

Sydenham Ridge

Recommendation

Adopt as an Area of Special Local Character for meeting the selection criteria for architecture, historical connection, townscape, and landscape.

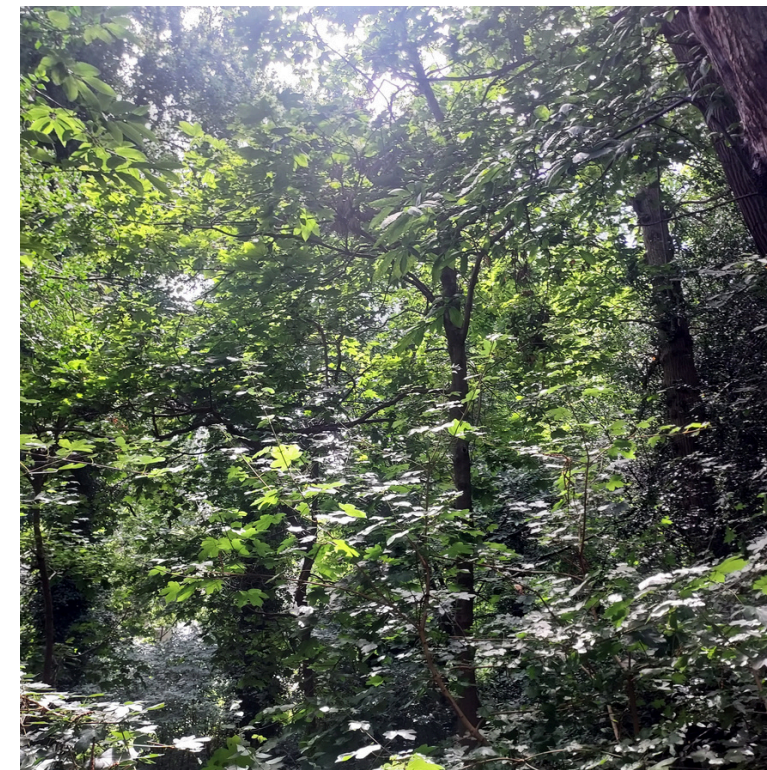
Description of the area

Sydenham Ridge is a large ASLC on the upper east facing slope of the Ridge and includes the area between the Sydenham Hill and Longton Avenue, and Hillcrest Wood. Hillcrest Wood is a remnant of ancient woodland, once part of the Great North Wood, within which the Hillcrest housing estate has been built. Some fine old oak and sweet chestnut trees link back to this time. The ASLC contains several groups of historic buildings of different periods with interesting historic and social connections.

1. Architecture

- A coherent group of villas in Longton Avenue inspired by the Arts & Crafts movement: 59-93 is a group of symmetrical pairs with hung tiles, projecting two storey bays topped by a gable, a shared large central chimney stacks, a recessed side porch under a brick arch and an oriel window. They are set in deep soft planted front gardens and staggered to embrace the curve of the road, and the topography.
- Westwood Hill & Sydenham Hill (12, 14, 16, 18 Sydenham Hill, 28, 94-100, 104, 106 and 108 Westwood Hill) comprises a group of substantial 19th C houses with expansive gardens, some of which are statutorily or locally listed (16 Sydenham Hill and 108 Westwood Hill are listed, 18 Sydenham Hill is locally listed). Several of the oldest buildings on Sydenham Hill were built before the 1863 OS map. Nos. 14, 16 and 18 are substantial, high-

Views, trees and vegetation on the Hillcrest and Sydenham Hill Estates



status houses set in large gardens, and are all present on early maps of the area. 16 used to be called The Wood, and 14 was called the Firs. 16 is thought to have been built in the mid 19th C, possibly incorporating an early 19th C house in its design.

- More diverse buildings comprise:
 - Locally listed Walter Segal self build houses (17a & b Longton Avenue)
 - Former Upper Sydenham train station, now converted to residential, at 151 Wells Park road, and the entrance to the defunct railway tunnel.

2. Historical, social, cultural, archaeological

- The historical connection to the now defunct Chatham-Dover railway which connected the Upper Sydenham station with the High-Level Station at Crystal Palace, both now closed. The station building remains in situ, as does the tunnel (though not accessible to the public).
- Walter Segal and the self build movement of the 1980s: 17a & b Longton Avenue were designed by the pioneering architect Walter Segal to allow residents to easily build their own dwellings at an affordable cost.

3. Townscape

- Sydenham Hill – a long linear route which runs along the crest of the Sydenham Hill Ridge, responding to this locally important geological feature and bounded on its west side by Sydenham Hill Wood,
- Longton Avenue has a very coherent pattern of buildings of similar scale, set behind large front gardens, with deep rear gardens and with many mature trees in gardens and on the street. The northern end has an attractive curve around the edge of Sydenham Wells Park (outside the ASLC boundary) and the houses (nos 59-93 Longton Avenue) form a coherent group with Arts and Crafts characteristics, with reference to cottage typologies (roughcast render, multi paned casement windows, tile hanging) and their substantial front gardens.

Group of high-quality, large 19th C villas on Sydenham Hill



28 Sydenham Hill, Highfield House



The transmitting station of Crystal Palace Park

The layout benefits from the topology which results in the houses being slightly elevated above their front gardens.

4.Landscape

- The Sydenham Ridge is part of a more extensive system of connected geological ridges; to the South, the Northwood Ridge with Crystal Palace Park, to the North the Greensand Ridge with One Tree Hill. It is part of the ancient landscape of the Great North Wood with remnant ancient woodland in the High Level Drive estate (Hill Crest Estate Ancient Woodland SINC) located on the slope between Sydenham Hill and Longton Avenue.
- The wider Sydenham Ridge area supports a well treed and wooded landscape, which includes Sydenham Wells Park and extends more widely to include the Horniman Gardens in Lewisham, but also Low Cross, Dulwich Wood and Sydenham Hill Wood, and the Old and New Camberwell Cemeteries in Southwark, as well as Crystal Palace Park in Bromley. The Sydenham Ridge is part of the Green Chain in SE London and the closely connected Capital Ring at Crystal Palace. The oldest Tree Preservation Order in the Borough is in Sydenham Ridge, TPO n. 2 dated 1957, at St Clements Heights.
- The Hillcrest Estate on High Level Drive is a post war residential development (1967), organised in small maisonettes and 5 large tower blocks. While the architecture itself is not particularly interesting, the surrounding green environment on the steep inclines of the hill, the many mature trees and large gardens surrounding the tower blocks, especially Cambria House and Targwin House, give the impression of a residential development set inside a forest. This impression is reinforced when taking the small pedestrian paths through the steep and densely wooded site to climb to Sydenham Hill.
- Longton Avenue has a very coherent pattern of large street trees, green

verges, large front gardens and rear gardens with many mature trees forming part of the SINC. The steepness of the front gardens in Longton Avenue makes these gardens very visible from the street, increasing their contribution to the street scene.

- On Sydenham Hill, Sydenham Hill Estate has buildings staggered up the hill with long views towards the Southeast, glimpsed in the gaps between buildings.
- Similarly, Sydenham Hill towards the top of the ridge has views in the gaps between buildings and trees towards the Southeast, and in some cases, the Crystal Palace Park transmitting station is visible and prominent.
- Sydenham Ridge is also a prominent landscape feature within wider South London, and is visible for miles around.

Statement of Significance

Sydenham Ridge is an important natural and historic suburban landscape. The ASLC has an elevated position which allows far reaching views across London to the southeast and northeast. Its ancient woodland has been recognised with a SINC designation. The topography has a strong influence on the layout and routes through the area. The presence of many tall mature trees and other dense vegetation within and just outside the boundary of the ASLC lead to a strong woodland character which is unique in the borough. Sydenham Ridge has long been recognised as an important location in the borough, with locally important landscapes and distinct topography, affording long views both of the ridge and from the ridge over London, notably in the GLC Greater London Development Plan (GLDP) policy and Lewisham's 2004 Unitary Development Plan. The ASLC research and nomination recognises and confirms the local importance of Sydenham Ridge.

Sydenham Ridge ASLC contains several distinct groups of buildings with architectural, historic and landscape interest dating to the 19th and 20th centuries, notably 3 key groups:

- The large Victorian houses in large gardens on Westwood Hill & Sydenham Hill (12, 14, 16, 18 Sydenham Hill, 28, 94-100, 104, 106 and 108 Westwood Hill) which reflect Sydenham Hill's development in the mid 19th century;
- 51-93 on Longton Avenue, Arts and Crafts inspired houses set behind large front gardens;
- Hillcrest Estate – a 1967 Lewisham Council Estate on a steep site in an open wooded landscape;

and a number of other buildings of architectural and historic interest.

The architecture is tied together by how it is incorporated into and amongst a well treed landscape.

The area has historic significance through its connection to the 1852 relocation of the Crystal Palace to upper Sydenham and the associated railway provision and suburban development, as well as to the architect Walter Segal and self-build housing.

Issues, threats & opportunities

- Development pressure: the locally listed 27 Longton Avenue was demolished in 2023 to enable denser residential development on the site.
- Pressure for development in gardens that remove vegetation and trees: garden outbuildings, annex extensions, office/cabins resulting in loss of space for large canopy trees at the ends of gardens.
- Reduction of garden area as a result of houses being enlarged or redeveloped on a larger footprint.

- Subdivision of gardens as a result of houses being divided into flats - gradual degradation of tree cover from post- development pressures.
- Ageing tree population without adequate replacement planting.
- Climate change and new diseases reducing tree health, more susceptible to decay.
- Tree removal associated with subsidence claims.

Boundary Map

