

The Hammersmith Society



56th Annual General Meeting

ANNUAL REPORT 2017-18

The Society has had another very busy year. The Committee has met 9 times and engaged in meetings with developers and planners on specific issues. Two paper newsletters have been circulated, plus regular email news updates. If you are not receiving email updates and would like to, please send your email address to our Membership Secretary, Richard Farthing, at membership@hammersmithsociety.org.uk

As always, we have had to dedicate time both to strategic matters affecting the Borough and to individual planning proposals. Here is a summary of some of the most significant issues we have been involved with. More detail can be found in our email newsletters and the website.

Town Hall Redevelopment: There has been wide public support for the Town Hall proposals: the removal of the 1970s Town Hall Extension, construction of new housing, the new open space in front of the Town Hall, and a new cinema. We hope the scheme overall will be in a position to proceed in the coming months. A planning application was submitted in May for the scheme which was consulted on and shown at exhibitions in November, February and April. The application process includes reference to Historic England, who we understand are supportive of the scheme in principle and are currently discussing aspects of the application design.

Heathrow Third Runway: on 5 June the Government published a document giving outline planning permission for a Third Runway and announced it would hold a Parliamentary vote which will have taken place by the time of our AGM. Promoters claim the new runway could be operational by 2025 but this seems fanciful given the challenges of tunnelling under the M25 and meeting pollution and noise conditions and legal challenges. The Society has supported the Heathrow Third Runway case that in our borough we will reap few benefits (some extra employment – but we are a high-employment area – and more, but more expensive, flights) vastly outweighed by new flightpaths over Hammersmith, congestion on public transport caused by the huge increase in passenger numbers and an increase in air pollution caused by greater traffic on the A4 and A40.

January saw the finalisation and adoption of the new **Local Plan**, into which the Society made considerable input over the last 18 months. Our priority is to ensure that it gives adequate consideration to the quality of local townscape and conservation, which in general it does. However, all local plans are subject to the overriding provisions of the National Planning Policy framework introduced in 2012 (NPPF) which contain the notorious “presumption in favour of development”.

This means councils must be cautious about refusing planning permission, and if they lose a case on appeal they have to pay costs.

The new **London Plan** is now under consultation, with proposals for greater height and densification across the Greater London area. The Society made a written response to the first draft, in February, objecting to the removal of the previous housing density matrix and to the new Plan's "design-led" (as opposed to "plan-led") approach which effectively invites developers to seek ever-higher density on a site, which in turn will ratchet up land values. We will support the London Forum of Civic and Local Amenity Societies in its future submissions on this.

The **Old Oak and Park Royal Development Corporation (OPDC) Local Plan** is also progressing through the consultative progress. We keep members informed about this (perhaps some wonder why) because a large part of the OPDC Area is in LBHF, and when and if its ambitions are realised it will be a tall, dense neighbour to Hammersmith and Shepherd's Bush, bringing very considerable new pressures on roads, transport and open space. While the cornerstone elements of the Area – the new HS2 and Crossrail stations - are set to go ahead, as for the rest of the Area there could be several years of a static or declining residential and commercial market in London, during which developers may do nothing on their property, or try to offload land and half planned schemes for which they have overpaid. Unlike other Opportunity Areas such as the Olympic Park, we have not yet seen any credible commitments to a cultural catalyst for the area which would bring something special to our part of London. We support the newly formed Old Oak Neighbourhood Forum in its work to achieve the best for the area.

CS9: TfL's proposal for the new cycle route from Kensington Olympia to Brentford prompted a strong response from our members, who argued it would cause problems for pedestrians and for bus traffic flow in King Street. In the run-up to the Local elections in May the (now re-elected) Council manifesto said "We will lobby the Mayor to run the CS9 cycle route down the A4, not King Street or the Hammersmith Road". This is a welcome approach and we understand LBHF are in discussion with TfL.

White City: A trip up Wood Lane is beginning to offer a glimpse of the future. The completed John Lewis and Westfield extension offer generic shopping and commercial design. On the other side of Wood Lane, the completed TV Centre development is considerably more interesting and the conservation of the famous BBC "Question Mark" building is very satisfying. Claiming the central vista up Wood Lane to the north is Imperial's 32 storey cheese-grater-style building, nearly complete. It is likely that will divide opinion strongly as to its success or otherwise. Many more tall buildings are to come along Wood Lane.

In **Central Hammersmith**, we have met developers to seek to improve plans for **Brook House** (between Hammersmith Library and the Broadway, where the plan is to re-clad this undistinguished office building and turn it into a hotel. **66 Hammersmith Road** (between Blythe Road and Olympia) is subject of a proposal to demolish and rebuild, bringing the building line of a taller and bulkier building than at present (albeit of better design than the existing) right to the pavement, losing the existing considerable landscaped area and dominating the smaller buildings opposite. These two cases show how the reality of what one would like to see in one's area is often not showcase "starchitect" work – and not bland second rate off-the-shelf design – but good-mannered thoughtful design, of appropriate scale that fits into the townscape, acknowledging its neighbours where necessary and not calling undue attention to itself. Even these modest goals seem hard to achieve.

New plans are proposed for **Olympia**, and an exhibition is being held in early July around the time of our AGM. Early proposals we were shown indicated plans to renovate and make alterations to the

Grand Halls and to restore the very fine Pillar Hall (not currently open to the public) to its former glory. However, there may also be parallel plans to build up and above the original Olympia buildings. Earlier this year the Pillar Hall Listing was upgraded to II* while the Grand Halls are Listed Grade II.

Meetings of the **Hammersmith Town Centre Residents' Working Group** have petered out without a formal winding up, and indeed there have been none this year – a source of frustration to all involved. The Council has said that once the masterplan on which the Group was working is finalised into a draft version there will be a public consultation but there is no timetable for this. The group suffered from an overly-wide remit and a lack of chairmanship, but nonetheless it delved into the detail of planning, design, height and traffic in a way which has not been done before and amassed useful material.

Hammersmith United Charities achieves a remarkable milestone this year in celebrating its 400th anniversary of founding. The Society is very pleased to be, with the Fulham Society, Partners in a new venture by HUC called Hammersmith United, which aims to publicise the work of HUC (one of Hammersmith's best-kept secrets to date) and launch a programme of community events and housing initiatives, building on its existing grant-giving schemes and sheltered housing at John Betts House and Sycamore House.

Other matters on which we have had meetings or made comments include:

- OPDC Rail Stations
- The Triangle Site
- Hammersmith Bridge works and repainting
- The Lyric Theatre refurbishment
- DIMCO buildings at White City
- West London College
- Protection of Parks via "Fields in Trust"
- Proposed Centre House, Wood Lane ("Ugli Building" site)
- Walkabout site (extension to Dorsett Hotel)

Thanks are due to the Committee for their hard work over recent months. Particular thanks are due to Richard Farthing for coordinating membership, mailing and website.

We have welcomed Chris Tranchell on to the Committee. We are always pleased to hear from local residents who might be interested in joining us.

We thank the Bush Theatre, winner of last years' Conservation Award, for hosting our AGM.

Finally, the Committee records its great sadness at the loss of our Chairman Tom Ryland who died in March. A full appreciation of his contribution to life in Hammersmith was included in our April Newsletter. The Service of Thanksgiving for his life was attended by many members of the Society.

Melanie Whitlock, Vice Chair, June 2018.