



THE HACKNEY SOCIETY

# SPACES 2022

News and views about Hackney's built environment

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## Hackney Bridge



© Tim Crocker

**Inspired by the industrial heritage of the site (once home to the Clarnico sweet factory) and now next to the Copper Box Arena, the project offers workspace, public facilities, events, markets, restaurants and bars - giving local enterprises the space they need to make, create, trade and ultimately thrive together.**

Hackney Bridge is a 'meanwhile' (or short-term) project to provide incubator space for a range of people and organisations, combined with public facing elements such as an event space and food hall, provided across five buildings arranged around a central yard. The site will eventually be developed as part of the Olympic Legacy Plan for housing, but the interim period of 12 years will allow the site to support start-ups and offer opportunities for local people on the Olympic Park and surrounding neighbourhoods.

Hackney Bridge is the third meanwhile project that Turner Works have designed for

Make Shift, following on from Pop Brixton and Peckham Levels. For many reasons, this was the most challenging of the three sites but still using values of 'the least money, materials, energy and time'.

The Environmental Strategy focuses on practicality. The rub here was working within a highly controlled environment (from planning through to construction) that is the Olympic Park.

There was an intensive period of research and local consultation, examining the working of Hackney Wick located opposite the site, talking to artists, makers and creatives about the area and about how they worked and the kind of space they might need in the future.

Each building has been designed to be dismantled and either recycled or relocated (in whole or in part). The result is five modest buildings that can all have separate lives beyond.

The five buildings forming Hackney Bridge

share many similarities, but some key differences. The three along the quayside have been connected together (as they are all public) via linking roofs, allowing roofs, allowing people to walk between buildings without getting wet. They are also already offering space for pop-up stalls and bars at events. The market hall is unheated and the block nearest the bridge is insulated and heated, with food and drink at ground floor and workspace above.

The black timber clad building houses 'maker' spaces at ground floor level, with co-work space above. The maker spaces have a fenced yard to the rear to allow deliveries and safe outdoor making. Local enterprise remains at the core, 40% of founding Members live within 1 mile of the site, with 84% from a neighbouring 'Growth Borough' (Hackney, Tower Hamlets, Waltham Forest and Newham).

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# STAMFORD HILL AREA ACTION PLAN (SHAAP)

By Tom Stebbing of John Stebbing Architects (JSA)

## The idea of a Stamford Hill Area Action Plan (SHAAP) has been in discussion since 2014.

This was when the dust was just settling following the attempt, by two rival groups, to establish a Stamford Hill Neighbourhood Plan. The coalition government's "big society" policy of handing planning control to local communities had hit an issue in multi-ethnic Stamford Hill where streets are home to people with hugely different ideas about priorities.

JSA have worked for the Orthodox Jewish Community (OJC) in Hackney since 1983, and in 2017 were asked by the Interlink Foundation to help shape their 'official' response to Hackney Council's initial document (December 2016). It was felt the document failed to properly address the scale of the issues facing the OJC and fell well short of understanding the priorities of the community: housing, school places, and the ability to build and extend places of worship. The demographics of the OJC appeared to have been seriously underestimated and the document to ignore how OJC "community infrastructure" needs to be located within walking distance of homes, rather than focussed in the town

centres identified by the plan. A second stage response was prepared in 2017 to identify the streets in Stamford Hill where more than 50% of the residents are members of the OJC, and where it is likely that additional floors on existing houses would be supported. The document provided visualisations showing how whole streets could be extended upwards.

It is heartening, therefore, to see that the Draft SHAAP issued for consultation in November 2021 might finally contain some key Policies that could start to address the needs and respect the priorities of the OJC, albeit with checks and balances required to protect wider residential amenity and the quality and character of the public urban realm. The "Stamford Hill Design Guidance" document and Policy AAP3 could lead the way to additional floors being added to suitable housing stock, and Policy AAP5 appears to take a big stride towards supporting improvements and intensification of community infrastructure where it is needed within the residential streets of Stamford Hill.

For a long time there has been a tension between the planning needs and aspirations of the OJC and Hackney's wider population.



Before and after. [photos computer generated mock ups of extended buildings]

The draft SHAAP walks a fine line and seeks to balance between addressing overcrowding whilst preserving and improving Stamford Hill's unique character – it is to be welcomed as positive step forward.

## How did that get built? By Vincent Stops

### Outgoing Chair of the Planning Committee, Hackney Council

The planning process is there to ensure the public interest is served, but there are many reasons why development takes place where it may appear it should not. I will focus on three of these.

1) A strong presumption in favour of development. If you own land then policy allows, indeed encourages, development. Local decisions to refuse without good planning reasons will be challenged and the government's inspectors will make the decision, often prioritising national policies over local ones.

2) Targets for housing. Hackney's target is 1,330 homes every year! Councils should be granting permissions on this scale. If they do not, then developers will use the system to argue for schemes that are unsuitable. Hackney has identified capacity for housing at this level, albeit at greater intensity than that which currently prevails.

The tenure mix and affordability however, is often not what one might want. This is not the fault of the planning process, but rather the politics of funding public housing. During the years of the Labour government funding was significantly greater.

3) Financial viability. 50% of new homes should be 'affordable' in the ratio of 60% social rents and 40% sub-market models of rent/ownership. But other planning constraints will often mean this target is missed. For example, much of the major housing development in Hackney is on commercial sites, where the council wants to retain employment as well as facilitating housing. If the costs associated with such developments can be shown to yield less than a benchmark profit for a developer, then they can make a case not to cross-subsidise 50% of the associated housing units.

So the challenge is to work within the

existing system to deliver the best it can to meet varied future needs in terms of; housing, employment, retail and social infrastructure; and in buildings that people find acceptable both aesthetically and for local amenity.

I like to think Hackney has established a reputation for consistent decision making so developers know what to expect. If proposals come forward with high quality design, albeit intensifying the land usage, chances are they will be supported by planners and at committee.

This is as it should be. Major proposals will have been through years of development and consideration before coming to committee. Serious applicants would have sought pre-application advice, had plans peer reviewed by our Design Review process and been examined by many teams at the Council - design, conservation,

heritage, strategic housing, transport and property. Evidence will have been presented by the developer and more commissioned by the council.

There are, however, inevitably tensions between policies e.g more housing

means higher density and greater amenity impact on neighbours. It is the planners' job to balance these and other tensions, and it is the committee's job to challenge the balance and to test the justifications offered.

As I stand down from council and my planning role after 16 years I believe that the service is in a good place to carry on delivering high quality development. I look forward to your challenge and questions in June! See the Events section for more details.

## Holborn Studios Revisited by Laurie Elks

**Holborn Studios is an iconic venue, a meeting place and a thriving cultural business in an historic site beside the Regents Canal. Hackney Planning Officers' report to the Planning Committee recommended a scheme for demolition and redevelopment which would have swept away Holborn's business. At a dramatic meeting in March the Committee voted 5 to 1 – Chairman Vincent Stops dissenting – to refuse permission. The case illustrates the difficulties of a planning system so closely aligned to meeting housing targets.**

The refusal followed two previous applications, the first as long ago as 2015, when the committee voted in favour of a plan for a mixed employment/residential scheme (50 new canalside homes, predominantly one and two bedroom, and none affordable) turning out Holborn Studios in the process. Both those permissions had been overturned in Judicial Review proceedings.<sup>1</sup>

The planners took the view that the errors leading to the JR decisions were "merely procedural" and brought back a virtually identical scheme for approval save that the developer's contribution towards affordable housing in the Borough was reduced from £757,000 to £158,000, officers having been persuaded that in light of the risks and cost of the scheme the developers "would just about break even" and this was the most that could be afforded. As is customary in these cases, there was a woeful lack of detail as to how exactly this figure was arrived at.

The scheme recommended by officers was categorised as "employment led" although it didn't actually allocate 60% of space to employment properly required for an employment-led scheme. Nevertheless, this categorisation was said to justify the nil allocation to affordable housing. Planners said, again, that the housing included was the very minimum required for a "viable" scheme and there was nothing they could do about that.

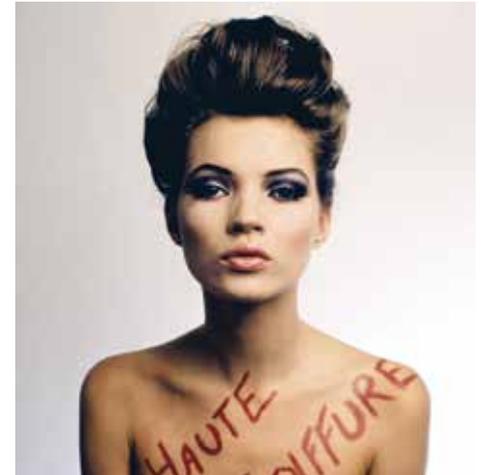
The planners (and developers) made much of the case that the existing workspace was allegedly "substandard", "basic" "outdated" and "inefficient" and would be replaced with a slightly increased footprint described as "modern", "flexible" "suitable"

and – of course – "in line with policy". Officers persisted in making the somewhat implausible case that the replacement workspace could accommodate a comparable photographic studio business – if not Holborn itself.

In consequence of the second Holborn JR decision, Hackney no longer operates "planning purdah" meaning that committee members could receive submissions from Holborn Studios giving the other side of the argument. Holborn's case is that its existing business is established and thriving, and that together with its satellite businesses, supports over 300 jobs on site. And most importantly, it provides an essential service to other creative businesses supporting the existence of cultural clusters which planning policy is supposed to support. Furthermore, the new emerging London Plan gives specific weight to the need to protect "creative workspace" and the GLA culture team submitted that Holborn made a valuable and significant contribution to London's cultural infrastructure.

A further factor is that the future of the Shoreditch creative cluster looks less assured than before. Much has changed since 2015 including Brexit and Covid. The changed policy framework and the changed economic circumstances merited a reappraisal – to "strike the balance" afresh between the planning merits of the existing use by Holborn and its allied businesses against the new scheme.

All this cut no ice and officers did not concede an inch to Holborn's case. The Committee chair, supporting officers, asserted that Holborn were trying to create a special planning use class consisting of *Holborn's* photographic studio business as opposed to *any* business in the same planning use class including another photographic studio.



Committee members were not persuaded voting 5 to 1 against granting permission. They disliked various aspects of the new scheme including the quality of the proposed accommodation; the lack of family housing; the destruction of the buildings' special character and the failure to meet planning policy targets. Most importantly, they gave weight to Holborn's cultural and economic importance – to "strike the balance differently", even if officers were unwilling to do so.

The chairman made the warning (duly recorded in the minutes) that the decision was unsustainable on appeal. But there are in fact sound planning grounds for this decision.

Planners need to take care that in working with developers to meet housing targets; they do not take out creative spaces, banalise interesting places, and jeopardise not only Hackney's vibe but also its creative base.

Let us hope that the Council will effectively defend this decision at the appeal that will inevitably follow.

1. See <http://www.hackneysociety.org/page/holbornstudiosjr> for a discussion of this earlier history.

# The Peace Mural

Following the article in the last issue on the Peace Mural, 'Loving Dalston' and David Altheer (helped by Spaces designer Glory Hall) further advertised the campaign to identify people in the mural. The story was then picked up by Time Out and a publication in France. Further updates will appear in Spaces.

<https://lovingdalston.co.uk/2022/03/how-did-these-people-pop-up-in-dalstons-landmark-mural-and-are-you-or-a-pal-among-them/>



## Hackney Society Events

June 15th

### "How did that get built?"

Vincent Stops

Reflections on development pressure and the planning process after 16 years as Chair of Hackney Council's Planning Committee

Venue TBC

### Dates for your diary

September 21st

### AGM preceded by a Christchurch Estate tour

October 23rd

### "If only they'd take the 'ackney Road and plant it over there..."

History walk on Hackney Road led by Sean Gubbins, Sue Doe and Laurie Elks

## Noticeboard

### Hackney Time Travel events

#### St Augustine's Tower

On Saturday May 14th, the Tower will be open from 12-3.00 with an exhibition on how transport has changed over the years, and its impact on the area.

People are invited to share their own stories. Artist Emily Tracy will run an arts workshop exploring the graves in the graveyard around the tower and collect rubbings of names, words, dates and patterns which give clues to Hackneys' history. There is a monthly competition with prizes donated from M&S.

On June 11th, the Tower will be open from 12-3.00 with an exhibition about 300 years of Narrowway shops, again inviting people to share their own stories. Storyteller Rebecca Tubridy will weave stories from the past. Artist Emily Tracy will run art workshops on Hackney's long history of shoemakers Book a place via [https://www.eventbrite.com/e/hackney-time-travel-art-workshop-with-emily-tracy-tickets-329898253557?aff=ebdssbdestsearch&keep\\_tld=1](https://www.eventbrite.com/e/hackney-time-travel-art-workshop-with-emily-tracy-tickets-329898253557?aff=ebdssbdestsearch&keep_tld=1)

On July 23rd, the Shops theme will continue with Jane Smith running art workshops on the theme reflecting shopping in the past, present and future.

During the year there will be more exhibitions, workshops and events showing 700 years of change in our backyard. If you're passing, and the Tower is open, drop in to see what's on. All the events and activities are free.

### Hackney Time Travel project is part of the Hello Again Hackney programme

funded by London Borough of Hackney, to enable more people to re-discover and enjoy the buildings and services that Hackney offers. It is run by the Hackney Historic Buildings Trust.

See programme updates on <https://www.staugustinetower.org/>

Instagram: [staugustinetower](https://www.instagram.com/staugustinetower)

Twitter: [staugustinetwr](https://twitter.com/staugustinetwr)

### Springfield Park event 2nd June

Springfield House open 10-5pm, guided tours (with actors from Time Will Tell Theatre playing local characters) 11-4pm

To celebrate the completion of the project to restore, refurbish and develop the park.

The Hackney Society hope to have a bookstall at the event.

More information can be found at <https://www.hackney.gov.uk/springfield-park>

### East End Canal Festival

Sat 16 July & Sun 17 July, 11AM to 5PM

Art Pavilion and Regent's Canal  
Mile End Park, Clinton Road, E3 4QY  
[www.regentscanalheritage.org.uk/](http://www.regentscanalheritage.org.uk/)

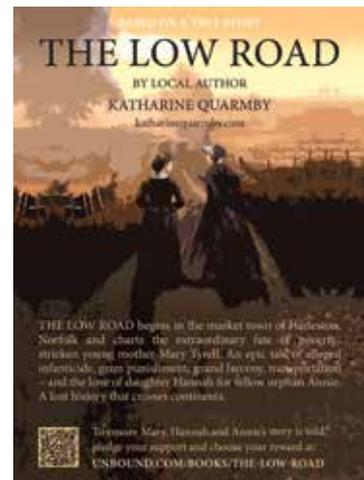


## Publications

### The Low Road by Katharine Quarmby

A novel based on a true story. The author is currently crowdfunding in order to get the book published.

Katharine used Hackney Archives extensively for the research behind the story, including the detailed Minute Books of the Refuge for the Destitute in Hackney Road, where the two women in the story were living before they were transported to Australia.



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

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