5.5 Swiss Cottage

Brief description

This area is defined by the edge of The Swiss Cottage Town Centre to the east by Fairfax Road to the west and by the Borough boundary with Westminster at Boundary Road to the south.

The centre is bisected by Finchley Road (A41), a strategic route that extends from Central London via Swiss Cottage to Hendon and ultimately the A1. It carries a significant volume of traffic including numerous heavy goods vehicles and as such an important artery for the city. This road acts as a one way gyratory around the 'Swiss Cottage' at the heart of the centre and has a significant impact on the character of the centre creating a barrier to movement through the area. The centre has seen significant development in recent years including construction of a new leisure centre and central library.

For much of its length Finchley Road is flanked by post-war residential estates developed over parades of shops. Beyond the main street the character of the area changes to either side. To the east Adelaide Road connects Swiss Cottage with Chalk Farm (this area is discussed separately) and side streets lead directly to Victorian neighbourhoods. To the west the land steps downwards towards South Hampstead station and is dominated by post-war estates. Southwards large houses fronting leafy streets creating a contrasting urban form.
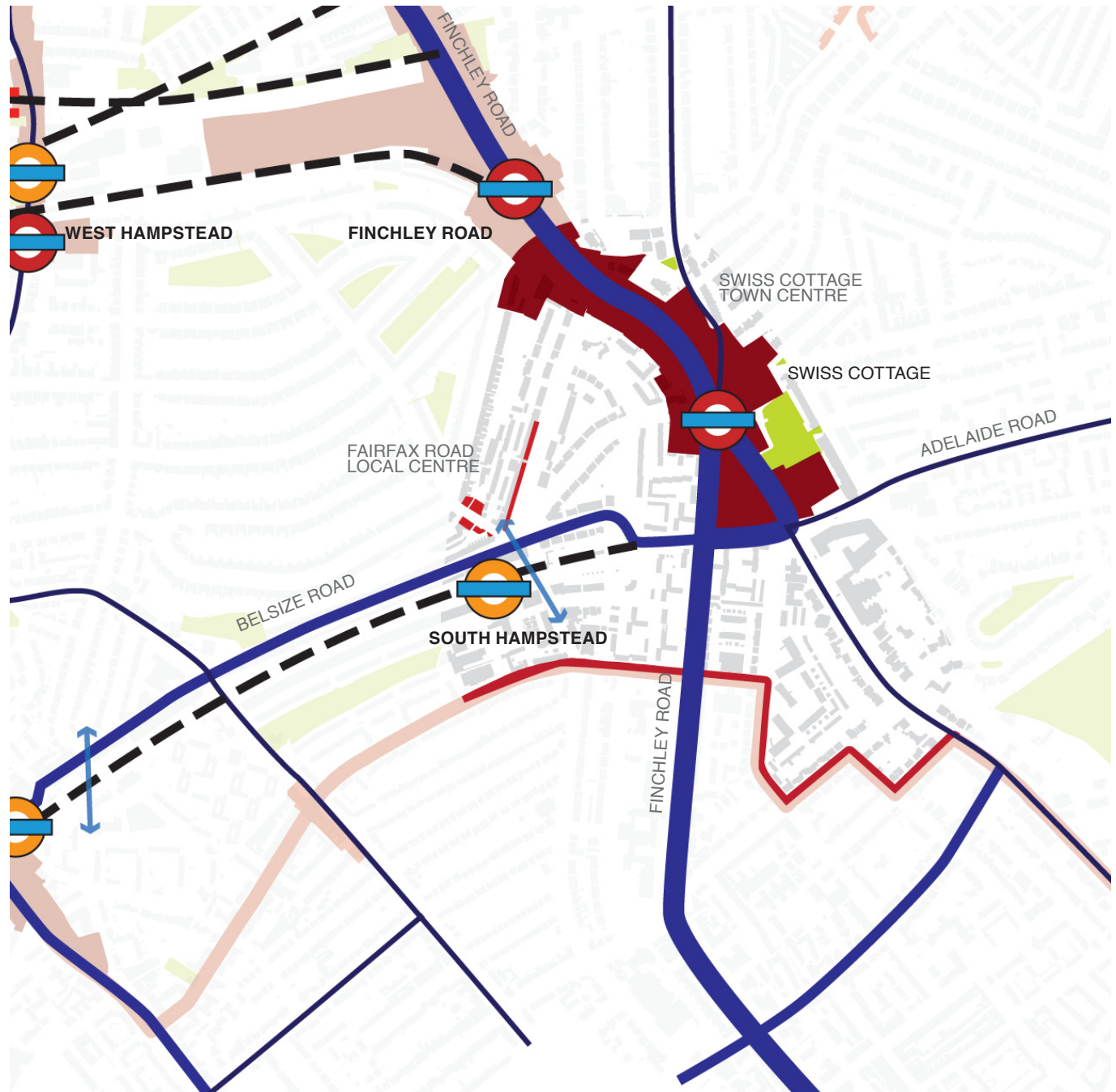
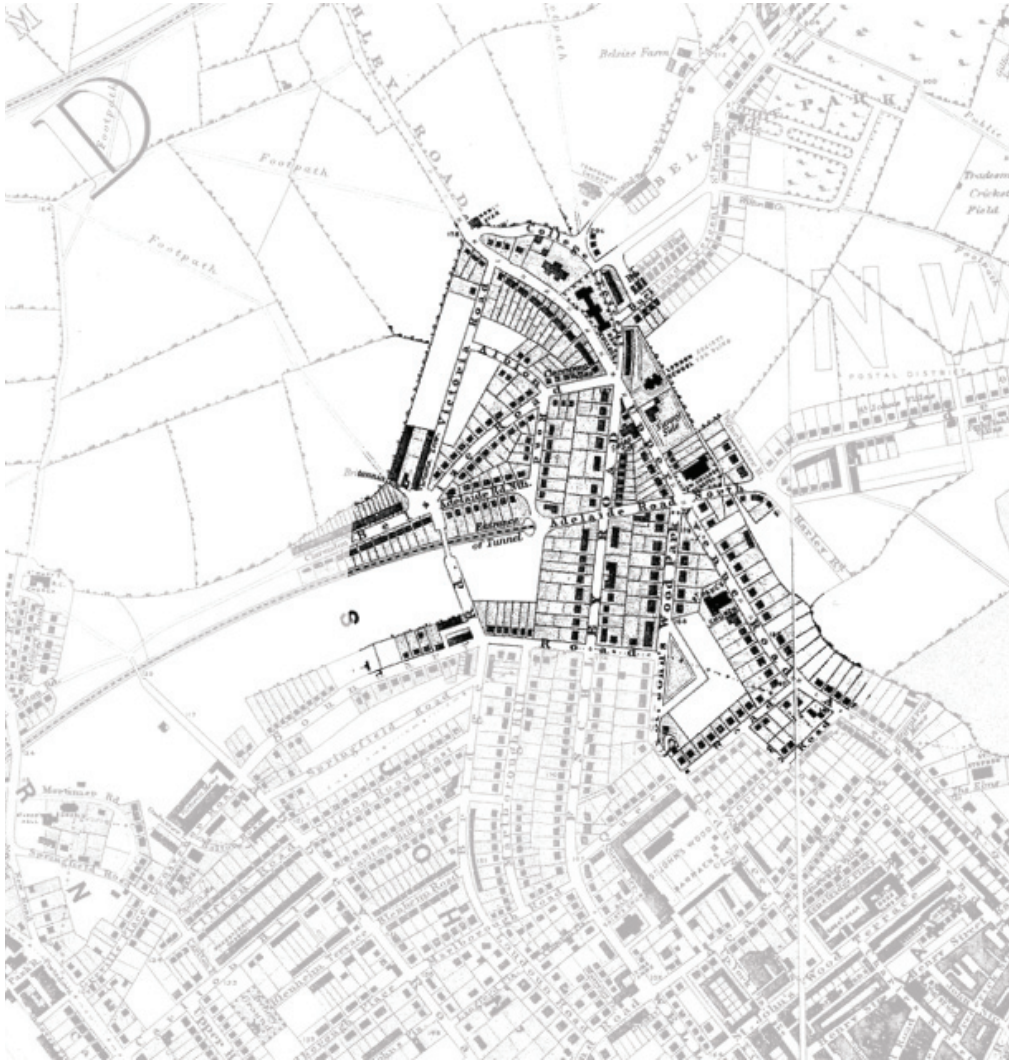Figure 5.18: Swiss Cottage Context Analysis

Figure 5.19: Swiss Cottage Historic Plan 1862

Figure 5.20: Swiss Cottage Historic Plan 1890

Historical development

Finchley Road was built as a turnpike in the early 19th Century to provide a by pass to the route north through Hampstead. Swiss Cottage was named after a Swiss chalet located on the site of the tollgate keepers cottage where Finchley Road and Avenue Road met. By the mid 19th Century a network of connected streets had been laid out within the Swiss Cottage area with open fields to the north.

The historic pattern of streets remains broadly the same now but post-war development on Finchley Road and on adjacent blocks has transformed the environment around the centre.

Public transport accessibility

The area has a PTAL of 5 to 6a reflecting the access to Swiss Cottage, Finchley Road and South Hampstead stations and the bus routes along the main road corridor.

Socio-economic issues

The area ranks as:

- Within the 20-30% most deprived areas in respect of Index of Multiple Deprivation;
- Within the 20-30% most deprived in respect of health and disability deprivation; and
- Within the 10-20% most deprived in respect of income deprivation and this impacts strongly on children and older people across the area.

Existing character

Swiss Cottage feels fragmented as a result of the significant road passing through it and the band of post-war estates that have been developed to the immediate west. The main street, Finchley Road, is fronted by and enclosed by development on the northern approach to the centre but the quality of buildings is mixed and the scale is not consistent ranging from two to ten storeys. To the south of the centre development is set back from Finchley Road and in some cases it backs onto the route.

Significant investment has recently been made in a new leisure centre and library and these are positive changes in the centre but reducing the impact of traffic in the centre is the biggest challenge to enhancing its character.

The land falls away to west of the centre and here there is a mix of pleasant Victorian streets lined by modest buildings from a variety of periods and significant post-war blocks set within space and with little relationship with the streets.
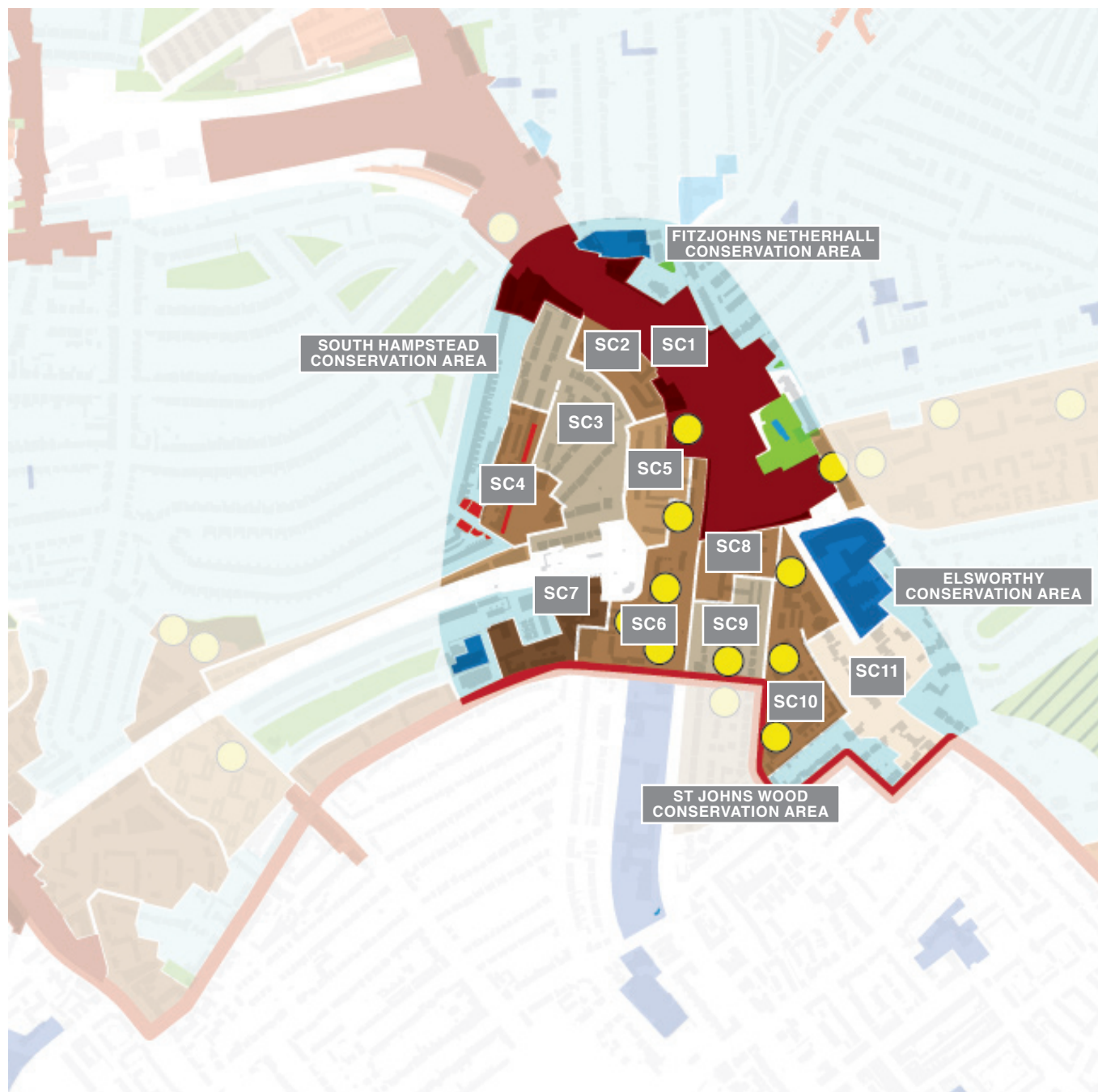
Figure 5.21: Swiss Cottage Character Areas

Identity

Post-war development in Swiss Cottage is of a significant scale with a cluster of blocks of 8-10 storeys on the approach to the centre. Recent residential development to the east is of an even greater height. Some of the centres new additions may help to strengthen the centres identity but the Swiss chalet that gives Swiss Cottage its name is dwarfed by the much larger structures around it.

Enhancing character

Swiss Cottage is a dense and intense centre that can take development of a significant scale however this must be managed to reinforce the structure of the centre and to reduce its current fragmented character.

Opportunities for change

The Finchley Road corridor is an important route into the city and as such highly visible to many visitors. Currently the environmental quality is poor. A unified public realm treatment could be introduced along the length of the route (extending northwards beyond Swiss Cottage) with improved crossing facilities and measures to reduce the impact of the traffic.

The post war estates to the west of the centre create a fragmented development pattern and investment is required here to enhance the environments around these estates. There may be opportunity to comprehensively re-plan this area and to improve the interface and integration of the centre into the wider area.

From top left, clockwise:

New development in the centre; Finchley Road; Harben Road Estate, Post-war blocks i the centre and Homes backing onto Finchley Road.

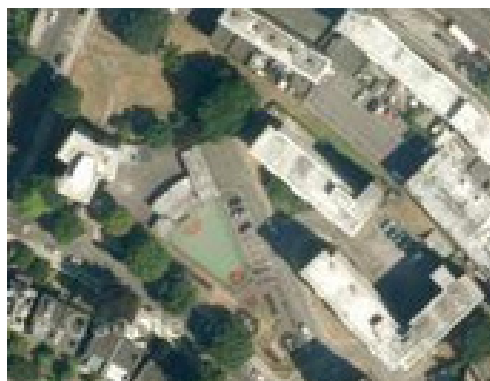## SC1 - Finchley Road / Swiss Cottage · Typology: HIGH STREETS

Building type / age	Mix of properties fronting Finchley Road
Scale and massing	Typically 4-5 storeys but varies from 2 up to 7-8 storeys
Street character / building interface	Busy but fragmented high street with active uses at ground floor and buildings fronting directly onto the street
Interface with surrounding area	Focus and centre for the area but centre is dominated by road and some buildings and public realm quality poor
Public realm character	The public realm is cluttered and its design lacks coordination or quality. Many shopfronts are unattractive
Opportunity for improvements	**MEDIUM: Public realm and shopfronts are in need of investment. There may be potential to address urban design weaknesses or for infill development**

SC2 - Harben Road Estate · Typology: POST-WAR ESTATES - MEDIUM/HIGH RISE

Building type / age	Post-war housing blocks providing flatted accommodation
Scale and massing	7-9 storey housing blocks; single storey garages
Street character / building interface	Blocks set back from street within a predominantly hard landscaped estate
Interface with surrounding area	Fragmented built form to the rear of Finchley Road, southwards development is street based
Public realm character	Public realm creates a poor setting for the blocks and is disjointed. Mix of hardstanding and grassed areas but poorly defined by blocks and offers limited amenity.
Opportunity for improvements	**MEDIUM: Investment required in public realm and there may be potential to address urban design weaknesses or for infill development**

SC3 - Harben Road South

Building type / age	Predominantly late 20th century town houses
Scale and massing	Typically 2 storey with additional upper floor set-back
Street character / building interface	Streets generally fronted by housing but in some cases homes are internalised around a semi-private mews court
Interface with surrounding area	Well connected with wider street network
Public realm character	Broad footways and street trees create an attractive setting for development
Opportunity for improvements	**LOW: Resist paving of front gardens to accommodate further parking and introduce more street trees**

SC4 - Fairfax Road

Building type / age	Post-war housing blocks providing flatted accommodation
Scale and massing	4 storey linear block on Fairfax Road; 4-6 storey elsewhere
Street character / building interface	Local Centre on Fairfax Road with shops at ground floor fronting the street. Other blocks set back from road
Interface with surrounding area	Well connected with wider street network. Railway line reduces permeability to the south
Public realm character	Broad footways in front of shops and street trees add to amenity. Roundabout at junction reduces attractiveness of area for pedestrians
Opportunity for improvements	**LOW: Enhancement of the roundabout and road crossings to reduce vehicle priority would improve the setting**

SC5 - Dobson Close, Hillgrove Estate

Typology: POST-WAR ESTATES - LOW RISE

Building type / age	Brick built post-war housing and flatted accommodation
Scale and massing	Mix of 2 storey housing and 4 storey blocks
Street character / building interface	Properties front onto estate roads
Interface with surrounding area	Fragmented built form to the rear of Finchley Road, and whilst connections are provided estate feels semi-private
Public realm character	Public realm is in need of investment and is basic and uninspiring. Street trees add to amenity
Opportunity for improvements	**MEDIUM: Investment required in public realm and there may be potential to address urban design weaknesses or for infill development**

SC6 - Hillgrove Estate

Typology: POST-WAR ESTATES - MEDIUM/HIGH RISE

Building type / age	Post-war housing and flatted accommodation
Scale and massing	3-9 storey blocks
Street character / building interface	Properties set within a landscaped estate but with poor relationship to streets
Interface with surrounding area	Blocks are set back from Finchley Road, and whilst connections are provided estate feels semi-private
Public realm character	Public realm is in need of investment and is basic and uninspiring. Mature trees set within green courtyards add to amenity
Opportunity for improvements	**MEDIUM: Investment required in public realm and there may be potential to address urban design weaknesses or for infill development**

SC7 - Loudon Road

Typology: MIXED RESIDENTIAL

Building type / age	Mix of Victorian and contemporary houses and apartment blocks
Scale and massing	Typically 2-3 storey with taller buildings up to 8 storeys
Street character / building interface	Mix of building types but with frontages onto the streets
Interface with surrounding area	Well connected with wider street network
Public realm character	Mature planting and trees add to the streetscape quality but footways are in places very narrow.
Opportunity for improvements	**LOW: Resist loss of front gardens and planting and where possible introduce more street trees**

SC8 - Boycell Court

**Typology: POST-WAR ESTATES - MEDIUM/HIGH RISE**

Building type / age	Post war high-rise residential blocks
Scale and massing	10 storey blocks with additional upper floor set-back
Street character / building interface	Apartment building set back from street within a gated estate
Interface with surrounding area	Tall blocks are prominent in the streetscene
Public realm character	Broad footways and tree lined streets but blocks set within well maintained private spaces
Opportunity for improvements	**LOW**

SC9 - Middlefield

Typology: MIXED RESIDENTIAL
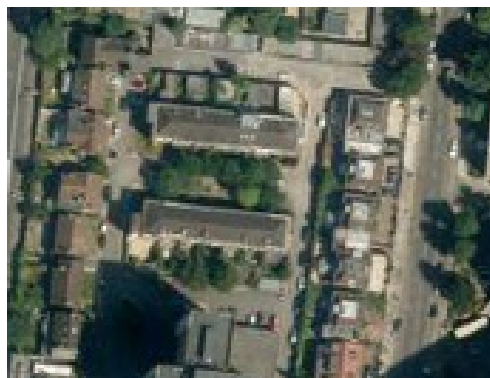
Building type / age	Mix of detached houses, townhouses and taler blocks
Scale and massing	Predominantly 2-3 storey but with 12 storey tower
Street character / building interface	Properties front onto St. Johns Wood Park but poor interface with Finchley Road and front / back conflicts
Interface with surrounding area	Development form is suburban in this location close to Swiss Cottage centre. Form extends southwards
Public realm character	Varied quality with car parking dominating some areas and others well landscaped. Some streets feel semi-private
Opportunity for improvements	**MEDIUM: Investment required in public realm and there may be potential to address urban design weaknesses or for infill development**

SC10 - St John's Wood Park

Typology: POST-WAR ESTATES - MEDIUM/HIGH RISE

Building type / age	Post-war residential estates
Scale and massing	4-10 storey high blocks
Street character / building interface	Buildings set back from road within a well landscaped estate
Interface with surrounding area	Well connected with wider street network and Swiss Cottage centre
Public realm character	Attractive green landscaped environment fronting the street, car parking courts to the rear. Mature trees enhance the character
Opportunity for improvements	**LOW**

Typology: LARGE DETATCHED HOUSES

Building type / age	Large detached houses of variable age
Scale and massing	2 storey with additional accommodation in roofspace
Street character / building interface	Attractive well treed street with buildings set back behind front gardens
Interface with surrounding area	Well connected with wider street network
Public realm character	Attractive tree lined streets with homes set behind large, well landscaped gardens
Opportunity for improvements	**LOW: Resist loss of front gardens to create further parking space**