



Balfron Tower

Conservation Area

1. Character Appraisal

2. Management Guidelines

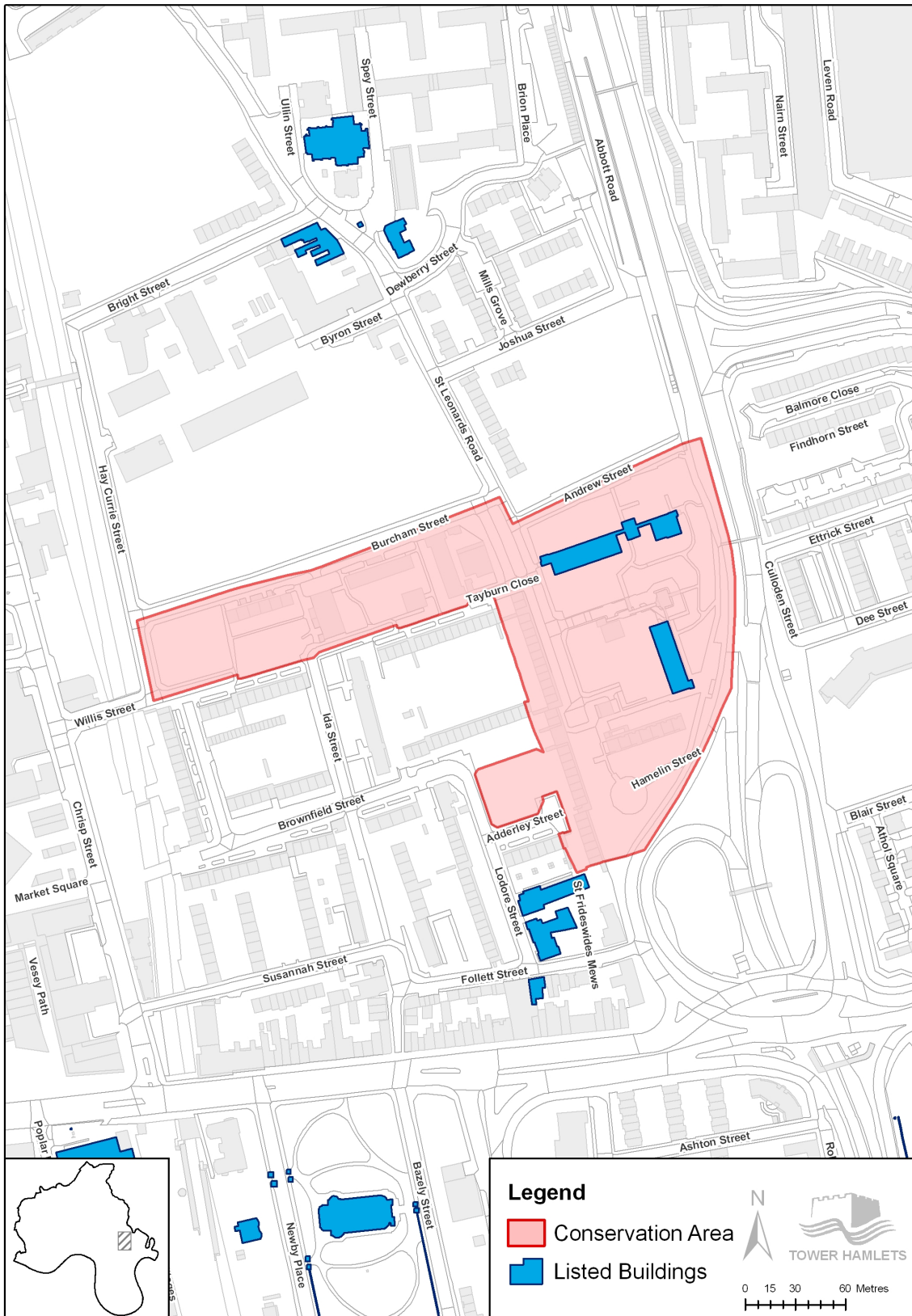
London Borough of Tower Hamlets
Adopted by Cabinet: 7th March 2007

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.



BALFRON TOWER 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 Balfron Tower Conservation Area was designated in October 1998 around the two residential blocks designed by Ernő Goldfinger for the London County Council in the 1960s. The Conservation Area boundary protects the listed Balfron Tower and Carradale House, and other buildings in the 'Brownfield Estate', including Glenkerry House, a community centre, shops and associated low-rise housing development.

The 27-storey Balfron Tower is Goldfinger's first public housing project, and a precursor to his better known Trellick Tower in North Kensington. The neighbouring Carradale House and Glenkerry House sit within the landscaped areas developed at the same time. The Brownfield Estate (also known as the East India Estate) is now recognised as a fine example of planned 1960s social housing. Considered to be exemplary examples of the post-war housing schemes, Balfron Tower and Carradale House were listed in 1998 for their cultural & architectural merit.

History

Characteristic of the many areas in the Borough, the land currently defined by the boundaries of the Balfron Tower Conservation Area was once occupied by a grid of tightly-knit terraced housing. St Leonard's Road was one of at least four main north-south routes through the old Borough of Poplar and runs through the centre of the Conservation Area. Much of this old residential area to the west of old Brunswick Road was lost when the Blackwall Tunnel Northern Approach Road carved through the 19th century terraces.

The area identified for the Brownfield Estate was planned in 1951-2, but not acquired by the London County Council and Poplar until 1959. In 1963, the LCC invited the celebrated modernist architect Ernő Goldfinger to design the first building on the site. Originally known as 'Rowlett Street Phase I', Balfron Tower was constructed by the Greater London Council between 1965-7. It was followed by the Goldfinger-designed, 11-storey Carradale House, and later the more simply detailed 14-storey Glenkerry

House (Rowlett Street Phase II & III respectively), both completed in the early 1970s. The low-rise housing to the west of Glenkerry was built at the same time as part of the Stage-III development works. Development adjacent to the Conservation Area is a mix of uninspiring LCC/GLC social housing.

The estate suffered from a lack of maintenance and social problems throughout the 1980s and 1990s, now reflected in the condition of the building fabric and associated landscaping. Security was improved in the early 1990s with the introduction of CCTV cameras and a concierge service. Some of the features added to the ground floor of Balfron Tower in the late 1990s were designed by architect James Dunnett, who had worked with Goldfinger on the Rowlett Street Phase I & II designs.

The Balfron Tower Conservation Area was designated in 1998 with the support of English Heritage, in order to secure the protection of the environment around the Goldfinger towers. This includes control over the demolition of unlisted buildings which form part of a planned group in the area.

Character

The Balfron Tower Conservation Area mainly consists of the low and high-rise council flats of the Brownfield Estate. It lies to the north-east of Lansbury, the Festival of Britain's Architectural Exhibition site, which was developed in 1951 following similar clearance. Balfron Tower dominates this landmark development and is representative of the post-war aspirations for good quality public housing. The tower is a significant realisation of many design concepts of the modern movement, expressing the social idealism of the time.

The 11-storey Carradale House houses 88 flats and sits perpendicular to Balfron Tower, creating the suggestion of a large courtyard. A row of two-storey terraced maisonettes lining St Leonard's Road was built in the early 1970s and further encloses the landscaped space to the east. This landscaped space was included within the Conservation Area to allow a greater level of control over future development.

Glenkerry House, although not designed by Goldfinger himself, was a product of the Goldfinger Studio and forms a boundary between the low-rise housing along Burcham Street and the listed buildings to the east. Although the estate comprises a collection of buildings of various scales, the architectural character of the area is cohesive, adopting a restricted palette of building materials and architectural elements, such as windows, in a considered and sophisticated manner.

It should be noted that Balfron Tower originally had a boiler room with windows at the top of the service shaft, much like the one on Glenkerry House. This was removed in 1985 due to concrete decay, as were the boiler flutes, where the original concrete was replaced with metal.

Land Use

The area is mainly residential, and many of the housing units are council owned and leased. Some leaseholders have purchased their flats under the government's right to buy scheme. The commercial uses include shops, a launderette and a community centre, known locally as "the club".

Open Spaces

The open spaces were designed at the same time as the buildings, and are integral to the quality of the Conservation Area. The landscaped walk to the north is a different character to the hard landscaping and car park in the central part of the area.

Scale

The scale of buildings in the Conservation Area varies from high rise tower blocks to the single storey commercial pavilions and two-storey terraced flats. The arrangement of the buildings means that there is little scope for new development within the Conservation Area.

Views

The key vistas include views south along St Leonard's Road from Balfron Tower and Carradale House, and striking views across the Borough. The view of the towers from the Langdon Park area is also of high quality. The tower blocks are clearly visible from East India Dock Road, and have long been considered landmark buildings in London's East End. The adjacent open space of Jolly's Green provides an appropriate 'forecourt' to Carradale House and the northern edge of the Conservation Area. Most vehicular entrances into the Conservation Area are framed by the buildings of the estate.

Summary

This is an area of particular special architectural and historic interest, illustrated by its rich history and significant architecture, dating from the 20th century. The character and appearance of the area, as described in this appraisal, define its special qualities. There are a few gap sites and some minor inappropriate buildings in the Conservation Area, but overall these have little impact on the qualities that led to its designation.

2. Management Guidelines

Overview

This Management Plan has been prepared in consultation with the community, to set out the Borough's commitment to high quality management of Conservation Areas and their settings. The Development Design and Conservation Team operates within the context of the Development and Renewal Directorate of the Council, alongside Major Projects, Development Control, Strategy and Building Control.

Areas are as much about history, people, activities and places as they are about buildings and spaces. Preserving and enhancing the Borough's architectural and historic built heritage over the next decades is of vital importance in understanding the past and allowing it to inform our present and future.

Conservation Areas also promote sustainability in its widest sense. The Council is committed to this in 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 Balfron Tower is described in detail in the Appraisal in the first part of this document.

In Balfron Tower, 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 area's eastern edge is defined by the Blackwall Tunnel approach road, which is identified as a strategic route.
- A cycle route is proposed along Burcham Street at the northern edge of the site.
- At the western end of the Conservation Area, the LDF proposes safeguarding a 12m zone to the north of the Willis Road bridge over the DLR railway lines.

Listed Buildings in the Conservation Area

Grade II

- Carradale House, St Leonard's Road
- Balfron Tower, St Leonard's 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 area suffers from its proximity to the major Blackwall Tunnel Approach Road.

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

More detailed guidance should be produced on the management of small scale refurbishment works to individual flats or maisonettes, in order to protect the character

of the original fabric. For example, the doors to the maisonettes on Burcham St and St Leonard's Road incorporate a distinctive semi-circular window at the top of the door, which should generally be retained.

As the landmarks of this Conservation Area, the original character or like-for-like features of Balfron Tower and Carradale House should be reinstated. uPVC windows and unauthorised front doors should be replaced with original fittings wherever possible.

No. 96 Burcham Street has no windows to the road and is situated in the middle of a grass area just outside Glenkerry House. It prevents the open space from being open and a sheer brick façade makes the area uninviting. The same can also be said of 100 Burcham Street which currently houses a launderette and newsagents. Air conditioning units on the outside of this building detract from the Conservation Area and Glenkerry House.

There is potential for improvement in the car park at the east end of the Conservation Area and in general the quality of paving, signage, street furniture, lighting and open spaces should be improved where necessary. The children's play area remains derelict and detracts from the quality of the area.

The bin stores in front of the houses in Burcham Street are later additions to the Conservation Area and are detached from the houses. They create a walkway in front of the doors of the houses and prevent anyone entering the houses from seeing if there is anyone standing next to their front door. Burglars have broken in to first floor properties by climbing on top of the bin stores that are currently locked because of vandalism. If possible, these bin stores should be removed, as they are unused and detract from the original building and threaten the house owners' safety.

The Borough's land use policies seek to enhance the character and vitality of the area through any future development. Planning permission will not be granted to expand or intensify non-residential uses where this would harm the residential character of the

Conservation Area. The retention of community uses for community buildings within the area will be encouraged.

Trees, Parks and Open Spaces

The area between Balfron Tower and Carradale House is at best, good, and at worst, appalling for a Conservation Area. Outside Carradale House there are mature trees and grass and the concrete is well maintained. The area at the base of the front of Balfron Tower is badly maintained and suffers from the constant rubbish being thrown from the balconies above. Proper management and maintenance of the trees in front of Balfron Tower is required.

The access to the basement of Balfron Tower, through a door behind the shop at 76 St. Leonard's Road is also broken and this area in general is detrimental to the appearance of the Conservation Area.

The landscaped areas surrounding the Goldfinger towers form part of the original design for the estate and fall within the curtilage of the listed towers. Any alteration to the landscaping will require listed building consent, and should be based on an understanding of the original design intent to ensure that the significance of the buildings is not compromised by insensitive work.

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 Survey of London, volume 43: Poplar, Blackwall and the Isle of Dogs.
- 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:

English Heritage	www.english-heritage.org.uk
The Georgian Group	www.georgiangroup.org.uk
Victorian Society	www.victorian-society.org.uk
20 th Century Society	www.c20society.org.uk
Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings	www.spab.org.uk

Listed Buildings at Risk:

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

Any other threats to the Conservation Area

- The dereliction of the car park at Balfron Tower is a continuing threat to the Conservation Area.

Priorities for Action (1-5)

1. Preparation of a detailed Conservation Plan for the estate.
2. Reinstatement of original architectural features and details where missing.
3. Care and maintenance of the trees in the area.
4. Secure appropriate new use for car park at Balfron Tower.
5. Further mitigate the impact of the A102 Blackwall Tunnel Approach on the area.