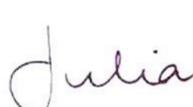


Wapping Conservatives

Cllr Julia Dockerill's Newsletter

I am sorry for the lack of website updates recently. It's been an incredibly busy time both in the council and at my day job so I haven't had a moment to write everything up. I summarise below some of the Wapping issues I've been engaged in over the past few weeks. It's by no means an exhaustive list but I hope it gives you some helpful local information, as well as a flavour of the political issues in our borough.

Very best wishes,



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Surgeries

Hurtado Centre, 2 Chandler St, E1W 2QT

See website for forthcoming dates

PLANNING

The two applications of most concern to Wapping residents at the moment are:-

Wapping High Street/Cinnamon Street/Clegg Street

Proposals for a mixed-tenure residential development across three sites and a retail unit opposite the Overground. I shall write about this in more detail in a separate article. I have been helping residents make representations to the planning department over light, privacy and height issues with the proposed plans. I have also been lobbying for any CIL or Section 106 money from this development to be spent in Wapping, not elsewhere in the borough, ideally to restore heritage aspects of this conservation area and improve green spaces in the immediate vicinity. I have also highlighted my concern about the junction of Cinnamon Street and Wapping Lane—although it is technically a car-free development, there will be more pressure on the surrounding roads at weekends and this is a tricky junction because of the bend in Wapping Lane where the D3 and 100 buses pass through. I have also raised concerns about the width of the pavements around the site, particularly if families with pushchairs or disabled people will be living in any of the new properties.

I managed to get the consultation period extended on this development and since there have now been over twenty letters of objection, this application will be decided by the Development Committee not officers.

Red Lion Court

Proposals for the demolition of the old warehouse on Reardon Path, to be replaced with a block of new flats. Again, I shall write in more detail in a separate article. After I expressed concern about the loss of heritage in this conservation area, I was contacted by the developer who took me through the reasoning behind the removal of the façade in a meeting and site visit. I am not entirely convinced of their case and have made further representations on behalf of concerned residents to test the arguments being made by the developer.

ORNAMENTAL CANAL

Lighting & Upkeep

I continue to push for the reinstatement of the bollard lighting to improve personal safety along the canal. I am awaiting an update on this. I also alerted the council to an overgrown, messy area of the upper walkway which has now been cleared up.

Wildlife

A number of the council's Clean & Green team came down to the canal to see what can be done to improve the environment for wildlife. We are hoping for more bird platforms, planting that might encourage better water flow and other steps to make it a nicer environment for young families and others to enjoy. I have asked for improved information boards to replace the grim bye-law notices there at the moment. We're waiting on a progress report. The Conservative group's submission to the most recent Budget included a green spaces and urban wildlife fund, paid for by diverting money the Mayor is spending on cars and advisers. We also requested a proper community room for St Katharine's & Wapping that would be open to everyone, not just exclusive groups.

ROADS, PAVEMENTS AND GREEN SPACES

Wapping Lane

Before Christmas, I ensured work was carried out on the pavement by the zebra crossing in order to reduce flooding. I believe the engineers only looked at part of the pavement so there may be further work done at a later date to improve the pavement closer to the shops.

The Mayor of London has given Tower Hamlets a pot of money to improve local high streets and I have asked whether Wapping can get a slice of the action.

Bascule Bridge on Garnet Street

I asked over the summer whether the bascule bridge could be repainted and was told it would cost £345k to do the work. I have now asked again for the bridge to be looked at and a site visit has been undertaken by the Clean & Green team to see whether there is any cheaper way of making the bridge look less tatty. I await their update.

Highway

I have managed to get a temporary fix of a clattering drain cover on the Highway that was keeping residents of Eluna Apartments awake at night. Thames Water are currently negotiating with TfL about when they can carry out a permanent fix.

I asked a question at full council about pedestrian safety on the Highway after the tragic death of a motorcyclist at the Dock Street/Vaughn Way junction. I shall post the full answer I got on the website.

Wapping Green

It is taking some time to establish who actually has responsibility for the piece of land opposite Wapping Green, next to Laksha Bay. However I managed to get Tower Hamlets Homes to clear out the messy, overgrown area behind the wall and trim back some of the bushes so that the area looks a little nicer.

Tower Bridge Wharf

I managed to get the electricity cupboard fixed and secured after cables had become loose and exposed.

Matilda House

I had a site meeting with Tower Hamlets Homes and residents to discuss the best location for a new kind of bicycle storage facility, the Lambeth Bike Hangar, as a number of bikes have recently been stolen from the estate. A consultation will soon be carried out and residents will be able to comment on their preferred location out of several options.

POLICING

I went on the ward walkabout with our local policing team, led by Sgt Jak Bentley, Wapping's ward sergeant. Jak is now on twitter so that local residents can learn more about the priorities of the team, the issues they are tackling and the areas they most frequently patrol:- <https://twitter.com/mpswapping>

We visited Inglefield Square where a group has been hanging out behind the wall, smoking cannabis and intimidating residents. While there, I noticed that the development needs some repair, particularly on the back door, and this has been reported to Tower Hamlets Homes. Neighbourhood Manager, James, is keeping me updated with progress in carrying out those repairs and securing the area. We also visited some of the riverfront to discuss how to reduce anti-social behaviour in front of the residential warehouses. I raised with them similar concerns about Shadwell Basin and the Ornamental Canal/Kennet Street, and Cllr Ohid Ahmed, Cabinet Member for Community Safety, has agreed the need to extend the 'No Alcohol' zone to include these areas. They have also been doing a lot of work to tackle fraudsters who have been preying on tourists around the Tower of London.

Jak and his team are now holding regular street surgeries and meetings in case any resident wishes to discuss worries they have about crime in the ward in person.

WASTE

I recommend to all residents the council's app, Fifili, on which you can report dumped rubbish, potholes and repair jobs. I do so myself regularly as the council's senior officer on this, Simon Baxter, is trying to build a detailed picture using all the data to see where the persistent problem areas are. I have drawn his attention to the area by Doughty Court on Prusom Street and the narrow lane opposite Smith's restaurant.

There is a wider debate going on in the Town Hall about the renewal of the council's waste contract. The future of the existing borough depot has been put in doubt and there is concern that any replacement depot will be outside of Tower Hamlets, meaning that rubbish trucks will get stuck in traffic on the A12 and A13 everyday when they are meant to be cleaning our streets.

TOWN HALL

Questions over the conduct of Tower Hamlets Mayor, Lutfur Rahman, continue to dominate discourse at the Town Hall. At the end of last year, PwC completed their report into aspects of the Mayor's operation, including the handling of community grants and property disposals. As a result of their findings, Communities Secretary, Eric Pickles, ordered that three appointed commissioners take on some of the mayor's powers. Sir Ken Knight and Max Caller now come into the Town Hall every Wednesday (we still await the appointment of a third commissioner) and are in the process of reforming the community grants process. A recent meeting of councillors, officers and commissioners over grants was utterly depressing as Labour and Tower Hamlets First councillors fought over who best represented particular 'communities'. I asked what had happened to the Mayor's 'One Tower Hamlets' brand which was meant to emphasise that we are all one community, not a set of people divided into separate boxes according to race, ethnicity and religion. It only brought home to me (again) how divisive it is when our borough is allocated to groups that are exclusive not inclusive. I recently brought to council to try to make our borough grants programme more like Newham's, where money is allocated only to groups that explicitly bring people together. Unfortunately it never even got debated.

Meanwhile, a group has legally challenged the conduct and result of the 2014 mayoral election. This so-called 'election petition' is currently going through the High Court with a judgement anticipated just after Easter. If successful, it is possible that the mayoral election would have to be re-run. It is very difficult to get an objective sense of where this case is going and I am reluctant to give my own thoughts while the matter is still live so I shall leave it at that. Suffice to say, in Tower Hamlets anything could happen...

I sit on the council's HR committee so have been kept busy with interviews for a lot of the senior posts. There is also a lot of discussion over the appointment of a Chief Executive. Tower Hamlets First does not want one, everyone else does.

I also sit on the Strategic Development committee which decides whether to grant planning permission to major developments in the borough. The majority of big developments are based in and around Canary Wharf, with a huge number of units planned for the South Quay area. The sheer volume of proposed dwellings is causing a great deal of controversy since the council has not yet completed a South Quay Masterplan which would give us all a better idea of how infrastructure and services will be improved and added to in order to cope with this vast increase of residents.

The council has just approved the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) which will, in most instances, replace Section 106 in calculating what financial contribution developers should make to the borough to offset the impact of any new building.

As the General Election approaches, we wait to see whether Tower Hamlets First will field any candidates in Poplar & Limehouse and Bethnal Green & Bow. No doubt they are waiting for the outcome of the Election Petition to see how the land lies. Conservatives have selected the excellent Chris Wilford to stand in our parliamentary seat, Poplar & Limehouse. Chris fought Lutfur and John Biggs in the mayoral contest last year and I have already been campaigning with him in Wapping and introducing him to local people.

If you are interested in politics, East End history or the workings of our great city, get down to the Town Hall and be an audience member at Full Council. We normally have about half an hour of good behaviour before the whole thing descends into an episode of Jeremy Kyle. No matter what your opinion of the various political forces in the borough, Tower Hamlets remains one of the most fascinating and exciting places in which one could hope to be a councillor. It continues to be an honour and a privilege to be a representative here.