



CHAIRMAN

AMANDA FRAME

THE SOCIETY IS FACING many challenges. It has been five months since the AGM and we have had a glorious summer and a very active time. Our time seems to be consumed with responding to consultations both from the government as well as from the council. This is on top of an increasing number of planning applications.

Government changes to planning continues

The government has not stopped in its onslaught of changes to the planning system - sold as "streamlining" and reducing "red tape". We have certainly not seen any reduction in planning applications or a reduction in the time it takes to process applications. What we have seen though is worrying. The government is selling its planning changes as a way to kick-start the economy and solve the housing shortage. If the increase in house prices in the Royal Borough are an economic boom for some; it is certainly not for those of us who still want to live here. To quote the council's own website: residential prices have increased by 50% since 2009. It is doubtful our children will ever be able to buy here. It appears the government is not able to separate the problems that other areas of the nation may have from London or other large cities. There seems to be no understanding or consideration given to how relaxing planning legislation could destabilize our local development plans and actually is contrary to our goals. We have had to fight to safeguard our town centres, our small businesses and the amenities of our residents. Luckily RBKC agreed with many of our concerns. As a result of its efforts along with this society's lobbying our MP, RBKC is one of the few local authorities to be exempted from allowing offices to change into residential properties.

Retail loss to housing gains: who loses?

The government has not stopped at offices and has moved on to retail units. Anyone reading the proposals would be concerned, but we hope to be protected by the exemption for conservation areas.

However, we are still under threat of retail units being allowed to change into housing without planning permission. The proposals will be disastrous. The intention was to press for better use of our empty shops but does not have any restrictions of change of an existing and viable shop.

- Existing shops, financial and/or professional services (A1 and A2 – banks, building societies, betting shops, estate agents) up to 150sqm could change use to a residence (C3).
- Offices (B1), hotels (C1), residential (C2 and C2A) and non-residential institutions (D1), and leisure and assembly (D2) are proposed to be able to change use to state funded school or a childcare nursery.

The temptation for landlords is tremendous. Housing sells for three times the value of a retail unit, and in some sections of the borough even more. Who would not think of selling?

Suddenly we could have our valued newsagents or dry-cleaners changed to housing. While we all value our schools; there are locations not suited for the traffic or noise. There will be no controls to stop the change of the house next door to you to being a school. The public consultation ended on 15 October. We made our objections known and encouraged our Sounding Board members to do the same.

Per-application advice: for whom?

Within the borough there have been several major applications which have progressed through the summer. Michael Bach will comment on the Young Street development and the Lancer Square applications in this newsletter. One issue which is becoming a great concern to us and to the locals affected by these applications is the pre-application



Ian Blatchford, director of the Science Museum talking about the birth and growth of the establishment.



process. Basically the pre-application advice on the planning process is a device help an applicant before the application is made. There are four levels and a range of fees for the service.

What has evolved is the exclusion of the public in the process. Though not required to do so, all applicants are encouraged to consult their neighbours. Other than telling the developer what their concerns are and hoping the developer will adjust for these concerns, there is no method for neighbours or potentially affected locals to comment or for the planning department to consult them. The service is a one-way street with the potential of the officer becoming captured. What has

evolved is a service for the applicant in a way that the pre-application planning officer 'works' for the developer. This must change and we are in discussions with the planning department and Tim Coleridge, the cabinet member in charge of planning policy, transport and arts, over how the local residents can be part of the process.

Sounding Board

Some years ago the then director of planning and development instituted the Sounding Board. The purpose was for the local amenity and conservation societies to meet and openly discuss the planning process and developments within the borough. We have asked for the board to be reinstated. Instead an alternative has been formed called the User Forum, representing both developers and local societies. The Kensington Society felt that many of the issues which directly affect us could not be addressed in the forum meeting. We have re-established the Sounding Board which is open to all our affiliated members. Non-members can attend but they will not receive alerts on consultation or planning changes. The purpose of the board is to ensure that we hear each other's planning concerns; that we work together as a joined-up force when faced with planning changes; and that there is a conduit for information which pertains to us all but may be overlooked.

Changes in the cabinet

There are changes which we are sure you all know about within the council. The new leader, Nicholas Paget-Brown, has been involved in many planning issues in the past and it is refreshing to have an open dialogue about the ways the planning process can improve. Tim Coleridge's position as cabinet member for planning has been combined with traffic. Many of the problems we hear about construction relate to the traffic management statements in the planning approval process. It is encouraging that the council has recognised the coordination issues. Tim Ahern has moved to environment where his experience in planning will come in useful when faced with these environmental nightmares in our borough.

LECTURE SERIES: 2013 AND 2014

This year we started a new lecture series and it has been a great success. The London Future Airport Needs was attended by more than 80 people which showed the obvious need to communicate the issues involved in the possible expansion of Heathrow. Ian Blatchford, the director of the Science Museum, gave a fascinating talk on the history of the museum. There are major plans for renovation of the museum and we will come back to Ian in the future for an update. The Kensington pub tour, though in the middle of summer, was well attended and enjoyed by all. We are discussing with Dale Ingram further walking tours perhaps involving the historic area of Kensington. The walk through Kensington Gardens with Todd Longstaffe-Gowan was greatly enjoyed and the glass of wine at the Milestone Hotel was all the more refreshing since it was the hottest day of the summer. Our last event, a talk by Sir Peter Bazalgette about his great-grandfather's design of the London sewers was both amusing and enlightening. Several key people from Thames Water came along which added a touch of the future to the discussions following the presentation.

I hope that within this newsletter will be a new leaflet announcing our 2014 series. We are wrestling with finding a location which is affordable for one of the lectures.

I would plead again to give us an email address if you have one since the postage cost is increasing and if we can notify you of the dates via email when confirmed we can save at least £1 a letter.

SAVE the DATE

The reception and dinner to celebrate the 60th anniversary of The Kensington Society in the Kensington Mayor's parlour



SAVE the DATE

6.00 to 7.30
Workshop: Permitted Development, your rights and the lack thereof
David Reynolds, Director, Neighbourly Matters, Deloitte LLP
Small Hall, RBKC Town Hall



SAVE the DATE

The Aunt Heap, Kensington Palace from 1860 to 1960
Robert Golden, author of *The Golden Book of Royalty: Relatively Speaking*
St Mary Abbott Church, Long Hall



SAVE the DATE

The annual general meeting of The Kensington Society will be held on Monday, in the Great Hall of the Kensington Town Hall at 6.30pm for 7.00pm. The speaker will be Richard Fortey, British palaeontologist, writer and television presenter of BBC Four series *Survivors: Nature's Indestructible Creatures* and *The Secret Life of Rock Pools*. The mayor, councillor Charles Williams has invited the members to join him afterwards in the mayor's parlour for a glass of wine



ACCESSING INFORMATION ABOUT PLANNING DECISIONS

HENRY PETERSON

DECISIONS MADE BY LOCAL authorities on planning applications are often controversial. By their very nature, individual and collective interests are being weighed up and balanced when such decisions are made.

Members of the public affected by a decision often want to know more of the background. What pre-application discussions took place between a developer and the council? How was the financial viability of a particular development assessed? What responses to consultation were received?

Many aspects of the planning system are open and transparent. Committees meet in public when determining planning applications. Council websites carry details of applications, plans and drawings. Letters of comment from the public are routinely published on committee agendas.

Anyone who wants to find out more information, beyond that placed in the public domain, has two routes to follow:

- Making an application under the Freedom of Information Act
- Requesting sight of 'background papers' to a committee report, under the 1985 Local Government Access to Information Act.

The Freedom of Information Act gives a general right to ask any public sector organisation for all the recorded information they have on any subject. Kensington & Chelsea's website carries advice on how to make a FoI request, and how to download a form for doing so, at this link:

<http://www.rbkc.gov.uk/councilanddemocracy/commentscomplaintsfeedback/freedomofinformation.aspx>. The application form asks you to be as specific as possible on the information requested, and to check first whether the information is readily available. There are a number of grounds under which a public body can argue that information is exempt, and can be withheld.

These exemptions are wide-ranging and include legal professional privilege, commercial confidentiality, and the broad category of information "prejudicing the conduct of public affairs". But these are 'qualified' grounds for exemption, and the public body concerned has to apply a 'public interest test' and demonstrate that withholding the information outweighs the public interest in releasing it. Appeals can be made to the Information Commissioner.

The second route to obtaining information is less well-known, and applies specifically to local government rather than to all public bodies. The 1985 Local Government (Access to Information) Act sets out rules about when council committees are required to conduct their business in public (which is the norm) and when they may move into confidential session. The Act also gives the public various rights to inspect documents. Copies of committee agendas and reports have to be available for inspection at one or more designated offices at least five clear days before the meeting (albeit that late and urgent reports can be added to an agenda).

Rights of access do not end with committee reports. The Act provides that the public can see any 'background papers' (not otherwise published) which

- "disclose any facts or matters on which the report or an important part of the report is based? or

- "have been relied on to a material extent in preparing the report?."

In theory, every committee report should be accompanied by a list of such background papers. In practice, Kensington and Chelsea adopts the same mechanism as many other local authorities and uses a standard wording at the end of each committee report. This refers to the public to the contents of a named or numbered file, holding background papers.

As with FoI legislation, the Local Government (Access to Information) Act includes a number of categories under which documents can be deemed 'exempt information' and withheld from the public. There are seven categories. The one most commonly applied is "information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information)".

Changes in the way in which Kensington & Chelsea council operates its customer service arrangements have impacted on the way in which the public can access planning information. There was a time when the public could come to the planning desk in the main reception area and ask to see the paper files held on individual planning applications. These contained much background material, including correspondence between the applicant and the council and internal notes and memoranda exchanged between council departments.

Information now available is limited to the contents of the electronic file published on the RBKC website. This includes the formal planning documents (e.g. application form, drawings, supporting statements on design and access and other material required from applicants such as construction method statements). But these electronic files do not normally include internal memoranda, or the comments of bodies such as Transport for London or the Greater London Authority, nor comments on the application submitted in response to public consultation.

The Kensington Society is concerned that the background information now available from the council on planning applications is much less than in previous years. It would seem that the requirements of the 1985 Act are no longer being adequately fulfilled. The comments of bodies such as English Heritage, or the GLA, on a planning application will often play a significant part in the officer recommendations on an application, and the public are entitled to see such source documents (unless these meet grounds for exemption).

This is an issue which the society has been discussing with council officers, in the context of a publication on Involving People in Planning (currently being drafted by the council).

We appreciate that there are costs involved in 100% compliance with the requirements of the local government framework on access to information. The legislation needs to be interpreted sensibly, and not every note or document of possible relevance can realistically be scanned and published. But the rights of all of us, to access material on decisions that can have a very big impact on our homes and our daily lives, are an important part of a democratic society and not ones to be lost by default.

PLANNING PROBLEMS

MICHAEL BACH,
TRUSTEE, CHAIRMAN OF PLANNING COMMITTEE

YOU MAY WELL HAVE noticed that the government has run into public opposition on changing planning policies to make development easier. Building on greenfield sites does not affect this borough and most of the borough was protected from the 'freedom' to build very large conservatory extensions as conservation areas were exempted from this initiative.

But whatever happened to the promise that local people should make local decisions?

Offices to housing:

The next government initiative was to allow offices to turn into housing without requiring planning consent. This was based on the idea that there is a large amount of vacant office space just waiting to be converted. Not in Kensington. Unfortunately the proposed change in the rules was incapable of distinguishing between vacant offices and occupied offices, which means that wherever housing values are considerably higher than those for offices, even occupied offices would be under threat.

The Kensington Society's original concern in 2008 was about the rapid loss of small offices and the implications for the borough which relies greatly on the supply of office space for small firms. We persuaded the council to adopt a policy of resisting the loss of offices, especially small offices, when the Local Plan was developed in 2010. Following this new proposal we lobbied the then leader, Sir Merrick Cockell, our MP Sir Malcolm Rifkind, and the Planning Department. Thanks to everybody's efforts, especially Sir Merrick, and the excellent case presented by the borough, the government exempted the whole of the borough from this deregulation. The society is very pleased with this outcome – about half the authorities in England applied for an exemption, but only about 10% succeeded, and this borough was considered to have the best case.

Shops to housing:

The latest proposals would allow small shops to be converted into housing with fairly minimal conditions, but we are lucky that the proposal, which could wipe out local shops and local centres in much of London, excludes conservation areas. This will mean that only those shops outside conservation areas would be at risk – but in addition to places like Golborne Road, some parts of main centres such Portobello



the redevelopment of de Vere Gardens



3-4 Albert Place basement work without suspension of parking place for the skip

Road and Notting Hill Gate, as well as a few small centres, are not currently in conservation areas.

This is another case of the government making across-the-board changes to planning, when local authorities for the most part have already identified which shopping areas they want to protect and support. This should be a matter for the borough to decide, rather than be imposed on us by the government.

Changing the Local Plan

Another long-running planning saga is the proposal to change the Local Plan (aka the Core Strategy), particularly to produce a tougher policy on basements, to tighten up housing policy on the mix of types of housing and to consolidate the policies of conservation and design.

After a year of consultation on various draft policies, the council received comments on these changes at the beginning of September and was due to submit the new policies to the Planning Inspectorate for an examination-in-public to test the "soundness" of these revised policies in the New Year.

All of us, particularly those threatened with a large basement near them, were very much looking forward to getting these new policies adopted, even though we still wanted them to be stronger and clearer. The council has recently decided to defer the submission to the inspectorate. Their reasoning is to give them time to strengthen their case and, if necessary, respond to some of the suggestions made, such as those made by the society. This means that the examination and the final adoption will be delayed. We have had assurances that it will go to examination next summer, however there is no guarantee that it will happen then.

Basements

The society has been very concerned that the basement policy adopted



Albert Place really needed that tree the society managed to save.

in 2010 is totally inadequate. We consider that it needs a complete overhaul. We therefore strongly supported most of the council's proposals – indeed we wanted a still stronger policy, with no basements under gardens. The council was proposing this only for listed buildings, whilst non-listed buildings would be allowed to cover up to 50% of their garden. We strongly supported the proposal to limit any basements to a single storey. These changes would reduce the extent of excavation, the duration of the construction period and, therefore, the disruption to all our lives.

We, and indeed the Planning Committee, are alarmed about the number and size of new basement proposals currently being approved in the run-up to the change in policy – there is a growing anger among residents and increasing frustration by the Planning Committee. The problems we all face with basement development are increasing as is our frustration. Meanwhile the basement contractors ran a scare campaign this summer to encourage people get their proposals in quickly, which has resulted in a spate of proposals for two-storey basements even in the most unlikely and formerly untouched areas. Each week there are as many as 20 new applications for basements, some with two or more levels and in areas which will be restricted by the new policy. The scale of the activity has become absurd, as has the time it has taken to get a new policy. This was all easily predictable almost before the current policy was adopted in 2010. The prospect of no new policy before the end of 2014 is alarming.

We urgently need a new, stronger, more robust policy, which, whilst not banning basements, would greatly reduce our suffering – and we want it now!

Housing

The society has been concerned for some time that the council's planning policy for housing seems to have been to make the borough a destination for foreign investment. Most of the largest housing projects have been designed for this market in terms of their size and price range, to be solely an investment or at best a "second" (probably fourth or fifth) home, rather than meeting the housing needs of people who live and work in London and who are looking for their primary residence in this borough.

This has meant that, despite the council's official policy (in the Local Plan) being to provide a mix of housing to reflect the housing needs and to maintain mixed and balanced communities, all the recent major housing schemes – such as De Vere Gardens (see photo), Charles House (375 Kensington High Street), the Commonwealth Institute and the new scheme on the south site of Holland Park School with many of the units the size of a very large house – will effectively provide no significant addition to the housing available to London, let alone borough residents. Most of these schemes, like those before them, will be largely unoccupied for much of the year.

The society has proposed that the council seek a more appropriate mix of sizes of new flats and houses – rather than solely feeding the international, super-prime housing market and leaving us with monuments rather than an increase in the housing stock.

The evidence is already there from the 2011 Census – Kensington and Chelsea has a high proportion of vacant/second home units. Since 2011 this has risen. It is a major challenge for the council – to secure a genuine addition to number of homes which residents can live in. We do not consider the revised housing policy, which was due to go to examination, addressed this issue of whether providing very large units for investment or for second homes would be consistent with providing a mix of types and sizes of housing or meeting the housing needs of the borough.

Conservation

The council is trying to bring all its policies on conservation and design together by revising the "Renewing the Legacy" chapter by incorporating remaining policies from the previous plan – the UDP. We welcomed some of the improvements proposed, such as a much stronger statement about advertisements on the street including the proposed large advertisement panels with phones on the back and the large, flashing LED advertisement towers. Without these changes the council's policy is less clear than it could be. (See advertisements below)

Involving People in Planning

The council is required to produce a Statement of Community Involvement, setting out the public's rights with regard to public participation, including notification, consultation and addressing the Planning Committee, as well as access to information (see Henry Peterson's article elsewhere in the newsletter).

The latest draft describes these as "opportunities" without setting out our rights, which include:

- neighbour notification - although this has recently been reduced to occupiers of adjoining properties either side and to the rear, but no longer across the street or two doors away;
- a minimum of 21 days in which to comment (the statutory minimum);
- the right to see the officer's report to the committee five working days in advance;
- the right to see all the background papers to that report at that time; and
- the right as an objector to address the committee, subject the chairman's agreement (recently reduced to three minutes, often only one objector allowed to speak).

These rights are set out in legislation and the council's constitution or are established practice (such as right to address the committee). The society is proposing these rights should be listed in one document – this one!

Notting Hill Gate: New Plans

Notting Hill Gate is a disaster area – a major London County Council road-widening scheme from the late 1950s/early 1960s designed to carry more traffic from the west into central London, but it was promptly bypassed by Westway. One of the few dual carriageways in the borough, part of which even has barriers down the centre of the road. Yet over 14 million people a year come to the area.

The 1960s buildings create an unattractive and unwelcoming streetscape, despite the heroic efforts of the Notting Hill Gate Improvement Group to introduce trees, art and seating. Notting Hill Gate is classified as a 'district centre' for shopping purposes, but is failing to provide the range of goods and services the residents of North Kensington need, despite being able to tap the surrounding area and the large number of people who pass through it every day. Many of the local shops have been lost to non-retail uses and cafes.

The council is currently preparing a development brief for Notting Hill

Gate – draft Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) – which should be available for public consultation at the end of November for six weeks, allowing for the Christmas break.

Meanwhile the owner of Newcombe House, Brockton Capital and Development Securities, is well advanced in producing a detailed design for the redevelopment of its site. We have had a preview of the designs which, although an improvement at street level, would include a “shopping street” in the car park, where the the farmers’ market now is. It would retain the offices and shopping elements, but proposes a tower 81m (266ft) – some 18m (59ft) taller than Campden Hill Towers on the north side of Notting Hill Gate.

The society is concerned that, like previous SPDs, such as for the Warwick Road sites, the Commonwealth Institute and, most recently, Earl’s Court, the developers are moving faster than the Council’s SPD and its content will be constrained by the developers and may fail to accommodate residents’ aspirations.

We have had preliminary discussions with the Planning Department, about the society with other conservation bodies, producing a proposal for the area. It is our suggestion that we establish an alternative scheme which will promote debate about quality of place with more of a focus on residents. At the time of writing we have not received a positive reaction from the department. We will be discussing this with local councillors and the cabinet member for planning and transport.

We urge you all to get involved in the consultation on the SPD and with the application for the Newcombe House site in the next few months. Watch this space.

Young Street Car Park

After more than 40 years, the council has sold to Grainger plc a 125-year lease for the multi-storey car park in Young Street site, and for it to be redeveloped as housing. The council will retain the freehold and share in the rental income. Built in 1968-1970 this car park was controversial from the start because of its impact on Kensington Square.

Grainger has developed proposals for 55-60 units, half of which will be to rent, in a six-storey building with an eight-storey tower at the northern end. Grainger held a number of exhibitions and many meetings with residents, which resulted in a much better scheme. The design was changed considerably in response to residents’ concerns. Grainger has also been responsive the continuing involvement of local residents in agreeing the construction traffic management plan, the agreement about working hours, and the control of noise, vibration and dust during the building operation, and continuing liaison throughout the project.

The only outstanding issues are objections to the eight-storey tower and in particular the treatment of the top floors across the building, where lighter coloured materials are being sought, and, finally, the loss of offices. The council having succeeded in retaining powers to resist the loss of offices and has taken a tough line taken with private developers seeking to change offices to housing, the society is seeking consistency for the council’s own buildings.

Lancer Square

Kensington Barracks was redeveloped in the mid-1980s and Lancer Square was opened in 1987 - a mixture of shops and restaurants at ground floor level, with offices above. The whole development, plus part of Old Court Place, was bought by a Malaysian developer a couple of years ago. Since then we have seen not seen any investment towards maintaining the buildings. In fact we have seen the retail mix and quality reduced with more coffee outlets and fewer shops.

Unfortunately we have not had the same helpful interaction with the developer as we had with Young Street. Proposals have now been developed over the last year to redevelop the site completely, nearly doubling the floor area and increasing the size of the buildings. It would retain the amount of shopping floorspace, though the locations of the shops and their vitality is questionable, and

office floorspace, most of which will be in the basements with deep spaces and minimum daylight for floor lights. The developer proposes adding a considerable amount of housing. Its community offering is to convert the buildings in Old Court Place from offices to affordable housing for older people and a postage stamp-sized park. A new road will run through the site to allow the new housing to have its own drop off. The vehicular access to the buildings to service the shops, offices and residences falls on the narrow dogs-leg of Old Court Place. We question the impact on Old Court Place and the ability of this narrow, street with a fire station to carry the extra traffic and traffic flow problems from Kensington High Street.

The society considers that the development is too large and too tall compared with the scale of the other buildings in this part of Kensington Church Street. We will be commenting this scheme shortly.

Advertisements

The issue of advertisements on the street – such as the scrolling adverts on plinths with a telephone on the back and advertising towers on West Cromwell Road, Olympia and Westway – is a live issue. The council refused all the proposed advert/phone sites but the applicants (BT and J C Decaux) have appealed. Many of you joined us in supporting the refusal – we still are awaiting the inspector’s decision. Our case went beyond objecting to the 25 individual cases, but what was not clear from the Local Plan, that the borough has been trying to drive up the quality of the streetscape by removing and thinning out the clutter our streets. We consider that this should be a strong statement in the Local Plan and have agreed a change to that effect with the council.

The society managed to persuade the Planning Committee to refuse a proposed advertisement tower in West Cromwell Road. Again we will need to convince the Planning Inspector that, along with Hammersmith and Fulham which recently joined in opposing these structures, we need to reduce the number and size of advertisements along our border – West Cromwell Road, Olympia and Holland Park Roundabout. We are particularly concerned about the application for the retention of the advertisement tower next to the Westway Sports Centre. The council had previously agreed that this would not be renewed – it has now come up for renewal and we intend to keep the council to its word. I hope we can report success since the council and specifically the new cabinet member for planning policy and transport, Councillor Tim Coleridge, has strongly supported a tougher policy on these adverts. This will be key test of the council’s convictions.

Earl’s Court

The mayor and the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, failed to intervene in the demolition of the exhibition site and redevelopment of housing estates in Hammersmith and Fulham despite considerable opposition to the scale of the proposed development. An attempt to get a judicial review has failed. This leaves the developer, Capco, free to proceed with the demolition late next year at the earliest, although it will take at least 18 months.



Some of the traditional telephone boxes have been rescued from destruction, but they cannot be used as gaudy advertising hoardings

White City

A more encouraging development is that Imperial College has bought the former Dairy Crest site off Wood Lane in White City, and will be developing this as a combined 22 acre site, including its existing land holding at Imperial West. The college has retained Skidmore Owings Merrill to develop a new masterplan, taking into account the accommodation needs on the existing Imperial College campus at South Kensington. Is it too much to hope that this review may lead to a rethink of the un-built parts of the scheme approved by Hammersmith and Fulham at Imperial West, with its very unpopular proposed 35 storey residential tower?

Neighbourhood Planning

Over the last year progress has been made on the neighbourhood plans. The Norland Neighbourhood Plan has passed its scrutiny through an examination and is nearing a referendum, after which it will form part of the borough's Local Plan. The St Quintin and Woodland Neighbourhood Forum, which spans the borough boundary into Hammersmith and Fulham, has been designated by the council and is now at the early stages of plan preparation. Both bodies are active in supporting the work of the society.

ARTESIAN ACADEMY

DAVID WHITE

CHAIRMAN OF THE CAMPDEN HILL RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION

The plans for rebuilding Holland Park School had to include the condition that the community could use the school's facilities, including the swimming pool. That was one of the requirements of Sports England, a statutory body to be consulted on the plans. As a result, planning approval was duly given with the inclusion of a detailed community access plan.

The council leadership frequently referred in public to reassure doubters the 'flagship' school would benefit not only its pupils and staff but the wider community. Yet when the Walmer Road pool was closed for rebuilding – and for adding another school – and its users wanted access to the Holland Park School's pool they received a blank refusal. The construction finished in November 2012, but the promise to the community enshrined in the planning conditions has not been implemented. The council's requirements and its own promises have been ignored and use of any of the school's facilities by the wider community has been denied.

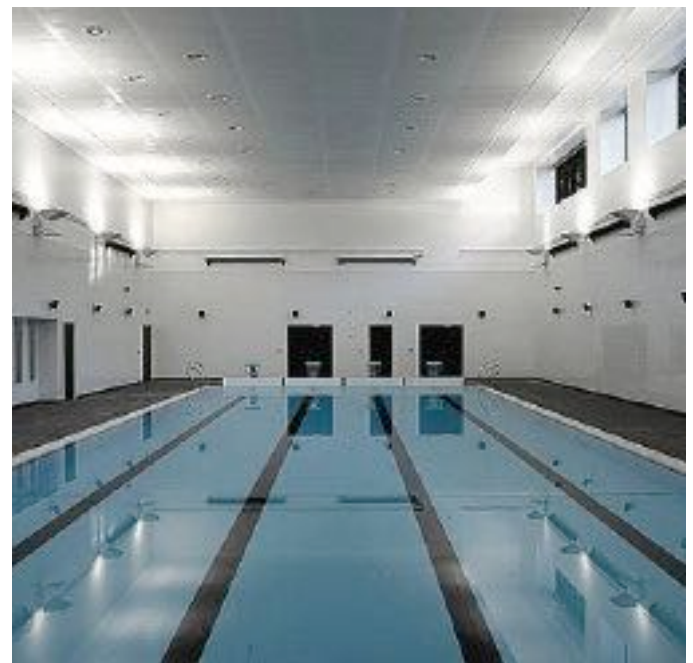
Ironically, the school itself is now unable to use the pool as it has sprung a leak. The school discovered over the summer, water leaking into the swimming pool. The water was drained for investigation. The school has now established that a substantial amount of ground water has been building up under the pool linings, so much so, that the pressure has blown holes in the concrete slab. The school and its set of builders did not discover the source of this stagnant water. It could

however be from a spring which is under the school site.

What has been discovered is that the pool will not be usable for 'at least' the autumn term. Shepherd Construction, the original contractor, is due to begin intrusive investigation and it is quite possible that may show the problem is not isolated to the pool area.

The authorities should by now have issued a public statement setting out the full facts. Not to have done so only increases residents' suspicion that the council has something to hide and is dragging its feet in implementing the planning condition to permit community use of all the school's facilities. Just because the pool is out of action there is no reason why the other facilities should not be made available for the use of the community. Doing so would send a reassuring message of the willingness of school to implement the provisions of the planning condition.

In the meantime, discussions continue trying to get an enforcement action but progress is slow and a suitable plan is a long way off. A council spokesperson said "The school and the council are both committed to the community use to the school's facilities and the school plans to submit a revised community use plan to the council for approval in accordance with the conditions of its planning permission".



Everything apart from the brown is gravel of various types, the brown is London Clay. The gravel is water bearing. The northern edge of the clay is the theoretical spring line - St Governor's Well (actually spring) is located on it. The gravel cap on the summit of Campden Hill and the well[s] at Aubrey House tapping into it. There is a well in Holland Park into the same gravel where you can see the water level. Theoretical spring line goes pretty well exactly through the site of interest. It would normally not be wise to disturb the spring line - the water would be pooling there more than on the general slope. But this is a built-up area with lots of impervious roads, pavements and buildings, with the run-off channelled into the sewers – so how much rain goes into the water table is hard to tell. All the springs have stopped running since Victorian times. The problem of flash flooding which Thames Water is trying to get developers to design out is because there is no absorption reservoir anymore. The map is not that accurate however and likely to be only broadly indicative. The gravel/clay transition might well be well north or south of Holland Street. It might need a hydrologist to find an accurate update.

THE FUTURE MAY BE BRIGHTER

SOPHIE ANDREA, E,
CHAIRMAN OF THE BROMPTON ASSOCIATION

TEN YEARS AGO THE Natural History Museum hosted London Fashion Week in its grounds. What began as a modest event rapidly grew each year with almost all-day noise, more and more unsightly portakabins being shoehorned onto the Museum's East Lawn with the total loss of the grand building behind. The exterior appearance was dire and completely inappropriate up against Sir Alfred Waterhouse's great building, one of the finest Victorian buildings in Britain and listed Grade I. Next, the lawn disappeared regularly under twee timber sheds sold cheap in garden centres selling items of no relevance to the Museum and numerous unsightly 'temporary structures'. The ice rink, though a popular Christmas entertainment, has also brought its own issues of noise and the effective closure to the public for months on end of much valued green space.

The response to mounting local concern about the inappropriate use of the East Lawn was to commission a study which advocated concreting over the grass to facilitate yet more events many of which had no connection with the purpose of the museum. The concept, central to Waterhouse's original design, that the Museum of Natural History should be surrounded by attractive gardens had somehow been lost.

Last year, the museum sought planning permission to pave the majority of the much-valued green spaces in Exhibition Road either side of Museum Lane (between the NHM and the Science Museum). The plan was presented as an area for seating. In fact it was have a another wooden hut to sell food and drink to passers by. Major objection was raised to this proposal by the Society and other local groups on the grounds of loss of green space, the proximity of residents' homes rendering the space unsuitable and the noise, nuisance, litter and vagrancy such a proposal would create. In addition, we were very concerned that he area would become the "perfect" space for events. The museum already has a number of restaurants and the capacity for more within the curtilage of its buildings and happily the council refused planning permission. This left relations between the local community and the museum at a particularly low ebb.

Since then, however, we are delighted to report a new dialogue has begun. The museum now seems keener to listen to the concerns of local groups. They led by Amanda Frame and Sophie Andreae, chairman of the Brompton Association, now have regular meetings with representatives of the museum and their professional advisors, led by former NHM trustee, Ian Henderson.

There is increasingly recognition that the museum needs to look at its wider estate. The configuration of its lacklustre 1960s buildings at the back and at how public circulation within the museum might be improved given ever larger visitor numbers (4m a year) and increasing overcrowding in key galleries. Encouragingly, in September the museum launched a new

initiative. Called a Design Competition for the NHM's Grounds, the aim is to appoint a design team that can begin to look at some of the issues (disabled access being one) starting with the exterior.

We have consistently made the point that the museum needs to take a new, holistic and sympathetic approach to its beautiful building and its setting, to embark on a new masterplan covering both buildings and grounds that can take it forward into the 21st century – just as the V&A has done in the past twenty years and the Science Museum is now doing – and to work with the grain of Waterhouse rather than against it.



Preparing for the ice-rink

CONSERVATION AREA PROPOSAL STATEMENTS AND THE FUTURE

ANTHONY WALKER,
KENSINGTON SOCIETY TRUSTEE AND CHAIRMAN OF ESSA

CONSERVATION AREA PROPOSAL STATEMENTS will soon be a thing of the past. As part of the review of core policies, the plan is to remove planning policies and proposals from these and they will be reborn as Conservation Area Appraisals. They will consist of factual assessments of the character of the buildings, the spaces and the activities which take place in each area. As such, the document will be even more important than in the past since much of the proposed core policies will rely on current appraisals of the character and appearance of each area.

The Kensington Society is taking a leading role with the aid of Neil Burton, an architectural historian, in formulating the format for these documents which will need to be rewritten for every conservation area. We consider that the new documents will need to be much more than

just an assessment of the buildings in each area because they must help to establish the sense of place which is a fundamental part of the character of an area. It has already been recognised in the new policies for pubs that these activities do more than shape the appearance of a building and that they have an impact on the character of an area.

Buildings however will not be left behind. Many of the existing CAPS identify buildings which have a local significance and the CAA's will give scope to expand this understanding to identify those which are of local significance and which have either a positive, neutral or even detrimental impact on the area. This will be an opportunity for associations, with their local knowledge, to influence the understanding and future of their own areas.