

LONDON BOROUGH OF LAMBETH

CONSERVATION & URBAN DESIGN TEAM

Designation of the Albert Embankment Conservation Area (CA 57)

(Princes & Bishops Wards)

Report by: Chief Executives Office-Community Renewal: Strategic Planning

Consultation (internal) - formally: Borough Solicitor, DE - Highways
- informally: Development Control, Policy Team
- all ward members & all planning sub committee members

Consultation (external) - Environment Agency, Port of London Authority, London Fire & EP Authority, Director of Establishments (M16 HQ), occupiers of the Windmill PH & Rivers PH, Vintage House & Southbank House

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PURPOSE

To designate the Albert Embankment Conservation Area (CA No.57)

RECOMMENDATIONS

(1) That the Committee designates the Albert Embankment Conservation Area (CA No.57), under section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas) Act 1990 as shown on Plan No. DES/PP/524

(2) That the Committee approves the detailed boundary of the designated area as shown on Plan No. DES/PP/524.

1. **Relevant Corporate Themes**

- **People first: customer care and public involvement.**
- **Education and opportunities: the learning borough.**
- **A clean borough, a green borough.**
- **Good homes, strong communities, low crime.**
- **A healthy, supportive society.**
- **Value for money.**

DESIGNATION REPORT FOR ALBERT EMBANKMENT CONSERVATION AREA (CA57)

1. Context

1.1 The function of the planning system is to regulate development and use of land in the public interest. The best of the Borough's built and landscaped environment can be valued and protected as part of this regulation through the designation of new conservation areas or the extension of existing ones. The enduring quality of these areas adds to the quality of life of the residents by protecting and enhancing the local scene and sustaining the sense of local distinctiveness and civic pride.

1.2 Existing and potential conservation areas are currently being reviewed by the Council, in accordance with guidance contained within Planning Policy Guidance (PPG15 - sec. 4.3) issued by the Department of National Heritage and the Department of the Environment in September 1994, Conservation Area Practice (English Heritage 1995) and Conservation Area Appraisals (1997). The importance of preserving and enhancing the character and appearance of areas of historic or architectural interest and setting high standards of design for new development in and around these areas is also a key policy contained within the Unitary Development Plan. Policy CD1 states that the Council will consider whether Conservation Areas should be extended or new ones designated in areas of special architectural or historic interest, the character of which is desirable to preserve or enhance.

1.3 A strategy for the review of existing conservation areas and the designation of new conservation areas was approved by the Environmental Services Committee on the 21st July 1997 (Ref. ES 55/97-98). This report identified three approaches for implementing this review; development pressures, pressure from local residents and a geographical basis starting with conservation areas in the north of the borough. To date, 9 new Conservation Areas have been designated since 1997 (Lambeth Walk, Mitre Road, Poets Corner, Clapham High Street, Westow Hill, Rush Common & Brixton Hill, Peabody Estate Herne Hill, Oaklands Estate Clapham and Streatham High Road. The boundaries of 12 existing conservation areas have also been reviewed with appropriate extensions/partial de-designations being approved.

2. Introduction to the Albert Embankment Conservation Area

2.1 This proposal was mooted within the Lambeth Key issues paper issued in May 2001 and would rectify the glaring anomaly whereby the western half of the River Thames is protected by conservation area status within the adjoining City of Westminster and the eastern half is currently afforded no protection. It also brings Lambeth into line with Westminster in that all of the Thames within the borough boundary will be within a Conservation Area (the Lambeth Palace Conservation Area was extended south to include Lambeth Bridge in 1997 and the South Bank CA was extended up to the boundaries of Southwark and the City of London in 1998).

2.2 The designation recognises the historic significance of one of London's most ambitious engineering achievements of the Nineteenth Century - the construction of the Albert Embankment itself, planned by the famous Victorian engineer Sir Joseph Bazalgette in 1869 (including the dolphin/sturgeon lamps and benches) and the surviving small docks associated with it. The Conservation Area status will also recognise the architectural significance of the two major landmark buildings on the Embankment - the monumental post-modern MI6 building at Vauxhall Bridge and the art deco moderne London Fire Brigade Headquarters, along with what survives of the 19th Century heritage of the area including Vauxhall Bridge, two mid 19th public houses - The Crown (now known as Rivers Bar) and The Windmill, and a Victorian warehouse. Finally the Conservation Area will further protect the important strategic views from the Albert Embankment and Vauxhall Bridge of the Palace of Westminster and the Tate Gallery. It is not proposed to include the arguably generally monotonous and architecturally mundane office blocks of the 1950's and 1960's which line the majority of the Embankment.

3. Character Appraisal for the Albert Embankment Conservation Area

3.1 A detailed assessment of the Albert Embankment area has now been completed in accordance with the guidance referred to in paragraph 1.2. This is important both for the purposes of providing a sound basis for the designation for the Unitary Development Plan and development control purposes which are defensible on appeal, and also to aid the formulation of proposals for the preservation or enhancement of the character and appearance of the area. The assessment of the area's character is derived from the different elements that contribute to its special character - this criteria includes:

- (i) the origins and development of the topographical framework,
- (ii) the architectural and historic quality, character and coherence of historic buildings and their style and materials, and the contribution they make to the special interest of the area,
- (iii) the contribution made by green spaces, trees, hedges and other natural elements to the character of the proposed conservation area,
- (iv) The relationship of the built environment to the landscape including significant landmarks, vistas and panoramas,
- (v) The extent of loss, negative or neutral factors which affect the overall character of the area.

3.2 Assessment of location and the boundaries of the conservation area

3.21 The character of this conservation area is clearly defined by its location along the River Thames and the borough boundaries to the west (with Westminster) and south (with Wandsworth). Over half of the area of the Conservation Area is occupied by the River Thames itself, including the shingle foreshore and mud-banks, the Fire Brigade Pier and Vauxhall Bridge rebuilt in 1906. The northern boundary is formed by the boundary with the Lambeth Palace Conservation Area, the Westminster Tower and International Maritime Organisation (IMO) building (both dating from 1982 and neither considered to be of sufficient architectural to merit inclusion) and Whitgift Street (to the north of the workshops of the London Fire Brigade which were developed at the same time as the headquarters building fronting the Embankment). The Windmill PH is included as it is a most attractive mid Victorian edifice, is a key part of what little survives of the Nineteenth Century character of this part of the south bank and has clear historic associations serving the adjoining Fire Station for the last 60 years. The eastern boundary is formed either by the elevated railway lines which form a spine dividing the south bank and the remainder of Vauxhall or by the wall of office buildings erected in the post-war office boom of 1955 - 1965, some of which are already being redeveloped or remodelled (e.g. Peninsular Heights - now luxury flats).

3.22 Also included is the Grade II listed former Royal Doulton Building (now Southbank House) by virtue of its obvious architectural qualities and major historical importance as the most prominent Nineteenth Century industrial complex in the vicinity of the Embankment. The only other historic buildings of this period to survive the Blitz and the post war redevelopment are The Crown Public House (now known as Rivers Bar) and the attached Nos. 36-37 Albert Embankment - an attractive warehouse of four stories. The MI6 building is included by virtue of its monumental landmark presence, its importance as one of the most prominent examples of the post-modern movement to be built in the 1980's and 90's and as one of the most well known works of one of the late Twentieth Century's leading architects Sir Terry Farrell. The St George's Wharf site is currently still under-construction and its architectural merits are still to be fully assessed.

3.3 Origins & Urban development of the Albert Embankment area

3.31 The shape of the conservation area is therefore determined by its location along the River which encouraged the development of wharfage, boat-building, industrial and dockside uses in the 18th Century and first half of the 19th Century. However the origins of settlement on this stretch of the river go back much further. As early as 1670 the Vauxhall Plate Glass Works were in operation and there were established landing stages along the riverbank and potteries producing

Delftware, majolica and stoneware - the most famous being the Doulton' company. Roches map of 1746 indicates a built-up fringe including houses accommodating those in occupations related to the river such as boat-builders and fishermen or industries such as the soap and whiting works (the latter product was used for whitewashing walls and front door steps in the C19th); wharves and warehouses along the riverbank between Lambeth Palace and Nine Elms. The gently sloping sandy beach at Lambeth proved ideal for boat-building and the keeping of boats and barges - soon associated industries such as oar, scull and pump makers grew up too. The area soon developed a reputation for its cramped and unsanitary housing - exacerbated by the concentration of sewage outfalls discharged directly on to the open beach, and the noxious fumes produced by its industries such as the soap works which belched out pollutants from boiled animal bones. By the 1860's a dense concentration of industries had developed including the South London soap works on Princes Street, Henry Millichamp glazed stoneware and Alfred Hunt's soap works. All of these properties - along with Princes Street and Lower and Upper Fore Streets were to be swept away by the end of this decade. This long history of settlement is reflected in the areas status as an Archaeological Priority Area.

3.32 The nearby Vauxhall pleasure gardens were by this time nearing the height of their popularity - having been established following the Restoration of 1660, and this venue also influenced the development of the area over the next 200 years - the river affording the only access to the gardens until the opening of Westminster Bridge in 1750. The area underwent rapid development following the opening of the first Vauxhall Bridge in 1816 (the initial architect being the prolific Georgian bridge building Sir John Rennie who also designed London Bridge and Waterloo Bridge). This area was effectively divorced from the hinterland of Kennington and the rest of Vauxhall in 1848 by the extension of the London & South Western Railway from its initial terminus at Nine Elms into Waterloo on one of the longest viaducts in the country - a series of 290 arches. Over 700 houses were lost to make way for the railway and some 80 million bricks were used to construct the viaduct - the railway company were forced to incorporate six bridges to allow local roads to remain open and not to sever the riverside with its hinterland completely.

3.33 The construction of the Albert Embankment between 1866 and 1870 transformed this bank of the Thames - it was named in memory of Queen Victoria's Prince Consort who died a few years before in 1861. It was designed to prevent the flooding of low-lying areas of Vauxhall and Kennington which occurred whenever there was an exceptionally high tide and to assist the Metropolitan Board of Works to carry out its main drainage system for the capital. The Board of Works had been formed in 1855 and this was one of its first major projects - authorised in 1863, its efforts were welcomed by M.P's who were anxious to improve the view from the windows and terrace of their recently completed Houses of Parliament, and also to eradicate the stinking mud-banks which so offended their noses. The old courts, alleys, boat building yards and timber yards focused along Upper Fore Street which formed the nucleus of the original riverside village of Lambeth were swept away and land was reclaimed from the River at a cost of over £1 million. Fragments of Delft pottery were found during the digging of foundations - some dating back to Elizabethan times. The massive construction project was led by the renowned Victorian engineer Sir Joseph Bazalgette, who was responsible for the creation of London's mid 19th century sewage system including the grand pumping stations of Crossness and Abbey Mills, and also of Hammersmith Bridge.

3.34 Between 1870 and the 1920's, the industrial character of the area further developed - the Ordnance Survey map of 1875 indicates a large Gin and Vinegar Distillery on the site of the present M16 complex, a coal wharf where Peninsular Heights now stands and the London Pottery Works on the site of the London Fire Brigade HQ. The Lambeth Soap Works occupied the site of the British Steel HQ and a huddle of small terraced houses and timber yards stood to the south of this office block. By 1894 the Ordnance Survey records the development of a Flour Mill complex where Camelford House now stands and an India Rubber Works adjacent to the Soap works south of Black Prince Road. By the 1890's trams were routed down the Albert Embankment further improving communications to central London and South West London. The large site now being developed as St George's Wharf just outside the conservation area boundary, was by 1894 occupied by the sprawling Phoenix Gas Works. Access to the south bank was further improved by the rebuilding of Vauxhall Bridge opened in 1906. Only four buildings from this period survive - the Doulton building (Southbank House), a warehouse building (Nos. 35-37 Albert Embankment) and the two Victorian public houses - The Crown (now known as Rivers Bar) and The Windmill (see section 3.4 for full description).

3.35 In the inter-war years, the 18th and 19th Century industrial and river-based activities began to be supplanted by office development, following the rebuilding of Lambeth Bridge in 1932 by consultant architect Sir Reginald Blomfield. WH Smith led the way in 1933 with the siting of their distinctive stone fronted office building crowned by a central clock-tower rising 150 foot high, just south of Lambeth Bridge, followed by the Head Offices of Doulton in 1938 designed by TP Bennett - a handsome building with a facade of ivory, black and gold terracotta and a coloured pottery frieze by Giles Bayes depicting the story of pottery through the ages (saved from demolition by the Victoria & Albert Museum). These buildings were regrettably demolished to make way for the Westminster Tower and IMO building in c1980. The only edifice of the inter-war years to survive redevelopment is the imposing London Fire Brigade Headquarters & Fire Station at No.8 Albert Embankment (see parag. 3.41 for full description). Immediately behind the building on the eastern side of Lambeth High Street lies a contemporaneous complex of Fire Brigade workshops built in the same style and same materials as the main headquarter building. Another important development in the 1930's was the laying out of a new traffic system at Vauxhall Cross including a relief road from Harleyford Road to the Wandsworth Road, which opened in 1938 and was the precursor to the present interchange. This now congested, polluted and confusing interchange is due to be remodelled to improve access for public transport users, pedestrians and cyclists.

3.36 The Second World War interrupted any further redevelopment schemes along the Embankment and the area suffered heavy bombing raids aimed at the concentration of industry and the mainline railway. It was not until the mid 1950's when office development resumed following the lifting of post-war restrictions on building licences. It is not proposed to include the line of post-war office buildings which are considered to be of little architectural or townscape merit, however these do form a fundamental part of the setting of this conservation area and any redevelopment proposal for these sites will have preserve or enhance this setting by virtue of their quality of design, massing and scale. At the northern end of Albert Embankment stand the Westminster Tower (J.S. Bonnington Partnership 1982) - a 14 storey tower which breaks the post war generally uniform height and is unusual in its use of a vivid red brick and The International Maritime Organisation (Marriot, Warby & Robinson 1982) with a 4 storey frontage building of yellow brick bedecked with flags of the world and a taller block to the rear.

3.37 South of the Fire Brigade HQ lie a dozen post war buildings of generally mediocre architectural quality - firstly No, 9 - the former British Steel Corporation HQ (architects Grace & Fanner 1957), then 10 Albert Embankment (Oscar Gany & Partners 1963), Nos. 12-18 (Queensborough House -incorporating the Old Father Thames Public House - designed in 1954 and built in 1956 for the National Coal Board) and No. 20 (TP Bennett 1956). Nos. 22-26 Albert Embankment is of more architectural interest - one of the first office buildings to be built following the lifting of the post-war austerity office building restrictions in 1954 - designed in that year by Sir Frederick Gibberd (master-planner architect of Harlow New Town and designer of the Grade II* listed Pullman Court in Streatham and Grade I Catholic Cathedral Liverpool) and opened by the Duke of Edinburgh in 1956, it was the Dock Labour Board HQ. Faced with reconstructed Portland stone with structural mullions in natural concrete, it is enlivened by two projecting framed balconies at 4th and 7th floor and a roof pergola in true Corbusian form.

Continuing south is Prince Consort House (Nos. 27 - 29 - architects Pascal & Watson 1959), and Eastbury House (Nos 30 - 34 - Ian Fraser & Associates 1958). The site of Nos. 38 - 46 (Texaco Garage) has been the subject of numerous development proposals in the 1970's and 1980's, and again in 2001. The stretch between Albert Embankment Gardens and M16 comprises of Peninsular Heights - No.93 - formerly Alembic House - a 15 storey tower designed by Oscar Carry & Partners and built for the United Nations Association in 1965 - remodelled and converted into flats in 1996, Tintagel House and Camelford House are of some interest - both designed by TP Bennett in the late 1950's and built in 1960 - both have pleasing elevations of contrasting stone and horizontal brick banding, the former having a double height ground floor plinth with fenestration echoing the old warehouses in the area and the latter having an interesting curved wing fronting the river.

3.38 Upon the completion of Alembic House in 1965, there was then a lull in development until the end of the Twentieth Century with the exception of the redevelopment of the two sites closest to Lambeth Bridge in 1982 - the IMO Building and Westminster Tower. By the late 1990's the changing property market, decline of the big state corporations and the increasing obsolescence of the 1950's/60's office space combined to fuel a demand to abandon office uses and develop new residential schemes which took advantage of the unrivalled views across the Thames to Westminster and the excellent public transport links afforded by the proximity to Vauxhall mainline and Victoria tube line stations. A third exception in this 35 year period of little change along the Albert Embankment was the construction of the massive M16 Headquarters (No. 85) between 1989 and 1992 which has to be one of the most imposing landmarks standing at a gateway into the borough (see full description in paragraph 3.46).

3.4 Assessment of the architectural & historic character of buildings which make a positive contribution to the conservation area

The conservation area contains three major landmark buildings of significant quality and architectural character representing the three key historic periods of development along the Albert Embankment - the Victorian age, the inter-war years and post-war era (the former Royal Doulton Building of 1878 - now Southbank House, the 1930's Fire Brigade HQ and the M15 complex designed in the 1980's), two Victorian public houses of significant character and historic interest (The Crown and The Windmill) and a later Victorian warehouse. The structure of fundamental importance is of course the Albert Embankment itself - the embankment retaining walls, the stone balustrade, the famous lamp columns, elegant benches and the associated docks (the White Hart Dock and Lack's Dock). Finally there is the eastern half of Vauxhall Bridge - a fine example of late Victorian architecture and engineering and a key vantage-point for views towards Westminster. The character of these buildings is reviewed below, working southward.

3.41 London Fire Brigade Headquarters - 8 Albert Embankment

This most impressive building was designed by the London County Council Chief Architect E.P. Wheeler and opened by H.M. King George V on 21st July 1937. It cost £390 000 and comprises of a steel-framed construction of 25 bays and nine stories. It has a strong horizontal emphasis with stylish art deco influences characteristic of this popular idiom of the 1930's. The ground floor is of Portland with brown brick upper stories above - the top 2 floors stepped back and topped by a bold cornice and central flag pole. The central bays of the facade are particularly richly, boasting seven pairs of very fine varnished timber doors serving the fire station, embellished with intricate metalwork grills and stylish art deco wall mounted lamps.

Above the central bay at 1st, 2nd and 3rd floor levels are richly decorated sculpture panels depicting aspects of the fire service, flanked by two grand lamp columns which pierce the ribbed stone band which runs the length of the facade above the 1st floor. The sculpture on the facade is by Gilbert Bayes (whose other work includes the frieze on the Saville Theatre Shaftesbury Avenue 1931, War Memorials for the Law Society in Chancery Lane, a garden and statue at the Merchant Taylors' Hall in Threadneedle Street and a bronze portrait memorial plaque to architect Ralph Knott in County Hall 1931).

The rear (east) elevation to this building is also impressive - comprising of a series of cantilevered balconies and an elegant bull nose observation room at 1st floor with clear references to the work of Sir Charles Holden for the Underground. In the rear service yard stand a fine practise tower of a similar height to the main building and an interesting rendered obelisk. An extension to the main building accommodating *the* fire brigade control room, designed in the 1980's and built in c1990 stands to the rear fronting Black Prince Road - it is of a most unfortunate design which utterly disregards the proportions or character of the 1937 building, obscures part of the striking rear elevation and certainly harms the character of the conservation area and this landmark edifice.

Immediately behind the main building, on the east side of Lambeth High Street is the Brigade workshops designed at the same time as the headquarters building to maintain the Brigades fleet of over 500 vehicles. It was built in the same style with the same materials and with the same strong horizontality (emphasised by a ribbed brise soleil extending the full width of the facade). It comprises of a 4 storey building fronting the High Street with 2 storey workshops behind running the length of Whitgift Street to the railway viaduct.

It is considered that the inclusion of the Fire Headquarters complex is a fundamental part of the character of the Albert Embankment which this authority is seeking to preserve and enhance - it has clear associations with the history of the Embankment and is a fine landmark building which has made a positive contribution to the character of this area for over 60 years. It is a building of significant architectural quality and its historic associations are equally important - not least its relationship with the river, its fireboat pier and its importance as one of the first civic buildings to be built on the South Bank marking its transition from an industrial area to a key part of central London. The frontages facing the river are considered to be the most important in respect of the building's contribution to the character of the conservation area (the magnificent art deco detailing and sculpture being key elements).

The 1970's designed control room structure makes a negative contribution to this character whilst the brigade workshops building makes only a neutral contribution. It may well be that the future requirements of the Brigade change and it is considered that there is scope for extensive remodelling of the main headquarters building for a different user together with the potential of substantial new-build extensions to the side and rear. It is anticipated that Conservation Area status will protect the key exterior elements of the building and yet allow sympathetic development on the majority of the site. The workshop site could well be redeveloped with a significantly larger and higher quality development, subject of course other planning criteria such as neighbour amenity, land-use, employment policy etc. Its inclusion within the conservation area (notwithstanding its neutral contribution to the character of the conservation area) is however important as it is an integral part of the purpose-built Fire Brigade complex.

In front of the HQ building stands the Fire Brigade Pier on the Thames built in the 1930's to serve the fire brigade and enlarged/remodelled with a new pontoon in c1990.

3.42 The Windmill Public House - 44 Lambeth High Street

This attractive mid Victorian public house has significantly earlier origins although the present edifice dates from 1886, records show that there was a hostelry on this site before the 1820's serving the dense concentration of houses and industries which existed before the construction of the Albert Embankment. It is an attractive 3 storey building with canted facade, having 5 bays with a ceramic tiled Ground Floor -pilasters supporting a modest fascia board which runs the full width of the property. The upper floors are of stock brick with 1 over 1 box sash windows set within reveals - the first floor windows having red-brick segmental arched headers with painted keystone. The pub has unusually retained its original name over its 120 year history - proudly displayed at high level just below the parapet as well as the narrow fascia. The external and internal appearance of the present building is little altered from its original character and it is one of a rapidly diminishing number of un-modernized or branded traditional public houses dating from the mid Victorian period. It is also an important last fragment of the old Lambeth High Street before the large scale redevelopment of the remainder of this thoroughfare commenced with the Fire HQ complex and municipal flats in the 1930's and continued with the commercial developments of the post war years. It forms a key gateway into the conservation area from the north and sits

comfortably as a footstool to the fire practice tower immediately to the south.

3.43 Southbank House (former Doulton building) - 28 Lambeth High Street

This monumental Victorian building was erected in 1878 and designed by R Stark Wilkinson - it is an outstanding example of High Victorian Gothic with a wealth of exuberant brick and red and buff glazed terracotta decoration produced within the Doulton works as a permanent advertisement to demonstrate their high quality products. The corner oriel turret is corbelled out on an angle over the street and a tympanum below exhibits a relief of craftsmen examining vases, by the Lambeth sculptor G Tinworth who did much work for Doulton's. The DCMS listed building description records that it is a long six-storey building with two western bays on Black Prince Road (known as Broad Street in the C19th) and a two bay return on Lambeth High Street - it is of red-brick with dressings of pink and beige terracotta, including many moulded bands and corbel tables at eaves and one storey below. The tall pyramidal tiled roofs incorporate a wrought iron cresting. The fenestration varies from Tudor-arches, square headed, pointed or circular windows. The architraves and cills are enriched with glazed relief tiles in subdued polychrome colours with decorative plant motifs. The wings between the highly decorated corner building and the railway viaduct were probably constructed slightly later in the C19th/early C20th and are simpler in their elevational treatment, but share the same proportions, scale, height and redbrick facing material which complement the 1878 edifice.

3.44 The Crown Public House (currently known as Rivers Bar) - 35 Albert Embankment

This fine early Victorian public house dates back to the c1850's and was an old established Whitbread house. It is a four storey building with 3 bays to the Albert Embankment and 6 bays to Tinworth Street - a handsome example of mid Nineteenth Century public house architecture by virtue of its well preserved elevations. Of particular note are the richly decorated with intricate ironwork above the ground floor fascia and to the window ledges on the 2nd and 3rd floors, the fine reticulated rusticated quoins and the elaborate capitals to the shopfront. Regrettably the original box-sash timber windows have been replaced by PVCu units, but at least these follow a somewhat similar 1 over 1 fenestration pattern.

3.45 Nos. 36 & 37 Albert Embankment (Vintage House)

This warehouse is the last remaining such building on the Embankment and is therefore a most important reminder of the once bustling industrial and warehousing character of the area. The six bays of this four storey edifice are divided by expressed piers which incorporate bull nose bricks and frame the windows installed in 2000 which replaced inappropriate c1970's units. On the upper floors within the two larger bays the windows are separated by vertical tongue and groove panelled timber spandrels. The window bays terminate with pointed segmental arches with painted keystones and a prominent painted cornice and a parapet which conceals the roof - the building also has a central flagpole. A traditional gas mantel style lamp is attached to one of the left hand piers at 1st floor level. The blank south facing flank wall has been enhanced in recent years by the planting of a row of trees which softens the boundary with the adjacent filling station.

3.46 M16 Headquarters - 85 Albert Embankment

This building is a monumental edifice in the post-modern style with strong art deco revival influences designed by Sir Terry Farrell (perhaps the most prolific and most well-known post-modern architects of the last quarter of the C20th) and built between 1989 and 1992. Its enormous bulk is successfully broken down with a series of interlocking terraces which are part of its formal symmetry - architectural critic Charles Jencks has described this edifice as 'a ziggurat of masonry syncoating into a glass pyramid'. The original design incorporates pyramidal conifer trees on the high level terraces which take full advantage of fine riverfront views and the development includes a new riverside wall, promenade and landscaped gardens with fountains and a circular stone pergola marking the corner of the promenade and the return walkway which runs back along the inlet of Lack's Dock.

3.5 Assessment of Structures associated with the River Thames & the Albert Embankment

3.51 Albert Embankment - retaining walls & lamp columns

The Albert Embankment was constructed between 1866 and 1870 - it consists of a grey granite wall extending just over 0.5 km south from Lambeth Bridge to a point adjacent to Peninsular Heights where a shoddy concrete post-war retaining wall continues in front of Tintagel House and Camelford House, to the former Lack's Dock - beyond which is the new riverside wall and short landscaped esplanade constructed in 1992 as part of the M16 complex. This mid-Victorian structure was listed Grade II in 1981 - the listing description records the wall as having a square coping heightened by a later granite course. At intervals there are lamp standards of cast iron (28 in total), made of entwined pairs of dolphins writhing around a fluted, wreathed column with globular lampholder and crown finial. The bases of the lamp columns are decorated on two sides with the coat of arms and the monogram of the Metropolitan Board and the other two faces are inscribed with the date '1870' and "Vie Reg" (Victoria Regina) which appear alternately because every other standard is reversed. They also bear the name of the foundry and architect - Masfield & Co and C Vulliamy respectively. Facing the river, most of the pedestals are adorned by bronze lion head with a ring in its mouth.

3.52 The Albert Embankment walk and benches

The walk was opened in 1868 and extends from Lambeth Bridge and Peninsular Heights - paved in reddish-brown flags, it is furnished with four public benches which are set behind the riverside, with views across the Thames towards Westminster. The benches are now set on plinths of modern concrete and exposed aggregate - to elevate the benches to afford much better views across the river. They have cast iron centre and end supports with ornamental open-work panels and arms fashioned in the shape of swans - these hold long wood slats for seating. Recent tree planting has significantly enhanced this thoroughfare.

3.53 Vauxhall Bridge

The first Vauxhall Bridge was begun in 1811 by John Rennie (1761 - 1821) who was probably the most renowned architect of bridges, harbour and dock projects of the early C19th - he designed Waterloo Bridge (1817 - demolished in 1936), Southwark Bridge (1819 - demolished in 1912) and London Bridge (completed in 1831 - dismantled and re-erected in Arizona USA in 1968). Rennie's bridge was of masonry construction, however in 1819, after the construction of the north abutment, the Vauxhall Bridge Company decided to adopt a cheaper cast-iron design by James Walker (who was to rebuild part of the Surrey Docks in Rotherhithe in the 1850's). The Regent's Bridge, as it was first named (commemorating the Prince Regent, later George IV) was finally opened in 1816 and was the first iron bridge over the Thames in London, comprising of nine cast iron arches with ribbed spandrels of only 78 foot span. In 1881 the two central piers were removed, converting the middle three arches into one to aid navigation. Vauxhall Bridge remained a toll-bridge until 1879, In 1898 this structure was replaced by the 80 foot wide present bridge -the original nine arches of the 1816 bridge reduced to a 5 arch bridge which opened in 1905.

This fine bridge comprises of five steel two-pinned arches on granite piers, re-using the piled footings of the earlier abutments. Mounted above the cut-waters are eight monumental bronze figures representing Pottery, Engineering, Architecture and Agriculture on the upstream piers and on the downstream side - Science, Fine Arts, Local Government and Education - all designed by F.W. Pomery (whose accomplished work also survives at St Paul's Cathedral, the Old Bailey, and the Guildhall in the City of London), and Alfred Drury (a well known sculptor who designed sculptures at the Old Bailey and the War memorial in front of the Royal Exchange, also in the City). The balustraded screens which formed the parapets of the bridge were regrettably removed in 1972. The architect of Vauxhall Bridge was Sir Alexander Binnie - a renowned late Victorian engineer who designed the original Blackwall Tunnel at Greenwich for the London County Council (completed in 1897), the Greenwich Foot Tunnel which links Docklands with the Cutty Sark (opened 1902) and The Archway in Islington (1900) which also incorporates dolphin lamps designed by Vulliamy - copies of his design for those along the Albert Embankment.

3.54 Fire Brigade Pier & moored vessels on the Thames

Directly in front of the Fire Brigade Headquarters Building is the pier which serves the brigade - this was developed at the same time as the Brigade building but was remodelled in the c1990 when an enlarged pontoon was constructed. On the Thames adjacent to the White Hart Dock a number of planning consents have been issued in the last 30 years for moored vessels including The Flagship - a barge restaurant approved in 1994 and a Thames barge accommodating a supervised youth club approved in 1974 and also the 'Anna G' - a floating restaurant approved in August 2000. This latter consent followed a refusal by the Council of the mooring of a larger vessel the 'Ross Leopard' in June 2000 - a decision upheld at appeal.

3.6 The relationship of the built environment to *the* landscape including significant landmarks, vistas and panoramas

3.61 The views and panoramas from within the conservation area form a key part of its character. The riverscape of the north bank (i.e. Pimlico, Millbank and the Palace of Westminster) form the entire backdrop on the western side creating an unfolding panorama for the whole length of the riverside walk. The vista from Vauxhall Bridge towards the Houses of Parliament is also of critical importance. These views are ever-present - by day and by night by virtue of the illumination of the key buildings within Westminster. The Tate Gallery and Thames House form lower book-ends (both buildings being representative of the high noon of British Imperial power bridging the decades of the 1890's - the Tate and the 1930*s - the former Imperial Chemical Industries' Headquarters Building - Thames House) either side of the 390 foot high Millbank Tower built between 1960 and 1963 for the Vickers group, in the decade that saw the transition of the Empire to a Commonwealth of independent nations. Rising above another late example of the Edwardian imperial architectural style - Lambeth Bridge (designed by Sir Reginald Blomfield and opened in 1932) is the symbol of the new millennium in London - the London Eye (erected in 2000),

3.62 Two background consultation areas protecting strategic views to the Palace of Westminster bisect the conservation area - one from Parliament Hill affects the northern half of the conservation area (all buildings and spaces north of and including the Crown Public House) and the second from the junction of Albert Embankment with Black Prince Road affecting all land and buildings northward from this point.

3.63 Other notable vistas include the view of the highly decorated corner turret at the apex of the two facades of the Royal Doulton building on Black Prince Road, and the view of the Fire Brigade training tower with the Windmill pub as its backdrop from the junction of Black Prince Road and Lambeth High Street. One of the most striking gateways to any of the borough's conservation areas in terms of sheer scale is the impressive vista from the borough boundary in the middle of Vauxhall Bridge looking east with the grandiose mass of the MI6 building forming a gigantic bookend to the left and the new St George's Wharf which is emerging on the right, forming a similarly mammoth bookend. A second gateway is the southern end of Lambeth High Street where the Windmill PH and the Fire Brigade workshops frame a view towards the Doulton building. Thirdly there is the most impressive vista from beneath the railway arch on Black Prince Road - the great redbrick cliff of the Doulton works leading the eye west across the river where the view is terminated by the classical Thames House (1929).

3.64 The key relationship between the built environment and the urban landscape is the Thames - not only the river itself but also the two former docks which are all that remain of the areas once thriving wharves and river-based commerce. Lack's Dock still exists between the MI6 building and Camelford House (the Cornish names of these office blocks a reminder of the association of the area with the Duchy of Cornwall who laid out an attractive residential quarter in nearby Kennington in the early C20th) and has been altered to allow a ramp down to the river for the Frog Amphibious vehicle/craft tours. It used to serve a site known as Vauxhall Stairs - wharfage between what in the late C19th were a large Gin and Vinegar distillery and a flour mill. The White Hart Dock to the north served the extensive Lambeth and Salamanca soap works - it currently presents a rather neglected appearance requiring more frequent maintenance. The second key relationship is between this area and the elevated railway line to the east. The railway arches between Waterloo

and Vauxhall have a strong presence of enclosure and form an important setting to the conservation area on key stretches of its eastern boundary - they have been identified as a potential enhancement project. The railway arches over Whitgift Street, Black Prince Road and Tinworth Street in particular form significant gateways to this Conservation Area.

3.7 The contribution made by trees, open spaces, water and other natural elements to the character of *the* conservation area

The key natural feature of the conservation area is obviously the Thames itself which, following the completion of the MI6 building in 1992 can be appreciated from a continuous Thameside path along the south bank up to Vauxhall Bridge (with a slight deviation around the small inlet of Lack's Dock between MIS and Camelford House). Upon completion of the St George's Wharf development, this path will extend right up to the borough boundary with Wandsworth where an existing riverside promenade extends south-westward alongside a small linear park between the river and Nine Elms Lane. North of Vauxhall Bridge are three similar separate linear grassed open spaces all of which contribute to a softening of the generally hard landscaped environment of the Albert Embankment. The first consists of a narrow grassed strip between the river walk and Tintagel House. The largest of the three is the middle public open space known as Albert Embankment Gardens which forms an apron to Peninsular Heights and is shaded by a number of mature trees. This space is of fundamental importance as it is a rare green oasis along this stretch of the Thames.

A smaller satellite of Albert Embankment Gardens is located in front of Queensborough House (12-18 Albert Embankment) with a small lawned area and trees forming a soft landscaped contrast with the adjacent White Hart Dock - a narrow former dock forming a potentially pleasant water feature in front of Nos. 9-11 Albert Embankment. The dock acts as a reminder of the former character of the area and its preservation is fundamental. The roadway along the embankment from Peninsular Heights to Lambeth Bridge is lined with trees - some mature and others recently planted to further green this heavily trafficked thoroughfare and create a boulevard character. Important green open-space planted with mature trees extends from the Texaco Garage to a point opposite the main entrance to MIS also softens this hard, traffic dominated environment and creates a significant landscaped setting to the conservation area.

This stretch of the Thames is tidal which adds to the intrinsic character of the conservation area - at low tide there are substantial areas of exposed mud flats or shingle bank (up to 80 meters in length and 40 meters wide). These banks support important ecology which needs to be taken into consideration when future proposals along the Embankment, including the mooring of any additional or replacement vessels is considered.

3.8 The extent of neutral areas or loss, intrusion or damage to the special character of the conservation area

The boundaries of this proposed conservation area have been tightly drawn to exclude the areas of wholesale post-war redevelopment, so all of the buildings in this area are of architectural and/or historic interest too - all making a positive contribution to the overall character and appearance of the proposed conservation area, with the possible exception of the Fire Brigade workshops to the rear of the main headquarters building which on balance make a neutral contribution to this character and appearance.

4. CONCLUSION

This area has been carefully assessed in accordance with the criteria recommended by English Heritage and the Albert Embankment area is considered worthy of Conservation Area status by virtue of its special historical and architectural character. The Conservation Area recognises the architectural qualities of the few remaining buildings of note on the Albert Embankment (i.e. the imposing London Fire Brigade Headquarters by the LCC Chief Architect EP Wheeler 1937, some later C19th commercial buildings including the last warehouse and two Victorian public houses to survive in the vicinity of the Albert Embankment. It also includes the monumental post-modern MI6 building by Terry Farrell 1992 which it is anticipated is already seen as a key landmark building of

the late Twentieth Century exemplifying a leading architectural style of this period. The conservation area status confers recognition of the historic importance of the Albert Embankment itself as an outstanding piece of mid Victorian engineering and urban planning. Finally it acknowledges the importance of this prominent part of the borough as a key vantage point for the important strategic views to and from Pimlico, Millbank, the Palace of Westminster and the Victoria Tower Gardens.

5. Response to Consultation

Letters of consultation were sent on 8th October 2001 asking for the comments on the conservation area proposal were sent to the London Fire Brigade, Director of Establishments (MI6), occupiers of The Windmill and Rivers Public Houses, Nos. 36-37 Albert Embankment and Southbank House. The Environment Agency and the Port of London Authority were consulted on 8th November 2001. The Environment Directorate and Borough Solicitor were also consulted, as were the Vauxhall Society, English Heritage and members for Bishops and Princes wards and members of the planning committee.

The Borough Solicitor stated that they had no observations to make on the designation proposal. The Environment Directorate have not made any comments.

English Heritage have commented that the creation of the Albert Embankment in the 1860s was a major piece of engineering and civic pride transforming this part of the central London riverfront. It is something of an anomaly that the opposite side of the river has been designated as a conservation area for many years.

The Government Communications Bureau have written to support the principle of conserving the local environment but consider that it would not be appropriate to include the MI6 building and submit that it be excluded, citing that the neighbouring (1960's) office buildings do not form part of the proposal. This representation has been carefully assessed however it is considered that this building is a landmark of such importance and contributes to the character of the CA to such an extent that it should be included - it is of significantly greater quality than the nearby 1960's buildings to be excluded, and in any case enjoys full crown immunity from the planning process. Nonetheless PPG15 does encourage that central government organisations do consult the local planning authority if they wish to undertake external alterations. It should also be noted that the sister organisation to MI6 (MIS) occupies buildings on the opposite bank of the Thames in Millbank (City of Westminster) that have been subject to conservation area status for over 32 years.

The London Fire & Emergency Planning Authority have written to say that they have formally considered the proposed designation and that *whilst they would prefer that the entire Fire Brigade HQ site should be excluded from the proposed CA. it recognizes and welcomes the very constructive approach adopted by Lambeth Borough Council in response to concerns raised with them. In particular, the Authority notes Lambeth's assurances as to the scope for future redevelopment/remodelling of the HQ site (even as part of a conservation area) and their advice that the strict sequential test of demolition required by PPG15 would not have to be met if a proposal for redevelopment of the rear workshop block and/or Control Building were submitted. On the basis of these assurances, the Authority raises no objection the proposed designation of the Albert Embankment Conservation Area.*

The occupiers of Rivers (No.35 Albert Embankment) have written to oppose the inclusion of their mid Victorian public house on the grounds that this building is under-scaled compared with its 10 storey + neighbours and that the site should be allowed to be redeveloped in the future. The occupiers of Vintage House (37 Albert Embankment) - NICEIC, have raised a similar objection to the inclusion of their C19th warehouse office-building, citing their blank gable end facing the garage as very poor and the degraded setting of the building caused by the adjacent filling station. They also indicated possible future plans of redeveloping the building, again on a similar scale to the nearby 1960's buildings. The desire of these property owners to possibly redevelop their buildings is understandable but it is considered that these fine historic buildings make an important contribution to the character of this proposed conservation area as the

very last surviving examples of the C19th history and character of the Albert Embankment.

6. Effects of Designation

Under the Town and Country General Development Order 1995 (the GDO) and the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (the Act), conservation area designation has a number of practical implications for the area. These are outlined below:

- (i) Designation would take effect on the date of the Committee's resolution to agree to the recommendations in this report.
- (ii) Conservation Area Consent is required to demolish or partially demolish buildings within a conservation area (Section 74 of the Act).
- (iii) Consent for all advertisement hoardings, temporary or permanent, is required.
- (iv) The Council must be informed of all works to trees within a conservation area 6 weeks in advance to give time to issue a Tree Preservation Order, if required.
- (v) The design quality of all new development in a conservation area is important. Planning Policy Guidance: Planning & the Historic Environment (PPG15) and Section 72 of the Act state that all development is required to preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the conservation area. PPG15 goes on to state that new buildings should respect their context, as part of a larger whole which has a well established character and appearance of its own.
- (vi) The council has the power to make a direction withdrawing certain other permitted development rights.

7. Procedure After Designation

Following Committee approval of the report a number of actions would be undertaken:

- (i) All owners of properties within the area designated as a conservation area would be informed in writing of the designation, which would also be advertised in the local press and the London Gazette. (ii) English Heritage and the Borough Land Charges section would be notified of the decision.
- (iii) The production of a character statement and design guidance for the whole of the extended conservation area would be reported to Committee for approval as resources permit.

8. Legal Powers and Advice

8.1 The Planning (Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas) Act 1990 gives the Council power to declare a new conservation area or extend an existing one. Section 69 (2) states that: "It shall be the duty of a local planning authority from time to time to review the past exercise of functions under this section and to determine whether any parts or any further parts of their area should be designated as conservation areas; and if they so determine, they shall designate those parts accordingly".

8.2 Section 69 (4) states that: "The designation of any area as a conservation area shall be a local land charge".

8.3 Section 70 (5) of the Act states that the Local Planning Authority (LPA) should publish notice of any designation, variation or cancellation with particulars of its effect, in the London Gazette, and in at least one newspaper circulating in the area of the LPA.

8.4 Section 71(1-3) of the Act identify future duties on the Council associated with a designation, stating: "

(1) It shall be the duty of a LPA from time to time to formulate and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of any parts of their area which are conservation area.

(2) Proposals under this section shall be submitted for consideration to a public

meeting in the area to which they relate.

(3) The LPA shall have regard to any views concerning the proposals expressed by persons attending the meeting.

9. Environmental Implications

The designation of the Albert Embankment Conservation Area provides the Council with additional development control powers to protect and enhance this small area, it also places a duty on the Council to include this area within a plan outlining the aims of preserving and enhancing the conservation area as a whole.

10. Financial Implications

Approval of the recommendations will result in the expenditure of approx. £150 for advertising the designation in the South London Press and the London Gazette - the requisite budget is held by the Planning Division Business Unit.

11. Staffing & Accommodation Implications

There are no staffing implications as a direct result of this report. The designation of this new conservation area may generate some additional workload for Development Control and Conservation officers, however since this designation only includes seven this should be minimal. The duty to prepare public design guidance and enhancement schemes will be a part of the conservation team's future work programme.

12. Equal Opportunities

There are no implications for equal opportunities as a direct result of this report, however any improvements to the urban environment gained as a result of the extending the conservation area should benefit all groups in society. Any improvements will of course take into account the needs of people with mobility problems (e.g. traffic calming initiatives).