

Silk Mills Path 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.

Description of the area

Silk Mills Path is a pedestrianised street to the north of the railway arches crossing Lewisham Road and running towards the Ravensbourne River at its western end. It comprises two groups of well-preserved mid 19th C villas on the Path, set in green gardens and surrounded by mature trees, creating a peaceful atmosphere which contrasts with the busy Lewisham Road to the east and the dense, complex urban environment of the fast-changing Lewisham town centre to the south and west. The ASLC boundary also includes 2 terraces on Lewisham Road, one with ground floor shopfronts, as well as two remaining references to the former industrial past which Silk Mills Path was integrally connected to: the section of the Ravensbourne river to the West, and Eagle House to the North on Lewisham Way.

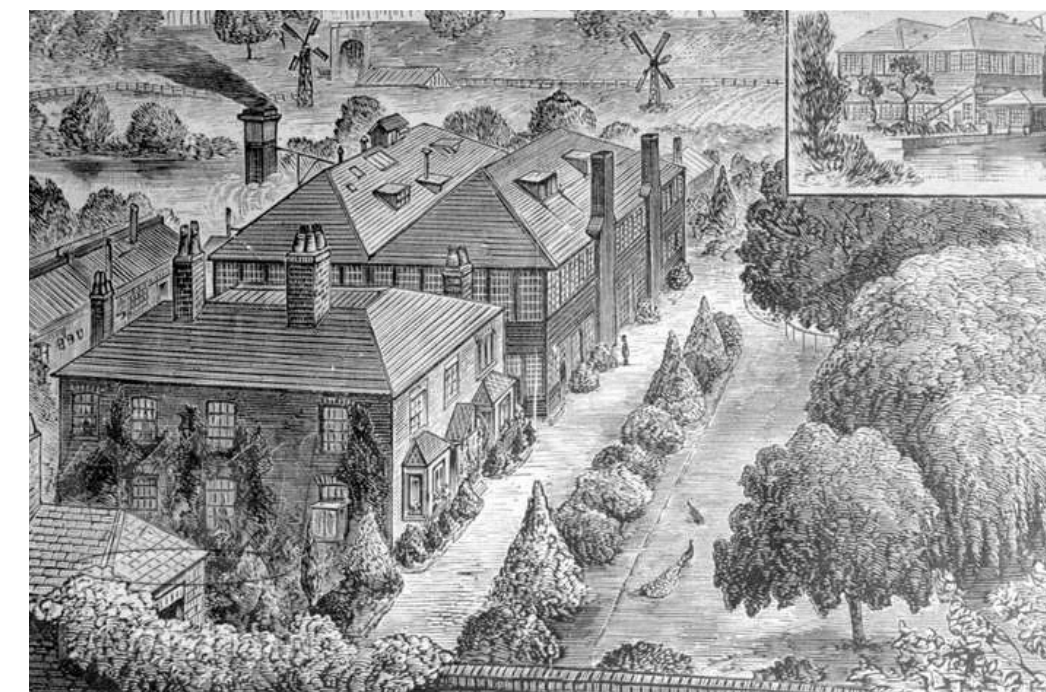
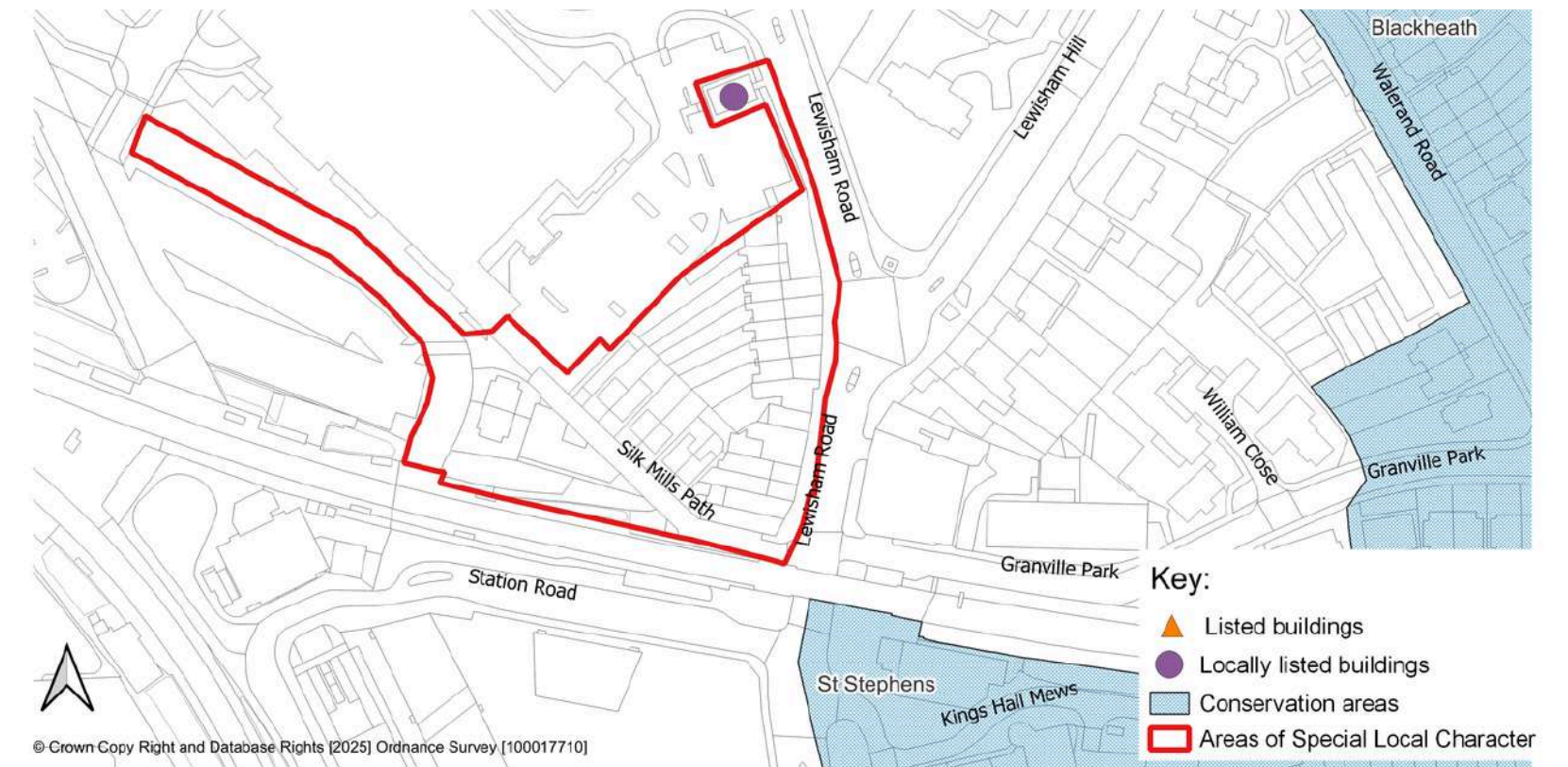
1. Architecture

The built form in this ASLC comprises a group of 1850s villas and terraces on two roads, Silk Mills Path and Lewisham Road.

Silk Mills Path comprises two groups of houses on two sides of a triangular piece of land with the railway running along the third side.

- On the west side, **1-2 Sharestead Villas**: two large villas, rendered white, in an Italianate style. The houses project in the centre, and have front bay windows.

Boundary Map



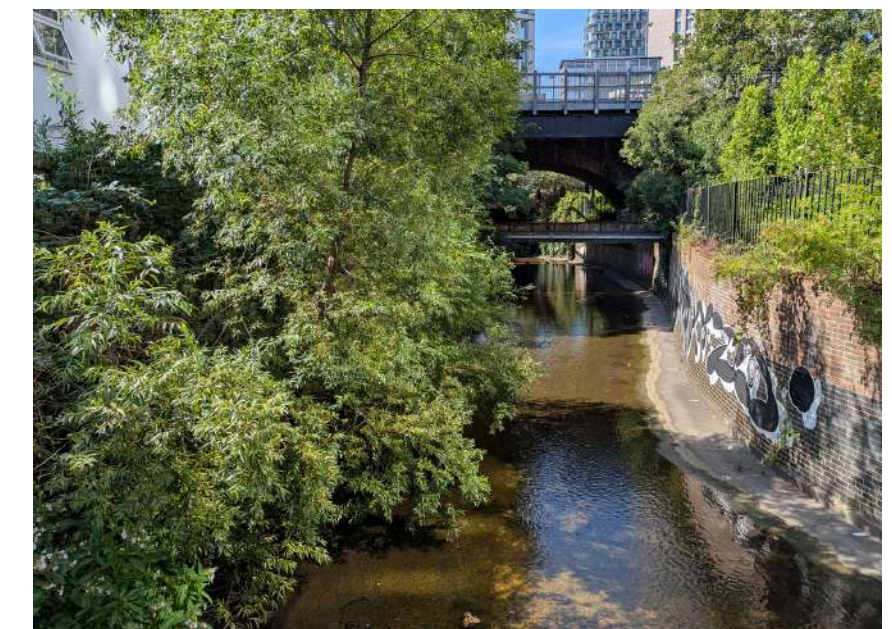
Engraving of the Lewisham Silk Mill, undated.
Source: Borough Photos

- On the north side, **1-6 St Germans Villas**: three two-storey paired villas with basements and dormers at roof level. These houses are quite narrow with entrances down the side elevation, and some have retained what appear to be original railings.

House – Office” on the front elevation. Only remnant of the historic brewery, present on maps as early as 1840. The brewery changed ownership and name to “Whitbread Brewery” in 1890, and continued in operation until the 1980s, when it was demolished to build the Tesco’s supermarket on the site.

Both groups are carefully detailed and well-preserved, with elaborate entablature lintels supported by curving brackets, moulded window architraves and projecting cills, and tall chimney stacks with chimney pots.

- **Waterloo Terrace** (308-322 Lewisham Rd): Terrace of eight 3 storey houses, mid to late 19th century, set at the back edge of pavement with shopfronts to all at ground floor, London roofs hidden behind parapet wall. Most of the buildings have elaborate architraves and entablature lintels, some supported by brackets, but all with slightly different detailing. This terrace has been substantially altered, with casement upvc windows and a variety of modern shopfronts and fascia signs, which make the historic buildings rather more difficult to appreciate.
- **Heath Terrace** (292-306 Lewisham Rd): built in 1854, this terrace of 8 houses, built in London stock brick, in Italianate style, set back behind front gardens, have slated shallow-pitched roofs with overhanging eaves and tall chimney stacks. They have elaborate entablature lintels and window surrounds supported by moulded cills and brackets, with grand entrance steps and porches surrounded by large columns. Most front gardens have been converted to parking, and several of the front steps and railings have been altered, but the houses are generally well preserved and seem to have retained original doors and windows.
- **Eagle House** (Lewisham Rd), former office of the H & V Nicholl’s Anchor Brewery, built in the late 1870s. Two storeys, brick and plasterwork with tall sash windows, decorative dentil plasterwork banding, an Eagle and “Eagle



Clockwise from top left: the Sharestead Villas, the St Germans Villas, the river Ravensbourne, and Heath Terrace

2. Historical, social, cultural, archaeological interest

Silk Mills Path: The name refers to the early mill history of the site: first recorded in the Domesday book in 1086, the silk mill probably started as a corn mill, then was recorded as an armoury mill to create high-quality armour for king Henry VIII, and later as a silk mill, though it only produced silk for a very short time before producing gold and silver thread, mostly for military/naval uniforms. The name provides the only reference to this important historic site, all the physical evidence having now been lost after the demolition of the last mill building c. 1937.

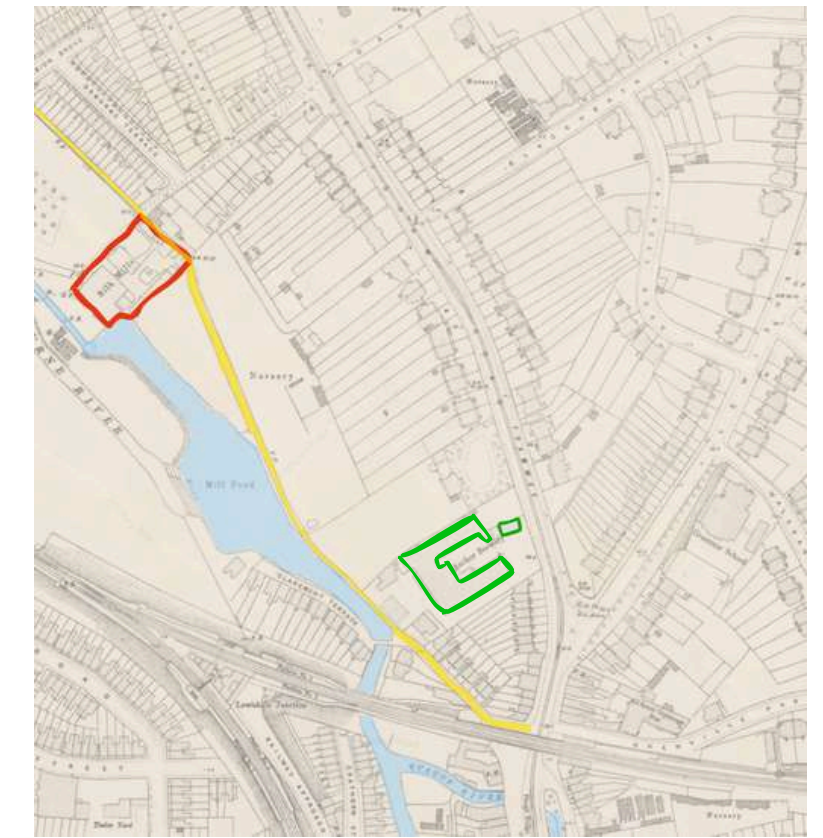
Area of Archaeological Priority: Mills played an important part in the early settlement of Lewisham as well as its industrial development in the 18th century. The Domesday Book in 1086 refers to eleven mills along the Ravensbourne. The Domesday mills probably originated as grain or corn mills, and later diversified to power a number of different industries. Mills powered by the River Ravensbourne remained a large part of the local economy and by the 18th and 19th century many different types of mill were in operation between Lewisham and Catford. Many of these later mills utilised or were rebuilt on the site of the earlier medieval mills. The area was subject to rapid industrial growth during the 18th and 19th centuries, leading to the amalgamation of the settlements of Catford and Lewisham. This period saw the increasing expansion of the mills of Lewisham and Catford, which were by this time producing a range of products including steel tools, weaponry, leather, mustard and corn/flour. Riverdale Mill is the only mill to survive, the rest of the mills between Lewisham and Catford have been demolished.

Anchor Brewery: Eagle House is the only surviving physical building connected to the longstanding and historic industrial uses of the area.

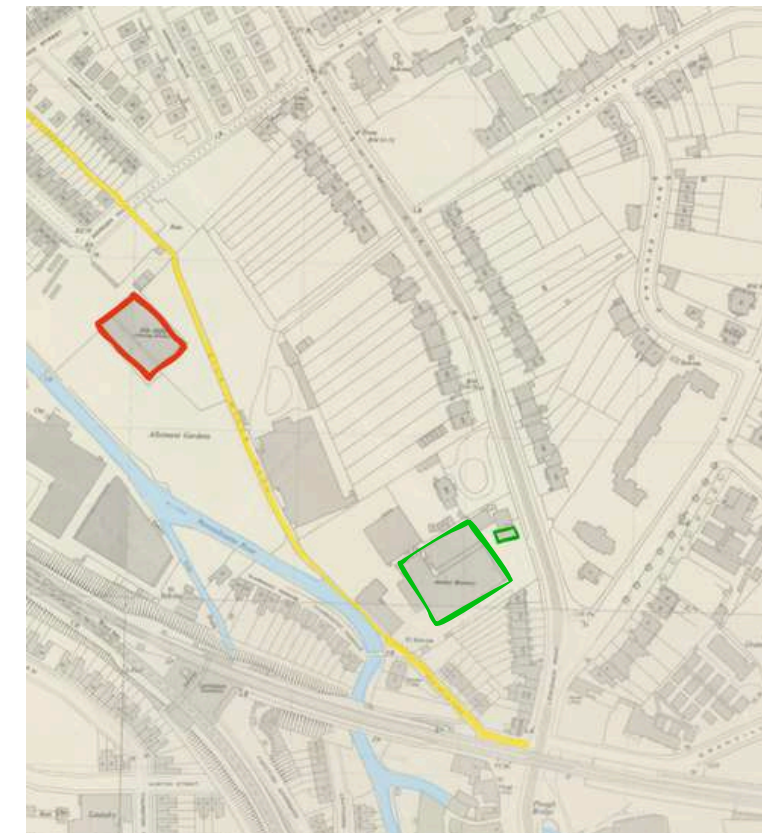
Historic maps showing the evolution of the river Ravensbourne and the mill pond (blue), the Silk Mills Path (yellow), the Anchor Brewery and Eagle House (green), and the Silk Mill (red).



1864 Stanford Library Map of London



1893-96 OS map



1940-60 OS map



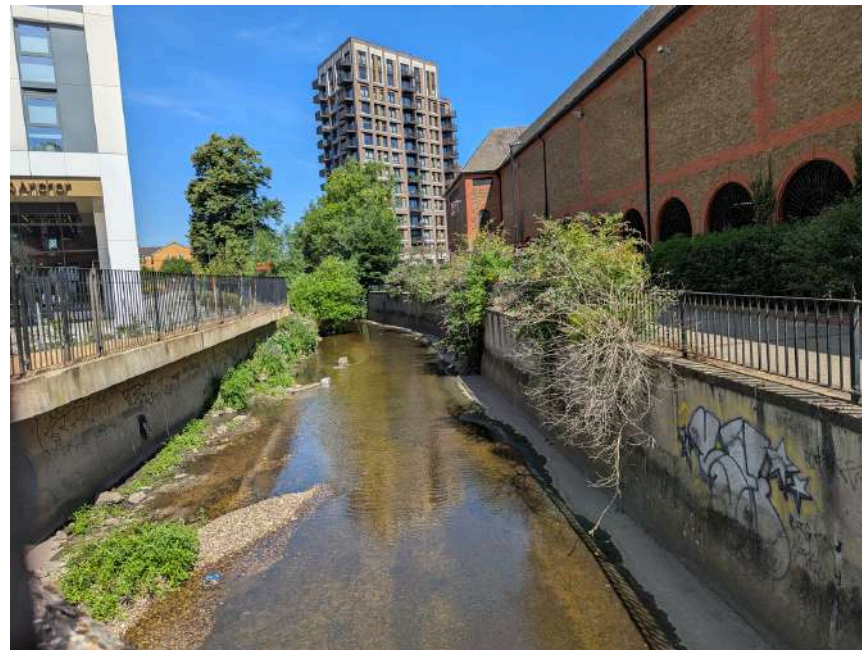
2025 OS map

3. Townscape

- Triangular layout created by the railway, the Sharestead villas and St Germans villas. The 1840 tithe map of the Parish of Lewisham indicates that the site of these villas was unbuilt land before the arrival of the railway in Lewisham in 1849. A pre-existing path to the silk mill existed, roughly following the path of Silk Mill Path today along the river, which historically led to the mill pond. The historic structures which would have contributed to the area's industrial character have now disappeared, including the mill building, the mill pond, the brewery, and the northern extent of Silk Mills Path. Historically, the Path extended from the railway arches at the rear of 320-322 Lewisham Road to the silk mill, located at the southern end of Morden Hill. On the other side of the mill, the passage connected to another footpath connected to a street called Albion Street, now called Nectarine Way.
- The centre of the triangle would historically have been the front garden and drive of the Sharestead Villas. Thanks to the presence of a mature tree, the green verges of the railway and the verdant front and rear gardens of the properties on Silk Mills Path, this area creates an attractive pocket of green and peacefulness in the busy Lewisham town centre.

4. Landscape

- The Ravensbourne river flows along the boundary and immediately to the South of the ASLC for several meters. The river was essential to the early history and development of Lewisham, and its industrial development in the 18th century, as it allowed the operation of mills in Lewisham over centuries. It is set in a deep channel lined with self-seeded vegetation and black metal railings. It is an important wildlife corridor, and while discreetly tucked away behind the Tesco superstore, it brings a much-needed pocket of green and blue natural environment to the town centre. The concrete channel with its deep overhang, the neglected planting and the presence of debris in the river give it a neglected appearance, and does not make the most of its historic and ecological importance.
- The course of the river has been modified over time, notably through the creation of the mill pond, visible in earlier historic maps. The stretch of Silk Mills Path that remains, at the rear of the Sharestead villas and in front of the Tesco superstore, is all that remains of the historic relationship between built form and the river, that was essential to the various industries on this site.
- The tall tree and shrubs in the open space, edged by Sharestead villas and St Germans villas, contribute to the green, peaceful character of the Silk Mills Path.
- The soft planted front gardens of the villas on Silk Mills Path provide a much needed pocket of peace and greenery in the very urban, busy centre of Lewisham.



The river Ravensbourne



Possible original railings on Silk Mills Path

Summary of Significance

The area is of heritage significance because it reveals the importance of River Ravensbourne to Lewisham's early history, first as a more rural site with mill activity powered by the river, and later with the expansion of the mill buildings, engineering of the waterways and arrival of other industries, including the brewery. These industrial buildings have now all disappeared through successive waves of redevelopment. The ASLC contains a number of reminders which evoke the area's distinctive history, including the name "Silk Mills Path", Eagle House, and the remaining C19th houses. This knowledge of Lewisham's past industrial and rural history should be preserved and shared, to increase awareness of the richness and diversity of Lewisham's history and built heritage.

The historic evolution of the area also indicates how much human activity shaped the river, with the course of the Ravensbourne being altered over time and the mill pond created to power the armoury, then silk, mill. The rivers of Lewisham town centre powered development in the area since at least the Domesday Book in 1086, when Lewisham was associated with 11 mills. These mills probably originated as grain or corn mills and remained a large part of the local economy. By the 18th and 19th century many different types of mills were in operation between Lewisham and Catford, producing a range of products including steel tools, weaponry, leather, mustard and corn/flour. Many of these later mills utilised or were rebuilt on the site of the earlier medieval mills. Riverdale Mill is the only mill to survive in the town centre, the rest were demolished.

In the second half of the 19th century, the rapidly expanding urban form and industry was still surrounded by fields and orchards, and Silk Mills Path was lined with trees. The historic villas of Silk Mill Path are the only parts of the

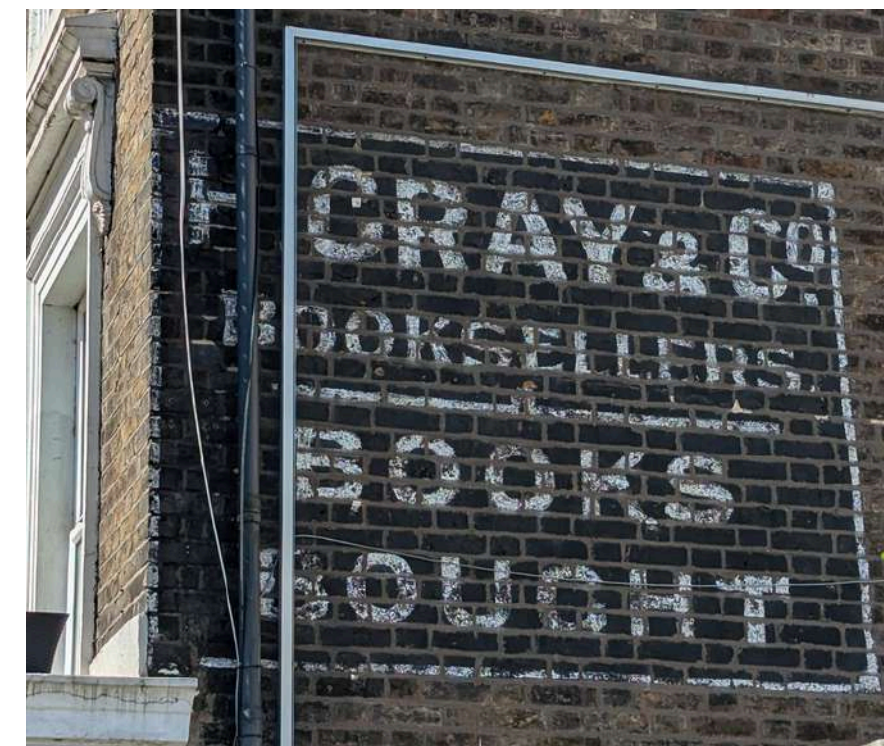
ASLC to have retained significant greenery, in the form of front gardens and street trees. This creates a peaceful pocket of calm, green space and contrasts with the traffic of Lewisham Road, and the busy activity of Lewisham station and Lewisham town centre. The natural environment was historically much more apparent than today, the river now being tucked away between modern buildings, and trees being few and far between.

Features of Interest

- Ghost sign on the side of 308 Lewisham Road, indicating "Gray & Co. Booksellers. Books bought"

Issues, threats & opportunities

- Eagle House is completely disconnected from its historic context – knitting it back into future re-development of this site and greening its immediate setting would be beneficial.



Ghost sign on the side of 308 Lewisham Road, indicating "Gray & Co. Booksellers. Books bought"

- Modern window replacements (upvc) and aluminium shopfronts lack traditional elements such as stallrisers on Waterloo Terrace. Reintroducing historic shopfronts, revealing historic brickwork concealed by modern render, reintroducing lost window surrounds and cills, and reinstating timber sliding sash windows here would improve the readability of the historic architecture.
- Loss of front gardens due to off-street parking in Heath Terrace has diminished the appreciation of the historic design of the 1850s terrace. Providing parking in a predominantly soft landscaped front garden would go some way to restoring the green setting of the houses.
- Parking spaces in Silk Mills Path creates a large area of hard landscaping, with timber posts and metal link chains adding visual clutter. Better integration into the natural and historic environment would be beneficial.
- Modern red and brown pavers on Silk Mills Path: this is not in keeping with the historic environment, reinstating historic paving materials or granite setts would be more appropriate for this important historic streetscape.
- Opportunities to enhance the river and channel, and to highlight its vital historical and ecological importance to Lewisham town centre, should be explored.
- Setting: the modern, unsympathetic roof extension to the rear of 320-322 Lewisham Road looms over the historic architecture. The intense redevelopment of Lewisham Town Centre means that the immediate historic setting of the ASLC has been severely eroded. This trend is set to continue, with the likely redevelopment of the Tesco superstore and parking lot – care should be taken to respond to the grain and scale of the ASLC, and opportunities should be explored to enhance the historic environment, and incorporate Eagle House into newly developed streets and spaces



Eagle House, the only remaining building of the Anchor Brewery



Eagle House, 1985, in the Whitbread Bottling Plant (formerly Anchor Brewery)

Source: breweryhistory.com/wiki/index.php/Nicholl_Ltd



1937 Photo of the Lewisham Silk Mill, prior to demolition

Source: Borough Photos