



# Lowell Street

## Conservation Area

### 1. Character Appraisal

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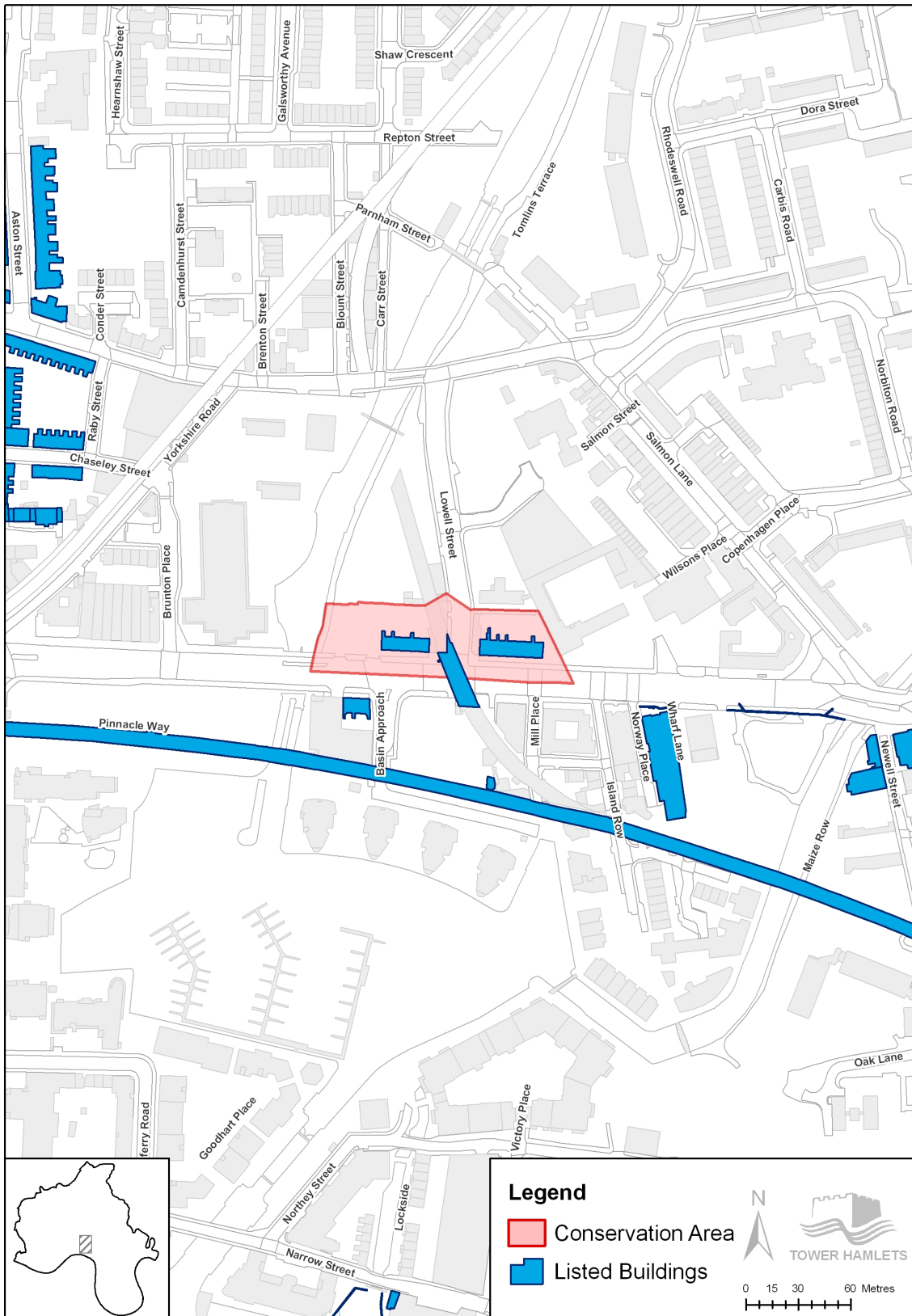
London Borough of Tower Hamlets  
Adopted by Cabinet: 7<sup>th</sup> March 2007

## 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.



## LOWELL 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 Lowell Street Conservation Area was designated in June 1989. Located on the north side of Commercial Road at the junction with Lowell Street itself, the Conservation Area was essentially designated to protect the two rows of Grade II listed terraces on either side of Lowell Street and the section of the Limehouse Curve bridge (an extension to the London and Blackwall Railway).

## History

The early 19th century saw major urban developments in the area. In 1802–4, Commercial Road was created as a quick and direct route between the City of London and the new East and West India Docks. East India Dock Road was not completed until 1812. Such main roads linked the Docks, to allow for the transport of goods from the ships into the City. When the roads were built, Stepney and Limehouse were still small villages and some distance away from London. By 1830, historical maps of the area show that most of the land lining Commercial Road was developed with terraces and shops, extending from Limehouse to Salmons Lane and St Anne's Church.

With the development of canals and the introduction of water transportation, the direct transport of goods was made possible, such as via the Regent's Canal at Limehouse (1820) and its own dock, the Limehouse Basin. Although most of the docks were developed on untouched land, soon existing inhabitants were forced beyond the riverside hamlets and spread into areas north of Commercial Road and East India Dock Road.

To coincide with the development of docks and freedom of trade, the 1830s saw the arrival of railways in the area. The London & Blackwall Railway opened from the City and Blackwall in 1840 and was extended to Bow in 1845-49 and the Isle of Dogs in 1865–72. This link to the main line was strengthened in 1880 with the Limehouse Curve between the main London and Blackwall line and its extension to Bow, crossing Commercial Road via the wrought-iron lattice girder bridge. The 19th century terrace

housing in this part of Commercial Road was considered contemporary when housing was originally developed in this district.

### **Character**

The prevailing character of the Lowell Street Conservation Area is defined by early 19th century terrace housing at 683-691 and 699-711 Commercial Road. The terraces are Grade II listed and 3 storeys in height with basement and are 2 bays wide with round headed doorways.

683-691 Commercial Road presents terraces of stock brick with stucco eaves cornice and blocking course. The windows have plain reveals, sashes and intact glazing bars. 699-711 Commercial Road has rusticated stucco on the ground floor, with round-headed windows and steps with iron railings. The windows on the first floor have moulded stucco architraves.

The Grade II listed railway bridge (a part of the Limehouse Curve) spans across Commercial Road above the junction of Commercial Road and Lowell Street. Dated 1880, the railway bridge (now unused) is partly supported on large round cast iron pillars.

### **Land Use**

The land use character of the Lowell Street Conservation Area is essentially residential. The terrace housing on either side of Lowell Street at 683-691 and 699-711 Commercial Road set a precedent for the scale and land use for future residential development, including the recent Tequila Wharf development at the west end of the Conservation Area.

### **Scale**

The scale of the area is predominantly low, with a uniform 3 storey frontage to Commercial Road. Higher residential development exists behind this frontage at Tequila Wharf, with views over the Regents Canal.

## **Open Space**

The Lowell Street Conservation Area is defined by a hard building edge and does not contain any significant open space.

## **Views**

Long views run along Commercial Road, highlighting the surviving pockets of terrace housing. These are seen in juxtaposition with other land uses that exist along this section of the road between Limehouse and the junction with Salmon Lane, and clearly demonstrate the proximity of residential (the houses) and commercial (the cast iron bridge) activities at that time.

## **Summary**

This is an area of particular special architectural and historic interest, illustrated by its rich history and significant architecture, dating from the 19<sup>th</sup> 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 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.

### 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. The Plan 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 Lowell Street is described in detail in the Appraisal in the first part of this document.**

In Lowell 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 adjacent site to the east is designated as an Area Action Plan development site.
- The west is part of the Green Chain and Blue Ribbon networks.

## Listed Buildings in the Conservation Area

### Grade II

- 683 – 691 Commercial Road
- 699-711 Commercial Road
- Section of the Limehouse Curve Bridge, railway bridge at the junction with Lowell Street
- Drinking Fountain under railway bridge at junction with Lowell 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 the main road along the southern edge of this small Conservation Area, and the design and management of this road has a significant impact on how the buildings in the area are perceived. This road is managed by Transport for London, and is identified in the plan as a strategic route.

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**

Commercial Road itself is one of the dominant features of the Lowell Street Conservation Area, due to its size and the volume of traffic it carries. Any efforts to enhance the quality of this area should investigate options for calming the traffic, reducing noise and improving the street environment.

Although it is just outside the Conservation Area, any proposals to redevelop the site at 721-723 Commercial Road should respect the setting of the listed terraces. In particular, any proposals should restore a clear defined frontage to the north side of Commercial Road.

There is potential to clean and refurbish several aspects of the Conservation Area. In particular, the bridge itself suffers from graffiti and building works to the corner of 497 Commercial Road appeared unfinished at time of survey. A new accessible use for the surviving part of the Limehouse Curve's viaduct might also be sought.

Although the road is wide, the quality of the space also depends on its enclosure by buildings on both sides of the road. On the other side of the road, outside this Conservation Area, Nos 604-608 (even) are Grade II listed. These buildings could contribute to a high quality edge to the southern side of the road.

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

There are no significant parks or open spaces in this Conservation Area, although there are pockets of green space along the nearby canal. There may be potential for creative re-use of the space on top of the viaduct.

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 Buildings of England (London Docklands)

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 within the Conservation Area.

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

- New development on the fringes of the Conservation Area should not harm its character.

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

1. Prepare Stakeholder guide including detailed design guidance.
2. Use Grant Aid to assist repair of building frontages including railings.
3. Prepare and implement scheme for general improvements to streetscape.
4. Bring forward scheme for the appropriate new use of the railway bridge.
5. Improve visitor access and maintain historic structures along the canal.