

Review of Existing Conservation Areas & their boundaries and the designation of new and extended conservation areas

Review No. 6 - Proposed Westow Hill (north side) Conservation Area (CA 23)

(Gipsy Hill Ward)

Report by the Director of Environmental Services

Consulted Formally: CEO & B.Sol,

Authorised for submission by:

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Contact for enquiries: Edmund Bird - Conservation Officer (tel: 0171 926 7182)

PURPOSE

To designate the Westow Hill (north side) Conservation Area (CA 23) and its boundaries

RECOMMENDATIONS

- (1) That the Committee approves the designation of the Westow Hill (north side) Conservation Area, under section 69 of the Planning (Listed Building & Conservation Areas) Act 1990 as shown on Plan No. DES/PP/413
- (2) That the Committee approves the detailed boundary of the area as shown on Plan No. DES/PP/413

For decision

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 Historic areas are recognised for the contribution they make to our cultural inheritance and economic well-being. Areas which are considered to be of special architectural or historic interest are currently being assessed as part of the borough wide review of existing and potential conservation areas, 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. 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 Deposit Draft Unitary Development Plan. The UDP (1992) includes a commitment to consider the designation of various new Conservation Areas in areas of historic and architectural interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance (Policy C1).

1.3 The assessment of the proposed Westow Hill (north side) Conservation Area was commenced in December 1997 with a thorough character analysis based upon the criteria contained within PPG 15 (section 4.2) and within English Heritage guidance - Conservation Area Appraisals (March 1997). This guidance stressed that priority for conservation area designations should be given to those where the pressure for change is greatest, identifying the historic retail or commercial centres (i.e. a typical high street exemplified by Westow Hill in Upper Norwood) as the most likely priorities. 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 historic development of the area,
- (ii) the prevailing uses/former uses within the area and their influence on building types and plan form,
- (iii) the form of the layout of the area; the architectural and historic quality, character and coherence of historic buildings (including local landmark buildings) and their style and materials; and the contribution they make to the special interest of the area,
- (iv) The setting of the conservation area and definition of significant 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 any neutral areas.

2. Justification of the boundaries of the proposed conservation area

2.1 From the outset it is essential to define the area of special interest which justifies designation and to define the exact boundaries of the proposed conservation area. In this case, the boundaries are generally very distinct and it is possible to select a tightly drawn area which includes all of the buildings which make up the commercial character of this part of Upper Norwood. The southern boundary is very straightforward - it is the borough boundary with Croydon, and also the boundary of the Upper Norwood Triangle Conservation Area declared by Croydon in 1989. The northern boundary runs along the rear boundaries of the properties fronting Westow Hill, from the current boundary with the Gipsy Hill Conservation Area (declared nearly 25 years ago in 1974), to the lane along the side of the White Swan Public House. The easternmost point is the convergence of the Lambeth, Bromley and Croydon borough boundaries at the

Crystal Palace Park roundabout. The proposed conservation area includes three historic warehouse buildings (Imperial House on Jasper Road and Nos. 20-22 and 19-25 Beardell St) which do not front onto Westow Hill but are attached to buildings which do. They are therefore considered part of the general commercial character of the area, as distinct from the residential nature of the remainder of the properties on these side roads.

3. Character Assessment of the proposed Westow Hill (north side) Conservation Area

3.1 It is essential to define as fully as possible the special architectural and historic interest which justifies the designation of this proposed conservation area. 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 is defensible on appeal, and also to aid the formulation of proposals for the preservation or enhancement of the character and appearance of the area.

3.2 The origins and historic development of the area

The development of this historic part of the borough stems primarily from the re-erection of the greatly enlarged Crystal Palace at the eastern end of Westow Hill in 1854, the structure having been moved from Hyde Park where it housed the Great Exhibition of 1851. In 1854 Upper Norwood was already an established local shopping centre - by 1845 it is recorded that there were over 120 shops in Upper Norwood, mainly fronting Westow Hill and Westow Street. The opening of the Palace injected a massive investment into the area which brought a tide of prosperity to Upper Norwood. Soon visitors from all over London and indeed the whole country, were flooding in to attend the unique attraction, arriving mainly at one of the two railway stations which opened to serve the Palace - the site of Crystal Palace High Level Station, closed in 1954 and demolished in 1962, lies immediately to the rear of the White Swan.

Until the 1860's the north side of Westow Hill, with its fine views across the capital, had been the preserve of fine townhouses, but this decade saw the street transformed by a building boom into what one historian has described as 'a mini Oxford Street' lined with jewellers, music sellers, book stores and wine merchants which opened to serve the crowds of visitors to exhibitions, concerts and other entertainments at Crystal Palace. The popularity of the Palace began to wane by the late Nineteenth Century but it continued to be an important entertainment centre right up until its tragic destruction by fire in 1936 - arguably the greatest architectural loss of the inter-war years. Although the crowds of visitors and day trippers who once descended on Westow Hill before or after events at Crystal Palace have long gone, Upper Norwood has become an established district shopping centre with considerable historic interest and character.

3.3 The prevailing/former uses within the area & their influence on building types & plan forms

Westow Hill is a typical high street with a wide range of retail and other commercial uses on the ground floor with residential units or offices on the upper floors. It includes two larger stores (Woolworth's and Iceland), a bank, building societies, estate agents, post office, a pub and a cafe. There are a few vacant shop units (e.g. Nos. 25-27 and 69-71) but generally Westow Hill appears to be a relatively buoyant district shopping centre. The library is one of the largest branches in the borough and occupies a substantial landmark building. Attached to the frontage buildings but accessed off the side roads leading into the residential area behind, are several light industrial/warehouse buildings. An interesting historic feature is the stone steps leading down between Barclays Bank and a launderette which used to lead to an early cinema, demolished many years ago.

3.4 The architectural and historical quality, character and coherence of the buildings, and their style and materials, and the contribution they make to the special interest

Most of the historic buildings which line the northern side of Westow Hill date from the mid Nineteenth Century and include parades of 3 storey shops with flats over. The first block as one enters Westow Hill from the Gipsy Hill/Central Hill junction, consists of a fine mid Victorian corner property (No.1) of stock brick with stone dressings including a robust parapet cornice partially concealing a slated mansard roof with original dormer windows. The remaining properties in this terrace are of a similar design (two however are of a smaller scale and have been rendered) except for the last two (Nos. 13-17) which are two storey buildings. No.15-17 was built for the David Grieg supermarket chain in 1964. It has a very plain stock brick elevation more akin to a light industrial estate unit and, following the closure of David Grieg, was taken over by McDonalds in 1980.

The next block includes a rather ugly Iceland supermarket (Nos.19-21) with flats above, built as a Tesco store in 1964 on the site of a demolished Wesleyan Church erected in 1874. Its concrete elevations and banal shopfront do nothing to enhance the character of this historic thoroughfare. Adjoining the supermarket is a Nineteenth Century pub (The Orange Kipper - formerly the Queens Arms Hotel) with a single storey extension built out over what was probably a large front garden earlier in that century, and Nos. 25-27 which retain part of their original Victorian shopfront with a first floor addition of c1979. This addition is of a relatively sympathetic design of redbrick and render details including a double pediment, but should ideally have been a storey taller to maintain the established building heights. Nos. 33-35 are attractive mid Victorian properties with rusticated pilasters - No. 35 has a well detailed cornice, but No.33 has lost its cornice and would be greatly enhanced by its reinstatement. Next to this pair is another infill (No.37)- a simple red-brick three storey building which probably dates from the late 1940's/early 1950's.

This whole block of properties (Nos. 23-37) have very long backland plots which could be subject to redevelopment proposals in the future - immediately behind Nos. 25-27 stand the ruins of two cottages (nos.29-31 - c1840) which were left standing after the redevelopment of Nos. 25-27.

The library (jointly administered by Lambeth and Croydon borough councils) is one of the finest historic buildings on Westow Hill - built in 1899 and opened in 1900, it is a good example of late Victorian municipal architecture. It is of red brick with stone dressings with two prominent gable ends (one incorporating carved stone heraldic shields of the two boroughs) and an arched corner entrance. Unfortunately the original white painted timber windows on the Westow Hill elevation were removed in 1966 and replaced by unsympathetic modern units - the windows on the Beardell Street frontage have however survived and ideally these could be faithfully replicated and reinstated on the Westow Hill facade. A plain redbrick extension with simple classical references was erected in 1936 to accommodate the junior library and a lecture hall and another extension further down Beardell Street was completed in 1966 (a very dull two storey structure completely out of scale with the tall Victorian and 1930's buildings). A vehicular entrance leads under the 1960's extension to the library car park which is the only potential access to the backland plots referred to above.

Opposite the library extensions stands a plain stock brick single storey warehouse with a central arched opening and bricked up windows either side. This is attached to a large development (No.49A) completed in c1990 by Woolworth's, following the tragic destruction by fire in 1988 of their art deco style store built in 1925. It is a rather dull yellow brick two storey structure without the character of the previous edifice, rising to a height of four storeys on Beardell Street - a similarly dull elevation relieved only by rather arbitrary bands of contrasting red brick. This development wraps around Nos.45-47 - a simple brick box with neo-Georgian style windows which dates from c1970's and which accommodates the Woolwich Building Society.

Adjoining the Woolworth store is a dignified early Victorian three storey terrace (Nos. 49-55) of part rendered, part original stock brick buildings with elegant curved pediment architraves and a strong cornice parapet concealing the roof. It still possesses its original chimney stacks and pots which greatly enliven the character of the roofscape. The corner unit (No.55), occupied by a Woolwich estate agents, has an attractive Nineteenth Century shopfront with finely detailed mullions and a well preserved cornice to the fascia and console brackets. The fascia sign itself is however far from appropriate - the over-large box sign is very top heavy and detracts from the character of the shopfront as a whole. A very tall antenna mast high has been erected above the mobile phone shop which detracts from the character of this part of Westow Hill.

On the opposite corner of Westow Hill/Woodland Road is a three storey stock brick building - a typical design of the late 1960's (No.57) which is at best a neutral building - it is occupied by a hardware store with a colourful array of goods displayed outside the shop which add to the interest of the high street character of Westow Hill. Next to this 1969 building stands the splendid Barclays bank which probably dates from late 1850's - a regency style rendered corner building with rusticated quoins and arched windows on all three floors with Grecian style heads on keystones above the ground floor windows. This building has recently be redecorated and the unsightly canopies removed. A flight of old stone steps leads down beside Barclays Bank, leading nowhere now, but they used to access a very early cinema at the foot of the steps - the Electra Picture Palace, long demolished and replaced by a row of modern houses.

To the east of the bank are two mid Victorian terraces (Nos. 63-67 & 69-75) of three stories with a mansard attic storey - both of the same design - stock brick elevations and pedimented windows on the first floor, with rendered parapets and dormer windows in the mansard roof. Again the attractive roofscape of chimneys has survived, although the shopfronts have regrettably been replaced in the post-war years. No.77 has a later Victorian/Edwardian elevation of red brick with an interesting recessed bay window above a rather unattractive and poorly scaled shopfront.

The final two buildings are local landmarks. The magnificent former National Westminster bank (No.77a) now a solicitors office, has a rendered rusticated ground floor frontage with a splendid doorcase on the Westow Hill facade, and. The upper stories are of orange-red brick incorporating a stone pediment on the corner elevation. Below this is a frieze of classical swags supported on fluted pilasters either side of a pedimented bay window. Another interesting feature of the building is the blue plaque on the Westow Hill facade which commemorates the residency of Camille Pissaro, the French Impressionist painter, in 1870-71 in the dairy which stood on the site before the bank was built. The side elevation is dominated by two splendid chimney stacks rising above the parapet and a stone plaque commemorating the date the building was erected (1884). This elevation overlooks a small square and is at right angles to its equally grand though smaller neighbour, the White Swan public house.

The White Swan is a mid Victorian two storey building which stands on the prominent gateway site leading from Crystal Palace Park and Anerley Hill into Westow Hill. The existing structure was built in 1885 on the site of an earlier Nineteenth Century public house of the same name. It is a charming building of stock brick with interesting rendered pilasters terminating somewhat inconclusively below a cornice supported on brackets. There may well have been a balustrade above this parapet - if so its re-instatement would greatly enhance the building. The traditional ground floor frontage of rusticated blockwork and leaded window includes a grand porch supported on marble columns with an elegant balustrade. The public house is set back from the general building line along Westow Hill creating a small square. This square is an obvious candidate for remodelling - it presents a rather unkempt appearance with ugly leaning concrete and metal bollards and poor surfacing.

3.5 The setting of the conservation area and definition of significant vistas and panoramas

The setting of the conservation area is also important - it occupies a significant plateau position between Crystal Palace Park and the downward slopes of Gipsy Hill and Central Hill. There are several significant vistas and panoramas from Westow Hill - perhaps the most notable one can be viewed from the top of the steps leading down to the site of the Electra Palace Cinema, where a view can be enjoyed right across South London to the cluster of towers in the City of London. The sudden transition from the bustling high street of Westow Hill to the green open spaces and trees of Crystal Palace Park is also an important one when viewed from outside the former National Westminster Bank (No.77a). Another fine view can also be

enjoyed at the extreme western end of Westow Hill - looking down Gipsy Hill towards the great landmark tower of Christ Church - the only part of the church to survive the tragic fire of 1982.

3.6 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,

Many properties have suffered from crude and insensitive alterations, particularly in the 1960's and 1970's when inappropriate aluminium shopfronts and ugly internally illuminated plastic shop fascias and projecting signs were installed. Perhaps the worst shopfront which detracts the most from the character and appearance of this historic area is on the prominent corner building Nos.69-71. Some properties have regrettably been rendered, obscuring their attractive brick facades, others have lost their original windows - either having glazing bars removed or else being totally replaced by inappropriate uPVC units which detract from the historic character of the properties. The small square fronted by the White Swan and the former bank (77a Westow Hill) is in obvious need of enhancement - a repaving scheme with high quality stone flags, benches and lighting would greatly improve this potentially attractive public open space. Two particularly obtrusive communications masts detract from the character of the historic roofscape of this thoroughfare and should ideally be removed or relocated to a less prominent position (above Nos.53 & 63).

3.7 The existence of any neutral areas.

There are also a number of at best neutral buildings and at worst buildings which detract from the overall character of the proposed conservation area. The Woolwich Building Society and adjacent Woolworth store are modern buildings of little character, but they are simple brick fronted background buildings which do not really harm the overall character of Westow Hill. It could be argued that the least attractive building in this area is the Upper Norwood Methodist Church (c1964) - a concrete structure which is partially hidden from the Westow Hill frontage by Nos 19-21, and has been deliberately excluded from the conservation area. Other neutral buildings have already been referred to such as No.57 and Nos.23-25 - imaginative and sensitive proposals for their redevelopment would be considered favourably if it could be demonstrated that their replacements were of greater quality and made a greater contribution to the preservation and enhancement of the historic area..

4. The Crystal Palace Conservation Area Partnership Scheme

The designation of the north side of Westow Hill as a conservation area could bring considerable financial benefits to the area as the new status will make several historic properties in this area eligible for grant aid. More than £600, 000 is to be made available for the repair and improvement of properties in the Crystal Palace/Upper Norwood area, following the successful bid by Lambeth, Croydon and Bromley Council's to the Heritage Lottery Fund. The funding, which has been earmarked for spending over three years from April 1998 should help to enhance the image of this part of Lambeth - improving the physical appearance of commercial buildings along Westow Hill, assisting in the reinstatement of architectural features, the replacement of unattractive and inappropriate shopfronts, the upgrading of the local streetscape and

possibly the introduction of local traffic and highway improvements. This grant aid scheme is to be jointly administered by Croydon and Bromley councils on Lambeth's behalf.

5. Consultation

Letters of consultation were sent to owners/occupiers of properties within the proposed conservation area asking for their views were sent on 19th December 1997, giving them a 3 week period of consultation. These letters outlined the type of controls that would apply in a conservation area and also gave information about the new Conservation Area Partnership Scheme. Letters of consultation were also sent to English Heritage, the Norwood Society, the Crystal Palace & Norwood Chamber of Commerce, and the three Ward Councillors requesting their views.

The English Heritage Historic Buildings Inspector has responded to express his view that that the proposed Westow Hill Conservation Area is an integral part of the Crystal Palace [Upper Norwood] Triangle and complements the existing Conservation Areas [in Croydon & Bromley].

The London Borough of Bromley Development Control Committee, at a meeting on the 27th January 1998, resolved to 'strongly support Lambeth Council's proposal to designate the Westow Hill (north side) Conservation Area'. The report considered by Members described the area as being 'of high townscape quality and demonstrable architectural and historic interest, completing the protection of Upper Norwood Town Centre already provided by conservation areas in Bromley and Croydon'.

The London Borough of Croydon has written to say that they 'welcome the prompt action taken by Lambeth Council towards the declaration of the new conservation area which will compliment and strengthen the adjoining Upper Norwood Triangle Conservation Area designated by Croydon in 1989'. They go on to say that the new conservation area 'will help to complete the protection of the fine townscape of mainly Victorian terraces which once formed an original approach to Crystal Palace - the designation should also lead to a greater uniformity in planning policy and decision-making in Upper Norwood, reinforced by a successful outcome to the joint Lambeth/Croydon/Bromley/English Heritage Conservation Area Partnership scheme.

The Chief Librarian of the Upper Norwood Joint Library has written, stating that he 'broadly welcomes the proposal' although he is aware of some of the problems which arise in the Upper Norwood Triangle Conservation Area in Croydon such as disputes between shop owners and the planning authority. He also points to the great pressures Lambeth is under and the problems of service delivery such as giving advice. He adds that he wishes he had delayed the restoration of the front of the library which was completed in 1996 until this year when a grant may have been available as part of the Conservation Area Partnership scheme!

The Chief Executive's office has noted that an allocation of grant aid has been made subject to receipt of a satisfactory action plan, setting out the proposals for improvement within the area and that English Heritage

is keen to see the conservation area status to ensure a comprehensive scheme was established working across borough boundaries. The Borough Solicitor advised he had no comments to make.

6 Effects of Designation

Under the Town and Country General Development Order 1995 (the GPDO) 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) Some permitted development rights are restricted within a conservation area, e.g. neither stone cladding, or roof extensions are allowed without planning permission.
- (iv) Consent for all advertisement hoardings, temporary or permanent, is required.
- (v) 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.
- (vi) 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.
- (vii) 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 Westow Hill 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

There are no financial implications to the Council as a direct result of this report.

11. Staffing & Accommodation Implications

There are no staffing implications as a direct result of this report, although the additional powers associated with the designation of the conservation area could generate some additional workload for Development Control and Conservation officers. The duty to prepare public design guidance and enhancement schemes is already 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).

13. Background Documents

Planning (Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas) Act 1991

Department of the Environment: PG15: Planning & the Historic Environment (September 1994)

English Heritage: Conservation area appraisals (March 1997)

Brixton & Norwood in old photographs Jill Dudman (with Lambeth Archives) 1995

Crystal Palace & The Norwoods in old photographs - Nicholas Reed 1995

Crystal Palace & Norwood Heights - A Pictorial Record Audrey Hammond & Brian Dunn 1988

The Story of Norwood - J.B. Wilson (published by the London Borough of Lambeth in 1973)

Ordnance Survey - 1870, 1890, & 1932

14. Audit Trail

Committee deadline:9/2/98					
Author: Edmund Bird - Conservation Officer					
Date drafted:8/1/98					
Consultation with other Officers/Directorates					
Date	Name	Directorate	Date Received	Date Cleared	Date Returned
12/1/98	S.Whitaker	CEO	13/1/98	14/1/98	14/1/98
12/1/98	M.Dickens	B SOL	13/1/98	15/1/98	15/1/98
12/1/98	P. Hart	CEO	12/1/98	15/1/98	15/1/98
Date sent to Committee Secretariat:					
Date received by Committee Secretariat					
Date sent to Councillors:					

STOP PRESS - FURTHER REPRESENTATION RECEIVED AFTER COMMITTEE DEADLINE

The Norwood Society have written to support the designation as a 'logical proposal' conforming with the adjacent conservation area already designated by the Borough of Croydon.