

1C HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE

01 BACKGROUND AND HISTORY

A full copy of the 'Conservation Area Statement' prepared by London borough of Camden is included in Appendix 3E, extracts are included here.



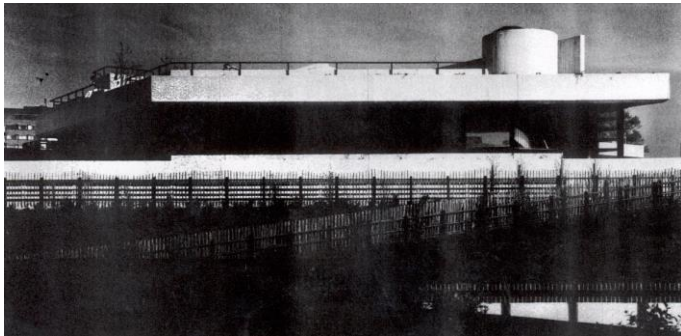
View looking West along Rowley Way

1C-01.01 HISTORY

The area which now forms the Conservation Area originally formed part of the Eyre Estate bought by Henry Samuel Eyre in 1732 from the Earl of Chesterfield and comprised open fields until it was developed by 1853 and from 1896 formed the border between the parishes of Hampstead and St Marylebone. Alexandra Road was built shortly after the marriage of the Prince of Wales to Princess Alexandra in 1863.

By the advent of the Second World War the area had become rundown and was awaiting demolition. Some redevelopment did occur immediately post-war with the construction of the Ainsworth Estate on Boundary Road. Subsequently in the 1960s there were a number of proposals for the redevelopment of the Alexandra Road portion of the Eyre Estate to provide luxury accommodation. This gave rise to concerns for the security of existing tenants, which culminated in the purchase of thirteen and a half acres of land by the Council in 1966. The Ministry of Housing and Local Government part funded the purchase on condition that the area is redeveloped for public housing. Proposals were drawn up by Camden's Architect's Department for a high-density mixed-use development, which included housing for 1660 people in 520 dwellings, a tenants' hall, underground parking, shops, workshops for Camden's Building Department, a school for children with learning difficulties, a children's reception centre, residential accommodation for young physically handicapped people and a public open space. A youth club was later added to the brief. Planning permission for the housing estate was granted in 1968; demolition commenced in 1970, building works in 1972, partial completion and occupancy in 1978. The estate was fully occupied by 1979. The remainder of the buildings within the Conservation Area also formed part of the comprehensive redevelopment of the area and were completed by 1981 (see map showing the Conservation Area boundary on page 3)

The estate residents were originally Council tenants. The South Hampstead Housing Co-operative took over the day to day running of the estate in 1991. The Housing Co-operative is due to hand back the running of the estate to the London Borough of Camden sometime in 2005.



Tenant's Hall from the East

1C-01.02 WHAT IS SPECIAL ABOUT ALEXANDRA ROAD?

At the time it was the largest and most complex development yet undertaken by the new revised London Borough Authorities, bringing together high density housing and a group of social facilities including a public park on a single site. It was innovative in that it was the first large high density complex development of medium/low rise, based on the 'street' concept, and integrating the housing and all the other facilities in a continuous urban form making an integrated environment including existing adjoining buildings. It was also innovative technically, and in the planning of the dwellings and other spaces. From inception it was controversial.

On completion during 1977-78 the materials were fresh and clear, the concrete and rendering complimentary whites, the painted colours matched and bright, and it looked wonderful. It was dubbed 'Casa della Alexandria' by residents.

1C-01.03 INFLUENCES

This high-density housing bears similarities to the Brunswick Centre (1967-1972, by Patrick Hodgkinson) in Bloomsbury where low-rise high-density housing was also stacked, ziggurat-style, in a concrete mega-structure, providing an alternative to the high-rise solutions, which were being implemented at the time. In addition to providing a new approach to mixed-developments including mass housing, the Brunswick Centre and Alexandra Road were examples of a radically new building form in the urban scene. Though contemporary commentators suggested that the vertical subdivision of these mega-structures made reference to eighteenth century patterns of street development, any resemblance between these modern housing forms and historic housing patterns now appears to be vestigial. The Alexandra Road Estate also represents a development of Neave Brown's earlier work for housing societies, undertaken while he was in private practice, at Winscombe Street and Fleet Road. Though on a much smaller scale, these too were essays in high-density developments of stacked dwellings and the considered sequencing of spaces moving from public and semi-public to private and semi-private.



Rear Elevation Facing Train Line to the North

1C-01.04 ARTICLES OF INTEREST INCLUDED IN APPENDIX K

Architectural Review

Alexandra Road. Housing, School and Community Centre, Camden, London.
vol. 166, no. 990, 1979 Aug, p. 76-92.

Article from the time of completion with architect's statement by Neave Brown and criticism by Robert Maxwell

Architects Journal

Alexandra Road: what does it mean for public housing?
vol. 198, no 8, 1993 Sept. 01, p. 14-15.

Article from the time of the listing.

1C-01.05 WHY PRESERVE THE ESTATE?

Peter Brooke, the National Heritage Secretary at the time hailed the estate as 'one of the most distinguished groups of buildings in England since the Second World War'

1C-01.06 NEGATIVE FEATURES

Negative features identified as detrimental to the appearance of the estate as a whole include:

- a large galvanised duct fixed to the underside of the raised walkway and traversing Rowley Way in the vicinity of the estate office
- solid roller shutters and internally illuminated signage to the shops neighbouring estate office
- graffiti
- the erection of a variety of garden fences to define occupancies
- the erection of garden sheds within confined garden/terrace areas (Block B)
- the introduction of ornate mild steel metalwork of "traditional" design
- satellite dishes
- painted concrete
- poor concrete repairs
- the original integrated external lighting now largely disused and has been replaced by new surface mounted fittings and conduit
- wire mesh fence to the Abbey Road boundary of the Afro-Caribbean Centre in poor condition
- lack of landscape maintenance resulting in a weakening of structure planting.

1C-01.06 Estate Action Works Undertaken in 1991.

Phase1

- Full external repairs to concrete and render including structural cracks to blocks A, B and C.
- Roof renewal including insulation, new lighting protection and cable TV installation to blocks A, B and C.
- Conversion and extension to existing office to form new tenant Management Co-operatives Office.
- Repairs and improvements to existing Tenants Hall.
- Full repairs and improvements to the lighting on the estate, underground car park and landscaped areas.
- Full overhaul, repairs and improvement of the lifts to Block A.
- Reinstatement including waterproof membrane of the pavements to walkways and terraces on Rowley way.
- Replacement of the district heating mains from the boiler house to blocks B and C.

Phase 2

- Completion of the concrete repairs to internals of flats and those associated with balconies and planters.
- Second stage of works to existing Tenants Hall, including security.
- Second stage of lighting improvements plus some installation of CCTV surveillance in vulnerable areas.
- Reinstatement including re-waterproofing of paved areas on all raised walkways and terraces including external insulation as appropriate.
- Installation of secondary windows to the rear of block A, principally to provide sound insulation.
- Replacement of all existing front entrance doors with high quality security doors.
- Re-waterproofing of planters and associated drainage improvements.
- Environmental works comprising improvements to open space, creation of dog-free areas, re-planned play areas for small children and improvements to estate signs and flat numbering.
- Replacement of existing internal heating system with individual controllable system to each flat fed from the district heating system.