

BROCKLEY SOCIETY



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Delivered free to 4000 households in Brockley Conservation Area
three times a year: March, June and November www.brockleysociety.org.uk

BROCKLEY SOCIETY

Midsummer Fayre 24 June 2023



The Lilybelle DanceFit class got everyone into the arena to dance
Fayre date: 22 June 2024

Historic Mews Walk

Three mews walks took place as part of this year's London Open House Festival on Saturday 16 September. It was a beautiful day and over 48 people joined the walks, and others came to the community garden.

The Mews Walks offer opportunities for local people to learn about the history of the area, the purpose of the mews and to appreciate their contribution to the Brockley Conservation Area's leafy character. They are also an opportunity to view the different characteristics of Ashby, Wickham and Breakspears Mews and some of the newer buildings that have been constructed.

The walks ended at Breakspears Community Garden, which has been established for over 10 years, with refreshments and an offer to pick some of their glut of tomatoes!

Green Lewisham



Candy Blackham (left), author of the beautiful book *Green Lewisham*, gave enticing extra bits of information about Lewisham's green spaces at Brockley Society's Open meeting in Francis Drake Club on 19 July. The pavilion's open doors let us enjoy the balmy evening



Conservation - Legacy and Innovation

All-day conference, Saturday 21 October 2023, Lewisham College.

50 years of Brockley Conservation Area

Housekeeping announcements **Alison Basa** (Brockley Society)

Councillor **Stephen Penfold** - Brockley Ward and Housing Select Committee Chair -- *opened the conference*

I am delighted and honoured to be asked to introduce this conference to celebrate 50 years of Brockley being designated as a conservation area. Until I became a councillor, I did not fully appreciate the importance of amenity societies and the range of functions they perform.

Local amenity societies are the eyes and ears of the local community. It is vital that they are accessible and responsive to all members of the community, as is the case with the Brockley Society. Amenity societies are essential to good local governance: their input on matters such as planning, both applications and policy, is absolutely invaluable. Their input is hugely valued both by councillors and council officers.

Amenity societies have a very proactive role: campaigning, education, work within the community, working with other like-minded community organisations and pushing for change and improvement in their area. I recall the Society's inspiring Festival of Ideas for Change a few years ago and a mass photo on Hilly Fields to replicate one taken in 1918. Projects like these bring the whole community together. Currently, I applaud and support the society's work to try and bring a much-needed community space to Brockley ward.

Unquestionably, the biggest issue facing us, locally, nationally, and internationally is climate change. Lewisham has declared a climate emergency and set a target of being carbon neutral by 2030 - hugely ambitious. At a local level, amenity societies have an important role in combating the climate emergency.

50% of carbon emissions in the borough come from residential housing. There is obviously a potential tension between taking steps to reduce residential carbon emissions and protecting the features of the historic housing stock within a conservation area. Amenity societies can play a crucial role in

assisting and working with local authorities to achieve the necessary reduction in carbon emissions from residential housing, whilst maintaining the ethos of a conservation area. Some of the talks today will look at that issue.



Historical displays including some of the nearly 300 photos taken by John Moreland in 1972-3 in the campaign to establish the conservation area



Brockley Society chairs, past and present: Gillian Heywood MBE, John Moreland (from 1973) and Clare Cowen (current)



See reports inside:

How We Got Here - p3

Achievements & Exemplar Projects - p4

Current Concerns - p5

Community Involvement - Ways Forward - pp6&7

View the conference presentations on www.brockleysociety.org.uk

Breakspears Mews Community Garden



A small but committed group of volunteers have maintained the garden over the last year. We had a successful bid for funds to replace old tools and buy seeds and compost from Lewisham Communities Fund. We had a successful growing season – the best crops being green beans, tomatoes, beetroot, courgettes and chard. We also had a magnificent row of huge sunflowers. Fundraising was mainly from plant sales at the Midsummer Fayre, hosting five artists for Brockley Open Studios and providing refreshments for the Open House Mews Walk.

We had a rather damp squib of an open Mic in June – we need more performers to do their stuff! We welcomed a group of children from Myatt Garden Nursery for an outdoor session and would love to have more children attend the garden. Re-organisation at Lewisham College meant that we didn't have any young adults attending sessions this year but hopefully we can welcome them again next year.

An exciting new project has begun to take shape. On 5 October we had a presentation by Liam Ashworth, Architect, and colleagues to discuss ideas for the development of the derelict workshop adjacent to the garden into a Community Space. Lewisham Council granted us NCIL funds to explore the feasibility of this. *Caia Goddard*

Architect Arthur Timothy, formerly of Brockley, has been featured in the RIBA architects' Journal — as a painter. He now focuses fully on art after the Royal Academy Summer Show accepted his vibrant paintings reflecting Ghana and Sierra Leone, where he grew up until aged 9. As architect he worked on Pynes building, Lewisham Way, and Hay's Galleria.

- See [instagram.com/arthurbtimothy](https://www.instagram.com/arthurbtimothy)

BROCKLEY SOCIETY

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 Instagram

Chair 020 8692 3829
chair@brockleysociety.org.uk
 Fayre fayre@brockleysociety.org.uk

Planners, architects and others with conservation knowledge or interest are welcome to join our planning and conservation group. See planning email above.

Breakspears Mews Community Garden.....
breakspearsmews@brockleysociety.org.uk

**Join our occasional email circulation
 about Brockley Society and local events:
 email chair@brockleysociety.org.uk**

*Everyone in the Brockley Conservation
 Area and its surrounds is an associate
 member of Brockley Society.*

Newsletter copy deadlines:
 1 February, 1 May, 1 October
Email to news@brockleysociety.org.uk
Advertising rates - back page

Brockley Social Club

The club at 240 Brockley Road was a regular venue for the Brockley Society's AGMs, open meetings, talks and midwinter warmer events until 2020, when it closed for redevelopment as flats and a new social club. It provided a meeting place for its members for over 100 years and was available to local groups for events and activities, including weddings and other celebrations.

The site was sold in May 2021 for over £500,000 and a planning application was granted in November 2021. The Brockley Society was supportive. This application was not enacted and in May 2023 the developers submitted a new application changing the new social club to commercial/community use. The community use was proposed to be managed by ARC Club, a co-working operator, with individual membership at £180-220 a month.

Brockley Society's planning group were given a presentation about this new application by the developers and were dismayed at the loss of a community venue open to all. Representation by members of the Society at the recent Brockley Assembly resulted in a referral to Mayor and Cabinet.

BROCKLEY SOCIAL CLUB

IS 100 YEARS OLD!

Open Day - Entrance FREE
 Saturday 28 September, 12 noon till late
 240 Brockley Road, SE4 2BU

12.00pm - 1.00pm - music supplied by William House (Lewisham East District)
 Open till later - Entertainment, including a DJ with a wide variety of music

Open and enjoy the after-noon and try the Community 12 month 100p Membership 100p

Club activities include the entertainment lounge and show on Friday nights, 8.15pm - 11.00pm - music supplied by William House (Lewisham East District) has changed in the last century and now includes a DJ with a wide variety of music for birthday parties, wedding receptions, etc.

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The Brockley Social Club had been established in 1913 and was affiliated with the CIU (Clubs and Institutes Union), in common with clubs such as the Miners' Welfare Clubs and the

British Legion. The Union, originally called Working Men's Clubs and Institutes, is an umbrella organisation set up in the mid-19th century as an alternative to the pub for the purposes of education, entertainment and discourse. For a small monthly subscription, workers could access these local clubs and some of them became well-known through factual and fictional programmes on TV.

Nearby the United Services Club was redeveloped as a dwellinghouse not flats, after operating since the 1920s.

Planning application references: DC/19/114244 (November 2021) and DC/23/132303 (July 2023).

Lewisham Way Youth and Community Centre Reunion Family Day

To celebrate the Centre's role in supporting the community, the first reunion family day was held in Luxmore Gardens on 29 July. For 40 years until 2016 the Centre provided a safe place for black young people to come together.

Nearly 100 people, including many children, enjoyed the day. Some were past users but the event was open to everybody. There was a sense of recapturing the past community created by the Centre. Speakers and performers included the final administrator, Maureen Allen.

There was a strongly expressed wish for another reunion to be organised next year, to recreate the community that existed around the Centre. Plans were discussed about how to publicise the event to the thousands of past users, and to find a way to contact former youth leader Harry Powell.

Next Reunion Family Day: Saturday 27

July 2024, Luxmore Gardens
 • Photographic artist John Goto died in August 2023. His obituaries mentioned that he taught photography classes at the Centre in 1977 and took portrait photographs in the rear dance hall of the young people. In 2013 they were they published as a book called *Lovers' Rock*.



Left: King Sam explains the proposals

New life for children's phone box library



Before

Breakspears Road has been worked on with assistance from Lewisham College and will soon house a defibrillator. The box at the end of Tyrwhitt Road has flourished since it was set up in 2012 as a community library. It seems to have a life of its own. It is managed by specified and mysterious volunteers, who tidy and maintain it. We have had letters

The children's telephone box library at the corner of Wickham Road and Lewisham Way was a bit forlorn but has been taken in hand by some enthusiastic volunteers.

Brockley Society owns four Grade II listed telephone boxes, three along Lewisham Way. The box at the end of Tyrwhitt Road has flourished since it was set up in 2012 as a community library. It seems to have a life of its own. It is managed by specified and mysterious volunteers, who tidy and maintain it. We have had letters

and messages from people expressing their gratitude and enjoyment of it. We are very grateful to the volunteers who put effort into tidying it, as well as to people who bring books.

The boxes are rather dilapidated on the outside. Brockley Society looks to do some repairs and refurbishment in the new year. We also own a box in St Margaret's Road, which awaits guardians and some ideas to bring it into community use.

If you wish to join a forum for the phone boxes, please email chair@brockleysociety.org.uk.



Now, after some tender loving care



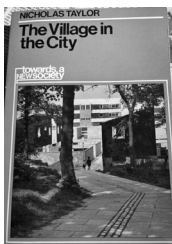
Conservation - Legacy and Innovation

How We Got Here

Session Chair: **Lorna Jackson**
 (Brockley Society Committee)
Welcome and opening remarks
Clare Cowen - Chair of Brockley Society

The conference began with a **specially commissioned film interview with Nicholas Taylor** - author, former councillor and Brockley resident:

The campaign for the conservation movement nationally and its implementation in Lewisham.



Nicholas Taylor's 1973 book *The Village in the City* played an important role nationally in the discussions which underlay the campaign for conservation: *rehabilitation not demolition*.

His role as a councillor was also vital in setting up Lewisham's conservation areas, specifically in Brockley.

View this fascinating film on brockleysociety.org.uk and discover the devastation that was planned for a four-lane motorway through much of today's conservation area.

John Moreland, the first chair of Brockley Society: *The campaign to establish a conservation area in Brockley.*

In 1972-3 John photographed nearly 300 Victorian houses in the campaign to designate Brockley Conservation Area. A

fascinating selection of them was on display in the hall.

'Thank you so much for inviting me to join the 50 year celebration of the Brockley Society. Little did I imagine 50 years ago when we created dear ol' BrocSoc

that I would be standing here in front of you all these years later — and that the Brockley Midsummer Fayre has been celebrated EVERY year since.

In the last century, in 1973, some friends in Wickham Road and Manor Avenue, were very concerned that the Victorian area of Brockley was under serious threat from developers who wished to demolish the larger buildings and replace them with inferior 'anywhere developments'.

We circulated the whole area with a door-to-door leaflet suggesting the formation of the Brockley Society in order to protect the central residential area. Following a public meeting in St Peter's Church Hall, this was duly done. Working with the local authority we were able to create the Brockley Conservation Area.

The area was a socially vibrant and exciting place to live, but with unsettling racist undercurrents; it was the time of the National Front marching in the area and the very tragic New Cross fire where many young people died.

To bring the community together, the Brockley Society, working with other community groups in the area, decided to hold the **Brockley Jubilee fayre**. This was a great success, and I'm delighted to see that the fayre has continued for all these years.



Congratulations on organising such a stimulating and professional conference, especially the presentations from the other groups. It is so heartening to see such excellent and positive work being done, in contrast to the bad old days of the 1960s and 1970s. We really did stop the demolition juggernaut in its tracks!

Gillian Heywood MBE, President of Brockley Society
Protecting the Brockley Conservation Area once designated

The Brockley Society was inaugurated at an open meeting in 1973. We decided

1. All residents of the Conservation Area were to automatically be members.
2. There would be no membership fee.
3. We would run a Fayre on Hilly Fields, as 'nothing happens in Brockley'.
4. We would print a monthly newsletter to distribute free to all households.

We collected waste newspaper, which funded us for quite a while until the bottom fell out of the market.

We were to have an official dialogue with the Planning and Highways departments of Lewisham Council over the environment in general and to comment on all planning applications in the area. In time, the planners realised that we had the local knowledge and they came to us for information. If a Conservation Group objected to a proposal



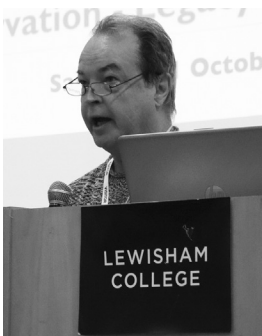
Achievements and Exemplar Projects: (l to r) Neill & Hannah Campbell, Harriet Saddington, Rhys Cannon, Robert Barker. Chair: Julia Rowntree, Brookmill Road Conservation Area Society



Jens Cole, David John, Robert Prewett and Anna-Maria Cahalane spoke in the section on Current Concerns



Lorna Jackson, chair of the first session, How We Got Here.



Cllr Stephen Penfold opens the conference



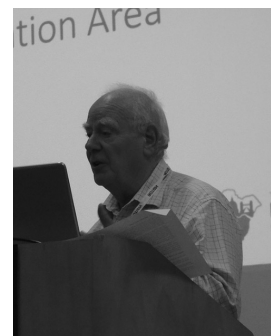
Malcolm Bacchus, Chair of Telegraph Hill Society



Cllr Chris Best, Lewisham Council's Heritage Champion



Annabel McLaren, outgoing Chair of Sydenham Society



Paul Thornton of London Forum

due to be passed, it went automatically to a Planning Committee. Occasionally the Councillors saw things from our point of view, and the application was refused.

Chris Johnson chair of Brockley Society planning group has been through 50 years of back newsletters and noted successes: a list of 50 items! I will pick out the most important ones.

Mews housing

A constant threat to the conservation area has been to build houses in back gardens where we have mews, the narrow lanes behind the houses in Breakspears Road, Wickham Road and Manor Avenue. These were originally for horses, carriages, coach houses and servants, who were not allowed to come through the front door. These lanes were considered ripe for development.

In 1972 Lewisham Council produced a plan for a row of council housing and a council tenants' hall down the mews between Wickham Avenue and Manor Avenue, taking half the length of the gardens in Wickham Road and two thirds of the back gardens of Manor Avenue. We were furious partly because we were now aware of things like density.

The proposal was finally scrapped because Lewisham did not have enough money. But it opened the gates for other developers who started applying to build in the back gardens.

There were big constraints: there are no water, sewage, electricity or gas services. These would have had to be run through the side of the main house.

We were very much against a proposal at the rear of 102 Manor Avenue for a little house completely alien to the area's character. But it was passed and built.

We have been resisting development in the mews ever since, including because of density criteria.

Brockley Society objected to an application for a house facing the mews at the rear of 119 Upper Brockley Road. At a meeting in Myatt Garden school we pointed out that the density rules would only allow two rooms. I asked the very noisy meeting who wanted to refuse the application. All hands went up. It was refused by the planning committee and went to appeal but was dismissed, so we won!

We persuaded Lewisham Council that we needed a **Mews Design Guide**, published in 1987. We naively thought this would send the developers away, but they just saw it as a series of hoops to jump through.

In 1989, we learned that the **Channel Tunnel Rail Link** was due to run under Lewisham and come out into the open at Brockley Cross, meaning wholesale demolition around Geoffrey Road and further west, and a



BATTL Alternative Wins Major Support

Alternative proposals, for a Chunnel Link into Stratford, first put forward in February this year by BATT and HALT, have won backing from major bankers, Manufacturer's Hanover and construction giant Bechtel. Along with other action groups down the line, BATT and HALT have been proposing a link running into

threat to St. Peter's Church which sits on the Deptford Fault, a geological anomaly. We immediately started a campaign called **BATTL** — Brockley Against The Tunnel Link. Joining with other south London groups we had a rally and a march through London to the Houses of Parliament.

Rather than Waterloo, we proposed the

route should end at St. Pancras, going through the derelict marshall yards at Stratford. Eventually the powers that be realised we were right and the route now goes north of the river, to St. Pancras!!

In 1996 to commemorate the centenary of the opening of **Hilly Fields Park** in 1896 we worked with Glendale to get the original cricket pitch reinstated, improvements to the playground and establishing a café. **Friends of Hilly Fields** still work to improve the park.

We worked with **Brockley Cross Action Group** to improve Coulgate Street and get a new footbridge over the railway at Brockley station. The Police were instrumental in closing the Breakspears Arms because it was ideal for drug running, being near the station. We worked with them to get a new responsible management and rename it the **Brockley Barge**.

More recently, with further work from Lewisham and us, the **Brockley Conservation Area Supplementary Design Guide** was published in 2006.

Other problems arose in the mews: illegal traders, car paint spraying, unneighbourly uses and flytipping. Gallows gates were installed to stop illegal dumping. After a long campaign **Breakspears Mews Community Garden** was formed.

We have run historical walks for many years in the mews and elsewhere in Brockley.

Stone Circle

In 1999, Polly Ionides proposed to a Brockley Society meeting to erect a Stone Circle on Hilly Fields for the Millennium: a sundial, large boulders and two uprights, known as St. Norbert's Gate, which would frame the sunrise on summer solstice day. Two members of the Brockley Society went to Scotland to choose the stones. It is now well used by picnickers and all the community.

There is a lot more to the story than this, but I'm running out of time.

Achievements & Exemplar Projects

Session Chair: Julia Rowntree (Brookmill Road Conservation Area Society)

Robert Barker - Stolon Studio

The Rusty House, 18 Ashby Road, SE4 1PX
Various applications for this site had been refused on grounds of impact on the conservation area. Consent was (finally)



granted for a one-storey emulation of garages. But our clients wanted something more exciting.

Design proceeded through sketching and modelling: concept, context and feedback. Brockley Society supported the design for this unique site.

Next came navigating planning – research / policy, design. The metal cladding... Paneltech Systems ... and the perforations.

Harriet Saddington - Harriet Saddington Ltd

69c Tressillian Road Extension, SE4 1YA
Harriet spoke about the challenges of extending a ground floor flat in a building that had been divided into multiple flats. She



aimed to retain the elegance of the Victorian original, without impinging on the other flats, and to produce something elegant to meet the requirements of a growing family. 69C Tressillian Road was used in adverts featured in the Architects' Journal.

Hannah Campbell - Hannah Campbell Design, and Neil Campbell, BPTW

1830s Coach House Restoration
Hannah and Neill Campbell showed how a small Victorian coach house could be



converted into a comfortable and sustainable family house fit for the 20th century without compromising the beauty of the original finishes and reusing existing materials as much as possible.

PHOTOGRAPH CREDITS: RACHAEL A SMITH WORLD OF INTERIORS. JOCELYN LOW. HANNAH CAMPBELL.

Rhys Cannon - Gruff Architects -

8a Tyrwhitt Road, SE4 1Q
This difficult site behind Tyrwhitt Road villas had been a builders' yard, adjacent to the steep railway embankment. The design posed challenges. A rotating car port caught the conference's imagination.



Current Concerns

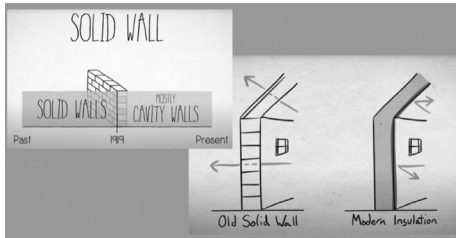
Session Chair: **Jane Hearn** (Prefab Museum)

Jens Cole - DC Design / Brockley Society's planning group
Energy Efficiency and Heritage Conservation: an Achievable Balance

Jens described measures that should be taken to mitigate the effects of climate change.

Office for National Statistics: Mapping the efficiency of homes as rated by the Energy Performance Certificate (EPC)

- Just over one in three homes (35%) in this part of Lewisham have an EPC rating of C or above - considerably less than the average across London (49%).
- Across Lewisham, 28% of homes were constructed before 1900, and 8% were constructed in 2012 or later.
- Homes built after 2012 are more likely to have a high energy efficiency.
- Homes built before 1900 are the least likely to have a high efficiency rating.



The loss of heat from old solid walls (pre-1919) and modern cavity walls:

The four main moisture-generating activities in homes are breathing, cooking, showering and drying clothes. High levels of heating will absorb high moisture levels – but eventually it will precipitate out onto colder surfaces and promote mould growth.

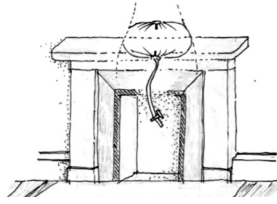
A Hygroscopic fabric can absorb and release moisture, whether it is a brick wall or an insulated solid wall.

The Sustainable Traditional Buildings Alliance (STBA) aims to deliver a sustainable traditional built environment in the UK.

STBA has a **Whole Building Approach** for traditional buildings in the UK. Factors to be considered for each building are: Fabric, Services, Occupants and Context.

- **Knowledge:** understand the building, its context and impact.
- **Eliminate:** unnecessary energy and resource wastage
- **Mitigate:** the impact of unavoidable energy and resource use

- **Improve:** performance of existing building fabric and services
- **Active:** introduce appropriate, zero carbon energy technologies such as photovoltaics, solar hot water panels, district heating/cooling network, heat pumps, biomass.



Quick wins:
Chimney balloon and sah window draft proofing combined with lined curtains

Robert Prewett - Prewett Bizley
Retrofit / Passivhaus Case Studies

What we do:

1. Assessment
2. Whole house
3. Planning
4. Windows
5. Roofs
6. Walls
7. Floors
8. Putting it together
9. Fabric and services
9. 'One-offs' to archetypes

Window options: New units (double glazed), Secondary glazing (double glazed too, sash or casement), New sashes in old boxes (double glazed)

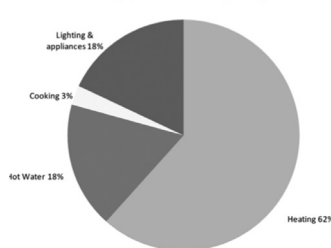
Roofs can be insulated 1. within the loft (maintaining insulation through eaves and ridge), or 2. within existing rafters with ventilation over rafters (stripping roof tiles), or 3. insulation over rafters with ventilation to side (stripping roof covering)

Walls - internal or external insulation

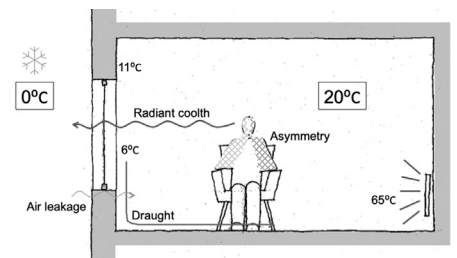
Floor insulation - suspended floors and over concrete floors

Air source heat pumps - advantages and disadvantages of where they are located.

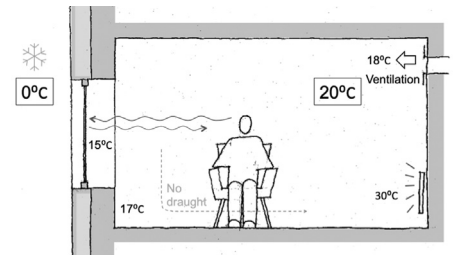
Housing Overall Energy Use
 (expressed as % of oil equivalent)



Reminder of the challenge: Housing overall energy use, with heating at 62%



Windows - why they are important



Better windows - Higher comfort less energy

David John - Historic England / SPAB -
Heritage at risk and the future - a personal view

David John, a Conservation Accredited Architect, has worked mainly on churches in London and the South East. After a short spell in York he returned to London to work as Islington Council's 'Buildings at Risk' Officer and then for Thomas Ford, mainly on churches. He is now employed as an architect with Historic England but is also employed by the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings half a day a week.

In his presentation he displayed pictures of buildings that deserved preservation for their ancient beauty.



Concrete House, Lordship Lane, Dulwich

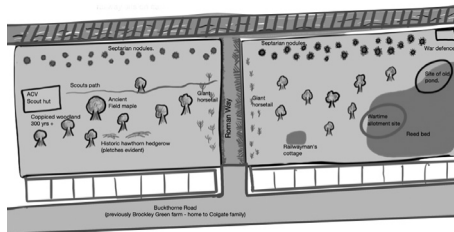
Dinosaur, Crystal Palace Park



Anna-Maria Cahalane - Co-founder, Fourth Reserve Foundation
Brockley Green and Gorne Wood - how history played a part in protection from development

In the 1980s the Railway authorities sold parcels of land along the Forest Hill to New Cross railway corridor for housing development. The London Wildlife Trust, Lewisham Council and residents tried to safeguard the rail corridor and negotiated the creation of three nature reserves. A fourth nature reserve in Crofton Park was rejected and land behind Buckthorne Road and to the rear of the Rivoli Ballroom was sold for development. Two planning applications for Buckthorne Road failed in 1990 and 1999. The first proposed a road, a carpark and several houses. The second proposed blocks of flats. In 2004 the current land owner bought the land at auction, hoping to succeed where others had failed.

Between 2004 and 2016 the land was



Buckthorne Cutting - historic landscape. Croydon Canal and Railway: the only stretch where the railway sits on the canal course line

degraded in a variety of ways and several Sweet Chestnut trees were cut down and the stumps burnt. By 2016 it looked like a derelict dump. It was, and still is, an eye-sore.

How then in 2022 did this dump end up on BBC news, Radio 4 and in the national press? How did a small local charity raise over £100,000 from community donations in just 12 months? This is how..

1. **Nature:** Producing evidence of biodiversity and geological significance to increase protections.
2. **Community:** Building community support and establishing the site as an asset for the community.
3. **Heritage:** Piecing together the story, the characters, the heroes and the villains. Increasing an appreciation of what happened in the past and igniting a desire to be part of its future.

We used maps, census records, newspaper archives, social stories, societies, local historians and "reading the land".

We found a rich story that people want to see continued. We sought evidence that supports the need for legal protections.

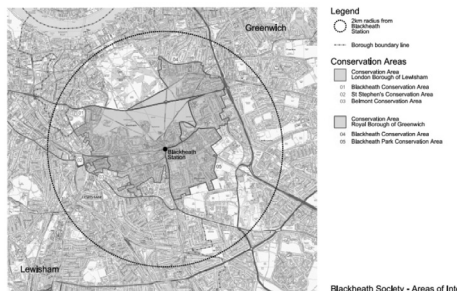
Anna-Maria showed interesting finds such as an ancient marble, milk bottle, plants, fungi, pictures of archaeological diggings into the Roman road through the crossing, sketch maps, pictures from past decades of scouts using the land and their scout hut.

Community Involvement - Ways Forward

Session Chair: Rhymer Rigby (Brockley Society Planning Group)

Nick Patton - Blackheath Society, Trustee/ Management Committee
The challenge of large developments beyond the CA boundaries

Blackheath Society was founded in 1937. We have 957 member households, open to anyone with an interest in Blackheath for £20 p.a. Blackheath straddles Lewisham and Greenwich and the Society focuses on five conservation areas.



The Blackheath Society - area of interest

Planning is a big part of our daily work, but we also work on transport issues and increasingly on environmental issues, from litter to trees, and the conservation of the Heath and its ecology.

This map illustrates the problem with Lewisham Council's original proposal that an amenity society could only represent one conservation area. Our area of interest extends particularly into Lewisham town centre where there has been a huge amount of dense, high-rise development in recent years, with a significant impact on infrastructure, services and views.

Our main planning work is on small residential building projects and trees, for which there is so little protection, despite the climate emergency!

Big developments are complex, lengthy, and take up a huge amount of time. We are not against them, but they should be proportionate and sensitive to existing host areas and established neighbouring communities, including adjacent conservation areas.

Until recently, there was no useful quantitative policy on what constituted a tall building. New, area-specific height limits are in Lewisham's Draft Local Plan but they carry no weight until finalised – no comfort at Leigate where a 15-storey tower was recently approved despite a draft policy limiting height to 12 storeys!

Amid many issues, large developments pose a challenge in its widest sense in a London that is ever-changing, where many people



View down Belmont Hill into Lewisham town centre across Belmont Conservation Area

do not engage in their local area, often work outside it, frequently move on quite quickly, and don't have a strong sense of belonging. Public awareness is only part of the problem. Professional planners have very clear legal parameters to work within when dealing with developers and assessing schemes before making recommendations to councillors. There is a presumption in favour of development, and a strong desire for more homes, especially affordable ones, by councils with housing targets and long waiting lists.

Unfortunately, **planning departments** are under-resourced, overstretched and suffer from high turnover of staff who sometimes have little local knowledge. All the more reason for them to work collaboratively with volunteer groups who have local knowledge and who passionately want to conserve and improve their local areas for the long-term benefit of all.

Equally, **local councillors** have many and conflicting pressures: to party and council policies, to constituents, and to the local economy and environment. But they are uniquely placed to make up for any deficit in local knowledge and community engagement, which can tip the scales heavily in favour of well-resourced developers and under-resourced officers, who may not have the knowledge or freedom to work outside the narrow confines of financial and/or legal silos. Councillors can and should take a strategic long-term view and bring parties together.

Individuals and ad hoc groups have little power and influence – especially since recently the Lewisham threshold for taking a planning application to committee has risen from 3 to 10 individuals. Most individuals and small groups simply don't have time or resources.

So we come to **amenity societies**. These tend to be well-established and have continuity and corporate knowledge. These should be key players in fostering community involvement, and should be valued by local councillors and officers who are working under severe constraints themselves.

For all the warm words about valuing amenity societies, the direction of travel in deeds is all one way – towards marginalisation. All too often, amenity societies are treated with little respect, as a nimby nuisance getting in the way, rather than as well-informed and engaged partners working to improve schemes and protect the communities they love. By all means disagree with us, but do listen and acknowledge we can sometimes be right!

My conclusions?

Some really basic things can be done, including getting out of offices, talking to local individuals, both to listen and learn and to educate and involve in a non-defensive way. Councils work increasingly behind closed doors and electronic walls, and communicate either in legalese or PR language. They need to be seen to be more on the side of individuals and communities and less on the side of bureaucracy, lawyers, accountants, and developers. Papers in the public domain need to be shorter, clearer, accessible via many channels. Consultation needs to be earlier and genuine.

A major change of culture is needed, to be more outward-facing, open, responsive, and sympathetic towards the communities councils serve.



Malcolm Bacchus - Chair, Telegraph Hill Society - *The changing face of community involvement: a reflection*

A plethora of government, London and Lewisham policies govern what can be done in conservation areas. The National Planning Policy Framework, The London Plan, Lewisham's Core Strategy Development plan document, Development Management Local Plan, Alterations and Extensions Supplementary planning document, and the Small Sites Design Guide. Keeping track of them is a challenge. Telegraph Hill Society submitted a detailed 59-page response to the Draft Lewisham Plan.

Unlike Brockley Conservation Area, whose houses were speculatively built and therefore contain a variety of styles, in Telegraph Hill all the houses were built by the Haberdashers' Livery Company with the same style. Thus the details of front doors and windows are very important to be maintained in the conservation area. Telegraph Hill's beautiful houses would be compromised by proposed multi-story tower developments in New Cross.



The Council's SPD on alterations ... para 5.5.4 states:

'If conspicuously located, rooflights can be visually intrusive, alien elements which harm the distinctive character of the host building and diminish its contribution to the special qualities of the conservation area. Rooflights should be few in number and generally restricted to the rear or least visible roofslopes.'

Annabel McLaren - Outgoing Chair of Sydenham Society - *Sydenham town centre - 10 years since the Portas Pilot*



SEE3 covers high streets in Sydenham, Forest Hill and Kirkdale.

- SEE3 Portas Pilot set up in July 2012
- £ 2 0 0 , 0 0 0 regeneration for Sydenham, Forest Hill and Kirkdale
- To create high streets which are both friendly and functional



- To revive empty shops
- Annabel showed slides of the various changes made to shops in these three areas, including community hubs called Jack and Jill, pop-up shops, as well as community events or ‘happenings’, such as bands on the high street, a fashion week, an Easter bunny parade, Halloween trail, a tea party in honour of the Queen’s Platinum Jubilee, and an intergenerational coronation tea party for our diverse community with the police cadets waiting on our guests.

All three high streets now seem far livelier and supported locally.

Paul Thornton - Vice Chair, London Forum of Amenity and Civic Societies
A London-wide perspective



The London Forum represents the views and interests of over 100 amenity and civic societies in London. The Forum’s main focus is on Planning, Development Management, Heritage, Transport, Environment, Waterways and Open Spaces. Paul divided his talk into four sections:

- National Influences
- London-wide Factors
- Local Issues, and
- Threats and Opportunities.

The Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill

(LURB) was in its final stages, dating back to 2020. (received Royal Assent on 26 October 2023) The Planning White Paper was back in Commons after 154 pages of amendments in Lords and could become law within weeks, mostly conferring powers on the Secretary of State to make Regulations. Controversial provisions included the National Development Management Policies; the Infrastructure Levy and Street Votes.

Recent consultations included:

Infrastructure Levy – no one seems to have a good word for it, better to improve S106 and CIL

Permitted Development

- Pretty much carte blanche to convert existing buildings to residential accommodation
- Only World Heritage Sites are exempt by way of land designation; Conservation Areas etc should have ‘the opportunity to benefit from the boost that new development can bring’
- Dropping Prior Approval for conversion of ground floor premises to residential in Conservation Areas?

Speeding up Plan-Making

- Aim to reduce time for a full Local Plan review from 7 years to 30 months
- Recognises that Local Planning Authority (LPA) resourcing is a major impediment
- Places much hope on digitisation and design codes
- Little scope for LPA-specific policies (“saved” Supplementary Planning Documents to be phased out)
- Much mention of communities but unclear how/when our views will be accommodated
- Little, if any mention of London

Labour Party Policies which will have an impact on Conservation Areas

- A commitment to build 1.5 million

- homes in 5 years
 - Blitz of Planning Reform???
 - Next generation of New Towns
 - Devolution to Mayors
 - Planning Passport for Urban Brownfield sites
 - First dibs for first time buyers
- And also:
- Keir Starmer is a YIMBY (Yes In My Back garden)
 - Land acquisition at near ‘current use’ value
 - Whither the ‘Take Back Control Act’ of January 2023? (to transfer powers from Westminster to communities)

London-wide factors

- Approaching 1100 Conservation Areas across London, 50%+ of land area in inner London boroughs
- Still being created, – Walworth Road CA designated in 2016
- London Plan Guidance only now being rolled out, over two years after adoption – Optimising Site Capacity and Small Sites Design Codes
- Few policy changes re heritage protection, policies ‘saved’ from previous versions, but will they survive LURB planning reforms?
- Government (and Opposition?) determination to accelerate house-building in cities, and in London in particular
- City of Westminster has adopted guidance requiring developers to consult local communities before seeking pre-app advice; little sign of other councils following suit

Lewisham-specific Factors Local Plan

- Regulation 19 consultation closed April 2023
- Submissions available on Council website
- Timetable for examination and adoption?

Revised Constitution

- special status for some ‘Amenity Groups’ in Conservation Areas
- Can ask for ‘Chairs Review’ as to whether planning applications go to Planning Committee
- What about applications not in Conservation Areas?

Threats and Opportunities

- Up-to-date Local Plans essential, can civic societies help with resourcing?
- Conservation Area Management Plans as Design Codes? Civic Societies to lead reviews?
- Planning Digitisation
- numerous pilots under way
- will take time for winners to emerge
- greater reach but could by-pass long established community groups
- Press for pre Pre-App consultation, as per City of Westminster (Secretary of State has power to require this but only used for onshore wind farms)
- Neighbourhood Priorities Statements – an alternative to Neighbourhood Plans
- Examples of well-intentioned early community consultation (e.g. Kew Retail Park) but clarity needed about that which is non-negotiable
- But ... fewer Permitted Development exemptions for Conservation Areas?

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