



THE HACKNEY SOCIETY

# SPACES 2018

News and views about Hackney's built environment

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## Woodberry Wetlands



**Woodberry Wetlands is a nature reserve on the site of the East Reservoir in Stoke Newington. It was opened to the public on 1 May 2016 for the first time since the reservoir's construction in 1833.**

The reserve was developed by London Wildlife Trust in collaboration with Thames Water, Berkeley Homes and the London Borough of Hackney. Work was carried out by Kaner Olette Architects and Allen Scott Landscape Architecture. The main aims of the redevelopment project were to: create a publicly accessible wetland habitat with visitor and educational facilities; save and restore the significant listed buildings; and enhance and develop the site for all

ecology but especially as a crucial habitat for overwintering rare birds.

The Grade II listed former kitchen and coal store has been converted to a café and training/education space. As a result of the works, the building has been removed from the Heritage at Risk Register. The Grade II Ivy House Sluice has been made visually accessible.

Woodberry Wetlands supports many species throughout the year, from wintering populations of pochard, shoveler, tufted and gadwall ducks, to reed warbler and bunting which have migrated from Africa for spring and summer. Some 17 hectares of enhanced habitats include reed beds,

hedgerows, grassland, a wildflower meadow and an orchard.

The redevelopment of the site was one of the winners of the Hackney Design Awards 2016. The judges commented: 'This public realm project is successful on many levels. It provides new public space, makes sense of its location, creates a sense of community ownership and provides an opportunity to appreciate nature'. They considered it 'an amazing exemplar of its kind: the scheme is redefining how this part of London is imagined'.

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# Artists in the City: Celebrating 50 Years of SPACE By Wendy Forrest

**SPACE was set up by Bridget Riley and Peter Sedgley to seek out affordable workspace for artists in London. Although their first sites straddled the river – St Katherine’s Dock and the Marshalsea prison – SPACE soon came to see Hackney as home. Their 50-year anniversary was recently celebrated at the HQ at the Triangle, Mare Street with the launch of a book, *Artists in the City: SPACE in ‘68 and Beyond*, that tells their story and reminds us that SPACE has always supported innovation, experimentation and emerging practice.**

Set up in 1968, SPACE has since enabled more than 3500 artists to reclaim unused buildings as flexible studios. While tackling a very practical problem, SPACE created new ways for artists to engage with each other, with local and city authorities and with audiences and communities. Bridget Riley told the launch crowd how proud she was of their work and how it met more than a material need. A studio space, she said, ‘exerts a pull’ and fosters discipline and focus.

Peter Sedgley talked about the ability of artists to fit in anywhere and use spaces for which the community had no current need. He didn’t need to tell a Hackney audience about the way that artists then enhance and enliven those forgotten places. Sympathetic use by SPACE has helped preserve listed buildings like Stoke Newington Library, those locally listed like Eastway Baths, and those

threatened by large-scale redevelopment like the White Building. This last is also a very clear demonstration of the wider community benefits: harder to pin down but critical in shaping neighbourhoods.

Hackney sees itself as a creative hub within a global capital of culture. But rent hikes are putting the squeeze on those who do the work. Anne Redmond, a Hackney artist and resident who has worked locally for over 20 years talked about the impact on her own practice. Moving out of SPACE’s Sara Lane studios in Hoxton after her rent increased by almost a third within a year, Anne is going to their new premises in Redbridge costing almost half as much. A cash-strapped council can’t offset those market pressures but it can help. The mayor’s recent commitment to protect at least some affordable studios in Hackney Wick is welcome.

Reflecting on the history of SPACE, Andrew Wilson from the Tate talked about the 1960s as a special moment when art, culture and politics were more closely meshed. He cited the Antiuniversity – launched in Shoreditch and recently revived in Hackney – as another key example of self-organisation. Breaking down the boundaries between artist and audience, he said, was critical to the way these ground-breaking organisations worked.

That continues through the work of practitioners like Lucy Harrison. An artist and social historian, Lucy is occupying her third SPACE studio in Hackney. She spent seven years in a former bathhouse, four in



*Bridget Riley + Peter Sedgley*

a library and is now in a repurposed shoe factory. Funded by Heritage Lottery and commissioned by London councils, her work considers how the history of place resonates into the present. Lucy uses oral history and a public engagement to document and represent community experience. She has recently won Heritage Lottery Funding to support a new project exploring printing industry heritage in East London.

*Artists in the City: SPACE in ‘68 and Beyond* explores the early history of an artist-led organisation and the impact of artists in their city. It looks at the challenges of self-organisation and of gentrification. Bridget Riley, Peter Sedgley and many others reflect on the artist-run initiative that has been copied in New York, Berlin and around the world. SPACE has proved a radical and sustainable way to support creativity: an organisation Hackney can be proud to host into the future.

## ‘Small Sites’ – New Policies By Laurie Elks

**The Mayor of London’s revised London Plan was published in December. Our own erstwhile mayor, Jules Pipe, has led on this plan as London’s Deputy Mayor for ‘Planning Regeneration and Skills’.**

Particular attention will focus, in Hackney and elsewhere, on policy H2 concerning development of small sites. The Plan says that ‘small sites should play a much greater role in housing delivery’ and London boroughs are required to ‘proactively support well-designed new homes on small sites’. Individual boroughs are set 10-year targets for net housing completions on small sites, below 0.25 hectares. Hackney’s target is 6600 over 10 years.

GLA spokespeople have emphasised that, if we are to protect London’s Green Belt, we

have to get serious about using available spaces to meet the housing needs of London’s growing population.

Put in stark terms this policy means that small parcels of land in our borough, gardens, backlands, unbuilt land within housing estates, are all up for grabs for ‘infill development on vacant or underused sites’.

Before expressing our (considerable) reservations, there are some positives that should be said about this policy.

First, the GLA hopes through this policy to support small and medium-sized housebuilders. In an age dominated by a small clique of major housebuilders, we should surely say ‘amen’ to that.

Second, the policy is said to ‘support those wishing to bring forward custom, self-build

and community housing’. We are not sure how well this will work in practice, but the aspiration is surely sound.

Third, a small site policy will probably bring greater equity in the spread of development within Hackney. A Hackney cabinet member, on being asked by one of our committee members how sites would be found for 16,000 new homes over 10 years, replied: ‘We’ll build them all down on East Road’. The remark was semi-flippant but it reflected a prevailing attitude that we can pile up the new houses on Shoreditch’s City Fringe. One of the objectors to the redevelopment of the Britannia Leisure centre in Hoxton said in effect ‘Why always pick on us’ for the densest and grossest development schemes. It will not come

# Picture from a *Portrait*: Stoke Newington West Reservoir

By Laurie Elks

Our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary publication, *Hackney: Portrait of a Community 1967-2017*, was published in October 2017. This is one of the photos from the book.

This photo by Monica Blake shows the Stoke Newington West Reservoir seen in all its glory from one of the adjacent tower blocks built by Berkeley Homes as part of the emerging 'Woodberry Park'. The reservoirs were originally proposed to be redeveloped as housing by the owners, Thames Water. In the end, Thames Water managed to develop the Filter Bed site (to the west of Green Lanes) as housing but the reservoirs escaped development as a result of tenacious resistance, lasting almost 20 years, by the Save the Reservoirs Campaign. The West Reservoir is now a sailing centre and the East Reservoir has become the marvellous Woodberry Wetlands nature reserve. It is richly ironic that Berkeley Homes now boast of the 'unique waterside setting' of their development.



as any secret or surprise that Hackney Society members are more to be found in leafier Conservation Areas but we have never been a Nimby society and we have to recognise that the pressures of population must inevitably affect all parts of the borough.

What of the negatives? First, those targets bear down hardest on boroughs like Hackney which were built by the Victorians on tight street patterns. Compare for instance Kingston, built out mostly in the 20<sup>th</sup> century to far more generous street patterns, with a target of 6250 net completions. These proportions do not feel quite right.

Second, and this is the flip side of the last of our positives, the policy provides that 'designated heritage assets' should

be protected from an 'unacceptable level of harm' but not conservation areas. Indeed, the policy requires boroughs to 'recognise...that local character evolves over time and will need to change in appropriate locations to accommodate... increases in residential density through small housing developments'. No doubt conservation-minded boroughs will balance the legitimate requirements of policy H2 against the requirement that developments in conservation areas should 'preserve or enhance' their character. In Hackney, it sometimes seems, any development that does not 'preserve' a conservation area is deemed to 'enhance' it. To such a point that in one 'garden grab' application seen by the Society the planning officer's report went so far as to say that 'the proposal ... would

provide the first modern contemporary building within a Victorian street and *thereby* enhancing the conservation area' (emphasis added). We can hope for a more balanced and nuanced approach to future small site applications but may be left disappointed!

Third, there is a larger question whether the protection of the Green Belt has got (a little bit) out of kilter in the modern era of population pressure. If it is deemed necessary to change the character of our streets to protect the Green Belt it is well to remember that the Green Belt was designed to protect the interests of Londoners, not just the inhabitants of the Green Belt. However, that raises larger and wider issues than policy H2, and they are unlikely to be resolved anytime soon.

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## Hackney Society Events

### Hackney Wick

Thursday 24 May 2018, 7.00pm

#### Walk with Ralph Ward

Hackney Wick is Hackney's most febrile hotbed of change. After becoming Hackney's last artistic frontier a few years ago, the Wick now faces an influx of housing developments.

Meanwhile, artists and hipsters, cafes and brewers co-exist in a colourful graffiti-laden milieu. Ralph Ward's tour will finish at the Howling Hops Brewery where we will have a short introductory talk from the head brewer, Tim O'Rourke.

Meet at the foot of the entrance ramps to Hackney Wick station at 7.00pm. About 1½ hours + 15 minutes brewery visit followed by a beer.

Booking essential. FREE for Hackney Society members, £5 for non-members.

Book at <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/walk-hackney-wick-tickets-45121433422> or via Hackney Society home page.

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## Noticeboard

### Daubeney Fields

Campaigners in Lower Clapton have objected to Hackney Council's plans to demolish garages in Mandeville Street and build new houses. The groups Daubeney Fields Forever and the Clapton Improvement Society have presented alternative plans for the site. They want to see fewer homes, more workspace and the expansion of a community garden.

### Stik Statue

The artist Stik has received planning permission to create a statue in Hoxton Square. The statue, called 'Holding Hands', is based on a banner commissioned by Hackney Museum to represent Hackney at the Pride in London parade in 2016. It is being made in collaboration with The Sculpture Factory in Kingsland Road.

### An Viet House

The An Viet Foundation is collaborating with the Kanlungan Filipino Consortium and Hackney Chinese Community Services to turn An Viet House in Englefield Road into a community centre. The building, a former public bathhouse, has served the Vietnamese community for some 35 years. For more information on the An Viet Foundation, see the chapter on 1983 in *Hackney: Portrait of a Community 1967-2017*.

### Pages of Hackney

The bookshop Pages of Hackney in Lower Clapton Road is the winner of London Independent Bookshop of the Year 2018. It will now be in line for the Independent Bookshop of the Year at the British Book Awards in May.

### Talks at the Tower 2018

This year's Talks at the Tower will be held on 18-22 June. The speakers are all contributors to the Hackney Society's recent book: *Hackney Portrait of a Community 1967-2017*. They are: Laurie Elks (18 June), Ken Worpole and Anna Harding (19 June), Duncan Campbell and David Hoffman (20 June), Carolyn Clark (21 June) and Stuart Weir (22 June). All talks will be at St Augustine's Tower Mare Street E8 1HR. Talks are free but donations are welcome. Doors open at 7.00 and talks will be at 7.30. For more information, see <http://www.hackneysociety.org/page.aspx?idtxt=talks-at-the-tower-2018> To book, go to <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/talks-at-the-tower-tickets-44913194574>

### The Chesham Arms

The Chesham Arms has become the first community asset in Hackney to retain its protected status. The pub on Mehetabel Road was first awarded 'Asset of Community Value' (ACV) status by Hackney Council in 2013 (see *Spaces* 41).

### Summer Swifts Walk

The guided walk by award-winning local architect Lisa Shell has been confirmed as a 'Summer Swifts Walk – Architecture & Biodiversity in De Beauvoir', 7.30-9pm Wednesday 20 June, De Beauvoir Square to The Scott Head. The event will be free but there will be a suggested donation for a local charity. Please email [debeauvoirsifts@gmail.com](mailto:debeauvoirsifts@gmail.com) if you are interested in attending.

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## Publications



### *The East End in Colour 1960-1980*

by David Granick contains photographs that capture the streets and waterways of London's East End in the warm hues of Kodachrome film. Journey back in time to a place now long vanished. Hoxton Mini Press, £16.95.

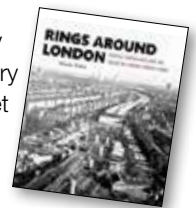
### *Artists in the City: SPACE in '68 and Beyond*

explores the early history of an artist-led organisation which broke new ground by taking on large properties for artist studios in London (see p02). It includes essays by artists Bridget Riley and Peter Sedgley with an introduction by Anna Harding, plus contributions from Mel Dodd, William Fowler, Larne Abse Gogarty, Rebecca Gordon-Nesbitt, J&K – Janne Schäfer and Kristine Agergaard – Robert Kudielka, Courtney J. Martin, Alicia Miller, David Morris, Neil Mulholland, Naomi Pearce, Shirley Read, Ana Torok and Andrew Wilson. SPACE/Cornerhouse, £19.95.



### *Rings Around London: Orbital Motorways and the Battle for Homes Before Roads*

Wayne Asher provides a history of the London Ringways, a set of urban motorways planned for London in the 1960s and 1970s. They would have been the largest civil engineering project since the war – and cost between 60,000 and 100,000 people their homes. The book describes what they were, where they would have gone – and how Londoners fought them off. Capital Transport, £25.



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