

GLENHILL CLOSE CONSERVATION AREA

CHARACTER APPRAISAL STATEMENT



FOREWORD

What is a Conservation Area?

Conservation areas were introduced through the Civic Amenities Act 1967, and there are now more than 9,000 across the country. They are 'areas of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance' (Section 69(1)(a) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990).

This Character Appraisal Statement seeks to identify the special characteristics of Glenhill Close so that they may be better preserved and enhanced in the future.

What are the implications?

Conservation Area status acknowledges the importance of an area, highlighting its real and potential attractiveness. It also means that the council's efforts in the area are geared to preserving and enhancing its special character.

One way of protecting conservation areas is through the planning system, which is designed to protect local amenity, whatever the area. However in conservation areas planning legislation requires local authorities to ensure in particular that development proposals do not detract from the character or appearance of the area.

In conservation areas local authorities have more say over some minor changes to buildings, trees and gardens. This does not mean owners can not change their properties but the controls allow proposals to be checked to make sure they are in keeping with the area. Conservation Area Consent is required for the demolition of any building within the designated area.

The council has introduced an Article 4 Direction for the Glenhill Close Conservation

Area. This has removed one class of permitted development and allows the council to control the erection or alteration of gates, walls, fences or other means of enclosure. This is to ensure that any such changes to the conservation area preserve or enhance its special characteristics. Anyone thinking about doing works within the conservation area should check with the Planning Department first. There are no planning fees charged for works needing permission because of an Article 4 Direction.

Grant funding from bodies such as English Heritage and the National Lottery is sometimes available for enhancement projects in conservation areas. However the priorities for such funding often change and not all work in all conservation areas will be eligible for this type of help.

What is a Character Appraisal Statement?

Conservation areas are designated by local planning authorities after careful local assessment. This assessment forms the basis for a character appraisal statement. The format and scope of such statements are guided by English Heritage.

A character appraisal statement includes information to explain and justify the conservation area status. It therefore forms a basis for planning decisions in the area and provides the groundwork for any future policies and projects to preserve or enhance the area. The statement does not include specific projects itself.

Unitary Development Plan

The council's Deposit Draft 2000 Unitary Development Plan contains the relevant conservation area policies which apply to Glenhill Close. These are as follows: GBEnv.1, GBEnv.4, HC1, HC2, HC3, HC4.

Trees All works to trees (over 75mm in diameter) must be notified to the planning authority who have six weeks to decide whether or not to control the works.

For further information on works in conservation areas contact

The Trees Team

020 8359 4624

or

The Conservation and Design Team

020 8359 4661

CHARACTER APPRAISAL

1

Location

Glenhill Close is located to the east of the area known as Church End and due south of Finchley Central Tube station. This small estate of privately-owned flats lies between Lichfield Grove and The Avenue, an historic footpath running between Regents Park Road and Manor View. To the immediate south of The Avenue is Avenue House and its grounds.

The Close is accessed midway along Lichfield Grove via a gap between pairs of semi-detached, Victorian houses. A pedestrian access gate is set in the southern boundary wall of the site and this leads directly onto The Avenue. The boundary of the existing Conservation Area of Church End (Finchley), is to the immediate south of Glenhill Close running east/west along The Avenue and then south to coincide with the curtilage of the grounds of Avenue House.

The Conservation Area of Glenhill Close covers approximately 1.1 hectares and is entirely residential in character comprising 66 flats.

2

Origins and development of Glenhill Close and surrounding area

2.1 Historical Development

The land on which Glenhill Close now sits was formerly part of the Bibbesworth Manor, the sub-manor of Finchley, first called a manor in 1319. Thomas Allen was the squire of the manor who owned much of the land around Church End. Bibbesworth manor house stood at the centre of the estate, between Church End and East End (now East Finchley). It was the largest house in the parish in 1664. The existing manor house on the site dates from 1723 and is used by

the Sternberg Institute.

It is unlikely that any regular settlement existed in the Finchley area before or during the Roman period. In common with much of the area to the north of old London, the local soil is heavy clay on which thick forest once grew. This was hard to clear and cultivate making occupation difficult and it is not until the late 12th century that recorded references to the area began to appear. The parish church of St. Mary at Church End dates from this period.

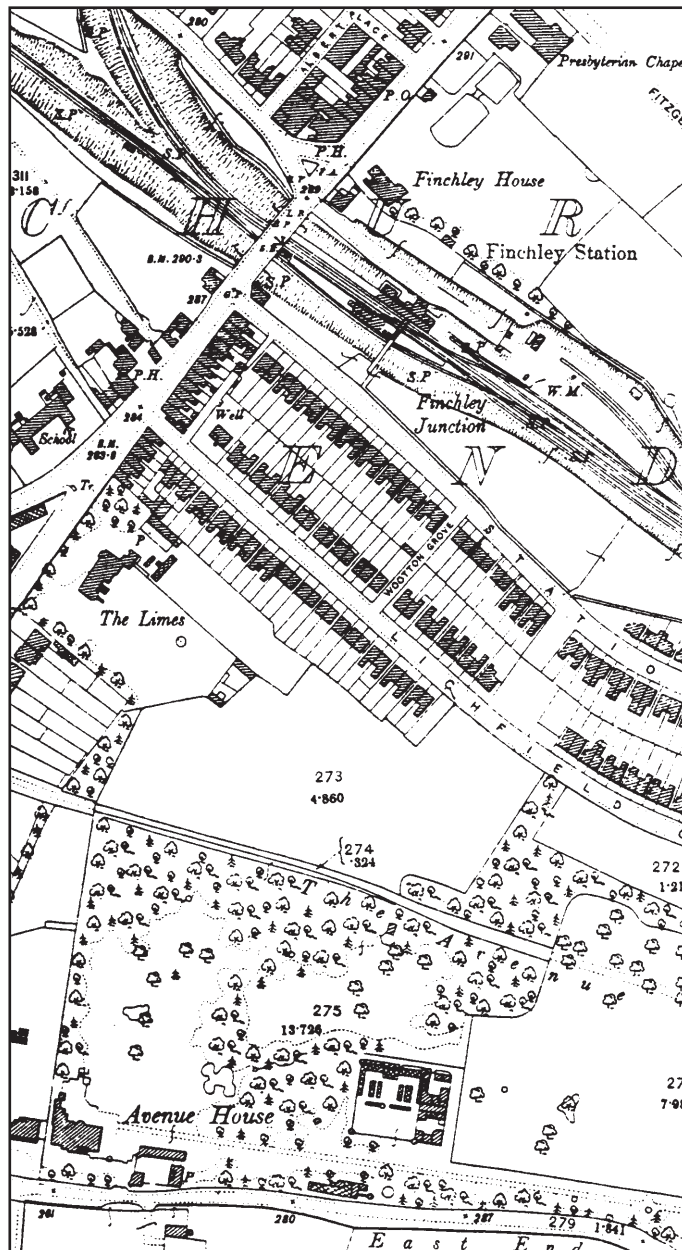
Ducksetters Lane was the original road running between Church End and Temple Fortune although it is no longer evident. Ballards Lane and Nether Street are clearly indicated on Rocque's map of 1754 and together form a medieval village street plan. In 1826 the new London and Finchley Road was laid, linking Finchley with the new estates around Regents



Rocque's map of 1754

Park in the West End. This road continues to be a major thoroughfare today.

The area provided for the needs of travellers until the coming of the railways in the 1830s when the local economy suffered following the decline in coaching. However, new developments began to appear, in particular market gardens with the first opening in Ballards Lane in 1845. The Claignar Vineyard occupied a large area to the east of Finchley Station and in 1899 it had 18.5 acres under glass producing annually 100 tonnes each of grapes and tomatoes and 240,000 cucumbers.



*Ordnance Survey
map of 1894*

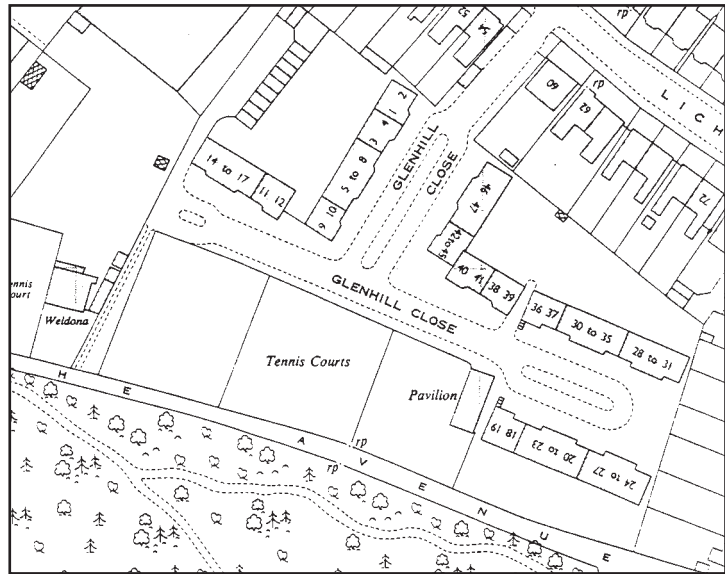
Large houses were built in the area from the Middle Ages onwards as the combination of close proximity to central London and good access were significant attractions. The suburbanisation of Finchley began in earnest in 1867 with the opening of an overland railway line from Finsbury Park through Church End to Mill Hill and Edgware. A branch from Church End to Woodside Park and High Barnet opened in 1872. Soon after the arrival of the railway, a wave of new housing was built in the area around the station, including Lichfield Grove (in 1869), Long Lane and Station Road. It wasn't until 1939 however, that a tunnel was built to connect East Finchley with Archway and thus provide direct access to the West End of London.

The following year, in 1940, Church End Station was renamed Finchley Central. The centre of Church End moved closer to the station where newer shops had emerged along Ballards Lane. Between the wars the remaining fields of the Finchley area disappeared under suburban development and trunk roads were constructed to meet the demands of mass car ownership. Three of the most important buildings in Finchley, all of which remain today are the Manor House on East End Road dating from 1723, Park House on Hendon Lane dating from the early 18th century and Avenue House on East End Road, built in 1859 but enlarged in the 1880s by Henry Stephens the ink manufacturer and MP for Hornsey. Stephens bequeathed the house and grounds to the people of Finchley in 1918. In 1928, nearly 10 years after Stephens' death, Avenue House was formally opened to the public. Avenue House takes its name from The Avenue which connected the parish church of St. Mary with the Manor House and was planted with trees by the Lady of the Manor in about 1604.

2.2 The prevailing and former uses within

the area In the latter part of the 19th century the land on which Glenhill Close now stands had not been developed but fell within the curtilage of a

Victorian villa called 'The Limes' on Regents Park Road, owned by Hugh Taylor a Justice of the Peace. This building was demolished between 1912-15 and was replaced by the New Bohemia Cinema, built in 1920. This cinema survived until 1959 and stood on the site now occupied by Gateway House.



*Ordnance Survey
map of 1955*

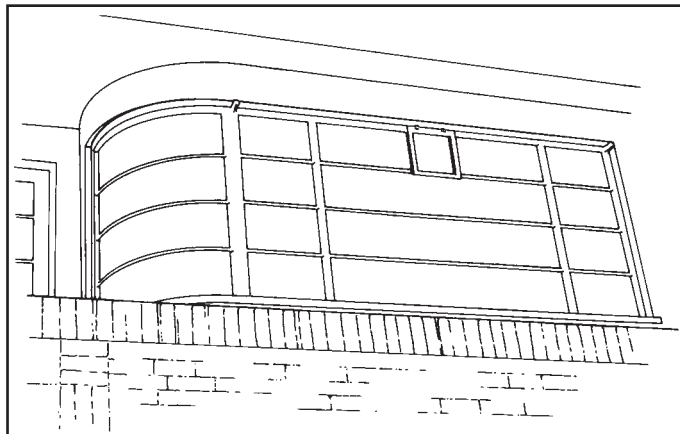
Glenhill Close was developed in two distinct phases, the first and most architecturally impressive phase was in 1936 when 46 flats were constructed. At this time the Cymric Tennis Club, which dates from the 1920s, occupied the south-western part of the site and thus limited this first phase to six 2-storey blocks. The tennis club disappeared in the late 1950s and in 1961 the second phase of development consisting of four, 2-storey blocks containing 20 flats, commenced.

3 Glenhill Close and the Modern Movement of Architecture

The flats at Glenhill Close were designed at a time when the Modern Movement was in vogue, and the buildings reflected this architectural style which was initiated by Walter Gropius and others in Germany and Holland in the 1910s. In London the Modern Movement came to the notice of the general public principally through Dr. Charles Holden's underground stations of the 1930s, including Southgate, Arnos Grove and East Finchley. Initially, English modernist architects designed detached houses for wealthy clients and it wasn't until around 1932 that London's speculative builders took up the fashion.

Many of the early designs featured flat roofs, smooth white walls and large steel-framed windows set in curved bays. In one respect the modern style offered builders savings in costs over the traditional rural-romantic designs with their mock-timber beams, gable-ended roofs and a variety of decorative wall treatments. By comparison the uncluttered elevations of the modern style were simple and initially at least, maintenance free.

The house builders quickly realised however, that these new designs could also be sold with pitched roofs and increasingly they appeared



after 1933, sometimes with green tiles instead of the usual red. In the mid-twenties concrete tiles became available although the quality varied and often houses had to be retiled after thirty years or so.

Steel-framed windows were first introduced in 1919 but were not adopted by the speculative builders until the mid-thirties. They were seen to be neater in appearance than the previously used heavy timber frames, easier to paint and generally more weathertight. They were, however, prone to rust if not properly maintained.

The typical speculative builder tended to look upon the use of an architect as something of a luxury and therefore, once familiar with the layout and design of a house the builder would proceed by rule of thumb to save architects fees. Also, once architectural designs had been acquired they would be used time and time again on different sites. This appears to be the case at Glenhill Close where no reference is made to the architect in the council's Building Control records. Furthermore, the builder Messrs. George Payne & Co. used the same design of building on two other sites in the local area (at Gainsborough Court, Nether Street, N3 and at Ossulton Way, N2) both of which were constructed at around the same time as Glenhill Close was built.

Blocks of self-contained flats first began to appear in the London suburbs from about 1934 frequently with the name '. . . Court' (in fact the Glenhill Close flats were originally named Glenhill Court). These flats were often erected in areas which had not previously been developed, as well as on sites formerly occupied by large Victorian villas. Rents ranged between £70 to £150 a year for which the tenants enjoyed central heating and maintained communal gardens. Accommodation usually comprised one reception room, two bedrooms, a kitchen and bathroom.

The modern style of architecture was not always welcomed and Hendon Council refused planning permission in 1934 for a house on the corner of Broadfields Avenue and Hale Lane, Edgware on the grounds that the white walled elevations presented too violent a contrast against the adjacent houses in traditional styles. The builders successfully appealed with the explanation that their architect was ‘merely trying to get away from useless ornamentation and flummery’. By 1938 however, the modern style had largely disappeared and the ordinary house-buying public with their conservative tastes were still seeking the more traditional mock ‘Tudor’ or ‘Elizabethan’ designs.

4 The architectural qualities of the buildings and the contribution they make to the special interest of the estate

4.1 Phases of development

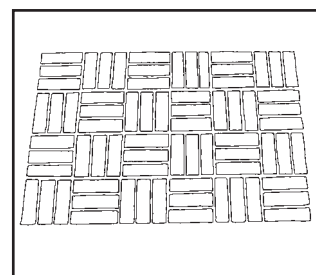
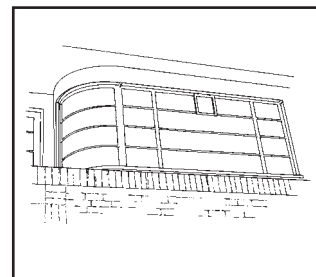
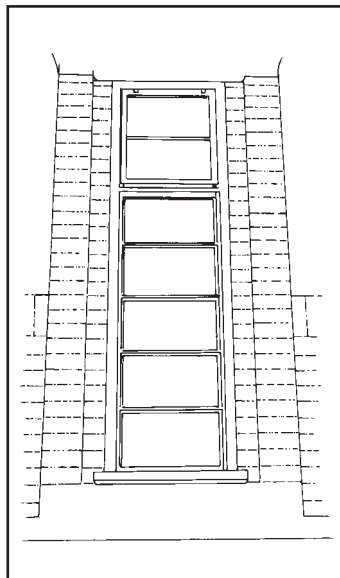
As the site was developed at two different periods of the last century, the appraisal will deal firstly with the earlier and most architecturally

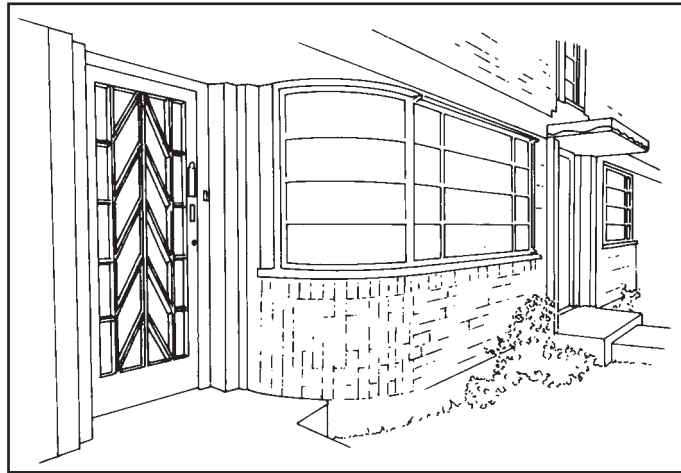


important phase of 1936 followed by the later infill development of 1961. The local building firm Messrs George Payne and Co. of Lyttelton Road, London N2 were responsible for both phases of the site's development. Unfortunately, the name of the architect for each of the phases is not revealed on any of the plans. At the time of writing none of the buildings in Glenhill Close are included in the Statutory List of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest.

4.2 Prevalent building materials, textures, colours and details

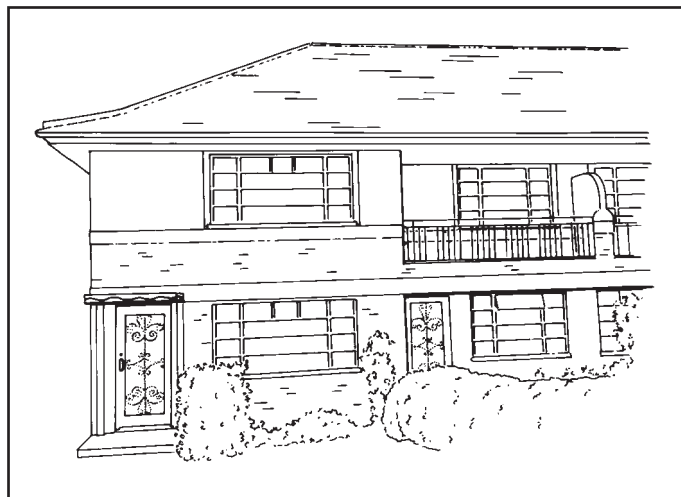
The residential blocks of 1936 are two storeys in height with steeply-pitched roofs featuring swept eaves, clad in plain concrete tiles. Multi-coloured brickwork is laid in flemish bond and pointing on the main facades is given horizontal emphasis by the use of lime mortar on the horizontal courses only. A decorative basket-weave pattern of brickwork is also featured between ground and first floors at balcony level. The upper storey is part-brickwork, part-render. Chimneys are either rendered or in exposed brickwork, some with their original tall clay pots. Windows are steel of the Crittall variety and feature the suntrap design with curved glazing. The windows are given a horizontal emphasis in the modern style of the 1930s.





Ground floor front doors are in timber with a chevron pattern and on the first floor, balcony doors have horizontal glazing bars to match the sub-division of the windows. Each of the first floor flats has front-facing balconies. The outer, wooden window frames and sills are painted in light blue as are the external doors. The horizontal and vertical glazing bars are all painted white. This colour scheme has been used for many years on the buildings at Glenhill Close.

The flats built in 1961 have been designed to match with the 1930s blocks, however, they are generally plainer in appearance. They feature fletton brickwork laid in flemish bond with pitched and hipped pantile-clad roofs. Windows are Crittall although they do not use the suntrap curved glazing. Doors are timber with a large



single piece of glazing. All doors and windows are painted white.

Ground floors are in exposed brickwork and the upper storeys are part brickwork, part render. The balconies feature metal balustrading typical of the 1960s, rather than brickwork. Several of the units have rear-facing, flat-roofed dormer windows, although these are not original features.

5 The character and relationship of spaces within the estate and the contribution made by green spaces, trees and shrubs

The layout of the estate is based on the principles of symmetry and balance. In plan form the 1930s and 1960s flats are laid-out in the shape of a crucifix with blocks facing each other at distances of approximately 25 metres from window to window.

Very generous communal open space is provided around the blocks in the form of lawns and verges, and this is well landscaped with established shrubs, hedges and mature trees. The 1960s blocks have been positioned to complement the layout of the 1930s blocks resulting in a very cohesive development, despite being developed at different periods of the 20th century. A pathway running north-south leads to a gate providing private access for residents of the estate to The Avenue.

The vehicular access from Lichfield Grove lies to the north of the site and runs centrally between the blocks and then in an east-west direction. Parking spaces are provided around the grassed islands in the centre of the Close.

Close to the site entrance sits the former site office, a single-storey brick built structure with architectural details to match the flats. It is an attractive feature which acts as a gateway into the site and remains in use as an office for a local heating and plumbing firm. The estate has a very peaceful and tranquil character due to its location, the established vegetation and the absence of through traffic. In *The Buildings of England*, Nicholas Pevsner describes Glenhill Close as a “select piece of the 1930s”.

Views into the site from public places include from Lichfield Grove, from The Avenue and also from the grounds of Avenue House. However, given its secluded setting the essential character of Glenhill Close is not fully experienced without entering the small estate.

6

The extent of loss, intrusion or damage

One negative feature of Glenhill Close which detracts from its special character is the block of twelve garages, erected in the 1960s in the north-west part of the site, which have fallen into disrepair and are no longer in use. Other features include the modern rooflight on flat 2, the glazed screen on the balcony of flat 2 and the white plastic gas-meter boxes fixed to the front walls of some of the ground floor flats in the north-east part of the site. There is also some unauthorised car-parking across a footpath running east-west, which is not only unsightly but restricts pedestrian access.

Despite these relatively minor intrusions the special character of Glenhill Close is unharmed. The 1930s architecture is virtually unaltered since the flats were built, with all of the original doors and windows remaining in-situ. Even the light blue colour scheme has changed little in this time. One of the contributory factors for the well-preserved condition of the estate is the fact that none of the flats have ever been sold by the original owners the Payne family who were also

the builders. As the flats have always been rented fully-furnished on short-term contracts the tenants have not had any incentive to make fundamental alterations or additions.

Furthermore, great care has been taken by the owners to ensure that repairs and maintenance are in-keeping with the original designs using authentic features and materials. This has resulted in a uniform external appearance to the individual flats and consequently the estate is quite unique when compared to similar developments of this period.



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