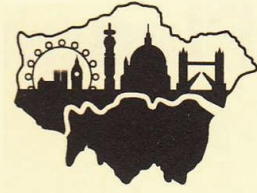


The **London Forum** of
Amenity and Civic Societies



working to protect and improve the quality of life in London

London Forum *Insights*

Issue 9, April 2022

Editorial

With local elections due on 5th May and the Queen's Speech on 10th, the past few weeks have been eerily calm on matters of Planning Policy; just as well, as rising prices, Partygate and events in Ukraine leave little space on the front pages. In this issue of *Insights* we return to some themes that are likely to become important as the year progresses:

- The suite of **London Plan Guidance** documents, and how best to make their contents accessible to London Forum members
- A further paper from Samuel Hughes and Ben Southwood for Create Streets, promoting a community-led approach to **urban densification**
- Westminster City Council's approach to **early community engagement** - a model that other boroughs should be encouraged to follow?

We also carry short articles on London Forum new(ish) member, the **Osterley and Wyke Green Residents Association**, and on Britain's oldest national conservation body, the **Open Spaces Society**. For those who missed the event itself, there is a summary of the open meeting on **Low Traffic Neighbourhoods**. The national organisation for the civic movement, Civic Voice, has contributed an article on Reading

University's study into the **Role of Civic Societies in the English Planning System**. There is also a brief update on an initiative with the Environmental Law Clinic at City University looking at the potential for a **Third Party Right of Appeal** within the planning system. And, of course, no issue of *Insights* would be complete without our ever-popular **Round the Societies** column.

Readers are reminded to visit the [Updates](#) page on the London Forum website from time to time. We regularly post links to articles and documents of interest.

London Plan Guidance

An update from Forum trustee, Michael Jubb

In an e-bulletin dated 7th March, we alerted members to a consultation on three draft documents labelled London Plan Guidance, and dealing with [Characterisation and Growth Strategy](#), [Optimising Site Capacity](#), and [Small Site Design Codes](#) respectively.

These three drafts form a coherent group, heavily aligned with the *National Design Guide* and the *National Model Design Code*. They are directed primarily at plan-makers, and the main emphasis is on housing (though this is not made explicit). The scope of each document is summarised briefly below:

Characterisation and Growth Strategy

This draft comes logically first in the sequence. It directs plan-makers to undertake a borough or neighbourhood-wide characterisation assessment and formulate a growth strategy and future area-wide visions for their local area. The end result of the whole process should be area-wide design visions, policies and codes, including those relating to tall buildings.

Optimising Site Capacity

This Guidance is aimed at anyone involved in the planning, design, construction, delivery and operation of new major developments, as well as LPAs. It sets out a five-stage process to meet the London Plan Policy D3. The Guidance includes an Appendix with an analysis of the performance, strengths and weaknesses of different housing types: terraces, linear blocks, 'villa' blocks, and towers.

Small Site Design Codes

This Guidance is aimed at plan-makers, as well as (for reference) developers of small sites. It sets out a four-stage process for the development of design codes. There is an

Appendix with worked examples of codes for street-facing sites, high streets, backlands, and extensions.

London Forum commented in detail on earlier drafts published last year under the heading “Good Quality Homes for all Londoners”. We have not found it necessary to do so with this latest set of drafts, which we broadly support, and which we expect to see adopted with little change. The key problem, of course, is whether Borough planning departments have the capability and capacity to meet all the requirements set out in these three Guidance documents.

The Forum is currently in discussion with the GLA Planning team about how we can best inform our members about these important documents and their likely consequences.

Have I got mews for you, asks Samuel Hughes

Ben Southwood and I are immensely grateful for the kind help given by the London Forum, and in particular Ben Derbyshire, Peter Eversden and Paul Thornton, as we have sought community-led means to regenerate areas of waste land while providing better housing to meet local needs. I want to particularly thank Gordon Massey for his enormously helpful advice and comments on our earlier report.

The neighbourhood planning regime has been popular and successful, but uptake has been lower in urban areas and areas with more social deprivation. We need to make community-led planning work better for a wider range of communities.

Our [new report](#) suggests a complement for neighbourhood planning in urban areas. The idea is to empower the residents of each block of houses, if they wish, to set their own mini-plan for what may be done with waste land within the perimeter defined by their houses. In this way, dilapidated sheds, patches of concrete, deserted rear service alleys and disused garages too small for modern cars might be put to better use, if the residents wish. That may help to provide home offices for people working from home, or perhaps living space for an adult child or an elderly relative. Some plans might give permission for such a service alley to be turned, over time, into an inhabited mews.



A potential transformation. By Thomas Dougherty.

The mews is a well-known and much-loved feature of many areas. Today, pressure is mounting on our skyline, parks and countryside, generating intense concern about inappropriate high-rise towers and loss of precious and irreplaceable green space. Traditional intensification with mews development may help to relieve that pressure.

The proposed mini-plans or 'block plans' may only permit changes that are effectively invisible from the street, and compliant with

extensive rules on design and safeguards for other residents. They must result in no net loss of green space, and any added housing must be car-free. As well as helping to make better use of privately owned land, this may help councils and housing associations with the replacement of disused sheds or garages.

Providing more living space in this way makes better use of our existing infrastructure, allowing more people to live within walking distance of high streets and railway stations. It is thus far more sustainable in its infrastructure requirements and in the movement patterns that it facilitates. It can also enable less disruptive modern methods of construction. It will not solve every problem our built environment faces. But it could make a real contribution.

Open Meeting on Low Traffic Neighbourhoods

Mary Hogben reports

This well-attended Zoom meeting was chaired by Andrew Bosi who reminded us that Low Traffic Neighbourhoods (LTNs) have been around since the 1970s with early examples in Barnsbury, Pimlico and Kensington. LTN's were introduced during the pandemic as part of the emergency measures, and are additionally supported by the Mayor as part of the long term strategy for achieving zero carbon. These schemes are funded by the Department for Transport, rather than

the Local Authority.

The first presentation was by Julian Bell, Ealing Councillor and TFL Board member. He had been instrumental in implementing LTNs in Ealing. He made the following comments.

- We need (a) to avoid a car-led recovery, as people shun public transport for fear of Covid, and (b) to maintain the pre pandemic focus on active travel.
- There are currently 89 LTN's across 18 London Boroughs and polls show that the level of support is rising
- The implementation of the 2020 covid emergency regulations was fast and without consultation and the need for better engagement is recognised.

The second presentation was by John Stewart, former long-standing Chair of HACAN Clear Skies and current Vice Chair of the Campaign for Better Transport.

Having campaigned for 40 years for traffic reduction he felt he should be a supporter of LTN's. But the consequence of moving traffic to boundary and main roads was unacceptable to him. Main roads are often where more affordable housing is located, leading to increased suffering for those already disadvantaged. The aim of an LTN is to facilitate walking and cycling and the impact on main roads had not been considered.

The way forward needed to be fair and holistic. The solution should not be seen to be imposed by narrow sectarian interests, in this case the cycling and walking lobbies. However LTN's have shown what life could be like with fewer cars.

Topics raised in the panel discussion and in the Chat window included freight and servicing; lack of electric vehicle charging points; unruly behaviour of cyclists (and motorists); success of the Covent Garden LTN where 80% of residents did not own a car; impact of cycle lanes on freight access kerbside; apps that take drivers through LTN's because they do not appear on mapping software; the importance of good affordable public transport; the need for proper cost benefit analysis of LTNs and the impact of motor vehicles on our health and environment; and the need for interest groups to work together with local residents' groups.

Andrew Bosi noted that road pricing is essential, and that the most people in the chat supported sustainable transport solutions, the most widely used being public transport. It will take time for users to adjust to any new road scheme, particularly so with the impact of the pandemic, Work from Home, and reluctance to use public transport. Local authorities should be urged to keep schemes in place and under review, rather than abandoning them prematurely.

The two sets of speakers' slides can be accessed [here](#) and [here](#), and a more comprehensive write-up of the meeting can be found [here](#).

General Secretary, Kate Ashbrook introduces the “Small but Feisty” Open Spaces Society (OSS)

The OSS is Britain’s oldest national conservation body, founded in 1865 to defend the commons in and around London. Its early victories included the rescue of Hampstead Heath, Wimbledon Common, and Epping Forest, and legislation such as the Metropolitan Commons Act 1866. Its lawyers helped those with common rights to prevent enclosure and encroachment on these important green lungs.

The OSS has continued to fight for common land and has extended its remit to other open spaces and public paths. In 1895, recognising that ownership of land was the best protection, its founders formed the National Trust, and the society then raised funds to assist the Trust in acquiring land.

Active throughout England and Wales, the OSS responds to all applications for works on common land, arguing for the public interest.

It has been particularly exercised about the abuse of London’s open spaces for commercial events and activities. It opposes Lambeth’s Council’s proposed appropriation of Clapham Common for a festival, to be considered at a public inquiry. Previous events here have left terrible erosion and mudbaths. The OSS is fighting the development on Tooting Bec Common of football pitches with floodlighting, also to be heard at a public inquiry. The society backed the Friends of Finsbury Park in its unsuccessful court challenge of Haringey Council’s permission for the Wireless Festival in the park. In 2016 the OSS supported the Save Battersea Park Action Group in stopping Formula E from using this tranquil, grade II*-listed park (pictured) for racing.



The society has also fought for public paths in London. It defeated Harrow School’s egregious plans to divert paths across the school grounds to routes which were less enjoyable for the public. It also saved a path across Northwick Park golf course in Brent from being diverted to an inferior route.

The OSS’s local correspondents act on its behalf in various localities, although it does not have complete coverage. It helps and supports its members, which comprise individuals, organisations, and local authorities.

The society is ready to jump in where others fear to tread, sometimes resorting to the courts where all else fails. It has remained small but feisty in defence of our open spaces and paths.

Westminster Council targets better Community Engagement Is WCC setting the new Gold Standard?

Two months ago, Westminster City Council launched their **Early Community Engagement Guidance**, requiring developers to consult with the local community ahead of seeking pre-application advice from the Council's officers – as [here](#). Applicants that fail to do so will find that any advice given may be subject to the caveat “advice may be amended once community consultation has taken place”. This initiative has been generally welcomed by London Forum and by member societies, especially for major applications. Some important questions remain: will the process be too onerous for smaller schemes, and will viability considerations frequently leave little scope for responding to community ambitions with or without early engagement?

WCC also launched consultations last month on their draft **Planning Obligations and Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document**, and on a draft Informal Planning Guidance Note on Affordable Workspace. The former provides further detail on how to implement the City Plan's policies, and includes guidance on issues such as affordable housing, affordable workspace, employment and skills contributions and carbon off-setting.

A third WCC initiative aims at **Widening Community Participation**, feeding into “a Community Engagement Strategy to make sure across the council that it widens effective participation through the whole community of residents, societies and businesses.”

Your committee will follow these developments in Westminster closely with the help of Forum members based in the borough, with a view to advising on whether members should be pressing for similar moves across the Capital.

London Forum reopens the case for a Third Party Right of Appeal

The absence of a Third Party Right of Appeal against bad planning approvals has long been of concern to the Forum, as well as to many of its members and of other organisations with whom we have discussed it. It could surely be considered a breach of human rights that, while a developers can appeal as often as they wish even if a refusal has been made on sound grounds, a resident or community adversely affected by a decision clearly given in breach of local or national policy, has no recourse other than the expense and risk of a Judicial Review.

We tentatively flagged this up with the Environmental Law Foundation, which offers advice to communities and individuals on environmental issues and access to justice. They referred us to the Pro Bono Environmental Law Clinic at City University; one aspect of their training for law students is to assign such projects to post-graduate students under the supervision of an environmental lawyer on the University faculty. The Chair of the meeting and project supervisor, environmental lawyer Paul Stookes, revealed that it was an issue which had troubled him in the past – describing it as “an affront” - and he was interested in taking it further. He gave a detailed background to the position as regards the current Human Rights legislation avenues open, such as the Aarhus Convention.

We recognised that an untrammelled right of appeal would inevitably be abused by single-issue parties aiming to halt development, but suggested that this could be addressed by the implementation of a tribunal system which would assess the validity of any claim before it could go forward; this, however, must also apply to applicants, since they are similarly open to abusing the appeals system by making vexatious appeals as a “second throw of the dice”.

After considering our case, they agreed to investigate it further, and on March 16th we had a constructive preliminary Zoom meeting with them to explore the possible grounds on which the absence of the right might be challenged. The Law Clinic will come back to us when they have consolidated their thoughts on it and considered how it might best be taken forward.

London Forum welcomes the Osterley & Wyke Green Residents Association

Osterley & Wyke Green Residents' Association (OWGRA) is a long-established residents association in West London, run by volunteers. It was first set up over 30 years ago to oppose plans to construct a development on Osterley Park. Its aim is to act as the voice for local residents and to protect and enhance the things we all like about the area. You can see a map of the OWGRA area [HERE](#).



There are continual pressures on our area (developers seeking to build on open land, replacement of existing building by tall buildings, increasing crime not being addressed effectively, street and other infrastructure not being maintained, etc.). We attend regular meetings with the Council, the Police and other local bodies to ensure we are aware of what is happening. We respond on all sizable planning applications on the area. We provide support to OWGRA members on matters impacting the area and are continually pushing the relevant bodies to maintain the upkeep of the area.

Our committee meets every six weeks, and we publish e-newsletters sent to all our members every 2-3 weeks, with the latest news about our patch. We try to produce a paper newsletter every six months which goes to some 5000 homes in the area. Membership is £10 a year, and last year we had 415 members – so far this year we have signed up 255.

Over the last couple of years much of our time has been spent on challenging two linked planning applications to develop a Tesco and a Homebase site near Gillette Corner on the Great West Road (A4). The two developments would comprise more than 2100

homes, with tower blocks up to 17 storeys, in an area primarily consisting of two-storey semis and maisonettes. This would increase the population of the area from c13.5K to c20K, an increase of 40%. The developments would be hugely overbearing and inappropriate, with inadequate transport links and infrastructure.

Despite convincing arguments to refuse, the Council's planning committee approved the proposals. Representations to the Mayor of London did not prevent him deciding to allow the developments to proceed – subject to any action the Secretary of State might take. We organised a petition of more than 4,000 names (online and paper) to overturn the decision, which we presented to the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, for the attention of the Secretary of State, Michael Gove. This led to the two applications being called in.

We are currently in the middle of the planning inquiry, which started with a day in person, and has continued virtually. For details of what happened each day you can read our blog on our homepage <https://owgra.org.uk>. We are all lay people and have only one paid witness, a foremost expert in photo visualisation, who has produced many shocking images to show how the developments will look. We, ourselves, funded the construction of an accurate scale model of the developments, as, despite promises, the developer failed to do so. There will now be a hiatus and the inquiry will finish in September, with a decision probably due in spring 2023. We obviously think we have very convincing arguments to refuse the applications, and most of the sessions have gone well. We will see!

Report commissioned by Civic Voice brings to light the extraordinary amount of work that civic societies do

A new independent report which aims to better understand the role that civic societies play in the English planning system has been published by academics from the University of Reading.

The report titled, *Civic Societies and the Planning Process*, draws on data collected through a survey questionnaire sent to all Civic Voice member societies. This independent report is the first extensive survey of how civic societies perceive their role

in planning processes under the restructured planning system introduced by the Localism Act 2011.

The report is available on the University of Reading website, [here](#). The recording of the report launch is available at: <https://vimeo.com/675467547>

The research shows that engagement with the planning system is a significant part of the work of most civic societies, with some spending more than 80% of their time engaging with it. We can then assume that the planning system also spends considerable time engaging with or dealing with civic societies, supported by the fact that more than half of civic societies have been approached directly by the Local Planning Authority for their inputs. The report recommends that any further reform of the planning system must then explicitly consider this relationship as considerable expertise and experience on local planning matters does also rest with civic societies.

The report notes a number of challenges facing civic societies if they are to maintain and enhance their leadership and stewardship roles in place-making; these include devoting effort to engaging with their local community and with other community groups in their neighbourhood, attracting new members with the energy and skills to maintain their capacity and capability, and sustaining good relations with their Local Authority in the face of rapid staff turnover, remote working and an unremitting workload.

And a reminder that Civic Voice needs your help to assess the impact of the recent relaxation of permitted development rights (PDR) allowing the conversion of most categories of high street properties to residential use (Class C3). If you haven't already done so, sign up to the campaign by emailing info@civicvoice.org.uk. Then check your borough's planning database for 'Class E to C3 prior approval applications' and input the data into Civic Voice's open access [spreadsheet](#)

Briefly Noted

Just Space Recovery Plan for London

More than 60 community groups and campaigners contributed to the ***Just Space Recovery Plan***, published earlier this month. It calls for a radical change of course in London's planning: less a developers' city, more a city for its people. The Just

Space network brings together a diverse range of groups to participate in London planning, as a counterweight to the traditional dominance by town planners and developers. The Plan, which can be downloaded [here](#), aims to reverse the inequalities that the Covid-19 pandemic brutally exposed.

Four themes emerge from the Plan's 44 policy statements: **A Caring City, Visibility & Influence for all, A City of Local Neighbourhoods**, and **Priority for Climate and Nature**.

Richard Lee, co-ordinator of Just Space said: *'It is now more important than ever to ensure all voices are included in the future planning of London. This is a vital part of recovery.'*

Suburban Task Force Report Launch

The 'Suburban Taskforce' was established in 2020 to help us understand what 'suburban' really means in modern Britain. It is formed by a cross-party group of politicians who have come together with experts from a range of backgrounds to shine a light on the suburbs to identify and secure the clear, long-term and properly resourced policies needed to support thriving, sustainable and inclusive suburban areas.

The Taskforce is pleased to present a report that reviews the current estate of the English suburbs and includes recommendations which focus on the ways our suburbs are understood and to ensure that the change within them is meaningful. How should we understand and manage change within the suburbs? How can we increase public engagement in the planning process of suburban areas?

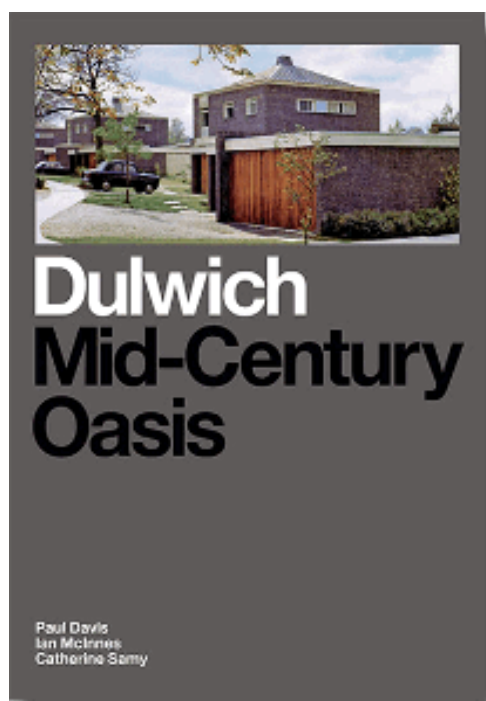
The launch takes place online on 4th May at 10 am, register [here](#).

Two Westminster developments halted

The High Court has overturned the planning consent controversially granted for the **Holocaust Memorial and Research Centre** in Victoria Tower Gardens, because no account was taken of a provision in the London County Council (Improvements) Act 1900, which specified that the Gardens are to be used as a park in perpetuity.

The government has issued a holding direction preventing the formal issuing of planning consent for the controversial demolition and redevelopment of a **Marks & Spencer** store on London's Oxford Street.

Dulwich - Mid-Century Oasis: Michael Coupe welcomes a lavish new book about the development of the Dulwich Estate



This handsome, privately published, and copiously illustrated publication mounts a potent response to the common jeremiad that much of mid-century post-war housing was of poor quality and lacking in architectural merit. It does so in the context of the Dulwich Estate, an historic landholding of some 1500 acres in South East London, that identifies strongly as a 'leafy green oasis' strategically located close to the urban centre, whilst contriving to maintain a distinctive village character.

In essence, this is an account of a large number of innovative estates built for the landowner, mainly through the auspices of their architect

Austin Vernon and Partners, the builder/developer Wates Built Homes, and the landscape architect Derek Lovejoy and Associates. The various schemes owed their genesis to the Dulwich Development Plan, which was prepared on behalf of the Estate, as a riposte to threats from the LCC and Camberwell District Council to compulsory purchase large areas of the Estate to help make up for some of the losses of social housing during the War. The Plan was successful in presenting a number of schemes at a sufficient density to meet the councils' requirements, and allow the Estate to keep the land in its ownership.

Between 1954 and the early 1970s, almost 3000 houses and flats were built, both for private purchasers and social housing tenants, in a series of some 31 individual estates of enduring quality and cutting edge design, which stand comparison with any other of the better suburban estates built in London at that time. Largely ignored hitherto by the architectural establishment, despite three schemes earning design awards at the time,

this book examines each of the estates in some detail, and goes some way towards giving them the recognition they deserve.

[Copies of the book may be obtained from the RIBA Bookshop, Village Books in Dulwich Village, Dulwich Books in West Dulwich, Chris Vernon at vernonrum@aol.com and from Catherine Samy at Catherine@catherinesamy.com.]

Round the Societies

Michael Hammerson and Helen Warner raid members' newsletters for items likely to be of wider interest

The Kensington Society echoes the frustrations of many societies, noting that Council officers have pre-application discussions with developers but give the community no opportunity for input. Too often the result is overwhelming opposition when the schemes appear for approval. There were over 480 objections to the Wellcome Trust Pelham Street and 380 to Old Brompton Road redevelopments, both recommended by officers and (inevitably?) approved. The **Islington Society** is concerned about Peabody's proposals for the Holloway Prison site. Islington Council have assessed a density of 720 units as appropriate, but this is exceeded by 265 homes in the application. **West Hampstead Amenity and Transport** report on redevelopment plans of the O2 Centre in Finchley Road with a density of 326 dwellings per hectare, whereas Camden's draft Site Allocations Local Plan specifies 211 d/ha.

The Highgate Society are battling three developments each of which, they believe, could justify a judicial review if granted.

In November the Secretary of State called in the huge Tesco/Homebase redevelopment at Gillette Corner **Richmond**. The tower blocks will badly affect the view from Kew Gardens across the Thames. The **Kew Society** were among those supporting Kew Gardens at the public inquiry in March.

The Barnet Residents Association and the **Barnet Society** find the Council's planning committee have been refusing unwelcome prior approval applications submitted under widened Permitted Development Rights. The **Westcombe Society** report similarly

Greenwich's refusal of the Woodland Heights scheme by virtue of its bulk, height, and prominence.

The Peckham Society celebrate the success to secure protection for the Old Mill Building, threatened with demolition by the Council's redevelopment plan. At the Examination in Public of the Plan, the Inspector ruled that the plan should include a reference to the Old Mill Building as an important heritage asset of local interest. Southwark Council have created two new Conservation Areas.

Meanwhile the **Ealing Society** has major concerns about the Council's review of its 29 conservation areas (CAs), including de-designation of much of the Canalside CA which extends along the Grand Union Canal. The justification is the gradual degradation over the years of the area, not helped by unsympathetic developments, some of them approved by the Council.

Lambeth Village People are celebrating the failure of the High Court challenge by U+I and the London Fire Brigade for developments at 8 Albert Embankment. The Hon. Mrs Justice Lievn in rejecting the challenge, found the development would have severely impacted on both the local community and the Westminster World Heritage Site. Also in Lambeth, the **Brixton Society** report that the demolition and rebuilding of the former council offices were "an extended nightmare for residents" and following complaints, the Local Government Ombudsman found the Council failed to listen to or act on residents' concerns and demanded they apologise and pay symbolic compensation to the resident who brought the complaint.

West Hampstead Amenity and Transport group have been pressing Camden for traffic improvements on Kilburn High Road, including: a speed limit of 20 mph; increased pavement widths; consistent timings for bus lane restrictions; fixed delivery time slots for shops; cycle parking on the High Road pavements more than 4m wide; more bus lanes; diagonal pedestrian crossings at junctions; and timed rubbish collections.

The **Sydenham** and **Greenwich Societies** both raise concerns about the future of London's transport system with significantly lower passenger numbers than pre-pandemic levels, with cuts in services reported in Greenwich.

The **Wimbledon Society** submitted great questions to their local political candidates ahead of the May 5th elections, publishing responses on their website.

The **Enfield Society** has formed a new Conservation and Heritage Group, to monitor the condition of nationally and locally listed buildings.

London Friends of Green Spaces note publication of *State of UK Public Parks 2021* <https://www.apse.org.uk/apse/index.cfm/research/current-research-programme/state-of-uk-public-parks-2021/#>. This finds that local parks have lost £690 million in funding over the past decade.

The Dulwich Society have been given four *Ulmus wingham*, a Dutch Elm disease-resistant variety, by Elms4London as part of an initiative to re-establish Elms in London.

The London Gardens Trust will be opening over 100 green spaces across London, not normally open to the public, on June 11 and 12. For details, see www.londongardenstrust.org

The Open Spaces Society have published the seventh edition of their book *Our Common Land: The Law and History of Common Land and Village Greens*. It costs £25 and can be ordered from publications@oss.org.uk

The **Pinner Association** has celebrated its 90th anniversary, and the **Amwell Society** is about to celebrate its 50th: congratulations to both!

The full-length version of this round-up can be found [here](#)

Save the Dates

24th August 2022, 18.00 – 19.45: London Forum **Summer Reception** on the roof terrace at 75 Cowcross Street (weather permitting)

12th October 2022, 18.30 onwards: London Forum **Annual General Meeting**, on Zoom

Further details in due course.
