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![Typical Building](image1)

![Typical Group of Buildings](image2)

![Aerial View](image3)

![View to Flats](image4)
The aim of this study is to provide an independent assessment of the architectural and historic merits of the Aldersbrook Estate so as to establish whether or not the area meets the threshold of townscape quality sufficient to justify its designation as a conservation area. To this end the study is required to conclude with a series of recommendations upon which Members can take an informed decision as to the future policy status of the Estate. The study is also required to consider the implications arising from any such designation.

“Aldersbrook is not a conservation area, and does not include a single listed building, yet it retains its original character better than many comparable Victorian of later post war developments simply because of the quality of the buildings.”

*(100 years of Suburbia RCHME)*
1.2 Scope and Methodology

The scope of the conservation area study is set by the terms of the brief which requires the:

- rigorous analysis of the existing townscape, buildings and spaces of the area in the context of the guidance set out in PPG 15 (Planning and the Historic Environment) and English Heritage advice contained within ‘Conservation Area Appraisals’
- appraisal of the special architectural and historic interest of the area
- consideration of the potential conservation area boundary
- identification of key issues and development pressures
- consideration of the management and resource implications of designation.

The adopted methodology for this process is based upon the best practice model for townscape appraisal as applied across the City in relation to conservation area assessments. This process sets a robust benchmark for the understanding of the physical context and for the generation of guidelines for future development.

In undertaking this analysis it has been necessary to review conditions and opportunities in an area wider than the previously prescribed boundaries. This allows a more thorough appraisal of architectural and historic value in a wider context. The Study Area is shown on the map opposite.

1.3 Policy Context

Redbridge has a duty under the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 to designate as conservation areas any “areas of special architectural or historic interest, the character of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance”. Designation provides the basis for the application of the general policies set out in the Unitary Development Plan for the control of development and change within conservation areas, the most notable of which is the general control over demolition of unlisted buildings.

Designation also brings with it the expectation that the local authority will devise, adopt and publish supplementary policy statements for each individual area dealing with its unique character. The production of this appraisal document is the principal step in this process. The appraisal process may also lead to the adoption of special controls, through the imposition of Article 4 Directions, over works that would normally require planning permission. In this way characteristic details such as the removal of boundary walls, front gardens, doors and windows and decorative details along with the painting of brickwork, the replacement of roof coverings and the erection of dormers can be made to require express consent.
2. Analysis

Aldersbrook occupies a triangle of land defined by Wanstead Park to the north, Wanstead Flats to the south and the City of London Cemetery to the east. This land historically formed farmland attached to the nearby Aldersbrook Manor (probably located on the site of the Cemetery). Aldersbrook Road is the main historic route in the area, none of the other tracks or lanes predating the development survive. Other than the farm itself little built development predates the Estate itself. Only a Victorian sewage works and a group of workers cottages are recorded – none of which survive.

The development land was assembled by the Earl of Mornington purchased from the Wanstead Park Estate and the Corporation of London in the late 19th century. Under the Epping Forest Act of 1882 the Flats were preserved for the use of the public forever. The impetus for development was triggered by the reconstruction of Manor Park Station.

Aldersbrook Estate was created between 1899 and 1910, a period characterised by a huge boom in house building and the quick progression of house types and forms from the Victorian to the early modern of the 20th century. Aldersbrook is an excellent example of the social, economic and physical trend for the creation of planned middle class suburbs on the periphery of the Metropolis, served by the rapid expansion of public transport.

The Estate was built to accommodate the growing middle classes seeking to both escape the inner suburbs and display their new wealth. These are large, purpose built, houses with generous gardens and attractive outlook, designed to match the aspirations of this emerging class. Built over 10 years it displays the entire eclectic characteristics and variety of evolving form and decoration of the fast moving architectural fashions of the late Victorian and Edwardian period. This is its historical distinction that makes it of particular interest.

In very recent times the administrative boundaries that historically divided the Estate have been adjusted so that Aldersbrook is for the first time within one local authority. This unified control is in itself another reason why it is timely to review the conservation area potential for the area.
Aldersbrook is a well-defined physical entity and its original street plan was devised and laid out at the earliest stage of development in 1899. The plan was principally a response to the shape of the site and the alignment of Aldersbrook Road itself. A series of usually curving cross-streets spring from Aldersbrook Road, with a long spine road taking the development to the west.

The Figure Ground clearly illustrates the relationship of buildings to the street plan and gives a big clue to the nature of the place being created – truly ‘rus in urbs’ - the curving and sinuous street alignments responding to the open ‘countryside’ all round. Curiously other than on Aldersbrook Road and Northumberland Avenue the Estate avoids ‘urban edges’ with this surrounding open land. Again this may be a deliberate attempt to merge the development in with its green context.

With its full range of terraces, ‘semis’ and detached houses Aldersbrook perfectly typifies Suburbia. More than this the provision of churches, schools, shops, a children’s home and a hotel indicate that it can be treated as a model community. This social, spiritual, and educational provision was quite deliberate on the part of the developers as was the location of the buildings housing the community functions. These ‘community buildings’ are different in form and height from the predominantly two-storey domestic buildings – a deliberate scale distinction.

The churches on the most important perimeter road – Aldersbrook Road - signify and signpost an upstanding community. The school buildings in the centre of the development located there as for ease of access and as symbols for the future of the community. The commercial buildings located (closest to the railway station) at the southern tip of the triangle form a landmark overlooking the Flats and indicating the presence of the community without offending its residential amenity. In its own unassuming way the development of the estate predicts the qualities of layout and form which dignify the garden city movement.

Within the street pattern the plots were laid out closer to the time of actual sale. The developer also laid own various stipulations seeking to encourage the highest quality of development as possible. These stipulations laid down the building line – 15 feet behind the kerb, 25 feet in Aldersbrook Road. These building lines remain intact and a very important component of townscape quality. In general terms development proceeded from east to west.
Typically a plot, or group of plots, was purchased by speculative builders who usually undertook the design of the houses themselves. Within the developer’s stipulations significant stylistic freedom was allowed. These competent, yet conservative, ‘design and build’ properties form the basic built fabric of domestic buildings on the Estate. Architects were used on major buildings and often on larger or more prominent corner site buildings.

The late Victorian and Edwardian buildings of Aldersbrook typically reject the earlier Gothic fashion displayed in the inner suburbs for the eclectic borrowing of a full range of contemporary fashionable styles and revivals. Most typically these included the ‘Queen Anne’, the ‘vernacular revival’ and the Arts and Crafts Movement.

Of particular interest is the way in which the sequence of construction on Aldersbrook, as shown in the Development Phases map on Page 3, illustrates the hectic transition of styles. Where the earlier properties display hipped roofs over bays, the later ones have gabled bays infilled by mock framing and bargeboards. The former illustrative of an earlier typology, the latter predicting the form and appearance of the more extensive inter-war suburbs.

The buildings are of the highest quality for the period and collectively generate an attractive and unique character which, given the remarkable survival rate, is out of the ordinary when compared to other similar contemporary developments.

Characteristic building types and their details are illustrated opposite.
In 1907 the estate was described as a ‘compact, detached, self-contained colony…the houses on the estate are all very much one class, the estate possesses its own church and chapel and is socially and logically a well defined unit’. The colony was built with its own landmark buildings as they remain landmarks today. They are:

- St Gabriel’s Church, Aldersbrook Road – designed by Charles Spooner and built in 1914.
- Baptist Church, Dover Road – constructed in 1908.
- Childrens Home, Bradenham Crescent – the Receiving Houses were built in 1910 in extensive landscaped grounds to the south of Woodland Avenue. The main building has been demolished but the wards remain and have been converted to residential use. As a result of their scale and attractive, distinctive, form in counterpoint to the general form of the area they are of some townscape value.
- Elementary School, Ingatestone Road – built by the Wanstead School Board in 1907 to the designs of the architect C.H. Brasse. A handsome, symmetrically arranged building in yellow stocks with red brick dressings of the Queen Anne Revival style.
- Infant School, Harpenden Road – also to the designs of Brassey built in 1910.
- Library, Park Road – although a modest building of little architectural interest it is the former diary building that provided milk to the estate and so is of genuine historic interest.
- Commercial buildings, Aldersbrook Road – stylistically consistent but distinct in scale and composition from the remainder of the area these buildings are located in a very prominent position at the interface between the built-up area and the openness of the Flats.

In addition it is important to recognise the townscape role played by those buildings on corners and at junctions within the estate. These buildings frame and close views and vistas throughout the area.
The modern Aldersbrook with its mature street tree planting and its green swathes of backland vegetation is seamlessly connected with its wider green framework. The presence of so many trees within, on the perimeter and in the wider setting of the estate is a major factor in generating the unique qualities of the place. Few residential areas share the arcadian qualities of Aldersbrook.

2.5 Trees and Groups of Trees

The map illustrates different types of trees and groups of trees in the Aldersbrook area. The map is color-coded to indicate:

- Street Trees
- Backland Trees
- Framework Trees - Formal
- Framework Trees - Thick Bush

The images at the bottom of the page show:

1. Tree Lined Street
2. Aerial Close-up Backland Trees
3. View Towards Flats / Trees
Given the pattern of streets and the wider natural setting of the estate there are a large amount of important views and vistas to be identified and enjoyed. These views define a significant part of the essence of the estate and its relationship with its surrounding landscape. They fall into three main groups:

- views or glimpses out of the estate of the open land beyond and framed by buildings
- views of the landmark buildings, both from within and without the estate
- panoramic views from outside towards the estate.

These views provide further evidence of the importance of the unique relationship between buildings and landscape found at Aldersbrook.
2.7 Negative and Neutral Areas

The principal negative areas lie on the periphery of the core area and generally outside the historic extent of the Aldersbrook Estate development. Although contiguous in physical terms they do not share the age, architectural design, materials, scale and built form characteristics of the predominant historic buildings. Generally these are residential developments dating from the mid-late twentieth century. They include:

- the area to the west built on the land of the former Children’s home
- the area to the east built on the land of the former Infectious Diseases Hospital
- the area to the south built on the site of the former Aldersbrook Farm and associated buildings.

For these reasons it is recommended that they be excluded from the potential conservation area boundary. The only exception being the surviving former Children’s Home institutional residential buildings which have a pleasing Arts and Crafts appearance and which also contribute to the overall sense of cohesive planned community that marked out the early aspirations for Aldersbrook.

Within the core area there are a relatively small number of buildings, which are alien to the overall character. Some of these replaced bomb-damaged buildings, others were built on odd gap sites, while more recently replacement and redevelopment of original buildings is beginning to take place particularly on Aldersbrook Road.

Finally, a very small number of original buildings have had their original character effectively compromised by ‘modernisation’. These buildings which are capable of restoration are identified as being neutral.
3. Recommendations

3.1 Conservation Area Designation

This study benefits from the 1999 publication by the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England of “One Hundred Years of Suburbia: The Aldersbrook Estate in Wanstead 1899-1999”. This states that “the history of the Edwardian housing of Aldersbrook is also the story of thousands of other housing developments on the outskirts of towns and cities throughout the country”.

Aldersbrook is the classic suburb, geographically distinct from but economically linked to the city. A place not dynamically urban but not truly pastoral – a place of ‘conformity, safety and autonomy’. As a result of:

- its coherent and intact plan and layout
- the unique juxtaposition of the stylistic evolution of its buildings
- the architectural quality of those buildings
- its unique ‘island’ location surrounded by attractive, wooded, open land
- the remarkable extent of the physical survival of buildings and
- the impressive range of special views that result

it should not be treated as just another suburb. It is in fact a fine example, if not one of the finest, of the turn-of-the-century London suburb.

Aldersbrook is just over a hundred years old and has stood the test of time very well. It has matured and aged gracefully, and despite the loss of a few original buildings, the general erosion of original detail and some unattractive more recent developments (particularly on the perimeter) it remains an attractive and desirable suburb. The character of the place is so robust that it can accommodate significant change without compromise to its appearance.

The foregoing analysis clearly demonstrates that the character and appearance of the area meets the criteria required by general guidance to justify designation. These criteria are reviewed in the table opposite at Figure 3.1.1. In addition comparative analysis as been undertaken of other existing conservation areas which have been identified as comparative designations. These conservation areas are reviewed in Figure 3.1.2 and provide a quality benchmark that is considered to Aldersbrook meets.

It is recommended that the Aldersbrook Estate be designated a Conservation Area in line with the identified proposed boundary.
3.2 Unlisted Buildings of Merit

Of the landmark buildings identified in Section 2.4, four are considered to be of sufficient architectural and historic interest to warrant designation as ‘unlisted building of merit’ were the area to be designated as a conservation area. They are considered to be of particular merit because of their special architectural quality and their important townscape role as previously defined. These buildings are identified opposite.

3.3 Opportunities for Enhancement

It is interesting to note the RCHME records that “a suburb and the houses within it are subject to the changes in taste which develop within a society and the houses in suburbs are frequently the recipients of ‘individualisation’ by residents. Architecturally, Aldersbrook is an Edwardian gem, but personalisation adds variety to the larger ensemble and provides things that amuse and interest us. The character and uniqueness of Aldersbrook is as much about the odd and quirky as about the perfectly restored Edwardian villa.

These sentiments are entirely appropriate for Aldersbrook. The key benefit of conservation area designation is the control of demolition to prevent the loss of original buildings and the raised standards of design that would be applied to any extensions or new developments that take place. The place is robust enough to accommodate the type of natural change that occurs without the need for planning permission.

Accordingly it is recommended that should the area be designated as a conservation area it would not be necessary to require any additional controls through the imposition of an Article 4 Direction.
Policy Framework Set by PPG15 and English Heritage Guidance

It is the quality and interest value of an entire area that should be the key consideration

Local authorities should be careful not to devalue Conservation Area designation by imposing restrictions in unremarkable locations

Key considerations should include

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PPG15 &amp; English Heritage Criteria</th>
<th>Commentary on Aldersbrook</th>
<th>Compliance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It is the quality and interest value of an entire area that should be the key consideration</td>
<td>Though individual buildings on Aldersbrook are charming, it is the cumulative effect of the design sub-groups and the relationship with the surrounding topography that marks the estate out</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local authorities should be careful not to devalue Conservation Area designation by imposing restrictions in unremarkable locations</td>
<td>The existing designation of Mayfield and Wanstead in the Borough of Redbridge, and the existence of designations in areas similar to Aldersbrook in other areas, would indicate that its designation would not represent a devaluation</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key considerations should include</td>
<td>When analysed according to these criteria, Aldersbrook appears to score strongly:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>■ Topography</td>
<td>■ Unique topography thanks to surrounding open spaces</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>■ Historical development</td>
<td>■ Important historically as preserved example of Edwardian suburbanisation cohesively displayed the rapid, sequential, exploration and introduction of new styles</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>■ Archaeological significance</td>
<td>■ Red brick and attractive details, adornments and decoration typifying Victorian' Edwardian housing</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>■ Prevalent building materials</td>
<td>■ Though lacking in public spaces in its interior, Aldersbrook possesses extremely charismatic spaces on either edge</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>■ Character of spaces</td>
<td>■ Relatively high density spacing creating a pleasant feeling of enclosure</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>■ Quality of buildings and their relationship to one another</td>
<td>■ Most streets are tree-lined and green features like front gardens are integral to the estate's character</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>■ Trees and 'green' features</td>
<td>■ A significant proportion of Aldersbrook residents have long campaigned for Conservation Area designation</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.1.1 Conservation Area Compliance Matrix
3.1.2 Conservation Area Precedent

1. Holly Lodge, Camden
   - Construction started in 1923 and continued through to the mid-1930s, forming a development on St. Pancras’ last privately owned open space.
   - Built on the Garden Suburb model, with a mixture of houses and mansion flats. Modern flats for the elderly were built in the 1970s. The combination of housing styles has created a number of distinctive sub-areas on the estate.
   - Derives its character from its hilly topography, its strong planned form (built around a central ‘spine’ road), its soft landscaping with tree lined verges and screened front gardens, the ‘island’ form of development contained between Hampstead Heath and Highgate Cemetery, and the preserved townscape ‘rhythm’ of scale and spacing.
   - The Arts & Craft movement of the late 19th Century and the use of the vernacular heavily influenced Holly Lodge’s design. This is evident in the use of gables, hipped roofs, expansive tiled roofscapes and double-height bay windows.
   - There are no listed buildings on Holly Lodge, though all buildings are deemed to make a positive contribution. The estate’s management committee have published a design guidebook to assist with alterations.
   - Concerns about ‘erosion of character’ centre around the use of inappropriate materials, the loss of gardens and gateposts, and unsympathetic extensions and alterations.

   Holly Lodge has much in common with the Aldersbrook estate, having been built around a planned form with a residential purpose. Like Aldersbrook, it embraces an evolving range of housing types, though all possess common design characteristics and form a unique townscape in combination with a distinctive natural topography. In addition, Holly Lodge, like Aldersbrook, possesses a modernist extension, and carries many of the same fears about unsympathetic alterations and the loss of semi-public assets like gardens and gates.

   It must be concluded that the designation of Holly Lodge provides Aldersbrook with strong support for its claim to Conservation Area status.

2. Queen’s Park, Westminster
   - Built by a philanthropic organisation to house the poor in 1848. Designed as a Cottage Estate, the forerunner to Garden Suburbs, and remains a remarkably complete example.
   - Some new build followed significant Second World War damage, including the construction of the Mozart estate in the 1970s.
   - 5 types of property exist in Queen’s Park, all possessing a common design pattern of Gothic detailing (gabled porches, turreted roofs and decorative brickwork), apron gardens and distinctive red slate roofs with red brick detailing.
   - 53 buildings are Grade II listed, and an Article 4 direction is in existence. This requires residents to consult with the local planning authority (LPA) about any alteration to a visible elevation. All repairs should be undertaken using traditional materials, and should retain or restore original details.

   Queen’s Park differs slightly from Aldersbrook as it features a more unified design scheme, with greater unity in the design of the public realm (e.g. distinctive railings and boundary walls). It is this level of detail that lends itself to Article 4 restrictions. However, Queen’s Park provides support for Aldersbrook’s case, as it is a planned residential area that typifies an important historical period, and derives its character from a cohesive townscape with a good use of trees.

3. Mayfield, Redbridge
   - Designed and built by two local builders in the 1920s as a well-defined residential estate.
   - Virtually all dwellings are detached or semi-detached bungalows, spaced at low density, and featuring common design details including finials, ornamented timbering and bay windows.
   - A feeling of spaciousness is created by the low eaves level and generous planting and landscaping, which offers a pleasant contrast to the 2-storey terracing which surrounds Mayfield.
   - The design characteristics of the estate have been largely preserved, though this has been made easier by the imposition of an Article 4 Direction in 1987. This was imposed in response to concerns about unsympathetic extensions and alterations to porches and windows.

   Mayfield provides an interesting blueprint for Aldersbrook, as it is another residential estate in Redbridge, which was built around the same time as parts of Aldersbrook. It is also worth noting that Mayfield begun as a Residential Precinct, and progressed to become a Conservation Area as appreciation of the estate’s unique character grew. A similar path of designation may be appropriate for Aldersbrook. The identification of Mayfield’s detailing as a reason for designation is important for Aldersbrook, as similar features are common to both estates, as is the pleasant cumulative townscape effect in comparison to surrounding areas. Redbridge’s designation of Mayfield is undoubtedly a strong precedent for some change in policy status for Aldersbrook.

Designated 1978, extended 1991