

LOWER MARSH CONSERVATION AREA (NO. 40) - Bishops Ward

Report by DTPED in consultation with DALs.

SUMMARY

This report seeks approval to the designation of the Lower Marsh Conservation Area.

RECOMMENDATIONSTown Planning Committee

- 1) That Committee approve the designation of the area shown on Plan UD.77.2 as the Lower Marsh Conservation Area (No. 40) under Section 277(1) of the Town and Country Planning Act, 1971;
- 2) That the Director of Administration and Legal Services be authorised to advertise the above designation and to notify the Secretary of State for the Environment in accordance with the provisions of Sections 277(6) and (7) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1971; and
- 3) That the Director of Town Planning and Economic Development be authorised to prepare a scheme of preservation and enhancement as required by Section 277(B) of the Town and Country Planning Act, 1971 for further consideration by committee,

For decision1. Policy considerations

1.1 In March 1981 the Town planning Committee approved the "Strategy for the Designation of New Conservation Areas." (TP 298/80-81). The area described in this report was included in the Strategy and indicated on the map which accompanied that report.

2. Financial, Staffing, Accommodation and Race Relations considerations

2.1 There are no staffing, accommodation or race relations considerations arising from this report apart from marginal increases in Development Control and Urban Design Groups arising from the more complex procedures involved in handling Planning Applications in Conservation Areas.

2.2 If it is decided that a programme of enhancement is to be drawn up, there will be financial implications. However, at this stage, possible improvements have not been looked at in sufficient details for costings to be made available though possible sources of funding have been explored in Paragraph 9 below.

3. Legal considerations

3.1 Section 277(1) of the Town and Country Planning Act, 1971 (as amended by the Town and Country Amenities Act, 1974) states that:

*"Every Local Planning Authority shall, from time to time, determine which parts of their areas are of special architectural or historic interest, the character and appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance and shall designate such areas as conservation areas."* Subsections (6), (7) and (9) refer to the provisions for notifying the Secretary of state, and advertising the designation of such areas respectively.

3.2 Section 277(B (1) and (2)) of the Town and Country Planning Act, 1971 states that:

*"It shall be the duty of a local planning authority to formulate and publish, within such period as may from time to time be directed by the Secretary of State, proposals for the preservation and enhancement of any parts of their area which are conservation areas."*

3.3 It is the opinion of officers that the criteria laid down under S.277 of the 1971 Act concerning the designation of Conservation Areas are satisfied by the Lower Marsh area.

#### Detailed consideration

#### 4. Location

4.1 The proposed Lower Marsh Conservation Area lies to the south-east of Waterloo Station. Its boundaries, shown on Plan UD.77.2 are drawn to include the whole of the Lower Marsh Market and shopping area and adjacent buildings, the shopping frontages of Westminster Bridge Road and Waterloo Road and other important buildings and spaces.

#### 5. History

5.1 As a street, Lower Marsh pre-dates all the buildings which now line it. It has origins back before the 17th century and can be identified in the de la Peuille survey of 1690 as a lane across Lambeth Marsh, lined with cottages and smallholdings. Its alignment is almost identical to that of today.

5.2 It formed the basis of a link across the marsh between "Westminster-Bridge (1750) and Blackfriars Bridge (1769)—after which—the Waterloo area became a playground for north bank residents with its pleasure gardens, circuses and theatres, including the Old Vic opened in 1818. The area was also the birthplace of the music hall. Many of these activities were housed in or around Lower Marsh.

5.3 The opening of Waterloo Bridge in 1817 brought an area of cheap housing land within easy reach of the expanding city of London. The Marsh was drained and soon covered with rows of small houses, wharves and workshops. Lower Marsh, together with The Cut formed the commercial heart of the area and its street market has operated more or less continuously for over 150 years. Then the construction of Waterloo Station in 1848, and its subsequent expansions, had a profound impact on the street, cutting it off from the riverside. It also heralded the changes to come in trading patterns with an increasing level of custom drawn from workers commuting in on cheap workers tickets. When Baylis Road was widened and The Cut became an important traffic route in the 1960's, the market was relocated back to Lower Marsh.

5.4 Throughout its history, the alignment of Lower Marsh has been retained while the building stock has continually changed and adapted to new retailing methods. This process, accelerated by extensive damage in the Second World War, has continued to the present day, There are still three sites awaiting redevelopment.

#### 6. Character

6.1 The proposed Conservation Area consists of two main parts:

#### 6.2 Lower Marsh

6.2.1 The street itself has a canyon-like form created by high buildings which line a narrow street and the sense of enclosure is heightened by the market stalls which further sub-divide and enclose the space at ground level, and which dominate the street" It is further heightened by the subtle curves in alignment which deflect views in either direction. However the widening of Baylis Road in the 1960's destroyed the tight enclosure of the east end of Lower Marsh and has created a rather open, bleak space at the junction with Waterloo Road.

6.2.2 With few exceptions, the buildings themselves are unexceptional and represent many phases of development over the years, and many different styles. There are few unifying elements in the street but two are of great importance in its character. The first is the building line dictated by buildings being located at the back of the footways. This creates a close relationship between the buildings (and the uses housed in them) and the public space of the street itself. The second unifying element is the plot size which has dictated narrow fronted buildings, a feature which has continued to the present day. The character derived from narrow plots, developed singly or in small groups, is one of great variety, a continually changing scene for the passer-by. This variety is further enhanced by the market and the impression is of a very busy, diverse environment with only the building lines and narrow frontages able to define patterns in a potentially chaotic scene.

6.2.3 This narrow street has a number of small yards and cull de sacs leading from it which have lost their function as streets and are the remaining vestiges of the street pattern before various redevelopments took place. They are now blocked by cars and are unpleasant areas but offer potential for improvement.

6.2.4 As far as the character of Lower Marsh as a shopping street is concerned, it has retained its local community function as a food shopping centre and offers other services of local importance " hardware, clothing, etc. However, there is an increasing tendency towards more specialist shopping and other services such as travel agents, restaurants, etc. This trend is similarly reflected in the types of market stalls. The dependence of the businesses on workers custom is illustrated by the hustle and bustle of a weekday lunchtime compared to the quiet of evenings and weekends.

### 6.3 Westminster Bridge Road

6.3.1 Westminster Bridge Road consists of a variety of buildings whose qualities have been marred by unsympathetic redevelopments, a large vacant site and the heavy traffic which effectively isolates one side from the other. However, it does form an extension of the Lower Marsh shopping area, providing additional, more specialist shopping services. Any development of the vacant site on the north side will have a significant effect on both this street and Lower Marsh itself,

6.4 There are no listed buildings within the proposed Conservation area but one or two buildings are worthy of note:

The former Library, now the Action Centre, at 14 Baylis Road was housed in a picturesque Gothic styled Victorian building which has a large hall with interesting windows at the rear.

The Patriot Public House (claimed to have been established in 1742) on the corner of Johanna Street is a typical Victorian pub which stands out from its surroundings by virtue of- the ornate mouldings around windows, polychrome brickwork and an unusual roof shape.

27 Lower Marsh, a simple mid Victorian building with well-maintained window mouldings is notable for its painted signage on front and side elevations

121, Westminster Bridge Road - a tall, narrow building with an imposing, columned facade.

## 7. Pressures and Problems

7.1 Because of the expansion of Waterloo Station to the north and the destruction of the street pattern to the south through housing redevelopment. Lower Marsh has become somewhat isolated from its surroundings. This isolation is compounded by, heavy traffic on the roads around. But so well established is the shopping centre, and such is the character of the street, it continues to be a bustling shopping area providing essential facilities for residents and workers alike. However, this does not mean that it has no problems,

7.2 As with any shopping centre, Lower Marsh has developed a form which creates a successful and attractive shopping environment but which is sensitive to unsympathetic change. For example, the demolition of a building in the middle of a frontage could significantly alter shopping patterns, particularly if the site is left vacant for some time. But at present the Council has no powers to control demolition. There is no apparent prospect of demolition occurring in the foreseeable future but it is difficult to predict where and when future development pressures may occur and there is already some evidence of developers seeking sites for development south of the viaduct. Lower Marsh would be markedly affected by any developments of a scale larger than those existing and it is unlikely that the sorts of businesses operating in the street could afford the costs of new accommodation even if it was provided. It is notable that the three shop units provided in the latest redevelopment (nos. 13 - 16 Lower Marsh) are occupied by a dry cleaners, a travel agent and an office-

7.3 As a provider of local services, the street would appear to be in a less than healthy state, suffering from the trend towards more specialist shops and non-retail services. There is also a relatively high number of vacant premises some of which have been unoccupied for a good number of years. This can be explained in part by the declining residential and industrial population nearby and the subsequent drop in demand for convenience goods but there is also something of a crisis of confidence in the future of the shopping area brought about by development pressures and short leases on properties. Because of this lack of security, with businesses operating on the margins of profitability, the maintenance of buildings has suffered along with the environment generally, resulting in a rather down-at-heel appearance. In addition the quality of surfacing and landscape in the street is poor.

7.4 The cluttered and congested nature of the street is further exacerbated by the number of parked vehicles when the market is in operation and when it closes down, there is a shortage of accommodation locally for the storage of traders barrows and goods.

## 8. The Future

8.1 These pressures and problems are unlikely to diminish significantly in the near future and, if the character of Lower Marsh and adjacent areas is to be maintained, then additional protection and a programme of enhancement is required. The designation of a conservation area will be one of the best means of achieving both objectives.

8.2 A Conservation area will focus attention on the area; will provide additional protection not only for its built form but also its function as a local centre; will provide very necessary security and a more assured future for tenants and traders; and will enable the area to be considered for section 10 grant aid (for buildings in Conservation Areas) and other funds to enable a programme of improvements to be embarked upon, particularly the residential accommodation above shops.

8.3 Conservation Area status together with the policies of the adopted Waterloo District Plan and the Interim Shopping Policy for Waterloo will afford a good measure of protection over undesirable

## 9. Possible Improvements

9.1 The designation of a Conservation Area offers the opportunity to initiate improvements in the area to give it a much-needed facelift. The investment of public money may give a much-needed boost to confidence in the area. Some possible improvements include:

Repaving the Street to form a shared surface

Landscaping and improving some of the now redundant cul de sacs A concerted effort using existing grant and loan programmes to upgrade the building stock

Redevelopment of the temporary library to provide a new building with associated public space

New shops of lightweight construction on the paved areas of the junction with Baylis Road

9.2 A programme of enhancement for the area would need the widest involvement of local groups before it is finalised and the committee is formally requested to authorise the preparation of such a programme.

9.3 As far as funding is concerned, the area is proposed to be designated part of the Vauxhall/Waterloo Industrial and Commercial Improvement Area and will be eligible for grants and loans under S.5 of the Inner Urban Areas Act for the improvement of local amenities and grants under S.6 for the improvement and conversion of buildings. In addition, some residential properties may qualify for Improvement Grants under the Housing Acts. Designation as a Conservation Area will release grants under S.10 of the Town and Country Planning (Amendment) Act, 1972 for the restoration of buildings in Conservation Areas. A potential source of funds for environmental improvements would be the Environmental Improvements Package of the Inner City Programme. Further sources of finance could be GLC Community Areas Funds and Urban Development Grants.

## 10. Tenure

10.1 The majority of the properties in the proposed conservation area are in private ownership with few large holdings but few (less than 5%) are owner occupied. The majority (over 60%) of both the residential and commercial property is privately rented. The Council owns approximately 17 units, some 14% of the total.

## 11. Conclusion

11.1 Lower Marsh would appear to be a good case for the designation of a Conservation Area as an additional protection for its built form and its function, but it is also in need of a comprehensive scheme of improvements to restore confidence and generally restore its attraction as a District Shopping Centre.

## 12. Consultations

12.1 With the agreement of the Chair, the draft report was subject to consultation with local groups prior to its consideration by this committee. The groups consulted were:

1. Association of Waterloo Groups (AWG)
2. Waterloo Community Development Group (WCDG)
3. Waterloo Action Centre
4. North Lambeth Community Council
5. Lambeth Chamber of Commerce

Replies were received from AWG and WCDG and the report has been amended where necessary. In summary, both groups were generally in favour of the proposal in principle as an additional means of protection for the area. Both groups also implied a desire to see the area enhanced but made it clear that they wished to be involved in the formulation of proposals from the earliest opportunity. The WCDG did not wish to see any proposals included in the report until public discussion had taken place but those which are described in para 9.1 are clearly not firm proposals and are intended only to demonstrate the range of possible improvements which may be considered for further examination. Para 9.2 expresses the Council's Commitment to the widest possible consultation on the compilation and implementation of a programme of enhancement.