

Friends Meeting House, Forest Hill

34 Sunderland Road, Forest Hill, London, SE23 2QA

National Grid Reference: TQ 35788 73003



Statement of Significance

A plain modern building of the 1980s, located to the rear of a large suburban house of the 1870s. Overall the meeting house is of low significance.

Evidential value

The meeting house was built in 1983. Its evidential value is low.

Historical value

The meeting house is of relatively recent date but is attached to a large 1870s villa, in a street largely composed of similar properties. The meeting house itself has low historical value.

Aesthetic value

While the Victorian house is an attractive design, the meeting house is more modest, though well detailed, and hidden from public view. It is of low aesthetic value.

Communal value

The building is valued by the meeting and other users. It could probably be put to greater use. As it is, it is of medium communal value.

Part 1: Core data

- 1.1 Area Meeting: *South East London*
- 1.2 Property Registration Number: *0010250*
- 1.3 Owner: *Six Weeks Meeting*
- 1.4 Local Planning Authority: *London Borough of Lewisham*
- 1.5 Historic England locality: *London*
- 1.6 Civil parish: *Lewisham NPA*
- 1.7 Listed status: *Not listed*

1.8 NHLE: *N/a*

1.9 Conservation Area: *No*

1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*

1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*

1.12 Date(s): *1983*

1.13 Architect (s): *John Marsh*

1.14 Date of visit: *7 October 2015*

1.15 Name of report author: *Andrew Derrick*

1.16 Name of contact(s) made on site: *Thecla Geraghty*

1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *34 Sunderland Road, SE23 2QA*

1.18 Attached burial ground: *No*

1.19 Information sources:

Butler, D. M., *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain*, 1999, Vol. 1, p. 391

Forest Hill Meeting after 40 years: a celebration, 2013

Local Meeting Survey, by Yvonne Rigby, June 2015

Meeting house website, <http://foresthillquakers.org.uk/>

Part 2: The Meeting House & Burial Ground: history, contents, use, setting and designation

2.1. Historical background

A meeting house was built at Peckham in the 1820s, but was abandoned in 1961 when it became too large and expensive to maintain (it became a post office sorting office and survives to this day in Highshore Road, listed Grade II). The Forest Hill meeting was the result of the Sydenham and Dulwich meetings joining forces in 1973, when a large 1870s house in Sunderland Road, Forest Hill was acquired for £9,000. A meeting room was formed on the ground floor (architect H. Martin Lidbetter, Six Weeks Meeting Surveyor). This was superseded by the present meeting room, added at the back in 1983 at a cost of £75,000 (architect John Marsh, Six Weeks Meeting Surveyor).

2.2. The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

The meeting house lies to the rear of a large double fronted house of the 1870s, which is arranged with facilities for Friends and other users on the ground floor and rented accommodation on the upper floors. The meeting house was built in 1973 from designs by John Marsh. It is single storey and square on plan (chamfered at the corners), built of yellow brick with a pyramidal slate roof with projecting eaves. Large timber framed windows and doors look out onto the yard and garden. The interior of the meeting house (figure 1) is a pleasant, flexible space, with a polished boarded timber roof, polished woodblock floor and fair-faced brick walls.



Figure 1: The interior of the meeting house (<http://foresthilquakers.org.uk/>)

2.3 Loose furnishings

There are no internal loose furnishings of particular note.

2.4. Attached burial ground

None.

2.5. The meeting house in its wider setting

The meeting house lies in a residential street consisting mainly of large double-fronted villas of the 1870s, such as that to which the building is attached. Being behind the building, it does not feature in the street scene. There is an area for parking in the former garden at the front. At the back is a small garden, containing a memorial birdbath from the Petts Wood Meeting (via Peckham). Sunderland Road is not far from Forest Heath town centre, and the South Circular Road.

2.6. Listed status

Not listed. Neither the meeting house nor the Victorian house to which it is attached is considered to be a candidate for listing.

2.7. Archaeological potential of the site

Little is known about the archaeological potential of the site but it is considered to be low.

Part 3: Current use and management

See completed volunteer survey

3.1. Condition

- i) Meeting House: Good
- ii) Attached burial ground (if any): Not applicable.

3.2. Maintenance

It is reported that a QIR has recently been carried out and most of its recommendations carried out. The report has not been seen, but the meeting house certainly appears to be in good condition and well maintained. There is no EPC for the former warden's accommodation; such decisions have been deferred pending a decision on a project to develop the upper floors into three flats.

3.3. Sustainability

It is not clear whether the meeting uses the Sustainability Toolkit. Measures to reduce environmental impact include transferring to a green electricity supplier, the installation of timers and thermostats in different areas, and recycling (including chairs when no longer needed). Bicycle racks are installed, and public transport links are nearby (and their use encouraged via the website).

3.4. Amenities

The meeting considers that it has all the amenities it needs, including adequate kitchens, WCs and meeting space. There is no resident warden.

3.5. Access

There is level access into the meeting house, and its ground floor facilities are accessible to people with disabilities. There is a hearing loop, but no specific provision is made for partially-sighted people. The meeting has conducted a Disability Access Audit.

3.6 Community Use

Friends use the meeting house for six plus hours a week, and the meeting house is let for twenty plus hours a week, out of a total possible maximum of 162 hours for all rooms. The meeting has a lettings policy, and if in doubt queries are referred to elders. Party political meetings and other regular forms of worship are avoided. The meeting house is said to be used because it is well advertised, and promoted by word of mouth.

3.7. Vulnerability to crime

There are no reported incidents of crime, heritage crime, or anti-social behaviour. The local area is considered to be well cared-for, with low levels of crime and deprivation.

3.8. Plans for change

Conversion of the former warden's accommodation to three flats is being considered.

Part 4: Impact of Change

4.1. To what extent is the building amenable or vulnerable to change?

i) As a Meeting House used only by the local Meeting: The meeting house is modern and flexible and there are no heritage constraints governing change. The main meeting room is not large, and could not be made larger without (possibly unacceptable) further encroachment on the garden.

ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use: The meeting house is already widely put to community uses. It is well appointed and close to public transport, and doubtless such use could be increased.

iii) Being laid down as a Meeting House: The Victorian house is an attractive property in a street of similar properties. In the event of the meeting house being laid down, that building could revert to its original use as a single residence, or could become flats (subject to planning). The modern meeting house might form part of that residential accommodation, or might be demolished to restore a larger garden.

Part 5: Category: (modern meeting house) 4