

Panda House
628-634 Commercial Road, London E14 7HS

Heritage Appraisal

March 2019

Consultancy for the
Historic Built Environment

KMHHeritage

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1 Introduction

- 1.1 This report has been prepared to consider proposals for the redevelopment of Panda House, Commercial Road, London E14 7HS.

Purpose

- 1.2 The purpose of the report is to set out the history and heritage significance of the site and its context, and to comment on the emerging proposals for its development.
- 1.3 This report should be read in conjunction with the drawings and report prepared Create Design Ltd Architects.

Organisation

- 1.4 This introduction is followed by a description and analysis of the site and its context. Section 3 sets out the national and local policy and guidance relating to the historic built environment that is relevant to this matter. An outline is provided in Section 4 of the merits of emerging scheme in heritage terms.

Author

- 1.5 The author of this report is Kevin Murphy B.Arch MUBC RIBA IHBC. He was an Inspector of Historic Buildings in the London Region of English Heritage and dealt with a range of major projects involving listed buildings and conservation areas in London. Prior to this, he had been a conservation officer with the London Borough of Southwark, and was Head of Conservation and Design at Hackney Council between 1997 and 1999. He trained and worked as an architect, and has a specialist qualification in urban and building conservation. Kevin Murphy was included for a number of years on the Heritage Lottery Fund's Directory of Expert Advisers.
- 1.6 Historical research and assistance for this report was provided by Dr Ann Robey FSA, a conservation and heritage professional with over twenty years experience. She has worked for leading national bodies as well as smaller local organizations and charities. She is a researcher and writer specialising in architectural, social and economic history, with a publication record that includes books, articles, exhibitions and collaborative research.

2 The site and its context

- 2.1 Panda House is located on the south side of Commercial Road, between Mill Place to the west and Island Row to the east. The Docklands Light Railway (DLR) runs near to the boundary of the site.
- 2.2 The existing building is three storeys high fronting Commercial Road, stepping down to two storeys at the rear. It is of red brick construction with a flat roof and is typical of the 1960s/70s.



Figure 1: Panda House, Commercial Road

The area

- 2.3 Limehouse takes its name from the noxious lime kilns that operated in the area around Lime Kiln Dock. From the 14th century they burned chalk that had been brought in by ship from Kent which was used in the building and pottery¹ trades. The hamlet was detached from London until the 18th century and supported an active and sometimes transient mercantile community dependent on the Thames and the seas beyond. Limehouse made its living from fishing, shipbuilding and associated trades such as rope making and the provisioning of ships (Figure 3). Ships' crews were supplied on a casual basis and Limehouse had permanent communities of foreign sailors including Lascars, Africans and Chinese. By the early 18th century Limehouse had become the eastern-most suburb of London and as the century progressed became part of the

¹ In 1660 Pepys visited a porcelain factory in Narrow Street and the Limehouse Pottery on the site of today's Limekiln Wharf was one of the pioneers of English porcelain manufacture in the 1740s

industrial East End. This became even more pronounced after the opening of the enclosed docks on the Isle of Dogs at the beginning of the 19th century.

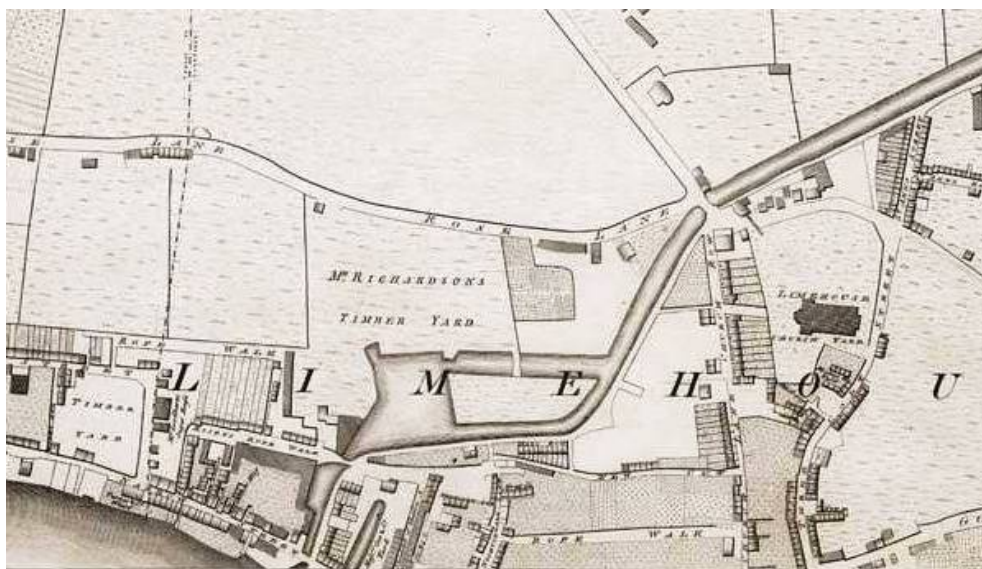


Figure 3: Horwood's Map of 1792-9 showing Limehouse before the building of the Regent's Canal Dock or Commercial Road (Mill Place formed part of Mr Richardson's Timber Yard)

- 2.4 Between 1802 and 1806, Commercial Road was laid out through open fields (above Rose Lane) to connect the recently opened East and West India Docks on the Isle of Dogs to the City of London (Figures 3 & 4). A new wide route² was needed to transport the heavy cargoes of imports that were carried from the docks to the City warehouses – and the trustees of the Commercial Road Company constructed a straight toll route that ran for one and three-quarter miles from Aldgate to Limehouse. The heavy traffic had increased to such an extent that in 1829-30 a stone way was laid along the southern side of the road. It was formed of blocks of granite eighteen inches wide and twelve inches thick like a tramway over which huge vans could be drawn with ease from the docks. By the 1830s, Commercial Road was almost entirely lined with houses and an illustration from the *Illustrated London News* from 1851 shows the road at that date (Figure 4).
- 2.5 Charles Dickens described Commercial Road in *The Uncommercial Traveller* in 1859 where the visitor 'Pleasantly wallowing in the abundant mud of that thoroughfare and greatly enjoying the huge piles of buildings belonging to the

² The Grade II listed bridge is wider than the present road, showing the greater width of Commercial Road when it was built

sugar refiners, the little masts and vanes in small back gardens in back streets, the neighbouring canals and docks, the India vans lumbering along their stone tramway, and the pawnbrokers' shops where hard-up mates had pawned so many sextants and quadrants that I should have bought a few cheap if I had the least notion how to use them'.

- 2.6 There were numerous 'terraces' and 'places' along Commercial Road indicating the comparatively well-to-do resident – the street was not numbered until 1874.³ Today some of these respectable early 19th century groups survive close to the Mill Place site including Nos. 683-691 Commercial Road (Grade II) and Nos. 699-711 Commercial Road (Grade II), both in the Lowell Street Conservation Area. Just to the west are Nos. 604-608 Commercial Road (Grade II).

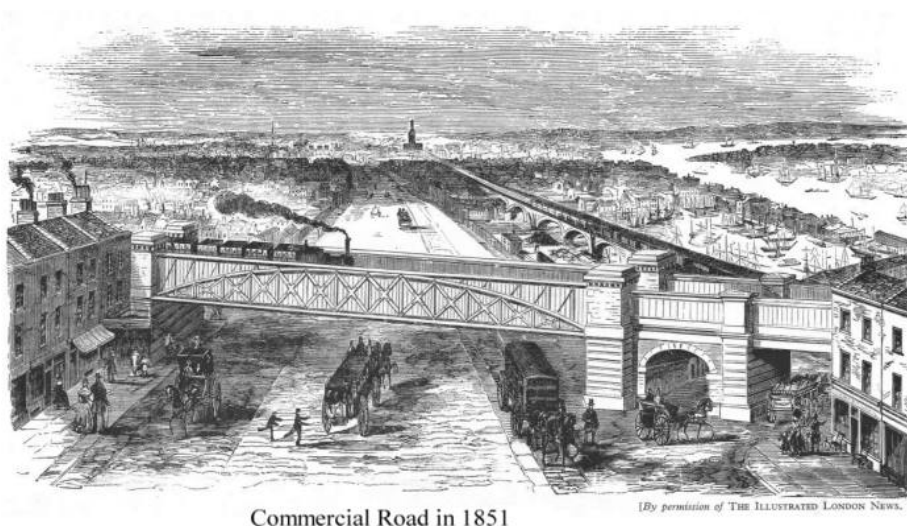


Figure 4: Looking east along Commercial Road in 1851 (the bridge depicted is located further east to the one on the development site and adjacent to Stepney Junction Station) [© ILN]

- 2.7 Development to the north and south of the new highway was rapid - especially after the construction of the Regent's Canal which opened in 1820 and what is now called Limehouse Basin. The Basin, also built by the Regent's Canal Company was originally called the Regent's Canal Dock and was used by seagoing vessels and lighters to offload cargoes to canal barges. It was constructed between 1812 and 1820. Later, a connection was made between Limehouse Basin and the Limehouse Cut, which had opened in 1770 to provide a link between the Thames and the River Lea.

³ Sydney Maddcks, *Commercial Road*, in *The Copartnership Herald*, Vol. II, No. 21 (November 1932)

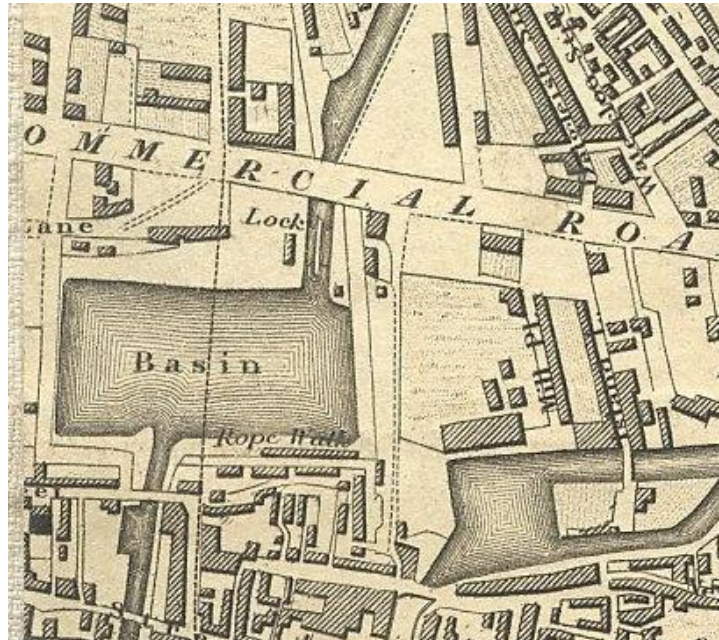


Figure 5: Greenwood's Map of 1824 (with Limehouse Basin to the left and Limehouse Cut to the right)

- 2.8 The Limehouse Cut, built in 1770 also had a basin where ships could unload goods and also an island in the middle where the Island Lead Works were built (see Greenwood's Map of 1824) and which operated well into the 20th century. White Lead working was a particularly noxious trade. The Regent's Canal Dock was the first, and for many years the only dock to allow in colliers bringing coal from the north-east of England. By the mid-19th century both the docks (and the canal) were a commercial success and vitally important for the supply of coal to numerous gasworks along the canal, providing fuel to light the City. Other commodities imported included Baltic timber, ice, fruit, salt and soda from Scotland which continued their journeys by barge. Interestingly the dock did not have warehouses – something noted in 1879 by Charles Dickens (jr) in his *Dictionary of London*.
- 2.9 Mill Place to the west of the site, is named after the wind-powered saw-mill built in 1767 by Charles Dingley, Esq. to his own designs that was located at the southern end of that road. By 1795 the saw mill was reputedly still standing, but no longer in use.⁴ When Richard Horwood produced his map in the 1790s the site of the future Mill Place was located at the edge of 'Mr Richardson's Timber Yard' (Figure 3).

⁴ 'Limehouse', *The Environs of London: volume 3: County of Middlesex* (1795), pp. 236-241

- 2.10 Mill Place was constructed in the early years of the 19th century, probably very soon after the creation of Commercial Road. Properties in the street definitely existed by 1809 when a copyhold and leasehold estate was sold that included '25 very substantial and convenient dwelling houses, with good gardens' in Canton Place, East India Dock Road, Jamaica Place, Mill Place and Island Row. At the time 23 were let to respectable tenants and the rent amounted to over £600 per annum. Two properties were empty including 'one which is designed for a public house and most advantageously situated on the corner of Mill Place, Commercial Road, Limehouse'.⁵ This became the Volunteer PH (shown on the OS Maps below) and which survived until recent years. Any public house close to warehousing and docks was undoubtedly a profitable enterprise and in 1839 it was described as immediately adjoining the railroad. The freehold ground rents of Nos. 1-4 and Nos. 10-20 Mill Place were said to produce £54 18s per annum in 1839.⁶

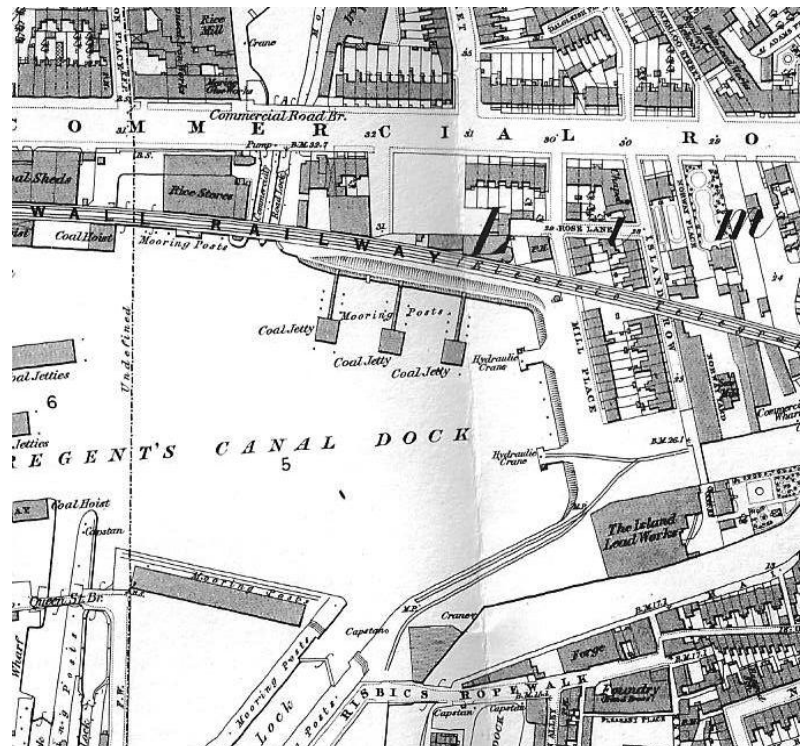


Figure 6: OS Map of 1870

- 2.11 As the OS Map of 1870 shows, Mill Place used to extend south of the London & Blackwall Railway Line which had been built in

⁵ *The Times*, 23 Dec 1809

⁶ *The Times*, 2 Nov 1839

1838 (Figure 6). The London & Blackwall Railway was one of London's earliest railways and was completed to the designs of George Stephenson in 1839, opening to the public in the following year. Passengers stopped using the line in 1929, but it continued to be used for freight until 1962. The railway was built on a brick arched viaduct but wherever it crossed a street cast iron beam bridges were used (Figures 4 & 7). Today the DLR is carried on the viaduct built for the original London & Blackwall Railway above the open paved areas where the former wharves were located along the north side of the basin.



Figure 7: Iron Railway Bridge over Commercial Road built in 1880

- 2.12 By the time of the 1894 OS map a spur viaduct had appeared, diverging from the main London & Blackwall Railway. The Great Eastern Railway Company completed what became known as the Limehouse Curve in 1880. This allowed goods trains from the London Docks to run directly onto the main-line system of the Great Eastern Railway. It was last used for passengers in 1929, but, as with the London & Blackwall line, freight continued to use the Limehouse Curve until 1962. A large section of the Limehouse Curve that lay to the north of Commercial Road was demolished in about 2007 for a new housing development.

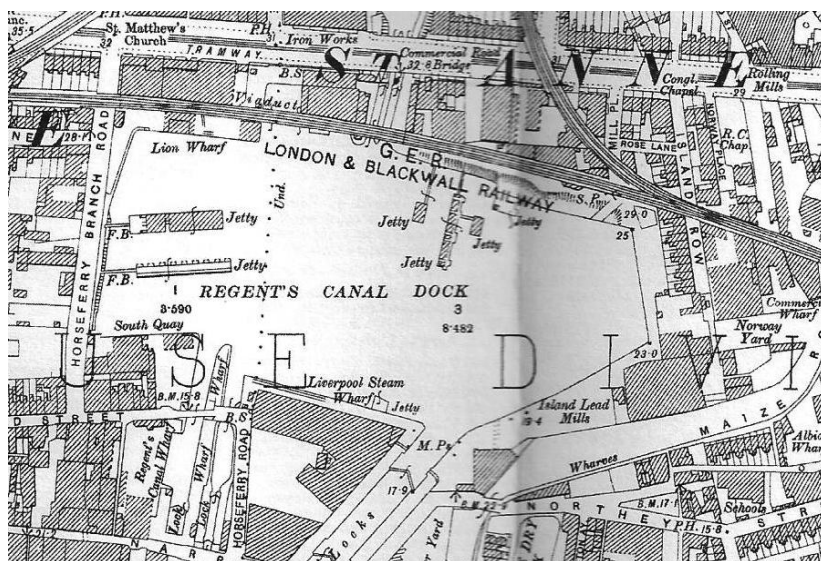


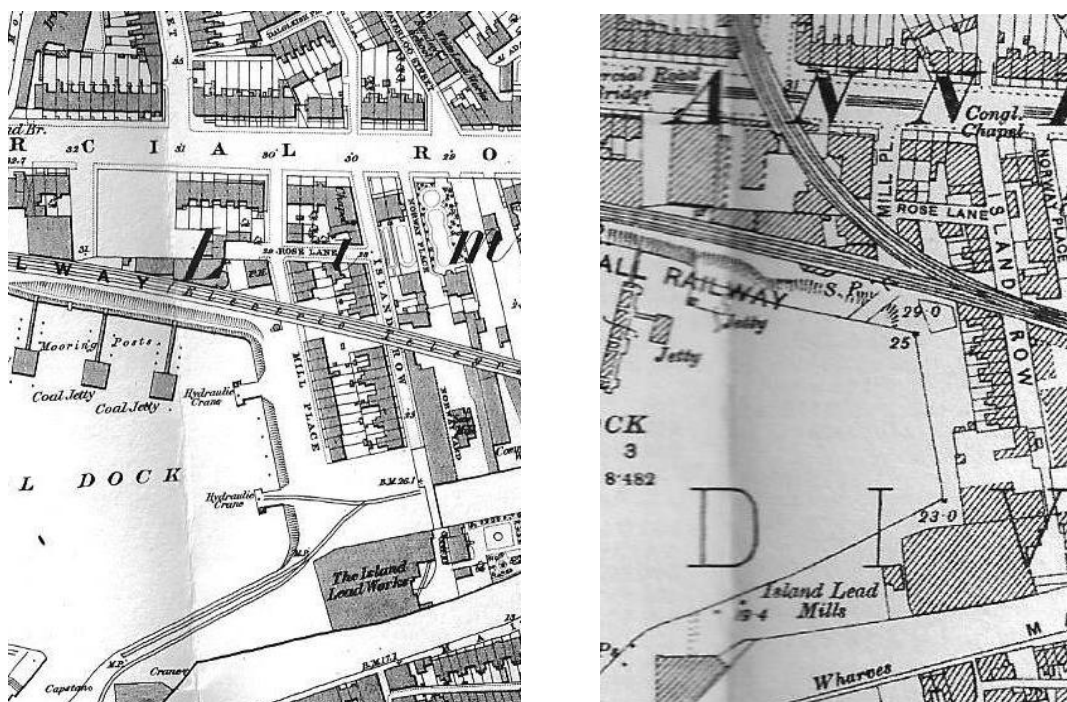
Figure 8: OS Map of 1894 showing the eastward expansion of the Regent's Canal Dock

The area from c. 1890

- 2.13 As mentioned above, the Regent's Canal Dock was extended eastward in the early 1890s after the demands for modernisation by the coal merchants. The coal merchants of Limehouse Dock were under threat of losing the coal trade on two fronts— from rail-carried coal arriving at King Cross from Yorkshire and from Poplar Dock⁷ on the Isle of Dogs which was equipped with the latest hydraulic cranes for unloading the new, larger, iron-hulled screw-driven colliers. So the dock was enlarged and projecting timber jetties with hydraulic cranes were built to speed unloading of colliers. An eastwards extension took the dock as far as the next beam bridge of the railway viaduct which crossed Mill Place.⁸ Cottages were demolished to make way for the quay (Figures 9 & 10).

⁷ 'Poplar Dock: Historical development', *Survey of London: volumes 43 and 44: Poplar, Blackwall and Isle of Dogs* (1994), pp. 336-341

⁸ Tim Smith, *Regent's Canal Dock: An introduction to its industrial archaeology*, GLIAS, May 1993



Figures 9 & 10: Details of the 1870 and 1894 OS Maps showing the demolition of the southern part of Mill Place and the site before and after the building of the Limehouse Curve

- 2.14 An important historical and architectural feature of the area is the Grade II accumulator tower dating from 1868-9, which replaced an earlier pioneering structure by William Armstrong, the engineer and inventor. The Regent's Canal Dock was one of the first to use hydraulic power very soon after the system was developed by Armstrong. A steam engine was used to pump water to high pressure and force it through a system of mains which supplied the various cranes and other hydraulic machinery. The pressure was regulated by means of a weight loaded hydraulic accumulator, which could also store a certain amount of energy. The accumulator consisted of a heavy weight (as much as 80 tons of gravel), supported by a ram on a column of water in a vertical cylinder. The weight moved up and down inside a tower according to whether water was being pumped into the system or used by the machinery.⁹ The accumulator tower is of octagonal shape with a rebuilt chimney stack - also octagonal - which is on the north side. The pumping station that adjoined it has been demolished. The tower reputedly also functioned as a railway lookout tower (the listing description is confusing as the structure is designated twice – once as an accumulator tower and also as a lookout tower). The

⁹ *ibid*

building was converted by Dransfield Owens de Silva for the LDDC in the mid-1990s to function as a viewing platform and is now open to the public once or twice a year.



Figure 11: The accumulator tower on the Mill Place site

- 2.15 The coal traffic using the dock declined rapidly before World War One and the old jetties were demolished - a large concrete jetty was built out from the north-east quay which can just be seen on the Goad Insurance Plan (see figure 12).¹⁰ As the trade in coal declined, timber imports became more important to the Regent's Canal Dock and also to the surrounding area. The narrow west quay had always been used for the Baltic timber trade and increasing amounts of timber were taken along the Regent's Canal for use by the many furniture makers in Shoreditch and Hoxton.¹¹ There were several timber yards and saw mills nearby and the Norwegian Seaman's Mission (built c.1930), which has recently been rebuilt behind its façade.

¹⁰ Tim Smith, *Regent's Canal Dock: An introduction to its industrial archaeology*, GLIAS, May 1993

¹¹ Joanna Smith & Ray Rogers, *Behind The Veneer: The South Shoreditch Furniture Trade and its Buildings*, (2006)



Figure 12: Goad Insurance Plan showing the Mill Place Site

- 2.16 No. 622 Commercial Road, adjacent to Mill Place was part of a property that was known as Labour House that occupied Nos. 622 – 626 Commercial Road, although No. 626 was specifically a Dr. Barnardo home. Labour House opened in 1882 as a commercial enterprise and provided work training for young men, especially those going to sea or planning to emigrate to Canada (Figure 13).



Figure 13: Labour House c. 1900 [© Barnardo's]

- 2.17 Up to 200 young men aged between 17 and 22 were housed there and occupied in a variety of trades including wood-cutting, packing-case making and the manufacture of aerated waters and temperance drinks. It was a commercial enterprise and the fizzy waters were supplied to many London hotels. It closed in 1909, with Barnardo's children being moved to other homes.¹² By 1914, a dressing gown manufacturer was in No. 626.¹³



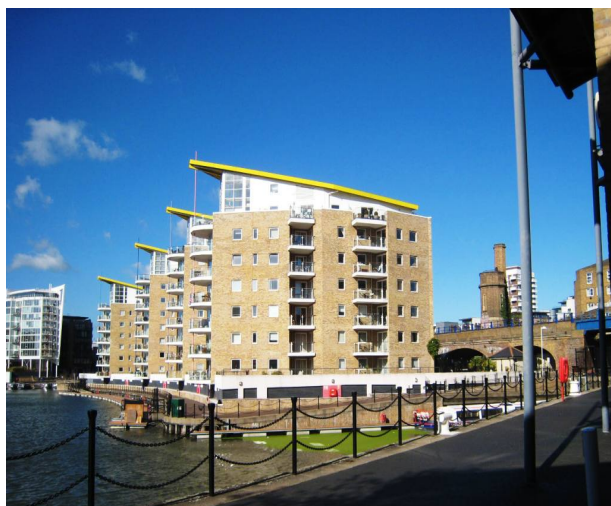
Figure 14: Aerial view of the site in 1929 [©Britainfromtheair]

- 2.18 The church of Our Lady Immaculate with St Frederick was designed in 1925 by AJ Sparrow and completed in 1934, replacing a temporary church of 1881. It has been described by Pevsner as having an 'austere exterior of dark red brick over a black brick plinth, with windowless apse towards the road, small arched side windows, and northwest campanile with copper pyramid roof. Surmounting the end of the nave to the south, raised up on a plinth, a chunky oak statue of Christ the Steersman, designed to be seen from the river.
- 2.19 For much of the 20th century Commercial Road has been largely associated with small scale manufacturing. The nearby Limehouse Basin was amongst the first docks to close in the

¹² www.barnardos.org.uk

¹³ Post Office Directory

late 1960s. By 1981, Limehouse shared the docklands-wide physical, social and economic decline which led to the setting up of the London Docklands Development Corporation. Poor access to the dock and run down warehouses and vacant land meant that it was not at the forefront of redevelopment and it has not been until the 21st century that regeneration of the immediate area has occurred. The majority of the formerly derelict land surrounding the basin has been developed into luxury flats. Over the last 15 years almost the entire waterfront area at Limehouse Basin has been redeveloped into residential accommodation convenient for those working in the City and Canary Wharf. Though no longer a working dock, Limehouse Basin has a working marina with visitor facilities. Of the new developments the most dominant are amongst the earliest dating from 1998 – the four huge blocks on the north quay of the basin with yellow roofs called Marina Heights (Figure 15). The Buildings of England described them as ‘prominent but banal’.¹⁴ Many developments around the Basin were built by Bellway Homes. They include the 11-storey Pinnacle, and the 12-storey Pinnacle 2 (both built in 1998 to designs by RMA Architects) which are distinctive tall white sail-like buildings (Figure 16).



Figures 15 & 16: Marina heights and Pinnacle 2

The heritage context of the site and its surroundings

Listed buildings

¹⁴ B. Cherry, Charles O'Brien & Nikolaus Pevsner, *The Buildings of England, London 5: East* (2005), p.537

- 2.20 The former London & Blackwall Railway viaduct, now carrying the DLR, is listed Grade II. It appears to have been listed twice: as a 'three arched brick bridge with heavy stone quoins to abutments' which is the bridge crossing the Regent's Canal and also as a viaduct structure extending to Branch Road and Three Colt Street. As pointed out earlier, the accumulator tower is also listed twice. The bridge across Commercial Road on what was the Limehouse Curve is listed Grade II. The list description says that 'the c.1880 viaduct continues to north and south', though the viaduct to the north has been demolished¹⁵.
- 2.21 Nos 683-691 and 699-711 Commercial Road, on the northern side of the street are listed Grade II, as is the drinking fountain under the railway bridge at junction with Lowell Street.
- 2.22 To the east the Limehouse District Library, its railings and gate piers are listed Grade II.

Conservation areas

- 2.23 The site is located in the St Anne's Church Conservation Area. This is contiguous with the Lowell Street Conservation Area to the north; the boundary between the two conservation areas runs along the centre of Commercial Road.
- 2.24 To the west is the linear Regent's Canal Conservation Area, and the Limehouse Basin is within the Narrow Street Conservation Area.
- 2.25 Figure 17 illustrates the location of listed structures and conservation areas.

¹⁵ Current Historic England mapping shows this bridge in the wrong position - it identifies the next railway bridge over Commercial Road to the west (at the top of Branch Road) as being listed; the associated list description is for the former Limehouse Curve bridge.

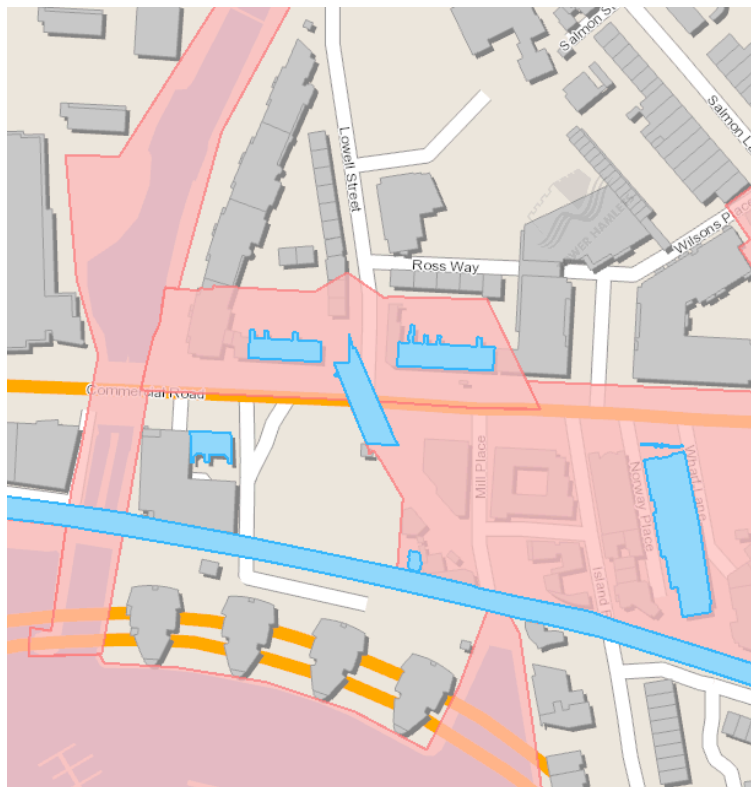


Figure 17: Listed buildings and conservation areas (©London Borough of Tower Hamlets)

Locally listed buildings

- 2.26 There are no locally listed buildings in the vicinity.

Heritage significance

- 2.27 The listed structures and the conservation areas described above are 'designated heritage assets', as defined by National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)
- 2.28 'Significance' is defined in the NPPF as 'the value of a heritage asset to this and future generations because of its heritage interest. That interest may be archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic'. The Historic England 'Planning for the Historic Environment Practice Guide' – as 'the sum of its architectural, historic, artistic or archaeological interest'.
- 2.29 'Conservation Principles, Policies and Guidance for the sustainable management of the historic environment' (Historic England, April 2008) describes a number of 'heritage values' that may be present in a 'significant place'. These are evidential, historical, aesthetic and communal value.

2.30 The character of the conservation area is identified in the St Anne's Conservation Area Character Appraisal (LBTH 2009). This identifies that the purpose of the designation was primarily to safeguard the visual setting of St Anne's Church, which provides a focal point and visual marker in Limehouse. It also protects the diverse historic streetscene along this part of Commercial and East India Dock Road.

'Historic interest' or 'Historical value'

2.31 Historical value is described as being illustrative or associative. The listed and surviving unlisted structures of any discernible quality in the area their relationship to one another and to the conservation areas, illustrates the evolution of this part of London. What happened to these older buildings, the historic urban grain and the area generally throughout the 20th century is highly illustrative of how our towns and cities changed in that period. It tells us about the transformation of the older city by new modern transportation and commercial forces, about social change and lifestyles in various periods, and about the introduction of modern building styles and methods. It tells us very forcibly that change in the area has been substantial and continuous for many decades, and that – unlike other, more homogenous parts of the capital, Limehouse and this part of London is an area that, historically and now, has always been subject to multiple forces of change.

2.32 Specific structures within the area under consideration have specific historic associations and are linked to specific strands in social history. The Regent's Canal, Limehouse Basin, the Limehouse Cut, the former London & Blackwall Railway viaduct, the accumulator tower, what is left of the former Limehouse Curve – each is associated with the historical events and activities which have contributed to the development of the area and represent a various aspect of its historical narrative. This narrative is principally concerned with transport and trade. Of these two things, only transport survives as a continuing echo of the past of the area. Trade has long since disappeared, and the history of the area since the Second World War has been almost entirely concerned with residential-led regeneration.

2.33 Similarly, The Mission, built as a sailor's hostel, the former Passmore Edwards Library and the Our Lady Immaculate Catholic Church Limehouse are considered to form a significant group of public buildings.

- 2.34 Panda House is a 1960s/70s building that is currently used as a hostel. The actual building has little historical value within the context of the evolution of the area other than as representative of the poor architectural quality of the post-war redevelopment of the area, however its use as a hostel is entirely appropriate within the context of the The Mission and its role as a hostel for the more transient population.
- 2.35 In terms of Historic England's 'Conservation Principles' the heritage assets of the area provide us with 'evidence about past human activity' and, by means of their fabric, design and appearance, communicate information about the past. Subsequent alteration and demolition has not entirely denuded the structures and the conservation areas of their ability to do this. However it is indisputably the case that the radical physical change that has occurred during the latter part of the 20th century has severely denuded the area of its coherence and integrity, and that its historic character and appearance has suffered due to this change. In particular, the Limehouse Curve (in contrast to the intact London & Blackwall Railway viaduct) has been largely demolished. Panda House reflects this negative evolution.
- 'Architectural interest', 'artistic interest' or 'aesthetic value'
- 2.36 The listed and unlisted structures and the conservation areas have, by definition, aesthetic value. While individual buildings may survive reasonably intact, the urban quality of the area as a whole is poor. The reality of St Anne's Church Conservation Area and the Lowell Street Conservation Area is that their character and appearance is compromised by the entirely visible, immediately adjacent and directly experienced low architectural and urban quality of their settings.
- 2.37 Much of the environment in the vicinity of the site, within the St Anne's Church Conservation Area, is indifferent in quality. The building at the corner of Commercial Road and Mill Place (Regent's Canal House, 626 Commercial Road) is clumsy and bland, and out of scale with its surroundings. Other new development nearby, including that opposite Panda House is typical of its time and whilst using a yellow brick is of no architectural merit.
- 2.38 To the east of the site is the tower and curved apse of the Our Lady Immaculate Catholic Church. Whilst an imposing presence on the street, the building is not listed, and forms a clear visual barrier between Island Row and the Queen Anne/Renaissance Passmore Edwards Library to its east.

- 2.39 Directly to the south of the Catholic church on Island Row is a series of older buildings, including a pair of late Victorian or Edwardian houses and some post-war buildings, which have little to commend them. Indeed, in this part of the conservation area, it is only the accumulator tower, the Catholic Church and the adjacent library that have any notable aesthetic value.
- 2.40 Panda House typifies the poor quality post-war development that replaced the older urban grain with buildings of bland generic style, in a form with materials that do not relate particularly to the surrounding area.
- 2.41 The new development that characterises the area to the south of the listed former London & Blackwall Railway viaduct is of very variable quality. It is highly dominant in visual terms – many of the buildings are of a greater scale than the earlier surrounding townscape, particularly those nearest the viaduct. That townscape is, in fact, most intact in terms of grain and architectural quality to either side of the listed railway bridge on the northern side of Commercial Road – notwithstanding some dereliction, and the presence of a large new apartment development to the north and to the east towards the Mission Building.
- 2.42 The built environment in this part of London was never consistent and homogenous, beyond lengths of terraced housing. It was, rather, extremely varied, and characterised by a very wide range of building typologies, alongside major engineering structures such as docks and railways. This area never had the consistency of a Belgravia or a Hampstead Garden Suburb – its essential quality was heterogeneity, visual discord, radical contrasts in type and scale, close proximity of very different buildings to each other, with a diffuse and varied character rather than a single, dominating spatial and architectural identity.

Summary

- 2.43 The historic built environment in the area is fragmented and very varied. The pre-20th century historic fabric of this part of London experienced radical change during the second half of the 20th century – firstly from WWII bombing and then from post-war renewal, and more recently from the large residential development. It is an area where radical economic transformation is highly evident in the physical evolution of the townscape – the change in circumstances of Limehouse Basin and the demise of the Limehouse Curve are the key examples. The large residential developments of the post-war era have

had a major effect on the setting of heritage receptors throughout the area.

- 2.44 The result is that the heritage assets of the area are far less 'grounded' or integrated with their surroundings, and those assets have many very poor buildings in their immediate vicinity. The remnant of the Limehouse Curve that remains is now an anachronism, and is illegible as part of the historic townscape which it once – when it continued to the north of Commercial Road – dominated.
- 2.45 The church continues to act as a 'marker' in the streetscape on the southern side of Commercial Road with its tower prominently positioned on the pavement edge. The viaduct provides the visual 'closure' to the west, crossing the road from north to south.

3 The policy context

- 3.1 This section of the report briefly sets out the range of national and local policy and guidance relevant to the consideration of change in the historic built environment.

Legislation

- 3.2 The legislation governing listed buildings and conservation areas is the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. Section 66 (1) of the Act requires decision makers to 'have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses' when determining applications which affect a listed building or its setting. Section 72(1) of the Act requires decision makers with respect to any buildings or other land in a conservation area to pay 'special attention...to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of that area'.

The National Planning Policy Framework

- 3.3 In February 2019, the Government published a revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).
- 3.4 The NPPF says at Paragraph 189 that:
- In determining applications, local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting. The level of detail should be proportionate to the assets' importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on their significance.
- 3.5 A description and analysis of the heritage significance of Panda House and its context is provided earlier in this report.
- 3.6 The NPPF also requires local planning authorities to 'identify and assess the particular significance of any heritage asset that may be affected by a proposal (including by development affecting the setting of a heritage asset) taking account of the available evidence and any necessary expertise. They should take this assessment into account when considering the impact of a proposal on a heritage asset, to avoid or minimise conflict between the heritage asset's conservation and any aspect of the proposal'.
- 3.7 At Paragraph 192, the NPPF says that:

In determining planning applications, local planning authorities should take account of:

- the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation;
- the positive contribution that conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities including their economic vitality; and
- the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness.

3.8 Paragraph 193 advises local planning authorities that ‘When considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset’s conservation. The more important the asset, the greater the weight should be. Significance can be harmed or lost through alteration or destruction of the heritage asset or development within its setting’.

3.9 The NPPF says at Paragraph 195:

Where a proposed development will lead to substantial harm to or total loss of significance of a designated heritage asset, local planning authorities should refuse consent, unless it can be demonstrated that the substantial harm or loss is necessary to achieve substantial public benefits that outweigh that harm or loss, or all of the following apply:

- the nature of the heritage asset prevents all reasonable uses of the site; and
- no viable use of the heritage asset itself can be found in the medium term through appropriate marketing that will enable its conservation; and
- conservation by grant-funding or some form of charitable or public ownership is demonstrably not possible; and
- the harm or loss is outweighed by the benefit of bringing the site back into use.

3.10 Paragraph 196 says that ‘Where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal, including securing its optimum viable use.

3.11 Further advice within Section 16 of the NPPF urges local planning authorities to take into account the effect of an

application on the significance of a non-designated heritage asset when determining the application. It says that ‘In weighing applications that affect directly or indirectly non-designated heritage assets, a balanced judgement will be required having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset’.

- 3.12 Paragraph 200 of the NPPF advises local planning authorities to ‘look for opportunities for new development within Conservation Areas and World Heritage Sites and within the setting of heritage assets to enhance or better reveal their significance. Proposals that preserve those elements of the setting that make a positive contribution to or better reveal the significance of the asset should be treated favourably’.
- 3.13 Paragraph 201 says that:
- 3.14 Not all elements of a World Heritage Site or Conservation Area will necessarily contribute to its significance. Loss of a building (or other element) which makes a positive contribution to the significance of the Conservation Area or World Heritage Site should be treated either as substantial harm under paragraph 195 or less than substantial harm under paragraph 196, as appropriate, taking into account the relative significance of the element affected and its contribution to the significance of the Conservation Area or World Heritage Site as a whole.

Local policy: London Borough of Tower Hamlets Local Development Framework

- 3.15 Following an Examination in Public in April 2010, the Council adopted its Core Strategy on 15 September 2010.
- 3.16 The Council’s Managing Development Document (MDD) was adopted in 2013.
- 3.17 Section 6 of the adopted Core Strategy is entitled ‘Designing a high-quality city’. Strategic Objective SO22 seeks to:
 - ‘Protect, celebrate and improve access to our historical and heritage assets by placing these at the heart of reinventing the hamlets to enhance local distinctiveness, character and townscape views’.
- 3.18 In terms of architecture and urban design, Strategic Objective SO23 seeks to ‘promote a borough of well designed, high quality, sustainable and robust buildings that enrich the local environment and contribute to quality of life’.
- 3.19 These two strategic objectives are supported by, amongst other policies, Spatial Policy SP10, which says that the Council will

ensure that 'heritage assets and their settings' are protected and enhanced, and that the Council will 'preserve or enhance the wider built heritage and historic environment of the borough, enabling the creation of locally distinctive neighbourhoods'.

3.20 Policy DM27 of the MDD deals with 'Heritage and the historic environment'. It says:

1. Development will be required to protect and enhance the borough's heritage assets, their setting and their significance as key elements of developing the sense of place of the borough's distinctive 'Places'.

2. Applications for the alteration, extension, change of use, or development within a heritage asset will only be approved where:

- a. it does not result in an adverse impact on the character, fabric or identity of the heritage asset or its setting;

- b. it is appropriate in terms of design, scale, form, detailing and materials in its local context;

- c. it enhances or better reveals the significance of the asset or its setting;

- d. opportunities to mitigate or adapt to climate change through the re-use or adaptation are maximised; and

- e. in the case of a change of use, a thorough assessment should be carried out of the practicability of retaining its existing use and the wider benefits of the proposed use.

3. Proposals for the demolition of a designated heritage asset will only be considered under exceptional circumstances where the public benefit of demolition outweighs the case for retention. Where exceptional circumstances require demolition to be considered, applications will be assessed on:

- a. the significance of the asset, architecturally, historically and contextually;

- b. the condition of the asset and estimated costs of its repair and maintenance in relation to its significance and demolition, and to the value derived from its continued use;

- c. the adequacy of efforts made to retain the asset in use; and

- d. the merits of any alternative proposal for the site.

4. For proposed development that lies in or adjacent to Archaeological Priority Areas, the Council will require the

proposal to include an Archaeological Evaluation Report and will require any nationally important remains to be preserved permanently in site, subject to consultation with English Heritage.

4 The proposals for Panda House

- 4.1 The proposals are outlined in the documentation prepared by Create Design Ltd.
- 4.2 The proposals are to redevelop the existing hostel but bringing a more efficient use, offering exceptional quality of facilities and spaces to suit the demands of a modern generation. Short term accommodation with shared cooking facilities, lounges, recreational areas, (cinema, gym, top floor terrace) and shared working spaces.
- 4.3 The proposals have been designed having full regard for previously permitted – and refused – schemes and the comments received from officers and has evolved to address those points raised.
- 4.4 It is recognised within the Conservation Area Appraisal that the area is made up of a diverse historic street scene, and this is typified by the building complete mix of building types, uses, scales and materials that surround Panda House. This is what creates the character and appearance of the area.
- 4.5 The building has been designed to be read, along Commercial Road, in three parts – with the three bays to the east and west reflecting a rhythm and proportion, particularly the horizontality of the windows, that recognises the architectural proportions of some of the surrounding Victorian buildings.
- 4.6 When viewed from Commercial Road – where an appreciation of the more important buildings within the conservation area are best seen – the upper storey element of the proposals is set considerably back from the road, and also from Island Row. This ensures that the breathing space is given to the adjacent church and the visual supremacy of the church tower is maintained in views along Commercial Road.
- 4.7 When seen in the context of the building to the west of Panda House, the proposals are broadly of a similar height and therefore sit comfortably alongside.
- 4.8 Even though the existing Panda House is set back slightly, the majority of buildings along Commercial Road sit at the back of the pavement line – this includes the adjacent building to the west, The Mission, and the new development to the east of the Library building. The proposals retain a set back from the pavement edge which will ensure that the church, and its tower retain their prominence and their contribution to the character of the street is not diminished by the proposals.

- 4.9 In terms of the east and west elevation views, in reality they will never be seen directly side-on due to the usually tight nature of the side streets off Commercial Road. The area is typified not only by the variety of building types, scale and proportions, but also the ability to get glimpsed views down streets, round corners and over other buildings. The listed railway viaduct is an example of how historically structures have changed the views and vistas of the area. The pulled back elevation along Island Row will allow for greater views of the church from the south which will have a positive impact on the relationship between the two buildings.
- 4.10 The current public realm is poor. Concrete pavements and bollards define the highway and pavement edge. The proposals add limited opportunities for greenery – which recognise the very urban nature of the area whilst attempting to soften this for the users of the space – as has also been attempted on the Commercial Road street front opposite the church and Island Row, to the north.

Summary

- 4.11 Overall the proposals have had regard for the historic nature of the area – in particular the character and appearance of the conservation area, and those buildings within it that have been recognised as making a positive contribution – such as the adjacent church. Ultimately it is important to ensure that the proposals preserve or enhance the conservation area, and do not detrimentally affect the ability of other buildings – such as the church – to retain their significance within the area too.
- 4.12 It is believed that these proposals achieve that. The proposals replace a building that makes no contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area and merely reflects the poor quality generic architecture of the post-war period – this includes its form, materials and proportions.
- 4.13 The proposals reflect the eclectic mix of buildings types, form, scale and heights whilst allowing the landmark qualities of the church tower to retain its prominence – from classical, to art nouveau and Queen Anne – to modern, post war and industrial. The architectural style has made reference to surrounding buildings and the materials chosen for the proposals have been selected to both match and complement those found in the surrounding buildings. A predominant use of brick is typical of the area, and the documentation provided by the architects demonstrates the level of detail that has been considered to ensure that the proposal will be of a high quality.

- 4.14 The proposals can certainly be regarded as preserving the character and appearance of the conservation area and the setting of nearby listed buildings, and further is a considerable enhancement over the existing Panda House. The development would secure the optimum viable use for the site in a much enhanced form over the existing.

5 Compliance with policy and guidance

- 5.1 This report has provided a description and analysis of the significance of the site and its heritage context, as required by Paragraph 189 of the National Planning Policy Framework. In addition, the report also describes how the proposed scheme will affect that heritage significance. The effect is positive, and for that reason, the scheme complies with policy and guidance.

The level of 'harm' caused by the proposed scheme

- 5.2 As outlined in Section 4, the NPPF identifies two levels of potential 'harm' that might be caused to a heritage asset by a development: 'substantial harm...or total loss of significance' or 'less than substantial'. Both levels of harm must be caused to a *designated* heritage asset – in this instance, the Conservation Area and the setting of nearby listed buildings.
- 5.3 The proposed scheme, in our considered view, preserves and enhances the character and appearance of the Conservation Area and the setting of nearby listed buildings and thus complies with S.66(1) and S.72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. It does not lead to 'substantial' harm or any meaningful level of 'less than substantial' harm to any heritage assets.

The National Planning Policy Framework

- 5.4 In respect of Paragraph 192 of the NPPF, the proposed scheme can certainly be described as 'sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation'. The proposals replace a building that makes no contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area and merely reflects the poor quality generic architecture of the post-war period with one that reflects the eclectic mix of building types, form, scale and heights – whilst allowing the landmark qualities of the church tower to retain its prominence.
- 5.5 The proposed new building will make 'a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness' through its contextual architectural approach.
- 5.6 The proposed scheme complies with Paragraph 195 of the NPPF - it certainly does not lead to 'substantial harm to or total loss of significance of a designated heritage asset'. It also complies with Paragraph 196 for the reasons given in detail earlier in this

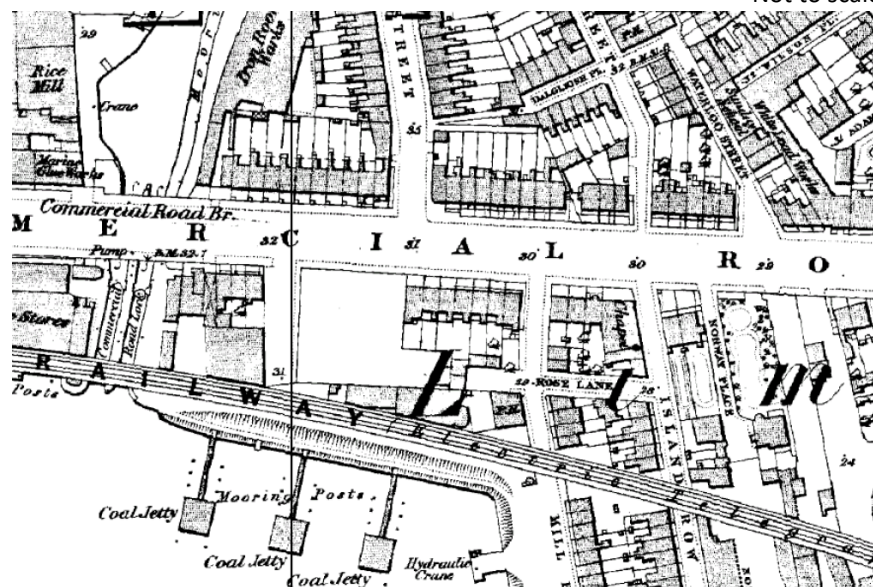
report – the scheme cannot be considered to harm the setting and thus character and appearance of the conservation area or the nearby listed building, but rather alters it in a fashion that enhances its setting. The choice of materials with good quality detailing will have a positive impact on the surrounding heritage assets.

London Borough of Tower Hamlet's Local Plan

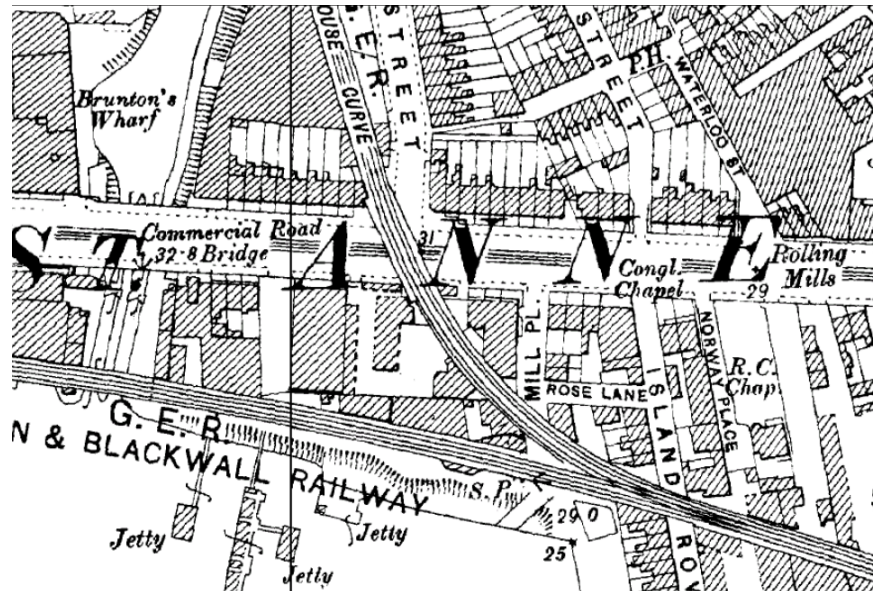
- 5.7 In positively addressing the requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework, the works also meet the policy requirements of the London Borough of Tower Hamlets Local Plan relevant to the historic built environment.
- 5.8 In terms of Policy SO23, the proposals are 'well designed, high quality, sustainable and robust' and particularly in comparison to the existing building. With regard to Spatial Policy SP10, the proposals 'preserve or enhance the wider built heritage and historic environment' both in comparison to the existing situation and also with regard to this proposal.
- 5.9 In terms of Policy DM27, the proposals 'protect and enhance the borough's heritage assets, their setting and their significance' and 'does not result in an adverse impact on the character, fabric or identity of the heritage asset or its setting'. We also believe that it is appropriate 'in terms of design, scale, form, detailing and materials in its local context' as outlined in the previous sections.
- 5.10 In conclusion, we believe that the proposals preserve the character and appearance of the conservation area and the setting of nearby listed buildings, and further are a considerable enhancement over the existing Panda House. The development would secure the optimum viable use for the site in a much enhanced form over the existing.

Appendix A: Historical maps

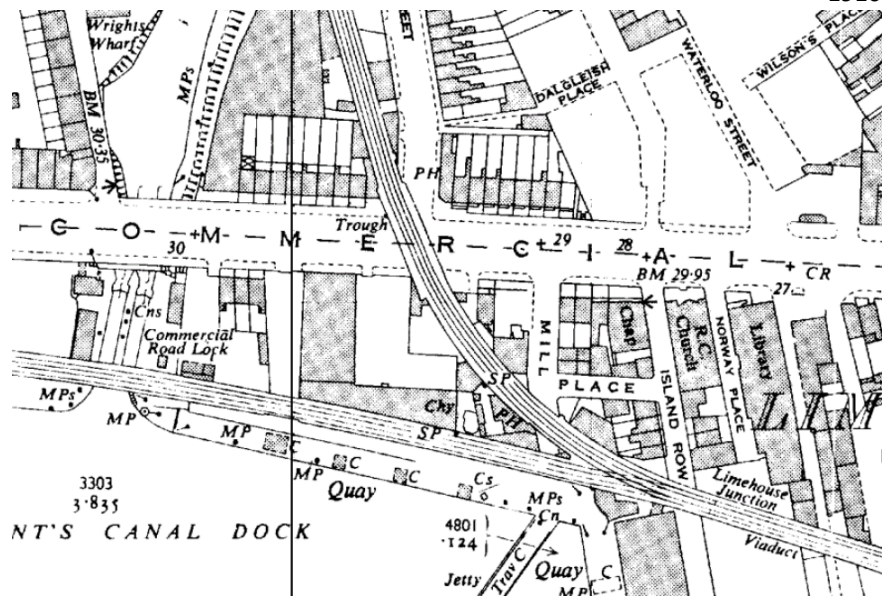
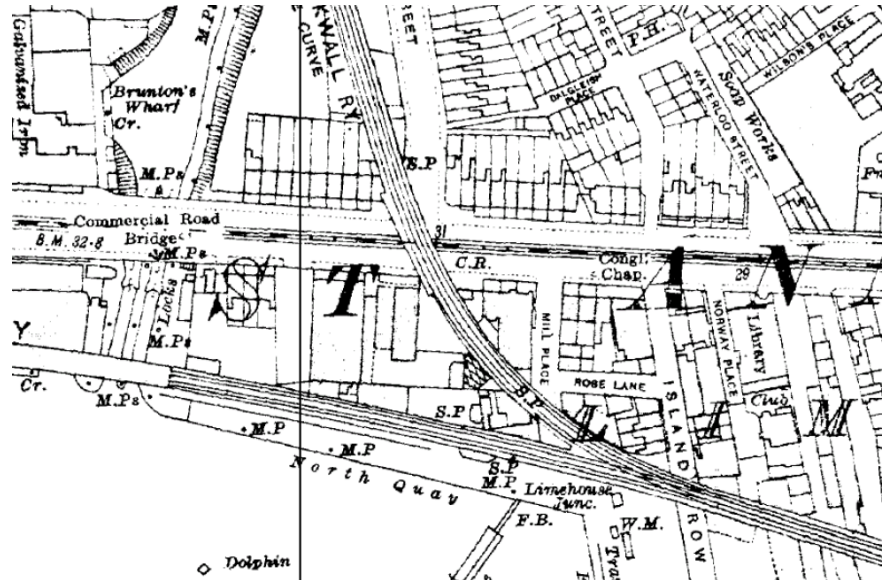
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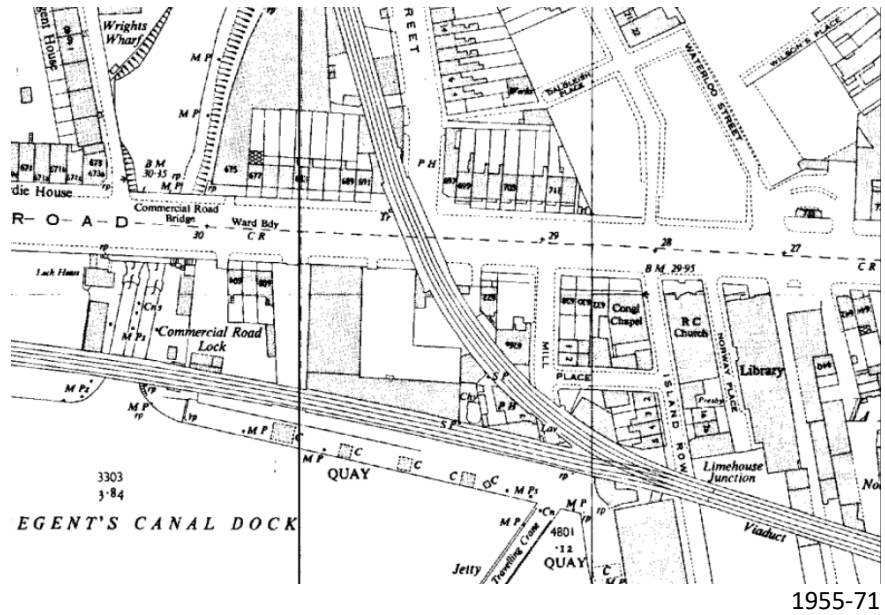


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