

Lewisham Town Centre Area of Special Local Character



This document provides a short description of this Area of Special Local Character (ASLC), and a statement of significance. It should be used to inform planning applications within the ASLC.

Boundary Map

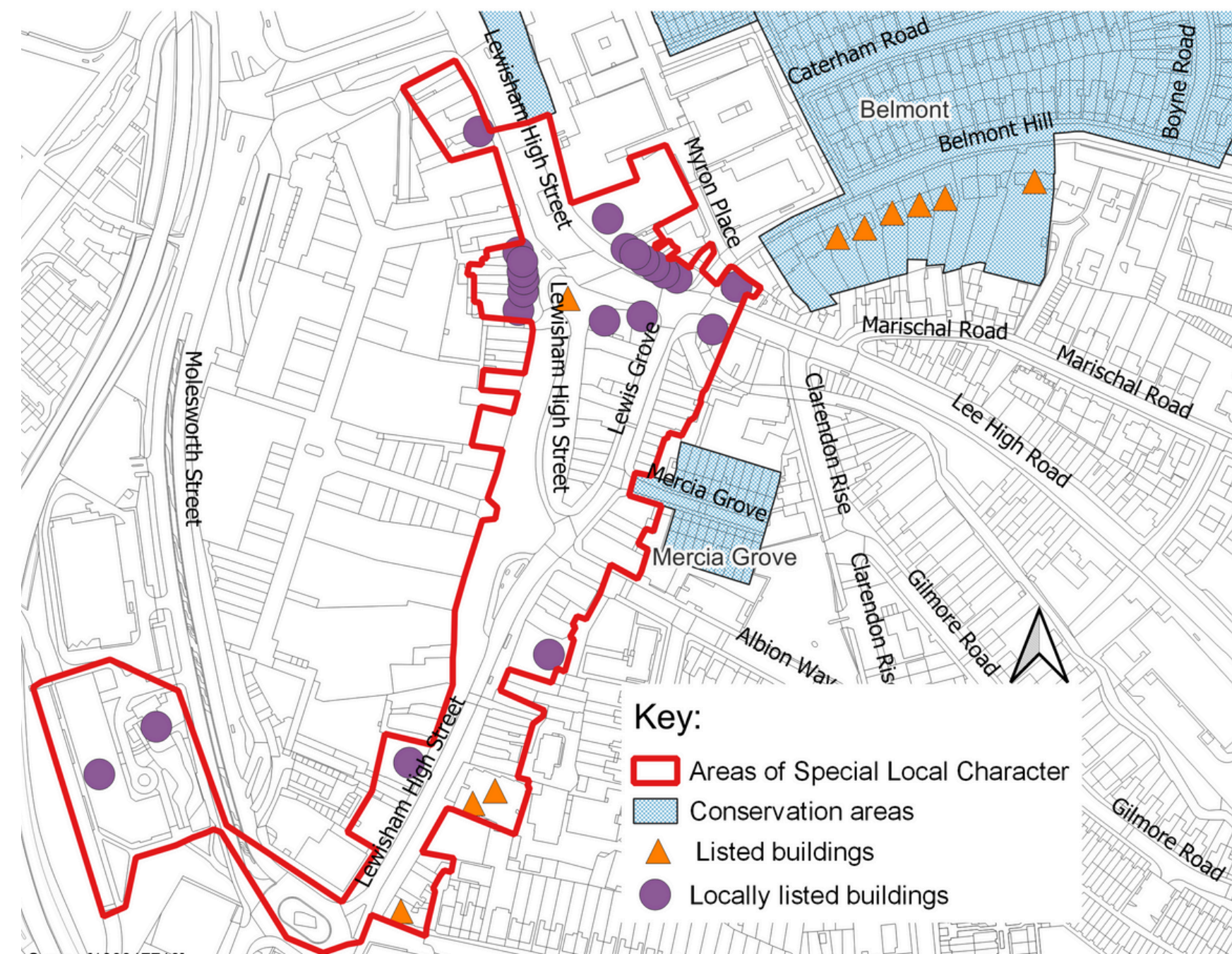
Description of the area

The Lewisham Town Centre ASLC includes the stretch of Lewisham High Street between Rennall Street and Limes Grove, Lewis Grove, and part of Molesworth Street. This area forms the core of Lewisham town centre and is characterised by intense commercial activity. There is a wide diversity in building type and architectural style, and most buildings share a commercial purpose with retail premises at ground floor. The range of commercial buildings/activities varies from market stalls and small shops, to large purpose-built commercial premises and the enormous Lewisham shopping centre. Lewisham town centre is a vibrant, busy town centre location with a popular 6 day market and heavy pedestrian and bus traffic.

1. Architecture

A varied group of buildings built mostly in four phases, with other additions:

- a small number of Victorian and Edwardian buildings;
- an inter-war group including large shops with Art Deco architectural inspiration;
- a post-war group built as part of the reconstruction of the town centre following very destructive bombing in 1944;
- the 1977 Shopping Centre.



These phases of urban development illustrate the tenacity of Lewisham Town Centre as a major centre of retail, commercial and leisure activities through a tumultuous 20th Century.

This group of eclectic buildings shares a building line, with heights of 3 or 4 stories, brick as the predominant materials, and all have a very commercial character, with shopfronts at ground floor in nearly every building, creating a visually harmonious group. The inter and post war buildings of the ASLC demonstrate an interest in evolving national and international architectural styles, and an optimism in the continued viability of the town centre as a retail location. The variety of the architecture and the four distinct periods of development indicate that Lewisham was an enduring local centre which drew investment and people from long distances.

The quality of the architecture is recognised by a number of statutory and local listings, and the high number of other buildings which are not designated but are of townscape or architectural merit. Several landmark buildings stand out in the townscape: Lewisham Clock Tower, Tower House, Prudential building, Tower of Church of St Saviour and St John. The historic buildings are well preserved at upper levels, though the majority of the shopfronts are modern.

Listed buildings



Clock Tower, Lewisham High Street (Grade II): Erected in 1897 to celebrate Queen Victoria's diamond jubilee. The Clock tower was originally sited on a traffic island in the middle of Lewisham High Street. In 1995 it was moved closer to the market and out of the main road, where it is still located today.



Church of St Saviour and Sts John Baptist and Evangelist, 175 Lewisham High Street (Grade II): 1909 by John Kelly.



Former Prudential Building, 187-197 Lewisham High St (Grade II): The Prudential Building, 1908 by Paul Waterhouse. Prudential is a rare Victorian company to have developed an impressive and instantly recognisable architectural style for its offices across the United Kingdom. This is a late and impressive example of the type.



Presbytery adjoining church of St Saviour and Sts John Baptist and Evangelists (Grade II): Presbytery of 3 storeys, 3 windows in late Art and Craft style. Tall square campanile of 1925-9 has open arcaded top floor and huge figure of Saint as finial.

Locally listed buildings



143-149 Lewisham High Street (Iceland building): A large and imposing commercial building faced with large faience blockwork. The vertical window openings give the impression of a grill. This is a fine example of early twentieth century architecture on a large scale.



Lewisham Tavern, 1 Lee High Road : Formerly an Ind Coope pub, the building dates to 1860, and forms an integral key piece of the local townscape.

Locally listed buildings



4-6 Lee High Road: The building dates to 1840, built from yellow stock brick and delicate architectural detailing across the frontage, with an ordered fenestration of four bays, cut brick lintel and central stone keystone, and corning under a historic mansard roof.



93-95 Lewisham High Street (Barclays bank building): An attractive three storey curved corner building, evenly balanced and classically proportioned, early 20th century building.



180-190 Lewisham High Street (Primark building): A large and imposing 1920s red brick four storey commercial building, originally built for C&A, that forms part of the retail centre of Lewisham. An Art Deco-inspired building with metal windows and fluted stone/cement aprons and carved stone corner details at eaves.



Riverdale Mills, 68 Molesworth Street: built around 1830, and a rare surviving mill building in Lewisham. It is believed to have been built on the site of an earlier mill with possible medieval origins, possibly by John Penn Senior, a noted engineer and millwright who owned a large engineering works in Lewisham. Although converted to residential, the building itself is a good example of early 19th century industrial architecture in Lewisham.



Tower House, 65-71 Lewisham High Street: Tower House was built as a department store in 1933 in an Art Deco style for the Royal Arsenal Cooperative, and has landmark status in the town centre with its distinctive central tower. The low relief carvings along the parapet feature a lorry, steam train and steam ships, reflecting the industry of the Cooperative.



93-95 Lewisham High Street: Sharing the same address as above is the adjacent property. This is a four storey stone temple style building with a giant order of fluted ionic columns over the upper three storeys and original black metal windows.



Riverdale House, Molesworth Street: Riverdale House is an innovative office development designed by Frederic Gibbard & Partners, and constructed in 1981 as a dynamic office block and complex for Citibank. This followed the shift in this period of moving the commercial office market from the centre of London to periphery areas such as Lewisham. It was converted into residential use in 2015.



90-98 Lewisham High Street: high quality surviving late Victorian buildings. 98-94 form a group of red brick buildings with 98 and 94 sharing a street facing gable while 96 has a central Dutch style gable/dormer window at roof level. The 3 buildings share elaborate window lintels topped with triangular decorative pediments. 90-92 is either late Victorian or early Edwardian, in a Neo-Tudor style with tall windows divided by mullions and transoms.



100-104 Lewisham High Street: A former Burton's menswear shop with the typical Burton frontage of the 1930s by Harry Wilson, combining Neo-Classical references and Art Deco motifs. The façade has six central columns, with classical motifs above, constructed of cream ceramic tiles.



85-87 Lewisham High Street (corner HSBC bank building): A well-detailed corner property, 1901, narrowly escaped the nearby V1 bomb in 1944. Currently a bank, it is a three storey plus attic red brick building with limestone detailing, classically proportioned. The decreasing hierarchy of window openings is particularly striking.



The Joiners Arms, 66 Lewisham High Street: There has been a pub called the Joiners Arms on this site since 1881. This pub is an unusually small historic pub and a rare survival in an area that has seen the loss of several nearby pubs.



73-85 Lewisham High Street : Group of surviving 19th century buildings. 73-77 are late Victorian c. 1890, 79 has a date plaque dating the building to 1886, and 81-85 are earlier and date to 1850 and are more simple and traditional in style. One of a few groups that were not harmed by any major bomb damage.

Other buildings of townscape interest



142-148 Lewisham High Street: former Woolworths building, built in 1937 in a grand Art Deco style, replacing the earlier Woolworth shops located on the same site since 1913. The building is still visible today, set back from the building line, though the Woolworths lettering to the top has disappeared. The historic shopfront has been replaced by modern signage and divided into several units.



122-126 Lewisham High Street: Marks & Spencer has operated a shop in this location in Lewisham Town Centre since 1929, but the historic building was demolished by a V1 bomb on the 28th of July 1944, killing 51 people and injuring 216 more. The building was rebuilt after WWII in a "Festival of Britain" modernist style that is still appreciable today.



1-11 Lewis Grove (Twin Training Centre): likely built in the first half of the 20th century, this corner building curves at the top of Lewis Grove. It is two stories with a shopping parade at the ground floor, an undulating frieze at parapet level, and red brickwork and lintels and white columns separating windows with a regular rhythm of wider and thinner openings at first floor level.



13-27 Lewis Grove: part 3/part 4 storey red brick building on Lewis Grove, with decorative stone and brick on edge banding, and brick on edge lintels with some Art Deco influences. The central section of the 4-storey part of the building projects slightly and has a decorative stone pediment above the first floor window. The 3-storey element of the building has a modern roof extension, set back from the front elevation. The ground floor contains a variety of shopfronts.



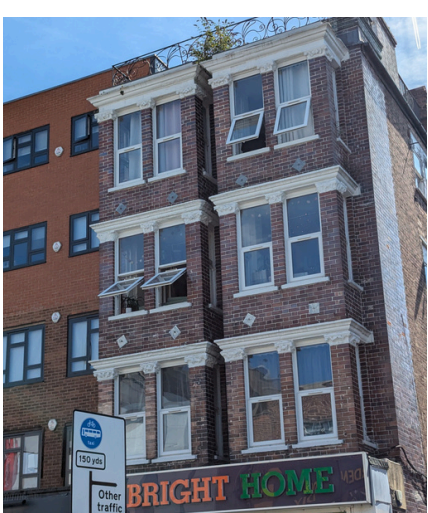
116-118 Lewisham High Street: two narrow, three-storey Victorian London stock brick buildings with tall roofs with dormer windows on their front elevation. The shopfronts are modern additions. A rare Victorian survival in Lewisham town centre.



97-99 Lewisham High Street: 3 storey red brick building, with a plaque to the People's Building Society which had an office here. It operated from the 1860s in Deptford, Greenwich and Lewisham, and merged with the Greenwich Building Society in 1968. The proportions of the windows match the more elaborate 93-95 next door. It is one of few remaining traditional shopfronts in the town centre.



194-196 Lewisham High Street: a modest two storey building with a gambrel roof, rendered. The building is one of the lowest in the high street and is a typical vernacular cottage with an extended shopfront, and could be a surviving older architectural typology. The ground floor has been gutted and is in use as a shop, little historic fabric remains.



155 Lewisham High Street: unusual four storey glazed brick building with two close-set projecting bays with decorated corbels and projecting moulded lintels. Elaborate ironwork balustrade at the top of the building with an art nouveau flavour. The building was possibly reconstructed or refronted (clear distinction between two brick types on the side elevation) following the second world war – the 1945 bomb damage map suggests it was “damaged beyond repair”.



70 Lewisham High Street: Narrow three-storey Victorian brick building with splayed brick lintels and a modern shopfront at ground floor, and a steep gable end at roof level. A rare Victorian survival in Lewisham town centre.



50-58, 60-64 Lewisham High Street: 62-64 is a 3 storey early 20th C building, formerly a Lyons teahouse, and forms a group with the Joiners Arms. Interesting windows: sashes with multi paned top sash, windows divided by stone mullions. 50-58 was originally a coherent 3 storey terrace of houses, much eroded by WWII bomb damage.



198-208 Lewisham High Street: a surviving group of Victorian buildings, now with a pub at the ground floor. 208 is built in red brick with decorative brick lintels and a gable end to the street with decorative brickwork, the other buildings have been rendered. These were partially damaged during the second world war.



161-171 Lewisham High Street: three storey red brick buildings with shops at ground floor, alternating gables and tall dormer windows at roof level. 169 and 171 have large central first floor arched windows with red brick and decorative plasterwork. This group was likely built at the end of the 19th/early 20th century, on the site previously occupied by the Limes, one of the largest houses on the High Street which was demolished in 1894.

2. Historical, social, cultural, archaeological interest

- **Suffragette activities in Lewisham Town Centre:** the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) was formed by the Pankhursts in 1903 to promote women's suffrage. The Lewisham branch of the WSPU was active from 1907 and held regular meetings which attracted large crowds. They also held street corner meetings and spoke in the marketplace of Lewisham Town Centre, where they also sold their paper Votes for Women. From 1908 until 1910, the Lewisham WSPU rented a shop at 107 Lewisham High Street.
- "Post box outrages", the act of dropping explosive or damaging material or setting fire to letters in pillar post boxes, attacking very visible state institutions in a context of increasingly militant activity to protest the lack of political response to their demands, began in Lewisham at the end of 1912 and continued until the outbreak of the first world war. On 17 December 1912, the post box at the main Lewisham Post office was attacked, as well as others in Lewisham, Lee, Hither Green and Blackheath. The suffragette activists May Billingham and Grace Mitchell were arrested. Other attacks took place at the Lewisham Post Office, on May 3 1913, in September 1913, in early October 1913 and on April 14 1914.
- Some Lewisham town centre shops were favourable to the suffragettes, or at least thought that support would enhance their business. In 1908, Mr Chiesman, the owner of the large department store in Lewisham High St, asked the WSPU for a speaker, Edith New, to address a sports day he was organising for customers and employees. J Sainsbury, the famous grocer, owned a drapery store in Lewisham High St and held a special exhibition of dresses and blouses in the suffragette colours of green and purple. During the local election in 1910, a draper displayed the colours of the two political parties, conservatives, liberal, as well as of the suffragettes'. The following year a drapery store took copies of Votes for Women for its refreshment room.



Lewisham clock tower before the construction of Tower House (pre 1933)



Lewisham clock tower after the construction of Tower House (1933) To the left of Tower House, the large department store Chiesmans is flying flags. It was bought by House of Fraser in 1976, traded as Army and Navy until 1994 and was demolished 2001-2004 to build the police station that stands on the site today.

Source: Borough Photos

- A **V1 Flying Bomb** exploded in front of the clock tower in Lewisham High Street at 9:41am on Friday 28th July 1944 in the middle of a bustling market. The market stalls lined up outside Mark and Spencer's, Woolworth and Sainsbury's caught the full force of the blast, which came without warning. The bomb had detonated on the roof of a surface shelter, which collapsed. Shops were demolished on both sides of the street. Casualties occurred in the basement cafe of Woolworths and even on passing buses. The bomb damaged property in a 600yd radius. The more seriously injured were taken to the nearby Lewisham Hospital, which itself had been hit by a bomb only days earlier, resulting in 70 injured and 3 dead. The Lewisham Market bombing was one of the worse V1 incidents in London, with 28 dead at the scene and 83 seriously injured. In the final figures released in September, the death toll had risen to 51 [archive records show at least 52 victims, 3 not identified], with 216 injured. The names of the victims of the bombing are recorded [here](#).

- **The Great Floods:** heavy rain on the 15 and 16th of September 1968 led to the Rivers Ravensbourne, Pool and Quaggy overflowing their banks. The flooding was severe: the Quaggy, which typically had a depth of 15 cm, was at one point was over 5 metres deep in Lewisham. In Lewisham town centre, the entire area around the confluence of the Quaggy and Ravensbourne was inundated, leading to the iconic images of the “Lewisham Lake”, which made the front page of the Daily Mirror. The Mayor of Lewisham at the time used his dinghy to ferry people around, and buses and bin lorries were used to transport people up and down Lewisham High Street and in other parts of the borough. The Chiesemans store organised a large “flood sale” to offload damaged stock, drawing hundreds. Long stretches of the rivers were canalised after this event, but recently natural methods of flood management and river restoration have been introduced (e.g. Cornmill Gardens).



Lewisham Town Centre, bomb damage at Lewisham Market due to V1 bomb (1944)

Source: Borough Photos



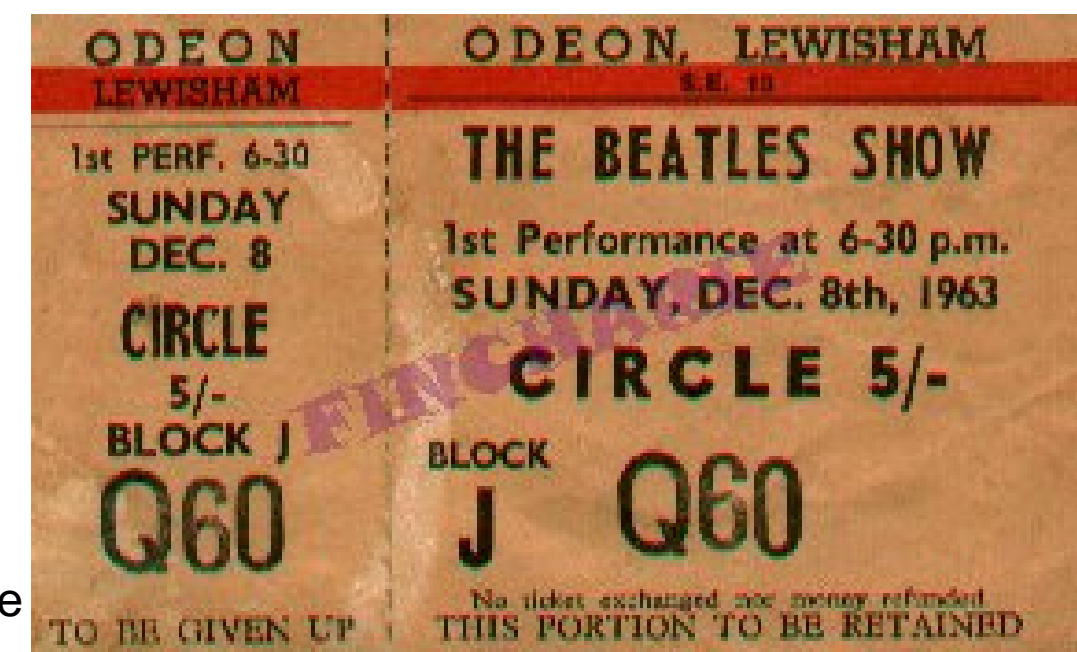
Front page of the Daily Mirror on Monday 16 September 1968

Source: British Newspaper Archive

- **Lewisham Town Centre was a world class music destination:** Just outside the ASLC boundary, the Odeon, which stood on the North side of Rennall Street with its entrance just to the West of St Stephen's Church (now part of the Lewisham Gateway site redevelopment and road realignment), originally opened as the Gaumont cinema in the 1930s. It was the largest cinema in the borough and one of the biggest in London. In the late 1950s, the Gaumont became a music venue, with a focus on rock'n'roll. In April 1959 the Gaumont hosted Cliff Richard. In 1963, the Beatles played twice at the recently renamed Odeon, including on 8 December 1963. Beatlemania was in full swing: tickets went on sale at 10.30 on Friday morning (15 November 1963), but the first fan arrived at 6am on the Thursday and by that evening a huge crowd was queuing overnight for a chance to get a ticket. On 31 October 1963, a show by Little Richard, Bo Diddley and others included the Rolling Stones on their first ever tour. It was attended by Beckenham teenager David Jones, who returned to the venue a decade later as David Bowie on his Ziggy Stardust Tour, on May 24th 1973. Other world class artists to play at the Odeon in Lewisham town centre included Stevie Wonder, Nat 'King' Cole, Johnny Cash, Sarah Vaughan & Count Basie and His Orchestra, Ted Heath and His Orchestra, Ray Charles, The Supremes, Chuck Berry, Cliff Richard and The Shadows, The Rolling Stones, Manfred Mann, The Clash and The Who, and Rod Stewart, amongst others.
- **Battle of Lewisham, 13 August 1977:** The 1970s in London were a time of mounting resentment against racial discrimination and frequent police harassment of minority communities. In response to a planned march by the far-right National Front between New Cross and Catford, local residents of Lewisham organised under the All Lewisham Campaign Against Racism and Fascism (ALCARAF) to hold a counter-march. Thousands of residents, anti-fascist activists and community leaders, including the Mayor of Lewisham, the

Bishop of Southwark and anti-racist activist Darcus Howe, gathered for a peaceful counter protest in Ladywell Fields. In New Cross, crowds had also gathered to block the National Front's intended route, but in this location the march and counter-protest resulted in violent confrontations. Violence continued throughout the afternoon in Lewisham Town Centre between counter-protesters and the police, after the National Front had abandoned their march. The day is remembered as the Battle of Lewisham and was acknowledged as a severe blow to the National Front's fascist and racist rhetoric. It also marked the first time that the police deployed heavy duty plastic riot shields in England, previously only used in Northern Ireland, which became a staple of policing tactics in the following decades.

- the **National Migration Museum** was located in the Lewisham Shopping Centre, just outside the boundary of the ASLC, between 2020 and 2025, exploring how the movement of people to and from the UK and across the globe has shaped the UK, through exhibitions, talks and events. Lewisham has a rich history of migration, becoming home to in particular Caribbean Commonwealth citizens settling in the borough between 1948 and 1971. Many of them had fought for Britain in WWII and were invited by the

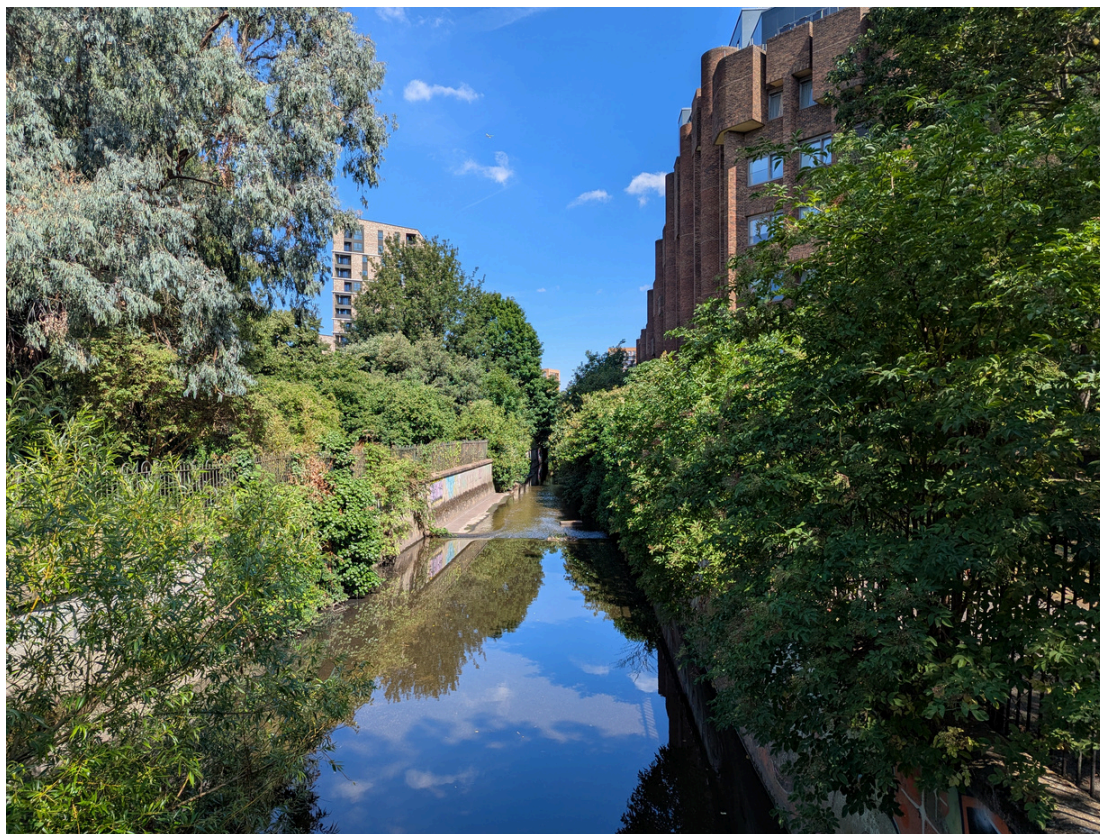


Tickets for the Beatles concert, Dec 8 1963 at Lewisham Odeon.

3. Townscape

government to work and live in the UK to help rebuild the country after the destruction caused by the war, settling to build lives and communities in Lewisham. By 2021, 10.8% of Lewisham's residents identified as 'Black, Black British, Caribbean, or African: Caribbean', the highest proportion of any local authority in England. Another significant population was created by the settlement of Vietnamese refugees fleeing Vietnam after the war ended in 1975. Lewisham was one of three boroughs, with Southwark and Hackney, to welcome sizable Vietnamese communities which flourish to this day. In May 2021, Lewisham became the UK's first Borough of Sanctuary, recognising the collective effort of the borough to welcome those fleeing violence and persecution in their own countries and to protect the rights of all migrants, asylum seekers and refugees.

- The town centre has evolved over time, from a medieval village green until 1810, when the Enclosure Act led to it being developed into a busy commercial and residential area (19th C onwards). The streets to the west of the high street were demolished following WW2 bombing and redeveloped as the shopping centre in 1977, to create the street arrangement we know today. The town centre was pedestrianised in 1995, creating an active street animated by the daily market stalls and the foot traffic generated by the shopping centre and the shops, cafes and restaurants of the town centre.
- The alignment of the clock tower and the spire of St Saviour's Church creates two key focal points in the town centre.
- The tall brick projection at the centre of Tower House, opposite the clock tower, is also a local landmark and creates a focal point in views from the market.
- Older historic street patterns have been partially retained as service routes in the shopping centre complex, such as for example Avenue Road, behind the shopping centre market-side entrance opposite Albion Way.
- Different building lines at upper storeys indicate the ad hoc development and previous phases of construction of the town centre, with buildings such as 116-118 and 142-148 Lewisham High Street set back from the building line, with projecting modern shopfront extensions at ground floor.



River Ravensbourne, running behind Riverdale House.



The campanile of the presbytery adjoining the church of St Saviour and Sts John Baptist and Evangelists, viewed behind the shopping centre from Molesworth Street.

4.Landscape

- There is some planting to the market space in front of the shopping centre, and the sculpture park and garden by Riverdale Mill provide much needed greenery. The town centre is very busy and densely built, and would benefit from additional planting and trees.
- The Ravensbourne River runs to the west of shopping centre, and its confluence with the Quaggy River is to the north of the ASLC boundary, by the DLR station in the location of the new Confluence Park. The Ravensbourne was essential to the early development of Lewisham, it powered a number of mills, including Riverdale mill, recorded as early as 1086 in the Domesday Book. The course of the rivers has been changed over time because of the creation of mill ponds and weirs to power the various mills. Today, the Ravensbourne is somewhat disconnected from the town centre, but is glimpsed from the sculpture park, Riverdale mill and Riverdale House, before becoming more appreciable outside the boundary of the ASLC from River Mill Park.
- The width of the road of Lewisham High Street and the marketplace today is due to historic green enclosures, now disappeared, which can be appreciated from historic photographs (below).



1910 photograph of the site of today's street market, showing the green enclosures on Lewisham High Street, James Collingwood's draper store to the left, and the clock tower in the distance. Source: Borough Photos

Summary of Significance

In its early beginnings as a village green with the village stocks, where Lewis Grove stands today, through to medieval and 19th century mill activity on the Ravensbourne, to a 21st century vibrant shopping district, what is now the Lewisham town centre has always been a commercial, retail and entertainment attraction, first in Kent, then in London. The built environment of this ASLC reflects this heritage of commercial, shopping and leisure activities, with 4 main phases of buildings. These include Victorian and Edwardian shops and offices, interwar purpose-built offices and retail spaces, 1950s shops, and the 1977 shopping centre, designed by Bernard Engle and Partners, who also designed the 1976 Brent Cross Shopping Centre, the UK's first American-style indoor shopping mall. The shops, buildings and road alignment have changed over time, and all the Lewisham town centre's cinemas and several historic pubs have been closed and demolished, but it nevertheless remains a busy retail centre with its long-standing market, many shops and a large shopping centre, attracting visitors from across South East London. The story of Lewisham Town Centre is one of endurance, change and renewal, with an eclectic range of high-quality buildings showcasing the evolution of architectural styles over time and the resilience of local traders and businesses despite bombings, large scale destruction and change, and flooding. The variety and distinctiveness of the architecture and the vibrancy of the market and retail activity marks out Lewisham Town Centre from many traditional historic shopping streets in London. Though historic shopfronts have for the most part been lost or replaced with modern ones over time, the well-detailed elevations of the buildings at upper storeys reveal the quality of the ASLC's architecture.

This ASLC recognises the diverse commercial, retail and entertainment activities that have taken place in Lewisham town centre over time, including those that are no longer visible in the built environment. The ASLC also highlights a number of important historic and cultural events which took place in the town centre,

recognising its historic and present function as a vibrant meeting, social and public space.

Features of Interest

- V1 rocket plaque – located on the side of 122-126 Lewisham High St (M&S)
- Ghost sign for C. Holdaway, Painter-decorator on the corner of Myron Place.

Lewisham Town Centre is home to several pieces of public art which enhance the urban environment:

- Column (sculpture) by John Maine (b.1942) Riverdale Garden, Molesworth Street, Lewisham
- The Ridgeway (sculpture), Shephard Hill, Easton Masonry, John Maine, Roundabout opposite the library, Lewisham

Some of the public artwork in the town centre is just outside the boundary of the ASLC and reinforces the setting of the ASLC:

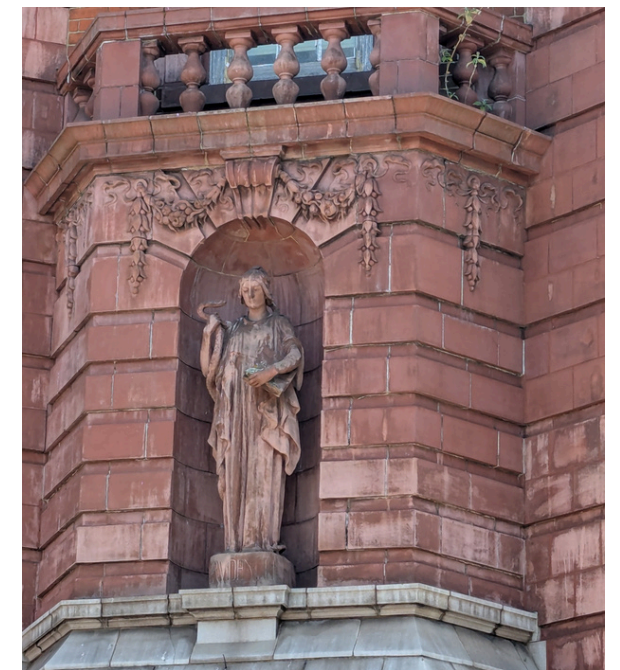
- “Lewisham” mural, 2022, on Lewisham Shopping Centre by Gaurab Thakali celebrates people, place and local pride.
- “Welcome Home” mural, 2021, on Lewisham Shopping Centre, by Lewisham School of Muralism
- “Lewisham History Mural”, Lewisham Shopping Centre, Molesworth Street, 1998, celebrates key moments and characters of the borough’s past.
- “South Mall”, 2022, by Molly Hankinson, pays tribute to Ono Dafedjaiye for making creative arts more inclusive for people with learning disabilities
- “The Wall”, a fragment of the Berlin Wall with the work of famous muralists, Thierry Noir and Stik, Museum of Migration, Lewisham Shopping Centre
- “Volunteers Across the Borough”, 2022, by Emma Barnie
- “Celebrating Lewisham Educators”, 2022, by Shauna Blanchfield



The Ridgeway by Shephard Hill, Easton Masonry, John Maine. Roundabout opposite the library, Lewisham



Ghost sign on the corner of Myron Place



Statue on Prudential building

Issues, threats & opportunities

- The loss of the historic shopfronts, in the Victorian buildings and the early 20th century ones, hinders the appreciation of these surviving historic buildings and their high quality architecture. There is an opportunity to reinstate shopfronts which better relate to the historic architecture of the buildings they are located in, and which would enhance the town centre.
- There is an opportunity for the reinstatement of historic windows in historic buildings (timber in Victorian buildings, metal windows in Lewis Grove).
- The gradual removal of architectural details, such as corbels, architraves, chimneys and decorative elements, results in the cumulative erosion of the special historic and architectural character of the town centre. Historic features should be preserved or replaced if lost.
- Heavy bus traffic makes pedestrian experience fraught on Lewis Grove/Lewisham High Street.
- The part of Molesworth street that provides the link to the sculpture park would benefit from an opportunity for greening and street activation to create a green link to the commercial core of the town centre.
- The shopping street currently feels very disconnected from the river, which is a crucial part of the historic development of Lewisham town centre. Opportunities to better connect the town centre to the river should be explored.
- Lack of trees and planting in the town centre. With the exception of the trees in front of 187-210 Lewisham High Street, the town centre is a hard, very urban environment which becomes very hot in the summer and suffers from insufficient shading. Opportunities for additional tree planting should be explored.



The Albion, Lewisham High Street at the corner with Lewis Grove, 26 Feb 1898 (now the site of 129 Lewisham High Street)



The Lewisham Odeon, c.1932-1937. The site location is now part of the Gateway redevelopment.
Source: Borough Photos