



Friends of St. James's Park and The Green Park
www.thethorneyislandsociety.org.uk Registered Charity No. 1000751

ANNUAL REPORT 2015-2016

We are pleased to report that The Society has had a very good year with our key interests including planning issues, community and local history. We have also made a big effort to improve our public profile on social media. The website (thethorneyislandsociety.com) has been re-vamped to make it easier to access and to enable us to publicise events and developments plus planning applications in our area.

Our new Twitter feed now has approaching 500 followers and is used to publicise events and to draw attention to interesting things happening in the neighbourhood. We would like users to make more comments on Twitter so that we can improve interactivity with the people around us.

During the year we also established a presence on the Eventbrite website which enables people to pay for visits and other events online without having to fill in forms on paper and sign cheques.

The year also saw us start to develop more links with the local community by initiating a series of talks on local history in the William Gibbs Hall on the Peabody estate. This is very close to our Archives in Old Pye Street and will be used for our committee meetings in the new year.

We are continuing to publish our excellent twice yearly newsletter despite increased efforts online, as this gives a more permanent account of our main activities and is particularly useful to members who do not regularly use the internet.

Our popular programme of visits continued throughout the year. In keeping with a recent change of policy, they will mainly concentrate on places within the broad Thorney Island area - such as our recent visit to the medieval remains of Parliament - rather than going further afield. There is no longer any need to sign cheques in advance if bookings are made through Eventbrite.

In the last year we have been asked to comment on 77 planning applications, ranging from the placement of tables and chairs on pavements (which we always approve because they enhance street life) to large projects, mostly rebuilding or converting existing buildings into luxury flat developments, which we have usually objected to, generally on the grounds of an increase in height, but often because of the lack of affordable housing in the scheme. In between these extremes many applications are for extensions of residential properties or change of use of different types of commercial properties. The more significant comments are available to view on our website, and all comments are available to view in the individual applications on the WCC (Westminster Council) planning website.

We would like to give a special thank you to Grange Hotels for their generous support in hosting our Summer and Christmas drinks parties as well as the AGM in a most convivial surroundings and atmosphere.

We are deeply grateful to all who attended and supported the Fundraising Gala Dinner with special thanks to the Hon Jacob Rees-Mogg MP for his speech, describing growing up in Smith Square, using the building as a public library and the huge refurbishment project planned at the Palace of Westminster. Also many thanks to Colin Sheaf, Chairman of Bonhams UK & Asia who auctioned some unique lots and raised an excellent amount for our Archives refurbishment. Finally, thanks to all those local connections and businesses who donated items for the auction. Feeding the pelicans in St James's Park being the top lot!

We warmly welcome two new members to the Committee, Sue Ball and Cyril Freeman. Most Executive Committee members are re-nominating for the year ahead but we have to thank Oliver Bradbury who is stepping down, for his help over several years on historic matters, his deft envelope stuffing and general contributions to the Committee. Lastly, but not least, we say goodbye to Chris Beddoe who, as Chair for the last two years, guided the society through some essential modernisation changes and whose vision will help us in the right direction in the future. Her contribution and experience will be much missed and we wish her all the best for the future.

Finally, we would like to thank all our Members - 382 of them including 122 life members - for their continuing support and we look forward to meeting even more of them at our various events during the year.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE