



Statement of principles

The Blackheath Society's Objectives

The Society's aims and objectives are as follows:

To preserve and enhance for the benefit of the public such features of Blackheath and its vicinity as are of particular beauty or historical, architectural or constructional interest, to protect from disfigurement or encroachment its open spaces, particularly the Heath, to encourage high standards of planning and architecture in its new buildings, to promote improvement of and interest in the amenities and development of the district, and in furtherance of the objects, to monitor, protect and seek to improve or enhance its environment, security and character, including its built environment, its transport and licensing regimes.

The Planning Group contributes to the achievement of these objectives through a process of monitoring planning issues – both policies and specific cases - consultation and commenting on planning applications.

Principles of operation

The objectives are our starting point. They are, however, inevitably quite high level. This note provides more detailed guidance on how we operate and arrive at our decisions at a day-to-day basis.

We need to be flexible in our approach. There can be no hard and fast rules governing how we operate. The following should, accordingly, be seen as broad guidelines rather than a definitive list.

- We take a close interest in the design of new developments, especially where these would have a significant visual impact. The weekly list circulated by the secretary is an essential starting point, though we are alert to information from other sources such as local residents and sometimes developers themselves.
- We aim to be balanced in our approach and to support developments – both new projects and alterations to existing structures – which are of genuine merit. It is inevitable that our role in questioning new developments and sometimes objecting to them will be the most visible aspect of our work and this may create a perception that we are negative or obstructive. But our overall approach is a positive one.
- Supporting and encouraging sustainability in design, construction and operation is an important recent and growing dimension of our work. This includes encouraging

walking, cycling and public transport use over private motor vehicle use (except for the people with mobility problems)).

- In making judgements about the appropriateness of new developments we will typically consider issues such as the following (though the list is not exhaustive):
 - The extent to which a development is compatible with the existing context including the character and density of development in the immediate locality. We support good modern design and do not expect new developments merely to imitate what already exists. Each scheme needs to be considered on its merits and the broader context will be an important factor in assessing the appropriateness of design.
 - Choice of materials. Blackheath is an urban setting and the materials used in new developments need to be compatible with the established pattern of development in the area. We will not normally support schemes which seek to introduce discordant or alien materials unless there are good reasons for this.
 - Sustainability and the natural environment. We aim to preserve and improve the tree cover of Blackheath, for aesthetic, climate and environmental reasons. We also aim to promote improvements in policies and applications in respect of energy conservation in buildings.
 - We are sensitive to the impact of developments on broad visual perspectives and vistas.
 - Durability of design. We try to imagine whether developments will still look good and contribute to the quality of the area in decades to come.
 - Apart from objecting to/supporting developments as a whole we seek to offer constructive input as early as possible where we believe that outline plans or formal applications can be improved, including by inclusion of conditions. We do not however act as a reference point or source for detailed pre-application advice.
- The Society presses local authorities to adopt and maintain appropriate policies and guidance in the area of planning, including in emerging areas of concern such as sustainability and energy conservation.. We participate in the development and review of such policies and guidance and press local authorities to ensure compliance with these.
- We may, exceptionally and as resources permit, involve ourselves in developments outside of Blackheath/the conservation area where it is judged that these will have a significant impact either visually or, for example, on infrastructure (eg Lewisham town centre, Lee Green, Kidbrooke). We aim to leverage our own and others' efforts by working closely with other amenity groups in such cases.
- We are a volunteer organization with many demands on our time and resources. We therefore need to prioritize our work to focus on those issues which have the highest impact and where we can have most influence. We bear in mind that the planning

authorities already place extensive requirements and limitations on development, particularly in conservation areas. Whilst we aim to remain vigilant in respect of all issues potentially impacting on the conservation area, limited resources may require us to rely on the planning authorities to provide necessary protections in respect of matters which have lower priority such as fenestration and minor/routine tree issues.

- Objections to proposed developments have immeasurably greater weight where local residents take the lead through sending written objections to the Councils, and/or speaking at planning meetings. The Society will seek to work with members/local residents/residents groups as far as possible to provide help and support.

The Blackheath Society, November 2022