

# West Greenwich

## Conservation Area Appraisal



2013

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## Contents

1.	Introduction	1
2.	Planning policy context	3
3.	Historical development	5
4.	Special interest and character assessment	7
5.	Appendix: Useful information and contact details	130



# I. Introduction

West Greenwich was designated as a conservation area in March 1968, making it one of the first in the country. It is one of five conservation areas in the western part of the London Borough of Greenwich that are currently being re-examined.

This report was produced by Urban Practitioners for the London Borough of Greenwich and English Heritage. A companion report, Greenwich and Blackheath Conservation Areas Management Strategy and Conservation Guidance, complements this study.



## West Greenwich: Definition of special interest

The West Greenwich Conservation Area extends from the town centre, the pier, the Thames foreshore and Cutty Sark to the railway station, the Georgian and Victorian housing and the open heath on the edges of Blackheath to the south. The conservation area shoulders the Old Royal Naval College and Greenwich Park and the three areas make up the Maritime Greenwich World Heritage Site. The inscription by UNESCO's World Heritage Committee confirms the international significance of the area.

West Greenwich is significant for the quality of its townscape and the diversity of its architecture, which includes Hawksmoor's Church of St Alfege, the Georgian houses of Crooms Hill and Hyde Vale and, in the twentieth century, the former town hall on Greenwich High Road. The Cutty Sark, now Grade I listed, is one of London's most famous landmarks. The area is also notable for the formal set pieces such as Gloucester Circus and the

Regency replanning of the town centre around the market.

Finally, the topography of Greenwich, with streets rising up the escarpment to Blackheath, affords incomparable views across the town centre towards the Thames and the centre of London.







Top: Queen Elizabeth's Cottages  
Middle: Nelson Road  
Bottom: Crooms Hill



**Figure 1.1 West Greenwich Conservation Area**

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## 2. Planning policy context

This appraisal is a non-statutory planning document but it relates to, and should be read with, current national, regional and local planning policy.

The key documents are referred to below.

### National planning policy

Since 1967 there has been a legal duty for all local authorities to designate as conservation areas those parts of its area that are of "special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance". There are currently 20 conservation areas in the London Borough of Greenwich.

Many conservation areas, but not all, are centred on listed buildings. English Heritage lists buildings of special architectural or historic interest on behalf of the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport. The Secretary of State is also responsible for the scheduling of ancient monuments and the registering of historic parks and gardens.

Planning Policy Statement PPS5, Planning for the Historic Environment, sets out current national policy on conservation.

UNESCO inscribed Maritime Greenwich as a World Heritage Site in 1997. Parts of the West Greenwich, East Greenwich and Blackheath conservation areas fall within the 'buffer zone' around the inscribed area and the impact of new development on the setting of the World Heritage Site is a material consideration when planning permission is being sought. An updated Management Plan for the World Heritage Site was issued in 2004.

Circular 07/2009 gives advice on the consideration of Outstanding Universal Values in relation to the protection of World Heritage Sites. In particular, Outstanding Universal Values are highlighted as material

considerations in determining planning applications and appeals. In this context the advice emphasises the need for appropriate policies in local core strategies and in the management plans for each site. Such policies should be concerned with promoting change that will preserve and enhance the Outstanding Universal Values of the Site. World Heritage Site status is a key material consideration in the determination of these policies.

English Heritage has produced guidance for the protection and management of the World Heritage Sites in England which accompanies Circular 07/09. The guidance has been endorsed by Communities and Local Government (CLG) and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS).

Circular 01/06: Guidance on Changes to the Development Control System includes the requirement for Design and Access Statements to accompany planning applications, including those within a Conservation Area or World Heritage Site. The Circular also sets out what should be included within a Design and Access Statement.

### Regional policy

The principal regional policy is contained within the Mayor of London's London Plan (the Spatial Development Strategy). The Mayor works with strategic partners to protect and enhance London's historic environment (Policy 4B.10) and expects Boroughs to ensure that the protection and enhancement of historic assets in London is based on their special character (Policy 4B.11). The Plan also includes a commitment to protecting World Heritage Sites and safeguarding or enhancing their settings (Policy 4B.13). The London Plan and Supplementary Planning Guidance also contains proposals for protecting and managing strategic views, including those of central London from Greenwich Park and Blackheath Point.

The Mayor has produced a draft replacement London Plan, which was open for public consultation between October 2009 and January 2010. The policies addressing the historic environment in the draft replacement London Plan are broadly in line with those contained in the consolidated London Plan (2008). The draft replacement London Plan will undergo an Examination in Public in the summer and autumn of 2010, with the Mayor looking to publish the replacement London Plan towards the end of 2011.

### Local policy

Greenwich Council has started work on a new statutory plan, the Local Development Framework (LDF). This will comprise a suite of documents that will eventually replace the current Greenwich Unitary Development Plan (UDP).

The Greenwich UDP was adopted in 2006 and in July 2009 the Government Office for London (GOL) issued a direction to extend the life of most of the UDP policies and site proposals.

The UDP contains detailed policies for the period to 2011 and in some instances to 2016.

The following policies are of particular relevance to development in and around conservation areas.

**TC7** The Council will protect and enhance the site and setting of the Maritime Greenwich World Heritage Site, as defined on the Proposals Map. Development within it should preserve and enhance its essential and unique character and appearance. Views and vistas to and from the World Heritage Site will also be protected by ensuring that developments in the buffer zone of the Site or directly visible from it are visually sympathetic.

**DI6** Planning permission will only be granted for proposals which preserve or enhance the character or

appearance of conservation areas, taking into account local scale, the established pattern of development and landscape, building form and materials. Where the character of a conservation area is threatened by inappropriate development, the Council will seek to control these through the use of Article 4 Directions. Development on sites in the vicinity of a conservation area and which would have a visual effect on its character or appearance should respect the setting of that area.

The UDP also contains specific policies for siting telecommunications equipment and satellite dishes, as well as for the design of shopfronts, signs, street furniture and advertisements.

**D17** Demolition of buildings and structures which positively contribute to the character or appearance of a conservation area will be resisted. Conservation Area Consent for the demolition of buildings will normally be given only when planning permission has been granted for redevelopment which complies with the requirements of Policy D16. When demolition is permitted it will be subject to the building remaining until a contract for redevelopment is let.

**D18** There will be a presumption in favour of the preservation of listed buildings. Listed Building Consent will only be granted for demolition or partial demolition in exceptional circumstances and will be assessed against the following criteria:

- i. the condition of the building and the cost of repairs relative to its importance.
- ii. the adequacy of efforts made to retain the building in use.
- iii. the merits of alternative proposals for the site.

**D21** Proposals for changes of use of listed buildings will only be granted planning permission if it is no longer in its original or other established historic use and the new

use is beneficial to the building and is compatible with its character and features of historic interest. Such a change of use should not conflict with other policies in the Plan.

**D22** The Council will assist English Heritage to maintain and revise regularly a Register of Listed Buildings at Risk from neglect and decay. The Council will promote action, including the use of building repair notices and urgent works notices where appropriate, to bring about the reuse and repair of buildings on the register.

**D23** The Council will give substantial weight to protecting and conserving the special character of buildings on the Local List of Buildings of Architectural or Historic Interest, with every effort made to secure their long-term retention, maintenance and use.

#### **Article 4 Directions**

There are two Article 4 directions in operation in the West Greenwich Conservation Area. These are on painting in the town centre core, and for controlling and managing small scale alterations to houses in Randall Place and Church Fields.





### 3. Historical development

Greenwich, like its neighbours in Deptford and Woolwich, began as a Thames-side fishing village. There is little evidence of prehistoric habitation but archaeological discoveries in Greenwich Park have confirmed a Roman presence in the area. The main Roman road from London to Dover, Watling Street, crossed Shooters Hill and although there is no indication of a Roman settlement, there is likely to have been some traffic on the riverfront towards Deptford.

Burial mounds in Greenwich Park, once thought to be Bronze Age, are now believed to be Saxon, and the Church of St Alfege in the town centre marks the site of the martyrdom of the Saxon saint. King Edgar granted lands at Greenwich in 964AD to the Abbey of St Peter in Ghent. The Flemish connection lasted until 1414 when Henry V repossessed the estate. By this time, Eltham Palace was already occupied and a second royal seat was established on the Greenwich waterfront. Henry VI enclosed the park in 1433 although the brick wall dates from the reign of James I (r 1603 -1625).

The Royal presence gave a new impetus to the fishing port, with a supporting community for the Court established outside the palace walls. The medieval town centred on Greenwich Church Street, between the river and the Church of St Alfege; there was also a friary nearby.

By the time of the establishment of the Royal Naval Hospital in the seventeenth century, Greenwich and neighbouring Deptford had become a sizeable urban centre whose population of around 15,000 inhabitants was rivalled only by Norwich, Bristol and London. The Church of St Alfege was rebuilt to designs by Nicholas Hawksmoor and consecrated in 1718. Crooms Hill became the most fashionable address for Greenwich's gentry in the early 18th century and was part of a wider migration of London's rich to new suburbs around the capital, including areas like Hackney, Lambeth and Richmond. At this time, the perimeter of the Naval

Hospital was extended westwards to the full width of Greenwich Park, clearing the huddle of buildings that had grown up at the river front against the Hospital walls and establishing the new line of King William Walk. The most impressive addresses in Greenwich were the mansions built on the higher ground to the south, between the Park and Blackheath. They included Chesterfield House (today Rangers House), Macartney House and Montague House (now demolished), the home of Princess Caroline. The main set piece was the creation of Gloucester Circus, an incomplete but impressive speculative development designed and built by Michael Searles between 1791 and 1809.

By the early nineteenth century the town centre was overcrowded and run down. A school had been built in 1814 close to the Church of St Alfege and the Queen Elizabeth's almshouses were rebuilt in 1817. In 1830 the Greenwich Hospital commissioned their architect Joseph Kay to replace many of the smaller streets between Church Street and the Hospital itself. The formal, rectilinear plan that resulted included Nelson Road (formerly Nelson Street) in 1828 as a westward extension of Romney Road, and College Approach (originally Clarence Street), as well as the market, occupying the site of the late medieval mansion of Swanne House and later, Powis Brewery. Contemporary with Kay's improvements was the Church of St Mary in King Street by George Basevi, demolished a century later. In the years that followed the town grew steadily, with streets and terraces being laid out to the west of Hyde Vale and Crooms Hill, including Royal Hill. Denser housing for workers in the new industries was built along Creek Road (then known as Bridge Street, laid out in 1815) towards Deptford's industrial heart. A new Roman Catholic church, Our Lady Star of the Sea, was built on Crooms Hill in 1851.

London's earliest commuter railway line terminated at Greenwich in 1840 with a station designed by George Smith. The original building was re-erected on its

present site in 1878. A theatre opened in 1871. In Greenwich South Street, Penns Almshouses were built in 1884, and a few years later Charlton Park School (now Greenwich Community College) opened, one of two Board Schools of this period to be built in the town.

In the twentieth century further slum clearance took place, especially in the area now known as Cutty Sark Gardens. The Greenwich Foot Tunnel opened in 1902, enabling workers from Greenwich to reach the docks on the Isle of Dogs. A similar tunnel opened at Deptford. West Greenwich Library opened in 1907 on the Greenwich High Road, but undoubtedly the main civic gesture in the first half of the twentieth century was the Town Hall on Greenwich High Road, built in 1938. Its lofty clock tower remains a beacon for the surrounding area.

Greenwich had become a tourist destination during the nineteenth century, with London's swelling population drawn to Nelson's lying-in-state in the Painted Hall and the popularity of Greenwich Park. Visitor numbers continued to increase in the twentieth century with the opening of the National Maritime Museum in 1937 and the display of the Cutty Sark tea clipper in 1954 in a purpose built dry dock on the site of the former Ship Tavern.

Greenwich town centre was bombed during the Second World War and the principal architectural casualty was the interior of Hawksmoor's Church of St Alfege. In the decades that followed, the church was restored and redevelopment took place in the area around Stockwell Street and Greenwich High Road, which radically departed from the former street pattern and building scale. Gloucester Place on the north side of the Circus was also bombed and the 1840s houses were replaced by new flats. New housing was built to infill sites.

In 1999 the Docklands Light Railway was extended to Lewisham with new stations opened at Cutty Sark and Greenwich mainline station. Greenwich University and the Trinity College of Music moved into the Old Royal Naval College and the whole area was opened up to the public.



Figure 3.1 West Greenwich historical development: 1866 - present day overlay

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## 4. Special interest and character assessment

Greenwich lies on the southern bend of a deep loop of the Thames, which is tidal at this reach, and faces the Isle of Dogs. In common with East Greenwich and the Old Royal Naval College, the town centre lies on a gravel terrace that rises gently from the river then more steeply towards the escarpment that runs across the middle of the Park and marks the northernmost edge of the North Downs. Here, at the most elevated points, a number of viewpoints exist that allow incomparable views north to London (protected by the Greenwich Unitary Development Plan and London Plan), which contrast with other important low-lying panoramas available on the Thames looking east and west along the river.

The West Greenwich Conservation Area abuts Greenwich Park to the east and Ashburnham Triangle conservation area to the west. In the southern part of the conservation area there are numerous views to the west and north. Hyde Vale, as its name suggests, is a shallow valley separating the higher ground of The Point and Heath by Chesterfield Walk.

Greenwich does not have areas that are designated as being of special wildlife importance at the regional or national scale, however its extensive areas of open space and mature vegetation are of local significance and home to a number of priority plants, birds and animals including the great crested newt, the pipestrelle bat and the water vole.

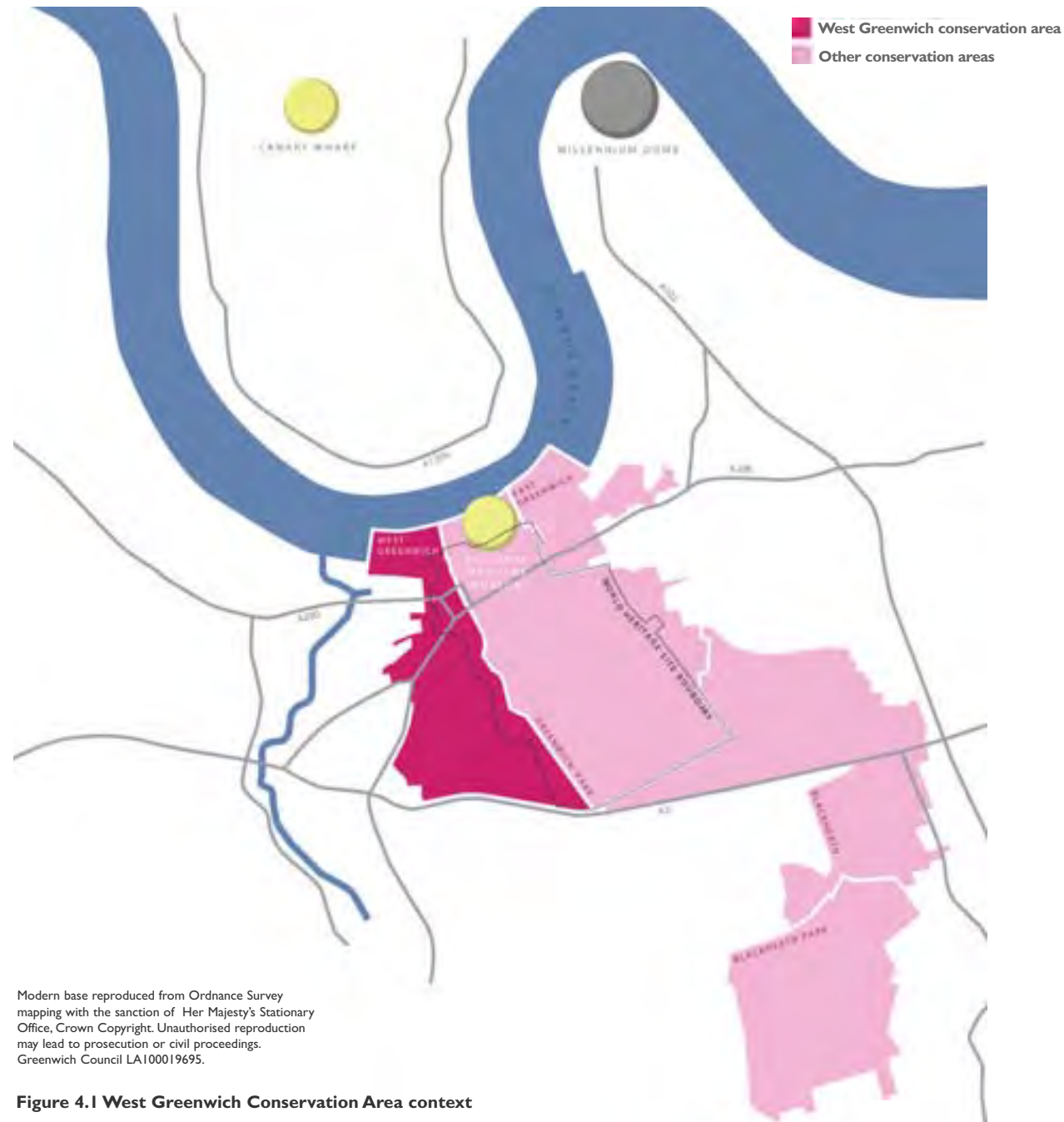


Figure 4.1 West Greenwich Conservation Area context

## General character and urban form

The shape and layout of West Greenwich derive from the following influences:

- The medieval village, whose pattern can be perceived from the sinuous form of Greenwich Church Street and the survival of narrow, tapering building plots on its western side;
- The constraint of the boundary of the Royal Naval Hospital and Greenwich Park, pushing the growth of the town up the escarpment towards Blackheath and westwards to Deptford;
- The constraints and opportunities offered by the steep topography to the south towards the Park and Heath;
- The appeal of the Heath and the Park as a fashionable new suburb for Greenwich's prosperous incomers, migrating from London from the eighteenth century onwards;
- The replanning of the town centre in the 1830s and the creation of a straight, wide route connecting East and West Greenwich;
- The influence of the railway, stimulating the growth of the town after 1840; and
- Twentieth century rebuilding and consolidation, particularly at the waterfront and around Greenwich High Road.



Figure 4.2 Urban form

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## Key landmarks and views

The town centre and riverward part of the conservation area is notable for the fine views across the town and towards central London. There are four highly distinctive landmarks in the conservation area that can be seen from many of the streets and open spaces as well as from the upper floors of countless buildings in Greenwich and beyond:

- The tower of the Church of St Alfege, especially visible in the town centre but also in long views from Trafalgar Road in East Greenwich, and from the terraces and streets above Hyde Vale;
- The spire of Our Ladye Star of the Sea, seen across Greenwich Park and from Deptford, as well as in more local views;
- The clock tower of the former Town Hall on Greenwich High Road, as conspicuous as the tower of St Alfege and often seen in conjunction with it; and
- The masts of the Cutty Sark clipper, (currently undergoing restoration) are seen to powerful effect from the portico of the Church of St Alfege and from King William Walk.

Minor landmarks include the two Victorian Board schools; Greenwich Community College and (just outside the conservation area) Randall Place School. These and other buildings contribute to the sense of place.

The Maritime Greenwich World Heritage Site Management Plan identifies other important views, including long distance strategic views.



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There are two outstanding panoramas to be enjoyed from within the conservation area:

- The view from the Point on the north west corner of Blackheath, in which the landmarks of London can clearly be seen including St Paul's Deptford, the dome of St Paul's Cathedral and the office towers in the City. Looking eastwards, the Old Royal Naval College can be seen and beyond it, the O2 (Millennium) Dome. The strategic importance of this view is given in the statutory recognition in the Mayor's London Plan.

- The prospect of the Thames from Greenwich waterfront towards central London, Canary Wharf and the Dome.

In addition to these vantage points there are also excellent views of Greenwich from Island Gardens on the Blackwall Peninsula.

There are also many important local views, of which the glimpse of the river from Point Hill is noteworthy, along with the view of Greenwich Park from King William Walk. In addition, there are several significant sequences of views, such as the unfolding view of the houses on Crooms Hill or the progression of properties on Maze Hill.



Top left: City of London from Greenwich waterfront  
Top right: Greenwich Park, from King William Walk  
Bottom left: Tower of St Alfege, from Straightsmouth

## Character analysis

For the purpose of this study, West Greenwich Conservation Area can be divided into five broad character areas. The areas overlap, particularly with the views from one to another, but they are sufficiently distinctive to be examined separately.

They are as follows:

1. The Thames waterfront
2. Historic Town Centre
3. Greenwich High Road and Burney Street
4. Crooms Hill, Hyde Vale and nineteenth century Greenwich
5. Blackheath and the houses on the hill



Figure 4.4 Character areas

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## I The Thames waterfront

The Greenwich waterfront was a warren of pubs, yards and houses and was the focus of the town's maritime activity until its clearance in the twentieth century. Today, Cutty Sark Gardens is important as the arrival point for visitors coming to Greenwich by boat. The rather unnatural appearance of the square is due to the raised deck, which covers an underground car park reached from a concealed ramp. The Cutty Sark, a Grade I listed structure, has a justifiably commanding presence in the square and the ship's masts lie well against the trees of the Old Royal Naval College. There has been an effort to retain historical maritime links through the choice of materials and detailing of the square. At the water's edge, the little glass dome over the entrance to the Greenwich foot tunnel contrasts with the scale of the Canary Wharf towers behind them.

The large tidal range of the Thames provides a constantly changing river scene, ranging from an extensive area of foreshore (mud and shingle) with a narrowed navigable river in the centre at low tide, to a full river close to the top of the river banks on both sides at high tide.

To the west of the square are the blocks of council flats, built in the post-war period in a solid, stripped down, classical style. They are a jump from the prevailing scale of other buildings in the town centre and of no special distinction but the blocks are well spaced to take advantage of river views from their windows and from the gaps in between. The Thames footpath has a pair of cannons facing the river that are distinct features. However, the general treatment to the paving and landscaping is degraded. At Wood Wharf a new block of flats faces across the river, taking its style from the warehouses and industrial buildings that once dominated Deptford Creek.



### CHARACTER AREA I: THE THAMES WATERFRONT

Top left: The Cutty Sark and foot tunnel entrance

Top right: Post-war council flats

Bottom left: Cutty Sark Gardens

Bottom right: The Cutty Sark



## 2 The historic town centre

The traffic that funnels into the town from Creek Road and Greenwich High Road mars the appreciation of Church Street. It is nonetheless the town's oldest thoroughfare, full of vitality and interest. As the street rises from the waterfront, it twists past the market and the Church of St Alfege before widening at the junction of Greenwich High Road. The plots on the west side of the street are narrow and tapering, reflecting their medieval origins, although most of the buildings are from much later periods. No 45 Greenwich Church Street, with the remnants of a timber frame, is one of the earliest survivors.

A similarly fine grain is evident opposite on the market side of the street but this is part of Joseph Kay's redevelopment of 1831 for the Greenwich Hospital. The shops here are regular in width and shallow behind, backing onto the service yards and market itself. The passageways into the market have recently been paved in York stone. Kay adopted the then fashionable stucco for the facing material, following the example of John Nash and others in central London. Nelson Road (1829) and College Approach (1836) are each symmetrical and formal routes on axis with the Old Royal Naval College and anticipating its grandeur.

The market place itself is a contrast; quiet, traffic free and sheltered by a big glazed roof, its discolouration filtering the daylight. The stone paving and setts emphasise its functional character. A new block and a curved arcade wraps around the Cutty Sark DLR station, sparsely detailed and bland at the Cutty Sark gardens end, it is largely respectful of the scale of its neighbours.

King William Walk is a step up in quality. The street connects Greenwich Park to the river and there are important views of both; a gentle bend towards the waterfront ensures the pre-eminence of the masts of the Cutty Sark in the descent from the Park. The crossroads



### CHARACTER AREA 2: CHURCH STREET AND THE HISTORIC CORE

Top left: Church Street and St Alfege

Top right: Lord Hood public house

Bottom left: View of The Cutty Sark from King William Walk

with Nelson Road and Romney Road is marred by traffic and the clutter of signs and highways paraphernalia, spoiling the townscape.

To the rear of the Church of St Alfege lies a square and park that together make an important sequence of open spaces connected by St Alfege passage. While the sequence is reminiscent of the medieval structure of the area, buildings did not enclose the land until the early to mid-twentieth century. Georgian terraces and the St Alfege Church Hall overlook the peaceful and secluded church square. It comprises a central lawn with a number of trees of varying ages including a mature horse chestnut and London plane tree. Around the lawn, a granite cobble circular roadway allows for restricted parking and creates an entrance space to the church, reinforced by a line of replica iron streetlamps and railings to the north. While the character of the square and the urban form that has created it contributes to the character of the area, the architectural quality does not transfer to the space itself, which has depreciated over time and does not reflect the status of the surrounding buildings.

To the immediate west of the church square lies St Alfege recreation ground, which in the past served as a burial ground. Today, the space has a mixed identity of a formal park, recreation ground and cemetery. The park has a strong sense of arrival from the Church of St Alfege through iron gates. A dominant avenue of mature limes and occasional horse chestnuts forms a sweeping central axis leading towards the church. Other less dominant planting includes occasional conifers and ornamental shrubs. The mixed boundary treatment ranges from informal and overgrown shrub planting to gravestones that line the redbrick façade to the south. The space has good pedestrian links north and south but is not overlooked and has consequently suffered from vandalism.

St Alfege Passage is a pedestrian scale route that has



### CHARACTER AREA 3: GREENWICH HIGH ROAD AND BURNIEY STREET

Top left: 199-203 Greenwich High Road

Top right: Mitre public house and Church of St Alfege

Bottom left: Greenwich High Road Picture House and Old Town Hall (Meridian House)

Bottom right: Randall Place

largely retained the York stone and centrally cobbled surface treatment. It is partially overlooked (to the north of the Church of St Alfege) and is flanked by iron railings that allow visual permeability into the square and create a semi-private area to the front of the terraces. Traditional styled streetlamps line the passage, which provides a promising framed view of Church Street when travelling west.

### 3 Greenwich High Road and Burney Street

Greenwich High Road is heavily congested, despite a lorry ban limiting through traffic. Entering the conservation area from the south, it begins unpromisingly with the Novotel hotel, a building too big for its site with a blue-green clad top that is strident in distant views.

Greenwich railway station is a cheerful Italianate composition in yellow brick with stone dressings. Its symmetrical façade provides a dignified point of arrival and departure from the town and with the almshouses opposite (in the Ashburnham Triangle Conservation Area) signal the entrance to the historic core.

Greenwich South Street joins the High Road at an oblique angle and the wide junction gives prominence to the terrace of Georgian houses opposite, later altered with projecting shopfronts. This block has a pronounced urban scale. A row of paired early nineteenth century villas back onto the railway line.

West Greenwich library has a well-detailed and lively brick façade, with an iron plaque commemorating its benefactor, Andrew Carnegie. The modest scale of the library contrasts with the flank of the Old Town Hall, rising sheer from the street and making a dramatic contribution to the area. The modelling on Royal Hill is subtle, with a hierarchy of forms above a long horizontal canopy. Opposite the library, the street frontage comprises a low brick wall, iron railing and privet hedge, which is typical of Georgian Greenwich.

Beyond the Town Hall the quality of the buildings deteriorates, with the determinedly horizontal form of the 1960s shops and flats faced in white tiles. The buildings are showing their age and are not improved by the barren forecourt. Opposite them is an irregular block of new housing that makes a neutral contribution to the conservation area. The glassy, curved front of the new Picture House enlivens the street scene and is the best building in the group. Despite its tower, the Ibis Hotel is incoherent in plan and profile, failing to reinforce the corner or to relate meaningfully to its neighbours. Looking back from the corner by the Church of St Alfege, the town hall clock tower stands in proud isolation.

Roan Street and Randall Place converge on the High Road, marked by The Mitre, a tall and characteristically confident Georgian public house (1831). Its single storey extension disrupts the symmetry of the elevation but permits another view of the tower of St Alfege. The churchyard is a calm refuge from the throb of traffic on the High Road, enriched by the Georgian terrace on the north side of the space.

The streets behind the church and to the north of the railway cutting are mostly plain Victorian cottages. Randall Place is substantially intact, and its visual interest is enhanced by the bend in the street, as well as by the presence of the contemporary Randall Place School, a board school of 1877.

Burney Street lies parallel to Greenwich High Road and connects Crooms Hill to the former Town Hall. The southern side is made up of neo-Georgian houses, executed with rather more conviction than usual; they face the genuine article at 26-40 Burney Street, built by Richard Smirke Martyr 1839-40.

### 4 Crooms Hill, Hyde Vale and Nineteenth Century Greenwich

Crooms Hill is justly regarded as one of London's most significant and historic residential streets, comparable in its interest with Richmond Green, Hampstead, Stoke Newington High Street and Cheyne Walk, Chelsea. The street's appeal owes as much to its topography, winding up the side of Greenwich Park to Blackheath, as it does to the richness of its architecture. To the western edge, gardens and mature ornamental trees make a significant contribution to the grand character of the street. The greenery is mirrored to the east by Greenwich Park, which forms a strong boundary becoming more informal to the hilltop.

From the corner of Nevada Street (formerly Silver Street), Crooms Hill begins with a substantial early Georgian terrace of 1721, set back from the road behind gardens and distinguished by high quality brickwork. As the road rises, a sequence of houses of various shapes, heights and materials unfolds. Stone paving adds to the character of the area, although some of it is crudely laid. Amongst the earliest are Nos 16-18, which are late seventeenth century and later stuccoed. Leading from Crooms Hill are some of the set pieces, most notably Gloucester Circus and Crooms Hill Grove, an intact and remarkably narrow row of 1838. One of the earliest survivors on Crooms Hill is The Grange, with its gazebo of 1672, attributed to Thomas Hooke (Cherry and Pevsner, 1983).

Past King George Street, Crooms Hill bends to reveal the white spire of Our Ladye Star of the Sea, a Gothic revival Roman Catholic church of 1851, built in Kentish ragstone. It takes full advantage of its prominent position to act as a distinctive landmark on the Greenwich skyline. The church is not however at the crown of the hill and a winding stone path rises towards St Ursula's Convent (1925) and the spur of ground overlooking Hyde Vale, topped by a cluster of red brick Georgian



revival properties, Chesterfield Gardens. The semi-rural, rough and tumble character of the Heath prevails, but the presence of highways lighting and the hum of traffic on Blackheath Hill is a reminder of its busy location.

Hyde Vale rivals Crooms Hill for its architectural pretensions, with an impressive sequence of eighteenth and nineteenth century villas and town houses that wind up the escarpment to Blackheath. Diamond Terrace to the rear is more private and informal; it includes Nos 1 and 2, a handsome Regency pair with iron balconies that employ a striking frond pattern. Like Crooms Hill, the gardens to both sides of the road are well maintained and contain a collection of ornamental and native mature trees and shrubs that add colour and variety to the streetscape. A number of properties have well-established climbers trained up their façades. In addition, the street retains the typical granite cobble, gutter and kerb detail, and has boundaries formed of brick walls and iron railings.

College Place East, built in 1841 for Morden College by their Surveyor George Smith, is contemporary with other College developments on Maidenstone Hill and in East Greenwich, in the Pelton Street area. The narrow streetscape of Trinity Grove is similar in scale to the adjacent streets. Residents there have developed a great sense of ownership for it, and have added their own individual touches to the pavement such as seats, decking, climbing plants and window boxes.

Greenwich South Street is a relatively busy road and its houses therefore have greater public prominence. At the junction with Blissett Street, the corner is bluntly terminated by a four storey block of flats, Woodville Court. There are a number of semi-mature cherry and sycamore trees set within an open area of grass that provides a valuable green infrastructure to the area. The clock tower of the former Town Hall is prominent. Highlights in the street include the former Victorian Gothic vicarage (1868), now in poor condition, and its



**CHARACTER AREA 4: CROOMS HILL, HYDE VALE AND NINETEENTH CENTURY GREENWICH**

- Top left: Royal Hill
- Top right: Our Ladye Star of the Sea, Crooms Hill
- Bottom left: Diamond Terrace
- Bottom right: Hyde Vale

later neighbour the neo-Tudor Penn almshouses (1884) with contemporary boundary walls and iron gates. Nos 71-85 are a well preserved group of Regency villas, stucco rendered with pedimented doorcases and half-moon fanlights. The clipped privet hedge and railings detail can be seen again here.

Towards the town centre, the linear allotment of the Prior Street Gardens (which was formerly the route of a railway line running from Lewisham to Greenwich, terminating at Stockwell Street) presents a pocket of well-tended allotments. Further east, Gloucester Circus contains an oval shaped, formal private garden with ornamental planting (including weeping ash and cherry) and lawns. The garden is bounded by black iron railings and adds a sense of privacy to the space, which portrays a Regency style character.

### 5 Blackheath and houses on the hill

The favoured position for many of Greenwich's grandest houses was on the edge of Blackheath, on Chesterfield Walk. The first of these in the approach from Crooms Hill is the Manor House, built in 1695 for Sir Robert Robinson, Lieutenant Governor of Greenwich Hospital. Rangers House is the most intact survivor, but its neighbour Macartney House is also an important and complex assembly and includes the remnants of a substantial remodelling in 1802 by Sir John Soane. Of Montague House, built in the 1690s and once the home of Princess Caroline, only a remnant remains in Greenwich Park.

Blackheath Hill, now blighted by heavy traffic, has been a desirable address since the eighteenth century. Point House in West Grove, one of the largest houses in Greenwich, has a symmetrical five bay front built in header bond brickwork, with a hefty extension to its side. Closer to the main road are Nos 87 and 89 Blackheath Hill, the latter with a grand pedimented porch.



#### CHARACTER AREA 5: BLACKHEATH AND HOUSES ON THE HILL

Top left: 18 West Grove (Point House)

Top right: 17 West Grove

Blackheath's open and elevated character creates a strong sense of arrival. The predominantly grassy heath is vegetated around the edge, and the lower slopes give way to more informal vegetation of local ecological importance. There is a strong edge to Greenwich Park formed by a line of mature lime trees. The Heath provides an important open setting for Rangers House, which has a bowling green to the right of its frontage.

To the east of the Heath at West Grove, an extension of the open green is local and semi-private. The mature trees (hornbeam, chestnut, oak and plane) reinforce the maturity of this landscape, which partially bleeds into Hyde Vale. The simplicity of the landscape both contrasts and complements the surrounding Georgian town houses and gardens, and provides a visual barrier between the houses and Blackheath Hill. A newly planted avenue of horse chestnuts along the roadside will reinforce this as it matures.

Point Close flats, three storeys plus basements, are mid-twentieth century Georgian style, respectful and muted in this location. To the north of Point Close lies The Point, which is the part of Blackheath with a key strategic view towards Greenwich, Deptford and the city (protected in the Mayor's London Plan and the Greenwich UDP). A strong avenue of very mature plane trees reinforce the southern boundary which leads to the viewpoint, marked and illustrated by a simple steel sign. The view is partially blocked by semi-mature holly bushes to the north, which mark the more informal vegetation that has been planted on the lower slopes. The Point lies upon a pedestrian route that connects Maidenstone Hill and Point Hill with flights of steep steps that pass through informally vegetated slopes. The mature garden vegetation to the east contributes to the strong character of this green space. A footpath at its base reveals the importance of roofs, chimneys and back extensions in the Greenwich panorama.



## Architectural and historical building quality

The conservation area contains many buildings of individual intrinsic merit, and even more that have group value. The following buildings may be singled out for their particular historic, architectural or landmark value:

**Cutty Sark** One of the last, and for many years the fastest tea clipper trading between Britain and the East. Now Grade I listed, the Cutty Sark has been a treasured Greenwich landmark since 1954 and is currently undergoing restoration.

**Church of St Alfege** Commemorating the martyrdom of Archbishop Alfege at the hands of the Danes in 1012. The roof of the old church collapsed in 1710 and its replacement by Nicholas Hawksmoor was built between 1714 and 18, using money from the Fifty New Churches Act of 1711. The old tower was recased by John James in 1730 and rebuilt in 1813.

**Greenwich Railway Station** The original terminus of London's earliest railway (1840), which was rebuilt on this site in 1878.

**Greenwich Old Town Hall**, (now Meridian House). Designed by Clifford Culpin (1939) and inspired by Scandinavian and Dutch precedents. Altered internally but "a progressive building for its time. A fine irregular composition with tall sheer tower, with well balanced opposing elements, especially in the elevation to Royal Hill. Some of the details now with rather a period charm, especially the flat bricks and the piquant angle window high up in the tower, both Dudok motifs which had begun to fascinate certain English architects about 1930 (Cherry and Pevsner, 1981).

**Our Ladye Star of the Sea** Designed by architect William Wardell, pupil of Pugin and the architect of Our Lady of Victories, Clapham Park Road, completed at the same time (1851).

**Greenwich Market** The centrepiece of Joseph Kay's rebuilding of the town centre for the Greenwich Hospital and a significant example of Regency planning. The market block is superimposed on the medieval street pattern, and includes Turnpin Lane as well as the curve of Church Street.

**Rangers House, Chesterfield Walk** A seven bay red brick house (1699). South gallery added in 1749-50 for the fourth Earl of Chesterfield. A complementary north wing was built after 1783.

**Gloucester Circus**, designed and built by Michael Searles (later the designer of the Paragon at Blackheath) as a speculative venture, and completed in 1809.

**Greenwich Community College** (formerly Greenwich Park School) A local landmark executed in the Jacobean revival style.

**West Greenwich Library** (1905-07) Architects H.W. Willis and J. Anderson. One of many libraries across the UK funded by the Andrew Carnegie Foundation. Crisply executed, symmetrical red brick façade and doorways with Gibbs surrounds.



Top: Greenwich railway station  
Bottom: Gloucester Circus

## Land uses and activity

This large conservation area embraces a wide range of activities, including offices, education, leisure, shopping and transport. Residential is the main land use, complemented by open space at Blackheath and the Point.



West Greenwich: Local details

## Local distinctiveness

The main contributor to the special character of Greenwich is the way the area has developed in response to its two natural characteristics, namely the River Thames, and the hills and escarpment rising to Blackheath, which provides impressive views from a number of points. Supporting these influences is the interplay between groups of buildings and open space, principally Greenwich Park and the Heath but also including characteristic pockets of hidden areas between buildings.

There are no surviving medieval buildings in Greenwich, but the street pattern in the town centre is ancient and the character of the centre is partly governed by the shape of Greenwich Church Street, as well as the narrow plots that run from it on the west side.

Greenwich's landmarks are immediately identifiable and reinforce local distinctiveness, especially the masts of the Cutty Sark, the tower of the Old Town Hall and the tower of St Alfege.

### **Local details**

Greenwich, close to the heart of a cosmopolitan city, does not have its own building style or a narrow palette of local materials. On the contrary, it is the range and mix of materials that contributes to the vibrancy of the area.

There are several commemorative plaques in the conservation area, including two official blue plaques marking the homes of C. Day Lewis and Benjamin Waugh. The plaques of the Morden College Estate, which can also be found in the Pelton Road area of East Greenwich, are to be seen in the Maidenstone Hill area.

Original nineteenth century cast iron railings survive in some places, including Gloucester Circus and the terraces around Maidenstone Hill. Iron railings are often

in combination with a privet hedge and low London stock brick walls. Several Georgian buildings have incised or raised lettering, carved in the stone string courses or pediments. From the same period, there are some good examples of wrought iron balconies, especially the Regency group at the end of Diamond Terrace.

A prominent kerb detail exists throughout the conservation area comprising granite cobble gutters and single or double kerbs. There are fine examples on Royal Hill and Hyde Vale.

### **Prevalent local and traditional building materials and the public realm**

The Greenwich area lacks any building stone of quality but the Thames has long provided ready access to materials from distant places. Brick is the predominant building material and from the latter half of the eighteenth century the favoured type was the yellow London stock brick, which discolours to a dark grey hue. Most of Greenwich's public buildings have been cleaned and so too have many houses; cleaner air since the 1950s has also resulted in a progressive lightening of the brickwork.

Red brick was used for the earliest buildings in the area, such as the gazebo on Crooms Hill. It was used decoratively in combination with yellow stocks as dressings for many Victorian houses and schools such as Charlton Park School. By 1900, warm and finely textured red brick was undergoing a revival and West Greenwich library is a fine example. The outstanding example of twentieth century brickwork is the Old Town Hall, whose narrow bricks and subtle bonding pattern provided a foil to the substantial mass of the building.

By the seventeenth century, Portland stone had become the preferred material for high prestige, classical buildings and was used extensively for the Royal Naval Hospital. It was thus the obvious material for Hawksmoor to use at the Church of St Alfege and likewise John James for the

recased tower.

For the rebuilding of the town centre, Joseph Kay and the Greenwich Hospital Charity followed the example of Nash and others by using stucco as the facing material, painted in imitation of stone.

In 1851 the local stone, Kentish ragstone was employed for Our Ladye Star of the Sea on Crooms Hill.

The predominant roofing material is Welsh slate but tiles and lead sheet are also to be found. Some of the slate roofs have been replaced with concrete tiles or artificial slates, which have a relatively lifeless appearance.

Windows and doors have until recently been almost universally painted softwood, but, stained tropical hardwoods have also been used and there has been a vogue for plastic windows in some streets.



## Listed buildings

The map opposite shows the high concentration of buildings of merit in the conservation area, including many statutory listed buildings. The close-knit character of the area means that the majority of buildings have group value with their neighbours, adding to their intrinsic interest.



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## Key unlisted buildings

The Council has identified many buildings in the conservation area as being of local interest. The majority of these make an important contribution to the townscape as part of a group, with each other or with nearby listed buildings. Examples include the Morden College Estate terraces on Maidenstone Hill, the villas on the east side of Hyde Vale (Nos 11-35) and the Straightsmouth cottages.

Locally listed buildings that are of landmark quality include Randall Place School and the Greenwich Community College.



Top left: Hyde Vale  
Top right: Greenwich Community College  
Bottom left: Straightsmouth  
Bottom right: Maidenstone Hill



## Natural features

### Green open spaces

The open spaces within West Greenwich are characterised by the wide, open spaces at higher elevations and hidden pockets of green at lower elevations and within the town centre. This gives the impression that the Heath (Blackheath) gradually bleeds into the town centre through fingers of green defined by prominent green streets, local parks, and gardens.

The exposed and public Heath develops an obvious semi-private feel towards residential boundaries where the lawns adopt a grander and more intimate character. At West Grove, the green serves as a buffer between the houses and the traffic of Blackheath Hill. A newly planted row of chestnuts is likely to increase this effect.

The Point is a spur on the Heath located on a small plateau of the escarpment. The main attraction is the panoramic view, identified within the London Plan and the Greenwich Unitary Development Plan as one of strategic importance. The simple combination of mown grass and very mature plane trees give way to steep slopes to the north and west that are more heavily vegetated with scrub and pioneer species. The slopes provide an important habitat for wildlife and contain steep flights of steps that are typical of the slopes to the north of the escarpment.

Opposite The Point is a small triangle of informally managed open space that is typical of the lower slopes leading from Blackheath and Greenwich Park to the town centre. It is a small pocket of informal space that contributes to the rural sense of place experienced on Westgrove Lane.

From Blackheath, two important streets that contribute significantly to the character of the area are Hyde Vale and Crooms Hill. The streets are both leafy and contain well-maintained gardens that add visual interest and



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colour to the streetscape. A number of mature trees exist along both streets that add structure. The old (and dying) beech opposite the King George Street Gate of Greenwich Park is particularly dominant.

Gloucester Circus is a semi-circular, private garden from the Regency period, enclosed with iron railings. The private lawns with ornamental trees and shrubs (such as weeping ash and cherries) contain an old plane tree to the northeastern side. The garden contributes positively to the overall composition.

Prior Street allotments remain mostly hidden to the passer by, only visible through the gated access from Prior Street. The walled allotment gardens provide an area of wildlife value as do the more informal boundaries of Greenwich Park.

It is worth mentioning Trinity Grove, which is a small residential street to the south-west of the conservation area. Despite the lack of front gardens, residents have adopted the pavement with decking, pot plants and window boxes.

The Church of St Alfege and recreation ground are hidden areas of key green space that operate as important pedestrian routes, despite their concealed location. The church square contains a group of mature plane trees in a central lawn encircled by a granite cobble road. The mixed boundaries (rails, gravestones, walls and hedges) add a sense of age to the square, reinforced by the historic style of lamps present here.

St Alfege's recreation ground previously served as a burial ground and some of the more significant tombs remain, although some have been subject to graffiti. Other headstones line the southern boundary adjacent to Sussex Court. The strong avenue of mature limes and occasional horse chestnuts define the sweeping, central axis of the park, reinforcing the strong sense of arrival from St Alfege's churchyard. Other ornamental planting

(including some conifers) have less of an impact but together create the sense of a traditional park landscape. There is a sports pitch and playground to the west that is located away from the key movement routes. Despite the significance of this space, it is poorly maintained and does not fulfil its potential as a key open space in a historic town centre.

### **Hard open spaces**

Cutty Sark Gardens is a prominent open space named after the adjacent famous tea clipper. The Thames ferry pier and the entrance to the Greenwich foot tunnel make this space just as important for people passing through it as it is for those visiting the attractions. Cutty Sark Gardens, despite its name, is predominantly a hard-surfaced space, combining timber and stone and incorporating seating, lighting and artwork. The detailing of the hard space adopts a contemporary style but is of high quality and reflects the maritime activities on which Greenwich founded. The orange rendered retaining wall to the west of the space is an effective screen to the car park below the gardens and provides a line of well-used seating.

## Loss, intrusion or damage

Stockwell Street, Creek Road and Greenwich High Road are the most altered parts of the conservation area, and redevelopment has tended to disregard the special architectural and historic character of the area. The flats around Winforton Street and Blissett Street similarly disregard their historic context, sited at odds with the street pattern and paying no heed to the general pattern of development.

The greatest damage to the conservation area has been to the area around Stockwell Street and the eastern end of Greenwich High Road. Redevelopment after bomb damage has either completely disregarded the character of the area or has been superficially contextual - an example of this issue is at the Ibis hotel, which uses a yellow brick and loosely Georgian idiom but does not produce a coherent composition. Some of the new housing around Royal Place is weakly derivative of the adjacent nineteenth century houses and tends to diminish their impact.

## Neutral areas

The blocks of flats between Creek Road and the Thames do nothing for the character of the conservation area but nor do they unduly detract from it. The same may be said about the flats at Point Close, which are of no special interest but generally respect the scale and setting of their historic neighbours. The neo-Georgian housing on Burney Street has more confidence than most of its contemporaries and responds positively to the historic buildings opposite.

## General condition and buildings at risk

Most of the property in the conservation area is in full economic use and is well maintained. Where there are exceptions, they tend to be larger properties located on busy roads.

The Old Vicarage on Greenwich South Street, a building of local interest, is in poor condition and needs immediate attention. The Old Town Hall on Greenwich High Road is also showing some signs of deterioration. Number 24 Royal Hill (the former greengrocers) is unoccupied and in poor repair.

## Conservation area boundary review

The conservation area is very large and abuts others; it is not therefore a self-contained area of historic and architectural interest. Obvious examples include King William Walk and Crooms Hill, abutting the Greenwich Park Conservation Area, and Greenwich South Street, where the west side falls within the Ashburnham Triangle Conservation Area.

Three small adjustments to the conservation area might be considered:

- South from Horseferry Place to include the listed St Alfege with St Peter's CE Primary School, as well as the housing blocks to the south of Welland Street. The inclusion of No 302 Creek Road, currently a cabaret club, would give a measure of protection to a building of local interest.
- Randall Place School has powerful group value with the houses opposite and there is logic in including it within the conservation area boundary.
- The flats around Dutton Street and Winforton Street are of no special merit and might reasonably be omitted from the conservation area.

## Problems, pressures and capacity for change

Heavy traffic in the town centre has long been recognised as Greenwich's most intractable problem. Despite a lorry ban on Romney Road, Greenwich High Road, Church Street and Romney Road continue to bear an unacceptable burden of cars, buses and other vehicles. The pavements are often crowded and noise levels are high. There are also associated problems, such as occasional damage to buildings and a proliferation of road signs and highways paraphernalia. A strategic approach is needed to calm the influence of vehicles and perhaps to find ways of sharing surfaces in the town centre. Traffic and noise levels on Blackheath Hill are also uncomfortably high.

West Greenwich is a popular place to live but some of its newer housing has been out of sympathy with its surroundings, either by ignoring its context altogether or by being weakly imitative. There is scope for a higher standard of development that takes full advantage of the exceptional topography and historical shaping of the area.

Greenwich is well served by cafés, pubs and restaurants, although its shopping is relatively modest. Redevelopment opportunities on Greenwich High Road and Stockwell Street could provide high quality mixed use development including university accommodation that could mend current breaches in the townscape.

Greenwich Market is a fragile asset to the town and would benefit from refurbishment, but its intimate scale and functional character should not be sacrificed. Proposals for its future are currently under consideration.

In recent years there has been considerable investment in pavement resurfacing and in other public realm work, but it has been sporadic. There is a case for a new street

audit, with a view to removing clutter and a planned programme of maintenance and enhancement works.



## 5. Appendix: useful information and contact details

Urban Practitioners wishes to acknowledge all those who, in print or in person, have contributed to the historical and architectural content of these reports. They include staff of Greenwich Council, English Heritage and the London Metropolitan Archives. Particular thanks are due to the Greenwich Heritage Centre and to Neil Rhind, historian of Blackheath, who has generously shared more than forty years' research for these volumes.

### Publications

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John Bold **Greenwich - An architectural history of the Royal Hospital for Seamen and the Queen's House** (London: Yale University Press 2000)

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Neil Rhind **Blackheath Centenary 1971-1971 A Short History of Blackheath from Earliest Times** (Greater London Council, 1971)

Neil Rhind **The Heath: a Companion Volume to Blackheath Village & Environs** (Bookshop Blackheath Ltd, 2002)

Neil Rhind **Blackheath Village & Environs: Volume I The Village and Blackheath Vale** (Bookshop Blackheath Ltd, 1976)

Neil Rhind **Blackheath Village & Environs: Volume 2 Wricklemarsh and the Cator Estate, Kidbrooke and St Johns Park** (Bookshop Blackheath Ltd, 1987)

**Maritime Greenwich World Heritage Site Management Plan** (revised 2004)

Available online at:  
[www.greenwichwhs.org.uk](http://www.greenwichwhs.org.uk)

**Cutty Sark Gardens Planning Brief** (2006)

Available online at:  
[www.greenwich.gov.uk](http://www.greenwich.gov.uk)

### Archives and libraries

Greater London Sites and Monuments Record, English Heritage, 1 Waterhouse Square, 138-142 Holborn, London, EC1N 2ST

Greenwich Heritage Centre, Artillery Square, Royal Arsenal, Woolwich SE18 4DX

London Metropolitan Archives, 40 Northampton Road, Clerkenwell, London EC1R 0HB