

Blackheath Park

Conservation Area Appraisal



2013 

Blackheath Park Conservation Area Appraisal

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I. Introduction

Between 1968 and 1970 the Council designated three conservation areas covering Greenwich and Blackheath. In a boundary review carried out in 2002, Blackheath was subdivided into two separate conservation areas, known as Blackheath and Blackheath Park. Blackheath Park was designated as a conservation area in 2002 and is one of five conservation areas in the western part of the London Borough of Greenwich for which Conservation Area appraisals are being prepared.

This report was produced by Urban Practitioners for the London Borough of Greenwich and English Heritage. A companion report, Greenwich and Blackheath Conservation Areas Management Strategy and Conservation Guidance, complements this study.

Blackheath Park: Definition of special interest

Blackheath Park Conservation Area covers an area that was the southern and larger part of a rural estate bordering the Heath. Wricklemarsh House was built here in 1724. It was dismantled in 1787 by John Cator and development under leaseholds began in earnest from about 1820 in response to demand for suburban housing in and close to Blackheath Village. By the end of the nineteenth century, most of the land was being occupied, and included street frontage homes and small mansions with grounds. In the twentieth century, many of the grounds were turned over to smaller scale housing, and a few earlier properties were demolished in the process. Significantly, no access was ever provided across the eastern boundary of the estate.

The special significance of the area comes from the quality and diversity of its housing, ranging from grand Georgian and Victorian villas to compact flats. Some of the designs are progressive, extrovert and highly personal; others are highly conservative and retiring.

A signature quality of Blackheath Park is the harmonious relationship between dwellings and landscape on the long

and broad tree-lined avenues that run through the area and in the post-war estates.

Part of Blackheath Village is in the conservation area and its eastern roads, Bennett Park and Cresswell Park, are nineteenth century developments and are much more urban in character.

The majority of the conservation area is typified by:

- Roads with restricted access and large historic or bespoke twentieth century detached houses;
- Wide, tree-lined avenues with broad, soft verges; and
- Residential character that has, largely due to the lack of ancillary activities and poor connectivity to the east resulted in a quiet and suburban quality. This has combined with the area's rich architectural history to create a sense of grandeur and exclusivity.





Spire of St Michael and All Angels' Church



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Figure 1.1 Blackheath Park Conservation Area

Blackheath Park Conservation Area Appraisal

2. Planning policy context

This appraisal is a non-statutory planning document but it relates to, and should be read with, current national, regional and local planning policy.

The key documents are referred to below.

National planning policy

Since 1967 there has been a legal duty for all local authorities to designate as conservation areas those parts of its area that are of "special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance". There are currently 20 conservation areas in the London Borough of Greenwich.

Many conservation areas, but not all, are centred on listed buildings. English Heritage lists buildings of special architectural or historic interest on behalf of the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport. The Secretary of State is also responsible for the scheduling of ancient monuments and the registering of historic parks and gardens.

Planning Policy Statement PPS5, Planning for the Historic Environment, sets out current national policy on conservation.

Regional policy

The principal regional policy is contained within the Mayor of London's London Plan (the Spatial Development Strategy). The Mayor undertakes to work with strategic partners to protect and enhance London's historic environment (Policy 4B.10) and expects Boroughs to ensure that the protection and enhancement of historic assets in London is based on their special character (Policy 4B.11). The Plan also includes a commitment to protecting world heritage sites and safeguarding or enhancing their settings (Policy 4B.13). The London Plan also contains proposals for

protecting and managing strategic views, including those of central London from Greenwich Park and Blackheath Point.

The Mayor has produced a draft replacement London Plan, which was open for public consultation between October 2009 and January 2010. The policies addressing the historic environment in the draft replacement London Plan are broadly in line with those contained in the consolidated London Plan (2008). The draft replacement London Plan will undergo an Examination in Public in the summer and autumn of 2010, with the Mayor looking to publish the replacement London Plan towards the end of 2011.

Local policy

Greenwich Council has started work on a new statutory plan, the Local Development Framework (LDF). This will comprise a suite of documents that will eventually replace the current Greenwich Unitary Development Plan (UDP).

The Greenwich UDP was adopted in 2006 and in July 2009 the Government Office for London (GOL) issued a direction to extend the life of most of the UDP policies and site proposals.

The UDP contains detailed policies for the period to 2011 and in some instances to 2016.

The following policies are of particular relevance to development in and around conservation areas.

D16 Planning permission will only be granted for proposals which preserve or enhance the character or appearance of conservation areas, taking into account local scale, the established pattern of development and landscape, building form and materials. Where the character of a conservation area is threatened by inappropriate development, the Council will seek to

control these through the use of Article 4 Directions. Development on sites in the vicinity of a conservation area and which would have a visual effect on its character or appearance, should respect the setting of that area.

The UDP also contains specific policies for siting telecommunications equipment and satellite dishes, as well as for the design of shopfronts, signs, street furniture and advertisements.

D17 Demolition of buildings and structures which positively contribute to the character or appearance of a conservation area will be resisted. Conservation Area Consent for the demolition of buildings will normally be given only when planning permission has been granted for redevelopment which complies with the requirements of Policy D16. When demolition is permitted it will be subject to the building remaining until a contract for redevelopment is let.

D18 There will be a presumption in favour of the preservation of listed buildings. Listed Building Consent will only be granted for demolition or partial demolition in exceptional circumstances and will be assessed against the following criteria:

- i. the condition of the building and the cost of repairs relative to its importance.
- ii. the adequacy of efforts made to retain the building in use.
- iii. the merits of alternative proposals for the site.

D21 Proposals for changes of use of listed buildings will only be granted planning permission if it is no longer in its original or other established historic use and the new use is beneficial to the building and is compatible with its character and features of historic interest. Such a change of use should not conflict with other policies in the Plan.

D22 The Council will assist English Heritage to maintain and revise regularly a Register of Listed Buildings at Risk from neglect and decay. The Council will promote action, including the use of building repair notices and urgent works notices where appropriate, to bring about the reuse and repair of buildings on the register.

D23 The Council will give substantial weight to protecting and conserving the special character of buildings on the Local List of Buildings of Architectural or Historic Interest, with every effort made to secure their long-term retention, maintenance and use.



Blackheath Park and St Michael and All Angels' Church

3. Historical development

This section draws on the extensive research and publications by Neil Rhind and Julian Watson.

Records show that Wricklemarsh was a formal estate or manorial holding at the time of the Domesday survey of 1086. Up to the eighteenth century the Blackheath Park area was open countryside and common pasture, with the hamlet of Lee to the south west as the main concentration of buildings. The notable exceptions were Morden College founded as almshouses in 1695 by Sir John Morden (1623-1708) and Wricklemarsh Manor, purchased as an extension to the Morden estate. Morden College survives, and adjoins this conservation area's northeast boundary.

Wricklemarsh was sold in 1721 to Gregory Page, a local landowner and brewer, who commissioned the architect John James (1673-1746) to build a grand Palladian mansion within 80 acres of formal landscape. James's house was built in 1723 on the high ground between the Upper and Lower Kid Brook. It was positioned as the centrepiece of two broad avenues to the front and rear of the house. Two ponds or ornamental waters were placed within the avenues in the valleys of the two brooks.

By 1783 Page's descendants no longer needed the house and about 280 acres of the estate, including the present conservation area, were sold again, this time to a wealthy timber merchant, John Cator. As Cator already occupied a large house at Beckenham Place, he dismantled the mansion in 1787, and leases for development bordering the Heath were let soon after.

The mansion stood at the present-day crossroads of Blackheath Park, Pond Road and Foxes Dale. The first new house in the area was built in 1787 on the western edge of the estate, using building materials from Wricklemarsh ruins. It overlooked the small village of Blackheath beyond the Upper Kid Brook, and had a large lawn to the south, next to which Blackheath Park came

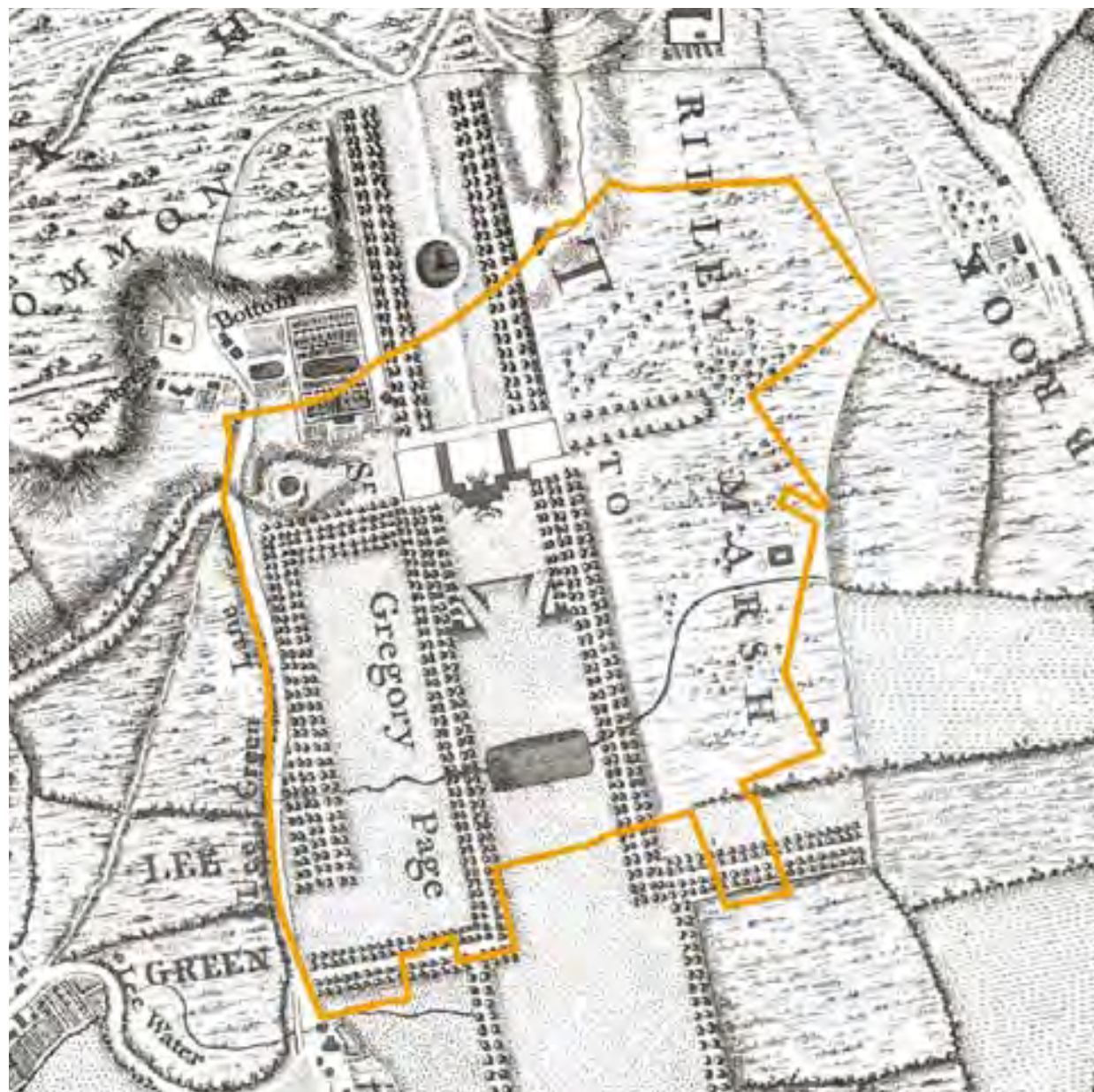


Figure 3.1 Blackheath Park Conservation Area overlay on John Rocque's map of 1746
Wricklemarsh House is in the middle, with the round pond to the north and the ornamental lake, served by the Upper Kid Brook to the south.

to be built. The house and its lawn survive today as part of St Mary's Presbytery, the sole eighteenth century building in the conservation area.

The form of development of the present conservation area was mediated throughout the nineteenth century and beyond by the Cator family's practices in issuing leases. Significant leasing of small parcels of land for house building began around 1820 and, in the course of the nineteenth century, gave the conservation area much of its basic layout.

The earliest development was close to the village; six large semi-detached houses west of Park House on Cresswell Park, and some terraced houses on Lee Road, between the Upper Kid Brook and the entrance to Blackheath Park, followed by terraces round the corner in Blackheath Park itself.

The 1820s saw the development of substantial villas on generous plots along Lee Road, Blackheath Park and part of Pond Road. The estate's principal landmark, now St Michael and All Angels' Church, was built in 1830 to the designs of George Smith, Surveyor to the Modern College Trustees, whose own surviving Italianate villa on Brooklands Park had been completed a few years earlier. Several further mansions with grounds were added in the 1820s on land south of Blackheath Park followed by villas on the east side of Pond Road as far as the pond.

The North Kent railway, built in 1849 along the Upper Kid Brook valley, was placed in a tunnel to protect Morden College, allowing Morden Road to enjoy uninterrupted access to the Heath. The line to Bexleyheath was tunnelled under Blackheath Park in the 1890s.

In the Village, major changes occurred between the 1860s and 1890s with the building of large banks and cultural buildings. Bennett Park was slowly developed, concluding with the Arts Club building. Shop fronts

facing the station were added over the gardens of the original houses. The Village section of the conservation area reached its present form by the end of the century.

Of several early nineteenth century lodges to the estate, only the one along Manor Way remains today. The remnant of the Wricklemarsh rectangular pond, and two other lakes on the course of the Lower Kid Brook were an important element in the semi-rural landscape. The roads created in the nineteenth century continue to play an influential role in the character of the conservation area.

With the exception of five surviving Edwardian houses built prior to the First World War, little changed in the early twentieth century. By the 1930s, it was clear that the large landholdings created in the 1820s represented valuable development potential, and, with the exception of Elmsdale, were developed for two-storey middle class houses. The diverse selection of fairly commonplace good quality homes in ample gardens, created a section of the conservation area distinct from previous development. By the 1930s the development of the Cator Estate was substantially complete, with detached houses lining roads such as Parkgate, Foxes Dale and Manor Way. Some of the older mansions were divided into flats and others were demolished to make way for more intensive developments.

The area was spared heavy destruction by enemy action, although a few houses were hit and eventually re-built. After the Second World War, a combination of social and economic factors put land at a premium and compulsory purchase powers were used to address London's housing shortage.

In 1950 a Residents' Association was formed within the Cator Estate, later becoming Blackheath Cator Estates Residents Ltd. The new body purchased the private roads and covenants from the freeholders, the Cator family. It continues to maintain the roads, to which

access is restricted. Only Lee Road, Bennett Park and Cresswell Park are public roads.

When post-war reconstruction got seriously under way in the 1950s, it was public housing that first made its presence felt, quickly followed by a new period of sustained private development. A municipal housing estate of flats and houses was built by the London County Council in about 1955. The point blocks remain the only construction of their type in the conservation area.

Other housing schemes were private initiatives. The most significant housing developments in the 1950s and 1960s were undoubtedly the Span estates, mostly built in small, tightly planned enclaves and generally tucked behind existing frontages. The layouts often included a mix of flats and houses and employed a variety of building materials and forms, but a common characteristic was their subordination to the landscape combined with a strong effort to minimise the impact of cars. Four substantial schemes were completed in the 1950s, and another four in the 1960s. The larger post-war schemes introduced minor access roads within the developments, creating modern open access enclaves within the older development areas.

In the 1970s and 1980s there has been further consolidation, with three further schemes by Span, one by Barrett Homes, and others including Guy Barnett Grove. In addition to the estates, there have been numerous instances of individual house commissions, stepping outside the norm to experiment with architectural form. They include houses by architects Peter Moro and Patrick Gwynne. Since the mid 1980s, there has been little opportunity for sizeable schemes because remaining developable spaces are of modest size and in multiple ownerships. For twenty years therefore change has been through addition, replacement, or extension of individual properties.

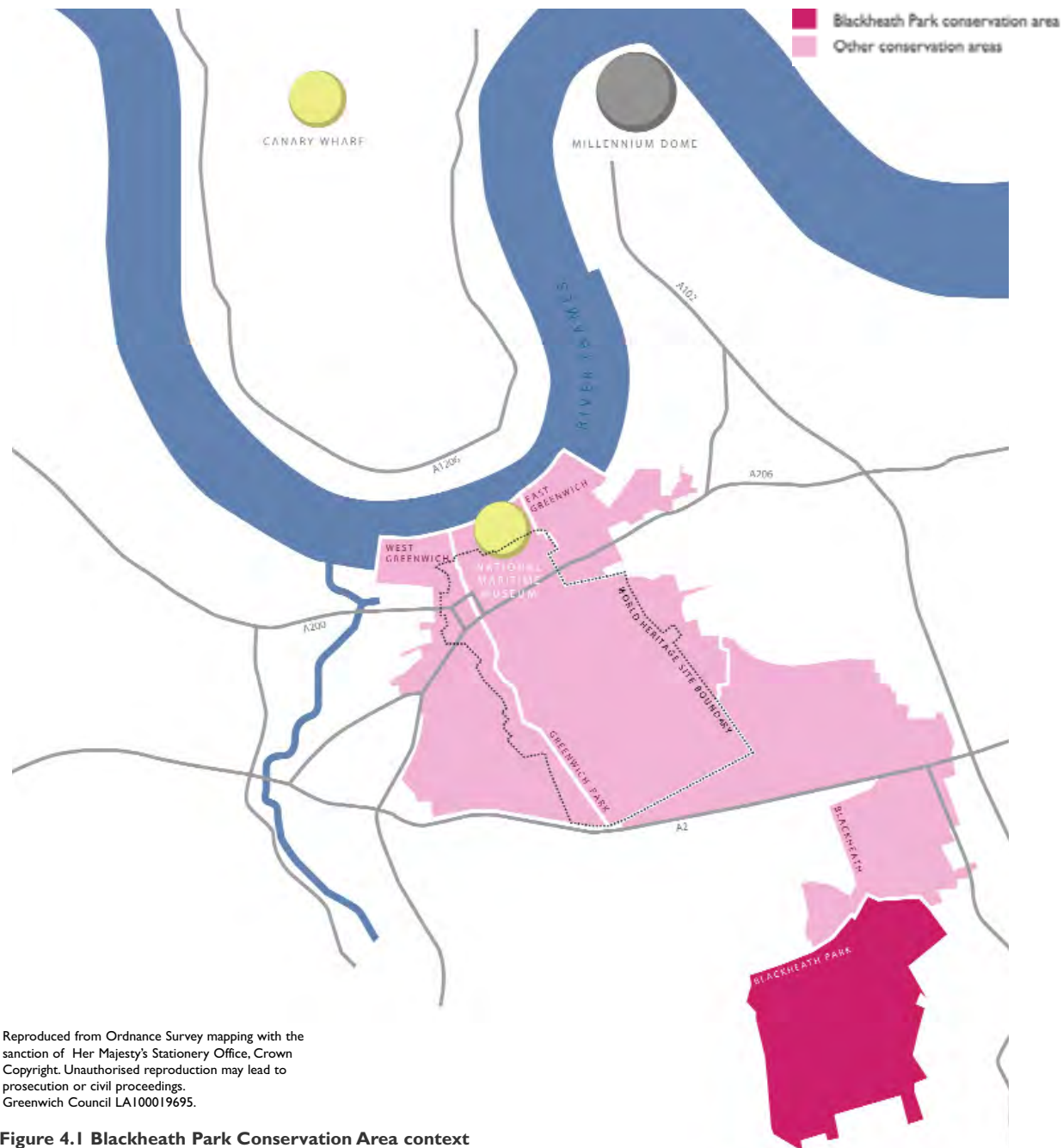
4. Special interest and character assessment

This section sets out an assessment of the special interest and character of the Blackheath Park Conservation Area.

Blackheath Park is situated to the south of Greenwich Park and Blackheath, and lies a little over two kilometres from the River Thames.

Blackheath is on a level plateau of gravel and sands, some 35 to 40 metres above the Thames. From the Heath the ground falls to the south across three valleys that drain westward to the Ravensbourne through Lewisham and Deptford. The Upper Kid Brook (its course now occupied by the railway) ran through Blackheath Village. Further south is the Lower Kid Brook, which is partly culverted. Between the two valleys is the higher ground along which Blackheath Park has been laid out. South of the Lower Kid Brook there is a slight rise to Manor Way; and south of Manor Way the ground falls to the River Quaggy outside the conservation area.

Blackheath Park Conservation Area includes part of Blackheath Village at its north-western corner and then extends both south and east for approximately one kilometre each way. It is bounded by the railway to the north, the busy Lee Road to the west, Meadowcourt Road and the Ferrier Estate and playing fields to the east and housing and Morden College to the northeast. Most of the roads are on a roughly north-south or east-west orientation producing an informal grid pattern.



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Figure 4.1 Blackheath Park Conservation Area context

General character and urban form

The Cator Estate has a discernable hierarchy of roads. The principal east-west spine is the wide succession of straights which make up the gently curved path of Blackheath Park itself, which is paralleled to the south by Manor Way. Brooklands Park and Foxes Dale connect these treelined roads, with Morden Road and Pond Road being the principal approaches from the north. The junction of Blackheath Park, Pond Road and Foxes Dale is the historic heart of the estate, being the site of the former Wricklemarsh House. St Michael and All Angels' Church marks its position in distant views.

Later roads such as Parkgate and Brookway lead off the main avenues, and in turn are joined by an array of cul-de-sacs and courts, many tucked behind the main frontages.

Despite the verdant character of the Cator Estate there is surprisingly little public open space. The pond and grassy areas around the Casterbridge Road flats are the largest private amenity space. The Lower Kid Brook, feeding the Brooklands Pond and still unculverted between Foxes Dale and Lee Road, runs east-west across the southern part of the conservation area.

Lee Road is a fairly busy thoroughfare, leading up to the Village and beyond it Shooters Hill.



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Figure 4.2 Urban form

Key landmarks and views

The most significant landmark in the conservation area, and the most visible from a distance, is the slender and delicate stone spire of St Michael and All Angels' Church, sometimes described as the 'Needle of Kent'.

The thresholds to the Cator Estate are signalled by the white wooden gates, which hint at a semi-rural, private character that distinguishes it from its wider urban context. The Victorian pavilion at the head of Blackheath Park consciously imitates the lodges found at country estates.

The other notable landmark in the conservation area, by virtue of its size as much as its architectural distinctiveness, is the Blackheath Hall building. It makes a distinguished contribution to the southern part of Blackheath Village and is prominent in the view from the north side of the Heath.

Other lesser but notable landmarks are Lloyds Bank, the Art Club, Lee Working Mens Club and the Cator Estate Lodge. Within the Cator Estate itself, the towers of the Priory and Brooklands House as well as the Casterbridge Point blocks stand out.

The area has significant tree planting and there are no outstanding vistas into, from or within the conservation area. It is worth noting, however, that the long, straight roads that cross the area yield an important sequence of views as buildings of interest are reached. Lee Road, Pond Road and Blackheath Park are the most significant, but the view southwards along Foxes Dale to open fields is also of merit.



Figure 4.3 Key landmarks and views



BLACKHEATH PARK: KEY LANDMARKS

Left: The Old Prioory

Top right: Blackheath Art Club

Bottom right: Lee Road, Blackheath Village

Character analysis

The Blackheath Park conservation area can be divided into five broad character areas, which are as follows:

1. Blackheath Village
2. Lee Road
3. Blackheath Park (the road)
4. Cator Estate North
5. Cator Estate South

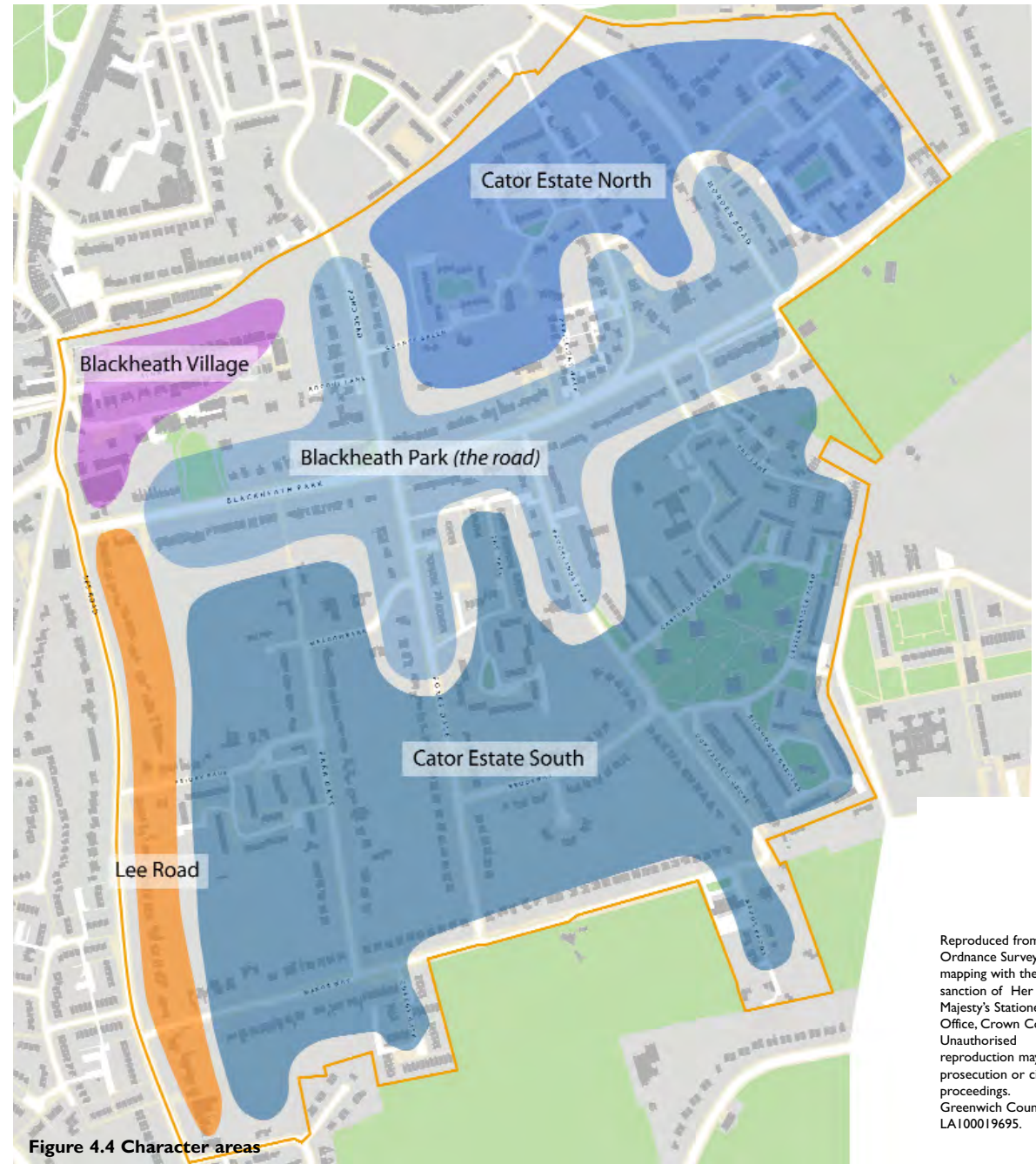
1. Blackheath Village

The whole of Blackheath Village has conservation area status, including parts in Lewisham Borough. The area of the Village in the Blackheath Park Conservation Area must therefore be considered in this wider context.

This part of the village comprises Blackheath Village east side (from the railway to Cresswell Park); 1-23 Lee Road (from Cresswell Park to Blackheath Park); Cresswell Park; and Bennett Park. Cresswell Park has two large yellow stock brick 1820s semi-detached buildings, now mixed use, and beyond them through private gates is St Mary's Roman Catholic Church in stone from 1896. Beside the church is a very simple cream-rendered church hall, and beyond that again are the various two to four storey brick buildings and the car park in the backland beyond the much-altered white-rendered presbytery (originally Park House) of 1787.

Bennett Park has a decidedly urban flavour, with three storey closely spaced villas in pairs, in yellow stock brick whose verticality is emphasised by double height bays and tall windows. It was developed speculatively over two decades from 1861 on a plot severed by the railway in 1849.

Lacking the arcadian qualities of other suburbs, including Blackheath Park itself, the area was slow to take off as a commercial proposition. The end of the street is also



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satisfactorily terminated by the Grade II listed Blackheath Art Club, an arts and crafts-influenced design, conspicuously asymmetrical. It is a building of historic significance as the home of the GPO Film Unit, which commissioned many pioneering films in the 1930s and 1940s. Bennett Park is also enlivened by the two storey house on the south side, built by the developer for himself, and the curious residential infill next to Lloyds TSB: conversely, it suffers from the incongruous panels and glazing of the modern offices on the same site that replaced a burned-down religious assembly hall. Commemorative plaques record that cartoonist Donald McGill and mathematician Sir Arthur Eddington both lived in Bennett Park.

The Art Club is one of five cultural buildings in this character area. One of the other four is the white-rendered Lloyds TSB bank on the corner of Bennett and Cresswell Parks and the others are the Conservatoire, Arts School and Blackheath Halls. The other east-side frontages on Blackheath Village and Lee Road are commercial in two parts. Between the railway and Bennett Park the two and three storey shops with some offices above were originally early nineteenth century yellow stock houses. South of Cresswell Park the premises were purpose built in red brick in the late nineteenth century, with a single storey retail addition in Cresswell Park.

Together the buildings constitute one of the important character elements of the commercial life of the Village as a whole, particularly since the opposite side of the road is only partially nineteenth century.

2. Lee Road

Lee Road has long been a well-used route through the area, visible on John Rocque's map of 1746 and thus predating the Cator land purchases. The east side of Lee Road is substantially nineteenth century, with houses set at some distance from the pavement. Some are



Top left: Cresswell Park
 Top right: Blackheath Art Club
 Bottom left: Bennett Park
 Bottom right: Blackheath Village

rendered, some of yellow stock brick. Several are listed. Lee Road, formerly a country lane, was developed between 1810 and 1830 in a series of small frontage developments, contemporary with building within Blackheath Park. Today it carries substantial traffic. The first two Regency houses at the top of Lee Road were isolated by the wartime bombing of the next two houses and were eventually replaced by three-storey purple brick weatherboarded Span redevelopment in the 1960s. Southwards, the run of Victorian buildings is only twice interrupted, once by the two-storey Span terraced houses south of Priory Park and once by the four-storey part redbrick flats next to Lee Mens Working Club. None of the post-Victorian buildings enhance the road, but it is only the discordant four-storey flats that are significantly out of place and detrimental to character.

Cator Estate

The prevailing character of the present-day Cator Estate is one of wide tree-lined avenues, with substantial villas and houses set back from the road but clearly visible from them. The nucleus of the estate is the crossroads of Blackheath Park, Pond Road and Foxes Dale. There is a consistent landscape treatment to the main roads within the estate comprising an aggregate top, brown tarmac with gutters of granite setts and grass verges. Many of the roads are unusually wide with broad pavements and shallow cobble gulleys, free from standard traffic signs and other highway equipment. White-painted timber gates and signs mark the entrances into the estate and evoke a semi-rural and private character. While there are no significant public open spaces, communal gardens, front and back gardens and mature street trees create a green and a leafy character.

3. Blackheath Park Road

The nineteenth century avenues of Blackheath Park, Pond Road and Morden Road retain much original character and have a unified feel, despite there having



Top left: Blackheath Concert Hall
 Top right: Spangate
 Bottom left: Lee Road
 Bottom right: Priory Park

been more post-Victorian change than on the east side of Lee Road. Brooklands Park and Foxes Dale were individual drives from Blackheath Park to give access to nineteenth century mansions. Manor Way was laid out in the eighteenth century, but scarcely was developed and has only a fragmentary Victorian feel today.

Blackheath Park, the main east-west route, is a long and broad avenue that was built piecemeal after 1812. With Lee Road it has the most important sequence of historic buildings in the conservation area. Like other principal roads on the estate, Blackheath Park has a spacious, airy character that persists, notwithstanding the courtyard developments tucked in amongst the bigger houses. Large nineteenth century houses survive, some divided into flats or converted to institutional use (The Gables). Interspersed with these larger houses is the post-war courtyard housing, started by Span and continued through to the 1980s.

The redbrick Victorian 'Wrenaissance' lodge at the western end of Blackheath Park is hard up against the road, marking the entrance to the estate. The adjacent wooden gates define the threshold and a more private character than the busy thoroughfare of Lee Road. Opposite the lodge are the block of flats and one of the smaller Span estates, known as Spangate.

The entrance to the road is marred on the north side by the south side of the Concert Halls. Past this are the earliest Victorian terraces and the lawns of the sole eighteenth century house, now St Mary's Presbytery. On both sides are substantial terraces or villas, fronting the road but set back from the pavement behind trees and hedges. Building materials are diverse; although stucco render, slate and weathered yellow brick predominates amongst the nineteenth century villas, there is also Edwardian red brick, including the Gables by Aston Webb, and some rendering, plus a variety of materials in infill.



Top left: Lodge to Cator Estate
 Top right: Casterbridge
 Bottom left: Morden Road
 Bottom right: Span housing

Notable modern houses include No 10 Blackheath Park, a bold design in tinted glass and slate of 1968 by Patrick Gwynne, and No 20, built by Peter Moro in 1958 for his own occupation. Many buildings are listed, and provide the most consistently rewarding sequence in the conservation area.

Several Span developments provide replacement frontages on Blackheath Park, as do the less attractive flats of Bernersmede. The three-storey Papillons development turns its back to the road. The facing frontages retain a nineteenth century feel, despite substantial alteration.

The junction with Foxes Dale and Pond Road is the historic heart of the conservation area, marking the site of the old Wricklemarsh mansion. The landmark is the slender spire of St Michael and All Angels', on the same building line as its domestic neighbours.

Pond Road lies along the line of the northern carriage drive of Wricklemarsh and takes its name from the ornamental water that once lay in its midst. It was situated to the north of the present railway line, at the point where the road kinks to the left.

Beyond the church to the west of Pond Road are four substantial distinguished 1860s villas, individually designed but loosely Italianate in style, variously of yellow stock and render. The earliest houses on Pond Road (1830s, two to four storeys) are north of the entrance to Corner Green on the east side, a range of listed Regency stucco villas with yellow brick flank walls built by Thomas Ross and contemporary with those at Nos 45 - 115 Blackheath Park. Pond House at the northernmost end of the group was demolished as early as 1849 to make way for the North Kent railway.

Notwithstanding the newer buildings, this section of Pond Road, with its important sequence of grand villas, has a strongly nineteenth century character that is little

diluted; a character enlivened by the massive plane tree in the church grounds.

Morden Road takes its name from nearby Morden College and was laid out for carriage use in 1852-3. Nos 1 and 3, the two houses nearest Morden College, were bombed and replaced in the 1950s. Their neighbours on both sides of the road are large weathered yellow brick villas, some of which had been divided into flats by the 1930s. There are newer and smaller houses at the southern end of the road, but in general Morden Road retains the grand scale of its original conception. A commemorative plaque records the road's association with composer Charles Gounod who lived here 1861.

4. Cator Estate North

The narrow spur of Blackheath Park that becomes Morden Road Mews was never an avenue. It retains a historic feel as a quiet old service road for Morden Road, but now serves two storey mainly post-war houses, with only two earlier buildings to emphasise its antiquity. Near its entrance is the former gateway to the mews.

Between Pond Road and Morden Road is an early Span development (see panel overleaf), Corner Green, considered by Lyons to be one of the Company's best. It was preceded by The Keep, also by Span. Corner Green was supplemented in 1979 by The Keep, Span's last housing in Blackheath. A small detached house, Oak Yard, designed in 1992 by Allies and Morrison forms a pivot to the Span schemes and continues Blackheath's tradition of well crafted, bespoke houses amongst the speculative developments.

The Plantation off Morden Road is an Eric Lyons-designed Span estate of 1961, on the site of a former market garden and nursery. It is a well maintained, semi-enclosed landscape of safe communal space that contains a simple palette of planting of high value.

Sweyn Place in red brick with white panels is a not well-integrated replacement to the character of Blackheath Park, but the period character of the road is lifted near the end by the sole remaining grand Victorian villa.

5. Cator Estate South

In the nineteenth century, the land to the south of frontage development on Blackheath Park was held as small estates by the owners of several small mansions, as described earlier, each with its own gardens and grounds and usually some woodland, pasture or arable land.

Brooklands Park takes its name from one of the four big houses, Brooklands House, a towered two storey mansion designed by George Smith in 1827 for his own occupation and now divided into flats. The bowls club to the south was originally part of the garden, with the estate boundary reaching down to Manor Way and across to Foxes Dale, taking in the ornamental south water of Wricklemarsh and two other lakes on the Lower Kid Brook.

Brooklands House is the sole nineteenth century building, yet the trees, curvature and old boundary walls still give a hint of the nineteenth century to the top half of the road. Later infills are each very much of their own time.

Drake Court opposite was built in 1905, a large redbrick house that was by the London County Council with the addition of a mundane wing for use as an old peoples' home, recently permanently closed. The original house has an imposing presence on the road.

In the nineteenth century, Foxes Dale served Park Lodge (surviving, in Meadowbank), Bellefield and The Hall. Park House was added at its southern end in the interwar years. The three storey yellow brick Span houses on the west frontage commemorate the site of Bellefield, and this top length of the road from St Michael's, with its

ample trees, still has a trace of nineteenth century character.

Manor Way is the other avenue laid out, but scarcely developed, in the nineteenth century. Only one of the two small patches of nineteenth century development survives, namely the villas at the east end. The listed three-storey No 102 (Rowlands House) was built in 1862 to the designs of local architect, Joseph Black. The adjacent three storey buildings with iron-lace conservatories behind are locally listed. Two yellow brick Victorian buildings sit at the end of Manorbrook. However, today Manor Way is predominantly of interwar character.

In the 1930s economic circumstances and lease expiries led to major change in the south of the conservation area. Foxes Dale, Brookway, Meadowbank and Parkgate date from this period and, together with Manor Way, are laid out with two to three storey detached and semi-detached houses on long garden plots.

Built by a number of different builders in small numbers, the houses followed a common model characterised by two storey brick construction, plain-tiled roofs and chimneys, with significant front gardens and long rear gardens.

Cator Estate South has a distinctive character, which has been only slightly altered by infilling at higher densities. The garden areas behind the houses provide large green spaces which are a valuable aspect of the character of the area. This is particularly so where Parkgate backs on to Lee Road.

Meadowbank was built south of the lawn of Park Lodge to give access to the land between Lee Road and Foxes Dale on which Parkgate was laid out. The pine in the centre of Meadowbank is of particular note. Park House was built on the severed grounds of Park Lodge, at the entrance to Meadowbank. Later development on the

east end of Meadowbank includes a pair of unassuming semis in Park House gardens, and, more valuably, a secluded courtyard bungalow by architect David Branch for his own use.

Foxes Dale was extended southwards to Manor Way across the filled-in bed of the old Wricklemarsh south water. Despite the post-war development of The Hall, Foxes Dale south of the entrance to the Hall flats retains its 1930s feel.

Brookway follows the course of the Lower Kid Brook culverted underneath it, and the visual link to the Brooklands pond is significant. The frying-pan section marks the eastern extent of the Wicklemarsh south water, and rear gardens towards Foxes Dale are two to three metres below ground floor level. Brookway has mostly semi-detached houses of the conventional appearance of the period.

Brooklands Park provided access from Blackheath Park to Brooklands House and thence to Elmsdale via a narrow bridge over the Lower Kid Brook, which has one parapet surviving. With development it acquired a clear 1930s character marked by a fine specimen tree. The setback of later development behind established vegetation on the west side allows the 1930s character to remain.

Land on the north side of Manor Way was originally part of the pleasure grounds attached to The Priory, Park Lodge (Meadowbank) and Brooklands House. Neil Rhind suggests that Manor Way owes its name to Kidbrooke Manor, the medieval estate to the north east of Blackheath. Chicanes slow traffic and the changing depths of grass verges help segregate pedestrians and vehicles.

Open land on the south side maximises views south through the sports ground which bounds the conservation area. Never developed, the ground and the

area beyond on either side of the River Quaggy are designated as Metropolitan Open Land.

This character area also includes several Span developments. Contrasting with the earlier London County Council development, the more intimate Span developments typically have a high standard of landscape treatment with small courtyards that operate as communal gardens and contain features such as play facilities, ponds and specimen trees. There is a sense of tranquillity evident within the estates, created by irregularly planted mature and dense vegetation.

These were the most significant housing developments in the 1950s and 1960s, built in small, tightly planned enclaves and often tucked behind existing frontages. The layouts employed a variety of building materials and forms, but a common characteristic was their subordination to the landscape combined with a strong effort to minimise the impact of cars. Examples in this character area include The Priory (1956), the earliest Span development and locally listed; Quaggy Walk (1964) designed by Andrew Sherlock and Partners; and Streetfield Mews (1984) the last Span development to be built.

SPAN AT BLACKHEATH

One of the most notable features of Blackheath is the quality of its post-war housing estates, especially those built by the pioneering development company known as Span.

Span Developments Ltd was registered in 1957 by Geoffrey Paulson Townsend and Leslie Bilsby. They combined forces with architect Eric Lyons, later a President of the RIBA, and the landscape designer Ivor Cunningham to provide a special design and development partnership. The company's aim was, in their words, to "span the gap between the suburban monotony of the typical 'spec building' and the architecturally designed, individually built residence".

The name Span had already been used in Eric Lyons schemes at Ham and Twickenham and the company's most ambitious venture was to be in the 1960s at New Ash Green in Kent. However it is at Blackheath Park where the greatest number of small Span projects may be found.

Hallmarks of the Span developments were short terraces of houses and flats, often grouped round courtyards or set amongst shared gardens and with subtle changes of level. Landscaping was a high priority and an effort was made to subordinate the car to free pedestrian movement. Maintenance of the grounds and shared space was secured by residents associations, with Span remaining a ground landlord.

The architectural form and materials varied, but large, square windows and tile hanging were common motifs, with flat or shallow pitched roofs.

Of the several Span estates at Blackheath, the earliest date from the late 1950s and are at the Priory, Hallgate and Corner Green. Hallgate was listed Grade II in 1998.

Span Developments got into financial difficulty in the late 1960s and ceased trading shortly thereafter. A successor company, Span Environments Ltd, was launched by Bilsby and Townsend nine years later and re-united with Lyons and Cunningham to build in Twickenham as well as a group of three storey houses in Blackheath at Corner Green. These were to be Span's last projects as Lyons's death in 1980 brought the creative partnership to an end.

Many of Span's 'flat fronted' housing projects in Blackheath were bitterly opposed, especially for the demolition of the Regency mansions. In all, however, only eight houses were lost between 1958 and 1969, and were replaced by 240 houses and 181 flats. With the passage of time, the skilful integration of the distinctive new development with their surroundings has earned the Span estates much respect and they are now a key part of the significance of the conservation area.





Architectural and historical building quality

Blackheath Park has a significant number of buildings of architectural and townscape quality. Some are of individual merit and others are of group value. The best preserved groups of houses are in Lee Road, Blackheath Park, Morden Road and Pond Road.

The following buildings may be singled out for their particular architectural, historic or landmark value:

St Michael and All Angels' Church Designed in 1828-29 by George Smith as the centrepiece in the design of Blackheath Park. The church is distinguished by its prominent and slender spire. The vestry and porches are 1879 additions from the office of Norman Shaw.

Blackheath Halls (Architects Edmeston and Gabriel, 1895). The dominant edifice in a group of civic buildings established in Blackheath by a local benefactor, William Webster. Others are the Blackheath Conservatoire (1896), Blackheath Art School (1896) and the Art Club at the head of Bennett Park. The arts and crafts detailing of the Club is characteristic of the period (1886).

Brooklands House 1826, one of the first Italianate villas in Blackheath and designed by the architect to the Morden Estate, George Smith, for his own use. In addition to its architectural interest, the house is an important survivor from the period when the area south of Blackheath Park was dominated by a few large houses.

20 Blackheath Park (Peter Moro's House) A small, low detached and private house built by Peter Moro, who was a distinguished theatre and concert hall architect, and built this house for his family's occupancy in 1958.

The Presbytery (1787), originally Park House in Cresswell Park is the oldest house in the conservation area and is Grade II listed.

Span developments

The history of the Span estates is described elsewhere in this report. The list of Span schemes in the Blackheath Park Conservation Area is as follows (Eric Lyons & Span, 2006):

- The Priory (1956) 61 flats south of Priory Park
- The Hall (1957) 44 flats
- 2-6 Foxes Dale (1957) 3 houses
- 1-5 Priory Park (1957) 4 houses
- The Keep (1957) 44 houses
- The Hall (1958) 41 houses
- Hallgate (1958) 26 flats and 23 houses, also notable for Keith Godwin's sculpture
- Corner Green (1959) 23 houses
- Morden Road and Mews (c.1959) 11 houses
- The Plantation (1962) 34 houses
- Parkrow, Lee Road (1963) nine houses
- Spangate (1964) 17 flats
- Brooklands Park (1964) 16 houses
- The Lane (1964) 39 houses
- The Hall (1967) 13 house
- Park End (1967) 19 houses
- Holm Walk (1978) 10 houses
- Corner Keep (1979) 10 houses linking the two groups
- Streetfield Mews (1984) 15 houses and 5 flats



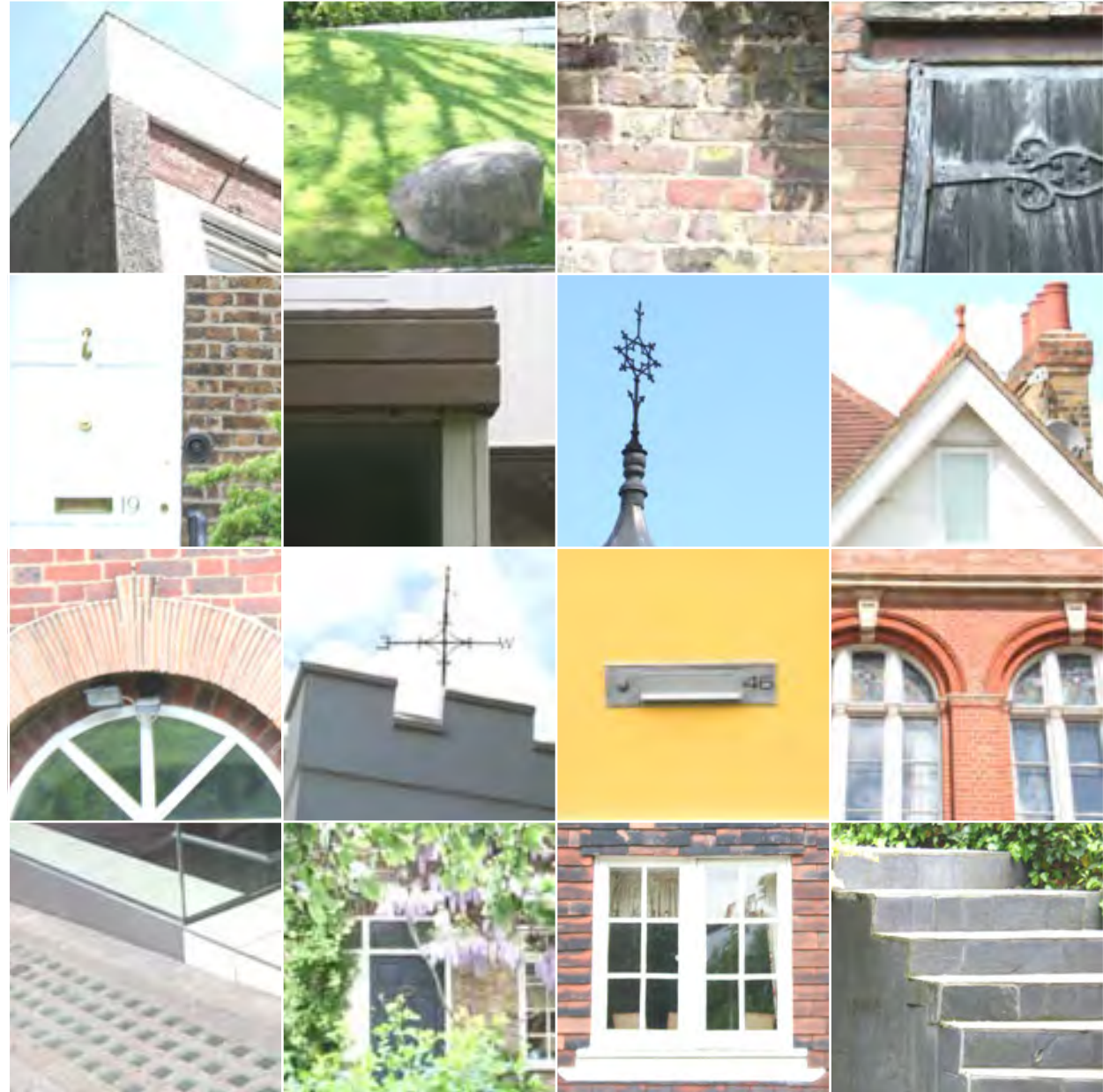
Top: St Michael and All Angels'
Bottom: The Lane housing

Land uses and activity

Blackheath Park Conservation Area is almost entirely residential, apart from the point at which it shoulders the Village. There are houses of every shape and size, including flats and maisonettes. Many of the older, larger houses have long been divided into flats.

Within the Cator Estate there is a quiet, undisturbed character, with little through traffic and few pedestrians. St Michael and All Angels' church and halls and the community hall in Richmond Gardens are the main institutional uses. There is a bowling green in Brooklands Park, and playing fields on Manor Way and Blackheath Park. There are homes for the elderly or vulnerable in Blackheath Park and Morden Road. There are two local shops serving the area from Casterbridge Road and nearby there is a single-form entry primary school.

Blackheath Village as a whole is livelier, with a bank, shops and businesses, St Mary's church and hall, and church offices, and there is a steady flow of traffic up and down Lee Road. The Conservatoire and Blackheath Halls, managed by Trinity College of Music, provide day and night-time activity and interest. Opposite the station is a street of houses mostly converted to flats.



Blackheath Park: Local details

Local distinctiveness

The distinctive character of the Cator Estate is a reflection of its growth and subsequent management from the late eighteenth century. There is no common building style and the palette of building materials is very wide, but the contrast between the broad principal avenues, relics from the Wrinklemarsh Manor, and the intimacy of the Span courtyards gives the area a particular flavour.

Local details and associations

The Cator Estate was developed outside any conscious attempt to replicate the Kentish vernacular but the estate has some distinctive qualities, including the consciously rural white timber gates at the entrances to the estate, and the soft verges and bound gravel of the avenues through the area.

Commemorative plaques record the area's association with famous people including composer Charles Gounod (lived in Morden Road 1861), cartoonist Donald McGill and mathematician Sir Arthur Eddington (both lived in Bennett Park).

There is also a blue plaque in Bennett Park to the GPO Film Unit (later the Crown Film Unit) pioneers of documentary film making, operated from the Blackheath Art Club in the 1930s.

Prevalent local and traditional building materials and the public realm

The Heath itself has long been a source of clay for brick making, and brick remains the principal building material in the area with stone commonly reserved for decorative mouldings and high prestige structures like the dressings and spire of St Michael and All Angels', which used Bath stone. Stuccoed brickwork was a fashionable alternative from the Regency period and throughout the nineteenth century; good examples can be found on Blackheath Park and Lee Road. Yellow London stock brick predominated in Bennett Park and the big houses in Morden Road but by the late Victorian period, rich, smooth red bricks had become the fashionable material.

In the inter-war years, red brick and clay tiles were the dominant building materials, and were usually combined with white metal windows. In the later twentieth century there was no governing palette or style, and in the 1950s the Span developments combined modern elements like flat roofs and concrete columns with vernacular references such as weatherboarding and tile hanging, creating an eclectic and distinctive mix.

Listed buildings

Figure 4.5 identifies the buildings within the Blackheath Park Conservation Area that are listed, most of which are well preserved houses and villas from the late Georgian and Regency periods. They reflect the early pattern of development south of Blackheath Village, with concentrations at the western end of Blackheath Park, Pond Road and Lee Road. Another significant group are the Victorian cultural buildings in the Village.

There are no scheduled ancient monuments in the conservation area but Blackheath Village and Lee Road are identified within the Greenwich Unitary Development Plan as an area of high archaeological potential.

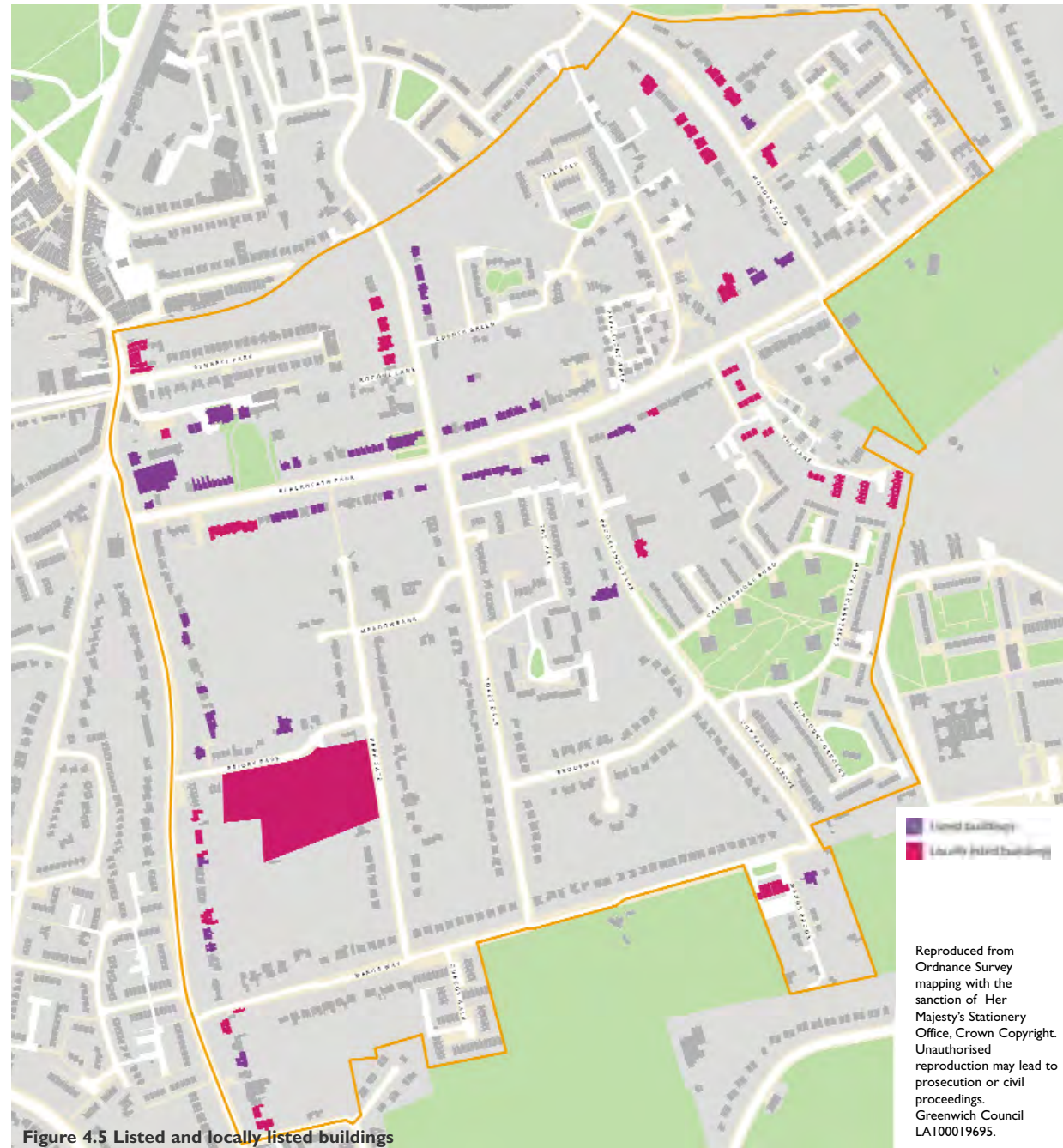


Figure 4.5 Listed and locally listed buildings

Key unlisted buildings

Greenwich Council has identified a number of buildings which, although statutorily unlisted, make a particularly important contribution to the character of the conservation area. These buildings are also shown on Figure 4.5 and include:

- Lee Working Mens Club, Lee Road;
- Lee Constitutional Club, Lee Road;
- Nos 96-98 Manor Way;
- The Lodge, Manor Way;
- Nos 3-13 Blackheath Village;
- Drake Court, Brooklands Park;
- Nos 3-9 Pond Road;
- Nos 2 & 4 Blackheath Park (designed by Sir Aston Webb); and
- 99 Blackheath Park.



Top: Oak Yard (designed by Graham Morrison)
Bottom: Drake Court, Brooklands House

Natural features

Blackheath Park's name suggests a green and open place. Little survives of the formal avenues of Wricklemarsh House and the density of the Cator Estate has markedly increased in recent decades, but careful site planning has ensured that the area still lives up to its name.

Within the verdant character of Blackheath Park there is surprisingly little public open space. The lake and the grassy banks around Casterbridge flats are amenity space for the estate, but in practice is accessible to all. The gardens of St Agnes house are not usually open, and St Michael's church gardens are private but not closed to passers-by. Most of the remainder is in private gardens, or in privately-maintained communal areas such as those created within the Span developments.

Mature trees have been retained across the conservation area and many are forest trees, much older (and taller) than the buildings they adjoin. Private front gardens are for the most part well-maintained and make an important contribution to the quality of the conservation area.

The principal roads across the Cator Estate are tree lined avenues, flanked in most cases with grass verges. These reinforce the gentle arcadian character of the conservation area and bring seasonal variety. There is formal tree planting on the verges along Blackheath Park and on the southside of Manor Way and in a few other short stretches, but the verdant character of many roads comes from trees in gardens.







Neutral areas

The twentieth century development in the estate has not all been to the high design standard of the best Span estates but there is little that is overtly discordant or harmful to the character of the area. Furthermore, it may be argued that the special interest of Blackheath Park is in the exceptional variety and richness of housing types, which has evolved over the past two hundred years.

General condition and buildings at risk

The overall condition of properties in the Blackheath Park Conservation Area is excellent and there are no buildings at risk. The public realm is generally well maintained but on the east part of the Cator Estate at Casterbridge the paths and green spaces are eroded.

Loss, intrusion or damage

The Casterbridge Estate has retained some important landscape elements such as the ornamental lake and the mature trees, however the remaining spaces between these elements are outworn and eroded.

An intrusion into the character of the conservation area is the busy traffic and streetscape of the Lee Road. It is worth considering a more sensitive urban treatment that might include adopting appropriate materials, better and simpler street furniture and appropriate traffic calming measures.

Conservation area boundary

The Blackheath Park Conservation Area boundary could be extended to include the strip of land occupied by Nos 83-85 Brooklands Park.

Problems, pressures and capacity for change

The Cator Estate is very stable and cherished by its residents. Its popularity may however be putting the area under pressure for redevelopment and in particular, the subdivision of plots and development in rear gardens. Arguably this is no more than a continuation of a process begun in the 1920s and continued through the Span schemes of the 1950s and 60s. At risk is the balance between the green elements and the buildings and the verdant character of the suburb.

On Lee Road and in Blackheath Village, the growth in traffic volume is the main threat to the character of the area and in the absence of a significant reduction though a strategic intervention, well designed traffic restraint and calming measures may be worth considering.

There is scope for a borough-wide design guide for domestic extensions and building alterations, as well as guidance on the treatment of boundary walls and off-street car parking.

5. Appendix: useful information and contact details

Urban Practitioners wishes to acknowledge all those who, in print or in person, have contributed to the historical and architectural content of these reports. They include staff of Greenwich Council, English Heritage and the London Metropolitan Archives. Particular thanks are due to the Greenwich Heritage Centre and to Neil Rhind, historian of Blackheath, who has generously shared more than forty years' research for these volumes.

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Barbara Simm **Eric Lyons and Span** (RIBA Publications, 2006)

Archives and libraries

Greater London Sites and Monuments Record, English Heritage, 1 Waterhouse Square, 138-142 Holborn, London, EC1N 2ST

Greenwich Heritage Centre, Artillery Square, Royal Arsenal, Woolwich SE18 4DX

London Metropolitan Archives, 40 Northampton Road, Clerkenwell, London EC1R 0HB