

# newsforum



The London Forum - working to protect and improve the quality of life in London

The London Forum of  
Amenity and Civic Societies

Founded 1988

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## The National Planning Policy Framework - disaster or opportunity?

# The NPPF – a disaster or an opportunity?

**Michael Bach** gives a summary and a critique of the NPPF, beginning with some historical background to the development of our planning system.

*The NPPF is a once in a generation opportunity – we must get it right. We must set off in the right direction for long-term change rather than a short-term fix*

## New Newsforum schedule

There has been such a lot happening over the summer that this edition of the Newsforum is in two parts. The usual printed copy which concentrates on the NPPF; and a supplement in the form of a PDF covering other stories, which will be emailed to all of you.

We recently reduced Newsforums from three to only two per year because of the ever rising cost, in particular of postage. However at the AGM members indicated that they would like to go back to receiving three editions but that they would not mind if one edition was sent by email to help with costs. Therefore in future I will aim to produce a midsummer PDF edition to send by email. Editor. ■

## Policy Change and the NPPF – a historical overview.

There is a distinction between law and policy. Changing the law is a long, tedious process which can be fundamental or tinkering. Policy, on the other hand, can be changed relatively quickly, subject to consultation and examination by the Select Committee, and can change the whole political philosophy of how the Government thinks things should be done. This is what is happening now.

### Policy Change 1. The 1980s:

The Conservative Government after 1979 embarked upon a pro-development phase, by introducing a "presumption in favour of development" (1980) and, as a matter of policy, downgrading the status of the development plan to being just another material planning consideration. Little of this involved changing the law, although they did pass legislation to introduce Enterprise Zones – which assisted the development of Canary Wharf as well as a number regional out-of-town shopping centres.

The result of the policy changes was, for example, that unless a local authority could demonstrate a permanent 5-year supply of housing sites, developers could propose any sites, however unsustainable the location, and, if refused, win on appeal on the basis that there was a shortfall. Likewise with out-

of-town shopping developments, the local planning authority had to prove the likely harm. It was a period of "planning by appeal" which brought forward proposals that would otherwise never have been proposed. Appeals rose, but not the success rate. It was a field day for planning lawyers.

### 2. The 1990s

This approach produced a strong reaction within the Conservative Party by the end of the 1980s, but especially following the relative success of the Green/Ecology Party in the 1989 European Elections, and policy change was introduced through the 1990 Environment White Paper, reversing previous policy changes:

- a change in the law – the Planning and Compensation Act 1991 – which formally introduced the plan-led system – applications should be determined in accord with the development plan, unless there were strong overriding reasons not to – in practice a presumption in favour of development which is line with the development plan;
- rewriting a whole set of Planning Policy Guidance Notes (PPGs) between 1991 and 1996 – PPG3, PPG4, PPG6 (x2) and PPG13 – which introduced the concepts of: sustainable development; focusing high trip-generating uses in locations well served by public transport; reducing the

### *Planning should not be unbalanced, favouring the needs of business over local communities.*

need to travel; focusing shops, leisure, offices and other town centre uses, using a sequential approach (town centres first) - this guided the choice of locations/sites in plans, giving the private sector the confidence to invest in large-scale, long lead-time projects in town and city centres and bring about the regeneration of most of England's larger city and town centres;

- consolidating the issue of where and how to build more housing in PPG3 (2000) - focusing new housing in existing urban areas, a strong preference for "brownfield first" approach, the need to allocate a sufficient supply of sites for the future, and making the best/most efficient use of land, all of which reduced the amount of new greenfield sites used for housing from more than 50% to less than 30% from 2000 to 2010.

All of these policy changes were introduced, or, in the case of the latter, initiated by the Conservative Government and were adopted and consolidated by the incoming Labour Government in 1997. There was an all-Party consensus on the need for a plan-led approach, more sustainable patterns of development, brownfield first, town centres first, etc.

### **3. the 2000s**

Momentum for these changes is not all down to the current Government; it has been building up over the last 10 years, particularly from the Treasury, supported by various think-tanks and business interests, and lobby groups such as housebuilders and large-format retailers to change the policies in the name of competitiveness, productivity, etc amid assertions that the planning system was not only a significant problem for business, but the main problem.

There were also pressures to change the "town centres first" policy in the mid-2000s – from Treasury and certain large-format retailers, but public opinion, the development industry and an all-party consensus ensured that the policy was maintained. This is still the case. The Government has repeatedly given the assurance that they strongly support the "town centres first" policy.

A Select Committee on Planning, Competitiveness and Productivity in 2002/03 failed to find any evidence to

substantiate that the planning system was a barrier to growth, productivity and competitiveness – nobody, whether in Government or from the business community, produced any evidence to substantiate the assertion. This was reassuring – if there had been evidence somebody would have produced it!

### **So where are we today?**

There has been a revival of the Treasury attack on planning system; pressure from development industry and think tanks; and a full-scale attack from leading Ministers.

The Government commissioned a Planning Practitioners' Group consisting of a development consultant, a housebuilder, a councillor and an RSPB representative to précis various planning documents down to a single short document. They reported to Ministers in June this year.

The NPPF is a total rewrite of 25 PPGs/PPSs in one short document. At first sight it is workman-like, even slavish précis of some of those documents, but others, especially PPS3, PPS4 and PPG13 – the 3 key documents - have been altered, weakened or, in the case of the latter, bowdlerised.

As a result planning has made the front pages of national papers for the last three months!

The same assertions are now being repeated about planning as a barrier to business but nobody in Government is testing the evidence. This is not evidence-based policy making nor even policy-based evidence finding. Certain Ministers, not necessarily in DCLG, are insisting that the proposed changes are essential for business.

Experience has shown that planning is in fact very low on the list of the major concerns of business – usually between 12th and 15th - and what business really wants to encourage their investment is clarity, certainty and consistency of policy: these are the key tests that the current proposed changes need to be assessed against.

### **Draft NPPF**

The draft NPPF is a missed opportunity to present a clear, coherent vision of how England's cities and towns, villages and countryside should develop over the next 20 years

- there is no reference to London, and its special circumstances in having a Spatial

Development Strategy which does have an evidence-driven basis for planning for growth within the constrained opportunities of the region.

- a plan-led system is still central to the NPPF, but only if the "local plan" is up to date (and in general conformity with the NPPF). There is now the severe penalty of a "presumption in favour of sustainable development" if plans are not up to date;
- there is absolutely no guidance on how our cities, towns or villages should develop in the most sustainable way;
- minimal guidance on which land should be developed (it sees green belt, national and European designations and avoiding the best and most versatile agricultural land as constraints, but no priorities for the use of the rest), with how, where and what is developed left to housebuilders;
- It abandons emphasis on using previously-developed land or redevelopment, which means that greenfield sites will often be the default option; and
- vague guidance on appropriate locations for high trip-generating uses, although local authorities are advised to "prefer" town centre sites for shops and leisure.

### **So can the NPPF be fixed?**

It could easily be amended without adding more than a page or two by

- inserting a clearer vision for planning in England generally, and specifically in towns and cities, and, especially, adding a further paragraph on London and England's major conurbations
- retaining the existing plan-led approach in planning for the development we need as well as when assessing applications that are not in accord with the plan,
- reinstating some guidance about choosing where and which sites to develop
- ensuring the "town centres first" policy is effective by firmly applying the sequential test for out-of-centre sites.
- providing better protection for open spaces by reinstating the sequential approach in PPG17

### **Summary**

The NPPF is a once in a generation opportunity – we must get it right. We must set off in the right direction for long-term

# The NPPF: omissions and contradictions

**Peter Eversden** spells out what the proposed NPPF changes will mean for London

change, rather than a short-term fix. Planning should not be unbalanced, favouring the needs of business over local communities. They can and should be compatible through positive and proactive planning which plans for the right development in the right place which takes in the direction we want to go to achieve the community's vision.

## Will the Government listen?

Will it take ten years again for the Government to understand that policies like "brown-field first" and "town centres first" were not only more sustainable options; they gave business the confidence to make long-term investment, but also ones which had popular support?

Do we have to wait five years for a middle England revolt against the scale of greenfield development or the scale of out-of-town retail development before the Government sees the light?

Are there signs that Ministers are listening or that they are getting the message that this not a left-wing conspiracy – people are genuinely concerned. Mixed signals are coming out day by day. They may yet reconsider restoring priority for reusing brownfield sites rather than developing greenfield sites.

Getting this right is essential – the Government needs to find a better balance – it needs to listen rather than confront those that see a need to improve the current draft. ■

**Michael Bach** is Chairman of the London Forum Planning and Transport Committee. He was senior planner at CLG and wrote several of the PPSs. He led the Department of the Environment team that devised the "town centre first" policy.

The notes for Michael's talk to a London Forum meeting on September 30 about the draft NPPF have been emailed to members. The question and answer session is reported on page 8. ■

The NPPF has killed many of the Localism Bill proposals for community participation in deciding what development will happen in their area. That was stated at the GLA Urban Design London conference not only by myself but in talks by a leading planner and by one of the UK's top planning barristers who said the NPPF would guarantee him a Maserati, as more decisions would be made through appeals.

## What is the purpose of planning?

Greg Clark states in his foreword to the draft NPPF that "the purpose of planning is to achieve sustainable development." But the present purpose of planning is not that. Since 1947 the Town and Country Planning Acts have been the means of balancing economic development with social and environmental quality. Developments should not be approved unless sustainable in that way. TCPA expects 'presumption in favour of sustainable development' will have to be clarified through the courts.

It changes development from being plan led to being developer led. It changes the level playing field of decision making on planning applications to one where boroughs will have to grant approval unless they can prove that a tremendous degree of harm would be caused by a development. That puts it in conflict with our current plan-led system, where there is a legal requirement in the planning legislation "to determine applications in accord with the development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise".

## The London situation

In London we have two levels to the development plan - the London Plan and the borough Local Development Framework. Developments must conform to policies in both of them, unless the weight of any other material considerations are sufficient to override the concern about a proposal. Questions remain regarding how the London Plan will interact with the NPPF, particularly given a number of sections of the London Plan specifically reference elements of guidance soon to be abolished.

## What is 'sustainable development'?

But the NPPF will change all that. Its paragraph 19, second bullet point, says that: "Decision-takers at every level should assume that the default answer to development proposals is "yes", except

where this would compromise the key sustainable development principles set out in this Framework".

But 'sustainable development' is not defined in the NPPF. We have been lobbying for it to be in the Localism Bill and the Lords have tabled an amendment for that. Development control officers need a definition of what makes a scheme sustainable. It may be illegal if they "approve all individual proposals wherever possible", as told they should by NPPF para. 14.

## Overriding locally-agreed plans

The new test for proposals is no longer to find sufficient reasons to override the locally-agreed development plan before allowing development which is not in line with the local plan, but that planning consent should always be granted "unless the adverse impacts of allowing development would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole." (NPPF, paras 14, 20, 110 and 165)

This means that, despite the policy in the plan to resist certain types of development, local planning authorities will have not only to prove the anticipated harm, but that it is significantly and demonstrably greater than the alleged benefits of the development.

Moreover no consultation with the public is required to take place if a local authority finds itself in a position to have to grant permission for a scheme contrary to its local policies.

## But it gets worse ! -

NPPF paragraph 14 states that local authorities should "grant permission where the local plan is absent, silent, indeterminate or where relevant policies are out of date". But only half the boroughs in London have an examined and adopted Core Strategy and only a quarter have an LDF with adopted Area Action Plans and other Development Plan Documents which state comprehensively where development will take place, of what kind and when.

Even adopted plans could be considered 'out of date' because of changes in National policies since they were approved and because of the policies in the NPPF. So, if we don't get all LDFs up to date, only the policies in the London Plan and some expensive barristers helping boroughs to defeat appeals could prevent unsustainable development anywhere. The third party right

*We cannot have borough plans put to one side because they are not up to date and decisions made on poor NPPF policies.*

of appeal by communities, to balance that right which applicants have, offered in the Tory's 2010 'Open Source Planning' green paper has been dropped.

Crucially the 2011 London Plan was not examined on the basis of the NPPF and other Government changes, and may well therefore have to be altered. Meanwhile it is vital and urgent that the Secretary of State gives it a certificate of general conformity with national policy, so it can be applied without challenge.

### Omissions and contradictions

There were 6,000 pages of guidance to the PPG and PPS national planning policy documents. Even the current PPG and PPS policies on where development should take place have been omitted from the draft NPPF. It will be essential to have clear guidance in future to the very condensed policies in the NPPF.

There is no 'brownfield first' requirement, no town centre first for offices, no tests for retail and leisure developments to be in town centres, no policy to reduce the need to travel by locating development suitably, no prioritisation of some sites over others when there is a shortfall (as in PPS3) and no sequential tests for disposal of open space (as in PPG17).

There is reduced protection for heritage assets, conservation areas and weakened policy against advertising and for sufficient affordable housing.

Green Belt land can be used for housing: several types of development to be allowed in future on Green Belt Land are detailed in the draft NPPF and its Impact Assessment.

The NPPF fails to address inequality and equal life chances for all, as PPS1 did.

Designing housing to high standards is supported by NPPF paras. 114 to 123 but para. 70 states that "Local planning authorities should avoid unnecessary conditions or obligations, particularly when this would undermine the viability of

development proposals."

NPPF paragraph 50 states that "neighbourhood plans....must be in conformity with the strategic policies in the Local Plan." But paragraph 51 states that "When a neighbourhood plan is made, the policies it contains take precedence over existing policies in the Local Plan for that neighbourhood, where they are in conflict." So, developer led neighbourhood plans could 'trump' borough intentions.

Metropolitan Open Land, currently protected in PPG2 is not mentioned.

We cannot have borough plans put to one side because they are not up to date and decisions made on poor NPPF policies.

### Vital to work with boroughs

Faced with this potential disaster, propelled by the drive for growth and development of the economy, we MUST get our local plans up to date with policy content for neighbourhoods. The boroughs have to do that now but they need the help and cooperation of communities. Never before have we needed so much to work successfully together. The preparation of LDF content must take priority, in my view, over Neighbourhood Plans. Much of what a Neighbourhood Plan could devise in the way of policies and Local Development Orders can be built into an LDF. ■

*This article is based on a talk by Peter Eversden about Community involvement with local planning, given recently to the GLA Assembly investigation on the subject. ■*

## Summary of London Forum concerns

### What will it mean for the London Plan and Borough Core Strategies?

Both these up-to-date plans will need to be assessed for compliance with the new NPPF – CLG is likely to give us 18 months to do it

### The draft NPPF proposes to change how decisions are made.

At present applications have to be determined in accord with the plan: if a proposal is contrary to the plan the onus is on the applicant/developer to demonstrate that the benefits are sufficient to override the plan policies

Under the NPPF, where a proposal is contrary to the plan, it is the local authority that will have to prove that the "harm" is "significantly and demonstrably" greater than the benefits before it can refuse.

### The NPPF does not provide clear and unambiguous guidance on key choices, including:

- choosing previously-developed land in the right place before greenfield sites;
- choosing new housing sites which are best-placed to benefit from existing physical and social infrastructure, such as sites within or on the edge of the urban area;
- ensuring that town centre sites are the first choice sites for retail, leisure and offices in development plans and the sequential test requiring applicants to demonstrate that all more central sites have been fully considered;
- ensuring that sites for major office developments are either in town centres or are close to major public transport interchanges and not in locations where more than half the employees can only access the jobs by car – applicants for such sites should be required to demonstrate through the travel plan that this will be achieved;
- ensuring that open spaces are not released for development until the evidence-based needs for other open space uses are also satisfied. ■

## A successful Civic Voice campaign

### All Party Parliamentary Group on civic societies

Over the summer Civic Voice has run a campaign with the aim of establishing an All Party Parliamentary Group for civic societies.

Members of societies were asked to write to their MPs inviting them to join the new group. Civic Voice is delighted to announce that this has been successful.

They expect to launch the new group in the House of Commons in October. ■

# The NPPF – The London Forum “myth buster”

The Department for Communities and Local Government published a “Myth-Buster” as part of its effort to justify the NPPF proposals. **Helen Marcus** compares some of its claims to the available evidence and finds the government’s ‘myth buster’ busted.

The response of ministers to CPRE and the National Trust, who have been leading the campaign for a rethink of the NPPF in recent weeks, have been venomous and quite shocking. Business Secretary Vince Cable described campaigners against the proposals as “semi-hysterical”. Bob Neill made the astonishing accusation that it was “a carefully choreographed smear campaign by Left-wingers based within the national headquarters of pressure groups”, with “vested interests”. Greg Clark accused those who sought to “preserve in aspic” their towns, as guilty of “nihilistic selfishness” because they will prevent young people from getting on the housing ladder.

The Financial Times by contrast described the campaigners as the “cultural wing of Tory and Liberal Democrat-voting Middle England”. The Daily Telegraph launched a ‘Hands Off Our Land’ campaign with a leading article saying the government’s actions are “a shameful way to treat rural Britain”. Hardly newspapers of the loony left!

For the record CPRE actually said it “welcomes much of the thinking behind the Government’s reform of the planning system. We do need more people engaging with planning, and its complexity has become a barrier. But with their crude focus on economic growth and default ‘yes’ to development, Ministers are storing up plenty of unintended consequences for the future”. Hardly a “semi-hysterical” reaction.

## **CLG Myth: the NPPF was not written by developers, for developers**

Two of the four members of the Planning Practitioners’ Group, which drew up the draft NPPF, were advisors to developers, supermarkets and the housebuilding industry. The third was a Conservative Councillor, Leader of South Holland District Council. The fourth was Simon Marsh, Head of Planning at the RSPB who has since publicly dissociated himself from it.

There is a Conservative Property Forum listed on the Conservative Party website – which donates to the Conservative Party, and facilitates meetings with senior Tories to discuss planning and property issues. Various company chief executives wrote to The Times in support of the NPPF claiming

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*“The recent furore about changing the planning system is mistaken, I could actually say fundamentally misconceived: the system is not wrong”*

George Dobry QC, *The Times*

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that England’s planning system put “a brake on UK business”, impeding new housing, and harming growth because “the presumption is ‘no’.

Responses in The Times roundly refuted these claims. Richard Summers, president of the RTPI said: “Simply blaming the planning system for thwarting economic recovery is not a serious analysis.” Sir Simon Jenkins went further describing the letter as “self-serving rubbish”.

George Dobry QC, the distinguished planning law barrister who 40 years ago, wrote the Dobry Report, Circular 9/76 pointed out that English planning law has always been, from 1946 onwards, based on the principle that “planning permission should be granted unless there is sound and clear cut planning reason for refusal”. The presumption is, “yes”. Furthermore, “The onus ... lies on the authority to show that proposed development is not acceptable, rather than on the applicant to show that it is”.

He cited the Review of Development Control which stated (paragraph 1.32) that: “Positive planning means not only preservation of the countryside and in towns, but also positive encouragement, and help for, development” and added: “The recent furore about changing the planning system is mistaken, I could actually say fundamentally misconceived: the system is not wrong”.

## **CLG Myth: House building has slumped and planning is a significant factor.**

The CLG labels as a ‘Myth’ that there are already hundreds of thousands of planning permissions granted for homes that aren’t being built. Eric Pickles stated on conservativehome.blogs that “Another big barrier to development is the shortage of land with planning permission”. This is simply not true.

## **Housing landbanks**

The 11 largest housing developers have land banks for at least 280,000 units with planning permission, ready for development. National statistics on Planning Applications show that of the 119,400 applications recently received, the majority, 78,500, were granted. (See Newsbriefs for further detail)

## **Supermarket landbanks**

The OFT has raised concerns about the size of the big four’s land bank, enough to build 316 stores. It questioned whether big chains were simply sitting on sites to stop them falling into hands of rivals. In Jan 2007 the Competition Commission found that Tesco’s land bank stood at 81 per cent of the available undeveloped sites across the UK.

The truth is that housebuilders are not building at the moment because they cannot make enough profit. Barratt Homes said that the market was constrained, by ‘the dearth of first time buyers’ - not planning permission or land. As Tony Travers has said: “Prices are high in relation to incomes, while borrowing has become more difficult”. Housebuilders have now resorted themselves to creating schemes to help customers to buy homes.

## **CLG Myth: NPPF changes are about meeting the long term needs.**

One of the most often-heard claims is that there is a shortage of housing. Martin Waller, editor of Tempus, a daily business analysis column in The Times, wrote in September “.....the debate over planning is largely irrelevant. There is no shortage of houses per se. There is a shortage of land available to build in areas where people want to live, which is not quite the same thing”. “[In many areas] of our post industrial landscape houses are boarded up because no-one wants to buy them”

## **Rise in population**

Until recently the UK population was fairly stable. Now we are told it is rising so fast that hundreds of thousands of houses need to be built every year.

Paul Finch chairman of CABE posed the question in Planning in London Journal: “whether the housing shortage has anything at all to do with the planning system, or whether a bipartisan policy not to

### w weblinks:

w <http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/sitecontent/newsarticles/2011/september/32-mac-revised>

w <http://conservativehome.blogs.com/localgovernment/2011/03/eric-pickles-mp-localism-and-growth-go-hand-in-hand.html>

Conservative Property Forum w [http://www.conservatives.com/Donate/Donor\\_Clubs.aspx](http://www.conservatives.com/Donate/Donor_Clubs.aspx)

The Planning Practitioners' Group w <http://www.nppfpractitionersadvisorygroup.org/biographies/>

build social housing since 1982 has played its part along with the arrival of 3 million immigrants in the last 10 years." Under the Right to Buy scheme, nearly 3 million council homes have been sold since 1980. 1.8 million households are now waiting on housing lists.

### Speculation

Tony Travers pointed out in *The Telegraph*, housing is no longer seen as just providing homes, but is also used as "a savings mechanism, and, indeed, a sign of an individual's social standing." "People see their house or flat as a predictable way of building up capital."

A report this month in the FT tells of property investors returning to the London new-build buy-to-let market "in droves" because of the rise in rents and the renewed potential for 'capital gain'. Australia and Ireland, with no lack of space to build, or shortage of houses, also have house price inflation. In other words speculation is a large factor in driving up prices.

### CLG Myth: Planning is a brake on delivery of new jobs and business.

There is substantial evidence to show that it is misguided government policies over many years that have held back the economy, in particular our failed education system. Figures show that up to 20% of young people now leave school semi-literate and therefore unemployable. In a PricewaterhouseCoopers survey of businesses this year, 38 per cent identified the lack of basic skills as the most important issue for growth.

Professor David Metcalf CBE, Chairman of the Migration Advisory Committee, part of the UK Border Agency, linked migration to training and the economy: "We think it is vital that the government, employers and the training sector take concerted action to raise the skill levels of the UK workforce, especially in long-standing shortage occupation areas. This will reduce the UK's reliance on migrant workers in the long term and provide real benefits for the economy as a whole."

### CLG Myth: The NPPF retains strong protections for the environment and heritage

Universal opposition has warned that the historical environment will be under as much threat as the countryside.

Mary Portas, Mr Cameron's adviser on high street retailing, warned that the changes would weaken the protection of town centres, allowing more out of town development that could threaten businesses in town centres.

Charles Tucker, chair of the National Flood Forum, said: "Although the NPPF includes a provision for flood risk assessments, the definitions that set out what those risks are have been withdrawn" "Ultimately it could mean that councils will not be able to stand up to developers and it could see much more development on flood plains"

Shaun Spiers of CPRE pointed out that the European countries suffering most in the economic crisis – Greece, Italy, Spain and Ireland, already have weak planning controls; this has led to landscapes scarred by estates of housing that are now unused, unfinished and unsaleable.

At a CLG Seminar on the draft NPPF in September for planning professionals and councillors, not a single person spoke in favour of the draft: many of the points made by the professional planners confirmed the concerns of civic groups.

### CLG Myth: Presumption in favour of sustainable development is not a green light for development.

The NPPF paragraph 19, states that: "the default answer to development proposals is 'yes', except where this would compromise the key sustainable development principles set out in this Framework".

*But 'sustainable development' is not defined in the NPPF. Vital guidance that underpins the law will be swept away and borough plans can be overridden*

Members of the Environmental Law Association, the TCPA and others have warned that 'sustainable development' will have to be clarified through the courts and could cause legal chaos with a huge rise in legal challenges.

### 'There is plenty of space to build on'

A justification for increasing building in the countryside is that 'only' 10 percent of the country is developed so there is plenty more space to build on. It is a false comparison; the real one should be with the thousands of years when there was no development. By the 19th century less than

one percent of our landscape was built over. It then rose to 10% in barely a hundred years. That is surely unsustainable, especially in the light of the fears about the effects of global warming.

### CLG Myth: new neighbourhood planning powers will give real control to local people

The only power given to local people is to *approve* development, not to oppose it; that is in no sense "real control". The NPPF document states that "Neighbourhoods will have the power to **promote** more development than is set out in the ..... local plan" At the same time the Localism Bill specifically **prohibits** communities from arguing for "less" development.

**Borough plans** agreed through a local democratic process can be put to one side.

**No consultation** with the public is required to take place if a local authority finds itself in a position to have to grant permission for a scheme contrary to its local policies.

**The third party right** of appeal by communities, offered in the Tory's 2010 'Open Source Planning' green paper has been dropped.

The NPPF and the Localism Bill together therefore constitute a dangerous diminution of local democracy.

### CLG Myth: This is not a sham consultation and planning inspectors have not been instructed to make decisions in accordance with the Framework

Communities minister Bob Neill has said that the draft NPPF was not being applied before the consultation had ended. But the Daily Telegraph published evidence from all over the country showing that it is already being cited to allow development even in areas of countryside protected under local plans.

At the London Forum open meeting in September it emerged that the Government had indeed advised the Inspectorate to treat the draft NPPF as a material consideration. (see comment from Lucy Rogers of Just Space, page 8)

It is not time the politicians were made to address these problems seriously before sweeping away planning regulation that may lead to the concreting over of swathes of land on the basis of spurious and inaccurate claims. ■

# Tony Travers at the London Forum

The economy, regional reform, council funding, localism, the Big Society and elections in London: 2011 to 2016.

**Helen Marcus** reports on Tony Travers's talk at a London Forum open meeting in July

London Forum's new Patron, Tony Travers gave a wide-ranging exposition to London Forum members of how government thinking is developing. Although the NPPF had not yet been published he anticipated many elements of it in his talk. In particular he explained some of the financial background.

## London within the UK

After many years of above-average economic growth London and Greater South East are in a relatively strong position with a relatively strong economy and private sector across many boroughs. The region suffered less badly from the recession than other parts of the UK.

## The end of 'regions' and the spending squeeze

Government policies are moving from 'grants' to 'incentives' driven mechanisms. 'Big Society' and 'localism' imply a shift of power downwards and to neighbourhoods. London councils and the GLA are faced with many radical changes: the abolition of the LDA, and budget cuts, although transport has been relatively well-funded. Are the Olympics a help and/or a distraction?

## New incentives and financial mechanisms

**Enterprise Zones** – these are not new they were originally introduced by Thatcher. The Isle of Dogs and Canary Wharf are "Americana brought to London": dynamic but actually not very efficient in terms of building. Will there be more? Which areas to be chosen? By councils?

## Local Enterprise Partnerships

Business / local government partnerships are the government's new approach to the promotion of enterprise, to foster an "environment for business and growth". They will bid for resources from the Regional Growth Fund (RGF). There is only one for the whole of London so a significant excess of demand over supply. This is still in a formative stage.

## Tax Increment Financing

This has been around for a number of years and is being used at Battersea Power Station. It attempts to fund projects to allow them to go ahead by making available the expected increased local tax payments resulting from the development. Widely used in the USA (see Newsforum 57, 2010)

## Local government resource review - Proposals for Business Rates Retention

A white paper will look at Business Rate Supplement, Business Improvement Districts, Community Infrastructure Levy etc to consider: "how to deliver Tax Increment Financing proposals against a context of greater retention of business rate revenues" [This paper was published in July soon after Mr. Travers's talk. It can be found at

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/localgovernment/pdf/1947200.pdf> ]

A key idea is that from 2013-14, many councils in London should be 'self-sufficient', facilitated by a move to business rate (non domestic rate, NDR) retention. A 'New Homes Bonus' is already in place. If council tax goes up the grant can be reduced.

In Central London some councils such as Westminster and Camden will have such a large NDR yield that revenue will greatly exceed current income.

But not all will achieve self-sufficiency. This may be countered by pooling excess amounts to switch money from rich councils to poor ones. But also incentive based – councils to keep some extra council tax and growth in business rate.

## Tax competition and development:

Another American idea to encourage growth is allowing Councils to keep part/all of growth in NDR and council tax base, or offer reduced business rates. Will also produce 'gainers' and 'losers' over time: High-growth areas may 'pull ahead'; some areas may decline faster. This could encourage councils to give planning permission and for bigger buildings because they will get more in business rate.

## Other related policies

**Business Rate Supplement** – used for Crossrail funding - could be extended?

**Business Improvement Districts** - there are 2 or 3 in London. Residents don't like them but Councils do.

**Community Infrastructure Levy** is a new version of section 106

## Localism and the 'Big Society'

These two key elements in the Coalition's programme are not fully worked-through policies. They envisage development of more extensive local activism with additional provision of local services by

charities, trusts, private companies, co-ops, Local housing associations, Garden squares/park trusts, Business Improvement Districts, Regeneration partnerships/development trusts, schools.

The neighbourhood Forum: if there is more than one group the Council must determine which is more representative. Fear is that developers will pour in with money and development

The government has no overall plan: 'Localism' and the 'Big Society' will evolve in different ways from borough to borough. Research suggests some boroughs feel they already do these things. Others see little need or demand from the public to move to greater local involvement in decisions about local provision or to run parts of services.

Tony Travers ended his talk with a brief summary of the issues for the 2012 Mayoral Election: transport, crime, development, the future of the economy; City Hall vs the boroughs; Outer London vs Inner London...

## Question and answer session

Peter Eversden led the discussion and questions by highlighting the problems of proposed neighbourhood forums – how do local people get involved; it will be urgent to ensure that local plans are in place and appropriate; use classes orders will be changed to make it easier to switch – this will bring risks.

**Points raised** covered: whether the business rate would be linked to sustainability; it could also give the borough the ability to impose higher standards. Doubts were expressed about how devolution would work – do they mean to ordinary people or to the local authorities – local authorities don't want ordinary people to get involved.

In particular it was pointed out that many of these ideas make more sense in a rural setting and are not appropriate for London. Where would the Planning Inspector fit in? The neighbourhood plan would have to be in conformity. There is potential for conflict between a small borough group or Forum and the Mayor. Would people in deprived areas loose out? What will happen to these neighbourhood Forums as people get older? How representative would they be? Processes are becoming so complicated that they become a barrier to participation. ■

# NPPF Open meeting

Report by **Peter Pickering**

The concern over the government's alterations to planning policy in the NPPF were reflected in the unusually high turnout for the London Forum Open Meeting on 30th September 2011 to discuss it.

Peter Eversden opened by explaining what the Forum had been doing on the draft NPPF; it had put in a submission to the Select Committee, and hoped it would be invited to give evidence orally; it was actively preparing a response to the consultation itself, due by 17th October.

He also described the state of play on the Thames Tideway Tunnel, which had earlier been planned as the subject of the evening's meeting. (see more page 15)

## Talk by Michael Bach

Michael Bach then outlined the content of, and the objectionable features of, the draft NPPF. He was preparing a full response, which he would circulate to Forum members. The public criticism of the NPPF had focussed on the countryside; but its implications for urban areas were serious too, though in London the existence of an adopted London plan should mitigate some of its effects.

## Question and answer session

This highlighted the need for redrafting before the legislation was enacted. Those present were keen to know how their societies should respond to the consultation, and whether they should make representations to the Select Committee (the formal date for submissions having passed).

## Among points raised were:-

When would the NPPF be finalised?

Answer: probably early in the New Year.

Would the NPPF overrule Westminster's LDF? Answer: plans must be in general conformity with the NPPF.

Lucy Rogers (Just Space) had recently been to a Core Strategy EIP at which the Inspector's first question had been whether it was in conformity with the NPPF. She had argued that this was not necessary since the NPPF had not been adopted yet.

Answer: the draft NPPF was a material consideration, and the Government had advised the Inspectorate so to treat it.

Eric Sorensen (Angel Association) opined that the NPPF would not overrule local plans; the regime would continue to be plan-led, and the detail in local plans would overwhelm the very general NPPF. Answer: there are several things in the NPPF which would change the basis of planning decisions, and the NPPF gave much greater weight to the plusses than to the minusses in reaching decisions on planning applications; this was already evident in some decisions by Inspectors. But, a recent decision in a Winchester case upheld a refusal because approving an application would prejudice the core strategy.

## The greenest government ever?

A representative from Hammersmith contrasted Mr Pickles' exhortation 'Get on and Build' with the claim that this was the greenest government ever. Eric Sorensen noted the strength of the draft NPPF on carbon emissions and on design.

Tony Hillier (Heath and Hampstead) noted the complete failure of the NPPF to mention Metropolitan Open Land. He also wondered what would happen to the reams of useful material in the discarded PPSs. Answer: All this content would go. The NPPF would be followed by guidance, which was to be provided from outside Government, but would presumably include some of what was now in PPSs.

## Heritage and culture

Richard Buchanan (Woolwich Antiquarians). While the draft NPPF dealt with the heritage, it said nothing about any other cultural assets (eg cinemas and theatres). Answer: this defect had been picked up by, among others, the Theatres Trust.

Michael Coupe (London Society). The Government should realise that countries with the stronger planning systems were also those with better economic growth.

Peter Pickering (Finchley Society) feared that the NPPF would be used by council officers to browbeat councillors into approving planning applications to which the public objected.

## Societies pressed to respond

In summing up, Peter Eversden and Michael Bach pressed Societies to respond to the consultation, and to lobby their MPs.

The Forum would be circulating fuller guidance to member societies in good time. Besides the NPPF itself, the Government had published an 'Impact Assessment' (downloadable from the DCLG website) with a set of questions; this was an attempt to justify parts of the draft NPPF, and it would be useful if Societies could respond to it also. ■

## Early use of the draft NPPF

Ministers insist Local Development Plans will give power to local authorities and communities to decide what will be built in their area. In September research by the Daily Telegraph confirmed what Lucy Rogers found. Notwithstanding communities minister, Bob Neill's insistence that the draft NPPF was not being applied before the consultation had ended, the Planning Inspectorate issued guidance that stated the draft framework could be used as a material consideration in planning decisions as it indicated a "clear indication of the Government's 'direction of travel' in planning policy"

The Telegraph uncovered cases in **Rutland** where planning inspectors cited the NPPF seven times in overruling a Rutland County Council rejection of 96 houses to be built on countryside protected under its local development plan. Under the NPPF an Area of Particularly Attractive Countryside receives no protection; **North Norfolk** District councillors took the NPPF into account when they granted permission for a lorry park and silos to be built on a country meadow on the outskirts of Great Ryburgh, Fakenham, on the advice of officers; **Redditch** Borough Council granted permission for 171 homes and office buildings on Green Belt following an appeal to the local authority. The officer's report said the development complied with the draft NPPF.

**House builders** have also been citing the draft NPPF to support applications:

**Malmesbury**, Wiltshire: 200 homes on green fields to the north of the town, on the edge of the Cotswolds.

**Kingswood**, Surrey, Taylor Wimpey is appealing against a refusal for 37 homes citing the default "yes" under the NPPF. ■



# London Forum AGM 2011

Tuesday 11th October 2011 at the Gallery

**Peter Pickering** reports

The meeting was opened by the President, Sir Richard MacCormac, who welcomed members, and congratulated the Forum on its work during the year, singling out Peter Eversden, its indefatigable Chairman. He drew attention to the misconceptions behind the Government's draft National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), which compared badly with the perceptive analysis of the housing market by Savills. He doubted whether the Government understood the implications of the Localism Bill. He mentioned his own work on suburban densities.

## Chairman's Report

Peter Eversden referred to the 23rd Annual Report which had been circulated. He then reviewed the principal activities of the London Forum since the 2010 AGM. First had been the Examination-in-Public of the London Plan (at which he had been pleased to see some member societies) and then the Government's seriously flawed draft NPPF; the Forum was preparing a response, and he hoped member societies would respond themselves, supporting the Forum. He emphasised the need to get all boroughs' Core Strategies in place very soon, and for member societies to pay close attention to 'opportunity area frameworks'.

## Two new Patrons welcomed

He asked the membership to endorse the appointment of two new patrons - Alan Baxter CBE, who was a tremendous help in providing the Forum with a headquarters, and Tony Travers of the London School of Economics; these were approved with acclamation on the proposal of Tom Ball, seconded by Lee Abbott.

## Treasurer's report

The Treasurer presented the accounts; he said that his first year in the post had been uneventful, the most difficult aspect having been the bureaucratic difficulties in the handover from Andrew Coleman. Expenditure had been lower than in 2009/10 because there had been no special events and subscription income had been higher, owing to some new members and the efforts of Membership Secretary, Haydn Mylchreest in chasing non-payers. He believed that the Forum's reserves

should be built up, to enable it to undertake more activities, and to enable it to hire venues if necessary, and to get a proper website going again.

The subscription increase agreed by the AGM in 2009, but deferred, should therefore be implemented. Tom Ball asked about Gift Aid; it was observed that since the overwhelming amount of the Forum's income came from societies who were themselves charities and did not pay income tax, the gain to the Forum would be very small, and not worth the effort involved. The report and accounts were then approved nem. con. after being proposed by Andrew Bosi and seconded by Derek Chandler.

The Honorary Independent Examiner, Mr Baddeley was re-elected nem. con. on the proposal of David Lewis seconded by Tom Ball.

## Election of Officers and other Trustees.

The Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer were continuing. Michael Bach, Haydn Mylchreest and Martin Jones were retiring as Trustees after three years service and offering themselves for re-election. Lee Abbott and Ms Macnair were resigning. There were therefore two vacancies; Diane Burridge and Peter Pickering had been nominated. Re-election of the retiring Trustees and election of the two new ones was proposed by Tom Ball, seconded by Monica Smith, and carried nem. con.

## Any Other Business

Marion Harvey drew attention to the forthcoming Walter Bor Media awards presentation on 30th November. No other items had been received.

## Open forum session

Following the close of the formal business, and refreshments, there was an open forum, at which the following topics were discussed:-

**Thames Tideway Tunnel:** Peter Eversden said that Thames Water's consultation on this had been deferred because of the Commission to investigate it set up by the riparian Boroughs. He doubted whether there would be other than changes in detail. He hoped to rearrange the Open Meeting on this subject which had been postponed from 30th September. (see more page 15).

**King Edward VII Memorial Park** Edward Dawson (CPRE London branch) told of the efforts to combat the threat to this park from the tunnel construction.

**BT Openzone cabinets:** drawing on local experience Peter Eversden said that it was possible to get the location and size of these obtrusive cabinets altered in conservation areas, but that there was no control on them outside such areas.

**Cycle Superhighways:** the Mayor's cycle lanes were painted a very obtrusive bright blue colour. People were sceptical of the claim that this had nothing to do with the sponsorship by Barclays. Tom Ball described the arrogant refusal by Transport for London to listen to the objections to this, and to the removal of a pedestrian crossing in Grosvenor Road in the interests of the cycle lane.

**NewsForum:** there was support for the view that this should return to thrice-yearly, costs being contained by more use of electronic distribution.

**NPPF:** Several member societies said that the size and complexity of the Government's proposal and its implications overwhelmed their planning committee. The Chairman said that he and Michael Bach would get advice to societies before the 17th October deadline. Among the many worries was the belief that it left too much to case-law and would mean many appeals; and that it was a serious threat to the recently-approved London Plan. Peter Eversden said that there were certainly aspects of that Plan which would have to be revisited, but he hoped that it would gain a certificate of conformity. He underlined the importance of having proper up-to-date borough plans. Edward Dawson of CPRE London branch would circulate his paper on the NPPF.

**Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs)** Nick Jeffrey (Culverley Green R A) drew attention to the many conversions of large family houses (for which there was a need) in Lewisham into HMOs. Local societies were working together to fight this. Planning officers seemed incapable of judging quality.

**Closure of Pathways.** Mr. Jeffrey also drew attention to the number of local paths in his area that were being closed by the authorities, ostensibly on grounds of safety and security. ■

# Spotlight on The Muswell Hill and Fortis Green Association

Working for a cleaner, greener, safer environment

By **John Hajdu**

The Muswell Hill and Fortis Green Association was formed by 9 residents in May 1948 following an outcry over parking of commercial vehicles. Its aim was to "foster an interest in local government and other matters of local interest".

The Association was to be strictly non sectarian and non political and the slogan "strength through unity" was adopted. By 1957 there were 148 members. Our first official Newsletter was published in 1965 and in 1977 the subscription was raised to 75p.

By 1974 many young families had moved into this comfortable Edwardian north London suburb and joined the Association. This resulted in the formation of a dynamic and active committee with a more green, conservationist and pro-public transport stance and was the beginning of a proactive, strong and lively Association, fighting for the interest of the residents.

## A flourishing Association

Today we are busier than ever and have a membership of 680 people, paying £8 per annum membership fee. We publish a Newsletter 6 times a year which is either hand delivered or sent out by e-mail; we have a website which has 2000 hits per week and a Notice Board at the centre of Muswell Hill. A Facebook page provides a link to our Website and supports our Newsletter.

We have regular members activities with talks and discussions on anything that interests our members. Guest speakers cover local topics, we have slide shows on our area's history and walks to explore our built and natural environment.. This year we had our first Association social evening which was a great success.

## The Association's work

We represent our members on many committees and panels, including the Alexandra Palace Statutory Advisory Committee, the Haringey Federation of Residents' Associations, and the local Conservation Area Advisory Committees. The Association's planning officer examines drawings and details of planning applications covering anything from extensions to conversions, from demolition to redevelopment.

Through regular exchanges and

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*A dynamic committee with a more green, conservationist stance was the beginning of a strong and lively Association fighting for the interest of the residents.*

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consultations with Haringey Council we can and do influence decisions on community safety, policing, environment, conservation, traffic control, trees and flowerbeds, litter and graffiti, planning applications and shop fronts, among others. We have taken the lead on licensing issues in the Borough, and submitted a highly critical paper on the Council's policy. We have also contributed to discussions on localism, the Big Society and the proposed changes in the NHS. Drawing on decades of experience, our committee often acts as a first port of call for advice when problems arise, and we are regularly quoted in the local press.

## Fine Edwardian architecture

Muswell Hill's fine Edwardian streets have at their centre the Broadway and Fortis Green Road, the main shopping streets, still maintaining their historic character with most of the original facades preserved above street level. The area was laid out and built by the Edmondson and Collins families and during 2006 and early 2007 we made a photographic record of the heritage shopfronts and architectural features as an archive for our historical resources. We contributed to the formulation of the Council's design guidelines that are still relevant and should be applied at all times: they are needed for good design of shop fronts and the overall well-being of the shopping centre.

## Association successes

Through the decades the Association has had many successes. In 1974 the Council proposed to cut down all 3600 mature street trees in the west of the borough, known for its beautiful planes, chestnuts and limes. The committee fought vigorously against such a barbaric act and,

with the help of many residents, forced the Council to abandon this project.

In 1973-6 there was a plan to widen the Archway Road to motorway standard through Highgate towards Finchley, with serious knock-on effects for the heart of Muswell Hill. But a hard fought and nationally reported campaign through three Public Inquiries stopped the widening of the road.

We created and organised the first Muswell Hill Festival in 1976 and for many years it took place in Fortis Green Road, one of the main shopping streets, with the road closed to traffic for the day. It is now organised by local charities and takes place in a nearby park but our presence is still important as our stall is a 'shop window' for the Association's aims and achievements.

A major innovation to commemorate famous Haringey residents with a plaque on the building where they lived was the brainchild of the Association's Chairman. So far 13 plaques have been put up.

## The Association's Jubilee project

The handsome and decorative Langton Clock at 3 Princes Parade, has been a well known and much loved feature of the shopping centre since 1899 and the Association saved it from being scrapped. Put up by E.W. Langton, the jeweller and clock-maker, when they established a branch in Muswell Hill, it was considered to be the most attractive and accurate time piece in the area as well as being an essential service to shoppers. We believe that the original mechanical movement was sold when Langton's left the premises more than ten years ago. Saving and restoring it was the Association's 60th Anniversary Jubilee project in 2008.

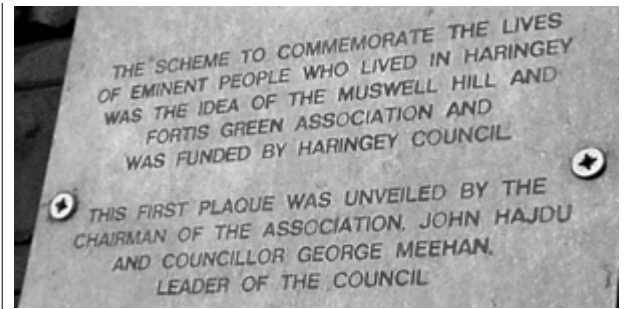
## Greening our environment

Another fruitful area of co-operation between our Association and Haringey Council, are the improvements that have been made to green sites in the last few years. We discovered an unused and overgrown garden on Muswell Hill, the remains of the garden of Grove Lodge an historic 18th century house. We persuaded the authorities to start restoring it. The work includes coppicing of the area, cutting back the weeds and brambles, re-defining the pathway, turning the soil and clearing



## The Muswell Hill and Fortis Green Association

**Contact:** Chairman: John Hajdu  
**email:** hajdu.clarion@talk21.com  
**website:** www.mhfg.1to1.org



**Age:** 63; formed in May 1948

**Circumstances of birth:** formed by 9 residents following an outcry over parking of commercial vehicles.

**Biggest successes:** 1) campaign to stop the widening of the Archway Road to a motorway through Highgate towards Finchley; 2) restoration of the Langton Clock on Muswell Hill Broadway; 3) forcing the Council to abandon plans to cut down 3600 mature street trees; 4) Winning a Haringey Award for recycling; 5) Introduction of the Haringey-wide Green Plaque Scheme

**Biggest disappointments/ frustrations:** 1) shop front designs in the Broadway not compliant with design guide; 2) vehicle crossovers and destruction of front gardens for parking; 3) Ham & High newspaper stopping the Broadway edition.

**Present preoccupations:** 1) applications for basement extensions and possible impact on neighbouring properties; 2) the need for good design of shop fronts for the overall well-being of the shopping centre and ensuring that design guidelines are applied; 3) keeping a close watch on the Government Localism Bill and how it will affect a conservation area; 4) ongoing problems with cost of refurbishment at Alexandra Palace; 5) possible pollution which could be caused by the North London Waste Authority's proposal for a large plant and depot at Pinkham Way, on the North Circular Road

**Working details:** Membership: 686  
 Annual subscription: £8 per annum  
 Publications: 8 page Newsletter 6 times a year  
 Activities: Guided walks; talks; local restoration projects; AGM

**Special characteristics:** One of the most complete Edwardian suburbs in England

**Last word:** Still fighting to retain the area's special character. ■



the rubbish. This is a long-term project and the work is monitored by our association on a regular basis. We are regularly in touch with the Parks Department at the Council and, in general, we have a good relationship with them as they do a good job.

Another borough enhancement project that we are involved in is to clean up the Parkland Walk Tunnel area. Parkland Walk was established in the 1980s on the disused branch railway line from Highgate which terminated at Alexandra Palace. Originally intended to be integrated into the Northern Line - some contemporary tube maps (e.g. the 1948 map) showed it as being under construction - it was cancelled after the 1939-45 war and abandoned in 1954. It was opened as a public walk in 1984.

We also monitor other green sites, flower beds and pocket parks in and around the area, working with local traders to ensure that planters continue to brighten up the roundabout, a focal point on the two arms of The Broadway.

social enterprise company, en10ergy limited, formed to undertake such projects and which is going from strength to strength. Local volunteers, including Association members are half way through a 2 year programme of reducing carbon emission from homes and businesses by 20%.

### The Association's history published

On becoming chairman in 2001, I inherited boxes of archive material and I had a dream of researching and publishing the Association's history. After 9 years, in May 2010, the book was at last ready and 125 copies sold in just one year. It gives the history of the Association's campaigns and landmark achievements since its formation in 1948.

Having chaired the Association for just over ten years, I am proud to look back and see the progress we have made and acknowledge the hard work of my committee. We continue our fight to ensure a cleaner, greener and safer environment. ■

**Top right :** a plaque to mark the Association's scheme  
**Below:** front cover of the Association's history  
**Below right:** the restored Langton clock



### An outstanding Green initiative

The Muswell Hill Sustainability Group was launched by members of our Association in 2008 to encourage carbon reduction through various promotions. In a remarkable achievement they have completed two major installations, the first on the roof of Marks and Spencer and then on the Methodist Church in Pages Lane. Funding was provided by Central Government but the detailed planning and grant work was done by members of this Association and local experts. Over 100 local residents have so far purchased shares in the

# Centenary of the Romford Garden Suburb - Gidea Park

By **William Davies** of Gidea Park and District Civic Society, a founder member of London Forum

The development of Romford Garden Suburb was promoted by Herbert Raphael, a Liberal MP, who had acquired Gidea Hall and its surrounding estate in 1897. The site chosen for the Suburb was mainly within the grounds of Gidea Hall, comprising part of the area to the East of Romford, now known as Gidea Park. The Suburb was formally opened to the public on 1st. June 1911.

## How it all began

Raphael joined forces with John Tudor Waters, another Liberal M.P. and an architect and surveyor by profession, and John McCurdy, a barrister, to form Gidea Park Limited for the purpose of developing the Suburb. Gidea Park Limited and its three shareholders had close links with the development of Hampstead Garden Suburb.

In 1909 Herbert Raphael entered into an agreement with the Great Eastern railway to build a new station on the main line from Liverpool Street to Colchester to serve the new suburb. The station came to be called Gidea Park.

As a new development of houses and cottages with some shops set within but remaining sympathetic to its then largely rural surroundings the concept of the Suburb reflected the principles of the Garden Suburb movement while the individual properties were designed in a vernacular idiom consistent with the Arts & Crafts movement of the late 19th. and early 20th. centuries.

## An architectural feast

An exhibition of houses and a competition was organised to generate interest. Between July 1910 and June 1911 one hundred and fifty nine individual properties were designed and constructed for the exhibition and of these one hundred and thirty two were entered for the competition. Many architects, well known in the garden city movement and for their work at Hampstead Garden Suburb took part. They included C.R.Ashbee, Reginald Longden, Geoffrey Lucas, Baillie Scott, C.M. Crickmer, Curtis Green, Parker & Unwin, Herbert Welch and Clough Williams-Ellis. All of their work can still be seen in the present day suburb.

The competition was organised into two classes; Class I were £500 houses with 73 entries; Class II were £375 cottages with 59 entries. First prize in the house class was won by Geoffrey Lucas with Courtney Crickmer winning the first prize in the cottage class.

Part of the grounds of Gidea Hall, donated to the Council by Herbert Raphael and called Raphael Park after him, was laid out as a Park by the then Romford Council in 1904

## Conserving Gidea Park for the future

In 1970 the Gidea Park and District Civic Society was instrumental in having the Suburb together with certain adjoining areas designated as a Conservation Area. In the 1980's Havering Borough Council, with the active help and encouragement of the Society, adopted a Planning and Design policy for the Area which includes controls over the design of small scale alterations to 1911 exhibition and associated houses, the construction of hardstandings and driveways in front gardens, and dormer windows throughout most of the area. Six of the 1911 houses and cottages are Grade II listed.

## A year of celebration

The Society has planned a year-long programme of events to celebrate the Centenary of the Suburb.

A formal dinner was held in June attended by the MP for Romford, the Mayor and local dignitaries. The guest speaker was Ian Harvey of Civic Voice who gave a succinct and entertaining address.

A Summer concert was held in the bandstand of Raphael Park with a span of popular music throughout the 100 years which have passed since the opening of the Suburb.

Other celebratory events have included a jazz evening at the Romford Golf Club and a photographic competition with a view to encouraging local residents and also local school children to appreciate the environment created by the Suburb and the adjoining parks and open spaces in which they live and/or work..

The Society has produced a range of memorabilia which record some of the more distinctive features of the Suburb.

*Gidea Park and District Civic Society featured in Newsforum's Spotlight on our Societies, in Issue no.25, Spring 1998*

## Raising public awareness

However, perhaps the most distinctive element of the Centenary celebrations has been the design and commissioning of two elegant street signs portraying in the form of a stylised map the two distinctive parts of the Suburb. The Society is working closely with Havering Borough Council with a view to the signs being installed in their respectively chosen locations before the end of the year.

The Society has also endeavoured by a number of minor initiatives throughout the Suburb's centenary year to raise awareness among local people, both members and non-members, of the history of the Suburb and the crucial influence it has had on the designation of the Conservation Area in Gidea Park. One such initiative has been the republication and wide distribution of the definitive history of the Suburb written by the late Laurence Leicester, the first minute secretary of London Forum. ■



Above: an old poster  
Below: Herbert Raphael

## Waste plant on green corridor

Dismayed local residents have forced Haringey Council to repeat its consultation over its Core Strategy. News from **Tim Hunt** of Muswell Hill and Fortis Green Association and **Colin Parish** of the Pinkham Way Alliance

(adapted from an article and press release)

A consortium of seven North London boroughs - Barnet, Camden, Enfield, Hackney, Haringey, Islington and Waltham Forest, have formed the North London Waste Authority (NLWA) with plans to refigure the way they process and dispose of waste.

### The need for action

North London has no landfill sites and around half of its municipal waste and a quarter of business waste goes to landfill sites in the surrounding counties. But the Mayor's municipal waste strategy Rethinking Rubbish in London and his draft Business Waste Management Strategy commits London to dealing with its own waste, rather than exporting it to surrounding areas.

### NLWA proposals

NLWA want to build a Mechanical Biological Plant (MBT-AB), 150m long and 23m (75ft) high, with a chimney, a vehicle depot, and other related facilities, on the site of Pinkham Wood on the North Circular Road. It will sort and process residual 'black bag' waste by extracting the metal, and heat composting the rest to reduce it to a form where it can be incinerated and used for power generation, although the developers say that the proposed plans do not include incineration on site. Some of the processed waste will continue to go to land-fill. Methane gas will be produced that can be used for power generation.

### Grade 1 Site of Importance to Nature

NLWA refers to the proposed site at Pinkham Wood as a "former sewage works". This is misleading as the site has not been a sewage works for 40 years. In that time it has regenerated itself to the extent that it is listed in Haringey Council's Biodiversity Action Plan as a Grade 1 Borough Wide Site of Importance to Nature Conservation, and an important wild-life habitat. Uncommon plants such as the Bee Orchid and Golden Dock have been recorded, and bats and owls have their homes there. The site also forms part of an important Green Corridor that stretches from Alexandra Park through to Coppetts Wood which has the potential to form a linear nature reserve comparable to Haringey's Parkland Walk. The NLWA are offering some compensatory green planting and screening, and are calling the site an Eco Park.

### Lack of consultation

Local people have been stunned at the lack of consultation, and the risk the development will pose to their health, safety, quality of life and the environment. It would be one of the biggest of its kind in the UK located just 85m from the nearest dwellings.

### Local concerns

Concerns include massive traffic congestion from 1,200 vehicle movements a day (most of which will be trucks), increased pollution, noise from the plant working 24 hours per day 365 days a year; odours, emissions and health and safety risks to nearby residential areas: there are at least 10,000 homes within a 1km radius of the site and many schools, the nearest of which is only 300m away. Similar plants in Europe are built far away from towns and cities where they can cause less disruption to people's lives.

### The Pinkham Way Alliance

The Pinkham Way Alliance was immediately formed as an action group and drew in local resident associations from Haringey and Barnet. They contend that the North London Waste Plan is deeply flawed, especially in the way the criteria used to select the Pinkham Way site were applied. The Planning Inspector agreed, voicing serious concerns about the validity of certain aspects of the strategy. The planning application submitted to Haringey Council in May this year has been put 'on hold' until the Inspector has completed his inspection of the council's Core Strategy, probably in the spring of 2012. The Borough has been forced to consult residents for a second time over its core strategy after the Planning Inspector highlighted flaws revealed by the Pinkham Way Alliance.

**For more information** contact Colin Parish on 07909 978858

[www.pinkhamwayalliance.org](http://www.pinkhamwayalliance.org)

**The inspector's letter** can be seen at

[http://www.haringey.gov.uk/letter\\_from\\_inspector\\_21\\_july\\_2011\\_\\_3\\_.pdf](http://www.haringey.gov.uk/letter_from_inspector_21_july_2011__3_.pdf)) ■

## Anaerobic plant at Mitcham

### Merton decision overturned

Mayor Boris Johnson has overturned a decision by Merton council to reject an anaerobic digestion plant which turns rotting vegetation and slops from the capital's pubs and restaurants into electricity.

It is the first time he has used new powers to rule on a waste facility planning application considered to be of strategic importance to the capital.

Mr Johnson told a planning meeting at City Hall that developments like this would help London hit sustainability targets.

The Mitcham facility, branded "ugly and uninspiring" by opponents, turns organic waste into bio-gas which is burned to produce electricity and could power 1,800 homes a year from 40,000 tons of refuse.

Merton council rejected the scheme in October last year after residents told of their concerns at the "visual impact" of the plant.

Sita, the UK rubbish-disposal division of Suez Environnement of France, responded by making several changes to the scheme, cutting the size of the digestion tanks by 40 per cent and lowered the height of the stack by five metres.

Councillor Ian Munn, representing Cricket Green ward, told the Wimbledon Guardian he was "disappointed but not surprised" by the Mayor's decision, as London's planning laws made the scheme's approval inevitable.

He said: "In fairness to Boris he asked some very probing questions but he was essentially boxed in to make a decision in favour of Sita."

The ability to overrule councils on important waste facilities was one of a raft of new powers given to the Mayor in 2007 by then-communities secretary Ruth Kelly, in a move designed to strengthen local government in the capital.

Mr Johnson has overruled councils on planning applications three times, though this is the first occasion he has called in plans for a waste facility.

A spokeswoman for the Mayor said: "He is confident that the Sita plant will help London to meet many of its sustainability targets." ■

# The London Historic Environment Forum

The London Forum represents the community and amenity sector on the London Historic Environment Forum. It has met three times during the past year.

**Michael Hammerson** reports

The Heritage Alliance, Spatial Planning Group (formerly Heritage Link), is an important umbrella organisation for heritage groups nationally on which the London Forum is also glad to sit, together with Civic Voice, as representatives of the amenity and community sector.

## Drastic cuts to English Heritage

English Heritage (EH) have suffered drastic cuts and been obliged to lay off experienced staff and restructure. Cuts to 2014 represent a 35% reduction in their budget, and a loss of c.200 staff, which is even more damaging in its impact following years of cuts during the period of growth when other budgets were increased – an extremely worrying indication of the value successive Governments have put on Britain's heritage which draws in so much revenue from tourism and has such importance for its residents.

## Impact of the National Planning Policy Framework

An update on the draft National Planning Policy Framework made depressing listening. Despite Minister John Penrose's assurance that "it is not our intention to reduce protection of the historic environment", it is clear that the Government have little concept of what matters to local people, and that their understanding of heritage is alarmingly narrow, and limited mainly to Grade I and II\* Listed Buildings, with no recognition that the Historic Environment is everywhere; that the "Presumption in favour of sustainable development" is, by any other name, a presumption in favour of development; and that there will be a significant weakening in protection of the historic environment. There would be no protection for the majority of archaeological sites, since most had no protection. It was essential that this was fought as strongly as possible.

## Cuts and grant losses elsewhere.

While the Heritage Lottery fund has had a significant increase in its 2011-12 funding, this has been more than offset by cuts and grant losses elsewhere. Ten per cent cuts at the Museum of London have necessitated cuts there too, with a loss of up to 50 posts. Several London Boroughs have cut their CAACs.

## Meeting of London Conservation Officers

We were also invited to attend the Heritage of London Trust's annual meeting for London Conservation Officers; these meetings are well-attended, valuable networking events, and feature excellent speakers; Trevor Beattie, Chairman of the RICS' Land and Society Commission addressed the meeting. The message this year was a depressing one of more substantial cuts in Conservation – some 20 posts in London, with 6 Boroughs now having no conservation advice - and closure of Local History libraries across London, and the likely damaging impact on the Heritage of the Localism Bill and the NPPF if passed in their present form.

Harmondsworth Mediaeval Barn was highlighted as an example of the problem. It is owned by an offshore company who are allowing it to deteriorate, and who appear to be willing to spend far more money on legal costs to fight E H than would be needed to restore the barn –

## Heritage Crime

Archaeologists, Museums and heritage sites are increasingly affected by theft and vandalism: arson, graffiti, illegal metal-detecting which wrecks archaeological sites, damage from off-road vehicles, illegal diving on wrecks or excavation of aircraft crash sites; and behaviour affecting the fabric or setting of a heritage asset. Churches suffer regular theft of architectural materials (and potential irreversible damage from theft of roof lead). We learned that there is "significant ignorance" of the value and importance of heritage at the official level. EH and the police have launched a new initiative to promote better understanding of Heritage Crime among the police and the judiciary; magistrates in particular need greater awareness of it; too often they do not see it as a priority unless linked to other social issues.

A Heritage Crime Memorandum of Understanding was recently signed by EH, the Association of Chief Police Officers, and the Crown Prosecution Service to ensure that Heritage Crime is combatted in a much more co-ordinated way. EH has also established the ARCH (Alliance to Reduce Crime against Heritage) Initiative, a national voluntary network to galvanise local action.

## A bleak future

All in all, the future for heritage currently looks bleak, making it all the more important that London Forum members put maximum pressure on their political representatives to reject those aspects of impending legislation which pose such a grave threat to our historic environment and our ability to protect it. ■

## Better news for listed churches

The Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme (LPWGS) introduced in April 2001 was due to continue up to March 2011. It allowed historic places of worship to reclaim the VAT charged on repairs and maintenance, amounting to more than £111 million since it started. 93% of beneficiaries were CofE churches and Cathedrals.

However the 32% cut in English Heritage's grant as part of spending cuts announced by the Government in October 2010 forced English Heritage to review all its grant Programmes.

In February this year English Heritage and the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) announced the Repair Grants for Places of Worship scheme which will be funded by HLF and administered by English Heritage. More than £15.7 million will be made available to support urgent repair work to 153 Grade I and II\* listed places of worship across England.

Then in June the Heritage Lottery Fund announced a further £8million of Lottery funding to support urgent repairs to 67 of England's most important Grade II listed churches, chapels and synagogues enabling vital repairs to be done.

## St Augustine in Honor Oak a beneficiary

The Church of St Augustine in Honor Oak Park, South London will be one beneficiary. Set within a nature reserve, the Church is a local landmark and an example of Gothic Revival in the Early English style. It was built in 1872-3 by William Oakley, with later additions by Vincent John Grose. A grant of £199,000 will now enable essential repairs to the stonework at the nave chancel and transept along with work to the degrading drainpipes and guttering. ■

# Thames Tideway Tunnel – the saga continues

Peter Eversden reports on a new inquiry

The London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham announced in July the setting up of an independent Thames Tunnel Commission (TTC) of "internationally renowned experts" to examine the case for the controversial new tunnel to collect sewer overflows into the Thames.

Led by Lord Selborne, it includes respected engineers and representatives from the Consumer Council for Water, and the US-based National Resources Defense Council. It is sponsored by H&F Council with the support of other London boroughs including Southwark, Richmond and the Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea. It is examining the case for the massive 20-mile long sewer – which will be larger than the Channel Tunnel if it is built. (see Newsforums, 55, 2009, and 56, 2010).

## Claim and counter claim

Residents, councils and MPs have questioned whether Thames Water's plan for the super sewer is the best solution.

Lord Selborne said: "I welcome the opportunity to pose the questions that millions of water bill payers are starting to ask. The key question is whether this multi-billion pound project is the best solution to making the Thames cleaner or whether there are sensible alternatives that are cheaper, greener and less disruptive."

H&F Council Leader Cllr Stephen Greenhalgh expressed concern "that our approach seems to be one where Thames Water customers are being asked to foot the bill for a European edict where the main beneficiaries will be shareholders from an Australian finance group which owns the utility company."

The Environmental Food & Rural Affairs Parliamentary Select Committee also recently agreed that Thames Water had not properly evaluated alternatives. The pressure finally led to Thames Water agreeing to consider alternatives as part of a second phase of consultation which was set to start in September.

## Explosive new evidence

The Commission is not due to report its full findings until the end of October but on September 16 Greg Hands, MP made an astonishing announcement about new evidence submitted to Lord Selborne that

week by Chris Binnie, the Independent consultant expert who originally advised that the scheme should go ahead. Mr Binnie was Chairman, from 2000 to 2006, of the Thames Tideway Strategic Study Group set up to examine ways of making the River cleaner. It was he who recommended that the Thames Tideway Tunnel would be the most effective and cost-efficient way of reducing the amount of waste that flows into the river. Thames Water has used his recommendations as a major plank of their publicity offensive to justify the rising cost of the scheme and neutralise opposition from residents across London. It has insisted throughout that a shorter tunnel running east only to Heathwall, would not suffice for the volumes of overflows to be handled.

The TTC Commissioners heard that the cost of Thames Water's current scheme, £3.6 billion in 2008 – an extra £65 per customer annually for life – has doubled since 2006 and improvements in green technology alternatives have progressed at a rapid rate over the past five years.

Now Binnie has told the TTC hearing that the Thames Tideway Strategic Study Group's recommendations may be out of date and should be revisited. Moreover he also admitted that there had been a limited review of alternative options to the Tunnel: only £12,000 was spent on researching sustainable urban drainage solutions but £5m spent on researching the Thames Tunnel. His written evidence to the Commission suggests that a much shorter tunnel, working in tandem with the recently-built Lee Tunnel, could be an effective solution to meeting EU requirements: "There are a number of features that would be worth looking at as to see how viable a two tunnel scheme might be."

## Thames Water must reconsider

Binnie accepts that a much shorter tunnel, from Hammersmith to Heathwall might work and that the original 20-mile Tunnel may not now be needed, because, since his report, Thames Water has built the Lee tunnel, from Abbey Mills Pumping Station in Stratford to Beckton, which accounts for 60 per cent of the total discharge into the river.

Cllr Stephen Greenhalgh, Hammersmith & Fulham Council Leader, said: "For years, Thames Water has cited Mr Binnie's

research as the main body of evidence to support the need for their costly and controversial super sewer. For the respected independent expert who made the original recommendations to now come forward and say that his research may be outdated by subsequent developments in green infrastructure solutions blows a major hole in all of Thames Water's arguments.

"Thames Water must start listening ..... and go back to the drawing board. There are cheaper, more effective and less disruptive options to clean up the river that need to be re-examined as a matter of urgency."

It is clear now why the second consultation planned by Thames Water for last month has not happened. The saga will continue. ■

## Desalination of Thames water

A revolutionary desalination plant in Beckton, East London, will help provide the capital's supplies for the future whatever the weather.

The £270 million plant removes the salt from the water in the Thames Estuary before pumping the filtered liquid into its vast reservoirs.

After some controversy about its high energy consumption, it was given the go-ahead by Boris Johnson in 2008 and completed in 2010. It was used for the first time in March this year and has been used intermittently since then. It could pump up to 150 million gallons of fresh water into its reservoirs per day, if needed enough to keep them topped up.

The key process in desalination, reverse osmosis, forces the water at high pressure through very fine membranes which hold back the salt and other molecules. The treated water is then re-mineralised; and is slightly softer than normal.

Most reverse osmosis plants have one or two stages, which yield around half of the source water as drinking water. The Beckton works is the world's first-ever four-stage reverse osmosis system, yielding a far more efficient 85 per cent.

The works will only take in water on the outgoing tide when it is a third as salty as normal seawater, and so requires less energy to treat it. ■

# Legislation and governance

Helen Marcus picks up some points of relevance and interest

## Council constitutions

In our last newsforum we reported on the failure of Islington and Camden boroughs to combine under one Chief Executive. Islington Society commented that the stumbling block had been the lack of a distinction between officer responsibility and member-led decision making in Camden. The officer/member relationship was also raised at last year's AGM by members from Barnet.

It may therefore be of interest to members to know that Part II of Local Government Act 2000 contained a duty for local authorities to create new constitutions, and that they deal with this very subject.

The publication, New council constitutions: Guidance to English Local Authorities, contains statutory guidance to which local authorities must have regard, and underpins the provisions of Part II of the Local Government Act 2000.

It states that

- All local authorities must have a written constitution.
- The constitution, and other documents referred to in it, should set out everything anyone who has dealings with the local authority would need to know about how the local authority conducts its business, who takes which decisions and how to work with the local authority.

Furthermore it stipulates that:

"The constitution should be widely and readily available to the public." How many people know this? Certainly nobody I asked seemed to know such a thing existed and I had to search for it on various websites.

## The role of members and Officers

Chapter 10 of it's 15 chapters deals with the roles of members and officers. "All councillors represent their constituents ....and .... should play an important role in consulting their communities on the development of policy"

"Local councils are run by elected councillors who are voted for by local people. Councillors are responsible for making decisions on behalf of the community about local services"

"Officers should be responsible for day-to-day managerial and operational decisions within the local authority and will provide support to all councillors in their several roles"

The document can be downloaded from:

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/newcouncilconstitutions2> ■

## Too many badly prepared new laws

Research by Mattison Public Relations, on behalf of Sweet & Maxwell, the leading legal information provider, announced in May this year, has found that the number of new laws introduced in the UK in 2010 alone leapt by 41% to 3,506 up from 2,492 in the previous year. It is the highest number of laws introduced in any year. Sweet & Maxwell's online legal information service, shows that half of them were introduced in the first four months of 2010 alone.

## Bypassing parliamentary debate

Of greatest concern is that new laws can be introduced by means of a "statutory instrument" which bypasses full parliamentary debate. Analysis from Westlaw uk shows that in 2010, 98% of new laws were introduced as statutory instruments.

In the light of an extremely disturbing report in January 2010 from the Executive Committee of the Better Government Initiative – a panel of former senior civil servants - this should be of huge concern. It found: "There has been too much legislation in recent years, some of it has been unnecessary and too much of it has been badly prepared." "a higher proportion of Bills now enter Parliament incomplete, poorly explained, and requiring substantial amendment" "Some parts of many Bills receive little or no attention in the Commons"

As part of their pre-election pledge, the conservatives had announced that they would introduce fewer new laws and actively cut the legislative burden for businesses. ■

## Duty to Involve scrapped

A little publicised move by the government casts doubt on all their grand statements about localism, the big society or empowerment of the people.

A "Duty to Involve" was imposed on English councils and other local bodies by the Labour government in 2009. It requires public bodies to 'inform, consult and involve citizens (or their representatives) in decision-making where appropriate'. It aimed to 'embed a culture of engagement and empowerment.' This requirement is now to be scrapped.

The Coalition will retain only the Duty to Consult, which was imposed ten years earlier, in 1999. This places a requirement on councils to consult "representatives of council tax payers, those who use or are likely to use services provided by the authority, and those appearing to the authority to have an interest in any area within which the authority carries out functions."

It represents a significant shift for democracy in England, but is dealt with in only two pages of the government's new Best Value Statutory Guidance.

It can be found at

<http://www.opendemocracy.net/ourkingdom/simon-burall/local-governments-duty-to-involve-english-is-being-scrapped> ■

## The Localism Bill

### Removal of some referenda

During the debate in the House of Lords in October on the Localism Bill, the entire chapter on referendums (18 clauses) has been dropped abolishing the public petitioning procedure.

Community referenda related to Council Tax rises, Right to Build and Neighbourhood Plans remain.

However, several Lords expressed the view that communities could in fact be less empowered than they were before Localism. ■



# Round the Societies

A round-up of news from our member societies.

By **Haydn Mylchreest**

## London Forum meetings – passing on the word

At our recent important meeting on the NPPF at The Gallery on September 30th, we discovered that several people had only heard of the event at the last minute through a reminder email sent out by our Chairman, Peter Eversden. Peter relies on those receiving the bulletins he sends, to circulate them within their own organisations. How many of you actually see the paper copy of each edition of London Forum's Newsforum? It would be a great help in future if every organisation circulated important parts of the bulletins we issue.

## Greenwich Society celebrates 50th Anniversary

**The Greenwich Society** celebrated its 50th Anniversary this year by producing from its records a brief history of the Society entitled "50 years of challenge and change" giving a selection of the successful campaigns it has fought over the years. It is a testament to the valuable work of Civic & Amenity Societies prepared to question proposals which might undermine the character and social value of local environments. Highlights include the 1967 campaign to get the neighbourhood designated as a conservation area under the newly established 1967 Civic Amenities Act. This resulted in the creation of London's first and largest conservation area covering Blackheath Village down to the Thames including the Heath, the Park, St Alfege and the Royal Naval College. In 1986 they got the three towers at Canary Wharf moved further east as a result of vigorous campaigning assisted by the Commander of the Royal Naval College with the aim of preserving the view from the Park over the Wren's Greenwich Hospital (Royal Naval College) buildings. The challenges continue, ranging from the impact of the Olympics 2012 to countering the scourge of graffiti.

## Extending Boris Bikes south of the Thames

'Boris Bikes for Battersea' is the headline of an article in the **Battersea Society** newsletter this summer reporting that the Wandsworth Cycling Campaign worked with a local MP on the petition submitted last March to the Mayor asking the GLA to consider extending the scheme south of the Thames to Battersea. The scheme as a whole seems to have been successful and the Mayor has promised to look carefully at the proposal.

## Crystal Palace park reprieved

**The Crystal Palace Community Association**, together with other civic and amenity societies, has been campaigning for several years against the LDA's controversial £100m Crystal Palace Master Plan which includes the sale of public parkland for the construction of blocks of luxury apartments. The Secretary of State was minded to agree with the Inspector who carried out a public enquiry, and therefore approve the granting of planning permission. The CPCA had intended to challenge the decision in the courts having received advice that there was a powerful legal case. However, following the withdrawal of Government funding and the proposed abolition of the LDA, the immediate threat seems to have been lifted.

## Campaign to stop pop festival on Blackheath

**The Blackheath Society** challenged a decision by Lewisham Council to grant a licence to NIMBY EVENTS to hold a two-day pop festival on the Heath every September "in perpetuity". Had the Council granted a licence for a one-year trial event, the Society would probably not have appealed. Unfortunately the challenge was unsuccessful and the cost to the Society was £80,000, but the Society believes there is good reason to hope that NIMBY's ambitions may be reigned in because they still have to obtain permission to use an area of the Heath and there is strong and continuing supporting opposition from the Blackheath Joint Working Party. The magistrate's court acknowledged that the appeal had been properly brought and this was reflected in its order that the Society should pay less than 50% of the costs claimed by NIMBY and Lewisham Council. There seems to be an increasing, and worrying tendency for local authorities to see parkland and open spaces as opportunities for raising revenue. One good result flowing from the effort the Society has put in is the ongoing consultation on developing a proper policy for the Heath.

## Midnight meeting with councillors

**The Knightsbridge Association** arranged a midnight meeting with councillors and officers of RB of Kensington & Chelsea and Westminster City so that they could see for themselves how regulations are being flouted by cafes exceeding their licensed hours, tables and chairs encroaching on the pavement, illegal parking of pedicabs, and so on. A further meeting was arranged to discuss the problems and to try and achieve uniformity in the licensing and operation of the premises.

The Association continues to be concerned also about subterranean developments and their impact on neighbouring properties during construction; the chairman of the Considerate Basement Development Group has written to the Secretary of State on this matter and his letter is fully supported. A former senior planning officer of WCC has been commissioned to draw up a definitive position paper on this type of development covering planning requirements, enhanced party wall agreements, construction practices, bond and compensation procedures, noise abatement and parking. The final version will be shown on KA's website.

## Compiling Lambeth Council's Local List.

Members the Lambeth Civic Forum, which includes LF member, **Brixton Society** (see newsforum Spring 2011) have embarked on another initiative submit to Lambeth Council a list of buildings that should be included in the Council's Local List. ■

*Material for this article is drawn from society newsletters and magazines. Societies' members have a wealth of practical experience and fascinating historical and cultural information which can be shared to the benefit of London residents. I would like to hear from all our Members. If you do not already send me copies of your own organisations' newsletters, please put me on your circulation list and send them to me at our office:  
70 Cowcross Street, EC1M 6JE. ■*

# newsbriefs

Key issues of interest and concern to note.

## Councils sell off historic properties

The Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB) has warned that hundreds of historic buildings could be sold off by councils to fill funding gaps caused by severe budget cuts. Other buildings could be boarded up and left vacant to save on running costs.

Ian Lush, chief executive of the Architectural Heritage Fund, which supports local groups said "It is a threat because the number of historic buildings which are being declared redundant by public sector owners – not just local authorities, but also includes the Ministry of Defence, fire services, health trusts – exceeds the number of community groups and commercial developers able to take them on,"

Other public bodies are also selling heritage buildings, with the former St Giles Hospital being sold by NHS Southwark, the Government is trying to reduce its own estate, with a sale of the historic Land Registry office Lincoln's Inn Fields, and the courts service is putting two Georgian terraces in Greenwich up for sale. SPAB is deeply concerned that great swathes of the nation's built heritage will face an uncertain future under new ownership - or will simply be mothballed.

## Government 'Cabs for Hire' out of control

In view of some of the stories circulating about the NPPF, the report 'Cabs for Hire', launched in May by Transparency International UK, is of more than usual significance. It reveals that the system for regulating the 'revolving door' between government and business is "spinning out of control" and needs a radical overhaul.

The study which examines the movement of politicians and officials between positions of public office and jobs in the private sector, concludes that the current system has created an environment that increases corruption risks and undermines public trust in government and parliament

The report makes fifteen recommendations, including replacing the Advisory Committee on Business Appointments (the current body that regulates the system) with a new statutory body; setting up a register of lobbyists and introduction of legislation on lobbying; and a three-year ban on lobbying by public officials who have had responsibility for procurement decisions.

## From the horse's mouth: I'm sorry about the Gherkin

Ken Shuttleworth of Make Architects, the man behind "the Gherkin" has said he now regrets his design. He said the days of "crazy shapes, silly profiles and double curves" were over and that he was disappointed with the 40-floor City office block, which forms a focal point on the London skyline.

"I was in there the other day," he said. "I was looking at the glass all the way round thinking 'Why on earth did we do that?' Now we would do things differently." He added: "I think a lot of architects are egotistical, almost like artists who see themselves as a one-man show."

Mr Shuttleworth has also criticised the Renzo Piano design of the Shard London Bridge, saying: "I just don't get it."

## 2011 Building Design Journal Carbuncle Cup

Building Design the online journal was worried that with so few buildings being constructed in Britain, this year's Carbuncle Cup award might suffer from a shortage of candidates. They "faced disappointments — not least the realisation that regular shortlistee, Make, had failed to build anything sufficiently hideous in the past 12 months to warrant inclusion." Nevertheless they still managed to identify "six crimes against the built environment," for the shortlist:

The jury of architecture critics: Rowan Moore of the Observer, Hugh Pearman of the Sunday Times and the Guardian's Jonathan Glancey awarded the Top Prize to MediaCityUK at Salford Quays but London fielded "two worthy candidates" as runners up:

Phoenix High School Post-16 Centre Shepherd's Bush, where "we encounter a series of luridly coloured and jauntily disposed panels that march down the building's considerable length like so many dwarves hi-hoing their way to the diamond mine." The architects claim that it has actually inspired some pupils to pursue a career in architecture to which BDJ responds: "God help us!"

The other is One Hyde Park by Rogers Stirk Harbour and Partners. BDJ points out the irony that Richard Rogers, once a highly vocal opponent of the socially divisive effects of gated communities, should now be the architect most associated with the provision of high security compounds for London's super-rich. "It is one of a number of recent instances where the appointment of a big-name architect has proved sufficient to persuade the planning authorities that grotesque overdevelopment can be justified!"

## Controversy over new Broadgate plans

Perhaps BDJ should not be too worried about a future entry from Ken Shuttleworth. Even though Make's plans for redevelopment of Broadgate Centre have only just been approved by the Corporation of London they are causing controversy. Following the Department for Culture, Media and Sport's refusal to list the current buildings, they will now be demolished. Secretary of State Jeremy Hunt decided that the 1980s complex, by Peter Foggo of Arup, was not of sufficient architectural or historical interest to merit listing. He said the estate was impressive but fell short of the outstanding quality needed to list buildings less than 30 years old.

But the proposed new design has already set financiers against conservationists, architects against developers. The original Broadgate developers, Stuart Lipton and Peter Rogers, described the new proposal as "the worst large building in the City for 20 years". Shuttleworth replied by claiming his design "heralds a sea change in modern architecture."

## The purpose of listing

Reacting to the refusal to list Broadgate Centre English Heritage said: "There has been some suggestion that listing stunts investment or creates 'streetscape museums'. This is to entirely misinterpret the purpose and effect of listing ... Every year, consent is given for change and adaptation to thousands of listed buildings. It would have been entirely possible to consider significant alteration to the inherently flexible Broadgate Square buildings while enabling the original scheme's intrinsic qualities to shine as an exemplar of commercial development in the City."

# newsbriefs

## Sixteen London tube stations listed

Sixteen underground stations have been given Grade II listed status by Heritage Minister John Penrose, on the advice of English Heritage. They include several of the tube stations designed by Leslie Green whose 'ox-blood' red tile facades pioneered the use of a strong and consistent corporate image that is recognised around the world. All the stations have historic and architectural significance, illustrating the development of the capital's Underground system.

### Grade II listed status are:

Aldwych, Belsize Park, Brent Cross, Caledonian Road, Chalk Farm, Chesham, Covent Garden, Hendon Central, Oxford Circus - originally two separate stations (on the north-west corner of Argyll St and Oxford Street, and the north-east corner of Argyll St and Oxford Street including the office above), Perivale, Redbridge, Russell Square, St John's Wood, West Acton, and Wood Green.

### Upgrade from Grade II to Grade II\*

Three other stations - Arnos Grove, Oakwood, and Sudbury Town - have had their listing upgraded from Grade II to Grade II\*.

These were designed by the distinguished modernist architect Charles Holden, for the Piccadilly Line extension in the 1930s.

## Sir Humphrey lives

A corner of the veil concealing the secrets of what goes on behind the closed doors of government was lifted a fraction recently. At a Mile End Group seminar chaired by Professor Peter Hennessy at Queen Mary College in July, Cabinet Secretary Sir Gus O'Donnell discussed his update of the 'Guide to Minute Taking', used by every Cabinet Secretary since the 1950s, with one of his predecessors, Lord Armstrong of Ilminster, Cabinet Secretary under Margaret Thatcher. It provided a privileged insight into the practicalities of being Cabinet Secretary.

The practice of taking formal minutes of Cabinet meetings was first introduced in 1916 by Maurice Hankey, in the midst of the First World War, as part of an aim to address major problems of Government decision-making. Since then the thousands of minutes produced under successive governments provide a near continuous account of British government history over the century. Their primary purpose is a 'tool of administration' rather than an historical record and they are not verbatim.

The Guide sets out the various tactics used by senior officials to create an accurate record of high-level meetings; some of the disclosures are both revealing and entertaining.

"There are many occasions on which the members of a committee are not altogether clear what had been agreed until they see the minutes," notes the guide. It is, apparently, civil servants, not the ministers, who 'decide what has been decided'. As Sir Gus O'Donnell explained: "Sometimes ministers are delighted to read the minutes and find out the outcome of their discussion."

Lord Armstrong revealed that he was told by his predecessor Sir Norman Brook: You don't write down what they said but what they would have said if they had thought what they ought to say.

Straight out of Yes Minister. Sir Humphrey would have been pleased!

**The Mile End Group** (MEG), based at Queen Mary College, provides a forum for the exchange of ideas and experience.

The National Archive recently transferred the paper copies of the Cabinet Minutes to them. MEG events are free to attend and they welcome all who wish to come along.

A video of this fascinating discussion, apparently in full, can be found in on the website of the Mile End Group. Their website contains also other videos of similarly interesting events.

<http://www.meg.qmul.ac.uk/pastevents>

## Housing landbanks - some figures

**Bovis Homes** has added 1,571 plots on nine new sites in the first half of the year, and agreed terms to acquire a further 2,500 plots. Altogether it has amassed 14,470 plots with planning consent.

**Redrow's** chairman Steve Morgan, said it has grown its business by changing group strategy, its land acquisitions are continuing to drive the average selling price up.

**Persimmon** reports its order book stands at slightly more than £1 billion - up by 10 per cent. Affordable housing made up 19 per cent of the company's sales - up from 18 per cent. Persimmon has sold 3,000 homes to housing associations for this year and next and has also secured £21 million from the Homes and Communities Agency for 2,000 homes in 2013 to 2015.

**Baratt homes** reported that buy to let sales rose sharply in the past six months. Tellingly they warned that the market was constrained by the dearth of first time buyers - not lack of planning permission or land.

## Tax Increment Finance scheme for West End

We reported last year on the pilot to set up the first Tax Increment Finance scheme in England, to improve the eastern parts of Oxford Street (see Tony Travers talk, page 7 of this issue, and Newsforum No. 57, 2010).

The New West End Company, the business improvement organisation representing 600 businesses in London's West End, has now announced a deal in which public and private sectors will join together to invest over £1 billion to reinvigorate the East end of Oxford Street. It involves Frogmore; Great Portland Estates plc; Land Securities Group plc; and Derwent London plc. and includes a commitment from Westminster City Council and Transport for London to work with its partners to deliver £1.7m public realm enhancements by 2016. Transport for London will deliver two new Crossrail stations and tube upgrades at Tottenham Court Road and Bond Street stations.

## Scandal of City Hall adviser who shoplifts

An astonishing story appeared in June about Boris Johnson's cultural strategy manager, who boasted to The Evening Standard that he steals from retailers such as Tesco and Pret A Manger. He appeared to feel justified in stealing something whenever he went in, "so they don't make a profit out of me". The advisor was responsible for organising the Cultural Olympiad and attracting international businesses to invest in the arts in London. He resigned shortly afterwards.

# newsbriefs

## Google lands at Silicon Roundabout

Old Street roundabout in Shoreditch has been dubbed 'Silicon Roundabout' due to the number of technology companies based in the area. According to Tech City, the body set up to promote the initiative, there are as many as 300. Now Google is to provide office space and assistance to new technology companies there too. The company has leased a seven-storey building in Bunhill Street which will host "a range of activities, such as speaker series, hackathons, training workshops and product demonstrations". The new facility is expected to open in 2012, following a major refurbishment.

## PFI a bad deal for taxpayers: MPs verdict

Two parliamentary committees, the Treasury Select Committee and the Public Accounts Committee, have made devastating criticisms about the use of private finance initiatives (PFI)

**The Public Accounts Committee report** issued in September, entitled 'Lessons from PFI and other projects', says the public sector is getting a bad deal out of PFI, and that the taxpayer's position is made worse by "poor transparency of investor and contract information alongside patchy public sector commercial skills". It finds that private investors are making excessive profits and, most shockingly, using off-shore accounts to avoid tax. It has called for HM Treasury to employ freedom of information powers to investigate.

**The Treasury Select Committee report**, Private Finance Initiative, made the same criticism: that PFI funding for new infrastructure, such as schools and hospitals, does not provide taxpayers with good value for money and stricter criteria should be introduced to govern its use. Whitehall departments have become 'addicted' to getting something now and paying later. A total of £60bn of capital investment has been committed to PFI projects under successive governments. The committee found that there was no convincing evidence that savings and efficiencies during the lifetime of PFI projects could offset the higher borrowing costs of using private capital over government borrowing. It should be brought onto the balance sheet.

PFI is now an "extremely inefficient" method of financing projects with perverse incentives unrelated to value for money. ■

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Registered Charity Number 1093134

# Date for your diary

London Forum event

## Walter Bor Media Awards 30th November

### London Forum Event The Gallery, Cowcross Street

Don't miss the Walter Bor 2011 Media Awards Presentation evening

### Walter Bor Media Awards 2011

10th anniversary year

### Wednesday 30th November 6pm.

Interval refreshments

**William Palin**, secretary of SAVE, chair of the panel of judges which includes Forum vice-presidents Judy Hillman and Bill Tyler.

Like the Man-Booker, the winners will be revealed on the night so all societies who submitted entries should be prepared to speak.

**Neville Grant**, editor of the Westcombe Society Newsletter has been invited to make a special presentation. The Newsletter, published monthly, has won frequent commendations, and scores on media impact.

**The categories for this year's awards are:**

**Newsletters | Printed publications | Books  
Web sites | Media impact: ■**

### London Forum on Twitter

#### Don't forget the London Forum Twitter site.

Stories; updates on the latest news as it comes in; useful web addresses.

Do pass on the address to all your amenity society contacts.

Twitter can reach far beyond London Forum's e-bulletin list of contacts.

[http://twitter.com/london\\_forum](http://twitter.com/london_forum)

NB - note the underscore: \_ in the name ■

### newsforum

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# newsforum



The London Forum - working to protect and improve the quality of life in London

The London Forum of  
Amenity and Civic Societies

Founded 1988

[www.londonforum.org.uk](http://www.londonforum.org.uk)

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## The future of local government

# 'A profound control shift in the governance of cities'

The City Finance Commission Report calls for a new relationship between businesses and local government; but what of democratic accountability?

## Newsforum supplement

This PDF supplement to the Autumn Newsforum takes the form of an extended newsbriefing.

In addition to consultations on the government's proposed legislative changes, there was so much happening over the summer months that it could not all be fitted in to one edition of newsforum.

In order to get this supplement ready as quickly as possible no other contributors have been involved. I trust you will find the selection of reports presented here useful and of interest.

Helen Marcus, Editor ■

## Responses to the NPPF

Many London Forum members have sent copies of their responses to the NPPF consultation to the Forum. It will form a valuable body of evidence.

The government's new housing strategy, announced in late November, includes a strategy to bring some of the 700,000 empty homes into use. Could it be that responses to the NPPF have been taken heed of? ■

The City Finance Commission was set up by Manchester, Birmingham, and Westminster Councils, and Central London Forward which represents other central London boroughs, to look at the way councils are financed. It was headed by Sir Stuart Lipton.

Although little publicised the report, published in May, has influenced the coalition's review of local government finance. It is notable that it took evidence from businesses, local authority chiefs and think-tanks but there is no mention of how the views of the electorate, who will have to live with any changes made, were taken account of.

It has called for changes aimed to encourage local authorities to strengthen their relationship with businesses to drive growth and become less dependent on Whitehall. It is clear that its ideas influenced the NPPF and the Localism proposals. Some of its elements were touched upon by Tony Travers in his talk to the London Forum in September.

### The main proposals

- Powerful incentives, freedoms and flexibilities for cities to "go for growth" in the national interest
- Devolving all centralised services into a single pot with significant savings in management and administration costs and enhanced quality

*If business is to be given this sort of privileged place within the local governance structure, then we need to be clear on what terms*

- Better connections between businesses and local government and real influence for business over local priority-setting.
  - Long-term, ambitious investment in the infrastructure needed to drive growth
  - The opportunity for Government to trial radical, innovative approaches in a small number of high performing cities – minimising the risks associated with major change on a national scale
- Cities should be allowed to keep the growth in business rates and council tax that is generated by new planning consents. At present the £20 billion of rates collected by local authorities are sent to central government and redistributed around the country.

It believes that if restrictions on cities' ability to innovate and shape local services using local knowledge and circumstances, are lifted somehow they will respond better

to local need and the communities they purport to serve. But then we find that in fact the real aim of all this is once again to “enable local cities to deliver growth”, as emphasised throughout the report

### Their recommendations:

- Area Growth Budgets: devolving Whitehall budgets to cities giving them responsibility for local public spending for growth.
- A commitment from Government to support cities to drive growth, giving them the right to ask government for necessary powers to bid to become a “devolution pilot” with new financial or regulatory freedoms, such as the ability to grant regulation-lite zones to spark development and new employment opportunities or to reduce rates or other costs.
- An inquiry to investigate the future relationship between central government, local government and businesses, to provide the right governance framework for growth. Perhaps this could be achieved by way of making business a statutory consultee on parts of cities’ agendas.
- The business rate retention system and
- New Tax Increment Financing (TIFS) which gives councils the power to borrow against future revenues such as business rates to invest in capital projects [both already mentioned elsewhere in Newsforum].

### The aim is for these changes to deliver:

- Powerful incentives, freedoms and flexibilities for cities to “go for growth” in the national interest.

- Significant savings to the in management and administration costs.
- Better services for communities and individuals.
- Better connections between businesses and local government and real influence for business over local priority-setting.
- Long-term, ambitious investment in the infrastructure needed to drive growth.
- The opportunity for Government to trial radical, innovative approaches in a small number of high performing cities – minimising the risks associated with major change on a national scale.

The word ‘democracy’ is scarcely mentioned.

If business is to be given this sort of privileged place within the local governance structure, then we need to be clear on what terms. Their only responsibility is to their shareholders, as they so often point out, and they frequently use the excuse of commercial sensitivity not to answer important questions. To whom they will be accountable? There is a clear contract between local communities - the electorate - and local authorities who represent them and are legally accountable to them. Where will this third element fit in?

There is no attempt to define what is meant by “growth” although the implication is that it is growth of businesses. In view of the universal concern about global warming, and growing fears that such “growth” is part of that problem, one might have expected at least some discussion of what sort of “growth” is meant and whether there might be alternatives.

[www.cityfinancecommission.co.uk/db90834m/useruploads/WCC\\_CityFinanceCommissionLR.pdf](http://www.cityfinancecommission.co.uk/db90834m/useruploads/WCC_CityFinanceCommissionLR.pdf) ■

## Barnet Easy Council

Barnet Council has already run into huge controversy as it appears to be trying to implement a commercialised agenda, dubbed Barnet ‘easyCouncil’.

Its drive to make savings of up to £15m a year is said to be based on a budget airline business model, charging customers extra for services which were once considered part of the standard provision; one idea has been, for instance, to get householders to pay extra to get their applications for planning permission dealt with quickly.

Following a scandal that erupted over its

payments of £1.3m to a security firm who were found to have secretly filmed residents who attended a council budget meeting, there is concern about the risks of the commissioning-led, outsourcing model of public services.

Local objectors have questioned whether there are sufficient financial and accounting safeguards or appropriate management systems in place to monitor and enforce contracts on these consultant-led initiatives. ■

## Business Rate Retention

The ideas of the City Finance Commission have already fed into the Government consultation on changes to the way Business Rates are dealt with so that Councils will in future be able to keep more of what they collect.

The intention is that local councils’ budgets will be more strongly linked to local business growth: the more new business premises are developed in an area, the more funding (outside of council tax, fees and charges) the council will have, to provide local services and investment, as well as having positive impacts on employment and the local economy more widely.

The following statement should raise particular concern, especially in the light of the NPPF proposals:

“Developers will find local authorities have greater incentives to grant planning permissions for appropriately-sited and well-planned non-residential development and go for growth”

Another cause for worry is what will happen to the current arrangements for Charity relief. The Charity Commission advice has been that charities can expect to receive about 80% relief on business rates. But if the government no longer controls Business Rates it would be up to local authorities to give relief, if they see fit. For more information:

[www.communities.gov.uk/documents/localgovernment/pdf/1947200.pdf](http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/localgovernment/pdf/1947200.pdf) ■

## KPMG local government report

**The Brilliant Local Authority of the Future** - a report produced by KPMG in conjunction with the Centre for Public Service Partnerships - continues the commercial theme.

The report asserts that the best councils may prove to be very different to the present. They will address new realities through “clear and commercial business plans and operating models that focus on politically determined outcomes, accountability, productivity and financial control. They will find roles as strategic commissioners, and will wholeheartedly adopt payment by results supply chain management”

[www.kpmg.com/uk/en/issuesandinsights/articlespublications/pages/brilliant-local-authority-of-future.aspx](http://www.kpmg.com/uk/en/issuesandinsights/articlespublications/pages/brilliant-local-authority-of-future.aspx) ■

# Revelations about civil service credit cards

It would appear that it wasn't only MPs who made free with expenses on taxpayers money

Since May reports have been emerging that taxpayer-funded credit cards have been subject to widespread abuse by civil servants, both at local authority and central government level, with thousands of pounds squandered on luxury restaurants, visits to pubs, fine wines and days out. The cards have been used to pay for first-class flights, theatre tickets, exclusive restaurants and hotels, and shopping sprees.

## Whitehall Departments

Government Procurement Cards (GPCs), – credit cards embossed with the words HM Government – are used widely throughout the public sector. More than 140,000 have been handed out to staff, who are using them to spend £millions of public money every year. Bills of less than £1,000 a month are not routinely audited.

The cards could be seen as an efficient way to allow civil servants to purchase necessary items without having to go through elaborate procedures to get expense claims signed off. If used correctly it could save taxpayers' money, but the ease of making purchases has resulted in many dubious claims being made and until now, spending by civil servants on credit cards has gone largely unchecked.

There have been prosecutions: The Times obtained details under the Freedom of Information Act showing that at least 30 officials had fraudulently spent a total of £20,756 on their government credit cards; four had been jailed and others were disciplined or dismissed. The Times reckoned that this represented a fraction of the true scale of fraud.

Now the coalition Government, led by Cabinet Office Minister Francis Maude, has sought to introduce stricter oversight policies on spending in Whitehall and Local Authorities. It is said that there has been much internal argument and obstruction from officials but it now claims to have cut the spending on these cards from £387 million to £342 million. It is set to publish all spending over £500 on GPCs online.

But while the £500 cut off is consistent with other government spending rules, it would still exclude a huge number of transactions. Many of the claims are small in value and would be exempt from publication under these new guidelines, for

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*Until now, spending by civil servants on credit cards has gone largely unchecked.*

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example, £258 spent by the Department of Health at Puppets by Post, for finger and glove puppets. The process of filtering out transactions below a certain threshold could itself add to the expense. Why not publish all the amounts spent on these credit cards?

Civil servants at the Department for Communities and Local Government spent more than £850,000 in the two years before the 2010 election, £34,000 of it at restaurants and bars. £5000 went to an events company to organise a bongo-drumming day.

The Equalities and Human Rights Commission, NICE, Ordnance Survey and the Health and Safety Executive are all involved; Select Committee clerks who look after MPs have about 230 cards.

The Ministry of Defence, with 14,271 cards as of last December, managed to get through nearly £1bn using department credit cards over the past four years, more than any other department. It is apparently "in discussions" with the Crown Prosecution Service.

There was also evidence that cards were being used to withdraw more than £500 in cash, which is forbidden for procurement cards used by Government departments, although it was unclear if the same rules applied to the Commons cards.

## Local authorities

Local authorities spending on taxpayer-funded credit cards is estimated to be more than £100 million over the last three years. While cutting jobs and front-line services, many town hall chiefs and councillors are lavishing hundreds of thousands of pounds on a jet-set lifestyle, with first-class travel to foreign destinations, dinners at Michelin-starred restaurants, leisure trips, stays in five-star hotels, and expensive gifts including iPads and video games.

In response to an investigation by the Daily Telegraph, 186 councils released data, but only of expenditure over £500 –

potentially meaning there are tens of millions of pounds in additional spending on lower value items or services. 48 councils responded saying they do not use credit cards, or had no items of expenditure over £500 on credit cards in the last 3 years.

£500,000 was spent on gifts such as Tiffany jewellery, Gucci products and pure silk ties; more than £300,000 was spent online at Argos and £150,000 at Amazon.

More than £2 million was spent on travel over the last three years, including flights to Thailand, Kenya and Bermuda, and hotel bills. Perhaps if they travelled less and stayed at home to concentrate on their remit of looking after local services they might be more efficient.

Some of this money might have paid towards keeping libraries open.

## More information: The Daily Telegraph

has released information as a database: [www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/council-spending/8542676/Council-credit-card-spending-database-released.html](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/council-spending/8542676/Council-credit-card-spending-database-released.html)

**Information about Whitehall**, DCLG and Government Offices credit spending data September 2011 can be found on

[www.communities.gov.uk/publications/corporate/spendingdatasep11](http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/corporate/spendingdatasep11) ■

## Just deserts - private or public?

Communities Secretary Eric Pickles was challenged recently about not declaring in the register of Members Interests a dinner at the Savoy, paid for by Bell Pottinger the lobbying company. He apparently replied that:

"The Secretary of State has no reason to register it in the Members' Interests because that day he was not eating as a minister, he was eating as a private person"

As Ann Treneman, the Times Parliamentary Sketch writer asked: "Can dinner with Bell Pottinger really ever be such a private affair? What about just deserts? Are they private, or public? We should be told" ■

# Closing libraries – an irrational strategy

A personal view by **Helen Marcus**

The battle to save libraries continues. Two important judicial reviews have been mounted by local campaigners: the result of the one in Brent is still awaited; and a favourable result in Gloucester has just been announced, but with a disturbing caveat from the judge. The arguments have centred on interpretation of various relevant Acts, and faulty consultation processes. But if the councils satisfy further consultation they will still be able to proceed with closure.

The real issue, the budgets, do not seem to have figured in the debates. They should: if these were examined more closely people would be surprised and even more indignant because they do not stack up. Indeed they are irrational.

First of all any figures are hard to come by – local authorities are notoriously coy about publishing accounts in a straightforward way that can be immediately understood. Without knowing ‘how much out of how much’, the figures are meaningless, and that information is rarely provided. Without it one cannot make an informed judgement.

Surprisingly Camden is an exception, actually giving more information than most, with an expenditure figure of £8m in their consultation document on cuts to Libraries, and pie-charts in their Statement of Accounts that make it easy to see overall borough income and expenditure. It was when I studied it that I realised how disproportionate their cuts to the library service were and wondered how other boroughs compare. Some time spent filleting out information on council and newspaper websites helps to uncover some of the facts.

## Some facts and figures

The average turnover of London local authorities is probably over a £1 billion – Camden, Brent, Hackney and Enfield for example. But money spent on Libraries budgets, on average across London somewhere around £5 - £6m, is a tiny proportion of that annual figure. Most of the cuts to the library budgets are between £500,000 and £2 million. This is not even peanuts in the context of Councils’ £billion turnovers and their wages bills. In Camden for instance a third of the borough’s total budget, £353.51 million, goes on 5468 employees; around £15 million of it goes to 240 chief officers in salaries of £50,000 upwards, as

well as perks. Are they really all necessary? Thousands are allocated for Performance Awards - presumably for their skills in cutting our services. The picture is similar in Brent, and no doubt in most London Authorities.

Such financial decisions are irrational and could not be justified on “best value” or any other criterion. For the sake of paltry sums of money dozens of valued public buildings that provide a vital service are being closed: in Lewisham five of its 12 libraries; in Brent 6 out of 12; Lambeth 4 branches out of 11, in Camden at least 4, while the inflated centre, with its perks and government expenses cards, remains intact.

When you look at the percentage of the Library budget that the amount of the proposed cuts represents more questions arise. Councils were told to cut 10% of their budgets, but in the boroughs that are closing libraries the percentage cuts to libraries are well above that: from 16% in Bexley; to 20% in Enfield and Brent and 25% in Camden. While Camden and Brent are closing libraries for the sake of £1 or 2 million they are both proposing to spend hundreds of millions on new town halls. And when one sees that many boroughs are not closing libraries at all, but finding other ways to cut expenses, then one questions: what is the real hidden agenda?

## Other agendas

There are other agendas that have influenced these decisions over many years and no-one should be under any illusions that what is happening is simply due to financial constraints. I became starkly aware of this when I wrote a book on the history of the Camden Festival, closed down by Camden in 1987. Research in Camden’s Library Service minutes and reports (the Festival was run by the Library Department) revealed extraordinary prejudices that should have had no part in any Council decision. Perhaps one quote might serve to throw light on the sort of thinking that has influenced decisions on education since the 1970s:

“The so-called cultural heritage which made Europe great – the Bachs and Beethovens, the Shakespeares and Dantes, the Constables and Titians - is no longer communicating anything to the vast majority of Europe’s population. It is not that these cultural forms are ‘above

people’s heads’ but that it is a bourgeois culture and therefore only meaningful to that group.” (*Artists and People*. Sue Braden, Routledge and Kegan Paul 1978)

It is no accident that nearly 20% of the adult UK population is now functionally illiterate. Britain has fallen to around twentieth place in international indices for educational achievement. Employers continually bemoan the fact they cannot find sufficient workers with adequate skills and technical knowledge.

Over many decades Councils have turned their backs on the library services, mounting a steady and determined assault on them. Book funds and staffing levels have been drastically cut. Opening hours have been slashed in a number of authorities in bids to save money. It is therefore not surprising that numbers of people visiting libraries or borrowing books have declined. That apparent decline in usage is then used by councillors as the ammunition they need to claim libraries are no longer required.

And let there be an end to the specious argument of libraries versus the old and sick. Libraries are often a lifeline for those very people.

They are used by schoolchildren to do their homework. The access to reference books and the help of librarians is always important but for some youngsters in large families and overcrowded homes, a library is the only place they can work.

The Evening Standard campaign to improve reading capability of children has clearly shown their interest and pleasure when libraries are refurbished and equipped to interest them.

The real question is whether we wish still to live in a civilised society that values knowledge and education, to which libraries are an integral part of providing access.

There is a case for re-examining the provision of Library services in an era of computers and Kindles, but simply closing them without any proper discussion of what the budget figures and the cuts really signify, and of how future need might be assessed, is not a rational way to address the problem.

**Information** about closures and campaigns to save libraries can be found at [www.librarylondon.org/](http://www.librarylondon.org/) ■



# Is the third Heathrow runway finally dead?

The latest developments from press reports and the **HACAN** website

A flurry of recent articles and letters in the press from the aviation lobby, trying to ramp up pressure yet again for expansion at Heathrow, appears to have been finally squashed. Speaking at the Airport Operators Association conference recently, the new Transport Secretary Justine Greening said: "The political reality is that the runway decision has been made and it is done."

## Vital political changes

On the same day it was reported that the Labour Party has also now at last dropped its support for the third runway. Ed Milliband, who was energy secretary when the decision was made to give the go-ahead, was apparently opposed to the scheme. Now as leader he has made that official party policy, meaning that there is now cross-party opposition to it.

## But the lobbying continues

Despite falling profits and passenger numbers, and rising costs, the airline industry continues to lobby for new airports, and expansion at Heathrow. The Confederation of British Industry (CBI), London First and Andrew Adonis have all featured prominently in the press, making dire predictions that without expansion at Heathrow we risk "being cut off from global growth". The CBI at least accepts that any expansion of Heathrow in the foreseeable future is unlikely.

London First doesn't even accept that position. Chief Executive Baroness Jo Valentine, called for reconsideration of greater capacity at Heathrow, and expressed concern that "Our main airports – particularly in the South East - are blighted by overstretched infrastructure, where the slightest disruption results in thousands of passengers queuing". She appears oblivious to, and totally unconcerned about the real "blight": not just the inconvenience of a few minutes queue but hours of torture by droning noise pollution that affects millions of Londoners every day, and would affect millions more if flights from Heathrow increase.

However another survey, by ComRes published in September, of 1,600 Londoners, including 750 business leaders, contradicted these views. It found that in fact London executives think sorting out

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*The real 'blight' is not just the inconvenience of a few minutes queue but hours of torture by droning noise pollution that affects millions of Londoners every day*

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roadworks disruption should be the mayor's number one priority, with only 14 per cent being bothered about airport expansion.

Within hours of Greening's appointment, the aviation industry's PR machine sprang into action trying to discredit her, saying she was 'compromised' over Heathrow expansion because she is the MP for Putney, which sits under the Heathrow flight path. But Philip Hammond, Greening's predecessor, also represented a constituency heavily overflown by Heathrow aircraft – yet, curiously, there had been no mention from the aviation industry that he might have a conflict of interest.

The airlines' initial response to the Government's policy Scoping document (see page 7) has been to ridicule it. A report by Business and Finance journalist, David Robertson, in the Times on November 7th stated that "the industry is almost united in its call to rethink the ban on a third runway at Heathrow". For good measure Mr Robertson adds his own view that ruling out new runways for London's airports on the ground that this will limit carbon dioxide emissions is "questionable". "In reality, the policy seems to be more about currying favour with voters under the Heathrow flightpath". That is a startling denigration of the democratic process. As Earl Attlee said in the House of Lords debate in an ironic put down of Clive Soley who is still actively lobbying: "My Lords, the noble Lord will understand that we cannot arrange for every flight coming into Europe to land at Heathrow".

## The true extent of noise damage

Much has been made of the arguments about carbon emissions and climate

change, but the most debilitating threat to the well-being of millions of Londoners from any such plans, acknowledged in a major article by the Times's economic editor David Wighton, is that they would subject a fresh swathe of London to aircraft noise.

HACAN research has found that The Department for Transport grossly underestimates just how serious the problem has become and there are disturbing question marks over the Government's noise calculation methodology. Claims that aircraft have become quieter over the years are laughable if you live underneath the flightpath. Government understates the extent of the problem and the number of people affected, and has made the astonishing claim that the 2 million affected in 1970 has fallen to 250,000.

But the average population of each London borough is about 250,000 (GLA Intelligence Update Resident population of Greater London June 2010), so the combined population of the west London boroughs alone, where government research accepts that aircraft noise dominates the local environment, is at least over a million.

HACAN research has shown that in fact the problem has worsened in the last decade due to the steady increase in the number of planes using Heathrow, and now affects areas many miles from the airport. (Study commissioned from consultants, Bureau Veritas, 2007).

## An EU report

A Report from the European Environment Agency confirms that over a million people are disturbed by aircraft noise from Heathrow; and another European report shows that people are disturbed by much lower levels of aircraft noise than previously thought. When you add in the numbers of people living in areas as far away as the Southwark / Lewisham borders, Brent, and Camden that are now overflown, the numbers are probably well above two million and will rise if the industry's campaigns for increased flights are successful.

## A larger airport for a contracting industry?

Recent press reports about airlines' financial situation have been somewhat contradictory,

but many have spoken of contraction and losses. A recent IATA forecast predicts a reduction in leisure travellers and Tim Jeans, former commercial director at Ryanair, which has, in fact, scaled back expansion plans, even went so far as to say that the golden age for low fares is coming to an end. Flybe will cut capacity this winter in response to weak consumer demand and has admitted that its performance since flotation has been disappointing. At Stansted also, according to a recent report from Airport Coordination Limited (ACL), responsible for slot allocation and schedules, demand is contracting.

Although business class travel is expected to grow by up to 6% IATA has admitted there remains a 'mismatch' between capacity growth and demand: passenger growth of 4.7% is outstripped by a 5.8% increase in the amount of seats flown leaving more flights competing for the same amount of passengers.

Lufthansa is selling off BMI, which has lost £136 million this year. There are contradictory reports about British Airways: earlier in the year it was said that profits had collapsed by nearly 98% and it has a massive £6.5 billion debt pile; but this month they announced the opposite – that profits are rising.

Air cargo forecasts dipped in the first quarter and profitability is expected to fall this year, driven largely by the increase in fuel costs.

Air fares and fuel prices have soared and further costs will come in 2012 when air passenger duty will rise. As was tellingly described in a special aviation supplement in the Times, "the industry is being dragged kicking and screaming into the ETS"; the European Union's Emission Trading Scheme, which will impose a new 'green emissions' tax in January. A number of non-European governments and airlines are threatening court action and other measures in an attempt to get out of it.

### Who pays the cost?

One does one wonder how they could possibly afford expansion at Heathrow or why they even need it at the present time. In view of the recent furore over the inability of the Border Agency to process the number of people arriving already, how can the industry's claims to need more capacity be justified. Are

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## *The industry is being dragged kicking and screaming into the ETS, the European Union's Emission Trading Scheme*

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TheTimes

they going to contribute to the necessary cost of processing these increased arrivals, presumably currently paid for by the taxpayer? The airline companies seem oblivious of the costs they impose on others, whether financial, or by degradation of the environment, in order to make their profits.

### The carbon emissions problem

We reported in Newsforum (Issue 55) two years ago of the industry's efforts to get round the emissions problem: at a UN Forum on climate change, BA Chairman, Willie Walsh, on behalf of the International Air Transport Association, announced a global plan to reduce net emissions by half from 2050. Flying contributes about 2% of global greenhouse gas emissions, but accounts for 13-15% of UK emissions. At altitude they are more damaging than at ground level.

### Experiments with green fuels

With the current economic problems and rising cost of oil it would actually benefit airline companies - although not necessarily the environment - to find alternative green fuels.

Thomson Airways recently announced the UK's first commercial flight to be powered by biofuel made from waste cooking oil. A £1.4 billion research project called Clean Sky is developing new technology to make aircraft more fuel-efficient.

Sir Richard Branson has announced that he aims to introduce a "green aviation fuel" on Virgin Atlantic aircraft within three years using a method that converts waste gases from industrial steel production into a jet engine fuel that could ultimately account for nearly a fifth of the present annual global consumption of aviation fuel. He spoke of a possible demonstration flight within 12-18 months.

The German airline Lufthansa is already running regular commercial flights using a

mix of biofuel and kerosene in a six month trial that started last August.

Government may well be persuaded by all this to allow an increase of flights. Unless the arguments about noise pollution continue to be pressed forcefully, they risk being sidelined in such developments.

### The end of Runway Alternation?

There is also real concern about pressure to change the use of the existing runways to increase the number of flights. While the Government says it is committed to retaining runway alternation (the practice of switching runways at 3pm to give residents in the boroughs closest to Heathrow a half day's break from the noise), it already seems to be flaking at the edges.

### Yet another report

The South East Airports Task Force, chaired by aviation minister Theresa Villiers, published a report in July, saying that delays will be reduced if BAA is allowed more flexibility to land aircraft on both runways at the same time. A four month trial of the new arrangements will take place from November to February and then from July to September next year. If, after the trials, the Government is minded to make it permanent, the proposals will go out to public consultation. ■

## Useful web addresses

### Good practice guide on noise exposure

and potential health effects Intended to assist in understanding and fulfilling the action planning requirements of EU Directive 2002/49/EC Nov 2010  
[www.eea.europa.eu/publications/good-practice-guide-on-noise](http://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/good-practice-guide-on-noise)

### Study from Warwick University

published January 2011 on sleep deprivation has found that it increases the risk of stroke and heart attack  
[www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/med/research/csri/sleep/d](http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/med/research/csri/sleep/d)

### South East Airports Task Force

[www.dft.gov.uk/publications/south-east-airports-taskforce](http://www.dft.gov.uk/publications/south-east-airports-taskforce) ■

# A new airport?

Various suggestions have surfaced in recent months for a complete rethink about provision of airport capacity for the south east: 'Boris Island', and Manston in Kent have been touted. Now Lord Foster has thrown his hat in the ring.

Lord Foster has come up with a proposal for a £50 billion transport hub in the Thames Estuary with a four-runway airport capable of handling 150 million passengers a year. It would be built partly on reclaimed land at the Hoo Peninsula on the Isle of Grain in Kent, 55km from London, 30 minutes by high-speed rail. He is, of course, the man who designed the terminal building at Stansted Airport, and the off-shore airport at Hong Kong.

The ambitious plan brings together rail, freight logistics, aviation, energy and its transmission, flood protection as well as regional development. Aircraft would approach over water.

It calls for a four-track, high-speed passenger and freight orbital rail route around London, which would link to a future high-speed rail line to the Midlands and the North, the Thames Estuary ports, High Speed 1 from the Channel Tunnel to London and European networks. The station would be built under the airport.

Part of the plan would be a new upgraded Thames barrier crossing providing flood protection to London and the Thames Gateway, which would be able to harness tidal power to generate carbon-free energy.

## A visionary plan or a non-starter?

Medway Council denounced the plan, saying it was one of the worst places anyone could build a new airport. Leader Rodney Chambers said it: "is quite possibly, the daftest in a long list of pie-in-the-sky schemes." He pointed out that "The Isle of Grain is home to one of the world's largest liquefied natural gas terminals..... aircraft and huge gas containers are a potentially lethal mix. In addition, the sunken American warship the SS Richard Montgomery is submerged just a few miles from the location and laden with high explosives. [It has been deemed too dangerous to recover the wartime ammunition since the ship sank in 1944]; the London Array wind farm is being built nearby and the airport cuts through an area that is home to hundreds of thousands of migrating birds."

## An integrated vision for Britain

Lord Foster, described his plan as an "integrated vision for Britain"; "If we are to establish a modern transport and energy infrastructure in Britain for this century and beyond, we need to recapture the foresight and political courage of our 19th century forebears and draw on our traditions of engineering, design and landscape."

**Jonathan Glancey**, writing in the Guardian suggested that Foster and his team have offered a big-spirited vision that

could power Britain's economy, which in the past was capable of producing huge infrastructure projects, into a newly competitive age. But, he asks, "do we have eyes to see it?"

**Tony Travers** commented in The Times: "London needs additional airport capacity. There are good economic reasons for creating an airport in the east: London's centre of gravity has hitherto been tilted too heavily westwards. If there is no new airport in the east London faces gradual decline as one of the world's best connected cities."

Early reports claimed government support for the project, but ministers quickly distanced themselves, ruling out any decision until next year. ■

## HACAN campaigns

### HACAN's three main campaigns for 2011/12:

- Keep meaningful runway alternation
  - The nightmare of Night Flights: To get a ban on night flights before 6am
  - 'Give Us A Break, Gov': To get relief for residents suffering constant noise
- For all the latest developments see:

[www.hacan.org.uk/](http://www.hacan.org.uk/) ■

## The Department for Transport Policy Framework for aviation

The Department for Transport, (DfT) published a Scoping Document in March this year, to consult the public on developing a new aviation policy in a sustainable framework. Consultation closed on 20th October and there will be a further full consultation next March on the 'developing policy', for planned adoption by government in March 2013.

The Coalition considered the previous government's 2003 White Paper, The Future of Air Transport, fundamentally out-dated and failing to adapt to the increasing climate change challenges. The DfT is calling for progressive policy scenarios, balancing tougher emissions standards, incentives for

technological advancements, meeting the increasing passenger demand, with improving well-being and quality of life, and aviation's economic role in tackling the budget deficit.

### Some welcome commitments

The first few pages contain some commitments which will be welcome. In Philip Hammond's forward we have:

- "...we are firmly focused on the benefits aviation can bring, particularly in terms of economic growth. But we are not prepared to support growth at any price." and in the introduction (1.15)
- "Our objective is to develop a long-term,

high-level framework for aviation which: takes account of the positive and negative impacts of aviation, and achieves a sustainable balance between them;"

However this is just a "scoping" document. The consultation proper, when it comes, might not be as balanced, as has happened so often in the past with government consultations. Greening's speech and the Labour Party volte face are most welcome but the aviation lobby continues its campaign.

[www.dft.gov.uk](http://www.dft.gov.uk) ■

# Offices to flats: jobs versus homes?

A controversial proposal by the Government to make it possible to convert offices to residential use without planning permission may be withdrawn. What are the issues?

A Government proposal to amend The Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order 1987 to facilitate the conversion of empty office blocks to homes has aroused stiff opposition and may now be withdrawn. It would grant permitted development rights for changes of use from commercial B use classes to residential C3 class use. To qualify for conversion the premises would have to be vacant for more than a year. The new permitted development right would only apply to the change of use, not to any physical alterations or developments which would still have to get planning permission. The change would not require primary legislation and could be effective before the end of the year.

A study by the Policy Exchange think-tank, *More Homes, Fewer Empty Buildings*, claimed that there are currently 266,000 empty units, between 7-9% of commercial properties. Many are redundant or no longer suitable for commercial use. 2.8% of new homes came from office conversions last year. The government estimated that if all these empty buildings were converted into residential property it could create 250,000 new homes, save nearly £140 million in planning costs, and encourage first time buyers back into the housing market. The Homebuilders Federation estimates the change could create an extra 200,000 jobs in the construction industry and help tackle urban blight.

DCLG figures based on collection of business rates, show that some of the inner London boroughs have some of the highest rates of vacant office space in England. Kensington & Chelsea, Hammersmith and Fulham, Islington, Tower Hamlets, Lambeth, Westminster and the City all had at least a thousand each, more than 10% of the total stock.

## London Forum view

The Planning in London Journal ran an interesting debate on the subject. London Forum Committee member Michael Bach set out the rationale behind the Use Classes Order (UCO) as a positive tool for policy delivery with the ability to allocate sites in plans for particular uses and examined some of the concerns. He points out that such a change could destabilise the property market: housing values greatly exceed

commercial values at the top end of the market with differences in value of up to 40%. This could attract pressure from developers on all office blocks for conversion to more lucrative housing, not just on vacant buildings, creating a huge market distortion that could lead to speculation in certain types of property, and in shares in commercial property firms. How does all this fit with the localism agenda - communities being able to shape their own place. Is housing all we want from the planning system? And would these homes really be where needed?

## Is the system out of date?

However others argue that the UCO system is out of date and too inflexible to take account of new technology, the great variety of work activities that have arisen in recent years, or the growth in the number of people working full time from home. Marco Goldshmid (former President of the RIBA) pointed out that "The UK is unique in sticking to [these use classes orders] as the Holy Grail of Planning..." "a rigid outdated structure" preventing "new and old buildings to be freely used for a wide range of activities which change over time".

But the City of London saw the proposals as a threat to its unique status as a world-class business centre, jeopardising its international competitiveness. It feared it could precipitate a flight from commercial to residential development because of the higher value of residential space, which would also put up rents. It could make it difficult for institutional developers to assemble large sites thereby reducing its attractiveness as a business centre. Together with local councils and officials at the CLG itself, it mounted a campaign against the proposals and plans for this change to the UCO have been scaled back.

London Forum also lobbied against it. The conversion of office buildings to residential use is promoted by a policy in the draft NPPF and the Forum considers that it would have a serious adverse effect in London, by removing from the market the low cost office space needed by small and medium enterprises. Conversions of offices without planning permission will not allow any part of their increased value as homes to be secured as a contribution to affordable housing within them or elsewhere. No planning obligations could be imposed for

mitigation of the effects of new usage. It would not be possible to impose planning conditions to ensure the resultant building met required standards and appearance in line with local plan policies.

The Local Government Association and Planning Officers Society have lobbied for it to be included in the NPPF on the basis that there was no evidence that the planning system was causing "undue delay or obstruction" to change of use. There should merely be a "strong policy steer... in favour of change of use" in the NPPF, the two groups said in a submission.

The final announcement may come by the end of the year. Stuart Robinson, head of planning at CB Richard Ellis, the property agency, said there had been a "real power struggle" over the issue. Mr Robinson said the change was unnecessary given developers already found it reasonably straightforward to carry out change of use with council support.

So much for the NPPF claims that the planning system was obstructing such changes! ■

## Empty Homes Toolkit

The Homes and Communities Agency has produced an Empty Homes Toolkit giving advice on how to bring empty homes back into use. It has been put together by organisations from across the housing and regeneration sector, including the Department of Communities and Local Government

They say "there are enough empty properties in England to provide hundreds of thousands of people with a home". But the obstacles to getting empty homes actually re-occupied tend to be practical ones. This toolkit provides advice and information on all the important aspects of returning an empty home into use. It is designed to be useful for a wide range of people - from property owners, and concerned neighbours, to council officers and local councillors.

In September the HCA published Camelot's case study, illustrating a unique and pro-active approach to protecting and utilising empty property.

[www.co.uk/empty-homes-toolkit?page\\_id=&page=1](http://www.co.uk/empty-homes-toolkit?page_id=&page=1) ■

# Tesco towns

Tesco is planning four mini-villages complete with supermarkets - is "supermarket-led mixed-use development a good idea?

Tesco has built stores with flats in Clapham and Kensington with other developers. Now it plans to develop "mini-villages" itself, featuring scores of homes, all near a Tesco store. Four hundred homes, primary school, hotel and park - and a new 24-hour Tesco megastore, of course - are planned for Bromley-by-Bow.

We have already reported on the plans at Streatham for the controversial Tesco scheme to build 200 homes, a bus depot and ice rink (see Newsforums 57, 58). Now the Streatham Hub development of 900 homes is proposed. Other similar proposed Tesco developments that are in partnership with a local authority are planned for Queen's Square in West Bromwich and Love Lane, Woolwich

## "This town has been sold to Tesco".

Critics have dubbed these schemes "Tesco Town" and have criticised the growing tide of what are described as "supermarket-led mixed-use development proposals" - entire districts of homes, schools and public places built by the company. There's a sense that they are using their market power to dominate aspects of the economy: "This town has been sold to Tesco".

'Tesco Towns' on this model are being planned across the UK, and Tesco recently announced it aims to ramp up its superstore expansion by 40%, largely as a result of the mixed-use development.

While anyone building new affordable homes must be welcome, these projects raise serious concerns about the role of private enterprise in things that are public. CABE has questioned the quality of the

*Local authorities are prepared to grant permission for superstores they may have previously refused, as long as they are accompanied by the sweetener*

*While anyone building new affordable homes must be welcome, these projects raise serious concerns about the role of private enterprise in things that are public. .*

proposed developments which they consider is generally very poor, and the way in which architecture and places are created in the image of the retailer."

## A bartering culture between councils

One reason that this approach to development has been allowed to take root is the bartering culture that developed between councils and developers as a result of the introduction of section 106 planning gain in the early 1990s. Since then, it has been customary for local authorities to negotiate with developers over the amount of community infrastructure they are willing to provide to accompany a development, including affordable housing, new roads and sports facilities. Local authorities are prepared to grant permission for superstores they may have previously refused, as long as they are accompanied by the sweetener of housing, schools and sports facilities, which the councils don't have the funds to provide.

Another key factor is the change to planning policy made in 2004, when the benchmark test that a new development should be in line with "public benefit" was quietly dropped in favour of "economic benefit".

Tesco points out that it is providing much-needed mixed use development in deprived areas: "urban areas which have not received investment for a number of years". ■

## Mixed use scheme refused

### Mixed use scheme in Walthamstow refused

Communities Secretary Eric Pickles has rejected on appeal a major mixed-use development at the Kimberley industrial estate in Billet Road, north-east London of over 560 new homes, shops, and community facilities, partly because of flaws in the section 106 undertaking proposed by the developer. Walthamstow Council had refused permission because of concern over its design and residential density and the proportion of affordable housing on offer.

The planning inspector who heard the appeal inquiry last year recommended that the scheme should go ahead. The minister believed the undertaking offered by the developer was flawed and did not comply with London Plan guidance on density. ■

## RIBA: houses are too small

### HomeWise - RIBA national inquiry

The Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) has launched HomeWise, a national inquiry chaired by business leader Sir John Banham, to find out what people need from their homes.

In September, RIBA published The Case for Space, a report based on 80 sites across England, criticising housebuilders for building houses that are too small.

New research reveals that thousands of brand new houses are failing to provide the space families need. British houses are the smallest in Western Europe the average newly built home is 818sq ft only 92% of the recommended minimum size.

A lack of space has been shown to impact on the basic needs that many people take for granted, such as having enough space to store possessions or even to entertain friends. In more extreme cases, lack of adequate space for a household has also been shown to have significant impacts on health, educational attainment and family relationships.

The HomeWise website is at

[www.behomewise.co.uk](http://www.behomewise.co.uk) features ■

# Environment and sustainability

A wide range of issues from disappearing gardens and lock-keepers on the Thames, to Solar energy at Blackfriars, broadband boxes and a legal challenge to recycling methods

## Concern about insulation in old buildings

The Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB) is concerned about the effect that the government's Green Deal programme will have on older properties. There is serious concern that the programme to improve the energy efficiency of homes, and promote the complete thermal upgrading of pre 1919 buildings with inappropriate forms of insulation and the sealing up of interiors, may do irreparable damage. SPAB has warned the Government that older properties need special consideration when it comes to making them more eco friendly.

These buildings perform differently from modern ones and are likely to require a different approach, in particular with regard to the movement of moisture within them. Together with leading names in the property industry they call on the Government to involve bodies knowledgeable about old buildings in research and planning for The Green Deal. Many of these bodies already have helpful research to contribute but to date have not been called on to do so.

SPAB is currently conducting and collating research into the energy efficiency performance of a range of older properties built using traditional materials. Results to date suggest that these buildings actually perform better than expected and may not be as energy inefficient as the building industry has generally understood them to be.

The Society believes it is only by understanding old buildings fully that we can decide whether the insulation upgrades we are making are of any energy efficient or sustainable benefit.

## Legal challenge to recycling methods

The Campaign for Real Recycling (CRR) has been granted an application for a Judicial Review of the UK's interpretation of the European Union revised Waste Framework Directive, aimed at reducing volumes of landfill disposal. The introduction of new recycling methods is causing controversy. In our last newsforum (No. 58) we published West Hampstead Amenity and Transport group's question: "What exactly is the purpose of the recycling strategy?" Following a visit to the London Waste Ecopark in Edmonton the writer wondered whether we all might be wasting a lot of time separating everything out.

Government policy allows local council discretion over recycling methods for household waste. Local authorities are split between those that ask residents to separate out recyclable materials and those that allow the 'co-mingling' of waste which is then dealt with at separating plants known as Mirfs (material recovery facilities).

CRR argues that the government has wrongly allowed local authorities the discretion to promote co-mingling recycling because it does not meet the spirit or technical demands of EU law to maximise recycling among member states. It could permanently undermine the environmental and financial benefits of recycling.

Biffa, a waste management company that uses both recycling techniques, criticised the CRR challenge, saying it could lead to months of uncertainty for local councils before judgment was delivered. They say there is evidence that co-mingling could deliver higher

levels of overall reductions in landfill.

A spokesman for the Local Government Association estimated that councils were evenly split over collection techniques; they appeared on track to meet a target of reducing UK domestic landfill waste by half by 2013 compared with 1995 levels. This will be an interesting case to watch.

## Carbon trading

A report in The Times on August 27 claims that some energy companies are manipulating the carbon trading scheme and pocketing millions of pounds profits at the expense of their customers as a result.

For more information about carbon trading see the Sandbag website. They believe emissions trading can be a very effective tool if used correctly. But the vested interests that lobby civil servants and Governments are getting in the way. They believe there needs to be a strong voice to counter-balance them and to act as a watchdog to ensure the schemes have integrity.

[www.sandbag.org.uk/press/releases](http://www.sandbag.org.uk/press/releases)

## Solar energy for Blackfriars station

More than 4,400 solar panels are being installed by Solarcentury on the roof of Blackfriars station, closed since March 2009, as part of a £5.5bn Thameslink project due to be completed next year. Over 4,400 panels covering 6,000 sq m are expected to generate enough energy to meet half the station's electricity needs.

The new station will also have sun pipes for natural lighting. ■

## Greenery is disappearing from London gardens

A study, London: Garden City?, by London Wildlife Trust raises the alarm about the rate at which hard landscaping such as decking and paving is replacing greenery in London gardens.

Private gardens cover 37,900 hectares or nearly a quarter of Greater London. Of that land, 22,000 hectares is now covered by lawn, trees or other plants, as compared to 25,000 hectares in 1998-1999. Removal of lawns accounted for the largest loss of greenery, with 2,200 hectares being lost, although trees and other plants were also

removed, according to the research. On average, nearly two-thirds of a London front garden and nearly a quarter of a back garden is now covered with hard surfacing.

This could have a serious impact on wildlife and on the city's ability to cope with the consequences of climate change, according to Mathew Frith, Deputy Chief Executive of London Wildlife Trust. "Hard surfacing holds more heat than vegetated surfaces and then releases it at night which over time will contribute to the urban heat island effect. You've also got the

additional impacts of surface water run-off, less particulate pollution being absorbed and more dust in the air," he says.

The study, carried out by London Wildlife Trust in partnership with Greenspace Information for Greater London and the Greater London Authority, was based on a comparison of aerial photographs of London from two different periods, 1998-1999 and 2006-2008.

**For more information see:**

[www.wildlondon.org.uk](http://www.wildlondon.org.uk) ■

# Environment Agency to get rid of lock keepers on Thames

Since 2008 the Environment Agency has actively sought to reduce its property portfolio by selling or renting out the Area Relief Lock Houses based along the River Thames from Oxfordshire through Berkshire and into Surrey. Most of the sites are very remote and are located near the locks for operational reasons so staff can respond to incidents within a matter of minutes. But lock staff numbers have been hugely reduced over the last few years.

Now the lockkeepers' cottages are under attack again from the Environment Agency. It has said it will not replace nine out of 45 resident lock and weir keeper posts as they become vacant between now and the end of 2012/13. The lockside houses will be rented out as they become vacant to people who have no connection with the river whatsoever, to generate income which the Agency estimates to be £416,000. The duties will be covered by the rest of the permanent lock and weir keepers and seasonal staff.

There has been little publicity for this move which could increase the risk of flooding on the Thames. Lock keepers have been threatened with the sack if they speak to the media.

## Lock keepers essential for flood defenses

In 2008 a campaign to overturn the Environment Agency's attempt to rent out the houses was backed by the then local MPs David Cameron and Theresa May, and led to a six month review of the decision. The Environment Agency decided to retain ownership.

The review found that resident lock keepers were essential for flood defenses on the River Thames waterway. Environment Agency Director, Howard Davidson, gave assurances to those living on the flood plain that keeping a resident lock keeper at each of the 45 locks along the Thames was "the most sensible way forward to manage the river as safely and efficiently as possible". He told MPs that the key considerations to his decisions were mitigating against the risk of flood and response times to out of hours incidents.

At that time Theresa May MP pointed out that the Environment Agency were very unlikely to make any real savings through the disposal of lock houses, and said: "From our discussions it became clear just how weak [the Environment Agency] case for getting rid of the lock keepers was. The officials were not able to provide exact figures for proposed savings and furthermore they

could not even guarantee that the removal of resident lock keepers wouldn't cost more money than keeping them."

## New decision increases flood risk again

This new decision ignores the conclusions from the Review and seems to be a penny-pinching scheme that will increase the flooding risks and put the whole ambience of the river with its beautiful lock gardens and paths, at risk.

With four sites already vacant the Agency now claims that there has been no detrimental impact on its operational performance or ability to respond to accidents or flood incidents. There is a pool of more than 250 employees who are on call around the clock, to respond rapidly to incidents, wherever they may occur on the river.

So what has changed since 2008? Government funding for the River Thames is reducing again, and there is an £800,000 funding gap. Will David Cameron, now Prime Minister, and Theresa May step in again?

## For more information see:

[www.nfpparty.org/Jubilee%20River%20story%20-%20200933.htm](http://www.nfpparty.org/Jubilee%20River%20story%20-%20200933.htm) ■

## Broadband Cabinets defacing conservation areas - CivicVoice campaign

While we all understand the need to upgrade technical facilities to improve broadband connection, the cavalier way in which BT is going about it is drawing anger and criticism.

About 52,000 green boxes which allow a fibre-optic connection to be made between the local telephone exchange and homes and businesses in the area, are being installed across the country at the rate of 200 to 300 a week. The £2.5 billion operation by BT Openreach will provide two-thirds of homes with faster broadband by the end of 2015.

BT does not need planning permission for these cabinets which are enormous, most of them standing 66in high, 47in wide and 17in deep.

## Little protection for conservation areas

Even in conservation areas local planning authorities need only be 'notified' of proposals a month before work starts. A legal presumption that such infrastructure

should be placed underground in conservation areas is seemingly ignored on the grounds of questionable 'technical difficulties' and 'huge cost'. But boxes are suddenly appearing outside people's houses in conservation areas with no forewarning.

MP Paul Burstow, who is Health Minister, but was speaking on behalf of a constituent who had complained, accused the company of behaving 'outrageously', ignoring the wishes of residents and local councils by positioning the broadband cabinets in unsuitable places.

## London Societies protest

Societies all over London have been grappling with this problem. The Heath & Hampstead Society reported a box that was placed in Downshire Hill, one of the most beautifully preserved Regency era streets in Hampstead. It took residents several months to get it removed.

When the first cabinets were installed

two years ago in Muswell Hill, householders complained they blocked pavements. Muswell Hill and Fortis Green Association said the 'unsightly' units were blighting the neighbourhood because they were taller than most garden walls.

However the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, encouraged by Kensington Society, took forceful action against the 55 applications that came before them and refused the lot on various grounds including harm to visual amenity and character of the area.

## CivicVoice campaign

CivicVoice is campaigning to ensure broadband Britain is beautiful too: the nation needs broadband but it does not have to be at the expense of the street environment. Let's hope that BT mends its ways. For more information on the CivicVoice campaign see:

[www.civicvoice.org.uk/campaigns/broadband-boxes/](http://www.civicvoice.org.uk/campaigns/broadband-boxes/) ■

# News from the Mayor and GLA

## Threat to affordable homes in London

A report by the London Assembly's planning and housing committee details the fears of the G15 group of the capital's largest housing associations, that the number of affordable homes built in the capital could shrink by 50 percent under the government's new policy. If it is right, there would be a drop in 'affordable' supply in the capital to around 6,000 new homes a year. The report expresses particular concern about large family homes.

The economics of the 'affordable rent' model caused Rod Cahill of the Catalyst Housing Group to say that achieving 20 percent of new homes having three or more bedrooms would be "doing well." In recent years the percentage has been between 35 and 40.

With vastly-reduced levels of government grant to housing associations the new 'affordable rent' range will be set at anything up to 80 percent of local market ones which, it is feared, will mean that the existing client group will not be able to afford the homes being built.

## The London Plan

The Mayor published the replacement spatial development strategy for London – the London Plan – in July. This replaces the Plan consolidated with alterations since 2004, which was published in February 2008.

The London Plan 2011 is available to download in PDF form, as one very large file or in separate chapters and as RTF (text only). An order form for printed copies is available.

[www.london.gov.uk/priorities/planning/londonplan](http://www.london.gov.uk/priorities/planning/londonplan)

The London Forum has reviewed the new London Plan. The 16 page document is available in PDF form and can be emailed to members.

## Revised London View Management Framework

A revised draft London View Management Framework SPG July 2011 based on the London Plan 2011 has been published for consultation. The main changes include:

- Amendment of policy references to London Plan Policies 7.10, 7.11 and 7.12
- A new Management Plan for the new

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*A report into the state of London's environment warns that the capital continues to face big challenges from a growing population and changing climate.*

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view from Parliament Square to the Palace of Westminster

- For clarification, amendment of terminology from Lateral Area Assessment and Background Area Assessment to Wider Setting Consultation Area
- Removal of the downstream view from Blackfriars Bridge
- Revision of Appendix E to provide greater clarity to the application of earth curvature calculations

It is available in PDF and RTF (text only) files to download - because of the size of the PDF document, it is available in three parts. The consultation closed in October. [www.london.gov.uk/consultation/draft-london-view-management-framework](http://www.london.gov.uk/consultation/draft-london-view-management-framework)

## Mayor seeks London sponsorship deals

Following the success at raising £700m in sponsorship for the 2012 Olympic Games Mayor Boris Johnson is seeking to replicate that success with London itself.

The strategy would follow the Olympics model with companies invited to become 'official partners of London' in return for co-financing events, cultural activities and sustainability projects.

This would supercede previous individual sponsorship deals, such as Virgin Money's £17m support for the London marathon.

## A revised London Housing Strategy

Since the Mayor published the first statutory London Housing Strategy in February 2010, a new investment period has begun. There have been major changes to the allocation of government funding for housing and there are significant changes proposed in the Localism Bill, including significant new housing and regeneration

powers for the Mayor. The 2010 strategy has now been reviewed, a number of areas have been identified where change is needed, and a revised housing strategy is being produced.

The Mayor's initial proposals for this new strategy, setting out new areas of policy that will be taken forward, were published in August for consultation with the London Assembly and GLA Group [www.london.gov.uk/publication/london-housing-strategy](http://www.london.gov.uk/publication/london-housing-strategy)

## London's Environment Revealed

A comprehensive report published in July, into the state of London's environment has found improvement in a number of areas over the past decade, including a significant reduction in the amount of waste sent to landfill and an increase in the recycling and composting rate: from 9 per cent in 2001 to 32 per cent in 2009/10. However the report warns that the capital continues to face big challenges from a growing population and changing climate.

London's Environment Revealed is a joint report of the Greater London Authority, Environment Agency, Forestry Commission and Natural England. It can be seen on the London Datastore website:

<http://data.london.gov.uk/datastore/package/state-environment-report-london-june-2011>

## Assembly calls for tube upgrade transparency

The Independent Investment Programme Advisory Group (IIPAG) was set up in March 2010 to provide advice and assurance to TfL about its entire investment programme. Its role was changed in October 2010 so that it now provides advice directly to the Mayor. Its remit includes the funding and management of the line upgrades managed by Tube Lines (as a subsidiary of TfL) and the publication of benchmarking information across the entire upgrade programme.

Its latest report was published in September and there is disappointment that it makes no commitment to making more of IIPAG's findings public on a regular basis. ■



# The changing face of London: Luxury goes east

Affordable housing on the Olympic site is outpaced by the race to redevelop offices and 'luxury' homes in the City and surrounding areas.

Luxury residential development in London has been booming recently in response to the desire of the world's wealthiest people to own a London home. Development activity continues apace all over the capital with almost 70 projects - from Lots Road Power Station in Chelsea in the west to Tower Bridge and further, in the east - in the pipeline and due for completion by 2020 to meet the demand.

However a new feature of the latest drive is that whereas the West End has been the traditional area for developers of luxury homes, companies are now looking at east London for opportunities. New development has been creeping along the Thames, toward the City borders, from the South Bank to Tower Hill. Major schemes include Heron Plaza in the City, and two tower blocks at the Pan Peninsula in the Docklands with 762 apartments by the Irish developer Sean Mulryan. A recent survey found that property in the City of London is for the first time majority owned by foreign institutions.

## Redevelopment of Trinity Square

The latest is the redevelopment of 10 Trinity Square, an early 20th-century landmark building alongside the Tower of London. Designed by Edwin Cooper for the Port of London Authority, it opened in 1922. The structure, in the Beaux Arts-style, has a grand limestone lobby and some of its original fittings, including decorative plasterwork and paneling in oak, walnut and mahogany. The formal meeting room, where the inaugural reception of the U.N. General Assembly was held in 1946 will become a 'private members' lounge'. The project, by KOP Properties, involves a £400 million purchase and renovation to feature 37 residential units and a top-end hotel, due to be completed in mid-2014.

## Southwark Council waives affordable housing.

Another scheme for luxury riverside apartments is planned at Neo Bankside, next to Tate Modern on the South Bank. Consent for the scheme included a condition for 34 shared ownership homes. However Southwark Council has agreed with the developers, GC Bankside, that due to high property values and high service charges these units are unlikely to

be affordable in the foreseeable future and has waived their obligation to include affordable housing. The authority has agreed to vary the planning permission and replace it with a £9m cash payment for housing elsewhere in the borough.

But housing charities say London is crying out for more affordable homes for key workers rather than multi-million-pound apartments for the rich, many of which will not even be occupied full-time. The huge sums being ploughed into the prestige schemes dwarf the £1 billion to £1.5 billion a year invested in affordable homes in London.

## Tower 42

Tower 42, the iconic City of London office tower, has been put up for sale for £290m, down from the original asking price of more than the £300m its owners sought 17 months ago. The former NatWest headquarters, designed by Richard Seifert, was the first skyscraper to be built in London's main financial district. It was damaged by an IRA bomb in 1993.

The estate includes five other commercial buildings on a 2.2 acre freehold site: three on Old Broad Street comprising 20 Old Broad Street (36,000 sq ft), 30 Old Broad Street (49,000 sq ft) and the Plaza Restaurant (3,500 sq ft). On the Bishopsgate elevation there are two buildings at No 15 Bishopsgate (46,000 sq ft) which is a potential redevelopment in 2013 and the grade I-listed Gibson Hall (13,000 sq ft).

## New 20-storey tower completes the Canary Wharf masterplan

In August it was announced that Canary Wharf Group will build a 20-storey tower designed by architect Kohn Pedersen Fox at 25 Churchill Place on its Docklands estate. It will complete the 1980s master-plan for the area, an enterprise zone set up to encourage investment. Half the building will be let to the European Union's European Medicines Agency; construction will begin this year.

The company has a number of other schemes in the pipeline to the north and east of the original estate with planning consent in place, as well as buildings intended to be the new headquarters for JPMorgan in the west of the area.

The developer has also agreed on a joint venture with Qatari Diar to overhaul

London's Shell Centre at Waterloo, one of the largest redevelopment sites in the capital. Construction has already begun on its 'Walkie Talkie' Tower.

## 'Baby Shard' at London Bridge

Plans to build another office block, The Place, next to the Shard at London Bridge, have been unveiled by Sellar property group. Dubbed the 'Baby Shard', it is part of a £2billion "London Bridge Quarter" redevelopment.

## News of deals at the Olympic site The Olympic Village

Delancey and Qatari Diar have beaten rival bids from Hong Kong conglomerate Hutchison Whampoa, as well as a high-profile £1bn proposal from the Wellcome Trust, to take over the Olympic Village after the 2012 games.

Plans include 1,439 homes and six other plots to be redeveloped. Delancey will work with Triathlon Homes, which has already taken on the affordable homes element of the 2,818-home development. The deal includes surrounding development sites capable of holding a further 2,000 homes.

The Olympic Delivery Authority, which owns the site said the majority of the homes will be let on a rental basis, instead of being sold, with the ownership remaining with the Delancey and Qatari Diar joint venture. This is intended to create a sustainable leasing model, the first UK private sector residential fund of over 1,000 homes to be owned and directly managed as an investment.

## The Olympic Park Legacy

The Olympic Park Legacy Company (OPLC), a not-for-profit public-sector organisation, has submitted an outline planning application for the first tranche of a 20-year transformation of the surrounding area, a vast former industrial site. Duncan Innes, executive director of the OPLC, says the three key themes of the legacy plan are "family houses, connectivity and quality open space".

Five new neighbourhoods are planned around and between the four Olympic venues that will remain (the Stadium, Aquatics Centre, multi-use sports venue and the Velodrome). From 2013 they will be known as the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park.

# Meanwhile in the west.....

The Olympic site (continued), and developments in west London

## An emphasis on family homes

The OPLC plan sets out the street pattern and the approximate sizes and shapes of buildings, as well as detailing the mixture of housing, commercial and public buildings. In contrast to too many regeneration plans of recent years, which focused on single-bed accommodation, there is an emphasis on family life with 40 per cent of the 8,000 new homes intended as family homes, many of them terraced houses. 35 per cent will be 'affordable'. Infrastructure proposals include nine nurseries, three health centres, three schools, 'employment space' for 4,400, and another dozen as yet unspecified community buildings.

## Chobham Manor

The OPLC hopes to have the developer for the first of the neighbourhoods - so-called Chobham Manor, consisting of 960 family homes between the Athletes' Village and the Velodrome - in place before the Games. This will be followed by East Wick, the area opposite Hackney Wick on the west side of the Park, and later by the southernmost reaches near Bromley-by-Bow, and neighbourhoods around the Park's South Plaza, the main public space. This is a 55-acre "island" between the Stadium and the Aquatics Centre, and is earmarked for music festivals and other large-scale events.

However, it has been commented that the foundation for the masterplan appears not to be traditional London street life - there are no high streets in the legacy plan, the aim being rather to be about creating vistas and views of the Olympic landmarks across the Park such as tourists might wish to see.

## Redevelopment of The Glebe in Chelsea

Meanwhile in west London more new sites are coming on stream. A £300m housing development, designed by the practice of Sir Norman Foster, is planned for the one-acre site called The Glebe, set behind high walls off Old Church Street in the heart of Old Chelsea. The six large apartments, a penthouse and two villas, will each have a swimming pool and a gym. The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea granted planning permission in 2009 for the extension and conversion of the former school building but the project fell foul of the credit crunch. It has now been bought

by Orion Capital Managers, a property-based equity fund which has spent the last couple of years snapping up recession-hit retail, hotel and office projects in Spain and France.

The permission is accompanied by a Section 106 Agreement to secure the delivery of the affordable housing at the former Derby Hotel, 155-157 on Cromwell Road, London SW5 0TQ and a new school at 48 Old Church Street, now known as Frederick Hugh House. There are also provisions relating to the payment of a contribution for local art and highway improvements. Since the granting of the principal permission the Vendor has worked to deliver all four of these requirements so as to leave The Glebe free of these encumbrances.

## St Johns Wood barracks

The St John's Wood Barracks was put up for sale in July. The 5.5 acre (2.2 hectare) site has been occupied as a barracks since 1804, most recently by the King's Troop, Royal Horse Artillery, which will move to a new location in Woolwich by early 2012.

Planning permission has been granted by Westminster Council for 12 apartment blocks, eight semi-detached villas and seven terraced town houses, to provide a mixture of 74 private and 59 affordable homes. The proposal includes the refurbishment of 16 flats in Queen's Terrace. The development has been designed by architects John McAslan and Partners.

The land originally formed part of a farm purchased in 1750 by the current owners, the Eyre Estate. The site's Grade II-listed riding school building, which dates back to 1825 is the only major remaining part of the original barracks. It must be preserved, but can be converted into a private leisure centre. The rest of the barracks consists of the neo-classical Officers' Mess dating from 1921 and various modern buildings built in the 1970s.

Offers of more than £225m are being sought, but under the Section 106 agreement the Trustees of the Eyre Estate will contribute only just over £1 million.

## Earls Court Exhibition Centre must stay

One of London's biggest redevelopment proposals areas was submitted by developer, Capital and Counties (CapCo), in June after three years of consultation. Residents on the Gibbs Green and West

Kensington estates are still campaigning against the plan to bulldoze the the 26 acres Earls Court complex including their homes and the iconic Earls Court Exhibition Centre itself.

But the scheme has split the community of 750 families who live in council houses on the estates. Some favour the redevelopment but others have formed a campaign to take advantage of a law that the last government passed - and which the coalition government has promised to bring into force as part of its "Big Society" drive - that would allow them to transfer tenancies into a mutual organisation that they would own.

The existing art deco Earl's Court exhibition centres will be demolished after the Olympic Games in 2012 when it will be hosting the volleyball tournament, to make way for an expanse of green public space bordered by residential developments.

In May this year the Association of Event Organisers (AEO) urged a re-think. Austen Hawkins, AEO Chief Executive, said: 'The plans to destroy London's major West End exhibition centre will have disastrous consequences on not only the UK exhibition industry but also on the national and local economy'. They are lobbying the national Government, and the London Mayor, to take action to prevent Earls Court being demolished or at least to ensure that the new development includes a 'new' Earls Court exhibition centre.

Earls Court attracts more than 2.5 million visitors, 30,000 exhibiting companies and hundreds of events per year. Together with Olympia it supports £258m of expenditure in their boroughs and over £1.25bn in the London region, and accounted for (directly and indirectly) over 1,000 jobs in the boroughs and around 12,500 in London. One in two Londoners visits the venues every year.

The AEO claims that UK exhibition organisers lead the world in innovation and geo-cloning of exhibitions. Yet the industry receives less governmental support than most other countries with sizable economies. It says the loss of Earls Court and the resultant reduction in overseas exhibitors, conferences and business tourists visiting the UK could cost the country billions in lost revenue when it is most needed. ■

# newsbriefs

Issues of interest and concern to note.

## Transforming vacant shops

Town centres have been hard hit by the recession with empty shops creating a depressing atmosphere in the high street. Harrow Council has come up with a novel scheme to regenerate the retail centre where around 20 percent of units are standing vacant. Launching a two-year programme, they have transformed the front of a vacant shop in North Harrow into a fake florist emblazoned with the message "this retail space could be yours" to attract potential investors.

They will conduct a residents' survey at the launch to measure demand for different retail types and are working with commercial agents to advise prospective investors on travel-to-shop patterns, spending patterns, catchment area and transport routes. This eye-catching and cost effective campaign is about showing the business potential in North Harrow, while improving the look of the high street.

## Victoria Business Improvement District

A Business Improvement District (BID) has been established in Victoria in response to new policy in London Plan to promote urban greening. It is intended to provide a platform for businesses, including Microsoft, John Lewis, Marks and Spencer and EDF to work together to improve and enhance the urban context of the SW1 area and help shape future development. It will make an audit of all existing green spaces and street trees, as well as pavements, walls and roofs.

## A good year for The Crown Estate

The Crown Estate celebrated its 250th anniversary in 2010 by planting 3,000 trees. Despite the recession it reported record profits, with its capital value at the highest levels in its history. £230.9 million in net income was returned to the Treasury, up 9.6 per cent on the previous year.

For more information see:

<http://ar2011.thecrownestate.ry.com/overview/chief-executives-overview.aspx>

## Now we know.....

In addition to mangling our finances the banks also mangle the English language. Heard from a banking official in a discussion about banks on Radio 4:

"The autonomy has now gone into a centralised function"

She was apparently trying to say that local branches no longer have any decision-making powers.

## Notting Hill landmark for redevelopment

Newcombe House, a 1960s landmark site in Notting Hill adjacent to Notting Hill Gate Station has changed hands. The block covers a 1 acre site, close to the top end of the Portobello Market. It consists of a 14 storey office block, 13 shops and 55 car parking spaces. As yet the partners have not decided whether to press ahead with an extensive refurbishment of the site or build an entirely new mixed-use development with luxury apartments.

## Growth in rail travel

Figures published by the Association of Train Operating Companies (ATOC) in May show that passenger numbers on the railways grew by 4.8% in the first three months of 2011, taking growth over the entire financial year 2010/11 to 6.6%. The sharp rise in the price of petrol over the first three months of the year was one of the main reasons.

## Crossrail contract decision delayed

Crossrail has got caught up in the furore over the Thameslink fleet contract to Siemens: In August it was announced that the procurement process for 60 Crossrail trains has been postponed by several months, to allow its purchasing rules to be re-examined.

The procurement of the Crossrail fleet had been scheduled to begin towards the end of this year, but will now be held up until 'early' in 2012 so that the rules which govern the awarding of major contracts can be put under the spotlight.

The issue facing the government is how much national interests can properly be considered when major buying decisions are made, while still keeping within European law.

It has been pointed out that other European countries such as France and Germany usually require their trains to be built locally, even if the company winning the order is foreign-owned.

The Thameslink procurement process is also coming under scrutiny in an inquiry by the National Audit Office, which is expected to publish its preliminary findings in October.

## New life for old stations?

There are around 40 disused Tube stations in London; most closed because they weren't very busy. With their hidden platforms and old bomb shelters, these ghost stations have acquired a patina of mystery, often featuring in films and television dramas.

Ajit Chambers, a former banker who says he has backing from foreign investors, has set up The Old London Underground Company with the idea of finding a use for these spaces. He is lobbying Mayor Boris Johnson, to support his bid to revamp a clutch of former Tube stops. Mr Chambers wants to enliven the forlorn platforms and concourses with museums, restaurants and nightclubs, and to put rock-climbing facilities in abandoned lift shafts.

Mr Chambers claims he has a business plan and funding in place and the scheme could make £40 million for London. He has also had discussions with the health and safety consultancy that works for London Underground, run by the ex-Director of Security for London Underground who said it could be done. After an initial enthusiastic response from Mayor Boris Johnson, the trail went cold. But he has not given up.

**Brompton Road** station is one of the targets. It closed in 1934—though it was used as the headquarters of an anti-aircraft division during the Blitz, and, according to a senior officer in the RAF squadron that now occupies part of the building, the renegade Nazi Rudolf Hess was interrogated there. The spiral staircase is still lined with art-nouveau wall tiles in green, cream and brown. A map of London from 1942 is tacked to the wall of one deep chamber. A nearby door is marked "Danger—Ammunition." Vacant rooms are hung with stalactites and light-bulbs that have been switched off for half a century. Trains still pass through the defunct platforms.

# newsbriefs

## London TravelWatch

London TravelWatch is the official body set up by Parliament to provide a voice for London's travelling public. It issues regular Performance Reports summarising the performance of all the Transport for London (TfL) modes of transport.

They can be found at:

[www.londontravelwatch.org.uk](http://www.londontravelwatch.org.uk)

## Yuri gagarin statue unveiled in London

A statue by Russian sculptor Anatoly Novikov, of Yuri Gagarin, the first man in space, has been installed outside the headquarters of the British Council on the Mall in central London, the spot where cheering crowds gathered to greet the cosmonaut on 14 July 1961.

It was unveiled by his daughter Elena Gagarina and shows Gagarin standing on the globe in his spacesuit. It is a gift from the Russian Space Agency and will stand in The Mall opposite a statue of explorer Captain James Cook for a year. ■



## London Forum on Twitter

### Don't forget the London Forum Twitter site.

Stories; updates on the latest news as it comes in; useful web addresses.

Do pass on the address to all your amenity society contacts. Twitter can reach far beyond London Forum's e-bulletin list of contacts.

[http://twitter.com/london\\_forum](http://twitter.com/london_forum)

**NB** - note the underscore: \_ in the name ■

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Registered Charity Number 1093134

# Dates for your diary

## London Forum meetings and events

## London Forum Events Spring 2012

### Meetings at the Gallery, Cowcross Street

### Three meeting dates for spring 2012:

Wednesday February 22

Monday March 26

Tuesday April 24

Subjects to be announced - watch out on your email

### Don't forget

## The Walter Bor Media Awards 2011

10th anniversary year

### Wednesday 30th November 6pm.

Interval refreshments

### Speakers

**Dr Peter Geraghty**, Junior Vice-President, RTP1  
**William Palin**, secretary of SAVE, chair of the panel of judges (which includes Forum vice-presidents Judy Hillman and Bill Tyler.)  
**Neville Grant**, editor of the Westcombe Society Newsletter who has been invited to make a special presentation. His Newsletter, published monthly, has won frequent commendations, and scores on media impact.

Like the Man-Booker, the winners will be revealed on the night so all societies who submitted entries should be prepared to speak.

### The categories for this year's awards are:

**Newsletters   Printed publications   Books**

**Web sites   Media impact: ■**

## newsforum

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