



Wiltons Music Hall

Conservation Area

1. Character Appraisal

2. Management Guidelines

London Borough of Tower Hamlets

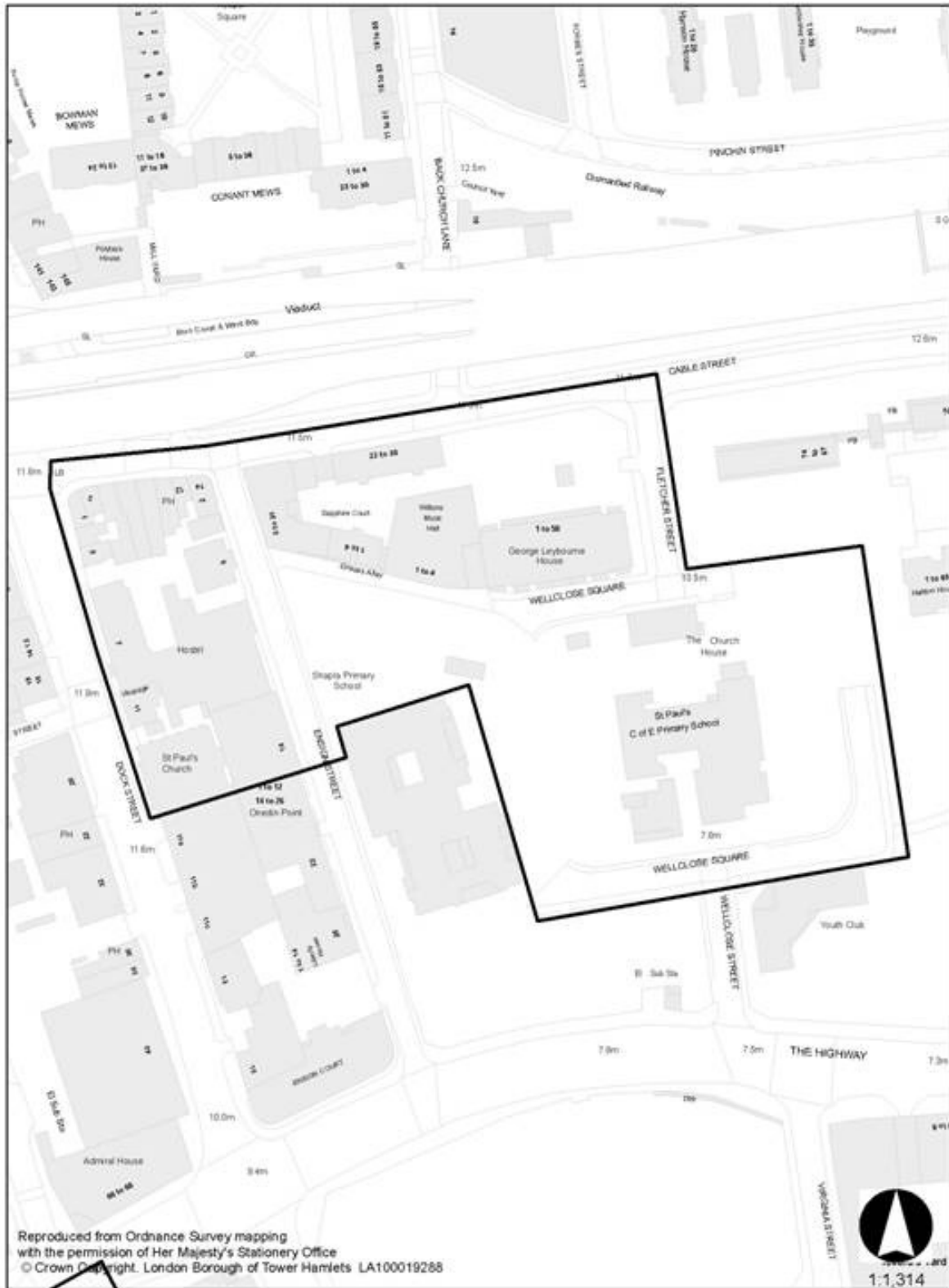
Adopted by Cabinet: 4th November 2009

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.



Conservation Areas - Wilton's Music Hall

1. Character Appraisal

Overview

Wiltons Music Hall Conservation Area, located in the western part of the borough, was designated on October 2008. It is bounded by Cable Street to the north, Dock Street to the west and The Highway to the east. Ensign Street runs north-west through the area.

The reason for designating the area is to protect the remaining townscape, street pattern and the buildings within it. Wellclose Square still maintains its 18th century plan. Many other interesting street patterns and historic structures remain within the area, such as Grace's Alley, and smaller details like the Listed bollards on Ensign Street.

History

In 1820 the area around St. George's in-the-East was at the height of its prosperity, and wealthy merchants and traders resided in the parish. Wellclose Square was one of the most fashionable quarters and the Danish Ambassador resided there. The Square was part of the 'liberty' of the Tower of London, because it fell outside the County of Middlesex over which the City of London exercised control. By Letters Patent 1688, King James II included Wellclose Square among the Tower Liberties, which meant that the maintenance of law and order within the area lay with the Governor of the Tower of London. The Square was of a considerable size, laid out from 1678 and built up piecemeal by Nicholas Barbon and others, with the best houses on the east side. These houses were inhabited by well to do merchants, whose business interests were in the locality, or who were concerned with the river and sea. In the centre of the square is St Paul's School, built in 1869 – 70 by Reuben Greatorex. The school is a Grade II Listed building. St Paul's School sits on the site of a Danish Church established there in 1694 with funds from the King of Denmark. This was for the use of the Danish community, some of whom lived in the riverside neighbourhood, where they conducted trade with their country, and for others who

made occasional visits to the shores. It ceased to be used as a church in 1816 and was sold in 1868. It was eventually demolished.

To the west of Wellclose Square is Ensign Street, originally called Wells Street, here are found a number of identical bollards with the monogram RBT with a crown over the top. This stands for the Royal Brunswick Theatre, which was built in 1828 to replace the Royal Theatre. But the Brunswick did not last long, as the building collapsed almost as soon as it was opened. On its site was built the Brunswick Maritime Establishment, promoted by the Reverend George 'Bosun' Smith of the floating seamen's church and erected by voluntary subscription in 1830-5, designed by Henry Roberts. This was the first example of a sailor's rest home. It was three storeys tall with an attic and a stuccoed ground floor but originally built with a low Doric arcade and projecting wings on each side. The centre block had a registry, saving banks, dinning hall and reading rooms. The design was ambitious for its time. It housed up to five hundred sailors in each of its wings in double tier cabinets. The reason for building the home was to discourage sailors from going to the Ratcliffe Highway which was notorious for Victorian prostitution and dens of thieves. Agents were employed to meet ships on arrival and persuade the men to stay at the home. The main entrance was originally on Well Street, but was later changed to be on Dock Street. The London Nautical School opened there in 1893. In 1955 it was modified and renamed the 'Red Ensign Club' and over the years various extensions were added to the home to provide further accommodation until the building covered the whole of the site between Well Street and Dock Street.

Dock Street is parallel to Ensign Street. It was laid out for access to the London Docks after 1806, but only became an important route after the opening of Commercial Road in 1843. The street houses St Paul's Church which was built to replace the seamen's church. The foundation to the church was laid by Prince Albert, Prince Consort, in May 1846 and the church was completed two years later. Among the facilities the church provided was an infant Nursery school for the children of seamen. This was in nearby Wellclose Square. The church and the associated building are still standing today. St Paul's Church closed for worship in 1990 but is used for other purposes. Next to the

church is the former vicarage, a pretty three-storey house built by Henry Roberts in 1847 with stucco band architraves to ground floor sashes.

A peculiarity of Wellclose Square was the little alleys that led diagonally from each corner; of these Grace's Alley to the north west of the square is the only survival. The alley is home to Wilton's Music Hall from which the Conservation Area derives its name and one of the oldest and last surviving grand Music Halls. Established in 1843, it was rebuilt in 1858 - 59, on its present grand scale by the architect Jacob Maggs for John Wilton. Like most Victorian music halls it was built behind the Prince of Denmark Pub. The pub was locally famous as the first to use beautiful mahogany fittings and became known as the Mahogany Bar. Originally the building was landlocked by surrounding property and even today, must be reached through its parent pub. After John Wilton died in 1880, the hall was used as a Methodist Mission from 1888, known as the Mahogany Mission until 1956. The first Dockers strike was in 1889. During this Wilton's Music Hall served 2,000 meals a day to the strikers and in the 1930s was the head quarter for the people of the East End who gathered to stop Mosley's fascists in the famous battle of Cable Street. It also served as a shelter to the community during the blitz of World War II. In 1956 the building was sold and used as a rag warehouse. To save it from demolition in 1964 the poet and conservationist Sir John Betjeman campaigned to make Wilton's Music Hall a Listed building. It was eventually given a Grade II* listing. Repairs have been carried out (though more work is needed) and the hall is still used regularly for performances and functions.

Character

The prevailing character of Wilton's Music Hall Conservation Area is as a mid-nineteenth century complex of more formal inner city streets rendered informal by the alleys which bisect this formality, in some instances creating their own local environment, both lined with historic buildings giving a deeper glimpse into city life one hundred and fifty years ago.

Additionally eighteenth century Wellclose square abuts this nineteenth century complex, and give an older reference to the locality.

Uses are mixed, with an emphasis on commercial use on ground and sometimes first floor, and residential above. There is also a small proportion of office use.

There are three main areas:

- 1) The formality of Dock Street and Ensign Streets.
- 2) The web of city life in the alleyways.
- 3) The more formal and larger scale character of Wellclose Square, with the Listed school within it.

Dock Street and Ensign Streets: Dock Street is the most formal street in character. It is wide and lined by buildings that are an integral part of the character of the Wilton's Music Hall Conservation Area. Prominent among these is the mid-Victorian Church of St Paul, now serving community uses. Next to it is the very distinguished proportioned Vicarage.

Further north are smaller late-eighteenth and mid-nineteenth century buildings which lead to Cable Street, continue along it and then return south into Ensign Street. This street has on its west side some slightly larger but nonetheless interesting former commercial buildings, now largely used for residential purposes, including the Locally Listed No 18 which alludes in style to a northern Renaissance palace.

Building heights are generally ground and three or ground and four floors. Although some of its original buildings have been replaced in the south of this street, the west side maintains a strong continuous skyline. The line of strong bollards on the west pavement to this street only serve to remind one of the powerful formality this side of the street once had.

Alleyways: Grace's Alley is wide enough to have admitted horse drawn carts and carriages, yet had no pavements to give security to the many pedestrians who would also have used it. The tall southern wall with its punctuated buttresses maintains the original 'closeness' of this alley, and the paving stones serve to underline the harsh character to this alley, only slightly lessened by the discreet and slightly scant style of

the wall enclosing the former pub and leading through the double timber doors towards the Grade II* theatre beyond. The timber doors and their curved upper angles, together with the elaborate loadstone panels of flower groups each side, are the only concessions this harsh Victorian alley presents to the visitor.

But its authenticity is unchallengeable, and gives only a first glimpse of the relative richness to be found in parts of the theatre the other side of the doors. Little has changed over the 150 years since it first opened. Use of this alley, apart from the pub, is still largely residential.

Wellclose Square: Wellclose Square is eighteenth in century in origin, and lies at the east end on Graces Alley, and is the most formal part of the Wilton's Music Hall Conservation Area. Into this square was built the mid Victorian church school, (Grade II) complete with a residential house to the north, and both remain, together with other later additions. They were built in the Gothic Revival style, and as such are distinctive visual centres of focus in the square. It is this distinctiveness that aligns these buildings with others in the Conservation Area, including St Paul's Church onto Dock Street.

The square has been divided into three major zones - the green planted area to the west, the built-up area in the centre, and the hard play area to the east. The more recently opened up areas to the north, east, south and to the west, around this square have reduced its impact.

The use of Welclose Square is predominantly scholastic, with the play space and some planted areas. The area around it is mixed, with scholastic to the west, public open space to the north and east, a youth club to the south, and residential use along the north-east corner.

Land Use

The area has differing land use characteristics. The busy Dock Street has a mixed use, as does Cable Street and the northern end of Ensign Street, with commercial uses on ground floor and office/residential on the upper floors.

The Alley and the area to the north of it is residential apart from Wilton's itself. Wellclose Square is predominantly educational.

Scale

Scale within the Conservation Area varies. On Dock Street it changes dramatically from 3 storeys to 7 storeys, and rises up to the height of St Paul's Church. Within Grace's Alley it is predominantly 3-4 storeies, and for the area within Wellclose Square it is of two to three storeys.

The historic character of the area has been affected by later larger scale development. At Dock Street, at the southern end of Ensign Street, at the north side of Wellclose Square and to the west of Wellclose Square.

The narrow width of Grace's Alley is the most authentic survival, representing accurately the way this alley would have looked for the last 150 years. Scale within this alley conveys accurately the experience of such an alley, including a glimpse of the harshness of the streetscape and adjacent buildings, a characteristic of this part of London just east of the city between 1800 and 1900.

Open space

There is no significant public open space in Wilton's Music Hall Conservation Area, apart from Grace's Alley itself. Most of the open space that occurs is found within the school enclosure of Wellclose Square. There is public open space immediately outside the eastern boundary of the Conservation Area.

Views

The most significant views are those at the west and east ends of Grace's Alley. These are rare glimpses into a mid-nineteenth century alley that has changed little for 150 years. Also important is the view from Dock Street looking south under the railway bridge to St Paul's Church, and the opposite view up Dock Street from the junction with the Highway, again looking at St Paul's Church.

Summary

This is an area of predominantly mid 19th Century development, embracing the busy commercial thoroughfare of Dock Street, and the quieter more formal Ensign Street.

The rare preserved Grace's Alley with its accompanying Wilton's Music Hall, itself a most remarkable survivor of the early music halls of London, dating in its present form from 1840-58, and the eighteenth century Wellclose Square, with the mid nineteenth century and later school buildings within it all make a positive contribution to the Conservation Area.

There are no gap sites, though some assimilation of the later ad hoc school buildings to the south of Wellclose Square may be possible. The immediate locality around the Square suffered considerably from the bombing of the Second World War, and the redevelopment that has arisen subsequently has not re-consolidated the form of Wellclose Square.

Restoration of the railings around the square would go a long way towards commencing this consolidation, and would be much to the advantage of the Wilton's Music Hall Conservation Area.

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 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 will be 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 the Wiltens Music Hall Conservation Area is described in detail in the Appraisal in the first part of this document.

In the Wiltens Music Hall Conservation Area, 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 (eg. 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

Ecclesiastical Grade III

- St Paul’s Church

Grade II*

- Wilton's Music Hall

Grade II

- The Vicarage, Dock Street
- St Paul's Church of England Primary School
- The House, Wellclose Square
- The Bollards, Ensign Street

Locally Listed Buildings

- Onedin Point

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.

Within the Conservation Area, the quality of the public realm, the surface materials, street furniture and other features are all integral parts of the character of the Conservation Area. 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.

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

Wilton's Music Hall, though made watertight, and made operable by recent works, nonetheless still needs considerable further investment to consolidate these partial repairs, to repair the existing internal and external fabric, to improve as far as possible insulation levels, and to upgrade the provision of services. This work is urgent if degeneration of the wonderful fabric is to be avoided.

Restoration of the cast iron railings to Wellclose Square would remarkably consolidate the form of the square, which has been so weakened by the bombings of the Second World War and subsequent partial redevelopment around it.

Trees, Parks and Open Spaces

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.

The trees within Wellclose Square give space and refreshment to the locality. Located within the Conservation Area these now enjoy protection.

Further planting along the southern border of Wellclose Square, both within the square and along the south side of the road bounding it, would consolidate the form of the square and also enhance the character of the Wilson's Conservation Area.

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 inclusivity 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.

In addition, the Borough's Annual Monitoring Report, prepared with the new LDF, will assess progress on the implementation of the whole Local Development Scheme, including policies relevant to conservation.

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

Wilton's Music Hall is 'at risk'.

Priorities for Action

- 1) Consider resurfacing Grace's Alley in traditional stone setts.
- 2) Reintroduce traditional cast-iron street railings to the area.
- 3) Introduce more tree planting to the area.
- 4) Create public accessible historical information board for this interesting area.
- 5) Create a stakeholders guide around conservation of this historic area.