

# Suburb News *in conversation with...*

## *...Nick Packard, new Trust Manager*

### 'The new face of the Trust' by Diana Brahams

Nick Packard took over as Manager of Hampstead Garden Suburb Trust from Jane Blackburn in February 2015.

He is a new broom with keen and practical ideas to safeguard the Suburb with useful experience under his belt as he worked for five and a half years as the Trust's Estate Manager under Jane's stewardship during which time he qualified as a chartered surveyor. He offers a safe and sensible pair of younger hands but with relevant experience and fresh ideas.

Nick was born in Kingston-upon-Thames and grew up in the Barbican, has worked in central London and currently lives with his wife and young family in Hackney. In consequence, he brings a wider perspective to the Trust and while he is a committed conservationist he told me he recognises that conservation has to be sensible and practical and take account of modern living.

After university, Nick's early career was spent working as an estate agent during the rapid gentrification and advance of the City into Spitalfields where he observed at first-hand how rapidly an area could change both visually and in terms of its occupancy and land values and increased his undoubted

commitment to conservation. "I think some important old buildings and areas are worth preserving and that we need to build on a large scale to help improve the affordability of housing."

He decided to become a chartered surveyor and to enable himself to start formal training he obtained the prerequisite of (in his case) a Master's degree (2007-8) at Kingston in European Real Estate. At this point he joined the Trust as its Estate Manager in 2009 as a trainee surveyor and told me he is very grateful to Geoffrey Marriott, a former Trustee, who helped and mentored him during the qualification process.

I asked Nick what it was that attracted him to become a surveyor and work in the Trust: "I have always been interested in residential property – people's homes are interesting – people are different in their homes from their work life."

With regard to the Trust: "I liked the personal element – it can be very enjoyable but also sometimes stressful. People are passionate about their houses."

I asked about funding for the Trust in the light of some expensive litigation which ended in the Lands Tribunal finding against the Trust's refusal

to agree to give permission to demolish the single J C S Soutar designed house in Ingram Avenue which stood on a large double sized plot. However, even though the developer won the right to demolish the original house and build two houses on the same land, they had to negotiate with the Trust in the redesign of the two houses. The Trust was also successful in a second case in Ingram Avenue at the Lands Tribunal and Court of Appeal in resisting building above a garage.

While it may at times be frustrating personally, in many other instances we must be grateful to the Trust for keeping inappropriate "improvements" and additions out of the Suburb. When the Trust has taken its eye off the ball in the past it was not long before ugly cladding and extensions and so forth began to appear. People are attracted to the Suburb precisely because of its consistency and charm, the hedges and trees and pretty windows on the houses with their red brick or white-washed walls and yet, human nature ensures that new buyers and even long-standing residents fail to appreciate the bigger picture if and when their own plans for extensions and alterations and dormer windows are turned down.

It is worth remembering how the Trust began. In or around 1906, (close to the time when the Northern line was extended and Golders Green tube station opened), the original Hampstead Garden Suburb Trust was set up by Dame Henrietta Barnett to purchase the land that was to become and be developed as Hampstead Garden Suburb (from Eton College Estate and the Church Commissioners). The Trust sold plots on 99 year leases with restrictive covenants to individuals and builders over the years retaining others and building many of the smaller houses and cottages and then letting them out at modest rents to artisans and other working people with a view to achieving the integrated social and class mix that Dame Henrietta desired. No pub was allowed on Trust land and the girls' school and the adult Institute (that shared the same premises for so long) were intended to prioritise local people, but no longer do so.

The Suburb quickly became a very desirable place to live and bring up families and was soon a hostage to its own success: prices rose ahead of other local areas and 'artisans' cottages' were sought as bijou residences in need of modernisation. Many of these smaller homes have delightful and relatively large gardens, which had been intended for growing vegetables and fruits by their tenants to improve income and diet. By the 1960s many tenancies had ended and the Trust sold them off, and increasingly was selling 900 year extensions to the original 99 year leases with fixed ground rents. The Leasehold Reform Act 1967 was in the process of



going through Parliament and the original Trust was facing financial difficulties as it had a fixed income from ground rents and borrowings linked to variable interest rates which were rising. The original Trust was wound up and the Suburb sold at auction in 1969 to a property company. During the late 1960s and early 1970s a group of residents fought to obtain section 19 of the Leasehold Reform Act and formed the New Hampstead Garden Suburb Trust as a body to run a Scheme of Management for the Suburb under that section of the Act. The Scheme of Management was eventually granted to the New Trust in 1974 to control alterations to freehold properties and manage communal areas of the Suburb. The Scheme of Management must equal the Trust's reasonable

costs of operating the Scheme each year and the Trust is not allowed to make a profit on its operation.

The New Trust (now renamed the Hampstead Garden Suburb Trust) therefore requires its own income to continue to operate. The Trust eventually obtained all of the freeholds on the Suburb and the benefit of restrictive covenants over the estate. Within the last 10 years the Trust has reversed its diminishing resources by taking a more commercial view on its assets e.g. releasing owners from the restrictive covenants that prevent conversion of garages into living space.

The Trust has also been seeking investments to provide an income to the Trust as its capital assets will eventually run out. Until fairly recently the only property the Trust retained was

its office headquarters building at 862 Finchley Road. It has sensibly extended the downstairs area and this has enabled it to re-convert a flat above, which it lets out. It has also been buying flats (it now owns four) on the Suburb, which it lets out, and aims to provide itself over time with a portfolio of property that will provide an income and capital growth to sustain its future. This strategy coincides with Nick Packard's arrival and time spent as Estates Manager and we can be sure that he will carry it forward in a practical and sensible fashion and so ensure the Trust will endure to support Suburb activities which include the forthcoming Suburb Proms at St Judes (20-28 June) and will protect the character and all that is best about our beloved Hampstead Garden Suburb now and in the future.

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