



The Bulletin

October 2020



Wimbledon and Putney Commons October webinar for members

It has been a turbulent year for the Wimbledon and Putney Commons Conservators (WPCC). Over the last twelve months our local Heath and Commons have experienced much higher than usual visitor numbers as local people sought a release from lockdown. Many were new to the commons and had little knowledge of the by-laws. One result was that expenditure on litter clearing rocketed. At the same time income dropped as paying events such as sports fixtures and fairs had to be cancelled. In the lead up to next March's elections for Conservators, Steve Bound, the Chief Operating Officer, has agreed to join a webinar to talk about how the organisation is facing up to these challenges and planning for

the future. **Monday 26 October at 7.30pm**

Do register for this webinar (and do not be put off by the name – joining and participating is really simple). Please email secretary@putneysociety.org.uk to obtain joining details and submit any questions that you may have. You can also submit questions during the course of the webinar.

Note from Editor – *I already have a question – why is it that 60% of the commons levy received by WPCC comes from Putney and Roehampton but that four out of the five elected Conservators come from Wimbledon? Time for more residents from SW15 to stand for election.*

Editor's Note

Here is the response from **Andrew Catto, Convenor of the Putney Society Buildings Panel** to Mr Vandenberg's letter

It is a well-known saying that *'Beauty is in the eye of the beholder'*, and a curious aspect of modern life that beauty in buildings is now seen as any style except today's. The Victorians pulled down Georgian buildings because they saw them as 'too plain'. The 20th century did the same to Victorian buildings as being over decorated (*and consequently hard to maintain*). Right now it is the 20th century that is out of fashion.

If the only purpose of the Planning White Paper was truly to give local communities the right to get good looking development we should support it. But behind the widespread (*and never defined*) use of the word 'Beauty' lies an intention to centralise power, increase density and fast track the beautifully profitable. No mention of preserving communities, or the damage to the climate and waste of resources in demolishing buildings that could and should be improved instead.

Proposed changes to planning legislation – a controversial issue

Dear Editor

With reference to the White Paper "Planning for the Future" (see the Buildings Panel report in your September issue), the Putney Society should welcome most warmly the prospect of future new developments being fast-tracked if their designs are judged to be "beautiful" by local communities.

One of the main reasons for people opposing desperately needed new housing in their locality is that they expect to hate what will be built – an expectation usually amply justified, as a look around London's once-gracious skyline will confirm.

For one indication of what people yearn for, compare these prices for a 3-bedroom dwelling in Roehampton.

- Angel Mews (picturesque traditional style): £800,000.
- Dover House Road (more cheaply built traditional style): £660,000.
- The five Corbusian slab blocks on the green overlooking Danebury Avenue,



widely acclaimed as exemplars of modernism): £250,000.

The fact is that people know what they like (and, even more important, what they don't like), and use their wallets to prove it. We are now being offered the right to express those preferences through the planning system, and should grasp it.

Should communities' preference be for traditional design, present-day exemplars of excellence do exist (*for instance the recently built Queen Mary's Place in Roehampton Lane SW15, or the 1980s-designed Bessborough Crown Estate in Pimlico*). These could form the basis of the locally approved design codes envisioned by the White Paper.

The Putney Society should give this most welcome provision in the White Paper its wholehearted support.

Maritz Vandenberg, Minstead Gardens

Buildings Panel

Co-convenor: Andrew Catto
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I'm sorry to report that Wandsworth Council has failed even to acknowledge our letter suggesting a more piecemeal and sensitive way to deal with the run down Alton Estate now that Redrow have walked away. They have clearly read it because our words are quoted almost directly in recent council announcements. The Assistant Director of Regeneration says "that the use of infill and refurbishment is not regeneration, it's a major works project". What's in a word? Maybe that although this would be a lot quicker to implement as well as far less disruptive for residents, the Council will still own the estate? The Councillor in charge of housing claims that they cannot change course because the Redrow scheme is 'what residents have been promised and want'. That's not what locals tell us.

Meanwhile we are told that the Redrow proposals, now as a 'Council's own application' will go to the October Planning Applications Committee for approval, no doubt then to be called in and rejected by the GLA. They have already published their objections.

Planning applications are still down on previous years as might be expected, but this is mainly for large developments. Domestic alterations are continuing, as are small scale developments and we remain vigilant for those small changes that will have an undue effect on the street scene such as high front walls or extra storeys where there are none nearby.

More worrying is the continued approval of schemes for new flats, be they tiny (20 sq.m. in one case) or north facing - that don't meet guidelines but are passed as a way of meeting housing targets. Has it really come to the point where building slums is acceptable again?

What has continued this year are reforms to the planning system aimed to give more and faster consents. The panel have been following the introduction of new Permitted Development rights now in force, but we are yet to see any applications for the extra storeys on blocks of flats mentioned in my last report*.

Meanwhile we have been discussing our response to the two government consultations on further and deeper changes. Key concerns are that the council will need to designate whole areas as Growth, Renewal or Protected, supposedly in consultation with the public, whilst also under pressure to ensure plenty of Growth. How will a true balance be achieved in places such as Wandsworth where there's very little underdeveloped space left? Members of your panel have also been listening in to online forums to learn more about what is proposed. Our responses are still being assembled but should be tabled in October.

STOP PRESS: *Just when I said we had not yet seen any proposals for extra floors on postwar buildings, one arrived today.

Transport Panel

Convenor: Stephen Luxford
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The introduction at the end of August of the West Putney Low Traffic Neighbourhood (LTN) scheme attracted considerable local interest. A number of members contacted the Society while others commented, usually adversely, on PutneySW15.com website. And within days of its introduction, a petition of over 600 people called for the Council to abandon the Putney LTN. Across the Borough over 80% of the comments received by the Council opposed the different schemes.

By early September, after a volume of criticism, all seven LTNs across the Borough were suspended, while interestingly one suggested for Thamesfield never got off the ground. The Council gave a number of reasons behind their decision. A primary cause was the significant concerns raised by the NHS, the Police and the Fire Brigade related to extended response times as well access more generally to the hospitals within the LTN areas. One obvious question is why weren't these key stakeholders consulted first and their views taken into account before implementation? Officials also reported serious and

continuing traffic problems on the ground with drivers still reluctant to use public transport because of Covid.

Sensibly, rather than pursue the exercise to the bitter end, the Council pulled the plug. But what have they learnt? Should they return to LTNs, or a variation of them, then a starting point might be to consider how they communicate their plans and to explain clearly what they expect the benefits of such schemes to bring.

Many of you will have noticed the increasingly long tail backs on the High Street and the roads feeding into it, particularly along Putney Bridge Road. We strongly suspect that the Hammersmith Bridge closure to be the primary cause with extra cars clogging up Putney Bridge at peak hours. The Society has written to the Council to ask them to revisit, with TfL, the traffic light phasing on the Lower Richmond Road and Putney Bridge Road.

FUTURE PANEL MEETINGS

For the moment all panel meetings are held on Zoom. We will let you know as soon as the guidance allows us to meet in person. If you are new to panel meetings, please contact the panel convenor by email if you want to take part in the Zoom meeting and they will send out an invitation.

COMMUNITY

8 October, 12 November
by Zoom (18.30)

Co-convenors:
Vicky Diamond & Val Jones

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TRANSPORT

13 October, 10 November
by Zoom (19.30)

Convenor:
Stephen Luxford

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BUILDINGS

7 October, 4 November
by Zoom (18.00)

Convenor:
Andrew Catto

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OPEN SPACES

1 October, 5 November
by Zoom (18.00)

Convenor:
Judith Chegwidzen

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Community Panel

Co-convenors: Victoria Diamond & Val Jones
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Do you live in **Roehampton**? Can you spare a couple of hours a month? Would you like to join the Community Panel? We are really keen to get someone on board who lives there. PLEASE let us know or contact me for more information about the role of the Community Panel. Currently you only need to have access to Zoom to join our monthly meetings. Thank you.

Regenerate Rise is doing a big fundraising push for the Platt Centre in Felsham Road. They do incredible work in the community, under the guidance of Mo Smith, and, since lockdown, have served over 13,000 meals to vulnerable and isolated residents, as well as supplying activity packs to those with children. They have about 240 individuals on their books at the moment, who they support daily with their team of volunteers. They are trying to raise money to purchase the Platt Centre to enable them to continue their work there as well as to support those in need during this Covid crisis. In addition, they are planning to build a two storey Re-ablement centre above the current building, to enable older people to rehabilitate after staying in hospital, before being able to return home.

If you would like to be a history-maker and help revolutionise the care of older people, please help them to continue their work by giving them a donation to enable their work to continue. Cheques made payable to Regenerate-RISE and sent to Regenerate-RISE, The Platt Christian Centre, 22 Felsham Road, SW15 1DA or donate through Just Giving with reference to the aspect of their work that you would like to support.

- The purchase of the Platt Centre (Platt)
- The building of the new Reablement Centre (Reablement)
- The continuation of support within the community (Covid-19)

<https://www.regenerate-rise.co.uk/Donate>

Or you can physically go to a bank and make a donation.

CAF Bank
Account number: 00016531
Sort code: 40-52-40

Thank you

Open Spaces Panel

Convenor: Judith Chegwidden
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The panel met on September 3. Much of its discussion was rendered obsolete by subsequent events, namely the cancellation of the Low Traffic Neighbourhood and the cancellation of the London Car Free Day at which the Society was planning to have a stall for recruitment purposes.

There was a brief discussion about the Council's proposed safety improvements to Church Walk, and whether it would be possible to install a mirror at the east end of the passage in recognition of the fact that it will not be possible to prevent all cycling through Church Walk. Indeed there are peddled vehicles that cannot readily be pushed owing to a child seat a mounted on the front etc. This is being followed up.

The Panel had planned to organise a litter pick on

Putney Common but this has been deferred in recognition of the increased risk from Covid 19 associated with rising numbers of infections in the community in West Putney.

There has been correspondence with Enable regarding the number of dying trees in the Borough, particularly in West Putney. In spite of the absence of a tree officer for this area at present Enable says it ensures that tree inspection, maintenance and watering of new trees are carried out as appropriate. It was noted, however, that there is still a significant number of dying, recently planted, trees in the Borough.

Note from Convenor: *Many thanks to Charles Gillbe for stepping in to run the panel and produce this report while I was away.*

PUTNEY SOCIETY CONTACTS

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www.putneysociety.org.uk

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Information comes in many forms... increasingly through the digital world



Over the last couple of months we have become increasingly concerned that much of the information we used to receive in paper form – and many of our daily activities – have moved ‘on line’. To many this is a good thing – *a natural progression in a fast-moving world of technology, a way to save paper* – and trees, and to save money. However, for a significant minority of people these moves are unwelcome, poorly understood and outside of their field of interest. But those people – *part of our community* – still need information, and to obtain goods and services without having access to computers and wi-fi. So, how can we help to

bridge the gap . . . ?

The Community Panel has become actively involved with several organisations across the borough which seek to help people of all ages to become more ‘digitally included’. These organisations range from those who help by giving people donated computers (*See below*), those who offer help and support to people who are not confident or think the internet is ‘not for them’, and those who are in touch with people who feel isolated from their communities – all of these even more important during the corona virus crisis. We work with them to support and publicise their work. Important as

these are however, we are committed to finding ways to help people who can’t or don’t want to be part of this digital world yet – and there are many reasons for this. Noticeboards in public places, newsletters, newspapers, leaflets in libraries and surveys that can be completed in paper form or with the help of volunteers – all will be needed for the foreseeable future, until the transition to digital is complete – whenever that may be. Research has shown that digital exclusion and social exclusion can be closely related – for communities this is probably the most important piece of information of all.



Can you help to Keep Kids Connected?

Helping to reduce inequalities and fight digital poverty across Wandsworth, Merton and Kingston, **Keep Kids Connected** have already delivered 800+ laptops and tablets thanks to many generous donations. Demand is still high however . . . an estimated **700,000** young people do not have access to the internet on a computer or tablet at home in the UK. This is a real concern as children with access to technology at home tend to do better in school exams and gain valuable skills. Even more

worryingly, as teachers and parents navigate a safe return to school this autumn, local lockdowns and individual household isolation are likely to continue to disrupt the education of many - Keep Kids Connected aim to ensure no child or teenager is left behind.

- Do you have an old laptop or tablet you’d like to put to good use?
- Less than 8 years old and in good condition?
- KKC can wipe all data and fix faulty devices

If you can help, visit <https://donslocalaction.org/keep-kids-connected/> and scroll down on the **Home Page** to the **Keep Kids Connected** section.

