

CONSERVATION STATUS FOR AVERY HILL

Overview

In terms of landscape and the Victorian buildings and structures which remain, Avery Hill retains the ambience of a Mansion.

Despite its usage since 1904 for education, the general appreciation of the site, as viewed from all sides, is of a particular period in England's history, which is witnessed by the way it sits in the landscape as seen from the park and in proportioned character from the north.

The general lay-out of opulent winter garden, stately entrances, proportionate buildings, sweeping driveway, adjacent terraces, adapted stables, water tower and ancillary outbuildings means that the public's appreciation of the site is quite different from surrounding suburbia and more in keeping with the rest of the borough's set-piece historical locations.

As such, there is compelling reason for it to be designated a conservation area, to ensure these aspects are retained for future generations.

History

There has been a mansion at Avery Hill for more than two centuries. An estate map of 1806 shows a substantial dwelling with a southerly aspect and a wing projecting in a northerly direction.

Field patterns and hedgerows to the west suggest farmed occupation going back many hundreds of years.

In 1848, Samuel Bagshaw, in his *History, Gazetteer and Directory of Kent*, the house at Avery Hill was described as 'a pleasant mansion overlooking an extensive district to the south, one mile from Eltham'.

An auction notice in the *Kentish Mercury* on 14 May 1859 says it was 'a villa seated in its own grounds with 2.3 acres of meadow, pleasure gardens and kitchen garden'. It had its own stables and home farm. It was 'a very desirable abode for a family seeking retirement or for a merchant'.

Owners were Thomas Hale, described in 1836 as 'a proprietor of houses' and from 1859 James Boyd, a sugar refiner, who died in 1882.

In 1884, John 'Colonel' North had the building demolished to be replaced by the structures which remain to this day. Although the eastern side of his Mansion was lost in WW2, the rest remains largely untouched, apart from careful adaptations carried out to the stable block for use as education.

When he built his Mansion, completed in 1890, he was one of the wealthiest men in the country, income derived from mineral extraction in South America and coal. It was the hey-day of British Imperialism and Victorian industrialists left their mark on Britain's architecture across the country.

Historic England describe Avery Hill as an example of late Victorian vulgarity in the extravagance of its design and quality of materials used. The grandeur of scale can be indicated by the Winter Garden which is the highest in the UK and only the second largest after Kew. It outranks the latter in its overall presentation by its use of brick and its raised location, commanding a view over surrounding fields and into Kent. Its adjoining 'galleries' are on a grand scale, more redolent of an important institution or Royal occupation.

The character of its estate setting has been retained by the parkland of Avery Hill Park, a freely open and accessible public resource. To the west, the estate atmosphere is reinforced by the remaining existence of stables and grounds cottages, also the openness of aspect.

What can be witnessed of Col North's buildings from his six year occupation of Avery Hill include the two 'Lodge' buildings, located when he had the road diverted from the frontage of the Mansion; the perimeter walling to the north and east; the entrance portico from Reinikendorff Avenue; the Winter Garden, the sculpture and pictures galleries (ballroom, now library); the terrace to the west; the stables; the water tower and ground level 'pump room', the landscaping between Reinkendorff Avenue and the wall; topography – in terms of the natural slopes, particularly to the north and west of the entrance roads; many of the trees which date back centuries; the exterior staircases; stud groom cottage and vernacular stabling blocks of antiquity.

The overall collection of buildings is sufficient in scale and unaffected by modern developments to retain the initial intentions of their design; all the replacement modern buildings to the east have been carefully executed to respect their older neighbours and adaptations to the stable block have been achieved carefully with appreciation of style and scale; the railings alongside the entrance roads, while tatty, are correct in terms of scale and style and reinforce the 'stately mansion' ambience.

Since 1904, when the London County Council acquired the site, public access, and therefore, appreciation, of this heritage asset has been free and beloved by generations of local people.

The purpose of this application is to ensure that proper status is accorded to the history of the site and that this should be fully respected, over and above the Grade 2 listings of individual parts of the site and their interior. The overall presentation of Avery Hill as it stands is more than the sum of its parts and must be retained by reference to conservation area designation.

Public Interest

Since 2014, when the University announced its intention to sell the site and abandon its HLF bid, a campaign has organised three very well-attended public meetings and undertaken a long series of lobbying meetings with officials and elected representatives locally. At the campaign's instigation, a motion was passed by the full council in October 2017 which unanimously agreed to the revival of the lottery bid and to work with the University to safeguard the building's future (see below)

A hard copy petition of 2,000 names was presented to the council and an on-line petition now has more than 3,400 signatories.

It is a ‘front rank’ issue among local people, many of whom have enjoyed the site and associated park over generations.

Does Avery Hill meet the conservation area criteria?

Architectural and Historic Interest

Do the majority of buildings have some strong intrinsic architectural or historic merit by virtue of age, design, technology, materials or form?

The complex of buildings and structures at Avery Hill are linked to three significant historical events.

Firstly, 1884. The purchase of the site by Colonel John North, at that time one of Britain’s wealthiest and self-made capitalists who built his mansion at Avery Hill 1886 – 1890. The building reflects late Victorian hubris in terms of its scale and use of high quality materials. His lay-out and use of the area’s elevated and sloping topography sets the template for the current day presentation of the site. The structure and buildings which are still extant include the 300m perimeter wall to the north; the grand arch entrance from Bexley Road; the two vernacular ‘lodges’ to east and west; the grand ‘porte cochere’ entrance; the ballroom/picture gallery; the Winter Garden (highest glasshouse in the country); the entrance gallery and living room (now SCR); the grand stable block with clock tower and cupola; an immense water tower and pump room; the two-terrace ornamental garden; ancillary buildings to the west including the stud groom cottage, additional low-level stables and linking staircase. These together form around two-thirds of the built structures at Avery Hill and their planned and spacious lay-out dominates the ambience of visual experience of visitors.

While the ambience of the ancillary areas to the west including the stud cottage and stables has been prejudiced by the scruffy car parks and negligent housekeeping, the aim should be revived being careful incorporated into a sympathetic future development and not further prejudiced,

The country estate history is reinforced by the repeat usage of Colonel North's crest above the West Lodge archway, on the cast iron gates and above the main entrance, caved into the Portland Stone.

Secondly, in 1904, when London County Council bought the Mansion to create the country first female boarding teacher-training college. This has left its mark in the contiguous extension to the ballroom (1910) and adaptation and extension of the stables (1906). Both these additions were carefully designed in terms of scale, materials and design to complement the North mansion and they remain important features of the overall appearance of the buildings on site. The stable block was skilfully extended again to the rear in the early 1960s, without substantially affecting the main public facing aspects, nor the scale and balance of the overall appearance.

Thirdly, the 1940s when bombing damaged to the buildings to the west of Colonel North's mansion, subsequently demolished after the end of the War. This wing was replaced in the 1960s and thereafter by a medley of buildings to meet the educational requirements as they developed with lecture theatres, offices, teaching spaces, studios and ancillary services including as canteen and restaurants. In scale and design, they together capture sufficient elements of the remaining Victorian construction to complement rather than detract. They are consistent with the footprint of the original Mansion and are outnumbered by the Victorian/1900s constructions by around 2:1.

In summary therefore, Avery Hill has '*strong intrinsic architectural or historic merit by virtue of*':

Age: *Victorian imperialist flamboyance (Winter Garden, state rooms, substantial water tower) with Edwardian additions.*

Design: *it retains the scale, lay-out and ambience of a Victorian country mansion, adapted for institutional use but retaining many of its original characteristics.*

Technology: *the immense cast iron, brick and glass structure of the Winter Garden;*

Materials: *the characteristic weathered Victorian red brick, vernacular window casements and Portland stone*

Form: *despite the loss of the eastern block of the North mansion, the form of the site still retains its original character of opulence, a zoned lay-out and*

massive scale, when including the ancillary areas to the west and the estate (now park).

Historical endorsements:

Architectural: Pevsner's Guide, London South: Avery Hill 'the remains of a amazingly sumptuous, late Victorian Italianate villa in large grounds. In front is a generous semi-circular porte cochere with paired Tuscan columns; the Winter Garden is the best survival in London of such Victorian extravagance. Brick and stone exterior; internally of rivetted steel with Corinthian columns supporting a domed centre. The main lodge is a picturesque piece with French chateau roof and archway.

Darrell Spurgeon's local architectural guide describes the West Lodge archway as 'remarkable chateau-like roof with fine brick vaulting'.

Does the area include a number of existing designated and other heritage assets?

Historic England listings

VERY HILL TRAINING COLLEGE (MAIN DOORWAY, LOBBY, PASSAGE AND THEATRE)

List Entry Number: 1079081

Heritage Category: Listing

Grade: II

Location: VERY HILL TRAINING COLLEGE (MAIN DOORWAY, LOBBY, PASSAGE AND THEATRE, BEXLEY ROAD SE9, ELTHAM, Greenwich, Greater London Authority

VERY HILL TRAINING COLLEGE (CONSERVATORY)

List Entry Number: 1079082

Heritage Category: Listing

Grade: II

Location: VERY HILL TRAINING COLLEGE (CONSERVATORY), BEXLEY ROAD SE9, ELTHAM, Greenwich, Greater London Authority

VERY HILL TRAINING COLLEGE (ENTRANCE GATE AND ADJOINING LODGE)

List Entry Number: 1217996

Heritage Category: Listing

Grade: II

Location: AVERY HILL TRAINING COLLEGE (ENTRANCE GATE AND ADJOINING LODGE), BEXLEY ROAD SE9, ELTHAM, Greenwich, Greater London Authority

Are any buildings associated with a particular industry or individual with a particular local interest?

Colonel North, who built the mansion, was a prominent figure in Eltham between 1882, when he bought the estate and his death in 1896. This is documented by RRC Gregory's book 'The Story of Royal Eltham' written in 1909 (<http://gregory.elthamhistory.org.uk/bookpages/p318.htm>) In it, he says that North's 'bountiful hospitality, his thoughtful consideration for poorer neighbours, especially at Christmas time, when it was his custom to provide every cottage with the good things needful for the season's festivity, his generous patronage of local sport and his readiness to give of his wealth towards the maintenance of local institutions, charitable and otherwise, are memories which will long be associated with his name and with Avery Hill. On his death, there were 800 wreaths, the procession stretched from his mansion to Eltham churchyard and people lined the streets between Avery Hill and Eltham, where his body was interred. His elaborate grave is a prominent feature in the churchyard, visible from Well Hall Road.

In the era from 1904 to the current day, many people now living locally trained to be teachers at the College and therefore Avery Hill and its buildings played a formative role in their lives. In addition, generations of local people have enjoyed the public park and visited the Winter Garden, both of which have played an integral part in their lives.

Does the area have a distinctive character derived from its historic pattern of land uses and settlement?

In addition to the character derived from the footprint of the buildings laid out as a grand Italianate country mansion, the 90 acre parkland which sweeps down below the building line to the south is retained from the period of

occupation dating back to the Boyd-era mansion of the early 1800s which then formed the footprint for North's mansion; since 1904, the estate has been maintained as public parkland with the pattern of oaks, beech, cedar, willow, black poplar, and pine; many of the extant specimens date back more than a hundred and, in some cases, several hundred years, creating a timeless ambience of stateliness, large-scale and opulence, which reflects the site's history. The park is fringed on all sides by mature trees which remain from the estate lay-out.

To the north of the Mansion, the banked mown grass landscaping contains many old and mature specimens of pine, horse chestnut, and beech; from Bexley Road, these specimens surmount the lengthy walling adding to the grandeur and scale of the site and its status. From within the complex, in semi-circular style, the trees and landscaping surround and encompass the built structures, adding to their scale and stateliness of the whole.

To the immediate west of the Mansion, a row of mature limes separates it from the ancillary areas.

To the west of the park, hedgerows and avenues of mature trees are dated several hundred years in age; they previously formed field boundaries of ditches and trees, part of the mansion's home farm and consistent with the grazed landscape characteristic of most of the Eltham/New Eltham and Avery Hill area in the 19th century. These are dominating features of the west of the public park, freely accessible by footpath but retaining the field structure of the farm associated with the main dwelling house.

Are earlier historic layouts and boundaries visible in the modern street patterns?

Yes, the parkland and footprint of the Mansion are the same as the previous dwelling dating from before 1800. The basic lay-out of internal roads and spaces have been unchanged since North planned and executed his Mansion plans in 1890 with Bexley Road being diverted to the north of his new wall. The features and topography of the site is the same, unaltered by its current say usage. The council car park occupies the space of the mansion's greenhouses; the university car park was the former garden nursery; access to the mansion was the same then as is now used as access to the University main entrance and for park visitors. The nature of the boundaries themselves is unaltered,

with the extensive wall to the north as it was originally built and with few additional intrusive boundaries either to the south, which is open parkland or around the buildings themselves, which have only low railings to delineate the roads from the grass. Any new intrusive boundary fencing around the buildings would be highly prejudicial to the open ambience which has been preserved since its original conception.

Do the buildings illustrate the historic development of the area or settlement?

As outlined above, the buildings and associated parkland take their place in the tapestry of the borough's historical sites which are represented in Eltham by the existing conservation areas of Eltham Palace, Tudor Barn/Well Hall, Progress Estate and Eltham Green. It represents a major Victorian presence in the south of the borough which should be enhanced and amplified for the enjoyment and appreciation of future generations.

It combines Victorian mansion with a 110 year old institutional usage which tells its own story of early expansion of free educational provision in the early 1900s.

Do the buildings include good examples of the work of well-known architects?

North's conception was born from a visit he made to the Italian exhibition in London in September 1888 where he met the architect to the exhibition, Thomas Cutler who was responsible for much of the red brick Victorian expansion of wealthy areas of west London including Kensington and public buildings such as Great Ormond Street hospital. When Cutler exceeded his £40,000 budget by more than £25,000, precipitating a court case; Cutler's assistant J O Cooke completed the mansion.

Townscape Quality

Do a high proportion of buildings contribute positively to the special interest of the area?

Yes, Avery Hill is defined by the original Victorian conception of Col North and his architects; where they have been expanded (ballroom, stable block), this has been done sympathetically to the original. In the case of the bomb-destroyed areas to the west, all of the replacement post-war buildings have been carefully designed to reflect, by use of materials, scale and detailing, the original. Apart from the five storey block to the extreme west, at a lower level, all the buildings and structures are either original, directly responsible for the area's special interest, or are designed to contribute sympathetically, consistent with their intended function.

Does the area have a distinctive character derived from a particular style of architecture or characteristic building materials?

Yes, as outlined above, the original Mansion buildings were designed with Victorian flamboyance with extravagant use of materials; the early 20th century additions to the ballroom and stables were consistent, using similar materials. The Winter Garden likewise. Each of these buildings retain their character. The substantial water tower is a distinctive feature which is retained in its original character, as is the associated pump room, which has some modern elements to make good war-era damage. The ancillary buildings to the west – stables and cottages – retained the character of an adjunct facility to a country Mansion both in architecture and scale.

Does the area have a distinctive character derived from topography or landscape elements such as open spaces, green areas, parks, gardens and trees?

The topography is crucial to the original conception of the site and in essence is retained, creating a unique character. The pre-existing Bexley Road was diverted behind the 300 metres of walling so that the Mansion and Winter Garden could stand in their own landscaped surroundings to the north and to the south, utilising the natural slope of the land to command a vista over the estate (now park) and out into the surrounding countryside, looking towards the North Downs. The logic of this topography remains, even with the addition of the buildings which replace those lost in the war. The open spaces and estate areas are retained as originally planned and have lost none of their

character since becoming open to public access. The Mansion's terraced ornamental terrace gardens have been maintained as a public amenity.

The landscape to the west, where the ancillary buildings are situated, are distinct in that they are placed on lower land but maintained the natural sloping topography, so that they sit naturally in the pre-existing landscape.

Do the buildings retain original features and fabric such as shop-fronts, doors, windows, porches, stucco detailing, chimney stacks, brickwork/stonework etc.?

The original features of those buildings not lost in the War retain their original features in terms of the windows, brickwork and open aspect. All the brickwork moulding on the Winter Garden is retained; the gates and brickwork of the lodges and walling is as originally built; the brick staircase joining the west and east of the site is retained; the water brick water tower and pump room are retained; although subject to extensions, the features of the stable block – windows, bay entrance, cupolas and brickwork – are retained as are all the features of the main Mansion, including porte cochere entrance, ballroom and galleries.

Does the area have a distinctive townscape character derived from the relationship of buildings and spaces between them?

Yes, the overall character of the site derives from the retention of its original lay-out which is unamended from its Victorian conception, with spaces retained to both north, south and west which allow for landscaping to the north, the estate (now park) to the south, entrance 'turning circle to the north of the porte cochere, and the space to the north of the stable block. The relationship of the buildings and ancillary areas to the west have retained their original spacing, with the water tower, pump room and terrace garden all playing their role in creating the 'country mansion' character.

OCTOBER 2017 Motion to full council;

Council notes public concern over the future of Avery Hill Winter Garden and Mansion following the decision of the University of Greenwich to vacate the site in 2018. Council believes this unique and listed heritage asset must be protected and restored, with a revival of

the bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund forming part of any redevelopment, and proper involvement of the local community in the future of the site.

Council has long recognised the existence of three education covenants on the site and expects that an education tenant would be part of any redevelopment. Moreover, Council notes that the Leader of the Council is requesting a meeting with the University, the Winter Garden campaign lead, and others, to push the case to relaunch a new Heritage Lottery Fund bid aimed at ensuring that the future of this hidden gem is assured.

Summary of Public Meeting October 2019

SAHWG PUBLIC MEETING SUMMARY, HELD AT ELTHAM WARREN GOLF CLUB, 7.30PM MONDAY 21.10.19

Over 100 people attended the SAHWG public meeting on Monday evening, expressing the depth of their interest in, and concern for, the future of the Winter Garden and the wider Mansion site. This summarises the main points made at that meeting under the three headings we used in our response to the Council's consultation exercise.

1) Saving the Winter Garden

The meeting welcomed the considerable progress made since the last public meeting held in July 2017. The Council is well advanced in its negotiations to take back ownership of the Winter Garden, and you have been eminently successful in persuading the University of Greenwich to make a significant financial contribution to support its restoration and development. The meeting received positively the news that the Council is committed to working with local residents and community groups, as well as experts, in bringing the heritage assets back into sustainable use and in developing a plan of action to maximise their potential. The meeting felt that the success of the Winter Garden in the future would be determined by its impact and utility as a historical, cultural, recreational, educational and events asset. Members of the audience argued for community representation, alongside appropriate experts, on a Winter Garden-specific trust, if that were to be the vehicle for future governance and management.

2) Links with the Historic Mansion Site

The meeting pressed the need for a physical and integrated connection between the Winter Garden and the listed parts of the Mansion site, allowing public access to, and community use of, their proud heritage. This linkage would need to transcend the impending split in ownership between the Winter Garden, on the one hand, and the Mansion site, on the other, with the implications of that split for future planning and management. The meeting recognised the imperative for SAHWG to be involved in the maximum level of pre-application consultation, both with the DfE and the Council, so that the case for the Winter Garden's linkage with the listed features of the Mansion site is presented and addressed at the earliest possible stage.

3) Impact of the school on the heritage of the historic Mansion site and the integrity of the park

Local residents expressed deep apprehension about the impact of increased traffic, inevitably caused by the location of the new school, on local parking conditions (the problems are currently massive, with one school already located in the immediate vicinity). The meeting raised the potential problem of access to Avery Hill park, given that the main access road from Bexley Road cuts directly through the space to be developed by the school. Those present argued that the design and construction of the school should be in harmony with the historic buildings and the ambience of the site. The meeting articulated its misgivings over frequent or daily usage of quality heritage assets by young students and the inevitable damage to these over time. SAHWG and local residents look forward to working closely with the Council on the way forward.

Historical Source:

‘Teachers in Training: A History of Avery Hill College’ by David Shorney 1985

Winter Garden listing citation <https://britishlistedbuildings.co.uk/101079082-avery-hill-training-college-conservatory-eltham-south-ward#.Xevjkm52uM8>

Entrance and galleries citation: <https://britishlistedbuildings.co.uk/101079081-avery-hill-training-college-main-doorway-lobby-passage-and-theatre-eltham-south-ward#.XeviX252uM8>

Entrance gate and lodge: <https://britishlistedbuildings.co.uk/101217996-avery-hill-training-college-entrance-gate-and-adjoining-lodge-eltham-south-ward#.XevjHm52uM8>