

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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The housing crisis – claim and counter claim

How can the number of homes needed in London be built on the land available? Will building more houses bring down the prices? Or is speculation the cause? Are developers prevented from building by the planning system? Or are they sitting on permissions waiting for the prices to go up? **Peter Eversden** reports on issues of concern for London Forum, with additional material by **Helen Marcus**.

As we consider what response to make to the Mayor's draft London Housing Strategy and his recent Further Alterations to the London Plan (FALP) we draw together some of the many issues - some of them conflicting - that need to be considered by all those responding. The London Forum and its members need to take these into consideration as we prepare our response to FALP by 10th April.

Confusion about the figures

Unfortunately, the figures on which projected growth in London's housing need are based are inconsistent and confusing. London's population is predicted to rise from 8.4 million in 2013 to nine million by 2020 and ten million by 2030. It is estimated that, with the backlog of housing need, this could give rise to a long-term requirement for some 50,000–60,000 homes per annum.

The 2011 census appeared to show that London has had a population explosion since the 2001 census. But it is now believed that this may partly be because the number of people resident in London in 2001 was under-counted. Some of the apparent increase revealed in 2011 may be people who were already here in 2001 but were not captured by that census, when there were fewer penalties for non-completion than in the recent one. That could mean that the latest figure of extra houses needed is too

The figures on which projected growth in London's housing need are based, are inconsistent and confusing.

high or it could be the case that people are becoming more used to, and accepting of, overcrowding in accommodation.

The FALP is based on a Strategic Housing Market Assessment and Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment carried out by the GLA with the London boroughs, who have identified more developable land than they did for the 2011 London Plan. But that is only 42,000 homes p.a. against the SHMA requirement of up to 62,000 annually, impossible to achieve given the land and construction resources available.

It is more than double the recent levels of home building and would need to be sustained over a number of economic, public spending and political cycles. Such levels of housing delivery have not been seen since the 1930s and have not been sustained for anything like a 25 year period. The reality is that the building rate has been as low as 20,000 annually recently.

The Mayor's challenge

The Mayor has indicated that he thinks some outer London boroughs could build more homes than they have declared and has set a target of 49,000 more homes annually though there is land available for only 42,000.

He has issued an 18-point challenge to Government in the draft Housing Strategy stating how the gap could be closed. This includes getting homes built that already have planning permission, intensification of land use in town centres, higher density development in Opportunity Areas and at points of high transport availability, better performance by boroughs on housing delivery, borrowing reforms, devolution of taxes, bringing forward public sector land and a Build to Rent fund.

In the absence of any indication by the Mayor on which of his suggested initiatives could deliver specific estimates of increased housing deliveries, of what type, and when, it is a difficult task for communities, developers and Government Inspectors to consider the altered Plan. Some of them will need Government changes to taxation and powers, many in line with the recommendations of the Finance Commission which the Mayor set up. It looks like an open challenge to Government to make changes that will support the delivery of more homes for London than current rules would allow.

London's housing crisis (continued)

"Londoners first"

Mayor Boris Johnson used his speech to the MIPIM property conference in Cannes to call on major property developers to sell new homes to Londoners first, not foreigners. "These homes are not there as a new kind of asset class, like Old Masters or diamonds or bullion, they are there as part of the living infrastructure of the city. Londoners depend on them. Our economy depends on them."

The Mayor has set up a new homes concordat which has already been signed by 50 developers who have committed to selling homes on every development to Londoners before, or at the same time as, foreign buyers.

Absentee residents

Another problem is the "buy-to-leave" phenomenon which is said to be undermining communities in prime parts of London where the super-rich are blamed for pricing locals out of London's central areas but leaving their homes empty for long periods.

Official figures, analysed by the Empty Homes charity, revealed that while there was a fall in the overall number of empty properties last year, by contrast, the number of properties empty for more than six months in Camden rose from 964 in 2012 to 1,482 last year; in Kensington and Chelsea there was an increase of 1,215 to 1,700; 1,671 to 1,699 in Westminster, and 33 to 59 in the City of London.

Research by Knight Frank indicates that 49 per cent of sales of newly built property in central London were to foreign buyers, most of whom are from Europe, Russia and the Middle East.

Lack of co-operation

The Mayor and GLA, and the surrounding local authorities have a Duty to Co-operate. It is doubtful whether they have adequately complied with this Duty on housing. However the degree to which the surrounding local authorities could provide homes for London's workers is not clear.

All this may give rise to problems and may limit the Mayor's options for producing a 'sound' plan. The London Plan must conform to the National Planning Policy Framework which states (paragraph 47) that every planning authority should "identify and update annually a supply of specific deliverable sites sufficient to provide five years worth of housing".

But under GLA legislation an Inspector cannot reject the Mayor's altered plan - even if it does not meet the requirements of the NPPF - only make recommendations to the Mayor, some of which in the past have been rejected. If the Secretary of State approves this FALP, it may not be a plan which meets the NPPF requirement in its paragraph 14 for sustainable development.

HBF report admits the problem is finance not the planning system

The latest figures released by the Home Builders Federation, *New Housing Pipeline Report for 2013*, confirm that the real problem in housing provision is finance not the planning system. It is now a matter of record that companies have no shortage of planning permissions in "land banks". As Stewart Baseley, executive chair of Federation admits, they are holding back on building starts, not because of planning constraints but because "People's inability to buy in recent years has been the biggest constraint on the industry's efforts to build more homes." The report says "The overall trend in residential permissions is very positive" and "If people can buy, builders will build." But are they?

The report shows that planning permissions granted have increased greatly over the last 2 years especially with the Government's Help to Buy lending scheme. The number of approvals for new homes in the last three months of 2013 was up 13 per cent on the same period in 2012 with 26,230 housing starts in 2013. There are planning permissions for over 270,000 homes now in London that are not being built. The Mayor's powers to tackle this need to be increased.

Developers still attack the planning system

Mr. Baseley again uses the opportunity to blame planning constraints. Having admitted that the biggest constraint on the industry's efforts to build more homes has been people's inability to buy, he nevertheless cannot resist having another dig at the planning system: "the conditions attached to many of these permissions prevent actual work starting on site. Local Authorities must ensure planning conditions are not overly onerous or unrealistic." Surely efficient management should ensure a smooth throughput of ready-to-build permissions while awaiting finalisation of new ones? The impression given is that developers will not be satisfied until the planning system is dismantled.

A different view comes from Daniel Van Gelder, a property developer and chairman of the Westminster Property Association who has blamed Government cuts to local authority funding, rather than the planning system per se: "We just can't get our planning consents at the moment because council planning departments are understaffed and just can't cope with the workload". That applies also to the time taken to negotiate developers' contributions under S.106 and Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL).

Unfortunately, the Government has allowed developers to reduce these contributions by claiming their development would not be viable if they had to provide affordable housing and make financial contributions to the social infrastructure.

Prices and property speculation

There is increasing evidence foreign investment has had an inflationary impact on house prices in London. Peter Franklin, a former Conservative policy adviser, recently wrote in *The Times*: "Without a crackdown on property speculators, first-time buyers will always be shut out of the market". "Before the crash, the previous Labour Government achieved a significant boost to housebuilding, but prices still went through the roof." He advises that "the assumption that building booms cut property prices" should be questioned; "... experience points in the opposite direction. America has an abundance of land. And between 2002 and 2007 the rate of housebuilding increased by 50 per cent." It did not bring down prices. It led to "the biggest property bubble in US history, which nearly brought down the international banking system." The same could be said of Australia which is also suffering house price inflation.

Spain, Ireland and China where planning constraints are not an issue have all experienced the same phenomenon. (see Newsforum No. 59, Sept 2011, p.5)

The role of foreign investors and buyers

But a report in January from long established property adviser firm, CBRE, claims that foreign investment is now essential to house building in London because they are taking on major sites that are beyond the capacity of domestic housebuilders. Developers say foreign investment is vital, allowing them to tackle long-derelict sites such as Battersea Power Station, which is funded by investment from overseas.

Yet it is now clear that many of these developments are being used as an asset class with new-build blocks of flats simply being bought off-plan by overseas investors and left empty for prices to rise. Chancellor George Osborne has now announced that overseas owners of UK property will be charged capital gains tax on sales for the first time from 2015.

The CBRE report found that foreign investors have permission to build nearly two years' supply of housing in the capital.

The shortage of affordable housing

As commentators are increasingly saying, the real "shortage" problem is that of affordable housing in the right places. As an article in the FT (Feb 27) pointed out: "The trend is being driven by high and rising prices, combined with the dwindling availability of council houses to rent. More than 1million have been sold over the past three decades through the Thatcher government's Right To Buy policy of the 1980s."

Better analysis of all factors needed

But any attempt at analysis of the situation must also take into account the underlying imbalance of the UK economy which leaves large areas of the UK with high unemployment. In some of these areas there is an abundance of housing at low prices and little price inflation, but few jobs. It surely cannot be right for the environment of London and the south-east to be degraded by cementing over green spaces and overdevelopment of high density town cramming, while little is done

"Without a crackdown on property speculators, first-time buyers will always be shut out of the market".

Peter Franklin, a former Conservative policy adviser

for other parts of the country which have no jobs and empty houses.

Another revealing statistic from the CBRE report is that foreign investors from just four countries hold twice the number of housing development sites in London as housing associations and affordable house builders. There are in fact fewer social rented homes in London now than ten years ago.

Vital workers driven out by high prices

The draft Mayor's Housing Strategy acknowledges (page 12) that quality affordable housing is needed in London to enable "low paid workers, who often deliver the basic services that support the London economy to live close to their jobs. Further, investment in new homes with low rents for those who need them represents better long-term value for tax payers than meeting the high costs of market housing through housing benefit."

However, against an estimated requirement of 25,600 affordable homes annually the Mayor has set in his FALP a target of only 17,000 pa. The reasons given are the lack of funds and the constraints imposed by the Government on their use for the homes that Londoners on low incomes will need. This must be addressed. And it is not just low paid workers who are being hit. Middle income workers are also being driven out by high prices and the Housing Strategy estimates "that there could be a total shortfall of between 50,000 and 90,000 homes for professionals in London over the next ten years" which would "have a disproportionately negative impact on London's economy".

The super-rich effect

Research by Ramidus Consulting, an economic consultancy, presented at the Centre for London think-tank in February, found that some 1,338 homes were sold for more than £5m in the "prime" areas of central London in the decade to 2013. Ramidus estimated that at least 60 per cent of these were bought by overseas buyers.

Ramidus also claims that, even though many of these owners leave their houses empty for large parts of the year, they are "major contributors to the UK economy", spending £4bn a year on goods and services. They calculated this by surveying agents, "lifestyle managers", concierge groups and luxury service providers. This, it is claimed shows that payments to domestic staff, professional services fees, medical expenses, maintenance and decoration carried on throughout the year even in the owners' absence.

Generation Rent

All this is forcing a new reality on people. The trend to home ownership is reversing. In the 20th century it rose from 10 per cent of households in 1901 to around 70 per cent in 2001, since when it has dropped five percentage points. If current trends continue it could fall to 49 per cent by 2041, with half of Britons living in rented accommodation.

The Department for Communities and Local Government figures released this month show there are now 4 million households in private renting out of a total 22 million homes in England. 14.3 million households are owner-occupied. With 3.7 million social-rented homes it is the first time that the number of households living in the private rented sector has overtaken those in social housing.

Some suggest that renting is better than buying for many people who may need to be mobile if they are to remain in work. It has long been pointed out that affluent countries like Germany and Switzerland - where institutional investors own large tracts of property - have much higher renting populations.

London's housing crisis (continued)

But house price inflation has distorted the rental market too, pushing rents also to unaffordable levels. The English housing survey published in February found that a quarter of households in the private rented sector are also now subsidised by housing benefit.

There is a rising trend for young people, both single and as couples, to continue living with their parents. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) has found the numbers of families living together has risen by 70 per cent in the past decade, to 289,000. London has the highest proportion of multi-generational households. Almost half are couples with no children, living with one set of parents, and three million adults aged between 20 and 34 were still living with their parents. Older people will remember that in previous generations up to as recently as the 1970's, this was considered normal: it was quite usual to have grandparents, parents, children living together in one house. ONS acknowledges there may also be cultural reasons: boroughs with a high proportion of ethnic minority populations such as Newham and Brent also have the highest proportion of such extended families living together.

Homeless families pushed out of London

London boroughs have doubled the number of homeless families they are placing outside the capital as a result of the soaring costs of private rented accommodation. Unpublished documents by London Councils, seen by Inside Housing, the social housing magazine, reveal that in the past 12 months to June, 789 households have been housed in 69 local authority areas as far flung as Manchester, Birmingham, Swansea and Accrington. In the first quarter of 2012/13, 113 people were placed outside London. But in the first quarter of 2013/14 this rose to 259. Factors contributing to the problem are the failure to build new social housing, the increasing rents being levied by private landlords and the letting of temporary accommodation on a nightly rather than weekly basis in London in anticipation of demand caused by welfare reforms.

What can be done?

Peter Franklin suggests in his *Times* article that: "as well as increasing supply we

must manage demand by shutting out speculators. This could be achieved through an enhanced system of conditional planning permissions. No doubt this would be condemned as state-controlled rationing. But that's exactly what the planning system is — a means of rationing land. As things stand, we ration land in such a fashion as to direct the profits of development to speculators, planning lawyers and landowners. The time has come to redirect these benefits to new homeowners, and local communities. There is a difference between maximising the existing distribution of profits and creating a true property-owning democracy."

London Forum's chairman, Peter Eversden has suggested at conferences on the FALP some actions that are required. Firstly, get over 200,000 homes for London that have planning permission actually built. Secondly, support the Mayor's eighteen actions and reforms defined in the draft Housing Strategy, and lobby MPs and Government to respond where needed. Thirdly, find more land and fourthly, build in suitable places at higher densities than outer London boroughs have been used to, including regenerating areas of London that still need it. He emphasises that housing densities must be within the appropriate ranges for each development site, as required by London Plan policy 3.4.

Above all, he suggests, reductions in S.106 and CIL financial contributions should not be conceded unless development scheme viability is really impossible. Any increases in housing and jobs will be sustainable and deliver quality of life only if the required infrastructure is in place.

21st Century Garden Suburbs

Another Mayoral initiative is to regenerate large parts of London through facilitating the release of vacant public land for housing development and long-term public-private partnerships with the private sector on major sites.

Some might be new 21st century Garden Suburbs, including at Barking Riverside, where the GLA is supporting the creation of a new community larger than Windsor, as well as in Beam Park, which has the potential to be an attractive new waterside neighbourhood.

Improving the private rented sector

The London Rental Standard (LRS), published in July 2013 sets a benchmark for the standards expected for landlords and letting agents. It sets a framework for other accreditation schemes and set a target to achieve 100,000 accredited landlords and agents by 2016. The GLA will develop a 'badge' of accreditation, underpinned by the LRS and will launch a public awareness campaign in early 2014. The offer of incentive discount cards is being explored as part of the LRS. The Housing Covenant sets out two further ambitions:

The Mayor is keen to see landlords testing new and innovative tenancy agreements as well as using the assured shorthold regime to accommodate longer tenancies and provide more certainties around rent increases. Letting agents will be encouraged to adopt a means of independent redress for when disputes occur between them and landlords or tenants. The Mayor supports government plans to improve the letting agent market with greater protection for tenants and greater transparency about letting agents fees.

The quality of rented homes and the behaviour of letting agents and landlords to tenants has been exposed as unsatisfactory by a scrutiny conducted by the London Assembly. The Mayor needs new powers to regulate this market.

A new role for institutional investors

Perhaps the new business model beginning to gain support in the private sector may help.

Professor Michael Ball of Reading University examined the residential rental investment market in the UK, (*Making Sense of Large-Scale Residential Investment*) looking at historic trend data and has challenged some of the considered norms of the sector, in particular the belief that residential property is not suitable for institutional investment. He takes the view that there is untapped potential in large scale private residential rental development. Residential property is the largest single asset class in the UK with a value of over £1 trillion and yet has comparatively small institutional holdings.

The lobby group, Million Homes, Million

Lives set up by Natalie Elphicke and Calum Mercer (see Newsforum No. 65 Winter 2013) have just issued a further report entitled *Nation Rent*, looking at how institutional investors could play a positive role.

Only 1 per cent of the UK's private rented housing stock is currently owned by institutions. But according to the data provider IPD, the figure is 17 per cent in Germany, 23 per cent in Switzerland, 37 per cent in the Netherlands, and 13 per cent in the US. But things are changing, with APG, the Dutch pension manager, and M3 Capital Partners, an Anglo-US group funded by US pension schemes entering the market. Legal & General have unveiled plans to build five new towns at a cost of up to £5bn, and Prudential are also coming into the market.

Professor Ball's report was commissioned by Get Living London, the new residential owner and rental management company of joint venture partners Delancey and Qatari Diar Real Estate Development Company,

established to act as landlord for the former Athletes' Village at East Village, the first legacy neighbourhood to result from the London 2012 Olympic Games. Homes will be rented out on long-term tenancies with no fees or estate agent involvement "providing residents with a direct relationship to a quality landlord who both owns and manages their home."

Councils to build houses again

There is also now a move for Councils to get back into housebuilding. Under a local government finance reform in 2012 aimed at easing Britain's housing shortage, English councils are able, for the first time in two decades, to negotiate long-term deals with leading property developers for rebuilding on swaths of land. This revives councils' historic housebuilding role. From the end of the second world war until 1980 when they were stopped, councils built half of all new homes. The new rules give councils the potential to profit from

building homes for sale, as well as developing property for below-market rent.

According to the Association of Retained Council Housing, which represents local authority providers, three-quarters of English councils are now planning to do this. Hammersmith & Fulham Council has agreed a deal with Stanhope the developer, giving it first refusal on the redevelopment of many of the local authority's housing estates for the next 15 years. Nearly two-thirds of the 300 homes in the first stage are to be sold on the open market, with the remainder offered through low-cost ownership schemes, not for rent.

Enfield Council has announced that it will buy 500 homes through a private company over the next five years to tackle housing shortage. The homes will be exempt from right to buy legislation. Southwark, Thurrock and Newham councils have also announced ambitious building plans. ■

Offices to homes - contributing to further imbalance

Evidence is emerging that confirms London Forum's concern about the misguided legislation allowing offices to be converted to homes. (see Newsforum No. 64, 2013). Although Ministers have led people to believe that it deals with empty offices the legislation is not restricted to them and evidence is emerging of the potential to destabilise local economies.

Richmond upon Thames

Members of Richmond Society have drawn the Forum's attention to an astonishing list of over 150 planning applications to Richmond Council to turn offices to flats.

These are not empty buildings; thriving small businesses and enterprises with limited capital and resources are simply being given notice to quit. The loss of commercial space will be devastating for the local economy.

The Leader of Richmond Council, Lord True, used his position as a Conservative Peer, to draw attention to the situation during the Lords debate on the Local Government Finance Settlement in January: "We should consider the vital duty of promoting local business, which is

absolutely central to any debate on local authority finance. Businesses need premises, but what do we get? Are we trusted to do locally what is right to secure them? No—we get the dogmatic imposition of the automatic right to convert office space to residential use. I was disappointed that, jointly with Islington's Labour council, we were unable to persuade the High Court of the unfairness of this policy. Given the staggeringly high land values in south-west London, we are quite predictably being hit heavily by it. Already there have been 140 prior approvals for automatic permitted development. This has so far lost some 20,000 square metres of office space—a high number in our local context—denied opportunities for future business development in an area where we want to promote small IT businesses, and involved so far the eviction and termination of almost 50 existing business tenancies."

Lord True expressed his "dismay at this back-of-the-envelope planning policy, imposed from on high over the reasoned objections of local councils, in which a short-term dash for profit is cutting an irreversible swathe through strategic provision for small

business". He expressed the wish that whatever Government may come to power "will listen to advice from those with local experience and understanding in some policy areas".

The wider context

Two recent reports into commercial property across London, by estate agency Cushman & Wakefield, and IPD and Levy, give more concern as to just how misguided this policy may turn out to be. Both found rising tenant demand in the West End and Mayfair, which now have the world's most expensive offices, ahead of Hong Kong, Moscow and Beijing. They found also that the lack of top-quality office space in these areas is already pushing rents up. The London Markets Report by IPD, studied the performance of 20 of London's 'micro' markets – measuring over £42bn in assets across the capital. It showed significant divisions emerging with a trend to peripheral locations across London and 'fringe' markets outperforming many conventional locations. But will there be any office space left for such developments in future? ■

Climate change Open Meeting

Dr. Mayer Hillman, Senior Fellow Emeritus, Policy Studies Institute, London, addressed London Forum members on

Climate change and its implications for the future of London

Society is demonstrating all too clearly its strong preference for downplaying the relevance of the changes that must be made if we are to limit the devastating impacts of climate change. It is seen neither as the overriding background against which decisions affecting the future must be made nor as one that needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency owing to the fact that any increase in greenhouse gas emissions can only make matters worse! We continue to plan without due attention to this reality.

Instead, successive governments have seen one of their main aims as accommodating as much public demand as possible, for instance for ever more road, rail and air travel, albeit with some limited consideration given to the likely social, economic and environmental consequences. It is salutary to realise that the origins of that demand are personal decisions reached with little if any regard to these consequences rather than, as it should be, to the capacity of the global atmosphere to safely absorb further emissions. Indeed, the public appears to be hard-wired into believing that it has an inalienable right to travel further and faster to take advantage of the rising opportunities of 'connectivity' opened up over the last few decades to attend more social occasions, sporting events, professional conferences, and business and leisure activities.

The situation in London

Take London as an example of this lamentable process. Witness the strategic planning decisions that have been taken to benefit its population. Nearly all policy makers subscribe to the view that the capital's future prosperity lies in promoting and facilitating continuing growth of its economy, such as in the sphere of tourism – an especially energy-intensive activity heavily dependent as it is on flying. That entails turning a blind eye to the fact that, to accommodate it, will need greater investment in its energy-intensive infrastructure and transport system – Crossrail 1 & 2, HS2 and new airport capacity.

From a climate change perspective, that is highly disturbing. We have a responsibility to do all we can to ensure

We have a responsibility to do all we can to ensure that the quality of life of the generations succeeding us is not diminished

that the quality of life of the generations succeeding us is not diminished by our failure to come to terms with the reality that anthropogenic global warming poses the greatest threat ever to face mankind.

There is now near-consensus in the scientific community that the manifestations of climate change are occurring at an accelerating rate and that human activity is a significant contributor. One of the most eminent climate scientists in the world, James Hansen, now warns of the dangers of the concentration of carbon emissions exceeding 350 ppmv. At present, it is 400, and the relatively progressive UK Government continues to spell out the extreme difficulties of limiting it to 500 – double the level of the last million years and almost certainly irreversible.

It is no wonder then that, last year, Lord Nicholas Stern, one of the most influential government advisers, made a public statement that the situation is 'far, far worse' than he realised when writing his 2006 report on the economics of climate change. When Connie Hedegaard, the European Commissioner on Climate Change was challenged a few months ago to indicate what steps could now be taken to reverse the process resulting in the melting of the Arctic ice cap, she responded disarmingly - 'we must be optimistic'!

The legacy for future generations

No other aggregation of human behaviours in recorded history can begin to match the appalling legacy we are in the process of bequeathing to future generations. At the heart of this impending tragedy lie a number of erroneous assumptions subscribed to by all the main political parties, including the view that a safe limit

on climate change can be reconciled with rising economic growth; sufficient cuts in greenhouse gas emissions can necessarily be achieved by a combination of more fuel efficiency, technological developments, alternative fuel sources, renewable energy, and carbon sequestration; and that voluntary action based on better education and promoting a wider take-up of energy-saving measures will deliver in time the degree of reduction required.

So what is to be done?

I have studied this subject for 25 years. I am now wholly convinced that there is only one way out of our predicament. It is the Global Commons Institute's C&C (Contraction & Convergence) framework – an ingenious means that is speedily gaining international support around the world.

It is based on UN Climate Treaty's principles of precaution and equity by which the future allocation of a carbon allowance or ration becomes equal globally by an agreed year, with aggregate global emissions reduced year-on-year to their relatively safe level of concentration. Its adoption is inevitable or we are doomed. Overall C&C has unique characteristics: first and foremost, by its very nature, governments are assured of success in delivering the internationally agreed degree of reduction in gases. This is in marked contrast to the present strategy

The implementation of C&C in the form of annual but tradable personal carbon allowances is its logical manifestation. Its adoption will act as a driver towards minimising the awful impact of climate change far more effectively than by relying on the setting of targets and encouraging individuals to engage in green practices, which are unlikely to be met owing to unforeseen political, economic or practical circumstances. It contrasts sharply with current policies by which, in general, the affluent world has been advantaged by its unfair share of fossil fuels. Instead, people who are not contributing to the degradation of the planet's climate system become recipients of a rising revenue from the sale of their unused carbon allowances to those disengaging from their energy-profligate activities.

All sectors of the economy as well as

Climate change Open Meeting

Fiona Booth, from DECC, Heat Strategy and Policy, gave a presentation entitled **An Introduction to Community Energy and Heat**, reminding us that DECC's mission was to power the country and protect the planet. Why was heat important?

Diana Linskey and **Diane Burrige** report

personal lifestyles will inevitably be transformed in the process. Bearing in mind the embedded energy in the existing infrastructure, the balance between demolition and refurbishment will be dramatically altered and the impact of a low carbon approach to public policy objectives will have to be comprehensively measured in terms of energy conservation.

Long-distance commuting, holidays and global business activity will rapidly become a thing of the past. This will need to be done to take account, from an energy perspective, not only of all the stages of materials used in new developments, but also the transport and infrastructural implications for its users as well as the energy needed during its lifetime. No developments will be able to be sanctioned in isolation from the fundamental imperative of ensuring absolutely minimal use of fossil fuels in construction and in use – including transport. Its relevance to London is even greater than to other settlements owing to its pivotal position in global activity of all types.

We are surely now beyond the stage of denial of the threat of climate change. Prospects are grim indeed if little more than lip service continues to be paid to massively curbing fossil fuel-based activities. We are all complicit in our failure to press for international agreement to effect the massive but essential changes in the behaviour of the world's population. In the absence of this agreement, we will assuredly hand over a dying planet to the next generation. ■

*Mayer Hillman is co-author with Tina Fawcett of the Penguin Book, **How we can save the planet**, (2004)*

More energy is used for heating than for electricity generation. Most of our gas is used to provide heat, and causes around a third of UK greenhouse gas emissions. Heat is economically important and has a big impact on consumer bills and industrial competitiveness. 1.6 million boilers are replaced each year. The move to condensing boilers saved UK consumers £800 million in fuel costs in 2009 alone. Heat demand is very seasonal and therefore different from electricity demand which remains more constant throughout the year. In March 2013 the Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) published a plan of action – The Future of Heating – meeting the challenge. Fiona then ran through some of the initiatives which were supporting delivering change under this action plan.

She talked about Heat Networks which are far more common in Continental Europe than in the UK. Heat Networks, often referred to as district heating schemes, supply heat from a central source directly to homes and businesses through a network of pipes carrying hot water. This means that individual homes and business do not need to generate their own heat on site. Their report showed that in the right conditions heat networks could supply up to 14% of the UK's heat demand and be a cost-effective and viable alternative to individual renewable technologies while reducing the cost of energy for consumers. DECC were supporting local authorities in developing heat networks by establishing a Heat Networks Delivery Unit within the Department that will work closely with individual authorities' project teams in England and Wales. They were also providing funding over two financial years to contribute to local authorities' costs in carrying out early stage heat network development. This will enable local authorities to bring forward projects to the stage where they are suitable for investment including loan finance from the Green Investment Bank or commercial lenders. Successful Local Authorities in London so far have been Ealing, Haringey, Islington, Merton, Sutton, and Kingston.

In addition the Local Energy Assessment Fund was to help prepare communities in England and Wales to take action on energy efficiency and renewable energy and to take advantage of the opportunities offered by Government policies such as the Green Deal, Renewable Heat Incentive and Feed-In Tariffs. It was delivered within a short timescale

(between December 2011 and March 2012) and received over 600 applications from community-led organisations of which 236 were successful and shared a £9.3 million. The average award to organisations was approximately £44,000. Activities delivered included public engagement, scoping studies, demonstration projects, awareness-raising and behaviour change projects.

DECC has also launched a Community Energy Strategy. There are many examples of community energy projects across the UK, with at least 5000 community groups undertaking energy initiatives in the last five years. Key announcements as part of the Strategy include a £10 million Urban Community Energy Fund, a £1m Big Energy Saving Network, a £100,000 community energy saving competition and a one-stop shop for information.

Question and answer session.

The question and answer session mainly discussed carbon taxes and airport taxes.

To the question Why isn't air travel taxed as much as car usage of carbon? Why isn't air travel considered in the calculations for a country's carbon emissions? Murad Qureshi responded that carbon taxes could reshape priorities fundamentally. He was against having another runway at Heathrow, as 600 flights/week go to destinations that could easily be reached by Eurostar.

Fiona Booth added that taxes are now £12/tonne of carbon emitted, and Lambeth had paid £400,000 for their carbon emissions in a recent year.

Mayer Hillman asserted that the situation is so serious that we need carbon rationing now, as there was food rationing in 1939. And the answer is not simply having electric cars, as these need lithium, an increasingly scarce resource, for their batteries; and batteries need charging – this requires heat, which is usually obtained from carbon-rich fossil fuels.

To a question on how much is volcanic activity factored into the increases in the emissions of carbon dioxide and other carbon-based gases, a response was that 97% of the members of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) agree that the increased rate of climate change is due to human activity. And with city dwellers using three times more carbon than rural dwellers, London has a duty to reduce carbon emissions. ■

Saving London Pubs and other Assets of Community Value - Open Meeting

Speaker: **Dale Ingram**, of Planning 4 Pubs Ltd

Report by **Peter Pickering**

This well-attended event showed the London wide depth of concern. Michael Bach opened the meeting by emphasising the dangers of the traditional prioritisation of housing over everything else - offices, shops, garages, schools, hospitals - and pubs. Kensington & Chelsea had adopted a policy of "keeping life local"; and some other boroughs were protecting assets like playing fields, but few were protecting pubs, despite the valiant efforts of the Campaign for Real Ale (CAMRA).

Michael introduced the speaker, Dale Ingram, of Planning 4 Pubs Ltd, a historic buildings and planning consultancy with a particular expertise in, and passion for Britain's pubs and the brewing sector including pubs campaigning.

Dale Ingram said that although she would concentrate on pubs, what she had to say, especially on campaigning and Assets of Community Value (ACVs), was just as relevant to other kinds of community facilities. She illustrated her presentation with examples of pubs lost and saved. Although the rate of pub losses nationally had slowed since its peak, it was now accelerating again, and the estimate was that 28 pubs nationally were being closed every week, some half of them becoming residential.

The power of the breweries

Part of the problem lay with the monopolistic power of the breweries and the pubcos which could make pubs uneconomic, since tenants had to buy all (or most) of their supplies from, and pay rent at inflated prices to, their landlord. Pub conversions were attractive projects for small and medium-sized developers, who were less able and willing to accept losses if a project proved unworkable than a professional developer would be.

The National Planning Policy Framework, in paragraphs 69 and 70, indicated that community facilities should be provided and protected, and this was now being picked up by Inspectors in appeal decisions. Regrettably, Steve O'Connell's report "Keeping Local" on which the Mayor's proposed Further Amendments to the London Plan were based (para 4.48A) though welcome, did not appreciate the implications of the current high value of land for housing.

The NPPF says that community facilities should be provided and protected, and this was now being picked up by Inspectors in appeal decisions.

The paragraph says: "The Mayor recognises the important role that London's public houses can play in the social fabric of communities and recent research highlights the rapid rate of closures over the past decade and the factors behind these. To address these concerns, where there is sufficient evidence of need, community asset value and viability in pub use, boroughs are encouraged to bring forward policies to maintain, manage and enhance public houses."

Dale went on to emphasise how important it was that the protection of pubs should be enshrined in local plans. Westminster, Harrow, Merton, Richmond, Lambeth, Camden, Kensington and Chelsea and Islington currently have specific pubs policies in their plans.

The only way of controlling some types of change of use of pubs (to other A Use Class uses and the new temporary B1 business use), or demolition of pubs without heritage protection is by Article 4 Directions, which can take particular buildings out of the ambit of a general permission. Councils are often reluctant to make these directions because the payment of compensation could be involved, although there are few examples of this actually occurring.

Councillors must therefore be made fully aware of local feeling; petitions should back up requests for ACV listing or Article 4 Directions, and residents must turn up in force at meetings where planning applications are being decided.

Consideration should be given to instructing professionals to support campaigns. Dialogue is essential - protesters should talk to developers, council planners, councillors and each other; they would thus learn and increase understanding.

Registration as an ACV

The interiors of pubs might be of historic or aesthetic importance, even where the outside is not particularly attractive; amenity societies ought to join with pub campaigners to save these. Registration as an ACV can prevent the loss of a facility without the knowledge of the community; it might not be possible for the community to buy a threatened pub, but they might nevertheless be able to find another pub operator to purchase it. Compromises are possible - for instance the retention of a pub on the ground floor when pubs are replaced with mixed use residential and commercial schemes. Examples were provided in Wandsworth, Hackney and Brent.

In discussion:-

The Sydenham Society asked about the possibility of appeals against ACV listing. An owner could appeal against such listing, and ask for it to be reviewed, but only on grounds relating to process in the first instance. The only way to challenge the principle of listing is in the court of the First Tier Tribunal. Dale made it clear that listing as an asset of community value depended on its social value, not on, for instance, its heritage significance.

In response to a question from the Goldhawk Road Shopkeepers' Action Group, Dale expanded on the uses of, and difficulties with, Article 4 Directions.

The Ealing Society asked whether Councils could use compulsory purchase where a pub (or other ACV) was simply left to decay by its owner. Dale said that compulsory purchase was possible in these circumstances, but was very rarely used, and hopes should not be pinned on it.

The Herne Hill Society said that the 'Honor Oak' pub, listed as an ACV, was closed; it was rumoured that Punch Taverns, its owner, might go into receivership and there was fear about the effect of receivership on the protection of the ACV. Dale said that, regrettably, a sale resulting from receivership would be an exception to the Community Right to Bid, and there would be no ACV protection.

The George IV pub in Brixton

Bill Linskey (Brixton Society) gave a graphic account by of the way in which the George IV pub in Brixton had been lost to Tesco

despite petitions, a letter to the Evening Standard, its being in a conservation area and Lambeth's policy of retaining pubs. Change of use from A4 (drinking establishments) to A1 (shops) did not require permission, and so Tesco needed to apply only for alterations to the building. These were supported by planning officers (including the conservation officer) and approved by councillors on the Chairman's casting vote after a 2-2 split with two abstentions.

Other participants told of their own experiences in battles to keep pubs. Peter Eversden spoke of the Tabard in Bedford Park, being run down by its owners despite being a Grade II* Listed Building.

Michael Bach described a case where an appeal against a Council refusal in Kensington had been lost because the Council had not yet adopted a policy to protect pubs. The community persuaded the Council to adopt a pub protection policy in December 2011, after which the Council had to turn down almost all applications for change of use to housing. Three of these refusals – the Cross Keys, Phene Arms and Queen's Head – went to appeal – two via a hearing and one, Phene Arms, to an inquiry. Even though the Cross Keys was closed in advance of the appeal, residents were able to persuade the Inspector of the degree to which it was the focus of the community. That and the Queen's Head were both able to demonstrate strong community support. The Phene Arms appeal was dismissed even though the community was split, some wanting a pub as a community facility, and others hostile because of the noise, etc., attendant on pub use.

It was essential for those who fought pub closures to have a clear strategy, including strong use of social media and a strong campaign with witnesses. If Councillors could be persuaded to accept 'ownership' of the strategy, half the battle was won. ■

Privatisation of parks

Privatisation continues apace - more concerts at Finsbury Park

By **Diane Burrige**

Committee Member, Highbury Community Association and a member of the Friends of Finsbury Park.

Haringey Council, has agreed to an increase in commercial use of Finsbury Park. Until January 2014, it was five days for events per year. Now Haringey Councillors have agreed to five 'major events' taking 'up to' three days each per year, making a total of 15 days, not including the days to set up and dismantle equipment and staging before and after events.

The area in the park for these events is near the Seven Sisters Road entrance which faces the boroughs of Hackney and Islington (and interestingly not the borough of Haringey). Given that Islington has the least amount of open space in the country and the highest density of population, and given that Hackney is one of the poorest boroughs in the country, one would have hoped that Haringey would have realized how we all need green open spaces for mental well-being, to exercise, for people to meet and for children to play in a quiet and non-polluting environment - not an environment full of noise and fumes from operating machinery.

Despite vociferous objections from local residents and the boroughs of Hackney and Islington which back onto this major Park, Haringey's response is that money earned will benefit park services, and such income generation is needed as a result of Government cuts. They have agreed that there will be no clashes with major events at the Emirates (the home of Arsenal Football Club) which is nearby. In fact, for some international games, the same area of Finsbury Park is used for coach parking and so there cannot be any clashes here, as the park is required for this other income generating purpose.

Noise and licence monitoring will take place on the Islington side of the park. Islington Councillors, in the February 2014 edition of the Highbury Community Association's newsletter, have stated that they will continue: 'to press Haringey Council to set maximum attendance limits and earlier finish times and to insist upon better street management, including barriers along key routes from nearby stations... commercial interests must not be allowed to trump the interests of the local community.'

In the meantime, the Friends of Finsbury Park, Highbury Community Association and other groups are planning strategies to monitor the situation. ■

Loss of Police and Fire stations

Dozens of police stations to close

Communities across London have been dismayed by Deputy Mayor for Policing Stephen Greenhalgh's controversial plans to sell off dozens of buildings which are part of London's most familiar infrastructure.

The Mayor's Office for Policing And Crime's (MOPAC) estate comprises 500 buildings, many of which MOPAC says are underused, and costs £203 million a year to run. Sixty three of the capital's 136 police front counters will be closed.

The sell-off which forms part of MOPAC's plan to meet £500m of funding cuts over the next three years, is intended to save £85million a year on running costs by 2015/16.

Receipts from the sales and any resultant savings in property maintenance and running costs are promised to be ploughed back into frontline policing.

St John's Wood Police Station fetched £8.5m. Another thirty six Metropolitan Police properties are being marketed.

It is acknowledged that there is "a high degree of risk" to the policy. Bids are likely to be conditional subject to the granting of planning consent which will delay the receipt of funds. If planning consent is not given purchasers may "seek to renegotiate the purchase price...or may withdraw from the purchase altogether." Successful buyers will also be expected to agree to a claw-back clause allowing MOPAC to benefit from any increase in value should they sell the property within an agreed period of time for more than they paid MOPAC.

Fire stations too are under threat

as the Mayor seeks to save £10s of millions over the next two years. 10 fire stations across London are closing along with the loss of more than 550 firefighters' jobs and 14 fire engines. Communities mounted petitions and protests across London to no avail.

The fire stations closing include several historic buildings such as Clerkenwell Fire Station, which was the oldest in Europe; Westminster station, opened in 1906, Belsize Park, opened in 1915, Bow, Downham, Kingsland, Knightsbridge, Silvertown, Southwark, and Woolwich. ■

Spotlight on the Carshalton Society

Fifty years of working to preserve Carshalton's identity

by **John Thornton**

In 1963, at a time when the civic amenity movement was gathering strength throughout the country, one of Carshalton's oldest and most picturesque buildings, Queen's Well, was demolished after falling into what was at that time considered to be irreversible disrepair. The local sense of dismay at the loss of this building, coupled with apprehension over what might replace it, brought together a group of people whose determination that local opinion should be taken into account gave rise to the formation of The Carshalton Society.

Prominent in this group was Dr Michael Wilks, who effectively became the voice of the Society over the next thirty years. During this time the Society actively campaigned to preserve and improve the amenities of Carshalton by protecting its historic buildings from unsuitable development, and its open spaces from encroachment, by combating attempts to increase the capacity of its roads, and by encouraging good architecture in new buildings.

As an eminent historian, Dr Wilks possessed a sense of the identity of Carshalton, which was important at a time when it was about to be subsumed into the newly-formed London Borough of Sutton and as an able propagandist he always insisted that this identity should be respected.

Successful post-war conservation

This was a time when the continuing momentum of post-war reconstruction and development was prompting ambitious and often entirely inappropriate planning schemes and the Society quickly became involved in many matters of public concern.

With the coming of the Civic Amenities Act, the Society produced its own Conservation Area proposals for the village centre, which laid special emphasis on the need to relieve the congestion of the High Street shopping area by re-routing through-traffic. It successfully opposed attempts to sell off nearby parkland for redevelopment and to erect office blocks in the centre of the Village. Particular care has been taken to oppose the indiscriminate felling of trees, to maintain rivers and watercourses, to secure nature conservation, and to improve the scenic amenities of public

The Society can take some credit for ensuring that the High Street remains as harmonious as it is.

spaces and recreation areas.

Whilst a Conservation Area was soon established, the traffic provisions were not incorporated, and a juggernaut-free High Street is still an unrealised vision. Planning applications are regularly inspected and investigated. The Society has given advice on numerous planning matters and made every effort to give individual people an effective voice in the planning process.

Carshalton Village

The history of the Village and its surroundings is another of the Society's interests. The Manor of Carshalton situated in the valley of the River Wandle, dates from before the Domesday Book; 2009 was the 750th anniversary of the granting of the charter. As with so many villages on the outskirts of London, although it was overtaken by the expansion of the outer London suburbs, it retains its own character. In the 17th and early 18th centuries industries developed along the River using water power from numerous mills. Carshalton House, part of the medieval Manor of Carshalton, was rebuilt in 1718-21 by Sir John Fellowes, a director of the notorious South Sea Company, and confiscated after the South Sea catastrophe in 1721.

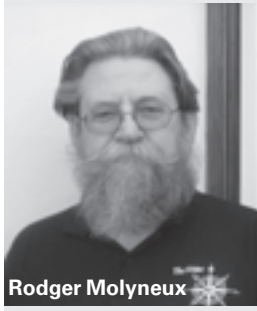
A view of Carshalton Ponds and All Saints Parish Church, featuring traffic on the A232. After years of wrangling and frequent incidents of vehicles plunging into the pond, the 18th century railings were replaced in 2012. The stanchions were raised to modern standards but made in cast iron to the same design as the originals.

Before the First World War, the nucleus of the village – the High Street, Church and Ponds – was still surrounded by large houses in large grounds, dating from the era when Carshalton was a popular country retreat for wealthy London merchants and financiers. But the surge of suburban housing development which followed the war saw them begin to be sold off for building. It is to the everlasting credit of the Carshalton Urban District Council that they bought up several of these properties, using the houses as offices and converting the grounds into public parks. This has caused the centre to continue to be referred to as 'the Village' and it retains that feeling, despite being run through by the A232, the main east-west road between Sutton and Croydon, and having rather too many estate agents, charity shops and fast-food outlets for comfort. There has been only one major development in the High Street since the sixties, a shopping frontage with flats above and a small precinct in the middle, and those of us who were around at the time feel the Society can take some credit for ensuring that it was made as harmonious as it is.

The Ponds

As stated above, Carshalton Ponds in the centre of the village, one of the sources of the River Wandle, used frequently to dry up in the summer, being fed with water issuing from springs in the bed. The problem therefore was how to allow the water to come up whilst stopping it going back down. With encouragement (some would say nagging) from the Society, the





Carshalton Society

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Carshalton Park Grotto Canal, March 2014 Normally just a grassy dip, this year's weather has returned the feature to its original appearance.

Age: 50

Founded: 1963

Circumstances of Birth: Demolition of Queen's Well, an old and picturesque house overlooking Carshalton Ponds.

Biggest Successes: 1. Instigating engineering works to ensure the Ponds did not dry up in summer. 2. Securing Conservation Area status for the centre of the village.

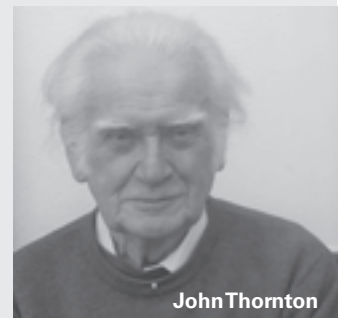
Biggest Disappointments/Frustrations: Failure to get heavy traffic rerouted away from the High Street.

Present Preoccupations: Trying to raise the profile of the Society in a stagnating planning climate.

Working Details: Membership, at one time over 200, now well below 100 and ageing. Annual subscription rates: £4, Seniors £3, Corporate £10. (Everyone tells us we should put them up.) All the Committee members are active in other local activities: three in the local archaeological society, two as trustees of the Carshalton Water Tower, one on the borough's Arts Council, one running jazz clubs and one (the Chairman) as licensee of a local community-owned pub and reviving folk traditions such as the annual harvest-time Straw Jack

Activities: Four open meetings a year; four members' Newsletters issued. Annual Charter Fair held in July. Participation in the borough Conservation Areas consultative committee.

Last Word: Last word: continuing to work to preserve Carshalton's identity ■



John Thornton

water company produced an ingenious scheme whereby a grid of pipes beneath an impervious lining fed water to the edges of the ponds where it flowed over a retaining sill. The essential additional feature is a recirculation system to prevent stagnation – when they remember to turn it on, that is. More nagging required.

Incidentally, the current abundance of water has produced in Carshalton a number of 'bourne' flows, causing long-vanished ponds and canals and cascades to spring into life again.

The Charter Fair

The Carshalton Fair charter was granted to the Lord of the Manor in 1259 and seems to have continued quietly until 1851, when it quietly expired, having at some point moved from its prescribed September date to the beginning of July. The Society revived the Fair in 1983 to mark its own twentieth anniversary, returning it to its original date, although excessive rain has subsequently prompted us to retreat back to July in turn. ■

The Hope, West Street. A 1930s frontage on a 19th century building.



Left: The Carshalton House Water Tower

The water tower is a very unusual early 18th century garden building in the grounds of Carshalton House (now St Philomena's School). As the name suggests, this contained a water-powered pump which supplied water to Carshalton House and the fountains in its garden. However, the building was and is much more than this as it contains a splendid early 18th century cold bath lined with Delft tiles.

A critique of the 'New Bus' for London

After experiencing the "Boris Bus" and listening to comments from fellow passengers and staff, **Tom Ball** finds the new bus not to be fit for purpose.

The 1930's Routemaster bus was rigorously tested before going into production and won favour from Londoners, over many decades. Mayor Boris Johnson has backed the new 'virtual' Routemaster, describing it as "an example of wonderful best of British design". In my analysis this is proven to be totally wrong.

Access and circulation

All other London buses have a clear 'in' and 'out' system. This bus with its three doors and two staircases is confusing, leading to conflicts. The platform invites conflict too, which may be why a 'conductor' is required.

"Present Card"

On boarding a passenger has to "present card". This is in fact above the location, so first time passengers do what they are instructed - and wonder why nothing happens!

Passengers' Space

The lower deck layout is awkward due to the doors and staircases. Congestion and muddle surrounds passengers' movements. The disabled passenger's stop button can be accidentally pressed by a passenger leaning against it - sending a wrong signal to the driver. The 'bus stopping' and destination sign is positioned so that it is hidden by standing passengers. The space on the upper deck is simple to understand despite ergonomic problems.

Stair access

The stairs are not straight flights which increases the difficulties. The hand rails on both staircases are uncomfortable owing to the fixing brackets which make it impossible to slide a hand continuously on the rail. With the rates of deceleration and acceleration, and the uneven ride of the bus this is a fundamental failure.

Visibility

It is impossible on the upper deck to see out of the rear of the bus. This is a result of imposed styling rather than design. Obscuring the rear view is a significant disadvantage to passengers.

The bleeping noise

The pitch and the tone, as well as the volume of the warning signals are discordant and unpleasant, compared with others.

Bus Suspension

The ride is very hard resulting in passengers feeling the many bumps of the road surface. When the bus negotiates sharp bends there is invariably a 'wobble' transmitted particularly to the upper deck: while the recovery may result in a 'rock and roll' particularly felt on the upper deck. If the bus takes a sharp curve and then straightens quickly, the passenger may feel an 'unwinding' and vibration. This will be aggravated by an abrupt change in speed and braking.

Steering Radius

One wonders why the bus 'designed' for London's streets has such a problem with the turning circle. For many routes the streets may be narrow and involve tight corners as well as angular junctions. On route 24 in Pimlico the junction of Lupus Street and Belgrave Road has had to be changed, reducing the opposing carriageway to a single lane.

Ventilation

The heat wave of 2013 resulted in instances of total failure of the air conditioning, and with no natural ventilation, led to physical distress and withdrawal of the service. TfL had the temerity to call this due to "teething problems" even though the first buses had been running for over a year. There is absolutely no excuse for such failure.

Conclusion

There is confusion between styling as 'design' rather than fitness for purpose which is true design. The facts show that the bus is not "fit for purpose", the prime requirement. The unevenness of travel, the higher rate of acceleration/ deceleration and the cramped lower deck ignores passengers requirements - of all ages. There are ergonomic flaws on most seat positions. Passengers carrying parcels, bags, brief cases, umbrellas etc. have to cope with the conditions of the bus in motion including descending stairs.

Those responsible for this bus need to be called to account as a matter of principle; and also for the huge costs to be borne by Londoners who deserve and expected 'best of British design' - not this! ■

HS2 update

HS2 compulsory purchase powers

Legislation, published just before Christmas, to clear the way for HS2 contains sweeping new powers. Top legal experts on infrastructure projects who specialise in the hybrid bill process needed for HS2 have raised concerns about a clause which allows ministers to force the sale of any land which becomes economically viable as a result of the £50bn project. They say the wide-ranging wording of the Bill around compulsory purchase orders is without precedent for national government in the UK.

Clause 47 states that if the government "considers that the construction or operation of phase one of High Speed 2 gives rise to the opportunity for regeneration or development of any land" it may acquire the land compulsorily. The clause has no spatial or time limits, and represents a new general power that is unprecedented in the history of infrastructure projects. There are fears that it could lead to a blighting of property in the vicinity of the line.

A spokesman for HS2 insisted that the powers were in the Bill in the public interest, to ensure that any business that was forced to move premises because of the project could be found another site locally.

The Higgins review

Opponents of HS2 lost their legal challenge in the Supreme Court. However Sir David Higgins, the new chairman of HS2, in his review on the progress of the rail link published in March, has recommended axing the controversial stretch of the line joining HS2 to HS1 through Camden. He advocates completely rebuilding Euston, and including the extension of the line to Crewe in phase one, six years earlier than currently planned. He believes speeding up the project will help keep costs under control and potentially cut the overall budget. A Crewe hub would bring HS2's benefits to places such as Liverpool and North Wales more quickly than originally envisaged.

The government is hoping to secure passage of the hybrid bill before the general election next year, although most experts believe that timetable is highly optimistic. ■

Thames Water super sewer will do nothing to prevent flooding

Helen Marcus reports

In the context of the dreadful flooding this winter Thames Water's extravagant 'super sewer' Tunnel is being described a 'vanity project' that will do nothing to prevent flooding in low lying areas or basement flats. Cllr Nicholas Botterill, Hammersmith & Fulham Council Leader, has called for the Environment Agency to stop supporting projects like the super sewer and instead redirect the money to practical flood defence measures such as Sustainable Drainage Solutions (SuDS).

The proposed sustainable alternative, adopted by most major cities in the western world facing similar issues, is Blue Green Infrastructure (BGI). BGI is the integrated implementation of a range of measures including SuDS to stop rainwater at source from entering the sewerage system.

Cities such as Philadelphia, Portland and Copenhagen favour SuDS where storm water is slowed by various methods so existing systems can cope. Fresh rainwater is kept separate from the sewage and the water can be harvested, so that hosepipe bans can also be avoided, rather than just shedding it as polluted flood excess. Such methods are widely used in the Netherlands, together with green infrastructure which work with water rather than against it.

National expert in water management Professor Richard Ashley, Professor of Urban Water at Sheffield University, agrees. Professor Ashley said: "The super

sewer is a prime example of the failure of sustainable water management in the UK. Instead of capturing the fresh rainwater and using it productively we are allowing it into the old Victorian sewers where it mixes with sewage. Thames Water is then proposing to spend billions of pounds to build a massive concrete pipe to pump the combined rainwater and sewage out to east London - only to be separated out again."

Lord Selborne's Thames Tunnel Commission also recommended that green infrastructure solutions should be considered instead of the super sewer, particularly in light of new EU legislation on environmental sustainability.

Chris Binnie, who was the original master mind behind the super sewer, has also weighed into the debate arguing that a revised cost benefit analysis shows the modest benefits of the mega pipe no longer justified the massive cost.

The coalition of groups and individuals opposing the super sewer are seeking the implementation of BGI as the rational and legally compliant solution for the water/environmental problems facing the Thames River Basin instead of the Drain project advocated by the Government and Thames Water Utilities Ltd.

14 million Thames Water customers, from Essex to Swindon, and all Londoners, face paying £80 per year for life on top of current bills to pay for the sewer. ■

Flooding risk in London

Figures requested by the London Assembly Environment Committee from the Environment Agency in February show that in 20 boroughs out of London's 32, a significant number of homes are at 'high risk' of tidal and river flooding. Only two London boroughs, Camden and Islington, have no homes at all in the high risk category.

Murad Qureshi, Chair of the Assembly Environment Committee, called on the Mayor to secure the funding necessary to protect those London homes. Current flood defence

proposals will only protect a fraction of the estimated 14,408 homes at high risk.

The Assembly investigated the capital's flood defences in 2002, 2005, and 2011.

For more information see:

<http://www.london.gov.uk/media/assembly-press-releases/2014/02/assembly-reveals-20-london-boroughs-have-homes-at-high-risk-of#sthash.TtwPXA0o.dpuf> ■

Floating homes

After one of the wettest winters on record more radical ideas for future protection than the usual engineering solutions of building higher flood walls, drainage and dredging, may be needed.

In the Netherlands the government concluded some years ago that it could not go on strengthening and raising its dykes to keep out rising seas. Hundreds of floating homes have been built that rest on dry land but in floods rise up with the water and float back down again when the floodwaters recede. They are anchored in place by strong posts embedded in the ground so that they cannot drift away, and rest on solid foundations. When floods strike the houses float up and all the lines for water, gas, electricity and sewage float up with the house through flexible pipes. One architectural company is even planning to build a complex of apartment blocks on water that could house hundreds of people.

Similar homes have been built in the US, Canada and Germany. In Britain, permission has been granted for a floating house to be built on the banks of the Thames at Marlow, Buckinghamshire, and floating homes are being considered in Liverpool, Glasgow and Edinburgh. ■

APPG Water Group

The All Party Parliamentary Water Group was established in 2005 and reconstituted following the 2010 General Election, to create a forum for discussion and debate on water policy.

Its current officers are: Anne McIntosh MP, Chair, Nia Griffith MP, Vice-Chair and the Earl of Selborne GBE FRS, Treasurer.

At the Group's meeting, *Governance and legitimacy in the water industry*, in Feb, the speakers included Tony Smith, Chief Executive, Consumer Council for Water and Keith Mason, Senior Director of Finance and Networks, Ofwat.

Members of Thamesbank attended and managed to get in 3 questions on some of the anomalies surrounding the super-sewer. Unfortunately they felt the answers were all too predictable and failed to address the issues. ■

Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Act

Secondary Legislation to accompany the Heritage Provisions. **Peter Pickering** responded on behalf of London Forum.

The opportunity to comment on the three items of Secondary Legislation implementing the heritage provisions of the Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Act was welcome.

The main concern relates to consultation with the community, which is very important since heritage assets are assets of the whole community, and not just of their owners and of regulatory authorities.

We ask therefore for the national Amenity Societies to be consulted whenever there is a proposal for a Listed Building Heritage Partnership Agreement, or for a Local, or (a fortiori) a National, Listed Building Consent Order. The requirement should be clear and unequivocal.

Whereas the provisions for publicity and consultation in respect of Heritage Partnership and Consent Orders are generally good, those for Certificates of Lawfulness are not. The consultation document is, we maintain, wrong in equating these with Certificates of Lawfulness under the planning regime, because:

(a) the latter are determined according to the precise - often very precise - provisions of the General Development Order, with little room for judgement, and

(b) there is no requirement for anyone to apply for a Certificate of Lawful Development (except in cases where there is a Prior Approval Provision) - since if a development is lawful it is so with or without a Certificate, and work done without planning permission is not a criminal offence.

On the other hand whether a minor change to a listed building is lawful or not must always be a matter of judgement, related to significance; and if such a change is not lawful, it needs Listed Building Consent before work begins. Therefore some proportionate publicity and consultation about them is necessary and should, we contend, be welcomed by local planning authorities, since it will reduce the danger of complaints when people see work taking place on a listed building which they, though not the Planning Authority, believe to be damaging.

We therefore ask for the regulations to require applications for Certificates of Lawfulness to be given local publicity before any certificate is issued and if there is an appeal against the refusal of one. ■

Peter Pickering is a member of the Historic Buildings and Conservation Areas Committee of the London and Middlesex Archaeological Society.

New specialist court to deal with planning

A dedicated Land and Planning Chamber in the Upper Tribunal to review planning-related cases, is one of the measures proposed in the Criminal Justice and Courts Bill, published 5th February 2014 by justice minister Chris Grayling.

Following representations from the senior judiciary, specialist judges will deal with disputed schemes, and will work to fixed time limits building on a new fast-track system for planning appeals in the Administrative Court. The aim is to speed the consideration of challenges to planning decisions.

Chris Grayling said that further

reforms would mean the judicial review process "focuses on matters of substance and not mere technicalities" and "enable more cases to 'leapfrog' directly to the Supreme Court, ensuring they are resolved more quickly".

Comment from the legal profession on the proposal for a dedicated Land and Planning Chamber was generally favourable although Stephen Ashworth, a partner at law firm Dentons, said that he is not quite sure that the problems caused by judicial review in planning justify all this activity. "It's launching an Exocet to kill a mouse," he said.

The bill can be found at

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/bills/cbill/2013-2014/0169/14169.pdf> ■

Cash for planning applications

Planners seek cash for fast ruling

The leader of Westminster Council Philippa Roe, the Deputy London Mayor Kit Malthouse, and several prominent developers including senior executives at property companies Land Securities and British Land, have written to George Osborne seeking permission to accept cash payments for planning applications from developers in exchange for fast-track decisions. Camden Council also signed in support.

Westminster is proposing a pilot scheme for office, retail and residential applications in the West End whereby developers would be able to pay higher application fees, which would subsidise planning departments, in exchange for fast-track decisions.

Campaigners fear the subsidy would amount to property companies paying for planning consents, and that in practice, the onus would be on councils to wave through applications. "Iron-clad assurances should be sought that developers are only paying for more efficient decision-making processes, and not permissions," said Fiona Howie, head of planning at campaign group the Campaign to Protect Rural England. The Local Government Association welcomed the idea.

A spokesman for the Treasury pointed out that: "It is important that local authorities provide a prompt and efficient service to all applicants, irrespective of who they are." Westminster Council leader Philippa Roe said: "What we are proposing is voluntary and not for all areas - just those where the volume of planning applications is creating a slower than desirable process and where the industry is requesting it."

The number of planning applications received by Westminster Council has nearly doubled in the last four years from around 8,000 a year to nearly 16,000 in 2013. Even though the department has taken on extra staff to deal with the flood of applications it is still difficult to cope. Westminster would recover the full cost of planning staff needed to determine applications from property companies, regardless of whether permission was granted or denied. ■

DECC Community Energy strategy

Peter Eversden reports

The Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) has published a Community Energy Strategy, the first published by a UK government. It brings together existing policies and initiatives with new actions to provide a coherent package of support across the spectrum of community energy. It sets out the role that communities can play in helping to meet the UK's energy and climate change challenges, including supporting a sustainable and secure energy system; reducing UK greenhouse gas emissions; and lowering consumer bills.

The Department estimates that in generating electricity, schemes involving local communities could supply enough electricity for 1 million homes by 2020. DECC believes that communities are able to maximise the benefits of certain renewable technologies, such as district heat networks, and can gain wider benefits such as local economic regeneration and a stronger sense of community.

DECC has a new £10 million Urban Community Energy Fund. The quadrupling of the Green Deal Communities Scheme to £80 million will increase infrastructure and capacity across English local authorities. DECC's Heat Networks Development Unit is partnering councils in the largest programme of local heat network developments ever. A new Community Energy Unit in DECC will not only provide leadership for DECC's role in this Strategy but link the sector into the wider working and objectives of the department.

Attendees at London Forum's open meeting on climate change recently heard details of these schemes. Societies might wish to consider the local energy initiatives that are possible. The full report and an 18 page summary is available at

[w https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/community-energy-strategy](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/community-energy-strategy)

Important High Court decision on wind turbines

An important ruling was made in a High Court challenge in February, to an Inspector's decision to allow plans for an 86 metre high wind turbine in Bodham, Norfolk which it was claimed would spoil the setting of prized local buildings and monuments.

Deputy judge Robin Purchas QC found that the planning inspector who allowed the appeal against a refusal of planning permission by North Norfolk District Council, had performed a flawed balancing exercise when weighing the energy benefits of the turbine against the impact on surroundings. He had failed to give the necessary weight to the impact it would have on the setting of listed buildings, including All Saints' Church at Bodham.

The council planning officer's report considered that the turbine - which would be 86.5 metres tall to the tip of its blade - would result in "significant change to the character and scale of the landscape" and impact on views and would harm the setting of such assets. He also found that the benefits of the

relatively small amount of electricity produced by the turbine were not enough to outweigh this harm.

However, when the applicant appealed, the inspector took the opposite view that the public benefits did outweigh the harm,

The Judge said: "... the inspector's approach seems to me to have balanced the relative harm and benefit as a matter of straightforward planning judgment without that special regard required under the statute." "The inspector did not in fact have regard to the statutory duty but applied a simple balancing exercise."

Judge Purchas refused the Secretary of State permission to appeal, and ordered the government to carry out a rethink of the plans (the importance of preserving heritage assets under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.)

The matter will now have to be reconsidered by a different inspector with the balancing exercise carried out properly in the light of the judge's ruling. ■

Wind power or biomass?

Eggborough, one of Britain's biggest power stations has claimed that the Government refused to grant it a subsidy lifeline because of a "bias" for wind farms by the Energy Secretary Ed Davey.

Eggborough coal plant, which generates 4 per cent of the UK's electricity, was seeking green energy subsidies needed to convert to burning biomass material. The power plant claimed that DECC officials had indicated that the project would qualify and that it fulfilled all the necessary criteria. But in December DECC unexpectedly rejected the company's application, although it gave the go-ahead to a giant biomass conversion plant by Drax.

Industry sources claim that Mr Davey intervened to block Eggborough's application to prevent biomass projects taking up all of the subsidies and leaving nothing for offshore wind.

Eggborough's closure, now scheduled for next year, would wipe out Britain's wafer-thin reserve generating margin, raising the chances of blackouts. ■

Instant houses

Scientists at the University of Southern California are testing a giant 3D printer that could be used to build a whole house in under 24 hours.

The technology, known as 'contour printing', is basically a giant robot which uses a computer pattern to 'squirt out concrete' and build a house. It sounds simple but how safe is it? Well, the scientists working on the project believe that 'contour crafting' produces much stronger structures than traditional building methods in a much safer way. The designs are all taken from a computer programme allowing a lot of flexibility with the design of the houses so they would not have to look the same. In fact, there could be more opportunity for creativity and adding complex architectural designs, such as curved walls which under traditional methods would cost more money.

Given the incredible speed in which these homes can be built, it is being touted as the solution to disaster relief and emergency replacement housing. It could however also be applied to the crisis in housing supply closer to home, here in London, possibly also impacting on rising prices. ■

The Earls Court Area Action Group continues its campaign

The Earls Court Area Action Group continues its campaign against the proposed demolition and re-development of Earls Court exhibition centre with the active support of local Labour MP Andy Slaughter, (Hammersmith). He secured an Adjournment Debate in the Westminster Hall, House of Commons on 21 January, on the contribution of Earls Court to London's culture and heritage.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, Edward Vaizey, also a local resident, responded on behalf of the Government. Sir Malcolm Rifkind MP for Kensington and Helen Goodman the shadow Culture Minister both spoke.

There are serious questions about land ownership and the involvement of Transport for London, (TfL) and whether it is appropriate for TfL to enter a joint venture arrangement with Capital & Counties Properties (Capco), London Underground is the freeholder and Capco the long leaseholder, along with other properties owned by London Underground and Capco.

The Mayor of London has approved the Earls Court Opportunity Area plans, in the absence of a full, independent economic impact assessment, and in the face of opposition from the event organisers industry. "The failure by the two local authorities to conduct an Area Action Plan, which would have provided a wide-ranging strategic assessment of the proposed

development, Earls Court heritage for the long term future, with a continuing enrichment both of London's creative life as well as the national economy."

Following that the Save Earls Court campaign held a press conference on the Earl's Court Masterplan in the Jubilee Room of the House of Commons on the 7th February 2014. A well informed cross-party panel of Andy Slaughter MP, Darren Johnson AM (Chair of the London Assembly), Murad Qureshi AM and ECAAG Chair Linda Wade along with Karim Halwagi, Chief Executive of the Association of Event Organisers took part.

The role and actions of Hammersmith & Fulham and Kensington & Chelsea borough councils, and the decisions made by Secretary State of Eric Pickles were discussed, with Mayor Boris Johnson's dual roles, chairing both TfL and the London Assembly, given particular attention.

Numerous key areas will be impacted negatively if this scheme goes ahead: the national and local economy, housing, culture, transport, the environment and population health were all raised as areas of grave concern. Outrage was expressed that no public inquiry has been allowed. No other developments of similar scale or even a fraction of the size have been given permission without one. ■

For more information about the campaign by the Earls Court Area Action Group see www.saveearlscourt.com tel: 020 7373 0810

'Gotham City'

Another City tower

The City has "resolved to grant planning permission" for Henderson Global Investors' scheme at 40 Leadenhall Street, yet another tower, designed by architectural practice, Make. It has already been dubbed 'Gotham City'.

Located in the heart of the City's Eastern Cluster of tall buildings it will vary in height between 7 and 34 office storeys. With two additional basement levels, a roof level plant, and terrace overlooking Fenchurch Street. The total height will be 170m.

The tallest part of the building will rise to match neighbouring tall buildings, reducing in height toward the River Thames and Tower of London to the south. Its various elements will be arranged around the grade II listed building at 19-21 Billiter Street, built in 1865, which will be restored and integrated into the proposed scheme.

The highest level is also terraced so that it remains out of sight when travelling east along Fleet Street along the ceremonial route to St Paul's Cathedral. Ground floor frontages which include around 20,000 sq ft retail, café and restaurant are set back to create pedestrian zones, and wider pavements. There will be 890,000 sq ft of office space.

The decision is much regretted by LAMAS Historic buildings Committee. ■

London's skyline is about to change for ever - 200 new towers planned

A report by New London Architecture says that more than 200 towers of at least 20 storeys are either under construction or being planned in London, of which three-quarters are residential. The number of projects by property developers, seeking to capitalise on foreign investor demand for homes in the capital, has prompted concerns that the capital's skyline is about to undergo the greatest change in its history. English Heritage has called on the Mayor of London, Boris Johnson, to tighten development rules in order to make it harder for such a volume of towers to be built.

The south bank of the river from Battersea Power Station to London Bridge is a particular draw for tall residential buildings, because it is relatively underdeveloped. Nearly a quarter of the buildings planned are for Tower Hamlets, almost a tenth are more than 50 storeys and the Columbus Tower will be 75-storeys. Half have already been approved.

Sir Edward Lister, Deputy Mayor for planning said that the policy was still to permit tall buildings only in clusters, and only in particular areas, such as Old Street, Nine Elms, Elephant & Castle, London Bridge and along the South Bank.

Rosemarie MacQueen, strategic director of built environment for Westminster City Council said that there needed to be more consultation about the changes, before the city was changed irreparably. "Dramatic changes to the London skyline are happening fast, and with little debate. Tall buildings have a London-wide impact and, as such, need a London-wide debate."

Should London should really be modelling itself on Manhattan? The Times quoted several architects, who favoured these developments. Are we about to repeat the disastrous mistakes of the 1960s? See:

www.newlondonarchitecture.org/ ■

It's just not Cricket

The connection between cricket, a hospital and some disused Victorian railway tunnels. More twists in the extraordinary saga of MCC's development plans at Lords involve three disused Victorian railway tunnels and an application for a court injunction.

Report by **Helen Marcus**

In 2007 Lord's decided that the Nursery end of the grounds, sited well away from the main playing area, should be developed. But beneath that end of the Cricket Ground, between its boundary and Wellington Road, are three disused Victorian brick railway tunnels measuring 322 ft by 329 ft. A further complication is that the tunnels can only be accessed from the Wellington Hospital who would also like to expand their premises.

Unfortunately in 1999 MCC passed up an offer from Network Rail to purchase the 999-year lease on the tunnels for £1.5 million. MCC believed at the time that they could not afford to buy the lease. It was instead bought by the Rifkind Levy Partnership (RLP), and MCC leases only the topsoil to a depth of 18 inches above the tunnels.

Thus when MCC developed its "Vision for Lord's" in 2007, the redevelopment of the Nursery End, it required the involvement of RLP. A proposal, drawn up by the developer Almacantar in partnership with RLP to develop four or five blocks of luxury apartments above the tunnels caused immense controversy.

The decision to scrap the £400 million development in 2011 led to an acrimonious legal dispute with Almacantar, which was settled out of court at a cost to MCC, it is reported, of £100,000. Instead a smaller proposal, not involving RLP, to remodel the ground was developed.

At the end of last year dissatisfaction at these dealings provoked 212 MCC members put forward a resolution asking for an Independent Inquiry into the

processes, finances and governance of the Club's ground development. But the management called a Special General Meeting to vote on the matter. The disgruntled members sought an injunction to prevent the meeting going ahead but were refused; the meeting went ahead and their resolution was voted down. It is thought that MCC will now proceed with their reduced development plan.

It is suggested that the tunnels are now possibly one of London's most famous "ransom strips". Lord's is not talking to RLP and neither of them is talking to the Wellington.

It has also been pointed out that had Network Rail retained the tunnels they might have permitted "quadrupling" of the railway lines into Marylebone. ■

Lionel Road BFC stadium - Peter Eversden reports

A black day for West London has seen a coach and horses driven through normal planning standards in Hounslow.

Brentford Football Club's application for a 20,000-seater stadium and up to 910 residential apartments on a site between Kew Bridge railway station and the M4, approved by Hounslow Council, will not be called in by the Mayor.

Objectors to the scheme say it does not conform to planning policies for housing density nor to context and character guidance; it lacks any affordable homes and has the potential, according to TfL, to cause delays on the North and South Circular Roads and the A4. There were also concerns about lack of public transport and the effect on the view from Kew Gardens.

Sir Edward Lister, Deputy Mayor for Policy and Planning, has admitted in a comment to Hounslow Council that "Concerns raised previously on design and layout residential quality, townscape and World Heritage Site impacts and views, and transport impacts, in part still remain." "....the development would cause some harm to the setting of the conservation area at Strand on The

Green and would also cause some harm to the wider setting of the listed buildings that face onto the Green. The existing setting is to a degree compromised by existing tall buildings to the north although that in itself would not justify further harm." "....the proposed non-stadium elements of the scheme will produce significant and noticeable increases in journey times on non-match days on the Transport for London Road Network (TLRN) at Kew Bridge, Kew Bridge Road and Gunnersbury Avenue."

The scheme delivers only half the percentage of family housing sought by LB Hounslow's policy. There is inadequate play space for the over 5s and the access to Gunnersbury Park for them is at ground level across the six lanes of the A4 and underneath the M4. However this may not be the last word, because the Secretary of State still has to approve the scheme.

The GLA approves schemes against the wishes of boroughs but will not support the Mayor's policies by intervening in cases like this when required. ■

Threats to the Green Belt

Belmont Farm, Barnet - appeal lost

The area of Green Belt earmarked for development has nearly doubled in the last year. Societies in Barnet were disappointed that Inspectors allowed an appeal for a stable to be built into a four bedroom bungalow at Belmont Farm, although the application has been withdrawn.

An 18 hole golf course at Edgwarebury Farm

A planning application has also been submitted to build an 18 hole golf course on land at Edgwarebury Farm. The Mill Hill Society is determined to protect the local Green Belt and have urged local people to support CPRE's Save our Countryside campaign. See: www.cpre.org.uk/charter

QPR football club at Warren Farm, Ealing

The Save Warren Farm campaigners are seeking a Judicial Review of Ealing Council's decision to sign over 61 acres of Green Belt land at Warren Farm, rent free for 200 years, to QPR football club for their new Training and Academy HQ. Campaigners allege that the decision is unlawful on several grounds, including the enclosure of Metropolitan Open Land, and concerns about councillors handling both the decision to grant the rent-free lease and the planning permission. The land has been used as playing fields for the Borough's schools and local sports clubs for over 50 years. Robert Gurd, Chair of Ealing Civic Society, said "Instead of being sensitively designed to fit in with its surroundings the proposed buildings would jar like a very bulky warehouse in the countryside." *Report by Diane Burridge* ■

Round the Societies

A round-up of news from our member societies.

By **Diane Burridge**

Awards and celebrations

Daphne Marchant Vice Chair of the **Streatham Society** was awarded the British Empire Medal in the 2014 New Year's Honours List. The award was for services to local government and the voluntary sector in South London. Daphne has been an active member of the Streatham Society since its formation in 1974 – as a member of the Executive Committee and now as joint Vice-Chair. The **Teddington Society** celebrated 40 years of existence and **Carshalton Society** 50 years (see Spotlight) in 2013.

Good and Bad News for Chelsea Society

The **Chelsea Society** received some depressing news late 2013, when the Planning Inspector decided to allow 20 of the 25 JC Decaux/BT proposed advert panels on the back of phone boxes. Six of the seven boxes planned for the King's Road were allowed despite all the Council's efforts to clear out clutter, and despite a vigorous campaign against these panels by the Society.

On a more positive note, John Simpson CBE, the BBC world affairs editor and writer, became the Chelsea Society's 13th President, succeeding Lord Salisbury who held the office for six years. John's family has long been part of Chelsea dating back to 1840 when his great-great grandfather ran the Queen's Head public house, which the Society helped to save last year.

News from Ealing - Civic Awards

For the 2013 **Ealing Civic Society's** Awards, the Plaque went to Dormer's Wells School, for a new build. The headmistress, Mrs Maggie Aylott, was there to receive the certificate and plaque together with Nicholas Hare Architects. A Highly Commended award went to the Xanadu Hotel and Commendation Awards to a restoration of The Coach House, Edgehill Road, and 116 The Avenue, W13. The Council received a Commendation Certificate for the restoration work done on the masonry facade of Ealing Town Hall.

UDP policies lost

The Society has been disappointed at the lack of recommendations on issues raised by local people in the Inspector's report on the Hearing into Ealing's final stages of the Local Plan. Apparently, the Inspector was restricted in the changes that she could propose in response to the many local objections. Important Unitary Development Plan policies were lost, including those relating to: back land; controlling tall buildings in Conservation Areas; and the protection of Locally Listed Buildings. The Ealing Society has written to the Council expressing concerns about this lack of response; you can view the letter as a PDF file on the Society's web site.

Restoring 'Little Ben'

Friends of Brockwell Park and the Herne Hill Society, with Brockwell Park Community Partners and Lambeth Council, have raised £20,000 to restore 'Little Ben', a Grade II listed cast iron ornamental clock tower. This was gifted to Brockwell Park in 1897 to signify the park's change from being a private estate to a public amenity.

Town Centre Offices for Chislehurst

The **Chislehurst Society** has completed the purchase of 'the Chapel', situated in the town centre. Plans are underway to completely renovate the building.

Campaigning for Smithfield

Following Eric Pickles call-in of the Smithfield redevelopment plans, a three week public inquiry was held in February. Many local organisations including the **Amwell Society** have worked together in support of **SAVE** to object to the plans for the old General and Fish Market. Approved by the City of London in July 2013, the plans would retain only the Victorian facades, behind which would be a seven storey office block and shopping complex. The Victorian Society made another attempt to get it listed just hours before the public inquiry began - previous attempts have been unsuccessful. Objectors want a conservation-led scheme, building on the success of the Covent Garden model of development.

No change in Greenwich

Detailed comments submitted by the **Greenwich Society** during the rounds of consultation for the draft Greenwich Core Strategy did not secure any changes. Not to be deterred, the Society has produced another response, focusing on three key points: The importance of quality standards for housing as well as quantity. The need for an analysis of infrastructure provision and requirements in planned key development sites. The need for regular consultation as part of the 'Statement of Community Involvement', at a level between borough-wide matters and individual planning applications.

Consultation in Exhibition Road

The **Kensington Association** is being increasingly consulted on planned major developments by the Science Museum, Imperial College and the Natural History Museum who are all in the process of drawing up masterplans for improvements. The Association objected to the Natural History Museum's plans in 2012/13 to create hard surfaces instead of retaining the lawns on both sides of Museum Lane. These plans were dropped and hopefully more amenable developments will now take place, with the Kensington Association being pro-actively consulted.

Award for Working with Schools in Camden

Camden Civic Society's annual Letter Writing Competition has been honoured with a Youth Engagement Award from Civic Voice to mark National Civic Day 2013. The award recognised the work the society undertook to engage 324 young people in a letter writing competition on heritage assets which should be added to the Camden Local Heritage List.

This is the sixth year that committee member Aileen Hammond and Camden's School Improvement Service have organised the competition. Fifteen classes from eleven primary schools took part, giving the Mayor their considered views on what is good, what is bad and what can be done to make things better in the borough. ■

newsbriefs

Key issues of interest and concern to note

Privatisation of the Land Registry

The Government has launched a consultation on whether to sell or part-privatise the 150-year-old Land Registry which raises £98 million a year for the Treasury. Almost 350 Local authorities in England and Wales maintain registers and routinely search records going back to 1926. The plans would take local land search registers away from councils and place them in a centralised register which would hold digital records dating back only to 1999.

There are fears that this could put listed buildings at risk. The 430,000 buildings listed before 1999 would not show up on searches for buyers of those properties, if the listing took place more than 15 years ago. People could find themselves buying a listed property without knowing it. Other significant issues that may not show up if registered before 1999 included conservation areas, tree preservation orders, noise abatement orders and private sewers which, if not properly maintained could cause tens of thousands of pounds of damage for the homeowner.

Another serious concern is that of security and the risk of fraud. Land Registry staff would become employees of a private, profit-making company. A situation could arise whereby the registered title to all properties would be in the hands of an overseas company, or one with its own commercial interests in the property market. The public service role of the staff would disappear and their responsibilities would be towards the company — not the government. The consultation has not been widely advertised, and the very short consultation period ended in March.

Concerns mount over empty UK shops

According to data from property firm Jones Lang LaSalle, almost 80 per cent of high street leases are due to expire in the next five years. It is feared that major retailers will use the opportunity to close down unprofitable stores as their leases end, adding to an already bleak situation in many town centres.

It is thought that up to half of existing high street stores could be vacated by retailers when leases expire. Jones Lang LaSalle said this was partly a consequence of the trend in the 1980s and 1990s to let shops on short 25-year or 15-year leases which are now coming up for expiry.

The rise of e-commerce means that many firms no longer feel the need for a presence in 100-200 high streets and are focusing on just the top 25-50 locations. One answer may be to turn stores into a point for “click and collect” – buying online but collecting the goods at the store.

About one in seven shops in the UK are standing empty, with city and town centres in the north hit hardest, according to the Local Data Company. While the vacancy rate in London is 9 per cent, in the northwest it is 20 per cent. In some smaller centres, up to one in three shops are vacant.

Businesses that have expanded in the downturn include betting shops, charity shops and payday lenders.

Brompton Road Tube station sold

Brompton Road, a former London Underground station on the Piccadilly Line, has been sold for £53m by the Ministry of Defence as part of cost-cutting efforts.

Designed by English architect Leslie Green, it opened in 1906 but closed in 1934 when it was no longer considered financially viable.

During the Second World War the station was taken over by the War Office as a command centre to control anti-aircraft batteries protecting London from air raids. Rudolf Hess was reportedly interrogated there. The 28,000 square feet property contains a drill hall, garages, offices and mess above ground.

It was most recently occupied by the London University Air Squadron and Royal Naval Unit and air cadets. It is now expected to be used for residential development. The tube platform and line itself are the property of Transport for London and the new owner will not have access to them.

Road casualty statistics

The annual road casualty statistics issued January in show that although motor vehicles kill five times more pedestrians than cyclists, cyclists are almost as likely as drivers to cause serious injury to pedestrians; measured as a proportion of distance travelled, cyclists injured 21 pedestrians per billion km travelled in 2012 compared with 24 pedestrians injured by drivers. Cycling organisations acknowledge that cyclists who ride on the pavement are seen to be a problem. However, they point out that most collisions occur when pedestrians step out into the road without seeing or hearing a cyclist.

In 2012 one pedestrian was killed by a cyclist and 78 were seriously injured. At the same time, 253 pedestrians were killed by drivers in urban areas and 4,426 were seriously injured. Analysis of the past ten years of road casualty data by CTC, the national cycling charity, showed that cyclists killed 23 pedestrians in the decade to 2012 and seriously injured 585. In the same period, 3,330 pedestrians were killed by motor vehicles and 46,081 were seriously injured.

Research by the City of Westminster Council last year found that, in collisions between pedestrians and cyclists, 60 per cent of the crashes were caused by the pedestrian.

End of London's gyratory systems

The Mayor has announced a new £290 million project, The Better Junctions programme to improve 33 of London's most notorious roundabouts and gyratory systems and make them less threatening to cyclists and pedestrians.

Archway, Aldgate, Hammersmith, Vauxhall, Elephant & Castle, Swiss Cottage and Wandsworth will be improved, and work will include safe and segregated cycle tracks, two-way roads and traffic-free public spaces.

It is part of Transport for London's programme to help deliver the recommendations of the Mayor's Roads Task Force to make London's streets and roads pleasanter and safer.

Committee chair Valerie Shawcross said. “These gyratories are not just dangerous, they are unpleasant and polluting and it is in the public interest to redesign them and make them more human friendly.”

newsbriefs

Key issues of interest and concern to note

The changing the character of the West End

There are fears that new commercial imperatives are changing the face of the West End. The new owners of Mayfair's Burlington Arcade may be aiming to price out its long-standing tenants with huge increases in rent. When Thor Equities, the US property fund, paid £104 million for the 195-year-old arcade in 2010, tenants were joined by celebrities such as Stephen Fry and Dame Judi Dench to opposed plans for a £2.5 million makeover. The scheme was largely rejected by Westminster council although some smaller scale changes were allowed. Now there appear to be moves to replace the long-standing occupants with major international labels that can afford higher rents.

Concerns about the future of Cork Street continue

Following a high court action over applications for controversial redevelopment of two large sites that formerly housed galleries in Cork Street, that will leave only facades - one designed by Richard Rogers's firm, Rogers Stirk Harbour and Partners - Westminster City Council is now proposing new measures to protect art galleries in Mayfair from encroaching fashion shops. Planning permission was only given after the developers agreed to reserve spaces for art dealers in their new buildings, and the council held a consultation - that ended in February - on the establishment of a "special policy area" for the area. ■

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If you do not keep your hard copy and feel you could do without it, relying on the PDF, please let us know via one of the email addresses below, giving your Society name as well as email address, so that we could reduce our postal mailing list and save printing and postage costs. ■

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Dates for your diary

London Forum Open Meetings 2014

Friday April 11

Planning chaos, the housing crisis and the Mayor's new policies

Tuesday June 10

Tall Buildings Impact on Character, Context and Heritage
In conjunction with an exhibition: *London's Growing Up*
April to June 2014 at the NLA, Store Street (off Tottenham Court Road). See: www.newlondonarchitecture.org

Meetings are held at The Gallery,

75 Cowcross Street, EC1M 6EJ, (Farringdon station)

All meetings begin with refreshments at 6pm
for a 6:30pm start

For more information about the meetings see:

<http://londonforum.org.uk/events.php> ■

Membership renewal - reminder

As you all know, London Forum relies totally on Members' subscriptions for its budget. Many Members are early payers and we are most grateful to Members who have already renewed this year. If for one understandable reason or another, you have not yet sent us your cheque we would be delighted to hear from you.

Please also let us know if there are changes to postal or email names or addresses so that we can keep our records up to date, otherwise post may not reach the right persons.

We would like to welcome other groups to be members and your suggestions and recommendations would be valued. ■

London Forum on Twitter

Don't forget the London Forum Twitter site.

Stories; updates on the latest news as it comes in; useful web addresses.

Do pass on the address to all your amenity society contacts.

Twitter can reach far beyond London Forum's e-bulletin list of contacts.

http://twitter.com/London_Forum

NB - note the underscore: _ in the name ■

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