

Comments from the Hackney Society Planning Sub-group on the:  
**Hackney Wick Draft Conservation Area Appraisal**

**General comments**

1. The Hackney Society welcomes the somewhat belated designation by the LB of Hackney of the tiny Hackney Wick Conservation Area, located directly north of Hackney Wick station. It is in a part of the borough that has already seen many changes and it will continue to do so in the run-up to the Olympics and immediately post-2012. It is an area that has long been neglected by officialdom and the general public.
2. Hackney Council has taken the very unusual step of designating the Hackney Wick Conservation Area before the completion of a public consultation (something that occurred once before, with the creation of the Lea Bridge Conservation Area in 2005). By doing so, the LB of Hackney might be said to be showing its commitment to protecting Hackney Wick's character, but there might have been greater long-term benefits to preserving the character of the area if designation had happened earlier.
3. We do however have concerns about the quality of the *Hackney Wick Draft Conservation Area Appraisal* and see its rapid and somewhat indifferent production, as a backward step for the *Sustainability and Urban Design Team* who wrote the document. We outline these concerns in the comments below.

**Comments**

We are concerned about many aspects of the *Hackney Wick Draft Conservation Area Appraisal*. Not only do we have unease about the content of the appraisal but we also have concerns about the desirability of releasing into the public domain a draft document that has not even benefited from the most basic copy editing.

1. Over recent years the conservation area appraisals produced by the LB of Hackney have been of a very high standard – whether produced in-house or by consultants and the *Hackney Wick Draft Conservation Area Appraisal* does not come up to the standard of any of those produced over the last 8 years.
2. Not only is every paragraph littered with spelling mistakes, inconsistent use of capital letters and incorrect punctuation but the content and substance of this appraisal is lacking.
3. The quality of the photography in the appraisal is poor and the images reproduced are much too small to give a good idea of the architecture of the buildings shown. Sensitive cropping of images and photographing at different angles (and waiting for cars to go by) would have improved the visual quality of the draft appraisal. In particular the photograph on the cover showing Lion Works with their plastic replacement windows is perhaps ill-judged and not the best image to put on front of a conservation appraisal.
4. The amount of 'mapping' in this appraisal might be considered excessive. The reproduction of these maps in the draft appraisal is of poor quality and many can not be easily read.

5. The inclusion of more historic images to give an impression of the area in the past and to show its historic character would have improved context of the appraisal.
6. The *Hackney Wick Draft Conservation Area Appraisal* contains just 14 buildings. None of these buildings have been sufficiently researched, described or adequately photographed or even clearly plotted and named on any single map in the appraisal. We feel that an adequate building development history should be undertaken for each of the buildings in the Hackney Wick Conservation Area. No builders and architects are mentioned and a quick visit to Hackney Archive could have established some of this information very quickly.
7. Despite a short bibliography, the author of the *Hackney Wick Draft Conservation Area Appraisal* appears to have undertaken very little research on the history of Hackney Wick and the important architectural history of the few buildings included in the conservation area. The only history of the area and description of the architecture of the buildings within the Conservation Area has been taken from the Architectural History Practice's (AHP) report *Hackney Wick and the Old Ford Area: Characterisation Study and Assessment of Key Buildings* (2009) which forms part of the *Hackney Wick Area Action Plan*. Large chunks of text have simply been lifted from AHP's report and reproduced in their entirety in the *Hackney Wick Draft Conservation Area Appraisal*.
8. No clear overall impression of the character and architecture can be obtained by reading the *Hackney Wick Draft Conservation Area Appraisal* and that is a real problem. The Conservation Area Appraisal produced in Nov 2009 by LB of Tower Hamlets on the nearby area of Fish Island is a much clearer and better written document which gives a clear sense of 'place and character'.
9. More structural information about building materials, architectural style and condition of the buildings should have been included in the appraisal. More details of each of the 14 buildings should be recorded and presented with more photographic images and even some basic historic plan.

We do not think the layout and design of the *Hackney Wick Draft Conservation Area Appraisal* was attractive or easy to use. It also was very different to the consistent design of the appraisals produced by the LB of Hackney over recent years. The information in 'blue' boxes was confusing – sometimes repetitive and sometimes significant. If there was a perceived need for a new format for conservation area appraisals, we don't think this has been successfully achieved in this appraisal.

### **Inaccuracies**

Throughout the document there is constant inaccuracy in the capitalisation of the phrase *Hackney Wick Draft Conservation Area Appraisal*. Every paragraph has a different number of capitals. It needs to be standardised throughout the whole document.

The individual inaccuracies in the *Hackney Wick Draft Conservation Area Appraisal* are too numerous to mention but we include the following as examples:

1.2. 1 'Hackney Wick is located in North East part of Hackney' should read 'Hackney Wick is located in the **South East** part of Hackney

3.2.1 Entrepreneurship in Hackney: The whole paragraph is badly constructed and inaccurate and includes 'Namingly, Clarnico' should read '**Namely**, Clarnico'

4.6 'Historically the area has been in industrial use from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century'. This is simply not true – there was industry in Hackney Wick from the early to mid 19<sup>th</sup> century

Sentences are overlong and many of them do not make sense. Whole paragraphs especially in the conclusion are simply not clear concise and understandable, the following are examples

*'the conservation area designation is an inception of a process towards recognising the future scope of this innovative entrepreneurial spirit that is crystallised in its multiuse built form and characteristic streetscape'*

*'The appraisal attempts to unpack the positive and negative features influencing the quality of the historic environment and highlights on the future opportunities and areas of potential growth and requiring attention'*

To make this document clear and useful to the public it needs to be rewritten or drastically edited and whether the LB of Hackney has the commitment or resources to do this is doubtful. The appraisal is too long and repetitive. Given that the conservation area covers only 16 buildings it is surprising that the appraisal runs to 51 pages. The appraisal is overdesigned and is a triumph of style over substance.

We hope that this is not to be the standard of Conservation Area Appraisal produced by LB of Hackney in the future and we recommend that time is spent correcting, editing and adding important facts to the content of the *Hackney Wick Draft Conservation Area Appraisal*.