

**FAO Mr Stephen Howlett,
CEO Peabody Trust,
45 Westminster Bridge Road,
London,
SE1 7JB**

BY EMAIL 4 October 2011

Dear Mr Howlett,

**Re: PROPOSED DEMOLITION
Former Jewish Maternity Home 'Mother Levy's',
Underwood Road at Vallance Road, Whitechapel, London, E1**

I am informed that Peabody, as the current owners, submitted a prior notice of demolition of all buildings on site to Tower Hamlets Building Control on 19th September. This is with view to submitting a planning application for redevelopment later this month (October).

An application to List, made locally, was rejected by English Heritage in April 2010. Although Jewish Heritage UK was not consulted at the time, this is a decision with which we concur given the limited architectural interest of the purpose-built hospital buildings.

However, we consider that their historic significance to the Jewish community has not been fully appreciated and would like to propose a compromise solution.

As you may not be aware, the East End of London was the Point of Arrival for most of the estimated 100,000 Jewish refugees from persecution in the Russian Empire, Austria and Roumania before the First World War and therefore the place of origin of the vast majority of Jews living in Britain today (estimated at 267,000 according to the 2001 Census).

Given today's enormous interest in the social history and heritage of the Jewish East End (today is the 75th Anniversary of the Battle of Cable Street) from heritage groups, tourists and genealogists, we urge you to reconsider the total demolition of the buildings on Underwood Road. We would like to suggest that you instruct your architect, understood to be Angela Brady of BradyMallalieu, (the new president of the RIBA), to revisit her proposals in order to accommodate retention of the well-built cottages at Nos 22- 24 Underwood Road (with the attractive stepped gable) and their adaptation to a use compatible with your social housing project (e.g. warden's flat or even private residences to sell on the open market). We would like to see an English Heritage blue plaque affixed to the restored facade (i.e with reproduction period diamond leaded lights) of No.24, commemorating Alice Model and as a reminder of the former identity of the cottages as part of the Jewish Maternity Home.

Please refer to the following sources:

Lara V.Marks, *Model Mothers: Jewish Mothers and Maternity Provision in East London, 1870-1939* (Oxford, Clarendon Press 1994) for more information about the pioneering work in British women's health care done by the Jewish Maternity Home and its forerunner Alice Model's Sick Room Helps' Society: Susan L.Tananbaum, 'Alice Model' entry in *New Dictionary of National Biography*.

I am taking the liberty of copying this letter to a number of interested parties ahead of due public consultation on the plans which should accompany your formal planning application (ideally in November, after the end of the autumn Jewish festivals). Included amongst

them are the Mayor and Chief Planning Officer of LB Tower Hamlets. I gather that Peabody acquired the site from LB Tower Hamlets. Having perused the Council's website, I came across and read with interest the policy document *A Conservation Strategy for Tower Hamlets* (n.d. 2010?) drawn up by Chris Blandford Associates. This document scarcely acknowledges the importance of the Jewish heritage to the borough. Indeed, the Executive Summary refers to successive immigrant groups as namely Flemings, Huguenots and Bangladeshis. In fact, there are still four active purpose-built synagogues within the borough, one of which, Sandys Row, is Grade II Listed and is currently undergoing major repairs funded by an English Heritage and Heritage Lottery Fund Repair Grant.

I am compelled at this point to self-cite (!): please refer to the 'Discover the Jewish East End' section of my book *Jewish Heritage in England: An Architectural Guide* (English Heritage 2006) which features four related heritage trails in Tower Hamlets and an entry on 'Mother Levy's'. On the synagogues: Ibid *The Synagogues of Britain and Ireland: An Architectural and Social History* (Yale University Press 2011)

Please don't hesitate to be in touch to discuss the anticipated modification of your development scheme, to retain its economic viability whilst at the same time rendering it sensitive to the unique and disappearing Jewish heritage in Tower Hamlets.

We look forward to hearing from you soon.

Yours sincerely,

Sharman Kadish D.Phil (Oxon), FRHistS, FSA
Director