



The Hammersmith Society

Newsletter September 2011



KEEP HAMMERSMITH'S RIVERSIDE SPECIAL

The Town Hall redevelopment is back on the agenda, as is the 744-apartment development by St George at Fulham Reach, just downriver of the Riverside Studios. The combined impact of both schemes would change Hammersmith's historic, low rise riverside irrevocably and for generations, with overly high buildings crowding the river and dwarfing Furnivall Gardens and the listed buildings around Hammersmith Mall and beyond.

The revised scheme

Revisions to the redevelopment scheme, submitted last month, include the reduction in height of the south tower to ten storeys, a slight easing away of the bridge ramping from the Town Hall as it goes over the A4, the bridge crossing the A4 at a slight angle to land a little further east of listed Sussex House, and 8150sq m of Council offices rather than 10,000. Other amendments include a reduction in the number of luxury flats from 320 to 290, amphitheatre-style seating alongside the ceremonial steps at the front of the Town Hall, semi-recessed balcony details to the blocks either side of the square, and four townhouses in Cromwell Avenue. For more details see the developers' website, www.kingstreetregeneration.co.uk.

The scheme is still far too tall and dense and will overwhelm the Grade II 1930s Town Hall and will be shockingly out of scale (especially the 15-storey north tower) with neighbouring buildings and the residential pattern of local streets. It threatens views into and out of conservation areas and from the Thames. It demolishes Hammersmith's only cinema with its 170,000 annual footfall and demolishes Pocklington flats for the blind and low-paid (with no replacement). It would cover some 25% of

Furnivall Gardens with access ramps up to 5m high, obscuring the Town Hall façade. And it incorporates an unnecessary 2000sqm supermarket which will undermine King Street retailers. As well as demolishing the Cinema it proposes to knock down another local building of merit, Cromwell Mansions. In keeping with the overwhelming vote at our AGM in June we will continue to oppose this scheme and work for a better redevelopment of the site, and we are contributing £500 towards the costs of planning consultants who are advising local groups which oppose the scheme.

*The deadline for objections is 30 September. This is likely to be the last opportunity for public comment. If you objected before, please re-send your letter or email to susie.saraiva@lbhf.gov.uk quoting reference number 2010/03465/FUL, changing the date and saying that the changes do not address your objections, which still stand. Ensure you include your name and address. This is still an overbearing, inappropriate development which is simply not of sufficient quality for its location near the river and listed buildings. It is essential the Council receives as many objections as possible :if you have not emailed/written before, go to www.saveourskyline.co.uk for advice on how to object, where you will also find information about their **public meeting on Tuesday 27 September at 7.00pm at the Rivercourt Methodist Church, King Street W6 9JT.***

Fulham Reach: many of the same objections apply to the major development at Fulham Reach, just downriver from Riverside Studios. There is general agreement that the site needs development, but this extremely dense scheme, which offers buildings all but identical to the schemes by the same developer (St George) on the river at Wandsworth and Vauxhall, is simply not as good as the site deserves. The first Planning Application Committee which met to approve it on 14 September broke up in disarray when moved into the Town Hall's Assembly Hall to accommodate objectors but had no working microphones. It is likely to be finally rubber-stamped on 23 September, as we go to press. See www.saveourriverfront.co.uk for an update.

WHAT IS GOING WRONG?

The applications have received near universal, vehement and articulate opposition from the community and in the case of the Town Hall, from the major national heritage groups, but the proposals have been consistently supported by the Council. This pattern of community opposition and Council approval has been repeated for virtually every major development application over the recent years.

Community dialogue: The community opposes not the principle of development, but the quality of the developments. Whilst community objections painstakingly identify where the application design fails to take account of the quality standards of the LBHF and the London Plan, the officer's reports refer to the same standards and then confirm that the application scheme is compliant. They can't both be right. The officers' reports usually offer no specific answers to the issues raised by the community.

Creative planning: Discovery of the urban potential of development requires a creative approach to urban planning. Urban creativity will not be found in the developer's proposals - the developer's default brief is limited to profitability and the minimum commitment required to win planning consent. The local authority should not wait for developer's proposals, but should take the lead in identifying the creative potential of the site and the site context. Creative urban design addresses the explorative stage of planning: it is dynamic and fluid, the priorities being creativity, identifying the opportunities, spotting the synergies and seeing beyond the site boundaries.

Town Hall inspiration: The local authority maintains the planning big picture and is in a position to nurture the creative opportunities that lie ahead. The local authority can steer development designs to realise these opportunities. The quality standards of the UDP, Core Strategy and London Plan are set out in general terms to give authority for this process; they provide a platform for the local authority's handling of developments to realise their potential, and for its motivation of the development team to provide original, high quality design – releasing the design team from the developer's shackles.

Missed opportunities: The mediocrity of major schemes recently approved or currently under consideration by the borough demonstrates that creative thinking is not taking place. Compliance and legislative obligation are the only criteria evident in the LBHF planning assessments. The recently appointed Design Review Panel gives brief consideration to completed application designs, fulfilling part of the compliance review but playing no part in the creative thinking we need.

There are alternatives: dynamic planning and creative solutions **are** there to be found for even the most challenging urban sites. This was demonstrated by a group of public-spirited West London architects who worked up alternative schemes for the Town Hall site, extracts of which will be available to view on the Save our Skyline website after the end of September.

The above is adapted from an article by Richard Winterton for the Brackenbury Residents' Association

HAMMERSMITH INFORMATION CENTRE TO CLOSE

The Information Centre on Hammersmith Broadway will close its doors in January, as the Council is terminating the funding of its service charges and utilities. The Centre, which has no staff costs, was a "Section 106" contribution (i.e. community gain) negotiated from the redevelopment of Hammersmith Broadway in the 1990s and due to run till 2014. It is run by volunteers organised by Hammersmith Community Trust and is a treasure trove of information about resources, services, air quality, urbanism and the arts in Hammersmith and more widely across London. It has also provided meeting space and display space for community and school projects, including, among many others, the pictorial displays from the London Festival of Architecture and last year's Love Your Street projects.

Louanne Tranchell and her colleagues made it a truly valuable resource and Hammersmith owes them a vote of thanks. *The Centre is located on the west side of the Broadway "island", and accessed from the open space behind Bradmore House.*

LOCALISM BILL AND THE NATIONAL PLANNING FRAMEWORK

Local civic and amenity societies are having to cope with the welter of planning legislation coming from central government. Not only have we had to participate in the Core Strategy process (see separate report), but we now have to assess the implications of two very significant new strategies, the Localism Bill and the National Planning Framework.

Development is a necessary part of creating a living community – but in London civic groups spend much time and effort trying to achieve *appropriate* development, rather than the maximum possible development. The Government seems to forget planning policies should be comprehensive to be effective and that they are meant to be used by professionals and knowledgeable community

representatives. 'Simplification' can be overdone, and the terminology of the present regulations and guidance had become understood by those who needed to be involved.

The summary below of the National Planning Policy Framework is provided by Civic Voice, which with organisations such as the National Trust and the Council for the Protection of Rural England has expressed strong criticism of the proposals.

Not only have over one thousand pages of existing guidance been reduced to 52 but important and controversial changes have been made. In a nutshell:

- *The default answer to development is to be “yes”*
- *Planning policy is to be “pro growth”*
- *Local and neighbourhood plans can provide for more but not less development*
- *The focus of new housing is no longer to be on re-using urban land and local authorities have to provide 5 years of land plus an extra 20%*
- *Town centres should be the preferred location for retail development but the policy has been weakened for offices*
- *There is to be strong protection for designated sites, such as Green Belts and AONBs, but not for the local environment*
- *Good quality design and the importance of the historic environment are stressed but against the backdrop of planning for growth.*

The **Localism Bill**, now going through the Lords, is designed explicitly to enable growth and development. It is aimed at rural and suburban communities where there may be potential for more development, and there is a consensus that it will sit very uneasily in London where overdevelopment is a more frequent problem and where “neighbourhoods” may span two or more borough boundaries.

It offers a process for setting up Neighbourhood Forums which could in turn develop Neighbourhood Plans. Such plans could identify sites for redevelopment and ideas for such sites; identify improvements to parks and streets or town centres; state local needs (schools, surgeries); or conduct conservation area assessments.

21 people are needed to start the process, and it needs to be noted that business groups, not just residents, could lead a neighbourhood plan process, and their priorities could be quite different to those of residents. A plan would be subject to a complex – and expensive - process of local referendum and public inquiry. Neighbourhood Plans might be relevant to any part of Hammersmith where change could be envisaged in the future. But clearly it would be very relevant to the areas of major new development, the White City Opportunity Area and Earls Court/West Kensington.

We will be holding a Hammersmith Society “Working Together” forum for local groups on the Localism Bill and National Planning Framework later in November. Please get in touch if interested.

FUTURE OF THE ARCHIVES

The uncertainty over the future of the borough Archives and Local History Centre was highlighted in our March newsletter. We are glad to report that a dedicated band of volunteers has come together to assist in the opening two days a month, with a professional archivist from London Metropolitan Archives (LMA). This arrangement can only continue in its present form

until next March, as after that LMA will have to reassess its charging arrangements. So are we assured of local access to the archives after March 2012?

Far from it. One possibility is for Hammersmith and Fulham Archives to move in their entirety to LMA's premises in the City of London. As well as being extremely costly for the borough, this would mean a time-consuming and expensive journey for local residents who wish to investigate family, house or local history or conduct professional research. Other possibilities are to see if the Tri-Borough working agreement on libraries will include archives – but not necessarily in our borough; and to investigate sources of grant funding which mean the Archives could stay in their present premises, with part-time opening, until the lease expires. If the collection was moved, there would need to be careful investigation of the terms under which donations and bequests were left to the borough. A move would also put into question the future location of the Archives' holdings of William de Morgan and other pottery and objects, and the borough's own collection of pre-Raphaelite paintings, the Cecil French Bequest, some of which are on display at Leighton House.

The Society is pressing the Council to publish the costs of the various alternatives and to carry out a public consultation on the future of the Archives, so that all the users have a full opportunity to say how they would like to see the future of the Archives develop, and to offer ideas for their wider use, eg in education. The Archives and Local History collections represent the borough's collective memory: they are part of our municipal commonwealth. Let's try our best to keep them in Hammersmith.

CORE STRATEGY

Hammersmith society representatives attended the whole of the Examination in Public of the Core Strategy, which sets the parameters for development in the borough for the next 20 years. It will be adopted at a Council meeting in October. The consultative process resulted in more references in the document to the historic environment, and the Inspector ruled against taking away Metropolitan Open Land status from Linford Christie Stadium on Wormwood Scrubs and also ruled that in the Town Hall redevelopment, "any loss of specialist housing for the disabled must be replaced on an equivalent basis in the locality as part of any comprehensive scheme," a vindication for the partially-sighted occupants of the Pocklington housing.

However, we are concerned that the CS does not sufficiently emphasise the importance of historic heritage. The major regeneration areas (White City Opportunity area and Earls Court/West Kensington) have conservation areas in or around them, and the CS should contain specific references to heritage-led regeneration. English Heritage agreed with us and the Historic Buildings Group that the Tall Buildings policy was not satisfactory, and we sought to have a reference included to the English Heritage/CABE Guidance on Tall Buildings, which the Council declined to include. We are concerned that the rush for "regeneration" is taking precedence over the significance of the historic environment. We are very lucky in our borough to have a rich historic environment, in particular the historic riverside. But it is safe only insofar as it is protected, and we look to the Council to be proactive in the documents which will follow on from the CS to ensure the special quality of our historic environment is preserved and enhanced.

MORE PUBLIC LAND AND BUILDINGS TO BE SOLD

The Council's Cabinet minutes in July reveal that Residents' and Children's Services have been asked to identify further land and buildings seen as 'surplus to requirements'. The report focuses on 'tied accommodation' properties in or close to parks, cemeteries and school grounds. Such housing is often occupied by current or former council employees and their families. 10 properties were found, six of which were identified for sale in the open market. The occupants of four have already been warned that they will be served with notices to quit. We do not know what properties these are, or where they are located as it is not recorded in the public papers.

Apart from the impact on the individuals and families concerned, what concerns the Hammersmith Society and other amenity groups is the continuing erosion of our public open spaces and the irretrievable loss of what can be historic buildings.

The Cabinet papers spell out that separating such properties from their settings means creating 'separate planning units' with boundary walls and gates. This has implications for public open space where private rights of way could be driven through through parks, cemeteries or school grounds, for new owners to have access and amenity space. In one part of the borough this has already happened, where Avonmore Youth Club has been designated for sale.

The Council only needs to give two weeks' notice for two consecutive weeks in a local newspaper before going ahead with such sell-offs. Some notices, referring to a leasehold deal in Hammersmith Park and a land swap in Wormholt Park, have already appeared, tucked away in the back pages of the Chronicle freesheet. We have been warned, and should be vigilant.

The Friends of Ravenscourt Park, with its two Grade II listed buildings, already have concerns about the Council's future plans and will be discussing these and other issues at their AGM on November 2, at 7pm in Hammersmith Town Hall.

SHEPHERDS BUSH MARKET

The astrologer, Russell Grant, is one of the more unexpected supporters of the shop-keepers at 30-52 Goldhawk Road. From a baby Mr Grant was fed pie, mash and eels at Cooke's restaurant by his grandmother Lily, who owned the fish and chip shop just off Askew Road. Cooke's is a landmark on the Goldhawk Road and one of the shops which will be demolished under the Council's plans to redevelop Shepherds Bush market.

The planning application by Orion for the market site has recently been posted on the Council's website; see 2011/02930/OUT for outline permission to demolish existing buildings and build 212 residential units of flats and mews houses, 6000sq m or retail/market space, plus food and drink outlets, basement parking and amenities. On the other side of the line see the Facebook site at "Save 30-52 Goldhawk Road from demolition": with 1233 members it gives an insight into the value of the shops to fashion students, for example.

Meanwhile the shop-keepers at 30-52 Goldhawk Road – including family-owned fabric shops for which Goldhawk Road is famous – have clubbed together to take legal action, and they have now been granted a judicial review of the Supplementary Planning Document. But even Russell Grant cannot predict exactly when this will be heard.

WHITE CITY OPPORTUNITY AREA: 34-STOREY TOWER ON WOOD LANE

We submitted comments on the White City Opportunity Area Framework published in April, which covers the area between the rear of Westfield and Westway, but does not at this stage include the White City Estate. At present it is largely warehouse use. The major landowners are keen to redevelop with a mix of housing and office - up to 6,000 new dwellings. Aspects of the Masterplan are positive: a park is included, if the landowners can agree on sharing costs; but we are particularly concerned about the density and height. A general increase in height of 6-9 storeys is planned for the area, punctuated by taller buildings (12-15) storeys and then a cluster of very tall buildings up to 30 storeys, envisaged here as a “gateway” - but where to? In an area which at present is characterised by open skies and low buildings, the motivation seems to be to bring the height and development density of Paddington Basin, 2 miles further into London, out to Hammersmith and Shepherds Bush. There is now a proposal in for a **34 storey tower** on Imperial College’s site on Wood Lane. Can we ask our local political leaders to pause for a moment to reflect on the impact on those living in the Eynham Road area of the borough and on the residents in neighbouring West Kensington? On the views from Wormwood Scrubs, Ravenscourt Park and the river? To read English Heritage/CABE’s Guidance on Tall Buildings? To ask whether we want the “Chicagoisation” of the north of our borough?

AND ALSO...

The Hammersmith Society gave evidence at the Public Inquiry into improvement works for **Shepherds Bush Common**. We broadly supported the Council’s plans for tree planting and relocation and relaying of paths and had no objection to the planned cafe but regretted the removal of a proposed multi-use games area which would have offered much-needed ball-game space for teenagers. The Inspector ruled in favour of the works with the exception of the cafe. We have been anxious for the renovation works to go ahead as soon as possible, but the need to keep streets clear for the Olympics apparently means that works will not begin until late 2012.

We have been invited to meet the architects and landscape consultants for **Westfield’s** planned northwards expansion and have made our point that very tall buildings are not appropriate here and that the opportunity should be taken to improve the landscaping around Shepherds Bush tube stations and Wood Lane. We were invited also to see the proposals for the rebuilding of the **Haymarket Publishing** offices on Hammersmith Road. A revised scheme for the **Hammersmith Palais** site may soon be submitted. While still overly large for its location it looks to have some improvement of architectural detail. The over-large and inappropriate development for **Queen’s Wharf**, immediately downriver of Hammersmith Bridge, has been rejected by the Council, in a welcome reflection of the general opposition to the scheme.

50TH ANNIVERSARY NEXT YEAR

The Society celebrates its 50th birthday in 2012. Do you have any old photographs or memorabilia which show the changes Hammersmith has undergone since the 1960s? And any ideas for celebrating this anniversary? Planning of various events is now under way - do let us know if you would like to contribute your ideas. **Contact the Hammersmith Society via Annabelle May, Secretary 35 Ashchurch Grove, London W12 9BU, or secretary@hammersmithsociety.org.uk .**

ENVIRONMENT AWARD 2011

The Society's AGM, held at last year's Environment Award winner, Burlington Dane's Academy, was extremely well-attended, and was the occasion for announcing this year's awards. Introducing the awards, Society Vice-Chairman Tom Ryland noted the fact that there had been fewer new buildings to choose from this year, because of the economic downturn.

To its great disappointment, the Committee decided that this year no building or project met a high



enough standard for the main Environment Award. High standards of design have the power to transform places, which is why it is so important for developers and planners to foster creative urban design. The **Nancye Goulden award for a smaller scheme went to the Phoenix School Caretaker's House** (left) (rebuilt as part of the Sixth Form project) by Bond Bryan Architects. The committee praised its understated elegance and calm modern design.

The Society's Conservation Award went to 20 St Peter's Square (below) – Completion of the Square by the demolition of a later Victorian house, replacement by two of the three missing facades



to make up the triple villas, by Warren Smith Architects. The Committee were enthusiastic about the elegant recreation of the terrace, based on detailed research to the original 1830s design.

The society also awards its famous **Wooden Spoons** to those responsible for eyesores in the Borough. This year they went to: **Latymer School** – New Science and Library building, especially seen from Rivercourt Road: although probably an excellent building for the school, in the

view of the Committee it presents a bleak and un-neighbourly facade to Rivercourt Road and the design should have done more to engage with the outer world; **Ladybird Nursery**, Ravenscourt Park – cutting down apparently healthy tree and construction of structures including a pink pavilion adjacent to the Park, in a conservation area without planning approvals; **Night-time lighting** of Trussley Drycleaners shop in Hammersmith Grove (in the terrace opposite Trussley Road) – excessive and gaudy lighting causing light pollution; **New housing development incorporating Sainsbury Local Store in Askew Road** – the design of the block as a whole and its disappointing paint colour were felt to be a missed opportunity to improve Askew Road.
