

AGENDA ITEM: 12

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Meeting	Finchley and Golders Green Area Environment Sub-Committee
Date	23 September 2008
Subject	Proposed Conservation Area Designation at Golders Green Carmelite monastery site, Bridge Lane, NW11
Report of	Director of Planning, Housing and Regeneration
Summary	To report on the proposed designation of a conservation area at 119 Bridge Lane, NW11 (site including the former Carmelite Monastery)

Officer Contributors	Jonathan Hardy – Principal Planner, Urban Design and Heritage
Status (public or exempt)	Public
Wards affected	Golders Green
Enclosures	Site Plan
For decision by	Finchley and Golders Green Area Environment Sub-Committee
Function of	Executive
Reason for urgency / exemption from call-in (if appropriate)	

Contact for further information: Jonathan Hardy– Principal Planner 020 8359 4655.

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1.1 **That 119 Bridge Lane, NW11 (site including the former Carmelite Monastery) be recommended to Cabinet for designation as a Conservation Area.**
- 1.2 **That interested stakeholders are notified of the Council's decision in writing and the designation recorded statutorily on the Council's planning register and local land charge records.**

2. RELEVANT PREVIOUS DECISIONS

- 2.1 Planning Application Reference: C09514 for Rebuilding of wall on west boundary & part of entrance driveway: Withdrawn 1988.
- 2.2 Formal Tree Works Application References:
 - TREC09514A to Raise crown to 2m, prune to clear building by 2m and thin crown by 30%, deadwooding of a Norway Maple T1 of Tree Preservation Order: Approved 1993.
 - TREC09514B: Remove Tree of Heaven, T11 of Tree Preservation Order: Approved 1998.
 - C09514C/01/TRE: Norway Maple - lift to 4.5 metres, remove rubbing branch, thin by 15%, reduce back from building by 1.5 metres (T1 of TPO): Approved 2001.

3. CORPORATE PRIORITIES AND POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

- 3.1 By designating this site as a conservation area will help meet the Council's (2008/09-20011/12) Corporate Plan priorities and objectives of delivering a Successful City – Suburb, which is Clean, Green and Safe. Conservation area designation will also accord with the Council's 'Three Strands Approach' of Protection, Enhancement and Growth, and in particular, Strands 1 and 2.
- 3.2 Designation will accord with the Council's Adopted Unitary Development Plan policies GBEnv1, GBEnv4 and HC13 which seek to protect and enhance buildings and areas of special value in the Borough and to protect locally listed buildings from demolition.
- 3.3 Local Planning Authorities have a duty under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act, 1990 to review their areas from time to time to consider whether further conservation area designation is called for.

4. RISK MANAGEMENT ISSUES

- 4.1 An application has already been made under the Building Regulations for the demolition of the former monastery building. Should this site not be designated as a conservation area, there would be no planning control over demolition of this important, locally listed building.
- 4.2 It is almost certain therefore, that this historic building would be lost by demolition and its setting destroyed, thus eroding Strands 1 and 2 of the Three Strands Approach. Consequently, an important part of the borough's heritage would be lost.
- 4.3 A claim has been submitted for compensation by the owners against the Council which is currently being assessed separately from this conservation area designation proposal. The proposed designation does not directly affect that claim or the Council's position in terms of risks associated with its pursuance.

5.0 EQUALITIES AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

- 5.1 The preservation and protection of the monastery building from demolition and the added control over future development on the site will ensure that the whole community benefits from its heritage importance in the borough.

5.2 The historic background to the monastery building and its former use is one of considerable interest in terms of diversity and efforts by a religious order and a Nineteenth Century Jewish musician who converted to Catholicism and established the Carmelite Monastery.

6. USE OF RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS (Finance, Procurement, Performance & Value for Money, Staffing, IT, Property, Sustainability)

6.1 The designation of the conservation area will result in minimal costs to the Council in respect of statutory consultation and publicity costs, which is to be borne by the Planning, Housing and Regeneration Directorate within approved planning budgets.

6.2 There has been no formal application for planning permission submitted (or previously approved). The monastery building is on the Council's Schedule of Buildings of Local Architectural or Historic Interest and the site contains trees protected by a Tree Preservation Order. The building is currently vacant, except for caretaker operations.

6.3 English Heritage strongly advises in their guidance that the special architectural and historic interest of a proposed conservation area should be clearly defined, preferably in the form of a character appraisal. The appraisal would provide the basis for the positive management of the conservation area, against which future applications would be considered. A formal letter of support has been received from English Heritage dated 14 August 2008 (Appendix 1) supporting designation of the proposed conservation area and efforts to retain secure the buildings' long term preservation.

6.4 The claim for compensation is made under separate provisions and the designation proposal does not affect the financial provisions of that claim.

7. LEGAL ISSUES

7.1 Pursuant to Section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, the Council has powers to designate as conservation areas any 'areas of special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance'.

7.2 A Building Preservation Notice (BPN) was served on the owners of the building on 12th December 2007 and this became effective for a maximum period of 6 months. On 5th June 2008, following an assessment and recommendation by English Heritage, the Department of Culture Media and Sport notified the Council that the BPN was not to be upheld and therefore, the building was not to be added to the statutory list. The reason being that whilst the building was recognised for strong local heritage interest it did not warrant inclusion on the national list of buildings of special architectural or historic interest in terms of the strict tests and selectivity of the listing process.

7.3 A claim for compensation 'for loss or damage caused by service of the BPN', was received on 7th August 2008 from Lawyers acting on behalf of the site's owners, Metro Construction Limited, under section 29 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act, 1990. This is presently being considered by the Council's Legal representatives.

8.0 CONSTITUTIONAL POWERS

8.1 The Council's Constitution - Part 3, Responsibility for Functions; Section 3 – Responsibility for Executive Functions – Area Environment Sub-Committees' responsibilities include making recommendations to Cabinet on the designation of Conservation Areas.

9. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 9.1 The proposal to consider the designation of the conservation area has arisen from an immediate threat of demolition to the locally listed monastery. A notice has been received by the Council requesting consent under the Building Regulations to carry out total demolition of the existing buildings on the site.

Site location, surroundings and recent history

- 9.2 The site contains the Carmelite Monastery, founded in 1908 and is located on Bridge Lane in Golders Green, which runs east to west from Finchley Road at Temple Fortune to the North Circular Road. The site is located at the western end of Bridge Lane and has an additional access to the rear from Harmony Close, although this is not currently in use. The total site area is approximately 11, 430 m² (i.e. 1.1 hectares). The frontage of the monastery is set-back from Bridge Lane, behind a brick boundary wall with iron gates. The site also contains a two-storey, detached house in stock brick with a slate roof, located close to the main entrance. A tall, stock brick wall, with substantial buttresses encloses the site. The area around the building is now predominantly residential, although when built the monastery would have been surrounded by open farmland.
- 9.3 The building is one of a small number of remaining Carmelite convents in England. There were once 39 such facilities in the U.K, approximately half of which remain. The Carmelite Order was brought to England from Lyons in France 150 years ago by a Jewish musician, Hermann Cohen, who converted to Catholicism. He opened the first Carmelite house in Kensington. The Carmelite nuns were living alongside the Jewish community of Golders Green since 1908.
- 9.4 The monastery building is partially screened from Bridge Lane and from the surrounding housing by a tall brick wall, which provided privacy, whilst creating a sense of tranquillity and serenity for the nuns. The nuns had homeless people come to their door for food on a daily basis, but they did not leave the convent other than for medical reasons. Food and other necessities were delivered to them. The nuns took a vow of silence and only spoke to each other when necessary. The site was vacated by the nuns in 2007, having been purchased by a developer, although it has remained vacant other than for site security staff.
- 9.5 A formal pre-application meeting with the site's new owners and their representatives took place on 5th December 2007, to discuss future development on the site. At that time, the intention was to convert the monastery building into 30 self-contained residential units and provide a total of 44 new residential units within the grounds. Following the Building Preservation Notice being served in December 2007, discussions with the site owners were curtailed whilst English Heritage considered the architectural and historic merits of the building. There is currently no application for planning permission affecting the site. The building is in immediate danger of demolition and therefore, the need to designate a conservation area is imperative in order to protect its integrity and the special interest of the site.

Reasons for designation of the conservation area

- 9.6 The qualities and special interest of the monastery building and its setting have only recently been fully appreciated, due to its limited access and concealment from public views. This was due to the fact that the order was an 'enclosed' order with virtual no contact with the wider public. This is evident by its high brick boundary wall and separated access for anyone not part of the 'order'. The use of the building was operating until recently, as it was originally intended.

- 9.7 It should be acknowledged that the monastery and its landscape setting are important to this area historically and culturally, as well as the building having architectural merit. These factors have contributed to its local listing, but without conservation area designation the current owners could otherwise proceed with demolition in preparation for a comprehensive re-development of the site.
- 9.8 The Adopted UDP (May 2006) lists specific criteria which are used when assessing whether an area has the special architectural or historic character necessary for designation. Areas exhibiting some or all of the characteristics can be considered appropriate for designation. Those criteria which are considered applicable to the Carmelite monastery site include the following:
- Areas of historic, social, economic or architectural interest;
 - Areas with green open spaces, trees, hedges and other natural elements of exceptional quality, which in relation to the built environment make a significant contribution to the character of an area;
 - Areas with a distinct physical identity that has not been spoilt by insensitive development.
- 9.9 By designating the site as a conservation area will allow the importance of this fine, locally listed building and its garden setting to be fully recognised and will allow the Council to resist its demolition in the absence of successful applications for conservation area consent and planning permission. It needs to be stressed that without conservation area status, the monastery, despite having locally listed status could be demolished without requiring planning permission. As a notification of intent to demolish has already been received by Building Control, the building would otherwise be removed without regard for its architectural, historical and social values to the community of Barnet and beyond.

Historical background and architectural merits

- 9.10 The Carmelite Order has its origins in the early 12th Century centred in on Mount Carmel, Israel. In the mid 15th Century, a formal order of nuns was established, with a constitution providing for a life of prayer, solitude, silence and penance. The late 19th Century saw the beginning of a new wave of Carmels in Britain founded from Paris, the first of which was built in 1878 on a site in Charles Square, Notting Hill, known as the Carmelite Monastery of The Most Holy Trinity. Other Carmels were established in the 20th Century, of which twenty survive and 15 are in England. Unlike Notting Hill, the monastery in Golders Green was founded in 1908 from Lyons. It served a community of Catholics that had been growing in England throughout the 19th Century.
- 9.11 The Golders Green monastery was designed by D. Powell of the architectural practice Sinnott, Sinnott and Powell, in the Gothic Revival style. It is built in London stock brick with red brick and stone dressings, with a slate roof. It consists of four ranges built around a central courtyard and has a bell tower in the south-east corner. Around the courtyard is a stone flagged corridor with large, pointed segmental-arch windows, creating an indoor cloister. The interior of the building is plainly detailed, as might be expected, however, most rooms have original panelled doors, parquet floors, and window shutters. The refectory walls are panelled to dado height and the chapter room has beams across the ceiling supported by carved stone corbels. The chapel is more decorative and has contrasting red brick walls with stone surrounds to the doors, bands of stone on the walls and dark timber roof trusses rising from stone corbels. The stained glass windows in the chapel are later replacements, although the original polished timber floors and benches in the nun's choir survive.

- 9.12 The building appears today, much as it was originally intended and despite some uPVC window alterations, the architectural integrity of the building remains intact and in good order, externally and internally. Despite not being considered worthy of statutory listed building status, English Heritage commented that, "this is clearly a building of some interest".....and, "it now forms an increasingly rare incident in the swathes of 20th Century domestic suburbia in north London". They concluded that the monastery is of considerable local interest as an early-20th Century foundation of the Carmelite order in suburban London, which survives very well and represents the religious practice and the secluded nature of the nuns in this monastic community.
- 9.13 The Victorian Society has registered its support for the proposed designation of the site as a conservation area. In a letter dated 4 August 2008, it comments that, "It forms a peaceful surprising enclave in the suburbs of north London, the character of which should be preserved. These buildings are ultimately very well suited for conversion but the architectural and historic interest of a place such as this which has seen minimal change in the time that it has existed could easily be lost without some form of designation."

Trees and landscape

- 9.14 A Tree Preservation Order 1975 (Carmelite Monastery, Bridge Lane and 99 Princes Park Avenue, NW11) was made on 7th October 1975 and confirmed without modification on 5th March 1976. The Order, which included 13 individual trees and 6 groups (41 trees in total), was made in the light of proposed development at 99 Princes Park Avenue and the monastery land to the rear. Since the Tree Preservation Order (TPO) was made, Harmony Close and Meta Worms Court (a block of sheltered residential accommodation) have been developed on the southern part of the former Monastery site, with road access through part of 99 Princes Park Avenue.
- 9.15 Not all of the trees at the former Monastery site were included in the TPO - e.g. the rows of pollarded Poplars around the boundaries were excluded because of their condition and previous treatment; the orchard was not included because of the exemption provisions applicable at that time in respect of fruit trees.
- 9.16 In January 2008, planning enforcement investigation was undertaken following a complaint about tree removals at the site. The trees and shrubs that had been removed were not protected (i.e. they had not been included in the TPO) so no Council consent would have been required for their treatment. At the time of investigation, it was also apparent that the formal garden had been partially destroyed - but, again, the Council has no powers of control over such activities. In the circumstances, no further action could be taken by the planning enforcement team in respect of removal of vegetation and damage to the garden.
- 9.17 Nevertheless, the large, open, garden setting to the rear of the monastery, with its numerous mature trees and established vegetation, makes a valuable contribution to character and appearance of the locally listed building and is fully justified in being designated as a conservation area.

10. Summary

- 10.1 It is considered that the area including the Carmelite monastery and its grounds are of special architectural and historic interest, which it is desirable to preserve and enhance, and this should be recognised by the designation of a conservation area. Without such designation, all buildings on the site will almost certainly be destroyed and removed.

11. LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

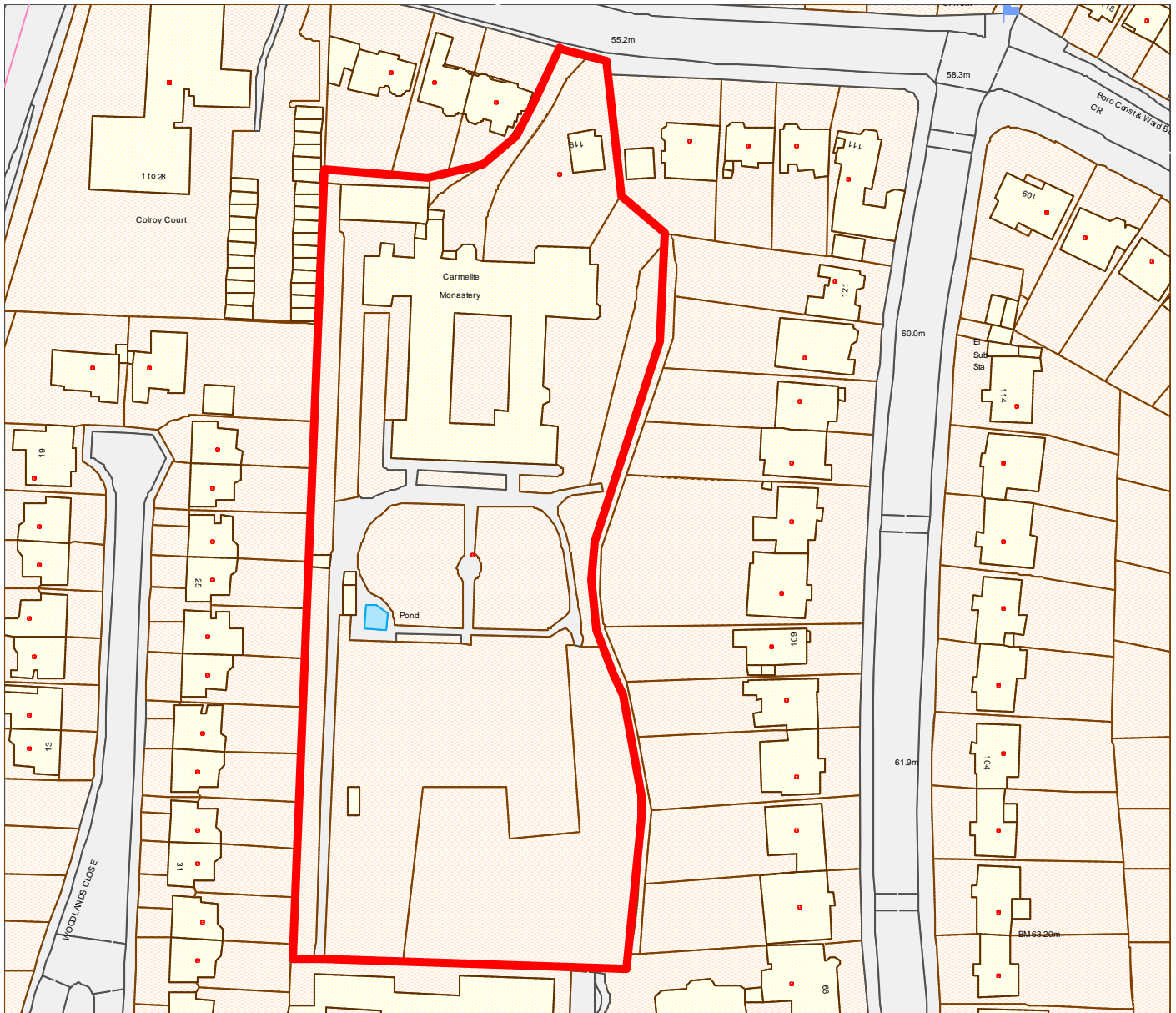
- 11.1 Planning Policy Guidance Note 15 (1994) **43** Planning and the Historic Environment.

- 11.2 English Heritage Guidance (February 2006): Guidance on Conservation Area Appraisals and Guidance on the Management of Conservation Areas.
- 11.3 London Borough of Barnet various planning documents on building preservation notice application and response of the Secretary of State.
- 11.4 Please contact Jonathan Hardy or Karina Sissman to examine these papers (Tel: 0208-359-4655/4985)

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