

MOUNT PLEASANT NEIGHBOURHOOD FORUM

NEWSLETTER

Due to the coronavirus pandemic we have been unable to have public meetings (which would have been held at the end of March and the end of June). The Executive have discussed issues electronically and we have responded, at distance, to groups and individuals. So, some work has continued, though progress has been slow, due to the delays caused by the lockdown. To keep everyone up to date we're sending all of you this summary of where we stand.

1. ABOUT US – A REMINDER

We cover the area from Clerkenwell Road to Frederick Street, from Gray's Inn Road to Granville Square, Margery Street and Farringdon Tube Station. Our defined area of interest includes parts of both Camden (East Bloomsbury) and Islington (Mount Pleasant). A map of our area is shown on our website (www.mountpleasantforum.org.uk).

We have representatives from t/r associations (New Calthorpe Estate, Granville Square, Margery Street, Calthorpe Street, Laystall Court, Mullin Tower) and from local organisations (Calthorpe Community Garden) as well as individual residents who have signed up as members. Our subscribed membership is listed at 183 (and rising); many of those members also report back to their own local groups, so we have a potentially larger audience.

1.2 We have a committee and hold public elections annually in March. We could not do that this year, due to lockdown, so the elected Executive for 2019 is continuing in office whilst we decide how to handle a democratic election in these difficult times.

1.3 We are set up to write a Neighbourhood Plan and to represent the views of residents within our Neighbourhood, particularly in planning matters.

2. ACTIONS TAKEN

2.1 Former Eastman Dental Hospital (Gray's Inn Road). This site is to become a mainly new-build site for a Dementia Research unit, including some in-patient facilities, and a site for teaching facilities for UCL. There were comprehensive local objections to the inclusion of the teaching facility, to the size and height of the new structures and their impingement on local

neighbours, including the Calthorpe Community Garden and the residents of New Calthorpe Estate (NCE).

Although the project was given planning permission for other reasons (importance of the new dementia unit, prestige of UCL etc) we were pleased that Camden did incorporate some of the local objections into the Section 106 agreement (where the developer, UCL, pays compensation or provides some compensatory help, such as landscaping). As usual, we felt, this was some recognition of local concerns, but not enough. Our overall view was that the planning system just did not take local concerns seriously enough, and that the Forum should do more about this (see below).

The Forum, Calthorpe Community Garden and NCE have all placed representatives on the community liaison group which meets with the developers and the builders to discuss progress on the building work (Construction Management Plan). So far, this group has done very little effective work and of course is not meeting at present due to lockdown. We will keep you informed.

The building work on site is delayed by some 2-3 months due to the pandemic. Workers stripping out the existing structures (shelves, doors etc), were pulled off work and will probably re-commence stripping out early in August. **Demolition** proper is to start after that, once asbestos testing has been completed, but at present dates are not confirmed.

You should be aware that **the agreed site traffic plan is that lorries and equipment will be entering through the Calthorpe Community Garden football-pitch access gates and will be leaving via Langdon Close and Wren Street** – which may cause problems for pedestrians and residents. The pavement immediately in front of the Eastman will be closed off, so you'll have to walk on the western side of Gray's Inn Road. You will need to be aware that repairs are underway at Jubilee Court (sheltered housing units) immediately opposite the Eastman site, and their scaffolding may impede pedestrians using the western side of the road. Bad liaison between Camden Council and the developers despite concerns voiced by the Forum. The Calthorpe Community Garden will still have pavement access and the football pitch can still be reached via the gardens and the existing but narrower access drive. This is not an ideal situation, but probably the only practical one.

You will note that **the Calthorpe Community Garden** has sacrificed some of its access to the football pitch for the new site-traffic route but in exchange have received a properly surfaced driveway to the pitch; they have similarly lost their portacabin, but gained a new meeting cabin in their main grounds. These are like-for-like replacements which cost CCG nothing, and the developers will also be paying them compensation of £300k for disturbance and for the developer's temporary use of CCG land for site-traffic. In due time CCG will also receive a payment of around £700k through Section 106 agreement, which in this case is money allocated for CCG's specified needs for building improvements. This means that in time CCG will receive total payments of around £1 million, which is earmarked for their much-needed rebuilding programme. They will still need to fundraise, towards their rebuilding, since these awards do not meet all their requirements. CCG, including this Forum's representative, (*who held a watching brief*), spent many long hours bargaining to

get the best possible deal. This was difficult work. **Well done CCG team for successfully negotiating all this. A local VICTORY!**

CCG are still working during the pandemic. Now all the safe access rules are changing, you should contact CCG at www.calthorpecommunitygarden.org.uk , tel 0207 837 8019 about their opening hours and safety rules during this semi-lockdown period.

The **NCE residents** have not been so fortunate in their Section 106 settlement (which really amounted to little more than sympathetic planting and landscaping) and are still fighting to get triple glazing to offset noise pollution and “promised” further education places. Not good enough. **Julie Riley for NCE, and the Forum Executive are continuing work on this.**

2.2. Ear Nose and Throat Hospital redevelopment, Gray’s Inn Road. We all missed a public exhibition at the Calthorpe Community Garden, and then the lockdown inhibited further action. As far as we can see this very large site (Gray’s Inn Road eastwards to Kings Cross Road) is to be made over into a (?) hotel complex. We’ll get more details and let you know. This is on-going, and although technically just outside our designated area of interest, will affect some of our neighbourhood residents and businesses, so we will be involved.

2.3 Panther House redevelopment, Gray’s Inn Road/Mount Pleasant. This new application was passed by Camden with Sec 106 notices incorporating some local views. The application was less striking than the former plan, which had been passed after considerable consultation and many objections. The former plan was never built up, and the site was sold-on to new applicants. Public consultation on the new application took place (rather half-heartedly). The Forum made Camden aware of local views re noise and light pollution, some provision for workshops, maintenance of historic features, and appearance of Gray’s Inn Road frontage. Some of these views appear to be reflected in the Section 106 settlement. We all need to watch for correct application of building codes, site traffic etc when/if a building date is announced – particularly since the location is adjacent to the major Mount Pleasant site, where construction is still ongoing. No date to begin building work has yet been set for this site.

2.4 Former Children’s Society Building, Margery Street. (This is in Islington). The existing building, although run-down, is well designed and in harmony with its surroundings. A proposal has been made for a larger, more obtrusive office block which has been objected to by the Amwell Society, Margery Street t/r assoc and the Forum, all of whom favour retention and restoration of existing building. **As a result of these local objections the planning application was refused. A VICTORY for local people! ...and many thanks to all those local representatives, particularly Gail Sulkes and Francois Smit, who did such sterling work.** However, it is expected that the developers will lodge an appeal. **This is still, potentially, work in progress.**

2.5 Mount Pleasant redevelopment (Farringdon Road/Calthorpe Street site) “minor” application for changes due to post-Grenfell rules on insulation (Islington part of this development).

This is a nightmare. Under the guise of needing different building specs (post-Grenfell rulings on insulation) the developers (Taylor Wimpey) and their new designers have also included dubious changes – increased height of blocks (and, possibly, plant on roof), adjustment of floor levels, diminished access to natural light in some social-let flats, an attractive green wall feature to be replaced with painted metal, timber cladding and rails on balconies to be replaced by metal, some retail units to be extended into the public walkway ...all this so, it seems to us, that the units and flats will be commercially more attractive.

The developer and designer have justified these changes as being “required” by post-Grenfell legislation concerning cladding and fire regulations. Local representatives did not think these new “minor” proposals were all a result of new insulation requirements. Forum representatives, together with representatives from the Margery Street t/a and the Amwell Society, (who all took part in an electronic discussion with the developers) were not impressed by the presentation. It seemed to local people that the developer’s driving force, as they attempted to correct design faults in the original, (and much disliked concept), was to maximise their profits at the expense of local well-being.

The local representatives asked to see the full documents before making formal objection, but it was clear that the local group was inclined, if legally possible, to reject this amendment application and request a new full planning application for major changes to an approved scheme.

This is on-going work....no formal group decisions on our opposition methods have yet been made, but, clearly, objections will be voiced.

You may remember that this unpopular scheme, which was opposed by all local groups and both Camden and Islington planning authorities, was foisted on this community by Boris Johnson, then Mayor of London, for political and commercial reasons. It appears that the developers are still trying to extract maximum gains rather than showing any attempts to make the development and the neighbourhood more attractive, more functional, and more humanely viable.

2.6 Mount Pleasant redevelopment (Phoenix Place, Mount Pleasant, Calthorpe Street site). This is the Camden part of this development.

Phase 2 works include building the flats which back onto the Calthorpe Street (south-side) residents’ back gardens and the Post Office Museum.

A letter has been sent to residents from an architect citing Taylor Wimpey (developer) and Party Wall agreements requesting to visit our homes in Calthorpe Street for reports on the condition of the structures. It is up to individuals to react as they see fit, but the Forum does advise some caution.

Any financial recompense agreed is awarded to your landlord, and not to you, as tenants renting your premises; leaseholders will need to consult the terms of their lease, but many will find they are not eligible for financial recompense. The Forum is attempting to clarify the status of these proposed inspections. To date we have found out the following:

The architect/surveyor says they notified Camden Council, which we're reasonably sure they did, but it is not clear who in Camden (the main leaseholder) is dealing with this; the Housing Department and the Works Department know nothing. The purpose of the proposed visits is to list the present condition of the premises, to help evaluate claims for damages which may arise during the building work. The only three dwellings within 6 metres of the intended works are the corner house (no 26 Calthorpe Street) and nos 28 and 30 – all of which will have a legal duty to permit inspection. Other residents have no legal duty to allow inspection and can, we are advised, decide for themselves what to do. Do what you think is best for you unless your landlord tells you otherwise.

You should note there is a **“minor” amendment to move the traffic bollards** at Mount Pleasant/Gough Street, which has the potential to unleash cars from the new underground carpark in the development onto Mount Pleasant and Laystall Street, just where the Christopher Hatton primary school is placed. This was not what had been previously agreed, and is being objected to by the Forum, the headmistress of the primary school and Laystall Court t/a. We are awaiting details, but again this seems like another underhand method for the developer to ignore local needs. **This is work in progress.**

You should also note that **the developer is providing the Pocket Park on Mount Pleasant** but without the active engagement of Forum nor making use of the previous design work done on this project by Mount Pleasant Association. We have offered participation but have merely been told we will be “kept informed”. Apparently, the sum set aside for these works is £0.5m, which seems rather little in our opinion. **We are pressing for more details.**

2..7 Neighbourhood Plan. This is being edited, illustrated and formatted into a document. We plan to circulate this to all members, ahead of formal submission, so you can make your comments.

3. PROPOSED FUTURE ACTIONS

You will see from the notes above that **this locality is becoming a continual construction site, and that the planning system does not take sufficient account of local needs.**

There is a nexus of complex building work around **Farringdon Road/Margery Street/Calthorpe Street**. Charles Simmonds House redevelopment, Mount Pleasant redevelopment and Children's Society building's application for development will collectively cause a spatial, social and visual disaster, and none of which appear to have any value other than commercial gain.

There is a potentially similar nexus of disturbance with the **huge Mount Pleasant development on Phoenix Place/Mount Pleasant and the accepted but not yet progressing Panther House** development running from Grays Inn Road to Mount Pleasant, adjacent to the primary school. So that whole area will be subject to noise, site traffic and nuisances for some years.

The **former Eastman Hospital site** on Grays Inn Road will be under building development for the next six years, by which time we suppose work will have started at the **Ear Nose and Throat hospital site** also on Grays Inn Road, both of which will affect local residents and businesses.

Meanwhile building development is ongoing around **Great Ormond Street Hospital and Queen Square**, and there is said to be a proposed new development of **children's/youth centre somewhere near Argyll Square**.

The Forum is organising a Bloomsbury-wide group meeting to recognise this complex situation and make a plan-of-action. The meeting set for beginning of April was cancelled due to lockdown. We need to set a new date, as soon as possible, in safe surroundings.

We are proposing a deputation to Camden Planning authority to discuss **a) policy change to include recognition of local community needs as a required condition at the start of the planning process and b) setting up construction zones to control building nuisances more thoroughly.**

The Forum is also concerned by the Camden traffic plan, which many local groups such as Bloomsbury Residents Action Group (BRAG) and many individual residents all actively oppose. **The Forum stance, after many public discussions, is that we approve the principle of less cars/more bicyclists and pedestrians**, since this helps reduce air pollution, and makes a more pleasant local environment. **We have some practical doubts, however, about some of the proposed details**, such as the cycle lanes in Gray's Inn Road, and are discussing these with Camden, and **concerns about traffic reorganisation whilst multiple local sites are undergoing development** producing additional site-traffic – **these are ongoing discussions**, as are considerations of tree-planting and general "greening" of the area.

We are also aware that the recent cuts in TfL funding *may* affect the fine details of the proposed traffic works on cycle-lanes. We await further details.

CONCLUSION.

Despite the lock-down, a very busy time, and lots of up-dates we still must put up on the website..... we appreciate your membership, and we need your energy, your feed-back.

Contact us via our website www.mountpleasantforum.org.uk Let us know your views...and...please.....**pass this Newsletter on** to your local group and its members. Spread the word!