

TOWN HALL S Q U A R E *CONSERVATION AREA*

PROPOSAL FOR CONSIDERATION

May 1995

London Borough of Hackney
Town Planning Service
Directorate of Environmental Services

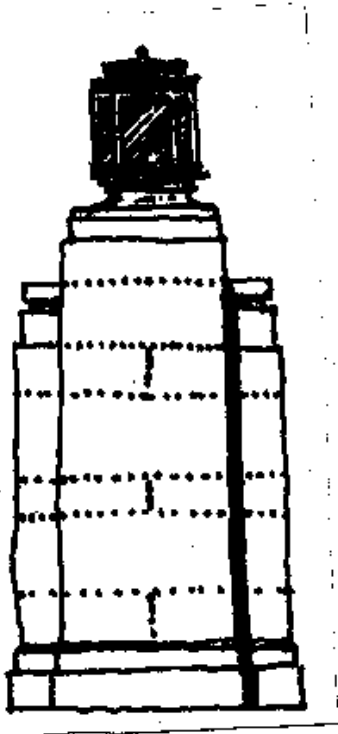


Town Hall Square

Conservation Area

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1.0 Summary

This report proposes and then justifies the designation of the Town Hall Square as a conservation area. It describes and analyses the historic and architectural importance of the area, reports on its present state and outlines future development proposals. Through an analysis of the areas environmental and architectural strengths weaknesses, opportunities and threats, it develops the case for a series of proposals to conserve and enhance the proposed conservation area and sets out a series of basic principles and guidelines to inform development. The report contains a full list of properties recommended for inclusion in the conservation area and also an inventory of statutorily and locally listed buildings of architectural or historic merit.

2.0 Introduction

Hackney contains many areas of architectural and historic interest. The Council has a series of policies to help conserve and enhance these areas including a progressive programme of conservation area designations. Conservation areas are defined in legislation as areas of special character or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to improve or enhance.

The Town Hall Square is now proposed for designation and this report sets out the historical context and analyses the characteristics of the area, and goes on to establish a series of aims and more detailed proposals and guidelines for the area.

3.0 Context

3.1 The surrounding area

The Town Hall square area is generally framed by the North London Line Railway viaduct to the north which splits central Hackney into two, and the Liverpool Street Line to the west. To the east and south there is little to mark the edge of the district and the urban fabric drifts towards London Fields and Cambridge Heath in the south and Homerton in the east. Mare Street runs north south along an apparently ancient alignment. The Town Hall Square is an important event along this part of Mare Street as well as a public open space

and the focus for the Civic core of the London Borough of Hackney. The Town Hall square is distinct from the Narrow Way, to the north, which contains the core shopping area. Along Mare Street, travelling south, the shops gradually give way to the civic uses such as libraries, halls, the Town Hall and the Hackney Empire. South of the Square, the built fabric becomes more fragmented and a strong sense of coming to the end of the town centre quickly establishes itself.

Graham Road, Morning Lane, Amhurst Road, the Narrow Way and Mare Street itself form an important vehicular and pedestrian crossroads at the northern end of the study area.

3.2 Policy context

National policy is set out in Planning Policy Guidance Note 15 and The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation area) Act 1990. It places a duty on local authorities to consider, from time to time, suitable areas which would benefit from conservation area designation. Draft Strategic Guidance for London recognises the contribution of historic environments to diversity, vitality and as a focus for tourism as well as for their intrinsic interest. The guidance encourages local authorities to identify areas and buildings of special character and to promote policies for conservation which complement the designation of areas.

Concern for the quality of the environment lies at the heart of the Council's planning policies set out in the Draft Unitary Development Plan. Strategic policies set out in the plan seek to ensure that all new development will be in keeping, or enhance, the local character of established areas of townscape. The preservation and enhancement of the character and appearance of conservation areas is also set out as a strategic policy.

The Plan sets out detailed policies to designate and to protect conservation areas and to develop guidance for each area to inform conservation efforts and control demolition, alteration and additions to buildings. The UDP also proposes the designation of new conservation area on a progressive basis.

3.3 What is a conservation area?

Conservation areas were introduced under the 1967 Civic Amenities Act as a means of identifying areas of special character to be protected or enhanced. The Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Area Act) 1990 defines conservation areas as; "areas

of special architectural or historic interest, the character of appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance.

Legislation places a duty on local planning authorities to designate as conservation areas any areas of special architectural or historic interest the character of appearance of which it is desirable to conserve or enhance. The Borough has already designated sixteen conservation areas covering more than 214 hectares. Conservation areas are the main mechanism available to Local Authorities to implement conservation policies on an area or neighbourhood basis.

Designation introduces a general control over the demolition of unlisted buildings and provides the basis for policies designed to preserve or enhance all aspects of the character and appearance that define an area's special interest. Designation also strengthens controls over minor development and protects trees.

It is the quality and interest of the area as a whole, rather than individual buildings, which is the prime consideration in choosing areas for designation. Conservation areas are a way of recognising all the factors which affect the quality of the townscape in its broadest sense.

3.4 Designation programme

The Town Hall Square is proposed for designation along with Broadway Market; and . A further four areas are proposed for designation by March 1996. They are:- De Beauvoir Conservation Area (extension); Clapton Square Conservation Area (extension); St Thomas's square (Mare Street); and Graham Road/Mapledene. These areas have been prioritised and brought forward on the basis of a survey of all the potential conservation areas in the Borough identified in a previous report to the Council's Planning Sub Committee in 1994.

3.5 Criteria for designating conservation areas

Conservation officers have selected three broad criteria to help prioritise and focus conservation work:

To prioritise and focus efforts on:-

- a) areas and buildings of highest architectural historic and townscape value;
- b) areas and buildings of architectural, historic and townscape value under greatest threat;
- c) area and buildings where the potential for wider regeneration benefits exist and where there are opportunities to draw down additional funding from other agencies and from central government to support conservation efforts.

These broad criteria have been used to prioritise the proposed conservation areas listed in section 3.4 above.

4.0 Development Proposals

Hackney Council, through the Hackney 2000 strategy and the Heart of Hackney project has focused regeneration efforts in this area. As a result, many improvements have already been implemented. The general thrust of these efforts, as they effect conservation, has been to encourage the redevelopment of vacant and derelict sites and buildings and to encourage and support improvements to the existing built fabric.

These initiatives are broadly in line with conservation objectives and it is anticipated that conservation area designation and control will support and complement the overall strategy.

At this time, there are a number of development proposals within and near the conservation area. However, these are unlikely to affect or harm the character and setting of the proposed conservation area. Number 287 Mare Street, adjoining the conservation area boundary, is a vacant former Housing office. The site is proposed for redevelopment and will incorporate a new Library for Hackney as well as other uses with a broad arts and cultural theme. The loss of the existing building is accepted on the basis of the Council's intention to ensure its replacement with a scheme which represents the highest architectural quality so enhancing the setting of the conservation area and, in townscape terms, this will represent represents a radical but sympathetic improvement to the southern boundary of the square.



The Central Hall is to be improved to provide a new theatre/concert space. This is likely to involve some limited demolition of ancillary buildings to the rear and possibly remodelling of 290 Mare Street. This is supported on the basis that it is necessary works to secure the re-use and development of Central Hall, a locally listed building.

There are a number of proposals to alter the current traffic management scheme. These include the reintroduction of a right turn into Mare Street from Morning Lane. There are also wider ranging proposals to more effectively manage traffic around the Town Hall and Square including a one way arrangement along part of Reading Lane and the exclusion of through traffic along Wilton Way. None of these proposals involve the displacement of built fabric in the conservation area.

5.0 History of the development of the area

Hackney's second town Hall (the first is now the Midland bank in the Narrow Way), was completed in 1866. The Town Hall was built on the former Hackney Grove, and open space at one time used as a paddock for sheep by local butchers. It cost £18,000. Wings were added in 1896. It was demolished after the present Town Hall was built behind in 1937 and the site was then laid out as the present ornamental gardens.

The Hackney Empire was designed by the renowned theatre designer Frank Mitcham and opened in 1901. Its narrow frontage onto Mare Street is reputedly the result of astute site planning in which the auditorium was located further back from the street so minimising the need to purchase expensive properties fronting onto Mare Street. The Theatre was renowned in the field of variety and music hall attracting the top performers of the day.

Mare Street, before the 1900's was no wider than the Narrow Way. When the road was widened, it appears that all the enclosing built fabric to the east of Mare Street was lost leaving a largely Victorian street frontage to the west and mainly Edwardian development to the east.

John Roque's Map of 1769 shows Mare street, then called Church Street, winding northwards towards St Augustine's church. Development lines both sides of the street up to the approximate

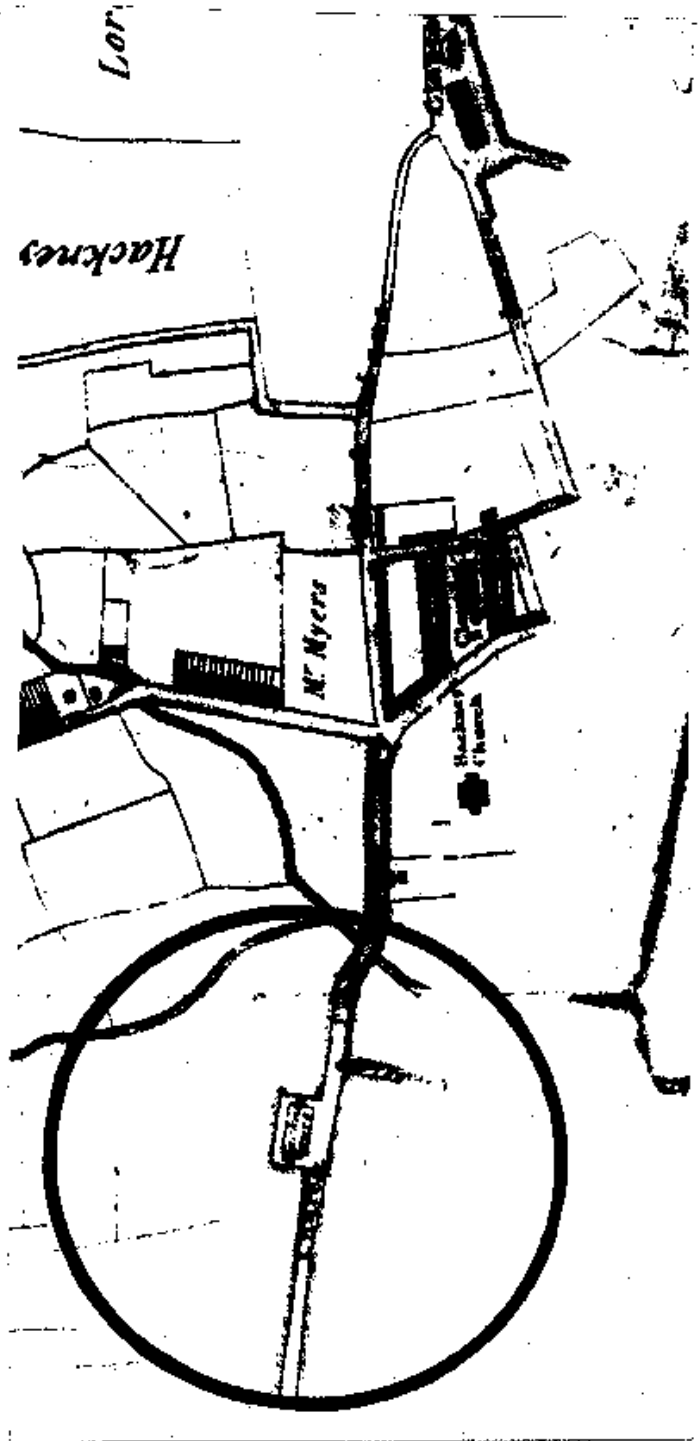
alignment of Reading Lane. What appear to be market gardens and orchards lie to the rear of the houses developed in a haphazard and individual way in the style of a village. Sylvester path also contains development along its length and, along with Morning Lane (named as Money Lane), comprise the other two main routes in the centre of the village.

The Starling Map of 1831 shows Hackney Grove as an informal open space. Development has begun to stretch away from Mare Street (still known as Church Street) forming development of a more urban character. Hackney Grove, the site of the town hall square, existed at this time. The Grove was fronted by terraces of georgian houses, for the emerging bourgeoisie. What may be the Britannia Inn is located on the approximate site of the current Samuel Pepys public house. It was destroyed by bombs in 1940.

Almshouses, known as Spurstowe's almshouses are located along Sylvester path and the annotation on the map states that they were for six widows. The Almshouses were demolished in 1966 after their location, opposite a pub, was considered unsuitable. Paragon Road has been created and called Pleasant Place leading on to Paradise Row. The Hackney Brook which ran from east to west at the top of Mare Street was, until, 1790 a ford. It was then bridged over and the brook eventually culverted.

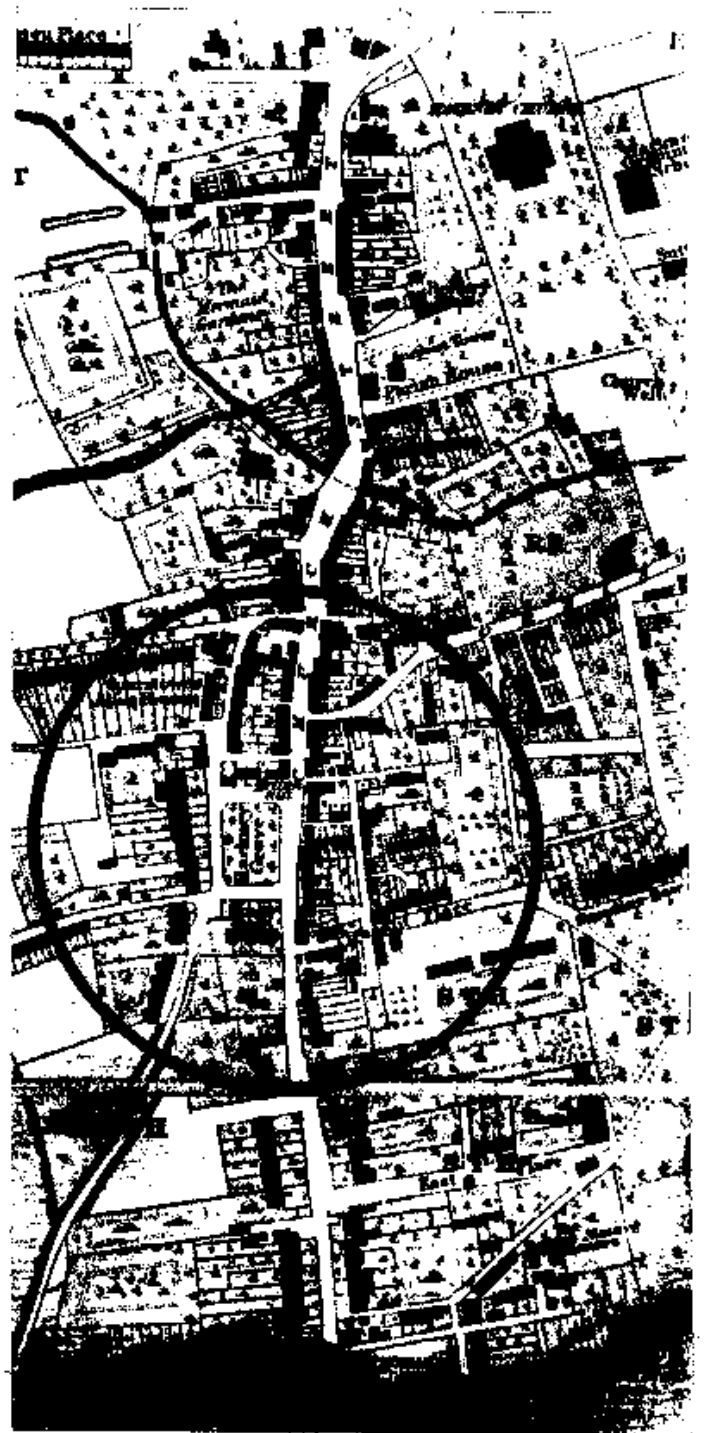
The Ordnance Survey map of 1870 shows the Victorian Town Hall developed on the site of the Grove, but without its later extensions. The North London Railway has been constructed to the north and Hackney station was then located to the east of Mare Street. The Hackney Brook is shown culverted. Mare Street is now densely developed on both sides and residential development has spread to the east and west. The current Graham Road has not yet been laid out. Jerusalem Square is a narrow alley running east from the Grove to Jerusalem Passage, the alignment of the current Vallette Street.

The maps after 1870 show an emerging and familiar pattern of development similar to today's. However, a major change occurred to Mare Street in approximately 1887 when the road was widened significantly to the east.



Historic Maps
1828

London Borough of Hackney



Historic Maps

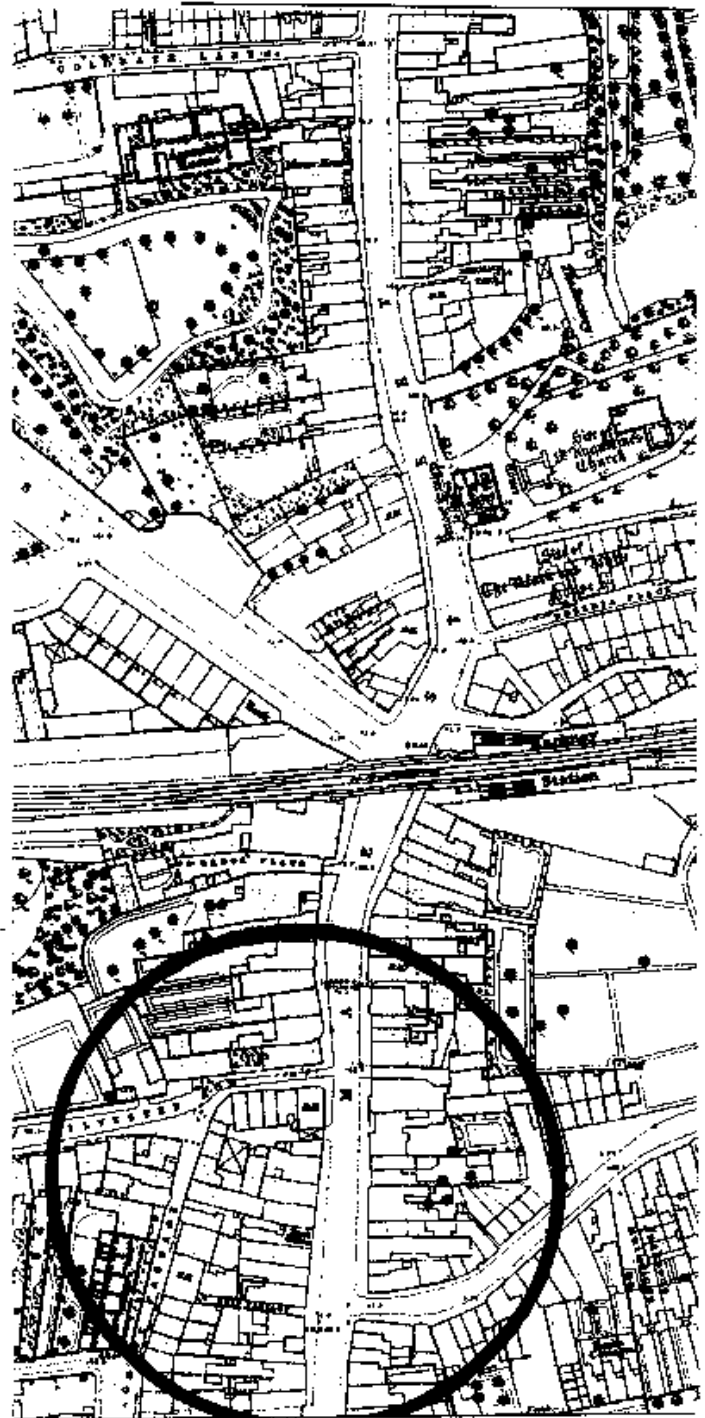
1831

London Borough of Hackney



Historic Maps
1870

London Borough of Uxbridge



Historic Maps
1870-93

London Borough of Hackney

6.0 Analysis of the built fabric and spatial character of the area

The pattern of streets and places is broadly formed by the strong north south axis of Mare Street with streets leading off to the east and west. Since its widening in the 1900's Mare Street has a reduced sense of enclosure. Smaller two storey properties, particularly to the east, create this effect. Development is mostly of three and four storeys with floors above this set, most often, in dormers and mansards.

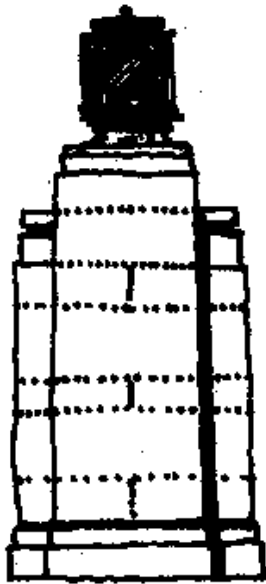
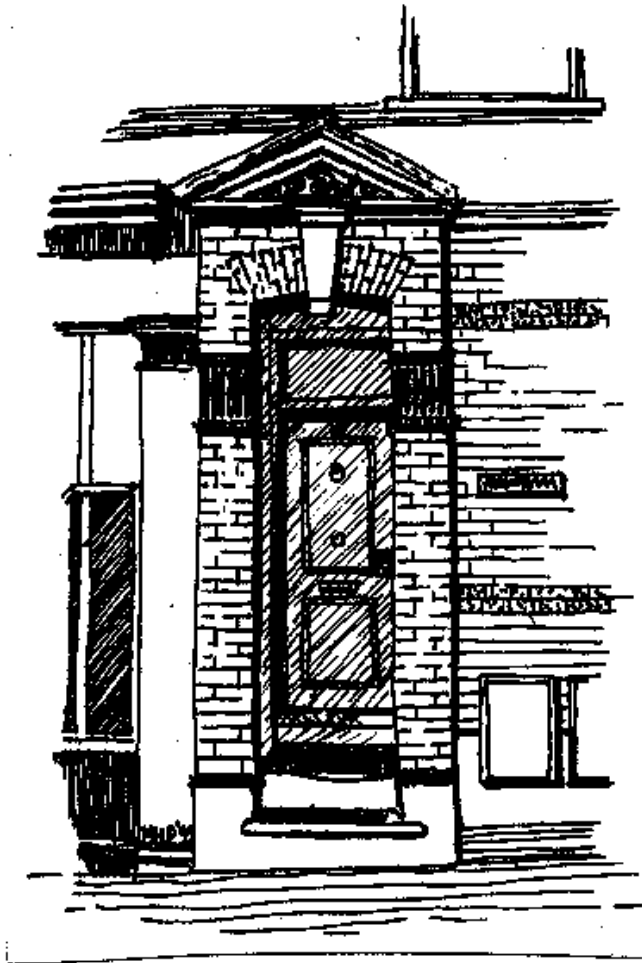
There are four broad areas of character within the conservation area. The Town Hall Square itself is dominated by the three storey 1930's art deco town Hall, the architectural style of which is continued in the ornamental gardens in the centre of the square. The square lacks the character and enclosure of a more traditional London Square and can be perceived more as a setting and forecourt for the town Hall.

The northern and southern sides of the square present the flanks rather than the front of buildings. However, the Central Hall though isolated by the traffic on Mare Street, and offset from the alignment of the Town Hall manages to complete the square's eastern flank with an appropriate scale and quality of building. The Central Hall is flanked by other Edwardian civic buildings but let down by a gap site adjacent to 298 Mare Street and the intrusive Barclay's bank development. The Samuel Pepys pub is a poor quality and under-scaled building for this corner site and appears to reflect a certain post war austerity.

Properties on the eastern side of Mare Street south of Paragon Road are largely early nineteenth century three storey houses with a later Edwardian building at the corner of Darnley Road which celebrates the corner with tall chimneys, a dome and a turret. Many of these buildings are in a neglected state and have suffered from insensitive alterations. Overall, the impact of this stretch of Mare Street is quite negative, despite the intrinsic quality of the buildings. The vacant petrol filling station site to the west of Mare Street strikes the final blow to the townscape quality.

Sylvester Path still retains some of the character and enclosing built fabric of this historic route. The almshouses to the north have been lost and the site are now an open yard which damages the sense of

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intimacy and enclosure which properties to the south suggest once existed.

The northern end of Mare Street is in effect sliced in two. To the west are a row of haphazard two and three storey mid Victorian buildings, their intrinsic quality hidden by alterations and additions, and the whole group sandwiched between the grandiose Empire and Graham Road. To the north on the easter side are two towering Edwardian buildings which drop back to the 1930's utilitarianism of Woolworths. To the east is a cohesive terrace of Edwardian Mansion block with shops on the ground floor and richly detailed upper floor rising to towering gables. The railway bridge has a strong visual severing effect at the northern end of Mare Street. This is not softened by a fairly utilitarian bridge design and its poorly maintained state.

7.0 Aims and objectives of designation

The designation of the Town Hall Square as a Conservation area is informed by a number of aims and objectives. These are outlined below:

- * To protect and enhance buildings, features, artifacts and environments of architectural, historical and archaeological interest.
- * To protect and enhance the townscape attributes that reflect the area's historic evolution and contribute to its quality and character.
- * To utilise the environmental heritage and functional character of the area to stimulate economic development through providing an attractive and appealing locality and environment for appropriate business location and an attractive place to live, work or visit.
- * To facilitate the development of economic activity in the area which is compatible with its historic and architectural character, its environmental quality and evolving role.

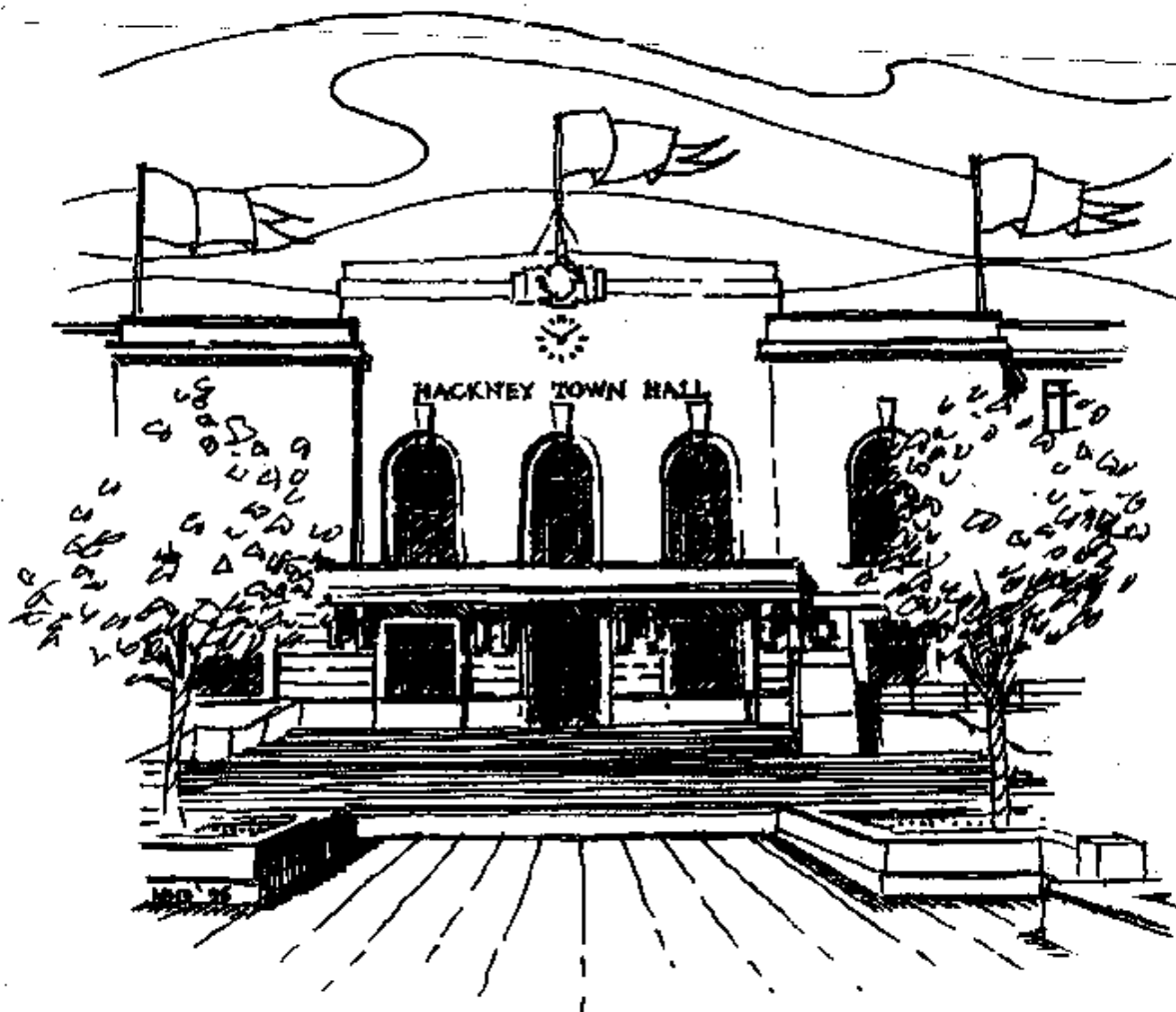
- * Adopt a co-operative, partnership approach to conservation and urban regeneration in the area involving the active participation of the private sector, Local Authority, other public sector agencies, and the local community.
- * To generate and promote schemes which improve and enhance the area's public realm in a positive and sensitive way.
- * To prevent demolition and redevelopment which conflicts with, or inhibits, the achievement of the objectives above.
- * To discourage the development of buildings and redevelopment of vacant sites in a way which is incompatible with, or detracts from, the historic character and quality of the area.
- * To encourage the effective interpretation (for the purposes of education, research and general interest) of the character and history of the area and its activities, reflecting its local and regional significance.
- * To encourage in owners, occupiers, users and visitors a sense of civic pride, respect and the care for the quality and character of the environment of the area, its buildings, features of interest and the public realm as a whole.

8.0 SWOT analysis

An analysis of the conservation area has been carried out by listing the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats presented by the areas environment, its historic and architectural quality, its activities and vitality, and also its landscape and floorscape qualities.

8.1 Strengths

- * Street pattern which still reflects a growing eighteenth century village.
- * Largely coherent, complete and cohesive historic fabric.
- * Significant number of listed buildings.
- * The Hackney Empire a nearly unique surviving Victorian Music Hall still thriving today.



- * An impressive 1930's art deco Town Hall forming the centrepiece of a mainly Victorian and Edwardian civic complex.
- * Features and details of buildings such as window frames and fenestration, cornices, doors and railings still present and largely intact. Most are well maintained.
- * Insensitive adaptations, additions and 'improvements' to properties are limited
- * Activity and vitality has been maintained by the continued mixed use character of the area, the retention of shopfronts and by a continuing retail base. This has been reinforced and complements by the civic function of the area.
- * Environmental improvements in the streets through new paving, street furniture and lighting has demonstrated a collective caring for the environment.

8.2 Weaknesses

- * Limited vacancy, decay, dereliction and vacant sites detracts significantly and disproportionately from the sense of environmental quality in the area as a whole.
- * Shopfronts have been insensitively altered or replaced.
- * Traffic detracts significantly from the environment and has a severance effect particularly in the Town Hall Square.
- * The railway bridge visually severs the town centre into two halves and is of a poor design and poorly maintained.
- * Shops which have closed along with vacant sites and buildings have removed activity and a sense of vitality from the street.
- * A number of listed buildings are identified as at risk
- * Some details of buildings such as cornices, railings etc. are dilapidated or have been lost
- * Sylvester Path, an important historic route, contains paving and street furniture which is mundane and detracts from the environment.

- * The Town Hall Square barely functions as a public square. It is underutilised and its potential untapped, lacking the essential vitality it needs
- * Large scale advertisements hoardings detract from the environment.

8.3 Opportunities

- * Implement a floodlighting strategy to highlight the buildings of architectural importance at night such as the Empire, the Town Hall, and Central Hall.
- * Explore the possibility of an enveloping scheme for Nos 299 - 313 Mare Street.
- * Install fingerposts and interpretation boards along the Market Hauliers Route to signal and explain its historic importance.
- * Implement the strategy to tackle Listed Buildings at Risk
- * Encourage shopfront improvements and activity generating uses at street level supported by a shopfronts design guide.
- * Produce a guidance leaflet encouraging and explaining to owners how buildings can be sensitively restored and historic features repaired or reinstated.
- * Repaint and carry out other environmental improvements to the railway bridge and its environs.
- * Upgrade hard landscaping and street furniture along Sylvester path.
- * Explore opportunities for sensitive developments on small vacant sites along Sylvester path to begin to restore its historic character.
- * Explore opportunities to further improve the Town Hall square, reduce the impact and severance effect of traffic in Mare Street, and encourage more activity in the square itself.
- * Formulate and implement a strategy to remove unsightly advertisement hoardings and other unnecessary clutter such as traffic signs.

8.4 Threats

- * Permitting continuing decay in buildings eventually causing their loss.
- * Insensitive and unsympathetic infill development
- * Additions to buildings such as stone cladding, inappropriate window and door replacement.
- * Lack of care to traditional features of buildings such as railings, balconies, decorative stonework, cornices, etc.
- * Loss of retail activity and consequent loss of viability and vitality.
- * Loss and unsympathetic replacement of traditional shopfronts.

9.0 Proposed boundary

9.1 Boundary

The boundary of the proposed conservation area is formed by:-
Mare Street (east side); Reading Lane (north side); Hillman Street (east side); Wilton Way (south side); western boundary of property on Sylvester Path (east of 117 Wilton Way); rear of 13 Sylvester Path; Nos 7 & 7a Sylvester Road; Sylvester Road (south side); rear of nos 317 - 337 (odd) Mare Street (including Nos 257 - 239 [odd] Graham Road; southern boundary of railway including bridge at Mare Street; rear of nos 202 - 338 (even) Mare Street.

9.2 Inventory of properties

Mare street	Hackney Town Hall (inc. car park) to north
Mare Street	Nos 289 - 337 (odd), nos 202 - 338 (even)
Sylvester Path	Nos 2 - 16 (even), No 13
Graham Road	Nos 239 - 257 (odd)
Wilton Way	Site adjacent to 117 Wilton Way
Brenthouse Road	Nos 2 & 5

10.0 Opportunities to improve the environment

A significant number of projects and improvements have already been implemented by Hackney Council, other agencies such as English heritage, and individual property owners. These include new paving, amenity lighting, shopfronts improvements, building facelifts and the restoration of listed buildings.

The following is a list of suggested projects derived from the site survey work and analysis in this report. At this point in time, no sources of funding have been identified for these projects. The list should therefore be considered only as future opportunities. However, following designation, the Council will explore sources of funding for some of the projects either from Council sources, other agencies, private property owners or local businesses.

- * Facade improvement programme for nos 299 to 313 Mare Street including installation of traditional windows, shopfront improvements and restoration of other facade details.

Estimated project value £10 -20,000.00 per property.

- * Environmental improvements to Sylvester Path to include new paving, amenity lighting, tree planting etc.

Estimated project value £15 -20,000.00

- * Shopfront restoration and improvement programme, particularly for historic shopfronts

Estimated project value £8 - 10,000.00 per property

- * Floodlighting of prominent buildings.

Estimated project value £ N/A

- * Restore and repaint railway bridge and carry out other improvements around the bridge.

Estimated project value £8 -15,000.00

- * Possible facade and forecourt improvements programme to Nos 202 236 Mare Street

Estimated project value £10 - 20,000.00 per property

- * Install Interpretation Boards at key points to explain the history and architectural significance of the area and its buildings.

Estimated project value £1,500.00 per board (inclusive of artwork)

11.0 Urban design and development control principles

The following section explains the salient characteristics of the conservation area, and the design principle which follow from this. They should be taken into account in devising and agreeing proposals for development, redevelopment and improvements in the area with a view to emphasising the uniqueness of the Town Hall Square. The guidelines should not be applied to the main public buildings which are unique and mostly protected by listing, local listing or by virtue of their inclusion in the conservation area.

These guidelines are not an attempt to set hard and fast rules. Nor are they an attempt to limit the creativity of architects and designers. They are presented as broad rules of thumb and as an indication of the principles on which the Council, as Local Planning Authority, will assess applications for planning permission and conservation area consent.

11.1 Built fabric

The proposed Mare Street conservation area has a well established local character composed of a relatively large range of mainly Victorian, Edwardian and more modern buildings. There is no overall uniform scale or common approach to the composition of facades. However, older vacant and decayed buildings should, if possible, be retained and sensitively renovated for new uses. New development should be sympathetic to the scale and character of the area and should normally reflect the detailing and proportions of existing buildings except where the new design is of such a quality that it justifies a different approach. Buildings should usually be from three

to four storeys (except along Sylvester Passage where the maximum should be two storeys). The heights of new buildings should relate closely to the scale of their neighbours.

11.2 Street frontages

Some recent shopfronts in the area have fallen short of the quality of traditional designs elsewhere along Mare Street. These new shopfronts do little to enhance the attractiveness and value of the area to shoppers. Shopfront designs should reflect the character of the buildings on which they are placed and should most often reflect the quality and character of the historic shopfronts in the Mare Street.

11.3 Windows and doors

Windows are generally sliding box sashes in timber with thin glazing bars. This should be the general approach taken in new development or when windows are replaced. Window openings have a vertical emphasis which accentuates the heights of buildings. Some buildings have round headed segmented or gothic (pointed) arches. These should be retained and replicated in new development where neighbouring properties are similar. Details such as rendered reveals and mouldings around window opening should be carefully maintained, repaired and where appropriate, reinstated.

There are a variety of door types in the area and many historic doors have been replaced - often with inappropriate designs. In general, doors should be wooden panelled, painted, and of a design which reflects the traditional doors found in the area. Careful attention should also be paid to the retention or replication of fanlights, canopies and mouldings over doors.

11.4 Building heights

Development in the conservation area does not exceed four storeys and development which exceeds this 'ceiling' is unlikely to be acceptable.

11.5 Roofs and Parapets

Some buildings in the area have overhanging eaves, whilst others have parapets. There is also a tradition of steep gables orientated end on to the street on some buildings. These different approaches should

be considered carefully before other approaches are proposed. Traditional design details should normally be retained when buildings are renovated.

11.6 Materials

The shape, colour texture, pattern and decoration of materials make an important contribution to the quality of buildings and the experience of environmental quality in the area as a whole. Sympathetic materials are also important in new development to ensure a sense of continuity in the built environment.

Yellow stock brick, render, stone, terracotta wooden mouldings, and wrought or cast iron railings are the predominant materials in the area and are used in limited combinations on each building. New schemes should aim to use a limited range of materials with detailing and colour normally reflecting the qualities of the surrounding built form. Fussy, overdetailed schemes and the use of cheaper, non-traditional materials should be avoided.

11.7 Activity and Vitality

Street level activity is a vital ingredient in creating a sense of environmental quality and a perception of vitality. This is particularly so around the Town Hall Square and along Mare Street. There will be a general assumption against uses and street frontages which do not bring activity to the street and therefore detract from a sense of vitality in the area as a whole.

12.0 Statutorily and locally listed buildings

12.1 Statutory List

The area contains the following listed buildings:-

Nos 210 & 212 Mare Street	Grade II
Nos 222 - 232 (even) Mare Street	Grade II
The Hackney Empire, Mare Street	Grade II*
Hackney Town Hall, Mare Street	Grade II
Hackney Town Hall Forecourt Gardens	Grade II
Nos 4 & 13 Sylvester Path	Grade II

12.2 Locally Listed Buildings

The following buildings are contained in a list of buildings of local historic or/and architectural importance. This list is compiled by Hackney Council.

No 270 - 276 Mare Street Central Hall and Library

20 Mare Street, former Salvation Army building.