

THE WESTMINSTER SOCIETY



URBAN VITALITY AND CONGENIALITY

NEWSLETTER

APRIL 2009

WESTMINSTER SOCIETY AGM 2009

The date of the Society's 50th AGM is Wednesday, 13 May 2009.

The meeting and the reception beforehand will be honoured by the presence of our

Patron, HRH The Duke of Gloucester, in the extensively restored house that William Kent built at 22 Arlington Street, which now forms part of the Ritz Hotel. Our Annual Lecture will be given by Lord Hankey of the Chart, President of ICOMOS, who will talk about the challenge of working as an architect within the conservation sphere.

The reception will begin at 6.00 pm and the AGM proper at 6.45 pm. The room in which the reception is being held is not large, so the number of people who attend will have to be limited.

Included with this newsletter is a formal notice of the AGM, an Agenda, and an application form to attend the reception. Please return your application form together with an envelope addressed to yourself (for the return of your ticket of admission) and a cheque for £10 (if you are joining the reception).

The form should be returned to the Chairman, Olwen Rowlands, 19 Regency Street, London SW1P 4BY by Monday 27 April at the latest.

Kindly note! Security will be in operation at the Ritz on the 13th, so please bring with you your ticket of admission, a driving license bearing a photograph or your passport, and a recent utility bill.

It will not be possible to buy a ticket of admission on the door.

MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS

Our thanks to all who have renewed their membership. If you

haven't yet renewed, it's not too late. Please send a cheque for £15, payable to the society, to the Chairman at the address above.

We are grateful to those who not only renewed their membership but also donated a sum towards the work of the Society.

WESTMINSTER SOCIETY AWARDS: THE NOMINATIONS

Nominations have been received from members for the Westminster Society Awards 2009,

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

Exceptionally, we make an award for work outside the boundaries of Old Westminster when the recipient deserves our recognition because of its broad influence and urban significance.

and since the last Newsletter the nominated works have been visited and debated by the Executive Committee. (*For the awards criteria, see box.*) Winners will be revealed, citations read and presentations will be made on 13 May at the Society's AGM, William Kent House, Ritz Hotel. Be there and enjoy the glitz at the Ritz!

The following notable new works were considered:

St Marylebone School (C of E) Performing Arts Academy: 64 Marylebone High Street, W1U 5BA—Gumuchdjian Architects [*not in Old Westminster*]

One Vine Street: offices, residential and retail development and neighbourhood improvement, The Quadrant, W1—Allies and Morrison, architects

Kings Concert Hall, Kings Place, 90 York Way, N1 9AG—Dixon Jones, architects [*not in Old Westminster*]

Bocca di Lupo: restaurant interior and neighbourhood improvement, 12 Archer Street, W1D 7BB—Jo Hagan of USE Architects [*could be justified for consideration in a new awards category since retail shopfitting designs are often ephemeral*]

16 Palace Street, SW1 [*after discussion, removed from 2009 awards consideration because it was completed in 2005*]

The following were the nominees for outstanding renovated architecture:

St Martin in the Fields: new public spaces and restoration, W1—Eric Parry Architects [*possibly an urban design contender also*]

William Kent house: restoration and adapted use, Ritz Hotel, 22 Arlington Street, W1—Ettwein Bridges, architects

St George's Bloomsbury: restoration, Bloomsbury Way, WC1A 2HR—Molyneux Kerr, architects [*not in Old Westminster*]

And these were the nominees for an award in urban design:

BBC Broadcasting House: All Souls' Place pedestrianisation, Langham Street, W1—Sir Richard MacCormac of MJP Architects [*later removed from consideration since the pedestrianisation is not fully completed*]

Projected design for Parliament Square with pedestrianisation at Westminster Abbey, W1—Hawkins Brown Architects; Colin Buchanan & Partners, Traffic Consultants [*a so far unbuilt proposal*]

Festival Walk and Festival Riverside: parades of shops and walkways adjacent to the Royal Festival Hall, Southbank Centre, SE1—Allies and Morrison [*not in Old Westminster*].

HIGH-RISE BUILDINGS UPDATE

The economic climate is not propitious for developers of high-rise buildings.

The 250 metre glass tower proposed for the redeveloped *Battersea Power Station* site has been abandoned by

the developers, Treasury Holdings, because of the hostile response of the mayor, Boris Johnson.

It is possible that 20 Fenchurch Street, known by the tabloids as “*the Walkie-Talkie*,” the Society’s objection to which we reported in the January Newsletter, could be shelved.

Development of the group of Allies and Morrison buildings at Waterloo unfairly called “*the Ugly Sisters*” by the Evening Standard, is on hold and awaiting a public inquiry.

The St George Wharf Tower at Vauxhall has been granted planning permission, but the project is said to be in abeyance until 2010 when the housing market is predicted to improve.

The Doon Street tower on the South Bank is being challenged in the courts by English Heritage. The project is also now said to be in doubt because of the slumping property market.

Glass towers apart, the London Borough of Wandsworth has revealed that something is cooking apropos the development of the site adjacent to Battersea Power Station as a new diplomatic quarter centred on the proposed new US embassy in Nine Elms Lane, and a million square-foot redevelopment of New Covent Garden Market. There’s still a long way to go, but it’s been revealed that the US State Department has been finalising a shortlist of eminent architects towards holding a limited competition for the design of the new embassy.

CHELSEA BARRACKS: NOW IT’S IN TURMOIL

Gorges have been rising in Chelsea, unlikely though that sounds topographically.

To begin with—following consultations with planners and residents—the Rogers Stirk Harbour scheme for the Chelsea Barracks site was restudied. Last month the developers, Project Guernsey Blue

Limited, submitted a substantially revised planning application to the City of Westminster that reduced the built footprint, lowered building heights, and increased open landscaped space. Some nine-storey elements became four-storey ones to match the height of the Bloomfield Terrace houses. The massing of the Ebury Bridge Road affordable housing elements were appreciably de-massed, and a Primary Care facility to be staffed by ten doctors was added.

The total number of residential units in the revised scheme fell from 638 to 552 (in both cases, half of them market-priced and half of them affordable). The central publicly accessible spaces more than tripled in size from 2 acres to 6.2 acres, addressing some of Westminster’s stated aspirations. In response to CABE, the developers agreed to feature some commemoration of the military history of the site.

Then the drama began. Shortly after the revised proposals were made public. Prince Charles, who once called Richard Rogers’s competition scheme for the National Gallery “a carbuncle,” decided to speak out about architecture once again (not to mention the work of the Rogers practice). Declaring the new scheme “unsympathetic” and “unsuitable for the area,” he urged the principal financial backer, Qatari Diar—the developmental arm of the Qatari royal family— to dump the

Rogers Stirk Harbour firm and supplant it with Quinlan Terry, the prince's favourite exponent of architectural neoclassicism.

While we all uncomfortably await the outcome of Prince Charles's royal-to-royal recommendation and its no doubt reactive republican political sequel, Westminster's Deputy Mayor, Kit Malthouse, has chimed in to agree with the prince. More reassuringly, CABE has supported Rogers Stirk Harbour's revised scheme.

The RIBA, which exists to support architecture and—among other things—see that architects don't poach work from other architects, has so far put up only a feeble objection to Prince Charles's interference. As they previously booked him to give the RIBA Trust's annual lecture on May 12th, it may be an invitation they now regret.

Will the RIBA withdraw their invitation? Will Lord Rogers sue? If a lord sues a prince, who hears the case, anyway? The Westminster Society will do its best to keep up to date with the contretemps, and, you can be sure, will continue to support Vitruvius's famous dictum (in Henry Wotton's 1624 translation) that "Well-Building hath three conditions: Commodity, Firmness and Delight." Without our feeling the need to plump for fluted columns.

LONDON CYCLE HIRE SCHEME

A new cycle hire scheme is due to be introduced to central London in May 2010. The scheme, similar

to the Vélib cycles in Paris, will allow people to pick up a cycle at a docking station, use it as they like, and return it to a docking station at their final destination.

We fully support this initiative. We were however surprised that virtually no docking stations are currently planned in the vicinity of Victoria Station and only one at Pimlico station, while there are five sites round Charing Cross and Embankment stations. (They seem to be everywhere on the streets of central Paris.) We have passed on our concerns to Martin Low of the Directory of Transportation for Westminster City Council.

ANOTHER DATE FOR YOUR DIARY

On Tuesday 15 September, Westminster Abbey will host an event to celebrate the

founding of the society in 1959. Members of the society will be invited to attend sung evensong—one of the most magical of all the Abbey's services—and will then be taken in small groups for a private tour of the Abbey.

Following the tour, a reception will be held for society members in the Jerusalem Chamber. Full details will be given in the next Newsletter.

AN APOLOGY

In the January newsletter,

the address we gave for the Society's website was incorrect. The correct address is: www.thewestminstersociety.org.uk.