

DRAFT SUBMITTED REPORT FOR: TOWN PLANNING DD 1
PART 1
DIRECTORATE CONSULTED: _____ CATEGORY: B
TITLE: PROPOSED CONSERVATION AREA NO.26: BRIXTON TOWN CENTRE
COMMUNITY PLAN REF: Vol.1. 5:1:1 WARD Ferndale, Angel
Town Hall and
Herne Hill

The following report is submitted by the Director of Development.

1. INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

The statutory criteria for selecting areas for Conservation are that the areas must be of special architectural and historic interest and that it is desirable to preserve or enhance the character of these areas. Public opinion has indicated in recent years that it is desirable to preserve or enhance the character not only of exceptionally important buildings and areas but also of the familiar and cherished physical and social scene as well as existing communities.

The present aim of Conservation in Lambeth is to concentrate not only on isolated individual areas as samples of the peaks of the historic evolution of the borough. The aim is to conserve significant parts of Lambeth's continuous evolution. In this way conservation can contribute towards the preservation of existing communities and provide also a physical framework to which the scale and pace of urban change can relate.

This report presents evidence that parts of Brixton Town Centre:

- (i) have special architectural and historic interest, and
- (ii) have strong links with the local and broader community and therefore it is desirable to preserve and enhance the character of those parts.

Therefore, this report proposes that the area shown on plan No. UD/CON/207D be designated a Conservation Area.

11. RECOMMENDATIONS

Town Planning Committee

- (1) That the Committee approve in principle the designation of the area shown on Plan No. UD/CON/207D as a Conservation Area, subject to formal consultation with the GLC.
- (2) That the Director of Admin & Legal Services be authorised to seek formal observations of the GLC on the above designation, in accordance with section 277 or the T & C P Act 1971.
- (3) That the officers be authorised to ~~contact~~ ^{consult} local Organisations and other bodies concerned and seek their views on the proposed designation.

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111. BRIEF PLANNING BACKGROUND OF THE TOWN CENTRE

In 1962, in view of the rate of change in the economic and social characteristics of Brixton, the then Metropolitan Borough Council initiated work on the preparation of a plan for the renewal of Brixton Town Centre.

In 1963 the Council requested the L.C.C. to designate Brixton as a Comprehensive Development Area, but no action was taken by that Authority. In 1965 the London Borough of Lambeth took over planning responsibility for Brixton.

In 1967 the London Borough of Lambeth published proposals for development on a large scale in Brixton. Because of restrictions in public expenditure LBL was asked by the Minister to revise the proposals.

In 1969 a revised plan with less redevelopment proposals was published by L.B.L. This plan was not approved by the Minister in view of the preparation of the GLDP as a structure plan. In view of the length of time that preparation of the GLDP was expected to take, LBL decided to proceed with its proposals, as far as possible, on the basis of a non-statutory town map.

During the early 70's companies interested in carrying out a joint development with the Council in the Coldharbour Lane area were invited to submit proposals. The firm selected by the P & D Committee (29.1.74), indicated later that due to the worsening economic climate they were not able to proceed.

A joint Lambeth and G.L.C. Steering Group was established in September 1975. This Steering Group advised the Council that a joint approach to the renewal of Brixton should be adopted.

The GLDP, which was finally approved by the Secretary of State for the Environment in July 1976, identifies Brixton as a strategic Town Centre, preferred office location and future Action Area. In March 1977 the Council decided to initiate the preparation of an Action Area Plan and the Secretary of State confirmed Brixton's Action Area status in September 1977 in accordance with the Town and Country Planning Act 1971. In March 1978, the Council adopted an amended policy for Brixton Town Centre comprising a strategy of piecemeal new development, rehabilitation

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of existing premises and environmental improvements within the existing layout (P & D Committee 22nd March 1978). This policy depends to a large extent on retention of the existing scale and character of much of the existing Town Centre.

A Report of Studies was published in October 1978 as the first part in public consultations on the preparation of the Plan and work on the Draft Plan is currently in progress.

The Town Planning Committee on 3rd September 1979 approved a report on the Strategy for future designations of Conservation Areas. This report states that areas for new designations may be sought in a number of directions, one of which is the following:

"Areas of long-established uses such as street markets, civic and cultural enclaves, areas of open landscape, especially if such uses have strong links with particular communities and even more so if they have survived in their purpose-built enclosures and surroundings.

Areas for consideration under this category are:-

Brixton Town Centre which, apart from its 19th century commercial development centres on Electric Avenue and Atlantic Road, contains the purpose-built early 20th century Market Row Arcade, the Market Row and the street market mainly on Brixton Station Road, which are long-established uses strongly connected with the economic and social life of the local and the broader community."

As a result of the Conservation Strategy Study it is evident that part of the Town Centre in Brixton is worthy of Conservation. The above mentioned Council Policy would be in complete accordance with the area's proposed designation as a Conservation Area.

DoE Officers have visited the area and their informal response was that if the area is designated a Conservation Area, the DoE would be prepared to consider proposals for its recognition as an Outstanding Conservation Area.

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1. The triangle east of Brixton Road and between Coldharbour Lane and Atlantic Road/Brixton Station Road (Brixton Market).
2. Brixton Road, between Acre Lane and St. John's Crescent (Brixton Road).
3. The Town Hall/St. Matthew's Church area.

In addition, the proposed area contains smaller extensions to include interesting terraces or other buildings, namely

- 2-10 and 1-5 St Matthews Road
- 2-8 Acre Lane
- 7-49 Effra Road
- Granville Arcade and Brixton Railway Station
- Dover Mansions, St. John's School, Canterbury Crescent
- The Astoria Cinema and also 201-209 Stockwell Road
- 240 to 246 and 248/250 Ferndale Road
- 10-12 Stockwell Avenue

The main areas are described in more detail below:

1. Brixton Market

For the purposes of this report, this part of the proposed area consists of four main parts:

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- (i) Electric Avenue
 - (ii) The Covered Arcades
 - (iii) Atlantic Road
 - (iv) Coldharbour Lane

Electric Avenue was purpose built as a shopping avenue and completed in 1891. The original name of the road was to be Palmerston Avenue. The name Electric Avenue was submitted to the Lambeth Vestry by its Clerk of Works, Mr. Farrow and was agreed in 1889. The pavement on either side was covered by a glass roof supported by cast iron columns and trusses. It is one of the *earliest* purpose-built shopping streets in this Country to be lit by electricity.

The street was originally constructed as shops on the ground floor with three storeys of residential accommodation and a mansard roof.

Not all the original buildings survive today. On the south corner of Brixton Road they have been replaced by a modern development (Boots the Chemist). Except for one shop, the remainder of the south side of the street as far as Electric Lane was bombed, and replaced by single storey shops. The "Electric Mansions" on the north-west side of the quadrant portion were built in 1905.

The only remaining part of the glass roofing is on the south-east side of the quadrant and the whole of the remaining arcade is in need of substantial repairs and ^{re}construction.

The remaining original buildings are fine examples of late Victorian residential building in red brick with stucco decorations and mansard roofs, with shops on the ground floor. At least two of its shopfronts survive in their original style.

Although severely mutilated, the street retains much of its original character which stems, apart from the surviving buildings, from the street's general environmental characteristics, i.e.

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- The curved crescent-shaped space of Electric Avenue which gives the street a strong feeling of enclosure.
 - The overall proportions of the space.
 - The stalls fronting the arcades and the general shopping activities.
- The retention and rehabilitation of Electric Avenue was proposed in the Council's 1969 plan for Brixton Town Centre following revision of the 1967 plan. Proposals to pedestrianise it, by restricting the hours when vehicular access would be allowed, have not been implemented for a variety of reasons. A scheme was deferred in 1969, for example, because the construction of the Victoria Line extension required vehicular access to the roads near the underground station. Further difficulties encountered include the problem of providing for adequate servicing and cleansing arrangements for the shops and street market. In 1979 the Council proposed that Electric Avenue should be paved over in order to infer priority for pedestrians in the area. Although this proposal has met with objections from emergency services, officers have been instructed to overcome these and resubmit a scheme that can be implemented when finance becomes available.

The Covered Arcades

There are three such arcades included in the proposed area: The Market Row, the Granville Arcade and the Reliance Arcade.

The Market Row Arcade was built between the late 1920's and early 1930's. It contains small shops on both sides of the narrow walks, most with open shop fronts. Natural light comes into the arcade through the glazed parts of the roof.

The **Granville** Arcade was built between 1935 and 1938: it is the largest of the Brixton Arcades and its design, content and character are similar to the Market Row Arcade.

The Reliance Arcade is a straight, narrow, covered passage with very small shops on either side. From the ground floor of No. 455 Brixton Road it is a direct pedestrian route between this road, Electric Lane and the centre of Brixton Market. Its character is similar to the two major Arcades.

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The important reason for including the above Arcades in the proposals of this Report is that they form a continuity of shopping activities, and character of space, connecting Brixton Road and the North end of Coldharbour Lane. The variety of type, bulk, colour, and even smell of the displayed goods and the other activities connected with shopping and supplying/servicing the shops of the arcades, give this part of the shopping centre (and indeed Central Brixton) its distinct and rare character.

Atlantic Road

Most of the south side of Atlantic Road consists of continuous terraces of 3 or 4 storeys. Nos. 32-38 appear to be the oldest, predating 1874. The rest of the properties are of a variety of dates, predominantly late 19th and early 20th century. Stock brick (with red brick detailing) is the prevailing material; most buildings have a roof parapet. Nearly all the shopfronts have been modernised.

The north side of Atlantic Road is a continuous row of small shops under the railway viaduct. During busy hours most of the shopfronts are hidden behind stalls and displayed goods. The Railway T.H. has an unusual clock at roof level with six faces.

Apart from the buildings, the following features are very important in defining the distinctive character of this street.

- The curved alignment of the street as imposed by the railway.
- The busy retail shopping atmosphere.
- The elevated railway and the railway bridges, which are the predominant environmental elements of this street.

These structures including Brixton Station were opened to the railway use in 1961-62 and they are virtually unchanged since then.

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The arches on Atlantic Road are at present in use as shops; (those west of Brixton Road - and within the proposed area - are used by the Marks and Spencers and Littlewoods Stores)

Brixton Station was built originally with four platforms, two of which have been disused for the last 50 years.

The disused parts of the station and the viaduct arches are in need of, and have considerable potential for, improvement.

Coldharbour Lane (including the west end of Electric Lane)

Variety is the main characteristic of both buildings and shopping activities in the street.

This street contains many interesting buildings, ranging from the "Classic" cinema (the second purpose-built cinema in South London) built in 1911, to typical mid Victorian style mansions (see 388-402 Coldharbour Lane). There is also a Dutch-gabled pub with 19th century timber mullioned curtain wall on the first floor.

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Although widely different, these small buildings form groups which are visually interrelated, by means of scale and their relative positioning which forms recesses and projections into the Street.

The overall visual effect in Coldharbour Lane is of considerable group-value. However, it could be significantly improved by an enhancement scheme which would emphasise the good and eliminate the destructive visual characteristics (such as unsympathetic and poorly designed modern shopfronts, traffic pollution, and parked vehicles).

2. Brixton Road

The part of Brixton Road which is included in these proposals is between Acre Lane and St. John's Crescent.

The western side of Brixton Road between Acre Lane and Stockwell Park Walk is an interesting example of groups of different buildings visually unified by means of common height and scale.

The majority are late 19th or early 20th century buildings and their total effect is that of a formally designed "turn-of-the-century" shopping parade, with flats or offices above.

In more detail, some of the buildings possess a very strong architectural character and are also important from the historical point of view.

These buildings are:

- The Bonne Marche, built in 1884, as one of the first purpose designed department stores in London. This building and also 248/250 Ferndale Road and 414-426 Brixton Road (which are also included in the proposed area) form a splendid group of civic character and scale.

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- The Marks and Spencer's store of the mid 1920's, a very characteristic building of this period of commercial architecture.
- The British Home Department Store, built at the beginning of this century, a typical commercial building of that period.
- The Astoria Cinema - Stockwell Road (off Brixton Road) designed by Edward Stone and built in 1929. This is an important historic recreational building. It is listed (grade II*) mainly for its internal layout and decoration which is preserved almost intact.

The eastern side of this part of Brixton Road presents a different, but equally interesting picture, with considerable contrast of style, size and scale between some of its buildings. The building line forms recesses and projections and this gives opportunities for two wider sections of the pavement, one outside the modern tube station and the other outside Nos. 415-419

- Nos. 453 (Dolcis) and 457-461 (Woolworth's) are interesting examples of 1930's commercial architecture. Most of the other buildings on this side between Coldharbour Lane and Canterbury Crescent are of the same period but they are mainly residential, with shops on the ground floor.
- 337-365 Brixton Road. The dominant part of this row of listed buildings is the part of the terrace which consists of Nos. 341 to 361. It is a symmetrically designed substantial 4-storey and basement building of the mid 19th century, of brick with stucco detail. Nos. 337-365 Brixton Road are currently being rehabilitated by LBL to provide residential accommodation and offices and public rooms for the Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages (part of the Inner Cities Partnership Programme).
- St. John's School, Canterbury Crescent (off Brixton Road), an important listed (Grade II) educational building of the late 19th Century designed by Benjamin Ferrey

3. The Town Hall/St. Matthew's Church Area

This part of the proposed area contains three prominent public buildings of special architectural and historic interest.

- Lambeth Town Hall, designed by Septimus Warwick and Austen Hall, and built in 1908. An attractive building of red brick and Portland stone, with a tall square clock tower which forms a landmark in the surrounding area.

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- St Matthews Church. Designed by C.F. Porden in classical style and completed in 1822. The church is described in great detail in the Survey of London and also in N.Pevsner's "London" Volume of "The Buildings of England" Following its declaration as redundant, this Church has recently been converted into a social/recreational hall, with facilities for exhibitions/concerts, smaller rooms for meetings, and a chapel. Due to lack of funds, only Stage 1 (conversion of the Crypt) has been carried out to date.

Listed by DoE in 1967 (Grade B).

- The Tate Library. Designed by Sidney Smith and completed in 1893. A classical style building of red brick with Portland Stone dressings. The directorate has recently proposed this important building to the DoE for listing as of special architectural and historic interest.

Apart from these important public buildings, this part of the proposed area includes the public open spaces around the Tate Library and St. Matthews Church. This prominent junction suffers from very heavy traffic on Brixton Hill, Brixton Road and Acre Lane.

Adjacent to the Town Hall area is the stretch on the west side of Effra Road which is included in these proposals and which includes Nos. 7-17, 19-29 and 31-49. These three residential mid 19C. terraces are predominantly of large 3-storey and basement houses.

The proposals have also included Nos. 2-10 St. Matthews Road (a terrace of substantial mid 19th century villas) for their architectural value and also for their environmental importance in forming part of the view of St. Matthews Church from a number of positions in the immediately surrounding area.

Tenure

In September 1974 the Planning and Development Committee asked for details of tenure to be provided in reports proposing areas for designation as Conservation Areas.

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Regarding the area proposed in this report, the relevant information given by the 1971 census comes from five different Enumeration Districts which cover a much bigger area. Therefore, given that the proposed area contains only a small number of residential buildings, the relevant figures give a misleading picture. However, these figures are quoted from the "Brixton Town Centre Action Area Plan", as calculated for the whole of the Town Centre (see Report of Studies, LBL, approved by P & D Committee on 22nd March 1978).

Brixton Town Centre (1977)

Population estimated	2,240 persons
Number of dwellings est.	740
Council owned	244
Private occupied (most unfurnished)	421
Owner occupied	74

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