

The Brixton Society

Understanding the Past, Looking to the Future
Reg'd. Charity No.1058103, Registered with the London Forum of Amenity Societies
Website: www.brixtonsociety.org.uk

Conservation & Urban Design,
Lambeth Planning,

planningconservation@lambeth.gov.uk

Enquiries to:
Alan Piper, RIBA,



apiperbrix@aol.com

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CONSERVATION AREA REVIEW – Ferndale Road (CA46)

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 (*original paragraph numbers are shown in italic where relevant*).

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. The Ferndale Road CA has been relatively non-controversial among those in our catchment area.

3. Character Appraisal – corrections and comments (Section 2)

Para 2.4 is wrong in claiming that the core estate dates from the mid-19th century. *Para 2.12* is more accurate in reporting that construction began in 1870, which is borne out by the characteristic design of the terraced houses.

Para 2.16: The name Stafford House (or Mansions) is no longer displayed at the main entrance, only the property number, 138.

Para 2.19: The present attic storey to No.138 can be considered an improvement on the original "birdcage" structure which enclosed a rooftop ball games area.

Para 2.22: We dispute that the 3 additional houses up to the corner of Sandmere Road are of no consequence. On the contrary, they form a

picturesque group of matching scale to the Jennings terrace to the north, particularly when approached from the southern end of Bedford Road. The detailing and the general use of red brick suggest a date of about 1885. The mix of 20th century buildings to the rear, fronting the western end of Sandmere Road, form a more natural break to define the edge of the CA.

Para 2.24: The two surviving terraces flanking No.138 (the former Brixton School of Building) are again inaccurately described as mid-19th century. The style suggests construction between 1865 and 1875, as part of a surge of terrace house-building around Brixton, following completion of the railway line from Victoria, immediately north of the CA. The relatively plain style, with London valley roofs to conceal cheaper pantile roofing, implies that they were a little more downmarket than the nearer part of Jennings' development, but not by much. Notably, a couple of houses retain distinctive original railings.

Para 2.31: Rathcoole House was designed as a one-off house, as confirmed by original plans in Lambeth Archives. Terrace housing immediately to the north may have been a separate development.

Para 2.32: It was not unusual for large-scale residential developments of this period to offer a range of dwelling sizes, with the grander examples closer to established highways or the railway station (Clapham High Street in this case). The same can be seen elsewhere in Brixton such as the Stuart-Bruce Estate, between Effra Road and Barnwell Road.

However, I recall from 50 years ago that Roger Dixon, a founding member of the Victorian Society and a history lecturer at the Brixton School of Building, pointed out that multiple occupation set in fairly early, in response to high demand for housing around suburban railway stations. This is borne out by 1881 Census records elsewhere around Brixton.

Paras 2.33-35: The historic background provided is incomplete. We should point out that Ferndale Road in its present form is the result of development extending separately from the Clapham and Brixton ends, and eventually joining at Tintern Street. From the Brixton end, the road originated as Shepherd's Lane, at the western end of which a private sports club was opened in the 1870s, eventually becoming almost a forerunner of the Brixton Recreation Centre, before failing financially. Its premises were taken over for the Brixton Polytechnic which formally became the Brixton School of Building in 1904. All the early buildings, including the shell of the sports club's old swimming pool, were replaced by the modern apartment blocks in Rubens Place, adjacent to the railway line.

Paras 2.54-56: Most of the architectural interest of this CA lies with the street frontages. Even corner properties tend to wrap around, rather than leaving rear additions exposed. Guidance should not attempt to impose a spurious order on alterations and extensions at the rear, provided only that the principles of subordination are followed.

4. External Works & Enhancement: paras.2.59-66 & 2.76

Some very modest and improvised planters are beginning to appear on the streets, to complement the current Low Traffic Neighbourhood (LTN) centred

on Ferndale Road. We would prefer these to develop into better-quality and more durable features.

However the LTN is currently compromised by closure of the railway footbridge alongside Rubens Place, blocking the long-standing pedestrian link to Hubert Grove and Landor Road. This appears to be solely due to the Council's inability to organise repair of the steps on the footbridge.

5. Boundary Review: paras. 2.72-75

5.1 4a Ferndale Road (Colcutt Lodge) para 2.74

We support the proposal to include the whole plot within the CA, thereby removing an anomaly.

5.2 138 Ferndale Road (Stafford House/ Mansions) para 2.75 bullet 1

The surviving block from the Brixton School of Building is of continuing historic interest, and should be retained within the CA. Otherwise, the same argument for exclusion could be deployed against 2 Ferndale Road (Rathcoole) because it did not conform to Jennings original pattern of development. We are not confident that merely local listing would offer effective protection.

5.3 118-128 & 148-164 Ferndale Road para 2.75 bullets 2 & 3

See also our comments/ corrections to *para 2.24* above. We see no compelling reason to remove these terrace houses from the CA. Indeed, given the Government's stated intention to reduce planning controls, removal would introduce uncertainty and planning blight. We must therefore strongly object to their removal.

5.4 Rubens Place para 2.75 bullet 4

This modern development is screened from the street scene on Ferndale Road by older buildings, so does not contribute to the CA either positively or negatively. We therefore agree that it can be deleted from the CA.

5.5 65-69 Bedford Road

As outlined in our comments on *para 2.22* above, this is a substantial and characterful group which completes the frontage between Ferndale and Sandmere Roads, and holds its own alongside the slightly older Jennings terrace. We propose that it should be added to the CA.

6. Generally:

While this CA is based on a unified estate development, there are inevitably some infill or non-standard buildings. Landmark buildings, whether listed or not, should be included in the overall scheme as far as possible.

Given the Government's stated ambition to reduce planning controls, in an ill-considered attempt to boost housing numbers, we should be trying to extend our existing Conservation Areas, rather than reduce them.

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.

*Alan Piper,
Secretary.*