



# Wentworth Street

## Conservation Area

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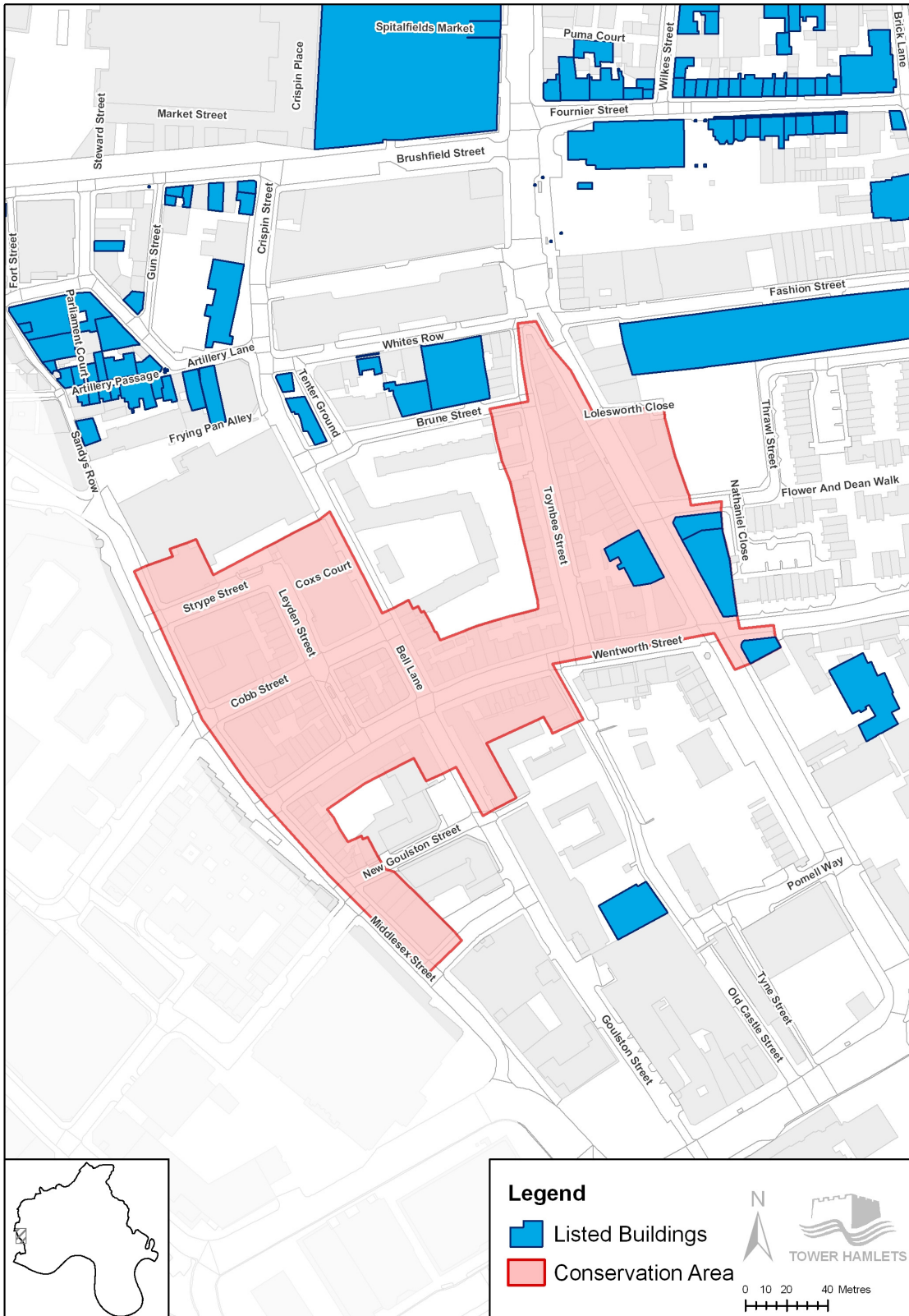
London Borough of Tower Hamlets  
Adopted by Cabinet: 7<sup>th</sup> March 2007

## 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.



### WENTWORTH STREET 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 Wentworth Street Conservation Area was designated in October 1989. It is defined on the west side by Middlesex Street, formerly known as Petticoat Lane and the site of the medieval market. The area's character as a mixed use residential and commercial area, and its association with the clothing industry, has endured for hundreds of years.

The area extends east along Wentworth Street, and north and south along Leyden Street, Bell Lane and Toynbee Street. Its eastern boundary extends across Commercial Road to include a small group of listed buildings.

## History

Today, Middlesex Street at the western edge of this Conservation Area forms the boundary with the City of London, although historically the Roman and medieval city walls were located a couple of hundred metres further to the south-west. In the medieval period, this area became a densely built up district, and Petticoat Lane was an important thoroughfare running from north-west to south-east, parallel with the old city walls.

As an indication of the dense residential character of the city at this time, in 1700 the population of the City of London was approximately 200,000 as opposed to a residential population of around 24,000 today.

By the start of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the area had developed as an important centre in the garment industry, or 'rag trade' as it was locally known. Johann Homann's map of London in 1705 and Rocque's map of 1746 shows that a tenter ground existed just outside the area to the north-east, in the area bounded by White's Row, Wentworth Street and Bell Lane. Tenter grounds were common on the outskirts of London at this time, and were areas where newly manufactured cloth was dried on frames (tenters) so that the cloth would dry flat and square.

In 1746, Wentworth Street and Bell Lane existed as narrow yards, as was Bell Lane, but Strype Street and Cobb Street only existed as narrow yards. The area south of Wentworth Street was a warren of small passages and yards running east from Petticoat Lane, which included Marlborough Court, Three Tun Alley, Sun Court, Black Bell Alley and Horseshoe Alley.

At the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the large warehouses for the East India Company were built to the north-west of the site, and major changes continued in the area. In 1843-5, Commercial Street was built through this area, requiring the demolition of many houses and other buildings. Although the road was finished in 1845, many of the sites along Commercial Street took several years to be built up. The developers of the road were concerned that only appropriate uses and architecture was allowed along this route.

Most of the buildings still existing in the area today date from this period of development from the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Petticoat Lane was renamed Middlesex Street, although its previous name has endured in the market. Strype Street was known as 'Tripe Yard' for a while. The tenter ground was built over with terraced housing on the new streets of Butlet Street, Tenter Street, Freeman Street, Palmer Street and Tilley Street. Between 1880 and 1896, the western part of Wentworth Street was widened to its current width.

Over the 1700s and 1800s, a large Jewish Community moved into the area, many arriving in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century from Eastern Europe and Russia, at the nearby St Katharine's Docks to the south. By the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the area was firmly established as part of the 'Jewish East End'. Institutions such as the Jews Free School (on the site of 39 Bell Lane) and the Jewish Infant School (building still exists on Commercial Street) had been built, and the famous market established in 1883 was almost entirely Jewish.

Toynbee Street was known as Shepherd Street, but was not extended south to Wentworth Street until the early 1900s. Also around this time, the Holland Street

estate was built by the London County Council (LCC). During the Second World War, many parts of the area were severely damaged by bombs and consequently rebuilt.

The market has survived as an important defining characteristic of Wentworth Street. Today, there are a large number of Bengali residents who play a vital role in the continuing life of the area.

## **Character**

The area can be broadly divided into two character areas – the area west of Toynbee Street, and the area to the east around Commercial Street.

### The Western Area around the market

On Wentworth Street and the surrounding streets in the western part of the Conservation Area, the famous Petticoat Lane market still operates market trading every day. The market's presence contributes to the liveliness and activity on the streets and the enduring heritage of the clothing industry in this area. The mix of other small scale businesses in the area contributes to the activity on the street.

There is a regular grid structure of streets which has its origins in several medieval lanes and passages, meaning that the block sizes are unusually small. This gives the area a permeable quality (of both movement and views) which is an important characteristic for the market which extends over several streets.

Most of the buildings in this area are 19<sup>th</sup> century mixed use buildings of 2-3 storeys. There are generally no setbacks to the buildings, which have a fine grain of narrow fronts. The buildings on the western edge along Wentworth Street are larger and taller, often rising to 4 storeys.

The Market Trader pub on the corner of New Goulston Street, is in a brick Queen Anne or Artisan classical style with pilasters, pediments and brick aprons beneath the windows. Nos 52-72 are plain late 19<sup>th</sup> century buildings commercial buildings and on the north corner of Wentworth Street is an unusual corner building, stuccoed, with

rusticated pilasters and a pediment on the corner. Then there is a grander commercial block at No. 82 which dates from the 1920s.

In summary, the character of the buildings varies greatly throughout the Conservation Area, but most contribute to the general low-rise, mixed use, fine grain character.

#### The Eastern Area around Commercial Street

Several of the buildings built on Commercial Street are architecturally and historically significant, and were built to a larger size to reflect the scale and importance of the new road.

No. 43a Commercial Street was built in 1841 as the Jewish Infant School, but has since been converted to other uses. It is a distinctive 2-storey building of yellow brick with stucco quoins and decorative mouldings, and is important for its historic value as well as its contribution to the townscape. Internally, its fine metal railed stone staircases are also significant.

There are many mid to late Victorian commercial buildings of 4-5 storeys along the road, containing shops and warehouses with a variety of well-detailed elements and polychromatic brickwork. Nos 44-54 Commercial Street were built around 1868 and are significant as little-altered examples of mid-Victorian commercial premises. This area is overshadowed by the high-rise Denning Point tower.

Brody House is a robust 1930s building which has recently been refurbished.

#### **Land Use**

The most characteristic land use of area are the market stalls of the Wentworth Street / Petticoat Lane market, which expand through to surrounding streets on Sundays. There are many shops and services associated with the clothing industry in the area. There are offices, small shops, and a large amount of residential accommodation in the area.



## **Scale**

As described above, the buildings in the western part of the area are predominantly 3-4 storeys, rising to 4-5 storeys along Commercial Street. This low-rise scale is an important characteristic of the market streets in particular.

## **Open Space**

There are no major areas of open space in this Conservation Area, as the area consists of a network of streets. The market itself is the nearest equivalent to an open space.

## **Views**

There are few long views in this area. The views north and south along Commercial Street are framed by the many Victorian commercial buildings. There is also an interesting view along Toynbee Street from Whites Row.

The changing short views in the streets around the market are also valuable, allowing the fine grain architecture to be appreciated. The small size of the urban blocks means that any new views along streets open and close frequently while walking around the area.

## **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 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 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.

The area is on the border with the City of London and a coordinated approach is required to conservation.

### 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 Wentworth Street is described in detail in the Appraisal in the first part of this document.**

In Wentworth Street, 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’. 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.

- The following frontages are identified as primary frontages in the London Central Activities Zone (CAZ): 1-79 (odd) 2-72 (even) Wentworth Street, 6 Bell Lane, 15-41 (odd) 20-42 (even) Toynbee Street, 41-47 (odd) and 40-48 (even) Goulston Street.
- The area lies inside the area covered by the City Fringe Area Action Plan, and within the 'Aldgate and Spitalfields Market' Sub-Area. The Area Action Plan states that 'Regeneration and new development must strive for design excellence which respects and enriches the sensitive townscape and the built heritage of the area. New buildings and public spaces must enhance the historical features of the City Fringe, including the numerous Conservation Areas, Listed Buildings, street patterns, and the Tower of London.' Policy CFR1 of the City Fringe spatial strategy states that 'development in the City Fringe should ensure ... the preservation and enhancement of the historic environment of the Borough.'
- The area is identified as an area of archaeological importance.
- Mallon Gardens, just outside the Conservation Area to the south, is identified as public open space.

## Listed Buildings in the Conservation Area

### Grade II

- 43a Commercial Street
- 44 – 52 Commercial Street

### Locally Listed Building

- 40 Commercial Street
- 54 Commercial 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.

Wentworth Street and the other market streets are important for residents, commercial users and customers. Deliveries to businesses and parking provision needs to be managed in a way that respects and maintains the character of the street.

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**

West of Toynbee Street, there are relatively few buildings of significant historical value, but the consistent character of small scale, mixed use buildings should be protected.

There are several dead frontages in the area with potential to be brought back into use by small scale business and residential uses. There are also a number of single-storey infill development along Commercial Street which replaced bomb-damaged buildings. These require full infill buildings which match those of Commercial Street (67 and 69)

In time, the quality of the streetscape could be improved to respect the historic character of the buildings, by reducing unnecessary highways clutter, introducing higher quality paving and more controlled parking spaces.

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

There are no parks or significant open spaces in this 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 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 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:**

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

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

- At this time, we are not aware of any other threats to the Conservation Area, but it is important that tall buildings in surrounding areas are not allowed to overwhelm the intimate character of the Conservation Area.

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

1. Prepare Stakeholder Guide with detailed design guidance.
2. Carry out survey of historic street surfaces and improve street environment.
3. Prepare and implement strategy for greening the environment.
4. Use grant aid to assist improvements to historic building frontages.
5. Promote the local tourist and visitor economy.