



# St George in the East

## 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.



### ST GEORGE IN THE EAST 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 St George in the East Conservation Area was designated in July 1969 and extended south across the Highway in October 2008. It protects the setting of Hawksmoor's St George-in-the-East, one of the 18th century churches constructed under the New Churches Act to service the burgeoning communities of the East End. Located in the heart of the Conservation Area, the church is surrounded by historic properties of note, including the late 18th century Rectory and Town Hall (1860). Memorials located in the church grounds include the Raine family memorial (founders of Raine's Foundation School, 1719), and a First World War memorial, both Grade-II listed.

## History

The first documentary reference to the Shadwell area dates back to 1223 (a corruption of 'St Chads Well'). Between the 16th & 18th centuries, a rise in the population of the many riverside communities, of which Shadwell is one, reflected a growth in the shipping and ship building industries located along the banks of the Thames, east of the City. Tiny settlements grew into distinctive villages supporting the maritime trade, and by the time Shadwell became a separate parish in 1669, the local population had grown to about 8000.

During the 17th century, churches and chapels-of-ease were being constructed in response to London's eastward spread, and in the 18th century a commission was established to implement the construction of fifty new Anglican churches in areas of population growth. The New Churches Act was passed by Parliament in 1711 and enabled money to be raised for the construction of the churches from coal tax. Of the 50 churches planned, only 12 were built to designs by architects associated with the Office of Works, including St George-in-the-East (Wapping) and St Anne (Limehouse). These also represent two of the three Borough churches designed by architect Nicholas Hawksmoor, a pupil of Sir Christopher Wren, (the third being Christchurch, Spitalfields).

Considered the most original of Hawksmoor's East-End churches, St George-in-the-East, constructed between 1714-26, was dedicated in 1729 to serve Wapping-Stepney and the area to its north. The tower was added between 1720-3, plasterwork between 1723-4 and the pews and carving in 1729. At the time of its construction, the surrounding area was still largely rural, with open fields to the north of the churchyard (itself occupying an area known as the Gun Field), otherwise enclosed by buildings lining the principal roads. The 18th century churchyard was lined with rows of trees along the north, south and eastern boundaries, and in 1862, when further land had been added; a new layout included a Rector's Walk and Lime Avenue.

By the beginning of the 19th century, the adjacent fields and vacant land, (freed by earlier slum clearance) had been re-colonised, and a rope-making factory established to the north-east. The church and its yard were land-locked by the surrounding development, and its main entrance was through a narrow gap in the streetscape off Cannon Street Road. The church burial ground was extended in 1829 with the purchase of the rope walk, and in 1875 was amalgamated with the graveyard of St George's Methodist Church (Cable Street), forming St George's Gardens in 1886. The new public gardens had entrances off Radcliffe Street, Cannon Street Road and Cable Street. The former parish mortuary (1880) opened as the 'Metropolitan Borough of Stepney Nature Study Museum' in 1904, providing 'hands-on' nature education for East End schoolchildren until it was closed in 1939.

The church and many of its surrounding buildings were gutted by fire in the 1941 bombings, the church lying derelict until the 1960s reconstruction by Ansell & Bailey, a contemporary insertion within the original (restored) shell.

### **Character**

Until the Blitz in 1940, the south side of St George-in-the-East church was always screened by housing along The Highway. At the time of construction, Hawksmoor originally tried to persuade the Commissioners to demolish and replace the houses with more appropriate precinct buildings. The former Rectory (1726-9), at the north-

western corner of the church, represents the only part of Hawksmoor's Precinct Plan that was achieved. Its original street address has been lost to recent residential development. The eventual demolition of The Highway housing has provided a new formal entrance and has exposed the southern façade of the church and grounds.

St George-in-the-East has formed a landmark in this part of the Borough since its construction, and its prominence has been secured with the expansion of the gardens to the south. The church, rectory and associated walls, gates, railings and memorials form a significant group within the former churchyard, and are the focus of the Conservation Area. The urban character is further defined by the surrounding historic buildings lining the streets on the area's perimeter and. The setting is enhanced by 128 The Highway, which, to the other side of the Highway, provides a period counterbalance to remainder of the Conservation Area. The Cannon Street Road and Cable Street buildings are of value for their group setting and their role in the historic presentation of the church. Their retention and appropriate presentation is therefore important to the preservation of the areas historic significance.

Buildings of note include No. 44 Cable Street (circa 1810), listed for its largely intact interior and original shopfront, forming part of an attractive row. The Dolphin Public House (at the corner of Cable Street and Cannon Street Road), the former Britannia Public House (on the corner of Library Place and Cable Street) and the listed Vestry Hall & gated entrance. The terrace at No. 192-224 completes a well defined group along the southern edge of Cable Street.

The Conservation Area is also located in an Area of Archaeological Importance or Potential. Evidence of Roman roadside settlement has been established in two areas of the Borough, one in the vicinity of Old Ford Road in Bow, and the other along The Highway in Shadwell, where a road followed the river bluff from a location just north of the Tower to the Roman outport of Ratcliffe. Policies associated with Archaeology and Ancient Monuments apply to development proposed in the Conservation Area and its surrounds.

### **Land Use**

The proposed redevelopment of Mulberry College demonstrates a recent history of changing use in the area, from commercial and public to residential. However, some mixed uses remain which support the community, these contribute to street level activity, urban variety and historic character. Further erosion of the existing mix of uses will detrimentally effect the character of the Conservation Area and should be avoided.

### **Open Space**

The churchyard of St. George-in-the-East was laid-out as a public garden in 1886 and re-landscaped by the London Docklands Development Corporation in 1996. Headstones were relocated to the garden perimeter in the 1870s and now form a low barrier between the northern (Cable Street) approach and churchyard. The boundary wall, opened out to reveal the northern entrance, is listed, as are the original gate piers framing the principal entrance off Cannon Street Road. The garden's Cable Street access is reached via a paved forecourt to the western flank wall of Town Hall, now decorated with a mural. It depicts the famous Battle of Cable Street (1936), when East End residents fought police to stop Mosely's fascists marching through their neighbourhood. A second entrance from Cable Street is framed by the listed gate.

The Conservation Area is separated from the neighbouring areas by the heavily trafficked Highway to the south and the historic City-Blackwall rail viaduct to the north. The boundaries are clearly defined by roads on three sides and the eastern churchyard wall. A planned program of conservation and landscape improvement works have restored the gardens to an attractive external amenity space for the local community, however, a new use for the former 'Old Nature Study Museum' needs to be secured.

### **Scale**

The scale of the Conservation Area is largely defined by the buildings lining Cannon Street Road and Cable Street. The buildings in the Conservation Area provide an

appropriately low-rise context for the tower that rises above the Church of St George-in-the-East.

### **Views**

Hidden from view by perimeter development, the lantern tower of St George-in-the-East has provided a historic focal point for the parish and a prominent feature on the Borough's skyline. Visual permeability through the area has been improved by the demolition of buildings lining The Highway. Although altering the historic presentation and, to a certain extent, the address of the church, the exposure has also increased passive surveillance and public use of the gardens.

### **Summary**

This is an area of particular special architectural and historic interest, illustrated by its rich history and significant architecture, dating from the 18<sup>th</sup> century and earlier. 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 St Georges Town Hall is described in detail in the Appraisal in the first part of this document.**

In St Georges Town Hall, 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.

- The churchyard and the green space to the south-west of the site is designated as a site of importance for nature conservation and archaeology.
- Cable St is part of the London Cycle Network.
- The Tobacco Dock to the south is identified as a development site in the City Fringe Area Action Plan.

## **Listed Buildings in the Conservation Area**

### **Ecclesiastical Grade A (I)**

- Church of St George-in-the-East, Cannon Street Road

### **Grade II**

- St George's Rectory, 16 Cannon Street Road
- 44 Cannon Street Road
- 192-224 Cable Street
- 230 Cable Street
- St George's Town Hall, 236 Cable Street
- Gate piers to St George in the East Gardens, Cable Street
- Gate piers to church drive at Church of St George in the East, Cannon Street Road
- Pier, Gates, Railed Wall to north side of Church of St George in the East, Cannon Street Road
- St George's Gardens Raine Memorial, Cannon Street Road
- St George's Gardens War Memorial, Cannon Street Road
- St George's Gardens Garden Wall, Cannon Street Road
- Churchyard and Rectory Wall at Church of St George in the East, Cannon Street Road

### **Locally Listed Building**

- Britannia Public House, 232 Cable Street

- 26-42 Cannon Street Road
- 46-52 Cannon Street Road
- 56 Cannon Street Road

## **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.

The Highway is by far the busiest traffic route adjacent to this Conservation Area. It is an important route from the Tower of London eastwards to Docklands via the Limehouse Link tunnel, and is designated as a strategic route. As with the nearby St Pauls Shadwell Conservation area, options could be investigated for calming the speed of this road in deference to the architectural importance of the church, and to lessen the sense of the road being a barrier between St Georges and Wapping to the south. Currently bollards along Cannon Street have been positioned in the middle of the pavement.

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 Mortuary Chapel in the curtilage of the church is in desperate need of repairs and refurbishment, and is included in the 'Buildings at Risk' section below.

Minor repairs and refurbishment are needed to several parts of the churchyard, including the paving. Other minor improvements would help to lift the area, for

example replacing the metal grills over the gateposts on Cable St just east of the Town Hall.

South of the Highway, outside the Conservation Area, is the large Tobacco Dock development site identified in the City Fringe Area Action Plan. The preferred use for this site is Hotel, Retail, Leisure, Residential and public open space.

Preservation of the main views towards the tower from surrounding sites, the historic setting of the Church and glimpses of the church gardens through breaks in the perimeter edge, will be a consideration in the assessment of new development proposals.

The Swimming Baths on the Highway present a dead frontage to the road, and ways of improving the pedestrian environment should be investigated.

### **Trees, Parks and Open Spaces**

The management of parks and open spaces are particularly important to preserving the character of this area. When the churchyard was first converted into a public garden (in 1875-6), it was considered very important that the sacred character of the grounds was preserved, and this principle should be observed in all future management and maintenance of the garden.

To the west of the church, just outside the Conservation Area, is a large unused green space. This is fenced off from the residential development to the west, and from the road to the east. This is potential for this space to be restored as a usable public park, possibly linked to a re-surfacing of Cannon Street Road near the church entrance to calm traffic speeds at this point.

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 Buildings of England (London 5: East). Cherry, O'Brien and Pevsner.
- St George's-in-the-East Gardens – An Archaeological Assessment. Museum of London Archaeological Service, December 1997.

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](http://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk) or by contacting:

Tel: 020 7364 5009

Email: [dr.majorprojects@towerhamlets.gov.uk](mailto: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	<a href="http://www.english-heritage.org.uk">www.english-heritage.org.uk</a>
The Georgian Group	<a href="http://www.georgiangroup.org.uk">www.georgiangroup.org.uk</a>
Victorian Society	<a href="http://www.victorian-society.org.uk">www.victorian-society.org.uk</a>
20 <sup>th</sup> Century Society	<a href="http://www.c20society.org.uk">www.c20society.org.uk</a>
Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings	<a href="http://www.spab.org.uk">www.spab.org.uk</a>

### **Listed Buildings at Risk:**

#### **Mortuary chapel, churchyard of St George in the East**

Cannon Street Road E1

Priority - A (A)

Designation - Conservation Area

Condition - Very Bad. Vacant

Ownership - Local Authority

#### Summary

c1870 brick and tile mortuary chapel. In curtilage of Grade I listed church. Adapted in 1930s as a nature study centre but abandoned during World War II. Now derelict. The Spitalfields Trust proposes to acquire the building and repair it.

#### **Action Proposed to Secure:**

- Contact owners and secure temporary repair.

#### **Any other threats to the Conservation Area**

- The incessant noise of the traffic on the Highway is detrimental to the character of the area.

#### **Priorities for Action (1-5)**

1. Secure a new use for the former mortuary building ('Nature Study Museum).
2. Reinstate historic street surfaces.

3. Remove street clutter.
4. Secure implementation of full repair of mortuary building.
5. Investigate next steps in repair / restoration of Hawksmoor's church.