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AUTUMN 2014

In his first newsletter as Chair of the Amwell Society, Paul Thornton sets out his approach

From the Chair

We were blessed with a lovely evening for the annual late summer party held on 5th September in the St Helena Garden. Islington South MP Emily Thornberry, together with local councillors Raphael Andrews, Alice Donovan and James Murray, joined us for the event. In conversation with our guests, I was pressed about what makes our part of London so special, and how do we maintain its distinctive appeal without turning the whole area into a museum. For me, the three key ingredients are:

- **fine architecture** - ranging from the set pieces of Myddelton Square and the Lloyd Baker Estate through to the Amwell Street shop fronts, the Claremont Square railings, and any number of attractive nooks and crannies
- **a mixed population** - sustained mainly through a decent amount of social and affordable housing, and temporary accommodation for those in need of short-term support
- **vibrant street life** – stimulated through the surprisingly large number of those working in the area, and providing a youthful clientele for our shops, bars and restaurants.

As a result of soaring property prices, there is currently a risk that upscale residential

development will trump all other uses for the area's finite building stock. If this trend is allowed to continue, and the proportion of social and affordable housing diminishes, alongside the space given over to commercial uses, then the impact on population mix and the street life of our neighbourhood will be harmful, and quite possibly irreversible.

Of course we cannot and should not seek to preserve the area in aspic; homes must be adapted to modern living, streets to modern transportation, and shops to 21st century retailing. However in reviewing development proposals both large and small, I suggest that we should be asking ourselves not only whether they will enhance the visual appeal of the area, but also whether they will help to sustain a mixed population and whether they will benefit the area's street life. My impression, e.g. from the Draft Planning Brief for Clerkenwell Fire Station is that Islington Council supports this line of thinking, but that they will need all the help they can get in the face of relentless pressure from developers with deep pockets and so much to gain.

Paul Thornton

The Amwell Society campaigns to protect and promote the area and its architectural heritage and to encourage a sense of community.

The Society serves Pentonville Road, Penton Rise, King's Cross Road, Farringdon Road, Rosebery Avenue, and St. John Street and all the streets within the area.

The Society is open to all residents.

Will the shops on Amwell Street hold their usual late night opening on the first Monday in December this year? At this stage we don't know. If they do, we will let you know by email.

MOUNT PLEASANT DEVELOPMENT

Edward Denison gives a summary of the year's events so far, surrounding the key issue facing the area at the moment.

When Boris Johnson honoured the Royal Mail Group's request to 'call in' their planning application for Mount Pleasant in January 2014, the Mayor justified his decision by claiming he could speed the process up and make a decision 'in the summer'. His initial optimism, like the summer holidays, has now passed. The scale and complexity of the scheme has meant that a decision was not made in the summer and most likely will not be made before late September at the earliest. *[Edward was right; the mayor made his decision on 3rd October 2014 – see update].*

In the interim, the Mayor, despite his obligation to remain impartial, has branded local residents 'bourgeois NIMBYs' and claimed the RMG's scheme is a 'beautiful design' and will make 'a wonderful place to live.' These prejudicial comments have prompted Islington South MP and Shadow Attorney General, Emily Thornberry, (like the Mount Pleasant Association (MPA) before her) to write to Eric Pickles, Secretary of State for Communities and Local Communities, to demand Boris recuse himself from deciding this planning application. Both the MPA and Ms Thornberry are awaiting replies from Mr Pickles.

Meanwhile the MPA has been working closely with a range of professional partners to demonstrate to politicians and other stakeholders that this site could deliver much more if treated differently and more holistically in terms of the wider neighbourhood. To this end, the MPA is drafting a Neighbourhood Development Plan that seeks to resolve many issues concerning a wide range of developments in this area

now and in the immediate future, including but not limited to Clerkenwell Fire Station, The Holborn School, Charles Simmons House, and the Pakenham Arms.

Autumn will be a busy and important time for Mount Pleasant. We await the Mayor's decision but local residents will also make significant progress in taking control of development in the area through the drafting of a Neighbourhood Development Plan.

Edward Dennison.

UPDATE – FRIDAY 3rd OCTOBER 2014

As was widely anticipated but is no less disappointing for that, the Mayor granted the Royal Mail Group's planning application in principle. The Mount Pleasant Association represented local groups at Friday's hearing at the Greater London Assembly. Edward, who is also a committee member of the Amwell Society, and a founding member of the MPA, reports that the association's alternative scheme, produced in collaboration with Create Streets, was described by the Mayor as "beautiful"; the Mayor urged the MPA to press ahead with developing a planning application of its own.

Edward says that that is precisely what the association will do and promises that the campaign to provide the area with a "good quality community-led development that serves the interests of all," will continue.

You can access a webcast of the hearing on the Mount Pleasant website:

www.mountpleasantforum.wordpress.com.

George Smart

Myddelton Square Gardens update

The public gardens in Myddelton Square have been leased to the London Borough of

Islington, and its predecessors, since the Square was originally laid out in the 1820s.

The 2013 Christmas newsletter described the lead up to the sale of the freehold to Marcus Cooper, a property developer, along with his application to carry out “*substantial works of construction*” in the Square. These plans included a hut to complement a bowls area and a refreshment kiosk to be placed alongside a seating area.



His planning application was dismissed by Islington Council on 9 September 2013, with the reason given that the proposed siting of the tea hut and seating would result in intrusive visual clutter that would have a negative effect on the character and appearance of the gardens. The proposal would be contrary to planning policy. His company, Myddelton Square Investments Ltd, made an appeal against the Council decision.

On 21 August 2014 Matthew Nunn, the Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, dismissed this appeal on the basis that the kiosk and seating area “*would neither preserve nor enhance the character or appearance of the New River Conservation Area*”. The full text of the appeal decision can be found on the Council website, and in Bulletin no. 17 of the Myddelton Square Gardens Group.

So while we can be pleased that Mr Cooper’s appeal has been dismissed, this will not be the end of the matter. For the moment the LBI lease on the gardens continues: necessary maintenance can be done; the Square remains open to the public. We need to remain vigilant to ensure that this public space is retained and continues to enhance the Amwell area.

Sally Hull

SAFER NEIGHBOURHOODS

Typically anti-social behaviour in the Amwell area has been reported mainly in Wilmington Square Garden and around the estates.

There are two categories of offenders: youngsters who live in the area and who like to hang around together and can be noisy, destructive and sometimes intimidating, (but are generally harmless); and then older youths who are into more serious crime such as drug dealing and mobile phone theft.

Several years ago the EC1 gang were operating in the area, but thanks to police efforts, a number of them were sent to prison. Now that they are being released, the police, working with the council, have secured stringent licence conditions which determine who they can meet and where they can go. Breaching these conditions can mean an immediate return to prison. The police are very keen to see that the offenders are complying and will act if they are not.

Anti-social behaviour orders have also proved effective in curbing the bad behaviour of some of the other offenders. So for most of us, things have been surprisingly quiet this summer. It must be said that the closing of the St Mungo’s short stay hostel on Margery Street has also helped. This has now been taken over by a hotel for staff accommodation.

Note: To report anti-social behaviour dial 101. Calling this number will not get an immediate response from the police, but reporting incidents, no matter how trivial, helps them build up a picture of what is happening in the area. If you need an immediate response then dial 999.

Darian Mitchell

CLERKENWELL FIRE STATION

Jane Wainwright reports on the practical steps the Amwell Society is taking to preserve the old Clerkenwell Fire Station.

The impressive, much-loved fire station at the junction of Rosebery Avenue and Farringdon Road was closed as an operational fire station in January of this year - to the great regret of many local residents. Soon after, the Amwell Society applied to Islington Borough Council for the site to be listed as a community asset and this was granted.



A community asset ensures that the community has six months to find a new owner if the existing owner decides to sell and, not surprisingly, we were soon informed that the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority had authorised its sale. Initially there was a six-week extension but thanks to a community organisation declaring an intention to bid for the building, the full six-month moratorium on its sale was extended to 26 November 2014.

Islington's Planning Department issued a Draft Planning Brief for the site in August 2014. A month-long period of consultation about the

Brief followed and the Amwell wrote to the Council as follows:

"I am writing to express our strong support for the Draft Planning Brief for CFS. In particular we endorse the following guiding principles and specific provisions of the brief:

1. Infrastructure assets should continue to be used for public benefit unless no such use can be found
2. The fire station's important role in the development of London's fire service should be recognised in its future use. We would be particularly interested to explore the notion of an Infrastructure Heritage Hub centred around a Fire Service museum at CFS, the intended postal museum at Mount Pleasant and designated heritage assets at New River Head
3. Should the Fire Service museum fail to get off the ground, then uses such as a community arts facility should be seriously considered.
4. A development consisting of upscale apartments, and, say, a restaurant on the ground floor would be unacceptable.
5. The affordable and social housing elements of the development should be maximised (having inspected the building in some detail, our view is that the configuration of spaces lends itself to such use).
6. The Topham Street and Coldbath Square developments should be configured so as to secure active street frontage."

We hope the Brief will be adopted, supporting our wish to have the building preserved and the site brought into community use, with new housing built at the back of the site. The 1950's freestanding drill tower would probably go, but the Rosebery Avenue frontage would remain as it is now.