

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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The changing face of London - protected views destroyed by skyscrapers

Protected London skyline destroyed

Despite reports of continuing economic gloom and doom in the construction industry the wholesale refiguring of London's skyline is now gathering pace.



This photograph shows how Europe's tallest building, the Shard, has dramatically compromised views of London's greatest landmark, St Paul's Cathedral from Parliament Hill on Hampstead Heath, one of six protected panoramas.

"Greed, egos and yet another blot on the horizon"

Sir Simon Jenkins

"It shows once again that land, bricks and mortar are the Achilles heel of the financial system"

Nevertheless, as Richard Morrison (chief music critic of The Times, and also a wide-ranging weekly columnist on cultural and social matters) wrote recently: "Londoners will see their City remade in the interests of a small group of publicly unaccountable people who are fundamentally

altering not only London's skyline but its streetline too". He warns that the warren of ancient alleys with their pubs and quirky shops is being replaced by corporate plazas policed by security guards.

And, under the above quote, Sir Simon Jenkins protested last year in The Evening Standard about the failure of the planning system to protect heritage sites: "The rules governing city views and open spaces are meant to apply to everyone, not just those who cannot afford fancy architects and lawyers. Allow any exception

Warm thanks to members

London Forum warmly thanks the many members who have so generously made donations recently, in addition to their usual membership fee.

Your committee is deeply appreciative of this support for the Forum's work. Individual letters of thanks will be sent to everyone.

The latest Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors Commercial Market Survey says there is a continuing decline in demand for commercial property, and occupier demand fell for the second consecutive quarter in Q3 2010, with demand for office space showing the greatest decline. The Institute of International Finance warns that "it is clear that many borrowers may not be able to refinance." The FT calls the current economic crisis "simply the biggest in a long line of property-related banking crises.

and a planning rule is defunct. One blot spoils the picture. A new rule is thus established, that there is no rule. "...various developers bulldozed their towers through the planning system.... Towers now punctuate every vista. These destructive and costly London arguments have always the same cause, the authorities gutless in the face of serious money coming over a horizon it wants to spoil."

While one must be relieved if this is a sign that confidence is returning to the economy, does it have to be at the expense of a cityscape held dear by millions? The excuse for introducing tall buildings in the centre of London has been the proviso that they are sited at major transport nodes. But why super-tall? What end is served by this macho rush for height? With several more towers to come, Londoners will soon see the extent of the betrayal by the politicians tasked with preserving our heritage. As Sir Simon says, it has simply allowed a new rule to be established which will set the precedent for further breaches until there is nothing left.

The Shard - London Bridge Street.

Designed by Renzo Piano for the Sellar Group, to replace the 1970's Southwark Tower, at 306 metres, 66 storeys, it will be the tallest tower in the UK and in Europe. As the form, said to be inspired by the spires of London's churches and the topsails of the ships that used to moor on the Thames, starts to emerge, there is growing consternation as to its scale and the way it affects protected views. In addition to office space there will be a hotel, apartments, restaurants, naturally ventilated winter gardens and public viewing galleries.

Members will remember that it was enthusiastically supported by Ken Livingstone as Mayor. He even ordered Transport for London to take a reported £13.5 million a year lease on office space to help its funding. TfL subsequently had to pull out of that financially unsustainable deal as we reported in the last Newsforum (no. 57). The government was warned about the "unequivocal, major and detrimental impact" (English Heritage) it would have on protected views and intrusion on two world heritage sites, the Tower of London and Palace of Westminster, but was approved by John Prescott after a public inquiry. Martin Stancliffe, Surveyor to the Fabric of St Paul's Cathedral, said: "We raised our concerns about the effect of the scale of the Shard on St Paul's in this iconic view at the public inquiry but our objection was overruled."

WalkieTalkie skyscraper 20 Fenchurch St

Designed in 2007 by Rafael Vinoly for Land Securities Group Plc, the 150 metre high 36 storey structure provides retail and offices. The project was shelved during the recession in 2008 but Land Securities has now negotiated new deals with foreign owned Canary Wharf Group enabling them to restart the project. It is due to complete within the next three years.

The Cheesegrater: 122 Leadenhall Street

Also stalled since 2008 due to unfavourable economic conditions, the Leadenhall Tower, a 48-storey Richard Rogers design for developer British Land with Oxford Properties looks set to go ahead after a cash injection from a Canadian pension fund, which has signed a joint venture deal with British Land. Due to open in 2014.

The Pinnacle 22-38 Bishopsgate

Also called the Helter Skelter or Bishopsgate Tower. The development manager, Arab Investments, the largest sharia-compliant property fund in the world, has negotiated additional funding to continue construction. The architects of the 60-storey building are Kohn Pedersen Fox Associates.

100 Bishopsgate 40 storeys

The Allies and Morrison-designed, 165m tall office tower is part of a three building scheme totalling 815,000 sq ft (75,715 sq m) approved in 2007. It will be delivered by the 100 Bishopsgate Partnership, a joint venture between Great Portland Estates and Brookfield, a Canadian developer which has put in £43m in cash for an equal stake in the development. It includes a public library, retail, a new public square and a new Livery Hall for the Leathersellers' Company. Building will start in 2011 when leases on the existing buildings run out.

Blackfriars tower in administration

The tower planned for 1 Blackfriars Road has had several names: the Jumeirah Tower, Blackfriars Tower or the Beetham-Mirax Tower. The 52-storey design by architect Ian Simpson included 64 luxury flats and a Jumeirah hotel. It was originally 70 storeys but went through several redesigns in 2006 following criticism

from CABE and English Heritage over height and scale.

The joint venture between Liverpool-based Beetham Holdings and Russian property company Mirax, headed by property tycoon Sergei Polonsky, with an £80 million loan from Royal Bank of Scotland, ran into financial difficulties in the recession. RBS put it into administration last October after the developers failed to secure further funding. They then announced that the site would be marketed and sold in early 2011. But Mirax and Beetham said that they expected to be taking the project out of administration 'very shortly, in association with new investors'.

Bondway Tower appeal refused

Bondway was a proposed 42-storey tower in Vauxhall, by developers London and Regional. Lambeth Council refused planning permission in March last year. Following an appeal last summer, Secretary of State Eric Pickles, turned down the scheme on 10 February. Reasons given were to do with perceived risk to a World Heritage site and the relationship of the building to its surroundings: whilst the building was considered sustainable (with over 150 units it fitted with government plans to create more housing) and with certain design merits, it lacked "well planned public open spaces" and failed to provide adequate pedestrian links to the wider public realm. ■

An artist's impression of how the Helter Skelter Tower will impinge on the setting of the old Stock Exchange



The changing face of London

In addition to skyscrapers, huge 'opportunity area' regeneration schemes will change the face of London. **Helen Marcus** rounds up some reports

Battersea Power Station and Nine Elms

The Government has formally approved the £4bn project to redevelop the iconic Battersea Power Station in central London. The decision by Communities Secretary Eric Pickles follows planning approval given by London Mayor Boris Johnson in December 2010 - one month after Wandsworth Council gave its green light for the plans. It marks the final decision in a process that has spanned more than a quarter of a century. Plans for the Grade II* listed power station would see it restored and opened up to the public for the first time.

Work is expected to start on site in 2012 to be completed by 2024. It will include 3,400 new homes, a pedestrian high street and town square with 1.7 million square feet of offices, shops, restaurants, cinemas, hotels and leisure spaces including London's largest ballroom in a former turbine hall. A new section of the Thames Path is to be created along with a five-acre riverside park. Other outdoor recreation spaces would be provided as well as cycle paths and pedestrian walkways. There is also a proposed Section 106 framework designed to secure more than £500m for an extension of the Northern Line from Kennington with two new stations, one at the power station site, the other at Wandsworth Road.

The Nine Elms and Vauxhall area covers 227 hectares (2,443 acres) and is the largest development opportunity close to the centre of London with a projected 16,000 homes, with tower blocks of flats up to 17 storeys high, the new US Embassy, the redevelopment of New Covent Garden, the creation of thousands of jobs and the largest new park in London in 50 years. But the need for affordable housing is not being given the prominence it deserves as part of the overall plans for this 'opportunity area'. The financial arrangements for all these developments has yet to be put in place; The developer, Dublin-based Treasury Holdings, is searching for a development partner to share the risk.

Earls Court Regeneration Area

The Mayor has designated the Earls Court exhibition centres and surrounding area an 'opportunity area' in the draft London Plan. It is also part of the regeneration plans of the borough of Hammersmith and Fulham, to bring thousands of new homes and jobs to

residents in one of the most deprived parts of the Borough, as well as shops and offices. The Council believes the new International Conference Centre to be built could help generate up to 5,500 new jobs. The masterplan, developed by Architects Farrell & Partners, is to be based on the concept of creating four villages, a new high street and 23 acres of public open space. It is envisaged that work will begin after the 2012 Olympic Games, during which the site is a competition venue. Plans are about to be unveiled and a formal submission for planning permission is expected this summer.

If the landowners Capital & Counties (CapCo) can agree, the Council wants to use the potential investment from this development to build new homes for 1,650 residents on West Kensington and Gibbs Green estate. But the residents are fearful that their homes are under threat and that the Council wants to move them out of the area. They have applied to become a "resident controlled association" under Section 34A of the 1985 Housing Act. They have contacted CapCo director Gary Yardley direct to seek assurances, citing David Cameron's recent remark at an event in Hammersmith, that schemes improving neighbourhoods "shouldn't involve knocking down places that people like to live in." Guarantees issued to tenants stating that if redevelopment occurs they will be offered a new home in the same area as they are living seem to indicate that their campaign is being taken seriously.

Biomedical research centre in Somers Town

The UK Centre for Medical Research and Innovation, a huge new 14-storey facility to be built on 3.6 acres of disused land in Brill Place, behind the British Library, was given planning permission by Camden Council in December despite strong opposition by local residents.

UKCMRI was founded by four of the UK's largest scientific and academic institutions - the Medical Research Council, Cancer Research UK, the Wellcome Trust and University College London. It will house more than 1,200 research scientists and is scheduled to open in 2015. Its work will help understand why disease develops and find new ways to prevent and treat illnesses such as cancer, heart disease and stroke, infections, and neurodegenerative diseases.

Funding for the £500 million project

allocated by the last government was confirmed in October's spending review and some of it will come from selling the derelict National Temperance Hospital site in Hampstead Road.

Local campaigners objected that the new building is too big and too high, will not provide any open space, and ignores the need for more affordable housing in the area. They had hoped the hospital site would house a new secondary school and pointed out that the site of the new lab had been earmarked for social housing and a park. Fears have also been raised over security at the centre and what types of viruses would be being tested.

The Science and Technology Select Committee, chaired by Labour MP Andrew Miller, has called in the plans for scrutiny. The Committee's terms of reference include examining whether the financing of the UKCMRI is "robust and justified", particularly in light of "the public support for the project and the knock-on effect on budgets for other research". The matter will also be referred to the Mayor of London and CLG for consideration.

Marble Arch House to be re-developed

British Land Company PLC has paid the Portman Estate £18 million for Marble Arch House. They plan to redevelop the 60,000 square feet with office and retail space. Ten luxury residential apartments with a 5,000 sq ft restaurant unit at ground level will also be built behind the Victorian facade of 62-64 Seymour Street. Completion is scheduled for mid-2013.

Park Royal

Another huge regeneration area identified in The London Plan is Park Royal. Situated across the Boroughs of Brent, Ealing and Hammersmith & Fulham, and abutting the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, an Opportunity Area Planning Framework has just been published. Extending five kilometres west to east and between one and two kilometres north to south, the 700 hectares are bounded by Kensal Green Cemetery, the railway line from Euston and the A40 Western Avenue. It includes Willesden Junction, Hanger Lane and Alperton. The Park Royal Partnership includes the London Development Agency and Transport for London, who have all worked together on the Framework. ■

London Forum AGM 2010

London Forum President Sir Richard MacCormac congratulates the Forum on its formidable and vital work. **Peter Pickering** reports

Sir Richard MacCormac opened the 2010 AGM, welcoming members, and congratulating the Forum on its formidable and vital work during the year. He paid tribute to Peter Eversden, its indefatigable Chairman, and drew attention to the challenges that the new Government would bring. Everyone was curious to see what their Big Society ideas would mean but, he suggested, the Forum already exemplified such ideas.

He mentioned his work on suburban densities which was to be the subject of a London Forum Open Meeting on February 1st.

Chairman's report

Peter Eversden reviewed the principal activities of the London Forum during the year as reported in the Annual Report. He was proud of the Forum's achievements and each member of the Executive Committee had made a huge contribution. Newsforum is going from strength to strength and articles from it had been requested by other journals. The Walter Bor Media awards had again been a great success. He thanked Peter Pickering and Helen Marcus for their help in preparing the Annual Review. The quality of the website needed improvement, and he would turn his attention to this after the conclusion of the Examination-in-Public.

The Examination-in-Public

He updated the meeting with news from the ongoing Examination-in-Public. With a new Mayor it was inevitable that the previous Mayor's policies would have to be re-written. Much of the Forum's time this year had therefore been taken up with responding to the consultation on draft New London Plan and the preparation for its Examination-in-Public. In addition to the Forum some members Societies had won the right to attend on their own account. He felt the Inspectors had conducted matters well, for instance allowing the Forum to come back with extra responses when requested. But the advent of the new Government had caused some difficulty for the Inspectors about the interpretation of devolution.

The Outer London Commission

His membership of the Mayor's Outer London Commission had provided a

valuable opportunity to raise the profile of London Forum with outer London boroughs. The Commission's report had been published for the Plan Examination. It should be of use to societies in seeking policies in Borough LDFs.

Thanks and acknowledgements

He warmly thanked Alan Baxter for his continuing generosity in providing the Forum with office space and use of the Gallery. It was hugely appreciated, bringing extra valuable benefits through the networking opportunities with other groups in the building. He thanked the Vice-Presidents, Tom Ball, members of the Forum's Committees, and member societies for their help with the Forum's activities,

The Accounts and Election of Honorary Independent Examiner

In the absence of the Treasurer the Chairman introduced the accounts for 2009/2010. In answer to questions, he said the loss of the Civic Trust grant could be managed without undue effect on the Forum's finances; Newsforum would in future be appearing only twice a year because so much of our work could be reported more effectively by email. The accounts, proposed by John Payne (Crystal Palace Community Association) and seconded by Tom Ball (Thorney Island Society) were approved nem. con. Mr Baddeley was re-elected as Honorary Auditor nem.con. on the proposal of the Chairman seconded by Bill Tyler.

Election of Officers and other Trustees

There had been an excellent response to the recent appeal for new trustees to come forward. Tony Allen of Chislehurst Society was warmly welcomed as new Treasurer. Lee Abbott and Derek Chandler offered themselves for re-election. Derek had also kindly agreed to take on the role of Secretary, and Peter Pickering would continue to act as the Forum's most efficient minute secretary. Two more new trustees, Marilyn Larden (Isleworth Society), and Alison Macnair (Clapham Society) were welcomed to the committee. An en bloc vote was proposed by Terence Bendixson (Kensington and Chelsea Society) and seconded by Dick Allard (Westcombe Society). It was approved unanimously.

Other contributions

Marion Harvey expressed appreciation of the work of the Chairman and other trustees, and paid especial tribute to the retiring Treasurer Andrew Coleman, stepping down after ten years of invaluable service, and Jim Nicolson, whose contribution to London Forum since its inception had been outstanding, among other things as secretary and former editor of Newsforum.

Helen Marcus reported on the progress of the newly established Civic Voice to which she had been elected as a Trustee. Its membership now stood at 258 groups, with a total individual membership of 68,000. But it will need more than this to be sustainable. The Civic Voice Board was well aware that difficulties remained with regard to an appropriate fee structure that would enable it to remain financially independent.

Good progress had been made in establishing Civic Voice's profile and influence, at the highest level in Government circles, particularly on the policy and lobbying side. The Director, Tony Burton, reports in greater detail in this newsletter.

Open forum for members

The AGM was followed by a discussion by members on subjects of concern:

Conservation Areas

Terence Bendixson (Chelsea Society) welcomed the new PPS5 as an improvement on what went before. He suggested that, with conservation area appraisals often out of date and Council staff overstretched, civic societies should take the job on, perhaps as contractors to the local authority; many of them had the skills and could probably do the job more cheaply. Forum Members from Camden, Hammersmith & Fulham, and Finchley said that this had already happened. Peter Eversden said that this could be an aspect of localism. Conservation area controls had been adequate in west London, but there was a danger that, under the new PPS5, developers would take to themselves the definition of 'significance', in the absence of a proper up-to-date appraisal.

Threats to Metropolitan Open Land

John Payne of Crystal Palace Community Association (CPA) reported on the

London Forum now has a Twitter site

at which you can find many of these stories, updates on all the latest news as it comes in, and useful web addresses.

Do pass on the address to all your amenity society contacts.

Twitter can reach far beyond London Forum's e-bulletin list of contacts.

w http://twitter.com/london_forum

NB - note the underscore: _ in the name ■

Inspector's decision to allow the sale of part of Crystal Palace park (Grade 2* listed) to finance the improvement of the rest of it. The 'special circumstances' clause invoked by the Minister was a let-out which put all open land and Parks at risk. It is a watershed moment; he felt the Inspector's report was biased and had not given due weight to CPA's arguments; all policies seemed to have been set aside. The Association felt betrayed by the London Mayor who changed his mind during the protest. CPA was considering a legal challenge and appealed for support from other amenity societies.

Michael Bach said that it posed a similar risk for MOL protection to Green Belts. There was no consideration of damaging impingement of tall buildings on open land and on the tree line. Societies must be vigilant that protection policies did not get lost in the transition to LDFs.

Green Park

Tom Ball (Thorney Island Society) referred to the proposed desecration of MOL at Green Park by the proposed Bomber Command Memorial. It was contrary to all declared Council policy; objections were ignored and no alternatives were considered. The Westminster City Council Planning Committee consists of only four members, and the quorum is only two. He asked what should be a quorum in such circumstances? Objectors were not permitted to speak (WCC is the only London authority that has no provision for public deputations to the planning committees). All appropriate legal approaches - call-in, judicial review - had been tried without success. It is believed that more memorials are now being lined up.

Brian Bloice of Streatham Society reminded the meeting that sometimes strong local opposition can work: they had persuaded Lambeth Council to leave Streatham Common alone.

Basements

Tony Hillier (Heath and Hampstead Society) described their fight (with professional help) against basement developments. There had been about 200 and some of them are causing serious problems to neighbouring houses. There are particular problems in Hampstead with its hilly topography and, in places, sandy heathland subsoil. The changes

Changes to planning law by the last government had created ambiguity about what is allowed under permitted development

to planning law by the last government had created ambiguity, in particular, about what is allowed under permitted development. Many local authorities see basements as Permitted Development. Reports by Ove Arup, relied on by councils, appear to understate the potential problems. H&HS are working with Camden Council to try to get a policy on basement development into the LDF. PPG14: Development on Unstable Land, originally produced for mining areas, and PPS25: Development and Flood Risk, had proved useful. The possibility of using an Article 4 Direction was also being explored. Simply leaving it as a civil matter to be sorted out under the Party Wall Act after damage has been done is unsatisfactory.

Other Forum members also reported problems: Michael Bach said that Kensington and Chelsea Council who had been very liberal on basements except on listed buildings, were now clawing a little back by requiring a method statement. A member from Blackheath mentioned the serious effect of basement excavation on protected trees. It was said that in Australia a bond has to be posted covering 50-60 years to cover any potential problems. H&HS appealed for help from the Forum on the possibility of an approach to the Government to produce guidance and definitions (see more on page 12).

Houses in Multiple occupation

The Lewisham Society reported serious problems in their area. Houses are being converted without planning permission, and it was creating slums. Planners do not know what is happening; building control officers do not speak to the planners; policies to control it are simply not being adhered to. The Society had managed to get something done by going directly to their elected Mayor. The law should be enforced but

there was no consistency. The new government had acted to reverse previous decisions, giving wider control in some situations. Councils could now make Article 4 Directions requiring planning consent for conversions to multi-occupancy. Helen Marcus reported that in Hampstead, Camden Council had allowed a transfer of multi-occupancy permission from a very large detached house to a much smaller terraced house, against the wishes of all the residents to suit a wealthy buyer who had bought both houses for the purpose.

Other subjects of concern included night flights at Heathrow, the aspirations of the Mayor to widen his powers, LDF preparation, the new 'super sewer'; removing street clutter; the implications of the new London Plan.

Peter Pickering, Finchley Society posed the question: Do other societies have the strong impression that planning officers have their own agenda, bearing little relationship to that of the elected members, and produce slanted reports to members, and if members decide against their recommendations, produce 'reasons' that may not be the most robust possible? If so, what can be done about it? London Forum will return to these issues during the coming year. ■

Tottenham future still uncertain

Tottenham Civic Society Chairman, Matthew Bradby, comments in the Society's newsletter on an announcement by Daniel Levy, Spurs' Chairman, that has shocked many: Tottenham Hotspur will still leave Northumberland Park, despite being unsuccessful in their Olympic Stadium bid, leaving a prospect of years of uncertainty and boarded up buildings, which blight the High Road in one of the poorest wards in Western Europe. Half the site is now a field of brick rubble.

Matthew notes: "We live in an increasingly divided society, one of haves and have nots. Tottenham Hotspur FC belongs to the shiny, glitzy new 21st century of big deals, big money, megastars and merchandising. Socially and economically, 21st century Tottenham is languishing in the second group - the have nots" ■

The Localism Bill - Planning in a local context

by **Professor Hans Haenlein**, a leading expert in the planning of education facilities who has advised the government and individual schools on strategies for education facilities and the design of specialist buildings

In the context of a comment made by the London Deputy Mayor, Kit Malthouse, in a recent BBC news programme, to the effect that it was a fallacy to assume the UK planning system was ever democratic, it should be a relief that the present government is placing Planning at the heart of its Localism Bill.

Planning at the heart of the Big Society

In the words of Richard McCarthy, who presented an outline of the Bill to members of the London Forum on the 13th January 2011, Planning is to be at the heart of the Big Society and the government's decentralisation agenda. This is to empower communities to take control. Change is to be Neighbourhood-led, not Local Authority-led, to facilitate small-scale community developments and to inspire innovation and creativity. The Neighbourhood Forum is to be the mechanism for achieving this.

There was general agreement by the London Forum members present at the meeting that if the implementation of this grand vision was not going to be based on much clearer thinking than the government appears to be devoting to it, then the outcome could be even worse than the current system. How are neighbourhoods defined and what is their governance? How are adjacency issues resolved? How can

learning from experience be safeguarded? On what will the neighbourhood deliberations be based and how are they funded? These were only some of the questions raised by the meeting to which answers were not available.

The crucial differences in Europe

The proposed new system could be construed as being similar to the dominant European model in which the initiative for local change lies with the local community. However, a detailed analysis of the pros and cons of that system appears not to have been carried out by the government. If it had, it would have become apparent that the European local communities have direct access to funds which enable them to instruct qualified professionals to investigate relevant strategies for change within agreed planning briefs and within an accepted framework that links local, regional and national interests. For this to be possible in the UK, we would first have to significantly change the legal and financial frameworks which determine the way we relate to each other and within which we carry out our economic, social and cultural functions. Above all we would need to decide whether we are content as a nation to allow the profit motive to dominate the development process, or whether we would prefer to see

a wider and more balanced range of criteria to inform environmental change.

It is, for example, illegal in some European countries to proceed with publicly funded, as well as with important privately funded, developments without regional, national or international design competitions based on professionally prepared development briefs, which reconcile the financial, social and cultural aspects of each project and are publicly scrutinised. The judgements are made on added value - not on cost.

A rearrangement of the deckchairs

If individuals and local communities continue to be relegated to making their contributions to the development process simply in the context of the dominant development control functions set out by the Government, then Planning at the heart of the Localism Bill will amount to nothing more than a rearrangement of the proverbial deckchairs. ■

Professor Hans Haenlein MBE has a well established reputation in the field of architectural and construction education. His practice, Hans Haenlein Architects, has become known for its work in the planning and design of education and community buildings. He is President of The Hammersmith Society. ■

Decentralisation and Localism - London Forum Open Meeting - notes by Peter Pickering

The London Forum has held two meetings to discuss the Government's proposals for Localism, one last November, which also covered enterprise bids, on the White Paper and the second on 13th January after the Localism bill was published.

Neighbourhood planning

At the November 2010 meeting Martin Simmons (a Vice-President of the Forum, and on the Council of the Town and Country Planning Association) gave an account of what, on current information, he thought Government policy was. Making planning more locally based was a laudable aim, but he warned that localism needed to be responsible and democratic, and the number of 'neighbourhoods' - 1000 in

Greater Manchester alone - could make it unwieldy. Communities' ability to deliver the new agenda might depend too much on their affluence; and there could be real conflicts with elected local councils.

Mr Simmons said that the London Plan had been drafted and examined in public under the old legislation; the Mayor had said that he would work with the public, voluntary and community sectors, and would put a new paragraph about localism into his Plan.

Michael Bach thought that changes in the Use Classes order, and making it easier for Councils to issue Article 4 Directions could make it easier to deal with particular local problems with development control. He would like to see local councillors made the agents of their electorate, so that what happened was what "we" and not "they"

wanted. Scrutiny committees should behave more like Parliamentary select committees, calling for evidence and hearing expert witnesses.

Views from the floor

Views expressed included: that Local Enterprise Partnerships would be a developer's charter, without democratic accountability; that the Government wanted to bypass local authorities; whether reform of the electoral system could reduce the dominance of the party machine.

The general feeling of the meeting was that there was much wrong with the present system, but that whether the Government's proposals would improve matters could not be judged until they were seen in detail. ■

The Localism Bill

Gareth Bradford, senior CLG official, spoke at London Forum's Open Meeting in February on the implications and opportunities in the published Bill, for neighbourhood groups in the context of the London Region, the GLA and the boroughs.

Notes by **Peter Pickering** and **Helen Marcus**

The Bill is a sketchy framework, leaving much substantive detail to be developed later, but containing flexibility for local options. Local Authorities must collaborate with their citizens, not simply consult. Communities are best placed to understand what is needed, and if local people have real control, so the thinking goes, their attitudes will change from the present tendency to oppose what the Council wants to do. Local people do want to see more houses built, but they feel powerless at present; they would be able to take decisions on design, townscape, car parking etc within a neighbourhood plan.

Mr. Bradford suggested that Authorities would be required to pass on a percentage of the money from the Community Infrastructure Levy to the neighbourhood, and that money could be used for on-going expenses and not only new infrastructure. Enforcement provisions would be stronger. The Local Plan would continue; it would be critically important, and must be up-to-date (the examiner's report would no longer be binding on an authority). Neighbourhood plans must be in general conformity with the local strategic development plan - in London, the London Plan plus the borough's Core Strategy.

Many doubts were expressed by Forum members about the new legislation and about the way Local Authorities involve their communities in local planning. How are 'community' 'groups' or neighbourhoods defined?

The meeting pressed Mr Bradford on what is a 'community' or 'neighbourhood'. In London many long established neighbourhoods, such as Highgate, crossed borough boundaries. He admitted that the Bill did not define 'neighbourhood forum' and it had proved impossible legally to provide for neighbourhood plans to cover areas in more than a single local authority; he promised to give the Forum a formal response on this issue. He said it would be possible to have two neighbourhood plans with identical provisions in contiguous areas but in different boroughs. But he did not cite examples in London.

Questioners pointed out that community groups were not necessarily representative; some were 'self-appointed', and may well

'If individuals and local communities continue to be relegated then planning at the heart of the Localism Bill will amount to nothing more than a rearrangement of the proverbial deckchairs.'

Professor Hans Haenlein

disagree among themselves. Though some had many experts to hand, many did not and had few manpower resources. Where would funding come from? Although the Bill required local authorities to provide "support", it did not require them to provide money for neighbourhood forums.

In theory a community group could propose an area to be a 'neighbourhood area', and the local authority must designate it unless there were good reasons against. But Mr Bradford agreed that power would remain with the local planning authority, who would ultimately decide what was or was not a community/ neighbourhood. This was necessary because as the local planning authority it was the competent authority under EU legislation and was subject to judicial review. The Council would appoint an independent examiner perhaps drawn from the RTPI or similar.

Other points made:

A participant from Hammersmith observed that there was already a rush to tie things up before the Bill became law.

Tom Ball commented that the Bill is supposed to allow 'people' and 'groups' to achieve what the 'Authorities' are not providing for them now; yet will be controlled by the very 'authorities' that are the stumbling block at present.

Communities in London are more likely to want to stop what they see as inappropriate development, against the community's wishes.

A Putney member asked if a neighbourhood plan could control tall buildings; the answer was that it would depend on whether the local strategic

plan, with which a neighbourhood plan had to be in general conformity, had a policy on tall buildings.

Michael Bach, London Forum committee member, and Esther Kurland from Urban Design London, sought to bring out what they saw as positive aspects of the proposals, suggesting that the Bill offered a real chance of change in local planning with an opportunity for communities to initiate proposals, not just respond to them; or draw up a neighbourhood plan. Ms Kurland stressed particularly that Urban Design London would be able to help communities in this process.

London Forum follow up

Amongst the associated planning issues which London Forum has communicated to CLG Ministers and officers and to the MPs on the Localism Bill Committee is that the idea of neighbourhood plans seems to be rooted in the rural model of village and town plans promoted by parish and town councils which have the opportunity to raise a precept. Is the idea likely to be transferrable to urban areas which lack both the formal vehicle and the precepting power?

Following the meeting Chairman Peter Eversden emailed a paper identifying issues of concern to London Forum in the Localism Bill, providing a useful guide in assessing what we need to take note of. Sent to all members on 14 February, it included the slides used at meeting in an attachment ■

Lambeth Civic Forum

Civic and amenity societies in the London Borough of Lambeth have come together to form a Lambeth Civic Forum. There are existing, successful borough-wide forums: a local history forum and forums of friends of parks and friends of library groups but not a general one for civic societies until now. The newly elected chair, Bill Linskey said that, "this will enable societies to support each other, learn from each other and coordinate their responses to the council where appropriate such as in the case of the newly emerging Local Development Framework." (Contact: bill@linskey.org.uk).

Is the the way forward for civic groups? Let us know what is happening in your area. ■

Sustainable Suburbia

London Forum President, **Sir Richard MacCormac**, addressed an open meeting in February at the Gallery on his project 'Sustainable Suburbia'. The meeting was chaired by **Alan Baxter**, himself renowned for expertise and innovation in structural, civil and infrastructure engineering, building conservation, and urbanism

MJP Architects have been researching the possibilities and benefits of higher suburban housing densities. Sir Richard's work proposes a methodology for assessing residential land capacity, achieving higher density of housing of various types in a sustainable manner with easy access to the required infrastructure. The study, Sustainable Suburbia, addresses the issue of increasing the density of family housing and considers two distinct contexts: existing suburbs and new settlements.

It argues that raised density, reduced car dependency and suburban viability can be achieved while retaining key qualities of the suburban environment, the family house and garden in a green setting. Sir Richard explained how planning new housing in this way will result in walkable and integrated communities with a good quality of life for those who live in them. A key objective is to demonstrate that higher densities can reconcile private aspirations with the communal benefits that higher densities yield.

The study sets out to explore the interdependence of house design at the smaller scale and land use planning at the larger scale.

Macfarlane Wilder Landscape Architects have collaborated in the project, demonstrating, with the inclusion of public open space, a further key objective of sustainable suburbia, how public open space can contribute a setting of openness, natural surrounding and greenery.

It can also provide for recreation, children's play, biodiversity, rain water management and the use of water, planting and trees to mitigate the effects of the rising temperatures of climate change.

To illustrate the issues he drew a comparison between two neighbourhoods in the north west of Milton Keynes, Greenleys built in the 1970s, and Wolverton, which represent respectively the 'car suburb' characteristics of the 1970's and the more urban artisan housing characteristic of the 1880's which can be found in the inner suburbs of English towns and cities, for example Fulham and Chelsea. Both developments contain 3 bedroom houses of approximately 120sqm and off street parking and the type of construction is comparable.

Optimising land

Using a repertoire of combinations of house types and layouts can optimise land use and minimise 'left over' space across the density range, and can achieve densities often thought to require flats. These can include detached houses which can be planned at a higher density than might be expected; L-shaped houses at 6.5m frontages, combining the compactness of the terrace form with the identity of semi-detached houses and incorporating car parking into the plot; the mews house type, in three or four storeys, can offer live/work units. This kind of suburban mews development can have a strong sense of community.

A settlement of 10,000 dwellings can still offer most residents a maximum walking distance of about 10 minutes to a high street.

A key characteristic of the layout is to stagger the houses to increase their separate identity and, to some extent, their privacy.

The inclusion of non-family accommodation in flats can raise density further or increase the ratio of public open space as green infrastructure. Five-storey flats can achieve a density of 180dph and this higher density can contribute to the quality of suburbia by releasing land for open space and greenery within the overall density of 50dph.

A toolkit

A 'toolkit' has been drawn up which offers a quantitative methodology for exploring the potential quality and character of different options within the development of a site. There is potential for a database of layout typologies across a whole range of densities, providing planners with a method for assessing residential capacity.

Suburbia will continue to be a preferred location for the majority of families because of the benefits of house and garden, and a green and natural environment. The study has demonstrated that a strategy for achieving a combination of private and public benefit depends on residential density. ■



Above: Three images from Sir Richard's presentation. Full details and a copy of the study can be obtained on the website:

<http://www.sustainable suburbia.co.uk/>

Planning news

The Infrastructure Planning Commission has published guidance on the processes it employs. The IPC will sit within the Planning Inspectorate as the Major Infrastructure Planning Unit. Sir Michael Pitt will be Chief Executive of the Planning Inspectorate

The future of CABE

The government has confirmed the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) is to merge with the Design Council from April 2011. ■

Mayor's draft cultural strategy -

Following London Forum's response to the consultation, members of the London Forum Committee were invited to a meeting to discuss the strategy

The London Forum response welcomed the Strategy in that it gives prominence to the cultural dimension of life in London as well as the economic, environmental, health and physical dimensions. The Forum supported the strong statements on the value and meaning of London's heritage and the way in which the draft treated heritage throughout; and the encouragement it gives to local activities, although it needs to be much clearer on implementation. It was felt that the Cultural Strategy and the London Plan would need to be better co-ordinated.

The Forum made the following points:

- that the plan places too much emphasis on culture as an economic activity - as an industry providing employment with ordinary people seen almost entirely as consumers.
- There should be greater acknowledgement of the immense amount of work done by voluntary arts organisations which initiate, and do things for themselves. There are many amateur dramatic, operatic and orchestral societies, amateur artists, amateur archaeological and local history

societies (some of whom run museums), all of whom do these things, not as a way into the cultural industry, but in their own right simply because they enjoy them.

- Amenity societies and residents' associations voluntarily devote significant time to promoting local history and culture, producing guides and walk books on the history and architecture of their areas and conducting walks to help people appreciate those.
- More support could be given to local museums.

The commitment to obtaining empirical data on London's creative industries is welcomed but we strongly recommend that a similar survey be undertaken to ascertain the size, range, skills and contribution (both economic and social) of the voluntary sector, which we believe would prove to be surprisingly large.

There is scarcely any reference to religion as a factor in arts activities. Yet a significant number of London's historic churches are active in performing and commissioning music.

We agree with the separation of sport from culture, but some reference to 'mind sports', as distinct from physical sports, would be appropriate in the cultural strategy. Chess, for instance, is an activity with a wide appeal, embracing many ethnic groups and people with a range of disabilities. The Mayor might wish to consider policies to encourage chess in schools, and to encourage the provision of accessible venues.

Meeting with Tom Campbell of the GLA

Subsequently a meeting was held with Tom Campbell from the GLA and London Forum Committee members in November.

Tom Campbell assured the Forum members that the draft had been revised in the light of all the comments received, before its launch. It would be an on-going process, for which the Mayor could be held accountable. He emphasised that the strategy could cover only matters over which the Mayor had some power and on which he could deliver, not matters on which he could do no more than lobby in a personal capacity.

London Forum's detailed response can be sent by email. ■

A Constitutional change that few people noticed.

Buried in George Osborne's Comprehensive Spending Review speech to the Commons last October, was a brief - and almost unnoticed - passage about the financing of the Royal Family, undoing, without any consultation, a constitutional arrangement over 250-year old.

Many people assume that the Crown Estate - from beef farms in the north of Scotland, forests in the West Country to Portland stone mining in Dorset, and large chunks of London, such as Regent Street - is managed for the benefit of the Queen. In fact, crown lands and properties are managed on behalf of the crown by the government and any surplus revenue goes to the Treasury for the benefit of the public purse.

It works within very strict rules. It cannot borrow money, cannot invest in property overseas, must maintain the totality of its holdings in lands, gilts or cash and is forbidden from investing in shares. In return, the monarch receives the fixed

annual payment known as the Civil List.

The origins of the Civil List

The arrangement originated in 1760, when the estate was making very little money and George III did a deal with Parliament to boost his income. It remains the prerogative of each new monarch to decide whether to maintain the Civil List/Crown Estate trade-off. This vast and incredibly valuable portfolio of property and land is now worth more than £6.6 billion, and runs substantial surpluses, £210.7 million in the last financial year. Under the new arrangements, thought to be the culmination of a personal campaign by the Prince of Wales going back more than 20 years, the Monarchy will in future receive a percentage of this surplus.

The Civil List has been frozen by the Government at £30 million for the next three years and, from 2013, will be replaced with a Sovereign Support Grant

which will include a share of the Crown Estate profits, initially to have been 15 per cent, but not surprisingly, it's now being negotiated down.

The implications are significant. For instance the Estate owns extensive marine assets throughout the UK including 55% of the foreshore and the seabed out to the 12 nautical miles limit. Currently-planned offshore wind farms on the estate could provide enough energy to meet 25% of the electricity consumption forecast for the UK in 2020. This is in addition to power produced in years to come by wave and tidal technology.

There are already 436 turbines in operation around the UK's 7,700-mile coastline - but within a decade that number is set to reach nearly 7,000. Experts predict this growth could be worth up to £250 million a year to the Crown Estate. ■

Spotlight on the Wandsworth Society

Forty years on we flourish still. Some of the issues that concerned us then concern us now, albeit in different ways. Whereas then visions of brave new worlds seemed blind to the merits of our heritage and open spaces, now commercial pressures threaten.

Peter Farrow reports

To many Wandsworth is an annoying place where you get stuck in traffic. To others it represents the epitome of the affluent middle-class with an enviously low Council Tax.

But to our members it is the place where we live, and we like it, and not only because of the low Council Tax. We have some wonderful open spaces, a town centre just waiting to be restored to a simple two-way road system, a wealth of listed buildings and some attractive and stylish new buildings. We are a varied mix of peoples.

Our area of interest is Wandsworth, the town (not the borough), the rivers Wandle and Thames, and the open spaces of Wandsworth Common and King George's Park. The town centre lies in the valley of the River Wandle. Here there is a high proportion of social housing. The higher surrounding land has areas of fashionable Victorian properties. We are bounded to the west by Putney, to the east by Battersea and to the south by Balham and Tooting. Our northern border is the Thames, and the River Wandle runs through our middle, creating the valley from which our East and West Hills rise. We share a concern for our wider environment, and a particular dislike of tall buildings in common with our neighbouring amenity groups.

In the beginning

The Wandsworth Society was formed in 1971. Its genesis was a sense of opportunities being wasted. There was still much dereliction, and much activity. Like many others, then, and now, the founding members had an antipathy to the then prevailing trend of large-scale development, both proposed and in the process of being carried out. These were by and large developments that it was felt paid too little regard to the value of the existing fabric of our area. The virtues of the new were overestimated, the qualities of the past were undervalued. Fine buildings, and many less distinguished but still valuable buildings, together with open spaces had been lost, and more were threatened.

In 1971 a vast swathe of our town centre was cleared to make room for an Arndale Centre. When it opened it was the largest indoor shopping space in Europe. A year earlier Trinity Road, the A24, as it passed through Wandsworth Common, was

We do not claim to have single-handedly saved a building or changed Wandsworth for the better. We do claim to have contributed to a more environmentally conscious attitude in planning matters, and an awareness of the town as a distinct place within the borough

converted from a two-lane road to a six-lane dual carriageway, providing the opportunity for a heady burst of speed for a scant half mile until it returns to a two-lane road again. But doing nothing to improve the Common.

These were the major disasters of what now seems long ago. Since then we have been faced with a few more. Perhaps the most significant being another major road improvement scheme in 1989. We knew it as WEIR. In various guises it was a threat to many parts of London. A meeting of some 2,000 people at the town hall was part of our campaign to oppose it.

Ale 0 - Apartments 829*

We are still recovering from our most recent major battle in 2009. At the heart of our town centre was Young's Brewery. It gave Wandsworth an individual character, a strong identity. It was a worthy part of Wandsworth's heritage, provided useful employment, and occasionally a distinctive aroma. Regrettably Young's discovered it was able to sell its site for an eye-watering sum – and it did. A scheme to develop the site included two tall buildings, one of 32-storeys, the other of 42. The taller block was almost, just a few metres short, of being a hazard to aircraft approaching Heathrow. The rest of the site was to be densely developed, with blocks of 8 to 16 storeys.

Despite strong opposition, including detailed submissions by the Society, Wandsworth Council approved the proposed development. Through the intervention of our then MP Martin Linton the application was

called in and a public inquiry was held. The case for the scheme was made to the Inspector by barristers representing the developer, Wandsworth Council and the Mayor of London. The inquiry sat for 20 days in a draughty room in an empty building on the site. Down one side of the room sat some 20-30 barristers, solicitors, Council officers and clerical support making the case for. On the other side sat 2-4 members of the Society making the case against. We were more than a little pleased when the Inspector made his decision to refuse permission.

It would be unfair not to mention that the Health and Safety Executive also opposed the scheme, and that they put up a legal team, and that the potential danger of an exploding gasholder also concerned the Inspector. But the arguments on the merits of the case on planning, design, the effects on the listed buildings, the provision of affordable housing and all the other planning issues were more than ably made by the stalwart John Dawson, Shirley Passmore, Philip Whyte and Tony Taylor of our planning sub-committee. And – despite the serried ranks on the other side, we won the day, but at no little cost in terms of anxiety, adrenaline and exhaustion.

However, it is unlikely that the Brewery site will not be redeveloped at some point, and we understand an application is in the offing. Who knows, this time it might be an imaginative scheme that does not exceed the prevailing building heights, is not an overdevelopment and respects the listed buildings on the site – who knows? The possibility that loins will need to be re-girded currently has the shortest odds.

Planning applications great and small

We are also gearing up for what we think will be a disastrous threat to our area with Thames Water's Tideway Tunnel needing three CSO shafts in the Wandle Delta and a main shaft either to the west at Barn Elms or the east in Battersea. We are not convinced that the most appropriate sites have been chosen, but more fundamentally we are not convinced that a storage tunnel, removing a low percentage of the sewage in the Thames at enormous expense and environmental cost, is a good idea.

Apart from having responded to some significant developments we also monitor the smaller, but often visually damaging



The Wandsworth Society

Contact: Chairman: Valerie Taylor
email: vt@wandsworthsociety.org.uk
website: http://wandsworthsociety.org.uk/

Valerie Taylor

planning applications. We do not oppose as a default response. We seek to give a considered opinion on all applications, and we welcome new design.

Our social side

We are proud of the scope and quality of our regular meetings. This year we will have had talks on Transition Towns, Women in Intelligence Espionage and Resistance, the poet Edward Thomas, two local writers publishing in 2011, the local authority's strategy on Ecology, Biodiversity and Sustainability. And we have planned a series of local visits and celebrations to mark our 40 years.

We are also proud of having hosted a twenty-four year series of soirées at the house of our members David and Elizabeth Ward. Some eighty-seven evenings of superb chamber music, performed by established musicians, but mostly by students or recent graduates.

As to the future

We are a relatively ageing bunch : while some of our founding members have maintained the zeal that prompted the formation of the Society, we feel the need for more, and younger, members. Somewhat frighteningly, we realise we are looking to those who were not yet born when we started.

However, we have been encouraged of late at signs that younger people are taking an interest, and wonder if we amenity

groups will experience a renaissance arising from the current attempts to foster a local interest in local affairs. ■

**829 is the number of the residential units, or luxury apartments in the proposed Ram Brewery development*



Top right: The frieze on the High Street frontage of the town hall; **Above:** St John's Therapy Centre designed by Buschow Henley; **below** the High Street showing the tower of All Saints parish church, and W G Child & Sons, founded in 1890, now run by the fifth generation of the family.



Age: 40 years old. Founded July 1971 as the Wandsworth Amenity Group.

Circumstances of birth: Disturbed by lack of awareness of, or concern for Wandsworth; a town within the eponymous borough. Catalysts: unrestrained policy of demolition/redevelopment of Victorian houses instead of refurbishment; building of the Arndale Centre removing much of town's historic heart; building over the River Wandle. Wandsworth Bridge Southern Approach Road, cutting swathe through common and small streets. Nobody seemed to care.

Biggest successes: (1) Listing, and restoration of the Royal Victoria Patriotic building. (2) Recognition of the River Wandle as a significant environmental asset. (3) Influential in the formation of Conservation Areas, and of Management Advisory Committee for Wandsworth Common. (4) Significant objector in the successful stopping of WEIR, new highways planned through the borough. (5) Rejection of high-rise scheme for Ram Brewery site in town centre. (6) Stopping indoor sports buildings on open space. (7) Recognition by borough planners as an informed consultee.

Biggest disappointments/ frustrations: (1) Inability (so far) to restore High Street to two-way traffic. (2) Failure to stop very high-rise and dense development along Thames frontage. (3) Inability (so far) to get Feather's Wharf turned into the promised little park alongside the Wandle.

Present preoccupations: (1) Prevention of very tall buildings. (2) Ram site development proposals. (3) Springfield Hospital development proposals. (4) Safer streets and removal of street clutter.

Working details: Membership of around 500. Executive Committee plus Planning, Roads and Transport, Open Spaces, and Meetings sub committees. Monthly meetings (free). Regular Soirees. Occasional arranged outings. A (roughly) quarterly Newsletter, with bumper issue at Christmas. Annual subscription £10.

Special characteristics: Wandsworth is one of five towns that form the borough of Wandsworth. Largely Victorian / Edwardian but with scattered Georgian, and some noted 1950/60s council estates. Now also many modern private residential blocks. There are 15 Grade II* listed buildings and also a number of Grade II listings. We are an ethnically mixed community.

Last word: We do not claim to have single-handed saved a building or changed Wandsworth for the better. We do claim to have contributed to a more environmentally conscious attitude in planning matters, to an awareness of the town as a distinct place within the borough, and to the acknowledgement of the importance of the little river Wandle, responsible for our existence. ■

Basement problems in Camden

Problems with basement development are increasing all over London

Tony Hillier, the Heath & Hampstead Society Chairman, describes how his society approached it

London Forum readers may be interested in the campaign the Heath & Hampstead Society has conducted over the past two years to introduce proper and effective controls at the planning stage to limit the risks from potentially dangerous basement development. Our members gave generously to a campaign fund to make this possible.

Camden's borough-wide statistics show that 953 planning applications for basements were made between June 2005 and February 2010. Around 75% of these have been residential. The main concentrations have been in Hampstead and Belsize villages and around Primrose Hill. Just over half have been approved.

What are the problems?

Developing below ground has allowed living space and property value to be cost-effectively increased, while avoiding planning restrictions; and is resulting in damage to neighbours. Noise, street damage, and disruption while the works are going on, are virtually uncontrollable during the hours of 8am to 6pm, provided the developer uses best building practice.

The Heath & Hampstead Society has concentrated on the issues of local flooding and structural damage to neighbours' property for which the law in theory offers preventative remedies which are open to being dealt with at the Camden level, rather than the national policy or law making level. It has proved a tough obstacle course.

One might have thought that the law doesn't allow someone to damage your property or build a dangerous building and get away with it. While Building Regulations apply to how your neighbour builds his basement, they do not address the possible impact the excavation may have on your property. In addition, since the powers of the District Surveyor were removed in the 1980s, allowing the developer to choose his own subcontractor, these Regulations are toothless. If you can prove that the damage was caused by the neighbour's excavation you can sue him for damages under the Party Wall Agreement, if you have one. This involves huge risks and expense, and your house might also be uninhabitable while you pursue your remedies. You might then have difficulty in recovering any damages that are awarded from your neighbour.

Serious damage from next-door basements was occurring and neither Camden, nor the courts nor the Planning Inspectorate were doing anything about it. There was poor understanding of the particular geological and groundwater conditions found locally: the presence of four of London's ancient river catchments within the upper and water bearing Divisions of London Clay, large areas of Bagshot Sand, and eighteenth and nineteenth century houses with old and quite weak foundations. This called for a drastic new look at planning policy and possibly building design and practice.

What obstacles have we encountered?

A combination of weak Camden planning policy (confined to tree protection and light well control), and controversial and poorly understood national policy. In addition virtually all experts in planning practice, whether acting for Camden, the developers or the objectors, seemed to be under the impression that the risk of neighbour damage could not be dealt with at the planning stage. We concentrated on the principle that planning law should consider the impact development may have, and if serious damage can be predicted, it should be prevented.

One of the problems was and remains that the advisers and contractors engaged on domestic development often lack the necessary expertise to do a proper job, and/or the developer is not interested in paying for one.

We commissioned the help of two experts with the necessary high powered credentials in geology, hydrology, hydrogeology, geotechnics and structural engineering. They advised us that for any basement excavation the resulting damage can be predicted and in the majority of cases any predicted damage can be mitigated at a cost.

Their reports cover obvious factors such as soil and underground water conditions on both the site being developed and the site next door, which must be measured and analysed using sufficient and appropriately placed boreholes to calculate potential ground movement. The depth of the basement; its proximity to the neighbours; the design and methodology of the proposed containment measures and later construction; the state of the foundations

and structure next door must all be taken into account to calculate the impact on neighbouring properties when the planning authority considers an application.

Relevant policies

We persuaded Camden that planning policy guidance PPG 14, dating from the 1990s, does place a duty on the local planning authority to require the developer to demonstrate that the impact of a proposal can be deemed acceptable. If this cannot be shown, the application must be refused. There are some ambiguities in the wording as a left-over from its predecessor policy, which was historically drafted for the protection of disused mining areas.

Camden was in the process during 2008-2010 of consulting on a whole new set of new local planning policies for the Local Development Framework which replaces the UDP. This enabled us to recommend the drafting of two new policies, DP23 to control the impact of basements on local flooding, and DP 27 to control the impact on damage to neighbour structures. These were adopted in November 2010 and must be taken into account when basement applications are determined.

Camden also invited the firm Arup to write a Guide Note to provide professional evidence that local conditions justify the introduction of the new LDF policies, and to give advice as to how these policies should be interpreted and applied. With significant input from the Society and our experts, the result is a 5-step Basement Impact Assessment procedure: "Camden geological, hydrogeological and hydrological study. Guidance for Subterranean Development" (it can be found on Camden's LDF website). It specifies the investigations which the developer must present to Camden as part of all basement applications and will form part of new Supplementary Planning Guidance, which Camden will publish on 6 April 2011.

Finally, we have given Camden notice formally requesting the introduction of a new local Article 4 Direction preventing any basement application, however small, from being treated as permitted development. Two case histories, one in NW3 and one in NI, of basements which were not properly investigated at the planning stage and

Civic Voice and the London Forum

Establishing a working partnership by **Tony Burton,**
Director of Civic Voice

www.civicvoice.org.uk

caused terrible damage to neighbours (in one case two properties completely collapsed) are presented as evidence to support the case for insisting that all basement applications must be reviewed under the new Basement Impact Assessment process.

We feel we have made some progress and indeed are perhaps somewhat ahead of the field. But after 6 April we will have to be vigilant in insisting that Camden applies their new policies and guidance. We are also lobbying for Officers and Councillors to receive some introductory technical training to understand the issues. The contact details of the experts, who have advised us on the technical aspects of basement applications, whether you are a digger or an objector, are published in our Newsletter. ■

Local authority action

Local authorities are beginning to take action in response to concerns:

Westminster City Council has drawn up a more detailed policy suggesting information requirements which could help ensure that the impact of development is fully considered prior to works being undertaken:

- extending under no more than 50% of the garden area
- natural or passive ventilation
- not adversely affect neighbours in terms of light pollution
- protect existing boundary walls
- a policy on lightwells (Option 7.4)
- a limit of one additional basement storey (option 7.5)
- ensure the character of historic buildings is respected in terms of plan form and room proportions (Option 7.7)
- development under the highway (Option 7.8)

Royal borough of Kensington and Chelsea has also brought in Arup, to scope the issue of Subterranean Development in greater detail and make recommendations in addition to their 2009 Subterranean Development Supplementary Planning Document which supplements their Unitary Development Plan Policy CD32 and emerging policies in the Local Development Framework (LDF). ■

Civic Voice has been up and running for nearly a year now and Tony Burton recently met with Peter Eversden and the London Forum Committee to discuss how they could work together to strengthen the civic movement as a whole.

Complementary roles

The London Forum "represents the views and interests of amenity and civic societies and their members on issues that are important for the quality of life of Londoners." It is the key voice on civic issues shaping strategic planning, transport and heritage decisions across the capital. From the London Plan to Thames sewers it is the London Forum that is making the running on the big policy and infrastructure issues.

Civic Voice is the national charity for the civic movement. It doesn't get involved in London specific issues except to support the London Forum and civic and amenity societies throughout the capital. Civic Voice's external focus is on national politics, policy, partnerships and the media.

It lobbies Government and its agencies, influences Parliament and raises awareness of the civic movement for the benefit of everyone. It also speaks at a number of national conferences, many held in London, to professional and other audiences.

In the short space of its existence Civic Voice has brought a new level of media interest in the civic movement, including slots on the main BBC and ITV television news, BBC Radio 4's Today programme and You and Yours and a recent BBC Politics Show in which its President, Griff Rhys Jones, gave viewers a tour of the key civic issues facing Fitzrovia. Civic societies in London are helped by this high profile for the civic movement on the national stage, and by changes to the law and policy which shape decisions in their local area. Just as the London Forum shapes strategic decisions in London so Civic Voice complements this on the national stage and raises the media profile too.

Both Civic Voice and the London Forum play important roles in bringing civic societies together to share experience and make their views known. Civic Voice helps connect London groups with others

elsewhere in the country through meetings, workshops and bulletins, and national campaigns for civic societies and their members to get involved. Its Street Pride campaign has successfully secured Government support to clear street clutter and is based on groups around the country doing surveys of their local streets. Several London groups attended a workshop and have contributed to this campaign. The Love Local campaign drew attention to the local DNA which makes places distinctive, enjoyable and attractive, and was supported by the Prime Minister David Cameron and Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg.

How Civic Voice can help

Civic Voice can provide direct support in helping to set up a website for a group which doesn't have one; advising on recruiting members; raising funds; becoming a charity; working with local schools; running an awards scheme or setting up a heritage trail. It has a hotline and a website rich in useful resources to help civic societies get stronger. Civic Voice also provides direct benefits to civic societies who join – a good value civic society insurance scheme tailored to their special requirements and a free day pass to the National Trust for the individual members of civic societies. There is also free membership of NCVO which provides a host of services and a free current account with The Co-operative Bank for civic societies which pays interest above the going rate.

"Together we're stronger" is an old adage that could have been written for civic and amenity societies. By joining both the London Forum and Civic Voice the whole movement is strengthened. We look forward to your support and your ideas for the future. ■

Events to watch out for London Forum Meeting March 29th

Your chance to quiz Tony Burton and Chair, Paula Ridley - details back page

Civic Day

Civic Voice is organising Civic Day on 25 June 2011 for civic societies across the country to showcase their work and encourage people to get more involved in their local area. ■

News from the Mayor and GLA

New powers for the Mayor

Mayor's new powers

Development Corporation

Plans to create a Mayoral Development Corporation to maximise the regeneration legacy from the 2012 Games in East London have been published for consultation by Mayor Boris Johnson. He has proposed that the Olympic Park Legacy Company (OPLC) will be reformed as a Mayoral Development Corporation (MDC), which would incorporate the assets and responsibilities of the existing OPLC, as well as some of the work of other existing regeneration agencies in the area.

With greater powers, including planning powers, and working over a wider area than that covered by the existing OPLC, the Mayor has argued that the new corporation would boost the effectiveness of the Legacy Company and help make the most of Games-related investment. Stratford Town Centre will not be included because the Mayor does not wish to disrupt the existing arrangements put in place by the London Borough of Newham and its partners for regeneration in the town centre.

Partnership for growth

The economic growth of the capital will be supported by a new enterprise partnership between City Hall and the capital's boroughs and businesses. Covering the whole of the capital, the new London Enterprise Partnership (LEP) will identify opportunities for business and economic growth, innovation, training and job creation. It will also make the case to central Government to ensure London receives its fair share of funds to support economic development. It will be co-chaired by the Mayor and a leading member of the capital's business community.

The proposal to create a London-wide LEP has been given the go-ahead by the Coalition Government. The partners will now establish a board and develop plans to ensure London remains the engine of the UK economy and the most competitive city in the world for business, and maximises inward investment opportunities.

Money to improve council homes

The Mayor of London has secured more than £800m, over half of the Government's £1.6 billion Decent Homes budget, for

The identity and character of the parks would not change and sensible safeguards against unsuitable developments and activities would be put in place

The Mayor takes over the Royal Parks

London. Thousands of the capital's poorest council tenants, currently living in some of the worst housing conditions in the country, will now see their homes brought up to the national Decent Homes standard.

Royal Parks

Following much recent speculation, the Government published a Statement of Intent in January announcing its intention to pass control of the Royal Parks to the Greater London Authority. The 5,000 acres of historic parkland run by the Royal Parks Agency (RPA) are currently managed by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS).

The transfer will require legislation to be passed by Parliament "when the opportunity arises" and will not take place until after the Olympic Games in 2012. Control will pass to a board chaired by a Mayoral appointee and comprising representatives from the London boroughs and a member "appointed by or on behalf of the Sovereign".

The Mayor and new board will be bound by all existing arrangements between the Royal Parks Agency, the Royal Household and armed forces for ceremonial use of the parks "which should have overriding priority." They will also take on responsibility for allowing rock concerts, new cafés and shops, parking charges and leisure activities.

It was pledged that the identity and character of the parks would not change and that sensible safeguards against unsuitable developments and activities would be put in place. A framework setting out the maintenance of the parks and safeguarding their "primary use" as a place of "quiet recreation by the public" will be established. The GLA will also be granted a new power to make bye-laws covering the parks, subject to agreement by the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport.

The Mayor had been on record as saying that adequate funding was essential before he could consider the move; the DCMS confirmed that the GLA would receive funding, said to be £32 million, for the parks which will be "agreed at the outset" but "subject to future spending reviews."

It is also the intention to introduce park champions who will voice users' concerns and report back up the chain to the Mayor. The eight parks are:

- Bushy Park,
- The Green Park,
- Greenwich Park,
- Hyde Park,
- Kensington Gardens,
- The Regent's Park including Primrose Hill
- Richmond Park
- St. James's Park.

Talks continue over responsibility for other green spaces in central London, such as Victoria Tower Gardens, Grosvenor Square Garden and Brompton Cemetery, which have been run by the Royal Parks.

Community Infrastructure Levy Consultation

The Mayor launched a six week public consultation in January on a preliminary draft charging schedule to be paid by most new development in Greater London that has 100 square metres or more of gross internal floorspace. It is the first step in setting a Mayoral Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL). The money raised by the CIL is intended to be used to pay for infrastructure needed to support the development of an area. Initially, the Mayor proposes to use the CIL to raise £300 million towards the cost of Crossrail – as agreed in the funding agreement with Government for the project.

Roadworks fees

A scheme is to be set up under which utility companies and other organisations will have to apply for permission first and pay a fee before digging up roads.

Transport for London and 16 of the capital's boroughs officially launched a permit scheme in January; any company digging holes without permission or breaking the conditions of their permit risks being fined. The scheme was a manifesto pledge by Mayor Boris Johnson as part of his efforts to smooth traffic flow and it

aims to encourage companies to work together and thereby reduce the number of holes dug in London's roads each year.

The Mayor is also seeking Government permission to run a lane rental scheme that would mean companies would pay for every minute they dig, encouraging the utility companies to manage their work time more efficiently.

Lorries to be banned from central London

Boris Johnson told a People's Question Time event at the Camden Centre that heavy goods vehicles could be stopped from entering parts of central London to help keep out some of the worst polluters. Lorries would be made to drop off their goods at bases around the perimeter. Low-carbon vehicles would then be used to take the goods to their destination. Pollution is said to cause the early deaths of 3,000 to 5,000 people in the capital each year.

Bexley council leader to advise Mayor

The Mayor has asked Bexley council leader Teresa O'Neill to help him tackle problems with housing, transport and employment in the outer boroughs. Ms O'Neill will work with the Outer London Commission. Mr Johnson said: "It is vital we address the historic neglect of the outer boroughs that preceded this mayoralty."

Mayoral Award for floating river walk

Plans to create a new mile long floating river walk along the north bank of the River Thames, parallel to the river frontage, connecting Blackfriars Bridge with the Tower of London, designed by global architects and planners Gensler as part of the London 2012 celebrations, have won the Mayor's Award for 'Planning Excellence' at the 2010 London Planning Awards.

However the 'London River Park' proposal has aroused concerns about implications for navigation channels and docking alignments, risk of collision, impact on freight, and potential obstruction of existing river use, in particular at the City of London refuse transfer station.

Bid to end rough sleeping in capital

The Mayor has secured £34 million to cut rough sleeping in the capital. The

Government has devolved greater powers to the Mayor which will help meet his commitment to end rough sleeping across the capital by 2012.

Planning powers returned to local people in east London

The London boroughs of Barking and Dagenham, Havering, and Newham will resume planning functions in the area known as London Riverside, from the London Thames Gateway Development Corporation on 1 April. Bob Neill, Planning Minister said: "Putting local boroughs back in control of planning in the London Riverside area puts decision-making power back into democratically elected hands – marking a new era in the area and giving local people more influence to shape the place in which they live"

The Corporation will for the time being retain planning powers in the Lower Lea Valley area covering the London Boroughs of Hackney, Newham and Tower Hamlets. Decisions on the way forward in this area will be taken in due course, once the Mayor of London has decided whether to establish a Mayoral Development Corporation in part of the area, on which he is currently consulting.

Mayor's Annual Monitoring Report

The Mayor published his latest Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) in February. It monitors progress on the implementation of the London Plan. The AMR reports on Supplementary Planning Guidance, Best Practice Guidance, progress on the Opportunity Areas and Intensification Areas, and other Mayoral Strategies.

In addition, the AMR gives an update on the Mayor's planning activities and sets the context for planning development in London.

The report contains the Housing Provision monitor as an Annex with the Affordability thresholds for social/intermediate housing.

The latest AMR covering 2009/10 shows London's economic output fell by 4.9% from its mid 2008 peak to the third quarter of 2009, but by the second quarter of 2010 had risen by 2.4%. In employment terms, 190,000 jobs were lost during 2008 – 2009,

mainly in the private sector, but there was some recovery in the first half of 2010.

The recession has also impacted on London's housing record, reducing output by 16% from its 2008/9 peak to 24,300 conventional homes in 2009/10 and, unsurprisingly, to below the long-term monitoring benchmark (27,600). However, the decline in residential approvals appears to be abating, falling only 5% to 44,100 and close to the average for the last decade. In percentage terms, affordable housing output remained at record levels (37% of the total), but in absolute terms fell to 9,000 in 2009/10.

It can be found at:

<http://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Annual%20Monitoring%20Report%2007%20Feb%202011.pdf> ■

Results of the EIP

We still await the Inspectors' report of the Examination in Public of the Mayor's new London Plan.

We will inform members by email when it is published. ■

Heritage Alliance AGM

Michael Hammerson attends meetings on behalf of the London Forum. The AGM in December was held at the Banqueting Hall. Chairman Lloyd Grossman addressed the meeting and Heritage Minister Jeremy Hunt gave the keynote talk. HA now has 88 member groups.

There is considerable concern about cuts to funding and the main challenges are: Fundraising; putting Heritage as high as possible on the agenda; ensuring Ministers and MPs understand what Heritage is; ensuring that we make our MPs aware of Heritage and of what HA is doing. They are pressing the issue of VAT on repair and restoration; all agree that the differential is ludicrous, but the Treasury remains inflexible.

For more information

<http://www.theheritagealliance.org.uk/heritage-link-update-e-bulletin> ■

Environment and planning

Stories of interest from London Forum members and associates, and others

Report by **Helen Marcus**

Campaign for Clean Air

London Forum Chairman, Peter Eversden joined members of the Campaign for Clean Air in London, and two London MEPs Jean Lambert (Green) and Claude Moraes (Labour) recently to meet Janez Potocnik Commissioner for the Environment European Commission to urge that the UK government is not given more time to meet EC air quality standards. Concern was expressed about premature death numbers in London which the Mayor has admitted are considerable. They maintain that the UK doesn't comply with pre-conditions of Directive ii, and that the Government is being selective or 'misleading' to the Commission by saying Marylebone Road "[has] the highest exceedences (both modelled and monitored) [in London]" (3 September letter).

They highlighted inconsistencies between UK's reapplication and Mayor's statements/ consultation documents. The lack of tangible UK measures severely limits scope for a 'conditional time extension'. The Campaign for Clean Air has set up an online petition demanding the Mayor take action.

Recycling –What recycling?

This question was raised in the West Hampstead Amenity and Transport group's newsletter:

"For quite a while many of us have been concerned about the result of our efforts to recycle parts of our refuse. The way in which all of our waste has been collected over the past few years has led to many questions. A while ago we asked about whether food waste should be separated

from other waste and, perhaps as a result of this enquiry many of us now have green caddies and brown food waste boxes. However this is comingled with garden waste which does not make sense.

"What exactly is the purpose of the recycling strategy? This question was further fuelled by a visit I paid to the London Waste Ecopark in Edmonton which is where some of our refuse is treated. At the centre of this facility is an Energy from Waste plant which is producing electricity from a mixed waste stream with by-products of metals and material suitable as a building aggregate (used for building roads etc). So impressive was this facility that it begged the question of whether this is not in fact the best way of dealing with all domestic waste. With this method of disposal all household waste could be collected at once (with no household sorting) and it might be environmentally more beneficial.

"So we all might be wasting a lot of time, money and energy living with the possibly false assumption that all of our efforts to recycle our waste is good for the planet."

Carbon negative cement

A new class of cement with a carbon negative footprint has been developed by the London-based company Novacem. Set up by chief scientist Nikolaos Vlasopoulos and his colleagues at Imperial College London, following on 20 years of research, Novacem has already attracted the attention of major construction companies and investors including the Carbon Trust.

The company has just started a £1.5m

project funded by the government-backed Technology Strategy Board to build a pilot plant. It offers performance and cost parity with ordinary Portland cement, and if all goes well, it is expected to have Novacem products on the market within five years.

Traditional cement results in greenhouse gas emissions from two sources: the intense heat from the ovens required to process the raw material; that then releases further CO₂ as it burns. Novacem's cement, based on magnesium silicates, not only requires much less heating, it also absorbs large amounts of CO₂ as it hardens, making it carbon negative.

Energy-from-waste in Bexley

Following a tortuous planning process going back 15 years, with opposition from local groups and the London Borough of Bexley, several public inquiries and an insolvency set-back last year, the completion of Cory Environmental's energy-from-waste plant at Belvedere in South East London is back on track. Work is being carried out by construction company Costain, which was awarded the £120 million contract to design and build the facility's main buildings in August 2008 by Swiss energy-from-waste specialist Von Roll Inova, which is set to manage the plant.

Set to be the largest such plant in the country The Riverside Resource Recovery Facility is expected to be complete by mid 2011. It is intended to treat up to 670,000 tonnes of residual waste and will generate energy adequate to power 66,000 homes. ■

A 'cri de coeur' from the Secretary of the Charlton Society

Thank you for another important message from the London Forum (they never seem unimportant). On public improvements, I want to make a comment (probably similar to many others) in connection with Public Realm Improvements, about the role of local authorities. My 15 years' or more experience in our Society shows that, however well-intentioned they might be, any attempt to improve anything working through the local authority, it sometimes seems as if at least twice as much energy and time is needed to get anywhere as might be required if they were not in the loop. Procedural problems; identifying the

people that count; highways departments that see their role as that of simply keeping motorists happy and the pedestrian "safe"; bylaws and regulations emanating from central government with exactly the same priorities; surreal budget constraints and opportunities; the strong sense that everyone is watching their backs; etc.

Of course, one has to accept that it was ever thus - but does it really have to be for ever more? Will the recent spreading official urge to devolve powers to the citizen and increase transparency create the possibility of a little real improvement? So how about some ideas to help time-poor, hard-pressed

local society volunteers suss their local authorities and find a way forward without having to reinvent the wheel? Or, on the other side of the coin, ideas for ways in which LAs might come up with creating points of contact that actually work (I have in mind our LA's recently created "contact centre": the old switchboard used to do a much better job, so much so that I make the point of pleading with the operator to not put me through to the centre)?

Best wishes and thanks for the Forum's great work.

Roden Richardson ■

Come Friendly Freight...

by **Dick Allard**, Westcombe Society and London Forum committee member

The London Forum has long argued for polices to reduce the level of disruption caused by freight traffic, for example by limiting the size of delivery vehicles in town centres and promoting greater use of rail and river, and has called for appropriate changes to the Mayor's Transport Strategy and The London Plan. However, individual amenity societies can also play a useful role in seeking to reduce detrimental impacts of freight movements, using the local planning process.

What amenity Societies can do

Planning applications for any new development or change of use should include a transport assessment, covering movement of both people and freight. Where there are appreciable levels of freight, TfL urge that this should incorporate a Construction Logistics Plan (CLP) to cover the construction phase and/or a Service & Delivery Plan (DSP) covering subsequent deliveries and disposals, assessing the impact of freight movements and incorporating a range of measures appropriate to the site in question to minimise that impact. Because of their familiarity with the planning process, amenity societies might play an important part in this process.

In considering transport issues, planning officers can of course call on the advice of their transport colleagues, and on developments which are sited on (or have a significant impact on) TfL designated roads they have to seek comments from TfL. As appropriate, they can also seek advice and guidance from one of London's 'sub-regional' Freight Quality Partnerships (FQPs), which are currently established in Central London, South London, Thames Gateway and West London.

FQPs bring together representatives of the relevant boroughs, business, freight operators, and the community (the London Forum is represented on the Central, South and Thames Gateway FQPs).

As with all aspects of planning applications, what amenity societies can bring is detailed local knowledge (of the site and its surrounding transport problems and opportunities), a range of expertise and, equally important, a fresh pair of eyes with a different perspective.

How should societies approach the task

How should societies approach the task of assessing the adequacy of the CLP and DSP in a proposed development? In general, we should expect the planning application to show that the applicants have fully investigated, and are making all reasonable use of, more sustainable and less disruptive modes of operation, as well as means of reducing the amount of freight and the number of unnecessary journeys. This can involve a mix of features, including the maximum use of sustainable modes (water, rail, low emission vehicles, bikes for local deliveries); making the most effective use of each journey to site, using consolidation centres (break-bulk centres, pallet hubs etc.) where, for example, longer distance loads of specific items (sometimes for a number of sites) can be transferred to smaller vehicles containing a mix of items for just-in-time delivery (which has the added advantage of reducing on-site waste and its subsequent disposal); and wherever possible, re-using waste products from site clearance and demolition on-site.

Another important issue is ensuring that the development's design incorporates appropriate features from the start, such as off-street loading / unloading bays which can substantially reduce on-street disruption. They can also facilitate quiet out-of-hours deliveries which (with the right management practices and in appropriate circumstances) have the potential to reduce both peak period congestion and pollution.

How to implement this approach,

As a tentative first attempt to implement this approach, I have recently been looking at a substantial proposed development at Enderby Wharf on the Greenwich waterfront, comprising a cruise liner terminal with new jetty, a 251 room hotel, and 770 residences. Whilst (surprisingly?) there was no specific reference to either a CLP or a DSP, a good deal of relevant material was included in the Transport and Waste chapters of the Environmental Assessment. The Transport chapter comprised an analysis of the impact of the additional traffic on local roads, plus some discussion of enhancing pedestrian access to bus routes and the use of the jetty for the

www.londonsfqps.co.uk

This website describes the work of the FQPs, provides contact details, and there are links at the bottom of the home page to the published leaflets on CLPs and DSPs.

www.tfl.gov.uk/freight

is the website for general information on freight issues in London (including the London Freight Plan). ■

regular Thames Clipper services. [The supporting evidence - assumptions and traffic simulations - is provided in a separate "Transport Assessment"] The Waste chapter covered the handling of waste both during construction and in subsequent operation, including the on-site re-use of waste from demolition (and the resulting reduction in freight movements), the substantial use of the river, and the use of off-site prefabricated sub-units to reduce both waste and freight movements.

However, there was no attempt to estimate the nature and volume of road deliveries to the site, and no description of the provision for loading/unloading, and (apart from aggregates) there was little description of how the stated aim of maximising use of the river would be implemented - all points which I argued, in my submission, should be incorporated in a CLP, and which were, in the event, largely covered by the Council's planning conditions.

I also suggested that the developers should hold a meeting for local residents/business to describe and discuss the anticipated levels of construction traffic, and that the operational plans for the site should include provision for the receipt of daytime deliveries to the 770 residences. These two points were accepted by both the Council and the developers at the Planning Board meeting at which the development was approved.

How we can best develop our ability

Since commenting on the freight aspects of applications would, for most of us, be a new venture, we need to consider how we can best develop our ability to make the most effective observations. At least in this initial stage we should be able to get some very useful guidance from the FQPs, but we can also learn from each other. To this end, I am happy to compile a contact list - if interested, email me at: r.j.allard@qmul.ac.uk.

Any suggestions as to how we might operate or as to the main issues would also be helpful (as would any indication of experience or expertise), and depending on numbers it might then be useful to arrange an informal workshop at which we could be guided through a variety of cases. ■

Round the Societies

A round-up of news from our member societies.

By **Haydn Mylchreest**

The material for this article is drawn from society newsletters and magazines. Societies' members have a wealth of practical experience and fascinating historical and cultural information which can be shared to the benefit of London residents. Do send copies of your newsletters to our office at 70 Cowcross Street, EC1M 6JE.

Highgate Society Response to Localism Bill

The Highgate Society was surprised to find that it appeared, as far as it could see, to be the only Amenity Society in the country to have sent a submission to the House of Commons Select Committee on the Localism Bill. However it was also very pleased to see that its submission was among those selected to be notified to the House.

Who runs the Council?

Islington Society Journal reports on the failure of Islington and Camden boroughs to combine under one Chief Executive. They comment: "Whereas the Labour group in Islington has stamped its mark on the Council by reaffirming the distinction between officer responsibility and member-led decision making, the same progress has not been made in Camden where the Labour group appears to have been less optimistic about taking control and consequently less prepared." The officer/member relationship (in Barnet) was also raised at our AGM. London Forum would be interested to hear from other societies who feel this is a problem in their boroughs.

Clamp down on disorder in Richmond

The Richmond Society supported by Richmond Council has helped to achieve a significant change in the use of a very popular pub in the town (owned by Mitchells & Butlers) which has been associated with anti-social behaviour. As a result there has been a clamp down on disorder by the police, an application to the Council by the owners to change the Bull into a venue mainly for dining, and other changes sought by the Society: a reduction in capacity from 650 to 350, a bar area for only 150 (down from 650) where patrons can only drink at tables, and a reduction in the licensing hours. The change is in progress. Could this success be a pattern for others to follow?

Concerns about Basements

Proposals for excessive increases to the floor area of properties by basement development is a topic that continues to exercise many of our members, including Highgate, Clapham and Central London Amenity Groups. The Knightsbridge Association is so concerned about subterranean development that a paper is being prepared with a view to submitting a private members' bill to change the planning legislation. For more information and an account of the Heath & Hampstead Society campaign, see page 12.

200th anniversary of Dulwich Picture Gallery

This year marks the 200th anniversary of the opening of the Dulwich Picture Gallery. The Friends of DPG organised The Big Bang, a celebratory family event in January to start the 200th anniversary year off. A highlight will be the return to the gallery for one month of The Adoration of the Shepherds by Domenicino Zampieri from the National Gallery of Scotland to which it was sold by the trustees in 1971, the only picture the Trustees have sold, to raise money to provide an endowment so that the gallery could continue to function. It will be on view in December 2011. The gallery is currently mounting the first ever exhibition of the work of the American 20th century illustrator Norman Rockwell.

Threat to open spaces in Lambeth?

The Clapham Society February newsletter carries an article on moves being made by a local authority to maximise their income. This time it is Lambeth Council that are in the spotlight because they are proposing to change the policy governing the Council's Parks & Open Spaces which would result in the removal of restraints on the size and frequency of events.

Finchley Society celebrates 40 years

The Finchley Society celebrates its founding on 11th February 1971. Congratulations! This year we have asked member societies sending their annual subscription to let us know the year they were founded; one response I have seen records a foundation date of 1895 and another "More than 100 years" and several founding dates are in the 1930s.

Saving Libraries

The **St. Marylebone Society** expresses grave concern in its newsletter about the future of the Council House and Marylebone Library, a group of neo-classical buildings prominently situated on Euston Road. Three years ago the library was moved 'temporarily' from its Grade 2 listed building called the Annexe, into the basement of the Council House next door. The council had made a commitment that the Annex, a historic building of grand scale with classical detailing, was to be refurbished and that the library would be returned to its old site. But renovations were never started and the Annexe is falling into a very poor state of repair. The Society felt that if refurbishment did not start soon, the building may degrade into a condition whereby the Council may try to use that as an excuse to sell it off.

That is indeed what has now happened. Although Westminster had stressed that they do not intend to sell off the building and that the local community would be consulted on their opinions and ideas, they appear to be trying to sell the leasehold of both buildings. They are now claiming that the Annexe is too outmoded and not easily convertible to meet today's technical requirements. Last summer the Society initiated a local campaign and started a petition to demand that Westminster Council begin the promised restoration. In December committee members were invited to meet council leaders at the building. They were shocked to see the state of the interiors, neglected, insensitively subdivided, with disregard for the decorative cornices. Westminster has now admitted that while they do not intend to close the library, it may re-open in a new location.

Meanwhile **Blackheath Society** has had some success. Their autumn newsletter describes the campaign being led by the Society to prevent the closure of the Blackheath Village Library as part of proposals by Lewisham Council to reduce expenditure. The effectiveness of the campaign has been recognised by the Council which has put off any closure decision until further work has been done to examine different "service models".

The determination of Central Government to remove the massive national deficit as quickly as is reasonable is posing problems for nearly every Council and it is hoped that the eventual cuts will be backed up by sound and convincing analysis. ■

newsbriefs

Key issues of interest and concern to note.

Alcohol licensing reforms

There has been widespread public concern about the effects of irresponsible drinking. Without a stronger say on alcohol licences being put in the hands of local communities, towns and cities will continue to be blighted. A study in Richmond upon Thames reported by the Richmond Society and Friends of Richmond Green found around 1,000 incidents of anti-social behaviour in four evenings in April 2009. The Societies estimate that 95% of such incidents are not recordable crimes.

Open All Hours? network of civic societies and residents groups teamed up with CivicVoice to call for stronger alcohol licensing controls. In response the Home Office put out a consultation on Rebalancing the Licensing Act last July.

An analysis of the consultation, published in November 2010, included the following proposals :

- giving local authorities and the police much stronger powers to remove or refuse licences to premises that are causing problems
- allowing councils and the police to permanently shut down any shop or bar that is repeatedly selling alcohol to children
- doubling the maximum fine for those caught selling alcohol to minors to £20,000
- allowing local councils to charge more for late-night licences, which will help pay for additional policing

For more details see:

<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/publications/consultations/cons-2010-licensing-act/responses-licensing-consult>

Boroughs sharing resources

Following the announcement of task and resource sharing by Westminster, Hammersmith & Fulham and Kensington & Chelsea boroughs, Waltham Forest and Haringey have agreed to merge economic development units tackling unemployment. Richmond is to share legal services with Merton which will host most of the team. However, Islington Society Journal reports that "to the relief of some and disappointment of others"; the plan to appoint a single chief executive for Camden and Islington will not now proceed. (see Round the Societies).

Key UK assets foreign-owned

A report published in December by the Office of Fair Trading (OFT) throws a harsh light on the extent to which ownership of key national assets have passed into foreign hands, revealing that 38% of key UK assets, water, energy, roads, rail, airports and other key facilities, are now foreign-owned. Surprisingly, given the OFT's usually-positive stance on foreign ownership of British corporations, it warned of 'negative effects' on local communities when owners from overseas decide to restructure the businesses they have bought.

Perhaps that is what accounted for the complete collapse of Spanish-owned BAA at Heathrow Airport in this year's snowfalls, while Manchester Airport, owned by the City Council, operated close to normal, having invested in snow ploughs.

Ferrovial was in any case deeply in debt when it launched its leveraged takeover of Heathrow and therefore had no capacity to invest.

Britain's education standards fall still further

In a recent study, economists Eric Hanushek, Paul Peterson of the Hoover Institution of Stanford University and Ludger Woessman professor of economics at the University of Munich, compared educational achievement across nearly 60 countries, by looking at the percentage of 15-year olds who had advanced mathematical skills, as measured by standardised tests. Of the 30 OECD countries Britain is now in 19th place. This provides context for repeated warnings from manufacturing and engineering sectors in recent years that we are falling behind.

Government proposals for planning policies

There are serious concerns about government proposals to consolidate national planning policies. An onslaught by Government on all national policies, to reduce the number of words in them, make them less prescriptive and combine them all into one framework document could weaken the support they have given communities and boroughs in handling planning applications. More information and a full list of policies under consideration can be seen at <http://www.communities.gov.uk/planningandbuilding/planningsystem/planningpolicy/planningpolicystatements/>

More on libraries

In addition to the stories on page 18, civic groups all over the country have been mounting protest campaigns to stop local authorities closing libraries as part of their cost-cutting. A third of London's public libraries face the axe. In Lewisham where 400 protesters crowded into the town hall, Darren Taylor, a former City worker who became a not-for-profit entrepreneur, hopes to take over four libraries that are facing closure.

Hammersmith & Fulham's threat to close the borough archive library brought dismay from historians and a letter to The Times that a valuable resource will be lost, with important historical documents, newspapers and photographs becoming unavailable to future generations. Camden and Brent are threatening to close half their libraries. Groups in Brent are considering a legal challenge.

British Waterways

In May 2009 British Waterways launched a new strategy recommending that it be moved into the 'third sector' as a way of closing its funding gap and giving stakeholders greater involvement in the running of the network. The Government has now decided to turn British Waterways' network in England and Wales into a new 'national trust' for the waterways. It will continue to be funded through a combination of Government grants, income from boat licences, third party grants and commercial activities. The main change would be through the establishment of a guaranteed, long-term contract with Government (giving greater certainty over funding); a 'charity lock' on British Waterways' property endowment; and growing income from tax relief and charitable sources such as donations and legacies. In the 40 years since it was set up it has been transformed and the waterways are now better used and busier than ever. But this has brought new challenges which were not envisaged under the 1960s legislation.

newsbriefs

Streatham Ice Rink Closes

In our last newsletter we reported on local protests at plans to build a temporary ice rink on Streatham Common. (Newsforum, Round the Societies, Autumn 2010, no 57). The protests were successful resulting in a "Plan B" to build the temporary rink on a council-owned car park site in Brixton.

Lambeth council has now agreed to amend the Section 106 agreement attached to the planning permission Tesco received in 2007, to build a new superstore, 250 homes, a new ice rink and 25-metre swimming pool on the "Streatham Hub" site. But the new deal removes the duty on Tesco to build a new rink on the site before closing the existing facility. The Mayor cannot intervene now on the Section 106 change. The council has been accused of giving in to Tesco after accepting a temporary ice rink elsewhere for three years to allow the supermarket to open its new store two years earlier than would have been the case under its original agreement. The council has been condemned for agreeing to this amendment against the wishes of local civic groups, the Mayor, MPs, skaters and sports organisations. There is much concern that the temporary rink in Brixton could lead to clashes between teenagers from the two areas, as well as over the loss of parking spaces for Brixton's historic market and other local amenity issues.

A Book of interest

North and South in East and West

Highgate Cemetery and The American Civil War (1861-1865)

Archeologist Michael Hammerson has written a fascinating and well illustrated booklet about Highgate Cemetery throwing light on a little known connection to the American Civil War. It tells the story behind the lives of three men buried at Highgate, one of whom, Richard Booth, turns out to be the half-brother of the notorious John Wilkes Booth who assassinated President Abraham Lincoln.

Michael, a long-serving committee member of both Highgate Society and the London Forum, was recently interviewed on the BBC Radio 4 History Programme about the book. It is available from Highgate Cemetery, price £3,

A must for those of you keen on local history ■

For information about the London Forum contact:

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Registered Charity Number 1093134

Dates for your diary

London Forum meetings and events

London Forum Events

Meetings at the Gallery, Cowcross Street

29th March 6 for 6:30pm

Civic Voice

Tony Burton, Director, and **Paula Ridley**, Chair, will be on hand to speak on the latest developments and answer your questions

Two meeting dates planned for the summer:

19th May and 5th July at the Gallery,

Subjects to be announced - watch out on your email

Walter Bor Media Awards 2011

The biennial awards, named after our founder President, will take place this autumn and formal submission details and entry forms will be sent to societies in June. However this preliminary announcement will give members extra time to think about what they might submit.

This is the 10th anniversary year of the awards so please make sure your society is entered to mark a special year.

The anticipated closing date will be in early September, .

The categories for this year's awards are:

1. **Newsletters**
2. **Printed publications:** annual reports, membership and promotional brochures, guides, town trails, posters
3. **Books:** histories and studies
4. **Web sites**
5. **Media impact:** newspaper/radio/TV coverage of environmental and/or landscape and/or building projects.

The panel of judges will be chaired by William Palin, Secretary of SAVE Britain's Heritage.

Watch out for entry information and in due course your society's submission will be included in the list of all the winners and participants to be published in NewsForum. ■

newsforum

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