



Decision Maker:	Cabinet Member for Place Shaping and Planning
Date:	21 June 2018
Classification:	For General Release
Title:	Commemorative Green Plaque for architects John Darbourne and Geoffrey Darke on Morgan House, Lillington Gardens Estate, SW1V 2LF.
Wards Affected:	Tachbrook
Key Decision:	No
Financial Summary:	The Green Plaque Scheme depends on sponsorship. Sponsorship has been secured for this plaque from the ward budget.
Report of:	Strategic Director, Built Environment

1. Executive Summary

John Darbourne C.B.E. (1935-1991) and Geoffrey Darke (1929-2011) founded their architecture and landscape-planning practice in 1961 after Darbourne won a prestigious competition to design the Lillington Gardens Estate in Westminster.

2. Recommendations

That the nomination for a Westminster Green Plaque to commemorate the two architects, who designed the Lillington Gardens estate, SW1, be approved.

3. Reasons for decision

This is an opportunity to commemorate the two architects whose design skills set new standards in social housing and made Lillington Gardens estate one of the most outstanding public housing schemes of its time. Their innovative designs

are widely credited with pioneering the move from tower and slab block designs, which dominated the 1960s.

4. Policy Context

The commemorative Green Plaques scheme complements a number of council strategies: to improve the legibility and understanding of Westminster's heritage and social history; to provide information for Westminster's visitors; to provide imaginative and accessible educational tools to raise awareness and understanding of local areas, particularly for young people; and to celebrate the richness and diversity of Westminster's former residents.

5. Background

5.1 John Darbourne CBE (1935 - 1991)

5.1.1 John Darbourne was brought up by his grandfather in London's East End. His modest circumstances probably gave rise to his later unpretentious realism and pragmatism. In the 1950's he attended the Bartlett School of Architecture under the tutelage of Tom Manning.

5.1.2 He met Geoffrey Darke while working at the practice of Eric Lyons and both men set about entering architectural competitions. It was while at Harvard, completing his post-graduate studies in landscape architecture, that Darbourne made his breakthrough by winning the prestigious competition for new housing at Lillington Street, Westminster.

5.1.3 In later years, between 1983 and 1990, Darbourne was the architectural consultant for Bath City Council. Here many architects, attempting to bring a contemporary approach to design in a classical context, benefitted from his advice and guidance. Without his presence, Bath would have continued to trade on its reputation for fundamental classicism to the exclusion of all other styles and to the detriment of the city as a living organism.

5.1.4 John Darbourne died on the 29 September 1991 at the age of 56 and is buried at St Peters Church, Petersham. He left a legacy of buildings that demonstrated his ability as a humane and sensitive designer, and as an architect of international standing. Most significantly, Darbourne's work showed how vital the strategic role of the landscape architect is.

5.2 Geoffrey Darke (1929 – 2011)

- 5.2.1 Geoffrey Darke was born in Evesham, Worcestershire, where his father was a car mechanic. With encouragement from his parents, he and his brothers won places at Prince Henry's Grammar School in Evesham. There, a supportive art teacher helped Darke to secure an RIBA scholarship to the Birmingham School of Architecture in 1947, where he trained under Douglas Jones. His first job, for Stevenage Development Corporation, was interrupted by national service in Malaya for the Royal Engineers.
- 5.2.2 His career took him to Pemberton and Bateman, who specialised in Cotswold architecture. In 1958, he joined the architect Eric Lyons who designed for the public sector but is best remembered for his flats and houses for the developers, Span. Darke's housing design skills came to the fore with his complex planning, detail, high densities and rich landscaping. It was in Lyons's office that he met John Darbourne. Both entered prestigious housing competitions in 1960, Darke in Harlow, Essex, and Darbourne for Lillington Street, Westminster. Darke secured a commendable second place with his scheme for Bishopsfield and when, in 1961, Darbourne won with his scheme for Lillington Street, he invited Darke to form a partnership with him.
- 5.2.3 After his partnership with Darbourne ended, Darke set up his own practice in 1987 at Aldeburgh, Suffolk, where he and his wife Jean could devote more time to music as members of the Festival Chorus (they married in 1959 after meeting in the chorus of *The Gondoliers*). Later, moving nearer to their family in Oxford, their music interests continued. They were singing together in a concert only 24 hours before his sudden death on 8 November 2011. He was survived by Jean and his children Christopher, Elizabeth and Sarah.

5.3 Darbourne and Darke

- 5.3.1 Having won the architectural competition, John Darbourne returned to Britain from the U.S.A. and with Geoffrey Darke opened their practice as architects and landscape planners from an office in the nearby Churchill Gardens estate.
- 5.3.2 Lillington Gardens was constructed in phases between 1961 and 1972, and it was a resounding success, breaking with the then current use of standard units in high-rise blocks. Instead, it emphasised individuality in the grouping of dwellings, provided for private gardens at ground and roof levels, and achieved high densities with blocks of only eight storeys.

- 5.3.3 It is hard now to imagine the impact of this, their first project together, for the pair changed the look of social housing virtually overnight. In a bid to break down the barriers between public and private housing, the scheme adopted the red brick of one of London's finest Victorian churches, St James the Less, designed by G.E. Street in 1860. The estate surrounds the church, its spire dominating the staggered terraces and internal squares.
- 5.3.4 Complex plans gave even small flats a dual aspect, and planting boxes on the walkways (watered from the roof) provided colour and interest. Darbourne and Darke felt that these details personalised the large development. A later phase combined maisonettes (with gardens for families) with pensioners' flats on the roof. It was also a mixed development, intended to function as a community and feel like a neighbourhood. The original brief specified the inclusion of schools and playgrounds, a community hall, 90 sheltered homes for older people, other housing adapted to those with special needs, two doctors' surgeries, a range of shops and several pubs. Not all these facilities came to fruition or survived to the present day.
- 5.3.5. The firm's later (1966–67) project at Marquess Road, Islington, London, alongside the New River, developed an equally difficult urban site on similar stylistic lines of irregular ziggurat formations. This also had family maisonettes with gardens at ground level and smaller flats above, fronted by wide 'roof streets' with space for planting. The estate did develop some policing problems and the site was remodelled in 1979 and 1998. More innovative were infill schemes between Islington's older terraces led by Darke, at Camden Road, Northampton Park and with the best being perhaps Aberdeen Park.
- 5.3.6 Although the firm's most notable output was in the realm of public housing, other work designed by the firm included Simons House, a retirement home near Cambridge, built in 1977; a football stand for Chelsea Football Club, 1972–4; laboratories and offices; and the landscaping (1976–7) of much of Heathrow Airport. The work of Darbourne & Darke was the subject of an exhibition at the Royal Institute of British Architects Heinz Gallery in the summer of 1977.
- 5.3.7 The office grew to about 100 staff in its heyday and was based in re-designed premises on Richmond Green, Surrey. At Montpelier Row, in nearby Twickenham, Darke designed a house for his family after a long struggle with the Greater London Council. He was able to persuade them that a modern design with proportions carefully related to its neighbours and without pastiche could fit into a Georgian street environment. The design expressed Darke's personality, with glass walls to the office so that he was not cut off from his family, and a superb sound system that

reflected the family's love of music. Threatened with demolition it was Grade II Listed in 2007.

- 5.3.8 Darke's Worcestershire connections led to a commission for low-rise housing on back-land plots at Pershore, in which he took a personal hand, and which included a library and health centre, these being other genres in which the practice excelled. The houses were scaled-down versions of Darke's own house in Montpelier Row.
- 5.3.9 Darbourne and Darke went on to undertake work in both the UK and abroad - notably several schemes in Germany and Italy, through competition wins (Hanover, Stuttgart and Gifhorn, in Germany, and Bolzano in Italy). Although their main work was in public housing they undertook many public and commercial buildings, winning a number of Civic Trust and RIBA awards, culminating in the prestigious Fritz Schumacher international award for "Services to Architecture" (1972) an award usually given to statesmen, scientists, writers, artists and musicians.
- 5.3.10 The practice's last major housing in Britain was also in Richmond, in Queen's Road, for the London and Quadrant Housing Association, in 1978-88. It was sensitively grouped and detailed and reflected the concept devised for Lillington Street of simple practical design built on a human scale within landscaped grounds.

5.4. The Lillington Gardens Estate

- 5.4.1 The Lillington Street scheme, which became the Lillington Gardens Estate, is recognised as one of the outstanding housing schemes of its time, and influenced the style of public housing schemes from the mid-1960s until the 1980s.
- 5.4.2 Much of run-down Victorian Pimlico was marked out for redevelopment in the County of London Development Plan of 1955. The area became part of the Metropolitan Borough of Westminster's post-war housing programme and in 1960 the council compulsorily purchased 13 acres of land for a new housing estate. Eventually some 400 homes would be demolished to make way for the new scheme, with the church of St James the Less, remaining in the centre.
- 5.4.3 Westminster City Council had a record of building high-quality council housing and in 1961 sponsored an architectural competition to find a suitable design for a new development centred on Lillington Street. The Churchill Gardens Estate, built between 1946 and 1962, was one of Britain's finest and its architect, Phillip Powell, was selected to be the

judge of the competition. The winner was 26-year-old John Darbourne who would then form the partnership with Geoffrey Darke to complete the plans.

- 5.4.4 The impact of this large-scale social-housing estate is notable. Built in the same red brick as the nearby church of St James the Less, the staggered terraces and internal squares enable a large number of flats and maisonettes without the need for a high-rise construction. This achieves the intended continuity between public and private housing, and allows the aesthetically appealing church spire to be visible from the whole estate. This estate was one of the first medium-rise, high-density schemes in London and was developed in three phases between 1964 and 1972 with each having a slightly different character.
- 5.4.5 Following the construction of the estate it won four major architectural awards: the Housing Design Award 1961, the Ministry of Housing and Local Government Award for Good Design in 1970, a RIBA Award in 1970 and a RIBA Commendation in 1973. By the late 20th century, the importance of the Lillington Gardens Estate had been recognised by its designation as a conservation area in November 1990 and by the listing of many of its component buildings in 1998 [Phases I & II] and in 2000 [Phase III].
- 5.4.6 Today, the original Lillington Gardens estate remains of significant historic interest as a pioneering example of medium-rise high-density housing in a more humane contextual style, which established an alternative to post-war modernist high-rise housing development. It provided a model for Longmoore Gardens which came later (and forms part of the Lillington Gardens conservation area) and for housing developments of this type throughout the country.

6. Financial Implications

The cost of the plaque, its installation and the Green Plaque Scheme administration costs will be borne by the ward budget.

7. Legal Implications

The Lillington Gardens Estate, including Morgan House, on which the plaque is to be located, is listed. A Listed Building Consent application for the plaque was submitted independently by the Lillington and Longmoore Residents Association and approved on 23rd February 2018.

8. Consultation

CityWest Homes support the nomination. Ward Members have been consulted and no objections have been raised.

If you have any queries about this Report or wish to inspect any of the Background Papers please contact: Claire Appleby

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1

Location plan of Lillington Gardens Estate showing proposed location of the Darbourne and Darke Green Plaque at 1:2000 scale.

Appendix 2

Photo Montage showing proposed location of the Darbourne and Darke Green Plaque on the NW elevation of Morgan House, Lillington Gardens Estate, SW1.

Appendix 3

Wording and layout of proposed Darbourne and Darke Green Plaque.

For completion by the **Cabinet Member for Place Shaping and Planning**

Declaration of Interest

I have <no interest to declare / to declare an interest> in respect of this report

Signed: _____ Date: _____

NAME: **Councillor Richard Beddoe** _____

State nature of interest if any

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(N.B: If you have an interest you should seek advice as to whether it is appropriate to make a decision in relation to this matter)

For the reasons set out above, I agree the recommendation(s) in the report entitled

Commemorative Green Plaque for the Lillington Gardens Estate architects Darbourne and Darke at Morgan House, Lillington Gardens Estate, SW1.

Signed

Cabinet Member for Place Shaping and Planning

Date

If you have any additional comment which you would want actioned in connection with your decision you should discuss this with the report author and then set out your comment below before the report and this pro-forma is returned to the Secretariat for processing.

Additional comment:
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If you do not wish to approve the recommendations, or wish to make an alternative decision, it is important that you consult the report author, the Head of Legal and Democratic Services, Strategic Director Finance and Performance and, if there are resources implications, the Strategic Director of Resources (or their representatives) so that (1) you can be made aware of any further relevant considerations that you should take into account before making the decision and (2) your reasons for the decision can be properly identified and recorded, as required by law.

Note to Cabinet Member: Your decision will now be published and copied to the Members of the relevant Policy & Scrutiny Committee. If the decision falls within the criteria for call-in, it will not be implemented until five working days have elapsed from publication to allow the Policy and Scrutiny Committee to decide whether it wishes to call the matter in.