

## ***Wandsworth Council public consultation on a Draft Conservation Area Appraisal for Sutherland Grove Conservation Area (SGCA)***

### ***Response from Sutherland Grove Conservation Area Residents Association (SGCARA)***

SGCARA welcomes the Draft Appraisal document & is very appreciative of its detail, including the plethora of photographs – both historic & current. Many of these current photos celebrate & show how beautiful many parts of SGCA remain, & help guide residents to ‘best practice’. The lack of detail in the 2007 (re-) Appraisal of SGCA is striking in contrast. Sadly this lack of detail in the 2007 Appraisal has led to much confusion amongst residents about what was mandatory or merely advisable, & equally worrying, a perception by SGCARA of an ensuing lack of consistency & understanding on the part of some planning officers when considering Applications. SGCARA hopes that the final 2023 Appraisal & Guidance for planning officers will give clarity to both residents & planning officers alike.

Discussions with SGCA residents, both in zoom meetings & informal contact, have fed into the SGCARA response, including the following:

1) The 2023 Appraisal must make clear what is mandatory in terms of retaining original features. The wording in the draft Appraisal - such as that features are “important” or “should be” protected - is not sufficiently clear for everyday application. The Draft Appraisal states that the finalised Appraisal will be a ‘material consideration’. We all need clarity about how much weight that carries in the decision-making. There are some new families moving into SGCA who are really committed to SGCA. Due to the current high house-prices within SGCA, young families to support, the ever-increasing cost of projects & so on, these – and all - residents need assurance that changes they propose for their homes are appropriate/acceptable & cost-effective. It was noted that Historic England recommends that Guidance is produced using *‘the Appraisal as its source for Applicants seeking to make changes that require Planning Permissions helping to make successful Applications’*. Clarity is essential. For instance, if retention or reproduction of original front door-styles is agreed as a ‘must be’ element, exactly what will be the mechanism to manage that? Will PP be required, or some other mechanism? There was agreement that this Guidance should identify key design features that should be cherished & retained but also should be forward-looking to reflect appropriate expressions of individuality. The properties in the area are lived in by younger & older households & families with legitimate ambitions, needs & expectations.

2) Guidance & clarity is needed as regards front gardens – residents were keen to facilitate off-street parking for charging of electric cars, & off-street parking for more than one car, whilst retaining trees & greenery that make the environs of SGCA so attractive. *(SGCARA can undertake to help residents find the best solutions, including good examples within SGCA)*. (The current rules about creating permeable hard-standing are clearly broken in a number of cases. Some contractors & residents openly admit this). See: **More emphasis on Environment/bio-diversity gain needed** below.

3) There was broad agreement however that the key features in the ‘must be retained’ list relate to the appearance of properties from the street with more flexibility as to what happens at the back, (although impact on the amenity – visual & other – of neighbouring & nearby properties is an important consideration). Front doors are a key feature, since they are the ‘face’ of the house. Where original front doors remain, SGCARA would like to see these in the ‘must be retained’ category – or reproductions (which can incorporate good heat-insulation). Where doors have already been changed to other less appropriate designs, if further changes are required, these should be back to the original

design for the street. (Advice is needed as to how to renovate/replace these at affordable costs, especially where stained glass panels are involved. *SGCARA can play a part in this by seeking to source appropriate contractors & discounts if at all possible.* WBC at one time gave grants to CA residents towards restoring original features. It would be heartening if these could be restored, even on a small scale, for residents who would like to restore but find the costs just too high.

4) There was almost universal dislike of metal (zinc)-cladding to dormers. Zinc-cladding is not a material of the original houses, it was a surprise that the planners continue to Approve them in a small number of cases. Dislike of flat-roofed dormers was also prevalent since they appeared discordant with the original roofs. The inappropriateness of both zinc-cladding & flat-roofed dormers moving forward should be emphasized in the Appraisal.

5) Given the Climate Crisis, many of us are keen to facilitate clean-energy production for our Homes, eg the installation of solar panels will increasingly be needed to tackle climate change. It was agreed that a more permissive approach is called for, even if the best location is on the front roofs of houses, facing the street. Planning Permission should still be required to ensure that the best solutions are achieved for both appearance & energy-generation. Air heat-source pumps are another solution, but again PP should be required to ensure that there is no visual or noise blight to neighbouring properties.

6) There was some discussion of basement-development. There was concern about (ever-larger) basement construction. It is well documented that this area, built on London Clay, has subsidence & flooding issues given its hilly location. These will only get worse as the Climate Change weather-extremes grow in intensity. The British Geological Society's paper of May 2021 makes clear the increasing liability of subsidence for buildings on London Clay. Even now there is a current substantial problem in the basement-construction of a SGCA property. This has been ongoing for 18 mths+. The Appraisal focuses on the outward *appearance*' of the CA, so the following may not have a place in it. However it was agreed that WBC should be urged to put in place measures to discourage further basement-excavation. (SGCARA understands that Kensington & Chelsea have adopted some such measures). Although this blurs the Planning/Building Regulations boundary, it was agreed that a way should be found by the Planning Dept for any Application developing basement space to be accompanied by a mandatory Engineering Report. This also for the protection of adjoining properties.

7) As regards windows, it was generally agreed that wooden - or rarer, metal - window-frames, where either of these was the original material, are the ideal. However the cost of wooden /metal replacements may be prohibitive for many residents. It was considered that UPVC replacements could be acceptable if they followed the exact style – shape, number & size of panes, opening style, glazing patterns (eg diamond lead-glazing) of the originals. These days UPVC does not have to be white, attractive wood-grain finishes being available. *How would this be mandated/enforced? See 1) above.*

8) There was discussion of the stained glass featuring in some front doors, but also in distinctive panels in some SGCA streets, eg parts of Girdwood Rd & the southern part of Sutherland Grove. (The latter do not appear to be mentioned in the Draft Appraisal but over 90% remain, the vast majority original). SGCARA would like them to be included as key features for retention. Discussion focused on the challenge of the costs of upgrading them to retain heat which can be very high. SGCARA was (pleasantly!) surprised to find how many residents are passionate about these stained-glass side



panels (that light the stairs). Some residents have had them remounted in new frames, whilst other have had replicas made when windows were replaced. We would like all such stained-glass panels to be included as key features for retention (or reproduction where necessary)

Photos left:  
Sutherland Grove stained glass windows on side elevations.  
Charming variations of colour & pattern.

9) SGCARA would like inclusion of other distinctive features in the final Appraisal which appear to be omitted at present. This includes the distinctive 'Quoins' found on a number of houses in Skeena Hill. The importance of these for retention & also inclusion in extensions added to these houses in Skeena Hill has always been emphasized by the Conservation section of the planning dept. The following 2 pictures include both side & roof extensions in Skeena Hill houses incorporating additional quoins.



A few residents seem unaware of the significance of this charming feature & the brick-quoins have been painted over when the house was repainted. Residents should be encouraged to restore the brick quoins to their original state. Some houses in Girdwood Rd have their own distinctive brick quoin features, (different from Skeena Hill). Retention of all these special features in the original houses & in any extensions should be mandatory, (including not painting over)

10) The detached houses 1-21 Combemartin Rd each have a pattern of varied & unique roof slopes. Apart from dormer extensions these remained completely intact until a planning Decision in 2005. The vast majority remain as originally built. SGCARA would like the final Appraisal to protect these remaining original roof patterns from change. That does not affect appropriate proposals for sympathetic dormer-extensions.



11) There is another original feature in Skeena Hill which we believe to be unique. That is the tiled-roof garage of 40 Skeena Hill that adjoins the house. (Photo left) SGCARA would like to see this feature preserved from change in any future proposals for the house. It also shows the attractive glimpse of trees between the houses which is mentioned in the Draft Appraisal.

(There is scope for expansion via a sympathetic loft-conversion and/or rear extension of course, so retention of the garage roof does not inhibit appropriate expansion.)

12) There was discussion about 'artificial grass', & a general dislike of this as inappropriate visually & environmentally. This is a delicate issue, as some residents who have patches of artificial grass in their front gardens may have attractive flower beds & trees which offset to some extent, whereas some front gardens with no artificial grass may have more hard-surfacing. However, as the environmental negatives of artificial grass (plastic pollution etc) become clearer, it would be good to find a way to discourage its use, without demonizing those who have chosen it for parts of their garden. Residents who understandably choose artificial grass for children's play-surfaces should be encouraged to increase natural vegetation for bio-diversity elsewhere in their gardens.

13) There was general dislike of electric gates which were felt inappropriate & could also create a 'fortress' impression. These appear contrary to planning protocol:

Wandsworth Local Plan (2016) Supplementary Planning Document – Housing:

[https://www.wandsworth.gov.uk/media/1554/housing\\_spd\\_adopted\\_nov\\_2016.pdf](https://www.wandsworth.gov.uk/media/1554/housing_spd_adopted_nov_2016.pdf)

*5.19. 'The traditional appearance of front gardens is enclosed rather than open, so this means retaining as much as possible of existing walls and fences and introducing appropriate gates for any new vehicle access. This also helps keep your front garden private and your car more secure. Planning permission is required for the demolition and erection of walls, gates, fences and railings where adjoining a highway, as set out above.*

*A "fortress" approach should be avoided, and walls, fences and railings adjoining a road and exceeding this height would not be appropriate. **Similarly, garden gates should also follow this approach, and should allow for general access including postal deliveries.***

The 2007 Appraisal appeared to only require Permission for removal of a more than a certain part of a front boundary. SGCARA requests that Permission is required for any change to the front boundary, as per 5.19 above. Anecdotally, SGCARA hears of legitimate deliverers of leaflets etc being unable to access properties with electric gates. We ask that additional installation of electric gates be prohibited in the final Appraisal/ensuing Guidance.

#### 14) More emphasis on Environment/bio-diversity gain needed

**14a)** The puzzling omission in the Draft Appraisal is much reference in the Management Strategy to future protection of 'green' elements in SGCA - environment & enhancement of bio-diversity. The description in 'Open Space, Gardens & Trees' – & celebration of the beautiful gardens that remain - is very welcome, but ideally would be closer to the top of the Appraisal.

**14b)** The 2007 Appraisal included the following assessment:

##### 1 MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

1.1 The Council has a duty under section 71 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 to formulate and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of conservation areas.

1.2 The issues raised during the public consultation are listed below. This document aims to address these issues by aiding the understanding of the important features of the conservation area through the information given in the character appraisal.

1.3 Items of particular concern in this conservation area are:

##### ***Excessive paving of front gardens***

Roof extensions

The removal and replacement of original features

Given the council's duty described in 1.1, in these environmentally-aware times, it is hard to understand how the following acknowledgement of '*excessive paving of front gardens*' in the 2007 Appraisal was not followed up by discussions of a possible Article 4 Direction which would allow the creation of appropriate off-street parking to go hand in hand with retaining some trees & greenery . It would be good to consider at this point whether an Article 4 Direction could be explored that would achieve those two outcomes.

An appropriate Article 4 Direction could also have addressed the problem of '*the removal and replacement of original features*' noted in the 2007 Appraisal.

There was some discussion as to whether Article 4 Directions might be achieved to over-ride Permitted Development Rights where these are no longer appropriate for SGCA in terms of environmental protection – eg in strengthening the protection for trees & greenery in front & rear gardens & limiting the extent of hard-surfacing in both front & rear gardens. (Although a number of front gardens now have greatly-reduced vegetation, & a few no vegetation at all, many well-planted front gardens remain - eg fig 37 in the Draft Appraisal). Habitat remains unprotected from some excessive rear-extensions.

Article 4 Directions might also be used to mandate retention of certain agreed characteristics of SGCA properties, eg protecting original front doors from inappropriate replacement

**14c)** The 2007 Appraisal contained the following important para:

##### 5 GREEN ELEMENTS

*5.1 A large factor in the attractiveness of the area is the greenery. Although front gardens are not particularly large, they are often well planted with mature vegetation and good sized trees. Large trees are also evident in rear gardens from gaps between buildings and in the grounds of the college. Street trees are common in all streets but with particularly fine specimens in Sutherland Grove. Grass verges in most streets add to the verdant character.*

It is puzzling that the draft 2023 Appraisal describes the Sutherland Grove tree-avenue as 'maple and plane trees' – whereas London Planes form the vast majority – and should remain so. A way needs to be found to grant better protection for trees within SGCA. There have been too many S111



Applications to remove 'all trees' in front gardens (to allow full hard-standing for parking) which have clearly not been properly assessed & have been unchallenged.

Removing trees for parking is contrary to WBC's own Local Plan:

WBC Local Plan 2016 – SPD Housing

*5.22 Trees are important to the pleasant appearance of the area, whether they are in your garden or in the street. Making a space to park a car is not usually a good enough reason to remove a tree.*

Since the views between houses of rear-garden trees have always been described as a distinctive feature in SGCARA, greater protection for rear-garden trees is required. This means a change towards a more holistic view of the environmental benefits of trees, (& indeed their contribution to human wellbeing) rather than purely 'visual amenity'.

Acknowledgement of the positive contribution of the avenue of fine London Plane trees that line Sutherland Grove & also the 'greenery' should be included in the area-description. SGCARA would like this avenue of (mostly) plane trees a named protected feature of SGCA.

15) It was also noted that current boundary treatments between front gardens & the pavement vary considerably & it was agreed much greater protection for appropriate boundary treatments should be included in the final Appraisal & Management Strategy. Such protection is very weak in the 2007 Management Strategy. The historic wall extending along the east boundary of Whitelands Park is described in a positive way and photographed in the Draft Appraisal. It does not appear to be noted that this same boundary wall extends along much of the north side of Girdwood Rd. SGCARA requests that protection for this wall where it remains should be included in the final Appraisal & Management Strategy, PP required for any changes, including reduction, of the historic wall. Where it was removed in individual properties in the past, residents should be encouraged to restore it if they are proposing removal of what replaced it.

16) A SGCARA resident has alerted SGCARA to the fact that Historic England also includes Guidance about traffic considerations, & shared her personal consultation-submission about this issue. SGCARA also urges the Council to add this matter into the final (re)Appraisal document, since the presence, pollution & noise generated by excess traffic, including 'rat-running', have a corrosive effect on community-cohesion & quality of life within SGCA. The resident has given permission for her submission to be quoted, part of it included as follows. *'...the number of delivery vehicles, Ubers, contractors and general traffic has increased steadily over the past 10 years to an intolerable level for local residents and visitors to the environment and tranquility of this very special area, particularly on the stretch of Sutherland Grove between the A3 and Girdwood/Granville Roads and Girdwood Road. This is ongoing and at its worst from approx 2pm to 7pm on weekdays; Saturday mornings and afternoons; and Sunday from approximately 11am onwards'.*

The rush-hour 'no left turns' into our area from Parkside have helped to address the morning 'rat-run'. However, in fulfilment of the Historic England expectation, the afternoon 'rat-run' & other unnecessary through-traffic must be brought to a halt. SGCARA appreciates that this will involve collaboration & agreement between WBC & tfl, reflecting the responsibilities over various roads concerned.

17) Some other Boroughs (eg Merton) advertise Conservation Area status on street signs/road names. We request this for SGCA, (along with other WBC Cas?) helping to give residents a sense of identity and pride in their CA.

18) The final Appraisal once agreed, & the ensuing, clarifying Guidance, should be made widely available – to all new & existing residents, to all Planning Officers, both new a & experienced. It should also be available to local Estate Agents since we have discovered they may have little or no understanding of what CA-status means for prospective purchasers. In fact some Estate Agents do not include any reference at all to Conservation Area status when they are selling a SGCA house.