

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

In this issue

Spotlight on WHAT
 (West Hampstead)
 Page 10

- | | | |
|---|--|---|
| 1 Celebrating societies | An illuminating journey | 14 London Forum Open Meeting:
The Mayor's draft Housing Strategy |
| 2 The London Forum AGM | 10 Spotlight on West Hampstead
Amenity and Transport (WHAT) | 15 The Mayor's drive for affordable homes |
| 3 London Forum Awards | 12 Chislehurst Society safeguards
Chislehurst commons | 16 Round the Societies |
| 4 London: from Brexit to the new
London Plan, Tony Travers | 13 New housing developments -
grey and greenless | 18 News briefs |
| 5 50 years of Conservation Areas | | 20 Events and meetings |
| 8 Lighting Conservation Areas: | | |

Editorial

Celebrating societies

In this edition London Forum highlights the splendid achievements of several of its members who are making outstanding contributions to their communities.

The huge range and variety of Society activities, from designing new street lamps at Covent Garden, to saving a common in Chislehurst, to persuading TfL to change its policies at West Hampstead to benefit passengers, to equipping a children's playground, and publishing books and widely read magazines, is celebrated in these pages.

Yet we still have to combat the denigration of our communities as "nimbys" whenever they have the temerity to stand up for their right to have a say about what happens in their area.

The latest such unthinking attack came from Sir Mark Bolleat, Deputy Chairman, and former Chairman, of the Policy and Resources Committee in the City of London. Bolleat's remarks, as published in the Evening Standard on 18 Oct 2017, trot out the canard of "selfish middle class 'Nimbys,'..." articulate groups who make a lot of noise," whose views are "give[n] far too much weight" and, according to this report, are preventing houses being built for the "have nots".

The City has a proud 1000 year record of strenuously – and rightly – defending its interests. Is Bolleat saying that privilege is to be denied to the rest of us? We note that he sits on several "articulate groups who make a lot of noise," such as the Building Societies Association, (BSA) the Council of Mortgage Lenders, the Association of British Insurers;

and he chairs the Housing & Finance Institute, founded to boost house building.

All these organisations exist, in the words of the BSA, to: *represent their interests to a wide range of audiences including regulators, the government, parliament (EU and UK), the media, other opinion formers and the general public.* In other words they try to impose their views on others and get laws changed to suit their pecuniary objectives. Are not amenity groups also entitled to protect their interests and the areas where they live, by at least objecting when agreed planning laws are not observed?

We reprint the letter from London Forum Chairman Peter Eversden, only part of which was published in the Evening Standard, refuting Sir Mark's views (page 17). Were it not for these "selfish" people, London would now be a desert of concrete skyscrapers, with no Covent Gardens, or other historic conservation areas to attract visitors to its multi-billion tourist industry. As it is, that seems to be happening anyway.

We round off the 50 year celebration of conservation areas, which form such an important element of Society work, with a wide-ranging and fascinating overview of their development by Frank Kelsall. As Frank recounts, it was started by Duncan Sandys, a government minister. Perhaps Bolleat would dub him a nimby as well. ■

*London Forum Chairman
 Peter Eversden
 defends our communities
 in a letter to the
 Evening Standard
 see page 17*

The stated aims of the various groups with which Sir Mark Bolleat is involved give a clear idea of his expectations. They certainly do not include listening to ordinary members of the public.

The Building Societies Association: "represent their interests to a wide range of audiences including regulators, the government, parliament (EU and UK), the media, other opinion formers and the general public."

The Council of Mortgage Lenders: "One of our core activities on behalf of our members is to develop positions and responses that set out lenders' views to government and regulators."

The Association of British Insurers: "get the right people together to help inform public policy debates, engaging with politicians, policymakers and regulators at home and abroad."

Housing & Finance Institute, "working with central and local government and building relationships between capable councils, businesses and investors who want to do more or work differently." ■

The London Forum Annual General Meeting

Minutes of the 2017 AGM of the London Forum Of Amenity And Civic Societies - held 7.30pm, 12th October 2017, at 77 Cowcross Street, London EC1 **Peter Pickering** reports

Present: Peter Eversden (Chairman), Judy Hillman and Marion Harvey (Vice-Presidents), and representatives of the Amwell Society, Angel Association, Beckenham Society, Bedford Park Society, Camden Civic Society, Clapham Society, Ealing Civic Society, Ealing Fields Residents Association, Earl's Court Society, Finchley Society, Gidea Park Civic Society, Greenwich Society, Hampstead Garden Suburb Residents Association, Highbury Community Association, Highgate Society, Islington Society, Kensington Society, Ladywell Society, Putney Society, Regents Network, Sydenham Society, Pinner Association, Tottenham Civic Society, Westcombe Society and Wimbledon Society.

1. Preliminaries

Before the meeting began Professor Tony Travers, a Patron of the Forum, gave a talk and answered questions, and representatives of the Highgate Society and of the Pinner Association gave short presentations based on their entries for the Forum's 2018 Awards Scheme.

2. Minutes of the AGM, 25th October 2016

The Minutes of the 2016 AGM had been circulated in News Forum. In the absence of comments the Chairman proposed the acceptance of the Minutes. These were agreed, nem. con.

3. Chairman's report

The Chairman thanked his fellow Committee members, and all member societies, for their support during the year, and especially Alan Baxter for providing office and meeting space. The Forum's Annual Report had been circulated: he drew particular attention to the work the Forum was undertaking on the new Mayor's London Plan (Sadiq Khan was showing a refreshing approach in his strategies). He hoped that all member societies would involve themselves in the process.

4. Approval of Annual Report and Accounts for 2016/17

The Chairman said that the Treasurer was not able to be present; if there were any questions on the accounts he would try to answer them, or refer them to the Treasurer for a response. The Forum's financial

position was healthy, and there was no need for a subscription increase this year, though it would be kept under review. Problems with the recently adopted web-based subscription system seemed to have led to a reduction in income - the Trustees would examine this carefully with a view to possible simplification; it might be necessary to get paid help with the website and database. At the previous AGM a question had been asked by the Putney Society about the Forum's policy on reserves; the Trustees would be looking at this - it was necessary to have sufficient funds to cover contingencies, especially the possible unavailability of a meeting room at Cowcross Street. Mr Bosi and Mrs Harvey both expressed their admiration for all the work Mr Eversden undertook it was essential for there to be more people to share the burden. Mr Bosi proposed and Mrs Marcus seconded the approval of the Annual Report and Accounts for 2016/17; the motion was passed nem. con.

5. Appointment of Honorary Independent Examiner

Mr Egan was willing to continue, and this was agreed.

6. Election of Trustees:

The Chairman reported that three members of the Executive Committee retired by rotation and were willing to stand for election. Each had been nominated: Michael Bach, Diane Burrigge and Peter Pickering. There were still several vacancies; Andrew Bosi of the Islington Society and John Myers of the Camden Civic Society were willing to serve, and two other people had also expressed some interest. It would be possible for the Trustees to co-opt during the year. A motion to elect the five candidates en bloc was proposed by the Chairman and seconded by Mr Chandler. They were elected nem con.

The Trustees would appoint the officers at their next meeting; Mr Eversden would continue as Chairman, Mr Bach as Vice-Chairman, Mr Chandler as Secretary and Mr Allen as Treasurer. It would be necessary to find a replacement for Mr Linskey, the Membership Secretary, who was resigning; perhaps the membership secretary of a society would find it possible to take on this extra task.

7. Amendment to the Constitution

The proposed amendment to the Constitution that had been circulated was required to remove the reference to registration with the Civic Trust, an organisation that no longer existed, and to clarify the acceptability of new applicants for membership of the Forum. It might be desirable to look more deeply at various provisions of the constitution, but that would take time, and might involve the Charity Commission; the Trustees would look at this subject in 2017/18.

The AGM agreed the following amendments: In paragraph E, delete sub-paragraph (1) in its entirety and replace with:

*(1) Full membership of the Charity:
(i) shall be open to any local amenity or civic society or group, not being party political, having as its basic objective the protection and improvement of the environment within Greater London;*

and

(ii) which is, in the opinion of the Chair and Membership Secretary of the Charity or in any case where they do not agree a simple majority of the Executive Committee, suitable for full membership;

and

(iii) provided always that such organisation shall have paid the annual subscription as laid down from time to time by the Executive Committee.

8. Any Other Business:

The Chairman said that it was proposed to carry out a survey of members, using SurveyMonkey, to help the Trustees judge better what member societies wanted of the Forum, and help it go forward.

Ms Chegvidden (Putney Society) felt that there could be a more regular channel of communication from member societies to the Forum; Ms Burrigge said that she was very happy to receive newsletters and other communications from societies physically or by email; Mrs Marcus encouraged member Societies to contact her for inclusion in the 'Spotlight on member societies' section of the newsletter - Mrs Harvey suggested a Spotlight on the Patron, Tony Travers. ■

London Forum Awards

London Forum Vice-President, Judy Hillman, introduced the two societies who had won the award, **Highgate** and **Pinner**. She was particularly impressed by how much more both did than just objecting to planning proposals. They were community societies providing a framework through which to build a community; for people to meet each other through social events.

Ruth Boff, of the Pinner Association

gave a presentation of the Society's achievements. It had been founded in 1932 in response to concerns about the proposed new fire station in Pinner and the amalgamation of local government areas.

Since then it has developed continuously and is now involved in a wide range of topics including health - the Association has been involved in fighting for the future of Mount Vernon and Pinner and Northwood Community hospitals; traffic schemes and parking; and amenities such as the restoration of West House, a historic building in the Memorial Park, and the development of the Peace Garden in the Park, dedicated in 1995, marking the 50th anniversary of the end of the Second World War. The children's playground in the park was re-equipped and the access improved, largely by the Association.

'The Villager' Magazine, an 80 page publication, was launched in 1938 and is now published three times a year and contains news and gossip about Pinner and also items about the work of other local societies. It has assumed the status of a Parish Magazine and is widely read by Pinner residents who are not necessarily members of the Association.

The Association's website has been revamped and a Facebook page set up. This too provides a valuable service beyond the Association's own membership because the Harrow Council website is not very user friendly.

However it is difficult to persuade new members to be active - people find it off-putting to sit through committee meetings. The internet is very useful to make contact with people but it is still essential to get people to actually do things.

<http://www.pinnerassociation.co.uk/>

(Pinner Association was spotlighted in the Newsforum in 2004)

Michael Hammerson also highlighted how **Highgate Society** strengthens links with its 1,350 members and the wider community. It is fortunate enough to have its own HQ, at the heart of Highgate Village, rented, since it was founded, from the neighbouring Highgate Literary and Scientific Institution. This enables the

It's vital that local authorities, developers and consultants are made to realise that working with civic societies can save them time and money and end up with a better result.

Society Planning Group to hold a very popular weekly planning surgery on Saturday mornings where members can come for informal advice and help on local planning issues. They can also simply pop in for coffee and meet others. Non-members from Highgate and well beyond also come for advice. "Going on the appreciative letters and e-mails we keep in our "Happy Customers" file, this service really is appreciated by the community."

The Society has to deal with four local authorities - mainly Haringey and Camden, but sometimes also Islington and Barnet. It sits on the City Consultative Committees for Hampstead Heath and Highgate Wood, and has established several local charities, now completely independent.

It is conscious of the importance of informing members what it is doing and is always careful to give the background of the regional and national planning regime in reports explaining why "it can't always defend 'the right against the wrong'"

It has a website, and also publishes a quarterly 34 to 48-page magazine, Buzz, with extensive reports of its work. That goes to all members, is on sale locally, and is sent to local councillors, officers and libraries. It is also issued electronically.

Two 50th anniversaries

This year the Society celebrated two 50th anniversaries: its own with a book about its history, to which Griff Rhys-Jones contributed a foreword. It was funded entirely by local subscription. There was a special feature on local businesses, who contributed to the costs. As a supplement to the book the Society put a vast archive of newspaper cuttings on its website

which can be freely accessed; it makes fascinating reading.

At this year's annual summer fair in Pond Square, the Society mounted a display celebrating 50 years of Conservation Areas, emphasising what it has achieved in protecting Highgate. Free leaflets explaining what Conservation Areas are all about were handed out and the exhibition has been on public display again recently. The Society also had a walk round the Conservation Area, led by a Blue Badge guide. "Even though we and Conservation Areas have been around for 50 years, the great majority of local people - many of whom read Buzz - still have only the haziest idea of what a Conservation Area is, let alone that they live in one." However, the display was popular, particularly with young families, and several new members joined as a result.

To answer the perennial accusations that we "hate modern architecture and want to preserve everything" the Society mounted a successful public exhibition on modern architecture in Highgate. It was open for two weeks at one of the local schools, and later at a local gallery. There was also a well-attended public lecture.

Other annual events the Society organises are: a party every year for New Members to make them feel welcome and find out what interests them; and a big Carol service every Christmas in Pond Square for charity, music provided by the Highgate School band. It also has the occasional litter picking session.

Michael finished his talk on an upbeat note: "On the whole, we get on well enough with our local authorities, who sometimes seem to rely on us for comments on applications, particularly relating to heritage, architecture, design, accordance with the local plan, space standards, archaeology, ecology, trees, and transport. It's therefore vital that local and regional authorities, developers and consultants are made to realise this, and that working with civic societies can save them time and money, end up with a better result." ■

www.highgatesociety.com/

(Highgate Society was spotlighted in the Newsforum in 2006) ■

London: from Brexit to the new London Plan

London Forum Patron, **Professor Tony Travers**, of the London School of Economics & Political Science gave a thought provoking and stimulating talk ranging over past and possible future developments in politics, planning, demographics, and housing.

Professor Tony Travers began by showing four different views of London:

- The present City skyline with its tall blocks and strange shapes - London's skyline is getting more like Dubai.
- The same view from a distance showing the burnt out Grenfell Tower - could the first view end up looking like this? It could happen!
- A typical suburban Victorian terrace;
- A new metropolitan style development (in Harrow centre), now moving into outer London.

London's international image is of a 'mega city', dynamic, international, young, developing, flexible, 'Open'. But it is also still a city of Dickensian contrast where a large proportion of the population is excluded from its benefits.

There are many different Londons, each affected by 30 years of growth and change; it used to be the biggest in the world and still is the biggest in Europe. Although many residential parts of outer and inner London have been largely (but not wholly) unaffected by the renewed growth of the city, rapid development is now moving quickly from central/inner London with increasingly 'metropolitan' scale architecture in outer boroughs. The Croydon skyline will appear in other outer boroughs.

Population, projections and change

Projections in the 1960s saw the possibility of London shrinking to 5.5 million or below but London's population has grown from 6.6 million in 1986 to 8.8 million today with 40% of London's present population born outside the UK, and 40% is "non-white". London could have 11M people but Tony suggested that it might be less than that. People are moving outside London, but largely to just outside the boundary - London is spreading out. But the London boroughs do not want the boundary to be moved.

All this has been accompanied by major investment in transport, housing and regeneration but because of house price inflation relative to incomes London is perceived as 'too expensive' for many. Outer London housing prices are now rising faster than inner London, described as the reverse ripple effect. Putting the cost of infrastructure on private

development with Community Infrastructure Levies and S106 agreements leads to overdevelopment. The area round Battersea Power Station for example, is overdeveloped because it has had to pay for the refurbishment of the Power Station itself and for the new Northern Line extension. But transport usage shows signs of falling (which shows the difficulty in following trend lines), so company bids may collapse because revenue will be too low for sustainability.

London's system of governance is much more flexible compared with, say, Paris. The Boroughs are independent so can compete and/or co-operate for distinctiveness. It is thought that the populations of Barnet and Croydon will rise to 400,000 each.

London: myth and reality

London is widely seen to be a city of people with high incomes and wealth; GDP per head is far higher than the UK median. Viewed from central London, streets do indeed appear to be paved with gold.

London has a GVA (gross value added) per head well above all other nations and regions and its relative number of high earners and wealth means it pays more in tax than its public expenditure.

For centuries, London has been seen as an alien and problematic place as described in Hoagarth's 'The Rakes Progress'. It is increasingly somewhat resented by the rest of the UK - is Brexit a manifestation of this?

But in reality central London is only 5% of the city's area and London (and the South-East) pays more in taxes than it receives in benefits. Moreover, 30% of homes in Westminster and Camden are social housing. Contrast that with Paris where there is only 5% social housing in the centre. And once taxes and benefits are taken account of, the difference is much reduced. The statistics show that if taxes, benefits and housing costs are all taken into account, median incomes in London are, remarkably, below the national average. Material deprivation for pensioners and for children is worst in London.

Perceptions of London feed public policy
Because London is seen as having high

incomes and great wealth (and becoming ever-more so) ministers are put under pressure by think-tank reports and media commentators to re-distribute resources away from London with a drive to re-direct investment from London to the rest of the UK. Centralised public finance means Crossrail2 is in competition with Manchester-Leeds HS3. There is a perception that "London can look after itself".

The new London Plan

This will need to focus on the key issues of how to manage continued population and business growth; where to locate new housing and what percentage should be affordable and/or social; further transport development and the impact of Crossrail; anti-pollution measures; improvement of quality of life; what is to happen in outer London; relations with the South East and East, and with other cities/mayors.

Brexit

How will London politics cope with the fall-out from Brexit? The possible impacts are wide ranging: population growth and migration; the future of the City and the tech sector; a loss of dominance and access to talent?; company start-ups and inward investment; the NHS; social care; hotels & catering; universities. How will all this affect London's international attractiveness? Brexit might see a rebalance away from the financial sector. If Sterling and property values fall there might be more inward investment from China and less from Europe.

Finally...Politics: London vote share

The General Election saw a remarkable surge to Labour. The borough elections are approaching. EU citizens will have a vote in them, which they did not in the General Election. Conservative share has been falling. In 1968 most London boroughs were Conservative; will they hold even 5 boroughs next year? The Conservative Party has far fewer members than Labour but usually achieves higher turn-out. ■

Professor Travers powerpoint presentation that accompanied his talk can be found at: <http://tinyurl.com/ybseusq6>

50 years of Conservation Areas

We round off this year of celebration of Conservation Areas in England with an overview by **Frank Kelsall** who has been involved from the beginning: with the London County Council's Historic Buildings Division from 1964; then with the GLC, until its abolition in 1986, when he transferred to English Heritage

This article is a combination of pieces written for the London Society Journal and read as a paper at a London Society meeting

No-one will dispute that the Civic Amenities Act 1967 was a key moment in what the 20th Century Society has dubbed a Heroic Age. The name of Duncan Sandys is rightly associated with the passage of the Civic Amenities Act 1967 because it was his good fortune to come first in the ballot for introducing private members' bills. As the founder of the Civic Trust he wished to tidy up Britain; reading the parliamentary debates on his Civic Amenities Bill it would be easy to think that ridding the streets of abandoned cars was the principal objective. That his Bill became the law creating the conservation areas we know and love was largely due to two government ministers who saw the opportunity to graft their ideas on to Sandys' bill. My heroes are Richard Crossman and Wayland Young, Lord Kennet.

Their role was drawn out by John Delafons in his 1997 book where he writes: 'Those who wonder when the floodgates of conservation were opened need look no further than Circular 53/67'. This was the document issued by the Minister of Housing and Local Government after the Civic Amenities Act 1967 came into force. Delafons had been made secretary of the Ministerial Advisory Committee on Listing in 1959 and when Richard Crossman became Minister of Housing and Local Government in Harold Wilson's cabinet in 1964 Delafons became Crossman's principal private secretary.

Richard Crossman and the Preservation Policy Group

It was Crossman who in 1966 set up the Preservation Policy Group and commissioned the studies in conservation on Bath, York, Chester and Chichester to back up the ideas later given statutory force in the Civic Amenities Act. Of these York was written by Lord Esher. How far back in his career Crossman had first thought about conservation is not clear, but in Esher's autobiography he records setting up a dinner in the 1930s for John Betjeman, Kenneth Clark, and the two cleverest dons he knew, Maurice Bowra and Richard Crossman. When he took office in 1964 Crossman did not know that historic buildings were part of his

*Only in Crossman's time
have historic buildings been
the direct personal
ministerial responsibility of a
full member of the Cabinet.*

responsibilities until he was visited at his home, Prescote near Banbury, by one of his wife's cousins who happened to be an Investigator of Historic Buildings. But having found out, he took to his duties with enthusiasm. He records with delight the discovery of a townscape group among his civil servants and his battles with his Permanent Secretary, the formidable Dame Evelyn Sharp, who was not a conservationist. Only in Crossman's time have historic buildings been the direct personal ministerial responsibility of a full member of the Cabinet.

Evolution of ideas

Despite Dame Evelyn the ideas behind the 1967 Act flow from the government's existing work on historic buildings. The 1932 Planning Act had provided for the making of building preservation orders; the 1944 Town and Country Planning Act renewed that power and by introducing the listing of historic buildings gave local planning authorities a greater idea of what buildings might be covered by such orders. The Instructions to Investigators, of which the key parts were written by John Summerson, recognised that 'it may often happen that the unit of architectural or historic interest is not the individual house but the whole context of which it forms part'. Dealing with this was not a problem in cases such as the Royal Crescent in Bath or Bedford Square in London, but was more of an issue in what Summerson described as 'the accidental or pictorial architectural group where, by the good fortune of architectural good manners or a prevalent unity of feeling and approach at the time and place of building, a row of houses blends together into a group which in its wholeness gives a greater value to

many of its members than they would have if they stood alone'. A dispute among members of the Ministerial Advisory Committee that this could lead to too many buildings being listed was solved by the creation of the non-statutory Grade III, the so-called supplementary list, eventually phased out by more widespread statutory listing and the specific inclusion of group value in the 1968 Planning Act.

In London this can be seen in what happened on the Packington Estate in Islington where Crossman records his problems with what his Department was doing as mid 19th century houses were being bulldozed to make way for system built flats, leaving Union Square a square of two halves. At this time I and my colleagues on the GLC were researching great swathes of London's estates which seemed likely candidates for conservation area status; this was seen on the Packington Estate by the designation of the Arlington Square Conservation Area in January 1969 though the buildings were not individually listed until 1994.

Lord Kennet takes over

Crossman left the Ministry of Housing and Local Government in August 1966. Three months earlier Lord Kennet had become his junior minister and Crossman had ceded to him the care of historic buildings, perhaps because Harold Wilson insisted on it. Kennet was ideally suited to the job though he had hoped for a post in the Foreign Office. His father had seen through Parliament the 1932 Planning Act which introduced Building Preservation Orders, his mother was the sculptor Kathleen Scott, widow of Scott of the Antarctic (whose studio was at the back of 100 Bayswater Road), and his wife a writer with whom he had written on Old London Churches in 1956. From May 1966 to the end of the Labour government in 1970 it was Kennet, building on the impetus which Crossman's heavyweight political status had given to conservation, who saw through the major statutory and policy changes of the Heroic Age. It was he who was principally responsible for those floodgates which Circular 53/67 opened.

One of Crossman's achievements was to grab control of historic building grants from the Ministry of Works. It would be

50 years of Conservation Areas continued

unfair to criticise Works for having no sympathy for area conservation, for under the guidance of the Historic Buildings Council town schemes had been set up. While early examples were Bradford-on-Avon and, adventurously for the 1960s, St Peter Chesil in Winchester where a town scheme grant helped the conversion of a church into a theatre, London didn't get a town scheme until well into the 1970s when one was eventually established in Spitalfields. The role of the Historic Buildings Council became crucial after 1972 when government money first became available to support work in conservation areas. As the grants could be made for individual buildings which were 'outstanding', so conservation area grants became available only in those areas which the Council had declared 'outstanding'.

This use of language shows how closely conservation area practice developed out of the existing provisions for the protection of historic buildings - witness 'Buildings of special architectural or historic interest' in Clause 1 of the current 1990 Act and 'areas of special architectural or historic interest' in Clause 69.

Creative use of Building Preservation Orders

Examples of how areas could be protected before the Civic Amenities Act made conservation areas possible come from the creative use made of Building Preservation Orders by the London County Council and the Greater London Council. Early orders had covered isolated buildings under immediate threat but practice changed in the 1950s, especially after W A Eden had come from Leeds School of Architecture to head the Council's Historic Buildings Division and Hubert Bennet had come from the West Riding to be the Council's Architect; the Yorkshire connection is an interesting one. In 1959 when redevelopment west of Paddington Station threatened Westbourne Terrace the LCC served a Building Preservation Order on more than 160 buildings in the terrace and adjacent streets; at public inquiry, in his successful defence of the order, Eden commented that the threat to a part constituted a threat to the whole. A few years later a threat to the Pantechon in

"I wanted the local authorities to designate many and large areas, which they probably would if they did so before thinking out what had to be done... We advised the local authorities to designate first and think later".

Lord Kennet

Motcomb Street Belgravia led to a Building Preservation Order on both sides of the street. The council again successfully defended its order (I remember it well because I wrote much of the evidence) but only because Lord Kennet and the Ministry of Housing and Local Government did not uphold the inspector's view that one side of the street could be demolished. Kennet's book Preservation records the thinking in government as it made its decision, firmly rejecting the view put forward by Robert Furneaux Jordan in evidence that Motcomb Street was outside the central citadel of Belgravia. The government's view, following the GLC, was that this was 'the sort of unpretentiously pleasant area which is part of the charm of London', and that it was a much better foil to the central citadel than the off the peg new scheme offered by the developer.

London's first conservation areas

Now, following all this, let's come to London's first conservation areas. The first two announced in the London Gazette were both designated on 17th January 1968 by the London Borough of Greenwich; they covered the old Greenwich town centre and its part of Blackheath. Nationally they were preceded only by conservation areas in Stamford, Plymouth, Winchester and Exeter. In London it was the boroughs formed in 1965 which took the lead. Westminster

City Council had been considering proposed conservation areas even while the Civic Amenities Bill was going through Parliament; after delays waiting for views from the GLC, Westminster gazetted six designations in early April 1968. By the end of that year there were some 50 conservation areas across London. In at least one case, Albury Street in Deptford, the GLC designated the conservation area which crossed borough boundaries and where the Council owned the houses which were of the greatest interest, but in other areas which crossed boundaries, such as Blackheath or Highgate, there were parallel designations by the boroughs.

The power to designate a conservation area did not at first impose any additional controls on buildings within them. These followed in a series of measures in the 1970s as the idea of the conservation area gripped public attention and there was a greater appetite to give them meaning. What designation actually meant in those early years was not clear, a case well illustrated in the time between the passing of the Civic Amenities Act in 1967 and the Planning Act of 1968 which abolished Building Preservation Orders and introduced listed building consent. The last BPO made by the GLC was on houses at the corner of Mount Street and Berkeley Square, on the basis that they typified the character of this well-known quarter of Mayfair. These were in an area proposed for designation as a conservation area by Westminster City Council but the Council told the GLC that it would object to the order on the grounds that the buildings are not of sufficient architectural merit to justify preservation. The GLC stood its ground and the buildings are now on the statutory list.

Thoughts about the present day

I've spoken at length about the years when the Civic Amenities Act became law because we can perhaps learn some lessons from them. Now fast forward and one or two thoughts about the present day. Conservation areas were the subject of the first advice note issued by the newly constituted Historic England in 2015, though that advice was essentially that

first issued in 2011 by English Heritage. This current guidance emphasises the role of survey, appraisal and management which is in stark contrast to 1967 when drawing a boundary line on a map and getting on with designation was the priority. Circular 53/67 said that areas would be numerous; Kennet was quite open about getting designations done without much thought for the consequences: "I wanted the local authorities to designate many and large areas, which they probably would if they did so before thinking out what had to be done... We advised the local authorities to designate first and think later".

So where are we now?

At the latest count there are just over 1000 Conservation Areas in Greater London, about one tenth on the national total. They vary enormously in size and character. Some boroughs are now extensively covered; Kensington & Chelsea has 38 areas, including the large Ladbroke area, and many areas immediately adjacent to each other. Lambeth has 62 areas covering 30% of the borough. Others have fewer: Barnet has seventeen, which includes the substantial Hampstead Garden Suburb Conservation area. Barking & Dagenham has just four. Some areas need dual designations because they overlap borough boundaries – Highgate and Blackheath are notable examples.

Local planning authorities have a statutory duty to consider designations; at present new ones seem unlikely though many are being amended in the process of review. This may be in part reflect a feeling that a limit has been reached but it also follows the difficulties of local authorities in adequately resourcing the areas they already have. The number of conservation officers has declined by one third in recent years, and their efforts are largely directed to producing the appraisals and management plans which current policy demands. This problem can be seen acutely in Hillingdon, for instance, where there are 31 conservation areas, many covering old village centres, long under threat from Heathrow expansion, but of these only five have appraisals and only two management plans.

Where an area retains most of the buildings and a residential character with which it was first developed conservation policy is generally straightforward. Preservation usually means keeping the buildings as intact as possible and enhancement often means improving the public realm. But where 'character' derives from piecemeal development over many centuries, as in old high streets or former village centres, the problem is more difficult. Should this process of continuous redevelopment be brought to an end? If not there are hard decisions to take: should new interventions merely preserve the character of an area (established by the courts as meaning 'doing no harm')? Or should they seek to enhance by more radical new design which will in time become accepted as part of the character of an area?

A small conservation area may be easier to manage by a local authority strapped for resources; but should a capacity to manage be a constraint on designation of character? Should conservation areas, like World Heritage sites, have buffer zones?

And lastly, as with listing, designation will have to keep up with taste and understanding of what is historically important. With the support of Historic England the Twentieth Century Society has just embarked on a project to identify areas where more recent buildings may form the core of a conservation area. An example which might perhaps be regarded as an exemplar is the Glenhill Close Conservation Area in the London Borough of Barnet. It comprises a small estate of privately built flats from 1936 with additions in 1961 echoed the interwar moderne style of the first phase.

I started with the Heroic Age of Conservation. Perhaps a new topic for discussion is 'Are we still in it?' ■

Should this process of continuous redevelopment be brought to an end? If not there are hard decisions to take: should new interventions merely preserve the character of an area (established by the courts as meaning 'doing no harm')? Or should they seek to enhance by more radical new design which will in time become accepted as part of the character of an area?

Frank Kelsall joined London County Council's Historic Buildings Division in 1964, working with the LCC and the GLC, until its abolition in 1986, mainly as an architectural historian. He also worked on listed building control, running the scheme of commemorative blue plaques and supervising the recording of threatened buildings. After transfer to English Heritage in 1986 he acted as Inspector of Historic Buildings for the North West until he retired in 1998. Since then he has acted as Casework Adviser to the Ancient Monuments Society and founded the Architectural History Practice. He is a past-president of the Society of Architectural Historians of Great Britain and former chairman of the London Society. ■

Heritage At Risk 2017

More Conservation Areas added than removed

Historic England's Heritage At Risk Register for 2017' was published on 26th October

"In their 50th anniversary year, there are more Conservation Areas added (47) to the Register than removed (22)".

There are still over 500 at risk.

<https://historicengland.org.uk> ■

Lighting Conservation Areas: An illuminating journey

David Bieda, Chairman of the Seven Dials Trust, tells the story of a unique award-winning lighting partnership between the voluntary, statutory and private sectors

This partnership between the local authorities and the voluntary sector has brought to the market well designed and long life bespoke products suitable for any conservation area. The Covent Garden Lantern™ and bracket can be seen on all the streets off Seven Dials in Camden and across the borough border in Westminster in Shelton, Mercer and Langley Street (and Court). They are now planned for Floral, Neal, Tower and West Streets and New Row and are the accepted norm for Covent Garden, and we hope beyond, maybe into your conservation area?

Genesis and Objectives

Some years ago the Seven Dials Trust formed a Lighting Partnership with Camden, Westminster, English Heritage, the Mercers' Company and Shaftesbury PLC. Lighting engineers from both authorities and the Corporation of London brought many years of experience and of problems encountered with existing products. We had to bring Camden and Westminster together with the help of their respective Deputy Leaders to cement the Partnership.

We began by reviewing market offers, all of which were rejected for design and sustainability reasons, and we set ourselves some strict objectives:

1. To overcome the damage caused to lanterns adjacent to the carriageway in narrow streets due to the road camber;
2. To design an historically authentic Windsor style façade and post mounted lantern which had presence in day-time and was effective at night;
3. To reduce carbon emissions and energy needs;
4. To reduce the glare from pot optics and other forms of lighting which tend to 'hide' the historic fabric;
5. To reduce the maintenance costs of local authorities;
6. To create a lantern and form of lighting both for our area and as an exemplar for other inner city conservation areas;
7. To create consistency and remove a plethora of conflicting lanterns and light sources;
8. From the Trust's perspective to obtain royalties for what became our designs.



Above: Damages and a plethora of lantern types

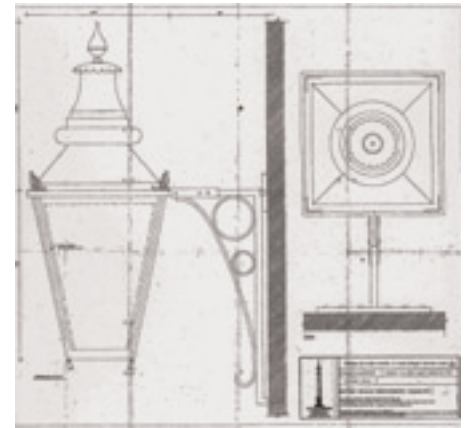
Design Issues | Specifications | Tenders

We were lucky to have Seven Dials Trustee Paul Draper on board as one of the country's experts on perspective and design as you'll see from below. Paul surveyed 1880s gas lanterns in Covent Garden and elsewhere to arrive at an accurate contemporary interpretation of this very traditional design which has been watered down over the years and become a weak pastiche of the originals. The group went on a mini-bus tour of façade lanterns in three London boroughs and the first designs emerged.

Lighting engineers buy off the shelf and the last time Westminster had a bespoke lantern was the Grey Wornham in the 1950's. The specification was arrived at through the unusual process of lighting engineers from Camden Westminster and the Corporation of London listing every fault they had encountered over the years so they could be designed out, creating a long life product. Key issues were: welded parts failing so lanterns had to be chucked; the vexed issue of dirt and insect ingress rendering light sources ineffective; glare; the use of flimsy materials.

Once the design and specs were completed Camden went to tender including Lefebvre SA in France recommended by M. Fretet chief engineer for Paris whom I had met by chance. Long stories often need to be shortened! Lefebvre won the tender and brought our V1 proto to London, rejected for various

Below: Paul Draper's measured survey of historic gas lanterns by the Lamb & Flag



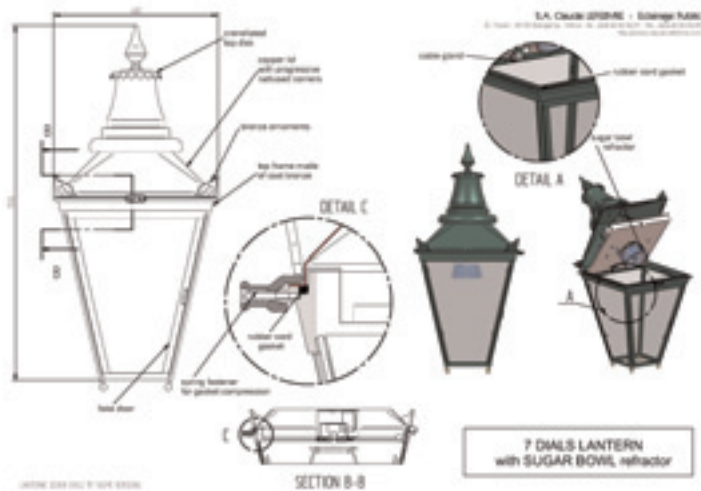
technical reasons and a successful V2 was then installed in Shelton Street in 2010 where it still sits with no dirt ingress. We went through numerous detailed design options. Lefebvre was then sold to Indal Spain who were then bought by Philips Lighting, causing substantial delays to the project.

The Light Source | Glare | Funding

One key issue was how to mitigate glare, where lighting engineers' views did not concur. John Burke from the Corporation gave a seminal talk promoting the use of the Victorian 'sugar bowl' thus proposing a combination of current and historic technology which was finally accepted when trialled in our V2 in Shelton Street. We chose the Philips 60w Cosmopolis lamp which can



Left: the final façade V3 Lantern with the 'sugar bowl';

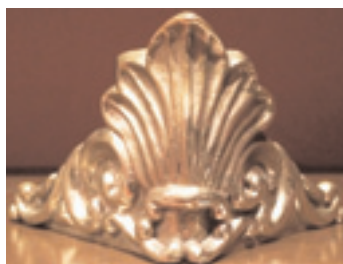


Above: One of the many production drawings for the façade version with the 'sugar bowl'



Above: Paul Draper and David Bieda (left and 2nd left) in the Lefebvre factory looking at production techniques

Below: Paul Draper's drawing and the final cast bronze model for the Acrotaria



be seen in all the current lanterns within sugar bowls, however technology moves on.... The overall cost was £208,000, funded by Camden, Westminster, English Heritage and the St. Giles Fund. We had to obtain wayleaves and some listed building consents.

Attention to Detail and LED

Attention to detail has been the key to our success from design to manufacture and installation so we have met all of our objectives and have now moved on to sell the products, first to the Mercers' Company in Mercers' Walk and shortly to Capital and Counties PLC for Floral Street where they have substantial developments nearing completion. In March 2017 the Trust and Westminster trialled 3 LED units and the Zeta LED is now up in Mercers' Walk and Floral Street will have the Braun gas lookalike. Unusually all the EDF boxes and conduits were painted to match the shopfronts and façades.

How did we go about the project?

Once all the key stakeholders were on board we set up a formal Lighting Group which met regularly over several years with a much larger reference group informed by email newsletters. The positions of the lanterns were arrived at via walkabouts and an 80 page master document with pictures of each façade, lantern positions, supply routes and EDF boxes produced by Fresson Tee and sponsored by Shaftesbury PLC. It can be seen: <http://www.sevendials.com/projects/all-projects/item/35-re-lighting-seven-dials-covent-garden>. Hitherto façade lanterns have not been the norm because of the complexities of obtaining wayleaves, now far easier with new legislation in the 2015 'London Local Authorities and Transport for London Act'.

Results

We now have an elegant and effective 19" Windsor style lantern, either post or façade mounted and soon a 17" version which is now the accepted norm for Covent Garden and embedded within both local authorities. This has encouraged larger freeholders to invest in the products thus augmenting limited local authority funding. We have moved onto LED through on-site testing involving a large group of stakeholders, still retaining the Victorian sugar bowl.

Awards

The project was highly commended in the 2015 Highways Magazine Excellence Awards, the first for a lighting project, and for all involved and the first for a charity. (see page 17). The Covent Garden Lantern™ has created consistency throughout our public realm; at day through the presence of an imposing lantern and at night by lighting suitable for a conservation area (both reasons for the involvement of Historic England).

If you feel they might augment any of your conservation areas do draw them to attention of your lighting officers or ask us for further details.

David Bieda

The Seven Dials Trust.

info@sevendials.com 020-7437-5512 ■

Spotlight on West Hampstead Amenity and Transport (WHAT)

Former Chair **Virginia Berridge** describes how WHAT developed its own ideas and strategies for issues which are still on the agenda forty years later

West Hampstead Amenity and Transport is the current name but at its inception WHAT stood for West Hampstead Action on Traffic. The organisation began with a demonstration in 1973, when local people gathered on West End Green, a small open space in the centre of West Hampstead. They formed a crocodile, crossing the Green and the main road, West End Lane, which snakes round both sides of the Green. This effectively stalled all traffic passing through the area. A mild mannered college lecturer, Don Hill, stood on a chair on the Green and made an extempore speech to the participants, denouncing the impact of traffic on the area. WHAT was borne as an organisation at that stage.

1970s road widening schemes

1973 was when the love affair with the car in London and other big cities was beginning to be questioned. The influential Buchanan Report on Traffic in Towns of 1963 had indeed used West End Lane as one example of the conflict between polluting cars and people on the pavements. But the steamroller of road development initially continued, and roads in West Hampstead and across north west London had been earmarked for widening and expansion into an inner London motorway (of which Westway was the only section built). The establishment of WHAT was a particular response to the newly formed London Borough of Camden's 1973 Road Network and Environmental Policy Management document. This proposed a borough wide network of main distributor roads which would take the main bulk of traffic. Between them would be environmental areas which would be traffic free.

There were protests all over the borough with a loose coordination through a "No to the Network" organisation. Local groups still in existence, but now with a different purpose, were set up at this time, such as the South End Green Association and the Belsize Residents' Association. Protestors pointed out that these major roads were also heavily residential and that residents would suffer increased pollution because of the car traffic.

WHAT officers challenged the environmental area policy in detailed

WHAT is unusual in the wide range of its interests over the years. It has taken an active role in planning matters but this is by no means its only focus.

submissions to Camden's Borough Plan hearings in 1976-77. These were non-professionals in the planning field who had developed enough expertise to be able to challenge the policy. This ran strongly counter to the emphasis on professional expertise in planning circles, but ensured that WHAT had to be taken seriously.

A change of name

This stance was taken forward by John Mathews, an ASTMS union researcher who became the next WHAT chair at the end of the decade. He and the committee developed an interest in environmental issues. There was a change of name in 1977 and WHAT came to stand for West Hampstead Amenity and Transport, not Action on Traffic, and broadened its remit to the local environment in all aspects. It developed its own ideas and strategies for issues which are still on the agenda forty years later. It worked with the Ring Rail group which wanted to upgrade and modernise what was then called the North London Line and to open up the possibilities of rail integration in a circular network of lines round inner London. This had to wait for Ken Livingstone's tenure as Mayor of London and the development of what is now called London Overground under the aegis of Transport for London.

It also developed its own strategies for what were then called the 'railway lands' in West Hampstead. In 1979 it published a discussion document (price 20p) urging better use of these lands which lay between the three different rail and tube lines which intersect the centre of West Hampstead. It wanted a low rise craft and light industrial development with plenty of pedestrian

access. This did not happen and these areas were rezoned as an 'area of intensification' in the early twenty first century in the London Plan, the cross-London planning framework produced by the Mayor, with proposals for substantial housing development. High-rise rather than low rise became the norm and there were continuing local battles about the nature of the housing and the relationship to existing local facilities. WHAT continued to take a lead in these discussions, producing their own blueprint at one stage for possible interchange options.

Initiatives by WHAT

WHAT is unusual in the wide range of its interests over the years. It has taken an active role in planning matters but this is by no means its only focus. A bus group operated on a fluctuating basis from the mid-1970s, carrying out surveys and prodding and chivvying TfL and the bus operators about local routes, their pattern and reliability. A bus survey published in 2004 revealed some serious deficiencies in the timing and operation of local buses. Shortly afterwards, TfL itself introduced regular monitoring of bus timing with statistics on their own website and these were used in negotiations with the bus operators.

Local floods in 2002 were another issue taken up by WHAT. Camden invited its secretary to sit as a public member on a council scrutiny committee inquiring into the floods. As a result serious attention was paid to the area and its drainage by Thames Water. Sewer renewal took place and the local risk was recognised with regular gully and drainage clearing. Camden publicised a local public meeting set up by WHAT to disseminate information about its response and the report of the scrutiny panel.

Recently air pollution has come back onto the agenda. WHAT had campaigned on lead in petrol in the 1970s and 80s, even submitting the teeth of WHAT members' children for analysis. More recently the issue is diesel and the role of taxis and buses in London as well as cars, and a well attended public meeting was held on this subject. It continues its role as a local group covering anything relevant to transport and the environment in the area - a very wide brief compared to the street or area specific focus of much local activism.



West Hampstead Amenity and Transport

Contact: John Saynor, Chair
email: whatnw6@gmail.com
website: www.whatnw6.org.uk

John Saynor

Into the future

WHAT like all organisations established for some while has had to get to grips with new technology and also with committee renewal. The arrival of 'new kids on the block' has seen local street specific residents' associations and also a neighbourhood development Forum (NDF) established which produced a local plan. The long term Chair (author of this article) gave up the role eighteen months ago and the organisation has successfully renewed with initially two Co-chairs and now a single Chair and two thriving sub committees on Environment and Transport. ■



Above right: West End Lane;

Right The new Thameslink station, one of three in close proximity on West End Lane; the third is West Hampstead Underground.



Below: Community fair on Fortune Green



The old North London Line, West Hampstead station now the London Overground

Age: 44

Circumstances of Birth: formed in 1973 with a demonstration on West End Green, in protest at the impact of traffic on the neighbourhood, and in response to the London Borough of Camden's Road Network and Environmental Policy which would have increased pollution on residential roads.

Biggest Successes: include, being represented on a scrutiny panel investigating local flooding in 2002 and helping secure the renewal of sewers and measures against future devastation in the area. WHAT was also the first organisation to think proactively about the options for the West Hampstead rail interchange, putting forward proposals which then built into a longer term response to this issue.

Biggest Disappointments/Frustrations: The impenetrability of Transport for London, although this has improved recently with better liaison established.

Present Preoccupations: Transport: successful initiative to persuade TfL to build a new West Hampstead Overground station, with lifts, taking advantage of S.106 money and central government funding. Major campaign, building on work we have done over the years on the West Hampstead transport interchange, to get a lift installed at West Hampstead tube station, the only local station left without step free access. Blueprint for the area round the stations which would benefit pedestrians and road users currently being discussed with Camden.

Environment sub committee: focusses on recycling since the institution of a new refuse and recycling contract by Camden. We have held one public meeting on the topic and another is planned for this autumn. We have also taken a recent interest in rented housing in the area and submitted evidence to a Camden scrutiny committee on this subject arguing for the extension of landlord licensing in the borough.

Working Details: Operates according to 1973 constitution. Committee of around 12 with cooption possible. Membership around 170 Annual subscriptions – £5. Publications: twice yearly newsletter. Regular e mails to members and twice yearly public meeting. Website currently defunct and a new one planned.

Special Characteristics: Through research and long term involvement in the local scene WHAT has a reputation for informed comment and response on local issues.

Last Word: We have developed good networks with Council officials and local councillors, also with GLA members and our MPTulip Siddiq. ■

The Chislehurst Society safeguards the future of Chislehurst commons

Chairman **Tony Allen** give a fascinating account, with some historical background, of this outstanding achievement

The Chislehurst Society has announced that it has purchased Chislehurst Commons to safeguard their future for the benefit and enjoyment of the community. The 180 acres of common land in and around Chislehurst in the London Borough of Bromley have passed through generations of monarchs and landed aristocracy since the 10th century.

What are the commons?

The woodlands, grasslands, heathlands and ponds that make up Chislehurst Commons give the area its rural charm. The diverse habitats are home to rare species of plants as well as birds, reptiles, amphibians and small mammals.

Legal protection

The commons embody the ancient 'right to roam' and have been fiercely protected by local residents for centuries. History records various moments when the people of Chislehurst had to stand up to the Lord of the Manor to maintain their rights as 'commoners' and prevent enclosure. Prominent residents lobbied for an Act of Parliament that was passed in 1888 to guarantee both protection of the land and a public right to use it.

The Act - still in force today - also established a local body to preserve and maintain the land. This body, now known as Chislehurst Commons, is a charity run by a voluntary Board of Trustees and employs two full-time keepers to maintain the 180 acres.

What is the significance?

Purchase of the commons is historically

significant because for the first time in history the land is now owned by a charitable entity representative of the people of Chislehurst. The Society's main purpose includes the preservation and protection of local amenities.

Whilst the Chislehurst Society is now 'Lord of the Manor', Chislehurst Commons retains its day to day responsibility for managing the green spaces and will continue its invaluable work.

The commons will still play host to annual events such as the Open Air Cinema, the Big Draw and the Chislehurst Chase. These events are organised by volunteers to bring the community together and to help raise funds for upkeep of the Commons. Other events include the annual May Queen festival and the Rotary Summer Fair.

History of the commons

The first recorded owner of Chislehurst Manor and its commons was King Eadgar, in 974. With some interesting complications along the way (for a while the commons belonged to a hospice at the Great St Bernard Pass in Switzerland), the land passed through successive monarchs until the time of Henry VIII.

It was then sold to the Walsinghams, an influential family at the Tudor Courts. Their most famous son, Sir Francis, is often referred to as Queen Elizabeth I's 'Spymaster'. In the late 17th Century, the Walsinghams sold the land to Richard Bettenson, whose most famous descendant is Thomas Townshend, the first Viscount Sydney; the man after whom Sydney, Australia is named.

New Lord of the Manor

The commons have remained privately owned by Viscount Sydney's surviving descendants, who earlier this year expressed an interest in selling the freehold.

The freeholder of the commons carries the title 'Lord of the Manor'. Since 1975, the title has been held by family trusts on behalf of the Marsham-Townshend family.

The trusts made the decision to sell as they are not involved in the day to day running of the commons, nor are they obliged to finance it. As none of the family lives locally, it was their wish that ownership should be transferred to a local entity better placed to act in the interests of Chislehurst.

Generosity of Chislehurst residents

We are a widely supported membership organisation and the generosity of Chislehurst residents, past and present, has enabled us to make this important acquisition. The commons are the very essence of Chislehurst and I am delighted that we have been able to use our funds to secure the freehold for the benefit of residents. The Chislehurst Society is wholly committed to the preservation of the commons for future generations.

Funding

Upkeep of the common land costs £100k a year. Chislehurst Commons receives a third of its funding from the London Borough of Bromley, raising the rest from small grants and donations from residents. The Trustees and keepers are assisted by volunteers who contribute over 2,000 hours a year to

help conserve the commons.

The purchase of the freehold is an exciting development for both Chislehurst Commons and the Chislehurst Society. The two charities now look forward to working together to enhance and protect the commons for the benefit and enjoyment of residents and visitors, now and in the future. ■



New housing developments - grey and greenless

Diane Burridge reports on a recent Urban Design London event and recent research

Just as the virtues of green open spaces for people's mental and physical well-being are being extolled, new housing developments all around London seem to be ignoring such needs.

Public Health England in March 2017 called again for the Government to ensure that people have access to green open spaces, and Nick Cavill of Oxford University's Department of Public Health noted the many benefits from activities undertaken outdoors - mentally and physically. And yet plans for housing in Enfield, Croydon, Ilford and Harrow, as discussed at a recent Urban Design London event*, show dense development, with so little open green space.

Dense development in outer London

Outline proposals for **Enfield Town Centre** do not give too many details - so as not to alarm local residents, I wondered? Speakers did acknowledge the need to get the balance right between supporting new retail growth whilst there are empty retail units in the town centre. But will there be open areas for people to mingle and relax in, as human beings are wont to do?

Sixteen areas for development have been identified by **Croydon's** Placemaking Team - all with distinct identities. An 'evolutionary increase' in housing is planned to meet the target of 34,750 new homes being built between 2016 and 2036. The Intensification Areas could be 'contentious' admitted speakers at the event, although Croydon's Public Realm Design Guide will guide better designs, it is hoped. Just approved by Croydon Council is the One Lansdowne Road development, with 794 flats (making this the UK's tallest residential building and the second tallest building after the Shard). This site is right in the middle of Croydon and will be 68 storeys high with offices, shops and a free public viewing deck, restaurant and bar on the top floor. I could not see any open green spaces or play areas...just glass, glass, glass. Hopefully, the £340 million loan that Croydon Council has obtained for public realm improvements and infrastructure will go towards greening some spaces here.

Twelve areas are designated for major housing projects in **Harrow**, many of which

were once car parks. Even in this outer London borough, car ownership is decreasing year on year. Surely with such land now becoming available, some thought could go towards improving or even having more green open spaces, leisure centres, play areas, schools etc. There is even a loss of open space planned - in the Byron Quarter development. Here, the existing park 'will interact with new residential blocks'... whatever that means. And although there will be high density housing of 900 units, there will be 'pedestrianised courtyards'. Thankfully, the contentious housing plans at Grange Farm are now being 'readjusted', after an outcry.

A cluster of high rise buildings are now going up near **Ilford** Station, where Crossrail will be stopping in 2018. I suppose residents should be grateful for the planned 'roof garden' on top of the large retail unit at the base of the Valentine's House development. This was the only green area I could see. How will this be accessed and for whom? This cluster of high rise housing overlooking a railway station, with so little green open space, could be so dreary for the residents, perhaps desperate to see some greenery somewhere.

'A compelling public realm offer'

Local authorities wanting to support public and private sector collaboration were advised at the seminar that they should have 'a compelling public realm offer'. To sell, I thought? As it is, existing facilities are over-stretched or have been cut. Who will pay for the running costs of any new 'compelling public realm', including green open spaces? The pressure on local authorities is to sell off any land, including the open spaces on existing council estates.

Looking at the council housing estates of the twentieth century, there are football pitches, play areas, community centres etc - even on estates in the inner city. It can be done: proposals for the £1 billion total redevelopment of Wandsworth Council's Winstanley and York Road Estate near Clapham Junction will include 2,200 new homes, a gym, sports hall, swimming pool, library and children's centre.

The cumulative effect of these recent housing development approvals could

result in a chronic lack of public realm 'goods', including green open spaces.

Decline in physical activity

Where can people connect and build social and community bonds, let alone exercise and simply enjoy green open spaces, for their health and mental well-being? There has been a massive decline in physical activity since the 1960s, due to a wide variety of reasons. Physical inactivity is responsible for one in six deaths in the UK - which is the same as smoking. This costs the UK an estimated £7.4 billion each year.** Accessible green open spaces are needed more than ever.

Funding reduced

Planning Futures, in a recent survey, found that development management teams have been reduced by 13 per cent over a 10-year period, and planning policy teams by 18 per cent. Local authorities are having to focus on their statutory obligations such as the speed of decision-making and optimising the housing potential of sites. Perhaps these teams are not in a position to insist upon green open spaces, with this pressure from developers, councillors and the Mayor?

And Government funding for local authorities to build affordable homes with public realm facilities, such as green open spaces, has plummeted by 50% between 2010/11 and 2016/17. Funding for housing overall has halved to 0.2% of Gross Domestic Product, compared to 0.4% in 2005.*** So the pressure is on for high density, with any open space seen as a luxury, not as a human need.

If we care about the quality of life for people living in densely developed housing areas, we need to examine plans for these with great vigilance. So hard to do, in an era of cuts and when many architects, developers and decision makers are enthralled by high rise and dense housing - often the same people who would not want to live in these areas themselves - much preferring to have access to green open spaces. ■

*Zones Two and Beyond: building neighbourhoods, UDL, 19 September 2017.

** Public Health England, March 2017 Report

*** National Housing Federation. ■

The Mayor's draft Housing Strategy

Open Meeting 11th September 2017

Dominic Curran, Senior Housing Policy Officer at the Greater London Authority, described the Mayor's draft Housing Strategy, which had been published the day before, and answered questions about it. The GLA will be holding workshops and events, and consulting up to 7th December. **Peter Pickering** reports

Mr Curran said that the Mayor wanted as much publicity as possible for this important strategy which is a vital component of the new London Plan. Radical policies were needed to meet London's housing crisis - the problem of supply. New housing had to be genuinely affordable; and there must be social infrastructure. Mr Curran summarised the six chapters: Housing in London and the Mayor's vision; Building homes for Londoners; Delivering genuinely affordable homes; High quality homes and inclusive neighbourhoods; A fairer deal for private renters and leaseholders; and Tackling homelessness and helping rough sleepers. There was then a discussion, Mr Curran answering questions and points made.

Will there be time constraints?

Peter Eversden wondered how the time required to consult on and finalise this document fitted in with the preparation of the new London Plan and its Examination-in-Public. He welcomed the proper control proposed for Houses in Multiple Occupation, but was concerned that the provision of affordable houses would apparently outrank rules about density and space standards. Densification in outer London was likely to upset the borough councils and their residents.

Will central Government change attitude?

Mr Catto (Putney Society) asked about the document's hopes to 'encourage' central Government; was it realistic to expect central Government to change its attitudes and do what it had not hitherto been doing? Mr Curran recognised that the draft strategy was in part a lobbying document; the Mayor did not have great powers, but he would not stay silent. Mr Eversden observed that boroughs themselves could build, if they could retain more money.

What about residential towers?

Roden Richardson (Charlton Society) asked about the Mayor's attitude to residential towers and their design. Mr Curran said that the Mayor did not oppose towers in principle; but some towers with social housing should be demolished and central government should meet the cost.

Intervention in the land market

Michaëlle Bach asked what London would actually look like in fifteen years time if the Mayor's strategy were carried through; how did he link building houses with building communities? Mr Curran said that the Mayor's aim was a more inclusive and affordable city. Mr Eversden said that to get more building land there would have to be more intervention in the land market.

Mr Walters (SW Planning) said that housing zones were working in practice - Havering Council (for whom he was acting) were using their SDP policies to refuse applications that were not holistic for a wide area. But generally, the draft strategy was very aspirational. The public sector was under immense financial pressure, and the NHS would want their surplus land to produce the maximum profit for the health service which they would not get if it went for affordable housing. Mr Curran admitted that there was tension for the NHS (and similarly for Transport for London); but if local authorities and the NHS worked together the priorities of both of them could be met. Mr Walters said that this would be feasible only if the NHS land were surrounded by other non-conforming land; not if it were surrounded by residential land.

Should demand be restrained?

Peter Pickering (Finchley Society) echoed Mr Eversden's forecast that outer London boroughs and their residents would be upset at the suggestion that population, and therefore building, would continue to increase, and would look to see a halt. Rather than inexorably increasing supply there should be action to restrain demand. Mr Curran explained that other options were not practical or acceptable. There was a backlog of housing need that must be met. Ms Elks (Hackney Society) said that it was ridiculous to assert that Barnet was full.

A representative of the Highgate Society asked about university accommodation. Mr Curran replied that the draft strategy did not cover this subject.

Professor Edwards (UCL/Just Space) said that some action could be taken on the demand side - for instance to

encourage downsizing by people like him. Mr Eversden and Mr Bach agreed that downsizing should be encouraged by increasing choice. Mr Pickering said that the bedroom tax nudged people away from houses that were bigger than they needed; it should perhaps not be abolished (as the Mayor was proposing), but generalised beyond the social rented sector, and through tweaking the council tax rules.

Mr Coupe (Dulwich Society) said that the Mayor must think of the environmental capacity of London; there were finite limits, and people should be encouraged to move out of London, by relocating some employment. Mr Curran said that that was not within the scope of the Housing Strategy, and he doubted anyway if it would work. Mr Eversden said that the Economic Development Strategy might be relevant, and that other major UK cities should be encouraged to draw population from London. Professor Edwards pointed out that the economic disparity between regions was growing in the UK, while it was reducing in other, similar, countries.

Affordability problems

Professor Edwards was also concerned that the Mayor's policy on affordability was too subservient to the concepts of the Government; shared ownership, for instance, was not affordable to anyone on less than two and a half times the London Living Wage. The Government's proposals on LHA benefits would make supported housing impossible to provide. Mr Curran said that the Mayor intended a third of the affordable housing to be at the London Social Rent.

Mr Schumacher (St John's Wood Society) asked where was the greatest convergence and divergence between the boroughs. Mr Eversden suggested densification in outer London as the greatest divergence, and the greatest convergence in the desire for stronger viability assessment and for more intervention in the housing market in the interests of affordability.

Mr Schumacher also asked about the definition of a 'small site'; Mr Curran said that in practice there was flexibility here.

John Trotter of the Stamford Brook Residents Association said that the Mayor

The Mayor's Draft London Housing Strategy and drive for affordable homes

Helen Marcus comments

was recorded as not being against rent stabilisation. What did that mean in practice - some form of rent control? Mr Curran said that the policy on renting was discussed extensively in the draft strategy; it would be developed in consultation with as many groups as possible; but the danger of rent control was that it would choke off supply.

Mr Coupe expressed concern that assisting people to get on the housing ladder, as the Government wished, could prove disastrous if interest rates rose.

Jan Morgan (Highgate Society) wondered when it would be judged that the right number of homes in London was affordable - or, if the population of London is for ever increasing, would it always be out of reach? She suggested that a developer would appeal if he was refused planning permission on the grounds that his development was viable with a larger number of affordable homes than he was prepared to provide. Mr Curran said that such an appeal would be assessed in accordance with the Mayor's current planning policy; there were several measures of affordability, and the GLA did not assume it would necessarily win such a case; they just had to do the best they could.

Ms Wilson (Barnet Society) suggested that key workers should have priority in housing. Mr Curran said that problems of definition made such a policy impossible. ■

The Strategy and the Evidence

Base can be downloaded from [w](https://www.london.gov.uk/) <https://www.london.gov.uk/> Consultation ends on 7 December 2017.

You can respond online at: [london.gov.uk/housing-strategy](https://www.london.gov.uk/housing-strategy) or submit comments by email to: housingstrategy@london.gov.uk ■

The Mayor's Draft London Housing Strategy sets out five priorities:

- i. Building homes for Londoners
- ii. Delivering genuinely affordable homes
- iii. High quality homes and inclusive neighbourhoods
- iv. A fairer deal for private renters and leaseholders
- v. Tackling homelessness and helping rough sleepers

A contradiction

The basic premise is still that a shortage of dwellings is the underlying problem.

But the evidence base, *The Housing-in-London-2017-report*, contradicts this. It states that "By the 1970s there were finally more homes than households in London", and that "There are now slightly more homes than households in London". This document contains much useful information some of which tends to contradict some of the Mayor's assertions.

Cause for concern

Some of the Mayor's policies give cause for concern. He is committed to: "promote higher density schemes" and "the importance of more higher density homes across the city, including in outer London". Will this really be sustainable? Or produce pleasant places for Londoners to live? Or will it simply produce the slums of the future? Is it even necessary? With the 270,000 unimplemented housing permissions in the pipeline and a great deal of undeveloped brownfield land coming on stream, there must surely be enough land to provide new housing for many years to come before one resorts to these kinds of town cramming policies.

The Mayor's statement that he "will set out clear housing targets for every council in London" to address "imbalances between areas" sounds as though town cramming will be the order of the day and that local wishes will be over-riden. He considers that significantly more than 50,000 new homes will be needed each year for at least the next 25 years. But the Evidence paper suggests that projected figures for population growth "are unconstrained by housing supply. In reality, if not enough new housing is built population growth may well be lower".

Welcome commitments include "councils and housing associations enabled to build more homes, supported by a long-term, stable and devolved funding settlement from Government"

and opposition to "any plans to force councils to sell their homes in higher value areas." The Mayor considers that 80 per cent of market rents is not genuinely affordable in most parts of London and "will not authorise any further conversions of social rented homes to higher rents."

He also wants to "protect London's existing affordable housing"; and "will do what he can to ensure that affordable homes are protected for future generations". He sets out a raft of measures for improving standards for private renters, and work with councils and Government to target enforcement against poor quality landlords.

His proposals for a Construction Academy scheme to deal with the skills shortage would be a positive step.

Call-ins lead to more affordable homes

The Mayor has called in several recent planning applications to increase the affordable homes being built. On the site in Swandon Way, **Wandsworth**, where only 23 per cent of the 348 homes in the scheme were to be affordable, there will now be 35 per cent

On the former National Institute for Medical Research site in Mill Hill, **Barnet** (see last Newsforum) the level of affordable homes has been doubled to 40 per cent. Some sports pitches previously in private hands will be transferred to the local council for community use. Fewer trees will be removed: originally 507 were to be cut down; now only 388 will be removed and more new trees - 839 - will be planted. This has been achieved through reducing the number of car parking spaces from 613 to 535. As this site has poor transport links one wonders how residents will manage without cars.

Hale Wharf (**Tottenham Hale**) and Palmerston Road (**Wealdstone**) developments will now have 35 per cent and 41 per cent affordable units respectively. Both are high-density schemes close to transport links, with tower blocks of 21 storeys at Hale Wharf and 17 storeys at Palmerston Road.

Plans to replace the New Scotland Yard building at 8-10 Broadway in **Westminster** have been subjected to scrutiny by the Mayor's new team of viability experts following the developer, BL Developments's application to increase the number of homes from 268 to 295, with no increase in the number of affordable units - only three per cent - or payment in lieu. Permission for this amended application has been refused. ■

Round the Societies

A round-up of news from our member societies.

By **Diane Burridge**

A cultural complex for Peckham

Mountview Academy of Theatre Arts has chosen to create a purpose-built complex next to the award-winning Peckham Square Library. Supported by the **Peckham Society**, planning permission was granted in April for a building which will bring all the departments of the Academy under one roof for the first time. A 200-seat main house, 80-seat theatre, studios for dancing and acting classes, as well as TV and radio work, are all planned. Both professional and community groups will be able to use the facilities in the evenings, weekends and holidays. Half of undergraduate students will receive a bursary and there will be a hardship fund for those students needing this support. Planned to open in September 2018, the Academy is halfway towards raising the remaining £6.5million needed.

The Great North Wood

This ancient wooded landscape once stretched across the Sydenham Ridge from Deptford to Selhurst. It lives on in fragments of small woodlands, parks, cemeteries, playing fields and back gardens. The **Dulwich Society** and **Sydenham Society** are supporting a four year project, led by the London Wildlife Trust, to revive the Great North Wood and connect this more with community groups, councils and landowners. The Trust will work with such partners across 13 key sites in Bromley, Croydon, Lambeth, Lewisham and Southwark. Funding has come from the Heritage Lottery, Greater London Authority, Veolia Environmental Trust, the Dulwich Estate and the Dulwich Society.

Events Policy for Brockwell Park

The battle by the Friends of Brockwell Park to 'have the unique and fragile nature of urban parks recognised as the dynamic contributor to urban health and well-being, has moved one step forward. The Friends have formally agreed an Events Policy which has been endorsed by the Brockwell Park Community Partnership. One matter raised is the need to monitor noise levels and other disturbances due to events in the park, and for user-friendly accessible information to be available to all interested parties as part of any consultation programme. How much events cost to the park and how much the promoters contribute to these costs should also be made available, as well as the intended objectives for money raised from parks. Such queries will continue to be raised by the Friends.

Payphone Kiosks in Westminster

There have been 86 planning applications for payphone kiosks, the majority of which will be located on city blocks which already have BT and other payphone kiosks, sometimes located close together. The St Marylebone Society and other societies have objected to these, as most are being built to provide visually degrading advertisements. The existing, often poorly maintained, BT boxes are not being removed owing to the costs of doing this.

Councils have limited powers to refuse telecoms equipment and Westminster Council has written to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, Sajid Javid MP, to ask for additional powers to deal with this attempt to use outdated legislation to put up such kiosks for financial gain.

Landmark House height reduced

The **Hammersmith and Fulham Historic Buildings Group** (HFHB), the Hammersmith Society and other groups, have successfully ensured an amendment to proposals for Landmark House, reducing the proposed height of this from 28 storeys to 22. The downside of this achievement has been that the width of all three blocks has been increased. Concerns continue about the impact of this development on surrounding listed buildings particularly St Paul's Church, Angel Walk and Hammersmith Bridge, and on the Riverside when viewed from the Surrey bank.

Late night licences in Richmond

The **Richmond Society** and residents are opposing applications to sell alcohol by the two Richmond Odeon cinemas. The closing hour on the existing licences for films is 00:30 with non-standard times allowed on request to the Council of 01:00 on Saturdays and to 02:00 on three occasions a year for each cinema. The cinemas are seeking to add to the licence the sale of alcohol between 08:30 and 23:00 seven days a week. Consumption could continue until the above closing hours.

The cinemas have a combined seating capacity of around 900 and residents nearby are concerned at the potential for disturbance late at night as people leave the cinemas and walk past homes in the area. The Richmond Society is now in discussion with the Odeon and residents.

Litter on Clapham Common

The litter on the Clapham Common, especially during busy summer months, has become a disgrace to the Council. The **Clapham Society** has been working with Clapham Common Management Advisory Committee and other interested parties to improve the situation, and the Council has finally give a number of undertakings to improve the situation. Better litter receptacles and cleaning equipment, and the recruitment of weekend park attendants whose primary role will be litter collection, have been the results of many complaints. The situation has improved but vigilance is needed to ensure this situation continues.

Retention of quirky Rectory Grove buildings

The **Clapham Society** lobbied for many years to retain the existing quirky buildings of Rectory Grove, after Lambeth Council planned to demolish them to develop new build. In 2016/17, Lambeth finally sold off all the properties, mainly to the Lexadon Property Group, which plans to repair and market these privately.

The Clapham Society wanted to retain the houses for rent as a group, possibly by a housing association. However, the society did succeed in ensuring the retention of the buildings, helping to keep this part of old Clapham architecturally interesting.

A series of articles in the Times newspaper of the history of Rectory Grove between 1972 and 1979, and the story of the Public Inquiry, is in the Clapham Society book: Clapham in the Twentieth Century, price £5, available at Clapham Books, 26 The Pavement, SW4 0JA

Peter Eversden's letter to the Evening Standard "Bonfire of the Nimbys" - the complete text:

Sir Mark Bolleat's comments about communities in London ('Bonfire of the Nimbys' ES 18 Oct 2017) were insulting and so wrong. Residents in London put effort into getting their Council's Local Plan to define what housing developments of what type will be delivered and where. They want the right kind of affordable homes for their children and grand children. They become 'Nimbys' only when housing schemes are proposed or approved which do not conform to policy, fail to meet needs and harm their neighbourhood. There are over 270,000 approved homes in London that are not being built. How can Bolleat say it is a "myth" that building is too slow? New and large market homes which are sold off plan as investments for foreign buyers fail to meet London's housing requirements and keep prices high. They use land that is needed for real homes for London's workers. How does Bolleat think that problem is another myth?

He proposes that young "have nots" who are priced off the housing ladder should be heard but it is developers who are not listening. It is not the planning system that is at fault. Bolleat wants penalties applied to public sector bodies that hold on to land they do not need. The real issue is that when they dispose of it they want maximum profit, rather than sell it at existing use values. That reduces the percentage of affordable homes that are likely to be built on such land. Densification of parts of London is possible, as he wrote, but only if done in a way that is sensitive to local context and character. Few people or planning committees would object to more of the mansion blocks and multi-storey terraces that have delivered high densities and beautiful townscapes since Georgian and Victorian times.

The problem is that architects offer ugly skyscrapers instead, with a lack of the mix of types of homes required. Developers should plan to deliver what London's boroughs and their residents want on the land for development that we have, then Nimbyism would fade away and decisions would be quick and low cost. Instead of that, Bolleat recommends building homes on Green Belt land but such open space belongs to us all and opposition to its loss would a rouse more objections.

Peter Eversden MBE, London Forum of Amenity and Civic Societies

Commemorating traders and businesses

If you walk round the Crystal Palace Triangle, many of the shop windows display an adhesive 'blue plaque' which commemorates a previous trader or business. The **Norwood Society** has undertaken unique research into the history of these 126 businesses and produced a free leaflet locating the plaques. This community project brought together young and old to research street directories, census returns and newspaper adverts.

Fight to save historic gas holders

The **Sydenham Society** with the 'These Streets Belong to Us' association recently presented a joint petition featuring over 600 signatures to Lewisham Council, requesting the Council to save the historic landmark gasholders in Bell Green, Lower Sydenham. These are planned to be demolished to make way for an Aldi supermarket. The society has called for the gas holders to be listed, and for the land around these to be used for residential units rather than retail developments.

SAVE to challenge Paddington Cube decision

SAVE Britain's Heritage has been granted permission to challenge the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government in the High Court over his refusal to call in the Paddington Cube proposals for public inquiry. Judge Sir Ross Cranston gave permission in August for the challenge to proceed to judicial review and it was expected to be heard within the ensuing three months.

Marcus Binney, Executive President of SAVE said: "SAVE is deeply concerned at the way Westminster Council brushed aside its own conservation policy to allow this grossly overscaled building in a conservation area and next to one of London's great Victorian masterpieces. We hope this will open the way to a proper thorough reconsideration of this contentious application." ■

Seven Dials Trust Award

The Covent Garden Community Lighting Partnership

Historic England citation:

"Seven Dials is one of London's most historic neighbourhoods with a unique character and a strong community. The project shows that it possible to develop street furniture which is historically accurate, underpins local historic character, and can meet and exceed today's rigorous performance standards. The Trusts dedication to achieving such high standards and to working in partnership has borne exemplary results."

<http://bit.ly/2h2V9R4>

(see David Bieda's article page 8) ■



newsbriefs

News and issues of interest and concern to note.

Neave Brown awarded the Royal Institute of British Architects' Royal Gold Medal for 2018

Described by the RIBA as "a pioneer of quality public housing", the US-born architect, Neave Brown, is best known for the post-war housing, most of which is low-rise and high density, that he designed during his time at Camden council. One of the best-known is the unusual 1970s Alexandra Road terraced estate, Grade II* listed, near Swiss Cottage. Brown, now 88, is the only living architect to have all of his projects in the UK listed.

Other housing projects in north London include a terrace on Winscombe Street built between 1963 and 1966, where he himself lived for 40 years, and the Dunboyne Road Estate constructed between 1971 and 1977, and where he now lives. Both have been given Grade II status.

He recently expressed the view that council high-rise blocks should never have been built because they ostracise the underprivileged into special places for the poor, and therefore they become colonies of underprivileged people. He also said that space standards should be reintroduced for public housing.

In addition to his work in England, he also designed projects in Italy and the Netherlands, including the Zwolestraat Development in The Hague with David Porter in 1994, and Smalle Haven residential scheme, Eindhoven, in 2002.

Roman sarcophagus found near Borough Market

A 1,600-year-old Roman sarcophagus has been unearthed at a building site in Swan Street, several metres underground, in an area that was used by the Romans as a burial ground. Its lid had been slid open and experts suspect that it was targeted by thieves back in the 18th century. It is thought to contain the remains of a mother, after the bones of a baby were found near by. A broken Roman bracelet was also found in the surrounding soil. The site was close to two large Roman roads and Roman rules on burials, which had to be outside of town walls, meant the location was a prime spot for historical finds. Archaeologists discovered the coffin six months into the dig just as they were due to finish their search. They will now be testing and dating their finds.

The Garden Bridge

The GLA Oversight Committee heard that Transport for London are still waiting to hear from the Garden Bridge Trust as to how much of the £20 million loan they received might be repaid. Overall £46 million worth of public money was spent. Len Duvall AM, Chair of the Committee, said TfL needs to ensure that the Garden Bridge Trust publishes detailed breakdowns of its pre-construction spending: "... the checks and balances have been loosened and I'm glad to hear that TfL changed its procurement processes." "Public trust must be restored after this fiasco and the responsibility for that lies firmly at the feet of TfL"

It was also said, unfortunately, that Dame Margaret Hodge MP who conducted an Independent Review into the Bridge thought that the concept of the bridge was fine – it was only the process that was dubious.

New householders "held to ransom" over unadopted roads

Owners of freehold houses on newly built unadopted streets are being "held to ransom" by management companies that charge households up to £660 a year for road maintenance. Normally housebuilders have new roads "adopted" by the local authority through a legal agreement under Section 38 of the Highways Act 1980, while the sewers underneath are covered by a similar Section 104 arrangement. But some developers are saving money by not fulfilling these agreements, leaving roads unadopted, and leaving homeowners to pay for the road's upkeep or see it fall into disrepair. Some builders are also being allowed to make roads narrower than usual. This causes problems when those living on these new roads wish to sell their homes, making it harder to find buyers and being forced to seek approval from road management committees.

Property 'flipping' and house prices

In July the Financial Times highlighted another cause of rising house prices: property 'flipping', when speculators buy and sell homes over a short period of time purely to make a profit. According to Countrywide, the estate agency, which analysed Land Registry data, some £5.5bn of homes across England and Wales were bought and sold more than once in the year to April. Quick turnrounds of expensive London homes are now less appealing and investors are looking for quick gains in outer boroughs and beyond London. The London boroughs of Newham and Waltham Forest saw a rise in this activity.

The new £10 T-Charge

The Mayor launched a £10 toxicity 'T Charge' aimed at older, more polluting vehicles on London roads on 23 October. It applies mainly to diesel and petrol vehicles registered before 2006, but includes later models too. It is additional to (and the same operating times as) the Congestion Charge (Monday to Friday 7am-6pm). However some critics have said that it would disproportionately affect smaller businesses and individuals on lower incomes. The Mayor has also launched an online Cleaner Vehicle Checker offering emissions data to help motorists choose less-polluting vehicles.

'Conflict of interest' at Westminster council

In August it was revealed that Westminster council owns and runs a private lobbying firm that offers to target local authorities for fee-paying companies. It is the sole shareholder in Westco, a communications and public affairs firm. Transparency campaigners said that there was an "obvious" potential for a conflict of interest.

The company is registered at the council's headquarters in city hall and its chairman is a Conservative councillor who is also on the planning committee of the London assembly. At least two of its employees combine their work for Westco with jobs at the authority. On its website, Westco makes explicit claims about its ability to influence both central and local government.

newsbriefs

Heathrow further consultation

Secretary of State for Transport, Chris Grayling, is proposing a "short period of further consultation" on the third runway at Heathrow. The statement co-incided with the publication of Sir Jeremy Sullivan's interim report which received more than 70,000 responses. But the unexpected general election in June upset the timetable so that key information on two of the main issues: revised aviation demand forecasts and the government's final air quality plan, in addition to noise pollution, was not included. It is expected to begin later this year. The new information, when it is published, could radically change the case for and against Heathrow. Already there is comment that the Gatwick option looks increasingly more viable.

Deepening concerns about Thames Water

There has been sustained public criticism of water companies with complex ownership structures such as Thames Water. The Financial Times has run several stories recently on the problems, from huge and unjustifiable emoluments for chief executives; vast sums paid out as dividends while almost all capital expenditure is financed by debt - now standing collectively at a towering £42bn (FT September 11, 2017) and failure to control pollution of lakes and rivers. And all this while customers' bills are rising to fund the massive shareholder payouts and mounting debt interest. Moreover the paper accused Ofwat of doing little about it and of being more focused on keeping the industry happy than it is on the consumers. Jonathan Ford called for "a wholesale rebalancing of the system. And if Ofwat will not do it, someone else should". (FT September 18, 2017)

Thames Water has been described as the worst of England's privatised water companies for leakage. A quarter of the water in London leaks away before it reaches customers, according to Ofwat, with the number of leaks rising this year. In one week in January, more than 1,000 repairs were needed. London's mains, the big supply pipes that often date from the Victorian era, have been bursting with alarming frequency in the past 12 months, according to an internal report commissioned by the board of Thames Water that has now been released to the public. It states that Thames lacks a "long-term strategy to replace the trunk mains". It did not have a good understanding of its main trunk network; failed to maintain a comprehensive database of its assets; had a shortage of out-of-hours staff to respond to an emergency event; and lacked a clear claims process for customers affected by flooding. An Ofwat survey of customer satisfaction released last week also found that Thames, which serves about a quarter of the population in England and Wales, came last on every score. (FT 19 October 2017)

Over the past decade, the nine main English water groups have made £18.8bn of post-tax profits in aggregate, according to a study by Greenwich University (See last Newsforum, no 76), which accuses Ofwat, for permitting it because it takes no interest in the companies' capital structures as long as they retain investment grade ratings.

Only since the 2014 Water Act, is Ofwat now monitoring the resilience of corporate structures, but this is a recent development; now that some companies are so indebted that they and their consumers are at risk. (Letter FT September 14).

New park on top of gravel quarry

Landscape architects Carmody Groarke and engineers Arup received planning permission from Hounslow Borough Council in July for a novel and complicated scheme at Rectory Farm, a 44 hectare site on Green Belt in Hounslow, east of Heathrow airport. The proposal, which the architects have been working on for eight years after winning a competition, is to excavate the land - one of the country's largest remaining deposits of high-quality gravel - in sections, replacing 3m tonnes of gravel after extraction with concrete basements. This will provide 180,000 sq m of space below ground, which could be used as warehousing (particularly given the potential expansion of the adjacent airport) but also for indoor sports and leisure facilities, a prospect backed by Sport England. At ground level will be a new park to be designed by Carmody Groarke who have developed a plan for an undulating landscape modelled using spoil from the excavations.

Help to Buy and its unintended consequences

According to Alastair Stewart, an analyst at broker Stockdale Securities, in August, housebuilders have been charging a premium of up to 5 per cent for homes sold using the government's Help to Buy equity loan scheme. It is causing prices for homes sold under the scheme to rise faster than the wider market, and has boosted margins and profits at house-builders without reducing pressure on the stretched housing market.

Another report from Morgan Stanley in October concurs and finds that the money has been almost entirely wasted. Headlined "The help to buy premium – and its unintended consequences", it unpicks the data, confirming that the major developers have been the beneficiaries. Although that wouldn't be hard since developers themselves have publicly said how much this misconceived scheme has boosted their profits.

Meanwhile yet another FT commentator, Jonathan Eley, poured cold water on the pundits who think there is a "chronic shortage of homes for sale". "Except" as he says "that there is not a shortage of homes for sale. More than half of homes on agents' books never sell, more in some areas. What happens to the rest? They either stay on the market, or are quietly withdrawn from sale. There is an alternative explanation for each of the factors above. It is that prices are simply too high". (Financial Times, July 29, 2017) He too remarks that the simple explanation for "housebuilders' exuberance" is the government's Help to Buy scheme, which accounts for up to half of their sales.

The Times Economics Editor Philip Aldrick called the Government's policy on councils building homes "perverse". In a most interesting article on August 26 2017 he describes how various governments have thwarted schemes to "capture the increase in land value" and to help local authorities "build more social housing". "The government knows what to do to fix Britain's 'broken housing market', as the White Paper put it. Social housing generated £9.3 billion in planning profits for the private sector in 2015, the Centre for Progressive Capitalism estimates. A little more of that for local authorities would go a long way." "The government knows it needs to raise more funds through land value capture, by streamlining section 106 and backing councils with debt." ■

Membership renewal

As you all know, London Forum relies totally on Members' subscriptions for its budget. Please do use the new membership renewal facility on the web site:

http://www.londonforum.org.uk/member_login.php and make sure to amend your data so that the right people are receiving post and email bulletins, otherwise societies might not be kept informed. The way in which members can amend their details is secure, as is the information we hold.

Queries can be sent to admin@londonforum.org.uk

The Newsforum team would be delighted to hear from members

Please send us your newsletters so that any items of interest can be featured in

Round the Societies:

dianeburridge@btinternet.com

The Editor would welcome submissions for the **Spotlight pages**

admin@londonforum.org.uk

Delivering Newsforum by email

The Newsforum in PDF form sent by email can be widely distributed at no cost. It is environmentally more friendly, saving paper, and it also saves London Forum a great deal of expense. If you do not keep your hard copy and feel you could do without it, please let us know via one of the email addresses below, giving your Society name as well as email address, so that we could reduce our postal mailing list and save printing and postage costs.

For information about the London Forum contact:



Peter Eversden Chairman
London Forum, 70 Cowcross Street,
London EC1M 6EJ
Telephone: 020 7993 5754
email chairman@londonforum.org.uk

Registered Charity Number 1093134

Dates for your diary

London Forum events

London Forum Open Meetings 2017

Save the Dates

2017

Tuesday November 28th

A presentation on the Mayor's Environment Strategy has been requested from a possible GLA speaker – to be confirmed.

2018

Monday January 29th

Thursday April 18th

Watch out for emails and consult the website nearer the time for more information

Meetings are held at **The Gallery,**

75 Cowcross Street, EC1M 6EJ, (Farringdon station)

All meetings begin with refreshments at 6pm for a 6:30pm start

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

NB - note the underscore: _ in the name

newsforum

Editor Helen Marcus

Editorial team Diane Burrige, Derek Chandler, Peter Eversden, Peter Pickering

Original design Ross Shaw

Original Spotlight concept Tony Aldous

Print Express Printing. Telephone 01733 230 800

Published by the London Forum, 70 Cowcross Street, London EC1M 6EJ. Telephone 020 7993 5754

Member societies are encouraged to use London Forum news in their own newsletters.

While the London Forum is concerned that the views written in articles are relevant and honestly held by the contributor, the opinions stated by individuals may not necessarily be held by the London Forum Executive, who are not in a position to vouch for their factual accuracy.