



# City Heritage Society

## ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1993

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**T**he City of London Unitary Development Plan, having crossed its final hurdles at the end of 1993, will come into force in the spring of 1994. It establishes the planning framework for all aspects of City development over the coming years.

Members will recall that the Society, in its evidence to the public enquiry held in October 1992, asked that the plan should acknowledge the fact that there existed in the City an over-abundant supply of office floor space and that a smaller workforce should be envisaged and that to reflect these facts there should be a reduction in the "plot ratio" control reducing it from 5.1:1 to 4:1 —as a signal to encourage the design of buildings of smaller scale. In making this proposal we were not unaware that development interests were agitating for an increase in plot ratio opening the way to even bulkier and more massive office developments.

In the outcome the enquiry inspector has recommended that plot ratio should be scrapped entirely. The proposed change has been accepted by the Secretary of State and by the Court of Common Council. The new policy incorporated in the City plan now requires buildings which will visually enhance the City and avoid harm to the townscape. These objectives are to be achieved by ensuring that the bulk and massing of schemes are appropriate in relation to the surroundings and that development pays due regard to local scale, height, character and materials.

What will be the result for building development in the future? The City Planning Officer has welcomed the new approach as allowing each scheme to be dealt with on its merits. He has pointed out that plot ratio control had little effect in curbing such "air rights" buildings as the Lee House replacement, buildings with atria in the middle, and many other of the vast developments of recent years.

The question now, however, is whether planning officers and members of the City's Planning Committee, with no quantitative control at all to guide them, and with only drawings and perhaps a model on which to base a judgement, will come to the right conclusion as to the appropriate bulk and mass of a proposed building in relation to its setting.

What is abundantly clear is that the City Heritage Society, and the national bodies such as English Heritage, will have an even greater responsibility than hitherto to express their views on the building designs being submitted in the months and years ahead.

### **The empty office buildings: *the way ahead***

**P**revious plot ratio control, plus the fact that all too often the Planning Committee approved applications for buildings which even further exceeded the already high plot ratio figures of 5.1:1, have contributed to the surplus of office accommodation with which the City is now over-loaded.

As a result of the Bishopsgate bomb in April, some of the empty office space was thankfully taken up by firms whose premises were destroyed or damaged. There are also glimmerings of a property revival generally with good new, or well refurbished, buildings being most in demand.

### ***But what can be done with the vast residue that remains?***

While all the signs are that the City will remain as one of the world's great financial centres, it is a fact that increasingly businesses will regard such centres as places for headquarter operations. The City's working population fell by nearly 30 per cent in the ten years from 1981 to 1991 and the overall trend is certain to be one of continuing fall.

Against this background it is interesting that the inspector for the public enquiry into the City plan urged the inclusion of a new policy to encourage "affordable housing".

The City Heritage Society has long urged that the City should provide more housing and other uses alongside the office buildings. Such uses could be for education, medical and hotel purposes to name but three, but residential accommodation would appear to offer a particularly rewarding approach. The Society plans, actively, to promote this cause in the coming years.

**Poultry - end of story**

Last year we reported that the threat of demolition hanging over the Mappin and Webb and other buildings on the famous Poultry site had once again been lifted thanks to objections to the road closures that Lord Palumbo's scheme would necessitate. Alas, the reprieve was only a temporary one.

Following yet another public enquiry in March, to which the Society again submitted evidence, the Secretary of State for Transport went against his own inspector's views (the second time this has happened in this sorry tale) in giving the all clear for the "stopping up" of Bucklersbury, which effectively sounded the final death knell for these buildings. It was hoped, at one stage, that a new planning application would be required but the City Corporation decreed otherwise. So, after a battle lasting for some 25 years, it would appear that some time in 1994 demolition will begin to make way for what we consider to be the indifferent building which Lord Palumbo intends to erect there.

**Other planning matters****Paternoster Square development.**

The Corporation gave approval in February to the plans for an £800 million classical redevelopment of Paternoster Square on which the Society had earlier submitted detailed comments. We had commended the scheme in general while regretting over-development.

**Old Broad Street/Threadneedle Street.**

We have made detailed comments on this proposed redevelopment of 11 buildings by National Westminster Bank. We said that the proposals remain disappointing for this important site at the heart of the City. We believed that there were some good ideas within the scheme and that they should be further developed.

We said that the concept of a single floor plate over the whole site needed reappraisal and questioned the need for yet another large floor plate building, suggesting that smaller units based on individual plot boundaries would be more appropriate — and would perhaps more readily meet today's demands.

**4 Pump Court, Temple.**

Objection to placing a cabin-like structure on the roof of a Grade 1 listed building of 1686.

**2-3 Amen Court.**

Objection to proposed roof treatment of Grade 1 listed buildings of the 17th century.

**1 King William Street.**

Generally acceptable but weakness of detail at ground floor and roof levels.

**9-11 Eastcheap.**

An acceptable replacement building provided that the upper fenestration is improved.

**18-25 Eldon Street.**

Strong objection to proposed building's gargantuan proportions — an inferior replacement of anonymous aspect for two buildings capable of refurbishment which are characteristic of their period and native to the City. Application later withdrawn.

**Pavement outside Guildhall Library.**

Strong objection to proposal to locate an automatic public convenience in this environmentally attractive area.

**7-15 Fleet Street.**

We welcomed a proposal for change of use from bank and office to hotel.

**Bowring building, Tower Place.**

The sooner the present ugly Bowring building is demolished, the better! The replacement which has been approved by the Corporation represents over-development of the site but the design is certainly more stylish than the existing building.

**Little Britain**

The Society welcomed a Court of Common Council decision that Wimpey Property Holdings should be made to go ahead with at least one of the three residential phases of their massive Little Britain office development. Wimpey's had said that because of the current economic climate flats were unlikely to sell and therefore asked the Corporation to defer the date of the three residential blocks until June 1997. Work will now start on one of the sites — in Little Britain — during 1994.

**Shelley House, Noble Street.**

A revised scheme for a replacement office building has been described as "no worse" than a scheme already approved. The new design is for a building on eleven floors with overall floor space of some 15,000 sq.m. Plot ratio is 9:1!

**Crossrail.**

The proposed rail link between Liverpool Street and Paddington is still very much in doubt pending private investment in the scheme. Meanwhile there has been strong criticism of the scheme on the grounds that it would involve demolition of the Amro Bank at Moorgate, offices and shops in the Liverpool Street Arcade and other office buildings. Finsbury Circus would be turned into a work site. The suggestion has been made that the rail link should be re-routed along Marylebone Road.

**The security cordon.**

It seems likely that the traffic control measures introduced by the Corporation following the Bishopsgate bomb in April will be made permanent — while the terrorist threat continues. We have suggested to the Corporation that the various check points controlling entry to the City centre should in the long term be made less ugly and obtrusive.

**Conservation Area Advisory Committee.**

Three of the members of our Executive Committee - Messrs. Searle, Thomas and Fitzpatrick — serve on the City of London Conservation Area Advisory Committee which we regard as an important part of the Society's work in that they are able to comment on many of the important cases which are regularly under consideration by the CAAC.

**English Heritage.**

The Chairman had expressed the Society's concern about English Heritage's proposals to devolve responsibility for London to the Boroughs. These proposals had met with an unenthusiastic response, with the City Corporation almost alone in favour. The Society deplors any loss of control by English Heritage on development and conservation matters.

**Events 1993**

The Executive Committee met on 9 February, 26 May, 3 August and 2 November 1993.

The Annual General Meeting took place on 3 February 1993 at the City Conference Centre.

Visits, much enjoyed by members and their guests, took place during the year to the newly restored St. James Garlickhythe Church; Vintners Place, the dramatic new building development on the Embankment; the Royal Exchange (recipient of the 1992 City Heritage Award); and to the Mansion House following its magnificent refurbishment.

In July, the City Heritage Lecture was presented by Dr. Frank Duffy, President of the RIBA. The title was "New buildings for a new City".

## The 1993 Awards



The 1993 City Heritage Award for building conservation was presented for the comprehensive scheme of refurbishment and redevelopment of the Prudential Assurance Company's Holborn Bars site. The original Grade II\* listed buildings of the 1870's by Alfred and Paul Waterhouse have been brilliantly refurbished and added to with a series of new office buildings.

There was much praise for the way in which the Waterhouse buildings had been restored with many of the faience, granite and brick features of the original buildings — lost over the years — having been revealed and restored. The assessors also praised the opening up of the site for public access to the main internal courtyard, a major addition to the City's streetscene.

The architects were **EPR Architects Limited** and the main Contractor, **Sir Robert McAlpine Ltd.**

*The assessors:* Ashley Barker, Mrs. Jennifer Freeman (*English Heritage*), R.C. Houghton, and A.F. Shannon (*Painter-Stainers*), Peter Rees (*City Planning Officer*), Matthew Saunders (*Ancient Monuments Society*) and Douglas Woodward (*CHS Chairman*).

This conservation award has been presented each year since 1978 by CHS in partnership with the Worshipful Company of Painter-Stainers

**The City Heritage New Architecture Award**, which is run by the Worshipful Company of Chartered Architects in association with us was presented for the redevelopment of Bracken House, the former Financial Times Building in Cannon Street. Members will recall that Bracken House was given the City Heritage conservation award in 1992 and it is a notable first for a building project to receive accolades in this way both for the refurbished element and for the new building work.

Bracken House, by **Michael Hopkins and Partners**, was found by the assessors to be "*head and shoulders above its rivals in the elegant, quiet and dignified refinement of concept*".

The owner is the **Obayashi Corporation** and the main contractor **Trollope and Colls Construction Limited**.

**The New Architecture Award for 1992** (also presented in 1993) went to the J.P. Morgan headquarters building on Victoria Embankment — the former City of London School. Architects were **Building Design Partnership** and main contractor, **Higgs and Hill Management Contracting**.

*Assessors:* Stuart Murphy (*Chartered Architects*), Sherban Cantacuzino (*Royal Fine Art Commission*), Rory Coonan (*Arts Council*), Max Hutchinson (*RIBA*), Steven Greenberg (*Architects Journal*) and James Thomas and Douglas Woodward (*City Heritage Society*)

**City Heritage Award 1993.**

*The Prudential Headquarters at Holborn*  
 Left to right: Douglas Woodward, Chairman City Heritage; Lord Mayor, Sir Francis Mc Williams; Hugh Jenkins, Prudential; the Master Painter—Stainers



### Members of The Executive Committee 1993

**C. Douglas Woodward, OBE**  
*Chairman*

**Norman Searle**  
*Vice Chairman*

**Gordon Rees**  
*Hon Treasurer and City Heritage Award Secretary*

**Mrs. Ann Woodward**  
*Membership Secretary*

**David Tettmar**  
*Hon. Secretary*

**Anthony Hemy**

**Tom Wilmot**

**Peter Duggan**

**James Thomas**  
*Planning Applications and CAAC*

**Desmond Fitzpatrick**  
*Planning Applications and CAAC*

**Stella Currie**  
*was responsible for arranging social events.*