

Proposed Extension of the Ferndale Road Conservation Area
(Ferndale Ward)

Report by the Director of Environmental Services

Consulted Formally: CEO, B.Sol, EDFCS, EDHS, EDE

Authorised for submission by:
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PURPOSE

To extend the Ferndale Road Conservation Area

RECOMMENDATIONS

(1) That the Committee approve the extension of the Ferndale Road Conservation Area under section 69 of the Planning (Listed Building & Conservation Areas) Act 1990 as shown on Plan No. DES/PP/396

(2) That the Committee approve the detailed boundary of the area as shown on Plan No. DES/PP/396

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. This is of particular importance when it comes to protecting local landmark buildings such as the former Brixton School of Building, which has contributed much to the character of Ferndale Road in terms of its streetscape value, and its former uses as a centre of academic excellence in the field of architecture, building construction and town planning throughout much of this century, before its reorganisation as the South Bank Polytechnic and relocation to the Wandsworth Road campus in 1974. Since that time, it has continued as an important centre of learning, serving the local community as a centre of adult education until its closure in 1994.

1.2 The proposal to extend the Ferndale Road Conservation Area to include the former Brixton School of Building falls within the general objectives of the Environmental Services Committee as reported to Committee on 15th June 1995 (Ref. ES 20/95-96). That report included principles promoting civic pride (1.6) and the objectives for service areas including 'sensitive planning and conservation' (11).

1.3 This review is also in accordance with the earlier report approved by the Environmental Services Committee on 11.02.93 – Establishment of Conservation Officer in DES Town Planning Division (ref. No. ES/115/92-93). One of the key tasks of the conservation

team, as set out within the Conservation Officer's work programme included within the above report to committee, was the review of new and existing conservation areas.

- 1.4 Policy C1 in the Deposit Unitary Development Plan on the designation of conservation areas 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 it is desirable to preserve or enhance.
- 1.5 The policy goes on to state that the Council will consider the designation of areas which have been strongly recommended by residents organisations, or whose character is under threat from possible unsympathetic developments. The former school of Building is now vacant and is to be sold for redevelopment, and it is considered that conservation areas status is vital to ensure that there is a presumption in favour of retention of the principle buildings, as well as ensuring that any new development on the site is in keeping with the character of adjoining buildings and the area.
- 1.6 The Conservation officer has carried out an appraisal of the site and found that, because of various physical attributes outlined below, it should be considered for conservation area status by extending the existing Ferndale Road Conservation Areas, which currently abut the western boundary of the former School of Building Site.
- 1.7 It is considered that its proposal accords with the standards outlined in Planning Policy Guidance : Planning & Historic Environment (PPG15) and guidance issued by English Heritage in October 1995 (Conservation Area Practice). These standards include the quality of existing buildings within and adjacent to the conservation area, the mix of uses, characteristic materials, vistas along streets and between buildings, and the importance of landscaped areas.

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.

3. Public Consultation

All the residential properties either side of the college building were sent notification of the proposal to designate this small area as an extension to the existing Ferndale Road Conservation Area, also outlining the type of controls that would apply within a conservation area. The former School of Building is owned by the Council - a letter of consultation was sent to the Director of Education and the Estates & Valuation Manager (EVM) asking for their views. The EVM has advised that the closing date for offers is 6th July 1997. He also advises that prospective purchasers have been notified of the proposed extension of the conservation area.

Even before this consultation process was commenced, the planning authority received a letter from a resident of one of the properties which lies within the proposed extension area and immediately abuts the college site, urging that the Council extend the Ferndale Road Conservation Area to include the college. He refers to the *'unique merit of the college both in its architecture and historic value'* and raises concerns about the possible destruction of the local landmark building.

4. Effects of Designation

Under the Town and Country General Development Order 1988 (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) Conservation Area Consent is required to demolish or partially demolish buildings within a conservation area (Section 74 of the Act).
- (ii) Some permitted development rights are restricted within a conservation area, e.g. neither stone cladding or roof extensions are allowed without planning permission.
- (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. 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.

5. Procedure After Designation

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

- (i) All owners of properties/land within the area designated as an extension to the 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's 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.

6. Legal Powers and Advice

- 6.1 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".
- 6.2 Section 69 (4) states that:
"The designation of any area as a conservation area shall be a local land charge".
- 6.3 Section 70 (8) 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.
- 6.4 Section 71 (1 - 3) of the Act identifies 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 areas.
"(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."*

7. Financial Implications

There are no financial implications as a direct result of this report. However the former School of Building is owned by Lambeth. As outlined in paragraph 1.5, the Council is now in the process of disposing of the site. The inclusion of the site within the Ferndale Conservation Area would mean that the presumption would be to retain any part of the complex which it is considered contributes to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area. Similarly any new-build development on the site must preserve or enhance the character and appearance of the Conservation Area - this may affect the capital receipts obtainable from the disposal of this site. However, the decision on whether or not to extend the Ferndale Road Conservation Area to include this site should be determined on the conservation merits of the designation, and not be influenced by non-planning considerations. The Council should not be seen to treat its own land holdings differently from those of the private sector, by reason of its position of being the local planning authority. This would certainly leave the Council open of accusations of hypocrisy and double standards which would be difficult to refute.

8. Environmental Implications

The extension of the Ferndale Road Conservation Area provides the Council with additional development control powers to protect and enhance this area. It also places a duty on the Council to include this site within a plan outlining the aims of preserving and enhancing the conservation area as a whole. All trees within the conservation area are given protection in so far as notification of any works to a tree must be given six weeks in advance to the Council to enable it to consider issuing a Tree Preservation Notice.

9. Staffing & Accommodation Implications

There are no staffing implications as a direct result of this report. The additional powers associated with the extension of the conservation area could generate additional workload for Development Control staff, but it anticipated that this will be minimal given the small area of the extension. The duty to prepare public design guidance and enhancement schemes is already a part of the conservation team's future work programme.

10. 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 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).

11. Sources & Background Papers

Report to Environmental Services 11.2.93: Establishment of Conservation Officer in DES Town Planning Division (Refno.ES/115/92-93).

Report to Environmental Services Committee 15.6.95: Objectives for Committee & Work Programme (Ref no. ES 20/95-96).

Planning (Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas) Act 1991

Department of the Environment & Department of National Heritage: Planning Policy Guidance (PPG15): Planning & the Historic Environment (September 1994)

English Heritage: Conservation Area Practice (October 1995)

A History of Brixton by Alan Piper - published by the Brixton Society in association with Brixton Challenge (1996)

A brief history of the School of Building held by the Lambeth Archive Library

Letter from M. Rogers (Ferndale Road resident) dated 28th April 1997