



THE KENSINGTON SOCIETY

AUTUMN NEWSLETTER 2009

TIME TO TAKE FLOODING SERIOUSLY – AND FOR ACTION

In July 2007 our home in St James's Gardens was flooded with over 24 inches of sewage. We did not know we were lucky: previous storms, which caused flooding in other parts of Kensington in 1981, 2004 and 2005, had not flooded us. Our insurance premium was increased immediately by 15% and by another 15% the next year. Like others we are now locked into one insurer because of the flood claim. I wanted to know why we were flooded and what could be done to keep it from happening again. Simple questions you may think but they have in fact proven difficult to answer.

WHY WERE WE FLOODED?

The answer is easy: the sewer system could not cope. Since the sewer system was built in the mid-19th century large areas previously undeveloped have been paved over, causing the volume of waste water and surface runoff to increase beyond capacity at peak times. All rainfall that previously soaked into the ground increasingly flows into sewers. Our waste water, the rainwater from our garden and all street drainage, flows into the Counters Creek sewer. Many feeder sewers connect into the Counters Creek Sewer which takes water from a very large catchment area that straddles Hammersmith & Fulham, Kensington & Chelsea and Brent. Heavy rainfall in Brent can result in flooding in Kensington. If there is too much rain water (as there was on 20th July 2007) the Counters Creek sewer fills up and then the water backs up into the feeder sewers, which in turn flood back into our houses. As a result, according to Thames Water, over 1,400 properties were flooded in July 2007, 500 of which had not been flooded before.

EXTENT OF THE PROBLEM:

Since July 2007 it has taken Thames Water a great deal of time to find out exactly what happened, what the problem is, and what the solutions could be. Initially there were denials all round; but now the position is pretty clear. Thames Water stated in their report on Counters Creek Strategic Sewer Flooding Alleviation published on 18 February 2009 that "we have confirmed that levels in deeper storm relief sewers rise following rainfall in the wider catchment, removing the capacity to relieve the trunk sewer

SAVE THE DATE!

The Annual General Meeting of The Kensington Society will be held on Thursday, 29th April 2010 in the theatre, first floor of the St. Mary Abbots Centre, Vicarage Gate, LONDON W8 4HN at 6.30 for 7.00. The speaker will be announced within the Annual Report 2009.



network (the Counters Creek) and placing the high density of basement properties at risk". In plain English, those of us who live anywhere along one of the feeder sewers that flow into the Counters Creek Sewer with basements are at risk of flooding. Thames Water estimates that there are 37,000 properties in the catchment area and that "over 7,000 properties will be at risk of internal flooding from a 1 in 10 or more frequent event by 2020"...and "if nothing is done to alleviate this risk, we will have to respond to a catastrophic sewer flooding event in the Counters Creek area at some point in the near future". Meaning it is likely that in the next 10 years about 7,000 properties in the catchment area will flood.

However, knowing why we flooded does not solve the problem; in fact the lack of action is increasing the severity of the situation. One example is the Westfield development's effect (at the White City and Shepherd's Bush). The sewers from Westfield flow in part into the Counters Creek Sewer, as do all other new developments in West Kensington. Westfield is designed to cope with a 1-in-30 year storm. The July 2007 storm was assessed as a 1-in-120 year storm. If Westfield had been completed the flood water sewers would not have been able to cope, and would have added to the flooding. So far minimum action has been taken. Westfield shows how there is now more rain water runoff into the drainage system due to more impermeable surface cover; the 6 major housing developments along Warwick road all present similar scenarios.

So far the Borough's planners have plead that limited planning restrictions have made little attempt to eliminate or even reduce either the paving over of gardens or building over of open land. Thames Water cites this ▶



The Kensington Society would like to thank Gordon French for allowing us to reproduce his beautiful drawings of the eastern elevation of Kensington Palace. Gordon is the Director of Gallery 19, 19 Kensington Court Place, London W8 5BJ. The original is ink and acrylic on paper.

◀ as one of the primary reasons for the increased risk of flooding but the Council has still not acted.

WHAT ACTIONS CAN BE TAKEN AND HOW SOON?

Reducing the amount of existing impermeable surface is impossible; however, the future can be controlled. Thames Water stated that they "need to work closely with the boroughs to minimise any further increases to the impermeable area, by ensuring that sustainable urban drainage systems are incorporated into all new developments and that any further applications for dropped kerbs to allow front garden parking and for more basements in the catchment are rigorously appraised." The Kensington Society has pushed the Council to incorporate such policies in the new Local Development Framework. The means to control this is there; we now must make sure it is implemented.

However, the primary solution is to increase the capacity of Counters Creek Sewer. Thames Water accepts that the existing sewer is no longer fit for purpose. In April, Thames Water presented to Ofwat their plan for the redevelopment of the Counters Creek Sewer. Ofwat is the regulator of all water companies and Thames Water has to put in their plans and receive budget approval for all action from Ofwat. Ofwat has until November to approve the budget for the planning. It is not the budget for the works, only the budget for the planning of the works. This plan will itself take until the end of 2013 and, if it is agreed, then construction work could start sometime after the beginning of 2014 at the earliest, and would not be completed until 2018 at the earliest. But it is possible that work may not start until after 2020, by which time it is likely that 7,000 of our homes will have flooded again.

We need to be clear; this is only a plan and there are a number of stages where approval is needed for this plan to be implemented. That approval may not be given and even if it is, we are still at risk from flooding until it is effected but eventually the scheme would only cover storms of up to a 1-in-30 year frequency. So we would not be protected from the likes of the 1-in-120 year storm we had on 20th July 2007.

WILL THAMES WATER BE ABLE TO CHAMPION THE PROJECT?

There is a great deal of misunderstanding of Ofwat's role in the funding of developments such as the proposal for Counters Creek. Whatever happens the funding of any such work will come from Thames Water, either from their own resources or from money they borrow. They could do exactly that without Ofwat's approval, but they will not do that. If they get Ofwat's approval then they can raise their charges to take account of the cost of the Counters Creek Sewer project. Without that approval they cannot raise their charges in that way.

The mechanics for approval are not easy. Ofwat works on a five-year budget period. Thames Water must first produce a development plan which fully outlines the methods of construction, the benefits, and the costs, but it first must receive permission to finance the cost of the design work.

Convoluting, yes. Delay through process, yes. Uncertainty; massive.

Many people think that Thames Water has approval for the works to rectify the flooding problem, they do not. Indeed Ofwat seem to be focusing more on the cost of the scheme, rather than on ensuring that the scheme is effective at the earliest possible moment.

In addition, the recent announcement that Ofwat requires the water companies to reduce their charges by 4% is cause for concern. Again, there is a misconception by the public, aided by the press. The announcement appeared to be a conclusive statement but it is not. Ofwat is currently in a consultation period, and the reduction is a recommendation and may not be approved or at least, may not be approved universally.

So there is a massive amount of uncertainty, and whatever happens we are all at risk for the next ten years. It maybe that Ofwat or Thames Water

decides that the scheme should not go ahead in any event – leaving us at risk for much longer. So we all need to make our voices heard now.

WHAT CAN WE DO?

Each of us must write or email to the following:

Government: Lobby our MP, Sir Malcolm Rifkind, stating our concerns over the perilous situation we are in and that we demand that the Government push for escalated action from Ofwat to direct approval of the works to the Counters Creek project as soon as possible. Sir Malcolm has been very supportive and a major help, but he needs our encouragement and the weight of our letters to make sure that his voice is heard.

Malcolm Rifkind, MP for Kensington & Chelsea;
shaylorc@parliament.uk 1A Chelsea Manor Street, LONDON SW3 5RP

Hilary Benn, Secretary of State Department of Environment & Rural Affairs; hilary.benn@defra.gsi.gov.uk
Nobel House, 17 Smith Square, LONDON SW1P 3JR

Ofwat: Write demanding accelerated action and disapproving of any reduction in funding to Thames Water that may delay the improvements to the Counters Creek Sewer and ask that Ofwat and Thames Water continue to hold public meetings every six-months to inform the residents of the progress made.

Regina Finn, Chief Executive of Ofwat;
regina.finn@ofwat.gsi.gov.uk
Centre City Tower, 7 Hill Street, Birmingham B5 4UA

Thames Water: Write supporting its action and press for a workable solution in the shortest time and ask that Thames Water continue to hold public meetings every six-months to inform the residents of the progress made.

David Owens, Chief Executive of Thames Water;
david.owens@thameswater.co.uk
Clearwater Court, Vastern Road, Reading, Berkshire RG1 8DB

Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea: Write to the Leader and copy your letters to the Planning Department and your own Ward Councillor:

Merrick Cockell, Leader of Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea; leader@rbkc.gov.uk
The Town Hall, Hornton Street, London W8 7NX

Planning and Development: planning@rbkc.gov.uk;
Tot Brill: totbrill@rbkc.gov.uk

Points to make:

- Pressure Ofwat and Thames Water for a workable solution in the shortest time;
- Pressure Government for action from Ofwat;
- Confirm action to be taken that all developments that could exacerbate the problem (including the concreting over of garden areas) must be refused until such time as a full solution is working;
- Ask that RBKC work with all other Councils in the problem area in particular the London Boroughs of Hammersmith & Fulham, Camden and Brent to scrutinise and control developments in their areas so that extra water is not directed into the inadequate Counters Creek Sewer;
- Continue to put pressure on Thames Water and Ofwat to hold public meetings every six-month to inform the residents of the progress made.

Amanda Frame

The next public meeting is on Thursday 3rd December at Kensington Town Hall at 7.30pm (7.00 for 7.30pm). It is essential that we are all there and make our voices heard.

PLANNING REPORT

This year has been very busy with the Borough's new development plan – the Local Development Framework – nearing a final draft, consultations on a number of Supplementary Planning Documents – which elaborate the policies in the plan or provide guidance for developing particular sites – and some really major planning applications.

LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

The Council had a major consultation on the draft Core Strategy over the summer – 24 July to 4 September – to which we have submitted a full response. The Council has now digested the comments they received and have proposed further alterations.

Quite a number of our concerns have been met, such as policies:

- to give more protection to small offices – a large number have been lost in the last ten years; and
- to give more control over the commercial use of open spaces, such as the East Lawn of the Natural History Museum.

But there are still issues that concern us and which we will continue to pursue, including the need for a proposal to increase the capacity of the Counters Creek Sewer and stronger measures to reduce the flood risk from surface water runoff and flooding in the meantime – the next 10-15 years.

The Society will support the Council against other objectors where this would undermine the Council's policy.

SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING DOCUMENTS

The Council has consulted on a number of new SPDs – including subterranean development, tall buildings, and briefs for the Commonwealth Institute, Warwick Road sites and the Wornington Green Estate. Not all have yet been published in their final form.

The SPD on subterranean development was produced after a long campaign by the Society, amenity societies and residents' associations and a study by Arups. The draft was heavily criticised by the Society and others, but the final version was much improved, especially since it requires owners to improve the energy efficiency of their whole house to off-set the increase in energy of the basements and their uses. The Society is still concerned about the degree to which developments almost totally cover gardens and do not provide sufficiently for water run-off to be handled on site by not building or paving over the whole garden and taking measures to ensure basements used as bedrooms are not at risk from flooding.

The SPD on tall buildings was also heavily criticised as it seemed to be trying to find locations to put tall buildings, after defining areas where these would be unsuitable. The redrafted SPD, which the Society has not yet seen, is stuck with the Mayor of London. Meanwhile the only guide to what it might say is the LDF policy, which, if people understand it, places some significant hurdles in front of those interested in giving us one.

COMMONWEALTH INSTITUTE

The Society, along with all the neighbouring residents' associations has been extremely concerned by the approach taken by the Council to the site. The draft SPD should have stressed that the aim was to secure the refurbishment and suitable reuse of the Commonwealth Institute exhibition building whilst minimising the amount of "enabling development" – new buildings that would help pay for the refurbishment. Instead of seeking the minimum it sought to indicate the maximum acceptable – which is exactly what the applicants, the Ilchester Estate and Chelsfield, have offered.

The scheme involves retaining and refurbishing the exhibition building, demolition of the administration building, and the construction of three large blocks of flats. The amount of demolition and refurbishment work that the developers want to undertake has ratcheted up the amount of "enabling development". The Society believes that this scheme is not the minimum necessary to restore and reuse the exhibition building – less work would suggest a much smaller scheme, especially with less of the expensive underground development, would be a much better solution.

The revised proposal, after the Major Planning Development Committee asked for significant changes, changed very little – it was still three buildings on the same footprint but slightly lower. The effect would be the same in terms of impact on the grade II* listed building, its setting, on Holland Park and on views both from the park and from the High Street. The Society joined with other local groups to object most strongly to this proposal and addressed. The Major Planning Development Committee which heard the case on 17 September.

The Society was very disappointed with the decision – the scheme was approved only after the chairman, Councillor Terence Buxton, used his casting vote to push the scheme through after the Committee was split 5 for and 5 against the scheme. While the Society strongly supports the reuse of the Exhibition Building, it considers that the damage to the listed buildings, but more particularly to their setting makes the current proposals too high a price to pay.

SOUTH KENSINGTON STATION

Transport for London are reviving proposals for a development above South Kensington station. The new proposals are being developed gradually, taking into consideration the listing of much of the station at ground level – the arcade and characteristic buildings associated with the Piccadilly Line, as well as the ticket hall.

The failure of previous schemes, the listing and the need to engage the public has produced a different approach – the Society and amenity groups and residents' associations in South Kensington have been consulted by Transport for London. Consultation began with the proposed brief to consultants to produce a "massing study" – an outline of the sort schemes that could be developed further taking into consideration the various constraints.

From the start the consultation group made it clear to TfL that providing step-free access to the underground was absolutely essential for any scheme, Thurloe Terrace should be retained and the height of the buildings should respect the surrounding conservation areas and that the height of the 1930s blocks of flats should not be the benchmark.

TfL's consultants presented the draft massing study, but after due consideration of the report, the Society and the other amenity groups, led by the Brompton Association have expressed disappointment about the omission of step-free access as an integral part of the scheme, that the proposals are not "conservation led" and that the buildings are still too tall.

KENSINGTON PALACE

It is not often that we disagree with Kensington Palace. We strongly support the project by the Royal Palaces Trust to refurbish, expand and open up the Palace as a visitor attraction. Their ambitious plans, scheduled to be completed in 2012 to coincide with the Queen's Diamond Jubilee, would expand visitor facilities, open up more of the Palace for exhibitions and create a new entrance in the east façade facing the Round Pond. We support the Palace in this project.

We did, however, disagree with their proposal, as part of this package, to build a rather ornate "loggia" in front of the new entrance. The design solution was a result of constraints placed on the options by English Heritage. The Society objected to this structure, proposals to fell most of the trees on the east side of the Palace and to plant trees along the Kensington Road frontage which would block off the vista created by the double avenue of trees planted by the Society after the 1987 Hurricane. ▶

◀ We attempted to persuade the Trust to withdraw these elements of the scheme and, when that failed, to persuade the Council not refuse the whole project but to grant only those parts it agreed with, which is what happened. We hope that, having help resolve this hiatus, the Trust will consult us on resolving the outstanding issues.

NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM:

The Natural History Museum needs to raise money and to do so they have held an increasing number of 'events', ranging from London Fashion Week, an Ice Rink to a Butterfly Exhibition. The Society, along with the Brompton Association, Knightsbridge Association and residents' groups, has been pressing the Council to get to grips with the fact that the activities have increased in number, size and duration, such that the East Lawn is occupied by or in the process of setting up and breaking down events for 95% of the year.

As part of the LDF process, in conjunction with Chelsea Society, we urged the Council to develop a policy for tackling this issue. We are pleased to say that the Council has responded positively, and the new policy in the draft LDF requires any proposals to meet tough criteria.

But this is not just a planning issue, as a recent licensing hearing revealed – the museum wants to hold more and more events within and outside the buildings. This issue will continue as the Museum is pressing hard to increase its revenue.

HOLLAND PARK SCHOOL

When the Major Planning Development Committee agreed to the application for the new Holland Park School and the new housing scheme on the south site, the issues of detailed design and the legal agreement governing the transport of construction material was left to be determined later.

The Council in its role as the developer has held a number of public meetings at Holland Park School. Some residents are still very worked up about the proposals – they don't like the decision and they are horrified at the cost which has now reached £80 million.

The Major Planning Development Committee will deal with the approval of details and the construction management plan on 15 October. The

project will then go to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 19 October and finally to the Cabinet on 22 October, where the viability of the project will need to be reassessed.

Michael Bach

OBITUARIES

Robert Meadows

Robert Meadows, member of the Kensington Society since 1986, died peacefully at home aged 93 on 28 August 2009. Robert was on the Executive Committee for 15 years and Vice Chairman for 5, and was appointed a Member of the Council in 2005.

A full appreciation will appear in the Kensington Society's Annual Report for 2009.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Amanda Frame:	Chairman
Celia Rees-Jenkins OBE:	Vice-Chairman, K&C Partnership
Anthony Lee:	Hon Treasurer & Licensing
Michael Bach:	Chairman, Planning, Environment & Transport
Angela Darwin:	Membership Secretary
Gill Foley:	Events
Dianne Gabitass:	AGM coordination
Charles Lutyens:	Gambling Policy
George Wightman:	co-opted September 2009
Richard Chaplin:	

– The views expressed in this Newsletter are those of the individual contributors and not necessarily those of the Kensington Society –

EVENTS FOR 2010

To reserve a place please send separate cheques for each event to:

The Kensington Society, c/o Mrs G.Foley, 34 Kelso Place,
London W8 5QP

Cheques are to be payable to The Kensington Society.

Please enclose a stamp addressed envelope and give your contact telephone number.

Tickets will be sent giving full instructions.
Guests are welcome at any of these events.

Wednesday 20th January 2010

Mercers Hall, Ironmonger Lane EC2V

Meet at the above address at 10.30am.
£12 per person including coffee/tea.

The Mercers' Company is the premier Livery Company of the city of London. Although the Company no longer regulates a trade it is dedicated to a number of charitable endeavours including schools, almshouses, church and faith, heritage and arts. The present Hall is the 3rd on the site. The first was destroyed in the Great Fire of 1666 and the second by an air raid in 1941. Fortunately, the Company had evacuated all its treasures to safe storage in 1939.

We shall be escorted by the archivist to the Chapel, the ceremonial rooms and shown the impressive art collection and show-cases of silver and gold.

Friday 5th March 2010

The Parlours & Museum of the Bank of England, Threadneedle St.

Meet at the above address at 5.30pm. £12 per person

After a look around the Museum we will have a private tour of the Bank's Parlours with the Curator. The grand rooms of the Parlours include the Court Room and the Committee Room and contain late 18th & early 19th century furniture as well as a collection of paintings connected with the Bank's history. The tour is a blend of architectural, banking, economic and monetary history.

The tour lasts approximately 1hr 30mins. As the Bank has no alcoholic licence Members may like to enjoy a drink afterwards at the Royal Exchange Courtyard Bar across the road.

Wednesday, 9th June 2010

Down House, Downe, Kent and Eltham Palace, Eltham

Depart by coach from Kensington Square at 9am. £38 per person

From his study a Down House, Charles Darwin worked on the scientific theories that first scandalised and then revolutionised the Victorian world, culminating in the publication of 'On the Origin of Species'. Thousands of objects relating to Darwin's work remain including portraits, photographs, family furniture, memorabilia from the Beagle voyage and manuscripts. The gardens surrounding the house have recently been restored to their former Victorian charm.

There will be time for a light lunch (at own expense) before we depart for Eltham.

Eltham Palace is a magnificent example of Art Deco style, built by textile magnates Stephen and Virginia Courtauld next to the remains of a medieval royal palace that was the childhood home of Henry V111.

Set amid 19 acres of gardens - including a sunken rose garden and medieval bridge - and surrounded by a moat, it is considered a masterpiece of 20th century design.