

HERITAGE STATEMENT

Rocks Lane Multi Sports Centre

The application site is located at the north east corner of the conservation area, adjacent to Old Barnes Cemetery. Barnes Common comprises a series of open spaces separated by roads and railway lines. It is designated Metropolitan Open Land, 48 hectares of which were designated as a Local Nature Reserve in 1992, following denotification of the site as a Site of Special Scientific Interest in 1989. It was drained in the second half of the nineteenth century, before which it was virtually marshland. The Common extends to more than a100 acres and forms part of a green chain of related open spaces, a swathe of land which runs south from the former Barn Elms Reservoirs (now the Wetland Centre) to Richmond Park and beyond.



1898 Ordnance Survey extract

The land is almost uniformly flat, the highest point being Mill Hill, which is only eight metres above flood level. The landscape comprises a mixture of acid grassland, scrub, woodland, wetland and 'wasteland' vegetation. Over much of the Common the soil is thin and sandy with outcrops of gravel and pebbles. The areas of acid grassland, which are rare in London, are of special interest, being rich in unusual flora and fauna, including the burnet rose and the speckled wood butterfly. The variety of habitats from grassland through scrub to birch and finally oak woodland, give Barnes Common great potential as an educational site, although it is not used much by schools at present. This diversity is maintained by careful management to prevent the whole site developing into woodland. The focus of the management, therefore, is to keep the grassland areas open by cutting wherever possible, and removing encroaching scrub on a regular basis.

The area has been used as common land for hundreds of years, both for strip farming and grazing, as part of the Manor of Barnes under the ownership of the Dean and Chapter of St Paul's Cathedral. In 1894 it came under the custodianship of the new Urban District Council of Barnes, while still being owned by the Church. This scheme empowered the Council to plant trees and shrubs and generally improve the Common for exercise or recreation purposes, but on condition that no alteration should be made to its natural features and that unhindered public access should be ensured. The creation of the football and cricket pitches, the bowling greens and tennis courts were thus permitted, but no permanent fencing was allowed anywhere on the Common apart from around the Recreation Ground, for safety reasons. In 1965 Barnes was incorporated within the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames, who now manage the site on behalf of the Church Commissioners.

The earliest recorded building on the Common was the mill, first mentioned in the mid fifteenth century. The Gate House and boundary ditch were introduced in the sixteenth century, to keep livestock within the parish after a dispute between Putney and Barnes commoners. After the gate was removed, the cottage became the residence of a Common keeper. The small, single storey, red brick building now known (erroneously) as the Toll House is a listed building. As early as 1796 the Vestry, concerned for the protection of the common ground, gave responsibility to the Common Keeper for ensuring that commoners constrained their hogs from ranging freely, paid 3 pence a head for every horse or cow turned out to graze, and that no-one exceeded his limit of ten free loads of sand a year. Apparently, pigs, cows and geese roamed the Common at will, "and in the corner, near the cross-roads, there used to be a pound, which was always on Sunday mornings full of animals waiting to be claimed." The Common was a favourite promenade location for the young Queen Mary and her mother, the Duchess of Teck, who were driven over from Kensington Palace.

Barnes Workhouse was built in 1778 on the extreme south eastern edge of the parish on a triangular piece of land enclosed from the Common between Queen's Ride and the Upper Richmond Road. The 30 inmates were moved on in 1836 to the Richmond Union Workhouse in Grove Road. The site became a market garden and private house, then the Manor House Hotel, and the site is now occupied by houses and flats. The money raised by the original sale was invested and is still managed by the Barnes Workhouse Trust, which funds a variety of causes strictly within Barnes parish.

'The Cedars', a fine colour washed detached villa, is the only Georgian building within the conservation area. This was built in 1780 on land enclosed from the Common and is a listed building. The eighteenth century carved Portland stone milestone, which was previously situated on Rocks Lane, now on the Upper Richmond Road and is also listed. It states that Hyde Park Corner is less than 6 miles distant, which is difficult to imagine from the rural setting of the Common. A number of trees were planted on the Common in 1969 and some of these have now reached maturity. In September 1976, over a third of the grassland was razed to the ground in fires, and local residents had to be evacuated from their homes. Since then little development has taken place, the only new

buildings being individual houses and small blocks of flats to the south east of the conservation area. It remains an area predominantly of residential and recreational use. Despite being dissected by roads and the railway, the Common has retained its overall character as an ancient managed open space, and it is remarkable that, despite strong pressures to build in the vicinity, so much of the Common has survived unspoiled.