

Deptford Creekside Conservation Area

Character Appraisal – Part I

Draft for Adoption May 2012



Summary of special interest

Deptford is one of the oldest settlements in Lewisham. The town is well known as the location of the historic Royal Dockyard, whose establishment brought fame and prosperity to Deptford for many centuries. Known to a lesser extent is the significance of the Creek to the development of the area. Here, on the banks of the Creek, as well as on the Thames foreshore, lie the beginnings of settlement, industry and urban growth of the borough.

Deptford Bridge has been a historic crossing point and place of continued occupation since Roman times. It was part of Watling Street, the Roman route that linked London with Canterbury and on to Dover. A tide mill was established in the area by the time of the Norman Conquest. The street Creekside has its origins in the 16th century, as a small lane leading to the King's Slaughterhouse on the site of Harold's Wharf (today the APT Studios).

Creekside's medieval origins are still evident in the lay-out at its southern end, although the area's character and appearance today is mainly the result of its industrialisation in the 19th and 20th century and 1930s re-development with the Crossfield Estate, and the interesting juxtaposition of two entirely different character areas this creates. The area's layout, wharves, yards and buildings - combined with the spatial qualities of the Creek - create a clear and distinctive townscape, to which river-related structures and the palette of traditional materials add a high level of local identity.

The special interest of the of the Deptford Creekside Conservation Area lies primarily in its historic interest based on its evidential, historical and communal value:

The industrial part is now a rare survival of a fast disappearing heritage that illustrates the importance of the River Thames and the Creek to the economic, cultural and social self-sufficiency of Deptford. The industrial premises and wharves at the southern end of the Creek constitute today the only surviving river-related industrial quarter of integrity and coherence within the borough. The area's lay-out and fabric give evidence and illustrate the evolution, settlement pattern, town planning characteristics and land-uses in Deptford from medieval times to the 20th century. The surviving workshops, offices and warehouses illustrate the last phase of a pre-dominantly river-related industry before its decline in the 20th century.

The area contains three sites that have high archaeological potential to yield evidence of medieval occupation and early industries on the Deptford Creekside, notably the Gibbes / Skill Centre Island, where remains of the medieval tide mill and its successors may still be in situ below ground. The same applies to Harold Wharf, the site of the Tudor slaughterhouse, and the Sue Godfrey Park, the site of the early 18th century Copperas Works. Harold Wharf is of particular significance for its association with Henry VIII and as evidence of the influence Greenwich Palace once exerted on Deptford.

The Crossfield Estate has significance as part of the development history of the area and

illustrates the LCC's engagement in the borough. It is a good example of its time that shows the underlying design principles of the LCC social housing types while containing locally distinctive features, such as the lay-out. Crossfield has a special social history for its role in the Deptford Music Scene of the 1970s and 80s. As a social housing estate it has a particular social character - working class – and has high social value for residents, musicians, artists and the Deptford gay community.

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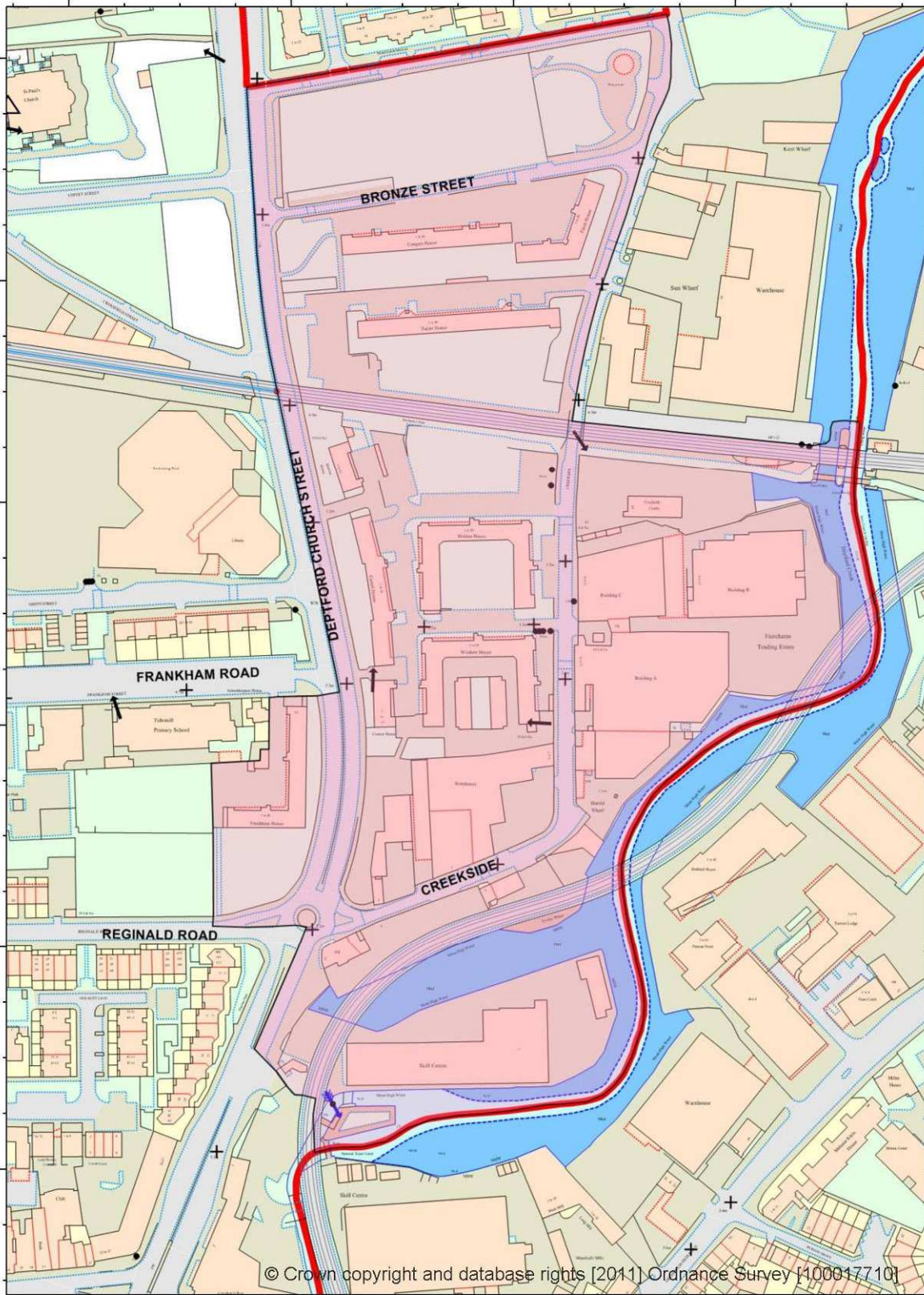
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Proposed Deptford Creekside Conservation Area



Key

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-  Deptford Creekside - proposed Conservation Area boundary (May 2012)



1 Introduction

Deptford is one of the most historic places within the Borough of Lewisham. At its Thames riverbanks and the Creek lie the beginnings of industry and urban growth of the borough.

Although a little run down today, Deptford Creekside still benefits from the proximity to the river, the survival of associated industrial yards and wharfs and a reasonable number of traditionally-built industrial buildings and warehouses. As one of the last central and largely undeveloped corridors in the Thames Gateway, there has been great pressure for re-development. Recent residential developments have already had a significant impact on the character of the area but have come at the price of seeing much of the industrial heritage around the Upper Creek obliterated.

The historic environment enhances our cultural, social and economic life and has an important role to play in the process of managed change set out in the Council's Core Strategy. As the area will continue to change and evolve there is also a need to ensure that its heritage value is recognised. Conservation Area designation can assist the careful management of change to ensure that the distinctive historic character is preserved and enhanced and used as a cue to be positively recognised in new development.

This character appraisal has been written in support of the proposed designation of the Deptford Creekside Conservation Area. The designation aims to afford protection to a distinctive neighbourhood in recognition of its industrial and working class origins and spatial identity which is unique in the Borough of Lewisham. The following pages set out the special architectural and historic interest of the area and explain why it is considered worthy of designation.

Unless otherwise indicated, 'Creekside' refers within this document to Creekside the street only, i.e. not to the full extent of the historic Deptford side of the Creek. The potential for conservation area designation of parts of Creekside were first investigated in 2008 within the scope of the intended Deptford High Street Conservation Area review. Shortly after in 2009, the London Development Agency published the *Heritage Scoping Study of Deptford Creek* highlighting the heritage assets and areas of interest surrounding the Creek.¹ It provided the incentive to investigate the area further and the findings of the report are included in this appraisal.

The fieldwork, research and analysis to this document have been undertaken in stages since 2009. Whilst every attempt has been made to consider all aspects of the character of the proposed conservation area, there may be elements that have been omitted due to lack of space or inaccessibility (private land or restricted access). Any such omission does not imply that such an element does not contribute to the character of the conservation area.

¹ London Development Agency – Design for London: Heritage Scoping Study of Deptford Creek (written by Edmund Bird, London 2009)

Location, boundaries and setting

The development and character of the Deptford Creekside Conservation Area is defined by its location at the Creek south of the River Thames. The Creek is the 1.2 kilometre long tidal stretch of the River Ravensbourne where it meets the Thames. It defines the borough boundaries and is equally shared by Deptford and Greenwich.

The conservation area lies to the north of Deptford Bridge, which is the historic crossing point of the Creek on the route of Watling Street, the Roman Road linking London to Dover, which is today the A2. It focuses on the remaining industrial estates along the Creek and the Crossfield housing estate.

The proposed conservation area boundary takes the line of the borough boundary running through the centre of the Creek and includes all the historically industrial wharves east of Creekside from the [Gibbes / Skill Centre Island \(part of Lewisham College Deptford Campus\)](#) in the south to the historic London-Greenwich railway viaduct [in the north](#). The boundary includes the viaduct and follows its line to the west up to Creekside where it extends north up to borough boundary [to include the Sue Godfrey Nature Reserve and Ferranti Park](#). The western boundary is [for the most part](#)-defined by Church Street [including all](#) the buildings of the Crossfield Estate and the industrial premises in Creekside down to the entrance of the [Gibbes / Skill Centre Island](#). [At the junction with Frankham Street the boundary extends to the east of Church Street to include Frankham House of the Crossfield Estate and the associated green amenity space to the south.](#)

The area has been the focus of settlement since the Middle Ages. The architectural legacy of mainly the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries is recognised in the Deptford High Street and St. Paul's Conservation Area on the Deptford side, both west of Church Street, and the Ashburnham Triangle Conservation Area on the Greenwich side.

The Creek's wharves and river walls on the eastern (Greenwich) side are as much part of the character as those within the conservation area. Two important listed industrial buildings are located here and form the immediate setting of the conservation area: the Mumfords Mill grain silo (1897) and the Deptford Pumping Station (1865). [The recent redevelopment of the Merryweather fire engine factory and Skillions site by Galliard Homes has introduced medium to high rise residential blocks into the area, which architecturally do not relate to the distinctive character of the area, turning their back on the Creek and fencing themselves off with industrial palisade security fencing.](#)

To the south, at the busy junction of Church Street and Deptford Broadway (A2) lies Lewisham College. The northern part of campus, the [Gibbes / Skill Centre Island](#), has been included in the conservation area for its [archaeological](#) and [historical](#) significance to the area. The modern Sun Wharf to the north of the railway viaduct and Kent Wharf, which has recently been cleared, are not included in the conservation area. The heritage value of their wharves, however, and the contribution these make to the riverscape of the Creek is recognised and these will be addressed in the forthcoming Supplementary Planning Guidance for the area.

Heritage Significance

English Heritage promotes a values-based approach to significance as set out in Conservation Principles. This identifies four broad groups of values through which a site or place can be interpreted: evidential, historical, communal and aesthetic. The definition of these values are set out in Appendix A to this document.

The proposed conservation area focuses on industrial Creekside south of the railways and the Crossfield Estate, each of which constitute assets of heritage significance to the borough in their own right. The Creek itself has long been recognised as a natural heritage asset to the borough.

The historic industrial premises at the Creek's southern end between the [Gibbes / Skill Centre Island](#) and the railway viaduct remain today's only surviving river-related industrial quarter of integrity and coherence within Deptford and along the Creek itself. The principal heritage significance of the area lies in its evidential and historic value. The Creek was the reason for the area's early settlement and continued to be the focus for development until well into the 20th century. River-related industrial uses within the proposed conservation area date back as far medieval times with the establishment of a tide mill north of Deptford Bridge. In the 16th century, the foundation of the King's slaughterhouse on the site of Harold Wharf established associations with the Royal Palace in Greenwich. The narrow lane that lead to the slaughterhouse was the beginnings of today's street Creekside (then called Slaughterhouse Lane). Its medieval origins are still evident in the narrowness of the street and the tight urban grain of the wharves at its southern end.

Creekside retains the industrial character that developed in the 19th Century. The mixed industry along a Thames tributary plays an important role in the development and reflects the evolution of historic Deptford and formed the basis for its economic, cultural and social self-sufficiency. The surviving workshops, office buildings and warehouses within the proposed conservation area, dating mainly from the mid 19th to the mid 20th century, illustrate the last phase of a pre-dominantly river-related industry before its decline in the late 20th century. Although many of the warehouses are utilitarian and individually of modest aesthetic value, collectively [and combined with the area's layout, yards and wharves](#) they have considerable evidential and historic value. [The sum of these elements](#) provide evidence of the historic development pattern and land-use along Creekside and combine with the spatial qualities of the Creek to create a clear and locally distinct townscape and character. To this character, the predominant use of brick as building material, Crittall-type windows, river-related structures and other details add a high level of local identity.

The physical integrity of Creekside within the proposed conservation area has been the base for small-scale industrial and creative businesses and encouraged the growing of a vibrant community [and network](#) of artists. [The creative energy this has brought to Creekside is mutually appreciated from all parts of the community and visitors to the area](#)

[alike. Buildings and structures are often used as ‘canvasses’ for artworks, as evident in many murals and graffiti works in the area, and these have now become an established part of Creekside’s appearance.](#)

The history of social housing provision in the borough by the LCC and the local council starts in Deptford. The **Crossfield Estate** illustrates a new stage of the LCC’s programme when, in response to Government incentives, the focus shifted from creating cottage garden estates outside the established borough boundaries to the clearance of the historic urban grain of inner-city areas, and their replacement with planned, single-phased housing blocks. As a public housing estate it reflects a particular social character – working class – built in a period in which local and regional Councils had accepted the responsibility of state intervention as a necessary pre-condition to create a more civilised and humane industrialised city.

The estate is in many respects a typical example of its time illustrating the underlying design principles dictated by social and economical considerations and built in the ‘domestic’ style that was favoured by the LCC as the appropriate one for social housing. Its lay-out is distinct due to the partial inclusion of pre-existing 19th century street pattern, which has given the southern part a sense of intimacy and surveillance not usually found in housing estates of that time. Castell House and Farrer House are notable for added individual feature, such as the rounded balconies attaching to the stair towers (Castell House) and rounded balconies to Farrer House, now individual for each flat, which add sculptural elements to its south elevation.

Added to its evidential, historical and, to a lesser extent, aesthetical value, the estate has considerable significance for its communal value. When Lewisham Council changed its housing policy for the estate in the late 1970s – giving priority to young single professionals – it gave impetus to the development of a radical arts and music scene that gained Deptford an almost legendary status in the 1970s and 80s. The estate became the base for a number of musicians including members of Dire Straits and Squeeze, who performed regularly in local venues, satisfying an increasing demand for live Pub Rock (and Punk) music that developed in reaction to mainstream British Rock music. The estate and surrounding area laid the beginnings for a number of British bands that brought it to international stardom and as such also has historical and communal significance at a national level.

Planning Policies

Under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, the Council has a duty to identify areas of special historic and architectural interest and to formulate and publish proposals for the management of such areas. In determining applications for development in conservation areas, the Council has also the duty to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character of the areas.

National planning guidance [is set out in the recently-published National Planning Policy](#)

[Framework \(2012\)](#). It classifies conservation areas as 'designated heritage assets' and introduces a national presumption in favour of sustainable development. [One of the key dimensions of sustainability is protecting and enhancing the historic environment](#).

The requirement [to protect and enhance the historic environment is](#) reflected in Lewisham's Core Strategy Policy 16: Conservation areas, heritage assets and the historic environment. The Core Strategy, together with the London Plan and the saved policies of the Unitary Development Plan (UDP), is the borough's statutory development plan. It states the Council's commitment to monitor, review, enhance and conserve the value and significance of its heritage assets and their setting.

Character appraisals are a material consideration in the planning process and are used when determining planning applications and appeals. However, the designation itself and the Appraisal do not constitute the end of the process. In response to the development pressure the area faces, the Council will adopt a positive and collaborative approach to conservation, one that focuses on actively managing change in the area in a way that increases confidence in using the historic place to support its regeneration.

In parallel with the designation of the area, the Council is in the process of drafting Creekside Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPD) that will help to guide the form of new development on the Deptford Creekside. It will include the findings and recommendations of this appraisal to develop policies for the conservation of the area and its immediate and wider setting. The draft SPD is expected to go to public consultation in 2012 and residents' groups, amenity groups, businesses, and stakeholders will be invited to provide input on the issues facing the area and how these might be best addressed.

Public Consultation

The framework for this study follows English Heritage guidance '*Understanding Place: Conservation Area Designation, Appraisal and Management* (2011). The Appraisal [was](#) made available for public consultation from 6 December 2011 to 27 January 2012.

Residents, businesses and stakeholders [were](#) sent details of the proposed conservation area and Character Appraisal and [were](#) invited to attend a drop-in session to discuss the proposals with officers.

[The findings and issues raised during public consultation](#), and the Council's formal response to it, [are](#) published in the [Deptford Creekside Conservation Area Consultation Report on the Council's website](#).

2 The conservation area today

Population

Lewisham has a number of severely deprived areas. As part of New Cross Ward, Deptford Creekside falls within one of the five most deprived wards in Lewisham and within the 15% of most deprived LSOA's in the country. At the Lower Super Output Area Level (LSOA) residents in the area have reported lower than average levels of income, health, housing services and living environment, all between the 10 to 15% lowest in the country.

Deptford Creekside residents have reported higher levels of educations, skills and training (top 30% in the country) than other parts of the borough. Institutions such as Lewisham College, Trinity Laban College and the Creekside Centre are not only key for the Deptford but for Lewisham as a whole and some of these facilities will need to be enhanced in the future. Although residents enjoy high levels of education, training and skills and the level of employment in the area have improved (ranked within 25% most deprived areas in 2010 rather than the 17% most deprived area in the country in 2004 and 2007), residents in the area have reported low levels of income (within the 15% lowest in the country).

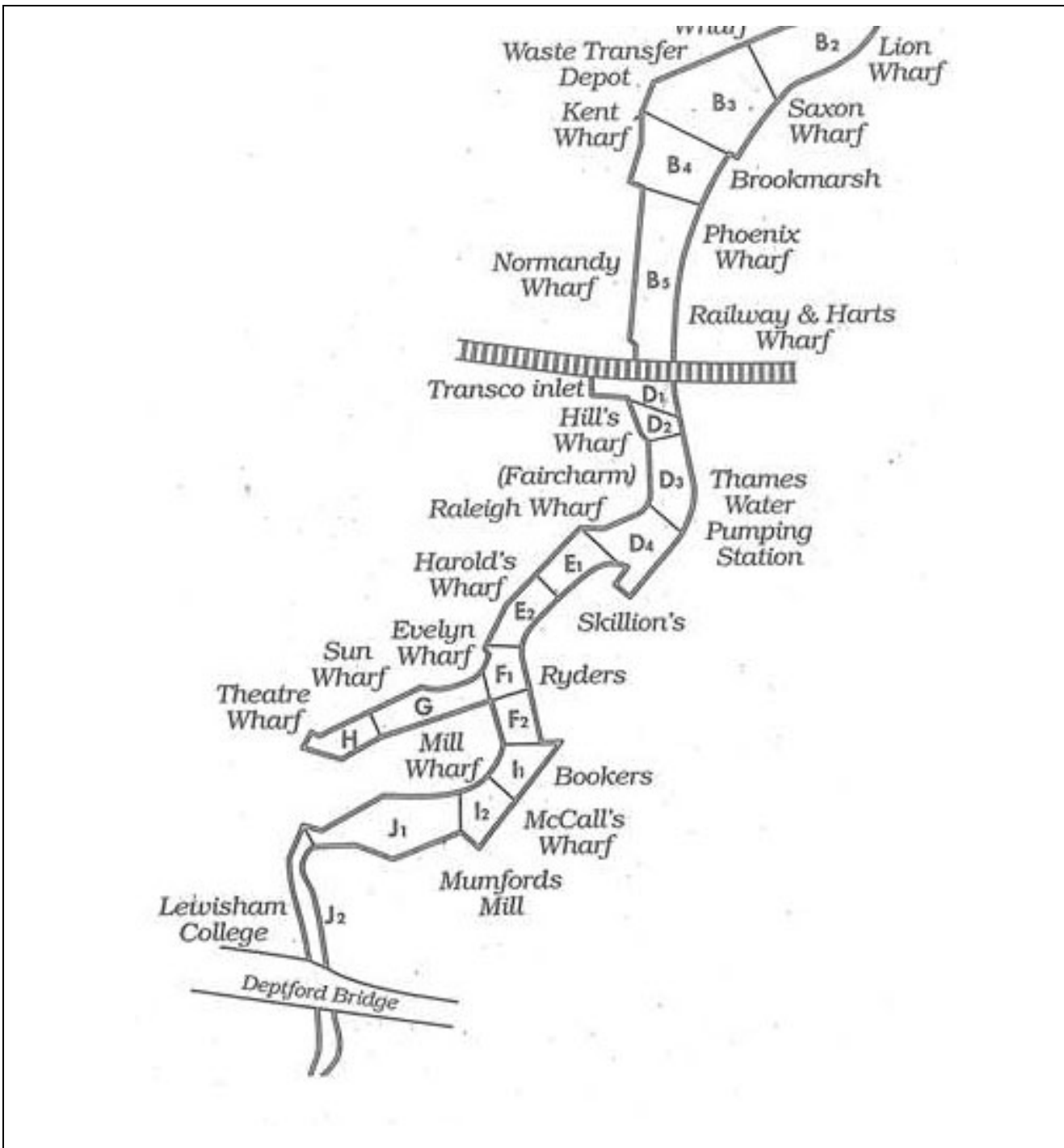
Economy and Uses

The historically predominant use of the area has been industrial inter-mixed with housing for the workers. Following the decline of the river-related industries in the 20th century and subsequent demolition of the power stations, warehouses and mills, the focus has shifted to light industry. The strongest link to the Creek's historic industrial use is today provided by Brewery Wharf on the Greenwich site south of Creek Road, used by Prior Aggregates whose barges bring sand and gravel from Colchester for the construction industry. Within the conservation area, a variety of small-scale businesses operate from the former wharfs, including garages, scaffolding businesses, and printing, which no longer require the river as a means of transport. [Theatre Wharf, which incorporates what was historically Sun Wharf, has become the location of a cluster of houseboats. A number of the residents run their business from the wharf and as such it is not just a place for mooring, but forms part of boat residents' livelihood.](#)

Over recent years, the southern end of Creekside has established itself as a hub for the creative industries. The surviving warehouses located here have proven to be crucial for providing low-cost starter units and accommodating the needs of new businesses, innovation and creative industries which were pushed out by high rentals from the inner-city areas. Creative industries are now concentrated on all the larger premises, of which Faircharm is clearly the dominant provider. The low rentals in the area have not given the incentive to owners to invest in the buildings, which is particularly noticeable at the wharfs and premises at the southern end of the street which are in low-key industrial use.

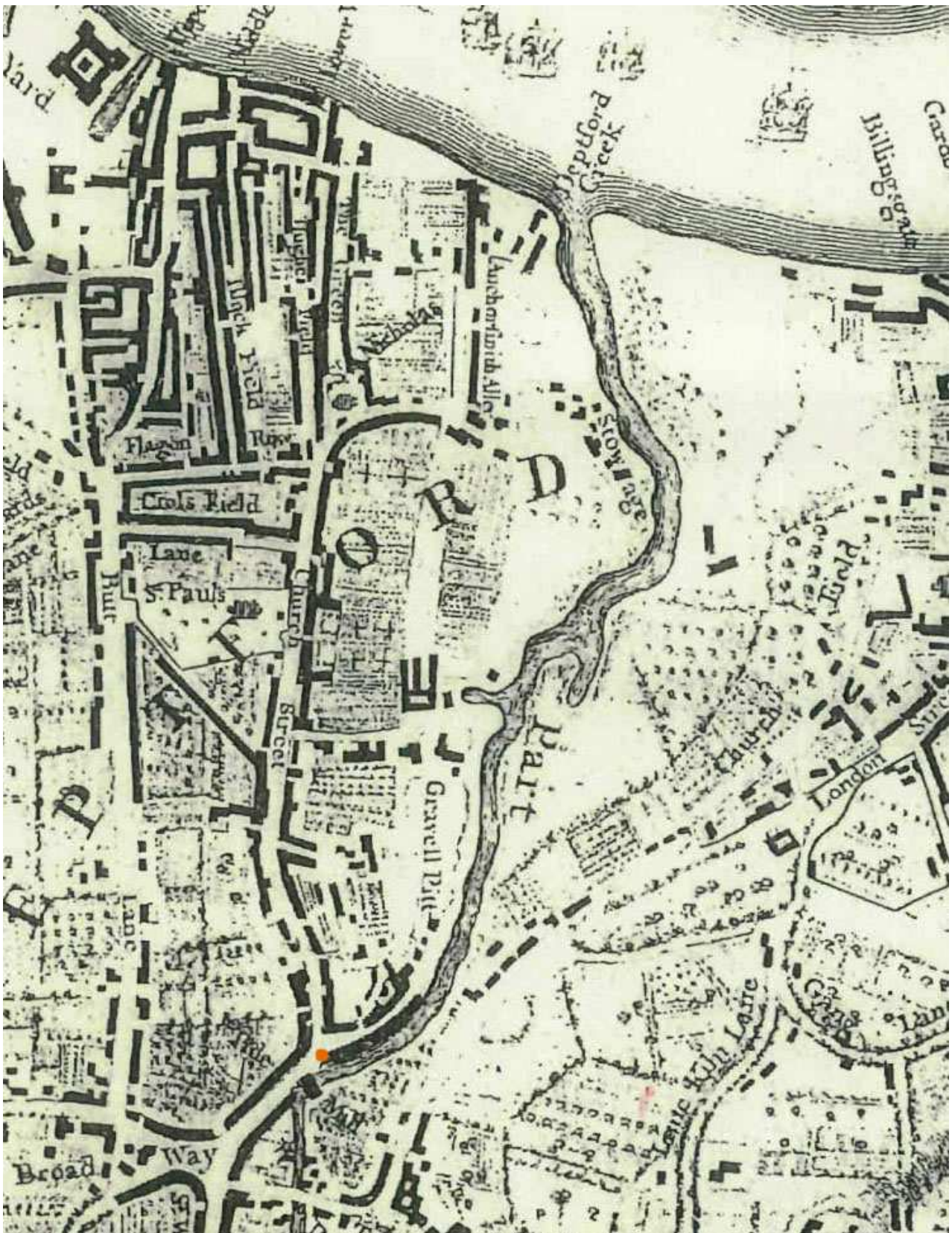
With the Crossfield Estate housing remains the second most dominant use in the area

complemented by community and commercial facilities such as the pub, a café, a gallery and the Creekside Education Centre, the latter a facility promoting the history and wildlife of the Creek. The Laban Dance Centre further north outside the conservation area boundary and Lewisham College at Deptford Broadway have also brought a focus on culture and education to the area. The Laban Centre, built on one of the Creek's former wharfs in 2003, has brought a cultural asset of London-wide importance to the area, which has helped raising the profile of the area with significant beneficial regenerative effect.



Historic wharves along the southern part of the Creek (Source: *Deptford Creek. Surviving Regeneration*, 1999)





Detail of Rocque's Map of London and surrounds 1745-6.

The orange dot marks the location of the Oxford Arms (today the Birds Nest Pub) at the junction of Church Street and Slaughterhouse Lane (today Creekside).

3 History of the area

Archaeology

The area lies within two archaeological priority zones – Deptford Creek, and Deptford Broadway and Tanners Hill.

The junction of the Thames with the River Ravensbourne at the Creek mouth may have attracted early settlement or ritual use. The area is therefore thought to have high archaeological potential for further finds of the Bronze Age, Iron Age and Roman period, including organic materials such as timber structures and artefacts, for which the alluvium and peat layers provide good survival conditions.

There has been continuous activity at the southern end of the Creek at Deptford Bridge from at least the times of the Norman Conquest. The Archaeology of the area has the potential to provide further evidence of earlier periods, from the late Iron Age to the Roman period and from the Roman period to the mid-Saxon centuries. [A number of sites have high potential to yield evidence of former medieval and post-medieval industries and these have been pointed out within the document.](#)

3 Development History

The following pages describe the development history of Deptford with the focus on Creekside and the area of the proposed conservation area. Site specific information is also included in Chapter 5: Character Areas. The development of the Crossfield Estate is best understood within the history of social housing provision in the early 20th century, and this is set out as an introduction to the character assessment of the Estate in Chapter 5.

Roman (43 AD – 410 AD)

Evidence of human activity in the Deptford area can be traced back to Roman Times. A ford crossing the River Ravensbourne is thought to have been in the location of Deptford Bridge. It was part of Watling Steet, the Roman route that linked London and Canterbury and on to Dover, now the A2. A number of finds in the Deptford Broadway area indicate dense Roman occupation over a long period of time, probably being a roadside settlement based around the river crossing.

Early Medieval (410 AD – 1066 AD)

The place name Deptford is thought to be derived from the Anglo-Saxon for ‘deep ford’. (The ‘t’ appeared in the middle from the 15th century onwards). It is likely that the settlement at Deptford Broadway may have had Saxon successors. Two graves thought to date from the 7th century have been found in the area and were perhaps part of a Saxon

cemetery.²

Medieval (1066 AD – ca. 1500 AD)

In the Domesday Book survey of 1086, neither the present Deptford nor Greenwich were mentioned by those names. Deptford was referred to as the manor of 'Grenviz' (le West Greenwich), held by Gilbert de Magminot, Bishop of Lisieux, from Bishop Odo of Bayeux, brother of William the Conqueror. The Domesday Book describes the population as '24 villeins, four bordars, and cottar and five slaves', with their families, and the land comprising arable, meadow, pasture and woodland.³

The manor was passed on from de Magminot to his decedants the Maminots, and later the de Says who gave the manor its alternative name of Sayes Court. In 1487, the manor was confiscated by the Crown. In the early 16th century it was held for several short intervals by royal courtiers, including Cardinal Wolsey, but passed back to Henry VIII in 1535. It has been held by the Crown ever since.⁴

The fundamental theme in medieval times was the struggle to reclaim the marshes and control the river to prevent flooding. Earth banks were built and the land behind drained by ditches. The tenants of the manor had the obligation to maintain and repair them. The river banks were often breached, leading to flooding of the fields behind, despite regular royal commissions reviewing the state of repair and ensuring that repairs were carried out.

By the late medieval period, two distinct centres of settlement had emerged in the area. One comprised Deptford Strand along the Thames river front and Deptford Green around the parish church of St. Nicholas, later called 'Lower Deptford'. The other settlement, separated by an expanse of fields to the south, was the Broadway at Deptford Bridge, later called 'Upper Deptford'. The two settlements were linked by Butts Lane (now Deptford High Street) and Church Lane and only merged during the course of the 19th century gradually together to become what we know today as Deptford.

Deptford Strand is thought to have started initially as a small fishing village. In 1420, it became a focus for shipbuilding industry with the rebuilding and refitting of royal ships. Other late medieval industry included tile and brick making for the London market, for which a Dutch craftsman was hired to test the qualities of the local clay.⁵

Distinct from the settlement at the Strand, the hamlet at Deptford Broadway clustered around the river crossing at Deptford Bridge. It was named 'Depeforde vill' and is known to have included shops and inns, and more substantial buildings of two-storey height with cellars. A wooden bridge is known to have existed here from about the 1230s. It was rebuilt in stone in 1570. To the north of the bridge, in the area that forms today the entrance to the [Gibbes / Skill Centre Island](#), stood a tide mill dating back to at least the 12th century. It became the starting point for a small concentration of wharves and industries at the

² Phillpotts, p. 16

³ Phillpotts, p. 19

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Ibid, p. 28

southern end of the Creek. There are references to wooden wharves, limekilns and gravel pits at the Creek to the north of the bridge from the late 15th century. Gravel was probably being dug to provide ballast for ships.

In the 15th and 16th centuries, Deptford increasingly felt the influence of Greenwich Palace on its economy. The site had passed into the Crown's ownership in 1447. It was previously owned by Humphrey Duke of Gloucester who built his residence 'Bella Court' there in ca 1427 and laid out Greenwich Park in 1437. The residence was expanded from c1500 onwards by Henry VII and renamed Greenwich Palace by Henry VIII. With the establishment of the court's household, the pastures of Deptford came to be used for the maintenance of cattle to supply the royal household. Its proximity to Greenwich Palace probably also explains Henry VIII's decision to use Deptford's shipbuilding tradition and establish the Royal Dockyards in 1513 on a site west of Deptford Strand.⁶ A year later in 1514, the Corporation of Trinity House, responsible for the pilotage and navigation lights on the Thames and British coasts, established its first headquarters at Deptford Strand.

Along the Creek, on the site of **Harold Wharf (APT studios)**, the King's Slaughterhouse was built in the 16th century to supply the Royal Palace at Greenwich with meat from cattle grazed locally. The exact date of its foundation is unknown.⁷ The building measured 160 feet (48.8 metres) from east to west and was 50 feet (15.2 metres wide), with a wharf and a pond at its west end. It also occasionally worked for the Navy in the 17th century, at times when the demand on Navy's own slaughterhouse was too great. From 1649 the property was leased out to various owners, and in 1663 it was sold to John Evelyn. The site still appears on late 18th century maps when it was a pottery.⁸

The small lane leading off Church Street to the slaughterhouse, with the distinctive bend in northerly direction, was called Slaughterhouse Lane. It became Creek Road in the late 19th century and was renamed **Creekside** in ca. mid 20th century. On the 1867 OS map the stretch between Church Street and Harold Wharf still appears as Slaughterhouse Lane, but by the end of the 19th century had been re-named into Creek Street.

16th to 18th century Deptford

Following the establishment of the Naval Dockyard, Deptford developed during the 16th century into a town of some prominence. Royal Dockyards were some of the most considerable industrial units in the country. By the 17th century, the town also became a centre for victualling the Fleet and in 1742, the official victualling depot was established by the Navy Board. It was re-named the Royal Victoria Victualling Yard in the 19th century. The surviving 18th century buildings of the Victualling Yard have been incorporated in the Pepys Estate.

⁶ Phillpotts, p. 28.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid, p. 29.

Closer to the Creek itself, the newly formed East India Company began fitting out its fleet of merchant ships in 1601. By 1614, the Company had a shipyard, ironworks and extensive storage facilities around the area that on the maps appear as the 'Stowage'.

Dockyard and victualling brought prosperity and fame to Deptford, created employment and a steep rise in population as shipbuilders, carpenters, sailers, rope-makers and many others settled here. By the 18th century Deptford was a prosperous and bustling town, and as important as Greenwich and Woolwich, boasting a population of 12,000 by 1700, rising to 18,000 by 1800. One of London's finest baroque churches, St Paul's (1713-30) and one of London's earliest Georgian Terraces at Albury Street (1707-17) are physical remainders of Deptford's past wealth and grandeur.

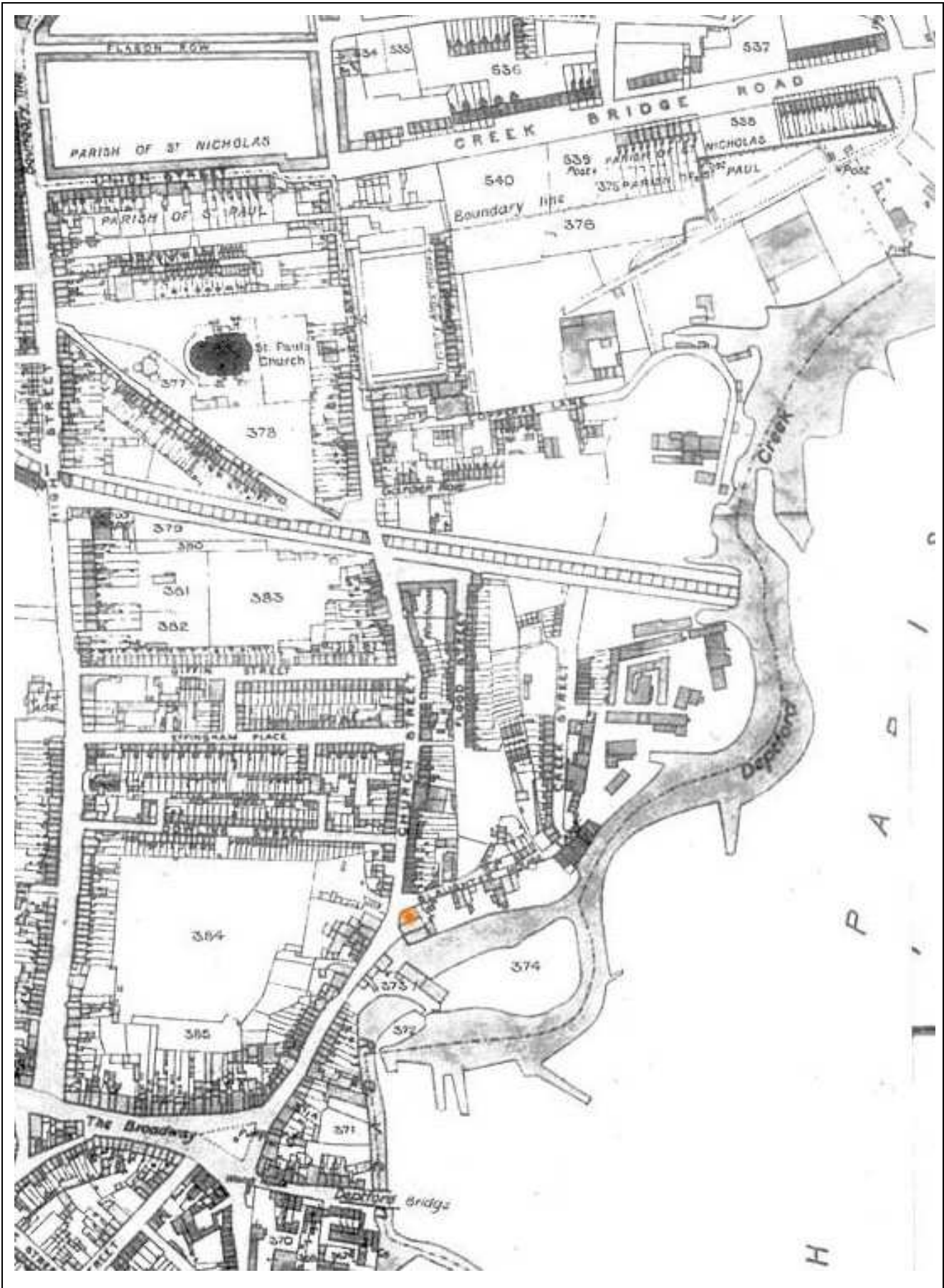
Pre 19th century Creek and Creekside

Up until the early 19th century the land to both sides of the Creek was mainly in use as meadows and market gardening. The area today covered by the **Faircharm Estate and the Crossfield Housing Estate** was common pasture for Deptford in 1608. This land was bought by John Addey's charity and became known as the Gravel Pits Estate. On the 1745 Rocque Map it is marked as a 'Gravel Pit' with a few scattered buildings and market gardens around it.

By the mid 18th century, Church Street was fully enclosed by buildings on both sides. In 1672, the Corporation of Trinity had constructed the Trinity Hospital and Almshouses here, in an area today covered by the Sue Godefroy Nature Reserve **north of Bronze Street**. Initially, the accommodation was for 24 seamen's widows, but the building was later extended to 38 houses containing 56 apartments. The almshouses were demolished in 1877 and replaced by terraced housing.

Between the gravel pits and Church Street in the area of today's **Browne House of the Crossfield Estate**, a house of correction, the Deptford Bridewell, was constructed in 1707. The Bridewell was an early form of prison, focussing on vagrants and idle paupers. It closed in 1721 and was soon afterwards converted into a workhouse known as St. Paul's Workhouse. It was enlarged in the late 18th and early 19th century but closed in the late 1830s. It is still shown on the 1844 Deptford Tithe map as a large complex south of the railway viaduct but by 1867, the site had been re-developed with housing.

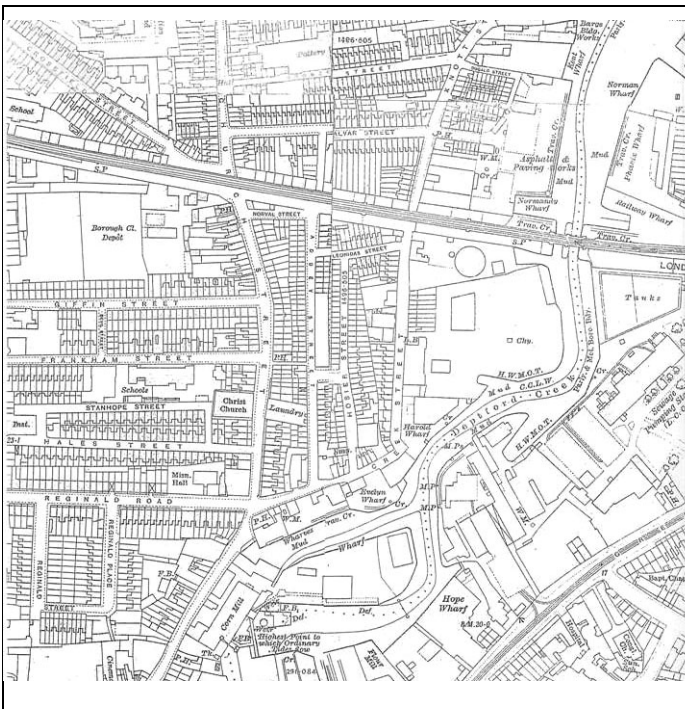
To the north of the Gravel Pits Estate, lay the Copperas lands, where early dye and chemical manufacture was established by the mid 17th century. Here, copperas stones of iron pyrites from Kent and Essex were processed in copperas beds to produce red and black dyes. The works continued until the 1830s. Other industries in this area included potteries producing the Deptford Ware.



Detail from the Deptford Tithe Map of 1844. The former Oxford Arms Public House (The Birds Nest Pub) is highlighted in Orange as a reference point.



Detail of the 1868 OS Map
 The former Oxford Arms
 Public House (The Birds Nest
 Pub) is highlighted in Orange
 as a reference point



Detail of the 1914-16 OS Map

19th century industrialisation of Deptford and the Creek

The 19th century saw the industrialisation of the river banks of Deptford and the Creek. New privately owned shipyards and boilerworks appeared on the Thames waterfront and a variety of new industries along the Creek, many of which were unpleasant and ‘dirty’ industries: As early as 1852 The Kentish Mercury listed chemical works, breweries, bleach, dye and glue works, tar distilleries and manure manufacture, making the Creek area ‘one great stinking abomination’.⁹ ‘Deptford became a synonym for industry. A Guide to Greenwich and Deptford published in 1893 described the area occupied by ‘almost every industry of importance (...) and the admirable facilities it offers for manufacturing purposes causes the rents in the neighbourhood to stand abnormally height.’¹⁰ In 1836, London’s first railway, the London to Greenwich Railway, reached Deptford. Much of its four mile route was elevated on a continuous 878-arch brick viaduct bridged over the Creek by a drawbridge.

On the Deptford Creekside, one of the first notable areas of intensification was in the area south of the railway line on the site of today’s **Faircharm Estate**. The Beneke family founded its verdigris works for the manufacture of copper sulphate here in 1814. This became the Deptford Chemical Works and passed to Frank Hills in c1840 who operated a vitriol distillery here. The Chemical Works continued in his family until the early 20th century.

On the land of today’s Creekside Education Centre operated the London and Greenwich Railway Gas Company from 1836. The works were closed in 1857, but the land still belongs to British Gas.

In parallel with the increase of industry on the Creek’s bank is the development of the area behind with housing for the workforce. On the former market gardens and gravel pits between Creek Road and Church Street, and west of Church Street up to Butt Lane (Deptford High Street) dense terraced housing for the workers began to emerge. By 1867, the area was nearly fully developed, and at the turn of the century it is one dense conurbation of industry, housing, and complementing facilities and businesses that serve the rapidly growing population.

The southern end of the Creek became the focus for a number of flour and corn mills and warehouses. The historic tide mill at Mill Wharf ([Gibbes / Skill Centre Island](#)) was joined in the late 18th century by the Mumford’s Flour Mill. Its tall former grain silo, dating from 1897, still stands today and is one of the most important landmarks in the area, exerting a grand presence over the Creek. The tide mill continued to operate on the same site until it was destroyed by flooding in 1824. It was re-built and taken over by J H Robinson, who turned it into a steam-powered flour mill. Later the mill buildings expanded towards Deptford Bridge and also covered the ground on its east side (Skill Centre site). The mill closed in the 1960s, and was demolished after a fire in 1970.

⁹ Steele, p. 96

¹⁰ Steele, p. 98

On the opposite side of the Creek, south of the railway viaduct, the Deptford Pumping Station was opened in 1865. It was a key part of Sir Joseph Bazalgette's great scheme to pipe London's sewage via the new Southern Outfall Sewer to the treatment plant at Crossness. Until then, much of the city's sewage had run untreated into the Thames and by 1850, had been proving a major health threat for the capital. The new sewers carried their flow to Deptford by gravity where the pumping station raised the contents by 18 feet from where it made its foul way nearly eight miles to Crossness.

Just north of the Stowage, built on the former site of the Trinity House Headquarters, Deptford Power Station opened in 1889. It was the world's first high tension central generating station, designed by Sebastian de Ferranti to supply electricity to London. It dominated the landscape at the entrance to the Creek and was joined by a second power station (Deptford West) in 1929.

By the mid Victorian era, the Royal Dockyards had become outdated and unsuitable to launch ships. It eventually closed in 1869 and between 1871 and 1913, the dockyard site operated as the Foreign Cattle Market. It became notorious for its 'gutting sheds' in which girls and women worked in squalor, gutting animals.

The cattle market and the other heavy unpleasant industries which began to dominate Deptford attracted great numbers of unskilled or semi-skilled workers, most of them living in poverty and deprived conditions. By the end of the 19th century, new industries, such as the power stations and the railways, provided new opportunities for many, but unemployment remained high and living conditions low. As part of his *Inquiry into the Life and Labour of the People of London* in 1899, Charles Booth identified the streets east and west of Church Street as amongst the poorest in the area. Addey Street between Church Street and Creek Street (Creekside), later incorporated into the **Crossfield Estate**, was considered the worst in all Deptford, an area of criminals and prostitutes.¹¹

Gradually, the town began to lose its more prosperous and respected inhabitants and was generally considered a 'low neighbourhood'. On the other hand, Deptford avoided becoming a London suburb but remained a separate and self-sufficient community with its own social make-up, own industries and own version of urban life. It also remained also quite clearly divided from its nearest neighbour, Greenwich.

20th and 21st century

In 1900, Deptford became a Metropolitan Borough of the County of London. This lasted until the local government reorganisation of 1965, when it was amalgamated with the Metropolitan Borough of Lewisham to become the London Borough of Lewisham. It's history in the 20th century is mainly one of economic decline. The town suffered during the depression of the 1930s, with pockets of severe unemployment, and was badly hit during the bomb raids in World War II, resulting in widespread destruction and the death of some

¹¹ Steel, p. 86.

650 people.¹² The industries recovered briefly in the 1950s and 1960s, although this proved to be short-lived. By the mid 1960s, a phase of inexorable decline of the riverside industries started. Many of the large firms in Deptford closed down in the late 1960s and 1970s leading to widespread unemployment and physical decline of the area.¹³

As a result of economical decline and redundancy, the Creek and Thames waterfront saw much of their industrial heritage demolished to make way for new development, notably the clearance of the Royal Dockyards (to make way for Convoys Wharf – in use until 2002), the Naval Victualling Yard (remainders incorporated in the Pepys Estate), the demolition of the Robinson Mill and other mills at the southern end of the Creek, and the clearance of the Deptford West power station (re-developed for housing by Fairview New Homes). A few sites have remained in industrial use, notably within the proposed conservation area.

In the late 1990s the area benefitted from the 'Creekside Renewal Single Regeneration Budget (SRB)' which, for the first time in its history since industrialisation, helped to raise the profile of the Creek as a natural heritage asset. The scheme funded the Creekside Greening and Cleaning Project for Deptford Creek, which aimed to protect and enhance wildlife habitats, enhance and repair floodwalls, remove rubbish, improve local access, and facilitated the establishment of the Creekside Education Centre.

More recently, the process of regeneration and re-development for other uses in the area has continued and gained new impetus with the construction of the Laban Dance Centre and large residential developments in Greenwich High Road and Creek Road. A number of other sites hold outline planning permission for mixed uses.

Within the proposed conservation area, there were at first two important additions to the townscape the beginning of the 20th century. In 1911, J & A Dandridge Ltd established their wholesale rag and metal merchants business on the site of Harold Wharf (today the **APT studios**) for which they built an attractive manufacturing building designed by local architect Alfred Roberts. When the 19th century workers' houses west of Creek Street (Creekside) were cleared in the late 1930s by the London County Council (LCC), the company leased further land to expand their business on to the other side of the street, today known as the **Framework Studios**. The site is shown on the 1952 OS map as 'Rag and Metal Warehouse'.

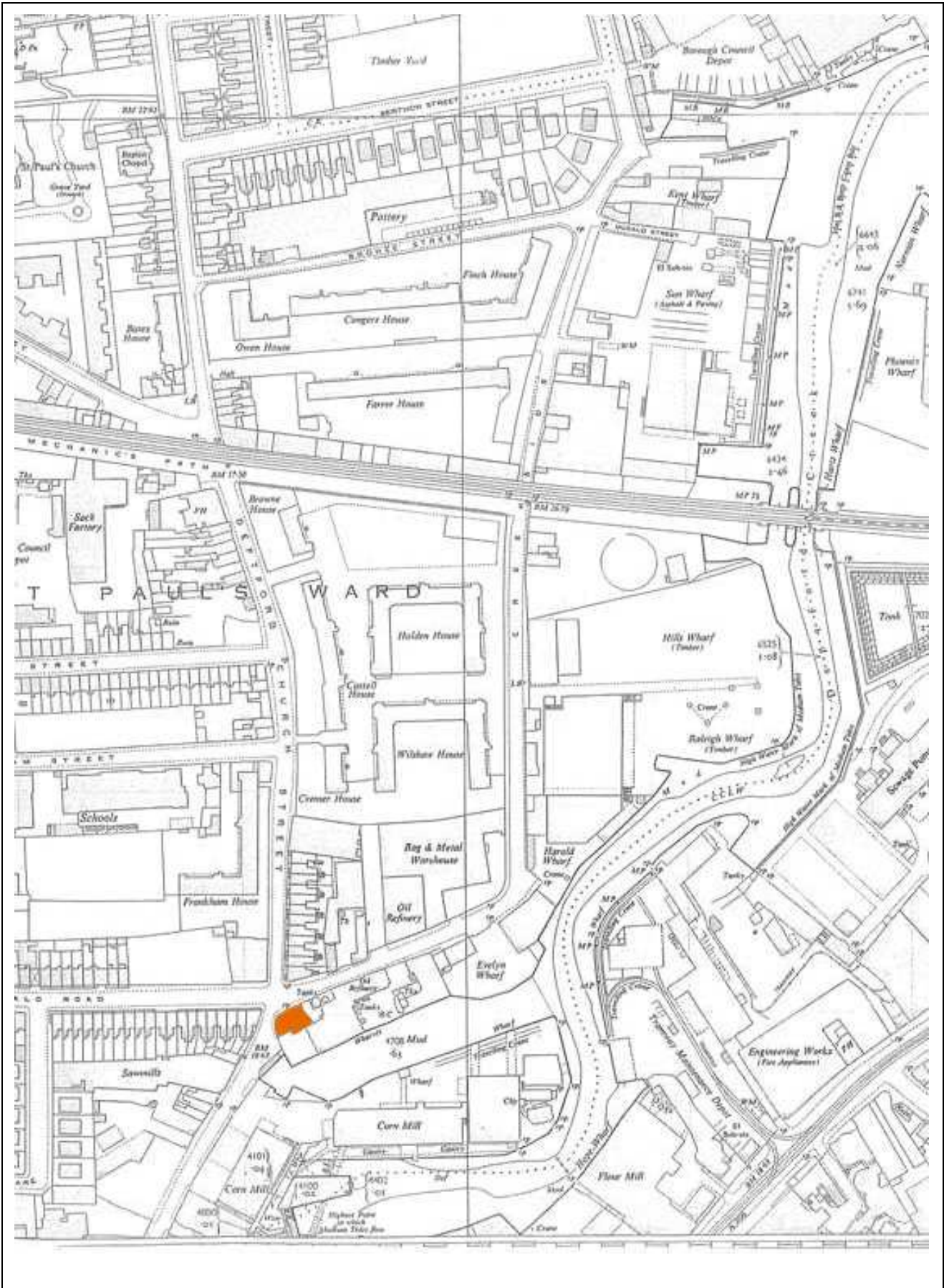
The **historic Sun Wharf** (between Theatre Wharf and Evelyn Wharf) was by the 1920s in use as an oil refinery, the Medina Works, which produced edible oils and fats. Their tanks and part of the refinery were located on the waterfront, while the company built their Art Deco office and factory building on the opposite site of the street, where it still stands today.

The use of the Chemical Works on the site today occupied by **Faircharm** ceased some

¹² LDA, p. 29.

¹³ Ibid, p. 31.

time around 1945, possibly as a result of war damage. The site was subsequently cleared and re-developed between the late 1940s and late 1950s. Contrary to most other premises along the Creek, the area has avoided the physical decline and dereliction, partly because the buildings themselves have proven to be capable of adaptation and conversion allowing a range of businesses, light industrial uses and a growing community of artists to operate side by side.



Detail of the 1952 OS map. The former Oxford Arms Public House (The Birds Nest Pub) is highlighted in Orange as a reference point



The Creek as seen from the Ha'Penny Bridge looking north (above) and south (below)



4 Spatial character of the area

Topography and Geology

The topography of the area is fairly flat and has been shaped by centuries-long intervention by man. The surface consists of man-made ground, which conceals the lie of the original strata below.

The solid geology is Upper Chalk overlain by Thanet Sand. The overlying drift geology is gravel and alluvium. The gravel comprises former flood plain terraces of the River Thames laid down and left behind during the last continental glacial period when the Thames lowered its course.

The Alluvium (= soil or sediments deposited by rivers) has been deposited by the tidal flooding action of the Thames and the River Ravensbourne, and by rising sea levels during periods of marine transgressions.

Alluvium deposits tend to be fertile, and prior to the Creek's industrialisation in the 19th century much of the area was used as market gardens supplying the markets of London with vegetable produce.

The Creek

The Creek forms the northern part of the River Ravensbourne where it meets the River Thames. It runs in a winding course from Deptford Bridge in the south to the Thames in the north and, in contrast to the Ravensbourne further south, it is deep and tidal. The frontages are revetted throughout with a variety of materials, but principally with timber fendering, brick and steel piles.

Most of the course of the Creek is screened by buildings and walls and thus has little presence in the public realm in Creekside. The occasional glimpse can be gained via the yards of Theatre Wharf and Evelyn Wharf, usually only during daytime when the gates are open. More unexpected is the experience from the Ha'Penny footbridge, the Creek's central crossing point, which reveals the extent and dramatic nature of the river - an oasis of water, mud and greenery amongst an intense urban landscape.

Since the docks and wharfs are no longer in use, the Creek has become an area of tranquillity to which the service yards adjacent to the river embankment add a sense of openness and light.

Street pattern and townscape

Creekside is the main access route and spine to this proposed small conservation area. From Church Street it follows the course of the Creek in north-easterly direction and at Harold Wharf turns in a sharp bend into a straight line towards the north.

Church Street, which bounds the area to the west, is the historic link between Upper and Lower Deptford. Its present appearance is the result of a 1970s highways 'improvement' scheme which saw the road widened and straightened.

A network of pedestrian routes in east-west direction provide linkages between Creekside and Church Street, including the Mechanic's Path to both sides of the railway. South of the railway, the footpath continues over the Ha-Penny Bridge to Greenwich, providing an important central east-west link and currently the only unlimited public access to the Creek in the area.

The industrial premises and wharves along Creekside are of varying plot shapes and sizes which reflect the development history of the area. The historic wharves lining the edge of the Creek have open service yards to the river to allow for loading and unloading of goods – a reminder that the Creek was once a busy working river and main means of transport. The plot sizes of the oldest wharfs south of Creekside up to Harold Wharf are noticeably smaller and so narrow that the footprint of the building at Evelyn Wharf and that of the APT studios nearly cover the full depth between street and water edge. Office buildings are either facing the street or located next to the entrance, as was traditionally the case.

Despite differences in style there is some consistency maintained in the continuous low scale – buildings are generally not taller than two to three storeys - and use of traditional materials. Building forms are typically simple. At the larger premises, such as the Art Hub studios and the Faircharm Estate, a number of warehouses of different age are conjoined creating a more complex and interesting townscape. The group of the buildings A, C and D on the Faircharm Estate provide the most coherent piece of industrial townscape within the area.

The buildings are located right at the back of the pavement, creating a clearly defined street frontage and sense of enclosure. High brick walls with gated entrances separate service yards from the street/footpath and maintain a continuous built frontage and firm boundary between public and private space.

The change to 20th century housing at the Crossfield Estate is immediately obvious in its lay-out as a series of five-storey apartment blocks surrounded by defined semi-public and private spaces. The building line is set back from the street to allow for the provision of amenity spaces and (towards Creekside) for car parking with low front boundaries behind. These areas now benefits from mature tree cover and hedges that add a rather soft, green edge to the street.

The Crossfield Estate incorporates a number of 19th century residential streets laid out in straight lines to the north and south of the railway viaduct. These are still legible though

only Bronze Street has remained identifiable by name.

Two large open spaces north and south of the railways are laid out as recreational space to the estate. They help to reduce the impact of the railways and greatly contribute to the visual amenity of the area.



Creekside looking towards the east



Creekside at the bend looking towards the north-east

Railway Viaducts

The historic viaduct of the London-Greenwich railway line crosses the area in an east-west direction. It is an attractive brick structure of monumental quality comprising 32 arches from the Creek to Church Street, most of them open and topped with parapets that enclose the railtracks to both sides. The viaduct constitutes a significant physical and visual barrier between the southern and northern part of the area and also effectively splits the Crossfield Estate into two entities.

In 1996 the Dockland Light Railway (DLR) was extended across the Thames to Lewisham. The line took advantage of the clear space above the southern part of the Creek, with one station located to the south at Deptford Bridge. An elegant concrete structure in itself, the DLR has changed the character of the [southern part of the](#) Creek, terminating views [and affecting the legibility of the area](#). The line criss-crosses the southern part of the Creek four times, mirroring the route of the river in opposite direction and creating an interesting juxtaposition between these two features.

Open Space and Trees

Public open spaces and trees are not a traditional feature within this historic industrial urban landscapes, but are an integral part of the 20th century housing estate. As such, Creekside features two significant open spaces within the Crossfield Estate, one each side of the railway. These are the lawn and car park north of Holden house and the large green south of Farrer House. Both contain playgrounds and many informally placed deciduous trees, many of them London Planes. Other, smaller open spaces within or surrounding the estate have been turned into wildlife gardens and allotments. Another large public open green space, the Sue Godefrey Nature Reserve, borders the estate north of Bronze Street.

The Creekside Education Centre south of the railways, built on the former Transco Inlet, is the only open space directly abutting the Creek. The former dock was converted in 2002 into a beach for natural colonisation as innovative flood defence.

Spaces and trees alike greatly add to the visual amenity and environmental quality of the area and have value as corridors for wildlife.



A section of the listed 1838 railway viaduct



Farrer House as seen from Mechanic's Path

Landmarks and views

Landmark buildings provide focal points within the conservation area through their position as individual or corner buildings. The principal landmark buildings within the proposed conservation area are:

- The Birds Nest Public House,
- the Art in Perpetuity Trust (APT) studios,
- the railway lifting bridge,
- the railway viaducts.

A number of local landmarks that terminate views or constitute important focal points in long views are just outside the proposed conservation area. These are:

- The Laban Centre
- The [former](#) Mumford's Mill grain silo
- The Deptford Pumping Station
- St. Paul's Church

Despite the limited access to the Creek, there are a number of comprehensive views down into and across it from both within and outside the conservation area. The DLR in particular enables views of the Creek and surrounding area never seen before and has contributed significantly to bringing the area back into the public conscience. The line allows good sequential views even into the private service yards of the businesses situated along the river which are well screened towards the street. From within the conservation area, the Ha-Penny Bridge offers long distance views towards the south and, through the arch of the lifting bridge, towards the north where the view is terminated by the Laban Centre and the multi-storey blocks that have recently gone up behind it. The elevated position of the footbridge also allows for good views into the conservation area from the east down the Mechanic's Path along the viaduct, onto the Creekside Education Centre and to the Crossfield Estate beyond.

At the Church Street, roundabout the Birds Nest Pub constitutes an important landmark at the entrance to Creekside in views from all approaches. Turning into Creekside, the view down the road is terminated by the sharp bend in the road where the APT building occupies a prominent position. In views from the north down Creekside, the towering grain silo of Mumford's Mill ([now flats](#)) is the defining feature in the distance.

The occasional glimpse can be gained of the Creek via the service yards, although these views are dominated by the DLR viaduct, which obstructs long views to the riverbanks at the east side. An unexpected and very attractive view of the lifting bridge can be gained across the yard of the Creekside Education Centre through its gate and railings. Just north of the conservation boundary, the café and terrace at the Laban Centre offer unlimited views of the Creek and adjoining industrial estates to both sides of the river, as far as the

railway viaduct where the lifting bridge creates a key focal point.

The flat topography means that within the Crossfield Estate, views are generally contained by buildings and greenery and the railway viaduct that cuts across.



Mumford's Mill as seen from the wharf at No. 2 Creekside

Natural environment – nature conservation

The Creek is the only tributary south of the Thames in inner London which has remained relatively intact. Following its decline as transport river and abandonment by the industries, and the general improvement in the water quality of the Thames, the Creek is in a better condition than it has been for more than a hundred years.

In ecological terms the Creek can best be described as a watery wasteland, with a diverse range of habitats that are species rich and locally distinctive. The Creek has an exceptional but often unseen biodiversity value that is a result of this unique ecosystem. The variations in surface topography combined with the variety of artificial and natural substrates and the tidal nature of Deptford Creek has led to the development of a bewildering array of habitat types and specific niches.

At low tide the tidal waters retreat to reveal a shallow trickle of freshwater that meanders down the middle of the creek, flanked by the rich mud and shingle banks of the foreshore. The intertidal foreshore provides fish spawning grounds, and it is here that the most abundant algal and invertebrate communities occur. The vertical sea walls lining the Creek support over 120 plant species that exploit a range of opportunities in nooks and crannies, cracks in concrete and wood, the rotten tops of fenders and ledges of wood or concrete, inundated or not.

This combination of wet and fully aquatic habitats that are exposed to different regimes of fresh and salty water along with the infinite variety of substrates is the key why the Creeks is so important as a biological resource and why it supports such a variety of organisms. This is illustrated by the millions of tubifex worms found in a single square metre of mud which each day poke their heads up through the mud when the tide returns to be grazed by birds, other invertebrates and fish.

The Thames and its tidal tributaries including Deptford Creek contain vital ecosystems, habitats and species that represent a regionally important ecological resource. This has been recognised in their designation as a Site of Metropolitan Importance for Nature Conservation in 1986.



The beach at the Creekside Education Centre, formerly a small dock to the Transco Inlet. The beach was created in 2002 and left for natural colonisation as innovative flood defence.