

## 2. Justification

The character appraisal of the former Brixton School of Building site is important in justifying the area as part of an extended Ferndale Road conservation Area, and it also provides a clear definition of the special interest which is a factor taken into consideration by the Secretary of State in considering related appeals. The assessment of this character derives from elements that include the following:

### (i) The origins and development of the topographical framework

This is an important site of considerable historic significance and architectural interest on account of its use as the renowned Brixton School of Building – the forerunner of the Polytechnic (now University) of the South bank's School of Building. The college was opened by the London County Council in 1904 and soon gained a world-wide reputation as a centre of excellence in the fields of town planning, building technology, estate management and building architecture. By the early 1970s, when the School relocated to the current purpose-built Polytechnic of the South bank School of Building on Wandsworth Road, there were some 6,000 part-time students and 1500 full time and sandwich course students studying at the college and in its annexes.

Parts of the buildings however date back a lot further than 1904 as this was the site of a public baths opened in 1874 by the Surrey County Club, built at the same time as the remainder of the properties within the existing Ferndale Road conservation area. This private venture failed in 1881 and the premises was next used for Lambeth Polytechnic School, organised by a local committee. In 1892 this too had closed, and the buildings were vacant until the acquisition by the L.C.C who adapted the baths into the School of Building. A school of architecture was added in 1906, directed by the renowned Edwardian architect Beresford Pite (who designed Christ Church, Brixton and the Anglican cathedral in Kampala, Uganda). A new four storey technical school was built along side the railway in 1909 and in 1935 a large new building was completed fronting onto Ferndale Road. Following the merger of the college with other institutions to form the new Polytechnic of the South bank in 1970, all courses were moved to the new Polytechnic campus on Wandsworth Road in 1974. The site was then occupied by Lambeth College (transferred to Lambeth Council ownership following the abolition of ILEA in 1991), later the Ferndale centre, which closed in 1994.

### (ii) **The archaeological significance and potential of the area**

Ferndale Road is not specifically identified as an Archaeological Priority Area within the Deposit UDP, however this classification is only based on the current state of knowledge of archaeology in Lambeth and therefore this may not reflect an absence of archaeology, but a lack of knowledge of archaeology in this area.

### (iii) The architectural and historical quality, character, and coherence of the buildings and the contribution they make to the special interest

The site is characterised by several local landmark buildings of not only significant architectural interest but also considerable historic interest, given its importance as a renowned centre of specialist educational excellence which has produced students who have imparted their knowledge in the fields of architecture, town planning and building technology throughout the world for much of this century.

The two buildings of greatest architectural interest are firstly the three storey building fronting onto Ferndale Road – a fine edifice of stock brick with well proportioned fenestration, and an imposing main entrance in Portland stone bearing the crest of the former London County Council and the name of the college in gilded lettering incised into the stone. This building, surmounted by an unusual and distinctive metalwork structure in the style of a rooftop aviary, was completed in 1935. Although it is a storey taller than the two terraces of mid Victorian

houses on either side, it complements the rhythm, simplicity and materials of the terraces. The decorative brickwork cornice and three panels below the parapet of the central block add additional interest to the building.

The second is considerably older – dating back to the Edwardian era (1909) – it is an attractive four storey range of buildings with a prominently steeply pitched roof and simple window openings – a long established landmark for travellers along the railway into Brixton which immediately abuts the site to the rear. Both buildings contain some fine interiors including a moderne style entrance hall with art deco influences in the 1935 block, and in the Edwardian building, a grand triple height assembly hall with galleries and several elegant stairways with arched windows and glazed tiles.

The remainder of the site is occupied by ancillary buildings which include a former boiler house with a tall chimney of brick with stone dressings. Some of the properties still have their original brickwork elevations, others have been rendered over. None of the buildings on this site are listed, however they do contribute positively to the character and appearance of the area. The two main college buildings in particular are most distinctive landmarks and add much to the townscape and the historic interest of the neighbourhood.

It is also proposed to include two short terraces of mid 19th Century two storey-plus-basement houses which stand either side of the Ferndale Road frontage building. These terraces are important to the setting of this college building which forms a grand centrepiece with the two terraces either side, in the manner of a classical composition of an imposing centre block flanked by two much smaller scale wings. These terraces are attractive properties of stock brick with double height canted bays on the lower ground and hall floors of the dwellings. They have a strong cornice supported on decorative corbels, and slight Gothic influences are evident in the pointed arched lintels over the front doors. Most of the houses still have their original brickwork elevations and rendered cornices. Some have their original painted iron railings, and the end property on the corner of Dolman Street still has a splendid enamelled historic street sign indicating the route via the footbridge to Hubert Grove beyond the railway line.