



# SNPF Community Consultation

Stakeholder Research Report

September 2018



GRACECHURCH

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# Introduction and Background

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The Spitalfields Neighbourhood Planning Forum (SNPF) is a group of local volunteers who, through seeking community involvement, will produce neighbourhood planning policies for the Spitalfields area. They have been designated by London Borough of Tower Hamlets for this purpose.

Part of the work of the SNPF is to undertake widespread community and business engagement to ensure the policies are based on local priorities. From this evidence base they will develop a plan which will be subjected to an independent examination and agreed by the community in a local referendum of businesses and residents at the end of the process. Once agreed, the local policies become legally binding.

The initial phase of public consultation was designed to gauge the "needs and priorities" of the neighbourhood. It comprised of an online quantitative consultation exercise and a qualitative consultation among key local stakeholders and interest groups. Alongside these initiatives the SNPF have also been researching the 'primary data' generated by the Office for National Statistics through the National Census and surveying initiatives undertaken by the Local Planning Authority (Tower Hamlets).

This Report covers the findings from the qualitative phase of the public consultation. During this consultation, members of the SNPF committee spoke with representatives of the most important organisations in the area (as identified by the Committee). These organisations included: larger businesses, representatives of business organisations locally, Tower Hamlets Council, the housing associations with significant representation in the area, civic society and amenity groups focused on Spitalfields, community organisations and elected representatives.

The qualitative interviews were carried out by members of the SNPF committee however, to ensure fair and impartial reporting of these interviews, the transcripts and summary notes have been analysed by Gracechurch Consulting, an independent research consultancy. This Report covers the findings of this analysis and has been written by Joanna Bolton (research consultant) and reviewed by Ben Bolton, Managing Director of Gracechurch Consulting who is a Full Member of the Market Research Society.



# Executive Summary

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## What do stakeholders value about Spitalfields?

- The area is valued for its diversity, vibrancy and strong sense of community. For residents this is about the rich diversity of cultures, while for businesses this is predominantly about the successful mix of business and residential found in the area.
- Stakeholders value the architectural heritage of the area; the markets, the Church, the restored Georgian buildings.
- Spitalfields is seen as a constantly evolving community, one that doesn't and shouldn't stand still. Businesses value the way Spitalfields embraces change and aspires to constantly improve and adapt. Residents are positive about change but express concern about ensuring the unique feel of the area is not lost.
- The convenient geographical position of the area is valued. Transport links are good for workers commuting in and tourists visiting and being on the edge of the City, while having a thriving residential community, gives unique appeal as a place to both live and work.

## What hinders stakeholders in the way Spitalfields works now?

- Increasing business rates/rents is a key issue for business stakeholders, potentially making the area unaffordable for small businesses.
- Fear of cultural homogenisation as small businesses are forced out of the area to be replaced by large retail chains.
- Refuse collection and street cleanliness is an area that LBTH is seen to be failing at, causing issues for both businesses and residents.
- The current road system is not thought to be coping with the increase in traffic in the area causing frustration and concern.
- Residents identify significant problems with anti-social behaviour, strongly linked to the night-time economy. Drug usage, prostitution, begging, homelessness and noise disturbances are becoming significant negative issues for residents.
- The lack of affordable housing is another issue for residents. High demand for private property in the area is pushing up rents generally, which it is feared will result in less demographic diversity.

## How could the Neighbourhood Forum's policies make Spitalfields better?

Overall, policies need to focus on creating a successful balance between the continued growth and economic success of Spitalfields, and ensuring the existing local community thrives and benefits from this success. The SNPF should look to focus policies to:

- Protect diversity through making affordable business space available for new/small businesses and considering the impact of any proposed new developments on small businesses. Ensuring sufficient affordable housing of a good quality: thus maintaining a sustainable diverse community
- Provide support to the Bangladeshi community to revive Brick Lane; specifically looking at the unique visual culture of Brick Lane, careful use of colours, improved signage etc. and allow owners the freedom to create their own identities.
- Develop a strategy to broaden evening activities, away from just food and alcohol, to create a more diverse and sustainable range of activities: culture, art, theatre, sport etc.
- Run a full consultation to improve the flow of people, both pedestrians and vehicles, exploring potential pedestrianisation of busy areas and road closures.
- Protect and improve existing green spaces (specifically Allen Gardens) while identifying potential for more, through either new developments or small areas of existing unused land.



- Protection of existing historic buildings – not just facades but the interiors should also be considered
- Consider both the style and function of new developments to ensure the unique culture of Spitalfields is not adversely affected



# Methodology

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The SNPF committee identified a sample of 54 local organisations and representatives to include in this part of the community consultation. They were contacted and invited to take part in a 30-minute interview to discuss their views on what the area needs in terms of planning and development (see approach letter in Appendix A.).

A total of 27 stakeholders from various local stakeholder organisations agreed to participate in the research (a full list of respondents can be found in Appendix B.). Interviews took place between 13/2/2017 and 20/4/18.

Interviews were conducted by members of the SNPF committee, following a semi-structured interview guide (see Appendix C.). Conversations typically last for 30 minutes. When possible, interviews were recorded, and the recordings transcribed to be made available for analysis. When interviews were not recorded, interviewers took notes (of varying consistency and quality) which have been made available for analysis.



# Main Findings

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## WHAT DO ORGANISATIONS VALUE MOST ABOUT SPITALFIELDS TODAY?

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### Unique vibrant community

Stakeholders representing both businesses and residents value the diverse and vibrant community that exists within Spitalfields. For businesses, the emphasis is predominantly on the mixed use of the area where both businesses and residents successfully co-exist. For residents, the emphasis is more on the cultural diversity and how people from very different backgrounds come together to create a unique community.

Business stakeholders strongly value the unique mix of both business and residential found in Spitalfields and feel this creates a vibrancy and community not found in other parts of London.

*Diversity. Vibrancy. The different uses side by side. We know that sometimes it's quite difficult, but the vibrancy of Brick Lane alongside the residential area of the Brick Lane hinterland creates a unique culture. (Rachel Blake, LBTH)*

*It is completely mixed use and that's exactly why I love it. So, office occupants, fashion retail, food and beverage, the traders market, the parts market, the public spaces and the residents - we have got a blend of everything. (Jason Devlin, Spitalfields Estate)*

Larger businesses feel the vibrancy of the area is particularly appealing for employees. Being located in an interesting environment which people can experience during lunch and after work is seen as a way of attracting and retaining talent.

*Interesting public realm, vibrancy and community - you have to manufacture that at Broadgate, but it's embedded in Spitalfields. I think you'll see the private equity firms and hedge funds that will want to be in a more vibrant area move here – they're fed up with the stuffiness of Mayfair. (Mike Meadows, British Land)*

*It's a much more vibrant area than where we were before, there's more sense of community life, there's a range of people that live here, not just a place of work. ... The other business districts feel sterile in comparison, I really value that. Those other places feel much more contrived. ...it's much more innovative in terms of places to eat and good value, and it's very high quality. That view is shared by my colleagues. (Mark Mansell, Allen and Overy)*

Residents also value the range and variety of businesses in the area and feel this contributes to a unique community where businesses and residents can thrive.

*I love my neighbours, I love the variety of small businesses and things to do. I love its vitality. (Christine Whaite, Friends of Christchurch)*



*It is unusual in London because London is much more usually a smart area and a poor area, and they can be quite close together but they are not usually all mixed together in the same place and you get that overlap in Spitalfields which is unusual ... it is a pretty rich mix... but it's a kind of rich mix in that the restaurants are good, the houses are good the businesses are good. It's all piled in together. It's a village on steroids isn't it really? That's why it creates and attracts interesting characters.*  
(Rupert Wheeler, Spitalfields Society)

The diversity of cultures living and working in the area is valued predominantly by residents however businesses also acknowledge the cultural diversity and feel it adds to the unique vibrant atmosphere of the Spitalfields area.

*There's a mix of different ethnic communities. As in Muslim, Bangladeshi, English. It's becoming very European as well. And the fact that there is a series of urban historic events that we, as a community, are just one layer of an ongoing, constantly changing cultural mix.* (Matthew Piper, Spitalfields Community Group)

*We love the fact that there are old East Enders here, there is a Bengali community here as well as other cultural communities. There are professional city workers, there are hipster, arty characters alongside people who have lived here longer and who have maintained and developed and looked after the beautiful old Georgian properties. I think it is that melting pot that Spitalfields is that we really appreciate.*  
(Andy Ryder, Spitalfields Parochial Church)

Spitalfields, specifically Brick Lane, is thought to have the largest concentration of Bangladeshi people outside Bangladesh, creating a compelling cultural mix within the area that attracts tourism.

*Brick Lane, outside of somewhere like Bangladesh, is quite a big draw for Bangladeshis, so you're looking at the largest concentration of diaspora outside of Bangladesh. So, we were looking at that and saying, is it something that's very important to us as a community? ... we felt it was unique, if you look at how Bangladeshis aren't generally quite as forward. So, if you look at New York, it hasn't quite got the feel that it's got here.* (Saif Osmani, Bengali East End Heritage Society)

## **Architectural heritage**

Stakeholders value the architectural heritage within the area; the markets, the Church, the restored Georgian buildings and the Asian influences found on Brick Lane.

*Its grand architecture which is aesthetically nourishing. I lived opposite the north-east flank of the church for many years and woke up to see the glory of Hawksmoor's Portland stone every day. It made me feel good.* (Alistair Brown, Friends of Christchurch)

*The historic residential streets bring a lot to the table. It's all very atmospheric and lovely.* (Jason Zeloof, Zeloof LLP)

*So, it's things like the Kobi Nazrul Centre, the community centres, and areas of significance, so a line of shops, things like lamp posts, for example, and those kinds of architectural features that are important to recognising this area as quite unique.*  
(Saif Osmani, Bengali East End Heritage Society)



*I think it's got to be the heritage of the Huguenots, where they lived, where they worked, the street names. All of it has got to be, is what is left of Huguenots culture. I think that's what we all come here for and that's where the visitors come, they just want to learn more and more about these amazing and quite extraordinary people. So that's what I value the most. (Charlie De Wet, Huguenots of Spitalfield)*

## **Evolving community**

Both resident and business stakeholders feel that the community that exists within Spitalfields is constantly evolving. Historically, it has successfully absorbed and adapted to new cultures, which is largely seen as a positive characteristic of the Community.

Businesses value the way Spitalfields embraces change and aspires to constantly improve; creating a dynamic culture which is attractive to certain businesses. Residents are also positive about the evolution of Spitalfields, but express concern about ensuring the unique feel of the area is not lost for the sake of a desire to continually redevelop the area.

*It [Spitalfields] is a constant evolution and things continue to change and I think that's also part of what makes Spitalfields quite successful. We use an awful lot of the history of Spitalfields, it helps us to work out how and why we manage the estate. For example, regarding the waves of immigration through Spitalfields over the years, we see this as just another transition and another part of that evolution and the site could be completely different in another 20/30/50 years' time. (Jason Devlin, Spitalfields Estates)*

*I don't want to see it [Spitalfields] frozen as it's the energy and the activity and the aspect of change which are really important to the District. (Toby Brown, Old Spitalfields Market)*

*This area has been in flux for centuries. It would be a disaster if we made it a museum. There's enough policy to protect the Georgian houses, and we have to encourage growth. (Jason Zeloof, Zeloof LLP)*

*One doesn't want to preserve the 'status quo', that sounds too static. But keep what is here, and good. Which is the small businesses. (Oliver Leigh-Woods, Spitalfields Trust)*

*I also think of people just not caring about the heritage, or even just not understanding why it's even important so probably it's just enormous demand for growth and rent and rates and there must be some managed growth instilled in the area somewhere. Can you imagine what would be like if 20 years times if we just saw the same again? I mean how many high rises would be in Brick Lane? (Charlie De Wet, Huguenots of Spitalfields)*

## **Convenient geographical location**

The geographical location of Spitalfields is valued by residents and businesses. The good transport links enable visitors and workers to easily access the area, although there are some concerns that more thought needs to be given to the flow of visitors coming from various stations.

*There are lots of people who use the advice centre who were referred by other London boroughs. The transport links are valuable, we've withstood the test of time from that point of view. We would lose all of that if we went to Dagenham. It wouldn't be the same. We're ingrained in the geography of the place. (Karen Hart, Toynbee Hall)*



Spitalfields' proximity to the City and the fact it has a thriving residential community, gives it a unique appeal as both a place to live and work.

*I think also there is something about the heritage and the built environment that is very unique, especially so adjacent to Liverpool Street and the city fringe. (Rachel Blake, LBTH)*

*Primarily, being at the boundary of the City but not being in the city so that it was a place in which people can start small business and have markets and draw business from the city, but small enterprises could start. (Gentle Voice, Spitalfields Life)*

Spitalfields is also considered to be part of 'cool' East London which has over recent years been associated with more creative and innovative industries.

*Here we have enough proximity to the technology sector on Old Street but we embrace other industries – it's cool East London. (Sam Aldenton, Second Home)*



### **Increasing business rates and rents**

For business stakeholders the main impediment is the increasing business rates and rents; potentially making the area unaffordable for small businesses.

There is a sense that the Brick Lane restaurant trade is in decline as owners struggle to deal with rent/rate increases and therefore lack the ability to invest.

*Rising rents...people [are] being priced out of the area and as a whole that [is] having a detrimental effect on the Spitalfields area and as the area becomes more generic, becomes less unique as a lot of smaller businesses and independents and creative people are forced out. (Gary Means, Alternative London Walking Tours)*

*The rents are just creeping up, creeping up, every year and so are the rates now. I don't see a bright future for us restaurateurs, especially in Brick Lane. (Guljar Khan, Brick Lane Restaurants Association)*

*So this place, that is defined by markets and the availability for affordable work spaces, that's really what's been key to this community for centuries now. That's very much challenged at the moment by rising property prices. (Gentle Author, Spitalfields Life)*

*You've now got chains at the top of Brick Lane. I'm not going to be judgemental about the kind of chains but there will soon be a real issue about the cost of business units on Brick Lane itself. And the Truman brewery and the kinds of businesses that operate there. The impact of business rate changes. I would hope that the way we sustain Brick Lane and what we like about Brick Lane is helping those small businesses to stay there. (Rachel Blake, LBTH)*

### **Cultural homogenisation**

Both residents and business stakeholders fear cultural homogenisation could occur if small businesses are not supported and retail chains are allowed to move into the area.

There is concern over the number of large-scale developments offering only large footplate office/retail spaces that have been permitted, replacing sites that previously housed small and diverse businesses. It is felt that further developments of this nature will have an irreversible impact on the cultural uniqueness of Spitalfields. Indeed, some feel this is already happening and beginning to negatively impact the culture, economy and social balance of the area.

*I see the changes, pubs closing and the Fruit and Wool exchange, which contained over 100 small, local businesses and that's been shut down and gone to the wall, and that's been replaced by one single corporate international law firm. (Gentle Author, Spitalfields Life)*

*In the market, many of the shops and restaurants almost seem to be lost these days to the flagships and brands, and large corporates can afford to have one or two of those, small business don't. And that makes the area bland and we want to protect the identity by protecting that balance between small businesses and large ones. (Matthew Piper, Spitalfields Community Group)*



*Spitalfields Market is very unimaginative. It's a bit of a shame that they've got all those chains in there. Some celebration of Brick Lane, celebrating the diversity of the area, would be a great thing to do – it's a shame to have lost that. (Sam Aldenton, Second Home)*

### **Inadequate refuse collection and street cleanliness**

Both business and residents feel the local authority is failing to provide adequate services with regards to refuse collection and street cleanliness which is impacting the overall appeal of the area.

*Everyone hates the waste – the services are totally rubbish! (Krissie Nicolson, East End Trades Guild)*

*I came to the Mile End market on Saturday and the streets around us were covered in litter and bags of rubbish piled up which is a poor illustration of what could be done. I think the amenities provided by the local authority on the very simple level could be much better. (Toby Brown, Old Spitalfields Market)*

### **Flow of traffic**

There is a view, held by both residents and stakeholders, that the current flow of traffic within the area is not working. The increase in popularity of the area has resulted in an increase in both pedestrian and vehicle traffic that the existing system is struggling to cope with.

*Parking and traffic and roads in Tower Hamlets is just very tricky to get right because everyone has their own rat run that their entire life depends on it, but I think the sense of enclosure is to do with all the cars and so thinking about how cars could be managed in the area. (Rachel Blake, LBTH)*

*General circulation and access we are still pretty much dealing with the 19th century pattern and it's struggling. (Rupert Wheeler, Spitalfields Society)*

Some recognise that there may be conflict between residents and businesses as to how best to improve this aspect; residents may wish to reduce traffic, while businesses are looking for efficiency of flow rather than a reduction.

*So, there are a lot of issues of controlling the circulation which has a lot to do with the fact that it is this mix of residential and business use and what generates the conflict is that the two have very different access requirements One wants peace and quiet and the other wants busy, busy, busy all the time. (Rupert Wheeler, Spitalfields Society)*

### **Anti-social behaviour**

Resident stakeholders especially, identify significant problems with anti-social behaviour in the area, strongly linking it to the night-time economy. Specific issues highlighted include drug usage, prostitution, homelessness, begging and noise disturbances. There is a feeling that the Local Authority has failed to act responsibly when issuing late night licenses; choosing perhaps to maximise revenues even though there is a lack of resources to enforce licensing and insufficient police to deal with behavioural issues.

*One of the biggest problems is vagrants and drug addicts and the homeless. I'm not talking about recreational drug use. People posing on the street. They're not customers of leisure premises. Some of it is connected to Daniel Gilbert House. The drug dealing that feeds into that and the drug dealers around Allen Gardens. But it's not a planning point, it needs the authorities to get on top of it. (Jason Zeloof, Zeloof LLP)*



*Night time economy – we have one block here, the residents rightly and understandably complain about the anti-social behaviour, the noise, drug dealing a bit of prostitution – nothing like it used to be but there's still some. (Paul Bloss, East End Homes)*

*I think it all comes down to resources. If you look at Westminster, they have an equally busy area, busier area, but they have better resources therefore it's fairly well managed. In Spitalfields, we've got the licensing aspects, the hostels, a flux of new developments, but no resources to throw at this area and the police in particular, if you look at the number of police on duty here, it's hopeless. (Matthew Piper, Spitalfields Community Group)*

*Excrement, urine, drug needles in alley ways, it could all be improved. There's lots of drug dealing on this street which is a problem for the surgery. This street is apparently worth £30K/week in terms of drug dealing, plus a lot of prostitution. More policing could help with that, moving them on or stopping them. The cleanliness of this alleyway is a horror, especially with the City close by, it feels really out of kilter. (Dr Ali Uddin, NHS Brick Lane surgery)*

### **Lack of affordable housing**

The lack of affordable housing within Spitalfields is a key concern for resident stakeholders. The increase in demand for private property which the area has been experiencing, has had the effect of pushing up rents generally. There is concern that this will result in certain demographic groups no longer being able to afford to live in the area, ultimately impacting the diversity of the community which is so highly valued.

*Affordability is a problem, even in social housing. Private sector is coming in and pushing up rents. But ultimately, we're running out of housing stock. (Murselin Islam, Spitalfields Housing Association)*

*We're very conscious of the lack of affordable homes and people having to move to somewhere more affordable. Our aim as an organisation has always be to look at ways of increasing truly affordable homes. (Paul Bloss, East End Homes)*

*This could all become absorbed into the greater City and the identity of this place is completely lost, it becomes a kind of Knightsbridge, or a place where a lot of rich people are living in expensive houses and you've got a lot of chain stores, and offices and nothing else. (Gentle Voice, Spitalfields Life)*

The increasing desirability of the area is also thought to have led to property speculation, with prime properties remaining empty, as seen in Kensington and Chelsea.

*Well too much money is not good for the historic aspect... it's destroying a lot of historic fabric quite unnecessarily. And there are threatening to be too many houses that are just standing empty because the people can afford to own them without using them. It's an interesting and a fairly unusual threat in terms of residential areas in the country although it certainly afflicts places like Kensington and Chelsea. (Rupert Wheeler, Spitalfields Society)*

The social housing available within the area is generally of a poor quality, lacking basic facilities and lacking investment. Due to the lack of social housing within the area, people whose desire it is to stay within the community are now being offered housing outside the borough.

*There's not enough housing, it's a very bad problem in a densely populated area like this. Lots of people who need to be rehoused don't want to leave the Borough, but*



*that's what they're being offered, lots of people are being moved out of the Borough.*  
(Dr Ali Uddin, NHS Brick Lane surgery)

*Some of the housing is not up to scratch in terms of quality, Jacobson House for example is very poor quality. They don't have lifts which is a problem for the elderly and people with multiple chronic illnesses, they could fix that.* (Dr Ali Uddin, NHS Brick Lane surgery)



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## HOW COULD THE NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANNING FORUM'S POLICIES MAKE SPITALFIELDS BETTER?

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Overall, the policies developed by the SNPF need to focus on creating a successful balance between the continued growth and economic success of Spitalfields, whilst ensuring the local community benefits from this success and the history/heritage of the area is respected and preserved.

Although there is strong consensus over how the SNPF could improve the area, for example development of green spaces, improving traffic flow, ensuring considerate development; there are also some opposing views between resident and business stakeholders. This is particularly stark on views of the balance of residential versus business property usage, where some resident stakeholders feel that, despite the area being designated a business zone, there should be more residential development in the area, whereas some businesses feel there is already too much residential property and that more should be converted into business units.

*Another thought for Brick Lane District Centre, there's encouragement for retail and frontages, I think there should be encouragement to change residential into commercial in certain cases. In some ground floor places it would be good within the town centre, changing residential to commercial would be good, we should be encouraging work space. (Jason Zeloof, Zeloof LLP)*

*I know that the Council slightly regret allowing all the houses to be turned back to houses and it's a shame more of them aren't businesses still because it's swung too residential and you get that strong residential focus and that's when the politics changes and then it's quite hard to maintain that rich mix of uses and scales and wealth and endeavour. (Rupert Wheeler, Spitalfields Society)*

*It just seems relentless, wherever you go, it's just shops and restaurants and it would be quite nice if there was more residential, and affordable residential, for people who'd need homes near the city. (Charlie De Wet, Huguenots of Spitalfields)*

### **Protect community diversity**

Both resident and business stakeholders highly value the diversity found within Spitalfields. There is a strong desire to ensure the history of supporting small business enterprise is maintained and that there is adequate safeguarding the provision of affordable housing. Stakeholders make various suggestions around how the SNPF could develop policies to protect this diversity.

- Making affordable business spaces available for new/small businesses. Ensuring spaces of small square footage remain within the area and looking at ways to reduce costs without necessarily having unsustainably low rents, for example, office sharing, short term contracts, shared facilities.

*Some sort of protection within the plan, to look after smaller businesses, smaller enterprises within the area, to prevent them all being swallowed up by large corporations with a lot of money. (Matthew Piper, Spitalfields Community Group)*

*Providing the right kind of workspace is key. What's unique about Blossom street is 300,000sq ft in total but the largest floor plate is 20,000 square foot. We think the smaller businesses will be key – lots of leases will be shorter than the larger banks usually take. We think the key to retaining the smaller businesses that are already here is mixing them with the new ones. (Mike Meadows, British Land)*



*I'm against affordable offices and subsidy. It has unintended consequences around rent doubling if they grow. What planning policy should encourage is about lease terms and fit out costs, sharing services and meeting rooms. Affordable might be about, month-by-month paying. Particularly in the tech sector, small businesses can be high value so it's not so much about cost for them. (Mike Meadows, British Land)*

- Considering the impact of any proposed new developments on small businesses in the planning approval phase. Maintaining a sustainable small business community should be a priority when new developments are evaluated.

*They (the local council) ought to use planning, they could limit shops joining together, they need to be proactive in supporting the local economy and they're not. (Gentle Author, Spitalfields Life)*

- Preventing large developers buying up adjacent lots to turn into larger buildings, which results in the area being owned by a few, powerful developers.

*So the policy adopted at Redchurch Street might be one way that the Council could retain the diversity and rich mix that we were talking about earlier on ... what policy will preserve that richness and stop it becoming monocultural or dominated by one big developer or landowner... you can't stop them buying stuff and assembling things through the planning process but what you can do is stop them putting it all into one lump and putting one massive building on it or one use. (Rupert Wheeler, Spitalfields Society)*

*They may be in a conservation area but the conservation doesn't seem to be good enough and we are very concerned of the pressure that the City and big developers have upon the area and they desire to take whole blocks that are divided into lots of little buildings and turn them into a monoplane building that takes a whole block. That's a real danger in this area the moment and that's happening at Fruit and Wool Exchange, it's threatened at Norton Folgate and it's happened over half the market, and it's a real threat to anything that's not listed. (Tim Whittaker, Spitalfields Trust)*

- Ensuring sufficient affordable housing of a good quality: so maintaining a sustainable diverse culture.

*The edginess has brought in new people, to a degree. They are sort of in front of the City expansion ... but they're going to have to go soon because property prices are going up, rents are going up there isn't the art spaces available any more. So, there is a churn and it is changing but for us it's how we continue to try and maintain some degree of demographic diversity within that framework. (Paul Bloss, East End Homes)*

### **Provide support to the Bangladeshi community to revive Brick Lane**

Both resident and business stakeholders value the unique Bangladeshi heritage found in Spitalfields but recognise that the restaurant trade on Brick Lane is struggling to compete with the influx of new eating and drinking options now available in the area. There is appetite, both from stakeholders representing the Bangladeshi community and other stakeholders, for the SNPF to explore ways in which to support the revival of Brick Lane.

- Preserve and improve the unique visual culture of Brick Lane; use of colours, signage, lamp posts. At the same time, allowing business owners to have the freedom to create their own unique identities that develop organically.



*It's also part of the visual culture. If I look at it, it's not just something we take out of archive and say "hey, this is your Bangladeshi" which happens a lot in certain circles, other heritage projects as well. Sometimes it's about creating the new, and I think, that dynamism. (Saif Osmani, Bengali East End Heritage Society)*

*Take, for example, the lamppost issue, where there's a petition happening at the moment, it is and was designed as a bespoke design for the area a couple of decades ago. And that was replaced with what I would describe as quite generic street lamps, I mean, Brick Lane could look like anywhere else in England. In a way, I think that's a little bit short-sighted, we find it short-sighted, because what's unique about London is that it's able to absorb all those aspects of ethnic minorities. (Saif Osmani, Bengali East End Heritage Society)*

- Consult with the Bangladeshi community and jointly develop a cohesive strategy with the restaurants to improve their commercial offering: improved menus, quality service, quality décor/ambience/environment.

### **Develop a strategy to broaden evening activities**

Stakeholders feel there is too much focus on food and drink within the area which is creating many of the anti-social behaviour issues previously highlighted. To offset this over reliance on food and drink, stakeholders suggest developing opportunities for a more diverse and sustainable range of evening activities, e.g. arts, music, sport etc.

*We are not here to sanitise the area, but neither are we here to give it over entirely to night clubs and so on. It need to be about much more than just food and drink. In the West End it's about theatres and galleries and late-night shopping and lots of other things in Spitalfields it seems to be about food and drink and it shouldn't be. (Rupert Wheeler, Spitalfields Society)*

- Review the strategy for issuing licenses for the area to ensure resources do not continue to be overstretched and that a balance between food and drink and other entertainment options exists.

*I think licensing constraints and planning constraints. I think we would be and we are very keen to – our events licence for example doesn't include Saturdays and Sundays I think only to 4pm, I think we are quite keen to push it to 6pm but we are not going to do that until after we've looked at the planning for here rather than muddying the waters. (Jason Devlin, Spitalfields Estates)*

*I think rather than just constantly fighting licences and food outlets we ought to be responding in a more positive manner saying that we accept that we are an inner city area we accept that we have attractions twenty four hours a day but they need to be managed in that rich diverse way that we were talking about right at the outset and not just become a monocultural drinking den or a kind of fast food outlet. (Rupert Wheeler, Spitalfields Society)*

- Look for opportunities to create more public space for the community within new developments, to allow for cultural events during the evenings and weekends.

*I think it's providing spaces for people to do things for free or affordable amounts that would be great ... There is little live music available now, street theatre - I don't see it. I think we owe it to the younger generations to make sure there are thriving cultural activities going on. People are keen to do them it's just providing the spaces for them. (Toby Brown, Old Spitalfields Market)*



*That needs an element of partnerships of people being brave enough to let things happen in the spaces there are in parks and in public spaces and in buildings and we try and encourage it by being pro-active about it and determinedly saying we want to have artistic and cultural activities available to people in the area. (Toby Brown, Old Spitalfields Market)*

### **Consult to improve traffic circulation**

Both resident and businesses feel there are significant issues with the current road system and the flow of pedestrians. Although some efforts have been made to address this, the current sentiment is that this has not been done comprehensively enough and that a full community consultation should be undertaken.

*British Land, Exemplar, Truman Brewery, these are big landowners who could actually - if we engage them actively – help collectively improve things and put things right and resolve a few bottlenecks and open up opportunities so that business could sit better with residential and big business can sit better with small business. (Rupert Wheeler, Spitalfields Society)*

*I think that the planning forum should probably look into ways of controlling permit ability in certain parts of Brick Lane and the area. Maybe commission some sort of a study where certain streets like Fournier are protected certain times of the week. (Matthew Piper, Spitalfields Community Group)*

*Getting rid of car parking spaces on Brick Lane, some of the bays, that would really help. It's going towards Carnaby Street or Covent Garden. I can see there being no parking on Brick Lane and specific hours for servicing in terms of traffic. (Jason Zeloof, Zeloof LLP)*

### **Protect and improve existing green spaces/identify potential for more**

Stakeholders acknowledge the importance of the existing green spaces in an area of very limited green space.

- Allen Gardens is highly valued by the residents, but stakeholder suggest improvements that are needed: maintenance of and enhancements to play equipment, making the space safer (addressing the issues of drug users/drinkers in the space) and potentially developing a community café/centre.

*The only green space we have is Allen Gardens, it is fairly plain at the moment, but it's amazingly well used, but it would be nice to have slightly better facilities there. At the moment there's a slightly unpleasant part to it, because it's used for drugs and drinking etc. (Matthew Piper, Spitalfields Community Group)*

*Allen Gardens, we have not done anything with, but yes, we have some dreams about how we would love to see that park a much safer park for children to play in. We believe there are some easy wins there that could benefit the park, the farm, the play group, the neighbourhood – blessing Spitalfields and keeping the green space the same size it is. (Andy Ryder, Spitalfields Parochial Church)*

- Some suggest looking for opportunities to develop 'pocket parks' in unused small sites that are not of interest to developers. These could potentially be turned into community gardens for residents and workers to use.



*I'm sure that there is more that we could do around pocket parks and I think one great thing that the neighbourhood forum could do within its plan is identify opportunities for pocket parks. (Rachel Blake, LBTH)*

*It might be a good idea to look at what open space there is, because there is quite a lot of open space that is not green open space or even useful open space, various courtyards, derelict sites etc. (Rupoert Wheeler, Spitalfields Society)*

- The SNPF could also look to increase the amount of green space by ensuring new developments incorporate 'green' elements for public usage. At the same time there is an opportunity to look at incorporating 'green development' within existing housing estates e.g. court yard gardens, raised beds etc.

*There must be space on the estates for further greenery or planting. There is some really lovely planting just north of Cheshire street in the Weaver's Ward rather than the Spitalfields Ward, but instead of having bollards to stop cars you just have big railway sleeper planters and there are lots of ideas like that that I think the neighbourhood forum would be great to bring forward that kind of thing. (Rachel Blake, LBTH)*

### **Protect existing historic buildings**

Stakeholders agree that Spitalfields contains some very important and special architectural heritage that should be preserved, however there is some disagreement over how much preservation is still needed. Some feel that all the important buildings are already protected and that the forum should focus on policies around new developments; whilst others feel there are still buildings/architectural features within the area that need protection.

*There's enough policy to protect the Georgian houses, and we have to encourage growth. We need to be careful not to cross the line into preservation. (Jason Zeloof, Zeloof LLP)*

*There's a real danger that we ignore, and only concentrate on superlatives. And therefore, if that happens, anything that isn't listed or isn't considered great architecture and grand is disposed of and lost. You'd end up with a very skewed view of the past. You'd only see the houses of the 'great and good' and the great thing about Spitalfields is it has all the rest, that is not listed, mostly. (Tim Whittaker, Spitalfields Trust)*

- Some also feel that the protection of the interior of historically important buildings, rather than just facades, is important. As well as preserving historically important engineering features, it could also be beneficial for smaller businesses by enabling more flexible workspaces.

*Some of those [buildings to be locally listed] may refer to the interior of the building where it has an interesting and fairly unique function like 106 Commercial Street. The old omnibus stable with those great big cobblestone ramps those are a of great social and economic historical value. Architecturally they are not much but engineering-wise they are pretty interesting. The building is not listed but that is as significant an element as the nicely gauged brick facade onto Commercial Street. (Rupert Wheeler, Spitalfields Society)*



*I think is very interesting it to look at what happened in Shoreditch with the tech industry, because what happened there is that you had all these empty spaces that were ex industrial because the cabinet and clothes making industries kind of left Shoreditch, and the tech industry grew up there quite naturally to begin with, nobody tried to make it happen there because those spaces were so flexible. (Gentle Author, Spitalfields Life)*

### **Consider impact of style and function of new developments**

In addition to identifying and protecting historical buildings, there should be careful consideration given to the impact of new developments within the area. This is about ensuring new developments are sympathetically designed to fit in with the historical architecture but also considering how the proposed use of new developments will impact the existing culture of Spitalfields.

*I am not personally against pastiche, and I think there are some opportunities in Spitalfields to do some developments that reflect the historicity of the area and could be done sensitively and well. So, height, retaining frontages, retaining buildings where possible and looking creatively at new-build so that it might bed in better with the existing architecture. (Andy Ryder, Spitalfields Parochial Church)*

*What we have here is an Urban Environment which has proved to be flexible, and very creatively successful for centuries and that needs to be respected. This idea that you just bulldoze that and put in street to street office walls is very short-sighted because that isn't what the future will be like. (Gentle Author, Spitalfields Life)*

*I believe for example that if the Spitalfields market were much more imaginatively organised, all the shops would do better, to me what it's really about isn't actually about money, it's about failure of imagination. (Gentle Author, Spitalfields Life)*



## Conclusions

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- There is a consistent view from stakeholders, representing both residents and businesses, as to what they value most about Spitalfields. There is a strong sense of it being a very special and unique part of London and stakeholders share the aspiration for it to continue to be so.
- There is overlap regarding the negative issues that both resident and business stakeholders experience. There are problems with traffic flow and anti-social behaviour impacting the whole community, that all agree need to be addressed.
- The increased popularity of the area is also creating potential issues for both residents and businesses as rents/rates for businesses and property prices increase. The negative impact of this is seen as being a loss of the diversity, both within the residential community and the type of businesses, which is felt to be at the heart of what makes Spitalfields special.
- Opinions regarding the future development of the area vary: some business stakeholders prioritise economic growth/prosperity, while some resident stakeholders place the emphasis on preserving and improving existing sites.
- Ultimately, the majority agree that the area should continue to be developed – or at least accept that it will happen - so the focus for development going forward needs to be on creating a balance between development for purely economic advantage, and development to provide community improvements. This needs to be sensitively managed while acknowledging that not every stakeholder's needs or viewpoint can be satisfied by the SNPF policies.

*We love the old buildings and they should be kept, however that doesn't mean you can't do other things and that you can't have beneficial development. We are operating in the real world and you can wish all you like that the world was just how you want it – but you can choose to do something, or you can do nothing. (Paul Bloss, East End Homes)*



# Appendices

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## Appendix A. Stakeholder Approach Letter/Email

Subject Line: Local Stakeholder Consultations: Spitalfields Neighbourhood Plan

Dear Fred/Mr Bloggs

I am writing to you in my role as a committee member of the Spitalfields Neighbourhood Planning Forum.

You may be aware that the Neighbourhood Forum is a group of local volunteers seeking community involvement so that over a period of (probably) two years we can produce neighbourhood planning policies for Spitalfields. We have been designated by London Borough of Tower Hamlets for this purpose.

Our work will be based on widespread community and business engagement and underpinned by a proportionate evidence base. Our plan will be subjected to an independent examination and needs to be agreed by the community in a local referendum of businesses and residents at the end. Once agreed, our local policies become legally binding and carry the same weight in planning decisions as those in the Tower Hamlets Local Plan.

In practice what that means is that we as a local community get more of a say over what our local streetscape looks like and how development in our area can be shaped better to reflect the needs and desires of local businesses and residents.

We are starting our community engagement by seeking to talk to representatives of the forty most important organisations in the area (including the bigger businesses, representatives of business organisations locally, Tower Hamlets Council, the housing associations with significant representation in our area, civic society and amenity groups focused on Spitalfields, community organisations and elected representatives). The feedback from these conversations will help us shape what questions we ask when we engage more widely with residents, workers and other businesses.

Would you be prepared to spend half an hour with a couple of members of the Spitalfields Neighbourhood Forum committee to share your thoughts on what the area needs and answer a few questions about how you/your organisation sees Spitalfields now and what it might like to see for the area in the future? We would very much appreciate your input and would be happy to meet you in your office or somewhere locally in Spitalfields to have the conversation.

Yours sincerely (if name known) or Yours faithfully (if name unknown)

<My Name>

Spitalfields Neighbourhood Planning Forum



## Appendix B. Full List of Respondents

Stakeholder Type	Respondent Name	Organisation
<b>LBTH</b>	Rachel Blake	LBTH Cabinet Member for Strategic Development
<b>LBTH</b>	Ellie Kuper-Thomas	LBTH Strategic Planning, Plan Making Team
<b>LBTH</b>	John Pierce	Weavers Ward, LBTH
<b>Business</b>	Sam Aldenton	Second Home
<b>Business</b>	Toby Brown	Old Spitalfields Market
<b>Business</b>	Guljar Khan	Banglatown Restaurants Association
<b>Business</b>	Krissie Nicolson	East End Trades Guild
<b>Business</b>	Mike Meadows	British Land
<b>Business</b>	Jason Zeloof	Zeloof LLP
<b>Business</b>	Gary Means	Alternative London Walking Tours
<b>Business</b>	Jason Devlin	JP Morgan (New Spitalfields Market)
<b>Business</b>	Mark Mansell	Allen & Ovary
<b>Business</b>	Jeremy Tarn	Tarn & Tarn
<b>Business</b>	Gentle Author	Spitalfields Life
<b>Civil Society/Residents</b>	Murselin Islam	Spitalfields Housing Association
<b>Civil Society/Residents</b>	Karen Hart	Toynbee Hall
<b>Civil Society/Residents</b>	Matthew Piper	Spitalfields Community Group
<b>Civil Society/Residents</b>	Andy Ryder	Spitalfields Parochial Church
<b>Civil Society/Residents</b>	Christine Whaite	Friends of Christchurch
<b>Civil Society/Residents</b>	Rupert Wheeler	The Spitalfields Society
<b>Civil Society/Residents</b>	Ali Uddin	NHS Brick Lane surgery
<b>Civil Society/Residents</b>	Mhairi Weir	Spitalfields City Farm
<b>Civil Society/Residents</b>	Jon Shapiro	SPIRE
<b>Civil Society/Residents</b>	Charlie De Wet	Huguenots of Spitalfields
<b>Civil Society/Residents</b>	Saif Osmani	Bengali East End Heritage Society
<b>Civil Society/Residents</b>	Tim Whittaker	Spitalfields Historic Buildings Trust
<b>Civil Society/Residents</b>	Paul Bloss	East End Homes



## Appendix C. Interview discussion guide

We have two parts to what we'd like to talk to you about today. The first is we'd like your views on Spitalfields and how it works now and how it could work in the future, to benefit what your organisation does. The second is we'd like to tell you a bit more about the Neighbourhood Forum and we'd like to ask for a little more of your help in our activities.

### a) Views on Spitalfields:

What does your organisation value most about Spitalfields as it is now?

What hinders your organisation, in how Spitalfields works at the moment? Or what are the biggest problems you see that impact your business in Spitalfields at the moment?

How could the Neighbourhood Forum's planning policies make Spitalfields better? What improvements or changes would you like to see?

Is there anything else that you'd like to comment on about how Spitalfields could be improved?

### b) What the Neighbourhood Forum does, and your help:

The Neighbourhood Forum is led by volunteers from the community. Spitalfields is designated as a 'business area' so we have equal representation from businesses and residents on our Forum Committee. The Localism Act which was passed in 2011 means that, if we go through the right process (including lots of community consultation and a vote at the end), we can put in place neighbourhood planning policies for our area which give us as a community more of a say in how we shape the streetscape and the future development of the area. For instance, most of the precious green spaces we have in our area are not guaranteed in law as public spaces – so we think we'd like to change that and get the Neighbourhood Plan to give legal status to those green spaces so they can't be built on or interfered with. We have been designated by London Borough of Tower Hamlets to perform this role.

We're trying to make sure that our Neighbourhood Plan reflects the local community's interests (businesses and residents) – so we're going to run extensive community and business engagement with everyone over the period that we're working on the Neighbourhood Plan. We need help to do this and there are three immediate priorities we would like to explore with you:

i) The first is money to pay for administration. As a Neighbourhood Forum we can access a certain amount of Government funding but, quite rightly, the rules around what we can use it for are strict. One of the things we need more help with (particularly as most of our Committee members are in full time jobs so have limited time) is administrative support. We'd like to have someone on a part time contract to help us run our admin and we need contributions from organisations be able to pay them. If larger organisations (particularly the commercial businesses) could offer us £2-5k each, that would give us the kind of budget we need to afford this support.

ii) The second is 'in kind' help. Some organisations can help us with offering us their office space to run public consultations or our Committee meetings. Some might be able to help with offering pro bono professional advice (so we'd love the law firms and the digital design businesses, for instance, to help us by contributing time from their professionals for getting our planning policies to be legally robust, and getting our digital communications to be really engaging and informative). Others might be able to help with printing costs or running a survey?

iii) And lastly, we'd like to be able to send a short survey to your staff/members/supporters to get their views on how they feel about working in Spitalfields and what they would like to see for its development in the future. Workers who come into the area every day are an important group for us to understand and you could really help us by facilitating our short survey going out to your team here.

