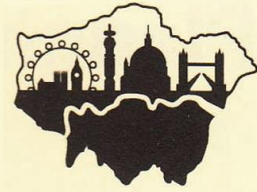


The **London Forum** of  
Amenity and Civic Societies



*working to protect and improve the quality of life in London*

# London Forum *Insights*

Issue 11, September 2022

The London Forum of Amenity and Civic Societies offers its condolences to the Royal family on the death of Queen Elizabeth II. Click [here](#) to listen to Forum President, Ben Derbyshire praising His Majesty King Charles III for his long-standing commitment to a symbiotic relationship between human kind and nature.

## Editorial

This issue of London Forum *Insights* is coming out in the immediate aftermath of the Queen's funeral, and does not take into account any policy statements made since then. As yet we have heard nothing from the Truss government about Levelling Up, and whether the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill (LURB) will continue its journey through Parliament in broadly its current form. Some commentators have suggested that the Prime Minister's views align more closely with those of a previous Secretary of State, Robert Jenrick, than with those of the Bill's architect, Michael Gove. Others predict that Levelling Up will slip down the agenda as the Prime Minister focusses on policies that "will deliver a great victory for the Conservative Party in 2024", such as energy prices and immigration control. Oh, and of course no issue of *Insights* would be complete without the announcement of a new Housing Minister. Lee Rowley, MP for NE Derbyshire becomes the 4th holder of that office this year, following in the footsteps of Christopher Pincher, Stewart Andrew and Marcus Jones.

In this issue we bring Forum members up to date on LURB's progress through the Committee Stage, and the main topics still to be addressed. We also have two articles on trials and tribulations affecting those in the Modern Methods of Construction sector. We speculate on whether various straws in the wind on Community Engagement are just that, or whether they might pave the way for significantly greater community participation prior to the submission of planning applications. And, of course, we have our usual round-up of transport matters, important decisions by the Planning Inspectorate, and items culled from members' newsletters that are worth sharing across the Forum.

We also carry an appeal on behalf of Civic Voice, the national organisation for the civic movement, which has been hit by a substantial theft from its bank account.

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## **Rooftop Reception held in glorious weather**

Following on from last year's trial run, London Forum hosted a second rooftop reception at 70 Cowcross Street, courtesy of Alan Baxter Ltd. The event attracted 45 participants from 30+ member societies, a few more than in the previous year. We were rewarded with a glorious evening in which to enjoy the spectacular views and each other's company. Several of our members took the opportunity to beard Forum trustees for an in-depth discussion about current matters of concern on their particular patch.

It was a great pleasure to welcome back Helen Marcus, former London Forum Vice President and long-standing editor of Newsforum, the highly regarded predecessor of this newsletter.

Unfortunately, one of our guests collapsed during the evening, but revived quickly once paramedics arrived. Our thanks to British Transport Police who were first on the scene (don't ask!) and to the Ambulance Service who were hot on their heels. We will almost certainly repeat the reception next year, and would urge all societies to take advantage of the opportunity to meet their counterparts from other societies and Forum trustees in an informal setting.



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## **A tough road ahead for TfL**

### **Andrew Bosi untangles Transport for London's "long term" deal**

An uneasy truce between the DfT and TfL was declared on August 30<sup>th</sup>. Transport for London has reluctantly accepted the deal, because the alternative – an Article 114 direction, bankruptcy and take over by the Department for Transport – would have been far worse.

The long term deal is for 20 months, less than the three years hoped for. The succession of short term deals in the wake of the pandemic lasted more than two years. This is hardly a recipe for long term planning, and the people who lose out most will be the passengers of 20 years hence when schemes should have been completed but are now paused *sine die*.

The detail of the agreement remains somewhat obscure. It is said that some improvements were negotiated from the original offer, made on July 22<sup>nd</sup>, but no specific detail has been given as to what these are. It may be that the requirements to explore driverless trains and changes to the pension scheme have been watered down, though the Mayor expressed concern that they could still provoke "industrial action and more disruption for commuters".

It seems that the agreement allows for some capital projects and precludes others. So the new Piccadilly trains, ordered before the pandemic and being built behind the Red Wall (in Goole) will appear; but government money cannot be spent on developing the Ultra Low Emissions Zone (ULEZ) or working up Crossrail2 or the Bakerloo Line extension.

Transport for London seems to think it will be able to proceed with extensions to the ULEZ as it will generate enough income to cover expenditure. In the short term, the most important capital project is the Piccadilly re-signalling scheme, which would increase capacity to 36 trains per hour (as on the Victoria line) and optimise use of the new rolling stock. It is unclear where this project stands. Schemes to overcome acute overcrowding, such as that at Holborn and perhaps Camden Town, appear to have a double yellow aspect if not the green light, although railway buffs will be quick to point out that the double yellow is not used on the London Underground. Overcrowding at Holborn is expected to worsen once the Elizabeth line is fully open.

Users of the London Overground will be aware that the half-life refurbishment programme for the class 378 units was paused at the start of the pandemic. As yet there is no evidence that it will be resumed, although one set has received new seating in the revised London Overground livery. Another half-life refurbishment programme is that for the “new Routemaster”. A limited number of these buses were repainted around March 2022 and some had attention to their seating. Extensive cuts to bus services could have led to these buses (owned by TfL and not the privatized bus companies) being withdrawn or mothballed. Some bus cuts are still expected, with a response to the consultation on the large-scale series of proposed cuts imminent. Cuts to the 21/271 and the 1/168 had already been approved for 2023 despite significant opposition from passengers and politicians. Another indicator will be the future award of bus contracts. Will they be awarded using existing (and therefore ageing) vehicles, with electric buses or with super-electric buses as introduced on route 63? New buses result in older ones cascading to the Regions, but they are built in the UK outside London, and any slowing of their introduction would stifle growth and levelling up.

The funding agreement seeks to protect passengers from extensive cuts to bus services but again it is far from clear what this might mean in practice. And TfL still has to find £230m of as yet unidentified savings.

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### **Civic Voice needs our help**

As many of you will know, Civic Voice (CV), the national organisation for the civic movement has been hit by the theft of funds from its bank account. Steps are being taken to recover the missing funds, but at best this will take time. In

the meantime, the organisation is seeking to raise around £80,000 to enable it to continue its operations. Those Forum member societies that are also CV members and those of us who are individual members will already have seen the appeal from Martin Hamilton, CV's Acting Chair, asking for donations or loans. About half the necessary sum has been raised so far.

The London Forum is not eligible to join Civic Voice, but the two organisations work closely together. It is important for us and our members that CV is able to interact at a national level with government departments, politicians and other influential stakeholders, ensuring that the views of the civic movement carry weight in policy formulation and legislation. The Forum is in contact with CV Trustees and is considering what it can do to help. If any society or individual wishes to support Civic Voice, please make your payment to:

Account Name: Civic Voice R/C 1134476

Sort Code: 08-02-28

Account Number: 68045492

Please use the word APPEAL as your Reference. An email to [info@civicvoice.org.uk](mailto:info@civicvoice.org.uk) to let CV know that you've made a donation would be much appreciated. If your society is considering joining Civic Voice and would like to discuss this, please also get in touch at [info@civicvoice.org.uk](mailto:info@civicvoice.org.uk).

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## Is Modular Construction on the ropes?

A [recent article](#) in Building magazine asked "Why are we struggling to make Modular Construction work?" *Insights* sought views from the Forum's resident Architect, Mary Hogben, and from Forum Vice President, Nicky Gavron.

### **Mary Hogben writes:**

As a practising Architect for more than 40 years I have experienced the inefficiency of the traditional building site, the waste of materials, poor working conditions, lack of skilled labour and inefficient supply chains first hand so a change from that would be very welcome.

In 2016 Mark Farmer wrote a report 'Modernise or Die' identifying a skills crisis in mainstream construction, with an ageing workforce and rising costs of imported materials.

In September 2018 the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors produced a paper called 'Modern Methods of Construction (MMC) - a forward thinking solution to the housing crisis?' They were addressing the inability of the construction industry to provide the level of quality, quantity and affordability that was needed, particularly in the provision of new housing. They concluded that "demand fluctuations, unstable investment and construction cycles, and a fragmented housing market procurement model is not obviously a good fit with factory production".

In 2018 the Government and the Construction Leadership Council allocated £420m in support of industry transformation. Since then, Britain has finally woken up to the climate crisis and the need to reduce our carbon use significantly. Studies have shown that as well as all the other efficiencies, carbon emissions can be cut by as much as 45% compared with traditional methods. Additionally, government support in the form of the affordable homes programme requires 25% of homes built under the scheme to be MMC, so there is cash available. Yet we remain in an acute housing crisis with an inefficient building industry, and buildings that are wasteful of carbon.

But not all developers are succeeding at MMC, and some have even made huge losses and ceased production. Companies have found that gaining the accreditation needed to be fundable, mortgageable and insurable can take many years of research, development and testing. Furthermore, larger housebuilders do not necessarily want faster production which might flood the market and depress prices. There may also be some lingering anxiety dating from problems with the prefabricated panel systems of the 1960s.

Changes to legislation requiring whole life carbon assessments for all construction projects might encourage the more traditional constructors to think more radically about decarbonising their low-rise and mid-rise schemes. A further shot in the arm for MMC might come from the proposed "use it or lose it" clause in the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill, aimed at speeding up build-out rates.

### **MMC: a Point of View from Nicky Gavron**

Working internationally on climate solutions for housing, I am very aware of how this country is lagging behind when it comes to incentivising and regulating

truly low carbon homes, particularly in mid-rise buildings. We have a triple housing crisis: supply, affordability and construction. Add to that the climate emergency and you have a perfect storm.

Part of the answer *has* to be modular housing/MMC. We have only ever reached high housing numbers when two things came together: more public housing and prefabrication. And the Government's net zero targets will never be reached unless it incentivises a materials revolution.



The examples of MMC I've seen in London are light years away from prefabs and system buildings of the past. They're digitally designed, precision-engineered in factory-controlled conditions, ensuring high quality and minimal waste. Camden Council tenants I met in Bacton Estate are delighted to have energy bills slashed - imagine the impact on fuel poverty! This very constrained site abuts a mainline railway, but you could a pin drop inside the homes, with no noise and no vibrations. Construction was completed in 10 weeks and required only 18 lorry loads.

In 2017, I produced a [report](#) with illustrated case studies and recommendations for the Mayor on MMC. This showed that modular works for all kinds of sites, typologies and tenures. But significantly, the business model particularly lends itself to rented housing (from build-to-rent to public housing) because it relies on speed of delivery and quick returns.

Like all manufacturing processes, offsite requires volume, continuity of demand and a degree of standardization to justify the up-front capital investment needed. Those procuring a scheme and those investing in it need confidence that if one manufacturer pulls out, another is able to step into the breach and confidence that there is a sufficient volume and pipeline of homes. The procurer

wants continuity of supply and the manufacturer wants continuity of demand. Investors and lenders don't want risk.

With London's demand, we could catalyse a new industrial sector, new factories, new jobs and a new, more diverse workforce right across the country. The key to success will be local authorities pooling sites to aggregate demand, collaborating with housing providers, manufacturers and supply chains to deliver housing, especially affordable housing, quickly and to a high standard,.

Modernisation of house building is not just about how we build, but **what we build with**. As the article in Building magazine says, regulation on embodied carbon during construction would: "put rocket boosters beneath the modular sector". Our building materials - concrete, steel, bricks and iron - are carbon intensive to source and manufacture, and use finite resources. Construction using these materials chucks tonnes of avoidable carbon into the atmosphere even before the homes are lived in.

We need a materials revolution. We need greater use of biobased materials, where not only production is low on embodied carbon, but which store and sequester carbon too. Imagine our homes as carbon sinks. Advances in technology have created the first significant new construction material since reinforced concrete around a century ago: structural engineered timber, which can replace the majority of concrete in new multi-storey residential buildings.

MMC can take us so far, but we will never achieve our net zero targets without replacing high carbon materials wherever we can.

*Nicky Gavron's chapter [The Habitable City](#) on this subject has just been published by Wiley: [The Climate City](#).*

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## **A bloody nose for over-development**

### **Gordon Massey\* celebrates an important Appeal decision**

In low-rise suburbs many community associations see the proliferation of tower blocks as a fundamental threat to their way of life. 'Suburban' gradually turns into 'urban'. Despite often ferocious opposition many unwelcome tall blocks



continue to be approved. So it is pleasing when a proposal is resoundingly defeated. One such recent victory was Victoria Quarter in New Barnet where a scheme for 539 flats in blocks up to seven storeys has been dismissed on appeal. And yes – only seven storeys – a height which in Barnet which does not even qualify as a tall building. And most importantly, the reasons for dismissal should offer a valuable precedent to keep in mind when considering similar schemes in the future.

The Planning Inspector said the scheme would insert an ‘alien typology’ into the suburban character of New Barnet and would disrupt ‘any sense of continuity’. Whilst recognising the London Plan’ promotion of higher density developments to address the housing crisis, the Inspector considered this should not mean ‘a complete disregard for wider context’.

The Inspector also went on to criticise several aspects of the design that could result in unsatisfactory living conditions. Ninety rooms would receive less than adequate daylight; flats adjacent to a railway line would need mechanical ventilation and cooling systems because opening windows would breach noise thresholds; and 30% of flats were single aspect, so more likely to overheat. It was perhaps fortuitous that the Inquiry was conducted at the height of the summer heatwave!

This success may not have happened but for the magnificent work undertaken by members of New Barnet Community Association who organised an energetic campaign that produced nearly 800 objections. They also undertook a forensic examination of the scheme, putting their case forward over the eight days of the Public Examination, with many of their observations featuring in the Inspector’s decision.

And a postscript - in 2017 a scheme for 371 flats on the site which had the support of the community was approved. But developer Fairway wanted more – much more (with the support of planning officers). A scheme for 652 units up to ten storeys was thrown out in 2020, with the recent scheme a scaled-down version of that. No doubt those campaigning to speed up the planning system (a euphemism for neutering opposition?) would point to this debacle as a case in point. But where exactly should the blame lie?

The [Updates](#) page on the London Forum website gives a link to the Appeal Decision and to a UDL Guide which societies may find helpful.

\* Chairman, Federation of Residents Associations in Barnet

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## Endless LURB?

### Paul Thornton summarises the Bill's progress to date

In the previous issue of *Insights* we outlined those areas of the Bill that give us the greatest cause for concern. Briefly, these are the Government's intention to introduce National Development Management Policies which will apply nationwide, the apparent downgrading of the London Plan in terms of scope and standing, the complexity and risks associated with the new Infrastructure Levy and the fact that so much of the Bill content is intended to be specified in future Regulations over which there will be little or no parliamentary scrutiny.

The Bill Committee has now had 21 half-day sittings and has discussed a large number of amendments, many of which address our concerns. However, the Government has made few concessions and the Opposition chose in most cases not to seek a vote of the Committee with its in-built majority of Government MPs.

Following the death of Queen Elizabeth, the work of the Committee was suspended, and no announcement has yet been made about the dates of future sittings. These sittings will debate a number of proposed new clauses to the Bill, rather than amendments to clauses in the published version. Many of the new clauses have been proposed by Theresa Villiers, MP for Chipping Barnet. One, strongly supported by the Forum, provides for a Third Party Right of Appeal when planning consent is granted against Local Plan policies or where due process appears not to have been followed. Others prevent central government from imposing mandatory housing targets on Local Planning Authorities, abolish the "5-year land supply" rule, and revoke the London Mayor's power to call in planning applications for determination by City Hall. Those interested in the Committee's detailed deliberations can find links to the relevant documents on the London Forum Updates webpage [here](#).

We had expected by now that the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities would be consulting on a revised National Planning Policy Framework reflecting the provisions in Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill – or would, at the very least, have issued a prospectus outlining which areas are likely to change and the consultation process for the proposed changes. Thus far nothing has emerged; presumably the Department is waiting for a steer about whether the policies of the previous Secretary of State, Michael Gove,

are to be pursued seamlessly, re-tuned, or, heaven forfend, thrown overboard for the second time in as many years. We will keep members informed.

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## **Briefly Noted**

### **London Recovery Newsletter**

If you don't already receive this email newsletter, you may want to sign up to do so. It pulls together a wide variety of information about London's economy, the CAZ (central activity zone), high streets, inequalities, property market and more. One could argue that the COVID recovery is behind us now and we have other more pressing issues to cope with like the energy crisis and rapid inflation. But this board may have a longer life than originally expected as there seems to be a determination amongst London institutions to find a way to continue to work in partnership. The newsletter is sent out by Luke Bruce, Director of the London Recovery Programme run by London Councils and the GLA. To receive the newsletter [sign up here](#).

### **NLA New London Agenda**

New London Architecture (NLA) has launched the New London Agenda, "a multi-year project that will develop a vision for London, alongside practical policy outcomes setting out how the built environment sector can deliver London's needs. It will be used as a tool to influence City Hall in adopting this vision and ultimately shape the evolution of the next London Plan." The first edition will be unveiled in August 2023, and the intention is to influence Mayoral strategies and the replacement London Plan ahead of the May 2024 Mayoral election. Much of the policy formulation will be done by the NLA expert panels. Most, if not all the built environment professions are represented on these panels, but there is virtually no community participation anywhere to be seen.

NLA expert panel chairs have met as part of New London Agenda and suggested a range of priorities to "unlock housing" in London for new Government Ministers to consider, as [here](#). Do we have a volunteer to review these recommendations for the next issue of *Insights*?

### **Early Community Engagement**

At the start of the year, we reported favourably on Westminster City Council's Guidance Note for Applicants and Developers strongly advising engagement

with the local community **prior** to seeking pre-application advice. Although this is not mandatory, any pre-application advice sought before community engagement will come with the proviso that the advice may change post community engagement. We now understand that Barnet Council either has adopted, or will adopt the WCC model. Are member societies aware of similar moves in other boroughs?

We also note that one of the clauses in the Levelling Up Bill, LURB, makes permanent existing provisions that allow the Secretary of State to require that community engagement takes place prior to submission of a planning application for specific types of development. Thus far these powers have only been used for onshore wind farms. When asked about this at one of the Bill Committee hearings, the Minister indicated that it was the Government's intention to use these powers more widely, though he wouldn't be drawn on what types of application.

### **London Forum Strategy Review**

The trustees of the London Forum have initiated a review of our strategy for the next three to five years. It is some time since we last reviewed our strategy and activities, and much has changed in the last few years, not least since we all had to stay at home during the pandemic.

Our key aim is to maximise our effectiveness in pursuing our charitable objects to support and promote high standards of planning, conservation, design, infrastructure and transport; and improvements to the built environment, open spaces and amenities in London. One of the key issues we shall consider is how to develop closer and more effective relationships with our member societies. So we shall shortly issue a survey for members to give us their views on a range of issues; and we are arranging interviews with a representative sample of members. We will welcome your views, however candid, critical or friendly they might be.

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### **Round the Societies**

#### **Michael Hammerson & Helen Warner select items from members' newsletters**

**The Brixton** society report that, though the night-time economy has recovered to pre-Covid levels, daytime services and retail are struggling, with a drop in footfall from pre-Covid. The future of our high streets is a 'hot topic'. Many

areas increasingly have 'pop-ups'. Banks have been disappearing, such as noted by the **Pinner Association**, **Westcombe** society and **East Dulwich**. With the energy crisis, we wonder how significantly high streets are further changing across London?

A number of tall buildings are noted to be in abeyance across London. The **Enfield** society question increasing time lapses between the grant of permissions and a start on site and are told that increased building costs mean developers are delaying or perhaps rethinking scheme designs; a factor which also applies to Council schemes.

The **Highgate** society report on a major deterioration in relations with Haringey's planners, with whom they used to work well. There "have been too many poor decisions", against local and national policy, with agreements reached in pre-application discussions before public consultation on major schemes. Whilst local authorities such as **Westminster** are prioritising community engagement. The **Kew** society report that Berkeley Homes have bought half of Kew Retail Park and welcome that, at least on this scheme, initial community engagement is taking place at an early stage of the process. **Peckham Vision** report that the National Heritage Lottery Fund's Townscape Heritage Initiative, which they persuaded the Council to bid for in 2011, ends in November. An exhibition was mounted on the work done, with visits to the restored buildings. It shows the significant role local heritage can play in engaging the interest of local people. Southwark Council have started a consultation on adopting a Local List of buildings of local heritage value, including a walk in Peckham town centre to explore the buildings which people value and want to nominate.

The **Wimbledon** society have published proposals for a Tree Strategy. More trees are being lost to development than are being planted, despite local policies, because other policies such as housing are given precedence. <https://wimbledonsociety.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/WSPC-Tree-Strategy-2022-FINAL.pdf>. The **Westcombe** society and the **Friends of Greenwich Park** report on the Royal Parks' ambitious National Lottery funded, £8 million project to restore the Park's lost 17<sup>th</sup> Century landscape. Turkey oaks and beech trees declining due to disease and squirrel damage will be replaced with disease and drought resistant elm and lime trees. No trees planted before 1970

will be removed, with a major replanting programme over the next 2-3 years.

The **Hammersmith and Fulham Historic Buildings Group** report controversial proposals to move the historical archive store potentially out of the borough, have been halted as a result of local action, and the archive service reopened in June.

Climate activists called Last Gasp and Tyre Extinguishers have been deflating tyres on SUVs in south London. The **Dulwich** society has installed a defibrillator in the former village phone box. An initiative by the **Brixton** BID, has resulted in a twinning link with Harlem in New York. **Southgate District Civic Voice** are planning for their 60th Anniversary! And following on from last Insights, the **Horniman Museum** has won UK Museum of the Year 2022, at £100,000 the world's largest museum prize. It was praised for bringing together art and nature, breathing new life into their collections, and setting the agenda in how a traditional museum can reinvent itself.

The full length version of this article may be found [here](#)

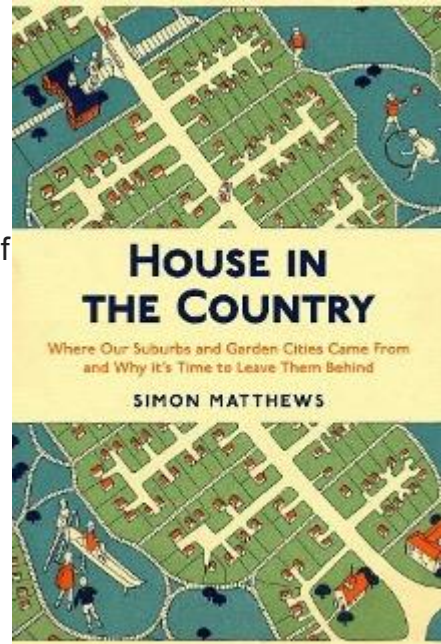
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## House in the Country

**Andrew Bosi reviews Simon Matthews new book**

This book is a social history of housing policy in the UK since 1815. It traces the origins of the garden city movement and how its ideas continued to prevail long after the inadequacy of its density levels became apparent. The narrative is detailed and incisive into the prevailing politics of the day. It contrasts the prevailing levels of income tax with the ability to provide social housing at the level of need.

It notes the degree of cross party support that has often existed and laments the fundamental departure from that in 1979. The initial right to buy scheme had been fashioned to ensure the building of replacement social housing, and we learn of Lord Heseltine's dismay at the change of direction. Equally dismaying is the failure of the subsequent Labour Government to recalibrate. In fact Lord Heseltine, who contributes a forward, is the only modern politician to emerge with credit, and he is over 90.



Inevitably many of the mould-breaking schemes over the last 200 years have been constructed in London, and members may welcome this book's contribution to the history of their locality. Not only is the narrative detailed: there are comprehensive footnotes providing further background information.

The author, Simon Matthews, has enjoyed a career in housing and for eight years was a Councillor in Hackney. The book, ISB number 978-0-85730-495-7, is available from Oldcastle Books Ltd. And retails at £19.99.

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### **Register for the London Forum AGM**

**which takes place on Wednesday 12th October 2022,**

**at 6.15 pm for 6.30pm via Zoom video conference**

**To register, please click on the following link: <https://bit.ly/3TvlhS3>**

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