

newsforum



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

The London Forum of Amenity and Civic Societies
Founded 1988
www.londonforum.org.uk

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Pollution dodge at Heathrow

"A disgraceful act of bad faith"

That is how John McDonnell, Labour MP for Hayes and Harlington, described the government's plan to apply to the European Union for limits on air pollution to be suspended to allow Heathrow to expand.

The reference, buried in a paragraph on page 88 of the DfT report *Adding Capacity at Heathrow Airport* - was revealed in The Times on June 14.

However it has not gone unnoticed. A delegation of leaders of local authorities representing more than two million residents around Heathrow plan to go to Strasbourg next month to ask the Commission to block the Government's plan by refusing to grant a five-year exemption.

Darren Johnson, a Green Party member of the London Assembly, said: "Burying this clause deep in the consultation document is a sign that the Government is embarrassed. It goes against the whole spirit of consultation to effectively try to hide that fact from the public." ■

More about Heathrow on page 4

The Mayoral elections resulted in over a million votes for the new mayor, Boris Johnson

Boris Johnson's appointments

GLA elections start a new era

Boris Johnson sets up his team and publishes his intended actions. London Forum Chairman **Peter Eversden** reports

The new GLA emerges

Labour Assembly members have formed a coalition with the Liberal Democrats and the Green party to fill most of the posts decided by the Assembly. Jennette Arnold, the Labour member for the North East, is chairman of the Assembly. Members have exercised new powers under the GLA Act 2007 to conduct confirmation hearings on the mayor's nominations for some jobs. Those include Brian Coleman as chairman of London Fire & Emergency Planning Authority, Harvey McGrath and Peter Rogers for the LDA and David Ross to the Olympic Games Organising Committee board.

The Mayor's team

The mayor set up a strong team of deputy mayors, directors, special appointments and advisers. Richard Barnes, Assembly member for Ealing and Hillingdon, was appointed as the statutory deputy mayor; Tim Parker has the title of first deputy mayor and will chair Transport for London and run City Hall as Chief Executive.

Ian Clement, former Leader of Bexley Council, is deputy mayor for relationships with Government and the boroughs and is to deal with the Mayor's planning decisions. Deputy mayor Ray Lewis will lead on the mayor's manifesto commitments for children and young people. A new Assembly member, Kit Malthouse, is deputy mayor for Policing and first deputy chair of the Metropolitan Police Authority. Andrew Barry-Purcell has taken over as Head of the London Plan team.

Implications for the London Forum

There is a lot of work for the London Forum to do in building new relationships, seeking clarification on the mayor's new powers, pursuing changes in policies or their application and liaising with the Assembly committees on their activities and scrutinies. Feedback from our members has been sought on key issues and we are analysing the survey returns to prioritise those.

London Forum's planning concerns

London Forum's planning issues were put to the mayor's senior adviser for planning, Sir Simon Milton. They include concerns about the way tall buildings and the maximisation of housing densities were promoted in the past. We are seeking clarification on how the mayor's pledges on protected viewing corridors will be implemented. Also, how the mayor's aim for 50,000 new affordable homes by 2011 can be achieved now that he intends to scrap the 50% affordable housing target. The mayor's new planning powers raise questions about the processes for his direction to refuse planning permission and for taking over cases for his own determination. There must be procedures for hearing and responding to representations from third parties, boroughs and the community. ■

Full details of the Mayor's appointments, pledges and priorities are at

www.london.gov.uk/mayor/team/

www.london.gov.uk/mayor/priorities/

London Forum opposes unprecedented 'call-in' powers for the Mayor

Chairman, **Peter Eversden**, gave this talk to borough planning officers and GLA staff at City Hall on the changes in the Mayor's powers introduced in April 2008

We originally opposed the proposed Mayor's 'call-in' powers in the latest GLA Bill which are unprecedented in the UK and a departure from the normal requirements of propriety. With the new powers, the Mayor must meet the standards of propriety expected for quasi-judicial decision making by a local planning authority and not give his support to a scheme.

The intention is that a discretionary power be used sparingly because, and I quote, 'only a small number of cases' are expected per year, since 'few cases will raise issues that justify taking over the application'.

Concern over what is 'strategic'

Our main concern is that there is too great a scope for defining applications as 'strategic' and there is no provision, other than judicial review, to appeal against the Mayor's decision to take over an application. There is an absence of any clear method of reviewing the Mayor's decisions, although call-in by the Secretary of State is still possible.

The new Order defines 'Applications of Potential Strategic Importance' as only those that are genuinely strategic and may be taken over only if they pass a 'stringent' policy test and thresholds for such applications have been amended, especially:

- raising thresholds in the City of London to exclude office development less than 100,000 sq metres and those less than 150 metres tall – fewer schemes will be notified by City of London which could affect contributions for public transport or affordable housing
- lowering the threshold for notification of housing schemes from 500 to 150 housing units.

London Forum believes that few if any housing schemes with 150 units are likely to be strategic in terms of undermining the implementation the strategy of the London Plan.

Our concerns are:

- few schemes under 300 units are 'strategic' at borough level, let alone sub-regional or London-wide.
- the debate on these schemes is usually about how many units (density) or the height – the difference between whether a site has 250 units or 200 units on a site or the height are not strategic.
- it is the borough that should decide the

The proposed Mayor's 'call-in' powers are unprecedented in the UK and a departure from normal propriety requirements

form that a development should take, not the Mayor.

- we strongly support the Density Matrix in the London Plan – it sets an 'appropriate density range' for each site and is the basis for setting the capacity of sites that makes up the Borough Housing Targets.
- in practice, for two years two-thirds of permissions for schemes over 10 units exceeded, often greatly, the upper end of the 'appropriate density range' for site.
- these excessive densities, that fail to conform to policy, are unacceptable as they are not sustainable, often lack infrastructure facilities and may provide a poor quality of life for those crowded into them.

How is 'strategic' to be assessed?

We do not understand when a housing scheme between 150 and 499 units would be 'strategic' if:

- the principle of housing was agreed; and
- a density in the appropriate density range was acceptable, but not one significantly above it; and
- the proportions of affordable housing were acceptable

London Forum is concerned about intervention in cases which are not 'strategic' - and the resulting conflict with local communities.

Issues of governance

In considering Governance Issues, we are concerned that the Mayor's decision to intervene should be subject to scrutiny; reliance on judicial review is too high a hurdle.

- a. we expect the Mayor to hear representations before making decisions on cases where he intervenes – this should include civic and amenity societies, not just the applicant and the Borough.
- b. the Mayor will need to be careful about meetings with developers and statements about developments.

Careful consideration will need to be given to the application of the policy test by the Mayor for taking control of development decisions based on a borough's past performance. We would expect any concern by the Mayor about the performance of a borough was published and dealt with in advance of any consideration of a specific planning application, to avoid unnecessary call-in.

The London Forum wants to see the way in which the Mayor applies his new planning powers to be open and fully democratic and to be conducted on an accurate and complete basis of assessment against the London Plan and associated strategies. Finally, the Government's changes in planning have to be taken into account and we will all need some clear interpretation when the Planning Bill has been processed.

London Forum Open Meeting on the Mayor's New Planning Powers

Also in April, Giles Dolphin, GLA Head of the Planning Decisions Unit addressed a London Forum Open Meeting. He explained how the new planning system will work and went through details of changes to the referral criteria.

He attempted to assuage the fears expressed about the new system in a lively questions and answer session. It would mean only a relatively small number of cases would be called in although it was not clear how Policy tests would turn out. The procedure will be kept under review, and is likely to change.

He nevertheless gave a startling warning that people should be vigilant as there was a threat of the loss of the planning system itself, as a result of the Planning Bill.

The following month Boris Johnson was elected as Mayor and we wait to see how his administration will deal with these matters. London Forum is pursuing the points above and seeking an acceptable GLA call-in process. ■

Giles Dolphin's power point presentation is available and can be emailed to members on request.

Stephen Thornton's full report of the meeting can be seen on the London Forum website:

www.londonforum.org

News from the new Mayor, Boris Johnson

Issues of concern to Londoners

One of Mayor Boris Johnson's election pledges was to introduce a Cabinet system at City Hall, and he has made cutting crime his top priority

London Views

He has pledged to restore protected views that were altered by Ken Livingstone.

The Olympic budget

He is closely examining the assumptions of the London 2012 organisers, warning that their plans are too vague. He has cut his official Beijing Olympics budget by more than £1 million after discovering a Ken Livingstone plan to fly 18 Gordon Ramsay chefs to China and to have an expensive GLA entourage. It is part of a cost reduction pledge that could result in the original £4.6 million Olympics bill for the GLA cut by more than a quarter.

A reprieve for police stations?

Boris Johnson is to examine plans by Scotland Yard to close up to 60 London police stations. The deputy in charge of policing, Kit Malthouse, is to conduct the study.

Tightening up on private hire drivers

40,000 private hire drivers can only carry pre-booked passengers, but some are breaking the rules by touting on the streets. Unlicensed drivers, who are also uninsured, also routinely tout. The Mayor is introducing an immediate 12 month ban for those caught touting.

Water fountains

Water fountains could be placed in parks and public spaces across London under plans being developed by Boris Johnson who wants to reduce the buying of plastic bottles of water.

London Post Office Closures

In the past four years, London has lost over 300 post offices, with numbers cut from 1,175 to 849. It was therefore with incredulity that Londoners learned of proposals to cut a further 169 branches by June 2008, including some which, like Abbeville Road in Clapham, is profitable, and those such as Highgate, which serves, by the post office's own figures, a population of 49,000, and where some local business owners will now have to close down for over an hour a day to visit the nearest post

The new Mayor has committed to amend the London Plan to recognise the need for a Post Office within walking distance for residents and to do everything in his power to protect them

office, nearly a mile away. The "Consultation" period was a derisory 6-week charade during which it became clear that the decision had already been taken: despite vigorous campaigns by angry communities, only seven were reprieved. And the Government wonders why the public has just given them a massive thumbs-down for, among other reasons, not listening to their concerns?

The previous Mayor undertook to seek a Judicial Review to overturn this unpopular and flawed decision. Boris Johnson continued the legal process but the High Court refused the review. He has committed to amend the London Plan to recognise the need for a Post Office within walking distance for residents and to do everything in his power to protect them.

Solutions for young people

At the State of London Debate on June 25th the Mayor proposed a 'tough love' approach to dealing with unruly teenagers. He called for parents to be held to account, discipline and boundaries to be applied and more support and activities for young people made available.

Drinking ban on public transport

The Transport Commissioner, Peter Hendy, and the Mayor imposed a ban on carrying open containers of alcohol on the transport network from 1st June 2008. ■

London Forum Survey

will help us to refine the issues to raise with the Mayor and Assembly.

There is still time to return your completed form. See back page.

Waste Reduction Pilots

Select Committee announcement on refuse collection

There has been much controversy recently over Government plans for refuse collection charging schemes. The Communities and Local Government Select Committee has criticised as a "messy compromise" plans for five Waste Reduction Pilots projects to test refuse collection charging schemes.

It finds that the Government appears to lack the courage of its previous convictions that local authorities are best placed to decide what will work in their own areas and that recycling incentive schemes can contribute towards a genuine measurable reduction in the volume of waste being sent to landfill.

Pilot schemes inadequate

MPs conclude that the five pilot schemes will not provide the evidence needed to judge whether all authorities should be able to offer such schemes and the timescale for their introduction, after April 2009, will have no discernible effect on local authorities' ability to meet European Union landfill targets before penalties are due.

The Committee remains to be convinced that proposed incentive, or charging schemes would work well in England and wants the Government to reconsider devolving the power to introduce charging schemes to local authorities themselves, rather than taking forward proposals for pilot schemes in the Climate Change Bill. The Chair of the Committee, Dr Phyllis Starkey, accused the Government of mounting "a wholehearted retreat from even the limited policy outlined last May."

New Waste and Recycling Board

In the capital Mayor Boris Johnson will chair London's new Waste and Recycling Board, members of which will be appointed both by London's Boroughs and by the Mayor." So, London Forum would expect decisions to be taken which reflect Londoners' expectations and needs. ■

Increasing Capacity At Heathrow?

Opposition to the Government's plans is coming from some unexpected directions. London Forum Chairman **Peter Eversden** summarises London Forum's response to the Department for Transport's consultation. See also comments from an article in the Sunday Times, by Bob Ayling former chief executive of British Airways

London Forum opposes the building of a 2,200m third runway at Heathrow; it is not necessary and there is no case for Government to have increased the length of the runway since the Aviation White paper. The Government consultation paper admits that more easterly operations would increase the number of people affected by 57dBA Leq noise levels, surely a good enough reason to make no change to current westerly preference. The paper gave no opportunity to oppose the expansion of Heathrow. The questions dealt mainly with how it could be achieved. Our feedback to the DfT covering each of the ten question topics, is summarised here.

Incompatibility with Government policies

It would result in pollution levels that lock Britain into extra carbon emissions just at the time it needs to reduce them at the rate of 8% annually to achieve commitments undertaken. It would also be incompatible with the government's policies for the housing shortage as it would mean the loss of homes, villages and listed buildings between the A312 and the M25.

A third runway is not achievable within the noise contour limit of 127 sq km and the Government's assessment of harmful noise levels is too high. It has failed to accept recommendations of its own commissioned NASE noise study on the levels of noise that are significantly annoying. It has not, apparently, accepted the World Health Organisation's levels of the noise limits that should be set for impact on people and for conditions suitable for children to be educated.

'Benefits' unachievable.

The Government assumes benefits from lower road vehicle emissions and cleaner aircraft engines which we conclude to be unachievable. In fact noise and pollution would affect a greatly increased number of people; would exceed required limits; and would be damaging to children's education, adverse for business employee productivity and harmful to the quality of life of existing residents. The increased number of flights from 480,000 to 800,000 annually would more than offset any benefits of technology improvements and would result in extra emissions. There would be far more pollution from the extra number of vehicles predicted by Government for the delivery of goods, passengers and workers to Heathrow than

"The expansion plans are a "costly mistake" and "against Britain's economic interests"

Bob Ayling former chief executive of British Airways

could be offset by cleaner car and lorry engines. Airlines may not be able to afford to switch their fleets to new aircraft.

Damage to quality of life

We object to the potential damage to people's quality of life at home, in open spaces, at work and in buildings that may not all be soundproofed by the time of implementation of the Heathrow expansion proposals, or even afterwards.

There is a likelihood of creating conditions of noise that could drive away from London and southeast England the businesses and skilled professional people on which the UK's prosperity, reputation and growth depend.

Runway alternation must stay

London Forum does not agree that mixed mode working could be introduced within the noise limits set out in the White Paper.

The twin approach to two runways, initially at two different levels of entry into the approach path, with no relief by alternation for those affected would add to the cumulative noise experienced by those near to the flight paths and increase the potential stress they would feel. It would remove the opportunity for low noise enjoyment of parks, gardens and open spaces that is possible with the present alternation runway usage.

Full mixed mode working would add more road traffic and congestion with more air pollution, and would not be compatible with compliance with air quality limits. Emissions and pollution are near to limits now and there is no 'headroom' for such an increase in the number of flights, or the increase in vehicle movements in the vicinity of the airport that more flights would attract.

Alternation of preference at night is required only because there are flights arriving after 04:30 from the Far East and North America. We oppose all arrivals before 06:00 and believe that the UK Government

should ban them rather than considering what to do about the amount of alternation at night, used to spread the unacceptable noise misery amongst those trying to sleep and be fit for work the next day.

A misguided policy

Finally, we think that the Government should be managing and constraining air travel, not operating a 'predict and provide' policy.

78% of businesses in London oppose the third runway, according to the London Chamber of Commerce. The GLA, Mayor and Assembly Members have opposed increased capacity at Heathrow and have decided that London's growth in the Spatial Development Strategy of the London Plan will not need expansion at Heathrow. Their policies and reasons should be accepted by Government.

Government should commit to the new HS2 rail line and other transport improvements and promote rail travel within the UK and to Europe to reduce many hundreds of flights a week at Heathrow and thereby provide extra capacity.

Heathrow should be a high quality airport for business and long distance travel and does not need to be a hub airport attracting over 20 million passengers a year who arrive only to change aircraft. ■

Ayling attacks expansion plans

The concentration on hub-and-spoke element of the the proposals was vigorously attacked by Bob Ayling, former chief executive of British Airways in an article for The Sunday Times. He warns that BAA's hub-and-spoke policy will lead to yet more increase of transfer passengers, and is a flawed business model which is "against Britain's economic interests".

So far from being, as the Government claims, essential for the country's economy, he calls it a "costly mistake" and points out that transfer passengers spend no money in Britain. Government policy is creating perverse incentives which encourage increased congestion and leave little room for operational error. How the airport will cope with 135m passengers a year and 702,000 flights after 2030 is not explained.

He damns it as "a classic exercise in misguided central planning". ■

The Garden House - a cautionary tale

Final victory for the Heath & Hampstead Society in their epic battle to get planning law adhered to, following a return to court after the developers were granted leave to appeal.

Martin Humphery, Vice President of the Society, reports

The Garden House is an undistinguished but unobtrusive four bedroom 1950's house in the Vale of Health, a small, historic enclave in the middle of Hampstead Heath. It overlooks the Vale of Health pond on one of its most beautiful verges. Over the years there have been several attempts at development here, which have successfully been resisted.

In January 2006 a planning application was made to Camden to demolish the house and replace it with one four times larger. As London Forum members may know, there is a legal presumption, set out in the former Planning Policy Guidance 2 (PPG 2), against development on MOL, which enjoys the same protection as Green Belt land. Only "appropriate" development is allowed. Amongst the categories classed as "appropriate", are replacements of existing buildings provided they are not "materially larger" than those they replace.

The Camden officer's report recommended the granting of permission, concentrating on the merits of the new building and its supposed positive contribution to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area. Despite the Society, and other local amenity groups, pointing out that it contravened the provisions of PPG2 and Camden's own planning policies, and a joint deputation to the Planning Committee, planning permission was granted.

An important test of principle

Readers will be aware that one of the great failings of our planning law is that there is no provision for appeal against a grant of planning consent. The only available route is by way of a costly application to the High Court for Judicial Review and our barrister warned us of the well-known reluctance of the courts to interfere with decisions of elected councils. This is in stark contrast to a developer's right to appeal a refusal to the government's Planning Inspectorate. It is quite daunting for people not used to litigation to realise that their vital interests and a lot of money will ride on the decision of a single judge and that two opposing QC's will be trying their utmost to persuade him to decide against you.

We felt that this was such an important test of principle that we must pursue it but, as we discovered, going for a judicial review

We are left disturbed by the hugely difficult and costly task faced by representative groups when attempting to question decisions by Planning Authorities

is not a straightforward process. We had to go through four rounds of high court hearings over a period of two years, each fraught with anxiety and financial risk. In order to safeguard Society funds, pleas had to be made to members on two occasions for pledges to support the potential costs. We were hugely encouraged and gratified to receive about £ 50,000 of pledges from over 300 individuals in amounts varying from £10 to £1,000 or more, and from members not just in London, but further afield. We also had generous support on fees for a second opinion from a leading planning silk.

Our first application to the High Court for permission to bring the case to trial was refused, on the grounds that we had no arguable case! We appealed this decision in open court, opposed by Camden and by the "Interested Parties" (the developers) who had both briefed QC's. This time we were rewarded by a strong opinion in our favour and permission to go ahead.

The actual judicial review was a two day hearing before Mr Justice Sullivan, who delivered a very strong judgment in our favour saying inter alia that there had been a serious misdirection of the Camden Planning Committee leading it to arrive at an unlawful decision. He refused an application by the developers for leave to appeal, saying that their case was "hopeless". Nevertheless the developers were, after all, granted leave to appeal and yet again we had to defend our judgment in the High Court. Appeal judges, Lords Justices Waller, Sedley and Carnwath, took only half a day to dismiss the appeal and uphold the order quashing Camden's planning permission.

Interpretation of the law on 'materiality'

The case hinged on the interpretation of "materiality": whether the replacement house, being "materially" larger than the

one it replaced, was a "threshold question", which a planner had to ask and answer before he could take into account other considerations as to design and the effect on the MOL or its surroundings, and the like. Only if this question could be satisfactorily answered could the proposed development be "appropriate" and therefore allowable on MOL. The question of a "material" increase in size calls solely for a mathematical calculation and cannot involve other subjective considerations of suitability.

The other side argued that it was open to a Planning Authority to interpret the word "materially" in a much wider sense as meaning materially larger in planning terms, and that this allowed a planner to consider such questions as the effect on the openness of MOL, the perceived impact or prominence of the building when seen from its surroundings and its effect on the character of the surrounding Conservation Area. In both courts, the judges held that such matters were not relevant to the "threshold" question of relative size governing "appropriateness" and that no reasonable person could hold that the proposed very large increase in size was not "material". Since "inappropriate" development is by definition harmful to the MOL, it cannot be allowed, despite any merits it may display.

We are delighted at the outcome of what is, in our view, a landmark decision. Had it been decided against, it would have resulted in opening the way for similar gross enlargements on MOL and, nationally on Green Belt.

But we are left disturbed by the hugely difficult and costly task faced by residents and their representative groups when attempting to question decisions by Planning Authorities, which vitally affect their interests. Without the generous support of our members, we could never have embarked on a process, which has resulted in an important definition of the law. One is left wondering whether conservation societies in less prosperous neighbourhoods could ever get justice for their communities. ■

The Queen on the Application of the Heath & Hampstead Society v London Borough of Camden and Messrs Vlachos

Hands Off The Green Belt

The CPRE Surrey message - "Hands off the Green Belt"- needs to be heard loud and clear. The future quality of life of literally millions of people depends on our resolute defence of this policy. **Tim Harrold**, Chairman CPRE Surrey, reports

The Government economic strategy, dictated by the Treasury, wants three million new houses to be built across Britain in the next 20 years, largely regardless of the environmental consequences. To achieve this well proven policies and planning processes based on local democracy are being put at risk by legislative change and local government "reform". Campaign for Rural England (CPRE) is particularly concerned by the threat to the Metropolitan Green Belt that has protected open space and the countryside around London so well for over 50 years. This most successful land use policy was established for the benefit of London inhabitants just as much as for residents of the Home Counties.

Future quality of life depends on resolute defence of this policy

The general public has a high regard for the Metropolitan Green Belt and its role in preventing ribbon development and urban sprawl. There is a good understanding that such policies are necessary in the heavily populated country areas close to London. It is ironic that the Government is poised to undermine the Metropolitan Green Belt heritage whilst claiming that it still supports National Planning Policy 2 with its emphasis on open space, countryside protection and urban renaissance. Formal consultations on Regional Plans and Spatial Strategies have become so technical and remote that the general public and many amenity and civic societies often feel excluded.

The CPRE role

CPRE played a prominent participatory role throughout the 42 day Examination in Public of the draft South East Regional Plan which was produced under great time pressure against a constant background of new policy announcements from the Government. Having obtained a "seal of approval" from the Panel Report on 11 of the 12 tests of soundness, it was anticipated that the Government would respond without delay. But to the contrary, there has been no momentum forward and a great deal of credibility in the process lost as a result. It is as if we have all been walking in the wilderness for 40 days but there is still no sight of the promised land.

It is not an exaggeration to say that we are facing a period of planning chaos

The key issue

For us in Surrey, the key issue in the Panel report is the proposal for a 20% higher rate of house building which will require the sacrifice of important parts of the Metropolitan Green Belt. The ominously named "London Fringe" Sub-region in Surrey, which covers two thirds of the county and much of our best and most beautiful countryside, is to be transformed by the Panel recommendations from an area of growth constraint into a priority location for development. Whereas in the draft South East Plan, Guildford, Redhill and Woking were described as "transport hubs", now they are to become major centres of housing increase and further economic expansion. Moreover, this proposal is made without any commitment to meet the additional infrastructure support needed. The Government is expected to call for an even higher rate of housing growth in its delayed consultation document now scheduled for publication just before the Parliamentary recess in July.

A Democratic deficit

It is not an exaggeration to say that we are facing a period of planning chaos. None of the Regional Spatial Strategies for England have yet been signed off by the Government, a situation which contrasts strangely with its repeated calls for more rapid decisions on planning. Instead, they have issued a hastily prepared Sub-National Review of Economic Development and Regeneration (SNR) announcing that Regional Assemblies will not continue in their current form beyond 2010, and that they will be replaced by the Regional Development Authorities (RDAs) formerly only concerned with economic priorities and not spatial strategy issues. These Government-appointed quangos include no elected councillors from local authorities and so we are faced with a "democratic deficit" and accountability problem which cannot be adequately met by

the appointment of Regional Ministers, undefined new scrutiny arrangements for RDAs, or proposals for Parliamentary select committees for the Regions.

Volunteers needed

So what can be done to safeguard our Metropolitan Green Belt? Fortunately, the delay in Government response and the Spatial Strategy turmoil around the South East Plan and the preparation of Local Development Frameworks, has given more time for public protest to strengthen at grass roots level. During the spring and summer CPRE Surrey's recently updated website will feature details of the action supporters may wish to consider taking around the forthcoming consultation. It is hoped also to make available a range of flyers, posters and car stickers to help increase the visibility of this "Hands off the Green Belt" campaign.

If you would like to volunteer to help, please make contact with CPRE Surrey at the address given below. Letter writing to your MP and to locally elected Councillors remains an effective means of indicating your support for the Green Belt. Writing to the Secretary of State for Communities & Local Government expressing your concern at Government policy in this context is essential. CPRE Surrey believes that this is an issue on which the public feels strongly and on which compromise is not the answer. After all it is everyone's quality of life that is at stake in London and the Home Counties! ■

Useful Addresses

CPRE Surrey, The Institute, 67 High Street, Leatherhead, Surrey KT22 8AH
Tel: 01372 362720

E-mail: cpre.surrey@btconnect.com
www.cpresurrey.org.uk

The Rt Hon Hazel Blears MP, Secretary of State for Communities & Local Government, Eland House, Bressenden Place, London SW1E 5DU
E-mail: hazel.blears@communities.gsi.gov.uk

Colin Byrne, Regional Director, Governmental Office for the South east, Bridge House, 1 Walnut Tree Close, Guildford GU1 4GA
E-mail: colin.byrne@gose.gsi.gov.uk

Green Belt Policy and Statistics

A report on statistics from the Department for Communities and Local Government, *The statistics for England in 2007* shows that total Designated Green Belt land amounted to 1,635,670 hectares, about 13 per cent of the land area.

The London Green Belt

At 554,240 ha. the London Green Belt is by far the largest, straddling London, the East of England and South East regional boundaries. By comparison the next largest are the West Midlands at 268,770 ha. and Yorkshire and Humber, at 264,450 ha.;

In 2006 there was a real increase in Bromley (20 ha.) and a real decrease in Brentwood (60 ha.)

The report states the aims as being to:

- check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;
- prevent neighbouring towns from merging into one another;
- assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
- preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and
- assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

Full information is obtainable from Housing Markets and Analysis Division, Communities and Local Government, 2/A5, Eland House, Bressenden Place, London SW1E 5DU. Tel. 0207 944 5507 ■

What future for Smithfield?

Can the historic buildings be retained?

English Heritage's barrister Robert McCracken QC, delivered some damning comments at the Inquiry into redevelopment proposals for the Smithfield Market Building by Thornfield and the Corporation of London:

"These applications are an attempt to drive a bulldozer, preceded by a ball and chain, through national and local heritage policies."

"This decision will be a test of the Government's commitment to its heritage policies and a development plan led system of planning and of its commitment to participatory decision making. It raises the question of whether the City is in effect... a plan free office zone. It... will be closely watched by landowners and developers.

"If a... landowner.. can, with impunity, flout national and local policies, then local authorities throughout the kingdom, most of whom are subject to far greater financial pressure, will seek to do the same... Landowners will neglect historic buildings in the hope of enjoying similar benefits."

Much of the evidence focussed on the financial viability of the proposed redevelopment, and English Heritage's demands that the General Market Building be retained and refurbished for new uses. It emerged that the developer, Thornfield, bought the basement car park beneath the building for £12 million in 2007; this additional cost makes the

proposals unviable, but makes retention and repair of the existing building more financially attractive. The alternative, according to English Heritage, would be to leave a vacant site in the heart of the area for the foreseeable future. ■

For more details, see

W www.englishheritage.org.uk/smithfield

Smithfield Market, City of London. Interior view of Grand Avenue with red K2 and K6 type telephone kiosks.



Changes to Empty Property Reliefs

Changes to empty property reliefs announced by Local Government Minister John Healey came into force on 1 April.

Empty commercial property

The 100% relief from taxation for empty commercial property for the first three months remains but thereafter will be liable for the full business rate (formerly 50%) Empty warehouses and factories formerly received a permanent exemption from rates. This will now be only six months.

Local authority powers

Local authorities' existing powers to tackle avoidance already include:

- Making owners take action to clean up any derelict or semi-complete building if they are 'adversely affecting the amenity of the local area'. Councils are encouraged to use this power proactively.
- Order the completion of a development if it is causing an adverse affect on its surrounding and the planning permission period has expired. (Section 94, 1990 Act)

Remaining exemptions

Charities, community amateur sports clubs and companies in administration will be granted a complete exemption from rates

on their empty properties.

The proportion of commercial properties lying empty in 2004-05 in London (11%) is higher than the national average (9 per cent), and Hackney has the highest proportion empty in the country (28%). The changes remove perverse incentives to keep buildings empty, and encourage owners to bring them back into use. The minister promised further measures if evidence suggests deliberate dereliction of properties is taking place. ■

Spotlight on Ealing Civic Society

Civic Society, 40, sees old challenges coming round a second time
by **Tony Aldous**

There seems to be a certain circularity in the history of local amenity societies. The founders of Ealing Civic Society, which last year celebrated its 40th birthday, must have a strong sense of déjà vu. In 1967, they were faced with a new London-wide authority, the GLC, whose proposals for a series of “metropolitan centres” encouraged developers to come forward with proposals for a huge and out-of-character new buildings.

Threat of a 41 storey tower

Forty years later – once more with a new and powerful pan-London planning authority – Ealing Civic Society has been in the van of opposition to ambitious but over-dense and overbearing redevelopment proposals – notably proposals by an Irish developer, Glenkerrin, for redevelopment of the Arcadia shopping centre just opposite Ealing Broadway station and overshadowing Ealing’s central public open space, Haven Green. This developer’s initial proposal included six tall blocks including one of 26 storeys. In the face of criticism from the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) and English Heritage, Glenkerrin engaged Foster & Partners to design a new tower – this time of 41 storeys and curiously named “the Leaf”.

The society, wisely, joined a coalition of more than 30 local organisations, including residents’ associations and other amenity societies, which was formed to fight the proposals under the banner “Save Ealing Centre”. At a packed public meeting last year, the developer and its architects were left in no doubt what the people of Ealing thought of their plans.

But none of the critics was much impressed. The tower is far too tall, the whole development too dense, over-bearing and out of character with adjoining conservation areas; its 700 flats have little amenity space; and – as the Mayor of London’s planners have pointed out – it fails to connect with development on an adjoining site or provide for a much-needed transport interchange. And while there is general agreement that Ealing needs a shopping centre with more muscle if it is not to be drained of trade by the new White City development, there are complicating factors. Development depends on an expensive rafting over of the main line

railway; the council, despite an expensive study by consultants, still lacks an effective master plan for the centre of Ealing or an effective policy on high buildings; and the need remains to reconcile redevelopment with the statutory requirement to protect and enhance adjoining conservation areas. As the society’s chairman Robert Gurd points out, “One person’s enhancement is another person’s desecration.” Glenkerrin have now gone back to the drawing board and it is widely expected that revised plans will be submitted later this year.

An exemplary consultation by contrast

One senses, however, an underlying confidence among Ealing’s conservationists. In the 1960s and early ‘70s they fought successfully to transform the proposed Ealing Broadway Centre from a brutalist concrete-faced monstrosity out of character with its surroundings into the present brick-clad building, whose scale is not overbearing and which knits into the established street scene.

Some developers have learnt from experience. Ealing’s other big redevelopment scheme, Dickens Yard, adjoining the Arcadia site, has been the subject of exemplary and timely consultation by developer St George and has so far avoided the huge public outcry that Glenkerrin provoked. But the civic society still considers it too dense and in parts too tall, and believes that where, as here, the council is the landowner, there is a case for having someone else decide the planning application.

The great strength of Ealing Civic Society

One of the great strengths of Ealing Civic Society, as with other amenity societies throughout Britain, is that they often know more than the experts. Planning officers, highway engineers and other local government officers come and go, following peripatetic career paths; so too do politicians. Civic society stalwarts know what happened earlier, what claims and promises were made, what key pieces of information stopped ruinous changes and can do so again. Something a council officer may present as the only rational, affordable answer turns out to be nothing of the kind. Take that avenue of lime trees – “messy, impossibly expensive to manage; should be replaced by smaller trees”. Not so, said the

society. Large trees were a valued part of the street scene, ecologically more valuable, and simply needed a cleverer management regime. Councillors agreed.

More recently a row blew up over Ealing’s distinctive street lamps – stately brown-and-cream former gas lamps converted piecemeal to electricity but not well maintained over the years (Ealing once won the accolade of “worst lit London borough”). The council, not able to afford to upgrade them from its own current resources, followed the presently fashionable path of doing it on the “never-never” – in other words, a PFI contract. But some Ealing people, supported by the society, felt strongly that these lamps were part of their heritage. So strong was the pressure that the council’s leader “found” an extra half million pounds. By a mixture of refurbishment and replica replacement, Ealing’s heritage lampposts will now largely survive.

A borough-wide remit

In principle the society looks after the whole of Ealing, but the borough is a large one, generating some 3,000 planning applications a year. Where an active and effective local society exists, as in Bedford Park, the ECS is more than happy to let it get on with the job. Its committee members and activists come mainly from the leafy C19 and early C20 suburbs of the original Middlesex borough of Ealing, “retired civil servant” being probably the commonest description – though the present committee includes, most usefully, one retired local authority planning officer.

Conscious, no doubt, of the danger of an amenity society being dubbed “those people who always say No”, Ealing Civic Society has for almost two decades run an annual design award scheme. Lately this has covered landscape and urban design as well as buildings; but, less happily, for the last few years judges have felt able to give only commendations which do not attract the society’s official plaque.

The sense of déjà vu comes not only with redevelopment proposals but licensing issues. When in the late 1980s pubs and restaurants were brought into the same A3 use class, Ealing suffered an explosion of the so-called “night-time economy”, with family friendly restaurants transformed into pubs and wine bars; drunkenness and anti-social behaviour



Robert Gurd

Ealing Civic Society

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took over the town centre and spilled into surrounding residential areas. Ealing was dubbed “the Las Vegas of West London”.

The society campaigned successfully for the council to take a firm line under the planning and licensing laws and the situation was brought more under control. More recently a new Licensing Act with its regime of flexible drinking hours has been causing concern. The society has successfully argued for the establishment of a “saturation zone” to limit further proliferation, but the jury is still out on how effective this will be in curbing the problem.

Other activities

While the society concentrates primarily on planning and development issues, it does run some other activities: conducted walks to show people parts of their own patch they have not previously discovered; occasional social events; and an annual lecture. This year’s speaker, the eminent town planner and geographer Sir Peter Hall, is an Ealing resident and the society’s president. His students from the Bartlett school of planning have recently been cutting their teeth on the area’s planning problems.

The future

What of the future? Where is Ealing Civic Society headed? Its chairman, Bob Gurd, says: “Our mission remains the same: to preserve the best of our urban environment while ensuring that new developments improve the quality of our borough”. He adds “I would hope that I could pass the society on in fine fettle to my successors, confident that it would continue to protect and improve Ealing for the next 40 years as well as it has done in the 40 years since its formation”. ■

One of the great strengths of Ealing Civic Society, as with other amenity societies throughout Britain, is that they often know more than the experts.

*The proposed Leaf Tower
“One person’s enhancement is another person’s desecration”.
Chairman **Robert Gurd***



A restored lamppost

Age: 40; born 1967

Circumstances of birth: Threat of an unsympathetic and damaging redevelopment of the town centre.

Biggest successes: (1) Fighting off the original redevelopment proposal and seeing them replaced by the much more acceptable shopping centre which exists today. (2) Persuading the council to take effective action on the increase of drinking places and drunkenness in the town centre.

Biggest disappointments/ frustrations: (1) That (1) and (2) above are again to some extent in question, with new and potentially damaging redevelopment schemes to be battled over, and the ground gained on alcohol licensing control having to be fought over again. (2) Failure to attract new blood into the society and on to its committees, especially from among younger people and the ethnic groups in which the borough is so rich

Present preoccupations: (1) Two big redevelopment proposals at the heart of Ealing: the Glenkerrin scheme for a site opposite Ealing Broadway station (opposed by CABA, English Heritage and the Mayor of London as well as by the society; and a large but much better scheme by developer St George for the Dickens Yard site at the back of the town hall. (2) Lack of an effective master plan for central area redevelopment. (3) Concern that the huge shopping and leisure development at White City will suck life out of Ealing’s shopping centre. (4) Refurbishment rather than replacement of the distinctive brown-and-cream street lamps which are an important part of Ealing’s distinctive character.

Working details: Membership: about 250 households plus corporate members; annual subscription £8 (£7 by standing order). Committee structure: executive committee meets six times a year; chairman retired civil servant Robert Gurd. Sub-committees: Communications (including PR); Environment (including planning); Licensing. Publications: newsletter; leaflet for householders on building alterations; picture postcard of Ealing sights. Website: good, but soon to be even better. Activities: annual design award (in its 18th year); lectures, social evenings and occasional walks.

Special characteristics: Ealing is a borough rich in variety and buildings and places, ranging from Southall with its large Asian and Somali communities to the ring of green and affluent suburbs round Ealing town centre, and areas like Acton with a distinctly “inner city” character.

Last word: “Our mission remains the same: to preserve the best of our urban environment while ensuring that new developments improve the quality of our borough”— Robert Gurd, chairman. ■

Flooding in London

Long-term planning can minimise the risk to the Capital, according to the Environment Agency's **Rachael Hill**. **Stephen Thornton** reports on an eloquent presentation at an Open Meeting held at The Gallery earlier this year

A large audience braved heavy rain to attend this well-received talk. Ms Hill gave a detailed analysis of the work the Environment Agency is undertaking to ensure that the risk of tidal flooding in London is managed to the end of the century. She said she was very keen to engage with the community and welcomed comments on her talk and the Agency's plans. A consultation had been held which ended in March.

The Agency is also anxious to dispel the misinformation which exists about the risk to the Capital – for example, the likelihood of tidal flooding in London and the Thames estuary is very low. In the main estuary it is very unlikely that the tidal defences would be over-topped or breached. They are designed to protect against a 1:1000 flood level predicted by 2030.

The TE 2100 project

The main part of Ms Hill's talk was devoted to describing the TE 2100 project on 'Planning for Future Flood Risk Management'. It is aimed at producing a comprehensive plan for submission to the Government by 2010, giving information on what should be done, where, when and at what cost. The project would increase understanding of the Estuary and how changes would affect flood risk. The plan would take into account increasing flood risk due to:

- Climate change
- Rising sea levels
- Natural ageing of flood defence infrastructure
- Changes in land levels
- New developments in the tidal flood plain

The Estuary obviously varies greatly along its length and solutions must be adapted to local requirements. The flood plain falls naturally into geographical areas by topography and so it is possible to plan in these areas individually.

Options for managing future sea level rise

To produce a plan that is adaptable to the uncertainties relating to future sea level rise and climate change, the project is planning for a range of climate change scenarios by the end of the century.

The different predictions include:

Defra: Climate change guidance, November 2006 – a sea level rise of +0.94m

UK Climate Impacts Programme (UKCIP) Medium High – a sea level rise of +1.51m

- TE 2100 High (plus) – a sea level rise of +2.6m
- TE 2100 High (plus plus) – sea level rise of +4.2m, which is an extreme scenario including maximum predictions from accelerated ice melt and increases in storm surge heights.

The plan was testing five options for managing risk against these scenarios:

- Traditional engineering
- Flood plain storage
- New barrier with or without existing Barrier
- New Barrage
- Flood plain management

A new barrage would be the only way of coping with a sea level rise of more than 4m. Flood plain water storage was an attractive option for reducing risk, with the Thames Barrier and Tilbury the most suitable places for implementation.

Flood defences in London were the best in the country, being designed to protect against a 1 in 1000 risk, compared to 1 in 200 elsewhere

The findings of the project so far include:

- An adaptable plan can manage rising sea levels occurring this century
- The Thames Barrier will continue to protect London until the end of the century, provided that the rise in sea level can be restricted to +0.94m.
- Existing flood defences have a greater safety margin than previously thought
- No major development is expected before 2030
- Walls and embankments need improvement by 2050
- High quality spatial and emergency planning is essential
- New inter-tidal habitats must be created to replace those lost by rising sea levels
- Creating space for water storage in the flood plain would reduce the need to raise the height of defences, defer the need for a new barrier, and create open spaces that could have a variety of uses, including recreation and agriculture.

Questions and answers

There was a lively question-and-answer session. Some members of the audience were equally concerned by local flooding caused by heavy rain, and the lack of co-ordination between agencies. Ms Hill commented that the Government had recognised that increased co-ordination was essential, following the report into the July floods in England. The report had also emphasised the need for the infrastructure such as water and electricity to be more resilient. Ms Hill made clear that flood defences in London were the best in the country, being designed to protect against a 1 in 1000 risk, compared to 1 in 200 elsewhere. The insurance industry had undertaken to provide cover to properties at a risk of up to 1 in 75. ■



The Thames Barrier

The Cultural Olympiad

A round up of news and concerns about the preparations for the 2012 Olympic Games

by **Michael Hammerson**

The London Organising Committee for the Olympic Games (LOCOG) is co-ordinating projects under the Olympic-approved 'Inspire' mark for cultural initiatives. Launched in March, the projects must meet the criteria of welcoming the world; inspiring people; and leaving a lasting legacy, with an emphasis on youth involvement. Sarah Barnwell is Creative Programmer. There is no deadline for submissions; application can be made right up to 2012 and decisions should take 7 weeks. Once approved, a project will be officially a part of the Cultural Olympiad and the participants sent details of the rules.

Applicants must secure their funding before making an application. LOCOG is putting a funding guide together. Commercial sponsorship will be possible, but must be handled carefully to avoid problems with the official sponsors. The LDA have a £1.4 million Cultural Opportunity Fund for small organisations who can't go to big funders; this is administered by the Arts Council, who are developing the criteria and will be open for applications by Summer.

English Heritage initiatives "Access All Areas"

LOCOG has already been flooded with dance, music and theatrical projects but heritage projects have so far been minimal, the only London applicant being the Lea Valley Heritage Museum. The "Access All Areas" initiative has been set up to address this concern. English Heritage are funding Heritage Link to employ a project co-ordinator, who will work with EH, The Civic Trust, etc. to develop it. This is intended to build on Heritage Open Days / Open House events UK-wide. It must involve all community groups, welcome the world, involve young people, and leave a post-2012 legacy.

London Action plan "High Street 2012"

This is an EH initiative to achieve improvements to Whitechapel Road, Mile End Road and Stratford, the main road route from London to the Olympic Park with the aim of promoting the historic environment in the build-up to the Olympics. EH have done a preliminary study of the many Listed Buildings in the area in various states of decay, and the many similar unlisted buildings which ought to be Listed. A full study will look at the public realm in its widest

Useful websites

www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200708/cmhansrd/cm080115/debtext/80115-0006.htm#080115102000001

www.conservatives.com/tile.do?def=news.story.page&obj_id=142217

sense and carry out a full assessment of the local Historic Environment.

Olympic "Live Sites" screens

English Heritage and CABE are concerned about the siting, design and proliferation of the proposed large permanent screens in public places, where people can see the Games events, and can learn about other cultural events going on. Two are proposed for London at Romford and Walthamstow – as well as temporary sites for Trafalgar Square and South-West London. They will need planning consent.

Archaeological damage in Greenwich

The location of temporary venues is giving rise to great concern: these include the big public spaces – Regents Park, Hyde Park, Horseguards Parade (spilling into St. James' Park), Woolwich and – most contentious – the Greenwich World Heritage site, proposed for the Equestrian Event even though the equestrian world doesn't want it there.

It will take up the whole of the Park and the area around the Queen's House, one of the few areas of acid grassland in this part of London and the whole World Heritage Area will be packed with installations. It could cause enormous damage to archaeological sites including a Roman Villa a Saxon burial ground, and earlier Palace remains. All are very near the surface. The foundations of a proposed grandstand for 23,000 round the Queen's House will go directly into Henry VIII's Tilting Yard, with a cut and cover tunnel beneath it.

There will also be a grandstand on the main road in and out of Greenwich, cutting off access from July to September. This is driven by the demand of the media, including the BBC, for good views and camera angles aimed at promoting the image of London for TV viewers across the world, with the Greenwich buildings as a setting and the City of London in the background. Archaeological mitigation measures will have a huge cost. It will require planning permission but the

Council have said that many of the concerns raised are premature and largely speculative and that the organisers are fully committed to consulting residents on the detailed plans for the Games.

Westcombe and **Greenwich Societies** submitted their concerns, (see page 13) but there is cross-party support for it among politicians in Greenwich as it will bring Olympic money to the area.

Campaign to protect Lottery funds

Government raids on the Lottery to fund the Games have resulted in a huge fall in Heritage Lottery Funding. The average £315 million per annum paid in grants between 1995 to 2007 has fallen to £255 million for 2007-8, £220 million in 2008-9, and a sorry £180 million a year from 2009 to 2017. In addition to the original budget of £110m a further £675m has been taken from the lottery.

Heritage Link and others mounted a successful campaign to secure a commitment from Government to make no further raids on the National Lottery to fund the Games. The amount to be raised by Olympic Lottery games sales will be capped at £750m and Lord Davies of Oldham confirmed that "We will not continue to collect funding from the planned Olympic Lottery game after the target of £750 million for that is reached"

Olympics Minister Tessa Jowell MP agreed to provide more regular and detailed financial briefings to Parliament. This will improve scrutiny of the project's budget and ensure that money which has been diverted away is spent as effectively as possible.

The campaign has significantly raised awareness that there is a big arts, heritage and sports voluntary sector not covered by the ring fencing agreement for Big Lottery Fund recipients.

The Conservatives announced proposals to protect National Lottery good causes in future with a National Lottery Independence Bill, launched in February. (Details on their website - see above).

Heritage Link's concern over how and when the funds might be repaid from the sale of Olympic sites after the Games was also addressed. Estimates vary from between £800m and £3bn but it may be 10 or 20 years before it is realised. ■

The Planning Bill - a disaster in the making?

The London Forum is deeply concerned that the Planning Bill may result in a deterioration in the quality of planning. A round up of the latest news

When the Financial Times reports that "The Government sees the bill as one of its key pro-business measures", one needs to worry. It confirms what many of us have suspected all along. Much of its alarmingly vague wording provides that detail may, in effect, be filled in by the Minister by the making of regulations which will effectively take a wide range of changes in planning law out of open Parliamentary debate.

The Infrastructure Planning Commission

This has received most of the press coverage and has attracted opposition from many Labour MPs, who have criticised the "inordinate and unprecedented powers" it would have. They appear to have at last understood what Civic Societies have been saying: that it would destroy the long established framework and would be unaccountable and undemocratic. They have put down an amendment to the Bill to require planning applications for large projects to be decided by ministers. However past experience leads us not to place much hope that this will affect the final outcome.

Changes to the local appeals system

Less publicised are other changes such as those affecting appeals. "Minor" local appeals would no longer be heard by the Planning Inspectorate but by a panel of local Councillors. This proposal failed to appear in the Planning Bill, but a subsequent Government statement indicates that they will be proceeding with it, despite widespread criticism:

- Appellants will be able to submit an appeal document, but
- local authorities will be unable to defend their decisions, and
- there is no apparent provision for input from objectors or third parties, who are not even listed under "all stakeholders".

A Fast-track appeals pilot project

A "pilot project" to assess how a new "fast-track" appeals system would work has just been announced by the Planning Inspectorate, which enthusiastically welcomes the change (though they perhaps have little option but to do so openly, with the Government's heel, as it were, on their necks).

Six of the eight pilots are in London Boroughs: Brent, Ealing, Harrow, Hillingdon, Richmond and Wandsworth. Members in

It will effectively take a wide range of changes in planning law out of open Parliamentary debate

those Boroughs are urged to monitor carefully how the project is working. In particular, they should monitor the effect on quality of decisions.

Unresolved problems

- Will the appeals panel include Councillors not on the Planning Committee, and therefore having no planning expertise or training?
- What happens if Council Members find themselves in the difficult position of having to decide against officers whose decisions they had previously agreed; or coming under pressure from constituents to decide in their favour by, for example, threats of orchestrating votes against them at elections?
- What will be the likely effect on officer morale of having Members overturning their decisions after having agreed them; or of possibly having to review their own decisions, or having them reviewed by another colleague?

Permitted development

Another area of potential concern is change to permitted development rights for householders. Whilst encouragement for energy conservation is to be welcomed, care needs to be taken about the effect of infrastructure on conservation areas. Iain Wright, Parliamentary Under-Secretary, Department for Communities and Local Government, made the following reply to a question from MP Grant Shapps (Welwyn Hatfield, Conservative):

"In general, forthcoming changes will extend permitted development rights. Householders will have more scope to extend their homes under permitted development up to maximum dimensions designed to ensure no adverse impact on neighbours. There will also be a separate allowance for loft extensions. Local authorities will be able to introduce local variations using Local Development Orders

to provide greater freedom for development and Article 4 Directions to restrict permitted development where greater protection is needed. Permitted development rights will be restricted in a similar way to the current rules in designated areas, such as conservation areas."

Installation of microgeneration equipment

An amendment to the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (Amendment) (England) Order 1995 (the GPDO), from 6 April 2008, provides rights for the installation of specified types of microgeneration equipment on or within the curtilage of dwellinghouses, including solar photovoltaics (PV), solar thermal, ground and water source heat pumps, biomass heating and combined heat and power systems.

Solar PV or thermal equipment will be allowed on the wall or roof of a house or a building within its curtilage so long as the equipment does not protrude more than 200 millimetres. Stand-alone solar PV or solar thermal will be permitted if its height does not exceed four metres above ground level and it is more than five metres from the boundary. Restrictions apply in conservation areas, in world heritage sites and to listed buildings.

Standards to control noise levels.

In due course, the GPDO will incorporate standards to control noise levels. A noise limit of 45 decibels will apply to wind turbines and air source heat pumps, and will be reviewed after two years. However, the WHO specifies a background noise no higher than 35 dBA for teaching in schools to be effective, and the permitted 45db may be quite irritating to a neighbour.

Paving front gardens

Mr Wright also announced "that planning permission will be required for paving front gardens where the surface is impermeable. This change is designed to reduce the risk of flooding from rapid surface runoff of rainwater." ■

Websites where details can be seen

www.info4local.gov.uk/filter/?item=629550 or on the Planning Inspectorate site at

www.planninginspectorate.gov.uk/pins/appeals/fast_track_householder_appeal_project.htm

Round the Societies

A round up of news from our member societies.

By **Haydn Mylchreest**

A warm welcome to two new societies

We are delighted to welcome two new Societies as members of the London Forum

Tottenham Civic Society campaigns for and promotes high standards of planning and architecture in Tottenham and surrounding areas, and the preservation of historically important buildings.

West Hampsteas Amenity and Transport (WHAT) cares about local issues such as parking, open spaces, graffiti, litter, noise, traffic congestion, local amenities, tube safety, bus routes, station improvements, planning issues, too many restaurants and bars, not enough shops, disabled access, children's amenities, heritage, environment.

Lively Lidos

The lead item in the Battersea Society's Spring 2008 Newsletter is a report on the World Winter Swimming Championships at **Tooting Bec Lido** in February. Apparently this is the first time this international event has been held outside Finland where winter swimming is an old tradition. There were enthusiasts from Finland, Russia, Latvia, Canada and Australia – and from the UK, of course. The Tooting sky was blue and the water temperature of 6° C induced a comment from a competitor that "after a swim you get an intense feeling of well-being".

The newsletter also announced that the Society's website was launched just before Christmas. The address is: www.batterseasociety.org.uk

Friends of Brockwell Park also reported a midwinter swim on 22nd December 2007 in the **Brockwell Lido**. Some 70 hardy souls signed up to take part in the mass plunge in water temperature of 3° C! The oldest swimmer was 87. The original all-year swimming club was called the Brockwell Icicles.

Kingston upon Thames Town Centre

Kingston upon Thames Society reports that the ambitious Town Centre Plan has run into difficulties for a variety of reasons one of which was created by the decision to favour one developer and dispense with a competitive stage and all the necessary property acquisitions were not secure anyway. Back to the drawing board, apparently.

Sites of special value in Lambeth

Lambeth Council has apparently not yet prepared a Local List of buildings and sites of special historical and architectural value, so the **Streatham Society** has taken the initiative and assessed some 170 individual buildings, monuments, estates or roads in the Streatham wards, and has prepared its own Local List. The Society will encourage local planners to give special consideration to property on this list before planning decisions are made.

In its newsletter, 'Pump', (edition 188) the Society asks readers to be on their guard because Wandsworth Council apparently plans to build up to 10 hard surface five-a-side football pitches on Tooting Common. The common is seen by the Society as an environmental treasure and the Council should not regard the land as theirs do with as they wish.

Congratulations to the Greenwich Society

on the celebration last year of its 50th anniversary. Unfortunately they begin their second fifty years with anxieties over activities proposed for the World Heritage Site.

Olympic plans for Greenwich Park

Following the Olympic Delivery Authority's Draft Transport Plan published in October 2006 the Westcombe and Greenwich Societies submitted concerns over the impractical and worrying plan for the Greenwich Marine events, equestrian and modern pentathlon in the Museum grounds and in the Park. Where are all the events going to take place? Which roads are going to be closed? How much of Greenwich Park will be closed off to regular users? The lack of many answers is offset to some extent by the good news that work is already in hand at DLR stations to take 3-carriage trains by 2009 (a 50% increase in capacity), and on improved signalling on the Jubilee Line which will increase capacity from 20 to 17 trains an hour.

A new Ferris wheel?

Another threat to the World Heritage Site at Greenwich is a proposed Ferris wheel. The proposal, reported in the Greenwich Society newsletter, was to erect the wheel in 2007 in the grounds of the Old Royal Naval College. The application was refused by Greenwich Council, the developer appealed against that decision, and the inspector appointed by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government allowed the appeal and this will now apply to 2008.

Societies campaign against airport development

The consultation period for the expansion of Heathrow may have ended but the campaigning will go on as vigorously as ever. There are claims that the consultation document and questionnaire had been confusing and misleading and allegations that the claimed economic benefits of expansion are flawed. (see report on page 4)

Vauxhall Society and Sydenham Society are among several societies to report on their opposition to the possible increase in air traffic over London. Blackheath Society also objected to the almost total lack of consultation in their part of London and an article in SEBRA's Spring 2008 newsletter states that the Government's consultation process is regarded by the Association as a sham because the 220 page consultation document sought views on the proposal to build a third runway but did not seek views on whether it was necessary or not. Greenwich Society reported in January that 12 local authorities have joined together to form the 2M Group to oppose the expansion. Sydenham Society News recently reported that Lewisham and Greenwich Councils have also now signed up.

Sydenham welcomes Thameslink upgrades

Sydenham Society News Summer 2008 reports a £3.5 billion improvement to Thameslink by 2015 that will provide a three-fold increase to 24 trains per hour. It could provide four trains an hour along the Sydenham to London Bridge line with services to St Pancras and Luton airport. The society reports also that the East London railway will provide four trains an hour for West Croydon and six per hour for Crystal Palace.

Round the Societies

A round up of news from our member societies.

Museums libraries and arts centres

Wandsworth Museum closed in December 2007 in spite of a well-supported plea for it to continue. However, there is a new Museum Board and the hope is that the museum collection will again be exhibited in new premises with generous financial backing from the Hintze Family Charitable Foundation.

Battersea Society reports that the future of the **Battersea Arts Centre** has been secured for the next 100 years after fears that the lease on the building would not be renewed and that financial backing from Wandsworth Council would be withdrawn.

Another piece of heartening news is reported by the Sydenham Society: the **Forest Hill library** re-opened in December after a complete refurbishment and up-grading of this listed building. Opening hours have been extended.

Opposition to basement excavations

Several Societies including Chelsea, Bedford Park and the Heath & Hampstead Society have expressed growing concern at the current fashion to dig out basements and under gardens to build swimming pools, family rooms, home cinemas, and gyms. Council UDP policies are not well specified to prevent such developments. Kensington and Chelsea Council has invited consultants to report on the implications of deep excavations for structural damage to neighbouring properties. Bedford Park Society has achieved one appeal dismissal.

Conservation in action

The Muswell Hill & Fortis Green Association celebrates their 60th anniversary this year – congratulations! The Association mounted an experiment in March 2008 by sending the March edition of their Newsletter to a small selection of members by e-mail. The advantages of distribution using this method mean a savings in costs and it will be a contribution towards a cleaner, greener environment.

The Amwell Society's November newsletter announces "Good News about Lloyd's Dairy": all products are being sold without using cellophane, cardboard, plastic bags or any mass-produced throw-away containers. How many businesses are thinking along these lines? Can other Societies offer similar eco-friendly pieces of news?

The Brixton Society recently carried an article from the coordinator of the Every Action Counts project at the Civic Trust devoted to issues surrounding climate change and energy conservation. "Some Societies have begun considering these matters seriously," says Emma Montlake, "and it requires members to encourage the climate change sceptics to take personal and collective responsibility. Our Societies should be at the vanguard of efforts to bring about change".

East Putney tower blocks

The Putney Society reports that two Victorian family villas are to be replaced by a proposed development scheme with 330 new homes plus shops and offices with 25 and a 19 storey towers. The residential density is thought to be too high and the borough does not seem to have clear policies on the future urban form for the area.

Green spaces

The Mill Hill Preservation Society's Spring 2008 'News' reminds its readers of the wide-ranging and substantial changes to rights of way law under 'Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000'.

After a two-year struggle, the Society's application to the local Council to have Simmond's Mead registered as a Village Green has been approved. Although the land is owned by the local Council, it is now protected against development and must be kept for use by members of the public. The MHPS organises Spring and Autumn walks and anyone can join in.

St. Mary Cray Action Group's Newsletter (edition 57) carries an interesting article on the creation in 1977 of the South East London Green Chain as the result of the combined efforts of four London boroughs and the GLC. There are now nearly 300 Green Chain open spaces including some of the finest landscapes in S.E. London. A 40 mile network of well-signposted footpaths link together many Green Chain spaces many of which have interesting historical associations.

The Chislehurst Society recently carried an article on how Petts Wood was saved and finally presented to the National Trust. Tucked away in the interesting article describing the twists and turns of ownership of the years is a reference to the memorial erected in what is known now as Willett Memorial Wood to the memory of William Willett (1856-1915) the originator of 'daylight saving' who advocated the introduction of the first Daylight Saving Bill in 1908, and which led to the Summer Time Act of 1925

The UK's busiest railway junction

Clapham Junction, reputed to be the busiest railway junction in UK and possibly in Europe, is the subject of proposals for commercial redevelopment of the station area and of the station itself. The Clapham and Battersea Societies have had the opportunity of discussing the initial ideas with the developer's team and expect that the first planning applications will be submitted later in 2008.

Dangerous dogs

Is there a problem in your area? The Clapham Society reports that last autumn two family pet dogs were killed by pit-bull type dogs on Clapham Common in unprovoked attacks. Although a national problem, the Society is hoping for a borough-wide response to this problem, and asks for first-hand reports to be made to the police.

Langton Clock saved in Muswell Hill

In its Diamond Jubilee year the Muswell Hill and Fortis Green Association reports a successful conclusion of three years' campaigning and fund raising to save the much loved iconic Langton 1899 clock of Muswell Hill Broadway. Full restoration is now under way.

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Key issues of interest and concern to note.

New Secretary of State for culture

After only seven months as Culture Secretary, James Purnell has now moved to the Department for Work and Pensions. His speeches, at the launch of Heritage Counts in October, and subsequently, encouraged us that here was a Secretary with an interest and grasp of heritage issues. His replacement is Andy Burnham, formerly chief secretary to the Treasury. He had been a special adviser to former culture secretary Chris Smith and a researcher for Smith's successor, Tessa Jowell.

The effect of VAT on conservation - a campaign

Presently, VAT policy is inconsistent with policies on sustainability, being heavily weighted in favour of demolition and new build: new build is VAT exempt, repair and renovation of existing buildings is charged at 17.5%.

The Civic Trust has joined with the Federation of Master Builders and others to campaign for this to be cut to 5%.

Some of the deleterious effects are:

- to discourage repair work to the 700,000 empty homes in England and to millions of substandard houses, particularly in low-income areas whose owners / tenants tend to be the most vulnerable people in society, with the elderly particularly at risk.
- a threat to greenfield land.
- it is cheaper to demolish a building and rebuild than paying the VAT bill to renovate the existing one.
- a threat to Britain's national heritage because of the VAT burden that repairs and maintenance work carries.

A petition in support of the campaign can be signed online at

www.cutthevat.co.uk.

For other information, contact Hannah Mummery on 020 7539 7908 or hummery@civictrust.org.uk

Government Historic Estates Unit guidance

In the House of Lords in January, Lord Howarth of Newport pointed out in that notwithstanding government commitment 'to conserve and find appropriate contemporary uses for historic buildings in the public sector that become redundant', the number of redundant buildings in public hands that had been allowed to deteriorate indicated that Government guidance needed strengthening. Lord Bassam on behalf of the Government confirmed that 'the Government Historic Estates Unit is undertaking consultation on that review', and agreed that government should work 'much more with local authorities to ensure that they get a satisfactory community outcome for buildings that could have a great future'.

More government commitments to heritage

HRH The Prince of Wales gave the keynote address New Buildings in Old Places at a joint event of the Prince's Regeneration Trust and the CLG in January. He warned that historic cities were at risk of being wrecked by a rash of high rise office and apartment towers. He said that Bath and Edinburgh were also under threat and suggested that sky scrapers in London should be confined to Canary Wharf 'rather than overshadowing Wren's and Hawksmoor's churches.'

CLG Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, Baroness Andrews also gave a strong speech in support of conserving historic buildings and thoughtful regeneration. 'We have as our particular responsibility the task of enhancing our built environment and our heritage to benefit all. To do this successfully it is vital that we understand what makes communities work. And that can be explained, I hope by the notion of belonging: the power of memory; a will to engage all of us and an understanding of what the past can bring to the future.'

For the full text see:

www.communities.gov.uk/speeches/corporate/ourbuiltheritage

News from English Heritage

Climate change and your home - new guidelines

English Heritage has published three sets of guidelines:

- Energy conservation in traditional Buildings;
- Micro wind generation and traditional buildings; and
- Small scale solar thermal energy and traditional buildings.

They are available at www.english-heritage.org.uk/climatechange.

Parallel to this guidance are three sets of guidance notes to help homeowners and domestic energy assessors to better understand and interpret home improvement recommendations in the Energy Performance Certificates, a mandatory feature of the Home Information Packs. They highlight that the ways to achieve energy efficiency in modern housing are different from those in traditional houses. They are available online, www.english-heritage.org.uk/climatechange

History in Views: Seeing the history in the view: English Heritage is developing a method to help it assess the historical significance of views, systematically and consistently. Perhaps this work should have been done before Ken Livingstone halved the width of the protected viewing corridors towards St Paul's Cathedral to allow more tall buildings in Victoria?

Details are at :-

www.english-heritage.org.uk selecting Research & Conservation, then Public Policy and see the 'History in Views' link there.

Useful websites

Local authority historic environment guidance

English Heritage's website, contains a valuable guide to most, if not all, heritage-related guidance produced by local authorities in England:

www.helm.org.uk/server/show/nav.005005002

Looking for grants?

<http://www.grantsnet.co.uk/search.asp> is a useful website to search for appropriate grants and funding streams.

www.justgiving.com/ site for fundraising

Vital Statistics?

This website is a useful source for a wide range of local statistical information:-

www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk

www.myneighbourhoods.co.uk/ is a useful local information site

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National Archaeology Week, 12th-20th July

This presents an opportunity to promote work, engage with communities and help everyone to engage with archaeology and the historic environment. NAW 2007 offered over 430 events, held by museums, heritage sites, archaeology and history societies, universities, local councils and countryside agencies. More information from www.britarch.ac.uk/naw.

The London Open House weekend

The London Open House weekend this year will be on September 21-21. For details of properties open, or of how to participate, go to www.openhouse.org.uk or e-mail hsasaki@openhouse.org.uk

The 2008 London Festival of Architecture

The organisers of the 2008 London Festival of Architecture have asked to hear from anyone who knows of any secret or unknown roof top rooms and spaces or beautiful roofs and ceilings in Greater London.

If you know of any such hidden spaces, please contact James Bacon on 020 7 779 6199 www.lfa2008.org

The London Forum's 20th anniversary

The London Forum is marking its 20th year by launching a website and carrying out a survey of its member societies. www.londonforum.org.uk

The London Forum 20th Anniversary Survey

Forms went out earlier this year; there is still time to send back your completed survey form to the address below, if you have not already done so.

By letting us know how well the Forum represents your views you will enable the Forum to direct its efforts effectively during the next few years. This is your opportunity to say what you would like to see as the five main priorities for London Forum over the next five years.

The results of the survey will be published later this year.

For information about the London Forum contact:

www.londonforum.org.uk

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Notice is hereby given that the

Annual General Meeting of the London Forum of Amenity and Civic Societies

will be held on

**Wednesday 15th October,
6pm for 6:30pm.**

The location will be advised to members with the annual report.

If you are prepared to accept the annual report by e-mail to your contact who receives London Forum's e-bulletins, please notify us to email@londonforum.org.uk

The guest speaker following the AGM will be

Philip Kolvin

the new chairman of the Civic Trust

Philip is a barrister and Head of Licensing in the Chambers of Mark Lowe QC, Grays Inn Square, London. He is also Chairman of the Institute of Licensing (the national body for licensing professionals) and has a particular interest in the night time economy and the impact it has on local communities. His publications on the subject include *Licensed Premises: Law and Practice*; *Gambling for Local Authorities: Licensing, Planning and Regeneration*.

Philip has a long standing interest in the environment and has written a guide for campaigners: *Saving Open Space*. He has served as a national Trustee of the Campaign to Protect Rural England. He has been involved in a number of campaigns, including the Crystal Palace Campaign which successfully prevented the building of a multiplex cinema on an historic park.



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