Location

Eastfields Estate

3.8 Situated in the Figge’s Marsh ward, Eastfields is located to the east of Mitcham Town Centre and covers an area of approximately six hectares. The site is bound by Acacia Road and Mulholland Close to the North, Clay Avenue to the east and south and Hammond Avenue to the west. The site is surrounded to the north by two schools (St Mark’s Church of England Academy and Lonesome Primary School) and by the South London Crematorium, Streatham Park and the Jewish Cemeteries and Long Bolstead Recreation Ground to the west. The nearby Mitcham Eastfields railway station acts as a key local hub.

3.9 The estate was designed by Richard MacCormac and was built in the 1970s and consists of 465 homes. The Eastfields homes are a combination of three storey houses with integral garages and flats in three storey ‘walk up’ blocks each having one or two bedrooms. The homes are all of ‘Wimpey no-fines’ construction, clad with enamel panels. The Eastfields Estate has an inward looking layout distinct from the surrounding neighbourhood. The surroundings have a suburban residential character dating predominantly from the inter-war era, with some earlier late 19th Century development in Grove Road.
Historical context

3.10 The Eastfields area played a significant part in the early history of Mitcham. It was the site of a number of local and world renowned businesses that brought employment to the area. Up until the 1880’s however, Eastfields retained a medieval open field system. The neighbourhood takes its name from the East or Common fields which were cultivated in strips with different crops. Much of the area was used for the cultivation of herbs, roses and lavender. Adjacent to the estate, Mitcham Little Wood once occupied the site of the Streatham Park Cemetery and a few isolated oaks from the hedgerows still remain today.

3.11 In 1868 the Mizen family established a flourishing horticultural business in the Eastfields area. As was the tradition in Mitcham, the Mizen family for a time grew lavender, as well as culinary herbs such as chervil and tarragon. By the late 1880’s, Eastfields Farm was thriving with extensive glasshouses covering much of the area between Grove Road and Acacia Road which is now occupied by Lonesome Primary School and St. Marks Academy.

3.12 As industry expanded in the area, the crops were affected by the coal smoke and the family business was moved. Pain’s fireworks factory stood from the 1870’s on a site known as Oak Stubbs comprising three different parts. One of these was on the site of the Eastfields Estate off Clay Avenue. Pains fireworks mounted displays for Queen Victoria and at their height traded across the world. Firework production stopped in 1965 and shortly after this the housing estate was developed.

3.13 To the east of Pains Fireworks was Mitcham Little Wood. This remained as woodland until 1907 when it was gradually cleared for use as Streatham Park Cemetery. The cemetery is formally laid out towards the crematorium and

Mizen Brothers nursery, Eastfields, Mitcham

Source: Merton Memories Photographic Archive
chapel at its northern end and more informal towards the southern end where it joins the recreation ground. The mortuary chapel was built in the 1930’s in a formal art deco/classical style. The impressive crematorium was built later in a well detailed Art Deco style with raised brickwork details around the windows and moulded plasterwork decoration. Adjacent to the cemetery, and developed a little later, is a separate Jewish cemetery. The appearance of this is significantly different to the Streatham Park Cemetery. Its plots are rigidly aligned, compact and consist of more substantial memorials above ground, giving it a far more urban character compared to the ‘parkland’ feel of its neighbour.

3.14 To the north of the Eastfields estate there was once a rural area known as Lonesome. This area was one of the most isolated parts of Mitcham and was reached by rural lanes from the surrounding areas, such as Mitcham and Streatham, but which did not quite establish themselves as a through route between places. The arrival of the railway in 1868 created a physical barrier between its east and west sides, particularly north of the level crossing at Locks Lane, ensuring the area of Lonesome became even more isolated. As recently as the 1930s much of this area consisted of little more than dirt tracks, which quickly turned into quagmires during wet weather. Even today, this area retains something of an ‘in between’ area on the way from Mitcham to Streatham.
Historical context

3.15 The Lonesome Chemical Works operated in the second half of the nineteenth century, established here due to the sparse population. The presence of industry continued into the 1960s when Beck and Company manufactured petrol pumps on the site. At the end of the 19th Century Lilian Road and Marian Road were laid out and developed. In the second half of the twentieth century a further phase of residential development occurred with the redevelopment of the remaining industrial land into Veronica Gardens and Ebenezer Walk.

3.16 Tamworth Park, an area between Tamworth Lane and Commonsise East was partially laid out as building plots by 1868, but by the turn of the century only a few medium-sized houses in large grounds had been completed. There were aspirations to transform the area into an affluent Victorian suburb as had happened in nearby Streatham however development was stagnated by economic depression and the area’s attractiveness for residential development was adversely affected by fumes emitted from local industries. Maps from 1896 also show a street of detached villas south of the chemical works known as Blake’s Folly. However these were never completed and subsequently demolished in 1927.

3.17 The housing development which followed was smaller modest housing and in the 1930s the area steadily became suburbanised and housing estates began to appear along Tamworth Lane, Oakleigh Way and Woodstock Way. The rapid suburbanisation of the area resulted in an increase in traffic particularly at the level crossing; work began in the 1960s to ease this by widening the crossing and the creation of a new roundabout. Public transport provision in Eastfields was poor right up until 2008, when Mitcham Eastfields station opened at the level crossing providing an regular train service into Central London.

3.18 Up until the late 1960s the appearance of the Eastfields site was much the same as at the turn of the century. The site was approached from ‘Firework Lane’ now Acacia Road. The area retained a rural appearance due to the proximity of the site of Mizens Brothers market gardens and the landscaping around the adjacent cemetery. The fireworks factory site comprised a range of brick built offices and small wooden weather-boarded manufacture huts loosely dispersed around the site. Due to the marshy nature of the soil wooden walkways connected the individual huts.

3.19 Transformation of the Eastfields site began in the early 1960s with the demolition of Mizens’ greenhouses. This site was developed as Eastfields School and sports ground – now St. Mark’s Church of England Academy. The Pains fireworks factory changed ownership and eventually ceased production in 1965. Part of the site passed into municipal ownership and was redeveloped into the Eastfields Estate. The estate comprises 466 houses and flats and was completed in 1972 by the same design team that developed the Pollards Hill Estate.

3.20 The estate consists of three-storey terraces throughout, in a mix of houses and flats in a uniform architectural style. The terraces enclose a large, long rectangular open space with smaller squares leading off it. It was designed as an alternative to the high rise schemes of the previous decade and was in a tight pattern of buildings in a “castellated” pattern. The layout and design concept of the estate is an example of high density low rise social housing of the 1970’s and forms part of a group of estates in the borough which include Pollards Hill, Watermeads and the Cherry Tree Estate which were designed along similar principles.

3.21 Upon its completion the estate was considered iconic. However, over time the appearance of the estate has weathered poorly, cladding panels have deteriorated and replacement glazing has diluted the initial design intent of the scheme. The generous spaces in front of the houses and flats have also fared less well, becoming ill-defined spaces of tarmac and concrete.
Industrial building Lonesome area

Pains fireworks factory 1965

Eastfields Estate 1975

Eastfields level crossing 1961

Mitcham Eastfields station 2008

Source: Merton Memories Photographic Archive
Part 03: Analysis and planning policies - Eastfields

Site analysis

1. Character areas

3.22 The Eastfields Estate is located to the east of Mitcham town centre and north of Mitcham Common. The wider area is defined by the railway line to the west, with Eastfields Station acting as major gateway.

3.23 The map above illustrates the main character areas in the surrounding neighbourhood including the Eastfields Estate. The estate itself is distinctive enough from its surroundings to form its own character area. This is also the case for the area occupied by St. Mark’s Academy and Lonesome Primary School. To the east is the large open space comprised of Long Bolstead Recreation Ground, Streatham Park Cemetery, Rowan Road Jewish Cemetery and Westminster City School Sports Ground.

3.24 The surrounding residential areas are predominantly low rise inter-war suburban housing of semi-detached or short terraced houses.

However, there are some pockets of earlier late Victorian cottages and a number of late 20th century infill developments, usually replacing former industrial uses, as was the case with the Eastfields Estate. The significant amount of open space within the area.

3.25 In the wider area a large proportion of the properties date from the 1930s and represent good quality examples of suburban design of the era. The 1970s Eastfields Estate has a very distinctive layout and architectural style that sets it apart from the surrounding street pattern and building forms. There are also two large new housing developments nearby at Brenley Park and Rowan Park, which offer good examples of how new development can fit into the area without replicating it.