



THE HACKNEY SOCIETY

# SPACES 2024

News and views about Hackney's built environment

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## Holborn Studios – the struggle continues **By Laurie Elks**



Holborn Studios Eagle Wharf Road entrance.

**The battle to save Holborn Studios rolls on with no end in sight. Legal wrangling has been running since the owners of the Eagle Wharf Road site first applied (well before Brexit!) to redevelop in 2015 – readers can consult Spaces 59, 69 and 76 for previous instalments.**

So far, the developers GHJ (brand name Galliard), have twice been granted planning permission to redevelop, which has twice been overturned on judicial review (JR) brought by Holborn Studios (HS). A third planning application to Hackney Council was considered in March 2022 when committee members, going against officers' recommendations, refused permission. Central to their decision was the new, emerging London Plan which gives specific planning weight to the protection of creative workspace. The committee considered that HS makes a significant contribution to London's cultural infrastructure. The owners appealed this decision and following three weeks of hearings, the Inspector's decision



Regent's Canal side. Photos outside Paul Bolding, inside Holborn Studios

to allow the appeal was published in August. The decision can be seen at <https://acp.planninginspectorate.gov.uk/ViewCase.aspx?caseid=3306886>.

At the time of writing, HS has applied for judicial review of the Inspector's decision and therefore the battle continues.

The central issues in the appeal (and it should be emphasised that there are others) were (i) does HS qualify as a "cultural facility" which relevant planning policy is designed to protect?; and (ii) if "yes", does the development scheme, by offering replacement workspace which could potentially be put to the same use by "an alternative industry operator" accord with policy? Despite significant changes in planning frameworks since 2015, this has always been a central issue. Hackney planning officers have consistently downplayed (i), and at the first application they provided a distinctly misleading answer to (ii), leading to a successful JR application (see Spaces 59).

On question (i) the Inspector came down on the side of HS:

"Based on Holborn Studio's history, client base, iconic output and range of work, it is of more than local renown and possibly of national or international significance ... It was suggested that it was the largest photographic studios in Europe ... and that it contributed to London's cultural infrastructure. On the basis of its size and evident industry reputation, I have no reason to take an alternative view. [It is also] a space where industry creatives can meet, exchange ideas and learn. Based on the evidence before me I am satisfied that the studio brings together people working in cultural or creative industries, [and] I accept the existing use could be described as a creative hub".

On question (ii) the Inspector acceded to the developer's submissions that the replacement employment workspace provided by the scheme had been configured such that it "could" accommodate the existing cultural facility provided by HS irrespective of whether it was suitable for use by HS itself.

The Inspector's judgment in fact contains a remarkable number of "coulds". The developer "could" be willing to let to a tenant carrying on an equivalent business; such a prospective tenant "could" come forward; and the space "could" be configured to meet such a tenant's requirements.

*Continued overleaf...*

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# Obituary: Nick Perry

## Nick Perry

1972-2024

**It was with great shock and sadness that we learnt of Nick Perry's death, aged 52, on 1st October 2024. Nick chaired the Hackney Society from 2014 until 2021 and continued to drive the business of its Planning Group as secretary with immense enthusiasm (at my side for ten years) as well as supporting the activities and interests of all aspects of the Society.**

He was a stalwart monthly attendee of Planning Group meetings, where his breadth of interests and range of skills were an invaluable and delightful contribution to discussions over a pick of the latest applications in Hackney. His passion was infectious. It was in planning and development, ideally where heritage figured, that he rose to the challenge presented by complicated social and political situations addressing conflicts and dilemmas through his ability to investigate, engage and affect, if not solve.

His day job as an IT manager for a firm of legal publishers allowed him the flexibility to pursue built environment causes that gripped him. As an example, part of his research to support the listing application of Hackney's currently threatened brutalist Ash Grove Bus Garage involved a day-trip to Ramsgate to meet one of the original architects, Keith Makinson. Such commitment stemmed from great seriousness, but he also found amusement



and entertainment in the mad business of planning. And he loved no more than to share his bemusement at unfathomably dire planning submissions.

He could talk with intelligence and insight, without resorting to bullshit or banter. He never dominated. But he didn't shy away from calling people out if he disapproved of their manners. Or their bullshit.

Nick was reliably great company, and good fun.

Nick didn't just do, he also organised and enabled. He still tended to the Hackney Society's IT needs, writing custom software to harvest and organise information from the council planning website and manage responses to submissions. He also prepared and maintained software for all six of Hackney's Conservation Area Advisory Committees, two of which he attended – Stoke Newington and Clapton.

It was this which in 2010 had kickstarted his preoccupation with history and heritage, the environment, and legislation. But his engagement with local community groups had started when he joined the management committee of Growing Communities in Stoke Newington in 2007; he was to then become a long-standing member of Gay Pride's logistics committee and volunteered for many years for the Terrence Higgins Trust.

In the years that I knew him, I also discovered that he was a fine photographer and film maker, an impressive artist in stained glass, a cycling enthusiast, a transport geek (mostly trains), and I wouldn't be surprised if I now discover that he had a background in opera.

Described by his alma mater, Keble College Oxford, in one of its annual reports on college life, as 'an underrated genius', we can rest assured that the Hackney Society and all those who encountered Nick through it, rated his genius enormously and will miss him terribly. His generous spirit will live on through his influence.

He leaves behind family in Blackpool, and husband Andrew Grace with whom he enjoyed many adventures (that didn't necessarily involve planning).

**Lisa Shell**

## Gayne Wells

We also mourn the passing of Gayne Wells on 29 August at the age of 91. He had been active in conservation campaigns in Hackney before the turn of the century, notably Sutton House and Mapledene. He was also Chairman of the London Society for many years and later its Hon. Librarian.

## Holborn Studios – the struggle *continues*

The decision acknowledges that these are all hypothetical possibilities and it might be the case that the space would not be let for such purpose, in which case the cultural facility provided by HS would be eradicated and not replaced. Nevertheless, he concluded that "could" is sufficient to meet the requirements of policy.

With respect to the Inspector, his decision is unduly formalistic. The policies enshrined for the protection of cultural industries are something of an outlier in planning policy, requiring planning authorities to recognise that London's economy depends to a great extent on the vitality of creative businesses such as Holborn Studios. To accept that

the mere possibility of some equivalent use satisfies policy is to miss the point of the policy. It is right that this reasoning should be challenged in the courts and we will report further on the case in the future.

## Bollard saved By Rob Briggs

**In late June 2024, two cast iron “gunposts” or bollards were removed in the course of works to improve the pavements along Queensbridge Road and Laburnum Street north of Haggerston Park. From lockdown walks in 2020 I knew they were historic – the post on Queensbridge Road on the southern approach to the bridge across the canal bore the legend “St L.S. 1841” (i.e. the parish of St Leonard’s Shoreditch) – but had thought no more about them until I noticed they were gone.**

That was on a Friday afternoon. I duly fired off an email to various Hackney Borough Council planning email addresses as well as the Hackney Society, explaining my understanding of the situation and requesting urgent investigation. To their credit (and my considerable relief) I received an email from the Planning Enforcement Team Leader at Hackney just after midday the following Monday, promising to investigate. Things moved quickly from there, with the Streetscene service

(responsible for the works in question) finding the posts had been removed to a contractor’s yard.

I learned later that the post facing onto Queensbridge Road was in fact Grade II listed (entry number 1265131). The other one, at the east end of Laburnum Street, featured on Hackney’s Local List. I found the TfL approval for the pavement works but no evidence of Listed Building Consent for the removal of the nationally listed post, contrary to the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. Queensbridge Road had become a heritage crime scene!

When I returned to Queensbridge Road on 7th July, the post had been re-erected in its former location, even being put back the right way round. Unfortunately, the locally-listed old post at the east end of Laburnum Street was not able to be restored, and a new (non-matching) bollard now stands in its place.

My being in the right place at the right time resulted in the rescue of one of Hackney’s



Listed Bollard. Photo Rob Briggs

designated heritage assets, sparing it a fate suffered by several other listed posts in the borough in the years before 2009. It is to be hoped Streetscene and its contractors pay greater heed to such historic street furniture in the future.

\* Rob Briggs was elected a trustee of the Hackney Society at the recent AGM.

## Hackney development recognised

**An infill development in Hackney of 11 houses was shortlisted for the prestigious Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) Stirling Prize 2024.**

Chowdhury Walk in Daubeney Road was designed by Bethnal Green-based architects Al-Jawad Pike for the London Borough of Hackney. The red-brick terrace of houses uses land formerly occupied by garages and parking.

Architecture’s top prize was won by the Elizabeth Line, with Chowdhury Walk one of five other shortlisted projects that also included the King’s Cross masterplan.

The Hackney development has already been awarded a 2024 RIBA National Award and 2024 RIBA London Award.

RIBA said of Chowdhury Walk: “The architects have arranged the houses in a two-storey staggered terrace, set along a newly created public thoroughfare for pedestrians and cyclists, with private patio gardens to the rear. Each home is oriented so that its frontage acknowledges the main approach road, while the staggering ensures they do not directly overlook their neighbours. With a mix of two- and three-bedroom houses and one fully accessible

four-bedroom home, seven of the units are for social rent and four for private sale.

“Entrance porches are carved out of the plan with granite plinths and planters lining the building frontage. The elevations have a regular rhythm of openings, save for the ‘teacup’ feature window on the main street frontage, signalling this new and contemporary intervention. The overall material palette is constrained – red brick and granite. House numbers are elegantly set into bespoke precast panels.

“The newly created route is cobbled with differing patterns demarcating uses. In the main thoroughfare, the cobbles are orthogonally laid, while those adjacent to the boundary wall fall into an arrangement of concentric pools laced with intermittent pockets of planting. These serve as rain gardens and are set within projecting buttresses along the length of the boundary wall.

“The development has engaged with the issues of climate challenge in a positive way, clearly acknowledging all the requirements for both operational and embodied carbon. The homes are constructed in cross laminated timber, which is exposed internally in places. Windows are triple-glazed and



Chowdhury Walk. Photos Paul Bolding

the houses have photovoltaics on their mono-pitched roofs. The scheme was well developed before 2019 when the RIBA 2030 Climate Challenge was issued and utilises gas alongside on-site renewables for the energy strategy. As a result of a good fabric efficiency, residents have benefited from a significant improvement in actual versus predicted energy use.

“Overall, Chowdhury Walk is an elegant piece of architectural and urban design, providing new homes that are successfully



knit into their context – satisfying both resident and passer-by.”

**Paul Bolding**

## Noticeboard

### Hackney Design Awards

The winners of the 2024 design awards, held by Hackney Council every two years, are due to be announced in December.

The panel of six making the awards is chaired by architect Owen Watson.

Alongside standard categories, there is a Climate Change and Sustainability Award and Heritage and Restoration Award as well as a People's Choice Award.

The shortlist is:

#### **Abney Park Restoration Project (see Spaces 79)**

#### **52 Aden Grove**

#### **Black & White Building**

#### **Bradbury Works**

#### **Chowdhury Walk (See this issue)**

#### **Elemental House**

#### **House Made by Many Hands**

#### **Ivy Street Family Centre**

#### **Park House**

#### **The Portico (See Spaces 70)**

#### **St John at Hackney (See Spaces 67)**

#### **Tower Court**

### Hackney Society trustees elected

The society elected a new committee of trustees at its AGM on 18 September. They included four new members, Gordon Shrigley, Abigail Winslow, Robert Briggs and Janet Chapman. They join Julia Lafferty, Tina Skivington and Oliver Schick who is in the middle of a two-year term. Susan Doe and Bob Mitchell have stood down and were thanked for their contribution to the society. At the first trustees meeting in October, Janet Chapman was elected Chair.

### Solar panels application for Sutton House

The National Trust has applied to put solar panels on the roof of the Wenlock Barn, the Edwardian hall at the rear of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Grade II\* listed Sutton House in Homerton High Street. They will not be visible from the front but the trust acknowledges they will be able to be seen from Isabella Road at the side.

### Town Hall Square set for revamp



Town Hall Square. Photo Paul Bolding

Hackney Council has published proposals for a revamp of the square in front of the Town Hall in Mare Street. Final public consultation is underway with implementation due in 2025.

The proposals developed with consultants muf include:

- Central space with “play prompts” that can be used for events and gatherings.
- New shorter route from the bus stop to the council’s service centre with clear signage.
- Making more space outside the Empire and calming traffic on Wilton Way.
- Keeping the palm trees and adding new bio-diverse and climate friendly plants to the planters.
- More seating facing the Town Hall and new stone paving throughout.
- Options to improve visibility of the Library and Museum.
- Expanding the Square into the forecourt of the TLC (library and museum) and adding more planting.
- New planting and links to the library making more space for the Robert Levy memorial bench.

Details are here: <https://consultation.hackney.gov.uk/communications-engagement/hackney-town-hall-square/>

### Publications

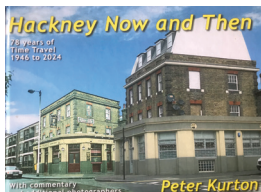
#### **Hackney Now and Then** by Peter Kurton

314 pages; copies are printed on demand.

Available from <https://www.hackneynowandthen.co.uk>

Queries to [sdp.repro@gmail.com](mailto:sdp.repro@gmail.com)  
£38 – reduced initially to £32

Peter Kurton was born in 1946 and lived for much of his adult life in Hackney, taking

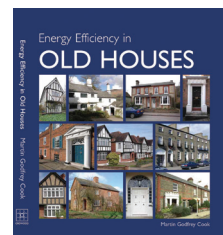


photographs from an early age, initially with a Kodak “Brownie”. He left Parmiter’s Grammar School in Bethnal Green with “handful of GCEs” to work in the printing industry. He has a strong interest in history, born, he says, out of his mixed English, Italian, Lithuanian and Polish heritage. The book charts nearly eight decades of change in Hackney through his own and others’ pictures. His accompanying text comments on the change he has seen. There are also features on particular aspects of life in the borough. Peter has designed the book himself and corrected the pictures to get the best reproduction available.

The book is 314 pages and includes what he says is probably the definitive collection of photos of Clarence Road before the demolitions of 1969-70 as well as photos from other estates.

### Energy tips

Further to our report in Spaces 83 of a Hackney Society meeting on the question of retrofitting old houses, member Colin D. Brooking, an architect, has created a flow chart for those looking to do this. Contact him on [c.brooking@architectural.org.uk](mailto:c.brooking@architectural.org.uk). Colin also recommends the book Energy Efficiency in Old Houses, in which author Martin Cook covers issues relating to houses in eras through to Inter-War 1918-39 and Post-War 1945-80.



**Spaces** is published by the Hackney Society. Views expressed in the articles are not necessarily those of the Society.

**Edited by:** Paul Bolding

**Layout by:** [design@gloryhall.com](mailto:design@gloryhall.com)

#### **The Hackney Society**

The Round Chapel, 1d Glenarm Road, London E5 0LY

T: 07815 053779

E: [hackneyhistoryfestival@gmail.com](mailto:hackneyhistoryfestival@gmail.com)

W: [www.hackneysociety.org](http://www.hackneysociety.org)

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/TheHackneySociety>

Twitter/X: @HackneySociety

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