



Three Mills

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.

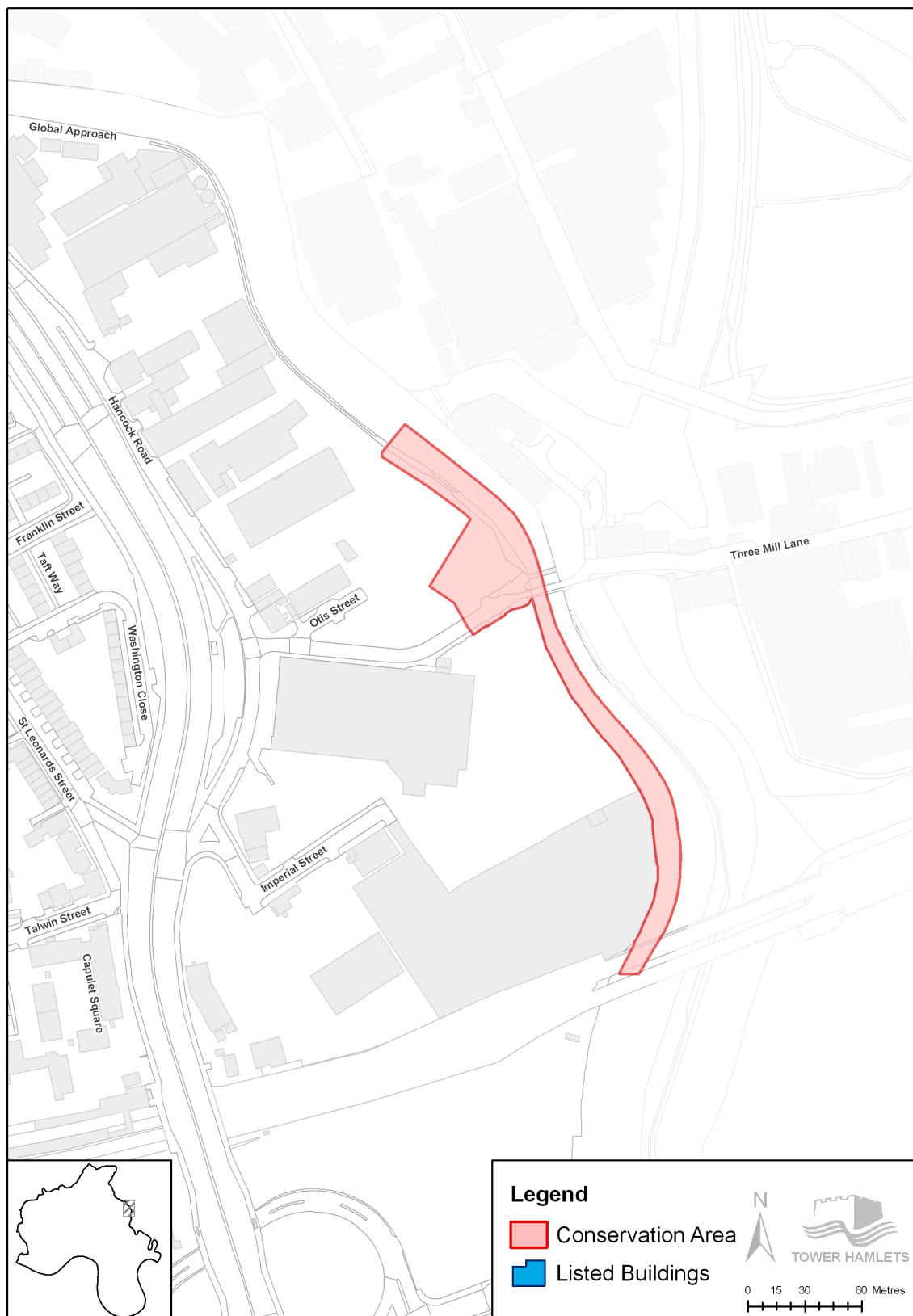
This guide has been prepared for the following purposes:

- 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.

This Conservation Area was designated to complement the Three Mills Conservation area in the London Borough of Newham, on the other side of the river.

Most of Three Mills lies on the east side of the River Lea, within Newham, and the part within Tower Hamlets is a small area on the west bank of the river. (the river is the boundary between the two boroughs).

The two authorities share responsibility for the enhancement of the riverscape in this location, and Tower Hamlets has designated the small area to the west of the river in order to ensure that development respects the character of the historic industrial quarter on the east side.



THREE MILLS 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 Three Mills Conservation Area was designated in September 1971 to complement The London Borough of Newham's designated Conservation Area. Its purpose is to safeguard and provide design control in the setting of the listed structures, in particular to the towpath surfacing, landscaping and any future development adjacent to the River Lea. The area is of considerable significance as it contains unique examples of 18th and 19th century industrial architecture.

History

Industrial activity had taken place on the River Lea for a long time, from dyeing and calico in the 17th and 18th centuries, to the production of gunpowder in the area. Milling was a characteristic of the area since the 16th century.

The first mills in the area were established at Stratford Langthorne Abbey in the Medieval and Tudor times to grind grain for the bakeries that supplied bread to the City of London. This was until the mills fell into disuse after the Dissolution. Whilst milling continued along the River Lea, by the 18th century, the mills used the ebb tide to power machinery. In 1727, Three Mills (a man-made island) was purchased privately by Peter Lefevre who operated the group of buildings, comprising the two tide mills and its associated distillery buildings. Constructed in 1776 with a brick front and timber-framed internal structure, The House Mill was used as a tidal grain mill. The Clock Mill, dating back to the mid 18th century but destroyed by fire, was rebuilt in 1817. This incorporated the original octagonal brick clock tower of 1753. Although originally purchased for alcohol distilling, the House Mill operated until the Blitz in 1940. It now belongs to the River Lea Tidal Mill Trust and operates as a museum. The Clock Mill continued to be used for milling and distilling until after 1945, where its site was converted to film studios and offices. All buildings on the Three Mills site was restored and converted by Julian Harrap Architects from 1989-1997.

Character

The character of the Three Mills Conservation Area is defined by the Clock Mill and the House Mill as the centrepiece of the area. As approached from Three Mills Lane across the River Lea, the House Mill, Clock Mill and associated distillery buildings are seen, linked by granite paving.

The House Mill is now the oldest surviving and largest tidal mill in the country and represents the qualities of both the pre-industrial and industrial periods. Its brick faced frontage and weatherboard rear conceals its timber-framed structure. It has a doubled ridged, steep roof with 12 dormer windows lighting its two attic storeys.

Opposite the courtyard is the Clock Mill, a substantial tidal water-grain mill built of brick with timber floors and supported by iron columns. Altered over the years, the Clock Mill retains its corner tower, and is faced in brick with pointed gothic windows. Later additions to the Clock Mill included two drying kilns with dentilled eaves cornices, conical slated roofs and cowls. Entirely gutted of its fittings, including its grinding stones and wheels, the Clock Mill is now used for residential housing.

Land Use

Within the Three Mills Conservation Area in Newham are three statutorily listed buildings, including warehouse buildings of 19th century industrial architecture. On the west of the River Lea, in Tower Hamlets, the Conservation Area covers the towing path for pedestrian access and part of the Tesco car park. It has been agreed that an allocation of car parking spaces would service visitors to the House Mill, which has been restored as a museum.

Scale

Any future development in proximity to the Three Mills region must respect the existing scale, proportions and character of the House Mill at 3 storeys (plus 2 attic storeys) and the Clock Mill at 4 and a half storeys. The Conservation Area designated by

Tower Hamlets on the west side of the river seeks to control the impact of any potential development on Three Mills.

Open Spaces

The River Lea is one of a network of rivers set within the open lands of Mill Meads, east of the Conservation Area. The open and unenclosed feel of the towpath is an important characteristic of the area.

Views

The River Lea is significant in defining the visual character of the Three Mills area and is a historical reminder of the city's dependence on water-power and industrial activity in the 18th century. The Conservation Area safeguards important townscape views, in particular the view east across the River Lea from Three Mill lane. Other views include panoramic views towards the House Mill and Clock Mill via the Three Mills Lane approach and to the gas works of Bromley-by-Bow as a backdrop to the river.

Summary

This is an area of particular special architectural and historic interest, illustrated by its rich history and significant architecture, dating from the 18th century and earlier. The character and appearance of the area, as described in this appraisal, define its special qualities. There are some inappropriate buildings near 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. 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 Three Mills is described in detail in the Appraisal in the first part of this document.

In Three Mills, 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 lies within the boundary of the Bromley-by-Bow Masterplan.
- The Area is covered by the Leaside Area Action Plan, and the Bromley-by-Bow North Sub-Area is planned to be an area of considerable change. The part of the Conservation Area in Tower Hamlets is identified for mixed-use development.
- The River Lea forms part of the Blue Ribbon network, and its towpath part of the Green Chain network.

Listed Buildings in the Conservation Area

There are no listed buildings in the Three Mills Conservation Area in Tower Hamlets. However, there are several listed buildings in the adjacent Conservation Area in Newham.

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.

Three Mill Lane is the important historic route which runs through this area across the river to the east. There are several areas of historic road surfacing and paving which should be protected as a valuable reminder of the area's past.

Works by statutory services (gas, electricity, water etc) have the potential to damage historic ground surfaces or ancient underground structures. Early consultation with the conservation team is encouraged for any works.

Opportunities and Potential for Enhancement

The current land use as a car park does not do justice to the historic or architectural value of the Three Mills area. The proposals in the Area Action Plan to redevelop the area with a mix of uses represent a significant opportunity to enhance the riverside area.

Any proposals should respect the scale and presence of the historic mill buildings, particularly those closest to the river. In practice, this means that any new development should not be more than 3-4 storeys high in the setting of the mills. New development should not mimic the architectural style or details of the mill buildings, but should be high quality, and reflect the robustness, simplicity and attention to detail of the historic industrial buildings.

The high quality of the historic paving is a key characteristic of this area, and new developments should give special attention to the quality of the public realm.

Trees, Parks and Open Spaces

The River Lea itself is an important key open space, and part of a much longer network of open space running north to south along the eastern edge of the Borough.

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 demolition within a Conservation Area. Unauthorised substantial or complete demolition of a building within a Conservation Area is illegal and it is therefore essential to obtain Conservation Area Consent before works begin.

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 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:

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| 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 |

Any other threats to the Conservation Area

- The Lea Valley will be experiencing considerable new development in the coming years. When considering development nearby, the setting of the Conservation Area and the adjoining Three Mills Conservation Area in Newham must be carefully taken account of.

Priorities for Action (1-5)

1. Work up joint management plan with LB Newham and British Waterways.
2. Prepare and implement a nature conservation strategy with Natural England.
3. Improve links to the Conservation Area from Bromley-by-Bow.
4. Investigate and implement improvements to street surfaces and lighting.
5. Undertake a views study to ensure that setting of Conservation Area is preserved.