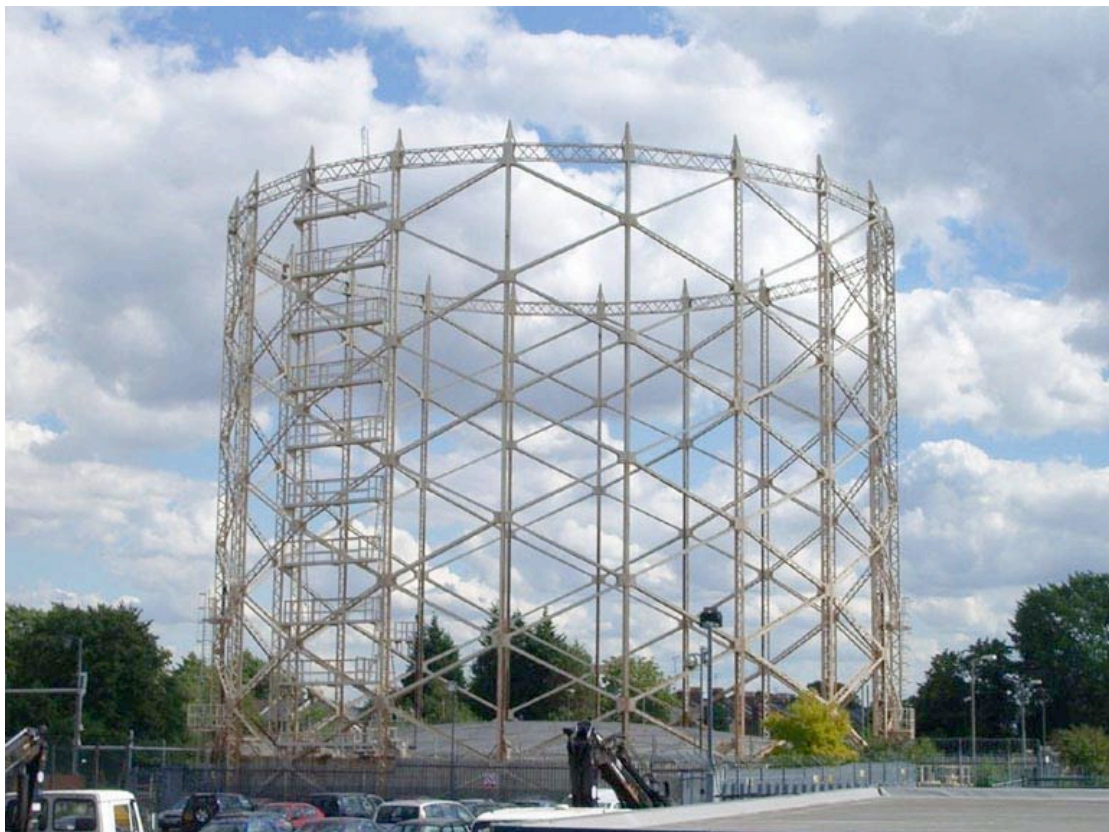


## A gasholder that should be saved

This is about a gasholder known as 'Hornsey No 1' - it is the smaller one of the two at the old Hornsey Gasworks, on Mary Neuner Road between Hornsey Park Road and the railway line. Up until 2006 it had been on the local list of historic buildings and structures. It was then described as: "1892 gasholder using Cutler's patented helical girder frame". Unfortunately, it was removed from the local list at Haringey Council's request to ease the way for development of the site as part of Haringey Heartlands. Although objections to this were raised at the Haringey UDP inquiry, the Inspector upheld Haringey's wish and it came off the list.

The whole point of having a local list is that historic buildings should be protected and not simply wiped out at the whim of a developer. It is not that this structure has become less historic and important – on the contrary, only in recent years has its true significance been recognised. And it is scandal that it is not now protected.



What makes this structure so important is its highly innovative design that uses helical (or spiral-like) girders joined to vertical members to form triangular cells with each side being equally stressed. This provides for a very strong yet relatively light weight structure with the vertical elements also acting as guide rails for the gas tanks

to rise and fall inside. The resultant form is both functional and elegant – it is beautifully proportioned and topped out with inwardly tapering finials.

What is remarkable is that this innovative structure from 1892 uses the same geodesic principles ‘invented’ by Barnes Wallis 30 years later for airships, ‘re-invented’ by Buckminster Fuller 50 years later for his geo-domes and ‘re-re-invented’ yet again more than 100 years later by Norman Foster for the Swiss Re/ London Gherkin building! All highly praised engineering achievements of world significance, well recognised and celebrated internationally – yet predated by unrecognised and unsung Hornsey No 1!

An attempt was made early in 2006 to get English Heritage to list the structure, which was clearly at risk from the development of Haringey Heartlands. The attempt failed because EH misunderstood the structure as being simply “heavily braced” and failed to understand the significance of its triangular elements. There were two appeals to English Heritage, who they were wrong, but wouldn’t budge on their decision. They also claimed that an earlier example of Samuel Cutler’s work existed (in prototype form) at Tunbridge Wells and if anything is to be listed it should be that one. Ironically, there is no interest in this at Tunbridge Wells where the site is also doomed for development by Barratt Homes. English Heritage did not even visit the Hornsey site and their assessment was done entirely on the paper work – their ‘no’ came in August 2008.

The tragedy is that this will be a lost opportunity for Haringey. With some architectural imagination the outer frame of Gasholder No 1 could be reused as the outer shell of a spectacular modern building – a building that could be a proper and much needed landmark feature for Heartlands. There are good examples of such reuse of gasholders in Dublin (see photo at end), Vienna and Germany.

Another irony is that the master plan for Heartlands has been prepared by the architect practice MAKE, one of the directors of which is Ken Shuttleworth, who was the structural engineer for the Gherkin. One might have expected Ken to be interested in reuse of Hornsey No 1, if only as a tribute to the pioneers of the form that he is celebrated for 100 years later. But no, Ken declined to take any interest and the MAKE plan of monolithic blocks of apartments fails to make any reference to the origins of the site.

There was a Development Control Forum on the Heartlands outline plan, which took place in June 2009. The architect and Haringey Planning took a bashing from residents who were highly critical of the scale of what is proposed; its unimaginative

nature and that it will mean the closure of small business with job losses. Several references were to the gasholders and how much they were preferred features in the landscape.

The next step in Heartlands is for the proposal to go to the Council's Planning Committee and this is expected later this year. The major landowner is National Grid and clearly they want to make the maximum windfall profit from the old gasworks site and are keen for demolition and site clearance. It is to be expected that Gasholder No 1 will shortly be de-commissioned as a prelude to demolition. Meanwhile, it is still working after almost 120 years and this winter it has been rising and falling in keeping with the demand for gas.



Other aspects of Hornsey No 1 that are of historic interest include the fact that Cutler's works were at Millwall where in the 19<sup>th</sup> century they diversified from shipbuilding, which had been one of London's major industries. The cast iron 'Cutler & Sons Millwall' plates would have been a tribute to London's lost industrial past. Similarly, the historic growth of Hornsey and Wood Green could have been referenced by retention and reuse of this local landmark.

What a pity it is that Haringey and its Planning Development and Control are so compliant with land owners and property developers like National Grid. In a more ideal world one might have expected Haringey to take a stance to protect its cultural history and provide something better for its future residents.



*Dublin example – Hornsey No 1 could be better!*

Colin Marr 26 March 2010