

CITY HERITAGE SOCIETY

ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1998

Shape of the City post-2000

The Society celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary in November with a Dinner at Pewterers Hall, the Society being toasted by Sir Lawrence Verney, lately Recorder of London. The Chairman, responding, told members and guests among whom were the Chief Commoner, the Chairman of Save Britain's Heritage and the City Planning Officer. 'I promise that we will continue in our small way to discourage skyscrapers, groundscrapers and other undesirable blots on the City scene and to work for a City which all of us can enjoy into the next millennium.'

The Society's most important contribution to that end came in the closing months of the year when we submitted comments to the City Corporation on its proposals for updating the Unitary Development Plan which is intended to provide a blueprint for the City's planning strategy over the first years of the new millennium.

City Heritage was much involved in the drafting of the original UDP which, in general, provided a commendably civilized approach to planning and environmental matters for a City with two thousand years of history. Our chief cause of concern in 1992 was that there already existed in the City an over-abundant supply of office floor space and the 'plot ratio' (which controlled the bulk of buildings) should be reduced so as to encourage the design of smaller-scale buildings.

In the outcome 'plot-ratio' was scrapped altogether, superseded by a policy requiring that new buildings should visually enhance the City and avoid harm to the townscape; that bulk and massing are appropriate to their surroundings; and that developments pay due regard to local scale, height and character.

Over the past few years this loose policy has been all too freely interpreted, with much of the City's building stock being replaced. There is little to regret in the loss of many of the unlovely buildings of the 1950's, 1960's and 1970's; some of the replacements are positive improvements, but most, in our view, are too big.

Coming now to the proposals for a new Unitary Development Plan we can therefore say that our earlier concerns were certainly justified and that the new Plan should be more restrictive in its options.

Alas, the Corporation's 'discussion papers' indicate that any such restriction is still far from envisaged.

In regard to 'Economic Activity' the Corporation foresees long-term growth in financial services and makes the assumption that there will be an increase in financial sector employment over the next 10-15 years between 1% and 2.5% per annum. We have said in our comment that against a substantial fall in City employment from 310,000 in 1994 to some 250,000 today, and with economic circumstances at home and across the world resulting inevitably in further reductions in the financial sector workforce, such forecasting is a nonsense and needs to be corrected.

Our concern is that on the basis of such a false premise the case continues stubbornly to be made for more and bigger new office buildings. Incredibly it is suggested that the City will require up to 2.8 million more square metres of office floor space over the next 10 years!

We have said in our comments that developers will always urge the need for more office space but their optimism should not be the basis for City planning. In practice, however, planning permissions are applied for and granted for buildings invariably larger than those they replace with little regard as to whether they will ever be built or, if they are, whether they will be fully occupied or even occupied at all.

City Heritage is at the forefront of those wishing the City to remain a strong and independent centre of world finance but in view of inevitable shrinkage in the numbers employed in the financial sector we have pointed out the need first to retain or create groups of useful smaller buildings rather than overblown ones; and second to give positive encouragement to 'non-office uses' – e.g. educational, medical, advertising, and of course residential – as a way to ensure continuing demand for buildings no longer required as offices and to help ensure the City's continuing future prosperity.

In regard to 'Environmental Quality' we have urged that 'plot-ratio' should be restored with a lower limit than the 5:1 formula applying in 1994 and that there should be an additional control that any new development should fit comfortably into the existing landscape.

City Heritage has commented on all eleven of the Corporation's discussion papers: on 'Transport' to urge for more constructive policies to ease vehicle movement so as to reduce the pollution affecting all the City's major traffic routes; on 'Housing' the benefits of making greater residential provision as a way of finding a new use for unwanted office buildings; on 'Visitors' the disadvantage of attracting yet more tourists; on 'Shopping' our hope that small retail units will continue to have a place in new buildings; on 'Social Services' the desirability of extending medical uses on and around the Barts site.

Planning applications

During 1998 the Society submitted comments to the City Corporation on 46 planning applications. Extracts are published below.

14 West Smithfield/22-29 Hosier Lane City Heritage warmly commends the conversion of this warehouse block to residential and retail and in particular the proposal for a new livery hall for the Haberdashers Company.

15 Newgate Street The sooner the existing Sudbury House is demolished the better. We are please the replacement is only seven storeys and we like the recessed corners to reduce apparent bulk.

Paternoster Square Whitfield's master plan has many commendable features, in particular the facility for piecemeal development. What is proposed is so splendid in comparison with the derelict eyesore of today, it would be easy to say let the scheme go ahead without reservation. However, we have concerns which we hope the architects can take on board . . . a pity not to include more public use . . . materials and elevation of 'Building 1' do not relate well to Cutlers Hall and Amen Court . . . 'Building 2' is monolithic and promises to be extremely boring – needs livening up at street level on Newgate Street . . . commendable delicacy and simplicity in 'Building 5 and 6' which work well with the Chapter House and Temple Bar.

Three Quays, Tower Hill Support the concept of an hotel and the building will help to improve this end of ghastly Lower Thames Street.

7-12 Gracechurch Street Changes to the existing elevations are positive improvements. Change of use to hotel is welcome.

33 Holborn Foster's proposed nine-storey building is more appropriate in height than the existing Daily Mirror slab and the quadrant form more suited to the site.

3-9 Newgate Street No objection to demolition of the unattractive 1960's building but the elevational appearance with its clumsy and awkward shape is unappealing.

Bridge across the Thames CHS is opposed to this project which would offer no benefit whatsoever to the City. Such a structure would be highly intrusive of views along the river, from Paul's Walk and from the steps down to the riverside. Forecast to promote four million 'pedestrian trips' a year it would exacerbate the City's already over-crowded transport.

41 Eastcheap The existing c. 1910 office block suffered an unfortunate addition of two upper floors in the 1960's. The proposed replacement is ordinary but relates quite well with the adjoining Victorian building.

15-17 King Street Wholly admirable development restoring a neglected piece of Victorian Italianate and a faded rococo-ish neighbour to make a splendid contribution to street architecture.

The Bowring Building, Tower of London The buildings are on a vast scale and their mass is made worse by the total uniformity of all the elevations. Surely more variety and interest are merited on this much-viewed site. The block to the east is two storeys higher than the existing building and one storey should certainly be removed. A glazed screen encloses what is now open public access. Such loss of open public space in the City must be resisted.

104-111 Houndsditch City Heritage welcomes the demolition of the existing ugly building but we would greatly regret the loss of the brick building in Cutler Street which would lose its distinctive character if this very large (and architecturally boring) development opens on to it as well as on to the other three frontages.

29 Gresham Street We are concerned at the way Pewterers Hall is being totally engulfed by massive new and rather ugly buildings. This proposal with its excessive height and the way it would fill the whole of the Oat Lane frontage should not be given planning permission. The existence of the livery hall should be recognized and its future well-being safeguarded.

Plantation House This proposal is for a really massive development stretching from Fenchurch Street to Great Tower Street and from Rood Lane to Mincing Lane. The repetitive elevations will be vastly boring . . . could not the developer arrive at something that breaks up this site while still achieving the dealing floors they seem to think vital? The existing Plantation House provides a large number of small office suites and not to replace them would be a great loss to the City's business

community. Fourteen storeys is too high. Best features are the galleria and roof gardens.

29-32 King Street The Planning Committee should consider whether any more of the traditional buildings in this important City street can safely be lost. Certainly 29-30 is worthy of retention.

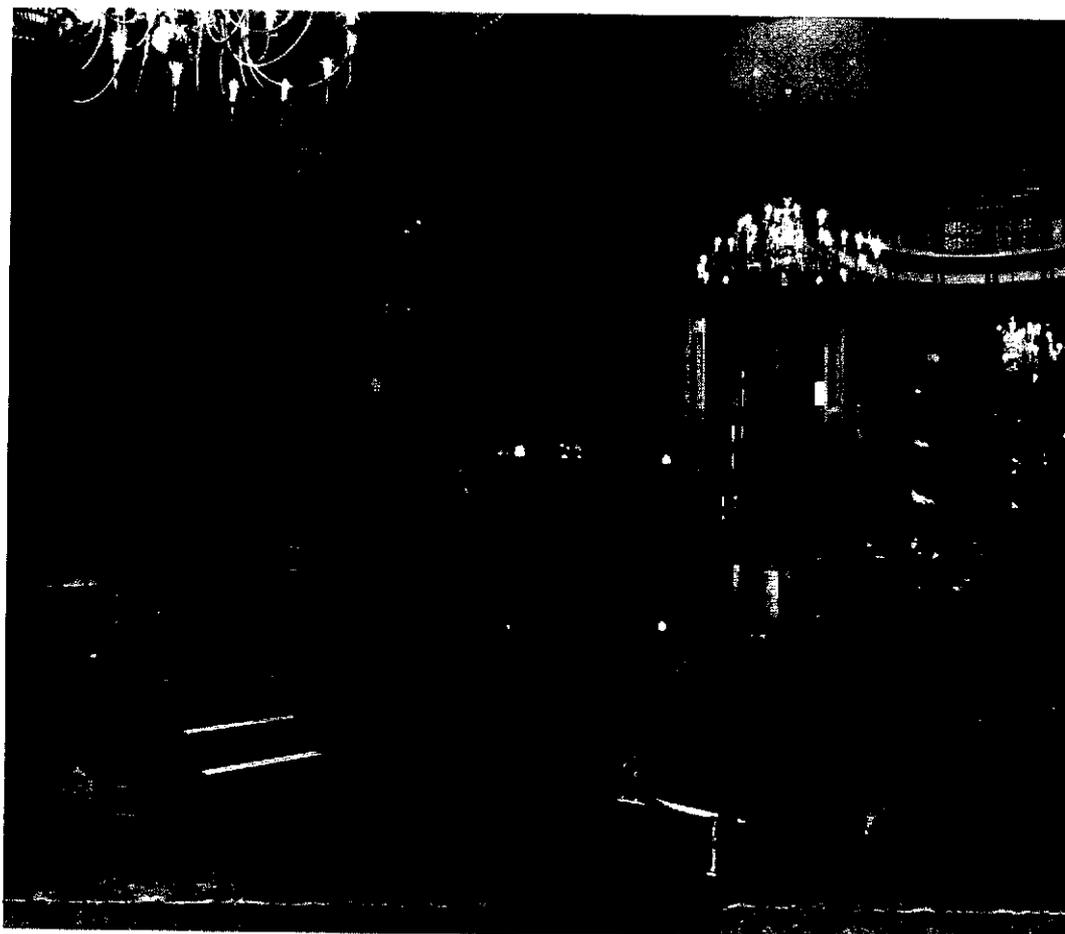
20-28 Moorgate We recommend refurbishment and retention of the existing Moorgate facade. We regret the proposed closure of Cophall Close which could be much improved. The proposed bridges across Telegraph Street and Whalebone Court are an unattractive feature.

Broken Wharf, Upper Thames Street We are grateful for the surprisingly agreeable replacement proposed with its low height and good elevation.

42 Threadneedle Street, etc City Heritage regards these proposals, the latest in a long history, as offering a potentially brilliant solution to the use of this large and important site at the heart of the City. We welcome the retention of most of the exterior of the existing buildings and the sympathetic creation of new features with a lively retail shopping area within and the opening up of thoroughways for the public. A likely conservation award winner

61-63 West Smithfield Another example of excellent refurbishment, finding valuable new uses (restaurant and residential) for a former bank. Another potential conservation award winner.

Moor House, London Wall We question the process by which the architects were able to 'promote' their design in advance at an earlier meeting of the Planning Committee. There some interesting features in the proposal, notably the way the building would taper up from its base giving a 'half-dome' effect. However, we question whether such a radical departure from the norm should be encouraged, especially at this junction, where the unusual shape could have a seriously deleterious effect on the attractive small buildings nearby, some of which are listed. There would be less retail at ground level than at present which is a pity. more at basement



Interior of the Award-winning 'Counting House' pub in Cornhill

and upper level. Replacement retail should not be a single unit but as many small units as possible. The larger 'foot' of the new building would result in the loss of much of the open space existing at present. Interesting proposal but would need to be modified so as not to overpower this quite sensitive space.

29-30 Queen Street, etc We are pleased that some of the attractive existing features would be used and welcome the intention to replicate other features of these interesting buildings. Pity that the Vintry pub is not to stay in situ and left undisturbed.

1 London Wall Another very large development of 13 storeys overtopping the already high Shelley House opposite. A building of no great architectural excitement. We strongly oppose the thought of pedestrianizing Noble Street with all the traffic problems it would create for Staining Lane and Oat Lane – particularly for Pewterers Hall.

19-21 Moorgate, etc Our chief regret is that this proposal would replace four separate buildings with a single office block with one large and continuous frontage along Moorgate and Coleman Street. The major loss would be 58 Coleman Street dating from the late 18th century.



Sir David Calcutt Q.C. receives the City Heritage Award for 1-4 Middle Temple Lane. With him, the Lord Mayor and City Heritage Chairman, Douglas Woodward

The City Heritage Award 1998

Two outstanding submissions vied for the Assessor's accolade in this, the twenty-first year of the City Heritage Award for excellence in building conservation and renewal in the City of London.

In the outcome the Assessors decided to name each of the two as joint recipients of the 1998 Award, the buildings concerned differing so greatly in character and the work afforded to them:

1. The 'Counting House' pub has been created out of a former banking hall in the heart of the City. In style it harks back to the opulent heyday of Victorian public house design with its mahogany panelling, alabaster walls, timber floor – all retained from the bank interior – plus large mirrors, chandeliers and leather seating.

The original timber-panelled gallery has been extended to form seating at mezzanine level and a new timber staircase built to provide access. A new glazed screen matches existing screens to the rear rooms. A plastered glazed dome has been decorated and picked out in colours. A large central island bar has been constructed.

2. 1-4 Temple Lane was recognised by the Assessors as the outstanding refurbishment project of the year.

The barristers' chambers facing on to Fleet Street and Middle Temple Lane date from 1684 and 1693 and are listed Grade I and Grade II*. Extensive structural repairs needed to be undertaken including repairs to the timber roof trusses, stabilisation of the leaning pediment facing onto Fleet Street, new piled foundations and a timber-framed wall to brace the timber frame. All the roofs were retiled or releaded. Internally floor boards were lifted and repairs to the floor structure carried out. Repairs to the panelling, some 17th century, were extensive.

Events 1998

- Annual General Meeting, Pewterers Hall
- 'Pevsner Revisited: The changing face of the City of London', an illustrated talk by Simon Bradley, at The Gallery, Cowcross Street
- Tour of the Midland Grand Hotel, St. Pancras Station
- Another of the popular walks conducted by Desmond Fitzpatrick – Cornhill to Billingsgate
- 'Friends of Friendless Churches', a lecture by Matthew Saunders at St. Andrew-by-the-Wardrobe
- The Society's Silver Jubilee Dinner at Pewterers Hall

THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE 1996/1997

C. Douglas Woodward CBE* Chairman and Treasurer

Norman Searle J.P. Deputy Chairman

Desmond Fitzpatrick Deputy Chairman

Ann Woodward Membership Secretary

Peter Duggan Social Events

Barbara Allan Hon. Secretary

R T D Wilmot C.C.

Anthony Hemy ARIBA

James Thomas B.A. Arch, Dip T.P., FRIBA

CITY HERITAGE AWARD 1998

The 'Counting House' 50 Cornhill

Owner: *Fuller Smith & Turner plc*

Architect: *J Thwaites on behalf of CUBE*

Contractor: *Broadoak Construction Ltd*

and

1-4 Middle Temple Lane

Owner: *The Honourable Society of the Middle Temple*

Architect: *Carden & Godfrey Architects*

Contractor: *Wallis Ltd*

THE ASSESSORS

Lady Freeman, BA Dip.Cons(AA)

London Advisory Committee of the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission for England

R. C. Houghton, Dip.Arch, RIBA

Worshipful Company of Painter-Stainers

Peter Wynn Rees, BSc, B.Arch, BTP, RIBA, MRTPI

Corporation of London

Matthew Saunders, MBE, MA, FSA, IHBC

Ancient Monuments Society

A.F. Shannon, ARIBA, AADip

Worshipful Company of Painter-Stainers

C. Douglas Woodward, CBE

City heritage Society