



Commercial Road

Conservation Area

1. Character Appraisal

2. Management Guidelines

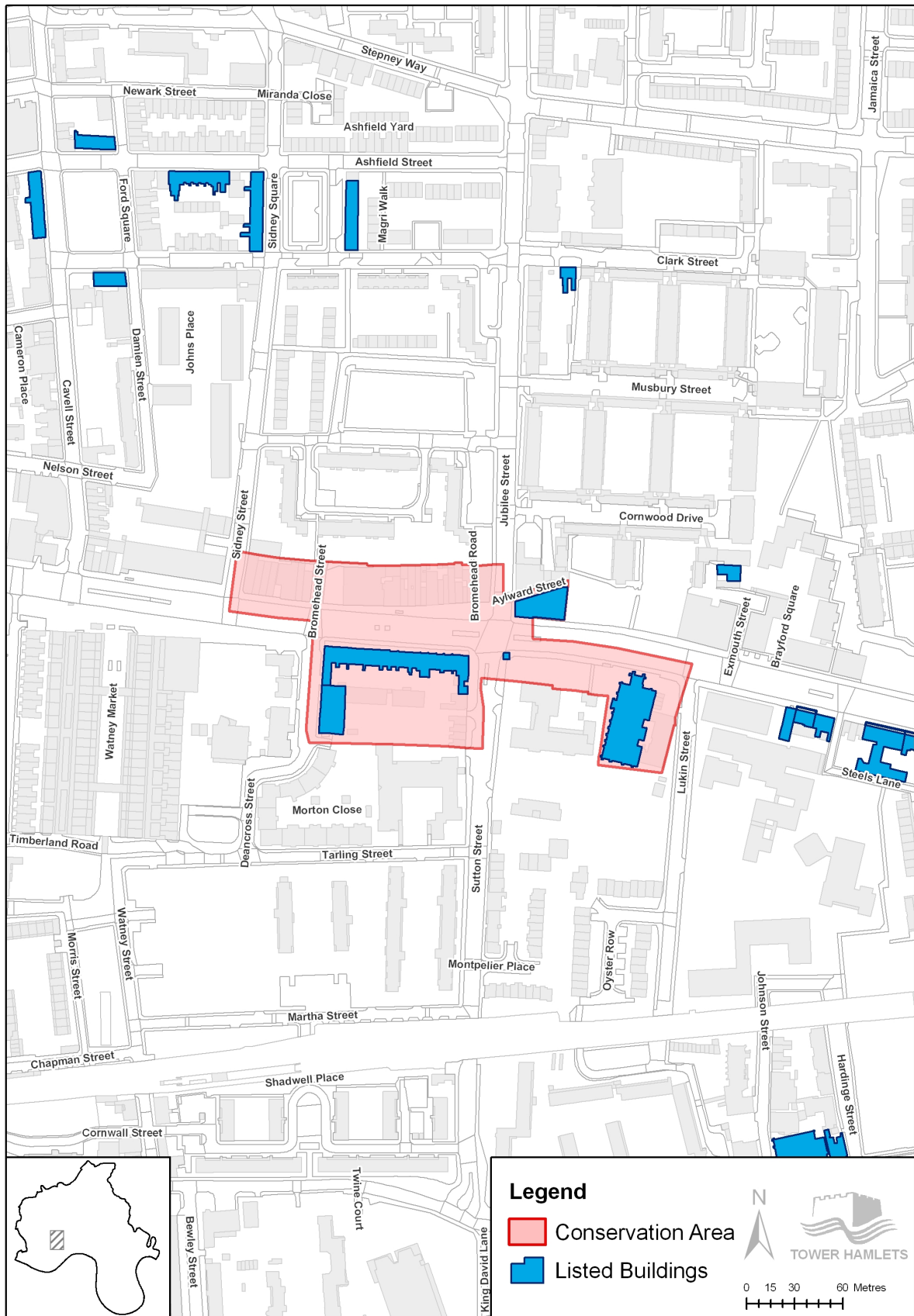
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London Borough of Tower Hamlets
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Introduction

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 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.



COMMERCIAL ROAD 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 Commercial Road Conservation Area was designated in September 1989. It is bounded by Bromehead Street and Sidney Street to the west, properties along Commercial Road to the north, Lukin Street to the east and includes listed properties along Commercial Road to the south. The Conservation Area contains surviving remnants of Victorian townscape on both sides of Commercial Road. The listed terraces at 300-334 Commercial Road and 1-11 Dean Cross Street form a group with The George Tavern Public House (Grade II listed). The area also contains a former Synagogue and the significant St Mary and St Michael Church building (Grade II listed).

History

Early 19th century urban developments saw the construction of Commercial Road in 1802-6 as a direct route, linking dock traffic between the West India Docks and East India Docks with the City of London. Construction of the road was given by an Act of Parliament to the Commercial Road Company, whose trustees were allowed to raise money and levy tolls. With ruthlessness and Roman planning, the road cut a near straight line through the East End. This broad and very busy road stretches for a mile and three-quarters from Aldgate to Limehouse.

The road which was laid out across fields to the north of the congested Ratcliffe Highway originally started at Back Church Lane. By the 1830s, it was almost entirely lined with houses all the way to Limehouse. Historical maps dating from 1869 to 1968 reveal a Victorian landscape, characterised by traditional, close knit, urban communities, typified by rows of modest, back to back terrace housing. By the 19th century, the area became crowded into rambling narrow streets, courts and winding alleys, mixed with industry activity that provided employment. The prevailing street patterns from this Victorian phase of development were obliterated in the wider area by post war housing re-development. Today, some three storey terraces with

decorative iron balconies still survive along parts of Commercial Road, close to Limehouse.

Commercial Road and its tributary East India Dock Road soon became the main thoroughfare for dock traffic. It conveyed so much traffic from dock trade that in 1828-1830, the Company decided to construct a stone tramway of Aberdeen granite along its entire length to reduce wear from heavy road wagons. Railways and factories followed and by the end of the 19th century, the whole area became a dense street pattern, polluted and overcrowded.

In the 1860s, Commercial Road became a public road when control passed to a number of local Metropolitan Boards of Works. Road tolls were subsequently abolished. Major re-planning of the area occurred in 1865. Commercial Road extended from the West India Docks as far as the junction with Union Street (now Whitechurch Lane). It was extended in 1865 to join Whitechapel High Street at 'Gardiner's Corner', named after the department store that dominated the junction until it was destroyed by fire in the early 1970s.

The County of London Plan was prepared for the London County Council by J.H. Forshaw and Patrick Abercrombie in 1943. Its main purpose was to point out the main directions of development and reconstruction of London, which in the past decades had faced big changes and irregular growth. It was prepared in anticipation of the end of the Second World War, which resulted in drastic bomb damage in East London. Radical post war reconstruction was adopted for the area between Commercial Road and Ratcliffe Highway, known as neighbourhood 5 of the Stepney/Poplar Reconstruction Area. As part of this post war re-development, much of the dense street pattern was obliterated and replaced by new layouts. This was intended to provide more open space and better housing for a diminished population but was never fully realised.

Character

The Commercial Road Conservation Area is not outstanding architecturally but does have some fine examples of mid and late Victorian terraced buildings. These form a homogenous and cohesive group, largely intact despite war damage and redevelopment.

The prevailing character of the 'high street' in the Conservation Area is typified by the ground floor of Victorian terrace buildings lining the northern edge of Commercial Road. Reminiscent of traditional shop fronts, the ground floor shop follows the original skewed kerb line of Commercial Road. A common building line applies to the upper residential floors, setback from the ground floor building line. The style and quality of the shop fronts vary considerably. Rebuilding has taken place on the sites flanking the northern side of Commercial Road, resulting in overlays of building forms and styles contained within the structure of the existing buildings themselves. Taller building forms with larger building footprints occupy important corner sites and detract from the continuous building line of the three storey Victorian terraces on this side of the street. No 313 Commercial Road is an original Victorian terrace, retaining its original detailing and proportions, including windows with vertical sliding sashes in painted timber. From no 313 onwards, there is a traditional hierarchy of windows, with window sizes decreasing on each floor as the building rises.

The collection of statutory listed buildings, namely the groups of terraces at 300–334 Commercial Road and the locally listed George Tavern building at 1–11 Dean Cross Street were built during the Victorian period (1837-1901) and form a group. The early 19th century terraces on the southern side of Commercial Road and Deancross Street have hardly been altered externally, retaining the Victorian townscape and historic character of the area. The buildings on both sides of Commercial Road retain some degree of townscape coherence from the Victorian age, illustrating its terraced form and hard urban landscape.

Nos 300 - 334, flanking the southern side of Commercial Road, is a good example of the distinctive and genteel character of a surviving group of Grade II listed, early 19th century Victorian terraces. The terrace group is made up of three storey terraces with

basements, on fine grain allotments, with a consistent parapet roof line. Nos 326, 328 and 330 feature rusticated stucco ground floors, with no 328 having a stucco façade. The buildings are either set hard on the edge of pavement, as on Dean Cross Street, or alternatively behind front areas and railings. Similar details in the railings, doors, window hood moulds and consistent parapet lines all contribute to the coherent character of early to mid 19th century architecture within the Commercial Road Conservation Area.

The mid 19th century George Tavern Public House, established 1654, is set prominently at the corner of Jubilee Street and Commercial Road (No 373) with 2a Aylward Street. This handsome, three storey building has three facades with 4 windows facing south, 3 facing west and 1 on the Aylward Street façade. It features a stucco face to its two frontages, arches to the ground floor, a central pediment at first floor and a parapet roof level, providing this corner with great presence.

The Grade II listed Church of St Mary and St Michael was designed by William Wardell. Its Catholic foundations were laid in 1852 to serve the Irish population of southern Stepney. The single storey, Roman Catholic Church, built in the Gothic Revival style was completed in 1856. It is a large building on a tight site, with its height emphasised on the Commercial Road frontage by its rising up directly from the pavement. The north entrance was adapted in the 1920s when a sloping roof was constructed over the entrance, which had previously been covered with a flat roof. The building has solid masonry walls with sloping slated roofs overlaid with Welsh slates. The roofs and end walls were overhauled after the Second World War and many windows were replaced following bomb damage.

Land Use

The land use character is predominantly residential, with one strip of localised, commercial and retail uses along the ground floor of Commercial Road north. The high street character forms an extension of the entertainment use, personified by the George Tavern building on the corner site. Religious and educational uses are

concentrated in the eastern part of the Conservation Area, in the street block between Sutton and Lukin Streets.

Scale

Much of the historic, 19th century terraces fronting Commercial Road stand at 3 storeys, with basement levels and consistent parapet rooflines. Recently built, taller building forms stand on important corner junctions on the north side of Commercial Road. These present a very different image to the historic, coherent townscape of terrace buildings of uniform scale and building alignment. The main building of the St Mary and St Michael Church is single storey in height, with a gable end to Commercial Road.

Open Spaces

Despite the small pocket of open space of the St Mary and St Michaels Church grounds, the Commercial Road Conservation Area does not contain any significant open space component.

Views

Views within the Commercial Road Conservation Area reveal the scattered fragments of surviving 19th century terraces, in context with The George Tavern occupying a prominent corner on Commercial Road.

Intact views of 300-334 Commercial Road can be appreciated from the northern side of Commercial Road. A glimpse of the butterfly roofscape, along the rear of 300-334 is visible on approach from Sutton Street.

The prominent and imposing frontage of the large St Mary and St Michael Church is visible from the northern side of Commercial Road and upon approach Commercial Road west. Similarly, the three-sided George Tavern is readily visible upon from the western approach.

Summary

This is an area of particular special architectural and historic interest, illustrated by its rich history and significant architecture dating from the 19th Century. 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 has 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 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 this in Policy CP3 of 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 Commercial Road is described in detail in the Appraisal in the first part of this document.

In Commercial Road, 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’. This is described in detail in policy CP49 of the Core Strategy of the LDF. In addition, applicants should note policy CP46 to ensure that access issues are properly addressed in work carried out in a Conservation Area.

Listed Buildings in the Conservation Area

Grade II

- 340A Commercial Road – Church of St Mary and St Michael
- 300-334 Commercial Road
- 373 Commercial road – George Tavern Public House
- K2 Telephone Kiosk at junction with Sutton Street

Locally Listed Building

- 1 – 11 Dean Cross 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 an arterial road and the busiest route in the Conservation Area and indeed across the Borough. It attracts constant and heavy 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 should be investigated, in particular on the northern side of Commercial Road which is currently dominated by the highway function of the road, and is not pedestrian friendly. The highway, the high traffic volumes, noise and vibration also represents a significant barrier to pedestrian movement, resulting in an incoherent feel to the area.

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 setting of St Mary and St Michaels Church is poor. It is a large building on a tight site, with little setback from the Commercial Road frontage. Consideration should be given to ways in which this building might realise its full potential as a historic landmark and to strengthen its sense of place.

On the northern side of Commercial Road, there is potential for improvement to the area of shop fronts and fascia boards, which are currently varied in alignment. Inappropriately illuminated signage of varying sizes and quality detracts from the quality of the streetscape at present.

The lack of respect for the prevailing front building lines of the terrace group on the northern side of Commercial Road has resulted in a prominent staggered effect, detracting from the setting of both the listed Tavern building and the terrace group on this side of Commercial Road.

More detailed guidance should be produced on the management of small scale refurbishment works to individual buildings, in order to protect the original fabric. There are minor improvements that could be made to the existing terraces along Commercial Road including the re-painting, re-rendering, or cleaning of the individual facades, where the paint is flaking off the walls. The predominant facing material colours within this Conservation Area consist of warm yellow/ brown hues, harmonising with the facing London stock brickwork. In time, it is encouraged that the original character is restored. Measures must be made to ensure that further damage to the brickwork is avoided and to ensure that further application of the pebble-dash is not allowed.

The simple repetition, rhythm and consistency of materials and details create an overall effect of the terrace group. Inappropriate alterations to shop fronts, replacement doors and windows are unwarranted and moreover, erode the character. The raising of building heights, increases in massing and general lack of regard for existing building lines and heights, breaks the careful balance and continuity of the terrace façade. The result has created discord and fragmentation to the elevation of the terrace, to the detriment of the character of the Conservation Area.

Trees, Parks and Open Spaces

There are no significant parks or open spaces in this area, although there are several areas of green space associated with housing blocks. Maintenance of these areas, including any boundary treatments should respect the character of the area.

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 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:

Mile End Old Town Residents Association

English Heritage

www.english-heritage.org.uk

The Georgian Group

www.georgiangroup.org.uk

Victorian Society

www.victorian-society.org.uk

20th Century Society

www.c20society.org.uk

Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings www.spab.org.uk

Listed Buildings at Risk:

At this time we are not aware of any listed buildings at risk in the Conservation Area.

<check against Register>

Any other threats to the Conservation Area

(to be written at public consultation stage)

Priorities for Action (1-5)

(to be written at public consultation stage)