

ISLINGTON *news*

The Journal of the Islington Society

Society Dismay at Planning decision

On 11th September Emma Smith, representing The Islington Society spoke at the Islington Council Planning Committee meeting to object to the planning application for 99 City Road, the Inmasat building, at Old Street roundabout.

"The Islington Society is very concerned about this re-development, and despite meeting the developer who recognised that the height of the building is an issue, we are disappointed it is proposed to be 151 metres tall.

We are concerned about its impact on the townscape and local area, and particularly its disregard for Islington Council's Tall Buildings Study and the very newly-adopted Islington Local Plan. At 151m, it would in fact be 50% taller than the recommended maximum height for this site.

The Tall Buildings Study recognises the opportunity for a taller building in this location: up to 106 metres, provided it does not create unacceptable harm to views onto Lowndes House from City Road.

99 City Road is a Site Allocation in the Local Plan's Bunhill and Clerkenwell Area Action Plan which re-states that a building of up to 106 metres may be suitable. The new Strategic and Development Management Policy DH3 states that: buildings over 30 metres are only acceptable in-principle on specific identified sites. And that on these sites development must not exceed the maximum building heights set out in the site allocation.

We note the Design Review Panel still has concerns about the height and massing of the proposal and the impacts on heritage and views. Importantly, Historic England objects to the proposal saying that: the impact on Grade II* listed Armoury House would be less than substantial but in the middle of the range; harm to the significance of Wesley's Chapel and the Benson Building would be caused through changes within their setting; and the

conservation of the Grade I listed Wesley's Chapel in particular should be given very great weight.

A further concern to The Society is the loss of daylight to the Foundation School, particularly the science classrooms. Overall 104 windows break BRE guidelines on VSC - that's 82% of the windows tested including 12 windows losing 40 to 50% and 11 windows losing 50% or more.

The Society does not necessarily disapprove of tall buildings, and agrees this is potentially a 'landmark' site which justifies one - however, not at 50% more than the maximum stated in the Plan. We support the Local Plan - this being perhaps its first test since formal adoption by the Executive only last week - and recognise the value of adhering to its well-argued provisions. The Plan must now be enforced by officers and the Committee to ensure the Council adheres to its own policies.

The Society fears granting permission would set a dangerous precedent not just at Old Street - where the Moorfields site is potentially proposing a similarly tall building that contravenes the Local Plan - but also in the wider borough, before the ink is even dry on the Plan.

We would ask the Committee to defer the application and insist the developer significantly reduces the height of the building."

Sadly, despite our objection and two residents also speaking against the proposals, the application was granted permission by a majority, but not all, of the committee. Some members believed the regeneration of the area was dependent on a development which breached the Plan.

Islington Society News

Following the chairman's plea in the last Newsletter, we have been pleased to welcome Andrew Robinson and Paul Thurlow to the Committee as co-opted members.

The AGM will take place on November 7th at which members will be invited to endorse their membership and that of continuing members of the committee. It will be followed by a talk *London Bus Routes* by Andrew Bosi.

Annual Dinner

Those of us who believe an annual dinner should be a social highlight of the Society year are hoping that this event can return in February. Expressions of support, in the form of a brief e-mail to the Chairman or Editor, would be welcome.

Islington Society: 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 send advisers to Council groups dealing with development, the environment and transport
- we are represented on the London Forum of Amenity & Civic Societies, which takes up cross-borough issues and is a member of Civic Voice
- we publish a regular newsletter The views expressed in the Islington Society's Journal are not necessarily those of the Editor or the Society's adopted policy.

Our web site is www.isingtonsociety.org.uk

CURRENT OFFICERS OF THE SOCIETY

President : Lord Smith of Finsbury

Vice President: David Gibson

Chairman: Peter Kilborn 18, Bewdley Street, London, N.1 tel: 020 7-609 8822; e-mail pkilborn@aol.com

Vice-Chair & Events Secretary: Andrew Clayton, andrew.clayton@blueyonder.co.uk

Secretary: David Trillo 45, Ellington Street, London, N.7 020 7-607 9325; e-mail david@trillo.net

Treasurer: Patrick Green, Colman Coyle Solicitors, 80, Upper Street, London, N.1

Newsletter: Andrew Bosi, The Croft, Wall Street, London, N.1 000 020 7-354 8514; e-mail: AndrewBosi@aol.com

Society mail: Resource Centre, 356, Holloway Road, London, N.7; isingtonsociety@aol.com

Next Newsletter

Copy date for our next newsletter is February 4th, 2023. The views expressed in the journal are not necessarily those of the chair, the editor, or the Society's adopted policy

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Books from our President and late Vice-President

Suicide of the West, by Richard Koch & Chris Smith, £14.99 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, published by the Islington Archaeology & History Society

Redevelopment of key Golden Lane site

Early informal consultations have begun on the redevelopment of the locally listed 113 Golden Lane. This is one of the best of Islington's London Board Schools, originally Baltic Street School. It is currently occupied by the London College of Fashion, which is to move out shortly. It is dated 1888 on the pediment facing Honduras Street, so comes from the time when the Architects Department at the London School Board was run by T.J Bailey. It is in the Queen Anne style used for most of Bailey's schools, with a fine bay frontage facing south, elaborate Baroque detail on the separate Boys, Girls and Infants entrances, and an imposing pediment.



The pediment on 113 Golden Lane, facing Honduras Street

The site also surrounds on two sides another locally listed building, the slightly earlier 115 Golden Lane, which stands on the corner with Baltic Street. This is an exceptional part of Islington's industrial heritage, well restored in the early 2000s, with the crane mechanism largely intact on the Baltic Street access bay.

The developer proposes a conversion of 113 Golden Lane to residential use, with an extra storey on top and an additional block to the side. Much of the existing open space around the school is to be retained for landscaping. The

Islington Society has taken part in the consultation and has expressed two main concerns. One is that the pediment facing Honduras Street should not be overwhelmed by the additional storey behind. This is the building's most important external architectural feature and it should be respected as such. The other is the view of 113 Golden Lane from the corner with Baltic Street. Any additional height and mass behind it have the potential to overwhelm this building, which is arguably more important than the former board school.



115 Golden Lane. Part of 113 can be seen to the left

The Islington Society has seen the early-stage designs for this scheme and so far feels that its concerns have been addressed. However, the proposals have not yet been submitted for planning approval and may still change. The society will monitor the planning process as it proceeds.

AC

Revised staircase rule delays building

The schemes for both Holloway prison, and the Barnsbury estate, have been delayed by the requirement for a second staircase for buildings taller than 18 metres (59 feet). The ruling applies even where planning permission had already been granted. Applicants have to choose between lowering the height of the building, reducing the number of dwellings, or seeking a higher or bulkier building with a fresh planning application.

Increase in shoplifting.

The cost of living crisis may be responsible for an increase in shoplifting and, even more seriously, physical threats to staff. Signs urging people to wear a mask have been replaced by a prohibition on masked customers entering shops, particularly where CCTV has been installed to protect against crime and identify the culprits. The government is considering use of databases in conjunction with CCTV but may face opposition from those concerned with the erosion of civil liberties.

Islington Pub news

The hospitality sector continues to face many challenges post-Covid. Even the highly successful Wetherspoon chain has resorted to selling some of its pubs. The Angel has been sold to Urban Pubs and Bars and is now the Junction. It could not be more different to its predecessor: a gastro pub in which you are encouraged to await waiter service at table. Wetherspools have also sold the Coronet, winner of the Geoffrey Gribble Award in 1996, though at the time of writing it is still operating as a Spoons.

Uncertainty continues to surround the Charles Lamb, which at one time was renowned for its food. It seems that the owners would like to contract the hospitality offer and develop part of the site, including the kitchen area.

The King's Head is no longer a theatre pub following the theatre's move to larger and more suitable premises in Islington Square just behind the pub. The Arsenal Tavern has been renamed Brook Gate.

The Grade II listed McGlynn's pub just across the Borough boundary at King's Cross closed suddenly in September following the sad and unexpected death of the landlord, Gerry Dolan.

Better news is that the Island Queen in Noel Road has reopened after refurbishment.

New Parliamentary constituency

Residents of South Islington will continue to be represented by the member for Islington South & Finsbury. In a move that will dismay our neighbours in De Beauvoir, their move into our constituency will go unmarked in its name.

New Chief Executive

Islington Council has appointed Victoria Lawson as its new Chief Executive. Ms. Lawson has been a senior officer at Hounslow for the last seven years, culminating in heading their environment department. She also chairs the London Environment Directors Network.

Society visit to Copped Hall

The Society has ventured outside the borders of the Borough of Islington for events in the past, including visits to waste treatment plants in Newham and Enfield and to a reservoir-nature reserve in Hackney, so a visit to Epping Forest District, which borders Enfield and Waltham Forest, was not unprecedented, being also to somewhere of direct relevance to our core interests of historic architecture and amenity, and to our nearest bit of Green Belt. It helped get fresh air into our lungs.



Copped Hall, just outside the M25 in rolling countryside midway between Epping and Waltham Abbey, is a very substantial mid-Georgian mansion (with much earlier historic roots) undergoing painstaking reconstruction for community use and enjoyment after having been reduced to a roofless shell in the 1950s, under the guidance of Camden-based architect Alan Cox, who is the driving force behind the whole project. From having been the summer residence of the Abbots of Waltham Abbey, the house passed into the hands of Henry VIII who allegedly spent the day there when Anne Boleyn was executed, and it continued to enjoy royal patronage under various ownerships through the reign of Charles II. It was rebuilt as an E-plan Tudor mansion in 1567 and then again in its present adjacent location on a commanding hill-top site in 1753-58 under architect John Sanderson. It was altered by James Wyatt in the later eighteenth century and embellished and extended in the later nineteenth, before being burnt down and abandoned in 1917 (there being almost no fire brigade available during the First World War), then stripped of all remaining assets in 1952. The park was protected by being

in the newly-designated Green Belt, though this did not prevent the M25 being driven through it in the early 1980s. Mostly in a cutting and far enough from the house not to spoil its setting irreparably, the M25 going westwards does nevertheless offer a good view of the house between Junctions 26 and 27.

The saga of its rescue is heroic indeed. Various proposals from developers for converting the shell into a hotel with massive extensions and ‘enabling development’ in the grounds, and with golf courses beyond, came and went until the City of London – which manages Epping Forest on which the park borders – bought 90% of the park to forestall any such development. Alan Cox and the Friends of Copped Hall were then able to raise or borrow enough funds to buy the shell of the house itself and immediate surrounding grounds in 1995 and invest them in a Trust, – and to embark on the daunting task of restoration, beginning with clearing the bramble jungle from the 4-acre walled garden with much voluntary labour, which has continued. Rent from the stable block converted into housing provides an income and work proceeds room by room, window by window under a temporary roof... and fund-raising is a constant battle. The cantilevered stone main stair, which had been removed completely, has now been reinstated, but there is as yet no handrail or balustrade. The ground floor has impressive brick vaults that survived everything. The enthusiasm and determination are infectious, and the attractions of the site and of the now-beautifully-tended walled garden make one feel that, slightly compromised though the Palladian architecture of the house is by the late-Victorian embellishments, it is all very much worthwhile and should provide a invaluable community asset for many years to come.

We were fortunate indeed to have a personal guided tour led by Alan Cox himself, with a forthright and amusing commentary, complemented by sunny weather, and including a walk through the park to the site of the Tudor mansion, of which fragments remain. The visit was enjoyed by all and is to be recommended. The house is open one Sunday a month or by appointment – check the website. JD

Talk by John Greenshields of KANDA, Kate Woods of DP9 and Charlie Page of AHMM

To understand how the planning system (for want of a better name) works nowadays – and therefore how you might apply any meaningful pressure on it – you have to be an expert. The hierarchy of factors that shape its decisions, from the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), to the London Plan, the Local Plan and related SPGs (Supplementary Planning Guidance), and the Site Allocations, – before you even get to the substance of a particular planning application, let alone its details – requires an informed understanding of the system – certainly beyond what I as an architect claim to have. So the Society was fortunate indeed to be offered a presentation by three influential parties whose job it is to have such understanding – Kanda, DP9, and AHMM. Of course actual decisions on planning applications are informed not just by the legislative framework described above but by a wide variety of political considerations and by a consensus about architectural objectives that is subjective, constantly changeable, and that not all may share.

Bunhill-based Kanda offer ‘Strategic political, community and planning engagement’, and we have been invited on several occasions to pre-planning application presentations of projects in Islington. Pall Mall-based DP9 typically, according to the website, are advising on 650 development proposals and related planning applications nationwide including almost all of those of major significance in Islington such as the Holloway Prison Site, the New Barnsbury Estate, and what is now called 1 Torrens Street (former Islington Square, on the corner of City Road and Islington High Street. AHMM are an international architectural practice with offices in Old Street and in many other cities, headed by the most recent Past-President of the RIBA, Simon Alford, who were also responsible for the Holloway Prison site and 1 Torrens Street applications (both projects now under way) and earlier transformed the office building on the opposite corner of the crossroads from 1 Torrens Street.

These are all heavyweight players and

work of course in the interests of the powerful developers who pay their fees, and of whose planning applications the Society, constitutionally bound to protect the amenities of the Borough, frequently has reason to be critical, as it has been in all the three cases mentioned above, as well as more recently in the 99 City Road (present Inmarsat building) application for a 36-storey tower on the Old Street roundabout (Kanda and DP9 with KPF architects). So this was arguably a ‘charm offensive’ on the part of these players to ourselves, and it is perhaps flattering that we are thought to be worth the dedication of what was collectively a considerable amount of valuable professional time, especially since our own self-perception is scarcely of us having any perceptible influence on actual planning outcomes. The lead was taken by John Greenshields of Kanda who, as a ‘community engagement’ specialist, evinced the most charm and was the most articulate. Katie Woods was most explicit about the bartering approach that is adopted – that if the requirements of the local plan are met in some respects then they can be adduced as a reason to disregard departures from those requirements in other respects – such as building height. Thus it was argued successfully with the planning system by DP9 that because KPF’s scheme for 99 Old Street provides some ‘active frontage’ and social facilities at street level, and e-uses some of the structure of the existing building, the fact that the tower exceeds the limit set by the local plan by some 50% can be disregarded. It emerged that in Paris there is no, or less, such ‘give and take’ – the official Plan is the plan and has to be complied with fully, an attitude that we might well emulate here. There are some who believe that as things stand here planning permissions can effectively be bought by the promise of sufficient affordable or social housing and social facilities.

So this was a meeting of parties on opposite sides of the fence, but on our side we at least gained some useful insight – and no one came to blows!

JD

Transport News Round-up

Superloop begins

The existing routes X68, X26 and 607 have been rebranded as Superloop routes SL6, SL7 and SL8. Buses are in a livery in which the word Superloop is prominently displayed.

Consultation on the new proposed routes is well underway. Fears that the express routes might come at the expense of service frequencies on parallel routes have largely been dispelled. There have been some minor tweaks as a result of the consultation although there is some disappointment that the route passing the North Middlesex Hospital is unable to stop there. The road layout would add considerably to journey times in one direction, which would defeat the objective of time saving.

The hope is that passengers would be attracted to the new bus routes and that patronage would reach its peak by the time charges for polluting vehicles in the ULEZ dwindle.

Central London bus cuts

The last of the cuts announced some time ago, removing much of the number 1 route and giving its number to what remains of the 168, was implemented at the end of September. The section from the Royal Free to the Bricklayers Arms remains and the southern terminus is Canada Water instead of Tesco's, Old Kent Road.

Although the Mayor's policy is to expand services in outer London, figures obtained by the Liberal Democrats indicate that some outer London boroughs have seen a reduction in services since 2015.

Pentonville Road

The Society's comments reported in the last (Summer) edition of *Islington News* clearly fell on deaf ears in TfL, as the station entrance in Pentonville Road has been blocked off in a more permanent way by them.

When the Thameslink station was moved from there to St. Pancras, there was of necessity a formal process of consultation. The main concern was that the lack of a Thameslink station would result in the loss of access to the Victoria and Piccadilly lines from Pentonville Road, and it was on the assurance that there was no intention of depriving the public of that that the change was approved.

It should be recalled that on the occasion of the King's Cross fire in 1987, four or five people escaped via this route. Although the entrance was closed in the evenings at that time, they were able to await assistance in safety well away from the fire.

HS2 two year pause

It seems likely that confirmation of rigor mortis will at last come in the Chancellor's Autumn statement. Although it has been obvious to those with any grasp of detail that the scheme was neither affordable nor practical, political forces have continued to argue against sanity, which has only succeeded in delaying the inevitable. Quite what the people whose homes or livelihoods have been disrupted will make of all this can only be imagined.

There is already speculation that other expensive projects will be shelved or cancelled. These include the river crossing planned to relieve the Dartford tunnel.

Ticket office closures

Over half a million responses were triggered by the proposal to shut most ticket offices on railway stations, including some as large as Euston. The proposals purported to come from the Train Operating Companies but there was widespread belief that they reflected the view of the government, and specifically the Treasury. Fares are no longer the concern of TOCs but go straight to the Treasury to whom the concept of generating more income to balance the books is alien.

Even a champion of low taxation, Priti Patel, voiced objection, which has come principally from various groups representing disabled people, many of whom would be unable to use the railways if the proposals were adopted. Anyone who has had to use ticket machines is aware of their inadequacy in comparison to asking a booking clerk armed with machinery that leads him or her straight to the ticket of choice.

London Travelwatch and Transport Focus are analysing the responses, but it would be a major surprise if anyone other than a Treasury Minister or some petrol-head dedicated to eradicating rail travel had expressed support. They have promised to report by the end of October.

Recent and Forthcoming events

Society events

Notice is hereby given that the 61st Annual General Meeting of the Islington Society will take place in the Town Hall, Upper Street, Islington, on Tuesday November 7th, commencing at 7 p.m. It will be followed by a talk on London Bus routes from Andrew Bosi.

The recent Society visit to Copped Hall and the meeting with Kanda on June 27th are reported on pages 5 & 6 - thanks to James Dunnett for these.

London Forum

The London Forum AGM will be held on October 12th at the Gallery in Cowcross Street.

There is increasing demand for use of the gallery and consequently the next open meeting, on November 15th, will be on line using zoom. The subject is Small sites and a design led approach.

Future open meetings are planned in person at Cowcross Street on January 16th, and April 18th, 2024. Provisionally these will cover Enforcement and Broadening the Membership, the latter a follow up to the previous meeting on this topic.

Heritage Alliance

The theme of this year's Heritage Debate will be: *'Careers at a Crossroads: How Can We Future-Proof the Heritage Sector Workforce?'* and it will take place from 11am-1pm on 15th November 2023. Tickets for this on line event are available via Eventbrite.

Sustainable Conservation Conference

On October 17th English Heritage will be hosting a Sustainable Conservation Conference which is free for heritage sector colleagues to attend. The event will bring together partners from across the heritage sector to share knowledge and experiences of how we are collectively working to address key challenges - such as how to respond

to climate change and how to sustain specialist heritage skills - as partners across the sector work continue our work to conserve the nation's heritage in a sustainable way. This will include case studies and experiences that will be shared by a range of sector partners and Q&A sessions where attendees will have the opportunity for questions and debate. The venue is One Moorgate Place, London, EC2R 6EA

The SPAB & The STBA - A Nature-Positive Approach to Traditional Buildings

The SPAB-STBA Conference - a packed day of talks exploring nature-positive approaches to traditional buildings takes place on **November 2nd** at The Ecology Pavilion, Mile End.

Islington Council

Meetings in or close to November (Town Hall, 7.30)

Oct. 31st: Licensing Sub-committee C

9th: Planning sub-Committee A

16th: Licensing Sub-Committee D

23rd: Environment & Regeneration Scrutiny

27th: Planning Committee

30th: Executive

Dec. 5th: Licensing Committee (6.30 p.m.)

Greater London Assembly

November Meetings in the new City Hall, 10 a.m. except where stated, also live streamed.

2nd: Plenary -full Assembly

4th: Planning & Regeneration

7th: Transport

15th: Environment

15th: Housing (2p.m.).

16th Mayor's Question Time