

# 37: TOWN HALL ROAD

## **Introduction**

This document identifies and appraises the special architectural and historic characteristics of the Town Hall Road Conservation Area and it also gives practical guidance on the implications of the Conservation Area status. It is in two parts: a Character Statement and a Management Plan.

**[Selection of photos including phone box]**

## **Character Analysis**

Town Hall Road Conservation Area has special character as a compact, mixed but contemporary townscape, centred around the Battersea Arts Centre an impressive Grade II\* building. There are five distinct groups of buildings: the parade of shops on Lavender Hill; the tenement flats in Latchmere Road; the tenement flats in Theatre Street; the former Battersea Borough Council dwellings in Theatre Street and Town Hall Road; and the Battersea Arts Centre which was built as the Battersea Town Hall.

**[Townscape Analysis map]**

The Conservation Area is located within Battersea and is 2 miles from central London. It covers a relatively small area incorporating, commercial, residential and cultural development, it was designated a conservation area in 1989. The commercial development is on Lavender Hill – a vibrant street leading to Clapham Junction mainline station to the west, and to the London Borough of Lambeth to the east. The eastern section of Lavender Hill and Northcote Road make up Clapham Junction Town Centre as designated in the Unitary Development Plan. Most of the commercial development on Lavender Hill is made up of cafes, restaurants and estate agents, the main shopping area is based in Northcote Road. The residential development is situated behind Lavender Hill; it consists of three streets of compact terrace housing. The Conservation Area leads on to the Shaftesbury Park Estate, which was built from 1873 to 1877 by a housing co – operative; the Artisans, Labourers and General Dwelling Company.

Town Hall Road Conservation Area is very close to excellent public transport links in and out of Central London. Clapham Junction mainline station has over 50,000 passengers passing through the barriers a day, there are also 17 bus routes surrounding the station which bring in 4,000 buses per day. As major A roads both Lavender Hill and Latchmere Road suffer from a high volume traffic. A private landlord tenants the majority of Theatre Street and as a result resident population is very transient. Economic profile. The conservation area is in a mixed condition. The BAC is reasonably well maintained and so are the council owned houses in Theatre Street and Town Hall Road. The tenement flats are uniformly rather drab. The shops on Lavender Hill are a mixed bag in themselves.

## **Buildings & Townscape History**

[Insert Rocque map, and other OS maps]

John Rocque's map of 1746 shows that Battersea was predominantly a rural area, with small farms and a village core which is now Battersea Square and Battersea High Street. Lavender Hill takes its name

from the Lavender Fields that were cultivated here to produce perfume. The 19<sup>th</sup> century saw the development of large villas around Lavender Hill.

The London to Southampton line was the first railway line through the Battersea area it was opened in 1838. Battersea was still very rural at this time, interspersed with large villas built for rich merchants. Four more railway lines were built before Clapham Junction Station was opened in 1863. When the station was built Clapham was a more fashionable area than Battersea and so to attract middle and upper class clientele the railway companies choose to call it Clapham Junction although it was in South West Battersea. The construction of the railway station sparked mass development and by 1897 most of the area surrounding Clapham Junction had been developed.

The 1869 – 1874 London OS map shows that on the land that is now the Conservation Area there were several large villas facing onto Lavender Hill, farm buildings set back behind the villas, and an orchard to the north. The Battersea Town Hall was built in 1893 replacing one villa; the other two villas were demolished to make way for Picture Theatre. By 1916 the whole area had been developed. The Picture Theatre, by then renamed the Shakespeare Theatre was bombed in the Second World War. It has been replaced with a four storey mixed development, which is not included in the Conservation Area.

### **Battersea Arts Centre**

The former Battersea Town Hall is a very impressive Grade II\* Listed building now housing the Battersea Arts Centre. It was designed by EW Mountfield in 1891 and first opened in 1893. Mountfield went on to design The ‘Old Bailey’ - the Central Criminal Court in 1907.

Battersea Town Hall was used for over 70 years as council chambers, holding borough meetings, elections and discussions - it was a key focal point essential to the legislative activities within the borough. The Grand and Lower Halls were used to stage talent contests. It was used as a recruiting station during both World War I & II. In the First World War it was also used as a conscientious objectors tribunal site and in the Second World War it was the distribution centre for gas masks, and ration books and the lower hall was used as an air raid shelter. In the 1950's after the bombing of the Shakespeare Theatre the Grand and Lower Halls were used a music hall venue.

The building lost its role as the Town Hall in 1965 after Battersea Borough became part of Wandsworth Borough, following the 1963 London Government Act, which reformed London's 83 Metropolitan boroughs, dissolving them into the Greater London Council and 32 London Boroughs. The Grand and Lower Hall continued to be used to hold dances, shows, wedding receptions and lots of other community events, the rest of the building became redundant.

In 1967 plans were announced to demolish the building's Victorian frontage so that a recreation centre and library could be built. The Battersea and Victorian Societies supported by local residents and the general public pressed for the building to be listed. The building was reopened in 1974 as a community arts centre, providing a variety of adult education classes and space for local theatre groups to use for rehearsals and performances. In 1980 the building was renovated and the council chambers were made into a theatre, studio, workshop and gallery spaces. In 1993, the building's centenary year was marked with a weekend of celebrations.

The building has a long symmetrical front with a central cupola and a semicircular porch. There are carved figures in the pediment and spandrels by Paul Montford. On the pediment, Labour, Progress, Art and Literature are depicted instructing a youthful figure of Battersea. The interior is equally lavish and contains a public hall capable of seating over a thousand people. The quality of this building far exceeds that of its neighbours, although it could be said to be peripheral to the character of the conservation area, since it faces away from the rest in some splendid isolation. The double canopy over the Grand Hall Entrance makes for an impressive east elevation. The rear part of the building offers none of the flamboyance of the front, and looms rather austere over Town Hall Road and Theatre Street.

### **[Series of photos showing BAC]**

#### **The parade of shops on Lavender Hill**

The shops were built after the Town Hall was built completing the development along Lavender Hill. The terrace of shops is three storeys high with usable space in the roof. The corner shop now an estate agent has a distinctive hexagonal turret with weather vane on top. Most of the original shop fronts have been lost.

#### **The tenement flats in Latchmere Road**

Built in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the tenement flats on Latchmere Road face out to the west. They are three storeys and are built in red brick with canted bays rising up each frontage. They are architecturally only modest, with for their time fairly routine decorated lintels and stuccowork but importantly have retained their original front walls and red brick piers. Many have good privet hedges and some have fragments of original railings. Most have original sash windows and matching pairs of entrance doors within a common porch, which provides consistency and a robust quality; some original front path tiles remain but are mostly in need of repair and separating railings have been lost. Most significantly, in townscape terms this terrace provides a strong visual emphasis to the steepness of the slope as it steps relentlessly up the hill.

#### **The tenement flats in Theatre Street**

The buildings on the west side of Theatre Street are three storey red brick tenements, which rise almost directly from the back of the footway. These buildings have a somewhat overbearing impact on the street, reinforced by their austere appearance. Entrances with their small chequered tiled thresholds and large door-sets are the only relieving decorative features. Some buildings have patches of surviving tuck-pointing. Front boundary walls are ugly painted concrete. The street pattern with its tight crowd of buildings gives this conservation area a very urban character.

#### **The former Battersea Borough Council dwellings in Theatre Street and Town Hall Road**

The detailing of the block of housing on the eastside of Theatre Street built by the former Battersea Borough Council has some robust charm. Surprisingly, one house, one of a pair with ground floor castellated bays, has retained its original iron railings. Both here and in Town Hall Road, the style and appearance are similar to the Latchmere Estate and differ only in the introduction of imposing crow-stepped gables at the bottom of which are found (as at Latchmere) four matching front doors crowned by a bracketed corniced canopy. Rather than stepping down closely following the street, the terrace is stepped flat by flat so that the ground floor windows at the top of the hill are very close to the ground, and at the bottom of the hill the ground floor windows are eight brick courses (about 600mm/two feet) from the ground.

The most distinctive feature of this block is the extension of Town Hall Road north to Heathwall Street, which is a pedestrian walkway with no access for vehicles. This part of the street has a particularly attractive character because it is free from traffic and has been planted with a few trees.

**Layout, topography, green elements and open areas.**

Lavender Hill runs along a ridge above the Thames flood plain. To the north the land slopes steeply, dropping some 15m. down to Heathwall Street. The conservation area lies on this slope and results in a dramatic articulation of the terraces which descend Theatre Street, Town Hall Road and Latchmere Road turning fairly ordinary terraces into distinctive townscape. The impact of this is seen more clearly looking from a moderate distance from the north. The strong lines of the different roofs slopes can be seen from afar.

There are few green elements, the privet hedges in Latchmere Road provide welcome softness against the hard brick elevations. The small front gardens on the east side of Theatre Street are delightful. Buildings dominate the townscape, and there is generally insufficient space for significant planting. The trees that are there are therefore very important.

The closest open area is Falcon Park, off Latchmere Road.

**Public Realm**

The quality of the BAC building is enhanced by the use of natural York stone slabs and granite setts outside the main entrance and into the side roads. Concrete slabs and brick are used elsewhere in the area. Adjacent there are two red telephone boxes, which provide a positive accent in the setting of the listed building. There are original streetlights with ornate bases and double lamps around the Arts Centre. The bases match the supports of the canopy over the Grand Hall entrance in Town Hall Road