



# Lansbury

## Conservation Area

### 1. Character Appraisal

### 2. Management Guidelines

Adopted by Cabinet: 5<sup>th</sup> march 2008

London Borough of Tower Hamlets

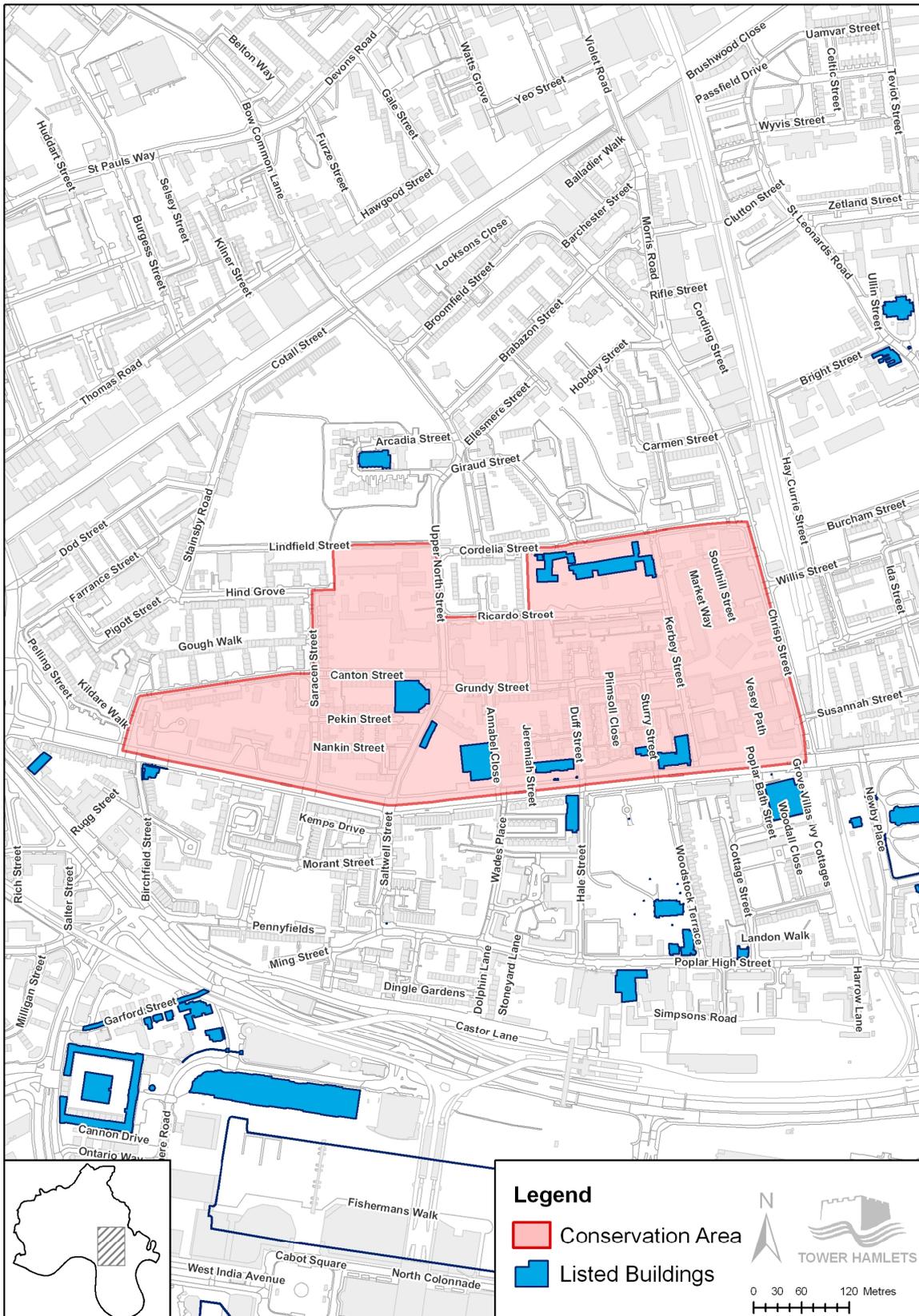
October 2007

## 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.



### LANSBURY 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 Lansbury Conservation Area was designated in January 1997. The Conservation Area includes the post-war redevelopment of Poplar, north of East India Dock Road, including the permanent buildings of the 1951 Festival of Britain. The Conservation Area is located to the north side of East India Dock Road, between Stansby Road to the west and Chrisp Street to the east. To the north, it is bounded by Canton Street, Lindfield Street and Cordelia Street. The fundamental principle behind the designation of the Lansbury Conservation Area is aimed to preserve and safeguard the original character and integrity of this exemplary post-war housing.

## History

The area of the present day Lansbury Estate was previously known as Poplar Fields. In the early 19th century, when the Enclosed Dock Systems were being built, the area was given over to market gardening and pasture. Although some development began in the 1820s, rapid development progressed between the 1840s and 1870s. This included a development of narrow streets between Upper North Street and Bygrove Street which centred around Randall's Market. This was an attempt to create a shopping district north of East India Dock Road. The market eventually failed after 1870, and Chrisp Street to the east, became the dominant market in the area. By 1860, Poplar had become a typical working class district, with roads of terraced houses, narrow streets, little open space and severe overcrowding. The area remained largely unchanged until the 1940s.

During the Second World War, because of its proximity to the docks, almost a quarter of the buildings in the area were destroyed or seriously damaged by bombing and redevelopment was urgently required. Even before the end of the war, detailed plans for the area's reconstruction were being prepared. These plans were made in the context of increasing concern about living conditions in the crowded city and borrowed many ideas from the Garden City Movement of the late 19th century. A key principle was to move 1.5 million people from the overcrowded city, particularly from its East

End to the less crowded New Towns in the surrounding countryside. These ideas were published in the County of London Plan by Patrick Abercrombie in 1943.

Eleven planned neighbourhoods were proposed for the London County Council's (LCC) Stepney/Poplar Reconstruction Area; Lansbury was neighbourhood number 9. Its name commemorates George Lansbury (1859-1940), the MP for Bow and Bromley for many years who was known for his tireless campaigning for the working people. The underlying concept was that each neighbourhood was to be self-contained with shops, schools, houses and open spaces all to be provided locally. Ideally this would be an old style of community, minus the overcrowding, poor building and the health hazards of the old days.

In 1948, Lansbury was chosen as the site of the 'Live Architecture' Exhibition of the 1951 Festival of Britain. The idea was to create a 'live' exhibition that used real building projects as exhibits of the latest ideas in architecture, town planning and building science, and which would leave behind permanent and useful structures at the end of the festival. The LCC planned to have their neighbourhood development completed in time for the festival and to demonstrate to the public the potential of town planning. When the Lansbury Estate was ready, residents moved in and the market and shops were open for business.

Lansbury was the first comprehensive post-war housing redevelopment in the east end of London. The plan was to redevelop an initial 30 acres of war damaged and derelict property in order to regenerate the area and to create opportunities for new public housing "fit for heroes". Lansbury was very much a planning-led project. The plan included a cross section of different types of development, comprising of housing, a shopping centre, a market place, schools, churches, church hall and a small amenity park. The area was designed by a group of well known architects and planners including J.H Forshaw, Frederick Gibberd, Geoffrey Jellicoe and Judith Ledebor, who were each allocated a particular site or sites. The team of architects were constrained by the overall plan and its requirements for housing typologies. They were asked to use London stock bricks and purple grey slates in order to achieve some kind of unity across the architecture and also because these were the traditional materials used in

this part of Poplar. The Lansbury Estate remains a notable showcase of the ideas of early post-war development which resulted in the orderly arrangement of community buildings and dwellings. It demonstrates a different trend in post-war council house design and lay out, from that which existed pre-war.

The exhibition opened in May 1951 and was visited by King George VI and Queen Elizabeth (Queen Mother), leading planners, architects and some 86,000 members of the public until the end of the exhibition in September.

### **Character**

The Lansbury Conservation Area is characterised by low scale residential architecture and traditional housing, exemplifying the yellow stock brick and slate for the Festival section of the estate and continuing the traditional housing of the East End. It demonstrates a different trend in post-war council house design and lay out, from that which existed pre-war. The houses and flats are grouped into closes and squares of different sizes in Lansbury and are linked with open and landscaped land. This adds to the visual interest and distinct uniform character of Lansbury.

Where the old Lansbury predominantly comprised of terrace houses, the area now accommodates houses and flats. The area encompasses a suburban feel, with pockets of open space and mature landscaping on some streets such as Canton Street. The streets do not feel significantly enclosed, with buildings set back from the road and the street frontages reasonably defined by walls and planting.

The group of residential buildings in the south-west corner of the Conservation Area are particularly important historically. Baring House, Gladstone House, Granville House, Overstone House, Northcote House, Playfair House, Colborne House and Spearman House, as well as the residential buildings along Saracen Street, were among the first post-war buildings to be built. They are characterised by the orthogonal composition of buildings set within and around green spaces and by its mature landscaping. They form a large, intact example of town planning from the start of the 1950s.

Subsequent developments have added to the hotchpotch appearance of the Lansbury Conservation Area. This was a consequence of the prolonged construction and completion of the estate, in which Lansbury was the subject of planning concepts, architectural design and changing trends in housing policy. The area also includes several statutory listed landmarks which contrast to the restraint of the majority of the residential buildings. At the junction of Upper North Street, Canton Street and Grundy Street, is the Grade II listed Church of St Mary and St Joseph Roman Catholic Church, by Adrian Gilbert Scott, 1951-4. Built as part of the 'Live Architecture' exhibition of the Festival of Britain, the church is brick constructed with concrete vaulting and moulded brick banding at each of the three main levels. As one of the very first Roman Catholic churches designed after the Second World War, it is remarkable for its plan-form which was designed to allow the congregation to be close to the altar. Regarded as old fashioned when it was built, the church can now be appreciated for the handsome quality of its workmanship, materials and design. Its massing is among the most ambitious and satisfying of any post-war church, and it is now recognized as Scott's finest church design.

The Grade II listed Trinity Methodist Church on East India Dock Road was also part of the 'Live Architecture' exhibition and designed by Cecil Handisyde and D Rogers Stark, 1950-51. It is an example of an English non-conformist Church in a Modern idiom. The concept of the church entailed meeting rooms and recreational facilities as well as a worship space. Restored in 1975-6 by Edward Mills, the church exposes a reinforced concrete frame and is of yellow brick, pre-cast concrete panels and copper sheet cladding. It was widely published and became a model for subsequent churches of many denominations.

Around Crisp Street, the 19 storey Fitzgerald House dominates the skyline although its architecture is not as memorable as the nearby Clock Tower, which is now an essential part of the architectural identity of modern Lansbury. The red brick Clock Tower originally dominated Market Square, enclosing the view from the principal road originally leading into the Square. In addition to its function as a clock, it was designed to serve as a viewing point over the surrounding neighbourhood. The tower is essentially two interlocking reinforced concrete staircases above which the clock and

its mechanisms are mounted. The scissor-like form of the staircase is expressed externally, intersecting and creating a series of diamond shaped windows open for view, with the landings designed as a series of balconies. As the stairs only meet at the top and the bottom, it enabled one to be used for going up and the other for coming down, with the public passing each other in opposite directions.

The market place was designed as a formal open space with shops and a library, now central to the whole of Poplar. The open market square accommodates temporary stalls and is pedestrianised. The Chrisp Street market is surrounded by ground floor shops with two storey residences above overlooking the market square.

## **Land Use**

The Lansbury Conservation Area is predominantly residential in use. Additional to the two Grade II listed churches, there are a variety of smaller scale institutional, educational and office buildings, such as the Grade II government offices on East India Dock Road. The east end of the Conservation Area mainly retails around the Chrisp Street market, with residential housing and offices circling the main market square. There are several schools within the Conservation Area, namely the Mayflower Primary School, Bygrove Primary School and the Grade II listed Susan Lawrence Primary School, all of which are set in ample grounds.

## **Scale**

The residential buildings are predominantly low-rise in scale and range between 2 to 4 storeys throughout the Lansbury Conservation Area. The occasional higher flats exist to the west of the Conservation Area, but generally do not rise above 6 storeys, as restricted by the LCC at the initial stages of planning Lansbury. Yet, the first post-Festival developments at Lansbury, built in the mid-late 1950s are high-rise mixed developments, with a prevalence of 11 storey blocks and 4 storey maisonettes.

## **Open Spaces**

The most notable open space in Lansbury is the Market Square in the Chrisp Street shopping precinct. This is a large space, approximately 70m x 60m, and is defined on three sides by shops with maisonettes above. The distinctive Clock Tower is one of the most recognisable features of Lansbury. Although not the first of its kind, it is an important prototype for similar shopping precincts built throughout the country.

The Lansbury Conservation Area does not include any formal squares of the kind found in many other historic areas, but the modern housing is characterized by the principle of organizing dwellings around small neighbourhood green spaces. This can be clearly seen in the earliest buildings at the western end of the Conservation Area. There are pockets of green spaces between Gladstone, Grenville and Overstone Houses, between Hopkins and Russell Houses and between Playfair, Northcote, Colborne and Spearman Houses. In later phases, as at Elizabeth Close and Chilcot Close, houses are also grouped around a small area of green space.

## **Views**

The area is characterised by many distinctive views. The straight lines of East India Dock Road create long views to the west and east, including the composition of early 1950s residential buildings on the north side of the road, from Baring House to Trinity Church. The St Mary and St Joseph Roman Catholic Church is also highly visible from the local streetscene, particularly through Upper North Street, Canton Street and Grundy Street. Its stepped profile dominates the local townscape while its short spire is visible on the skyline. Panoramic views also exist in the area, with the towers of Canary Wharf setting a backdrop to the smaller scale of Poplar, highlighting the distinction between the low-rise character of the Lansbury Conservation Area and its developing metropolitan surrounds.

**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. 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 Lansbury is described in detail in the Appraisal in the first part of this document.

In Lansbury, 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.

## Listed Buildings in the Conservation Area

### Grade II

- 14 – 26 Upper North Street
- Church of St Mary and St Joseph, Upper North Street
- Trinity Methodist Church, East India Dock Road
- Department of Health and Social Security, 133 East India Dock Road
- Gate and End Piers to 133 East India Dock Road
- 153 East India Dock Road
- Susan Lawrence and Elizabeth Lansbury School, Cordelia Street

### Locally Listed Building

- George Green's School, East India Dock 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 Manual for Streets, 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.

East India Dock Road is the major traffic route along the southern edge of this Conservation Area. Despite its more residential surrounds, Upper North Street which cuts through the Conservation Area from north to south, suffers from heavy, speeding traffic.

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**

There is potential for redevelopment to the north-western part of the Lansbury Conservation Area, namely The Blessed John Roche Catholic School site and its immediate surrounds. A high quality, sensitive new building could restore a sense of pride to the junction at Canton Street, Upper North Street and Grundy Street, opposite to the St Mary and St Joseph Roman Catholic Church. The site's current unkept condition is unsatisfactory. An appropriate development which is consistent and respectful to the historic character of the area is desirable. Across the road at 14-26 Upper North Street, this early 19<sup>th</sup> century, stock brick terrace at 3 storeys requires immediate attention and renovation to restore the group of Grade II listed buildings to its original quality.

The renovation and reuse of the Trinity Methodist Church is also sought. After previous pre-application meetings, the Council is still awaiting a viable planning application for the potential reuse of the church building,

Throughout the Lansbury Estate, street lighting could be replaced with higher quality and more regular lighting. Missing street signage should also be replaced.

East India Dock Road is itself a major traffic arterial, with traffic permeating north through Chrisp Street and Upper North Street and through the local residential streets. Despite road markings, further measures to calm the traffic is required, for example the introduction of speed humps at regular intervals particularly along the northern section of Upper North Street, to minimise the speeding traffic. Road markings and other highway infrastructure needs to be reapplied in a more sensitive and subtle way to significantly enhance the setting of the Lansbury Conservation Area. Currently the oversized road markings on Annabel Close, marking a speed limit of 20km does not act as a deterrent for over zealous drivers. Such a reduction of speeding traffic is imperative and should be enforced, particularly around the local primary schools.

Due to the evolved nature of the area which is predominantly residential in character, it should be investigated whether any design strategies can be introduced to meet both residential and commercial parking needs. It is necessary to curtail the amount of

on-street carparking, particularly the off-spill of Chrisp Street patrons requiring parking, along the perpendicular Ricardo Street. Cars parked on both sides of Ricardo Street have narrowed the road width for moving vehicular traffic. Options to reduce the traffic and to relocate commercial parking should be sought, in order to preserve and restore the character of the Lansbury Conservation Area.

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

Mature tree planting exists and align the residential streets to the western part of the Conservation Area, on streets such as Canton Street and Pekin Street. Lush planting also greets East India Dock Road in front of the Grade II listed government offices at 133 East India Dock Road. Apart from the open space quadrangle adjacent to Trinity Church, the communal amenity space in between the flats of Hopkins House and Granville House and the little pockets of open spaces such as Elizabeth Close and Chilcot Close, the Lansbury Conservation Area is very much urban in feel, despite the original intention. The quality of execution of this development in time for the Festival, showed that the country had not fully recovered from the Second World War, with some areas in Poplar appearing exhausted. The opportunities for resolved open spaces must be explored to provide soft landscaping at paved areas between buildings. The recreational spaces including the basketball courts and school play areas display stark expanses of concrete areas.

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](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:

Mile End Old Town Residents Association

English Heritage [www.english-heritage.org.uk](http://www.english-heritage.org.uk)

The Georgian Group [www.georgiangroup.org.uk](http://www.georgiangroup.org.uk)

Victorian Society [www.victorian-society.org.uk](http://www.victorian-society.org.uk)

20<sup>th</sup> Century Society [www.c20society.org.uk](http://www.c20society.org.uk)

Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings [www.spab.org.uk](http://www.spab.org.uk)

**Listed Buildings at Risk:**

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

<check against Register>

**Any other threats to the Conservation Area**

(to be written at public consultation stage)

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

(to be written at public consultation stage)