

Sibella Road

Conservation Area

Appraisal

The character appraisal below is reproduced from the Council's original designation report of 11 December 2001. It is reproduced here to provide guidance on what the Council believes makes the area worthy of its conservation area status and should be consulted by anyone wishing to undertake development affecting the conservation area.

Character appraisal for the Sibella Road Conservation Area

3.1 A detailed assessment of the Sibella Road area has been completed in accordance with the guidance referred to in paragraph 2.2. This assessment is important both for the purposes of providing a sound basis for designation, for the Unitary Development Plan and development control purposes, as a defensible tool at appeal, and also as an aid to the formulation of proposals for the preservation or enhancement of the character or appearance of the area. The assessment of the area's character is derived from the different elements that contribute to its special character. These criteria include:

- 3.2
- (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, intrusion or damage i.e. the negative factors which have exerted a detrimental impact upon the character and/or appearance of the historic area;
 - (vi) the existence of neutral areas;

4. Justification

4.1 Origins and development of the topographical and historical framework

The first documented mention of Clapham dates from a will of AD880. The village referred to was centred around the present day North Street and Rectory Grove with its lands spreading to meet the neighbouring parishes of Streatham, Battersea and Lambeth. The land covered by the proposed Conservation Area is sandwiched between two important historic arterial routes out of London; Wandsworth Road being the ancient road from Westminster to Kingston and the South West and Clapham Road comprising part of the Roman Stane Street. This area was in use as farmland up until the early 19th century, remaining largely undeveloped. A small number of houses had been constructed along Larkhall Rise at the bottom of what is now Albion Avenue during the course of the 19th century, but these were swept away when the area was comprehensively redeveloped after 1874. The proposed Conservation Area also includes the site of The Retreat, a private

lunatic asylum opened in 1823 by George Man Burros and formerly the home of the Hankey family. This building stood on the site of what is now No.16 Sibella Road but was demolished in the 1860s.

Larkhall Rise was already in existence before the main grid of streets were laid out, appearing on an 1849 map of the parish of Clapham as Larkhall Lane, a name believed to derive from the Lark Hall Tavern in Lambeth in recognition of a former licensee who kept larks in a cage. Union Road also pre-dates the late 19th century development, following the line of an older thoroughfare which accounts for its less regular shape. The area became known as the Clapham Rise Estate when its roads were laid out by E B l'Anson in 1875-76 for the landowner George Hankey, with its streets named after some of Clapham's important historical figures.

This part of Clapham was developed as part of the general speculative housing boom which was taking place throughout London. Demand for suburban housing was fuelled by a general population increase between 1840 and 1914, and more specifically, by the massive expansion of both the Civil Service and the finance system based within the City of London which created a growing army of clerks, accountants and administrators. The corresponding increase in the number of professionals such as doctors, shopkeepers and teachers, during the same period, rapidly expanded the ranks of people who considered themselves to be part of the aspiring middle classes. Suburban housing development offered this burgeoning group the chance to escape the built up squalor of inner London and establish themselves in salubrious, green and spacious areas with houses designed for single family occupation. The census of 1861 indicates that the original residents of the area were part of this new middle class and included clerks, architects, pharmacists, builders and solicitors. An advertisement appearing in the South London Press on 18 May 1878 confirms the calibre of tenants which were being targeted when these houses were built, stating that: "A well built 9 roomed residence of handsome erection...Good gardens back and front", emphasising the important features of space and greenery.

Operating in tandem with these changes was the expansion of the public transport network, facilitating the development of housing in parts of South London which were relatively untouched and enhancing demand for middle class housing in areas which were already well connected. The arrival of the London, Chatham and Dover railway in 1863 resulted in the opening of nearby Wandsworth Road and Clapham High Street stations, whilst the intensive train services along the South London Line, commenced in 1867, linked Victoria with the City at London Bridge and Ludgate Hill. However, it was probably the extension of tram routes along arterial routes into the city, such as Clapham Road, which specifically sparked the speculative building boom within this particular area.

Little further development took place within the area after its Victorian housing development until the infill buildings which were a response to bomb damage during World War II. For example, the landmine which fell at the junction of Bromfelde Road and Union Road on 18 September 1940 resulted in the rebuilding of 49-51 Union Road.

4.2 Townscape features, setting and landscaping

The proposed Conservation Area is situated on a gently undulating site with Larkhall Rise sloping steadily downhill, and Union Road sloping up slightly to meet Bromfelde Road. The street pattern within the area is primarily laid out in a grid pattern, a feature which was consistent with the requirements of the Victorian speculative builder who sought to produce groups of standardised housing based upon uniformly sized plots. Some townscape interest is added where Union Road zigzags gently, with the buildings at 25-37 Bromfelde Road closing the vista when looking northwards.

The proposed Conservation Area appears relatively densely developed when viewed from the public realm, characterised by its runs of terraced buildings and in many cases, such as

at 1-21 Larkhall Rise and 62-82 Bromfelde Road, terraces which give the impression of semi-detached properties through the use of an inset bay between each pair. Nonetheless, the area has a distinctly leafy and suburban feel, despite its urban location. This is engendered by its wide streets, mature street trees and greenery, such as on the corner of Bromfelde Road, and plentiful soft landscaping which appears in the front gardens of many houses. This impression is heightened by the large plot sizes and from the glimpses of mature rear gardens through the gaps between detached buildings and semi-detached pairs, as well as oblique views at street corners. There are a number of points throughout the proposed Conservation Area where the rear elevations and rear roof slopes of properties can be viewed from the public highway, such as at the corner of Sibella Road and Bromfelde Road, offering glimpses into back gardens and blurring the obvious distinction between the public face of the buildings and the private realm to the rear of properties.

IMAGE REMOVED

Caption - The street trees along Sibella Road contribute towards the suburban and leafy character of the proposed Conservation Area.

An interesting feature of the proposed Conservation Area which is not readily visible is the square of greenery formed by the extremely large rear gardens to the houses along Bromfelde Road, Sibella Road, Larkhall Rise and Union Road. When viewed from the rear of these houses the impression of suburban greenery and peacefulness is heightened yet further.

The buildings within the proposed Conservation Area are largely set back from the highway, either with a shallow forecourt, or alternatively, with a basement floor surrounded by a combination of either a low wall, railings or hedges.

Many tessellated paths have survived, such as along Sibella Road, leading directly to front doors or to substantial flights of stairs up to raised ground floor level. Larger front garden areas appear at the south western end of Larkhall Rise where houses are set back further from the street, and their forecourts are enclosed with tall gate piers and walls. Attractive stock brick walls form the side returns to the gardens at both ends of Sibella Road and at the intersection of Gauden Road and Larkhall Rise, adding a pleasant sense of enclosure to the street.

IMAGE REMOVED

Caption- Attractive cast iron railings surround basement areas.

4.3 Architectural and historic quality of the buildings, their style and materials

The character of the proposed Conservation Area derives largely from the speculative building system which created it and the 'pattern book' architecture popular with builders during the mid-late 19th century. A range of different builders were responsible for the houses, with some names appearing at several different sites, for example John Lucas at 1-7 Gauden Road and 25-39 Larkhall Rise and H J Brashier on Bromfelde Road and Chelsham Road. This system of building, where speculators developed a small number of plots of land at any one time, accounts for the piecemeal nature of development within the area and the range of different groups of stylistically identical buildings.

The houses within the proposed Conservation Area are of a substantial size and display structural forms which reflect the social status of the owners and tenants for whom they were originally constructed. The properties are substantial, ranging from two storeys with 4 storeys including a basement, suggesting that the properties were designed for households which included servants or extended family members. The widespread use of

pattern books allowed standard house forms to be customised for the local housing market, with the size and style reflecting the anticipated tastes of prospective tenants. Technical guides were also used which outlined plans, specifications, estimates and detailing.

A wide range of shapes, styles and decorative motifs were available to the speculative builder and were combined to create a series of differing house types, producing a pleasant visual diversity. However, the use of a limited palette of materials and a relatively consistent building line, roof height and plot width adds a strong cohesive identity to the area. The vast majority of the buildings are constructed of yellow stock brick. More expensive grey gault bricks appear at 27-37 Bromfelde Road and along Chelsham Road, although only on the front elevations, with cheaper yellow stocks to the side and rear. A limited amount of polychrome detailing appears to the gault brick facades at 44-62 Chelsham Road where gauged brick arches appear with alternating red and yellow brickwork. Stucco is a widespread and important decorative feature, used in varying degrees on lintels, around doors and windows, as corbels at the eaves of many houses and decoratively as balustrades, keystones and columns.

IMAGE REMOVED

Caption- Decorative stucco doorway

Speculative builders tended to use popular styles, for example gothic and a restrained Italianate style, both of which appear throughout the area. Gothic features such as windows grouped in pairs and triples, and slightly pointed windows and door heads appear at 39-49 Bromfelde Road, whilst gothic inspired decorative features include naturalistic foliage topped capitals, grouped pilasters and dogtooth or egg and dart moulding.

IMAGE REMOVED

Caption-Grouped pilasters used to decorate a bay window feature.

IMAGE REMOVED

Classical style entrance porch.

Classical and Italianate forms can be seen in the acanthus topped columns and pilasters surrounding doors, the balustrades over entrance porches, found with an unusual pierced clover motif at 59-97 Bromfelde Road and a guilloche pattern at 1-7 Gauden Road, stucco architraves and console brackets to windows and the scrolled brackets supporting the ground floor bays at 2-8 Gauden Road and 41-63 Larkhall Rise.

Standard mid Victorian speculative building forms such as the semi-basement and canted bay are widespread features within the proposed Conservation Area. The popularity of the canted bay as a means of bringing additional light and space into front rooms was boosted after 1851 by the availability of cheaper glass in large panes. The demise of the basement, an essentially Georgian feature, coincided with the rise of the bay window and many houses within the area, such as on Union Road and Sibella Road are without basements. These features are combined however on many houses, for example at 25-39 Gauden Road where bay windows are used as an exuberant decorative feature and at 20-34 Gauden Road where they are used in a more restrained and simple manner.

IMAGE REMOVED

Caption- 25-39 Gauden Road

Despite the reliance upon pattern books, a number of the houses display unusual features which make them locally distinctive. Many interesting forms are repeated throughout the area offering a sense of visual continuity, for example, the steeply pitched bay window roofs with an inset dormer at 81-91 Union Road which also appear along Larkhall Rise. The roofscape of many houses within the proposed Conservation Area are of particular interest, for example, the centrally placed paired square turrets which appear along Sibella Road, the decorative features which atop the chimneys at 25-39 Larkhall Rise and the repetition of the large gables and attractive bargeboards which create a pleasing sense of rhythm along Chelsham Road.

IMAGE REMOVE

Caption- Unusual bay window roofs on Union Road create a pleasing sense of rhythm

A number of individual houses within the proposed Conservation Area stand out as different to the main bulk of speculative housing, for example, 2 Sibella Road which is thought to date from before 1865 and is the only survivor of a row of earlier houses on this site. This detached building has restrained classical decoration including a balustraded ground floor square bay, front dormers, an attractive fanlight a Greek key motif to the first floor window.

IMAGE REMOVED

Caption -round and square turrets add interest to the roofline at 70-74 Bromfelde Road

36 Gauden Road is a simple and largely undecorated double fronted yellow stock brick building with a single canted bay and balustraded balcony to one side of the ground floor elevation, whilst 41 Gauden Road is a fine detached stock brick house dating from c-1875 whose vernacular style. including a large pointed gable, gothic porch and gabled dormers, differs from the vast majority of houses within the area.

The only building within the proposed Conservation Area constructed for non-residential use is Fern Lodge at 118 Gauden Road. dating from 1875-77. This imposing red brick building has a pair of steep gables, a gothic arched door and pointed arches to its third floor windows, infilled with a herringbone pattern of red and grey bricks. This building was originally built as a grammar school but has been in use as a working men's social club since the early 20th century.

IMAGE REMOVED

Caption-41 Gauden Road

The proposed Conservation Area also includes the local landmark Savoy Laundry chimney, visible from Union Road The chimney, dating from c.1920 is of a slightly tapering square section divided by brick bands into five vertical elements. Other buildings on this site include a small attractive lodge building of yellow stock brick with dentilation at eaves level and a number of other associated warehouse buildings.

A number of unattractive blocks of flats dating from the immediate post-war era have been excluded from the proposed designation as they are considered to detract from the character and appearance of the area. These include Chelsham House at 37-47 Chelsham Road and the Gauden Estate which sits between Bromfelde Road and Chelsham Road. The buildings on Kelman Close have also been excluded as these buildings are a modern development which has no visual affinity with the remainder of the proposed Conservation area.

4.4 The extent of loss, intrusion and damage to special character

At present, the majority of buildings within the proposed Conservation Area retain a

significant amount of their original features. In particular, the area has suffered little from the unsympathetic replacement of original windows and doors with PVCu or aluminium alternatives.

- (a) Pockets of loss do appear however, where buildings have lost important features. For example, the loss of many original front doors and the replacement of timber windows with PVCu or aluminium units at the NW end of Union Road.
- (b) In some areas, the substantial size of the houses has resulted in their subdivision into flats and consequently the proliferation of wheelie bins and bin stores in the front gardens of these types of properties. This poses a particular problem along the NE side of Sibella Road.
- (c) The intrusion of hardstandings into front garden areas has obviously been minimal in areas where basements are common and this feature has resulted in the retention of many original railings. Where houses are set back from the street without a basement the houses have suffered more greatly from the removal of front boundary walls and railings. Particularly badly affected are the NE end of Bromfelde Road, and Union Road where there is a deeper front garden area and these large properties have been subdivided into flats. Chelsham Road has also been affected, where the visual impact of the hardstandings has been exacerbated by the removal of all the soft landscaping and the inclusion of overly high or bulky railings.
- (d) The majority of houses retain either their original slate roofs, or have had these sympathetically replaced with matching materials. However, concrete roof tiles have been substituted in some cases, adding a bulky and uneven profile to the houses and detracting from their original historic appearance.
- (e) A minority of houses have also suffered from the application of paint and render to their brickwork, obliterating their attractive brickwork and stucco detailing, for example. 34 Gauden Road and 94-96 Bromfelde Road which have been painted and 47 Union Road and 46 Chelsham Road which have been rendered and pebble dashed respectively.
- (f) A number of properties have received insensitive additions to the front roof slopes, either as extra mansard floors as at 94-96 Bromfelde Road, front or side dormers at 12 and 108 Gauden Road, or bulky front and side roof extensions at 44 Chelsham Road. Side roof extensions are particularly damaging to the streetscape when added to semi-detached houses as they unbalance the symmetry of the pair.
- (g) A number of sites within the proposed Conservation Area have completely lost their front boundary treatment, particularly along Chelsham Road and at the corner of Chelsham Road and Union Road, where the absence of a boundary wall leaves this part of the streetscene lacking articulation and definition. The gap in the building line between 8 and 10 Gauden Road intrudes upon the streetscene as this space is used for parked cars, offering access to garages at the rear of the properties.
- (h) A number of sites were developed within the proposed Conservation Area which have either a neutral or detrimental effect upon its special character. For example, 49 Union Road is an ugly post war red brick building which takes no architectural cue from the surrounding buildings. Other buildings such as 16 Sibella Road and 72-74 Chelsham Road, dating from the early 1980s, whilst obviously new, are likely to weather and mellow in time and by virtue of their size and scale are in harmony with the character of the proposed Conservation Area.
- (i) A large amount of street furniture has been added to the area, associated with the

Controlled Parking Zone. The proliferation of posts and signs creates a sense of clutter within the streetscene and the co-ordination of street furniture in the future is important in order to preserve or enhance the character of the proposed Conservation Area.

4.5 Conclusion

The Sibella Road area is deemed worthy of conservation area status by virtue of its architectural character and significance as a fine and well preserved example of mid-late Victorian speculative development. Whilst the area exhibits an eclectic range of differing house styles and forms, this diversity is set within an overall harmonious and unified aesthetic. The extent of the soft landscaping and the green and suburban nature of the proposed area, considering its urban geographical location, are features worthy of preservation.

4.6 Justification for transferral of 41 - 63 Larkhall Rise from the Rectory Grove CA to the Sibella Road Conservation Area

The Rectory Grove Conservation Area was extended in July 1986 to include 41-63 Larkhall Rise. However, it is considered that these buildings are more consistent stylistically, historically and architecturally with the character of the proposed Sibella Road Conservation Area.

The designation report acknowledged at the time that these properties were more recent than most of the buildings within the Rectory Grove Conservation Area, which consists largely of early to mid 19th century buildings, concentrated upon Clapham Manor Street which was developed between 1837 and 1855. The historical development of the Rectory Grove Conservation Area is linked closely with the development of the old Clapham village settlement, whilst the houses at 41-63 Larkhall Rise are part of the Victorian speculative development which took place within this area from 1874 onwards. These buildings share many of the same characteristics with other buildings within the proposed Sibella Road Conservation Area such as their bay windows, gothic stucco ornamentation and hipped roofs.

Furthermore, the buildings in question are separated physically from the Rectory Grove Conservation Area by the Larkhall Bridge and the railway lines, enhancing the justification for their inclusion in the proposed Sibella Road Conservation Area.'