

THE LONDON FORUM

of Amenity and Civic Societies

Founded in 1988

Registered Charity No. 1093134



London Forum Survey of Members 2012

Working for London!

Since the Coalition Government came to power in 2010 there have been changes in policy and legislation. The recent National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and other proposed planning changes constitute a diminution of local democracy, though in London the existence of an adopted London Plan (now being updated) should mitigate some of the effects. These topics have been the focus of much of the work of the London Forum of Amenity and Civic Societies since 2010.

This is the fourth member survey conducted by London Forum. The overall aim was to gather opinion on issues members face and on elements of the Forum's work that local societies have found to be of value. Their views were sought on where the future strategic emphasis of London Forum should be placed.

The survey was issued only one month after the NPPF was published. Also most members had not got to grips with the Localism Act (Nov11) and its opportunities and threats, except for the Neighbourhood Planning part which several are keen to follow up. That is probably a result of their feeling of confidence in 'improving local planning documents' - the second highest achievement identified.

Developer-led planning and high density housing are claimed as serious challenges and reflect the fact that developers are getting planning permission for some schemes which do not conform to planning policy. London Forum has taken up these issues with the Deputy Mayor, Sir Edward Lister and the Mayor's Planning Decisions Unit and will pursue them in the 2012 alterations to the London Plan and the revision of the Mayor's Supplementary Planning Guidance on Housing.

Since the survey, the Government has issued, for consultation, changes to the process for Listed Building Consent and for the Use Classes Order, both of which threaten communities in their aim to 'prevent inappropriate development'. The latter is now the most important achievement for societies, so they and London Forum need to build on their success by opposing changes in legislation which would make it easier for developers to get permission for harmful schemes.

The main roles member societies want London Forum to pursue in its work for London for the next few years are:

- ➔ Influencing Planning Policy
- ➔ Giving local issues a bigger voice
- ➔ Expert Information and Advice Hub
- ➔ Providing a London wide perspective for members
- ➔ Proactive role with the Mayor/GLA

Highlights of what Member Societies say:

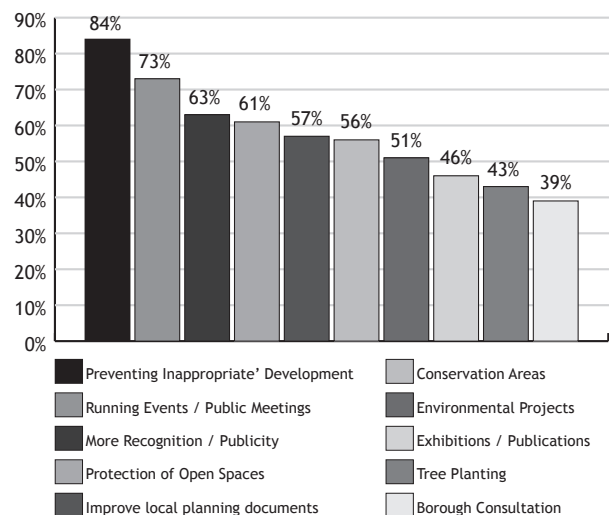
- Top achievements for societies over the last two years have been preventing inappropriate developments, running events and public meetings and gaining more recognition and publicity
- Member societies have enjoyed consistent success in core areas since 1998 including protecting open spaces, improving local planning documents, and managing, designing or improving conservation areas
- The top challenges in the last two years for member societies have been traffic/ road safety, the decline of local shops and excess street clutter followed by high density housing, developer-led planning and open spaces
- Progress continues to be made in running societies - working relationships remain consistently positive with local councillors, officers and other stakeholders
- Communications continue to improve despite a slight dip when internet usage is included
- Eight out of ten member societies are active in responding to consultations locally, London wide or nationally and are coping with on-line application processes
- Membership of London Forum is now important to seven out of ten member societies
- Nine out of ten member societies say they are thriving or ticking over

Member Societies' Achievements

Member societies recorded their recent top achievements as preventing inappropriate development (84%), running events and public meetings (73%), gaining more recognition and publicity (63%), protection of open spaces (61%) and effecting improvements to Local Plan documents (57%).

Top Achievements of Member Societies in the last two years

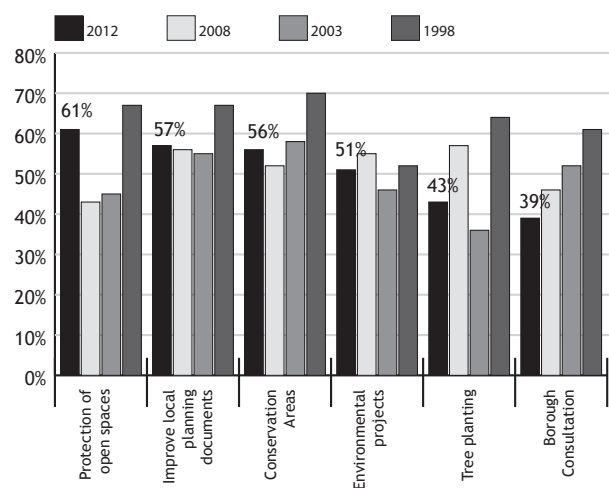
Member Societies' top achievements



Q1 What have been the most important achievements of your society/group over the last two years?

The following chart shows the comparable results for 1998, 2003 and 2008. The decline in the score for borough consultation confirms what we see later namely that member societies see responding to consultations more as a problem area in running their society than one where they are making progress. The sheer volume of consultations could be the issue here.

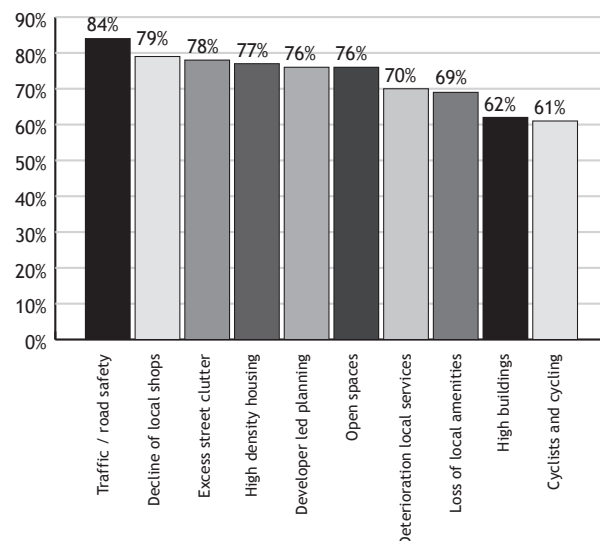
Member Societies' most important achievements from 1998 to 2012



Q1 What have been the most important achievements of your society/group over the last two years? (Some activities no longer included in the question.)

Issues and Challenges

Member Societies' main issues and challenges in 2012



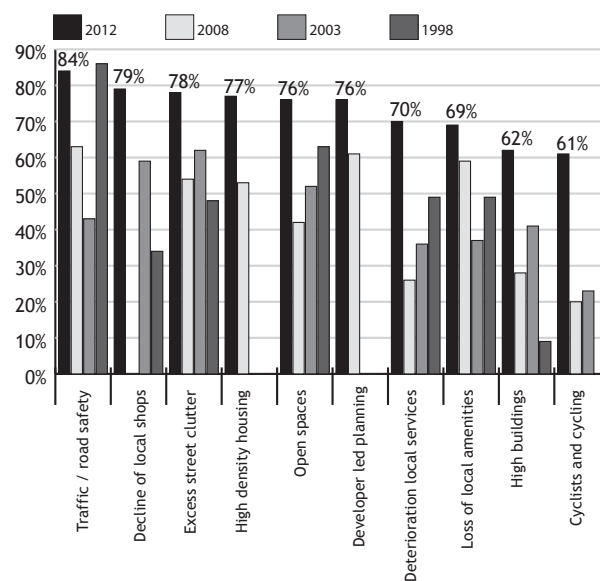
Q2 What are the most significant issues and challenges which your society or group has to deal with in your area now? (Chart shows medium/high responses combined.)

After the top three issues and challenges facing societies, of traffic/road safety, decline of local shops and excess street clutter, there are two planning-related issues of almost equal importance, developer-led planning and high density housing. These reflect the decision-making problems being pursued by London Forum.

There is a core of issues and challenges which member societies have been dealing with over the last twenty years, and these are illustrated in the following chart.

Percentages were higher across nearly all issues and challenges in 1998 and 2012 than in 2003 and 2008 - it is interesting to speculate whether this fluctuation is in response to planning changes favouring developers.

Member Societies' main issues and challenges from 1998 to 2012



Q2 What are the most significant issues and challenges which your society or group has to deal with in your area now? (Some issues not included in question in each survey.)

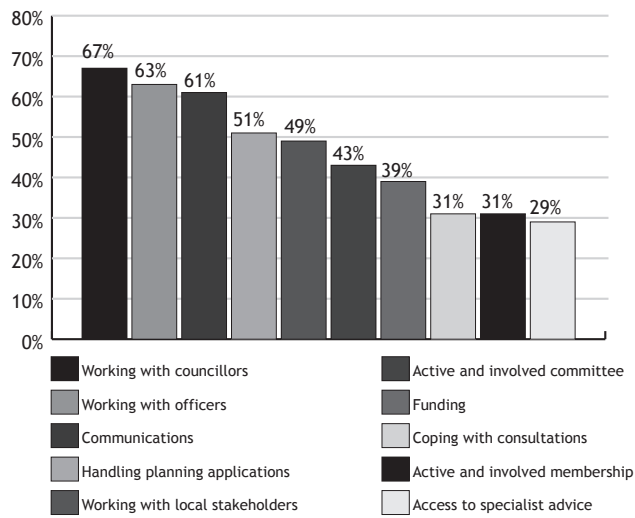
Progress and Problems in Running Societies

A significantly higher proportion of member societies feel they are making progress in their working relationships with local councillors and council officers (67% and 63% compared with 53% and 43% in 2008) and nearly half say they have made progress in their relationships with local stakeholders (a new question). 61% of member societies report progress in their communications, but this year's question specifically includes internet usage which may account for the 3% fall since 2008.

Member societies are on average more positive about handling planning applications than coping with consultations. (Handling planning applications is an area of progress for 51% and a problem for 33% and coping with consultations is an area of progress for 31% and a problem for 41%).

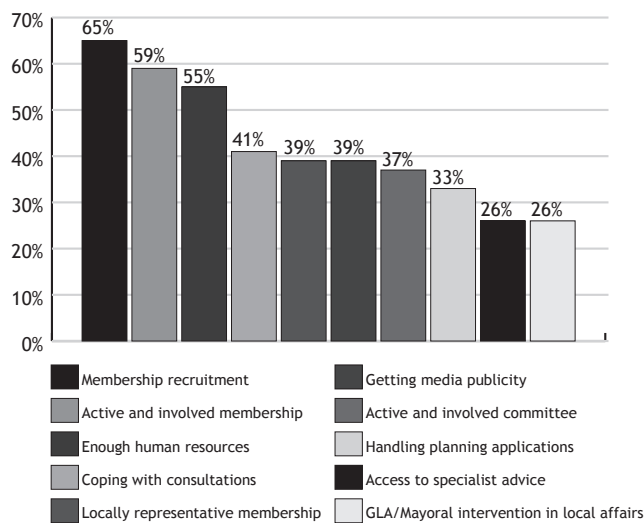
More than half of member societies mention membership recruitment (particularly of young people), achieving an active and involved membership and accessing enough human resources as problems in running their societies. Getting media publicity was a new question this year and is a problem for 39% of societies.

Top ten areas of progress in running societies



Q3 What are the main progress and problem areas in running your society or group now? Chart shows top ten out of fifteen

Top ten problem areas in running societies



Q3 What are the main progress and problem areas in running your society or group now? (Chart shows top ten out of fifteen.)

Consultations Activity among Member Societies

Member societies have become more active in responding to local government plans and consultations. 80% now respond to consultation opportunities from Central Government and 78% to those from the GLA. Of these, three quarters respond on an 'occasional' basis compared with fewer than one in ten (6%) responding frequently. Societies select the consultations for response based on local relevance or impact (47%), their interest and expertise where the impact is wider (26%), resources (10%) or on a decision by their committee (10%). (Q10,11)

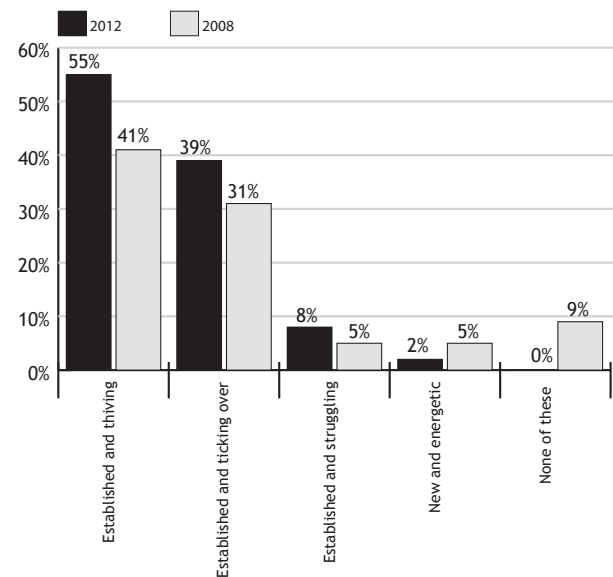
In 2012 94% had taken some part in the development of their local authorities' plans with 80% taking an active to pro-active part - (Q5). This compares with 2008 when 83% had contributed to the Unitary Development Plan or Local Development Framework policy documents over the previous five years.

70% find the on-line planning application process manageable, however there is some underlying dissatisfaction with the accessibility of the process. Eight out of ten societies commented on this, indicating issues in coming to terms with the on-line process. Examples are the difficulty of reviewing large applications because of the quantity of documentation and unreadability of plans and occasionally the liability of local authority systems to go off-line or suffer other system 'glitches'. A significant minority (10%) send or attach emails or letters rather than adopting the full on-line process. (Q12,13)

Vitality of Member Societies or Groups

More societies responding describe themselves as better established. 94% of members are established and thriving or established and ticking over compared with 72% in 2008. There is a somewhat lower proportion of new and energetic societies from 5% to 2% (Q4).

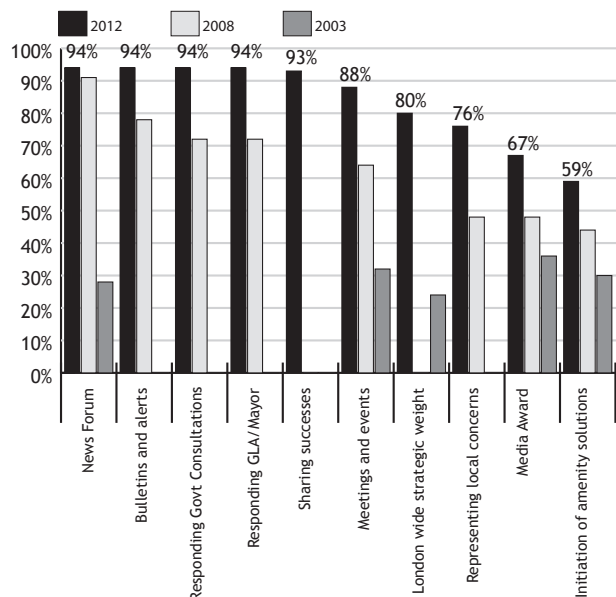
Vitality of Member societies



Q4 Which of the following descriptions best describes your society or group? (Double mention and no answers account for totals +/-100%)

Most Valued Benefits of Membership of London Forum

Benefits of London Forum membership



Q7 How useful to your society or group are the different benefits of membership of London Forum? (Some benefits added between surveys)

Membership of London Forum continues to increase in importance for member societies - from six out of ten to seven out of ten and with eight out of ten expecting membership to be important in the future (Q6). Two comments follow to illustrate this-

'It is essential that the aims, experience and skills of the amenity societies are made clear to those who run London and all efforts to press home that greater consultation with and listening to local people who know their areas better than most local authorities will result in better and probably more development'

'We rely on London Forum's expert knowledge and analysis which we cannot access ourselves, for example the NPPF and the Localism Act'

The most useful benefits of being a London Forum member are shown in the chart above. The usefulness of each benefit has increased significantly since 2003. A new measure was included in 2012 on London Forum's work in sharing the successes of member societies and 93% of societies rate this as a useful benefit.

Adoption of E-Information

In 2012 the proportion of member societies receiving newsforum electronically has increased to 75% from 41% in 2008, which is very encouraging and shows how members are embracing electronic communications. E-bulletins from London Forum are primarily circulated to societies' committee members - in 80% of cases. However 10% forward e-bulletins to all their society or group members for whom they have an email address. In addition the proportion not circulating e-bulletins, etc. has fallen dramatically from 30% to 10% (Q8,9).

The Developing Strategic Role of London Forum of Amenity and Civic Societies

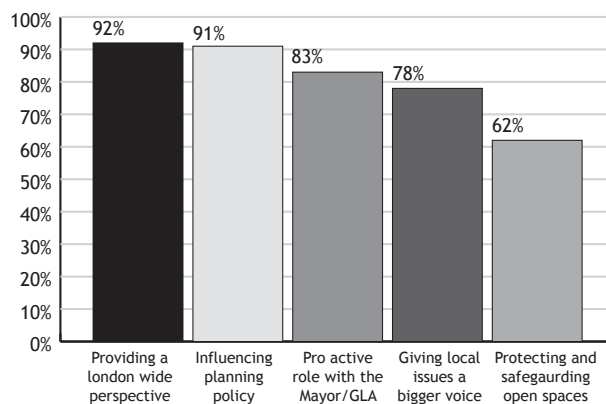
Success of London Forum in Progressing Strategic Priorities in the last 2 years

In 2008 five priorities for London Forum emerged and were developed from what members said at that time. On these five priorities, societies rate London Forum as particularly successful in the last 2 years on four out of the five. Namely, in providing a London wide perspective (92%), influencing planning policy (91%), maintaining a pro-active role with the GLA and Mayor (83%) and giving local issues a bigger voice (78%).

Protection of open spaces was not rated as comparatively a success despite the London Forum open meeting with the London Green Spaces Friends Network held this year. Open spaces and transport are seen

as priorities for London Forum for a significant minority of member societies (around 10% mentioned these in this context). These are important areas of achievement and challenge for member societies and have been since 1998 but are often matters of local borough policy. However, more will be ascertained in discussions with members on the role of London Forum in sharing information, influencing policy and encouraging debate and action on these issues.

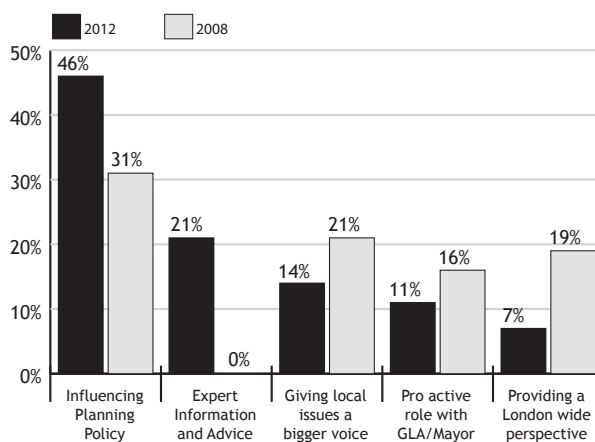
Success of London Forum in progressing priorities set by member societies for the last 5 years



Q14 Five main priorities were identified for London Forum by member societies for the last 5 years. How would you rate the success of London Forum in progressing these priorities since then?

The Developing Strategic Role of London Forum

Member Societies' strategic priorities for the London Forum for the next few years



Q 15 What should be the 5 main priorities for the London Forum of Amenity and Civic Societies in the next few years in relation to your society or group?

Influencing planning policy is mentioned significantly more than in 2008 and emphasises the need for the resources and expertise London Forum puts into its key work of negotiating with Government departments and the Mayor.

The London Forum of Amenity and Civic Societies is an umbrella organisation for over 130 resident, conservation, civic and community organisations and other affiliated bodies in the Greater London Region, with an aggregate membership of over 110,000 Londoners.

- List of participating societies and groups will be posted on the London Forum website
 - Technical note on sample - 51 member organisations responded - this number gives statistical validity to the use of percentages; 'no answers' account for totals not coming to 100%
 - The questionnaire will be posted on the London Forum website with relevant appendices
 - The results from Q16 to Q33 'About the Societies' will be published separately
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