



## **THE HACKNEY SOCIETY**

**A charitable company limited by guarantee.**

Company registration no. 4574188

Charity no. 1126736

### **Trustees' annual report**

**For the year ended 31 March 2021**



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### **Charity information**

The Hackney Society Limited is a civic and amenity society.

### **Board of Trustees:**

Ray Blackburn  
Monica Blake  
Laurie Elks  
Wendy Forrest  
Tony Gillett  
Julia Lafferty  
Nick Perry  
Lisa Shell – resigned 16 September 2020

### **Officers:**

Chair:	Nick Perry
Vice Chair:	Lisa Shell – resigned 16 September 2020
Treasurer:	Tony Gillett

**Registered office:** The Round Chapel  
1d Glenarm Road  
London E5 0LY

**Bankers:** The Co-operative Bank PLC  
P.O. Box 250  
Skelmersdale WN8 6WT

**Independent Examiner:** David Harris FCMA  
36 Malvern Road  
London E8 3LP



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### ANNUAL REPORT 2020/21

The Trustees present their report and the financial statements for the year ended 31 March 2021. The company's charitable objects are as follows:

- 1. To promote the highest standards in design and protect Hackney's unique heritage.**
- 2. To encourage positive development of the borough's built and natural environments, through engagement with a broad cross-section of local people and experts.**
- 3. To encourage exemplary new design, regeneration and conservation of our rich heritage.**

The Hackney Society is a membership organisation, a registered charity, and a company limited by guarantee. An elected Board of Trustees, drawn from the membership, manages the work of the Society.

#### What do we do?

- Organise public events including talks, guided walks, exhibitions and site visits (aimed at members, non-members and new audiences)
- Produce publications which celebrate Hackney's social, cultural and architectural history
- Produce a regular newsletter 'Spaces' to highlight the society's work and important current issues
- Campaign to protect local buildings of historical and/or architectural merit
- Co-ordinate a Planning Group to assess important developments and emerging policy on the built environment
- Promote high standards of design, construction and conservation, including through making comments on selected planning applications in the borough
- Support the six Conservation Areas Advisory Committees (CAAC) made up of local people including publication of their minutes on our website, where required
- Build links between residents, officials and councillors, including being a member of Sustainable Hackney
- Provide advice and support to local groups to help them improve their neighbourhoods



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## Review of activities during year ended 31 March 2021

### Introduction

Despite the fact the Society receives no public funding, it continued to deliver a modest programme of projects and events on modest income from activities and donations, whilst maintaining its public profile and its level of engagement with the planning authority on matters of development, and develop future projects.

Crucially, the Society continues to meet its charitable objectives.

Statutory 'lockdown' measures were put in place towards the end of the last financial year, to mitigate the global Coronavirus pandemic. The Society operates in an agile fashion and had no major projects in progress, so the impact of those measures has not had material effect on our operations in that year. The exception we noted at the time was a nascent project to engage members and the wider public to discuss the future shape of the Society. The project was due to begin a programme of meetings in March 2020, but was put on hold and to date has not resumed.

The pandemic inevitably led to some changes. We did not print two issues of *Spaces* – though we did still publish them online. Events took a brief hiatus before moving online and establishing a new rhythm, style and audience – largely for the better. In spite of the pandemic we published, jointly with Hackney History, a new book which has proved to be incredibly successful.

The AGM saw Lisa Shell resign from the Trustees but we are grateful she continues to Chair the Hackney Society Planning Group and provide the Society with her valuable professional insight as an architect.

### 1. Membership

Membership income is at its highest level for 8 years, and the number of members at 261, of whom 57 are life members, is nearly a quarter up on the previous year. Other than book sales it is our largest single source of income, albeit generating little to no surplus for general projects.

### 2. Fundraising and volunteering

The necessary work to continue the activities of The Hackney Society either has been undertaken by volunteers, or, where appropriate and funding has been obtained, outsourced. Work such as organising events, editing the newsletter, book sales, managing the membership and dealing with planning matters continues to be done solely by volunteers including, and especially, the Trustees.

### 3. Programme of events

In light of the Covid-19 pandemic planned walks and visits were cancelled or postponed and a programme of online "walks and talks" has been devised. These events have been very well-attended and we have reached much larger audiences than for our traditional "in-person" events. Where possible recordings have been placed on the [Hackney Society YouTube Channel](#) and these have been viewed by



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numbers of people who were not able to attend at the scheduled time (or who wanted to enjoy a repeat!)

Usual charges for events were suspended.

We ran **six online events** during this financial year.

*Alexander Baron's Hackney, led by Rachel Kolsky, followed by the AGM.*

*A Glimpse into Hackney Archives' Photos of Stoke Newington, led by Amir Dotan, with an introduction by Hannah Milton of Hackney Archives.*

*Alan Denney in Conversation with Wendy Forrest – Hackney in the 1970s and 1980s.*

*The Lee Valley Regional Park: A Two Dimensional Tour, led by Laurie Elks.*

*"Down With the Fences!" – Popular Protest and Open Space Preservation in Victorian London, led by Mark Gorman.*

*Walking in the Footsteps of Women from Hackney's History, Some stories of Hackney women from the new book by the Hackney Society and Hackney History, led by Sue Doe and Lucy Madison, with Wendy Forrest.*

The Trustees would like to thank our events partner Hackney History (Friends of Hackney Archives), the walk and talk leaders, Nick Perry for providing the technical platforms plus help and guidance to all who used them, Wendy Forrest and Monica Blake for publicity and all who supported our programme through volunteering to participate in these events. Their energy and commitment are greatly appreciated.

#### **4. Publications**

The Society continues to sell its backlist titles through local bookshops, and online from our website. This year we were unable to be present at any local events or fairs.

Work that began in 2014 on a new version of *Hackney Houses*, a guide to improvement, conservation and maintenance of late Georgian, Victorian and Edwardian houses remains on hold.

Towards the end of this financial year The Hackney Society published, *Women from Hackney's History* jointly with Hackney History (formerly the Friends of Hackney Archives). It is our first hardback book and was published on International Women's Day (8 March). The book has been researched, written, illustrated and designed entirely by women from Hackney – all volunteers and many with close relationships to The Society and/or Hackney History. The only costs for the book were the printing and listing (ISBN) – all other materials (including pictures) and effort were donated to the project and we are immensely grateful to the organizations, institutions and individuals involved.

With a significant number of pre-sales and a special introductory price of £10 to members and non-members alike, which ran till the end of March, We sold an



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incredible 422 copies in that period – three quarters of which were online through our website. There was significant public interest in the media and on social media and the launch was supported by events. We're grateful to everyone involved. As a result we made a modest profit quite rapidly and had no reason to call on the cost-sharing arrangement with Hackney History in order to settle the printing bill. Nonetheless, we came to an agreement with Hackney History on how to share the profits in the next financial year.

### 5. Spaces newsletter

The Society produced **four** issues of *Spaces*: 68, 69, 70 and 71. Issues 68 and 69 were not printed, in order to reduce postage costs associated with pandemic restrictions on hand delivery. However, those issues are on our website. The newsletter is quarterly and is written by voluntary contributors. They cover planning and historic building issues in the borough, topical issues, forthcoming events, buildings at risk and updates on Hackney Society projects and events. Buildings and issues covered by *Spaces* over the year included: Pitwell Mews, Mind the Gap, The Tin Tabernacle, Wrong House, St James the Great, Holborn Studios, Openness and its Collective Value, East London Line, PEER Gallery, The Clapton Portico, Statue of Sir Robert Geffrye, Broadway Market Mews, 98 Clapton Common, Phase 3 Woodberry Down and Central and South Hackney CAAC.

The newsletter continues to be funded piecemeal and by in-kind contribution of the editor and Trustee, Monica Blake, along with Ray Blackburn for help with copyediting. The Trustees would like to thank Roger Blake, Tom Feary, Patrick Hammill, Neil Martinson, Barbara McFarlane, Maris Mazulis, Kilian O'Sullivan, Hedy Parry-Davies, Regeneration Practice and Lisa Shell for their **articles** and **photographs**. We would also like to thank Glory Hall. Without her generosity, we would not be able to afford the commercial rates for **design**.

### 6. Websites

The Society continues to maintain our main website <http://hackneysociety.org>. Redeveloping the site continues to be a priority, medium term project for the Trustees, but has been hampered by the lack of responses to our call out for a volunteer to manage the project.

We maintained two other *micro-sites*. These had both been mothballed some time ago but continued to be available online for much of the year:

[hackneybuildings.org](http://hackneybuildings.org) (aka [lovelocallandmarks.org](http://lovelocallandmarks.org))  
[hackneysociety.org/health](http://hackneysociety.org/health)

Regrettably the technology behind [hackneybuildings.org](http://hackneybuildings.org) had reached the end of life and crucially could not be updated with the latest security fixed needed to keep the site secure. As a result the site went offline in February 2021. A copy of the data is with the Council, with the hope that it will be used to enrich the local list in the future.

The Trustees thank *Community Sites* for their continued provision of services at very modest costs for community and amenity groups such as ours.



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### 7. Social Media

Social media continues to be important and we are indebted to member Rossana Tich who continues to manage the vast majority of our Twitter presence. As at 31 March 2021 we had around 11,900 Twitter (@HackneySociety) followers, up by 800 on the same time last year.

This increase is probably in part a result of the pandemic and our online events programme. As we reach a newer and much wider audience than physical events allow, our social media presence has expanded to match. Our YouTube channel – on which most of our past events can still be viewed – has 196 subscribers (from almost zero). This, along with the Eventbrite platform, proves to be an important way to highlight new events to those who have been to our previous events.

The *Spacelets* email newsletter has 1,555 subscribers, a near doubling of subscribers over the year – in principle due to online event registration.

Our Facebook (@theHackneySociety) page is less actively engaged but has a shade over 500 followers.

### 8. The Hackney Society Planning Group (HSPG)

The Planning Group continued to meet on a monthly basis during the pandemic – albeit online – to review proposals for significant developments within the Borough. Although Lisa Shell resigned as a Trustee during the year, we are grateful she remains Chair of The Hackney Society Planning Group.

Group members submit comments to the Council in response to planning applications, as well as provide advice to developers, their design teams and other interested parties ahead of their submissions for planning approval. Although the Hackney Society is not a statutory consultee, consultation is a matter of the Council's adopted policy and the Planning Group continues to be approached directly by developers, who make regular presentations to the group ahead of their submissions for planning approval, including the following over the last financial year:

- 17 Corsham Street
- 35 London Lane - Stephen Taylor Architects; DWD Property+Planning; Intex Properties

Significant schemes upon which we commented during the year include:

- 2019/2458 **New Era Estate N1**. Passed at Planning Sub-committee
- 2019/2175 **305A Kingsland Road E8 4DL** Passed at Planning Sub-committee.
- 2020/0702 **Gasholder Site Marian Place Bethnal Green Road E2 9AP**. Passed by Tower Hamlets
- 2020/1211 **351 Mare Street E8 1JB**. (M&S). Refused by officers.
- **Bishopsgate Goodsyrd** - Hackney raised objections at officer and Committee level and despite a recommendation to support the application from officers, LBTH's members raised objections to the scheme instead. The Mayor of London granted consent in any event, in December 2021



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- 2020/2032 **Footway verge at the corner of Crossway and Boleyn Road N16 8LA** - a number of applications for large 5G masts have come in and somewhat overwhelmed everyone. Despite limited grounds to do so the Council has refused a number in poor locations but one or two have slipped by. In particular one at Clissold Crescent / Albion Road.
- 2020/0765 **Thoresby House, 1 Thoresby Street N1 7TQ**. We objected to the principle of redevelopment but it was granted at planning subcommittee.
- 2020/3491 **146a Lea Bridge Road, E5 9RF** Buddhist monastery on site of the old schoolhouse. Despite a slightly rudimentary level of detail for a listed building application we supported the recovery of this site to community use. Granted.
- 2020/3786 2020/3787 **Mildmay Club 33-34 Newington Green** - has consent for three flats on the upper floor despite poor quality and threat to club use.
- 2020/3630 **17 Corsham St** - further consent sought to increase hotel to 13 storeys from 10. Previously had a presentation, now refused.
- 2021/0116 **4 Christopher St** - London Stock Exchange whole-block scheme significantly changes since presented last year. Granted by Planning Subcommittee.
- 2021/0361 **Acme Works, Rendlesham Rd** - Between 1A Down Rd (on site) and the travellers' site, an awkward refurb with additional mass.

The group raises questions and concerns but also attempts to provide support to those bringing positive visions and quality of design to the borough.

Several significant events have had varying degrees of impact on planning in the borough

Firstly, the pandemic – the effects of this have been relatively minor and largely practical. A small reduction in planning applications for larger schemes soon caught back up though we have seen fewer public consultations of pre-application schemes.

Secondly the Council planned to introduce a new IT system for planning applications when the pandemic hit so this was delayed until the around September 2020.

Thirdly, an alleged cyber-attack on Hackney's legacy systems was reported in early October which affected a large number of council services including planning and the 'legacy' planning system. Although the new platform was still 'up' and was unaffected, we saw no new applications added for some weeks.

These last two events had a profound impact. Not just on the Council but also the tools we use to support casework for the CAACs and HSPG. HSPG abandoned the output of its September meeting as application numbers were no longer valid. HSPG resumed in December (and subsequently as normal) when we had some stability in the planning output of LBH - albeit with the problems identifying all applications.

Fourthly the Government has introduced sweeping changes to permitted development rights and to 'use classes' which have brought the need for many planning applications out of the Council's control and encouraged other types of application for enlargement to be submitted with fewer means available to the Council for assessing suitability and quality.



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The HSPG has taken on, and supports, a project to encourage the Museum of the Home to remove the statue of Sir Robert Geffrye and has assembled a working group to consider the Planning aspects of this.

The group recognises a shared interest with the borough's six CAACs (Conservation Areas Advisory Committees), who comment on applications within conservation areas, and continue to share information, and invite CAACs to relevant presentations, meetings and discussions. Whilst procedural and technological constraints prevent comments from the Planning Group being routinely uploaded to the Hackney Society website, four of the CAACs have provided their comments for upload each month.

The Council held only one Planning User Forum in the period of this report – in part due to the issues above. Nick Perry has had to redevelop his planning application monitoring and access software for the Group and CAACs, which makes their work more efficient and effective and can mitigate some of the shortcomings of the Council's services.

The Society's Chair, Nick Perry, continues to attend most of the Council's Planning Sub-committee meetings as an observer, occasionally making a public address, and usually reporting his personal take on developments live via Twitter.

Lisa Shell retains the chair of the Planning Group, with administrative support from Nick Perry, and a consistent contribution from the following volunteers throughout the financial year: Luke Dewey (Metropolitan Workshop), Craig Douglas (Douglas Architects), Dickon Hayward (Material Works), Trevor Horne (Trevor Horne Architects), Jenny Lovell (Associate Director, Allies and Morrison), Robin Mallalieu (Brady Mallalieu Architects), Sarah Mann (Director, Studio Wolsey), Ross Perkin (Director, Emil Eve Architects), Nick Perry (Chair of The Hackney Society), and Bernard Tulkens (Tectonics Architects). Craig Douglas and Sarah Mann left the group towards the start of the year though Sarah returned in April 2021. We remain in contact with some of our other former attendees in the hope they will return in due course.

The planning group email discussion list comprises many more members, including the chairs of the CAACs, who receive monthly minutes and are updated of meetings, presentations and planning issues of interest.

### **9. Partnerships**

The Hackney Society works with other organisations in Hackney. In particular, it is represented on the committee of Hackney History (formerly the Friends of Hackney Archives) with whom we have an ever closer working relationship. The Society entered the sixth year of a reciprocal membership exchange with Sustainable Hackney. The Society retains a paid membership of the London Forum of Amenity and Civic Societies.

### **10. Plans for 2021/22**



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With no immediate prospect of grant funding, and a continued lack of specialist trustee skills in this area, our plans for the next year continue to be modest and focused on what volunteers can offer. We continue to seek to expand on those skills and apply for funding where appropriate and the return on the investment of time is sufficient. Whilst COVID has given us pause for thought on major projects it has clearly not had a major negative impact on the Society and has, in fact, created a positive change in some regards – particularly wider engagement. We need to think carefully about how we capitalise on that in the future and engage with our new audience who may no longer be based in Hackney.

We continue to have eyes on a revamp of our websites but these are likely to require at least £3000 of capital funds toward which we have already received a generous one-off donation of £500. Whilst we may be able to support this from our own funds now, the limiting factor is currently the lack of a volunteer to co-ordinate the project.

Two publications remain mothballed and it remains to be seen if there is the capacity to resurrect these in the coming year.

The standard membership fee of £15 has remained constant for a number of years and is modest considering the benefits that may derive from it. Membership fees no longer provide the Society with any material surplus once the production expenses for *Spaces* and postage costs are deducted. Having suspended charges for online events, we plan to resume charging an optional modest fee to members and non-members alike and will likely move back to a mandatory fee at some point as this provides a useful income.

We intend to resume talks, walks and visits in person as Covid-19 regulations and prudence permit but we plan to mix these with more online events. We are always interested in members' suggestions for future events.

As mentioned in the introduction, a nascent project to engage members and the wider public in discussions on the future shape of the Society has been on hold since the Coronavirus outbreak. This will need resurrecting in some form though the pandemic and our collaboration with Hackney History has provided much informal input into that project.

Both our Chair, Nick Perry and *Spaces* Editor Monica Blake intend to resign as Trustees at the next AGM and sadly Laurie Elks resigned as a Trustee in April this year. Now, more than ever, the Society needs to bring new voices and experiences into the committee of Trustees and encourages those with a passion for Hackney to join us and help shape the Society.

We continue to be grateful for all membership contributions and loyalty in these circumstances. Membership fees and donations of all sizes allow us to continue to do what we do on a tight budget.