

## ST HELENS RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION/ST QUINTIN AND WOODLANDS NEIGHBOURHOOD FORUM MINUTES OF OPEN MEETING HELD ON 24 APRIL 2014

Present: Chair Henry Peterson, SHRA Vice-chair Ruth Hillary, SHRA Secretary Tania Martin, SHRA Treasurer Maggie Tyler, Jenny Harborne, Steve Divall, Richard Ehrman, other SHRA and StQW Forum management committee members, and around 40 members of the public.

### **Latimer Road/Imperial West underpass**

The Chair explained that the planned presentation by Imperial and the Westway Trust had been deferred to a future meeting. Imperial was having to amend their designs in the light of new engineering information from Network Rail

### **Conservation policies within the StQW Neighbourhood Plan**

The Chair reminded those present that the StQW Plan provided an opportunity to review and update RBKC policies for the western part of the Oxford Gardens/St Quintin Conservation Area. Responses to the StQW Survey suggested that many residents were not aware that the boundary of the CA had been extended in 2002, and now covered streets to north of North Pole Road, and the Oakworth Road are. Research showed that the benefits of being within a Conservation Area included a premium on house values, which disappeared if policies were not adhered to.

The meeting then discussed a series of slides showing conservation issues to be addressed in the neighbourhood plan. JH and HP explained the context of each, and a vote was taken on whether the suggested policy should be included in the draft StQW Plan. The issues were as set out below:

**1. Rear dormers** Under current RBKC policies, planning permission for loft conversions with rear dormers has been granted for houses in some streets, but refused in others. This has led to perceptions of inconsistency and unfair treatment. The current principle that dormers should not be allowed in 'unbroken' rooflines can deny a house-owner the opportunity to extend a home at relatively little cost (as compared with e.g. basements) while allowing this for near neighbours.

The **initial view** of the Forum is that rear dormers should be allowed in all the streets in that part of the conservation area within the StQW neighbourhood, provided they conform to RBKC design guidelines in terms width and height. **The vote at the meeting was For 18 and Against 2.**

### **2. Rooflights on front roofs**

Current RBKC conservation policies do not permit rooflights on front roofs, while allowing 'conservation' rooflights at the rear and (usually) on the side roofs of end-of-terrace houses. The **initial view** of the Forum is that this policy should be continued. Allowing rooflights on front roofs would severely damage the appearance of roofscapes from the street. Cross-ventilation to loft rooms can be achieved by other means. **The vote at the meeting on this approach was For 22 and Against 2.**

### **3. Painting of brickwork on front facades**

This is discouraged in the 1975/1990 Oxford Gardens CAPS. There is also an RBKC Article 4 Direction in place, applying to the 'red brick' streets in the area, which removes permitted development rights to make '*alterations and extensions to any part of those elevations of the dwelling house which front onto a highway*'. Advice from the council is that painting of brickwork does not constitute an 'alteration' and can therefore be carried out as permitted development.

The **initial view** of the Forum is that the painting of brickwork on front facades should not be allowed, as its cumulative effect would destroy the present pleasing and consistent appearance of our streets. This view is felt more strongly in relation to the 'red brick' streets as compared with e.g.

Bracewell Road and Brewster Gardens, where house types are more varied and where a significant number of facades are already painted. As part of the Neighbourhood Plan, the council could be asked to apply to specified streets an Article 4 Direction stating that front facades should not be painted. **The vote at the meeting on this approach was For 22 Against 0.**

#### **4. Front boundary walls and fences**

These are an aspect of the conservation area where fashions have been changing. The original design of the streets on the St Quintin Estate involved low brick walls and with hedges. Recent years have seen the introduction of significantly higher walls and railings. There is now a wide variety of boundary treatments, including wooden fences and metal or ironwork railings as well as hedges. The desire of house owners to increase levels of security for the area in front of their houses is understandable. This has been coupled with the introduction of more hard surfacing and outdoor storage for bins and bikes. But the cumulative effect is beginning to change the feel of the streets.

It is also not clear that all these alterations have been the subject of planning applications, where needed. The **initial view** of the Forum is that front boundary walls/railings should not exceed 1m in height, this being the maximum allowed under permitted development rights. **The vote at the meeting for this proposal was For 17 Against 0.**

#### **5. Permeable surfaces in front garden areas**

These are disappearing across the neighbourhood, with a growing number of former garden areas being covered with impermeable paving or slate. This creates problems of surface water run-off and resultant risk of flash flooding. Although this neighbourhood has no history of flooding it is a very real issue in other parts of the Borough. Demands on the Counters Creek main sewerage/drainage system grow by the year, with the new developments in White City adding to these. Hence the **initial view** of the Forum is that front garden areas (other than the main front path) should consist of permeable surfaces (this can include e.g. cobbles, stones, brick and other hard surfaces laid on a bed of sand). **The vote at the meeting was unanimously in favour of this approach.**

#### **6. Insulated render on back walls**

This is currently resisted by RBKC as being a replacement of original brickwork. The arguments in favour are based on the resultant increased insulation levels at a time of rising fuel costs. The case against is the change of appearance and the potential issues when a 'thicker' wall meets an existing one in a terrace or a pair of houses (the thickness of such render being a minimum of 2-3 inches). The Forum was marginally opposed to allowing insulated render on back walls, the vote being For 11 and Against 13.

#### **7. Side extensions or infill extensions**

These are extensions, where the original rear side passage is incorporated into the body of a terraced house with a glazed roof to the party wall, are a popular form of alteration to houses in our neighbourhood. These are normally granted planning permission by RBKC unless particular factors apply. They may also be a source of contention between immediate neighbours, as they have an impact on daylight/sunlight and aspect where one house owner wishes to build such an extension whereas their immediate neighbour does not.

The **initial view** of the Forum is that side extensions should continue to be permitted, subject to a maximum height of 3m at the Party Wall and a maximum slope of 45 degrees on the additional roof. A 3m height is that which is allowed in such contexts under permitted development. In some streets RBKC requires the rear facade of a back extension to include a small setback to demonstrate that the side part is 'subordinate' to the original rear of the building. This is incompatible with full width sliding doors or glazing. The view of the Forum is that this is an unnecessary requirement,

which should be dropped to allow full width extensions. **The vote at the meeting was unanimously in favour of both the above approaches to back and side extensions.**

#### **8. 'Garden studios/workrooms'**

Buildings of a significant size, in rear gardens, have become another feature of houses in the neighbourhood. In many cases these may be built under permitted development rights with no requirement for planning permission, provided they are less than 3m high at the maximum roof height. In other case planning permission has been granted (and sometimes refused) for more substantial outbuildings with their own showers and WCs. In all cases such outbuildings are supposed to be 'ancillary' to the main house rather than a separate dwelling. But the distinction between a 'guestroom' and a sublet mini-residence may become blurred in practice. Council policies on such outbuildings are not well defined and were drafted to apply to more conventional 'conservatories'.

The initial view of the Forum is that more control is needed over such outbuildings, given that gardens in the area are generally small and that use of such rooms can reduce privacy and enjoyment of gardens. Controls could take the form of percentage limits on the area of garden to be used, or requiring that such structures should not occupy the full width of gardens. More research is needed before an effective neighbourhood policy could be drafted. **The vote at the meeting on this approach was For 17 Against 0.**

#### **9. Basements**

These have become one of the most visible features of the refurbishment of houses in this neighbourhood. The increase in numbers in recent years drew many responses in the StQW survey, some supportive and some very opposed. There are now 50 examples in the 'red brick' streets of the St Quintin Estate where basements have been built or granted planning approval.

RBKC has been revising and strengthening its policy towards basements, and is at an advanced stage in adopting a new set of detailed criteria requirements for basement applications. Subject to forthcoming an Planning Inspector's Inquiry the RBKC policy in future will be that basements should not exceed more than one storey, not exceed a maximum of 50% of each garden or open part of the site (85% currently), have a good construction management plan and traffic management plan, ensure structural stability for neighbours, plus some other conditions.

The Forum is not currently intending to propose any new policies on basements specific to this neighbourhood, on the basis that the council's policy is being sufficiently strengthened.

#### **Next steps**

The Chair explained that the votes from the meeting would be helpful in the next stage of drafting the Conservation section of the StQW Plan. There would be further consultation on the draft, so these decisions were not necessarily the final proposals that would be included in the Draft submitted to RBKC later in the year. Meanwhile the council may begin to take account of this 'emerging policy' when deciding on individual planning applications. He thanked those for attending and giving a view.

#### **Ideas for pedestrianisation of St Helens Gardens**

The Chair showed two slides, prepared by local architect Gennaro Picardi, showing how the short stretch of St Helens Gardens opposite the church could become a local focus, or pedestrian 'piazza'. A temporary road closure would be used, as out in place for the St Helens Festival in recent years. This could be done at weekends. The space provided could then provide for various activities,

including the possibility of a Farmers Market. London Farmers Markets had been approached and had suggested Sunday morning as the best day.

Steve Divall advised that St Helens Church would not be keen on a Sunday market, as this would disrupt those arriving for services. Saturday was a possibility. Concerns were also raised about rubbish and smells that might arise from a Farmers Market with hot food stalls.

It was agreed that the idea was well worth exploring, as this section of St Helens Gardens is seen as the 'heart of the village'. More consultation would be carried out with the shopkeepers in the Parade. Also agreed that the Chair should sound out RBKC, as St Helens Ward was earmarked as priority for streetscape works in 2014/15.

#### **West London Bowling Club**

Under AOB, Jim Tocher reported that good progress was being made at the Club, and that further information would be circulated shortly on new membership arrangements.

The meeting closed at 21.20 hours