

## ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE REPORT, March 2013

It is fascinating how Highgate's heritage has been highlighted in recent events. The launch of the film "Lincoln" reminds us that we have a brother of his assassin buried in Highgate Cemetery, while the discovery of the remains of Richard III revealed to the world that his closest traceable relative, whose DNA confirmed the identification of the last Plantagenet king, lives in Highgate – and some of you will recall that it emerged, some years back, that Hitler's sister lived for a while in Priory Gardens. What other intriguing history-related facts await discovery?

### The wider world

The onslaught on our town planning system continues, reducing it to a state of greater uncertainty for all with every change and the Government cannot be shaken of their obsessive, and mistaken, conviction that Planning is holding back the economy, despite all the evidence to the contrary. Recent changes in "planning" include:

- the Government have decreed that **vacant offices can now be converted to housing without the need for planning permission**. While it is sensible that there should be a greater degree of flexibility than current zoning regulations allow in permitting changes of use when there is clearly a good reason, the Government have seriously misquoted the Portas report on town centres, which only argued for more flexibility in allowing change of use, as has already been done in some Boroughs. The purpose of "planning" is to ensure that there is a balanced mix of uses to promote sustainable and liveable communities. In most of inner London, residential values are so far in excess of commercial that there will be a massive loss of employment space in many areas to residential use, and inevitably of the higher end of the market. The preferred location for offices in the new, vague NPPF is in town centres; but this is where residential values are at their highest. What effect would stripping offices from town centres have on their viability and vitality? Will this new move provide *any* of what is most urgently needed – affordable housing? "Town centre first" policy is about supporting town centres as concentrations of economic activity? Where will the displaced offices and employment go, and what will be the transport, accessibility and sustainability impacts? What will be the impact on a small-firm local economy? Even stranger is the provision that this will be reviewed in three years, by which time much of the damage will be irreversible as there will be a rush to convert to more profitable residential space before the rules are changed again. Our parent body, the London Forum of Amenity and Civic Societies, whose members include senior former planners, put forward a strongly-reasoned argument against the change, and pointed out that no impact assessment of the change has been carried out, that it is predicated on the clearly flawed assumption that only vacant and underused offices will be affected, and that it will result in regeneration. They have urged as strongly as possible that change of use of this nature must remain a matter of planning control; and the City of London objected so strongly to what would clearly have a major impact on it that it was granted a special exemption!

However, we learn that the Greater London Authority has also sought an exemption for London's Central Activities Zone (CAZ) covering parts of 10 inner Boroughs, and has been in talks with a number of London Boroughs over, which has also been echoed in a number of other conurbations including Manchester. The Government has said that exemptions could be granted in "exceptional" circumstances. But – what if they are all successful in getting exemptions – and, surely, if some are and some are not, without good reason, there will be a spate of judicial reviews of the decisions – in which case, does that leave us with conversion from office to residential as "permitted development" merely in the suburbs and countryside? That will be a constructive way of securing inner city regeneration, won't it?...

Planning authorities had until 22 February to make a request to Government for an exemption. We are trying to ascertain whether Camden and Haringey are among them.

- In addition, there is a proposal in the Growth and Infrastructure Bill to allow **Free Schools** to set up in former offices, hotels, hostels, shops and warehouses, again without planning permission – and therefore, presumably, without any need to assess the suitability of the premises, and such issues as transport and effect on nearby residents.

- A new "consultation" on "**simplifying the laws on rights to light**" (which appears to mean weakening them), to enable developers to build high without having to worry about the impact on neighbours. We are incredulous at the comment from the Law Commission that "most seasoned developers [whatever they are?] would tell you that, particularly in a city centre, the two main constraints on development are planning and rights to light" - well, of course, "planning" is perhaps the most serious threat to unrestrained development, isn't it? - not to mention their contradictory statement that "the availability of modern, good quality office, residential and commercial space is important to the success of modern town and city centres": but "good quality" surely includes good lighting? The Government, unfortunately, has listened to developers who want to build where their scheme would reduce light to windows of nearby offices or homes. They want to change ancient rights. Are we turning into complete barbarians? Our light

and air regulations go back to the Victorian age and were there to ensure the health and well being of the occupants, and rid us of the dark dank slums in which people used to have to live. It will also disadvantage anyone who wants to challenge a neighbour's building proposals on grounds of rights to light.

- Other proposals include:

- Limiting the need to seek Listed Building Consent to specifically-identified aspects of a building (a huge burden for a local authority, necessitating a survey of every listed building in their area);
- allowing developers to apply for a Certificate of Immunity exempting their building from being Listed for five years;
- removal of the need to apply for Conservation Area consent when demolishing unlisted buildings;
- a system of prior approval for specified works to Listed Buildings;
- allowing Listed Building applications, and certain ecological works, to be certified by "accredited independent agents", instead of the local authority.

- The **Taylor Review of Planning Guidance** sets out to identifying simpler policy and practice framework for spatial planning. While it identifies the lack of coherence and clarity in much of the current National planning guidance, it seems to think clarity can be achieved solely by a radical reduction in the amount of guidance; but, given the lack of detail in the NPPF itself, guidance becomes even more important. Some guidance is out of date, but guidance which helps deliver growth and supports activities such as neighbourhood planning will be central to a workable planning system which operates in the public interest. Below is a range of comments and cautions put to Government by Civic Voice:

One fault is the suggestion that Ministers should decide what to include in guidance, a dangerous idea given that Ministers are not the experts and must be able to justify any decisions against published criteria that are consulted on. Likewise, a system of charges for access to the guidance would be wrong, and would unfairly discriminate against voluntary groups and individuals. The only definitive source of official Government planning guidance will be web-based and access must be freely available.

The process of transition from the old to a new system must be seamless; cancelling important current guidance before there is something to take its place, as has already happened under the NPPF, will cause chaos, make public inquiries difficult, and ensure that many more planning schemes are decided by the courts. Particularly dangerous, and relevant for groups like the Highgate Society, is the proposal to withdraw the PPS5 Guidance (on the Historic Environment) in July 2013 before any replacement has been produced.

The transition, and keeping the new system up to date, will require a huge input of resources which, under the present economic climate, makes the proposed deadline of March 28, 2013, hugely optimistic.

Astonishingly, and nonsensically, it attempts to justify cancellation of all existing Planning Guidance on the grounds that it is not needed because its content is now common practice. Surely this shows that the guidance is working well and, even more surely, it will not long remain common practice if it is withdrawn.

The review assumes that local government has all the specialist knowledge it needs; but local groups, and the authorities themselves, know otherwise. National Guidance is essential when negotiating with developers, particularly on matters of design and on justifying refusals. The recent cuts to local authority budgets has meant that older and more experienced planners, with deep knowledge of the system, mean that planners have even less access to specialist advice. Tried and tested planning guidance should only be abandoned when it is out of date - not discarded on the naive assumption that all this knowledge is somehow embedded in the 'no frills' planning departments of this era of austerity.

However, the Government is at least being consistent in putting greater importance on getting something out as fast as possible, however inadequate and flawed, than ensuring that it is fit for purpose and has general support. At the Select Committee inquiry, the Minister made clear that the Government had dismissed the Review's recommendation that there should be a second formal consultation; given the scale of the changes proposed, this should be an essential part of the process.

In the face of all this, the government's "Localism" agenda could become distinctly hollow, if the end result is to give local communities more of a say over less and less. What value is a Neighbourhood Plan, if local people are on the one hand allowed to produce one, and then on the other bring deprived of and right to have any say in something as essential to their area as the protection of office and shop uses, and the employment they bring?

- The London Forum held a useful members' open meeting on the ***Implications of Government Changes to Planning for London***. Let me know if you would like a copy of the Power-Point presentation.

Some interesting issues emerged from a recent **New London Architecture conference**. Mark Lee at DCLG reported on the progress of the Growth and Infrastructure Bill, which was at Report stage in the House of Lords. Interesting points were:-

1. It is now only major projects that may be taken over by the Planning Inspectorate from the local

planning authority – in the original draft, it could be any project.

2. There have been over 700 applications for exemption from the proposal to allow change of use from offices to residential without planning permission – and the faintest of hints that the Government might rethink this. [n.b. almost all the Londo Boroughs applied for exemption; only 17 were granted it, including Camden but not Haringey. What will be the impact on “planning” in town centres in all the others?

3. The proposal to allow developers to renegotiate Section 106 agreements to allow them to get out of commitments to affordable homes provision, which they now say would render the scheme unviable. The concession will lapse if the development is not started within three years. There will be guidance to local authorities on “viability”.

4. “Localism”, they were told “is about responsibility to serve your community properly.” As described above, it looks as if that ability is being rapidly eroded before it has even been granted.

Duncan Bowie, former GLA planner and now University of Westminster, mounted a comprehensive attack on Government policy as “Any development is better than no development”:-

1. Building for investment is very different from building for need; why build if not for what people want?  
2. The crucial decision was the Government’s to stop funding social rented housing; the sub-market rent that the Mayor favoured is not social housing. We need effective public sector investment in social housing, not to make it a burden on developers.

3. Only 18% of Section 106 money (18% of it) goes to affordable housing; reducing it would not get much more building, and there’s little logic in allowing renegotiation on that element only?

4. Some schemes would not have been given planning permission at all if they had not included affordable housing; it was not just a matter of the amount of the contribution.

Anthony Lee (BNP Paribas Real Estate) said that authorities had to strike a balance between getting funding for infrastructure and endangering economic viability. The Mayor’s CIL was £70 or £35 per square metre, according to house prices in a borough, but took no notice of house price variations between areas within a borough. Only Redbridge (£70 a square metre) and Wandsworth (£0-575 a square metre, depending on area and values, and £100 for office or retail) had as yet set a CIL. Government has not provided an guidance. He thought that differences amongst boroughs would not affect developers’ location decisions as much as the price they expected to get.

Stewart Murray (GLA) said London’s population would reach the 1939 figure of 9 million by 2026, and would increase thereafter. He emphasised the importance of regeneration areas, of funding for transport improvements, including Crossrail 2, and HS2.

- **What can we expect next?** Your rights to make objections to “householder” appeals have already been taken away – so, if your neighbour was refused permission for something and appeals, and you were not notified of the original application, you have no right to make any comments to the Inspector. Possibilities unthinkable not long ago but, alarmingly not any more, could include the removal of building restrictions for flood areas; removal of Article 4 Directions which remove certain permitted development rights when considered in the public interest; de-listing of any Listed property built after 1799; ending of Metropolitan Open Land protection to make building next to, or even on, it easier; removal of village green and Green Belt restrictions and open space policies; ending of BRE requirements on light to habitable rooms; removing overlooking, play space and amenity space as material considerations for a development.

### **Planning and Development Group** (*Elspeth Clements and Michael Hammerson*)

A recent survey suggested that up to 80% of new houses in London are sold to foreign investors. In an area such as the western part of Highgate – the so-called “Bishops” area between Hampstead Lane and North Hill - this must be a major factor in the relentless proliferation of applications for demolitions of houses which are an integral part of the Conservation Area and their replacement with vastly larger and singularly insensitively designed mega-mansions. Each has its basement, often extending from boundary to boundary and well into the garden, to accommodate those essentials for modern-day living, such as swimming pools, gymnasiums, wine cellars, media rooms, spas, etc., without which no civilised human being can evidently live. The cumulative effect is to negate the whole purpose of Conservation Area protection by destroying its character – a point which we have made forcefully to Haringey, in view of their deplorable record of failing to follow their own policies for development within the Conservation Area. However, they are also causing cumulative ground water problems for neighbours as more and more basements interrupt the flow of ground water in an area networked with underground springs and streams (we hear on a regular basis of neighbours experiencing ground water problems throughout the area). The problem is increasingly serious, the scale of damage is growing, and the result is a heavy workload on the members of the Planning Group – indeed, the agenda for our January Planning Group meeting had 82 planning cases on it. Examples of these and other issues follow:

- The most urgent current case is at **21 Broadlands Road**, where it is proposed to demolish an attractive house which is part of an unspoilt street of late Victorian and Edwardian villas, and replace it with a vastly larger house, designed by Athlone House and Witanhurst Orangery Architects Robert Adam in mock Jacobean style, together with a large classical-style garden pavilion which is unacceptable backland development. The developers immediately appealed when Haringey failed to make a decision in time; Haringey have stated that they would have refused permission, and the Society submitted a strong objection criticising the proposals. A number of local residents who would be badly affected have also objected, and we have been working closely with them and the planning consultants they felt necessary to take on to help fight the development.

The inquiry was held on March 28th; we attended, to urge that the appeal should be dismissed. As an "informal inquiry", it was meant to be a small-scale round-table discussion to try and find common ground between the parties, with no pre-prepared statements to read out. In the event, two planners from Haringey, two of us from the Society, and a few local objectors found ourselves confronted by the developer and his team of twelve specialist consultants, led by a planning barrister, and we found ourselves having to mount a forensic attack on the statements made by the other side which we didn't agree with - a truly daunting prospect, which we took on as best we could. The Inspector was considerate and gave us a very fair hearing, but the subsequent six weeks' wait for the decision was a trying time for us. The outcome? We won - the appeal was dismissed. We complain that local groups, and local authorities, are put at a serious disadvantage when fighting the unlimited wealth which can deploy such formidable expertise to bulldoze through their inappropriate developments; so it somewhat restores our faith in the system when we local Davids can still defeat the wealth and professional expertise of the Goliaths.

- We, and affected neighbours, are fighting another basement development two doors away, at **25 Broadlands Road**, where a new application for a large basement swimming pool under the front garden (the previous one was refused last year) - could, combined with no. 21, create major ground water problems for neighbours. Haringey did not decide it in time, and it too has gone to appeal.

- the onslaught on the area continues with yet another proposal for demolition and rebuild at **30 Denewood Road**, a formerly pleasant road in the Conservation Area which has been relentlessly damaged by weak planning which has allowed a series of oversized and overbearing rebuilds in complete negation of policies for the Conservation Area (for example, the vast new house now being erected on the large garden of the former Goldsmith's Cottage). Here, the proposal is to demolish one of the most attractive and important earlier 20th century houses in the Arts-and-Crafts cottage style which is the defining character of the area, and replace it with a vastly extended house to be built, in mockery of the original, behind the existing façade, though significantly extending it, and destroying the informal and rural feel of the area. Like so many other houses now being built in the so-called "Bishop's" part of the Conservation Area, it is the sort of development which would be perfectly at home in The Bishops Avenue but which is relentlessly destroying the character of Highgate and would completely negate the purpose of the draft Conservation Area Appraisal, written by the Society and the CAAC for Haringey, at their request, precisely to channel and contain such destructive developments. If ever there was a clear case for refusal as likely to cause significant harm to the Conservation Area, and set a damaging precedent for other developments of this type, it was this. We therefore learned with disbelief that Haringey granted permission.

- Yet another demolition and rebuild is proposed for **5 View Road**, the house which some of you will remember as the former home of Friends of Highgate Cemetery founder Jean Pateman. It is yet another example of the problems described above; the design and bulk was completely inappropriate for this already-damaged street in the Conservation Area and we made clear to the developer, at a recent meeting, that we could not support it. As a result of approaches by neighbours, the plans were considerably modified, but it is still yet another demolition of one of the buildings for which Highgate was given Conservation Area status, and View Road too is now almost irredeemably wrecked by weak planning.

- Indeed, the sheer frustrating inconsistency of planning decisions in Highgate was highlighted by allowing a major demolition and rebuild at **60 Lanchester Road**. The decision prompted a letter in the *Ham and High* for February 17th, from a member of the Society who had experienced this at first hand, which is worth repeating here as epitomising the problem: "I was very interested to read Cllr Erskine's defence of Liberal Democrat councillors at a recent planning committee (letters Feb 7th). She had spoken on behalf of residents in Lanchester Road who were objecting to plans for a new house that wouldn't fit into their street. Despite her objection, the plans were approved. Could this be the same Cllr Erskine who last July, in a landmark case, voted to *approve* an eyesore house in Grange Road, Highgate, despite *two* of her Lib Dem colleagues speaking strongly against. This [badly designed] basemented house... will be more than three times the size of the existing house on an extremely constrained site. The Councillors voting against it included both Lib Dem and Labour Councillors, but thanks to Cllr Erskine, it was approved 5:4 and provided a precedent for the approval of a backlog of similar developments. Well Cllr Erskine, now you know how it feels! Had you paid more attention at that meeting, there would have been a precedent against this type of development and the outcome in Lanchester Road could have been very different."

- **Basements** have become a concern in the Holly Lodge Estate, where our experience of basement issues has been sought by residents concerned about the possibly impact of a basement proposed for **1, Makepeace Avenue**. With our help, they persuaded Camden that the application should be considered by the Planning Committee. We have supported them by requesting that the hydrological report must be vetted by independent experts; that any decision is based on the fullest possible understanding of current knowledge of the local hydrology, given that we are receiving reports of ground water problems throughout the area when basements are installed; that the precedent set by the consent, and the cumulative impact of more basements, should be a factor in making the decision; and that a Construction Management Plan must be produced and neighbours consulted before any consent is granted. As if to illustrate the problem, an Engineers and Hydrology/Geology report has been submitted for the proposed basement at **Furnival House, Cholmeley Park** as required in the planning permission; but the report is long (240 pages) and detailed, and vetting such reports will become an increasing financial burden on the local authorities, who do not have the expertise to do so themselves. This is merely another aspect of how the Planning system is becoming more and more weighted against local authorities and the local community; in the face of expensively-produced specialist reports of any kind in support of an application, most local authorities simply do not have the expertise to assess them and satisfy themselves that they are comprehensive, and may find themselves having to grant permission not because they are happy with the report, but because they cannot afford to assess it themselves. This is why I have long argued that specialist reports should be paid for by the applicants, but commissioned by the local authority. At **53 Fitzroy Park** where, despite strong arguments from the well-informed Fitzroy Park Residents' Association, Camden granted permission for a new development with a substantial and deep basement, the FPRA have felt constrained to go to the risk and expense of seeking a Judicial Review of the decision; we await learning whether the Courts have granted their request, while nearby we are awaiting revised proposals for a massive new development at **The Water House, Millfield Lane**; this is of major concern not only because of its scale, but because it lies directly astride a stream feeding into the Ladies' and Bird Sanctuary Ponds on the Heath, and it is feared that it could cause major disruption, and possibly pollution, to the water supply to both ponds.

- The current proposals for **69 Highgate High Street**, the site at the corner of West Hill which includes the flower stall, would destroy the character of this part of Highgate Village. The site is currently part of an open and low-scale gateway into and out of the generally low-scale historic architecture of the village, balanced by the green open space of the Chapel Churchyard across the road, and the valuable views into and out of Pond Square. It marks the entrance to Highgate from all directions – from a considerable distance down the High Street, from Southwood Lane, from West Hill, from North Road, and from the churchyard side across to the pleasant 19th century buildings behind. The entry to the village is marked by the fine Listed early 19th century merchant's house at No. 67, which has stood as a lone landmark for two centuries. The proposed four-storey building for the site would at a stroke destroy all this, turning a historic village gateway into an abruptly-ending terrace, cutting off vital views in all directions, and turning a fine free-standing Listed building into a part of a terrace. All this is exacerbated by what we consider to be signally inappropriate architecture – not a case of modern v. traditional, but good design v. bad design. We have sent in a detailed objection, and a member who has independently submitted their own strong objection has done a telling computer reconstruction of the site 'before' and 'after', which can be seen on the Society's website. We are glad to say that Camden have agreed with the many objections submitted (and, it has to be added, disagreed with a number of letters of support), citing height, bulk, detailed design and use of materials as detrimental to the character and appearance of the conservation area and harmful to the setting of the adjoining and nearby listed buildings, contrary to a raft of planning policies for promoting high quality places and conserving our heritage. We understand that a local resident has generously offered to produce a refurbishment and improvement plan for the existing buildings.

- The increased pressure for gates, railings and high walls are also a growing threat to the whole character of Highgate. Thankfully, Haringey recently refused such an application for 12A View Road, a road already seriously compromised by too many demolitions and substantial rebuilds; but this decision has been appealed, and new applications in this road continue to come in.

- Still no news on **Athlone House**: the new application to demolish and replace it with a Bishops Avenue-style palace has been expected since last summer, but there is currently only silence. It has occurred to us recently that a restored Athlone House would make a superb 5-star bijou hotel; do any readers have any contacts in the hotel industry who would be interested in a hotel in what must be London's most spectacular setting?

- The situation surrounding the **Highgate Garden Centre** remains similarly obscure, with rumours circulating of sales and re-sales for multi-million sums, and even of it being purchased by a "local philanthropist" to prevent it being developed, though our efforts to find out who it may be have failed and it may only be wishful thinking.

- A new application has been lodged for the site at **225 Archway Road**, where there is an existing permission to restore the Listed Victorian house and add two houses to the existing Edwardian terrace at the front of the site, which we did not oppose following major amendments to the proposals. This now

includes a large basement under the terraced house. Due to the slope of the site, the rear of the basement flats will be looking out on 7m of wall or steeply sloping land, while the front of the flats would be looking out at wheel level of the Archway Road traffic. Further, the new basement could severely affect local ground water as the site lies across the course of the old, not underground. Finally, the design of the new side extension to the listed building is not sympathetic to its character, and we have registered an objection.

- At **179 Archway Road**, we have objected to a proposal to change the use of the rear of a restaurant into radiocontrolled minicab office; a 24/7 business activity is not acceptable in a property with flats above, its entrance off a residential street (Cromwell Avenue), and a statement only that they do not "expect" taxis to park outside, or collect clients from, the proposed office.

- As the new mansion on the site of the old **Fitzroy Farm, Millfield Lane** takes shape, our dismay increases. What we had hoped would be an attractive looking modern building which respects its setting has turned out to be an overbearing monster, made even worse by the addition to the outside of the structure of what appears to be a gigantic enclosed children's slide in gleaming aluminium. This has severely damaged the previously rural atmosphere of this popular corner of the Heath at the junction of the Stock Pond and Ladies' Pond enclosures. We are appalled at the insensitivity of the owners and architects who have built it, the failures of design control at the planning stage which allowed it to be permitted, and the onslaught of successive governments on the planning system which is making it easier for our valuable open spaces to be marred by such developments and more difficult for the communities which value and want to protect their open spaces to oppose them.

- Haringey's failure to take enforcement on a signally ugly rear extension at **46 Milton Park** resulted in local residents referring their inaction to the Local Government Ombudsman, who agreed that Haringey were at fault in issuing a Certificate of Lawful Development and that they should compensate the adjoining owner, who will have to look out permanently at the excrescence, to the tune of a massive £200. However, he inexplicably accepted Haringey's argument that "The aims of Conservation Areas are to protect the street-scene, and that as this is a rear extension, the effect of the breach is slight". This is surely a dangerously mistaken interpretation, and surely that is the whole point of development control in a Conservation Area? We have queried it with English Heritage.

- **The Listowel site, at the junction of West Hill and Swains Lane**, has been under threat of redevelopment for many years, and several badly-designed schemes have been successfully opposed. The site is both an important local amenity, and a critical gateway to the Highgate and Holly Lodge Conservation Areas, and a strong local campaign group. "Save Swains Lane", has been negotiating with the site owners on an appropriate development. For the up-to-date position, see the campaign website <http://www.saveswainslane.com/home.asp>

- Just outside our area, we have joined with the Highgate and Dartmouth Park CAACs to object to a proposal for a large development on the Mansfield Bowling Club, because it has major implications. The Club is tucked away on backland off Croftdown Road. The popularity of bowls is falling, the club faces closing down and has already abandoned its outdoor green although it has indoor facilities. The proposal is to sell off the outdoor facilities, which include two tennis courts used by another club, and build 8 houses, mainly on the courts. The club house will be refurbished, the indoor bowls area reduced and a private health club established; the "community" will "benefit" from a small public garden area adjacent to Regency Lawn in Croftdown Road but not visible from the public highway. The houses will be 30-storey with basements, and will be visible from all round as the land is in a bowl. The whole area is designated Private Open Space. While the Club's problems are clear, allowing the development of designated open space and backland sets a very bad precedent everywhere. There is more info on the Dartmouth Park CAAC's website.

- In the last report, I highlighted the excellent restoration by Camden and Thames Water of the listed mid-Victorian Railings around the **West Hill Reservoir**. Recently, as I stood there admiring them, I realised, to my dismay, that the hedge of native shrubs which had been planted, at our request, along the ugly modern barbed paling fence at the southern end of the site, and which had just grown enough to soften the impact of that fence, had inexplicably been cut down! Following our expressions of concern to Thames Water, they have agreed to replant the hedge and to plant more trees within the grassed area..

- Islington have rightly refused the application to demolish the **Whittington and Cat Pub, Highgate Hill** and rebuild it behind the façade as flats, on the grounds that pubs are an important part of the social fabric and history of an area, and that it would have harmed the Conservation Area.

- Our Ward Councillors have been assured by Haringey's Head of Finance that there are no proposals to close the **Jackson's Lane Community Centre**. We hope that this commitment is a long-term one.

- The **Highgate Junior School redevelopment** in Bishopswood Road has been approved. The Society was consulted by the School over the shortlisted schemes and supported the final proposals. The School has also responded positively to our urgings that an archaeological investigation of the site should be undertaken, as it could have some potential, and investigations will take place during the summer.

- Though marginal to our area of concern, we show an interest in the redevelopment proposals for the former **St. Luke's Hospital site, Woodside Avenue** from the Hanover Housing Trust, who propose a housing scheme mainly for over-50s, funded by a private element. Some 200 residents of the area

attended a Development Management Forum meeting held by Haringey, where it was clear that the mood locally was that, while the principle of development, and the general approach, including retaining the Listed and other older buildings, was welcomed, it was over-development. Our own concern is that the site has considerable archaeological potential, yet the developers' archaeological assessment was that, as there were no "designated archaeological monuments" on the site, there was no need for any excavation. This, we believe, is foolish, given the close proximity of prehistoric and Roman sites, and its location in a corner of a mediaeval agricultural estate owned by the Church for some 1,300 years, and we are pressing for a proper archaeological sounding-out of the site. Indeed, we have major concerns about the cavalier attitude taken towards archaeology by our local authorities, particularly Barnet and Haringey, and have made our concerns known.

- The **Highgate Magistrate's Court** closed down at Christmas, and we hear unofficially that the site has already been sold, though to whom or for what purpose we do not know. The building itself is a notable example of good 1950s architecture, but, equally important, any long-term plans should include the former police station next door and the Probation Service's Telfer House behind. This is probably one of the most important development sites in Highgate and must be looked at holistically and with a view not only to careful and sensitive design, but to its most appropriate use, and the Neighbourhood Forum are giving its future a high priority.

- As mentioned in a past issue, the restoration of the fine Victorian House at **4, North Hill** was well done. It was therefore a great pity that the two high flank garden walls (one rendering the south windows of Kipling's Restaurant inaccessible), the front wall and railings, and the forecourt parking, all damaging to both the building and its area, were installed without planning permission. Haringey have refused the application for retrospective permission, and we await the next steps to secure enforcement.

### Other Happenings

- In **Park House Passage**, we have repeatedly reported to Haringey the fact that the low York stone wall surrounding the raised bed along the Passage is being progressively stolen and the beds threatened with erosion. Following a site meeting, work has started to replace the missing stones, albeit with much cheaper concrete slabs, but the appearance should not be materially different and the stones, hopefully, not worth stealing.

- The anxiously-awaited **Conservation Area Appraisal** for the Haringey half of Highgate (yes, Highgate only has half a Conservation Area Appraisal, for the Camden side; they are vital guidance documents for developers) has completed its consultation phase. The Society, together with the Conservation Area Advisory Committee, put a huge amount of work into drafting it for Haringey, as they had no resources to do the work themselves; so we were dismayed when the version put out for consultation contained some elements of our work, but was mainly an old, badly-written and discredited version which was thankfully shelved. Urgent negotiations followed, after which we have submitted the correct version to them once again, and we understand that the next version will be the correct one; as it will differ materially from the version put out to the public, there will be a further 4-week consultation on the amended version.

- Concerns mount about the future of **Ashmount School, Hornsey Lane** (*writes Gail Waldman*).

English Heritage has recently decided not to list this building, designed in 1956 by architect Henry Thomas Cadbury-Brown, which is curious as they described it in 2008 as "one of the first constructed using self standing curtain walling and is additionally unusual in that it is one of the very few schools that used this system. It also contributes positively to the architectural and historic character and appearance of the conservation area and its loss would detrimentally affect this character and appearance. [We] would resist its demolition and would strongly support its repair and reuse". Islington Council had locally listed the school in 1999. Islington Council has now built a new Ashmount School on Metropolitan Open Land (the highest urban grade) belonging to the Parkland Walk, despite the GLA pointing out to them that "there could be considerable objection to the loss of the important 20<sup>th</sup> century heritage asset". Islington has now designated the site for housing. The Highgate Society has supported local objectors, arguing at the Site Allocations Hearing that the existing building should be retained in educational use and should not be demolished. Permission was sought in December 2012 from the Secretary of State for Education for it to be used as a free school; the decision is awaited.

- Across the border in Islington, the local authority refused a 24-story student accommodation block in the sensitive Highbury Fields area. The developers got the decision reversed on appeal, but Islington have sought a Judicial Review of the decision.

### Telecommunications equipment

A member recently asked us why we were objecting to the installation of the new fast **broad band control cabinets** in the area. The answer was, of course, that most of us use, and even depend upon, it and we are certainly not objecting to them. What we try to do is to meet the operating companies, in cases where siting is important, to try and agree the best location for what are necessary but, unfortunately, ugly and poorly designed objects; what is the point of having strict rules requiring everyone else to apply for permission for works in a Conservation Area, if the broad band operators do not take some responsibility for locating their equipment as sensitively as possible? After considerable effort, during

which our early approaches for meetings were rather petulantly dismissed, we found someone at BT who agreed to a site meeting, at which we hope we were able to agree on a more acceptable location.

Nationally, however, the prospect is alarming, with the Government having now been persuaded, by the operators to issue legislation exempting telecommunications equipment from the need for planning permission anywhere except in an SSSI. The extensive objections to this unnecessary and illogical further weakening of planning control were ignored; so expect a broad band cabinet, telegraph pole or similar equipment to suddenly appear outside, or up against, your property, without any notice. Why can they not design the control boxes more attractively, or, even better, sponsor a competition for design students to come up with a range of attractive designs? There are several websites showing how some cities abroad have made telecom cabinets cheerful and even attractive by allowing local artists to decorate them, and we are currently endeavouring to persuade British Telecom to give this serious thought.

### **Traffic and Transport Group**

Richard Webber's report has its own "box" within the latest hard copy "Buzz" report, but as we go to press, we learn that Barnet GLA member Andrew Dismore has made his own useful contribution to the debate with a question to the Mayor: "The current 271 bus turnaround is a major impediment to environmental improvement in Highgate Village; is an environmental nuisance to local people; is dangerous; and it is not helpful to have two different places to guess from, when you want to get a bus to Archway. Will you instruct TfL planners to work with the Highgate Society to implement the evident consensus in the community for alternative proposals, including a split arrangement under which half the buses would terminate at the Archway and the other half continue to the bottom of Highgate North Hill where they would turn and stop at the headstop currently used by the 234?"

### **Sustainable Homes Group (Catherine Budgett-Meakin)**

The group has now been in operation for a year. It has had three very well-attended and successful events between September and December. Its weekend event, "21<sup>st</sup> Century Homes – character – comfort – low carbon," had 200-250 visitors, with a range of enthusiastic exhibitors and speakers. This was followed by a "Winterproofing your home" workshop in mid November which also attracted a good crowd, many new to the Society. In late November, the group had a joint meeting with the Environment Committee's Planning Group on Conservation and Sustainability, with a speaker from English Heritage and a panel representing a range of views.

For more information, see the "Sustainable Homes" part of the HS website. Our 2013 programme is now being developed. We are planning to organise Thermal Imaging for houses – these fascinating images, taken at night by infra-red photography, will show just how much; this will be followed up by a workshop to analyse the findings.

We still have funds available from the Haringey 40:20 grant and the generous donation from the Muswell Hill Sustainable Homes Group.

### **Ecology and Biodiversity in Highgate**

This does not feature in our reports as often as we would like, beyond items linked with the management of Hampstead Heath and Highgate Wood, but it is an integral element of Highgate's character. We may be surrounded by important and well-protected open spaces – Hampstead Heath, Highgate, Queen's, Cherry Tree and Coldfall Woods, and Waterlow Park – but they are still only ecological "islands" or reservoirs, and their biodiversity will only be maintained if wildlife can travel to and from them. This is why the importance of "green chains" or "ecological corridors" is now becoming increasingly recognised. Such spaces in Highgate include the Parkland Walk; the open, wildlife-rich land around Highgate Station and the above-ground railway line; the land and woodland of the "Highgate Bowl"; the West Hill reservoir land; the Highgate School Chapel churchyard (owned by Haringey); and the densely-treed slopes of The Park and Southwood Lane (about which, alarmingly, a rumour has recently been circulating to the effect that Haringey are considering using that land to help boost their housing targets).

A little-realised, but particularly critical, element of all this is the substantial ecological chain formed by all our gardens. A recent study by Anglia Ruskin University of garden birds has confirmed that fewer chicks survived in areas where gardens were planted with exotic non-native plants, in all likelihood because they do not support the insect life on which the birds feed. We should all, therefore, make a point of dedicating some part of our gardens to native plants – what some of you might call "weeds": but, what is a "weed"? Most of your garden plants are tropical weeds, and a properly-tended wildlife garden (it doesn't have to be a bramble-and-nettle-strewn wilderness) can be a pleasure to see. There is any amount of advice available on it; I googled "wildlife gardening" and got 216,000 hits. Most of the plants in my tiny 25' x 20' garden are native, but no-one ever suspects until I tell them.

### **Kenwood Concerts 2013**

English Heritage have engaged Rouge Events, a company with considerable experience in running outdoor events, to deliver the summer concerts for the next 3 years. Responding to requests,

they have looked at ways to provide a range of concerts which will appeal to a wider cross-section of the local population than has been the case in recent years, when the offer was simply pop, whilst minimising the impact of the concerts on local residents. As a result, the following changes are proposed for the 2013 season:

- Reduction in the number of concerts from 8 to 6, and in the number of weekends when concerts take place from 4 to 2. There will be two back-to-back concert weekends, probably at the end of August and beginning of September, with entertainment on Friday evening, Saturday evening and Sunday afternoon.
- The season will incorporate a broader range of music, including classical and family pop.
- There will be no deck chair seating directly in front of the stage; all visitors will now need to bring their own seating. This is to address health and safety issues in the event of having to evacuate the arena, and will also allow event capacity to be increased by 2,000 to a maximum audience of 10,000.

The location and size of the arena, stage, the maximum permitted noise level and the location of the sound monitoring points will be as before. This is the basis on which English Heritage will seek a new concert licence application from Camden.

English Heritage and Rouge Events will present their plans in more detail at an evening event in the next few weeks. To attend, contact Lizzie Bracegirdle on 01223 582797 or e-mail [elizabeth.bracegirdle@english-heritage.org.uk](mailto:elizabeth.bracegirdle@english-heritage.org.uk)

### **The London Forum of Amenity and Civic Societies**

Despite our best efforts, this invaluable umbrella body for London's amenity societies remains little-known among Highgate Society members. No-one has yet responded to my offers to provide electronic copies of its very useful and informative newsletter, which contains much of importance to us all but which cannot be covered here.

Its website is a mine of information about the full arrange of issues affecting London; I do urge you to check out its website (<http://www.londonforum.org.uk>), and follow its Chairman's tweets on issues of immediate concern ([https://twitter.com/London\\_Forum](https://twitter.com/London_Forum)).

As a further extremely valuable benefit for its members, the London Forum has also taken out a subscription to the very useful quarterly magazine *Planning in London*, which allows it to send electronic copies to all of its members – and that, dear reader, includes you, if you are a member of the Highgate Society, which is itself a member of the London Forum. The first issue under the subscription offer is already available; please let us know if you want to be included on the distribution list.

Finally, a reminder, once again, of our **Members' Planning "Surgery"** every Saturday morning at 10a, between 10.30 and 12, where members can come and talk to us about any planning, ecology or environment issues. If possible, do let us know I advance that you are coming, as some Saturday mornings lately have been very busy indeed!