

Historic development

How significance is assessed

Methodology for Assessing Heritage Significance

Significance is the term given to the total sum of the cultural and heritage values that make a place special to this and future generations. It encompasses not just the physical attributes of a site but also its setting, contents, use, history, traditions and wider context; these may be tangible or intangible (i.e. physical or thematic). It is therefore unique to each place and relative significance can vary from element to element.

The following assessment of heritage significance is informed by Historic England's *Conservation Principles* (April 2008), *Managing Significance in Decision-Taking in the Historic Environment* (March 2015), and *Statements of Heritage Significance: Analysing Significance in Heritage Assets* (October 2019).

Heritage values

The concept of 'significance' lies at the heart of Conservation Principles, it is a collective term for the sum of all the heritage values that society attaches to a place. Understanding who values a place and why provides the basis for managing and sustaining those values for future generations. Heritage values can be arranged into the following four groups:

Historical Value: The ways in which past people, events and aspects of life can be connected through a place to the present. It tends to be illustrative or associative.

Aesthetic Value: The ways in which people draw sensory and intellectual stimulation from a place.

Communal Value: Derived from the meanings of a place for the people who relate to it, or for whom it figures in their collective experience or memory.

Evidential Value: The potential of a place to yield evidence about past human activity.

Factors such as rarity, integrity and group value will further contribute to significance. Setting – the surroundings in which a heritage asset is experienced or is otherwise linked to – is also a key consideration.

Levels of Heritage Significance

Significance and the interests/values which contribute to it are measured against a sliding scale: whilst many elements will be significant, not all will be significant to the same degree. It is important to recognise these variations so that future change is determined proportionately to significance.

High: Themes, features, buildings or spaces which have high cultural value and forms an essential part of understanding the historic value of the site, while greatly contributing towards its character and appearance. Large scale alteration, removal or demolition should be strongly resisted.

Medium: Themes, features, buildings or spaces which have some cultural importance and helps define the character, history and appearance of the site. Efforts should be made to retain features of this level if possible, though a greater degree of flexibility in terms of alteration would be possible.

Low: Themes, features, buildings or spaces which have minor cultural importance and which might contribute to the character or appearance of the site. A greater degree of alteration or removal would be possible than for items of high or medium significance, though a low value does not necessarily mean a feature is expendable.

Neutral: Themes, spaces, buildings or features which have little or no cultural value and neither contribute to nor detract from the character or

appearance of the site. Considerable alteration or change is likely to be possible.

Intrusive: Themes, features or spaces which detract from the values of the site and its character and appearance. Efforts should be made to remove these features.

The Heritage Significance of the Cator Estate

Historic Value

The Cator Estate has a high level of historic value when considered as a whole. The estate has a long history of transformation, having been the site of one of the finest mansions built in the early 18th century, before being developed in multiple phases from the late 18th century onwards. This long history of evolution is illustrated by the variety of architectural styles evident in the houses that have been built across the estate, ranging from the refined classical buildings designed by Michael Searles along South Row in the late 18th century to the gentle modernism of the Span developments. The changes in how this tapestry of diverse buildings look not only illustrates changing tastes in architectural style but also speak to broader changes in patterns of domesticity since the late 18th century.

The association of the Cator Estate with its former owners and occupants is also a large facet of its historic interest. A particularly high degree of associative historic value is derived from the Cator Estate's relationship with the eponymous John Cator and his descendants. Cator was incredibly commercially successful as a timber merchant and developer, sat in the House of Commons for over two decades and was connected to a number of prominent late 18th century figures, such as Samuel Johnson. He, like his descendants, also played a highly significant role in the development of the estate. As a desirable area of south-east London,

the Cator Estate has also been home to a series of influential figures in British culture, science, business and politics, whilst a series of locally, and in some cases nationally, significant architects have been commissioned to work on the estate. These include John James and Michael Searles in the 18th century, George Smith and Sir Aston Webb in the 19th century, and Peter Moro, Eric Lyons and Patrick Gwynne in the 20th century.⁰¹

Historic significance is also ascribed to the potential for the roads within the Cator Estate to perpetuate the historic pattern of routes within the area. In this respect, particular significance is ascribed to Pond Road, which follows the alignment of the historic, formal drive down to the grand mansion at Wricklemarsh that was built for Sir Gregory Page in the 1720s. Other routes such as Manor Way and Morden Road, which appear to follow the alignment of earlier, minor tracks, are of more limited significance. Meanwhile, Blackheath Park has more historic significance than other post-1800 roads on the estate due to its status as the most important road laid out during the first phase of concerted development within the centre of the estate.

The road surfaces, footpaths, kerbs, and areas of soft landscaping have low historic value in their own right but through their sympathetic materiality they contribute more generally to the interpretative value of the estate, allowing its 18th and 19th century origins to remain legible. The two surviving gate lodges on Manor Way and Blackheath Park and the five sets of later gates spread across the estate entrances also reflect the Cator Estate's long history as a private developed and owned estate.

⁰¹ James designed the long-lost Wricklemarsh House for Sir Gregory Page; Searles designed much of South Row; Smith designed the church, and Brooklands Park and Belleview; Webb designed The Gables on Blackheath Park; Moro designed 20 Blackheath Park; Lyons designed over dozen multi-house/flat estates of varying sizes for Span Developments; Gwynne designed three different houses for builder Leslie Bilsby.