

# newsforum

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



**The London Forum of Amenity and Civic Societies**  
 Founded 1988  
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## Select Committee inquiry

# Government response to CLG Select Committee into the operation of the NPPF

Most of the Committee findings rejected by government

**Helen Marcus** reports

The report of the DCLG Select Committee inquiry into the Operation of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), published on 16 December 2014, had all the right ingredients – a clear brief focusing its scope on housing, town centres and wind energy, good contributions and a good set of conclusions and recommendations.

London Forum’s Michael Bach called the report “an excellent example of the good work that Select Committees can do to shift policy incrementally, sometimes significantly, along a better path. The report did not call for an overhaul of the NPPF but rather a series of changes aimed at ensuring it does the job it is intended to do.”

However one notes with surprise the gratuitous reference in the Committee’s report singling out the “middle classes” for a pejorative reference: “It is important that neighbourhood planning does not become the preserve of the middle classes”. In today’s changing world how do they define what that means? Surely anyone prepared to give time to these matters on a voluntary basis should be encouraged, not demeaned. Such statements should have no place in a document of this nature.

### Government response

The Government has now responded. While “recognising” many of the concerns, the reply to two thirds of the 43 recommendations was

*“In many areas of the country, localism is almost non-existent in the planning system..... there is a gaping hole in the NPPF for planning authorities whose local plan has not yet been adopted”*

**Geoffrey Clifton-Brown MP**

either that the NPPF already had measures in place, or outright rejection.

### Government rejections

The Government rejected the committee’s recommendation for amendments to the NPPF on the following: strengthening the definition of sustainable development; that any loss of ancient woodland should be ‘wholly exceptional’; setting out the expected responsibilities of developers; making clear that all sites with planning permission should be counted towards the five year supply of housing land; further guidance on the importance of timely infrastructure provision; clearer guidance on what constitutes co-operation; greater transparency in the viability assessment (“it would conflict with

commercial practice”); revising the guidance on strategic housing market assessments; commissioning research into changing retail dynamics as they relate to planning policy; the recommendation revoking the permitted development rights allowing change from classes A1 and A2 to C3.

### On sustainable development

To the Committee’s call for Local Authorities to set out clear policies on sustainable development, the reply merely stated: “The Government encourages local authorities to think creatively about how they access ecological services appropriate to their needs and requirements in an efficient and effective manner.” Green Belt land remains constant, covering over 13 per cent of England.

### On town centres

The Government stated that the Framework makes clear that local authorities should apply a sequential test which requires proposals for main town centre uses including retail to be located in town centres.

### On local plans

The Government rejected the Committee’s view that without an up-to-date Local Plan local authorities surrender their ability to influence the future development of their areas and does not support placing a statutory requirement on councils to have an adopted local plan in place in a specified time.

# Government response to CLG Select Committee into the operation of the NPPF

(continued)

62% of local planning authorities now have an adopted local plan in place compared to 17% in 2010; the Government will keep under review whether it may be necessary to introduce further requirements or sanctions in respect of plan-making in the future should this situation change.

## Neighbourhood planning

The Government agreed with the Committee that confidence in neighbourhood planning is undermined by the perception that plans are being ignored in planning decisions. However they claim that two measures have been taken to provide stronger support.

- The published appeal recovery criteria have been amended to enable a decision on any appeal that involves a potential conflict with an emerging (or recently made) neighbourhood plan to be taken by the Secretary of State.
- The Framework and planning guidance set out the weight that may be given to relevant policies in emerging plans in decision taking.

Factors to consider include the stage of preparation of the plan and the extent to which there are unresolved objections to relevant policies.

The Government encourages neighbourhood areas and the development industry to work together collaboratively.

## Recommendations that were welcomed

The Government expressed support for the following: the suggestion of a "planning users' concordat" between local government, the development and property industries and the voluntary sector to set out the responsibilities of these groups within the planning process – "a more suitable approach than top down national requirements"; that the Planning Inspectorate produce a document setting out lessons learned from the examination of local plans since the launch of the NPPF; measures to encourage local authorities to group together to produce joint core strategies; strengthening existing guidance on the use of section 106 planning obligations agreements; councils should treat planning as a front line service and not see it as an easy target for spending reductions.

The Government agreed with the

Committee that Instead of objecting to policies in neighbourhood plans, house builders and developers should be working with communities to ensure that development meets local needs. They are open to considering modest improvements to the examination procedure. The Government claims that 99% of decisions are right first time with only 1% of applications overturned on appeal.

The Government is consulting on measures to improve data availability on brownfield land because it recognises the importance of having good data in order to monitor progress against its objective.

## Backbench Business Committee debate

Geoffrey Clifton-Brown, Conservative MP for The Cotswolds secured a debate on planning and the National Policy Planning Framework at the Backbench Business Committee in early March.

It was notable that MPs echoed many of the criticisms the Forum and its members have made, particularly Mr. Clifton-Brown, who is not on the DCLG Select Committee. Clearly these are being repeated to them by amenity groups across the country, particularly the conflicts that are arising between neighbourhood forum plans, planning inspectors and local authorities, due to the lack of local plans.

Mr. Clifton-Brown led the debate saying: "while they support the changes in the localism agenda and the NPPF, unfortunately, in many areas of the country, localism is almost non-existent in the planning system". But "the purpose of the debate was not to criticise the NPPF, but to highlight problems associated with councils whose plans have not yet been adopted."

"We recognise the need for more housing, [but] we must ensure that houses are built in the most appropriate places and, as far as possible, in accordance with the wishes of local people and with good design."

"However, there is a gaping hole in the NPPF for planning authorities whose local plan has not yet been adopted." "It is worrying that a significant proportion [two fifths ] of the planning authorities that are trying to operate within a plan-led system are without a plan.

"Neighbourhood plans are a fantastic innovation. But "without an adopted local plan in place, neighbourhood plans..... can

be overruled" and "planning authorities are at the mercy of developers." leaving "an area subject to speculative applications, because developers know that they have a good chance of success at appeal."

**To see the full reports:**  
**Hansard report of the Backbench Business Committee debate:**

<http://bit.ly/1CJttD3>

**CLG Select Committee report:**

<http://bit.ly/1FPPvV3>

**Government response to the CLG Select Committee report**

<http://bit.ly/1BGttOZ> ■

## Bernard Selwyn Bequest

Bernard Selwyn was a member of the executive committee of the Open Spaces Society from 1982 to 2006, and their Vice President. He was a chartered surveyor with the Greater London Council.

He supported the London Forum with generous donations for many years, and on his death left a further legacy from his Estate, totalling some £3,100.

There is no condition attached so the funds will be added to reserves and available for general use by the London Forum.

The Trustees of the London Forum express their immense appreciation for Mr. Selwyn's generosity. ■

## Public Accounts Committee

### The price of criticism

In a recent speech, Chair of the Public Accounts Committee Margaret Hodge, attacked an unaccountable Whitehall "freemasonry". She revealed that an "explicit threat relayed to me was that if we did not change how we held civil servants to account, we would be closed down."

Ms Hodge said that this attitude demonstrated a fundamental lack of respect for parliament. The traditional convention that civil servants were accountable to ministers who in turn were accountable to parliament was no longer sustainable against public demand for transparency. ■

# Examination in Public of the altered London Plan - the Inspector's report

Inspector Tony Thickett's report on the Further Alterations to the London Plan (FALP) was issued last December. **Peter Eversden** sums up the key issues.

The latest Examination in Public (EiP) assessed the eighth London Plan. A revision was necessary to take account of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). The 2014 alterations were intended to address housing and employment issues arising from a substantial increase in population, to respond to changes in national policy, to examine the 2013 Mayor's Housing and other new strategies and to address advice from the Outer London Commission on Town Centres. However the EiP did not address all the issues participants identified.

The Inspector approved the Further Alterations to the London Plan (FALP) content on transport, cycling, walking, energy, digital connectivity and water. He made little comment on matters such as climate change and flood risk, living spaces, neighbourhoods, public realm and viability. Presumably this lack of comment on most of them implies that he considered the policies are adequate.

Despite certain reservations, the Inspector recommended that FALP should be adopted but he insisted that a review should commence immediately after adoption this year, rather than waiting until 2016 as Mayor Johnson had envisaged.

## Housing and density

There is a mismatch in the capital's housing target: 42,400 against an assessed need of between 49,000 more homes a year, leaving an annual shortfall of 6,600 homes a year over the next ten to 20 years. In the absence of any mechanism for apportioning these extra homes to individual boroughs, the Inspector was unable to see how the Mayor could guarantee delivery. "The evidence before me strongly suggests that the existing strategy will not deliver sufficient homes to meet objectively assessed need." Some of Mr Thickett's reservations echo concerns expressed by the London Forum. In paragraph 54 he said "I am concerned that the strategy of accommodating the development necessary for London's growth within its existing built confines will place unacceptable pressures on the city's communities and environment."

On proposals to increase housing density the Inspector commented (paragraph 42) that "It cannot be assumed,

*"I am concerned that the strategy of accommodating the development necessary for London's growth within its existing built confines will place unacceptable pressures on the city's communities and environment."*

**Inspector Tony Thickett**

in my view, that it will be appropriate to increase densities over the existing Density Matrix guidelines in all cases. Town centres are accessible locations but each has its own character which new development should respect. Meeting the pressing need for housing in London will require new, innovative and possibly unpopular solutions but care must be taken not to damage its environment such that it becomes an unpleasant place to visit, live and work."

"It is not easy to see, therefore, where London Boroughs would find additional sources of supply. Capacity could be increased but I have significant concerns regarding whether higher densities can or should always be sought or achieved." Unfortunately Mr Thickett did not carry these observations through into the recommendations on housing density in his report.

As James Stevens, strategic planner at the Home Builders Federation commented: "This is the first recognition in 15 or 20 years that there are limits to London's housing capacity."

## The duty to cooperate

The Inspector recommended that the boroughs should not be required to conduct their own assessment of need nor address any gap between supply and need by seeking to exceed their target.

The Mayor needs to explore options with other authorities in the South East. In the absence of a wider regional strategy, this "may include engaging local planning

authorities beyond the Greater London Authority's boundaries in discussions on the evolution of our city". and also "Outer Boroughs could seek help from their neighbours beyond the GLA boundaries."

The Inspector found that the Mayor failed to meet the duty to cooperate and confirmed that the duty does apply to London's spatial development strategy, because it establishes housing targets and other requirements that guide the preparation of the development plan. He said the Mayor "did not engage constructively with adjoining waste planning authorities" in formulating the alterations. However, he found that this failure was outweighed by the plan's benefits in terms of reducing pressure on waste facilities outside the capital and the urgency of getting higher housing targets enshrined.

## Car parking standards

The Mayor's use of maximum car parking standards and a restraint based approach were supported by the Inspector, despite an attempt by the Government to seek relaxation in line with the Planning Policy Guidance.

## Green Belt

There was also some discussion of the need to consider the Green Belt, which the Government wishes to protect. 64,000 ha of it are within one mile of an existing railway station; the growth corridors across the GLA boundary are identified in the London Plan's Key Diagram and are well supported by transport.

## The recommendations of the Inspector are as follows:

- Committing to an immediate full review of the London Plan.
- Removing references to London Boroughs being required to carry out their own assessments of objectively assessed housing need.
- Allowing London Boroughs to set their own income criteria with regard to intermediate housing.
- Mayoral Development Corporations are to co-operate with boroughs to ensure that their waste apportionment requirements are met. ■

# What makes for a dynamic civic society?

**Professor Jan Pahl CBE**, Chair of the Canterbury Society discusses the experience of the Canterbury Society which may have relevance to the civic movement more generally

If the civic society movement is to grow and become strong we need to understand what makes local societies flourish. Why do groups wax and wane? How do we recruit and retain members and leaders? What makes for a dynamic civic society? These are key questions to which much academic study has been devoted. There is only space here to summarise a few of the answers.

This issue came up at the Civic Voice Annual Convention, which took place in Canterbury in October 2014. The Convention was hosted by the Canterbury Society, which has itself had some experience of waxing and waning. The Society is first recorded as existing in 1766. However, more recently we know that it flourished from the 1960s to the 1990s, but was wound up in 1996, only to be revived again in 2008. It is now a respected part of the life of the city, with a knowledgeable and energetic committee, which in 2013 produced its own Residents' Vision for the Future of the City. What can be learnt from this history, and from the wider academic literature, to help us build a strong movement?

First, there is the issue of why groups wax and wane? A useful theory is provided by Greiner's Model of Organisational Growth. This was developed for growing businesses, but it has relevance to civic societies too. Different stages in organizational development contain the seeds of problems to come.

**Phase 1** sees the start of the organisation, with growth through creativity; there may be a leadership crisis when the 'founder members' move on.

**In Phase 2** the work of the organization may become more formalized and routinized; there may be a crisis of autonomy as members feel sidelined.

**Phase 3** sees increasing delegation and specialization, introduced in order to increase autonomy, which can lead to a crisis in management and control.

**In Phase 4** increasing coordination and control can lead to a crisis expressed in organizational inflexibility and rigidity.

**In Phase 5** increasing cooperation and consultation are introduced, in order to overcome rigidity, but this can lead to a crisis in decision-making.

Civic societies do not necessarily go through all these stages, but each one contains relevant lessons. Many societies are born in response to a threat to the local environment, with a strong leader heading up a group committed to doing something about the threat. When the threat diminishes, or the founder members move on, careful management of succession is necessary if the society is to survive.

The Canterbury Society was revived in 1961 in response to the changes currently going on in the city. After terrible bombing during the war, the 1950s saw the historic Guildhall demolished, medieval houses being swept away, and plans made for new roads driven through the historic centre. The Canterbury Society was founded in order to counter these threats; strong and effective leaders ran the society for 20 years or more. However, it was wound up in 1996, basically because no one could be found to lead it.

This brief account raises a second issue which is about how members and leaders can be recruited and retained. Recent research has identified three main motives for volunteering: unpaid work or service, serious leisure, and activism. An organization which offers its members these has a better chance of flourishing. In its best years the Canterbury Society offered all three, as members planted trees and flowers, enjoyed talks and walks and engaged in bitter battles to protect the historic environment.

Research on volunteering also tells us that though volunteers come from all sorts of backgrounds, in general they tend to be drawn from the more affluent and educated sections of society and to be middle aged rather than young or old. In general, women are more likely to be involved in caring and social volunteering, while men are more likely to be involved in sporting and leisure activities.

However, anyone who is familiar with the civic society movement knows that those who volunteer for this sort of work are rather different. Looking round Civic Voice meetings it is clear that those present may be typical of other volunteers in terms of socio-economic status and education, but that they are likely to be older than the average volunteer, typically coming from what has been described as

the 'active retired'. They may have largely stopped paid work, but they have energy and good health, often with expertise derived from their professional work, and a concern to do something to benefit the communities in which they live.

These patterns have implications for the civic movement and for the recruitment of new members and leaders. Much is said about the importance of recruiting younger people to civic societies. However, we have to be realistic about this proposal. Middle aged people tend to be busy with paid work and with family responsibilities: if they do volunteering this is likely to be related to sporting or social activities or the interests of children.

It might be more productive for civic societies to focus on recruiting those who have recently retired, many of whom are looking for a new direction for their lives. However, this policy has its dangers. The 'active retired' may have the necessary time, energy, interest and commitment. However, increasing age can limit what they are able to do. The implication is that civic societies should plan for a turnover among their members, and committees should be actively recruiting new members.

This article grew out of discussions about the waxing and waning of the Canterbury Society. The aim has been to use this story to draw out some lessons which may have relevance to the civic movement more generally and which may stimulate a wider discussion.

Key messages are that dynamic civic societies should:

- Provide a mix of activities for a variety of members
- Welcome all comers but recognise that the 'active retired' are a core group
- Aim to recruit new members of the committee on a regular basis

## References

- Greiner, L. (1998) *Evolution and Revolution as Organizations Grow*, Harvard Business Review.
- Kendall, J. (2003) *The Voluntary Sector: Comparative Perspectives in the UK*, Routledge. ■

# All Change at Finsbury Park

Diane Burridge, Highbury Community Association, reports on a conference organised by the Finsbury Park Trust in February

**N**otorious for overcrowding due to Arsenal matches, events at Finsbury Park and when used instead of Kings Cross Station, Finsbury Park Station has recently had a bad press.

Located in an area of high crime, and in the top 10% of the most deprived in the country - where men live eight years less than the national average, the station environs have been in need of improvements since the end of Single Regeneration Budget investment in 2005.

Although not helped by being at the intersection of three boroughs - Hackney, Islington and Haringey, the station area is in Zone 2, with the large Grade II listed Finsbury Park and excellent transport links. It has been a surprise that there has been little investment since 2005 until very recently.

## And suddenly it is happening:

The award-winning ParkTheatre opened in May 2013; the John Jones Art Centre opened in June 2014; by 2016 there will be two 21 storey City North Twin Towers with 475 bedrooms for University of the Arts students. The £220 million City North development will also have 355 new homes, a cinema, a health and fitness club, and a range of shops and cafes. And by 2018 Thameslink services will come to Finsbury Park. Over 20 million people use the station each year and urgent improvements have just started to expand the northern ticket office and have step-free access - admittedly works which were agreed eight years ago!

## Concerns

And so, why were many of the 200 participants at a conference organised by the Finsbury Park Trust, held 21 February 2015, expressing concerns?

For one: The closure of the northern entrance to the station for over two years will cause much disruption, as people have to navigate through bus stations to get to other entrances. What happens on Arsenal match days and when 30,000 people come to events at the Park?

And why is Haringey Council now allowing 15 days of events at the Park each year (trebling the previously agreed allocation)? The Stone Roses concert witnessed massive overcrowding and an eight-fold rise in crime in the area.

## Park is focus for community

Although there are many local groups, surely the Park is the focus for community enjoyment and engagement, especially in this area with no town centre. And tentative plans by Rowans Bowling Alley to develop from three floors to about 11 floors, taking some of the Park land, were queried. How can losing any precious park land even be considered by Haringey Council? Once you start nibbling away at park land, what next? queried the Friends of Finsbury Park.

## Unwanted towers

Other concerns centred on the approval by Islington Council of the two 21 storey towers for student accommodation when Islington's own planning policy states that no more than 10 storeys are allowed outside the central zone. In fact, Section 4.3.2 of the Draft Finsbury Park Development Framework Supplementary Planning Document states that these towers were approved under: 'now outdated and superseded planning policies', and that tall buildings in this area are no longer supported under current policy.

What is the point of stating this in the Document if the precedent has been set, people queried? Eric Sorensen, the keynote speaker, former Director of Central London Forward and the London Docklands Development Corporation, and now of the Angel Society, said that problems relating to growth, although needing to be acknowledged and addressed, are far easier to handle than problems of decline. He advised of the need to retain a mix of uses and local heritage sites; have a centre for the area and employment and training brokerage schemes, as well as 'tame' main roads which can divide an area so starkly. Overall, the advantages of agglomeration of population and businesses outweigh the disadvantages.

Councillor Richard Greening, Chair of the three boroughs' Finsbury Park Regeneration Board, called for powers of compulsory purchase of derelict property, such as for the abandoned George Robey Pub, now a massive eye sore in the area.

At the moment there is little that councils can do here.

## Call for new groups

Encouragingly, local people urged that a Neighbourhood Forum and a Finsbury Park Station Users' Group be set up, recognising that, as with the Friends of Finsbury Park, these groups will need to operate on a shoe-string, run by volunteers. The organiser of the event, the Finsbury Park Trust, was gratefully thanked, and participants were appreciative of the work of the Trust's volunteer administrators and Management Committee Board members in their dedicated support of the Executive Director, Talal Karim.

The fact that 200 people turned up on a Saturday wanting to improve and protect their area bodes well. Rapid growth may be welcomed by some, but it needs to be managed to ensure that London retains its parks, heritage and human scale - reasons why the city is so popular in the first place. ■

## Arsenal loses latest appeal

Arsenal Football Club has lost a Court of Appeal fight to build a 25-storey tower next to their Emirates Stadium at 45 Hornsey Road, which they claim would be part of the regeneration of the area.

Consent for the tower was originally approved by a local government planning inspector who considered it would not be out of scale with its surroundings.

But the London Borough of Islington took the matter to the High Court last July, where Judge David Mackie upheld their appeal on the ground that the permission was granted in breach of Council policy against high buildings.

Arsenal asked the Appeal Court to reinstate the original permission.

This has now been dismissed by the Master of the Rolls Lord Dyson, sitting with Lord Justice Davis and Lady Justice Gloster, who said the decision of the judge was 'unimpeachable'. They endorsed the judge's findings that tall buildings did not fit in with Islington's policy that buildings over 30 metres were 'generally inappropriate' to the 'predominantly medium to low level character' of the area.

But this was followed by a re-hearing of the Planning Inquiry of which news is awaited ■

# Town centres

Open Meeting 25th November

**Gerard Burgess** and **Jennifer Peters** from the GLA, and **Stephen Kelly** from the London Borough of Haringey, discuss how they might be affected by the Government's recent changes to the planning system. **Peter Pickering** reports

**M**ichael Bach opened the meeting, discussing the importance of town centres and how they might be affected by the Government's recent changes to the planning system; they served many purposes besides shopping. The Government's deregulation, which overruled local decision making, could leave high streets looking totally different. Recent pressures included out-of-town shopping (much less of a threat in London than elsewhere in the UK), multiplex cinemas and on-line shopping.

**Gerard Burgess** outlined the policies in the 2011 London Plan. Town centres were focuses for growth, some being Opportunity Areas in their own right. There was in London a hierarchy of centres: international, metropolitan, major, and local. The London Plan policies discouraged out-of-town centres (even if this policy conflicted with national ones), supported small shops and wanted town centre management and proactive strategies. It was necessary to co-ordinate London's policies with the enormous shopping centres in the wider city-region - for instance Bluewater. He drew attention to the Mayor's regeneration policies and associated documents: 'Learning from London's High Streets', 'Culture in the High Street', 'the High Street Fund' etc. The Mayor was seeking proactive stewardship, occupying empty spaces, accommodating growth, especially with mixed use. Fragmented ownership of plots in town centres was an obstacle to be overcome.

**Jennifer Peters** spoke about the Further Alterations to the London Plan (FALP); it took account of the reduced need for floor-space in retail outlets due to the growth in on-line shopping. It focused more on high-density housing in town centres; necessary if the annual target of 49,000 homes was to be reached; such housing might be especially suitable for students, older people, etc., but must not be at the expense of the ordinary town-centre offer. FALP supported community pubs and sought to manage clusters - say of betting shops and hot-food takeaways. Ms Phillips said that the effect of the Government's permitting conversions from offices to residential was being monitored; 58% of the offices benefitting

from this permission were occupied or part-occupied; conversion of an office block produced fewer dwellings than redevelopment of the block would have done; of the London boroughs Richmond had had most cases, but Croydon the greater quantity of floor-space affected. The GLA was giving boroughs advice on how to deal with cases where prior approval was sought for conversion of retail premises to residential.

**Stephen Kelly**, who had worked for many other authorities, inside and outside London (including Wales), most recently Harrow, said that the future of the High street depended now not on planning (writing plans that would probably never be implemented), but on community action and conversations across the public sector. Local authorities were running out of money. Questions must be asked like 'What is the point of Wood Green', and 'Why do more people go to the Outlet Centre in Wembley, which is not a Town Centre, than to places which are?' Change must be managed so as not to alienate parts of the community; places must be humanised. Local authorities and civic societies must engage honestly with traders and make them realise the importance of the quality of their offer; the need to make high streets enjoyable places; and how average household income in an area affected the type of business that would thrive there. They must be aware of what is happening in other areas.

Local authorities were finding they needed fewer buildings (meetings being held in e.g. Wetherspoons, and the public sector was moving from Harrow town centre); this could affect town centres profoundly. Students or older people could make for a more thriving daytime economy than did working people. It might be possible to spend money to bring small employment back to the edges of town centres. Mr Kelly was not so concerned at the principle of making it easier to convert from offices to residential as at its being taken out of the hands of local authorities. Under the present regime small businesses such as architects were being thrown out of premises, and it was very difficult to get long tenancies.

**Michael Bach opened the questions** from the floor: could redevelopment replace lost business space? Ms Phillips said that it would depend on specificities. Mr Kelly said that demolition of office blocks in Suffolk Street, behind Tate Modern, was very encouraging in this respect.

**Wandsworth Society:** Were there mechanisms to oblige cross-subsidisation from housing to affordable work-spaces? Ms Phillips said that there could be such policies in a local plan, but they were difficult to enforce. Mr Burgess said that the Mayor's priorities for Section 106 money included affordable housing. Mr Kelly agreed that Section 106 was a mechanism, but said that the trade-off between affordable housing and affordable work-space was a challenge. Mr Farrow doubted whether Section 106 could be used for this purpose, given that its use had to be site-specific. Mr Kelly said that there could be a site-specific policy - for instance if there were a policy to have space for employment on the ground floor of town-centre developments.

**Mill Hill Neighbourhood Forum:** is there a template for town-centre health checks (answer - on the website); with the difference between the daytime and the evening economy, are Plans too focused on central zones, while in fact people were being pushed out to the suburbs by costs. Mr Kelly observed that in reality it was central London that was the growth area for employment. Mr Burgess said that the London Plan recognised the importance of the evening economy, and sought to get its benefits without compromising other things important to local residents.

Are local authorities still trying to do too much? Mr Kelly had some sympathy with this view. There was not going to be the level of funding in the future as there had traditionally been. Authorities would have to have frank and honest conversations with communities, getting them to do more and to prioritise what authorities should do.

**New Barnet Community Association:** experience in New Barnet was of inner city densities, as intensification of the suburbs continued. There seemed to be a shortage of family homes; it was hard to provide the amenities for families in high density developments. Ms Phillips agreed that it

# Transport in the Mayor's 2015 Infrastructure Plan

Open Meeting 29th January 2015: **Geoff Hobbs** and **Helen Cansick** of Transport for London  
**Peter Pickering** reports

was new for the UK (though not for some other countries) to have families in areas of high density; there would have to be innovations in family accommodation. If providing amenity space was not viable with Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), perhaps CIL was too high. Mr Kelly said that there was certainly a demand for 1/2 bedroom units in Haringey, and more would therefore be built. But Haringey council had a blanket ban on converting modest family houses.

What infrastructure is required to support all the new housing - over 2,000 were being built around Wandsworth town centre, and employment space was being lost. Ms Phillips said that the London Plan did take account of infrastructure, in close cooperation with TfL. Witness the recent Infrastructure Plan.

**Hammersmith Society:** did the Plan recognise that the next generation, with its low pay, would probably not be able to afford the standard of housing that the present generation expected? That should be factored into the employment/housing balance. Mr Burgess said that the Plan attempted to ensure that there was space for different types of employment, through its land use policies, and to match skills and job opportunities. Ms Phillips drew attention to the targets for affordable housing. Mr Bach said that it would be impossible to manage the growth in local employment.

**Ealing Fields Residents Association:** too many boroughs looked at 'regeneration' rather than at planning; it was good to see how the borough of Haringey engaged with its local community. It was feared that much of the new housing in outer London boroughs would be in areas of a very low PTAL rating (59% of it in areas of PTAL 0-3). TfL were not prepared to undertake a thorough review of the bus network; they should undertake the planning, even if they knew the implementation was not currently affordable. Ms Phillips said that FALP sought high densities only where there was a high PTAL. Mr Kelly said that TfL undertook good transport modelling - both of the road network and of public transport. ■

**G**  **Geoff Hobbs (rail transport) and Helen Cansick (road transport)** discussed strategic transport measures for accommodating London's increasing population.

## The salient points in Mr Hobbs' presentation were:-

**The population of London** would be 11.3 million by 2050 (with many more older people than now), and that there would be an increase of 35-40% in the number of trips over the present level, entailing a 70% increase in the capacity of public transport (the projection was for a rather lesser increase in car use). Much of the growth would be in the Central Activities Zone (CAZ), to which jobs were likely to migrate: options for meeting this were expanding the CAZ, intensifying it, and establishing satellite CAZs.

**Overcrowding of London's transport** system was forecast to improve up to 2021, and get worse after that (especially on the heavy rail network); development of the Royal Docks would increase pressure on the DLR. Trams would get busier.

**Air quality targets** would have to be met, and step-free access expanded.

**Innovations**, such as autonomous (driverless) vehicles, could have a big impact. Improvements on the rail system (including upgrading signalling, e.g. on the Jubilee Line) could make it possible to have many more trains per hour - potentially 36 instead of 24 on the Piccadilly Line; the Bakerloo line - currently the quietest - could carry more passengers; a computer-controlled sub-surface railway could run much more regularly; Overground trains could be longer; Thameslink would be much improved by 2018; contactless payment would reduce the need to visit ticket offices, and would free staff to walk around and provide information and reassurance to passengers.

**All-night operation** much improved the standard of service, but was a problem for those lines which needed maintenance at night.

**The suburban heavy rail system** (currently no more than 14 trains an hour compared with 34 on the Victoria Line) was capable of improvement. There was pressure to expand Crossrail, even before it

had been built; Crossrail2 would relieve the Piccadilly and Victoria Lines.

## The salient points in Ms Cansick's presentation were:-

**Providing for wheeled transport** was not the only purpose of roads - other purposes included walking, cafés, and the reduction of pollution. Roads should be 'places' in themselves, not simply to facilitate movement. Roads could unlock growth - witness Croydon and the Elephant & Castle. Commercial vehicles were important users of roads.

**Traffic volumes** were starting to increase, after ten years in which they did not.

**It was vital to keep in good condition** the assets that roads comprised - congestion was often caused by asset failure. Lack of network resilience (exemplified by the Blackwall Tunnel) reduced reliability.

**Demand had to be managed**, but charging would marginalise some of society. Urban congestion could be managed by traffic lights; they should be used better. Enforcement should be stepped up.

**Fly-unders and mini-tunnels** could help. If roads could be put out of sight, below ground, building on top would be practicable.

**Current projects included** revolutionising the Tottenham Hale gyratory, improving Euston Circus, better junctions, cycle superhighways, more priority for buses. Behaviour could be changed by car-clubs, or the promotion of walking, cycling and public transport, but in central London the problem was not the private motorist, but freight. In one street up to forty different waste removal companies could be dealing with business waste. More night-time deliveries, and more freight consolidation could help. The river could in principle be used better, but development on the waterfront was more profitable.

## The presentations were followed by a question and answer session.

**Terence Bendixson (Chelsea Society)** followed the idea of J H Mogridge that improving public transport would produce a virtuous circle, benefitting journey times by all modes. Mr Hobbs said that in central London private car travel was so low that

# Transport in the Mayor's 2015 Infrastructure Plan

## Open Meeting (cont)

improving public transport would have little effect on it. Ms Cansick observed that the recent bus strike had reduced congestion within central London though increasing it outside.

**Peter Eversden (Bedford Park and Chair, London Forum)** suggested more car parks at stations to encourage people to use the underground. Mr Hobbs said that in zones 1 to 3 providing car parks would actually increase car use since more people would drive to the station; further out they might reduce car use, but the land near stations was very profitable for other purposes.

**Andrew Bosi (Islington Society)** suggested reducing the need to travel, so that people lived nearer to where they worked. Mr Hobbs said that actually employment was becoming more concentrated, as firms found proximity to each other beneficial and central areas more attractive. There was however some potential for adjusting travel behaviour by small schemes improving stations - joining the two Hackney stations was an example.

**Alastair Hanton (Dulwich Society)** suggested increasing the amount of walking, e.g. by getting people living nearer one another. Ms Cansick agreed; walking was built into their scheme designs - the cycle highways would bring a net gain in pavement space, and traffic lights could be programmed to take more account of pedestrian demands. Mr Hobbs said that if firms clustered, there would be more walking between offices, etc., and trips in employment areas would become shorter.

**A CBT representative** favoured satellite centres, and asked about TfL's plans for Old Oak Common. Mr Hobbs said that it would be the best connected of all business areas. He was keen to have a big overground station there.

**Rosalind Readhead (Ban Private Cars in London)** pointed out that though private car use in central London was low during the week, it was much greater at weekends. She asked for less and more expensive parking. Ms Cansick said that car parking provision and charging was the responsibility of the boroughs, not of the Mayor or TfL; she pointed out that the more difficult it was to find somewhere to park the more people drove around looking for a parking place.

**John Saynor (West Hampstead Amenity and Transport Association)** argued that the TfL policy on pedestrian crossing times was very inflexible. Ms Cansick said that the times were laid down nationally by the Department for Transport. Countdown demystified crossing by indicating the time remaining.

**Martin Jones (Highbury Fields Association)** asked whether Crossrail 2 would be a regional rail scheme, as preferred by people outside London, or a Metro one, as preferred by Londoners. Mr Hobbs said that the choice between the two was still being evaluated. The regional one (which would benefit certain parts of London) was more expensive, but had the greater economic benefits.

**Peter Hartley (Westminster Living Streets)** argued that underground motorways had no point, since they would rapidly fill up with traffic. He favoured increasing the congestion charge and having road pricing. Ms Cansick said it was necessary to look at all possible ways of meeting the challenge of the forecasted increasing population and travel. The motorway tunnels idea was at a very early stage. Road Pricing was very unpopular. If societies had preferred options they should lobby politicians; TfL was there to provide appraisals, not to take decisions.

**Tom Ball (Thorney Island Society)** asked how the service between Pimlico and Warren Street was to be improved. Mr Hobbs answered 'by increasing frequencies'.

**Mark Leffler (Clapham Society)** said that an interchange at Tooting Broadway with Crossrail 2 would increase congestion on the Northern Line, with its dangerous island platforms at Clapham Common and Clapham North. Mr Hobbs demurred - Crossrail 2 would take passengers from the Northern Line, and hence reduce congestion.

**David Leibling (Pinner Association)** asked whether there would be any policy to reduce congestion on the North and South Circular Roads. Ms Cansick said that various options were being considered, and she would e-mail Mr Leibling with more details. Lots of resurfacing was in train, and would improve the quality of the road.

**Del Brenner (Regents Network)** asked why the Infrastructure Plan did not have proposals relating to waterways. Mr Hobbs said that

there was a River Plan, and effort was going in to the promotion of the Thames. A strong business plan was needed. A difficulty was that there were a limited number of wharves, and many were historic, and not suited to modern river transport.

### For more information:

The slide presentation is available at:  
<http://tinyurl.com/jwh7x38>

For more information see:  
<http://bit.ly/1HjStQv>

<http://bit.ly/1xpOYrT> ■

## Aircraft near misses increase

The number of investigations into alleged aircraft near misses over Britain has reached its highest level in at least a decade. Official figures show that 213 incidents were reported to aviation chiefs by the end of November last year — almost 25 per cent higher than for the whole of 2013.

By the time final data is published for 2014, the number of suspected near misses is likely to be close to the record for a 12-month period, logged a quarter of a century ago. Of those, 18 were the most serious "category A" incidents deemed to pose a risk of collision.

Aviation experts said the rise reflected the fact that airspace was becoming scarce as growing numbers of light aircraft, private jets, gliders and unmanned drones take to the skies.

About half of incidents involved military aircraft, although the Ministry of Defence denied that there had been any increase in flights in the past 12 months. The disclosure was made after investigators published a report into an incident near Heathrow when a device — believed to be a radio-controlled helicopter — came within 20ft of an incoming passenger plane. ■



# MPs flag concern over HS2 economic benefits

by Peter Eversden

A report by the House of Commons Public Accounts Committee set out a number of concerns about the delivery of major rail infrastructure programmes.

MPs were "sceptical" about whether the Department for Transport (DfT) can deliver value for money for the taxpayer on High Speed 2 (HS2) and they criticised the Department for failing to present a convincing strategic case for it.

"The Department needs to set out clearly who is responsible for ensuring that benefits are realised, and how that work will be coordinated," the committee said.

The report is also critical of the DfT's overall planning for the railways: "The Department still lacks a clear strategic plan for the rail network, and it is unclear how the Department makes decisions about which programmes to prioritise for investment." "The recent proposals for High Speed 3, which aims to link northern cities, indicated a 'piecemeal approach' to its rail investment".

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## *The Department still lacks a clear strategic plan for the rail network*

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It called on the Department to set out a 30-year strategy for transport infrastructure, and use this to inform decisions about investment priorities.

A DfT spokesman gave assurances that "As the project moves forward towards construction we will continue to address the issues raised by the PAC, and in particular value for money."

HS2 would provide "high value for money to the taxpayer"; "HS2 Ltd is fully focussed on keeping costs down; and are determined that this vital part of the government's long-term economic plan will be built on time and within budget". ■

## Funding the Northern Line extension to Battersea

Transport secretary Patrick McLoughlin has given the go-ahead for the 3.2 km extension to the London Underground's Northern Line from Kennington to the site of the old Battersea Power Station, via Nine Elms.

Funding will be provided through an agreement between Transport for London (TfL), the Greater London Authority (GLA), Wandsworth Borough Council and Lambeth Council which will use Section 106 and Community Infrastructure Levy contributions from sites in the Nine Elms Enterprise Zone.

All parties are agreed that the Northern Line Extension should "take a degree of priority" and therefore receive the largest chunk of developer contributions from within the Nine Elms Enterprise Zone.

A Tax Increment Financing deal was also agreed to provide additional funding for the Northern Line Extension. It will see the GLA take out a loan of up to £1 billion to fund the project, with a

repayment guarantee provided by the UK government. Loan repayments are due to be paid back, in part, through future growth in business rates revenue within the Nine Elms Enterprise Zone. The CIL and s106 revenues will also be used to pay back the loan.

An economic study was carried out to prove to the Treasury and the Department for Communities and Local Government that the estimated uplift in business rates would come from genuinely new business growth, rather than from businesses relocating from other areas. The extent of planning permissions in the pipeline was also assessed to help provide an estimate of the future growth in business rates. ■

## TfL property deals

TfL is hoping to raise £1bn towards funding the capital's transport infrastructure through developing the sites it owns into various fully-realised properties.

TfL's annual budget is almost £10bn, with money coming from fares paid by the public and government subsidies. Until now their policy has been to dispose of unneeded assets thereby yielding capital receipts, rather than develop their assets themselves bringing long-term revenue and greater self-sufficiency.

The organisation is a major land owner in the capital. It currently has over 5,700 acres of real estate over 3,000 different sites. This makes it a serious player in the property world and it is currently seeking development companies with which it can partner to redevelop more than 500 sites.

It is aiming to set up a multibillion-pound joint venture body with six developers to transform at least 50 sites around the capital, taking its joint venture with Capital & Counties to build 7,500 new homes on land at the Earls Court exhibition centres as its template.

### 55 Broadway

One of their most iconic buildings, the listed, purpose-built towering art deco headquarters of London Underground above St James's Park Tube station, with wood-panelled interiors is to be turned into 90 upmarket apartments.

**South Kensington Tube station**, is to be remodelled as a mixed development.

### Other projects

Other initial projects include the Underground's buildings around Oxford Circus and homes to be built on rail land at Kidbrooke close to Blackheath in southeast London. The majority of the sites are in central London and will help to increase non-fare revenue from £250 million a year to £500 million — or £3.4 billion over the next decade. ■

# Spotlight on The Brixton Society

Understanding the Past, Looking to the Future  
by **Alan Piper**, Secretary of the Brixton Society

Opening our archive of old newsletters, I see that the earliest item is a handbill for our inaugural meeting on 30 January 1975, but the Brixton Society emerged gradually from discussions during the preceding year.

## Origins

In the early 1970s, Lambeth Council was keen to rebuild much of the borough to provide more Council housing, whilst also trying to regenerate Brixton as its main town centre. As the Council continued to seek more sites for redevelopment, it began to target neighbourhoods where densities were already high and many homes were in good condition or capable of refurbishment. Local resistance to this "clearance" approach gradually became more organised, and several major Compulsory Purchase Orders were eventually abandoned by the Council or refused by planning inspectors.

The residents' groups who had defended these areas soon began to network with each other to promote an alternative strategy of refurbishment, leading to several housing improvement areas starting around Brixton in the late 1970s.

As a spin-off from this networking between activists, we were inspired to create the Society as a body to look out for Brixton as a whole, and in particular to champion its flagging town centre, which was blighted by a combination of unrealistic plans and a lack of commercial investment.

## Town Centre Challenges

As a commercial centre, transport interchange, and the location of Lambeth's Town Hall, Brixton's Town Centre has always had lots of competing interests. Its buildings range from mid-Victorian through to 1939, with only a few later buildings, the most prominent being the Recreation Centre completed 30 years ago. Working with other local groups, the Society was successful in modifying the Town Centre Action Area Plan in the 1980s, and then was involved in Brixton City Challenge in the 1990s and the Local Strategic Partnership a decade later.

In recent years we investigated the scope for a Neighbourhood Plan but

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*The current Supplementary Planning Document for Brixton Town Centre was broadly acceptable – the challenge has been ensuring that the Council and developers follow it.*

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concluded that the current Supplementary Planning Document for Brixton Town Centre was broadly acceptable – the challenge has been ensuring that the Council and developers follow it. Commercial interest has revived and footfall is now growing, but it is a struggle to prevent private residential development displacing all the other uses which make for a lively town centre. We continue to challenge proposals which are damaging, greedy or unworkable.

## Local History

Research was slow in our early years, due to our heavy involvement in planning issues and housing improvement schemes, but we gradually pieced together how the area had taken its present shape, and were able to publish *A History of Brixton* in 1996, followed by a book of Heritage Trails and several monographs on local topics. We have also published two volumes of reminiscences, the second in 2007 specifically from Black people who had lived or worked in the area, issued to coincide with the bicentenary of the abolition of the slave trade.

In collaboration with the Brixton Market Traders Federation, we lead a guided walk once a month through the street market and covered arcades. We provide some extra walks around the wider Brixton area, as part of a summer programme shared with neighbouring societies under the umbrella of the Lambeth Local History Forum. We also try to provide occasional extra walks for visiting parties.

## Conservation

Identifying key buildings to retain, for historic interest or simply for their usefulness, started early on, and the extent of conservation areas and listing, both national and local, has gradually increased, though of course there have been landmarks whose loss we regret. We also regret that the council discontinued its Conservation Areas Advisory Committee in 1988, so it has been more difficult to influence the borough's conservation policies. There are still many sound Victorian terraces without special protection, and we consider they are more likely to survive if planning policies on alterations and conversions are not too restrictive.

An unusual survival in Brixton – close to the prison – is a Windmill, dating from 1816. We have encouraged the growth of the Friends of Windmill Gardens, who now run regular tours of the mill during the summer months, and champion the pocket park in which it stands.

## The Way We Work

From the outset, the society has been led by an executive committee of at least a dozen members, with a range of skills and interests, so that we have been able to share the workload and keep in touch with other groups and networks. Reflecting the area's ethnic diversity, four current committee members are black but of different backgrounds.

A sub-committee monitors local planning applications, with most of its business conducted virtually, by e-mail. We try to encourage and support residents' groups, and have worked to establish a Friends group for a local library, and another for a small but busy open space, Windrush Square.

## Collaborative Projects

Over the years, the Society has provided representatives and trustees for a wide range of community projects. Following Lord Scarman's Inquiry into the 1981 Brixton Riots, we participated in the Lambeth Community/Police Consultative Group, only recently superseded by the Safer Neighbourhood Panels rolled out across Greater London. Other fields of



Bill Linskey

## The Brixton Society

**Contact:** Chair: Bill Linskey.

**email:** chair@brixtonsociety.org.uk

**website:** www.brixtonsociety.org.uk



Street Market, Electric Avenue

collaborative activity have included health and social care, establishing a voluntary action council, supporting local libraries, and launching an annual borough heritage festival.

The Society is currently part of a Heritage Regeneration Partnership which is overseeing restoration of Victorian and Edwardian properties around Electric Avenue, under the HLF's Townscape Heritage Initiative. Associated projects will support further work on promoting good conservation practice and sharing our knowledge of the area's history.

### New Pressures

A growing concern is the loss of employment space from the area. Small flexible spaces for artists and creative industries are being displaced by private apartment blocks, and any workspace provided as a sop to the planners is of limited appeal. A critical shortage is of local premises for successful firms to

expand into, so they move away – like the Brixton Pottery, now in mid-Wales!

Lambeth Council has been encouraging community groups to take more responsibility for running local amenities, to compensate for cuts in its overall budget, but there is limited capacity in the local community. Many people are wary of new commitments after past attempts at co-operation with the Council proved frustrating.

One sharp contrast with 40 years ago is that the present generation of Councillors have lost any interest in providing traditional Council housing, while continuing to resist alternative ways to keep housing affordable. Thus we now find residents asking us to help defend from "densification" and gentrification of some of the Council estates that went up just as the Society was being formed. ■

**Age:** 40 - founded 30 January 1975

**Circumstances of Birth:** Residents' groups around the Town Centre came together to defend it from comprehensive redevelopment plans, and to watch out for adverse proposals in the wider Brixton area.

**Biggest Successes:** 1. In the early 1980s, steering Lambeth Council towards a more sympathetic approach to the Town Centre, most of which now has Conservation Area status. 2. Publishing the first definitive history of the area.

**Biggest Disappointments/Frustrations:** 1. Councillors are too much in awe of their officers, who in turn are too easily swayed by developers if the project is big enough. 2. Lack of a regular channel for discussing planning or conservation issues with the Council. 3. The London Overground service passes through the Town Centre without stopping - but we are continuing to push for a local station.

**Present Preoccupations:** 1. Maintaining a varied mix of uses within the Town Centre. 2. Retaining a supply of useful employment floorspace within the area. 3. Retaining a supply of affordable housing locally.

**Working Details:** Membership: 300 including 20 local organisations. Committee structure: Executive committee of at least a dozen members, meeting monthly. Sub-groups look after Town Planning issues and lead the Friends groups for the central library and an adjacent urban public space. Annual subscription: £8 individual, £3 unwaged, £15 groups/ businesses. Publications: Quarterly newsletter, complemented by the society's website, plus occasional e-mail updates for key members. We have also produced a range of local history publications and reprinted Edwardian postcards.

**Activities:** Regular guided walks (monthly around the market areas, with others going further afield in the summer) plus a local history evening in the Autumn and a Winter social; also occasional displays at local events.

**Special Characteristics:** A quiet suburb until the railways stimulated rapid development and Brixton's growth as a major shopping destination. Now, after decades of stagnation, visitors are returning for entertainment, arts and eating-out, but long-standing residents are under pressure from rising rents and house prices, and from threats of denser development.

**Last Word:** We strive to make Brixton a better place, without losing its distinctive identity. ■

Brixton Village market arcade



# Basement planning controls

The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea will become the first local authority in the country to impose further stringent restrictions on subterranean development.

The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea's (RBKC) core strategy was subjected to a partial review at the end of last year. Planning Inspector David Vickery found their proposed Basements Planning Policy to be 'sound', and, subject to a number of inconsequential amendments, the policy and guidelines were set to be formally adopted by RBKC in January.

He said: "I am satisfied that the Council has identified deep concerns amongst its local residents about alleged adverse impacts on living conditions from noise, vibration, dirt, and dust from construction and from associated traffic, in addition to concerns about impacts on drainage, on appearance and landscape, on structural stability, and on historic buildings."

The policy which has taken two years to develop and has been through five rounds of consultation, was aggressively opposed by developers every step of the way. Basements will still be permitted but strict guidelines will now set limits on their scale. Highlights include:

- a reduction in the maximum extent basements can extend under the garden, from 85 per cent to 50 per cent, with that 50 per cent being a single area of space;
- a restriction to a single storey in most cases (with exceptions for large sites);
- an outright ban on basement

developments under listed buildings; • a requirement for Construction Traffic Management Plans to be submitted alongside planning applications to help protect residents from the disturbance caused by these developments.

The decision may have significant implications for subterranean development for other London Boroughs if they choose to follow suit – Westminster has also been developing a Basement Development SPD.

## Islington opens a consultation

The London Borough of Islington opened a consultation in January on proposals for new planning controls on basement excavations following an 'unprecedented' rise in the number of householder applications from 41 to 62 between 2013 and 2014.

The proposed controls aim to protect the borough's character and environment and reduce the impact on neighbours, and include new limits on the extent of basement developments "to protect the long-term future of the gardens and trees above" and measures to control the "heightened flood risks and structural impacts that subterranean developments may present". For more information see the council websites, ■

## Councils filing ban - open and accountable local government

Following controversy over people being blocked from recording council meetings the government has now issued *A guide for the press and public* on the use of modern technology and communication tools to report on local government meetings they are attending. The Guide covers meetings of any council's executive (i.e. the council's cabinet), including any committees and sub-committees of the executive. It replaces the Guide titled "Your council – going to its meetings, seeing how it works" that the department issued in June 2013.

<http://bit.ly/1CMxMiy> ■

## Radical changes at Richmond and Wandsworth

The Leaders of Richmond and Wandsworth Councils have agreed to establish a common staffing structure as from 2017. Both councils would continue to be separate bodies with their own elected councillors, cabinets and leaders, maintaining their distinct identities and retaining the ability to develop policies and priorities that matter to their local residents. But they would be managed by a single chief executive. It is claimed that this would deliver substantial savings of up to £10 million per year in each authority, to preserve front line services. It is suggested that there should be a referendum before the scheme goes ahead.

The proposals will be considered at future meetings of both councils. ■

## Concerns about Capita

The National Audit Office (NAO) is to look into claims that the outsourcing group Capita has been breaching the terms of its £250 million government contract to train civil servants.

The deal was supposed to oblige the main contractor to keep competition open to other businesses and ensure that at least 51 per cent of the contracts were delivered by smaller businesses. But a group of small businesses has complained that Capita breached the terms of the deal by blocking small firms from winning work, and, in some cases, contributing to their failure.

The NAO review will look at how Capita calculated its fees; whether it met an obligation to pay subcontractors within 30 days.

Small recruiters are complaining that they are being asked by Capita to accept terms that leave them with little or no profit from the contracts, and that they are being marginalised.

The NAO will publish its report in the spring. ■

## Cuts to council services planned

According to the Local Government Association 60 per cent of councils are drawing up plans to stop some of their services this year, possibly having to close one public service completely in response to an 8.6 per cent reduction in their main revenue grant settlement from government central funding.

But at the same time it has been reported that councils have been increasing spending on temporary workers and consultants and rehiring staff they have recently made redundant.

According to results obtained from Freedom of Information requests and published in The Times £5 billion was spent on agency and consultancy workers with an increasing amount going on interim managers and consultants, who can earn up to £1,000 a day. Many such workers had originally left after receiving big redundancy packages, and are being re-employed on more expensive contracts. ■

# Summaries of recent responses made by the London Forum

Many London Forum consultation responses can be found on the Forum's website: News/What We've Said' at <http://londonforum.org.uk/responses.php>

## TfL Ultra Low Emission Zone

The European Union has set legal limits to protect human health from concentrations of air pollutants, including particulate matter and nitrogen dioxide (NO<sub>2</sub>) which apply to London and the UK as whole. Failure to take action to meet these limits may result in significant fines being imposed on the UK Government under EU law.

London is still currently in breach of legal limits for the pollutant NO<sub>2</sub>. The Mayor and Transport for London (TfL) are therefore proposing a new Ultra Low Emission Zone (ULEZ) in central London, seen as the most efficient way to achieve further reductions of the most harmful road transport generated emissions.

The standards would apply to the area of the Congestion Charging Zone, which is where air pollution levels are consistently the highest.

It would take effect from 7 September 2020, and apply 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. All vehicles driving in central London would have to meet new exhaust emission standards or pay a daily charge if they fail. There would be additional requirements for TfL buses, taxis and private hire vehicles.

**Daniel Instone's** response on behalf of the London Forum is summarised as follows:

Overall, while we welcome the proposal, we do not believe that it goes far enough for the following reasons:

"While the proposal will have an impact on NO<sub>2</sub> concentrations especially in Central London, EU legal limits for NO<sub>2</sub> will continue to be exceeded in several parts of London, leaving many Londoners exposed to unacceptably high levels of air pollution, for both NO<sub>2</sub> and particulates, with

continuing significant adverse impacts in their health and quality of life. The proposals as set out would not have a significant impact for about another 10 years.

"Consequently, given current legal action being initiated by the EU Commission and others, these proposals are unlikely to be sufficient to comply with the law.

"The main cause of NO<sub>2</sub> and particulate pollution in London is diesel vehicles. The most recent sets of EU emission standards for diesel vehicles have failed to deliver the reductions in NO<sub>2</sub> emissions (and hence NO<sub>2</sub> concentrations) that were expected.

Some of the most polluted roads in London will not be covered by the proposals, including the Inner Ring Road, inner suburban centres such as Putney High Street and Brixton High Road, the Archway Road area, Cromwell Road, the Earl's Court One-Way System and the area round Heathrow.

"The London Forum therefore believes that additional action should be taken urgently, and within the same timescale as the current proposals, on the following lines:

"The current set of proposals should apply to all Inner London boroughs, as well as to areas in outer London (especially around Heathrow) that are currently subject to high levels of air pollution; the arrangements for such extension should be based on a partnership of TfL and the individual boroughs concerned.

"The proposals should be extended to provide for more explicit incentives, including a significant differential charge between petrol and diesel vehicles, for vehicle users to switch from diesel to petrol or ultra low emission vehicles; currently this is being proposed only in relation to buses and taxis." ■

## The Silvertown Tunnel

TfL are proposing to build a new road tunnel under the Thames linking the Greenwich Peninsula and Silvertown. **Dick Allard** responded for the London Forum:

1. Need to reduce air pollution. A Silvertown Crossing, with demand regulated by appropriate charging, can reduce local congestion and thus improve local business and social connections. However, we also believe it has the potential to reduce the current excessive levels of local air pollution, so it is very disappointing that the current scheme proposes no overall reduction. A reduction in local air pollution should be one of the main aims of the project. Specific targets should be determined in consultation with local communities.

There should also be local involvement in the subsequent monitoring of whether the targets were being met.

2. Flexibility of charges. We fully support the use of charging to regulate demand, but the level of charges should remain flexible after the tunnel is in operation.

3. Bus Routes. We fully support the proposal for new bus routes providing links to growth areas and rail stations, which should be designed to provide current car commuters with the alternative of convenient rail + bus journeys to work.

4. Quality of Technical Documents. This is a more general issue, which applies across a range of transport related consultations. We of course understand that documents covering technical issues need to contain technical material. Nevertheless, we would expect to see a reasonable effort to make such material at least a little more accessible to a wider audience, whereas often none appears made. ■

## Changes to Traffic flows in Wandsworth Town Centre - summary of David Lewis's response

At present the current traffic layout for the town centre does not work well. Through traffic is unduly dominant and creates significant barriers to pedestrian movement within the town centre.

Conditions are unsafe for cyclists. Changing between bus routes can be complicated and involve quite long walks, to the disadvantage of people who are less

mobile or carrying heavy shopping, especially in bad weather.

These proposals for the removal of the gyratory system can be broadly welcomed but there are a number of important issues that still have to be resolved in the course of more detailed design work, including the design of junctions (including signage and signalling), the design of pedestrian

crossings, the provision for cyclists and the paths, stops and, where appropriate, termini for bus services. There needs to be discussion with local organisations about these matters at an early stage in this process. Modelling of the effects on traffic will be essential and it is understood this has still to be carried out. ■

# Heritage news

Helen Marcus rounds up recent stories of interest

## London's hidden history: Deptford dockyards

Most people might be astonished to learn that Deptford Dockyard was named alongside Venice on the World Monuments Fund's watchlist for 2014. But as the result of a proposed regeneration scheme for the largely derelict 41-acre riverside site - which includes 3,500 homes, 500 classified as affordable; shops, offices, restaurants and parks - some of its fascinating history has become more widely known.

As London's first royal dockyard, built in 1513 by Henry VIII, Deptford is an important archaeological site which for 350 years was at the heart of ship construction, exploration and royal might. It was where Sir Francis Drake was knighted by Queen Elizabeth I and where Sir Walter Raleigh is reputed to have laid down his cloak to prevent the Queen muddying her shoes.

Evidence of the dry docks, mast ponds, the basin and the slipways are all there to be referenced in above ground development. The Tudor dock wall and parts of the perimeter wall are Grade II listed, as is the Olympia building, a great roofed space which was used to cover the slipways, keeping ships dry as they were worked on.

### Sayes Court Manor

Sayes Court Manor adjacent to the dockyards, where Tsar Peter the Great stayed in order to learn of the innovative shipbuilding of Great Britain, inspired some of the most important innovations in the history of horticulture and landscape of the last 360 years. John Evelyn set out his famous garden in 1653, using it to test experimental new designs and horticultural techniques in conjunction with his founding role at the Royal Society.

The Mayor has required the developers to make provision for two local projects: the restoration of Sayes Court garden and a plan to rebuild a 17th-century warship called the Lenox. It is to be hoped that the wealth of archaeological remains under the concrete might reveal more of the story of the Deptford Docks and will be properly recorded and made available for people to see. ■

### Commercialism in the Royal Parks

An interesting exchange of views took place in the pages of the Financial Times this month. Jane Owen wrote an impassioned plea in the paper against commercialism in the parks. She feels the Royal Parks are being increasingly "commandeered" for commercial activities "denying great chunks of them to the public". During the Christmas period, Hyde Park was "blighted by the Winter Wonderland theme park with flashes, throbs and a giant Ferris wheel". This summer Blur and Kylie Minogue will be "grinding out rock" for a rock concert series, with tickets costing from £50 to more than £200.

Owen asks "How are these activities supposed to sit with the gentle traditions, let alone the ethos, of the Royal Parks? Its own annual report says that "we seek to balance the enjoyment and inclusion that events in open spaces can bring with the provision of spaces for quiet enjoyment and relaxation". "These moneymaking entertainments are tawdry rather than visionary. The effect is that our public space is being turned into a private area". "The more the Royal Parks become permanent moneymaking entertainment grounds the more barren they will be."

### An opposing view

However in a follow-up on the letters page she was taken to task by the Chairman of the Hyde Park Association, Peter Brown, who, while he understood her view, suggested she was being elitist. He pointed out that the parks were given to the nation for all citizens, and the Prince Regent himself allowed its use for the Great Exhibition in 1851. Living 100 yards from the Park, he said he welcomed these initiatives as, from his personal observation, they bring thousands of people into the Park who might never otherwise visit. He praises the Royal Parks' administration for the way they have used their imagination to make up shortfalls in funding so that their full costs of £30m a year does not fall on the taxpayer.

Food for thought! ■

# Strawberry Hill

## Second stage of restoration completed

In the second stage of restoration of Strawberry Hill, Horace Walpole's Gothic villa, his private rooms will be on display for first time since 18th century and will be opened to the public in March.

The house re-opened to the public in 2010, with 20 rooms fully restored including the famous State Apartment and the newly restored private rooms.

It has been made possible with a further £821,000 grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) together with partnership funding from other trusts and foundations.

The house, dubbed the "celebrity" home of its time, is Britain's finest example of Georgian Gothic Revival architecture. ■

## Revocation of outdated guidance

Eric Pickles has cancelled outdated Government guidance from the last Administration which encouraged demolition, in particular the last Administration's Housing Market Renewal Pathfinder programme which imposed targets on councils to demolish homes.

## New Head of Historic England

The first Chief Executive of the new body, Historic England, which will come into being on 1 April, will be Duncan Wilson. He has worked in senior positions at DCMS and English Heritage and at the Greenwich Foundation. He was the first Director of the Somerset House Trust, and for the last four years he has been Chief Executive at Alexandra Palace. ■

## Heritage Counts 2014

### Heritage Counts National Report 2014

The thirteenth annual survey of England's historic environment has been published, prepared by English Heritage on behalf of the Historic Environment Forum. Its research finds huge support amongst the public for conserving heritage sites.

The reports can be downloaded from <http://bit.ly/1xca90j> ■

# Open Spaces Society celebrates 150 years

Britain's oldest national conservation body celebrates its 150th anniversary this year. Founded on 19 July 1865 as the Commons Preservation Society, to save London commons from destruction, its first battles included Hampstead Heath, Wimbledon Common and Epping Forest.

The society campaigns throughout England and Wales to protect common land, greens, open spaces and public paths.

There are now thousands of square miles of common land in England and Wales because of the campaigns led by the Open Spaces Society to ensure that commons and commoners' rights were protected and that a right of public access there was secured.

## Events

The society plans a number of events during the year, including a joint *Big Picnic* with the High Wycombe Society (Bucks) on Wycombe Rye, which the two organisations saved in 1965, an open day at Bursledon in Hampshire and a commemorative tree-planting in Nottingham.

## Commemorative books *Saving Open Spaces*

by Kate Ashbrook

a brief history of the society charting the Society's activities through the years

Forward by Richard Mabey, a Vice-President of the Society

Available from  
The Open Spaces Society  
25a Bell Street  
Henley-on-Thames RG9 2BA  
£5 to include post and packing  
28 pages - lavishly illustrated

Watch out also for  
**Common Land**,  
in conjunction with Pitkin Publishing

Tel: 01491 573 535

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

# The London Green Belt Council – new map

A new map of the London Green Belt published by The London Green Belt Council was launched at a meeting of MPs in the Houses of Parliament last November.

The comprehensive map of the Metropolitan Green Belt shows the built-up areas, motorways and main roads, elevated land such as the Chilterns and the North Downs, designated areas of outstanding natural beauty, and denotes features of local interest. The map also indicates the boundaries of district councils and the Greater London Authority, together with parliamentary constituencies. It is published in co-operation with the Department for Communities and Local Government, the Ordnance Survey, and the A-Z Geographic Map Co. It is up-to-date, save where revised local development plans are still in preparation.

The purpose of the map is to promote greater awareness of the extent of the London Green Belt in relation to local authority and parliamentary constituency boundaries, historical features, country parks etc.

## Increasing threats to Green Belt

The year has been characterised by increasing threats to build on the Green Belt, driven by the need to meet the severe shortage of housing in the London area. There have been a worrying number of organisations even proposing the total reconsideration of the relevance of Green Belts.

There are over 30,000 dwellings in the pipeline in the London Green Belt, together with over 100 ha of commercial buildings. Cane Hill Hospital in Croydon is threatened with 670 houses and Epping Forest DC is considering releasing Green Belt for building.

There are further threats in Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Essex, Surrey and Hertfordshire and it is not clear that councils may be allowed to default on their housing obligation because of Green Belt constraints.

The London Green Belt Council continues to seek clarification from the Department of Communities and Local Government. So far the government continues to express strong support for maintaining the Green Belt. The Mayor has also expressed strong resistance to development on both green field and Green Belt land, suggesting that there are plentiful brown field sites to meet all housing needs.

But the Council would like to be sure that the Planning Inspectorate is prepared to take a robust view and refuse planning applications which breach Green Belt policy.

**Copies of the map** may be obtained from Stanfords of Long Acre

[www.stanfords.co.uk/](http://www.stanfords.co.uk/) £10.00

## Lord Rogers defends the Green Belt

Following a widely publicised suggestion by London First in their report, *London 2036: An Agenda for Jobs and Growth*, for London's Mayor, that building on "low quality" Green Belt would solve our housing problems, Lord Rogers wrote to the Financial Times on February 26 challenging their assumption: "it is wrong to suggest that loosening London's Greenbelt is the remedy"

While he agreed that "London First is right to see our chronic housing shortfall as the biggest challenge facing London" he points out that "London has planning permission for more than 200,000 homes, meeting more than five years' housing need. It is estimated that the capital can accommodate at least 400,000 homes on

brownfield sites, on top of the potential for infill and intensification."

He also pointed out that "a recent post on the Shelter Policy Blog observed, the number of units with unimplemented planning permission has almost doubled over the past decade, but the rate of building new houses has lurked at around 20,000 each year" "If planning or land was the problem, you would expect housebuilding rates to respond to the increase in planning permissions. They have not done so." He suggests that "unless we tackle our dysfunctional housing market, any relaxation of Greenbelt controls would lead to a flurry of land speculation".

# Old Oak Common regeneration to go ahead

**E**ric Pickles has confirmed his support for Mayor Boris Johnson's plans for a Mayoral Development Corporation at Old Oak Common. If Parliament approves the scheme it will be known as the Old Oak and Park Royal Development Corporation and will come into existence on April 1.

The project will be controlled by the Mayor of London and his team, as well as councillors from the three boroughs to ensure accountability. Some planning applications will be sent to the boroughs but most will be decided by the Development Corporation.

However, Hammersmith and Fulham Council said that taking away local planning powers on one of the capital's biggest housing projects is "an anti-democratic land grab" which gives the potential for the Mayor to allow the building of properties for overseas speculators rather than homes Londoners can afford.

The 950 hectare site which straddles the three boroughs of Hammersmith and Fulham, Brent and Ealing will be one of the largest regeneration schemes in London. Old Oak Common is to become a superhub for Crossrail and High Speed 2 by 2026, capable of serving 250,000 passengers a day. The plans include the creation of up to 24,000 homes and more than 55,000 jobs.

Queens Park Rangers hopes to build a new stadium at Old Oak Common but has clashed with car dealership Cargiant, which owns the land and has plans of its own for Old Oak Park, which would have a new town centre providing 9,500 homes and a new high street, two schools and a cultural hub.

Local campaign groups Save Our Scrubs and the Wormwood Scrubs Charitable Trust Committee have expressed fears that the development will seriously disrupt the open space of Wormwood Scrubs,

[www.shepherdsbushw12.com/shared/hfoldoak001.htm](http://www.shepherdsbushw12.com/shared/hfoldoak001.htm)  
<http://bit.ly/1CdRku2>

## Knock It Down or Do It Up?

### Reports from The London Assembly's Housing Committee

A report in February looked at how to improve the process of regenerating housing estates – including the decision of councils or housing associations to either renovate or demolish the estate.

The report is designed to provide a guide for community groups, councillors and housing professionals to some of the best ways to work together to regenerate estates. The report also makes recommendations to central government and the Mayor, including:

- Reviewing the level of the Mayor's affordable housing grant
- HM Treasury allowing councils to borrow against existing homes to reinvest in building new homes
- Central government reducing the VAT disparity between refurbishment (20% VAT) and new build (0% rated).

<http://bit.ly/19dxWla>

### 'Out of Stock'

A report by Assembly Member Tom Copley into Right to Buy sales. He finds they are set to outstrip supply of new council homes in London and highlights the need for councils to be given new powers to properly invest in new social housing.

<http://tinyurl.com/p3sgfon>

## Infrastructure Bill amended with new Mayoral Development Orders

**T**he government has added a new clause to the Infrastructure Bill (at committee stage) which would give London Mayor Boris Johnson powers to make Mayoral Development Orders (MDO) granting planning permission for development on specified sites in the capital.

Communities minister Stephen Williams said that the government had introduced the new clause to "recognise the opportunity to plan proactively for housing and growth in London".

The Mayor would also be able to attach conditions to any permission. These provisions would give effect to a new draft section of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

The legislation has finished detailed scrutiny by MPs and Peers and is ready for its report stage and third reading in the Commons.

Questioned about the amount of affordable housing that would be delivered using MDOs and whether they would be used to bring forward mixed-use development as well as housing, the minister said: "It would be up to the London borough to say what the planning brief for that site should be on deliverables and outcomes, such as how many housing units there are and whether it is a mixed development."

## Elphicke report: new guidance on assessing housing need

Natalie Elphicke, chair of housing association Million Homes, Million Lives, and Keith House, leader of Eastleigh Borough Council, were commissioned by the Department for Communities and Local Government to consider how councils can help to increase housing supply across all tenures.

The study highlighted "considerable variation in quality and accessibility" and finds significant differences in councils' approach to assessing need, and supporting and delivering wider objectives.

The report recommends that at the next annual review of the National Planning Policy Framework the government considers

- giving guidance to councils on the "importance of transparency about the

findings of housing market assessments".

- working with developers, local businesses, agencies and others to ensure that sites with planning permission are taken forward in a "timely manner to delivery".
- strengthening advice to encourage more councils to "pro-actively support neighbourhood planning and for councils to engage residents in shaping housing needs more regularly".

The Elphicke-House report: *From statutory provider to housing delivery enabler: Review into the local authority role in housing supply*

<http://bit.ly/1xcbmVr>



# Round the Societies

A round-up of news from our member societies.

By **Diane Burridge**

## Controlling short letting in central London

Covent Garden Community Association (CGCA) is continuing to lobby Government to address the threat of short lets in London more properly than simply by deregulation. They are looking for examples of flats being rented short-term and used as brothels and for other illegal activities. BloombergTV is preparing a piece on the whole issue, with a particular focus on web-based short-let agents whose services are being misused in this sort of way.

## Hampstead Heath - Ponds legal challenge fails

The Heath & Hampstead Society lost its Judicial Review hearing in November 2014 to try to stop the City of London from building dams around the ponds on Hampstead Heath. The Society decided, on legal advice, not to appeal.

## Hampstead Heath - Athlone House appeal

The Highgate and Heath and Hampstead Societies' 18-year battle to the death over rogue developers and the historic Athlone House entered yet another phase in February with yet another appeal hearing presided over by Colin Ball, the Inspector for last year's Smithfield inquiry. The awaited outcome may well have national implications, since if the appeal is upheld, no undesignated Heritage Asset anywhere will be safe, and Section 106 Agreements will no longer be worth the paper they are written on. Local campaigners persuaded Private Eye that it was worth reporting; an excellent article appeared just before the hearing.

## Spike Milligan and the Finchley Society

In the most prestigious event in its history, the Finchley Society hosted a ceremony in Stephens House grounds at which a life-size bronze statue of Spike Milligan, a former President and Patron of the Society, was unveiled.

Finchley Society Chairman, David Smith, opened the ceremony attended by over 250 people, including Sir Michael Parkinson, Terry Gilliam, Lynsey de Paul and Maureen Lipman. He noted how Spike had helped stimulate the setting up the Society in his work to save a row of old cottages in Lodge Lane and his letter writing campaigning. Thanks were given to Barbara Warren of the Society who worked tirelessly for 10 years to achieve the goal of having this memorial to Spike.

## Greyhound Pub campaign in Sydenham

In protest at seven years of delays in the re-development of this pub, a campaign was launched in 2014 by the Sydenham Society. Planning consents have been contravened and the developer has repeatedly refused to provide a timetable for the rebuilding of this much-loved local landmark. Works should have been completed by mid - 2012 and, in frustration, the Sydenham Society campaign committee recently held meetings with pub operators who were keen to purchase or rent the site. After letters from the Mayor and the Cabinet were sent asking for a timetable for completion, the developers are now back on site, and are now following the planning permission which was agreed back in May 2010.

## Green Belt in Enfield - a victory ?

As reported in the Winter Newsforum, the Enfield Society Management Committee opposed the planning application to build a large 15.2 MW solar panel installation on a 25 hectare site at Sloeman's Farm – which is designated Green Belt land. Due to objections to the scheme and Council officers' recommending refusal, the application was withdrawn and so was not considered by the Planning Committee. Government statements urging such developments to be carried out on brownfield land rather than greenfield sites also helped officers in their case for recommending refusal.

## Community Archeological Dig in Greenwich Park

With funding from the Royal Parks Foundation, English Heritage and the Field Studies Council, a three year dig has started on the Old Keepers Cottage built in the 17th century and demolished in 1853. The Friends of Greenwich Park are supporting the project's consultants - Keevil Heritage Ltd - with funding and crucially important volunteer diggers. Already a fine piece of decorated stoneware, probably 18th or 19th century, has been unearthed.

## Societies and associations in Marylebone

St Marylebone Society is encouraging its members to join the Marylebone Forum in its work to consult on an overall vision for the area, and the aims for its future development. Once the Forum is formally established, it will apply for designation as the Neighbourhood Forum for the official Marylebone Neighbourhood Forum Area, as agreed by Westminster City Council. The constitution provides for a committee of at least 22 representatives - of which a minimum of two must be members of the St Marylebone Society.

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

Whilst this work is going on, the Society has set up a planning sub-committee to help respond to proposals for removing the Baker Street one-way gyratory. This £15million scheme involves the Portman Estate, Westminster City Council, TfL and the Baker Street Quarter Partnership (which was set up in 2011) working together to draw up options for formal consultation. The St Marylebone Society is united with the Marylebone Association on the need to ensure that through traffic is kept to the main roads to prevent rat-running in the area, and is encouraged to avoid the Baker Street (one of the longest existing Georgian Terraces in London) and Gloucester Place area altogether. [planning@stmarylebonesociety.org](mailto:planning@stmarylebonesociety.org)

## Demand for Brixton heritage walks

The demand for guided walks around Brixton has increased. The Brixton Society has had to reprint a second edition of their Brixton Markets Heritage Walk book. Since the monthly walks began at the end of 2011, over 450 people have joined these, including students and groups from South Korea and Switzerland.

# newsbriefs

New and issues of interest and concern to note.

## Save Ally Pally - again!

Alexandra Palace in Muswell Hill has been threatened by unsuitable developments over a period of many years. Designed by the Victorians as the People's Palace for educational recreation, music, sport and entertainment in 1900, it literally became the People's Palace because by Act of Parliament it was given to the people of London, with its Park, in trust for all time. It has survived two fires and lasted 130 years becoming in 1936 the birthplace of television.

Having also survived Haringey council's attempts to sell it off to a commercial developer, involving a High Court decision against the Charity Commission itself, trustees have replaced the officials responsible for these policies. But the years of uncertainty and neglect have taken their toll. It is the two BBC television studios, the scene of the birthplace of television, and surely spaces of international historic importance, which are the subject of the latest controversy. To create the studios the BBC bricked up the Victorian arches on the facade. The building's Grade II listing actually recognises the national historical significance of the studios. But many are opposed to the plans to open up the arches again. They say it will remove the spaces constructed for John Logie Baird's equipment and add huge costs to the budget. They maintain there are better ways of dealing with the problem.

## Plans for replica of Crystal Palace fall through

Meanwhile on the other side of London, plans to recreate the Crystal Palace as a cultural and entertainment complex, as part of regeneration plans for the Park, have fallen through. Announced in October 2013, the deal with Chinese developer, ZhongRong Group had the backing of Bromley Council and London Mayor Boris Johnson. However Bromley Council has been concerned by slow progress on the project and has announced that it is not extending its "exclusivity agreement".

They said the 16-month agreement had lapsed, and would not be renewed. A recent request for assurances from ZhongRong Group about the company's plans, which imposed conditions including a non-refundable deposit of £5m, has received no reply. The original glass structure was built in 1851 in Hyde Park. It was moved to Crystal Palace Park in 1854 and burnt down in 1936. A Bromley Council spokesman said "We will meet with community stakeholders to review options going forwards". "We are continuing to progress plans to improve Crystal Palace Park with an investment in excess of £2m."

## Good news for the New Era estate

After the 93-flat New Era Estate in Hoxton was bought by American property speculator Westbrook Partners in March last year there were fears that they might evict the tenants and rent the flats out at market rates. But the residents mounted a strong campaign including a march to Downing Street with a 300,000 signature petition calling on David Cameron to pressure new owners into keeping their rents affordable. Following a six-month campaign the Estate has now been sold to an affordable housing provider, the Dolphin Square Foundation who have said that rents and tenancies would be guaranteed until at least 2016.

## Bishopsgate Goods Yard project

Politicians have joined residents in opposing the proposed redevelopment of Bishopsgate Goods Yard which was left derelict by a fire 50 years ago. It includes the listed Braithwaite Viaduct, one of the oldest railway structures in the world, which will be incorporated into the development. Plans for the site, situated just behind Shoreditch High Street, have been submitted to Hackney and Tower Hamlets councils by developers Hammerson and Ballymore. They include a four-tower residential complex, the tallest of which is set to be 48 storeys high and the smallest 20 storeys. Shoreditch's current tallest building, The Tea Building, is only eight storeys. The redevelopment would create up to 2,000 new homes as well as office space, shops and leisure facilities but only 10 per cent of the development is expected to offer affordable dwellings.

The developers said they wanted to get involved with the local community as much as possible but residents argue that the final design has gone directly against their feedback. One commented: "Instead of being a grassroots consultation, it was astroturf: the whole thing was fake."

The new East End Preservation Society and the blogger Spitalfields Life have both called on people to register their objections to Hackney and Tower Hamlets councils. See more at: <http://hackneypost.co.uk/2014/11/27/politicians-join-row-bishopsgate-goods-yard/#sthash.AxWVoBRD.dpuf>

## Thames Path improvements

Part of the Nine Elms Vauxhall Partnership, a consortium of local authorities, developers and other agencies working on the redevelopment of the area, is to improve the southern riverside walk from Lambeth Bridge to Chelsea Bridge and to unite it with the rest of the Thames footpath. Studio Weave and Urban Projects Bureau are working with Churchman Landscape Architects to carry out this project. The first phase extends for half a kilometre between the Vauxhall tower and Heathwall Pumping Station, running past the front of the emerging US and Dutch Embassies and includes three pocket parks and a pavilion. Future phases are being considered, including the enhancement of the areas fronting M16 and Lack's Dock. When complete the entire length of path will extend 2kms, linking Waterloo and the Royal Festival Hall with Battersea Park.

## New use for air raid shelter in Soho Square

From abandoned tube stations to catacombs, London has a wealth of hidden underground space that is being sold off for re-use.

The Grade II listed mock-Tudor gardener's cottage in the centre of Soho Square is actually the entrance to a 3,200 sq ft brick and concrete air raid shelter where hundreds of Londoners sought refuge from the Blitz in World War Two. Westminster Council is now offering it on a long lease for £175,000, for possible use as a restaurant, gym or music venue. The cottage itself, part tool-shed, part arbour, dates from 1875-6 when the gardens were renovated. New railings were erected and a statue of Charles II which had been there for over a century, was removed to the grounds of Frederick Goodall, R.A., at Harrow Weald. There is also an electricity sub-station under the cottage.

# newsbriefs

## Two books of interest

### Architecture an Inspiration, by Ivor Smith

*Architecture an Inspiration* is addressed to those who enjoy buildings, cities and landscapes. In particular, the author has in mind civic and amenity society members, local authority planning committees, consultative bodies, conservation and planning officers.

Ivor Smith worked in Sheffield City Architects Department where, with Jack Lynn, he designed the Park Hill housing redevelopment. After teaching at Cambridge University he became Director of the School of Architecture in Dublin, and Professor at Bristol and Edinburgh. In partnership with Cailey Hutton, housing and university commissions have won many awards.

He has chosen buildings that he finds particularly inspiring, to illustrate each topic. London examples include the Royal Opera House Covent Garden, King's Cross station, the British Library and Canary Wharf underground station.

Paperback £24.99; Please contact Rosie Grindrod,

Tel: 0116 279 2299 Troubador Publishing Leicester LE8 ORX

## The Destruction of the Country House: Forty Years On, a new book from SAVE

by Marcus Binney, co-written with John Harris

41 years ago Marcus Binney and John Harris organised a landmark exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum, illustrating the loss of 1,100 notable houses over the previous century. The story of this destruction caught the public imagination. It led to the halting of the demolitions and the founding of SAVE Britain's Heritage. The new book chronicles the rescue from "death row" of dozens of these fine houses.

Marcus Binney is executive president of SAVE. He and John Harris were joint organisers of the 1974 exhibition. Their book is available from [www.savebritainsheritage.org/publications](http://www.savebritainsheritage.org/publications) or from 020-7253 3500, £20 plus P&P.

## Section 106 rule change

New planning practice guidance published last November exempted developments of 10 homes or less from section 106 affordable housing contributions. The previous target under the last Labour Government, as stated in PPG3 had been 15 units.

The government said that a lower threshold - of five units or less - could be implemented in designated rural areas such as National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

The Government has said they do not believe these reforms will have any significant adverse effect on provision of affordable housing.

But a report of the Rural Housing Policy Review, set up by Hastoe Housing Association and chaired by Lord Best, describes the change as "devastating" and has called for the government to reverse the section 106 rule change.

The Review says that small sites are the "mainstay of rural development with mixed market and affordable housing sites accounting for 66 per cent of affordable housing delivery in settlements of less than 3,000 population".

## Walter Bor Awards 2015

### Expanding the Awards' categories

London Forum Vice Presidents David Lewis, Bill Tyler and Marion Harvey are considering expanding the categories for the Walter Bor Awards to reflect the wide range of innovative work undertaken by societies.

#### Categories being considered include:

- Increased membership
- Saved/improved the public realm
- Running activities for children/young people
- Making a significant contribution to the history of the local area
- Using social media effectively (previously media and publications).

Once categories have been finalised, we will contact societies with further details. ■

## Re-using Britain's gasometers

National Grid and Berkeley Group have together set up a venture, St William Homes, to develop new homes on land currently occupied by disused gasometers. Many gas-holders date back to the Victorian era, but they fell into disuse in the 1970s after the creation of the national transmission system, which sourced gas from the North Sea. While most of the structures will be demolished, some are listed by English Heritage and will be made part of a scheme's open space.

Up to £700 million will be invested to develop as many as 14,000 homes on the Grid's 20 sites in London and the southeast over the next 15 years, including 71 acres in Beckton, east London. The first phase, will include over 2,000 affordable homes. National Grid said that it could look at the possibility of similar schemes outside the southeast.

## The Pinnacle Tower

It seems that plans for the Pinnacle Tower, Bishopsgate may be abandoned. Construction began in 2008 but was put on hold in 2012 with only the concrete core of the first seven storeys built. At 288m high, it was due to become the tallest building in the City of London, and the second-tallest in both the United Kingdom and the European Union after the Shard. However the project has been beset by financial problems and in February this year the site was acquired by a consortium led by Axa Real Estate in a deal worth £300 million. It is understood that the building is being completely re-designed, with a new landmark tower.

## Cheesegrater's bolts from the blue

Two bolts the size of a human arm snapped off the "Cheesegrater" skyscraper in the City of London, last November with part of one falling to the ground 737ft below. By chance, part of the area below the skyscraper which was finally completed only a month before, was already cordoned off while building works were being carried out so fortunately no one was injured. A spokesman for British Land said: "A full investigation is being conducted by contractor Laing O'Rourke and structural engineers Arup." An examination is being undertaken of the remaining bolts. ■

# Dates for your diary

## London Forum events

### Membership renewal - a new system

We have recently changed our membership renewal process so that it can all be done through the London Forum website. Emails have just been sent (in March) to your Society's contact person giving details of how subscription renewals for this year can be made, including on-line.

We are introducing also a secure way in which members can amend the details we hold of their officers and their organisation. Information on how to do this was included in the email sent in March.

As you all know, London Forum relies totally on Members' subscriptions for its budget. We hope you will find this new system easy to use. Please do use the new method of members amending their own data within the web site to make changes to those people meant to receive post and email bulletins otherwise societies might not be kept informed.

**Queries** can be sent to [admin@londonforum.org.uk](mailto:admin@londonforum.org.uk)  
Or contact Diane Burridge, (see details below) ■

### Delivering Newsforum by email

We currently send you Newsforum by email in the form of a PDF as well as posting you a hard copy.

For most of you the PDF is the most useful form as it can be widely distributed at no cost. It also has the advantage that web links can be accessed directly.

We have reduced our costs by sending the summer edition in PDF form only. It is environmentally more friendly, saving paper, and it also saves London Forum a great deal of expense. With the enormous increase in the price of postage this is now becoming a major consideration.

If you do not keep your hard copy and feel you could do without it, relying on the PDF, please let us know via one of the email addresses below, giving your Society name as well as email address, so that we could reduce our postal mailing list and save printing and postage costs. ■

### For information about the London Forum contact:

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

**Peter Eversden** Chairman  
London Forum, 70 Cowcross Street,  
London EC1M 6EJ  
Telephone: 020 7250 0606  
email [chairman@londonforum.org.uk](mailto:chairman@londonforum.org.uk)

**Diane Burridge** Membership Secretary  
email [membership@londonforum.org.uk](mailto:membership@londonforum.org.uk)

Registered Charity Number 1093134

### London Forum Open Meetings 2015

#### Dates for your diary:

#### Wednesday 29 April

**London's growing population: how will they be housed?**

#### Monday 8 June

**The General Election: the implications for London of the priorities of whoever forms the new Government.**

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

#### Meetings are held at The Gallery,

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

**All meetings begin with refreshments at 6pm**

**for a 6:30pm start** ■

### London Forum on Twitter

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

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

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

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

[http://twitter.com/London\\_Forum](http://twitter.com/London_Forum)

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

### newsforum

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