

Wandsworth Society

Newsletter June 2014



But is it art . . . ?

. . . a personal view

There is an expanse of pavement at the north end of Southside. (A sentence that would benefit from some additional work. As it formed it had an 'unlovely' that was cast aside, but on reflection seems more justified than trite. It is an unlovely expanse of pavement. And while there is something mildly amusing about it being at the north end of Southside, there is something slightly more than mildly unsatisfactory about 'Southside'. It is a definite place and, do you not think, calls out for a definite article? So - at the north end of the Southside . . . but then that seems unfinished, seems to hang in the air, did we ever say we were going to Arndale? At the north end of the Southside . . . the Southside what? What should we call it? Its owners call it Southside and southside, and on their website they welcome us to southside wandsworth; and then helpfully explain that 'Southside shopping centre in Wandsworth is a quality retail and relax leisure destination.'

That was more than a paragraph break, I had to break off there for a brief lie down. Anyway, good to know that we have a relax leisure destination, if there was one thing Wandsworth town centre was missing . . . but, to the matter at hand.)

There is an unlovely expanse of pavement at the north end of the Southside Shopping Centre between TK Maxx, Costa and the 4-lane one-way highway that is Wandsworth High Street. Some few years back it had a number of mature plane trees. Several were removed by the then-owners of the shopping centre, as they were thought to be incompatible with its future as a quality retail and relax leisure destination. That is, they were thought to prevent you being aware that there was a

'destination' behind them. They were removed, with the promise that they would be replaced by a row of trees along the line of Buckhold Road. That never happened. The current owners of the 'destination' that is the Southside Shopping Centre are busy improving it, and a part of that improvement is a proposal to place a piece of public art on that unlovely pavement. It is the subject of planning application 2014/0832. Details of the final design and location of the public art pursuant to condition 26 of planning permission dated 28/03/2012 ref. 2011/5534. The public art has a name, it is called *Oculus*.

It's not easy being public art. There is art in a public place; Elisabeth Frink's *Horse and Rider* on Piccadilly, an exemplar, it's just there, not designed to 'do' anything. Then there's the public art designed for its site, intended to be 'a highly visible sculpture which works on an intimate scale and from afar, it has been designed specifically for Wandsworth and it's [sic] site celebrates a sense of place and acts as a destination point, a marker and an enclosure. *Oculus* creates a new permeable enclosure offering a space to relax, create, meet, eat and ponder. [Where] ... the skies above and the hidden River Wandle are framed and celebrated. It acts as a fulcrum, a landmark and a destination point which has been inspired by and makes essential references to Wandsworth's rich industrial and rural heritage.' The hell it does, but, meaningless justification aside, is it art? It is not a *Horse and Rider*, it is designed to 'do something', and that is perhaps both its strength, and its weakness. It could easily work as its creator intended, be a meeting place, be a point of reference, but will it be admired for what it is?

One thing's for certain, I would rather have more trees.

Peter Farrow



Wandsworth Society

June 2014

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Voicing our Concerns: The Society's Letter to the Prime Minister

Members of the Wandsworth Society may be aware, from our website or from the press, that on 3 April the Society wrote to the Prime Minister (with copies to local MPs) and to the Leader of the Council expressing our serious concerns over recent local planning decisions. We submitted a detailed report, analysing a series of Council decisions and we sought an urgent independent review of the failures, as we see it, of local planning procedures and, indeed, of the Government's 'localism' policies.

In taking this action, the Society was joined by the Clapham Junction Action Group, the Friends of Putney Common and the Putney Society. We are very grateful for the hard work put in by many members of these societies in the preparation of a comprehensive and, we believe, compelling report.

At the time of writing, in early May, we have seen, in the local press, a response from the Council, briefly rejecting our concerns. We have been advised by No. 10 that the Department of Communities and Local Government, headed by Mr Pickles, would consider our letter and we have been advised by the Greater London Authority that we should contact the Local Government Ombudsman. The full report to which they are responding can be accessed via the Current Concerns page of our website (<http://wandsworthsociety.org.uk/concerns.htm>), which will also inform you of any recent developments.

It is an unusual step for local amenity societies, certainly for the Wandsworth Society, to raise concerns over local decisions with the Prime Minister. It is not a step that we took lightly. Our planning team and, we believe, all our members, have become increasingly frustrated that the views of local residents have been ignored, and wrong decisions taken by the Council on major planning applications. We thought it would now be right, therefore, to express those concerns at the highest level of government.

Our letter says that 'the issues which concern us all are the fairness and legitimacy of Wandsworth Council's planning procedures. Planning decisions frequently breach local and national policies and guidelines and, in recent years, there have been too many examples of bad practice for this to be ignored.'

Efforts to engage with the Council to get them to follow adopted local and national planning policies have been to no avail. Our report gives many examples of policies stated in the Local Plan being blatantly circumvented or swept aside. Local residents' objections have too often been undervalued or discounted.

Our planning concerns include: general development principles; management of the historic environment; tall buildings; methods of visual representation of architects' plans; supplementary planning as it relates to housing generally, affordable housing, conservation and heritage matters, transport and employment policies; and consultative procedures. However



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From The Direct Communications Unit

25 April 2014

Mr Cyril Richert
Clapham Junction Action Group
51 Mossbury Road
London
SW11 2PA

Dear Mr Richert

I am writing on behalf of the Prime Minister to thank you for contacting him.

Mr Cameron is most grateful for the time and trouble you have taken to get in touch and for informing him of your views.

Because the Department for Communities and Local Government is best placed to respond to the matters you raise, he has asked me to forward your letter to the Department so that they may reply to your concerns directly.

Thank you, once again, for writing.

Yours sincerely

Correspondence Officer

GREATER LONDON AUTHORITY

Development, Enterprise and Environment

Cyril Richert
Clapham Junction Action Group
51 Mossbury Road
LONDON SW11 2PA

Our ref: MGLA080414-3507
Date: 2 May 2014

Dear Mr Richert

Thank you for your letter of 3 April 2014 regarding your joint letter to the Prime Minister sent in partnership with the Putney Society, Wandsworth Society, Clapham Junction Action Group, and Friends of Putney Common.

I am sorry to hear of the concerns that you have raised regarding Wandsworth Council's planning procedures. However, it is not appropriate for the Mayor to investigate the procedures of a local planning authority, and he has no statutory role in these matters.

I am sure you are already aware, but in addition to your request for the Prime Minister to instigate an external review, may I also suggest you contact the Local Government Ombudsman (<http://www.lgo.org.uk/>).

Yours sincerely

Sarah Considine
Principal Strategic Planner – Development & Projects

impressive the Council's Local Plan might appear, the guidelines and policies it enshrines are useless if consistently ignored.

Calling on the Prime Minister to set up an urgent independent review, the letter says:

Your government has rightly placed localism at the heart of the agenda for reforming local government practices, and indeed you have said you are a 'confirmed localist' . . . you [have] rightly criticised the 'top down, target-driven, big bossy, bureaucratic "we know best arrogance"' of some local authorities and declared that this had been 'turned upside down'. Wandsworth Council is falling far short in putting localism into practice in its planning procedures. It has failed to listen to its residents and the groups that represent them, on numerous occasions.

Whatever the result of our initiative, we believe that we must continue to do all that we can to ensure that the voices of local residents and amenity societies – not just local ones, like ourselves, but national conservation bodies as well – are properly represented to the Council's decision-

makers and listened to. (There will of course be some new councillors after the May elections!) We trust that we shall soon be able to 'turn the page' and have a constructive dialogue with Wandsworth's elected representatives on the planning matters that are a central concern of the Society.

We do not believe for a moment that our concerns can be dismissed as 'nimbyism' – in a large and significant area of the largest London borough. We do not automatically reject re-development or new buildings. We accept the need for new investment and economic regeneration. But we reject, and will continue to argue against, insensitive and ugly new development: we want to conserve and enhance our local environment in the interests of all who live and work in Wandsworth – in all our 'backyards'!

Philip Whyte and David Kirk

Local Election Forum

Thursday 10 April

This was a well-attended event at which five candidates were given the opportunity to share their views on governance of the borough: how it has been and how they would like to see it. Aably chaired by Sheila Allen, the candidates were Lois Davis, Green Party; Jon Irwin, Liberal Democrat; Ravi Govindia, Conservative; Rex Osborn, Labour. Strachan McDonald for the UK Independence Party was most unfortunately was taken ill before he was able to make his presentation, however Richard Shuttleworth stepped in.

Whilst Ravi Govindia, Leader of the Council, described necessary cuts made, reorganisation to compensate for said cuts and benefits from redevelopment, main concerns included the recent reduction in affordable housing and low-rent accommodation and a lack of transparency and true consultation on major planning decisions. What is the point of volunteers spending inordinate amounts of time scrutinising and commenting on planning policy documents if they are to be treated only as guidelines, and planning policy is in fact decided by the Mayor or central government?

Concern was expressed at the high density of new developments, for personal safety and generally about the huge contrast in standards of living in the borough.

Whilst this may be alleviated to some extent by the regeneration of Winstanley and Latchmere estates, should there be a divide between public and private housing?

There was discussion on the ethics and efficacy of privatisation and contracting out of services. How can we encourage 'the disenfranchised' to take an interest in local politics and indeed to vote? Solutions ranged from the need for parties to state more clearly what they stand for to the provision of benefits, including the provision of bicycle parks.

Should the Council support the Museum so it can be free on entry to all or should it be aided in such a way as to enable it to continue as are BAC and Tara Arts?

All agreed the Wandle Valley Regional Park was a good thing; that it must be looked after, the river liberated and Feathers Wharf used to connect the Thames to the town centre as soon as future developments make this possible.

Generally, all want to see a healthier, safer borough with adequate housing for all, jobs, clean air, safer streets (with 20 mph speed limits, etc.) parks free to enjoy, a riverside connected to the town and an end to the gyratory road system at its centre and prosperity without a loss of civic pride.

Valerie Taylor



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Richard Shuttleworth, Ravi Govindia, Sheila Allen, Jon Irwin, Lois Davis

Our European Election Hustings: A Very English Affair?

Thursday 1 May

What did we get out of this European election hustings? In the absence of significant polling data, I can only record a 'don't know', but the reluctance of many to finish after two hours, and the level of audience participation (calmly managed by Jonathan Callaway of the Putney Society), suggest that most gained something from the event.

Certainly, we are grateful that the Putney Society organised this 'hustings' – involving a good deal of work – in association with ourselves and other local societies. On a dank and rainy May Day evening 70–80 people, including a good number from the Wandsworth Society, assembled at St Mary's, Putney, that very English church, where the Putney Debates took place during our Civil War.

By the time you read this, you will know whether UKIP achieved the 'political earthquake' it hoped for, and which appeared, a month ago, to be a likely outcome (but 'a week is a long time in politics . . .'). Of our five candidates, it was UKIP's Paul Oakley, barrister, former Conservative and a punchy debater (and second on his party's 'London list'), who appeared to have the best chance of winning one of London's eight seats in the European Parliament. But many in the audience may have thought that Dr Charles Tannock, the Conservative, had a stronger claim: an MEP for 15 years, Dr Tannock has the most experience of 'Europe' and has made a significant contribution to the Parliament's work on foreign affairs and human rights. The other candidates, all further down their parties' lists, were comparative novices, whatever their – considerable – individual qualities. Ivana Bertolotti (Labour), Richard Davis (Lib Dem) and Amelia Womack (Green) will have been elected only if their parties' share of the votes exceeded all expectations.

A Walk Along the Ravensbourne

Tuesday 29 April

Wandsworth Society members have started to walk some of the 21 rivers that flow into the tidal Thames within London. Of these rivers, most – like Battersea's Falcon Brook – are partially or wholly lost, buried beneath the street as sewers or inaccessible behind houses and commercial properties. However, six rivers have marked walks along much of the way, allowing Society members the opportunity to compare and contrast the environment of the other rivers with the Wandle.

On a fine spring day 11 members followed the River Ravensbourne and its main tributary the Pool River. The river is 11 miles long and rises at an elevation of around 400 ft in Caesar's Well on Keston Common, on the northern slope of the North Downs. It flows gently northwards through common land until it reaches Bromley, where it becomes inaccessible, for the most part, to emerge at the start

As for the debate, it seemed for much of the time to be UKIP versus 'the rest', Out v. In – where all the rest would prefer to be, hoping in varying degrees that the UK could benefit from positive engagement in a reformed EU, with the Lib Dem perhaps the keenest 'In'. UKIP was seeking European seats only to make the case for the UK's leaving the EU: MEPs had no power to influence the Brussels bureaucracy; Britain's Parliament alone should make our laws (over 50% of them originating in the EU, Charles Tannock told us) – particularly over immigration; there could be no 'European' foreign policy – and Britain, 'only a small country', should not be sacrificing soldiers' lives far away. 'No, we are a big country', snapped back Richard Davis: we should be using our power and influence for good through EU (and NATO) membership. All agreed that global environmental challenges and European energy policies needed a multinational approach – except for UKIP, for whom global warming was 'a scam' (many gasps of astonishment at this).

During these exchanges, it was hard to remember that the UK has been part of a 'European project' for over 40 years, with every institutional development of the 'Common Market' since then agreed by our Parliament. Yet our hustings suggested that we remain remarkably insular, still seeing 'fog in the Channel', with no agreed view about our role 'in Europe', and now poised for further protracted debate about our national identity – Little Englanders or Big Europeans? The view from Scotland and the significance of its own forthcoming vote were never mentioned, but then we scarcely discussed 'London in Europe' either. But I hope that we all decided to vote for one party or another.

David Kirk

of this walk in Beckenham Place Park. However, after a mile-long rural stretch, 20th-century urban developers have caused it to disappear again behind houses, until it merges with the Pool River just south of Catford.

So that walkers do not have to endure busy roads, the path diverts through the little-known park, a pleasant landscape garden spoiled by the presence of a golf course. The centrepiece is the decaying Grade II* Beckenham Place Park Mansion and adjacent homesteads, originally built as a private residence in the 1770s for the Cator family. It is now largely unused and in need of considerable restoration to secure its long-term future.

The walk continues through residential streets between the park and the Pool River. Lewisham Council, QUERCUS (the EU-funded Quality Urban Environments for River Corridor Users and Stakeholders!) and Sustrans have created a footpath,
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Other Events in the Borough

Wandsworth Heritage Festival

24 May – 8 June

This now well-established event brings together many organisations in the borough in a wide range of talks, walks (including the Society's walk around the Wandle Delta on 24 May), family events and discussion groups (for information on the Society's contribution on 5 June, see p. 8). Pick up a leaflet at libraries or go to www.better.org.uk/libraries/areas/wandsworth.uk.

Green Thinking: Designing to Survive

Wednesday 4 June, 7 – 9 pm

A slide show, talk and workshop about sustainable architecture and climate change at Sprout Arts, 74 Moyser Road, SW16 6SP. For more information go to www.sproutarts.com.

Open Squares Weekend

Saturday 14 – Sunday 15 June

Seven Wandsworth gardens will be participating in this annual celebration of London's public gardens, including three managed by the Battersea-based garden charity Thrive. For more information go to www.opensquares.org/index.html.

A Walk Along the Ravensbourne



The Ravensbourne joining the Thames at Deptford

cycle route and linear park beside the river from Sydenham to Deptford Creek. This passes along the edge of Catford and Lewisham centres, which historically developed as crossing points of the river. Between the town centres it is a fairly tranquil – but manicured – walk (apart from the occasional rattle of trains that run along the valley floor).

The walk effectively finishes at Cornmill Gardens on the western edge of Lewisham – reminding walkers of the corn mills (first mentioned in the Domesday Book) that existed here until the last closed in the 1920s. Downstream from Lewisham the river becomes tidal at Deptford Creek, formerly heavily industrial, with a power station and wharves. Walkers can weave in and out of the buildings – through the growing Deptford Arts Quarter and alongside the ubiquitous new riverside apartments – to complete the walk at Deptford Bridge, a few minutes from Greenwich town centre, the Thames and the opportunity (which many of us took) of taking the Thames Clipper back to Waterloo, or even all the way to Wandsworth.

So how does it compare with the Wandle? Historically it does not have the commercial importance of the Wandle (does it flow too slowly to power mills upstream from Lewisham?) and therefore there are no interesting buildings along the way. However, the linear park feels well cared for and well used – reflecting perhaps good integration with housing, the provision of interesting playgrounds and an open environment. However, there is not the same variety that the Wandle offers – and it is far less wild with none of the same opportunities for solitude.

This walk is clearly mapped on the Lewisham Council link www.lewisham.gov.uk/myservices/sport/get-active/walking/Pages/Waterlink-Way.aspx.

Caroline Pook

Wandsworth Society Events

Unless otherwise stated, events will take place at 7.45 for 8.00 in West Side Church, at the corner of Melody Road and Allfarthing Lane, SW18 2QQ. For any updates, see the Events programme page on www.wandsworthsociety.org.uk.

Thursday 5 June

Wandsworth's Heritage: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow

In a rapidly changing London how can, or should Wandsworth preserve, sustain and enhance our built and natural environment? A panel of specialists will lead a discussion on the future of our local heritage: our town centre, commons and rivers (Thames and Wandle).

Tuesday 10 June

Walk along the Hogsmill River

Meet at Clapham Junction on Platform 11 to catch the 10.03 am train to Ewell West, or meet at Ewell West Station at 10.24 am.

The walk is about 7.5 miles on easy terrain. The lunch stop will be The Hogsmill Tavern, Worcester Park. The walk can be cut short at 5 or 6.5 miles and finishes at Kingston. For further details contact Caroline Pook, caroline@pookfamily.co.uk, or 020 8870 4958. Mobile contact on the day: 07836 254065.

Monday 16 June

Annual Public Meeting of the Wandsworth Common Management Advisory Committee

Fitzhugh Community Hall, Fitzhugh Grove, off Trinity Road, 7.30 pm

If you care about our piece of countryside in London come and hear council officers, contractors and police talk about how the common is managed. This is your opportunity to ask questions and comment and perhaps consider joining the committee.

Tuesday 8 July

Walk along Beverley Brook

Meet at New Malden Station (street level) at 10.00 am (frequent direct trains from Clapham Junction and Earlsfield stations).

We will walk the 6.5-mile marked path from New Malden Station across Wimbledon Common, Richmond Park and Barnes Common to the Thames at Putney. The lunch stop will be the Roehampton Café, Richmond Park. There are no obvious escape routes until about the 5-mile mark. For further details see above.

9 September, Walk along the River Lea



The Ravensbourne mid river