

newsforum



The London Forum working to protect and improve the quality of life in London

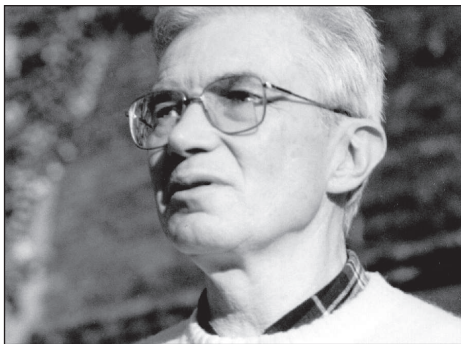
The London Forum of
Amenity and Civic Societies
Founded 1988

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Islington Society
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Chairman's remarks



How is London changing? Are the changes in the right directions?

The effects of the London Plan adopted in February 2004 are hardly yet apparent. The five Sub-Regional Development Frameworks are still in preparation, and Supplementary Planning Guidance is only slowly emerging. It will be a long time before all the boroughs bring their development plans into 'general conformity' with the London Plan.

Many of the data sets required to chart what is happening are not yet available. But there are some significant indications, and some reasons for concern.

One controversial issue is the density of new housing developments. Although their average density across London is rising; the GLA is concerned that, in many of the boroughs where the average was 50 dwellings per hectare or less in 2000–03, density had actually fallen since 1995–98. At the same time, the London Forum is concerned at the excessive densities being allowed in some locations nearer the centre as described inside by Harley Sherlock and in a report by a member society.

These link to a wider worry about the way the Mayor is exercising his powers to comment on planning applications of strategic importance. By December there had been 850 references of planning applications to the Mayor, about 250 a year (though with some surprising variations between boroughs). The Mayor's Planning Decision Unit has appeared to approve excessive densities and a loss of open space, and in the case of riverside sites failed to uphold the London Plan's positive policies for the Blue Ribbon Network. Strong representations were made to the Assembly about this and the Mayor has initiated a scrutiny of several cases.

Housing completions in London in 2003 exceeded the Plan's minimum target of

23,000 a year, although they were differently distributed. But they were well below the 33,600 a year that would be necessary to eliminate the existing shortage of housing over a 10-year period. The Plan's target for housing is to be reviewed in 2006, in the light of findings from current studies of the capacity for additional housing in each borough.

The estimated proportion of new homes in 2003/04 that were affordable (30%) could be regarded as reasonably reassuring progress towards the London Plan's target of 50%. But there was enormous variation, with proportions as low as 5% (Kingston), 7% (Havering and Wandsworth) and 8% (Barnet).

There are some hopeful signs about transport. Use of public transport increased by more than 8% between 2001 and 2003. In addition to reduced traffic levels in the Congestion Charging Zone, there were also small reductions in average weekday traffic in the rest of London. Public transport capacity increased by 4% between 2001 and the end of 2004, largely through improved bus services. But use of the Thames for freight continued to decline.

The London Forum will continue to monitor planning trends across London. We shall also continue to give effective voice to the concerns of our members whenever those trends threaten to be unsustainable.

Peter Eversden Chairman ■

MPs savage government housing policy

The Commons Environmental Audit Committee report on Housing: A Sustainable Future.

At the launch on 30th January, Chairman Peter Ainsworth MP said that 'the Government's housing policy is an alarming example of disjointed thinking in an area where joined-up policy is crucial. John Prescott's new Five Year Plan still misses the key point; unless the Government takes proper account of the strain which house building places on the environment, we will continue to create serious problems for ourselves and future generations'.

Readers of this and past issues of newsforum will be aware of the major reservations held by the London Forum and others about housing policy; this report therefore makes disturbing reading and confirms all our concerns.

Conclusions and recommendations

It contains 59 conclusions and recommendations. Other sections cover Skills; Planning and Sustainability ('We are surprised to see the proposed PPS1 title "Creating Sustainable Communities", given that there is as yet no clear understanding of what sustainable communities are'), the Role of DEFRA, Housing Construction ('We are alarmed at the apparent ease and possible extent of non-compliance with part L of the Building Regulations'), A Code for Sustainable Buildings, and the House Building Industry ('While we are encouraged by the attitude of some house building companies, the majority are nowhere near achieving the kind of record with regard to environmental performance we would consider acceptable'; 'It is unclear to us how increasing the supply of land available to private developers, as proposed by the Barker Review, would in any way compel them to bring forward proposals for smaller dwellings, at higher densities, to reverse the trend in reduced affordable and social housing supply')

There is a serious risk that, as matters stand, the principal beneficiaries of housing growth will be property development companies, whilst the principal loser will be the environment.

Main points relating to Barker Review

We summarise the main points relating to the Barker Review of Housing Supply and the Sustainable Communities Plan. We urge members to study the full version of this important report themselves, in view of its disturbing conclusions, and ask their MPs to ascertain how the Government intends to take on board the Committee's concerns. There is a serious risk that, as matters stand, the principal beneficiaries of housing growth will be property development companies, whilst the principal loser will be the environment.

The Barker review of housing supply

– The Review's proposal that a set of predetermined market indicators should be used to bring land forward automatically for housing development would be a direct attack on the principles underpinning the planning system. It would establish the principal role of planning as being simply to meet market demand, without regard to any other considerations, including democratic accountability.

– It was disingenuous of Kate Barker to insist that there was no geographical dimension to the Review's recommendations when it is obvious to us, and to many others, that any measure that aims to build more where the housing market is stronger will inevitably result in increased building in the South East. It is important that the Government acknowledges and addresses this.

– It is a matter of great regret that Kate Barker failed to take full advantage of the remit of her Review in relation to sustainable development. It is also extremely disappointing that the Review did not address how fiscal measures could be used to improve the efficiency of the housing industry and reduce its environmental impacts, as Kate Barker has since told us should be the case.

– We urge ODPM and HM Treasury to acknowledge the shortcomings of the Barker Review and to ensure that the concerns Kate Barker has subsequently expressed regarding the environmental impacts of increasing housing supply inform the Government's approach to considering her recommendations.

– We urge ODPM and DEFRA to ensure that any future study on the environmental impacts of increasing housing supply in England takes as its baseline no growth over the next thirty years. It is vitally important that the impacts of all homes that are to be built over this period are determined, so as better to inform the decisions on how and where they should be built.

– The present evidence base for the Government's housing policies is inadequate and it is imperative that the Government ensures that work is carried out to rectify this. We recommend that no proposals are taken forward to further increase housing supply without ensuring that there is a sufficiently strong evidence base to support them. (Paragraph 35)

– ODPM and HM Treasury should publish a substantive response to the Barker Review as a matter of urgency. This response should set out which recommendations are being taken forward, which are being considered as options and which have been discarded.

The Sustainable Communities Plan

We are disappointed not to see set out explicitly in the key requirements for a sustainable community the need to comply with the principles of sustainable development; and we deplore the absence of any reference to environmental protection.

– We would like to know if or when ODPM intends to publish its definition of sustainable communities. This should explicitly give the environment equal footing with social and economic goals.

– The belated effort by ODPM to explore how sustainable development is linked to the Sustainable Communities Plan is a stark example of the failure of Government to place sustainable development at the heart of policy making and of how environmental considerations remain a bolt-on rather than a primary concern.

– It would appear to us that many of the efforts directed towards achieving sustainability within the SCP are little more than a window-dressing exercise.

- Sir John Egan was of the view that it will be very difficult, and probably detrimental to the economy, to focus too much effort on developing northern regions when there is such a draw to the South East from all over the country and from the rest of Europe. He implied that these other regions would develop of their own accord if they had the potential. Whilst this argument may make some sense from a purely economic perspective, it has few merits from a social or environmental one. It is alarming to us that a senior Government advisor should express such views: we believe them to be wrong and would like to hear from Government to what extent it supports them.
- ODPM and HM Treasury must make clear at what stage they will judge the South East region to have reached its growth limits and what options they have considered to assist social and economic development within sensible environmental limits elsewhere in the country.
- The SCP simply predicts growth in the South East and sets out to provide for it. This predict and provide approach makes no attempt to rebalance housing demand and economic development in the country as a whole. Given the limited ability and willingness of the South East regions to absorb further growth, this reflects a short-term approach from the Government to what is a long-term problem.
- It is astounding that despite the clear need for an assessment of the environmental impacts of the proposals for the Growth Areas as a whole, nothing has been done to date by ODPM or DEFRA to address this issue.
- Development as proposed in the Thames Gateway will result in a long commuter corridor, where most residents will travel to London to work, unless every effort is made to create jobs in the area, provide local infrastructure and ensure a significant proportion of new housing is affordable.
- There is disturbing evidence that the sum so far allocated for infrastructure funding will not be anything like sufficient to meet the requirement generated by the Growth Areas.

“The Government’s housing policy is an alarming example of disjointed thinking in an area where joined-up policy is crucial.”

Peter Ainsworth MP

- The focus in the Sustainable Communities Plan on improving and protecting the local environment is a positive step; however there is as yet no clear understanding of the impacts of development on the wider environment and this has to be urgently addressed.
- It is imperative that something as significant as the Sustainable Communities Plan should be assessed for its environmental and other impacts on the country as a whole, not only for its impacts on the areas where growth and investment are planned. With this in mind, the Government should strongly consider a National Spatial Framework similar to those already in place in Scotland and Wales ■

The full 77-page report can be downloaded from the web www.parliament.uk > Committees > Environmental Audit Committee > Reports > 2004–5.

Planning briefs and developers

Comment by
Harley Sherlock.

The case of City Road Basin on the Regent’s Canal

Islington Council recently gave planning permission for a thirty-five-storey tower in one of London’s (and Islington’s) all-too-rare backwaters, thus, at one blow, undermining London’s reputation as a city of contrasts (see Steen Eiler Rasmussen’s “London the Unique City”) and bringing into disrepute the idea that the planning brief for a particular site can be prepared by an architect whose client proposes to develop that site: a very wide interpretation of the Government’s desire to see developers more involved in the preparation of planning briefs.

The fact that the planning brief for City Road Basin was somewhat irrational added to the general concern about the way it had been prepared. It was apparently claimed that a nicely-designed slender tower was to be the money-spinner that would pay for the rehabilitation of the Basin; whereas, as every reader of **newsforum** knows, it is the tall buildings that are the expensive ones, especially if they are elegant slender towers.

The trouble, as I see it, is that councillors are not used to turning down planning briefs prepared by, and recommended by, their expert planners; and in this case the planners were hardly likely not to recommend the planning brief that they had commissioned, even though it was to the developer’s architect that they had entrusted the commission.

All this goes some way to explain the unexpected approval of one particular project, and to demonstrate the weakness of the new Area Planning Committees, which seem to find it difficult to resist the blandishments of their planning officers, who have themselves often become too identified with projects that they have been encouraged (rightly) to discuss with developers before planning applications are submitted ■

Editor’s note: We will all have to be involved in the new type of Site Briefs and Area Action Plans that will be Local Development Planning Documents within LDFs. Have other members experienced problems of this nature? It also happened in Highgate, where the brief so bad that our pressure led to a radical revision. Please let us know so that we can, if necessary, pursue it.

Ken Livingstone's high density housing

Comment by **Harley Sherlock**.

London, The Unique City was the title of Steen Eiler Rasmussen's book on London (last published in 1958). In it the internationally-acclaimed Danish planner urged us, when we came to rehouse bombed-out Londoners, to ignore the disciples of Le Corbusier and his tower-block "machines for living in". Instead Rasmussen pressed us to find a modern equivalent of our traditional and friendly three-and-four-storey Inner London streets.

Alas, all this advice fell on deaf ears; and most of Britain's new urban housing was built by local authorities whose architects were almost universally "sold" on the idea that tower blocks were the answer to their problems: an idea that was positively encouraged by the Government, who happily stumped up the twelve-percent increase in building costs made necessary by the lifts, deeper foundations and generally more expensive construction needed for tall buildings.

The irony of all this was that, in order to reduce the population density as overcrowding was eliminated, the County of London Plan had laid down maximum permitted housing densities that were based on the average bricks-and-mortar-density of existing streets. Hence tower-block housing was usually being built to the same density, or to a lower density, than the streets it replaced!

At first this rather strange state of affairs was ignored: apparently because it was felt that the potential public parkland in the spaces between tower blocks was a very positive asset; and the London County Council's Roehampton Estate, built in the early 1960s, seemed to prove this point. But, in reality, the more important point about the Roehampton housing was that it had been built in already established parkland, and overlooked the expanses of Richmond Common. When similar tower blocks were built on more mundane sites they were a failure; and the open spaces

between them which were necessary to avoid overshadowing (and, of course, to keep within the maximum permitted density) were a poor substitute for friendly streets and private gardens.

By the time, however, that this important message had got through to the housing authorities, Margaret Thatcher's Government had brought local authority housing to an end. Thus, as nearly all inner-city housing at the time was sponsored by local authorities, there was virtually no housing built in Inner London (except in Docklands) until housing associations got going on a large scale in the late 1990s.

In the meantime what little the associations had managed to build was usually in the form of two-storey housing: the consequence of which was a tendency to start reducing urban densities to suburban levels. Environmentalists, including the London Forum, were quick to point out that, while suburban areas might have their advantages if they could keep the countryside close to them, the whole point of urban living was to have the necessities and pleasures of life (shops etc) within walking distance of everyone's front door. And it was beginning to be realised that this couldn't be achieved unless new communities were built at a sufficiently high density to keep them compact: like their Georgian predecessors, which had usually been built to about 450 habitable rooms per hectare (hrh).

Therefore the London Forum welcomed Ken Livingstone's early statement in favour of high densities. But when we discovered that he was not talking of 400–500 hrh but 1000–1200 hrh we were, and still are, horrified. Of course there are a few places where very high densities can be justified. The obvious example is the Barbican: sited close to the cluster of tall buildings that marks London's business centre. The Barbican was built to a very high standard by the City Corporation to house people working in the city, and it included forty-five-storey towers, a lake and a beautiful landscaped garden. And it has been said in defence of Livingstone's policy on densities in general that all he is doing is to compensate for existing very low densities in suburbia. But that is no excuse for a policy of pushing lots of Londoners into tall buildings, which many of them do not like.

The London Forum welcomed Ken Livingstone's early statement in favour of high densities. But when we discovered that he was talking of 1000–1200 hrh we were, and still are, horrified.

Livingstone is probably right in wanting to raise London's average housing density. But the obvious way of doing this is to raise densities in Outer London, thus making suburban communities more viable. And this can be done only gradually: replacing housing as it reaches the end of its useful life.

He therefore needs to be more patient! To start with he needs time to work with boroughs to assemble sites large enough to provide us with modern equivalents of our Georgian streets and squares. He should not be denying London families the right to live in modern three-and-four-storey streets, where people can meet, children can play, families can have gardens, and shops, pubs etc are within walking distance. Housing built to densities much higher than this should be the exception, not the rule ■

It is no excuse for a policy of pushing lots of Londoners into tall buildings, which many of them do not like.

Lots Road Power Station. A case for concern

Extracts from the **Chelsea Society's** evidence for the Lots Road Power Station redevelopment public inquiry.

In the 1960s Professor Leslie Martin of Cambridge University carried out an academic land use exercise in which he concluded that, taking into account the sunlight, daylight, open space and overlooking standards that are considered acceptable in this country, the most efficient way in which to plan residential developments is in the form of streets of terraced houses and flats arranged around landscaped squares (as is generally found throughout RBKC). The Mayor for London is equally aware of this, for in his London Plan he notes that London has achieved some of its highest residential density in relatively low rise areas.

In spite of the rash of high residential buildings that were erected in London throughout the 1960s, the residential character and urban grain of inner London is still dominated by its traditional streets and squares of terraced houses and flats. Kensington and Chelsea has the highest residential density of any local authority in the UK, yet this is achieved by means of terraced houses and flats, generally no more than 6 or 7 storeys in height, arranged in streets and around garden squares. The resulting residential environment is considered to be one of the finest anywhere in the world.

The Society is in general opposed to tall buildings unless they are part of a designated cluster of tall buildings or they can be justified as a landmark, either by virtue of their use or by an officially identified need for a visual landmark in the urban scene.

The advocating of higher densities in the London Plan is conditional upon development being visually acceptable, generally in compliance with all other planning considerations and the location of the development being one that enjoys a good transport infrastructure, particularly in respect of public transport. High density does not necessarily mean high buildings.

When the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea carried out the redevelopment of the World's End Estate, they revealed

High density does not necessarily mean high buildings.

that the number of households and the area of accommodation provided was no more than could have been accommodated by converting the streets of four storey Victorian terraced houses that previously existed on the site into flats and maisonettes.

In the interests of the proper planning of London, it is essential that if tall buildings are to play a part in the urban renaissance, local authorities need, after rigorous assessment and full public consultation, to identify specific sites that are suitable for such buildings. Westminster City Council... has carried out such an exercise.

The Lots Road Appeal site has never been identified as a location that is suitable for the erection of tall buildings. The Society agrees with Sir Terry Farrell's comment on the Appeal Site that it was important to build on the experience of the past and to have respect for what has gone before, and the aim should be to build upon the established grain of the surrounding area.

It is completely unacceptable to have a free for all as at present, whereby every major development proposes tall buildings where it is calculated that they might get away with it. Recent examples nearby include:

1. The former Battersea Flour Mills site, now occupied by the Montevetro slab block... Wandsworth prepared a development brief... which proposed that no new building should exceed 5–6 storeys. The building proposed contravened not only that development brief but the guidelines set out in the Thames Strategy document which stated that high buildings situated on the inside bend of the river were especially undesirable, as were buildings set at an angle to the river. In spite of these factors, consent was given by the Secretary of State and a dangerous precedent set.
2. The redevelopment of Albion Wharf, opposite Chelsea Old Church, also in Wandsworth; here, it was initially proposed that the scheme would rise up to a height of 20–storeys but it was realised by the developers that they were unlikely to receive consent for this and they substituted a scheme of 11 storeys, which has now been built.

Tall buildings are often more about power, prestige and aesthetics than efficient development.

3. The Belvedere Tower at Chelsea Harbour: here, the local authority in preparing a planning brief... indicated that a single tall building would be appropriate as part of the overall development.

Tall buildings are especially damaging to the open spaces of a metropolis such as London; for they have the effect of diminishing the apparent size, and therefore the sense of openness, of those open spaces. In that respect London's parks and the river Thames... are especially vulnerable to tall buildings. Hyde Park, of which it used to be said that it was just like being in the countryside, no longer seems that way; it has become smaller as a result of the tall buildings that have been erected around its perimeter. Likewise, the Thames, which in comparison to the Seine, was always praised for its width, appears much narrower every time a tall building is erected on its banks.

Amongst the conclusions of the Urban Affairs Sub-Committee of the House of Commons Select Committee on Transport, Local Government and the Regions' Inquiry into Tall Buildings (November 2002) was: Although tall buildings can be a method of achieving high densities, it is equally clear that tall buildings are not necessary to provide high density accommodation; high rise is not the only or most efficient way to provide high densities. Tall buildings are not essential to the urban renaissance. There must be a suitable framework for tall buildings if we are to avoid past mistakes and it was recommended that local authorities identify areas which are and are not appropriate for tall buildings in their development plans... Tall buildings are often more about power, prestige and aesthetics than efficient development ■

Five year funding settlement for Transport for London

News from the DfT Website: Last July the Secretary of State announced a five-year funding settlement for TfL.

Transport for London (TfL) is the executive body which runs most of London's transport and reports to the Mayor. As well as strategy, TfL are directly responsible for London's strategic roads, bus services, the London Underground system, the Docklands Light Railway, Croydon Tramlink, taxi regulation and river services.

TfL currently has an income of approximately £5 billion per year. Of this slightly over 50% comes from fares and congestion charges, council tax precept and other sources. The rest comes from a central government block grant known as the GLA Transport Grant.

"Groundbreaking" settlement

Following the July 2004 spending review, the Secretary of State announced a five-year funding settlement for TfL (2005/06 to 2009/10) setting out the level of central government grant over the period, allowing TfL to plan and prioritise its investment priorities for the rest of the decade.

The settlement was announced ahead of other transport spending review allocations in order to meet the timetable required for London's Olympic bid.

London's Transport Commissioner Bob Kiley has said that the settlement is a "groundbreaking agreement" which will allow TfL to "make a step change in its approach to investment in London's transport infrastructure". As a result TfL have now been able to publish a financially balanced five-year business plan consisting of a £22bn operating plan and a £10bn capital investment programme (www.tfl.gov.uk/tfl/reports-businessplan05.shtml). This includes proposals to borrow £3 billion for investment under the new prudential borrowing regime.

Major schemes for the future

TfL are planning to take forward a number of major transport schemes, particularly in support of London's Olympic bid and Thames Gateway, including:

- East London Line Extension (phase one);
- DLR enhancements - extension to Woolwich Arsenal, 3-car upgrade, conversion of the North London Line between Canning Town and Stratford;

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- East London and Greenwich Waterfront bus transits;
- Major congestion relief works at Covent Garden, Holloway Road, King's Cross and Vauxhall London Underground stations.

The Tube and PPP

Approximately 50% of all TfL spending relates to London Underground. Although this funding is included in the 5-year settlement, the actual amounts payable are subject to an earlier agreement between TfL and the Department for Transport. In December 2002 and April 2003, London Underground Ltd signed 30-year PPP (Public Private Partnership) contracts with two companies (Tube Lines and Metronet) to provide maintenance and renewal for the Underground infrastructure (trains, track, stations and signalling).

With an investment of £16 billion over the first 15 years of the contract, the PPP will reverse the long term under-investment on the Tube and the system will be modernised over the course of the contract. Tube capacity will increase by 12 per cent by 2012 and by 15 per cent a few years later and 249 stations will be improved, modernised or refurbished. There will be new or refurbished trains on all lines by 2020. The Government has given a long-term commitment to funding the Tube, averaging more than £1 billion up to 2010–11 ■

A freight strategy for London

Dick Allard reports.

The London Sustainable Distribution Partnership (LSDP) was established early in 2002 under the auspices of TfL as part of the Mayor's Transport Plan to assist in the development and implementation of proposals for effective distribution of goods in London (see **newsforum** 38 for more). In practice it has been better at discussion than implementation. To provide a sharper focus to its activities and to general policy formation, TfL is developing a Freight Strategy for London. At the core is a working group, run by TfL but with members from the GLA, the ALG, the three transport modes (road, rail and water), London business and the London Forum. Each represents a number of bodies, and as the LF person, I also represent Transport 2000. The group has been meeting since December, and it is hoped to present a full draft to the LSDP in April. The overall approach is indicated by a draft vision and objectives.

Vision:

"The reliable and efficient movement of freight within London in balance with the needs of other transport users, London's environment and Londoners' quality of life."

Objectives:

Economy

- Support London's growth in population and economic activity
- Improve the efficiency of freight distribution and servicing within London
- Balance the needs of freight transport and servicing with those of other transport users and other demands from London's resources.

Environment

- Reduce emissions of local air pollutant, CO₂ and noise caused by freight and servicing.

Society

- Minimise the impact of noise and vibration on the public and reduce the negative impacts of freight and servicing on communities.
- Reduce deaths, injuries and ill-health associated with freight movement and servicing.

Discussion of the detailed strategy

Discussion of the detailed strategy is still

➔ *Continued on page 7*

Community plans – get your society involved

Tony Michael of Wimbledon Society reports.

The Vision: “The reliable and efficient movement of freight within London in balance with the needs of other transport users, London’s environment and Londoners’ quality of life.”

in its initial stages, but a wide range of issues is being addressed. These include: the extent to which funds should be provided to enable and encourage switching from road to rail and water; within each mode, the balance between movement of people and freight (eg, establishing a metro type service may limit the ability of rail to handle freight); what measures should be supported to reduce road congestion (the biggest single factor in terms of efficiency, and estimated to cost London £800m per annum); a goods vehicle route network; emission and noise standards; space for loading/unloading, and enforcement of parking regulations; the size of vehicles entering the often small scale road systems of town centres. This final issue, strongly emphasised by some in the Forum, has been neglected, and is likely to need pressure from member societies through their boroughs, as well from the Forum itself, to move it up the agenda.

Your views on any of these issues

Views on any of these issues (and relevant examples) from member societies are welcome – the sooner the better.

You can email me at r.j.allard@qmul.ac.uk. We hope to provide an update on developments in the next issue ■

Some London Forum members may have picked up information from their Council, or local libraries or the Web, about an exercise that is under way to prepare a Community Plan, or Community Strategy, for their Borough.

This has its origins in the Local Government Act 2000, which placed a duty on local authorities to promote the economic, social and environmental well-being of their area. This included a statutory duty to produce a Community Plan.

This process started some two or three years ago. Some Boroughs produced these plans quickly, but for a short time-frame; others looked perhaps ten years ahead, but few considered how these might link up with their UDP. Boroughs are now revising what they did two or three years ago and need to consider how the vision prepared for the Community Strategy will relate to the vision for their new -style development plans - the Local Development Framework.

Local Strategic Partnerships

To produce their Community Strategy, Boroughs need to work closely with other public bodies and community and voluntary sector, in a Local Strategic Partnership (LSP). The aim of the LSP is to prepare an overarching approach that knits together the currently rather unco-ordinated plans of a wide range of bodies involved in providing public services. The membership of the LSP usually includes, in addition to the Local Authority, the Health Authority, the Police, Education Authority, Job centres, Skills Councils, Chambers of Commerce, voluntary and community organisations and others.

Some Councils are taking the lead role in the preparation of the new strategy, others are working under the leadership of Chambers of Commerce or other bodies.

The range of subjects covered by these new strategies is intended to be much wider than in the conventional UDP; for example, the creation of safer and stronger communities, meeting transport needs, establishing healthier communities, maintaining economic viability, better accessibility to housing, raising standards in schools, local services in local centres, leisure and arts futures, as well as transforming or enhancing the local environment. The Community Strategies

should include the aspirations of residents for the improvements they want to see in their areas.

The timetable

The timetable for the production of these strategies is tight, and most have to be finished in the spring, and will then be publicly available. There should be public consultation on their content. Community groups should look also for measurements that will be applied to these strategies for monitoring achievement of their aims. Those might be Quality of Life Indices or annual opinion surveys.

UDPs will be replaced

The intention is that these new Community Plans will provide the background, against which the programmes of each of the partners will have to be produced in the coming year. The new-style development plans - the Local Development Frameworks which are to replace the UDPs - will have to have regard to these strategies. It is vital that Societies contribute to the content and direction of the Community Plans at an early stage bearing in mind that they will need to be expressed in terms that they produce a vision of how the Borough will develop over the next 10 years. They will need to be translated into spelling out where development should take place as well as proposals for the new plans ■

Comment by Peter Eversden:

Member societies should clarify with their borough when the Local Development Scheme for their Local Development Framework will be prepared. It should identify all the Development Plan Documents that will be prepared to replace their UDP. Look up the document **The Planning System: General Principles** on the ODPM website www.odpm.gov.uk. Your feedback about your Council would be welcomed.

Spotlight on Islington Society

Tony Aldous looks at the patch of London his parents came from – and finds the local amenity society battling for a civilised environment.

For once, in throwing the Spotlight on a London Forum member society, I find it necessary to “declare an interest”. I’ve never lived in Islington, but my mother and father were both born and grew up there, one in Barnsbury, the other in a house in Union Square – since demolished by the council to make way for the Packington Estate, which itself now faces demolition. They married at Holy Trinity church in Cloudesley Square. My grandfather owned a tiny workshop in Copenhagen Street where he and two others made wooden mirror frames – now replaced by much needed public open space.

A personal reminiscence

In the mid 1950s one of my aunts felt obliged to sell a pair of Barnsbury houses for £150, so desperate had the excess of maintenance costs over controlled rent become. My younger daughter has done rather better with a flat in Highbury which has gained in value astonishingly over the 10 years she has owned it. Islington is and was a place of disturbing contrasts. It is, as Andrew Bosi, chair of the Islington Society, puts it, “characterised by very rich being close neighbours to very poor, with too few people in between”.

The origins of the Society

The Society was founded in 1960 as a result of growing concern that the whole character of the place was under threat. The changes it worried about included new buildings which were out of scale and out of character, and yellow sodium lights which may have been good for safety but gave out a light that leached the colour from everything it touched and, moreover, were mounted on exceptionally ugly concrete columns. “We’re almost rid of them now,” says Bosi. The council has adopted a better design more suitable to conservation areas, though it is rather more expensive.

The founders of the society were in many cases outsiders who moved there because they liked its harmonious pattern of Georgian and Victorian squares and terraces (then by no means so smart and well-cared for) but also valued its mixed neighbourhoods, with professionals living cheek by jowl with traditional working class families. Ironic, then, that they sometimes find themselves accused of being part of a gentrification

process which has increasingly pushed out the less well off – though it has to be said that those among them who were able to purchase bricks and mortar have seen these assets appreciate beyond all expectations.

The Packington Estate

One of the society’s earliest battles concerned the Packington Estate, an area of 1840s terrace housing north of the Regent’s Canal and halfway between the Angel and New North Road. In 1963 Islington council began replacing this Victorian housing with what Bridget Cherry describes in the north London Pevsner as “unappealing five- and six-storey blocks with dark gritty panels”. Housing minister Richard Crossman’s decision to approve the scheme was later lambasted by a government inquiry, but too late to save most of the houses which could have been, like others nearby, refurbished to provide good quality social housing. Four decades later the Packington Estate has been found to be suffering from a sickness similar to that which brought down the Ronan Point tower block.

The tenants would like a redevelopment where they would remain council tenants; Islington’s Lib-Dem administration sees a private finance deal as the best way forward. The Islington Society is mainly concerned at the scale and impact of the proposed buildings. It argues that the council’s intended density is too high, and favours four-storey buildings without lifts providing a reasonable density rather than the six and eight storeys the council wants. One point at issue is how housing densities should be calculated. They should not, argues Bosi, count the adjacent canal as if it were normal, usable open space. “It restricts rather than enhances access or egress,” he points out.

The need for high density recognised

It should be added that the society does not favour low-density housing. Its president, architect Harley Sherlock, has long been eloquent in arguing that imaginative reworking of the traditional Victorian pattern of three- and four-storey housing can actually deliver both better living conditions and higher densities than most council plans stipulate, and make for more cohesive, better functioning communities into the bargain.

Concerns over shops, parking and traffic

Another issue currently causing the society great concern has to do with shops, parking and traffic. It recently celebrated a public inquiry decision refusing consent for a superstore which would have drained life from local shops. But now, says Andrew Bosi, draconian and inflexible parking controls are making life impossible for many of those shopkeepers. It has not so far had much success in persuading the council to be more flexible towards car-genuine loading and unloading, but has made some progress with a poster campaign urging local people to use local shops – and go to them by bus, cycle or on foot. However Bosi believes part of the trouble is Transport for London’s new “bendy-buses”. Though popular with bus users, they are, he says, in streets like Islington’s Essex Road, too long and cumbersome to use the restricted road space efficiently. So they cause congestion, with ever more stringent parking controls introduced to try to deal with it.

‘The A1 borough’

Another current cause of disquiet is the council’s strategy of promoting itself as “the A1 borough”, with plans for major development at four key junctions on that road. Much will depend on the scale and nature of that development, but, with the A1 already overloaded, the society is extremely worried about the traffic implications.

Recent successes

Asked about the society’s biggest successes, its chairman points to the retention of many Victorian terraces – an abiding success which made up for, and in some sense may have resulted from, the loss of the original, 19th century Packington streets. He also takes pleasure in the way in which, after years of unresponsiveness by property owners, rooms above shops are coming back into use – often residential use. Other successes include saving the Matilda Street chimney, a local landmark and a valued piece of industrial heritage in the midst of residential Barnsbury; and the conversion of St Luke’s church, Old Street, into a rehearsal space and music education centre for the London Symphony Orchestra. The society can justly claim a hand in this because its own architectural award scheme celebrated landscape improvements round the shell



Islington Society

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of this ruined Hawksmoor church and in doing so made it look less like a ruin and more a suitable case for Lottery assisted repair and conversion

Set up originally as a memorial to Islington's conservation officer in the 1980s, Geoffrey Gribble, the awards have alternated between new buildings and restoration projects. Apart from St Luke's, they have included modern infill buildings in Clerkenwell, a canal bridge, relandscaping of gardens round Islington's parish church, St Mary's, and two pubs reusing redundant buildings of some distinction – one a dairy, the other a cinema, the Coronet.

Though it has achieved much, the society has little inclination to rest on its laurels. Its membership – a respectable 500 – is concentrated in fashionable central Islington, either side of lively Upper Street, with other pockets in Highbury and towards Highgate. It needs more members in areas like Clerkenwell and Holloway. It also – like all too many amenity societies – needs people from outside its traditional older, middle class core. But probably the biggest challenge it, and Islington council, face is how to reconcile density of development and activity with a civilised environment. Traffic has to be tamed; more affordable homes provided; the local economy developed – but without damaging a sensitive physical and social fabric, and without killing off the essential "fizz" which makes Islington, despite its problems, a very popular place to live ■

The biggest challenge is how to reconcile density of development and activity with a civilised environment.



Age 45; born autumn 1960

Circumstances of birth growing alarm at threatened drastic change in a harmonious streetscape; dislike of yellow "sod-um" streetlights on ugly concrete pillars.

Biggest successes (1) retention of many Victorian terraces after initial losses at Packington Street. (2) Return to mostly residential use of empty rooms over shops. (3) Saving Matilda Street chimney. (4) Conversion of derelict Hawksmoor church into orchestral centre. (5) Successful campaign for reasonably scaled commercial development at King's Cross.

Biggest disappointments/frustrations (1) Loss of Victorian terraces at Packington Square. (2) Council's failure to protect canalside against over-development. (3) Threat to local shops from harsh parking regime together with congestion aggravated by "bendy-buses".

Present preoccupations (1) King's Cross redevelopment (mostly over border in Camden). (2) Arsenal football ground redevelopment. (3) Parking and local shopping. (4) Council plans for development at four major junctions on the A1.

Working details Membership nudging 500 mark. Committee of 15, chaired by Andrew Bosi, meets six times a year. Islington News published XX times a year. Subscriptions: £8 single, £10 couples, £20 corporate.

Special characteristics (1) Islington characterised by very rich being close neighbours to very poor, with too few people in between. (2) Society's membership strong on architecture, planning and transport. (3) Close links with other local societies (archaeology and history, gardeners, Canonbury Society, Angel Improvement Trust) and good neighbours (Hackney, Highgate and Camden Societies). (4) Architectural awards recognising both conservation and new buildings.

Last word "Our membership is concentrated in certain parts of the borough. We need to recruit more widely, in every sense".

Sub regional development frameworks

SRDFs will have a major influence on your local UDPs and LDFs, which must be compatible with them and with the London Plan. **Peter Eversden** reports.

This article is long and detailed – but critical for all LF members please read it!

SRDFs will have a major influence on your Local Development Plans, which will be part of the Local Development Frameworks, that must replace all UDPs. The development plan documents in the LDFs will have to be in general conformance with the policies of the London Plan (LP) and will have to describe how the issues identified in the SRDFs will be addressed to meet the aims of the LP. SRDFs for the East and South sub regions should be finished by early March. The others will be available during March or early April. The consultation period on them all will be about three months. The Forum will hold an open meeting for members on the issues that have been identified, and the implications for the Local Development Frameworks and for the update of the London Plan.

Preparation partners

The preparation of the SRDFs is being led by the GLA Spatial Development and Planning team and the London Development Agency with the boroughs and their partners that form London's sub-regions.

Purpose and scope

The purpose and scope of the SRDFs can best be explained by the following extracts of sections from the LP. This should help Forum members to consider how well their SRDF covers the topics identified when the Frameworks are published for consultation.

The preamble to the LP states that it provides a clear framework within which all of the stakeholders in London's future can plan their own activities to best effect, and enables Londoners to participate

in shaping the future of their city, mostly at the sub-regional level. SRDFs are confirmed as the key vehicles for resolving strategic cross-borough issues.

Para. 6.18 of the LP proposes that the Mayor's Annual Monitoring Report, published at the end of January, on progress in implementing the London Plan should be used "as material for the consideration of Sub-Regional Development Frameworks, Community Strategies and UDPs (now LDFs) and as inputs to the first review of the London Plan and of other mayoral strategies."

Sub-regional arrangements

The London Plan describes the sub-regional arrangements as follows:

Sub-Regions are the primary geographical features for implementing strategic policy at the sub-regional level. They are:

Central: Camden, Islington, Kensington and Chelsea, Lambeth, Southwark, Wandsworth, Westminster.

East: Barking and Dagenham, Bexley, City, Greenwich, Hackney, Havering, Lewisham, Newham, Redbridge, Tower Hamlets.

South: Bromley, Croydon, Kingston, Merton, Richmond, Sutton.

West: Brent, Ealing, Hammersmith and Fulham, Hillingdon, Harrow, Hounslow.

North: Barnet, Enfield, Haringey, Waltham Forest.

Policy directions and focus for implementation for each of the five identified sub-regions are to be produced by the Mayor in partnership with boroughs and other stakeholders. They will provide guidance on Opportunity, Intensification and Regeneration Areas, town centres, suburbs and Strategic Employment Locations. They will be consistent with, and provide further guidance on, the policies in the London Plan. SRDFs will be non-statutory documents.

Strategic priorities

Strategic priorities for each sub-region are given in chapter 5 of the LP.

SRDF development will involve the participation of infrastructure providers, and representation from the private sector, voluntary sector and community groups (LP Policy 5A.1 and para. 5.6). "The starting point for the development of SRDFs is therefore an analysis of how the forecast

population and economic growth will impact across London in the sub-regions, together with an assessment of the linkages necessary between land use, transportation and intensification to meet that growth."

LP Policy 6A.9 states that the Mayor will work with the voluntary and community sectors both locally and at the sub-regional level to develop their role in the delivery of skills, training and services and community empowerment.

Para. 1.22: "There are especially strong interactions between communities across the London boundaries. A key feature of the Sub-Regional Development Frameworks will be the achievement of the most effective and sustainable relationships across these boundaries. Attention is also drawn to the need for SRDFs to address the issues of co-ordination that may arise where priority areas for action straddle borough boundaries. The regional and local government authorities in the South East and East regions will be appropriately involved in this work." Attention is also drawn to the need for SRDFs to address the issues of co-ordination that may arise where priority areas for action straddle borough boundaries.

Sustainability criteria:

Policy 2A.1 – The Mayor will use the following criteria in developing SRDFs and when considering UDPs and planning applications referred to him:

- optimising the use of previously developed land and vacant or underused buildings.
- using a design-led approach to optimise the potential of sites.
- ensuring that development occurs in locations that are currently, or are planned to be, accessible by public transport, walking and cycling.
- ensuring that development occurs in locations that are accessible to town centres, employment, housing, shops and services.
- ensuring that development takes account of the capacity of existing or planned infrastructure including public transport, utilities and community infrastructure, such as schools and hospitals.
- taking account of the physical constraints on the development of land, including, for example, flood risk, ensuring that no significant harmful impacts occur, or that

The LP states that it enables Londoners to participate in shaping the future of their city.

- such impacts are acceptably mitigated.
- taking account of the impact that development will have on London's natural resources, environmental and cultural assets and the health of local people.
 - taking account of the objectives of preventing major accidents and limiting their consequences.
 - taking account of the suitability of sites for mixed use development and the contribution that development might make to strengthening local communities.

Opportunity Areas

Para. 2.8 explains "Opportunity Areas have been identified on the basis that they are capable of accommodating substantial new jobs or homes and their potential should be maximised. Typically, each can accommodate at least 5,000 jobs or 2,500 homes or a mix of the two, together with appropriate provision of other uses such as local shops, leisure facilities and schools. These areas generally include major brownfield sites with capacity for new development and places with potential for significant increases in density. Their development should be geared to the use of public transport and they are either located at areas of good access or would require public transport improvements to support development. Their detailed boundaries, capacity and policies will be identified in Sub-Regional Development Frameworks, in participation with local communities, and in UDPs" (LDFs). Similar details are applied to Intensification Areas and Strategic Employment Locations.

Housing type and quantity

SRDFs are also required to indicate housing types and quantities, the needs of the education sectors and the mixed use development to be sought. They should support the establishment of green industries and green practices in business. SRDFs will cover the minimisation of the environmental impacts of the increase in capacity of airports. They will contain assessment of the need for new retail development and cultural and sports facilities. For rural London, SRDFs will explore the potential for taking forward the concept of Community Forests. SRDFs will identify suitable locations for tall buildings. There will be policies at sub-regional level for dealing with the social and economic impact

assessments in Areas for Regeneration. The LP requires sub-regional partnerships and boroughs to avoid planning delays and facilitate site assembly, if necessary, through the compulsory purchase process.

Town centres

Policy 2A.5 requires that a robust strategy for town centres in each subregion be developed through SRDFs, taking into account the relationship with town centres in adjoining sub-regions and in the regions adjoining London, to provide strategic direction for the development of the network of centres. They are to accommodate economic growth, meeting the needs of Londoners and improving the sustainability of London's development.

Para. 2.16 states that SRDFs will

- promote the complementary offer of different centres in the network;
- sustain and enhance the viability and vitality of town centres and manage changes in their functions;
- encourage their contribution to sustainable development and a polycentric pattern of development;
- help assess future need and capacity for different types of town centre related uses and provide strategic guidance on accommodating them in terms of this plan's policies, if necessary, reconciling need and capacity within the network as a whole.

Sustainability

LP Policy 4A.3 is for waste management and para. 4.8 states that this topic will be covered by an early alteration to the London Plan "to inform the preparation of the SRDFs".

Para. 4.18 requires "...boroughs to set consistent targets for the generation of renewable energy in their areas, to install at least one zero carbon development and to identify Energy Action Areas. These concepts will be addressed in the SPG or development of SRDFs with a view to incorporating the outcomes into the first review of the London Plan."

Regeneration Areas

Para. 5.5 says "The focus of SRDFs will be to address issues of wider than borough significance that need to be addressed at a sub-regional level. The frameworks

will provide guidance on development in each sub-region, including the Opportunity, Intensification and Regeneration Areas, town centres, suburbs and Strategic Employment Locations (SELS). Draft SRDFs will be consulted upon. SRDFs will inform the review of, or an alteration to, the London Plan. If they give rise to the need for new policy content, this will be addressed through an early alteration to or review of this plan, including all necessary consultation."

Annex 4 of the LP advises that "Further work is being undertaken with adjoining regions to bring parking standards in neighbouring areas outside London closer to those appropriate in outer London over time. This will be reflected in the SRDFs."

Progress so far

The GLA spatial development team has been holding discussions with key stakeholders on the process for the development of the SRDFs and on the main issues that had been identified for the sub-regions at the end of 2004. Newsletters are being published to explain who is involved and to indicate the timetable for SRDF development and consultation.

The next stages – action by civic societies London Forum members should consider what key issues they have with local plans, policies and developments and the implementation of the London Plan in their area. They should identify the borough officers and other sub-regional partners with whom those points could be discussed. Council Community and Cultural Strategies should be examined. Societies are urged to have a representative at the Sub-Regional Development Framework review and development sessions within each sub-region and prepare for the SRDF consultations from March 2005.

Societies should ensure they are listed in their borough's Statement of Community Involvement for the preparation of a Local Development Framework and associated planning documents that will replace the Unitary Development Plan.

Contact details for the sub-regions can be found on page 13 ■

For more information see:

www.london.gov.uk/mayor/planning/docs/monitoringreport.pdf

South London SRDF Seminar

David Lewis attended a seminar held by the GLA and the South London Partnership.

Sub-Regional Development Frameworks (SRDFs) are due to be in place before the end of the year, following a three month consultation period. But the drafts have been slow in emerging.

A seminar held in October 2004, with representatives of the GLA and the South London Partnerships discussed key issues for the Region. It was essentially a presentation of GLA thinking to Partnership members who included representatives from Bromley, Kingston upon Thames, Wandsworth, and the Chief Executive of South London Business. Several of the GLA team shot through parts of their presentations at such speed that it was impossible to absorb the content!

The Mayor's advisor, Robin Thompson, characterised SRDFs as a source of ideas for future reviews of the London Plan. He listed as issues the first review of the London Plan (beginning in 2006) will have to consider, the Olympics, expansions in airport capacity, the new housing capacity study, waste policy and targets, and transport improvements at sub-regional level.

The discussion ranged over housing, employment and training, transport, health, education and retailing. Issues such as the release of Green Belt land for housing; the lack of small business premises in South London; the conversion of employment land to mixed uses, revealed some wide differences of view.

Important factors will be that migration from London to other parts of the UK is starting to exceed immigration from other countries; and that London has a high proportion of single people who are content to share rather than create separate households.

London Forum executive committee members have been involved in some of the discussions leading to the preparations of SRDFs.

The full report of this seminar, putting some more detail of the thinking which is going into South London Sub-Regional Development Framework, is available to London Forum members by email from David Lewis: drlewis27@yahoo.com ■

Parliamentary committee launches attack on mobile phone companies

The Report of the All Party Parliamentary Mobile Telephones Group, released back in July 2004, was described by the Evening Standard as launching "a blistering attack on mobile phone companies", accusing them "of walking all over the feelings of local people, and councils of failing to understand the issues". It called for mandatory full planning applications for all masts. The Committee's main recommendations can be summarised as follows:

- that the Government should implement Sir William Stewart's recommendation (Independent Expert Group Report on Mobile Phones), that permitted development rights be revoked for the erection of all base stations.
- that a joint body be established between the Government and the industry, with representatives from local authorities and the regulator (Ofcom), to aim to build confidence between all parties and the community; sign a concordat regarding working practices; lay down and monitor informal consultation processes; sponsor joint research.
- that methods of providing technical advice to local planning authorities are actively sought, and that fees are increased to reflect the resource demands on local authorities in considering applications.
- that sharing solutions continue to be pursued by the industry in conjunction with local planning authorities and that further research is carried out in this field.
- that further research be carried out to identify best practice in other European countries.

Revision of the GPDO

- The provisions of the GPDO in respect of telecommunications should be comprehensively reviewed and revised, using plain English, including a review of permitted development rights on Article 1(5) land.
- In a revised GPDO, the Government should investigate emergency provisions, but with more stringent regulations regarding what constitutes an emergency, and with suitable penalties for operators who do not comply with these procedures.

A revised PPG8

- should specify much more clearly the arrangements for public consultation during annual pre-rollout discussions to encourage local planning authorities, in conjunction with the operators, to publicise strategic plans for mobile phone networks. The perceived risk and fear arising out of health concerns could be reduced by adopting consultation methods aimed at involving the public more.
- should include further guidance on pre-application discussions, and consultation and advertisement arrangements should be widened to ensure that everyone who might be affected is well informed.
- should reflect Sir William Stewart's (2000) recommendations that the precautionary approach be adopted when considering the siting and location of masts, until much more detailed and scientifically robust information on health effects becomes available
- should contain best practice guidance: ODPM and mobile phone operators should undertake research into the potential of alternative design solutions for telecommunication apparatus to reduce visual intrusion.

Local planning authorities

- should be obliged by the Secretary of State to include a Telecommunications Plan as a local development document.
- should lay down policies and guidance in the development plan on the siting, design and appearance of telecommunications installations with the aim of minimising the visual impact of mobile phone masts and base stations.
- should follow a more rigorous procedure in the process of searching for and allocating sites.

We acknowledge that changes to legislation can take some time to implement, but in order to restore confidence in the planning system, we recommend that a ministerial statement be made as soon as possible to add strength to the requirements for consultation on pre-application proposals. (see next page) ■

Telecommunications masts. New procedures

The Minister's statement.

In his Parliamentary statement of December 9th, Planning Minister Keith Hill said that both local councils and mobile phone operators should carry out proper public consultation with local people when making decisions about where masts should go. Masts need to be sited sensitively to minimise their environmental impact and local concerns. In his statement, he said:

"I am seeking to place a renewed emphasis on the importance of both the local planning authority and network operators participating in the annual rollout discussion process described in the Code of Best Practice on Mobile Phone Network Development. The importance of this was recognised in Planning Policy Guidance Note 8 (revised) Telecommunications (PPG8) and the Code of Practice and has recently been emphasised by the All Party Group on Mobile Phones (apMobile) in their report into planning procedures.

The report recognised the benefits of local planning authorities and operators working with the local community, to review annual

roll out plans and to develop local strategies for telecommunication developments... it is desirable that in their local development frameworks, local planning authorities consider how they plan to manage the developments needed to meet the growing demand for communication services.

I am also reiterating the importance of effective pre-application discussions... In accordance with the Code of Best Practice, it is reasonable for the local planning authority to expect that evidence of the consultation undertaken should be provided as part of the supplementary information sent with an application.

In respect of the Court of Appeal case, *First Secretary of State v T-Mobile* and others, on 12 November the Court dismissed an appeal by the First Secretary of State against the decision of Sir Richard Tucker in relation to an application by T Mobile for a shared mast in Harrogate. The issue was whether the High Court had dealt correctly with the extent to which public fears about the health risks arising from masts was material, when the

Both local councils and mobile phone operators should carry out proper public consultation with local people.

development in question had the benefit of an ICNIRP certificate. Sir Richard had held that the Inspector had misconstrued PPG8 when dealing with this issue in his Decision Letter. The Court of Appeal gave consideration to the policy guidance in PPG8.

The Court found the FSS' policy to mean that in cases where an ICNIRP certificate exists, only in exceptional circumstances would it be legitimate for a local planning authority to take public fears about health risks into account. They agreed with Sir Richard that the Inspector had misconstrued this advice, and his decision was therefore flawed." ■

SRDF contacts

Useful SRDF contacts

North

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Unit AO12 The Chocolate Factory,
Clarendon Road, Wood Green,
London N22 6XJ

Telephone 020 8352 5920

e alison.dickens@urbanfutures-london.org.uk

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Central London Partnership,
29 Heddon Street, London W1B 4BL

Telephone 207 478 8479

Facsimile 207 478 8461

e pbrown@c-london.co.uk

w www.c-london.co.uk

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Deputy Chief Executive: Strategy,
Thames Gateway London Partnership,
8th Floor Anchorage House,
2 Clove Crescent, East India Dock,
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South London Partnership,
Suite 4.01, 4th Floor, Segas House West,
20 Katharine Street, Croydon CR0 1NX

Telephone 020 8726 0172

Facsimile 020 8726 0572

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West:

Ian Nichol,
West London Alliance

Telephone 020 8825 8566

e nicholl@ealing.gov.uk

Round the Societies

A round up of news from our member societies.

By **George Parish**.

Green Belt Holds Firm

The Mill Hill Preservation Society has welcomed the Inspector's report on Barnet's UDP, which recommends that there should be no change to the existing Green Belt boundaries within the borough and rejects six proposals which would have infringed it. Meanwhile, at a separate appeal hearing, another inspector has ruled that a "tellytubby house" designed by London Eye architect, David Marks, should not be built on Green Belt / Conservation Area land on The Ridgeway.

Highgate Acoustics

The Highgate Society is concerned at the gradual deterioration of the streetscape and the indifference towards it both of local authorities and private owners. A recent example has been the stark 6 foot plus acoustic fence erected down Archway Road. Not only does this destroy any view of greenery which residents and shopkeepers once had but it traps pollution within the confines of the road and, far from reducing traffic noise, turns the Archway Road into an echo chamber. TfL's acoustic consultants have clearly got it very wrong.

Underground History

The Kensington Society has welcomed the listing of South Kensington Station, whose special features comprise the arcaded walls at track level of the original Brompton Exchange Station of 1867-8, the street-level arcade between Thurloe and Pelham Streets (the first shopping arcade in a tube station) and the 1907 Pelham Street frontage. This should ensure that (unlike the recent "gasometer" proposal) any redevelopment respects the listed features and is sensitive to its context.

Apathy?

A contributor to the Waltham Forest Civic Society Bulletin complains that, although the Government says it wants people to be more active in local politics, successive governments have evolved a planning system that ensures they are discouraged. The Cabinet system has not helped and Waltham Forest now has no Conservation Areas Advisory Committee or Heritage Panel. Its UDP is so cumbersome and time-consuming that the Civic Society has not got involved in its recent updating.

What is a Brownfield Site?

The Wimbledon Society draws our attention to an article in the Journal of the Royal Horticultural Society about the growing practice of "garden snatching" by developers. This has been facilitated by John Prescott's decision to allow gardens to be designated as brownfield sites. In PPG3 (Housing), previously developed land is defined as that which is or was occupied by a permanent structure and associated fixed surface infrastructure. But this covers all the land within a property's curtilage, including its mature gardens, which are thus made available for redevelopment, usually with blocks of flats.

The Horniman

The Tewkesbury Lodge Estate RA Newsletter, News From the Hill, has a lot of news about the Horniman Museum and Gardens. They

have won awards for Museum of the Year, Family Attraction of the Year and Britain's Best Park For the South East, and have retained their Green flag status. A complaint about bonfires in the Gardens is balanced by the Garden Manager's account of the increasingly ecological techniques that are being introduced, though he also points out that removing visitors' litter costs £20,000 a year.

Stations Old and New

The Sydenham Society reviews the history of Forest Hill Station, one of those to be served by the extended East London Line. (Alight here for the Horniman). There have been four stations on the site, the third of which formed a worthy centrepiece to Forest Hill but was badly damaged by a flying bomb and finally demolished in 1972. Its replacement is described as probably the smallest, meanest and least attractive of all the stations that have served Forest Hill.

The Peckham Experiment

Peckham's famous 1930s Pioneer Health Centre has provided the name for a bistro/bar in the new urban village of SE15, where it brings continental style to a borough not renowned for gastronomic excellence. Its lamb navarin and duck fillet, followed by creme brulee or sticky toffee pudding, have won the praise of the Camberwell Society. But would Sir Owen Williams have approved?

George Parish ■

Some websites of interest

The Town and Country Planning (Residential Density) Direction 2005 was published in January:

www.info4local.gov.uk/searchreport.asp?id=23085&heading=e-mail+alert

Sustainable Communities: Homes for All published by the ODPM in January:

www.info4local.gov.uk/searchreport.asp?id=23074&heading=e-mail+alert.htm

The Sustainable Communities Summit 2005 Newsletters:

Day 1

www.info4local.gov.uk/searchreport.asp?id=23202&heading=e-mail+alert

Day 2

www.info4local.gov.uk/searchreport.asp?id=23207&heading=e-mail+alert

London wide initiative to deliver high-quality affordable homes:

www.odpm.gov.uk/pns/displaypn.cgi?pn_id=2005_0028

London Housing Delivery Newsletter Issue one:

www.info4local.gov.uk/searchreport.asp?id=23211&heading=e-mail+alert

Waternet News is the name of an e-newsletter, which appeared in November 2004, aiming to keep you updated on water transport initiatives in London. For information, contact Jonathan Rosenberg on: Rosenberg@freeuk.com or 020 8960 7620.

Derelict London: An unofficial website which gives a photographic portrait of dereliction, neglect and abandonment in London:

www.derelictlondon.com

newsbriefs

Some key issues of concern to note.

Open All Hours

The Civic Trust information leaflet on the Licensing Act and how civic societies etc. can become involved in the monitoring of applications. It will be posted on the CT's website. Copies of the Licensing Act 2003 and the Ministerial Guidance which accompanies it, are all available to be viewed on the DCMS website.

For licensing enquiries:

The Department of Media, Culture and Sport
2-4 Cockspur Street, London SW1Y 5DH
Telephone 020 7211 6200

[e alcohol.entertainment@culture.gov.uk](mailto:alcohol.entertainment@culture.gov.uk)

[w www.culture.gov.uk](http://www.culture.gov.uk)

Brave New Streetscape?

London Forum members will surely follow with interest Kensington and Chelsea's experiment in obliging traffic to 'share' space with pedestrians in Exhibition Road. All signs, lights and barriers will be removed, and the pavement and road will become one common space, restricted by a 20 m.p.h. speed limit. The impetus came from the town of Drachten in the Netherlands where, following removal of traffic lights, signs and road markings, motorists had to be much more careful. No serious accidents occurred. If the initiative is successful, the implications for our health-and-safety-regimented streetscapes will be far-reaching; but can the British driving culture adapt?

Fewer playing-field sell-offs?

During the autumn the Government announced a tightening-up of the regime governing the sale and redevelopment of school playing fields in England. Under the new arrangements, local authorities will have to demonstrate that they have exhausted all other sources of funding to pay for new school sports facilities, an argument often used to justify the sell-off of land. The proceeds from any playing fields sale will have to improve outdoor facilities, which will have to be sustainable for at least 10 years. The National Playing Fields Association are encouraged by the government's move, which should mean playing fields are lost only in the most extreme circumstances. Since 1998 playing field sales have required the prior approval of the government. In 2003 the Department for Education and Skills considered 17 applications for sell offs but only approved nine.

Design concerns in the Square Mile

Huddersfield MP Barry Sheerman, joint chair of the Parliamentary Design Group, who lives in the Barbican, is particularly incensed by office schemes built in the area. His call for a Parliamentary Inquiry into what he claims is the failure of the Corporation of London to ensure high-quality design for new and replacement buildings in the Square Mile was declined by planning minister Keith Hill on the grounds that local authorities are accountable to their electorate, their Auditor and ultimately to the Courts. Sheerman also failed to persuade Hill to meet the Royal Institute of British Architects or the construction industry to discuss the standards and quality of new buildings in historic parts of the City of London. Sheerman plans to push for a Commons adjournment debate.

Regeneration of Dukes Meadows Open Space

Neglected for many years, buildings in Dukes Meadows, Chiswick, became a target for vandals, rubbish was fly-tipped, and the whole area became a focus for anti-social behaviour. Local residents formed Friends of Dukes Meadows; new benches were built, litter collected and graffiti removed, and a strategy was drawn up for the long-term sustainable regeneration of the area. On 24th January local environmental quality minister Alun Michael commended the regeneration: "Parks are an important amenity for any community. They are the sorts of public places which will really benefit from the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Bill, currently being considered by MPs on the standing committee... People need to be involved in taking ownership of open spaces in their area and not expects government or local government to do it all." More information about the Friends of Dukes Meadows can be found at: [w www.fodm.org.uk](http://www.fodm.org.uk)

CABE: London local authorities design training

CABE has committed £150k to promote design standards in London Boroughs. It will fund the creation of the London Exemplar, a councillor training programme run by London Open House, and the continued funding for the London Authorities Urban Design Forum (LAUDF), a support and training network for council officers. CABE will fund both programmes for two years. Open House have recruited a Project Co-ordinator, and LAUDF will put in place a training programme aimed primarily at council officers. It will also strengthen existing networks between design and built environment organisations and individuals across London and promote the creation of design champions within London Boroughs as well as encouraging closer inter-borough working and discussion.

Nation-wide debate about architecture on C4

Channel 4 TV are currently working on an ambitious series which will be broadcast later in the year. It aims to kick-start a nation-wide debate about the value of architecture, showing how we can all influence the quality of the built environment. The programme aims to campaign for a better urban environment and provide the public with the opportunity to voice their opinions. They want to hear from local action groups who are campaigning to have a building demolished in order that the space be regenerated. For more information contact Emily Benson, emily.benson@oftv.co.uk, or telephone 0207 483 8822.

Gordon Brown pledges protection for Green Belt

"Following the recommendations by Lord Rogers, highlighted by John Prescott yesterday, the Deputy Prime Minister and I have developed a series of measures to renew run down local high streets and urban estates... showing that our objectives for growth and employment are not at odds with but complementary to our objectives for environmental care and protection. ...And through building regulations, planning guidance, our new Code for Sustainable Buildings and the Community Infrastructure Fund we are determined to drive up standards of energy and water efficiency, increase housing density and green space and tackle flood risk, while protecting and increasing the area of Green Belt.

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newsbriefs

Townscape Heritage Initiative

The Heritage Lottery Fund's Townscape Heritage Initiative, which supports local partnerships aiming to regenerate the historic environment, announces that bids under the 2005 round will be due in May. For an application form, ring 020 7591 6042 or access the website: www.hlf.org.uk/English/PublicationsAndInfo/AccessingPublications

Local Development Frameworks

A Guide for Heritage Groups is the title of Heritage Link's useful 6-page guide to getting involved in LDFs, which will be the successors of UDPs and other local structure plans. The Forum is a member of Heritage Link, a grouping of over 70 bodies concerned with the Heritage, set up in 2002 to speak with a more concerted voice on issues of concern. For a copy, apply to mail@heritagelink.org.uk or call 020 7870 7796.

Planning Appeals Reform

Planning Minister Keith Hill announced a package of reforms to help reduce the planning appeals backlog on December 16. These include an extra £1 million for the Planning Inspectorate to reduce the current 12-month delay in hearing appeals, and extending the time period in which an appeal can be lodged from three to six months in order to give local authorities and applicants more time to negotiate a compromise. The target time for local authorities for processing large applications has been increased from eight to thirteen weeks.

Barnet introduces compulsory recycling

Barnet will be the first London Borough to introduce compulsory recycling for all houses (flats with shared bins are excluded from recycling laws) following a successful pilot scheme. The aim is to recycle 30% of domestic waste in 2005/6.

London Open House Architecture Bulletin

London Open House has launched its Architecture Bulletin, issued ten times a year to give information about architectural and related events, tours, talks and exhibitions taking place in London. A year's subscription is £14.50 (promotional offer £12.50). For details call 020 7267 2070.

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Help still needed at London Forum

We currently have no 'Hon Sec' and too few people for our administration and publications.

As a result of illness and other problems, the Forum has lost several active members who were invaluable in helping us with our administrative workload.

At our AGM in September only half the committee members we need were nominated.

We are well aware that many societies have similar problems but please consider if you can suggest anyone who could help us or any jobs for which we could share someone.

Minute taking, organising meetings, visiting our office

to check and allocate correspondence, maintaining our membership database and giving advice for a website are all things that could help us.

Spotlight – help!

After eight years of writing our popular 'Spotlight' feature, Tony Aldous, taking up a trend currently fashionable among Government Ministers, has decided to retire in order to spend more time with his family. We are immensely grateful to him for all the time and work he has given to the Forum in making this regular feature one which our members always look forward to reading, and which provides an important link between all our member societies. This means that a new 'Spotlight' editor is needed. If there is anyone who would like to take up the challenge, please contact Michael Hammerson on 020 8341 1437. In the meanwhile if any society has a profile of their organisation that they have developed we would be pleased to consider it for publication.

If you, or someone in your society or group, would be willing to help in any way with this vital work, please contact the Chairman, Peter Eversden, urgently ■

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While the London Forum is concerned that the views written in articles are relevant and honestly held by the contributor, the opinions stated by individuals may not necessarily be held by the London Forum Executive, who are not in a position to vouch for their factual accuracy.