

Our changing town centre



The view of the new Peabody Building (102-104 Wandsworth High Street) and All Saints Church, from the east (left) and from the west (right): an improvement or a neo-Stalinist eyesore?



Beside the River Wandle a 'Ram Quarter' tower starts to rise



This curious object remains in place (for the time being), but what, and where, is it? See page 5

Planning News

Philip Whyte, Chairman of our Planning Group, reports:

A very happy New Year to you all: what will it bring? And what have we achieved in the last twelve months? For many living in the north, last year brought heavy rain and flooding, reminiscent of the pictures of Somerset levels the previous year. We are lucky in the south not to have suffered as badly as others, but "climate change" may be accelerating.

I have provided regular updates on planning matters of major concern over the past year. The applications received by the Council have followed the trend of renewal and increased density which generally leads to taller buildings. One of our great concerns over the last five years has been the loss of employment space in the borough, as the residual site value for multi-storey residential buildings far outpaces that of single-storey industrial space. Thankfully, the Council is now commissioning a review of the remaining employment space, with a view to saving major employment areas, but allowing change elsewhere - which could include sites such as Travis Perkins on Lombard Road and Halfords. (So where would we go for the bits for DIY and the car? To say nothing of where we would go to play bingo - once the Mecca site on Garratt Lane is transferred to residential use!)

Following the financial crisis of 2008/9, central government enacted rules permitting change of use of office premises to residential (known as Permitted Development Rights). This change was not properly thought through: while many 1960s or older buildings had probably reached the end of their useful lives, the legislation opened the door for wholesale change, even of buildings which could still provide economic office accommodation. The original intent was to bring this scheme to an end in 2016, but it is now being extended without limit. The upper parts of many High Street buildings provide office accommodation for small user requirements but are now being converted to residential use. Examples over the past twelve months have included Book House, East Hill and The Old Paint Factory on Garratt Lane.

The planning group has met every month over the past year - my thanks again to those who support its work and contribute so ably to the consideration of planning applications and related issues and their discussion at our meetings. We have made representation to the Council on many applications this year: each one takes time in preparation and presentation (thank goodness for email!). A brief update on current concerns:

Feathers Wharf*

An application has been approved for the temporary use (20 years) for an extension of the Waste Transfer Station and open storage at the northern end. It is good to report that, after many years of lobbying, the application included a provision for the opening of the high-level walkway above the transfer station itself and the provision of a much wider and improved pathway along Thames and Wandle riverbanks. We await the start of work. Our President, who has championed this much needed improvement for many years, will be delighted when it at last happens.

Homebase, Swandon Way*

We have submitted comments on an application currently with the Council to redevelop this site, to which we have objected. The application proposes a 17-storey tower and a series of linked blocks (all residential) along the Swandon Way frontage, although it does include a small amount of workspace and nursery facilities, with a new entrance to Wandsworth Town station from the north.

Springfield Park, Springfield NHS Trust*

An application for a park strategy has now been approved by the Council. We have supported the Trust on this, as also on previous applications.

Ram Quarter

New issues of 'detail' continue to be addressed on certain 'reserved matters', the latest including the removal of the substantial London Plain tree outside the Master Brewer's house on the High Street. Where appropriate, we comment, but, realistically, there is little we can do to influence decisions on such issues. Construction continues on site: our communications with the developers and contractors are good, with regular updates on progress through email and meetings. Some disruption is inevitable for local residents, but we are seeking to ensure that their concerns are addressed by the developers and that all concerned are kept up-to-date with construction plans and issues raised by residents nearby. I fear some disruption of local people's lives is bound to arise from such a large development.

Wandsworth Gyrotory realignment*

The group attended a number of meetings with TfL before the second round of 'public engagement' which started last November. Certainly, some of our comments have been addressed and we have commented further on the latest proposals. It appears that full funding is in place and a start on the changes is expected in 2017.

*The Society's submissions to the relevant authorities on these projects and further background information can be found on our website, www.wandsworthsociety.org.uk

President
Shirley Passmore

Chair
David Kirk
15 Aspley Road, SW18 2DB
020 8874 9167

Vice-Chairman
Philip Whyte
49 West Side, Wandsworth Common
SW18 2EE
020 8874 4745

Secretary
John Dawson
210 Beechcroft Road, SW17 7DP
020 8772 4282

Treasurer
Norman Holmes
Flat 7, Tiffany Heights
59 Standen Road, SW18 5TF
020 8877 9616

Membership Secretary
Gill Gray
Studio 8, Royal Victoria Patriotic Building
SW18 3SX
020 8870 4567

Other Committee Members
Sheila Allen
13 Earlsfield Road, SW18 3DB
020 8874 2341

Bruce St Julian-Bown
39c Heathfield Road, SW18 2PH
020 8874 6966

Iain Gray
Studio 8, Royal Victoria Patriotic Building
SW18 3SX
020 8870 4567

Harry Waddingham
61 Magdalen Road, SW18 3NE
020 8874 8784

Open Spaces lead
Bruce St Julian-Bown

Planning Group
Philip Whyte

Roads and Transport Group
Harry Waddingham

Events Team
Valerie Taylor (020 8767 3814)
Wendy Cater – Diana Godden
Catherine Headly – David Kirk
Jenny Massey – Caroline Pook
Libby Spurrier

Newsletter
David Kirk – Nigel

Newsletter distribution
Paschal Allen – Wendy Cater
Gill Gray – Iain Gray
Jan Passey – Charles Walton

Wandsworth Society

February 2016

From the Chair – a Happier New Year?

In a year that sees the Society's 45th birthday, middle-aged navel-gazing may be timely. Our constitution* states:

“The Society is established for the public benefit for the following purposes...

a) To promote high standards of planning and architecture in or affecting the [Society's] area of benefit [effectively, 'SW18'].

b) to stimulate the interest of the public in the geography, history, natural and social history, architecture and character of the area of benefit.

c) to secure the preservation, protection, development and improvement of features of historic or public interest in the area of benefit.”

These “purposes” need no revision (in my view) – but how well are we achieving them? My own view is that we are doing some things well, but there is more that we could do. We should be very concerned about our ability (or inability?) to influence major planning decisions. Government policy requires our Council to (never mind the grammar!) draw up clear, up-to-date Local Plans that conforms with the National Planning Policy Framework, meets local development needs and reflects local people's views of how they wish their area to develop”.

To its credit, Wandsworth Council has had a Local Plan for some years. However, the Council is unenthusiastic (the Society too – and sensibly so?) about the concept of ‘neighbourhood plans’, with associated local ‘referenda’, which central government encourages and has legislated for. The Council states on its website: “Neighbourhood Planning is optional. You do not have to prepare [a Plan or Order] to influence development in your area.” Rather, the Council “encourages local people to make an active contribution to policy making” by taking part in Local Plan reviews; getting involved with Conservation Area Appraisals and Management Strategies; commenting on planning applications; contributing to prioritisation of projects for CIL neighbourhood funds”.

So it is up to us. Are we, the Society and local communities, playing as effective a part as we could/should? How can the Council so often override its own Local Plan against local wishes? That may be the biggest issue that we need, as a Society, to debate further. Please join in that debate. Let us hear your views at our AGM (10 March) - or tell us now.

David Kirk
davidcameronkirk@hotmail.com
*see www.wandsworthsociety.org.uk

Other news and views

Let us have your news and views for our next newsletter and/or our website. David Kirk

Local planning and architecture

Promoting good local planning and architecture is central to the Society's mission. How, we ask, could the Council have approved the (neo-Stalinist or neo-Fascist?) new block at 102-4 Wandsworth High Street (see cover), blotting views of the Town's parish church? We objected strongly to the application, to no avail, it seemed.

How can the community achieve something better in future - in part by public education - and by celebrating the best? Last year the Society applauded Burntwood School's Stirling Prize (and we hope to organise a Society visit to the school before long). We support the design awards schemes of Civic Voice and the Civic Trust awards. And our Council runs its own design awards scheme - Philip Whyte represented us at a recent awards panel meeting. An announcement of the outcome is awaited at time of writing.

The Council is also seeking our suggestions for buildings of architectural or historic interest to add to its list of locally regarded buildings not currently included in the statutory listings. You can find the current 'Local List' at: http://www.wandsworth.gov.uk/info/514/building_conservation_and_design/. Suggestions, please, to philip.whyte@fraserwhyte.co.uk (07860 317509). Any building or other interesting site/object (even a horse trough) that is proposed should preferably include the full address, post code, a photo, and brief description and justification for proposing.

Rubbish can be fascinating!

Wandsworth Environment Forum discussed 'rubbish' at its meeting on 19 January. The WEF comprises many local societies and groups, including us. The minutes are on our website and include much interesting material and useful links. For example, you may not know that: there is a financial incentive to maximise

recycling: the charge for processing recyclable materials is only £25/tonne; sending non-recyclables to incineration costs £142/tonne. Wandsworth currently recycles only 23% of domestic household waste - a poor performance compared with other London boroughs (Richmond achieves twice that percentage). However, as Cllr Jonathan Cook explained at the meeting, an analysis of waste processing that measures the equivalent weight of CO2 emissions per tonne shows Wandsworth as the second best performing London borough.

The Woods Cry Out

The Society supported, and several hundred people attended, a Great War commemoration, The Woods Cry Out, organised by Putney Music in the Town Hall's Civic Suite on November 11 and 12. This was a very eclectic mixture of poetry, prose, music and film - pulling us rapidly in different emotional directions: compassion, pain, horror and laughter - and Wandsworth's history. The event might just have been a confusing helter-skelter of emotions - perhaps as the war was for many on the front line and waiting at home - but Andrew Neil and Sue Rolfe, who devised the programme, somehow made the mixture into a compelling reflection on the nature of war. And of course the brilliant readers - Wendy Cater and Timothy West, both Society members, and Clive Merrison. The event raised £3,500 for the Service charity SSAFA. The Society is planning another Great War event for November 2016.

Our 2015 Christmas Party

Last year's Christmas party at St Anne's Church Hall on 5 December was, Mr Feedback told us, an event much enjoyed - by over 55 members and guests. There were warm congratulations to Valerie Taylor and helpers for their "tremendous effort". Our Vice-Chairman commented: "The Porchlight Smokers band was tremendous fun, their variety of music great entertainment" and "the food was delicious". Another member wrote "many thanks to all who contributed to the success of the Christmas Party; we thoroughly enjoyed the music and the food". Some of the band's music can be found at:

www.porchlightsmoker.wordpress.com.

The Festival Chorus at St Luke's

The Festival Chorus is a choir of over 100 voices (including some of the Society's!), based between Clapham and Wandsworth Common. It performs three times a year, employs professional orchestras and soloists and is one of the "most established and accomplished amateur choral societies in South London", open to all "no matter what your ability or experience", and "welcoming to new singers". It embarks on its fortieth year with a performance of Brahms' German Requiem and Beethoven's Choral Fantasy - part of the St Luke's Music Society current season of concerts (www.slms.org.uk). The Chorus and Sinclair Sinfonia will be conducted by Andrea Brown and joined by the young Scottish pianist, Elspeth Wyllie, for the Choral Fantasy. That concert, at 7.30pm on Saturday 12 March in St Luke's Church (corner of Thurleigh and Ramsden Roads, SW12) is now 'sold out' – there may be returns (call 07951 791619).

A story of Wandsworth Common Station, petitioning and social media:

For many years, many have found it convenient to walk across the pedestrian footbridge from one side of the station to the other – with no railway ticket. But just before Christmas, a large Southern Rail poster appeared, stating that there was no public right of way. Southern Rail was planning to install ticket barriers on each side of the station, to prevent ticket fraud – as required by the company's franchise agreement, a spokesman explained, thus precluding free access. The Council confirmed it recognised no public right of way across the station, which is railway property.

A 'modern' protest began, using a social media website. As well as the leafleting of commuters, Cllr Sarah McDermott and her two fellow Nightingale ward councillors launched an online petition, addressed both to Southern Rail and the Council, urging the company to keep the footbridge open "as a route for walkers, runners and families as it has been without interruption since the station was built in Victorian times. We also ask Wandsworth Council to work with

Southern Rail to ensure the rights of way for local people are upheld even if ticket barriers are required at the station."

The petition was publicised on Streetlife.com, generating many 'congratulations', 'I've voted' and 'thank you, Sarah'. The local MP, Sadiq Khan, wrote to Southern Rail. Political activists then began to argue about which party had achieved the 'success' (a 'victory', in the local press) which several hundred petitioners claimed. The story may not have ended there. The company has put the installation of gates 'on hold' to 'think again'; it may be able to find a solution that suits all (as have other stations elsewhere), but it is not yet clear what that might be. Are there lessons here for the Society? Will the Council now take petitions and similar evidence of community opposition to Council planning policies more seriously than it currently appears to? Cllr McDermott herself of course chairs the Planning Applications Committee.

That object?

You can see it, for the time being, if you peek through the current hoarding alongside the Ram Brewery site, looking north-westerly from the Wandsworth High Street bridge over the Wandle. It is in this area that stood the nineteenth century Bull pub which was destroyed in the Blitz. The 'object' is not the most historically interesting or beautiful 'bygone' ever found, but it has a quaint and colourful charm, if in need of some new paint. No one is quite sure what it is. A vent of some sort perhaps, but too tall for a sewer vent pipe? The Council (Dave Clark) has stated that we can "rest assured that it will not be taken away and it will still be there, somewhere, to mystify future generations".

We shall soon be discussing further with the developers their plans for the 'heritage' on the Ram site and their developing 'cultural strategy' quite soon.



The Wandle Valley – the future of our regional park

report by Bruce St. Julian-Bown

BSJ-B is the Society's 'open spaces' champion. He worked on the initial concept of the Wandle Valley Regional Park and its early development, and was a founder Trustee – seen here (in Jenny Massey's picture) beside an impressive plane tree on the Society's 'Wandle walk' that he led last September.



Talk by Sue Morgan, CEO of the Wandle Valley Regional Park Trust

Sue, who has been in post since 2014, gave a much appreciated talk on 14 January about the Wandle Valley Park, 'our' regional park. The 15-mile River Wandle flows through four London boroughs, including Wandsworth, on its way to the Thames. The river and its valley are of course central features in our local landscape, and have always been a principal concern of the Society. Much has been done in recent years, through the efforts of many, including the Society, to restore, enhance and protect the river and its setting, and to ensure their enjoyment by future generations.

Sue discussed the Trust's vision, establishment, funding successes - and its uncertain financial future. She explained how the regional park concept creates a vehicle that facilitates Park development funding bids by stakeholder bodies, backed by a management that is both charity and commercial entity. The Park has spent several million pounds on a range of projects which include: opening up the river banks at Mitcham Watermeads (for the first time in a century), creating 'gateways', enhancements to the landscape, and 'outreach' and educational events. And plans are now proceeding for the preservation and enhancement of a major historical site in the valley, the Merton Priory Chapter House.

As CEO, Sue is clearly working very hard - much harder than her official two days a week! - to plan for the Park's sustainable future. She wants to step up from a 'Transition' to an 'Implementation' phase. But "...we can only find our way out of 'transition' if the local authorities are serious in their intent to allow us to develop the park and support the ideas that will attract the core funding we need".

This worrying prognosis reflects tapered and diminishing financial support from the four riparian councils, already burdened with a

£100,000+ Lee Valley precept. Lee Valley, having seen the writing on the wall, provides a token, single figure percentage rebate of what we pay them! It is clear to some of us that the CEO of a project this size needs to be full time, with adequate support staff and office facilities. It is ironic that just a quarter of what we contribute to Lee Valley is what we need for our own regional park, yet the politicians are not able to fix this constitutional paradox and have no cash to spare!

The four borough councils, the GLA, Wandle Trust, National Trust and Wandle Valley Forum, and, in our modest way, the Wandsworth Society and other groups, have all contributed to the Park's creation. Councillors Sarah McDermott, a founder WVRP member, and Charles Lescott represent the Council on its board, and we hope that the recently 'hived off' Parks and Leisure Dept (now part of Enable) will continue to be active in support of the Wandle Valley Park and use their influence to create funding.

Is it worth it? After all, much of the land has been 'public realm' for over a century. The answer is starting to become clear. Over the next few years awareness of the many enhancement projects completed or under way will grow - all 'tied together' with attractive, and increasingly visible (but low budget!) branded signage. (To learn more, go to www.wandlevalleypark.co.uk.)

If the Park stakeholders' 'campaign cry' is not responded to, however, four town halls and the GLA would have let down the now over 80 community groups and voluntary organisations that are declared supporters of the Park. To ensure the Park's success, it is up to us all of us - the Society is a leading stakeholder group - to talk to Councillors and Council officers, and increase awareness of the Park's unique attractions and the importance of sustaining it. So let's follow Sue's example and 'talk up' our Wandle Valley Park.

Planning News Continued...

Crossrail2

After the announcement of a proposed railway line to run from Wimbledon to Clapham Junction via Tooting, ground conditions were found to be very difficult and expensive to tunnel through, so a new line has been proposed via Balham. The project team held many public meetings to explain and discuss current plans. (I have sympathy with the Crossrail MD in her efforts to gain public confidence and support!) Whichever line is adopted, one or two ventilation and escape shafts may be judged by the project to be required on, or in the close vicinity of, the Common. Our response to the most recent consultation is on our website. We are on the alert!!

Thames Tideway Tunnel

This major engineering project is now under way, with work at Dormay Street in evidence. King George's Park is an area of concern in this context: while some trees have had to be removed, we shall do our best to limit

the destruction. It is easy to remove a hundred years of growth, difficult to replace.

The Fishmongers' Arms (latterly the Alchemist pub).

A little bit of local excitement occurred when a cement delivery lorry overturned into the basement of the building previously on site (see picture). The event caused some disruption, with a broken gas main and road closure; thankfully, no one was hurt. We await further news from the Council about the rebuilding, following the unauthorised demolition of the former pub on this site, located in a conservation area.

Finally, **the Local Plan Review**. No sooner had the Council completed the review, with the Inspectors' comments awaited, than a start was made on the new Local Plan, which takes us up to 2030. I have booked some seats on the first Crossrail2 train (planned to run in that year), but doubt that our planning group will be able to deal with the revisions required for the 2030 plan. Volunteers please!!



The overturned cement delivery lorry on 27 November 2015 – see the 'Fishmongers' Arms' report – not the first mishap relating to this site! (picture: Wandsworth Guardian)

Wandsworth Society Calendar

Meetings Our regular venue is West Side Church, Melody Road, SW18 2QQ (the corner with Allfarthing Lane). Our meetings are open to all at no charge — although we hope of course that newcomers will join the Society!

Thursday 11 February, 7.45 for 8

The Royal Victoria Patriotic Building and 'London Reception Centre' in World War Two: illustrated talk by local historians Paul McCue and Simon McNeill-Ritchie (both authors of recent books about Wandsworth and the Great War). The 'reception centre' housed in the 'RVPB' was in fact an MI5 interrogation centre, its role to investigate foreign nationals who had fled enemy-occupied Europe. The Centre sought to spot potential recruits to send back as Allied agents and to uncover enemy agents sent to Britain.

Thursday 10 March, from 7

The Society's Annual General Meeting — officers' reports, elections, debates (further details tba) and an opportunity to socialise over drinks and snacks.

Thursday 14 April, 7.30 at St Anne's Church

London Election hustings organised jointly with other local societies — with candidates for the Merton and Wandsworth constituency.

Thursday 12 May, 7.45 for 8

Elephant Complex – Travels in Sri Lanka Illustrated talk by local author John Gimlette (Wandsworth Arts Fringe event)

Thursday 9 June, 7.45 for 8

The Columbia Graphophone Company and Wandsworth

Illustrated talk by Dr Tom Going (Wandsworth Heritage Festival event)



Walks All walks, except for 'Kensington Village' and 'Wandsworth Common', will be led by Caroline Pook, with the group assembling at 9.30am outside 'M&S Simply Food' at Clapham Junction Station - no need for prior booking. If you want more details (or plan to meet the group later on the route), e-mail caroline@pookfamily.co.uk. The length of February and March walks will be tailored to the day's weather but will not exceed 4 miles on flat firm surfaces (with a warm café for a sociable lunch). From April walks will be around 7 miles, within outer London (Zone 6).

Tuesday 16 February

Tour of Kensington Village

led by professional guide Angela Down £8 a head, payable on the day; **booking** required - call Valerie Taylor on 8767 3814 or e-mail her at vtaylordavies@gmail.com.

Monday 22 February

Hyde Park, Kensington Gardens and Holland Park to Leighton House (charge)

Tuesday 22 March

Regent's Canal to Shoreditch and Geffrye Museum (Museum of the Home - free)

Thursday 21 April

Walk along the Dollis Brook following the Dollis Valley Green Walk

Wednesday 18 May, starting at 6 pm

Wandsworth Common: its history, ecology and management.

Led by Charles Walton (Chair, Wandsworth Common Management Advisory Committee). Meet at Skylarks Café on the Common, near Dorlcote Road.

Friday 20 May

Farthing Down and Happy Valley Circular; visit to Chaldon Church (murals)

Monday 20 June

Pymme Brook walk between Barnet, Southgate and the New River