

THE WESTMINSTER SOCIETY



URBAN VITALITY AND CONGENIALITY

NEWSLETTER

June 2018

DOLPHIN SQUARE



Main entrance, Grosvenor Road

No city in the world has equalled London's good fortune in being uplifted by exceptional and distinctive residential development. Paris and Amsterdam might measure up if their older residences alone were the determinant. But then in the 20th century, London incontrovertibly became leader, flourishing three superlative modern developments. *And all in Pimlico*, for heaven's sake. They were Dolphin Square (1935-37) by Gordon Jeeves for the private developers Costains; Churchill Gardens (1947-62) by competition-winning architects Powell and Moya for the City of Westminster; and Lillington Gardens (1961-72) by another competition-winning team, Darbourne and Darke, again for the City of Westminster. The Big Three, we should think, to which the earlier Peabody Estates could be added for a scattered but estimable Fourth.

If Dolphin Square for us may have sunk more into the stylistic and perceptual familiar than the others, Google shows its grandeur. It



Google satellite view

was built with 1,236 residential units, and when new was called the largest self-contained block of flats in Europe. Its estimable and resourceful architect Gordon Jeeves provided mechanical ventilation for the bathrooms, consolidated rubbish stores, an on-site restaurant and swimming pool, and heating that was once piped in under the river from Battersea Power Station. Hundreds of MPs have lived at Dolphin Square, many famous people, and in legend, it provided discreet comfort for kept women. The City of Westminster bought it all in the mid-1960s, then raised £200 million by selling it again in 2006.

Dolphin Square's present owners have been testing opinions about possible changes, causing anxiety and concern for long-time residents. They have now applied (see 18/01099/FULL) to demolish the somewhat lower north side of the vast quadrangle—currently used for short-term lets and a hotel—and to replace it with one of equal height to the others. All other existing buildings would remain, with one storey added, and one of the car parks would be converted to provide space for about 20 mews-type houses. The additional storeys and houses would provide about 150 additional homes. The owners also want to rebuild the swimming pool and restaurant underground, which is where the Westminster Society has drawn the line. We haven't objected to the major refurbishment and the additions, but we believe that the swimming pool, restaurant and gardens are strong elements of the original design that should be protected and retained.

NO MORE MISHMASH / HODGE PODGE



Woody Allen and Marshall
McLuhan in *Annie Hall*

When planners encourage developers by agreeing that a likely street scene up for redevelopment is "just a mishmash," or a "hodge podge that needs to be fixed," some of us feel that we want to reach out and pull Jane Jacobs from alongside the cinema queue the way Woody Allen produced Marshall McLuhan in *Annie Hall*, to hear her scornful refutation of such prejudices against vitality.*

Quite often we do, that is, but maybe not every time. On this current occasion, the matter in hand is a planning application for a new hotel on a site along a dreary reach of Vauxhall Bridge Road (nos. 268-282; see 17/11033/ FULL), where the site holds three poorly adapted georgianesque houses, a small hotel that looks to be worth half a star, and the back end of a small '60s office building where concrete steps have to be climbed above a grille ventilating a basement parking level accessible from the street behind. Visual chaos can be rich fun; sure it can. But this isn't a gladdening sight.

The proposed hotel replacing it would have 170 beds, a gym and a restaurant. There would also be two 2-bed apartments. Hotel guests and staff would be expected to arrive by public transport, because no on-site parking spaces would be provided. The maximum height of the

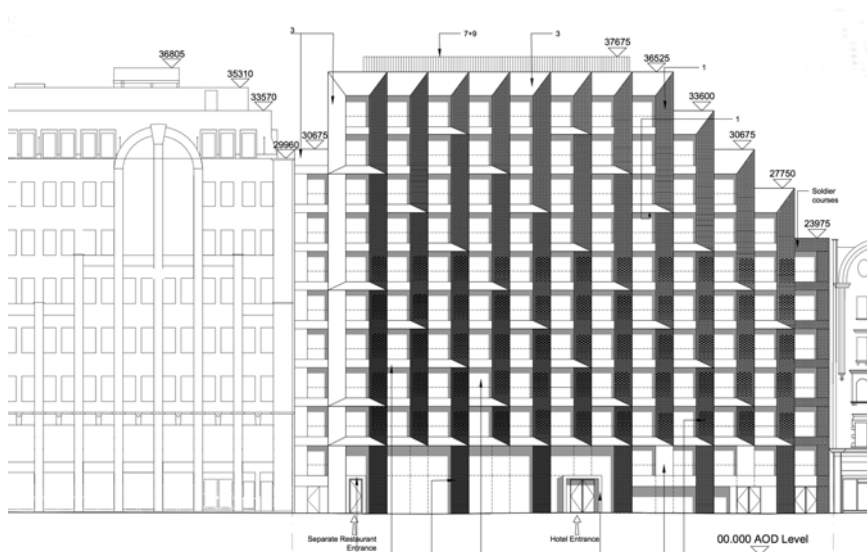


Mishmash at 268-282
Vauxhall Bridge Road

* Jane Jacobs: charismatic critic of comprehensive redevelopment who believed in old & new buildings together, mixed uses, high urban density, small city blocks favouring more public interaction, and natural safety arising from the neighbourly surveillance of streets.

building would be 11 storeys with stepping-down contrasting façade elements: the angled vertical ribs would appear to be stone when viewed from the south, and red brick when viewed from the north. In sum, 268-282 Vauxhall Bridge Road would overcome mishmash and hodge podge with a unified usage, but its harlequin mask would hint at some friendly hugger mugger. We've signified our approval.

The 268-282 Vauxhall Bridge Road proposal



CHRISTCHURCH GARDENS

That is the name of the charming small park at the corner of Victoria Street and Broadway that one goes past, or through, on the way to the St James's Park tube station. BID, a commercial improvement group aiming for "a vibrant destination for those who work, visit or live" in the Victoria business area, have suggestions they believe would make the gardens more accessible and congenial: cut down the trees, pave the centre, and relocate the monuments, such as the fine one to Henry Purcell (dimly visible in the centre of the photo).



Christchurch Gardens is the site of the former burial ground of St Margaret's, Westminster, dating from 1625 and actually still owned by the Diocese of London. In our view, much better ideas would be to protect the trees, remove the recycling bins, provide more seating, and help the Diocese to properly fund the maintenance of the grounds and horticulture.

ST JAMES'S PALACE FORECOURT



*St James's Street, upper left;
Pall Mall, centre and right;
The Queen's Chapel bottom right;
corner of St James's Palace with its
main portal, bottom left*

With "City for All" as the stirring title of their initiative, Westminster City Council are currently reassessing the townscape at the severely pedestrian-unfriendly corner of Pall Mall and St James's Street. In fairness, with the corner's multiple functional requirements of having to serve as mixing point for the feeder route for major traffic from The Mall, the big bend of main streets, the pedestrian access route to Inigo Jones's Queen's Chapel, and, blimey, also as the forecourt for St James's Palace, it isn't very surprising that it looks like a blasted heath.

Westminster now propose to redesign the lighting, widen the footways with York stone pavement, and introduce a lozenge-shaped traffic island to help stream the approaching vehicles. Fine; but rather than provide a lamely paved Lozenge Island surrounded by chained bollards, why not use it for planting a serene cluster of silver birches, or a triumphant row of insanely clipped topiary?

LITTLE ANCHOR IN GREYCOAT PLACE



*10 Rochester Row, upper left;
Townsend House, centre*

A proposal to redevelop Townsend House, a brick-built neo-Georgian building in Greycoat Place dating from the mid-1920s (see 18/00024/FULL), has attracted some heated opposition.

The proposal would replace it with an office, restaurant, retail and residential development of a height comparable with that of the adjacent 10 Rochester Row, with the residential element to be inhabited by the developer and family. For their sake, we regret needing to say that in our view the suggested replacement would be an undesirably characterless element on a site that is prominent on the three-way intersection because of its adjacency to the Grey Coat Hospital school across one side and the former Westminster firehouse (with a conservation redevelopment afoot) across the other, and because it is the inevitable cynosure for all eyes of the multitudinous people motoring along the main route of Horseferry Road.

The existing property rolls round the corner well and has some architectural refinement. If an outstanding replacement was proposed that at least did likewise it would be more difficult to deny. In our opinion, a really good design is what Westminster should require and do its best to encourage from any alternative redevelopment proposal seeking to be worthy. Westminster should decline the banal one that has been put on offer.

MORE BRIEFLY NOTED

Norman House, 105-109 Strand: A planning application was submitted last autumn (see 17/07421/FULL) to partially demolish, reconstruct, extend and refurbish Norman House, a mixed-use building opposite the Strand Palace Hotel with shops, a restaurant and offices. The office entrance would be moved to provide a view through the building to Savoy Steps and The Queen's Chapel of the Savoy, with new retail units on either side; and the existing roof with equipment would be rebuilt to provide two new floors that would not much increase the height. At the rear, a single floor would be removed and replaced with a three-storey new building. We commented favourably on the application, and it received planning consent in January.



Portland House

A SHELVO-RAMA of some recently reported deferrals... 55 Broadway: In 2013 Transport for London decided to apply to have their Grade 1 listed London headquarters converted into high-value residential accommodation, and in 2015 they received planning consent for that. (See our writeup about it in the March 2015 newsletter.) But whoa! Property values have been declining since then in the London prime residential market. So TfL decided recently to stay put, but sell the building to commercial office investors and lease it back. Their change of use consent on the building will expire soon.

84 Eccleston Square: The proposed redevelopment of this site to provide 99 residential units (reported by us in September 2015) has been shelved, also due to faltering prime residential real estate values.

Grosvenor Gardens House, AKA 1-23 Grosvenor Gardens: The future of this extensive building in Grosvenor Gardens remains up in the air after the owner lost a court case against the Candy brothers. (See our August 2017 newsletter report.) We saw that one coming.

2-4 Castle Lane: Land Securities received planning consent in 2013 for this Castle Lane redevelopment as an affordable housing set-off against the luxury residential accommodation planned for Portland House. (See our January 2013 writeup on the latter.) Now Portland House won't be contributing to the burgeoning glut of new high-priced residential accommodation, but Land Securities' affordable housing obligation remains. To that end they have decided to request a reconfiguration at Castle Lane that allows for more residential units.

DAVID CAMERON'S HOLOCAUSE, REVISITED

To summarise: as with most monuments and memorials destined for Westminster, the Holocaust Memorial was an influential proposal of the sort that tends to carry its own weight forward. David Cameron backed it from the start—no objections about that from us—but then personally decided that it should be made to happen in Victoria Tower Gardens, adjacent to Parliament. We thought that choice of site was disastrous for traffic, crowding, security, and park-destroying reasons.

Since our last report about it, an invited design competition for the Holocaust Memorial including an education centre has been held, which was judged to be won by a team including architects David Adjaye and Ron Arad. Nathan Silver of our Executive Committee wrote to both in October congratulating them, mentioning the site issues (no doubt blindingly obvious to them), and suggesting they use their influence to try to change the memorial location. No reply was received from either, but they've got that to chew over. Nathan also wrote to the Prince of Wales, who might decide to comment because he happens to be Patron of the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust. A reply did come from Ally Rae, the Prince's Assistant Private Secretary with heritage and built environment responsibility. He said, *inter alia*:

"As I know you appreciate, this was a decision made by the Government and follows the work of the Prime Minister's Holocaust Commission. It would not be appropriate for The Prince of Wales to comment *at this point in the process*." [Italics added.]

Having heard little more by February, Chairman Olwen Rowlands emailed the civil servant attending the Cabinet Office's Holocaust Memorial team to ask for an update. This was the reply she received:

"Since the announcement of the winning architectural team in October we have been working with Adjaye Associates, Ron Arad Architects and Gustafson Porter + Bowman [landscape architects], with engineers, planning and security consultants to develop the design. Our current intention is to submit a planning application in Autumn this year. As part of that process we plan to invite local neighbours and stakeholders including The Westminster Society to meetings and a public event in early Summer. We will make contact with you when more detail is known about these events."

As ever, we accept our bureaucratic designation as "stakeholders," and look forward to the next stage of revelation. The new Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government who may call in the planning submission is the reputedly independent-minded James Brokenshire, and the *menschen** Ed Balls and Eric Pickles are now Holocaust Memorial co-chairmen. So buck up! we tell ourselves. The Garden Bridge seemed unassailable too, until it suddenly collapsed!

MAIR ELUNED
GARSIDE, 30 August
1931 - 28 April 2018



We were deeply saddened by the recent sudden death of our cherished colleague and friend, Mair Garside.

Mair joined The Westminster Society in the early 1980s, and served as a devoted and enthusiastic participant on the Executive Committee. She had clear and well-founded views on all things Westminster, particularly those that were largely matters of social and educational benefit. When our then Chairman Sir John Bayley retired in 2002, the members felt that Mair should succeed him, and she was elected by acclamation. Though she decided to step down from the Chair two years later, Mair thereafter remained active on the Executive Committee—seldom missing a meeting, and usually asking the most trenchant questions.

Mair Eluned Garside was born in Cardiff, where she later received a degree at the University of Wales. In 1954 she married Hugh Garside, and they moved to Westminster where he became a Councillor. Upon Hugh's untimely death, Mair successfully defended his seat for the Millbank Ward, where she remained as a Councillor until the partisan ground moved. But Mair stood again, most recently in 2014. In 2015, at the age of 83, she appeared on a hustings panel run by The Mirror to support Yvette Cooper in the Labour leadership election.

Mair was intensely involved in education as a Labour member of the Greater London Council, and as deputy leader of the Inner London Education Authority. Locally, she was Chair of Pimlico School from 2005 to 2007. Mair lived happily across the street from Lillington Gardens (see page 1). A plaque commemorating the work of Hugh and Mair Garside is fixed to Garside House in Regency Street.

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* Yiddish for "people of integrity and honour."