

L. B. HAMMERSMITH & FULHAM CONSERVATION AREA No. 31

THE BILLINGS & BROMPTON CUTTING CHARACTER PROFILE

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 states:-
"Every local planning authority shall from time to time determine which parts of their area are areas of special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance, and shall designate those areas as conservation areas."

The Borough has 45 such areas designated over 31 years, of which The Billings and Brompton Cutting Conservation Area is one.

- 1.2 Under Section 71 of the Act, once an area has been designated:-
"It shall be the duty of a local planning authority from time to time to formulate and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of any parts of their area which are conservation areas."
- 1.3 The Council is doing this in stages. The first stage is this document, which is called a Conservation Area Character Profile. The "profile" is an appraisal, which aims to give a clear assessment of the special interest, character, and appearance that justified the designation of the area as a Conservation Area. It also includes some broad design guidelines that will aid all concerned in their efforts to preserve or enhance the character of the conservation area.
- 1.4 It is intended that each profile document will provide a sound basis, defensible on appeal, for the development plan policies and development control decisions, and for the guidance of residents and developers.
- 1.5 It will also form the groundwork for subsequent Conservation Area Studies. The next stage will be the production of more detailed design guidelines where necessary in consultation with Councillors, the Hammersmith and Fulham Historic Buildings Group, Fulham Society, Hammersmith Society and other local groups. These will be followed by the preparation of policy documents for the preservation or enhancement of the conservation area, which will be the subject of local consultation.
- 1.6 The profiles and subsequent design guidelines will form supplementary planning guidance and will support the Council's statutory Unitary Development Plan which sets out the planning policy framework for the development of the borough and development control decisions. Policy EN2 relates to conservation areas and makes special reference to the Character Profiles. They will constitute material planning considerations in the determination of planning applications.

1.7 The Government document (PPG 15) "Planning Policy Guidance: Planning and the Historic Environment" advises local authorities on how to operate the legislation, emphasizing that:-
"It is the quality and interest of areas, rather than that of individual buildings, which should be the prime consideration in identifying conservation areas. There has been increasing recognition in recent years that our experience of a historic area depends on much more than the quality of individual buildings - on the historic layout of property boundaries and thoroughfares; on a particular 'mix' of uses; on characteristic materials; on appropriate scaling and detailing of contemporary buildings; on the quality of advertisements, shopfronts, street furniture and hard and soft surfaces; on vistas along streets and between buildings; and on the extent to which traffic intrudes and limits pedestrian use of spaces between buildings. Conservation area designation should be seen as the means of recognising the importance of all these factors and of ensuring that conservation policy addresses the quality of townscape in its broadest sense as well as the protection of individual buildings."

1.8 This intention is reinforced by English Heritage in their document "Conservation Area Practice" which recognises that:-
"As the number of conservation areas continues to grow, the criteria for their designation are being looked at more critically."
It is, therefore, even more important than before that there should be a clear definition, recorded in some detail, of what constitutes the special architectural or historic interest that warranted the designation of every conservation area.

1.9 So, in line with the guidance given by both the Government and English Heritage, this conservation area profile will aim to define the character of the conservation area on the basis of an analysis of all or some of the following criteria:-

- origins and development of the street patterns, the lie of the land;
- archaeological significance and potential of the area, including any scheduled monuments;
- architectural and historic quality, character and coherence of the buildings, both listed and unlisted, and the contribution which they make to the special interest of the area;
- character and hierarchy of spaces, and townscape quality;
- prevalent and traditional building materials for buildings, walls and surfaces;
- contribution made to the character of the area by greens or green spaces, trees, hedges and other natural or cultivated elements;
- prevailing (or former) uses within the area and their historic patronage, and the influence of these on the plan form and building types;
- relationship of the built environment to landscape/townscape including definition of significant landmarks, vistas and panoramas, where appropriate;
- extent of any loss, intrusion, or damage that has occurred since designation;

- existence of any opportunity sites;
- unlisted buildings which make a positive contribution to the conservation area according to English Heritage's criteria.

2 DESIGNATION

- 2.1 The Billings & Brompton Cutting Conservation Area was designated on 2 July 2002 to recognise the transfer to the L. B. Hammersmith & Fulham of part of a conservation area designated by the Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea in March 1979. The reason for its adoption by LBHF was to control any development of the railway cutting, which forms an important setting to the adjoining Billings Conservation Area and Brompton Cemetery Conservation Area, both within the Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea.

3 CONSERVATION AREA BOUNDARY

- 3.1 The conservation area boundary can be seen on Plan 1. The boundary runs north west from the Stamford Bridge on Fulham Road along the top of the railway cutting following the amended Borough boundary to the west of The Billings and Brompton Cemetery, as far as the rail junction opposite Brompton Park Crescent, which it then follows south to the rail track and then returns south east along the west side of the track at the bottom of the cutting to Stamford Bridge.

4 BRIEF HISTORY OF THE CONSERVATION AREA

- 4.1 The Billings area is believed to have got its name from the creek known since 1437 as Billings Well Dyche, which formed the parish boundary. Between 1824 and August 1828 Lord Kensington's Canal, which was a tidal navigation one hundred feet wide, was constructed from the present Olympia site to the Thames at Chelsea Creek, along the line of the ditch or stream then known as Counter's Creek. The canal was not a financial success and appears to have suffered from engineering problems, as works of improvement carried out in 1839 were unsuccessful only a year later. It was sold to the West London Railway Company in 1846, which continued to run it on a more successful basis until it was partly filled in to enable the railway to extend across the Thames in 1860-62. By 1863 it had been filled in down as far as the King's Road. The section from the King's Road to the entrance to the Imperial Gas Works Dock remained open and tidal until the early 1980s when ownership changed to the Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea and it was filled in, leaving only Chelsea Creek at its southern end open and tidal.
- 4.2 It is part of the eastern cutting of the existing railway line laid upon the site of the canal that now forms this conservation area.
- 4.3 The adjoining development within the Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea to the east was built in 1846 & 1847 as St. Mark's Road, North Street and South Street on the north side of Bridge Street. However, by 1939 the street names had change to Billing Road, Billing Place, Billing Street, and Fulham Road respectively.
- 4.4 The west boundary wall of Brompton Cemetery, completed in 1840 runs along the north east boundary of the conservation area.

- 4.5 Stamford Cottages, immediately overlooking the south east part of the cutting that forms this part of the conservation area, originally had small front gardens onto the canal towpath. Unfortunately, their outlook has significantly deteriorated in subsequent years.
- 4.6 The west side of the railway cutting is dominated by the modern Stamford Bridge Football Stadium and Chelsea Village development.
- 4.7 Until 1982 the land that makes up this conservation area was reserved by the Greater London Council for the West London Relief Road. This road proposal is no longer under consideration. Any proposals that may come forward will have to be considered in relation to their impact on the environment of this conservation area and the adjoining Billings Conservation Area within the Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea.

5 CHARACTER AND APPEARANCE

- 5.1 The Billings & Brompton Cutting Conservation Area is railway land made up of a long narrow strip of railway cutting which contains no development. Its character assessment can be defined as an open space and area of nature & ecological significance, which forms a green screen between the busy railway line to the west and the attractive small scale Mid 19th Century residential development to the east.
- 5.2 Most of the conservation area falls beneath the Strategic View Corridor from Richmond Park to St. Paul's Cathedral, so any proposal for development on the restricted site of the cutting would have to take this into consideration together with other restraints.
- 5.3 The conservation area is also defined as part of the West London Line Green Corridor and is part of a Nature Conservation Area of Grade I borough-wide importance. Although the area is not large or significant enough to be designated as Metropolitan Open Land it is nevertheless an important part of the structure of open space in the borough, providing a break in the built up area and assisting biodiversity. Even though the area is not publicly accessible, it contributes to local and visual amenity. The need to enhance and extend the green corridor along the railway line in the Borough is stressed in UDP policy EN28, and any opportunity to increase the *'perception of the local environment as both leafy and pleasant'* by tree planting and landscaping within the adjoining Chelsea Football Club Grounds will be encouraged.
- 5.4 The conservation area, as a former canal, has important industrial archaeology potential, and in the event of any development, such as the proposed rail halt, taking place an archaeological investigation will be required.

6 BROAD DESIGN GUIDELINES

- 6.1 The previous section described the character of the conservation area looking at it in relationship with adjoining groups of buildings and the general landscape and townscape. This section identifies key components that define the character, or those which affect it, suggesting broad design guidelines to deal with each one.
- 6.2 Piecemeal changes, when considered cumulatively, can have a severely negative effect on the special character and appearance of an area. The following section outlines factors the Council considers important in preserving the character of an area through encouraging good practice. Not all the alterations and works listed below require planning permission or conservation area consent.

Uses

- 6.3 The balance of uses within a conservation area is important in defining its character particularly if they reflect the historic development of the area.
- 6.4 Originally a creek, then a canal, the primary use of the site is now associated to the operational railway, in the form of an overgrown cutting. There should be a clear expectation, therefore, that from time to time it may be necessary to locate railway equipment in this area to ensure the safe and efficient working of the network. Any such equipment or structure should be designed and sited to take full account of the character and appearance of the conservation area and not compromise its opportunities for biodiversity.
- 6.5 There are a variety of uses surrounding the conservation area including residential to the south east (The Billings), open space to the north east (Brompton Cemetery), transport to the north and west (railway lines) and south (Fulham Road) and a major sports facility further west (Chelsea Football Club). Planning permission for a new rail halt with platform and waiting room associated with the Chelsea Football Club on the central part of the conservation area, linked to the west by a foot bridge and lifts over the tracks was renewed on 23 June 2004.

Setting of the Conservation Area

- 6.6 The setting of a conservation area is important in defining its character and appearance. Any development, or alterations to properties, affecting the setting of the conservation area should take full account of its character and appearance, and should preserve or enhance it, as described in the profile. Although Network Rail has concerns about trees and shrubs creating potential problems of leaves on the lines and climbing opportunities resulting in trespass and vandalism, carefully managed planting along the boundaries of properties adjoining the conservation area could be maintained to enhance views and to provide an opportunity for biodiversity without compromising the efficiency and safety of the railway.
- 6.7 The small scale and original details of the two storey artisan development comprising Stamford Cottages, adjoining the east side of the conservation area, and their associated buildings within the Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea Billings Conservation Area, together with their combination of brick and stucco elevations, make a significant contribution to the charm, appearance and quality of the setting of this conservation area.

Landmarks

- 6.8 There are no distinct landmarks within this conservation area. However, the large modern Stamford Bridge Football Stadium and Chelsea Village development on the west side of the railway is a major landmark adjoining the conservation area. The parapet walls of the Stamford Bridge, Fulham Road have Parish boundary stones set in the brickwork. Those on the north side are inscribed 'FP 1860' and 'SL' with the date having faded, those on the south side are inscribed 'SL, No C41 1862' and 'FP, No 42 1862'.

Continuity and Historic Names

- 6.9 The Council encourages the erection of historic plaques where appropriate. A plaque referring to the Kensington Canal, erected in a publicly accessible position such as on or near the Stamford Bridge parapet, would be appropriate and of considerable interest.

Views

- 6.10 The rail land containing the conservation area is surrounded by high metal fencing along its boundary with Chelsea Football Club, and is obscured from general view from Fulham Road by the bridge parapet and from within Brompton Cemetery by the parapet wall of the catacombs, which line this part of the boundary. As a result there are only restricted views into the conservation area at ground level. Part of it can be glimpsed through the railings along its boundary with Stamford Cottages and from the Chelsea Village development.. However, high-level views into the conservation area are available at a variety of points including the upper floor rooms of the Chelsea Village buildings, Walsingham Mansions and Brompton Park Crescent, from the roof of the catacombs in Brompton Cemetery and from buses or other tall vehicles passing over the Stamford Bridge on Fulham Road.

Boundary Treatment

- 6.11 There is a mix of boundary treatments surrounding the conservation area. The south boundary is formed by the old brickwork of the parapet of Stamford Bridge (bearing a stone plaque dated 1860 on the Fulham Road side) and the south east part of the boundary is formed by tall railings covered with vegetation, and considerably affected by rust, which face the front of Stamford Cottages, which adjoin it. Immediately north of this is the high brick wall of the Brompton Cemetery, incorporating the rear of the catacombs, which has ventilation windows at lower level and is topped by a parapet with vertical slit openings and stone coping. The railway track and rails themselves form the western boundary of the conservation area, though the visible barrier on this side is the modern metal panelled fencing along the rear of Chelsea Football Club which is painted grey with blue vertical stripes.
- 6.12 Hedge planting and greenery in the front gardens of Stamford Cottages add to the quality of the area, and are also important along other boundaries with the conservation area both visually in softening the interface between the adjoining rail and street corridors and because of their biodiversity value. They should, therefore, be retained wherever possible.

Landscape

- 6.13 The conservation area has the typical characteristics of a railway cutting that is substantially overgrown with a mixture of trees, shrubs and ground cover, giving an overall green appearance conducive to a diverse collection of wild life species and biodiversity. Although the area has a history that has archaeological implications associated to the former canal, there is no visible physical evidence of the old towpath and canal-side wall that may still remain hidden beneath the undergrowth.

Trees

- 6.14 The conservation area contains several mature trees of value to its landscape quality which have self-seeded over a number of years. None of these are currently the subject of Tree Preservation Orders, but all trees in a conservation area are protected, and owners are urged to look after them, together with the associated shrubs and ground cover, to provide an opportunity for biodiversity. Whilst Network Rail is expected to make every effort to retain mature trees within the conservation area, it may in some cases be necessary to remove trees to satisfactorily locate operational equipment where it will allow the achievement of efficiency and safety benefits on the railway.

Opportunity Sites

- 6.15 There are no opportunity sites identified within the conservation area, as there is little, or no, scope for redevelopment. It should be acknowledged, however, that some railway kit is not particularly attractive, but may need to be placed in this location. Nevertheless, the proposed new rail halt, and any other associated new railway buildings or kit, should ideally be designed to contribute positively, but in all cases not harm, the visual, archaeological and ecological quality of the conservation area, respecting it in terms of their plan form and height in relation to the landscape and adjoining townscape.

Advertisement Hoardings

- 6.16 Advertisement hoardings are not substitutes for suitable boundary treatments as they detract from the amenity of the area.
- 6.17 There are three advertisement hoardings immediately to the north of the Stanford Bridge at present, two within the conservation area situated on the cutting to the west of the flank wall of Hereford House, Fulham Road, which itself is within the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, and one adjoining the conservation area, situated on the west cutting east of the flank wall of Walsingham Mansions. The removal of these hoardings will be encouraged in coordination with R. B. K. & C. and the erection of any new advertisement hoardings within the conservation area will be resisted as they have no relevance to the functioning of the conservation area and have a visually detrimental effect upon its approach from Fulham Road and the character of the adjoining related R. B. K. & C. Billings Conservation Area.

7 OTHER RELEVANT DOCUMENTS

Street Improvements in Historic Areas; English Heritage, August 1993.

PPG15: Planning Policy Guidance: Planning and the Historic Environment; Department of the Environment/Department of National Heritage, September 1994.

Conservation Area Practice: English Heritage Guidance on the Management of Conservation Areas; English Heritage, October 1995.

Traffic Advisory Leaflet 1/96: Traffic Management in Historic Areas; The Department of Transport & English Heritage, January 1996.

Streets For All: A Guide to the Management of London's Streets; English Heritage, March 2000.

The Unitary Development Plan: London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham, adopted August 2003.

8 STATUTORY LISTED BUILDINGS IN THE CONSERVATION AREA

There are no statutory listed buildings within the conservation area.

9 BUILDINGS OF MERIT IN THE CONSERVATION AREA

There are no local listed buildings of merit within the conservation area.

10 ARTICLE 4 DIRECTIONS IN THE CONSERVATION AREA

There are no Article 4 Directions in the conservation area.

NOTES

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AREA

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AREA

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