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# THE ISLINGTON SOCIETY

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## ANNUAL REPORT FOR THE YEAR 2006/7

I see from the computer that last year's annual report went to press on February 27th, so that this one will cover the best part of fourteen months. This year's A.G.M. is the same length of time from last: I hope it will be worth waiting for. This year our speaker is our newest M.P. Emily Thornberry.

The Committee has arranged a number of events in June and early July and they are listed here for ease of reference if you keep the Annual Report and discard inserts. However, we plan to include an insert of events and this will be more up-to-date.

The events are (1) Annual Dinner, Tuesday June 5th; (2) Annual General Meeting, June 14th; (3) Annual Bill Manley Memorial Pub Crawl, Friday June 22nd; (4) Fourth Annual Church Crawl, Wednesday July 4th. The usual "Meet the Officers" event will take place at the Marquess on Tuesday July 3rd: if you want to meet the officers on the first Tuesday in June you will have to come to the Dinner.

Once again, thanks are due to the committee in particular for the events. Stan Westwood has now taken on all the Secretary's role including the booking of rooms; Alan Turner has masterminded the Architecture and Conservation Award, which required his attention for almost twelve months so that planning for the next began as soon as the second award was presented. Bob O'Dell has continued to organise the Church crawls and other events, while Kathleen Frenchman has agreed to take on the role of event organiser/co-ordinator next year. Frank Hopkins and our Treasurer Donald Mitchell are organising this year's dinner: last year Emma Gowers generously organised it for us even though her Council and School commitments had forced her to stand down from the committee.

Another former member of the committee, David Gibson, oversaw the publication of our third book, the autobiography of Harley Sherlock. David has also continued to represent us on the Angel Town Centre Board and the Conservation Advisory Committee.

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**Members are requested to attend the 47th Annual General Meeting of the Society, on Thursday, June 14th at 7.30 p.m. in the Town Hall Islington, for the transaction of the undermentioned business.**

- 1. To receive apologies.**
  - 2. To adopt the minutes of the A.G.M. 6th April 2006.**
  - 3. To receive the Annual report 2006/7.**
  - 4. To adopt the financial report to 31st December, 2006.**
  - 5. To agree the levels of subscription.**
  - 6. To elect the officers of the Society & Committee.**
- (A full list will be provided at the meeting.)
- 7. To consider any other relevant business.**

This will be followed by a talk by Emily Thornberry, M.P.(Islington South & Finsbury).

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### *The year in more detail*

Last year's dinner saw us return to the Landseer, under different management since our first visit but as equally competent. A good time was had by all, thanks to Emma's organisation and David's Islington Quiz. Our next event took us out of Islington, many of us travelling by overground to the "Gateway to the South" for a walk around Balham led by John Rattray of the Balham Society. Glorious weather greeted us on the first day of April.

Five days later, we welcomed Chris Smith as our new President and he gave us a fascinating review of the changes Islington has enjoyed over the time he was M.P. A brief report appeared in our Summer 2006 issue of Islington News.

We also made Harley Sherlock, our only continuing founder member, a Life Vice-President and Harley continues to be ever-present at the monthly Meet the Officer sessions at the Marquess Tavern. He continues to contribute to Islington News, but his main

contribution this year was the autobiography *An architect in Islington* which was launched at Waterstones Bookshop Islington Green on November 7th. This was a great social event in itself with over 70 people attending; most of whom bought the book. I am sure that copies will be available at the A.G.M. if you were not one of them.

The early summer saw us out and about again. The Bill Manley Memorial Pub Crawl was this time down the east side of the Borough, starting at Newington Green and ending beside the canal in Baring Street. By contrast the church crawl was in the west, starting in Cloudesley Square and ending in Holloway Road. As well as organising the trip, Bob O'Dell wrote about it for us in the Autumn *Islington News*. In between these two events, and facilitated by Avis Baldry and Frances Balfour, the July Committee meeting was preceded by a visit to the former Anderson's Yard where the memory of the Old Collins Music Hall is being marked by the creation of a new theatre. While not rivalling the West End we will soon have enough for a theatre crawl which meets the criteria set for the regular crawls we already hold, i.e. no more than a gentle walking distance between venues. It is just pity that the last leg of such a crawl cannot be made to the Tower in Canonbury Place, or that we cannot then adjourn across the road to the Canonbury Tavern. Like Bob, Avis subsequently wrote about the subject of this visit for the Autumn *News*.

Our team of conservation and design experts also met in the summer to review a healthy shortlist of candidates for the Architecture & Conservation Award. The winner was the P & O development on the east side of York Way, known as Regent Quarter, with commendations for the terrace at the Angel end of St. John Street, the housing development at the former Penton/Angel Primary school and the small house which replaced some Day garages at 13, Morton Road. After a great deal of to-ing and fro-ing, Alan Turner's perseverance resulted in an award ceremony at the P & O offices in Butler Place, presented by our President Chris Smith.

We hope that the plaque will be erected on one of the buildings within Regent Quarter shortly: P & O have already sold their interest in the properties.

Our final event was the talk by our new Council leader, James Kempton, who impressed many with his easy manner - a bit of a contrast, many thought. He clearly felt that the Barnard Park development (reported below) had been key to an unexpected election defeat in Barnsbury Ward, and was anxious to learn from the experience in future. He drew a parallel with the proposals surrounding Ashmount School, and was clearly open-minded on the issue. He also announced a strengthening of the planning enforcement team, which was warmly welcomed by members present. It is to be hoped that it will be able to enforce the planning rules where protected shopping parades are concerned, because our meeting coincided with a Council Executive committee which was voting to sell off various properties including shops. The Leaders mind was closed on this issue: he argued that it was no place of the Council to operate as a landlord for non-domestic premises.

### ***Protecting local shops***

Unfortunately many of the shops are not protected under the Unitary Development Plan and its successor the Local implementation Plan. The Council's accountability to an electorate that depends on the shops being local is widely held to have kept rents down to levels that shops can afford: though some may welcome the chance to buy their freehold, many will find the cost prohibitive, given the higher value they command as development sites. There is also the question of whether Council Tax payers are best served by a one-off capital receipt or by the guarantee of regular income from rents. However, this is not as straightforward as it looks. Income from Council Tax covers far less than half the annual expenditure of the Council, and government grants may be reduced by the availability of income from other sources, or put another way, the formula is designed to help those councils for which such income is not available. However, it is hard to believe

that an Islington plc, if such were to take the place of local government, would not wish to protect its long term income stream by retaining its freehold interests.

The shops coming under the hammer include those in Amwell street, which are protected, and those in Essex Road built as part of post-war housing developments, which are not. Ownership issues are more complex than when these estates were built: Islington Housing is now Homes for Islington and the Right to Buy means some flats have private leaseholders. Flats in the parade opposite Essex Road station were transferred to a Housing Association in the 90s in order to fund renovation. Successive governments have encouraged local authorities out of housing and direct provision of services and towards facilitation of service provision by others. However, opponents of the sell-off would argue that Council ownership has facilitated the continued existence of local shops.

The debate is only part of a wider concern that the absurd values of land and property are undermining Islington as a balanced community. Everyone speaks of mixed development in the same terms as motherhood and apple pie, but market forces unchecked will lead to a Borough with more and more residential provision and less and less of the infrastructure to support it, so that people have to travel further for their work, retail, leisure, and educational activities.

### ***King's Cross Central***

As the legal battle over King's Cross Railway Lands hots up, it is perhaps worth reviewing the events that brought us to where we are.

The decision to come into St. Pancras rather than a glorified Thameslink station approached through Clerkenwell was generally welcomed. Had the government managed to shake off the unnecessary adjunct of a domestic service from Stratford to St. Pancras, all might have lived happily ever after because there would have been no demolition of Stanley Buildings authorised by the CTRL Act and the railway would have been in tunnel throughout Islington instead of emerging behind Gifford Street.

Even then, it was thought that the worst was over once the railway was constructed and that the redevelopment of a genuinely brownfield and vacant site would bring life to the area for those who live around it. Particularly encouraging was the decision to contract the work to Argent St. George, since of all the consortia partners bidding for the work St. George had the best track record in housing.

Roger Madelin, Chief Executive of the developer, spent a great deal of time consulting local opinion and claims to have been won over by some of the arguments in favour of the existing heritage. The German Gym has been restored to use ahead of the development. However, any expectation that Camden would play a role in representing its residents has been largely misplaced, with many councillors as critical as the electors who turned against them.

By the time an *outline* planning permission came before Camden's planning committee, St. George had passed into history and Argent was Argent King's Cross. Officers had contrived to have the Chair of the Committee (Cllr. Woodrow) sidelined for daring to question the efficacy of seeking demolition ahead of a full planning permission. They had also introduced the doctrine of accountability whereby it is apparently acceptable to have unlimited contact with the developer but even reading a petition from a constituent renders them compromised. When the Liberal Democrats became the ruling party, at least partly as a result of opposing the plans for King's Cross, they were led to believe that their discretion as a planning committee had been fettered by their predecessors. If a committee has no discretion, why is it being asked to make a decision?

This is the nub of the judicial review being sought by the community through the King's Cross Think Again campaign. Even if it does not achieve significant changes to the development plans, it is to be hoped for the sake of democracy in all future planning matters that the judicial review will be successful and that Camden's planning committee is indeed obliged to think again.

Not that legal judgements seem to have much influence on Camden's chief officers. Hardly was the ink dry on the judgement affirming that Cllr. Woodrow was blameless (a judgement for which he has had to pay a tidy sum from his own pocket) that councillors received a letter from their legal department attempting to justify their position. Meanwhile, having assured the umbrella community group (the King's Cross Community Forum) that the outline nature of the planning permission would not preclude detailed consideration of full applications, the very first batch of such applications was cunningly concealed within an agenda and the chair of the Forum persuaded to cancel a meeting - a decision he now deeply regrets. Of course, the concealment could not be cunning enough and the agenda was so hopelessly over stacked that the meeting ended in chaos with a new date later this (April) month. Camden Council has also sold its interest in the two Stanley Buildings at risk in a manner that has promoted further mistrust.

As a result of all this, many correspondents to the local Camden papers have suggested that the application was too big for a Borough to consider. While it is uncanny how frequently the observations of councillors from neighbouring boroughs fail to find their way to councillors in Camden (Westminster has had similar experience to Islington), this has to be the wrong response. The local planning committee, which must be made up of people living or with a business address in the Borough, and who are answerable every four years to local people, is the only player with a local focus. The Mayor (Assembly members have virtually no power in planning matters) is required to consider matters from a London-wide perspective and the government take a National or even International view.

Everyone speaks of the need for checks and balances and no-one defends nimby-at -all costs. But there are clear dangers that the balance is swinging away from established communities. The London Civic Forum is concerned that this will be the effect of some proposed amendments to the London Plan, and we published some of their detailed comments

in a recent newsletter, even though our own response was less pessimistic.

As far as the specifics of the outline planning permission are concerned, the points which disappoint us are, the loss of most of Stanley Buildings, even though the CTRL Act limited demolition to one block, and the encasement of the one surviving block so that no-one can see it; the use of the gasholders for housing, rather than a leisure use which might retain their open appearance; the lack of any housing in the lucrative southern part of the site and an unsustainably high density on the triangle site.

### *King's Cross Triangle*

It would be wrong to suggest that Islington's democracy has been undermined to the same extent as it has in Camden. When the P & O development first came before committee, some members of the Islington Society felt that officers were expressing views that were some way distant from their own professional opinion. However, at least there was some steer from one of the elected members, the then Council leader: and as we were reminded by the Architecture & Conservation Award, virtue triumphed in the end.

The same influence may have been behind the pressure which the West Area Committee was placed under when it considered the Triangle site last April. The members withstood what some in the audience felt amounted to bullying and insisted on reducing the maximum number of dwellings on the triangle site. It seemed rather unfair that many of them lost their seats despite this, although an earlier failure adequately to protect Barnard Park probably had more resonance with voters. It is easier to lose votes than win them.

The Triangle site spans both Boroughs and Camden has yet to be reconciled to this decision.

### *King's Cross Station*

Yet another problem at King's Cross for us in Islington are the plans of Network Rail for the listed railway station. Although the carbuncle is finally to be swept away from the front, providing much needed circulation space as

well as a view of the listed train shed, the view is to be spoiled by some rather inadequate cover against the elements. This provision merely exacerbates the antipathy created by the plan to close off access and egress from the east. Even Camden's officers have written to object to this, although it has not of course prevented them recommending the scheme for approval. The problem arises because of the obsession with a platform zero (sometimes called Platform Y which gives no clue as to its vicinity) inherited from Railtrack. An additional platform would not preclude some pedestrian route on the east, although it would add to the cost. Arguments about security are just an excuse: we are seeking nothing more than exists at the two most recently redeveloped London terminal stations, Paddington and Liverpool Street. The platform is of doubtful value though: the main problem affecting capacity is the narrow approach or "throat" of the station. Incredibly but unsurprisingly, there is no plan even to restore rails to the vacant track bed on the east side of the East Coast Main Line.

The loss of this pedestrian route would deny West Islingtonians access to the new development that will accompany St. Pancras International station. One might hope that its developer take some interest in the matter, but in vain. It also affects access the other way from Camden to the Regents Quarter, and here at least some concern has been expressed. The Guardian Newspaper cannot be too chuffed either. Their new offices will not be a short walk from the International station as they must have expected.

### ***Architecture & Conservation Award***

It is appropriate at this point to record the result of the second Architecture & Conservation Award in the series supported by the Business Design Centre. This is because the Regent Quarter at the Islington side of York Way was the winner. There was a strong field of candidates completed in 2005. P & O are shortly to submit plans for the northernmost block, so let us hope they are bidding for a second award next year.

This award was a unanimous decision of the panel, impressed by the sympathetic

treatment of historic buildings and its ability to put them to a use appropriate to the twenty-first century. As noted above, it was the outcome of a successful campaign against the plans first submitted for the site. One of the commended schemes, the conversion of Penton School (latterly known as Angel Primary School) to residential use, was the outcome of a less successful scheme to save the school, but this should not detract from the architectural and conservation merits of the scheme.

### ***Arsenal stadium***

The new stadium at Ashburton Grove opened in time. There were inevitably some teething troubles, the biggest being the numbers of people unexpectedly traipsing across Highbury fields to and from the new ground. In part this was a reaction to the high levels of policing on the official walking routes.

It was widely recognised that transporting people to and from the stadium would be key to the success of the scheme in terms of its impact on local residents. We urged the use of Drayton Park station and have continued to do so. The initial permission involved funding an extra lift at Holloway Road station and providing parking spaces for coaches within the stadium site. Unfortunately, neither has happened. The Holloway Road station scheme, which would not have added one seat on an already overcrowded tube line, has foundered as cost estimates escalated. The coach parking disappeared when the police took fright at possible safety implications and Arsenal seized on the chance to put the space to more remunerative use.

Recently the Council has come round to the opportunities that Drayton Park presents, and we understand an expensive consultants report confirms what the Islington Society told them for nothing.

### ***Revision of the London Plan***

Many of the proposed changes were welcomed by us and we supported the broad thrust of the Plan. In particular, we recognised that London is growing in population after decades of decline, and that housing densities must reflect this. Anecdotal evidence supports the assertion that although the total number

predictions are little altered, the number of households is likely to be greater. We reaffirmed that densities should be expressed in terms of people per acre as well as dwellings. The sustainable communities we seek to promote depend on four storey houses being well filled, to sustain our local pubs, our local shops, and our public transport.

We felt that the plan remains deficient in one important respect. The assessment of public transport accessibility is far too broad brush. To take one local example (which we were pleased the Mayor had agreed to review), the area around the former City Road tube station is now half way between two tube stations with only one bus route. Old Street by contrast has a tube (and National Rail) station, and a bus route intersection. Access on foot at City Road is restricted by a canal basin; at Old Street there are numerous back routes to potential destinations. It is completely erroneous to equate the two in terms of a public transport access index.

The one area in which the Plan continues to disappoint is in reducing the need to travel. This is all the more surprising given the welcome emphasis on addressing climate change and the staged targets supplementing the "with one bound he was free" target for 2050. The Plan supports mixed use development, the purpose of which is to bring jobs nearer to people. The government's Social Exclusion Unit has highlighted the lack of accessible jobs as a critical measure of poverty, defining access as within reasonable time/distance of home or school. This is particularly important for women with child care responsibilities because those responsibilities already restrict the time available for employment.

The document *Transport 2025* makes some welcome and timely comments about this: the reference to Land Use in the Executive Summary and the sections on Travel Demand Management (TDM). We feel that the growth in public transport chart, which first appeared in *Transport 2025* and is replicated here, should be annotated with the reduced figures that effective TDM might achieve. They would still show that CrossRail 1 and

CrossRail 2 (the current name for the Hackney-Chelsea line safeguarded in 1989) are essential to making tube travel civilised.

### *Islington Academies*

Islington's first academy, Mary Magdalene all age school, is set to open its doors to year 7 pupils in September - the first year of secondary school age children. It has attracted a large number of applications, which some would say proves its popularity, while in reality it means that fewer children will be admitted to their first choice school. It also means that other schools will be seriously under-subscribed. Not for the first time, projections about numbers have been widely exaggerated. I raised this over-provision of places with the Council Leader when he spoke to the Society at the end of January. He pointed out that next year reductions in roll elsewhere will restore the number of places on offer closer to the number that has been filled in recent years. However, neighbouring Boroughs are also changing their offer: academies in Hackney will also generate at least short term popularity, reducing intake to Islington schools, while Camden where the grass has always been greener is under pressure to increase secondary school places.

There are two principal concerns for the Islington Society. One is that there should continue to be local schools, within walking distance at primary level and one bus route away at secondary. There is already discentive enough for families to stay in Islington - mainly the cost of housing. The second is that where schools are in receipt of major capital funds, that those buildings worthy of retention are not swept away in the mistaken belief that modern buildings are the only way of providing a modern education. The concept of past time is a difficult one for young people and having some history around one is an asset unrivalled outside London. Happily early indications of the BSF (that is Building Schools for the Future) scheme is that the value of such buildings is indeed being recognised.

The Mary Magdalene Academy has involved extensive demolition and loss of public open space and continues to be

challenged by the local pressure group RAMMA. Opposition to the Islington Green academy is focused on the principle of converting a school that is not "failing": the difference between academies and the highly divisive GM schools of the 1990s is supposed to be that they are a vehicle for turning round failing schools, not an opportunity for better off parents to secure a disproportionate share of the financial cake. The replacement of an unattractive sixties building and the reduction in roll is not something to bother the Society, but the proximity of two major projects, this and the Packington redevelopment, may be. It is another opportunity to demonstrate the value of joined up thinking.

### ***Other developments in the Borough***

We have kept abreast of developments elsewhere, or perhaps more accurately discussion about developments elsewhere. Finsbury Square, City Road basin, redevelopment of the Packington Estate, the proposals for Archway and Nag's Head all look much as they did twelve months ago. The scene is changing on the Anderson's Yard site, albeit without much evidence of a fixed term contract.

### ***Transport matters***

It has been a quieter year on the transport front. The bendy bus continues to attract opprobrium from other road users, but nothing more has been heard of the proposal to transfer parking on to a crowded pavement in Essex Road: either that it is still planned, or that it has been dropped. There is promise of better things on the North London Line when Transport for London takes over and brands it as the Overground, and the East London line extension looks as if it will finally happen in time for the Olympic games. The Channel Tunnel Rail Link into St. Pancras is, like the transfer of the North London Line, set to happen in November this year.

Transport for London has recently acknowledged the need to improve information when a bus stop is temporarily moved as a

result of road works. Now that one cannot board in the traffic jam, and with Thames Water digging up every road in sight, the case for this has assumed a new urgency and we recently had the bizarre experience of two consecutive stops in St. Paul's Road and Balls Pond Road out of use at the same time.

The extension of route 21 northwards from Finsbury Square to Newington Green has proved extremely successful and further frequency improvements are now planned. Routes 205 and 277 have been are planned to be extended. It should be noted that the minimum fare using an Oyster card at certain times of the day is the same on the bus and the tube (the latter not in zone 1) and as the tube extends much further this makes it cheaper than a bus journey which cannot be made on just one bus - so these extensions are all the more worthwhile.

### ***Libraries & Islington Museum***

The main of event of the year was the success in obtaining funding for the museum alongside the local history collection at Finsbury library. Although the museum has lost its high street prominence next to the town hall, the Finsbury library is close to the London Metropolitan Archives, The British Postal Museum & archive, the Marx Memorial Library and the Family Records Association. The collection of this enclave of history in relatively close proximity will greatly facilitate future research and encourage researchers to visit Islington's Local History department in the course of their work.

### ***Annual Accounts***

Draft annual accounts appear on the back of this report. The publications account will be reported separately. The Committee is already planning a major event in 2010 to mark our fiftieth birthday.

**I hope you will be able to come to the A.G.M. and other forthcoming events.**

**Andrew Bosi**

**INCOME AND EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT**  
**for the YEAR ENDED 31ST DECEMBER, 2006**

		2005		2005
	£		£	
Subscriptions Donations & Events	3,968		3,927	
of which Annual dinner £952 (2005:£1100)				
Miscellaneous income (VAT)	--		99	
Interest receivable	244		22	
Awards	--		2,004	
		4,212		6,052
Printing & distribution costs	1,066		480	
Meeting expenses	1,478		2,142	
of which Annual dinner £1091 (2005: £1188)				
Miscellaneous expenses (VAT)	55		85	
Donations to other groups	20		117	
Awards	--		2,219	
Adjustments	--		651	
		<u>2,619</u>		<u>5,694</u>
(Deficit)/Surplus		1,593		358

**BALANCE SHEET AS AT 31ST DECEMBER 2006**

Cash at bank	8,321		6,725	
Add: received in arrears	-		-	
		8,321		6,725
<u>Accumulated funds</u>				
Balance brought forward	6,725		6,367	
Adjustment to prior year accounts	3		-	
(Deficit)/Surplus for the year	1,593		358	
<b>Total (note 1)</b>		<u>8,321</u>		<u>6,725</u>

**(Signed) Donald Mitchell, Hon. Treasurer**

**Notes.**

1. Split between current and Instant access business accounts

Registered Charity No. 261143