

# **Appendix: Built Heritage**

## **Annex 1: Built Heritage Statement**

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Aberfeldy Village  
 Poplar, London E14  
 Heritage Statement

October 2021

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## 1 Introduction

1.1 This Built Heritage report has been prepared by KM Heritage and is submitted in support of a hybrid planning application for the Aberfeldy Village Masterplan. The hybrid planning application is made in relation to the north of East India Dock Road (A13), east of the Blackwall Tunnel Northern Approach Road (A12) and to the south west of Abbot Road (the "Site") on behalf of The Aberfeldy New Village LLP' ("The Applicant"). The hybrid planning application is formed of detailed development proposals in respect of Phase A for which no matters are reserved ("Detailed Proposals"), and outline development proposals for the remainder of the Site, with all matters reserved ("Outline Proposals"). The Detailed Proposals and Outline Proposals together are referred to as the "Proposed Development".

1.2 The Proposed Development comprises the comprehensive redevelopment of the Site. The Proposed Development will provide new retail and workspace floorspace along with residential dwellings and the pedestrianisation of the A12 Abbott Road vehicular underpass to create a new east to west route. The Development will also provide significant, high quality public realm, including a new Town Square, a new High Street and a public park.

### Purpose

1.3 The purpose of the report is to identify heritage assets that may be affected by the Proposed Development and to analyse their heritage significance. The report also sets out national and local policies and guidance relating to the historic built environment.

1.4 Balfron Tower is far from being the only heritage asset potentially affected by the Proposed Development, nor the only heritage asset of notable heritage significance. However, its status as a Grade II\*, its prominence and its proximity to the Site causes it to figure centrally in considerations regarding the heritage effects of the scheme. The report, therefore, puts a special emphasis on understanding the nature of the setting of on Balfron Tower and its surrounding Brownfield Estate (the Balfron Conservation Area) and the contribution of that setting to their heritage significance.

### Organisation

1.5 This introduction is followed by a description and analysis of the site and its context in Section 2. Section 3 discusses heritage significance, with a particular focus on Balfron Tower. Section 4 sets out the national and local policy and guidance relating to the historic built environment that is relevant to this matter. Section 5 looks at the Proposed Development and its effects. Section 6 describes how the Proposed Development complies with policy and guidance and Section 7 is a summary and conclusion.

### Nomenclature

1.6 The extent of the Proposed Development is also referred as the 'Site' throughout this report.

### Authorship and contributors

1.7 The author of this report is Kevin Murphy B.Arch MUBC RIBA IHBC. Kevin was an Inspector of Historic Buildings in the London Region of English Heritage and dealt with a range of major projects involving listed buildings and conservation areas in London. Prior to this, he had been a conservation officer with the London Borough of Southwark and was Head of Conservation and Design at Hackney Council between 1997 and 1999. He trained and worked as an architect and has a specialist qualification in urban and building conservation.

1.8 Drafting and initial assessment was undertaken by Anne Roache MA MSc. Anne is an experienced heritage professional who began her career at Jones Lang LaSalle and went on to gain broad experience working for leading commercial organizations in the fields of property, planning and law. She has a specialisation in the architectural and social history of London.

1.9 Historical research was carried out by Dr Jonathan Clarke. Jonathan is an experienced historic environment professional, with over 25 years' experience in the private and public sectors including English Heritage where he was a Senior Architectural Investigator.

## 2 The site and its surroundings

2.1 This section of the report describes the history and development of the site and its surroundings.

### Summary description

2.2 Aberfeldy Village is a residential and community development sited on an approximately triangular tract of land bounded by the A12, A13 (the East India Dock Road) and the River Lea (figure 1).



Figure 1: Aerial view of Aberfeldy Village and its environs

2.1 Located immediately north of the East India Dock Road, the area developed from open marshland through to a peak of industrial and residential development in the second half of the 19th century before an extended period of decline during the post-war period. Poplar, like many working-class neighbourhoods which relied heavily upon the docks for employment opportunities, saw rapid economic decline as a result of the closure of the inner-London docks system, a

process largely completed by the early 1970s. A new era began to be ushered-in during the 1980s when the London Docklands Development Corporation began the regeneration of the extensive former docks and their hinterlands – symbolized most conspicuously by the Canary Wharf development of 1987–91 on the former West India Docks.

2.2 The site is not located in a conservation area, nor does it have any heritage designation.

### Early 19th century

2.3 Until the second half of the 19th century, the area to the north of the East India Docks was called Bromley Marsh. Following the construction of these docks - ‘a secure, walled enclosure constructed in 1803–6 by the engineers John Rennie and Ralph Walker - the East India Dock Company laid out East India Dock Road (1806–12).<sup>1</sup> A branch of Whitechapel’s Commercial Road, it extended from Burdett Road in the west to a new iron bridge over the River Lea to the east. The section of road east of the entrance to the East India Docks was, until 1871, called the Barking Road, as was the highway beyond the bridge.<sup>2</sup>

2.4 In 1813 the company sold land on the north side of the East India Dock Road to its principal engineering contractor, Hugh McIntosh (1768–1840), for £192 an acre.<sup>3</sup> McIntosh (who had followed his mentor John Rennie to London, to ‘supervise directly the massive East India dock excavations’<sup>4</sup>) built a large farmhouse in the middle of the Bromley Marsh which was, accessed by a lane from the Barking Road. An extract from the 1867 OS map, shows Bromley Marsh and the farmhouse built by Hugh McIntosh (fig. 2).

<sup>1</sup> Cherry, B., O’Brien, C. & Pevsner, N. (2005) *The Buildings of England. London 5: East*. London: Yale University Press, 659.

<sup>2</sup> Hobhouse, H. (ed.) (1994) *Survey of London: Volumes 43 and 44, Poplar, Blackwall and Isle of Dogs*, 575-82.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Chrimes, M.M., (1994) ‘Hugh McIntosh (1768–1840), National Contractor’, *Transactions of the Newcomen Society*, 66:1, 177.





Figure 2: Extract from the 1867 (survey date) OS map

Mid to late 19th century

- 2.5 It was Hugh McIntosh's grandson David that began the process of transforming Bromley Marsh into the densely packed streets of workers' houses that came to be known as the McIntosh Estate. New docks and factories in Canning Town and Poplar had created the demand and from about 1861 McIntosh began building along Barking Road laying out new streets behind, most with Scottish place names to reflect his family heritage including Blair, Athol and Aberfeldy Streets.
- 2.6 The architect or surveyor who supervised the early stages of the estate is not known, but the later stages of the work for speculator John Abbott, were supervised by Charles Dunch, a City-based architect. Most of the houses were small, terraced homes, with relatively few being detached or semi-detached.<sup>5</sup> The OS map surveyed in 1867 shows the beginnings of the McIntosh Estate as well as the four pairs of semi-detached houses built at Lea Place in the 1820s (fig. 3).

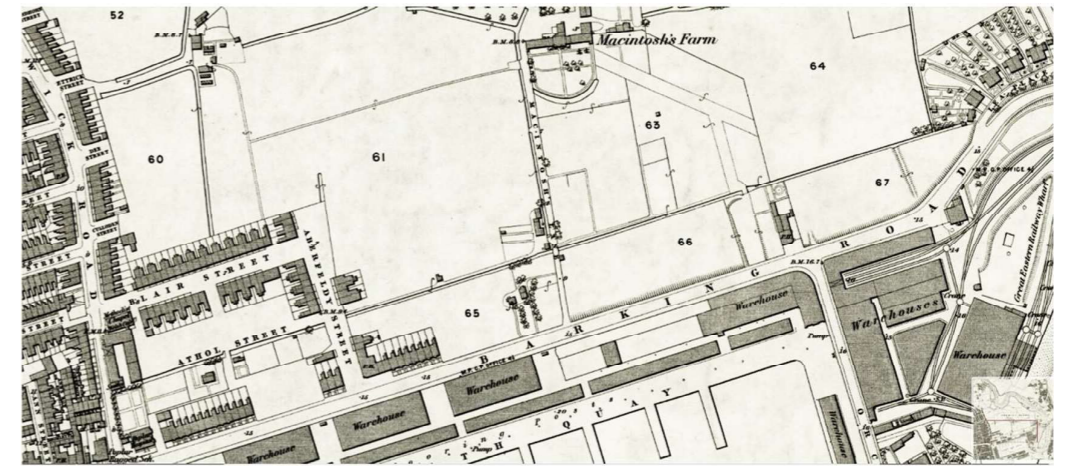


Figure 3: Extract from the 1867 (survey date) OS map

- 2.7 The estate, which was notable for its uniformity, might have been even more expansive had John Abbott not sold a part of it beside the River Lea to the Commercial Gas Company in 1873. Abbott took the estate right up to the boundary of the gasworks, with long terraces along Leven Road and the eponymous Abbott Road. These were built on the site formerly occupied by Hugh McIntosh's farm.
- 2.8 Although housing predominated, other buildings were also constructed. The first to be built on Barking Road, opposite the Dockyard, was the East India Dock Tavern erected in 1806–7 on a site at the east corner of East India Dock Road and Brunswick Road (then Quag Lane). From 1816 until the late 1830s it was used as a Customs House, then a 'Depot for migrants', and, from 1855, Poplar Hospital<sup>6</sup> (figure 4<sup>7</sup>).



Figure 4: Poplar Hospital in 1855 and 1912

<sup>5</sup> *Op. cit.* Hobhouse, 1994; 147-153.

<sup>6</sup> Demolished 1981–2.

<sup>7</sup> *Illustrated London News*, 1855



- 2.9 A Methodist chapel had been built on the corner of Brunswick Road and Blair Street by the 1860s. In the 1890s this had become 'Brunswick Hall', later demolished or absorbed into the expanding hospital.
- 2.10 In 1872 the North Metropolitan Tramways Company opened a horse-drawn tramway from the East India Docks to Whitechapel, with a depot on the north side of Leven Road. In 1906 the London County Council ('LCC') constructed an electric tramway along the whole length East India Dock Road (extending it across the Lea in 1912) along with a depot in Athol Street<sup>8</sup>. In 1939–40, trolley-buses replaced trams, necessitating the erection of overhead cables, and the LCC depot in Leven Road was extended to cater to these.<sup>9</sup>
- 2.11 In 1879–80 a mission church, All Hallows, was built to designs by Ewan Christian (1814–95) on a site along the East India Dock Road now occupied by one of the blocks of New River Avenue. It was badly damaged in the Second World War and was demolished in 1952. Thereafter it was represented by the church of St Nicholas and All Hallows in Aberfeldy Street.<sup>10</sup>
- 2.12 By the 1890s, a number of schools had been built, including one adjacent to the Poplar Gas Works, and another further north-west, between Bromley Hall Road, Lochnagar Street and Leven Road. Both were erected for the London School Board in the early 1880s to progressive designs by E.R. Robson (1836–1917). The former, Oban Street Board School, provided for 1,400, and the latter 1300 children.<sup>11</sup> In c.1897, the LCC built a school between Dee Street and Culloden Street.<sup>12</sup>

#### Early 20th century

- 2.13 The OS map published in 1916 illustrates the densely packed urban nature of the area very clearly (fig. 5<sup>13</sup>). The planned streets of terraced houses following the triangular shape former Bromley Marsh. To the south can be seen some of the transit sheds of East India Docks, Poplar Gasworks are a dominating presence to the east and the topography is defined by the bends of the River Lea.

<sup>8</sup> Athol Street no longer exists but was immediately south of Blair Street

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 120-126

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 147-153

<sup>11</sup> *The Builder*, 24 September 1881, 388; *The Building News*, 30 July 1880, 142

<sup>12</sup> Culloden Street School (formerly Dee Street School), Poplar, E.14. London Metropolitan Archives LCC/AR/SCH/050

<sup>13</sup> OS Essex (New Series 1913-) n LXXXVI.9 Revised: 1914, Published: 1916



Figure 5: The area in 1916

- 2.15 The area saw relatively little change in its built environment during the early 20th century. Even though housing conditions would have been poor, with noxious riverside industries close at hand, it was other parts of the borough which had more acute problems of slum housing and which saw piecemeal clearance and replacement by LCC cottage estates and flats. The four and five-storey Adelaide, Melbourne and Sydney Buildings, for example, were built on the west side of Brunswick Road, opposite Poplar Hospital (fig. 6<sup>14</sup>).
- 2.16 Proximity to the dockyards and riverside industrial sites saw Poplar relentlessly targeted during the London Blitz of the Second World War, and by flying bombs and rockets in 1944 and 1945. Some 24 per cent of the buildings in Stepney and Poplar were destroyed or seriously damaged,<sup>15</sup> including whole swathes of the Aberfeldy Street area (fig. 7<sup>16</sup>).

<sup>14</sup> Historic England Archive (EPW046625)

<sup>15</sup> *Op. cit.* Hobhouse, 1994; 212-223

<sup>16</sup> Historic England Archive (EAW022762)





Figure 6: View looking north-east in 1935, with the Poplar Hospital complex in the foreground (1); Culloden Street School (2) and the LCC Tram Depot (3)



Figure 7: A view eastwards in 1949, showing the many cleared sites in the western side of 'the triangle'. The T-plan Braithwaite House is shown nearing completion south of the gasholders

The post-war housing programme

*Abbot Road area redevelopment*

- 2.17 In July 1945 the Metropolitan Boroughs of Stepney and Poplar were included in the LCC's first post-war redevelopment programme, and 'steps were taken by the LCC to control or prevent rebuilding, reconstruction or replacement of war-damaged buildings in the area'.<sup>17</sup> In December 1947 the Minister of Town and Country Planning declared the 'Stepney and Poplar Reconstruction Area' and gave the Councils powers to make compulsory purchase orders. The Reconstruction Area was divided into 11 neighbourhood units, with Neighbourhood 9 becoming the Lansbury Estate – 'the most important, largest and best-known council estate in Poplar'.
- 2.18 Neighbourhood 10 straddled A12 and was bounded by the East India Dock Road to the south and the River Lea to the east (Figure 8<sup>18</sup>). Within the portion east of the A12, the LCC compulsorily purchased the Abbott Road Area, bounded by

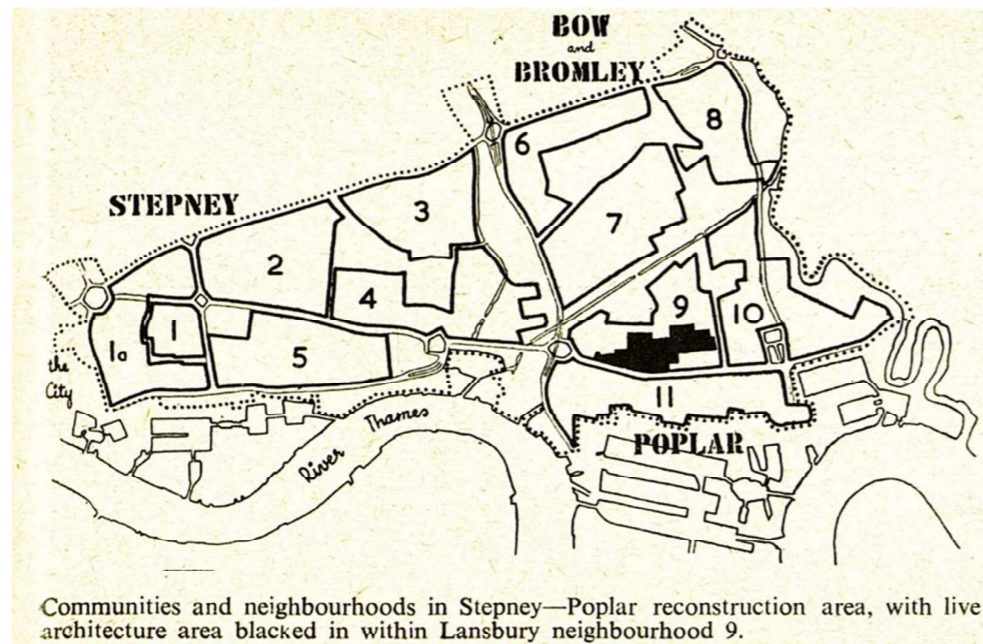
*Abbott Road to Nairn Street; Southern boundary of No 2 Nairn Street; Rear of No 229--233, Abbott Road, and North-West boundary OF 86, Leven Road, South-eastern Boundary of Poplar Gas Works, Western Boundary of River Lea, East India Dock Road, the Port of London Authority Boundary, Brunswick Road to Abbott Road*<sup>19</sup>

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Neighbourhood 10 would become the Teviot, Brownfield and Abbot Road (later Aberfeldy) estates. *Architects' Journal*, 15 June 1950.

<sup>19</sup> *The London Gazette*, 20 February 1948, 1199





Communities and neighbourhoods in Stepney—Poplar reconstruction area, with live architecture area blacked in within Lansbury neighbourhood 9.

Figure 8: The 11 neighbourhood units within the Stepney—Poplar Reconstruction Area

- 2.19 Poplar Borough Council had already erected 60 prefabricated Orlit houses on the Abbott Road Area. These two-storey terraced houses employed precast concrete and a pier-and-panel system. Initially Orlit houses formed part of the borough's temporary housing programme, but after their successful trial use at Abbott Road Area and on the Isle of Dogs (Kingfield Street Estate Area and the Glengall Grove Area), they were deemed as forming the initial instalment of its permanent programme. The experience gained in the Abbott Road Area led to the construction of a three-storey block of Orlit flats named Rawalpindi House in Mellish Street, Isle of Dogs (1947–8), which was, according to the *Architects' Journal*, the first block of pre-cast concrete-framed flats to be built in this country.<sup>20</sup>
- 2.20 The Orlit houses were followed by larger, low-rise residential blocks including Braithwaite House (Abbott Road) (Figure 9), and Mackay, Richie, Gaze, and Jervis Bay Houses (Blair Street). All seem to have been completed by the late 1940s and were followed by others in the early 1950s including Helen Mackay House and Dunkeld House (Blair Street and Abbott Road) (fig 11). They were designed, presumably, in

<sup>20</sup> *Op. cit.* Hobhouse, 1994; 446-451

conjunction with the Ministry of Works, by the Borough Engineer and Surveyor's Department.<sup>21</sup>

- 2.21 Braithwaite House was a six-storey block of 105 flats arranged on a T-plan block, built on an experimental steel frame in 1949–50 (Figure 9). Its name honoured Mrs Margaret Braithwaite, the first woman air raid warden to be killed on duty in Poplar during the war.<sup>22</sup> Currie House and Dunkeld House were nine-storey blocks (the former on a curved plan), designed by Faquharson & McMorrin and built 1952–3. The volume of work meant that most of the developments were assigned to private architects.



Figure 9: Early 1950s view south towards the East India Dock, showing (left to right) Richie House, Gaze House, Jervis Bay House and the taller Braithwaite House. Helen Mackay House has yet to take shape, parallel with Blair Street

- 2.22 Underpinning the planning of the 11 neighbourhood units within the Stepney-Poplar Reconstruction Area, was a recognition of the identity and sense of place of existing communities. The elementary school was seen as the determining factor in the size and organization of subsidiary or 'neighbourhood units' within a community.<sup>23</sup> The bomb-damaged Culloden Street Primary School site (between

<sup>21</sup> William J. Rankin, headed the department from January 1947

<sup>22</sup> Imperial War Museum, *War Memorial Register*, Online: [www.iwm.org.uk/memorials/item/memorial/56669](http://www.iwm.org.uk/memorials/item/memorial/56669)

<sup>23</sup> The Abbott Road Area already had the LSB schools in Bromley Hall Road and Culloden Street.



Culloden Street and Dee Street)<sup>24</sup> was demolished and rebuilt in 1967-8 on the same site which was extended south to obliterate Culloden Street itself (Figure 10).<sup>25</sup>



Figure 10: Extract from the 1949 and 1970 (published dates) OS maps, showing the relocation and reconstruction of Culloden Primary School

- 2.23 Built as a school for physically disabled children by the LCC/GLC Architects' Department under Bob Giles; the former Bromley Hall School opened in 1968 and was extended 1978-9. It replaced an earlier London School Board building on the site. Special schools, with their air of segregation and exclusion, fell from favour during the 1970s, as educational policy shifted towards greater integration of disabled children in mainstream schooling and the school later became a pupil referral unit for Tower Hamlets Borough Council. This closed in 2002 and the site has remained vacant. The building was listed Grade II in 2012<sup>26</sup> however it is on Historic England's Heritage at Risk Register where its condition is judged to be 'Poor'.<sup>27</sup>
- 2.24 The school's design responded to the A12 Blackwall Tunnel Approach Road (at the time under construction to the west) by employing 'an inward-looking cellular plan with classroom pavilions alternating with enclosed courtyards encircled by a continuous boundary wall – an arrangement indebted to Arne Jacobsen's Munkegård School in Copenhagen (completed 1957)'.<sup>28</sup> Its organic, expressive forms and intricate cellular plan

<sup>24</sup> London Metropolitan Archives ILEA/S/SB/38/009 & ILEA/S/SB/38/010

<sup>25</sup> *The Financial Times*, 13 March 1967, 9

<sup>26</sup> Historic England, National Heritage List for England, List Entry Number 1402561, Online: [historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1402561](http://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1402561)

<sup>27</sup> Historic England, Heritage at Risk Register, Online: [historicengland.org.uk/advice/heritage-at-risk/search-register/list-entry/407060](http://historicengland.org.uk/advice/heritage-at-risk/search-register/list-entry/407060)

<sup>28</sup> Text taken from Listing description

stood in stark contrast with the system-building that characterised much contemporaneous school architecture (figure 11<sup>29</sup>).

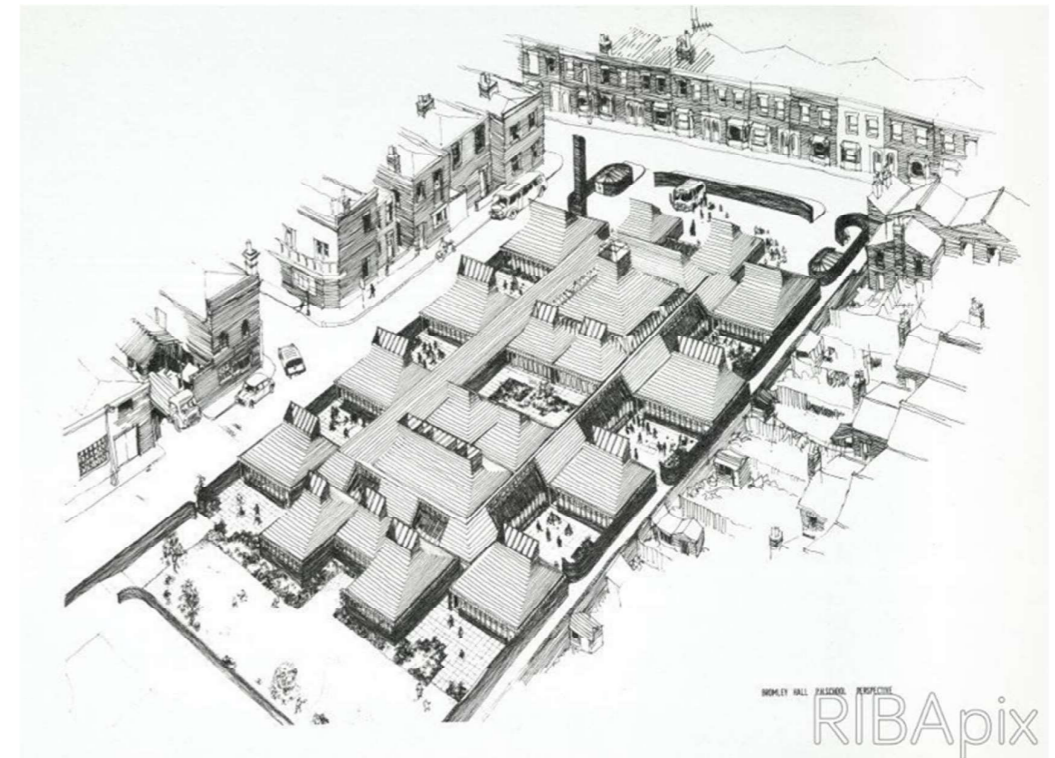


Figure 11: Design for Bromley Hall School for children with physical disabilities, 1960

- 2.25 Aberfeldy Street was 'rebuilt from 1948 as the main local shopping street: three-storey blocks of flats over shops' and became the commercial heart of the neighbourhood.
- 2.26 Reconstruction of the Abbott Road Area neighbourhood was substantially complete by the 1960s, with most housing having been erected in the late 1940s and 1950s. Despite the new scale of these high-density residential units, much of the pre-existing street pattern was preserved. The main alteration was the creation of four new streets (Lansbury, Wooster, Ada and Goodway Gardens) lined with two-storey terraced houses, which removed a stretch of Culloden Street. This was followed in the late 1950s/early 1960s by new estate roads for three

<sup>29</sup> RIBA Library, PA836/1

- four-storey system-built blocks named Thistle, Heather and Tartan House.<sup>30</sup>
- 2.27 In 1953–5 St Nicholas and All Hallows church was built to the designs of Seely & Paget. Aluminium was specified for both the roof covering and the steeple and ‘an innovation was the prefabrication of the steeple in the workshop and its assembly on the site.’<sup>31</sup>
- 2.28 Unlike other post-war neighbourhood units within the Stepney and Poplar Reconstruction Area, the Abbott Road Area neighbourhood did not see the construction of high-rise flats. It had been largely completed before the 1956 Act and in any case Poplar Borough Council had been opposed to high-rise flats generally. The Metropolitan Borough’s successor, the London Borough of Tower Hamlets (formed in 1965 from the merger of the former metropolitan boroughs of Stepney, Poplar and Bethnal Green) was less averse, as indeed was the Greater London Council (‘GLC’):

*‘The GLC, thus encouraged by the Government, and following the LCC’s lead, erected in Poplar a series of much taller blocks of flats than previously: the 19-storey Fitzgerald House, set on a podium, on the Lansbury Estate (1968–71), the four 21-storey point blocks (Bowsprit, Knighthood, Midship, and Topmast Points) on the Barkantine Estate (1968–70), the 25-storey Kelson House (an example of the ‘scissors’ type of maisonettes that were developed by the LCC in the early 1960s) on the Samuda Estate (1965–7), and, tallest of all, Ernö Goldfinger’s 26-storey Balfon Tower, just outside the parish, on the GLC’s Brownfield Estate (1966–8).’<sup>32</sup>*

*The Brownfield Estate and Balfon Tower*

- 2.29 The Housing Subsidy Act 1956 had confined provision of government subsidy only to new housing built to replace that removed by slum clearance; offering higher subsidy amounts for blocks of more than six storeys. Local authorities therefore focused their efforts on demolition and rebuilding coming under pressure to build ever higher by embracing the industrialized building systems which were then being

<sup>30</sup> These blocks appear on the 1962 (published date) OS map, and seem to have replaced mobile, temporary houses: files in the London Metropolitan Archives relate to ‘mobile homes, Dee Street, 1964’ (LMA SC/PHL/02/1057-1059-147) and ‘Landscaping: Dee Street, open space, 1974’ (GLC/RA/D2G/12/208)

<sup>31</sup> *The Municipal Journal* v63 (9 September 1955), 2444

<sup>32</sup> *Survey of London: Volumes 43 and 44, Poplar, Blackwall and Isle of Dogs*, ed. Hermione Hobhouse (London, 1994), 37-54.

- developed. The concrete point block seemed to offer a solution providing high density on a smaller footplate leading to the 1960s becoming a ‘golden age’ for mixed-type local authority estate developments.
- 2.30 Towards the end of the 1960s however, tower blocks and concrete system-built high-density estates came in for criticism for their ‘inhuman’ scale and of difficulty of upkeep. The Robin Hood Gardens Estate in Poplar, designed in the late 1960s and completed in 1972, was to become a symbol of this perceived failure of design philosophy being workable in the ‘real’ world. The partial collapse of the 22-storey Ronan Point building in Canning Town, Newham, on 16 May 1968, only two months after it had opened, heralded the demise of the point block as an option for local authorities.
- 2.31 The Brownfield Estate<sup>33</sup>, immediately west of the Abbott Road Area neighbourhood on the other side of the new Blackwall Tunnel Approach Road, was the south-western portion of the LCC’s ‘Neighbourhood 10’ and was approved for construction in 1951. It was originally envisioned as a low-rise scheme, with a mixture of 2-storey terraces, 4-storey maisonette blocks and 2/3-storey blocks of flats. However, this density of 142 persons to the acre (‘ppa’) for the first stages of scheme (1957–61) had to be increased to 170ppa to compensate for land taken for the eastern bore of the Blackwall Tunnel (1960–1967).
- 2.32 Short of in-house capacity, the LCC approached the architect Ernö Goldfinger in October 1962. The scheme was Goldfinger’s first public housing project and is considered to be an exemplar of post-war social housing.
- 2.33 Goldfinger planned the first two phases as a whole, to be executed in two halves. Phase one was completed in 1967 and included the construction of the Balfon Tower. Phase two was designed in 1965 and Goldfinger’s proposals for Carradale House were accepted in 1967. Phase three was completed in 1976 and included Glenkerry House.<sup>34</sup>
- 2.34 Balfon Tower (1965-67) was listed Grade II in 1996 and upgraded to II\* in October 2015. The listing description<sup>35</sup> noting that the idiosyncratic high-rise

<sup>33</sup> The Brownfield Estate was named in July 1958 after an existing road which had been named after a local doctor.

<sup>34</sup> Balfon, Carradale and Glenkerry were all named after Scottish places, following the precedent set by the Abbott Road Area neighbourhood.

<sup>35</sup> National Heritage List for England, List entry number: 1334931 Date first listed: 14-Mar-1996, Date of most recent amendment: 15-Oct-2015.