

THE WESTMINSTER SOCIETY



URBAN VITALITY AND CONGENIALITY

NEWSLETTER

April 2011

THE SOCIETY'S AGM

The Society's AGM will take place on Thursday 5 May in the Mayoral suite at City Hall. There will be a reception from 6 pm to 6.45 pm followed by the business element of the AGM. Then the Society's biennial annual awards will be presented, and the evening will end with a talk from our speaker Peter Heath. Peter is Public Realm Director for Atkins, the largest engineering and design consultancy in the world. Atkins were responsible for the Oxford Circus diagonal crossing; for implementing the public realm improvements of Trafalgar Square; for the refurbishment of Nobel House for DEFRA, and they are involved in the redevelopment of the World Trade Center in New York. When Atkins won an award for a scheme to combat major terrorist threats in and around Whitehall while enhancing the look of the area, Peter said that the project "demonstrate[d] the all-encompassing value of good urban design, making the area a better, more secure and more attractive place to live and work." The value of good urban design and achieving it will be the topic of Peter's talk.

If you would like to attend the pre-AGM reception, please complete and return the enclosed form with a cheque for £10. There is no charge for attending the AGM only.

(The AGM is taking place on the same day as the referendum on the introduction of the alternative voting system. Please be sure to vote before or after joining us in City Hall!)

WESTMINSTER SOCIETY AWARDS 2011 SHORTLIST (see Awards Criteria on the next page)

Here is the shortlist we have considered, under each category:

ARCHITECTURE

★ *Kings Place Concert Hall*, Kings Place, York Way, N1 9AG—Dixon Jones, architects

Since Kings Place opened two years ago in a mixed-use development adjacent to Regent's Canal that also includes new offices for The

Awards criteria:

The Westminster Society Awards are bestowed biennially for outstanding architecture and design of social, civic and/or aesthetic importance, for exceptional restorations that value historic qualities and renew public interest and appreciation, for significant contributions to urban vitality and congeniality, and for imaginative accomplishments that make urban life and work more pleasurable.

The regular categories are **Architecture, Renovated Architecture, and Urban Design**. In 2009 we made additional awards in two special categories: **Outstanding Work in Design Development** (for the in-abeyance redesign of Parliament Square), and **Neighbourhood Transformation** (for the Bocca di Lupo restaurant in Archer Street). This year we have added **Contribution to Urban Vitality**.

Exceptionally, we make awards for work outside the boundaries of Old Westminster when the recipient has broad influence and/or wider urban significance.

Guardian, it has become a premier chamber music and public lecture venue. Nobly simple, comfortable, acoustically excellent, it has made an important contribution to cultural life in London that may deserve our recognition, even though it's outside Westminster. (No alternative we have considered has comparable social and civic importance; e.g., the new accommodation at BBC Broadcasting House is not yet in use.)

★ *The Apple Store*, Covent Garden, 1 The Piazza, WC2E 8HA—Bohlin Cywinski Jackson (San Francisco), architects
Outstanding shop design with bewitching power extending beyond, outside—its attractive urban and social impact is already apparent.

RENOVATED ARCHITECTURE

★ *St George's Hanover Square restoration*, St George Street, W1—Colin Kerr of Molyneux Kerr
Renovated by the conservation architects also responsible for the excellent recent renovation of Hawksmoor's St George's Bloomsbury, this church, designed by John James, another of Wren's assistants, is also famous for having Handel as a parishioner. A beautiful renovation, and unlike St George's Bloomsbury which is just beyond the boundary in Camden, it's within our parish.

★ *Burberry offices, meeting rooms, design studios*, Horseferry House, Horseferry Road, SW1P 2AW—Gensler (San Francisco), designers
The transformation of a banal building into a classy and inviting one.

URBAN DESIGN

★ *BBC Broadcasting House: All Souls' Place pedestrianisation*, Langham Street, W1—Sir Richard MacCormac of MJP Architects, & successors
Unlike the Broadcasting House new accommodation, this is complete. When in full use the walkway is certain to be more than just a wide entrance for the BBC—it is likely to become a strong and important pedestrian stem branching off the Nash promenade architectural.

★ *The 7 July London Bombings Memorial*, Park Lane W1, by Carmody Groarke & Anthony Gormley
For once, a first-rate non-representational monument in Westminster.

CONTRIBUTION TO URBAN VITALITY (a new category that we may use especially to honour non-architectural accomplishments)

★ *Rental bicycle scheme for London*
Fantastic and unignorable. It was done in Paris first, but so what?

★ *The Oxford Circus pedestrian criss-cross scheme*
Tearing down the "safety" railings that squeezed and corralled people has liberated pedestrians. Encouraging diagonal road crossings has actually made the circus safer, and a friendlier place to be.

MEMBERSHIP

Thanks to all who have renewed membership to the Society and special thanks to those who included an extra donation with their subscriptions. Several new members have joined recently—it's a pleasure to welcome them to the Society. And, one or two people have let us know that they wish to cancel their membership. Naturally we don't wish to encourage people to resign, but if you no longer want to receive mailings from us do email the Chairman at olwen_rowlands@hotmail.com to let her know, or write to her at 19 Regency Street, London SW1P 4BY.

CHELSEA BARRACKS: THE PLANNING APPLICATION HAS BEEN SUBMITTED

At the end of February the Society provided its response to the submission of the outline planning application for the Chelsea Barracks site, having received a detailed and informative presentation from the applicants and their advisers earlier in the month. We concentrated on four elements of the development: affordable housing, the public realm and the treatment of the perimeter, access, and the sequencing of the phased development.

The affordable housing element of the scheme will account for 34% of the total number of units. We regard this as borderline-acceptable. At this stage detailed proposals for the public realm element are not available, but we expressed our interest about access to the development and in particular our concern about some impermissibly forbidding railings along Chelsea Bridge Road. On the other hand we were pleased about demountable bollards that will prevent motorists using the scheme as a rat-run while not deterring pedestrians or cyclists. We stated our view that the affordable housing provision should be part of the earlier if not the earliest phases of the development, and suggested that this might be achieved by means of a condition requiring that no market-priced accommodation be occupied before the affordable accommodation was available for occupation.

CLELAND AND ABELL HOUSES

Cleland and Abell Houses in John Islip Street were built in the 1930s and were previously the offices of the National Offender Management Service. Converting the existing buildings for residential use is unsatisfactory because of the floor-to-ceiling heights and the pattern of windows, so Berkeley Homes propose to demolish them. The plan is to provide 285 residential units in two slightly taller residential blocks. All accommodation in the rebuilt Abell House will be market-priced housing. A total of 81 affordable units will be included in the rebuilt Cleland House, making the overall proportion of affordable units just over 28%. One car parking space will be provided for each unit.

We think that one to one parking provision is unnecessary in an area with such good transport links. We also think that the proportion of affordable housing is far too low, and these are points we shall be making when we see the planning application for this development.

KINGSGATE
HOUSE

The demolition and redevelopment of Kingsgate House is the next in a series of projects by Land Securities to modernise the architecture of the western end of Victoria Street. The plan is to replace Kingsgate House with two new buildings, one for offices and the other for residential use. Both buildings would have retail outlets and restaurants at ground floor level. The proposals also include the bridging over of the underground railway to the rear of the site and the creation of a new entrance to Westminster City School. We have also heard that the conversion of Portland House in Bressenden Place to residential use is being considered.

SOUTH
WESTMINSTER
LIBRARIES

We recently contacted the Cabinet Member for Community Services about the future of the St James's Library. This library is situated in ~~in~~ the City Hall building over the ground floor One-Stop Shop. Our concerns were raised when, shortly after we overheard a developer indicating that the start of work on the Victoria Transport Interchange scheme would be delayed, we learnt that the library was to be closed. (Some years ago a replacement for the St James's Library was to be included in the VTI development.)

The letter we received in reply confirmed that St James's would be closing this September, but added that a start was anticipated on the replacement library in 2015. It was suggested that in the meantime—that is, for a minimum of four years and probably longer—St James's Library users might visit the library in Buckingham Palace Road or the new facility in Pimlico. We felt this response was unacceptably complacent. We recommended that temporary accommodation for St James's be found in vacant office space in Victoria Street until the replacement library could be made ready and was opened.

THE FORMER
NATIONAL TRUST
BUILDING, QUEEN
ANNE'S GATE

Development work has started on the former National Trust Headquarters, 36 Queen Anne's Gate, to turn it into a single dwelling. Something similar is happening at no 7 St James's Square, where a building by Lutyens is being turned back into a single dwelling. Why, you may wonder, are these buildings no longer being used as offices? It's because they don't meet the needs of organisations looking for compact, serviced accommodation, nor can they be converted to provide the open trading floors preferred by stockbrokers and investment bankers.

SOUP RUNS AND
ROUGH SLEEPERS

In February the City Council launched a consultation on the introduction of new bye-laws that would prevent rough sleeping and the distribution of free refreshments in a designated area of Westminster centred on the Cathedral. The Council believes that

homeless people should use building-based services rather than living rough and making use of soup kitchens. They now work with “third sector” partners to help homeless people with services providing shelter and guidance towards training, employment and long-term accommodation. In our response to the consultation we said that rather than introducing bye-laws, the Council should adopt a more positive approach to the issue of soup runs. It should negotiate with the organisations providing food and drink to rough sleepers and use its legal powers to regulate them rather than outlaw them.

PESTERING THE MAYOR ABOUT PARLIAMENT SQUARE

We wrote to the Mayor of London again recently to urge him to implement the Westminster Society Award-winning plan, or something like it, to hard-landscape Parliament Square and turn the island area into a pedestrianised peninsula like Trafalgar Square. We pointed out that his inaction had led to the Square becoming an unsightly semi-permanent tented squat for people with any political issues whatsoever. Meanwhile, tourists visiting the Palace of Westminster, the Supreme Court and Westminster Abbey are crowded on the too-narrow existing pavements and have to struggle to avoid being pushed into traffic.

Well, our view got nowhere with Boris: he ignored the urban precedent of the great classic squares of Europe that are always made of stone or tile as sovereign demonstrations of their use and importance. He dismissed our additional functional argument that creating a paved piazza would have discouraged protesters; in fact he thought paving would make it easier to occupy. (Perhaps we were too easily sidetracked into debating his reactive view of how to design a great national piazza: it’s all about making it no-go for protesters.) He said the square would be reopened once essential repair and “decontamination” work is completed (we foresee a rolling programme will be necessary on that, like repainting the Forth Bridge), and he added that his officers... (*his officers?...*) are looking at imaginative and cost-effective ways of improving the square that will not change the existing pattern of vehicular traffic (plainly an abiding Boris Johnson priority), nor spoil this important site. He said nothing about making it easier for people to get to it.

VISITS PROGRAMME

Included with the Newsletter as usual is the Spring/Summer visits programme. There are still spaces on the Lea Valley Walk on 13 April, and also on the visit to Haberdashers’ Hall on 16 May.

PATRON: HRH THE DUKE OF
GLOUCESTER KG GCVO
PRESIDENT: THE DEAN OF WESTMINSTER
CHAIRMAN: OLWEN ROWLANDS
REGISTERED CHARITY NO. 235400

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The 52nd Annual General Meeting

Thursday 5 May 2011, 6.45 pm in the Mayoral Suite in City Hall at 64 Victoria Street, London SW1

AGENDA

- 1 Introduction and apologies for absence
- 2 The Minutes of the 2010 AGM
- 3 The Annual Report and Accounts for the year 2010
- 4 Society management matters
- 5 Election of members of the Executive Committee
- 6 Appointment of a Reporting Accountant
- 7 Any other business
- 8 The Society's Annual Lecture

by Peter Heath, Public Realm Director for Atkins Design:
The Value of Good Urban Design and How to Achieve It

Peter Handley
Honorary Secretary

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