

Report on London Forum Open Meeting Thames-side Policy and the London Plan

Peter Eversden opened the meeting by expressing the hope that it would influence the content of the next London Plan and its strategy for the River Thames.

PRESENTATIONS

Mathieu Proctor of the **GLA** explained the context of the current London Plan and the work that was going on to prepare its successor, which would have to take account of factors like population growth. The relevant London Plan Policy was S14, covering flood management, biodiversity, leisure, transport etc. Future work, by the GLA with the relevant boroughs, would cover the four Thames Policy areas.

Rebecca Law of the **Thames Landscape Strategy** explained how S14 of the current London Plan was being implemented, in collaboration with the GLA and the boroughs. She described the existing (now rather dated) strategies and their intention to have strategies from Surrey to the Thames estuary, broken down into character areas. Besides S14, S12 - flood risk management - was very relevant because it was essential to ensure that London can survive through the century, with flood defences that do not interfere too much with the use and enjoyment of the river.

Philip Whyte of the **West London River Group** and the **Wandsworth Society** went through all the developments proposed for the stretch between Kew and Battersea and how they exceeded the heights laid down in the relevant plans, and impacted on safeguarded wharves.

Tim Catchpole of the **Mortlake with East Sheen Society** gave a full account of the series of proposals for the Stag Brewery site at Mortlake, for the latest of which a Public Inquiry was imminent. He also drew attention to how many of the tallest buildings close to the Thames had been permitted by Ministerial decision (appeal or call-in) rather than by the local planning authority.

Michael Ball of the **Waterloo Community Development Group** and of **Just Space**, observed that the Thames was the only natural feature specifically mentioned in the Act that set up the Greater London Authority, which required its use, particularly for transportation, to be encouraged; but specific Thames policies had reduced considerably over the iterations of the London Plan since the Blue Ribbon Network chapter was removed. Michael Ball described the development that had taken place near the river in Vauxhall and in the central, Waterloo, area, mitigated to some extent by the Views Management Framework; the horrendous proposal for 72 Upper Ground, agreed with reluctance by Michael Gove, could still be overturned through judicial review. There were many Opportunity Areas along the Thames, especially in East London; he was particularly incensed by the threat to the open land they posed; land that could be a 'playground' for the communities if development were further back from the river.

DISCUSSION

Paul Thornton opened the discussion session by saying that the implication of what the speakers had said was that the policy framework for the Thames in the London Plan was not fit for purpose. He asked Mathieu Proctor whether the next iteration of the London Plan, whether completely new or a revision of the existing one, might include a more coherent Thames strategy. Mr Proctor was unable to answer at this stage, since what the GLA team was doing was to look at individual policies in the current Plan to see if they were up-to-date; climate resilience would be a significant feature, and would have implications for water management. He urged people attending to participate actively in the Plan revision process, and to use the 'Call for Evidence' page on the Planning for London website.

Michael Bach observed that the Views Management Framework with its protective effect had no force west of Lambeth Bridge. Patricia Trembath argued that the development, and the whole planning process, did not take into account that London was in a basin and vulnerable to water and flooding; the Thames Barrier would soon be unable to cope; the balance was not right.

Paul Thornton asked Rebecca Law whether the strategies for which she was responsible had any effect on the scale of development along the Thames; she replied that the problem with these strategies was that though material considerations they were not themselves statutory and therefore did not have full force in decision taking; she hoped that in due course, with the work they were doing to make them more robust and up-to-date the force of these strategies would be strengthened by association with the statutory London and borough plans; of course development did not stop while strategies were being rewritten! Michael Ball commented that never, in any of the many planning inquiries with which he had been involved had the Thames Strategies even been mentioned; this must be changed in the future. As for the vulnerability of London to flooding, Rebecca Law was aware that besides water coming down the Thames and up from the tides, there was surface water that made its way into the river. She gave an assurance that this was in their sights and the short remaining life of the Thames Barrier was factored in.

There was some discussion of the impending General Election, and Paul Thornton observed that the London Forum ought to be compiling a list of significant policies to urge on an incoming government, and the importance of a Thames strategy could be one of them.

Peter Eversden observed that some developments along the Thames might so affect the World Heritage sites that they would be delisted by UNESCO. Rebecca Law said that the Co-ordinator for the Thames Landscape Strategy was a member of the committee for the Kew World Heritage Site.

The London Rivers Association had been a useful ally until it ran out of funding, and could perhaps usefully be revived. Rebecca Law said that there were now some equivalents, such as the Tidal Thames Councils Forum, which concentrated on flooding matters, but did also cover planning.

Dido Berkeley cited the Aarhus Convention, which required meaningful public involvement in major environmental decision making; building on the littoral flood plain was contrary to that. The River Thames was treated far better in the first London Plan than now, and should be given rights. There was much support for these points. Rebecca Law said that the GLA was looking to restart the All-London Green Grid, which had been one of Boris Johnson's initiatives as Mayor, and for it to cover Blue-Green as well as Green infrastructure.

Tim Catchpole said that the management of the Thames bridges had been fragmented since the demise of the Greater London Council, and ought to be considered in the context of the river.

Peter Eversden summed up the meeting. He had found the lack of a policy for the river, indeed the regression since the first London Plan, was depressing. The London Forum's committee would put effort into ensuring that the next London Plan went forward, rather than backward, and would keep Forum members in touch.