Extent and Justification

Sub Area 28 covers The Downs, which lies between Edge Hill (Sub Area 26) to the east, and Lansdowne Road and The Crescent (Sub Areas 29 and 30) to the west. However, unlike these roads, The Downs was not included in the Conservation Area when it was designated. But, since it stretches from the Ridgway south to Worple Road, its character has a significant impact on the setting of the parts of the Conservation on each side, and it was therefore appropriate as part of this Assessment to review its character and check if the changes in attitude towards the type of buildings it contains since the Conservation Area was designated are great enough to justify its inclusion.

Because of the length of The Downs, this Assessment divides it into two sections to enable the maps of the Sub Area to be shown at a reasonable scale. The northern part, Sub Area 28A, is bordered by Sub Areas within the Conservation Area: Lansdowne Road (Sub Area 29), to the west, and the northern part of Edge Hill (Sub Areas 26A and 26B), to the east. The southern part, Sub Area 28B, is bordered by Sub Area 33B, the east side of Crescent Road, within the Conservation Area, to the west, and Sub Area 26C, Worple Avenue, outside the CA, to the east. As a result of this analysis, most of the southern part has been included in the Conservation Area, for the reasons set out below.

History

According to Milward, in Tudor times The Downs was a more important right of way than Worple Way (now Worple Road) because it connected Wimbledon and Merton Commons [Milward, 1998, p. 82], and on the Tithe Map of 1838 it is still labelled “Path for Merton”. However, the 1865 OS map shows it lined with houses with substantial gardens, particularly on the west side. In fact, the depth of the plots on each side may have been the road’s undoing as far as the preservation of its historic character was concerned. Because they are significantly deeper than many of those on adjoining roads, they may well have appeared more attractive to developers, and the original houses appear to have been steadily replaced by substantial blocks of flats from the 1930s onwards, so that there are few historic buildings left and the road has therefore been omitted from the Conservation Area. In 1973 the Vic Soc report described The Downs as

“Well filled with institutions, of which two are of architectural interest – the Adult Education and Teachers’ Centre and the Ursuline Convent. Five Victorian houses also remain, including a tall, highly-mannered pair at 6 & 8, and a villa with crenellations, first class barge-boarding and a veranda at 30.

No. 8 survives, but No. 6 has been replaced by Rathbone House, and No. 30 by Wrenshaw Place. Since the report does not locate the other two, it is difficult to identify them.

Sub Area 28A, The Downs, northern section

Extent

Sub Area 28A extends from just south of the Ridgway as far south as No. 11, Parkfield, on the west side, and Southridge Place, to the east. As the latter name indicates, it is here that the road dips down the escarpment towards Worple Road and takes on a rather different character.
Map of Sub Area 28A, the northern part of The Downs
Character

The northern part of The Downs is essentially a straight road lined by substantial blocks of flats, almost all of them four storeys high, so that the townscape is somewhat monotonous, with only the mature trees within the grounds and along the back of pavement to relieve their impact. The scale of the blocks encroaches on the character of the Ridgway, to the north and, because the rear of the blocks on the west side are mainly devoted to car parking instead of greenery, they also have a detrimental impact on the character of Lansdowne Road, to the west.

Buildings

East Side, even numbers, north to south (No. 2 The Downs lies within Sub Area 15A)

The Sub Area contains one building which would make a positive contribution to the Conservation Area if Sub Area 28A were to be included in it – No. 8 – and two properties which would have a neutral impact, Nos. 4a and 4b. All the rest would have a negative impact.

Nos. 4a and 4b (with Kings View Court beyond) and Nos. 1 to 32 Wimbledon Close

Nos. 4a and 4b: A semi-detached pair of pitched roofed three storey houses which replaced a house named “Tinker’s Green” in 1998, in red brick with a pair of gables facing the road and porches over the front entrances and garages. Their design would have a neutral effect if located within the Conservation Area.

Nos. 8a and 8, and Nos. 8a and 10 (with Southridge Place beyond), both from the back
**Wimbledon Close** (east side): Two linked blocks of four storey flats with rear wings dating from the 1930s, flats 1 to 12 being accommodated in the northern block, and 14 to 32 in the southern one. They are each T-shaped on plan, with a rear wing, and extend over a considerable frontage, in stock brick with white rendered string courses, bay windows and glazed staircase panels over the rusticated entrances porches. Although they are reasonable examples of their kind, they are entirely out of scale with most of the buildings in the Conservation Area.

**No. 6, Rathbone House:** Three linked blocks of 34 flats, the two at the front being of three and four storeys, built in 1996. Both the scale and bland design of the building would make it unsuitable for inclusion in the Conservation Area.

**Southridge Place, on the east side of The Downs, and No.5, Marion lodge, to the west**

**No. 8:** All that remains of the pair of four storey Victorian houses which the Vic Soc report described as *highly mannered*. It is of stock brick with tall ornate chimneys and gables, including canted corner gables clad in red and grey ornamental tiles. It was converted to flats in 1957 and its setting is seriously compromised by the bland blocks of flats on each side. It would certainly enhance the Conservation Area if included within it. It has many attractive features and, being the sole survivor of the nineteenth century villas in this part of The Downs, and therefore in danger of suffering the same fate as its neighbours, it is recommended for local listing.

**No. 8a, Gordon Court:** A four storey block of eight flats built in 1988 of red brick with yellow brick string courses and projecting balconies. Again, the scale and bland design would make it inappropriate for inclusion in the Conservation Area.

**No. 10, Princess Court:** A four storey block of ten flats built in 1980 in red brick with a fake mansard top storey. No. 10 is, if possible, even more bland than Nos, 6 and 8a, and entirely unsuitable for inclusion in the Conservation Area.

**Nos. 1 to 23 Southridge Place:** An estate of 23 three-storey terrace houses built in 1987 in five groups on the site of No. 12, St Teresa’s Hospital. They are of red brick with shallow slate roofs behind parapets and first floor balconies. Although the houses are more sympathetic in scale with the houses in the adjoining Sub Areas than the nearby blocks of flats, they are somewhat bland and would tend to be detrimental to the character of the Conservation Area.

**West side, odd numbers, north to south**

**Wimbledon Close** (west side): A four-storey block of flats of similar design to the blocks on the eastern side, containing flat Nos. 33 to 48 and with 17 garages at the rear.

**No. 3, Upton Court:** A four-storey block of flats of box-like proportions with 22 garages at the rear, which because of its design would be unsuitable for inclusion in the Conservation Area.

**No. 5, Marion Lodge:** A three and four storey block of flats, U-shaped in plan, with a white rendered ground floor and red brick above, pitched roofs, projecting balconies and octagonal
stair towers. Although the design is less bland than the blocks of flats on the east side, No. 5 is of far too large a scale to be included in the Conservation Area.

**Lanherne House:** Two three-storey blocks of flats, in multi-stock bricks and red rubber surrounds to the windows, Nos. 1 to 6 being on the east side of a large green, and Nos. 7 to 18 on the north side. They were built in 1951, replacing a three-storey Victorian detached house, and planning permission was recently granted for the replacement of the two blocks by a three and four storey block of 51 flats arranged in an H-shaped plan (with one leg missing) with 36 parking spaces in the basement and 15 at ground level. The scale of the proposal is daunting, even in the context of the adjoining blocks of flats and would be entirely inappropriate within the Conservation Area.

The proposed redevelopment at Lanherne House, on the west side of The Downs

**Thaxted Place:** An estate of 11 three-storey terrace houses in two blocks, five at the front of the site and six at the rear, in red brick with false mansard roofs to the second storey. As with Southridge Place, they are of more suitable scale for inclusion in the Conservation Area, but somewhat bland and would tend to be detrimental to its character.

No. 11, Parkfield, and Thaxted Place, with Nos. 23 to 27, at the rear of Parkfield, beyond

**Parkfield:** No. 11, a three storey block of flats in brown brick with a rusticated white rendered ground floor, a semi-circular gable to the front projecting wing, and projecting balconies to the side wings; and **Nos. 23 to 27,** 3 three-storey houses of similar design at the rear. No. 11 is
partly classical in proportion, with classical columns to the central entrance porch. However, such details tend to give it a somewhat pastiche character which would be out of place in a Conservation Area containing mainly genuine historic buildings.

**Inclusion or Exclusion from the Conservation Area**

Since all but one of the buildings in Sub Area 28A would have a detrimental effect on the character of the Conservation Area, it is clear that, despite changes in attitude since the its designation, the northern part of The Downs is entirely unsuitable for inclusion.

**Sub Area 28B, The Downs, southern section**

**Extent**

Sub Area 28B covers the southern part of The Downs and extends from the top of the escarpment to Worple Road, taking in Nos. 31 to Lantern Court (no. 99 Worple Road) on the west side and from Nos. 14 to 32 on the east side. Most of Sub Area 28B is now included in the Conservation Area.

**Character**

This sloping part of The Downs is separated from the northern section by the ridge at the top of the escarpment and by a subtle but significant curve in the road, obscuring from view the large blocks of flats in Sub Area 28A. It is far more densely covered in mature trees than the area to the north, and provides an attractive setting for the buildings, which vary in size, scale and architectural and historic interest.