

Christine Cowdray
Planning Committee Chair

St John's Wood Square Project, Ordnance Hill

Jamie Buchan, Executive Chairman of Craigewan, the development managers, reported that there has been little progress with the £1.5bn residential redevelopment of the Barracks site which gained planning consent in 2015 (architects: Squire and Partners and Wilkinson Eyre Associates). He notes: 'The St John's Wood Square Project Team continues to work diligently through the detailed design and procurement of the WCC consented development, a major piece of work which will continue until mid-2019: it is not anticipated that a construction commencement date for the former Barracks will be announced before that date.'

The Society maintains a good working relationship with Craigewan, and Jamie reports: 'we have found the Society to be a passionate advocate for St John's Wood and at all times engaged, challenging and constructive in its dealings with our development.'

St John's Wood High Street

We are very aware of the number of empty shops in the High Street and are working closely with Matt Farrell, Director of Asset Management at Trophaeum Asset Management, who own a significant number of the shop units. We have full confidence that Trophaeum will be able to implement their vision for the High Street despite the present economic pressure on high street retail shops. Matt Farrell says:

Empty shops are certainly the hot topic at the moment and we are of course well aware of this. At the moment all of our vacant shops are either already rented (number 41 to FaceGym and number 51 to Core Collective) or are under development. Unfortunately with FaceGym, we have reached a difference of opinion with Westminster regarding the use of the unit and they have asked us to make a planning application. This is frustrating, as the retailer has been ready and waiting to open for six months and it looks like this will be delayed further. Core Collective is due to open in August. Number 11 is undergoing an extension to create a bigger shop. The Kooples and Maison Blanc have both



The Project Team in the Riding School of the Barracks (© Craigewan); an empty High Street shop.

closed down their stores but they still have leases in place and so we cannot re-let them yet, but we are in discussions with them to allow us to find replacement tenants. Lastly, we are working hard to find a high quality neighbourhood restaurant to replace Carluccio's. We hope to have more news on this very soon. With our vacant shops, we paint the shopfronts and regularly clean them, as well as installing smart, branded, brightly coloured vinyls in the windows.

Obviously it is in our interest to rent the shops out but we must balance this with ensuring we let the properties to the right retailers rather than national chains and estate agents, so some patience is required. There are a lot of other vacant properties on the High Street which are not under our ownership and unfortunately we do not have much control of these, but we have written to other landlords to encourage them to improve the appearance of their empty shops. However, it should be noted that we have made good progress so far, in

bringing the following retailers to the street:

- The Good Life Eatery
- The Ivy Café
- FaceGym
(signed, but not yet open)
- Core Collective
(targeted opening in August)

It is clear to see that the Good Life Eatery and the Ivy have breathed new life into the High Street with our vision; we are confident that Core Collective and FaceGym will do the same. Lastly, we are liaising with the Post Office in response to local feedback to establish if we can find a suitable location for a Post Office franchise on the High Street.

It goes without saying that we have found the Society immensely helpful and collaborative in our work to date on the High Street.

Affordable housing

As mentioned in my previous newsletter report, we are deeply concerned about the lack of affordable housing in St John's Wood and do not fully understand

the opaque and complicated policies surrounding the provision of all the different categories. We asked Cllr Daniel Astaire, Cabinet Member for Planning and Public Realm, for clarification, and we were told:

Funding for delivery of affordable housing comes from a number of sources, the most prevalent of which is contributions from private developers through their Section 106 obligations, triggered when a certain amount of additional floor-space or new residential units are proposed on a site.

Westminster is presently reviewing its City Plan (and also considering the draft London Plan presented by the Mayor of London). We are concerned to ensure that developers commit to provide affordable housing as part of their proposed schemes and that this is built and available to those on intermediate and social housing waiting lists maintained by the Council.

Our new policies will encourage these homes to be provided **on-site** and only in exceptional circumstances will we allow off-site provision in the locality. Taking cheques in lieu will become a rarity rather than a norm. It is important that we create mixed and thriving communities going forward. It is also important that we increase the variety of tenures available: affordable homes are needed not just at social rent levels but also for working families, the elderly, and those providing key services to Westminster and its residents. Our new policies are designed to encourage delivery of all such homes to meet our needs.

For too long developers have sought to rely on viability arguments to permit the building of luxury homes but to evade their social responsibilities to provide affordable housing. We intend to distance ourselves from these viability arguments: simply put, if developers cannot meet their legal obligations, then their projects should not proceed. Our city cannot prosper if we allow 'golden postcodes' to be sold off to the highest bidders. We are looking carefully at how we tackle viability and overage style payments if developers' profits are not in line with the financial projections put forward at the time of

the application.

When the City Plan comes out for consultation later in the spring, we hope that the policies set out reflect the needs and aspirations of our communities and will welcome all comments and opinions.

Street cleansing

A big thank you to Gustavo Leite (City Inspector for our two wards) and to Taffy Hughes (Manager of Veolia) and his team for the noticeable improvement in street cleansing on the High Street and surrounding streets. Both men work incredibly hard on behalf of residents and it has been a great pleasure working with them to bring about some significant improvements in our area.

Our collaboration has resulted in the relocation of the bins on highly visible corners of St John's Wood Terrace, and as you can see from the photos this has made a significant difference to the character of the area. Many thanks to Cllr Rigby for involving the Society, since working together really does achieve results locally.

Gustavo has issued a number of fines to businesses and residents who were ignoring the instructions as to where and when rubbish should be put out onto the street for collection.

Having spent the last few months

walking the streets of St John's Wood, I can assure you that it is our fellow residents who are largely to blame for the rubbish left on our streets at the wrong time and for leaving black bin bags and bags of dog waste abandoned beside trees or street bins. It is rarely the Council's failure to collect it at the designated time.

We rely on residents to inform us of any problem areas and problem bins, so if you are having issues with rubbish collection, fly tipping or vermin please get in touch directly with Gustavo on 020 7641 2000 or email me on stjohnswood-soc@aol.com. Be sure to include date, time, address and photographic evidence, as this always helps.

We have also worked hard on a variety of issues that residents have contacted us about, including rat infestation on Charlbert Street, disused BT telephone kiosks filled with rubbish, and fly tipping.

In conclusion

Many thanks as always to our amazing and dedicated Planning Committee members Virginia, John, Diana, Stephen and Morris and also to our MP Karen Buck and our ward councillors, with whom we enjoy working on behalf of the community.



Taffy Hughes (left), Manager of Veolia, and Gustavo Leite (right), City Inspector for WCC.

Before and after the bin relocation initiative on the corners of St John's Wood Terrace with Aquila Street and St Ann's Terrace.