

Appraisal No 2 Brentham Garden Estate Conservation area

Location

The conservation area covers the whole of the Brentham Garden Estate, including the playing fields between Meadvale Road and the River Brent on the northern boundary, and streets either side of Denison Road as far south as Woodfield Crescent, and to Brentham Way and Fowlers Walk to the east.

Designation details

The conservation area was designated in 1969. An Article 4 Direction, withdrawing certain permitted development rights, was made in 1976. A Policy and Design Guide for the conservation area was published in May 1988.

The designation report stated that ‘The Brentham Garden Estate was built at the beginning of this century in accordance with the social and aesthetic principles of the Garden City movement, and its importance lies in the fact that it was the pioneer co-partnership suburb. The amenities of the Estate included its recreational facilities, Club and allotments and the features of the layout included the various house styles and materials, closed vistas, the trees and distinctive privet hedges, and views across to Harrow-on-Hill. A large and interesting church was built in 1916. The later part of the Estate layout was designed by Raymond Unwin and Barry Parker, and has close associations with Hampstead Garden Suburb and Letchworth.’

History

The Brentham Garden Estate owes its origin to Henry Vivian, a trade unionist and Liberal Member of Parliament, who was concerned with the improvement of housing conditions especially for working people. The *Ealing Tenants Association* was formed in 1901, with the intention of building housing on the co-partnership principle. The philosophy of co-partnership housing was developed by Ebenezer Howard as part of the concept of the Garden City movement. ‘The principle of a co-partnership housing association was that each prospective tenant would take a share in the company’s capital and as a shareholder would be entitled to a share of the profits. By this means further land could be purchased and all houses would be held in common by the Society, the absence of private individual ownership reinforcing each tenant’s personal interest in the prosperity of the development as a whole’ (Brentham Society 1977).

By 1905, 50 houses had been built in a conventional late nineteenth century terraced form. When in 1907 a further 30 acres was purchased for development, Ealing Tenants asked Raymond Unwin and Barry Parker to design the road layout for what was to become the Brentham Garden Estate. Parker and Unwin were responsible for the overall planning of the estate, including the provision of allotment gardens, recreation grounds and the Institute building, and are reputed to have designed 1-7 Winscombe Crescent. Other architects who worked under their supervision were F. Cavendish Pearson who designed most of the houses in Ludlow, Meadvale and Neville

Roads, Ruskin Gardens and the upper end of Brentham Way, and G. Lister Sutcliffe responsible mainly for lower Brentham Way, Fowler's Walk and Denison Road. Progress was rapid and house building was effectively complete by 1915. Holyoake House, containing 24 small flats for single and elderly people, was built in 1912 and the Brentham Institute (by Sutcliffe) was completed in 1911. The large parish church of St Barnabas was finished in 1916.

Special interest

The planning of the Brentham Garden Estate is based on a clear set of rules, developed by Parker and Unwin and used by them elsewhere particularly at Hampstead Garden Suburb and at Letchworth. The road layout combines short terraces with set backs and projections to vary the street line, with variations in the roof line in which the chimney stacks are also visually important. Longer vistas are contrasted with shorter, winding roads. Corner treatments are designed to avoid blank end of terrace walls, typically with houses angled across road junctions to maintain the street frontage, which is traditionally lined with hedges, now mainly privet but originally including yew, beech and hornbeam.

The design of the houses uses a vocabulary of hipped and gabled roofs, dormer and bay windows, all variations on a theme expressed in a limited and traditional palette of materials based on brick, render and clay tiles. This aesthetic derives from an English tradition which was reworked by such architects as Webb and Voysey, conforming to the twin tenets of 'honest workmanship' with ornament seen as the enrichment of the essential construction of the building. The design of the windows and doors shows the same variation on a theme, the windows being mainly casements of two, four, six or eight small panes with several casements making up a complete window. Doors are a prominent feature of the elevations. The most common pattern is a wooden panelled door with a six-pane window, often set in a semi-circular brick arch or decorative surround. Other smaller but important details include the string courses formed by a double row of tiles, and the 'eyebrow' dripstones over windows.

A major feature of the estate layout was the provision of allotment gardens at the rear of some of the larger groups of houses, connected to the street frontage by a network of footpaths lined by hedges (of which at least one original hawthorn hedge survives). These open spaces are an attractive and important feature of the Garden Estate concept. The conservation area includes the twelve acres of open space which was intended for the enjoyment of the tenants, and which was transferred to the private ownership of the Brentham Club when the Institute was purchased in 1947.

The tower of the Brentham Institute closes the view along Denison Road and Holyoake Walk. The Institute is a good example of the Arts and Crafts tradition in brick, with eaves cornice and tiled gambrel roof. The four storey tower with its pyramidal roof has an unusual angular corner staircase feature. The Church of St Barnabas, at the junction of Pitshanger Lane and Denison Road, is built in purple-brown bricks with yellow limestone dressings and a slated roof and has an imposing visual presence in contrast to the smaller scale of the surrounding houses.

Listed buildings

Brentham Clubhouse (1910-11) G L Sutcliffe (grade II)
Church of St Barnabas (1914-16) E C Shearman (grade II)