



**Thornhill Road Conservation Area**  
*- Appraisal & Management Plan*

**March 2007**

# CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL

## Thornhill Road Conservation Area

### INTRODUCTION

This document is an “appraisal “ document as defined by English Heritage in their guidance document “Conservation Area Appraisals”.

The purpose of the document is, to quote from the English Heritage document, to ensure that “the special interest justifying designation is clearly defined and analysed in a written appraisal of its character and appearance”. This provides a “sound basis, defensible on appeal, for development plan policies and development control decisions” and also forms the basis for further work on design guidance and enhancement proposals.

This appraisal describes and analyses the particular character of the Thornhill Road Conservation Area which was designated by the Council in 1988. This includes the more obvious aspects such as buildings, spaces and architectural development, as well as an attempt to portray the often less tangible qualities which make the area “special”.

### PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

- (i) National Policies – Individual buildings “of special architectural or historic interest” have enjoyed a means of statutory protection since the 1950’s, but the concept of protecting areas of special merit, rather than individual buildings, was first brought under legislative control with the passing of the Civic Amenities Act in 1967. A crucial difference between the two is that Listed buildings are assessed against national criteria, with Lists being drawn up by English Heritage. Conservation Areas by contrast are designated by Local Authorities on more local criteria, and are therefore very varied in character. However, general guidance on the designation of Conservation Areas is included in Planning Policy Guidance Note 15 (PPG15), which sets out the government’s policies on the historic built environment in general. By 2005 there were eleven designated Conservation Areas in Waltham Forest.
- (ii) Local Policies – Legislation and guidance has emphasised the importance of including firm Conservation Area policies within the Unitary Development Plan (UDP), which must in turn be based on a clear definition of what constitutes that “special architectural or historic



Map showing the boundary of **Thornhill Road Conservation Area**, and an aerial photograph of the area before the Oliver Road Estate redevelopment was completed.



interest” which warranted designation in the first place. Policy BHE13 in the “Built and historic environment” chapter of the adopted Unitary Development Plan 2006 is the relevant council policy concerning the designation and subsequent control of Conservation Areas within the borough.

In addition Policy 4B.7 of The London Plan produced by the Greater London Authority emphasises the need for boroughs to work with local communities to recognise and manage local distinctiveness, ensuring proposed developments preserve or enhance local social, physical, cultural, historical, environmental and economic characteristics.

## **DEFINITION OF SPECIAL INTEREST**

### **(i) Location and population:**

Thornhill Road Conservation Area is situated in Leyton, which since 1965 has been within the London Borough of Waltham Forest. The area lies to the south of the old parish church of St Mary’s, and about a hundred yards west of the High Road, separated from it by the 1950’s “Thornhill Gardens” estate of flats.

The Lea Valley with its former marshes lies a short distance to the west beyond Oliver Road, and the area lies on the generally flat land just beyond the former flood plain.

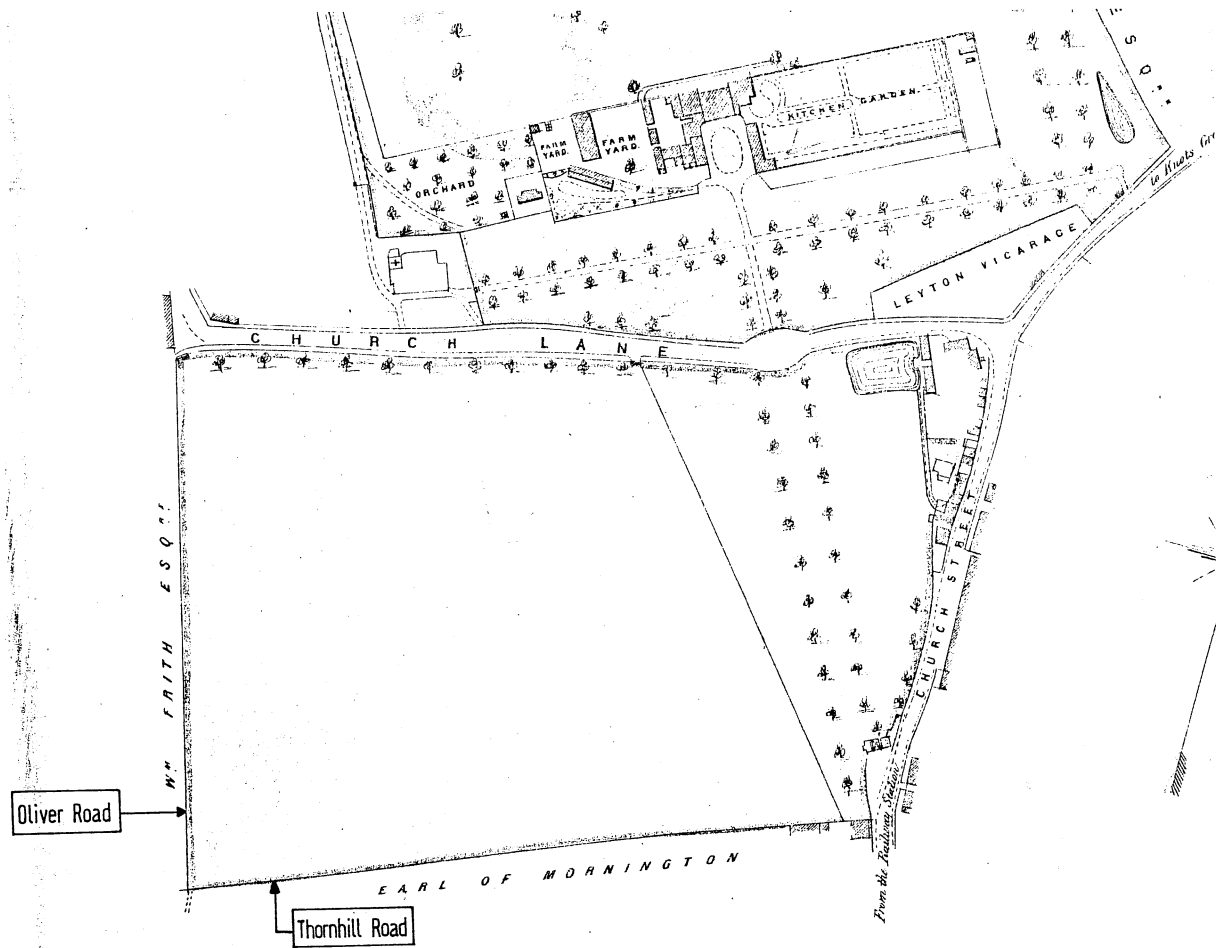
The Conservation Area contains 46 properties and the estimated population is approximately 200 people.

### **(ii) Origins and development of settlement:**

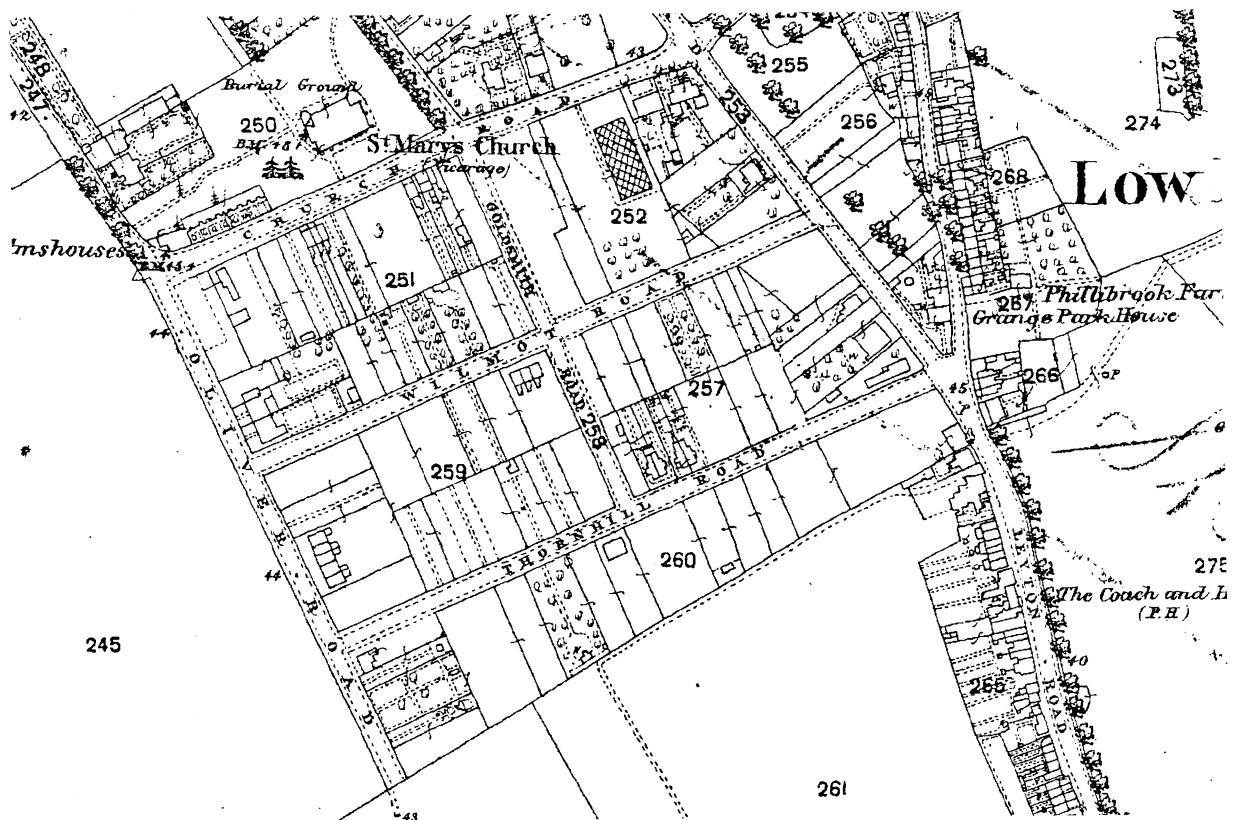
To the Saxons Leyton was Lugetune, and in the Domesday Book it is Leituna, “a farmstead on the Lea”. Whilst there is sporadic evidence of Roman settlement it was the Saxons who made the real beginnings of modern Leyton, and it is probable that their original settlement lay between the High Road, Grange Park Road, and Church Road.

The Domesday book records that there were two priests in Leyton in 1086, one in each of two of the three Manors. It was common practice for the Lord of the Manor to build a church, which naturally necessitated a priest, and it is likely that the parish church of St Mary’s originated in this way on what became the Manor of Leyton Grange.

Until the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Leyton, or Low Leyton as it was known, was a country parish in south-west Essex. Bounded on the west by the Lea and its marshes, and on the east by the remnants of the forest of Waltham (now Epping Forest), it was an attractive rural location for wealthy and influential Londoners to choose for their country houses or retirement.



(Above) The 1860 map of Leyton Grange showing the open field to the south of the Church and old Manor House, soon to be overlaid by Thornhill, Wilmot, Goldsmith and Oliver Roads. (Below) By 1865 the roads and building plots are clearly laid out, but in Thornhill Rd only the cottages at 35-41 and the villa at 48 have been built.



This rural character was to change dramatically after the construction of the Loughton branch steam railway line in 1856, which precipitated the break-up of the old manors and estates. Rapidly the fields, parks and gardens gave way to streets of Victorian housing, and by the turn of the century Leyton was much as we know it today.

Thornhill Road itself was laid out on an area of open land which was formerly a field belonging to the Manor of Leyton Grange. The Manor House itself, erected in 1720 by David Gansel, stood on the north side of Church Road astride what is now Grange Park Road. It was sold in 1860 to the British Land Company, who demolished it the following year and began to develop the estate for housing.

The first sale of building plots in Thornhill and Oliver Roads took place on December 2<sup>nd</sup> 1861. The estate was laid out in 66 separate lots, only 19 of which had been sold by the time of the second sale on January 20<sup>th</sup> 1862. One of the stipulations attached to the sale of Lots was that “no dwellinghouse, or portion of any dwellinghouse, of less value than £150, is to be erected on any Lot”. Plots on Oliver Road backing onto Thornhill Road were laid out at the same time, so the buildings erected are of a similar date. Development continued in a piecemeal fashion by speculative builders who built 1-6 houses at a time, using the standard building materials of the time; yellow London stock bricks and grey Welsh slates. The first Ordnance Survey plan of the area (1865) shows only a few plots developed, but all the housing in Thornhill Road was eventually completed by 1895.

Whilst the street layout is entirely conventional the fact that development was carried out piecemeal by a number of builders means that very few buildings are alike, and they range from small cottages to large villas.

During the last World War the eastern end of the road was badly damaged by enemy bombing, and a number of original properties were destroyed. The Thornhill Gardens flats were subsequently erected on the site in 1955 as part of Leyton’s post-war rebuilding programme. As part of the redevelopment the original road junction with the High Road was blocked off, removing through traffic and making Thornhill Road a quiet backwater, which it remains to this day.

**(iii) The prevailing or former uses within the area and their historic patronage, and the influence of these on the plan form and building types:**

Before being developed for housing in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century the site was an open field, probably farmed as part of the Leyton Grange estate. Neither this former use nor historic patronage had any influence on the layout of the road or the building types that followed.

**(iv) The archaeological significance and potential of the area including identification of any scheduled ancient monuments:**

The site contains no scheduled ancient monuments and is outside the archaeological priority zone identified in the Council’s Unitary Development Plan. The Leyton area has however yielded archaeological finds over the years. Palaeolithic implements and fossil bones found along the gravel terraces show that early man lived and hunted in Leyton. Roman remains have also been found, most recently in 2005 on the



Two good examples of medium & large Victorian houses in the street, both with original four panel front doors and single-glazed timber box sash windows. With the exception of the concrete roof tiles and front boundary wall treatment they are largely original in appearance and good examples to copy. The well established privet hedge, a traditional Victorian feature, adds considerably to the setting and appearance of the double-fronted villa (**Below**).



Beaumont Road estate to the north. There was a Roman cemetery south of Blind Lane, and massive foundations of some Roman building, with quantities of Roman brick, were discovered in the grounds of Leyton Grange during the 19<sup>th</sup> century so further finds cannot be discounted.

**(v) The architectural and historic qualities of the buildings and the contribution they make to the special interest of the Conservation Area:**

All buildings within the Conservation Area date from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and are essentially typical products of the period, using a limited range of materials: yellow London stock bricks, natural Welsh slates, clay chimney pots, painted timber box sash and casement windows, and painted timber doors. The special interest of the area derives from the diversity of Victorian building types in evidence, itself a product of the piecemeal way in which the street was developed. Cottages, houses and villas, semi detached or in terraces are all combined in one short street as a cross section of late Victorian speculative development.

**(vi) The contribution made by key unlisted buildings:**

There are no Listed or Locally Listed buildings within the Conservation Area, but the most original or least altered properties clearly have the greatest intrinsic value, and make the greatest contribution to the special interest of the area. They are also valuable as they also provide a reliable reference for original features and detailing which can be referred to when restoring similar properties in Thornhill Road.

**(vii) The character and relationship of spaces within the area:**

Thornhill Road is essentially a short, straight street of houses with tarmac footpaths on either side, into which a variety of medium-sized ornamental trees have been planted. The houses themselves are set back from the back edge of the footpaths, with a standard depth building line of approximately 3.0 metres. The only exceptions to this within the Conservation Area are 25 & 27 Rosedene Terrace, which abut directly onto the back edge of the footpath.

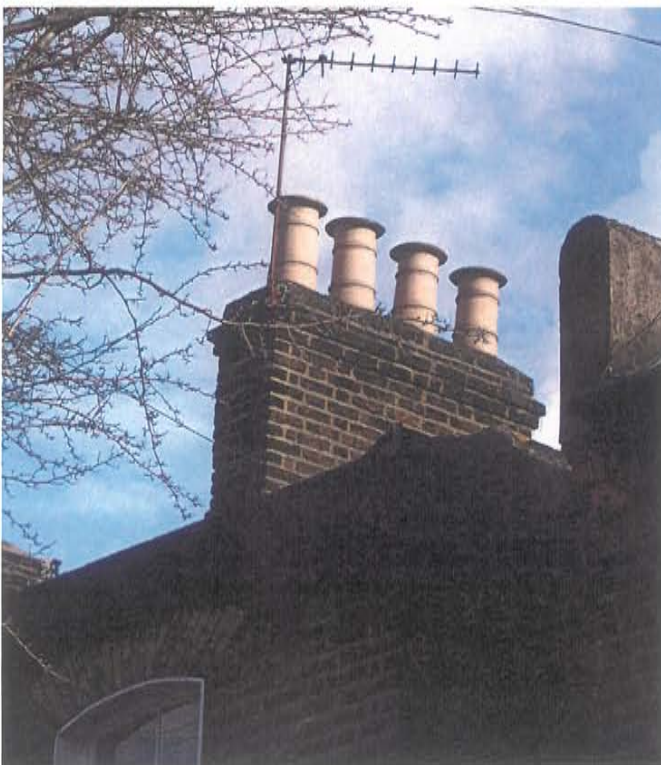
On the south side of Thornhill Rd and on the north side, west of Rosedene Terrace, the properties form a largely continuous built frontage, with just the occasional narrow gaps providing gated access to the rear gardens. Notably different are 35-41 Thornhill Road and the adjoining 25 & 27 Rosedene Terrace, which are distinctively designed pairs of semi-detached cottages. Their more spacious, lower density layout has resulted in greater distances between the buildings and more spacious gardens fronting the street. This contrasts with the smaller, standard depth gardens found in the rest of the area.

Nearly all front gardens are enclosed behind a variety of different front boundary treatments, mainly brick walls or timber fences, with the occasional use of metalwork. The piecemeal way the street was developed means that there was no uniform original boundary treatment, although surviving examples suggest that a low brick wall of London Stocks with stone coping (approx 750mm high) was fairly typical, probably topped by decorative cast-iron railings.





**Examples of original building details that contribute to the special character and appearance of the Conservation Area:** (Above & Below Left) Decorative clay chimney pots, on plain or more ornamental brick stacks, are distinctive features of the traditional Victorian roofscape, and a number of good examples still survive in the area. (Top Right) Highly decorative bargeboards, finial, and eaves brackets all survive on a pair of the earliest cottages in the street, erected in 1864. (Below Right) Original house nameplates, reflecting famous people or events of the Victorian era, are other more modest original features of interest.



**(viii) Prevalent and traditional building materials, textures and colours:**

The traditional materials used in the construction of the Thornhill Road properties were yellow London stock bricks, flush-pointed with Lime mortar, and grey Welsh slates with Lead flashings. Red brick can also be found on a number of the properties, used as decorative string courses, dressings, brick arches etc. Many properties feature artificial stone for lintols, keystones, window cills, bay windows, architraves and cornices etc. Almost invariably these are paint finished, usually in a white or off-white. Traditionally however they would almost certainly have been painted in more muted tones to resemble natural stone.

Cast-iron gutters and downpipes, and clay chimney pots on top of brick stacks were standard original features. The majority of pots still survive, mainly in yellow clay, and in variations of the common “cannon-head” style. Whilst a few terracotta pots exist it seems probable that they are slightly later replacements.

Painted timber doors and windows are standard original features for all properties within the area and many examples still survive. With the exception of 25/27 Rosedene Terrace and 35-41 Thornhill Road which had timber casement windows, all other properties were constructed with timber double-hung single-glazed box sash windows.

**(ix) Local details:**

The piecemeal way in which the road was developed is reflected in the mix of detached, semi-detached, and terraced properties within its short length. Most properties reflect the prevalent design conventions of the time, but there are nevertheless a few details of note that have especial local interest. Nos 35 and 37 Thornhill Road have particularly interesting examples of carved decorative bargeboards, brackets, and finials, which contrast with the plainer examples found on the otherwise identical pair of cottages at Nos 39 and 41.

On the flank wall of No 20 Thornhill Road can still be seen a carved stone tablet announcing that that this modest semi detached property is Inkerman Cottage. It thus takes its name from the Battle of Inkerman in the Crimean War, which was fought in November 1854.

No 27 Rosedene Terrace is the only property in the area to feature square clay chimney pots on top of its highly decorative chimney stacks. The matching items that must have originally featured on No 25 have long since been removed, making these original items all the more valuable.

**(x) The contribution made by green spaces, hedges and other natural or cultivated elements to the character of the area:**

Within the footpath either side of Thornhill Road are decorative street trees planted by the Council. Mainly decorative *Crataegus* cultivars, these trees are a valuable amenity item both for their attractive foliage and blossom, and for the wildlife that they attract to the area.



**Two examples of traditional Victorian windows within the Conservation Area.**  
(Above) An original timber box sash window complete with decorative “horns”, and set within a rendered reveal under a gauged brick arch. A good example of the most appropriate type of window for most properties in the area.  
(Below) A simple side hung casement window, a modern timber copy of the original, from one of the earliest cottages in the area.



Behind the front garden walls many properties still retain their original privet hedging, or some more recent shrub planting, which provides a degree of privacy and enclosure in the Victorian tradition. Along with the street trees this green barrier adds an attractive sylvan quality to an otherwise hard urban streetscape. More recently however this quality has been eroded as hedging has been removed and some gardens paved over, often with inappropriate materials.

**(xi) The setting of the Conservation Area and its relationship with the landscape or open countryside, including definition of significant landmarks, vistas and panoramas, where appropriate:**

When originally laid out Thornhill Road ran from Oliver Road through to Leyton High Road. Views to the east were terminated by yet more terraces of Victorian developments on the east side of the High Road, whilst to the west it remained first open land, then under greenhouses until well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Sadly none of this contemporary development survives today. At the eastern end, erected after enemy bombing in the last war, stands the Thornhill Gardens flats, an uninspiring Council development which respects neither the layout, scale, or architectural vocabulary of the Thornhill Road properties. Visually and physically it is a clumsy termination to eastern views down the street. To the west a modern development of housing on the west side of Church Road now closes off any longer views of the Lea valley, reinforcing the urban context of the street.

**(xii) The extent of loss, intrusion or damage. ie the negative factors:**

The Conservation Area has suffered greatly from misinformed and unsympathetic alterations to buildings since its designation in 1988. Whilst it is now belatedly protected by an Article 4(2) Direction, considerable harm has already been done to its special character and appearance by these alterations.

Two of the most harmful changes have been to original roofs and windows. Out of just 46 properties in the area, nearly 75% have had the original natural slate roofs replaced, mainly with coloured-concrete tiles, and 75% have had inappropriate replacement windows installed, usually made from upvc.

Originally built of facing brickwork, just under 50% of properties within the area have also been pebble-dashed and/or painted over the years, to the further detriment of the special character and appearance of the area.

The loss of decorative ironwork during the scrap metal drives of World War II undeniably had a negative impact on the original appearance of the streetscene. More recently the gradual loss of front boundary walls and hedging, and the paving over of front gardens is further eroding this original character & appearance.

Unless there is a firm commitment and concerted effort from residents to reinstate as near as possible the original appearance of properties within the area, it is debateable whether it will still merit it's Conservation Area status when the issue is next reviewed.

Apart from the street trees in the footpaths the public streetscape has no features of special interest, being largely typical of most streets in the surrounding area. The original paving flags were removed many years ago and replaced with tarmac, although the granite kerbing does survive. No original or early lamp columns survive however, having been replaced with nondescript steel columns of a standard pattern.

**(xiii) The existence of any neutral areas:**

Thornhill Road is a small compact street of Victorian houses and there are not considered to be any “neutral” areas within the designated boundary.

Guy Osborne  
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