



THE HACKNEY SOCIETY

SPACES 2013

News and views about Hackney's built environment

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Woodberry Down By Laurie Elks



Woodberry Down Estate was one of the LCC's largest housing schemes. Conceived in the 1930s, the estate was started after the Second World War and completed by 1962. There were 42 blocks in all, and four of the 1940s blocks broke new ground by being built to the unprecedented height of eight storeys. Overall, however, the estate was built to a low density with generous open space between the individual blocks.

In common with many large estates, Woodberry Down later fell prey to deficient maintenance, with attendant tenant dissatisfaction and social problems – a familiar spiral of decline. Hackney Council adjudged (although some contest this) that the estate was beyond economic repair. An

Area Action Plan proposing comprehensive development was published in 2005 followed in 2007 by a Masterplan. (<http://www.hackney.gov.uk/Assets/Documents/ep-woodberry-masterplan-a.pdf>). The redevelopment is being made in stages with completion due by 2031.

The main features of the development scheme are as follows:

- Progressive demolition and redevelopment of the entire estate
- Redevelopment entrusted to a single development partner – Berkeley Homes
- A very significant increase in density – current plans are to replace 2,013 homes by 4,684, albeit with some shift to smaller units
- Existing social homes to be replaced one-for-one, enabling all current tenants to be re-housed through a rolling decant
- The majority of the new units to be offered for private sale. The mix of housing has been criticised by some as

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amounting to planned 'gentrification' of the area

- An aspiration to high standards of urban design. The development is arranged to embrace the waterside of the New River and the Stoke Newington Reservoirs (largely ignored in the design of the LCC estate), with a grid of open spaces to create 'streets for people'
- Relatively generous provision of facilities, including a large community centre, health centre, and shops
- A programme of consultation involving existing tenants and Genesis Association, the designated provider of replacement social housing

A key question posed by a representative of Berkeley Homes is *can we do density well?* London has a predicted requirement for one million extra homes by 2030, the result of rising population, declining average household size and tight Green Belt policies. To see density done badly, *Spaces* readers could do worse than visit the so-called 'Hale Village' at Tottenham Hale – a grim assemblage of barrack-like buildings lacking coherent urban design with desultory open spaces, a virtual lack of communal space (beyond the obligatory gym and Tesco Express), and no meaningful sense of place.

How does Woodberry Down, or 'Woodberry Park' as Berkeley would have us call it, appear next to this comparator? In one sense, the verdict must be 'too early to say'. Berkeley understandably started with the best site ('Kick-Start 1') – a development of 456 homes bordering Stoke Newington West Reservoir. Severe design challenges



lie ahead, including the design of phases adjoining Seven Sisters Road, and keeping up standards of maintenance in more straitened economic times. More worryingly, Berkeley Homes are planning to submit a revision of the existing Masterplan consent, which may lead to an overall increase in numbers of units and a lowering of design standards.

However, even allowing for these important caveats, 'Kick-Start 1' is enormously impressive. It is designed to face the reservoir with a cluster of south-facing balconies – an impressive (even, on a warm summer evening, idyllic) landscaped waterfront; and a satisfying mixture of materials which avoids the perils of naff-eclectic.

This phase of development clusters round a 'landmark' 27-storey tower on Woodberry Grove, which avoids unduly dominating the composition. In due course there will be a second tower on the east side. Density is unlikely to be 'done' better than this in Hackney any time soon. Designed by architect Rolfe Judd and landscape architect Murdoch Wickham, the scheme was shortlisted for the 2012 Hackney Design Awards.

Woodberry Down/Park may prove to be a one-off. Hackney Council is currently concentrating on refurbishment of its estates rather than comprehensive redevelopment. Moreover, the generous public finances are unlikely to be available again – nor the exceptional design opportunities presented by the Stoke Newington Reservoirs. But, so far, it is a heartening demonstration that density can be combined with high standards of urban design.

The Hackney Society has arranged a walk around Woodberry Down on 1 September at 11am. The tour will include the new development and the soon-to-be-demolished 'Soviet' blocks of Nicholl House (used in the filming of Schindler's List) and Needwood House. See Events section.

Publications

The Hide and Seek Children: Recollections of Jewish Survivors from Slovakia by Hackney resident Barbara Barnett is a collected of first-hand stories of children who survived the Holocaust. It includes maps by Martin Gilbert. Mansion Field, £24.95.

Taking on the Empire: How we saved the Hackney Empire for Popular Theatre by Roland Muldoon describes how the theatre group CAST took over the crumbling Hackney Empire in the 1980s and transformed it from a dilapidated bingo hall to a home for popular and political theatre. Just Press, £15.

Travellers' Children in London Fields is a book of photographs of the children of Irish travellers whom Colin O'Brien encountered in 1987. O'Brien, who lives in

Hackney, has been photographing people in the borough since 1948. Spitalfields Life Books, £10.

The Marshes by Samuel Wright and Josh Lustig reflects the assorted characters that can be found on Hackney Marshes. The book brings together images by Lustig and text by Wright, in an unconventional design that lets the photographs and writing interact throughout. Tartaruga Press, £22.

Shooting in N16 by Andrew Dumbleton is a book of photographs of Stoke Newington. Starting in September 2011, Dumbleton began to photograph the area, taking one picture every Saturday for a year. Self-published, £20. (Available from Stoke Newington Bookshop.)
See photos opposite.

Chats Palace

Chats Palace is celebrating the centenary of its premises. As the inscription above the entrance indicates, the building began life as Homerton Public Library. It was opened on 31 May 1913.

The old borough of Hackney was relatively late in adopting the Public Libraries Acts of 1850-55, which allowed local authorities to raise money from the rates for public library provision. While Stoke Newington had adopted the Acts in 1890 and Shoreditch in 1891, it was not until 1903 that Hackney followed suit.

The site for Homerton Library was provided by the Council at a cost of £1,300. The building, constructed of Portland stone at a cost of £5,280, was funded by Andrew Carnegie (1835-1919). The self-made industrialist, born in Dunfermline, made a fortune from steel in the USA, and set up more than 2,800 libraries across the English-speaking world.

For Hackney, Carnegie gave £25,000 in 1903, of which £12,000 was for the Central Library in Mare Street (now Hackney Picturehouse), and £13,000 to build two branch libraries at Homerton and Dalston.

He gave a further £145 in 1909, and in 1910 contributed £3,000 towards a third branch in Clapton. Carnegie also helped fund an extension to Stoke Newington Library in 1904.

The three branch libraries were designed by Edwin Cooper (1874-1942), an architect best known for the former Port of London Authority building (1912-1922). Dalston Library was destroyed by a V2 rocket in 1945, leaving Clapton as the only library still functioning as such.

By the 1960s, the original Homerton Library was found to be inadequate to meet the needs of children and students. As improvements to the premises would involve a high level of expenditure, the Libraries Committee decided on a new building. The current Homerton Library, opened by Lord George Brown in 1974, was designed with large open plan areas that could be adapted in the future, and



included a lecture theatre and a special collection room.

Chats Palace Arts Centre opened in the former library in 1976. Currently it is holding a Centenary Celebration Exhibition of historic prints and posters, selected by the Fragile Archivists. Continuing through the summer, this exhibition is the first of a series of celebrations. Other events include a summer ball, a Caribbean night, a ceilidh, a cabaret night, a series of children's theatre shows in the autumn and a Christmas party, as well as a series of lectures in early autumn.

Building watch

Geffrye Museum

By Nick Perry

On 1 May Hackney's Planning Sub-committee debated the Geffrye Museum's application to extend the museum. Planning officers had recommended approval, albeit with some concerns over concessions that they had failed to secure during

the application process. At the end of a lively exchange between the Councillors, architect, Museum, planning department officers and objectors, the committee voted 7-2 to reject the application. They cited the 'substantial harm' a proposed gallery walkway would cause to the former almshouses, and felt the Modernist design by David Chipperfield for a new corner

entrance facing Hoxton Station was not of 'sufficient merit ... to overcome the harm that would be caused by the loss of the existing former public house building' currently on the site.

Dalston Development

Much to the dismay of OPEN Dalston, Hackney Council's Planning Committee has approved Transport for London (TfL)/ Taylor Wimpey's Western Curve Dalston development. The campaigners point out that the development will breach Hackney's government-approved Dalston Area Action Plan.

Chesham Arms

The saga of this much-loved pub continues. Since the Chesham Arms was closed in October 2012, local people have campaigned to prevent it being converted to residential use. Earlier this year they were successful in getting it listed as an Asset of Community Value (ACV), the first building in Hackney to receive such recognition, and offering some protection. Hackney Council rejected an appeal against the ACV status by the pub owners. Campaigners are now hoping that the owners will sell the building to a pub operator.



Photos: Andrew Dumbleton

Hackney Society Events

CFA Voysey suite at Capel House

Saturday 3 August 2013, 10.30 for 11am
Building Tour

The CFA Voysey suite featured in City Heritage Awards, grade II listed interiors. Voysey's 1907 bespoke design for the Essex & Suffolk Equitable Insurance Company was a rare departure from his domestic architecture. The tour will be accompanied by a curator from the Geffrye Museum and an architect from William Nimmo & Partners, the firm responsible for the refurbishment of the suite.

Booking essential by 31 July 2013. To book online visit <http://billetto.co.uk/capelhouse>

Meet 10.30am at 60 New Broad Street, London EC2M 2JJ (pedestrian thoroughfare) for an 11am start.

FREE to members, £5.00 non-members.

Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park

Saturday 3 August 2013, 9.30 for 10am
Boat Tour

This boat tour, which is exclusive to Hackney Society members and their friends and guests, will pass along the River Lee Navigation from Three Mills (Bow) to the southern entrance of Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, taking in the sights of the Stadium and the ArcelorMittal Orbit.

Booking essential ASAP. Maximum 50 people. Book online at <http://billetto.co.uk/olympicparkboatour>

Meet 9.30am, Three Mills Pontoon, Bow, E3.

FREE. All welcome (space permitting).

Please check our website for up-to-date information and additional events that are organised throughout the year. Most of our events are free to Hackney Society members and £5 to non-members. For special and joint events there may be a charge for members. To avoid disappointment, please book a place as some events have a limited number of places. For queries about booking, email events@hackneysociety.org or phone 020 7175 1967.

Noticeboard

Brooke House

BSix College has unveiled a blue plaque to commemorate historical figures who lived in Brooke House (originally known as King's Place), which was demolished in 1954. The plaque mentions Henry VIII, who owned the house from 1535 until 1547, William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke, and Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford, who occupied the house between 1597 and 1609.

Funding for West Hackney Recreation Ground

West Hackney Recreation Ground has been awarded almost £700,000 by the Heritage Lottery Fund. The funding will be used for renovation of the burial ground, recreation ground and the forecourt of St Paul's Church.

London Fields

Hackney's Parks Department has planted a wildflower meadow on London Fields. Created on an old red gravel sports pitch, the meadow will provide a rich habitat for insects and birds.

Highlights of Haggerston

Sunday 4 August 2013, 2.30pm
Walk with John Finn

Architectural and historical walk through Haggerston, taking in Ernö Goldfinger's Haggerston School and Haggerston Baths by Alfred Cross as well as recent buildings such as Adelaide Wharf and the Bridge Academy.

Booking recommended. Book online at <http://billetto.co.uk/highlightsofhaggerston>

Meet outside the entrance to the Geffrye Museum, 136 Kingsland Road, E2.

FREE to all.

Woodberry Down

Sunday 1 September 2013, 11am
Walk with Patrick Hammill and Laurie Elks

A tour of Woodberry Down, including the new development, which was shortlisted for the 2012 Hackney Design Awards, and the soon-to-be-demolished 'Soviet' blocks of Nicholl House and Needwood House.

Booking essential Book online at <http://billetto.co.uk/woodberrydown>

Meet at Manor House tube.

FREE to members, £5 non-members.

The Gingerbread House

Saturday 14 September 2013, 11am
Architectural tour with Laura Dewe Mathews

Architect Laura Dewe Mathews will guide a tour around her beautifully crafted home. The AJ Small Projects 2013 prize-winning Gingerbread House demonstrates a subtle yet witty balance between the historic wall of a former Victorian box factory and a playful cedar shingle clad roof.

Noted for its clever use of volume and daylight in a tightly constrained inner city site, this project, infused with spirit and local identity, offers an antidote and alternative to the uninspired, developer-led urban infill prevalent in our cities today.

Booking essential Book online at <http://billetto.co.uk/thegingerbreadhouse>

Meet 104 Balcombe Road, London E9 7AU at 11am.

£5 to members, £8.50 non-members (this is a Hackney Society fundraising event).

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76 Rivington Street, London EC2A 3AY
Tel: 020 7739 2451 Fax: 020 7729 5925
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Edited by: Monica Blake

Layout by: design@gloryhall.com

Contributors: Monica Blake, Laurie Elks and Nick Perry

Photos: Monica Blake and Andrew Dumbleton

The Hackney Society

The Round Chapel,
1d Glenarm Road, London E5 0LY
T: 020 7175 1967

E: info@hackneysociety.org

W: www.hackneysociety.org

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