



The Hammersmith Society

Chairman's Annual Report 2022-2023

It is with great pleasure that I present the annual report of the Hammersmith Society's work for the period of 2022-2023. The Hammersmith Society, a community-based organization, has been dedicated to preserving and enhancing the unique character of Hammersmith and advocating for the best possible environment for residents, businesses, and visitors. This review highlights the Society's achievements and contributions to the local community during the past year... [OK thanks, ChatGPT!]

Projects

Big projects - bigger buildings

Here I pick out this year's five most significant developments. We've seen rather fewer of the overt and now disparaged 'viability' claims recently, nevertheless developers are fairly obviously thinking of maximising returns - the theme for many has been somewhat ambitious overbuilding. Recent inflation in building costs, estimated to be as much as 25% or more, hasn't helped constrain those ambitions. I start with RMH, for much of the year the most read subject on the website.



Royal Masonic Hospital [RMH] Developer: Telereal Trillium, Architect: SSparc

We reported twice and had several meetings with the developers and architect, SSparc, also architects for Olympia.. This is an interesting combination of a Grade II* Art Deco main building with challenging room shapes and sizes, balconies on the adjoining blocks close to neighbours, and a 1978 block (E) which they are minded to demolish. The one to three-storey upward extensions are a challenge from

a heritage point of view, but at least they're not aiming for a ten storey block or similar! This could be a very special development if ambitions can be tamed, and a good community use found for the important GII* listed 'Block A' which we're encouraging to be fully established pre-planning. Planning is expected Autumn 2023, with much public consultation needed first to address local concerns from increased traffic to neighbour adjacency.

Developer website: <https://www.ravenscourtparkhospital.info>

Our articles: <https://www.hammersmithsociety.org.uk/search/?royal+masonic+hospital>

Marks & Spencer, 27 King St. (Developer/Architect: Reef Group)



This project has ebbed and flowed over the year. We're told that the developer originally wanted a twenty storey block approaching the size of Landmark House, but was told by the planners that something very much smaller would be appropriate. The ten / eight storey blocks and massing proposed are still excessive for the location, but this is M&S new corporate property strategy. The pocket park & passageway don't do enough to offset it, despite the developer's best efforts to convince us otherwise. The project

appears to have stalled now that the reactions of the public, planners and ourselves are evident.

Developer website: <https://27kingstreet.co.uk/>

Our articles: <https://www.hammersmithsociety.org.uk/search/Marks+%26+Spencer>

Olympia (Developer: Yoo Capital, Architect: SSparc)



We visited the site again this year to review and report progress. The large music venue is structurally complete, the theatre building is out of the ground, and the two huge cores for the glass office building atop the Deco frontage are nearing completion. The theatre school and hotel in the former multi-storey car park are out of the ground. Given its constrained location, the scale of the project is immense, and we await its gradual

appearance through the years 2024-2025. We'll look at it again over the next year or so.

Developer website: <https://olympia.london/future>

Our articles: <https://www.hammersmithsociety.org.uk/search/olympia>

Shepherds Bush Market [SBM] (Developer: Yoo Capital, Architect: AHMM)



Despite several iterations and three or four public exhibitions, this project seems to have changed little. The idea is to upgrade yet maintain the feel of the market while maximising the development potential of the Old Laundry Yard adjacent, including around forty 'affordable' flats at the far end of the site. The architect was taken aback when I gave my unvarnished first impression as a "big old lump", but viewed from any angle, this proposal

does redefine overbuilding in 2023, particularly in such a busy and constrained location. The building is as high as the Dorsett, but that's on Shepherds Bush Green, not down a side alleyway. There are mixed views of course, and it does offer a lifeline to the struggling historic market - post-pandemic. There's a petition running to 'save the market', and much more work to do here.

Developer website: <https://shepherdsbushmarket.org/future>

Our articles: <https://www.hammersmithsociety.org.uk/search/shepherds+bush+market>

Earls Court (Developer: Earls Court Development Co/TfL, Architect: various)



Earls Court has emerged from the ashes of CAPCO, and represents the largest project - half on our patch, half in RBKC. Half the area of the CAPCO scheme at forty acres, it aims to 'bring back the wonder' lost in the rush to demolish Earls Court 1 & 2 a decade ago. The Master-plan was launched earlier this year with much press fanfare. We walked the site and were amazed at just how much railway there is - two spurs of the District Line, the Piccadilly,

an underpass, a depot, and the West London Line bisecting it with a huge concrete 'table' over half of it, where Earls Court 2 stood. It's a difficult site then, and we're not sure we yet see 'the wonder'. What we do wonder at are the proposed thirty-nine storey towers, an awkwardly sized 'park', and lack of a distinct architectural theme borne of too many architectural firms vying for business, running the risk of another mish-mash of the type we now see at Imperial West. The proposed housing density at over 500/hectare is actually higher than the CAPCO scheme, itself originally seen as overbuilt, despite much protestation about 'greening' from ECDC. Our Vice Chairman, Richard Winterton, sits on the ECDC Design Review Panel to try to bring order.

OPDC West is a similar sized project that also has a lot of railway adjacent, but it has the benefit of the Grand Union Canal which was much liked at the charrette I attended with Henry Peterson.

Developer website: <https://theearlscourtdevelopmentcompany.com/>

Our articles: <https://www.hammersmithsociety.org.uk/search/earls+court>



Education: West London College and the ‘Community Schools Programme’



Our president, Prof. Hans Haenlein is a great advocate for education, and not just of the academic sort. He’s written several times on the subject of West London College, including recently Since the heyday of the early 2000’s when ‘Building Schools for the Future’ was all the rage, funding for school and college redevelopments has been scarce, especially during ‘austerity’, but in recognition of the labour shortages, perhaps the tide is now turning.

Meanwhile, Further Education, never a darling of recent governments, has been particularly hard hit. The College sees few, if any, of the high fee-paying foreign students that sustain Imperial College and its ambitious building projects north of Westfield, and the associated residential developments there and around North Acton and OPDC.

In 2018 WLC employed architects to design a new building with a rather smaller footprint than the generous existing site affords, with the idea to provide funding by selling off the remainder of the site for redevelopment. It never reached planning, but the issue remains of how to pay for refurbishment of the now 40 year-old buildings that have had a few unfortunate interventions over the years.

Beyond the focus on science and innovation of the headline-grabbing Imperial, we believe that there’s just as much future in FE, particularly in addressing the lack of skills and numbers of energetic people needed to upgrade our ageing built environment. Head-Heart-Hand as Hans says.

Similarly, LBHF is rather scraping the barrel, trying to fund school refurbishments such as Avonmore and Flora Gardens primaries by building on their heavily constrained playgrounds. This surprises us, particularly with such a public ‘green’ agenda, the recent Plymouth fiasco, and the massive amount of building going on elsewhere in the borough, providing thousands of ‘affordable’ homes with rather fewer constraints.

This misnamed ‘Community Schools Programme’, aims to fund schools AND flats, but the numbers can’t add up without significant overbuilding, and possibly not at all. Despite three years of trying to get a meaningful conversation going on better ways to square this circle, we have had to resort to a petition, now signed by over 500 people. We hope the council are listening - Private Eye is.

We say NO! to the sacrifice of school land





Transport - The Bridge



The bridge saga stumbles on inexorably. It's our membership's number one concern. Interestingly, feedback to me suggests there are as many that would set it in aspic as Bazalgette's museum piece, and build a new one instead, as there are those who would preserve and rebuild it, retaining its current appearance - even if re-engineered in a few invisible but critical spots to improve its function and lifespan.

Finally, the 'stabilisation' of the cast iron pedestals happened uneventfully and without massive cost, though as an engineer I'm no fan of pouring concrete into cast iron, it's at least done and Historic England were happy to agree to it, allowing the project to progress, albeit a little delayed, with roadway access for cycling not available until autumn 2023. The funding of the major refurbishment for the failing hangars, structure, roadway etc is still a sticking point, with central government seeming to play politics with this important piece of national infrastructure. The one-third split LBHF / GLA / Government is agreed, even if cash not found. Costs are said to have increased by 50% (!) to £230m, and the project - once funded - would take around three years to complete. Recently the Mayor publicly

disagreed with LBHF on their proposed toll to pay for their portion.

An interesting exhibition was held in March with models showing the proposed 2-level COWI temporary bridge that would facilitate proper offsite refurbishment. The related planning/Listed Building Consent is now in the works. I'm particularly pleased to see widening the pathways as part of the plan, something we proposed over 3 years ago. However, I was surprised by a couple of things:

- a) That some didn't appreciate that this proposal is a *temporary* bridge that affords better quality, quicker and cheaper refurbishment – some still see that as a kind of anathema, and that the poor old thing can soldier on as is, and be fettled - piece by piece – onsite. That would lead to a substandard result, taking even longer. There's a nagging concern that it could get left if the money were to run out halfway through, but everyone involved is aware of that, and taking steps to ensure it can't happen.
- b) That some think it can remain as a kind of historic 'maypole' over and around which people can dance and plant flowers, rekindling something like the *summer of love* of 1967, and it will somehow survive on this love alone, provided that little or nothing with a motor – electric or otherwise – passes over it. In reality, it will rot away if nothing is done before too long, and we can only continue urging those responsible to bury the hatchet and get on with it. There's now a shop in King Street to practice.

Transport – CAN's and C9

These are a number of controversial Mayoral policies currently being enacted by LBHF.

Wags on social media might occasionally posture that we're Clarksonesque petrol-heads, intent on motoring everywhere in our Aston Martins, but the reality couldn't be more different. Anyway Clarkson has taken up farming and May is now a keen cyclist.

While some of your committee own modest 3-cylinder cars that were momentarily congestion-charge exempt due to their ultra low emissions, we mostly get around on foot, bicycle, bus and tube like everyone else, and only use cars occasionally, and when necessary.

And here's the rub: neither we, nor struggling businesses working under the South Fulham TCPR, find it easier as a result of policies that are supposed to favour 'active travel'! There's more collateral damage than the tangible benefits, caused by trying to shoehorn either last century's policies (possibly also born in 1967), or policies born on wide European boulevards, into our medieval-sized streets. In some cases, like C9, the result is measurably more dangerous, despite the ironic name 'safer'. We need appropriate policies to fit our actual environment, rather than looking over the Channel and seeing ever greener Dutch pastures, where, despite all the bicycles in Amsterdam, they actually motor around 10% further per head of population than we do!



The Society

The subscribing membership grew by 8% this year, and we added 3 affiliates, including Avonmore RA. We now claim to represent 3680 residents directly and by affiliation. This year the committee has welcomed new member Nina Jindal as Treasurer, while Matt Hedges remains on the committee, but no longer has sufficient time to dedicate to the treasurer role. Sadly Derrick Wright stood down from the committee and Annabel Clarke is standing down as Hon. Secretary. I wish to thank them for their huge efforts over many years.

This creates one or two spaces on the committee. Please contact me on 0770 353 2448 or at chairman@hammersmithsociety.org.uk if you think you can help in any capacity.

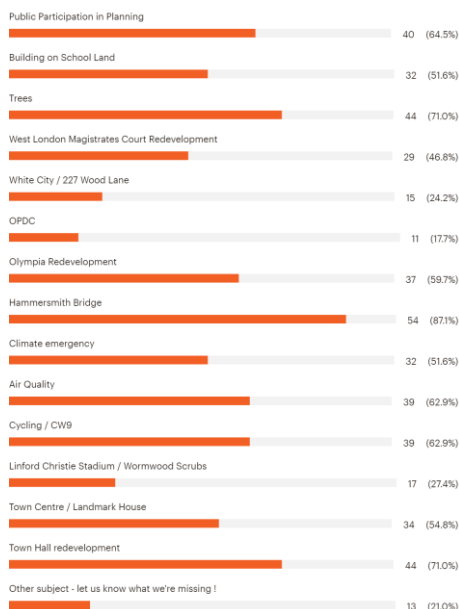
Affiliate Engagement

When I become chairman last year, I stated my intent to better engage with our affiliates who know their patches so well, and who we've somewhat drifted away from in recent times for a number of reasons, not least COVID. Committee member Robert Iggulden has kindly agreed to take on the specific task of working with affiliates to see how we can better work together in practice, and how we can best exchange information and news. If you're an affiliate, please work with him to help put this into practice.

To kick this off, in the last year I've attended a number of AGM's and other meetings, including some online. St. Peter's RA, Stamford Brook RA, Brackenbury RA, and the Kensington Society come to mind. We're stronger together!

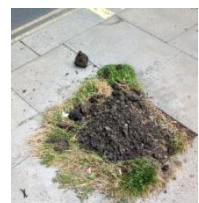
Question 1 has 62 answers (Checkboxes)

"Looking at our recent stories, please tell us what you're interested in (tick all that apply)"



We've had a survey running for a few years now as a way to 'take the temperature' more scientifically: new members are encouraged to complete it when they join. I recently added new topics 'RMH' and 'SBM' to gauge interest - results to date are interesting all the same. Most interest has been expressed in the bridge, which is why we regularly report on it (fourteen articles in the last three years), and why we regularly remind the council of the importance of getting it fixed. See above.

Equal second are 'Trees' and 'Town Hall'. Interest in the latter has waned since it became a building site, but as it emerges, that will change. Trees, as those of you who've been listening to the Today programme of late will know, are a big source of interest nationwide. Unfortunately LBHF has a way to go in the treecare department. In 'The Year of the Tree' I wrote about watering saplings amongst other things, but still they die! In two notable spots near King St Tesco Express, trees have been



replanted, died, replanted, and then died again! All in the space of 2 years. This is an unnecessary waste of resources and ratepayers money as there are established ways to solve the problem, along with fit-for-purpose tree pits, rather than Conway's preferred 'lump of unsightly & impervious asphalt', the subject of wooden spoons 8, 9, and 10 years ago. Getting on top of this is long overdue.



Conclusion

There are a huge number and range of projects to get our collective teeth into as you can see from the list above, and we already know of more in the pipeline. As the saying goes, many hands make light work, so if you think you can help in any way, please let me know. I'll sign off with a summary thanks be to ChatGPT again...

Preservation and Conservation: Preservation and conservation have been at the core of the Hammersmith Society's work, and this year was no exception. The Society actively engaged with local authorities and stakeholders to protect and enhance the architectural heritage of the area. Several notable achievements include:

Urban Design and Development: The Hammersmith Society actively participated in discussions and consultations on urban design and development proposals, aiming to achieve the best possible outcomes for the local community. Key accomplishments in this area include:

- 1. Design Quality: The Society worked with local architects, developers, and planners to promote design excellence in new developments. By advocating for high-quality design standards, the Society ensured that new buildings and public spaces enhance the visual appeal and functionality of Hammersmith.*
- 2. Public Realm Improvements: The Society actively engaged in initiatives to enhance the public realm, including the improvement of streetscapes, green spaces, and pedestrian access. Through collaborative efforts, the Society successfully influenced the design and implementation of several public realm projects, making Hammersmith a more attractive and welcoming place for all.*

Transport and Connectivity: Recognizing the significance of efficient transportation and connectivity for a thriving community, the Hammersmith Society actively engaged with local authorities and transport agencies to address key issues. Accomplishments in this area include:

- 1. Transport Infrastructure: The Society advocated for improved transport infrastructure, including better bus services, cycling infrastructure, and pedestrian facilities. Through constructive dialogue with relevant stakeholders, the Society contributed to the development of plans and policies that enhance transportation options in Hammersmith.*
- 2. Transport Hubs: The Society actively participated in discussions regarding the redesign and improvement of transport hubs in Hammersmith, aiming to create safer, more accessible, and aesthetically pleasing spaces for commuters and residents.*

Conclusion: The Hammersmith Society's work during 2022-2023 has been characterized by unwavering dedication to preserving and enhancing the unique character of Hammersmith. Through active engagement with local authorities, developers, residents, and other stakeholders, the Society has made significant contributions to the preservation of heritage, urban design, transport infrastructure, and community engagement. As we move forward, the Hammersmith Society remains committed to advocating for outcomes that work for all

Richard Farthing, Chairman, June 2023