

# The Hammersmith Society

## Chairman's Report 2014-15

### Introduction

**Flyover to flyunder?** In 1962 residents were first woken by the thunderous roar of the Flyover and the A4 - and the Hammersmith Society was formed in response. Now Transport for London and the borough of Hammersmith and Fulham have ambitions for a Flyunder, rebuilt Hammersmith Broadway, bus stations and King St rolled into a mammoth scheme. The Flyunder – proposed by the West London Link group of architects, chaired by Tom Ryland of the Hammersmith Society - first had the germ of an underpass idea in 2008 and, with Halcrow engineers, Hammersmith BID and Council support, developed the idea to a possibility. This year's London Festival of Architecture is hosting a Question Time on the Flyunder, chaired by John Humphrys on 18 June.

**I have introduced my report with the Flyunder, Broadway and King St** idea as this promises – for better or worse - to change the face of Hammersmith beyond recognition. As if a Flyunder lined with large-scale development were not transformative enough, TfL has plans for a bus hub funded by a 32-storey Broadway. TfL is currently pursuing a Roads Taskforce looking at feasibility studies for five tunnel proposals including Hammersmith; a Better Junctions team is studying the Broadway (possibility of two-way traffic); a Cycle Superhighway team is looking at the east–west route through Hammersmith; and redevelopment of the TfL-owned Broadway site, including both bus stations, is being assessed.

### Planning and development – how we work

**The priority for the Hammersmith Society** is to assess development proposals, large and small. Our chief constitutional aim is the encouragement of 'high standards of architecture and town planning in Hammersmith'. In pursuit of a decent standard we scour the posted applications lodged with the Council and, if they are of any size, attend exhibitions and briefings from the developer, architects and Council officers, study plans and documents, request planning fora, write letters of comment and assess amended versions. We only occasionally see off an over-bearing development – they tend to go round the block and return with minor amendments – but we can send warning signals and change a scheme for the better.

**Consultation of the local community** is required of developers under the Localism Act. In practice this means that, for a proposal of any size, we are approached by a developer seeking to woo us to the merits of a development. Most planning applications, however, are small and domestic. We tap a note if they infringe conservation area guidelines or are unneighbourly. On request we lend an ear to members seeking advice on planning dilemmas, and can cut through to the Council on their behalf. This is our everyday work.

**The Society also supports and encourages residents' associations**, as well as individuals caring for the beauty, history and character of Hammersmith. Over the last couple of years members have taken more opportunities noticeably to engage with the Council, report

development offences or otherwise become custodians of their neighbourhoods. We welcome this.

## **Interacting with H&F Council**

A new Labour Council took the helm in May last year. The administration has told us all that it has obtained an **additional £50mill from developers**. If this is confirmed it begs the question: was the previous administration asleep at the wheel? Developers' bland assertions of 'commercial confidentiality' and 'viability' only served to increase their profits in the borough, and yet when asked for more cash by the Council they paid up.

We – and other residents - also welcome new opportunities to **speak at planning meetings**. We have persistently asked for this right and have taken advantage of it. On the other hand, we are still **waiting for a reassessment of the Design Review Panel**, largely composed of architects; this Society is thunderstruck at some of the DRP's opinions on development proposals. We assert there are conflicts of interest which must be resolved.

The new Policy and Accountability Committees were set up to deliver services with, and for, residents. The **Economic Regeneration, Housing and the Arts PAC** is perhaps the most relevant to the Hammersmith Society and we have attended meetings on North End Road markets, affordable housing, and new retail and pop-up ventures. The **London Festival of Architecture**, linked to this Society by Tom Ryland and Hans Haenlein, is offering a Question Time, exhibition and workshops to coincide with H&F ArtsFest in June.

The H&F Commissions similarly engage with residents to examine issues of concern. A **Commission on Heathrow** and its expansion, chaired by resident Christina Smyth and on which Melanie Whitlock represented the Society, took evidence and reported earlier this year. This report has been submitted by LBHF to the Davies Commission on airports, due soon to announce its recommendations. I and others attended sessions of evidence of the **H&F Healthcare Commission**.

Over the last year we have appreciated this welcome from the Council. Not everything will be as we wish, but all too often in the past we felt like an interloper in our own borough, to be mollified at best. A Council that values the energies and goodwill of its residents will receive value in return.

*Turning now to a principal activity of the Hammersmith Society – the examination of, and response to, policy consultations, planning applications and proposals for development – I report on the following:*

## **Policy and consultation**

With the H&F Historic Buildings Group (HBG) the Hammersmith Society scrutinises new and emerging policy on planning and development, and has been called as a witness for Examinations-in-Public (EiP), chaired by an independent inspector at the Town Hall. Local societies should contribute their knowledge and assessment otherwise developers – also giving evidence – determine policy without challenge.

Last year, despite intensive work, very few policy amendments proposed by amenity groups were adopted for the **White City Opportunity Area Planning Framework**. This year, working

with HBG and residents' associations, we submitted 31 pages (including appendices) of comments on the **Draft Local Plan**. We shall have another opportunity to comment on the Council's own draft submission and appear at the Examination-in-Public next year.

LBHF is aiming to produce a **Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) for Hammersmith town centre**.

The 2014 Labour manifesto promised to '**Consult... and work... with residents to adapt the Local Development Framework**'; we aim for a similar approach towards the Council's Draft Local Plan. Given that previous efforts to influence development policy have been largely 'dry and fruitless', as noted in my report last year, we now expect a better response.

**Turning to Old Oak and the north of the borough** the Mayor of London has established a **Mayoral Development Corporation (MDC)** to lead the transformation of Old Oak Common with hubs HS2, Crossrail and up to 24,000 homes and more than 55,000 jobs. The big players – Cargiant and Queens Park Rangers – are even now battling for territorial rights. Meanwhile, we are in touch with residents in the Friends of Wormwood Scrubs and the Grand Union Alliance. Last summer Tom Ryland led a Walking the Course morning along the canal, into the industrial estate and along Wormwood Scrubs, and we shall – for sure - be spending a great deal of time in Old Oak over the next few years.

**My personal view of HS2** is that the huge cost of a high-speed train to Birmingham would be better spent on schemes which do not destroy a large chunk of Camden and 120 woods en route. Birmingham has never found any difficulty getting to London and the over-crowded south-east (and vice versa), and development at Old Oak without HS2 – taking advantage of the excellent connections generated by Crossrail, mainline and local links – would be correspondingly regenerating but less grandiose.

**Neighbourhood Planning Workshop:** Hans Haenlein is leading a small team to offer a Neighbourhood Planning workshop to residents' associations in the borough and elsewhere.

**Assets of Community Value:** We registered the Andover pub in Wingate Road as an Asset of Community Value, the first registration in the borough. This gives it some protection against a quick sale and change of use. We intend similarly to register the Walkabout (below) in Shepherds Bush.

**Conservation Area character studies:** Last year I reported that the eleven Conservation Area profiles still outstanding in the borough were making good progress towards completion. But they are still not available. We are, however, pleased that the long-requested extension of the Bradmore Conservation Area was agreed by Cabinet last year.

## **Planning proposals**

**Small developments:** This year we responded to over sixty applications, or proposals, some prompted by members. The height of a house extension, the introduction of uPVC windows, over-large advertising or, this year, a rash of unsolicited and badly placed satellite dishes are small in the scale of discomforts, but collectively downgrade the environment for everyone. We track these applications online and it has to be said that most eventually receive permission, even though there is often discretion for refusal. Small applications are

dealt with by officers under delegated powers. Only the most significant planning applications are presented to the planning committee.

I draw your attention here to the **Council Enforcement** team. Without their policing efforts Hammersmith would be living in the wild west. Enforcement jumps in whenever an unauthorised development takes place, a front garden used as a dump for example; these and other offences can be laid at the door of Enforcement.

**Mid-scale schemes:** These may be a major refurbishment project with change of use, a housing infill, new school buildings, conservation projects and, this year, basements. If any development causes more anguish to neighbours than basements it has yet to be named. Why should not the basement developer be required to compensate neighbours financially for the dirt, noise and disruption from which they never benefit? This year the Hammersmith Society responded to over fifty mid-scale proposals. Many of these are now – or soon to be – at the construction stage.

*Residents will be acquainted with a variety of mid-scale schemes coming forward in Hammersmith and Shepherds Bush, as the following selection shows:*

**6 Avonmore Road**, Leigh Court, 1 & 2 Rowley Cottages, W14 (with Avonmore Residents Association): we objected to the proposed demolition of locally listed Buildings of Merit; not yet given permission.

**14 Wellesley Avenue**, W6 (with Brackenbury Residents Association): demolition of half-timbered house and erection of a modern house.

**271-281 King St**, W6 (with residents, Council & Opposition councillor): over-dense residential development by Linden Homes unfortunately, in our view, agreed by inspector after a three-day inquiry last July.

**Adelaide Works**, Adelaide Grove, W12 (with local member): rare 19<sup>th</sup>-century foundry which manufactured Eros. LBHF refused permission to demolish and build flats. Future still uncertain.

**Bechtel House**, 245 Hammersmith Rd, W6: demolition of offices by Legal & General; hefty rebuild to include welcome pocket park accessed via public square and funicular.

**Brook Green Pavilion**, developer Friends of Brook Green: we had reservations about stone materials and design; improvements led to our neutral position on planning application. Given permission.

**Bush Theatre**, Uxbridge Road: sympathetic extension to increase access to the theatre's studios.

**Highmaster's House**, Hammersmith Rd: Grade II; fine restoration and build by Perflag Hotels.

**Quaker Meeting House**, Bradmore Park Rd, W6 (with Brackenbury Residents Association): low-rise building to PassivHaus standards, complementary to area; our concerns about frontages addressed.

**Riverview House**, Beavor Lane, W6 (with Hammersmith Mall Residents Association): office demolition in favour of new student accommodation; revised scheme incorporated many of our amendments.

**Thames Wharf**, W6: part retention, part demolition of Rogers Stirk Harbour offices, River Café and green. New residential wings and small offices. With minor reservations a good scheme.

**Walkabout** (formerly Shepherds Bush Palladium), Shepherds Bush Green, W12: proposal by adjacent Dorsett Hotel for demolition and serviced flats rebuild; new 16-storey tower too high in Grade II and theatre/cinema heritage area. LBHF refused permission.

The Hammersmith Society works with its sister organisation, the H&F Historic Buildings Group, on most development proposals as there is nearly always an historic building or heritage setting to be considered.

**Hammersmith Park:** we support the Save Hammersmith Park residents in their bid to regain ownership by the Council of the park from PlayFootball, previously granted a thirty-five-year lease to develop a third of the site. To date PlayFootball has agreed to manage the facilities and relinquish the lease; the Council is in negotiation with Stanhope (developer of TV Centre in Wood Lane) about funding works.

**Shepherds Bush Market:** we support market traders and shop-keepers in their lengthy bid to determine their own destiny, rather than the developer, Orion, arranging it for them. Both traders and shop-keepers challenged the decision taken by the Secretary of State to allow the Compulsory Purchase Order, ruled against by the Inspector at the 2014 public inquiry.

**Thames Water** is now consulting residents on its nine construction sites for Counters Creek storm relief sewer in Hammersmith and Shepherds Bush. These threaten to destroy small, but green, areas of open land. Residents, as well as associations, should respond.

All proposals which come to planning may be seen on the Council website, with accompanying documents and plans.

**Huge schemes:** The largest of these is the **White City Opportunity Area** north of Shepherds Bush which continues its onward march with an 'indicative' benchmark of 4500 new residential units. **Westfield** received permission for its phase 2 proposals: tall housing towers beside the West Cross route, an additional floor on its existing mall and a John Lewis extension. **Imperial College** already has permission north of Westway for its Woodlands site and 35-storey tower and has received a £40mill donation from a former student for the proposed Michael Uren bio-medical building. From time to time Imperial briefs us and the St Helen's Residents Association in north Kensington on the progress of development plans north and south of Westway. We still do not know what is coming forward on the former Dairy Crest site. There will be a welcome pedestrian Latimer Rd underpass between north Kensington and White City.

The former **BBC TV Centre**, a Grade II listed building, is being developed by **Stanhope** as mixed-use housing (1025 residential), commercial, TV studios and hotel. **St James's** proposals for its land on the former M&S site east of Wood Lane include an inviting deck across the Central line, some opened TfL arches in the Hammersmith & City line viaduct and a divided White City Green. Its residential towers, high and dense, will be as tall as 28 storeys and we objected strongly to these. The St James's proposals have been given planning permission in outline and in detail.

Other large schemes include plans by **Romulus** for its Triangle site north of Lyric Square. The latest version is a mixed office and residential scheme of up to 70 metres, four metres

higher than Sovereign Court's south tower in Beadon Rd. The scheme rises sheer from pavements and would be more at home in the City than next to a residential Conservation Area. We continue to oppose it.

Possibly the biggest of all huge developments in the borough, the vaunted mini-Manhattan of Old Oak and HS2, has been noted above.

## **Dense development and environmental mitigation**

**Empty homes – and over-dense development** go hand in hand. Increasingly – and most controversially - overseas investors seek a safe and profitable home for cash. This **buy-to-leave-empty** opportunity has erupted in more boroughs than Hammersmith. At every turn we question developers' selling practices. So scandalous has overseas-owned empty property become that the Government must surely soon curb it. **Student halls of residence** are packed sites – three completed this year, a fourth on the way and a new application in Western Avenue. *These halls will be the tenements of the future.*

**Trees:** Our principle for all development is '**no net loss of trees**'. We also seek additional trees through S.106 (mitigation of development impact) payments. This is an effective way of greening the borough. The new trees in the borough have been paid for by grant aid, the Mayor's tree planting programme, sponsorship or S.106 payments. The Friends of Brook Green and Brackenbury Residents Association have been responsible for many new trees. We are pleased that new development in the Seven Stars area has given rise to new trees in Askew Road and elsewhere.

**Hammersmith and Fulham, already a dense and congested borough**, is set to become ever more dense with greater pressures on parks, facilities and infrastructure. We urge the Council to be mindful of this. *Beautiful buildings on a human scale, parks, clean air and workable transport are a better environment for residents, now and in the future, than yet more over-dense development.*

By commenting on housing – including housing for the vulnerable - transport, Heathrow expansion, amenity space, air pollution, community safety, environmental sustainability, services and facilities affected by proposed development, we include 'quality of life' in our remit as well as good architecture.

## **Planning communications with LBHF**

In 2013 I reported on the **Planning Fora** introduced by the Council for significant new development proposals. Last year we had none. Assuming that developers take on board our assessments, these fora play a useful role in opening out a proposal to public scrutiny. The new administration reintroduced a well attended planning forum for the Thames Wharf proposal in January, and in the same month a meeting between the Leader, Romulus, architects and the Hammersmith Society discussed the Triangle site proposals.

Last September Council planners hosted a **Residents' Forum** as a planning update and to brief us, as requested, on **CIL** (Community Infrastructure Levy). CIL will partially replace S.106 payments from developers and allow community groups to direct a portion of these payments. We have not yet seen this direction in operation.

## Architecture and environment

The **Environment Awards**, established in 1989 as a hallmark of integrity, are organised with style by Tom Ryland every year to acknowledge our best townscape, architecture and urban schemes, and to promote and support higher design standards. Our **Wooden Spoons** for environmental horrors are a stick we wield with serious caution.

**In 2014 the Environment Awards** were awarded to Octavia Housing PassivHaus development in Sulgrave Road (Main award); Christian Fellowship/Gate restaurant and church complex in Queen Caroline Street (Nancye Goulden award); and The Grotto in Bath Road (Conservation award). Wooden Spoons were awarded to LAMDA hoardings on Talgarth Road, tree pit surrounds and, in general, gated communities.

This year, after taking positive soundings at the 2014 AGM, we have introduced a **Special award** for schemes, including publicly accessible interiors, which are not otherwise included in categories of award.

## Communications with members

**Membership** of the Society is estimated at **over 3000 residents, including membership of thirteen affiliated residents' associations**: Ashchurch Residents Association, Brackebury Residents Association, Cathnor Park Area Action Group, Friends of Brook Green, Friends of Wormholt Park, Hammersmith Embankment Residents Association, Hammersmith Mall Residents Association, Ravenscourt Gardens Association, The Ravenscourt Society, Stamford Brook Residents Association, St Peter's Residents Association, Woodlands Area Residents and Oakbrook Lodge Management Co. Ltd.

The Hammersmith Society has 248 individual members, an increase over last year of twenty-three. Membership is the lifeblood of any society – we welcome individual members and associations.

**Email news** is circulated monthly; we are always pleased to receive updates on proposed developments or other items of local environmental interest. We continue the **paper newsletter** – from three to two editions a year (with the onset of email news) – and will produce this as a publication of record and as a service to members. We are grateful to Richard Jackson for his enthusiasm and skill as editor of the newsletter, and to Elaine Yeung for early work on renovating the website.

## Working with other groups

To enhance our scope we aim to keep lines of communication with residents' and other associations in the borough (and outside the borough) fresh and alive. Links with associations in Hammersmith – always strong with **H&F Historic Buildings Group** - extend to the **White City Neighbourhood Forum**, the **Friends of various parks**, Friends of Wormwood Scrubs, and to our association members and other groups. We are fortunate that Henry Peterson of **St Helen's Residents Association** in north Kensington has done so much to liaise with Imperial and White City across borough boundaries.

**The Archives Consultation Group**, chaired by Melanie Whitlock, monitors the welfare of Hammersmith & Fulham Archives. The Local History Collection is now housed in Hammersmith Library and accessible to the general public. The bulk of the Archives remains at the Lilla Huset, however, as the planned conversion of the Library basement for storage proved too expensive. Archival material requested by the public is accessed by the Archivist. The Consultation Group has pressed the Council for assurances that the Lilla Huset lease will be extended to ensure this arrangement. The Consultation Group will support initiatives to display the Cecil French Bequest, H&F's collection of Pre-Raphaelite drawings and paintings.

**The Hammersmith Society is a member** of the London Forum of Amenity and Civic Societies, West London River Group and Open Spaces Society. We support HACAN Clearskies, a voice for those under the Heathrow flightpath, and I attended a rally against Heathrow expansion in March. Civic Voice, the successor to the Civic Trust, keeps us well informed and in January I was invited to the launch of their Collaborative Planning manifesto at the House of Commons. From time to time committee members attend briefings, e.g., on Crossrail, by New London Architecture. Angela Clarke represents the Society with the **West London River Group**, chaired by Angela Dixon, which oversees the river from Kew to Chelsea and I have a similar role with the **Fulham Palace Community Forum**.

### **Hammersmith projects**

Richard Jackson's proposal for a statue of England's greatest landscape designer – **Capability Brown** – has stalled. The local connection is that Mr Brown was a resident of Hammersmith Mall for thirteen years. We have the site in St Paul's Garden on Hammersmith Rd, we have the funding (tbc), now we need the go-ahead from the Council. A counter-proposal for a Montgomery/Eisenhower/D-Day memorial came in this year. We have no objection to this although the Garden might become a little over-crowded.

Another new project, supported by The Hammersmith Society, has **recorded the stories and memories of two of our older residents** for posterity and local history archives. It was conducted by resident Imran Ahmed of Spoken Portrait. We hope for more memories and a grant to support the work.

### **Events**

In January Hammersmith Society members and guests toured the newly restored and magnificent Art Deco interior of the Grade II Hammersmith Apollo. We were treated to delightful renderings from the restored Compton organ rising from the floor.

### **Thanks to the committee and invitation to contribute**

I thank the members of your committee wholeheartedly for their energy, expertise, effective action and good humour. We all help assess proposed developments, the architects amongst us prompting a professional response. All contributions are of value, whether mentioned by name or not in this report. Committee members contribute to their own residents' associations or Friends' groups. Melanie Whitlock has been hugely helpful – this year as last - in responding to the White City Opportunity Area proposals. Others have



been engaged with the Society – working for the betterment of Hammersmith and its residents - for decades.

This year Julian Hillman resigned as Treasurer and I thank him especially for his ten years' service in that role. I am also pleased to thank Carlo Nero who joined the committee as an expert proponent of a cinema on the Town Hall redevelopment site; he achieved that aim, although perhaps not as much as wished. Earlier this year we welcomed co-opted members Richard Tollemache (of Hammersmith Embankment Residents Association) as our new Treasurer, and Derrick Wright, chairman of the Friends of Wormholt Park. We are always pleased to hear from members willing to contribute to the Society.

At this AGM I stand down as chairman after my three years' term of office. If elected, I will be happy to serve on the committee. I am delighted to recommend Tom Ryland, currently vice-chairman, as the new chairman. Tom brings an architectural eye to the built environment. He has been assiduous in every aspect of Society work, creative when it mattered, and professional at all times. On that note I thank you all for this honour to chair the Society – it has been interesting, stretching and, I hope, forwarding of the best interests of Hammersmith. I look forward to the next year and whatever opportunities it may bring.

*Rosemary Pettit - June 2015.* [rosemary@rosemarypettit.plus.com](mailto:rosemary@rosemarypettit.plus.com)

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