

# Bellingham Estate Area of Special Local Character



This document provides a short description of this Area of Special Local Character (ASLC), and a statement of significance. It should be used to inform planning applications within the ASLC.

## Boundary Map

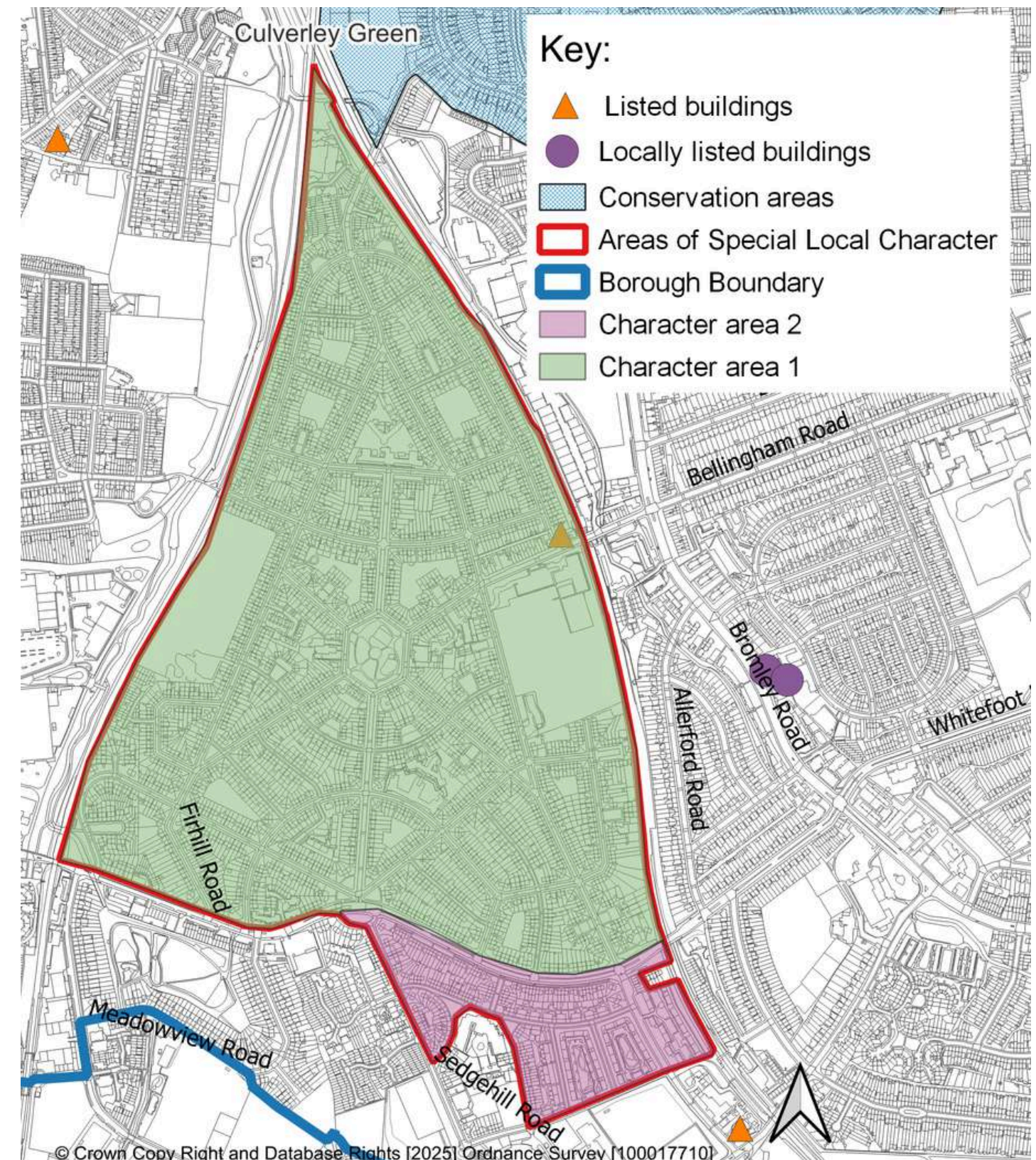
### Description of the area

Bellingham Estate lies on a triangular area of land bounded by two branches of railway and Southend Lane, south of Catford. It was developed rapidly with two storey brown-red brick semi-detached cottages, blocks of cottages, and flats, creating a highly coherent development rich with varied details and typologies. The influence of the Garden City Movement is illustrated in the layout of the Estate, with its central Green and main axis, curving roads, and its many swards (small areas of planting), greens and trees, reflecting emerging progressive principles for healthy, spacious working class accommodation. It is flanked by the Pool River on its West side, and is close to 3 train stations, Bellingham, Beckenham Hill and Lower Sydenham.

### 1. Architecture

The architecture of Bellingham Estate, designed by the London County Council's [LCC] Architect Department, built by the firm Sir Robert McAlpine & Sons, and funded by central government, is remarkably coherent.

Bellingham Estate comprises two different character areas, which were built as separate phases. The first phase started in October 1920 and was finished in 1923, and comprised the triangular area of land edged by the railways and Southend Lane. The second character area is smaller and to the south of Southend Lane, and was started a decade later.



The second phase of development in 1936, also by LCC, containing blocks of 2 storey flats with gambrel roofs, is also of architectural and townscape interest. Though some of the detailing has been lost (rendered elevations, blocked off passageways, paved front gardens) the group remains very coherent.

## Character area 1

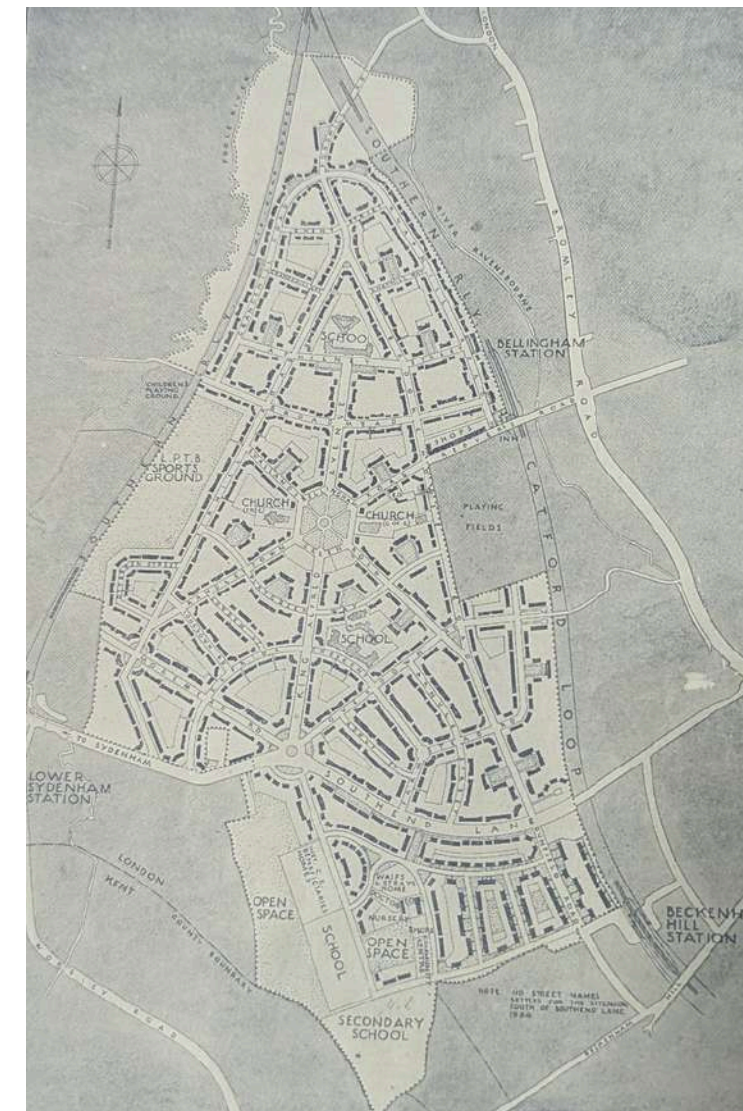
Character area 1 comprises the part of the Estate north of Southend Lane, bound by the two railways in a triangular piece of land. It was a planned estate started in October 1920 by the LCC to provide social housing for the London working class, and by January 1923, 2,088 houses and flats were completed.

### Residential buildings:

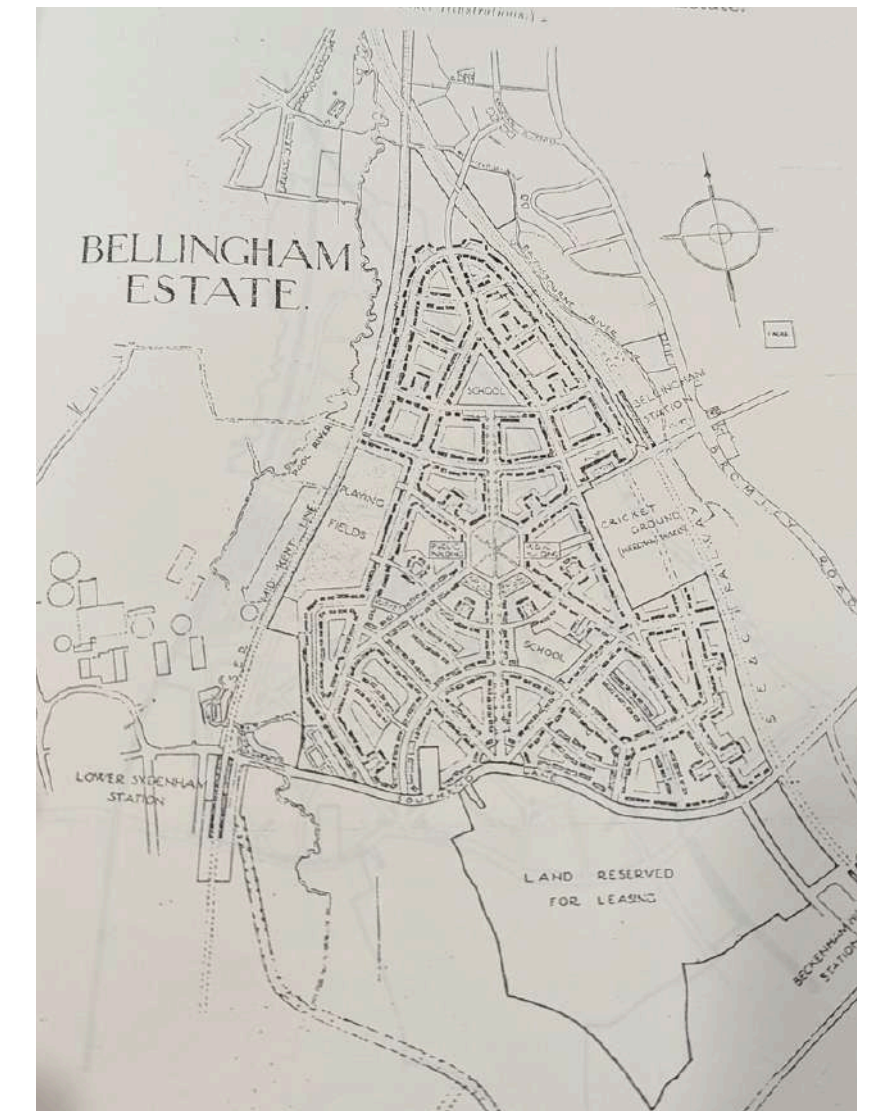
- The Bellingham Estate was built using a number of set plan types for flats and cottages, and between 1920 and 1923, 402 5-room houses, 111 4-room parlour houses, 1,099 4-room non parlour type houses, 188 3-room houses, 156 3-room flats and 132 2-room flats were constructed.
- A further 32 4-room houses were constructed between December 1928 and November 1929 by Blackwell & Mayer.
- The design of Bellingham Estate was composed of 23 basic house and flat plans, each specifically for an end of block or intermediate dwelling, and each adaptable to site requirements. Of the plans for end-of-block cottages, 4 were for special semi-detached blocks for use in the angles of street corners, and the remaining 10 for either semi-detached cottages or as terminals to longer blocks. The intermediate dwellings were designed to be sandwiched between two end-of-block type houses. For reason of economy, the semi-detached houses became less and less frequent over the development of the estate, and the size of the groups of cottages increased. In the earlier phases of

development, groups of 4 cottages were common, but in the later phases blocks of 6 or 8 cottages became more commonplace, until they dominated the last areas built. The largest grouping is of 10 cottages per block.

- The majority of the blocks contain single-family cottages, but some blocks are cottage flats – they have a very similar appearance to the blocks of cottages but the ground and first floor are two separate dwellings, each with its own entrance. In the first phase of development, 20% of dwellings were flats, with 156 3-room flats and 132 2-room flats constructed, as opposed to in the later character area 2, built in 1936, where 60% of all units were flats.



1920 original plan for the Estate



1921 development plan for the the first phase of construction of the Estate

- There is a uniformity in the buildings of character area 1. The cottage blocks are two storey, red-brown or London stock brick rectangular buildings, with symmetrical arrangements, open passageways to rear gardens, tall brick chimneys and hipped or gambrel roofs with deep eaves. Different motifs employed for door hoods, window lintels and passageway entrances give the buildings interest, and avoid monotony. Three different forms were used for door heads: the triangular, the curved and the flat. The round or square headed arch with brick pilasters were used for the passageway entrances. Architectural detailing on the scale of the whole building was concentrated at special locations, to create emphasis and a unified appearance at major street junctions and on Bellingham Green.

- Angled buildings at corners were a very successful design feature of the Bellingham Estate. Setting a building diagonally across a corner was a common feature of the Garden City Movement, allowing a continuous building line around a corner and creating a more open view of junctions, allowing clearer visibility for drivers and also avoiding visible views of rear gardens, enhancing privacy and obscuring views of personal spaces. This approach can be seen at the junction of Knapmill and Fordmill Rds, with angled buildings with tall gables creating very successful corner treatments and a sense of enclosure and coherence at the intersection. There are similarly successful angled buildings with tall gables at the junction of different roads across the Estate. At other intersections, notably around Bellingham Green, the corners are marked by two-storey corner turrets attached to the buildings, creating particular architectural prominence.

Architectural detailing on the Bellingham Estate: unusual corner treatments including angled, gabled and turreted cottages, a varied mix of pitched and gambrel roofs with tall chimneys, passageways to the rear of buildings and front doors accessed from the side and rear.



## Public and civic buildings:

### Schools:

- Athelney Street School opened in 1922 to teach up to 1,000 boys and girls. It suffered from bombing in WWII, and was partially rebuilt and modernised.
- Elfrida School opened in 1925 for the same number of pupils.
- Both were built as single storey bungalow schools, and were thought to facilitate exchange and learning. They contrasted with the tall Victorian London Board of Schools buildings. Originally, both schools offered elementary education, for students who would leave at 14 and find employment, rather than for students considering further university education.

### Shops:

- Shops did not qualify for state funding, so the LCC offered shop sites on Randlesdown Rd on building leases, for shop owners to build them themselves. The private sector response was poor: by 1927 only half of the shop area had been built. As a result, in 1930 the LCC built 6 shops, with living accommodation above. 18 shops in total were built on Randlesdown Rd, in red brick matching the materials of the rest of the Estate buildings, with accommodation above for the shopkeepers and their families. The shops, with front doors to upper flats interspersed at ground floor and three projecting elements with corner brick quoins, all have slightly different detailing and fenestration patterns, which could reflect the different phases and builders involved in their construction.

### The Fellowship Inn:

- The Fellowship Inn at Bellingham has the distinction of being the first public house to be built on a LCC estate, in 1923-24. This was because in the first

half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the LCC questioned whether a publicly funded estate, built to improve the lives of London's working classes, should include a public house.

- Barclay, Perkins and Company Limited, the company who were granted the lease to build and operate the pub, were likely successful because they promised to provide more than just a licensed drinking establishment, but rather an "improved public house", a "refreshment house to be run on model lines" with activities for both men and women, large lounges and ample seating accommodation, and a dining room for the provision of meals and all types of refreshments. Historic England has identified the Fellowship Inn as of outstanding significance because most of the interior fittings and original layout survive, and its exterior appearance is largely unchanged. This makes it a rare, virtually unaltered, example of a 1920s 'improved public house'. Architecturally, the building shows all the salient features of a typical 'improved' pub of this era with its 'Brewers Tudor' style, large bar areas, halls of entertainment, refreshment room, children's room, off sales shop and ample kitchen facilities. The half-timbered building in a Tudor style is unique in the area, and contrasts with the domestic, red brick architecture of the rest of the estate.



## Churches:

- The Church of St Dunstan, Bellingham Green, was built in a Gothic-inspired style and completed in late 1925
- The London Congressional Union (now Bellingham Methodist and United Reform Church), Bellingham Green, was also built in the 1920s to a design by Lewisham-born Percy William Meredith, who designed United Reform Churches across England.
- The two churches, though in different styles, fit comfortably with the residential cottage blocks through the use of the same materials, including red-brown bricks and tiles.

## Other public buildings:

- The LCC had originally allocated 4 sites on Bellingham Green for public buildings such as churches and community centres, but financial restraints dictated that these be let out on building leases – only two church sites were taken up, and by 1933 the remaining two sites were turned into allotments. These were built over in the post-war period, with two 2-storey London stock brick residential blocks.
- The doctor's house and surgery at 23A Bellingham Green, built privately on a portion of the southeastern site allocated to public buildings in 1924, is stylistically similar to the LCC's domestic architecture on the estate as a two storey red brick building, but with an interesting angled corner turret at the corner of King Alfred Avenue, and a two storey rounded bay on its opposite side, creating an architecturally unusual and interesting building on the green.

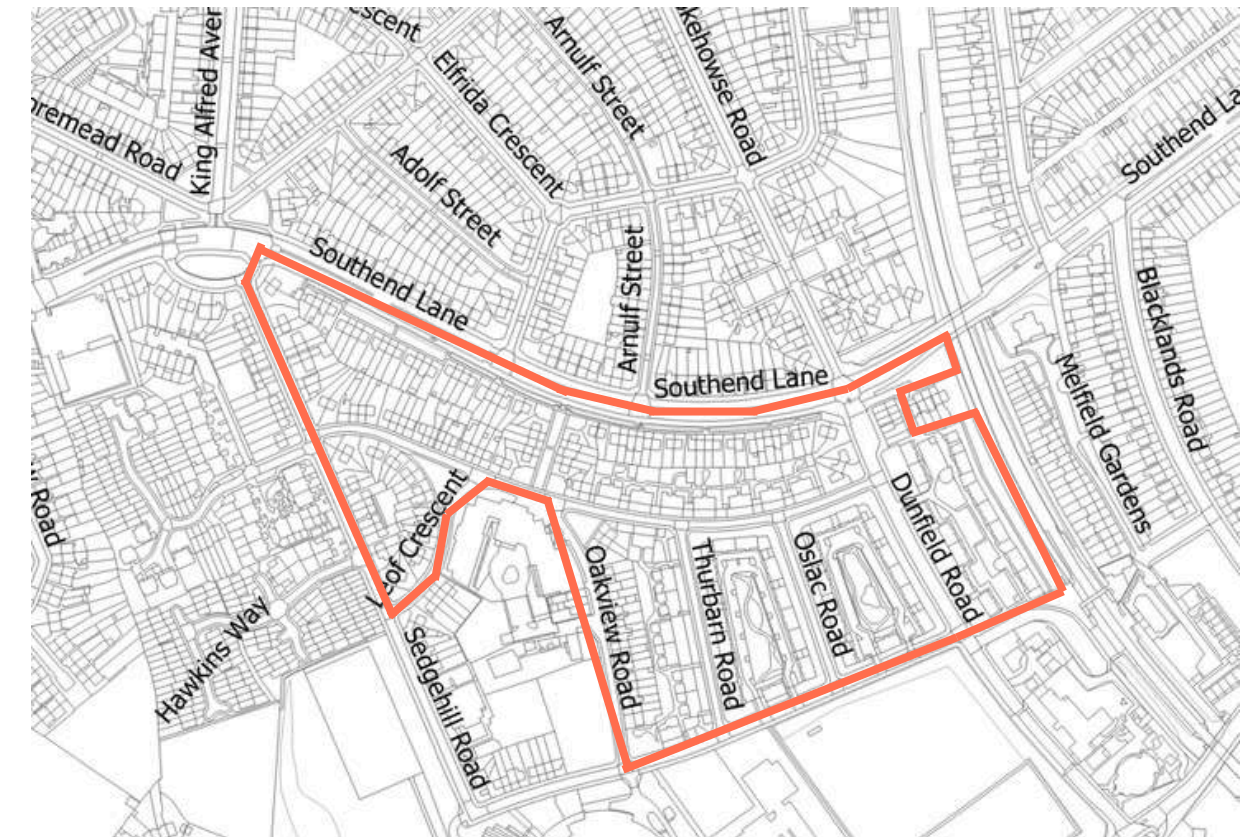


Top: Fellowship Inn, Left: London Congressional Union Church, now Bellingham Methodist and United Reform Church, Right: St Dunstan's Church

## Character area 2:

- Character area 2 comprises the area to the south of Southend Lane. This land was purchased with the northern triangular area of land, and had originally been reserved for private housing. It was then leased to a golf club, until in 1936 the LCC built an additional 555 dwellings on the site. This later part of the estate, on leftover land south of the earlier triangular area of Bellingham Estate, is also included in the ASLC boundary.
- It is of later date (1936) and of a separate design, with low blocks of flats rather than the cottages of the original Bellingham Estate design, and it contains more flats (60% flats, 40% houses) than the original Bellingham Estate, where only 20% of the units are flats.
- This later phase of the Bellingham Estate is visually related to character area 1, but also distinctive and interesting in its own right. It is composed of blocks of flats built sometimes in red-brown brick, and sometimes in London stock, with shared central entrances and tall, prominent chimney stacks. The blocks are two storeys tall with gambrel roofs containing a third storey of accommodation. As in character area 1, the blocks are organised around central courtyards, which have either been divided into private gardens (Lushington Road) or opened up as shared green spaces and parking (Thurban, Oslan, Dunfield Roads).
- Like in the earlier phase of Bellingham Estate, planting and green space were and still are important features of this part of the development. The blocks all have relatively large front gardens planted with trees, which effectively act as street trees. Swards, greens and planting create a very verdant, peaceful atmosphere, and on Southend Road, softens the impact of the busy, noisy

traffic and creates a pedestrian zone separated from the busy road by swards and hedges. There are also greens at the corner of Oakview and Lushington Rds, and at the corner of Lushington Road and Leaf Crescent. Hedge Walk is a planted pedestrian access route into this part of the Estate.



Character area 2. The corner of Sedgehill Road was originally part of the Estate, but is now occupied by the modern Watergate School and so has been excluded from the boundary.



Residential blocks of flats in character area 2, with shared courtyard garden and parking

## 2. Historical, social, cultural, archaeological interest

- **Link to the Garden City Movement:** The Garden City Movement was theorised by Ebenezer Howard in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century as an alternative to unrestrained, unplanned, crowded and unsanitary urban development. It was strongly supported by social reformers of the time and explored ways of building a new type of city which would solve the issues facing the rapidly urbanising, polluted, crowded industrial cities of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, where many lived in tenements with few shared facilities between several families. Building decent housing in peaceful, green and treed environments with defined areas for commercial and community activities, industry and residential neighbourhoods, were key elements of the movement.
- **New housing standards:** the Tudor Walters Committee on Working Class Housing report in 1918 recommended a new type of housing for the working classes. It was authored in part by Raymond Unwin, a proponent of the Garden City Movement (notably New Earswick Village, Letchworth Garden City and Hampstead Garden Suburb). Density should be no more than 12 dwellings per acre, houses should be 'parlour homes' with at least two bedrooms, 'of cottage appearance', with gardens front and back, a bathroom and a larder. The houses were to be built to improved standards in design and comfort. They were light and spacious, with one family to a house, and also included an indoor lavatory and bathroom. Each house was set in its own garden so that children could play outside in safe enclosed spaces. The layout of Bellingham was strongly influenced by the Garden City movement: the new homes were bright, airy, featured separate kitchenette and living room, and each had its own bathroom and flushing internal toilet, as well as both hot and cold water taps. The curved layouts of the streets allowed all houses to receive sunlight during the day. Trees, planting and gardens were carefully planned so that each cottage had a garden and residents had access to nature and trees in their immediate surroundings.
- **National housing policy:** Demographic pressures, rapid urbanisation and slum housing were already pressing concerns at the turn of the century, but the First World War meant very little building work took place in the second decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which severely exacerbated these issues. Furthermore, WWI revealed Britain to be a "C3 nation", referencing the many men who volunteered for the armed forces but were turned away because of ill health. Amidst general concerns over sanitation and health, the connection between inadequate housing and poor health could no longer be ignored. Lloyd George ran his interwar election campaign on "building a land fit for heroes to live in", and the interwar Housing Act (The 'Addison Act' of 1919) made local authorities responsible for the supply of houses for the less well off in need of accommodation, and enabled them to build it with central government funding. The LCC was quick to respond, building cottage estates on the outskirts of London, of which Bellingham is one example. This programme of state funding for these new estates was quickly scrapped in 1921 due to big spending cuts in a climate of severe economic hardship, but the first phase of Bellingham is one of the larger housing schemes and one of the rare few that was completed in its entirety almost to the original design. It is therefore an important early example of state-owned housing in planned estates that was brought into being by the Addison Act.

- Prior to WWI housing for working class families was built in tenement blocks, especially in London where land value and density was higher. The state financial assistance provided by the Housing Act of 1919 dictated that new council housing schemes had to take the form of suburban cottage estates. The LCC followed the principles encouraged by the Tudor Walters Report in its inter war estates and, for working class families used to living in crowded Victorian houses, often renting one or two rooms and sharing facilities with other tenants, the LCC estates were revolutionary in terms of comfort. Nevertheless, they were not accessible to all, as the rents remained quite high, and applicants had to prove they had regular income to pay for them. The LCC interwar cottage estates were also located far from central London. This meant that the provision of working class housing by the LCC in the suburbs only benefitted the top strata of that class, the artisan and skilled labourers who had regular employment rather than unskilled workers, who had to arrive to work sites very early in the morning to find employment, often before the workmen's trains arrived.
- The Fellowship Inn, renovated and reopened in 2019, was an essential social venue for the new estate. It is notable for being the first public house ever built on a London County Council estate, and dates from 1923-1924.
- It was said to have been used as a training base by the boxer Henry Cooper (though his main training happened at the Thomas A'Becket pub in the Old Kent Road) before his legendary boxing match in 1963 with Cassius Clay, later known as Muhammad Ali.
- The Fellowship Inn also hosted concerts in the 1960s by celebrated musicians including Fleetwood Mac, Eric Clapton, John Mayall's Blues Breakers, Yardbirds and Lonnie Donegan, amongst others.



Ongoing construction work on the Bellingham Estate in 1923. The houses have been completed but baths are outside waiting to be plumbed in and the road is still unmade. Source: Borough Photos

### 3. Townscape

- The influence of the Garden City Movement is clearly seen in the townscape of Bellingham Estate, with curving roads, ample swards and greens, trees and front and rear gardens. Though not all trees remain, the original distinctive layout and vision of the Estate has remained very well preserved. The principles of the Garden City Movement were promoted by Ebenezer Howard in his 1898 book, *To-morrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform*, and encouraged a Britain struggling with rapid urbanisation to build attractive green new towns and communities, as seen at Letchworth (1903), Hampstead Garden City (1906) and Welwyn (1920). The layouts diverged from the grid iron of streets required by C19th bylaws, and instead had curving and radiating streets incorporating green spaces.
- Bellingham Estate's layout was influenced by the constraints of railway lines on two sides, and also influenced by the need to provide relatively straightforward access to the 3 surrounding train stations (Bellingham, Lower Sydenham, Beckenham Hill). It was also influenced by the LCC's desire to

place the Green, designed to be the heart of the newly planned community, at the centre of the estate layout.

- One of the most recognisable townscape features of Bellingham's plan form is its approximate symmetry and sinuosity, with a central green, curving roads and a central spine road, allowing large numbers of cottages to have east west aspect and maximising their opportunity to receive sunlight.
- Bellingham Green is the heart of the estate, both geographically and socially, with six roads radiating out from the hexagon public open space that is the Green. Naming it "Green" and locating the Estate's public buildings around it suggests the influence of the traditional English village layout. The junction of King Alfred Avenue with Southend Lane creates a clearly defined entrance to the Estate.
- Three different carriageway widths were provided, for main roads, subsidiary roads and smaller roads that only provided access to houses. The building line was set back at least 10.6m from the middle of the road, allowing the houses on the wider roads to have larger front gardens and creating a sense of openness, but also creating a clear visual distinction between larger thoroughfares and smaller residential roads.
- The street layout was made even more spacious by public and private green spaces, and the use of swards and courtyards all over the estate, providing frontage for the cottages and amenity greens at the major road junctions. There are 15 open spaces around which houses are grouped, and at the bottom of Brookehowse Rd, near Southend lane, two swards face each other. Grouping cottages around amenity greens and courtyards at the front opened up the rear of these blocks to provide additional housing.



Aerial photograph of Bellingham, 1925  
Source: Borough Photos



Aerial photograph of Bellingham Estate, 1937. The second phase south of Southend Lane is mostly constructed.  
Source: Britain from Above, EPW056116

## 4.Landscape

Bellingham Estate was designed to accommodate large amounts of planting and trees, and swards were an important design feature of the Estate. Though some trees have been removed to make way for parking, the many swards, greens and the remaining street and front garden trees contribute to the peaceful residential character of the Estate and give it its distinctive verdant character. This is especially true on King Alfred Road, the spine road, which has retained several of its trees, now very large.

- Bellingham Estate was designed to accommodate large amounts of planting. 450 trees, 330 shrubs and 30,000 yards of hedges were planted as part of the development of Bellingham Estate. The many planted courtyards and swards of the Estate give the streets where they are located a sense of spacious, green openness, and where they are planted with trees in front of cottages, they create a verdant, village character.
- Bellingham Green places amenity and green space at the heart of the Estate and contains several large trees and a children's play area. The central green or square as a space for community, with roads radiating away from it, was a key feature of Garden City design.
- Allotments were located on the vacant public building plots in the centre of the Estate until the creation of the two residential blocks to the south of the Green in the postwar period. More allotments were created to take advantage of the block layout, with central green spaces in the middle of the blocks of cottages being shared as allotments, including at Firhill Road, Farmstead Rd and Broadmead Rd.

- Many of the new residents of the Estate had never previously had access to a garden of their own, and gardening was a popular pastime with early residents. Gardening clubs and gardening competitions were common to the LCC cottage estates.
- The Pool River runs parallel to the railway outside the ASLC boundary to the west, though it was never connected nor integrated with the estate design. It can be accessed by a bridge and an underpass from the Estate, crossing the railway to access the Waterlink Way, which follows the river.
- A playing field and a cricket ground, situated symmetrically on the west and east boundaries of the estate, also provided green and leisure space. The cricket ground is now also a playing field. The original sport & social facility, dating to 1932, with later additions from 1962 and a hall from 1977, were replaced with a modern leisure centre with facilities for different indoor and outdoor sports.
- There are also small, planted greens at each corner of the triangle formed by Brookehowse, Firhill Rds and Athelney St, which curve to soften the angles of the triangle.



- Trees were an important part of the estate. King Alfred Avenue was planted with a double row of Plane trees; Brookhowse, Firhill and Fordmill Roads with rows of Lime trees; and Randlesworth, Swallands, Overdown and Moremead roads with two types of trees each: Mountain Ash, Laburnum, Flowering Plum and Maples. Shrubs and trees were planted on the numerous amenity greens, and large trees on corner swards. Several of these trees, now large and gnarly with impressive canopies, remain today, providing shade and contributing to the peaceful, verdant character described above. It has been suggested that many trees were removed when the need for car parking became acute, as no provision had been made for car ownership when the Estate was designed.



## Summary of Significance

Bellingham Estate is a cottage estate, built by the LCC between 1920-1923 following the 1919 Housing Act ('The Addison Act') which enabled local authorities to build accommodation for working-class residents living in slum and unsanitary conditions, by providing state funding for a new building programme which started in 1920. Though the constrained financial conditions of the early 1920s led to the cancellation of this building programme soon after it started, Bellingham was completed in 1923, nearly to plan, with 2,088 new houses and flats. The layout of the estate and the design of the houses responded to the triangular geographical layout of the site and were inspired by the design principles of the Garden City Movement and the nationwide aspiration to improve the living conditions and health of the working class.

The Estate is notable for its large scale and the coherence of its architecture, simple in form, but with restrained decorative detailing to elevate it, interesting corner cottages with turrets and angled buildings, and 23 different plan forms slotted together to create different blocks of assembled cottages.

The layout of the Estate, its unusual triangular form, its central green and spine road, its curving roads with a hierarchy indicated by road sizes, all contribute to create an interesting urban layout. The many trees, swards, greens and gardens are integral to the design and create a peaceful, verdant residential environment. Combined with the cottage architecture, they gave the estate an almost village-like atmosphere, and denotes the influence of the Garden City Movement.

The Estate is also notable for how it provided for the needs of the residents, including planning for social and community venues, a central green, schools and shops. Bellingham Estate is home to the first ever public house built on a LCC Estate, the Fellowship Inn, which is grade II listed and interesting in its own right for its connection to boxer Henry Cooper and performances by celebrated

musicians over the decades.

Bellingham Estate should be recognised as an Area of Special Local Character because of its architectural, townscape and landscape qualities, and because of its interesting historic connections with evolving planning and housing standards of the early 20<sup>th</sup> C, with the Garden City Movement and with the London County Council.

## Issues, threats & opportunities

- Opportunity to encourage the retention of original architectural elements, such as brickwork, architectural details and passageways to the rear.
- Obscuring the brickwork with rendering or pebble-dashing is unfortunate, as it hinders the appreciation of the good quality brickwork and coherent detailing of the Estate.
- Retrofitting houses to improve their energy efficiency can be done in a number of different ways. Bellingham's houses could successfully accommodate solar panels as many houses have east or west facing roof slopes. External wall insulation would harm the coherent appearance of the estate, but this could be minimised by using a render colour that approximated to the colour of the brickwork or by using brick slips. Bellingham houses are of non-standard construction, built with a mix of concrete and bricks due to increasing financial constraints as the development progressed. Residents considering the installation of external wall insulation should therefore take a careful, well-researched approach to any retrofit project to ensure the retrofit measures are compatible with the historic fabric of the Bellingham Estate houses and flats.
- Some modern additions to the Estate are very different in style, height and materiality, and break the continuity and coherence of the Estate (e.g. Basing House on Southend Lane). On the other hand, some brick post war housing fits comfortably in scale, form and materiality within the original LCC housing, such as the two postwar blocks of flats on Bellingham Green.
- Some streets have lost all their trees, which is particularly harmful to the area's verdant, suburban character. There is an opportunity to encourage tree planting in the streets, to better reveal the original design of the Estate.
- The loss of soft planted front gardens in some streets (Northern half of Brookehowse Rd, eastern section of Athelney St, sections of Knapmill Rd and Firhill Rd) has resulted in very urban, hard landscaped environments, and has reduced the Estate's peaceful, verdant character. There is an opportunity to encourage the retention or reinstatement of planting to front gardens, particularly front hedges and small trees. Many front gardens are quite large and could accommodate both parking and planting to retain a soft, verdant character.
- Opportunity for a unified strategy for the maintenance and planting of the swards and greens throughout the Estate, as well as for enhancements of the central green.
- Opportunity for enhancement of shopfronts on Randlesdown road, to better reflect the historic character of the ASLC.