

THE WESTMINSTER SOCIETY



URBAN VITALITY AND CONGENIALITY

NEWSLETTER

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THE WESTMINSTER SOCIETY'S 2019 BIENNIAL AWARDS

Our 2019 Annual General Meeting was held on 4 June at The Crown Estate's head office, 1 St James's Market, a 2018 RIBA London Award-winning, part-restoration, part new-build complex designed by Make Architects. Members were impressed by the fine-looking premises and the good canapes on the terrace, and heard an excellent short talk by The Crown Estate's Head of the St James's Portfolio, Oliver Smith. Before that, Nathan Silver of our Awards Committee presented The Westminster Society Biennial Awards to highly deserving recipient clients, designers, and others. Those honoured, and their certificate citations, were as follows:



Weston Tower, Westminster Abbey

Award for Architecture, *ex aequo*:

Access tower to the Triforium, Westminster Abbey, SW1--
to The Dean and Chapter of Westminster Abbey, *clients*, with
Ptolemy Dean, Surveyor of the Fabric, *architect*

citation: A BASILICA'S TRIFORIUM IS ESSENTIALLY STRUCTURAL, PROVIDING HORIZONTAL BRACING FOR A LOFTY NAVE. WESTMINSTER ABBEY'S TRIFORIUM WAS VIRTUALLY INACCESSIBLE UNTIL FUNDS WERE RAISED TO MAKE IT A PUBLIC SPACE. THE DAZZLING DESIGN THAT NOW GETS US TO IT IS THE WESTON TOWER—A SEVEN-STOREY SPARKLER THAT IS BEYOND CONTEXTUAL: A RICH POLYMORPHIC DESIGN FOR THE AGES. LYING IN AN EXTERNAL NICHE OF THE ABBEY, IT CONFUTES ITS BASHFUL SEMI-CONCEALMENT.



Riverwalk, Millbank

Award for Architecture, *ex aequo*:

Riverwalk, Millbank, London SW1--
to Ronson Capital Partners, *clients*, with Stanton Williams,
architects

citation: RANGED IN TWO RESIDENTIAL BUILDINGS ON A PODIUM, RIVERWALK IS EXPRESSED AS CURVE-ENDED FORMS, WITH TANGENT CURVED BALCONIES THAT PROVIDE GRACEFUL EXTERIOR SPACES. ITS INDIVIDUAL SITE ON THE EMBANKMENT JUST DOWNSTREAM FROM VAUXHALL BRIDGE IS SKILFULLY USED TO INCLUDE A SMALL PUBLIC PARK, AS RIVERWALK PRESENTS ITSELF IN RESTRAINED BUT ORGANIC SPLENDOUR.



The Royal Opera's new entrance loggia

Award for Renovated Architecture, *ex aequo*:
The "Open Up" improvements, Royal Opera House, Bow Street WC2--
 to The Royal Opera House, *clients*, with Stanton Williams, *architects*

citation: OF THE MANY RECENT DESIGN AND FUNCTIONAL IMPROVEMENTS AT THE ROYAL OPERA HOUSE, TOP BILLING BELONGS TO THE NEW ENTRANCE LOGGIA THAT PROVIDES BETTER ACCESS WHILE INTIMATING THE "OPENING UP" OF PAUL HAMLYN HALL; AND THE BRILLIANTLY COMFORTABLE AUDITORIUM REDESIGN FOR THE MILES-DEEP LINBURY THEATRE, WITH A WELL-DEvised CASCADE OF LINKED AUDIENCE SPACES ON THE WAY DOWN. A SUPERLATIVE RECONCEPTION.



The Royal College of Music site with the stuffed-in addition embracing its new spaces

Award for Renovated Architecture, *ex aequo*:
New and transformed performance spaces, practice studios and control rooms at The Royal Academy of Music, NW1--
 to The Royal Academy of Music of the University of London, *clients*, with Ian Ritchie, *architects*

citation: A REBUILDING PROJECT EMBODYING MULTIPLE ADVANCED TECHNICAL SKILLS, THE INFILL DIFFICULTIES ALONE IN ACCOMMODATING THE NEW MUSIC THEATRE, RECITAL HALL, PRACTICE STUDIOS AND CIRCULATION ROUTES MUST HAVE REQUIRED *EIN ZAUBERSCHUHLÖFFEL* [a magic shoehorn] TO FIT THEM INTO THE GRADE II LISTED INSTITUTION. RENOVATED ARCHITECTURE OF VERY HIGH DISTINCTION IS THE LAUDABLE, AUDIBLE RESULT.



Royal College of Music link between new spaces and existing building

Award for Urban Design:
Leadership in principled opposition to the siting of the U.K. Holocaust Memorial in Victoria Tower Gardens--
 to Barbara Weiss, *activist architect*; Nina Grunfeld, *community leader*; and Rowan Moore, *architectural critic*

citation: BUILDING A U.K. HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL THAT EVOKES THE TRAGIC PAST AND WARNS ABOUT THE FUTURE WOULD BE A SUPERB ACHIEVEMENT, IF ON AN APPROPRIATE AND ADEQUATELY SPACIOUS SITE. WHEN THE SITE CHOSEN WAS THE SMALL, PROTECTED AND CHERISHED VICTORIA TOWER GARDENS, AND THE SELECTED DESIGN ENVISAGED A THEME PARK RATHER THAN A PROFOUND MEMORIAL, THE THREE RECIPIENTS OF THIS AWARD WERE LEADERS IN CONCERNED AND COGENT OPPOSITION TO IT. SOMETIMES THE HIGHEST CULTURAL OBLIGATION IS A DUTY TO OPPOSE, AND THEIR MERITS ACCLAMATION.



The lovely Victoria Tower Gardens



Lumière, London 2018

Award for A Contribution to Urban Vitality:
Lumière London, a Festival of Lights--
to The Mayor of London's Deputy for Culture and the Creative
Industries, *sponsor*, and Artichoke, *producers*

citation: THE ARTICHOKE COMPANY BEGAN THEIR SHIFTING-SITE LUMIÈRE FESTIVALS IN 2009 IN DURHAM, INVITING ARTISTS TO PUBLICLY DISPLAY EXPRESSIONS OF LIGHT IN DARKEST WINTER. FOR THE 2018 LUMIÈRE LONDON, OVER 50 WORKS OF ART WERE DISPLAYED AND BUILDINGS TRANSFORMED BY LIGHT IN WESTMINSTER AND OTHER NEIGHBOURHOODS. IN HONOURING THE INGENUITY AND IMAGINATION OF ITS FOUNDING COMPANY, WE HOPE THAT ITS ALLURING CONTRIBUTIONS TO URBAN VITALITY WILL BE PERENNIAL.

LITTLE BREXITS

We might think of them as such, because, smouldering, they are still with us:

The Holocaust Memorial proposal for Victoria Tower Gardens has been called in by Esther McVey, government Minister (soon, perhaps, someone new) since the City of Westminster planning committee seemed likely to spurn approval. We and other objectors aren't going away, and we await procedural details.

Recent news on **The Garden Bridge** is not good for CrowdJustice, which embraces a determined group of fighters trying to get some of Londoner's money returned. Transport for London has now paid out the £5.3m final tranche of public funds to the Garden Bridge Trust charity for the defunct scheme (it's cost us £43m in all).

Meanwhile, The Charity Commission's published Concluding Report on the matter has turned out to be "insufficiently robust," as CrowdJustice's *pro bono* QC later declared with legal tact. The Commission simply bemoaned the use of funds to no public benefit, and held that the Garden Bridge fiasco was a failure for charity that risks undermining public trust. No kidding!

PARLIAMENT'S NORTHERN ESTATE



Our team, attending a presentation by BDP masterplanners of the site chosen for the temporary decanting of Parliament for a period likely to be more than ten years while the Palace of Westminster is entirely restored, took away an overall impression of the enormity of the task that weighs heavily on BDP.

The overriding factor in their approach has had to be security: no MPs at Parliament should be using public pavements. To achieve this, the so-called Northern Estate (see left) was the only considered site that could meet the security brief, since some of its



New façade elements for the Northern Estate. Existing Norman Shaw building to the right

buildings already have underground connecting routes, and additional secure circulation could be established.

The main objection to BDP's decanting scheme from The 20th Century Society and Marcus Binney of The Times concerns the loss of the William Whitfield-designed Richmond House, except for its preserved Whitehall façade. The BDP planners' justification is that their brief required the replication of the exact dimensions of the large and lofty existing Commons chamber and its Division Lobbies on either side, which therefore had to swallow most of Richmond House's existing internal volume.

The Westminster Society's view is that a more major issue concerns the proposed new elements to be built in the Northern Estate. Meant to be read, BDP hopes, as "neutral backgrounds abstracting adjacent Georgian façades," their klutzy proportions belie that. Their bromidic appearance offers no sense of context and expresses nothing. "Not of sufficient quality," one of our notes says. Not of sufficient talent, really. BDP told us more work would have to be done, but our team feared we were being shown the finished design.

PALMER STREET



Proposed 2-14 Palmer Street, SW1

Planning approval has been requested for the redevelopment of an unremarkable-tending-to-dreary five storey 1950s office building formerly used by the Ministry of Defence. In its place would be a seven storey retail and office building (see 19/03757/FULL on the City of Westminster's planning website). On the whole we think it is a well-considered scheme, and we have supported it.

5 STRAND



The Park Hyatt hotel proposal (shown in a Daylight and Sunlight model)

Park Hyatt hotels have acquired this prominent site, and Squire Architects seek to take advantage for them of a planning consent obtained in 2017 for an office building by Adajaye Associates (see 19/04162/FULL). The Westminster Society raised initial objections about the hotel's new roof height which would have been prominent in views from Trafalgar Square, but that has now been mitigated. In appearance the building will be about as dull as modern hotels can get, but it's a slight improvement on the Adajaye scheme consent's excitable assembly of arched windows and detached exterior columns. The "antisocial purposes" currently in evidence in some of the existing building's ground floor recesses will probably disappear when five-star hotel guests are on the scene.

78-102 ROCHESTER ROW

The existing building is a 5-storey red brick-clad mixed-use job of residential and office use with separate vertical circulation. The proposal (now consented; see 19/04254/FULL), will increase office floor areas, and replace the office façades. Our own reporting architect thought the new elevational treatment-- on the north end

of the lengthy building-- was an improvement, and the removal of plant from the roof also improved the building's looks.

55 BROADWAY



55 Broadway

This notable Grade I listed building, designed by Charles Holden and completed in 1929, was until recently the main offices of Transport for London. Now acquired by a developer for probable conversion to a hotel, the building has an extant planning consent for offices and residential units. We were consulted for our preliminary thoughts before EPR Architects were appointed for the job. We advised that for all the beauty of this vast building, it would not be an easy task to imbue its rather severe, totally unique Art-Deco structure with all the services, finishes and fittings required by a luxury hotel, and to satisfactorily implement the necessary internal changes without introducing myriad, complex new circulation corridors that might sap its character. It will be crucial to have on board the right consultants, and to resist most temptations of commercialism and fussiness.

The owner hopes to obtain pre-app advice from Westminster planners soon. We'll comment fully on the scheme when the formal planning application has been made.

DACRE HOUSE



The existing Dacre House

We were asked to comment on a planning pre-application for Dacre House, in Dacre Street. The owners have a consent for the refurbishment of their office building plus a two-storey addition, but are now inclined to replace it instead with a building of equal volume in order to get more efficient floor plans by relocating the lobby and vertical circulation, and to get better floor-to-ceiling heights with more glass by means of the new structure. The Westminster Society told them last September we would support the scheme, but now, only a few months later, the energy and carbon expenditure to provide a scarcely necessary building replacement has come to seem something that could do without our encouragement. A planning application has just been filed for the new-build (see 19/09401/FULL), but we hope the owners will revert to their refurbishment scheme.

101-105 VICTORIA STREET



Nowadays The House of Fraser-- with which 101-105 Victoria Street is still badged (see left)-- is owned by Sports Direct, a company in such serious trouble it's been let off rent on these premises until the end of their lease in 2022. After that, BentallGreenOak (BGO), the property asset's owners, wish to redevelop the entire site, including upstairs offices currently occupied by tenants including the Labour Party. BGO have been speaking to architecture practices from Norway, Denmark and elsewhere. *Pro tem*, our own advice has been sought about how the building could become a Destination.

At the moment the idea is to build a new building with "a Town Hall feel," having attractions that take good account of local needs, such as a parcel collection centre; a site for events such as e-gaming competitions; a hotel; rooftop tennis; experiences for school kids. BGO want the new building to be carbon neutral or even carbon positive, with natural ventilation and recycled heat.

Other local groups have asked for the introduction of greenery in Victoria Street; partial pedestrianisation behind the building; and affordable workspace to compensate for that lost to offices in residential conversions. We talked with BGO about consolidation of deliveries, and car-free development.

The existing neo-brutalist building (it has plainly brutalist forms, though it's *neo* because it was not actually built in bare concrete) that will soon vanish was built 1973-77 for The Army & Navy Stores by Elsom, Pack and Roberts. Its colonnaded continuation west of the Westminster Cathedral piazza will persevere, for the time being. BGO seem positively keen for contextually resuscitating traditional local materials such as red brick. Glass would not be the primary material, they told us. On the other hand, BGO hinted at seeking lots of additional height in their redevelopment.

52-73 WILTON ROAD



From the 52-73 Wilton Road
planning application

Viticorp Limited have submitted a planning application (see 19/06682/FULL) by Matt Architecture for Wilton Road, across the street from Sainsbury's, to supplant the existing long row of houses and retail shops (including an excellent Chinese restaurant) with a large, high, and dense mixed-use scheme. Viticorp engaged in four pre-app conferences with planners, and displayed their scheme locally, only to draw many planning application objections from those nearby, and some of the most withering comments we've read from our own team. We'll spare you the animadversion and obloquy. We concluded by saying, "we feel this scheme falls well short of the quality of design expected in Westminster, and is ill conceived in concept and design and would harm the area. We strongly recommend that it be refused."

62 PAGE STREET

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Nathan Silver (this newsletter's editor) has applied for planning permission to enlarge his first floor family flat at 19 Regency Street by expanding onto the rooftop above the kitchen of The Regency Café, and to convert the derelict shop at 62 Page Street into a separate self-contained basement-and-ground-floor house for affordable rent. 62 Page Street's rooftop will become the expanded flat's terrace, and the first floor extension's rooftop will become a terrace for the second floor flat. Transparent grey photovoltaic glass will be used for energy and expression. The Regency Café's existing kitchen extraction and ventilation equipment will be moved and improved to meet current standards. See planning application 19/06223/FULL. Illustrations TK next newsletter.