

newsforum

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



The London Forum of Amenity and Civic Societies
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New London Plan

Jenrick and Khan at odds over London Plan

London Forum's **Peter Eversden** and **Michael Bach** dissect the Government's criticisms, and list Jenrick's Directions to the Mayor together with London Forum's view on whether these will improve matters.

In a strongly worded letter, Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, Robert Jenrick (SoS) has rejected the "Intend to Publish" version of Sadiq Khan's New London Plan (NLP) mainly because the number of homes delivered recently falls well short of identified need. In an equally bad-tempered reply, Mayor Khan accused the Secretary of State of "riding roughshod" over City Hall's attempts to finalise its blueprint for London.

Housing Delivery

The Mayor is blamed for housing delivery averaging only 37,000 units annually for the past 3 years against an assessed need of around 66,000. The SoS speaks of "underachievement and drift displayed under your mayoralty". Whilst the Mayor has some influence over the number of homes built, it is an indirect one. He cannot force private sector applicants to seek planning consents, nor can he force developers to build out their consents at a faster rate, or at all. There are approaching 300,000 unused consents in London, and the 2018 Letwin Review of Build-Out pointed the finger at developers seeking to maximise their profits long-term.

Lack of Ambition and Loss of Small Sites Contribution

The Mayor is criticised for accepting a reduction in housing targets from 66,000 to 52,000 homes annually following the Examination in Public, mainly because the EiP Panel did not accept that small sites would contribute 12,000+ per annum; neither did London Forum. The issue here is that the Mayor has not sought to offset this deficit, e.g. by building on Green Belt (which he has committed to defend) or industrial sites, or by increasing housing density on high-density clusters. These are measures that would be hotly contested by the boroughs (as was the Small Sites policy).

Opportunity Areas

The Mayor is lambasted for the failure to make progress at Old Oak and Park Royal because of his inability to work with the main landowner. London Forum has called for a review of the minimum housing targets for opportunity areas as we currently see more downside risk than is built into the NLP

Housing Mix

The SoS asserts that the Mayor's London Plan would not provide enough family-sized homes, nor stop existing family homes from being sub-divided. He also requires a "proactive stance in building homes for ownership and in parallel delivering a consistently high level of homes of all tenures." London Forum sees two issues at stake here. The first is that the London Plan makes housing mix primarily a matter for the boroughs. Secondly, the current national funding programme is focused on intermediate housing which limits the Mayor's ability to require higher levels of low-cost rented accommodation for those unlikely ever to afford a home in London.

Density

The SoS requires developments to "maximise site capacity, in the spirit of and to compliment [sic] the surrounding area, not to its detriment", "maximising density within this framework" with "higher density in clusters which have already taken this approach" and he directs the Mayor to consent them. That is contrary to policies for optimising site capacity, taking account of context and character, borough site allocations and design codes and the capacity of local social and other infrastructure and public transport. London's boroughs must take account of those for all new applications.

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Industrial Land

The SoS is directing that the provision for “no net loss” of employment space (which would retain such space through mixed-use development on industrial sites) be dropped. The loss of employment space is a particularly serious problem in London, given that residential development trumps all other uses from a developer’s perspective. Boroughs are unlikely to be able to find replacement industrial land elsewhere.

Summary

The loss of the Small Sites policy is a blow from which the NLP has yet to recover. It is most unlikely that the identified housing need of 66,000 units annually can be achieved by this or any other Mayor in the next 5 years, with or without the Secretary of State on his or her back. It is not in private developers’ economic interest to build anything like that number, and the not-for-profit sector cannot bridge the gap. Further forced densification will meet considerable resistance unless done with the engagement and support of local communities – nowhere mentioned in the SoS’s letter, notwithstanding the recent publication of the BBBB Commission’s Living with Beauty.

London Forum member societies were mostly relieved when the Small Sites policy was kicked into the long grass; these Directions from the SoS will lead to renewed fears that unfettered densification is about to be imposed across the Capital.

Finally, the tone of the Secretary of State’s letter and the nature of the directions imply that the NLP must conform in detail with NPPF; whereas our understanding is that it must conform generally, but that variations are possible where there is adequate justification.

No.	Direction	London Forum comment
DR1	Insertion of “the need for additional family housing”	This is not appropriate in inner London, where it will result in a loss of smaller, more affordable units in favour of larger homes which families cannot afford
DR2	Optimising site capacity	This Direction deletes the NLP policy in favour of a design-led approach, as required by the Good Growth objectives in the NLP and by the Government’s National Design Guidance. The Living with Beauty report also supports a design led approach to planning and development. The proposed “positive consideration” for expanding tall building clusters could have harmful consequences
DR3	Deletion of efforts to obtain cash contributions for developments of 9 units or less	These were guidance paragraphs that did not form part of the NLP policy, but they are contrary to a Ministerial direction made in 2014.
DR4	Delete “no net loss of industrial floorspace” for development of industrial sites	This carries the risk that developers will cherry pick the best industrial sites for residential development irrespective of the availability of more suitable sites for industrial re-location.
DR5	Lowering the protection afforded to Green Belt land	This would allow development “if very special circumstances permit”. Extension or de-designation of Green Belt would be via the Local Plan process
DR6	Ditto, Metropolitan Open Land	The SoS Direction fails to recognize any distinction between Green Belt and Metropolitan Open Land
DR7	Harmonise definitions of gypsy and traveller accommodation	No comment
DR8	Encouragement for Boroughs to adopt targets in excess of NLP figures	The NLP figures for each Borough are the minimum targets. There is nothing to stop Boroughs going for higher targets in their Local Plan development
DR9	Increases NLP maximum residential parking provision	Parking standards should be a matter for the Mayor and the boroughs to decide, not Government. Boroughs are able to conform generally with the London Plan, but can propose a higher level of provision if they can provide the justification for this.
DR10	Scope to increase retail parking standards to prevent loss of business to out-of-town locations	There is no evidence that this is necessary
DR11	Bring Housing Delivery Test into line with NPPF	This Direction suggests that the SoS is seeking strict adherence to NPPF, rather than conforming generally with scope for variation where justified.

Government commits to Planning White Paper in the Spring

The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, Robert Jenrick, signalled some significant changes to the Planning System in a statement issued the day following the Budget. London Forum vice chair, **Paul Thornton** reports

In *Planning for the Future*, Mr. Jenrick announced he will produce later “a series of major publications....to deliver lasting change”. These comprise:

- A Planning White Paper “to modernise our planning system, ensuring that it supports the delivery of homes that local people need and creates more beautiful and greener communities”
- A Building Safety Bill
- A Renters’ Reform Bill
- A Social Housing White Paper

The SoS asserts that “the planning process has failed to keep pace. It is now complex, out of date and fails to deliver enough homes where they are needed. We will act to change this”.

In advance of this, the Government is pushing through some specific, and in some cases controversial, measures such as a permitted development right for upwards extensions

and for housing-led regeneration of high streets, and a policy for “densifying gently in existing residential areas”.

There will be a deadline for all local authorities to have up-to-date local plans in place by December 2023; the Housing Delivery Test threshold will be raised to 75% and the New Homes Bonus will be reformed.

In his preview of the Planning White Paper, the SoS has clearly been strongly influenced by the recent Policy Exchange paper “Rethinking the Planning System for the 21st Century”, which comes down strongly in favour of a zoning system, in which all development is permitted other than that which is expressly forbidden in a zone earmarked for development, and forbidden unless expressly permitted in a zone not earmarked for development. As well as zoning, Jenrick is also proposing measures to:

- Reform planning fees to allow proper resourcing of planning

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Better Places by Design

The last few months delivered a rush of publications and policies on better design of places and buildings – a topic London Forum has promoted for many years.

London Forum's **John Myers** writes

Late last year, the government published its new National Design Guide, which seeks to set out the characteristics of well-designed places and demonstrate what good design means in practice. It promises a future National Model Design Code setting out detailed standards for key elements of successful design, which will build on the findings of the Building Better Building Beautiful Commission (BBBBC).

Building Better Building Beautiful Commission

The BBBBC published its final report, *Living with Beauty*, in January. London Forum was represented at the launch. We were pleased to see an entire chapter on community involvement and the conclusion that participation by the community in the design and planning process should be 'wide, deep and early'. We gave repeated input into Commission sessions, as did Civic Voice.

We were delighted by the focus on requiring good design that will meet housing or other needs by enhancing existing places, rather than the current negative — some might say defeatist — National Planning Policy Framework's approach of merely seeking to avoid net harm. We also welcome the BBBBC statement that, if they must continue, permitted development rights must be subject to proper standards across a range of matters, including design, and the call for the removal of the appalling tax distortion which means that demolition is treated more favourably than refurbishment, along with other BBBBC recommendations including more greenery.

Good Growth by Design

Another new initiative, the Mayor's Good Growth by Design programme, is an umbrella for a series of measures aiming to

ensure that new developments benefit everyone who lives there and are sustainable, accessible and sensitive to the local context.

The Mayor's new London Plan,

The Mayor's new London Plan, which even before adoption became a material consideration for planning decisions, also requires boroughs to draw up design codes. Given London's extraordinarily broad range of local heritage, design, materials, periods, sensitivities, needs and aspirations, it is difficult to see how a national design code can be more than a framework upon which local design codes can be built.

It will be critical for local amenity and civic societies to help and encourage their boroughs to create design codes to ensure high-quality design. Resources will be a problem. Societies lucky enough to have extensive heritage, design and planning expertise have an enormous opportunity to contribute in ways to ensure the preservation of the best aspects of their area, and enhancement where there is scope to do so.

Local development plans should have comprehensive context and character analyses, site allocations with definition of need and restrictions, area master plans, and possibly local development orders. Planning of infrastructure, including transport, must be comprehensive. Without that approach, decisions will be made on appeal or on call-in by the Mayor or Secretary of State.

We strongly support this stronger emphasis on design and the BBBBC's endorsement of early, detailed and meaningful community engagement, and we have written to the Prime Minister and Secretary of State encouraging them to pursue those goals. ■

Planning White Paper (continued from page 2)

departments in local authorities

- Ensure that land for housing is built out more quickly
- Promote greater use of Compulsory Purchase Orders for land assembly and infrastructure delivery.

The statement also confirms the Government's commitment to take forward "many of the recommendations of the Building Better Building Beautiful Commission," such as "giving communities a greater opportunity to influence design standards in their area". The main instrument for this is the production of local design guides and codes "informed by listening to local people and considering local context". Whether this will bring about the "early, deep and wide" local engagement foreseen by the BBBBC Commission, or whether it will be a mere fig leaf on what is essentially a developer's charter remains to be seen.

The statement pays the obligatory lip service to "work

tirelessly as part of the Government's commitment to net zero emissions by 2050" – without tackling the one thing that would, at a stroke, make this target more readily achievable, namely levelling the VAT regime between building anew and renovation of existing buildings.

The statement outlines numerous incentives for first time buyers, but how relevant is this to London, where many residents have little hope of ever clambering onto the property ladder? And will fresh incentives do more than line the already bulging pockets of the Big 5 developers?

There are few crumbs of comfort for renters, though the intention to abolish no-fault evictions will be welcomed. Quite how the Government intends to "ensure that residents in social homes are treated with dignity and respect" is unclear. A "simple and effective end-to-end complaints process" is mentioned, but surely there must be more to it than that? ■

Mayoral Call-ins – an Abuse of Power?

By Peter Eversden and Michael Bach

The Mayor has powers over planning applications of potential strategic importance to London. See <http://bit.ly/2UbNakg> for details. The Mayor can call in schemes for his own determination.

Concern over conflict of interest

Concern has grown in recent years that call-ins are used by the current Mayor (and by his predecessor) to approve planning applications that run counter to boroughs' Local Plans and planning policies. The Mayor has increased the height of some buildings to help deliver his housing targets even though a borough had sound grounds for refusal.

There can be a conflict of interest when the applicant is Transport for London, a statutory body reporting to the Mayor. That will become increasingly serious as TfL plans ever more audacious high-rise schemes above stations and on their car parks in an effort to offset its operating deficit. Examples include the recently approved Kidbrooke Station development scheme and the scheme being drawn up for towers at Finchley Central. London Forum is calling on the Mayor to refer schemes on his estate to an independent inspector.

London Forum's evidence

Last summer the London Assembly's Planning Committee investigated the way in which the Mayor is exercising call-in powers. London Forum's Peter Eversden and Michael Bach gave evidence and are quoted in the letter sent by the committee Chair, Andrew Boff, to Mayor Khan, which can be seen at <http://tinyurl.com/r3fjxj3>. The letter noted that of 29 applications determined by Mayors Johnson and Khan, only one (Charlton Riverside) had been rejected; the other 28 had all been approved. The Committee was concerned also that applicants have been requesting Mayoral call in if their applications were about to be rejected by a Council. Andrew Boff's letter makes several recommendations. We are not aware that the Mayor has responded to these recommendations.

Use of Section 106

London Forum and its member societies are also concerned about the recent practice of agreeing Section 106 contributions with applicants ahead of the public hearing, so that planning consent can be granted very quickly, allowing little or no time to ensure that the consented scheme is an improvement on the one originally proposed. This has prompted at least one Forum member to apply to the Planning Casework Unit for an Urgent Holding Direction, preventing the Mayor from granting planning consent.

Mayor's decision "made for an improper purpose"

There has been a recent welcome outcome related to one such case. The Mayor has submitted to judgment in the judicial review brought by the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea of his decision, having recovered the application, to

grant planning permission for the Kensington Forum Hotel development. The Mayor accepts that his decision should be quashed as it was made for an improper purpose and having regard to irrelevant considerations; namely that the Secretary of State should not be given the opportunity to call in the application for his own determination. The Mayor has agreed as part of the order to pay RBKC's costs in the sum of £90,000.

The 'Chiswick Curve' tower - another landmark judgement

In another landmark judgement, the High Court has upheld the previous Secretary of State's refusal of the 32-storey mixed-use 'Chiswick Curve' tower in west London. The Mayor did not call it in as the developer had appealed following Hounslow Council's refusal to grant planning consent. However, the GLA's reports on the application which had been referred to him had praised the scheme and concluded that it would not cause harm to heritage assets and the Kew Gardens World Heritage Site. That seems to indicate that the Mayor's staff are interpreting planning policies in a different way to boroughs and the Secretary of State.

At a time when several initiatives (including the Mayor's Good Growth by Design) are coming together to promote better design with a greater say for local communities, it is surely important that the Mayor's own decisions are seen to support these goals, rather than riding roughshod over them. ■

A message to our members and readers

March 2020 saw a positive flood of reports and announcements, many with an important bearing on the Capital.

The Coronavirus pandemic creates much uncertainty around publication dates for future issues of Newsforum, and we therefore decided to cover everything we can in this issue, at the risk of some repetition. The articles on Heathrow and HS2 were written before the severity of the pandemic, and its possible long-term consequences for travel became apparent.

The Newsforum editorial team wish all our readers and their families good health over the coming weeks and months.

It's time to take design quality seriously... time for a national 'Design Delivery Unit'

Sarah James MRTPI, Policy & Membership Development Officer of **CivicVoice** discusses the Government's Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission final report

Civic Voice welcomed the publication of the Government's Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission final report, *Living with Beauty*, in January 2020, and we contributed to the Commission over the previous 12 months as the authoritative voice for the civic movement.

Recognising our impact, our Director, Ian Harvey, was the only external speaker at the interim launch event of the report and Civic Voice were quoted at the actual launch of the report. Anyone who follows Civic Voice closely knows that we are campaigning for more meaningful participation with communities at every stage of the planning system, but we accept that more meaningful participation with communities alone will not solve the challenges of poor and mediocre housing. That is why we support the Commission's Policy proposition 45 to recommend a 'time-limited independent body to monitor and report back publicly on the implementation of [the] report'.

This recommendation is timely given the publication of a Housing Design Audit for England earlier this year. This research, undertaken by the Place Alliance and CPRE, with support from a cross sector advisory group, including Civic Voice, makes stark reading. For the first time in over 10 years, the audit evaluated the design quality of 142 large-scale housing developments across England against seventeen design considerations. I recommend reading the report in full but the headline conclusion was that, 'Whilst some limited progress has been made in some regions, overwhelmingly the message is that the design of new housing environments in England are 'mediocre' or 'poor'. Collectively, we need to significantly raise our game if we are to create the sorts of places that future generations will feel proud to call home.'

Whilst highlighting some good practice, the Audit shows that the majority of new developments are remote, poorly connected sites that are being developed far away from jobs, shops and community facilities, and at low densities that consume huge quantities of land and make public transport unviable. With the house building industry, supported by government, aiming to build 300,000 homes per year or, in other words, 3 million over the next decade, this pattern of unsustainable development cannot be allowed to continue.

The time to act is now

As the national authoritative body for the civic movement, we welcome the recommendation in *Living with Beauty* for a unit to oversee the implementation of the Commission's findings, but in order for it to sufficiently help deliver the fundamental changes required to tackle a legacy of poor quality residential environments nationwide, we suggest it needs to go further.

A recent Housing Design Audit for England shows that the majority of new developments are remote, poorly connected sites that are being developed far away from jobs, shops and community facilities, and at low densities that consume huge quantities of land and make public transport unviable..

We want to see an independent body that has a longer term focus and is more authoritative, with the ability to reach across Government departments and agencies, and bring together and harness the energies of the wide range of professional, industry, campaigning and advocacy organisations and experts in this field. A national 'Design Delivery Unit'. This is why Civic Voice recently signed a sector-wide letter sent to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, Rt Hon Robert Jenrick, calling for such a body. The letter is available to read online.

As the letter sets out, with the UK looking to strengthen its global position, it will be ever more important that we are able to compete with the best in the world in

terms of the urban quality that we are able to offer citizens, companies and investors. There is now a once in a generation opportunity for the Government to show real leadership and ambition in this regard.

But what would such a new body look like?

This is something Civic Voice had intended to explore at the now cancelled All-Party Parliamentary Group Meeting on 17th March; but at a high level, we recommend that such a body would have three allied missions, to 'monitor', 'challenge' and 'inspire'. The body should be able to influence developers, both national and local government, and help to give ordinary citizens and communities the confidence that design quality really matters. This might sound an aspirational ambition, but it is absolutely needed.

For this reason, Civic Voice met with the Minister of Housing, Communities and Local Government recently to follow up on the letter and is continuing conversations with senior officers in each of the supporting organisations, to keep the pressure up and to build momentum.

Because our experience is that a national Design Delivery Unit is needed. And there must be early action. ■

Sarah was recently selected as one of the top 5 most influential Women in Planning in the voluntary sector. Others on the list include the RTPI President and RTPI CEO.

Heathrow third runway - still nothing is settled

John Stewart, chair of HACAN, the organisation which gives a voice to residents under the Heathrow flight paths, explains the issues and background to the Government's controversial proposals for a third runway at Heathrow.

Plans for a third runway at Heathrow first emerged in 2003. Yet still nothing is settled. The Prime Minister was very careful to keep his options open during the recent General Election campaign. In planning terms the third runway is closer than ever before; but political approval remains uncertain.

For many, the uncertainty has gone on too long. 2003 was a long time ago.

The airport is currently working up the details of this. Some areas will just get a few hours break from the noise but other places could be without planes overhead for two-thirds of the day. It is possible – indeed likely – that some communities will have fewer planes overhead than now, even with a third runway in place.

The planning process so far

In June 2018 Parliament voted by a substantial majority to approve the Airports National Policy Statement. This gave in-principle permission for a third runway and allowed Heathrow Airport to start drawing up detailed proposals for it. Heathrow was expected to submit its application to the Planning Inspectorate in autumn of this year. This will be followed by a Public Inquiry, likely to start in early 2021. Under the new planning rules, it will be time-limited (to probably six months). The principle of a third runway cannot be discussed. Instead, it will focus on the impacts of the runway and whether the conditions laid out in the National Policy Statement will be met.

The Inspectors running the inquiry will then make a recommendation to the Secretary of State for Transport who will announce whether or not he has accepted it in late 2021. But, a decision of this importance will be made by the whole Cabinet. It is impossible at this stage to predict what that will be but essentially it is to be overseen by a Prime Minister who has never been a fan of the third runway. And it will be made at a time when there is increasing public and political awareness that tough action needs to be taken on climate change. If the decision goes in favour of Heathrow, it hopes to open the new runway by 2028 or 2029.

Arguments for and against

The arguments for and against a third runway have been well-rehearsed. Heathrow argues that, if the UK's premier international airport does not expand, the economy will lose out. It particularly emphasises the important of improved links to the key cities in the world's emerging economies.

Noise

The main concern of local residents is noise. A third runway will result in over 700 extra planes a day using Heathrow. Already London is in a league of its own as far as aircraft noise is concerned. European Commission figures show that 28% of all people in Europe annoyed by noise from aircraft live under the Heathrow flight paths. The biggest losers if a third runway goes ahead will be the communities which will find themselves under its approach paths. Many of these areas are currently free of aircraft noise.

Heathrow has indicated that it will mitigate the noise impact by guaranteeing that all areas below 7,000ft will be get a period of respite from the noise by alternating its flight paths.

Air pollution

There are also concerns about air pollution. At present there are areas in the vicinity of Heathrow where air pollution exceeds the legal limits. Much of the poor air quality comes from the vehicles on the heavily trafficked M25 and M4 motorways nearby. A move away from diesel cars and lorries may sort the problem in the longer-term but questions remain whether it will be dealt with if a new runway opens in less than ten years.

Traffic

Traffic levels also remain a concern. Heathrow has said there will be no more airport-related traffic on the surrounding roads than there is today. It is planning to achieve this by significantly cutting the number of its employees who come to work by car through investment in local public transport and cycle schemes. This will be a considerable challenge.

All these local issues will be discussed at the Public Inquiry. The National Policy Statement sets out non-negotiable conditions which Heathrow must meet if it is to get permission to build a third runway. These include an extension of the night period without scheduled flights from 5 hours to 6.5 hours; a significant increase in the number of homes which qualify for mitigation; a requirement that people whose homes are compulsorily purchased receive the pre-blighted cost of their home, plus 25%, all legal costs and any stamp duty paid; a plan that the use of a third runway will be curtailed if agreed air pollution limits might be exceeded.

Climate change

Climate change, of course, is not a local issue. The Government's advisers, the Committee on Climate, take the view that a third runway at Heathrow could be built and still allow the Government to meet its target of emissions from aviation back down to their 2005 levels by 2050. But this would require expansion to be curtailed at all other UK airports. Unless the Government can find a way around this – possibly through more off-setting schemes (though the effectiveness of many of them has been called into question) or by an earlier introduction of electric/hybrid aircraft – it could face the decision whether to permit Heathrow to expand or say no to a third runway in order to allow growth at regional airports. There is a limited market at some of these airports but a Government which, politically, needs to deliver for regions outside London and the South East

may balk at the prospect of curtailing growth at their airports.

If Theresa May was still Prime Minister and the Conservative Party hadn't made an historic break-through in the North and Midlands, I would have bet heavily on the third runway being given the green light. With Boris Johnson in power and a policy focus away from the South East, I'm much more cautious in placing any bet. But, whatever the eventual decision, I suspect that communities impacted by Heathrow are keen for a clear decision to be made. For many, the uncertainty has gone on too long. 2003 was a long time ago. ■

The London Forum has consistently argued that the only solution is to manage demand for air traffic, rather than simply adopting the current 'predict and provide' philosophy.

A book of interest

The Clapham Society

has recently published

The l'Ansons: A Dynasty of London Architects & Surveyors

about a successful dynasty of architects and surveyors operating all over London's southern suburbs, notably Clapham:

424 pages, £20 + £3 p&cp

from alysonwilson.sw4@gmail.com"

The Court of Appeal challenge

Daniel Instone assesses the implications of the latest Court of Appeal decision

The London Forum has been consistently opposed to a third runway at Heathrow. This is mainly because of the substantial environmental impacts (especially in relation to noise, air pollution and climate change). But a new runway at Heathrow is also, by a significant margin, the most expensive of the options for a new runway in the South East examined by the Government-appointed Airports Commission a few years ago. And a new runway would have knock-on effects on public transport and roads in the area, including on train capacity into central London. Even though the Government has said that the (private sector) owners of Heathrow would be responsible for all the costs of the new runway, in practice this would not have extended to all the surface access costs associated with the new runway.

However on 27 February, the Court of Appeal partially upheld a legal challenge mounted by environmental groups, the Mayor and several London boroughs most affected. The Appeal Court said that the Government should have explained in its national policy statement on airports how a third runway could be compatible with the Paris Agreement on climate change aimed at limiting climate change emissions; but had not done so. Although the Heathrow owners have said they will appeal to the Supreme Court against this judgment, the Government immediately said it would not appeal. (Indeed it said that so quickly that the Government must surely have agreed this position internally even before it read the Court's judgment.) So there are several alternative possibilities over what will now happen. Heathrow might win its appeal. Or, even without that, the Government might attempt to provide the climate change explanation that the Appeal Court said was needed. So the runway could go ahead anyway.

Alternatively the Government might use the Appeal Court judgment as a reason for not going ahead with the runway, which Boris Johnson strongly opposed as London Mayor. It is also possible that the Government drops support for a third runway, but allows a significant expansion of flights using the existing runways. This could have very damaging environmental consequences.

Air traffic forecasts don't help much. In the short term, the coronavirus is greatly depressing demand. Traffic volumes will no doubt bounce back, but how far and how quickly are unknown. But the effect of this will be that, if demand remains unconstrained, then even if the runway were built, it would soon prove insufficient for it, raising yet again the question of how to accommodate this rising demand. The only solution, as the London Forum has consistently argued, is to manage demand for air traffic, rather than simply adopting the current 'predict and provide' philosophy. ■

Spotlight on the Gidea Park and District Civic Society

By **William Davis**, Chairman Gidea Park & District Civic Society

Gidea Park lies one mile east of Romford in London's most easterly borough, Havering. Prior to the First World War Romford was a traditional market town surrounded by largely unspoilt and attractive countryside. Havering is now predominantly suburban in nature, although with many open spaces and with a surprising amount of its countryside still intact.

Romford Garden Suburb

In 1897 a Liberal M P, Herbert Raphael, purchased Gidea Hall (built in 1720 and replacing an earlier 13th century mansion) with its 450 acres of land. He formed the Gidea Hall Development Company in order to create the Romford Garden Suburb by means of competitions and an exhibition in 1911.

There were separate competitions for houses and cottages (costing not more than £500 and £375 respectively). The competing designs at Gidea Park were built with the architects paying for the land and the cost of construction, often in partnership with the builder.

The architects included many who had been involved at Letchworth and at Hampstead. Seven of the properties in the Suburb are Grade II listed.

Although lack of funding and the First World War precluded completion of the suburb's original concept, it remains a notable example of the Garden Suburb movement of that period with its emphasis on improved standards of design for affordable homes built in accordance with a properly conceived lay-out plan.

Interest in the Suburb has recently increased and it now enjoys an extended entry in Pevsner (London 5 : East (2005)).

The Modern Homes Exhibition of 1934

In 1934 an exhibition of modernist homes was opened adjacent to the Suburb. Twenty five designs were selected from over 500 entries resulting in 35 houses being built. The designs were intended to produce economical houses incorporating features suitable for 'modern' living and utilising the latest building techniques. One Grade II listed house was designed by the Tecton practice (More detailed information on all the above can be found on our website www.gpadcs.org)

The Gidea Park Conservation Area

In 1970 the area comprising the Suburb and the 1934 exhibition was designated as a Conservation Area.

History of the Society

The Society was formed in August 1968 at a public meeting attended by about 120. Its agreed objects were to promote high standards of planning and architecture in the area; interest in and education on its architecture, history and natural history and to secure the preservation, protection and improvement of features of architectural, historic or public interest.

The opening membership in 1968 was 104 compared with a current membership in the region of 500.

The Society's achievements

- Initiating and contributing significantly to the process leading to the designation in 1970, by Havering Council, of the area as a conservation area.
- Successfully campaigning against the development of two of the Suburb's covenanted open spaces and securing the designation of one as a town green.
- Carrying out comprehensive research into the houses in the Conservation Area, resulting in the Council's adoption of Article 4 Directions for the whole area, providing special protection from inappropriate alterations which would detract from its character and appearance.
- In relation to the Crossrail project, liaising with representatives of Havering Council, Crossrail and Network Rail on improvements to Gidea Park Station and the surrounding area.
- Acquiring, renovating and restoring the listed 18th century pillars and gates forming the eastern entrance to Gidea Hall.

Challenges

Road traffic: - The Society is engaged in an ongoing campaign to reduce the use of roads in the Conservation Area as rat-runs and to restrict traffic speed in the Conservation Area to 20 mph.

Artificial grass: - This has become an issue in recent years and we take the view that its use detracts from the character and appearance of the Conservation Area and is environmentally harmful.

Security gates: - The character and appearance of a garden suburb are negated by the use of security gates and the Society opposes all applications for their installation. This does, however, remain an ongoing issue.

Changing housing needs: - Some of the exhibition properties offer limited accommodation as modern family homes. Recently the Society has been exercised in its response to planning applications by the need to strike a sensible balance between respect for the relevant planning policies and recognition of the requirements of modern family living.

The Society's activities

The Society is notified by the Council of all relevant planning applications and makes representations to the Council and, where appropriate, to the Planning Inspectorate. It continues to advise residents generally on all relevant planning issues which affect the character and appearance of the area including the protection of trees.

Holding general meetings whenever a particular issue requires members to be informed/consulted.

Undertaking visits to areas having an architectural or historical affinity to the Conservation Area.

Guided tours for other groups visiting the Conservation Area, including visits to one or more of the 1911 exhibition houses.



The Gidea Park & District Civic Society

Contact: William Davis Chair
email: gideapark-dcs@live.co.uk
website: www.gpadcs.org

Chair William Davis

Committee members past and present

The Society is much indebted to the service given by its past and present Committee members. Special mention should be made of the late Pat Curtin who played a decisive role in bringing about the designation of the Conservation Area and the late Eric Wade, who secured the registration of Reed Pond Walk Copse as a town green. However, no commentary on the Society can be complete without paying tribute to the tireless work, especially in the field of planning, of Joyce Leicester who has for many decades been the Society's Honorary Secretary. (Joyce and her late husband, Laurence were for many years invaluable members of London Forum's Committee)

The future

The Society believes that it has an important and ongoing role to play in conserving and, wherever possible, enhancing the attractive environment of the Gidea Park area. It is reinforced in this belief by its continuing large membership and the increased appreciation of the area in recent years

For more detail on the area and the Society see www.gpadcs.org ■



Above and right - two views of original suburb streets

Below: A Grade II listed 1934 Exhibition house by Tecton



Listed gates

Age: 52

Circumstances of Birth: increasing concern at proposed developments and road schemes.

Biggest Successes: Initiating and contributing significantly to the process leading to the designation in 1970, by Havering Council, of the area as a conservation area; halting the development of two of the Suburb's covenanted open spaces and securing the designation of one as a town green; persuading the Council to adopt Article 4 Directions for the whole area, providing special protection from inappropriate alterations which would detract from its character and appearance; acquiring, renovating and restoring the listed 18th century pillars and gates forming the eastern entrance to Gidea Hall.

Present Preoccupations: ongoing campaign to reduce the use of roads in the Conservation Area as rat-runs and restrict traffic speed to 20 mph; Over-use of artificial grass which detracts from the character and appearance of the Conservation Area and is environmentally harmful; The rise of use of security gates which negate the character and appearance of a garden suburb; Changing housing needs: the need to strike a sensible balance between respect for the relevant planning policies and recognition of the requirements of modern family living.

Working Details: general meetings on particular issues to inform and consult members; visits to areas having an architectural or historical affinity to the Conservation Area. Guided tours for other groups visiting the Conservation Area; publications giving insight into the history and development of the conservation area

Special Characteristics: Combination of old Garden suburb and 1934 modernist exhibition homes. The architects included many who had been involved at Letchworth and at Hampstead and the Tecton practice. ■

Broadening the Membership Base

Open Meeting, November 2019, on attracting and retaining younger members. Guest speakers: **Henry Clay**, of the Richmond Society and **Clare Birks**, Chair of BermondseyStreet.London. London Forum membership secretary, **Paul Thornton**, reports

This Open Meeting was a follow-up to the April meeting which looked at how amenity and civic societies can attract a more diverse membership. Following a short survey completed by more than 50 member societies, the decision was made to concentrate on best practice use of social media.

Paul Thornton summarised the reasons for the scope and format of the event. Whilst member societies would welcome a more representative membership across all dimensions of diversity, the one that gives the greatest cause for concern is the age distribution. If we are to continue fighting for the well-being of our communities, we must reach out to a younger demographic – and we can't do that unless we communicate via media that our target audience use in their everyday lives. A recent survey had shown that nearly all societies have websites, though many of these are woefully out of date. About one-third also have Facebook pages and a similar proportion are on Twitter – largely the same societies. A small number, no more than 10% are on Instagram.

Henry Clay, digital committee member for the Richmond Society, gave an authoritative and well-received talk about the use of Facebook, Twitter and Instagram at one of the Capital's largest and best-established civic societies. As well as its website and email, his society also uses Facebook, Twitter and (more recently) Instagram. Henry posts to all three sites, based on content generated, mostly, by other committee members. He outlined the different strengths of each platform. For example Facebook is good for events pages and for targeted advertising, whereas Twitter is best for immediate

If we are to continue fighting for the well-being of our communities, we must reach out to a younger demographic – and we can't do that unless we communicate via media that our target audience use in their everyday lives..

relay of information (see tweet, below, of Henry talking to London Forum members posted during the event) and for getting into dialogue with members and non-members (all posts are public). Instagram is picture-focused and easy to use, and a good way to showcase local amenities.

Henry was followed by **Clare Birks**, Chair of BermondseyStreet.London, a civic society at the other end of the size range, which had been relaunched 3-4 years ago. BermondseyStreet.London also uses Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. However the

organisation is quite different to that of the Richmond Society. Clare posts regularly to a news blog on the website. Another member of her committee reviews the blog frequently and sends out posts on the relevant social media. The Society has 300+ members, with three times that number of Facebook followers and twice that number of Twitter and Instagram followers. As well as the slick organisation, the key here seems to be having a regular stream of newsworthy and, ideally, photogenic content.

After the break, participants worked in their groups to discuss what they should be doing in the societies that they represent, and what best practice means for them. The meeting then reconvened for a final Q&A session. More comprehensive notes and access to speakers' slides are to be found at

https://www.londonforum.org.uk/reports/Open_Meeting_Nov_2019_final_minutes.pdf

Footnote: Civic Society leadership as Continuous Professional Development?

At the April Open Meeting it was noted that some large civic societies had Chairs who were still in their late twenties. In part they were willing to do this because such activity helped to fulfil their Continuous Professional Development obligations. London Forum has examined the CPD requirements for five professions to see whether playing a leadership role in a civic society could indeed be reasonably construed as such.

It appears that such activity can indeed count as CPD for Architects (confirmed by RIBA) and Town Planners. It is probably the case, too, for Civil Engineers. The case could also be made for solicitors dealing substantially with planning law. It was not evident that Surveyors' CPD needs could be met by such activity. And, of course, care must be taken to avoid conflicts of interest. ■

Stephen Speak @North_Richmond · Nov 6
Henry Clay @richmondsociety speaks to @London_Forum members about using social media to get messages out and attract members.



The New London Plan

Open Meeting, December 2019, designed to prepare societies for the promulgation of the challenging New London Plan, which differs greatly from its predecessor. Guest speakers: **Alice Roberts** (London Branch of the Campaign for the Protection of Rural England) and **George Saumarez Smith** of ADAM Architecture

Alice Roberts said that the increased number of dwellings that the new Plan required could be provided without losing any Green Belt or Metropolitan Open Land. Mixed use development - housing with commercial space - was attainable. A project in Enfield demonstrated viable and deliverable alternatives to the massive development proposed. Developers would always prefer open land because their task was easier and more profitable. But appropriate densification (mid-, not high-rise); building on car parks, replacing old garages (rarely now used for cars); adding storeys to single-storey supermarkets; redeveloping retail parks; all could be practicable and sustainable. Dependence on the car should be reduced, though transport in the suburbs could not be equated with that in central London. Densification had positives - proximity to shops and other amenities, reducing isolation.

Peter Eversden explained how the Inspectors following the Examination-in-Public of the London Plan had recommended changes to ensure its soundness (without judging on its merits in other respects). The requirement for 66,000 additional homes annually had been properly calculated, but the Small Sites Policy H2A was deleted as unachievable; this will leave a 126,500 homes delivery shortfall over ten years. The Inspectors were concerned about a lack of funding for the required infrastructure, about the viability of some potential developments with 50% affordable housing and about the need for more land for storage and distribution.

Civic societies should press boroughs (which would have to accept some densification) to have up-to-date Local Plans. Societies should take a full part in consultation on them. Opportunity areas and site allocations would have to be covered. Land assembly was important for intensifying development acceptably. Design considerations would be increasingly relevant. Societies should resist proposals which destroyed character, and try to ensure that there was the necessary infrastructure.

Croydon's local plan

Peter Eversden showed slides about Croydon provided by the absent Steve Dennington, Head of Spatial Planning at the borough. Croydon had a local plan adopted in February 2019, including a spatial strategy, a green grid strategy and a suburban design guide. They were aware of likely community alarm, and had a prepared means to cope with it. The Plan identifies places in the borough for development, each with a defined corporate approach, all supported by a 'Suburban Design Guide'. There is a presumption in favour of sustainable development and one-third of the housing delivery in the borough is to be achieved by suburban intensification.

There was scepticism about local plans and a fear that they would be manipulated to meet housing targets.

An Architect's view

George Saumarez Smith of ADAM Architecture said that his practice had achieved densification through high quality redevelopment of a 1960s housing estate in North Kensington, which had been in effect a tower block and had used space wastefully - such 'green space' often became car parks. He also spoke of the Poundbury development near Dorchester, now accepted as a standard for new development, comparing

favourably with most modern housing estates. For success there had to be a master plan and a wide range of tenures.

Discussion from the floor

Asked in the discussion how to get boroughs to adopt policies like that for North Kensington, Mr Saumarez Smith said that vision was required.

The need to densify London and make Londoners more miserable was queried; there were other places in the UK. So was the need for people to work in London; there was more employment and more housing outside London. Mr Eversden said that London could not consume all its own smoke; the wider south-east must play its part; councils had a duty to co-operate.

There was scepticism about local plans (which had failed to prevent a 33-storey tower just outside the relevant 'character' area), and a fear that they would be manipulated to meet housing targets.

The Community Infrastructure Levy had a perverse effect in encouraging councils to support what developers wanted, not what the community required, e.g. a 37-storey tower block.

A residents association deplored the conversion of family houses into Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs). Mr Eversden said that while HMOs could be a successful way of meeting housing need, they needed careful regulation.

The Barnet Residents Association said that the suburban semi-detached was much desired by people with families; the Association was appalled by what was happening in Croydon. Mr Eversden said that the Croydon pattern was likely to be adopted more; and owners of suburban houses might find such redevelopment of their land attractive and profitable.

One council had had a design guide for many years, residents had participated and were supportive, but then it broke its own principles in the way in which a school was pushed through. Similarly Wandsworth had developed a design code, but had not implemented it. Mr Saumarez Smith said that a problem was the short-termism of councils. ■

Community Participation

Open Meeting, 14 January 2020. Guest speakers: **Ian Harvey**, Executive Director of Civic Voice; **Ben Rogers**, from Centre for London; **Koen Rutten** of the Town and Country Planning Association; **Daisy Froud**, a community engagement strategist

Ian Harvey spoke and answered questions. Surveys showed that the public did not trust the present planning system, and believed engagement with the community was little more than a sham. Recent Government reforms gave developers more power. A theme of the Civic Voice manifesto was the need to gain trust. Powers must be rebalanced. Councils' Statements of Community Involvement were, generally, unsatisfactory, and often did not even mention civic societies; the community should take the initiative in organising participatory events, not leaving them to developers or the council. Civic Voice was campaigning for pre-application consultations to include the community (Leeds provided a good example); for some right of appeal by the community against a planning approval; and for there to be community panels. Societies must consult their own members, using as many methods as possible, without being exclusive.

Ben Rogers saw the problem as how to accommodate the growing population of London; the gap between need and provision was increasing. London differed from the rest of the country - people were less concerned about migration - and there was more community involvement. Without trust, technical expertise would not suffice; the crisis of trust was not general, but specific to planning. The UK planning system was reactive, dealing with proposals case by case, while in Europe and North America there were principles agreed for an area, development in accordance with which was a right, a specific application being required only for exceptions. The UK system had merits, but needed well-resourced planning authorities, backed up by local plans and design codes.

Koen Rutten believed that the planning system should promote inclusivity and equality, but currently only a tiny minority of people took part in planning consultations, tending to focus on urgent and local cases, not wider matters, on which it might be easier to influence decision-takers. Neighbourhood Planning was a real opportunity for communities.

Daisy Froud said that participation was an essentially political act, determining who gets what. The goal should be co-production and co-design. Currently ordinary people could join in discussions, but decisions were taken by leaders and experts. 'Populism' could lead to collective action. All citizens should participate in decision taking - with a participatory local plan, produced through deliberation.

The following points came up in discussion.

Lewisham Council had produced a 'local vision' as a

Surveys showed that the public did not trust the present planning system, and believed engagement with the community was little more than a sham.

Ian Harvey

framework, but people actually found it easier to deal with particular cases than with a framework. It was specific policies that were needed, not frameworks. Ms Froud said that local authorities wanted to be collaborative, but being under-resourced had to use the private sector to achieve anything. Mr Rutten said that affordability seemed to trump everything, and permitted development allowed developers to escape from the rules. Mr Eversden said that the Assembly would have to scrutinise the way in which the Mayor took over cases and

ignored boroughs' policies and decisions.

On climate change, how could communities persuade councils that utilising the existing stock of houses would use less energy and carbon than rebuilding? Flooding would require rehousing people. Planning decisions should be climate change proofed. People living in totally unsuitable dwellings needed new houses; there should be a culture shift to provide new homes whilst at the same time decarbonising. Reinforced concrete, with a life of only 50-100 years, was a major problem for carbon emissions, but it was possible to build with more sustainable materials.

Why did London continue to attract people from other parts of the UK? London ought to be a world city in some sense, but local. The Johnson government was likely to take some funding away from London to the provinces. A shift of focus from London might encourage investment elsewhere, but London was competing more with the likes of Barcelona than with other British cities. The lack of truly affordable homes was driving key workers out of London; that would adversely affect the capital's service delivery and businesses - who might locate away from London.

Was positive public participation possible? Nimbyism was rife - almost all those living near a planned development opposed it. Ms Froud said that few people were incorrigible nimbies; under the present regime they were not given the time needed to participate and no account was taken of their views. Mr Rutten said that people in general were pro-development, but it had to be on their terms.

There was a lack of provision of infrastructure as the number of dwellings increased with the increase in population. It was not clear where Wandsworth's new inhabitants would find work - there was no room for workplaces to expand locally, nor was there provision for them in the local plan. Mr Rutten said that London needed its own tax-raising powers, as possessed by great cities abroad. ■

Johnson endorses HS2 with caveats as Oakervee report published

Andrew Bosi discusses the latest developments

In the course of the Conservative leadership campaign, Boris Johnson promised a review of whether and how HS2 should proceed and he implemented the promise of such a review on being elected and assuming the office of Prime Minister. The independence of the review was queried when it was learned that it would be led by Douglas Oakervee, a former chairman of HS2 Ltd., but this was tempered by the appointment of Lord Berkeley as Vice-Chair and a panel of advisory experts.

In practice the logistics of a panel of experts from around the country, mostly with demanding full-time posts like Mayor of a major city meant that they never met face to face. The compressed timetable also limited their input, and members were unaware of any detail of alternative proposals such as those put forward by HSUK. They were allowed to see but not copy or keep a draft of the report produced at the end of October. As one member told me, it was very much Oakervee's report.

The draft was so unbalanced that Lord Berkeley dissociated himself from it and produced a detailed minority report. The published version of Oakervee is dated December 2019, despite the fact that until early February the government was claiming it was only in draft. Some changes to the text have been made, notably a defence of its environmental credentials that is largely contradicted by the facts recorded later in the report.

Anyone reading the published report will conclude that the strongest reason for proceeding is that no other scheme has planning permission and the construction industry needs the work. In the past this has been known as throwing good money after bad.

For the same reason – lack of planning permission outside the limits defined in the Act – realignment to take advantage of the flexibility to go round curves which more realistic speeds would afford is rejected. Instead, Oakervee opts for fewer trains per hour as a means of saving costs. Acknowledging that plans for Euston are well behind schedule, Oakervee recommends, and the government has endorsed, a temporary terminus at Old Oak Common. Design of the Old Oak Common to Euston section is taken out of the hands of HS2 and the revised timescale gives another three years to sort it.

Local needs should be addressed first

There is also a welcome change in the north. In reviewing phase 2b, which does not yet have parliamentary approval and might not get it in its present form, there is a clear hint that local needs, principally served by better east-west links across the north, would be addressed first.

Bringing a new railway line into Euston is clearly a major

Anyone reading the published report will conclude that the strongest reason for proceeding is that no other scheme has planning permission and the construction industry needs the work. In the past this has been known as throwing good money after bad

engineering challenge, given the extensive infrastructure already under the ground and the age of surrounding walls and buildings. There may be no solution, just as there was no practical way of linking to HS1. Other options would then come into play. The Mayor's misgivings about the ability of Crossrail to take all passengers from Old Oak to their ultimate destination could be put to the test of experience, but this would lead to many years of continued blight. Taking HS2 somewhere else might be a better option – Euston was only chosen for the potential link to HS1. A tunnel to Clapham Junction, for instance, would open up connectivity between Brighton or Southampton and

Birmingham.

Is the report's optimism misplaced?

The Oakervee report is optimistic about the extent to which HS2 will draw passengers from other modes. There is still an assumption that fares will be no more than on classic lines, despite the fact that HS1 charges premium fares to Ashford, Canterbury and Thanet. Moreover, there are already differential fares between London and Birmingham. If you are prepared to spend 2 hours on the train instead of under 90 minutes, a single fare of under £5 is available when the fast trains cost at best £16.15 (both with a railcard).

The most obvious market for HS2 phase 1 services are those commuters to Park Royal and places on the Elizabeth line (as Crossrail will by then be known) who would like to own a family home but for whom London prices are out of reach. Provided that they can find a home close to Birmingham's HS2 station (Curzon Street), the new line offers the prospect of a quicker journey than those from Bexley, Buckhurst Hill or Belvedere.

The best market in the opposite direction might be to Birmingham Airport, which will be closer in time to many Londoners than Heathrow (it is 61 minutes from Watford Junction even now, on the rare train that stops). Perhaps the decision to continue with HS2 and the recent Court of Appeal ruling on Heathrow's third runway might yet mean Ruislip's loss is a reprieve for the villages of Longford, Harmondsworth and Sipson. ■

Round the Societies

A round-up of news from our member societies.

By **Michael Hammerson**

The Barnet Residents Association (Oct. 2019) report a huge upsurge in housing development; but while the Mayor requires 4126 new homes a year, Barnet has struggled to deliver 2000, and the most obvious sites have been developed, with high rise flats dominating the landscape in West Hendon. Appreciating that they must be realistic about what outright opposition would achieve, they aim to improve schemes and increase community engagement. Other problems are: tiny flats in converted office blocks (one of 14.5 sq.m); JCDcaux trying to install communications hubs, little more than Trojan Horses for advertising; and developers adding floors to blocks. They report on their efforts to tackle the poor state of many buildings on the High Street, approaching owners of sixteen deteriorating buildings; so far, three have been renovated, but ten have not replied. They deplore the Government's obsession with widening permitted development.

The Barnet Society (Autumn 2019) report local anger over TfL's proposals for up to 450 apartments on land round High Barnet station. Local MP Theresa Villiers has raised the matter in Parliament, and the Society has submitted its own criteria for the site. The plans, based on reduced car usage and increased use of public transport, are similar to those on 20 other Underground station sites in north London, including up to 700 homes at Finchley Central, and another scheme at Cockfosters. Objection is not to housing, but to the scale of development, involving loss of 75% of parking spaces in the station car park, lack of infrastructure services, and destruction of wooded areas round the station. Barnet is aware of the unpopularity of high-density schemes.

The Wimbledon Society (Dec. 2019) are raising money for the refurbishment of the Museum of Wimbledon and the design of a new website for the Society and Museum. They responded to the latest Heathrow Expansion consultation, opposing any extension or third runway, and urging a long-term policy to close Heathrow and develop a major new airport in the south-east away from high population areas. The site of Heathrow could then be developed as a new West London counterpoint to Canary Wharf.

They objected in vain to the demolition of the early 19th century Rose Cottage, in the grounds of Lord Nelson's Estate. They then objected to plans to develop the site into 13 flats, none social housing, which the Council refused as overdevelopment.

They note that the roll-out of 5G mobile technology requires more transmitters at closer intervals, closer to ground level, since the higher frequency waves travel shorter distances and are more susceptible to urban blocking of signals. Mast sharing must be encouraged to avoid visual clutter. They have asked the council to ascertain the operators' aims, and develop a holistic plan to avoid applications being dealt with on an ad hoc case-by-case basis.

The Westcombe Society (Jan. 2020) assesses the implications of the Grenfell Tower disaster for Greenwich, where 11 blocks have failed the cladding test. The top six authorities on the risk list are Brent, Greenwich, Manchester, Salford, Tower Hamlets and Westminster. They report that the annual Big Bottle Count, organised by waterways charity Thames21, found 1,732 plastic bottles at 17 sites. More than 27,000 plastic bottles have been removed from the river in the past year, and more than 107,000 since 2016. Local residents are considering plans to offset ecological damage from a proposed 20-storey tower block which will overshadow Greenwich Peninsula Ecology Park. A campaign to stop the block forced developers to reduce it to 13 storeys. Proposals involve an ecological park with a new wetland habitat and a Visitor Centre.

The Islington Society (Autumn 2019) report victory in the Regent's Wharf appeal, the Inspector holding that the proposals would cause significant harm to the character and appearance of the Regents Canal West Conservation Area and to locally listed buildings, and harm to local residents' amenities, especially through loss of daylight.

The Kingston-on-Thames Society (Nov. 2019) have objected to the massive "Kingston Gate" proposal for 445 rental dwellings up to 24 storeys high in North Kingston, which would impact on the Old Town Centre Conservation Area, residential streets and the Riverside North Conservation Area and would be visible from all over the borough.

The Charlton Society persuaded Greenwich to reject 750 homes at the previously commercial and light industrial Charlton Riverside, identified by the GLA as an Opportunity Area. The refusal was called in by the Mayor of London, who upheld Greenwich's decision, though the developers, Rockwell, have appealed. Three further developers are now carrying out local consultations, but all proposals disregard key features of the Charlton Master Plan, the result of 5 years of local consultations. The local community is represented by Charlton Together, of which the Society was a founder member, triggered by public outrage over how a development was pushed through by planners against comprehensive local opposition, undermining both the Master Plan and public trust in the planners.

The Finchley Society (Jan./Feb.2020) report the forming of the "Hands off Finchley Central" campaign to oppose TfL's proposed residential tower block which will threaten the character of the otherwise low-rise area. While appreciating the need for housing, this is inappropriate development, would have an unacceptably harmful impact, and will not create the good quality homes and open spaces needed. Separately, the Society has sent TfL a balanced critique of the proposals and hope that the awaited planning application will be an improvement

The Brixton Society (Oct. 2019 and Jan. 2020) report that Lambeth, desperate to generate cash to maintain its green spaces, propose advertising panels on railings or walls around its parks and open spaces, reversing long-held policies. In Brixton's Business Improvement District, footfall in the Town Centre is 14.4% up on 2018, when many other town centres are struggling. They are concerned about the impact of Lambeth's enthusiasm for tall buildings on conditions at ground level: not just overshadowing, but wind tunnel effects, noting that the City of London require evidence of how schemes over 35m tall will limit impact on pedestrians and cyclists at street level. They note that support and advice for owners of Listed Buildings are available from an organisation of which members may not be aware: the Listed Property Owners Club, www.lpoc.co.uk

They regret Lambeth's reverting to the old and discredited building of tower blocks for housing, with no community involvement, the pace being set by private developers. Policies limiting height and location of tall buildings have been weakened, and the London Plan is moving away from the old density matrix which kept the southern half of Brixton at a lower density. Lambeth wants to maximise floorspace as each unit will bring in more cash through Community Infrastructure Levy. Intended to offset the impact on public services in the face of Central Government cuts, CIL is in actuality used for any major Council expenditure, encouraging them to promote bigger developments, whose impact is exacerbated by bad design. However, the Society find that more developers are consulting them before making their applications.

The Enfield Society (Winter 2019) emphasise the urgent need for an Article 4 Direction to prevent the damage from the extension of permitted development. Developers have capitalized on this by creating flats which are often cramped, poorly ventilated and with no outside space; they can ignore the needs and views of local communities, and have forced existing businesses to move out. Forty office blocks in Enfield have been converted to flats, with 20 in the pipeline. Much office space has been lost in town centres such as Southgate and Enfield, harming not only local employment but the local economy, with the loss of office workers using local shops and other businesses. They cite Robert Halfon MP's condemnation of the policy as "possibly the most ill-thought out, ill conceived and subject to the law of unintended consequences than almost any other policy." With cross-party support, most London Boroughs are addressing the problem through Article 4 Directions; they cite Enfield and Harrow as notable exceptions.

The Highgate Society (Winter 2020) deplore the increase in certain practices: applications for Certificates of Lawfulness to remedy breaches of planning consent, often granted with inadequate evidence; and the use of Certificates of Lawfulness as an alternative to formal applications, and applications for non-material amendments to consents, to avoid the need for public consultation. In the last, it is unclear who decides what is "non-

material"; the Society considers that several have been very "material" and should have been subject to the normal planning process. However, Haringey assure them that they are alert to some developers' practice of submitting a series of applications which individually are non-material, but would be material if submitted together. At the Society's urging, they are also more alert to the practice of submitting an application for less than 10 units and then, after getting consent, applying for more units while avoiding CIL liability. In such cases, the planners say they will treat the applications as if they were a single one, and require CIL.

The Society is also angry about failure to protect its archaeological heritage. Though its historic village is an Archaeological Priority Area, in one case the planners ignored Historic England's recommendation for an archaeological condition, and in another, Historic England themselves put the Society in a Catch-22 situation by declining to recommend a condition on a basement development because there had been no excavations nearby, so there was no evidence of what archaeology might exist.

The Isleworth Society (Jan.c2020) note that, despite the Appeal Inspector's strong dismissal of an appeal over 127 units on the Syon Estate allotments, used since 1917, a new management plan includes proposals to build on part of the land. The Society is supporting the holders' opposition, and is also objecting to the Estate's proposed link road through the Grade I Listed parkland involving loss of a significant area of the Capability Brown parkland. More cheerfully, Hounslow's Greener, Cleaner Borough project will create wildflower areas. Less so, Hounslow was the fourth worst affected London Borough for fly tipping in 2018-19, with 21,897 incidents. This is being tackled through a "Grime & Punishment campaign"; incidents can be reported via the council website.

The Peckham Society News devotes four pages to their recently-revived Architecture Award. There is much good new architecture in Peckham, new buildings make them look afresh at their older neighbours, and both old and new architecture should be celebrated. The winner was the new Bellenden School.

The St. Marylebone Society's Autumn 2019 newsletter prints a photograph of Westminster Council Officers and Councillors and Society members on their Annual joint Planning walk.

The Greenwich Society (Sept./Oct.2019) report that with Councillors' help, their long efforts to highlight lax enforcement of breaches of planning control, fly posting, damaged street furniture, failure to follow the council's design guide, and litter within a World Heritage Site, are achieving results. Officers now carry out weekly inspections of the town centre and take action where necessary. They congratulate the council, particularly given scarcity of staff resources. ■

Membership renewal

Please keep London Forum's membership system up to date for your society by using the new membership renewal facility on the web site:

http://www.londonforum.org.uk/member_login.php

Do make sure to amend your data so that the right people are receiving post and email bulletins, otherwise societies might not be kept informed. The way in which members can amend their details is secure, as is the information we hold. Queries can be sent to admin@londonforum.org.uk

Round the Societies

During the Coronavirus pandemic,

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or post them to

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Dates for your diary

London Forum events

Open Meetings suspended

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, The Gallery at Cowcross Street has been closed until the end of May, and London Forum has suspended its programme of Open Meetings.

We wish all our readers good health throughout these unprecedented times.

London Forum on Twitter

Don't forget the London Forum Twitter site.

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

Do pass on the address to all your amenity society contacts. Twitter can reach far beyond London Forum's e-bulletin list of contacts.

http://twitter.com/London_Forum

NB - note the underscore: _ in the name

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