

newsforum



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

The London Forum of
Amenity and Civic Societies
Founded 1988

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Chairman's remarks

Ken Livingstone was elected for another term as London's Mayor but the Labour group leader, Toby Harris, who was also Chairman of the Metropolitan Police Authority, has lost his Brent and Harrow Assembly seat to a Conservative Member, Robert John Blackman.



That was the only political change in the constituencies but there were some new candidates elected. After adding in the London-wide Members, the Conservatives are now the largest group on the Assembly, with nine seats. Labour have seven, Liberal Democrats have five and the Greens and the UK Independence Party have two places each.

A two-thirds majority is required to challenge the Mayor's budget plans so there could be more debate and changing political 'partnerships' in the next four years in considering his expenditure and policies. We want the decisions to be based on sustainable development and for improvements in our quality of life in the capital.

Traffic and Transport

Ken has pledged to implement a tram along the Uxbridge Road and the extension of congestion charging to Shepherds Bush and through Earls Court. However, he has indicated that he would listen to people who strongly oppose his schemes, which is important, as our members and London's businesses seem to be against both projects. Transport and traffic improvements are necessary but not ones that would lead to loss of local shops and services, more vehicle 'rat-running' and increased pollution.

A full assessment of the capital's transport priorities has to be made and hundreds of millions of pounds of investment on the West London Tram may not deliver the best

benefits overall. The London Forum, as a GLA Stakeholder Group, keenly awaits the next stages of consultation and the preparation of the Mayor's new transport strategy for London.

We look for improvements in the reliability and service levels of the Underground and Network Rail services in the capital, with suitable Government investment. So far, the Infrastructure companies' deliveries of Tube enhancements and upgrades have not been impressive but they are now beginning to declare their plans for the future. Schemes they have introduced so far have had little local consultation with community groups and this has been taken up with Transport for London.

Urban design

There is now much encouragement in the strengthening of Urban Design resources in TfL and in several boroughs. The public realm changes in Kensington High Street are a fine example of what can be achieved and we hope our member societies will negotiate for similar upgrades by Councils in other town centres.

Planning

Civic and amenity societies will be facing significant development proposals in all areas, as shown in the Mayor's London Plan, and the battle for sustainability will be a key aspect of our work in the civic movement over the next few years. Several 'regenerated' areas in London still lack adequate education, health,

open space and other social facilities. The new local planning policy documents which must replace UDPs will have to address those needs for all in future. Several London Forum events have been held on planning subjects this year and we will continue to keep members aware of the changes and what has to be done to work with Councils to achieve the best local policies and community participation.

Communication

Updates on events, and key issues are now being sent to the majority of our members by email. Many of them forward the details to their officers, committee people and their own members through their email communications. If your organisation has given us a contact email address, I hope you are sending out what we supply. If we still communicate with you by post and telephone only, please let us have an address of someone who could receive information for you electronically. Those of you with 'web' access at home or in your local library may wish to keep an eye on the following sites for other updates.

www.planningportal.gov.uk

www.info4local.gov.uk

www.london.gov.uk

We are using some funds made available to us by The Civic Trust to improve the quality of printing of newsforum and I hope you like the result.

Peter Eversden Chairman ■

London Forum meets the London Transport Users Committee

David Lewis reports.

On 19th April a strong team from the London Transport Users Committee (LTUC), led by Suzanne May (Chair) and Rufus Barnes (Director), came to The Gallery to explain the Committee's role and discuss current transport issues with London Forum members.

LTUC is a statutory body appointed by the Greater London Assembly to monitor and express views on all forms of transport, including commuter rail services beyond the London boundary, and extending to taxis, cycling and walking. Members are selected after advertisement, and paid to devote 2-3 days a month to this work. There is some concern that the present membership of 25 may be reduced; it is already difficult to achieve comprehensive representation, although there is a wide age range, and a high proportion of women. There are 27 staff.

LTUC operates largely through two Sub-Committees (Service Quality and Service Development) and a number of Panels, which include many co-opted members from other user organisations. The Surface Transport Panel, for example, considers all changes to bus routes and railway timetables. A joint forum with Transport for London seeks to identify the best overall design for buses, and LTUC is also consulted on the design of railway rolling stock. However, transport operators are not obliged to take LTUC's advice.

There is an extensive website, and LTUC and its two Sub-Committees meet in public.

A research branch aims to play a proactive role on carefully selected issues, as well as collecting evidence to inform LTUC responses to consultations. Buses are the mode on which LTUC research has so far had most impact. Current research topics include early morning services, passenger information on operators, websites, and the adequacy of service in areas served by only a single bus route.

A Casework Panel investigates complaints from the public. The main subjects recently have been the temporary closure of the Central Line (for which some people have obtained compensation) and misleading features of publicity about oyster cards. LTUC is auditing a sample of operators' own complaints procedures, in the hope of reducing the number of complaints it receives.

Lively discussion took place on issues raised by London Forum members, including the existing congestion charge and the

"Rufus Barnes emphasised the role civic societies can play as a source of information about the great diversity of transport problems affecting Londoners."

proposed extension, the West London Tram, the case for trolleybuses, the design of buses and Underground and main line trains, the need for Orbital and better links between suburban town centres, positioning of bus stops, poor driving standards, a lack of bus routes from south London into the congestion charge zone, use of buses and trains in the evening, the possibility of switching off some traffic lights outside busy periods, and the advantages of removing guard rails. Looking further ahead, David Rennie put the case for electronic systems that will permit universal road pricing and control of vehicle speeds, in parallel with a dial-up minibus service to entice motorists to use public transport.

LTUC strongly supports the Mayor's campaign to take over the Strategic Rail Authority's responsibility for London commuter rail services. Under the present system there is constant pressure to degrade local rail services, and a forthcoming report reveals the lack of integration at stations served both by Underground and main line rail.

One outcome of the evening was agreement on both sides that similar meetings should be held annually. Peter Eversden noted the great range of reports LTUC produces, and their potential usefulness to civic societies; the London Forum has endorsed LTUC's conclusions on Thames Gateway crossings. Rufus Barnes emphasised the role civic societies can play as a source of information about the great diversity of transport problems affecting Londoners. Suggestions were invited for future research projects. If societies which are developing ideas on transport would like to discuss these with an LTUC member, Rufus Barnes can put them in touch with the most suitable person.

The offices of the London Transport Users Committee are at 6 Middle Street, EC1A 7JA. Telephone 020 7505 9000. Its website is www.ltuc.org.uk

David Lewis ■

Heritage is a human right

From The Heritage Link Newsletter, March 2004.

A parliamentary question and answer on human rights and listed buildings (asked on 7th March) seems to confirm that public interest in the heritage does have precedence over the rights of any individual or organisation to destroy that heritage.

Lord Monson asked: Further to the Written Answer by the Lord McIntosh of Haringey on 5th February, how is the principle of respect for private and family life and the home, guaranteed by Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights, reconciled with the current power of government to determine the interior layout of private dwelling houses which have not received state subsidies or tax concessions.

Lord McIntosh, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Culture, Media and Sport, replied that Buildings are listed because they are of special architectural or historic interest. Legislation provides that listed building consent must be obtained before carrying out work to a listed building which will affect its character as a building of architectural or historic interest. This will only entitle local authorities to "determine the interior layout of a private dwelling house" where the layout of the interior is part of the character of a listed building.

This legislation is compatible with Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights, which gives people the right to respect for their private and family life, their home and their correspondence. The Government consider that the restrictions on carrying out works to listed buildings do not interfere with this right to any significant degree.

If, however, Article 8 is engaged by the listing system, it is justified on the grounds that the system protects our historic buildings, and protects the rights of the general public and of future generations to enjoy the nation's heritage. The system which requires listed building consent before alterations affecting the character of a listed building is proportionate to achieve these aims ■

"The system protects our historic buildings and the rights of the general public. It also ensures that future generations are able to enjoy our nation's heritage."

In a nutshell: the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004

Adapted from the May 2004 Planning Portal website.

The new Planning and Compensation Act 2002 received Royal Assent on 13th May 2004, and comes into force in July. Regulations implementing the parts reforming development plans will come into force shortly afterwards, and those implementing the remaining sections of the Act over the next 12 months. Ministers say it is designed to pave the way for a "more flexible and responsive planning system". It:

- introduces what the government believes is a simpler and more flexible plan-making system at regional and local level;
- increases community involvement at regional and local level and enables provision of financial assistance to Planning Aid;
- improves the development control process by introducing standard application forms and changing the duration of planning permissions and consents, as well as new local permitted development rights provisions;
- speeds up the handling of major infrastructure projects by allowing the different elements of inquiries to be heard concurrently rather than consecutively;
- removes crown immunity;
- makes compulsory purchase simpler, fairer and quicker, to support major infrastructure and regeneration projects.

Parts 1 and 2 contain the measures which change development plan-making, replacing old structure plans; they will be a major challenge for LPAs and planners. The new elements are:

Regional:

- Each region will have a Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS);
- Existing Regional Planning Guidance (RPGs) will become the relevant RSS;
- Regional Planning Bodies (RPBs) must keep the RSS under review and monitor its implementation;
- The RPB must take advice from county councils and other bodies with strategic planning expertise about revisions, implementing and monitoring of RSS;
- The RPB must prepare a draft revision of the RSS when necessary;
- Housing allocations will be settled at this strategic level;
- There will be public involvement in the preparation of the RSS.

Local:

- LPAs will prepare Local Development Documents (LDDs), replacing local plans, unitary development plans and structure plans;

- Each LPA must have a local development scheme;
- These schemes will set out what LDDs the LPA will prepare, along with a timetable and whether they are to be prepared jointly with other authorities;
- County Councils will lose structure plans, but can participate in the preparation of LDDs (other than minerals or waste);
- LDDs must conform with the RSS (or in London, the London Development Strategy).

Part 2 of the Act makes general provision for the preparation, withdrawal, adoption and approval of LDDs and the examination of development plan documents. The inspector's decision, after public examination, will be binding – not, as at present, discretionary.

There will be a transitional phase. Councils with up-to-date local plans will be able to argue with their Regional Offices that they do not need to be superseded immediately.

Part 3 of the Act updates the definition of the Development Plan, including a new requirement that plan-makers have a duty to exercise their functions to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development.

Editorial view

The Forum has not yet had sufficient opportunity to study the Act and its implications in detail.

Our great concern is that the changes, particularly in the production of a raft of new local planning documents, revising them annually, and keeping up to speed on all the new Planning Policy Statements (PPS) which replace PPGs, will seriously overstretch many LPAs.

We are also concerned about proposed Statements of Community Involvement. In principle, they appear to herald a new age of public participation for which we have long struggled; however, there is no indication that there will be national minimum standards, which are essential if some local authorities are not to pay lip service

to the procedure, and we are pressing through the Civic Trust for them to be set.

The failures of the old system were due largely to lack of resources available to local authorities to employ adequate trained staff. Critics have suggested the legislation could make the planning system overly complicated and less democratic. Ministers naturally deny this and insist it will mean a new system to "make better plans and make better planning decisions more quickly". At first sight, it appears to introduce an immensely more complex new system and we are more inclined to agree with the "critics" ■

Spotlight on Elmbridge Borough Council

Residents oust political parties, and show how council should be run.

Elmbridge Borough came into being 30 years ago as part of the 1974 reorganisation of local government outside London. A merger of Esher urban district council and Walton and Weybridge, it is, in fact, only just outside London, and a proposal to include it when the Greater London Council was created in 1965 was the spur to the founding of Molesey Residents Association.

Now, 40 years later, the association is one of a consortium of local residents' organisations which controls Elmbridge council and has won plaudits from the National Audit Office for its performance as a local authority. In what for parliamentary purposes would seem to be rock-solid Tory territory, the Residents Group began taking seats from the Conservatives in the 1980s, deprived them of overall control in 1992, and then in 2002 gained an overall majority which, though slim, has proved durable.

Voters confirm mandate

Elmbridge elects a third of its council every year, and in every election since 2002 the voters have confirmed their mandate – this May's vote, with turnout more than 10% up, resulted in a council of 31 Residents Group councillors, 21 Conservatives, and 8 Liberal Democrats. There are still old strongholds which elect party political councillors – the Conservatives in Cobham, for instance, and the Lib Dems in Claygate – but most Elmbridge voters, whatever their allegiance in national elections, seem to approve of their non-party administration.

Why did Elmbridge reverse the national trend away from independent councillors in local government? Primarily, says council leader Alan Hopkins, because the Conservatives were making such a mess of things, particularly on the financial side. "They were borrowing from reserves, and the council's finances were in a very bad way. The district auditor refused to sign off the accounts". Ironic, he observes, since the Conservatives are often regarded as the party of business. "But local government finance is very complicated. So many people come in with a career in business, get elected and say, 'Let's sort out this council's finances.'" They seldom succeed because, he says, "local government finance is an entirely different ball game. You need to be businesslike, but you're not 'in business.'"

Hopkins, a retired pharmacist who grew up in south-east London, places great store on being businesslike but also on responding to local needs. One reason why the political parties lost out to the residents' groups was that all too often party councillors only seemed to come round at election time.

"The residents' associations were there all the time, keeping in touch on the doorstep and with regular newsletters". Elmbridge is a big and very varied borough, its 122,000 residents spread over more than a dozen distinct communities – Esher (where the council's headquarters are); the Thameside communities of Thames Ditton, Long Ditton, Molesey, Walton, and Weybridge; and a more rural hinterland including such places as Hersham, Hinchley Wood, Claygate, Cobham, Oxshott, Stoke D'Abernon and leafy St George's Hill with its millionaires' mansions and exclusive golf club. Some 57% of the borough's area is green belt, 10% public open space.

New riverside park

Mick Burgess, Elmbridge's current mayor and like Hopkins a Molesey councillor, was up for re-election this May, and won. His very unglorious election leaflet – A4 folded into three, in black-and-white, with a head-and-shoulders photo showing him in T-shirt and denim jacket – gives some hint of why Residents Group candidates held all their seats. He is someone who has lived in the area for more than 50 years; he and his wife have thrown themselves into work for voluntary organisations, and he's been a councillor for 12 years. Residents Group councillors, says his flyer, have achieved a new six-lane swimming pool for Molesey, a new riverside park, a sports ground for young footballers as well as a planning brief for redevelopment of the Hampton Court station site and briefs for new local health facilities including an accident and emergency clinic.

Molesey Residents Association has also led a campaign to save a local library, adult education and a youth centre threatened by Surrey County Council cuts; intervened on road improvements and planning applications; funded poop scoop schemes, seats, highway planters, trees, shrubs and seats; and cleaned up graffiti and arranged removal of abandoned cars. The association is active in groups campaigning against Heathrow aircraft noise, and belongs to the CPRE.

Bottom-up approach

So theirs is a grass-roots, bottom-up approach to local administration, but the controlling Residents Group to which they belong does not appear parochial in any blinkered sense. The pressures of London do not stop at the GLA boundary. They are, for instance, all too conscious of the need for more affordable housing. House prices, notes Hopkins, are the fourth highest in England – lower only than Westminster, Kensington and Chelsea, and South Buckinghamshire. "People need a joint income of £60,000 to buy a property, which excludes people with quite reasonable jobs," says Hopkins. And indeed the average income of Elmbridge people re-housed in such affordable housing sector as exists is less than £9,000.

The council has been tackling this problem in two main ways. Surprisingly it has a surplus of warden controlled sheltered housing – older people are generally in better health and their needs and attitudes have changed – and is redeveloping some sites to provide affordable housing. These are one- and two-bedroom units for key workers. Its second answer has been to change the threshold at which developers must provide affordable units from 25 to 15. Too many applications were coming in for 24-unit schemes, observes Hopkins wryly. Redevelopment of Walton town centre will produce a much more mixed-use centre including 370 flats, many of them affordable. This can mean low-rent homes, homes at higher rents which are still below market levels, or shared equity homes.

Working partnerships

Faced with a huge backlog of repairs in its own housing stock caused by spending or borrowing restrictions, Elmbridge has – like many other councils – handed them over to a housing association. But in its case this is a body of its own making – a housing trust, independent of the council but whose board includes councillors as well as tenant representatives. It has also gained plaudits for its services for older people, which include six purpose-built day centres with a range of activities such as art classes and computer classes. Alan Hopkins' wife Gloria chairs the social committee of one of the day centres, organising events such as regular outings. Some services Elmbridge provides were arguably the responsibility of Surrey's

Children's safety versus speed

Adapted from an article by **Harley Sherlock** written originally for the Islington Society, printed in **newsforum** with their permission.

Britain's roads are, in general, much safer than they use to be; but our figures for road accidents to children are amongst the worst in Europe. This is largely because we use our cars in urban areas much more than do our European neighbours; and this, in turn, may be because European cities have better public transport. But when local councillors try to do what they can to make our roads safer, they face a barrage of criticism: not just from motorists, but also from many of the very residents who should be the beneficiaries.

The crux of the matter is that a child hit by a car travelling at 30mph has only a 20% chance of survival but, at 20mph, the child has an 80% chance of survival. This is presumably a major reason for the 20mph (30kph) speed limit enforced over the major part of towns and cities in Germany and Holland. It is certainly the reason why the Buchanan Report on "Traffic in Towns" (1963) called for a 20mph speed limit on any street which had the front doors of houses opening on to it.

The awful thing about the Buchanan Report is that it was published forty years ago, yet its recommendations on speed limits are only now being taken seriously. Ironically, Buchanan thought that, by the 1970s, such speed limits would be easy to enforce electronically – probably by speed limiters (already standard in American cars in the 1960s) which needed only the addition of something like a light on the car roof which showed the speed to which the driver had set his speed limiter.

Because electronic speed control has taken so long to develop, and because British motorists are notoriously incapable of observing speed limits without such aids, the police have insisted that, if councils and local residents want a 20mph zone, it must be "self-enforcing". This inevitably means speed-humps or chicanes, both of which provide a physical deterrent to speeding.

I share the qualms of those who dislike these physical intrusions in their streets; but I accept that, until we either have more sophisticated ways of controlling speed, or have improved driver-discipline, we will be obliged to put up with them for the sake of our children's life-expectancy.

I am an occasional car-driver myself and recently drove the length of Liverpool Road in Islington: a road where speed humps seem

to cause the greatest controversy. My journey confirmed that it is an almost entirely residential road. And a glance at the map shows that it certainly has no need to play the role of a trunk road, running parallel as it does to Upper Street / Holloway Road (the original A1) and never more than a few hundred yards away from it. Some argue that wide roads like Liverpool Road need to be treated as major roads in order to provide relief for the real main roads, but all this does is to encourage more car commuting to central London, which is the last thing we want.

Until very recently, car-commuting to central London, while carrying only 14% of the central area's commuters, accounted for almost 70% of the area's morning rush-hour traffic. However the recent increase in bus-priority measures has in effect reduced road capacity for private cars; and this, combined with congestion charging, has not only reduced overall traffic levels (to the benefit of those who live, work or do their shopping on our main roads) but has also improved the flow of traffic, with the result that goods can now be collected and delivered more efficiently. In inner London there is a strong case for further reducing road capacity for non-essential vehicles, especially if, at the same time, we were to emulate other European cities and improve our public transport. A start has been made, in the form of recently-improved bus services; but we still need to make our urban streets feel more like places, rather than mere thoroughfares to somewhere else, and our minor roads need to become, once again, places where people meet and children play.

To achieve this we need the 20mph zones which are commonplace in Europe. But so long as motorists are disinclined to observe such speed limits, the police have every justification in insisting on self-enforcement, and this means that, until more sophisticated methods are available, we will have to live with speed humps or similar: surely a small price to pay for the safety of our children?

Harley Sherlock ■

"We still need to make our urban streets feel more like places, rather than mere thoroughfares to somewhere else."

London's Termini

London's Mainline Termini – A pedestrian Nightmare by **Michael Bach**.

Traffic engineers have traditionally marginalised pedestrians, segregated them from traffic, often by barriers, to prevent "accidents" – one of their key performance measures. Little attention or resources have been given to improving the pedestrian environment, let alone to giving people on foot equal status with other road users, even in places where their sheer numbers would suggest better treatment.

If traffic engineers did try to address the needs of pedestrians, it was primarily by treating walking as a "means of transport". But pedestrians – people on foot – need more than that. Certainly routes for walking need to be safe, convenient and direct and pedestrians need to be given greater priority in places where they outnumber cars, but there also need to be spaces/places where they can stop, stand, sit, drink coffee – simply be in rather than quickly moving through.

So, it would be churlish not to wholeheartedly welcome the Mayor's 100 Public Spaces initiative, which aims to transform London's public realm by creating upgrading 100 public spaces across London. This 5-year programme is promoted by the Mayor's Architecture and Urbanism Unit, working together with Transport for London, the London Development Agency, the London Boroughs and other partners. At its launch in July 2002, 10 pilot projects were chosen and a further 14 projects for the second phase were announced last December. All attempt to create places that people want to go to and be in.

This is all good news, but what about the places with huge pedestrian flows? Not one of the main line stations are on the Mayor's list of 100 public spaces. Surely these should be right near the top of somebody's list of places that need fixing for pedestrians. So what proposals does the Mayor /Transport for London have for giving greater priority to pedestrians in such places? Is there another list/programme which will tackle this and help make London the most pedestrian-friendly city by 2010? Or is there no programme?

If our mainline termini stations are the gateways to London – a visitor's first impression – the Mayor better start pretty soon. The public spaces programme is no substitute for tackling the pedestrian nightmares of our mainline stations. Why not start with Victoria?

Michael Bach ■

Round the Societies

A round up of news from our member societies.

By **George Parish**.

After the Olympics

The Waltham Forest Civic Society is holding a meeting in September on the future of the Lower Lea Valley. There are two main issues – the outline application for the Olympic Zone and the Legacy Scheme, which will be the plans for the land after the Olympics (or if the bid fails). At the same time, Stratford City (apparently known locally as Croydon north of the river) is being planned, so in 10 years time the Lower Lea Valley will bear little resemblance to how it is today. The WFCS suggest that by getting involved now residents can get it more as they want it than as the money-makers dream.

Gateway to Islington

Fiveways junction is where Kings Cross Road meets Farringdon Road, Calthorpe Street, Margery Street and Lloyd Baker Street. It is a notorious danger spot for pedestrians, with no features to protect them despite being on a Red Route. But that is part of the problem. Farringdon Road and Kings Cross Road are controlled by TfL, Calthorpe Street by Camden and Lloyd Baker Street and Margery Street by Islington. Result – no one will make a decision. If/when any plans do emerge, pedestrians must be consulted, says the Amwell Society.

Finchley local history

Finchley is one of the few London areas that do not have a dedicated local history group. It is now proposed to bring together a new group within the Finchley Society for all enthusiastic researchers, whether professional or amateur, so that original work can be done. There is a rich local archive waiting to be explored, including the Finchley Society's own.

The cost of our future

Faced with four impending planning battles, the Mill Hill Preservation Society is having to consider engaging professional help. This can be costly – £800 a day for a barrister at the lower end of the scale, plus "brief fees" of perhaps double that, plus fees for conferences, "all served up tied with pink tape on a bed of VAT." Reserves have been built up for just such a contingency, but more will be needed, preferably donated under Gift Aid.

Spotlight on conservation

The Inspector's report on Ealing's Replacement UDP both encouraged and disappointed the Ealing Society. On one issue, however, he gave a verdict which was entirely welcome. Whilst leaving the designation of Conservation Areas to Ealing Council, he was somewhat surprised by the strength, extent and eloquence of the objections to the current position and the lack of positive action to date in respect of implementation. He expected a commitment to the necessary resources to fulfil all relevant statutory duties in relation to existing, extended or new Conservation Areas.

Chislehurst report

The Chislehurst Society is celebrating 2004 as its 70th birthday. With 4,600 subscribing and over 150 active members, it believes itself to be one of the largest amenity groups in the country. A serious concern, however, is the future of Biggin Hill Airport, where a proposed major development seems to be inadequately reflected in the Government's White Paper on the future of air transport.

Helicopters over Greenwich

The Blackheath and Greenwich Societies recently made a joint representation to the Government's Directorate of Airspace Policy about the concentration of helicopter traffic over Greenwich Park and the Heath, citing World Health Organisation guidelines that quiet large areas such as parkland and conservation areas should be protected from noise. They were promptly told that DAP was concerned with safety, not the environment, and were referred to the Department of Transport's Aviation Environment Division. Their reply was even less helpful, the main point being that Greenwich is seen as a convenient non-residential open space for helicopter traffic. Any changes would have to demonstrate no operational disbenefit before a formal proposal could be put to the DAP, which is where we came in!

A move for Brunswick House?

Brunswick House is a Grade II* Georgian building which, on "Location, location, location" principles, could hardly be worse sited. It fronts the Vauxhall Cross one-way system and is dwarfed by the surrounding high-rise buildings. It has, however, a very high site value and this has enabled a local architect and resident to propose that it would be both technically and economically feasible to relocate the whole building to a site now occupied by the former Mary Datchelor School in the Camberwell Grove Conservation Area. A colour illustration in the Camberwell Society's April Newsletter shows how this could both preserve the building and enhance the conservation area. The Vauxhall Society, however, is unimpressed.

The Clapham sect

The Clapham Society has published a new book by Margaret Bryant about this important group of high-minded C18 reformers, who campaigned vigorously for the abolition of slavery and are commemorated in street names round Clapham Common.

Too much vinegar, too little Mozart

Commissioned to buy some vinegar from Waitrose, the editor of the Wandsworth Society Newsletter paid a visit to the under-new-management-newly-refurbished shopping centre that has replaced the Arndale in Wandsworth Town Centre. When finally located above the frozen foods, there were vinegars in flummoxing variety. Returning home with what would almost certainly be the wrong kind, he made a short detour via HMV. In a shop the size of a tennis court there was a classical department – just. At its heart was one CD of Mozart's Requiem flanked by two of Vanessa Mae and three of the Opera Babes. Waitrose may have added to the rich diversity that is Wandsworth; HMV has yet to make its contribution.

Celebrating the Crystal Palace

The Crystal Palace Foundation has staged a celebratory weekend to mark the 150th anniversary of the re-opening of the Palace at Sydenham. Local residents hope that assumption of responsibility for the site by the GLA and its designation as Metropolitan Open Land will finally put an end to proposals for its commercial development.

George Parish ■

The view from the thames

What could be more appropriate for the Forum whose logo has the River Thames at its heart, to enjoy a convivial evening on the river. A total of some 90 people, a good cross section of member societies, heard enthusiastic presentations about the environmental improvements and strategic plans, interspersed with history about the wharves and use of the river. We also heard of new proposals, including high density housing, as well as the astonishing result of a survey of Londoners as to what they would do in the event of a Thames Flood Alert – it appears that 87% of them would make for the Underground!!!

It's a pity if you missed it; the cruise, along with its buffet, terrific views of familiar (and not so familiar) landmarks and sites from Embankment to the Thames barrier, cormorants, and, not least, the opportunity of meeting others of like mind from societies across London. Even the weather turned up trumps – sunny and ending with the city framed by a spectacular sunset as we returned up the River to Embankment Pier. It was so enjoyable that no-one missed seeing the England-Portugal game in the slightest.

Our unbounded thanks to Tom Ball for his immensely hard work in organising it, and our congratulations that it all went so well ■

Below The Thames Flood Barrier, one of the many landmarks along the cruise.



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Forthcoming Events

Diary dates for 2004 – make a note.

London Forum Events Meetings at Cowcross Street

23rd September

AGM – Guest speaker Simon Thurley – the importance of heritage to regeneration

Planned for October and November

Public Open Space – jointly with CABA-space and Landscape Institute

Crossrail and Channel Euro link

London Open House 2004

This year's event will take place on 18th & 19th September. Last year, an estimated 350,000 visits were made to buildings across the capital. The Public will be able to visit 30 St Mary Axe – known as the "Gherkin" – and some 500 other contemporary and historic buildings.

There is a huge range of buildings from private homes, historic houses, arts spaces and contemporary offices and studios, institutions, City banks, and government buildings, all free of charge. The public will also be able to visit buildings under construction to see some of the capital's major projects, such as Wembley Stadium and St Pancras International taking shape. Engineers and architects will be on hand in many of the buildings to answer questions.

For further details please call Nicolette Spera on 020 7267 2070, or email jhoskin@londonopenhouse.org. Information Line:

09001 600 061 (60p p/min) or visit:

www.londonopenhouse.org.

The Buildings Guide will be available at the beginning of September by sending an A4 SAE (60p stamp) and a cheque for £2 (payable to London Open House) to PO Box 25361, London NW5 1GY.

The London Open House Trust is at Linton House, Unit C1, 1st Floor 39-51 Highgate Road, London NW5 2HR.

newsforum

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Design Ross Shaw

Print Express Printing. Telephone 01733 230 800

Published by the London Forum, 70 Cowcross Street, London EC1M 6EJ. Telephone 020 7250 0606

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