

Conservation comments	
Reference number	20/115160
Address	Sydenham Hill Estate – Mais House
Proposal	Demolition of existing buildings at Mais House and Otto Close garages, SE26, and redevelopment to provide a part four, six and seven storey building and a part two and three storey terrace building providing a total of 110 residential units (use class C3), community room and estate office; together with alterations to the existing ball court; associated works to vehicular and pedestrian access from Sydenham Hill, Lammas Green and Kirkdale; provision of car and cycle parking, refuse storage and landscaping including amenity space and play area.
Conservation Officer	Joanna Ecclestone
Date	28.01.2020

Significance
<p>The existing building is of no historic or architectural interest, and does not contribute positively to the CA architecturally or historically. The HS says it detracts from the CA and whilst I agree this is true for the physical fabric of the building itself, the arrangement of its form and height on the plot serves to preserve important aspects of this part of the CA, namely the historic pattern of development of large detached buildings set back behind a front garden area in large plots with a screen of mature trees that provides the dominant visual element in views along the street.</p> <p>The brick boundary walls and gate piers with stone coping pre-date the building and are of historic interest, dating to the previous house on the site which was built between 1896 and 1915.</p> <p>The existing single storey garages (part of the later 1970s Otto Close development) are of no heritage significance. The majority are outside the CA, with a small number to the western end within the CA.</p> <p>The western, upper most part of the site is within Sydenham Hill/Mount Gardens CA, for which there is no adopted Appraisal. Whilst not formally appraised or adopted, it is acknowledged that there are three distinct areas within this CA which I refer to as character areas: Mount Gardens, Mount Ash Road and Lammas Green. The development falls within the Lammas Green character area, which addresses Sydenham Hill at its top extent, and adjacent to the northern terrace of Lammas Green at its south east extent. The north east extent of the site adjacent to Otto Close falls outside the CA, but the CA boundary wraps around it on the south and east side.</p> <p>The Lammas Green character area is characterised by large detached houses in a rather ostentatious style, set back from the road behind large front gardens, and with large gaps between the houses. Mature large canopy trees partially screen their presence on the street, particularly in oblique views as one moves along Sydenham Hill where the dominant feature is the continuous tree screen on both sides of the road. The trees in front gardens provide a visual and historic link with Sydenham Hill Wood on the north side of Sydenham Hill, a large and important remnant of the former Great North Wood which formerly stretched across this part of south London.</p> <p>This character area also contains Lammas Green, a high quality grade II 1950s housing scheme</p>

of the City of London. It comprises three terraces set round a village green, with views of the north Downs, and two blocks of flats to the west and north which enclose the green and serve as a buffer to the road. This estate sits to the south side of the development site. The scheme bears no historical association with any other period of development within the conservation area but its 'village green' typology extends the 'rural' character of adjacent parts of the CA, and the broad grassed areas and mature trees fronting Sydenham Hill responds well to the established pattern of development.

A number of locally listed substantial Victorian dwellings are within proximity of the site. To the north is Castlebar, a large detached dwelling, 2.5-3 storeys, (local list states 1879; HS thinks possibly 1890s). To the south of Lammas Green is no.34a, 3 storeys (plus 4th storey in a tower element), 1899. To the south of that is The Cedars (no. 34), 3 storeys, 1898-9. These buildings are all architecturally flamboyant and set in spacious and well vegetated grounds with large mature trees along the front boundary.

Nos 34 and 34a are noted as 'scoped out' in the applicants Heritage Statement, but I advise that they are important to include in assessment of the setting of the site as they contribute to the historic pattern of development on Sydenham Hill which the proposed development will need to be sensitive to in order to preserve or enhance the CA's character and appearance.

No. 36, set immediately to the south of Lammas Green, comprises a later 20th C group of 3 storey dwellings set behind a dense evergreen high hedge such that the buildings themselves have minimal impact on the streetscene. They are of no heritage significance.

The Mount Gardens character area downhill to the east is on the site of the original Sydenham Common which was enclosed in the early 19th century, and developed from about 1833. The area covers a nearly rectangular site with unmade roads on three sides. It is covered with dense vegetation and many mature trees which give it a rural appearance. The detached properties are of varied design but each possess interesting architectural character and quality. Close to the southeast extent of the site are four locally listed dwellings – Ashtree and Rouselle Cottages (c1815), Lynton Cottage and The Cottage (e-mid C19th) – their relationship with the site is visually minimal but their form contributes to the overall character of the CA.

Outside the CA to the south along Sydenham Hill are 6 storeys (and 1 7 storey) blocks of 1950-60s, close to junction with Crescent Wood Road. Similarly to the current Mais House their footprint is oriented at an angle from the back edge of pavement which allows a sense of spaciousness, creates views between buildings and results in the landscaping and trees playing a dominant role in the streetview.

Bridge House Estate Boundary stone on the pedestrian path from Lammas green to Kirkdale – is a NDHA. The Reference Plan to the Sydenham Enclosure Award, 1819, (shown at Figure 6.5 of the applicants HS) shows that the local area was divided between a number of landowners including The City of London Corporation and Bridge House Estate. The latter is a charitable trust, established by royal charter in 1282 and its original purpose was to maintain London Bridge, but in later years branched into funding other bridges, their maintenance and donations to other public causes. The trust initially gained its funds through tolls and the renting of property on London Bridge but soon expanded and had an extensive property portfolio throughout London. This diversification allowed them to build the later versions of London bridge as well as Blackfriars Bridge and Tower Bridge and then also buying Southwark Bridge and Millennium Bridge. At the time of enclosure, the Bridge House Estate owned Ladywell Farm, and so was

awarded two large land parcels, one at the Kirkdale/northern end of Sydenham Hill. The Bridge House Estate placed boundary stones at the four corners of their plots. Three of those marking this land parcel have 'reputedly' survived (according to the HS) – I know of one on the pedestrian path from Lammas Green to Kirkdale which is dated to 1816.

Impact

Siting in plot and proximity to road

The current footprint of Mais House is angled so that the closest building element to the road is the apex of the foremost wing, at 5.3m at from the back edge of pavement at its closest point and 11.5m at its furthest. To either side, the closest point of Castlebar is 8.8m from the back edge of pavement, and Lammas Green's northern block's closest point is 5.6m from the back edge of pavement. Both of these buildings are also lower than the proposed development at 2.5-3 and 3 storeys respectively. Mature trees exist in front of both to continue the tree canopy in views along the road. Lammas Green has no boundary wall which means the built form is more visible but the view is of buildings set within spacious lawns..

As proposed, the orientation of the front block is changed so that the full front elevation faces the road rather than an apex, and the distance from back edge of pavement is reduced to 3.5m at its closest point and 5m at its furthest. The loss of between 1.8m and 6.5m of green space in this location, and the more dominant orientation of the building will increase the degree to which the building will break through the existing tree screen and canopy. The difference in height, from 3 storeys to 6 storeys also exacerbates this impact. The orientation appears to be driven by the location and amount of car access & parking to the east. Can this be minimised or re-located?

The HS states that the 'proposed front building line on Sydenham Hill is approximately in line with the existing on-site building frontage, and very approximately matches the building line of the former Otto House... and is considered to preserve the character and appearance of the conservation area. (p41). The 'very approximate' comparison with the adjoining site does not pick up the impact of the change in orientation, nor the impact of the loss of between 1.8 & 6.5m of highly significant garden setting and space for large canopy trees.

Fig 4.96 and 4.98 of the TVIA demonstrates the prominent and anomalous visual presence of the 6 storey element in northern and southern views into and through the Conservation Area on Sydenham Hill.

Tree screen

Mais House currently has a dense tree and vegetation screen in the front area behind a high wall, with the northern end less dense than the west end. Along Sydenham Hill the tree screen is continuous although varied in density. In the one area where it trees are notably missing (in front of no. 34a and the garage site adj this clearly appears as a harmful anomaly in the character of the street, and the locally listed dwelling behind is uncharacteristically exposed and harmed by the lack of verdant setting. The proposed development results in the loss of ** mature large canopy trees from the Sydenham Hill frontage, and replacement with ** smaller trees which are not of a comparable stature to those along this CA edge nor with those opposite in Sydenham Hill Wood. (David - I have not been successful in tracking down these details but trust that Val will).

The HS states that the impact of the loss of green space and trees *'is very minor as it does not lie within a key view within, into or out of the conservation area, does not affect a focal building or*

focal space within the conservation area' (p41). It is not clear if this relates to the whole of the plot or only to the rear garden. In any case, I disagree and consider that the edge of the CA along Sydenham Hill is highly significant. The whole frontage was included in the CA (rather than omitting Mais House) and the loss of trees here and introduction of development that introduces a visual gap in the tree screen and whose height exceeds the tree canopy will detract from the character and appearance of the CA.

The TVIA states that *'the proposals would add to the existing diversity of medium rise developments along Sydenham Hill, such as those present further south in the L&Q Sydenham Hill Estate'* (p16). This estate, being outside the CA, is not an appropriate part of the context to be responding to, and replicating this scale would not serve to preserve or enhance the CA.

Otto Place terrace

The southern end of the proposed terrace on Otto Place (replacing the existing garages) has a close relationship with Lammas Green. Original scheme drawings of Lammas Green (HS p38) show an early version with 2 storey cottages and an additional 2 storey semi detached pair set back at the north east corner, roughly in the position of the southernmost Otto Place house. The additional two cottages were not built, and the northern terrace was constructed with a variety of 1+ attic and 2 storey cottages. There is no commentary on this change in plan but the result was that the view towards the north downs is more open than if it had been built.

The southernmost house of Otto Place is set back behind the front building line of the northern terrace of Lammas Green, but at 2 + attic storey it will rise above the existing low (1 + attic level) house at the lowest end of the Lammas Green northern terrace. The upper parts will block a significant part of the gap that allows views through from Lammas Green over south London to the North Downs, which will detract from the original composition of Lammas Green. My advice at pre-app was that this last house should be omitted or reduced in width/height and the TVIA views confirm my view that this would be necessary to avoid this harm.

The houses have a traditional appearance with references to both the urban formality of Mount Ash Gardens, and the vernacular style of Lammas Green, e.g. in the attic level accommodation and projecting bay windows on the end elevations. I'm not clear as to the rationale behind the ground floor shopfront type treatment in ppc aluminium but have no objection to this and consider it will add character to this new street.

An existing narrow pedestrian route from Lammas Green to Kirkdale reinforces the semi rural local character created across the CA by unmade roads, open spaces and abundant vegetation. The street that replaces this path should aim to achieve a continuity of character as one moves between Otto Place and Lammas Green. Have we got streetscape treatment proposals? Details of planting? Surfacing materials?

Impact on Listed Buildings

A retaining wall to the east of 23 Lammas Green is proposed to be removed, but this is not shown on the demolition plan. Need details to assess whether this is part of the LB curtilage and whether its removal would affect the special interest of the LB/ whether LBC is required. What will the replacement treatment be? Need to understand this change and how it will impact on the setting of the LB.

The Sydenham Hill frontage of the new development will change the context of Lammas Green as seen from the road by introducing a significantly higher building in close proximity. The setting will be mediated by a lower, 4 storey block adjacent to the 3 storey northern block of Lammas Green, which could create a successful transition to additional height, but because of its depth, projecting balconies and proximity to the road results in a bulky and inappropriately assertive presence in the street. (The visualisations do not show window openings in the southern gable end – the plans indicate there will be two windows per floor). The scale of the 6 storey block is insensitively high, and does not preserve the setting of the listed building. Its proximity to the road only increases its visibility and dominance in the road. I consider this will cause a moderate degree of less than substantial harm to the setting of the listed buildings.

TVIA fig 4.102 – from within Lammas Green to the southeast corner of the site shows the extent of blocking of the view from within Lammas Green. This is regrettable and does cause a moderate degree of less than substantial harm to the setting of the listed buildings.

TVIA fig 4.100 – from within Lammas Green looking taller building on high ground. I consider it not harmful in principle to see new development beyond the boundary of Lammas Green, but the height appears out of scale and context with its surroundings and is particularly prominent on this high land. In my opinion this would cause a moderate degree of less than substantial harm to the setting of the listed buildings.

Impact on CA.

As set out above, the impact on the CA is largely due to the uncontextual height and proximity to the road on the Sydenham Hill frontage blocks. I consider that this will cause moderate to high degree of less than substantial harm to this part of the CA. Being the edge of the CA it is particularly important to reinforce its characteristics so as to prevent erosion which this scheme fails to do.

On the Kirkdale frontage the development is well set back: the northern flank wall of Otto Place will be visible behind a landscaped area, which will effectively replicate the current situation of built to unbuilt space. I consider that this layout massing and scale will preserve the character and appearance of the CA in this view.

Impact on non-designated Heritage Assets The impact on the neighbouring locally listed buildings on Sydenham Hill detracts from the group's unplanned yet strong composition by virtue of the height and proximity to the road of the northern most part of the proposed building. The introduction of one particularly dominant building to the group which will be unduly prominent in views from both directions will erode their settings and weaken the strength of the group as a whole. I consider that this will cause a moderate degree of less than substantial harm to their settings.

I do not consider the proposal will cause harm to the locally listed buildings in Mount Gardens.

I haven't found any proposals for the Bridge House Estate boundary stone currently in situ on the pedestrian path on the site's south-eastern boundary. This should ideally be relocated close to its original position.

Justification
The number of units is justified by the ambition to maximise new dwelling numbers and by viability, and thus does not provide a design or heritage based clear and convincing justification for the harm to the setting of the LBs or CA. No convincingly different alternative options have been provided to demonstrate that a scheme of lower density could be viable and the scheme is driven by achieving high housing numbers.
Policy
<p>Section 68 of the Act states that special regard shall be had to the desirability of preserving the listed building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses</p> <p>Section 72 of the Act states that special attention shall be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of a conservation area.</p> <p>NPPF Para 130 - Permission should be refused for development of poor design that fails to take the opportunities available for improving the character and quality of an area and the way it functions, taking into account any local design standards or style guides in plans or supplementary planning documents.</p> <p>NPPF Para. 193 - requires great weight to be given to the conservation of designated heritage assets and notes that significance can be harmed or lost through unsympathetic development.</p> <p>NPPF Para 200 of the NPPF – LPAs should look for opportunities for new development in CAs and within the setting of heritage assets to 'enhance or better reveal' their significance.</p> <p>NPPF 196 – Less than substantial harm to designated heritage assets should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use</p> <p>London Plan Policy 7.8 Heritage assets and Archaeology Draft London Plan Policy HC1 Heritage Conservation and growth.</p> <p>Draft London Plan Policy D8 C1(d) Tall Buildings - “proposals should take account of, and avoid harm to, the significance of London’s heritage assets and their settings. Proposals resulting in harm will require clear and convincing justification, demonstrating that alternatives have been explored and there are clear public benefits that outweigh that harm” and that “buildings should positively contribute to the character of the area”.</p> <p>CS15 - Design CS 16 - Heritage DM36 DM37</p>
Recommendation
<p>I have objections due to the harm caused to the CA, the setting of listed buildings and the setting of locally listed buildings, chiefly caused by the height and position on site of the proposed buildings.</p> <p>I do not consider that the harm is adequately justified by the aim for highly dense scheme or its viability.</p>
Clarifications needed

Demolition of retaining wall adj 23 Lammas Green –needs to be included on Demolition Plan. Need assessment of its significance, and details of extent of demolition to assess whether its removal would affect the special interest of the LB and therefore whether LBC is required. What will the replacement treatment be?

Otto Place - Streetscape treatment proposals? Planting? Surfacing materials?

What is the proposal for the Bridge House Estate boundary stone currently in situ on the pedestrian path on the site's south-eastern boundary? This should ideally be relocated close to its original position.



Scale of northern terrace of Lammas Green, close to Otto Place. No. 23 on right



Wall proposed for demoliiton to right of 23 Lammas Green. #which section of wall is to be removed?