

# THE WESTMINSTER SOCIETY



URBAN VITALITY AND CONGENIALITY

## NEWSLETTER

August 2012

### AGM

The May 2012 AGM was held in the Parish Hall of St Peter's Eaton Square. A drinks reception was followed by a brief business meeting and this was followed by our Annual Lecture. The speaker this year was Rosmarie MacQueen who gave a very interesting account of her extensive remit as Strategic Director for the Built Environment for Westminster City Council.

### *Ever more accommodation – but where are people expected to shop?*

At the AGM the Chairman commented that over the past year the Society had been pleased about the number of buildings that continues to be refurbished, often preceding a change of use, rather than demolished. The provision of additional domestic accommodation is often a result of this process, yet at the same time the number of supermarkets declines. Sainsbury's in Kingsgate Parade in Victoria Street has been demolished and to date there are no plans to replace it. A smaller Sainsbury near the corner of Allington Street and Victoria Street is scheduled for demolition and a small Tesco in Warwick Way is closing. Apart from Marks and Spencer in Cardinal Place and one or two Costcutters this will leave Sainsbury's Market in Wilton Road and a small Tesco in Monck Street.

Back in January we wrote about a proposed new Sainsbury Local at 10 Rochester Row.

The application was discussed at a recent Planning sub-committee. There is no denying that the stocking of supermarkets involves a certain amount of noise - empty delivery cages do rattle somewhat - but the proposal here was for four 15 minute delivery slots from Greencoat Place between 11 am and 2 pm. Consent for proposals was refused on the grounds of the nuisance to residents above the proposed new shop as a result of deliveries.

There were, it is true, 120 objections to the application from local residents but these amounted to fewer than 1 in 4 of those whose opinions were canvassed. Many of those who did not respond might well have welcomed a new convenience store. So the question remains: where are the people who

will be moving into the Court House, Castle Lane, the replacement for Kingsgate House, Great Minster East and Cleland and Abell Houses going to do their food shopping?

### *Neighbourhood Forums*

The government's Localism initiatives have made it possible for local communities to influence development in their areas by taking responsibility for neighborhood plans. In areas where there are no parish councils community groups designated to take forward neighborhood planning will be known as Neighbourhood Forums. These Forums will be able to permit development they wish to see realized without the need for planning applications.

Becoming a Neighbourhood Forum is a two-stage process. First an application for the designation of a Neighbourhood Area is made. After a period of at least six weeks, in which people living, working or carrying out business in the proposed area may comment, the decision to designate or not will be made by the cabinet member for the Built Environment.

Once an area is designated as a Neighbourhood Area an organisation can submit an application to be the Neighbourhood Forum for that area. Once again the designation decision will be made by the Cabinet Member for the Built Environment. Only one Neighborhood Forum may be designated for an area and the designation lasts for five years. Once a Neighbourhood Forum is established neighbourhood planning is not led by the local authority, it will become the responsibility of the Neighbourhood Forum. The local planning authority's role is to advise, manage and support the process.

Neighbourhood plans must be in line with the City Council's strategic planning policies and must be about enabling rather than restricting development.

The Westminster Society is not going to apply to become a Neighbourhood Forum. We question the appropriateness of such bodies for our part of Westminster. Currently 15 applications for area designation have been submitted in Westminster. For full details follow the link on our website and then click on Neighbourhood Planning in the column on the left hand side.

### *Former Monastery to be taken over by Westminster School*

St Edwards House on the corner of Tufton Street and Great College Street was built in 1903-05 as the home and chapel of the Society of St John the Evangelist, an Anglican religious order for men. The design was that of a midlands architect called Edward Burgess who was said to produce work similar to that of Norman Shaw. The Grade II listed building will be converted to a boarding house for girls at Westminster School.

Westminster School occupies several buildings in SW1 in addition those in Dean's Yard and Little Dean's Yard. It owns a state of the art music centre at 9 Tufton Street, classrooms in Sutcliffe's (named after the site of a tuck shop ) next to St Edwards House in Great College Street, the Robert Hooke Science Centre in Dean Bradley Street and the New Horticultural Hall in Greycoat which it uses as a sports centre.

## *Proposed new primary school in the grounds of Pimlico Academy*

In 2008 Westminster City Council voted to transform Pimlico School from a Community School to an Academy. When Westminster School declined to sponsor the new school John Nash a supremely well-connected private equity tycoon took up the challenge. The school was rebuilt under the former Labour Government's Building Schools for the Future initiative.

John Nash has now submitted an application to build a primary school within the grounds of Pimlico Academy which the Society has objected to on three grounds. First, it was not clear what the catchment area for the new school would be. If it is intended to be a purely local facility then estimates that 75% of pupils will arrive and leave on foot seem plausible. If on the other hand the catchment area is wider we could foresee considerable traffic and parking problems caused by the school run, especially as the entrances to the Academy and the primary school are close to one another.

Our second ground for objection concerns the location of the new building within the Academy site. The proposed new building effectively abuts the Academy building and would reduce the amount of open space available for Academy pupils.

The third reason for our rejection of this proposal was that no design details were provided nor any details of the range of the materials to be used. This lack of detail led us to conclude that the submission of the planning application was possibly a kite flying exercise to test local opinion about the proposed new school.

## *3-5 Great Scotland Yard: - a boutique hotel - but no coaches*

In our August 2011 Newsletter we reported plans to refurbish building just off Whitehall at 3-5 Great Scotland Yard and transform it into a 'budget boutique' hotel aimed at short stay coach groups. We did not object to the proposals despite our concern about the feasibility of coach access. We have since heard that the new hotel will not be targeting coach groups.

## *Battersea Power Station*

Following the financial collapse of the previous owners of Battersea Power Station, Real Estate Opportunities, bids were invited for the site worldwide. A bid of £400 million from a Malaysian consortium was the highest. A report in the Times early in July said that it is hoped that the deal will secure development of the largest brick building in Europe. The Malaysian bid has scuppered Roman Abramovich's hopes of building a landmark football stadium on Battersea Park Road. The Society's views were mixed as to whether this latest attempt to secure the future of the power station would succeed. Some of us thought the Malaysians would go the way of all the other developers who had had plans for the site: others that the Malaysians would take a longer view and might succeed. However, as we keep pointing out, the site will never be viable without an extension of the Northern Line and that won't happen without the agreement of Transport for London.

## SW1 Gallery - temporary change of use

The SW1 Gallery is a community facility tucked away above Marks and Spencer and adjacent to Wagamama in the Cardinal Place development. It's where the Society held its 2007 AGM. Founded and managed by Land Securities, the provision of the facility was a condition under a Section 106 agreement of Land Securities gaining planning consent for Cardinal Place. Land Securities have now applied for a temporary change of use for the SW1 Gallery lasting no less than five years. They wish to transform the gallery into an income-generating marketing suite and to use this money to subsidise another item in their Victoria portfolio, the rebuilt St James's Theatre in Palace Street. The theatre would house the temporarily relocated community facility.

Naturally the Society objected to proposals which would have let Land Securities wriggle out of their obligation to fund the gallery as a community resource.

## Thames Tunnel

In the January 2011 Newsletter we reported on the new sewer that Thames Water proposed to build in order to update Joseph Bazalgette's late 19<sup>th</sup> century sewer network. Originally Thames Water was going to construct a 10 meter ventilation shaft to a sewer overflow on the Victoria Embankment to the south of the Jubilee Bridge. We felt that the ventilation shaft would be intrusive and wished to be reassured that noxious odours would be not impinge on people using the Jubilee Bridge to cross the river. We were pleased to see that the 10 metre ventilation shaft is being replaced in revised proposals by two shorter ventilation shafts, one four metres high and the other six.

## Visits Programme

The Chairman has been involved in the running of the Society's visits programme since 2004. Following Bill Dunnett's resignation in she took over the role of Visits Organiser with help from Richard Palmer. She plans to stand down in January 2013 and if we haven't found someone else to take over (we are looking) there will be a hiatus in the visits programme. Whether or not we manage to find a new Organiser, one event we are planning to arrange is a guided walk in the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park once it opens to the public in 2013.

## Biennial Awards next year

The Society will be soon be considering which of the new buildings and renovation schemes that have been completed over the past two years in Westminster should receive one of our biennial awards. Air WI just off Regent Street, which some of us visited earlier this year, is likely to be on the long list but nothing has been decided yet. If there is a building or scheme that you would like us to consider for an award please email or write to the Chairman whose contact details can be found below. The categories for which we make awards can be found on the Society's website. If you wish to nominate in a category that we don't appear to acknowledge don't let that discourage you. We are nothing if not flexible.

## *Changes to our website*

You may not have noticed, but bit by bit we are making changes to our website. The most recent Newsletter can be found there along with a membership form and details of our biennial awards. It's been possible for quite a while to access Westminster City Council Planning database via our website. Recently we added links to the Crown Estate, an organization with a keen interest in planning issues in our area of Westminster, and Land Securities a key London developer that owns and is redeveloping large areas of Victoria Street.

## *Two dates for your diary*

At present there are still places available on the Society's private guided highlights tour of Buckingham Palace gardens on Wednesday 19 September. The garden tour will be preceded by a self-guided tour of the Palace's state rooms and a chance to see the exhibition called Diamonds in honour of the Queen's diamond jubilee. The cost of the visit for those who are 60 and over is £24.80 and for others, £26.00. Entry to Buckingham Palace is at 11.15 am. If you would like to come on this visit please contact the Chairman at [olwen\\_rowlands@hotmail.com](mailto:olwen_rowlands@hotmail.com) or on 0207 821 5324 before sending a cheque.

Open House weekend this year is taking place on 22 and 23 September. Copies of the Open House guide can be picked up free in participating London borough libraries, subject to availability.

## *An apology*

We apologise for the appearance of the August Newsletter. Unexpected events conspired against us and it wasn't possible to create our usual stylish design. We plan to be back to normal next time.