

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

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Recent changes to legislation

Threat to London's affordable housing

Recent changes to legislation - including the transfer of new powers to the Mayor of London and the Greater London Authority in the Localism Act 2011 - have forced the Mayor to redraft several policies in the London Plan. **London Forum** has sent detailed responses as part of the consultation process.

There is widespread concern about housing density and quality, and appropriate use of land. The fear is that some of these changes will lead to the building of substandard housing and a reduction in provision of social housing.

Recent changes to legislation including the transfer of new powers to the Mayor of London and the Greater London Authority in the Localism Act 2011, have forced the Mayor of London to redraft several policies in the London Plan, in particular those relating to housing.

This has resulted in a further flurry of consultation documents on revised strategies: the Housing Strategy, the housing Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG), the London Plan Implementation Plan (LPIP) and the All London Green Grid SPG. London Forum has made responses to these documents; some of these are presented in this Newsforum.

Concern about housing density

Running through all of them are the widespread concerns about housing density and quality, and the appropriate use of land. The fear is that some of these changes will lead to the building of substandard housing, and a reduction in provision of social housing, confirming our concerns raised in Newsforum last year.

So concerned is the Forum that, together with member societies from West London, we held a meeting with Sir Edward Lister, the Deputy Mayor with responsibility for Planning, to put to him our concerns about the sheer quantity of development, the massing due to the large number of high buildings, and the excessive density, in particular Earls Court/West Kensington and White City Opportunity Areas..

Together with the increase of powers for the Mayor, Local Government Secretary Eric Pickles has announced £3 bn of funding for the Greater London Authority for housing and regeneration in London, covering the spending review period up to 2014-15.

Mayor accountable for affordable housing

From this April the Mayor of London will be accountable for the capital's affordable housing programmes with a four-year commitment to build 55,000 affordable homes by March 2015, and to bring 45,000 existing social homes up to standard across London. This includes key development sites such as the Mayor's plans for the Olympic Park, and east London's Olympic legacy, and the Greenwich Peninsula.

The Greater London Authority will become responsible for all of the Homes and Communities Agency's land and property assets in London, with Department for Communities and Local Government continuing to receive a 50 per cent share of receipts from Greenwich Peninsula (the Homes Communities Agency's largest asset) reflecting the significant national investment in this site over the last 15 years.

£390 million is resource funding; £1,941 million will be capital investment for housing; and £481 million is capital investment for the transformation and development of the Olympic Park after the Games.

London Forum's full responses are available by email on request. ■

Coming next: Open spaces

The next Newsforum will be the PDF only version sent by email. It will focus on the results of the NPPF consultation; and environmental issues including a report of the London Forum open event on open spaces, parks, green chains (the recent GLA SPG consultation), boroughs' policies, plus the issues of corporate and noisy events for fund raising held in parks and public open spaces, including privately managed open space.

We will highlight the work of the London Parks and Green Spaces Friends Network ■

Draft Housing SPG

A summary of the response sent by **Michael Bach**, Chairman London Forum Planning and Transport Committee, focusing particularly on concern about density and proposing some changes to the document to meet those concerns.

The London Forum strongly welcomes the revised SPG on Housing. Some comments and points of concern include the following:

Housing Capacity and Density

The London Forum strongly supports the London Plan policies for housing, in particular the approach to establishing housing capacity, including the policy of optimising the potential of sites using the density matrix and its wide density ranges to determine the appropriate density range and how other factors, such as design and local setting, influence where within the range density should be set.

At the Examination in Public on the London Plan we made clear our strong support for the density matrix as both one of the most sophisticated and, at the same time, robust tools in the London Plan toolkit. The "appropriate density ranges" are wide. The main factors – broad setting and public transport accessibility – establish the wide density ranges and other factors help position a site within that range.

Our main concern – and our continuing concern – is not the policy but the practice. The London Forum supports Opportunity Areas and Areas of Intensification being developed at higher densities where the relevant "appropriate density range" supports them. However, we are increasingly concerned that the Draft SPDs for these Opportunity Areas do not seem to recognise that it is essential that the density of development of these areas does not exceed these ranges unless there is very strong evidence for doing so.

Disparity between policy and practice

Despite the change in the London Plan from "maximising" to "optimising" the potential of sites, and the built-in caveats with regard to design principles, maximisation of build density has continued to be applied by developers and the GLA Decisions unit. There is now a major disparity emerging between policy and practice, especially in Opportunity Areas, such as White City, Earl's Court/West Kensington and Vauxhall/Nine Elms/Battersea in the proposed quantity and massing of development. The approach being taken is still one of maximising the amount of housing produced that reflects the 2008 London Plan rather than the optimising approach of the 2011 London Plan.

The extent of the mismatch between the policy target and the outturn was first

exposed in the review of the density matrix in 2006. Successive annual monitoring reports show that the proportion within the ranges has failed to improve to any significant degree.

The excessive bulk and height of developments which are above the density range is unacceptable and the living conditions within them often fail to meet standards for daylight, overlooking, private amenity space and children's play space, which should be in accordance with the Mayor's SPG. We are worried that current practice is undermining the London Plan policy.

Action needed:

- Reaffirm that the density matrix and the appropriate density ranges should be applied in Opportunity and Intensification Areas.
- Amend the draft SPDs, especially those for White City and Earl's Court/West Kensington Opportunity Areas, to ensure: the "setting" classifications and PTAL ratings are appropriate and realistic;
- That the chosen densities are within the "appropriate density range"

We welcome and strongly support the new SPG clarification that in future "Unless additional reasons to justify exceeding the top of the appropriate range can be demonstrated rigorously, they should normally be resisted."

Housing Choice

The London Forum strongly welcomes the guidance on planning for specific groups – families in need of affordable housing, disabled and older people, the accommodation needs of particular groups, students and gypsies and travellers. This additional focus is welcome but will require take-up by the Boroughs and a real attempt to monitor progress.

Housing stock and investment

The London Forum is concerned that some of the changes in London's housing stock may not result in more homes for Londoners – whether through reconversion, the growing number of "non-primary residences" (second homes does not quite capture the phenomenon) and pressure for tourist accommodation. We consider that the "leakages" need to be recognised and monitored.

Action is needed on empty homes or business units above shops. ■

Offices revert to houses

The recent trend for reversion of buildings in London's West End, from office space back to residential use continues apace, largely due to demand from overseas buyers.

Planning consent has been given for more than 2 million sq ft of offices to be converted into residential buildings and a number of West End office buildings are being marketed for sale to residential developers, such as a £65 million property at 3 St James's Square. The property agent H2SO says that 3.2 million sq ft of office space has been lost in the past decade.

Westminster Council has shown little opposition to residential conversion, while new planning laws could mean developers do not need permission to change office buildings into housing. (see Newsforum 59 supplement, page 8)

At the moment high-end residential values outstrip their commercial counterparts: residential space in Mayfair and St James's is worth more than £3,000 per sq ft as against the value for offices at less than £2,000 per sq ft.

But if constraint on office supply continues it will put greater pressure on office rents and leave occupiers with a narrowing range of choice. ■

Council insurance claims

Councils face insurance surge amid trend for outsourcing

Local authorities are facing an increase in insurance claims and legal disputes as budgets and workforces are cut and the increasing trend for outsourcing raises the risk of service failures.

But this is bringing other problems – the law of unintended consequences. Even if councils may have outsourced services, they are still usually responsible by law for the upkeep of facilities such as roads, lifts and stairs. It is they who will foot the bill if insurance premiums go up or someone makes a claim because they have an accident. ■

Housing Strategy response

The London Forum working with other voluntary sector bodies has submitted a detailed response to the Mayor of London's latest Housing Strategy. **Peter Eversden** reports

A full copy of the response is available by email on request

The response focuses on six areas of concern – community engagement and empowerment; demographic change; housing need and supply; homelessness and rough sleeping; housing and climate change/environment and Inclusion. Each area is analysed and problems identified followed by recommended changes.

Community engagement

Whilst some proposals are supported more could be done by the Mayor, including:

- The need for accountable voluntary and community sector membership of the London Housing Board.
- Support of appropriate grass roots representation to ensure that the tenant empowerment role of the Homes & Communities Agency goes back to the London Mayor.
- Develop a wider voluntary and community sector housing forum.
- Build on current local work on tenant engagement in the spending of the London "Decent Homes" grant to ensure that there is community engagement, accountability and transparency in how this funding is spent.
- The London Mayor could use his new powers to develop best practice in community engagement that reflects his stated objective of an "equal life chance for all".

Demographic change

The groups' expressed deep concern that both the London Housing Strategy and the London Plan are based on inadequate understanding of

- changing composition and direction of migration flow into, out of and within London
- the role of rent and price differences as influences on migration
- the role of benefits (housing and other) as influences
- the role of 'regeneration' areas and policies as influences on migration and the class composition of localities.

To rectify this they proposed that there should be both expanded short-term studies and analysis, and long-term research.

Housing need and supply

Concerns identified included the location of affordable rent homes to ensure that

benefits meet the cost, the increase in the housing benefit bill as well as the impact of welfare and tenancy changes on levels of over-crowding.

Proposals made to the Mayor included:

- commission a new housing need survey in London, to take into account welfare benefit changes and the introduction of affordable rent tenancies
- provide targets in the London Housing Strategy for 'new and additional' homes, as the London Plan does
- monitor delivery of new and additional social-rented, affordable rents and intermediate homes separately
- set targets for delivery of family sized homes for social, affordable rent and intermediate homes
- make specific reference to encouragement to support community land trusts, co-operatives, self-build and other innovative and community focused ways of delivering low-cost homes
- set aside a significant proportion of the land from the proposed London Public Land Pool to hand over for community based housing.

Rough sleeping

The groups recommended that the Mayor

- make an explicit commitment to ensure that from 2013 onwards "no one will live on the streets of London and no individual arriving on the streets will sleep out for a second night"
- use his influence to advocate to central government for a return of a 'ring-fence' around housing related support.
- use his networks to raise awareness and disseminate accurate information about the benefit entitlement of the different groups of migrants to be found on London's streets and in our communities.
- monitor and publish reports on the placement of homeless families in private-rented housing; identifying where families are being placed outside their boroughs; where they are being relocated to and the reasons for the relocation.
- continue to argue for separate arrangements for London to reflect the additional challenges faced here.

Inclusion

On inclusion they asked that the Mayor

- encourage Boroughs to work with the voluntary and community sector to map

the availability of sheltered housing, care homes and extra care housing per 1,000 older people.

- take a strategic lead, working with local authorities and health authorities, to develop investment plans and allocate housing resources to those parts of London where mapping shows that the current supply of supported housing is insufficient to meet the needs and preferences of older Londoners.
- should undertake his assessment of the housing needs of older people, the development of policy proposals and the allocation of resources in discussion with the voluntary and community sector.
- take a strategic lead in addressing the evidenced accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers.
- discuss with the Boroughs their targets for additional Gypsy and Traveller sites and the development of site-specific proposals which can receive funding allocations.

Emissions

Homes and workplaces are responsible for nearly 80% of London's emissions, once aviation emissions are excluded. In 2008 3.1 million homes accounted for 16.7 million tonnes of carbon emissions each year. With continued growth this could rise to 19.7 million tonnes by 2025. London's domestic sector produces 36% of the capital's CO₂ emissions. To tackle this the groups proposed that

- environmental / climate change issues should form a key part of the Revised London Housing Strategy;
- the Mayor should encourage the use of cool roofs, pavements and parking areas in new housing developments and refurbishment schemes;
- the Mayor should lobby for the removal of the financial incentives in building new homes;
- embodied carbon emissions should be included in environmental impact assessments carried out in any scheme that involves demolition of existing homes;
- the Revised London Housing Strategy should provide clear information on how the Mayor will fund the retrofitting of homes in order to meet his 1.2 million retrofitted homes target by 2015 ■

London Plan Implementation Plan (LPIP)

Peter Eversden submitted comments for the London Forum

The purpose of the London Plan Implementation Plan (LPIP) is to set out how the policies of the London Plan will be translated into practical action. It provides an overview of mechanisms to achieve this and a robust basis for infrastructure planning across London. Community groups and amenity societies will need to understand and participate fully in the sub-groups. The LPIP concentrates on infrastructure; it will need to include other subjects.

Housing

London Forum highlighted the following concerns:

- problems with housing growth
- the risk that the Government's new 'Affordable Rent' housing will not adequately meet London's needs
- right to Buy income may not achieve sufficient new social housing
- estate renewal may result in a net loss of social housing
- the Government's rent cap will force many families out of Central and Inner London

A shortfall in provision of homes of 2,690 annually shows that the London Plan target is too low.

Democratic accountability

Borough Local Development Framework Plans must conform to the London Plan policies. London Forum considers this important aspect not made clear enough. There are too many boroughs where case officers do not quote London Plan policies in assessing applications, and some are still quoting from the out-of-date 2008 London Plan with its emphasis on 'maximising' instead of 'optimising' housing density. We note that the Government seem to have dropped the term 'Local Development Framework' and is now calling a local authority's set of policy documents a 'Local Plan'.

Only applications which conform to the Development Plan should be approved, with Housing at an appropriate density. The LPIP must address this.

There should be reference to Neighbourhood Plans, Community Right to Build and BIDs.

The poor state of the boroughs' infrastructure plans and Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Schedules (only two are published) is of concern and must be improved and standardised, with a Duty to Cooperate.

There are too many boroughs where case officers do not quote London Plan policies in assessing applications, and some are still quoting from the out-of-date 2008 London Plan

London Forum supports the need to look in more detail at Opportunity Areas. Infrastructure contributions have been missed. That must not continue. London Forum looks to the Mayor to prevent it.

Transport

The LPIP should suggest improvements in bus services in Outer London and improved targets for public transport mode share.

It should seek reduction in air pollution which the Mayor's Economic Development Strategy identifies as one of the negative factors about London in the choice by businesses on where to locate. Air pollution also causes early deaths, as the Mayor has reported.

Utilities

More needs to be done to increase sustainable urban drainage. More hard surfaces should be made permeable so that more storm water filters through into the groundwater for extraction, rather than into the sewage system.

DEFRA and Ofwat have suspended Thames Water's water main renewal project and the implications should be considered and stated. The long term figures are needed. Compulsory water metering does not appear to have commenced.

More needs to be done to protect future developments, especially along the Thames, from flood risk.

The two major water and gas renewal projects must be coordinated and linked also with National Grid's plans

Telecommunications

More note should be taken of advances by companies other than BT, in information and telecommunications, 'lightRadio' and

other developments. Modern wi-fi and data transmission advances could lead to the replacement of the mobile 'phone masts and cabinets on the top of schools and social housing blocks.

The implications and opportunities of the 4G rollout should be covered.

The loss of libraries with their provision of Information Technology for those who could not afford it is of concern. The Mayor should consider how to improve the availability of access to the Internet for those on low incomes.

Waste recycling

The figures indicating the extent of the waste capacity gap are alarming. Borough recycling is too variable and generally inadequate, with far too low a percentage of waste re-used, recycled or composted. The LPIP must bring forward proposals to support those local authorities that are failing to recycle, and to manage waste materials in the optimal way. Waste infrastructure capacity should be funded by developers through Mayoral and borough CIL contributions.

Higher Education

The focus on Higher Education ignores the fact that school education is failing to equip children and young people for higher education or work. Too many children are unable to read and write properly by the age of eleven; the curriculum lacks coverage of history, languages, the arts and preparation for citizenship. The problem is left to the boroughs to solve but schools cannot cope with pupils who arrive each day tired and hungry from dysfunctional homes and with special needs. The Mayor must take action to address these failures and issues that are not being resolved.

The LPIP should deal with the issue of student accommodation and its competition with land for housing, as covered by the London Plan Policy 3.8Bh. The Outer London Commission has proposed that Higher Education should be one of the activities for Strategic Development Centres but this section of the LPIP does not cover that.

Health

London Forum notes the complex issues in the section on Health and expects the Mayor to clarify with Government what the changes in NHS funding and management will mean for the capital.

What will Localism mean?

The Localism Act was enacted in November 2011.

Michael Hammerson reports on a presentation given by **Charles Wagner**, Head of Planning & Urban Advice, EH, at a meeting of London Historic Environment Forum

Sport

The LPIP should recognise the essential contribution of informal play and recreation provided by parks and open spaces; and the contributions and voluntary effort, in the spirit of the 'Big Society', of Friends' groups who have secured Lottery grants and made improvement in facilities. Many of them are members of the London Forum.

Strategic Green Infrastructure

The Olympic Park and the improvements and green chaining in the Upper Lea Valley arising from Opportunity Area planning should be mentioned.

London Forum shares the widespread concern that the Thames Gateway Parklands initiative will not be sustained and is concerned about problems highlighted by an Assembly scrutiny of contracts for maintenance of parks, open spaces and street trees.

Planning and development

London Forum objects to the Mayor's statement of reservation in the LPIP about developers to bearing the costs of providing infrastructure. It is unacceptable. The Government has put words about 'developer viability' in the draft NPPF as something for local planning authorities to take into account and it has recently encouraged all developers to renegotiate existing S.106 agreements.

Legal agreements must be in place binding developers to funding of mitigation of the effects of their developments and of any infrastructure required by their schemes. New types of agreement may have to be developed. Otherwise London will get developments lacking social and affordable housing, social infrastructure and services, open spaces and sufficient transport of the right kind. That would be contrary to many policies in the London Plan.

London Forum is concerned also how the Mayor will manage the situation if the Government gives boroughs "additional powers to offer discounts on business rates to promote economic development." Local authority funding shortfall should not have to be filled by higher Council Taxes.

London Forum disagrees with the conclusion that "Overall this Implementation Plan provides a clear overview of implementation mechanisms across all the policies of the Plan." It does not.

The LPIP must be developed to devise and publish the actions required to deal with these problems. ■

Some general points

- The Standards Board is to be wound up.
- Business rate changes are implemented.
- Infrastructure Planning Commission will be replaced.
- It allows Councils to revert from the Leader/Executive system to the old Leader/Committee system.
- There is provision for providing a List of Community Assets.
- There are no safeguards under the system for archaeological sites of either local or national importance.

Pre-determination

The Act makes clear that it is proper for Councillors to be able to join in discussions on planning applications in their wards, as long as they declare any interests and act openly. Previous restrictions are removed (see Newsforum 57, page 7). Local Planning Authorities can draw up their own Code of Conduct for Councillors' powers of involvement within Planning.

London: Changes to the GLA Act

Crucially for London, Part 8 (London) amends the GLA Act with the following:

- New powers for the Mayor in housing and regeneration, including compulsory purchase, new housing, and getting government grants for it;
- Social housing tenancies are changed.
- Economic Development Strategy and Environment Strategy must be in accordance with national policy.
- The Mayor can designate any area a Mayoral Development Corporation – e.g. the Olympic Park – where the Mayor acts as the planning authority, including for Listed Building Consents.

Neighbourhood Planning (Part 6)

This allows for Neighbourhood Plans; a Community Right to Build; a Requirement to Consult (though the threshold is so high and large that it may be of little value to most communities); Strengthening of Enforcement Rules; Reforming Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL); Reforming the Local Plans process

It requires that financial considerations should be material to deciding planning applications [a major cause for concern].

Neighbourhood Planning

Neighbourhood Planning is timetabled to come in in April – which may be when the NPPF appears.

But Neighbourhood Plans are already being worked on; there are 17 vanguard areas and others are coming forward. Lambeth, Edmonton Green, Highgate and several surrounding areas are in process of forming.

The LPA will advertise notice of a Neighbourhood Forum and give 6 weeks for responses.

Communities can grant planning permissions under Neighbourhood Development Orders for sites designated under the Neighbourhood Plan. But Neighbourhoods trying to stop infill development will find this more difficult since the Act does not permit them to argue for less development.

The Community Right to Build relates mainly to Community facilities.

Referenda

Referenda are proposed in the Act for Neighbourhood Plans, and must be approved by 51% of those voting; but Ministers are now worried that referenda could sink the whole system through low turnouts, and are considering alternatives: neighbourhood Plans may just become the first phase of a new SPG process. Concern was expressed about the lack of requirement for basic information gathering or even basic information in regard to the planning applications involved. ■

London Forum Survey

London Forum Survey of Members

A new survey to gather your views and inform London Forum's future representations, is being prepared.

It should be ready soon and will run through the summer. Look out for it and let us know your views.

We hope to hold a meeting in the autumn to discuss its findings. ■

Business Improvement Districts in London and the Localism Agenda

By **Diane Burridge**, Executive Committee member of the London Forum and Highbury Community Association.

Over the past ten years, 25 Business Improvement Districts have been set up around London, mainly in town centres, such as Croydon, Ealing, Bayswater, Kingston, Camden Town, Holborn, Victoria, and The New West End Company (Oxford Street, Regent Street and Bond Street areas, see recent Newsforums).

A Business Improvement District is a geographical area within which the majority of businesses have voted to pay about 1-2% on top of their business rates in order to invest collectively to improve their trading environment. There has been a 100% success rate in the ballots to date in London, with the agreed mandatory levy then collected by local authorities and ring-fenced for determination of spend by the businesses in the BID.

The total raised by this levy varies from area to area; for example, in 2010/11

- The New West End Company BID raised £2,608,000;
- the Angel BID raised £333,000;
- the Croydon BID raised £1,098,752.

Other investment was levered in using this income.

Business benefits

The business benefits of Business Improvement Districts include:

- Business cost reductions, for example, joint procurement and insurance.
- Place promotion to increase footfall, such as events and marketing.
- The provision of additional or improved services, such as extra safety, cleaning and environmental measures.
- Facilitated networking opportunities with businesses and local and regional government, as well as for community groups and residents.

Examples of Recent Activities:

Waterloo Quarter Business Alliance participated in a Prince's Foundation for the Built Environment spatial study of the Waterloo area. This Business Improvement District, which covers parts of the London boroughs of Southwark and Lambeth, has also introduced a cost-saving recycling scheme used by almost 200 local companies, and run a series of successful events, including an annual

The Mayor and GLA strongly endorse the concept of Business Improvement Districts. they are a great way of getting diverse local businesses to work together.

Food Festival to promote the area.

www.waterlooquarter.org

The Heart of London Business Alliance has recently helped to undertake two major infrastructure projects at Leicester Square and in the Piccadilly Circus area. (The recent renewal ballot for the period 2012 to 2017 here saw the highest turnout recorded in the UK to date, with 92% of businesses voting supporting renewal.)

Better Bankside several years ago initiated the Bankside Urban Forest Project - a partnership of many agencies, including Southwark Council, Tate Modern, The Architecture Foundation, Design for London, Bankside Open Spaces Trust and Bankside Residents' Forum.

www.betterbankside.co.uk/bankside-urban-forest

As a final example, Croydon BID funds a Visitor's Centre by East Croydon Station, and recently carried out a vacant shop unit investigation, working with the Council and others.

The Localism Agenda:

British BIDs, a national network of Business Improvement Districts (there are 112 in Britain), recently commissioned research of BIDs, carried out by the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (in liaison with Alliance Boots and the University of Ulster). This research found that there was concern by some BIDs that the 'Localism agenda', could see BIDs 'threatened by competing Neighbourhood Forum priorities and local community vetoes of business plans for the BID area'. (British BIDs Survey 2011, page 45)

www.britishbids.info

However, some BIDs may become interested in developing neighbourhood plans, working with local authorities and

communities on these. This situation will become clearer during 2012.

Support by the Mayor:

The Mayor and the Greater London Authority group strongly endorse the concept of Business Improvement Districts and their role in the 'place shaping' of local town centres and industrial estates. BIDs are included in the Mayor's Economic Development Strategy (EDS), which highlights the fact that they are a great way of getting diverse local businesses to work together.

The Greater London Authority (GLA) now supports BIDs by hosting bi-annual round-table meetings between them and senior GLA group officials, and running the annual Mayor of London's BIDs Awards. Transport for London (TfL) also holds briefing sessions on specific initiatives, and produces regular bulletins to update BIDs on transport infrastructure developments.

www.london.gov.uk/business-improvement-districts

If your society has worked with Business Improvement Districts in any way, or plans to do so, we would welcome information on this. ■

Diane Burridge joined the London Forum Committee last year. Over many years, Diane has been active on planning and environmental matters in her local area-Highbury and Finsbury Park. This has included being on the committee of: Friends of Gillespie Park which was involved in saving this ecology park from development; the Finsbury Park Partnership SRB Programme's Community Forum and Area Joint Working Group; her Neighbourhood Forum which was involved in the Arsenal developments, and more recently the Highbury Community Association.

Diane worked for six years for the London Development Agency, being responsible for the regional contract management of the London Business Improvement District Support Programme; the Sub-Regional Engagement Programme and several funding programmes supporting local initiatives. ■

Localism and neighbourhood forums

A personal view: **Tom Ball** considers how the neighbourhood forum element of the Act might work in practice and gives a warning.

The Parliamentary Bill for "Localism" is now an Act. Yet much of the details as to how it is envisaged to operate are yet to come. In theory giving local people the opportunity to have things as they would like them rather than what the Local Authority (LA) deems it should have, sounds appropriate for a democracy. But words of caution are required. This is only a part of the radical changes to Planning legislation as it has been.

The Government has set its priority on development projects, and has seen fit to completely reinvent 'planning' and its legislation, which evolved over years of experience and practice. This determination rather than applying corrective measures is fraught with unknowns. Londoners are to a degree better off than the rest of the Country since 'The London Plan' requires conformity, at least for substantial proposals.

How to define a Forum

So the effects of resorting to the 'powers' of Localism are as yet to be discovered and experienced. In essence a minimum group of people can join together to decide what they want, make sure that it is in accordance with the London Plan, and discuss with the LA their intentions so that it is likely to be considered acceptable by the LA. And then having formalised their wishes and prepared explanatory documents and plans as necessary, they must undertake a small referendum to obtain the views of other locals, that the proposals are acceptable: and then formally submit to the LA for its approval.

The group is described as a 'forum' or if a much larger set of objectives is entailed it could be referred to as a 'Parish Council'. The latter title is unfortunate since it has nothing to do with a traditional Parish as such, just that there may be some similarities with the processes involved. Where a large area is being considered it may be described as a 'Neighbourhood Plan'. This might be quite different from other traditionally understood and loosely defined neighbourhoods.

Potential for disagreement

The downside of 'Localism' in London, and elsewhere, is its potential to cause enmity and disagreement in what otherwise was

In theory giving local people the opportunity to have things as they would like them sounds appropriate for a democracy. But words of caution are required.

an easy going area where people live and the undefined 'community' tolerates comings and goings without getting too uptight. Situations come and go and time changes much.

Where there is a substantial issue it could have been raised with the Ward Councillor, and / or the Council by individuals or groups such as amenity or civic societies. Localism has a potential to lose sight of the actual community and carries a degree of 'nimbyism'. It defines areas and issues that may have short term significance but with long term implications. The Forum may achieve what it wants at the time of its creation, but may later have no relevance for future resident communities.

A further issue is the bringing together a group of people who see fit to develop a Forum. It is a characteristic that many local people do not want to get involved, or take responsibility, but this does not mean they don't have strong opinions. And this despite the Government's insistence that people 'will' get involved because they 'should' and 'wish to'.

Practical issues

Even having started the process of the Forum, there are practical issues such as costs and expenses to deal with the processes, technical and legal issues to cover, where to hold meetings, notification of such, printing of documents, and holding a referendum. After all of that, it is that the LA who must find the project acceptable and in conformity with other planning issues, or deemed to be acceptable otherwise.

For an affluent professional group of people the processes may well be achievable; a different matter for a 'poor' group. In this there is substantial inequity

as to who are able to achieve what - and by no means what might fairly be achieved. And note, it is not yet clear who or what part of the LA will be empowered to give approval as such - or who decides this. There will be no third party rights of appeal.

A warning

So the warning is, and already expressed by a small number of potential forum groups, to think long and hard before setting out with such intentions. And consider that the other side of the street, not included in the forum's area, may when ultimately challenged by a referendum or other, have a totally different opinion; and what was a tolerable existence may become riven with disagreement.

Remember the saying, attributed to Churchill, 'jaw jaw rather than war war' is much to be preferred and usually can resolve many issues; much to be preferred to establishing 'camps'.

It is up to the reader to consider whether 'Localism' is an improvement on previous established processes; and whether the application of a tuning fork might not have been preferable to throwing out the piano and starting afresh with a tympani set? ■

Nimby Ministers

At least half the cabinet have opposed developments in their own constituencies of the kind which will now be more likely to go ahead under their own government's changes to the planning system in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

Eric Pickles should be reminded of his words in 2004 against the then Labour government's efforts to liberalise the planning system: they seemed "determined to loosen control to make development easier" with "sprawling housing estates dumped by Whitehall on green land" and "bulldozing the green belt". Greg Clark, Grant Shapps and Francis Maude have all campaigned against affordable new homes in their constituencies. George Osborne, Vince Cable and Iain Duncan Smith have all backed opposition to developments in their constituencies as have Ed Davey, the new Energy Secretary, and Home Secretary Theresa May. One wonders if they have read the NPPF properly and understood its implications? ■

NPPF update: the Select Committee report

As we await the Government's response to the NPPF consultation, we report some recent comment. Many London Forum members forwarded their replies from their MPs who appeared to have accepted Ministers' assertions that the draft NPPF was sound and would cause no problems. **Helen Marcus** reports

There was a welcome Christmas present from the CLG Select Committee of MPs in their report of 21st December 2011 on their examination of the draft National Planning Policy Framework. The key points of the report's summary and recommendations were emailed to members in January. They are:

- The default answer of 'yes' to development should be removed, to create a balance between economic development and protecting the environment and communities
- The phrase "significant and demonstrably" should be removed from the presumption that all applications should be approved, unless the adverse effects outweigh benefits
- The phrase "brownfield development first" should be reintroduced into the policy, along with "town centre first"
- The definition of sustainable development used in the policy should be more clearly defined
- The framework should make clear the statutory importance of local plans and encourage all councils to develop them in order to steer local development. There should also be a clear transition period to move to the new system.

Undermining the planning system

Clive Betts, Chair of the Committee said: "The way the framework is drafted currently gives the impression that greater emphasis should be given in planning decisions to economic growth. This undermines the equally important environmental and social elements of the planning system. As currently drafted the 'default yes' to development also carries the risk of the planning system being used to implement unsustainable development. The document omits any reference to 'brownfield development first'. We welcome the Government's openness to reinstating the familiar and well understood term 'brownfield development' in the NPPF. For similar reasons the NPPF should be revised to reflect the 'Town Centre First' policy."

The supremacy of Local Plans

The committee also said the NPPF should unambiguously reflect the statutory supremacy of Local Plans, in accordance

with the 2004 Act. They therefore call for the NPPF to require local planning decisions to be taken in accordance with the presumption in favour of sustainable development consistent with the Local Plan. The government must make significant changes to protect communities against urban sprawl.

The Committee recommended that there must be a clear and realistic timetable for transition to the new NPPF.

The Minister's response

Decentralisation Minister Greg Clark responded by saying that changes will be made in the NPPF and that, specifically, the 'brownfield first' rule will be written back into planning policy. He claimed that the Committee concluded that "we can report that most witnesses to our inquiry were broadly content with the concept and approach of the NPPF in simplifying planning guidance and did not want a wholesale rewrite"; "the report showed people supported the concept of a streamlined planning system".

The DCLG website claims that in particular, the Committee considered that "it is reasonable and practical for the NPPF to have as an overarching principle a presumption in favour of sustainable development." That all appears to contradict what they actually said.

The RTPI response

The Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI), welcomed the Select Committee recommendations. Richard Summers, President of the RTPI, said: "..... the Government should think about how best it can map its policies and programmes so the public can see how they will affect local communities. We agree with the Committee that there is still much to do to produce an NPPF that plays an effective role in a workable planning system."

The major omission of a spatial dimension to the NPPF has been one of the RTPI's key observations and we welcome the Committee's recognition of the importance of this.

The RTPI welcomes the suggestion that there should be a presumption in favour of the Local Plan expressed in the NPPF, which is indeed the current legal position.

Advance notice from the Chancellor

George Osborne took the opportunity of his Budget Speech to make all the same claims again, about planning being a block to economic recovery, and said that the Government intends to push forward with its proposed planning reforms. Is anyone in government listening? ■

Other comment

The Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE), the National Trust and the RSPB, commissioned their own report into the NPPF. Entitled 'Inexpensive Progress?' it examines the likely costs and benefits of the proposed changes and examines whether the current planning system is holding back economic growth.

The report, prepared by Vivid Economics, finds that the changes proposed in the NPPF would have little or no impact in promoting economic growth and could undermine public well-being, the same concern expressed by the Select Committee.

Although there have been a few studies of the costs of the planning system, they say claims made on the back on them have been overstated - and very little has been done to measure the benefits that good planning delivers. The Government's own work as part of last year's National Ecosystems Assessment revealed that our green spaces provide economic, social and health benefits.

The report concludes that while there are costs in some sectors, there is no evidence that planning has large, economy-wide effects on productivity or employment and that the draft National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) is unlikely therefore to have much effect on growth, and could even undermine public well-being.

Liz Peace, Chief Executive of the British Property Federation, said: "The media has been very quick to paint the development world as being against sound planning and truly sustainable development. That is absolutely not the case. Developers want to see plans put together and decisions made against a sound, well constructed evidence base. We welcome this contribution to the debate and look forward to a continuing constructive dialogue on it with CPRE, the National Trust and the RSPB." ■

Open meeting on Town Centres

Wednesday 22nd February

Exploring the implications of the Mary Portas report on Town Centres and the Government's response. **Peter Pickering** reports

The meeting was very well attended by some 40 people representing a wide spread of the Forum's membership.

The speakers were Michael Bach, chairman of London Forum's planning and transport committee and a member of the National Retail Planning Forum; Jake Stafford, architect and developer of high street refurbishment schemes; and a representative from Beckenham Society who spoke about the Society's report and recommendations for the future of Beckenham High Street

John Lett, senior planning officer, GLA London Plan team was due to be there but had to send his apologies. He had however sent his presentation which was given by Michael Bach.

London Forum posed the questions:

- Does your society have any local High Street traders or businesses as members?
- Do you have any partnership arrangements with local retailers, businesses or BIDs?
- Is your organisation a member of a town centre partnership?
- Are you developing a Neighbourhood Forum which will include businesses and other local organisations?

The speakers

Michael Bach emphasised the need for town centres to be used, for a wide range of services – not just shopping, but work, leisure, culture, etc; a critical mass was necessary if they were to survive and flourish. In the 1980s life was sucked out (especially outside London) by the growth of out-of-town shopping; this was reined in by changes in Government policy. More recently in London the Westfield centres had drawn a large amount of trade away from traditional centres, and almost everywhere the recession had hit hard; independent shops were closing down, and multiples were closing town centre branches. In current circumstances the problem was how to get any growth anywhere.

Many Government policy actions and statements had led to doubts whether they were serious about town centres - the draft NPPF certainly seemed to weaken protection – as well as failing to recognise the importance of keeping offices in town centres. But, faced with this problem, the Government had set up the Mary Portas review, which highlighted several important possibilities: the need for

diversity; the potential of markets to attract footfall and graduate to shops; the need for councils to have town centre policies in their core strategies, to have town centre champions and to set up town centre teams, with wide membership.

Mr Bach emphasised the need for councils to plan for growth, and to use as appropriate their powers for site assembly; vision was necessary. Accessibility was important, for everyone, not just cars. Planning must bring a place alive - markets could be a catalyst for this. Town centres were not static displays, but theatre. Different centres should decide what they were really about. The quality of shopfronts was very significant.

John Lett's paper said that town centres were very important in London, especially for those without access to cars, enabling many different needs to be met in a single trip; town centre networks increased choice and competition. But people must use them, not simply say they supported them. Change was inevitable, but must be in a planned way. The London Plan contained good town centre policies; local societies should ensure that boroughs too had good town centre policies.

The Beckenham Civic Society presented the report they had just produced on the future of Beckenham High Street. The High Street was convenient, but its range of shops was disappointing; traffic flow, parking and walking were difficult. The Society had based its recommendations on a questionnaire to all the shops, and had had a good response; noteworthy had been the consensus that pedestrianisation was not wanted though better traffic flow and less commuter traffic was. The Society had submitted their report to Bromley Council, and hoped it would be acted on.

Jake Stafford described his work on improving shopfronts in conservation areas, especially run-down, poorer neighbourhoods, and the ways in which he got funding and co-operation. His message was that smaller-scale careful improvements could be much preferable to major redevelopment.

Peter Eversden said that the Mayor's Outer London Commission, on which he served, was promoting the idea of Strategic Development Centres; the Mayor's Outer

London Fund was designed to help regenerate 'outer' London centres; societies should ascertain what their boroughs were doing with the funding provided for these.

Discussion from the floor

Bill Linskey described the Brixton Society's successful Brixton Markets Heritage Walk, which had instilled a sense of place in Brixton's diverse community. Listing the building because of its importance to the Afro-Caribbean community had been instrumental in persuading a developer not to demolish but to keep it alive.

Harley Sherlock observed that local shops which provided a real personal service (for instance by obtaining items a customer wanted) would deservedly survive. At one time Islington Council had had a policy keeping rents down for locally important shops.

Putney Society was keen to go ahead with neighbourhood planning; they were consulting traders - something which their council failed to do. Mr Bach drew attention to the hurdles that would have to be surmounted.

The Tottenham Society said that Haringey Council had taken no notice of civic societies over the Wards Corner development and had signed a planning agreement that bound them to do everything to ensure that planning permissions were obtained.

A participant spoke of the value of bringing upper floors in town centres into residential use. Mr Stafford said that this could be in a plan, but not a necessary condition for a planning permission.

Alan Piper from the Brixton Society said that they were trying to get separate doorways required when there was housing on an upper floor separate from the ground-floor commercial use.

Peter Pickering said that the presentations had not mentioned the effect on town centres of the growth of internet shopping. Mr Bach said that the effect varied greatly according to commodity; travel, books and records were the most affected; department stores seemed to be compatible with internet shopping.

The Hammersmith and Fulham Society said that their council seemed happy to crush Shepherd's Bush Market and had failed secure the improvement of shops in Shepherds Bush through a S106 agreement with Westfield. ■

Spotlight on The London Society

The Society, among the oldest civic societies in the United Kingdom, celebrates its centenary. By **Frank Kelsall**

Among 2012 events such as the Olympics, the Queen's Diamond Jubilee and the bi-centenary of Charles Dickens the centenary of the London Society may seem small beer. But it is a centenary to be celebrated as the Society is among the oldest civic societies in the United Kingdom and is honoured by the patronage of HRH the Duke of Gloucester.

Origins

The London Society was founded on the back of the town planning movement in the early 20th century. In the year following the first planning act of 1909 the RIBA held a London conference which focused attention on the capital city, and the Architectural Review began a town planning supplement. In its first issue the architect David Barclay Niven wrote a paper on the need for new roads and a system of parks in outer London before the area was swamped by new development; his ideas chimed with those of George Pepler who gave a paper at the RIBA conference suggesting that a voluntary body might undertake inquiries into London's needs and lead public opinion. The London Society became this body.

Niven took the chair at the first meeting in 1912, though he was soon succeeded by the weightier figure of Aston Webb. Early members included Pepler, Raymond Unwin, planner at Hampstead Garden Suburb, and Stanley Adshead, the first man to hold a professorship in civic design. By the end of 1913 the Society's membership was over 400, including 65 MPs and peers, 9 members of the LCC and many practicing architects and surveyors.

The Society's Development Plan for Greater London

The first major project to be taken up by the Society was to put into a single plan many of the ideas for roads and open spaces being canvassed in the years before the Great War. War delayed this work though preparation of the plan provided some employment for architects when new building more or less ended. The plan was completed in 1917 but government controls prevented its publication until the end of 1918.

Many of the aims of the London Society's founders have been achieved. There is widespread recognition that planning is a public function. London regional planning now covers the area which the Society had considered from the first.

The Metropolitan Police had covered a wide area since its establishment in 1829 but otherwise the concept of a Greater London to be planned as a whole was forward-looking and not given administrative force until the establishment of the GLC in 1965.

When Patrick Abercrombie was asked to draft a plan for the LCC area in 1941 he commented that he would only do it if he could follow the lead of the London Society and do a plan for Greater London as well.

The Society Centenary

In 2012 the London Society intends to republish the coloured key to the 16 sheets of its 1918 plan as a commemorative item. Other events planned include a reception when the Society can celebrate its centenary and a Banister Fletcher Lecture by the Bishop of London. Banister Fletcher was an early member of the society and his will provided a small bequest to the society on condition that it held an annual lecture in his name.

The Society Now

Many of the aims of the London Society's founders have been achieved. There is widespread recognition that planning is a public function. London regional planning now covers the area which the Society had considered from the first.

Voluntary bodies of the sort that Pepler envisaged are more often ginger groups, locally based, and a London-wide view is largely focused through the admirable co-

ordinating role of the London Forum.

Without a specific local focus the London Society's membership, about 650, is widely spread across and outside the capital, and what the Society does has changed. The Society has an extensive programme of visits and events (about 25 to 30 a year) and issues a half-yearly journal.

It is based at Mortimer Wheeler House, the out-station of the Museum of London by the Regent's Canal where the Society's library is a valuable resource for the Museum staff based there and the archive and collections are used by planning historians and others interested in the development of London.

The Society has formal representation on the City of London's Conservation Area Advisory Committee and comments occasionally on applications all over London, especially when there is no more local focus.

Support at public inquiry for Westminster City Council's objections to the proposal to put the statue of Nelson Mandela in front of the National Gallery led to the Society suggesting that there should be supplementary planning guidance; this Westminster has now produced and the Council consults the Society on specific proposals for statues and memorials. The Society objected to the proposed Bomber Command memorial in Green Park.

Retrospect

The Society's long history enables it to take a wide view of how London has developed. In the early 21st century we see the improvement of public transport and control of the motor-car as key to maintaining an environmentally sound and friendly capital. But much of the Society's early work was directed to how best to provide for increasing car-use. This contrast can be seen in the Society's early attitude to Hungerford Bridge where it led a campaign to demolish the rail bridge (regarded as irredeemably ugly) and replace it with a road bridge providing better access to Trafalgar Square from the South Bank. The bridge was the subject of the Society's 2010 Banister Fletcher lecture by David Gilbert of Royal Holloway, published last year in the Society's journal. ■



Age: 100; formed in 1912

Circumstances of birth: George Pepler, who was instrumental in founding the Town Planning Institute, wrote a paper for the RIBA suggesting that a voluntary body might undertake inquiries into London's needs and lead public opinion. The London Society became this body.

Biggest successes: (1) To have survived for a century (2) Historically to have campaigned especially for open spaces and the protection of the City Churches (3) Presently to maintain a resource used by those interested in the planning of London (4) Most recently to have encouraged the formation of policy on statues and memorials (5) To have contributed to the restoration of the Alexis Soyer monument in Kensal Green Cemetery

Biggest disappointments/ frustrations: (1) Not to be able to participate in the planning process to the extent which our predecessors would have wished, especially on London-wide issues such as tall buildings and transport (2) Not to be able to identify a constituency in the voluntary sector for a London-wide remit (3) Being brushed aside, with others, on matters where we have traditionally had some influence, such as the Bomber Command memorial in Green Park

Present preoccupations: (1) Working out a programme to celebrate our centenary and developing our archive and library as a public resource (2) Identifying a new focus for the Society in the circumstances of the early 21st century (3) Finding members with the necessary skills, enthusiasm and commitment.

Working details: Membership of about 650 is widely spread across and outside the capital; formal representation of the City on London's Conservation Area Advisory Committee; comments occasionally on applications all over London. The Society's Journal has been published since 1913, currently twice a year, in the late spring and the autumn.

Special characteristics: promoting the concept of a Greater London to be planned as a whole The Society's long history enables it to take a wide view of how London has developed. The Society's archive is a treasure trove for those interested in the history of planning in London.

Last word: Our aim remains that of our founders: to promote planning in London which protects the special places and characteristics of the metropolis while providing new development which puts public benefit ahead of private interest. ■

The London Society



Frank Kelsall

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The Society's long history enables it to take a wide view of how London has developed.

**Illustrations:
Above right:**

Hungerford Bridge with the Lifshutz Davidson additions
 The wrought iron railway bridge was designed by Sir John Hawkshaw, but retained the original brick buttresses from an earlier bridge designed by Isambard Kingdom Brunel. There have been various walkways added and removed over time. Architects Lifschutz Davidson and the WSP Group engineers designed the current 4m wide footbridges that were completed in 2002.

Left: Photo of the cover of London Society Journal 461 showing the evocative Monet painting of the bridge in the 19th century

Below: the Society's 1918 plan which will be republished as a centenary item this year



Heathrow – the pressure continues

Lobbying by the aviation industry has increased several-fold in vehemence and intensity in recent weeks; Chancellor announces delay of Transport Strategy paper

Helen Marcus reports

The aviation industry is still relentlessly plugging the line that the UK economy will suffer if airport capacity in the south-east of England is not increased. There have been regular letters and articles in the press culminating with an open letter in March from some 70 business leaders and groups demanding the debate over the third runway be reopened. A group of 30 Conservative MPs have joined in with a paper *The Case for Aviation* written by Spelthorne MP Kwasi Kwarteng recommending expansion. In the week leading up to the budget there were more reports that David Cameron will look again at the possibility of a new airport in the Thames Estuary, and George Osborne announced the delay of the Transport Strategy paper.

A new CAA report rejected

A new report *Aviation Policy for the Future* from the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) claiming that new runways are needed in the south-east to meet consumer demand has been rejected by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and the Aviation Environment Federation (AEF). WWF transport policy expert Jean Leston says: "This report is just the latest in aviation industry 'groupthink' that new runways will magically lift us out of recession. It's time they came back down to earth and thought about the climate impacts of what they're saying."

AEF director Tim Johnson adds: "I am alarmed that the CAA, who have no official status as aviation policy advisors, are now trying to tell the government what to do. Their calls for more capacity are the latest in industry lobbying that would see us return to the bad old days of unconstrained aviation growth at a time people are flying less and there is spare capacity that could be better used, in the south-east and elsewhere."

Concern from London Forum members

London Forum members, in particular Greenwich, Richmond and Blackheath Societies all cover the subject extensively in their newsletters. Blackheath Society has written to the Department for Transport stating that night flights should be abandoned. The Government has approved an experimental but limited use of mixed mode and a formal aviation policy document may be issued this year.

CAA calls that "Government should focus on improving life for consumers, so long as it is environmentally sustainable" ring hollow. Surely this has little to do with a third runway and everything to do with Heathrow being clogged up by retail space. If the authority and the Border Agency provided more staff and greater capacity to speed up security checks, much of the problems for "consumers" would be alleviated. But of course that would affect profits.

Ample evidence has been provided that there is already sufficient capacity in the south-east and other regions to meet future demand.

The economic reality

And these repeated claims about need for more capacity are actually contradicted by the financial reports. The International Air Transport Association (IATA) has been warning since last year that the global airline industry is struggling to make ends meet and the situation in the near future looks bleak. "The biggest risk facing airline profitability...is the economic turmoil from failure to resolve the eurozone sovereign debt crisis." Recent headlines in the *Financial Times* in February record that: "Europe's flag-carriers take a dive"; "Qantas to trim routes and jobs". Even Ryanair was reported to be in trouble last year.

The CAA admits noise is a problem

The CAA makes further astonishing suggestions in an Insight Note, *Aviation Policy for the Environment*, covering the environmental impact of aviation. The CAA actually admits that "current capacity problems in the South East have partly been caused by an inability to move beyond local community concerns over aviation noise, which highlights the need for a radical approach to the issue to allow capacity increases".

Iain Osborne, CAA Group Director of Regulatory Policy, said: "To be able to develop sustainable aviation has to embrace and tackle both the noise nuisance that impacts communities around airports." "We need to consider how to reduce noise, but also recognise that it will still have a big impact on people living close to airports. So Government noise policy must find ways to help airport owners and local communities to engage more constructively on noise."

But who will pay?

But the "series of measures" suggested by the CAA are outrageous. Admitting that "noise nuisance caused by airports, has had significant impact on previous proposals to increase runway capacity," they seriously propose measures "the Government could take.....to benefit residents, such as council tax relief," and "wider economic instruments like a UK airport-wide cap and trade system for noise similar to the EU Emissions Trading Scheme for CO2 emissions".

Why should local borough councils forfeit their income to pay for the damage done by the aviation industry? How would any amount of money compensate for degradation of life caused by this nuisance? The idea that a cap and trade scheme could provide any relief is sheer nonsense and that is without even considering the sort of corruption that has been exposed in these schemes (see newsbriefs page 19).

Threats of legal challenge

And as if all that were not enough BAA is now threatening bully-boy tactics: it is considering legal challenge to the Government over its ruling out the option of expansion at Heathrow. BAA also threatened legal action if plans were announced to expand Stansted Airport rather than Heathrow. Claims by the CAA, BAA and BAA that they are concerned with "significant benefits for consumers, and for the UK as a whole" are clearly bogus. It is a bigger Heathrow that they want.

Safety of Londoners ignored

Another even more important element is being ignored altogether: the safety of Londoners. This was pointed out in a letter to the FT on March 8th 2012 by someone who described himself as an "unpaid individual professional, ...the sole body left challenging the development on the crash risks over London". He considers the risks to Londoners from Heathrow already "totally unacceptable.....and rising continuously".

For the full report of the WWF statement see their website:

www.wwf.org.uk/wwf_articles.cfm?newsid=5589

Aviation Policy for the Future

CAA website:

www.caa.co.uk/sustainableaviation
framework ■

East London River Crossings

Peter Eversden comments on proposals for an additional crossing between Silvertown and the Greenwich Peninsular

London Forum shares and supports the comments and objections to the proposal for an additional crossing between Silvertown and the Greenwich Peninsula of the Westcombe Society, one of our members.

The Forum considers that the proposed extra crossings are not sustainable and would fail to conform to draft National Planning Policy Framework for England policies and to those in the Mayor's London Plan 2011 for climate change mitigation, CO2 reduction, reducing the need to travel, smoothing traffic flow, road capacity effects of additional traffic (Policy 6.12B-b&c) reducing congestion, improving air quality, reducing noise, local character, building London's neighbourhoods, heritage and place making.

If the Mayor proceeds with these plans they would be subject to challenge on those policies unless he took mitigating action. London Forum is concerned that each of the crossings proposed would introduce more traffic, much of it diverting to take advantage of the new routes for convenience in crossing London more quickly and cheaply. We suggest that road pricing might deal with the problem and reduce the harm: businesses that need the access could have the advantages of the crossings and the cost

savings, but at a fee, whereas private motorists would be deterred by the charges.

The Inspectors at the examination in public of the Draft Replacement London Plan (DRLP) in 2010 recommended to the Mayor that he should modify the DRLP to prepare for introducing road pricing. The Mayor rejected this out right. He has reduced the congestion charge area, delayed the introduction of low emission zones and has not taken the opportunity to reduce business commuting traffic by imposing charges on private non-residential parking places.

Air pollution, much of which is from road traffic is of increasing concern. The Mayor must take action to reduce it before promoting additional roads and river crossings.

London Forum expects the Mayor and TfL to implement new controls and guidance on freight movements to limit congestion without increasing delivery times and costs.

The proposals for the additional crossing between Silvertown and the Greenwich Peninsula seem to have been compiled with inadequate assessment of the effects of increased congestion at peak times of the day on the A2 and the A102. The same issues could apply to the Western Way for the new ferry. ■

Crossrail puts out tenders

Crossrail has announced a short list of four companies to tender for the 60 high-capacity new trains and associated depot at Old Oak Common.

They are: Bombardier Transportation (UK) Limited; Construcciones y Auxiliars de Ferrocarriles SA (CAF); Hitachi Rail Europe Limited; and Siemens plc.

Last year, there was an outcry when Siemens was awarded the £1.6bn contract for Thameslink's rail project in preference to the UK arm of Bombardier. It was pointed out that notwithstanding EU regulations on this matter, other European countries made sure that such contracts were awarded to their own national companies.

Transport secretary, Justine Greening said that she was "keen to understand and communicate the benefit of this contract to the UK economy" The company awarded the contract will be "required to establish an appropriate local presence to manage the delivery of the contract"; "bidders will need to set out how they will engage with the wider supply chain and provide opportunities for training, apprenticeships and for small and medium size businesses within their procurement strategy."

The capital cost is in the region of £1bn and is the largest single contract that Crossrail will let. It will be awarded in 2014. A key feature will be air conditioning and inter-connecting walk-through carriages. Each train will be around 200 metres in length and able to carry up to 1,500 passengers. Crossrail will introduce rolling stock to the Great Eastern Main Line from May 2017. The future operation of Crossrail services is to be let as a concession by Transport for London

Crossrail is intended to boost London's rail capacity by 10 per cent, delivering faster journey times, with, for instance, 24 trains per hour between Paddington and Whitechapel during the peak. ■

Legal challenges for HS2

The decision to approve the UK's second high-speed rail network, HS2, in January has sparked a string of legal challenges.

An alliance of 18 councils such as Buckinghamshire County Council, has already served a formal letter warning they will mount a judicial review challenge into the 'deeply flawed' consultation process, and the government's economic and environmental cases, unless the Transport Secretary rescinds her decision to proceed with it. Made up primarily of Tory councils, it has named itself '51m' because supporters say the scheme will cost £51 million for every parliamentary constituency.

Another group, the HS2 Action Alliance has also served a formal letter on the Transport Secretary asking her to scrap the scheme which they say will devastate some of the country's finest landscape. They are backed by

more than 70 action groups and four wildlife trusts along the route. They argue that the Government has failed to comply with a series of European directives such as one which requires an environmental assessment not only of the scheme but also of alternatives. The campaigners say that the scheme does not comply with the European Habitat and Species Directive, which imposes a legal obligation on decision makers to take into account any threat to a number of endangered creatures, including all bats.

Camden council has signalled that it is considering joining rural anti-HS2 campaigners seeking a judicial review. The first section of the £33bn project's route from London to Birmingham will demolish much of an estate housing many hundreds of people near Euston station and could damage many houses on the route which runs through historic conservation areas. ■

The impact of the Olympic Games on transport modes in Central London

by Tom Ball

The accounts of personal misery and need to stay at home may be seen to be much exaggerated in the press. This is an amazing episode in London, and there will be lots of visitors, and lots of things going on, from the Diamond Jubilee celebrations on Saturday 2nd June. There is then the lead up to the Opening Ceremony of the Games on Friday 27th July. For many it will be a period of excitement and wonder, supplemented by the 'Cultural Olympiad' and many local events.

The likely impact on roads and transport systems in Central London during the period of the Games and Paralympics is hotly debated and likely to remain so up to and after the Games themselves. However amongst all the journalism and tales of doom it is helpful to see some of the workings and thinking of those who are really responsible for the detailed planning, which is enormous.

Rather than assuming a total 'shut down' it is helpful to recognise the different pressures by day and locations, affecting all kinds of transport and walking. Some details will continue to be refined during the count down period at the time of writing of some 15 weeks. It may be helpful to see the present thinking as to how individual journeys might be affected, and when.

Sources of information

As a starting point the internet has two main sites provided through TfL and the London Organising Committee (LOCOG) which are a good source of information. The first has information on all kinds of transport and includes plans from London as a whole, to some highly sensitive local areas. These are very detailed and will indicate some road closures. In the centre of Westminster Whitehall will often be closed to all but public transport for instance.

The first site offers three sub sites the first two being more general to today, but the third is significant for Games period information. See

www.tfl.gov.uk/corporate/projectsandschemes/18196.aspx

The sub sites which can be accessed are: **Corporate Projects and Schemes** which shows TfL's projects by location and

For many it will be a period of excitement and wonder, supplemented by the 'Cultural Olympiad' and many local events.

transport mode and offers a wide variety of maps, tube, bus, cycling and others; and bus journey routing.

Olympics and Paralympic route networks

which shows the Olympic and Paralympic route networks (ORN/PRN) listed as zones, and with details.

Note that with such detail while the maps may be clearly read on computer, it is recommended that to print at A3 size to be able to read the information. For some ORNs are the most contentious issue.

For the "Central London Zone Map 4 St. James's Park to Victoria Embankment" : see

www.tfl.gov.uk/assets/downloads/corporate/central-london-zone-map-4.pdf

The second of the two sites is useful if a bit 'quirky' in its presentation and is much more specific to the Games period and getting around, particularly in Central London. Its particular relevance is keeping up to date. See

www.getaheadofthegames.com and more specifically for London See

www.getaheadofthegames.com/travelinaffectedareas/city/london-public-transport.html

This provides an enormous amount of information for London, down to specific tube stations, with pressured times by date. It suggests some alternatives and advice on avoiding hot spots if possible.

Key dates

Diamond Jubilee 2 & 3 June

Opening of Olympic Village 15 July

Torch relay in London 21 July - 26 July

Olympic Games 27 July to 13 August:

Paralympic Games August 28 to Sept 9

Closing of Olympic Park 14 Sept ■

Ikea to develop Strand East

Ikea is to develop a new 26-acre site near the Olympic Park. LandProp, part of the Ikea Group is believed to have paid about £25 million for the site, Strand East, which had previously been in receivership. There was a gin distillery there during the last century until the war.

Built around canals, it is designed to be a "mini-Venice" with moorings, a water-taxi service and a floating cocktail bar, courtyards, and a public square. It will feature a 130ft-tall illuminated wooden tower and form the gateway to the Olympic Stadium.

There will be 1,200 new homes, about 40 per cent of which will be three-bedroom mews homes. The development will also include a school, health surgery and nursery, 480,000 square feet of offices and a 350-bedroom hotel in Stratford. A particular feature will be many car-free zones: cars that do enter the area will be stowed in an underground parking lot, out of sight.

Demolition work has begun and stage one will see a three-storey restaurant, office block and gallery space open next spring. Planning permission for the houses has not yet been sought. ■

London TravelWatch policies

Transport users' priorities

London TravelWatch has identified ten key policies for the 2012-16 Mayoral term, to help keep Londoners and visitors to the capital moving. Not all of these involve large expenditure, but they all require a strong commitment to using the Mayor's strategic powers to achieve a coordinated approach to improving the experience of London's travelling public.

There is a useful page on the TfL web site giving a comprehensive list of the projects planned for roads, junctions, stations and routes.

www.tfl.gov.uk/corporate/projectsandschemes/7500.aspx

www.londontravelwatch.org.uk ■

The London Historic Environment Forum

The London Forum represents the community and amenity sector on the London Historic Environment Forum. **Michael Hammerson** reports

Heritage Crime Update

Further to the report in the last Newsforum EH are working with the police on measures to strengthen protection for heritage assets at risk, both at public events and for day-to-day problems. One of the aims is to get the Courts to take account of the full impact of heritage crime, social and academic, as well as just the financial damage.

The Thames Tunnel

English Heritage is closely involved. The problem has been made worse by Thames Water's selling off a lot of land for development, leaving far fewer alternatives sites. There has been a reduction in the amount of open space and residential sites to be used. 27 large sites are involved. Although EH believes the tunnel is the best option it still has grave concerns about six sites in particular.

1. Putney Bridge with the St. Mary's Church and Fulham Palace sides; the new structure has been reduced, though there are still some concerns about design. There will also be a structure under the bridge. The vertical structures proposed were originally 15m high; now 3-5m.
2. Chelsea Embankment: concerns about design and the linear setting of the river here, especially in views from Battersea Park.
3. Albert Embankment: there is significant archaeology at sites proposed both sides of the Bridge, some 6,000 years old and needing excavation.
4. Victoria Embankment: EH are unhappy with the proposed very large and obtrusive structure, excessive in size and bulk. A revised design is expected.
5. Blackfriars Bridge: Concerns about this

significant historic environment including a WW2 pumping house, one of the few left, used to put out fires in the Blitz; 6. St. Paul's Deptford: there will be major adverse impacts from construction.

MOLA are involved in the archaeological work. There will be a significant impact on foreshore archaeology, needing mitigation measures. Two sites where burials are a possibility have been eliminated.

The present timetable anticipates commencement in 2016, and completion in 2022. There is a threat of an £8 billion fine from the EU for breaking the Water Quality Directive, plus an ongoing fine of £160,000 a day until remedied.

Localism Update

Charles Wagner, Head of Planning & Urban Advice, EH, gave a powerpoint presentation spelling out the implications of the Act (see page 5)

Preservation Trusts – current issues

There is concern that the Government shows a lack of interest in Building Preservation Trusts.

There are 280 registered Preservation Trusts and several currently have serious financial problems.

Heritage Lottery Fund Update

With the centenary approaching, WW1 cemeteries feature in further projects. English Heritage have a £100,000 War Memorial Grants Fund (managed by the Wolfson Foundation); applications are wanted. ■

Safeguarded Wharves Review

The London Forum welcomes the emphasis given by this Review of Safeguarded Wharves on relevant statements from the London Plan and the Mayor's Transport Strategy, and in particular the potential for increased use of the Blue Ribbon Network to reduce road based freight. We also welcome the discussion of the reasons for such increased use, including contributions to the reduction of carbon emissions, of other local pollutants, and of road congestion – to which we would add the value that many attach to retaining working boats on the whole network as an important part of London's heritage.

We expressed the following concerns:

- that safeguarding recommendations should be based on the higher growth scenario forecast.
- on quality of the derivation of the various forecasts. Given the frequent references to issues of climate change, we would have expected, at the very least, an outline analysis of the quantitative contribution which switching from road to water might achieve.

We pointed out a range of methodological flaws such as failure to indicate the basis for some of the forecasts.

We therefore strongly support efforts to ensure that relevant boroughs recognise, and follow through, potential opportunities for using canals to generate new demands for water freight and help achieve modal shift.

Dick Allard member of London Forum Policy & Transport Committee, with oversight of freight issues ■

All London Green Grid SPG comments by London Forum

The draft consultation SPG on 'All London Green Grid' is an admirable and comprehensive assessment and record of London's green spaces. London Forum supports the SPG but made the following suggestions

- 'Local Plan' replaces 'LDF' as introduced by DCLG.
- Concern about changes to existing hard surface areas where there is run-off into the drainage system. All new 'hard standing' should be permeable.
- The new Duty to Cooperate of boroughs

could be mentioned.

- The Thames should be shown on the map of Metropolitan Parks.
- The opportunities for District Parks need to be identified by all boroughs.
- Green Belt Land in Outer London should be shown.
- The value of the squares in Central London need to be mentioned; they should be open to the public wherever possible.
- Avoidance of conflict for those walking and cycling through green spaces.
- Promote the use of farmers' markets in

open spaces.

- The importance of increasing the number of trees in streets, good coverage by their foliage and appropriate maintenance should be emphasised.
- Clarify that the London Plan requires all London's riparian boroughs to develop Thames appraisals.

The present Thames Strategy policy gap between Chelsea and Tower Bridge is unacceptable.

Peter Eversden ■

Will there be any libraries left?

Councils across London are using the economic crisis as an excuse to close libraries and the coalition government do not seem to care

Helen Marcus reports on current developments

The worst offenders in library closures are Brent, Camden, Lewisham, Lambeth and Redbridge.

The "savings" involved are paltry and could easily be found in other ways.

In Brent they are spending as much as they are saving in maintaining the empty buildings. It makes no economic sense. The residents' attempt to challenge the decision at a judicial review failed disastrously. Culture Secretary Jeremy Hunt dismissed an appeal from the Brent protesters asking him to intervene. Brent councillor James Powney had the effrontery to say: "We're actually going to have a better library service from our six libraries than we had for the 12."

Brent attacks its own conservation area

Now, having closed six libraries on the basis of a so-called 'Transformation Scheme' in which Willesden Library was to be improved to serve the whole area, Brent are closing Willesden as well as part of a wholly unnecessary regeneration rebuilding plan (the current Library is only 20 years old and was built to last 60 years).

This is part of a secret deal with the developer Galliford Try who will grab several public amenities such as the old Library building in a conservation area and now used for community offices, and a public open space. It has been sprung on the public with no consultation. Residents formed a group "Keep Willesden Green" and have raised a petition of over 5500 signatures to demand that the scheme is called in for challenge and discussion by the full Brent Council. The story has reached the pages of Private Eye.

Lewisham library service collapse

Lewisham's library service has virtually collapsed with little media coverage. They have "lobbied the DCMS, knocked on the door of No. 10, challenged Ed Vaizey in public and collared Jeremy Hunt in the corridors of the House of Commons," where they were the only library campaigners at the CMS Committee interview of Mr. Hunt. They even won an award in November, as local heroes, from the South London Press, for their activities. They were hoping for a legal challenge but could not get legal aid, and the borough has no literary champions or people with enough money to fund a legal campaign. In any case Brent's unfortunate experience

did not give much cause for any optimism that that route would have had any success.

Residents step in

Camden residents in the north of the borough have been more successful in keeping in play three of the six libraries closed by the Council. Local residents have set up trusts and recruited volunteers. Negotiations are ongoing.

Residents in **Bexley** are following the same path: a Charity, Greener Bexley will shortly take over management of Bexley Village Library, and introduce a paid membership system once it leaves council control this spring.

The 1964 Library Act is flouted

It is a sorry tale of the complete flouting of the 1964 Act

"It shall be the duty of every library authority to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons desiring to make use thereof, ...

"of encouraging both adults and children to make full use of the library service, and of providing advice as to its use"

The duties of the Secretary of State are "to superintend, and promote the improvement of the public library service provided by local authorities in England and Wales and to secure the proper discharge by local authorities of the functions in relation to libraries conferred on them as library authorities by or under this Act."

Michael Rosen speaks out

The following excerpts from a blog by Michael Rosen rings many bells.

"In many streets, there is a scarcely visible process going on: developers eye up land and properties with a view to convincing councils that there is a place or space which they can make a profit out of. They don't call it that. They call it 'regeneration' and proceed to line up various agencies or authorities to back them: eg the local transport people, or some kind of 'development agency' and so on. They will also try to capture some key members of the council (elected or non-elected). Sometimes this process is initiated by a council committee as part of their own 'regeneration' scheme"

"In fact, more often than not, it's a con. The 'affordable' housing that is sometimes

promised at the outset, starts diminishing in numbers as the developer pleads economy and 'returns on investment'. The land or properties that the developers have been eyeing may well have been deliberately run down by the public authorities. The 'dereliction' they talk about in their glossy brochures may well have been engineered"

".....some deal is on the cards whereby the developer is getting some kind of subsidy from us, the council tax payers, but which may well be hidden as a non-ask eg a very low payment for a slice of property, and the council and the developer produce some great big brochure of blather saying how this is all a marvellous retail opportunity, everything is going to look smart and nice."

The drive by this government to open up everything to developers can only make things worse.

Lobby of Parliament by Library Campaign

There was a lobby of Parliament on March 13th by The Library Campaign together with The National Federation of Women's Institutes, Voices for the Library, Campaign for the Book, Libraries for Life for Londoners, Unison and CILIP.

New Super library in Southwark

Southwark Council has said it will not close any libraries and has actually opened a new one, the £14m Canada Water Library with a 150-seat theatre and space for meetings and evening courses. It will be open seven days a week. The Council say they have listen to the people who did not want libraries closed.

Designed by Architect Piers Gough, of CZWG Architects, the inverted pyramid shape overhangs Canada Water basin, allowing a rather a large library on a rather small site. "It leans out in every direction so we are able to have one library floor above really quite a small footprint on the ground." "It's integrated with the Underground so the Tube station entrance is actually part of the building."

The 1964 Act is available at:

www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1964/75?view=extent

The full text of Michael Rosen's blog is at: www.michaelrosenblog.blogspot.com/2012/03/historic-victory-against-profit-led.html?spref=fb ■

Regeneration at Vauxhall, Nine Elms and Battersea

A 'new' district for the capital

London Street Markets

The GLA Economic Development, Culture, Sport and Tourism Committee have examined London's street markets and say they wish to develop "effective policies to sustain them". They would like to see the Mayor develop a '100 London Markets' strategy, which "harnesses the energy and ideas of the various interested parties and leads a revival of our markets"

One is not sure whether to be pleased or afraid. When Camden tried to improve Inverness Street many years ago they virtually destroyed it. From being a thriving food market it has dwindled into a spin-off for the tat already sold in the surrounding Camden Lock establishments. The GLA report could not even identify the right date: they say it dates from 25 years ago but it is much older.

Certainly the One London Group doesn't think much of the report. They do not support the main findings and consider that "taxpayers' money should not be spent on protecting or promoting possibly unsuccessful commercial enterprises, which is what markets are first and foremost".

"While it is true that markets have existed in London for centuries" and "over those centuries they have changed their character and their geographic locations". "Traditional" markets may not be very successful, but newer ones, run by farmers or specialist traders and their organizations are doing well. Clearly, this indicates another change in direction as far as markets are concerned. It is not a sensible idea to interfere with these trends, using taxpayers' money. The people of London and visitors to the city make their own financial choices as far as markets are concerned. There is no role for the Mayor or the LDA in that." ■

Wandsworth Council has approved plans for the Nine Elms regeneration zone. The 13 acre site is currently occupied by the South London Mail Centre which is due to close as part of Royal Mail's ongoing restructuring programme. The Mayor's new planning framework confirms that the area will be transformed into a brand new district for the capital, with potential for 16,000 new homes and up to 25,000 new jobs.

Extension of the Northern Line

Crucially the extension of the Northern Line to Battersea, a commitment secured in the Chancellor's 2011 Autumn Statement, can now be funded, despite the ongoing failure to find a future for Battersea Power Station. A Section 106 levy on developments approved through the planning system is expected to raise more than £500m towards its construction as well as other community infrastructure. The majority will go towards the planned £600m Northern Line Extension which will create two new Tube stations in Nine Elms.

The scheme's mixed use masterplan by Allies & Morrison Architects, is called Nine Elms Parkside. It would create seven distinct plots with buildings ranging in height from 5 to 23 storeys, with new public squares, courtyards and gardens, space for new shops, businesses, postal services, cafés, restaurants, bars, and a variety of sports and leisure facilities. It would provide up to 1,870 homes, including up to 168 affordable rent homes, and up to 112 intermediate housing units in the form of First Steps shared ownership for sale.

Community benefits include a new state primary school, £200,000 towards an extension of the Barclay Cycle Hire scheme to Nine Elms, £300,000 towards a local employment initiative and new car club parking spaces. A new 3.3 acre public park is planned to run the full length of the site from east to west forming a key link in the Nine Elms Linear Park - a continuous green corridor that will run from Battersea Power Station in the west to Vauxhall Cross in the east.

Battersea Power Station

Meanwhile the future of Battersea Power Station is still in doubt. The Vauxhall Society website reports a gathering campaign to knock down the building in part or whole, with Wandsworth Council apparently in favour.

Since its closure in 1983, the derelict 40-acre site, with its Grade II listed London landmark has been at the centre of a string of failed redevelopment schemes. At first it was going to become the London equivalent of Disneyland, then a shopping centre with a roof-top ice-skating rink and finally 3,400 luxury apartments. But each grandiose plan failed as one developer after another ran out of cash.

It collapsed into administration at the end of last year, with 325 million pounds of debt, and is to go on the market yet again.

Built in 1933 by Sir Giles Gilbert Scott, who also built, Bankside, (now Tate Modern), it is said to be Europe's largest brick building. At the peak of its production in the 1950s, the station supplied a fifth of London's electricity. But it has been without a roof for two decades. Its Italian marble hall and Art Deco turbine control room with parquet flooring are slowly rotting away. The foundations need reinforcing and there are doubts about the structural soundness of the four chimneys, which are 103 metres (338 feet) tall.

Calls for destruction

Advocates for its destruction have come from some unlikely sources, including design commentator Stephen Bayley, one of the founders of the Design Museum, who thinks keeping it is "mindless nostalgia" for Britain's industrial past.

Its protected status is seen as a major stumbling block for redevelopment, adding tens of millions of pounds to the cost. "Enough is enough," this lobby says: efforts to save the much-loved brick building should be abandoned in favour of a more financially viable plan.

One of the many alternative proposals to remodel the Power Station comes from Terry Farrell. It would demolish the side walls of the building, replacing them with a colonnade that opens up into a park in the building's central space. Much of the building's signature details, including the chimneys, the turbine halls and the control rooms, would be retained.

The saga continues! ■

Alterations to the London Plan

Due to Government changes in national legislation since the London Plan was published in July 2011 the Mayor has drawn up proposals for early minor alterations to the London Plan.

The consultation closed 23 March. The proposals are available to download on the Early Minor Alterations publication page of the GLA website www.london.gov.uk ■

Round the Societies

A round-up of news from our member societies.

By **Haydn Mylchreest**

Congratulations on major anniversaries

The **Kew Society** reached its 100th anniversary in 2011; in 2012 the **Blackheath Society** celebrates 75 years since it was founded, **Amwell Society** is 40 years old and the **Herne Hill Society** 30 years.

Last year we asked all our Members to give the date on which they were founded and 77 did so. From this we see that two members of the London Forum were founded in the late 1800s, namely **Metropolitan Public Gardens Association** (1882) and the **Heath & Hampstead Society** (1897), followed last century by **Wimbledon Society** (1903), **Hampstead Garden Suburb Residents Association** (1911) and **The London Society** (1912). I hope that the archives will be searched and we will receive another batch of dates this year.

Persistence in Peckham

Once again, persistence brings its reward. The **Peckham Society** has been rewarded after eight years of campaigning with the support of English Heritage – two central area conservation areas were designated by the Southwark Planning Committee last October. Encouraged by this success, the Society has now set its sights on securing funding for the refurbishment of key buildings in the centre of Peckham from the National Lottery (Heritage Fund) Townscape Heritage Initiative.

Concern over capitalising on open spaces

Clapham Society was concerned about the proposal to fence off an area of grassland near the Common for 19 days over the Xmas 2011 and New Year period; the Society continues to be concerned about Lambeth Council's apparent determination to optimise the income from parks and open spaces to offset reductions in the budgets across the services. This policy has resulted in additional income of approximately £500,000 being generated between April and November 2011, 80% of which came from events held on Clapham Common. Clapham Society reports that last autumn two back-to-back events left the Common in state from which it took weeks to recover. Lambeth, of course is not the only Council trying to generate more income from its assets. Revenue-generating proposals by Barnet Council to stage events in various parks during the period April to September this year have also drawn criticism from the Finchley Society.

Action to improve Beckenham Town Centre

Beckenham Civic Society (BCS) has studied the London Borough of Bromley's Review of Beckenham and West Wickham Town Centres presented in late 2009, which was drawn up without consultation with the BCS. The Society has responded by appointing its own Working Party to draw up recommendations for safeguarding the future of Beckenham High Street. It provides constructive, practical ideas, reflecting the views of Beckenham's local residents and shopkeepers on the future of their Town Centre. This most attractive document was brought to the attention of London Forum members at the Open meeting on Town Centres.

Facelift for Albert Bridge

It is refreshing to report that Albert Bridge has now been revealed as a thing of structural beauty now that its repair and refurbishment (or facelift) is complete. **Battersea Society** reports this welcome news in their Winter Newsletter. We can again appreciate the graceful lines of this bridge in its unusual pastel colours. The bridge was first opened in 1873 as a toll bridge, but it was unsound structurally and so Sir Joseph Bazalgette modified it and it was then opened as a suspension bridge in 1887. Further extensive work was carried out by the GLC in 1973 when it was modified again by making the central span a simple beam. The bridge therefore is an unusual hybrid design but it is one of the most attractive of the Thames crossings. The toll booths at either end of the bridge are still in place, an interesting reminder of its first use.

Saving Hampstead Heath's landscape - again

Hampstead Heath's treasured "wild and natural" landscape is threatened by the most damaging works for over a century according to the **Heath and Hampstead Society**. The Ponds on the Heath are technically reservoirs and come within the scope of the 1975 Reservoirs Act. Although there have been numerous torrential rainstorms that have flooded the surrounding areas - Hampstead's topography makes it susceptible to such storms - the water from the Ponds has never been the cause.

Now the 'elf and safety' lobby has got going and engineers are claiming that massive engineering works to build 3 metre high dams round the ponds are necessary under the 1975 Act - and possibly also a new Act of 2010, although this has not yet been implemented - to protect the public from risk of inundation. They claim that the possibility of a 1 in 10,000 year flood could cause as many as 1,500 fatalities. The Society points out that in their 300 year history there is no evidence that anyone has ever been drowned by the ponds flooding. 10,000 years is longer than the span of recorded human history and would include Noah's Flood!

There is nothing in the 1975 Act which defines safety; these criteria have been invented by experts who base their risk assessment on computer modelling, ignoring the factual evidence, such as, that the Ponds are fed by trickling source springs, not great tidal rivers! There is a further problem of conflict of interest: the engineers who advise both government and the authorities also work for the engineering firms who get the contracts.

The Society has assembled a team of its own local experts to try to persuade the authorities not to destroy this beautiful and much loved historic landscape.

Saving Streatham's Heritage

The **Streatham Society** has been instrumental in saving a number of items of Streatham's heritage at the 'Hub' development site. They campaigned to have the dolphin stained glass window from the swimming baths preserved and reused in the new leisure centre. The site developers moved the Sunday School foundation stone of the United Reformed Church to a safe location in the care of the Society. One of the Art Deco panels from the ice rink is also in their safe keeping. Member Colin Crocker has also retrieved a number of historic artifacts from the site. ■

newsbriefs

Key issues of interest and concern to note.

Carbon prices and cap and trade scheme fraud

Whether European carbon permits actually do anything for reducing emissions is highly questionable but they have become a magnet for fraudsters. There are shocking stories on the internet, and highlighted recently in *The Times*, of the way in which the whole thing is being manipulated by criminals.

The EU authorities have admitted that "cyber-thieves" stole as much as 30 million euros in carbon allowances from the region's emissions trading system, forcing exchanges across Europe to halt briefly trading in carbon allowances. Detectives in Paris are now convinced that at least four recent unresolved killings are connected to a multibillion-euro fraud targeting the European Union's carbon trading scheme. The disclosure comes amid a flurry of court cases across Europe involving gangs who exploited Brussels' environmental policy to make lucrative gains. Europol, the European Police Office, estimates that they cost taxpayers about 5 billion euros in VAT.

Last month a court in Frankfurt sentenced six men to jail terms over a 300 million euro fraud.

One of the problems is the way VAT is charged on the permits. Some countries charge top-rate while others - including Britain - do not. Fraudsters buy the permits where there is little or no VAT and sell them where it is high and pocket the profit. The market is also being used to launder drugs money. It is claimed that most European countries have now stopped charging VAT on the permits, controls have been reinforced, and globally the market is now safe. The price of carbon permits has recently fallen to an all-time low, prompting bankers and traders to question the future of the European Union and United Nations' cap-and-trade scheme.

Lord Mayor condemns Shard

Following the recantation of Ken Shuttleworth of Make Architects over his Gherkin last year, and also his questioning of how the Shard can work environmentally, the new Lord Mayor of London, David Wootton, has waded into the controversy. He let it be known that in his view gargantuan property developments such as the Shard are "out of tune with the times". He went on to say that "Every downturn sees this kind of thing." "The property industry goes slightly too far, because of the time lag. But developers are sensitive to public mood, and build buildings that fit the spirit of our times, which rightly would be more in favour of sharing and connection, ie, being more one community, trying to lessen the differences rather than heighten them." [if only! Ed]

New concert hall in the City

Barely noticed by the wider public or the media, a new tower in the City is for once bringing some public good with it. Heron International's approval from the City of London Corporation for the redevelopment of Milton Court residential tower in Silk Street has brought huge benefit for the Guildhall School of Music & Drama. The plan includes additional world-class performance facilities for the School, providing it with state-of-the-art performance and teaching spaces. The new building will house a 625-seat concert hall, 225-seat training theatre, a studio theatre, and space for teaching, office and support services. The tower, with 284 apartments in a range of unit sizes, will sit above the school facilities. The proposals also include significant investment to improve the streetscape.

Tighter controls over betting shops

Both Prime Minister David Cameron and Communities and Local Government Minister Grant Shapps have hinted at Government support for moves to tighten planning controls over the proliferation of betting shops. Grant Shapps made it clear during the Commons debate on town centres that the Coalition was interested in the idea of a separate Use Class for bookmakers, as proposed in the report from Mary Portas on how to revitalise the High Street. He told the Commons: "We have promised to deliver [a response] by the spring, and we absolutely intend to do so; I can confirm that I mean spring 2012."

The next day during PM's questions David Cameron expressed interest in the idea of greater planning control over betting shops when asked to support Ruddock's initiative. There is wide support for such a move. Mayor Boris Johnson and the Local Government Association have called for tighter controls on betting shops.

Change of leadership at Westminster

Westminster City Council has a new leader, Cllr Philippa Roe. She replaces Colin Barrow who resigned amid the furore over plans to extend car parking charges to the evenings and weekends. 85% of those consulted were against them. The Council's own reports admitted that traffic pressure was lighter at these times, thus throwing doubt on whether there was any real justification on traffic grounds, as stipulated in the Road Traffic Regulation Act, for bringing them in, rather than them just being a form of tax-raising.

When residents in Mayfair successfully applied for a judicial review to challenge the plans, Colin Barrow, whose pet project it was, suddenly threw in the towel, abandoned the new charges and resigned.

Westminster Councillor, Glenys Roberts, who writes a column in the *Daily Mail* and stood for the leadership contest herself, claimed to be the only Councillor who voted against the scheme.

It is worth quoting what she wrote: "locked in their ivory towers my politician colleaguesassumed the public opposition would go away.probably because most people who disagreerealise they have no influence. This is the culture that has resulted in the public staying away from the ballot box in their droves"

"Many of my councillor colleagues are committed..... to what has become a very narrow career path where the opinions of their colleagues are more important than those of the voters. They have forgotten who they represent, or if they remember, they think it's all right to pull the wool over their eyes because it won't get noticed. There is a presumption that only the troublemakers respond so you can discount what they say and assume the silent majority is in favour of any proposal!" [Sounds familiar. Ed]

However although the new leader says the plans have been dropped, she has already found a different solution, described as "totally gratuitous" by one of London's leading restaurateurs: a huge programme of converting about five miles of single yellow lines to doubles so that there will now be nowhere to park at all.

Westminster appear not to care about the thousands of people who work unsocial hours to keep the West End economy vibrant and who need to get there by car. Equity, the actors' Union whose members will be particularly affected, has demonstrated against the plans.

newsbriefs

Eurozone crisis hits Property Market

After all last year's optimism of restarted office projects and towers in the City, recent trends have been more downbeat. The scale of the challenge facing property lenders trying to refinance their debt is highlighted by De Montfort University's mid-year report *The UK Commercial Property Lending Market*.

The financial pages have featured a spate of reports since late last year that the eurozone crisis is hitting UK commercial property, with limp demand for office, shop and warehouse rental space. Developers are finding it difficult to secure tenants for some of London's best-known skyscraper projects, including the Pinnacle, and the Walkie-Talkie tower. Almost two-thirds of the office space completed last year is not yet leased, even though the amount built was 43 percent lower than the 10-year average.

The number of jobs in the City and Canary Wharf districts is predicted to fall 8.5 percent this year and will inevitably affect the London office market. It is thought unlikely that tenant demand will pick up significantly this year.

Foreign companies now own 52 percent of all office buildings in the City, up from 50 percent in 2010 and 8 percent in 1980,

Fiona Reynolds to leave the National Trust

Dame Fiona Reynolds has announced that she is to leave the National Trust after more than eleven years as Director General. She will be taking up the post of Master of Emmanuel College, Cambridge, the first woman to be elected as Master in the College's history.

Her career has been devoted to working on matters related to conservation. Before joining the NT she was Director of the Campaign to Protect Rural England.

During her time at the NT she has boosted membership to over four million although there has been controversy over moves to make Trust properties more "accessible". ■

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Dates for your diary

London Forum events

London Forum Open Meetings 2012

Tuesday April 24th

The National Planning Policy Framework, Localism and Neighbourhood Forums

We await the publication of the NPPF as we go to press. This meeting will give members an opportunity to discuss its implications

Coming up:

Friday June 1st

Tuesday July 31st

Subjects and speakers to be announced

Watch out for further information by email

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

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