



Albert Gardens

Conservation Area

1. Character Appraisal

2. Management Guidelines

London Borough of Tower Hamlets

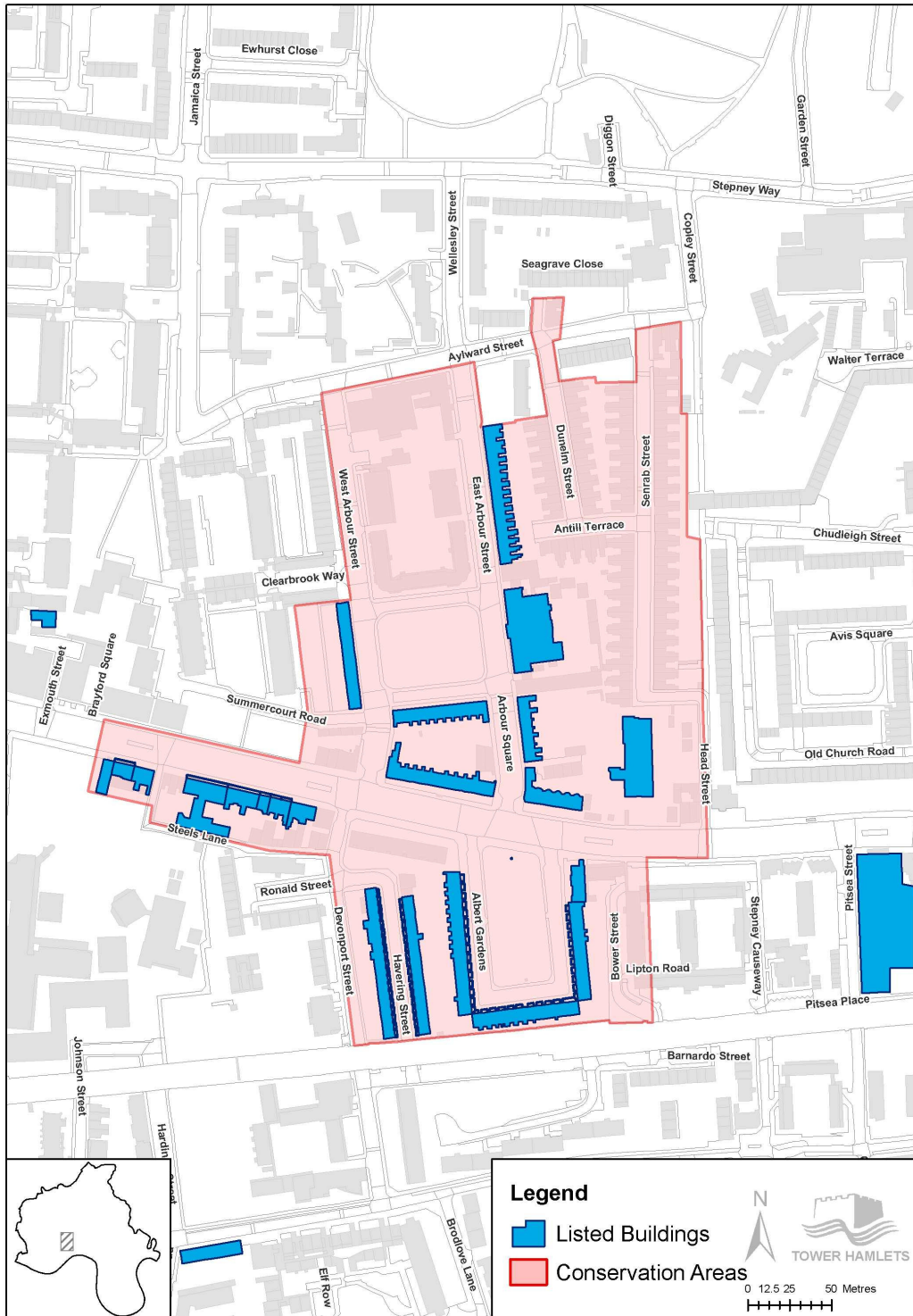
Adopted by Cabinet: 4th November 2009

Introduction

Conservation Areas are parts of our local environment with special architectural or historic qualities. They are created by the Council, in consultation with the local community, to preserve and enhance the specific character of these areas for everybody.

This guide has been prepared for the following purposes:

- To comply with the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. Section 69(1) states that a conservation area is “an area of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance.”
- To provide a detailed appraisal of the area’s architectural and historic character. To help those who have an interest in the area to understand the quality of the built environment and how they can protect, contribute to and enhance it.
- To provide an overview of planning policy and propose management guidelines on how this character should be preserved and enhanced in the context of appropriate ongoing change.



ALBERT GARDENS CONSERVATION AREA

This map is indicative only and is not a planning document. For further information please contact the Council.

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1. Character Appraisal

Overview

The Albert Gardens Conservation Area was designated in July 1969 and boundaries were revised in October 2008 to consolidate the area and include additional Victorian terraces and the Peacock Public House. The Conservation Area is bounded by Aylward Street to the north and the railway viaduct and a significant group of Grade II Listed terraces to the south. The west is defined by the Magistrate's Court at the junction of Aylward and West Arbour Street, the early Victorian Grade II Listed terrace at 1 to 13 West Arbour Street, the Grade II Listed 368 Commercial Road. It is bounded to the east by a Victorian terrace on Commercial Street and early Victorian terraces on Senrab Street and at the junction between Senrab and Aylward Street.

Commercial Road divides the Conservation Area into two parts, defined by two areas of open space, namely Arbour Square (north of Commercial Road) and Albert Gardens (south of Commercial Road), with statutory listed buildings surrounding each square.

History

Commercial Road is the main arterial between the City and the Isle of Dogs. The road itself was opened in 1810 as a quick and direct route between the New East and West India Docks and the City of London. When the road was built, Stepney and Limehouse were still small villages some distance from London. On exploited land cleared by the Ratcliffe fire in 1794, Mercers Company, who owned the greatest tracts of land in Stepney & Ratcliffe, sought to build anew on open land north of Commercial Road, as far as the parish church of St Dunstan and east towards Limehouse.

Arbour Square, together with West Arbour Street, East Arbour Street and Arbour Terrace, was built upon land belonging to the Mercer's Company, the name coming from the Mercer's twelve acre Arbour Field. In 1819, Arbour Square was laid out as a garden enclosure. Between this time and 1830 the square was surrounded by 3 storey houses. The street frontages in Albert Gardens are of a similar date to those

across the road surrounding Arbour Square. By 1830, maps of the area show the development of most of the land along Commercial Road. Arbour Square was taken over by the London County Council (LCC) and opened to the public in 1904, as Arbour Square Gardens. Its paths were asphalted in 1928.

The north side of the square, lined by terraces, was acquired in 1921 by the Borough of Stepney, who proposed to build a grand Town Hall with a design won in competition in 1909 by Briggs Wolstenhome and Thornely. This never took place and instead, the terraces were demolished to build a 4-5 storey flat block in 1937 in a modern style.

The eastern side of the square was replaced by a new school building in 1913 when the Grade II listed Raine's Foundation School, founded by Henry Raine in 1719, moved here from Cannon Street Road. This was designed by Herbert O. Ellis. The Raines Foundation School moved again to Bethnal Green in 1985 and the original figures of a boy and a girl which had stood in niches over the side entrances were relocated. The former Raine's Foundation School, is now used by Tower Hamlets College.

Two storey 19th century terraces line both East and West Arbour Streets. The Church of St Thomas by George Smith and William Barnes, 1838, which formally stood between East and West Arbour Street was demolished in 1955 and replaced by flats.

Albert Gardens (formerly Albert Square) was another 19th century development responding to the creation of Commercial Road. It remains largely intact. It consists of three storey residential terraces, built in the early 1840s which face each other across a railed garden. The square opens up to the south of Commercial Road on its fourth side. The garden area forms the focus of the square. In 1899, there was a proposal to build houses on the garden square, but the LCC bought the land and opened Albert Square Garden to the public in 1906. Albert Square Garden was renamed Albert Gardens in 1937 when the LCC rationalised street names to avoid duplications.

From 1969, the 19th century street pattern was replaced by comprehensive redevelopment and its historic character was irrevocably altered. These were formerly

protected by building acts which imposed height limits, which made for an orderly and elegant skyline, dating back to the 1890s. As a consequence, the surrounding Conservation Area is more fragmentary in form.

The trend for comprehensive redevelopment and mass housing was reversed in the 1970s as interest in conservation gathered momentum. Arbour Square was identified as an area where the restoration of early 19th century building fabric could have a useful future as social housing.

Character

The significant part of the attractive townscape is marked by the distinctive built form of the 19th century Victorian past. It is reflected by its layout, in its narrow street widths, fine urban grain, modest scale and by details such as door and window cases, stucco course bands, coped parapets, chimney stacks and railings, which contribute to the sense of architectural unity. The predominant building material of the preserved terrace group and grander scale public buildings is harmonised by the warm yellow / brown hues of traditional London Stock Brick. Across the Conservation Area, the same layout, design patterns and traditional building materials are repeated, making a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the area. From the 1950s, demolition of most of the traditional street pattern and the land north of Aylward Street, beyond Arbour Square and to its west resulted. Despite this, earlier 19th century fragments of two storeys terraces remain along street frontages.

On the southern side of Commercial Road, Grade II listed terraces surround Albert gardens on all three sides, forming a U shape. The regular rhythm of Albert Gardens is matched by the listed terraced group at 495-529 Commercial Road, opposite to and visible from Albert Gardens. These three storey, early 19th century terraces at 495-529 Commercial Road generally feature stock brick masonry walls, stucco band coursework, recessed round arched windows and doorways, chimney stacks and wrought iron area railings. They form an impressive composition, linking the formal landscape layouts of Albert Gardens and Arbour Square with a modest scale,

continuity and enclosure, making them unique spaces. Albert Gardens is a pleasing, formal garden area with mature trees and forms the focus of the historic square.

The Grade II listed group at 440-450 Commercial Road are an early 19th century terrace group, all 4 storeys and with parapet roofs. They have round arched entrances and panelled doors.

Locally listed, former 19th century shops with residential flats above exist at 406-410 Commercial Road. These are of 3 storeys, in late Georgian style, with stock brick masonry walls and London roofs set to the rear of a parapet. Other commercial units can also be found in a characterful group of three Edwardian houses at the junction of Senrab and Aylward Street to the north east corner of the Conservation Area.

Haverling Street is lined with Grade II listed, early 19th century terrace houses of 2 storeys and basements which back onto the rear gardens of Albert Gardens. The group at Nos 5-22 and Nos 27-45 are made up of narrow fronted, 2 storey houses (approx 4.75m wide), faced in stock brickwork, with butterfly roofs behind parapets, round headed door and windows, with delightful painted reveals and sashes and front area railings.

The Grade II listed buildings of Arbour Square form a well designed enclosure to the garden square, made up by 3 storey terrace cottages at Nos 1-13 on the west side and at Nos 50-60 on the south side. The 5 storey Raine's Foundation School, now Tower Hamlets College is located on the eastern edge of the square. The continuous rows of late 18th century and early 19th century terraces are generally of stock brick, with ground floor stucco, arched doorways and windows.

The Grade II listed Raine's Foundation School, located on the east side of Arbour Square is a large 5 storey building, with an ornate seven-bay frontage in brick and stone. This mixes the Wrenaissance (Queen Anne Style), Baroque, and Palladian styles. It features a first floor assembly hall, classrooms and workshops above and an attic shooting gallery. Located nearby is the locally listed, 19th century Marion

Richardson Primary School, built in 1907, which is a grander 3 storeys in scale. It is a LCC building, constructed of red brick and pitched roof.

Locally listed terraces of 2 storeys exist at 3-19 and 42-49 East Arbour Street. These are Georgian in style, and are modest in character. Later terraces which are similarly modest in style are the unlisted terraces along Dunelm, Senrab, Antill and Aylward Streets.

Land Use

The historical land use character of the area is predominantly residential. Educational uses occupy two substantial buildings, on the northern side of Commercial Road but these are surrounded by traditional 2-3 storey terraces. The East End Maternity Hospital occupies a large site on the southern side of Commercial Road, suggesting its importance to the Victorian community. The community is also supported by a variety of commercial uses on Commercial Street and three local shops at the junction of Aylward and Senrab Street.

Scale

The existing scale of the area is predominantly low-rise, with terraced housing ranging between 2-3 storeys plus basement. The East End Hospital, former Raine's Foundation School and Marion Richardson Primary School are slightly taller in scale, reflecting their historical and social importance. Their proportions, details and materials appropriately match the scale of the adjoining traditional terraces.

Open Space

The Conservation Area is defined by its two open spaces; Albert Gardens and Arbour Square. The centralised open spaces create a sense of enclosure, with rows of terraces surrounding the squares. These are considered as two important formal elements in the urban landscape and this is reflected in their protection against development above ground by the London Squares Preservation Act, 1931.

Arbour Square Gardens is a well maintained garden square which was completely refurbished in 1995 in a formal style. It has numerous ornamental beds within a central, oval lawn that is enclosed by low railings and surrounded by a paved pathway. Fine trees can be found around the edges of the gardens.

Albert Gardens Square is enclosed by replacement railings and has a single perimeter walk. It has mature trees throughout. The south side has a cast-iron, 19th century drinking fountain. Whilst the centrepiece of the Albert Gardens on the north side, is a drinking fountain topped by the statue of a Shepherd Boy, dated back to 1903. Albert Gardens is a pleasant, fairly well-maintained garden square with mature trees.

Views

Long views exist of good, early 19th century buildings running along Commercial Road, East and West Arbour, Havering and Dunelm Streets. This highlights a classic vision of the 19th century East End, with its traditional street pattern and repetitive and rhythmic continuous terrace housing. Local views through the narrow, intimate scale of Senrab Street terminates with the grand scaled Marion Richardson School. Other localised views around Albert Gardens and Arbour Square reveal the tree lined garden areas and domestic 2-3 storey scale.

Summary

This is an area of particular special architectural and historic interest; focussed upon two garden squares. It is illustrative of the development of Commercial Road and its environs. It incorporates a number of delightful terraces, whose uniformity is part of their success and includes a number of significant community buildings such as Tower Hamlets College and the East End Maternity Hospital. It also demonstrates the importance of the public realm in providing a setting for the buildings of the Conservation Area and clearly indicates that the spaces that surround buildings are as important to the character as the buildings themselves. The character and appearance of the area, as described in this appraisal, define its special qualities.

There are minor improvements that could be made to buildings in the Conservation Area, but overall this does not detract from the qualities that led to its designation.

2. Management Guidelines

Overview

This Management Plan has been prepared in consultation with the community, to set out the Borough's commitment to high quality management of Conservation Areas and their settings. The Development Design and Conservation Team operate within the context of the Development and Renewal Directorate of the Council, alongside Major Projects, Development Control, Strategy and Building Control.

Areas are as much about history, people, activities and places as they are about buildings and spaces. Preserving and enhancing the Borough's architectural and historic built heritage over the next decades is of vital importance in understanding the past and allowing it to inform our present and future.

Conservation Areas also promote sustainability in its widest sense. The Council is committed to the re-use of historic buildings and places is environmentally responsible as it protects the energy and resources embodied in them and combats global warming.

Consideration of appropriate amendments to the boundary of the Conservation Area, and recommendations for additions to the register of listed buildings, either the statutory or local list, will be considered by the Council.

Who is this document for?

This is an inclusive document which will engage with many different people and organisations. It will depend on the support of the community to achieve its objectives. It is aimed primarily at the residents, businesses, developers and others living and working in the area. The Conservation Area belongs to its residents, as well as the whole community, and their priorities are reflected in these documents after the consultation process.

The document has also been prepared to align conservation objectives within different parts of the council, and provide a single point of reference for the management of the area. It represents our shared commitment to conserve the special architectural and historic character, and to help manage sensitive new development and refurbishment where appropriate to successfully preserve and enhance the quality and character of the area.

Outline Guidance on Applications

Before carrying out any work in this area, you will need to apply for consent even for minor work such as replacing railings. These consents include planning, listed building and Conservation Area consent, as well as others for work such as felling trees.

When planning applications in a Conservation Area are decided, the planning authority will pay special attention to whether the character of the area is preserved or enhanced. The character of Albert Gardens is described in detail in the Appraisal in the first part of this document.

In Albert Gardens, as in other Conservation Areas, planning controls are more extensive than normal. Consent is required to demolish any building, and a higher standard of detail and information is required for any application. When applying for listed building consent, please note that all parts of the building, including its interior walls, ceilings and all other internal features, are protected. Some buildings are nationally (statutorily) listed, and some are locally listed by the Borough to indicate buildings that the Borough wishes to protect.

The exact information required will vary with each application, but in general applications must include:

- A clear design statement explaining the reasons behind the various architectural, master planning or other design decisions.
- Contextual plans, sections and elevations of existing buildings

- Drawings, including construction details, produced at larger scale (e.g. 1:50 or 1:20) clearly indicating the nature of the work proposed.
- Additional detail regarding materials and construction.
- Photos of the condition of existing building (including details where appropriate).

More details are available on the Tower Hamlets website. If in any doubt, the Council welcomes and encourages early requests for advice or information.

When alterations are proposed to listed buildings, complying with the building regulations can be particularly complex, and early consideration of building control issues can help identify potential problems early in the process.

Policies Relevant to the Conservation Area and how they are Implemented:

Any new development should have regard to national, regional and local planning policy.

- At the national level, the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 places a duty on Tower Hamlets to designate Conservation Areas in “areas of special architectural or historic interest”, and to formulate and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of its Conservation Areas. National policy for planning and the historic environment is set out in Planning Policy Guidance 15 (PPG15).
- At the regional level, policy 4B.1 of the London Spatial Development Strategy (or London Plan) states that ‘The Mayor will seek to ensure that developments ... respect London’s built heritage.’
- At the local level, the new Local Development Framework (LDF) of Tower Hamlets states that ‘the Council will protect and enhance the historic environment of the borough’. The Core Strategy states as an objective that we will ‘Protect and celebrate our history and heritage by placing these at the heart of reinventing the Hamlets to enhance local distinctiveness, character and townscape

Listed Buildings in the Conservation Area

Grade II

- Drinking fountain, Albert Gardens
- 1-16 (consecutive) and area railings, Albert Gardens
- 17-28 (consecutive) and area railing, Albert Gardens
- 29-39 (consecutive) and area railings, Albert Gardens Raine's Foundation School, Arbour Square
- 1-13 (consecutive), Arbour Square
- 50-60 (consecutive), Arbour Square
- 368 Commercial Road
- 370 and 372 Commercial Road and area railings
- 374 Commercial Road
- The East End Maternity Hospital and railings, 396 Commercial Road
- 398 Commercial Road and railings
- 400 Commercial Road and railings
- 440 to 450 Commercial Road
- 495-517 Commercial Road
- 519-529 Commercial Road
- 5-22 (consecutive) Havering Street and area railings
- 27-45 (consecutive) Havering Street and area railings

Locally Listed Building

- 3-19 Arbour Street
- 42-49 Arbour Street
- 406, 408 & 410 Commercial Road
- Marion Richardson Primary School, Head Street

Highways and Transportation Issues

The quality of the streetscape, the surface materials, street furniture and other features can all be integral parts of the character of Conservation Areas. Any work carried out should respect this historic character. Anyone involved in development which impacts on public spaces should refer to the Council's Street Design Guide, TfL's own Streetscape Guidance and English Heritage's 'Streets for All' document. The ongoing cost of maintenance should also be considered carefully.

Commercial Road is a busy traffic route in the Conservation Area and indeed across the Borough, attracting constant vehicular traffic particularly as the principal route between the East End and the City.

Options for improving the pedestrian and cycle environment along Commercial Road and side streets should be investigated which currently is dominated by the highway function of the road with high traffic volumes, noise and vibration.

Works by statutory services (gas, electricity, water etc) have the potential to damage historic ground surfaces or ancient underground structures. Early consultation with the conservation team is encouraged for any works.

Opportunities and Potential for Enhancement

The character of the terraces, as described in the appraisal and particularly their coherence, expressed in the consistent height, streetscape pattern, detailing and materials create an expression of harmony and proportion. Any development proposal in the area should seek to preserve and enhance the existing character of the area. Moreover, new, large buildings should relate to the scale, local traditional styles and building materials, the human scale and the picturesque quality that the traditional Victorian buildings and the architectural detailing it encompasses create.

Ways of improving the public realm could be investigated – for example, appropriate street lamps for historic context and removal of recent signs attached to traditional street lamp posts, more discreet road signposting, removal of surplus signage,

removal of obtrusive shop front signage designs that corrode local identity to shops along Commercial Road.

More detailed guidance should be produced on the management of small scale refurbishment works to individual properties, in order to protect the original fabric. There are minor improvements that could be made to the existing terraces along Commercial Road including the cleaning, re-painting and re-rendering of the individual facades, where pollutions has discoloured the brick work and where paint is flaking off the walls.

While the terraces present uniform frontages with little scope for alterations, any additions and renovations to the buildings must be considered in appropriateness to the group of buildings as well as to the overall setting of the Conservation Area. The quality of the street environment will indeed impact the character and setting of the Conservation Area, in which the Council seeks to preserve and enhance.

Trees, Parks and Open Spaces

Both Albert Gardens and Arbour Square have been well preserved as small pocket parks to complement their residential surrounds. The green open space, paths, mature trees and park furniture have all been well maintained. The simple character of the gardens should be protected and its ongoing maintenance ensured.

All trees in Conservation Areas are protected, and some trees are also covered by Tree Preservation Orders (TPO's). Notice must be given to the authority before works are carried out to any tree in the Conservation Area, and some works require specific permission. More information can be found in the Council's Guide to Trees, and on the Tower Hamlets website. Carrying out works to trees without the necessary approval can be a criminal offence, and the Council welcomes early requests for advice.

Equalities:

Valuing diversity is one of the Council's core values, and we take pride in being one of the most culturally rich and diverse boroughs in the UK. This core value has driven the

preparation of this document and will continue to inform changes to this document in the future. These values will also inform changes to buildings and places where this document provides guidance to ensure inclusively for all sections of the community.

This Character Appraisal and Management Guidelines will support the Council's aims:

- a strong spirit of community and good race relations in Tower Hamlets.
- to get rid of prejudice, discrimination and victimisation within the communities we serve and our workforce
- to make sure that the borough's communities and our workforce are not discriminated against or bullied for any reason, including reasons associated with their gender, age, ethnicity, disability, sexuality or religious belief.

Please contact us if you feel that this document could do more to promote equality and further the interests of the whole community.

Publicity

The existence of the Conservation Area will be promoted locally to raise awareness of current conservation issues and to invite contributions from the community.

Consideration of Resources Needed to Conserve the Historic Environment:

The most effective way to secure the historic environment is to ensure that buildings can continue to contribute to the life of the local community, preferably funding their own maintenance and refurbishment. Commercial value can be generated directly from the building, through its use as a dwelling or office, or through its role in increasing the attractiveness of the area to tourists and visitors. However, it should be noted that economic reasons alone will not in themselves justify the demolition or alteration of a building in a Conservation Area. The Council will consider grant aid to historic buildings and places.

In order to meet today's needs without damaging the historic or architectural value of a building, a degree of flexibility, innovation and creative estate management may be required.

Ongoing Management and Monitoring Change:

To keep a record of changes within the area dated photographic surveys of street frontages and significant buildings and views will be made every 5 years. Also, public meetings will be held every 5 years to maintain communications between all stakeholders and identify new opportunities and threats to the Conservation Area as they arise.

The Council recognises the contribution of the local community in managing Conservation Areas, and will welcome proposals to work collaboratively to monitor and manage the area.

Enforcement Strategy:

Appropriate enforcement, with the support of the community, is essential to protect the area's character. The Council will take prompt action against those who carry out unauthorised works to listed buildings, or substantial or complete demolition of buildings within a Conservation Area. Unauthorised work to a listed building is a criminal offence and could result in a fine and/or imprisonment. Likewise, unauthorised substantial or complete demolition of a building within a Conservation Area is also illegal. It is therefore essential to obtain Conservation Area or Listed Building Consent before works begin.

If listed buildings are not maintained in good repair, then the Council can step in to ensure that relevant repairs are carried out. In some circumstances, the Council itself may undertake essential repairs and recover the cost from the owner. The Council has powers of compulsory purchase, if necessary to protect Listed Buildings.

The Council will enforce conservation law wherever necessary, and will consider the introduction of Article 4 Directions to remove Permitted Development Rights where appropriate.

Further Reading and Contacts

- The Buildings of England (London 5: East). Cherry, O'Brien and Pevsner.

The Council encourages and welcomes discussions with the community about the historic environment and the contents of this document. Further guidance on all aspects of this document can be obtained on our website at www.towerhamlets.gov.uk or by contacting:

Tel: 020 7364 5009

Email: dr.majorprojects@towerhamlets.gov.uk

This document is also available in Libraries, Council Offices and Idea Stores in the Borough.

For a translation, or large print, audio or braille version of this document, please telephone 0800 376 5454. Also, if you require any further help with this document, please telephone 020 7364 5372.

Also, you may wish to contact the following organizations for further information:

English Heritage	www.english-heritage.org.uk
The Georgian Group	www.georgiangroup.org.uk
Victorian Society	www.victorian-society.org.uk
20 th Century Society	www.c20society.org.uk
Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings	www.spab.org.uk

Listed Buildings at Risk:

515 Commercial Road is currently listed as a “Building at Risk”; however, proposals are currently being prepared for its repair.

Any other threats to the Conservation Area

Inappropriate extensions to the listed flat backed terraces of the Conservation Area.

Small alterations to the properties carried out under permitted development rights which are detrimental to the character of the conservation area.

Priorities for Action (1-5)

1. Prepare a householders guide.
2. Audit street furniture and rationalise street clutter.
3. Introduce Article 4 Directions to remove permitted development rights
4. Improve shop fronts at 406-410 Commercial Road
5. Identify possible improvements to buildings on Commercial Road