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Whitechapel Market

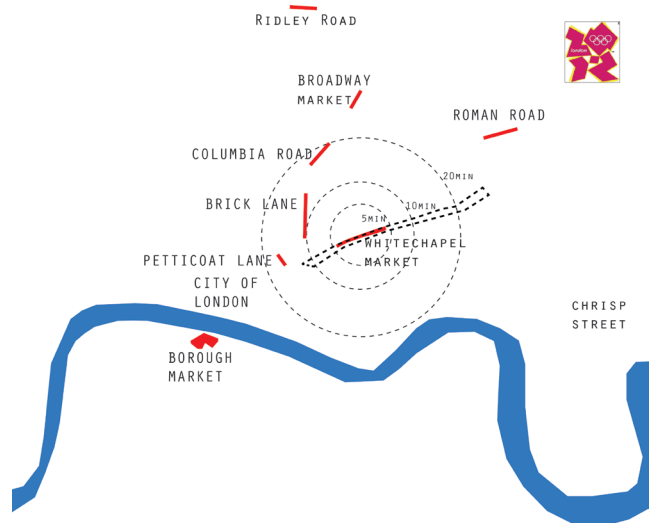
THE EXCHANGE STREET

INTRODUCTION

Notorious for overcrowding, squalor and crime in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, history is etched into the streets and alleyways of London's East End. While there have been many attempts to redress this neglected area, a stone's throw from London's city centre, it remains underdeveloped and some parts are still among the poorest in the nation. Our site, which includes the section of Whitechapel Road between Cambridge Heath Road to the east and Vallance Road to the west, is both a part of this history and a part of London's future as massive redevelopment efforts get underway in the area.

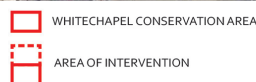
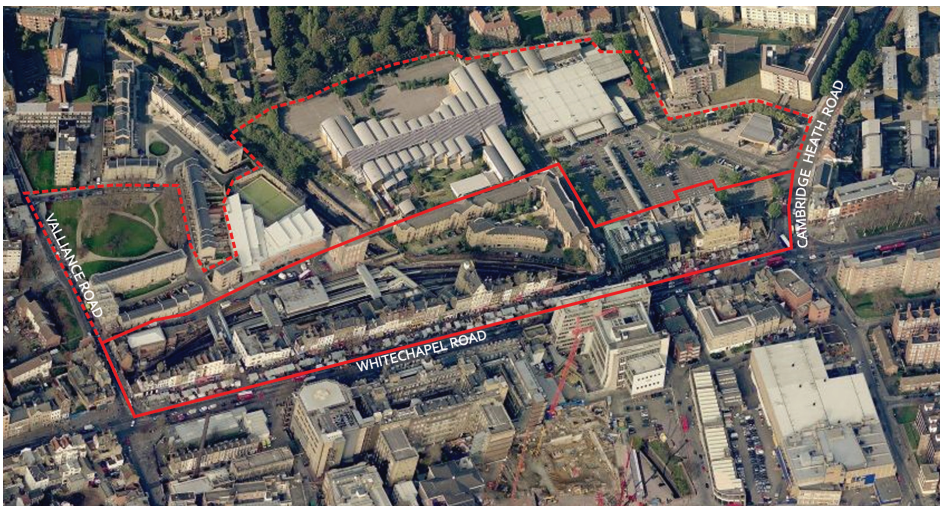
We are primarily concerned with looking at the street in relation to a wider context and across a number of different scales. The street does not exist in isolation but is influenced by a wide range of transactions and interactions taking place across scales from the local to the metropolitan to the global. Central to this area is Whitechapel Market, a market that has been in existence for over two hundred years and that has seen the comings and goings of a number of different immigrant communities. It is a key site of exchange and social encounter in Whitechapel.

Along the section of street stretching from Aldgate to Stratford, Whitechapel Road perhaps best encompasses the idea of a 'high street'. It is both a place of exchange, with a high intensity of retail, and a movement corridor linking the city centre to East London. We spent time on site interviewing traders and shopkeepers, examining the system of infrastructure, monitoring pedestrian movement, and meeting Council representatives and the various architects and organisations working on the redevelopment of the area.



Whitechapel Market in relation to other London Markets by walking intervals of 5, 10 and 20 minutes

We also looked at the operation of other London markets such as Ridley Road and Columbia Road. After investigations into the current dynamics of the area and the many changes scheduled to take place, we are proposing both a procedural intervention, to improve communication and ensure the economic viability of the market, as well as a spatial intervention to integrate the street with the broader local and metropolitan scale. Markets form part of the larger urban systems of exchange, employment, food, and social interactions and therefore their fate has implications for the broader city context. There is a need to think strategically about the system of markets in London, which offer a unique draw for tourists as well as providing for local livelihoods. Ensuring the survival of the rich and diverse character of Whitechapel Market is a step in this direction.



Whitechapel Road and the market

Located on the north side of Whitechapel Road, the market is an important local centre and borders the major redevelopment of the London Hospital to the south. It caters mainly to London's Bangladeshi community and is one of the borough's main local shopping areas. Historically, the stretch of street from Bow Road to Aldgate was one of the primary movement corridors into London, and continues to be a significant channel into the city.

OUR CONCEPTION OF WHITECHAPEL ROAD:

A historic urban corridor, with a high intensity of retail and opportunity for social encounters, making it a hub for transaction and interactions. It is a locally oriented high street, but highly connected to the greater London fabric.



The site is subject to a number of overlapping policies at national, regional and local level. As noted by the High Street London study (Gort Scott and UCL, 2010: 9), the management context for London's high streets is complex, intensified by the divide between Transport for London and Borough responsibilities. Moreover the real estate and exchange functions of high streets seem far less understood and prioritised than their movement function. Whitechapel Market is located in the Whitechapel Market Conservation Area which means planning controls are more extensive than usual and there are strict guidelines about what interventions can and cannot be undertaken. These regulations protecting the character of the area have guided our thinking about interventions and desire not to over-determine design, especially as there are dynamics of the market that already work.

The Whitechapel Road frontage, with its sustained stretch of fine-grain historic buildings, consists of a variety of architectural designs. Some eighteenth-century buildings survive, including the Grade II-listed Woods Buildings and Davenant Centre and the former brewery, as well as some examples of Victorian architecture. The market area consists of a very broad pavement, with stalls lining the Whitechapel Road roadside. The stalls on the pavement present a virtually unbroken line from Vallance Road to Cambridge Heath Road, and are permanent pitches taken up by traders. Whitechapel Station is centrally located along the stretch and is a focal point for pedestrian movement, drawing people along the line of stalls and across the road to and from the hospital (London Borough of Tower Hamlets, 2007).

The condition of being an urban corridor also reinforces the connectivity of the area, emphasising of the multiple layers that one can read in this urban stretch, from the local context to London as a global city. Upon examining options for the market in the area, we believe the location of the market is in the best position to take advantage of pedestrian footfall. Successful places are often 'go-through' places, where getting people who are already moving through the space to stop is much easier than drawing people to the space in the first place. If a space is poorly located in the local movement pattern, it matters less how well-designed it is, as it's unlikely to ever be well-used. On the other hand if, like the market, it is well located within the local movement system, upgrading the space and incremental improvements are likely to have a major impact on the density of people in the space. Quality thus affects density of use (Carmona et al, 2010: 202-207). Considering Tower Hamlets' goals of reducing worklessness, we also believe that the market is largely an asset to the area, providing 250 to 300 direct jobs and a turnover of roughly £3.5 million a year.



KEY

- Residential
- Large Retail
- Small Retail/Mixed Use
- Grade II Listed Buildings
- Local Services
- Regional Services
- Conservation Area



Future projects

The area is subject to a number of ongoing public interventions at different scales that will bring a significant change to its structure. Within the Olympic regeneration project and the High Street 2012 programme, four clusters of buildings are being restored by Julian Harrap Architects to 'reveal the original shopfronts and period façades' (London Borough of Tower Hamlets, 2011). This includes a cluster of buildings within the Whitechapel Conservation Area.

The market itself is the object of a complete renovation by Alan Baxter Associates (lead consultant) and East Architects among others. The market stalls will be demountable structures based on the Parisian model to be set up and dismantled daily by a third party contractor. This model has been identified as the best option to optimise the functions of the market, although concerns are being expressed by the traders who see this as a less controllable and manageable system. It will however have the benefit of reducing the traders' working hours, as they wouldn't need to assemble or dismantle the stalls. The small infrastructure of the market system will be renovated entirely too, including water provision, electricity and sewage.

The re-design of the station to integrate existing overground and underground lines and the construction of the incoming Crossrail station should be completed by 2018. An important strategic move is the attempt to integrate the station within the wider urban context, facilitating the interchange between transport modes and the connectivity and permeability of the urban fabric. This will include a link for non-ticket holders to cross from Whitechapel Road to Durward Street and a further connection is being considered to extend to the southwest corner of the Jewish Cemetery. The new station will transform Whitechapel into one of the most significant interchange nodes in London, posing significant questions about the consequences that this will have on the urban and social fabric of the area.

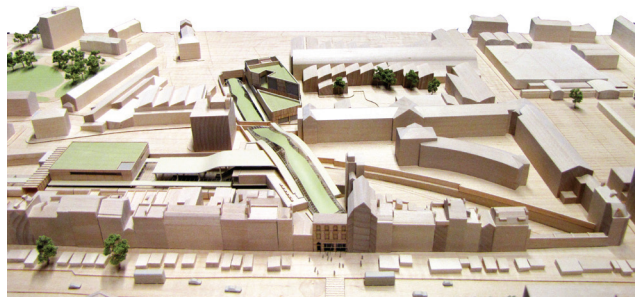
It is difficult to fully evaluate and illustrate these projects due to the ongoing process of consultation with local stakeholders and the confidentiality of certain documents. What is evident at the moment is that the partial implementation of the projects and the lack of communication with the traders are translating into contradictory results. Our aim is to ensure the market survives and flourishes alongside and in spite of these many changes.



Façade renovation along Whitechapel High Street by Julian Harrap Architects. Source: Design for London, 2010



Example of a Parisian market structure in Paris.
Source: Alan Baxter Associates, 2010



Model of the incoming Crossrail Station on exhibit in the Idea Store

Spaces of retail and small infrastructure

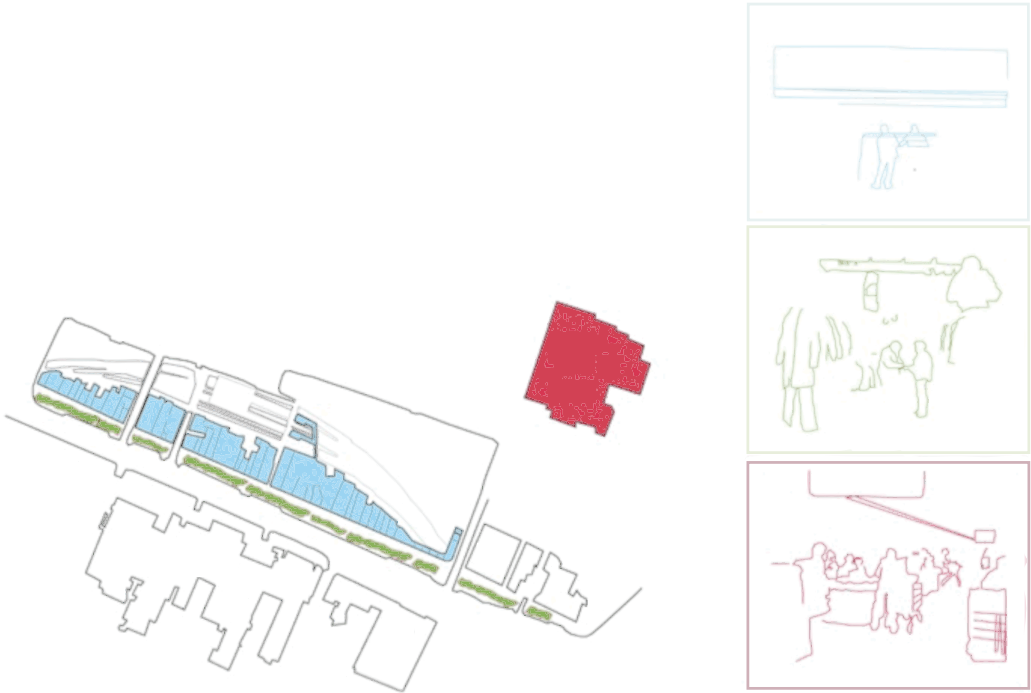
There are three types of retail in our study area that have different spatial and social implications, from the large-scale space of Sainsbury's, to the smaller scale shops, to the room-like space of the market stalls. We analysed how transactions are shaped by these different spaces of retail and what interactions they allow or hinder. The three spaces of trade are concentrated in a small territorial area, creating a hub of intense retail. Customers often shop at all three locations, the shopkeepers and market traders share facilities, and Sainsbury's provides a parking space that is a benefit to all three types of retail. While Sainsbury's could initially be perceived as a threat to the smaller, local shops and the market, after observation it became apparent that its retail offer is aimed at a different clientele and in some ways complements the other spaces of retail, drawing in customers who may not otherwise visit the area. The relationship between the market and the shops is key to the market's success.

The market is a physical system as well as being a site of transactions and interactions between traders and customers. The physical system impacts the visual quality of Whitechapel Road, extending into shops and adjacent streets. To understand the system we needed to define and map the small-scale infrastructure, categorising it into six main types: stall structure, storage, electricity, water, waste and toilets. The market has a long history and the market space has been negotiated over a period of time, resulting in an incremental and informal system of infrastructure. Mapping the infrastructure revealed that the traders collaborate and share pieces of infrastructure with shops, meanwhile establishing personal relationships with the shop owners. In spaces where pieces of infrastructure overlap, the frequent need for traders to visit these spaces turns them into informal meeting spaces.

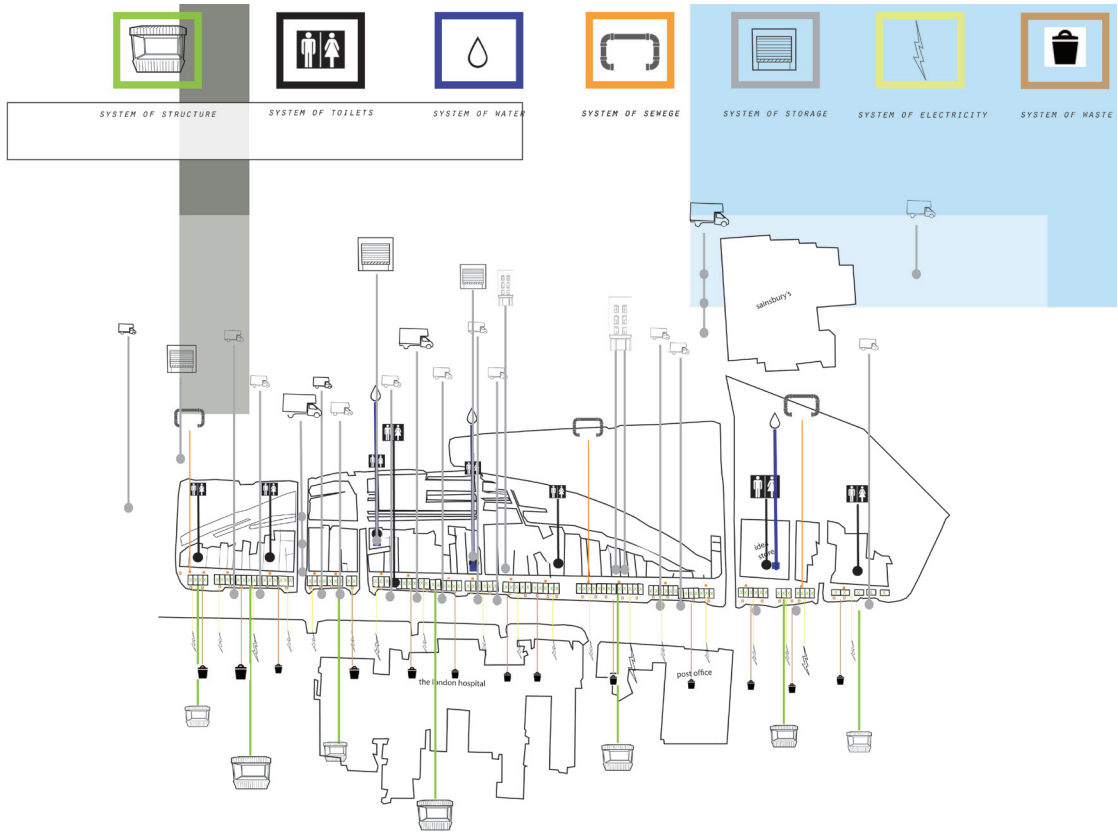
Problems of basic infrastructure

In interviewing the market traders we noticed how the location, state and characteristics of infrastructure shape the everyday life of the traders. The market is open six days a week from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m., but is busy before and after those times with traders setting up or packing up their stalls. Taking the organisation of storage as an example, it takes thirty minutes for a trader to store his goods in a shop or warehouse nearby, whereas the process of storing goods in a van can take a trader up to one and a half hours. This can extend a trader's working hours in what is already a long workday.

The infrastructure is in daily use, takes up space and affects how people inhabit and interact in the space. The presence of the market, which we generally see as an asset to the area, also gives rise to some problems along Whitechapel Road. The structure itself is poorly maintained and over time traders have extended their stalls forward on the pavement, somewhat inhibiting pedestrian flow. The traders complain about the sewage openings on the pavement in front of the market stalls which are poorly maintained, result in bad odours and affect their working environment. The system of waste encroaches on the street and pavement and is perceived to be unclean and disorganised. Not all traders have access to electricity from the bollards on the pavement and feel they need better electricity provision. The traders storing goods in vans use the loading bays behind the stalls to replenish their stocks throughout the day. The vans are used for transport and servicing and are often parked in the loading bays for long periods, resulting in parking fines. There is no real alternative for secure parking however, and the traders tend to be little deterred by regular fines. If their vans are parked elsewhere and out of sight, they are liable to get broken into and goods are stolen. The parking issue has long been a frustration for the authorities and traders alike. Social problems such as drug use are also related to the infrastructure. Drug addicts frequently use the public toilets on the street for recreational purposes, and the traders say they don't use these facilities for that reason, preferring to find alternative options in shops or the Idea Store.



Three types of retail concentrated in a small area create a hub of intense retail and varying levels of social interaction. Sketches from top: shop, market, supermarket.



Map of small infrastructure including market stalls, toilets, electricity, water, waste and storage

Communication constraints

An issue we identified early on in our investigations of the area, and was reinforced as we delved deeper into the market mechanisms, was a communication disjuncture, both vertically between levels of government and the traders on the ground, as well as horizontally between organisations working on the street and the traders and shopkeepers. There is also little communication between the traders themselves.

For the traders, this manifests in discontent about a number of matters affecting the market. They feel they haven't been consulted about the changes coming to the market, nor do they feel they have any way to express their concerns. One trader told us: 'They come here and change things, but they don't tell us what is going on. Will we have to pay for the new structure? Will our rents go up?' Another was concerned that 'they've changed the parking, but haven't told us what they're doing. Improvements to the market will be good for business, but it'd be helpful if they could explain to us what they're doing.' A long-term trader in the market said: 'They do whatever they want. When they say they'll consult us, it's a formality, not real consultation. Once they even read the riot act to us.'

The communication issue operates the other way around too, with consultancies working on projects in the area saying that it is difficult to communicate with the traders, not only due to language barriers, but also because there is no representative they can engage with. It has also proved difficult to engage with the shopkeepers along Whitechapel Road. With renovation to the building façades, the shopkeepers will be required to conform with certain signage rules and will have to remove the current signs along their shopfronts. It has been a challenge to explain the changes happening in the Conservation Area, and that shopfront signage has never been formally permitted. However, the council has done little to enforce this in the past, and many shopkeepers believed it was therefore acceptable. New signage is still being added to shopfronts.



CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Transactions/Interactions

It became evident early on that Whitechapel Road was a hub of transactions and interactions, particularly in comparison to the rest of High Street 2012. This is the essence of its urbanity and became our conceptual framework, influencing our approach to the area. It is also part of the character we wish to maintain or enhance over the long term.

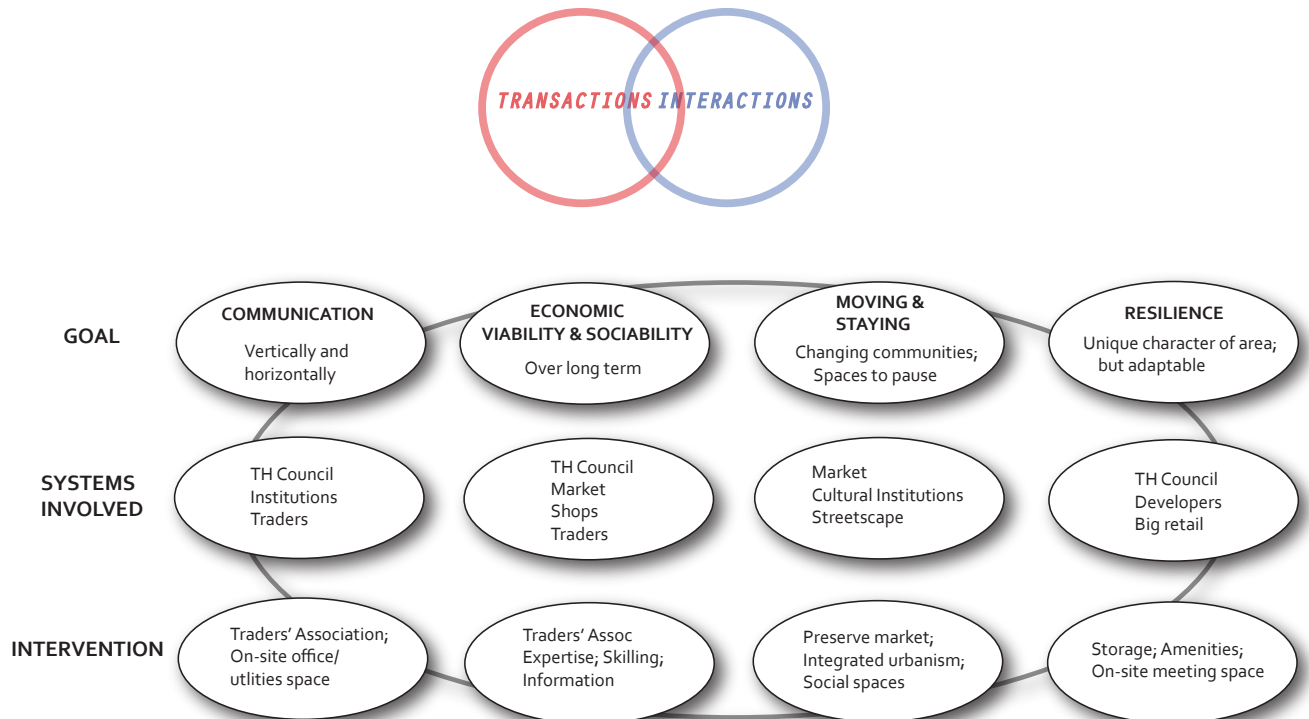
Identifying goals and interventions

This has been translated into a matrix of goals, systems involved and possible interventions where elements are not to be read in isolation but as interrelated actions and objectives (see below).

Communication is certainly important, both vertically between institutions and stakeholders, and horizontally between decision-makers, consultants and local actors. Another important target is economic viability over the long term, where the market plays an important role. As noted, more than 250 jobs are created locally and the market constitutes a significant source of affordable goods for low-income residents. Long-term viability also means enhanced possibilities for entrepreneurial ventures, increased competition to favour inclusion of young traders and an allowance for the diversification of goods.

The goal of 'moving and staying' has a twofold meaning. On the one hand, it refers to the physical target of creating pauses and silences in a system that lacks them, and providing seating areas to counterpoint the continuity and intensity of the urban corridor. On the other hand, Whitechapel has always been an area of changing communities, providing social and financial support to new migrants. The ability to adapt to and provide for changing communities is an important part of the area's character.

The area reflects the very essence of cityness, as a place of 'exchange, culture, knowledge, experience and news, ... a place with an overwhelming and unprecedented supply and an equally differentiated demand, not only of goods, but also of experiences, impressions and ideas' (Reijndorp, 2009). From this point of view, the fourth element of resilience acquires an extended meaning as the capacity of the urban and social fabric to resist and adapt to change; hence our focus on the Conservation Area, not as an administrative tool to preserve but as a set of resources to renew and develop without displacement of people or destruction of the intrinsic memory of places.



Conceptual framework showing interrelated actions and objectives

URBAN INTERVENTIONS

After a thorough analysis of the site, we have identified two main areas for intervention. The first is a procedural intervention aimed at improving communication both vertically and horizontally. The second intervention is to create a better-integrated urban fabric and firmer links between Whitechapel Road and Durward Street, which would support a new matrix of pedestrian movement around the planned Crossrail station.

Procedural intervention: Enhancing communication

We believe that enhancing the link between the market and local government will add to the area's economic viability and resilience. The intervention would involve setting up a Traders' Association as well as a new role for the Tower Hamlets Development and Renewal Directorate. The Directorate, responsible for the management and development of Conservation Areas in the Borough, would take on a new role overseeing the development of the market within the Conservation Area. This would include making sure market pitches remain affordable, improving the competitive position of the market, enhancing employment opportunities and encouraging a diversification of goods.

The Traders' Association would consist of both permanent and temporary permit holders in Whitechapel Market and the market representative would be the official link to the Council. The Traders' Association, in connection with the council, would give

traders access to skilling workshops, legal resources, language assistance and opportunities for consultation.

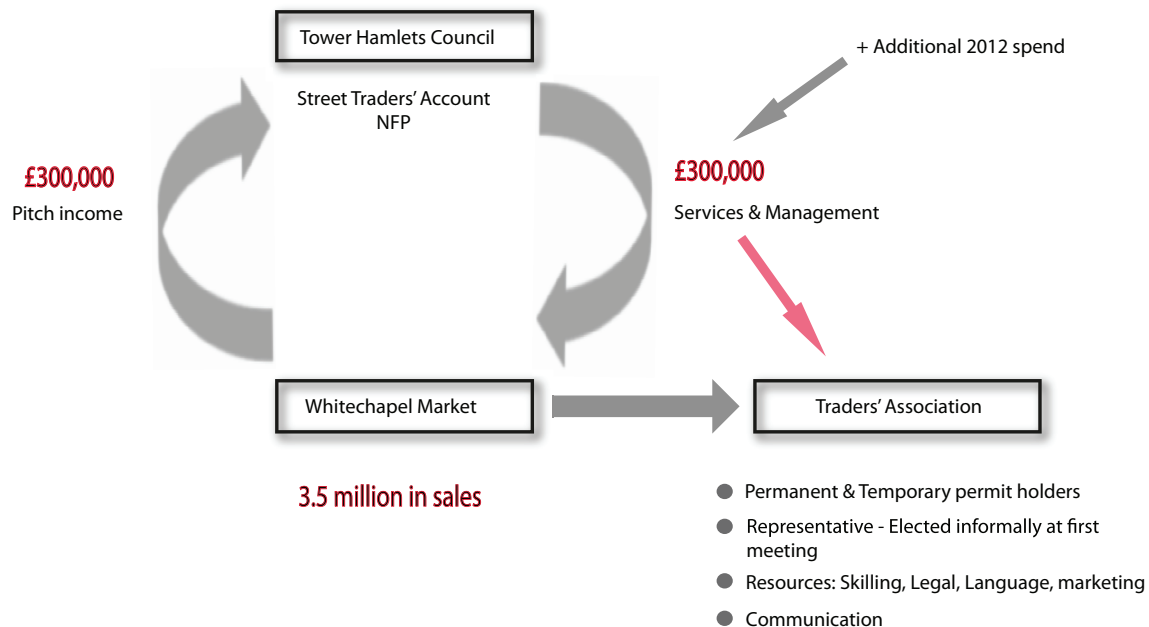
In terms of the mechanisms of the Traders' Association, we envisage the establishment of the Association to be funded by the Councils' Street Traders' Account. Being not-for-profit, all funds in this account (derived mainly from pitch income) must be reinvested in the market in terms of management and services. With the additional spend on the High Street 2012 project, this fund may be able to divert some of this income for the initial set-up of the Trader's Association.

Development of the Traders' Association will be in three stages:

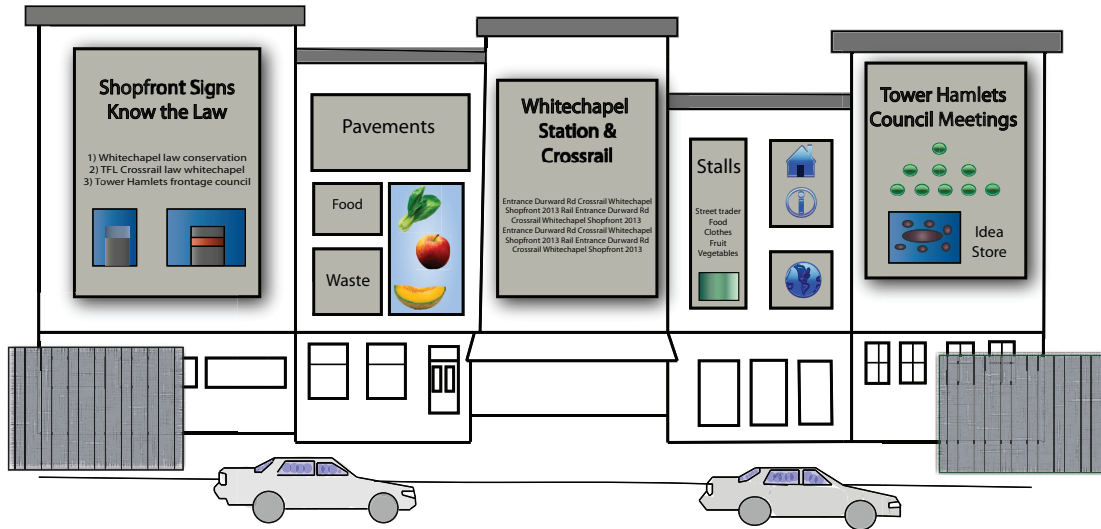
Stage 1:

The setup of a Traders' Association could take some time, so the purpose of the first stage would be to disseminate information quickly and affordably to both traders and shopkeepers along Whitechapel Road. This would take the form of a communications flyer containing information about laws and regulations in force in the area (see opposite page). It would also inform traders about Council meetings and the infrastructural changes coming to the area. This is inspired by a similar project for street vendors in New York where a pamphlet was distributed to empower vendors to understand their rights, avoid fines, and learn about the most commonly violated rules.

Mechanisms of Traders' Association



WHITECHAPEL TRADER GUIDE



Mock-up of communication flyer to be distributed to traders and shopkeepers

Stage 2:

The second stage involves setting up the Traders' Association and giving it space to operate in an existing facility on-site, namely the Idea Store. The advantage of this is in allowing the Association to build up incrementally while not requiring the retrofit of a new space. Here meeting rooms and toilets are available to kick off the process at a minimum expense. The Idea Store has a physical relationship with the market, being on the same stretch of street but towards the eastern end. It would only be occupied by traders during organised meetings so, while a convenient space, it has the disadvantage of not allowing for more informal encounters between traders.



Idea Store, stage 1

Stage 3:

In the third phase, the Traders' Association would move to a dedicated space on-site. This would provide meeting space for traders and Council members, as well as basic infrastructure such as toilets and a kitchen. There are two buildings we have identified as potential spaces for this stage: The Lecture Hall on Whitechapel Road, and Trinity Hall on Durward Street (see following page). The Lecture Hall is very prominent in the historic elevation and more or less in the centre of the market. Trinity Hall has the advantage of moving the functioning of the market to a parallel street and enhancing the urban system by integrating Durward Street with the mechanisms of the market (see following page). This would have the merit of creating a new secondary axis to complement the main one. The choice of Trinity Hall would serve to enhance the number and quality of connections between the two streets, and the spatial resolution of the corners on Whitechapel Road to make the connections more visible.

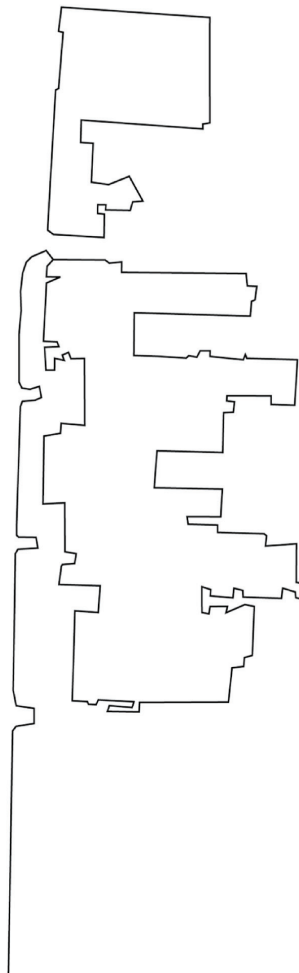


Trinity Hall, stage 2



Lecture Hall, stage 3

OPTIONS FOR TRADERS' ASSOCIATION MEETING SPACE



Spatial Intervention: Stitching the streets

The area is characterised by a stark contrast between the fine-grained urban fabric of the historical buildings that have been 'protected' by the curve of the rail tracks and a dispersed large-blocked area on Durward street, which is mainly residential and also includes local services such as the Sports Hall, Swanslea School and the supermarket. At the same time the tracks seem to have cut across important connections between Whitechapel Road and the back streets and spaces, amplifying the congestion of the urban corridor, especially for pedestrians.

The market, we think, is not incidentally located along the fine-grained urban fabric and this is confirmed by on-the-ground analysis of interactions between the two systems. From a spatial point of view, walking along the street gives an immediate perception of the 'envelope' created by the shops on one side and the market stalls on the other with the latter helping to contain the pavement to a manageable human dimension and to protect the pedestrian from the noise and pollution of the busy road. The intensity of retail activity on either side of the street creates a narrow channel of movement along the pavement and provides few opportunities for pauses and 'silences' along the corridor. It is evident the system would benefit from a number of breaks in the line of market stalls to provide small social

spaces, although this move would have to be balanced with the necessity of keeping the numbers of pitches in accordance with demand. In addition, other social spaces could be created on the complementary site on Durward Street.

Successful urban integration of the area would alleviate the pressure on the main road, and allow for the potential expansion of the market – at least on a weekly basis (the market could have a number of food stalls on Saturday for instance). It would also allow for the creation of a more intimate and calm public space on Durward Street to complement the fast pace of the stretch along the market. Whitechapel currently lacks stalls selling ready-made food or places to sit and eat or drink. As noted by Watson (2009: 1582):

'...the more social markets were those where there were places to eat and drink, either cafés or food vans on or near the site..., where there were places to sit, even informal seating places such as packing cases, or the stairs of old containers as in Ridley Road, or where there was a variety of stalls, particularly stalls selling unusual or attractive-looking products'.

Integrating Whitechapel Road and Durward Street





Connection between Durward Road and Whitechapel Street



Incremental improvements to the corners and paving can enhance connections between Whitechapel Road and Durward Street, and give clarity to the continuity of the active frontage.



Pavement when market not in use

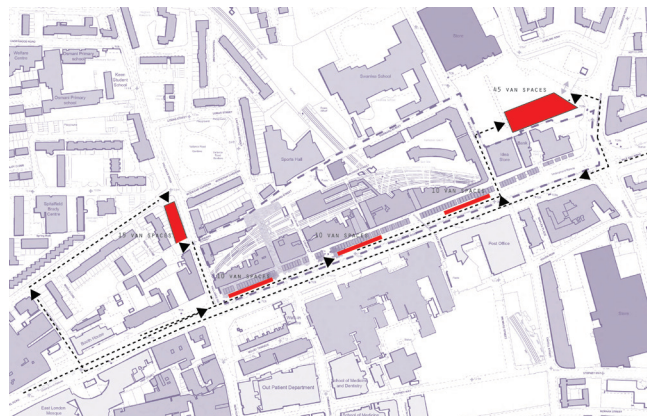


Visualisation of pavement and structure on non-market days

A more integrated area would function more organically and would utilise more efficiently the existing resources of Swanslea School, the Sports Hall and the Jewish Cemetery that may be linked in the future by the new station concourse.

Proposals for the market indicate a number of breaks in the stalls to provide 'social spaces'. We acknowledge and welcome this revised layout of the stalls to allow spaces for seating and standing, thereby enhancing the paradigm of transactions and interactions and its realisation within the market fabric.

In light of the problem of van parking and ticketing mentioned above, we envisage that the new integrated urban system will draw on the parking and gyratory space in front of Sainsbury's, transforming it into a more mature space of exchange between the big retail institution and the rest of the market. Parking would be rationalised to provide a number of loading bays in proximity to the stalls, with two wider areas at the east and west end of the market for longer-term parking (see below). This would include paid parking in an under-utilised part of the Sainsbury's parking lot. Considering that the traders already pay for street parking permits and additional fines, they are likely to be willing to pay a nominal amount to park in such a secure space. Although communicating with Sainsbury's has been difficult, in light of their stated commitment to community and area betterment and the fact the parking space is currently under-utilised, we believe this to be a viable proposal. Rationalising the parking areas for the vans would also help to de-clutter the street corners and side streets. The flow of traffic around the parking spaces and loading bays would be organised to facilitate smooth access and egress from all directions.



System of parking, providing 90 van parking spaces, including 45 in the Sainsbury's lot.

Bold interventions and areas for further analysis

A conversation with Julian Harrap architects confirmed that two or three units of the building stock between Whitechapel Road and Durward Street are of little or no historical value; more analysis may suggest partial or total demolition to create even more permeability and the opportunity for redesigning the flank wall of the retained units with active frontage to guarantee retail intensity along the routes.

We also examined the possibility of using parts of the market structure and pavement for other uses when the market is closed (in the evenings and on Sundays).

Tables could be set up on the pavement allowing restaurants and cafés to spill out onto the street. This would enhance the social use of the space when no market is in operation, as well as increasing safety with heightened use and a more orderly system of infrastructure.

An even more ambitious plan, to be verified after the consolidation of the Whitechapel Station re-design, would see the possibility of a structural floorplate to cover a large extent of the rail tracks and allow so-called over-site development. This is to recognise the augmented critical mass of retail and commercial space needed locally given the radical transformation of the infrastructural capacity of Whitechapel.



Left: Durward Street in March 2011.
Below: Visualisation of Durward Street with a spillover market from Whitechapel Road and additional social spaces.



CONCLUSIONS

In light of the changes coming to Whitechapel Road and the market, we have tried to read between the lines to identify what is not being addressed by these interventions. We want to ensure that the market retains its vitality and character, as well as enhancing its economic viability, during and beyond these changes. Yet we also recognise the need for the area to be adaptable to shifting circumstances, and to be an inclusive space for all city dwellers.

As part of a larger system of London markets, Whitechapel market is important for both economic reasons (jobs, trade) and social reasons (as a place of interaction and mediating difference). While each market is unique, they all require basic infrastructure for operation (such as storage and meeting spaces), as well as basic communication links to local authorities and working social spaces. Thus our ideas are replicable and may be relevant to the other market systems, enhancing strategic thinking about the market system.

With the incoming Crossrail station, we envisage stronger links between Whitechapel Road and the more auxiliary spaces of Durward Street. Joining these disconnected elements will enhance the area as a unified piece of London's urban fabric, and provide opportunities for expansion of the market and more integrated social spaces.

The forthcoming projects will have a huge impact on the visual quality of Whitechapel Road, but we hope to see the market adapt and thrive in its modified setting, while retaining its vitality and spontaneity.

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