

ISLINGTON *news*

The Journal of the Islington Society incorporating FOIL folio

Chief executive delivers state of the Borough report

The opening meeting of 2012 was the occasion for an address by the new Chief Executive of Islington Council, Lesley Seary, to members of the Society at Islington Town Hall on January 17th.

Previous experience

Lesley began by telling us of her previous local government experience. She joined the G.L.C. just before its demise from the private sector, but in time to see the much vaunted Coin Street development to fruition. She then moved to Newham in time for the Channel Tunnel Rail link (now HS1) debate. She subsequently worked at Redbridge and Lewisham before joining Islington last summer.

First impressions of Islington

In all that time one is bound to accumulate some knowledge of Islington, but Lesley had been surprised at how much more there was to the Borough as she toured each of the wards with their elected councillors. The statistics are well publicised in local government circles. Most stark is that Islington is the second worst Borough for child poverty in London. 43% of children are raised in households where no-one is in work. Uniquely, the most affluent areas exist cheek by jowl with the poorest. On the other hand, despite the loss of manufacturing and widespread conversion of buildings from employment use to residential, there is a thriving business community, with Jack Morris a beacon for enthusiasm and energy.

Bleak economic outlook

Lesley arrived at a time when the council was being forced to cut £100m. per annum from its spending (with additional cuts to police and health services); more than a quarter of total spend. A £52m. chunk would go this year. All this at a time when demand is growing. The CAB reports more and more consultations, with debt counselling in particular in increased demand. At the same time there is a decline in development activity and a serious slow down in house building. The government desires to cap benefits, with no allowance for the higher costs that obtain in London, and is increasing responsibilities through the Localism Act.

Islington's response

The change of political administration in May 2010 had led to the Fairness Commission and its 19 recommendations for working towards a fairer Islington carried unanimous support on the Council. Six priorities emerged from these recommendations, the first and most important being to ensure decent suitable affordable homes. The second is to reduce crime and anti-social behaviour, working with the police, individual families and on estates. The third priority is to break the cycle of poverty: seeking to equip people to be able to take the jobs that are available.

Priority 4 is to ensure the best start in life for children from age 0 to 18. Fifth is helping people to live active independent and healthy lives, and the final priority is to deliver basic services efficiently and well. The bin collection is only noticed when things go wrong. To the relief of many in the Islington Society, Lesley made specific mention of the planning service under this heading, and the need for a clearer focus in delivering more homes of the necessary standard.

Specific changes around the Borough

The chief executive was optimistic about the chances of finally ridding the Archway of its gyratory road system [see page 9], and of improvements at Finsbury Park where again it is transport infrastructure that makes the place unfriendly, in this case the "forbidding" presence of the railway bridge. Plenty is already happening at Farringdon and King's Cross and we need to maximise the benefits to Islington people. Improved relationships with local businesses at Angel and Nag's Head, and the growth of micro-IT businesses around Old Street roundabout were benefitting those areas. Development opportunities exist at Mount Pleasant, some remaining Arsenal sites, and in City Road basin. The Council hopes to build 1800 residential units in three years, [continued on page 9

Local News

Ashmount school building

We have reported on the failed attempt to persuade the council to retain Jim Cadbury-Brown's building for use as Ashmount Primary school, originally built to accommodate separate infant and Junior schools, and the consequent loss of Metropolitan Open Space to accommodate a new school building.

The objection to continued use of the 1954 building as a school was that this listed building would need more alteration than could be permitted. However, the Council is now proposing

to alter it for all time by demolishing it to make way for much needed affordable housing. James Dunnett has pointed out the inconsistency and suggested that if it were to be demolished, the open space lost should be provided on this site. The comments of the Communities and Local Government Minister on Green Belt appear elsewhere in this issue.

NDCMS one-off capital grant for listed places of worship

Last year John Penrose MP, Minister for Tourism and Heritage, announced a one-off capital grant of £1.1m for listed places of worship. Last month the decision was made to offer the funding to the Church of England and the National Churches Trust on the basis of the historic claims on the Listed Places of Worship grant scheme, with the Church of England receiving £781,000 and the NCT £319,000.

It has been agreed with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) that given the tight time scale and small amounts of money involved, the CofE Cathedral and Church Buildings Division will manage the distribution of this sum across the Church of England's dioceses. The National Churches Trust will distribute the remainder of the grant to listed places of worship of

other denominations and faiths across the UK.

The Cathedral and Church Buildings Division has announced it is inviting its 42 dioceses to recommend possible projects for new capital works that can be seen to increase the usefulness of their church buildings beyond the worshipping congregation, to facilitate greater community use.

Locally there is particularly good news. Money has been found for restoration of the important Willis organ at Union Chapel. The Organ has been in urgent need for many years but for obvious reasons the roof over its head had to take priority. The famous Protestant hymn writer built two magnificent organs in Islington, but the other was destroyed by fire along with the Harecourt United Reformed Church in 1981.

School house threatened with demolition

As we went to press, it appeared likely that demolition of the School House, 122, Canonbury Road, would commence within a week. In Autumn 2008 Islington News reported on the architectural merits of this building, and of the campaign to save and indeed list it, led by the late Michael Marland.

After Michael's untimely death, the campaign was taken up by the Canonbury Society, but the council believes the structure is now dangerous and of course the site is like every under-used site desperately needed for housing.

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Islington Society Design Awards

Following the sad death of Alan Turner, who had been running the annual Society Awards for design and conservation, there was a delay in presenting these awards, so that when Alec Forshaw rose to speak to Society members and invitees at the Angel Building on December 1st, it was to announce the winners for both 2010 and 2011. The Angel Building, formerly owned by BT and substantially rebuilt around the original shell, is the 2011 winner.

Alec began by reference to the 2010 competition, those buildings completed in 2009. They included a new Children's Centre at New River Green (behind St. Paul's Road and Essex Road); the Three Corners Youth Centre in Rosoman Street, and the impressive Hornsey Road baths site in Holloway. The panel had been particularly impressed by the excellent restoration and extension of the listed St. George's Church in Tufnell Park. One of the finest buildings in the north of the Borough, it had been a Building at Risk following its closure as a theatre. Another welcome development had been the landscaping of the Town Hall forecourt on Upper Street in conjunction with the repair, redecoration and reopening of the Assembly Hall, a really fine piece of civic improvement. These last two schemes were Commended.

However, the outstanding scheme for 2010, unanimously agreed by the judges, was Highbury Square, the transformation of Arsenal's old stadium into a new residential complex. Inspired by the retention and adaptation of the iconic Art Deco East and West stands and the creation of a new open space on the footprint of the former pitch, the north and south ends have been enclosed by sympathetically detailed new blocks designed by Allies & Morrison. Like much of the architectural press, the panel felt this was a truly extraordinary scheme unique for Islington and unlikely to be repeated anywhere else. Subsequent visits with urban designers and conservation officers viewing it for the first time reaffirm the wisdom of this choice.

In 2011 the panel visited a fresh batch of new schemes in mid-July. They included three of the Borough's Building Schools for the Future projects. This time there were several closely competing schemes. One of the school schemes, Highbury Grove with Samuel Rhodes on the

Highbury site, designed by the Building Design Partnership, was commended. The panel was impressed with the dignified and intelligent disposition of the buildings and recreation space across the site, and the imaginative use of colour and the palette of materials, particularly given the inevitably tight constraints on costs, resources and delivery.

Also commended was the Barnsbury Place scheme by Pollard Thomas Edwards. New residential terraces have been cleverly and sensitively integrated with the retained and converted Victorian and Edwardian school buildings. Some welcome pedestrian permeability between Barnsbury Park and Offord Road was another plus, so that the scheme supplements and reinforces the established quality of the Barnsbury Conservation Area.

Close by, the adventurous Arundel Square scheme provided further evidence of Pollard Thomas Edwards' contribution to the regeneration of Islington over four decades. Against all odds Bill Thomas has succeeded in decking over the railway cutting of the North London line to complete the Square and create an enlarged and much admired central park.

However, the Angel Building prevailed. It displaced the dull and tired hulk of the 1980s BT centre on a prominent corner of the Angel intersection. With the support of clients Derwent London, the architects Alford Hall Monaghan have demonstrated that good schemes do not necessitate pulling down and starting again. Retaining the structural skeleton, a new skin, and extended footprint facing St. John Street to match the street line, and new and retained trees enhancing the public realm; the panel liked the reflection of the historic buildings opposite in St. John Street, and most especially the new central atrium, created out of what had been a miserable light-well. This is a magnificent space with some stunning sculpture and art works, wonderfully lit and quite inspirational.

The panel had been aware that the Angel building had been shortlisted for the prestigious Stirling Prize, so were not alone. It deserved the Islington Award because it sets new standards for the working environment in Islington. Unsurprisingly it has been successfully let, mostly to a leading cancer charity.

Localism Act gains Royal Assent

An era of Whitehall control has ended with a historic shift in power back to local people, as the Localism Bill becomes law.

The Localism Act will trigger the biggest transfer of power in a generation, releasing councils and communities from the grip of central government.

The flagship legislation, which received Royal Assent in mid-November, puts a raft of new rights and powers at the disposal of local people to take charge of their future, delivering on more than 30 coalition agreement commitments.

Key measures to increase the power of local government through the Act include:

- *Introducing a new general power of competence, giving councils unprecedented freedom to work together to improve services and drive down costs.
- *Councils are now free to do anything - provided they do not break other laws
- *Opening the door for the transfer of power to our major cities to develop their areas, improve local services, and boost their local economies
- *Ending the ineffective system for overseeing the behaviour of councillors by abolishing the Standards Board
- *Clarifying the rules on predetermination in order to free up councillors to express their opinions on issues of local importance without the fear of legal challenge
- *Enabling councils to return to the committee system of governance, if they wish, regardless of their size. Centrally set rules interfering in how councils set up their own affairs are being scrapped
- *Giving councils greater control over business rates.
- *Introducing new planning enforcement rules, giving councils the ability to take action against people who deliberately conceal unauthorised development
- *Increasing powers for councils to remove illegal advertisements and graffiti and prevent fly-posting, and giving planning authorities stronger powers to tackle abuses of the planning system
- *Reforming homelessness legislation to enable councils to provide good quality private rented homes where appropriate, freeing up social homes for people in need on the waiting list
- *Allowing councils to keep the rent they collect and use it locally to maintain social homes through the abolition of the housing revenue account
- *Passing greater powers over housing and regeneration to local democratically elected

representatives in London.

Councils will have the power to offer business rate discounts, which could help attract firms, investment and jobs. The Act cancels unfair backdated business rates, which threatened to cripple key businesses. It stops plans to impose a business rate supplement on firms if a simple majority of those affected do not give their consent, and simplifies the process for claiming small business rate relief.

Key measures to increase the power of local communities include:

- *Introducing a new Right to Bid, which will give residents the opportunity to take over treasured local assets like shops and pubs and keep them part of local life
- *Introducing a new Right to Challenge, making it much easier for local groups with good ideas to put them forward and drive improvements in local services
- *Consigning Bin Taxes to the dustbin of history, by removing the ability of councils to charge families for overfilling their bin and to introduce extra tariffs for taking away household waste
- *Increasing transparency on local pay, by requiring councils to publish the salaries of senior officials working in local authorities, enabling local people to understand how public money is being spent in their area
- *Giving communities the right to veto excess council tax rises. Previously only central government had the power to 'cap' increases
- *Introducing a new right to draw up a neighbourhood plan, giving local people a real voice to say where they think new houses, businesses and shops should go - and what they should look like
- *Enabling communities to bring forward proposals for development they want - such as homes, shops, playgrounds or meeting halls, through the Community Right to Build
- *Freeing home sellers and buyers from red tape through the abolition of Home Information Packs. [The Act removes HIPs once and for all from the statute books.]
- *Enabling people to swap their social home, for example because they wish to move jobs. A national home swap scheme will give access to details of all other tenants who may be a match
- *Giving social tenants stronger tools to hold their landlords to account. Landlords will be expected to

support tenant panels - or similar bodies - so tenants can carefully examine the services being offered. The Tenant Services Authority will be abolished

*Requiring developers to consult local communities before submitting certain applications. This gives people a chance to comment while there is still scope to make changes

*Ending decision making by unaccountable officials on important infrastructure projects such as train lines and power stations. The Act abolishes the Infrastructure Planning Commission, and restores responsibility for taking decisions to elected, accountable Ministers.

National Planning Policy Framework

As we await the final version of the National Planning Policy Framework, here are the comments of Islington South & Finsbury M.P. Emily Thornberry.

"I was interested to hear your views on this important matter and I share your concern that the proposed new planning guidance will not protect our precious green spaces, The NPPF will replace all the existing planning policy statements and planning policy guidance documents. It is the government's overarching statement on the purpose of the planning system and sets out its priorities.

"A number of groups including the National Trust and Friends of the Earth have also expressed grave reservations about the coalition government's proposals. The National Trust voiced particular concern that the new framework will threaten "the everyday places in and around cities, towns and villages that are hugely valued by local communities". The government is proposing a presumption in favour of development. Such a presumption could undermine community input and result in poor and inappropriate developments.

"I share the ambition of streamlining the planning system particularly with regard to building new housing, but the government's document removes the criteria of environmentally friendly and affordable housing which is in the current planning guidance.

"I recently wrote to Greg Clark to raise concerns about the Framework and I enclose a copy of the response. Whilst the Minister is keen to reiterate the Coalition's commitment to protecting the environment where possible, unfortunately there is no mention of re-using already developed sites instead of building on greenfield sites wherever possible, as you mentioned. This could surely be an effective policy yet the government scrapped the brownfield first policy.

"The government is currently considering responses to its consultation. They must make significant changes if they are to reassure people who fear that England's green spaces are under threat,

and have a long way to go to persuade us that we will not see more appeals and more arguments about what the words of the new NPPF mean."

The enclosed letter from Greg Clark states that the NPPF will streamline reams of complex and unwieldy national planning policy. It will help ensure that planning decisions reflect local communities' vision of their future, while ensuring that genuine larger-than-local objectives - such as the need to safeguard the natural environment, combat climate change, and to support sustainable local growth - are met.

The Coalition Government is totally committed to protecting our natural and historic environment. Planning decisions should not only protect but wherever possible enhance biodiversity and improve people's access to our natural heritage. The Framework explicitly attaches great importance to Green Belts in safeguarding the country side from encroachment and checking the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas. It directly states that local plans should minimise adverse effects on the environment [but the problem is when the local plan is not written or fails to do this].

The presumption in favour of sustainable development means that where a local plan or proposed development does not give rise to problems it should be approved without delay. But this does not show a green light to development everywhere, Local plans will continue to set out what would be unacceptable, and neither plans nor developments may compromise national requirements for sustainability. The draft framework proposes no change in the approach to sustainability that has been used by previous governments.

Mr. Clark concludes by exhorting constituents to read the full document and make specific comments.

[see page ten for the points we made to Emily]

*Book Review***The Building that Lived Twice**

The suggestion that I might review "The Building That Lived Twice" came out of the blue. It was nonetheless welcomed because I hoped it would fill in the gaps in what I knew about the progress made by the Aggie from derelict building to the Business Design Centre, bring me in touch with old friends and bring back memories of the old Islington (of the 70's and 80's) where I used to live and for a brief spell (1982-86) represented as a Councillor.

The book did not disappoint me; it gave me everything I had hoped for and more and leaves me grateful to the Islington Society for the opportunity. The book "starts at the beginning". We are treated to the early thoughts of the Smithfield Club and the Agricultural Hall Company before the opening in 1862 and the first Smithfield show held that year. Had we not realised it, we hear of the Aggie's grandeur as an equal and near contemporary of Crystal Palace and Alexandra Palace, an opening ceremony graced by the Prince of Wales and the Kings of Belgium and Prussia. We read of no end of shows and of entertainment including the Belgian Grand Ball of 1867 well caught in a contemporary illustration. This and the later cycles of the Aggie's life are widely researched, illustrated and interestingly well chronicled. Its many connections with royalty soon earned the Agricultural Hall the epithet "Royal". As the chronicle progresses, we read of the end of the showtime and the use with the beginning of WWII as a massive post office. It remained the Foreign Parcels Department of the GPO until 1970 followed then by shabby decline.

Chapter 4, to a politico, is an intriguing catalogue, written concisely with the skill of an insider, into the maybes, hopes, disappointments and the intrigues and in-fighting about the future of the Aggie that to a lesser extent were still the order of the day when I joined Islington Council in 1982.

Sam Morris also arrived on the scene at about that time. If the book can be said to have themes, for example the Aggie Past, Present and Future, it must also have another - Sam Morris to the Rescue - and the increasingly intertwined fate/success story of the Aggie/Business Design Centre with Sam Morris and his family. Apart from Sam's driving inspiration, the contributions of two of his sons, Jack and Andrew are well highlighted.

Typical of the book's style, apart from the Morris family, no less fascinating is the story of the

workers, managers, customers and personalities that over 25 years made the BDC what it has become today.

Sam, when he was mentioned in my ear-shot was described as a local businessman with little chance of achieving anything with the BDC. On the other hand, the same people were asking if Sam didn't take the problem off the Council's hands what else could be done. Neighbours at the same time wanted to clean up the site but didn't want the risk that a new use for the Aggie would make their lives worse through noise, crowds and traffic generation. We know from the book and the account of Jack Morris that the BDC was his father's dream which he strained every sinew to achieve.

Sam somehow became aware that I, with some trepidation, like other better known and more influential Councillors, well noted in the book, became a supporter of his scheme. Frankly though, I thought the chances of success were low because of the size of the finance needed. Sam asked me if I would attend a meeting between himself and potential banking backers. I didn't hesitate to say yes, but pointed out that as a mere local Councillor and Planning Committee member apart from my personal support I could bring nothing more to the meeting. While attending that meeting with the Co-operative Bank, I was called out of the room to take a phone-call. It was Chris Tapp the Borough Solicitor phoning to say the "Leader" had asked him to phone me. He was in the process of telling me not to hold myself out as being able to bind the Council in any way, I replied peremptorily that he should not teach his grandmother how to suck eggs. As a partner in a City law firm, I didn't need his or the Leader's advice on how to conduct myself. When it came to a crunch decision in the Planning Applications Sub-committee, if the Council establishment had any doubts they appeared to have been overcome when the Leader came as an ex-officio member to add her vote to those in support of the application.

With the benefit of hindsight it might seem obvious that Sam Morris had things in the bag. The extent to which the struggle to secure finance and overcome the physical problems of restoring a just right, I personally would not have known without this book.

The breadth of the book is such that it can

also do honour to Islington personalities not directly associated with the Aggie but supportive of it and Sam Morris and their importance to Islington. Among them Lou Segal, of whom I personally have fond memories, is included for his creation of Fredericks Restaurant. With Lou 94 not out at the time the book went to print, the restaurant was still in the family, run by his son Nick.

Read this book also to discover the many successes that have followed in the last 25 years and the central role that the 150 year old building that is now the BDC now plays in the civic life of Islington and the role played by the Morris family, acknowledged by awarding them the Freedom of the Borough in 2003. The BAFTAs, CBI Conference, visits by Prime Ministers and members of the Royal

Family again became the order of the day. The Grand Hall that started its life with Belgian Grand Ball will this year still be equally grand when used as the Czech House, the Czech Republic's hospitality and commercial hub for the entirety of the London Olympics.

That Alec Forshaw is in touch with such up to the minute news is another indication of a book about Islington that has come from the pen of an author who has "lived Islington". For me, it was a memorable read.

GRH

The building that lived twice, by Alec Forshaw, £20, published by the Business Design Centre, ISBN 978-0-9541490-3-1



Backbenchers debate the future of town centres and high streets

Following the recommendations of the recently concluded Portas Review, the Backbench Business Committee granted a debate on the future of town centres and high streets, which took place on 17th January.

Bob Russell MP (Lib Dem, Colchester) echoed the words of many Members when he quoted the British Retail Consortium that it would be "essential that local authorities across the country work with retailers, cultural and heritage organisations, landlords and other local stakeholders to maximise the inherent advantage of an individual area's local heritage". George Freeman MP (Con, Mid Norfolk) agreed: "around the country there are inspiring examples...which have shown that it is possible to combine the one-stop shop convenience of an out-of-town supermarket that people with busy lives need with the heritage, community and authentic local community experience of a well run and well organised town centre."

Housing Minister Grant Shapps MP confirmed the Government would respond to the recommendations of the Portas Review by the spring. Over 50 Members contributed to this six-hour debate, highlighting the importance of this issue across all constituencies.

On Tuesday 13th December TV presenter and retail consultant Mary Portas published her High Streets Review, commissioned by the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister in May after figures showed town centre vacancy rates doubling in the space of two years.

The Portas Review sets out Mary Portas' vision to inject economic and community life back into our high streets. It makes a series of recommendations on what can be done - by government, local authorities and business - to help

high streets offer something new, in order to once again become destinations. The focus is on re-imagining high streets as multifunctional hubs for learning, socialising and leisure - as well as shopping. The report is published alongside new government commissioned research Understanding High Street Performance, which shows that although some high streets continue to thrive, a third are degenerating or failing.

The Portas recommendations include: getting town centres running like businesses by strengthening the management of high streets through new 'Town Teams' given the task of developing the Business Improvement District model and encouraging new markets; looking at how the business rate system could better support small businesses and independent retailers, encouraging affordable town centre car parking and looking at further opportunities to remove 'red tape' on the high street; levelling the playing field by ensuring a strong town centre first approach in planning and encouraging large retailers to show their support for high streets; defining landlords' roles and responsibilities by looking at disincentives for landlords leaving properties vacant, and empowering local authorities to step in when landlords are negligent; and giving communities a greater say by greater inclusion of the high street in neighbourhood planning, and encouraging innovative community uses of empty high street spaces.

Mary Portas recommends that these suggestions are piloted in a number of high streets. The Government has said it will consider the recommendations of the Portas Review and publish its response in Spring 2012.

Tied pubs: Business Innovation and Skills Committee rebuffed

To the great disappointment of CAMRA, the Campaign for Real Ale, the government appears to have shied away from regulating the relationship between pubcos and tenants. This is despite encouraging words from Vince Cable in particular,

and all party support within the Business Innovation and Skills committee. Too many pubs are being closed by pricing the tenant out of existence wherever a landlord perceives there to be a hefty capital receipt at the end of a change of use.

Chief Executive's address (continued from page one)

despite the challenge the present economic climate presents to achieving this.

Many of the housing schemes are of architectural interest. Whereas in the 1970s family houses had been converted to flats (often laterally using neighbouring properties) there is now a case for restoring family houses or reconfiguring. Fewer people are in need of one-bed properties (although new 1-bed properties with gardens might entice over-occupying tenants of family units). Under utilised communal areas, an undercroft and a former boiler room on existing estates are making way for two storey houses with gardens.

Other priorities on the list are being addressed through encouraging volunteering (20% of Council staff are already involved), and an apprenticeship scheme supported directly by the Council and by private sector employers.

2012 would be a big year in London with the Diamond Jubilee, the Olympics and the Paralympics. The Olympic torch would be passing through Islington on July 26th, one day before the opening ceremony.

In conclusion, Lesley Seary said that the council could not act on its own. She felt it and the Islington Society had the same desire, a better Islington. We would not always agree: the Society had been formed as a result of a disagreement, but the grit we supplied enabled the Council to improve the oyster.

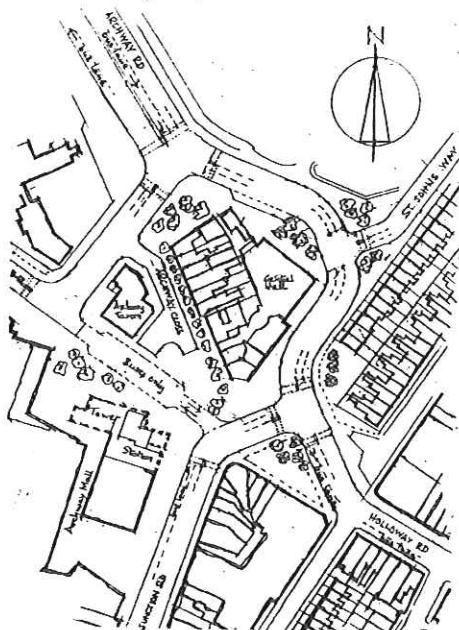
At this point David Gibson threw the meeting open to the floor. There was comment about the lack of jobs, or the mismatch between

available jobs and skills; forthcoming changes to the business rate, which might facilitate business in Islington; the need to eradicate empty properties and the difficulty in creating and sustaining mixed use developments. There were questions about the relationship between the chief executive and elected members, and about the conflict between relaxed planning laws and the empowerment of the community as envisaged by the Localism Act. There was support for action to tackle the Archway gyratory, and more generally carbon emissions, and a suggestion that wealth creation would trickle down to the working classes in the fullness of time, despite what the fairness commission had said about relative poverty.

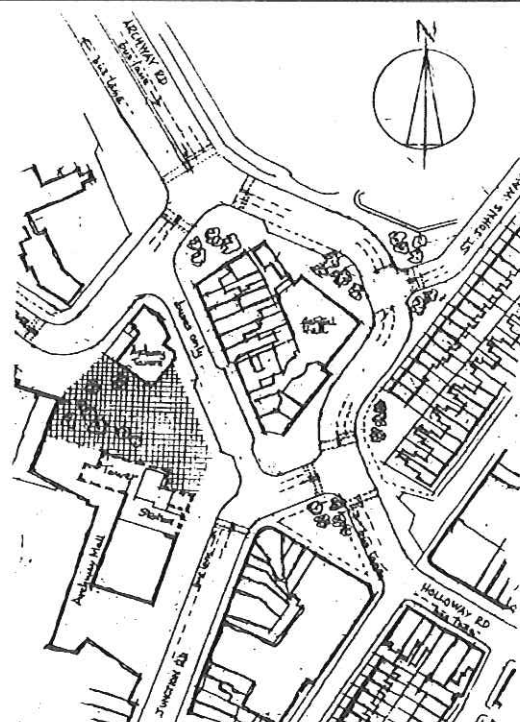
Lesley Seary felt that the benefit changes, and in particular the proposed cap on benefits that took no account of the higher cost of living in London, represented a great threat to the fairness agenda. However, low pay was often a greater source of poverty and this was why the council was actively supporting implementation of the London Living Wage set by the Mayor of London. She agreed with the comment about empty properties: the threat of CPO, and in one instance the issue of such an order, were proving effective in returning properties to use.

The ex-Chairman closed the meeting with a vote of thanks to Lesley Seary, noting that despite the relatively late finish no-one had left before the end.

AB



Joint Highgate Society & Islington Society scheme getting rid of the roundabout at Archway: adopted by Islington Council as a long-term plan



Modified scheme for Archway: showing a large pedestrian area outside the Archway Tavern

£100m fund to tackle empty homes: apply now

On Tuesday 24th January Communities Minister Andrew Stunnell invited applications to a £100m fund designed to enable voluntary and community groups to bring empty homes back into use. This fund is part of the Government's Affordable Homes Programme, which aims to create up to 170,000 new affordable homes over the next four years.

According to the guidance, successful applications will: bring empty homes back into use as affordable housing; deliver value for money; have support from their local authority, and set out how they will ensure that works will be completed by 31st March 2015. Mr Stunnell encouraged innovative

and ambitious applications, expressing his hope that successful projects would not only bring much needed empty homes back into use but also provide extra opportunities for local jobs and training.

The Minister has appointed fund manager Tribal to manage distribution of funding to successful applicants. Tribal will also assess applications and report back to the Department according to the criteria set out in the guidance document.

The deadline for applications is 17th April 2012.

National Policy Planning Framework - Islington Society comments

[continued from page five]. Under Eric Pickles' definition of "sustainable", which is sufficiently profitable to attract a developer, new affordable housing would be a thing of the past. It is clearly more "sustainable" to build market housing.

Our heritage should not be undervalued. Things like the views of St. Paul's or St. Pancras, or the fact that the Upper Street of the nineteenth century is recognisable as the Upper Street of to-day, provide a fantastic low cost educational resource that we do not always exploit to the full.

Although it is said that we have the London Plan (even in its new watered down version) to provide some form of protection, the Plan was

written on the premise that various Policy Planning Guidelines are in place. If they are not, it will immediately be subject to challenge under the draft NPPF for being out of date.

The whole thing is based on the unfair premise that planning is the block to development. It is all too easy to heap blame on back office administrators. You yourself know that you could not function as a constituency M.P. or Shadow Cabinet member without back office support. In fact, the planning system has authorised 178,000 housing units in London which are not being built for financial or other reasons.

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The copy date for our next newsletter is June 4th.

Society publications

Twentieth Century Buildings in Islington, by Alec Forshaw, £14.99, photographs by Richard Leeney, ISBN 0-9541490-0-9

The Story of Day Flats in and around Islington, by Andrew Bosi, photographs from C.F. Day Limited and Oliver Craxton, £5, ISBN 0-9541490-1-7

An architect in Islington, by Harley Sherlock, £14.99, ISBN 9-78-0-9541490-2-4

[all of the Society's publications are available from the Society at 35, Britannia Row, London, N.1 or from local bookshops]

Books from our President and Vice-Presidents

Suicide of the West, by Richard Koch & Chris Smith, £14.99 and available on Amazon, ISBN 0-8264 9023-9.

A History of Islington, by Mary Cosh, published by Historical Publications at £18.95, ISBN 0-948667-974

53 Cross Street - the biography of an historic house by Mary Cosh & Martin King, photographs by Pauline Lord, published by the Islington Archaeology & History Society

An architect in Islington, by Harley Sherlock, £14.99, ISBN 9-78-0-9541490-2-4

Transport News Round-up

More trains on the Overground

It has not taken long for overcrowding to return to the London Overground, as the improvements introduced last May have brought more passengers to its services. The Barking-Gospel Oak line, serving two stations in the north of our Borough, is particularly difficult to board westbound in the morning and eastbound in the evening peak. There have been tales of people travelling in the opposite direction first in order to get a seat.

The operator LOROL has therefore taken a calculated risk of using the "spare" train set to run an additional train each weekday morning. There is no space for it at Gospel Oak, so after calling at Upper Holloway it runs through to Hampstead Heath for same platform interchange to destinations further west. As the trains are fairly new, the failure rate should be lower than average and so the "spare" set should normally be available.

There are also extra trains on the North London line through Highbury on Sundays, although regrettably the last train still leaves some time before last orders are called in the pubs, and the first train even more time after the first call to prayer.

Boris' bus appears on route 38

The new bus for London was unveiled in December. To the consternation of TfL officials, the Mayor insisted on driving it himself but the vehicle survived and is due to enter service on route 38 on February 20th. After some trial runs as additional services, the new buses will take the place of seven of the DW vehicles currently running the route. As there are more than fifty vehicles operating the 38, the chance of catching one will be below 14%. If they are successful in reducing boarding times, they will catch up with the bus in front. In the past it was assumed that routes would either be wholly crew operated or fully OPO. If that remains the ultimate aim it is unclear what will be learnt from these trial operations.

One aspect of the bus that may prove controversial is the decision to perpetuate the three-door access and egress of the articulated buses. It will be recalled that these were held to be the main cause of one of the major concerns about articulated buses, namely their open-ness to criminal activity. The new buses will not have a conductor at night and even if it is intended to close the back it is

difficult to believe that safety requirements will allow it to be secured to the extent of being unusable in the event of emergency.

Astonishingly, the Transport Commissioner appears to share this concern, talking of the possibility of developing a two-door version of the bus. Aside from this aspect, a great deal of time and effort has gone into the design of the interior, something that was long overdue. Bus design has hardly kept pace with railway carriage design in the last fifty years.

King's Cross gyratory: TINA may not rule

Having been told by TfL that it would be impossible to remove the gyratory system at King's Cross, it seems that it may after all be replaced. Following the death of a female student public pressure seems to have forced a change of heart.

Although the Mayor has championed cycling and introduced the cycle hire scheme, which is popular even though it is not free to Council tax payers, his record on road safety for cyclists is poor. This can be traced directly to his policy of "smoothing traffic flow", which has resulted in reduced crossing times for pedestrians (no sign of smoothing pedestrian traffic flow), and reduced road space for cyclists. The only reason that the gyratory could not be removed was that this would reduce the supply of road capacity. The increase in fatalities over the last three years has (marginally) reduced demand instead.

New station at Farringdon

Thameslink services are now serving a new station in Cowcross Street, opposite the listed building that is undergoing renovation. Underground services are best approached from the secondary entrance in Turnmill Street. Eventually, Farringdon will be a major hub for trains to most of the London airports, as the interchange point between Thameslink and CrossRail.

M.P. Emily Thornberry has secured agreement to the provision of public conveniences as part of the CrossRail development.

Over-Sensitive trains on the Victoria line

The Victoria line continues to suffer delays as result of over-sensitive doors. They detect the slightest material which then provokes a safety check. TfL is appealing for passengers to be more careful of bag straps and long hair. AB

From the Society

Current officers are listed on page 2

What we do

- we support conservation planning work to preserve the borough's historic fabric and individual buildings of distinction
- we campaign for a high standard of design in new buildings
- we encourage best practice through awards for good architecture in new or refurbished buildings
- we organise a varied programme of events including talks, walks and site visits
- we campaign for better public transport and for priority for people travelling on foot or by bike
- we produce publications that celebrate Islington's history and its social and cultural diversity
- we publish neighbourhood walking trails to foster exploration awareness and pride of place
- we build links between residents officials and councillors
- we publish a regular newsletter
- we send advisers to Council groups dealing with development, the environment and transport
- we are represented on the London Forum of Civic & Amenity Societies, which takes up cross-borough issues and is a member of Civic Voice

Future Society events

The Society gives reminders by e-mail of meetings about a week before they are held. Please let the Secretary have your e-mail address if you are not on the existing mailing list.

June 22nd, 2012: Annual Bill Manley Memorial Pub crawl, from 6.0 p.m..

This year commencing at the Wenlock & Essex, in Essex Road. We hope to visit three pubs never before included, whilst retaining the tradition of maximising the pubs and minimising the crawling.

Our monthly Meet the Officers meetings have been restored to the Marquess Tavern, 32 Canonbury Street on the first Tuesday each month at 9.0 p.m., on Tuesdays 7th February, 6th March, 3rd April, 1st May and 5th June.

Other Events in or around Islington:

Archaeology & History Society (8.0 p.m. Islington Town Hall)

February 15th, 2012- Christian Wolmar, "Subterranean Railway"

March 21st, 2012 - Petra Laidlaw, "The Jews of Islington"

April 18th- Lester Hillman, "Regency Outrages and bicentenaries"

May 16th- Bob Cowie, "Saxon Islington", recollecting his IA&HS lecture of 1987

Islington Mayor fundraising quiz

Thursday March 22nd, Islington Assembly Hall, Upper Street at 7 for 7.30. Tickets £20.

Islington Museum & Local History Centre

March 29th 2012 at 6.30 p.m. The Story of the Royal Agricultural Hall and its rebirth as the Business Design Centre. Alec Forshaw.

April 12th 2012 at 2.0 p.m. Dickens; What makes him great and what does he mean to us now? Robert Patten.

April 19th at 6.30 p.m. The Assassination of Prime Minister Spencer Perceval. Lester Hillman.

May 18th at 6.0 p.m. A brief political history of Clerkenwell Green. Ben Smith

Estorick Collection of Modern Italian Art, 39a Canonbury Square

13th January - 7th April 2012 Retrospective of the works of Alberto Burri (1915-1995) Form and Matter, twentieth century master, who influenced the Arte Povera movement.

18th April - 17th June 2012 Exhibition of Giuseppe Cavalli: Master of Light.

Almeida Theatre,

Almeida Street, N.1 0207 359 4404

Monday-Saturday 7.30 p.m., Saturday matinee 2.30 p.m.

Until 10th March 2012 "The House of Bernarda Alba" one of Federico Garcia Lorca's best known plays.

15th March- 12th May 2012 New English version of "Filumena" by Eduardo de Filippo, comedy set in 1940s Naples

17th May - 30th June 2012 World Premiere of "Children's Children" by British playwright Matthew Dunster.

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