

Beckenham Town Centre Character and Appearance Assessment

Written by Robert Buckley, Principal Conservation Officer
2013



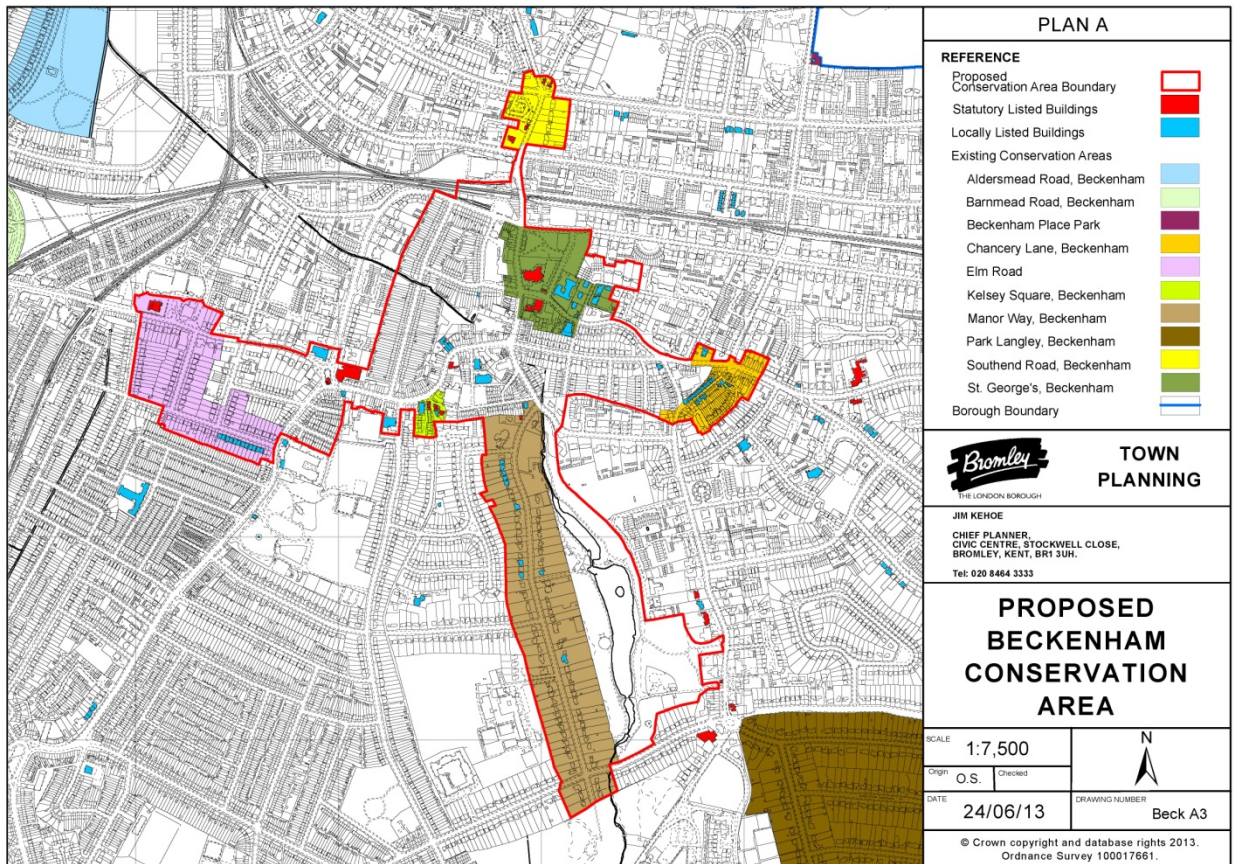


FIG1. Map of proposed conservation area for Beckenham.

Note: The study area for this report is that which is bounded by the red line and existing conservation areas

1. Introduction

Beckenham Town Centre is located in the North East of the London Borough of Bromley and is designated as a District Centre in Unitary Development Plan (Local Plan currently in consultation). A working group was set up to seek improvements in Beckenham and West Wickham. This group, lead by Cllr Michael Tickner, requested this study be undertaken to examine the possibility of increasing conservation area designation in Beckenham.

2. Previous Studies

The entire Northwest of the borough, including Beckenham, was covered by a conservation study in March 2004 by consultants GL Hearn, and the Elm Road conservation area was designated as a result of the findings. The only change to the town centre conservation areas proposed in this study was the eastward extension of the Beckenham St George's conservation area to take in the Victorian houses along Bromley Road. This latter recommendation was not adopted.

3. Policy

Section 69 of the Planning (Listed buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires all local authorities to identify "areas of special architectural or historic interest, the character and appearance of which it is desirable to preserve and enhance" and designate them as Conservation Areas. In considering a conservation area the Council must be sure that the area is of special interest as designation brings with it additional planning controls, control over demolition and the protection of trees. Section 72 of the Act also places a duty on the Council, and other decision makers, to give special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character and appearance of conservation areas.

4. Historical development

Beckenham has a long history as a village and the location of several notable country seats. However, its transition to a town, and then to a suburb have wrought enormous changes in its built fabric that largely define its character today.

The period of transition was relatively rapid. At the beginning of the 19th century, the population of the parish was approximately 1,000, hovering between that of a large village and a small country market town. At that time it had little local autonomy: it was a parish within the county of Kent. Local affairs were overseen by the parish Vestry, as was common in many villages at that time. The population remained steady until the 1840's, after which it doubled or even tripled over each succeeding decade. Autonomous local government began to develop. In 1878, a Beckenham Local Board was formed, which rapidly evolved into an Urban District. By 1901, 26,000 people lived in the parish. In 1935, the council became a Borough, electing its own Mayor, by which time the population was approximately 45,000.

The period of greatest growth and change, from 1860 to 1890, swept away most of the timber framed and clapboard houses that had characterised the village (with the obvious exception of the listed Old George public house that remains in the High Street), and replaced them with the solid architecture of prosperous Victorian urban life.

Beckenham Town Centre's two conservation areas (St. George's and Kelsey Square) are geographically isolated from each other. While both areas are connected with the common history of old Beckenham, they have undergone

separate historical development and have a different character today. They are separated by a section of High Street which has been substantially re-developed in several phases during the 19th and 20th centuries.

Beckenham St. George's is the historic core of the village and then town of Beckenham. As such, it has been occupied by built development for many centuries. Temporal and spiritual power in the form of the Old Manor, the Rectory and the Church were located there. Appropriately, it still contains the focus of the modern town: the banks, the Church, the Public Hall and the primary school. It is largely this collection of institutional, civic and community buildings that establish the character of the conservation area.

The area is a product of the rapid urban changes of the 1880's, during which its finest buildings were constructed on the site of the Old Manor and its grounds. The Old Manor was Beckenham's stepping stone to greater things. The direct pre-cursor of Beckenham Place, the Old Manor and the Lordship of Beckenham were purchased by John Cator in 1773. Although a grand old house, it was not of the style which a newly wealthy country gentleman would find sufficient, and Cator constructed Beckenham Place to replace it shortly thereafter. By 1788 it had passed to the Hoare family, who aggrandised it with land purchased from Lord Gwydir of Kelsey Manor, a property which the Hoares themselves would later own. They sold it in 1881, when it was purchased for the construction of the civic buildings required by the growing town.

5. Existing Conservation Areas

The study area involves linking several existing conservation areas as shown on the map. Each of these areas has specific supplementary planning guidance and are as follows:

Elm Road – late 19th century semi detached housing with church and former technical institute. Designated 2004

Kelsey Square- A small homogenous Victorian development of former estate cottages. Designated 1977

St Georges Beckenham- The historic core of Beckenham centred around St Georges Church, the Public Halls and surrounding Victorian development. Designated 1977

Southend Road, Beckenham- Early Cator Estate development of large Italianate semi detached villas circa 1850 and a 1950s flat block. Designated 1990

Chancery Lane- Small hamlet which predates the suburban expansion of Beckenham. Mainly late 19th century cottages but some older vernacular houses, possibly from 17th century. Designated 1973

Manor Way – Large, mainly detached, detached Arts and Crafts Houses, some by leading architects such as Edward Hooper.

6. Spatial Form

High Street

The study area is centred around the High Street which is the historic core of Beckenham. The High Street stretches from Beckenham Junction station westwards to the Beckenham war memorial. Historic land ownership patterns and topography have led to an unusual meandering layout including a 90 degree turn at the Junction with Manor Road. This area is characterised by narrow urban plots at right angles to the streets mostly with no front sites and predominately terraced development.

Surrounds

Immediately behind the High Street are some terrace Victorian cottages such as those on Stanmore Terrace which have a very urban character and are likely to be coeval with much of the High Street development. Otherwise the development surrounding the high street is far more spacious with plots often having both front and back gardens and semi-detached housing. Such development occurs on roads linking Beckenham with surrounding areas such as along Manor Road towards Bromley and Beckenham Road to the west which leads from Penge. These approach roads were developed in the late 19th century and later interwar development occurred on The Drive, again with spacious residential plots.

In sum, the spatial form has very little planned approach and is more organic in its evolution around a central nucleus.

6. Listed Buildings

Statutory Listed Buildings

3 Southend Road (CA)

3A Southend Road (CA)

24 Southend Road (CA)

Foxgrove Lodge Beckenham Place Park (CA)

St Georges Church (CA)

Alms Houses 1-3 Bromley Road (CA)

Beckenham Public Hall (CA)

George Inn High Street

Coach and Horses Burnhill Road

1-7 Kelsey Square (CA)

Odeon Cinema High Street

Beckenham War Memorial Jct Croydon Road and High Street

Former Technical College 28 Beckenham Road (CA)

4 Manor Way

	
St George's Church (CA)	The George Inn
	
Odeon Cinema and War Memorial	Beckenham Public Hall (CA)

Locally Listed Buildings

Bromley Road Infant School, Bromley Road (CA)
1-6 The Knoll (CA)
Knoll Lodge The Knoll (CA)
Beckenham Methodist Church Bromley Road (CA)
Oakhill Lodge The Knoll (CA)
Oakhill House (CA)
50 Manor Road
Nos. 6-42 , 9-13, 29-43 Chancery Lane (CA)
13 Wickham Road (CA)
1-7 Limes Road (CA)
24-32 Manor Way (CA)
Nos. 2, 21, 38, 39, 50, 52 Manor Way (CA)
Christ Church Fairfield Road
Christ Church Halls Fairfield Road
162-166 High Street
157 High Street (CA)
Kelsey Lodge Kelsey Square (CA)
St. Edmunds Church Village Way
Post Office Office 22 Rectory Road
5-27 Cedars Road (CA)



St Edmund RC Church



Christ Church



Christ Church Halls



Beckenham Post Office

7. Building styles and Landmarks

High Street Area

The most important buildings in the central High Street area are already within the St Georges and Kelsey Square conservations but there are some notable exceptions such as the Grade II listed George Inn which dates from the 18th Century, locally listed St Edmunds RC Church in a modern gothic style, the Grade II listed Art Deco Odeon and the Beckenham War Memorial. These last two in particular provide an impressive entrance to the town centre and are significant in both terms of 20th century design and their contribution to Beckenham's social history. Other 20th century buildings of note include the former Burton's shop which has a modernist façade and is currently occupied by Pizza Express at 189 High Street. However some of the interwar shopping parades are of poor quality such as those on the north side of the western extent of the High Street.

Surrounds

The conservation areas of Southend Road, Chancery Lane, Elm Road and Manor Way are the best examples of suburban and hamlet type development. Between The High Street and Chancery Lane is Manor Road which also has two cul de sacs; Manor Grove and Bevington Road. These red brick semi-

detached Victorian houses date from the 1880s and are of a common type in London with detailing most likely replicated from pattern books. Unfortunately many of these houses have lost their front gardens and many have uPVC windows. These changes are less pronounced on the side roads.

To the east of Manor Way conservation area is Kelsey Park which is a formal park laid out in what was the grounds of the former Kelsey Manor. The park is now within the area to be considered for conservation area designation. It should be noted that the park lodge is already included in the Manor Way conservation area.

To the north-west of the High Street is The Drive. These are 1930s semi detached houses of a typical design for this era comprising rough cast rendered facades and curved bay windows. The houses and their gardens have been greatly altered.

Between The War Memorial and the Elm Road conservation area there are some remaining Victorian villas of substantial size with some decorative detailing such as timber porches and brick banding. Many however have been demolished and replaced over the years with modern development which has compromised group value.

North of the St Georges conservation area is Beckenham Junction Railway Station which retains much of its original Victorian character on the platforms, with detailing such as the large and distinctive cast iron canopy brackets, but externally the front site is dominated by car parking and the station appears modest. Northwards towards the Southend Road conservation area are some modern buildings of no real architectural merit although some older remnants remain on the eastern side of the road.

8. Views

There are no views of a planned nature but the organic development and historic nature of the town centre means that glimpse of the various church spires are often visible and some of the better individual buildings on the High Street contribute to some pleasant streetscapes. As previously mentioned views into the High Street area from the west are dominated by the Odeon and the War Memorial.



High Street with no 134 in the foreground.



Southwards out of the St Georges conservation area. Old Police Station in the left foreground and the BT telecom exchange in the background.

9. Conclusion

The best areas within the study area have already been designated as conservation areas and those areas in-between lack the special interest or group value to be worthy of conservation area designation or indeed have undergone such change that they no longer have a coherent architectural quality. Therefore it is recommended that this proposal is not designated as a conservation area.

However, it is considered that a new High Street conservation area may be worthy of investigation to include the western extent of the High Street and joining St Georges and Kelsey Square. Such an area would effectively cover the area from Beckenham Junction station to the War Memorial and perhaps covering significant areas or buildings just off the High Street.

ADDENDUM

Response from English Heritage 27-8-13

Dear Robert

David has asked me, as Historic Places Adviser, to respond on the report on a conservation area extension for Beckenham Town Centre.

The following observations are based on that report, and a brief desk top assessment using GIS historic mapping and street view. I did consult Pevsner, but he would appear unreceptive in respect of the architectural qualities of Beckenham. If you are seeking a more detailed opinion I would be happy to do a walk through of the main areas when you return from Holiday.

I would consider that suggested extension is too widely based and as a result incorporates areas of no great historic or architectural character, or as set out in the report, areas of housing too altered to warrant CA designation. It must be possible to define the special character of the area in architectural and historic terms. This is particularly true of some of the streets of interwar housing. It must also be borne in mind that in designating conservation areas the Council must consider the resources and policies necessary to secure a positive management regime. It may be that larger areas are more positively managed via neighbourhood planning than CA status. If there is a strong lobby for the wider extension, it may be worth exploring the alternative possibility of neighbourhood plans. This would enable positive policies to be put in place but would not require CA designation over the wider area. However this would need to be community driven but could have a positive impact if the capacity and community will exists to undertake such as exercise.

That said there are areas of historic merit here and I would consider that some extension/s may be warranted. In particular, the High Street warrants further investigation (potentially from the High Street/Manor Road Junction as far as the attractive and locally listed Post Office building). The buildings along the High Street, although predominantly late C19th and early C20th, do follow of the historic road layout and are of generally good quality. A number of buildings such as 162 -166, which is locally listed, must be considered of high townscape quality. A more focused CA around the High Street may also facilitate positive shopfront and streetscape policies and SPD guidance. In addition, there may also be smaller extensions to existing CA's which could be justified.

I am sure you have a copy but I have attached a link to CA Appraisal and management guidance which sets out the considerations and possibilities

<http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/publications/understanding-place-conservation-area/>

Please give me a call if you wish to discuss further.

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