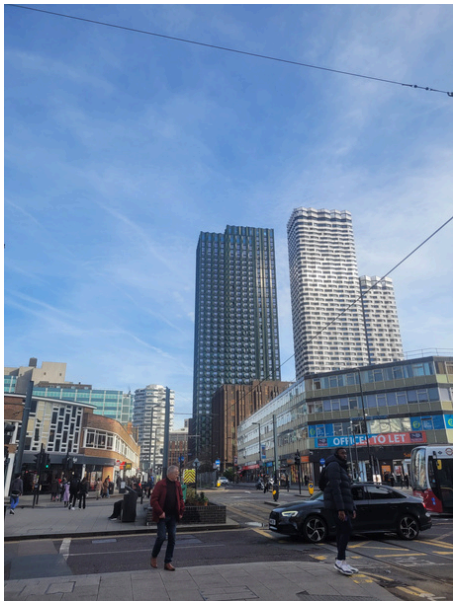
STANLEY ARTS

Historic England

Character Assessment Toolkit



Introduction

This character assessment toolkit was designed by Stanley Arts and volunteer Citizen Researchers to help examine the character of buildings in Croydon. It's purpose is to identify the features that make Croydon's built environment distinct and interesting, find the spaces that hold special meaning for the borough, and locate buildings at risk for future conservation efforts.

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How to use the toolkit

Section A - Initial Survey

- Take a walk around the building, taking pictures as you go, these pictures will help you to look at it in more detail later on
- Consider not just the building, but the surrounding area, including the plot of land it sits on and the views from the building
- Under **Survey Details,** note things like the time and weather, as the condition of the building can change based on these factors
- Fill out the initial survey, writing down your first thoughts on the building

Section B - Closer Inspection

- After completing the initial survey, the toolkit has several questionnaires to help you look at the building more closely
- Features of the building are divided up into 5 categories
  - Space
  - Building
  - Landscape
  - Views
  - Ambience
  - Spirit of the Place
- Make detailed comments for each of the features that apply, and give them a score of 1-5

Section C - Final Reaction

- Once you have evaluated all the features of the building closely, use this section asks you to give a score to the features of the initial reaction

Section D - Glossary

- Here you will find definitions for each of the features to help you understand and evaluate them.

How to use the toolkit

Before you begin, take a moment to filll out the survey details and familiarise yourself with the scoring

	Survey Details
Building name & address	
Date	
Time	
Weather	

Scoring

1	2	3	4	5
Feature greatly detracts from the character of the building	feature moderately detracts from the character of the building	feature doesn't affect the character of the building	feature moderately improves the character of the building	Feature greatly improves the character of the building

Section A - First Impression

Take a moment to walk around the building. Take a few pictures as you go, you can look at these later to describe the building in more detail. What do you first notice about this space? Make a few comments on how any of the features below impact the building.

Feature	Comments
Spaces	
Buildings	
Views	
Lightness/Darkness	
Surfaces / Textures / Materials	
Greenery / Landscape	
Uses and Activity	
Noises and Smells	
Topography	

Section B - Closer inspection

1 - Spaces

This category asks you to focus on the gaps between the building and other features. When going through each feature, think about if they have been planned, or developed organically over time. If the building doesn't have any of the features listed, you can leave it out.

Feature	Score	Comment
Formal Spaces		
Informal Spaces		
Wide Spaces		
Narrow Spaces		
Straight Spaces		
Winding Spaces		
Gaps between buildings		

1 - Spaces

Feature	Score	Comment
Means of enclosure		
Building plot		
Relationship bewteen the building and the surrounding space		
Street Furniture		
impact of traffic		
Access to the space		

2 - Buildings

Now you can evaluate the building itself, from its individual features to any visible signs of how it may have changed over time. Are the windows doors etc original, or have they been updated? Does the building's current use reflect its history? Are the featurs in good condition, are they uniform?

Feature	Score	Comment
Size		
Age of the building		
Building materials used		
Windows		
Doors		
Roofs/chimneys/ gables		
Has the building been altered?		
What is the building's condition?		

3- Views

In the section, you can evaluate views **of** the building. How does the buildilng relate to its surroundings. Can it be easily seen? Is it a popular focal point? Or is it difficult to see from further away.

Feature	Score	Comment
Historic / Popular Views		
Glimpsed views		
Wide open view		
Short view		
Long View		
Focal Points		
Streetscape		
Urban view		
Rural View		

3- Views

In the section, you can evaluate views **from** the building. What can be seen from the building itself? Are the views picturesque or historic? And how are these views affected by surrounding buildings and physical elements. How do the views from the building impact its character?

Feature	Score	Comment
Historic / Popular Views		
Glimpsed views		
Wide open view		
Short view		
Long View		
Focal Points		
Streetscape		
Urban view		
Rural View		

4 - Landscape

What surrounding landscape features affect the character of the building?
Comment on and score any features that apply

Feature	Score	Comment
Leafy / Green elements		
Hard urban landscape		
Public Greenery		
Private Greenery		
Water features		
Topography		

5 - Ambience

These features are the most likely to be affected by the date, time and conditions when you do this assessment. How does the area change from day to night, or at different times of the year? This section is the most subjective and relies on using your senses.

Feature	Score	Comment
Type of activities		
Level of Activities		
Traffic		
Darkness / Shadiness		
Light levels		
Smells		
Sounds		
Noises		

6 - Spirit of the Place

In this section, you may want to research the building further to learn about how its uses have changed over time, and how the people or communities who use the building relate to it. This can include your own personal connection.

Feature	Score	Comment
Emotional Response		
Community Value		
Historic Use		
Potential use		
Why should this building be preserved?		

Section C - Final Reaction

Now that you have evaluated all the elements of the building closely, use these observations to give a score to your initial reaction

Feature	Score
Spaces	
Buildings	
Views	
Lightness/Darkness	
Surfaces / Textures / Materials	
Greenery / Landscape	
Uses and Activity	
Noises and Smells	
Topography	

Section D - Glossary

This glossary gives more definitions of the features you can evaluate. It also includes some examples of how each feature can impact the character of the building.

1 - Spaces

Term	Definition
Formal	A planned and design space with uniform buildings like a town square or terraced housing
Informal	A space that has evolved organically with a range of different building styles and uses
Wide Spaces	The overall character of the space is wide & airy - eg a building located in a park or next to a field
Narrow Spaces	The building is surrounded by other structures especially tall buildings. This could be because of historic buildings, or a lack of available land.
Straight Spaces	Do the spaces around the building have a straight, clear layout? This could include the road and surrounding buildings.
Winding spaces	Do the spaces around the building bend so you can't see what is around the corner? This could be the result of the natural landscape impacting developed spaces.
Gaps between buildings	Gaps between buildings can allow you to glimps what lies beyond each building. These could be uniform because of planned development, or of various heights and sizes due to more organic development.

1 - Spaces

Term	Definition
Means of Enclosure	This can be anything that shows where the boundaries of the building are. Including walls, railings, fences or plants.
Building Plots	The land the building sits on. Are they at the front of the plot of land, or well set back. Do they fill the entire plot?
Relationship between the building and its surrounding space	is the building the main focus of the wider space, or are there many other features including street furniture, natural landscapes
Street Furniture	Is the street furniture a historic feature of the building? Does the street furniture make the place more cluttered. Does it make the space less usable?
Impact of Traffic	Is the building near a main traffic route? Does the traffic make the building easier to access, or less enjoyable? Does car parking have an impact? Does the time of day affect traffic? You could also consider pedestrian traffic.
Access to the space	Is the building easy to access? Are there obstacles outside of the building that make it hard to access? Is it usable by people with access needs? Does the road surface make it harder to access if you are using a wheelchair, cane or pushchair?

2 - Building

Feature	Comment
Size	Is the building all the same size, or does it have different levels? Is it made up of several buildings?
Age of the building	Does the building appear historic or modern? Could you estimate how old it is from looking at it? Do you know specifically when it was built?
Building materials used	Does it use lots of different materials? Do they complement or clash with each other? Is there a predominant material used?
Windows	Are the windows original? Do they match the aesthetic of the rest of the building? What condition are they in? Can you recognise what type of windows are used?
Doors	Are the doors original? Are they easy to find? if the building has multiple doors, do they match each other? Does the building front match the style of the rest of the building?
Roofs/chimneys /gables	Are the chimneys visible? Are they uniform? What height and material are the roofs, and what condition are they in?
Has the building been altered?	This can include if the building looks recently painted, or if doors and windows have been replaced. If any part of the building has been updated, does it match the original style?
What is the building's condition?	It may be helpful to include how the building's age impacts its condition. Eg is it well-maintained for an old building, or more run-down than expected for a newer build.

3 - Views

Feature	Comment
Historic / Popular Views	Is the view from the building very well-known. Does it contain historic buildings and features. Does the building itself form part of a historic or popular view?
Form of the view	This section asks to to fill in the descriptions of the view that apply to this building.
Glimpsed views	Describe any views that can just about be seen from the building. Eg views seen through gaps in between buildings, or views of narrow paths and roads.
Wide open view	Describe any views that can be easily seen from the building. This can include wide roads or open green spaces
Short view	This is the immediate view seen from the building that may give an intimate feel to the space.
Long View	Are you able to see far from the buidling because it sits on top of a hill, or on a long road.
Focal Points	What does your eye naturally go to when looking away at the view from the building. Is the building a focal point when looking at it from further away?
Streetscape	If the building sits on a street, what are the visual elements of this street? Do they work with the design features of the building?

Feature	Comment
Urban views	is the view from the building of an urban landscape? Does it contain features like tall buildings and a high level of activity. If there are some urban buildings or features in an otherwise rural landscape, you can note that as well.
Rural Views	Is the view from the building rural? Does it include tall trees, open spaces, loosely spaced buildings, hedgerows etc.

4 - Landscape

Feature	Definition
Leafy / Green elements	This can include natural greenery that has developed organically, or deliberately planted foliage.
Hard urban landscape	Is the area around the building built-up and made of industrial materials
Public Greenery	reflect on any green areas that are available for public use and how they impact the building.
Private Greenery	Reflect on any private gardens or spaces that are not open to the public. Do they improve the building?
Water features	This can include natural water features like rivers or streams, and planned features like fountains or artificial ponds.
Topography	Is the landscape low-lying or on a hill. Is it even, or does it change around the building?

5 - Ambience

Feature	Comment
Type of activities	What are the uses of the building? Does it serve mulitple purposes?
Level of Activities	Does the level of activity change depending on the time of day or the season?
Traffic	Consider the type of vehicles that are around the buidling. Is there a public or private car park? Is there a bus stop or other public transport that drives nearby?
Darkness / Shadiness	Dark or shaded characteristics can be impacted by the time of day, narrow or high surrounding buildings, the number of trees in the area
Light levels	This can be influenced by wider spaces between buildings, or electric lights around the building.
Smells	Are there attractive smells, not only of nature but of cooking? Are there negative smells such as of engine fumes or blocked drains?
Noises	Does a busy road create a lot of traffic noise? Can you hear music or people talking? Can you hear birds or other animals? Do the noise levels change at different times of the day or year?

6 - Historic Uses

Feature	Comment
Emotional Response	How do you personally react to the building. Does it trigger any personal memories that add to its character? You can also include how people generally react to the building. Eg is it a building many people are proud of? Is it a building many people don't like?
Community Value	Does the building serve an important function to the community? This could include a practical function like a train station or public hall, or a more informal function like a pub or a park.
Historic Use	How has the building been used over time? Is it a historically significant building? Has its use changed over time? Does knowing this affect the character of the building?
Potential use	Are there ways that the building could be used better in the future? Are there plans to change the way the building is being used?