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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

St. John at Hackney Churchyard is the primary heritage site in central Hackney. The site contains a Grade I listed church tower, a Grade II* listed church and a grade II listed wall as well as over 300 memorials, some of great historical significance including the Loddiges Family Tomb and that of Sir Francis Beaufort who in 1805 developed the Beaufort Wind Scale. The site is of great local importance as a large and well used area of green open space in a heavily urbanised environment.

Records show that a church has been present on the site since 1275 and St. Augustine's Church of which the existing tower was part, was built at some point in the 12th Century. The church's dedication changed from St Augustine to St. John at Hackney in 1660.

As Hackney grew from a small rural settlement to a fashionable London suburb in the 18th Century, the Churchyard grew and land acquisitions were made allowing more burials to take place.

In the latter part of the 18th century, a new church designed by James Spiller was built on the site and the old church was demolished. The Churchyard had developed a formal appearance with a layout which still roughly exists today.

The Churchyard was declared full in 1859 when burials ceased and in 1893, an ecclesiastical licence was granted allowing the Churchyard to be converted into open space. Graves were grassed over and headstones moved to the perimeter of the site, and chest tombs were moved to railed enclosures by the Metropolitan Board of Works. The Churchyard was reopened as St. John's Gardens in 1894 and its care and maintenance was transferred to the local authority at that time.

During the 20th Century, much of the Churchyard's historic fabric has been eroded. Railings which once lined the paths were removed during World War II and were replaced in the 1950s with low stone retaining walls. A Civic Trust award was presented for the Walled Quiet garden in the 1960s, however this and other areas of the site have suffered badly from years of vandalism and neglect.

The proposals in this report which were the subject of Public Consultations in March 2001 and February 2002, aim to restore the historic character of the 18th and 19th Century churchyard and in doing so halt the site's current spiral of decline. The overall aim of the proposal is to restore the site and allow it to once again perform a function as a high quality inclusive and welcoming public open space at the centre of Hackney. The proposal aims to celebrate the site's rich history whilst also looking forward into the 21st Century and accommodating contemporary aspirations for the site.

I. INTRODUCTION

- I.1. Land Use Consultants were commissioned by Groundwork Hackney in August 2001 to write this report as part of their application to the Heritage Lottery Fund's Urban Parks Programme for funding to carry out the much needed restoration of St. John at Hackney Churchyard.
- I.2. A Church has been present on the site since the 12th century A.D., at which time Hackney was a small village. As Hackney developed into an important London suburb and eventually a major urban centre in the 19th century, the church remained its most important cultural and spiritual centre.
- I.3. The Churchyard which was used as a burial ground until 1859 was enlarged as Hackney grew, with land acquisitions being made as need for further burial space arose. In 1893 the Churchyard was cleared of monuments and partly converted into a public open space as a result of the Metropolitan Open Spaces Act of 1885. In the 1950's, the Churchyard was converted into a municipal garden with changes to its fabric many of which were not sensitive to its historical origins.
- I.4. The church remains a spiritual and cultural centre at the heart of a diverse community and the Churchyard is well used as an important urban oasis. The general trend in the Churchyard's recent history however, has been one of gradual decline as maintenance resources have been reduced and alterations have compromised the historic qualities of the site.
- I.5. The result is a Churchyard with an eroded historic fabric: railings removed as a part of the war effort and replaced with inappropriate alternatives; a mismatch of furniture styles; overgrown and inappropriate vegetation and little in the way of information or interpretation.
- I.6. This report sets out the site's history and records its current condition followed by proposals for the sites restoration. Overall the aim of the project is to restore and enhance the site in a manner which celebrates its past while also satisfying the needs and aspirations of contemporary site users.

planting of trees in 1797, was suggested and overseen by Harry Sedgwick Esq., who is buried in the Churchyard. The trees that exist now are planted roughly on the same layout as those originally planted by Sedgwick and it is likely that the original trees would have come from the Loddiges Nursery which was located close to Mare Street. The nursery is considered to have been important in botanical history as it supplied trees and shrubs for parks and gardens all over the world and the Loddiges family tomb is within the Churchyard.

- I.7. By 1797 the building of the new church, apart from the porticoes and tower, was completed. In 1798, the demolition of the old church was completed and Urswick House was demolished in 1802. In 1812 work began on the construction of the new tower which was completed in 1814, 22 years after construction of the church began. Photographic records show that by 1830, the Northern Recreation Ground was well established with 2-bar iron railings and trees demarking its boundaries.
- I.8. In 1859 the Churchyard was deemed to be full and burials ceased following the Order in Council for closure. Then, in 1864, the Hackney Gazette was founded with an image of the church tower on its masthead, thus demonstrating its importance as a landmark within Hackney. In 1866, the Grade II listed Old Town Hall (now the HSBC bank) was built in front of the tower.
- I.9. Cartographic and photographic records from around 1870 show a cedar tree with a circular bench around its trunk planted in the centre of the Northern Recreation Ground where the war memorial stands today. At this time, most areas containing graves were demarcated by waist high 2-bar iron railings and the majority of paths were lined by straight avenues of mature trees. The recesses along the eastern and western sides of the church were filled with planting beds and the Rowe Chapel still stood on the site of the old church however it was demolished in 1893 following a fatal accident involving falling masonry.

1885 – 1940 CHURCHYARD TO PUBLIC OPEN SPACE

- I.10. The Metropolitan Open Spaces Act of 1881 enabled local authorities to convert disused churchyards into public open space. As a result of this Hackney's Local Board negotiated with the Rector and the Metropolitan Public Gardens Association and a new scheme was laid out for the Northern Recreation Ground. Between 1885 and 1886, the area was laid out with paths, lawns, seating and fencing, the design included a large urn at the centre surrounded by bedding displays, clipped shrubs and low lavender hedges. The cost of this work was met by the Metropolitan Public Gardens Association.
- I.11. In 1893 the controversial decision was made to clear the Churchyard of monuments and headstones as it was densely occupied by graves and had become overgrown and derelict after the cessation of burials. This work was carried out using the local unemployed labour force, after an ecclesiastical license was granted. As part of this

work, headstones were moved to the edges of the Churchyard along walls, flat stones with no inscriptions were grassed over and large chest-tombs were moved to their present day locations where they were fenced off with iron railings. The cost of this work was again met by the Metropolitan Public Gardens Association.

- I.12. Photographic records from the early 1900's show all grassed areas to be railed off, large ornamental railings and gates on the Clapton Road Boundary and a wall topped with railings on the Mare Street Boundary to the north of the Town Hall.
- I.13. By 1928, the Northern Recreation Ground had drastically changed in character with a municipal planting design replacing the open landscape of the 19th century. Linear pathways had turned into meandering ones, boundary shrub planting had been allowed to grow above head height and the war memorial had been placed at the centre of the area surrounded by planting beds.

1940 – PRESENT DAY

- I.14. World War II had a major effect on the appearance of the Churchyard when perimeter and internal site railings were removed to be melted down as part of the war effort.
- I.15. In 1947 the Lidice Rose Garden was planted and opened with great support from the local community. The garden commemorates those who died when the villagers of Lidice in Czechoslovakia were massacred by Nazis in 1942. In 1967, a plaque was placed to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the massacre and then on the 50th anniversary in 1992, a cherry tree was planted.
- I.16. Between 1953 and 1964, a series of schemes were carried out by the Metropolitan Board of Works. Cherry trees and shrubs were planted throughout the Churchyard and low stone walls were placed around grassed areas along with a selection of different types of railings.
- I.17. In 1964, the walled 'Quiet Garden' was opened and received a Civic Trust Award for its design. Surrounded by the walls, the garden contained sensory planting in a raised bed with herbs and scented plants which had plaques printed in English and Braille. A rose garden was planted to the east of the garden and a pond was constructed along with a shelter and two giant chess boards.
- I.18. The fabric of the Churchyard has inevitably deteriorated to the point where today the site is on the verge of entering a costly spiral of decline. Though the 19th Century layout of the Churchyard remains virtually unchanged, 20th Century additions to the site have had a negative effect on its character. In recent years there has been little investment in the park fabric resulting in a deterioration in the presentation of the whole site, the planting in particular is greatly in need of refurbishment.

3. BASELINE SURVEY INFORMATION

BASE PLAN

- 3.1. A topographic survey by The Gordon Tomalin Partnership was specifically commissioned for the purposes of this project, it forms the basis for plan information within this report, and is enclosed within Appendix 6. Current Ordnance Survey data has also been used.

TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

- 3.2. St John at Hackney Churchyard covers 3.15 hectares of predominantly flat land with gentle falls to the south. The Churchyard sits at approximately 15m above sea level. The geology is mainly Hackney Gravel though to the south eastern corner of the site is an area of Taplow Gravel geology.

HYDROLOGY

- 3.3. Historical map information shows that in the past there were small water bodies adjacent to the south eastern area of the site however, any water courses have been long since culverted.

HISTORICAL DOCUMENTS

- 3.4. A considerable amount of research has been undertaken by David Mander for the book *St John at Hackney; The Story of a Church* (Parish of Hackney 1993) and Susannah Duval for her thesis *The Conservation and Regeneration of Public Open Space; Case Study - St John at Hackney* (1999). The research in this document is based on these secondary sources; however historical maps and photographs from Hackney archives have also been used.

PLANNING DESIGNATIONS

- 3.5. In the *London Borough of Hackney Adopted Unitary Development Plan – June 1995*, St John at Hackney Churchyard is defined as a Local Open Space and as such is protected by a number of planning policies. Due to these policies, Hackney Borough Council will give favourable consideration to proposals which will enhance the appearance and attractiveness of metropolitan open land for leisure activities. Parts of the Churchyard are within the Clapton Square Conservation Area.

LISTING

- 3.6. St Augustine's Tower is a Grade I listed building and the Old Town Hall (now the HSBC bank) adjacent to it is Grade II listed. St John at Hackney Church is a Grade II* listed building and the 17th century wall which separates the Vicarage and the south western quarter of the Churchyard is a Grade II listed structure.

None of the monuments within the Churchyard are listed, although we believe several are listable.

LAND OWNERSHIP

- 3.7. The Churchyard is private land, in the ownership of the rector while he remains incumbent of the parish. There is a legal Care and Maintenance Agreement between the Church and Hackney Council (dating back to 1924) that covers all matters regarding the upkeep of the Churchyard Gardens. The maintenance of the Churchyard is the responsibility of the Council and some areas, like the Northern Recreation Ground and Churchwell Path Playspace have been granted specific public use. The London Borough of Hackney has no rights of ownership and the land remains a disused burial ground that is open to the public. There are rights of access under the various Open Spaces Acts to parts of the Burial Ground.

PARISH VIEWS OF THE SITE

- 3.8. The views and support of the Rector (and those of his successors) and the Parochial Church Council are of central importance within the development of the proposed restoration plan.

CONSECRATED GROUND

- 3.9. As a burial ground, the Churchyard is Consecrated Ground and nothing can be built on the land without a Faculty granted by the Ecclesiastical or Consistory Court. This protects any remains and ensures that they are safe for posterity.

ACCESS

- 3.10. The Churchyard is open all year round and there are no gates to allow it to be locked at night, it has 8 entrances and its generally flat topography means that it is easily accessible for able bodied and disabled users.

CYCLING

- 3.11. There is currently a designated cycle route running through the Churchyard, along Churchwell Path from Lower Clapton Road in the north to Morning Lane in the south.

PARKING

- 3.12. Unregulated car parking is a major problem in the Churchyard, with cars arranged adhoc around the Church building and along the access roads adjacent to the Northern Recreation Ground. The effect of this is a very negative influence on the aesthetic appearance of the church setting. This parking also blocks emergency access to the church and to the adjacent nursery school. If the following restoration scheme is not supported, it is likely that the Church will need to put in place a high capacity parking scheme, with the area effectively becoming a managed car park.

DOG CONTROL

- 3.13. Dogs are prohibited from entering the 'Children's Play Area', however because there is no enforcement of this policy and signs having been vandalised, dog walkers presently use the area freely. Dog mess throughout all grassed areas is a concern, particularly for parents with children.

9. OUTLINE MANAGEMENT PLAN

- 9.1. The proposals for the restoration of St. John at Hackney aim to restore and enhance the site's historic integrity whilst meeting the hopes and needs of current users. The capital restoration works are the first step in achieving the vision held within this plan. This section outlines the issues and objectives for the long-term management of the site, which must be addressed if the project is to be successful in the long term. The following paragraphs describe current management and identify, in outline, how the proposals for the site are to be maintained in the long term to ensure maximum benefit to the public.
- 9.2. The management plan that will be prepared for subsequent stages of the Heritage Lottery Fund Application process will address these elements in greater detail. The strength of the management plan will lie in its flexibility and ability to respond to changing situations as these may occur, however the principles that have been outlined in this document will be retained. The management plan will be subject to a continual programme of monitoring and review to ensure Best Value.
- 9.3. Current users of the site include local residents, people attending church, and those working in or using the shopping/business facilities in Hackney itself.

CURRENT MANAGEMENT

- 9.4. There is one full-time gardener (7.30am – 3.15pm, 5 days per week) based on site who is also responsible for Clapton Square and St John's Day Nursery. Two further gardeners who are brought in to assist with specific tasks as they are required. The gardeners are responsible for the following maintenance operations:
 - **Grass cutting:** generally cut once per week during the growing season with the exception of the naturalised bulb areas (daffodils and crocuses), which are cut once per week from mid June onwards. All large areas are cut by a ride on mower, smaller areas are cut by a rotary mower. All other areas are cut using a strimmer. The lawns in the Northern Recreation Ground used to be maintained as fine lawn and are now maintained as amenity grass.
 - **Hedges:** the privet hedges to the south of the site are cut once at the end of June. The cotoneaster hedge surrounding the Northern Recreation Ground is cut once during September.
 - **Rose beds:** the plants are pruned once in October. The rose beds are not mulched.

- **Weed control (general):** herbicides are applied to control weeds in the rose beds, shrub beds and around memorials. There is no set time for herbicide applications.
- **Litter picking:** during summer months litter is picked on a daily basis and is carried out as required other times during the year by the gardener. A litter gang visits the site once a week and empties the bins.
- **Shrub beds:** shrub beds are generally pruned heavily once every two years with greater attention being paid to beds that block internal sightlines.
- **Seasonal bedding displays:** there are two beds near the HSBC Bank, which are planted out twice per year (May and October).

9.5. A 3 year plan for tree works has been prepared for the site which is carried out by the team of arborists based at Hackney Council. Tree works that do not form part of the cyclical maintenance plan are also carried out by the arboricultural team as required, for example in the event of storm damage etc.

ISSUES

9.6. The key management issues for St John at Hackney Churchyard, which have been addressed in the Restoration Plan are:

Car parking and vehicular access

9.7. Un-managed car parking in the Churchyard and along the roads adjacent to the Northern Recreation Ground represents a major problem and detracts from the historic character of the site. Parked cars block emergency access to the Church and adjacent nursery and abandoned cars also represent a problem, with some being left until they have parts removed. As noted earlier in this report, the Church may need to establish a high capacity car-parking scheme. It should be noted that there is a high demand in the area for parking and little space available due to the proximity to one of the main shopping areas in Hackney.

Quality of presentation

9.8. There is currently no consistency in the design of site furniture, railings, walls and gates leading to a lack of legibility and identity. Macadam paths are, in some parts, in poor condition or where repairs have taken place they exist as small patches leading to an un-coordinated finish. Some of the York Stone paving is also in poor condition and has sunk or has cracked at several points. Much of this movement is probably due to incorrectly filled vaults and tombs. This may become an issue in some of the grassed areas of the site.

Play equipment

9.9. The play equipment in the space to the south-east of the site is in a poor condition and is almost unusable due to vandalism.