

BATTERSEA MATTERS

THE BATTERSEA SOCIETY NEWSLETTER WINTER 23/24



ROUGH SLEEPING: WHAT IS THE ANSWER?

Michael Jubb discusses the Council's proposed Rough Sleepers' Assessment Hub

Members may recall the note I circulated by email at the end of October about Wandsworth Council's proposal to establish an assessment centre for rough sleepers on the south side of Lavender Hill, opposite Battersea Arts Centre. Rough sleeping remains a significant problem, and GLA expenditure on it has risen fourfold in the last eight years. The Mayor, Sadiq Khan, has recently published, in concert with many businesses and charities, a Rough Sleeping Charter, encouraging all groups and organisations to work together to try to end rough sleeping altogether.

Rapid assessments

The proposal was outlined by the Council in a draft Housing and Homelessness Strategy issued for consultation in the summer. The hub would provide help to rough sleepers from a range of specialists from the Council and other agencies, co-ordinated and rapid assessments of their needs, and tailored planning to move them from the street and into housing. The Battersea Society supported the proposal in the draft Strategy; but few local people had read that document, and it did not say where the hub would be located. Hence we urged the Council to provide much more information to local people about the precise nature of the hub and how it would operate. See page 15 for our response to the draft Housing and Homelessness Strategy.

However, when a planning application appeared unannounced on the Council's website for the site on Lavender Hill to be used as the hub, it included only scant information about precisely what was proposed (much less than in the draft Strategy). As a result, more than 500 people objected to the application.

Rather belatedly, the Council organised a drop-in session on 6 December in Battersea Arts Centre



Rough sleeping is a significant problem in London

to provide more information and to answer questions from local residents. The meeting was led by local councillor Aydin Dikerdem, the Cabinet member responsible for housing, accompanied by housing department officials.

They repeatedly stressed that the hub's success depended on good relationships with local residents; but they also admitted that communications with those residents had been lamentably poor so far. There were even complaints about the poor publicity for the meeting itself: most people found out about it via social media such as Next Door and the Lavender Hill website, rather than from the Council.

A four-page Q&A was handed out at the meeting covering some of the most frequently raised questions and concerns. It makes clear that

- **the hub will offer short-term accommodation only, to a maximum of 11 people in nine bedrooms, and that residents will have to sign up to rules and expectations necessary for living in accommodation with shared facilities, and with no use of drugs;**
- **each resident will work with an individual housing officer and other specialists to explore longer term options, with a target of 28 days before they move on;**
- **the hub will not accommodate high risk individuals who are not suited to communal living;**

- **it will invite residents and others using its advice and support services by appointment only, and only during daytime hours;**

- **it will be staffed by specialist officers throughout the day, and by at least two staff members 24/7, with management on-call at all times; and it will be covered all round by CCTV inside and out;**

- **a 24/7 hotline will be provided for local residents and businesses.**

A promise was also made that a forum will be established for local residents and businesses to ensure that any issues arising from the hub are properly discussed and resolved.

Communications

Cllr Dikerdem and his colleagues said that a leaflet similar to that made available at the meeting would be circulated widely in the local area as soon as possible. They were aware that poor co-ordination and communications so far amount to a dreadful own goal for the Council, and that they must work hard to restore good relations with many members of the local community. Let's hope they make good progress before this article is published.

Michael Jubb is chair of the Battersea Society and a member of its planning committee.



Visit our website: batterseasociety.org.uk for regular updates on Battersea Society news, events and planning matters

FROM THE EDITOR



Homelessness, especially in its most extreme form rough sleeping, is a tragedy for individuals and a burning, and highly visual,

issue for society. Wandsworth Council is to be commended for trying to do something about it, but as Michael Jubbs points out on the front page, they have not gone about it well. They failed to give the appropriate information to the local community.

What is 'community'? What does it mean? When I worked in a brain injury

rehab unit, 'the community' meant anywhere that wasn't the hospital.

Nowadays there are online communities for people with shared conditions or backgrounds or interests. People need to find people, and we realised during the lockdowns that we needed real live people to touch and smile at and laugh with. A friendly word from a shopkeeper, being called by your name – all these brighten one's day and lessen loneliness.

We need to feel we belong. That can be to a chess or football club, a political party or a keep fit class. Or a place. I'm a Londoner – I belong to and love London. I also love Battersea, especially my own little corner of it, as you will see on page 12. Community is a theme of this issue of *Battersea Matters*. Our MP and the

Mayor of Wandsworth handed out awards to people who had contributed to the community (pages 3 and 6). On page 6 Carol Rahn points out that the name of a place really matters. The importance of locality, of belonging to a place and enjoying it is emphasised both about Nine Elms (p10) and Webbs Road in south Battersea (p12) And the Rev Simon Butler (p15) comments on both the inequalities and the diversity of north Battersea.

I hope you have found a community (or even several) to belong to. And I hope you will enjoy them in 2024.

Jenny Sheridan
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MAN ON THE BATTERSEA BUS

Mike Roden celebrates the shipping forecast, applauds river clean-ups, ponders the weird items mislaid by people, and looks ahead to the future.

I'm not sure what date you're reading this, but I imagine that your Christmas treats and turkey sandwiches are just a happy memory. If you had a 'real' tree which is now waiting outside for the council to collect, you're constantly finding (and treading on) the needles you so carefully swept up. Be advised that you'll still be finding them turning up by Easter. Anyway, it's January, or thereabouts so let's pick the needles out of our socks and kick off with a notable anniversary.

I did think I might mention that Lenin died 100 years ago, but it seemed more fun to recall that it was on 1 January 1924 that a still relatively small band of wireless listeners heard something like 'Rockall, Malin, Hebrides. Southwest gale 8 to storm 10, veering west, severe gale 9 to violent storm 11. Rain, then squally showers. Poor, becoming moderate.' Sailors round our coasts now have other ways keeping in touch with weather and sea conditions but the Met Office Shipping Forecast continues 100 years later though with a reduced number of broadcasts and still provides a useful check to anyone at sea wishing to check their own data.

Cricket fans listening to Test Match Special on Radio 4 longwave got very used to its interruptions and the late

night forecast preceded by Ronald Binge's restfully anodyne melody. Sailing By had its own fan base which had nothing to do with yachtsmen needing weather warnings.

Oysters

Turning to inland waterways, for the last 20 years Thames 21 and other organisations have organised regular clean-ups of the Thames – including on the foreshore here in Battersea. In that time the amount of rubbish has certainly diminished. There are far fewer plastic bottles bobbing around the boats moored near St Mary's Church. What's also disappeared though is the more interesting debris amongst the mud and shingle, like pieces of clay pipe (the Victorian cigarette end) and large oyster shells reminding us of what passed for fast food in the 19th Century. (The rich ate them with champagne, the poor with beer!) Sadly, the wash from the increase in river traffic, especially the Uber Boats, has scoured much of that local history away from the surface.

So I imagine we're unlikely to discover another Battersea Shield. Or indeed something like the find reported by a Derbyshire group clearing rubbish blown into the River Derwent from surrounding fields by Storm

Babet. Caught up among polythene wrapping from haybales they found a trombone! That wouldn't be much of a surprise to the TfL lost property office which has 'enough musical instruments to form a band' waiting to be claimed, along with prosthetic legs, false teeth and single shoes (rarely a pair).

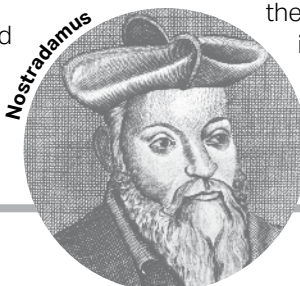
Returning reluctantly to the present day I suppose that January's not the most popular month of the year for most of us. Too much retrospection sets us wondering what we could have done differently in the last twelve months (or is that just me?) and looking ahead we're a bit like children peering nervously over the edge of the sofa at a scary episode of Doctor Who.

The French astrologer Nostradamus – whose 1555 prophecies of events far in the future are pure gold to anyone trying to write a piece like this – took a rather dim view of 2024. Unsurprisingly the world can expect floods, drought, and famine in addition to troubles in an unnamed royal family with the 'King of the Isles' being pushed aside by 'one who will have no mark of a king'; and the death of the Pope.

Still, over the centuries Nostradamus has had a lot more misses than hits so we shouldn't worry too much. And that's probably quite enough from me for this time. If it's not too late I'd like to wish you

all a Happy New Year and let's hope the world improves, even if just a little, in the next twelve months.

So mind how you go and I'll see you next time.



MP HANDS OUT AWARDS TO COMMUNITY CHAMPIONS

Parliament was the arena for Battersea MP Marsha de Cordova's ceremony to recognise Community Champions.

Abdirahman Xirsi, director of the Elays network based at the Doddingdon and Rollo Estate, won the Charity Leader award. The Good Neighbour Award went to Ania Kalacinska, co-founder of the Battersea Power Station Community Choir.

Rev Betsy Blatchley was awarded Faith Leader Champion for her work as leader of the Nine Elms Arts Ministry. Senia Dedic, founder and chair of WoW (Women of Wandsworth) was recognised with a Community Engagement award.



Other people and organisations to be awarded Community Champion status included Chocolate Films, Waste Not Want Not, Elizabeth Oddono and Edith Adejobi. Special recognition went to Aaron Barbour, until recently CEO of Katherine Low Settlement.

'Battersea has such a wonderful community spirit', said Ms de Cordova. 'I have seen at first hand the wonderful work of these dedicated volunteers during the pandemic, the cost of living crisis and years of austerity.'

BATTERSEA SOCIETY TRUSTEES

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John Oughton

Jenny Sheridan

BATTERSEA SOCIETY EVENTS JANUARY 2024 – APRIL 2024

For any enquiries please contact events@batterseasociety.org.uk

● **Tuesday 23 January, 6.30 for 7pm**
Talk on Battersea's industrial and agricultural heritage
St Mary's Church, Battersea Church Road, London SW11 3NA
Wandsworth archivist Emma Anthony explores Battersea's industrial and agricultural heritage
£5 payable in advance online at www.batterseasociety.org.uk or on the door

● **Thursday 15 February 6.30 for 7pm**
Film Night at the RCA
Royal College of Art, Dyson Building, 1 Hester Road, London SW11 4AY
A special screening of the 1951 classic *The Man in the White Suit*, starring Alec Guinness.
£5 payable in advance online at www.batterseasociety.org.uk or on the door

● **Tuesday 20 February 6.30 for 7pm**
Talk on The Lost Museums of Battersea and Wandsworth
St Mary's Church, Battersea Church Road, London SW11 3NA
Philip Bradley tells the story of our local borough museums.
£5 payable in advance online at www.batterseasociety.org.uk or on the door

● **Thursday 14 March 6.30 for 7pm**
Talk on The Mercenary River
St Mary's Church, Battersea Church Road, London SW11 3NA
A talk by author and broadcaster Nick Higham on the history of London's water supply
£5 payable in advance online at www.batterseasociety.org.uk or on the door

● **Wednesday 20 March, 11am**
Visit to the William Morris Society Archives in Kelmscott House
Kelmscott House, 26 Upper Mall, London W6 9TA
A private visit with a talk and special presentation of items not usually on display including original wallpaper, watercolour designs and other items



from the collection. Max 20 people
£13 payable in advance online at www.batterseasociety.org.uk

● **Sunday 14 April 12.45pm**
Spring Lunch at Al Phoenic
46 – 54 Battersea Bridge Road, London SW11 3AG
A special set menu at the popular Lebanese restaurant Al Phoenic, with a starter mezze and main courses.
£29 for two courses, excluding drinks.
Payable in advance
www.batterseasociety.org.uk

● **Thursday 25 April 6.30 for 7pm**
Talk on how Battersea's mosaic heritage influences modern artwork
St Mary's Church, Battersea Church Road, London SW11 3NA
Award-winning ceramic artist and architect Maria Gasparian will share her research into Battersea's rich mosaic heritage, and how it links to the Randall Tesserae project in Surrey Lane.
£5 payable in advance online at www.batterseasociety.org.uk or on the door

THE LIBRARY OF THINGS COMES TO WANDSWORTH

Borrowing is cheaper and more sustainable than buying, says Jenny Sheridan

Why buy an expensive piece of kit that you might use only occasionally, when you could hire it for a fraction of the price, and help the environment at the same time?

That's the basic idea behind the Library of Things, which has recently opened in Southside Shopping Centre in Wandsworth, supported by Wandsworth Council.

Better value

There are several reasons for borrowing rather than buying. For one thing, many items would only be used once a year or less. It's obviously better value to borrow a carpet cleaner for a day for £25 (Including cleaning tablets) than to buy its equivalent for over £700!

You might want to try out making a fancy dress costume for a party, or making pasta from scratch. A sewing machine or pasta maker could be yours for a trial run, for just a few pounds.

Among the Things in the Library's collection are garden shears, a projector screen, wallpaper stripper and pressure washer.

Borrowing reduces waste (one machine is used by many people) and saves space at home. It's more environmentally sustainable and prevents little-used things being dumped. A visit to the waste station at Smugglers Way demonstrates the vast amount of machines and electrical goods that are thrown out.

The Things are stored in lockers located inside the Southside Centre, near the Garratt Lane entrance and opposite Waterstones. To borrow an item, you visit www.libraryofthings/wandsworth and follow the instructions, choosing the date you want to borrow and return it. If the item you want is in stock, you pay for it by card and pick it up from the locker.

Sign up

Annabel, who tried out the system for *Battersea Matters*, said, 'The website is straightforward and easy to access. It's possible to browse without committing yourself to any hire and you can sign up for the newsletter/more info. I like the visual nature of the website — a pic of all



the items with the daily hire charge for each one. If an item isn't available, it says 'back soon.'

'The hire process is straightforward and gives useful info about what's included and a 'how to use' guide for each item. Once at the checkout stage, if you haven't signed up first as a member, there's a £2.50 additional sum, on top of the hire charge.'

There is at present no option to have Things delivered, so a car is needed to transport heavy items.

WHAT IS THE BID?

Michael Jubb explains the Clapham Junction BID

The Clapham Junction Business Improvement District (The Junction BID) provides value-added services to businesses around the Junction. It covers the main shopping, hospitality and other business areas on St John's Hill, St John's Road, Lavender Hill, Battersea Rise and Northcote Road.

Festivals

The BID was established in 2019, following a ballot of businesses in the area, which each pay a levy on top of business rates to fund its activities. Within a year of starting operations, the BID found itself dealing with the disruptions to businesses associated with the pandemic and lockdowns. But over the past 18 months it has relaunched its activities. These include support for the weekend festivals on



Northcote Road and St John's Hill; additional street deep-cleaning; and providing two street wardens who help businesses and the police to deal with the problems of shop-lifting and anti-social behaviour.

The BID's activities are overseen by a Board made up of representatives of local businesses, with support from Wandsworth Council. I serve as the

community representative on the Board. It has focused its recent work on securing a second term for the BID as it approaches the end of its initial five-year term next Spring.

A new ballot of local businesses was held in October, and I am pleased to say that more than three-quarters of local businesses supported continuing the BID. We have ambitious plans including events across the

whole BID area; supporting businesses in making the Junction greener, cleaner and safer for the benefit of us all; and promoting the Junction as a vibrant place that people want to visit to enjoy its amenities.

Michael Jubb is the chair of the Battersea Society

HENRIETTA CROKER-POOLE 1940 – 2023

Martin Stratton remembers the founder of the Battersea Summer Scheme

Henrietta Croker-Poole, who died in October 2023, was a well-known figure in Battersea as the chief inspiration behind the Battersea Summer Scheme and the Battersea Ball.

Born in Surrey on Christmas Eve 1940, Henrietta lived from 1969 in Rosenau Crescent, near Battersea Park, together with her husband Anto and their children Emma and Rupert.

In the mid-1970s Henrietta went on an ILEA (Inner London Education Authority) Sewing and Upholstery Course and began an upholstery business. She loved gardening and in the mid-1980s started Battersea Boxes with a friend, focusing on window boxes, hanging baskets and garden pots for homes and offices. Her businesses kept her busy and introduced her to the local community, and by the mid-1990s she was becoming increasingly involved in community activities, especially those involving young people.

Crime prevention

In about 1984 Henrietta was invited to join the newly formed Battersea Crime Prevention Panel, of which she soon became a key member. She was particularly concerned about the lack of activities for young people in the large housing estates of north Battersea especially during long school holidays. She introduced a day of sporting activities in Battersea Park in 1988 as a means of diversion from boredom. This increased in size and scope and her Summer Scheme grew in successive years from some 100 youths for one day to today's Battersea Summer Scheme which involves well over 1,000.

Families and youth clubs now enjoy five days of activities ranging from sports coaching to challenging activities on a climbing wall, zip wire, mast climbing, boxing and football. In addition, she introduced grants for activities which could be booked by youth clubs such as a day on a farm or at the beach, camping, sailing, canoeing, plus several residential courses to further develop young people.

Henrietta then embarked on activities which involved young people outside the summer period. Her later ideas involved more opportunities for young



women, such as Come Dine With Me, a youth club Bake Off competition, football competitions and much more. Her energy, ideas and enthusiasm were indomitable.

Police Ball

These activities do not come cheap. In 1988 Henrietta and PC John Johnson (a well-known Battersea policeman) and a couple of stalwart helpers started the Battersea Police Ball, entertained by the Police Band, in the Wandsworth Civic Suite. Henrietta's house became the storeroom for items used in support of the Ball. She remained involved in the complex organisation of the Ball and masterminded the fund-raising Magic Tree. She backed this up with house-to-house fund-raising throughout the local area.

The annual Battersea Ball has grown to be one of the largest charity balls in London. It is hugely popular and provides up to £75,000 a year for the Summer Scheme and other Crime Prevention Panel activities.

As a well-known and popular member of the Battersea community, Henrietta was a member of several local groups.



Henrietta retained her keen interest in the Summer Scheme

Her enthusiasm and energy were enormous; she was never put off by obstacles, whether finance which she gladly helped to raise, or bureaucracy which she charmed away, always accompanied by her endearing smile and common sense.

Henrietta was quickly recognized as a forceful leader, a hands-on 'doer', and a significant contributor to Battersea. It was no surprise that in 2001 she was awarded the Wandsworth Civic Award. This was followed in 2006 with her richly deserved award of the MBE which was presented by the late Queen Elizabeth II, a meritorious award which pleased so many in Battersea.

Henrietta was very private about the onset of her cancer which started around 2019. Despite numerous sessions of chemotherapy and other treatments, she remained cheerful, very positive and involved in the Crime Prevention Panel and Summer Scheme (both of which were quieter during Covid and lock down periods). Even last year, during the build up to the Summer Scheme and the Battersea Ball, Henrietta attended meetings when she was able and always wanted to read the minutes of meetings and reports and happily gave her advice.

Sadly, Henrietta died after a heroic fight against cancer on 11 October 2023. Throughout her final months, as was typical and natural for her, she retained her continued interest in the Battersea Ball and next Summer Scheme.

Martin Stratton was a colleague and friend of Henrietta Croker-Poole.

WHY PLACE MATTERS

Peabody thinks their development is in Clapham. Carol Rahn objects.

Being connected to the place where we live enriches our lives and improves our mental health. How can you be connected if you don't know where you are? Places need names; communities need names. Naturally, we in the Battersea Society are concerned by the confusion made by some businesses and even some residents between Battersea and Clapham.

Clapham and Battersea each have their own history and heritage; you are cut off from that if you think Battersea is Clapham. Battersea and Clapham each have their own local government, their own parliamentary constituency, their own schools, their own health management – if the two are being mixed up, people don't understand institutions that matter for their day to day life.

So it was with dismay that we noted the name for the newest building in the Peabody Estate redevelopment on St John's Hill is One Clapham. The good folks at Peabody and the developer, Mount Anvil Ltd told us that the original name, One Clapham Junction, was

causing confusion between the station and their newest residential offering. So they decided to solve the problem by leaving out Junction and just calling it One Clapham.

What sort of logic is that? People are having difficulty distinguishing between a residential building and the train station across the street, so we'll clear it up by giving it a name that refers to a place nearly two miles away!

Proud

If the building is called One Clapham, people will think it is in Clapham. There can be no other outcome. And is it OK for people to think it is in Clapham? No, it is not. The Peabody Estate, like Clapham Junction station, is part of Battersea and should be seen to be part of Battersea. We're proud of the redevelopment and we're proud of Battersea. Why aren't Peabody and Mount Anvil?

What do they think is wrong with Battersea? And what do you find when you look at the Mount Anvil website

and their promotion of One Clapham? Poor Battersea has disappeared in a rhapsody about Clapham – they even use a photo of Clapham High Street.

'Every detail' of the building, they say, 'is intrinsically Clapham', and 'Clapham epitomises the London village.' They can – and should – fix the website, but the fact remains that if they persist in calling this building One Clapham they will perpetuate and amplify a narrative that erases Battersea

in favour of Clapham. We do not want this high-profile building and high-profile development to do that.

Perhaps we should have a contest to help them find a new name? How about One Battersea? Or One Burridge Gardens (which has been the name used for the whole redeveloped estate). The Lavender? One Falconbrook? Send your suggestions to us (or maybe to Mount Anvil).

Carol Rahn is a member of the Battersea Society's community and heritage committees.



CIVIC AWARDS HONOUR LOCAL HEROES

Wandsworth's Civic Awards are given to individuals who make an outstanding contribution to their local community and to the whole borough of Wandsworth. The 2023 awards, presented at a ceremony on 7 November by Mayor Juliana Annan, included several people and organisations working in Battersea.

Katherine Low Settlement was awarded for their work with children and families from refugee backgrounds, helping them to integrate into their new community by providing ESOL classes for adults and homework and school support for children.

Support

Daren McCoy and JCT (Just Come Together) work to keep young people out of the criminal justice system and provide support for families on the Winstanley and other estates.

Nasiya Vorajee manages the foodbank attached to Battersea Mosque. She also provides a fitness and wellbeing class and organised a Communi-Tea, where women could enjoy a delicious tea as well as a wide number of workshops on exercise, nutrition and health. When space allows, all women, whether Muslim or not, can attend these activities. Teresa Harris and L2L2R (Love to Learn to Read). Teresa founded and is the CEO of this charity, which has recently extended its work into Battersea. It

The winners with the Mayor and Representative Deputy Lieutenant for Wandsworth, Colleen Harris

has been supported by the Battersea Society to help parents to talk, play and read with their pre-school children (see page 11).

This year has been an impressive year for the Doddington & Rollo roof garden. It has provided numerous workshops and opportunities for community gardening for local residents. It also inspired a garden at Chelsea Flower show and enjoyed a visit from the United States ambassador.



PLANNING MATTERS: MONICA TROSS LOOKS BACK AT 2023 AND HOPES FOR THE BEST IN 2024

Anyone who reads Planning Matters regularly will know that this past year has been consultation after consultation. In terms of development it seems hardly credible that there are any more sites still without approved plans although even when that is the case there are some, such as 220 Queenstown Road, where despite approval there are plans for changes and further consultation.

We very much hope that 2024 will at last see consultation begin for the development of a master plan for the area around Clapham Junction. This has been on the Council's agenda for at least ten years, probably longer. It has been equally long since we asked for improvement to the traffic flow at the approach to Battersea Bridge, promised after the TfL consultation, but no signs yet.

It has been less than 10 years since the new RCA building opened with hoardings and blocked pavements all around – though it begins to feel nearly as long. Let's hope that this will be sorted out soon.

In terms of consultation my main hope is that no one emulates the Glassmill team (for the proposed tower by Battersea Bridge). We expect to see feedback questions which have elements of asking the responder to vote for motherhood and apple pie; however this is usually in the context of a full presentation of the plans. The leaflet, and the news-sheet published by the developer, Rockwell, *Battersea Buzz*, cropped the illustration of the building with its proposed 38 storey tower at around 12 – 16 storeys at most. The questionnaire asked nothing about the design, merely asking at Q.12 if there were any other comments; and *Battersea Buzz* gave no website address merely asking you to scan for further details. The website, Glassmill.co.uk, does have one slide showing the complete building although nowhere do they state the number of storeys. Our website has our response.

SUPPORT FOR THE COUNCIL NEEDED

The Council tried to go for a prosecution following the unlawful cutting down of

trees at Ransome's Dock. They had photographic evidence but when it came to it, nobody was prepared to come forward to give evidence in person. This meant the case collapsed, and the developer has got away unscathed. This is disappointing and we commend the Council for trying.

THAMES CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

This new building, by architects Henley Halebrown, has recently been featured by Rowan Moore in the *Observer* who wrote that this building 'next to Clapham Junction in south London, (is) a calm six-storey cuboid in pale brick, which holds its own next to a high railway embankment and large housing blocks from the 1960s and the present. Rhythms of large and small windows impart a sense of civic dignity: it has the mood of a town hall or a church, without being either'. See the photo above, or visit the building at 12 Grant Road and see if you agree. Henley Halebrown also designed St John's Therapy Centre in St. John's Hill – an attractive landmark at the top of the hill.

CHANGE OF PLAN AT BATTERSEA SQUARE

As recently as 2022 we were commenting on the travel plans for Thomas's School's expansion into part of the former Royal Academy of Dance (RAD) building but we now learn that plans have changed and that their new secondary school will be located in Richmond, opening in 2025. This is a far more suitable location for a large secondary school than the busy access off Battersea Square.

We have now met the new developers of the former RAD building. They are currently planning to keep the existing buildings and layout for use as offices, studios and health/spa facilities, plus, they hope, space for hire



for meetings and community use. There would be limited vehicle access off Vicarage Crescent and the attractive internal courtyard would remain with some public access. They expect to open consultation on their proposals in the spring and we will keep you up to date on this.

OTHER NEWS AND UPDATES

The Environment Committee on 23 November approved a go ahead for Parkrun with officers working with Enable for a possible start for Junior Parkrun in spring 2024 and for adults in the summer. We are pleased that the impact will be reviewed after six months.

As predicted, the application to demolish all but the façade of 5 Albert Bridge Road (2023/3047) has been approved. The Igloo Flower Stall has applied for continued permission to operate at the entrance to Clapham Junction Station, 2023/3883.

Feedback appreciated: We always like to hear from our members so get in touch at planning@batterseasociety.org.uk with your concerns, queries – or even criticisms. It is helpful to know what you think.

A LOCAL AUTHOR'S JOURNEY THROUGH COVIDLAND

Janice Morphet reads Philip Hensher's *To Battersea Park*

Philip Hensher has been a long term resident of Battersea but his fiction has been set in other places, including Sheffield, where he grew up, and more recently Germany. His latest book, *To Battersea Park*, changes this and reflects on the confined spaces of the Covid lockdown in which period

the book is set. Its other singularity is to give the title of each section in the book to a different literary model that can be used to construct fiction, although this does not get in the way of the text for a reader less

interested in form than narrative.

The book starts with a sense of tight space and enclosure that the pandemic lockdown brought to us all. It focuses on the details of life – how each day had the same routines and a focus on the machines and processes of life from the coffee maker to the location of a rug bought many years before. The growing importance of a garden, disregarded before, is now something new to try even though it is a family tradition. Every day became a focus on these details, alongside a sense of remote control, of automatic repeats of these habits.

The daily walk became important in this confined and narrow world. In

this narrative it is the journey along Queenstown Road, walked many times over twenty years but never really seen before that offers the new. How the buildings varied, the differences in front gardens, places with links to other homelands such as Grenada, with different climates and soils. The importance of Queenstown Road in these confined times was its location between Clapham Common and Battersea Park, with choices to be made each day about which direction to choose – the flat walk to the Park, the incline to the Common, encountering neighbours and sometimes friends to share their reduced worlds.

From this specificity of place, the book fans out to discuss the lives of others who live nearby in Battersea, their pasts and how they were coping with the reality of the present. For older people focusing in on their pastimes – the model railway – or coping with dementia, a concern when the house of confinement was not the house of memory, recollection or familiarity.

Frightening

After entering into these other lives, this novel focuses in the end on the protagonist's experience of Covid – being there and not there and the responses of those neighbours in whose lives the lockdown had been shared and explored. At the end it is the blossoming of the cherry trees and the promise of Battersea Park that shows a pathway to recovery and restoration, after the narrator's frightening and

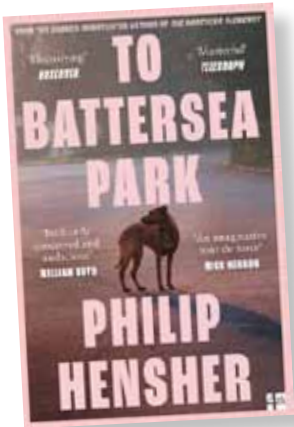
threatening encounter with Covid.

Is this a work of autofiction? In it, the narrator says that he can't write during the Covid lockdown, despite the opportunity of time and having no other pressures. But the wider worlds that are tackled in earlier books are replaced by those familiar homelands of neighbours and a focus on the precise location, of the soil underfoot.

Hensher's book reflects the reality of many during the Covid pandemic – bewilderment, fear, a lassitude born of too much time. But also the importance of the immediate place, the people around, the ground underneath and the open spaces and parks that became more important than ever before. Yet since lockdown, have we maintained these habits, still embracing the local as an attribute of working from home or have these confined times been consigned to memory, no longer an active ingredient in our daily lives?

While a few authors have written about the Covid period, its strangeness and difference, it is in the experiences represented in the book that many of us spent the period of lockdown, forced to focus locally and to confront the issues presented by the need to engage with the external world when an accident or Covid intervened.

The book is a reminder of the personal intensity of this period as we listen to the hearings of the Covid Inquiry, starting with the testimony of our political leaders and their response to the needs of the nation, but in the context of the effect on us as individuals.



COUNCIL PROMOTES WANDSWORTH'S VIBRANT ARTS SCENE

In November, after four months of consultations, Wandsworth submitted its bid to become the London Borough of Culture 2025 to the Mayor, Sadiq Khan. The consultation exercise saw councillors and officers meet and listen to thousands of individuals, community organisations and arts groups both large and small, all over the borough.

The fundamental aim of the bid is to increase access to the arts and culture. Cllr Kemi Akinola, deputy council

leader and leader on the bid, believes that the arts contribute to people's wellbeing and happiness and enhance a sense of community. In its bid, Wandsworth emphasised our 'vibrant neighbourhoods and a thriving art scene'. Council leader Simon Hogg said 'We want to showcase our local culture to London and the world'.

As well as Wandsworth, five other boroughs are competing to win the bid: Ealing, Greenwich, Hammersmith & Fulham, Havering and Newham.

The Mayor will announce the winner of the bid in March this year and the year will start in 2025.



A STEAM TRAIN FOR THE SECRET SERVICE?

Sue Demont investigates the Kenny Belle, a railway mystery

The legendary Brighton Belle train which used to ferry the great and good of the arts world between Brighton and Victoria is well documented. A byword for luxury, its passengers included such luminaries of the theatre as Sir Laurence Olivier, and it would have been a familiar sight to Battersea travellers as it powered through Clapham Junction two or three times a day. But who now remembers the more homespun Kenny Belle?

The official use of the word 'Belle' to describe a train denoted a rare example of luxury rail travel, where well-heeled passengers enjoyed table service in stylishly furnished Pullman dining coaches. In contrast, the Kenny Belle's nickname was largely ironic, referring to a little known and under-used service between Clapham Junction and Kensington Olympia. It was effectively a 'ghost train' which between 1955 and 1969 received no mention in the official BR timetable. By the time of the Beeching Report in 1963 the service consisted of just two trains each way a day and the route was identified as a suitable candidate for closure.

Shaken

As often happens once a closure proposal is looming, people start to take more of an interest in what they are about to lose. A local journalist therefore decided to do some research on the Kenny Belle's route before it was terminated. At 8.05 one morning he marched up to the ticket office at Clapham Junction and requested a ticket to Kensington Olympia. The clerk was visibly shaken and referred the request to his station master, who stated that this was probably only the second or third ticket they had sold for this train since the First World War! Further enquiries revealed that there were regular passengers using the train, but all on season tickets; and given the platform

location (behind a concealed entrance to today's platform 17, then platform 1) it was unsurprising that the average traveller would have been ignorant of the service's existence.

Determined not to be put off, the putative passenger demanded a single ticket and was duly sold one for a shilling – even though the fare on the ticket, taken from a batch published in 1959, gave the fare as 9d. However, boarding the train was another matter. Platform 1 was sealed off behind a metal railing, and an alleged platform lift did not appear to be operating. The intrepid passenger had to walk along the overbridge all the way to platform 4, descend the steps to the subway and then walk back as far as St John's Hill to access the concealed steps.

He was rewarded by finding a steam hauled four-carriage train – in an era when the Southern Railway had long been electrified – and a pat on the back from the ticket inspector who commented 'Well done. You need a fair knowledge of the station to find your way to this train'. The driver explained that crews were rostered on the service just once every 16 weeks – a fact he described as a 'right laugh'. Railwaymen referred to the service as the Winkle and claimed it had not made any money for 43 years, hence its withdrawal from the timetable. By 1963 it held the distinction of being the last steam hauled service in London.

On board the train, passengers were keen to share their views. A commuter from Horley – an accountant – insisted that the service could be made to pay if it was properly timetabled and advertised. A woman from Streatham claimed that her journey would cost twice as much if the service was withdrawn. Station master Davidge had been more pessimistic, claiming the line had no future even though he

acknowledged that two of the four daily trains were quite busy.

The service had acquired an aura of mystery in the 1950s and 60s, with some locals insisting that it was some kind of secret service operation due to the fact that most passengers were civil servants and both the morning and evening trains ran one way only with no return possible for the next nine hours. The truth appears to have been more prosaic as most of the workers were employed nowhere more mysterious than the Post Office Savings Bank at Olympia. According to the *Daily Express* – never a fan of British Railways or the Post Office – this was tantamount to one nationalised industry providing a bespoke train service for workers in another nationalised industry!

Myths

But myths persist around the Kenny Belle. One commentator believes that the secrecy around the service was because most of the passengers were spooks and didn't want the general public to know who they were. The bit of the PO they worked for was not the Savings Bank, whatever it might have said over the door. They worked in the section that intercepted and opened the mail of anyone the government regarded as a commie (Communist), which at the height of the Cold War was a lot of people. Some worked for PO and some for MI5. They didn't want to be recognised and so really wanted the train to themselves. Hence almost total secrecy about the existence of the service to discourage others from using it.

Whatever the truth about this unlikely but not impossible story, the Kenny Belle survived the Beeching cuts, although it had lost both its steam locomotive and its soubriquet by the 1970s. Today of course the line is thriving in every respect as part of the London Overground, or 'Orange Line'. Yet a faint whiff of the Kenny Belle can still be detected on its former platform (now 17) where the narrow internal staircase and sometimes blocked-off subway entrance have a quite different feel from the rest of Clapham Junction Station.

With thanks to the Railway Magazine February 2023.

Sue Demont is a member of the Battersea Society's heritage committee.



SHARING STORIES HELPS TO CREATE COMMUNITY

Manasi Pophale leads walking tours in Nine Elms

When I moved into my swanky new flat in Nine Elms in 2017, I couldn't believe my luck. I live in a building designed by the practice of one of my favourite architects - Sir Richard Rogers. I also have a magnificent view of Battersea Power Station. At the time, this industrial marvel only signified one thing for me - the album cover art of *Animals* by Pink Floyd. My mother introduced me to their music when I was growing up. They were also popular in my boarding school in the Sahyadri mountain range of Maharashtra, India. It was no surprise that when my school friends visited me in my new flat, they were just as excited by the view!

Once the flurry of settling in had died down, the reality of my context began to dawn on me. Real estate marketing brochures don't lie but they don't tell you everything. Yes, I have a view of the Power Station but I also overlook the Tideway project. Both will be under construction for a long time. Yes, I live in a beautiful building but most of the flats are empty. I rarely meet any of my neighbours. When I leave my flat, I spill out onto the main road with trucks barrelling down in every direction. I enjoy the view of aeroplanes on the flight path above the Power Station from the relative quiet inside my flat. But they also contribute to noise and air pollution outside.

Exodus

'All this is temporary', I told myself. Everything will be amazing once the construction is over. And then the Covid pandemic stopped us in our tracks. There was an overnight exodus of my expat neighbours. Fewer lights were on in the flats. The pollution stopped. The noise stopped. The flights stopped. It became very quiet.

This was not a pleasant silence. In the distance, I could hear sirens of the ambulances that would start a chain of thoughts, fears and anxieties in my mind. Even the simple act of feeling grateful came with the sadness of thinking of everyone battling with this disease. The fundamental truth that emerged from my experience of the pandemic was that people need people. I need people. It wasn't the construction or



Manasi shares the sights of Nine Elms with her walking tours

the noise pollution that made me feel disconnected with where I lived. That feeling came from the experience of not knowing a single person who lived in my neighbourhood.

The need to connect with people made me even more certain of the decision I had made to start conducting guided tours in London. I began researching my *Legacies of the British Empire in Westminster* walking tour in 2019. I managed to test the walk and refine it with my pandemic 'bubble' in 2020 and began delivering them in 2021 as the social distancing guidelines were relaxed. The tour did not attract large numbers. However, those who came were genuinely interested. We had enriching interactions which encouraged me to continue.

In December 2021, my friend Hassan booked two tickets. He brought his friend for the walk and that was when I met Battersea-based artist Raksha Patel. After realising that both of us lived in

the same neighbourhood, we walked back home together from Westminster. Raksha told me stories about living in the area and I spoke to her about my feeling of disconnection. Walking and talking about our neighbourhood inspired me to create a walking tour around Nine Elms.

My background in design was what first attracted me to London and keeps me fascinated by the city. I am interested in the storytelling ability of architecture and the built environment. Walking tours are an ideal medium to share this way of interpreting

our habitat. Watching the 'new' grow around the 'old' – integrating it, changing it or erasing it, became the framework for my *Art and Architecture Walking Tour of Battersea Nine Elms*.

I debuted this tour during the Wandsworth Art Fringe 2023. Since then, this activity has connected me with residents, visitors, local artists, community groups and people involved in culture and heritage in Battersea Nine Elms. I have drawn on the work of local community historians to share stories from our neighbourhood. I even carry the Battersea Society publication, *Inspiring Women of Battersea* by Jeanne Rathbone, on my walks to share with my audience. By engaging with the history of the place and sharing stories with people who come on my walks, I have begun to create a sense of belonging for us. I am not only a storyteller of Battersea but a character in the story as well!

I am still endlessly fascinated by the details of my swanky (not so new any more) building. But now, I have the added bonus of sharing them with the community that chooses to walk with me in my neighbourhood for a couple of hours.

Manasi Pophale is a community heritage practitioner and creative director of History Speak. She leads workshops and walking tours that look at spaces as mediums of storytelling.
www.historyspeak.co.uk

A LASTING LEGACY FOR BATTERSEA CHILDREN

We help parents and small children to read together, says Kate Bird

'Early childhood education is the key to the betterment of society.' So said Maria Montessori, renowned pioneer of child-centred education. Montessori's belief in the transformative power of early education was shared by the late Joan Brittain, a Battersea Society member for many years, former headmistress of the Bridge Lane Montessori School and passionate advocate of Early Years education.

It was a particular privilege, therefore, to discover that Learn to Love to Read was to benefit from a legacy left to the Battersea Society in Joan's will. We are a small children's literacy charity founded nearly ten years ago as an outreach project from St Michael's Church in Southfields by Putney resident Teresa Harris, still the charity's CEO. Our work was recently recognised with the presentation of a Wandsworth Civic Award. Our vision is every child a reader. A decade on, our six part-time staff and some sixty volunteers work with primary schools, nurseries, children's centres and voluntary organisations to support children's reading across the borough of Wandsworth.

Thanks to Joan's generosity, over the past year we have been able to bring our Early Years intervention, already established elsewhere in the borough, to Battersea for the first time. This project has seen us deliver 20 Early Years classes for parents and their preschoolers, at the Yvonne Carr and York Gardens Children's Centres, at Somerset Nursery and at St Mary's RC Primary, supporting over fifty local families.

Confidence

Targeted at families from under-served communities, our Early Years programme aims to give parents and carers the confidence to support their children's learning and development in the preschool years by singing, chatting, reading and playing together. Sessions take place over four weeks, with class leaders sharing tips and modelling games that will help parents nurture their children's speech and language skills, laying the foundations for children

to learn to read successfully when they start school.

Participating families received a gift pack, including song cards, picture books and puzzles, as well as follow-up support in the form of helpful messaging over the four-week period and beyond.

'The new books, puzzles and song cards are useful while we are on the go to keep the children entertained. I also appreciated the everyday tips from the sessions about how to engage with my children without using TV or gadgets. My older two children have speech and language delay, and we've seen so much growth and progress as a result of the advice we've received from Learn to Love to Read. The impact had been enormous' says one local mum.

Workshops

This year-long project has allowed us to build relationships with Battersea children's centres, as well as successfully trial a new school partnership, with St Mary's RC Primary School. We are very pleased to welcome St Mary's as our first partner school in Battersea, joining our existing eight schools across the borough. We look forward to delivering regular programmes of Early Years classes and parent workshops to support St Mary's families throughout their reading journey.

In addition to the delivery of our Early Years programmes, we were delighted to be able to use some of Joan's legacy to establish ourselves as an affiliate of Dolly Parton's Imagination Library, a book-gifting programme that posts free, high-quality books to children



from birth to age five, no matter their family's income. We have enrolled 20 Battersea children on the programme to date and we hope to be able to attract further funding that will allow us to expand the programme to benefit even more children. Families have told us how much it means to their children to receive their very own book in the post each month:

Comments include: 'She's always excited to receive her new book each month, and it's lovely that it comes addressed to her. When a new one arrives, she wants to read it at bedtime that night.'

'The books are amazing, and I've been really impressed by the diversity, too. She's engaging with reading much more – she's not reading words yet, but she picks up books and pretends to read. We chat about the pictures. She enjoys books as much as toys now, and I can't wait for her to start school so that she can read even more.'

Looking back on the success of our work in Battersea over the past year, we hope that Joan would approve of our endeavours there. We are honoured to be able to carry on her educational work, inspiring a new generation to learn to love to read. We are hopeful, too, that we can build on these beginnings, growing our work in Battersea to help more of the borough's most vulnerable children to gain the literacy skills they will need to thrive.

Kate Bird is family programmes manager for L2L2R

www.learn2love2read.org.uk/pages/2-get-involved

For more information or to support L2L2R, contact Matilda Tuke matilda@L2L2R.org

'I'm definitely playing more and giving my children my full attention, which they absolutely love'

A DIFFERENT SORT OF HIGH STREET

Jenny Sheridan sings the praises of Webbs Road

What is a high street? – or indeed ‘The high street’ as in ‘The high street is going through a difficult patch’ or even ‘The high street is dying’ – both of which we have heard all too often over the past 20 or so years.

A high street is generally taken to mean the main shopping street in an area, where banks, chain stores and independent shops are found. It is also the place where local people gather – to shop and window-shop of course, but also to meet friends, to make chance connections and to mingle. Independent shops play a particularly strong role in getting to know regular customers and developing a sense of local community.

For people who are alone or isolated the high street may be the only place where they can regularly at least see other people and exchange a few words with someone in a shop. For others it’s a lively spot to spend time enjoying the weekend.

In Battersea, we might count Battersea Park Road and Northcote Road as high streets (but not, I think, Battersea High Street). But there’s another street, in south Battersea, which has some of the social parameters of the high street, without actually being one: Webbs Road, which runs along a ridge above and just east of the more famous Northcote Road.

Multi-generational

Towards the southern end of Webbs Road is a convenience store which encapsulates many of the road’s charms. Amco News has been owned and managed by Jagrut Patel (universally known in the neighbourhood as Jack) for 38 years.

Jack arrived in Battersea from India, via Kenya, in 1985. He first worked in, then took on his shop (which his uncle had opened in 1960) and in 1995 he bought the building. The landlord had become a friend and supporter, partly because his own mother had been born in the building. Relationships around here can be multi-generational. Jack described the shop to me as ‘a paradise’. He encountered no racial prejudice and from the start found his customers

friendly and helpful. ‘I’m lucky to have this community around’, he says. The shop is rarely closed. When his first child was born, Jack allowed himself five hours off; all his customers congratulated him on the birth, he notes. As well as his wife, both his son and daughter helped out in the shop when young – he is now a doctor, she a dentist.

During the pandemic, Jack supported several of his older customers by delivering their groceries – ‘even if it was just one pint of milk. I didn’t want to think of a lady alone with no tea all day!’ When there was a rush on toilet paper, it was kept in the back room so that nobody could take too many rolls and there was enough for regular customers.

Asked if he has noticed many changes in the area over the last 38 years, Jack says there are more young people now – ‘still very friendly; they help me with heavy parcels. With so many parcels arriving now, they have become a big part of the business. We don’t make much on them but people buy something while they are here and often they return.’

Newspaper deliveries are also important, and are the main reason Jack opens the shop at 5.30 in the morning. It remains a family business; both his brother and nephew work in the shop.

But now Jack says the time has come to take a step back. ‘My kids are saying it’s time to retire. I’m 63. I want to find someone who will genuinely run the shop and serve the community. They will change the shop of course, but I will train them and I will probably come in and work here for two or three hours a day.’

Just across Webbs Road from Amco News is the Lemon Tree beauty salon, owned and run for 25 years by Dianne Bennett. ‘I love my business, and my staff, and our clients. Some of them have been coming for years and now their children come in. I’m still hands-on as well as doing all the admin and organising. It matters so much to me.

‘I love this area and I love the pub, the Eagle. It’s a good little community, with Stefan at Tierra Verde, Liz in the gallery, Graham in the guitar shop The sites

are small, so large chains wouldn’t be interested, the rents and rates are relatively low, at least compared to Northcote Road, landlords are fair. I think what people appreciate is that the shops are individually owned and the owners work in them. We really care.

‘Several years ago the council said they wanted to lose the businesses along Webbs Road and make it purely residential. I don’t know if that is still council policy but it would be a shame and people would miss us all. It’s a loyal area. People like the sense of belonging to an area.’

Beautiful

Another essential hub in Webbs Road is Tierra Verde, the café and greengrocer/deli owned by Stefan Bala. After living in Spain for 8 years, Stefan, his wife and their three children came back to London, to the area where he had lived as a child. ‘I went to Belleville Primary School on Webbs Road. I came back to open a shop selling Spanish food. We looked all over, including Borough Market, but every time I passed this shop I thought how beautiful it was.

‘We moved into my Mum’s house a few streets away. That was 11 years ago and we’re still there! All my kids went to Belleville and it was rather lovely going back to the classrooms I remembered.’

Before Stefan bought the shop (now the Tierra Verde café) it was run from 2005 to 2012 as *La Maison des Roses*, which sold nothing but roses. ‘Next door there was a whacky Polish artist who sold paintings and fabrics. When that didn’t work out I bought the shop, mainly because I wanted my kids to eat more fruit and vegetables and this was a cheap way to do it. And it’s a nice addition to the street.’

The fruit and veg shop is managed by Alex, who lives round the corner. He says he likes working in the shop because he feels the produce is both real and beautiful, and he likes having a regular group of customers; ‘My wife says I never walk down Northcote Road without seeing someone I know’.

All the part-time staff in both café and shop are local, and many of the younger staff are friends of Stefan’s



Top: Jack in Amco News
Above and left: Stefan's shop and café



children and have known and loved the shop since they were small.

Stefan is very aware of the important role the café and shop play in the street. 'It's a focal point. People who may have lived almost next door but hadn't spoken to each other have become friends. It's a place where men and single people feel comfortable just sitting and reading the newspaper. And I love the kids coming in – some of the teenagers I've known since they were three or four years old.

Affordable

What is special about Webbs Road? 'Rents and therefore rates are much more affordable than on Northcote Road. That's why there are many more independent shops here. And some of the landlords are local and really want to help.'

When Stefan was a child, the area was much more mixed, with a lot of poverty. 'I was stopped eight or nine times a day on my way home from school and asked for money. That

has never happened to my kids. The Northcote Road market was important, and on Webbs Road there was a tattoo artist and a chippy.

'I loved growing up here, spending all day on the common, all my friends close by. I still bump into people who live nearby, or they pop into the café. It's a really lovely area. It's got two massive green spaces, the library, and good shops and cafés and the library. And the Eagle is probably the best pub in London! We're very lucky to live here.'

How would he like to see Webbs Road develop? 'There are a few places that were shops a few years back but are now residential. It would be nice to see some more shops opening – just to extend the road a bit. And parklets – slowing the traffic a bit by having more planting would be a nice idea. And in an ideal road we'd have a few more good food shops – a bakery, perhaps, and a fishmonger or butcher.'

A bit further north on the road is The Deli Boutique café, popular with groups of mums from Belleville School

('Outstanding', according to Ofsted). Opposite is Bellevue Dry Cleaners, where the manager Jenny knows her customers by name and always has time for a chat. There's also a vet, a dentist and at least two hairdressers. No Starbucks, no Boots, but then it's not that kind of high street.

Jack and Stefan and Dianne encapsulate the success of Webbs Road – reasonable rent and rates and helpful landlords enable independent businesses to flourish and the strong emphasis on localness builds the feeling of community that we all feel is so important. And having a great pub just round the corner (the Eagle) certainly helps!

DRAFT HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY

Response from The Battersea Society's Planning Committee

Introduction

We give below our response to the five themes and would be happy to engage further should this be helpful. Overall we support and welcome these priorities.

1 Council Tenants and Leaseholders

We welcome the emphasis on housing management, and the increase in resources for it; also the stress on engagement with residents, and life-time tenancies.

We also welcome increased investment in capital works to improve estates, in some of which damp remains a real problem, and agree that energy efficiency should also be a priority. We also urge a more regular programme of routine maintenance. We know of one estate where there was a 20-year gap in routine maintenance and suspect this is not unusual.

This lack of maintenance can lead to another concern, that some schemes have been held up because leaseholders cannot afford the significant contributions they are required to make, sometimes when the work is not actually needed to their property.

2 Building More Homes

We welcome the More Homes for Wandsworth programme, and the focus on high standards. However, there is no mention of the importance of dual aspect properties and the need for good daylight ratings. In our experience affordable housing in high-level building is often provided on the lower floors and has poor daylight ratings.

The Local Plan is mentioned within the introduction but the strategy fails

to emphasise the importance of the Housing and Planning Departments working closely together. This co-operation is vital in meeting housing needs through building programmes, the design of those schemes and the housing within them (we could see no mention of the importance of good design in the strategy) and more widely, including where housing is within Conservation Areas. It is to be hoped that some of the increased staffing within the Housing department can be tasked with understanding the planning requirements of the work they do; and with liaising as appropriate with their colleagues in Planning and Conservation.

We welcome the efforts to secure 50% affordable housing (with focus on social rent) from developers; but the text needs to recognise the difficulties with viability assessments. New draft London Plan Guidance on Affordable Housing may help, as will the management training and transparency proposed by the GLA in relation to viability assessments.

It is a matter of concern that there's no mention of housing mix, and the desperate shortage of family-sized units. This is increased by the challenges posed by large-scale shared living developments, and of large student accommodation developments. While we welcome provision of properties which help people get on the housing ladder, it is essential that further rungs on that ladder are available within Battersea rather than it – and probably Wandsworth more widely – becoming a short-term home for single people.

3 Improved Standards for Private Renters

We welcome the proposed discretionary licensing scheme; the increased

emphasis on dealing with rogue landlords; and the empty homes programme

We would support further measures to tackle the problems associated with renting, both insecurity of tenure and problems with Airbnb and similar schemes. We will watch with interest the growth of build-to-rent private accommodation with its emphasis on long-term tenancies which we trust will include accommodation for families as well as smaller households.

4 Homelessness and Rough Sleeping

We welcome emphasis on prevention and support, and on working with a variety of agencies to that end.

We recognise difficulties caused by increasing use of Council properties for temporary accommodation and note the marked increase in rough sleeping in some areas, especially Clapham Junction.

5 Residents with Additional Needs

We welcome the stress on close working relationships between housing, children's and adult social services. We are concerned that there is no mention of the London Plan benchmark of 120 specialised units a year for older people. A target of 40 units over the next 3-4 years is not acceptable. There is also a need for a social rented equivalent of the private sector Retirement Village accommodation which is increasingly being built within London. Added provision would help with down-sizing, freeing up properties for younger people. Mary Court would be a prime candidate for refurbishment but appears to be under-occupied and increasingly neglected

*Battersea Society Planning Committee
planning@batterseasociety.org.uk
8 October 2023*



FAREWELL TO THE VICAR

Before he left St Mary's, Simon Butler spoke to Jenny Sheridan

The Rev Canon Simon Butler, vicar of the parish church of St Mary's, was a significant figure in north Battersea for 12 years. He left his role in December to take up a post at Holy Trinity Church in Guildford.

'I moved in on the night of the riots in Clapham Junction in August 2011, to the sound of helicopters and screaming police sirens. It was quite an introduction to the area!' he says.

Does he think the area changed as a result of the riots? 'Well, the town centre is nicer now! Citizens UK held a big, boisterous and passionate public meeting at BAC, which I co-chaired, but it didn't change much in the end. The biggest local issue then was – and still is – housing.

'It is concerning that there is still such a stark gap between the haves and have-nots. Tomorrow I will be conducting the funeral of Rico Andrews, the young man who was shot in October just a few streets away. His and his family's lives are such a world apart from the families who attend Thomas's School on Battersea High Street or most of the regular worshippers at St Mary's. It's an ongoing challenge to see how we can be together as a community. A coffee in Battersea Square can cost £4, while some families round here have to use the foodbank. None of us can be satisfied with that.'

Trustee

Rev Butler was a trustee of the Katherine Low Settlement for 12 years. 'KLS brings people together across the divide. It brings huge benefits to both rich and poor people, I believe. We at St Mary's have built close relationships with KLS.'

Rev Butler has worked to continue and strengthen St Mary's close relationships with local organisations. This, he says, stood them in good stead when the coronavirus hit. 'We had our leaflets out and the Coronavirus Angels ready even before the first lockdown started. We had over 500 volunteers who helped at least 1000 local people with a whole range of practical things and support. I saw this as what the Church does in times of trouble.

'Our close community links include the Salesians and Sacred Heart Catholic

Church as well as KLS and Thomas's School. There is an inter-faith stitching group linking St Mary's, Sacred Heart and the Ahmadiya Mosque in Merton.'

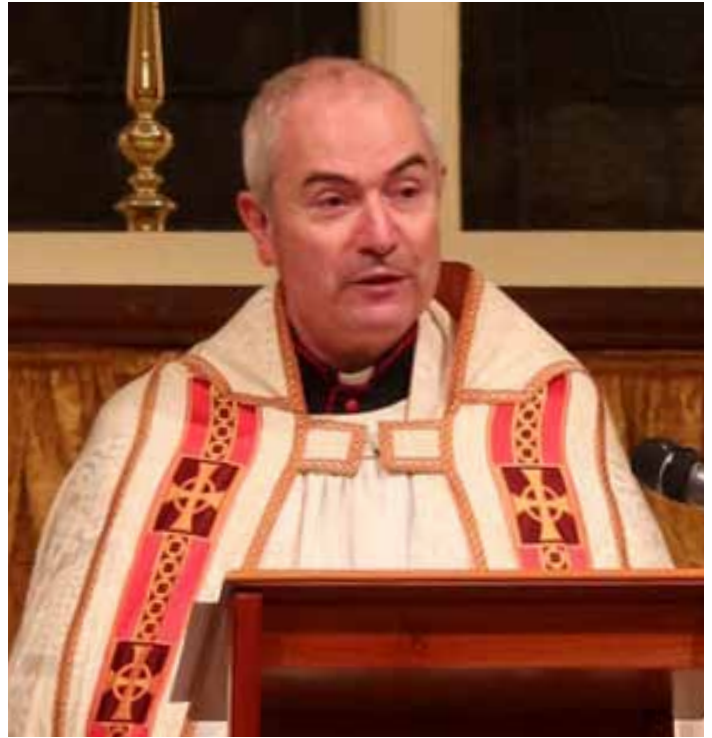
One of the main issues that has concerned Rev Butler over the last 12 years has been the state of the moorings on the river by the churchyard. 'It's a running problem that has been going on ever since the end of the Second World War. We want to improve them, build a proper pontoon and enable the council to repair the river wall. But one of the boats there was a trespasser, and there have been many problems. We have had planning consent since 2006 but we have been unable to move on.

Boats

'I am determined not to allow this to continue to be a millstone for the church. When I leave, the diocese will bring in a highly experienced churchman who is coming in for 15 months with the main aim of sorting the issue out. We want to provide homes on boats for people who actually want to live here – there is only one resident at present. I acknowledge that rents will have to go up to market levels to pay for the improvements.

'This has been the most complicated but the least rewarding issue I've had to deal with during my time in Battersea.'

St Mary's, a handsome Georgian building in a spectacular position on a bend of the river, is Grade 1 listed. Rev Butler is 'proud that it is open most days of the week, certainly more than when I arrived. We have installed new lighting and provided cushions for the pews, which were very welcome. The church is fully accessible, though perhaps we should have better signing to tell people about that. The next redecoration that's needed is the portico. We need to replace the current paints with more



historically correct ones that are also more resistant to the weather. Decisions around that will be for my successor to negotiate.'

The riverside path is copiously used by both walkers and cyclists, who cycle sometimes speedily through the churchyard. 'We allow them to use it because it is safer than the Thames Path, which goes along Battersea Church Road.'

Jazz Mass

Music is important to Rev Butler. 'It's great that most of our choir members are under 30 or 40. It's a friendly and supportive group. And we have regular recitals and a new addition is jazz, including Hugo Jennings' Jazz Mass. A few years ago, at a Faure Requiem, I noticed Bob Geldof upstairs in the gallery. He came up to me afterwards and said "That was f---ing brilliant, Vicar!" Which I thought was rather nice.'

Finally, what will he miss most when he leaves? 'It's the sheer range of people: one moment you can be talking to a refugee and the next to a captain of industry or a peer of the realm! It makes for a very stimulating place to live and serve.'

A SWEET GUM FOR THE KING

Clare Graham planted a Society tree to mark the Coronation

We marked the end of 2023 by adding a beautiful new liquidambar tree to Falcon Park, courtesy of Enable Parks and its Tree Team.

It was good to come together with some of the Society's members on Monday 11 December to plant a tree in Falcon Park at the end of Charles III's Coronation Year. The Open Spaces Committee had first approached Enable Parks about this back in March. We had thought initially of adding a new tree to a local open space around the date of the Coronation itself, on 6 May. Enable was happy to help, but it pointed out that May is not actually the best time to plant a tree.

We had just missed Enable's regular annual tree planting programme, would we like to wait until the next one started up in November? At that point its Tree Team would be able to offer us a choice of trees and planting spots free of charge, and even throw in some kind of modest ceremonial event. We were delighted to accept; autumn is after all much the best time of year to plant a tree, giving it time to settle in and get its root system established before it starts into growth again in the spring.

Meanwhile, we had the choice of three empty spots where new trees were needed, two in Shillington Park and one next door in Falcon Park. We plumped for the last, as most prominent, and so you will now find our tree a few metres south of the foot and cycle path between Cabul Road and Latchmere Passage, where the two footpaths heading towards the artificial pitch merge.

Sweet gum

When it came to tree varieties, I asked if a native pink May (hawthorn) might be available, remembering a fine one sadly lost nearby when the artificial pitch was



Top: Liquidambar leaves in autumn

Above: Society members wield the spade

installed a few years ago. Unfortunately, hawthorns often now struggle to survive locally, thanks to climate change. Instead we were offered two possible deciduous species, both highly decorative and much more likely to establish well: a Japanese flowering cherry, or a North American sweet gum. We went for the latter, Liquidambar Worpleston; it's already a handsome specimen, with its distinctive pyramidal shape already evident. Currently its branches are bare, but in 2024 it should develop large green leaves, five-pointed like a maple's, turning glorious yellows and oranges and reds when autumn comes.

Planting day had to be arranged at rather short notice, after Enable's trees had been delivered in mid-November but before Christmas, and to fit in with the planting contractors' availability. On the day eighteen of us made it, which felt pretty good for a chilly Monday afternoon in December! We were lucky with the weather – a dry interval in a wet week, with glimpses of sunshine. When I arrived a few minutes beforehand, the tree was already in place. Just the top of its pit had been left empty, waiting to be filled in from the neat tray of loose earth beside it, with three well-

polished spades standing ready. So we only needed to drape it with a pro-tem Society banner, ahead of our brief ceremony at 14.00 – just a short speech from myself, pointing out that the UK has a longstanding tradition of planting trees to mark royal visits, coronations and other special occasions, and now of course a king long known for his deep and abiding personal love of trees. I wound up with a short quotation of his, that 'planting a tree is a statement of hope and faith in the future' – something with which

we all felt able to agree, even those of us who loudly declared themselves republican in their sympathies! Finally I added a first spadeful of earth to the tree pit and invited anyone else who wanted to, to help fill in the rest.

Forward-looking

Modest as the occasion was, I think we all found it pleasing – a good, positive, forward-looking activity for the end of the year. What was also very pleasing was to have three members of the Tree Team present – Anthony Jones, our local tree officer for Battersea, and his colleagues Liam Hutton and Catie Ferguson. Afterwards all of them were happy to answer members' questions about their work as we stood around and chatted, before dispersing again at 14.45. Also present of course were members of OSC (the open spaces committee) – and don't forget that we're always here to answer your questions if we can, and would welcome your help too. Should you be interested in joining our committee, or just keeping an eye on your local open space for us, do please get in touch.

Clare Graham is chair of the Battersea Society open spaces committee.