along the southern edge of the lawn which separates it completely from the beach and

obstructs the view from the house. Despite these alterations, something of the original character of the south lawn still survives and could be enhanced by some minor alterations and judicious re-planting.

The 1930s leisure facilities on the development site itself and along the southern edge of the Beach House grounds also have some historic significance as part of an ambitious inter-war programme of improvements to the Worthing sea front. The Denton Gardens of 1924, Beach House Park, Beach House grounds and the former splash pool and boating lake - all of 1938 - were evidently an important part of the attractions of Worthing in the decades after the Second World War. Similar developments of similar date can be found in other south coast towns, for example in Hastings where the western extension of the Promenade dates from 1932-4. The examples at Worthing have some modest original features, like the ornamental bridge which spanned the cut between the two pools and the beach-huts with their Crittal windows but the development is not of such architectural quality to merit listing and some of its features, notably the elevated promenade, detract considerably from the setting of Beach House.

#### **4.0 Summary of Current Proposals**

The current proposals by the architects Wilkinson Eyre and the Borough Council for the Aquarena site and its immediate environs are set out fully elsewhere. In sum the scheme at present has three main elements

1. The building of a new swimming pool complex on the site of the present splash pool and former boating pool and the re-landscaping of the areas to the north and south of the new pool building.
2. The expansion of the present public car-parking space on the south side of Brighton Road to the north of Beach House and its extension down the west side of the ground of Beach House over the existing tennis courts.
3. Some re-landscaping of the grounds to the south of Beach House, including the removal of the central section of the elevated promenade

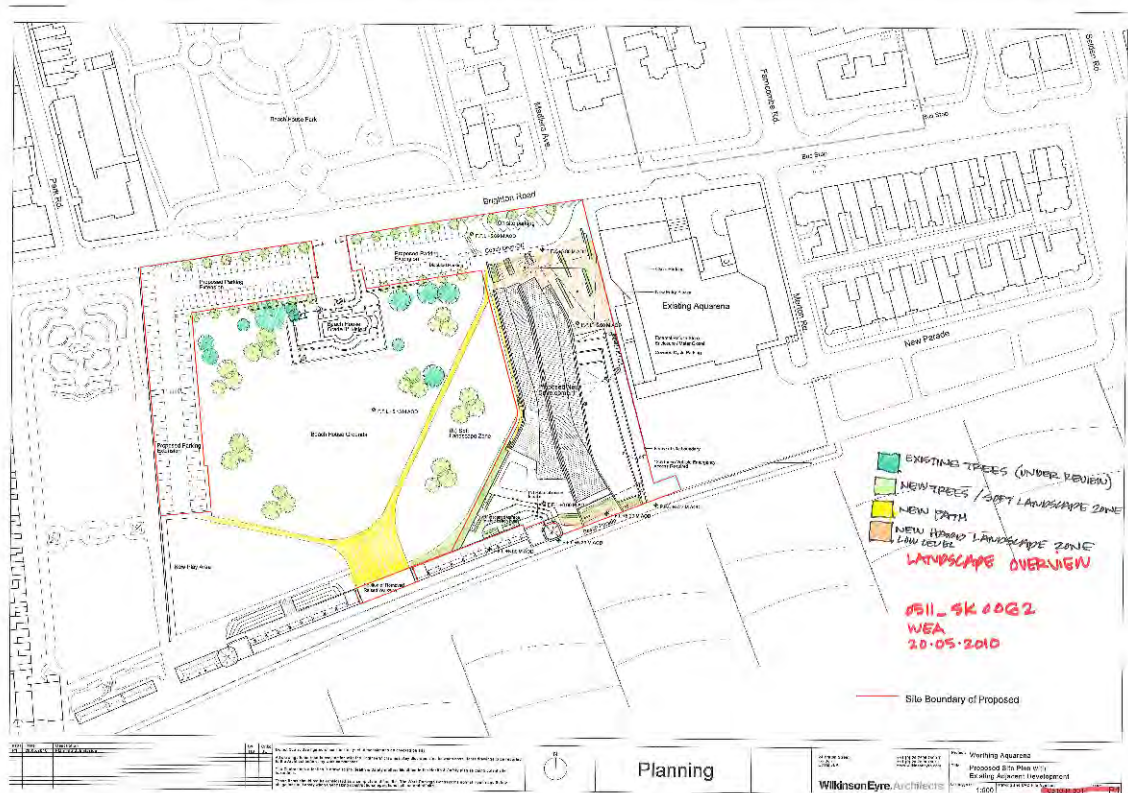


Fig.17 A plan showing the proposed new building and landscape



Fig.18 A perspective view of the Brighton Road front of the proposed Aquarena building with Beach House on the extreme right



**Fig.19 A perspective view of the proposed Aquarena building looking east across the south lawn of Beach House**



**Fig.20 A view eastwards across the south lawn of Beach House from the raised promenade looking towards the present Aquarena building.**

## **5.0 Impact Assessment:**

The proposed new Aquarena building would entail the demolition of some existing unlisted structures and would also affect the setting of the grade II\* listed Beach House although there may be some scope for mitigating adverse effects here by a programme of planting. The new development might also affect the setting of the adjacent Farncombe Road Conservation Area.

### **5.1 Demolitions**

The erection of the new Aquarena building, as presently proposed, would entail the demolition of all the present structures on the site, that is to say the splash pool, the boating lake, the ornamental bridge over the cut between them, the two small lavatory blocks and the two short rows of beach huts on the southern border of the site. It would also entail the removal of the Peter Pan Playground and the central section of the elevated promenade on the southern boundary of Beach House grounds and the appropriation of the south east corner of the grounds. On the north side of Beach House, the proposed enlargement of the car parking area would necessitate the removal of several Regency-style rectangular piers associated with the forecourt of the listed house.

While the loss of the 1930s pool complex may be regrettable to some, the structures and layout are not of particular architectural or historic value. It seems very unlikely that the structures would be considered listable by English Heritage. The Beach Chalets and promenade at the south end of the Beach House lawn are included on the Worthing Local List, but the removal of the central section of the elevated promenade would be a positive enhancement to the views from and to Beach House from the south. At present the elevated central section of the promenade with its *loggia* beneath looks uncomfortably like a motorway bridge at the bottom of the garden. The removal of the Peter Pan playground would also be a positive enhancement to the site. At present this scruffy enclosure is detrimental to the landscape setting of the listed building. The Regency-style concrete piers flanking Beach House by the present car park clearly date from after 1946 (see fig. 9 which is a view of that date where the piers are absent) and probably date from the

refurbishment of Beach House in the early 1980s. They have no historic significance.

## **5.2 The Effect of the proposals on the setting of Beach House**

Two elements of the proposals will have a considerable visual impact on the setting of Beach House: the new Aquarena building and the enlarged car park.

The new building will be visible in views along Brighton Road of the front of Beach House (Fig.18) and also in views looking east across the south lawn of the house (Fig.19), but Brighton Road is already a busy thoroughfare and the new building will not look unduly out of place on the street frontage. It is likely that the views along the Brighton Road will be softened by some tree planting, in addition to that already existing, and the contrast between the new pools and the listed building will be less stark than appears from the perspective view. The immediate frontage of Beach House is defined by the walled forecourt, which clearly separates the entrance of the building from its surroundings.

Views eastwards across the south lawn are already compromised by the existing Aquarena building (fig.20) which closes the view behind the Peter Pan Playground. The new pool would be closer to Beach House than the existing pool building. There is a certain amount of existing tree-screening but as presently proposed the greater part of the pool would be exposed to view. While there is nothing wrong with appearance of the pool itself, its strong presence would detract from the primacy of Beach House in its own grounds - a primacy which has been gradually eroded over the last half century. Another cause for concern is that the proposed apron at the south west corner of the new pool would encroach considerably on the grounds of the house. This area is presently occupied by the Peter Pan Playground, which is certainly unsightly but perhaps more consideration should be given to how best its replacement could harmonise with the existing landscape.

The enlargement of the car park on both the north and west sides of Beach House would have a relatively minor effect on the setting of the listed building. There is already car parking on the north, and part of the east sides. The doubling of parking

provision on the north side would not be a significant change to the present arrangements and would have only minimum additional impact on the setting of the listed building. The post-war concrete piers on the southern edge of the car park would have to be removed or re-set but this is a minor concern.

Extending the western car parking area over the present tennis courts would bring cars much nearer to the beach and would be very conspicuous from the elevated promenade. In other respects the proposal seems a sensible use of a space which is presently under-used. The extended car park would be less conspicuous from ground level and might benefit from some kind of solid enclosure on the east side to separate the parking area from the south lawn of Beach House.

### **5.3 Possible Mitigation**

At present the landscaping for the proposed scheme is apparently still under discussion. One option worth considering is the restoration of the tree planting which originally framed Beach House in views from the beach. This would have the benefit of restoring something of the original setting and enhancing the importance of the house itself and such plantations would considerably lessen the impact of both the extended car parking and the large new pool building.

### **5.4 The effect of the proposals on the Farncombe Road Conservation Area**

The north frontage of the proposed new pool would be fairly close to the south west corner of the Farncombe Road Conservation Area, which lies on the north side of the Brighton Road. The character of this small conservation area is predominantly domestic, with some substantial detached villas of the 1870s and 1880s, semi-detached houses of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and some later 20<sup>th</sup> century infill. The new pools building would be visible from the south end of Farncombe Road in an oblique view but the new building would have no significant effect on the character of the Conservation Area.

### **6.0 Conclusion**

The proposed new swimming pool building would certainly have an impact on the setting of the grade II\* listed Beach House, but the negative aspects of the impact



could be mitigated, most easily by judicious re-planting of the screen of large trees which once framed the house. The impact of the enlarged car park would be most pronounced at its southern extremity near the beach, but again the impact could be mitigated by enclosure and by planting.

## **APPENDIX: LIST DESCRIPTION OF BEACH HOUSE**

### **Building Details:**

**Building Name:** BEACH HOUSE

**Parish:** WORTHING

**District:** WORTHING

**County:** WEST SUSSEX

**Postcode:** BN11 3ED

### **Details:**

**LBS Number:** 302230

**Grade:** II\*

**Date Listed:** 03/08/1948

**Date Delisted:**

**NGR:** TQ1544902653

### **Listing Text:**

BRIGHTON ROAD

1.

5406

(South Side)

Beach House

TQ 1502 NW 5/19 3.8.48.

II\*

2.

1820 by J B Rebecca. Originally called Marino Mansion. 2 storeys, attic and basement. 3 windows. Stuccoed. Cornice and parapet. The central portion projects slightly with a pediment over. Windows in frames, the central one with entablature over. Porch in 3 sections with Doric pilasters. The south front has a curved bay of 3 windows with parapet over and Venetian shutters on the 1st floor. The east front of 1 window is also curved and

has a projection on the ground floor. There is a later addition of 2 windows to the west. Edward Knoblock, Dramatist, lived here for some years and added the "Regency" internal decoration.