

THE WESTMINSTER SOCIETY

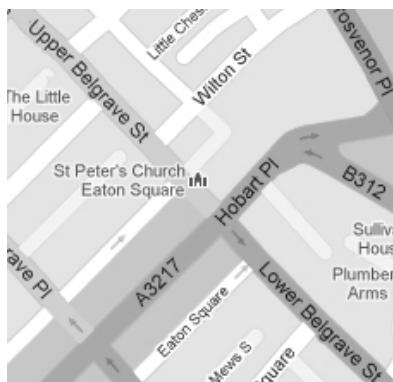


URBAN VITALITY AND CONGENIALITY

NEWSLETTER

April 2012

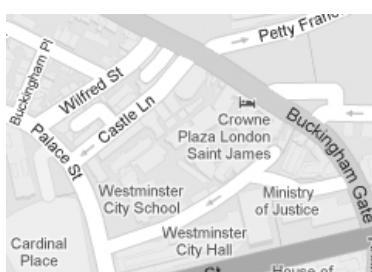
THE SOCIETY'S AGM



You'll know from the Bulletin we sent out at the end of March that the Society's Annual General Meeting will take place on Thursday 10 May in the Parish Hall of St Peter's, Eaton Square. There will be a reception from 6 pm to 6.45 pm followed by the business element of the AGM. The evening will end with the Society's Annual Lecture. This year's speaker is Rosemarie MacQueen, Westminster's Strategic Director for the Built Environment. A powerful person for us to hear from.

If you would like to attend the pre-AGM reception please complete and return the booking form we sent with the Bulletin. The cost of the reception is £12. There is no charge for attending the AGM only. Apart from a small number of steps from the ground floor, the hall is accessible by lift. St Peter's is a five minute walk from Victoria Station, and there will be some parking spaces within the church precincts.

DEVELOPMENTS IN CASTLE LANE



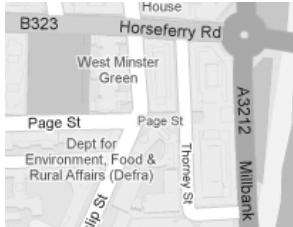
Land Securities have submitted a planning application to convert hostel accommodation in four buildings in Castle Lane and Palace Street. A total of 63 affordable housing units would be created, 60% rented and 40% shared ownership. Apart from an early 1990s mews, the buildings date from the late 19th century and were put up originally to house the workers at the Stag Brewery (which until 1959, stood on the site of Cardinal Place). The main buildings have plant units at roof level. It is proposed that these would be replaced by an additional storey of accommodation, set back. When the conversion is complete the converted buildings would be at the same height as others around the site.

Developers providing urban commercial market accommodation are required to fulfil the affordable housing need with a specified proportion of affordable housing as well, and some larger developers provide some on its own to count towards their future obligations on other sites. It looks as if Land Securities are banking Castle Lane against the market accommodation they are thinking about at

Kingsgate House in Victoria Street. But if the original hostel accommodation is deemed already to be of the affordable kind, that will reduce the number of additional affordable units being provided by Land Securities and the number of market units it can offset against them. Such calculations are the lifeblood of property development.

The planning application in preparation will preserve several attractive late Victorian buildings, and if it follows the lines expected, the Society will support it.

1a PAGE STREET



Local residents near Page Street will remember when departments of Westminster Hospital occupied the southeast corner of Page Street and John Islip Street. When the hospital moved out the building was modernised and became the headquarters of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, but since DEFRA moved to Smith Square a few years ago it has stood empty.

It has now been acquired by the big developers Derwent London who propose a renovation of services, replacement of roof plant with an additional storey, removal of the austere glass cladding and recladding in brick. The accommodation would be used solely for offices, possibly for occupancy by Burberry whose UK headquarters are nearby. We liked the renovation approach and the more congenial new look of the scheme, and have endorsed it.

REDEVELOPMENT OF ST JAMES'S MARKET



Those on the Society's visit to the new building on the site of the old Regent Palace Hotel site were told about the effort the Crown Estate has been making to upgrade the Regent Street area. (Well, it's essentially theirs.) To the southwest, "St James's Gateway," the block east of Simpson's in Piccadilly, is currently being redeveloped, and now the Estate has St James's Market itself in its sights. The old St James's Market plot is bordered by Jermyn Street, Haymarket, Pall Mall, and Waterloo Place-Regent Street.

The first phase of the proposed redevelopment will centre on Norris Street (which extends westward from Panton Street), part of St Alban's Street, and Carlton Street. It would see the demolition of the Haymarket block and its replacement with a new eight-storey building with retail outlets or other commercial activities at ground floor level and offices and plant above.

The Regent Street block would also be demolished apart from its Regent Street façade and replaced with a new seven storey building with a similar retail / office configuration. The Society needs to take a wary look at that. Traffic would be removed from the upper part of St Alban's Street and Norris Street to create a large pedestrian square.

A HISTORICAL NOTE ON OLD WESTMINSTER MARKETS



The original St James's Market was built in the 17th century for the convenience of the new residents of St James's Square—not *in* the square, as at Covent Garden, but a little way to the east. In 1720 the market was renowned for the quality of its provisions, which catered especially to the needs of “the Stewards of People of Quality, who spare no Price to furnish their Lords' Houses with what is nice and delicious.” By 1800 the market was dilapidated. Demolition began in 1816 under John Nash, who insisted that a new market be built. The replacement was the work of James Burton, a builder-developer. His lease expired in 1916, the market was closed and the area redeveloped.

The first market adjacent to one of the new London squares was built by the Earl of Southampton for his Bloomsbury Square development. All that is left now is Barter Street. Better known is Shepherd Market between Piccadilly and Curzon Street, built about 1746 by Edward Shepherd. Pevsner comments that it is a reminder of how carefully 18th century speculators considered the provision of shops. Another market commemorated today only by the name of its location, Market Place, was Oxford Market, built by James Gibbs in 1721 at the northeast end of Great Titchfield Street, just behind Oxford Street. It had an arcaded ground floor and a steeply pitched roof, like a country town market. Sadly, it was demolished in 1880. And there was Cumberland Market near Cumberland Terrace. Designed by Nash, it was aimed at providing for working people rather than posh residents, living east of Regent's Park on the Crown's Marylebone Estate.

FINALLY THE EARTH WILL MOVE



For years a small plot has stood empty on a site just north of the National Gallery's Sainsbury Wing, on the corner of Orange Street and St Martin's Street. An application has now been made for a mixed-use eight storey building, with retail occupancy at basement and ground floor level and six flats on floors above, almost all one-bedrooms.

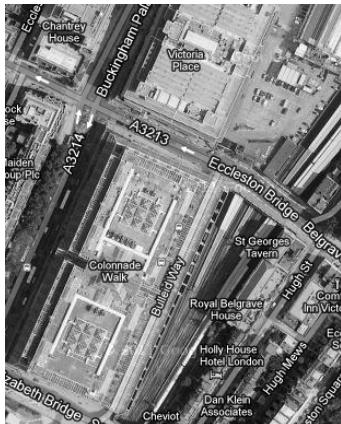
We haven't opposed the application, but we expressed some reservations about the cladding of the Orange Street frontage—patina copper, a bit flash for its immediate limestoney adjacencies. In our view this is a site where consideration of the new building's context and its immediate neighbours would have been particularly satisfying, and most likely more rewarding commercially.

SUMMER CAFF



A proposal has been put forward by St Martin-in-the-Fields for a seasonal café at the eastern end of the churchyard, near the Oscar Wilde memorial. It would operate as an addition to the café in the crypt between April and October, from 10am to dusk. There would be a small servery and about 40 seats at tables. We had no difficulty approving this well-designed scheme that will provide useful income for the Church and an enjoyable venue for Londoners and tourists.

BUCKINGHAM PALACE ROAD



Business is lousy in the shops below the Meccano-like structured twin office blocks at 123-151 Buckingham Palace Road that were designed by Peter Foggo as part of the last Victoria Station redevelopment: not enough customers are registering their existence. (And the shops aren't thrilling.) They are sited along a walkway screened from Buckingham Palace road by an early 20th century wall of Victoria Station, and the building's detached columns also intervene.

Architects Morrow + Lorraine are proposing to change things at ground floor level to improve "the retail experience." A sloping roof over the walkway would be removed, and the shop facades along Buckingham Palace Road and Eccleston Bridge Road brought forward to the line of the columns. The number of retail units would be changed from 26 to nine with more floorspace, and the unbusy existing food court replaced by a supermarket tenant. We don't object.

67 PALL MALL



This Lutyens building stands next to the Pall Mall entrance to Marlborough House. It was once occupied by a bank. The present space has no commercial scope for further office tenants, so we have supported an application that would permit the lower floor to be used as a restaurant, bar and function room. The restaurant, like the dining rooms of nearby clubs, will open for breakfast. We expressed some concern about deliveries since the building has a pedestrian crossing on one side and a motorcycle parking area on the other.

NEW COVENT GARDEN MARKET; NINE ELMS LANE



The Nine Elms Regeneration Area is larger than Hyde Park. The Mayor's planning framework for this part of London, which includes part of neighbouring Vauxhall, expects up to 16,000 new homes and 25,000 new jobs to be created as the region is transformed into what the London Borough of Wandsworth refers to as "a world class residential and business quarter"... like everyplace else. But:

The Covent Garden Market Authority is planning a modern new market (in reverse world-class-speak, to be simply called The Garden), as its 57-acre part of the wider regeneration in Vauxhall. Supremely good market facilities for the new main wholesale food centre for London will be paid for by developing 2,500 homes, shops, commercial space and parkland on other parts of the market site.

The proposals on view in Wandsworth impressed us. Three tall towers of between 32 and 46 storeys will replace the existing Market Towers of banal design in an area where clustered buildings up to 150m high will now be countenanced. The Society accepts the new building height allowances in an appropriate area like this. Overall, we maintain that the success of this development strongly depends on improved public transport, and said so.

AND NOW: AT HOME AT "THE COURTHOUSE"

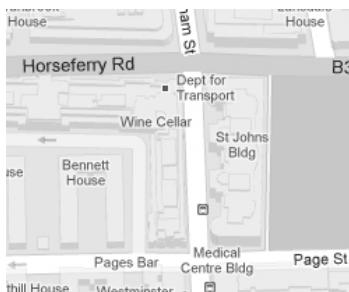


Some of us well remember the crimson days when Horseferry Road had police barriers holding back the mobs of paparazzi who were ready to kill for pictures of the latest pop star indicted in London. Those days have truly gone forever. The Magistrates' Court is being demolished, in favour of an unprepossessing residential development to be called—and dig this for nostalgic cool—The Courthouse.

Since our last Newsletter we've had a presentation from the developers and architects. 129 residential units are planned, with a mixture of studio flats and 1, 2 and 3-bedroom units, many with small balconies. Ironically for nomenclature-sticklers, the building will have no court of either kind. It will have 130 car parking spaces and room to rack 170 bicycles.

We halfheartedly said we would give the planning application our support, despite a number of unresolved issues. There are no plans for shops at ground floor level, though if any street could bear shops the wide and traffic-filled Horseferry Road could, and a continuation of ground-level pedestrian dullness in the vicinity won't be terrific. We were also taken aback to hear that the reasonable configuration of stepped terraces originally proposed at roof level may be cloaked with gauzy strips of perforated metal that look a bit like mansard roof shapes. This was explained as a design effort to please planners who want to discourage upstairs residents from having too much fun on the roof decks. Hey, let them tell it to the judge!

OFFICE BUILDING GOES REZ



Diagonally across Horseferry Road from the above we have Great Minster House, a wide, large, surly-looking postmodern job completed about 20 years ago. Its main occupant, the Department for Transport, has now consolidated itself into the Horseferry frontage, vacating the Marsham street wing that runs down to Page Street.

Developers Strutt Parker and architects EPR have put forward proposals to convert the premises, above the ground-level BMW showroom, for residential use. Interesting. A mixture of 1 and 2-bedroom units would be provided with 3-bedroom family units over the corner entrance. The facade will be stripped, fitted with balconies and domestic type windows, and "de-postmodernised," according to the architects.

Rooftop plant would be replaced by a new residential floor, raising the building height slightly. There would be a total of 60 market residential units with 61 rack spaces for bicycles and parking for 37 cars. Motor-loving residents would also be offered membership of the Westminster Car Club, a current council scheme partnered with Zipcar. Not such a big deal, since we note the club scheme currently has a fleet of only about 100 cars.

SOMERSET RISING



Somerset House Trust is a charitable organisation set up in 1997 to plan and manage the great building. We were recently shown designs for the proposed refurbishment of offices in the west wing of Somerset House, which was completed in the 1850s by James Pennethorne following William Chambers' original design.

The proposals hew closely to the original internal layout of the building and many of its features, down to fire grates and restored pine doors and window shutters. The most surprising element is a proposed new spiral staircase, inspired by the so-called Nelson stair in the rotunda (which was rebuilt in 1952 after its destruction in the blitz).

When the work is completed the ground floor will have commercial uses, and in keeping with the Trust's aims the upper floors will be occupied by an art institution or for exhibitions. We don't know about the Trust's development finances, but this looks like a carefully planned scheme to bring into public use a further wing of the building that was long occupied by poorly maintained government offices.

SWTMS...

stands for South Westminster Traffic Management Study, set up by Westminster, Kensington & Chelsea, Transport for London, the Cadogan and Grosvenor Estates, Land Securities, Victoria Business Improvement and British Land. The Westminster Society is in a less potent group of "stakeholders" being kept on the fringe.

So far the study group has divided the geographic turf into four sub-areas, and has identified some generic measures to look at, such as two-way traffic, removal of traffic signals, air quality improvement and on-street parking. As more happens we'll keep you posted.

MEMBERSHIP

Thanks to all who have recently renewed membership to the Society, and special thanks to those who included an extra donation with their subscriptions. We extend a warm welcome to new members who have joined recently. 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.

From our records it appears that not everyone who sent us a membership subscription by cheque last year has yet done so for 2012. Perhaps you have paid by standing order or BACS. If neither, may we gently remind you that the cost of a year's subscription is £15.

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