

newsforum



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

The London Forum of
Amenity and Civic Societies
Founded 1988

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Improving planning in London

Our aim is for sustainable communities but will real local democracy emerge from the Government's changes in powers and responsibilities?

Raising Residential Densities was the title of our conference in October following the AGM. The topic was a surprise to many of our guests from Councils, the GLA and developers who had seen London Forum vigorously opposing some developments of excessively high density.

Our President, Sir Richard MacCormac, explained how schemes achieving high residential densities can be developed in a sustainable way. (See report page 04).

In compact developments gross densities across a community sustain the net density of housing groups. Such walkable communities with a diversity and choice of types of homes, and key facilities in close proximity, make better use of land, including provision of green space, have lower infrastructure costs per household, support public transport, offer and provide a more cohesive community and good quality of life for residents.

London Forum expects to make progress along these lines with the GLA, local authorities, developers and architects. Our aim is that the London Plan's forty areas of opportunity, intensification and renewal should have planning frameworks devised for them in this way

Civic and community groups should seek involvement with their Council's planning team in developing those masterplans.

Meanwhile, London Forum will continue to oppose development proposals that significantly exceed the density ranges

of the London Plan and fail to conform to its policies for design and context sensitivity. In earlier editions of this newsletter we have reported the way some such schemes have had full support by the Mayor but were turned down after public inquiries. That informed our response to the Government's proposals to give the Mayor an increased role in planning.

New powers for the Mayor

We were critical of the proposals by the Minister, Ruth Kelly, to allow the Mayor to 'call-in' certain planning applications for his own decision. It would mean that he is able to permit developments which a borough and its communities do not want.

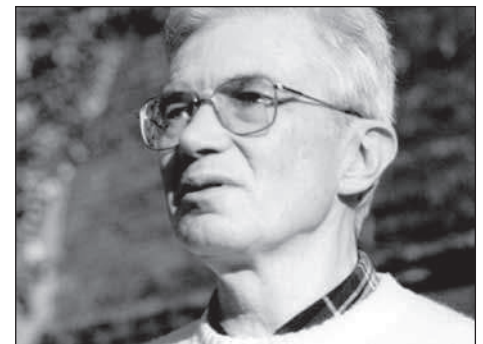
The Government has not given any evidence that the current system does not work properly. Their belief that the changes would "place powers at the most appropriate tier of governance in the capital" is not supported by the London Forum. In our response we have sought safeguards that should be applied if the changes are implemented. See the report on page 10.

Other consultations

Two other recent consultations are important for the London Forum and its members: changes to the London Plan and the Local Government White Paper.

London Plan Alterations

In our last edition I urged members to study the draft further alterations to the London



"The Government has not given any evidence that the current system does not work properly."

Plan. Members on our email list were asked to check if they approve of the changes in the light of their experience of developments and opportunities in their areas.

The Mayor published his consultation version of them in September for response by 22nd December. London Forum has been giving a lot of attention to the latest changes, following our participation in the public examination of the early alterations.

There were few surprises in the Panel Inspectors' report and recommendations to the Mayor on those earlier London Plan alterations for housing and waste management. The Inspectors' concerns were:

- The supply of water and sewerage to meet housing targets
- Problems in creating new public open space and community facilities
- High housing densities overwhelming local infrastructure and services
- Difficulties in achieving sufficient affordable housing in the east
- The need for innovation and new thinking in achieving sustainable communities with good architectural design standards
- Lack of planning frameworks and design briefs for development areas.

➔ *Continued on page 02*

Improving planning in London

→ Continued from page 01

The Inspectors noted that the housing developments that have been approved lack the 50% of affordable units that are expected and that will make current deficiencies worse.

They have recommended changes to Policy 3A.2 of the London Plan to identify new sources of supply for the adequate provision of infrastructure, local services (including primary education and health care) and public open space to meet future needs.

The Panel expressed confidence that organisations such as CABE and the London Forum will exert pressure on the Mayor and local authorities for the design of particular developments.

Local Democracy and Community Empowerment

The Local Government White Paper may help to address the confusion that has arisen for communities on the way the Government sees their future role, empowerment and engagement.

At the end of October, the Department for Communities & Local Government (DCLG) published an analysis of responses to their consultation on the future of Local Strategic Partnerships. It is clear that LSPs must seek and support neighbourhood engagement if LSPs are to 'own' and develop Sustainable Community Strategies and seek their achievement through Local Area Agreements.

A report on Community Strategies was produced in September by DCLG. It concluded that *"The relationship between LAAs and Community Strategies is complex and is throwing up a range of new issues that are worthy of further examination. There is a need to focus on the added value of Community Strategies, in particular to move beyond process outcomes and start to investigate some of the harder outcomes from Community Strategies and how they have added value at the local level."*

Last year the 'Together We Can' action plan was launched. It sets out the government's commitment to empower citizens to work with public bodies to set and achieve common goals. There is also a 'Cleaner, Safer, Greener Communities' programme.

A review is being conducted by the Office of the Third Sector to cover voluntary and community organisations. That department is in the Cabinet Office, not DCMS, and its conclusions will influence the next spending

review. At a conference with Ed Miliband that I attended most of the attention seemed to be on the delivery of services by volunteers and the funding for them, rather than on assessing and meeting the requirements of communities for service delivery and finding the best ways to meeting their needs. There should be clearer links with the LSP process.

The (latest) Local Government White Paper

Strong and Prosperous Communities is the title of the DCMS' Local Government White Paper published in October. It includes a proposal that communities in London will be given the same right to establish parishes as exist elsewhere, subject to consideration of community cohesion. It has nine chapters and annexes dealing with community safety, health and well-being, the economy, housing and planning, children and young people, the third sector and climate change. The substantive chapters cover:

- Responsive services and empowered communities
- Effective, accountable and responsive local government
- Strong cities and strategic regions
- Local government as strategic leader and place-shaper
- Performance framework
- Efficiency in transforming local services
- Community cohesion

It proposes to strengthen local leadership, enhance the role of front-line councillors, cut back the plethora of national targets, streamline inspection and broaden the scope of local area agreements.

An enhanced role for councils as strategic leaders and place-shapers is offered, through stronger Local Strategic Partnerships and next-generation Local Area Agreements with integration and cohesion at the heart of community strategies and LAAs. The white paper proposes to place a new duty on local authorities and named partners (predominantly statutory bodies) to co-operate with each other in order to agree LAA targets.

The Government requires all councils to opt for a directly-elected mayor, directly-elected executive or indirectly-elected leader for a four-year term.

The strengthened role for councillors includes powers to respond to community calls for action on local issues and greater freedom to speak up on planning and

"The Local Government White Paper 'includes a proposal that communities in London will be given the same right to establish parishes as exist elsewhere.'"

licensing issues affecting their wards. Also a wider and stronger role for scrutiny including the power to require evidence from all local service providers and a duty on them to have regard to scrutiny recommendations.

English councils will get the power to bring in bylaws with fixed penalties without Whitehall approval under plans to increase local communities' powers.

Councils will have the ability to retain more of the taxes already raised locally. There is explicit recognition that to deliver the ambitions in the White Paper local government will need to work with the third sector, including a new duty to ensure participation of local citizens and voluntary and community groups.

There is a significant move towards increasing the opportunities for local organisations to take on the ownership and management of assets.

The white paper announces the establishment of a fund by the DCLG to give local capital support in refurbishing buildings to facilitate their transfer to community management or ownership. It also introduces the 'Community Call for Action' (CCfA), a mechanism to strengthen the ability of local councillors to speak up for their communities and demand an answer when things go wrong.

Local authorities are required to secure continuous improvement in the way that procurement and commissioning functions are exercised and they will have the option to devolve small budgets to Councillors to spend on their area. However, ways of financing local government are not yet announced and powers and funding are closely linked.

London Forum will be seeking further policy and guidance from Government to ensure that all these related topics are properly integrated and societies can make the best use of them.

Peter Eversden Chairman ■

London Forum AGM voices concerns at planning decisions in the capital

A packed audience attended the Forum's AGM at the New London Architecture Gallery in Store Street.

Peter Eversden, Chairman of the London Forum, expressed anxiety at the Mayor's approach to planning decisions in his presentation to the AGM on 18 October. 'Ken Livingstone has supported many schemes leading to excessive housing densities, including developments at Lots Road and Vauxhall. Over two-thirds of all housing over 15 units in the Capital have exceeded the density ranges of the London Plan', said Mr Eversden in his presentation to members.

Concern at the Mayor's increased powers

'We are pleased that other schemes were ultimately refused, in spite of having the full support of the Mayor. These include a tall and bulky development in a conservation area at Gunnersbury, a 45 metre electronic advertising tower at the North/South Circular Road junction, and a very large development at the northern end of Kew Bridge'. It was therefore important to continue to monitor proposals carefully and take action where necessary. Mr Eversden urged members to respond to the consultation on increased powers for the Mayor. 'If he is given powers to direct approval of significant developments, there will be nothing to stop developers of rejected schemes that had his support from going ahead.'

Examination in Public of the London Plan

The Chairman reminded the meeting that the London Plan was being revised. He and others had attended every session of the Examination in Public during the summer. The Inspectors' report had now been published and the implications were being considered.

Members concern's

From the floor, members raised issues including a proposal for more cycling on Hampstead Heath, the encroachment of a tram scheme onto a park at Crystal Palace, the need to increase funding for open spaces, and the use of green spaces for memorials.

London Forum administration

Turning to administrative matters, Mr Eversden reminded the meeting that the London Forum Executive Committee needed more members to carry out its full range of objectives. There had so far been

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no offers from the Societies, so the co-option of members was being considered. He was pleased to announce that Dr Stephen Thornton had been co-opted as Honorary Secretary during the year. Haydn Mylchreest had taken over as membership secretary from Helen Marcus, who continued to act as Editor of newsforum. The Chairman thanked Helen for her many years of work on membership. Mr Eversden was pleased to report that the financial position of the Forum remained satisfactory.

Sir Richard MacCormac, President of the London Forum, expressed his appreciation on behalf of the members for the work of the Chairman, and was grateful that Mr Eversden was willing to continue for the coming year.

The meeting concluded with a presentation by Sir Richard MacCormac on 'Sustainable Suburbia: Suburban Housing Densities Re-assessed' ■

(See report of Sir Richard's address overleaf)

Editor's note Those who were not able to attend that evening should see the exhibition of new developments in the capital, when they can, at the NLA Gallery in the Building Centre at 26 Store Street, off Tottenham Court Road.

Urban gardens under threat

One of the most disturbing features of the ever increasing demand for land for new houses is the threat to gardens both in town and country. Such few reports as there are, are given little prominence in the media.

One such was a report, in a North London free advertising magazine, of a meeting held by the Royal Horticultural Society in November at which environmental experts attacked the government's housing policy, saying that it is demolishing gardens to make way for 'nobby houses' with pixie gardens'. (see also report on page 5).

Blame focussed on the government's move to classify urban gardens as brown-field sites, which opens the way for developers to apply for planning permission for new housing.

According to another report in The Times in July, information from the Communities and Local Government Department revealed that the practice of 'garden grabbing' where family homes are pulled down and replaced with flats, is rife in the South East. It listed some of the towns in the south east where 'garden grabbing' accounted for nearly half of all new house-building, and much more in some cases.

Despite objections local authorities appear reluctant to turn down planning applications because they regularly lose on appeal. There is a presumption that planning applications should be approved because the Government has classified homes and gardens as brownfield sites.

Tory MP Greg Clarke has attempted to introduce a bill to remove gardens from the brownfield classification on three occasions. He now has an online petition in advance of the bill's fourth hearing.

To find out more about Greg Clarke's bill visit www.gopetition.com/online/9231.html

Sustainable Suburbia.

Suburban Housing Densities re-assessed. London Forum President **Sir Richard MacCormac's** address to the AGM reported by Stephen Thornton.

We are a sub-urban nation, with our cultural roots in housing,' maintained Sir Richard in his presentation to the well-attended London Forum AGM held at New London Architecture on 18 October. He outlined his ongoing research which supported the view that many people's wish to live in a house with a garden and car space could be reconciled with the collective advantage of shared facilities within walking distance. It was possible to design housing at relatively high density which was attractive to residents, supported public transport, minimised infrastructure costs, had lower environmental impact and promoted a greater sense of community.

Sir Richard emphasised the difference between gross and net housing density. Many developments had groups of houses at a net density of 20-35 dwellings per hectare (dph). But when these groups were aggregated into an overall plan with highways, the gross density plummeted to as low as 7 dph! Such low densities could not support public transport or other amenities.

He compared two communities in Milton Keynes. In a development built in the 1970s, 20% of the area was devoted to roads and 40% to SLOAP (Space Left Over After Planning), a total of 60%. Such low density - 25 dph - meant that amenities must be reached by car. By contrast, in nearby Wolverton an area of 1880s terraced housing achieved a density of 50 dph with similar sized properties and ample on-street car parking. Amenities such as local shops were within easy walking distance. The popularity of these homes was demonstrated by their values being higher than those of their more modern counterparts.

Sir Richard outlined in detail his plans for a community of 5000 dwellings, high density (but not high rise). His project was designed around courtyards with a mix of terraced and semi-detached houses of at least three bedrooms with parking spaces, achieving a density of 70-80 dph; and a mews of 70% houses and 30% flats which achieved a density of 87 dph. This was similar to mews in Chelsea, which was not usually thought of as a high density area, and where high property values reflected the abundance of local facilities.

The overall density was 50 dph, yet all dwellings were within a 10-minute walk from public transport, schools, parks, retail

and other amenities. Various combinations of houses and flats could be used; one was 1500 apartments and 3500 houses. Of the total area, 70% was allocated to housing, 10% to flats and 20% to open space and other uses. Public open space was designed in squares to make them attractive, maintainable and less prone to vandalism. Each house had its own garden and the houses were grouped around a safe enclosed area which could be used by children. The extensive open space, which could include a lake, had been 'bought' by the inclusion of flats at a density of 150 dph, but which nevertheless did not overwhelm the overall scheme.

Sir Richard was joined by a panel which included Terence Bendixson (Living Streets), Deborah Heenan (George Wimpey), Nigel Kersey (CPRE London Branch) and Selena Mason (CABE), for a lively debate chaired by Peter Eversden (London Forum). The following is a resume of some of the main points:

Deborah Heenan felt that there was no reason why Sir Richard's ideas should not be attractive to a volume house builder.

Nigel Kersey wanted to see attractive suburbs, but at high density, since this would support CPRE London's aims of reducing out-migration. He also queried the enforceability of the London Plan. House-builders would need to be creative with their schemes and this in turn meant that Councils must also be creative in their response. Duncan Barry (London Plan, GLA) reminded the meeting that the Plan guidance called for densities of 30-120 dph, higher at public transport hubs. The suburbs must contribute in order to protect the inner city from hyper-development.

Selena Mason felt it was important to provide the right home in the right place. Currently the market was not delivering the range of properties required. Design intelligence was needed, and planning authorities should be robust in demanding appropriate schemes with adequate space standards. The terraced house remained popular but had been abandoned by builders. Michael Coombs (Alan Baxter Associates) also emphasised the importance of space standards with adequate floor space per person. Sir Richard agreed that it had been un-wise to abandon the Parker Morris standards; target net density needed to be sustained over a whole settlement, which

"We are a sub-urban nation, with our cultural roots in housing."

Sir Richard MacCormac

required adequate planning and infrastructure.

Terence Bendixson noted that the terraced houses of Kensington and Chelsea had some of the highest densities in Britain. However, residents were constantly seeking more space by creating extensions (basements were the current fashion), and many also had country homes. Michael Bach (Kensington Society) believed that a density of 50 dph was too low and required a focus e.g. of shops. However Helen Marcus (Heath and Hampstead Society), felt surveys were needed to find out if the public wanted the higher density housing currently being proposed by all the agencies.

Tony Aldous observed that there was no reference to local employment in Sir Richard's plans. In order to achieve densification of suburbs it would be necessary for compulsory purchase of land near transport hubs. Judy Hillman (Primrose Hill) was concerned at the absence of communal facilities such as a church, pub, meeting hall, farmers' market, etc.

Tony Miller (Ealing Civic Society) felt that Sir Richard's proposals may work on large green-field sites, but not in existing suburbs where there was not enough space of the required size. Sir Richard replied that it was possible to design at the proposed density, if the site was served by existing roads. In his proposal, 13 out of 113 ha was devoted to buildings such as schools, sites providing employment, etc.

Malcolm Bacchus (Telegraph Hill Conservation Society) noted that where there was no space left to build, conversion of houses into flats was driving families to the suburbs. Colin Wilson (Planning Team at GLA) observed that high land values had been created by the London Plan and competition between builders.

Jenny Bates (Friends of the Earth) observed that there was a need for more carbon dioxide reduction than provided for in current plans.

James Dunnett (Islington Society) hoped that the ability to densify small sites would help to protect the Green Belt. But Georgina Oliver (London Green Belt Council) was



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concerned that the amount of open space in the proposals could be used to justify taking Green Belt land for development. Sir Richard replied that encroaching on the Green Belt was not his intention. It was possible to achieve a green suburban landscape in a urban setting.

Sir Richard expressed his gratitude for a lively discussion and the Chairman thanked everyone for their contributions ■

A squeeze on house size

A report from the Policy Exchange think tank revealed that Britain is now building the smallest houses in Europe: 76 sq m. compared with an average of 100 sq.m. in the rest of Europe.

Concerns have been raised that families are having to accept smaller homes on smaller plots. CABI has acknowledged the growing public concern about a perceived decline in housing space standards.

Research by the Rowntree Foundation found that 15 per cent of newly built one and two bedroom homes have master bedrooms that are not fit for two people.

The number of new family homes being built has recently dropped by 20 per cent. The new guidance in Planning Guidance PPS 3 is designed to boost the number of new family homes and also adequate provision of green space.

(Reports in The Times November 25th 2006)



Protecting and Preserving the Historic Environment

The House of Commons Select Committee on the Environment calls for more support and funding for Heritage protection.

The House of Commons Select Committee on the Environment has issued a hard-hitting report on its inquiry into Protecting and Preserving the Historic Environment. It is highly critical of Government policy, and DCMS' approach to reform of the heritage protection.

It welcomed the Government's assurance that the proposed reforms for designation protection will not dilute current levels of statutory protection. But it found that with the real decline in grant-aid to English Heritage it is likely that the condition of heritage assets, and English Heritage's ability to provide support will worsen.

The following are some of its 50+ recommendations:

The importance of heritage

- This is not a good time for further restructuring of English Heritage. A period of stability and confidence-building is needed.
- Heritage should remain within DCMS and be more represented across Government. The heritage role envisaged for Green Ministers in A Force for our Future in 2001 should be revived.
- The omission of the historic environment from the Prime Minister's recent 'priorities letter' is surprising and worrying given the emphasis the Government places on regeneration.
- English Heritage should stand firm in taking principled decisions defending historic assets from inappropriate development.
- The significance of heritage for tourism must be identified more effectively.

Funding

- DCMS' explanation of why English Heritage funding has decreased is unconvincing, giving rise to suspicion that its claim to give priority to heritage is cosmetic. It must promote the value heritage can bring to planning and developing communities more energetically. It must recognise the long-term benefits and ensure the treasury provides requisite funding. There is no justification for allowing its share to decrease. We recommend an above RPI annual increase in Grant-in-Aid to English Heritage.
- The present VAT regime for repairs distorts priorities, rewards neglect and works against conscientious maintenance of historic assets. The Government should take a policy decision to return as grants some or all of the VAT paid on repair work to listed buildings.
- We welcome confirmation that heritage will continue to benefit from Lottery proceeds until 2019. The application process for Heritage Lottery Fund grants should be simplified urgently.

However the Committee was concerned that that Lottery funds will be diverted to Olympic funding. The Government should give an assurance that this will not occur.

The role of local authorities

If the Government wants the heritage protection reforms to succeed, local authorities should be encouraged to give the historic environment higher priority;

The report is highly critical of Government policy, and DCMS' approach to reform of the heritage protection.

ensure that they invest in historic environment services; and provide details of the level of provision of conservation advice with regard to the Heritage Protection Reform programme.

DCMS needs to grasp the implications for local authority staff, with an already overloaded timetable driven by the demands of development applications.

- DCMS Ministers must improve dialogue with Heritage Link as the voice of the voluntary heritage sector.
- RDA Boards should have at least one member able to act as a persuasive advocate on behalf of heritage.
- The new Planning Policy Guidance on the historic environment and archaeology should be undertaken without delay after publication of the Heritage White Paper.
- The Government's approach in addressing the Shimizu decision has been dilatory and unacceptable; this should be given high priority.

The Government has recently published its response. London Forum members should urge their MPs to press for implementation in full of the recommendations ■

The report can be downloaded from www.parliament.uk/parliamentary_committees/culture_media_and_sport.cfm

London world heritage sites threatened by development

Unesco's World Heritage Committee has raised concerns about developments around London's World Heritage sites at Westminster and The Tower of London.

The Tower's status as one of the world's most important buildings is under threat from plans for a series of skyscrapers in the capital which the Unesco Committee says appear not to respect its status. It has expressed concern about the development

of Lord Foster's 'Gherkin' block and plans for four other buildings. These include the proposed 306 metre Shard of Glass Tower at London Bridge and the 324 metre Bishopsgate Tower.

The Committee criticised the failure to implement the London Plan: 'The London Plan policies to protect the World Heritage property and its environment do not seem to be applied effectively' and there is a danger that statutory protection for views

to and from the castle built by William the Conqueror could be diminished.

The Unesco monitoring team called on Britain to provide a report on its efforts to protect the Tower by the end of February and gave warning that it could be put on the 'Heritage in Danger' list.

Nevill Shulman, of Unesco's UK Culture Committee said: 'Once you lose the views you start to lose the intrinsic value of the buildings' ■

Planning appeals

New procedures for call-in.

The majority of planning appeals are decided by inspectors, but a small percentage of large and controversial cases – 150 out of a total of 25,000 appeals, in 2005 – are decided by the Secretary of State. Changes, announced in July will 'achieve a greater focus on cases which merit Ministerial decision'.

Future criteria for calling in ("recovery of") appeals by the Secretary of State will involve:

Residential development of over 150 units or on sites of over five hectares, which would significantly impact on the Government's objectives to secure a better balance between housing demand and supply and to create high quality, sustainable, mixed and inclusive communities.

Proposals for development of major importance having more than local significance.

Proposals giving rise to substantial regional or national controversy.

Proposals which raise important or novel issues of development control, and/or legal difficulties.

Proposals which involve any main town centre use or uses of over 9,000 sq.m. gross floorspace which are proposed on a site in an edge-of-centre or out-of-centre that is not in accordance with a current development plan document.

Proposals for significant development in the Green Belt.

Major minerals proposals.

Proposals against which another Government Department has raised major objections or has a major interest.

Cases which can only be decided in conjunction with a case over which inspectors have no jurisdiction.

Other cases which merit recovery because of the particular circumstances ■

Pathfinder CPO dismissed

The Pathfinder/HMR programme, clearing thousands of terraced housing in the name of regeneration, is one of the most significant conservation battles of the decade.

As Marcus Binney, President of SAVE Britain's Heritage, commented in The Times on October 9: 'The Governments brutal plans to continue evicting tens of thousands of people from their homes in the North of England are at last meeting serious problems'. In Liverpool Elizabeth Pascoe won a High Court victory in September, ruling that English Partnerships, the Government's Urban Regeneration Agency, had acted unlawfully in pursuit of a compulsory purchase order for the demolition of 500 homes in Liverpool's Edge Lane West area to make way for a road scheme into the city centre and new housing.

Ms Pascoe had argued that the CPO would break up a supportive community where many houses were in good condition. The judge ruled that the CPO was unjustified and a breach of the Human Rights Act.

Adam Wilkinson, Secretary of SAVE Britain's Heritage, which has campaigned with numerous groups to retain the terraced housing, commented 'This is an incredibly important decision and the flaws in the case for demolition rest on far more than semantics or a mere technicality, as claimed by Government.

The judge found both the planning inspector and the Secretary of State to have impermissibly watered down the tests for the granting of the compulsory purchase order. This calls into question the validity of many other compulsory purchase orders, both now and in the future, in Pathfinder areas. Human rights lawyers said his ruling could have a serious effect on plans to demolish thousands of homes across the Midlands and the north under the Pathfinder initiative.

The battle against Pathfinder projects is being repeated in dozens of northern towns with residents having to take time off work to fight court cases. Apparently it is difficult to find solicitors who are independent enough to help: many regularly act for the local council and say there is a conflict of interest. Even when Inspectors refuse the schemes local councils continue to put pressure on residents to vacate their homes. Dwellings are condemned as unfit on the basis of superficial external surveys ■

Gasification Plant

Goes against environmental progress, warns Green MEP.

On September 15, London's Green Party MEP, Jean Lambert, condemned the decision to grant Novera Energy planning permission to build the Capital's first Gasification plant in Rainham, Havering.

She warned London Thames Gateway Development Corporation Planning Committee that it would undermine recycling efforts, later saying: "This decision goes against London's commitment to a sustainable waste strategy. With a feedstock demand of at least 55% paper and 23% plastics, the plant will have to find an estimated 500,000 tonnes of waste paper per year, inevitably impacting on the progress we have made in meeting recycling targets. It also contradicts the waste hierarchy, adopted by the Mayor, the UK Government and the EU, placing reduction and recycling ahead of energy from waste and incineration.

She questioned why the zero waste policy, agreed for the Olympics, had not been carried across the whole of East London and the Thames Gateway; "The Thames Gateway is the biggest regeneration project in Europe and it is essential that it develops in a truly sustainable way to lay the foundations for a 'green' future and a 'green' Olympics. A gasification plant isn't part of that future and we will continue to fight this decision until it is overturned."

With over 650 letters of objection, the final decision will now be taken to the Mayor of London. For more information, contact: media@jeanlambertmep.org.uk ■

English Partnerships Pathfinder compulsory purchase order dubbed 'unjustified and a breach of the Human Rights Act' by High Court judge.

Spotlight on the Sydenham Society

Lose one, win another. Scheme to improve lively high street.

By **Tony Aldous**.

For the chair of an amenity society that has just lost a long and hard fought public inquiry on a development which threatens to undermine its local high street and fill its already congested streets with even more cars, Pat Trembath is remarkably upbeat. You might say that, short of throwing in the towel, she has to be; but that would be to miss the point about the Sydenham Society. It is nothing if not positive, pro-active and even entrepreneurial.

Development of Bell Green gasworks

The inquiry was into proposals to develop the remaining part of former gasworks land at Bell Green on Sydenham's eastern fringes. Developers proposed almost 29,000m² of non-food retail supported by 1800 car park spaces. The shopping is greater than either of the two nearest town centres, Sydenham and Forest Hill; the car parking is as much as the parking in central Lewisham, a major shopping centre.

Although the Mayor of London had approved the scheme, the Secretary of State called it in and the society resolved to fight the resultant public inquiry despite the heavy cost of doing so. It opposed it because of the damage it would do to the viability of their own and other high streets and the impact the extra traffic would have on an environment already under pressure. But there was an earlier outline permission, and the inspector and the Secretary of State concluded the development should be permitted. "If that proposal were to come to the council today, it wouldn't even get to committee," says Pat. "It would be judged to be contrary to local, regional and national planning policies. This is a 1980s development going through in 2006".

High Street improvement

But all is not gloom and doom in Sydenham. The high street is poised to strike back, thanks to an initiative launched by the society two years ago and now taken up by Lewisham council and Transport for London. This has two strands – the improvement of the main shopping street (Sydenham Road) into a more shopper- and pedestrian-friendly place; and the improvement of the approaches to Sydenham station. It would get rid of an ugly, inefficient and detested roundabout installed by Lewisham but described by former deputy mayor Gavin

Moore as "reminiscent of something left-over from the Berlin Wall"; stop up one or more side streets, which would improve traffic flow and safety but also allow the creation of paved pedestrian spaces; and improve users' experience of the railway station.

Transport for London has commissioned London Forum member Living Streets (formerly the Pedestrians Association) to carry out public consultation on the improvements and this together with studies of pedestrian flows will feed into design of a draft scheme which will itself be subject to consultation. The society hopes that actual work on ground can start in 2007-08.

Transport improvements

The advent of the East London Line's southern extension in 2010 is a spur to this part of the improvements. The extension, bringing more trains each hour and a link with the Jubilee Line at Canada Water, is generally welcomed. The society is, however, concerned about capacity on its existing service into London Bridge. This currently has an enviable train-every-10-minutes service, which would reduce to a train every 15 minutes in order to make room for ELL trains. This might just be acceptable if the trains were eight coaches instead of the present four. There is also concern about the capacity of the Canada Water interchange and indeed of Jubilee Line trains. Nearer home, Sydenham station definitely requires radical upgrading. "North London is getting four new stations on the ELL," says Trembath. Ideally the society would like a radically upgraded station with a lofty, glazed "East Croydon-style" concourse, including coffee bar and other amenities. This could be built on the site of the present car-cluttered station approach. Some serious upgrading is certainly needed before ELL trains arrive. If not the East Croydon model, then at least a proper waiting room, decent toilets, and adequate shelter on the up platform.

Hopeful signs

Back in the high street there are hopeful signs. The Dolphin, an historic pub lately rather run down, is being refurbished by new owners with a good track record in hosting a gastropub in nearby Forest Hill; a fine Victorian building made redundant by a so called "high street bank" has

become the smart new premises for the local credit union; and the society hopes to persuade Somerfield, when it gives its Sydenham store a makeover, to do as Sainsbury's did at nearby Forest Hill and add some flats above. It would, of course, as well as providing homes, some affordable, add to the high street's footfall. As in quite a few other London "villages", Sydenham's main shopping street has a very lively feel, with frequent meetings between friends, greetings to and by shopkeepers, and a bustle and sheer friendliness which a Homebase or an ASDA can never emulate.

Other achievements

Promoting the high street and enabling it to prosper is all part of what may be called the "entrepreneurial" side of the society's activities – as well as stopping undesirable developments, working positively to achieve good ones. A good example of this is a couple of new pocket parks or greens created by the council after the society had offered a reasoned objection to neglected scraps of open land being crammed full of new houses and flats. "We looked at Lewisham's Unitary Development Plan and found a statement that Sydenham is short of public open space," says Pat. "We're quite good at holding on to things," explains Annabel McLaren who chairs the conservation and planning committee. One of its prime achievements was to persuade Lewisham to designate a conservation area in The Thorpes, an area of largely Edwardian housing between the high Street and Mayow Park.

Housing and development

McLaren's committee has become increasingly concerned at the way in which developers are under pressure to provide higher density housing and include more affordable units - no doubt both desirable aims, but too often resulting in poor designed schemes with too little amenity space. "They often just aren't sustainable," she says. A recent case in point was a scheme for flats at very high density, with virtually no amenity space, and facing west on to a railway so that they required mechanical ventilation in summer. "The council seemed to think it was the best thing since sliced bread," observes Trembath.

The society came into being in 1972 after Lewisham council has announced plans to



Pat Trembath – Chair

Sydenham Society

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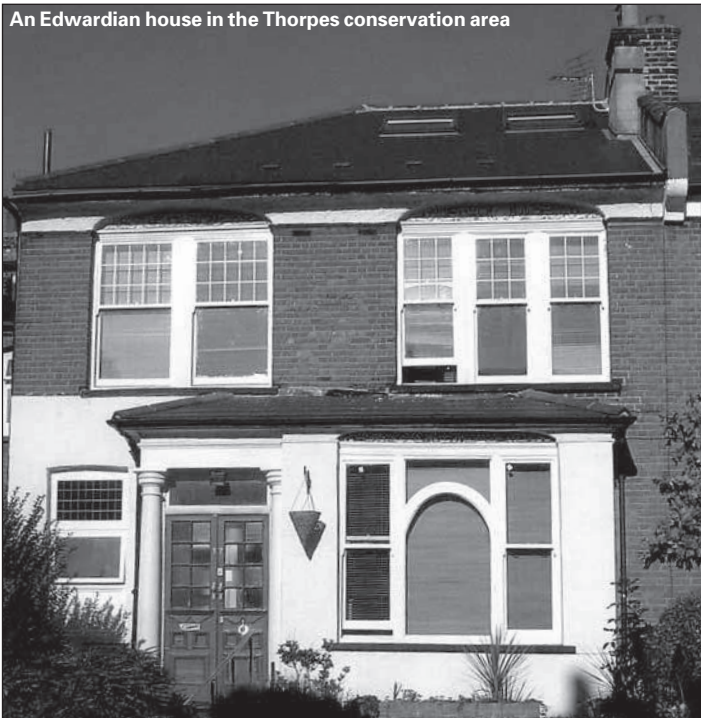
 www.sydenhamsociety.com

demolish Victorian villas in three separate Sydenham streets. The three campaign groups opposing this soon saw the advantages of working together, defeated the plan, and from this sprang the Sydenham Society. Unlike most other London amenity societies, it does not have charitable status, preferring the flexibility of being able to act without the constraints of charity law – though it does, stresses Pat Trembath, have its accounts independently audited each year.

In spite of past disagreements with its local authority, the society works closely with local councillors (who are given a spot in its newsletter), as well as with London Assembly member Len Duval and the local MP Jim Dowd. The current scheme for improving the high street is the result of working closely with Lewisham's head of highways Darien Goodwin. Another local organisation the society works closely with is the Sydenham Traders Association, chaired by Geraldine Cox, proprietor of the very successful and 40-year-old Kirkdale Bookshop. The society has recently agreed to, and indeed welcomed, the loss of part of its territory. Its watchdog role used to extend to nearby Forest Hill, but it has now handed over to the newly established Forest Hill Society and expects to work closely with its new neighbour ■

“Promoting the high street and enabling it to prosper is all part of what may be called the “entrepreneurial” side of the society’s activities.”

An Edwardian house in the Thorpes conservation area



The ugly roundabout at Cobbs Corner

Age: 34; born 1972.

Circumstances of birth: came into being following attempt by Lewisham council to demolish Victorian villas in three roads. Residents campaigning against this joined forces, defeated the scheme, and from this came the Sydenham Society.

Biggest successes: (1) Sydenham Gateway scheme, to improve pedestrian and shopping environment in main street and at Sydenham station; now taken up by Lewisham council and Transport for London. (2) Successfully resisting attempts to build on strips of open land, instead turning them into pocket parks or greens. (3) Designation of the Thorpes conservation area to protect an area of Edwardian housing. (4) With neighbouring societies and groups, resisting a scheme to build a horrifically ugly 20-screen multiplex cinema with 950-space car park on part of the Grade II* landscape of Crystal Palace Park.

Biggest disappointments/frustrations: (1) Failure to prevent a huge retail development on former gasworks land at Bell Green, with damaging implications both for traffic levels and high street shops. (3) Ugly, inefficient and dangerous roundabout at Cobbs Corner (which the Gateway scheme will hopefully undo).

Present preoccupations: (1) Arrival in 2010 of trains on an extended East London Line – worries about capacity on trains and at Sydenham and interchange stations. (2) Effect on town centre of Bell Green Development. (3) Future of Crystal Palace Park and National Sports Centre. (4) Number and quality of high density housing schemes now coming up for planning permission.

Working details: Executive committee and sub-committees for roads and transport, conservation and planning, and events; 1,100 members, subscription £6 per household (£5 concessions). Four newsletters a year; website; the society last year won London Forum's Walter Bor Award for media impact.

Special characteristics: (1) Conscious decision not to seek charitable status. (2) Though in Lewisham borough, Sydenham has parts of Bromley, Southwark, Lambeth and Croydon adjoining or close – all areas which are distant satellites of boroughs that control them.

Last word: In spite of the Bell Green defeat, Sydenham has much going for it. The Gateway scheme's creation of a more pedestrian friendly high street; arrival of the East London Line and possible extension of Croydon's Tramlink to Crystal Palace; and a new gastropub opening in the high street – these should encourage younger people into the area who want to conserve the best of its amenities.

Behind closed doors?

David Lewis examines the implications of the Mayor of London's new powers for Londoners.

In July Ruth Kelly announced conclusions about the Mayor of London's powers, following the consultation exercise described in the Spring 2006 issue of *newsforum*. Housing, planning, waste management and adult skills were identified as the key areas.

The London Forum supports a strong role for the Mayor on issues that are genuinely strategic, especially where that means central government relinquishing some powers. But only if the Mayor can be relied on to operate in an open, transparent and accountable way. The government's conclusions have left us extremely concerned at the proposal that Ken Livingstone should be able to give planning permission for major developments.

Housing strategy

In other fields the government's conclusions are welcome, or at least acceptable. The Mayor will now have a clear responsibility for housing strategy, instead of vying for supremacy with the Government Office for London (GoL); and a Housing Investment Plans drawn up by the Mayor will determine how capital allocations for affordable housing are distributed. Almost everyone favours moving in that direction. There will now be more effective levers for achieving the ambitious targets for affordable housing in the London Plan. But GoL has kept control of funds for improving existing housing (in the form of the Decent Homes programme).

Adult skills.

The Mayor will have a new role in the increasingly significant field of adult skills. The government is merging the five Learning and Skills Councils in London (which fund all post-16 education and training) into a single body. This will not be accountable to the Mayor (as he wanted, but the London Forum opposed): that would have had the effect of extending his responsibilities to school Sixth Forms and co-ordination of 14-19 education. Instead, in a fudge that may or may not work, the new London Learning and Skills Council will have to spend its adult skills budget in accordance with priorities set out in a Skills Strategy and annual delivery plans drawn up by the Mayor in conjunction with a London Skills and Employment Board which he will set up and chair. This Board, made up mostly of employers, will link improvement of skills

with wider employment strategies, with an aim of bringing down London's high level of unemployment.

Dealing with waste

Dealing with waste is a conundrum yet to be solved. The government put forward the idea of a single Waste Authority for London; the Mayor and the London Forum both backed that. In the event Ministers have shied away from radical solutions, and instead will take a much larger role themselves. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) is establishing a London Waste Infrastructure Development Programme to get new waste facilities built. It is also establishing 'a Londonwide Waste and Recycling Forum, to bring stakeholders together to deliver improved performance on waste minimisation and recycling, promote collaborative action and link waste with other London priorities around climate change, transport and employment'. This Forum's functions will include administering a fund contributed partly from an existing government programme and partly by the GLA.

The Mayor remains an indispensable player because of his existing powers of direction over waste management contracts and his strategic role in land use planning. Legislation is promised to require waste authorities to act in 'general conformity' with the Mayor's Municipal Waste Management Strategy. It is probably right that a larger class of planning applications for waste facilities should be referred to the Mayor in future (under the planning procedures considered below); as with waste management, radical options for reorganising waste planning (which in this case the London Forum opposed) have been dropped. Waste planning was a major gap in the initial London Plan. And the Examination in Public of the draft Alterations brought forward to remedy that ended chaotically in the spring when it turned out officials had failed to understand how much guidance the government requires the GLA to give to boroughs. We can only hope that Ministers, the Mayor and boroughs between them will soon get a grip on the situation.

Planning

In planning the London Forum is strongly opposed to the government's wish to give the Mayor a new power. Readers of

newsforum will be well aware that boroughs must refer to the Mayor defined categories of planning applications regarded as strategically important, and that he can direct a borough to refuse such an application. One proposal is to broaden those categories, and we do not see any general need for that. More important is the government's proposal that the Mayor should be able to take over referred cases, and if he so decides grant planning permission. In deciding whether to assume jurisdiction he would be required to apply a 'policy test', but the wording suggested for this purpose is far too subjective in our view.

Even if the policy test can be given a satisfactory formulation, the overall proposal threatens to undermine all the efforts governments have made to establish development control as a quasi-judicial procedure which commands public confidence, based on full consultation and subject to codes of conduct at all levels. At present the Mayor and his officials often act as advocates for major development schemes, and even brief counsel to appear at public inquiries in support of developers - often, in the London Forum's view, in disregard of policies in the Mayor's own London Plan. There are appalling dangers if in future the ultimate decision on such cases were to be taken by the Mayor himself behind closed doors at City Hall, possibly without even an opportunity for any other party to make representations.

In a detailed response to a further consultation paper published in August the London Forum has repeated its opposition to this proposal - and insisted that, if it goes ahead, strong safeguards will be essential. These would have to include a Statement of Community Involvement incorporating the principles of transparency and openness that other planning authorities have to follow; and a Code of Conduct to bar the Mayor from taking the decision on a case on which he has previously expressed an opinion. We have also urged the Secretary of State to consider whether decisions on such cases ought to be taken by a new Planning Committee sitting in public, rather than by the Mayor as an individual. Fortunately this proposal will require an Act of Parliament, so there will be an opportunity for second thoughts.

Another Local Government White Paper

The role of the London Assembly

Alongside proposals about the Mayor's powers, the government is also proposing some enhancements, which the London Forum supports, in the role of the elected London Assembly. But none of those is relevant to the Mayor's proposed new power to grant planning permission: we consider decisions in exercise of such a power should be treated as key decisions which the London Assembly can scrutinise.

The government has decided on other changes as well. Some give the Mayor increased powers of patronage, in relation to the 'functional bodies' (such as Transport for London) and the regional bodies for culture and sport. Others constitute government endorsement for the Mayor's initiatives in becoming involved with climate change, energy, water and public health. The London Forum applauds the breadth of vision. But there is growing awareness that a shelf full of wordy and expensively produced Mayoral Strategies have not always as yet been matched by outcomes ■

The Mayor's web site has summary details at the link www.london.gov.uk/view_press_release.jsp?releaseid=8621

Barely 6 years since Local Government Act 2000 the government is proposing yet more changes to Local government structure. It seems to be another attempt to force mayors on an unwilling public. Ruth Kelly, Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, speaking at the Development Trusts Association Conference in September said: 'When people come together voluntarily because they care about something and want to make a real difference, this can be a powerful agent for social change. More powerful in many cases than the government acting alone.'

'The White Paper is about more than local government; essentially it is about people and communities. It is about ensuring that, wherever possible, communities and individuals themselves have control over the decision that affect their lives'. [Do you get the feeling you've heard all this before! Ed.] In her list of Development Trusts and social enterprises, tenant associations, neighbourhood watch, local sports clubs and parish council, however, she failed to include local amenity groups ■

The full text can be found at: www.communities.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1503149

Listed Buildings Casework:

National Amenity Societies recognised.

A public consultation was held earlier this year on proposals to amend the Appointed Persons Regulations regarding intervention by the Secretary of State in Inspectors' decisions on Grade I and II* listed building consent and enforcement appeals. It found that 78% considered the specialist Planning Inspectors assigned to listed building appeals had the requisite expertise to decide the majority of cases themselves, although concern was expressed over the small number of Planning Inspectors and the increased workload.

Views were also invited on a second proposal to amend DETR Circular 01/2001 so that where English Heritage objected to a decision to grant consent, the Secretary of State should automatically be notified. The consultation also invited comments on whether the Secretary of State need be notified on intentions to grant listed building consent.

65% agreed that not notifying the Secretary of State could reduce the handling time and 68% felt the proposals would maintain the necessary levels of protection. However a further 23% felt protection levels would be maintained if the National Amenity Societies were added to those whose objection would trigger Secretary of State's notification.

DCLG will now amend the Appointed Persons Regulations and the Notification arrangements to include National Amenity Societies as bodies whose objection will trigger Secretary of State Notification. This will come into force in Autumn 2006. The summary of responses can be seen on www.communities.gov.uk/embedded_object.asp?id=1503187 ■

Change in London housebuilding policy

A CPRE press release in Sept stated that the London Mayor is considering altering the way social housing is funded. To ease severe overcrowding in the capital he favours the creation of more and larger family homes. New government legislation will give him power to decide how to spend the Housing Corporation's London budget. Building targets will be for the number of bed spaces instead of units with an increase in the proportion of family homes. The Mayor said: 'You won't have as many homes but will have more people living there.'

At the same time he announced that his plan to increase house building in the capital by a third had been approved by an independent panel set up by the government. The new annual rate of 30,650 homes a year is likely to take effect shortly. He warned Boroughs that resisted the higher build rate that this would only lend extra weight to his demand for powers of intervention.

Berwyn Kinsey, head of the London Housing Federation, said he fully supported the move. But he warned that it could clash with the demands of local authorities' planners because the planning system is stacked against larger homes. 'There is an assumption that you need more smaller homes because household size is decreasing. It will make planning decisions in some areas more difficult.' He also said that the Mayor's efforts to see more homes built in the east of London would have to be matched with a lettings scheme that gave people from western boroughs access to new homes built in the Thames Gateway, Kinsey said.

Dale Meredith, director of development at Southern Housing Group, said funding affordable housing in terms of units had always been a bad idea. 'The [Housing] Corporation has already started to look more at the number of people occupying a property or number of bed spaces in a property,' he said.

The London Freight Plan

Dick Allard reports.

Transport for London is at last giving freight issues the attention they deserve. Over the past year they have formed a Freight Team with about 13 staff, and in June published a draft London Freight Plan. The London Forum have responded to this draft, and the Policy and Transport Committee received a presentation from three members of the Freight Team.

A vision for London

The Plan starts with a vision for freight in London which properly balances the need for safe and efficient movement of freight and servicing in support of London's economy with the needs of other transport users, the environment and Londoner's quality of life. This is then supported by a range of laudable objectives, including reducing emissions of local pollutants and CO2, reducing deaths and injuries associated with freight movement, and improving the quality of life by reducing the negative impacts of freight and servicing on communities. There is also stress on the need to cope with the significant increases in freight expected from the anticipated growth in London's population and economy.

Core proposals

The core of the Plan comprises a set of 8 proposals under 3 broad headings.

Encouraging best practice: support Freight Quality Partnerships (FQPs) and improve communication; produce an annual Freight Data Report; develop and roll out both a programme of training and a Freight Operator Recognition Scheme (designed to encourage and reward good behaviour in respect of the environment and safety).

Improving reliability: primarily through improved arrangements for loading/unloading, including in the planning process.

Promoting sustainable distribution through: modal shift (to rail & water); consolidation; and changes in specification of vehicles and fuel to reduce noise and polluting emissions.

However, the general discussion and the lists of tasks that accompany each of these proposals concentrate very largely on the

concerns of operators and business, and although there are useful suggestions on reducing pollution and encouraging modal shift, there is no further mention of "quality of life", and only cursory mention of improving road safety. Furthermore, despite frequent references to working with operators, businesses and boroughs, there is not a single mention of working with the community. Whilst this emphasis is understandable, since implementation of policies depends primarily on changing the behaviour of operators, businesses and boroughs, those changes will eventually fall on those who live and work in London. Thus it is the community that is best placed to judge the relative emphasis to be placed on the various factors.

The London Forum's response

The London Forum's response is an attempt to secure a more balanced approach, and emphasises three broad themes: quality of life; improved arrangements for participation, especially from the community; and the need to take account of the full costs of various forms of freight movement. Our specific suggestions include:

- The need to restrict the size of vehicles in town centres, on the grounds that the largest vehicles cause both loss of amenity to other users (visual intrusion, noise, pollution) and much greater damage to road infrastructure. We should be working towards a "London Lorry".
- The need to achieve greater community involvement over a wider range of issues at the London level, as full participants in FQPs at the more local level, and for representatives of cyclists and pedestrians in plans for enhancing road safety.

There is also a number of aspects which we welcome, including measures to encourage greater use of rail and water, the promotion of consolidation centres, and the suggested extension of planning considerations to cover significant impacts on the transport system from movement of construction material. We also support the focus, both within the Plan and the structure of the Freight Team, on the specific issues of particular sectors (retail; waste & utilities; construction; courier, servicing and

The London Forum's response emphasises three broad themes: quality of life; improved arrangements for participation, especially from the community; and the need to take account of the full costs.

maintenance; oil & chemical), and efforts to resolve problems around unloading (to which we add further suggestions for the longer term).

The consultation concluded on September 5, but the Plan is still viewable on line at www.tfl.gov.uk/tfl/freight/plan.asp. The final version of the Plan is expected in about four months. Whether or not we are successful in shifting its balance there is also an useful role for member societies in helping to reduce negative impacts of freight by, for example, bringing attention to the impact of large lorries in local town centres, and getting involved in local FQPs ■

For the full version of the London Forum's 1,700-word response, please contact our office.

Highways Agency 'on the job'

The House of Commons Select Committee view of the Highways Agency:

"One organisation told us in evidence that the Agency is 'an elitist organisation which is... lumbering and risk averse.' To that, the Committee would add its concerns that the Agency has no grip on the costs of its major road projects; is managing a property portfolio it should not possess from expensive offices it should not be using; has only a limited idea what some of its staff are actually doing; and has failed to build a constructive dialogue with local communities over road planning."

One-Sided Vision

David Lewis examines **Transport 2025**: published in June by Transport for London

In *Transport 2025*: transport challenges for a growing city, published in June, Transport for London (TfL) sets out two broad goals for London's transport system:

- to get people to work on reliable radial links with acceptable levels of crowding
- to support the more dispersed travel associated with other economic sectors and trip purposes – ensuring as many trips as possible use public transport, cycling and walking.

A detailed response by the London Forum, however, has pointed out that the second of these goals looms very small in this 'long-term vision' by TfL.

There is a big discrepancy between the areas in which the London Plan projects employment growth and population growth. TfL points out that 95% of central London's workers already live outside the central areas. It argues that London's economy cannot continue to grow, and its productivity (indeed, the productivity of the UK as a whole) cannot continue to increase, unless more and more people can be brought into the central business district each day. It therefore projects a 30% increase in rail use in London by 2025.

The area of employment growth is characterised as 'an east-west corridor stretching from White City through the City of London to the Isle of Dogs and Thames Gateway, and including Paddington and Kings Cross'. The surface transport implications of Heathrow's growth are not discussed.

What this document fails to confront is the possibility that many new jobs in financial and business services could well be filled by people commuting from outside London (the average commute in the morning peak for workers in the City and Westminster is already 20km). The London Forum is concerned that a heavy emphasis in TfL's strategy on Crossrail and the Rail 2025 package for existing rail lines, plus the opening of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link, will be a powerful magnet drawing population out of London by making long-distance commuting faster and more attractive. In part that might well be at the direct expense of shorter-distance services. Orbirail (see **newsforum** Issue 46 Spring 2006) gets only

This document fails to confront the possibility that many new jobs in financial and business services could well be filled by people commuting from outside London.

passing mention, and nothing is said about a branded Overground Network, the extension of Oystercard to cover rail journeys within London, or the Crossrail 2 project. There is little discussion of the future role of the Underground, on the basis that the programme up to 2018 has already been determined.

In any event, over three-quarters of journeys in London do not involve central London. There is little discussion here of how to address the transport challenges faced by the rest of London. Half the trips made by residents to and within outer London are made by car, and most of the rest on foot or by cycle, only 12% by bus, and much smaller proportions by rail or Underground. All we find in this document are cryptic allusions to an overall increase in road vehicle capacity outside central London (but not 'to any significant extent'), parking policies, road user charging and modernisation of the traffic signalling system, and pious references to promoting walking and cycling. A 30% increase is projected in the 'underlying demand for bus travel', but it is left unclear how that will be translated into bus use.

In effect, *Transport 2025* is an attempt to keep the Crossrail project alive in the face of successive route changes and considerable slippage. TfL acknowledges that, besides facilitating economic growth, it ought also to be trying to improve social inclusion and help tackle climate change. But a strong emphasis on providing for longer-distance commuting works directly against those objectives, and makes this a woefully one-sided vision for London's transport system ■

Design and Transport in London

A new post of Heritage Advisor has been established, and is jointly funded by English Heritage and Transport for London (TfL). Edmund Bird has been appointed. His role is to act as a voice for London's built heritage and contribute to the Mayor's Making Space for Londoners programme, which will see the creation and improvement of 100 public spaces across the capital. He will promote the importance of London's historic environment within the development of the Mayor's Urban Realm and Transport Strategies and ensuring it is considered in all projects, in particular Crossrail and the remodelling of Parliament Square.

Edmund Bird said: "We are the custodians of a rich architectural legacy of underground stations by eminent designers of the Victorian era and the Twentieth Century such as Sir Charles Holden. We must ensure that these landmarks are sensitively adapted to meet modern travel needs whilst maintaining their character and integrity. We need to achieve the integration of new transport projects within our historic environment, including Crossrail, the Cross-River Tram and East London Line extensions. It is also crucial to ensure that new public realm initiatives such as a remodelled Parliament Square and Marble Arch are of the highest quality and enhance their historic context."

Drew Bennellick, Head of Regional Partnerships for London at English Heritage, said: "London is famous for its public spaces and streets, from its numerous squares to the Victorian engineering masterpiece of the Victoria Embankment. By part-funding this new post, we can ensure the unique quality of these spaces is enhanced by carefully considered new design."

David Ubaka, TfL Design Champion and Head of Urban Environment said: "We welcome this opportunity to work in closer partnership with English Heritage. TfL are very aware of the role they play in the quality of the historic and future legacy of London." ■

Round the Societies

A round up of news from our member societies.

By **George Parish.**

Keeping Mill Hill green

Two characteristic issues featured in this year's annual report of the Mill Hill Preservation Society were the latest attack on the Green Belt by the Adam Smith Institute, which has been strongly rebutted by the London Green Belt Council, and a Private Member's Bill which attempted to close the loophole that allows the classification of gardens as brownfield land.

Setback to Broomfield House

The Enfield Preservation Society reports that, following adverse comments from the Heritage Lottery Fund, the Broomfield House Task Force has withdrawn its application for a Project Planning Grant. It is now proposed to reassess the funding requirements and possible sources of funds. HLF money will be sought only for the final phase of the project.

West House update

The Pinner Association reports that, heartened by a successful provincial tour by the William Heath Robinson Exhibition, the West House trustees have decided to proceed immediately with as much work on the repair and restoration of the house as current funds, now standing at £469,000, allow.

Cycling on the Heath

The Heath and Hampstead Society has found it necessary to restate its opposition to the provision of new cycle paths on Hampstead Heath as now advocated by the Mayor of London's Cycling Greenways Implementation Plan and the London Sustainability Task Force. Fortunately neither of these has any jurisdiction over the Heath. Nor, apparently, do they show any appreciation of it. The Society again sets out the evidence presented only a few years ago that on legal, safety, environmental and engineering grounds, there is an overwhelming case against any increase in cycling on the Heath.

Classical pastiche in Camden

Camden Council has granted permission for what the Highgate Society calls a Kenwood House lookalike to replace Fitzroy Farm in Millfield Lane. This outside pastiche building, designed by Sir Quinlan Terry, might not be out of place on a country estate but is entirely out of character in design and scale with the Highgate Conservation Area and Hampstead Heath. But the Highgate Society was unable to convince the Camden Planning Committee of their ability to refuse consent on grounds of inappropriate design, though there is sufficient official guidance making it quite clear that they could have done.

Riverside visions

Two striking publications from south-west London are the special expanded summer/autumn issue of the Review by The Friends of Battersea Park, which includes a ten-page illustrated account of a day in the life of the park, and the Wandsworth Society's November Newsletter, which comprises an eight-page report with coloured maps and detailed recommendations for the future of Wandsworth Town centre.

Putney underfoot

Much of the Putney Society's September Bulletin is devoted to pavements. How far do they determine the quality of a high street compared with street furniture, traffic congestion or the quality of the shops? Are concrete slabs a sufficient enhancement or should York Stone be used at four times the cost and equally vulnerable to parked lorries? As one senior member cynically puts it, perhaps Putney residents have the best of both worlds – low Council Tax plus easy access to better centres by that nice Mr. Livingstone's buses.

Restoration

The Richmond Society reports three restoration success stories – the re-opening of Kew Palace to the public after painstaking works, a Council decision to use its own funds for work on the Terrace and Buccleuch Gardens rather than wait for Heritage Lottery Funding and a successful application by the recently formed Strawberry Hill Trust for Lottery Funding for the restoration of Horace Walpole's famous riverside house.

Tunnel under Streatham

The November Streatham Pump carries a cautious defence of the idea of putting Streatham High Road into a tunnel. It recalls the defeat of the M23 extension in the seventies and acknowledges that a tunnel would be a horrendously expensive panacea rather than a solution, but suggests that it may be the logical and only answer to Streatham's traffic problem.

A new society

The Tewkesbury Lodge Estate R.A. reports the formation of a Forest Hill Society, which hopes to represent the interests of this area more effectively than the R.A. or the Sydenham Society have been able to do ■

newsbriefs

Key issues of interest and concern to note.

Transforming our streets

The Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) has updated its 2002 publication *Paving the Way*. It sets out the problems faced with the design, regulation, management and maintenance of UK streets, and the steps still needed for improvement. *Transforming Our Streets* can be downloaded from www.cabe.org.uk/AssetLibrary/8784.pdf

Homes zones

Under the Department for Transport's recently-published circular on designating roads as quiet lanes or home zones, these are roads where the "whole of the space is available for a range of different users, and the quality of life for local residents should take precedence over the movement of traffic."

A scheme needs three key elements: community involvement to encourage a change in behaviour, area-wide direction signage to discourage through traffic, and entry/exit signs to remind drivers that they are in an area where the whole road space is subject to a range of activities. The guidance indicates that only minor roads with speeds already well below 20 m.p.h., and low traffic flows – i.e. less than 1,000 per day – are suitable.

Once the road is designated, local authorities can issue a "use order" to permit use for "purposes other than passage", such as ball games, and "speed orders" to set an advisory speed (though this would not be enforceable).

Natural England

Natural England came into being on 1st October uniting English Nature, the environment activities of the Rural Development Service and the Countryside Agency's Landscape, Access and Recreation division. It has a responsibility to conserve and enhance the value and beauty of England's natural environment and promote access, recreation and public well-being. It will have all the powers of the founding bodies, including awarding grants, giving advice and information, designating Sites of Special Scientific Interest, National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, managing National Nature Reserves, and enforcing the associated regulations. Its statement of strategic intent, *Strategic Direction 2006-2009* can be found on the new website www.naturalengland.org

However, in a joint letter to the *Times* on 30th September, members of Wildlife and Countryside Link, Heritage Link's equivalent in nature conservation, warned that funding for Natural England's responsibility for the management of the countryside had been jeopardised by last year's EU budget brokered by the UK.

Licensing Act guidance – revision

DCMS have asked for views on their current guidance, which can be seen on: www.culture.gov.uk/alcohol_and_entertainment/advice_and_guidance/residents.htm

The Civic Trust has been represented on the sub-group looking at revision to the Guidance for the 2003 Licensing Act. If there is anything you would like added, or that isn't clear, let Hannah Mummery (hmummery@civictrust.org.uk), 020 7539 7908, or at The Civic Trust, Essex Hall, 106 Essex Street, London WC1H 3RU know and she will pass suggestions to the DCMS.

In addition, LACORS (the organisation charged with helping Local Authorities implement the Licensing Act) have asked the Civic Trust to inform them of any issues residents may have on Local Authority implementation of the Act (eg interpretation of "Vicinity" etc.) Once again, sent comments to Hannah Mummery, as above.

New London Architecture

The new architectural centre at the Building Design Centre, Store Street, W.C. – where the Forum held its 2006 AGM – has had some 100,000 visitors and held 10 major exhibition since opening.

Its website has an extensive database of the best new architecture in the capital and 60,000 downloads of exhibition catalogues. For details, and information about its forthcoming exhibition, event and workshop programme, see www.newlondonarchitecture.org

UCL Centre for sustainable heritage website

The Centre has just relaunched its website with much more information for the heritage sector. Fifty pages of new content with links includes a growing list of publications to download, free downloadable software tools, information on events and guest lectures, information on research projects as well as application forms for the MSc courses and short course booking information. See www.ucl.ac.uk/sustainableheritage

An opportunity at CPRE

CPRE London is looking for someone to do some (paid!) work on the Barking Riverside proposal for 10,000 homes in Barking Reach). The task will be to produce a detailed critique of the planning application and make contact with local campaign groups. For details, contact Nigel Kersey (Director), CPRE London, 70 Cowcross Street, London EC1M 6EJ (Tel: 020 7253 0300; Mobile: 07981 242159; Out of Hours: 020 8699 4480; Fax: 020 7490 3001)

Guidelines on effective community involvement and consultation

This is the title of a 27-page guide published by the Royal Town Planning Institute; it can be downloaded from their website www.rtpi.org.uk

Rising house prices

Over half of "key workers" cannot afford an average house in Britain, with the two worst regions the south west and south east, and, according to the Building Cost Information Service, tender prices for construction work are expected to rise by 33% over the next four years, against a background of general inflation of 12%.

New biodiversity duty on all public bodies

The Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act October 2006 Under Section 40 of the Act all public sector bodies will be under a duty to consider biodiversity in their work: "Every public authority must, in exercising its functions, have regard, so far as is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions, to the purpose of conserving biodiversity."

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Defra, in partnership with the Local Government Association, the Association of Local Government Ecologists, English Nature, the Countryside Council for Wales, Welsh Assembly and Wildlife and Countryside Link are developing two sets of guidance which will be published in early 2007: specific guidance aimed at the needs and requirements of Local Authorities; a more generic guidance aimed at all public bodies affected. The aim is to raise the profile of biodiversity in England and Wales to a point where biodiversity issues become second nature to those making decisions in the public sector. Over 900 public bodies will be affected, ranging from local authorities, fire, police and health bodies, to museums and transport authorities. Copies of the Act can be downloaded from www.defra.gov.uk/rural/ruraldelivery/bill/default.htm. For further information, contact Kathrina Mannion on Defra's UK Biodiversity Policy Unit, Kathrina.Mannion@defra.gsi.gov.uk

Clear countryside clutter!

RAC Foundation has joined the CPRE in a new alliance against clutter in the English countryside. Since the modern system of signage was introduced in 1968, the number of signs in the Highway Code has risen by 44%.

At the Institution of Highway Incorporated Engineers' recent conference, Achieving Excellence in Signing, Edmund King, executive director of the RAC Foundation said that clear, concise, relevant, reliable and timely signs can improve safety. A clutter of contradictory signs detracts from the beauty of the countryside and leads to confusion. He called on local authorities to carry out clutter audits, and restore countryside character through the use of fingerposts and other locally distinctive signage whenever possible. He proposed the use of traditional cattle grids as an effective way of slowing down traffic without ruining the visual environment of small villages.

The alliance is also urging the Government to follow the lead of the Scottish Executive in producing clear guidance on how to manage road furniture in rural areas. For further information on the joint campaign see www.cpre.org.uk/news-releases/news-rel-2006/call-to-clear-countryside-clutter.htm ■

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Recent Publications from English Heritage

Illustrated colour booklets of interest to members published during 2006 include:

English Heritage in London, 2006-9 (12pp):

Their 3-year Regional Plan for work in London

Why Your Authority should appoint

an Historic Environment Champion (6pp)

Climate Change and the Historic Environment (8pp)

Wind Energy and the Historic Environment (12pp)

The Park Keeper (18pp): A history of Park maintenance and the value of permanent keepers;

Inspired! Securing a future for Historic Places of Worship (25pp)

Copies of all available from English Heritage Customer Services Dept., 0870 333 1181 or customers@english-heritage.org.uk

London Forum events

In 2007, the London Forum is intending to organise open meetings on some of the following topics: planning in London, town centres and retail, the Mayor's climate change strategy and local government reorganisation.

We will also invite members to submit items for the Walter Bor Media Award, which we hope to run as a bi-annual event.

It would be appreciated if a few member organisations could volunteer someone to assist with the organisation of our events.

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