



Dartmouth Park Conservation Area Advisory Committee

Annual Report 2011/12

It has, to put it mildly, been a challenging year.

We organised two very well attended public meetings to promote the formation of a Dartmouth Park Neighbourhood Forum. At the second of these a steering group was elected to carry this work forward. Already remarkably broadly based, the steering group has focussed its efforts on ensuring the Dartmouth Park Forum will be as inclusive as possible. Drawing new blood into the community's efforts to gain a larger say over its future is, of course, crucial. Supporting our fledgling Forum will remain a demanding part of our work programme in the coming year.

Sadly, the Council has pressed on with its own efforts to reshape key aspects of our environment before the Forum has had a chance to get going and enable our community to stamp its mark on its future. The so-called 'community investment programme' (CIP) consultations have resulted in a run of relatively unproductive but time consuming meetings. Friends of cherished community institutions, notably Highgate Library and the Highgate Newtown Community Centre, have had to call public meetings, establish working parties, etc in an effort to secure their future. The Advisory Committee has continued and will continue to play its part in these efforts.

Obviously we have a particular attachment to the listed Library as it is where we meet and we are very pleased that, albeit after some effort, the Library Service has agreed, with the support of the Friends, to its use by the community at least until its future is settled.

Much of the Council's effort is anyway patently premature. You can't look at the future of, in particular, either the Library or the Community Centre in isolation. Both are key elements of a significant neighbourhood hub which has been

massively disrupted over a long period. Before the devastation caused by first the planning blight and then the demolition of the neighbourhood shopping centre within the Chester/Baltimore redevelopment, this key community hub had been weakened by the closure of the Highgate Cemetery gates adjacent to the neighbourhood centre. What is needed is a comprehensive plan to rebuild the community hub and secure the future of the Library and Community Centre within it. The Council limiting itself to a marketing strategy for the small number of shops included in the Chester/Baltimore redevelopment when complete simply doesn't cut it. Worse, it opens the door to short-term opportunistic proposals. Our fledgling Forum will soon have a key role to play here and an interim working group is being considered. Meanwhile, the Advisory Committee has had to commit massive amounts of time to securing the future of this key area.

Throughout the year sections of our community have sought our help to face challenges which face them. For example, at one end of the scale, Railtrack proposed to uproot the trees and develop along the railway embankment in Churchill Road, Tree Preservation Orders were made. Recently the Council, as part of CIP, was preparing to consult on the adhoc disposal for development of a car parking area, a group of garages and a small but important open space. Prompt local action seems to have, at least for now, slowed this attack. Every few months there are issues with pavements, signage, and so on which typically affect several streets.

The community is also facing much larger and very immediate planning challenges. Developers have their beady eyes on land within the Conservation Area which hasn't, for good reason, been developed or fully

developed. For a goodly part of the year we have been working with the neighbours of the Mansfield Bowling Club resisting speculative building on the former Burdett-Coutts land. The land has been designated in all the Council's planning documents for decades as 'private' open space and makes an important contribution to maintaining the open and leafy character of the Conservation Area. More recently, we have seen a similar renewed developer assault on part of the Swains Lane shopping centre and, again, we have been heavily involved in the pre-application planning process and in supporting the action group resisting the very unwelcome development proposals. Again, we have a site which plays an important part in maintaining the open and leafy character of the Conservation Area. Again, the threatened land was never intended for serious development. Thus, for example, the Swains Lane land is vulnerable because it was hived off from church property, albeit subject to heavy restrictions, and the developers, who bought the land on that basis, now hope they can overcome the restrictions.

It is commonly assumed that once a planning permission for a major development has been granted, it is all over. As we have seen from the Chester/Baltimore disaster, nothing can be further from the truth. Particularly in Camden, famed as it is for allowing incrementally significant changes to permissions, the development process has to be watched to ensure safeguards for heritage sites are not lost. The Baptist Chapel is a case in point and has required a huge input of time and resources. Our year ended with a two day Public Inquiry into Council proposals to stop-up the Grove End/College Lane public highway in front the Chapel so that it could be used for private car parking for Chapel residents. Typically, the Inquiry was held at short notice given in the middle of the summer break, leaving no time for fundraising, and the Advisory Committee had to face two sets of barristers, solicitors and experts, one representing the Council and the other the developer, alone.

Rather unwisely, the Advisory Committee agreed to support a pilot Council initiative aimed at the enhancement of our heritage homes via the introduction of appropriate energy efficiency measures. Sadly time wasn't taken to engage our community properly, not even the Advisory Committee, and huge amounts of time were wasted in dealing with a sterile debate in which some argued key heritage features should be sacrificed to allow

inappropriate approaches inimical to the Council's duty to secure the preservation and enhancement of our heritage homes. We hope to revive the more constructive 'barefoot' approaches we had initiated before this damaging interruption and will continue to play our full part in developing borough-wide guidance for Conservation Areas.

The core function of the Advisory Committee is to support the Council efforts to secure the preservation and enhancement of the Conservation Area. The main way we do this is by advising the Council on planning applications it receives. This is done within the Council's planning framework including particularly the Council's Strategy Statement for the Conservation Area. During the year we have advised on nearly a hundred applications. We continued to formulate our advice in sub-committees of at least four people, typically more, meeting roughly every three weeks. In most cases a site visit is made before the meeting. Michael Port has managed this process with great efficiency. Although hugely time consuming, the process is mostly rewarded by achieving appropriate decisions in the more significant cases. This includes not only refusals but significant modifications of applications. In many streets we have built up a body of decisions, including decisions by Planning Inspectors, which assist greatly. That said, there are still many less significant decisions which, incrementally, do significant harm to the Conservation Area and there remains a significant communications problem.

Also very time consuming are our attempts to galvanise and support the Council's planning enforcement process. Here, it needs to be said, we have seen significant improvement in the Council's performance albeit from a very low baseline.

Council cutbacks in its Planning Service budget, have had a seriously detrimental impact not only on our Conservation Area but on conservation areas in the borough generally. It is not too alarmist to say these cuts are putting the Council's ability to meet its statutory duty at risk. The evidence that Article 4 Directions (which bring all decisions within planning control and create a level playing field for all residents) are needed has been long been overwhelming. Before the cutbacks the Council had a rolling programme for making appropriate Directions in its conservation areas. After work in three Conservation Areas had been completed the programme fell victim to the cuts. The incremental damage being done

to our heritage by uncontrolled development will soon reach crisis point and could result in the Conservation Area being classed by English Heritage as being 'at risk'.

We have a Tree Officer and are represented within the management structures of the Heath (see separate reports).

It has been a tough year for conservation generally. There has been a steady stream of government consultation and policy documents aimed at reducing planning controls. Although not really the intended target, the task of preserving and enhancing conservation areas and all heritage assets, including the many listed buildings within them, is being put at risk by a 'development at any price' agenda. Working with others to try, with some but limited success, to attenuate the impact of these adverse changes has soaked up huge amounts of our time and effort. This work is, though, all more essential given the cutbacks being made to, for example, English Heritage.

Finally, we also found the time, working with other community groups, to set up an internet website. Nothing flashy and resource intensive but a boon to effective communications. We will also be launching a new publication, 'Living and building in Victorian Dartmouth Park', at the AGM.

This is a programme which a resourced and staffed organisation could be proud of. We have neither. There is a serious downside to working at this sort of punishing pace, namely we are steadily burning people out. The Advisory Committee is mostly made up of representatives of street associations. Most, by definition, also serve our community wearing other hats. We also have a number of cooptees. Although many of our number have planning expertise and experience, we welcome anyone committed to the preservation and enhancement of the Conservation Area.

In February next year, the Dartmouth Park Conservation Area comes of age. The bulk of the Conservation Area was designated on the 1st February 1992. We are planning a series of community events in the Spring to celebrate, to broaden involvement and recruit fresh blood.

Heath Report

Flood management and the upgrade of the dams to prevent failure and inundation of the surrounding areas continued as a predominant issue over the past year. In July 2012 the City

authorities approved estimates of £15 million for works to reduce the risk of flood overtopping, embankment erosion and failure to comply with the Reservoirs Act 1975 and the Flood Water Management Act 2010. Design solutions must be sympathetic to the landscape and will ensure that the City meets its obligations under the 1871 Act to preserve the natural aspects of the Heath.

The Heath Management, accepting the need to communicate with Heath users and the wider community, has established a Water Management Stakeholders Group to represent users and communities north and south of the dams, including the DPCAAC, that meets regularly to discuss the project. The originally published designs were agreed to be excessive and unacceptable. A meeting on 16 July established terms of reference, a second on 30 August considered the appointment of a design architect to represent the Stakeholders' concerns during the design and construction stages. The group subsequently walked the entire Highgate Ponds chain, considering problems and possible solutions.

British Gas is tapping off the unsatisfactory pipe lines alongside the ponds, involving work above the Bandstand, with unsightly boarding and advertising by British Gas which had caused local protest. But the work will remove the problems of leaks and excavations that have occurred alongside the ponds in past winters.

Following the popular inaugural Affordable Art Fair on the Heath Lower Fairground last October, the Fair returned 1-4 November 2012, its charity beneficiary the Keats Grove Community Library.

In June 2012 the RSPB received a £440,000 Heritage Lottery grant to build links between people and nature on Hampstead Heath. The three-year project "Wild about Hampstead Heath" starts with activities and events in 2013.

Wild flower areas, including one next to Brookfield Mansions, have proved attractive to insects, but not to sparrows.

The Heath Constabulary is at last up to strength, and has undertaken successful prosecutions of persistent illegal cyclists.

Dogs. The City of London has achieved designation as a secondary authority for the control of dogs; it is conducting a trial at Burnham Beeches to consider the most appropriate and effective way to introduce dog control orders in its open spaces.

Tree Report

Street and Estate trees

The telephone number concerning trees on public land is 020 7974 1544. Work to be undertaken on street or council-owned trees is not available on the weekly planning lists. Since the last AGM, a Plane outside Parliament Hill School has been felled, a Mountain Ash in Croftdown Road and trees lost in the Chester/Baltimore development. Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) were served on trees in the York Rise Estate and a Lime saved in the Mansfield Bowling Club site.

Private trees

The telephone number of the tree team for work on privately owned trees is 020-7974-5613. Planning permission has to be sought when working on private trees in a conservation area, when their trunk is greater than 7.5cm in diameter and measures 1.5m above the ground. I am the voluntary tree officer on the committee and look at the planning applications for proposed tree work, found on www.camden.gov.uk/planning. Click on 'planning and built environment', then 'weekly list of registered planning applications'. Each numbered list is downloadable and is dated from Monday to Friday of each week. Trees are listed under 'Highgate/Dartmouth Park' with 2012/xxxx/T after their 4 digit planning application number. I try to visit the trees whenever possible, comment to, and take advice from, the council tree officers where necessary. Results of applications are found under 'Search for planning applications, decisions, site histories and appeals', using either the house address or planning application number.

Most applications are to crown reduce or prune to previous points and are usually much needed!. I usually consult with tree officers if permission to fell is applied for or if there is a Tree Preservation Order (TPO) already present. Owners are encouraged to replace felled trees with slower growing native ones when the tree has outgrown its site.

Since the 2011 AGM, examples of trees with permission to fell approved are the Willow at Hylda Court, a Lime and Sycamore in Bramshill Gardens, a Hazel in Grove Terrace, an Acacia in Twisden Road and a Lime in Croftdown Road.

Funding for replanting trees

Recently, due to changes in funding, the Council can no longer solely fund its tree planting. The cost of preparing a tree pit is £43.76 and the planting cost, including tree stakes and watering tube is £60.17. Currently the tree officers are applying to the Mayor's Fund for tree planting costs and should know if their bid is successful by mid-October. You are encouraged, as residents to volunteer to plant a tree in your street when necessary. A survey of the Conservation Area tree pits has been carried out to find the number of trees needed. If you wish to pay for a tree in your street or area, the officer involved can be contacted on 7974-1567.

A flowering Cherry on Highgate Road, in the Carrol and Sanderson Close Estate, was felled in the summer; the council are hoping to replant it in their November planting schedule, either using money from the Mayor's fund or by voluntary subscription.

Dartmouth Park Conservation Area Advisory Committee

Hon. Treasurer's Report for AGM 8th November 2012

Account for 2011-12

Bank reconciliation

Date	Comment	Income	Expenditure	Balance	Cash out of A/C	Paid into A/C	Balance
6/10/11	Opening Balance			£717.89			£717.89
	Collection AGM	£127.67					
	Library Hire		£117.00				
	Income Food, Wine, AGM	£96.42					
	Who built your house AGM	£5.00					
	Other Sales at AGM	£69.50					
	Total Cash	£298.59					
19/10/11						£112.09	£829.98
5/12/11	Repay Cash Loan		£50.00				
	Ctee Member Expenses		£6.40				
8/12/11	Cash						
	Ctee Member Expenses		£237.57				
	Ctee Member Expenses (AGM)		£29.40				
	Total Expenditure		£440.37		£253.87		£576.11
	Interest	£3.16				£3.16	
	Total Income	£301.75					
	Closing balance			£579.27			
15/8/12	Balance at NS&I						£579.27

John Carrier October 2012

