

Sydenham Ridge 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.

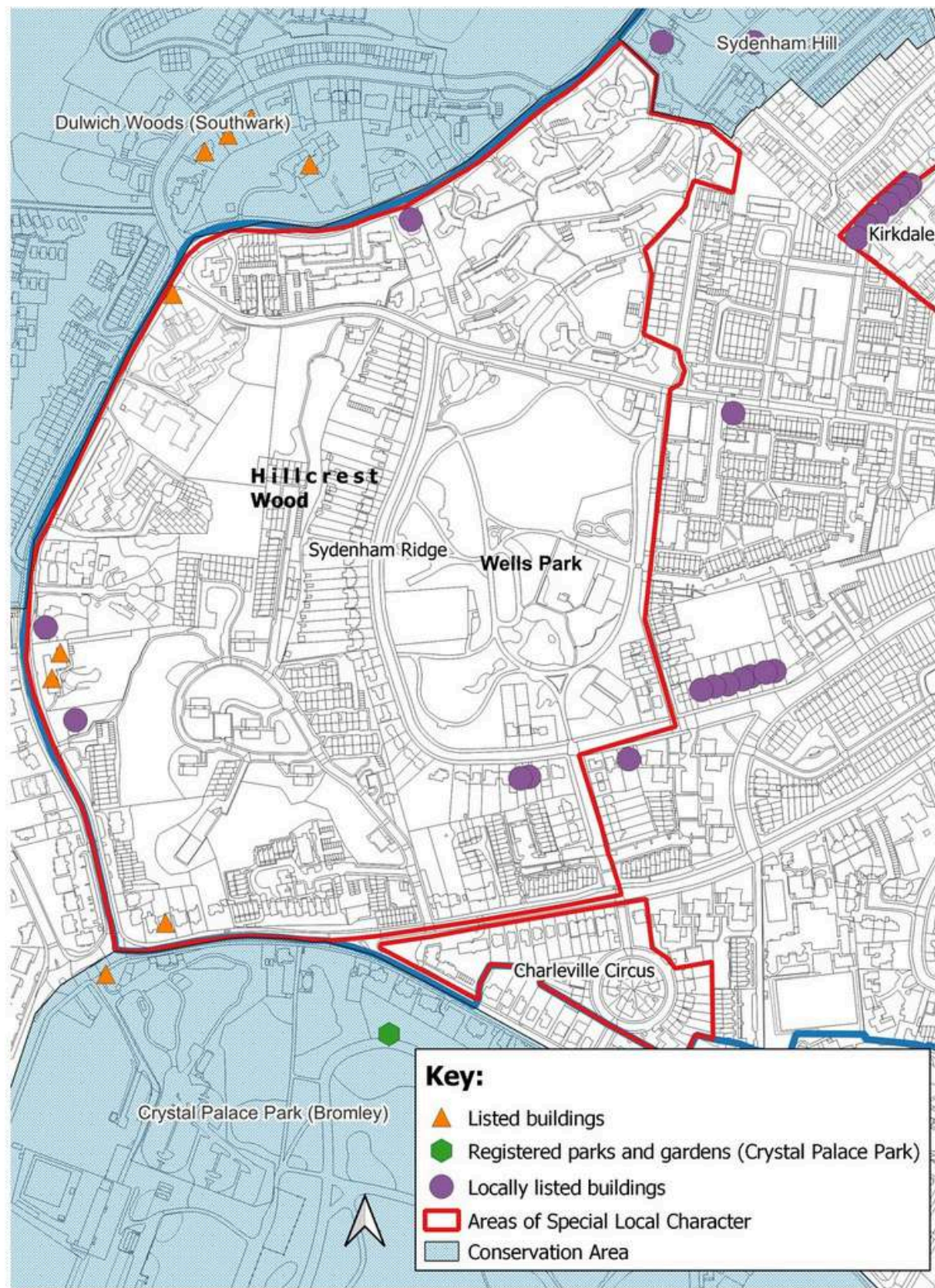
Description of the area

Sydenham Ridge ASLC lies on the upper east facing slope of the Ridge and includes the area between the Sydenham Hill and Longton Avenue, and Hillcrest Wood. Hillcrest Wood is a remnant of ancient woodland, once part of the Great North Wood, within which the Hillcrest housing estate has been built. Some fine old oak and sweet chestnut trees link back to this time. The ASLC contains several groups of historic buildings of different periods with interesting historic and social connections.

1. Architecture

- A coherent group of villas in Longton Avenue inspired by the Arts & Crafts movement: 59-93 is a group of symmetrical pairs with hung tiles, projecting two storey bays topped by gables, shared large central chimney stacks, recessed side porches under a brick arch and oriel windows. They are set in deep soft planted front gardens and staggered to embrace the curve of the road, and the topography.
- Westwood Hill & Sydenham Hill comprise a group of substantial 19th C houses with expansive gardens (12, 14, 16, 18 Sydenham Hill, 28, 94-100, 104, 106 and 108 Westwood Hill), two of which are statutorily listed (16 Sydenham Hill and 10 Westwood Hill) and several of which are locally listed (14 and 18 Sydenham Hill). Several of the oldest buildings on Sydenham Hill were built early to mid 19th century. Nos. 14, 16 and 18 are

Boundary Map



substantial, high-status houses set in large gardens, and are all present on early maps of the area (1863 OS map). 16 used to be called The Wood, and 14 was called the Firs. 16 is thought to have been built in the mid 19th century, possibly incorporating an early 19th century house in its design. The left side of the building is thought to have been altered by Sir Joseph Paxton c.1855, the celebrated architect of the Crystal Palace, and between 1858-1869 it was inhabited by Lady Ann Hunlocke (Lady Scarisbrick in 1860), a close friend of Duke of Devonshire who was a patron of Paxton. The house is also associated with Sir Alfred Newton, Lord Mayor of London 1899 – 1900, who lived there between 1897 – 1901, and as a magistrate, on 20 October 1920, sentenced suffragette Sylvia Pankhurst to 6 months for sedition. It is understood that 16 Sydenham Hill is also associated with the Beatles, who held a party to celebrate the first birthday of Apple Records at the house.

- More diverse buildings comprise:
 - Locally listed Walter Segal self build houses (17a & b Longton Avenue)
 - Former Upper Sydenham train station, now converted to residential, at 151 Wells Park road, and the entrance to the defunct railway tunnel.
 - Dome Hill Park: an eclectic mix of 1960s large villas built in different styles in the grounds of 18 Sydenham Hill

2. Historical, social, cultural, archaeological

- Sydenham Hill was part of the old London to Dover Road, an important historic road to the coast and further, and its links with the continent. Roman artefacts have been found along the ridge highlighting historic activities in the area.
- The area has a historical connection to the now defunct Chatham-Dover railway which connected the Upper Sydenham station with the High-Level Station at Crystal Palace, both now closed. The Upper Sydenham station building remains in situ, as does the tunnel (though not accessible to the public). The arrival of the Crystal Palace to Sydenham in 1854 was

important to the development of the area, and attracted speculative residential development in the areas surrounding Crystal Palace Park.

- A 1980s example of the self build movement is at 17a & b Longton Avenue: they were designed by the pioneering architect Walter Segal to allow residents to easily build their own dwellings at an affordable cost.



The transmitting station at Crystal Palace Park



Entrance to the redundant railway tunnel



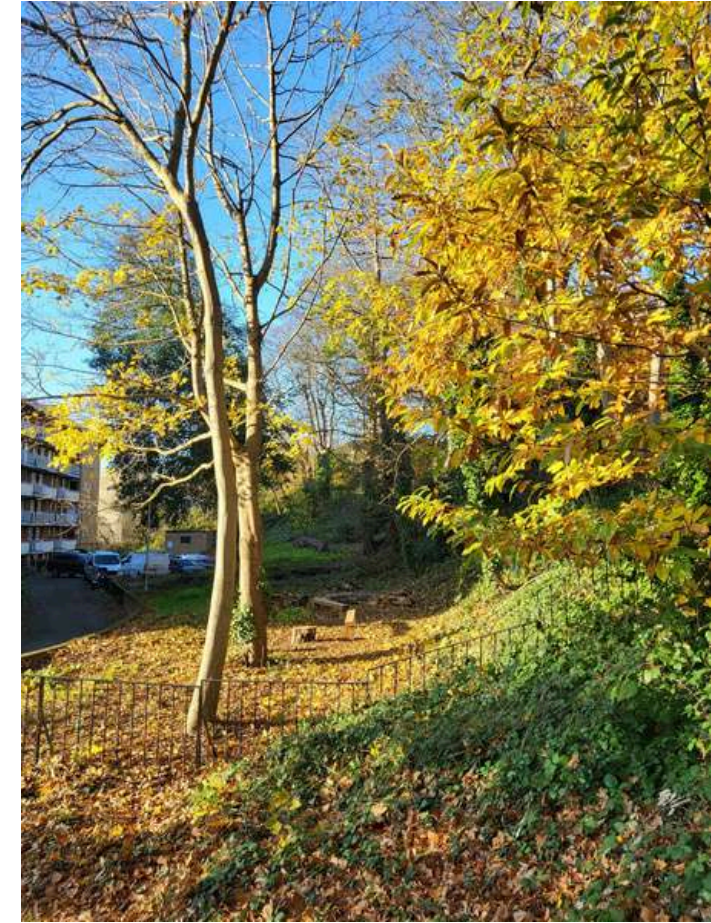
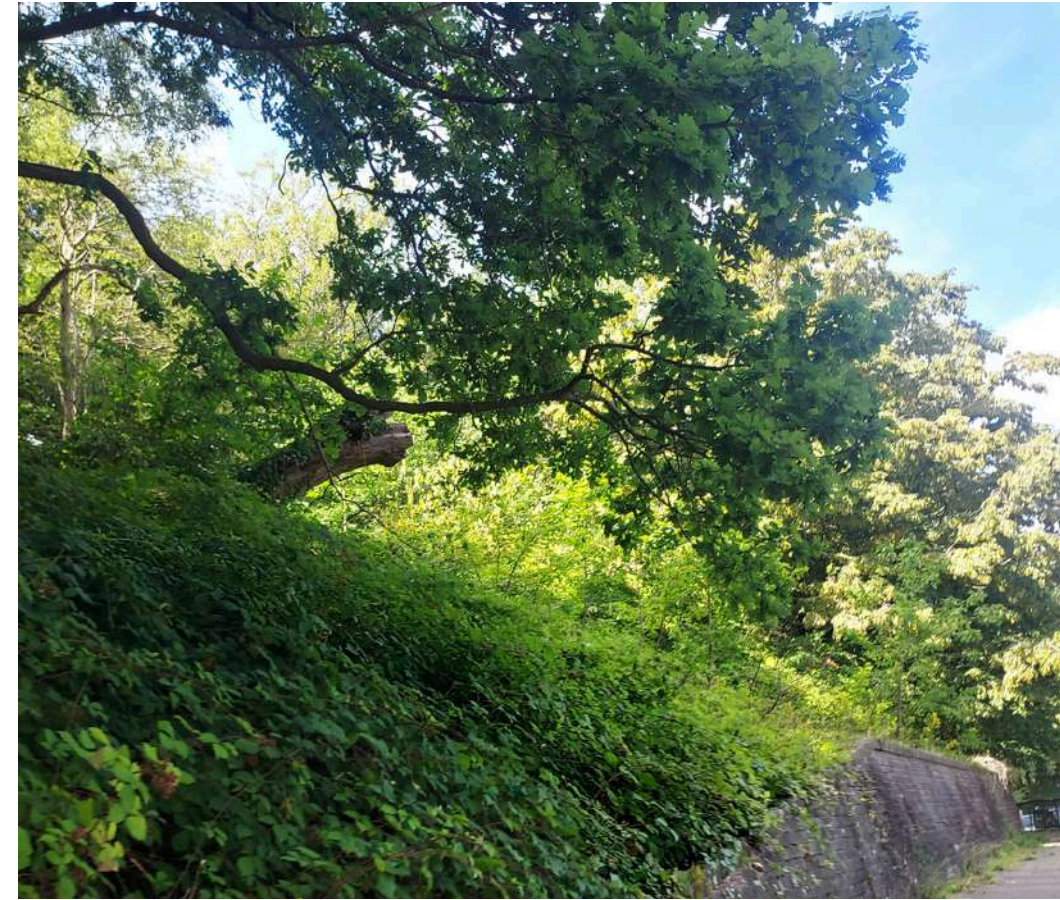
Former Upper Sydenham train station, 151 Wells Park Road

3.Townscape

- Sydenham Hill – a long linear route which runs along the crest of the Sydenham Hill Ridge, responding to this locally important geological feature and bounded on its west side by Sydenham Hill Wood.
- Longton Avenue has a very coherent pattern of buildings of similar scale, set behind large front gardens, with deep rear gardens and with many mature trees in gardens and on the street. The northern end has an attractive curve around the edge of Sydenham Wells Park and the houses (nos 59-93 Longton Avenue) form a coherent group with Arts and Crafts characteristics, with reference to cottage typologies (roughcast render, multi paned casement windows, tile hanging) and their substantial front gardens. The layout benefits from the topology which results in the houses being slightly elevated above their front gardens.

4.Landscape

- The Sydenham Ridge is part of a more extensive system of connected geological ridges; to the South, the Northwood Ridge with Crystal Palace Park, to the North the Greensand Ridge with One Tree Hill. Sydenham Ridge is one of the highest natural points in the London landscape, 112m at the top of Wells Park Road/Sydenham Hill. It is part of the ancient landscape of the Great North Wood with remnant ancient woodland at Hill Crest Estate Ancient Woodland SINC, located on the slope between Sydenham Hill and Longton Avenue. The Woodland Trust states that only 2.5% of the UK is covered by ancient woodland today, making Hillcrest Woods a rare and valuable natural environment nationwide.
- The wider Sydenham Ridge area supports a well treed and wooded landscape, which includes Sydenham Wells Park and extends more widely to the Horniman Gardens in Lewisham, and also Low Cross, Dulwich Wood and Sydenham Hill Wood, and the Old and New Camberwell Cemeteries in Southwark, as well as Crystal Palace Park in Bromley. The oldest Tree Preservation Order in the Borough is in Sydenham Ridge, TPO n. 2 dated



Trees and vegetation on the Hillcrest and Sydenham Hill Estates



Well treed landscape, with views across London from the Ridge



1957, at St Clements Heights.

- The Hillcrest Estate on High Level Drive is a post-war residential development (1967) organised in small maisonettes and 5 large tower blocks. While the architecture itself is not particularly interesting, the surrounding green environment on the steep inclines of the hill, the many mature trees and large gardens surrounding the tower blocks, especially Cambria House and Targwin House, give the impression of a residential development set inside a forest. This impression is reinforced when taking the small pedestrian paths through the steep and densely wooded site to climb to Sydenham Hill.
- Longton Avenue has a very coherent pattern of large street trees, green verges, large front gardens and rear gardens with many mature trees forming part of the SINC. The steepness of the front gardens in Longton Avenue makes these gardens very visible from the street, increasing their contribution to the street scene.
- The remnant of the Great North Woods are home to a variety of wildlife species, including Pipistrelle bats, birds including robin, nuthatch, lesser

spotted woodpecker, tits, goldcrests, tree creepers, mistle thrushes, sparrowhawks, tawny and little owls, kestrels, firecrests, common redstarts, common buzzards and ravens. Stag beetles, native to the area, are found in the area, and are under threat.

- The staggered layout of the buildings of the Sydenham Hill Estate allows long views towards the Southeast, glimpsed between buildings. The estate also contains tall, mature trees in a grassy landscape, some of which are taller than the buildings. These also serve to connect the estate to the remnants of the Great North Wood.
- Similarly, gaps between buildings on Sydenham Hill on the top of the ridge allow long views towards the south east, and in some cases, the Crystal Palace Park transmitting station is visible and prominent.
- Sydenham Ridge is also a prominent landscape feature within wider South London, and is visible for miles around.
- Water is a defining geological and historic feature of Sydenham Ridge. Rivers used to flow on open ground on both sides of the ridge, and still flows openly in Dulwich Woods. As clay is impermeable, and the hill comprises clay topped by gravel, rain water goes through the gravel but sits on top of the clay and finds its way out down the hill, creating wells and streams. These waterways may not all have been flowing at all times. They then converged toward the east end of Sydenham Wells Park and into Jews Walk. Some of these rivers have now been culverted into drains and are no longer visible, but the flowing water of the pools in High Level Drive and Sydenham Wells Park are evidence of this important natural resource, connected with the earliest form of development in this part of the borough. Cottages with wells were the only buildings on Sydenham Common before its enclosure in 1812. Most of these cottages were located near Wells Park Road and Taylor's Lane for well-keepers and visitors. The wells, considered to be medicinal springs since the 17th century, attracted visitors from London (Sydenham was in Kent

at the time), including King George III, coming to take the waters. The historical connection of the area with water is commemorated in the name of Sydenham Wells Park. Today, rushing water can still be heard from manhole covers around the area. It is understood that the Sydenham Hill Estate, with its unusual butterfly shaped buildings, was constructed as such to allow for the natural water flows around the estate and down the hill.

Summary of Significance

Sydenham Ridge is an important natural and historic suburban landscape. The area was identified in the GLC Greater London Development Plan (GLDP) for its importance in views in the south east of London. Its importance to the borough was noted in subsequent borough plans. The ASLC research and nomination recognises and confirms the local importance of Sydenham Ridge.

The built form in the ASLC comprises several phases of residential development with varied architectural form, dating from the early/mid 19th century to the later 20th century. They are notable through their incorporation into and amongst a well treed landscape.

The area has historic significance through its connection to the 1852 relocation of the Crystal Palace to upper Sydenham and the associated railway provision and suburban development, as well as to the architect Walter Segal and self-build housing.

The ASLC has an elevated position which allows far reaching views across London to the southeast and northeast. Its ancient woodland has been recognised with a SINC designation. The topography has a strong influence on the layout and routes through the area. The presence of many tall mature trees and other dense vegetation within and just outside the boundary of the ASLC create a strong woodland character which is unique in the borough.



Undated postcard of Sydenham Wells Park. Source: Borough Photos

Features of Interest

- Bridge House Estates boundary stone at the entrance of High Level Drive from Westwood Hill. The Bridge House Estate (now City Bridge Foundation) was set up to maintain London's historic Thames bridges, and owned land and considerable resources to carry out this duty.

Issues, threats & opportunities

- Pressure for development in gardens that impact the flow of water and remove vegetation and trees: hard landscaping, garden outbuildings, annex extensions, office/cabins resulting in loss of space for large canopy trees at the ends of gardens.
- Reduction of garden area as a result of houses being enlarged or redeveloped on a larger footprint.
- Subdivision of gardens as a result of houses being divided into flats - gradual degradation of tree cover from post-development pressures.
- Ageing tree population, opportunity for a tree management and consistent replanting strategy to preserve the woodland character.
- Climate change and new diseases reducing tree health, making them more susceptible to decay.
- Tree removal associated with subsidence claims.
- Lack of shops and commercial activity in the area, with little active street frontages. Appropriate locations for additional ones should be explored.
- Loss of architectural features in historic properties, including original timber doors and windows, slate roofs, ridge tiles, finials, and replacement with inappropriate modern materials (upvc windows and doors, concrete roof tiles).
- Uncomfortable pedestrian experience on Sydenham Hill, Westwood Hill and Wells Park Rd due to busy traffic. Opportunities for improvements of the pedestrian and cycling routes.

- Opportunity for improving access and signage for access to the woodland.



Bridge House Estates boundary stone (High Level Drive/Westwood Hill entrance)