



Supplementary Planning Document  
London Borough of Merton



# Bertram Cottages Character Assessment

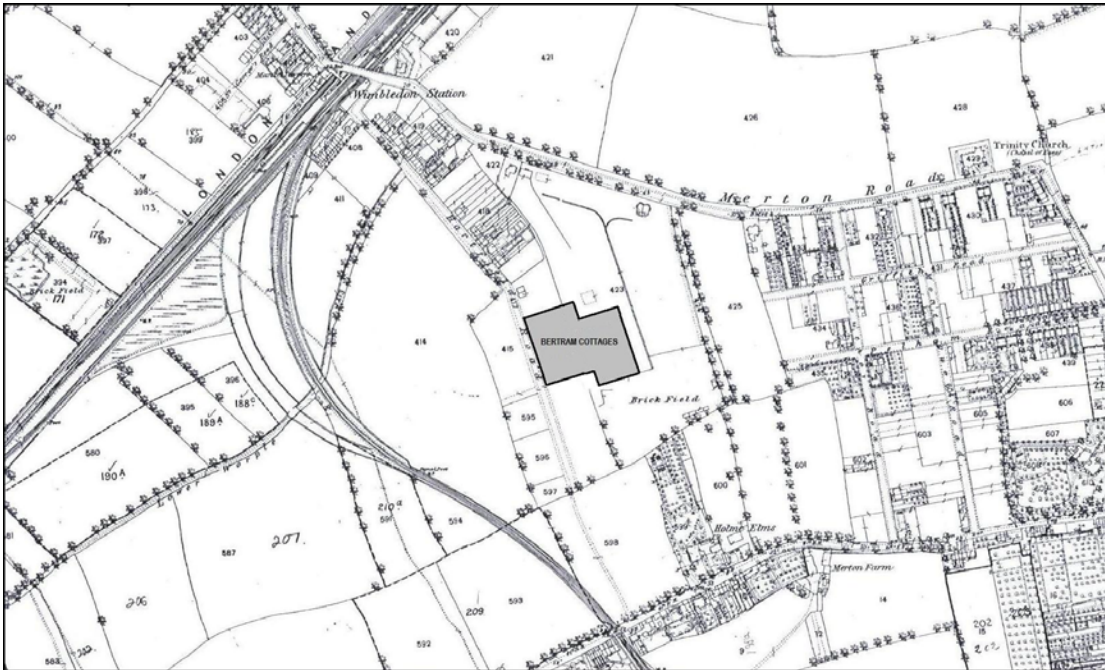


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BERTRAM COTTAGES  
CONSERVATION AREA

Character Assessment

London Borough of Merton  
2005



Above: a map of 1870 showing the relationship of Bertram Cottage, south east of Wimbledon station. Below, an aerial view of the Conservation Area from the north-west.



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## INTRODUCTION

### Conservation Areas

Conservation Areas were first introduced in 1967 and are defined as areas of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance. Bertram Cottages Conservation Area is one of 28 such areas within the Borough.

### Character Assessments

The Council is required to undertake character assessments of the conservation areas it has designated. It has already produced assessments of many of the Borough's conservation areas and this Assessment forms part of that programme.

The purpose of a character assessment is to set out the specific characteristics which merited the Area's original designation and which make it worthy of protection against unsuitable alterations or development. The assessments provide a tool to help the Council assess the impact of development proposals, and a guide for property owners and developers when designing new development, considering alterations to buildings and work to trees in a conservation area, by explaining the context to which any proposal will need to relate.

#### Map of the Bertram Cottages Conservation Area





*Above: Nos. 100 and 102 Hartfield Road, showing the unsympathetic scale of the buildings immediately to the north. No. 100 was originally numbered 1 Bertram Cottages. Below: Nos. 47-69 Gladstone Road, showing the context of the Bertram Cottages Conservation Area.*



## BERTRAM COTTAGES CONSERVATION AREA

### Location

Bertram Cottages consists of two groups of small semi-detached and terrace houses between Hartfield Road and Gladstone Road, to the south-east of Wimbledon Town Centre. This part of Wimbledon was mainly developed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the area east of Hartfield Road, which was originally named Norman Road, consists of a grid of Victorian houses laid out in the traditional manner. Most of Hartfield and Gladstone Roads form part of this grid system, with housing parallel to the street having small front gardens and more substantial gardens at the rear arranged back-to-back for maximum privacy. But Bertram Cottages breaks this pattern in a very individual and particularly imaginative way.

### Extent

At only one hectare, Bertram Cottages is Merton's second smallest conservation area. The houses appear to continue the narrow-fronted terrace and semi-detached housing typical of Gladstone Road and, to a lesser extent, Hartfield Road. Nos. 47 to 69 (odd) form two short terraces on the western side of Gladstone Road, and of similar height and frontage to the other houses in the street, while Nos. 100 to 114 (even) consist of four pairs of semi-detached houses of similar scale on the eastern side of Hartfield Road. However, closer examination reveals significant breaks in these frontages which lead to further similar housing to the rear, occupying the area taken up elsewhere by rear gardens of the adjoining plots.

### History

The fields on which Bertram Cottages were built was originally used for grazing the horses which pulled the coal wagons for the nearby railway. Bertram Cottages were built on the land in about 1872 to the design of Henry Charles Forde, a leading citizen of Wimbledon and an architect and engineer with an international reputation in the field of submarine telecommunications. His client was Miss Keziah Peache, one of the chief supporters of the Cottage Improvement Society who not only commissioned Bertram Cottages but also Courthope Villas off Worple Road and Belvedere Square off Church Road, for people of limited means.

The estate was built in two phases, those facing on to Hartfield Road being built first. Nos. 100 to 110 Hartfield Road were originally numbered Nos. 1 to 10 Bertram Cottages, which is why the houses at the rear of Nos. 100 to 100 are numbered 7 to 14. When they were first built, Miss Peache lived in No. 1, and the plaque which is now fixed to the side wall of No. 106 was originally on No. 2. No. 101 Hartfield Road is the only house with the brickwork on the front wall arranged in the pattern of the Star of David, others having the initials 'K' and 'P' of Keziah Peache.

The unique character and charm of Bertram Cottages was acknowledged by Merton Council when it designated it as a conservation area in February 1984 and extended to include Nos. 112 and 114 Hartfield Road in 1991. In the same year Nos. 7 to 18 and 31 to 34 Bertram Cottages, 47 to 69 Gladstone Road and 100 to 110 Hartfield Road were included on the Council Local (non-statutory) List of Buildings of Historical or Architectural Interest, and it became the subject of the first of the Council's design guides. Nos. 35 and 36 are recent additions, built in the back gardens of Nos. 112 and 114 Hartfield Road.

### Layout

The part of the site occupied by the cottages in and behind Hartfield Road lies slightly further north than the part in and to the rear of Gladstone Road, and this staggered arrangement has been exploited to enrich the variety of the layout. Nos. 7 to 14 Bertram Cottages lie behind and parallel with Nos. 100 to 144 Hartfield Road, and Nos. 15 to 18 and 31 to 36 Bertram Cottages are situated behind and at right angles to Nos. 47 to 69 Gladstone Road.



*Above: the spatially unresolved 'western square' showing the unattractive vista to the north and the rear gardens to the cottages in Hartfield Road. Below: The 'eastern square' off Gladstone Road, showing its attractive relationship between the space and the adjoining buildings, the termination of the view and the alleyway which leads into the 'western square'.*



Although the frontages of the cottages are similar in width to the other 19<sup>th</sup> century houses in Gladstone and Hartfield Roads, the depth of both the cottages and their rear gardens are not as great, enabling the additional properties to be accommodated within the centre of the site. Access from Gladstone Road and Hartfield is provided to the cottages in the centre of the site by means of pedestrian walkways. The one leading off Gladstone Road is oriented east/west and is wide enough to form a pleasant small square on to which eight of the cottages face, Nos. 15 to 18 Bertram Cottages on the north side and 31 to 34 on the south. Vehicular access to this square is restricted by a cast iron gates and bollards. The gates to Hartfield Road are original, and those to Gladstone Road are later replacements. They should be retained because of their considerable historic significance and major contribution to the streetscape.

A narrow pedestrian way then leads past Nos. 35 and 36 Bertram Cottages to another space which forms a narrow square or wide lane oriented north/south, with Nos. 7 to 14 Bertram Cottages, with on the east side and the backs of Nos. 100 to 114 Hartfield Road to the west. Two access ways then lead through to Hartfield Road, each of which have similar cast iron street furniture to that at the Gladstone Road entrance.

## Access

The common areas are Council property. Access is provided from Gladstone Road onto a small square, and from Hartfield Road between Nos. 102 and 104, and between Nos. 106 and 108. These passageways are lined with the fences to the back gardens. Although they are sufficiently wide for vehicles to pass, access is limited by the gates and bollards, both of which are intended to restrict access to residents' vehicles, although those on to Gladstone Road appear to be left open. Parking within the estate is restricted to the back gardens of those houses which have vehicular access, which is why those along Hartfield Road have double gates. However, this restriction is not always adhered to, particularly in the square off Gladstone Road.

The northern passageway is provided with similar gates and posts to those at the entrance to the eastern square, while the southern one has similar cycle barriers to those at each end of the passageway connecting the two squares. A red letter box adds to the attractiveness of the street furniture, but a 'no cycling' notice tends to detract from it. Both access ways are paved in tarmac and defaced by similar 'no entry' and yellow diagonally striped yellow 'boxes' to that at the entrance to the eastern square. Despite these restrictions, there is evidence that vehicles are able to gain access into the western square.

## CHARACTER

### General

The cottages are built of London stock brick with slate roofs and white painted timber framed windows and doors, and chimney stacks of London stock separate each pair. Although most of the cottages retain their original features, later alterations have resulted in some exceptions, details of which are given below under descriptions of individual properties.

The cottages are all of two storeys and are arranged in symmetrical pairs, most pairs sharing a central projecting gable end housing the front entrance and, at first floor level, blank brickwork decorated with a diagonal pattern in red brick. To the side are three-light windows on the ground floor and two-light windows above. Arches of red brickwork provide further decoration over the doors and windows. The main exceptions to this arrangement occur in the houses fronting on to Hartfield Road.

### Hartfield Road:

Hartfield Road forms part of the B285 between Wimbledon town centre Morden Road, and has been far more extensively redeveloped than Gladstone Road. The houses forming this section of Bertram Cottages are therefore of a more intimate scale than their surroundings. They are divided into three groups, Nos. 100 and 102, 104 and 106, and 108 to 114, separated by the two access ways into the middle of the site.





*Above: The barriers to the two squares which contribute significantly to the townscape.  
Below: Left, Nos. 17 and 18 Bertram Cottages showing a typical front elevation. Right, the cycle barrier at the eastern end of the passageway between the two squares.*



*Below the variations in the design to the houses along Hartfield Road; left, Nos. 100-102 and right, Nos. 108-110 (originally Nos. 1 and 2, and 5 and 6 Bertram Cottages).*



**Nos. 100 and 102 (even):** A symmetrical pair of semi-detached flat fronted cottages, each with a gable on to the road and sharing a common entranceway leading to a single semi-circular arched recessed porch. Nos. 100 and 102 possess the only remaining canopy over the porch, a feature originally common to all the houses, as well as original front door and internal timber panelling. Red brickwork is provided as arches to the windows and the entrance porch and to a string course at first floor level. The gables are decorated with white painted barge boards and a finial at their junction. The low front boundary wall to No. 100 is of brick and that to No. 102 of concrete block.

(Access way to Nos. 7 to 14 Bertram Cottages with security gate and posts.)

**Nos. 104 and 106 (even):** A symmetrical pair of semi-detached cottages, each with projecting gables and barge boards, with the entrances to the side under projecting canopies. No. 104 has been covered in white render and is the only house which does not retain its exposed brickwork. The front low boundary wall to No. 104 is of brick and that to No. 106 is in grey render.

(Access way to Nos. 7 to 14 Bertram Cottages, with a cycle barrier.)

**Nos. 108 and 110 (even):** A symmetrical pair of semi-detached cottages similar to Nos. 104 and 106, but both in London stock brick. The front boundary to No. 108 consists of a low brick wall surmounted by a hedge and that to No. 110 is a white painted picket fence.

**Nos. 112 and 114 (even):** A symmetrical pair of flat fronted semi-detached houses with typical Victorian bay windows to the ground floor and semi-circular arches to recessed entrance porches. The plan form is also of similar depth to the other 19<sup>th</sup> century property in the area. The front boundary to No. 112 is a low wall surmounted by a hedge and that to No. 114 is low wall in white render. Despite not forming part of the Bertram Cottages development, their scale and character blends well with the Cottages and their inclusion in the Conservation Area is appropriate.

## The Western Square:

The passageway leads to a space which is not so much a square as a wide access way to Nos. 7 to 14 Bertram Cottages. Despite two original cast iron street lamps the space is not as attractive as the eastern square for several reasons:

- It is not so satisfyingly proportioned;
- Houses face on to it on only one side, its western side being lined by the back gardens to Nos. 100 to 112 Hartfield Road;
- No screen is provided at the northern end, so that the rear gardens to the houses to the north in Hartfield Road and Ashbourne Terrace are exposed to view. This bleak vista gives the western square an unfinished appearance, as through the original intention was to extend the Cottages further north.
- The area is paved in tarmac.
- There is an unsightly telegraph pole towards the northern end.
- Although the boundaries to the front gardens to Nos. 7 to 14 Bertram Cottages are a pleasant mixture of hedges, brick walls white painted and picket fencing, the boundaries to the back gardens on the western side are less attractive.

The vista towards the southern end of the square is more satisfactory, consisting of the side boundary of the rear garden to No. 114 Hartfield Road, which is bordered by high fencing and mature planting. Another attractive feature is the Victorian lamppost between Nos. 8 and 9.

**Nos. 7 to 14 (consecutive):** A terrace of eight houses in symmetrical pairs, the houses being of the same design as those in the eastern square, an exception being the modern front door to No. 9, which is protected by a small canopy. There is little consistency in the boundaries to the front gardens, No.7 is bordered with a hedge, Nos. 8 to 10 with low brick walls, No. 11 with a white painted picket fence, and Nos. 12 to 14 with low walls and hedges. No. 9 was apparently the first house on the estate to receive electricity.

**Nos. 100 to 114 Hartfield Road, rear:** The rear gardens to these houses are mostly bordered by high close boarded timber fencing, the exceptions being:



*Examples of vehicular intrusion. Above, the western square: the use of the back garden to No. 110 Hartfield Road as a car park, and the unsightly garage at the rear of No. 102 Hartfield Road. Below: ways of accommodating cars into the front and back gardens to No. 57 and 59 Gladstone Road.*



*Above, the uncoordinated front garden treatment to Nos. 7 to 14 compared with the neat front gardens to Nos. 35 and 36. Below, the non-standard front doors to Nos. 59 to 61 Gladstone Road, and 112 to 114 Hartfield Road, which do not form part of the original scheme.*



Nos. 100 and 101, which consist of a most unattractive collection of fences, gates, doors and concrete blockwork (the end of the garden to No. 100 is occupied by a garage, which appears to be somewhat appropriate in this context);

No. 106, which appears to be of shiplap boarding covered in creeper;

No. 112, which includes a gate wide enough for vehicular access (again, the use of the rear garden as a car park appears inappropriate).

### The Passageway:

A narrow passageway connects the eastern and western squares. Cast Iron cycle barriers placed at each end blend satisfactorily with the historic cast iron barriers on to Gladstone and Hartfield Roads. The passageway is lined with high hedges and white painted picket and close boarded timber fencing, giving it a secluded and attractively intimate scale.

**Nos 35 and 36:** A recently built symmetrical semi-detached pair of houses south of the passageway were designed to blend with the earlier houses in the Conservation Area. The front gardens are bordered by white painted picket fencing and neatly clipped hedges.

### The Eastern Square:

The size of the small square off Gladstone Road and the scale of the buildings and streetscape details around it provide a most attractive environment, with trees and white picket fencing to the front gardens. The appearance of the original street lamp at the western end is somewhat marred by the addition of a 'no cycling' sign.

The ASPs along Gladstone Road do not continue into the square, both the road and pavements of which are surfaced in badly worn asphalt. The vehicular entrance to the square is covered by a visually obtrusive 'keep clear' sign and a yellow box with diagonal markings. Although the concrete gutters separating the vehicular from the pedestrian areas reflect the original character of the surfacing they are of inappropriate modern material. The appearance of the square would be considerably enhanced by the use of less obtrusive signage and the replacement of the asphalt, either with material which is more sympathetic to the age of the properties, or the possible exposure of the original material underneath.

**Nos. 15 to 18** (consecutive): A terrace of four houses in two symmetrical pairs on the north side of the square. The front gardens are bordered by white painted picket fencing, the front doors are modern substitutes (that to No. 16 being a 1930s insertion), the door to No. 15 is protected with a small canopy, and first floor sash windows to No. 16 have been replaced by top hung casements.

**Nos. 31 to 34** (consecutive): A terrace of four houses in two symmetrical pairs on the south side of the square. The front gardens are bordered by a mixture of hedges and white painted picket fencing.

### Gladstone Road

**Nos. 47 to 57** (odd): A terrace of six houses in three symmetrical pairs north of the access way into the site. The front gardens to Nos. 47 and 49 are bordered by a hedge, Nos. 51 and 53 by vertical close boarded fencing and Nos. 55 and 57 by white painted picket fencing. The front garden to No. 57 is paved to accommodate a small car. The front doors to Nos. 51 and 53 are protected by a small canopy.

**Nos. 59 to 69** (odd): A terrace of six houses in three symmetrical pairs south of the access way into the site. The front gardens are bordered by a selection of walls and hedges, the front doors to Nos. 59 and 67 have been replaced with modern off-the-peg substitutes and the first floor sash windows to Nos. 63 and 65 have been replaced by top hung casements.

**Streetscape:** The gardens to the houses in Gladstone Road are only a couple of metres wide and give on to a pavement surface of standard sized artificial stone paviors (ASPs) and a concrete edging to standard granite kerbs.

## PRESERVATION AND ENHANCEMENT

### Preservation:

As the Design Guide points out, the essential character of the Bertram Cottages Conservation Area is based on the intimate scale of the buildings and external spaces, the rural cottage style of the architecture, the historic street furniture, and the decorative treatment to the brickwork, windows and barge boards. It is crucial that these elements are preserved and that unsuitable alterations are controlled, since they have already begun to erode of Area's character. The Design Guide provides extremely valuable advice to local residents and, even when it was produced in 1991, non-standard doors were being installed, and since then several of the houses have had canopies fitted over them.

The Guide points out that the original boundary fences and railings, which were in cast iron, were dismantled as part of the campaign to collect iron for re-use in the production of munitions during the Second World War, and it recommends that white picket fences and gates should be provided whenever the opportunity arises, and some of the front gardens have now been provided with them, as shown on the Conservation Area map.

### Enhancement;

The eastern and western squares, and the access ways to them, require enhancement. The attractiveness of the whole area is marred by the widespread use of tarmac to both the vehicular and pedestrian areas. This finish may have been applied to the original paving; if so it might be appropriate to uncover the setts or cobble stones which lie underneath to reinforce the historic square's character. The original finish may have been removed because the underground services are so near the surface that they are sometimes disrupted by the impact heavy vehicles.

Also the boundaries to the northern vista require careful consideration. The northern vista destroys the intimacy of the space and should be screened from view, the materials used to screen the rear gardens to the houses in Hartfield Road require greater control, and the restriction of vehicles from the square should be rigorously enforced.

### Recommendations:

An Article 4 Direction is recommended covering the whole Conservation Area, controlling the design and materials used in replacement front doors and the treatment the boundaries to the back and front gardens to the public areas. Although the original windows appear to have been retained throughout, their control should also be included in the Direction to ensure to any future replacements are of a suitable design.

Also, an enhancement scheme should be carried out to look at ways of reinforcing the historic integrity of the Conservation Area and the intimate character of the spaces within it. The scheme should include proposals covering the following areas and features:

- Either exposing the original surface finish if it has been retained beneath the tarmac or repaving the whole of the Conservation in a material which more suitably reflects its historic character. If the original surface finish is found to survive in only parts of the Conservation Area, consideration should be given to using it in the most appropriate parts.
- The 'keep clear' signs and yellow boxes should be either removed entirely or replaced by more discrete notices. The 'no cycling' notices should be removed since they appear to be either superfluous or unenforceable.
- A scheme of enhancement should be produced for the western square, which would entail screening the northern end and the back gardens to the houses in Hartfield Road, and placing the telegraph wires to the houses underground.
- Consideration should be given to replacing the missing bollard in the eastern square, and locally listing these three bollards and other historic street furniture throughout the Conservation Area.

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