



London Forum *Insights*

Issue 7, Nov/Dec 2021

Welcome to the final issue of London Forum *Insights* for 2021

The year has seen some important developments, and also some “dogs that didn’t bark”

- There is still no news of how much of last year’s Planning White Paper will survive the change of leadership at DLUHC, with Levelling Up displacing Planning Reform at the top of the agenda.
- The National Model Design Code has aroused a great deal of interest, though big questions remain about its relevance to much of London and how the roll-out will be resourced.
- The Mayor’s London Plan was finally adopted, but little guidance has so far emerged on how its policies are to be implemented.
- The widening of permitted development for conversions to residential and upwards extensions have come into force, but their effects are not yet evident

In the meantime, several major planning applications have recently been rejected by boroughs, the Mayor, Inspectors and the Secretary of State, some against expectation.

In this newsletter, London Forum President, Ben Derbyshire follows up his talk at the AGM with an article setting out his personal take on issues that matter to the Forum. Mary Hogben writes about a planning appeal in Barnet which was dismissed mainly on grounds of poor design quality – Forum members take note! And we initiate a discussion about the merits of boroughs each having an umbrella body bringing together a wide range of community organisations to ensure that change in their borough is for the better.

The *Insights* team wishes all our readers an enjoyable Christmas, and a happy, and above all healthy New Year.

Tilting the balance Mary Hogben hails a landmark decision in the Finchley Homebase appeal

If you thought that 'tilted balance' was something that might have happened at a jousting match, then think again. This term is used to describe the balancing act that goes on

when considering an application for a housing scheme in the context of planning guidance, that will naturally restrict density by applying a variety of aspects of good design, against the push for housing numbers.



One such scheme was for 307 flats on the site of the former Homebase in North Finchley, at the edge of but crucially outside the designated North Finchley Town centre and in streets typical of suburban Finchley. The proposal of 6 long blocks of flats very close together and up to 9 storeys high, 5 of which were raised up on a podium, caused more than 200 residents to object. The Finchley Society assessed the proposal against the relevant planning documents, and good design principles, and found it wanting. An objection was lodged on several points but critically on the resulting harm to both the neighbourhood and the future residents of the proposed flats. This was about much more than height. For example, Barnet Housing SPD sets a minimum distance of 21m between facing habitable rooms for reasons of privacy, daylight and sunlight. These blocks were 18m or less apart and in one instance about 10m. Both Barnet and the London Plan recommend dual aspect flats with single aspect only in exceptional circumstances. The Finchley Society found that 60% of the proposed dwellings were single aspect. Just two of the many areas where planning standards were not respected.

The Planning Officers had recommended the scheme for approval, the Barnet Council Strategic Planning Committee unanimously rejected it. The Developer appealed and the Planning Inspector dismissed the appeal following a public Inquiry.

The Finchley Society chose to be a Rule 6 participant at the appeal. This allowed us to participate fully and to cross examine the various expert witnesses. Crucially we were able to show up the extent of poor design in a way that the Council did not. We learnt a great deal through the process not least about the great weight that developers give to unachieved housing targets. The National Planning Policy Framework is clear that where the result would be harmful the balance should not be tilted in favour. The Appellant was adamant that because Barnet appeared not have a 5-year secure supply of new housing, the provision of 307 units to add to this should override all other considerations. Quantity over quality.

The Finchley Society relies on volunteers and certainly does not have the financial resource to pay for 'experts'. We had set out our case clearly at the Planning stage and stuck to that, expanding as needed to provide evidence and highlighting the policy contraventions.

Planning magazine has reported that this was one of the first appeal decisions that highlighted the importance of design. If that is the case then we should be deeply concerned about the housing that has been approved and built to date and wonder whether it will provide good healthy homes that are a pleasure to live in and enhance their neighbourhood. It is also deeply concerning that up-to-date planning policies carried little weight in the Officers' assessment. These policies should be a reliable yardstick by which any of us might judge an application for planning permission.

Mary Hogben is Secretary of the Finchley Society Planning Committee and one of the Society's two witnesses at the Inquiry. The Society's closing Statement can be seen [here](#) and The Inspector's Report accessed via [this page](#). Mary is a London Forum Trustee.

London Forum President Ben Derbyshire sets out his Passions and Beliefs

I was greatly honoured to be approached by the London Forum Board of Trustees to put my name forward for the Presidency and very happy that the membership endorsed my appointment at October's AGM. I find myself walking in the footsteps of highly distinguished predecessors as Architects in the role – Sir Richard MacCormac who I knew personally and greatly admired, and Walter Bor who co-founded Llewellyn Davis, a distinguished firm of architects and planners.



Since my student days I have held out for communities to have a say in the built environment they occupy. My final year thesis at Cambridge School of Architecture sought to resolve the competing interests of the rag trade and conservationists in Spitalfields. I bought my first home in Bow where I set up a community trust which rescued Victoria Park Wharf from the bulldozer. Go there now and you'll find a canal-side environment teeming with life.

I have worked, man and boy so to speak, at the practice of HTA Design which I now chair, and which celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2019. In our early days, we became known as leading Community Architects with pioneering projects such as Lea View House, Hackney,

and Isledon Village in Islington. Nowadays, as a large interdisciplinary practice of 250 with four studios across the UK doing a wide range of housing and placemaking projects of all kinds, we maintain a team able to deliver cutting edge community engagement.

I believe that society must continuously invest in our built environment to ensure well-being and to enable humankind to coexist fruitfully with nature. For me, the driving priority is the climate emergency so that everything we do must contribute significantly to mitigation and adaptation. That means renovating our existing buildings, 80% of which will still be there in 2050 by which time they must be making a meaningful contribution to the zero carbon commitment. It also means accommodating sustainable new buildings as much as possible within the built footprint of existing towns and cities at increasing population densities.

I'm pro-development in a way that contributes to well-being. The solution lies just as much in the design of space between buildings as it does in the design of buildings themselves. Neighbourhoods need to be well connected to enable sustainable movement. If ever we needed reminding of the importance of high quality outdoor opportunities for leisure and play, the pandemic saw to that. And every opportunity must be taken to allow nature to re-establish long-lost biodiversity. So I'm proud that my practice won the Landscape Institute's Attenborough Award for our work rewilding Cator Park, Kidbrooke.

The development industry needs to up its game to reduce its impact on climate change. Location and density is important but so too is the way we build. Concrete production is one of the worst emitters of greenhouse gas and every time we demolish existing buildings we must take account of the carbon already embodied in them. We are learning how to do better, but not fast enough, to balance the loss of embodied carbon with other benefits of redevelopment. New buildings should increasingly become part of the circular economy and we are investing in factory production of low-carbon buildings to facilitate this.

All of these issues, and others, are challenges for the way we plan our cities and neighbourhoods. As I write this, news reaches me that Michael Gove may postpone his review of Planning reform until after the local elections next May. I hope this is not a political move to postpone bad news for local communities. I hope instead that Gove will have taken the time to listen to the profound concerns expressed by me and many others about the trajectory towards a free-for-all embraced by his predecessor. We need more, better planning embedded in accountable local democracy – not less.

I am excited by the opportunity to represent The London Forum of Civic and Amenity Societies as a positive voice for a better built environment that serves the long term needs of its citizens. I hope I can contribute to building on the Forum's reputation for a constructive narrative founded in its members passion for the sustainable future of their neighbourhoods that respects local character and looks to the future at the same time. I'll end with an inspiring quote from Jan Gehl, the Danish architect and specialist in planning cities for people, 'First people, then place, then buildings. The other way around never works.'

Is there an Appetite for Borough-wide Umbrella Organisations?

Some boroughs such as Ealing and Barnet have well established umbrella organisations representing a wide range of community organisations across the borough. London Forum was recently asked if we could assist the civic society in another borough to help them set up something similar.

Here is an extract from the Ealing Matters [website](#):

Ealing Matters is a borough-wide alliance of more than 60 residents' associations and community groups. Our aims are to raise awareness of how Ealing is changing and to help local people shape these changes and enhance their quality of life.

The alliance formed in January 2018 following a survey of potential members. The survey identified a range of issues that are common to groups from across the borough, notably over-development, the loss of heritage assets and the unresponsiveness of Ealing Council to the concerns of local residents.

Does your borough have something similar? Do you have experiences to share? Is it something you would like to pursue? If so, please contact London Forum Vice Chair, Paul Thornton, at london_forum@icloud.com

Cop 26 – A Game Changer or more “Blah Blah”?

A group of planning and environmental organisations including Civic Voice have issued an urgent call to Government to put the climate crisis at the heart of all planning decisions. The statement, published in the run-up to the crucial COP conference in Glasgow, highlights the power of planning to promote renewable energy, restrict fossil fuels and design places to reduce energy use and encourage walking and cycling. It also highlights the lack of priority given to climate change in existing planning policy and calls on the Secretary of State, Michael Gove MP, to urgently issue a ministerial statement to prioritise net-zero and tackle flooding and overheating.

Ian Harvey, Executive Director of Civic Voice, said: 'At our recent AGM, our membership voted in a majority for Civic Voice to recognise that a climate crisis is upon us and for us to commit to supporting individual civic societies to consider how they can promote sustainable development in their activities, so this joint-statement, timed to coincide with COP 26 sets out how the current English planning system is not delivering on its positive potential to tackle the climate crisis. This briefing shows how an urgent ministerial

statement can seize the opportunity of a resilient, net-zero future.' You can read the statement [here](#).

Meanwhile, in the spirit of “doing, not delaying”, Westcombe Society committee member and London Forum trustee Helen Warner has drafted an article for society members, setting out some of the things that homeowners can do to reduce the 22% of emissions emanating from the UK’s leaky housing stock. *Some Thoughts on Retrofitting Homes in Conservation Areas* can be read [here](#).

Towards an Integrated Rail Strategy

Andrew Bosi reports

The Integrated Rail Strategy was published on November 18th, 2021, a year after it had first been promised. Or rather, the *Integrated Rail Strategy for the Midlands and North* was published. There is still no strategy for London. The abandonment of some of HS2 will be welcome to many and further undermines any case for the line between Birmingham and London, for which there is already a choice of three rail routes. In particular, the problematic section between Old Oak Common and Euston, for which no engineering solution has yet been found should be dropped. The money thereby saved would have been sufficient to retain the Northern Powerhouse scheme between Manchester and Leeds via Bradford. Although Bradford now loses out, there are winners: Nottingham, Derby and Sheffield, although connecting Sheffield to Leeds is to be the subject of further study.



We welcome the reinstatement of electrification projects cancelled by the last Secretary of State though there is no news of the one major line out of London still reliant on diesel traction. Diesel multiple units throb away in Marylebone station, but of greater concern to local residents are the more limited number of diesel loco hauled trains. Their engines are bigger and noisier. Electrification of the line to Birmingham Snow Hill would better serve those needing to travel between England’s two largest cities than a premium fare service by-passing many intermediate stops. Of more immediate concern is the need for a financial settlement for Transport for London. The indications are that rail services for which TfL grants concessions (the Overground, Crossrail, TfL Rail) will be better protected than the Underground or bus services. The current settlement expires on December 11th and past practice suggests any announcement is unlikely to come much before that date, if then.

Design Codes

Michael Jubb takes stock after 3 London Forum events in 2021

On 7 October, the Forum co-sponsored the third of three members' events this year on design codes, following an introductory event in April, and the June workshop which provided training in the language and principles of urban design. Our co-sponsors this time were [The GlassHouse Community-Led Design](#) and [Urban Design London](#). The workshop brought together people from a range of sectors, including local authority planning officers; support and umbrella organisations; design professionals; developers; academics, students and researchers. The focus was on how to meet the requirement set in the [National Model Design Code](#) and other Government documents to ensure that community engagement is built into every stage of the development of design codes for local areas. The aim was to explore the opportunities and challenges of engaging communities in formulating local design codes, and to work together to draft some practical recommendations on what might help support and enable meaningful community participation and influence.

The workshop started with three short presentations from Sir Steve Bullock, Independent Chair of Place Limited and former Council Leader in Lewisham; Hana Loftus, Director at HAT Projects, and Engagement and Communications Lead at the Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Services; and our Chair, Peter Eversden.

Three key themes emerged from the presentations. First, the need for codes and plans to focus on meeting the practical needs of the diverse range of people in each community. Second, the challenge of getting the full range of groups to engage in such work. Third, the challenge for local planning authorities which need extra capacity and expertise both in community engagement and in urban design.

Key issues that arose in subsequent discussion in break-out groups included

- the need to start by mapping local community groups and organisations as means of connecting with wider audiences, building on groups and relationships that already exist
- the importance of building trust, and convincing communities that they will benefit by getting involved in the process
- creating clear and accessible pathways into the process, using social media as well as physical and online meetings
- the need to train planning officers and local groups in the techniques for effective engagement, as well as in the principles of urban design

Most people have not even heard of design codes, or of their potential importance for the future of their communities. Nor do they have any understanding of how they might get involved in shaping such codes. But codes could offer an opportunity to make the whole planning process more democratic and effective, so long as together we can co-design the process of shaping them. That's the challenge for the future.

Round the Societies - Michael Hammerson and Helen Warner pick out items from members' newsletters

Space limitations have forced us to leave out many other interesting items from this précis. Please read the full report [here](#).

The newsletters have many reports of planning applications deemed as 'horrendous' getting approval. We have nevertheless picked out some glimmers of hope!

The Kew Society are delighted that the Mayor of London turned down applications for the redevelopment of the Stag Brewery, citing inadequate levels and type of affordable housing and the unacceptable impact of the height and massing on historic buildings, riverside views and residents. However ... Hounslow and the Mayor have approved the Homebase / Tesco development at Gillette Corner, which the Society has asked the Secretary of State to call-in.

The Brixton Society report a Judicial Review ruled that Lambeth's decision to approve redevelopment of Ropers Walk was flawed because it had not taken account of the likely impact on local heritage assets, including "non designated heritage assets" – the Cressingham Gardens Estate. However a new application has now been submitted.

The Barnet Society reports dismissal of an appeal to decide the future of the Whalebones woods and farmland, at risk from housing development. The decision document may be of relevance to others, the appeal number is APP/N5090/W/21/3273189.

High Barnet Police Station is up for sale, one of many London police stations which have been lost, said by the Mayor's office to be "no longer needed nor fit for purpose". **The Barnet Society** note that only one police station remains open to the public in each London Borough. Over in Westminster, **The St. Marylebone Society** say the Council have refused the redevelopment of Paddington Green Police Station on grounds of height, bulk, and impact on residential amenity and heritage assets such as the Royal Parks. It is now being referred to the Mayor.

We are seeing increased use of permitted development rights. **The Pinner Society** expresses concerns at the growing impact of permitted development rights and highlights three applications for Prior Approval which would have a damaging impact. **The Barnet Residents Association** reports that a proposal for two extra floors to Richard Court, Alston Road in Barnet was rejected by Barnet Council under the few grounds available. With more than 8,000 planning applications a year, Barnet has the second largest number in London, and more than Liverpool and Manchester combined!

The **Richmond Society** has produced a four-page *Manifesto for Richmond* which can be seen on their website at www.richmondsociety.org.uk **Hillgate Village Residents Association** welcomes the government's decision to extend existing night-time restrictions on Heathrow flight paths until October 2024, banning the noisiest aircraft between 11.30 pm and 6 am. **The St. Marylebone Society** headlines the first battery / diesel hybrid train. The **Westcombe Society** reports success that the historic Angerstein pedestrian level crossing, in use since 1852, will not now be closed. The 'wonderfully restored Hanwell Station', a 1870s Grade II listed building, is the winner of the **Ealing Society's** 2021 Award, and has now been removed from Historic England's Heritage at Risk Register.

Briefly noted....

South Ken Station SAVEd

Despite being tipped for approval, Kensington and Chelsea's Major Development Planning Committee unanimously rejected proposals for a large-scale development at the heart of historic South Kensington. Said London Forum's Michael Bach "South Kensington Station has proven a graveyard for many schemes. This scheme had a good start – the two years of working with TfL was a good example of co-working ending in a development brief. However, once TfL got a partner, Native Land, the scheme was enlarged and became monotonous in design and massing and failed to respond to its historic context." Although last-minute concessions were made, it was too little too late.

Public London Charter adopted

The Public London Charter sets out eight principles which owners and managers of public spaces should follow to ensure that any new public spaces in London are safe, accessible, attractive and inclusive. London Plan Policy D8, on the public realm, requires all development that creates new public space to be managed in accordance with the Public London Charter – see [here](#). London Forum had proposed that every effort be made to get managers of existing public realm to sign up the 8 principles.

Beam Park Station axed

Beam Park station, between Dagenham Dock and Rainham, which was expected to open next May, has been axed by the Department for Transport, reportedly because it is not satisfied with the GLA contribution to its cost (the GLA owns the housing site). A large housing estate on the former Ford plant in Dagenham was given approval on the basis that the station would be provided to an area with a current PTAL of zero. Properties have been bought on the promise of the station. The planning permission for the second phase of housing is conditional on the station, and construction cannot commence without it. In contrast, construction had begun on the railway station.

Ministers cite embodied carbon for first time as reason for rejection

Ministers' decision to reject Foster & Partners' Tulip partly on the grounds of its "highly unsustainable" use of concrete may have set a "game-changing" precedent, according to architects, planners and lawyers. Other major projects are now likely to be given a much harder ride with their sustainability credentials set to come under increasing scrutiny. In a [ruling](#) that was backed by Michael Gove and housing minister Christopher Pincher, planning inspector David Nicholson noted that the Tulip would require the demolition of an office building less than 20 years old. The scheme replacing it would not be carbon neutral and would not achieve zero-carbon on site, despite the designers going to "enormous lengths" to make its construction and operation environmentally friendly.

Ultra Low Emission Zone Extension

The long-expected extension to London's ULEZ came into force on the planned date of 25

October. This means that anyone wishing to avoid paying an emission charge and driving inside the North or South circular roads must use a petrol vehicle less than about 15 years old or a diesel vehicle less than about 6 years old – or an electric vehicle.

The start of the extension appears to have gone very smoothly. But interestingly, compliance seems to have been much higher than TfL expected – good news for pollution but less good for TfL’s finances, already in a dire state due to the pandemic, as fewer drivers are paying the charge. There have been complaints that some key destinations are just inside the zone, especially some household waste recycling centres. It remains to be seen whether any adjustments will be made for this or any other reasons – none are planned so far.

The London Forum AGM - Peter Pickering reports

The Forum’s AGM this year was held by Zoom on 12th October. Twenty-six member societies were represented. The formal business was transacted properly and expeditiously. The Minutes of the 2020 AGM were agreed.

Peter Eversden gave a short oral report, drawing attention to the Annual Report, which had been circulated in advance, described in detail the work that had gone on during the year; he thanked particularly the members of the Forum’s committees, who had had a heavy workload during the year, and he asked for other members of societies to offer themselves to serve on committees. He said that *Insights*, which had replaced News Forum, was welcomed as a way of communicating with member societies in a timely fashion. The year had been dominated by the Government’s controversial White Paper and by the new London Plan, finally adopted in March 2021.

Stephen Speak, the Treasurer, went through the circulated accounts. Costs had been reduced and reserves increasing; a review of the Forum’s governance was in progress. In the next year there would be expenditure on renewing the website and the database, and on subsidising workshops, studies and publicity. The Report and Accounts for 2020-21 were approved *nem. con.* Mr Egan’s re-appointment as Honorary Independent Examiner was also approved unanimously.

Finally, the meeting approved the Executive Committee’s appointment of Ben Derbyshire as President and Nicky Gavron as a Vice President. All the present officers and trustees were willing to continue; the four trustees retiring in rotation - Peter Eversden, Michael Hammerson, Peter Pickering and Stephen Speak, were re-elected *nem con.*

Public House: A cultural and social history of the London Pub Andrew Bosi reviews a potential stocking filler

I am not sure the sub-title of this book is accurate. The book provides a snapshot of a few of the countless pubs that have existed in London since 1388. Written by a variety of authors, many of whom are better known for other things than writing, and in some cases by two authors in conversation, it lacks consistency. It required further research to track down one entry, not far from my home, identified as the Bill Murray but better known to most of us as the Mucky Pup or the Ram & Teazle, a name which lasted for more than a century and surely deserved a mention.

The order in which the pubs appear is based on the chronology of what are perceived to be significant events in their history, but of course many pubs have enjoyed more than one significant event. There is no index, and even the contents page is hard to find, sandwiched between a Foreword and an Introduction. There is also a Preface from the current Mayor.

There are though some useful maps in the front and back cover. As most readers will want to dip in to the account of one particular pub or location, this will be an essential first point of reference.

In its favour, the book contains much material about the featured pubs which has not been previously collected together. The text reflects the impact of Covid on our pubs although speculation as the longer term impact may or may not be borne out by events. If the turkeys don't vote for Christmas, the toys are in short supply and we survive without another lockdown, the book might well find its way into Christmas stockings.

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Alastair Hanton remembered

Michael Bach pays tribute to a committed and effective campaigner

I first met Alastair in the early 1980s, as a member of the London Amenity Transport Association (LATA), which merged with London Forum in the mid 1990s. LATA commissioned a report on "The Company Car Factor" in 1984, which Alastair then used to lobby the Treasury to extend company car taxation to cover a cars provided as an in-kind employment benefit. In the late 1980s he was actively involved in LATA's campaigns against renewed threats to London roadbuilding by the Department of Transport.

In 1989 Alastair was involved in founding of the Environmental Transport Association – a green alternative to AA and RAC. This was followed by the ETA Foundation, which he persuaded me to join. ETA promoted Green Transport, from 1993, Walk-to-School Day, and later Car Free Day, and 20's Plenty to promote 20mph zones across London.

I also remember Alastair at the Pedestrian's Association, now known as Living Streets, doing street audits in Borough High Street and later as Chairman of Living Streets. Alastair was a dedicated campaigner, for road safety, for pedestrians and for cyclists. He was an example to us all.
