

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

In this issue

Spotlight on
Beckenham Civic
Society Page 10

- | | | |
|--|--|--------------------------------|
| 1 London Forum's 25th anniversary | 6 Independent rule in Loughton | 13 News from the Mayor and GLA |
| 2 Continuing changes to planning | 7 Planning and legislation | 14 Planning and development |
| 3 Commons Select Committee review of GLA Act 2007 | 8 Local Government news | 17 Transport |
| 4 London Forum Open Meeting | 9 Heritage and conservation | 18 Round the Societies |
| 5 London – A City of Contrasts census statistics | 10 Spotlight on Beckenham Civic Society | 19 News briefs |
| | 12 Waiting for the Olympic Legacy | 20 Events and meetings |

London Forum celebrates 25 years

Celebrating London Forum's 25th anniversary

London Forum is planning a programme of events to celebrate the 25th anniversary of its foundation in 1988

This year the London Forum marks another important milestone by celebrating its 25th anniversary and, thanks to its achievements over the years, will do so in style. We are delighted to announce that the Mayor of London and the GLA have most generously offered to host a reception for the London Forum in London's Living Room at the top of City Hall, on July 17th 2013. Invitations to all our member societies will be sent out nearer the time.

Thanks to the Mayor and the GLA

London Forum warmly thanks the Authority and the Mayor for this extraordinarily

generous response to our 25th Anniversary.

The Forum is also planning other events throughout the year.

Open meetings

Our list of open meeting dates is on the back page and we hope to be able to announce some distinguished speakers.

Special Achievement Award - Celebrating your Society's achievements

As part of the Forum's 25th Anniversary Celebration each society will be asked to nominate its top two achievements over the

last 25 years. These will be announced at the Forum's AGM in October

25th Anniversary Walter Bor Awards

These are announced in this edition of Newsforum (see back page). The presentation of the prizes will be in November

We shall be sending you more details and nomination forms shortly.

We look forward to seeing as many of you as possible at these events through the year.

In this issue

Every aspect of our planning and legal systems seems currently to be subject to changes that many perceive to be undermining democratic process and accountability. In a process of change, begun under the last government, it seems nothing is safe. Attempts to cast the planning system in the role of scapegoat, to blame for the economic mess the country finds itself in, seem too often to be based on misleading claims that lack any basis in impartial evidence. Even the Judicial Review process is now coming under fire. This issue covers further changes

proposed to the planning system in the Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Bill and the Growth and Infrastructure Bill currently going through parliament, which could undo years of work to protect the built environment. There are also the Taylor Review, proposals to extend permitted development rights and a review of the the current law on rights to light.

We report also some forthright criticism by others of some of these changes ■

Civic Voice Review

Civic Voice has now been in existence for three years. It has embarked on a wide ranging review of every aspect of its work and governance, as promised in the report *Own the Future*.

If you have any comments or suggestions you would like to make, whether you are a member or not, please contact us.

Civic Voice has now established a Forum of Regional Representatives which it is intended will meet regularly. It will help inform Peter Eversden's contributions to these discussions if we know your views. ■

Continuing changes to planning

Two Bills before Parliament, the **Growth and Infrastructure** and **Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Bills**, are filled with unsatisfactory proposals. London Forum Committee members, led by **Peter Eversden**, have been analysing and responding

There are so many 'relaxations' of planning control and removal of local decision making in these bills that it seems as though 'localism' is being withdrawn and the Government wants to dictate centrally what will be allowed in local areas. Despite all evidence to the contrary, Ministers are still convinced that the planning system causes unnecessary delays to projects that will help the economy and create jobs.

London Forum has lobbied the Mayor and requested that he opposes these Government proposals and seeks to uphold the policies in the London Plan which are sound, suitable for the capital and have been developed over a ten-year period with boroughs and organisations like the London Forum. They are based on evidence that is well analysed.

A positive response was received from Sir Edward Lister, the Mayor's deputy for planning. Boris Johnson has since sought to prevent Government changes harming London, such as the conversion of offices to housing.

Growth and Infrastructure Bill

Following a delay last year this Bill has resumed its passage through Parliament. It contains a raft of further controversial reforms on planning, supposedly designed to stimulate development and boost the economy. There is concern that the Government appeared not to comprehend the implications, or the difficulties these changes would involve. It has been condemned as a developers' charter that conflicts with the "localism" agenda and conflicts with ministers' promises to leave planning decisions to be made at local level. It would give communities secretary Eric Pickles more power over planning decisions. Many of its provisions could actually reduce local democratic control.

It is feared that the Bill will create a fast-track for large-scale business and commercial projects, allowing developers to side-step councils on big supermarkets or retail parks by submitting plans directly to the Planning Inspectorate, where councils can be accused of performing poorly. It will rush through greenfield schemes for business and housing against the wishes of people living nearby with decisions to be

Boris Johnson has sought to prevent Government changes harming London, such as the conversion of offices to housing

taken within 12 months. The Bill will relax rules on affordable housing helping developers to minimise the amount of social housing they provide.

Broadband cabinets - consultation

The Bill contains proposals to relax planning rules and allow the siting of broadband infrastructure to be made easier. The Government believes that the planning system is holding up the roll out of superfast broadband across the country.

They propose that for five years, broadband street cabinets and new poles can be installed under permitted development rights in any location other than a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) without the need for prior approval from local planning authorities. This will involve changes to both primary and secondary legislation which are being taken forward via clause 8 of the Bill.

Threat to Open Space

The Open Spaces Society sees clause 22 of the Bill as an attack on open spaces. There are also clauses which threaten to debar the registration of land as a village green where it is earmarked for development. The Society considers that this provision removes democratic protection from open spaces threatened with compulsory purchase, putting established open spaces at risk. It will result in significantly less parliamentary scrutiny on planning matters and put in danger many thousands of acres of countryside which were painstakingly mapped under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, and the hundreds of sites which people enjoy by custom for informal recreation. It is urging members of the House of Lords to oppose it.

The Growth Bill also changes the rules on compulsory purchase of open space removing the special parliamentary procedure (SPP).

In future when there is no suitable land to give in exchange for the open space, or the exchange land is too expensive, the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government may himself decide that the order need not be subject to SPP, thus circumventing Parliament.

London Forum has emailed members with details of these proposals. More information can be found on the website:

www.dcms.gov.uk/consultations/9697.aspx

Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Bill

The Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Bill continues on its way through Parliament. It is a sweeping piece of legislation making provisions about: the UK Green Investment Bank; employment law; the Competition and Markets Authority; abolition of the Competition Commission and the Office of Fair Trading; amendment of the Competition Act 1998 and the Enterprise Act 2002; the reduction of legislative burdens; copyright and rights in performances; and payments to company directors.

Buried in this arcane assortment of provisions are important amendments to planning and historic environment legislation arising out of the Penfold Review. We alerted members to this last summer. A brief reminder of the proposed changes:

Abolition of conservation area consent

Conservation area consent is to be abolished and its controls merged into the planning system. CAC had long been criticised as being capable of easy abolition, and the widening of planning control over demolition by the Court of Appeal in a recent case taken by SAVE Britain's Heritage has confirmed this. The proposals include:

- Making it a criminal offence to carry out relevant demolition without planning permission;
- A new ground of appeal against an enforcement notice would apply for relevant demolition which was urgently necessary in the interests of health and safety;
- There would be no time limit for taking enforcement action against relevant demolition (mirroring the current unlimited time for acting against conservation area consent breaches).

Certificates of lawful works for listed buildings would be a useful reform.

Changes to the listing system

The Bill also proposes changes to the listing system which remove protection for objects or structures fixed to a building. The rationale for this exclusion is unclear. If the object does not contribute to the special architectural or historic interest of the building then that would be able to be specified in the list description under the second element of the proposals. If it does contribute then there is no obvious reason for excluding it.

Certificates of Immunity from Listing

It will be easier to apply for a Certificate of Immunity from Listing; this would be able to be granted without a planning application or planning permission for the alteration, extension or demolition of the building.

Heritage Partnership Agreements

The Bill aims to enable the creation of Heritage Partnership Agreements to be agreed between the local planning authority and the owner of a building or part of a building. It would carry statutory force and allow the Heritage List for England to define the extent of special interest in a listed building more clearly. A Heritage Partnership Agreement may grant listed building consent with or without conditions. Such a listed building consent will run with the land. Requirements for consultation and publicity in the regulations will be of particular importance if listed building consent is to be granted.

Lawful works certificates

The Listed Buildings Act would introduce certificates of lawful works for listed buildings which might cover proposed works or those which have been carried out. This would be a useful reform.

The Forum is examining the implications of all these proposals for London. ■

Commons Select Committee review of GLA Act 2007

London Forum has responded to a post-legislative scrutiny consultation on the Greater London Authority Act 2007 and the operation of the London Assembly

The Communities and Local Government Select Committee will examine the effectiveness of the Greater London Authority Act 2007, specifically, whether the Act has met its policy objective, and examine the powers and operation of the London Assembly.

At the time of its passage the Act was intended to strengthen the London Assembly and devolve more power from central government to London. There is concern that most parts of the 2007 Act had little effect or are impossible to assess because further legislation has superseded the 2007 Act.

The following points were highlighted by London Forum:

- Communities are concerned that local authority planning decisions have been overruled by the Mayor without full justification. It is not clear what safeguards there are for communities and Councils where the Mayor is both a developer and a planning authority and can therefore grant himself planning permission.
- There has been a major problem of excessive housing density of new housing developments in London, which often exceeds the London Plan limits, thereby overloading local infrastructure and facilities, and yet have been approved by the Mayor's Planning Decisions Unit.
- The further legislation on planning is not all suitable for London. For example the conversion of offices to dwellings and the extensions of homes, all without planning permission, are contrary to the Mayor's policies in the London Plan.
- The Mayor was given the right to develop a spatial development strategy for the capital. He should not have to change it to conform to new policies beyond those in the National Planning Policy Framework, (NPPF) particularly if they could damage the economic development of London. The Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) should not have tried to take away local decision making and should not dictate how development will be assessed.
- There are problems with the way the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)

works: the boroughs have to collect the 'Mayor's CIL' on his behalf, limiting their ability to secure further local benefits.

- The establishment of the London Waste and Recycling Board has allowed a strategic approach to be taken across London and has seen an increase in diversion from landfill and a significant increase in recycling rates.

Other questions

Q. How has the duty on the Mayor to create strategies impacted when there are no powers specifically to implement them? Have the strategies influenced policies either of central government or of the boroughs?

London Forum view: the process has gone well. The London Plan forms the basic Core Strategy for all London's boroughs to which they add policies for their Local Plan. They have been positively influenced by the Mayor's London Plan and its associated Guidance documents.

The latter are necessary now that DCLG has asked the Taylor Review to reduce the quantity of guidance in PPGs and PPSs. That guidance to Council planning and development management officers is important and it should be rationalised but not reduced in scope. The main problem is that DCLG continues to change the national planning policies since the NPPF was published, in ways that are not suitable for London.

Q. The legislation raises a wider question about the powers and operation of the London Assembly.

London Forum view: The Forum supports the kinds of scrutinies that the Assembly's committees initiate.

The Forum think that the Mayor's officers are slow to respond to recommendations by the Assembly Members in their reports.

The attendance at City Hall by Assembly Members and their response to emails varies considerably.

Several of the Assembly Members have work commitments as Councillors in London's local authorities which keeps them aware of local government matters and issues but restricts their availability for GLA work. ■

London Forum Open meeting

The implications for London of the government changes to planning; what do various community groups want to achieve through neighbourhood planning?

Lead speaker, John Walker of Westminster City Council Planning Department.

Report by **Peter Pickering**

Michael Bach opened the meeting by describing how the Conservative Party's pre-election commitment to localism and the devolution of powers to, and below, local authorities (neighbourhood planning, community rights to buy, etc.), had been overtaken in Government by enthusiasm for deregulation and development (extension of permitted development, relaxation of change of use, etc). The system, however, remained 'planned', and in London, uniquely, there was still a regional strategy with housing targets; the London Plan was a bulwark against inappropriate development.

John Walker of Westminster City Council Planning Department, gave a presentation with slides. Among the points he made were:-

Speeding up the planning process:

The Government proposed to allow major applications in 'failing authorities' (judged by the proportion of appeals lost or partly lost) to go straight to the Inspectorate; for fees to be refunded if an application was not decided within 26 weeks, and for Inspectors to consider awarding costs in every appeal, whether asked to or not.

Section 106 agreements - Viability

Developers could appeal to reduce the amounts they had agreed to pay under Section 106 for affordable housing. It was unclear how Inspectors would deal with such appeals. Cases in Westminster demonstrated that tough negotiations by experienced council officers could reach agreements with developers to pay far more under Section 106 agreements than the developer had initially claimed was the maximum possible without making the scheme unviable.

Neighbourhood Forums

There had been very little guidance from the Government on how authorities should deal with applications (Westminster had had thirteen already). The Government's decision to give 15% of the proceeds of the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) to neighbourhoods, and to increase this to 25% if there was an adopted neighbourhood plan, would be a great incentive in parts of Westminster where the proceeds of CIL could be many millions.

Use Classes Order

Allowing the change of use from employment to residential without planning permission would be serious for Westminster, where there were more offices than in the City and Canary Wharf combined; there would also be a problem with niche industrial uses, which could be incompatible with residential because of noise etc. Residential use was worth far more than office use.

Deregulation of broadband cabinets

This could mean that providers simply did not think about the consequences of their location (pavement width, etc) and deregulation of monopolies would mean that providers could always site them free on public land rather than having to negotiate a fee from the owner of a building. Planning authorities would have to include in all decision letters (approvals as well as refusals) a statement that they had worked with the applicant to make a proposal acceptable.

Discussion:

The discussion was structured by topic:

Overseas buyers:

Michael Bach: Kensington & Chelsea were favouring large residences, thus encouraging overseas buyers, who typically spent only very short periods of time in London. John Walker: There were also some very large flats in Westminster; people buying these flats, even though they were in London rarely, could spend very large sums of money indeed in Britain. Mark Poulter (Putney Society): - but these developments did not often use material or labour from Europe. John Walker: the planning authority could impose conditions requiring local sourcing.

Neighbourhood Planning

Eric Leach (Ealing Society) - neighbourhood forums and plans should not be denigrated; much work was being put into them; their local MP was arranging a meeting with a Minister. John Walker agreed; applications contrary to a neighbourhood plan should be refused, so a neighbourhood plan can strengthen or close loopholes in the council's local plan.

Housing

Alastair Hanton (Dulwich Society): what could be done about the shortage and high price of housing? Michael Bach: the large amount of money available for buying houses in Central London was rippling further and further out, and the building of new houses did little to mitigate it. John Walker: only when councils were major house-builders was demand met; the private sector was sitting on a great number of planning permissions, which they implemented only slowly in order to keep prices up.

House extensions

In Harrow most planning applications currently were to increase the size of 1930s houses, some to convert to multiple occupation; the Council was doing quite a good job in controlling these, but would be undermined by the Government's relaxations. John Walker: authorities would still be able to enforce against multiple occupation, but would need more enforcement officers than they currently had.

Community Assets

In reply to a point by Richard Buchanan (Richmond Antiquarians) Michael Bach said that societies should move quickly to get their councils to compile the register.

Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)

In reply to a point about the use of the proceeds of the CIL from the Mount Pleasant Sorting Office, Mr Walker said that the Council could spend CIL proceeds as it wished and not necessarily locally (for instance, the Mayor was spending the CIL he got in Croydon on Crossrail, which went nowhere near Croydon); but an area with a Neighbourhood Plan would be able to get 25% of the CIL raised in that neighbourhood for that neighbourhood.

Duty to co-operate:

John Walker: co-operation meant discussion and working together, not that an authority had to do what the next-door authority wanted (e.g. accommodate a waste-plant). But there could be a real difficulty in getting authorities inside and outside Greater London to work together.

(This report and Mr. Walker's 57 slides, have been emailed to London Forum members). ■

London – A City of Contrasts

Diane Burridge looks at the census statistics for local authorities in England and Wales released in December 2012

Noticeably London is changing rapidly, now verified by census statistics (for England and Wales), released for local authorities in December 2012. Many amenity and civic societies will have seen the statistics relating to their area; this article highlights some contrasts across London – illustrating the important role of each local society in being a voice for increasingly distinct areas.

Population Density and Growth

The greatest change since the last census must be in population size - the 'usually resident' population on Census Day (27 March 2011) was 8.17 million, living in 3.27 million households, an increase of 250,000 (8.3%) households since 2001, and the 19 local authorities with the highest population densities are all in London.

London is made up of quite distinct areas: from Islington being the most densely populated district in all of England and Wales (with almost 140 residents per hectare) to Bromley, Havering and Hillingdon with 20 residents per hectare; from the City of London and Kensington and Chelsea having the smallest average household size in England and Wales to Newham with the largest (greater than three residents per household).

Diversity of Population and Languages

In 2001, 72.9% of London's population were born in the United Kingdom, compared with 63.3% in 2011, with 8.7% born in other European Union countries. 26 of 30 local authorities with the greatest ethnic diversity nationally are London boroughs. The other four are: Slough, Luton, Leicester and Birmingham.

In 2011, 19.5% of the total population in England and Wales were from an ethnic group other than White British. London, with 14.5% of the national population, is home to 41% of non-White British residents - a total of 4.5 million people. This proportion varies greatly across the city, with Brent and Newham having populations of over 80% non-White British.

Across London, White British people make up 45% of the residents, having fallen by 620,000 since 2001. However, the White British population increased in the rest of England and Wales by only 220,000-

This article highlights some contrasts across London – illustrating the important role of each local society in being a voice for increasingly distinct areas

the 400,000 gap is perhaps due to a low birth rate and emigration. The largest drop of White British people is by 37.5% in Newham and about 30% in Barking and Dagenham, Redbridge and Harrow.

There are 422,000 households in London where no one has English as the main language; in particular, Newham has 24.3% of households where this is the situation. In all, 74% of households in London contain occupants who all have English as their main language - compared with 91% nationally.

Labour Market

In London, 65% of the population aged 16 to 74 were in employment, 5.5% were unemployed and 29.5% were economically inactive. Again, contrasts across London are stark: in Newham, 57% of the population were in employment compared with 73.2% in Wandsworth; and in Newham, 35.8% were economically inactive compared with 22.8% in Wandsworth.

Seven in ten households in London have at least one adult in work, and 6% of households had no adult in employment but with dependent children; however in five London boroughs more than 25% of households with dependent children had no adult in employment: Islington, Tower Hamlets, Hackney, Westminster and Barking and Dagenham.

A City of single people living alone?

Over 44% of people over 16 years old in London are single - that is, have never been married nor been in a civil partnership. Islington tops this rate, with almost 60% of adults being single. London also has the lowest number of adults who were married or re-married – with 40%. Islington's rate

was less than 25% compared with Newham where 40% were married.

And less than half of all Londoners aged 16 and over now live in couples, contrasting with 58% for England as a whole (compared to 37.7% of adults in Hackney). Very low proportions of Londoners are widowed or are the surviving partner of a civil partnership, compared with the national average - only Bexley and Havering were above the England figure for this category (6.9%).

Households and Housing

Nearly a third (32%) of households were comprised of one person living alone - 30% of these people were aged 65 and over, compared with 40% nationally. Here there are contrasts within London again: 80% of households in the City of London were one-person households, compared with 22% in Harrow and 6% in Tower Hamlets - the lowest proportion in the country.

Just over half of households were made up of one family, little changed since 2001. In Havering and Bexley, nearly two-thirds of households were made up of one family. And around 30% of households included at least one dependent child - in both London and England.

Privately-rented accommodation made up 25% of the capital's housing stock, and since 2001, the number of houses/bungalows has risen by 1.8%, with the number of flats having risen far more - by 18.6%.

The Role of Societies?

The complexity and variety of London reflects its world status as a global city and as a member of the European Union. Societies may be keen to investigate further the rapid changes now occurring in their areas, and discuss these with relevant politicians, officers and community groups.

Only the first key statistics have been released by the Office for National Statistics and, as more data is released and then analysed by the GLA Intelligence Unit, the London Forum will disseminate this to members. In the meantime, we welcome any updates from societies on their own work relating to census data.

For further information and interactive maps: <http://data.london.gov.uk/census>

Independent rule in Loughton

Extracts from an article by **Ron Heath** RIBA, former Epping Forest District Councillor and Chairman, and **Dr. Chris Pond**, former Loughton Town Councillor and Mayor, of Loughton Residents Association, describing how local residents took control of their council from the party politicians

Members may remember our spotlight on Elmbridge (Newsforum. June 2004), where local independents had ousted the political parties from the local council. Here is the story of Loughton.

Loughton Urban District Council (1900-1933) was a solidly middle class area before WW2, with a population of some 30,000 and its own Town Council. Some 3,850 new dwellings, together with shops, schools, and surgeries, were constructed in the 1950's to house post-war overspill from London's East End.

Loss of Independent Town Council

Various local government reorganisations saw Loughton become part of Chigwell Urban District until 1974, and then Epping Forest District Council (EFDC), leaving it with no town or parish council and no organised representation between the residents and the somewhat aloof district council.

Local residents were repeatedly dismayed by the impact of decisions on the town centre made by the district council, on issues ranging from traffic and car parking provision to planning and development. Decisions made by the planning committee, the composition of which was not published, were taken in private, with the press and public excluded. What many residents valued as a village atmosphere was being destroyed by brash modern developments.

It was inevitable that an association of some kind would emerge to express the concerns of residents in a structured manner. The eventual spur to setting up the Loughton Residents Association (LRA) was a permission granted late in 1979, without any local consultation, for a supermarket of hitherto unprecedented size, on the site of a complex of much loved Victorian buildings.

Financed entirely by subscription, proactive and rather populist in their approach, they had good support from the local press. Sitting councillors were largely unapproachable during this period and were seen as unavailable and unresponsive, whereas the LRA were seen to be democratic and open to public comment.

The Association believes that local issues should be dealt with by local people, answerable to the community, rather than by political parties with policies set by their masters in Westminster

Challenging the party politicians

The Association failed to stop the supermarket but as a result of this, and the demolition of another local Victorian landmark, together with other planning issues, local outrage was such that, following a public meeting, it was decided that the LRA would field a candidate at the county council elections in May 1981 against the sitting county councillor, who, significantly was the chairman of EFDC Development Committee.

The LRA candidate decisively defeated the sitting candidate in Loughton St Mary's county division. An early activist said 'We made it a rule that we would knock on every door in the ward and introduce ourselves and explain who we were, as well as handing over a leaflet setting out our manifesto. It was well thought out, even to the extent of making sure that we closed the gate behind us and spent a certain time at each door so that we could get around to everyone. This was novel as councillors at that time did not bother to meet people'.

Working for the town

The LRA went on to take all of the Conservative seats in the 3 central Loughton wards as each 'third' came up for election. By the 1990's seven of the 59 strong Epping Forest District Council seats were routinely held by the LRA, although Labour remained strong in the Debden wards.

The LRA councillors showed their commitment by securing alterations/improvements for Loughton in the Local Plan and successfully challenging ill thought out development while encouraging sympathetic and appropriate

development. They also successfully campaigned for a town council for Loughton - in spite of opposition by the EFDC. In the first elections for the newly established town council in 1996, Labour returned 12 members and LRA returned 10. By 2000 the result was 11-11.

They continued to gain ground participating in shared administration with the Conservatives from 2006 but without formal coalition, serving as committee chairmen: Resource Committee, Development Committee, Planning Sub-Committee, and Chairmen of the Council, or as cabinet members

Such was the LRA progress that in 2009 the new division of Loughton (Central) was held with 55% of the vote against Labour, Conservative, Lib Dem, UKIP and BNP opposition. In 2008 five BNP councillors were returned in Town Council elections. But in 2012 these were all lost and LRA took 18 of the 22 seats.

At District Council level startling gains were made in 2010; LRA are the second largest group on the district council. In the 2012 elections in Loughton, LRA held 12 of the 14 seats across the seven wards, becoming the majority group on the town council. They are now regarded as sitting tenants in virtually all of the wards, and work tirelessly to maintain that position.

Keeping people informed

LRA sends weekly e-news and twice yearly newsletters to every address in the town, and holds meetings and events such as a monthly farmers' market, and a stall where information about current local issues is available, with councillors in attendance to discuss those issues on a one-to-one basis.

Not surprisingly, planning and development are the major preoccupations of the Association. Its dedicated working group reviews all applications for development in the town and sometimes beyond. The group preserves its independence from the Local Planning Authority, by excluding any councillor sitting on District or Town Planning Committees, and planning matters are not discussed at LRA Executive so as not to fetter the discretion of any planning councillor.

High Street woes

LRA consults and informs residents on a range of other matters, such as alcohol and music applications, highways, parking, refuse collection, in addition to more local issues. It is particularly active in respect of town centre enhancement and viability, setting up a working group to survey it and to consult residents as to its improvement. A detailed study culminated in public exhibitions and presentations with proposals for improvements many of which have now been implemented.

Going from strength to strength

The Association has gone from strength to strength over the three decades of its life, largely because it is continually able to recruit first class members on to its committee, and as new candidates to replace those standing down. Its councillors have included bank directors, a lawyer, a public relations executive, an architect, an engineer, teachers, librarians, business consultant, Ofsted inspector, senior civil servant and many more local residents who have their ears to the ground and know which issues are of concern to the local community. Monthly committee meetings regularly attract two dozen or more enthusiastic committee members, a reflection of the esteem in which the community holds the Association.

Maintaining political neutrality

The LRA always maintains political neutrality; individuals' political persuasions are set aside and members' only motives are for the good of the town and its residents. The Association believes that local issues should be dealt with by local people, answerable to the community, rather than by political parties with policies set by their masters in Westminster. Its strength lies in openness, welcoming new members with fresh ideas and a constitution which ensures continuing democracy across the Association at all times. ■

Leading Conservatives question planning changes

Two leading Conservatives went curiously off-message recently with a call to protect small shopkeepers against big supermarket chains. It was reported that Jeremy Hunt, the Health Secretary, and Liam Fox MP want the Communities Secretary, Eric Pickles, to tighten the planning laws so that small shops are not forced out by big retail chains. They have apparently also written to Mr Pickles highlighting local cases where they are backing constituents against proposals for new Tesco stores.

Mr Hunt, MP for South West Surrey, told his constituents: "The planning system should recognise better, issues like the impact on a local area of losing small shops which are so central to its character."

Mr Hunt has also written to the Communities Secretary in an attempt "to raise the issue of pubs being converted to shops with relative ease" and to suggest that the "reforms" "aimed at freeing up the planning system" should be re-considered.

In Dr Fox's constituency, North Somerset, the two issues, small shops being forced out by big retail chains and pubs being converted to shops, have collided: in Portishead a Tesco Metro is planning to open on a former pub site.

In his letter to Mr Pickles, Dr Fox said: "Planning permission would be given to

Tesco on the basis that it does not represent a change of use. Most people would see this as a fundamental change of purpose and feel the presumption in planning law is wrong."

It all goes to show how little notice they take of what "the Big Society" is actually telling them, until it hits them on their own patch!

In a House of Commons debate in February on Planning and the High Street, Lib-Dem MP Greg Mulholland seemed to understand the problem:....."the nonsense that a viable, wanted pub can be turned into a betting shop against the wishes of the local community, the town council, the chamber of trade and all the retailers and residents of an area. That can also be the case with a supermarket. That is simply not acceptable. In many areas up and down the country, people find that a local pub that is wanted, used, viable and making money, can be sold. Indeed, pubs are being sold in their hundreds behind the backs of local communities by indebted pub companies, whose model is now facing the end. Pubs are sold direct to supermarkets, but the community has no say whatever. That simply cannot be acceptable." ■

Community Infrastructure Levy

Planning minister Nick Boles has announced that communities adopting neighbourhood plans will receive 25 per cent of the income from the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) – but only if they accept new development in their area.

"This cash boost will be paid directly to parish and town councils and can be used to back the community's priorities, for example to re-roof a village hall, refurbish a municipal pool or take over a community pub. Neighbourhoods without a neighbourhood development plan but where the levy is still charged, will still receive 15% share of the levy revenue arising from development in their area,

capped at £100 per Council Tax dwelling. "Communities without a parish or town council will still benefit from this incentive, with the local planning authority retaining it and spending it in accordance with the wishes of the community.

"Instead of hectoring people and forcing development on communities, the Government believes that we need to persuade communities that development is in everyone's interest. Incentives are key to getting the homes built that we both need for today and for future generations."

The full text of Nick Boles statement can be seen at <http://bit.ly/11n4HaA> ■

A round up of Local Government news

Funding settlement for local government; Barnet "easyCouncil"; local authority staff salaries

Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, Eric Pickles, announced the funding settlement for local government for 2013-14 of £26bn, representing a cut of 1.7%.

Councils account for a quarter of all public spending - with English councils still spending £114 billion. He also announced a new efficiency support grant to ensure that local authorities won't face spending reductions of more than 8.8%, although to receive it councils must improve services.

An estimated 70% of council income is now expected to be raised locally compared to 56% under the centrally distributed formula grant system. Part of that deal is a business rates retention scheme, allowing councils to keep an element of any extra rates they generate through economic growth. Government will set up a hardship fund to help those councils who lose a big slice of the levy – for example, through the closure of a big employer.

They will also have to find a 2 per cent cut in administrative costs in 2014-15. Staff costs dominate their internal revenue budgets. Guidance of 50 practical ways to make savings has been published showing how a culture change by councils can lead to more savings and help make

services more efficient. Better procurement, cutting fraud and sharing services and offices would bring about savings.

Shared service agreements

Shared service agreements is one route being pursued by councils to save money. The Local Government Association has said that the majority of England's councils have set up agreements with other local authorities to share services in an effort to cut costs. 337 councils – out of the 353 across England – had set up partnerships aiming to achieve £249 million in annual efficiency savings, with another £169 million of projected savings in the pipeline.

This is a 60 per cent rise from a year ago, when only 220 councils had such agreements.

The "tri-borough councils" partnership

In London, the "tri-borough councils" partnership – Hammersmith & Fulham, Kensington and Chelsea, and Westminster City Council – are aiming to save £40m a year by 2015/16 through combining costs. They are sharing £300m of services, such as libraries and adult social care, and cutting management costs, with the loss of 175 senior posts. ■

Where does transparent and accountable government or democracy in general fit in to all this?

Barnet "easyCouncil"

Barnet is going further than any other local authority by outsourcing as much as 70 per cent of its activities.

For several years, Barnet Council has been pursuing a plan called One Barnet to outsource council services. There are reports of two contracts out to tender, the first, covering support and customer services and the council's administrative functions, having been won by Capita, who collect TV licences for the BBC and administer vehicle tax for the Government.

The second will be for Development and Regulatory Services relating to the built environment, including Building Control, Planning, Regeneration, Transport, Highways Trading Standards and Licensing. The website says that there are two potential bidders: EC Harris and Capita Symonds.

But London Forum members in Barnet say that, to date, neither of the contracts has been signed because of a pending Judicial Review which may go to a full hearing in March.

Keeping the public in the dark

Only the Barnet Cabinet have any idea of what is going on as the project is entirely officer/consultant led. The decision was not taken in full Council but delegated to the Cabinet where there are no opposition members. The other 53 Councillors appear to know little more than the general public. It was called in but opposition objections were overruled on 13th December. Barnet's public statements seem designed to keep the public in the dark.

Where does transparent and accountable government or democracy in general fit in to all this? What ability will councillors have to scrutinise and challenge services which might be bound up in commercial confidentiality? ■

Local authorities increase numbers of high paid staff

We first drew attention to the large numbers of local authority staff drawing huge salaries in 2011, in connection with closures of libraries. Local authorities claim they are forced into service cuts by government constraints. Yet recent reports show that these inflated salaries are continuing to rise, with local authorities employing more high earners than they did before the financial crisis. In 2009-10, 575 council employees received salaries of between £150,000 and £249,999. In 2010-11, it had risen to 658 with London topping the list.

The Chief Executive of Hammersmith and Fulham Council received the highest pay at £281,666, an increase of 3.97 per cent on the previous year. The council with the most employees earning over £100,000 in 2010-11 was Barnet with 47, followed by Wandsworth and Tower

Hamlets, both with 32. Tower Hamlets has 306 staff earning over £50,000; Lewisham, with a smaller population, has only 160 staff earning over £50,000. 266 local authorities did reduce the number of officials receiving salaries in excess of £50,000, but 118 increased the number.

Local authorities justify these pay rises by claiming they are necessary to compete for top talent. But another interesting piece of research published in February 2013 by the High Pay Centre, looked at that argument as it relates to the private sector where stratospheric levels of Chief Executive pay are similarly justified by the alleged need to compete for top talent in a global marketplace. They concluded that high executive pay is based on a 'self-serving myth'. ■

Heritage and conservation

Listing: English Heritage changes the rules; campaign to rebuild the historic Euston Arch; Pitzhanger Manor; London's ancient markets

Helen Marcus rounds up recent reports

Euston Arch

After 20 years of campaigning, Professor Dan Cruickshank may be coming closer to the fulfilment of his dream to get the Euston Arch rebuilt at Euston Station.

Two factors have come together to make this a possibility: Euston Station may be rebuilt as part of the construction of the new high-speed rail line; and the discovery of some 60 per cent of the remains of the Arch at the bottom of the Prescott Channel near the River Lea, some of it dredged up during the building of the Olympic Park. The columns, which are thought to be largely intact, were rediscovered some years earlier.

The Euston Arch Trust was founded in the early 1990s, committed to seeing the reconstruction of the Euston Arch at Euston Station. Michael Palin, a railway enthusiast, is a patron.

The Trust has now prepared detailed plans, drawn up in collaboration with structural engineer, Alan Baxter, showing how the Euston Arch can be adapted for 21st-century use. Mr. Baxter is keeping the recovered portions of the arch at his farm in Lincolnshire.

It was built in 1838, by architect Philip Hardwick, at a cost of £35,000, and demolished in 1962. The station, which opened on July 20, 1837, a year before the arch was finished, was the terminus of the London and Birmingham Railway constructed by Robert Stephenson.

www.eustonarch.org ■

Spitalfields may be sold

Old Spitalfields, on the eastern fringe of the City of London, is one of the capital's oldest market places, tracing its history back to 1682. It was redeveloped around five years ago and has become a mecca for artists, fashion designers and creative start-ups.

Ballymore, the Dublin property company, has encouraged this trend and won a five-year battle with Tower Hamlets, the local authority, to introduce weekend trading.

However, it is understood that Ballymore, which is saddled with £1 billion of debt after the property crash, is considering selling the market for up to £100 million to raise money to fund its other large London developments such as a significant holding in the Nine Elms area. ■

We reported in the last Newsforum on the sad refusal by English Heritage (EH) to list the old Smithfield General Market buildings. Then, in November, English Heritage announced crucial changes to the process of spotlisting. In future, requests from the public for the spotlisting of local landmarks will be rejected unless there is clear evidence of an immediate and particular threat.

Marcus Binney, president of SAVE Britain's Heritage described this in *The Times*, as a "retreat" and "a black day for historic buildings": "Parliament has laid not just a power on ministers but a duty to list the nation's historic buildings. Some thought it was a welcome step towards taking listing out of the political arena, when greater responsibility for listing was transferred to English Heritage. Alas EH is too often proving a timid champion in protecting historic buildings."

EH states that, as only 30 per cent of spotlisting applications are approved, resources are being wasted. But this is in part a result of their repeated dismissal of cases as marginal and just below the "threshold" for listing.

What happened at Smithfield.

Mr Binney revealed the rather shocking circumstances behind what happened at Smithfield. The General Market, designed by the ebullient Victorian City Surveyor Sir Horace Jones, is a continuation of the magnificent meat market. With its splendid series of Victorian glass roofs around a central dome, it was recently likened to a "Moroccan Medina or Middle Eastern bazaar" by London Forum's Patron, Alan Baxter.

Incredibly, it was English Heritage which dissuaded the last government from protecting it. Lord McIntosh, then junior minister to the Culture Secretary, listed the adjoining Red House, but EH then spent a disproportionate amount of time getting it delisted!

Binney said that given the savage spending cuts repeatedly inflicted on English Heritage and the demoralisation that results, the urgent need is for a minister to act as a real champion of England's wealth of historic architecture great and small. He calls for Ed Vaizey to rise to the challenge as the man newly charged with these responsibilities. ■

Restoring Soane's Pitzhanger Manor

Pitzhanger Manor, in Ealing, West London, is the subject of a new £8 million restoration appeal. The Pitzhanger Manor Trust has been created to restore the 200-year-old house, which Sir John Soane designed for himself and his family. His idiosyncratic spelling with a "z" has been officially adopted.

The son of a bricklayer, Soane had worked on the house in the 1760s, as the 15-year-old assistant to George Dance Jr. By 1800 he had become successful and prosperous enough to buy it for himself. He swept away the non-Dance elements to create his own architectural laboratory, trying out ideas and displaying his curious collections. Hogarth's series *The Rake's Progress* was first housed here.

After half a century in the ownership of the Spencer Walpole family, it was acquired by the local authority in 1900 to be turned into a public library.

The council has now decided to turn Pitzhanger into a centrepiece for a revived Ealing and plans to open the building in 2017. ■



Spotlight on Beckenham Civic Society

Chairman **David Wood** celebrates 70 years of caring for Beckenham town centre

I appreciate the Forum noting that 2013 sees the 70th anniversary of the Beckenham Civic Society, and requesting a contribution to Newsforum. It has been interesting delving back into the past to produce the 1000 words requested. I was assisted by two colleagues who together with me have been members of the Society for over 50 years.

How it began

1943 was a year when bombs were falling on Beckenham causing much damage. A group of the Home Guard were meeting regularly, lending a hand to help unfortunate residents who had their homes damaged or destroyed.

One of these was Arnold Whittick well known at the time for his expertise in town planning and subsequently an active proponent of the post war New Towns Movement and author of several books. Chatting over tea and sandwiches the group got on to the subject of what would happen to Beckenham when the war was over and what form any redevelopment might take.

Arnold's enthusiasm was infectious and four or five others of the Guard were keen to put their thinking caps on. Planning for the future it was clearly simple to call themselves the Beckenham Planning Group. This led to ideas and plans being drawn up and after the war some radical suggestions were on the table and offered to the then Beckenham Borough Council for consideration.

The publicity given to these proposals caused much public interest so the Group opened a membership list and began holding regular meetings. Local architects, surveyors, town planners, solicitors and even some local councillors joined putting in place a considerable body of expertise. They all gave willingly of their time resulting in the Group producing further far-seeing proposals. Limited local authority funding meant many of the ideas were never implemented but it did not wholly dampen members' spirits.

The village green

One town centre area almost completely destroyed by two flying bombs in 1944

We are looking towards the next decade with enthusiasm, more members and a fully operational website.

was left derelict for many years. The Group's plans for this so called North Central Area were considered far too radical but come the 1960s the idea that a 'village green' should be formed received a welcome. By now the Beckenham Council had been subsumed into part of the London Borough of Bromley so the new administration had to be persuaded to accept the idea. They did and by 1972 Beckenham had its 'village green' which happily remains till this day. Two plaques note the Society's involvement.

1973 was 'plant a tree in '73 year'. The Group arranged a tree planting ceremony and all was well with our purchase for a while. But the hot dry summer of that year caused its leaves to shrivel and even a desperate call to the fire brigade to give it a good watering failed to save it.

Caring for the centre of Beckenham

The now regular meetings attracted a growing membership such that talks covered a wider agenda, though planning was usually well represented in the annual programmes. For many years this formula was and still is successful but the two or three outings a year to places of interest ceased due to costs.

Over time the Group concerned itself only with matters affecting the centre of Beckenham leaving residents' groups to campaign on local matters in their areas.

In terms of the buildings, the centre of Beckenham has changed little in my lifetime although many shop premises have changed occupancy with cafes, restaurants and charity shops though one of the latter has recently closed. Like many high streets shopkeepers are having problems largely of a financial nature but the number of empty properties has been reducing in the last year.

We have welcomed a traditional sweet shop, ladies' and gentlemen's hairdressers, a beauty spa and various cafes. There are always cries from shoppers that it is necessary to go elsewhere such as Bromley, Croydon or Bluewater for large items of furniture and white goods, clothing and even a reel of cotton since the haberdashery shop closed.

As we are all aware the internet has had quite an effect on High Street shopping particularly in the food sector. Beckenham has no independent butcher or greengrocer but does have a good wet fish shop which opened in 2010.

A vision for the High Street

As London Forum members may already know the Society has been busy working initially on our own recommendations for the future of the High Street and subsequently on a Bromley Council sponsored panel to implement many of these proposals. Our High Street is part of the A222 from Croydon to Bromley so is very busy at times with eight bus routes serving the town. A branch of London Tramlink terminates in Beckenham and six trains an hour to and from central London run from the Junction station.

Car parking is often a problem with no space for any more car parks. Charges for car parking were raised last year and parking attendants constantly patrolling the area are a disincentive to would-be shoppers. Try as we might Bromley Council is seemingly deaf to our pleas to offer free or reduced charge parking sessions on one or two days a week and to harmonise parking times on street, in car parks and in nearby residential roads.

Renaming

In around 1990 the Group changed its name to Beckenham Civic Society as it was felt the word 'planning' made people think it was something to do with the local council. Oddly enough it is now considered that the word 'civic' has a similar connotation and is to be dropped at our forthcoming AGM, assuming membership agreement. While many towns have their 'civic' society and it works well, in Beckenham it does not. Maybe because Bromley has the borough's 'civic' centre rather than town hall.



David Wood

Beckenham Civic Society

Contact: Chairman & Secretary: David Wood
Tel: 020 8650 4191
email: wood.david.j@virgin.net
website: In preparation

Overcoming present problems

The membership has dwindled over recent years in part because Beckenham has become something of a dormitory town, only 20 minutes by train to Victoria and the City, and with people working much longer hours, so that attending evening meetings has little attraction except for patronising the many local restaurants. Hence our membership is now formed mostly of retired people who are less willing to take on active participation in the Society's affairs.

Short of a major controversial issue affecting Beckenham and stirring up the local populace we shall have to work hard to recruit new members. We envy those societies who have a membership in the hundreds and thousands but even that must have its problems from a management and financial standpoint.

We are looking towards the next decade with enthusiasm, more members and a fully operational website. This latter is long overdue and according to other societies is the way to recruit new members. Our neighbouring society in Sydenham has over a thousand members on its roll.

Thank you for the invitation to contribute to the Forum's newsletter and for your good wishes for the future.

I thank my colleagues Alan Duncan and Roger Cookman for their contributions to this article. ■



Central Beckenham



Part of Beckenham

Age (and when founded): Founded 1943 so now celebrating 70 years

Circumstances of birth: Considering what would replace the war damaged parts of Beckenham notably in the town centre.

Biggest successes: (1) Finally persuading the local authorities, firstly Beckenham then Bromley, to convert a long derelict bomb site to a 'Village Green'. (2) Lately a High Street survey and list of recommendations for its future.

Biggest disappointments/ frustrations: (1) Declining membership; (2) 3 four storey tower blocks totalling 44 flats to be built on backland behind the High Street.

Present preoccupations: (1) Government changes to planning; (2) the localism agenda; (3) neighbourhood forums; (3) working on Bromley's panel to implement the recommendations of our late 2011 report on our High Street; (4) together with Bromley Council the production of a heritage walk booklet followed by funding to provide a Heritage Centre for Beckenham. (5) Improving the relatively small membership of 60 in relation to the local population of some 40,000 plus and attracting some greater expertise on to our committee of six.

Working details: Annual subscription is £10 for an individual, £15 for a couple. Meetings for members take place about nine times a year. The setting up of a working website (which is long overdue) is under way.

Special characteristics: A well preserved core Victorian town centre within which we have two conservation areas. We are seeking to have these linked so that certain other listed buildings are included. The serpent-like High Street provides shoppers and visitors with a continually varied streetscape.

Last word: taking the word 'civic' out of our name because it makes local people think we are part of Bromley Council's 'civic centre'. ■

Waiting for the Olympic Legacy

by **Diane Burrige** who was one of the volunteer Games Makers at last summer's Olympics

When will the 'legacy' start? I ask myself most days as I travel by train past the forlorn-looking Olympic Park. Admittedly, the Hockey Arena has been dismantled and 17,500 seats are being removed from the sides of the Aquatics Centre – but ever so slowly, and six months since the halcyon days of the Olympic Games.

Newspaper articles on the legacy of the Games abound – a key ingredient promised by London when it was awarded host city status. But what legacy: economic, an increase in volunteering, more housing, increased sports activity, project and traffic management skills to sell globally, increased interest by young people to become engineers?

The jury is out regarding the long term national economic impact of the Games. For example, Professor Stefan Szymanski, of the University of Michigan, has emphasised that, 'there are negligible economic benefits to hosting a major sporting event'. With the official cost to the taxpayer of just under £9 billion, the Government hopes that much of this will be 'reimbursed' by increased foreign investment and tourism. But Sydney found that tourism declined for the three years after their Games in 2000.

However, at Stratford, regeneration is definitely planned. For the Park, which became the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park on 1 January 2013, the London Legacy Development Corporation (LLDC), chaired by the Mayor, has budgeted about £300 million to be spent by April 2015 to make the 102 hectares of open space habitable.

Sport and entertainment

LLDC chief executive, Dennis Hone, has said that the main legacy will be to promote sport in the Park. There are plans to re-open the north section for the Velodrome and outdoor cycling areas by July 2013; and the south section by the spring/summer of 2014.

James Corner Field Operations (responsible for the High Line in New York City – the disused elevated railway line converted into a park) are responsible for the south area of the Park containing the Stadium and the Aquatics Centre, as well as the Arcelor Mittal Orbit. There will be a new visitors' centre and wild-life themed playground with a programme of food and arts festivals and concerts - attracting people as the Tivoli Gardens does in

Copenhagen. Events that used to be held in Hyde Park will go this summer to the Park, and a new charity, Legacy List, has been set up to support culture there.

Housing and employment

Regarding housing on the Park: the Olympic Delivery Agency/LLDC has to complete £150 million worth of work on the Olympic Village, where 15,000 athletes and officials lived during the Games, for the apartments to be ready for handing over to developers Qatari Diar and Delancey, who paid £557 million for their share of the £1.1 billion site. It will be converted into 2,818 homes (half affordable) and have a new postcode - E20. Over 17,000 people have registered interest in them. Triathlon Housing Association own the other half.

Another 6,500 new homes are planned in the 160 acres zoned in the Olympic Park for housing - with a 15 year sale period. In August, 2012, Taylor Wimpey agreed to pay £80 million for 20 of these 160 acres. (The Lottery Fund is expecting the return of £675 million from profits made from such sales to pay back this amount which was 'advanced' to build the Park.)

The million square foot Media Centre, which housed 20,000 journalists during the Games, has been bought by property developer Delancey and a new technology company Infinity. Called the City Consortium, there are plans for the centre to become a digital cluster. Potential tenants signed up to date include Channel 5, Hackney Community College, BT and Loughborough University. This centre plans to be open by late 2013, creating 4,500 jobs.

In all, permanent tenants have been found to date for seven of the eight venues - only the £429 million Stadium's ownership is still in question - with negotiations continuing with West Ham Football Club, focusing on the costs of the estimated £190 million modifications required before the Club will purchase the venue. This cost reflects the LLDC's determination to make the stadium's future as flexible as possible. Once agreed, at least 20 days per year will be used for athletics and community activities.

There are also two major developments planned next to the Olympic Park: The International Quarter, consisting of four million square feet of office space, owned by Land Lease, an Australian company with the government-owned London and Continental

Railways Company. They are planning to build 13 office blocks, a hotel and 350 flats. The office units are being designed for 'activity-based working', where allocations per worker will be 60 to 80 square feet, in comparison to usual allocations of 80 to 100 square feet, in recognition of new technology and more mobile workers.

And University College London has a £1 billion regeneration plan which includes the creation of halls of residence and laboratories, replacing the 23 acre Carpenters Estate, where there are 300 households, who need to be re-housed. Work is expected to start in 2016, for completion by 2027, with 4,500 jobs created, including 1,000 for local people.

Social and young people legacy

What about the social and sports legacy of the Games? A Media.Com survey in the summer of 2012 found that more than half of 8-12 year olds said that the Games had made them want to be more active in sport. Yet recent surveys have found no increase to the amount of PE and games in schools since before the Games.

As for the 70,000 volunteer Games Makers, the Prime Minister wrote to them thanking them for their participation, hoping that many will consider continuing to volunteer for other activities. Games Makers have been encouraged to volunteer at local sports clubs and events, such as the Commonwealth Olympics to be held in Glasgow in 2014. Some of the London Ambassadors continue to welcome visitors from overseas, for example at St Pancras Station.

Then there are hopes that more young people will be interested in studying science and engineering, stimulated by the new technology used for the Paralympics and the opening and closing ceremonies, as well as for the construction of the venues.

Hopefully, someone in Whitehall is measuring longer term legacy outcomes.

Knowing all this gives me some comfort as I strain my eyes through the train windows looking for an increase in building activity as the months progress. Surely schedules will be met, as they were for the Games, and the vibrancy of the Park will return with the opening of the Velodrome in July 2013. The area cries out to be used again, and I am sure many people cannot wait to celebrate this wonderful asset for London... ■

Mayor at odds with LFEPA

London Fire Authority

The Mayor of London has directed the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority (LFEPA) to start public consultation on the unamended version of the Draft Fifth London Safety Plan and in the form recommended by the London Fire Commissioner.

The Mayor has taken this unprecedented step after the Fire Authority amended plans put forward by the Commissioner. The Draft Plan sought to ensure financial stability over the next couple of years by reducing the number of fire stations in the capital from 112 to 100 cutting 18 engines and 520 jobs, and to make improvements in operational efficiency and effectiveness. However, the Fire Authority chose to remove any reference to fire station closures in the Draft Plan, making it undeliverable within the budgets set.

In the recent Local Government Settlement, the Mayor was able to secure a better than expected financial settlement for LFEPA, with an additional £13 million over and above what was previously anticipated for 2013/14, the best of any fire authority in England. However this still means that there is a need to make around £30 million of savings for LFEPA in 2014/15.

Plans also include how the service can start to recover costs from persistent false alarm offenders, and encourage the installation of sprinkler systems where appropriate.

The Mayor is taking legal action against the London Fire Authority. ■

London Planning Statement

London Forum response to consultation on the draft London Planning Statement and the Mayor's role in the London planning system

The draft London Planning Statement is intended to fill the gap left by the Government's revocation of the former Government Office for London Circular 1/2008, by pulling together information about the Mayor's role in the London planning system, to serve as proposed London Plan supplementary planning guidance.

The document:

- Sets out some general principles of fundamental importance to the planning system in London.
- Explains the Mayor's role in London's planning system, both in preparing strategic housing policy through his spatial development strategy (The London Plan), and in taking planning decisions on strategic developments.
- Highlights the issues the Mayor considers to be particular priorities for the London planning system.
- Sets out the Mayor's intended programme of planning-related work for the next four years.

The three principles the Mayor regards as being of fundamental importance to the taking of planning decisions are:

- propriety – complying with all legal requirements regarding procedural fairness and propriety, and ensuring that decisions are properly based on relevant planning considerations.
- promoting sustainable growth
- giving particular attention to ensuring development is viable – making sure that landowners and developers both make enough through the development process to make development worth their while.

London Forum response

London Forum welcomed the London Planning Statement as a suitable document

describing the way the Mayor and the Assembly operate in plan making and decision taking. The Forum made the following suggestions for improvements:

General Principles

Ensuring that development is viable:

The process outlined is unclear and the methodology for arriving at an acceptable profit is obscure and surely fundamentally inequitable and undesirable however calculated. It might well lead to unfair discrimination against smaller firms.

The sole criterion in assessing the requirement for information should be the relevance of that information to the scheme and the context, not cost.

Borough case officers must be encouraged to use the London Plan policies, where relevant. At present some officers ignore points made by community representatives that are based on the policies in the London Plan and associated guidance. This is particularly the case with housing density: too many approved developments are of excessive density and will overload local infrastructure.

There is a lack of detail on how the Mayor will deploy any section 106 funds he secures for the GLA from developments on which he makes decisions.

The reference to protected views and safeguarded wharves should be strengthened and the Mayor's role should be seen as wholly protective without exception.

There is a lack of assurance that the Mayor will consult with local communities in the preparation of plans for sites in Mayoral Development Corporation areas, and in the decision making process on developments.

London Forum's complete response is available in pdf form. ■

Issues currently being investigated on behalf of Londoners by the GLA

The Mayor's budget

Annual scrutiny of the Mayor's budget by the Assembly to assess how proposals could affect transport, fire and police services.

Community Infrastructure Levy

How will changes to the way developers contribute to the cost of local infrastructure affect funding for new schools, libraries and transport links?

London's social housing

How can London boroughs be given more powers to meet the social housing needs in London?

Airport expansion

The investigation into airport capacity will examine the arguments for and against changing existing capacity in London.

Police and Crime Plan Review

Will the Mayor's Police and Crime Plan make London a safer place?

The future of London's town centres

London needs a new vision for its town centres.

For more information and a full list of activities see:

www.london.gov.uk/priorities/ ■

The Taylor Review

A summary of **Michael Bach's** response on behalf of London Forum

Lord Matthew Taylor's review of planning guidance covers all guidance documents on aspects of planning, extending beyond PPSs and PPGs, which have been abolished in their entirety. He has recommended a radical overhaul cutting much of the present guidance completely.

He recommends creating completely new guidance to go with the planning reforms that have recently come into force, such as the Localism Act and the National Planning Policy Framework. It is intended that this work should be done by July 2013, producing a single, up-to-date "web-based live resource".

The London Forum welcomed the principle of single portal for guidance, and the need for a well-structured, word-searchable website that is regularly updated.

The major flaw in this review, however, is that in trying to reduce the amount of guidance weighed in words/pages to be written in plain English, it has totally lost sight of its audience. This is most evident in the complacent language of some of the assessments, probably suggested by expert advisors who have either a limited

understanding of the range of guidance needed by the various audiences that this guidance is trying to reach, or that they do not want this guidance in the public domain because it ensures that they continue to be consulted for this expertise. To suggest that many of the items are now "mainstream" says it all: they do not understand the purpose of the guidance - a common source of guidance available and accessible to all parties.

This major flaw undermines the value of the review's recommendations and suggests that, while work should go ahead in road-testing the vehicle (the new website) there is a need to rethink the needs of the various audiences it must serve - from the Planning Inspectorate to community groups like our members.

We consider that one of the main elements missing in the proposals for taking these issues forward is to look at the proposed content from a community perspective. London Forum would, therefore, like to offer to join any project group to help determine the content and structure of the proposed website. In addition we could help in looking at the London dimension. ■

Extending permitted development rights - case not made

A report by the Communities and Local Government Select Committee has concluded that the case has not been made for extending permitted development rights.

The Select Committee says the Government's claim that its proposals to extend permitted development rights for house extensions would save householders money and boost the economy is flawed. .

- The financial benefits of the plans were "so tentative, broad-brush and qualified as to provide little assurance that they will be achieved".
- It disregards the social and environmental impact of sustainable development

The report concludes by saying: "the case for the changes the Government proposes to permitted development

rights for domestic extensions has not been made. We therefore do not agree that in non-protected areas the maximum depth for single-storey rear extensions should be increased to eight metres for detached houses, and six metres for any other "type of house".

As the report was being prepared for publication press reports indicated that Eric Pickles appeared to be back tracking, suggesting that the plans could be watered down. In an interview he said: "We haven't come to a final decision about how far we will allow permitted development to go out."

The report can be read at

www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201213/cmselect/cmcomloc/830/83002.htm ■

Judicial reviews threatened

In a speech to the Confederation of British Industry last November, the Prime Minister made the most astonishing attack on the judicial review process. Calling for a cut in the number of applications, he appears to see judicial review not as a protection for our rights, but as an obstacle hindering economic recovery. He went so far as to liken curbing it to the task of beating Hitler during the Second World War: just as, during the Second World War, "everything was thrown at the overriding purpose of beating Hitler"; so in today's "economic equivalent of war", we "need the same spirit." He said we must reduce "completely pointless" judicial review claims. Applications in "hopeless cases" were hindering infrastructure investments and economic growth," the Prime Minister said. "We urgently need to get a grip on this."

Several eminent lawyers criticized the proposals and the motives behind them. The Law Society warned that any reform to the system of judicial review must preserve the principle of holding the executive to account.

It was pointed out that the Government has produced no research or other evidence to support any of its contentions about the allegedly damaging effect of judicial review.

The number of applications for judicial review had climbed from 160 in 1975 to 11,000 in 2011. But Adam Chapman, partner and head of public law at Kingsley Napley, pointed out that: 'Although there has been significant growth in the number of judicial review cases brought, the increase has been in cases about immigration and asylum – it's nothing to do with stopping the government from taking steps to assist business or proceeding with policies to help boost the economy.' Mr Chapman said that in non-immigration and asylum cases, the number of cases has actually gone down since 2006.

Lord Pannick QC said: "The consultation paper, and the statements by the Prime Minister that preceded it, display precisely those errors — taking account of irrelevant considerations and failing to have regard to relevant considerations — which result in courts quashing administrative decisions." ■

Regeneration or asset stripping?

Helen Marcus reports on two controversial schemes

Offices to homes

Allowing offices to be converted into homes without the need for planning permission might seem to help the housing problem. But like too many of the government's recent initiatives, it has not been sufficiently carefully thought through.

We covered this subject extensively in Newsforum (No. 59, 2011, pdf supplement), when the idea was first mooted and strenuously opposed. It takes no account of business needs: a functioning office market needs a vacancy rate of around 10% to accommodate the ability of firms to move when they need to. And because land for housing is much more lucrative than for offices, and let on much longer leases than businesses often require, once converted there will be no going back. It could well jeopardise growth in the business sector, desperately needed to boost the flagging economy.

Planning minister Nick Boles's latest plans, initially to be time-limited for three years, also included a suggestion that the stipulations for provision for affordable housing could be waived.

The Government has promised a review to see how the system is working, before making it permanent. Planning authorities had until 22 February to make a request for an exemption, to be granted only in "exceptional" circumstances. It appears that all but three London boroughs have sought either an entire or partial exemption.

The Greater London Authority is particularly concerned about London's Central Activities Zone (CAZ) which covers parts of 10 inner London boroughs. Westminster City Council and the City of London have also called for exemption. ■

So-called regeneration schemes seem to be a euphemism for dubious "partnership" projects which allow developers to asset strip publicly owned sites for private profit.

Since **Southwark Council** signed a Regeneration Agreement in July 2010 with global property developer, Lend Lease, local people have campaigned on a whole range of issues that are controversial in the Elephant & Castle regeneration: lack of truly affordable housing, smaller leisure centre, removal of mature trees, lack of insight into pressure put on local services and amenities with thousands of new residents coming to the area, housing density, effect on local businesses and so on. They have long been asking to see this agreement to enable them to make up their own minds about whether the existing residents are getting a good deal or not, but have always been refused or stalled with the mantra of 'commercial sensitivity'.

However as part of its compulsory purchase proceedings against remaining residents on the Heygate Estate, a key site for the regeneration scheme, a redacted PDF version of its confidential regeneration agreement was uploaded to the Council's website, accidentally exposing the contents of Southwark Council's deal with Lend Lease for the £1.5bn regeneration of the Elephant & Castle. It was possible to copy and paste the heavily blacked-out text straight into any word processing software to reveal the entire contents.

Local campaigners discovered that the recently approved Heygate plans propose only 79 social rented units out of a total 2,535 new homes in breach of Southwark's policy of a minimum 35% for developments in the Elephant & Castle Opportunity Area.

Emptying the Heygate Estate cost £44m but Southwark Council is set to receive just £50m in return for the 22 acre site. Comparisons with other development sites at the Elephant show that the Council is receiving well below the market value for its land.

On a much smaller site in **Brent** there is similar situation. A plan to "regenerate" the Willesden Central Library site, including a large car park in backland behind the High Street surrounded by Edwardian houses, and a town square, in "partnership" with developer Galliford Try has been pushed through with every normal planning procedure bypassed - no Local Development Framework or planning brief, no proper consultation and not even a pretence of any affordable housing - and many documents pertaining to the agreement were simply withheld. Local people whose 2 storey houses will be overlooked by new 3/4 storey blocks of flats on the backland were also not properly consulted.

The developer will build a new library for £10 million in return for permission to build 92 flats. The scheme involved the demolition of the locally listed remnant of the old Victorian library in a conservation area. But following hundreds of letters of objection and petitions with thousands of signatures, one small concession was gained as a sop to the local campaigners - the old library building will be preserved. But in a shoddy architectural compromise it will now be bolted onto the new four storey library and the small town square will be built over. The Council's attempt to portray this deal as public benefit was shown up as it became clear that the new Library building would actually be half the size of the old one, and every other bit of public amenity on the site would be lost. ■

Pinnacle skyscraper might be knocked down

The Bishopsgate Tower, or as it is also called, the Pinnacle skyscraper, which was planned as the tallest building in the City of London, could be knocked down and rebuilt to a new design due to spiralling costs and lack of demand.

So far demand for the commercial space has been slim, with few big names stepping up to secure space in the building. The partially-constructed building - only seven of the planned 63 storeys has been built - has lain dormant for over a year

due to funding issues.

A review of the scheme aimed at reducing the cost - expected to take about three months - is being carried out by contractor Brookfield Multiplex and developer Arab Investments. ■

Planning policy and procedures criticised

Marcus Binney calls for strong planning
Anna Minton on the undermining of democratic processes

'Planning policy is in disarray'

On January 12 Marcus Binney, president of SAVE Britain's Heritage wrote an impassioned attack on Government planning policy in *The Times*:

"Government planning policy is in disarray to an extent unseen since the 1930s.

"The first Town and Country Planning Act was passed in 1944 in the bitterest fighting of war to establish an (all-party) vision of a country that would remain beautiful for those who had dreamt of home as they fought — not just for decades but for centuries. And this is what the Government is prepared to let unravel as it proposes a bonfire of planning controls.

"Before ravaging England's countryside ministers should look again to the 400,000 permissions already granted (which served to prop up developers' bank accounts while waiting for the market to pick up) and the one million empty homes, all too many expropriated from their owners. For a decade the Empty Homes Agency and others have called for these properties to be offered for renovation — to no avail."

He declares that, like the previous Government, they are trampling over people's rights: "There are many ways in which the coalition can stimulate construction without ruining fine city views or eating up more green fields." ■

Undemocratic developments

Journalist Anna Minton, the 1851 Royal Commission Fellow in the Built Environment, is currently preparing a report on lobbying and failures in local democracy to be published by SpinWatch. In a recent article in the *Financial Times* she spelled out the sort of difficulties local communities have in combatting unwanted developments in their area, such as those we report on page 15:

"What these planning battles have in common....is the perception local communities have of being "at war" with a local government that is supposed to represent them. Allegations of underhand tactics and dirty tricks subverting democratic processes abound.

"In general the activities of certain councils, developers and lobbyists aren't actually illegal, but such behaviour undermines the spirit if not the letter of the law; public interest supposedly remains the justification for the planning system."

Her research discovered a common feature of development battles is consultation that is dismissed as "a sham" by local communities. "Consultation is a statutory requirement for councils and developers with the rhetoric of community participation at the centre of every development brief. But time and again residents claim that consultations are carried out in name only, with "roadshows" and "exhibitions" by lobbying companies replacing public meetings. What we are witnessing is the abject failure of democracy at local level." ■

Vauxhall skyscrapers get the go-ahead

A new residential and commercial hub featuring two identical 50-storey towers with a stone and glass façade, next to Vauxhall bus station, has been given permission by Lambeth council. It is part of the Vauxhall Nine Elms Opportunity Area which is set for significant change over the next decade. Vauxhall has been designated by the Greater London Authority as a "tall building" cluster; a number of other developers with sites in the area are also planning tower-led developments. If all the schemes get permission and funding within the next decade Vauxhall's skyline could be transformed with about six new skyscrapers.

The scheme, designed by the architect Allies and Morrison, includes 410 flats, and 110 affordable homes. There will also be two office buildings — totalling 22,732 sq m in size — two hotels, a four-screen cinema, a separate student accommodation scheme with 359 units, a 50-bed homeless hostel, and retail and leisure space at ground level.

It is hoped that the image of Vauxhall as a place to pass through and not to stop might be changed.

The work is intended to begin in 2015, dependent on funding, and the scheme could take between five and seven years to complete. ■

Rights to light threatened

In the latest attempt by Government to blame planning law and building regulations for the failure of the economy, the Law Commission is to review the current law on rights to light. Rights to light are private property rights that benefit residential and commercial buildings, and are separate from planning law.

This consultation will investigate whether the law provides an appropriate balance between the interests of landowners and the need to facilitate the appropriate development of land. It considers the interrelationship of rights to light with the planning system, and examines whether the remedies available to the courts are reasonable, sufficient and proportionate.

The Law Commission is proposing:

- that it should no longer be possible to acquire rights to light by long use.
- the introduction of a new statutory test to clarify the current law on when courts may order a person to pay damages instead of ordering that person to demolish or stop constructing a building that interferes with a right to light.
- the introduction of a new statutory notice procedure, which requires those with the benefit of rights to light to make clear whether they intend to apply to the court for an injunction (ordering a neighbouring landowner not to build in a way that infringes their right to light), with the aim of introducing greater certainty into rights to light disputes.
- that the Lands Chamber of the Upper Tribunal should be able to extinguish rights to light that are obsolete, with payment of compensation in appropriate cases, as under the present law in respect of restrictive covenants.

The consultation period runs from 18 February to 16 May 2013. For more information and how to send in your comments see the Law Commission website:

<http://lawcommission.justice.gov.uk/news/rights-to-light-news.htm> ■

TfL consultation on river crossings

Peter Eversden's response on behalf of London Forum

London Forum fully supports the aim of reducing the current unacceptable levels of congestion around the approaches to the Blackwall Tunnel, and of promoting local regeneration in this part of London.

However, we could only support the proposal for the construction of new crossings if it were part of a package of measures designed to ensure that there was no overall increase in traffic levels in East and South-East London, and that the full benefits of reduced congestion would be realised through reductions in pollution and improved journey times, especially for local business traffic.

To be acceptable, the Silvertown Tunnel and bridge/ferry further east must be part of a wider package including the following:

- a fully-fledged (time-based) pricing system for the tunnel, rather than fixed tolls levied for the purpose of funding the construction.
- local regeneration should be genuinely local,
- If TfL decides to proceed with the proposals, the consultation should seek a much fuller engagement and openness than is normally the case with public consultations.

TfL should also demonstrate a willingness to further extend the range of the analysis in response to public suggestions. ■

Conservatives criticise HS2

The Conservative Transport Group is hugely critical of the Department for Transport and its subsidiary HS2 Ltd.

They consider that the HS2 route and station modelling is "unsound and disastrously flawed" and are urging the Government to go back to the drawing board. Plans for so-called 'parkway' stations means that northern cities will not be directly served by HS2, which instead will interchange at new locations. It condemned the plan to enter Birmingham at Curzon Street station, rather than New Street, meaning that there will be a ten-minute interchange for passengers rather than a cross-platform connection. It believes that the main southern interchange for HS2 must, as things stand, be Heathrow.

But if the Government is to delay a decision on future Heathrow expansion until 2015, then a decision on HS2 cannot be made until then either. The group also sees merit in the proposals of the Railfuture lobby group, which says that HS2 should go north from London Euston and follow the M1 corridor.

Critics argue that the government's economic case for building HS2 simply doesn't stack up; that the predicted economic benefits have been overestimated; and that there are far better ways of spending £33bn to stimulate growth.

Results of Judicial Review

The legal challenge to HS2 suffered a setback in the High Court with the announcement in March of the judge's findings in the Judicial Review which was begun at the end of last year. Nine of the ten challenges were dismissed; only the challenge to the proposed compensation scheme was upheld.

But the judge granted the opponents leave to appeal and warned that the Court of Appeal could refer the decision to the European Court of Justice. He also left open the possibility that opponents could renew their challenge after the planning process is complete. ■

More Heathrow contradictions

Heathrow is seeking to raise £3 billion to help to fund its improvement plan. The increase, which has to be approved by the Civil Aviation Authority, was needed for improvements, and to make up for a shortfall in revenues. Heathrow's chief executive Colin Matthews said that the shortfall resulted from five years of over-optimistic passenger forecasts set by the aviation regulator.

But haven't they been telling us that Heathrow needed a new runway because it was already full?

Average passengers' departure charges would rise 41 per cent to £27.30 per traveller by 2018, but airlines are resisting the change, saying that costs have already trebled in the past ten years.

A new Terminal 2 is due to open next year and two Crossrail stations will serve the busiest terminals from 2018. New taxiways

will be built to handle more A380 "superjumbo" aircraft, a new baggage system and self-service bag drop facilities will be introduced and car parks will be improved.

Despite contributing £100 million to the Crossrail link, however, the airport expects to miss its target of half its passengers arriving by public transport.

Rise in traffic with China

Contrary to what the Heathrow third runway lobby would have you believe, the airport is already coping with increased demand for flights to China without an extra runway. According to recent press reports there has been soaring demand for flights to China from Heathrow. They rose by 14.1 per cent with traffic to India up by 7.1 per cent. ■

Chancellor guarantees loan for Nine Elms tube

Last month Chancellor George Osborne announced a Government loan guarantee of up to £1 billion to support the link, intended to be part-funded by new developments in the Vauxhall, Nine Elms and Battersea regeneration area.

But there is controversy over both the financing of the scheme for a short extension to the Northern line from Kennington to Battersea Power Station, and the effect that new ventilation shafts will

have on the Kennington area. Local campaigners also question the transport benefits of adding an extra branch to an already complicated and overcrowded rail route like the Northern line.

Some believe a light rail elevated transport system like the Docklands Light Railway would be a better solution. It would be cheaper than a deep-bored tube line and it could even be a 21st-century monorail system rather than DLR. ■

Round the Societies

A round-up of news from our member societies.

By **Diane Burridge**

Anniversaries

Blackheath Society's 75th anniversary year came to an end with the Village Christmas Festival on the Heath and a celebration supper in Blackheath Halls. The celebration supper was the fourth and final event during the year and was sold out, with 224 members and guests.

In December 2012, **The Knightsbridge Association** held its AGM, which also celebrated the 50th Anniversary of the founding of the Association - as usual in the Concert Hall of the Royal College of Music. This was attended by the two MPs, as well as the Leader and Mayor of the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea.

The **Kingston Society** celebrated its 50th Anniversary in 2012, and has just published: '*The first 50 Years. A History of the Kingston upon Thames Society*', written by Michael Davison, now a Vice President of the Society, who also served as Chairman from 1994 to 1997.

Green Spaces

Finchley Society's autumn newsletter welcomed news that Barnet Council has dropped proposals to hold revenue-generating events on several of its parks. This decision is the result of vigorous campaigning, with objections made by many local amenity societies.

Hammersmith Society's newsletter reported on work by the Friends of Ravenscourt Park with the Council to improve maintenance and planting. The Green Flag inspector has apparently stated that the most important issue is overuse of this historic park. Proposals to build changing rooms, effectively converting much of Ravenscourt Park into secondary school premises, are now being resisted.

The Sydenham Society has been active, with other amenity societies and groups, in attempts to improve Crystal Palace Park. The GLA has agreed £2m of capital funding which could be used as match-funding towards a Bromley bid in 2013 to the Heritage Lottery Fund for the regeneration of the park. Two 'Leaves to Appeal' (of three submitted to the High Court) were granted late 2012 against the Secretary of State's decision to grant permission for the Crystal Palace Park Masterplan. These are in relation to failure to comply with Habitats directives and regulations, and to it being unlawful to conclude that outline planning permission could be granted for landscaping, engineering operations and change of land use. These two appeals will hopefully be heard by the summer of 2013.

Planning Activities:

Due to concerns at the increasing number of local buildings at risk, **Enfield Society** is planning to set up a buildings at risk group to liaise with the Council or other owners to try to prevent further deterioration or improve their condition. Of concern are the chapel at Lavender Hill cemetery, Truro House, Charity Hall, Salisbury House and Kettering Hall.

The Finchley Society is considering drawing up a list of assets of community value which local authorities have to maintain under the Localism Act, as part of the Community Right to Bid provision. If such assets came onto the market, their sale would have to be delayed to give the community the opportunity to bid for these.

The Pinner Association circulated their in-depth response to the Department of Communities and Local Government's consultation document on 'Extending Permitted Development Rights for Homeowners and Businesses'. One salient point made was that all the voluntary effort that has been invested, in a spirit of good will, by members of the Society and other groups, to feed in views to the local council when they were drawing up Local Plans may have been a waste of time in relation to extensions. Also, allowing extensions without planning permission could set off neighbour against neighbour, not helping the development of community spirit.

Publications/Events

Most of **Brixton Society's** publications are now available to buy through their eBay shop. These items are linked through the Society's website. While Paypal takes a fee for transactions, eBay reimburses charities for transactions.

There are strong demands for advance tickets for monthly Market Walks, as well as for the Society's range of postcards showing Brixton today and during Edwardian times.

Herne Hill Society's 'Short History of Herne Hill', the old Ordnance Survey Maps and posters continue to sell well. Their next publication will be the updated Herne Hill Heritage Trail.

Muswell Hill and Fortis Green Association celebrated having a record 16 features in the local press during 2012, due to the Society's constant campaigning. This has been followed by a front page feature, including a photograph of the Chairman, John Hajdu, on 17 January 2013 – about the Society's objections to the proposed closure of the Muswell Hill Police Station.

Streatham Society has monitored its email correspondence for the last year. In all, 2,930 in-coming mails were received and 618 mails were sent on behalf of the Society.

Correspondence included family and local history enquiries, book orders, and notice of meetings of bodies, such as Friends of Streatham Green, Friends of Streatham Common and the Rookery Community Garden. The Society has also produced two new publications: 'Norwood Grove and the Rookery, Streatham Common - The History of Two Georgian Estates in South London' by Brian Bloice and Daphne Marchant. And 'From Silk Road to Superstore' by Brian Bloice - about a mill built in 1820 as London's first silk factory, which has since 1989 been a Sainsbury's superstore at Streatham Common.

The Northern Heights Trails is a collaborative project between four north London Societies: the **Heath and Hampstead Society**, **Hampstead Garden Suburb Trust**, **Hornsey Historical Society** and **Highgate Society** who initiated the project. A series of self-guided walks in DL size booklets, designed to fit in a pocket, cover the Northern Heights of London. With associations with Keats, Elgar, Coleridge and Constable, Marx and Freud, and landscaped gardens at Kenwood, the Hill Garden pergola and Golders Hill Park, it is not surprising that the societies report that the booklets have sold well.

We are delighted to welcome Diane Burridge as the new editor of this page, leaving Haydn Mylchreest free to concentrate on Membership.

We thank Haydn for all his work over the last few years. Please make sure Diane receives your newsletters either by post (to Cowcross Street) or email: dianeurridge@btinternet.com ■

newsbriefs

Key issues of interest and concern to note.

New Thames footbridge

One of the Nine Elms Vauxhall Partnership's key aspirations is a new pedestrian and cycle bridge crossing the Thames. Several locations have been explored as part of the Opportunity Area Planning Framework, and the Partnership is working with relevant stakeholders to undertake additional analysis to determine a preferred bridge location before proceeding with the next steps.

A proposal has been submitted to Wandsworth and Hammersmith and Fulham Councils for a white steel bridge alongside the existing Battersea Railway Bridge between Chelsea Harbour and Lombard Road, near Battersea High Street. It would mark the Queen's Diamond Jubilee.

Chris Medland, the architect who designed it, is hoping to secure corporate sponsorship to fund the £22million project, which could be open by 2014. Mr. Medland said that the idea for the bridge was first mentioned by a former Battersea MP, Viscount Curzon in the House of Commons in 1924. The central piers will be joined to the river banks by three arches, two of which curve significantly higher than Battersea Railway Bridge itself to allow the Victorian structure to remain clearly visible upstream.

Victory for Friern Barnet Community Library

Friern Barnet library which was closed by Barnet Council last April, has reopened after a long campaign in which several sections of the local community worked together to contest the decision. This included occupation of the library to prevent its closure and sale; a volunteer staff of guerrilla librarians who kept the building open 48 hours a week; and a successful legal action against the council which resulted in a deferred possession order in the County Court providing the campaigners with an opportunity to agree a licence/lease of the building with the council.

The keys to the library were then handed back to Barnet Council who promptly passed them onto the Trustees of the local residents' group 'Friern Barnet Community Library'. An agreement has now been reached for the library to be run as a community facility by residents. The council is set to award the library trustees a two-year lease to run the library, as well as a grant of £25,000 and practical help. Residents are now looking to find at least 50 volunteers to help run the library, and will continue to push the council for a paid librarian.

For more information about the campaign and a video about it: <http://fbpeopleslibrary.co.uk/>

Funding the super sewer

A cross-party group of MPs led by Stephen McPartland, the Conservative MP for Stevenage, met Martin Baggs, Thames Water's chief executive, to raise concerns over the utility company's plans to charge its 14 million customers up to £80 a year to fund a major new sewage tunnel under London. The largest water utility in Britain, Thames serves 5.5 million households in an area that stretches from Gloucestershire to Kent.

Mark Field, the Conservative MP for the Cities of London and Westminster, has questioned why Thames Water was so generous with its dividends in recent years when it might have cushioned the blow to customers by holding back more of its cash.

Radical new funding proposals.

At the same time, following repeated failure to secure private investment for the project, Oliver Letwin, David Cameron's head of strategy, has outlined radical new proposals for public funds to be used to construct the new super sewer. Private ownership is proving increasingly controversial because the government is likely to have to guarantee the risks on the scheme, in order to get it started. With current cheap government borrowing rates, Letwin is proposing using gilts; in other words, Treasury money, properly accounted for on the balance sheet, as part of the regular financing of the country's outlays.

Such vast contracts run the risk of cost overruns – but the reality of private financing is that, if risky projects go wrong, the Government picks up the bill anyway. Given the unfolding disasters of the last Government's record of financing public projects through private finance deals, perhaps going back to the old-fashioned way of paying for things should be applauded.

Thames Water tax 'deferred'

Thames Water, is also one of the privately owned water companies revealed last year to be paying little or no tax on their huge profits. It has emerged that it had not paid any corporation tax for the past three years. The company claimed that the regulator allows them to offset tax against capital spending in order to encourage companies to invest in the water network. They claim they are deferring — and not avoiding — their bills. A spokesman explained that it was carrying a deferred tax bill of nearly £1 billion on its books, most of it from the past five years as infrastructure spending on sewers and water mains rises.

Scrutiny of all-party parliamentary groups

The guidance on transparency and impartiality for all-party parliamentary groups (APPG) has come under scrutiny. It has emerged that there are several groups who have failed to properly declare the source of their secretarial or financial support. These include

- APPG on Energy Studies which does not flag up the fact that its secretarial services are provided by a consultancy that is retained by renewable energy companies and the Qatari sovereign wealth fund.
- APPG on aviation which advocates the growth of the airline industry and the re-examination of air passenger duty to boost the UK economy which is backed by the airline industry. A recent report by this APPG fails to mention that it was produced with the help of Heathrow airport and the airline industry, which vigorously opposes the tax on flying and has a strong vested interest in seeing government policy change.
- APPG Armed Forces group accepted more than £17,000 in 2012 from defence companies,
- Other groups include one on Georgia which failed to declare that the Georgian Government was indirectly funding administrative costs; and on Spain and Pakistan, who give only the name of a consultancy that works for them, without offering information on its clients.

The British electorate were under the impression that MPs' duty was to represent the interests of their constituents! ■

Dates for your diary

London Forum events; Walter Bor Media Awards 2013 Celebrating 25 years

Walter Bor Media Awards 2013

Celebrating London Forum's 25th anniversary

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.

The anticipated closing date will be in early September, .

The categories for the 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 Peter Murray of New London Architecture

This preliminary announcement gives members time to think about what they might submit. ■

Delivering Newsforum by email

We currently send you Newsforum by email in the form of a PDF as well as posting you a hard copy.

For most of you the PDF is the most useful form as it can be widely distributed at no cost. It also has the advantage that web links can be accessed directly.

Last year we reduced our costs by sending the summer edition in PDF form only. It is environmentally more friendly, saving paper, and it also saves London Forum a great deal of cost. With postage costs increasing enormously this is now becoming a major consideration.

If you do not keep your hard copy and feel you could do without it, relying on the PDF, please let the Editor know so that we could reduce our postal mailing list and save printing and postage costs. ■

For information about the London Forum contact:

www.londonforum.org.uk

Peter Eversden Chairman
London Forum, 70 Cowcross Street,
London EC1M 6EJ
Telephone: 020 7250 0606
email chairman@londonforum.org.uk

Haydn Mylchreest Membership Secretary
Telephone: 020 7720 2429
email membership@londonforum.org.uk

Registered Charity Number 1093134

London Forum Open Meetings 2013

Dates for your diary:

Monday April 22

Tuesday June 4

Tuesday July 2

Watch out for email updates with further details

Meetings are held at The Gallery,

75 Cowcross Street, EC1M 6EJ, (Farringdon station)

All meetings begin with refreshments at 6pm

for a 6:30pm start

Celebrating London Forum's 25th anniversary

Wednesday July 17 Reception at City Hall ■

Membership renewal - reminder

As you all know, London Forum relies totally on Members' subscriptions for its budget. Many Members are early payers and we are most grateful to Members who have already renewed this year. If for one understandable reason or another, you have not yet sent us your cheque we would be delighted to hear from you.

Please also let us know if there are changes to postal or email names or addresses so that we can keep our records up to date, otherwise post may not reach the right persons.

We would like to welcome other groups to be members and your suggestions and recommendations would be valued. ■

London Forum on Twitter

Don't forget the London Forum Twitter site.

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

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

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

http://twitter.com/London_Forum

NB - note the underscore: _ in the name ■

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