

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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What price a cabinet minister?

Betrayal of public trust

The sudden concern over former cabinet ministers Stephen Byers, Geoff Hoon and Patricia Hewitt's apparent willingness to influence government decisions on behalf of commercial firms, is somewhat belated. It has been going on for years. The changes to the planning acts pushed through at the behest of commercial interests, and the third runway at Heathrow where Geoff Hoon already has form, are prime examples (see report page 4).

Former cabinet minister Clive Soley has lobbied on behalf of the Airport industry business with impunity, and stated government policy has been changed against the interests of millions of Londoners. (see newsforum 53, 2009). In March 2009 the Daily Mail revealed Peter Mandelson's close links with Roland Rudd, whose PR firm Finsbury Ltd represents airport operator BAA.

The Labour Government since 1997 has a strange notion of what accountability should mean in a democratic society. It appears to believe that so long as it keeps repeating the mantra that "ministers should be clearly accountable" they can drive through any policy they want against the wishes of the electorate.

If your life is destroyed and you have no redress what difference does it make who is 'accountable'? The third runway at Heathrow is a prime example of this.

The Prime Minister's reaction to the recent High Court ruling, which may give some stay of execution, is chilling, showing no understanding whatsoever for the misery such a development will bring to millions of people. He just repeats his arrogant, well-worn phrases that he has taken "tough decisions" that are "the right decisions".

His transport minister Lord Adonis simply puts up two fingers to the public, the legal system and the High Court, stating: "Today's judgement marks no change whatsoever in the policy on Heathrow."

So much for democratic debate, accountability or consultation. ■

Civic Voice launched

Civic Voice rises from the ashes

After a year of intensive work Civic Societies have a new champion

Civic Voice is being launched on Saturday 17 April (2010) at London's Building Centre, Store Street, after a year of intensive work and consultation.

The announcement, by Tony Burton and Ian Harvey, "marks an important stage in the debate which followed the loss of the Civic Trust last April. Your thoughts and contributions have been vital in helping shape the new body. We have endeavoured to set it up in the best way possible to secure its independence and a grassroots approach. Now is the time to help build the momentum of enthusiastic support Civic Voice will need if the civic movement as a whole is to have the future it deserves".

The consultation findings were published in the report, *Own the future*, and societies have been kept informed of the progress through an excellent website, a helpful series of email bulletins, and regular Civic Society Live-discussion forums over the internet. Summaries of the main decisions and plans were regularly posted on the website. This all made interesting reading and gave an idea of what a valuable role a new organisation could play. One might not agree with all the decisions that have been taken but one cannot fault the thorough way in which it has been done, and Tony and Ian deserve our thanks.

The Underlying principles

The Underlying principles behind the decisions taken reflect a desire to:

- set up the framework necessary to make a success of Civic Voice while leaving as many important decisions as possible to the new Board (e.g. on the role of partner organisations in its governance)
- reflect the principles which commanded support during the debate around the new body being campaigning, responsive, light footed and grassroots
- establish a new national voice for the civic movement with a clear public purpose and a focus on the important role to be played by civic societies

It is hoped to establish a Civic Forum and a number of Open Forums around the country each year to enable civic societies to debate and discuss issues and priorities with Civic Voice, and to meet each other and trustees and staff. There will be targeted advice to civic societies on policy and planning issues and support on strengthening the civic society network.

The new name

In seeking a new name for the organisation, which will be registered as a charity and set up as a company limited by guarantee, they worked with expert advisors and held a workshop with civic society volunteers. A shortlist of four options emerged: Civic Matters - Civic Voice - C3 Championing Civic Causes - Civic Vision, and Societies were asked to vote on them. The name Civic Voice

attracted more than twice as many first choice votes as any other option

The costs

It is estimated that the cost of the proposed new organisation would be in the order of £300,000 to £400,000, significantly greater than the amount previously provided by civic societies to the Civic Trust. A transition period would therefore be required.

But they are budgeting for £180,000 in CivicVoice's first year which they envisage will fund two staff, office costs, meetings of societies and volunteers (including a national AGM and convention), development of a website, events, travel and publications, one or two campaigns (such as Street Pride), building a stronger media profile and lobbying on the highest priority issues. There will be no project funding.

In the event that the number of societies joining in the first year does not provide sufficient funds they will propose to seek financial support from other organisations. The hope is that CivicVoice will be on a sustainable financial footing, independently funded by the civic movement, after 3 years.

The membership fee

The membership fee for societies will be based on a "per capita levy", but excluding life members. In the first year this will be £1.50 per member, capped at a maximum of £500. Societies joining as "founder members" before the end of May 2010 will receive a 10% discount. However they expect that to rise to £2 per member from April 2011 and the cap to £800, to allow time for civic societies to adjust and determine how best to raise the necessary funds.

Regional groups and clusters of civic societies who have some form of memorandum of agreement or constitution can also join CivicVoice. Membership will cost £50 a year and will give access to benefits such as the insurance cover from Bluefin as well as being able to attend meetings and get involved in campaigns. Voting rights are limited to full members. By the end of March over 100 societies had signed up

Civic Society discussion forums highlighted strong support: "If you want something badly enough you'll find a way to pay for it" We do want to be involved.

Individuals will also be able to join CivicVoice. Individual membership has been set at £10 a year and is open to anyone with an interest in the civic movement.

Trustees

Applications were invited through the website for people to put themselves forward as trustees of CivicVoice, 6 places being available, and for a Chair and Treasurer. There were over 20 expressions of interest in becoming the first trustees of CivicVoice. Each civic society was able to vote for up to 3 candidates; short personal statements from each were posted on the website. The 922 civic societies who registered with the Civic Society Initiative were eligible to vote for the new trustees, and voting took place between 22 March and 9 April.

There will also be provision for 10 not-for-profit partners to nominate a single trustee between them if desired as previously proposed. Each of these issues will be for CivicVoice's Board to decide later in the year. They propose to hold the first AGM of CivicVoice in Autumn 2010 and would welcome suggestions for the venue. ■

For more information: how to join CivicVoice via the website at www.civicvoice.org.uk/join.html How to book the launch event at www.civicsocietyinitiative.org.uk/launch.html Instructions on how to access the discussion forum are also on the website.

Societies give their views

Comments from Civic Society Live -discussion forums highlighted strong support: If you want something badly enough you'll find a way to pay for it; I applaud the CS initiative; We DO want to be involved.

But this was tempered with concern, in particular about the high cost of joining: I do think you have got the support of the movement over the need for a national body - almost universally - but as we all know the funding is the issue; far too ambitious; no indicative budget to justify the need for £400k; membership model will force us out; a worry that it still too top-down; we must ensure the body does not get lost in extraneous things as the Civic Trust did.

In the words of one correspondent: I think we should give the new CS movement a chance for a year, see how effective the civic movement has become, and then get together again to discuss how we are doing. ■

Street Pride campaign

The next phase of the CivicVoice Street Pride campaign supported by English Heritage has been announced. It aims to rid our streets of unnecessary clutter and create streets we can be proud of.

There will be workshops hosted by civic societies across the country on Saturday mornings during May and June. They will be led by an experienced land use planner and community campaigner, Richard Bate. The workshops cost just £5 to cover light refreshments and places are limited to 30.

A Street Pride campaign pack is available and copies can be downloaded from the website at www.streetpride.org.uk If you have any questions about Street Pride or you would like to run your own session locally, please do get in touch through the CivicVoice website. ■

Love Local campaign

The Love Local campaign will be launched on 17 April. It will celebrate what is attractive, enjoyable and distinctive about where we live and what makes us proud to be there. There will be a survey for societies to give their views so that a nationwide picture can be built up of what communities love locally. Over 70 local groups have already signed up. ■

Strawberry Hill

Restoration of Horace Walpole's 'little Gothic castle' is underway.

Strawberry Hill, Horace Walpole's 18th century mock gothic villa in Twickenham has been saved from dereliction. The Strawberry Hill Trust, formed in August 2002 with a mission to restore and open it to a wider public has taken over a 120 year lease from the Catholic Education Service, the owner of the property, and with a £4.9m grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund, has now succeeded in raising the £8.9m needed to restore the villa and surrounding gardens. The Strawberry Hill Trust is supported by the Friends of Strawberry Hill and has also received generous help from English Heritage, The Architectural Heritage Fund, The Wolfson Foundation, and many others, both near-local societies - and as far afield as the Robert Wilson Challenge Fund in New York.

Horace Walpole acquired the lease of the little house in Twickenham, on a hillock called Strawberry Hill Shot, in 1747, when he was 30, and announced: "I am going to build a little Gothic castle on Strawberry Hill". He could afford to, because his father, Sir Robert, Britain's first prime minister, had been in office for more than 20 years, under George I and George II. These were corrupt times, and the older Walpole left office a very rich man.

Sellar and Yeatman's classic 1930 history pastiche, *1066 and All That*, sends them up: "Walpole ought never to be confused with Walpole, who was quite different," they explained. "It was Walpole who lived in a house with the unusual name of Strawberry Jam and spent his time writing letters to famous men (such as the Prime Minister, Walpole, etc)."

He spent 50 years and more than £20,000 – a vast sum in those days - expanding and improving the property. It became one of the capital's most famous addresses, inspiring the 19th-century Gothic revival in architecture and literature.

Horace Walpole had no immediate family, so he bequeathed the property to a female friend, who could not afford the upkeep, and handed it over to the Countess of Waldegrave. Her grandson, the 7th Earl, was a wild character, who in 1842, when he was heavily in debt, sold off all Walpole's treasures, in a sale that lasted 32 days, and abandoned the building. Fortunately his widow – who got through four husbands in all – had more taste.

She moved back into the house and used it to throw parties for the political elite. After she died, it was bought by the Catholic Education Council to use as a teacher training college thus saving it from demolition, while most of the surrounding estate was sold for housing.

It certainly wasn't built to last, with the apparently solid stone actually concealing red brick, lath and plaster, and medieval vaulting reproduced in papier mache. Victorian and 20th-century additions and alterations did the fragile structure no favours. By the 1990s, it was rotting and leaking, one of the most important Grade I-listed houses on the English Heritage Buildings At Risk register, and five years ago it made the World Monument Fund's register of the 100 most endangered sites in the world.

Work is due to be completed this summer and the house and gardens will be reopened to the public on Horace Walpole's birthday on the 24th of September. There is an exhibition currently at the V&A curated by Michael Snodin, Chairman of the Strawberry Hill Trust. ■



Above: An old print of the House
Left: the House today

If you want to object to the Bomber Command Memorial (right) email or write to: Mike Gray, Operations Director, Development Planning, Westminster City Council Bomber Command memorial Reference 10/00926/FULL City Hall 64 Victoria Street London SW1E 6QP email: southplanningteam@westminster.gov.uk.



Save The Green Park

The Thorney Island Society is urgently appealing for your help

The Bomber Command Association want to build a large memorial monument on the north side of The Green Park. With porticos and pillared loggias extending 60m along the park's Piccadilly frontage from the Hyde Park roundabout, in size it resembles a building rather than what one would usually consider a monument.

Should this be built there will be loss of natural parkland from this important green lung at the centre of London which has remained unbuilt for centuries. Views into the Park from Piccadilly will be reduced. The proposal contravenes many Planning Policies on Open Space, Design, and Location. The protection of our green open spaces, the views into and out of them and context sensitivity to their surroundings could not be more central to London's sustainability issues.

There is no specific memorial in central London, to the 55,000 who died in defence of the country during WW2, but the force is remembered in the RAF church of St Clement Danes in the Strand, with books of honour individually naming 125,000 airmen who died and a Bomber Command plaque. Countrywide there are very many memorials, including in Lincoln Cathedral, because the Command were mainly based in Lincolnshire. While one might empathise with the motivation of the Association, something on the scale of the recently erected memorial to the Battle of Britain on the Embankment, might be more appropriate.

The consultation period ends at the beginning of April. ■

Airport wars - the people fight back

What lengths will this government not go to, to force damaging and unwanted policies on the electorate? Controversy about flights over London has now spread to London City Airport; London Assembly calls for review; the Heathrow Judicial Review

City Airport.

Controversy about flights over London has now spread to London City Airport where the campaign group Fight the Flights is challenging their expansion.

Last May a new flight path was introduced over areas of Tower Hamlets, Waltham Forest and Redbridge which previously had few planes. Tens of thousands of residents now get planes overhead every few minutes at the busiest times of the day. Complaints about noise have risen by over 2,000% over the last year, and the airport, MPs and local authorities have been inundated with emails and letters.

The new, wider flight path was introduced because the large number of jet planes (rather than turbo-props) now using the airport could not make the narrow turn onto the previous flight path safely.

But CAA had long known that this would become a problem, and that the controversial new flight path was on the cards, five years before people were told about it.

Then in July 2009 Newham Council gave permission to increase the number of flights from 91,000 to 120,000 per year. Expansion was made conditional on tougher environmental controls for air quality and noise levels, (where have we heard that before!) which were to be monitored by borough staff.

Small airports are managed by the borough that contains them, not the Civil Aviation Authority. Newham failed to submit a Noise Action Plan in respect of the Airport changes and admitted that they didn't record any accurate noise data for eight years because their equipment wasn't working. Neither did they inform Redbridge and Waltham Forest, who oppose the plan.

Residents across Barking and Dagenham, Bexley, Greenwich, Hackney, Havering, and Tower Hamlets as well as Redbridge, and Waltham Forest, will be affected by an increase in flights. Many more people would have objected to the airport's recent application to increase flight numbers had they been properly informed.

In January Fight the Flights (FtF) won the right to apply for Judicial Review in the High Court against Newham Council's decision, expected to take place this summer.

A major undertaking for a campaign group based in one of Britain's poorest boroughs, FtF has a protected costs order which is only normally given where the Court recognises the public importance of the case. It will examine the legality of the Council's decision on three aspects:

- failure to have regard to the Government's policy on climate change and aviation;
- failure to consult relevant neighbouring local authorities; and
- failure to consult the residents of those boroughs.

A number of MPs, have expressed concern at the standard of consultation before the flight path was introduced. Fight the Flights has persuaded local MPs to set up an All-Party Parliamentary Group. The All-Party group is expected to be constituted formally after the General Election.

You can help donate to FtF fighting fund. Find out more on their website <http://fighttheflights.com>

London Assembly calls for review

The London Assembly has called on the Mayor to conduct an urgent review of Newham Council's decision. In a unanimously agreed motion the Assembly points out the growing nuisance from increased flight numbers and overflights to residents in Greenwich, Redbridge, Waltham Forest, Tower Hamlets, Barking & Dagenham, Bexley, Hackney and Havering.

The GLA Environment Committee is now investigating the environmental impacts of expansion at the airport, looking at noise, emissions and air quality, and whether the current safeguards and controls are adequate.

They want to hear from you if the extra flights at London City Airport are affecting you. You can email your views to David Bellman at david.bellman@london.gov.uk.

A public meeting will be held at City Hall on 10th June 2010 when the Committee hopes to hear people's views on the expansion of the airport and the environmental controls currently in place.

Havering Council U-turn on City airport plan

In February, Havering Council which had failed to consult, merely deferring to Newham, and issuing no decision, decided

to oppose the expansion of City Airport.

It declared that: "This council opposes any expansion of the airport. It also opposes any changes to the mode of operation of the airport, its hours of operation, flight paths or increases in aircraft noise".

It was found that the economic benefits had been exaggerated and there was no proof that a single job would be created.

Vanishing Heathrow emails

The Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) is to launch an "intensive investigation" of emails filed by the Department for Transport (DfT) about the 3rd runway after accusations were made that they had deleted internal emails which might show that government officials skewed the evidence in collusion with BAA in favour of the expansion of Heathrow airport.

Putney MP Justine Greening (C) has been trying to obtain these emails about the Heathrow consultation for nearly two years. When they were released it was clear that there were crucial gaps just at the time the government was pushing through its controversial plans for the third runway. An email sent between the DfT and BAA on November 1 2007 referred to potentially damaging information and asked: "Can we play down?" The reply is among those emails that have apparently gone missing.

Ms Greening made three identical requests for an investigation under the Freedom Of Information (FOI) Act, in July 2006, September 2007 and April 2008. Although a BAA spokesperson said the company was not covered by the FOI Act and had "no comment", it is a criminal offence to delete or conceal records to prevent them from being disclosed under the Act.

Lawyers acting for claimants in the judicial review of Heathrow expansion, saw this report of the apparent destruction of internal communications about Heathrow as demonstrating "bad faith" that could strengthen their case that the consultation was flawed.

Questionable ministerial conduct.

In March last year, Norman Baker, Liberal Democrat transport spokesman, asked a Parliamentary question about the close

relationship between Peter Mandelson and Roland Rudd - whose PR firm represents airport operator BAA - and the extraordinary ministerial access Mr Rudd had to the top tiers of Government. Mr Rudd, or his company, met with ministers at least five times in ten days in the run-up to Labour's unpopular decision to go ahead with plans for a third runway.

MPs demanded that Gordon Brown order a top-level investigation, but of course no more has been heard about it.

Geoff Hoon, the then transport secretary, approved the third runway in January 2009 and indicated he would rush the project through to make it difficult for any incoming administration to overturn the decision. Recent events surrounding Mr Hoon beg the question as to why it should have mattered to him so much.

High Court verdict on Heathrow policy

The ruling in March in the Judicial Review on the faulty consultation procedures over the third runway, may have profound implications, not just for Heathrow but for airport expansion plans across the UK, and government policy generally.

The case was brought by a coalition of objectors. Six West London members* of the 2M Group which comprises 24 local councils opposed to Heathrow expansion, joined forces with local residents' group (NoTRAG), the national campaigning group HACAN, supported by the Mayor of London, Transport for London, WWF-UK, Campaign to Protect Rural England and Greenpeace.

- The three main grounds were
- that the January 2009 decision was fundamentally different from what was consulted on;
 - that the Government had failed to account properly for the road and rail congestion that would ensue;
 - and had not taken account of later environmental concerns.

Of particular significance was Lord Justice Carnwath's ruling on the Government's position that policy that had been decided could not be changed. This was "untenable in law and common sense". "Consistency of policy is of course a legitimate objective. However, it could not be regarded as immutable.no policy can be set in stone. It must be open

The Government's position that policy that had been decided could not be changed was 'untenable in law and common sense'.

to reconsideration in the light of changing circumstances". "Further, common sense demanded that a policy established in 2003, before the important developments in climate change policy, symbolised by the Climate Change Act 2008, should be subject to review in the light of those developments.there is nothing in law entitling the Secretary of State to limit that debate". It was not open to the Secretary of State "simply to stand on the principle of the policy decision made in the 2003 Air Transport White Paper without regard to the important developments since then".

Justice Carnwath explained that he could not find grounds to order the whole project to be abandoned because the Government is bound to consult on that issue next year as part of its planned policy statement. He nevertheless accepted the need to bring the challenge at this stage because of concern that the Secretary of State or BAA might argue at any future planning inquiry that it could not be debated because it was "settled national policy".

On the economic case for Heathrow expansion he said that "the claimants' points were a powerful demonstration of why it makes no sense to treat the economic case as settled in 2003".

On climate change policy he found that "the claimants' submissions add up, in my view, to a powerful demonstration of the potential significance of developments in climate change policy since the 2003 White Paper. They are clearly matters which will need to be taken into account under the new Airports National Policy Statement". He did not see how the Secretary of State could reasonably have excluded the possible need to review it.

On the issue of access and congestion he said the claimants' criticisms were 'justified'. He found it "impossible to determine precisely what the Secretary of

State ultimately understood to be the scope of the third condition, or what if anything he has decided about it". There is no credible plan in place to transport millions of extra passengers to an expanded Heathrow and pressure on the Piccadilly Line will be worse in 2020 than it is now, even without the third runway. The Government was "unable to provide a convincing answer" when it was pressed about this in court.

He furthermore expressed real concern over the "hardship caused to the local community by uncertainty" over the third runway.

He did not consider a quashing order was appropriate in relation to a statement of policy which had no substantive legal effect at the time, and will have none under the 2008 Act. But he invited the Secretary of State to convert his "present intentions" in respect of section 12(1) into an undertaking, that it will not base future aviation policy solely on its 2003 white paper, "so as to put that matter beyond doubt".

He ordered written submissions, with proposed drafts of the order, should be filed and exchanged not later than 13th April 2010 when a further court hearing is expected to take place to examine it.

Arrogant government response

The breathtaking arrogance of the government's response to the judgement speaks for itself:

The Prime Minister said: "We are taking seriously both the concerns that people have and the need for public consultation. But we took a tough decision, the right decision necessary for the future of Britain and the economy." The government had backed an extra runway "only after a detailed assessment showing that the strict environmental limits for expansion could be met".

Lord Adonis, the Transport Secretary, said: "Today's judgment marks no change whatsoever in the policy on Heathrow. The process that was in place before this judgment is exactly the same process as will take place after this judgment!" ■

*Hammersmith and Fulham, Hounslow, Hillingdon, Richmond upon Thames, Wandsworth and Windsor & Maidenhead, supported by Kensington and Chelsea. 2M has a combined population of 5 million.

Planning and Heritage

New Government Planning Policy Statements and planning cases in the news

PPS 15 is dead – long live PPS 5

The controversial new Planning Policy Statement on the historic environment and archaeology was re-published in March as PPS 5; it renders PPG15 and 16 obsolete.

The Institute of Historic Building Conservation gave a more optimistic verdict than might have been hoped: "real progress has been made.... In particular, we welcome the recognition of the role heritage plays in delivering economic development and its intrinsic value for sustainability". Some major concerns had been addressed but members remained concerned over the loss of detail compared to PPG15, and whether the guidance can provide the level of certainty and consistency that is necessary. Both they and English Heritage will issue guidance in the coming weeks Planning Policy Statement 5 Planning for the Historic Environment from <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/planningandbuilding/pps5>

However the following reports do not give grounds for unconfined joy:

Concern at decline in conservation posts

The IHBC's twelfth annual analysis of local authority conservation recruitment in England has just been completed revealing a continuing decline, with the number of jobs advertised falling to a new low in 2009.

The findings underpin anecdotal evidence of frozen recruitment, disestablishment or the downgrading of posts as a result of local government restructuring and public expenditure cuts. This is all despite the statutory nature of much of the work being undertaken and the progress of heritage protection reform, the success of which relies on local authorities delivering effective services.

Heritage's low status confirmed in new Government statistics

A series of Parliamentary Written Answers demonstrates the declining priority of heritage when compared to other Government priorities, as shown by the decline in funding between 1997 and 2009. Spending on arts and sport has risen substantially while that on heritage has actually fallen. The share of DCMS's salaries being spent on heritage staff has

reduced from 10% to 5% over the same period and the share of total expenditure on heritage issues from 45% to 29%.

Government policy announcement on historic environment

The Government's new Planning Policy Statement and Practice Guide the first for nearly a decade sets out a Vision - "That the value of the historic environment is recognised by all who have the power to shape it; that Government gives it proper recognition and that it is managed intelligently and in a way that fully realises its contribution to the economic, social and cultural life of the nation."

There are six strategic aims: *Strategic leadership; Protective framework; Local capacity; Direct ownership; Sustainable future* and *Public involvement*, where we find the usual patronising remarks about wanting "to provide the public with a much stronger sense of ownership in the historic environment" to "...help people to take an increased pride in their local area and strengthening local communities".

It is the widespread experience of too many people that it is not they that lack pride in their areas, but the government. Statement on the Historic Environment for England 2010: www.culture.gov.uk/reference_library/publications/6763.aspx

Planning Policy Statement 4

Planning Policy Statement 4 (PPS4): Planning for sustainable economic growth brings together all of the Government's key planning policies relating to the economy, in both urban and rural areas, into one single PPS. It supports sustainable economic growth, protects local markets and small shops by keeping the important 'sequential test', and will help councils make the decisions to help speed up economic recovery in our towns and rural communities.

A tougher 'impact test' is also being introduced, replacing the dysfunctional 'needs test', which will now give councils better controls over big developments, which will be assessed against key factors including climate change, impact on the high street, consumer choice, consumer spending and jobs.

But questions were raised as to

whether the new policy will be effective in preventing the highly resourced and determined supermarkets from imposing unwanted new developments on communities, and how underresourced planning departments in local councils, will cope with interpreting and implementing it. The new Planning Policy Statement is available at:

www.communities.gov.uk/publications/planningandbuilding/planningpolicystatement4

Planning Act 2008: new guidance on the Infrastructure Planning Commission

A series of four Guidance papers was issued on 1 February on:

- Examination Procedures for Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects.
- The Infrastructure Planning (Fees)
- Examination of Applications for Development Consent for Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects
- Procedures for Compulsory purchase

For more information on the Planning Act 2008 visit

www.communities.gov.uk/planningandbuilding/publications/all

www.communities.gov.uk/planningandbuilding/planning/planningpolicyimplementation/reformplanningsystem/planningbill Planning Policy

Open Spaces Society Speaks Out on Kensington's Athlone Gardens

Athlone Gardens in North Kensington, named as a memorial to Prince Alice, Countess of Athlone, who died in 1981, is under threat from a proposed redevelopment of Wornington Green Estate by Kensington Housing Trust. Scheduled to take nearly 12 years, it could take much longer, or even be abandoned, for financial or other reasons before the intended completion in 2022.

Nearly half the gardens, and an adjacent children's and teenagers' playspace will be lost. It will take time to provide the promised replacement which will be smaller than the present gardens, and will mean starting again on the lengthy maturing process with new tree planting. The Open Spaces Society has described the loss of this valuable amenity, less than 30 years old, as catastrophic.

Books of interest

Guardians of the Heath.

Blackheath Society celebrates its first 70 years

Designing Sustainable Cities

Minister intervenes at Brent Cross days after Mayor gives go-ahead

The £4.5 billion development to expand Brent Cross in North London was approved in November by eight councillors on Barnet Council, against huge local opposition. It was referred to the Mayor for scrutiny but only days after he approved the scheme, Department for Communities and Local Government Secretary John Denham issued a "stop notice" to allow time to consider whether to call a public inquiry.

The development includes plans for a 370-acre town centre, with 7,550 homes, new schools, health facilities, a railway and bus station, cycle routes and six new bridges. Supporters claim it would regenerate a neglected suburb and create 27,000 jobs. But opponents welcomed Mr Denham's intervention, saying the project is a completely unsustainable over-development in terms of traffic, housing, and the environment and its effects will go far beyond the immediate area.

New guidance to stop 'garden grabbing'

In January Housing and Planning Minister John Healey changed national planning guidance to give Councils more power to stop developers from 'garden grabbing'.

Advice in Annex B of Planning Policy Statement 3 (PPS3) will be clarified. Text referring to previously developed land has been moved to the main body of the document so that Paragraph 41, explaining that brownfield land is the priority for development, now also reads "there is no presumption that previously developed land is necessarily suitable for housing, nor that all of the curtilage should be developed".

Any strengthening of planning guidance is welcome but this falls short of the explicit protection needed for gardens. Even in areas with a good local planning framework, planning authorities find it hard to resist the development of gardens for housing.

The Draft replacement London Plan also encourages boroughs to adopt policies against the loss of gardens. It "supports presumptions against development on back gardens where locally justified" and "has been taken into account in setting the Plan's housing targets". ■

Blackheath Society has published a book celebrating its first 70 years, *Guardians of the Heath*. It was given a city centre launch on 23 February at The Gallery, Cowcross Street.

The book itself has an interesting history. The witty and accomplished original manuscript was written in 1987 by Felix Barker, distinguished theatre critic and Blackheath resident, supposedly for the Society's 50th anniversary. But some of its comment was not to the taste of the then committee and it was never published.

A dusty brown envelope containing the text was re-discovered by Blackheath secretary Wendy Shelton, in the run up to the 70th anniversary in 2007. Society vice-president (and former Newsforum editor) Tony Aldous took charge:

"His neglected text for the Blackheath Society, though it may have been a little dusty, was a revelation: elegant, witty, perceptive and as fresh as a daisy."

Tony decided to cover the last 20 years of the story in a diary-like notebook form. He also used the opportunity to correct some misconceptions about the Society and amenity societies in general: "In particular, that we like saying No to anything new. Not so then, and certainly not so now. We are for quality – for whatever preserves or enhances our local environment. And that isn't necessarily the status quo."

President, David Quarmby, presided over the event. Philip Davies - Director for London & S.E. English Heritage, praised the work of the Society toasting "your 70 years of success." He called the Society "a relative newcomer" compared to its sister society in Hampstead to several light-hearted boos from the audience [taken in good part by your editor, vice president of the Heath and Hampstead Society!].

Barker died in 1997 and his son, Kent Barker, told the event that the book had come as a surprise, since he had no idea his father was writing anything for the Society. He was a jobbing journalist on the Evening News and a theatre critic, but his weekend job was local news,

"He loved it with a passion and he had Blackheath in his heart."

"I can understand why the manuscript didn't go down well with the people who commissioned it, but I think he was actually pulling his punches rather than punching. The Society was then perhaps overly concerned with preserving what existed, but it's not the same now."

For more information about how to buy this charming and interesting book telephone 020 8297 1937 or email: blackheath.soc@lineone.net Blackheath Society office and postal address is: Chapman House, 10 Blackheath Village, London SE3 9LE

Designing Sustainable Cities

Richard Buchanan of Woolwich & District Antiquarian Society has sent us information of a book that may be of interest to Members, "Designing Sustainable Cities" edited by Rachel Cooper, Graeme Evans & Christopher Boyco.

It looks at towns and cities from around the world as they try to curb their carbon emissions with renewable energy, recycling and green living to combat global warming. What are the secrets of sustainable living? They note the lack of joined-up thinking to link a design with support services, transport etc, in the UK, where Urban Design has been viewed separately from Town Planning. They also looked at crime and economic diversity and the provision of Public Toilets for which there is no statutory requirement and they are often not accessible to the disabled.

Published by Wiley Blackwell

It can be ordered at:

<http://eu.wiley.com/WileyCDA/WileyTitle/productCd-1405179155/html> ■

Spotlight on Camden Civic Society

From saving a Nash pub to support for the decision to make St. Pancras the terminal for the Channel Tunnel railway, the Society fulfills the need for a non-parochial voice
by **Malcolm Campbell**

The spark that in 1963 ignited the flame to become the St. Pancras Civic Society was the anger of local poet and mystic Tammo de Jongh over the erection of an inappropriate modern lamp standard outside his house! It was quickly apparent that others had similar concerns over current environmental developments in the borough and by March, a Provisional Committee had drafted a constitution. At an inaugural meeting in July an Executive Committee was appointed. One of these has served continuously ever since, apart from a stint as a Camden Councillor.

Wasting no time, in November a paper was sent to the Council with details of acceptable modern street lamp standards, plus proposals for the treatment of derelict open spaces. New planning applications were scrutinised and objections to the felling of trees to make way for garages lodged. As early as 1964 the Society received a Civic Trust award for a pilot survey of dereliction and neglect in the Kentish Town Ward.

Early campaigns

Having several practising architects actively in membership, there was no danger of the Society adopting a narrow conservationist programme – what later came to be known as ‘nimbyism’. We campaigned for the opening of the Regent’s Canal towpath and the planting of trees where there was a need, much achieved through funds raised by the Society. Newly appointed Councillors were invited on guided walks to familiarise them with problem areas and to discourage the then fashionable, and subsidy encouraged destruction of decent Victorian and Edwardian houses.

The proposed London Motorway Box and the extension of the M1 Motorway southwards through to Chancery Lane stimulated fierce objections. Some of our committee were active in the London Amenity and Transport Group and both of these destructive schemes were ultimately abandoned. Only the M25 survived.

In 1965 St. Pancras joined the Boroughs of Holborn and Hampstead to form the huge new London Borough of Camden. With hindsight the decision to broaden our remit as the Camden Civic Society may perhaps be regarded as a step too far. Recruitment of new members from the

wider area has never been easy and with some notable exceptions has too seldom strayed beyond the old borough boundary, with its hub around Camden Town. However our committee has been much strengthened by members from the broader catchment area.

Another adverse factor affecting the scope of our operations is the hugely increased level of public environmental concern since the 1970s. In addition to some of the old-established organisations such as the Heath and Hampstead Society and the Highgate Society. Many articulate neighbourhood protection groups have emerged and over thirty local Conservation Areas have been set up, often with our assistance and members of the Civic Society serve on several of these. Understandable enthusiasm for them has reduced the time available for more Borough related issues. As a consequence our membership has remained fairly static over time. Recruitment of new members, and especially new active Committee members, remains a long-standing problem.

Development of the railway lands

A long running matter has been the development of the huge railway lands north of Kings Cross Station. From the earliest opportunity the Society has involved itself with organisations monitoring various plans put forward. Years were to go by before something emerged that was broadly acceptable and on which work is now well advanced. In addition to the desire for an acceptable mix of residential, commercial, academic, residential etc. houses, there are important and iconic relics of historical interest which warrant protection. Perhaps the most widely recognised of these for instance, are the old gas holders. Their gaunt sight greeted the arriving travellers from the north for some 150 years. These are retained and will be restored and repositioned, but the need for vigilance is ongoing as work proceeds. Small boys will however no longer be permitted to climb inside to refasten the bolts.

We welcomed the decision to make St. Pancras the terminal for the Channel Tunnel railway. The subsequent transformation of that station has been a triumph, as we hope will be the renovation

of the formerly neglected St. Pancras Chambers into hotel use.

The other nearby terminus, Euston Station, is also to be re-designed, and may take the futuristic high speed trains from the north. We shall take a close interest in those plans. In particular we shall support moved to reinstate the much-missed Euston Arch, if sufficient parts can be recovered, mostly from a watery grave.

Camden Market

Camden Town has presented many problems, not least caused by the burgeoning popular markets in the area. Notably these have created excessive pressure on the tube station. The ultimate intention to rebuild and enlarge it is welcomed but not at the price of massive overdevelopment above, said to be necessary to finance the project. Our successful lobbying for the reopening of the Mornington Crescent Tube station has helped to relieve the week-end situation whereby only arriving passengers can be handled at Camden Town. We would also like to see the creation of a much-needed bus interchange facility there.

Our support for the Friends of Regent’s Park campaign to prevent closure of tennis courts to the north of the Park was unsuccessful, though plans for five a side football pitches and ancillary buildings were subsequently dropped. More recently the idea of giant screens in the Park to enable huge crowds to view forthcoming World Cup football matches has been withdrawn, though perhaps more to spare the sensitivities of the Zoo’s occupants, than those of neighbouring residents.

We are happy that the Roundhouse has been turned into a viable entertainment venue at last, although we supported an earlier bid from the RIBA to use it as an exhibition space and archive store.

From time to time we resist threats to Hampstead Heath and its fringes, but lately we are content to leave these in the hands of very able local organisations.

Restoration of a Nash building

The rescue of a long-established pub would not normally be regarded as a matter for our intervention, but the York and Albany, on the edge of the Crown Estate’s Park Village has a long history, and claims John Nash as its



Camden Civic Society

Contact: Martin Morton, Chairman,
Tel: 020 8340 5972
email: ml.morton@btopenworld.com

1827 architect. A number of incongruous plans had been put forward, which would have been severely compromising architecturally, inside and out. Much research by members of this Society first established the historical and cultural importance of the building. We then engaged architects to draw up plans for its return to a worthy public facility. These formed the basis of a formal planning application we lodged with the Council, designed to thwart the more philistine ideas of the Crown Commissioners. To a large extent these were taken on, to result in what is now a highly successful pub/gourmet restaurant and hotel, part of the Gordon Ramsay empire.

Partnership with Bloomsbury

An absorbing concern since 1996, in partnership with the Bloomsbury Conservation Area Advisory Committee, has been developments at the British Museum. The exterior transformation of the round Reading Room of the Great Court involved much research and lobbying. The end result is generally regarded as a success, but we still have serious reservations, notably regarding intrusive refreshment facilities in the Great Court and the use of inferior stonework. We successfully fought off a recent planning application that would have been detrimental to this great institution, internally and externally. Unfortunately a slightly modified second application received planning consent. We remain unhappy about the over development involved, the intention to insert three new doorways in the north wall of the Great Court, and the uncompromisingly brutal face of the tall new building to be positioned in Montague Place next to the Edward V11 building.

We are troubled, and continue to express concerns regarding the part played by English Heritage in these, and other matters. What caused them to set aside earlier misgivings and adopt what we feel is a failure of respect for Smirke's original

masterpiece?

Much else has occupied the attention of the Camden Civic Society including plans for an unwelcome commercial use of Lincoln's Inn Fields, support for a "railway heritage trail" and the rediscovery of much of Camden Town's Stables' Market, through the Camden Railway Heritage Trust, and the need for improvement of Camden's planning procedure. We have also run two essay competitions to elicit primary school childrens' thoughts on local environmental issues. A third is now underway.

We hope the intentions of our founding members are being adequately fulfilled, but we remain fearful for the future. Like many similar organisations, we find recruitment of younger people to take the place of ageing activists is an uphill struggle. The need to pursue a career, and a general reluctance to take an interest in the affairs of such a wide and disparate area work against us. Nevertheless we feel there is still a need for a non-parochial umbrella voice to be heard. ■

With acknowledgements to Peter Woodford, Camden History Review, Vol.24, 2000



St. Pancras station



The Kings Cross gasometers

Born 1963 as St. Pancras Civic Society.

Circumstances of birth – Awakening of local concerns about adverse environmental issues – lamp posts; trees; derelict open spaces.

Biggest successes – Keeping going when so much effort is devoted to more local issues. Abandonment of 1960's damaging London Motorway Box proposals. Reopening of Mornington Crescent Underground Station. Defeat of overdevelopment of Camden Town Underground Station – at the cost of its continuing weekend inadequacy. Restoration of Nash's 1827 long derelict York and Albany Pub. Standing up to the Trustees of the British Museum. Support of the Camden Railway Heritage Trust.

Greatest disappointment – Trustees of the British Museum finally getting planning permission for their overdeveloped Exhibition site at the cost of the Museum's architectural integrity. Failure to expand alongside the growth of more local Conservation Area Committees.

Present preoccupations – Improvement in Camden's planning procedures and outreach. Concern at British Museum's and Kings Cross developments. Recruitment of more active members. Primary school childrens' environment essay competition.

Working details – Membership - about 200, but nominally includes most local amenity groups. A registered charity.

Committee structure – (too) small; mostly retired; 3 ex-councillors. Subscriptions – Life £28; annual £4, and non-voting associate members £6.

Publications. A twice yearly Newsletter.

Activities. Twice yearly events – a walk; a visit, joining up with another organisation. Mid-Summer Garden Party.

Special characteristics. Camden is a large Borough with many listed and historic buildings, and an articulate, intelligent, artistic population, as well as one that is socially and ethnically diverse. Important transport hub. Significant tourist attractions – British Museum and Library, to Camden Market.

Last word. Great development pressures. High office and residential property prices, but much unemployment and social housing. Need for significant balancing by any environmental protection organisation to preserve and enhance the current mix, and offset the defects of an under resourced planning process. ■

News from the Mayor and GLA

Update on new London Plan

The Draft replacement London Plan continues its lengthy consultation process and we can do no more than summarise its progress

With over five hundred pages, the new London Plan is a hugely complicated document, subject to a lengthy consultation process and we can do no more than summarize its progress here. Members have been kept informed of London Forum's detailed responses by email.

Each section is subjected to an Examination in Public by an Independent Panel to debate and test the proposals. Following the Examination in Public, the Panel prepares a report of findings and recommendations to the Government on how the various policies might be improved.

The Government Office for London has the responsibility, on behalf of the Secretary of State, to ensure that Mayoral strategies, are consistent with national policies.

The Secretary of State has no role in approving the Strategy but does have powers to direct changes to it in certain limited circumstances as well as direct that it be reviewed, altered or replaced. He then makes any final amendments in the light of the responses to the Proposed Changes consultation, and issues the final 'Regional Spatial Strategy' (The London Plan)

Local authorities are expected to prepare Local Development Documents, which are consistent with the Plan, identifying specific locations for development.

The Mayor wants to make London "the big best city on earth" and recognises the need to bridge the gap between rich and poor and to fight illiteracy and poverty of ambition in young people. The Economic Development Strategy (EDS) will aim to give all Londoners "the opportunity to take part in London's economic success, access sustainable employment and progress in their careers."

London Forum believes that achieving those objectives will be one of the biggest and most difficult tasks the GLA and boroughs will face. Regenerating social housing estates, increasing the number of jobs and offering training for work may not be enough. With redundancies resulting from the recession still increasing and immigration continuing, the chances for the creation of jobs for the deprived people of London may be limited. It is not clear what will change that without very considerable

investment in school standards, which will need considerable school funding from DCSF, and that is already in doubt. More information can be found at:

[www.gos.gov.uk/gol/Planning/planat/170406/London Plan extracts](http://www.gos.gov.uk/gol/Planning/planat/170406/London%20Plan%20extracts)

Mayor and Housing minister clash

Boris Johnson's statutory housing strategy was published on February 27 2010, with three key ambitions:

- Raise aspirations and promote opportunity: by producing more affordable homes, particularly for families, and by increasing opportunities for home ownership through the new First Steps housing programme.
- Improve homes and transform neighbourhoods: by improving design quality, by greening homes, by promoting mixed communities and by tackling empty homes.
- Maximise delivery and optimise value for money

There are also initiatives on tackling overcrowding, ending rough sleeping and providing more family sized homes.

But the Housing Minister, John Healey, warned that the strategy and provision of affordable housing will not sufficiently address the Capital's needs. However the Government has decided not to use powers, granted in the 2007 GLA Act, to direct the Mayor to change his housing strategy, if any part is in conflict with national housing policy, in recognition of the Mayor's electoral mandate, and because the London Plan will be subject to further scrutiny through Examination in Public later this year.

Find out more at

www.london.gov.uk/publication/london-housing-strategy

www.london.gov.uk/mayor/strategies

Mayor intervenes at Southall Gas Works

After a scheme for the gas works site in Southall was rejected by both Ealing and Hillingdon Councils, the Mayor decided to act as the local planning authority approved the scheme in March.

The Mayor said at the People's Question Time recently in Harrow that he did not intend to oppose Councils' planning decisions but he has done so already for the Columbus Tower in Canary Wharf.

Other Consultations due to be published

Draft revised interim Housing SPG (44 pages) issued last October, Consultation ended Feb10.

Draft Municipal Waste Management Strategy (174 pages) A full public consultation is due "mid 2010". It is supported by the Mayor's Vision for London's Waste
Draft Air Quality Strategy

Nine Elms Opportunity Area plans

The London Plan has extended the CAZ to include the Vauxhall Battersea Nine Elms area as an Opportunity Area with the potential to accommodate substantial numbers of new jobs and homes. Its 450 acres straddling the boroughs of Lambeth and Wandsworth, includes Battersea Power Station, the new US Embassy, several proposed skyscrapers and a possible new footbridge over the Thames.

An Opportunity Area Planning Framework (OAPF) has been prepared by the Greater London Authority in partnership with the London Development Agency, Transport for London, Lambeth Council, Wandsworth Council and English Heritage. The public consultation ended in March.

Possibilities under consideration are:

- an extension of the Northern Line from Kennington to Battersea Power Station, predicated on capital costs being privately funded.
- a Light Rail Transit (LRT) option from Waterloo to Battersea Power Station;
- a cross river pedestrian/cycle bridge

Find out more at:

www.london.gov.uk/who-runs-london/mayor/publications/planning/vauxhall-nine-elms-battersea-opportunity-area-planning-framework

Gloomy forecast on jobs in London Plan

The London Plan team has revised downwards the forecasts on jobs as a result of the London Office Policy Review (LOPR) research, suggesting a slow recovery from the recession. A reduction of 40% in growth is mostly expected to be in Business Services, with only marginal growth in Financial Services.

www.london.gov.uk/who-runs-london/mayor/publications/planning/london-office-policy-review-2009 ■

Transport and travel

Relieving congestion in the West End shopping area (ORB)

The London Assembly report 'Streets Ahead - Relieving congestion on ORB' responds to widespread concerns about the unpleasant and overcrowded environment in the Oxford Street, Regent Street, Bond Street area (ORB).

Some 23 bus routes run along Oxford Street with up to 160 buses per hour and peak flows in each direction of over 300 buses per hour. They dominate the street, dividing it with "a red wall of metal" in the view of the Mayor. Regent Street and Bond Street have a better balance.

Accident rates on Oxford Street, 56.4 collisions per km, are 35 times the average of all other London streets (1.6 collisions per km) and on Regent Street 18 times this average. Pollution levels are four and a half times the EU target.

The Committee recommends two options: a shuttle bus to replace the major bus routes travelling up and down Oxford Street and pedestrianisation of the short area between Oxford Circus and Bond Street. The Mayor should also include Oxford Street, Regent Street and Bond Street in his Great Spaces programme to improve the public realm for visitors and residents.

Funding problems on the tube

London Underground has been told to cut back work or find extra £460 million.

The controversial PPP contract between the Tube operator and Tube Lines is unraveling amidst continuing funding disputes between the Mayor, the Department for Transport, Tube Lines, which signed a 30-year PPP contract in December 2002 to maintain the Jubilee, Northern and Piccadilly lines, and London Underground, (LU) which maintains the others.

Tube Lines is the sole surviving PPP contractor after Metronet, jointly owned by American company Bechtel and by Spain's Ferrovial, collapsed into bankruptcy in July 2007. The Public Accounts Committee condemned the lack of oversight on the contractor as unacceptable; no public body had the information necessary to monitor the company. Over £400m of tax-payers money was lost.

Chris Bolt, the PPP Arbiter, told LU in

March that it must pay Tube Lines £4.46 billion for the next seven and a half years of the PPP contract, which will see upgrades to the Northern and Piccadilly lines. That is £460 million higher than LU has said it could afford, although it is £1.29m less than Tube Lines had asked for. The Mayor of London has been left to pick up the difference. LU wanted Tube Lines to borrow to cover the gap. The alternative is to scale back planned improvements to the lines. Work on the Jubilee line which was supposed to have finished in December seems likely now to drag on till the autumn.

Mayor Boris Johnson, attacked the ruling, in typically forthright manner, saying that Londoners were "being asked to write a blank cheque in order to prop up an ailing and failing Tube Lines". "In other countries this would be called looting, here it is called PPP". He has argued that since central government imposed PPP on London against the authority's wishes, it should fill the funding shortfall. Mr Johnson also suggested that Transport for London could launch a legal challenge to the determinations.

Crossrail update

The Greater London Authority Transport Committee has published a report on progress with the Crossrail project: Light at the end of the tunnel. After examining the economic benefits it suggests that central government will get a very good deal out of Crossrail.

It will provide for the first time direct links from Berkshire in the west and Essex in the east into Heathrow, central London and Canary Wharf, including a new underground line through central London, which is anticipated to add 10 per cent to London's rail capacity.

The Committee believes that Crossrail is needed to relieve the overcrowding on the current system which is projected to worsen considerably over the next two decades as the population increases and the economy starts to grow again.

The funding package and relevant legislation are now in place. £15.9 billion has been made available of which London will contribute £7.8 billion, mainly through borrowing against a supplement to the business rate and future fares. It is forecast to generate at least £36 billion in current

prices to the national GDP over the next 60 years. The scale of the borrowing means Londoners will be paying for Crossrail for at least the next 25 years.

However the report recognises the risk in the current economic and political environment. The forthcoming General Election and the state of public finances casts some doubt over the project, and whether now is the right time to be investing so much money in new transport infrastructure. Crossrail could be seen as an easy cut. But the report believes this would be a mistake, underestimating the long-term economic benefits the project would bring not just to the capital but the whole UK.

South West Trains proposal to cut ticket office hours

London Forum is supporting The Campaign for Better Transport (CBT) and London TravelWatch opposition to South West Trains' proposals to reduce ticket office opening hours.

If you wish to add your objection, address it to London TravelWatch:

Tim Bellenger Director, Research and Development

London TravelWatch, 6 Middle Street, London EC1A 7JA

Tel: 020 7726 9959 Fax: 020 7726 9999

Email info@londontravelwatch.org.uk

www.londontravelwatch.org.uk

You could also let CBT know of your support at www.bettertransport.org.uk

CBT is campaigning also against the high cost of all rail fares.

If you would like to receive the London TravelWatch e-mail newsletter register at

<http://newsletter.londontravelwatch.org.uk/em-signup> ■

Overnight Lorry Parking

London Forum's Dick Allard has been collecting information on problems with overnight lorry parking in south London for a study by The South London Freight Quality Partnership in the London Boroughs of Bromley, Croydon, Kingston, Lewisham, Merton, Richmond, Sutton and Wandsworth. It will assess existing capacity and demand, and also identify locations where official and unofficial lorry parking may cause conflict. ■

Government waste, the credit crunch and IT

Kept well out of the public eye, the government has been pressing ahead with its Transformational Government programme: data sharing is seen as the solution to everything. The implications for the way Local authorities deliver services is little understood. **Helen Marcus** rounds up recent reports

A plethora of recent reports on government performance and initiatives, many contradicting each other, propose 'solutions' to the waste of resources involving increased use of IT and data-trafficking, dressed up with euphemisms portraying them as giving the public more choice and control. Local Authorities will be expected to enforce many of the provisions, in particular those of the Identity Card Bill. We take our cue from:

The Better Government Initiative, a strangely titled report issued recently by former Civil Service chiefs. It is a frank admission, from the horse's mouth, that: "There has been too much legislation in recent years..... and too much of it has been badly prepared". Furthermore "practices and attitudes have developed... [that] seem to us at odds with such principles of parliamentary democracy".

Transformational Government

Gordon Brown appeared last year to say that the ID scheme would be dropped. The truth is that the Identity Cards Bill with its National Identity Register (NIR) became law in 2004, and remains at the heart of the government's Transformational Government (TG) programme of "identity management" introduced in 2005.

Claiming that "public services has [sic] to use technology to give citizens choice, with personalised services designed around their needs not the needs of the provider"; it demands 50 categories of information about you to establish a "Single Source of Truth" for every British citizen - a data processing term which this government is now applying to our identities.

There will be no choice

But the reality is that the citizen will have no choice. The Bill contains a *Power of Secretary of State to require registration* and provisions for the *Imposition of civil penalties* specifying fines for non-compliance; *Rules for using information without individual's consent*; and a *Power to make public services conditional on identity checks*: eventually you won't be able to renew a passport, driving license, register to vote or with a doctor, or even have your rubbish collected unless you are on the Register.

The process continues apace and will be irreversibly embedded in administration by 2011, with compulsory registration for everyone, and an all-encompassing surveillance system. It introduces a level of state control never before seen in this country which could destroy our basic freedoms.

Smarter Government, December 2009

'Putting the Frontline First' This paper proposes "smarter, more efficient government" claiming that technological advances "provide us with the means to deliver public services in a way that maintains their quality but brings down their cost. It will "meet new challenges by strengthening the role of citizens and civic society; and streamlining government". More sinister is its stated intention to "recast the relationships between the centre and the frontline and between the citizen and the State" by "radically opening up data and public information, releasing thousands of public data sets".

Protecting local services sets out how councils' should protect vital frontline services in a period of tighter public finances, to improve services for Londoners and deliver billions of pounds in savings to the public purse. These include "creating customer focused 'Total Place' councils"; and having a chief executive that manages more than one public body.

Transparent services, The truth is out there, is a discussion paper published by the Audit Commission, examining ways of making data and information more widely accessible, again dressed up as "ways in which the public sector can be more transparent and make more information available to the public".

Civil servants to leave London

A government plan announced by Alistair Darling will move tens of thousands of civil servants out of "expensive" London offices into the regions in an attempt to reduce public spending "without damaging front line services". 15,000 out of the total over 81,000 will be relocated in the next five years. Clearly they need to read the National Audit Office Report that found wasteful reorganisations of central government is costing billions.

A report by the National Audit Office, issued in March shows that more than £1 billion of taxpayers' money has been spent restructuring government departments and quangos in the past five years with no tangible benefit. Too often, decisions are carried out on a whim after a reshuffle or an election, with rarely any clear explanation of what the changes were supposed to achieve and with no adequate scrutiny, or any assessment of benefits. Millions were spent just on redesigning logos and soaring redundancy costs.

Government PR officers' increase 72 % in a decade. A Commons Public Administration Committee inquiry revealed a huge 72% increase in the number of communications staff over the last 10 years. Independent estimates put the annual spend at around £250m with 242 press officers at the Ministry of Defence, and 150 at the Department for Work and Pensions, but no official figures were available. The Pre-Budget Report stated that it would cut the amount by 25 per cent but since there was no precise figure to confirm how much the government spent on marketing "it's pretty meaningless for them to say there will be a 25 per cent cut."

Finally damning criticism came in the Reform of the House of Commons Select Committee First Report, *Rebuilding the House*, which opens by quoting Sir Robert Worcester, in June 2009: "The public are sullen, some even mutinous". It continues: "the House of Commons is going through a crisis of confidence not experienced in our lifetimes.a storm of public disapproval and contempt".

Contrary to some of the government claims for policy changes listed above, the Committee found: "no major changes in terms of the public's ability directly to influence the parliamentary agenda". "It is not too much to say that the institution is in crisis. We believe that the present system does not, and should not, have the confidence of the House and the public".

Need one say more?

Communities will need to watch any new Government closely after the elections, to monitor what happens in their borough. ■

The Budget squeeze – how are London councils coping?

Stories about budget problems facing local authorities in the fall out from the global financial crisis are beginning to emerge. “Frontline” services such as libraries, schools and council housing will all be squeezed.

The Census and undercounted figures

Many Councils are finding that their populations are severely undercounted in official figures since the 2001 census and are worried that if the same inaccuracies are repeated in next year’s census it will cost the capital’s boroughs millions in funding. One of the problems is the failure by the government to keep any accurate figures on the extent of immigration.

London had the lowest response rate in the last census due to migration levels, language barriers, the large number of houses with many occupants, and the rise of gated estates, all of which make collecting data especially difficult.

The influx of many temporary migrant workers as well as people who work in London but have homes elsewhere, neither of which are counted in the population figures, are compounding the problem and putting extra pressure on services, as are birth-rates: Government figures published in December 2009 showed that fifty-five percent of babies born in London last year were to foreign mothers.

Hounslow Council is typical. A quarter of its population is Asian and there has been a large influx of Eastern Europeans. It has already found itself denied funds by DCSF to meet the rising demand for primary school places creating a £17M black hole in the borough’s education budget. The Council has had to introduce

‘bulge’ classes and is concerned about the deteriorating state of some schools.

Council salaries and “golden goodbyes”

Adding to the problems are the huge salaries of around £200,000, and “golden goodbyes” of as much as £500,000, now being paid to senior Council staff. An Audit Commission survey found that 20% of chiefs who received these vast lay-off packages, took up other posts within a year. In addition where councils laid off top executives their successors were frequently paid about 42% more to do the same job.

Westminster Council was the first to publish the pay figures on its website, with the top earner being Mike More, its chief executive. Brent, and Hammersmith and Fulham both said they would follow suit although neither has set a date. But Camden has refused to publish details, and will only give “ballpark” figures.

Skills audit makes disturbing reading

Where will recovery from this recession come from? Not from innovation and technology if the findings of the first National Strategic Skills Audit commissioned by the government and published by the UK Commission for Employment and Skills, are correct.

While government never loses an opportunity to claim ever higher standards in schools, and that school-leavers are attaining better results every year, there is continuing criticism from major companies who have to employ them, about lack of educational qualifications so severe that some of them can’t even read and write. Where is the truth?

This report, initiated by the government in

a policy statement published in April last year, *New Industry, New Jobs*, which set out the need for a more ‘active’ industrial policy to aid recovery from the downturn and drive economic growth, paints a worrying picture.

Written in opaque bureaucratic jargon from which the substantive conclusions have to be teased out, it finds that the UK’s growth in highly skilled jobs has been one of the lowest in the OECD since 2001, below the US and Germany. The number of people reported as ‘not fully proficient’ at their jobs has increased by 400,000 from 1.3 million in 2005 to 1.7 million in 2009; leadership and management skills, and technical skills are in need of particular improvement. Skill gaps, particularly technical/professional skills, are found in more than 50 per cent of all workplaces, in every sector.

The fastest decline is a 69% fall to 38,885 in assemblers of electrical products and a big drop in the heavy manufacturing category. There have also been precipitous declines in some service sectors that sprang up to replace jobs in the de-industrialised parts of the country. Skill deficiencies are highest in financial services, education, manufacturing, mining/quarrying and agriculture.

The fastest growing occupations are in the public sector, and in occupations such as psychologists, beauticians and other personal services. Chris Humphries, Chief Executive of the Commission for Employment and Skills commented: “We’re actually getting higher growth in public sector jobs than is ideal in economic terms” because “public sector jobs don’t create wealth, they spend wealth.” ■

Where to find some of these papers on the web

The Identity Cards Bill: www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200405/cmbills/008/05008.i-iv.html

Transformational Government: <https://govx.socitm.gov.uk/spaces/identity/knowledge/transformational-government-enabled-by-technology>

Smarter Government, ‘Putting the Frontline First’ www.hmg.gov.uk/media/52788/smarter-government-final.pdf

Better Government Initiative: www.bettergovernmentinitiative.co.uk/.../Good-government-17-October.pdf

Transparent Services www.audit-commission.gov.uk/nationalstudies/localgov/thetruthisoutthere/Pages/default.aspx

NAO Reorganisation of government departments: www.nao.org.uk/idoc.ashx?docId=5713014a-5bc2-4938-95ce-a6934a8af8d7&version=-1

Protecting local services www.communities.gov.uk/news/corporate/1488787

National Strategic Skills Audit www.ukces.org.uk/.../skills-for-jobs-today-and-tomorrow-the-national-strategic-skills-audit-for-england-2010-volume-1-key-findings

Round the Societies

A round up of news from our member societies.

By **Haydn Mylchreest**

Congratulations to The Isleworth Society,

which celebrates its 50th anniversary this year.

Hospital to school in Battersea

Battersea Society. A campaign has been launched to establish a school on the site of the old Bolingbroke Hospital. Success depends on the acquisition of the site and on funding being secured. The long term management of the school poses an interesting and important problem. In its latest newsletter it is reported that the Planning Sub-committee has formally opposed the present planning application for the redevelopment of the site. Major concerns include the isolation of the power station from Nine Elms area and surrounding area with densely packed high rise development.

Concern over the 2012 Olympics continues

The 2012 Olympics continues to be a source of concern to the Greenwich Society which has opposed the voluminous planning application submitted by LOCOG in last November. The grounds of their objection range from transport arrangements to the design of the stadium and to the much-talked-about legacy.

On a totally different matter, it was good to read the enthusiastic welcome to the restored West Greenwich Carnegie Library.

Exhibition the Lambeth Palace Library

The Clapham Society draws attention to the exhibition the Lambeth Palace Library will be mounting of its treasures in the Great Hall of the palace from 17th May to 23 July. It is the historic library and record office of the Archbishops of Canterbury, and its records date from the 9th century.

An April Fool

How many of Dulwich Society's readers were alert to the April 1st spoof article on the threat to the habitat of the increasingly rare tove, a wee beastie that could be observed at the brillig hours of early evening, moving in their peculiarly gyratory manner? How many readers reached for their reference books?

A castle in Reigate

The story of an interesting planning case is told in the Sutton & Cheam Society's March newsletter. It refers to Honeycrock Farm where a farmhouse resembling half a castle and half a Tudor-style abode has been built without planning permission and hidden behind straw bales and tarpaulins. The case has received national press coverage and the demolition order served by the Reigate and Banstead Council has been supported by a High Court ruling. But further legal appeals are likely by the owner of the property. The planning authority of the local Council is being tested, so we will watch the case with interest.

Battle of the Basements

The Heath & Hampstead Society continues to fight the increasing number of planning applications for basements, which could undermine the area's stability, a delicate mixture of clay and sand.

Archaeology at the Olympic Park

English Heritage, in the annual review of London Region Archaeology, carries a short article on the Olympic Park "From pre-history to 2012". Because parts of the Olympic Park were buried under metres of landfill dating from the 19th century, more than 100 deep trenches have been excavated in order to reach and examine the original ground surfaces and deduce the extent of prehistoric settlement. Evidence dating back to the Neolithic period was uncovered and fragments of pottery have been found as well as the waste from making flint tools. Hut circles have also been discovered. And on the Teardrop Site, Woolwich five pottery kilns have been found, two of which were of 13/14th century date and were used for the production of London Ware.

Responses to Civic Voice

The Herne Hill Society voices a widely held view: support for the new organisation will depend on being satisfied that that it is responding effectively to the needs of its members. An article by Tony Burton appears in the Dulwich Society's Spring edition. The need for a national voice for the Civic Society movement is widely supported but there has been much discussion on how such an organisation should be structured, managed and financed. The current election of trustees should result in a clearer and more convincing statement of what the new organisation will concentrate on and how it might evolve.

Helping or Snooping

Under the heading "Helping - or is it Snooping?" the Highbury Fields Association carries a thoughtful article on this question. The aim of reporting a problem should be to help make our local areas more agreeable and safer places for all of us. But there are overtones here of Big Brother; how should we ensure that antisocial activities are reported in good time to those who can and will take appropriate action?

A belated opening

In 1948 Pinner residents clubbed together to purchase West House and its grounds so that they might be developed as a memorial to those who fell in two world wars. Pinner Society newsletter has announced that On Sunday 20th 2010 West House will be officially re-opened in June

Celebrating Dr. Johnson

The 300th anniversary of the birth of Dr. Samuel Johnson, the compiler of the first definitive English dictionary, was marked last September by a programme of special events by the Streatham Society highlighting his close links with Streatham; he stayed regularly at Streatham House, the home of his friends Henry and Hester Thrale. For some 16 years he adopted Streatham as his second home. ■

Do please send me a copy of the newsletter you send to your members - it will add to the fund of material I can draw on.

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Key issues of interest and concern to note.

The tragedy of the Middlesex Guildhall,

Following a visit in July last year Tom Ball commented: An absolute tragedy has befallen the Middlesex Guildhall, and those responsible should be called to account, for the travesty arising out of the process to create a "Supreme Court"

To take a 'tour de force' set of interiors that existed in the Middlesex Guildhall, and a budget said to be of some sixty million pounds, and end up with a 'dogs dinner' is to do injustice to the dog and the dinner. The sights that are presented gravely call into question the whole process, the administration, and all those who are collectively responsible. A more depressing and tragic outcome it must be impossible to find in Great Britain. All those who voiced their concerns with the notion of transforming the listed building into a home for the Supreme Court, are now proved to have been completely justified in their concerns.

Cutty Sark funding confirmed

The Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) will provide the final £3m needed for the Cutty Sark Trust to complete the conservation project on the historic clipper following the devastating fire that gutted the ship in May 2007, caused by a vacuum cleaner left on overnight.

The bulk of the £46m funding came from the Heritage Lottery Fund supported by the London Borough of Greenwich, private donors, the Greater London Authority and DCMS. The work will be completed next year, in time for the Olympic and Diamond Jubilee celebrations in 2012. For the full story visit

www.cuttysark.org.uk/index.cfm?fa=contentNews.newsDetails&newsID=186623&from=list&directoryId=8

Green Belts Report

A joint report by English Nature and the CPRE on the state of Green Belts has just been published, examining to what extent the Green Belts are fulfilling their purposes and positive land use objectives. It asks how Green Belts might better connect urban centres to the wider countryside and to food production; how they can help us to tackle climate change challenges; and how they can be valued as part of a nationwide ecological network providing breathing places for people and for nature long into the future. Find out more at

<http://naturalengland.etraderstores.com/NaturalEnglandShop/NE196>

Tideway Tunnel meeting with Thames Water

Since our last report a meeting was held at the offices of Thames Water on 25th February 2010 to discuss the concerns of members, and residents in the fourteen boroughs potentially affected. London Forum put a paper to the TW experts Phil Stride (Head of London Tideway Tunnels) and Richard Aylard (Thames Water, Director), and there was a Q&A session afterwards. It was clear that many of the concerns still await answers. Thames Water will run a new consultation in the Summer on the details of construction sites that they propose, some of them the size of football pitches. The views of riparian communities will be sought then by London Forum.

Changes proposed by the Killian Pretty Review

Consultations by the Communities and Local Government Department (DCLG) on changes proposed by the Killian Pretty Review on use of planning conditions and processes for discharging them, ended in March. The Orwellian tone is set in the introduction with the statement: "Our aim is to make the process more efficient and effective, by ensuring that the right bodies are consulted, on the right matters, at the right time and in a proportionate way"

It recommends "improving" pre-application discussion stages by speeding up and simplifying the process; widening permitted development; reducing the time taken to agree S.106 planning obligations; ensuring that conditions are only imposed when "justified"; (by whom?); and ensuring fewer conditions with clearer and faster processes for discharging them.

With para 4.17 we are in the realm of newspeak. Commitment to "improving engagement by statutory and non-statutory consultees" is later contradicted by the aim to "where possible, reduce or simplify the recommendations for consultation with stakeholders". At 4.15 we have the fatuous statement: "The independent Killian Pretty review confirmed that this would be beneficial". Beneficial to whom? That they do not say but one can guess. For more information:

www.planninginspectorate.gov.uk/pins/appeals/model_conditions_consultation.html

Large digital screens in public spaces

Joint guidance from English Heritage and CABE has been issued to help local authorities when considering planning applications for large digital screens in public places. Some of these will be part of the Live sites programme for the London 2012 Olympic Games and the Paralympic Games, installed by the organising committee, LOCOG, which has been consulted in the preparation of this document. There are also proposals from other organisations, broadcasters and commercial companies to install large digital screens in towns and cities for a variety of purposes.

Broadband tax

The government is pushing ahead with its plan to make us all pay for superfast broadband whether we use it or not, and whether we even have computers. From October 1 every landline will be subject to a 50p levy; the measure was unveiled as part of last year's Digital Britain Report and was included in the March Budget. Its aim is to raise £175m a year to provide 50Mb per second broadband to 90% of home by 2017. But raising it will cost broadband providers £37.5m to implement, according to consultation papers published alongside the Budget.

Healey Cracks down on HMOs

In January housing and planning minister John Healey announced changes to the Use Classes Order controlling Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs). At present, a licence is required to lease a property to five or more people from two or more family units living over three or more floors. This number is being reduced to three

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people who are not related, and now falls under planning law, forcing landlords to apply for planning permission.. It will only affect the 400,000-plus HMOs already registered if their landlords change the tenancy arrangements or register for a "change of use" (for example, converting a family home into flats)

The change, due to come into force on April 6, is thought to have been prompted after residents' groups in university towns complained that students create noise and parking problems and leave towns deserted outside of term. A government consultation last year attracted around 900 responses from local authorities, residents associations, universities, individuals, MPs, councillors, and campaign groups, and it is claimed that a large majority of respondents supported the change.

But the new rules, designed ostensibly to help tenants facing landlords who rent unsafe or substandard accommodation, and take little responsibility for the problems caused for neighbours, is proving controversial. Landlords may decide that with all the extra cost and paperwork it will no longer be worth renting out. In London because of the high cost of accommodation it could create severe problems for housing which could destabilise the housing market, making shared and student accommodation scarcer and pushing rents up. In planning terms it may be unenforceable, or extremely resource intensive if many landlords do apply, increasing workloads on local authority planning departments.

Questions arise as to how this threshold was chosen? London Forum members queried what thought was given to the wider consequences? Is there an impact assessment which looked at options and considered the impacts beyond university towns? The choice of threshold seems totally out of touch with the real world.

London Councils' launch Manifesto for Londoners

A Manifesto for Londoners was launched in February in Parliament, setting out London Councils' case for devolution of powers from Whitehall and quangos to London boroughs. London Councils is a think tank and lobbying organisation that promotes the interests of London's 33 Borough Councils.

www.londoncouncils.gov.uk/aboutus/corporatepublications/manifesto/default.htm

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Registered Charity Number 1093134

Launch of CivicVoice
Saturday 17 April
the Building Centre, Store Street, WC1E 7BT
10.30am for 11am until 4pm

With Griff Rhys Jones

All civic societies registered with the Civic Society Initiative, are welcome

Programme will include

guided walks around Camden by Camden Civic Society, a display featuring London Forum's 21st Anniversary an area dedicated to individual society work. will be attending. opportunity to meet the newly elected Board.

Entry fee £10 to include lunch. See CivicVoice website

Workshops arranged by the Civic Voice

Saturday 19th June at 10:30am to 4:30pm

The Gallery, 75 Cowcross Street, EC1,
(near Farringdon station)

Workshops on undertaking surveys of street clutter.
For more information see the Civic Voice website

London Festival of Architecture

19th June to 4th July

'Love your Street!'

A key programme to encourage communities and professionals to work together and take the initiative in improving local environments.

They want to hear of 500 such projects located within the M25-schemes already under way, or plans and ideas that can be exhibited during the festival and completed at a later date. They will be exhibited at the New London Architecture centre in Store Street.

For more information and details of events contact

Jennifer Wakefield, London Festival of Architecture,
85 Clerkenwell Road, London EC1R 5AR Tel 020 7269 0060

www.lfa2010.org

newsforum

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