

BECKENHAM PLACE

Key characteristics

Large landscaped park formerly the grounds of a Georgian country house, now a public park and golf course. There is strong sense of high ground, but surprisingly few long views.

Heritage Assets

- Beckenham Place Park conservation area
- Beckenham Place Park – an important open space. The 18th century mansion, now the golf clubhouse, is listed Grade II*

Key Issues

- Maintenance of the historic park and accommodating the operation of the golf course







CONCLUSION

A scenic view of a park pond. In the foreground, a green lawn is partially visible. A paved path runs along the edge of the pond, featuring a black metal bench and a green trash can. The pond itself is calm, reflecting the sky and surrounding trees. In the background, a large green lawn is dotted with several trees, including a prominent weeping willow on the left and a large, dense tree on the right. A parking lot with several cars is visible on the far right. The sky is bright with scattered clouds.

ONS

LEWISHAM'S KEY CHARACTERISTICS

During the course of the project a number of key themes and issues have emerged which particularly define the character of Lewisham. These are important to the ongoing character of the borough in terms of protecting key features which make the borough special. They also may provide helpful guidance in terms of guiding future policy and design considerations, ensuring that new development proceeds in a way which is consistent with the core character of the borough.

This section describes the key characteristics and highlights the key issues for further consideration.



TOPOGRAPHY

Defining attributes

Lewisham's landscape is a gentle bowl, focussed around the Ravensbourne, Quaggy and Pool Rivers which flow into the Deptford Creek.

Elevated views play a significant role in the character of the borough – both within the borough but also with views towards the city.

The urban grid form is most likely to be rectilinear or clearly planned in the flatter, central areas of the borough and looser and more organic in the hillier areas at the borough edges.

Key issues

The nature of the area's topography is something which plays an important role in defining the underlying character of the borough. The form of the gentle bowl with hills dotted around the edge of the borough should continue to be recognised in how development occurs in the future. The layout of streets is central to the underlying topography and therefore should influence the future layout of development. Major new development on low-lying land should generally follow a clear grid format, whilst development on higher and sloping ground should reflect a looser form responding to the topography below.

The Lewisham Tall Buildings Strategy (September 2010) highlights that:

"The natural profile of an area helps define the character of an area along with the cultural and historic character of its built form heritage. Lewisham has a number of tree covered hill tops that can be seen from different parts of the Borough contributing to its verdant character. The location of tall buildings should carefully consider

this topographical profile of the Borough as tall and bulky buildings on high ground can easily appear overbearing and have a negative impact on the residential amenity of adjacent areas."

Topography should always play an important informing role in the consideration of locations of new taller development. Lewisham's character of tree covered higher ground is highlighted in the open space typologies and nature of neighbourhoods such as Telegraph Hill and Forest Hill.

Implications for future development

- Underlying topography should inform nature and layout of new development.
- Topography should be included in design and access statements for new development
- Development at lower ground should generally follow a clear grid format.
- Development on higher and sloping ground should reflect a looser form responding to the underlying topography.
- Tall buildings should be limited to the identified areas in the Tall Buildings Strategy and should avoid disrupting the natural flow to the landscape topography and the views this creates.



HISTORICAL GROWTH AND DIVERSITY

Defining attributes

As one moves across the borough there is a general gradient of development from oldest in the north to more modern in the south. As London has grown, the borough has since successive rounds of urbanisation moving south across the borough.

The urban origins of the borough are focussed on river-related uses including shipyards and victualing yards. There are some significant remnants of historical development and urban grain in the north although much was lost during World War 11 and is now occupied by post-war development.

The southern-ward expansion of the borough's urban area in the Victorian period was driven by the development of the railways. Neighbourhoods such as Forest Hill and Sydenham saw dramatic change as they were linked to central London via rail.

Overall, the combination of extensive bomb damage, garden grabbing and incremental historical growth has resulted in huge diversity across the borough. Changes in typology can happen abruptly and frequently over relatively small geographical areas. This is particularly true in north of the borough, where the "churn" in the built environment caused by these factors has created an attractive and at times striking diversity.

Key issues

Diversity in the built environment is something to be handled carefully. Whilst it can be a hugely uplifting quality in neighbourhoods which have seen a significant range of development occur organically over a long period, in other

areas an entirely unplanned level of change can result in a chaotic and very uncohesive character.

In Lewisham, the very different levels of diversity in the borough need to inform how change is managed in the long term. In the northern neighbourhoods of Deptford and New Cross new development and change can be accommodated but needs to be facilitated in a way which respects the headline principles with which all the development over the years has observed, for example, strong perimeter grid layout. New development should take the opportunity to reinstate some of the historic street pattern.

In southern neighbourhoods such as Bellingham and Sydenham a much less degree of diversity is found. In these areas, the overriding importance is to fit into a large scale design concept and regularity.

Implications for future development

- Diversity should fit with the existing character of an area and make a positive impact.
- The scale at which introducing new diversity through development needs careful thought. In areas with a more uniform typology, introducing diversity might be more appropriate at the building / frontage detailing scale, rather than the layout and form scale.
- The balance between diversity and coherence must be managed carefully to enable the existing characters of neighbourhoods to evolve positively.



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IMPACT OF RAILWAYS

Defining attributes

The early railway development in the northern part of the borough took routes through existing areas of development and on predominantly flat ground. These railways created isolated cells of development with poor links to the surrounding areas, as seen in neighbourhoods such as New Cross and Deptford. In these areas, the resulting railway arches have presented an opportunity for small scale business enterprise.

The later railway expansion to the south proceeded in hand with development and followed the topography. This expansion established a more natural relationship between the railway and the landscape. Thus, the railway is less of an imposition on the urban character in central and southern parts of the borough.

Key issues

There is an ongoing need to mitigate the negative impacts of the rail lines in the north of the borough. Whilst in a number of locations the railway arches have been used positively as business premises, elsewhere areas alongside or divided by railways are underutilised and devoid of real positive influence on local neighbourhoods.

Rail lines cause a problem in Lewisham and Catford town centres and also in places like Forest Hill town centre, where the legibility of the centre and division of plots is complicated by the dissection created by rail lines.

There is a need to safeguard a good source of small business accommodation in rail arches. In addition, in key public areas such as town

centres and around stations, greater active use of arches should be encouraged.

Implications for future development

- Enabling the positive use of rail arches and land adjacent to railways should be encouraged.
- Opportunities for new connections between cut-off areas to enhance legibility.
- Where environmental enhancements can help mitigate the divisory effect of the rail line these should be explored.
- Signage and lighting improvements may help the legibility around railways.
- Opportunities to tackle the quality of underpasses are being explored through the Links project.
- Development in the immediate vicinity of rail lines has often been uncharacteristic of the area and there is a need to avoid this in the future.



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VICTORIAN / EDWARDIAN DEVELOPMENT

Defining attributes

The large scale expansion of new housing areas which followed the growth of suburban railways has had resulted in a significant legacy of Victorian and Edwardian neighbourhoods. Across much of the borough, there is a common incidence of Victorian and Edwardian streets which has ensured a clear grid structure to residential development in much of the borough.

A series of well defined grids of smaller terraced houses and larger semis exist and have survived largely in tact.

In addition, the emergence of the 'villa' as an important housing type, particularly in the better neighbourhoods, is also a legacy of this era of development. The characterisation study has shown this typology to be evident throughout the borough and to be focussed on key routes and alongside major green spaces.

Key issues

- Storage in the streets can cause clutter - wheelie bin storage within the street can be unsightly.
- Loss of front gardens due to pressures for parking.

Implications

- Learning positive lessons from these typologies.
- Respecting and protecting the overall integrity of the design approach, including aspects such as the alignment, scale, roof line, windows and material.



FORMER LONDON COUNTY COUNCIL HOUSING

Defining attributes

Lewisham has some of the largest areas of interwar London County Council (LCC) housing in London. The Bellingham Estate, Downham Estate and Grove Park Estate are extensive examples of this era and nature of development.

The LCC housing in the borough illustrates the strong influence of the garden city movement on public sector planning and architecture. The estates are dignified and spacious compared to the more cramped inner-city residential areas evident at the time of their construction.

The estates have strong and large scale design concepts which ensure blocks and streets are seen as compositions. They have a consistent character with simple detailing and relatively basic specification. Overall the estates are of comparatively low density, but have been carefully planned around open space and access to community facilities.

Key issues

- Improving public transport access and connections across the estates
- Protecting against the impact of the private car - avoiding the loss of front gardens and grass verges as a result of parking, and ensuring car parking does not dominate the street scene.
- In some estates small changes to facades are more obvious and uncharacteristic than in others - the balance between consistency and diversity is important, and will be different in each estate.

Implications

- Managing change in these estates in a sensitive way is important. In some cases, such as Bellingham Estate there is a need to retain the consistency established through the original plan and design, in others such as Downham there is already a much greater diversity apparent and there can be greater freedom with small changes, however the scale of the development is a key characteristic to maintain.
- In the more consistent estates, limiting external modifications (such as facade treatments and window replacements) to maintain character may be a consideration - with potential for removing permitted development rights in these areas.



POST-WAR HOUSING

Defining attributes

Lewisham was one of the most heavily bombed areas of London during World War 11, resulting in a significant legacy of post-war housing development.

There was a high degree of experimentation with forms and building techniques as part of the post-war development in the borough, which has led to the significant variety now evident.

There is a significant range of high, medium and low rise development, sometimes all within the same area or estate.

Key issues

The post-war housing in Lewisham is an asset. It houses a significant population within relatively high density forms, whilst making a positive contribution to the diversity of architecture in the borough. However, the long term future of some of the buildings will in time become problematic. Many of the forms will need refurbishment in the medium term, and in some cases this will be challenging to achieve cost-effectively

Implications

In considering the long term form of the post-war housing areas a range of options will be available - ranging from wholesale refurbishment, through partial infill and piecemeal redevelopment, to comprehensive redevelopment.

In guiding future decisions on how post-war housing will be maintained and refurbished, the options should be informed by local character

considerations - both in terms of overriding design principles evident across the borough, and neighbourhood scale characteristics. Where opportunities exist to mend negative features of post-war housing, which are currently reducing the quality of life in these estates, they should be explored.

Rediscovering street patterns through partial redevelopment should be explored, as should opportunities for improving the environment at ground level, through the introduction of more ground floor active uses. Partial redevelopment can also offer opportunities to create more complete 'perimeter-style' blocks which can support enhanced safety.



HERITAGE ASSETS

Defining attributes

The historic evolution of the borough has left a number of features and characteristics which represent heritage assets. Each era of development has left a new layer of imprint on the landscape and each of these have relative merit. In some cases the evidence of these features has been entirely lost, but in many cases they remain as legacies within a more modern environment.

Examples of the heritage assets which are evident in the borough are:

- Wharves;
- Waterways;
- Railway arches;
- Roman roads such as New Cross Road;
- Former Grand Surrey Canal;
- Deptford Creek and the Creek / Ravensbourne River;
- Parks and former estates; and
- Heaths.

In addition, the Meridian line is an important asset, but one which is rarely highlighted in the borough.

Key issues

As the borough continues to change and evolve there is a need to ensure the heritage assets are recognised as part of each neighbourhood's legacy. In some cases, this might mean emphasising their protection and refurbishment, in others more a case of ensuring future

development uses these assets as a cue and feature to be positively recognised in new designs.

Implications

- Highlight landmark buildings through enhancements
- Support the waterways as foci for future activity and enhanced environments
- As areas are redeveloped seek to preserve and reflect the heritage assets by ensuring they inform the design concept



LOSS OF FRONT GARDENS

Defining attributes

Much of the borough was urbanised and developed during eras before the domination of the private car. By the 1930s there was a general expectation that the private car would have an impact on the way neighbourhoods were designed. However, given the car ownership patterns during the inter-war period, it was only the more wealthy neighbourhoods which were consciously designed in expectation of car ownership.

Across the borough there is extensive evidence of front gardens, originally designed to be attractive green spaces for personalising the front of homes, now paved over and used for parking private cars. Streets of Victorian, Edwardian and inter-war housing across the borough's neighbourhoods has suffered significantly from the intrusion of multiple car ownership.

Key issues

The paving over of front gardens, whether to enable car parking or simply to reduce maintenance, has a number of negative impacts on the street character. Crucially, the street loses a significant proportion of its greenery and coupled with the loss of street trees means many streets now look rather stark. In addition, the loss of front boundaries to enable car parking on front gardens reduces the definition of the street and the division between public and private space. A knock-on impact is the reduction of rainwater soak aways and the capacity of the street to deal with high levels of rainfall.

The loss of greenery also reduces shade and can contribute to a heat sink effect in hot weather.

Implications

- Guard against conversion of front gardens into paved areas and parking bays through planning policy.
- Current Lewisham guidelines require permeable paving to be used where more than a third of the space is being covered - this policy needs enforcement support.
- Consider different solutions for parking pressures in affected areas.



IMPACT OF CONVERSIONS

Defining attributes

Throughout the borough there are a number of building typologies which lend themselves to conversion into multiple units. The conversion of houses into flats enhances the population density of areas which can put pressure on services as well as the streetscape.

The images illustrate the street clutter that can also sometimes occur as a result of such conversions. Whilst the images highlight a very flexible typology which was consciously designed as flats, further conversion has resulted in an even higher density than planned.

Key issues

The impact of conversions is multi-layered:

- Increased street clutter in the form of multiple bins, and satellite dishes immediately outside properties.
- Horizontal differentiation to building facades as different storeys are maintained and updated at different times and in varying styles.
- Greater pressure for street parking with multiple car ownership per housing plot.
- Potential loss of substantial single family dwelling stock, and loss of large family accommodation generally.
- A generally more transient population with fewer ties to the area and less need to integrate and conform to accepted standards.

Implications

- A managed approach to change is required on this issue in policy.
- Where conversions are considered appropriate they will need to be of exceptional quality standards.
- Conversions should only be allowed in higher density areas, where the public transport accessibility supports low car ownership and the street infrastructure can accommodate the increased pressure.
- Living over the shop should be encouraged as a means for maintaining complete house units.
- Conversions should not be allowed in the suburban areas of the borough.



CLOSURE OF TERTIARY / LINEAR CENTRES

Defining attributes

The prevalence of small linear centres in the form of shop parades has been highlighted in the typology section. These parades exist primarily on key routes through the borough, but are also evident within neighbourhoods on less trafficked routes.

Over the last few decades there has been anecdotal evidence that linear centres are being progressively closed and converted to residential properties.

Key issues

- The loss of retail functions from these linear centres has a negative impact on the physical functioning of the local community.
- The visual impact of closed centres degrades the area, and increases the risk of insensitive conversion to other uses.
- Loss of retail unity to residential use.
- Design of residential conversions in shopping parades needs attention.
- In many linear centres a loss in the variety of goods sold and a dominance of take away shops is reducing the amenity of these centres for local communities.

Implications

- As linear centres are often on major routes they are the visible face of the borough, and therefore it is important to maintain a level of quality and coherence to their activity.
- Maintaining retail functions wherever possible should be the primary objective.
- Conversions where considered appropriate should be sensitively undertaken - ideally the impact on the coherence of the retail parade should be minimised with conversion occurring in a planned way at the ends rather than randomly within the group.



LOSS OF NEIGHBOURHOOD PUBLIC HOUSES

Defining attributes

Local public houses are dotted throughout the borough. They occupy often prominent locations in neighbourhoods and help provide local landmarks. Over the last decade a number of public houses in Lewisham have been closed, with some being converted to other uses following closure.

Key issues

- As with linear centres, the close of public houses has a negative impact on the both the cohesion of the community and the visual appearance of the area.
- Loss of valued community asset and prominent buildings contributing to local character.

Implications

- Neighbourhood public houses are highly valued and should be kept wherever possible and appropriate.
- All attempts to keep public houses in use as pubs should be fully undertaken and exhausted before conversion is considered - the viability of the building as public house needs to be clearly demonstrated first.
- When conversion is deemed appropriate, the detailing and identity of pubs needs to be carried forward into the conversions.



GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE

Defining attributes

The role of landscape, parks and green spaces is important to the character of Lewisham as a whole. Green space is generally well distributed across the borough, with some large high quality spaces which lend their names to adjacent neighbourhoods.

Key issues

- The borough's green infrastructure will become increasingly important as the impacts of climate change occur over the coming decades.
- There is a need to avoid the loss of street trees, vegetation and green spaces in the borough, and to look to maintain and replace that which is currently in place as appropriate to support its longevity.

Implications for future development

- Redevelopment and new development offer opportunities to enhance the green infrastructure in local areas and these should be maximised.
- In areas with deficiencies in open space, opportunities to provide new public green space should be explored.
- In all developments, opportunities to incorporate street vegetation, as well as green roofs (for example at Rushey Green School) and potentially green walls should be explored to both support local character and enable local adaptation to climate change.

- The River Ravensbourne Improvement Plan sets out a vision to naturalise the river as much as possible - enhancements around the river should have regard to this vision.



