

THE HAMMERSMITH SOCIETY

Chairman's Report 2015-2016

Taking over as Chairman last year from Rosemary Pettit with all her boundless energy was a daunting task. My Chairman's report is less comprehensive than that of 2015, but much of the Society's activities have been covered in our newsletters and my regular e-mail news updates which can be found on our website www.hammersmithsociety.wordpress.com/

Flyover to Flyunder? This was Rosemary's opening headline in her report a year ago. The same opening might apply today. As many of you know, I have a particular interest in the Flyunder project as one of the local architect team that came up with the original idea of an A4 tunnel in 2008. So where are we now?

In the last year, TfL completed the essential structural repairs to the flyover at the cost of little under £100million. As one might imagine, having spent this massive sum, replacing the flyover was not at the forefront of TfL's plans. Nevertheless TfL has continued conversations with the Council and in January of this year surprised us all by announcing their blue skies thinking which involved two 'super strategic tunnels', one running from the A4 in Chiswick, right under central London and connecting to the A13 in Barking, the other from the A40 around North Acton to the A12 coming in from the east. (See our April Newsletter P.8). The A4-A13 route would effectively combine the longer Chiswick to Earls Court tunnel, which the originators of the tunnel scheme proposed about four years ago.

These TfL studies form part of their strategic thinking as to how to deal with traffic in an ever expanding London where the population is expected to increase to 11-13 million by 2050. These projections go hand in hand with plans for severe measures to reduce or deter traffic volumes in central London, and an increase in public transport provision. I attended a half day seminar, hosted by New London Architecture, where comparative presentations were made by TfL and the transport authorities for Stockholm and Madrid. London is lagging behind in the race by major cities to bury its big roads: Madrid has not only relocated a huge network of its trunk roads with beautiful parks above, but has completed the project from inception to completion in a mere 7 years and without recourse to either state or national funding. What lessons are to be learnt by London?

Returning to Hammersmith, this time last year our local Council reached an impasse with TfL over the funding of the Flyunder project, which TfL insisted would have to be funded locally. It also became clear that TfL has ambitions to completely rebuild and reconfigure the Broadway site (which it owns) in order to replace the existing bus station which it claims is almost at capacity, and similarly improve the underground station. According to TfL, both of these projects could only be financed by building massive development on the site; 40-storey towers have been mentioned.

What next for Hammersmith Town Centre? At the London Festival of Architecture Question Time last June, the Leader of the Council announced the

setting up of Hammersmith Residents' Working Party to consider and advise on the many issues around the town centre, to include the above issues plus King Street, Kings Mall and better connections to the river. Four members of the HamSoc Committee are on the 25-strong panel which has met several times. Most recently the group has been invited to assist with the appointment of masterplanning consultants, and an announcement is imminent. This will be the start of more intensive study of how to resolve the many complex issues.

More surprise twists in the Flyunder story occurred in March when the Chancellor included a reference to it in his Budget, and invited TfL to put forward proposals for consideration. At the same time, while a HamSoc initiative to set up a Mayoral Hustings failed to materialise – we had a venue and a chairman but neither of the main candidates responded – we did get written undertakings from both the main candidates that they would support the project (See our News Update – March). Sadiq Khan said *'The Hammersmith Flyunder is an innovative idea that could both reduce traffic in the area and cut down on air and noise pollution in the local area....If the local community wants to go ahead, I would work with Hammersmith and Fulham council, Ministers and businesses to help facilitate getting the necessary funding and moving the scheme forward'*. So we shall have to wait and see what the new Mayor brings to the party.

Air Quality has become a big issue for our city and Hammersmith in particular, with much of the town centre and Broadway area exceeding EU safe limits of pollution. Again both Mayoral candidates made pre-election pledges to deal with the problem. In Hammersmith & Fulham, the Council invited Rosemary Pettit to head a resident-led Air Quality Commission which has been gathering both scientific evidence, and evidence from local organisations.

Website: One of our housekeeping projects last year was to update the website. This is of course an on-going task, but I am pleased with re-organisation so far in that for example details of previous Environment Awards, AGMs and Newsletters and the monthly electronic News Updates can all be easily be found. An up to date and even interactive section dealing with the many town planning issues is for the future.

Old Oak and Park Royal Development Corporation (OPDC): We have reported on this regularly and comprehensively in both our newsletters and the email news updates. Since Parliamentary approval in April of last year, the Mayor and the Greater London Authority (GLA) lost no time in setting the organization up as an autonomous development corporation with its own board of management, executive and planning team. It takes over all town planning powers from the three local authorities. In addition there is HS2 and Crossrail with their own statutory planning powers. The geographic area of the OPDC covers parts of Hammersmith and Fulham, Ealing, and Brent. Land ownerships are complex, including Network Rail, Crossrail, TfL and several other public bodies: Car Giant is the largest single private landholding, and there are the Canal and Wormwood Scrubs Metropolitan Open Land which are effectively operated as public trusts. This massive project is the equivalent of Canary Wharf/Olympic Park in East London and will take up to 30 years to realise.

The Hammersmith Society has been much involved in the consultations over the last year, largely through the Grand Union Alliance, a community collective of a wide range of organisations. The initial focus was on the vision and objectives for the OPDC and this fed into the preparation by the OPDC planners of their initial Draft Local Plan and the subsequent extensive consultations post publication.

The huge project which will be based around the intersection of Crossrail/HS2 and other railway lines (and the Grand Union Canal) is set to be London's largest project with 25,500 new homes and up to 65,000 jobs projected. This is the equivalent of a complete new town and all that implies. The main station alone will be one of the largest in the country handling over 250,000 passengers per day - only marginally smaller than Waterloo. There are also two other new stations and major rebuilding of others including Willesden Junction. The cost of providing the infrastructure and decontamination of the land will be enormous – but who pays? The Chancellor's Budget announcement that all publicly owned land within the OPDC area is to be transferred to the OPDC is a good starting point.

Although there are many commendable aspects to these ambitious proposals, we are questioning whether the housing and employment targets can be provided at a human scale – as an exciting, rewarding and original place for those that will live and work there, and whether it can sympathetically incorporate the existing local communities.

We believe the above targets, which may require towers of 40 – 50 storeys, came before any real design work had been carried out, and need to be reviewed. There is much good will and energy coming from the community and a wish to create a great place. Are the political ambitions in terms of housing and employment expectations too great? This is something which we have asked the new Mayor to urgently review.

There are other aspects of concern, which include the continuing protection of Wormwood Scrubs – a much-loved open space - the historic canal, and retention of the best industrial heritage in the area.

Membership Rosemary Pettit has taken on the role of membership secretary and reports that individual membership has increased from 248 last year to 277 (figures current as of May). Associated membership now totals sixteen (an increase of three over last year) and includes: Ashchurch Residents Association, Brackenbury 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, Oakbrook Lodge Management Co. Ltd, and new members Cambridge Grove & Leamore St Residents Association, Greenside Residents Action Group and Hammersmith Grove Residents Association. Taken together, we believe the membership of the associated groups and the Hammersmith Society represents some 3000 residents in Hammersmith. We have focused this year on straightening up members' details and following up subscriptions.

We hope to top the 300 mark by next year and enlist your support to bring in local residents interested in good architecture and the environment in Hammersmith.

In Brief

Phone Masts The society has objected to several proposals to erect phone masts in conservation areas. The issue is not just the 15m high masts but also the accompanying unsightly and obstructive steel cabinets. Vodafone is the main offender in our area. The Council has been supportive in refusing planning permission. We have also successfully supported local groups in Hounslow in objecting to 2 phone mast schemes..

Capability Brown The Society supports the proposal to erect a statue of the 18th century landscape designer, Lancelot "Capability" Brown, on the Riverside Walk at Fulham Reach (just south of Hammersmith Bridge). Capability Brown lived by the river at Hammersmith 1751-1764, and 2016 is the tercentenary of his birth.

Parks and Open Space The exciting archaeological investigations in Ravenscourt Park have been reported in our earlier newsletters. Much progress has been made in the re-landscaping of Wormholt Park, which was a planning gain from The Bloom development. Disappointingly, despite many complaints from us, the gates to the park under the Bloom, intended to open up the park to Bloemfontein Road, remain permanently closed.

Design Review Panel Having been very critical of the operation of the previous panel, the Society successfully pressed for the reconstitution of the DRP, which reviews major development schemes before they go to the Planning Committee. We also pressed for wider representation apart from architects on the Panel, which has in part been achieved with some lay members.

Hammersmith, Fulham, and Putney Societies Liaison This is a new initiative, aimed at working more closely with our neighbouring groups and sharing information on issues such as tall buildings, traffic, and local planning.

Meetings with Senior Planners Two meetings have been held this year with Juliemma McLoughlin (Director for Planning, Regeneration & Growth, LBHF) and senior planners, as a forum for discussing both the Society's planning concerns and to hear how Council officers view the present planning environment in London

Walkabout The owners of the Dorsett Hotel wish to develop this site with more hotel accommodation and a wine bar and studio cinema. Two public exhibitions of a new scheme have been held this year; we are pleased concerns raised at last year's AGM have been listened to and are optimistic that a scheme will emerge which will contribute positively to Shepherds Bush Green.

Thames Wharf Redevelopment with the permitted scheme looks unlikely to progress in the immediate future. Although controversial locally, we considered

it a good scheme for the site, and are disappointed that the Council and developers have been unable to reach a legal/financial agreement and agree on the affordable housing quantum.

Triangle Site After a series of applications, all objected to by the Society, and rejected by the Council, there will be an appeal in July and the Society will appear alongside the Council. We hope the application will be rejected.

Town Hall Phase 1 (the west side of the scheme) is set to start this year. We have been involved in discussion of the detail of this section and will continue to be consulted. The cinema has (sadly) now closed but the new scheme is will include a new cinema once the Town Hall Extension section of the development is realised.

White City East The development area is changing fast. Work has started on the former BBC Centre (941 residential units, and offices) and will soon start on the St James White City site behind Westfield (1460 units). Permission has been given for an extension to Westfield including a new John Lewis and residential blocks (1100 units). We continue to be concerned about high residential density and diminishing open space.

Dimes Place, King Street An approved scheme was drawn up which was satisfactory to local residents but the site was sold on to a new developer who drew up new, unsatisfactory plans. Residents are seeking to get back to a scheme all can support.

Cambridge House, Cambridge Grove Discussions continue on the plans to considerably expand Cambridge House and build two new houses in Banim Street.

St Augustine's, Fulham Palace Road The Committee was invited to view pre-application plans for redevelopment of the church's community centre and accommodation for its priors at the rear of its site. We were broadly supportive of the designs as shown at this stage. A formal application is expected shortly.

St Paul's Girls School We were pleased to support two schemes for expansion in the backland areas of the school site.

Savoy Circus The vacant site on this junction of the A40 was the subject of an application for 323 rooms of student housing. We felt the design was reasonably acceptable but took issue with the Council's suggested planning condition that the students should not be allowed to use the garden! The proposal was – unusually - rejected by the Planning Committee against officers' advice and a new scheme is under preparation.

Heathrow 3rd Runway No announcement is expected until after the Referendum. The new Mayor of London is against the 3rd Runway. We will continue to monitor the situation.

Shepherd's Bush Market A remarkable fight by local shopkeepers and stallholders, against market redevelopment and 200 flats, managed to overturn

previous approval when the High Court found the Compulsory Purchase Order faulty in March this year.

Neighbourhood Planning The Society sponsored an evening workshop in December on neighbourhood planning – a feature of the government's Localism proposals. Henry Peterson, responsible for successfully setting up the St Quentin and Woodland Neighbourhood Plan in North Kensington explained the processes involved. Other speakers discussed the advantages and the considerable hurdles in setting up such schemes as well as how to achieve wider engagement in local planning.

Local Plan. In addition to the OPDC Local Plan, consultation will shortly be starting on a revised draft Local Plan for Hammersmith & Fulham. And with the new Mayor of London will come the consultation on a new London Plan.

Permitted development We have written to both local MPs to argue against the Government's plan to permanently allow change of use from commercial to residential without a requirement for planning permission. It takes employment use away from town centres which are struggling to remain busy and vibrant, and will make it increasingly difficult for small businesses/ artisans to find premises as residential use is likely to bring in bigger returns for landowners. Greg Hands MP, Chief Secretary to the Treasury, responded that he supported the proposal.

Another proposal in the Planning Bill going through Parliament is to allow consultants to draw up recommendations on a development, on the basis of which a Council Planning Committee would decide whether or not to give planning permission - as opposed to Council planning officers who do the job now. It is more than likely that a recommendation from a private provider could well conflict with the local planning authority's own interpretation of the Local Plan. How residents would be able to object to private providers is another unanswered question.

As Chairman, I would like to express my sincerest **thanks to all the Hammersmith Society Committee for their work and their support.** Melanie Whitlock has given sound advice, based on twice previously being Chairman. Rosemary Pettit has done remarkable work in organising membership matters and increasing membership. Richard Tollemache has taken over the accounts and done battle with the bank on signatories and the like, which is hugely appreciated. Richard Jackson has continued to edit and produce the Newsletter, with excellent results, and Angela Clarke and Melanie Whitlock have assisted willingly with work on the OPDC Draft Plan. Thanks also to Annabelle May for her work on parks, and to Annabel Clarke as Secretary. Richard Winterton, Hans Haenlein and particularly Derrick Wright have worked tirelessly on the administration of the Environment Awards and this meeting.

We would like to express our warmest thanks to the Dorsett Hotel (which won our Environment Award last year) for hosting our 2016 AGM.

Tom Ryland
7 June 2016