



London Forum *Insights*

Welcome to the second issue of London Forum *Insights*

As the second Coronavirus lockdown approaches, we wish all all our members and their families a safe autumn and winter. For London Forum, the past three months have been dominated by the Government's White Paper, Planning for the Future. Our response has now been submitted (yours too we hope), and we can finally turn our attention to other matters, for now at least. As well as summarising our response to the White Paper, this newsletter also includes articles on TfL finances, high streets, online planning, and, sadly, a tribute to our long-serving Vice President Judy Hillman who died in August.

London Forum *Insights* aims to provide timely articles of substance, which should be of interest to most, if not all member societies. Where articles are too long for the email format, an abstract is included here, with a link to the full article on the London Forum website.

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Helen Marcus remembers Judy Hillman

We are very sad to report the death of Judy Hillman, aged 85, distinguished journalist, and writer who specialised in urban planning and cities. She had supported the London Forum as Vice-President since 1992.

After spending some of her childhood in Ottawa where she was evacuated during the second world war, she won a scholarship to Roedean School and then studied economics and moral philosophy at St Andrews University. Her first writing job was for the wonderfully named journal Muck Shifter and Public Works Digest. This was followed by stints at Woman's Day, the Evening Standard, the Observer, and eight years at the Guardian as planning correspondent in the 1970s. She was deeply concerned about London's decline in the 1970s: "London glamour masks fading quality of life...[as].. the pace of life gets increasingly difficult and exhausting". (*Guardian*, March 1970). Her *Planning for London*, was published as a Penguin "Special" in 1971.



She went on to write three seminal reports for the Royal Fine Arts Commission.

A new look for London (1988) inspired the 1991 exhibition, the Thames Landscape Strategy. *Planning for beauty: the case for design guidelines* (1990), examined the relationship between aesthetics and planning control. "Too much of London has become dirty, degrading and depressing". She strongly believed that planning authorities should draw up local design guidelines, and give local people a role in decisions about their surroundings. In *Medicis and the millennium?: government patronage and architecture* (1992) she described the lost opportunities to support the architecturally good against the bad.

She was a member and rapporteur of the Government's Royal Parks Review chaired by Dame Jennifer Jenkins, writing five reports published between 1992 and 1996. She was also involved

with the London Advisory Committee of English Heritage and the Urban Parks Advisory Group of the Heritage Lottery Fund.

She was active in supporting London Forum's efforts, making helpful comments and suggestions on every aspect of its work. She used every opportunity to promote and represent the London Forum at functions and conferences that she attended, drawing attention to what we had said on subjects in Newsforum. She was a skilled painter and a keen sportswoman. She volunteered to be an Ambassador of the London Olympics in 2012 and wrote a charming article about her experience for Newsforum. We shall miss her greatly and remember her with affection and gratitude.

London Forum AGM held on Zoom - Peter Pickering selects the highlights

On 15th October the Forum held its Annual General Meeting, in the way that is becoming all too familiar, by Zoom. 32 of our member societies were represented. Our Chairman, Peter Eversden, reported on the year 2019-20; the London Plan had taken most of the Forum's efforts until Covid19 came along; he thanked retiring Trustees Oliver Bennett, Diane Burrige and Helen Marcus, and mourned the death of Judy Hillman, a Vice-President. Our Treasurer, Stephen Speak, presented his report and accounts - the Forum's finances are healthy. Existing officers were re-elected, as were Trustees Clare Birks, Andrew Bosi, Mary Hogben, Daren Mitchell, John Myers, Paul Thornton and Helen Warner; one new Trustee, Michael Jubb from the Battersea Society, was elected.

Following the formal meeting there was a discussion about the Planning White Paper and the Forum's response, which was then being prepared for submission. With the help of slides Peter Eversden explained what was being proposed, criticised it and described the Forum's response. Paul Thornton went through what member societies had said in answer to the questions in the survey the Forum had carried out.

Representatives of member societies then joined in. The Sydenham Society argued that in view of the Covid pandemic all plans, including the Mayor's New London Plan and the White Paper, should be reconsidered realistically; Peter Eversden replied that the London Plan would have to be reexamined, but would still be relevant since London would continue to need key workers, who would need places to live which they could afford. Barnet Residents Association said that the community would have to be brought in throughout the process, including when particular

applications were made, and not only at the beginning as the White Paper envisaged; the neighbourhood planning process should also be simplified. The Hillgate Village Residents Association argued against the Mayor's call-in powers, and said that 'buy-to-leave' was a significant cause of the housing shortage; other participants thought it was not as great a problem as was often believed. Bermondsey Street London sought greater attention to the White Paper proposals on 'protected areas', and the need for applications there to be judged against local policies. The Beckenham Society said that people were wanting more control over the planners, and drew attention to the problems caused by the extension of permitted development rights.

The event was conducted in a convivial atmosphere, though it closed without the customary refreshments and conversation...

"Planning White Paper no basis for radical reform" says London Forum

The consultation period for the Government's [Planning White Paper](#) has ended. London Forum has made a comprehensive response, based on extensive consultation with member societies.

The White Paper presents some radical new ideas, but these are mostly at an early stage of development and fall well short of a coherent system that is capable of imminent deployment. The White Paper offers scant evidence either to support the Prime Minister's assertion that the planning system is principally to blame for the failure to meet housing targets, or to show that the Government's proposals will bring about a significant improvement.

The London Forum and our member societies support the goals set out in the White Paper. We would all like to see more up-to-date and easily understandable Local Plans, greater certainty of outcomes (for residents, as well as developers), markedly better design, more engaged communities, better use of software – and, above all, more homes built of the right types in the right places.

But will the Government's proposals deliver these benefits, particularly in London? In summary, our conclusions are as follows:

- We welcome the proposals for earlier and more intensive community participation in deciding what should be built where. However, the right to see, and to comment on planning applications should be retained.
- London has already moved part way towards the classification of land as growth/renewal/protection through the designation of Opportunity Areas, and through

site allocations in many boroughs' Local Plans. It is unclear whether the White Paper proposals will bring any further benefits. Metropolitan Open Land is not mentioned in the White Paper; current protections must be retained.

- The White Paper proposes that the Local Plan process should focus primarily on identifying land for development, and on specifying what can be built on that land. We agree that the current process could be slimmed down. However, land-use designations and site allocations are the end of a process that must start with a vision for the locality and a set of strategies to deliver that vision, for which an appropriate evidence base is necessary.
- “One-size-fits-all” policies, developed centrally and applied nationwide, cannot work across all areas and all aspects of development management. There must be scope for local policies where circumstances dictate. The role of London Plan policies will need clarification.
- We welcome the greater emphasis on good design. However, the White Paper proposals will impose a considerable burden on Local Authority resources and on the community, particularly in the preparation of design codes for all designated sites.
- Notwithstanding the previous point, it appears that developers will still be able to submit non-compliant applications for designated sites, and have them judged against national development management policies. This violates a fundamental principle of “zoning” systems, and could lead to widespread disillusionment in the community. Furthermore, a Planning Bill should incorporate a third party or community right of appeal in the event of consent being granted for non-compliant applications.
- In a similar vein, what happens if housing targets are not being met? Will the presumption in favour of development in Growth and Renewal areas mean that design codes or other constraints on development can be overridden?
- The new Standard Method for setting housing targets is wholly inappropriate for London, based as it is on the assumption that building more homes in areas of poor affordability will lower prices in those areas. Nor does it address housing mix, a particularly acute problem in London where more homes are desperately needed for social and low-cost rent.
- The huge number of unbuilt consents is an important factor in London’s housing shortage. Support for small builders is unlikely to be a solution in London where a 50-home scheme is typically a £50-100m project. We urge the Government to implement the recommendations of the 2018 Letwin Report.
- We support the White Paper’s proposals for enhanced use of technology in the planning process, but counsel against over-optimism, especially on timescales.
- We are not convinced of the merits of the proposed Infrastructure Levy to replace CIL and S106 obligations. Deferring payment until completion will expose Local Authorities to risks they are ill-equipped to bear, and most likely reduce the delivery of affordable homes and infrastructure. The proposed concessions on infrastructure payment by small builders and suppliers of First Homes would make some development unsustainable (as defined in the NPPF).
- The White Paper barely addresses the realities of a post-Covid world and one on the edge of a climate emergency.

London Forum questions whether this is the right time to turn the planning system on its head, especially as most of the benefits could be achieved without doing so. If the Government is determined to press on, then the next stage should be “proof of principle” rather than nationwide implementation. The suggestion by the Secretary of State in an interview with the former Chief Planner, Steve Quartermain, that the Government would conduct pilots with some local authorities is welcomed.

If the proposals are rolled out as they currently stand, the most likely consequences are the loss of what little public trust in the planning system remains, a large political backlash, and a continuing failure to provide the right homes in the right places. The full response sent to MHCLG is [here](#).

City Centres bear the brunt

At our members’ meeting in July we compared notes about the state of our high streets and the number of closed and open shops and restaurants. Generally it seemed that outer suburbs were more open for business than shopping areas nearer the centre of London, and the absence of tourists and commuters from the West End was a major worry. Since 2000, retail has expanded hugely on the back of cheap credit, to the point where we have twice the retail floorspace per head of population in the UK that there is in Germany. Pre-COVID, retailers and their landlords were already taking a hit. The news over the last few months has continued to be of retailers closing shops and cutting jobs despite COVID support from the government - the business rates holiday, grants, the furlough scheme and deferral of rent payments.



While out of town shopping centres are jogging along, London’s West End (along with other city centres) continues to be in dire straits. Recent forecasts are that spend in the West End in 2020 will be down £11bn of tourist spend and £2bn of commuter spend. John Lewis has gained planning permission to turn half its flagship store on Oxford Street into offices. We shall be keeping a sharp eye on the effects of the introduction of the

controversial Use Class E over the coming months, and ask that our members do likewise.

Khan and Johnson at odds over TfL finances - Andrew Bosi comments

A short term rescue package was agreed between government and TfL in April against a backdrop of party political hostility. The government’s mayoral candidate repeatedly implies that TfL’s woes stem from the fare freeze. In fact, the problem was an over-reliance on fares -

for 72% of total expenditure, brutally exposed by the drop in passenger numbers post Covid.

The controversial elements of the interim settlement were that it was less generous than that offered elsewhere - part loan rather than grant - that free travel for under 18s and over 60s was to be curtailed or ended, and that money was to be spent on Low Traffic Neighbourhoods to stop the rush from public transport resulting in congestion and deteriorating air quality.

The under 18 pass has proved difficult to cut without incurring greater cost. Local authorities have legal requirements to provide free travel to some of the recipients. The Commissioner recently said any change could not come before Spring 2021.

Low Traffic Neighbourhoods, which opinion polls show people approve of in principle, have attracted criticism in a number of locations. Wandsworth has backed down, Barnet has abandoned one proposed scheme, and TfL's flagship scheme for Euston Road is also to be reversed. Laws devised in part to address the problem of statutory undertakers digging up roads without notice are being used to implement first and consult later. The Forum has advised members to argue for amendments (tweaking) where appropriate now and to ensure that consultation when it comes is open and genuine.

The April deal funded buses and tubes until October 17th. On October 16th, we learned it was to be extended for two weeks as agreement had not been reached. Sticking points were rumoured to be the over-60 and under-18 concessions, and a possible extension of the Congestion Charge Zone. The over-60 pass was introduced by Mayor Johnson after an Order ironically signed by Sadiq Khan postponing the age at which eligibility for the National Pensioners pass applies. It is now 66. An extended Congestion Charge Zone would restore the western extension which Mayor Johnson repealed in 2009.

A further extension of the previous agreement was announced as we went to press. The "temporary" changes to the congestion zone charge remain but there is no extension to the zone, the under-18 pass is retained, and there is no change for over-60s. Council tax band D may rise by £30-£50 and fares will increase by RPI + 1%. TfL is left to find another £160m. from as yet unspecified sources.

Round the Societies - items from members' newsletters that caught our eye

Members are endeavouring to carry on in their best "business as usual" mode, however the pandemic inevitably forms a sombre background in several newsletters. The **Streatham Society** reflectively cite the memoirs of a local resident who lived through the Spanish 'Flu epidemic of 1918-19, while the **St. Marylebone Society** go back even further, citing Pepys' experiences of the Great Plague of 1665-6.

The **London Gardens Trust** and others note the unwelcome increase in litter. The **Pinner Association** asks whether the historic Pinner Fair could disappear, after 684 years, and hopes not.

One highly contentious Covid spin-off in many areas is the Government's emergency traffic regulation allowing local authorities to introduce "temporary" (i.e. 18-month) road closures, diversions and other works to improve conditions for pedestrians and public transport, without consultation. While well-considered schemes have a positive impact, ill-considered schemes have instead caused severe traffic congestion, rat-running and are leading to higher pollution. The **Barnet Society** report that Barnet Council had proposed closing the High Street to traffic; this produced such an outcry that it was quickly abandoned. The **Knightsbridge Association** articulate many groups' concerns in being baffled and frustrated by the re-designation of streetspace, generally to the detriment of motor vehicles and causing traffic tailbacks, and they note the wider impact of the pandemic causing TfLs indefinite shelving of improvements to South Kensington Station. Other TfL improvement schemes across London are also being shelved.

The **Highgate, Brixton, Enfield** and several other societies give a sharp critique of the Planning White Paper proposals. The **Isleworth Society** have requested Hounslow hold an urgent Resident Associations Forum meeting with senior officers, to understand the Borough's position and to exchange views on the impact of the proposals.

A number of societies write about redevelopment schemes which are of concern in their area. The **Greenwich Society** devotes a full page on the redevelopment of Morden Wharf. The **Barnet Society** report on a "horrendous high-rise monstrosity" at the Victoria Quarter. The **Hammersmith and Fulham Historic Building Group** report on the redevelopment of the Olympia Exhibition Centre site that has been permitted, despite lengthy objections. Such high-rise towers developments "create an intensely crowded and inhospitable environment in which green space is very subordinate to buildings". Neither developers nor government seem to be facing up to the serious questions about future planning policy posed by the pandemic.

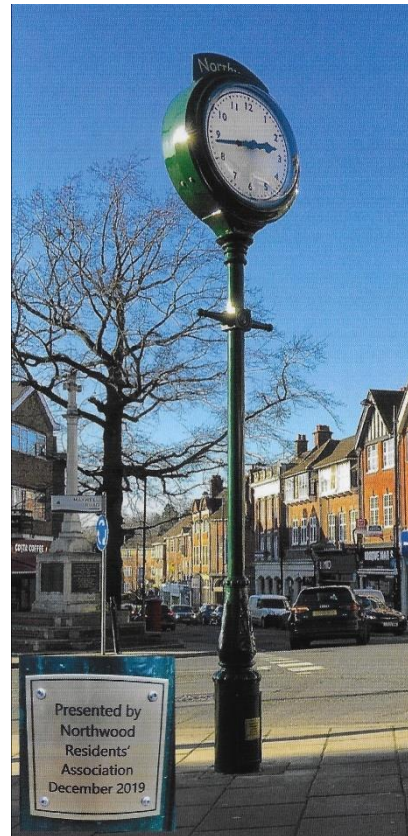
Introducing the Northwood Resident's Association - Chair, John Ellis writes

Based in the north of the London Borough of Hillingdon, the Northwood Residents' Association was founded in 1966. Northwood is an affluent, pleasantly wooded area, (partly in

Hertfordshire). With the Metropolitan Line, many of the residents are commuters. Heathrow is 15 miles away. Membership is also offered to local businesses and we have around 100 business members.

The society aims to protect the amenities of Northwood and particularly opposes erosion of the Green Belt. Our biggest challenge is to stop 'over development' which we see as detrimental to the 'village feel'. Many older houses have been demolished to make way for blocks of flats. We have, so far successfully, fought off (several times) a potential large redevelopment around Northwood station on land owned by TfL – but who knows what the future might bring.

We have an active committee, the members of which have portfolios such as planning, traffic and highways, environment. We meet monthly, currently on Zoom. We pride ourselves in having a good working relationship with Councillors, Council Officers, and our MP and involve ourselves in supporting local charities and schools. Like many societies, we are an ageing lot and struggle to widen involvement. I am personally finding it difficult to find a successor and this is my 13th year as Chair!



Online Planning - time to take stock?

In the spring we paid a great deal of attention to the way that boroughs were transitioning to online Planning. There was much concern that communities' interests could be by-passed, e.g. through poor signposting on council websites, more planning applications being determined by council officials, or members of the public being unable to speak at online planning committee meetings. Things have gone quiet on this front, as attention switched to the Planning White Paper - but hopefully also because online planning is now operating satisfactorily.

Please let us know how online planning is working in your borough. If there are persistent problems, do please let us know. E-mail any concerns to Paul Thornton at london_forum@icloud.com.
