PLANNING CONSENTS

All development in the Leigh Conservation Area should follow the advice in the Conservation Area Guidance leaflet and, in particular, respect the features outlined above that contribute to its special character.

Planning permission is needed for development which materially affects the appearance or use of buildings or land. This can include, for example, re-roofing and altering windows, constructing extensions and new buildings.

LEIGH ARTICLE 4 DIRECTION

Some minor forms of development are classed as "permitted development" and are normally exempt. But in the Conservation Area this has resulted in unsuitable changes which have harmed its character. The Leigh Article 4 Direction has, therefore, been made with the support of residents, withdrawing this exemption. Planning Permission from the Council is now needed for the following types of permitted development at properties in the area indicated on the plan.

All buildings:

- The painting over facing brickwork on any part of a building.
- The alteration of any window.
- The rendering of brickwork of any part of a dwellinghouse (other forms of cladding already need planning permission).
- Re-roofing with different materials.
- Hardstandings for vehicles.

(Similar alterations to other properties already need planning permission from the Council.)

All other properties

- Dwellinghouses:
  - The alteration of any window.
  - The rendering of brickwork of any part of a dwellinghouse (other forms of cladding already need planning permission).
- Hardstandings for vehicles.

This leaflet describes the main features that give Leigh its special interest and outlines additional controls on development that apply specifically to the area. It is one of a series of leaflets forming the Council’s Conservation Area Guidance and should be read, in particular, with the Conservation Area Guidance leaflet. Together, these leaflets will help owners make informed decisions about development at their properties and, so, help to preserve and enhance the area’s special character.

INTRODUCTION

Two Conservation Areas cover the historic settlement of Leigh. The Leigh Conservation Area relates to that part of the settlement north of the railway rising up Leigh Hill to the parish church. It was designated a Conservation Area in 1971, and later extended, because it has special architectural and historic interest and a unique character which needs to be preserved and enhanced. Leigh Old Town is to the south of the railway fronting Leigh Creek. (A third Conservation Area, Leigh Cliff, relates to late Victorian development as Leigh expanded eastwards.)

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HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Leigh has a long history as a settlement dependent on the sea, and despite many changes still has much of the character of the old seafaring community.

It was first recorded in the Domesday book of 1086 as “Lagra”, a tiny fishing hamlet. With increasing trade during the Middle Ages the settlement took advantage of its good sheltered position on the important shipping route to London and began to grow. By the 13th century it had its own parish church, although the present building dates from the 15th century. By the 16th century Leigh had become a fairly large and prosperous port handling coastal and continental trade, especially with France and the Low Countries.

In its heyday, Leigh had strong links through its seamen with both Trinity House and the Royal Navy. Being strategically located at the mouth of the Thames, Leigh and its shipping were frequently used by the Navy against threats from pirates and the French, Spanish and Dutch navies. Many local men entered the Navy from choice or via press gangs, and some rose to high ranks such as Sir Richard D’Haddock who became Comptroller of the Navy in the 17th century. Others served Trinity House, and the Salmon family was particularly notable, providing two Masters of Trinity House in the 16th and 17th centuries.

During the 18th century, ships became larger and patterns of trade altered. At the same time, Leigh’s deep-water channel silted up and the town’s importance declined. Gradually, it reverted to a fishing village, working local fishing grounds and supplying the London market by road and barge.

When the London to Tilbury railway was extended to Southend in 1856, it split the village in two and was responsible for demolishing many of its timber-framed buildings. But it did encourage the fishing industry with fast transit to Billingsgate. It also lead to new housing development on the hillside to the north to replace houses demolished for the railway and, towards the end of the century, to provide better housing in place of the overcrowded and often insanitary conditions in the Old Town.

Speculative land development also followed the railway. Leigh was promoted as a resort to rival the “Queen of Watering Places” and in one instance even Naples, and as a peaceful residential dormitory for London.

Despite its own growth, in 1913 Leigh was incorporated within the rapidly expanding Borough of Southend and it became only a small part of a much larger town. But its fishing industry has continued, although on a diminishing scale, and despite many changes it has kept something of the village character it once had.

ADVISE AND CONTACTS

Officers from the Technical Services Department are available to offer practical and technical advice on conservation and the need for consent. Contacts and sources of further information are given in a separate conservation leaflet.
LEIGH'S SPECIAL INTEREST

The Conservation Area's special interest comes from its history as part of the working marine village, its varied traditional architecture and its fine position on the hillside overlooking the Estuary.

HISTORIC INTEREST

Leigh's evolution over the past thousand years, outlined above, gives this Conservation Area great historic interest.

Historically, the village was centred on the waterfront at the foot of the hillside. Horse Hill (now Leigh Hill) was the main road from the village. The Parish Church in its prominent position at the top of the hill overlooking the Estuary was separate from the main settlement. Until the mid-nineteenth century, only a few higher status buildings were close to the Church with sporadic buildings close to the road into the main village.

From the mid 19th century, the village spread up the hillside towards the Church with modest vernacular housing, schools, and a new lane to the Church (Church Hill). New houses in the Broadway were gradually converted to shops to supersed the Old Town as Leigh's shopping centre.

VARIED TRADITIONAL ARCHITECTURE

The Conservation Area contains a variety of architecture. Buildings are mostly on a small domestic scale with simple designs in uniform terraces and more loosely connected groups. Traditional buildings and materials predominate and help establish the area's character. Features include:

- Feather-edged weatherboarding - terraces on Church Hill and individual buildings on Leigh Hill are particularly important.
- Yellow stock brick; red brick detailing and frontages are evident in buildings from the late 19th century.
- Slate roofs - views over the Area from the hillside give roofs greater prominence.
- Timber sliding sash windows.

Traditional shopfronts and upper floors in the Broadway contribute to the Area's character. Poorly designed modern shopfronts harm its character and the reinstatement of appropriate traditional designs will be encouraged.

BUILDINGS LINKED TO LEIGH'S HISTORY

Buildings linked to Leigh's history include:

- The Parish Church, the focal point of the village and a prominent landmark from the Estuary, contains memorials to many of those connected with shipping, the Royal Navy and Trinity House.
- 85 Leigh Hill, home of Leigh's surgeon in the 18th century.
- Leigh Library and gardens, built in 1838 as the Rectory.
- The Old School House, Church Hill, built in 1847 by the Rector as a National School.
- 42 Leigh Hill, built in the mid 18th century as Leigh's first bank.
- 28 Leigh Hill, a traditional fisherman's house of the late 18th century.
- 85 Leigh Hill which dates from the 18th century.

SETTING AND TOWNSCAPE

Leigh's unique townscape on the hillside reinforces its character as a working marine village. Factors important to its townscape include:

- The varied alignment of narrow streets and paths and buildings set almost at random on the hillside.
- The close urban "texture" of most buildings, interspersed with substantial open spaces, gardens, trees.
- Extensive views from many points in the Area across roof tops, between buildings and from open spaces, streets and paths, towards the Estuary to the south and the marshes and downs to the west.

The green open spaces on the hillside to the west and east of the Area define the edges of the former village and maintain its visual separation from later development.

Focal points, notably the Parish Church which dominates views into the Area, Clements Arcade which closes the view up Leigh Hill and 60/62 Leigh Hill which is central to the view westwards.