

27th July 1982

SOUTH BANK CONSERVATION AREA (NO.38) (BISHOPS WARD)

Lambeth Policies and Programmes 1980 Vol.1. Section 1.4.1.1

The following report is submitted by the Director of Town Planning.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Town Planning Committee

1. That committee approves the designation of the area shown on plan m)/CON/228 as the South Bank Conservation Area (NO. 58). Under Section 277 (i) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1971 as amended by section 1 of the Town and Country Amenities Act 1974.
2. That the Director of Administration and Legal Services be authorised to advertise the above designation and to notify the Secretary of State in accordance with the provisions of Sections 277 (6) and (7) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1971 as amended by Section 1 of the Town and Country Amenities Act 1974.

For decision Policy

1. Considerations

1.1 In September 1979 the Town Planning Committee approved the "Strategy for the designation of new Conservation Areas". The area described in this report was included in the Strategy and indicated on the map which accompanied that report.

2. Financial, Staffing, Accommodation and Race Relations Considerations

2.1 There are no financial, staffing, accommodation or race relations considerations arising from this report,

3. Legal Considerations

3.1 Section 277 (l) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1971 (as amended by the Town and Country Amenities Act 1974) states that:

"Every local Planning Authority "shall, from time -co time, determine which parts of their areas are areas of special architectural or historic interest, the character and appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance and shall designate such areas as conservation areas"

Sub sections (6), (7) and (9) refer to the provisions for notifying the Secretary of State, advertising and registering the designation of such areas respectively.

4. Location of the proposed conservation area.

The proposed conservation area lies on the South Bank including all of the riverside buildings between St Thomas' Hospital and Nelson's Wharf and some of the more important buildings behind -them.

5. Historic Background

The South Bank was one of the first parts of Lambeth to be affected by the rapid expansion of London

which took place during the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

By the eighteenth century the river, frontage was lined with a -variety of wharves, boat yards' and timber yards. It was also the site of a factory owned by the Coade family which produced a famous artificial stone known as Coade Stone, a cheap and durable material used for statuary art ornamentation. The secret formula for the stone died with the Coade family. However, several items made of the stone have survived including the lion which once stood on top- of the Lion Brewery, a well-known pre war South Bank landmark. The South Bank Lion now stands at the foot of Westminster Bridge by County Hall. The transformation of the South Bank began with 'the development of the County Hall. The building, designed by Ralph Knott, was constructed over the period 1911 - 1922. It is a fine example of Edwardian public building, presenting a highly elaborate and dramatic facade to the river.

The redevelopment of the South Bank was reconsidered by the London County Council in their "County of London Plan" of 1943, which stated that:

"One of the great anomalies of the capital that, while the river from Westminster eastwards is lined, on the north side with magnificent buildings and possesses a spacious- and attractive embankment road, the corresponding' south bank excepting" St. Thomas Hospital and the County Hall, should present a depressing, semi-derelict appearance, lacking any sense of that dignity and order appropriate to its location in the centre of London and fronting on to the great waterway"-' The authors of the Plan then suggested that "Cleared of its encumbrances, equipped with a continuous strip of grass and a wide esplanade..., this area-might well include a great cultural centre embracing, among other features, a modern theatre, a large concert hall and the headquarters of various organisations. It might accommodate too, a number of blocks of offices."

The choice of the South Bank as a focus for the Festival of Britain in 1951 caused rapid change-after the Second World War including the construction of a new river embankment.

Most of the structures erected for the Festival were temporary including the "Dome of Discovery" which, with a diameter of 565 feet, had the distinction of being- the largest dome in the world.

The most important permanent structure was the Royal Festival Hall. This building, designed by LCC architects Martin and Matthews, was completed in a remarkably short time. It is particularly important because it was the first major public building opened in London designed in the "contemporary style" of architecture,

The London County Council (later the Greater London Council)' was instrumental in the development of the South Bank Arts complex in the year following the Festival. The Queen Elizabeth Hall/ Hayward Gallery complex was opened in the late. 1960s, the National Theatre complex, designed by Denys Lasden and Partners was opened in the late 1970s. :

The opinions of both amateur and professional critics on the architectural merits of these buildings vary enormously. However it is undeniable that the complex as a whole forms one of the most famous performing arts centres in the world.

Apart from .the Arts complex, the original London County Council's comprehensive scheme for the area included the development of the Shell Centre, another controversial building, which is important because of its scale and technical innovation. The building was designed by Sir Howard Robertson and built over the period 1957-1962. The three bridges which cross the Thames from the South Bank are of considerable townscape importance as-well as being impressive structures. All of them replace earlier bridges. .

Westminster Bridge was designed by Thomas Page and built in 1862. The Hungerford Bridge was built in 1865 to replace an elegant suspension bridge designed by Brunel, (The chains of this earlier bridge were later used to complete the Clifton Suspension Bridge in Bristol). The newest of the three is the Waterloo Bridge, designed by Sir G. G. Scott and built in 1945- This fine structure is commonly considered to be of high architectural merit.

6. The proposed conservation area.

The proposed South Bank conservation area runs along Lambeth's northern river frontage including the new parts of St Thomas' Hospital, County Hall, the Shell Centre, the South Bank Arts complex and the sites and buildings fronting onto the river between the National Theatre and Nelsons Wharf.

The designation of a conservation area provides a basis for the preservation and enhancement of an area. In the case of South Bank, the area does not display the usual characteristics of areas chosen for conservation area status; nearly all of the buildings are new. However, most of them are of national and some are of international importance. The spaces around the buildings, particularly the riverside walk, are of great amenity value. They provide access to the river; an important pedestrian route; an area which can be used in conjunction with the Arts complex; and attractive views of central London. The area is also an important element in the character and appearance of the river. As such, it is important that care is taken to ensure sensitive changes to existing buildings and spaces and that new development is of appropriate quality to the status and appearance of the area.

The South Bank was one of the areas identified in the "Strategy for the designation of new conservation areas" which was originally approved by committee in September 1979. The area was included because it "contains developments which, are undoubtedly very important examples of architecture- and- townscape of the twentieth century, and now provide one of London's most important civic and cultural areas".

The designation of the South Bank as a conservation area would mark the completion of new conservation area designations as planned "in the Conservation Strategy for the northern part of the Borough (with the exception of some minor extensions to existing conservation areas which remain to be designated).

7. Tenure

In recent reports recommending the designation of conservation areas, information has been included on housing tenure. In this case housing tenure is irrelevant.

8. Consultations

The proposal to designate a South Bank conservation area was made public knowledge following committees approval of the "Strategy for the designation of new conservation areas" in September 1979. Since then no adverse comments on the proposal have been received.

9. Designation

The Director of Town Planning is of the opinion that the area shown on plan HD/CON/228 be designated as a conservation area named South Bank (NO.38).