

The Brixton Society

Understanding the Past, Looking to the Future
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9th January 2021

CONSERVATION AREA REVIEW – Brockwell Park (CA39)

1. Introduction:

The comments below are provided by the Brixton Society in response to the Council's proposed changes published on 2nd December 2020. They comprise our proposed **additions** to, or **omissions** from, the existing Conservation Area, and **clarification** of points within the Appraisal, in addition to **comments** on the Council's proposed changes. As far as practical, these responses follow the sequence of the Council Appraisal or report.

2. Background:

The Brixton Society was established in 1975 as the amenity society covering the wider Brixton area. We regularly comment on local plans, policy changes and individual planning applications, and try to promote good practice in design and planning within our area.

The Society has supported the concept of Conservation Areas since its early days. In respect of this CA, we liaise with other stakeholder groups through Brockwell Park Community Partners, the park's management advisory committee.

3. Changes to the CA boundaries proposed in the report

We have no objection to the relatively minor small changes proposed to the CA boundaries.

Area A - corner of Brixton Water Lane and Dulwich Road referred to as 70 to 74 Dulwich Road. This appears to be a mistake. The properties shown in the map extract are 68 and 72 Brixton water lane. 68 is a single-storey retail unit adjoining 66 Brixton Water Lane (in the Brixton Water Lane CA). Nos 70 and 74 do not exist.

72 Brixton Water Lane is a 3-storey block of flats between 68 Brixton Water Lane and 2 Dulwich Road. The rear of the property is clearly visible from within the Park and we support its inclusion in the CA.

Area B is made up of two parades of shops between Dulwich Road and

Herne Hill Station. This is within the area covered by the Herne Hill Society. We understand that they support this proposal.

Area C is the south-facing side of the railway bridge at the Park end of Croxted Road. The Bridge has attractive decorative railings and we agree that it should be included.

Area D – No. 249 Norwood road is half of a pair of terraced houses, 247 and 249, and the current CA boundary goes through the middle of the property. We understand that the owner of the other half of the terrace, no 247 Norwood Road, has requested that the neighbouring property is included in the conservation area, as his is, and we support this.

4. Cressingham Gardens Estate

We propose that the boundaries of the CA are extended to include the whole of the Cressingham Gardens Estate, as previously recommended by Historic England (then English Heritage) in December 2013.

Seven years on, we were surprised to see the draft Brockwell Park CA Appraisal does not make any reference to the option that the boundaries of the Conservation Area be extended to include the Cressingham Gardens Estate, given the clear recommendation made by Historic England as part of their listing report on the Cressingham Gardens Estate (case number 115845) that:

“a future reappraisal of the boundaries of Brockwell Park Conservation Area should give serious consideration to whether the estate should be included within it, in a similar way to previous extensions of the conservation area boundaries have encompassed other areas of housing of historic value adjacent to the park”.

Since 1999 the boundaries of the Brockwell Park Conservation area have been extended to include a number of neighbouring residential area in recognition of the importance that these areas have to preserving and maintaining the park’s setting.

In the time since the last review of Brockwell Park CA, Historic England recommended that the boundaries should be extended to include another residential area on the park boundaries – the Cressingham Gardens Estate.

This recommendation was made in recognition of the skill taken by Lambeth’s architects to respect the Estate’s setting, with low buildings that appear below the tree line when viewed from the park and open spaces which bring a park-like character into the estate.

We agree with this recommendation and believe there are strong grounds for including the estate within the CA.

4a. Risk to setting of the Park from inappropriate larger-scale and high-rise development.

As the Conservation Area Appraisal records, one of the greatest risks to the setting of the conservation area comes from potential larger scale development around its perimeter. This is because the current low-rise character of existing buildings contributes much to the suburban character of the locality and allows excellent distant views.

“with sensitivity and skill, both in the scale and massing of the built elements, as well as through the integration of these elements with open spaces which bring a park-like character into the estate.”(Historic England).

From the highest point of the park, views towards the south and west provide some of the finest and most rural views of the park, *“offering an undisturbed view of the park’s well preserved English landscape with the Holy Trinity Church spire as a local point and landmark”* (text in italics from the Brockwell Park CA Appraisal report).

In views from the ridge, the Cressingham Gardens Estate appears immediately to the right of the church spire (though almost hidden by trees in summer). The design of the Cressingham Gardens Estate, consisting as it does of buildings of one and two storeys in the part adjacent to the park boundary, succeeds admirably in protecting these views as it sits below the tree line and is barely visible in views from the plateau.

Conservation Area status would help to mitigate this risk, by ensuring that that any new buildings respond to the estate’s setting on the edge of the park, as the existing estates does now.

4b. Importance of preserving the green open spaces within the estate which soften the boundary between the estate and the park.

An important feature of the estate is the presence of green open spaces between the blocks, which are built at right angles (rather than parallel) to the park boundary.

These green open spaces stretching from the park boundary into the estate appear to soften the boundary between the park and the estate so that *“from the park, the estate is an almost seamless addition to its horizon; from the estate, the park seems almost to be its back garden”*. (John Broughton, *Municipal Dreams*, 2018).

The redevelopment of the estate poses the risk that these green open spaces will be built over with the result that, in place of the current arrangement of low-rise blocks separated by green open spaces and gardens, there will be an unbroken line of apartment blocks along the boundary with Brockwell Park.

4c. The quality of the built architecture of the estate

While a number of the residential properties currently included within the Brockwell Park Conservation Area boundaries are without interest (for example, the mundane late 20th century blocks of flats in Norwood Road or on the south side of Trinity Rise), the Cressingham Gardens Estate has been described as one of the finest examples of public housing in Lambeth from the Hollamby era.

As Historic England have stated *“It is also one of the more interesting housing schemes from this important period in the development of social housing, produced by one of the most progressive authorities.”*

It is a sad reflection on how little importance is now attached to these values by the paid officers and elected member now in control that the Cressingham Gardens estate is now being proposed for demolition.

We ask that CA status is granted to the Cressingham Gardens Estate in recognition of the role it has played as an exemplar estate standing as a lesson to architects and planners in how to design humane and civilized public housing for now and for the future.

4d. Risk of detrimental impact on neighbouring residential properties in the CA in Trinity Rise and Brockwell Park Gardens

Since 1999 the boundaries of the Brockwell Park Conservation area have been extended to include a number of neighbouring residential areas in recognition of the importance that these areas have to preserving and maintaining the park’s setting. These include early 20th century housing in Brockwell Park Gardens and Trinity Rise on the Park’s southern boundary.

As the recent Homes for Lambeth planning application for the redevelopment of a site facing Trinity Rise (currently known as Ropers Walk) has shown, inappropriate development of the Cressingham Gardens Estate is likely to have a detrimental impact on adjoining residential areas. As has been pointed out by critics of the Ropers Walk scheme, the replacement of a three-storey block facing Trinity Rise by one four storeys high will have a detrimental impact on views of the north side of Trinity Rise from the pavement outside Holy Trinity Church.

Conservation Area status for the Estate would help to protect the relationship between the park and these neighbouring residential areas.

5. Other Potential Extensions

We have considered whether other residential developments on the north-west boundary of the Park should be included in the CA.

Arlingford and Brailsford Roads were developed by 1880 on a single plot which was retained by William Winter when he sold adjacent land to John Blades c.1820 to enlarge the Brockwell Estate. The development includes shopping frontages on Brixton Water Lane and Tulse Hill. It sits in a shallow valley, whilst other sites further south appear on rising ground when seen from the centre of the park.

Only the east side of Brailsford Road directly adjoins the park, but the whole Victorian development retains a unity of design, so we would prefer it to be treated as a whole. While it could be added to the Park CA, it might be better considered as a CA in its own right.

Generally/...

6. Generally:

Since this CA is centred on a major open space, the buildings and features within and around the Park are relatively exposed to public view, so quality of design and upkeep must be encouraged.

Landmark buildings, whether listed or not, should be included in the overall scheme as far as possible.

We are disappointed that the Council remains hostile to standing consultation arrangements for Conservation Areas, having closed its Conservation Areas Advisory Committee in 1988. As a result, it is difficult to mobilise local support to complement the Council's limited resources for promoting good practice or enforcing planning controls.

In the interim, the Park's management advisory committee, Brockwell Park Community Partners, provides an effective vehicle for consulting with a wide range of stakeholder groups with an interest in the park.

*Alan Piper,
Secretary.*