

Forest Gate Town Centre

Conservation Area

**Character Appraisal and
Management Proposals**
March 2009



London Borough of Newham

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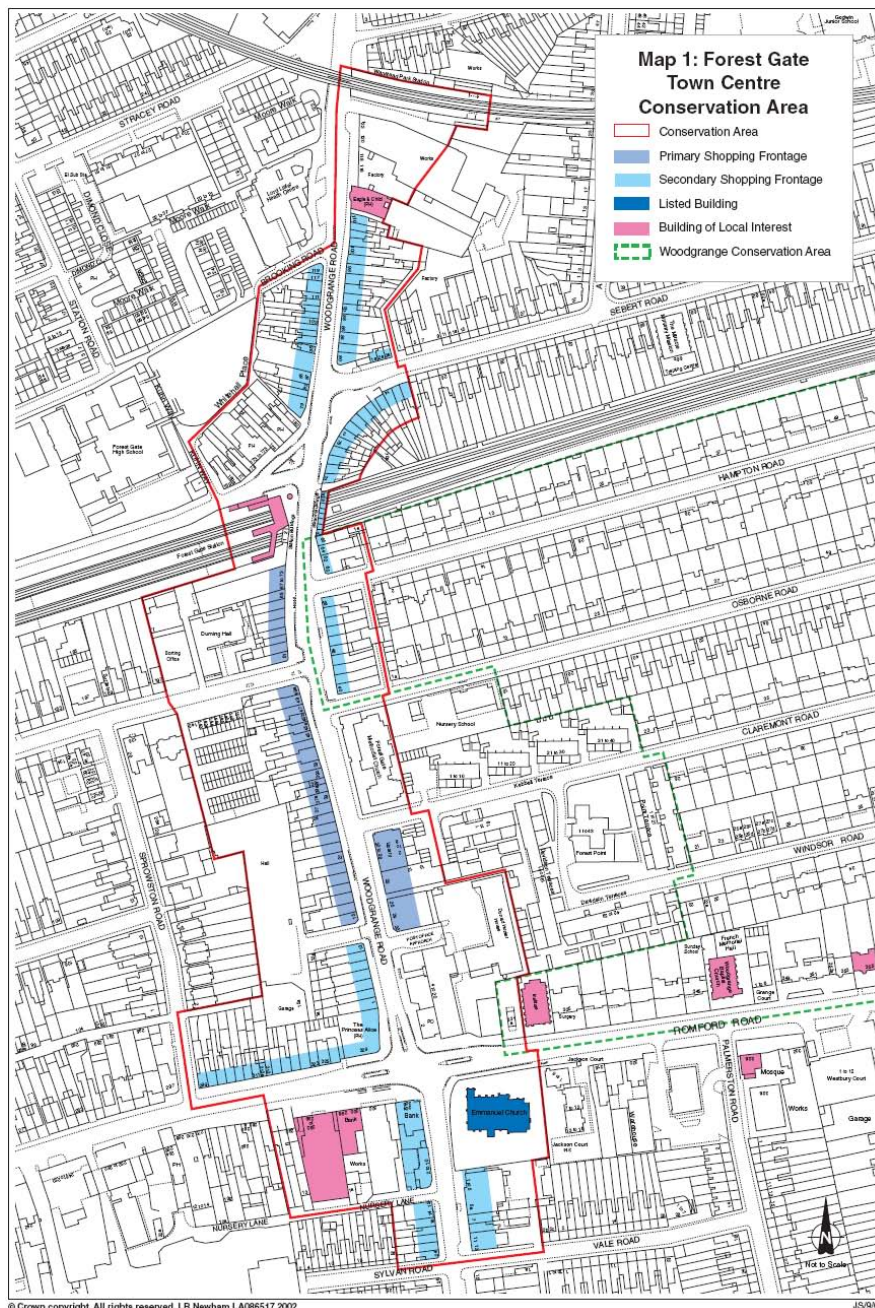
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PART 1: CONSERVATION AREA CHARACTER APPRAISAL

INTRODUCTION

The Council has a legal duty to designate as conservation areas, those parts of its area that it considers to be “of special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance”. This duty is found in the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation areas) Act 1990. Following public consultation and support, the Council designated the first Forest Gate Town Centre Conservation Area in 1999, extending it to its present boundaries on December 10th 2001.



The government requires the Council to produce and publish a Conservation Area Appraisal and Management plan for every conservation area in Newham. They must comply with guidance, published by English Heritage, which sets out the matters to be addressed.

The purpose of these documents is to:

- encourage appreciation of the area's history
- appraise its present qualities
- identify opportunities for enhancement
- inform and guide persons wishing to make changes to their property
- guide the Council in carrying out its planning and other functions.

The appraisal considers the factors that contribute to and influence the area's character.

The management plan identifies the action the Council will take, over the coming five years, to further the preservation and enhancement of the conservation area.

THE PLANNING CONTEXT

The Council, in carrying out its planning functions in the conservation area, is required to give proper weight to the preservation or enhancement of the area. It must also take into account wider planning policies and guidance. The statutory planning context and policies that apply are as follows:

National Policy

Planning Policy Guidance Note (PPG) 15 "Planning and the Historic Environment" sets out current national policy on conservation and heritage protection. It sets out requirements placed upon planning authorities when determining planning applications for development or demolition that affects a conservation area. The principle requirement is to assess whether or not the proposal preserves or enhances the character or appearance of the conservation area.

It also notes:

- that the general presumption should be in favour of retaining buildings that make a positive contribution to the character or appearance of a conservation area. The Secretary of State expects that proposals to demolish such buildings should be assessed against the same broad criteria as proposals to demolish a listed building.
- that where a building makes little or no such contribution [to the character and appearance of the conservation area] the local planning authority will need to have full information about what is proposed for the site after demolition. Consent for demolition should not be given unless there are acceptable and detailed plans for any redevelopment.

PPG15 also recognises the importance and role of stewardship that Local Planning Authorities are under.

Regional Planning Policy

The Mayor of London's "London Plan" (Spatial Development Strategy) states that the Mayor undertakes to work with others to protect the historic environment and expects the Council to conserve historic assets.

Local Planning Policy

Current planning policy is set out in Newham's Unitary Development Plan (Adopted June 2001, Saved from 27 September 2007 in accordance with direction from the Secretary of State). The UDP states "The Council considers conservation has an important contribution to make toward the future of Newham by protecting buildings which enhance the attractiveness of the borough as a place to live, visit and invest, thus supporting the regeneration process". And "Conservation Areas provide a focus for civic pride and, by preserving part of the borough's history, contribute a sense of continuity and stability in the context of substantial physical and social change". This approach is reflected in the appraisal and management plan. Council policies also commit to enhancing local centres, promoting mixed communities, achieving high quality design and sustainable development.

Other relevant Council policies and supporting documents include;

Supplementary Planning Guidance Note No 27 Forest Gate Town Centre Action Plan (1998). Following extensive public consultation this became the framework to guide investment decisions in the town centre. One of its objectives is "The improvement of the quality of the built and open environment, in particular to maximise the benefits of the centre's Victorian heritage".

The "Urban Development Framework for Forest Gate and Plaistow SRB" of 2005 developed options for future development and sought to balance the benefits of conservation with redevelopment. Its suggested design principles are:-

- new development be sympathetic to the existing scale, height, views, street rhythm and block enclosure;
- an avoidance of self-important buildings out of context with a local centre such as Forest Gate
- to require high quality new development that knits in with existing built form
- new retail frontage and signs should echo the standard set by the Heritage Regeneration Scheme enhancements.
- high quality public realm and safe, shared surfaces.

Newham's "A Vision for Town Centres 2007-2016" has a vision to create a village feel in Forest Gate Town Centre; upgrade and diversify community and shopping facilities, modest development to increase customer base and vitality; to deal with deprivation and anti-social behaviour; and continue conservation buildings improvements.

The Forest Gate Town Centre Planning Brief was approved by Newham's Mayor in Consultation with Cabinet on 24th May 2007. It provides guidance from the Council should redevelopment within the town centre be proposed. Any such proposals would be assessed according to statutory requirements, government advice and central and local policy as it applies to conservation areas.

A Supplementary Planning Document for Forest Gate will be consulted on later in 2009 and will look at these issues in more detail and elaborate on planning policy for the area. This document will be subject to extensive public consultation.

LOCATION

Forest Gate is in the northern part of Newham. The economic welfare of its town centre, and thus its conservation, is influenced by its location. Important factors that have, and will influence, its future are as follows:

- It is in, or close to, areas of substantial inward investment and regeneration. Broadly, these areas are the Thames Gateway and Stratford and the Lower Lee Valley. Of prime importance is its proximity to Stratford. Forest Gate station is two stops or five minutes by rail from Stratford station which is a growing regional centre, now with an international station on the Channel Tunnel route. The redevelopment of its redundant rail lands will produce an extensive new piece of town, "Stratford City". A major retail complex is currently being built. Stratford will also host the 2012 Olympics with the associated regeneration benefits in legacy. In future, Forest Gate's transport connections with Stratford and other parts of London and the South-East will be considerably improved by its connection to the new Cross Rail link.
- It is well-connected by rail with other larger centres, such as Ilford and Romford, themselves subject to considerable inward investment. Bus routes provide links to other neighbouring local centres.
- Forest Gate has recently been the focus of considerable public and private investment as a result of a 7 year Single Regeneration Budget. This has helped fund the improvement of Forest Gate's public realm, highways, traffic management and housing.
- Several Heritage Regeneration Schemes, part funded by English Heritage, have resulted in the major transformation of a number of blocks of heritage buildings through restoration and enhancement. Future options for other enhancement schemes will be pursued.

- The town centre's hinterland consists of attractive Victorian housing both larger villas and smaller terraces in a range of historic architectural styles, often standing in tree-lined streets. The supply of properly conserved housing is necessary to attract a customer base that will support the local town centre.
- An extensive area of open space, Wanstead Flats, with trees, ponds and leisure facilities attracts people to both visit and to reside in the area, again supporting the local economy.



Location of Forest Gate town centre within Newham.

GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY.

Forest Gate sits within the Thames Basin, a syncline of chalk overlain by London Clay and other deposits from the River Thames arranged as gravel terraces, the remains of former floodplains. The Geological Survey of Britain shows Hackney gravels in the northern part of the study area with Taplow gravels to the south. The land of Newham rises gradually from the River Thames to a height of around 15 metres on Wanstead Flats. Forest Gate thus sits on land which is higher and drier than much of Newham. Topography therefore has little influence on townscape save that long views are possible.

ARCHAEOLOGY.

The town centre roads and the Woodgrange Estate are defined as an Archaeological Priority Area in Newham's UDP. These areas have known or potential archaeological remains. An archaeological assessment will normally be required for development sites over 0.4 acres (0.16 hectares), or for smaller sites where evidence shows this is justified. Policy EQ 43 explains the information developers must provide and policy on preservation and/or recording of remains.

Existing records indicate that the Forest Gate town centre area has archaeological potential for the pre-historic, medieval and post-medieval periods. The Greater London Sites and Monuments Record has entries for sites close to the town centre, for the following periods, including:-

Palaeolithic. Five Palaeolithic hand axes and other pre-historic flint artefacts.
Roman. Romford Road approximately follows the line of the Roman road, linking London (Londinium) with Colchester (Camulodunum), thought to be laid out in the 1st Century. Several excavations have revealed sections of the road and associated archaeology.

Medieval. Woodgrange Farm was recorded in 1189 as attached to the Cistercian Abbey at Stratford. It was leased out to tenant farmers until the dissolution of the Abbey in 1538.

Post-medieval –Modern. The Eagle and Child Public House, shown at the entrance to “The Lower Forest” on Chapman and Andres map of 1777.

For site specific information, developers should undertake a full search of the Greater London Historic Buildings, Sites and Monuments Record and other sources.

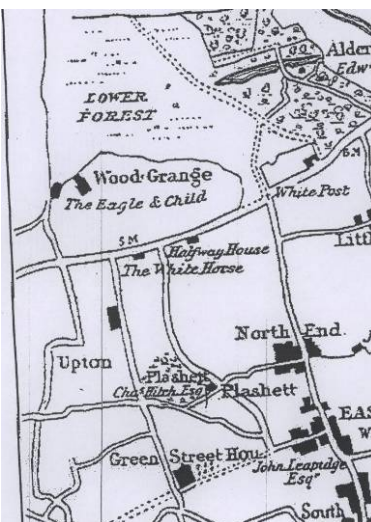
HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

The following historical maps illustrate the growth of Forest Gate from a hamlet at the edge of Epping Forest to an extensive Victorian suburb. The early maps show a rural area with farms, a few scattered dwellings and a pub. By 1821 there were some houses along Romford Road, especially at its junction with Upton Lane. The coming of the railways, from 1841, led to widespread development and the rapid growth of the town centre to service local needs. Later maps show further development and the effects of wartime bombing and reconstruction. The character of the town centre derives from these various stages of evolution with heritage buildings and spaces creating its special interest.

Pre-Victorian Expansion



1741 John Rocque



1777 Jackson's map



1821 Clayton's survey

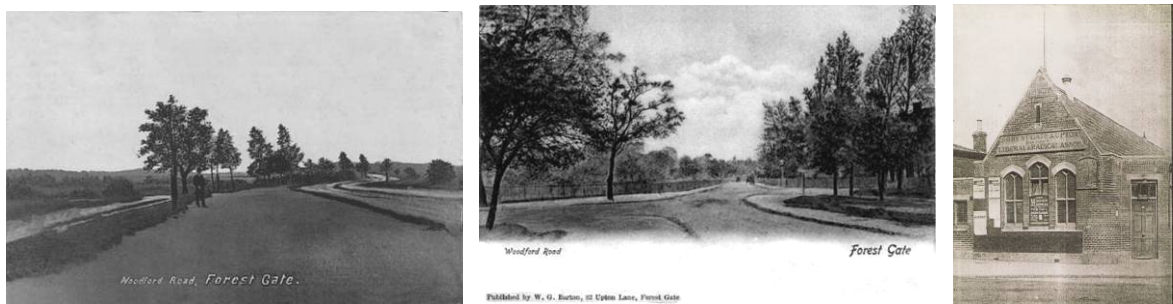
These early maps illustrate that the area now covered by Forest Gate and its town centre was once a rural part of Essex. Much land was within the estates of wealthy families. The Woodgrange Estate to the east of the town centre was owned by the Gurney family.

There were also some scattered, large houses, commutable retreats from the City, occupied by well off bankers, city merchants, doctors and professionals. The 1741 map also shows the farming nature of the area, providing food for the City. Woodgrange Farm is on the west side of the present Woodgrange Road and symbols indicating nurseries, orchards, crops and pasture.

Although there was little development, Woodgrange and Romford Roads and Forest Lane that are the framework of the present town centre, already existed.

The main east-west route, Romford Road, dates from at least Roman times. By the sixteenth century it was a well-established coaching route linking the City with the towns of Essex. After 1721 its maintenance was taken over by the Middlesex and Essex turnpike trust. Clayton's map and directory of 1821 shows some early development, a series of narrow, deep plots on the south side of Romford Road by its junction with Upton Lane. Evidence of this plot layout remains today. From this junction, Upton Lane ran southwards toward the wealthy estates at Upton. A road, along the line of the present Woodgrange Road, ran northward to the Lower Forest and Essex villages beyond. The Lower Forest, now known as Wanstead Flats, was then a royal hunting ground for deer. Cattle were also kept here and roamed freely, as they did until the recent BSE crisis.

The 1741 map shows that a pub called the Eagle and Child has been here for several centuries. It provided a hostelry with over night accommodation for drovers and travellers. A gate with a toll-house was built across Woodford Road close to the pub to prevent cattle and deer straying southward along the road. It is from this gate that the name "Forest Gate" derives. The gate stood from at least 1639 until its removal in 1883. Evidence for a toll-gate is found in the 1851 Census that describes Robert Baker as the "toll-keeper" and his home as the Forest Gate Toll-House.



Some small cottages grew up around the gate and early, small scale dwellings still exist in this location. A congregation led by a preacher named Jabez Legg, met in one. It grew so much that somewhere larger was needed. In 1831, Legg and William Strange built a Congregational chapel (see picture above right) further down Woodgrange Road near its junction with Forest Lane. The chapel remains today though its front has been altered for shop use. Forest Lane is marked on these early maps linking Forest Gate to Maryland and Stratford. Its junction with Woodgrange Road became the early focal point of the emerging town centre.

Victorian Development



1867 Ordnance Survey



1919 Ordnance Survey

The early town centre evolved around the junction of Woodgrange Road and Forest Lane, south of the toll house. The importance of this location was confirmed by the opening of Forest Gate station here in 1841, allowing faster access to the City, terminating at Liverpool Street station, and out to the towns of Essex. It was the catalyst for the development of Forest Gate. The First Edition of the Ordnance Survey (1865-7) shows the station originally a short way down Forest Lane opposite a passage, now Station Road.

The rail link flourished. A permanent station was built in its present position next to the bridge with coal offices adjoining. Forest Gate's accessibility so spurred development that from the 1850's large estate lands in the area were broken up and sold off.

In 1855 development began on the Gurney and Dames estates, north of the station. The 1865 Ordnance Survey map shows a tight pattern of narrow plots, linked by narrow roads and paths. Several of these paths still remain, the largest being Whitehall Place. The dwellings and roads immediately north west of the centre retain a small scale, simple character.

In Odessa, Field and Tower Hamlets Roads artisan's dwellings were built along with smaller dwellings for labourers. The Old St Saviours parish, a vibrant, well-knit community, grew to have over 60 shops, businesses, a church and three pubs. Whitehall School was built here in 1870 behind shops and pubs built to front Forest Lane and the "Broadway" as it was called. Larger businesses located here too, including Canon's brewery and the Steam Laundry (see photo below).



The 1865 map also shows some houses south of the station, on the west side of Woodgrange Road, including three pairs of semi-detached villas. Their long rear gardens with circular drives imply they were for more affluent owners. Now disguised by shopfronts, they remain today between 39-49 Woodgrange Road.

Next to them were the Pawnbroker's Almshouses built in 1849 by the Pawnbrokers' Charitable Institution and formed an impressive group in 'Elizabethan' style set back behind landscaped gardens. As demand for shopping in Woodgrange Road grew, they were demolished and replaced in 1897 by the impressive three/four storey terrace of 15-39 Woodgrange Road a key characteristic of Woodgrange Road today.

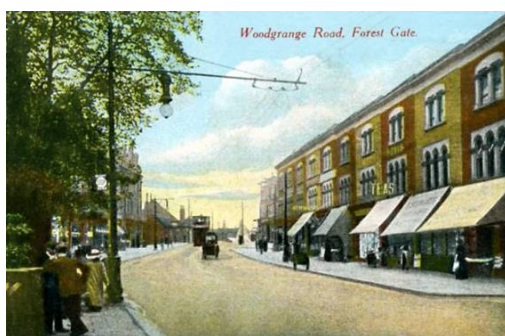
South of these were two more pairs of semi-detached villas, later redeveloped. The corner plot was occupied by a public house, on a larger plot than the present Princess Alice P.H, with pleasure grounds adjoining.

Early development also occurred along Romford Road on narrow but deep plots, maximising the number and value of properties with a prime frontage. The houses had long front gardens. The resultant layout and form still characterises this location. A lane behind gave rear access to these houses. Its various outbuildings provided stables and other supporting services. A smithy is shown here on a later map. At the end are orchards which may explain its current name, "Nursery Lane".

The impressive Emmanuel Church, built 1852, on the eastern corner with Upton Lane, indicates the early importance of this junction. Adjoining it is a pair of semi-detached villas. Upton Lane connected Forest Gate with the fashionable area of West Ham Park and became lined with high end shops.

A comparison of the 1865 and 1919 maps shows Forest Gate flourished and expanded. Hamfrith, Atherton, Norwich, Sprowston and Clova Roads, and Earlham Grove are wide tree lined streets with tall, substantial, attractively designed and detailed properties built for the wealthy middle classes. The conservation of areas of attractive traditional housing is key to promoting the future economy of the centre. Development of the Hamfrith estate, which stretched east to Manor Park cemetery, started in 1872. It includes Godwin and Sebert Roads, and roads off. The area south of Forest Gate was also growing fast. West Ham Park, dedicated to the public in 1874, attracted middle-class residents.

On the east side of Woodgrange Road, the Woodgrange and West Ham manors, including the old Woodgrange Farm, were developed by Thomas Corbett and his son Cameron (later the first Lord Rowallan) between 1877 and 1892. They built 1,160 good quality houses of four to six bedrooms, many with attached servant's quarters. They housed city business men, doctors and other professionals. The estate included several shopping terraces facing onto Woodgrange Road both to the north and south of a Methodist Church (completed in 1890). Two remain, including rear mews for stabling and servicing. Other shopping parades developed along Woodgrange Road.



Left: Looking south down Woodgrange Road. On the left is a planned terrace of the Woodgrange estate. Trees opposite mark three pairs of semi-detached villas, their gardens now covered by shops. The landmarks of the Methodist church, mid-distance, the ornate Barclays Bank, far distance, and tall parade on the right, no longer exist. The terrace has recently been restored, reinstating some of the Victorian grandeur of the centre.

Right. The same part of Woodgrange Road looking north to the station.

The earlier, smaller, organic, varied development contrasts with later, more substantial planned investments where the public realm is enclosed by terraces that adjoin the pavement rather than set back behind shops that indicate they were built over front gardens (called “bungalow shopfronts”). Examples are 1-13 Woodgrange Road and the south side of Romford Road. Evidence of the original house front still exists in some of these shops. Smaller shops were also created from the front parlour of houses.

Population growth was considerable in the late nineteenth century. The “Forest Gate Weekly News” of 1897 reflected that prior to the building of the 110 acre Woodgrange Estate, the population in 1861 was only around 5,000 with fields of peas, parsnips and rhubarb seen after leaving the station. “A stranger emerging at that time into Woodgrange Road, from the old wooden railway station, would see market gardens in front of him as far as the eye would reach, and on his way to Romford Road would have the same market gardens on his left hand and only a few private houses on his right”.

Forest Gate in 1876 is described by James Thorne, in his “The Environs of London”, as:

“A hamlet lying to the north of Upton and the Romford road, at the edge of Wanstead Flats, the southern extremity of Epping Forest, to which this was the entrance (gate). Forest Gate, with Upton and part of East Ham parish, was made an ecclesiastical district in 1852: population 7127. At Forest Gate is a station on the Great Eastern Railway (main Colchester line). By it is the Eagle and Child, tea-gardens and holiday resort. Emmanuel district church is a neat little Gothic building at the corner of Upton Lane. In Woodgrange Road is the Pawnbrokers' Charitable Institute, a cheerful group of 5 almshouses. Here is the West Ham Cemetery. Also, in Cemetery Road, the Jews' Cemetery, in which is the stately mausoleum of the Rothschild family, erected, 1867, from the designs of Mr. Digby Wyatt”.

The History of the County of Essex: Volume 6 (1973) also describes the growth of the area in its section: 'West Ham: Transport and postal services' underlining the importance of communications then, as now, in the development and future of the centre.

“The phenomenal growth of this area was made possible by good transport connections. The Eastern Counties railway had opened its line from London to Romford in 1839. Forest Gate station opened in 1841 but at first the station was not successful and closed 1844-6. But by the turn of the century 35,000 passengers a month were travelling from this station. As transport improved so development increased. In the 1870's trams came to Forest Gate heralding the decline of the horse-bus. The Tottenham & Forest Gate railway, opened in 1894, with a station at Wanstead Park, provided a new route from Barking to St. Pancras and Moorgate. The line, promoted jointly by the Midland railway and the London, Tilbury & Southend, was carried through the built-up area of Forest Gate on a long brick viaduct. It aroused considerable local opposition”. Small businesses opened up in its arches including the popular Elliot's Tea Rooms and Confectioners.

“The North Metropolitan Tramways Co. opened services along Romford Road to Manor Park and along Barking Road to East Ham about 1884-7. In 1901 the U.D.C. inaugurated an electric tramway system which by 1926 was providing services between Aldgate and Ilford, Aldgate and Barking, Wanstead Park and the docks, and East Ham Town Hall to Stratford via Plashet Grove.

After the 1880s Forest Gate had its own main post office which occupied various sites in Woodgrange Road. Telegraph services were available to the public at Forest Gate railway station by 1868 and at the post office by 1879. The telephone was available by 1905”.

As the population grew so did demand for churches, community and other leisure facilities. Whitehall School occupied a large site now covered by Forest Gate School. The London and South-Western Bank occupied a prime site at the junction of Upton Lane and Romford Road.



Emmanuel, the Church of England parish church, opened in 1852 was enlarged in 1889. Built to the designs of Sir George Gilbert Scott it survives today although its fish scale striped steeple is now plain tiled. The imposing Methodist church on Woodgrange Road, south of Osborne Road, was a massive, elaborate structure with twin gables onto the street. Its tall twin spires were the dominant feature at the heart of Forest Gate.

The Forest Gate Public Hall, Woodgrange Road was built about 1902. It housed a ballroom, a music hall, and the Grand Theatre (1907) and was important as a community focus. In 1909 a skating rink, heralded as "England's Premier Roller Rink", was built next to it. It was remained very popular into the 1950's having carnival nights, bands and exhibition dancing.



The Lower Forest was transformed into Wanstead Flats which became a pleasure ground attracting locals and people from much further a-field. Attempts at its enclosure by some landowners had led to such considerable public protest that, in 1878, it was taken over by the Corporation of London to be saved for public access and enjoyment. It was noted for its Bank Holiday fairs and circuses, which still continue. Its popularity supported local business. The roads around were, and continue to be sought after residential addresses.



In 1896 the Eagle and Child PH was rebuilt. Tea-rooms to the rear were famed for their excellent skittles and bowling- green. Other public houses were built, several of which still survive (if rebuilt) including The Railway Tavern; the Fox and Hounds and the Princess Alice.

Comparison of the 1865 and 1919 maps shows the rapid expansion that had taken place with tramlines added on the 1919 map. Around the station, now fronting onto the Broadway, are marked the Corbett drinking fountain, a post office, letter box and sorting office and public lavatories. The early fire engine had also been kept here but later the fire station is shown at Forest Street. The chapel has become a cinema. The passage from the station is widened to form Station Road. On the corner is a picture house (The Splendid). Behind, dwellings have been cleared to build Whitehall School. Two other cinemas are shown plus the public hall with adjoining skating rink; the vicarage in Earlham Grove; the Sunday's school and Methodist Church on Woodgrange Road; and three banks.

The expansion of Forest Gate underpinned the growth of the town centre. Shops served all requirements with independents alongside a plethora of national chains. There were many high class stores reflecting that this was a desirable, middle-class, commuter suburb and a place of status to visit.

The Forest Gate Weekly News of 1897 sums up the area's attraction. "There are few, if any, suburban districts, which combine, in so remarkable degree as Forest Gate, the three great essentials to the average city man of easy access, reasonable rentals, and a first class local market". Forest Gate was in its hey-day.

Inter-war

Between the wars Forest Gate continued to prosper. A local resident recalled - "Woodgrange Road was a very busy place with lots of varied shops, from a dairy where you bought biscuits by the quarter from a tin with a glass lid and butter was patted and weighed. There were small department stores that sold pianos and other musical instruments, a fishing tackle shop and all sweet shops sold fishing nets. This was a place people enjoyed living".



Forest Gate. Public Hall

It was a prestigious place to live, reflected by the range and quality of the shops. Most of the main chain stores were here - Boots, Marks and Spencers, Sainsbury's, Mac Fisheries, Home and Colonial - as well as high class department stores and specialist outlets like Rockley's the piano store. There were also many places where people could meet for tea and talk – a Lyons Corner House and an ABC for example. Churches, pubs, shops, places for education and leisure flourished. In 1937 a massive Odeon Cinema on Romford Road was opened, designed in the Art Deco of cinemas of that era. All of this produced a vibrant high street and local community reflected in the upkeep and activity of its townscape.

New businesses expanded. For example, a Colourpress works adjacent to Wanstead Park Station was opened in 1927, designed with a distinctively contemporary frontage. A new post office was built in Earlham Grove in 1939 in a style typical of its era and purpose. Public toilets were built at the junction of Romford Road and Upton Lane.

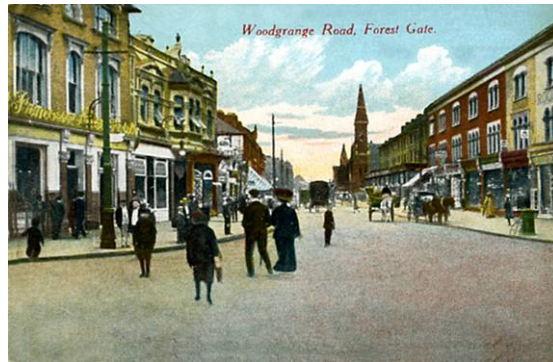
Wartime and After



1953 Ordnance Survey



Present Day Ordnance Survey



Above. The Princess Alice PH to the left, shops opposite part of the Woodgrange Estate, and the church mid-distance, were all destroyed by wartime bombing.

Forest Gate was heavily bombed during the Second World War. The Methodist Church was so badly damaged it had to be pulled down, several town centre terraces were damaged and part of the Woodgrange Estate was flattened. In the heaviest night of the blitz, 19th April 1941, the Princess Alice, the shopping terrace opposite and the bank and cinema on the south side of Romford Road were bombed. The ABC Cinema in Romford Road went and the Odeon next door was gutted, as was the YMCA next to the station. The adjacent Regal Cinema was destroyed. The extent of this devastation can be seen on the OS map of 1953.

Some buildings were repaired others redeveloped. The curving horizontal forms of the present Princess Alice exemplifies the Festival of Britain style. Other rebuilt terraces are simple, geometric, larger scale forms typical of the 1950s and 1960's. They contrast sharply with the dominant verticality, smaller scale, style and rhythm of the buildings that characterise the Victorian/Edwardian town centre. The differences are typified by comparing the present Methodist Church with its predecessor.

Aston Charities bought the site of the bombed cinema and shops next to the station. After 11 years of planning and public involvement, the Durning Hall complex was built, opened by Princess Margaret in 1964. It was designed by Architects Shigler, Risdon Associates. Its design, patterned concrete tower and layout to accommodate car parking reflects the style of civic developments of the time.

The late 1950s and 60's saw an explosion in office building. Tall slab blocks, with a concrete or steel frame, made sleek and light by extensive glazing and blue panels were typical. They announced a new era that paid no heed to the traditional context of plan, form or scale. Telephone House, at the Woodgrange/Romford Road junction, exemplifies.

However, during the 1990's offices migrated to cheaper greenfield sites out of town. Following this and the rise in demand for homes, vacant office buildings, such as Telephone House, now Donald Hunter House, have been converted to residential. The replacement of glass by panelling has emphasized its horizontality and solidity so increasing its overbearing appearance.



There has also been significant social change post-WW2. Approximately two thirds of the local population who left the area during the war, never returned. Many larger houses were divided up to make room for several families, including hundreds from Canning Town and other parts of the borough that had been badly bombed. The town centre's catchment population changed to lower incomes, smaller households and greater transience and diversity.

Social change also affected the town centre as a community focus and local provider. Greater car ownership enabled people to shop and use leisure facilities further afield. Multiple retailers relocated to larger centres. TV led to cinema closures so that all cinemas in Forest Gate had closed by 1975. Very recently use of the internet has also diverted demand away from local retail and leisure provision. Pubs are in decline. The churches' role at the centre of local life in Victorian times has declined.

These considerable changes are inevitably reflected in the centre's range of services, its buildings and the character of the area.

However, in recent years there has been considerable investment in improving the centre for local people and to attract new investment. This has included the restoration of traditional terraces, enhanced public realm and facilities, new and refurbished homes and improved traffic management and public transport with upgrades of both stations.

In the future, the construction of Crossrail will improve Forest Gate's public transport connections. Historically, these made Forest Gate an attractive place to reside and invest. It is envisioned that these future improvements will have a similar effect.

Such improvements and wider social and economic forces will shape the future of the conservation area.

URBAN FORM AND CHARACTER

The special architectural and historic interest of the area derives from its

- historic fabric, plot and grain.
- human scale buildings and spaces.
- clearly defined and enclosed linear layout with marked focal points.
- organic variety of building forms and spaces
- traditional materials and details
- well defined active frontages
- role as a focus for the local community and provision of local services

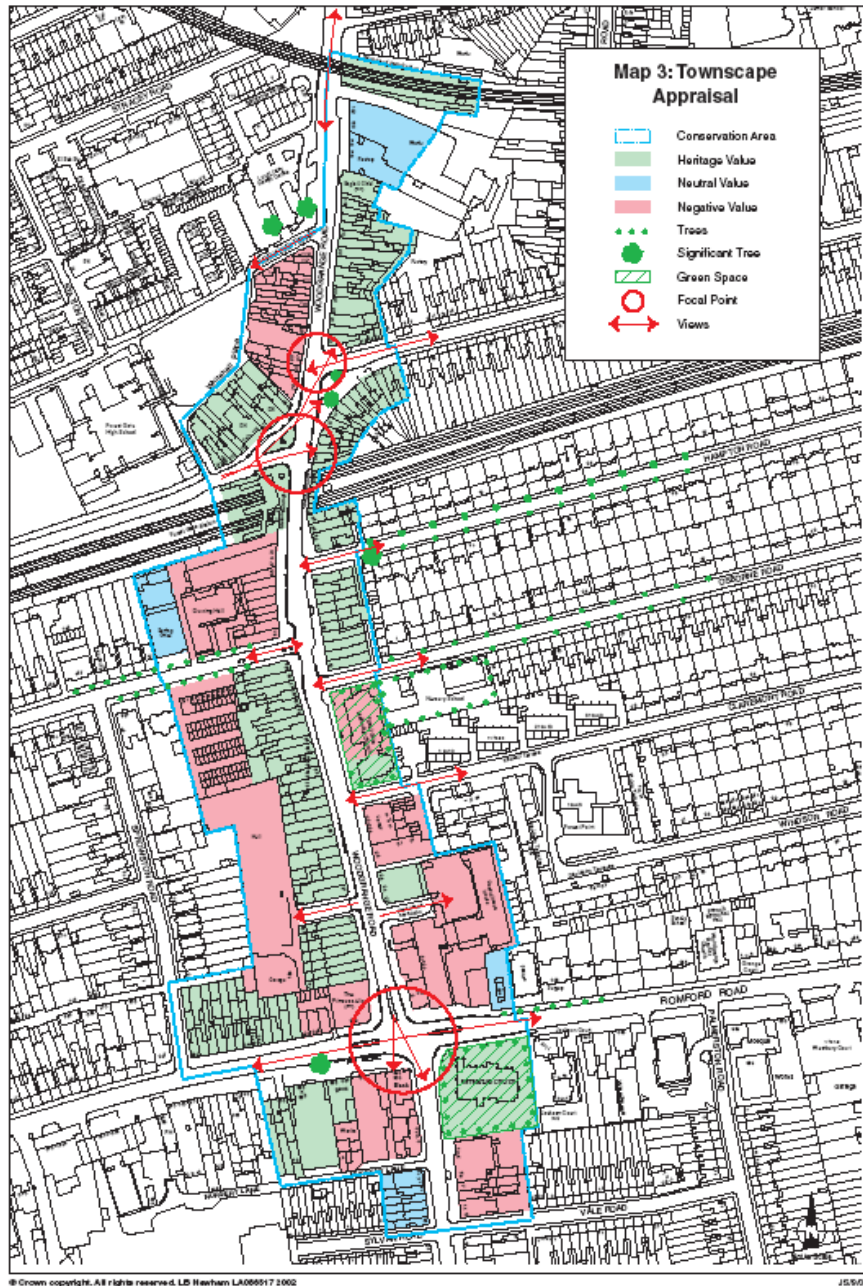
Woodgrange Road is the spine of the shopping centre. Primary retail is focussed south of the station on both sides of the road. Secondary retail occupies frontages to the north and along Romford Road, west of the Upton Lane junction. As there are no other retail frontages, the centre has a simple linear layout.

The centre is highly visible to through traffic. Where there is a predominance of prosperous retail, busy interaction creates a sense of place, community, and greater public safety.

Both roads are through routes. The public spaces between opposing frontages are dominated by traffic. This is exacerbated by vehicles servicing shops and by on-street parking. Buses add to the traffic but also the sense of centre and activity.

The public realm is tightly defined by the ground floor of buildings, most of which directly abut it. The set back of the church, behind its garden, provides the only relief and variation. Other set backs, above ground floor, add variety to the streetscene.

The only mature trees in the centre are found at the church. Mature trees provide fine views along all roads leading into the adjoining areas of housing. However, this is generally a hard urban environment. To counter this there has been successful planting on the south side of Romford Road and colourful, seasonal displays of flowers along Woodgrange Road.



The centre is reasonably permeable with direct pedestrian access from adjoining residential areas. The exception is the long block between Earlam Grove and Romford Road. A few small passages do not offer a welcoming or safe route.

There are two main nodal points – one at junction with Romford Road, the other at the junction with Sebert Road/Forest Lane. The first is important in announcing the centre to passing through traffic. The second sets the image of the centre for those alighting at the station.

The area outside the station has a distinct historic quality conveyed by its variety of historic buildings with the Corbett Clock and Drinking fountain at its centre. Buildings enclose and address the space by sweeping round at corners. The name "Market Place" explains its traditional importance. In Victorian times the post-office, fire engine pubs, station, turning point for the horse-drawn trams, school, laundry, brewery were here. People and farm animals stopped to obtain water.

Important buildings in the community also took the prime positions at the busy Romford Road junction – the church, bank and pub- and were cleverly designed along to address both frontages. The created a "place". The curves of the current Princess Alice still address this junction. The post war bank and Telephone House do not. Traffic and associated street signs, clutter, railings now dominate and the coherence of the space has been lost. Traffic dominates the pedestrian experience and separates the centre from the area to the south.

The defining qualities of the centre are created by its surviving historic fabric. South of the station this comprises tall terraces of 3-4 storeys with a strong vertical rhythm mostly carried out in a creamy stock brick with stucco detailing. Around the station the historic character derives from the variety of style and scale, with a simpler more human scale running north along Woodgrange Road. The height of the pre-war buildings in relation to the width of public realm between them is comfortable.

Plot size has also affected the street scene. The earliest plots were narrow, but deep, to maximise the units with a street frontage. This led to tall and narrow buildings with a dominant verticality. This rhythm was repeated in the Victorian planned blocks and emphasised window proportions and detailing; pilasters separating each shop unit; and parapet walls and chimneys on the skyline. This was not repeated in the post-war blocks which have a stronger horizontal emphasis.

The historic core terraces have repeating themes of eaves line, roof pitch, cornice, window arch and surrounds, capitals, fascia line and scale. Those built as part of the Woodgrange Estate, were planned as one composition. Others were developed in phases but unified by a consistent treatment (15-39 Woodgrange Road). Harmony is derived from common features, forms, scale and materials. The relatively small shop units have adapted overtime and where joined internally to create a larger unit, retention of the pilasters has safeguarded the pattern of the terrace.

Whilst vacancy rates are low, there has been poor maintenance, unsuitable alterations and additions that have undermined the harmony of terraces. Recent restoration schemes have restored several of traditional terraces and properties.

During the day the centre has a vibrant character. But it lacks an attractive evening economy that would promote a feeling of vitality and safety out of hours. Poor street and property maintenance, solid shutters and lack of interface between the public realm and building interiors reinforce this feeling.

Linear layout and level topography provides long views giving emphasis to taller buildings, landmarks and those that terminate of views.

Development that paid no heed to its setting derives from 1960's redevelopment. Telephone House, a nine storey office block, intrudes and dominates at the southern end of Woodgrange Road. Two other slab office blocks are seen westwards along Romford Road. All are unacceptably overly dominant and insensitive to their immediate setting. The tower of Durning Hall, dominates views south and north of the station. Its podium of shops address the main frontage but are of poor quality. Its roofline is marred by telecommunications. Its side return is open to a car park. It dilutes the dominant Victorian character of the centre by paying no visual reference to it. Post-war Council blocks along Woodgrange and Romford Roads also add little of architectural merit.

Recent redevelopment, immediately adjacent to Wanstead Park Station, illustrates a more sensitive approach in its use of materials and forms with a scale acceptable against the backdrop of the tall railway viaduct.

PUBLIC REALM

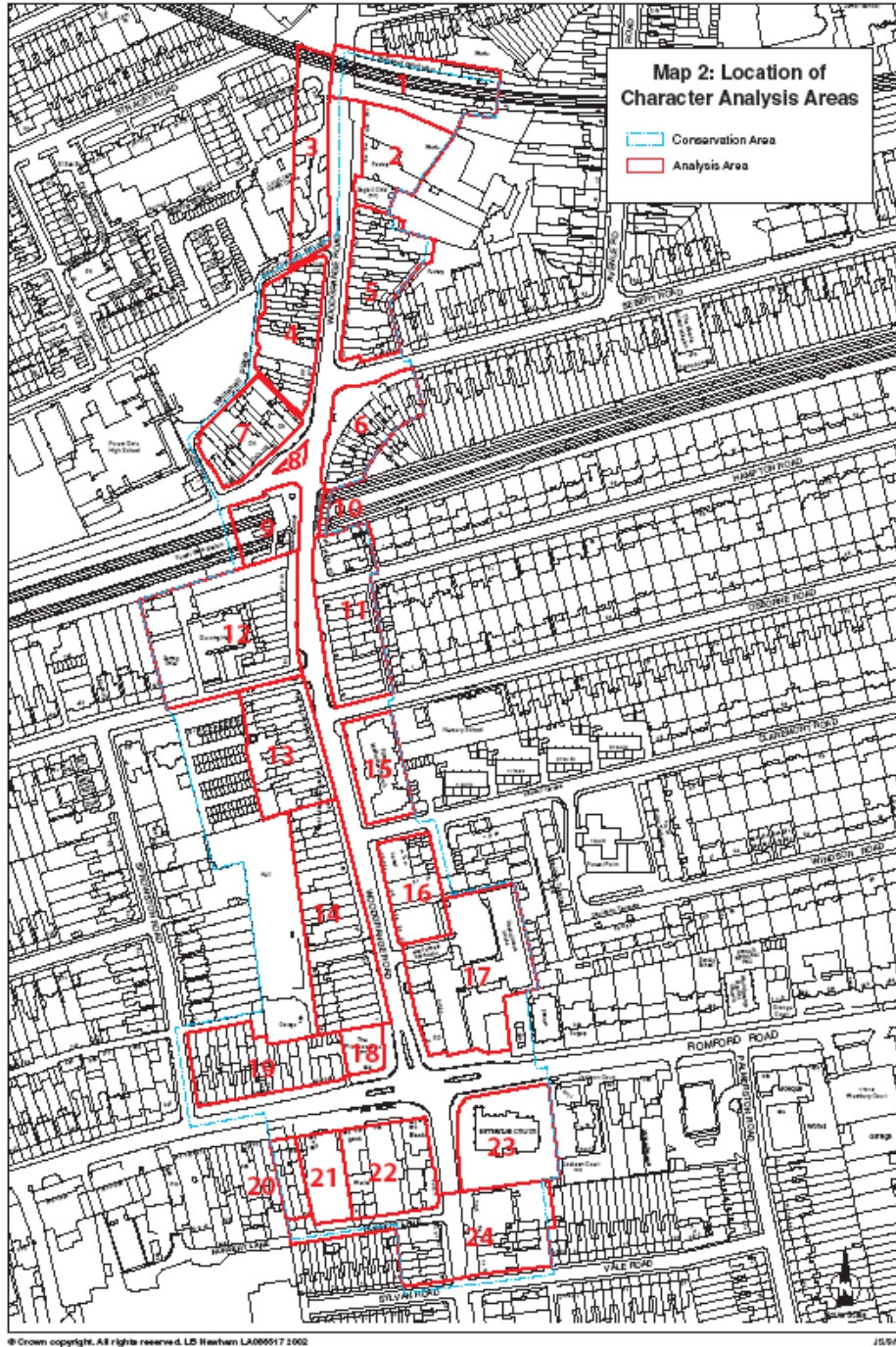
Whilst the original street pattern remains, the public realm has been extensively upgraded during recent years. Specific modern materials were selected to be sympathetic to the area's character. Improvements include new lighting, paving, drainage, traffic management, tree planting, safety measures, grade level public toilets and access to some shops achieved by regrading the adjoining pavement. Original granite kerbs have been retained.

The Council's aim is to ensure that future works to public and private realm together enhance the area's distinctive character and improve safety and access for all.



CHARACTER ANALYSIS BY AREA

This section describes the merit, issues and potential for enhancement of each area in the centre. Locations are noted on the map below.



AREA 1



The viaduct carrying the Barking to Gospel Oak line over Woodgrange defines the northern boundary of the conservation area.



Improvements to access and reuse of arches at Wanstead Park Station

Wanstead Park Station, opened on the 9th July 1894, is of historical interest as part of the railway expansion that supported the development of Forest Gate. These arches were occupied for many years by traders including the locally renowned Elliot's Tea Rooms and Confectioners. The viaduct is a strong architectural feature important in the townscape as pedestrian routes to the centre and station pass under its arches. In recent years the arches were restored for business and storage use. Brickwork was cleaned, the bridge repainted and access and facilities for the station improved. Further improvements could be achieved by repainting the bridge, removing staining and graffiti and all unnecessary advertisements, uplighting and relocating or screening recycling banks.



The bridge frames views southward. The impact of the scale and style of any new development beyond should be considered for its impact on this view. Looking northwards, Capel Point, a 1960's tower block, dominates the view to the forest. Any future work to it should reduce its visual impact.

AREA 2

The site immediately south of the viaduct was previously occupied by a single storey commercial property with an attractive Art Deco façade. However, the use had become redundant. It was recently redeveloped to maximise the site's potential, creating 76 new homes with commercial space on the ground floor. The massing, articulation and materials of the replacement building aim to echo its traditional context and to offset its relative height. It also improves the safety and security of the station and Station Approach through increased footfall and overlooking. The fully glazed commercial unit allows interaction and surveillance along Woodgrange Road. The increase in homes and commerce supports local regeneration. Retention and restoration of the locally listed Eagle and Child PH building was secured by inclusion in the scheme.



Although rebuilt in 1896, an Eagle and Child public house has stood at this spot for centuries. The name derives from the Stanley family (Earl of Derby) coat of arms that feature an eagle and child and is featured in the pub' sign and windows. The red-brick and stucco façade is robust, well articulated and retains original details. The ground floor façade features polished granite, an original fascia with five coloured wood carvings acting as capitals.

These convey “Merrie England” in medieval costume and include drinkers, musicians, a gentleman and queen.

AREA 3

Designed for security and privacy, the Lord Lister Health Centre provides little engagement with the public realm though visitors bring activity to it. Adjoining residential buildings, accessed by small passageways, also turn their back on Woodgrange Road. Trees and shrubs provide a welcome foil to a stretch of road otherwise devoid of natural softness or colour. Brooking Road provides an unattractive view onto the rear of a variety of uses and buildings. The area has a neutral to negative effect on the conservation area. Any future development should create active street frontage, provide greater enclosure and screen unattractive elements behind. New trees with greater presence would be welcomed.



AREA 4

Parts of Area 4 have been identified as being the oldest part of Forest Gate – a small row of cottages just to the south of the original ‘Forest Gate’, the tollgate across Woodgrange Road between 1851-1881.

The age and history of the Chapel at the southern end of that terrace and its similarity to the row of small cottages that were extended to the front to supply retail space is evident in historical records. An Ordnance Survey map of 1867 shows both the Eagle and Child pub and cottages in existence at a time when very little of present day Forest Gate has been built.

The scale and form of these buildings is a present reminder of these early beginnings although the area as a whole has been subject to some negative alterations and demolition. However, the properties house a variety of businesses that provide valued local services and opportunities for community engagement.



AREA 5

Here two and three storey buildings continue the building line of the Eagle and Child PH, single, paired or terraced. They have an appealing human scale and, though not architecturally special, are of townscape value and historic interest. The various styles and forms illustrate the piecemeal earlier development. Most of their original features remain - pitched roofs, parapets and chimneys, vertical window openings, arches and keystones, and brickwork - as do their form and rhythm created by repetition of small shopfronts defined by original pilasters, corbels and blindboxes. Where pitched roofs give way to butterfly roofs, a strong cornice line creates strong visual coherence. The small units here provide a range of local services typical of the “village” atmosphere the Council wishes to promote in Forest Gate.



Good maintenance and sympathetic repairs and restoration could significantly enhance this block given its underlying qualities and limited alteration.

At its end, the terrace curves into Sebert Road into the area previously called “Market Place” or Broadway. Its historic function and name is inscribed in its cornice. Windows were placed in both frontages giving interaction with the whole space and a balanced appearance. The ground floor has suffered unfortunate alteration that detracts from this and some windows are now blocked. Any new work should reverse this error. The removal of a large advertisement and parked cars would also significantly improve its contribution to this key space which was the heart of the early town centre.





AREA 6

The buildings on the south side of Sebert Road also curve into Woodgrange Road, addressing this focal point, historically at the centre of activity with public functions. Public toilets were originally sited on an island at this junction which was incorporated into a wider pedestrian space post-war. Private forecourts and public realm now combine and have been landscaped to provide a sitting out area with trees that mark and soften this busy junction. The relatively grand three storey town houses behind have been altered and neglected, with commercial uses on the ground floor. Restoration would enhance views down Woodgrange Road and the immediate setting.



A lower terrace adjoins, fronting Woodgrange Road and makes an important contribution to the image of the centre given to those arriving here by train or waiting at traffic lights. The terrace was badly damaged in WW2, losing its bold cornice. Cheap brick repair and poor detailing led to spalling brickwork. Some units were rendered to cover this. Their unity was further eroded by loss of sashes and changes to window openings, unrelated shopfronts and signs in cheap materials. Works carried out under a Heritage Economic Regeneration Scheme in 2005 have sought to address these problems. Unity was returned by rationalised window openings, new shopfronts with a consistent fascia line separated by pilasters. Their design derived from the one remaining original. To overcome the problem of spalled bricks and part render, all were rendered. The variety colours were chosen by owners along with shopfront colour. This brightens the street scene and creates an attractive visual stop to the long view down Forest Lane. Any new shopfront or sign should adhere to the overall style of the scheme.



Change and enhancements under the Heritage Economic Regeneration Scheme

The rear mews to these properties, in common with others in the centre, is neglected and not well-used. The smithy, shown here in 1919, has been demolished. New development in the rear yard should improve access, site security and appearance and not project above the buildings to the front.



Enhancements at Woodgrange and Sebert Roads. Rear mews in need of attention.

AREA 7

The north side of the Forest Lane/Woodgrange Road has considerable historic character resulting from the variety of traditional building forms that have evolved here. Number 79 Woodgrange Road is notably unusual in that it has a steeply pitched roof with the gable end facing the road and is only single storey. This is the former chapel, built in 1831, one of the oldest buildings in Forest Gate. Inside, the original roof beams can still be seen. It is of significant historical and townscape value. A suitable use and sensitive works to the front facade would create an attractive, distinctive landmark.

This area is one of the first seen by passengers arriving at Forest Gate. Given this and its historic and townscape merit, all development here, or affecting its setting, should be sensitively designed to conserve and enhance its qualities.



The early importance of this area was confirmed by the opening of the station, shops, school, brewery, pubs and steam laundry. Despite change, the character of the area remains in its variety of forms, scale and styles. The Fox and Hounds and the Railway Tavern, although rebuilt 1925, remain prominent buildings. The Halifax offices also occupy an early, if altered building. In the nineteenth century it was occupied by Vadanelli and Agostini, as the Broadway Stores. Ethnic diversity remains a feature of today's centre.



The Railway Tavern and the Fox and Hounds PH after enhancements under a Heritage Regeneration Scheme in 2005. The scheme included surrounding buildings.

This was traditionally a busy junction, but safety and traffic flow inform its layout with visual noise from street signs, lights, posts, clutter and dominant road markings. Pedestrian flow is confined by extensive guard railing.

AREA 8

The Forest Gate Clock and Drinking Fountain is the iconic landmark of Forest Gate town centre. It was donated by Archibald Cameron Corbett of the family responsible for the development of the Woodgrange Estate. The clock provided commuters with the time, although accounts of the day complain of its bad-time keeping! It was renovated in the 1990's by the original clock makers. It has had a variety of lamps and lanterns and is underlit creating an attractive feature at night. The iron pedestal sits on a bowl and stand of polished stone. It supplied free clean drinking water. Water was pumped to two brass spouts with rosettes. Two stone steps up were provided to reach metal cups which hung from two rings. Water for cattle, horses and dogs was provided in a trough donated by the Metropolitan Drinking Fountain and Cattle Trough Association Society. It has been moved several times to enable junction improvements. It is isolated on a traffic island surrounded by railings and traffic lights. Creation of a more integrated public realm would be desirable as far as safety constraints and traffic needs allow.



Enhancement works to the Gurney Clock and drinking fountain

AREA 9

Another historic landmark of Forest Gate is the leaded dome in front of the station. Formerly part of an extension added to the front of the rebuilt Victorian station, British Rail were persuaded to reinstate this feature, building a detached kiosk to take it. Its use by flower sellers enlivens the street scene. Its appearance should be maintained by keeping advertising and street clutter to a minimum and could be enhanced by feature lighting.



From this spot first impressions of Forest Gate are established. Its raised position affords views in several directions. The design, mass and roofscape of Durning Hall conflicts with and detracts from its setting.



Forest Gate Station facade improvements and kiosk

AREA 10

Single storey buildings are unusual in the town centre. Those on the railway bridge were originally offices of different coal and coke merchants until coal fires fell out of use. Now shops, they were refurbished in 2005 under a heritage regeneration scheme. The coherence of their form was restored by restoration of the plain tile roof and reinstatement of a regular line of fascia and pattern of pilasters. These provide the framework for a colourful collection of outlets. Independent fascia signs use individually illuminated lettering of a sympathetic scale. These enhancements must be maintained as designed without additional signage or alterations to avoid degradation of these gains.



Restoration of the former coal offices on the bridge opposite the station.

AREA 11

Development of the Woodgrange Estate (1877-1892) included several shopping parades on Woodgrange Road. Their former character was restored by another HERS scheme greatly improving the image of the area. Works included reviving the light buff coloured brick and repainting and restoring original windows, surrounds and the heavy cornice. The large Victorian window adds further interest. Granite pilasters with decorated corbels separating each shop were also restored. Reinstatement of the original fascia

line and depth, with the addition of traditional blinds, also enhanced this parade.



Restoration of Nos: 60 to 68 Woodgrange Road part of the Woodgrange Estate

A further Corbett terrace across Hampton Road is also part of the Woodgrange Estate. It had been badly effected by war-time bombing and subsequent neglect and unsympathetic alterations. However, a refurbishment scheme completed in 2008 included full restoration of the parapet cornice, shop pilasters, original window surrounds plus cleaning and repair of brickwork. Some shopfront improvements have also taken place. These schemes underline the importance the Council attaches to establishing the distinctive identity of Forest Gate based on its Victorian character.



Restoration of 40-58 Woodgrange Road

AREA 12

The grand Victorian properties that once stood here were destroyed by wartime bombing. The replacement development is distinctly post-war in form and style in contrast to its dominant Victorian surroundings. It houses Durning Hall community centre, designed with much public participation, to create a strong visual presence as a beacon of the revival of the local community. Its slab block of six storeys is taller and more bulky than surrounding development. It sits upon a lower podium of one and two storeys, a jumble of horizontal and vertical forms housing a wide supermarket and smaller commercial units. It is in concrete, cheap brick and panel materials. Whilst the commercial frontages face onto Woodgrange Road, the taller block, Durning Hall, is accessed from an open car park space facing onto Earlham Grove.

Whilst it is in a style distinctly identified with its period, the foregoing features combine to produce an overly dominant structure which adds little to, and lacks harmony with its traditional setting. A mass of masts and antennae on the roof add to its unattractive impact.

The Forest Gate Town Centre Planning Brief identifies the block for possible redevelopment. As well as regeneration benefits, redevelopment should improve upon past mistakes; secure new buildings of quality which, though contemporary, pay reference to the traditional contextual character and materials; create coherent townscape enhancing the character of the conservation area; better enclose blocks with direct interaction on all frontages; reduce the impact of a tall building on longer views and create an attractive landmark with clean, distinctive skyline.



Durning Hall and shops 51-73 Woodgrange Road.

AREA 13

Earlham Grove links the centre with a hinterland of grand Victorian houses. Lines of mature trees create a very attractive long view.



However, the immediate return in Earlham Grove is unattractive with blank sides to buildings and unsecured, vacant land on the south side. On the north side are the open boundaries of Durning Hall and Royal Mail. The latter, dating from 1939, has an interesting architectural style typical of its period and function. Some mosaic and detailed designs on the wall to Durning Hall are also attractive and of historic interest.

The creation of continuous boundary enclosure, active frontages, and natural overlooking and surveillance, as well as improved rear access to Woodgrange Road shops and to residential units above, and additional greenery and improvement to the public realm would enhance Earlham Grove and the setting of, and views into and out of the conservation area.



South of Earlham Grove are three pairs of semi-detached villas. As the oldest buildings on Woodgrange Road, south of the station, they are of local historic interest. Early photographs show they were originally houses with long front gardens and trees. Their original form and features are still visible above the shops built over their gardens. Their present form and scale contrasts with the taller terraces along Woodgrange Road, reducing the feeling of enclosure. Repair and restoration would be required to enhance their qualities. A small house, No 39A, now also a shop, separates this row from the next terrace, illustrating the quirky evolution of the centre.

AREA 14



This comprises a grand three to four storey terrace. A centrepiece comprises a pedimented gable, dated A.D. 1897. A further fourth floor block, with dormers, terminates this terrace. Despite its apparent unity, the roofline and the juxtaposition of chimney stacks shows this terrace was not constructed as a whole. Old maps confirm its piecemeal development and that the dated, middle section, was the last built. But visual coherence is achieved by use of common materials, creamy stock brick, and stucco and stone window surrounds and cill band.

Restoration of this terrace in 2001 revived these unifying features. The original proportions of shopfronts - their fascia lines, dental cornice, and blinds-were reinstated; the shop framework which lends the terrace its rhythm was also revived by repairing and reinstating the granite pilasters and corbels separating each unit. Facades were cleaned and redecorated and the roofs repaired. This was the first of four Heritage Economic Regeneration Schemes that have enhanced the best traditional elements that give Forest Gate its individual identity.

A second, similar restoration scheme enhanced the adjoining terrace. The shops are again built over the gardens of what were once tall houses creating a building line set back above the ground floor shops. Some shops still contain the original domestic rooms, even a front door at the rear. Original mews buildings to the rear have been converted into dwellings.

These terraces are key to establishing the distinctive identity of the town centre. It is essential that they are protected from unsuitable alterations and that new development preserves or enhances their character and setting.



1-13 Woodgrange Road before and after enhancement works.

Between these two terraces is a private roadway that once gave access to the Forest Gate Public Hall and skating rink. These buildings have since been replaced by a large brick vent shaft to the Channel Tunnel rail link, a dominant and bland end stop. This route also gives access to a garage (now closed) and residential units behind and above the shops. The potential use of this area should be exploited to improve its appearance, security and safety. This includes providing access to residential premises above shops from Woodgrange Road rather than the rear.

AREA 15

Across Woodgrange Road is the Methodist Church and Church Hall built 1962 that replaced the former large Congregational church following bomb damage. This was an elaborate and imposing edifice, its prominent design and place reflected its importance to the local community.



The replacement church hall is in a post-war simple utility style, carried out in brown brick and set in a well planted garden enclosed by a low wall. Mature trees make an important contribution to the townscape and introduce some greenery into this hard, busy environment. The church has architectural interest with its steeply pitched roof and colourful glazed windows. A sculpture, executed by Peter Peri in 1962, of a preacher holding a book, dramatically stretches out from the front end gable. The interaction of these important community buildings with the public realm is limited by the enclosing wall and relatively blank façades.



Any redevelopment of the site would provide opportunity to create more floorspace and community services, better visual interaction and engagement with the street, and a high quality, contextual landmark.

The mature trees at the site are a valuable asset that should be retained both for their softening impact on area views and character and particularly since the conservation area lacks mature trees to offset its hard, heavily-trafficked environment.

There are attractive long views from Woodgrange Road into the adjoining Woodgrange Estate Conservation Area characterised by its abundant greenery. The buildings on Woodgrange Road impact on the appearance of these “entrances” into this adjoining conservation area and form the visual end-stop of views out. The scale and appearance of any development in the centre must therefore be sympathetically designed for its affect on these views.

AREA 16

Nos: 28-38 Woodgrange Road comprises a four storey terrace of residential over shops. It is part of the larger post-war redevelopment of a section of the former Woodgrange Estate that was destroyed by bombing. Its geometric design and material typify the period and it is of an acceptable scale and plan with active frontage, but it does not make a positive contribution to the character of the centre. A passage to the estate behind is not a pleasant or safe and should be addressed if the opportunity arises.



The adjoining “Burton’s building” (formerly occupied by Burtons tailors), although not part of the Victorian legacy, is of interest for its typical Art Deco style. It is fondly remembered locally for the popular ballroom that operated on its upper floors. It was recently converted to residential. The ground floor shop unit is relatively wider than the average available in the centre. It would be much enhanced by a shop front that emphasises its Art Deco facade.

AREA 17

Prior to WW2 this was the site of a tall terrace that included Forest Gate Post Office. A massive wartime bomb explosion took out many of the buildings at or close to this site on the Romford Road/Woodgrange Road junction. It was redeveloped in 1958 as the nine storey building, formerly called “Telephone House” (now Donald Hunter House). This provided extensive offices for the Post Office.

Its upper floors were converted to residential use in the 1990's. "The Gate" library, local service centre and shops were put into a ground floor extension. A bold, wavy, canopy was added to soften the rigid geometry of this concrete framed / panel faced slab block and lend it identity. The form, design and scale of this building pay no heed to context. It dominates both long views and its immediate setting and does not address the junction. Its blank return onto Romford Road is detrimental to the appearance and safety of the public realm.



AREA 18

Opposite, in contrast, is the Princess Alice Public House. This post-war rebuild of this local landmark, is carried out in a distinctive, coherent, Festival of Britain style. Its curving form, terraces and windows are designed to engage with the junction. However, it does not fully exploit the potential of its corner position, in form, scale and presence and has an unresolved discordant relationship with adjoining buildings.



AREA 19



On the north side of Romford Road is a four storey utilitarian post-war rebuild of no visual benefit. Adjoining three storey Victorian terraces, although subject to some neglect and incompatible alterations, retain features of merit - consistent shop fascia levels, façade features and roofscape rhythms. They have attractive, individually designed pilasters, corbels, decorations to eaves and windows, plus a row of original gas lamp standards. Their restoration would make a valuable contribution to enhancing the area's appearance.



AREA 20

Some of the earliest buildings are found on the south side of Romford Road. Their age is indicated by their simple facades and windows details, with butterfly roofs hidden behind parapets. The historical maps show the early development of houses here on narrow deep plots. Shops were later added over front gardens. Although of historic interest they are in poor condition, most outside the conservation area. It is important that redevelopment of any sites adjacent to the conservation area are sympathetic in scale and design. Longer views looking westwards are dominated by the dark brick hulk of a post-war office block. Such mistakes in scale and appearance must be avoided in future.



Three of these earlier plots are within the boundary and are the best preserved, retaining their forecourts, bays and small shop-fronts or bays. They should be kept. Their contribution to the historic townscape could be easily enhanced by removal of forecourt structures and advertising, repairs and redecoration and re-landscaping of their setting.

AREA 21

The other buildings up to Upton Lane are distinctly different. They are forward of the earlier building line, abut the pavement and are wider. The former bank building, faced in buff stone is decorated with classical motifs to convey a feeling of stability and probity. The bank's insignia is on the front elevation. Its mass is broken by vertical rhythms, the entrance emphasised by a broken curved pediment and, its solidity, by a strong base. A balustrade marks the skyline. It makes an important contribution to the townscape and is sole survivor of the late Victorian development of this frontage.



The other building of local significance is the Art Deco styled ex-Odeon cinema which first opened its doors in 1937. It survived wartime bombing that destroyed the nearby Queens Theatre. It is the only cinema building, of many, that remain in Forest Gate. It is of historical and emotional significance as it played a large part in the lives of people and is fondly recalled in local memory. It retains the basic proportions and details of its Art Deco design. Any alterations should be consistent with its style. Refurbishment of the front elevation and shops beneath would greatly enhance its appearance.



Former Forest Gate Odeon

AREA 22



The two buildings before Upton Lane are post-war and of no significant merit. A bank building occupies the prominent corner position. It is opposite a listed church and is the visual end-stop in long views down Woodgrange Road. However its plan and design is very uninteresting for such a key site and does not turn to address the corner. Apparatus on its roof mars the skyline. Any new development should redress these failings. The original bank building, visible on the right of the photo below shows the importance of this corner site was marked by an elaborate, grand, imposing building with a clock as a useful, landmark feature.



This photo was taken after electrification of street lighting was installed in 1898 but before 1904/5 when trams ran here..

AREA 23

The final corner of this prominent junction is occupied by the Grade 2 listed Emmanuel Church, erected in 1852. It was designed by Sir George Gilbert Scott in decorated Gothic style using Kentish Ragstone. Its materials, steeply pitched roof and spire, trees and churchyard are a distinctive feature marking this busy junction. It achieves this whilst still retaining the human scale appropriate to a local centre and the appearance of the conservation area. The trees are covered by a Tree Preservation Order. Its form and setting are a welcome and essential contrast to this urban setting. The church has carried out successful landscaping improvements to the churchyard in recent years in conjunction with the Council. Further joint consideration of how to improve use of this space is required in future to make best use of this attractive resource. It continues to play an important part in the need to sustain and further develop a local sense of community.



This junction is the “entrance” to those passing into, and by, the town centre. Its character and views make an important impact on the perceived image of Forest Gate.

The junction itself, once a “place” shared by all, ceased to lack cohesion with the growing dominance of vehicular traffic. The aim of achieving good traffic flow and pedestrian safety now adds a plethora of traffic control equipment, guard railings and other street furniture. It is now a divided place, the south side severed from the north. However, new tree planting, paving, specially designed lighting and other street items have made a positive step toward improving this heavily used area and gateway to the centre.

AREA 24

The buildings on Upton Lane are of neutral interest. Nursery Lane is of historic interest but this traditional rear mews is now unsafe and unpleasant. The Forest Gate Town Centre Planning Brief identifies its potential for comprehensive redevelopment to three storeys. Any development must improve lighting, security, appearance and rear boundaries to Sylvan Road.

CONCLUSION

Conservation of the centre’s heritage and townscape can play an important part in giving Forest Gate its own attractive, individual identity. To that end, buildings of character should be preserved and enhanced. Redevelopment of neutral or unsightly plots is welcomed to allow for new investment. All new development should complement the centre’s heritage context so that, together, they work to provide Forest Gate with an attractive, distinctive identity.

Much good work has already been undertaken to buildings and public realm for these reasons. Improvements to its housing offer and conservation of its attractive Victorian/Edwardian hinterland is also essential to support the economy of the centre on which the character and appearance conservation area depends.

PART 2: CONSERVATION AREA MANAGEMENT PLAN

The Council's aim is to support and develop Forest Gate as a sustainable neighbourhood centre that will serve a desirable and well-connected residential area, attract high quality shopping opportunities and provide other commercial and community facilities. It will work to attract and facilitate new investment that will support these objectives.

It also recognises that places with a distinctive historic character are attractive places to live and to invest. It recognises too, the value placed by local people on conservation of their centre. It will seek to ensure that new and old development works together, creating a well-integrated place with a special identity, avoiding and correcting mistakes of the past.

The appearance and character of a place results, not simply from its buildings, but also its spaces and the activities that take place in both. The Council will therefore direct its other functions and services toward creating an enhanced town centre.

Much has already been undertaken by the Council, in conjunction with other agencies and local stakeholders, to promote regeneration through enhancement and conservation.

The Council's conservation management plan for the coming five years aims to continue to promote the centre's regeneration in conjunction with conservation and enhancement of its special qualities.

To that end the Council will:

- seek the preservation and enhancement of the character and appearance of Forest Gate Town Centre Conservation Area.
- promote the regeneration of the town centre to the benefit of its conservation.
- address other issues that arise within the town centre that impact on these goals.
- work with the local community, stakeholders and other bodies to achieve these goals.
- pursue its Vision for Forest Gate in 2016, as described in the Council's Forest Gate Town Centre Planning Brief adopted in 2007:

As a neighbourhood centre Forest Gate will offer local shopping opportunities with a vibrant evening economy including cafes, bars and restaurants.

Forest Gate will become a desirable, well-connected residential area, possessing a distinctive village feel with niche shops and independent cafes and restaurants offering a relaxed atmosphere away from the bustle of Stratford, with access to the open spaces of Wanstead Flats.

Forest Gate will provide an improved retail offer with a major new food store ensuring local residents have high-quality shopping opportunities to meet their everyday needs.

Important but outworn community facilities at Durning Hall will have been replaced to a high standard within a mixed use development that will also offer commercial space and mixed use tenure housing. Through effective urban design new development will integrate with the existing urban form and create a greater sense of place than currently exists, limited by the linear nature of the centre.

The Conservation Area Appraisal points to the following opportunities for physical enhancement:

- New build should be sensitive to the scale of its context with an interactive, immediate relationship with the public realm and echo features of the dominant Victorian architectural character, albeit in modern form, to create a greater coherence and collective character. It should improve upon past mistakes. Taller buildings should be designed to reduce their visual impact. To achieve this, form, materials, colour, base and skyline need particular attention. An oppressive sense of enclosure should be avoided.
- Mature planting should be protected and more new planting required and encouraged.
- Setbacks should be preserved, or new spaces created, to provide an attractive, interactive space for pedestrians.
- An attractive evening economy would improve the character of the centre.
- Opportunities to reduce the dominance of traffic over pedestrian needs should be taken where possible. Traffic management schemes here, and in the adjoining area, must be considered for their impact on this as a place for the local community.
- The safety of any new routes for pedestrians should be promoted by overlooking and secure boundaries. Rear access for servicing of shops and refuse storage should be provided with front access to any residential above.

In summary Council will seek and welcome development that preserves and enhances the distinctive historic character of Forest Gate Town Centre Conservation Area and contributes to creating a prosperous centre serving the needs of the local community.

This Vision for Forest Gate complements and supports conservation objectives.

In particular the Council will work toward its objectives in the following ways.

FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

The Council will:

- Exercise its powers under the Planning Acts to require that new development meets high quality design standards that also preserves and enhances the character and appearance of the conservation area.
- Issue site specific design advice to guide development proposals so they positively contribute to conservation objectives.
- Require new development to pay regard to context, complement or enhance established urban grain and townscape, whilst representing the time in which it is built and the culture it accommodates.
- Issue design guidance on specific areas of development including shop-fronts and facades.
- Be pro-active in working with developers to achieve the re-development and/or refurbishment of sites, in particular those identified by the Forest Gate Town Centre Planning Brief adopted by Council in 2007.

PLANNING CONTROLS

- Continue to enforce against unauthorised development, alterations, changes of use and other breaches of the Planning Acts where expedient and in the interests of the conservation of the area.
- Serve s215 notices under the Planning Acts on owners or occupiers of land or buildings whose condition is adversely affecting the amenity of the area, where expedient.
- Every four years undertake a photographic audit of buildings, land and the public realm noting especially features of historic interest (post boxes for example). This will be used to monitor and review progress and also aid effective enforcement.

- Investigate the necessity and desirability of serving an article 4(1) Direction to bring certain permitted development rights under planning control. These would be those that adversely impact on conservation of the area and would follow detailed survey and justification.
- Consider designating an Area of Special Control to increase the extent of its planning control powers over advertisements.
- Will use its powers to serve urgent works and repairs notices, if applicable and expedient, to secure the proper maintenance of buildings of merit.
- Review the Council's list of locally listed buildings and consider the inclusion of buildings within the conservation area in that list.

COUNCIL FUNCTIONS

- In carrying out its functions strive for best practice; ensure consistent and co-ordinated project management and decision-making based on published policies and guidance.
- Will provide specialist expertise in conservation and urban design to advise on proposals for the area. And, subject to resources and priorities will identify specific officers to focus on planning issues within Forest Gate Town Centre.

ENHANCEMENT AND FUNDING

- Seek funds to secure enhancement of the public realm and refurbishment of land and buildings in the interests of promoting conservation objectives. This will involve securing grants from government and other sources and financial contributions connected to the granting of planning permissions (called S.106 agreements).

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- Pro-actively engage with the local community, its representatives, stakeholders, commercial interests and other relevant bodies to promote preservation and enhancement of the conservation area; the upgrading of the local environment; and regeneration. This will include providing town centre management services.
- Promote better use and maintenance of property. This will include pro-actively seeking redevelopment that will bring needed new uses to the centre; liaising with owners to bring vacant or underused property into suitable use; town centre management advice to retailers; attaching conditions to grant-aided schemes to require on-going proper maintenance of improved properties.

PUBLIC REALM

- Ensure consistency and quality in the treatment of the public realm.
- Safeguard elements of the public realm that are of historic significance wherever possible (granite kerbs for example).
- Keep to a minimum, and where possible, reduce street clutter, including, posts, signs, railings, columns, apparatus, structures, advertisements, on the public highway, acting in the interests of conserving and enhancing the area.
- Maintain well areas of the public realm including street furniture (seats, cycle stand, bins etc).
- When undertaking works to the public realm it will aim to improve access for all including reducing visual clutter and physical obstruction.
- Undertake its duties in relation to traffic and transportation so that they support the Council's regeneration and conservation objectives, in particular to explore opportunities for reducing the negative impact of vehicles on the appearance and character of the town centre and the quality of the environment for residents and pedestrians.
- Promote improved access for all to land and buildings.
- Provide or promote greening of the area through additional tree-planting, shrubs and flowers (containers etc) subject to resources.
- It will address issues such as crime and anti-social behaviour; community safety, taking action against fly-tipping, graffiti, dumping of rubbish; proper arrangements for the storage and disposal of refuse from premises; removal of abandoned cars; improving access and security along thoroughfares and to private property.

Action by the Council in any of these areas will be undertaken subject to the availability of necessary resources and funding and within the context of its wider obligations, policies and duties.

BOUNDARY REVIEW

The Forest Gate Town Centre Conservation Area boundaries have been reviewed and are considered, at present, satisfactory for their purpose. Further review will take place as development of the centre progresses.

PUBLIC CONSULTATION AND MONITORING

The appraisal and management plan has been subject to public consultation with the local community and its representatives, relevant stakeholders and other bodies involved in the regeneration and conservation of the town centre. It was made available on the Council's website, hard copies were made available in Council offices, the local service centre/library and an advertisement placed outside the station. Comments received have been taken into consideration in the final drafting of these documents.

A review will be undertaken of these documents every five years.