



# **Limehouse Cut Conservation Area**

## **1. Character Appraisal**

## **2. Management Guidelines**

**London Borough of Tower Hamlets  
For Adoption 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2011**

We are always interested to hear your views. If you have any comments about this document they should be sent to the Development Design and Conservation Team at the following address:-

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If you have any queries regarding the Limehouse Cut Conservation Area Character Appraisal and Management Guidelines, or would like to meet with officers in person to discuss any matters raised by them please contact us by telephone on 0207 364 5009 or by e-mail, [conservation@towerhamlets.gov.uk](mailto:conservation@towerhamlets.gov.uk).

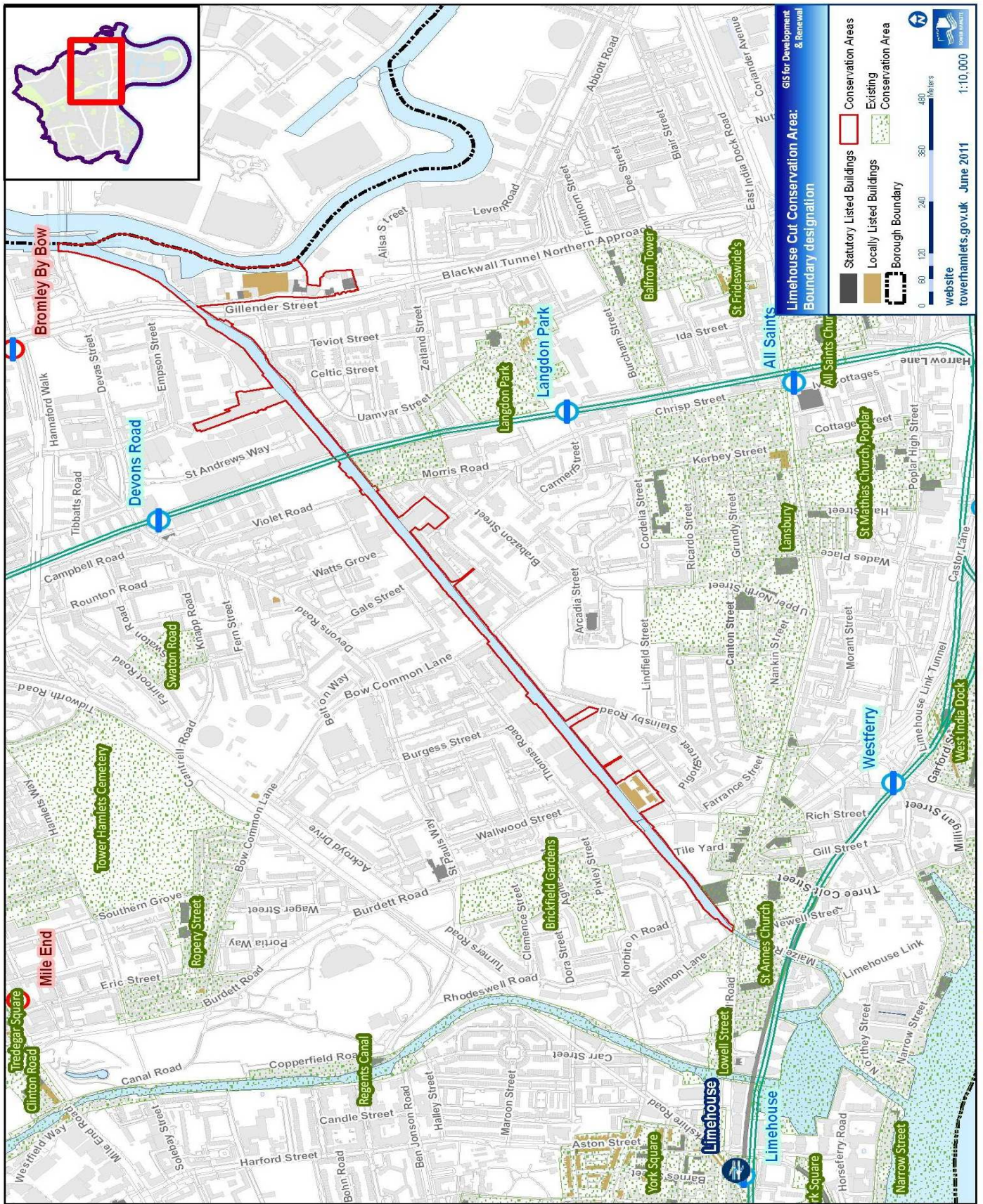
## Introduction

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 was prepared to accompany proposals to designate the Conservation Area and was revised following wide consultation. It was 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 assist those who have an interest in the area to understand the quality of the built environment and how they can protect, contribute to and enhance it.
- § 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.

# Limehouse Cut Conservation Area Boundaries



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# 1. Character Appraisal

## Overview

The Limehouse Cut Conservation Area is focussed on the historic Limehouse Cut and immediate hinterland, and runs south west from the River Lea to the Limehouse Basin. Included within its boundaries are the southern end of the River Lea and a section of Bow Creek which is the tidal part of the River Lea. Also includes important fragments of the areas historic past, such as a small remnant of the historic settlement of South Bromley along the west bank of Bow Creek, and a pocket of surviving Victorian development between the Limehouse Cut and Dod Street. The Conservation Area boundaries include all retaining walls, revetment walls and associated features on both sides of the historic cutting and its tow path. The substantial wall along the west bank of the associated part of the River Lea is also included within the area.

The Conservation Area is dominated by the waterscapes of the broad Canal, the River Lea and Bow Creek, and is characterised by the relationship of the buildings within it to the water. The buildings are diverse and span the history of the area from its largely rural origins, through medieval times when the buildings were associated with the River Lea, through its industrial heyday when the Canal and the River were commercial thoroughfares, to the present day when the waterways are enjoying a renaissance and evolving as an important resource for leisure and amenity. Much of the built fabric dates from that era when the canal was heavily industrialised and sat in a densely urbanised area.

The boundaries of the Conservation Area are closely drawn around the canal and the historic buildings adjoining it, as some sections of the canal side have been subject to redevelopment which fails to respect the character of the historic canal or develop a positive relationship between new and existing buildings. Creation of a positive relationship between the buildings adjacent to the canal and additional waterside activity will, it is hoped, be encouraged by the designation.

## History

The Limehouse Cut from Limehouse Lock on the River Thames to Bromley Lock on the River Lea was opened on the 17<sup>th</sup> September 1770. At this time the Canal cut through an area which was largely rural in character, although the hamlet of Bromley was already well established, having grown up around an ancient ford across the river and the Benedictine Nunnery of St Leonard, in existence by 1122. Bromley had expanded during the medieval era and following the dissolution of the monasteries, and was, at this time, a largely rural retreat with several large houses in spacious grounds. This can be seen in John Rocques map of 1746.

Today the hamlet of Bromley has largely disappeared, having suffered significant destruction and redevelopment at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and later. This started with the loss of the Old Palace in St Leonard's Street to be replaced by a Board School but continued after this. The newly formed Survey of London recorded 17 historic buildings within the Parish, but by the time of publication in 1900, four of these in addition to the Old Palace had already gone. By 1952 the architectural author Nikolaus Pevsner only notes two major historic buildings. Today, only the Drapers' Almshouses and the manor house of Bromley Hall survive to remind us of the long history of Bromley and the original character of the area. It is difficult to imagine the unspoilt riverside location the manor house once occupied, its present context isolated by the East Cross Route being very different. However, regardless of this, it is a very important fragment of historic Bromley. The Conservation Area at this point is included within an Archaeological Priority Area.

The Cut was one of a number of improvements to the River Lea Navigation recommended by John Smeaton. Construction of the Cut was authorised by the River Lee Act - an Act of Parliament obtained in 1766, and was carried out by Thomas Yeoman, the Lea Trustees' surveyor. It allowed River Lea barges bringing grain and malt from Hertfordshire to London, to short cut the long and difficult passage through the meanders in Bow Creek and around the Isle of Dogs, and ran in a straight line, more or less, at the foot of the minor bluff between the upper flood plain terrace to the north west and the lower flood plain terrace to the south east. The one and two thirds

mile long Canal took sixteen months to dig and was London's first canal. It was also one of the earliest canals in England. Its construction coincided with London's industrial growth.

Originally only wide enough for a Lea Barge of 13ft beam, this narrow width was soon determined to be a disadvantage and by 1772 a passing place had been introduced, this was swiftly followed in 1773 by the decision to widen the whole canal allowing barges to move freely in both directions.

By 1807 most of the canal had been widened to about 55ft. At this time, apart from the several late eighteenth century pot ash works, and a limekiln near Bow Common Bridge and various timbers yards and works at the Limehouse end of the canal, most of the canal still passed through fields.

However, the opening of the Regent's Canal Dock and ship lock just to the west of the Limehouse Lock, and its adjacent barge basin, began to encourage further industrialisation at the Limehouse end of the Cut. The Regent's Canal Dock specialised in the transhipment of coal from east-coast colliers into canal barges.

Whilst development along the Cut was slow at the beginning the advent of the railways accelerated it. Historic maps indicate that the railway lines had already been identified by 1848 together with an area for new housing and factories (Bromley New Town).

In 1850 James Rendel recommended improvements to the River Lea Navigation to allow barges of 19ft beam. The various works were carried out between 1851 and 1853 and it is likely that the works also included the widening of the Limehouse Cut to its present width of about 75ft. This final widening together with the arrival of the railways encouraged the industrialisation of both sides of this long straight section of canal.

In its heyday the Limehouse Cut was more or less fully lined with factories and warehouses on both sides. As the widest and most navigable waterway in the immediate hinterland of the West India and East India Docks, the Limehouse Cut

attracted port industries specialising in the processing or converting of imported raw materials. The Cut was also well connected to the Canal network in north east London and conveniently placed for chemical works processing the by-products of gas works.

The importance of this industrial link cannot be underestimated and development / redevelopment continued along the Canal into the 1950s, with the Festival of Britain at Lansbury influencing the style of building along the Canal.

The first Blackwall Tunnel opened for road traffic in 1897. An additional tunnel was added in 1967 and the road layout was radically altered. The road has a very negative impact on the townscape and isolates the area to the east of it.

Today many of the historic buildings that lined the Limehouse Cut have been destroyed either by bombing during the Second World War, or by the redevelopment and economic prosperity which followed it. Those buildings that have survived the blitz and its aftermath have been included within the Conservation Area because of the positive contribution they make to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.

These buildings form a part of, and reflect, the special character of this industrial waterway. The buildings referred to include the enclave of Victorian factories and warehouses along Dod Street, together with the industrial buildings at Barchester Street, Lusty's buildings on the North side of the cut and the industrial and public buildings on Gillender Street which back on to Bow Creek.

With the loss of so much of the historic environment along the banks of the Cut it is important that we preserve these remaining buildings as a reflection of the special industrial character of the canal, and its particular relationship to the River Lea. The buildings are a physical reminder of the industrial history of this part of the East End, where much of the working population was employed in the docks or warehouses or within factories processing and converting imported raw materials; when London was the greatest port in the world and the world's largest industrial city.



In addition to protecting the historic fabric and character of the area, the Conservation Area status offers the opportunity to enhance the character of the area through appropriate new development.

The historic development of the area can be explored further using historic maps held at the Tower Hamlets Local History Library, in Bancroft Road. Historic photographs are also available here.

## **Character**

The character of the Conservation Area is that of a broad Canal and towpath, presently a tranquil, calm open space, with plentiful wildlife but formerly an important transport link between the River Lea and the Regent's Canal Dock. This historic industrial character is reflected in the adjoining industrial sites located close to the Cut to take advantage of the accessible location it offered. Also the associated parts of the River Lea and Bow Creek.

Today, the use of the open space of the waterways is more for leisure and the amenity and wildlife value of the water are really important, but it is the strong industrial heritage and the three contrasting waterscapes which define the Conservation Area's special character, reminding us of the social history of Poplar and the part played by manufacturing in that history, much of which is now lost, partly as a result of the blitz, partly as a result of economic and social changes.

The character of the Conservation Area is comprised of those elements which are special to the canal and river environment, including the brick lining of the canal, the towpath and key buildings and revetment walls adjoining the waterways, which because of their important history, architectural value and robust industrial aesthetic are felt to make a positive contribution to the significance of the Limehouse Cut Conservation Area.

The buildings included form four clusters, groups of buildings which as a result of their character and proximity to the water and one another contribute positively to the Conservation Area.

### **South Bromley (Bromley-By-Bow)**

This northern section of the Conservation Area includes the dramatic peninsula between the River Lea and Bow Creek and important remnants of South Bromley separated from the main Hamlet of Bromley by the creation of the Limehouse Cut and isolated further by the extension of the East Cross Route.

Included within this cluster are a number of important buildings along Gillender Street, which is the surviving southern part of St Leonard's Street and the northern part of Brunswick Road. Of these perhaps the most architecturally important are Bromley Hall and Bromley Public Library.

Bromley Hall is the oldest of these buildings having Tudor origins. Built between 1482 and 1495 it was the manor house of South Bromley and is a rare survival of a substantial brick structure from the early Tudor period. In 1531 with the dissolution of the monasteries, the building was seized and refurbished for personal use by Henry VIII. The building's present appearance relates largely to an early 18<sup>th</sup> century remodelling, but recent repairs have uncovered significant elements of the original Tudor building including wall painting inside.

Bromley Library (1904-06) is a handsome public library building. Baroque in character the building has a rusticated basement, two storeys and attic with balustrade. The frontage has four recessed bays centrally and is divided by giant Ionic columns.

The sympathetic repair of Bromley Public Library and Bromley Hall, together with the introduction of the new containers by Containerspace Ltd, (Nicholas Lacey and Partners 2004), have begun regeneration of the area but potential for further enhancement taking advantage of the riverside location remains.

Also important between this historic streetscape and the west bank of Bow creek are the former 1909-11 LCC Fire Station and the massive mid-1930's bonded warehouse at 24 Gillender Street designed by Hal Williams and Company of Bedford Square, with an exposed reinforced concrete frame. The concrete columns on Gillender Street are only expressed at intervals between the continuous concrete beams and the continuous brick panels in the lower part of each tripartite storey. Unusual windows, good brickwork and tapered brackets at the tops of the concrete columns all add to the interest of this bonded warehouse which was mainly used by importers of wine, sherry and port. To the north at 23 Gillender Street are impressive grey brick buildings with corbelled cornices, and tall recessed bays under large round headed arches with keystones. They are now the only surviving buildings of John Currie and Co's Four Mills Distillery, which formerly covered the entire area between the southern half of Gillender Street and Bow Creek. The tall building was the still house where pure alcohol or spirit was distilled. The adjacent two storey building was the spirit store, and the breached front wall is all that survives of the old bonded warehouse. The pair of semi-detached cottages at 21 and 22 Gillender Street were built after the distillery closed. They mark the northern end of this historic streetscape.

### **Empson Street Industrial Estate (former Lusty's furniture works)**

Two buildings on this large site on the north side of the Cut are included within this Conservation Area. The oldest is the former steel-framed timber shed built by William Lusty and Sons 1930, sole British manufacturers of "Lloyd Loom" furniture. This substantial twin roofed timber shed bears the evidence of the two integral gantries which once extended to the middle of the canal and were each equipped with an overhead travelling crane for the unloading of timber from barges into the shed. Although the cantilevered parts of its two gantries have been cut off, the exposed end of the western gantry is still visible. This 1930s shed (known to Lusty's as the Gantry Building), is the only building on the site to have survived the fire started by incendiary bombs on Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> September 1940.

Lusty's erected new buildings following the fire and an interesting example of a mid twentieth century factory can be seen adjoining the steel-framed timber sheds. This

concrete framed building attracts attention by its unusual window to void relationships. Whilst the end wall facing the canal is traditional in appearance, the side elevations are defined by the fully expressed concrete columns and by the high proportion of glazing to wall.

### **83 Barchester Street**

These buildings sit on the south side of the Cut, west of Morris Road and the Spratt's Factory buildings. The traditional north lit factory building (1939) adjoining Balladier Walk on the east side of the group, was built for the Cooperative Wholesale Society Ltd and was intended as a Joinery Works. It is constructed of well baked Fletton bricks with metal windows. It has a distinctive factory type saw tooth roof profile on the elevation to Balladier Walk and is visible from the Canal.

On the west side is the large c1956 extension with a narrow slither of frontage onto the canal, extending southwards as the 'works' first, and then the large rectilinear 'warehouse building' which reaches Barchester Street. This replaced Edicos Ltd's edible oil warehouse following bomb damage to the site

Between the two buildings is an access lane which reaches almost as far as the canal. This is reached only by passing under the link building frontage onto Barchester Street, and being enclosed by a gate gives the feeling of a courtyard space. Those elevations which front onto this space retain traditional elements characteristic of the furniture workshops which were located on the Cut, with original timber loading doors still remaining, in contrast to the metal windows of the external envelope of these properties.

These buildings are a rare survival of this period and make a positive contribution to the Limehouse Cut Conservation Area. The massing onto the canalside, particularly from the east, is of special importance, as the pitched north light raking roofs above the massive, largely plain brick walls exemplify the industrial character which formerly lay on both sides of the canal.

The western building, especially when viewed from the south (Chrip Street) and along Broomfield Street further west, demonstrates clearly the massive yet compact form of this later industrial building, complete with its own smaller north light roofs, lift towers and other rooftop additions. This building incorporates interesting detailing with an impressive entrance and decorative brickwork and is reminiscent of the Festival Moderne style seen on the Lansbury Estate in Poplar close by and may well have been influenced by it.

The best view from the east is from the recently opened public terrace at Caspian Wharf, from where there are also excellent views of Violet Road Bridge (original 1890 brick piers and 1971 box girders) and the canalside elevation of the former Spratt's Biscuit Works (C1894-1904). This was the largest dog biscuit works in the world and whilst in the Langdon Park Conservation Area also makes a positive contribution to the significance and character of this Conservation Area.

### **Dod Street.**

Dod Street has a long connection with the labour movement. At its junction with Burdett Road it was historically a speaker's corner; speakers included the likes of George Bernard Shaw and William Morris. It also formed a meeting point for workers at times when there was trouble at the docks.

Today the inclusion of the area between the Canal and Dod Street recognises the special character of a number of Victorian factories and warehouses which developed as a result of the proximity of the canal, and which reflect the industrial history and character of the Canal.

Printers Gate and Towpath House were built c 1865 by Charles Dunk of Burdett Road as the western part of a steam powered courtyard cabinet works for Stephen W. Silver and Co. Since 1884 they were occupied by a firm of timber importers and furniture manufacturers, this changing only in the 1930s when the buildings became grocery warehouses. The conversion of imported timber to furniture for home and overseas

markets was one of the East Ends most important industries and these buildings are the only surviving former large nineteenth furniture factories in Tower Hamlets.

The Sail Loft (1872) built by Andrew Kilby of Limehouse, and the Spice Store (c1892) were erected as provision warehouses at Ramornie Wharf for the Australian Meat Company which imported tinned and fresh meat, meat extract and preserves from its factory at Ramornie in New South Wales. Although extensively repaired and altered since WW2, the Sail Loft retains its original cast-iron columns and timbers beams, whilst the Spice Store retains loading bays and a good example of a late 19<sup>th</sup> century wall crane for loading vehicles with goods for distribution. They are now the only surviving canalside warehouses in Tower Hamlets built for the storage and distribution of imported food.

These buildings are set around open courtyards which are an important element of their character and together with the small open fronted café at the Burdett End of Dod Street form a visually important canalside group on what was the most industrialised canal in Tower Hamlets.

Between the Burdett Road Bridge (1978) and the Britannia Bridge (1851-53) at the south western end of the Conservation Area, London's only surviving former marine distillation engineering works backs onto the towpath. The Caird and Rayner works at 777-785 Commercial Road designed and made sea water distillation plant for thousands of British and Foreign ships including "dreadnoughts" and Cunard Liners. Whilst these buildings are in the St Anne's Church Conservation Area they also make a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the Limehouse Cut Conservation Area.

## **Character Elements**

Along the length of the Limehouse Cut elements exist within the public realm which remind one of the canals industrial character and which are distinctive to this waterside setting. The brick lining of the Canal and the substantial retaining walls of

Kentish Ragstone, brickwork and other materials, sometimes layered together with a rich patina of age, which were required to retain both sides of the cutting containing the canal and towpath, together with mooring rings and mooring posts are best seen from the stone edged towpath. By cross referencing the present day locations of these retaining walls with historic maps, it is possible to identify their likely date and the wharves for which they were built.

The north-eastern part of the Conservation Area contains two very important locks Bromley Lock and the western of the two Bow Locks. Bromley Lock was the entrance to the Limehouse Cut from the southern end of the River Lea, which here passed through a tidal mill pond known as the Mill Head of the Four Mills. This Lock was reconstructed 1851-53 and the southern side of its lock chamber with the remains of one lock gate survive immediately east of the bridge carrying Gillender Street.

Also in 1851-53, old tidal gates in the narrow embankment between the Mill Head and Bow Creek were replaced by a brick and stone pound lock, which is the westernmost chamber of the present Bow Locks, and three bays of flood gates on the eastern side. A second pound lock of concrete was built alongside this in 1931-32 and the floodgates were reduced to one pair, while the extraordinary reinforced concrete towpath bridge was built across all three passages. The various gates have been modified since 2000 to exclude the high tides.

Elsewhere within the Conservation Area are granite setts, chunky historic railings and historic cranes, evidence of the areas rich history. Also bridges which pass over the canal.

The oldest is the 1851-53 Britannia Bridge, a brick arch bridge carrying the Commercial Road over the Limehouse Cut and is included in the St Anne's Church Conservation Area. It spans a former regulating lock of the same date and the brick and stonework is of high quality. The Violet Road Bridge retains original decorated abutments, and the early welded steel box girder bridge of 1971 carrying the road is of excellent design quality. One of the youngest bridges is Poplar Borough Councils 1929 Bow Common Bridge known locally as 'Stinkhouse Bridge'.

In addition to the historic features which can be seen along the Cut, there are a number of art projects which also contribute to the sense of place, in particular a mosaic of the canal and ceramic art work on an access to the Canal undertaken in 2004. Elements such as these are unique and their value should be recognised.

All these features make an important positive contribution to the significance of the Canal, and associated parts of the River Lea and Bow Creek. These elements help to create a distinct sense of place and uniqueness to the Limehouse Cut Canal Conservation Area, their retention and maintenance are important to preserve its significance.

### **Land Use**

The Conservation Area is largely comprised of open space and is a designated Site of Metropolitan Importance for Nature Conservation.

The Canal and towpath and associated parts of the River Lea and Bow Creek which form part of the Blue Ribbon Network and the London Green Grid, offer leisure and amenity opportunities and connect historic places within the Borough.

Associated with the waterways historically are commercial, light industrial and warehouse uses as seen in the adjoining buildings and included within the Conservation Area boundaries. Today some of these buildings are underused or vacant, e.g. 83 Barchester Street, and the opportunity exists for sympathetic development to enhance the character of the Conservation Area.

These are often large buildings offering flexible floorspace and a great canal side location, and would be suitable for a number of use. Conversion would need to respect the envelope and silhouette of these buildings. In some instances, redevelopment has already taken place adjoining the Cut, with new uses including residential use, a use compatible with the canalside location.



In developing these and other sites the opportunity exists to increase access to the water, encourage waterfront activity and increase the sense of security experienced upon the towpath. Policies within the London Plan require that the uses of the Blue Ribbon Network and the land alongside it should be prioritised in favour of those uses that specifically require a waterside location.

## **Scale**

The scale of historic development adjacent to the canal is predominantly low (3-4 storeys) and essentially human in character. No one historic building dominates the landscape by virtue of its height, but all sit comfortably beside the canal. The width of the canal adds to the overall feeling of the development adjoining it being low rise. Overall the consistency of building heights, bulk and massing and width of the canal combine to provide a sense of place, and overall experience of place. Thus scale and consistency add to the sense of calm that pervades the Canal.

Taller buildings can detract from the prominence of the canal in long views and interrupt the skyline interrupting the visual progression along the canal. The height and location of new buildings will require careful consideration, not just aesthetically but because of the danger of tall buildings casting shadow onto the water and causing damage to the ecosystem. Developers must consider the impact on the canal of loss of sunlight and overshadowing.

The traditional low-rise enclosure of the canal should be respected as this contributes to the special character of the various sections along its length, however, it will be important to increase access to and from the canal, and to increase waterfront activity and these elements will need careful consideration within development proposals.

## **Open Spaces**

The cutting containing the Limehouse Cut and its towpath is a linear open space linking the Limehouse Basin to the south-west and the River Lea to the north-east with the towpath running along between the canal and the south-western side of the

cutting. Although mostly built up on both sides, the unusual width of this canal cutting creates a feeling of spaciousness.

Elsewhere in the north-eastern part of the Conservation Area are the contrasting open waterspaces of the River Lea and Bow Creek, separated by the peninsula between the River Lea and Bow Creek bridged by Bow Locks. Currently little known and little used, the space on the peninsula is accessed from the Limehouse Cut towpath via an unusual floating towpath which allows access under the Blackwall Tunnel Northern Approach and Gillender Street. This is a strategically important link and was built by British Waterways with SRB funding in 2003.

The existing buildings on the peninsula vary in quality with a couple of mid twentieth century Lock Keepers Cottages, and single storey former engine house of 1908, a characterful building, in a Gothick style. Standing on this peninsula one can look west and see the River Lea and the narrow entrance to the Limehouse Cut and to the east Bow Creek; at low tide the difference in the heights of the two water bodies is dramatic.

Created within the new development of Abbots Wharf is a mooring basin with Stainsby Place to the rear of this. This has been carefully landscaped but needs more active frontages to enliven it.

Common to all these open spaces and enlivening them is the presence of the Canal and this should be the starting point for the design of waterside development. Access to the Canal and waterspace should be encouraged within new development. Use of the Cut by canal boats is desirable, and animates the area.

## **Views**

The straightness and broad width of the canal mean that views are long and diminish to a point on the horizon. They are calm and extend into the distance and are interrupted only by bridges. A consistency of heights along the canal contributes to a

feeling of tranquility. Providing contrast to this linear waterscape are the more open waterscapes of the River Lea and Bow Creek.

Forming part of the boundary at the north-eastern end of the Conservation Area is the listed c1870-1 road bridge built by the Imperial Gaslight and Coke Company to provide direct road access over the River Lea and Bow Creek. The simple elegance of this bridge forms an important view from Bow Locks, together with the listed gasholders on the Newham side of the Lea. In addition to closing a view it also provides an interesting viewpoint from which to look into the Conservation Area, the foreground of the view being the Locks themselves and the middle ground being formed by the massive former bonded warehouse at 24 Gillender Street, and the twin-roofed former still house at 23 Gillender Street, both within the Conservation Area and the backdrop being formed by Canary Wharf and some of the other developments upon the Isle of Dogs. This dramatic juxtaposition is illustrated on the cover of this document.

The listed gasholders are framed in views down the Cut and form an interesting end focus.

Where new development is proposed, proper consideration should be given to the opportunities to frame the waterspace, central to the character of the Conservation Area, and optimise views of it.

## **Summary**

This is an area of special architectural and historic interest illustrated by its rich history and robust industrial architecture, designated to protect its historic character, and to protect its broader setting and the associated part of the River Lea and Bow Creek.

Whilst the Conservation Area boundaries include surviving historic buildings, it is recognised that much of the historic context of the canal has been lost, and that what has replaced it varies in height, bulk and massing and is of varying quality. However, the surviving industrial buildings within and alongside the Conservation Area represent all stages in the 100 years of maximum industrial use from c1860 to c1960, and constitute one of the only two large former waterside industrial areas in the Borough,

indicative of the late C19th and early 20<sup>th</sup> century period when London was the largest industrial city in the world and the greatest port in the world. It will therefore be important that development adjacent to the canal and the river protects the setting of these important historic waterways and the settings of its surviving historic buildings, and this will be a key consideration when new development is proposed. Only by protecting the setting of the canal and the settings of its surviving historic buildings will the special architectural and historic character of this waterway and important former waterside industrial area be secured. The opportunity exists for appropriate new development to enhance the character and appearance of the Conservation Area, to open up access to the canal and encourage waterside activity.

The robust industrial character and appearance of the area as described in this appraisal define its special qualities and significance.

## **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. Conservation Areas, whilst having a special character and appearance of their own, which needs to be preserved and enhanced, also fall within the wider Council policy framework which seeks to create viable communities and to promote appropriate regeneration and development. This link is set out in the Council's Conservation Strategy. 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 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.

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 to the whole community, and their priorities, identified during the consultation process are reflected in this document.

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 may 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 the Limehouse Cut Conservation Area is described in detail in the Appraisal in the first part of this document.**

In the Limehouse Cut Conservation Area, 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, it is important to 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 (e.g. 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 and discussion through its pre-application planning advice service.

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 Statement 5 (PPS5).
- § At the regional level, policy 4B.1 of the London Spatial Development Strategy (or London Plan) consolidated with alterations since 2004 states that “The Mayor will and Boroughs should seek to ensure that developments...respect local context, history, built heritage, character and communities. The Limehouse Cut is included within the Mayors Blue Ribbon Network and policies 4C.11, 4C.12, 4C.13, 4C.20 and 4C.21 are particularly relevant.
- § 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’. The Core Strategy states as an objective that we will ‘Protect and celebrate our history and heritage by placing these at the heart of reinventing the Hamlets to enhance local distinctiveness, character and townscape.
- § The Conservation Area lies within the Leaside Area Action Plan.
- § The Limehouse Cut and associated parts of the River Lea and Bow Creek form part of the blue / green grid.
- § That part of the Conservation Area to the East of the A12 Cross Route is currently within the administrative boundary of the London Thames Gateway Development Corporation who is the local planning authority for the determination of significant planning applications in their area.

### **Listed Buildings in the Conservation Area**

The Limehouse Cut Conservation Area includes a number of Listed buildings at its eastern end however, it should also be noted that all of the mid and late Victorian, Edwardian and mid twentieth century industrial buildings, which have been included within the Conservation Area boundary, are considered to make a positive contribution to the character and significance of the area, which is a designated heritage asset. The only exception to this would be the modern industrial units near to Bow Locks, on

Gillender Street. The opportunity exists here for significant redevelopment of this key site to enhance the character and appearance of the conservation area.

## Grade II\*

43 Gillender Street, Bromley Hall

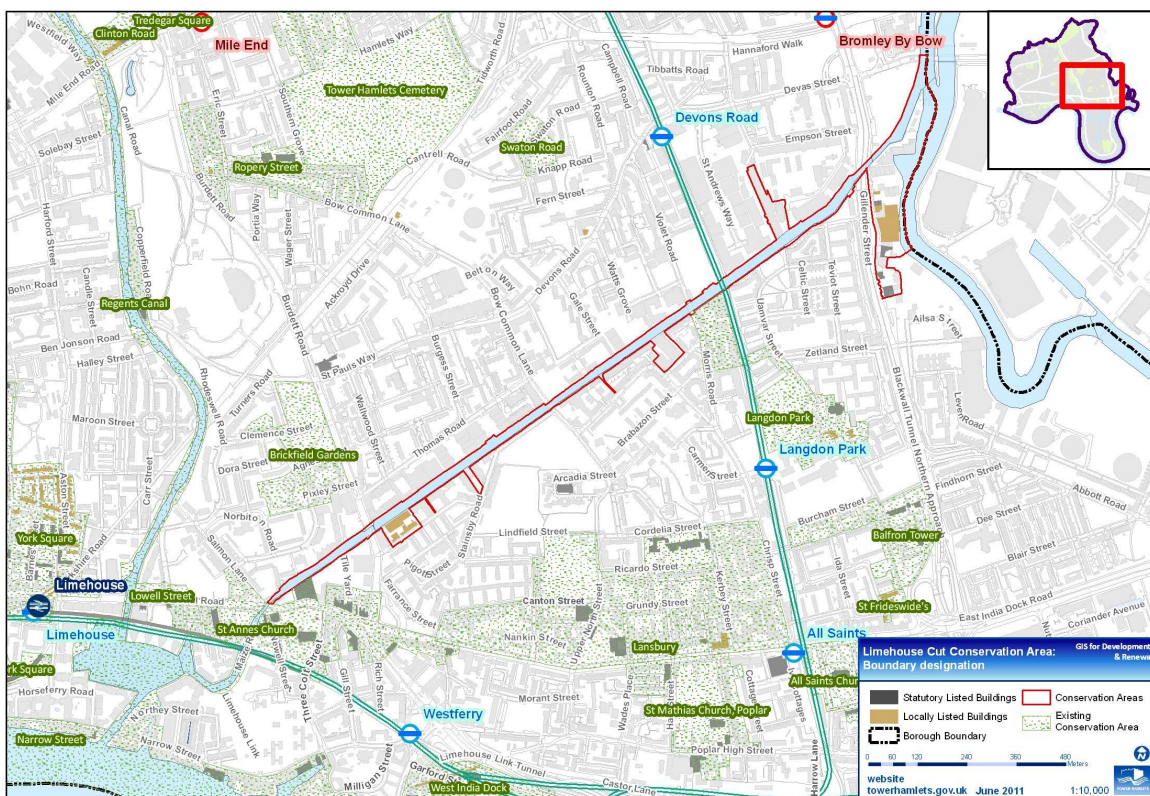
## Grade II

45 Gillender Street, Bromley Public Library

23 Gillender Street

38 Gillender Street, the LCC Fire Station

## Locally Listed Buildings



Ordnance Survey mapping with the permission of Her Majesty's Stationary Office (C) Crown Copyright London Borough of Tower Hamlets LA100019288.

Dowgate Wharf 22-23 Gillender Street

24 Gillender Street



Towpath House, Printers Gate, the Sail Loft and the Spice Store, Dod Street

The Conservation Area contains no Scheduled Ancient Monuments but parts of it lie within an Archaeological Priority Zone.

## **Highways and Transportation Issues**

The use of the canal and the quality of the public realm, 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.

In terms of the continued use of the canal as an environmentally friendly transport link it is essential that it should be properly maintained and regularly dredged. Waterways for Tomorrow seeks to encourage the transfer of freight from roads to water-borne transport where this is practical, economic and environmentally desirable. The Limehouse Cut is designated a commercial waterway by the Transport Act 1964. As such British Waterways are required to maintain the Cut in a suitable condition for use by commercial freight carrying vessels.

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.

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

Measures for improving the pedestrian and cycle environment should be investigated. Better integration of the different uses, signage and links to and from the canal should be considered.

In terms of works to the towpath it will be important to retain any canal side furniture which remains, mooring posts, rings and horse ramps together with Kentish ragstone retaining walls all serve to create a feeling of times gone by and any improvement works should build upon the existing elements rather than attempting to sweep them away.

The boundaries to the Conservation Area have been drawn to include two pedestrian accesses to the canal, one at Dod Street and one at Broomfield Street. These accesses are felt to be representative of the type of accesses that were common along the canal. Consideration should be given to how these accesses could be enhanced and sympathetically upgraded.

### **Opportunities and Potential for Enhancement**

At the present time the canal and the associated parts of the River Lea and Bow Creek are an underutilised resource. The Cut is an important link between places, an important open space and a significant heritage asset. The opportunity exists to improve the amenity, perception of safety, and experience of these historic waterways for all, increasing access to the canal and waterside activity and improving passive surveillance.

The Cut plays an active role in local life providing a sustainable pedestrian and cycle link (cycling should be in line with the towpath code for consideration cycling and the two tings campaign), a recreation asset for jogging and fishing and a transport link for recreational and commercial waterborne freight. Its use for all types of waterborne craft should be encouraged.

The waterspace must not be seen in isolation from the land simply as a backdrop but should provide a starting point for the design of waterside development; development must be planned in co-ordination with the water an integral part of a development. Significant benefits and enhancement to the Conservation Area can be achieved as a result of carefully designed appropriate development.

Consideration could be given to the preparation of an audit of existing street furniture, canal furniture, surfaces and street trees to inform a public realm and waterspace strategy to consider the following matters: -

- The enhancement of pedestrian accesses to the canal using more appropriate treatments and furniture.
- The enhancement of the existing area of open space at the junction between the Lea and the Limehouse Cut.
- The preparation of a design code for all waterside sites to protect the setting of the canal and the associated part of the River Lea and Bow Creek.
- Encouraging additional waterside activity, and enabling access to the water itself
- Encouraging waterbased uses, visitor mooring, water sports activities, water taxis
- Encouraging the use of the waterway for transport, for example for a two way passenger boat service, and recreation
- Reuse of vacant buildings
- Whether landmarks are appropriate and if they are where these might best be sited.
- Linkages and wayfinding for pedestrians and cyclists
- The role of ecology
- Lighting – a key way of preserving and enhancing the public realm whilst at the same time ensuring personal safety and a sense of well being.
- Safety and security. Inappropriate use of the towpaths by motorcyclists and at night is commonplace, and how this can be combated should be considered, increased access and waterfront activity may assist in encouraging passive surveillance.
- The appropriate repair and maintenance of the retaining walls to the canal banks.
- Towpath maintenance
- A unified approach to signage on the Canal network and interpretation of the environment. This will need to be accurate and informative.

- Encouragement of permanent moorings where appropriate.

The area surrounding the Limehouse Cut Conservation Area is diverse in terms of its uses and activities and the form and character of its buildings. The opportunity exists to ensure that new development delivers a more positive relationship between new and refurbished buildings alongside the Cut, and that it relates well to both water and street frontages. Constructive conservation will enable the existing sense of place to be protected and built upon.

Consideration could be given to identifying opportunity sites within and adjacent to the Conservation Area. High quality new development offers the opportunity for regeneration and the enhancement of the Conservation Area. Identification of these sites should be accompanied by guidance regarding the key opportunities offered together with the possible enhancements which their development may be able to deliver to the Conservation Area.

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

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.

The Canal and the associated part of the River Lea and Bow Creek are open spaces, and the area surrounding Bow Locks has the potential to become a more widely known about and used space.

### **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.

Where unlisted and locally listed buildings make a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area every effort will be made to ensure their retention and reuse. 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.

Officers will liaise with other Council Teams to try to improve the environment. Graffiti has been identified as a problem by residents and prompt removal of unsightly graffiti will be encouraged.

### **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.

Earlier public consultation highlighted concerns regarding the condition of some buildings and residents were keen to ensure that dilapidated buildings were reused and preserved. If Listed buildings are not maintained in good repair, then the Council will, where appropriate, take action to ensure that relevant repairs are carried out. In some circumstances, the Council itself may undertake essential repairs and recover the cost from the owner. The Council has powers of compulsory purchase, if necessary to protect Listed buildings.

The Council will enforce conservation law wherever necessary, and will consider the introduction of Article 4 Directions to remove Permitted Development Rights where appropriate.

### **Further Reading and Contacts**

- § The Buildings of England (London 5: East). Cherry, O'Brien and Pevsner.
- § England's Historic Waterways: A Working Heritage. British Waterways and English Heritage 2009  
<http://www.helm.org.uk/upload/pdf/HistWat.pdf?1258977969>.
- § PPS5 Planning and the Historic Environment (Mar 2010)
- § Policy Advice Note for Inland Waterways (July 2009) Town and Country Planning Association  
<http://www.tcpa.org.uk/pages/inland-waterways.html>
- § Historic Maps and photographs of the area can be found at the Tower Hamlets Local History Library and Archives.

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: [conservation@towerhamlets.gov.uk](mailto:conservation@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:

The Tower Hamlets Local History Library and archives	Tel 020 7364 1290 <a href="http://www.ideastore.co.uk">www.ideastore.co.uk</a>
English Heritage	<a href="http://www.english-heritage.org.uk">www.english-heritage.org.uk</a>
The Georgian Group	<a href="http://www.georgiangroup.org.uk">www.georgiangroup.org.uk</a>
Victorian Society	<a href="http://www.victorian-society.org.uk">www.victorian-society.org.uk</a>
20 <sup>th</sup> Century Society	<a href="http://www.c20society.org.uk">www.c20society.org.uk</a>
Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings	<a href="http://www.spab.org.uk">www.spab.org.uk</a>

### **Listed Buildings at Risk:**

23 Gillender Street, Aplins Spirit and Liqueur Warehouse.

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

At this time, we are not aware of any other threats to the Conservation Area.

### **Priorities for Action (1-7)**

These are the identified priorities for the preservation and enhancement of the Limehouse Cut Conservation Area.



1. Prepare a design code in conjunction with all local stakeholders for sites adjacent to this waterspace.
2. Review Locally Listed Buildings in the Conservation Area in line with the goals of the Conservation Strategy.
3. Enhance enjoyment of the open space on the peninsula of the Limehouse Cut and the River Lea.
4. Enhance public access to the canal including new waterside facilities, bridge crossings, interpretation, mapping and signage along the Cut.
5. Audit the condition of the Conservation Area, and prepare a schedule of improvements in conjunction with local stakeholders including a costed implementation plan to be reviewed every 5 years.
6. Prepare an audit of existing historic surfaces and features within the Conservation Area.
7. Improve connections and linkages to the canal including improved access from adjoining open space including from Bartlett Park in conjunction with local stakeholders.