

Committee: Development	Date: 15 th May 2013	Classification: Unrestricted	Agenda Item No:
Report of: Corporate Director of Development and Renewal		Title: Conservation Area Consent Application for Decision	
Case Officer: Iyabo Johnson		Ref No: PA/12/03218	
		Ward(s): Limehouse	

1. APPLICATION DETAILS

- Location:** Toilet Block, Poplar Recreation Ground, East India Dock Road, London E14
- Existing Use:** Disused toilet block
- Proposal:** Demolition of disused single storey toilet block in Poplar Recreation Ground
- Drawing Nos:**
- Site Location Plan
 - SK-01
- Supporting Documents:**
- Historic Building Appraisal by ARCOS Chartered Surveyors. Dated March 2010.
- Applicant:** London Borough of Tower Hamlets
Owner: London Borough of Tower Hamlet
Historic Building: Toilet Block – Poplar Recreation Ground
Conservation Area: Limehouse

2. SUMMARY OF MATERIAL PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

- 2.1 The local planning authority has considered the particular circumstances of this application against the Council's approved planning policies contained in the Adopted Core Strategy 2010, the Council's Managing Development Document (adopted April 2013), the London Plan 2011 and the National Planning Policy Framework and has found that:
1. The proposed demolition of the disused toilet block is acceptable as the building has little architectural interest or quality and is derelict. The building makes a limited contribution to the St Matthias Church Conservation Area and the application sufficiently demonstrates that efforts have been made to retain the building in use. Therefore the proposal accords with policy SP10 of the Core Strategy 2010 and policy DM27 of the Managing Development Document (adopted April 2013). These policies seek to ensure that proposals for demolition do not result in unduly detrimental impacts on the character and appearance of the Borough's conservation areas.
 2. The application sufficiently demonstrates that the building is no longer suitable for use as a community facility. The proposed loss of the public toilet facility therefore accords with policy DM8 of the Managing Development Document (adopted April 2013).
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3. RECOMMENDATION

- 3.1 That the Committee resolve to refer the application to the Government Office for The West Midlands with the recommendation that the council would be minded to **GRANT** conservation area consent subject to the following conditions:

Conditions on Conservation Area Consent

- 3.2
1. Time Limit for demolition
 2. Submission of details of rebuilt boundary wall using recycled bricks
 3. Submission of landscaping details
 4. Full details of screening equipment

Informative on Conservation Area Consent

- 3.3 1. Re-use of existing tiles and bricks

4. PROPOSAL AND LOCATION DETAILS

The Proposal

- 4.1 The Applicant is seeking conservation area consent for the demolition of a disused toilet block in north western corner of Poplar Recreation Ground.

Background

- 4.2 The site is owned by the Council. The Council's Asset Management service has been appointed by the Parks and Business Service to seek consent for the building's demolition.
- 4.3 The Council's scheme of delegation requires that where the Council is applying for the consent of a building in a conservation area that it owns, the application must be brought before Members.
- 4.4 The Council cannot determine applications for Conservation Area Consent for works to buildings that it owns. Section 74 of the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Regulations 1990 requires that such applications are referred to the Secretary of State, together with any representations received following statutory publicity.
- 4.5 The purpose of this report is to allow Members to consider officers' recommendation for approval to recommend to the Secretary of State that the Council would be minded to grant Conservation Area Consent, were it empowered to do so itself.

Site and Surroundings

- 4.6 The application site is a disused toilet block located at the north west corner of the Poplar Recreation Ground on the southern side of East India Dock Road at the junction with Hale Street.
- 4.7 The toilet block is a single storey building that is separated into both male and female areas. The building is constructed from yellow stock brick and features red brick voussoir arches and dressings.
- 4.8 The park is open from dawn until dusk each day.
- 4.9 The site is located within the St Matthias Church conservation area and the toilet block is not listed. There is a historic building on the western side of Hale Street (immediately opposite) which is Grade II listed.

Planning History

4.10 **PA/11/00015 – Full Planning Permission**

On 15 March 2011, planning permission was granted for the conversion of the disused public WC into a public café with dual use as a community centre; providing a new public toilet, a secure pantry and store for café furniture.

OFFICER COMMENT: *This is discussed in more detail in the “Material Considerations” section of this report.*

5. **POLICY FRAMEWORK**

5.1 For details of the status of relevant policies see the front sheet for “Planning Applications for Determination” agenda items. The following policies are relevant to the application:

5.2 **Adopted Core Strategy 2025 Development Plan Document (September 2010)**

SP10 Creating Distinct and Durable Places

5.3 **Managing Development Document (adopted April 2013)**

DM24 Place Sensitive Design

DM25 Amenity

5.4 **Government Planning Policy Guidance/Statements**

NPPF National Planning Policy Framework

2012

5.5 **Community Plan – One Tower Hamlets**

The following Community Plan objectives relate to the application:

A Great Place To Be

Safe and Supportive Communities

6. **CONSULTATION RESPONSE**

6.1 **LBTH Development Design and Conservation:**

The Conservation Officer acknowledged the poor condition of the building and the social problems associated with it but expressed a preference for the building’s retention. The Conservation Officer stated that the ultimate decision should be based on amenity and that should demolition be permitted, details of landscaping and the new boundary treatment would need to be resolved.

OFFICER COMMENT: *Officers recommend the imposition of a condition requiring submission of full details of the landscaping and boundary treatments prior to any demolition. The merits of the proposed demolition are discussed in detail in the “Material Planning Considerations” section of this report.*

6.2 **English Heritage:** No objections

7. **LOCAL REPRESENTATION**

7.1 A total of 186 neighbouring properties within the area shown on the map appended to this report were notified about the application and invited to comment. The application has been publicised on site. No representations were received from neighbours and/or local groups in response to notification and publicity.

8 **MATERIAL PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS**

- 8.1 The main planning issues raised by the application that the committee must consider are, the principle of the demolition, the principle of the loss of the community facility and the provision of public open space.

Principle of demolition

- 8.2 The application seeks Conservation Area Consent for the demolition of the single storey toilet block to enable the creation of additional open space within Poplar Recreation Ground.

- 8.3 Policy DM27 of the Managing Development Document (adopted April 2013) states that proposals for the demolition of buildings in conservation areas will be considered against the following four criteria which are discussed in turn below.

The significance of the asset, architecturally, historically and contextually

- 8.3 The St. Matthias Church Conservation Area Character appraisal documents the significant heritage assets that contribute to the character and appearance of the conservation area.

- 8.4 St. Matthias Church itself forms the centre piece of the Conservation with the Poplar Recreation Ground providing a retreat from the surrounding urban character of the area and protection for the setting of the church.

- 8.5 It is noted that the toilet block is not referred to specifically in the character appraisal which would suggest that its contribution to the Conservation Area is limited and certainly not on the same scale as other buildings, including those not statutorily listed.

The condition of the asset and estimated costs of its repair and maintenance in relation to its significance and demolition, and to the value derived from its continued use

- 8.6 In respect of the condition of the building and the feasibility of restoring it, the applicant has sufficiently demonstrated that the likely costs of repairing and maintaining the building are unfeasible.

- 8.7 The applicant commissioned ARCOS Chartered Surveyors to produce a "Historic Building Appraisal" and submitted this as part of their application. The report describes the building as "derelict" and "lacking in architectural merit". The report also notes that the former cast iron rainwater goods have been replaced with plastic. In addition, these observations are also noted:

- 8.8 *"There are no ceilings and the rafters are exposed. The close boarding to the roof is in a very poor condition having been exposed to the elements for some time. The rafters while being in better repair are of no historic or aesthetic interest."*

- 8.9 Officers have come to understand that the costs involved in repairing and converting and now maintaining the building have become prohibitively high following a significant cut in funding.

The adequacy of efforts to maintain the building in use

- 8.10 Officers understand that the building has not functioned as a toilet block for several years due to the unavailability of funding to maintain public facilities such as these. In that time has fallen into a serious state of disrepair.

The merits of any alternative proposal for the site

- 8.11 Officers consider that the site's planning history serves as evidence of the applicant's efforts to retain the building in use. In 2011, planning permission was granted for its conversion into a dual use public café/community centre. This permission has not been implemented to due to the unavailability of funding.

- 8.12 Policy DM27 of the Managing Development Document (adopted April 2013) states that

proposals for the demolition of a heritage asset will only be considered under exceptional circumstances where the public benefit of demolition outweighs the case for retention. The "Historic Building Appraisal" explains that drug paraphernalia is "very apparent" in the building which suggests that it has become something of a haven for crime and anti-social behaviour. In view of the impact of such activity on the local residents and useage of the park, it is considered that the public benefit from demolishing the building outweighs the case for its retention.

Loss of community facility

- 8.13 Policy DM8 of the Managing Development Document (adopted April 2013) states that the loss of a facility will only be considered if it can be demonstrated that there is no longer a need for the facility within the local community and that the building is no longer suitable. The submitted Historic Building Appraisal demonstrates that the building has been unused for a considerable length of time, that it is now derelict and that it now attracts crime and anti-social behaviour. On this basis, it is considered that the loss of the public facility is acceptable in principle.
- 8.14 Policy DM8 also seeks to ensure that lost community facilities are adequately re-provided elsewhere in the Borough. On a site visit, the case officer noted the presence of public toilets on East India Dock Road approximately 700m west of the site.

Provision of public open space

- 8.14 The proposed demolition would result in the creation of approximately 33 square metres of public open space which is in alignment with the principles of policy DM10 of the Managing Development Document (adopted April 2013) which seeks to increase the amount of public open space in the Borough.

Design

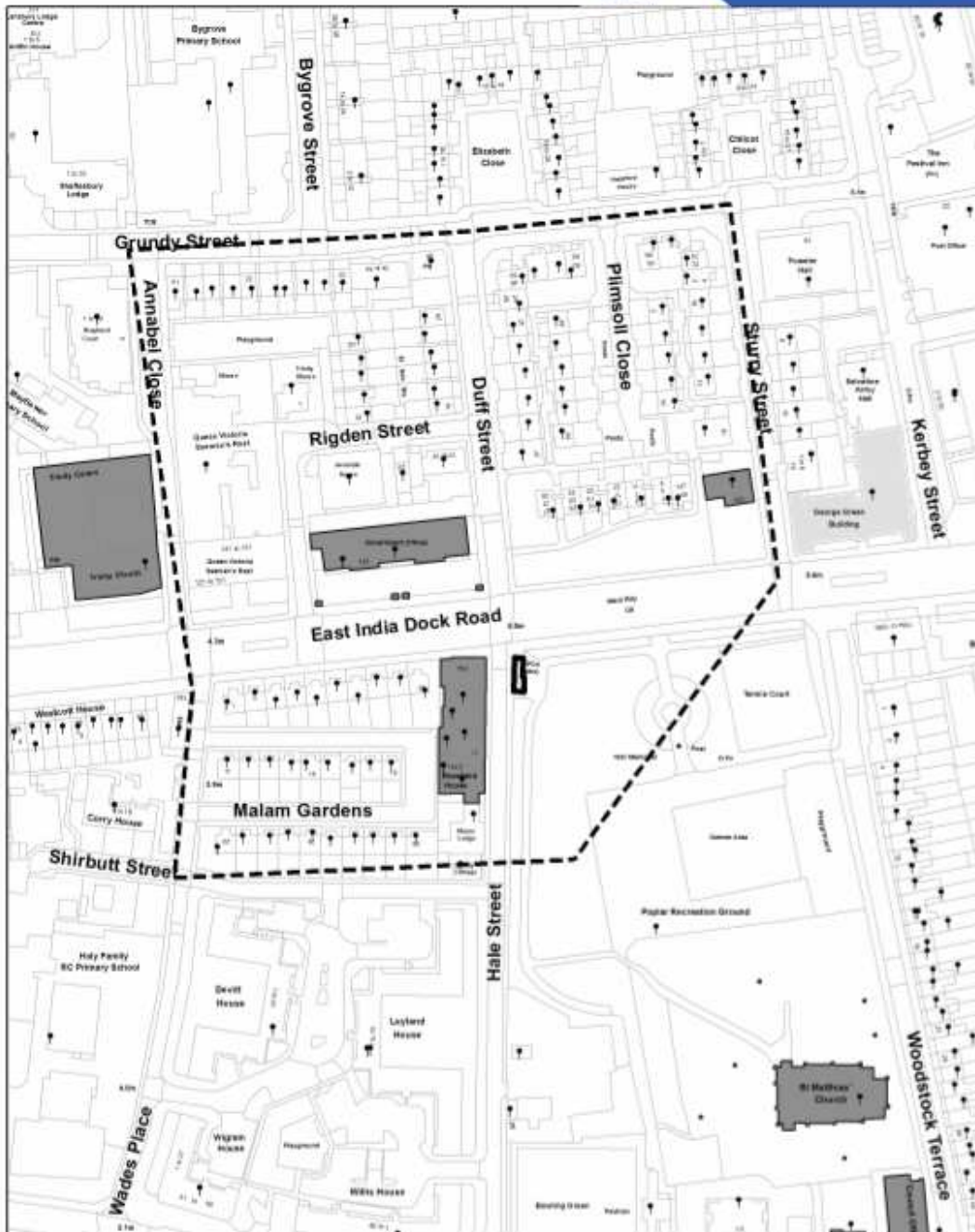
- 8.15 The flank wall of the existing block forms part of the boundary to Poplar Recreation Ground at Hale Street. The wall currently comprises of yellow stock brick. This wall would be demolished as part of this proposal.
- 8.16 The applicant has not provided details showing how the boundary would be reconstructed or how the resulting new public space would be treated.
- 8.17 Suitably worded conditions would be attached to the Conservation Area Consent requiring the submission of full details of the treatment to the boundary and landscaping prior to any demolition works. This is to ensure that subsequent works incorporate principles of high quality design that are sensitive to the setting of the St Matthias Conservation Area.







CONCLUSION

- 8.15 Whilst the loss of the existing facility is regrettable, the building has not been in use as a public toilet for several years. Furthermore, whilst efforts have been made to bring the building into an alternative use, funding has not been forthcoming for this venture, and subsequently the building has fallen into a state of disrepair. Accordingly, on balance, it is considered that the proposed demolition of the building and introduction of 33sqm of public open space is acceptable in this instance.
- 8.16 All other relevant policies and considerations have been taken into account. Conservation Area Consent should be granted for the reasons set out in the SUMMARY OF MATERIAL PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS and the details of the decision are set out in the RECOMMENDATION at the beginning of this report

9 SITE LOCATION PLAN

Planning Application Site Map



 Planning Application Site Boundary	 Locally Listed Buildings	 Land parcel address
 Consultation Area	 Statutory Listed Buildings	

0 30 m
1:1,750

This Site Map displays the Planning Application Site Boundary and the neighbouring Occupiers / Owners who were consulted as part of the Planning Application process.

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