

APOSTLES RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION DWELLING TYPE SURVEY AND CONSEQUENT RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE PLANNING POLICY IN THE LONDON BOROUGH OF MERTON

Background

- 1.1. The Apostles area is a fairly clearly defined area of Edwardian artisan terraced housing originally built with three bedrooms and an outside lavatory. It is one of several such grids of Edwardian housing in Merton largely developed prior to the 1914-18 war. In most cases these developments were originally built for renting and accessed a main road lined with shops with living accommodation above as is the case with Kingston and Approach Roads.
- 1.2. Over time improvements such as an indoor bathroom and electricity were carried out and since WW2 most of the houses have become owner occupied. In almost all cases, provision of an indoor bathroom resulted in the smallest bedroom being converted into a bathroom, the houses becoming 2 bedroom dwellings as a consequence.
- 1.3. Currently, for planning purposes, the London Plan defines a 'family home' as having 3 or more bedrooms.
- 1.4. This survey has been carried out to establish as accurately as possible the mix of dwelling types in the Apostles area in the light of current planning policy. The impact of this policy is that 2 bedroom terraced houses with gardens, not being considered as 'family' homes due to the current London Plan definition of a 'family' home, are at risk of conversion into flats.
- 1.5. The Apostles Residents Association (ARA) was set up in the 1980s to protect the area, at the time predominantly made up of 2 bedroom terraced houses with gardens, from the threat of conversions into two flats. At that time planning policy of the period allowed such conversions. Subsequent changes to the council's planning policies with regard to minimum floor space standards then prevented such conversions being permitted. Thus from the late 1980s until 2019, excepting a brief period of confusion following the adoption of the 2003 UDP (see para.1.6), when minimum floor space standards were abolished, no conversions into flats occurred.
- 1.6. Between 2003 and 2006, a number of conversions across the borough were approved under delegated powers despite complaints by local resident groups. In 2006 a decision was made to refuse applications for flat conversions on the basis of unacceptably small floorspace in the resultant flats. Interestingly in the case of those that went to appeal, the Inspectors upheld refusals not on the basis of floorspace, but based on a clear UDP policy about minimum amenity (garden) space. Somehow the development control officers had overlooked this policy between 2003 and 2006. As a result no further applications for flat conversions came forward.
- 1.7. In the meantime the number of permissions for roof conversions, to make 2 bedroom houses into 3 bedroom houses, grew in number.
- 1.8. The LDF adopted in 2011 specifically seeks to prevent the sub-division and loss of 3 bedroom 'family' sized homes. However the way the policy is worded appears, whether intentionally or accidentally, to once more allow the conversion of 2 bedroom houses into flats. Surprisingly this didn't result in any such applications coming forward in the Apostles until very recently. The public at large appears largely to have been unaware of the significance of the wording in the LDF.
- 1.9. The ARA has always felt strongly that a house with a garden should be considered a 'family' home, regardless of the number of bedrooms, as it provides safe play space for young children in an area of deprivation with regard to public local play area provision. The nearest play area is in Joseph Hood rec. (between 550m and 1400m from Apostles homes).

1.10 There have always been concerns at the availability of car parking in the Apostles roads and this despite the level of public transport provision. This has been exacerbated by the ever increasing number of dwellings, whether by way of potential flat conversions or the change of use of local adjacent employment sites to residential.

The Survey

2.1. The ARA has always considered that the Apostles as an area includes the housing on Bushey Road at the south end of Chestnut Road and along the south sides of Kingston Road and Approach Road. Many of those residents also park their cars in the Apostles roads and in some instances access their flats from back lanes to some sections of both Kingston Road and Approach Road. This survey therefore includes them.

2.2. The survey was carried out by walking all the streets to carry out a visual survey, checking some uncertainties using Google Earth and by going through planning applications on the council website.

NUMBERS OF APOSTLES AREA DWELLINGS BY TYPE (as at 30.04.2020*)					
ROAD	TYPE >	A 2 bedroom terrace house	B 3/4 bedroom 'family' house	C Flats (over shops or in conversions**)	Number of dwellings per road
Bronson Road		38	57	6	101
Chestnut Road		11	52	30	93
Bushey Road		-	-	10	10
Sydney Road		50	53	10	113
Dupont Road		43	54	8	105
Dorien Road		49	44	13	106
Edna Road		58	35	2	95
Vernon Avenue		42	50	6	98
Carlton Park Avenue		44	42	4	90
Prince Georges Avenue		41	39	2	82
Aston Road		40	32	9	81
Clifton Park Avenue		44	22	8	74
Gore Road		37	23	6	66
SUB-TOTAL 1		497	503	114	1114
Kingston Road (448-620 evens)		-	15	144	159
Approach Road (odd nos. only)		-	5	56	61
SUB-TOTAL 2		-	20	200	220
TOTALS by type		497	523	314	1334
% of all dwellings by type		37.25%	39.25%	23.5%	
* - includes dwellings with planning permission under construction					
** - except for all dwellings in Bushey Road, 14 in Chestnut Road and 5 in Aston House in Aston Road which were all built as flats and some single storey dwellings in the backland between Sydney and Dupont behind Whitfield Court on Kingston Road. Whilst most flats are one or two bedroom dwellings, an unknown number have three bedrooms.					

2.3. In the case of the twelve Apostles roads themselves, it is clear that, in 11 out of the 12, flat conversions account for less than 7% of the dwellings in the 12 roads. Chestnut Road/Bushey Road ex-council housing built at the end of WW2 boosts that to a little over 10%. It therefore has to be said that the ARA's pressure and, for large parts of the last 35 years, subsequent

supportive council policies were successful in minimising conversion of 2 bedroom terraced house into flats.

- 2.4. Of the 1000 houses in the 12 roads found to be 2, 3 or 4 bedroom houses, currently just under 50% (497no.) are 2 bedroom houses. Of the other 503no, approximately 380no.(38%) were previously 2 bedroom terraced houses that have been enlarged to 3 bedroom 'family' homes by the addition of a roof conversion, the great majority since the turn of the century. The balance of c.120no. 3 bedroom houses was built new with internal bathrooms. These are mainly the larger oldest properties in Chestnut Road, some post WW1 houses in Gore Road and the rest (46no.) are immediate post WW2 replacement housing (council built?) on bomb sites in four of the roads.
- 2.5. In the case of the south sides of Kingston Road and Approach Road adjacent to the Apostles roads, with the exception of the stretches between Bronson Road and Dupont Road and Aston Road and Gore Road, buildings are former shopping parades with one or in some cases two floors of living accommodation above. These parades have gone through changes of use for both ground and upper floors in many instances, but broadly speaking all upper floors are now residential, as are some ground floor former shop fronts. The stretch between Bronson and Dupont contains some of the oldest houses in the area built either side of Chestnut Road which was the first of the twelve roads to start to be developed. There were also a few former shops with residential above, the shops having long ago been converted to housing or in a couple of cases offices. However most of this stretch was purely residential, including the site of what is now the Salvation Army Hall. The library with the McCarthy & Stone residential block above, between Aston and Clifton Park, is of course recent. The row of houses between Clifton Park and Gore dates from around or shortly after the 1914-18 war.
- 2.6. When the shopping parades along Kingston and Approach Roads were built, it was generally the case that the shopkeepers, who were very much part of the local community, lived above the shop. Since the 1950s this has changed dramatically and so rented flats above the shops with their own separate entrances have become the norm, changing the social dynamic, with a supply of accommodation for an increasingly mobile population of mainly younger people.

Conclusion and Recommendations

- 2.7. As can be seen from the above table, currently just under 40% of dwellings in the Apostles area are 3/4 bedroom 'family' homes, whilst approaching 25% are flats of varying size. This leaves a little over 35% as typical 'untouched' Apostles terraced houses. It is important to note that in addition to the 200no. existing flats in the Apostles area, 172no. (85%) of the 201no. dwellings built or granted planning permission on land immediately adjacent to the Apostles area over the last ten years are 1 or 2 bedroom flats. So the proportion of one and two bedroom dwellings in the immediate area continues to increase significantly.
- 2.8. Additionally, any Section 106 (or now CIL) money that may have accrued for amenity provision (i.e. open space and in particular children's play provision that was not deemed possible within recent developments) has not been and will not be spent in the vicinity of the Apostles because there is no public open space to spend it on. This is an area of public open space deprivation. Instead that money has been or will be spent hundreds of metres away and provide no benefit either for the people in those new developments or for existing residents of the area. Every conversion of a 2 bedroom Apostles house into two flats will exacerbate this problem in that there will be an ever increasing population suffering the same public open space deficit.
- 2.9. The ARA therefore believes that council policy should protect existing 2 bedroom houses from conversion into flats for the following reasons:

A - The point has already been made that, in the ARA's view, these 2 bedroom houses with gardens are family homes and in fact many are occupied by families.

B - The fact that 380no. 2 bedroom houses have been turned into 3 bedroom homes by way of a roof conversion demonstrates the demand locally for enlarged family accommodation.

C - Satisfying this demand will in turn improve the number of 'family' homes in Merton's stock and potentially keep the gardens in family use for children's play, something flat conversions are far less likely to achieve.

D - Permitted flat conversions are likely to be irreversible on economic grounds, resulting in the permanent loss of a possible 'family' home.

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