



RE: Creechurch Conservation Area Consultation

Dear Planning Team,

Thank you for consulting the Georgian Group on the designation of a new conservation area within the City of London. Our statutory remit relates to applications concerning elements of alteration or demolition to listed buildings dating between 1700-1840. The Georgian Group's charitable objectives are as follows:

'to save from destruction or disfigurement Georgian buildings, whether individually or as part of a group, monuments, parks and gardens of architectural and historic interest and, where necessary, encourage their appropriate repair or restoration and the protection and improvement of their setting'.

'to stimulate public knowledge and appreciation of Georgian architecture and town planning; of Georgian taste as displayed in the applied arts design and craftsmanship, and its influence on later periods'.

The Group has reviewed the options proposed by your local authority and forward the following comments and recommendations.

Development Threat

The Group objected to two applications within the setting of Bevis Marks Synagogue in 2021, these were for a tower rising to just under 198 metres located at 31 Bury House and a tower rising to just over 93 metres situated at 33 Creechurch Lane. Both these applications, if permitted, would have caused significant harm to the setting and significance of Bevis Marks Synagogue and the Group were vocal in highlighting this threat to the City of London. Whilst the two applications were refused by your local authority, the threat to the synagogue from surrounding development still exists and measures need to be implemented to safeguard the significance of the grade I listed Bevis Marks, the oldest surviving synagogue in England.

Paragraph 10 of the *Conservation Area Appraisal, Designation and Management Second Edition, Historic England Advice Note 1* states that 'conservation area designation is undertaken to recognise the historic character of an area and/or in answer to the impact of development, neglect and other threats, on areas which are considered to have special architectural or historic interest'.

The Group therefore welcomes the initial steps in designating a conservation area including Bevis Marks Synagogue and acknowledging the rich history of this part of the City of London.

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Significance of Surrounding Area

The Bevis Marks and Creechurch area possesses considerable archaeological, architectural, artistic, and historic interest and is worthy of designation. The Group's statutory remit relates to listed buildings dating between 1700-1840 and for this reason only those buildings and their setting dating to this period will be alluded to within this letter. The Group defers to the expertise of other societies on buildings within their periods.

Bevis Marks Synagogue

Bevis Marks is the oldest surviving synagogue in England and is statutorily listed at grade I. It is a rare survival of an extremely well-preserved synagogue which has remained in continual use since its completion in 1701. Externally, the design of the building has drawn comparisons with the city churches of Christopher Wren and the early nonconformist meeting houses – most evidently with their large, arch headed windows. The interior of Bevis Marks bears a strong resemblance to the building of its mother congregation, the Portuguese great synagogue of Amsterdam designed by Elias Bouwman. Historic fabric linking these important synagogues is present in Bevis Marks, in the form of the great central chandelier which sits over the reader's platform and four lamp stands that stand before the Torah shrine.

Whilst the architectural interest of Bevis Marks is exceptional, the contribution the building and its associations make to the historic interest of the surrounding area is of the upmost importance. Bevis Marks is the only survivor of three Jewish places of worship in the vicinity. The first synagogue after the resettlement was situated where the existing Cunard House sits and is commemorated with a historic City Corporation Plaque. Duke's Place was the location of the now demolished Great Synagogue which was constructed to serve the growing congregation in the area but destroyed by bombing in 1941. Bevis Marks is therefore the last tangible link to the historic Jewish association in this area of London.

The setting of the synagogue not only greatly contributes to the significance of the building as an architectural composition but also to the synagogue's religious workings and function. The provision of light into a synagogue is fundamental to the practices of Judaism and would have been an influential factor in Joseph Avis's designs. Bevis Marks admits natural light through the large windows on the first floor, providing a suitable environment for the reading and reciting of prayers. This is particularly necessary on the eastern wall of the synagogue where the Ehal is located, which, in the case of Bevis Marks, is made up of three ark cupboards divided by pilasters of the Corinthian order. Setting is influenced by environmental factors, as set out within Historic England's guidance document GPA3 *The Setting of Heritage Assets*. Reducing the amount of light into the synagogue would harm its setting and therefore significance.

Wrapped around the synagogue is an enclosed space which performs a vital liturgical function in the celebrations of festivals and holy days. This space is seen as an extension of the synagogue and is therefore due equal protection. Threats to this functioning space have been posed in recent years and consent has been rightly refused. Now is the time to provide further protection to ensure the courtyard is allowed to continue to perform its integral function.

Whilst development threats to the south of Bevis Mark's Synagogue have highlighted the impact on the setting and significance of the building, development to the north would have a similar impact. The attached boundary to this letter includes those

buildings facing Houndsditch and Bevis Marks which are consistent in their scale and massing. This scale respects and preserves the setting of the synagogue whilst contributing to the surrounding character and appearance of the Creechurch area. Their inclusion is therefore recommended for the benefit of the wider conservation area.

St Botolph without Aldgate

St Botolph's church is located on the site of an earlier building thought to date to the 16th century but with earlier origins. The current building was designed by George Dance the elder and built between 1741-44. Dance was at this time the Clerk of Works for the City of London, a role he held from 1735 until 1765, and during this time was responsible for the Mansion House at Bank. Dance has a great association with the surrounding area, with his son George Dance Jnr taking up the role of Clerk of Works for the City of London in 1767. St Botolph's church possesses exceptional architectural and historic interest.

Externally, the church is laid in Flemish bond with mixed yellow and red brick and stone dressings. Venetian windows are present to the north, east and west elevations along with Gibbsian surrounds and pedimented doorways forming an impressive classical composition. The church is aligned N-S meaning that the tower, which rises from a pediment topping the body of the church, forms a pleasing view from the south and longer views down the Minories. The tower and spire hold prominence in its surroundings giving it a landmark quality.

The classical composition of the tower and northern elevation is appreciated from the Minories, with the buildings on the western and eastern side framing the church when approaching from the south. Their inclusion within the proposed conservation area is encouraged for the benefit of the surrounding character and appearance and setting of St Botolph's Church.

The setting of the St Botolph's greatly contributes to the significance of the church and the prominence the spire has on the surrounding built environment is a key element. The hotel development to the east of the church allows for the spire to appear against a clear skyline when moving along Leadenhall Street onto Aldgate High Street. Whilst development to the rear, notably Irongate House and those buildings between Houndsditch and Bevis Mark's leading to Duke's Place, contribute to the setting of St Botolph's due to their relatively low-rise design. The consistent roofline and scale along the eastern and western sides of the Minories draws the eye towards the northern elevation of St Botolph's and the spire creates a pleasing townscape element. The erection of One Creechurch Place has harmed the setting of St Botolph's church when viewed across Aldgate Square from the east, creating the potential for enhancement with future development.

Historic Interest of the Area

The Bevis Marks and Creechurch area has exceptional historic interest relating to the presence of Bevis Marks and those sites where former synagogues were located. The area has important and visible associations with the Jewish community and their resettlement within the City of London during the 17th century. This is a contributing factor to the importance of the proposed conservation area. The presence of Bevis Marks along with the two plaques commemorating the former synagogues within the area represent a unique connection between the area and the Jewish community and for wider Anglo-Jewry relations.

Alongside Bevis Marks Synagogue, two religious buildings in St Botolph's without Aldgate and St Katherine's Cree creates a distinct character of important religious institutions.

Legislation

Section 69(1) of the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 sets out the requirement for local authorities to determine areas which it is desirable to preserve and enhance, and designate them as conservation areas. Section 69(2) sets out the requirement for local authorities to review their past activities in this area, including existing conservation areas, and to add more conservation areas.

Recommendation

The Georgian Group supports the designation of the Creechurch and Bevis Marks Conservation Area, however certain additions should be made to fully reflect the special interest present.

To protect the setting and significance of those buildings falling within the Group's remit, we support option 3 with additional buildings to the east and south. The extent of this new boundary is shown in the map attached to this letter. There is a clear special interest within the area of Bevis Marks and Creechurch and for this to be fully recognised we recommend the City of London adhere to Option 3 with those additions to the east and south.

Options 1 and 2 put forward do not address the imposing threats of development in the vicinity and the need to expand on this is integral to character and appearance of the proposed designation. Omitting 31 Bury Street and One Creechurch Place would leave two plots of land located within the middle of the proposed conservation area open to development. If development was permitted on these two plots it would put into question the special interest of the conservation area, as well as causing serious harm to the significance of Bevis Marks synagogue.

Including those buildings to east and south of option 3 would ensure the landmark quality of St Botolph's church is preserved. The church and its spire are prominent in views down the Minories and from across Aldgate High Street. Extending the conservation area boundary to protect this would enhance the special interest associated with the designation. Whilst including those buildings facing Houndsditch is integral to preserving the setting of the Bevis Marks Synagogue courtyard.

Not all buildings within a conservation area will contribute to its importance and their inclusion should be seen as an opportunity to manage change and create the opportunity to address past harmful development, as set out within the Historic England guidance on conservation areas.

Designation reflecting the boundary put forward within this letter would help solve the potential threat on assets of the highest importance. Expanding the conservation area to the north to include those building on Houndsditch would preserve the setting of Bevis Marks synagogue, whilst expansion to the south and east would preserve the landmark quality of St Botolph's church.

Yours Sincerely,

Edward Waller (Conservation Adviser for London and the Southeast)