Farringdon Urban Design Study
Part 1: Baseline Study

Report excerpts
London Borough of Islington LDF evidence base
March 2010

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Farringdon Urban Design Study
Appendices to the final report


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NB This report is formed of excerpts from the full Farringdon Urban Design Study. As such page numbers are not consecutive.

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A layered history

‘Farringdon’ is perhaps best known to many people as a busy underground and railway station, one which is to increase significantly in prominence and usage in the coming decade with the arrival of major new lines. However, the wider area around the station is in fact a composite of historic places, including Smithfield, Charterhouse, and Clerkenwell. The name ‘Farringdon’ came into being for the area immediately adjacent to the city wall, with the Ludgate-Newgate ward becoming known as Farringdon-within-the-walls in the thirteenth century after aldermen Nicholas and William de Farrndon, while urban extension led the City to create the ward of Farringdon-without-the-walls in 1394. The station itself was in fact named after the adjacent Farringdon Street.

Nonetheless, while Farringdon as we know it today may be a patchwork, the history and character of its constituent places has been shaped by some consistent factors. The position of the area ‘without-the-walls’ allowed the proliferation of functions whose size or perceived undesirability precluded location within the walls, and in this respect there has always been a true mix of functions, though an evolving one. The impact of these changing functions has been a sense of ‘layering’. The basic street/block plan is essentially medieval, but new streets and institutions have been gradually added to (and removed from) it in sequence, though without always entirely obscuring earlier layers. The result, fundamental to the area’s character, is a dense juxtaposition of elements dating from the medieval period to the present, including narrow lanes, eighteenth-century houses, and major Victorian infrastructure. In addition, there is a substantial number of listed buildings, some of great individual value, while a series of Conservation Area designations by the three London boroughs, within whose remit Farringdon falls, recognises the attractive streetscape of the area, the product partly of the ‘group value’ of its constituent buildings.

Geology and topography

Farringdon’s geology and topography is its underlying ‘layer’, making a significant but often overlooked contribution to its character. The course of the River Fleet was obscured in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when the watercourse was covered over by a new layer of housing and transport infrastructure, but the valley that it created remains clearly visible, not least in the Saffron Hill area, while buildings associated with the river are commemorated in the name of Turnmill Street. On both sides, the ground dips steeply into the valley bottom, an area of alluvium, silty clay and peat beds upon the same impermeable London clay that underlies the higher areas. The intersection of gravel and clay gave rise to innumerable natural springs, including the ‘Clerk’s well’ that gives Clerkenwell its name and which survives below 14-16 Farringdon Lane.

There is a distinct uphill gradient from Ludgate Circus towards King’s Cross and Islington. Smithfield is 15.24 metres above sea level, whilst the Angel is at 38.1 metres. The result is that there are important (protected) views of the City across Farringdon from vantage points to the north.

A historical introduction

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Roman to medieval: establishing a framework

The few traces of Roman occupation that have been found point to a largely agricultural character. There seem to have been a good number of Roman burials on the site now occupied by St. Bartholomew’s Hospital, as burials within the city walls were not allowed. Much of the City itself was abandoned in the Saxon period, and Farringdon was not given particular mention in Domesday. Far more important in terms of its above-ground physical legacy, therefore, was the twelfth century, when a new layer of institutions was added to Farringdon, their location and boundaries exerting an influence on the nascent street plan that remains visible today. Religious houses needing large areas of land congregated in Farringdon, able to find unencumbered sites of a size that did not exist within the City itself. St. John’s Priory filled the block formed by modern-day Turnmill Street, Cowcross Street, St John Street, and Clerkenwell Green. The Charterhouse was bounded by St John Street, Aldersgate Street, and Long Lane. To the south, St. Bartholomew’s Priory slotted between Long Lane, Aldersgate Street, and Little Britain, the meandering line of which resulted from the adjacent city wall.

St. Mary’s Nunnery occupied the land north of Clerkenwell Green and east of present-day Farringdon Lane. Large private houses, such as the Bishop of Ely’s Palace (opposite the church of St. Andrew Holborn), came into being for similar reasons, and with similar effect. Together, these institutions effectively defined the main block plan: development was drawn along and between them. The roads between the religious houses were among the principal routes north out of London: Cowcross Street leading north-west towards Barnet, and St John Street to Islington.

To the south of Clerkenwell was the open area of ground known as Smithfield, derived from ‘Smooth Field’. A three-day fair (Bartholomew Fair) was established by royal charter in 1133 and held annually until 1855. Its vivid, at times bawdy nature was immortalised in Ben Jonson’s play of 1614. But it was the market for which Smithfield became especially known. Horse trading became associated with the area, and the tracks leading from the north to Smithfield became a series of droveways along which stock was moved to market. The meat market developed particularly in the fourteenth century, stimulated in part by a ban on slaughtering within the city walls in 1381. A further market took place at the Cow Cross, at the junction of Cowcross and St John Streets. Smithfield also became known for tournaments, pageants, and executions. A diamond-shaped space, it tapered to the south: this form is characteristic of market entrances and is also seen in the slight widening of St John Street to the north. Improvements in agriculture meant that, by the start of the eighteenth century, the market was open all year round. The field was paved and drained for the first time in 1614.

Yet although Farringdon was in the medieval period dominated by its large institutions, the area was in fact home to a varied mix of uses, at least some of which existed to support the market and religious houses. St John Street, in existence by 1170, was the prime route for drovers bringing animals to market, and its tenements provided accommodation for them. Over time, the street came to be characterised by many coaching inns, each with its own courtyard, and indeed by the eighteenth century was the departure point for coach services leaving London for the north. Cowcross Street and

Braun and Hogenberg, showing surviving monastic buildings some two decades after dissolution, 1560
Turnmill Street had come by the twelfth century to be the location of narrow plots occupied by both housing and manufactures. Mills were particularly dominant, powered by the Fleet and owned by the Priory. Not only were they used for corn, but lead-milling, pigment-grinding and other noxious trades had come into being by Tudor times. One eighteenth-century advertisement for a house in Turnmill Street noted that the current of the Fleet was sufficient to ‘turn a mill to grind hair powder or liquorice or other things.’

Between Smithfield and the City, St. Bartholomew’s Hospital survived the Dissolution of the medieval monastery (founded in 1123) to which it had been attached. In 1546, both it and Bethlem Hospital were granted to the City Corporation, and the hospital grew in both stature and physical presence. Elsewhere, former monastic sites and their associated properties were alternately turned over to private use, or raided for their stone, while their chapels took an exclusively parochial role. Charterhouse, for example, became a private residence associated with the court before its site was given over for hospital in the early seventeenth century. St. John’s Priory was granted to Mary Tudor and subsequently used as a store before much of its stone was transported to Somerset House. The priory’s inner gate nonetheless remains, forming a focus for St. John’s Lane and Square; Dr. Jonson worked in its garret for a time. Elsewhere, a patchwork of small lanes and courts had begun to spread across the area by this date, adding a new layer of ‘capillaries’ to that provided by the existing main routes.

But larger institutions did not disappear. In addition to the Charterhouse and hospital (rebuilt by Gibbs in the early eighteenth century on palatial lines) were penitentiaries associated with the Middlesex Court of Session, housed by the sixteenth century at the middle of St John Street by St. John’s Lane, later moving to Clerkenwell Green. (The boundary between London and Middlesex came at Bowling Green Lane). In addition, post-Dissolution landowners were not necessarily resident, but often comprised corporate institutions or landed families.
Post-medieval: new uses and densification

Much post-medieval building was residential, initially at least, generally being conceived for the middle classes, though many industries were attracted to the area as a result of the Fleet, the proximity of the City, and the market. Although the Fire of London progressed no further than the junction of Pye Street and Giltspur Street, the conflagration’s repercussions meant that housing laid out along subsequent new routes such as Red Lion Street (aka. Britton Street, 1718-24) and Great Sutton Street (1680s) was of brick: examples of late seventeenth-century date survive at Charterhouse Square. The planned nature and seventeenth-eighteenth-century origins of these streets are manifested in their essentially regular grid arrangement, though they too were permeated by smaller courts and passageways, shown clearly on e.g. Ogilby’s map of 1682. Tucked in tightly behind the main streets, these courts answered the need for cheaper dwellings in close proximity to sources of work.

By the start of the nineteenth century, therefore, Farringdon comprised a patchwork of largely post-medieval routes and properties set between the surviving medieval framework of Cowcross, Turnmill, and St John Streets. Industry and services continued to permeate housing: in 1841, only seven properties in Britton Street remained exclusively residential. The pattern of local occupations was evolving and by this time included watchmaking (involving 7000 out of 21000 residents in Clerkenwell by 1797), publishing, and furniture manufacture. To the west, Hatton Garden was being developed on planned lines to a grid pattern,
becoming famous for its jewellery manufacturing, while to the north, the opening of King’s Cross and Euston stations stimulated development in Pentonville – the first British suburb with a ‘-ville’ suffix. There remained a seedy side to the area, however, with prostitution being rife in some of the small courts and yards, not least in the vicinity of Chick Lane (now subsumed by the Metropolitan Railway). Turnmill Street was known as ‘Little Hell’, while the stench of rotting fruit and vegetables from costermongers’ stalls added to the pungency of industry. Chimneysweeps often stored soot in their homes. Known as the ‘Rookeries’, the closely-packed slums that lined the Fleet valley formed the setting for Dickens’ Oliver Twist.

By the middle of the century, the population density had reached some 230 persons per acre. Victorian missionaries wrote of crowding (with, in at least one case, 25 people in a two-room house), drunkenness, theft and violence. Matters were little better on the other side of Smithfield market: Cloth Fair was the location of run-down post-Dissolution houses that were eventually cleared in the early twentieth century.
As has been noted, Farringdon had long been subjected to gradual rebuilding, with new streets which gradually rationalised its dense network of courts, yards and alleyways. We have already mentioned Britton Street; we might add Sekforde Street, which replaced a patchwork of small courts, while the Great Sutton Street area was rebuilt on the same street pattern from the 1760s. The scale of development changed, however, in the middle decades of the nineteenth century.

Farringdon had historically been focussed on the City, accommodating its overspill functions and acting as the first part of London ‘proper’ encountered by those arriving from the north. However, the coming of the railways at King’s Cross (1850) and their attendant developments promoted new connections: Farringdon’s field of vision was no longer focussed entirely on the City. New relationships were stimulated in particular by the arrival in 1863 of the Metropolitan Railway at Farringdon Street station, providing a City terminus for trains arriving from the west and north: originally there was a goods depot in addition to the passenger station. After 1865, the line was extended east to Moorgate (and, later, beyond) and south to join with the London & Chatham Railway’s terminus at Blackfriars and Snow Hill.

In this respect, Farringdon became an important railway junction, not only used by Metropolitan Railway services but also goods services that crossed London by means of the Snow Hill Tunnel (now Thameslink) or what later became the East London Line from Whitechapel to New Cross. The importance of the junction at Farringdon was perhaps hidden by the location of the railway in a cutting, the construction of which was a substantial undertaking, threatened on occasion by the Fleet River.

The engineering ingenuity that was deployed in creating the cutting is especially evident in the grade-separated crossing of the ‘widened’ mainline tracks and the Metropolitan Railway to the north of Farringdon station, an engineering tour de force as the lines cross below a further bridge carrying Clerkenwell Road. Above ground, the cutting cleared a swath through what had previously been the densely-packed land between Turnmill Street and the Fleet.

Similar in its impact was new road building. The Victorian means of dealing with slum areas was often by means of clearance and road construction, and so another layer was added to Farringdon as Holborn Viaduct (1865-9), Farringdon Road and Clerkenwell Road/Rosebery Avenue (1878) were driven through some of the worst parts of the district. Their effect is seen especially clearly at St John Square, the historic centre of the Priory now bisected by the subsequent Clerkenwell Road, or at the point where Holborn Viaduct...
crosses the Farringdon Road. The late-nineteenth century buildings that line these routes, like those that sprang up around the railway in Cowcross and Turnmill Street, are typically large in scale, contrasting, like the new roads, with the finer grain streetscape around them. (See discussion of the ‘Victorian infrastructure’ character area for images). Cleared sites were typically given over to industry, rather than residential use.

The final component of the mid-Victorian ‘layer’ of Farringdon was that of the new Smithfield Market. Just as the new roads and railways were laid over the area, the buildings and their associated roads cut a swathe through Smithfield. Horace Jones’ grand market halls (1864-8) took up much of the open ‘smooth field’, serviced by such new roads as Charterhouse Street. They were soon supplementated by the Poultry and General Markets (1873-83). The new market was intended purely for the sale of butchered meat: the sale of live animals had been banished north to Islington in 1852, and indeed as a London-based trade gradually declined in the face of technological advances which allowed chilled meat to be rapidly transported to the capital by railway. Thus the location of the new market at Smithfield directly responded to the presence of the railway, with extensive below-ground sidings diverging from the route between Farringdon and Aldersgate Street. These sidings, which remained in use until the 1960s, permitted meat to be unloaded and taken straight to the market above for sale. The two-level nature of the market is one of its most distinctive features, yet perhaps one of the least known. In the present day, the lower level is predominantly used for car parking: a partition divides the space from the railway tracks beyond, and a mezzanine level has been inserted.

The presence of the market had a key effect on neighbouring streets, with butchers, bacon-smokers and similar functions joining the publishers, gin distillery, furniture works and watchmakers that had long occupied the area.

Functions associated with the departed live-meat market, such as horse-rendering, declined. In this respect, the characteristic pattern of large institutional uses around which were clustered smaller support functions was continued. In 1903, Charles Booth wrote of Clerkenwell that ‘almost every front door in certain streets has its brass plate stating its owner’s special occupation.’ New buildings were slotted along the streets: warehouses of the 1920s and 1930s, for example, in Cowcross Street and Great Sutton Street, and substantial cold stores in Charterhouse Street. By the beginning of the twentieth century, the residential population of the area had declined dramatically, a trend which was to continue into the 1970s.
The decline and revival after 1945

Second World War bombing and rocket attacks caused particular devastation around Holborn Viaduct and Aldersgate, and, to a lesser extent, at the markets and Mount Pleasant (where the Post Office’s sorting office had replaced Coldbath Fields Prison in 1887).

But what is notable about Farringdon in the years since 1945 is the extent to which the area has not only retained its historic street layout, but also a considerable number of its historic buildings: churches, houses, and warehouse/industrial premises as a testament to its varied past. Although numerous additions have been made to the area, these buildings have generally necessitated smaller-scale interventions in the urban fabric than their Victorian predecessors. 1940s proposals to drive multi-level new roads through the area on a scale even greater than those provided in the 1860s have remained largely unexecuted, while large-scale office blocks have been largely confined to the southern fringes of the area, around Snow Hill on the borders of the City. A local group successfully campaigned for the preservation of Clerkenwell Green, which the London County Council had long proposed to expand by demolishing the buildings along its northern side.

Ordnance Survey map from 1916

A Northern Boundary Route of multistorey roads to ease traffic congestion, proposed by William Holford and Charles Holden in 1947. Route Number 11 was built along London Wall and Route 5 on Lower Thames Street similar to the proposal.

In the latter half of the twentieth century, continuity has been balanced with change. Continuity is perhaps most evident in Hatton Garden, still the home of many small-scale jewellery workshops and dealers, and around Smithfield Market, now essentially consolidated into Jones’ original buildings refurbished in the late 1990s. The Poultry Market, rebuilt in 1958 with an impressive concrete shell vault, has become relatively little-used, while proposals to demolish the General Market (at the western end of the site) have recently been rejected in favour of a ‘conservation-led’ scheme. St. Bartholomew’s Hospital, after a period of piecemeal expansion across Little Britain in Bartholomew Close, is now consolidating its activities on its original site. At first glance, it might seem that Clerkenwell has changed to a greater degree, and indeed its present appearance belies the substantial dereliction which had taken root by the end of the 1970s. The 1950s and 1960s were marked by a presumption that the area was to remain in industrial use: ‘use class’ restrictions were rigidly applied, and most new buildings of the 1950s and 1960s were for light industry and commerce. The easing of these restrictions in the 1970s, the impact of ‘clean air’ legislation, plus the decline in meat retailing/smoking and closure of the gin distillery behind Britton Street, have all promoted the recasting of Clerkenwell as a vibrant area much favoured by the design professions, the media, and the leisure/entertainment sector. Nineteenth-century warehouses and cold stores, with flexible floor-plates and low rents, have been put to imaginative new uses, while a number of new buildings have made distinguished additions to the streetscape. Transport links have already improved dramatically: the creation of Thameslink in 1990 added a valuable new route at Farringdon, serving the new office and leisure uses arriving in the area. The Thameslink upgrade and CrossRail will continue this process, fully transforming Farringdon into an important destination in its own right.
Much of the present character of Farringdon is bound up with its variety, testament to its overlaid layers of history. The Survey of London’s comments on Clerkenwell are arguably applicable to the whole area: ‘the chance juxtaposition of disparate scales and styles adds spice to main roads, side streets and set-pieces alike.’ Interesting details, such as surviving ‘Borough of Finsbury’ street signs throughout Clerkenwell, or the cattle trough at Farringdon Lane, attest to the area’s long and rich heritage.

Views are a key component of the area’s character: views towards St Paul’s from Farringdon Road and St John Street, for example, while the Barbican, Golden Lane and Finsbury towers form a constant presence to the east.

Barts
The hospital has been long established as an insular, essentially introverted institution by virtue of its function, though it presents an impressive public face to Giltspur Street and Smithfield. The site, which lay immediately outside the city wall, has accommodated the hospital since the twelfth century. The main complex of buildings was reconstructed by James Gibbs in the early eighteenth century (though the south wing was later rebuilt). Gibbs was one of the leading architects of his day and the results have particular design value. With its courtyard form, the hospital recalls collegiate/palace typology and offers evidence of eighteenth-century attitudes to charity. It has further value as a well-regarded local institution: proposals to close the hospital or reduce its functions in the 1990s met with fierce resistance.

The hospital also has interest in townscape terms. As presently accessed from Smithfield and Little Britain, there is an interesting sense of compression and release as narrow passages and small open spaces give way to the ordered classical grandeur of the main quadrangle. In some ways, the consolidation of Barts onto this site (the eventual aim being to vacate most if not all of its later buildings across Little Britain) may well increase the sense of insularity presented by the site.

City Edge
An area on the fringe of the City both in historic times (when it lay outwith the walls) and in the present. Many of its narrow streets have historic origins. They attest to their past in the way that many of their names commemorate past uses (Hosier Lane), and in the historic paving materials found on some streets (e.g. Cock Lane). Juxtaposed with this historic palette and layout is a mixture of largely twentieth-century office buildings. There is little in the way of active frontages.
Charterhouse
An introverted, insular community, historically with its own local government until joined to the Borough of Finsbury in 1899. The site of a fourteenth-century Carthusian monastery that was violently suppressed in the Dissolution, the buildings subsequently functioned as a private residence, before in the seventeenth century becoming a hospital and school. Charterhouse thus offers valuable evidence of the large institutions which once characterised much of Clerkenwell. It now houses senior male citizens and Queen Mary School of Medicine, meaning that it has an important communal role as a focus of charity and education. Though damaged in the Blitz, some medieval and sixteenth-century buildings survive with later additions: buildings of this date are rare in central London and they therefore have particular design and evidential value. Charterhouse Square and the green space at the middle of the Charterhouse site itself are important open spaces, with the burial ground below the square having evidential potential and being associated with the Plague. However, access to these open spaces is restricted, limiting the extent of their communal value. In this respect, the site functions as perhaps the last vestige of the closed, insular institutions which once characterised much of this area.

Clerkenwell (Central)
Tightly-knit, mixed-use area centring on the historic open spaces of Clerkenwell Green and St John’s Square, with a variety of building scales from houses to larger warehouse premises. The area’s layout offers important evidence of its history. In the medieval period, much of this area formed part of St Mary’s Nunnery, the chapel of which became the parish church (St James’) prior to reconstruction in c.1790. The line of Clerkenwell Close deviates sharply to the west to avoid what was the nunnery cloister. The Green itself was characterised by grand mansions in the seventeenth century but gradually declined, its buildings becoming an important centre for publishing while the open space itself developed a reputation for radical gatherings -- an important communal use partly reflected in the presence in the area until recently of The Guardian newspaper. To the north of Clerkenwell Green, Woodbridge and Sekforde streets present a planned, coherent group of housing dating from the 1820s sandwiched between the Green and the former Middlesex House of Detention, with some industrial buildings of later date. To the west, Peabody flats act as a buffer against the Victorian infrastructure of Farringdon Road and the Metropolitan Railway. Notable buildings include the former Finsbury Savings Bank at 182 Sekforde Street. On the whole, however, there are few architectural set-pieces: the design value of the area arises from the coherent scale and materials of its otherwise varied buildings. It has particular group value, and a somewhat fortuitous, unplanned beauty. Key architectural features include strong parapet lines and hidden roofs; views (protected) of St Paul’s are also important.

Clerkenwell (South)
This area becomes seperated from Clerkenwell Central by the construction of the Clerkenwell Road. However, like Clerkenwell (Central), this area comprises a tightly-knit, mixed-use area displaying significant evidence of its monastic origins as well as later redevelopments, such as the planned seventeenth century housing in Britton Street. To some extent, the character area presents a denser pattern of development than the northern part of Clerkenwell, with a network of courts and alleyways behind its streets as well as the residue of larger sites (e.g. the former distillery between Turnmill and Britton Streets). By the nineteenth century, its fringes (along the Fleet river) had degenerated and were known as notorious slums. Much of the rest of the area had an industrial character, mixing small workshops with larger factories; by the twentieth century Cowcross Street had become a key centre for the meat trade, associated with Smithfield market to the south. In the present day, buildings include a mixture of (originally) residential terraced properties in Britton Street; Cowcross Street, St John Street and Turnmill Street feature late-nineteenth and twentieth-century commercial/warehouse blocks of four-five storeys as well as smaller properties, some of which retain residential overtones. Behind, the sites of Booth's distillery and the Danish Bacon Co. have seen substantial redevelopment in recent decades, the former by architects Yorke Rosenberg Mardall as their own offices and the latter in the late 1990s for a mixed-use scheme whose open courtyard recalls the dense pedestrian network of the area in earlier times.

Hatton Garden
A Conservation Area within Camden, Hatton Garden is associated historically with Ely Palace, the site of which (now Ely Place) remains outside the jurisdiction of the London authorities. The area’s gardens are commemorated in the names of such streets as Saffron Hill and Vine Hill: by the mid-seventeenth century, these gardens had been replaced by a planned grid of housing. When writing Oliver Twist, Dickens set Fagin’s den at Saffron Hill, while Bleeding Heart Yard features in Little Dorrit. Since the mid-nineteenth century, the area has been famous for its jewellery manufacture and trade. Merchants who had once dealt in watches and glass turned their attention to diamonds and gold, not least in the wake of the discovery of South African diamonds in 1867, and were followed by diamond cutters, setters and workers. The area’s architectural character is largely drawn from its nineteenth- and twentieth-century commercial buildings, mostly of four-five storeys and many with residential units above the jewellers’ shops. To the north, a tapestry of small yards and passageways is laid over the sides of the Fleet Valley. As with Clerkenwell, the design value of the area stems from its largely fortuitous qualities, with a mixture of buildings being united by their scale and materials to form a strong piece of townscape.

Little Britain
Historically associated with St Bartholomew’s Priory, the area was acquired by Sir Richard Rich in 1546. He laid out tenements in Newbury Street, Middle Street and East Passage, a very significant example of early planned development which pre-dates Covent Garden by at least thirty years. The gridded arrangement of these streets contrasts with the more organic alignment of such medieval routes as Cloth Fair and the complex network of historic passageways. Focused on Bartholomew Close, the name and arrangement of which recognise the monastic origins of the area. The essentially introverted character of the area, with relatively impermeable blocks to Aldersgate, also offers evidence of its institutional origins. In the present day, it has a
true mix of building types, scales and ages, ranging from the medieval church of St Bartholomew-the-Great (well-known from being the oldest parish church in London and its appearance in the film *Four Weddings and a Funeral*) and houses of seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to the 1930s high-rise Gloucester House (built as a nurses’ home) and modern residential/office blocks along Aldersgate Street. Nonetheless, most buildings remain 4-5 storeys in height, and many are located on plots whose boundaries have not altered since medieval times, leading to a remarkably cohesive if fortuitous townscape. The dense network of courts and passageways around Bartholomew Close and Cloth Fair/Long Lane gives the area a somewhat ‘secret’ quality that belies its location on the edge of the City. The consolidation of St Bartholomew’s Hospital will result in a number of key sites becoming available in this area, and will remove its links with the hospital site in terms of personnel/patient movement.

Great Sutton Street area
The Great Sutton Street area was long associated with the Charterhouse. It was first laid out in the seventeenth century, and was largely rebuilt from the 1760s, though to the same grid pattern. By the early nineteenth-century, the permeation of manufacturing was gradually leading to reconstruction of residential properties as industrial premises. A vast range of trades was located here, including clothing manufacturers, leather works, and glove makers. The area remained run down until the mid-1990s, since when a change of ownership and a number of warehouse conversions have led to a substantial improvement in the area’s fortunes and appearance. Buildings are mostly four-five storeys, commercial blocks of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (resulting from the eighty-year leases which the Charterhouse granted from 1886 onwards).

Smithfield Market
Smithfield’s medieval live-animal market, held on open space, was replaced in the 1860s by Horace Jones’ market for butchery meat, serviced by extensive railway sidings beneath. Slicing through the area, Jones’ buildings and their associated roads occupied the northern half of the former open space; subsequent additions in the Poultry Market (rebuilt following a fire in the late 1950s as a seminal example of concrete vaulting) and General Market extended the site to the new Farringdon Road. Around the market, cold stores and related functions grew up in solid four-five storey buildings whose rich detailing echoes that of the market buildings. The planned, gridded layout of the market and surrounding streets is complemented by the seemingly formal space of West Smithfield, whose buildings (including the hospital frontage) form an architectural setpiece of some grandeur, but which actually is a vestige of the historic public open space. The character of this area stems not only from its buildings but also its ongoing connection with the meat trade, something that is especially clear in the early morning as traders and buyers unload and load their vans. It is notable that, like Barts, the market has essentially ‘retreated’ in recent years into Jones’ (now listed) buildings; not only is the Poultry Market under-used and the General Market closed, but had this character area been drawn thirty or forty years ago, it would have also included much of Cowcross Street in recognition of the market-related functions then located there. In the present day, many market-related buildings have been turned over to bar and nightclub uses.

Victorian infrastructure
This character area represents the incursion of Victorian rail and road networks into Farringdon, an undertaking which transformed what had been the valley of the Fleet. It offers valuable evidence of the scale and ambition of Victorian engineering and town planning. North of the station, the railway cutting presents a substantial open space, with views of St Paul’s from the Clerkenwell Road bridge. On the space’s western side, i.e. Farringdon Road, there are substantial blocks of the nineteenth century, mostly of brick plus stone details, four to six storeys in height, with a rugged ‘warehouse’ aesthetic. The eastern side, i.e. Farringdon Lane/Turnmill Street, is more mixed in scale and style, with e.g. surviving domestic-type properties in Turnmill Street co-existing with the Middlesex Sessions House and the former warehouse at the corner of Turnmill Street and Farringdon Road. With the exception of the Sessions House, the historic materials palette here is also brick. Several modern buildings in Turnmill Street have deviated from this palette with mixed results, though their scale is more successful.

Alongside the station; the eastern side of Farringdon Road is dominated by the introverted 1980s block originally known as Farringdon Court (located on the site of the former Farringdon goods station). To the south is the post-war Cardinal House tower, and here Farringdon Road, like other Victorian streets in the area e.g. Charterhouse Street, remains wider and more formal than older routes but is nonetheless more ‘enclosed’ than is the case in the area north of the station. The current station, meanwhile, replaced an earlier structure in the 1920s and was designed in the Metropolitan Railway’s ‘house style’ of the time, complimented by a small parade of shops opposite that is to demolished for the creation of the new Thameslink station entrance.

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