

## **Planning Committee Report for the Autumn Newsletter 2010**

The Society's planning committee, under the chairmanship of Andrew Mainz, has had a busy six months as we have reviewed a total of 193 applications since January 2010. The enthusiasm, good humour and high level of professional expertise of my fellow committee members, John Villiers, Diana Eyre, Virginia Newman, Stephen Higgins, Peter Ungar and Robin Snell, makes this task much more enjoyable than it might otherwise be. Despite the fact that the committee has now to meet twice a month to cope with the volume of applications, most members rarely miss a meeting and they are totally committed to the conservation of the unique character of St John's Wood.

### **Basements**

We continue to be concerned by the large number of basement applications. There have been a total of 21 applications for basement developments within the Conservation Area since January. Whilst some of these are relatively modest developments which fall under the footprint of the house, and which are therefore "permitted development", a large number extend under both front and rear gardens and represent unacceptable over development of the site.

The planning grounds on which we can currently object to excessive basement developments are as follows:

- 1) The impact on trees and the loss of established gardens. Large mature trees and verdant gardens make a vital contribution to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area and the setting and special interest of SJW's Listed Buildings. This contribution includes the provision of greening, privacy, views, and the support of wildlife habitats. Very often we see applications that destroy the entire rear garden and have an inadequate depth of soil above the basement so that there can be little hope of achieving sustainable or significant replacement planting.
- 2) Some basements have an impact on the character of the listed buildings as an extensive basement development fundamentally changes the way in which the rest of the building is used.
- 3) Noise and sustainability implications arising from the installation of air conditioning units and swimming pools.
- 4) Light pollution for neighbours when large rooflights are used in the garden.
- 5) Overdevelopment of the site.
- 6) Impact on biodiversity. The planning system has a significant part to play in meeting the Government's international commitments and domestic policies for habitats, species and ecosystems.

We are aware of the negative impact that extensive basement developments can have on neighbours in terms of noise and disruption during construction, concerns about structural stability, increased surface run off, the water table and possible subsidence. These are however, Building Control and Construction Management issues and as such are not planning matters within our remit and upon which we can comment when replying to Westminster council.

Regrettably very few basement applications have been refused by Westminster council. Occasionally an application may be refused permission because of the potential loss of trees, whilst a few others may be refused on other grounds, for example a poorly designed extension or infill.

We have been given the opportunity to suggest changes to existing basement policy as the council is currently consulting on policies to be included in the new City Management Plan. To this end, the SJW Planning committee has had a useful and

informative meeting with Westminster council's Design and Conservation Support Officers, Lyndsay Glover and Jane Hamilton. Using the historical information stored on our database, as well as wider research into what is happening in adjoining London boroughs, we have made constructive suggestions about how to best control basement developments and we will be consulted further when the draft plan is released.

Applications currently under review

We have a number of major planning applications which are currently under review but which will probably have been decided upon by the time you receive this newsletter.

We have received all the documentation for the redevelopment of QK School and will be reviewing that over the next few weeks. Most planning committee members and our chairman have attended the consultation meetings held at the school, so the Society is fully aware of the issues raised by local residents. The Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove has recently announced the scrapping of the government's Building Schools for the Future but the Quintin Kynaston development is unaffected.

We are also currently reviewing the revised Barracks plans which are due to go before Robert Davis's planning subcommittee on the 26<sup>th</sup> August. This planning subcommittee approved the vast majority of the application in January and only the following four issues are currently under review:

- 1) The architectural treatment of the Queen's Terrace affordable block.
- 2) The refuse collection and on street parking arrangements on Queen's Terrace.
- 3) The sustainability levels to be achieved, which remain disappointingly low.
- 4) The use of the pool by local residents for one hour a day.

Also under current review is the application to host the archery event for the Olympic Games at Lords. We will be looking carefully at the noise and parking implications for residents.

I would also like to mention that the SJW Planning committee endeavours at all times to review applications in an unbiased way and we operate a strict conflict of interest policy whereby any member who has an interest in an application is excluded in the decision making process relating to that application.

Please do attend the Area Forums which are organised by Cllr Lindsay Hall as they provide useful access to senior officers from Westminster council.

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