



Bethnal Green Gardens

Conservation Area

1. Character Appraisal

2. Management Guidelines

London Borough of Tower Hamlets

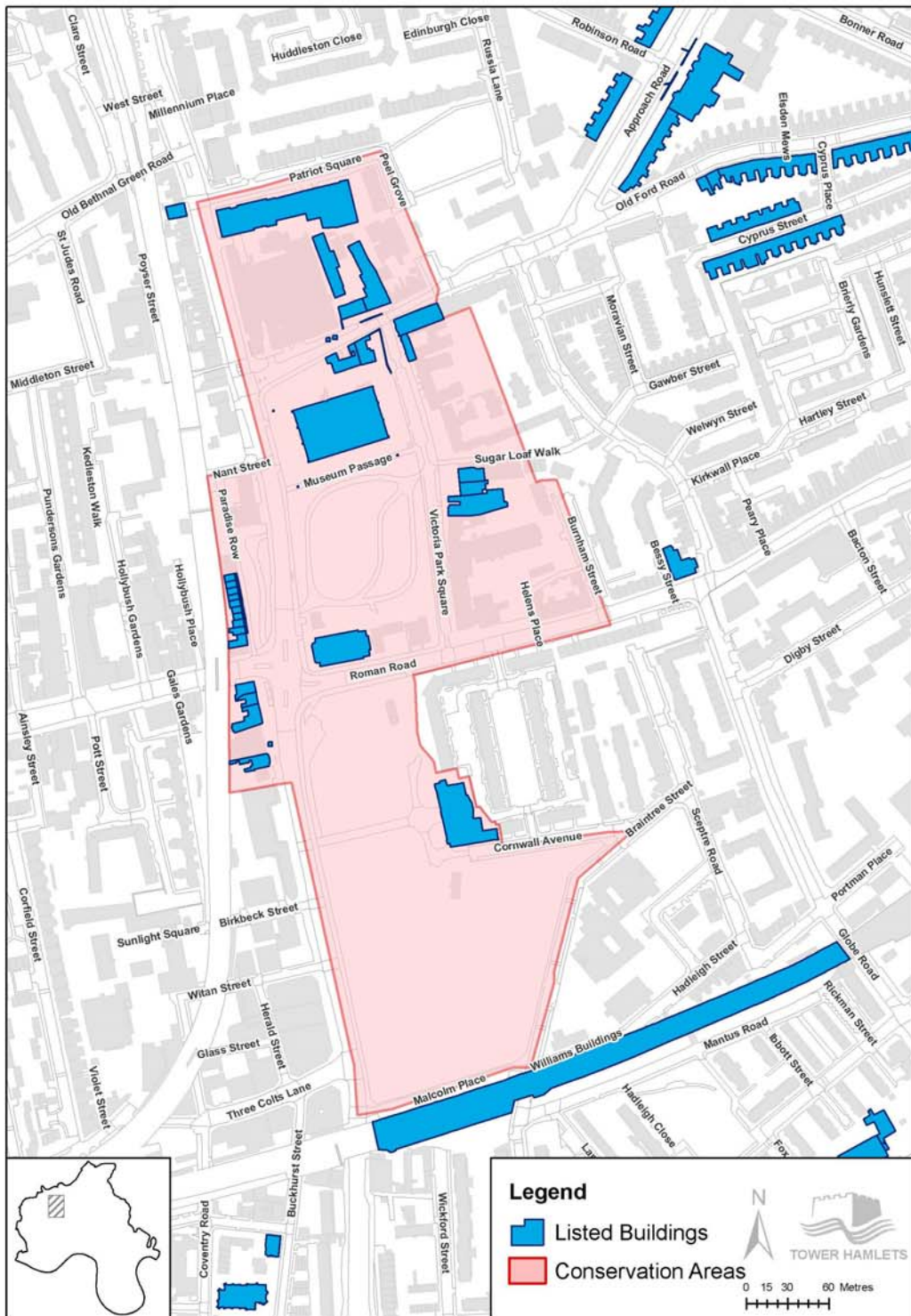
Submitted for Adoption: November 2009

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.

This draft guide has been prepared for comment by the local community 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 propose management guidelines on how this character should be preserved and enhanced in the context of any ongoing change.



BETHNAL GREEN 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 Bethnal Green Conservation Area was designated in July 1969 and extended to the south west of Bethnal Green Underground Station, in October 2008. It encompasses a series of significant statutory listed civic buildings, such as the Town Hall and Bethnal Green Museum, set amongst the public gardens and the open space of Bethnal Green Gardens. St John's Church (Grade I listed) is located at the heart of the area at the junction of Bethnal Green Road, Roman Road and Cambridge Heath Road.

History

Historical maps of 1703 show Bethnal Green as almost entirely rural grounds, providing open country for market gardening. As industries expanded, an overflow of immigrants from Spitalfields and Shoreditch arrived in the area. A rural retreat with large houses, often grand residences in their own grounds, Bethnal Green was still considered one of the most deprived areas in London. The inhabitants of Bethnal Green were adversely affected by the decline of the silk trade in London, prompting the initiative to build more churches in Bethnal Green. This was led by the Bishop of London, Charles Blomfield in 1828-56. He established the Metropolis Churches Fund (1836), with the resources and intention to build more churches in Tower Hamlets. Prior to 1743, Bethnal Green had no separate ecclesiastical existence, but was part of the parish of Stebenheathe, now known as Stepney. The scheme was successful in that ten ecclesiastical buildings were constructed to complement St Matthew and St John (destroyed by fire in 1859 and rebuilt in 1861). However, from the 1880s, there was a decline in church attendance coinciding with the increase of Jewish immigrants.

In 1899, three Metropolitan Boroughs were created, with Bethnal Green becoming a Borough in its own right, alongside Poplar and Stepney. Shortly thereafter, Bethnal Green built its own Town Hall in 1909, and that area around the gardens established itself as a civic district. Once known as a slum area, with no train station until the 1870s, the Borough introduced public buildings including York Hall.

The area did however have its shortcomings, particularly in housing demands and coping with the increase in population over the years. The population peaked in 1901, when the majority of inhabitants were Jews, engaged in the textiles and boot-making industries.

The London County Council (LCC) prompted large schemes of slum clearance in the area, and the Borough of Bethnal Green's continued the redevelopment of housing in the area during and after the Second World War.

Character

The Bethnal Green Gardens Conservation Area is characterised by the formal public buildings in their open space and individual garden settings. The collection of statutory listed buildings, namely the Bethnal Green Museum of Childhood, York Hall and the Town Hall are the highlights of this civic quarter. Varied in style and scale, these distinguished civic buildings are complemented by the greenery of the gardens, and are perceived as distinct from any residential character.

St John's Church (or the 'Church of St John) was built 1826-8 and designed by Sir John Soane. It is Grade I listed and forms the centrepiece of the Conservation Area. The exterior of the church is of stock brick and classical in detail.

Bethnal Green Museum was opened to the public in 1872, the Bethnal Green Museum was originally part of the Museum of Ornamental Art, South Kensington (1851), now known as the Victoria and Albert Museum. Its pre-fabricated iron structure was re-erected and encased within red brick and slate roof. The museum was renamed the Museum of Childhood in 1974.

The Public Library was originally constructed in 1896 as the wing of an asylum. The building is 2-storey brick constructed with a Neo-Georgian interior.

The Town Hall (1909-10) was built to provide a civic presence for the newly-created Borough. It addresses both Cambridge Heath Road and Patriot Square and was built in Edwardian Baroque style with its main frontage constructed in Portland stone.

York Hall (1929) doubled as the main swimming pool in the summer, whilst in winter, the large bath hall was covered, allowing the hall to stage organised events such as music, dancing and boxing. With its frontage to Old Ford Road, the public hall is Neo-Georgian built in red brick with Portland stone plinth and cornice.

Late 18th century and early 19th century terrace housing exists along Paradise Row. This group of Grade II listed buildings are set behind a wedge of open land, which was once part of the original green. These terraces are characterised by plain brick fronts, recessed arched doorways and straight-headed windows. The building line continues, across Bethnal Green Road to a further terrace facing Bethnal Green Gardens. It includes six Grade II listed and one Locally Listed building. This street represents a significant group of residential buildings in a Conservation Area which is predominantly civic and green in character.

The street environment along the main roads in the area, particularly at the major junctions, is overwhelmingly dominated by vehicles. This is particularly apparent at the staggered junction of Bethnal Green Road, Cambridge Heath Road and Roman Road, where the pedestrian environment is very poor. Pavements are narrow, and the street scene is cluttered by railings and posts. A moving advertisement in front of the Church and a mobile coffee store blocks the north entrance to the Bethnal Green tube station and conceals the good enamel direction board and interpretation panel. The junction of Cambridge Heath Road and Old Ford Road is also dominated by vehicular traffic. Parts of Cambridge Heath Road are deserted at night, as there are a lack of buildings with active frontages along this stretch.

Land Use

Apart from the residential terrace on Paradise Row, the land use character of the Bethnal Green Gardens Conservation Area is predominantly public recreational buildings and grounds.

Scale

The existing building scale of the area is varied but predominantly low-rise. The terraces along Paradise Row are a uniform 3 storeys. The landmark buildings are independent forms, and generally range between 2-5 storeys with high floor to ceiling heights. The overall scale depends on the individual building's roof profile, features and function.

Open Space

Within the Conservation Area, Bethnal Green Gardens itself provides the public green space for local residents and is paramount to the character and setting of the Conservation Area. In 1678, fifteen and a half acres of what was formerly manorial common was purchased from the Manor of Stepney. In 1690, a condition of the trust deed prevented any new buildings to be constructed on the green. In 1868, this condition was honoured when four and a half acres of the land was sold by the Bethnal Green Poor's Land Trustees to the Committee of the Bethnal Green Museum. This was on the understanding that the surplus land would not be built upon, but rather be open to the public as public recreation grounds. Despite the Museum opening in 1872, it was not until 1875 that the gardens (designed by the superintendent of Victoria Park) were opened. They were named Museum Gardens and were maintained in succession by the government, London County Council, Greater London Council and are now maintained by Tower Hamlets.

In 1891, the remaining six and a half acres of land south of St John's Church was sold to the LCC to avoid the sale and development of this open land, in favour of the land being used as public recreation grounds. The southern and western Bethnal Green Gardens were opened in 1895 and today the southern part is occupied by a large play area and tennis courts. The northern part of the southern gardens (now called Bethnal Green Gardens) is occupied by a lawn and rose garden in the quieter and more formal gardens.

Views

Views towards significant landmarks include the approach to the Library and views to the spire of St. John. There are also long views along street axes, including views down Cambridge Heath Road and Roman Road, and high quality views into Paradise Row from Cambridge Heath Road. Other significant buildings such as the Church of the Assumption, York Hall, and the Town Hall, act as landmarks for secondary views.

Summary

This is an area of particular special architectural and historic interest, illustrated by its rich history and significant architecture, dating from the 17th century. The character and appearance of the area, as described in this appraisal, define its special qualities. There are a few gap sites and some minor inappropriate buildings in the Conservation Area, but overall these have little impact on 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 operates 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 this in the Core Strategy its Local Development Framework (LDF). 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 Bethnal Green Gardens is described in detail in the Appraisal in the first part of this document.

In Bethnal Green 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, masterplanning 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.
- St John’s Church Bethnal Green is identified as a local landmark, and views of it from publicly accessible places will be protected.
- All of the gardens north and south of Roman Road, and the gardens in front of Paradise Row, are designated as public open space.

- Two sites are designated development sites in the north of the area – the Town Hall and York Hall sites. In addition, two development sites lie adjacent, but just outside, the conservation area to the south-west.
- A portion of the strategic views consultation area covers the northern part of Bethnal Green Gardens.
- The conservation area is also in between two district centres to the west and east.
- The Museum Gardens and Paradise Gardens are on the English Heritage Register of Historic Parks and Gardens.

Listed Buildings in the Conservation Area

Grade I

- St John's Church on Bethnal Green – see 'Buildings at Risk' below.

Grade II*

- Bethnal Green Museum of Childhood
- 18 Victoria Park Gardens
- 21 Victoria Park Gardens

Grade II

- Bethnal Green Library
- Bethnal Green Town Hall – see 'Buildings at Risk' below.
- Four lamp-stands in alleyway across Bethnal Green Museum Gardens south of Bethnal Green Museum of Childhood.
- 295-303 Cambridge Heath Road
- Salmon and Ball, Cambridge Heath Road
- K2 Telephone Kiosk outside No 289.
- 1-5 The Terrace, Old Ford Road
- 2-11 Paradise Row
- 15-19 (even) Old Ford Road

- University House
- The Assumption R C Church, Victoria Park Square

Locally Listed Buildings

- 287 Cambridge Heath Road

Other smaller structures in the area, such as walls and sculptures, may also be listed.

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.

There are two main roads which cut across the Conservation Area from west to east. These are Old Ford Road and Roman Road. Both handle a substantial amount of traffic, and join Cambridge Heath Road with large signal-controlled junctions.

The pedestrian environment is severely restricted at the entrances to the museum gardens, tube station and church by padlocked bicycles on both sides of the pavement. Padlocking of bicycles to railings should be discouraged by providing bike stands. Cycling in Sugar Loaf Walk and Museum Passage should be stopped, or at least not encouraged.

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 former Bethnal Green Town Hall represents a major opportunity for creative, sensitive and appropriate refurbishment and occupation.

Options for improving the pedestrian and cycle environment along Cambridge Heath Road should be investigated, and in particular around the two major road junctions which at present are dominated by highways infrastructure and do not do justice to the historic and architectural importance of the area. The highways also represent very significant barriers to movement, and contribute to an incoherent feel to the area. Parts of Cambridge Heath Road are deserted at night, due to the lack of activity along these stretches. Where possible, the Cambridge Heath Road should encourage active shop frontages.

The setting of St John's Church is poor. It is surrounded by busy roads, narrow pavements, and the front elevation is obscured by trees in summer. Consideration should be given to ways in which this building might realize its full potential as a historic landmark, and strengthen the identity of this place.

The land use within the gardens is public recreational grounds. Any alternative land uses would not be considered, as the purpose of the open space is to preserve the setting of the Bethnal Green Museum and St John's Church. The museum gardens and gardens in front of Paradise Row are also registered historic gardens.

On Cambridge Heath Road, there is potential for improvement to the area of hard landscaping in front of 309-317 Cambridge Heath Road, which detracts from the quality of the streetscape at present. The petrol station at 319-329 is outside the Conservation Area boundary, but is mentioned here because this site is an essential part of the setting of the Grade II-listed Bethnal Green Museum, being opposite it, and options for enhancing this site should be investigated.

Trees, Parks and Open Spaces

As described in the Appraisal, the gardens vary in character from north to south. The gardens in the north are more formal, and defined by stronger urban edges to the west

and east. South of the library, the garden opens up and becomes more expansive, accommodating more recreational uses – a sports play area, tennis courts and a playground. Management of these spaces should take account of the change in character from north to south, and in particular respect the setting of the listed buildings. These public grounds should further be enhanced with sufficient lighting, particularly on its sporting grounds.

The Conservation Area is not an inhibition to improving community facilities in the park.

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 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 Local Development Framework, 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 Survey of London, volume 27: Spitalfields and Mile End New Town.
- The Buildings of England (London 5: East). Cherry, O'Brien and Pevsner.
- The Official Guide. The Metropolitan Borough of Bethnal Green.

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:

Bethnal Green Town Hall

Cambridge Heath Road E2

Priority – E (E)

Designation – Listed Grade II, Conservation Area

Condition - Good. Part Occupied.

Ownership - Company

Summary

Town Hall built 1909-10 to the design of P Robinson and WA Jones in a florid Edwardian Baroque style. Substantial extension of 1937. Sold to commercial developer for office use, but no proposals submitted. A sympathetic use is needed that will retain the building's integrity.

Adjacent to Registered Park and Garden.

St John on Bethnal Green

Cambridge Heath Road E2

Priority – F (D)

Designation – Listed Grade I, Conservation Area

Condition Fair. Occupied.

Ownership Religious Organisation.

Summary

Church of 1827 by Sir John Soane. Occupied but in need of repair. Roof repairs completed with grant from English Heritage/Heritage Lottery Joint Churches Scheme. Works in progress. Adjacent to Registered Park and Garden.

Action Proposed to Secure:

- Discussions are ongoing about the re-use of Bethnal Green Town Hall as a serviced apartment and conference facility.

Any other threats to the Conservation Area

At this time we are not aware of any other threats to the Conservation Area.

Priorities for Action (1-5)

1. Secure the re-use of Bethnal Green Town Hall and Bethnal Green Library.
2. Improvements to the pedestrian environment by St John's Bethnal Green.
3. Improve the environment around the Bethnal Green Museum of Childhood.
4. General improvements to open space.
5. Improvements to street furniture.