

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
www.londonforum.org.uk

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Airports Commission Report

What future for London's airports?

Daniel Instone assesses the report of the Airports Commission

On 1 July the Government-appointed Airports Commission, under the chairmanship of Sir Howard Davies, finally published their report on the future of London's airport capacity. Rather surprisingly David Cameron has said the Government will not reach a decision till December. This further delay seems to reflect not only Cabinet splits, but also a view that the Government would be more open to legal challenge if they could not show that they had taken time to consider the report. It seems likely that the Government itself will conduct a further and possibly brief consultation in the autumn on its final proposal.

The Airports Commission have firmly recommended one of their two short-listed Heathrow extension options (the third option being extension at Gatwick), comprising a new runway to the North West of the existing runway, which is also the option proposed by the existing owners of Heathrow. The Commission say this would produce the greatest economic benefits to the UK - greater than extending Gatwick and with fewer environmental disadvantages than the other Heathrow option (extending the existing northern runway). They put particular emphasis on the existing concentration of long haul flights at Heathrow, and on Heathrow's role as a centre for air freight.

Far more people are exposed to noise at Heathrow than at any other European airport. ...there is no detail on how the proposed noise authority will work

The preferred option will increase noise
The Commission recognises that their preferred option will increase both noise and air pollution - far more people are exposed to noise at Heathrow than at any other European airport. To help mitigate these impacts, they propose a new statutory noise authority, a noise levy on airlines to fund measures such as noise insulation of houses, no flights between 11.30pm and 6am, no release of runway capacity till it is clear that this will not in itself prevent the meeting of EU air quality objectives and that there should be a firm legal commitment that there would be no fourth runway at Heathrow.

The London Forum earlier put in evidence to the Commission strongly opposing Heathrow expansion. A large number of major objections can also be made to the Commission's present proposals.

Substantial environmental impacts

First, the environmental impacts of the proposal will be very substantial. The report gives no detail of how far the Commission's proposed mitigating measures will reduce these. In the absence of detail it is certainly reasonable to be sceptical. For example, there is no detail on how the proposed noise authority will work, how much legal authority it will have to impose its views, how large the noise levy is likely to be (will it really be enough to quieten the pattern of flights significantly?), how anyone will judge whether at any given moment it is acceptable to release runway capacity on air quality grounds and so on.

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What future for London's airports?

(continued)

One suspects that these details would become clear only after a decision in principle to proceed had been taken and much negotiation had taken place. Equally, the precise way in which people will be affected by noise will be strongly influenced by the detail of air traffic control, which will not be settled till much later. It is notable that on release of the report, the Heathrow management said only that they would work with the Government on these issues, not that they would certainly accept them.

Greater delivery costs and risks

Second, the delivery costs for both Heathrow options are very much greater (by several billion pounds) than for the Gatwick option. The report seems to acknowledge that they also present greater delivery risks. A particular risk is that surface transport access to Heathrow will be insufficient, even with the planned improvements (Crossrail, a new rail link connecting with the line from Waterloo, and some motorway widening). So both road and rail could be intolerably stretched, especially for commuters.

Wider issues ignored

Third, the report seems to have ignored some important wider issues, especially on housing. The preferred option assumes the demolition of just under 1000 homes, especially in the villages of Harmondsworth and Longford (more demolition than under the alternative Heathrow option). But in addition the loss, through this option, of available locations for new London housing development does not appear to be discussed at all.

Finally, the report's standpoint seems to be that there is little that the public authorities can do to affect the aviation market in a more fundamental way, for example by imposing substantial economic incentives (sticks and carrots) to change the location of long haul flight departures, arrivals and connections. And there seems a huge weakness in the argument that there should be a binding guarantee that there should be no fourth runway at Heathrow. Not only could such a guarantee be reversed in a future parliament, as previous guarantees of this kind have been; but also if more transformational change

will be needed in a few decades' time to change the location of flights to and from London as demand for aviation outstrips the supply of runway capacity at Heathrow even with a third runway, why not grasp the nettle of transformation now rather than simply postpone it?

London Forum will continue to engage on this issue over the coming months. ■

Stop Press

As we go to print the House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee has announced a new inquiry into the implications for Government commitments on carbon emissions, air quality and noise should the Airport Commission's recommendation of a third runway at Heathrow Airport be adopted. The deadline for submissions is 3 Sept.

A Cabinet Committee has been set up to address the issues within Government. Press comment noted that it contains only people who favour expansion at Heathrow. ■

Airports commission review on air quality impacts

The Davies Commission launched a consultation on air quality impacts of the airport expansion options, in response to criticism by environmental groups, after it failed to deal with this in its interim report in November. It was announced on May 8, after the election, and after the **Supreme Court ruling** that the UK is in breach of its obligations for air quality.

A summary of **Daniel Instone's** response for the London Forum:

Case against Heathrow reinforced

The further work carried out by Jacobs consultants strongly reinforces the case against either of the Heathrow expansion options. Their report identifies the substantial economic costs, stemming largely from adverse health impacts, of either option.

The UK Supreme Court judgment

The case against expansion is reinforced by the UK Supreme Court judgment given on 29 April 2015, which requires the UK

Government to produce, by the end of 2016, plans aimed at compliance with EU legal requirements on air quality. This judgment, which takes account of an earlier judgment (in November 2014) by the Court of Justice of the European Communities (CJEU), is not referred to in the Airports Commission consultation – an omission.

Extra legal risk

Choosing either Heathrow option would introduce a substantial extra degree of legal risk and could leave the Government and the promoters of any Heathrow scheme, were one to be selected, at significant risk of further legal challenge, as well as the possibility of infraction fines imposed for unreasonable failure to meet EU requirements.

More detail on all these issues can be found on the LF website in News/Updates including the Supreme Court's Press Summary; a comment on the case by Clean Air for London; and a paper by Angus Walker on the implications. ■

Protest rally planned

Anti-Heathrow campaigners responded to the report by announcing that they are planning a rally in central London this autumn.

John Stewart, head of the lobby group HACAN, said the aim would be to unify protest groups in a public show of opposition to influence the politicians who will decide by the end of the year whether and where to build an extra runway in the southeast of England.

Lobbying will continue

HACAN will continue lobbying, preparing briefing notes for key members of parliament, and is planning to hold fringe meetings at the Conservative party conference in October

Possible further legal challenge

There are also plans to launch a legal challenge against a new runway at Heathrow on air pollution grounds with MPs, local councils and environmentalists involved in putting together a programme of action. ■

'Fixing the foundations: creating a more prosperous nation'

As the government launches yet another new strategy London Forum Chairman, **Peter Eversden** asks how it will fit in and affect all the other proposed changes that have been announced, in particular, on provision of new housing

HM Treasury and the Department for Business, Innovation & Skills issued a 15-point plan in July setting out a long-term strategy to boost the UK's productivity growth. The implications of this Strategy will not become clear until consultation documents, further proposals or Bills are available.

More sweeping changes to planning

In his announcement of a 'Game-changing Plan' the Chancellor claimed that "Britain has been 'incapable' of building enough homes to meet the needs of working people". He says that requires "sweeping new changes to planning laws" so that "more homes are built that people can afford."

It was surprising that the news release and the *'Fixing the foundations'* publication made no mention of the Department for Communities and Local Government and its planning function, only of the Treasury and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills.

The following points need to be considered

- Does the GLA know what the Government intends to do to support the Mayor in getting the 270,000 homes with planning permission actually built?
- Is it known how much of the incapability of London to build homes is based on lack of materials or resources or developers' profit motives? Has the Government or the Mayor analysed each of those as causes?
- Is it thought that 80% of the people living in London in rented accommodation will not be able to afford to buy a home and the rents are increasing much faster than earnings.
- Is there any indication of how the Government will help the Mayor to tackle those problems affecting "working people" before they are driven out of London and its economy suffers?
- For example, is it yet clear how the Government intends to carry out its policy in London of "helping people to live and own homes close to where they want to work"?
- Presumably the "new "zonal" system" is a re-statement of the Coalition's

requirement that there should be a Local Development Order for every brownfield site which will state what is to be built in it and where. How will the GLA facilitate that being achieved by boroughs?

- Where Local Plans in London are not up to date, will the Government allow the Mayor to assist those local authorities to make progress or will the plans be compiled for them by PINS?
- Is it expected that the compulsory purchase powers proposed to bring forward more brownfield land will be carried out by the Mayor or by boroughs? Is it likely that the Government will have any role?
- What does the Mayor understand is meant by the Government's proposal that "Working with the Mayor of London, proposals to end the need for planning permission for upwards extensions for a limited number of storeys up to the height of the adjoining building in the capital"?
- Would not tens of thousands of such small building projects be a drain on the available construction materials and resources required to build the approved homes?
- What controls or restrictions would the Mayor seek at the assessment stage of such house owners' proposals?
- How is the impact in London of the Government's proposal to "extend the Right to Buy to housing association tenants" being assessed?
- Can London provide larger social homes if local authorities are forced to sell any of high value?
- The Government proposes changes in the law "Requiring higher-density development around key commuter hubs". Is that meant to include stations on commuter rail routes? If so, some would be in Green Belt land.
- Are there any details yet of the programme of work for the London Land Commission?
- The 50 homes threshold for future Mayoral call-in seems a bit low.
- Is it understood what is meant by "Introducing a fast-track certificate process for establishing the principle of development"?

- Who will operate the "dispute resolution mechanism for Section 106 agreements"?

We must remember that in the Impact Assessment for permitted development right PDR conversion of offices to residential, the Coalition listed the options they had considered as only the ones they implemented, apart from 'do nothing'. They also rejected the subsequent objections to the effect of the relaxation of planning control, despite listing in the IA the possible consequences of "Loss of amenity from additional residential development. Costs to businesses of increased rents from a reduction in office space and loss of a nationally significant area of economic activity or substantial adverse economic consequences at the local authority level."

The key objective of the change was to "facilitate an increase in appropriate housing development", whereas most of the housing units delivered by conversion of offices were not of the type that the local authority and their communities wanted.

Presumably, we should not expect the Government to conduct impact assessments of any better quality for their latest proposals which include extending the trial period of office-to-residential permitted developments (see page 5). That would cause further harm to London's economy. ■

The London Land Commission

A new body called the London Land Commission was announced in February.

With a £1m budget from the Government, it will be based at the Greater London Authority, and will be jointly chaired by the Mayor and a Government Minister, with representatives of public bodies.

A register of brownfield land

It will seek to identify commercial and industrial public sector brownfield land that is no longer needed in London and could be redeveloped, and create a register of this land. The aim is to help ensure that all of the capital's brownfield sites are developed by 2025, and help meet its target of over 400,000 new homes by 2025. ■

The housing shortage - more contradictions

As the housing debate continues, and the figures being proposed for the numbers needed continue to escalate, **Helen Marcus** examines emerging contradictions in claims being made, and the lack of evidence or data on which to base them.

Peter Eversden has made some telling points in his article. Last year we reported in Newsforum that academics at LSE considered responses to London's housing crisis 'incoherent and weakly evidenced', and were to carry out research. This year two more bodies have been established to gather evidence about housing. Yet it appears generally to have been decided that we do not have enough houses and that the planning system must be to blame. It is curious to decide on the causes and solution to a problem before you have gathered evidence.

The Lyons Housing Review tries to strike a balance. They subscribe to the proposition that "Commentators agree that we need more houses", but the debate is "increasingly polarised between two entrenched positions": "... that the planning system is too liberal, so developers will have a presumption to gain permission and build without respect to existing communities" or "... that red tape is blocking development". However it does acknowledge that "both positions unfairly target the planning system."

But there are many other arguments about the underlying causes of the problem which have recently been given more prominence.

Prices do not correlate with population statistics or house numbers

It is constantly said that only building more houses will bring the price down. But will it? History contradicts that proposition. In 1951 London's population was, as it is today, over 8 million. It fell to 6.6 million by 1981. A survey by Knight Frank of the trend of house prices over the last six decades shows that steep price rises began in 1970 coinciding with that fall in population, i.e. demand. Even allowing for demographic changes something is missing from the argument.

Housing bubble is world-wide problem

Reports in the Financial Times (FT) this year find the housing bubble is now a world-wide problem, and explanations of the causes have little to do with any shortage of housing: "Record low interest rates, a rise in property speculation and a surge in overseas buyers are causing residential prices to rocket in some of the world's biggest cities." (FT May 7)

The Knight Frank global house price index shows China, Turkey, Brazil, Colombia, and the United States all have even bigger bubbles than Britain; prices in Dubai are rising at an annual rate of 27.7 per cent. A sustained property market boom in Australian cities partly fuelled by a flood of foreign money, is pricing first-time buyers out of the market and leading to fears of a housing bubble in Sydney; while The Times reported this month that in Auckland, New Zealand, Chinese buyers are reported to have forced property prices beyond the means of ordinary buyers. In none of these places can there be said to be a shortage of land or restrictive planning regulations.

The economic arguments

Research company Morgan Stanley Capital International finds the main factor to be "exceptionally low" bond yields, which made property much more appealing to investors in relative terms. Listed real estate companies had significantly outperformed the world's booming equity markets. European quantitative easing was likely to boost real estate prices further: "QE is sucking in real estate capital because debt finance is so cheap,"

Britain's biggest housebuilders have made record profits on the back of rising property prices and government incentive schemes. Many London developers are building for wealthy overseas buyers and buy-to-let investors, not for those at the lower end of the market where there is the greatest need. Moreover they have been actively lobbying London's Mayor to lower their affordable housing obligations. These statements come from the financial pages of The Times and the FT this year.

Zoe Williams in the Guardian makes the same points: "The problem of supply is not one of planning but developer incentives. Land value rises faster than the value of housing stock: expecting developers to crack on, to build and sell, is to expect them to get rid of an asset that would otherwise rise in value. ...where the aim is maximising shareholder value, these incentives more or less guarantee that they will drag their feet: land with planning permission will remain undeveloped..."

As Nicky Gavron chair of the Assembly Planning Committee said recently in a blog: "planning permission isn't the issue... In

London, there are already planning permissions for over 260,000 homes that are not getting built."

A glut of expensive homes

And to complicate matters further, recent reports now warn that so far from a shortage, there is now a glut of expensive homes. House prices in London's most expensive central areas are beginning to fall for the first time since the financial crisis and investors at Nine Elms are trying to offload their properties.

Empty homes and the homeless

Diane Burridge deals with the "buy to leave" phenomenon on the following page.

Shelter has found that there are 279,000 long-term privately owned empty homes in England. That is far more than the official figures for homeless households of 84,900 given by the Department for Communities and Local Government for England.

Crisis and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation say that 111,960 households applied to their local authority for homelessness assistance in 2013/14, a 26 per cent rise since 2009/10.

Unaffordable housing a problem for employers

Unaffordable housing in London is now becoming a serious problem for employers too. A new poll from ComRes for the London Chamber of Commerce & Industry reveals that 51% of London's business leaders cited lack of housing that is affordable to their employees as one of the top three issues affecting their firms and damaging their ability to hire the best talent.

Evidence needed

Policies need to be based on the facts: there is a shocking lack of data on too many of these issues on which to construct realistic policy. Is there really a shortage of houses? Or is it that too many of them are now simply unaffordable, or in places where there are no jobs? It is to be hoped that rigorous analysis of all these factors will provide much needed objective evidence so as to address the real causes of the problem, rather than simply use it as an excuse to dismantle the planning system and concrete over London's green spaces at the behest of those with a financial interest. ■

Lack of data

The London Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the National Audit Office find serious information gaps on land for housing

Brownfield land “information gap”

A report, *Unlocking London's housing potential* published in May by the London Chamber of Commerce and Industry quantifies for the first time the scale of the lack of information held by London's councils on their brownfield land. There is a large “information gap”: half of London's councils have little or no idea how much brownfield land they own.

The Chamber issued Freedom of Information requests to each London local authority. Fifteen of 32 either failed to respond or said they did not have the information. Another three said they had no brownfield land while seven more said they had only general land and asset data. At present, there is no statutory duty for boroughs to keep a record of the brownfield sites they possess.

Colin Stanbridge, Chamber chief executive, suggested that the newly-established London Land Commission (see page 4) will struggle to tackle the problem unless it is given more powers to get the information on brownfield land; it may need powers to compel local authorities to cooperate.

No data on government Land sales policy

The public land sales policy was launched by the coalition government in 2011 to stimulate the housing market by boosting building. Lack of access to land is one of housebuilders' biggest complaints. Ministers set Whitehall departments, councils and public bodies an initial target to sell off enough land to build 100,000 homes.

But a report by the **National Audit Office** could find “no supporting documentation or economic evidence behind the target or how it was allocated to departments” to show how the government came to choose the original 100,000-home figure. It found that while government had disposed of enough land for an expected 109,950 homes, the Department for Communities and Local Government does not collect that data. It did “not routinely monitor” what happened to that land after it was disposed of, meaning there is “no information on how many homes have been built on sold land”

This includes land sold off by Royal Mail and British Waterways, the Ministry of Defence, the quango Homes and Communities Agency, and the Department of Health. ■

Action On ‘Buy To Leave’ In Islington

Diane Burridge examines how the ‘buy to leave’ phenomenon affects one London Borough

Nearly one third of the 1,979 new build housing units completed since 2008 in Islington, have no-one named on the electoral register. This level of ‘Buy to Leave’ has prompted Islington to issue a draft Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) outlining plans to enforce greater levels of occupancy.

The most densely populated borough

Being the most densely populated borough in the country, with the least amount of open space (2011 Census), and with Mayoral and National Planning Policy Framework targets to build a minimum of 1,264 houses each year (until 2025), Islington is obliged to ensure that there is no wasted supply.

This high level of Buy to Leave - when “individuals or companies buy new residential dwellings for speculative investment purposes only, leaving the home vacant” (SPD, section 1.1), was discovered only after extensive research using Land Registry Titles, census returns and the electoral register.

Excluding ‘affordable housing tenure’ (40% of housing stock in the borough), students, tenants not eligible to vote on the grounds of nationality and serviced apartments, unexplained non-registration figures still remain high.

Examining new developments of over 20 units, it was found that, for example, 45% of 127 market units at the Bezier development, and 33% of 106 units at Worcester Park, had unexplained non-registration figures. The borough-wide level of household spaces with no usual resident is 4.8% - similar to other inner London boroughs.

Overseas ownership

Many of these vacant units are surmised to be owned by overseas companies. Data from Savills (Spotlight: The World in London, 2013, p5) showed that the proportion of UK buyers goes down as the price goes up. Molier Consultancy found that 70% of new-build sales (of over 20 units) in the £1,000 to £1,500 per square foot range, and over 50% in the £700 to £1,000 range, were to investors, not individuals. These two top market sectors are the most common in Islington. (Who Buys New Homes in

London and Why? British Property Federation, 2014, p20)

Section 106 agreements to ensure occupancy

The draft SPD, ‘Preventing Wasted Housing Supply’ (May 2015) advocates using a Section 106 legal agreement for each site of over 20 units to ensure occupancy. In Islington, there are 375 housing schemes in the development pipeline (2013 Annual Monitoring Report), which are aiming to deliver a net total of 4,300 residential units. Of these, only 28 schemes are for 20 or more homes, but the total delivery of these is 3,544 (82% of the total).

The Section 106 agreement will require the owners of individual dwellings within these developments to use and occupy the individual dwelling as a dwelling house or to ensure such use and occupation (at least 14 days in any period of three consecutive months). The freeholder (or head lease owner) will be required to include such an obligation in the lease/sub-lease of the individual dwelling, and to provide the council with reasonable evidence of compliance with this obligation – which applies from six months after the date of first purchase or practical completion of the dwelling.

Action is now imperative

The London-wide Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (GLA, 2014) states that no more than 0.75% of homes should remain empty for more than six months. Mayoral guidance is clear: empty homes are a wasted housing resource. But action is now imperative, not just policy statements.

As housing demand increases, and at the same time an increasing number of homes remain insultingly empty, something had to be done. The outcomes of Islington Council's strategy to reduce wasted supply of housing, due to Buy to Leave, may be of interest to similarly-affected boroughs in London. ■

For further information:
LDF@islington.gov.uk.

Offices to housing

Statutory Instrument
Deferred
Michael Bach reports

Thanks to the support for London Forum's campaign by a significant number of London MPs from all parties, the Mayor, London Councils, London Boroughs, the property, retail and town centre management/BIDs industries, and London Forum members, the Government has decided to redraft the proposed Statutory Instrument to give London Boroughs more time to prepare their proposals for exempting buildings, areas of their Borough or even the whole Borough through issuing an Article 4 Direction. This would have the effect of preventing the introduction of the Government's proposed freedom to change offices into housing without requiring planning permission.

These conversions have been gathering pace as found by commercial property consultancy Lambert Smith Hampton in their annual Office Market Report for 2015. Some Boroughs – such as Westminster – have already started the process, as may some other London Boroughs, but the approval of these would still rest with the Secretary of State, Greg Clark.

There is no room for complacency – the proposed extension of the offices to housing freedom, or worse still, making it permanent, could result in the biggest asset-stripping operation in London since the Use Classes Order changes of 1987.

Today, however, with the overheated housing market, especially in Inner London, the differential in values between housing and offices and other uses will mean the wholesale disappearance of offices outside the City, Canary Wharf and the Central Area. This would adversely affect London's local economies, town centres and local communities through the loss of small and medium-sized businesses who will not find alternative premises. The trip from offices to housing is a one-way trip. This measure would strip out jobs, services and diversity from our local communities.

We need to press for an end to this 'experiment'. It has achieved relatively little, has destabilised local markets, produces no affordable housing, and, if it were to proceed, would change radically London's local economies and town centres by stripping out local jobs. ■

More reports on the housing situation

Small builders struggle

While some of the biggest housebuilders are making record profits, small housebuilders are struggling to survive. In a recent National House Building Council survey, half of the small building companies questioned, said banks' reluctance to lend had become a serious impediment and has left smaller groups warning of a fight for survival. They play a critical role because they can take on small plots of brownfield land that aren't worthwhile for volume builders.

Right to Buy subsidises higher earners

There is much well researched opposition to the Government plans to extend the Right to Buy for housing associations. Discounts will be capped at £104,000 in London and £77,000 in the rest of England.

Government data show that there are 21,000 households in social properties, including council and housing association homes, who have incomes higher than £60,000. Some 8,000 earn over £80,000 and 5,000 are on more than £100,000. The new policy therefore appears to offer six-figure subsidies, funded by the taxpayer, to higher rate earners. Lord Kerslake has called for a 'radical review' of government plans to extend the Right to Buy policy to housing association tenants, and has not ruled out the possibility of legal action.

Stuart Lipton

In a widely reported national media interview Sir Stuart Lipton, one of Britain's most experienced property developers, continued the cry for 'reform' of the planning system. His call for "greater use of legal measures to override local opposition to new development to step up the number of houses being built" gives even greater cause for concern. What price democracy?

However he also attacked housebuilders for their role in what he called the greatest crisis facing the country, saying that some developments by today's biggest housebuilders were the "potential slums of the future". He called for greater regional co-ordination, more funding for councils' planning departments, and improvement to the quality and design of new buildings.

Lord Adonis

Lord Adonis has called for the systematic regeneration of council estates that are in desperate need of renewal. He makes the case that "local authorities [have the capacity] to make a big difference to housing supply by mobilising their own land already zoned for housing." "Hundreds of new 'city villages' should be created, improving the lot of existing residents while housing large numbers of new residents too." "These council estates were mostly built in the 1950s, 60s, and 70s. Many were badly designed. Most have barely been redeveloped in half a century, and they are often in poor physical condition. Too often they are social ghettos."

New affordable housing development company

We have reported on several new initiatives in these pages. Now John Gildersleeve, the chairman of British Land, has launched an affordable housing development company -Rentplus - in the latest sign that mainstream real estate businesses are focussing on the social housing sector. The new group will finance and build affordable homes for letting which tenants can choose to buy at a market price at a later date. Rentplus would help them on to the housing ladder by subsidising them with a 10 per cent deposit.

Rentplus is seeking to raise funding of £700m and has secured £70m from a UK pension fund. It has already agreed its first deal with Plymouth and Sedgemoor councils to build 900 homes. ■

London Housing Commission

The Institute for Public Policy Research has launched a commission to investigate the lack of affordable housing in London. The new **London Housing Commission** will be chaired by Lord Bob Kerslake, former head of the civil service and current chair of Peabody, with Terrie Alafat, chief executive of the Chartered Institute of Housing also joining and will report next March just before the Mayoral elections. The aim is to find evidence and produce a clear programme of action for London's housing market. ■

The Green Belt – up for grabs?

Diane Burridge reports on a recent Urban Design London event

Having travelled extensively to many 'global' cities, and experienced their appalling sprawl with little open space, I have to admit a bias: I am an unwavering supporter of the Green Belt. How alone I felt as I heard speaker after speaker, at a recent Urban Design London event, criticise London's Green Belt.

"We are going to have to build on Green Belt land, as well as brownfield sites; we need to look forward rather than backwards," stated Neil Deely, the Director of Metropolitan Workshop. Professor Paul Cheshire added: It is full of damaging intensive agriculture and, inside the Greater London metropolitan area, the Green Belt has golf courses covering an area twice the size of the London Borough of Kensington and Chelsea. "We see swathes of uninteresting waste land...and we are using too much of a legalistic approach when looking at land use here"

Jonathan Manns of Colliers International stated that the Green Belt is now "fragmented and used for many different purposes". Some original plans were for tree-lined boulevards, not the 3-6 miles width agreed in the Greater London Plan in 1943/44. Now it consists of 516,000 hectares of which 157,000 hectares are within the Greater London metropolitan area. Manns noted that, if we developed "just 4.6% of this area, we could build one million homes". David Rudlin, of Urbed, felt that a "confident bite" could be taken in some areas, which needed reforming, to build housing developments. Uplifts in land values here could be used to fund the infrastructure required, as happens in Germany and the Netherlands.

As I listened, I kept thinking: of course the Green Belt is not perfect but shouldn't the emphasis be on improving and protecting this unique land? Then it dawned on me why developing this land seems to be the theme tune at planning events; as Professor Cheshire noted, the Green Belt is where we are not building but it is where people want to live. In Barnet, for example, if you could convert one hectare of land of the Green Belt (worth £25 per hectare now) into housing, it could be worth £15 million per hectare. What a mark-up for anyone who would benefit from allowing housing development!

CPRE: the Green Belt's purpose

I was relieved to hear Paul Miner, of the Campaign to Protect Rural England, remind people of the Green Belt's main purpose which is to prevent urban sprawl. As he stated, growth within London and the new towns is taking place despite having a Green Belt. The Green Belt keeps land prices down so that parks, leisure facilities, the 10,000 km of public ways, and woodlands (18% of the metropolitan Green Belt) can afford to remain as such. Besides, housing is being built on the Green Belt even with existing planning controls: for example, 2,000 houses recently in Redbridge. And within London, from 2001 to 2009, only 35% of brownfield plots that became available for housing were redeveloped; 166,000 housing units were built when sites for 469,000 housing units were available.

Steve Walker of the Environment Agency, from the floor, noted the importance of the Green Belt for tackling climate change, helping to cool London as it increasingly suffers from being a 'heat island'.

And isn't using the Green Belt to build on just 'an easy option, which assumes that demand is finite' enquired one participant? She asked: there must be a limit to London's growth; surely a national strategy for growth is needed instead of continually expanding London? My spirits rose: perhaps there is an underlying public love of the Green Belt, and that its further development will be resisted? And the Government has reiterated, recently, that policies relating to the Green Belt will be maintained.

The challenge to those of us who treasure this wonderful protected land around London may be the need to be ever-vigilant, as developers see the vast profits that can be had from building houses on this land. If bite after bite is taken from the Green Belt we could see London end up like all those sprawling cities around the world - no longer unique and no longer a pleasant city to live in. ■

(See Mike Kiely's comments on page 16 and an Andrew Lainton blog at <http://tinyurl.com/ns9t9h3>)

Green belts – a practical view?

In February Tony Crook, Emeritus Professor of Town and Regional Planning, University of Sheffield, wrote to the FT in response to an article by Martin Wolf on green belts. He pointed out that the research evidence about the impact of green belt land on the supply and price of housing is contested.

"Restricting the supply of development to achieve wider objectives... [increases] the value of the land that is developed, enabling landowners to reap the financial benefits from planning decisions. But to address these negative impacts by creating a presumption in favour of development throughout green belts will be no guarantee..... of increasing our miserably low output of new homes and of ensuring that the matching infrastructure needed to support these new homes is also provided."

He suggests that if green belt land is to be released for development "the identified land should be acquired by joint public-private sector bodies charged with acquiring the land at its existing use value, putting in the infrastructure and then selling it on to developers at market prices, thus recouping the development value for further investment in the community and other facilities needed to support the new development, including affordable rented and shared ownership housing for those unable to pay full market prices." ■

New Brownfield Housing Zones

Nine new Housing Zones on brownfield land, have already been designated in Greenwich, Bexley, Barking and Dagenham, Wandsworth, Harrow, Hounslow, Lewisham, Ealing and Haringey. They will have access to funding set aside to deliver affordable housing. Housing zones are a new approach being used by the government, to get new homes built quickly. This investment will support and accelerate the construction of up to 30,000 new homes, of which around a third will be Affordable Homes. ■

Campaign to make London a 'National Park City'

by David Lewis

Just as siren voices start to support building on the Green Belt a campaign is gathering momentum to make the whole of London a 'National Park City'. Following a 'Green Paper' published in April detailed proposals are now awaited.

Unanimous Assembly vote

The idea of a National Park City was first put forward last year by Daniel Raven-Ellison, a documentary maker and former geography teacher. It has attracted so much attention that the London Assembly voted unanimously to support the idea at its June meeting.

London's rich natural heritage.

Urban landscape can be more ecologically rich and diverse than countryside. Greater London is said to contain 1300 sites of nature conservation importance, more than 13,000 species, 3000 parks, 3.8 million gardens, 30,000 allotments and 300 farms. There are references in the 'Green Paper' to built heritage but its overwhelming emphasis is on London's natural heritage.

Aims for a National Park City

The 'Green Paper' selects as some of the aims for this National Park City:

- connecting 100% of London's children to nature
- increasing London's green space from 47% to 51% by 2051
- increasing the number of tourists in outer London by 10% by 2025
- making Greater London a Green 'World City'
- fostering a new shared identity among London's diverse population.

The key components would be

- 'an inspirational hub at the heart of London' for learning, research and dialogue
- 'a dynamic visitor centre', prioritising destinations outside central London
- teams of City Rangers of all ages

(seconded, voluntary and paid) to support the work already being done by individuals and organisations across the capital. Unlike National Parks elsewhere in Britain the National Park City would not have any formal role in the planning system, and there is no proposal for any new legislation.

Governance

Governance would be provided by a board of trustees elected by different kinds of member. Details of how the National Park City could be funded will form part of the forthcoming proposals. The prospects for getting Government money don't look good – the grants to existing National Parks are being cut drastically.

Widespread support

Might a new organisation like this duplicate and complicate the work of existing organisations? Or could it provide new motivation and inspiration for them, and lead to greater public interest in London's wildlife and landscape? The signs are good. The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and the London Wildlife Trust are represented on the Steering Committee, and the Advisory Board includes Dave Morris, Chair of London Green Spaces Friends Groups Network. We await developments with interest.

Other information about London's Green Spaces

The All London Green Grid (London's green infrastructure strategy), the establishment of Green Space Information for Greater London (London's environmental records centre) and a number of funded programmes including those delivered directly by the Mayor including his Street Trees initiative, and funding programmes such as Help a London Park, Big Green Fund and Pocket Parks for improvements to parks and green spaces. ■

Avery Hill Garden under threat

The future of Avery Hill Mansion and its garden, in Eltham, is under threat following the decision by the University of Greenwich to sell the whole estate.

Built in 1891 by the entrepreneur John Thomas North who made his fortune exporting fertiliser from Chile, the London County Council acquired the site in 1902 for teacher training.

It is famous for its domed Winter Garden, a classically-styled historic Grade II listed conservatory housing exotic plants, second only to Kew in size. There is also a rose garden and sports areas.

The University has been responsible for upkeep of the garden but much of the site is now empty and has become run down since the opening of the University's new £60m building in Greenwich. It is now on English Heritage's at risk register.

The University had appeared to be fully committed to restoration, having received a Heritage Lottery Fund grant for a stage-one evaluation. They were due to submit a stage-two application for the restoration of the Winter Garden but have now withdrawn it. It is thought that doubts arose about the business case for functions income being adequate to pay for ongoing maintenance and repairs once the £5m restoration had been paid for.

The University was originally planning to build up to 500 new homes in blocks no more than four storeys high on the Avery Hill mansion site; discussions were held with housing developers and Greenwich Council. But the Council have now given 'in principle' approval for negotiations with house builders for more ambitious plans thought to involve more than 1,000 units with some blocks of eight storeys. A price of around £20m has been mooted for the site.

It is now believed that the University had always planned to sell the Mansion site. It has other heavy financial commitments including a debt overhang from a PFI agreement. Campaigners, led by the Park's Friends group, are hoping that any development is not allowed to loom over Avery Hill and that the Council will guarantee the Garden's restoration and maintenance as part of any planning permission. It appears that historic covenants are in place to maintain the fabric and keep the Winter Garden open to the public. ■

Garden, Bridge, What's not to like?

"It is a spectacular solution to a problem that doesn't really exist". (*The Guardian*)

by **Bill Linskey**

On the evening of Monday 18th May, hundreds of people gathered in St John's Church, Waterloo, to hear an impressive list of speakers criticise the plans for the so-called Garden Bridge across the Thames between Temple and the South Bank. Why "so-called"; because key themes of the speakers included: it's not a bridge and it's not a garden!

It fails as a bridge because:

- there will be no public right of way. This will be a private, not a public, space controlled by security staff. Groups above a size determined by the owners, not the public, will not be allowed on;
- it will be closed at night. The night time economy thrives on the South Bank but this bridge will be closed then, at hours to suit the management of the bridge rather than the public;
- it will close on various days for corporate events. Bridge for hire! (if you can afford it!);
- bicycles will not be allowed on. Safer cycle crossings of the Thames would be very welcome, but this structure will be banned to bikes;
- it is predicted that most visitors will not actually cross the bridge. Instead, they will come on to the bridge from one side to have a look, then turn and go back to the side from whence they came;
- and, if that's not enough, it's in the wrong place. A bridge is not needed just 300m from Waterloo Bridge. There are many other places where a proper bridge is needed. For example, a pedestrian and cycle bridge at Battersea/Nine Elms would help the regeneration of the area.

It will not work as a garden because:

- the Thames will provide a very hostile environment for plants. Trees are unlikely to survive in the winds;
- with such a small area to catch rain-water, it will need constant irrigation;
- no public garden activities, such as picnicking, will be allowed. The long, narrow shape of the garden will severely restrict what can be done with it;
- even the argument that a limited garden is worthwhile in central London does not work because 30 mature trees will need to be felled to accommodate it. It will destroy more green value than it will create;
- and the money it will cost could create

The Garden Bridge Trust and its backers have been evasive and misleading.

Observer editorial

It is little more than a trophy structure, largely devoid of utility. ...it is the Millennium Dome on stilts.

Financial Times editorial

far more and better green space elsewhere in London.

So what is it?

A vanity project and folly certainly: it is claimed it will be a tourist attraction – a "destination." But even if it were to work in those terms, it is being proposed just where we do not need any more attractions. The South Bank is already a victim of its own success, often getting very overcrowded. As if that were not enough, the projections for the bridge itself imply that it will be overcrowded at busy times, with visitors having no more than a metre square of space each.

Any other objections?

Surely there are no other objections to the project? Just a few:

- It will ruin one of the best, historic views of St. Paul's cathedral across the open space of the Thames.
- The bridge design itself has been much criticised: "Bridge architect Cezary Bednarski and Alistair Lenczner, engineer of the massive Millau Viaduct in France, criticised the design as ungainly and non-functional..." (Michael Ball, Director, Waterloo Community Development Group, reporting on the 18 May meeting).
- The bridge will not create a new public space but a large amount of existing public space, owned by Lambeth Council, will be lost. This is where the bridge lands on the south and where a large commercial/retail building is planned.
- The amount of public funding pledged to this private project has also been heavily criticised. The Chancellor, George

Osborne, and the Mayor, Boris Johnson, each pledged £30 million of public money towards the estimated £175 million construction costs of the bridge. Subsequent events have revealed more public funding pledges.

What has happened since?

If anything, the situation has become more confused. At the time of the meeting, Michael Ball had a judicial review action against the planning permission granted by Lambeth Council running in the High Court. This included the claim that Lambeth council had not taken proper account of the potential difficulties of funding the running costs. The court agreed and ruled that guarantees had to be secured for the estimated £3.5 million per annum costs. This settled the action and it looked as though it might settle the hash of the bridge which, despite the promised £60 million of public funding, appeared to still have a significant shortfall. Then the Mayor stepped in again. Having first said that the bridge would not cost any public money, then pledging £30 million towards the costs, he has now given a guarantee for the estimated £3.5 million annual costs.

In another bizarre twist, Lambeth council has granted an application to register its own land, which it had already agreed in principle to make available for the bridge, as an Asset of Community Value (ACV). The land is not fully protected by becoming an ACV but any proposed disposal would be subject to a six month delay to give the community an opportunity to mount its own bid. As one wag had it: "Lambeth were proposing to let it go for a peppercorn. We should be able to run to two peppercorns."

The latest development is that on 2nd July, Diane Abbott tabled an Early Day Motion (EDM240) in Parliament calling for the scheme to be reconsidered.

She joins the opposition speakers at the event on 18th May who included such unlikely bedfellows as the Green Party and the Tax Payers' Alliance, not to mention the Metropolitan Public Gardens Association, the London Cycling Campaign and the Twentieth Century Society; Labour and Liberal politicians; and the aforementioned bridge designer and engineer.

What's not to like? Just about everything. ■

The Scrutiny Role of the London Assembly on the Environment

David Lewis reports on the work of the Environment Committee

The Environment Committee of the London Assembly investigates policy issues and monitors the Mayor's strategies, policies and actions. As well as evidence submitted it draws on discussions with invited expert witnesses at its monthly meetings. These are held in public at City Hall and the dates and agendas can be found by googling 'London Assembly Environment Committee'. In the course of this year the committee has expressed views on a wide variety of subjects:

Bag it or bin it: managing London's domestic food waste

<http://bit.ly/1G1UxNS> advocates treating all domestic food waste by anaerobic digestion. That requires separate collection, which a number of boroughs do not provide at present. To remedy the lack of treatment capacity the report urges the EU to allow food waste to be treated in plants for sewage sludge. In April the Mayor responded briefly to the recommendations directed at him. Maps showing how boroughs deal with food waste at present are at <http://bit.ly/1JuxlM6>

Come rain or shine: London's adaptation to the risks of severe weather concludes that London is not well prepared and that climate change is likely to make things worse. The committee makes a number of recommendations to remedy that situation. <http://bit.ly/1G1T0Hq>

In March the committee wrote to the

Mayor about the role of biodiversity in London, the draft update to the 2002 Biodiversity Strategy and practical issues of implementing the strategic policy framework at borough level

<http://bit.ly/1IsbbtQ>

In June it returned to the subject of air pollution, in the light of the Supreme Court's Order that the Government must prepare new air quality plans and deliver them to the European Commission by the end of this year. Last year the committee, with the Conservative members dissenting, called for the Mayor's proposed Ultra-Low Emission Zone to be introduced sooner and be designed to achieve 80% compliance in Greater London, rather than just in Central London <http://bit.ly/1QdRR7M>

Airports Commission

In May the committee, on behalf of the London Assembly, called on the Airports Commission to reject both Heathrow expansion options because of their impact on air quality <http://bit.ly/1ARG0Wa>

Topics for later scrutiny

The committee is now starting an investigation of solar power in London homes. Other topics are the environmental impacts and demands from the projected growth in London's population and economic activity; the latest figures on carbon emissions and updates on progress in reducing them; and the potential for increasing recycling rates in London. London Forum is considering what evidence to submit to these scrutinies. ■

LGA study of Council Tax expenditure

The Local Government Association (LGA) published a study earlier this year showing how each £1 of council tax is spent now, and will be by 2019-20. It takes into account the present trend in spending and the likely squeeze on local government grants as a result of further cuts.

In 2009-10 councils in England received £21.8 billion in council tax and £29.87 billion in government grant. By 2013-14 council tax receipts fell to £19.4 billion and grants fell to £18 billion.

In 2010-11 about 41 per cent of council tax revenues were spent on social care for children and the elderly, rising to 45 per cent last year. The LGA reckons that by 2019-20 this will rise to an estimated 60 per cent. 7 per cent was spent on rubbish collection and 1 per cent on street cleaning. They calculate that road repairs will fall from the current 7 per cent to 5 per cent. Routine services such as fixing potholes, bin collections and street cleaning will be pared to the bone owing to rising numbers of elderly people and falling grants. Just under 5 per cent will go on libraries, parks and museums.

They LGA also calculated what these sums meant for actual taxpayers. A Band D council tax payer will contribute almost £800 a year to social care and just under £16 per year on street cleaning and flood defences by 2019-20. They suggest that although people will still be paying similar levels of council tax over the next few years they may see a lot less in return with streets and parks less well kept, the local libraries closing and bus services being cut. ■

Impact of impending S.106 restrictions - Peter Eversden reports

Local authorities could find they have no ability to raise developer contributions for infrastructure following the planned changes to Section 106 rules from 6 April.

Speaking at the National Planning Summit in London, Iain Gilbey, partner and head of planning and environment at law firm Pinsent Masons, considered the impact of the planned changes to section 106 rules. As of 6 April, section 106 payments can still be used to fund local infrastructure, but the way councils can use the contributions will be restricted: councils will be able to pool up to only five contributions to pay for any one project.

This applies to all contributions made since 2010. Gilbey said local authorities who do not have a Community Infrastructure Levy charging schedule in place could find they have "no ability to raise pooled funds to serve [their] borough or district's wider infrastructure requirements".

He said "You could expect rival developers to be looking very carefully at these sorts of planning permissions ... to see whether they can slow down, stop or try and thwart competitors proposals." This has the potential for judicial review challenges. ■

Tall buildings scrutiny rejected

In March, Mayor Boris Johnson rejected a call by the London Assembly for a Skyline Commission to ensure tall buildings were only permitted 'in the right place' and where they did not have an 'irreversible impact' on the city's skyline.

He dismissed the idea saying it was not needed and that the London Plan provided a 'sufficiently robust' framework for ensuring that new tall buildings were constructed in appropriate locations. He also claimed that recent research shows that the policy is effective. ■

Lords flag concern over HS2

Following searching questions on HS2 from the House of Commons Select Committee, (see Newsforum no 69) the Lords now add more. **Andrew Bosi** reports

The HS2 debate has hitherto mirrored a growing trend in politics more generally. Where we used to have left and right, now we have the populace and the parliamentarians, the Westminster Village and the country around. Parliament voted 10:1 in favour of HS2, when popular opinion is largely opposed. It seemed that only UKIP as a party was opposed to the scheme, and that the election would have no impact on its inexorable roll towards Royal Assent.

Opponents of the scheme have been portrayed as Nimbys and as standing in the way of progress. There may well be a few petrolheads who fail to have caught up with climate change or the fact that fuel resources are finite, and others who are facing personal threat to their home and livelihood. While not dragging the debate down to this level, the editor of Rail Magazine regards it as a requirement of all supporters of rail to support HS2 as the only game in town.

In fact, the main umbrella group outside London has not opposed the scheme outright. They have pointed out that, although originally flagged as a high speed scheme, its proponents now recognise the primary need for capacity. That need will best be met by serving intermediate stations.

Just as Parliament was to be prorogued, a House of Lords Committee - the Select Committee on Economic Affairs - produced a report on HS2 so full of common sense I agreed with every word of it. In fact, modesty aside, many of the words could have been lifted from my own newsletters! The Committee has the resources, which the London Forum does not, to research our anecdotal evidence. And yes, the inter-city trains from Birmingham do have spare capacity, except perhaps out of London on

Friday evenings. It is the local services at either end that are severely overcrowded. And yes, the benefits of the scheme would primarily be felt in London. The North needs a faster cross Pennine route like HS3, or the northern legs of HS2 to be built first. And yes, Old Oak Common meets most of London's needs at a fraction of the cost of reconfiguring Euston. The Committee believes that terminating at Old Oak Common would be appropriate in the current financial climate and would be consistent with the Government's declared objective of making rail less dependent on public subsidy.

The report also finds, and has wrung from the Department for Transport an admission to this effect, that the data on which the economic case for HS2 is based is either flawed or out of date. It recommends that more up to date research is carried out and that in particular, options for improving existing lines should be revisited. This should come as no surprise. If Transport for London can achieve capacity improvements of up to 35% on their antiquated Victorian railway, working underground in cramped conditions, surely Network Rail could do as well or better.

The Select Committee does not condemn HS2 completely, but says that a poor economic case has been made both in respect of capacity or rebalancing the economy (reversing the polarisation towards London and the south-east). Committee chair Lord Hollick concludes: "We have set out a number of important questions on HS2 that the Government must now provide detailed answers to. Parliament should not approve the enabling legislation that will allow HS2 work to begin until we have satisfactory answers to these key questions." ■

Update on Silvertown Tunnel

A Report of the findings of the consultation on the Silvertown Tunnel, was published in March. TfL received over 4,600 responses. 83 per cent felt that the Silvertown Tunnel is needed and could improve the resilience of the road network in east London, relieve congestion at the Blackwall Tunnel and beyond and support growth in London's population. Several broad themes emerged, including:

- Highway & Traffic issues – and the effect the scheme might have on traffic flow,
- User charging – opposed by 54 per cent with 37 per cent supporting. Some respondents commented on the effect that they felt the proposed charge would have on traffic. There was also a wide range of suggestions for discounts.
- Public Transport & cycling – Some respondents asked that TfL reconsider whether pedestrians and cyclists could be allowed to use the new tunnel.

TfL are reviewing the issues raised and will publish a further report responding to these points.

A final consultation will be held in the summer prior to submitting an application for the 'Development Consent Order' that would be necessary to build and operate the tunnel in late 2015 or early 2016. ■

The report is available to download at: <https://consultations.tfl.gov.uk/rivercrossings/silvertown-consultation>

Updated Crossrail 2 route protected from conflicting development

The DfT published updated plans in March to protect land for the Crossrail 2 route from conflicting development following a 10-week consultation

The high frequency, high capacity rail line would run between south west and north east London., Part of the line between Chelsea and Hackney has been safeguarded for the proposed project

since 1991.

However changes to the route required an update to the safeguarded areas. It will replace the previous directions and will ensure new development does not affect the ability to build and operate Crossrail 2 in the future.

This will mean that relevant planning applications in safeguarded areas will be

referred to TfL for advice. If development interferes with Crossrail 2, either a compromise will be reached or the development will not be allowed. ■

Spotlight on combined action by Societies

As more and more councils are combining their efforts, is it time societies followed suit? **David Howard** Chair of the **Federation of Residents Associations in Barnet** describes the FORAB model

The London Borough of Barnet is made up of 21 wards and was created in 1965 out of Finchley Borough Council (BC), Hendon Borough Council, Friern Barnet Urban District Council (UDC) - all parts of the former LCC - plus Barnet Urban District Council and East Barnet Urban District Council which had been part of the County of Hertfordshire. It is the fourth largest London borough in terms of area and by December 2015 will have the largest population of the 32 London boroughs.

Historical background

There are communities that trace their roots back to the 11th, 12th and 13th Century and are proud of them. The railways brought expansion in the 1850s but the main growth came in the 1930s with Metroland expansion alongside the Piccadilly and Northern Lines and the North Circular, A1, A41 and A5 roads.

Borough Strategy today

The Borough adopted a strategy of growth about fifteen years ago with an aspiration of 6,000 new homes each and every year from brown field sites, regeneration (intensification) of existing Social housing estates and various retail and commercial sites, infill, intensification and opportunistic sites plus a new town based on Brent Cross Shopping Centre which would be doubled in size. After intensive groundwork and lobbying from the community led by the Federation of Residents Associations in Barnet (FORAB) this was reduced to 2,500pa but is likely to rise again with the revised London Plan.

Civic action

The UDCs and BCs had a history of local active Ratepayers Associations but these died out on amalgamation. Civic Societies were set up in the oldest centres of Chipping Barnet, Finchley and Whetstone plus smaller local Residents Associations and Community Associations. It is noticeable that these groups are mainly to be found in the centre and eastern side of the Borough which are the oldest areas with far fewer smaller groups in "Metroland" to the West of the Borough where there are large estates of (former) Council housing with their own structures.

It was realised that the various residents groups would be more influential if they spoke with one voice.

Following amalgamation it was realised that the various residents groups would be more influential if they spoke with one voice so they set up FORAB.

Procedural matters

Membership was open to any group of residents in a properly established group, eg: with a Chair, Secretary, Treasurer, constitution, and AGM with open elections to all posts. It was non-party political, and was set up to:-

- a) protect and advance the interests of residents in general
- b) encourage interest in all aspects of local government
- c) provide friendly discussion among its members and to organise united action in matters of common interest

Each meeting has a standard agenda which includes updates from Barnet council, the NHS the Police and a Planning update.

It is a modern take on the constitution and allows for the constant changes in all areas of society to be considered in a structured way.

The problems

Since 1965 Barnet has been led primarily by its officers and with the introduction ten years ago of Easy Council and Outsourcing this is even more obvious. This has meant that discussions with Council members have become less frequent and far less useful as they are not the main decision takers now. This has led to residents becoming disillusioned with the process and opting out, resulting in lower membership levels in many groups.

At the same time the age profile of committee members and officers has risen making discussions about dramatic changes in governance and public decision making harder to accept. However this did not mean that the community was

apathetic. They will turn out to meetings, write letters, sign petitions and lobby councillors and MPs on issues that affect them closely or are dear to them e.g. Hospital, Police station or school closures, large new or inappropriate developments not to mention closing the libraries and cutting back on social care to children and the elderly.

A reinvention

The Whetstone Society closed and a number of other RAs were in danger of also disappearing three years ago so FORAB reinvented itself so that we could continue to work with both larger existing bodies and smaller groups of activists in different parts of the Borough.

The way it works today

We reduced the number of formal meetings from 6 a year to 4 but increased the flow of information from the centre to an "as needed" basis; this could be weekly or even several times a day. Each member got all of the information which they could circulate to their committee or general members as they saw fit or delete it if not relevant. They must not feel beholden to keep everything or distribute everything thus boring their members.

The information comes in to the chair from a variety of sources: FORAB committee members, Central Government, GLA, Barnet, NHS, Police, press releases or notifications, Committee reports, trade journals, newspapers, BBC, friends, colleagues.

The item may be very relevant to one area only and they will follow it up themselves. It may be of more general interest and email correspondence will follow. If urgent a majority agreed line will emerge and the Chair will write to the, Council, or department concerned with a FORAB view.

Good relations with Council officers

If time allows the relevant officer from the Council or NHS will be asked to come to the next FORAB meeting (or a special earlier one) to discuss the matter of concern. It is essential that officers are treated with respect and fairly. So far this has happened and we now find officers asking if they can

Athlone House, Hampstead Heath

An alliance of Societies in Camden have won a major victory over developers. **Michael Hammerson** reports

come to a meeting to open a consultation and find out the concerns from a well informed articulate group, often prior to formal public consultation.

The wider membership includes architects, developers, valuers, housing professionals, lawyers, care workers, lecturers, former civil servants, HR personal and many other skills to draw on. They don't all come to every meeting but are a resource to draw on which is an enormous asset especially for the smaller groups.

Being a non party political organisation we do not join in public protests, banner waving etc but find that senior officers and some decision making politicians are willing to discuss matters of concern on an off the record basis. When a huge development juggernaut is rolling down the road it is frequently impossible to stop. However a few modifications here or there; add this or take that out; recognise and address this concern or increase the compensation a bit there can go a long way to making an undesirable scheme less unacceptable. In an ideal world these discussions would take place in public at either public consultation meetings or in council committees. I fear that this is but a dream of days long since past.

FORAB is similar to many residents groups now in that the day to day running of the organisation rests in the hands of a few people. However there is a large groundswell of the silent majority somewhere behind us. If we get it wrong they tell us very quickly. If they are silent they leave us to get on with it but come to our support by letter writing and lobbying when the need arises.

It is hard work but rewarding when we manage to get some of our ideas or concerns addressed. ■

(A similar group has been formed by civic and amenity societies in LB Hounslow)

Athlone House is an important element of the Hampstead Heath landscape (see Newsforum No. 69) overlooking the Heath from high ground next to Kenwood House. The romantic detailing and mellowed tower of this late Victorian mansion provide interest but do not intrude on the Heath which surrounds it on three sides.

An NHS hospital for many years, the Parkside NHS Trust decided in 1998 to close it down and sell the site to developers. The Heath and Hampstead Society, the Highgate Society and the Highgate CAAC banded together as the Athlone House Working Group (AHWG) to try to secure the best possible outcome for the site which is Metropolitan Open Land, and have continued to battle with the authorities, and a series of anonymous developers, over the last 17 years.

Section 106 agreement ignored

The original section 106 agreement stipulated that the old house would be restored as part of planning permission to build three luxury blocks of flats replacing the nurses homes in the grounds. However the house was left to deteriorate and plans later emerged to demolish it and replace it with a grandiose palace two and a half times the area of the existing mansion, which would have destroyed the time-honoured skyline from the Heath and Kenwood. Despite pressure from many quarters, the local authority, Camden, shied away for ten years from enforcing the S.106 Agreement to restore the house, arguing that they could not enforce it while there was an appeal or a proposed development on the agenda.

Things came to a head last year with yet another application. After a high profile press campaign, an article in Private Eye, an on-line 5,200 signature petition urging Camden to refuse it, over 500 letters of objection from the public, as well as strong objections from English Heritage, SAVE, the Victorian Society, and the adjoining Borough of Haringey, Camden refused permission again. But their refusal was only on grounds of excessive size of the proposed development on Metropolitan Open Land, not on the principle of demolition. A previous appeal decision had conceded the possibility that the house could be demolished, and Camden's planners and legal advisers feared that they would lose any appeal on that ground and have costs awarded against them.

AHWG believed that fighting on this ground alone would be fatal, allowing the developers to come back again and again with ever-smaller schemes until they eventually got permission.

The developers lodged yet another appeal. At the pre-inquiry meeting, the AHWG team asked the Inspector – Colin Ball, responsible for the landmark 2014 Smithfield appeal decision – if they could validly argue against the scheme on grounds not specified by Camden. The Inspector was clear that they could.

AHWG grounds of argument

Thus encouraged, AHWG argued that (1) it would cause significant damage to the MOL of Hampstead Heath because of its design and size; (2) that it would cause significant damage to the Highgate Conservation Area by destroying what is clearly, under the NPPF, a significant undesignated Heritage Asset (English Heritage had declined to List it because of subsequent alterations); (3) That the house was a unique irreplaceable, and much loved element of the Conservation Area; (4) that the proposed replacement would not bring sufficient public benefits; and (5) that the developers had already profited significantly from their planning consent to build three luxury blocks of flats in the gardens, that the consent was predicated on the S.106 Agreement to restore the house, that it can and must be enforced, and that the developers should not be allowed to renege on it, having profited from it.

Pro bono help

AHWG fielded five expert witnesses including Professor Joseph Rykwert, 2014 RIBA Gold Medal Winner, who had also represented AHWG at the 2010 appeal and appeared again, pro bono, on the dubious architectural merits of the proposed building. Equally significantly, Jon Avent, director of specialist Bath conservation engineers Mann Williams, had read about the affair and was so angered by it that he contacted us, also offering his services pro bono. His superbly professional input, arguing for the good condition of the house, and its restorability, was pivotal in securing the dismissal. The whole effort was held together and presented by a senior planning barrister who is a local resident, and who, although he had to charge for his two days at the inquiry, did hundreds of hours of preparatory work pro bono.

continued on next page

Athlone House

(continued)

The public inquiry lasted for an unconscionable 12 days (requested by the appellants), but despite the developer's unlimited funds to hire batteries of expert witnesses to argue their case for demolition the Inspector dismissed their appeal decisively, and took up and endorsed every one of AHWG's points. He was scathing of the appellants' case, emphasising the value of the existing building and the importance of retaining it, and, most significantly, underlining very firmly that the S.106 Agreement remained in force, that Camden were mistaken in their assertion that they could not enforce it while there were applications or appeals current, that it is clear that the original permission would not have been given without the undertaking to restore the house, and that it must be enforced.

Wider ramifications of the decision

This decision has much wider ramifications. If it had been allowed, no undesignated heritage asset, however important, would have been safe from destruction, and no section 106 Agreement would have been worth the paper it was written on.

AHWG is now pressing Camden to enforce the S.106 Agreement without further delay, but has been told only that Camden are "looking at it". AHWG have been asked by Private Eye to let them know if Camden do not enforce it!

Meanwhile, there is no indication whatever as to the still-anonymous developer's intentions. Would it be too much to expect them to do the honourable thing? And if they don't, will Camden? And if neither do, where does that leave our already crumbling and increasingly undemocratic planning system?

The full decision can be accessed on the Planning Inspectorate's website, (appeal No. APP/X5210/A/14/2220872). ■

Saving Pubs, the NPPF and ACVs

Nearly 700 pubs have been listed, according to the Campaign for Real Ale lobby group.

A major victory has been won in Willesden where a planning inspector dismissed a developer's appeal against LB Brent's refusal to allow demolition of the Edwardian house opposite Willesden Green Station where the Queensbury public house occupies the ground floor. The building is on the very edge of the Mapesbury Conservation Area; the developer proposed to replace it with a 10 storey residential tower.

Asset of Community value listing

Several local residents organisations banded together and got an Asset of Community Value listing (ACV) for the pub and fought the developer, Fairview Homes, tooth and nail.

The Inspector's verdict

The Inspector considered the main issues in the appeal to be:

- the effect of the loss of the existing building on the character and appearance of the Mapesbury Conservation Area and on the setting of the Willesden Green Conservation Area and of nearby listed buildings;
- the inadequacy of proposed provision for affordable housing;
- the inadequacy of mitigation for the effects on local infrastructure and environment, including for the loss of the Queensbury public house.

He cited the duty to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the area's character or appearance, and that national policy guidance set out in the NPPF confirms the great weight in favour of the conservation of 'designated heritage assets', such as conservation areas.

He found that although the building in itself was not architecturally exceptional it makes a positive contribution to the historic interest, character and appearance of the conservation area and the preservation of this contribution would be desirable.

The intensification of development of the site would be intrinsically harmful to the character of the conservation area.

The character of the area would be adversely affected by the scale of the proposal, particularly of the tower element. The building would not relate well to the scale and character of the immediately surrounding buildings.

The Chesham Arms, Hackney

A similar battle has been fought to save the Chesham Arms in Hackney and again the crucial factor was its designation as an ACV. It was bought in 2012 by a property developer who closed it and tried to convert it into flats using the new permitted development rights. The owner eventually gave up his battle, signing a 15-year lease with a new landlord who is refitting the bar and other fixtures that had been ripped out.

The Carlton Tavern in Kilburn,

At the London Forum Open Meeting In June, members heard John Walker, Westminster City Council Director for Planning, describe how the Carlton Tavern in Kilburn, was illegally demolished by the developer CLTX when he failed to get planning permission to turn it into flats. The council has ordered the company to rebuild the pub in its original condition, brick for brick. CLTX has filed an appeal against the order, and the council wants to hold a public inquiry. ■

King's College plans to bulldoze historic Strand terrace halted

King's College London faced a very public barrage of criticism when it submitted plans to demolish four historic but unlisted buildings dating from the late 17th century, next to Somerset House on the Strand, as part of an ambitious redevelopment of campus by Hall McKnight.

Outrage at the role of English Heritage

There was particular outrage that English

Heritage had not opposed the application, resulting in an abrupt and public change of stance in a letter to The Times from Nigel Barker, Historic England's planning and conservation director in London.

Opposition by SAVE and the Victorian Society

King's said the buildings are much altered and in poor condition but Marcus Binney,

president of Save Britain's Heritage, said: "No seat of learning should countenance such vandalism."

James Hughes, of the Victorian Society said. "They are characterful structures protected by the conservation area, which make a positive contribution to the conservation area, and are a last remnant of the historic streetscape in that stretch." The College withdrew its plans. ■

Islington Council's Tall Buildings Policies vs. The Arsenal Student Tower - a six year battle

by **Roger Wright**, member for planning for Highbury Community Association

Islington Council has spent nearly six years tenaciously battling against the Arsenal Football Club's wishes to build a Student Tower against Council policy. The football club has appealed and appealed, with the Council winning the last legal challenge. The Highbury Community Association has supported the Council's position all the way through, making its own submissions and attending all the hearings.

This saga may be of interest to other societies involved in similar goliath battles, and consequently the history of this struggle is outlined below - step by step. The outcome shows that councils can maintain red-line policies in the face of developers, providing they are well-defined and properly consulted on.

History of the application

In November 2009, Arsenal Football Club (AFC) applied to the London Borough of Islington (LBI) for planning permission to build, at 45 Hornsey Street, a 25 storey, 78m high tower block consisting of 450 student bedrooms. The proposal also included the refurbishment of a row of railway arches which formed part of the site. This application was not well received by LBI nor by residents and was subsequently withdrawn.

At that time, building heights in Islington were covered by Unitary Development Policy (UDP) D9: "The Council considers that Islington is an area where high buildings are inappropriate, and will oppose any proposals for such buildings".

In 2011, the club tried again. They submitted two applications, one for a largely similar 78m building for 450 students, and another for an 18 storey, 51m building for 393 students. Both schemes retained the refurbishment of the railway arches.

UDP superseded by Core Strategy

By now, the UDP had been superseded by the Islington Core Strategy of which Policy CS9 covers tall buildings: "All buildings (above 30m high) are generally inappropriate to Islington's predominantly medium to low level character, therefore proposals for new tall buildings will not be supported. Parts of the Bunhill and Clerkenwell key area may contain some sites that could be suitable for tall buildings"

Islington Council rejected both applications on the straightforward

If a borough has a strong evidence based tall buildings policy, it can stand up to legal challenge from developers

grounds that both were far taller than permitted by the policy on Tall Buildings given in the Core Strategy.

AFC appealed against both refusals and a Planning Inspector was appointed to consider both applications. He decided to hold a single enquiry to cover both. Highbury Community Association (HCA) made a submission and participated as a third-party representative, supporting the Council's arguments and explaining the wide-ranging consultation process that had led to the establishment of policy CS9.

The Inspector's verdict

The Inspector rejected the appeal against the 18 story building, but to great consternation, supported the appeal against the 25 storey building on the grounds that: "A building more than 30 metres high in this area would not be out of scale with its surroundings, would not be contrary to the character of the area, would not be inappropriate, and would not be in conflict with the thrust of policy CS9".

As the Tall Buildings policy had been interpreted by LBI and residents as providing a "red line" against all buildings over 30m tall except on the City Fringe (Bunhill and Finsbury), this decision rendered that protection void, and opened up the possibility of tall buildings having to be permitted throughout the borough. As a result, LBI sought a Judicial Review in the High Court of the Inspector's decision

Judicial Review

The Judicial Review was allowed and took place on 24th July, 2013, with Highbury Community Association attending as observers, led by Roger Wright. Mr Justice Mackie QC heard the case. LBI had obtained the services of Ms. Nathalie Lieven QC, a highly regarded barrister, to put their case. Judge Mackie gave judgement in under a week, agreed with LBI and quashed the result of the Planning Appeal, leaving the original refusal in place. His judgement said:

"Further, many policies are equivocal and can reasonably be read in different ways. However CS9 is explicit and, on this particular issue, stands alone on the question of tall buildings".

The developer appeals again

None-the-less, AFC sought leave from the Court of Appeal to have Judge Mackie's judgement overturned and this was heard on 19th March 2014 before Lord Dyson, Master of the Rolls, Lord Justice Davis and Lady Justice Gloster. This judicial line-up was quite a surprise, given that the Master of the Rolls is the most senior judge in the Civil Division and second in the Judicial hierarchy after the Lord Chief Justice. Again, Highbury Community Association attended as observers. The judgement was handed down in under two weeks and supported Mr. Justice Mackie's verdict in no uncertain terms:

"CS9(E) makes it clear that, save in that area, the general rule is to be applied and tall buildings will not be supported" "...I would refuse to disturb the judge's decision."

The result of all this legal argument on behalf of AFC was that, since the result of the original Planning Enquiry was quashed, AFC could either accept LBI's original rejection of their application or seek a fresh Planning Enquiry from the Planning Inspectorate. This they did and that was held on 17-20th March 2015. [reported in the last Newsforum no 69] As with the original appeal, Highbury Community Association made a submission and participated as a third-party representative.

Further rejection on grounds of height

This time, the Planning Inspector rejected the appeal by Arsenal Football Club, on the grounds that the building was too tall with respect to policy CS9 and that it was detrimental to the surrounding area. At present, we are waiting to see if Arsenal Football Club will seek judicial review of this decision which, of course, they can do.

As things stand today, the conclusion of this protracted legal process is that, if a borough has a red-line tall buildings policy, which is supported by thorough consultation and a well-constructed evidence base, it can stand up to legal challenge from developers and provide protection from the over-development of the built environment. ■

How to house London's growing population

The new London Plan and the implications of the changes it introduced, the housing crisis and possible ways of alleviating it. The guest speakers were **Mike Kiely**, Director of Planning & Building Control at LB Croydon, and the new President of the Planning Officers Society and **Duncan Bowie**, Senior Lecturer in Spatial Planning at the University of Westminster. **Peter Pickering** reports on April's Open Meeting

Michael Bach opened the meeting giving some background information. The GLA forecasts of population growth were robust. Households were also increasing in numbers because of family splits and the increase in life expectancy. London had always had a housing shortage: remedies had been council house building after the First World War; the 1930s building boom; conversions into flats after the second world war; out-migration from London (encouraged by the Government) in the 1960s. Occupancy of houses was now falling; over-crowding was no longer an issue. The target for new homes in 2003 had been 23,000 a year; it was now rising from 42,300 to 49,000.

Peter Eversden said that the backlog had been increasing over the years to its present level. Densities were now higher, with the 2011 London Plan limits now regularly exceeded. The need was for low-cost housing. The problem affected an area much larger than that of Greater London; but the Government was adamantly opposed to wider regional planning, and the Mayor and councils outside Greater London were not co-operating with each other until recently.

Duncan Bowie set out some of the problems. The Strategic Housing Market Assessment had concluded that 62,000 homes a year were needed for the next ten years. Overcrowding was now increasing in much of London (except for inner West London); three and even four generation households were becoming more common.

Much commuting was from outside Greater London. But both the two main parties believed that planning should be 'bottom-up', and deliver what local people wanted.

Policy changes increase difficulties

The current Government's policy changes had made it difficult to negotiate for housing at social rents; and offices becoming residential as permitted development had no requirement for affordable housing. The international development market was buying residential property all over London.

Developers released land no faster than would maintain prices.

A summary of the options

He ran through the options. Higher densities were practicable in Opportunity Areas and in town centres. Compact cities would protect open land. Lord Adonis suggested more Garden Cities and increased densities on council housing estates - but whom would they be for? There were still cheap areas, but were there jobs there? Mr Bowie favoured incremental intensification, urban extensions in the London fringe, the development of sites near stations, orbital transport links, and perhaps 'green fingers' rather than the Green Belt. He was convinced that a metropolitan regional plan was necessary.

Review Green Belt and MOL?

Mike Kiely thought it essential to look at the Green Belt, which had successfully become an urban containment zone. The need for more housing must however now be faced: Croydon town centre could be densified; there was developable brownfield land in urban areas. People living at high densities had been found to be happier than those living at low densities*. Town centres were changing; there were now too many shops, and more residents could make town centres more vibrant. London was, compared with the rest of the country, too successful; but regional redistribution was not an option.

The Green Belt must therefore be reviewed; the review must be comprehensive, and cover Metropolitan Open Land and local green spaces as well - in some areas there might be an excess of parks. There should be building round stations. The New Towns legislation should be used, with a form of compulsory purchase. If done properly, such a procedure would answer a lot of the potential objections.

The following points were raised from the floor.

Did the speakers see any limit to the number of new homes in London. Mr Bowie thought that there was no realistic way of preventing the growth of London, since it was the place to which people wanted to come, from the rest of the UK as well as from overseas; Mexico City and Beijing were growing faster than London - numbers were not the real issue. It was essential to look beyond the present administrative boundary of Greater London.

It was pointed out that Mexico City and Beijing were not good models for London; to be a 'world city' might not be a desirable aspiration. Mr Bowie did not want to be like Shanghai either. A national regeneration policy was needed; the main parties were obsessed with 'bottom-up' planning policies. The issue was not numbers, but how we built.

Mr Eversden wanted the right growth in the right places; London was the magnet because it was the hub of the new industries that were replacing the traditional ones.

Bromley Civic Society said that housing was not an exceptional circumstance that would justify an attack on the Green Belt; nevertheless the Society believed there would have to be a Green Belt review. Mr Kiely agreed. Looking only at the 'bad' bits of the Green Belt would inevitably lead to infection of others; any review would have to be comprehensive. Estate management, like that of the original garden cities, and Milton Keynes, would be essential.

Mr Bowie said that any Green Belt lost must go to affordable housing.

Mr Eversden reminded the audience that the Green Belt included many golf courses, and fenced-off areas. It would be essential for the assessment of developers' costs to be rigorous.

Mr Kiely said that viability differed across London. It would be necessary to work with the market, without being dominated by it.

A democratic deficit

There was a democratic deficit. The housing that was needed was not being delivered, and numbers were used only in the context

Is high density good for you?

“People living at high densities had been found to be happier than those living at low densities” - **Mike Kiely**, London Forum Open Meeting. What does the research tell us?

of a planning application. Fitting individual cases in with an overall target was very difficult. Were flats currently unoccupied lived in? It would not be possible to control individuals' location, but it would be possible to require companies to relocate to outside London.

Mr Bach observed that borough targets took account both of overall need and capacity but much of what was happening in London (e.g. in Opportunity Areas) was under no democratic control; but Mr Kiely said that Croydon Council was a partner in the local Opportunity Area.

Mr Eversden said that developers released land no faster than would maintain prices.

Mr Bowie said that the viability assessment procedure was introduced only to see how much affordable housing was going to be built, and got a lot of money into it; it was now having the reverse effect.

It was suggested that a 'national regeneration programme' should look at the needs of people outside London and their need for better infrastructure. London had reached capacity; it was essential to reduce the pressure on London.

But governments believed that if firms did not come to London they would go to other countries. The new deal for Manchester might give the lie to this.

There was a problem of underoccupation. Density was currently measured by habitable rooms, not by the number of actual inhabitants. But reducing underoccupation would adversely affect many elderly people.

Many areas were being greatly changed by 'gentrification' and the much improved overground service. People wanted to come to London for reasons including culture. Perhaps London needed another new major railway station.

Mr Bach concluded by observing that planning should be about where we wanted people to go, not just about development control. If it was necessary to buy rather than rent houses, that would limit the sort of jobs people wanted (i.e. very highly paid ones). ■

* Is high density good for you? see further comments on density on this page

In a 2011 report, *Housing density and health*, the Centre for Primary Health Care and Equity reviewed the literature and health impact assessments, on the effect of housing density on health.

The literature is inconclusive

They found that the literature is inconclusive. "There is a large amount of heterogeneity between studies which makes it difficult to compare studies or investigate pooled effects. Results from studies are often contradictory – what works in one place doesn't necessarily work in another. This suggests that the impacts of housing density are context specific and the design of higher density housing needs to be fit for purpose."

"It is not clear whether objective or perceived environment has a greater impact on health outcomes. A combination of physical design and educative strategies may be needed to maximise any potential health benefits of higher density housing. We found no evidence that clearly differentiated between moving from low to medium and low to high density housing. There are a range of different definitions of density used which also complicates comparisons between studies."

"The evidence is unclear on whether there

is an ideal housing density. Some evidence indicates that there is a tendency to have more potential negative impacts on health at both ends of the housing density scale compared with medium density housing. Impacts associated with higher density housing are related to features such as: access to greenspace, active transport, services and resources; environmental factors such as noise, light, air quality; economic factors such as housing affordability; and social factors such as fear of crime, social capital, privacy levels, social interaction, networks and sense of belonging. These impacts are often not the result of housing density itself but rather the urban environment within which the higher density housing is situated"

CABE report, 2006

The report *Better Neighbourhoods: Making higher densities work*, prepared for the City of London by URBED made the comment: "The compact city and intensive development does not necessarily imply high rise buildings. London has achieved some of its highest residential densities in relatively low rise areas, while isolated, poorly designed tower blocks have not necessarily delivered high density or usable public space." ■

35-storey skyscrapers . . . built out of plywood

Houses built of wood are nothing new. But in a new, green approach to building for the future, new technology developed over the past 20 years is enabling architects to build wooden skyscrapers 35 storeys high.

It is now possible to produce what is essentially plywood - albeit a very thick plywood - which is sufficiently solidly engineered, using a cross-laminated technique: layers of small wooden pieces are glued and pressed together until boards are up to 18in thick. The panels are pre-fabricated, and therefore construction is much quicker, cutting the time to build by 50 per cent. It is also a much quieter process.

In London, one of the pioneers of this new technique is the architect's practice Waugh Thistleton. They are working on a

ten-storey project that will provide 121 homes by October.

In Paris, Canadian architect Michael Green is designing the world's tallest timber building, at 120 metres, with 35-storeys, as part of a competition called Réinventer Paris, while in Stockholm a proposal, for a 34-storey building has been put together by the architects Berg/CF Møller.

Mr Green said that wooden buildings caused less climate change, used renewable materials and should last 100 to 150 years — and it could be recycled. Cement is one of the biggest producers of greenhouse gases and is highly polluting. ■

Impact of recent and impending changes in planning policy and use classes

London Forum members drew depressing conclusions for the future

The speakers were **John Walker** director of planning, Westminster Council; and **Ben Johnson** of Islington Council. **Peter Pickering** reports on June's Open Meeting

Peter Eversden opened the meeting with news of the recent formation of an All-Party Parliamentary Group for London. He expressed the hope that it would mean a greater understanding of the issues special to London than had arisen in the 2010-15 Parliament.

The Coalition Government's pruning and relaxations of the planning code, intended to increase the provision of residential accommodation, had failed in that aim but had caused many serious problems (e.g. with office accommodation) in London. Despite a claimed commitment to localism they had interfered with the London Plan in respect of housing and parking standards, and despite the recommendations of the Inspector they were not willing for the next London Plan to look beyond the GLA borders. The new Government showed no signs of accepting that the direction of policy needed to be changed, and the 'Right to Buy' for housing association tenants would reduce affordable housing in London. They were not prepared to offer London the degree of control over its own affairs that they were proposing for Manchester.

Mr Walker and Mr Johnson endorsed what Mr Eversden had said, and provided more detail, including accounts of the practice of their authorities. They gave the Forum's members a vivid picture of the difficulties under which planning authorities were labouring. The Coalition Government's changes had made the planning regime more complex by introducing a control system intermediate between 'permitted development' and full development control. 'Prior Approval' had been extended far beyond its origin with statutory undertakings: the criteria according to which Prior Approval applications were assessed varied from one category to another: effect on immediate neighbours with rear extensions of houses; traffic etc with change of use from offices to residential; and for change of use from shops, a plethora of complex criteria. There were complex exemptions for listed buildings and conservation areas. It was hard to explain to applicants and the public alike exactly what conditions had to be fulfilled. It did not seem that the changes had significantly increased the provision of housing, while it had reduced standards.

The Coalition Government had failed to speed up the appeals procedure; but had increased the load on planning authorities by requiring them to work with applicants to make applications acceptable, no matter how half-baked. They had made it easier for developers to escape affordable housing requirements by claiming 'non-viability'. Partial deregulation of short-term lettings would bring little benefit while creating an enforcement nightmare.

The protection supposed to have been provided for 'Assets of Community Value' had proved weak, except for the enhanced version available for pubs. Community Infrastructure Levy was inflexible. Relaxation of control over broadband cabinets was a licence for advertisements. Neighbourhood Planning had merits, but the complexity of the rules was leading to court cases.

Now the new government's proposals to give Housing Association tenants a right to buy would reduce affordable housing still further; in London it was inconceivable that local authorities would be able to make good the loss by using proceeds of sales of their properties to build new affordable houses.

The speakers thought that the Government had accepted that the benefits of the deregulation of conversions from offices to residential had not been great in that few conversions that had received permission had been carried out, and it would not be continued beyond the original three years, but that other relaxations, like the deregulation of some rear extensions, would be continued. The Government also seemed more willing

than earlier to allow local authorities to claw back some of the deregulation by Article 4 directions.

The following matters were raised in discussion:-

Mr Gillett (Mill Hill Neighbourhood Forum) suggested that the shortage of housing in London, in view of population growth, could be helped by rebuilding council estates at much higher densities.

The Pinner Association said that the redevelopment of petrol stations was causing real difficulty. Their MP ignored representations made to him about the ill effects of changes in the planning regime. Mr Walker replied that in much of its planning policies the Government was looking at the country outside London - in which there was a degree of jealousy of London. Outside London there might be land available for authorities to provide council houses to replace losses due to 'Right to Buy'; there was not in London.

Dick Allard observed that the arguments for a Right-to-Buy for Housing association tenants applied with as much or more force to tenants of private landlords. Bill Linskey said that selling Housing Association houses might fall foul of covenants.

Mr Johnson said that Islington Council were consulting on a scheme that would prevent 'buy-to-leave'; if it were successfully implemented it could be a model for other authorities. ■



Two of the cartoons in John Walker's powerpoint presentation

Enfield: a book of interest

A Time Of Change: The History of Enfield

by **Monica Smith**

Volume Four; Published by the Enfield Society

March 2015

Enfield Society has been recording the history of the area in a series of books. This is the fourth in the series and covers the years 1939-69; it is a sequel to the late David Pam's three volume History of Enfield.

It covers life in Enfield, Edmonton and Southgate during the war, the austerity of the late Forties, the difficult Fifties and the Swinging Sixties.

There are also chapters on leisure, transport, health, education and industry. The book ends with a description of the activities of the Enfield Society (then called Enfield Preservation Society) at that time. There are over 200 illustrations, mostly photographs.

Monica Smith MBE has been active with the Enfield Society since the 1990s – as Treasurer, Chairman, and now overseeing the Society's publishing activities.

Local Councillor Michael Rye writes in the Foreword "The author has captured the many significant changes of the years 1939-1969 and has written a vibrant local history within the context of what was happening elsewhere across the British Isles. She has risen admirably to the challenge of producing an excellent volume four of A History of Enfield"

To buy the book - hardback £18.50 - and for more information, contact Monica Smith publications@enfieldsociety.org.uk ■

Eltham Palace Restored

English Heritage has reopened Eltham Palace after a £1.7 million refurbishment restoring the interiors to the way they looked in 1938 and with five new rooms open to the public.

Eltham Palace was built by Edward IV. By the 1930s, when Stephen Courtauld, youngest brother of Samuel Courtauld, creator of the Courtauld Institute, bought it, there was little left other than the great hall, which had become a barn.

An Art Deco showpiece house

Stephen Courtauld and his wife hired one of the most fashionable architectural practices of the day, Seely and Paget, and designers such as the Swede, Rolf Engströmer and the Italian socialite marquis Peter Malacrida, to create an Art Deco showpiece house. This included a central vacuum system of tubes that sucked dirt into basement canisters; a multi-room sound system; an internal telephone exchange with three external phone lines; and in the basement Courtauld's darkroom has been re-created, complete with prints drying on a line. The underfloor central heating which was revolutionary when it was first installed, has unfortunately had to be completely replaced. The surviving ancient hall with an old minstrels' gallery became the Courtaulds' music room.

The house was completed in 1933 and the Courtaulds lived here until 1944.

It then became the home of army educational units until 1992, and in 1995 English Heritage took it over.

Details of openings can be found on the English Heritage website. ■

Heritage Protection Plan

The National Heritage Protection Plan (NHPP) was developed to co-ordinate work to protect and promote England's historic environment for the years 2011-2015. On behalf of the heritage sector, English Heritage commissioned a consultation on what the priorities and form of the next plan should be.

The consultation, carried out last year, received 915 replies to an online survey (364 of which completed all questions); there were 13 workshops attended by 317 people and 36 in depth telephone interviews undertaken.

The full report can be downloaded from: <https://www.historicengland.org.uk/about/what-we-do/consultations/nhpp-review-consultation/> ■

Elephant and Castle

Regeneration - or displacement and 'gentrification'?

Recent analysis of London estate regenerations during the past decade, by the London Assembly, found that the total number of homes on the 50 estates studied almost doubled - from 34,213 to 67,601. But while units built for private sale increased more than tenfold - from 3,186 to 36,163 - the number of social homes fell, from 30,431 to 22,135. This trend can be seen in the plans for the proposed rebuilding and transformation of the Elephant and Castle area.

The Heygate and Aylesbury estates built in the 1960s and 1970s were home to over 4,000 households on subsidised rents. But the rebuilding of these two local authority housing schemes will favour expensive private apartments over affordable homes and will price poorer people out of the area.

Developer Lend Lease is replacing the 1,200 homes of the Heygate with almost 2,500 new apartments, plus shops but only a quarter of the units will be "affordable": half of these for sale on a shared ownership basis, the remainder for rent at up to 50 per cent of local market rents, with some lower still.

The 3,000-home Aylesbury is to be replaced with 3,500 new properties, including some for private sale. Notting Hill Housing, the not-for-profit housing association chosen to develop the site, says there will be no net loss of social homes, though rents will rise. All present Heygate and Aylesbury council tenants will be offered properties in the new schemes.

Protesters have demonstrated by occupying empty flats in blocks earmarked for demolition and had to be removed by police. About 17 residents are refusing to leave their homes. Aylesbury Tenants and Leaseholders First, which represent the residents against the planned regeneration say "It is not [a] plan that benefits existing residents, nor [does it] provide genuinely affordable housing."

As reported in the Guardian on June 25th, Southwark Council, which is a 'development partner' in the project, has breached its own planning policy on affordable housing: there will be only 74 social rented homes on the Heygate Estate, not the 432 that its policy requires. It has allowed this breach on the basis of the developer's financial viability assessment. It took a three year battle by a resident, under the Freedom of Information Act, to obtain the documents that expose these deals. ■

Martyn Harman

1947 - 2015

Marion Harvey pays tribute to Martyn's invaluable contribution to the London Forum

We are greatly saddened to hear that Martyn Harman died on 3rd May after a long battle with cancer. Martyn combined an active business life with the demands of important roles in the Wimbledon Society, and the London Forum. He was Chairman of Wimbledon Society's Planning Committee for ten years after which he became Chairman of the Society's Executive Committee from 1998, a post he held with distinction for nine years steering the Society through its celebratory centenary year in 2003.

He made an invaluable contribution to the London Forum's development, particularly in its early years. He was a member of our first committee in November 1989 and was part of a small group dealing with publicity and public relations. It was Martyn who invented the idea for the Survey of our member societies. He devised, and organised our very first questionnaire in 1990. This attracted the support of Coopers and Lybrand Deloitte who wanted our views on London for the LPAC analysis of London; and he played a key part in organising the second survey in 1992. This in turn led to a Civic Trust sponsored survey of a much larger Forum membership of 120 societies in 1994, *Towards a Liveable London*, which he also organised.

These early surveys played a vital role in promoting the Forum and its members' views on London. And I think this was a major contribution to recognition and development of the Forum.

He played a leading role on the Forum's Transport and Policy committee of which he was also a chairman. He focussed on issues raised by societies which included inadequate protection of the historic environment and lack of clear strategies for parks and open spaces - still relevant today.

Above all I want to pay tribute to Martyn's unfailing support as vice chairman and, on behalf of the Forum, to record our appreciation for all he did. ■

Summaries of recent responses made by the London Forum

The full texts of London Forum consultation responses can be found on the Forum's website

Minor alterations to the London Plan for parking in developments Michael Bach, May 2015

The London Forum has strongly objected to the proposed alterations to parking standards (Policy 6.13) The London Forum considers that:

- they are not based on firm evidence that there is a real problem for which this policy change is the appropriate solution
- the Integrated Impact Assessment is unconvincing
- the proposal misrepresents or disagrees with the advice of the Outer London Commission.

The NPPF (para 39) and London Plan Policy 6.13 (including supporting paragraphs) provide London Boroughs with sufficient policy without any need to change it.

London Forum, therefore, considers the proposed new policy 6.13E (e) that 'Outer London boroughs should promote more generous [parking] standards' to be unnecessary and should be left to the Boroughs to decide.

The full response can be found on the London Forum website.

News/What We've Said at <http://londonforum.org.uk/responses.php> ■

London Riverside Opportunity Area Planning Framework: Consultation Draft Verina Glaesner, February 2015

The London Forum welcomes the GLA's involvement in addressing this neglected part of London and considers the Opportunity Area designation appropriate and helpful. It is very much needed and is an opportunity to redress the urban balance between that to the west of the city of London, and that to the east, the victim of among other things poor planning decisions and the loss of an industrial base.

It also offers London a chance to redistribute its resources productively, while maintaining its city status, rather than becoming a mere conurbation.

The Framework aims to produce a strategy for social, economic and environmental regeneration for the next 20 years and gives priority to dealing with 'difficult' brownfield sites. It is important that issues such as density, land use, design principles and standards are clear. The Framework acknowledges that high densities can be achieved without high rise buildings. (5. Urban Design Strategy 5.4.4. Built Form). The high percentage of publicly-owned land could enable the construction of high-quality, low-rise social housing.

There is little in the Framework, however, giving priority to the 'imperative to plan for flood risk management' stated in the London Plan; and the opportunity to make better use of the Thames for freight, transport and leisure does not seem to be central to Framework policy.

See <http://bit.ly/1HSZIGm> ■

All-Party Parliamentary Group for London

An All-Party Parliamentary Group for London has been set up, and registration with the Office of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards has been applied for.

Around half of the London MPs and two Peers have joined it. The secretariat will be provided by London Councils. ■

Round the Societies

A round-up of news from our member societies.

By **Diane Burridge**

Vauxhall Cross campaign to retain bus station

Vauxhall Civic Society has submitted alternative proposals to the plans to remove the gyratory road system surrounding Vauxhall Station, as part of the Nine Elms Regeneration Masterplan. Lambeth is keen to create a new district shopping centre next to the station which would result in the reduction of the footprint of the bus station, and the relocation of this away from the two railway stations.

Whilst there is broad support for many objectives of the Masterplan, its impact on bus users could be detrimental, and the Society has set up a campaign to retain the bus station; see vauxhallcivicsociety.org.uk/. A report on the consultation exercise that ended in January 2015 is now available on TfL's website:

www.consultations.tfl.gov.uk/roads/vauxhall-cross.

WW1 online map in South London

Herne Hill Society's commemorative World War One online map has expanded to include 63 sites – with more planned. As well as Herne Hill, Dulwich and West Norwood, the map now covers sites in Camberwell, Brixton, Clapham and Tooting. It includes 25 war memorials, listing a total of 2,347 servicemen and civilians who lost their lives during the war – an incredible number for such a relatively small area.

As well as the war memorials, there are: people named who were awarded medals for gallantry; descriptions of attacks on local shops with German-sounding names; the Wellcome Pharmaceutical Laboratories where treatments for the effects of poison gas were developed; army training and sheep grazing sites in Brockwell Park; tents and huts in Ruskin Park used as a temporary extension to King's College Hospital to cope with the numbers of war wounded; areas affected by Zeppelin raids, and convalescent hospitals.

See: www.hernehillsociety.org.uk and click on the link.

Another football stadium over-development

Wimbledon Society's Planning Committee has concerns about the overall design and height, and impact of any flooding on residents, of the Galliard Homes/AFC Wimbledon plans for the redevelopment of the Greyhound Stadium at Plough Lane: a 20,000-seat stadium, 602 flats and retail and leisure facilities. The site is in a flood-prone area. There is no provision for affordable housing or plans for amenities, such as a doctors' surgery. Worryingly, there was no significant pre-application engagement between the promoters and various local interests, despite this being recommended by the British Property Federation and the Local Government Association in a 2014 report.

Controlling late night openings in Knightsbridge

McDonald's appeal to be allowed to extend their opening hours to 2am, at their branch at 177 Brompton Road, was rejected after strong opposition by Knightsbridge Association and others, supported by the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea and Westminster City Council. Residents attended the three day hearing at the City of London Magistrates' Court, and the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea was awarded costs of £45,000.

Isleworth Society leading on street improvements

The Isleworth Society's application for Street Improvement Funds from the London Borough of Hounslow has been successful. Agreed projects include: improving the landscaping at the car park by St Mary's School; updating the Shrewsbury Walk notice board; planting and straightening some street signs and bollards on South Street; renovating the Horse Trough by the Glossop Memorial and the memorial itself; and adding more railings and hedging in Memorial Square.

The Society has also been active for many years highlighting the need to mitigate the speed and volume of traffic using Church Street. The Isleworth and Brentford Area Forum has finally agreed to undertake yet another round of consultation on various alternatives to reduce or calm traffic here.

Kidbrooke plans referred to the Mayor

Greenwich Council's approval of Berkeley Homes' three completion phases of the Kidbrooke Village Masterplan has been referred to the Mayor of London, after heated opposition from many local groups. Representatives of Blackheath Society spoke against the application due to: the increase in the number of new homes to over 5,000 dwellings; the increase in building heights (with a 21 storey tower); increased residential density; the reduction in the provision of affordable housing; and the loss of communal open space and dedicated play space.

The Old Church in Stanmore and beheadings!

The Chairman of the Stanmore Society, John Williams, is on a newly-set up committee aiming to raise funds to protect the Grade II* listed 1632 St John's Church which stands behind the replacement church built in 1850. The original 1632 church, although now a ruin, is a rare red-brick church, consecrated by the Bishop of London, Bishop Laud, who was later beheaded in the Tower of London - having been charged with consecrating a private Catholic Chapel at Stanmore. The committee is setting up a Friends Group open to all, as the Old Church is a unique building nationally, and a wonderful local asset, not just a religious relic with grisly historical associations.

Protest campaigns against tall towers

Societies in south London are protesting against proposals for multi-storey buildings that would affect protected views. The Kingston Upon Thames Society, oppose a high rise building at the Old Post Office site which would have an unacceptable visual impact on Richmond Park. A group of local residents' associations, called the Kingston Residents Alliance, has set up a petition on-line.

Greenwich Society, the Greenwich Conservation Group and the Friends of Greenwich Park are opposing a massive planning application, which includes three buildings of 63, 32 and 20 storeys high for Marsh Wall E14 in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets. 1,820 residential units per hectare are proposed, when the London Plan maximum is for 1,100 u/ha. It would face Greenwich Park, which, with the historic Old Royal Naval College is a World Heritage Site. The Royal Borough of Greenwich has said it shares these concerns. ■

newsbriefs

New and issues of interest and concern to note.

Bulbs for London 2014

2014 saw the third year of the Metropolitan Public Gardens Association (MPG) highly successful initiative, Bulbs for London, in collaboration with. Taylors Bulbs of Holbeach. Taylors offer high quality bulbs totally free of charge to amenity groups across the 33 London Boroughs.

Over 500,000 high quality spring bulbs were distributed to around 300 parks and gardens throughout London. The scheme's reach has been extended further to a wide range of groups in the gardening world with whom we were not previously in contact and the MPG thanks all those who have helped. Over 200 organisations throughout the Capital, including schools, public gardens, hospices, churchyards and community gardens participated.

Duck derails statue of steam train designer

2016 sees the 75th anniversary of the death of Sir Nigel Gresley, designer of the Flying Scotsman and Mallard railway engines. The Gresley Society proposed to erect a statue at King's Cross station of Sir Nigel. However, the proposal has been fraught with controversy because he was to be portrayed standing beside a mallard duck.

Gresley's family including both of his grandsons disapproved of the decision to include the duck. They took the view that it detracted from the dignity of the statue.

Supporters, including the late Andrew Dow, one of Britain's foremost railway historians, felt that the duck would help popularise Gresley's most famous locomotive, the Mallard, which in 1938 broke, and still holds, the record for the fastest steam run recorded - 126 mph. Gresley also used to keep mallard ducks on his estate.

The Gresley Society decided to remove it, despite the fact that the sculpture had been crowdfunded by railway enthusiasts, with a design that included the mallard. This has created huge controversy with impassioned letters, mass resignations – including Dow himself before his death earlier this year - and some exceedingly nasty things said about ducks.

More sales of derelict Tube stations

As we reported in the last Newsforum (no 69) TfL continues its sell off of its property portfolio. At least seven stations and deep-level shelters could be sold off as part of plans to generate £3.4 billion to improve the capital's transport network. Stations being considered include York Road, shut in 1932, and St Mary's Whitechapel Road, closed in 1938.

Down Street in Mayfair is one of the stations to be given a new use. It opened in March 1907, but passenger numbers were low because it was so close to Hyde Park Corner and Dover Street (now Green Park) - and Mayfair's residents were reluctant to use public transport. It closed in May 1932. The station was used by Winston Churchill and his war cabinet during the Second World War, with offices and staff accommodation built just yards from passing Piccadilly Line trains. Adjoining parts of the station are still required for running the Tube, and TfL will continue to hold the lease.

Problems for the plastic recycling industry

The oil price crash has had a disastrous impact on the plastic recycling industry. Most plastic is derived from oil so when crude prices are high, it makes it more expensive to produce new plastic than the recycled alternative. Global oil prices had soared to a record high of more than \$140 per barrel by 2008.

They slumped sharply during the global financial crisis but recovered relatively quickly. But last summer, they plunged to less than \$50 a barrel leading to the collapse of several recycling firms as new plastic material became cheaper than recycled.

Lincolnshire's Eco Plastics, one of the UK's biggest plastic bottle recyclers, went into administration in December before being bought by Aurelius, a European investment group, later the same month. Firms in Germany and several other European countries are also in trouble.

Birthplace of cinema, the sequel

The Regent Street Cinema, which gave the British public its first taste of moving pictures 119 years ago, reopened in May as a newly restored and refurbished cinema. Part of Westminster Polytechnic, now the University of Westminster, it was closed to the public in 1980.

It has cost £6 million to refurbish including a grant of £1 million from the Heritage Lottery Fund; it retains art deco features from the 1920s and the organ installed in 1936 to accompany silent films. Its programming will combine cutting edge and experimental work with a mix of the best of independent and World cinema, documentary films, retrospectives and classic repertory titles.

Gladman Developments loses test case

Gladman Developments has withdrawn its legal challenge against Winslow neighbourhood plan (Buckinghamshire), trying to block its adoption.

Last year Gladman tried to prevent the residents from even voting on the plan by seeking an injunction to prevent a local referendum from taking place (see Newsforum no. 67 winter 2014). After losing that case, they challenged the legality of the plan at the High Court. A judge dismissed the case in December, but the company then appealed against that decision. They have now withdrawn the appeal, meaning that Winslow's plan will be used to decide where new homes should be built.

The legal status of neighbourhood plans, introduced under the Localism Act 2011, is still being tested with fewer than 50 completed to date. However at least 1,400 communities are understood to be preparing plans and this victory sets a precedent that could be used by other communities fighting developers.

Neil Sinden of the Campaign to Protect Rural England, said: "There is a need for much clearer legal status for neighbourhood plans. We are pushing for a community right of appeal against speculative development in areas where a neighbourhood plan has been prepared. This is intended to level the legal playing field between developers and local communities"

Gladman exploits weaknesses in local planning policies to target greenfield sites. If appropriate plans are not in place the local authority is vulnerable.

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Builder chosen for 'super sewer'

Yet more controversy accompanied Thames Water's announcement this month that a consortium led by the German insurer Allianz had won the contest to invest in London's new £4.2bn super-sewer.

Critics suggested that the process may have breached the government's own procurement guidelines: only two consortiums bid for the work despite the guidelines for complex infrastructure projects recommending three bidders to ensure a healthy competition.

Martin Blaiklock, a former director of utilities at the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and a long-term opponent of the Thames Tideway scheme, noted that none of the winning consortium had owned and built a tunnel before. "Is it wise to let a bunch of construction amateurs dig and operate a £4bn tunnel under the heart of London? Would any other government contemplate such a venture under their capital?"

Instead of funding the scheme on its own balance sheet, Thames Water has set up an independent company that will own the tunnel and receive a licence from Ofwat, the water regulator. They will "own, finance and deliver" the project, but the government will underwrite it, bearing the brunt of any cost overruns or incidents during construction, an arrangement that required government legislation in 2010. The consortium includes Allianz, Dalmore Capital, Amber Infrastructure, Swiss Life Asset Managers and International Public Partnerships.

Thames Water is owned and controlled by shareholders in a tax-haven (Luxembourg) based on complex tax avoidance structures. It pays huge salaries to its directors and has paid out £1.1bn in dividends to shareholders over the past five years but has paid no UK corporation tax.

Water bills have risen 50 per cent in real terms since the industry was privatised in 1989, according to a Unison report written by the New Policy Institute. Moreover Thames Water expects its 5m domestic customers to pay for the £4 billion cost of the Tunnel, through an estimated £80-a-year increase in their bills that could last indefinitely, according to predictions based on 2011 prices. The full cost to customers will be decided in the summer.

Utopia Village, Primrose Hill saved

Utopia Village in Primrose Hill, a thriving small business area which had been under threat of conversion to housing, has been saved by the intervention of Israeli entrepreneur, Teddy Sagi, who has bought the site for £44m. Mr Sagi already owns 11 acres of the Camden Lock market site.

The move comes after a lengthy planning row between the former owners of Utopia Village, Camden Council and many residents in Primrose Hill and the surrounding area.

In 2013, the council rejected a planning application to turn the site, home to 22 businesses, into 53 luxury flats. But after an appeal by Utopia Village's then-owners, the then Communities Secretary, Eric Pickles, overturned the council's rejection and gave permission for the project to go ahead.

However in April this year Mr. Sagi's company, Market Tech, stepped in with a commitment "to operate the complex primarily as a fully serviced co-working office environment where businesses can rent flexible accommodation"

Legal battle over Orchard Wharf

Orchard Wharf is an unused and vacant facility with some derelict buildings at Leamouth on the north side of the River Thames, near its confluence with the River Lea. Part of the wharf and an adjoining strip were owned by the Grafton Group who had plans to develop their part of the site for uses including residential, a boat yard and a waste-to-energy facility.

The Port of London Authority had plans to bring the wharf back into active use, handling river-borne aggregates and cement. They sought a compulsory purchase order (CPO) on the site under the Port of London Act 1968, and this was confirmed by the Secretary of State for Transport. But Tower Hamlets Council refused planning permission to Aggregate Industries UK and London Concrete for the proposed batching plant and ancillary development for the wharf on design grounds.

The CPO and objections, and the planning appeal went to an inquiry where the planning inspector recommended that planning permission be refused, but that the CPO should be confirmed. However Grafton Group has now successfully challenged the CPO which was quashed after a High Court judge agreed it was unfair.

David Sharp 1926 - 2015

David Sharp who died in April was the designer of the Thames path national trail which only came into existence due to his dogged persistence. He was a leading member of the Ramblers' Association, and also a member of the River Thames Society. From 1977 Sharp surveyed the disjointed route - with few rights of way, - and published a guide. The Countryside Commission then set up a feasibility study. Slowly, more sections were re-established. The path was designated a national trail in 1996. Its 184 miles stretch from the river source at Kemble in Gloucestershire to the Thames Barrier in Woolwich.

Concern in Churchill Gardens

Residents of Churchill Gardens in Pimlico are increasingly concerned about Westminster City Council's (WCC) plans for the estate. Designed by the architects Powell and Moya, it was developed between 1946 and 1962 to replace Victorian terraced houses extensively damaged during the Blitz.

It is notable as the only housing project completed under the ambitious post war Abercrombie Plan and was a pioneering example of mixed development. It became a model for many subsequent public housing projects, setting the space standards of dwellings and open space provision for council housing in England and Wales. It is also notable for its early and rare example of district heating. A glass-faced accumulator tower was built to collect by-product heat in hot water from the now-disused Battersea Power Station on the opposite side of the Thames, providing heat and hot water throughout the estate. It was designated a conservation area in 1990, and in 1998 six blocks and the accumulator tower were Grade II listed.

Westminster council has said that in light of residents' protests, it is now "pausing" its plans for Churchill Gardens. WCC is also delaying its decision on the residents well-supported application for Neighbourhood status which received no objections. ■

Dates for your diary

London Forum events

Membership renewal - a new system

We have recently changed our membership renewal process so that it can all be done through the London Forum website. Emails were sent in March to your Society's contact person giving details of how subscription renewals for this year can be made, including on-line.

We are introducing also a secure way in which members can amend the details we hold of their officers and their organisation. Information on how to do this was included in the email sent in March.

As you all know, London Forum relies totally on Members' subscriptions for its budget. We hope you will find this new system easy to use. Please do use the new method of amending your own data within the web site to keep us up to date and ensure that we have the right contact details for those people meant to receive post and email bulletins otherwise societies might not be kept informed.

Queries can be sent to admin@londonforum.org.uk
Or contact Diane Burridge, (see details below) ■

Delivering Newsforum by email

We currently send you Newsforum by email in the form of a PDF as well as posting you a hard copy.

For most of you the PDF is the most useful form as it can be widely distributed at no cost. It also has the advantage that web links can be accessed directly.

We have reduced our costs by sending the summer edition in PDF form only. It is environmentally more friendly, saving paper, and it also saves London Forum a great deal of expense. With the enormous increase in the price of postage this is now becoming a major consideration.

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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London Forum Open Meetings 2015

Dates for your diary:

Tuesday September 15th Open Meeting

Viability in assessing planning applications

The event will cover the way in which viability of developers' schemes are considered by local authorities.

Viability calculations have resulted in reductions in expected S.106 contributions and affordable and social rented homes. Affordability of homes and the problems in the rental market have become big issues for Londoners.

Tuesday November 17 -

London Forum AGM

Media Awards

The results of the Media Awards and prizes will be announced

Watch out for emails and consult the website nearer the time for more information

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 ■

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 ■

newsforum

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