

THE WESTMINSTER SOCIETY



URBAN VITALITY AND CONGENIALITY

NEWSLETTER

May 2013

2013 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The May 2013 AGM was held in the Parish Hall of St Peter's Eaton Square. A drinks reception was followed by a brief business meeting and then the Society's Biennial Awards were presented to the winners. The evening ended with the Society's annual lecture. This year the speaker was Justin Nicholls from MAKE Architects. He gave a fascinating illustrated presentation that explained the thinking behind MAKE's development of St James's Market, an area between Regent Street and Haymarket.

BIENNIAL AWARDS 2013



In considering the nominated choices, all excellent, the executive committee decided to make two equal 2013 awards in Renovated Architecture (or "ex aequo," as the certificates rendered it in Latin). The committee also decided that "Contribution to Urban Vitality," first given as a Special Award in 2011 for the criss-cross pedestrian traffic layout at Oxford Circus, should become a regular category. That made five awards for 2013. The recipients and citations were as follows:

The Biennial Award for Architecture:
to Peabody, *clients*, and Haworth Tompkins *architects*,
for PEABODY AVENUE (affordable housing), PEABODY AVENUE,
PIMLICO, LONDON SW1

PEABODY'S 150 YEARS OF UNIQUE HISTORICAL ACCOMPLISHMENT
IN PROVIDING AFFORDABLE HOUSING FOR LONDON HAS
BEEN FITTINGLY EXTENDED BY THIS NEIGHBOURHOOD-ENHANCING
RANGE OF RESIDENTIAL UNITS THAT IS BOTH CONTEXTUAL AND
PROGRESSIVELY UP-TO-DATE.

The Biennial Award *ex aequo* for Renovated Architecture:
to Rex Restaurant Associates Ltd, *clients*; and David Collins Studio,
architects & interior designers,
for four restaurants: THE WOLSELEY, 160 Piccadilly, W1; THE
DELAUNAY, 55 Aldwych, WC2; BRASSERIE ZÉDEL, 20 Sherwood
Street, W1; THE COLBERT, 52 Sloane Square, SW1

CHRIS CORBIN AND JEREMY KING'S CONCEPT OF POPULAR DINING
IS NOTABLY AN ACHIEVEMENT OF FITTINGLY CONGENIAL

SURROUNDINGS. AS RECENT EXEMPLARS OF THEIR FINE JUDGEMENT THESE FOUR CAFÉ-RESTAURANTS, RANGING IN DEVELOPMENT AIM FROM SENSITIVE CONSERVATION TO EFFECTIVE RE-INVENTION, HAVE BECOME OUTSTANDING CONTRIBUTIONS TO LONDON'S VITALITY.

The Biennial Award *ex aequo* for Renovated Architecture:
to The Photographers' Gallery, *clients*; and O'Donnell & Tuomey, *architects*,
for THE PHOTOGRAPHERS' GALLERY, 16 RAMILLIES STREET, W1

AT THE GALLERY'S SHREWDLY RELOCATED ADDRESS, ONE MUST NOW DO A LENS CORRECTION TO TAKE IN THE TOWERING EXPANSION OF AN OLD BUILDING. IT HAS ACHIEVED AN EDUCATION STUDIO AND TWO NEW FLOORS OF EXHIBITION SPACE IN A CHALLENGING REFIT—ITS IMAGINATION HARDLY CONSTRAINED BY A VERY LIMITED BUDGET.

The Biennial Award for Urban Design:
to The City of Westminster, *clients*; and Burns & Nice, *architects*,
for LEICESTER SQUARE W1 REDESIGN AND RENOVATION

THE LATEST PIAZZA RENEWAL SIGNALLY ACHIEVES AN ELEVATED SENSE OF CONGENIALITY WITH CONVINCING EXPERTISE FOR THE GREAT URBAN SPACE, INCLUDING WELL-BEDDED NEW GRANITE PAVING, NEW GRANITE BENCHING, SOPHISTICATED LIGHTING, SNAZZY POLISHED BALUSTRADES AND GATES, AND SIMPLIFIED PLANTING AT THE CENTRE, WITH A NEW PLAY SPRAY FOUNTAIN TO BE BEHELD BY SHAKESPEARE.

The Biennial Award for a Contribution to Urban Vitality:
to The London Organising Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games, and the Olympic Delivery Authority, *sponsor clients*; and Wilkinson Eyre & KSS Design Group (basketball arena), Allies and Morrison (arena for equestrian events), M & L Seddon (Hadleigh Farm, Essex, cycling), Team Populous—Populous, Allies and Morrison, Lifschutz Davidson Sandilands—(beach volleyball, and hockey arena), Magma and Team Populous (shooting), David Morley Architects (water polo arena), *designers*,
for IMPERMANENT STAGINGS FOR 2012 OLYMPICS EVENTS

NOT LESS THAN THE OLYMPICS' LEGACY BUILDINGS AND LANDSCAPE, THE OLYMPICS' IMPERMANENT PROVISIONS MERIT RECOGNITION FOR THEIR FUNCTIONALITY AND GIDDY CHARM. INSERTED ON THE SCENE BRIEFLY, THEY ENHANCED AND SOMETIMES GLORIFIED THEIR ENVIRONMENTS (TO THE SURPRISE OF SOME), AND BEQUEATHED ENDURING MEMORIES TO ASSOCIATE WITH THE PLACES WHERE THEY WERE SITED.

THE IN AND OUT (FOREVER) CLUB

In the January Newsletter we reported that a planning application had been submitted to develop this important site in Piccadilly. The property-owning Reuben brothers had been claiming that redeveloping the site would not be possible if they had to make a contribution in excess of £1.8 million to Westminster City Council's



affordable housing fund. In April, however, they increased their contribution threefold and now have consent to create one of London's most expensive residences. But there is now a new issue, downstream of the first one: for some reason Westminster finds itself unable to spend the Reubens' £5.5 million on affordable housing within the city boundaries. Can we believe it?

A SMALL SUPERMARKET, SOMEHOW?



In the August 2012 Newsletter we reported that an application by Sainsbury to open a local convenience store at 10 Rochester Row had been turned down by the Westminster Planning Committee. We wrote to Cllr Robert Davis, the cabinet member for planning, pointing out that one result of turning down this application was that

...what would have been a useful resource for many local people without cars, has not been granted planning permission because of a potential loss of amenity to residents living above the proposed shop caused by the noise of four brief daily deliveries.

In principle, the Westminster Society disapproves of the Council's always viewing local supermarkets as neighbourhood nuisances rather than desirable neighbourhood features.

Sainsbury have now lodged an appeal against the planning committee's decision and we shall be supporting them at the public hearing. We feel that local opposition to the application was partly and honestly based on a faulty understanding of what Sainsbury were proposing because of a previous application submitted some years ago. That had sought permission for a broadly similar use of the premises, but on less amenable terms regarding hours of operation and servicing.

SAVE OUR INCUBATORS!

Something else that we wrote to the Council about was a proposal by the government coalition intended to promote regeneration and make the planning system work more efficiently and effectively that would allow developers to convert offices— vacant or not— to residential accommodation without planning permission.

We have no problem with the conversion of unrentable offices to apartments in principle. What concerned us was the removal of restraint in respect of useful and occupied offices. The financial incentive to change use would be greatest where the difference between housing and business values was widest; that is, in London, and especially in central London. Such changes would have the effect of eliminating reasonably-priced rental premises that function as incubators for startup businesses where small commercial and services companies can begin to grow. The effect on Soho with its many little media outfits, for example, could be devastating. We therefore urged Westminster City Council to ask for exemption from such proposals as the City of London had done.

In the event, Westminster spoke up just in time. On 9 May, Eric Pickles, Communities and Local Government secretary, announced:

We recognised that there may be exceptional economic circumstances which would justify exemptions. Following a thorough assessment of cases submitted this change will not apply to areas in 17 local authorities, as set out in the secondary legislation.

In our view, the change fatally ignores a multitude of misjudged potential consequences. But in London the Central Activities Zone will be exempt, which includes a large proportion of the City of Westminster. Non-exempt parts of Westminster are in the north, west and south, west of Regent's Park, and to the south of Belgrave Square.

THE ADELPHI



The Adelphi—oh, impressive but ripped-off name—is a 1930s building at 1-11 John Adam Street WC2 that replaced greater ones: 24 Georgian buildings by the Adam brothers. Still, the semi-neoclassical, semi-art deco job is the one we've now got. It's had a variety of tenants including many public sector organisations, some of whom have not treated its interiors with respect. A proposal has now been submitted to convert the ground floor and basement into restaurants and a café. The loading bay would be relocated, and internally the reinstatement of light wells would improve the office space they serve as would the reinstatement of two atria plus associated rooflights. New public access seemed OK to us, and we welcomed the proposed restoration of the 1930s decorations to undo the casual neglect of earlier occupants.

ADMIRALTY ARCH



The Admiralty Arch with its large flanking wings, designed by Sir Aston Webb, was built in the early 20th century as a monument to Queen Victoria. The north and south wings provided houses for senior admiralty officials. Three office storeys were fitted in the entablature above the arch proper. In recent years, the Admiralty Arch was occupied by government departments.

An application has now been submitted to transform Admiralty Arch and its link bridge to the Old Admiralty Building into a 100-bed luxury hotel, a members' club, and a single residential unit. Changes to the Grade 1 building's exterior would be tactful and minor. The building would continue to be serviced from Spring Gardens South. The main entrance, made Disability Discrimination Act-compliant, would be in the north building and would provide access also to the club and the residential unit, both in Spring Gardens North. Visitors wishing to reach rooms in the south building would do so by taking a lift to the upper floors and crossing the Mall overhead. The Society supported the application—the alternatives would have been poor quality office accommodation or a noise- and fume-assaulted apartment block—but we had traffic concerns about provisions for a taxi pickup and dropoff point near the main entrance.

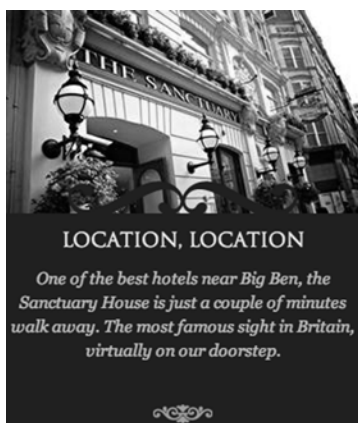
1 PALACE STREET



An application has been submitted to develop former government offices sited in Buckingham Gate, Palace Street and Stafford Place as residential accommodation. The main part of the ensemble is the Grade 2 listed building in Buckingham Gate which has in the past housed apartments, a hotel and most recently the Department for International Development. Redevelopment will mean the retention of the listed building and the facades of the three “buildings of merit” on the site. A weakly designed later infill in Palace Street will be demolished and replaced. A total of 75 residential units will be provided with a restaurant on the ground floor. In the centre of the site will be a private garden for residents, who will also have access to three basement floors of parking.

We had no concerns about the return of the site to its original residential use and were happy with almost all aspects of the proposal, but we were unconvinced by the elevation of the proposed replacement infill in Palace Street, which we felt required more study. In our response to the Council we suggested that the planners might discuss those design matters with the applicants.

NO SANCTUARY?



We have submitted an objection to an application to change the upper floors of 33 Tothill Street from its present use as the Sanctuary House Hotel, with 18 bedrooms, to nine residential units. The ground floor of the building would remain a public house.

It may be that a hotel of this size cannot be operated profitably even with the draw of the public house, though we doubt that on a street near Parliament and Westminster Abbey with tourists everywhere. This is an excellent site for a small hotel, as the picture on the hotel's website asserts (see left). The information provided by the developer doesn't make a good case for the proposed change of use, and we have asked for justifications.

73 GT PETER ST



We have indicated non-opposition to a scheme that would demolish a nondescript office block at 73 Great Peter Street and replace it with an eight storey building providing residential accommodation and a variety of retail outlets at ground floor level. The new building will improve the architecture and gainfully add more shopping in Great Peter Street, and we welcome the range of the residential provision from studio flats to 3 and 4 bedroom family units. But once again, neither onsite nor offsite affordable housing is being provided. We have been told that a contribution to the City Council's affordable housing fund will be offered in lieu. (To be spent where, WCC?)

THE CLARGES ESTATE



The Clarges Estate is bounded by 82-84 Piccadilly, 29 Bolton Street and 1-12 Clarges Street, facing across to Green Park. In the spring of 2011 consent was granted for the comprehensive redevelopment of the site, allowing the construction of new buildings for residential, office and other uses. The site is now owned by British Land, who have put forward a revised development scheme. It tweaks the earlier one to provide less office space and more residential accommodation, with the possibility of some on-site affordable housing. Retained in the new scheme is a new mews access route through the site between Clarges Street and Bolton Street. A key stakeholder in the redevelopment is the Kennel Club, which currently maintains dog headquarters at 1-5 Clarges Street. The latest proposals give them a new six-storey building running across the site from Clarges Street to Bolton Street featuring a grander entrance than the one they have at present.

Parking would be provided on a one-for-one basis for the market accommodation. The mews would be gated at the Bolton Street exit in order to prevent "rat-running" (landlord-speak for vehicular traffic taking understandable shortcuts).

The Society is likely to raise no objections to this scheme when a planning application is submitted.

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