

newsforum



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

The London Forum of Amenity and Civic Societies
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High steet problems

All change in the High Street: changing permitted development rights

By **Michael Bach**, Chair of London Forum’s Planning, Environment and Transport Committee

The planning system is an impenetrable morass. Few people had heard of permitted development rights seven years ago, other than in relation to whether planning permission was needed for a conservatory extension. Likewise, the Use Classes Order was equally incomprehensible, although you may have realised that your Council wanted to manage the balance of uses in your local high street.

Offices to housing

Since 2012, responding to lobbying by Policy Exchange, a right-leaning think tank, the Government was persuaded that there was a lot of “vacant or underused offices” that could be converted to housing by making change of use from offices to housing “permitted development”. The Government exempted most of Central London from this change, but it still affected most London boroughs.

In the Government’s terms this has been successful in that it has produced additional housing, but at the expense of town centre offices, often neither vacant or underused. Our town centres are important to the local economy. Stripping out town centre offices is bad news and has led to a shortage of office space. Much of this additional housing has been of poor quality, too small, lacking in open space and not producing any affordable housing. This has now been acknowledged by the Government and there will be new requirements of developers to ensure that higher space, design and safety standards are met.

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But it is too little too late, the damage has been done – and the low-hanging fruit has been picked.

Changes from shops and other town centre uses to housing

But these are not the only changes – first they came for the offices, then the shops, light industrial uses and even launderettes, to turn them all into housing. This initiative may have achieved a quick win for increasing housing, but at the expense of quality. Next came changes of shops, banks and estate agents to other town centre uses, such as cafes and restaurants, which have replaced shops not just on the edges of town centres, but even in the main shopping frontages.

Backfilling – changes to offices

Last year the Government consulted on further changes to permitted development rights. Almost as if they were acknowledging that stripping out offices was a mistake, they then proposed that shops, financial services, hot-food takeaways, as well as betting shops, pay-day loan shops and (again) launderettes should be able to turn into offices without needing planning consent. It is almost a “moral” judgement of encouraging the change from “unacceptable” uses to offices. It is not clear why launderettes were singled out.

Is this good for London’s town centres?

Changing permitted development rights or changing the use classes order applies to the whole of England. A crude

All change in the High Street (continued)

judgement about vacancy rates for offices or shops across the country does not mean that a “one-size-fits-all” approach is appropriate let alone good for London.

To get around this poor fit, London boroughs have had to apply for measures, known as Article 4 Directions, that would disapply this national secondary legislation within their area. This has been done for protecting offices in many boroughs, light industry and even launderettes. This is a cumbersome solution.

What has happened?

Following the consultation at the end of 2018, the Government announced the results in March and has now implemented the changes through new regulations which came into effect on 25 May.

The main changes are:

- making rights to build extensions of up to 8m for detached houses, and by up to 6m for other houses permanent, except in conservation areas;
- allowing change of use of various town centre uses to offices, although launderettes in conservation areas are exempted; and
- a right to change hot-food takeaways to housing

Two of the most popular changes – yes there are some – are the proposal to remove permission to “install, alter or replace a public call box” and to “remove deemed consent rights to display advertisements on the glazed surface of a telephone kiosk.” This should bring under control the spate of new phone boxes which are primarily a vehicle for digital, internally-illuminated advertisements.

What next?

The Government has indicated that there are still a number of issues they want to tackle. The first is “building upwards” to secure additional housing (not just enlarge existing houses), by building additional storeys on top of existing buildings. They consulted on the principle and sought to explore some of the difficulties. This was another Policy Exchange idea, which they floated some years ago. Through sheer persistence this is still on the agenda, although there are plenty of places where this would not deliver additional housing or would cause harm. Conservation areas would be exempted.

The second outstanding item was to allow commercial buildings, such as offices, to be demolished and new housing to be built without requiring planning consent, although other issues, such as space and design standards, will need to be assessed by the local planning authority including even the need to provide affordable housing.

But that is not all. According to a recent leak to The Times, the Secretary State is “working on draft legislation that will scrap the need for landlords and retailers to seek consent to change the use of empty or poorly-performing shops, bank branches or estate agents to other services, such as cafes or hairdressers” – does that sound familiar?

The idea is that there should be a broader “high street use class” consisting of shops, financial services and cafes, plus any other “acceptable” uses, and no planning permission would be needed to change between them. This would be complemented by a list of “unacceptable” uses, such as betting and pay-day loan shops, amusement arcades, shisha bars, tattoo parlours and casinos. Both Boris Johnson and Jeremy Hunt have committed themselves to this policy.

This free-market approach by Policy Exchange would remove any possibility for the local authority or the community being able to shape the role and offer of our town centres.

London Forum is very concerned about these changes and possible future proposals, which, contrary to the claims made by the Government, may not be helpful to our London town centres. These can be very different from borough to borough and for different sizes and types of centres. What is needed is locally-agreed strategies and policies that are appropriate to local needs, not a placeless, one-size-fits-all approach which undermines the future of our town centres. ■

Vacancies - another high street problem

A recent article by Norma Cohen in the Financial Times examined the causes of the current high vacancy rates in high street shops and suggested that part of the problem is the change that has occurred to the institutional lease system that underpins British property investment. Ms Cohen quoted Stephen Springham, head of retail research at Knight Frank, as saying that “There is simply no evidence to support the notion of a consumer slowdown in the wake of the EU referendum.” He pointed to UK retail data, the latest of which show annual growth to March running at a healthy 6.7 per cent. Mr Springham also dismisses the effect of internet shopping, noting that most retailers are on the web too. So, asks Ms Cohen, if there is no slowdown and we cannot blame the web, what is going on?

Data from the recent lease events review by MSCI, the research provider, show how trends have changed, in particular, underscoring the inflexibility of retail property leases, and risk-and-return characteristics that are closer to equities, which have turned property into a bond-like instrument. Knight Frank estimates that at least a tenth of each retailer’s estate is surplus to requirement. With no legal mechanism to alter terms, the leases are, in effect, a tax on occupiers.

More businesses are entering creditor voluntary arrangements (CVAs), a legal compromise that allows occupiers on the verge of insolvency to slash rental payments or void their lease. It is often the only legal way that occupiers can get out of inflexible leases that are a drag on profit. ■

Norma Cohen is a PhD candidate at Queen Mary University of London

DCMS Tailored Review of Historic England

The ongoing programme of Tailored Reviews of the various Executive Non-Departmental Public Bodies (NDPBs) answerable to individual Government Departments is recorded as being central to the Government's Public Body Reform Programme. **Michael Coupe** reports on the London Forum response

The Review of Historic England was launched on 15 April via an online survey, and concluded on 9 May. The survey was completed on behalf of the London Forum, but was supplemented by a written response amplifying many of the points made online.

Inadequate resources

In the first place, it was evident that a shortfall in resources affected almost all of the functions currently being carried out by Historic England (HE), and where performance was marked as 'moderate', for example, this did not indicate any failing in expertise or commitment on the part of HE staff. It was apparent that the total grant in aid budgeted for HE was inadequate, as evidenced by the retrenchment that had already taken place within the organisation (eg the closure of some regional offices). The Department needed reminding that the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) was originally established with the clear intention that Lottery funding was not to be a replacement for grant in aid, but was to be 'the icing on top of the cake' (ie additional to normal Government funding). This promise had not been kept, however, and given that Lottery resources now show signs of decline, the consequences for the historic environment over time could be serious. Noting the potent role of heritage-led regeneration, and the important contribution of the historic environment to the tourism industry, which in turn, is a significant component of national GDP, then a real terms cut in Government support for the sector could well prove to be a false economy.

Loss of local authority conservation officers

Straitened circumstances elsewhere were also adding to the pressures on HE. In local authorities, for instance, the ongoing loss of conservation officers across the country meant that the organisation faced additional demands for expert advice on cases with significant heritage impacts, of which only a limited proportion could expect a full response. We noted that this highlighted the importance of HE maintaining a suite of up-to-date guidance documents on policy, practice and procedure relating to all elements of the historic environment, and an extensive training programme for councillors, at a time when local government elections would have stripped out a sizable proportion of experienced committee members with some knowledge of dealing with heritage-related proposals.

Affirming the importance of HE's role

We suggested that the review represented an opportunity to affirm the importance of HE's role as the Government's statutory adviser on all matters to do with the historic environment, and to make it clear that a proper note of such

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advice would be taken.

The additional responsibilities placed on owners of listed buildings in the national interest had long since been recognised. We therefore suggested that the historic role of HE as the funder of last resort for Grade I and II* listed building should be retained and enhanced, particularly now that the perilous state of local authority finances effectively ruled out the provision of grant aid to owners of Grade II listed buildings.

Maintaining records and expanding listing descriptions

The Forum suggested that the Review should highlight the need for Historic Environment Records (HERs) to be maintained to a uniform standard across the country. The content should be up-to-date and comprehensive, and for the future, the aim should be that such records would be accessible digitally.

As far as the listed building component of the National Heritage List was concerned, we recommended that thematic listed initiatives should be accompanied by an adequately resourced programme of updating existing lists, concentrating initially on the more important historic towns. Ideally, not only would additional buildings be included, where appropriate, but listing descriptions would be expanded to better define the extent of the special interest, thus making it easier for all parties to understand when a separate consent would be required. Importantly, moreover, in the longer term, with digital access to properly curated HERs, a prospective developer would be able to establish any likely constraints before going ahead with the acquisition of sites and/or buildings. This would obviate the situation where a developer, in ignorance of potential constraints, had paid too much for the site, and was therefore predisposed to clash with the regulatory authorities when such constraints were revealed.

The Forum welcomed the fact that new additions to the statutory list now attracted better descriptions of the heritage asset on the lines suggested above, and we recognised that a comprehensive review of existing listing descriptions, with full digital access to HERs, could not be achieved in the short term, and would be an expensive exercise, but we hoped that the Department would see fit to include something on these lines in the remit for HE, perhaps with a new indicator to measure progress.

Postscript

The Government recently announced a new £44m fund to create High Street Heritage Action Zones, to be administered by Historic England. This is not connected with the Tailored Review, but is nonetheless welcome. ■

Wimbledon Town Centre - The Making of Vision 2040

By **Tony Michael**, town planner and architect; President of Wimbledon Society

The Wimbledon (Civic) Society was founded in 1903. With its base in Wimbledon Village, it majors on planning issues, runs its own public museum, and runs lectures and visits. It publishes a quarterly newsletter and has close to a thousand members. Apart from commenting on planning applications, the Society's planning committee has been much involved in the wider plans for the Borough of Merton over many years, and has actively participated in public inquiries.

A new plan for the town needed

Wimbledon is the Borough's major town centre and economic hub, but is dominated by traffic, has poor air quality, and is losing character with modern buildings that are out of scale and could be anywhere. And as with many high streets there are major pressures to deal with, and fundamental changes are needed. However current plan policies are seen as pious and vague intentions, seemingly unrelated to the future needs of the town and local people. No-one seems able to illustrate what kind of town centre we are going to expect, so there is common ground that a new plan for the town is needed.

To start this process of plan making, the Council (to its credit) decided to hold a series of 'workshops', where members of the public (including of course local groups like the Society) were encouraged to set down 'what they wanted to see in their future town' - and to say what was good about their town and what was not so good, and what was needed/not needed etc. One of the local groups (WEHRA) stimulated and encouraged them to produce their wishlists, which was very helpful. The Council then collated and published the results of all this endeavour, so that we now had a strong local block of material to work with. Local people saw all these wishlists as being the basic brief for the production of the future plan. Our approach was 'it is our town, so it should be our plan'.

Consultation process

The Council then produced for consultation its Masterplan for the town centre, giving the public just two months to respond. As it was consulting at the same time on its new Local Plan policies, this created an unreasonably heavy workload for local people. The Society got an extension of time to three months by approaching Councillors direct, Council officers having refused.

This Council Masterplan was, to put it kindly, not really appreciated by the local groups, who said that there was little correlation between what the public workshops had said they wanted, and the Council's proposals. And they did not like the kind of town centre that was being promoted anyway (18 storey office towers etc). Furthermore it was not a Masterplan, it was just (this is unkind perhaps) a development control

We decided we needed to break away from the "Policy-based" approach to local plans, as they were just reactive. Our approach was to be pro-active and set down what the future town could and should be like

device to allow the Council planning staff to talk to developers about yet more individual site development that was out of scale. Nor did it address the real issues facing the town centre and High Street that we all know about from the studies by Portas, Grimsey, Timpson and others. It did nothing about poor air quality, the conservation areas, small business, character, building height, pedestrian safety, cycling, traffic issues, housing and all the rest that had been identified in the wishlists.

The local MP called working meetings of local people to help us focus on what to do, which was helpful. So we had to decide how to respond. Each

local group was obviously going to 'write a letter' to the Council, but would that be enough to change the Council's approach? And would the ordinary member of the public be able to visualise the alternatives?

Wimbledon Society's approach

In the Society we decided that we had just enough time to put together our own counter proposals. As it happens we had experience of doing this. When faced with similar highly unpopular proposals by the then Council in 1984, we had produced 'Our Town, Our Plan', resulting in (some would say happily) that Council being quickly voted out of office. We had an advantage in that we had already produced extensive proposals for the whole of the town centre, which had been published in our quarterly Newsletter, with very few dissenting voices - on the contrary we were being urged on.

But this plan alone was not enough. We decided we needed to break away from the "Policy-based" approach to local plans, as they were just reactive, and no-one could understand what kind of future town we would end up with. The public we felt was just being asked to sign a blank cheque. Our approach was to be pro-active and set down what the future town could and should be like, and show over time how one could get to that end-state by explaining the steps one would need to take. We wanted to set everything out so that the general public could actually understand it (and agree or disagree with it). Policies could then be written to deliver it all.

It is a reasonably easy read at 60 + pages, but it does ask the readers to project themselves forward a couple of decades, and take in the various predictions and proposals, and is seen as quite unlike (some would say unfortunately) any town plan that normally gets produced.

Whether this is an approach that should be more widely followed nationally, that is for others to say. But why should not Councils do this, rather than limiting themselves to the writing of worthy "Reactive Policies" that we have been pushed into since the 1970's by the Government?

What does Vision 2040 suggest?

Progressively removing traffic from the main centre, creating safe spaces of character and better air quality where people congregate; and pedestrianising it - town centres die without pedestrians. Extending the pedestrian network via new development: using a small scale heritage grant scheme funded by CIL payments to improve frontages in the two conservation areas: limiting shop frontage widths in conservation areas to protect small businesses and give more interest for pedestrians. Specifying clear building height limits to protect local character: introducing sophisticated traffic control of speed and capacity: building-in adaptability to new developments, which also need to be zero importers of energy: providing extensive new housing rather than offices, which independent studies show are not needed locally. Extensive tree planting in the newly pedestrianised areas: protecting the housing just outside the town centre from loss of daylight caused by buildings that are too high. It also sets out how the whole programme of work can be financed.

If initial reactions from a Council appear to be negative, one counters by saying that the task of an expert is to tell us how something can be done, not why it cannot. Town Planning is not just about development control as many seem to think, it's far more challenging and interesting than that. We are dealing with managing the health and welfare of a complex organism called a town.

We urgently need this creative "third arm" of planning, almost atrophied in the UK, that works with local people, not just with the Councillors and developers (who give advice to Councils that is in their interests, not the Council's), and that slowly builds up an understanding of how towns work - if you like, how these town centre 'patients' can be kept healthy with plans that are holistic, and understandable by the ordinary member of the public. Whose town is it anyway? ■

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Visualising the alternatives: above: before.
Below: after pedestrianisation



The Wimbledon Society's proposals for Wimbledon Town Centre VISION 2040 can be viewed on the home page of the Society website: hard copies are available £7 post free from Museum of Wimbledon 22 Ridgway SW19 4QN

Planning, Environment & Transport Committee Matters

John Myers reports

Peter Eversden and John Myers met the Housing Minister, Kit Malthouse to put the views of the Forum.

Planning matters

Peter Eversden is discussing with Professor Edwards of the Bartlett School and with the Just Space Network a post-graduate study of the varying policies of boroughs on public participation in planning and in the publication of notes of pre-application discussions.

For the Rosewell Review of Public Inquiries, Peter Eversden raised some points relating to the submission of appeals with Mrs Rosewell, but she said that anything pre-appeal was not for her, and should be taken up with the Minister, Mr Malthouse.

Michael Coupe responded to the Tailored Review of Historic England, emphasising the need to fund Historic England properly. Priorities should be to bring listings up to date (describing 'special interest' more accurately) and the Historic Environment Records. (see page 3)

There had been a successful and informative APPG on 27th March about public participation in planning. The Committee regretted that there were few places for civic societies while several outside bodies were represented.

Town centres

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government is active on the topic of town centres, and providing funding. There are to be space and design standards for permitted development conversions to residential. The Article 4 Directions of Westminster and other boroughs came into force on May 1st.

The Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission

Nicholas Boys-Smith has become the acting Chairman of the Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission, replacing Sir Roger Scruton. The Commission continues its work on providing guidance for government.

Housing

The assessment of housing need in the revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) continues to be a matter of contention. The NPPF generally is inadequate on matters that had not previously been covered by PPGs. Hammersmith and Fulham were trying to extract their housing estate from the Earls Court Opportunity Area.

Peter Eversden is in discussions with the London Tenants' Federation about the New Rent Standard for social housing from 2020.

Transport matters

TfL published its response to the consultation on bus service reductions. There were changes in a few places such as

Kensington and Chelsea. TfL has adapted the Hopper fare system to accommodate the need for passengers to change buses where they hitherto had a through journey; but the bus stops TfL has chosen for this are not evidently the best ones for passengers. Mr Bosi will press TfL to make improvements.

ULEZ – the ultra-low emissions zone, requiring non-compliant vehicles to pay £12.50 at all times to enter the Congestion Charge area – came into force on 8th April. There was some surprise that it seemed to be going remarkably smoothly. The exemption from the charge for old black taxi cabs, which are among the most polluting vehicles, cannot be supported and should be quickly ended.

The Forum submitted a response to the Heathrow Airspace and Future Operations Consultation.

Mr Instone is responding to the future of UK aviation – Aviation 2050 Green Paper, stressing his opposition to a third runway, asking for stronger powers and action to curb noise and emissions, with much stronger incentives and regulation to fly quieter aircraft and limit night flights.

The Independent Commission on Civil Aviation Noise has recently produced a short corporate strategy which seems rather weak.

Attacks on the HS2 project are intensifying, with calculations of how many other transport projects could be financed if it were dropped. Crossrail 2 is being rethought to make it more relevant to London's needs. The target for opening the central section of the Elizabeth Line was now October 2020-March 2021. The Committee is concerned at the effect of all this on Community Infrastructure Levy and hence on affordable homes. The Silvertown Tunnel now has a preferred bidder. There is pressure for a Bricklayers Arms station on the Old Kent Road. The Committee agreed to endorse the Thames Path manifesto. ■

Glass skyscrapers and CO2 emissions

The Evening Standard recently published the following letter from London Forum's Peter Eversden:

Glass skyscrapers and CO2 emissions

The news item in Global Briefing on April 23 was significant for London: New York Mayor Bill de Blasio wants to ban new glass skyscrapers and retrofit old ones as part of his efforts to reduce city-wide greenhouse emissions by 30 per cent.

Perhaps Sadiq Khan should consider those initiatives when assessing the implications of the 541 tower blocks approved for development in London and the energy wasted by skyscrapers.

Yours faithfully,

Peter Eversden MBE

Civic Voice 10th anniversary

A survey of 10 years of achievement

By **Peter Pickering**

The Civic Trust was founded in 1957 and built up a great reputation as the national organisation for all the Civic and Amenity Societies that are among the glories of our country, voluntary organisations dedicated to conserving and improving the towns and cities in which we live. It is rare elsewhere in the world for volunteers to show such enthusiasm and passion. However, for whatever reason, in 2009 this once-proud institution went into administration. Civic Societies up and down the country were bereft of a national body on whose existence they had come to rely, and there was no-one to speak authoritatively to Government on behalf of urban areas in the way that the Campaign to Protect Rural England does for rural areas. Immediately, therefore, efforts were made to set up a successor organisation that would do much of what the Civic Trust had done while avoiding its fate. The London Forum was very active in this work, and rejoiced when Civic Voice was launched in April 2010; Helen Marcus was one of its earliest trustees.

Unusually among national organisations (and unlike the Civic Trust) Civic Voice is not based in London, but after a spell in Liverpool has made its headquarters at the historic Coffin Works in Birmingham's Jewellery Quarter. The comedian Griff Rhys Jones is its President; he received an OBE in the 2019 Birthday Honours List for services to conservation. Civic Voice is very active, and has held an Annual Convention in cities around England, and provides an email Civic Update every fortnight. Every year there is a Civic Day in June, at which all Civic Societies are encouraged to hold special local events, to increase the general public awareness of the movement; this seems to have caught on more outside London than in the London Forum's area.

Civic Voice campaigns

During its ten years Civic Voice has run many campaigns. Highest profile may have been that on conserving and protecting War Memorials, which had government support and funding during the centenary of the First World War. Other campaigns have been on street clutter and historic high streets. The two significant campaigns now running are on conservation areas, especially those judged to be at risk, and on public participation in planning, intended to make it collaborative rather than confrontational, and to equip societies with up to date and appropriate skills to shape development proposals. Civic Voice is fighting to stem the loss of conservation officers from local authorities.

National Design Awards

Civic Voice has promoted National Design Awards (successes in 2018 included Turner's House, Sandycombe Lodge,

Civic and Amenity Societies are among the glories of our country, voluntary organisations dedicated to conserving and improving the towns and cities in which we live.

Twickenham and St Clement's, Bow); and has held a competition for England's favourite conservation area, as part of its campaign to get conservation areas celebrated more widely and given greater recognition by central and local government. The winner was Swindon Railway Village, whose success demonstrated that conservation areas do not have to be immaculate to be loved.

Networking and events for members

Periodically meetings are arranged at which representatives from the regions, including London, compare experiences and make recommendations to the trustees of Civic Voice. The latest meeting heard a presentation by Sarah James on 'Building for Life 12', a government-endorsed industry standard for well-designed homes and neighbourhoods, which can help communities to respond to planning applications, through a structured approach.

Round-table events for Civic Voice members are being arranged to ensure that communities are heard in the Government's latest review into delivering the homes the nation needs. There are also networking gatherings at which one of Civic Voice's 'larger' or 'smaller' societies invites others to discuss matters of mutual interest and be taken round to see sites where there have been planning successes or failures; the most recent of these was arranged by the St Albans Society.

All-Party Parliamentary Group for Civic Societies,

Civic Voice provides the secretariat for the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Civic Societies, under the chairmanship of Craig Mackinlay, Member of Parliament for South Thanet. This APPG has held several meetings, with very good speakers, including Ministers, and productive debate. It is regrettable that few Members of Parliament avail themselves of this convenient way of informing themselves of civic issues and meeting a range of people without political affiliation. It is also unfortunate that the room in the Palace of Westminster where the APPG meets is too small to accommodate the number of people who want to attend. People from London Forum committees and from London societies have gained a lot from these meetings, the most recent of which have been on Public Participation in the Planning System and on 'Building Better: Building Beautiful'.

Civic Voice is very keen, as far as its staff resources will allow, to engage with civic societies. A Civic Voice trustee, Paul Bedwell, came and spoke at the Forum's Open Meeting on Broadening the Membership Base. Very recently, Civic Voice has co-operated with the Southgate District Civic Trust (a London Forum member) in a Community Planning day to discuss how the Southgate Office Village is to be redeveloped. ■

Spotlight on the Charlton Society

The First Fifty Years

By **Roden Richardson** (Vice Chair)

A Bit of History

Football fans will know where Charlton is: “The Valley” in south-east London is the home of Charlton Athletic. If you’re not a fan, here’s a clue: the Thames Barrier (sometimes identified as the “Barrier at Woolwich” – which it isn’t). A rather less known clue is Charlton House, officially London’s finest Jacobean mansion, completed in 1612 for James I’s son Prince Henry and his tutor, Sir Adam Newton. Nearby is St Luke’s, Charlton’s lovely castellated parish church (one of a handful of London churches still allowed to fly the Royal Navy ensign from their towers or spires in recognition of services formerly rendered to Thames navigation) which looks out across Greenwich Peninsula towards Canary Wharf, the City and beyond.

A Bit of Name-dropping

And our roll-call of famous-people? Born here were Flinders Petrie the archaeologist and John Masefield the poet laureate. Lived, died and buried here, William Henry Barlow, St Pancras station engineer; lived and wrote here, Italo Svevo, alias Ettore Schmidt, the novelist, playwright, businessman and protégé of James Joyce who oversaw his Italian family’s paint contract with the Royal Navy down on the Thames; and buried here, Spencer Perceval, the only British prime minister to be assassinated (but for nothing better than a personal grievance). And as for architects: reputedly John Thorpe (of James I’s Charlton House); contentiously, Inigo Jones (Charlton House’s jewel of a summerhouse); and on the record, Norman Shaw (the designer of London’s famed telephone box), of the Charlton House extension and billiard room, commissioned by the last family to occupy the House, the Maryon Wilsons.

A Bit of Boasting

For a small conservation society in a challenging area to reach 50-years-old is not to be sneezed at. It all started with a potentially positive local authority planning proposal in the 1970s, intended to improve our village, reportedly described by John Betjeman as London’s only truly authentic village – a judgment with which, of course, we completely agree. Unusually enlightened for its time Greenwich Council sought to pedestrianize the village shopping street by diverting east- and west-bound traffic along separate one-way service roadways to the immediate north and south of the Village.

The problem to which virtually everybody at the time objected was that traffic would be intensified where these two streams of traffic connected with the existing road network in the immediate vicinity. Although abandoned, the proposal stimulated widespread realisation what a great little village Charlton possessed and that more should be made of it. To get the ball rolling, we organised a period-dress procession that stopped the village traffic for an hour. Subsequently, the Civic Trust helped us work with the Council on an ambitious plan that resulted in an official Conservation Area covering not only the village but Charlton House and its estate, plus the large open

green space to its east below Shooters Hill. Not long after these important achievements the unique red brick Victorian Assembly Rooms was saved from demolition to make way for a car park (almost to be expected at that time when everything possible was done to make life easier for the motorist). Recently our Council carried out an ambitious and praiseworthy renovation of the Rooms, an effort rewarded when it was at last given an official Grade II listing.

Another important village initiative followed in the ‘80s. Central government grants allowed a number of important shop fronts to be given new, traditional timber-framed display windows to replace the plate glass that had been slipped surreptitiously into position when nobody was looking.

And today our fourth village initiative is rolling forward to further refresh and enhance its unique environment, with measures to counter the ever-increasing traffic and the difficult impact of nearby supermarkets (Charlton now has half a dozen in a large retail zone down by the river); and, perhaps more challenging still, the insidious influence of the online market. The timeliness of our initiative was duly confirmed recently when Historic England also recognised the threats and placed the Village on its “at risk” register.

Beyond the Pale

The Society has sometimes been accused of focussing too much on the village and Charlton House (the latter now part of a promising heritage trust set up by Greenwich Council designed to care for the House in the way it should be). We disagree. Charlton is home to a picturesque and fascinating mix of mostly residential buildings. There is a wide variety of Victorian and Edwardian terrace housing on the steep hillside about 140ft above the Thames and the railway line serving central London that first encouraged developers to build here. We also can’t escape the impact of a slightly surreal array of modern tower blocks – recently redecorated to advantage with Society involvement – that is somehow both impressive and regrettable. In addition, to all this, there is a large area of interwar semi-detached houses, both private and council, on the elevated plateau below Shooters Hill; while down in Riverside to the north, a number of 19th century and early 20th century industrial structures were very recently granted conservation status as a result of pressure from the Society and other groups worried about increasing redevelopment. There is an almost constant stream of home extension planning applications. The Society only has the time to focus on those in conservation areas or when, in the endless battle against the scourge of the plastic window, it tries to encourage designs and proportions more sympathetic to the character of the affected building.

Apart from trying to deal with an unending flow of smaller but important issues like tree maintenance, graffiti removal or bus and train services, another major pre-occupation is Charlton Riverside, an enormous mixed-use project which will

The Charlton Society

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Chair Carol Kenna



Early 19C church almshouses replacing early 18C ones

Age: 50!

Circumstances of Birth: Founded as a charity in 1969 in response to a local authority planning proposal that would have created traffic problems around our unique village.

Biggest Successes: Our “founding” success when we stopped the traffic threat, and the achievement of Conservation Area status. We are proud to have been involved in the saving of the village Assembly Rooms, recently listed; the reinstatement of a central London-bound rail service and the introduction of a new local bus service; a web-based exhibition and booklet about our wonderful parks inheritance; and, most recently, helping to convince the Mayor of London that he should reject an unsuitable, precedent-setting scheme for 700-plus homes in Charlton Riverside recommended for approval by his planners.

Biggest Disappointments/Frustrations: The quest for new and active members.

Present Preoccupations: Charlton Riverside: 122-hectare light industrial zone that is a GLA-nominated Opportunity Area, planned to become a mixed-use development with up to 8000 new homes. Our local authority commissioned an excellent masterplan but in the present housing crisis, and under enormous political pressures, it is proving extremely difficult to constrain both developers and local authority planners from creating yet more anonymous Thames-side tower block Legolands. Our other main preoccupation is revitalising our hilltop village, constraining its traffic and helping it survive and flourish in the age of the supermarket and the online marketplace.

Working Details: Main committee of (currently) 7 members meets monthly; a planning sub-committee of 5. Membership fluctuates between 110 and 150.

Special Characteristics: Combination of remarkable local history (linked closely to that of Greenwich and Woolwich and their royal connections); geography (the powerful presence of the Thames); topography (a long riverside and escarpment below the slopes of Shooters Hill); and complicated demography (large pockets of low-income residents, a growing but fluctuating young professionals component and a rapidly evolving background setting dominated by central London’s eastward expansion creating a uniquely dramatic set of attributes – and challenges).

Last Word: The Society wants to find a new, pace-setting accommodation between old and new based on imaginative interactive conservation, together with high-quality design, place-making and public transport. ■

probably more than double Charlton’s population. Its potential impact has triggered widespread concerns, bringing our many local groups informally together for the first time to monitor and influence the situation. The new grouping recently achieved a major victory when the Mayor of London rejected a very large (771 homes) development in an unprecedented decision that we hope will help open a new and more enlightened era of community participation in major planning decisions for London, which until now have been dominated by wilful development, developers and – disturbingly – supportive Council planning departments. ■



Charlton House estate: 19C Charlton Village Assembly Rooms, built for the community by the Maryon Wilson family, the last residents of Charlton House. The Council intended to turn the site into a car park and the Society initiated a campaign to save and restore it; now Grade II listed

Below: Charlton House, completed 1607, officially the best example of a Jacobean mansion in London.



New London Plan – marathon hearings at City Hall conclude

Newsforum Spring 2019 reported on the first fifty hearings of the Examination in Public (EiP) into Sadiq Khan's draft New London Plan (NLP). **Peter Eversden** and **Michael Bach** report on a further 40 hearings at which London Forum gave evidence.

Offices

The loss of offices to housing through permitted development has resulted in a scarcity of floor space in some areas. The GLA explained that many converted offices had been occupied by small businesses, social enterprises and voluntary groups. 20,000 jobs were displaced. See <http://tinyurl.com/y463g4tr>

Stronger policies were proposed to encourage more offices in Outer London town centres for local jobs, thereby reducing the need to travel. That should include the promotion of Outer London Development Centres on which little progress has been made since publication of the current London Plan.

The problems arising from capacity constraints on public transport routes and stations have to be recognised and the phasing of improvements clarified.

The requirements for office space may not take account of the reducing floor space per employee. London Forum sought more sensitivity testing to take account of redevelopment and refurbishment of existing stock.

Land for industry, logistics and services

London Forum proposed that boroughs should audit the supply and demand for industrial land. We sought control on release of industrial land until a pan-London assessment of need is concluded. The NLP will identify where industrial use capacity should be retained or increased, or where limited release may be possible.

Too much industrial land has been lost to housing. Mixed-use developments can be successful if planned carefully. Residential development requires public transport and social infrastructure, which are seldom in place in for industrial sites. London Forum asked for a Supplementary Planning Guide (SPG) covering industrial land substitution.

The Freight Partnership Association sought more storage and distribution land in suitable places. E-commerce is over 20% of all sales, and is growing rapidly. LB Enfield reported that this required them to create more industrial land.

Affordable workspace

This was seen by most EiP participants as essential, with space charged on turnover of an emerging small enterprise, not on the floor space.

London Forum emphasised the need for NLP policies to protect local economy businesses in the back streets and hinterland where 47% of local service businesses and social enterprises are located and which are vulnerable to new development. National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2019 paragraph 92 c) requires local authorities to "guard against the unnecessary loss of valued facilities and services, particularly where this would reduce the community's ability to meet its day-to-day needs".

The GLA undertook to modify the draft NLP to recognise the needs for low cost space for voluntary and community organisations.

Green infrastructure, Green Belt and Metropolitan Open Land (MOL)

London Forum sought policies to ensure private open space is well greened and not unnecessarily restricted in access and use. The Forum gave evidence that NLP policies G2 and G3 for Green Belt and MOL protection are not consistent with the NPPF. Protection of MOL against use by boroughs for new schools was proposed. There should be no "appropriate development" on MOL. Urban Greening Factors should be built into Local Plan Site Allocations so that developers know what is expected. See <http://bit.ly/2WA58fL> The exploitation of public parks for events to generate income was raised. The protection that the Open Spaces Society achieved many years ago has been weakened by subsequent legislation.

The Telegraph Hill Society had been invited to the hearing as they had sought protection for private gardens.

The biodiversity policies in the NLP were supported but a policy change was suggested to increase trees in roads.

Waste management

London Forum pointed out that NLP Policy SI7 A 3) for zero biodegradable or recyclable waste to landfill by 2026 seems unlikely to be met. NLP paragraph 9.8.2 states that in 2015 32 per cent of such was sent to landfill."

There are too many different policies for waste collection across boroughs. The GLA promised to produce an SPG on waste management. The scattered location of local amenity sites was criticised but that is a matter for the boroughs.

Flood risk and SUDS

Policies for managing flood risk in the Thames Estuary have been effective and should be satisfactory for some years. Councils use the Regional Flood Risk Appraisal (RFRA), which provides a strategic analysis of the risk to London from all sources of flooding. London Forum asked for more guidance for boroughs. There is also a Sustainable Drainage Action Plan <http://bit.ly/2IEM3nq> calling for hard surfaces to be reduced or made permeable.

Social infrastructure

This was one of the important hearings in May 2019. All new development must be supported by the facilities and services occupiers need, preferably within walking distance. The loss of youth centres was raised by London Forum and others.

Developers are unlikely to fund all required infrastructure by S.106 and CIL contributions and other funding to meet requirements is in doubt. The GLA offered to consider Further Suggested Changes to the NLP for this subject.

Public transport

Hearings on transport matters were extensive and the main concerns were about funding to implement the schemes in NLP Table 10.1 - <http://bit.ly/2WYkEbR>. Development may have

to be phased through to 2041 and the target reduction of cars' mode share from 37% to 20% might not be achieved.

London Forum asked for the current London Plan's policy 6.1 for "encouraging patterns and nodes of development that reduce the need to travel, especially by car" to be retained in the NLP. The GLA had no explanation for its exclusion.

There is a forecast deficit of £722m this year on buses. The delayed Elizabeth line is another impact on the TfL budget. The GLA said new forms of funding from central and local Government will be needed plus "next generation road user charging". More orbital transport routes and south London rail "metroisation" improvements are needed and the GLA undertook to research the requirements then consult.

Air quality

Most of the EiP discussions on this subject were about failure to achieve NO2 targets by 2015 and the likelihood of particulates in the air being twice the World Health recommended levels in 2020. This could be harmful to children's lung development in some Air Quality Focus Areas.

The GLA said guidance would be prepared on implementing the Environment Strategy for London, which calls for air quality targets to be met by 2030. Gas heating systems may have to be changed in all buildings eventually.

The Mayor is concerned about the environmental, pollution and transport impacts of a third runway at Heathrow with increased freight traffic and an impact on the Heathrow Opportunity Area.

Water and Waterways

Thames Water will outline policies for sufficient water to meet London's growth. London Forum sought a Thames Strategy for Central London to complement those upstream of Chelsea and downstream of Tower Bridge, for which boroughs should give more support and recognition. Support was given by most EiP participants (except those representing developers) to the protection of existing wharves on the Thames, and to goods transfer stations on the canal from Paddington to Park Royal.

More protection of the Blue Ribbon Network of waterways and water spaces was sought for embankments, linear open spaces for walking, green chains and biodiversity, and should be recognised in the NLP for its contribution to leisure, transport and freight movement and for those living on them..

Historic England sought inclusion in the NLP of policies currently in the 2016 London Plan to protect and enhance the Thames and to include consideration of archaeology.

Town Centres and retail

Some of the NLP policies on these subjects apply in the Central Activities Zone and some do not. EiP participants praised the Mayor's SPG for town centres. Policies were suggested to protect town centre markets. Consolidation of units could harm the viability of secondary and tertiary frontages. The harm to

London's economy and town centres caused by the Government's imposition of permitted development rights was condemned. Boroughs will have to use Article 4 Directions to control development. Concern was expressed about high business rates and rents and the vacancy rates of retail premises, particularly department stores. Out of town retail parks may not be suitable for mixed use development, which the NLP encourages. Housing development in and near to town centres will require more social infrastructure and should be concentrated on sites close to such facilities.

Funding and Delivering the New London Plan and Viability

The NLP proposes that boroughs' Local Plans should define design codes and other requirements and likely development viability by Site Allocations so that developers can take account of the obligations when acquiring land and submitting proposals.

Applicants are required to fund the infrastructure their schemes necessitate but that will be resisted, judging from comments made by housebuilders. High housing targets and intensification of land use is driving up land prices and could hamper delivery of homes for low cost rent. NLP policies that could have an adverse impact on development viability were identified. The impact of some could be considerable, such as those for good growth and good design. A Viability Study of the NLP was conducted and can be seen at <http://bit.ly/2IlbMT2>. The Mayor is to increase the threshold for affordable housing from 35% to 50%. This will still fall to deliver the 42,000+ affordable homes annually of which 31,000 should be for low cost rent.

Almost half of the Community Infrastructure Levy collected by boroughs is spent on public transport. The Mayor's MCIL2 is meant to assist in the funding of Crossrail 2, but Crossrail 1 is consuming part of the income. There is a funding shortfall of around £3.1 billion per annum for all infrastructure, and the Mayor is seeking more funding from Government for this and for affordable homes. The 12 Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) in the NLP for monitoring its achievement were criticised by many EiP participants as inadequate. London Forum submitted an analysis of NLP policies which listed 33 measurable aims, targets and objectives and proposed that at least 21 of them should be monitored by KPIs. The GLA responded that the Mayor's Annual Monitoring Report would report on a range of indicators other than KPIs.

Next stages

The GLA will propose further suggested changes to the EiP Panel Inspectors in July, in response to the ninety-four hearings on NLP content. The Inspectors' report to the Mayor is expected by the end of September. A modified NLP should be approved early in 2020. However the Minister James Brokenshire MP has stated that the Government will require further changes to take into consideration the February 2019 NPPF and associated national guidance. ■

Open Meeting - Considerate Construction

London Forum's Open Meeting on March 16 heard presentations from three speakers: **Tony Pidgley CBE**, Chairman of Berkeley Group plc; **Jonathan Wade**, Head of Spatial Planning at the Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea; and **Lucian Smithers**, Director of Pocket Homes.

The Berkeley Homes approach

Mr Pidgley said that development was all about community engagement; housebuilders had to support community well-being, providing places where people wanted to live. He gave as an example a recent development of three thousand units in Brent, where there had been objections from seventeen residents associations but Berkeley Homes had eventually achieved support from them all. It was necessary for housebuilders to do the consultation themselves and not use consultants, to be prepared to change a masterplan, and to continue the contact after planning approval. Estate regeneration could take ten to thirty years to completion, which made partnership important. Parks, biodiversity, good architecture, placemaking, individuality and the like were what people wanted. Woodberry Down had won a Queen's Award; but the credit should go to the community.

How Pocket Living works

Mr Smithers said that Pocket Living operated only in London - largely inner London. Working with the Greater London Authority they provided intermediate housing for purchase, giving young people a way into home ownership. Purchasers had to meet certain criteria, and what they paid depended partly on their income; sub-letting was prohibited, and there were strong restrictions on resale, which had to be to someone who met Pocket Living's original criteria at a fixed discount below market price. Pocket Living themselves consulted widely before undertaking a project, not through consultants; they tried to bring current renters into the discussion (and into contact with planning authorities). Their developments were less disruptive than others, since they used modular construction, with living units made off site and craned into place; only the exterior was constructed on site.

The local authority view

Mr Wade said that Kensington & Chelsea was an intensely developed borough. In recent years they had faced a basement plague, and in consequence much construction traffic. All this had to be managed, and the council was seeking the maximum of engagement before planning approval was given; all was set out in their Code of Construction Practice. The basis for this was in Sections 60 and 61 of the Control of Pollution Act 1974. A bespoke Construction Management team involved Environmental Health, and Highways as well as Planning; fees were charged, but could be rebated for good behaviour. There was firm enforcement of these requirements; the affected public had to know who to talk to and how to make complaints. Construction Traffic Management plans were easier to make and enforce with larger developments, since traffic was more predictable.

Discussion and questions

In discussion Mr Pidgley endorsed Mr Smithers' enthusiasm

for modular construction; Berkeley Homes had not wanted to be manufacturers but found the control of quality it gave beneficial. Mr Wade agreed that modular construction could speed up completion, and improve collaboration.

Mr Birkett (**Knightsbridge Neighbourhood Forum**) said that their Neighbourhood Plan included best practice guidance on air quality and community engagement. Policy on climate change required no new homes to be connected to the gas grid after 2025; buildings would have to be all-electric. Mr Pidgley said that the GLA still required combined heat and power plants, which were damaging to the environment, while Berkeley Homes had shown that even in winter it was possible to get close to zero carbon. Mr Birkett asked Mr Pidgley to support the removal of the combined heat and power requirement from the London Plan.

Mr Poulter (**Putney Society**) said that whatever the appearance of consultation councils did not do what the people wanted, for instance in restricting the height of buildings. The GLA was, in fact, pushing for increases in height. Mr Wade said that people would have to understand that there was a need for many more homes, and councils had to respond.

The **Ealing Fields Association** was concerned about the damage caused by demolitions (as distinct from construction); what could people do to mitigate this? Mr Wade said that in Kensington & Chelsea people might go to law. Mr Pidgley said that it helped if the owners of houses close to but not directly adjacent to a demolition site had a survey done before work began.

Mr Coupe interrogated Mr Smithers about the power to enforce the prevention of sub-letting and the requirements relating to resale, and about building for rent, which could be desirable. Mr Smithers said that that these provisions were enforced - subletting (including Airbnb) would be reported on by others in the block. Mr Smithers and Mr Pidgley thought it would be desirable to change the culture in London so that renting became more acceptable.

The **Amwell Society** expressed concern at the high price for the flats in the Mount Pleasant development, and the fact that many were going to foreign buyers. Mr Pidgley observed that most of the flats were lived in by someone working in the City or similar.

Mr Pidgley said that the Mayor's requirement of 35% affordable units in developments had reduced land values. There were large derelict sites (e.g. Southall) where lots of homes could be built; the Woolwich Arsenal site showed what could be done. He expressed scepticism about the destination of money paid by developers in Community Infrastructure Levy. ■

Open Meeting – Broadening the Membership Base

Some 50 participants attended this workshop, aimed at helping societies diversify their membership, and become more representative of the communities they serve.

The event commenced with 4 short introductory talks.

Dulwich Society

Dulwich Society Chair, Ian McInnes gave a pen portrait of the Society, its modus operandi and the challenges it faces. Originally representing residents on the Dulwich Estate, the Society is now open to residents of East and West Dulwich, drawing in a more diverse membership. As well as seeking to preserve the unique character of the neighbourhood, the Society is heavily involved in practical, workaday issues such as road safety, improvements to public transport and promoting the Council's Cleaner Greener Safer scheme. The overall impression is of a society with "clout" which contributes actively to the wider community, whilst continuing to deliver for its core membership.

Mapesbury Residents Association,

Gerry Weston introduced the Mapesbury Residents Association, with a catchment area between Willesden Green, Cricklewood and Kilburn. With around 800 members, it is the largest society of its kind in Brent. Its priorities are to press for improvements in the area, to protect the area's largely Edwardian character and to foster community spirit. The Association has a number of groups not normally associated with the civic movement – Reading, Bridge, Theatre, Gardening, Walking, History and Harvesting/Pruning. Some draw in a younger demographic, particularly families with children. The biennial Open Gardens day attracts a large number of visitors and raises an enviable amount of money for local charities.

Walworth Society

Paul Thornton delivered a presentation that had been prepared by Jeremy Leach, Chair of the Walworth Society. The Society represents residents of the relatively deprived area south of Elephant & Castle on either side of the Walworth Road. The Society's business model is very different from most civic societies; there is no membership fee, all events are free, all communication is electronic. Membership is by subscription to the email list. There is a monthly eNewsletter and monthly meetings that deal with all active business. The restoration of fire-damaged Walworth Town Hall, and protecting the Walworth Road Conservation Area are major issues. There is a small committee but most tasks are undertaken by volunteers for specific projects.

Civic Voice

Paul Bedwell, past Chair of Sheffield Civic Trust and a Deputy Chair of Civic Voice, spoke about initiatives to address the core challenge of attracting members to civic societies across the country. He noted that a number of civic societies had attracted a more diverse membership. For instance, Sheffield, Bradford and Birmingham civic societies all have Chairs in their 20s. Delegation to dedicated working parties and the

importance of micro volunteering were also cited. Paul commended collaboration and knowledge sharing through membership of the London Forum and Civic Voice and drew attention to analysis tools available to Civic Voice members, the Civic Society Assessment Tool and Trustee Skills Audit.

Discussion: which ideas are worth serious consideration?

The meeting then split up into seven break-out Groups. Each addressed the question: "based on the ideas put forward in the presentations, which ideas are worth serious consideration by your society?" The following "top ten" ideas received most nominations and drew general approval when presented.

- We must communicate via **the media that our target audience** use. Almost all civic societies have a website, which should be complemented by Twitter (or possibly Instagram) for immediate news items, and a monthly e-newsletter.
- Societies should be familiar with **free and low-cost utilities** such as EventBrite, MailChimp and SurveyMonkey for managing event bookings, email lists and surveys respectively.
- In seeking out **younger leaders for our civic societies**, we should look to rising professionals for whom a spell as Chair could be seen as networking or Continuing Professional Development
- **We must get out more** – and take our message to where our target audiences meet anyway - faith groups, tenants/residents association meetings, ward partnership events etc.
- We must mobilise people who are keen to help but don't want to sit on committees – **micro-volunteering** for short. Perhaps a small core committee and a larger pool of "activists" who will lead specific initiatives?
- We should **cooperate actively** with other civil society organisations on our patch, and with civic and amenity societies on our borders
- We should be as **easy to join** as possible – PayPal, credit/debit card online etc. Can we catch potential recruits "in the moment", e.g. immediately after they move to the area? Would **2-tier membership** make sense – paying members, and an email list that receives tweets and the e-newsletter?
- **Awards, competitions and events** – run an annual architectural award, or best window box display or best young volunteer scheme. Run an annual flagship event – local Open House day, Open Gardens, Local History festival etc.
- Use other organisations to publicise our activities such as the **London Society, London Forum**, local libraries etc
- Gain access to the **Civic Voice analysis tools** for assessing our organisations' performance and skills

London Forum will organise an Open Meeting in the autumn to examine at least one of these topics in depth. Please go to <https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/FMVS536> to indicate which of these would be of most interest to your society. ■

Round the Societies

A round-up of news from our member societies.

By **Diane Burridge**

Improving High Barnet Town Centre

A build-out of the pavement along the High Street, between The Spires and the Post Office, with trees, benches and more litter bins, was approved in April. The **Barnet Residents' Association** have been promoting this scheme ever since 2010 and members are now closely engaged with the Council in its development.

The result should be a major boost to the attractiveness of the Town Centre which will hopefully encourage more people to use the local shops. The Association is working with the Council on issues such as dealing with: rough sleeping, fly tipping, graffiti, street cleaning, the removal of redundant estate agent boards, and writing to owners about neglected aspects of their buildings. Association members have removed over 300 fly stickers in just a two - week period.

Reducing Pollution in Putney Town Centre

The **Putney Society** has been campaigning to reduce the levels of air pollution in and around the Town Centre, lobbying Wandsworth Council, the Mayor and TfL to take measures to reduce pollutants. Most efforts have concentrated on measuring levels of NO₂ in the immediate vicinity of heavily tracked roads. Now the Society has decided to invest in two sensors that will measure black carbon – one of the components in particulates, such as PM_{2.5}. (Particles of 2.5 micrometres in size measured per cubic metre.) While NO₂ disperses quite rapidly, particulates have a much greater spread. By measuring PM_{2.5} in streets around Putney, areas with the highest and lowest concentrations will be able to be identified. This will enable The Society to recommend the safest walking and cycling routes as well as provide more evidence for campaigning for cleaner (and fewer) vehicles.

No to Sainsbury's for the 4th time in Highbury

The **Highbury Community Association** has been active in successful campaigns since 2015 to stop a Sainsbury's Convenience Store being built at 211 Blackstock Road, which would have meant loss of pavement and trees. Sainsbury's appealed to the Planning Inspectorate against Islington Council's refusals; for the latest application, detailed evidence of traffic movements and tree surveys were carried out by local people. The Planning Inspector in supporting the Council's rejection, found that the loss of two mature trees was contrary to the Local Plan and an associated policy which protects green infrastructure. And that the use of the proposed loading bay (partly using the pavement) by Sainsbury's delivery lorries would result in displacing parking in the area, and be a risk to pedestrians and cyclists. This rejection offers some good news for groups trying to protect the street scene for pedestrians. An acceptable use now needs to be found for this site, and local Councillors have asked the Highbury Community Association to invite suggestions from its 1,000 members.

Bell Green Project in Sydenham

After Lewisham Council rejected using Article 4 to try to save locally-listed gas holders, the **Sydenham Society** has written to Southern Gas Networks calling for a halt to their demolition. This has not been successful but the Society continues to examine options to protect these gas holders, including drawing up a design brief and masterplan for the area - the Bell Green Project. Lewisham's Mayor has supported this initiative noting that the gas holders have important historic and cultural significance for Sydenham. Demolition is planned to be completed by 2029 and so there is time hopefully for alternatives to demolition to be found. Defunct sites like Bell Green are being redeveloped country wide, including two gas holders in King's Cross which have been transformed into modern apartment complexes.

Protecting College Farm in Finchley

Originally an Express Dairies model farm (established over 150 years ago), College Farm was taken over by a trust and was a much loved amenity which opened regularly to the public until the foot-and-mouth epidemic forced it to close. It has since then traded as an equestrian and pet store. Three of the original farm buildings are listed.

The **Finchley Society** has been concerned for some time about its future, as the listed buildings have seemed to deteriorate and there have been no signs of its reopening, though the fields have continued to be grazed. The Society therefore submitted an application to the London Borough of Barnet to list the Farm as an Asset of Community Value, backed by an online petition with 3,276 signatures. This was agreed by the Council in March 2019 and now offers some protection against the Farm's loss to developers if the owners decide to sell. The community would have six months to come up with an alternative proposal if required funds could be raised.

The Streatham Society is 45 years old.

The Society was initially set up in 1974 by local people concerned that the old Fire Station on Streatham Green (now the mosque), had been standing empty for several years, and a group was needed to deal with this and environmental matters. The Society now has five sub-committees working on a wide range of initiatives. Despite changed methods of communication (the internet) and socialising, and increased commitments for many people, the Streatham Society still attracts an average of over 50 people to meetings - an impressive number for any organisation.

Campaigns over the years have included: Saving Well House in Valley Road; setting up the Streatham Against the Roads campaign; saving Streatham Pool; setting up Streatham Against Litter, the Streatham Forum and London Walking Forum (creating the local link in the Capital Ring); and supporting the Civilian War Memorial and Palace Road Nature Reserve.

newsbriefs

News and issues of interest and concern to note.

A Gripping Story at the Birth of the Conservation Movement

Newsforum's long-serving editor, Helen Lawrence (Marcus) has authored **How Hampstead Heath was Saved – a story of people power**, published by Camden History Society with the support of the **Heath & Hampstead Society**. The campaign to save Hampstead Heath in 19th century was at the heart of what became the new conservation movement.

The book examines the political and social upheavals, the cultural developments that led to a new understanding of the value of open space, and the rise of Town Planning. It also tells, for the first time, the story of the Heath and Hampstead Society's century of achievement. The story has wide appeal and will be of particular interest to civic and amenity societies, and to anyone who has fought to save a cherished piece of heritage. "This book is a record of a great victory, but also a call to arms." Sir Simon Jenkins

There will be a full review in the next issue of Newsforum.

Discover Hackney Partnership

The **Hackney Society** is one of ten groups making up The Discover Hackney Partnership, aiming to increase the use and knowledge of the borough's rich heritage and its built environment. Hackney was the home of the earliest Elizabethan theatre, and a project by Every Generation Foundation is a film and exhibition about Eddie Noble – the Jamaican airman who inspired the lead character in Andrea Levy's book "Small Island". Hackney has 1,300 listed buildings and sites, and The Building Exploratory, an organisation which helps people gain a better understanding of the buildings and spaces that surround them. As part of this work, the Hackney Society and the Hackney Historic Buildings Trust both help to protect and preserve 'at risk' buildings.

Leof the Jute's Heritage 35 Years Later

Ladywell is the historical heart of Lewisham, where it is thought that Leof the Jute burnt his boat and settled in the 7th Century! The **Ladywell Society** is 35 years old, having been set up in 1984. Achievements over the years include: campaigning to stop the demolition of the Adhesives Specialities Ltd. Building; successfully advocating the setting up of the Ladywell Conservation Area; and adding these local buildings to the Statutory List of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest: Ladywell Railway Station (1857), The Old Fire Station (1898), Police Station (1899), Coroners Court (1894) and the Playtower (1884). Another success was the national listing by English Heritage of Riley's Billiard Hall (1910) on Lewisham High Street. ■

Residential units and overseas buyers?

Diane Burrige reports: Over a third of new private housing units sold in London from April 2014 to March 2016 went to overseas buyers. (Now public: Final Report on The Role of Overseas Investors in the London New-Build Residential Market. LSE London. May 2017 - for Homes for London.)

The London School of Economics' researchers concluded that this phenomenon benefits London, stating that: Overseas investment has had a positive net effect on the availability to Londoners of new housing, both private and affordable, with 70% of new units let out to Londoners. And that: Owners of London homes who come to London relatively rarely often contribute significant benefits to the London economy.'

Few facts are included in this Report to substantiate such claims. The researchers admit that there were many issues around definitions and data availability - including who is an overseas buyer.

What catalyses such ownership is the importance of pre-sales and off-plan sales to developers dependant on debt finance, with banks often requiring 40-60% pre-sales. This disadvantages first-time buyers who need to get mortgages, often only available for completed units.

The summary does, thankfully, include a caution: that the Report should not be seen as a full cost-benefit analysis. One has to ask: When will such an analysis be carried out, and in whose interest?

Problems at Earl's Court

The 77 acre site of London's Earls Court Exhibition Centre (now demolished) has lost more than half its value according to reports in June. It was to have been a joint venture between Capital & Counties, (Capco) and Transport for London, but Capco has been in talks to sell its share of the plot as it works towards a potential demerger of the estate from its other property holdings in Covent Garden. Amongst the problems besetting it are increased stamp duty, construction cost inflation, clashes with Fulham Council, ebbing demand from Asia and the steady deterioration of the London housing market. The 2013 master plan for the area included 7,500 new homes but the slump in the market for luxury homes, along with local opposition, means no home has yet been built despite London's acute need for affordable housing. Hammersmith & Fulham council and London mayor, Sadiq Khan, are pushing for the return of two council estates to the borough, along with more affordable housing.

Ashley Barker, OBE, architect

Ashley Barker, the surveyor of historic buildings at the Greater London Council's Historic Buildings Division from 1970-1986, and then head of the London division of English Heritage, died in March aged 91. He helped to preserve many areas of London most notably Covent Garden. ■

Membership renewal

Please keep London Forum's membership system up to date for your society by using the new membership renewal facility on the web site:

http://www.londonforum.org.uk/member_login.php

Do make sure to amend your data so that the right people are receiving post and email bulletins, otherwise societies might not be kept informed. The way in which members can amend their details is secure, as is the information we hold. Queries can be sent to admin@londonforum.org.uk ■

The Newsforum team would be delighted to hear from members

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

Round the Societies:

dianeurridge@btinternet.com ■

Delivering Newsforum by email

The Newsforum in PDF form sent by email can be widely distributed at no cost. If you do not keep your hard copy and feel you could do without it, please let us know via one of the email addresses below, giving your Society name as well as email address, so that we could reduce our postal mailing list and save printing and postage costs. ■

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Dates for your diary

London Forum events

London Forum Open Meetings 2019

Save the Dates

Thursday 3rd October - Annual General Meeting

Wednesday 6th November - Follow-up to 'Broadening the Membership Base'

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

Meetings are held at The Gallery,

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

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

London Forum on Twitter

Don't forget the London Forum Twitter site.

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

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

http://twitter.com/London_Forum

NB - note the underscore: _ in the name ■

newsforum

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