



The Hammersmith Society

Newsletter

February 2010



“Development within conservation areas...will only be permitted if the character or appearance of the conservation area is preserved or enhanced.” (UDP EN2)

GLARING ERRORS

Anyone driving around or through the centre of Hammersmith or walking from the centre to Hammersmith Bridge cannot fail to have been struck by the monumental advertising towers that have gone up by the flyover and elsewhere in Hammersmith centre. They display ultra-large, brilliantly illuminated digital advertising on a loop, changing the display every 10 seconds or so. There is a proliferation of digital advertising around Westfield as well.

It is impossible to see the newly-unveiled St Paul's Church from east or west without a glaring digital advertisement in the corner of the picture. The enjoyable swoop over the Flyover, flanked by St Paul's tower and the Ark, now has huge advertisements competing for attention. Awkward traffic manoeuvres on the Broadway are complicated by the visual distraction of the advertisements on the tower by the L'Oreal building, some of which depend on a visual gimmick which calls for a second glance – creating a serious potential traffic hazard.

“How can they have allowed it?” people keep asking. Well, the answer in the case of the adtowers by the Flyover and ones behind Marks and Spencer and next to L'Oreal, is that the land belongs to the Council and the Council gave itself planning permission.

Is this really how we want visitors to see Hammersmith? – As an area which apparently does not value itself enough to stop a rash of Las Vegas Strip–style advertising in its centre? An area that devalues its historic character and is happy to replace it with visual clutter and distraction hazards for drivers?

St Paul's Church has recently completed its restoration and is now fully visible. It dates from 1891 and stands opposite the elegant facade of Bradmore House, built in 1700. Nearby is the Apollo, a fine 1930's building (temporarily swathed in advertising shrouds). St Pauls Green was landscaped in 1998 and won the Hammersmith Society Environment Award in that year. Together they make a timeline of the townscape of Hammersmith which we can cherish and be proud of. The contribution of the new millennium is the erection of massive digital advertising displays. Is this really the way we want Hammersmith's townscape timeline to continue?

The Council has issued draft design guidance which would restrict the number of advertising towers by the flyover to no more than are already there. The draft effectively makes an excellent case against any advertising towers or hoardings by the flyover and its approaches, but at the same time says “the Council considers a number of well-designed and well-positioned towers are an acceptable form of advertising” – simultaneously arguing against the adtowers and justifying the ones it has put up.

We gave the Council a Wooden Spoon last year in our Environment awards for giving itself planning permission for the towers – and that was before the illuminated displays were put in place. We need more and stronger restrictions on advertising throughout the borough, and not just a limited restricted zone by the flyover. The rest of Hammersmith centre is at risk of advertising blight, and the scene around Westfield gives an indication of what uncontrolled digital displays result in. Illuminated advertising towers and hoardings create visual clutter, create traffic hazard and once given permission are likely to be with us forever. Now is the time to limit it, restrict it and stop it.

See www.lbhf.gov.uk/towerads . The deadline for comments (which should be sent to Barbara.woda@lbhf.gov.uk) is now 1 March: there is still time to send in your views.

Dates for your Diary

Working Together: our annual forum for residents' groups - 7.30pm on Thursday 4 March at Holy Innocents Church Lower Hall, Paddenswick Road W6.

Annual General Meeting on Thursday 27 May at the offices of Lifschutz Davidson Sandilands, our 2009 Conservation Award winner, in St Peter's Square (date to be confirmed).

IMPROVING PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT IN PLANNING DECISIONS

At the beginning of January the Council wrote to local amenity groups outlining proposals for improving the planning process and ensuring "only the best developments get approved in our borough".

The Council proposes more frequent use of **Planning Forums** – meetings where developers, planners, councillors and representatives of residents' groups can discuss the issues involved in development of a site at an early stage, before planning permission is applied for, so that potentially contentious areas can be debated before positions become entrenched; a **Design Panel** made up of architects (and we suggest, other specialists such as urban planners and conservation specialists) will scrutinise important schemes before the planning application; and **improvement to the information** on the Council's planning website to ensure people know how the planning system and process works and what the material considerations are which affect planning decisions. To these proposals – some of which the Society has been pressing for for some time – we have added drawing up planning briefs in consultation with local residents, in particular for sites the Council itself owns and wishes to see developed.

These are positive proposals, and we await further details with interest. However, the emphasis on pre-application debate and discussion should not be seen as in any way implying there is less legitimacy to objection at the stage of the planning application itself, especially over large or potentially contentious sites. It is only at this stage that the fully detailed architectural and engineering plans come into the public realm, which may give rise to well-founded objections that could not have been made earlier.

21 YEARS OF THE HAMMERSMITH SOCIETY ENVIRONMENT AWARD

This year will mark the 21st birthday of our Environment Awards, a project we are very proud of. The 2008 winner, Maggie's Centre at Charing Cross Hospital, was subsequently honoured with the 2009 Stirling Prize for RIBA Building of the Year. A full list of award winners can be found on our website.

You will get a nomination form in April. In the meantime look out for a new building or urban design project which you consider should be nominated.

LATEST NEWS

Local Development Framework

The process of formulating the Local Development Framework (LDF to its friends) continues. We explained in our last Newsletter that the LDF and its superior document in the hierarchy, the London Plan, are important because they set the statutory framework for land use, infrastructure planning and transport. In January the Hammersmith Society submitted detailed comments on the latest draft, the “Generic Development Management Policy Options” document. Too many essential details such as amenity space, space standards for housing, and guidance on building in conservation areas were being relegated to non-statutory “supplementary planning documents”, leaving the final LDF with fewer teeth than its predecessor. We are pressing for specific references to inclusion of large areas of open space – parks of sufficient size for informal ball games and energetic exercise - to be included in planning briefs for major redevelopments such as the White City Opportunity Area and potential developments at Earls Court/West Kensington.

Tall buildings

Mayor Boris Johnson was elected on a pledge to limit the tall buildings encouraged by his predecessor. The present draft London Plan, however, is much less clear on restricting tall buildings, and there is a widespread feeling that the development industry has leant on the GLA to prevent restrictive language in the London Plan.

We – together with many other London amenity groups - have consistently urged that tall buildings should be not merely restricted outside designated areas, but actively discouraged apart from a very few strictly limited areas such as the City and Canary Wharf. There should be a presumption against tall buildings along the riverside upstream of the central commercial areas, or where they intrude on smaller scale riverscapes. Tall buildings affect areas a long way from their immediate footprint, and affect riverside views from a long distance.

The LDF currently being drafted envisages tall buildings in Hammersmith being limited to parts of the White City Opportunity Area (ie north of Westfield and east of Wood Lane) and the central parts of Hammersmith Town Centre “where there is an existing concentration of tall buildings”. We consider it essential that existing heights should be used as a limit. The borough as yet has no ultra-tall buildings and it should not do so. However, proposals are almost certain to come forward for such buildings, as they have in Ealing, and the LDF should have policies in place to make clear that such buildings are not part of the development plan for the borough.

However, there is cause for satisfaction in that a recent public enquiry about the Ealing “Arcadia” tower ruled against a 25 storey tower in the heart of Ealing, over Ealing Broadway station, citing impact on nearby listed buildings and the adjacent conservation areas among the reasons for refusal.

St Paul's Church – Welcome Back

The increasingly faded image of the church printed on shrouds (with advertising for Apple and others) was removed and the scaffolding came down at last from St Paul's Church at the end of last year, after five years of restoration works, and the "real" church rejoined us as part of the familiar and cherished local scene. The sandstone has been cleaned and an enormous amount of less visible painstaking repointing and repair to stonework has gone on. Work is continuing at the west end of the church to build new space for meetings etc, to a design which is a considerable improvement on original proposals, thanks to input from the Hammersmith Society and the Historic Buildings Group.

Hammersmith Park Garden Festival

We are approaching the centenary of the 1910 Japanese-British Exhibition held in White City. To mark the anniversary there will be a Japanese Garden Festival held on Sunday May 23 in Hammersmith Park. There will be an exhibition of Japanese culture ranging from drummers, dancers, food and a variety of crafts. Perhaps even more importantly, it is planned that by then further work will have been undertaken in renovating the Japanese Garden and creating extra facilities in the Park. Much effort is being put into the project by the Friends of Hammersmith Park and the Japanese community in London. Do take a look as May approaches. Hammersmith Park must have one of the most misleading and unhelpful names in the borough: you will find it behind the BBC, access from Frithville Gardens and South Africa Road.

282 Goldhawk Road W12

Controversy continues to surround the Council's chosen development scheme for this prominent site in the Ravenscourt and Starch Green Conservation Area. The high-density design, intrusive footprint and hard landscaping of "Ashchurch Place" are entirely alien to this location, while the size and quirky layouts of the units, together with the predominant tenure option of shared ownership, will do little to address the Borough's housing need for family homes.

Given the strength of local objections, the Ashchurch Residents' Association (ARA) was surprised to see the original plans suddenly appearing, virtually unaltered, on the December agenda of the Council's planning applications committee. Residents were angered to find that officers had circulated a report recommending acceptance several days before the end of the consultation period. And while numerous assertions in this report seemed economical with the truth, further details of the plans did emerge during the course of the evening, revealing many aspects of the scheme as even more unacceptable than residents had been given to understand. Compared to 'caves' by one planning expert, several of the single aspect dwellings, for example, were north facing. Some units would closely overlook their neighbours; others would restrict sunlight from existing flats and houses.

Meanwhile the Council is continuing to block Freedom of Information requests that seek to establish when and why tree preservation orders were removed from some of the outstanding mature trees still on the site. The ARA has made a formal complaint to the Information Commissioner, and has now made a formal application to the Secretary of State for a 'call-in' on the application. The Hammersmith Society supports this, not least because the outcome here will have implications for other conservation areas across the Borough.

Friends of Ravenscourt Park

This voluntary independent local user group represents the interests of Park users in consultation with the Borough and other bodies. Issues raised with Park officers so far include: repairing the Teahouse clock; drainage problems and subsidence in the main field and elsewhere; dredging the lake; planting strategy and tree maintenance; resurfacing the joggers' path; and asking for the new flagpole to be moved to a more appropriate location inside the King Street gates. Anyone who would like to have a say or wishes to comment on the Council's management plan is welcome to join the Friends. Please contact the membership secretary John Bellringer, via email at info@friendsofravenscourtpark.org or visit www.friendsofravenscourtpark.org. Alternatively the Council's liaison officer for the Friends, Paul Bassi, can be contacted on 8753 2599.

Goldhawk Industrial Estate

Local residents have been successful in getting the application to develop this site between Dalling Road and Goldhawk Road "called in" by the Secretary of State, so that the planning permission granted by the Council in the autumn is on hold until the result of a public enquiry to be held in early summer. Residents have hired a barrister to present their case, based on loss of employment, and traffic, design, and amenity space issues among others.

Future of Palingswick House

Palingswick House is a notable Victorian building opposite the southern end of Ravenscourt Park on the corner of Weltje Road and King Street Given to the borough by the London Residuary Body in 1983, it has been in community use throughout its existence, and is used by a wide range of voluntary groups offering a diversity of services to their users, including immigration and advice services, English language classes and health support, holidays to underprivileged families and older people in the borough, and the Kurdish museum. The Council has given notice that it is considering selling it. If that proposal goes ahead, then it will be essential to ensure good provision for voluntary groups in the centre of Hammersmith, where access is manageable. There should be no suggestion of offering "replacement" provision at a distant location in the borough where transport and access will limit the numbers using these excellent resources, or dispersing the groups and therefore losing the centre's strength as a "hub" for its specialist services.

Local groups may find it useful to note that Palingswick House has meeting rooms available: go to www.cavsa.org.uk/infrastructure_premises .

Palingswick House started life as Marlesford Lodge, built in 1883 by Kensington & Chelsea Poor Law district as a school for some 130 children from union workhouses. It was used both as a "short stay" school for children in temporary care (because some parents relied on poor law institutions for short-term, intermittent care for their children at times of hardship) and for who were too young or too sickly to go to the district's school at Banstead. It was regarded as a model for other institutions as it enabled children to be removed quickly from the workhouse: any child admitted to the workhouse before 2 pm

was washed and dispatched to Marlesford Lodge the same afternoon. It continued into the 20th century as a children's home, a special school and a remand centre.

Cleverbins

Even more advertising could be appearing in our streets, as the Council plans to introduce new litterbins to parts of the borough: look out for a pilot scheme of "Cleverbins" around Hammersmith Centre. They are similar to the existing square black bins but have solar-powered panels to contain illuminated advertisements on three sides. If you miss them, you can see what they look like on the website: (www.cleverbins.co.uk). An alternative being considered is the plastic bag on a metal hoop as seen in railway stations. These will be trialled along Wood Lane. It is not clear why new bins are needed, particularly at this time of financial cut-backs – there is a good model in operation in the standard black covered bin seen in most parts of the borough. And it means yet more advertising to add to the towers, the digital displays round the Broadway and Westfield, and the Council's banners on King Street and Shepherd's Bush Green. Let us and LBHF Residents' Services know your opinion when you have seen the new bins.

Shepherd's Bush Common

Approval was given in November for renewal and renovation works on Shepherd's Bush Common, to a scheme drawn up by landscape consultants Whitelaw Turkington. Consultation on this issue has been long and contentious. Money for the project was part of the planning permission for the Westfield shopping centre, and it will be wasted if the works do not go ahead. And few people would not agree that the Common looks tired and shabby and bears the imprint of various, often contradictory, initiatives and makeovers from the last twenty years.

Argument centred on loss of mature trees as a result of new layouts for the walkways; a cafe on the northwest side of the Common; removal of any play provision for teenagers; the mounds proposed for the open areas; and the landscaping around the war memorial.

Although not everyone will be happy with the final scheme, (in particular, we deplore the removal of the multi-use games area for teenagers – teenagers are always expected to go "somewhere else", that somewhere being conveniently unspecified), we feel that it has the potential to make the Common a truly attractive green heart for Shepherd's Bush. Fewer trees than originally planned will go, and new London planes will be planted to make a double avenue of trees round the Common; there will be a cafe next to a new children's play area; the mounds have been reduced in height; and the opening up of the War Memorial site at the east end will enhance the view of the Common from outside and make it seem larger from within. Unfortunately the shabby area over the Ginglyk club will not be included in the works due to a disagreement between the Council and the owners of the club over responsibility for strengthening the Ginglyk roof. The scheme still requires further approvals because it involves Common Land, so there may be some time to wait before works start.

Shepherd's Bush Odeon

Planning permission was given last month for a 242 room hotel in the former Shepherd's Bush Odeon, the monumental 1930s building on the west side of Shepherd's Bush Green. Permission has been given previously for hotel use, and come to nothing, so it is to be hoped this proposal will be realised. The building (which was first a cinema when it opened in 1923 and latterly a bingo hall before it closed in 2001) is, from a distance, a vast looming presence on Shepherd's Bush Green; closer up it is a stupendous piece of architecture inspired by the great Roman baths – well worth making a detour to look at properly. It was designed by Frank Verity and is Listed Grade II.

Olympia Aparthotel Result

The call-in and public enquiry over planning permission given for a part 7, part 9, part 10 storey building to accommodate a 259-unit aparthotel next to Olympia exhibition halls in Hammersmith Road resulted in the inspector upholding the planning permission, in a decision issued in December. The development was virtually unanimously opposed by local residents and their case was ably co-ordinated and represented by David Morton of the Avonmore Action Group. The planned building is too large for the site, its aluminium cladding is unsympathetic to its surroundings and its use is likely to generate significantly more traffic. A disappointing decision because, as so often, a building on a less vast scale, of truly excellent and innovative modern design, would have been welcomed.

Mall Area Open Space: pedestrians and cyclists

The Highways department has proposed “improvements” to the Thames Path where it crosses Upper Mall Open Space, by making a more direct cycle path and removing steps, which would have the effect of making cycling easier and therefore faster. The riverside walk, where it runs next to the river, is a footpath, and pedestrians have priority. As cycling increases in popularity, there is more stress at locations where cyclists and pedestrians share confined spaces. Transport for London are planning to create a cycle route on the pavement alongside the A4, which should take some of the fast commuter cyclists way from the Riverside walk/Thames Path. In the meantime the newly formed HAMRA (Hammersmith Mall Residents' Association) has been seeking to have a dialogue with the Highways department and introduce its own lower-cost suggestions for Upper Mall Open Space which, while accepting cycle use, would not actively encourage a faster cycle route.

Subscriptions Due Now

Subscription rates are: £15 for organizations, £6 for families/ couples, £5 for individuals, £3 concessions. Make cheques payable to The Hammersmith Society and send to Julian Hillman, 19 Flanchford Road, London, W12 9ND. **Thank you to those who pay by standing order as this makes our Hon Treasurer's job so much easier. A standing order form can be found on our website, www.hammersmithsociety.org.uk.**

Contact the Hammersmith Society

Emailing or write to Melanie Whitlock, 38 Ashchurch Grove, London W12 9BU, whitlockmelanie@hotmail.com or Annabelle May, 35 Ashchurch Grove London W12 9BU, annabellemay@lineone.net . In order to receive email updates from us about local planning issues and public meetings, send your email address to the Secretary at annabellemay@lineone.net