

THE TRUST

# GAZETTE

PUBLISHED BY THE NEW HAMPSTEAD GARDEN SUBURB TRUST LIMITED

ISSUE No. 3

AUGUST 2006

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It is almost a year since the Trust Council began a strategic review of its activities and we have made substantial progress in our efforts to strengthen the Trust.

### Finances

The Trust has reviewed its financial situation. We have tightened up and re-cast our financial management and are publishing more informative accounts. The most urgent need is to stem the long term decline in the Trust's reserves. We have put the Management Charge onto a sound financial basis and continue to examine all aspects of income and expenditure.

We have identified areas in which economies are possible and are continuing to develop the longer-term

financial strategy. The Trust is studying the feasibility and fairness of applying the Management Charge using Council Tax bands and there is a report on this on page 6.

### Environment and infrastructure

We have put considerable effort into considering the way in which the Trust manages its own property, identifying the most urgent works and unravelling the complex and neglected area of rights and responsibilities in relation to open spaces and roads. This is a huge area of work for the Trust.

### Communication

The Gazette is a new channel of communication between residents

and the Trust. As future plans are agreed, it will settle as an annual or biannual publication. We have a Trust website, [www.hgstrust.org](http://www.hgstrust.org) where all basic data can be found for those interested in engaging in informed debate about Trust issues.

These advances would not have been possible without unstinting contributions by volunteers and the Trust is greatly indebted to them. The

(continued page 2)

### THE GAZETTE AT A GLANCE

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A joint Trust and RA group chaired by former Trust Council chairman Eddie Caplin has been working for some years in preparation for the Suburb's centenary in

More recently the Residents Association's Celebrations committee has been working with all the many Suburb bodies, churches and the synagogue, societies and schools, to arrange a year long programme of exhibitions, parties, concerts, tournaments, a programme its chairman David Littaur says "will, I hope, involve everyone living on the Suburb, young and old, long established and new residents."

### 2007. It has progressed major events such as a Heritage Lottery bid for Central Square; an international conference organised by Trust Hon President Dr Mervyn Miller and the Town and Country Planning Association; the creation of a new rose, Henrietta Barnett, from Harkness; a new book on the Suburb from Mervyn Miller and a fresh perspective on the life of the Suburb's founder in a biography from Alison Creedon.

### Helpers and funds needed

Many of the planned events will be self funding or sponsored but an appeal will be made in the Autumn for donations to make the party go with a swing. "We will also need a lot of volunteers to act as stewards or to help in other ways," says David who can be emailed on [celebrations@hgs.org.uk](mailto:celebrations@hgs.org.uk)

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An architecture student, Amy Butt, spent this summer on a work experience placement with the Trust. "As

well as appreciating the beauty of the Suburb, I was amazed at the amount and variety of work the Trust does." Amy made a photographic record as she shadowed staff, volunteers and trustees around the Suburb.



(Above left) Council members Simon Hurst, Wilfred Court and David Bogush with David Davidson and Jane Blackburn on a visit to an approved new extension in Willifield Way.

(Above) Council member Richard Wakefield with the Trust's tree specialist Tony George, right, the insurers representative and a concerned resident discuss the fate of a poplar accused of undermining neighbouring buildings.

(Left) David Davidson takes time to guide a group from Brooklands School and give them an appreciation of our heritage.



## One year on... (continued)

critical importance of the work of these unpaid volunteers is a measure of the need to increase the professional capacity within the Trust's office in order to make the very best use of its resources. Looking forward, we still have a lot of planning and work to do and we cannot simply rely on residents for help.

## Renewal

After a hundred years, the public fabric of the Suburb is showing signs of age and wear. Roads, walls and ornamental features need renewal or refurbishment. Open and green spaces also need improvement.

The prospective expenditure, which is very large indeed, does not all fall on

the Trust. However, even where the Trust does not bear the cost, it must ensure that a balance is struck between the demands of modern life and the conservation of the Suburb.

To do this we need to create a long-term development plan and to consider how best it can be financed. We intend to make a start on this in the current year.

## Area Characterisation Study

A key tool in this planning is the Area Characterisation Study. The start of this has been delayed by the sheer pressure of day-to-day work on planning approval which soaks up most of all our managerial capacity. Many residents have volunteered their help and we plan to co-ordinate and

put this energy to good use starting this autumn – again with the help of a volunteer.

## The provision of resources

We know that residents want the support of the Trust to conserve and improve the Suburb and the Trust Council is considering how to provide the greater resources that this will need. We need, perhaps, to contemplate the re-endowment of the Trust. This will be no light task and I would welcome any thoughts and suggestions that you may have about this.

Mervyn Mandell, Trust Council Chairman

**The Management Charge bills sent to all freeholders on the Suburb include:**

- **A balancing charge of £39.50 for the financial year 2005/2006;**
- **An estimated charge of £110 for 2006/2007.**

**The Trust has endeavoured to give freeholders prior warning of this substantial increase and previous issues of the Gazette explained the reasons for the increase:**

- **the Trust has in the past subsidised the Management Charge from its reserves but can no longer afford to do this;**
- **the Trust needs improved systems and sufficient staff to operate effectively in today's world;**
- **in appropriate cases the Trust needs to resort to the law to defend the Suburb against unsuitable development.**

The work of the Trust underpins both the unique environment of the Suburb and the premium on the monetary value of Suburb property. Many owners have told us that they recognise the Management Charge as a sound investment in the quality and value of their property. However the increase in the estimated charge for 2006/2007 to £110 is substantial and the Trust recognises that, taken with the balancing charge for 2005/2006, some residents may find it a burden.

The balancing charge of £39.50 is for the additional costs of operating the Trust in 2005/2006 over the estimated bill for £50 issued in August 2005. The

balancing charge is payable now, following the audit of the Trust's accounts for 2005/2006. A copy of the Annual Report and Accounts for 2005/2006 is sent free to all registered members of the Trust (there is an application form for membership on the back page of this Gazette). The Annual Report and Accounts can be sent to residents who are not members at a cost of five pounds or is available from the Trust website.

**The Trust will accept staged payments from those who find difficulty in affording the charge and will support applications to the Department of Work and Pensions from those in receipt of Pension Credit or Income Support. The Trust will also look in confidence at cases of serious hardship.**

Freeholders should be aware however that the Management Charge is mandatory (see clause 8 (b) (ii) of the Scheme of Management) and is enforceable.

The procedure for appealing against the Management Charge laid down in the Trust's Scheme of Management has been superseded and simplified by the Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Act 2002.

Anyone wishing to appeal against the charge should write for advice on how to make an application to:  
Donald Brown,  
Regional Manager,  
London Rent Assessment Panel,  
1st - 2nd Floor, 10 Alfred Place,  
London WC1E 7LR.  
Tel: 020 7446 7700.

'Leasehold Valuation Tribunals. Guidance on procedure' can be found

at [www.rpts.gov.uk/pubs\\_and\\_forms/pdf/LVTguidance.pdf](http://www.rpts.gov.uk/pubs_and_forms/pdf/LVTguidance.pdf).

Copies of the Scheme of Management are available from the Trust Office.

If any freeholder is considering appealing against the amount of the Charge the Trust would welcome the opportunity to discuss their concerns. Please contact the Trust office to arrange an appointment with me. In addition the Management Charge will be discussed at the Trust Annual General Meeting at 8pm on 13th September 2006 at the Free Church Hall in Northway NW11. Residents and owners are all welcome to attend and speak. Members of the Trust are entitled to vote.

Membership of the Trust is open to anyone who has been continually resident on the Suburb for three years or more. There is a membership form on the back page of this Gazette, there is no membership fee.

The Trust exists to maintain and preserve the character and amenities of the Suburb and is committed to doing that more effectively and efficiently. If however you have concerns please do not hesitate to contact me to discuss them.

*Jane Blackburn*

Jane Blackburn, Trust Manager

**Meet the Trust at the Annual General Meeting**

**8pm, 13 September  
Free Church Hall, Northway.**

*All welcome. Refreshments.*

**Visit the Trust on our new web site:  
[www.hgstrust.org](http://www.hgstrust.org)**

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**SUBURB RESIDENT  
JUDITH CHANEY INTERVIEWS  
DAVID DAVIDSON, THE  
ARCHITECTURAL ADVISER  
FOR THE TRUST**

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Many residents buy a house in the Suburb because of the excellent schools, pleasant environment or handy location, only to find that the Trust may prevent them from making major alterations to their own home. I interviewed David Davidson to ask him why the architecture of the Suburb is worth defending.

**So what is it that makes the Suburb special?**

People respond to the qualities of the environment as a whole; the trees and hedges, the open spaces, the architecture and the way the houses relate to each other. What really makes the Suburb unique is the way all the different elements complement each other so well and the level to which the design is continued in all the attractive details. And because it has survived so well, without major damaging changes, unlike most areas of London.

**This quality of design is obvious in Central Square, but what needs preserving in the very ordinary houses?**

There really are no ordinary houses in the Suburb. All the homes were designed by talented architects and built as part of an overall planned vision. If you compare them to typical speculative housing of the period which was aimed at the same market, you see that in the housing layout, density, variety, quality of design and crafted detail, they are hugely superior. And this is as much true of

the houses built between the wars as it is of the older parts of the Suburb. I feel very strongly about this. People occasionally say “there is nothing special about my house, why can’t I do what I like with it”. But when I point out to them why their house is so well designed they recognise it.

**When looking at plans for alterations, is not the design element just a matter of personal taste? Why should the Trust’s ideas of what is appropriate be more valid than the resident’s?**

The ‘element of taste’ was decided for all of us when the architects of the Suburb designed such a well detailed and cohesive environment. The main question for the Trust today is whether or not a proposed change is consistent with the existing character and appearance of the house and its surroundings. It’s not about personal taste at all – it’s about making an accurate analysis of the qualities and

Hill Top homes built in the 1930s. These are not ‘ordinary’ houses.



character of the area and applying carefully considered guidelines.

Each house is not an individual building – it is part of the Suburb as a whole. If an extension is ugly or too large it affects all the surrounding properties too. Changing a front door in a terrace of cottages can destroy the appearance of the whole group. Laying a hardstanding can spoil a group of well tended front gardens. You can’t get round it – living in the Suburb entails some constraints on individual choice but this is done for the huge benefit of all Suburb residents.

**Ok, so drastically changing the front of my house would be refused permission if it destroyed the character of the area around me, but why are you so fussy about the backs of houses?**

It is the same point really. Why should the back be different from the front? Often the backs of houses are just as visible as the front.



Hogarth Hill. Before and after – an unsightly garage replaced with an attractive extension.

The outlook from gardens is terribly important. In my experience, it is one of the things people value most and where feelings run highest when planning applications are submitted.

**What about applications to change a house to fit modern living requirements, changes like double glazing, off street parking spaces and decking?**

The Trust is very sympathetic to the desires of residents to upgrade their homes. I spend a lot of time on site visits trying to find ways to help residents find solutions that fit with their requirements but also retain the character of their home, whether they want more living space or double glazing. If a proposal does not adversely affect the appearance of the building and its surroundings then the Trust will be happy with the change. Suburb houses are for living in there is no reason they can't be adapted in certain ways to modern demands.

But these demands do need to respect the design of the traditional details of the original house and this sometimes means some changes cannot be allowed all of the traditional materials used in

**What about damage that has already been done? There are some real eyesores around, why doesn't the Trust do something about existing problems?**

Many of the 'eyesore' alterations were done before the Trust had powers to control change. Remember the Trust was only set up in 1969 and before 1974 it had no powers to control development. The Trust and the Scheme of Management were set up as a result of residents' concern about this. We do not have any retrospective powers. However, when properties change hands new owners are often keen to improve the appearance of earlier mistakes.

**It can be very daunting for residents to try and reinstate original features or even try to conserve the features of their houses – where do you begin?**

The Trust can help here. We can help you to find the right materials and specialist craftsmen. We have lists of architects and builders who are familiar with the Suburb. It is possible to obtain

Suburb properties and to replace windows and doors to the original pattern. We also have a lot of original drawings of the houses if you wanted to know how it may have looked.

Restoring the authentic detail is not as expensive as you may think. It is also a good investment; an 'unspoilt' house always commands a better price. It is only through the careful preservation and sensitive change that we can maintain the unique character that attracts people to live in the Suburb in the first place.

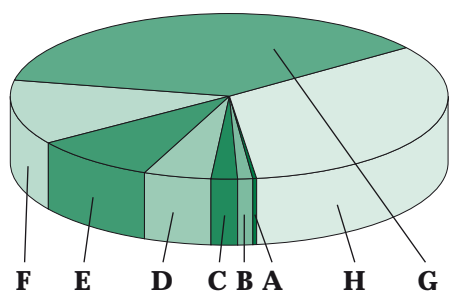
The Trust has approved these carefully designed timber double glazed windows.



At the moment the Management Charge is levied on residential freeholders at a flat rate irrespective of the value of their properties. When the Charge was very low this was not controversial. Now that the Charge has risen, the fairness of a flat charge has become an issue. A considerable number of residents have suggested that it should be progressive; that is it should be related to the value of the property on which it is levied.

As everyone knows, there is a very wide range of property values in the Suburb. One way of showing the relative distribution of property values is to look at the number of properties in the Suburb in each Council Tax Band. Figures taken from the Inland Revenue website from show that most properties are in the higher tax bands with a significant minority of freehold properties in bands A-D.

**NUMBER OF FREEHOLD PROPERTIES IN COUNCIL TAX BANDS**



Source data: Inland Revenue website

## Arguments against a progressive Charge

Those against a progressive charge argue that:

- the amenities of the Suburb are equally available to all who live there;
- those buying property do so in full knowledge of their commitment to paying the Management Charge.

## Arguments for a progressive Charge

Those in favour argue that:

- amenities are not universally distributed throughout the Suburb and that while every freeholder benefits from the Suburb 'premium', this itself is related to the price of individual properties and is a better indicator of the relative benefits that the Suburb confers;
- as a matter of fairness, the charge should be related to the ability to pay and that freehold values, though crude, are the best available indicator of relative incomes.

It is not a simple matter. Some have lived for many years on modest incomes in smaller properties where values have risen fast. They will not find an increased Management Charge easy to meet.

## How would a banded charge work?

One practical way of introducing a banded charge would be to relate it to the Local Authority Council Tax Bands. The bands and the weightings used have the advantage of being established by a public authority and therefore have some claim to objectivity.

The table in the next column illustrates the approximate effect on the level of the Management Charge if it were linked to Council Tax bands. The example assumes a Management Charge of £100.

The number of freehold properties in each band is also given so as to provide a better picture of the distributive effect.

## Effect on the level of a Management Charge of £100 per freehold if it were linked to Council Tax Bands.

| Council Tax Band | No of Freehold Properties | Approximate Management Charge |
|------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------|
| A                | 2                         | £40                           |
| B                | 25                        | £47                           |
| C                | 61                        | £51                           |
| D                | 173                       | £64                           |
| E                | 309                       | £74                           |
| F                | 409                       | £88                           |
| G                | 1235                      | £101                          |
| H                | 1092                      | £121                          |

Source: Trust staff calculations

Before the Management Charge could be applied in this way the method would have to be agreed and the results checked by independent assessors. However, the indicative illustration shows the significant effect it would have

## What is the legal position?

Such a change requires an alteration to the Trust's Scheme of Management. This alteration would require the approval of the Leasehold Valuation Tribunal and its approval takes some time to secure. If the Council should, therefore, decide to change the basis of the Management Charge to introduce banding, it is not expected to be able to get permission for this until 2007. Clearly a great deal of research and debate is needed and the views of freeholders are sought.

Wheelbarrows up the twittens, prize marrows behind the privet; earth turned with sweated brow, produce proudly on the table. What exactly is it that persuades some to forego the delights of supermarket shopping for 'growing your own'? Why do some choose careful cultivation of delicate blooms beyond the confines of their domestic plots, away from the attentions of the contract gardener and his noisy machinery?

Whether the motive be exercise, organic food, certainty of origin, creativity, peace and quiet or a passing interest in Voltaire, any resident

feeling the urge is warmly invited by the Trust to make use of its freehold allotment land in the Suburb. Those who neither till the soil nor abut those hidden open spaces may be surprised to know of the existence of the Trust's 11 allotment sites scattered around the Suburb.

Their administration is carried out by the Residents Association's Allotments Committee operating through Secretaries for each site. A modest annual rental is levied on each worked plot which is collected by the Allotments Committee and paid over to the Trust. Until now, Trust

expenditure on the allotments and overall management has been on rather an ad hoc basis. The Trust is now introducing a specified annual budget figure to be spent by the Trust on maintenance of the allotments. This will in future years be linked to the amount of rental income received by the Trust. It is intended that the Allotments Committee will mostly determine spending priorities.

The Trust hopes that this will engender a renewed sense of co-operation. Limited Trust funds mean that allotment holders' help is needed in general maintenance. Residents owning gardens bordering allotment sites are asked to ensure that boundary lines are respected and that Lease and Scheme of Management obligations regarding hedge and tree maintenance are carried out. The Trust will increasingly enforce these matters. In some places, overgrown hedges prevent sunlight and successful cultivation. It is in everyone's interest that these open spaces are maintained as viable working plots.

As a further step, the Trust intends to investigate the possibility of lottery funding to provide mains water supply to some of its sites to replace the somewhat patchy existing arrangements.

In the meantime, anyone who feels the slightest urge to get digging and planting is strongly urged to contact the Chairman of the Allotments Committee, John Freeborn, on 8455 9320. The Trust hopes that with co-operation from all parties this important Suburb amenity – part of its structure and heritage – will go from strength to strength.

Andrew Botterill



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## Contacting The Trust

The Trust's two full-time senior members of staff are:

Jane Blackburn BA(Arch), Dip Arch, RIBA Trust Manager

David Davidson BA(Arch), MA Arch Cons IHBC Architectural Adviser

The Trust can be contacted at:

862 Finchley Road, Hampstead Garden Suburb, London NW11 6AB

Tel: 020 8455 1066 / 020 8458 8085 • Website: [www.hgstrust.org](http://www.hgstrust.org) • E-mail: [mail@hgstrust.org](mailto:mail@hgstrust.org)

Company registration number: 928520 • Registered charity number: 1050098

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