

newsforum



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

The London Forum of
Amenity and Civic Societies

Founded 1988

www.londonforum.org.uk

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Kingston Society
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London Forum celebrates 25 years

Promoting 25 Years of Society Achievements

London Forum rounds off its 25th anniversary by celebrating its members achievements

Bill Tyler and Derek Chandler

Part of London Forum's 25th Anniversary celebration was to ask member Societies to submit details of their major achievements during the 25 years of the London Forum.

A diversity of interests

Eleven entries were received, perhaps fewer than expected, but while many Societies do campaign on local issues others are more concerned to inform their members on local matters such as planning proposals. None-the-less the entries do reveal the diversity of interests and that determination and perseverance can achieve success. Certainly these entries demonstrate to all 120 member Societies what can be achieved by a pro-active attitude.

Campaigns and activities covered a wide range - some being long-term and phased, such as **Knightsbridge Association's** to renew the railings round squares, or **Blackheath's** successful campaign to have roads across the Heath made into cycle+pedestrian ways.

Westcombe has achieved extension of its Conservation Area and works with the Local Authority on highway issues. Traffic and road matters have been a major concern in Herne Hill and the Society has also achieved a notable success in securing improvements to the rather run-down shopping area. The Society is very involved in the community, bringing people together

The entries reveal the diversity of interests and that determination and perseverance can achieve success

by raising money for purposes that benefit local 'society' as a whole.

The Enfield Society fought a long-running planning issue with the Rank Organisation and was the only successful combatant out of 109 nationwide similar planning issues with Rank.

Landscape improvements have also been a big part of the Enfield Society's continuing work - the New River waterway restoration scheme achieving a Civic Trust award.

The Putney Society has had success on another river - securing what has turned out to be an award-winning riverside housing scheme.

St Marylebone, one of our most senior members, achieved a particularly good outcome for a derelict piece of land that they had raised £3,000 to refurbish in 1951 - then "lost" to a building site, but were able to ensure that this was re-created in 2011/12 with new landscaping.

Ladywell Society campaigned successfully for Conservation Area status for their locality, as did **Victoria Drive residents Association**. These small local Societies, membership of 11 and 68 respectively, have shown what can be done with determination.

Knightsbridge successfully fought off Al-Fayed's proposal for helicopter take-off and landing on the roof of Harrods.

Winning of another sort has been the success of the **Isleworth Society** in achieving formal Village Green status from Hounslow Council for their village greens while the Clapham Society has notably secured the restoration of a remarkable band stand in their somewhat larger green 'Common'.

Legal challenges

London Councils are to mount Judicial Review legal challenges to government policies on office-to-residential permitted development rights

(see page 14)

Promoting 25 Years of Society Achievements

(continued)

Clapham, Herne Hill, Blackheath and St Marylebone have produced guides, books and leaflets on their localities - an essential component in reaching out to the public. There are no winners or losers but there are my thanks your efforts and successes.

Contributions from the floor

Tiva Montalbano of the **Camden Civic Society** reported on a 'work in progress', the revitalising of this Society. Tiva had joined in 2010 and about 18 months ago realised that the Society had become moribund. The membership was falling and the stable but elderly Committee could not attract replacements. The Chairman suggested a merger with another Society but there were no responses. Tiva decided to try to revive the Society by introducing more modern features. This involved much hard work but also some luck. A website was set up, also a Twitter account and a local Blog. A local voluntary centre provided speed-matching of an individual's interests to the local activities that were required. Several young people, disenchanted with politicians but wanting to be effective, came forward and received a one-to-one introduction, a 'buddy' system. The existing Committee kept office. The Society is moving to provide income-generating events such as pub quizzes and guided walks to involve people that were not yet members.

A **Sydenham Society** member emphasised that new techniques were needed so that Societies are seen to be up-to-date. Facilities such as PayPal were essential. A stall in the local market generates interest. Young people in particular would respond to matters of general interest such as transport. Web sites must be efficient and well-structured, if more than four "clicks" are needed to find information users will give up. Societies should blend voluntary community activities and interest groups. Nowadays there were many more people renting homes so these should be included as well as the traditional owner-occupiers.

Helen Marcus emphasised that while Societies do not get involved in party politics they must be politically conscious in their campaigns. Elmbridge borough showed that politically independent

candidates could get elected and run the Borough, although the party politicians eventually took it back.

Newsforum also ran an article about Loughton earlier this year where independent candidates had taken a majority on both Town and District Councils. Many young people were non-political but were interested in single issues; Societies must make use of this attitude.

Tom Ball said that Societies must balance "rules" and "no rules"; having a general aim to "do good" for the community. Councillors when members of a Society committee will try to use the committee as a vehicle for their aims and not a body concerned with real local problems. This distortion is best avoided by not having Councillors on a committee.

Gaby Higgs gave some more information about the re-created memorial garden on the site of the original Marylebone parish church, St Mary's. It took seven years to recover the garden and have it restored. This achievement has had a wide effect on the recognition of the value of the Society as it achieved what residents wanted despite the objections of the Council. Gaby agreed that it is very difficult to attract young people but perseverance is essential. The Society has a broad remit reflecting local interests but may not always be able to cover everything. The Society involves planning students in the nearby college in planning matters.

Peter Eversden described how local businesses were persuaded to help the William Hogarth Trust with the cost of a successful project to erect a statue of Hogarth in Chiswick High Road to raise awareness of Hogarth's house nearby.

Neville Grant spoke on the emphasis of the Westcombe Society in involving local people and the local paper as well as their 300 to 400 members by holding events which attracted local people, additionally raising money for local bodies. Some £100,000 had been raised so far. All this raised the profile of the Society. He commented that the young want to "do things", not talk about action.

Helen Marcus felt that we should carry on publicising member's achievements and asked that members send her anything they would like published in Newsforum. ■

Walter Bor Media Awards 2013

Awards and Commendations

Category 1 Newsletter

Winner The Seven Dials Trust

Joint Commended The Enfield Society
The Sydenham Society

Category 2 Printed Publications

annual reports, membership and promotional brochures, guides, town trails, posters

Winner The Highgate Society -
*Northern Heights Publication Series
Ten self-guided walks*

This was a joint project with London Forum member The Heath & Hampstead Society and other local groups

Highly Commended The Clapham Society
Clapham Common Trees

Commended The Enfield Society
Heritage walk No.5 Edmonton

Category 3 Books

histories and studies

Winner The Hackney Society Society
Hackney: an uncommon history in 5 parts

Commended The Herne Hill Society
The story of Sir Henry Bessemer

Category 4 Web-site

Winner The Herne Hill Society
www.hernehillsociety.org.uk

Highly Commended St Marylebone Society
www.stmarylebonesociety.org/

Commended The Thorney Island Society
www.thethorneyislandsociety.org.uk

The Chislehurst Society
www.chislehurst-society.org.uk/

Category 5 Media Impact

no awards given

The panel of judges was chaired by Peter Murray of New London Architecture. His talk will feature in the next edition of Newsforum ■

London Forum AGM 2013

15th October 2013 at The Gallery

The **Chairman's** address, and report of the AGM meeting **Peter Eversden** with additional notes by **Derek Chandler**



Chairman's welcome and introduction

I welcome you all, and particularly new members, to the London Forum AGM at the finale of our twenty-fifth year. Our Patrons, Dame Jennifer Jenkins, Alan Baxter and Tony Travers, are unable to be with us this evening. Normally our AGM meetings would be introduced by our President, Sir Richard MacCormac, but he has been seriously ill lately and has decided to step down from being our President.

Appreciation of Sir Richard MacCormac

I would like to record the Forum's appreciation of Sir Richard's support and advice in the many years he has been our president. London Forum has had only two presidents and, as this is our 25th year, I would like to recall also the hard work of its founder President, the late Walter Bor, and of its first chairman, Marion Harvey, who steered the development of the Forum for the first half of our 25 years. Several of the original trustees are still with us as Vice Presidents, supporting the rest of the team.

Several apologies for absence have been received. They include Harley Sherlock, Judy Hillman, Michael Bach of the Kensington Society, Peter Pickering of the Finchley Society, Monica Smith of the Enfield Society, Dave Morris of the Haringey Federation of Residents Associations and Peter Makower for the West London River Group. If there any other apologies that people here wish to have recorded please let us know.

Minutes of the AGM of 17th October 2012

Copies of the minutes of the last AGM are on our web site. A report on the meeting was published in last Autumn's Newsforum. There were no revisions proposed by anyone but if you have any suggestions for change now, please say so. In the absence of comments I propose the acceptance of the Minutes. These were accepted, nem con.

Chairman's address

We now move on to this year's business and the Annual Report and Accounts. I must start by giving my thanks to Helen Marcus and Peter Pickering for helping me to compile the review of the year. It summarises the key activities of members

A highlight of the year was the celebration of the Forum's 25th Anniversary; it was a significant indication of the standing of London Forum with the Mayor and the GLA. It has been a good relationship in which the Forum is seen as a critical friend of the GLA

of the London Forum's team and there is more detail on several topics in the editions in the past year of Newsforum, which Helen Marcus has developed to a high standard. I am amazed at the range of activities of member Societies that are reported in Newsforum.

I hope member Societies find Newsforum content useful for their own newsletters and work. It is issued by email, as well as in printed version. Do forward it to your Committee and anyone else you think might be interested if you have their email addresses. Please feel free to use material from it for your own publications. Helen would be delighted to receive material from you for inclusion in newsforum so that other Societies learn about your activities. We are keen to reduce the Forum's printing bill, so if you would be prepared to stop receiving the paper version of Newsforum, do let us know. A PDF version is already being issued by email and past editions are on the Forum's web site.

London Forum subscribes to the award winning 'Planning in London' magazine, which can now be made available in PDF form to Forum members at no charge. It should help to keep you informed on planning matters and some of the more eccentric planning ideas now being proposed.

A highlight of the year was the celebration of the Forum's 25th Anniversary just after our year end, hosted by the Mayor at City Hall. It was a great evening and many of those who attended

have expressed their appreciation of the event. London's Living Room has probably not seen an event with such a London-wide attendance before. Our thanks to Sir Ed Lister, who was closely involved in the preparation for this event. Newsforum had a report and photographs and there is a gallery of pictures on our web site.

A year of significant achievement

I felt it was a significant indication of the standing of London Forum with the Mayor and the GLA and, as I said at the event, I think we have achieved a lot together. It has been a good relationship in which I think myself and the Forum's Trustees are seen as critical friends of the GLA. We have been very demanding but the dialogue has been open and positive. The Mayor has just set the Outer London Commission, of which he made me a member, new tasks to help Outer London Boroughs with the viability of their town and district centres and to consider higher densities and intensification of land use in them. That will feed into further alterations to the London Plan at the end of this year which will be our next big challenge for responses seeking the policies we want.

It seems only a few months since Michael Bach and I were involved in the public examination on the alterations made then to the London Plan for which the latest version was published only a few weeks ago. The large growth in population, the changes in businesses and the lack of homes are the main topics for the next set of amendments. Government proposals and the need for more house-building are forcing changes to the London Plan. The Mayor now has powers, including the control of rents, which can overrule the London Boroughs. The Greater London Assembly did not vote against these changes.

Localism and the planning changes

The year covered by the annual report was one in which we saw the Government withdraw Localism, despite the Act of Parliament with that name. The introduction of more permitted development for changes to use of buildings and to other developments is damaging to London's town centres and

economy, and the Mayor sought exemption from some of the relaxations in control for only the Central Activities Zone. As with the National Policy Planning Framework, the Government has cut down the documentation for planning guidance and there is now only an on-line version, for which your comments have been sought. At present this is not easy to use. Because the on-line version will only have the latest content a question arises on the availability and effect of earlier versions. We will be reviewing the implications of the planning changes at one of our open meetings on 22nd November, as announced. One question that will arise is the effect of the end of "permitted use." Will planning applications be needed for this to continue? The conversion of offices to housing causes concern by displacing small businesses, for example in Richmond.

In view of the changes and "relaxations" in planning policy that the Government has introduced, all Societies need to ensure their Borough's Local Plan is up to date and its policies cover your neighbourhoods so that you do not need to consider the time and cost of producing a Neighbourhood Plan, unless local circumstances or lack of borough cooperation requires that you do so. A Neighbourhood Forum can help by "encouraging" a Borough to concede a Neighbourhood Plan.

London Forum is still concerned about the quality of the frameworks for London's large areas of opportunity and intensification. They are owned in various ways and are all at different stages of completion. Further planning detail will need to be added by Boroughs and I hope you will make sure that happens before developers take the lead.

Open meetings

Several useful open meetings were held here during the year, as summarised in the Annual Report and detailed in Newsforum. The ones on planning, population statistics and air pollution were very interesting. We are fortunate to have use of this Gallery for our meetings. The office space and facilities we have at this Alan Baxter and Associates building, and the valuable networking opportunities we have with so many other organisations here, are much appreciated.

The London Forum web site gives me the opportunity to keep you informed on all things that might affect you in your work and in the area you live. I do hope you will keep an eye on the updates there. It has London News feeds that bring the latest information from Government and the GLA and it displays my Twitter entries which have reached almost nine hundred and are followed by over 200 people.

Financial Report

Tony Allen of the Chislehurst Society, London Forum's Treasurer, presented his Report.

"We have £23,000 in the bank after paying all bills. At a level of £3,000 subscriptions substantially cover the running costs so our ongoing position is good. There was a small deficit this year of £171. I have to ask "What should we do with the £23,000?" "The Accounts show that membership is up a little but the accounting and membership years are different. A significant cost this year was the Membership Survey at £1,000. This Survey was last made in 2008. The costs for the Anniversary Event were met in the previous year. The collection of subscriptions is a heavy task and might be eased by use of electronic payment directly or through the website."

The Treasurer invited questions on the Accounts but none were asked. Marion Harvey, past Chairman, explained that the London Forum had a £10,000 dowry when it was founded, and in the early years had to pay for meeting facilities. We now had the very valuable benefit of the use of the Gallery without charge.

The Chairman thanked the Treasurer for his work over the year and noted that the subscriptions to London Forum were raised for 2012 by around 12%. He hoped that members found that acceptable. "We went for a period of around eight years without raising our subscriptions which was probably not wise, as we dipped into reserves a couple of times. Members present at our AGM in 2008 approved a gradual increase in our fees to ensure we could cover our costs and increase our reserves a little. I trust you will find your ongoing membership of London Forum worthwhile and we will continue to work hard on your behalf."

Approval of Annual Report and Accounts for 2012/13

The Chairman asked for a proposer and seconder for the motion to approve the Annual Report and Accounts for 2012/13. The Motion to approve was proposed by Neville Grant of the Westcombe Society and seconded by Nick Jeffrey of the Culverley Green Society, and was passed nem con.

Election of Honorary Independent Examiner

Simon Baddeley was re-elected as Honorary Independent Examiner, proposed by Tony Allen, seconded by Andrew Bois of the Islington Society, and passed nem con.

Election of Officers and Trustees

Two members of the present Executive Committee retired by rotation and were willing to stand for re-election having been duly nominated. A third nomination had been received for Lucie Carayon of Peckham Society. A motion to elect the three nominees en bloc was proposed by Annabel McLaren of the Sydenham Society and seconded by Anna Townend of the Greenwich Environment Forum, and passed nem con.

Peter Eversden stated that he was happy to continue as Chairman of the Executive Committee (EC); the other members the EC would be Tony Allen, Treasurer, Michael Bach, Chairman Planning and Transport Committee, Derek Chandler, Secretary, Helen Marcus, Editor Newsforum, Haydn Mylchreest, Membership Secretary, Peter Pickering, Minutes Secretary, Diane Burrige, Michael Hammerson, Martin Jones and Bill Linskey. Two vice-presidents were co-opted to the EC, David Lewis and Bill Tyler. Marion Harvey had decided to resign.

The Chairman thanked Marion Harvey for her many years of work for London Forum, she was a founder member, and hoped that she could continue to guide us in an informal capacity. Haydn Mylchreest wished to resign as Membership Secretary in the near future. The Chairman thanked Haydn for his work on membership records and subscription collection and hoped that a replacement could be found soon, possibly from one of our member Societies.

News from CivicVoice

Helen Marcus has been attending some interesting meetings for CivicVoice which is gaining increasing respect and recognition in the public sphere

The Chairman thanked the EC for their work and support, observing that there were vacancies for anyone interested in participating.

Any Other Business

Marion Harvey reported that the Walter Bor Awards event would be on 26th November at the Gallery and that Peter Murray of New London Architecture would present the awards and give a talk after the presentation. The Chairman praised New London Architecture for the quality of their exhibitions and catalogues. Also every quarter there was a "Sounding Board" for the discussion of current key problems.

A member of the **Sydenham Society** raised the matter of the plans for London's airports. The Chairman said that the Davies Commission was continuing its assessments while new and old ideas were pushed into view. The Estuary airport proposed by the Mayor was almost certainly too expensive. The Commission would almost certainly include employment and freight in the assessments.

A recent proposal was for runways 3 & 4 parallel to 1 & 2. This could lead to stacks making the entry path lower, increasing noise. The Commission might like the parallel proposal, the interim report is due at the end of 2013.

The business of the AGM complete, the Chairman introduced the Report on Society Achievements

Report on Society Achievements

The Chairman thanked the Societies that had submitted details of their achievements. Panels showing the entries were on display. It was very useful to have examples from Societies on the way problems had been tackled.

The Chairman then invited Bill Tyler to speak on the submitted Achievements. (see front page report)

Neville Grant proposed a vote of thanks to London Forum for their work, this was warmly endorsed by applause from the audience. ■

Freddie Gick has taken over as Chair from Paula Ridley who stepped down at the AGM. CivicVoice is strengthening its impact in the public sphere. It now has its own All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) and is regularly invited to other APPGs and meetings. I have been taking on this responsibility for the Board of Trustees and have attended the following meetings, and also an APPG on the Green Belt, reported on page 12.

Communities and Local Government Committee question Mary Portas

2 September

Mary Portas gave evidence to the communities and local government select committee about her work on reviving shopping centres. MPs expressed concerns about whether her contract with Channel 4, featuring her "pilot" schemes programmes on reviving town centres, had too much influence on the direction of her work. She strongly rebutted this saying that the work she had done for the government was entirely voluntary and unremunerated.

The Guardian had obtained documents from a freedom of information request revealing that the film-makers working with Portas had lobbied government officials to direct taxpayer funds to certain high streets because they would be popular with television audiences. Portas said that she had not been aware of this. The Bill Grimsey Review of the same subject was published the next day and can be found at: www.vanishinghighstreet.com/

Planning out Poverty

The launch of this Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA) paper was held at the House of Commons in October, hosted by the Rt Hon Hilary Benn MP, Shadow Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government. Focusing on "Challenging social exclusion through planning in different urban contexts", there was a remarkable discussion based on acceptance that the current system has often been criticised as out of touch with ordinary people's lives and not fit for purpose and that planners are losing public trust. The new coalition Government is placing a strong emphasis on Localism. I was able to make the point that the civic movement would welcome the report and any opportunity to work constructively with the planners and local authorities. www.tcpa.org.uk/

All Party Parliamentary Group for Civic Societies 29th October

The CivicVoice All Party Parliamentary Group for Civic Societies, discussed neighbourhood Forums. Chair Laura Sandys MP asked that if civic groups and others know of authorities that are obstructing the neighbourhood planning process, they should inform CivicVoice so that they can inform her. She said that if there were places where obstruction is taking place she wants to know. Roberta Blackman-Woods MP (Shadow Planning Minister) also spoke

Parliamentary launch - TCPA Community Guide to Garden Cities.

26 November, House of Commons hosted by Peter Aldous MP, Member of Parliament for Waveney and member of the Environmental Audit Committee.

An interesting discussion on recent thinking in the TCPA's latest Garden Cities publication. www.tcpa.org.uk/resources.php?action=resource&id=1175

The future of local government.

Rory Stewart MP for Penrith and the Border. 27 November, The Ideas Space. Mr Stewart spoke of the growing problem with democracy as overall levels of support and trust for government and the political system continue to fall. He felt local government is potentially in the best place to renew this trust, but innovation has proved difficult, with proposed measures such as the introduction of elected mayors failing to capture the public imagination. He said Communities must be helped to engage with the democratic process, but did not accept that it is maybe the rigid ideological approach of political parties that is part of the problem.

Tidy Britain All Party Parliamentary Group

5 December 2013, House of Commons. The "Which side of the fence are you on?" campaign. Following a positive reaction to the Panorama programme with Joan Bakewell highlighting the cost to the nation of cleaning up rubbish, there has been a renewed determination to address a problem that costs us £1 billion a year to clean up. The "Which side of the fence are you on?" campaign calls for a new approach to prevent litter being dropped. ■

Tony Travers at the London Forum

One of the highlights of our 25th year programme was a wide ranging talk by our Patron Tony Travers on London – past present and future.

Report by **Peter Pickering**

Tony Travers began by explaining how the present system of government in Greater London was an inheritance from its past, and shaped the present form of the conurbation and the way in which decisions were currently taken, such as the development opportunities stemming from Crossrail and Thameslink.

The refusal of the City of London over the centuries since its original charter to expand with the growth of the urban area, and the historical process which led to the current borough boundaries, had produced a system quite different from that in other great cities in Britain and overseas.

Instead of a Victorian city with a Council of leading citizens with vision and power to create public buildings and services there was in London, outside the historic city, a chaos of parishes ruled by vestries etc. which was given some order only with the creation of the Metropolitan Board of Works (with the achievements of Bazalgette and others), followed by the London County Council (LCC) and the amalgamation of parishes into Metropolitan Boroughs. Subsequently, the LCC gave way to the Greater London Council (GLC) and 32 London Boroughs (as well as the City) and after a hiatus the GLC was replaced by the Greater London Authority (GLA) with a directly elected Mayor.

This complex system was not necessarily bad - it produced much more democracy than, say, in New York with a very powerful single Mayor; but it did mean little in the way of grand planning, such as is seen in Paris. Attempts such as that of Wren after the Great Fire had failed.

In London, planning was a political decision, taken by many different politicians. Development was very much for the private sector; government could do no more than try to shape it. One result could be seen in the distribution of tall buildings. In Paris there was only one within the *Periphérique*, and in New York they were concentrated in two areas. In London they clustered round railway stations, and the policies of individual planning authorities varied: the City and Tower Hamlets welcomed them, while Westminster and Kensington & Chelsea opposed them. The result may be a less beautiful city, but a city like Venice could be too beautiful for its own good.

How Greater London has changed

Mr Travers then discussed how Greater London had recently changed and was currently changing. Its population, from its nadir in the 1970s (which was accompanied by much pessimism) was growing fast, and likely to exceed its 1939 level by 2015. It was becoming more and more different from the rest of the UK, for instance in the enormous international flows of capital - including investment in London property - it was receiving, and in the proportion of its population that had been born overseas. High immigration was proving good for London, and was accompanied by a noteworthy degree of calm - violent crime was very low in London by international standards.

London needed more capital investment, but this was difficult for government because of the resentment it provoked elsewhere. The GLA and the boroughs were more dependent for finance on central government than local authorities elsewhere in the world.

London governance

Mr Travers turned to the governance of London, which was evolving into a form of city-region. Having a GLA with a directly-elected mayor was a great innovation for Britain; it was proving resilient - though it was the Mayor rather than the Assembly that was flourishing. The flexibility of the system of government in London was a great benefit. Relations between the GLA and the boroughs seemed to be better under Boris Johnson than under Ken Livingstone. There was a feeling that there were too many boroughs, but Mr Travers did not share that view, pointing out that the boroughs were themselves among the largest local authorities in the world. Two tiers of government mirrored two levels of interest, local and London-wide.

Despite its difference from the rest of the UK in so many ways, electorally London was not different - the share of votes given to the parties was very like that in the country as a whole. Mr Travers noted the effect that the synchronisation of election dates had on the result - Labour votes in the boroughs had been boosted at the last election which was on the same day as a general election, while the next borough elections would coincide only with an

election for the European Parliament. He speculated that UKIP would be a force only in outer and in eastern London.

Discussion from the floor

The points made included:

- Boroughs worked well together in the organisation called 'London Councils', and co-operation between boroughs was successful in some joint-working arrangements (e.g. the 'tri-borough') and in places like Park Royal and the Harrow Road, but there were examples of difficulties between contiguous boroughs. The boundary of the GLA area seemed very robust, and there was no machinery connecting London with the counties and districts surrounding it.
- The Select Committee seemed more interested in the Assembly and the functional bodies than in the working of the 2007 Act.
- Some boroughs (Ealing and Haringey were cited) contained areas of very different demographics. Some were so configured as to make change in political control following elections quite likely, other to make it very unlikely. Changes in control could militate against consistency in policies.
- Some feared that there had been a diminution in community commitment in recent years; Mr Travers doubted this.
- Barnet was seriously considering reverting to a Committee system from the cabinet one. Mr Travers was unaware of this and did not comment.
- Lady Dido Berkeley was concerned that there was no overall water planning, and no money for green infrastructure, though Thames Water was profitable. Mr Travers said that this was a consequence of privatisation; he observed that nationalisation, on the other hand, often meant being starved of money by the Treasury, while private companies could raise money themselves.
- London was at a disadvantage because of the concentration on large corporate rather than small business activity. More local ownership was desirable.
- The Highgate Society expressed concern at the unavailability of anywhere for young people to live. Mr Travers observed that property, though nowhere cheap, was more affordable in outer London. Housing conditions had greatly improved since the 1960s. But more housing would be needed if the population of London increased as predicted. ■

The challenges for London

Open Meeting 22nd November; John Lett, GLA Strategic Planning Manager on the challenges of increased population, insufficient new housing, decline of retail provision and changes in planning introduced by the Government that require alterations to the London Plan

Peter Pickering reports

John Lett gave a preview of the Mayor's thinking as the time approached for a revision of the 2011 London Plan. The revision would concentrate on housing and, to some extent, the economy; its basis was the increase in the forecast for population. Over the decade 2001-2011 the increase had been 83,000 a year, and the forecast for 2011-2036 was 76,000 a year. The Mayor would have to convince the Inspector at the Examination-in-Public that the Plan was realistic.

Co-operating between authorities

Policy had always been that London should 'consume its own smoke', without serious encroachment on the Green Belt; this might have to be reconsidered. Greater London was, of course, not isolated from the surrounding area, but the London Plan did not extend beyond its boundaries, and the duty on neighbouring authorities to co-operate meant not much more than talking to each other.

Mr Lett hoped that Sir Edward Lister would engage in a meaningful dialogue with neighbouring authorities, for instance about infrastructure, which could become part of a plan outside the framework of the formal London Plan.

Loss of offices and business space

The new Plan would have to look at ways of stemming the loss of offices, and at the need for affordable business space. There should perhaps be specialist concentrations of economic activity - e.g. technology and media companies, focussing on good transport nodes. The Plan would also consider the effect on town centres of changes in the level and pattern of consumer spending.

Densities and population growth

Higher housing densities would be essential, and the Plan would have to recognise that 60% of the growth would be in one-person housing - especially for older people and for students.

The forecasts of population growth and housing need were subject to uncertainties. The Government was forecasting 52,000 extra households a year to 2021; but this rate of growth might be short-term, if the

Density was a serious issue – it may have to be reconsidered.

end of the recession meant that out-migration from London increased and returned to its previous level. The GLA was working on a series of scenarios in the Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA), and was likely to argue for 40,000 extra households a year; but other forecasts were for 56,000 (Alan Holmans) or even 60,000 (London Councils). But undeniably there was a gap between the current level of house building and the need. While 7,000 more a year seemed achievable, 18,000 would be very difficult. But it would be necessary to convince the Inspector that the new Plan was deliverable.

Density was a serious issue. The intention was to keep the density matrix as the benchmark and guide, but it may have to be reconsidered. Although London was building at a density that was high compared with the rest of the UK, it was low compared to Manhattan and Hong Kong. As for space standards, the Mayor wished to keep the current London ones, but the Government was looking to make such standards nation-wide.

The Mayor would be launching his new housing strategy, emphasising the need for affordable family homes, recognising the desire of older people to stay in their own homes (though with more specialist accommodation available) and taking into account the needs of ex-forces personnel and students (currently 344,000 in London, increasing by 6000 plus per annum. All housing providers - public, private, intermediate etc. would have to work together, producing where possible mixed communities. The private rented sector was growing fast, becoming for many the sector of choice, and attracting investment (institutions seemed prepared to maintain the present level of investment for many years.

Mr Lett was clear that to break down the barriers to housing delivery it would be necessary to ensure that housing development was viable, taking account of e.g. energy requirements and the financing

of affordable housing; the planning system must not undermine viability.

The economy and employment

As regards the economy, Mr Lett thought that employment in London would rise by 34,000 a year; while at first new employment was largely in part-time jobs, there were now more full-time ones. The revisions to the Plan would have to take into account the contraction in retail employment, in town centres. It could perhaps be drafted to stem some employment loss, and also to reduce the concentrations of betting shops and of takeaways, and to protect pubs. An aim would be to maximise the benefits and minimise the detrimental effects of new rail infrastructure, e.g. HS2 and Crossrail 2. There would be more emphasis on the need for energy infrastructure.

Mr Lett concluded by saying that a draft of the revisions to the London Plan would appear in January 2014, with a view to Examination-in-Public in September and promulgation at the turn of 2014/5.

Questions from the floor:-

Q. Putney society: Did the GLA believe it was possible to operate on the demand side (population growth) or only on the supply side, and (b) how to deal with the fact that flats in high-rise developments were offered and very rapidly sold to overseas buyers, but often not occupied.

A. (a) The GLA was challenging the Government's estimates for death and migration, but the population growth was caused by a reduction in domestic out-migration, by international and domestic in-migration, and the high-proportion of people of child-bearing age (there were more married young people in London than anywhere else in the country).

(b) Across London as a whole 10% of buyers were from overseas; it was not known what level were 'left dark', but it was under 5%. Most overseas buyers wanted an income, and their properties went into the Private Rented Sector.

Q. Hammersmith Society: At present the return on property investment in London, at 12%, was higher than elsewhere in the world; that would at some time reverse with damaging effects.

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The role of architects - blurred boundaries?

By **Diane Burridge**

A. Housing Strategy would have something in it about this.

Q. Highbury Community Association: Young people wanted to buy, not rent, and drew attention to the controls in many countries on who could own real property.

A: Private renting was becoming increasingly acceptable, and that control over land ownership was not a mark of a mature economy.

Q: Hampstead Garden Suburb: what is the total house-building in London that could realistically be attained on the available land. A: 42,000.

Q: Angel Association: how could the tower blocks that were appearing be integrated into the area.

A: The GLA was working on this, and had additional provisions in mind.

Other points raised:

Southwark and the City were working on 'character and context' on which there was draft Supplementary Planning Guidance; many boroughs were very behindhand in implementing the Community Infrastructure Levy; boroughs needed to be able to challenge developers' claims of non-viability; outer London boroughs would have to recognise that it was unrealistic to believe they could continue to have only houses with gardens. Higher densities inevitably cut amenity space. More information was needed about plans for town centres in Opportunity Areas.

The problem of architects who produced a good design on the basis of which planning permission was granted, then being removed and their designs downgraded by 'value engineering'. The City and Southwark were now insisting that the original architects were retained.

Affordable housing was defined as 80% of the market rent - impossibly above the level for social housing - poorer people were being moved from inner London boroughs and London was becoming more polarised. London needed housing for its own working people who might be on lower incomes. Lessons had not been learnt from earlier disasters with high rise buildings; there had to be more innovation in building. ■

With the urgent need for three million more homes in the country, who will be ultimately responsible for place making and urban design? To what extent should architects be leading the way? These challenging questions were discussed at a lecture in October, one of RIBA Journal's 120th Anniversary Series, appropriately titled: *Blurring the Boundaries*. Chaired by David Ubaka, the five panellists oscillated from different positions when responding to these questions.

A national plan for England is needed, according to Clive Dutton, Former Director for Regeneration and Inward Investment for the London Borough of Newham. This plan would focus on promoting densification and more use of brown field sites, as well as stronger space standards than those now set by the GLA. Architects need to be at the heart of this work. However, he added: some of the most exciting developments have not been planned at all: think of the creative industries in Shoreditch.

Ivan Harbour, of Rogers Stirk Harbour + Partners, noted that cities develop with a common purpose to meet a diversity of need. Architects have an obligation outside their projects; for example, they should bring the city to the city fringe. Architects are in the enviable position of being responsible for spending huge sums of money on behalf of others. He felt, 'politics is the answer and the problem'. For example, in Paris due to the mayoral system agreeing new plans can be a challenge. 'They should take the politics out of developments'. One good idea he proposed was that architecture should be taught in schools.

Lucy Musgrave, the Director of Publica, eloquently described the gloriousness of, 'complex and messy cities'. All cities are inherently mixed use, and we must not rub this mix out, but build on it. We need to think of the topologies of place, and cater for where people want to live. London is now the largest retail centre in the world, and we need to build in surprise in our urban spaces. However, few people will champion the civic if the client is not interested in this.

Citing the success of Hulme's regeneration, Stephen Hodder, RIBA President-elect and Chairman of Hodder + Partners, outlined the key ingredients of the

Hulme Regeneration Strategy and its design framework. Politicians can think in the short term, and he noted that, 'architects are well-placed to act as facilitators'.

In response to a question from the audience: 'Who are architects working for?', Stephen Hodder stated that architects should not work with clients who do not consider the community - they should be broadening the client's mind. But why should architects take on the consciousness of developers queried others.

And what happens when there is conflict over land use queried Tony Travers, Director of the Greater London Group at the London School of Economics. For example: over the use of the undercroft at the Southbank. Ultimately, Lambeth Council councillors will have to make a decision, not architects, if a compromise cannot be agreed between the skateboarders and the Southbank Trustees. Increasingly, we may see conflicting views over the use of land, as London's population continues to increase. It has already increased from 6.75 million in 1986 to 8.5 million in 2013.

People will only support developments if there is something in it for them. We have to, 'tame and manage capitalism as this is the only system we know'. We must reuse industrial land with quality developments, which make sense to local people. Otherwise nothing will happen.

The meeting frustratingly, for me, raised many questions, with few answers, on the future role of the architect in urban renewal. Perhaps there are no simple answers in a complex city with a rapidly increasing population with concomitant increasing pressures on land-use. The skill will be for architects to recognise such complexities, and all the different and changing interests around land use. As well, the role of local democratic structures in having to negotiate final agreements - perhaps aiming to upset the least number of people - needs to continue to be appreciated.

A more interesting question to debate might have been: how can the planning system in London better promote good architecture which meets community and national needs, and builds on complexity and 'glorious messiness'? But then: what is good architecture? ■

Planning for Highgate's Future

Maggy Meade-King, Chair, Highgate Neighbourhood Forum describes how the Forum was set up

Two years ago, the Highgate Neighbourhood Forum was just a twinkle in the eyes of a small group of people in the Highgate Society. We had successfully lobbied for a change in the Localism Bill to allow cross-Borough forums and now we had to do something about it! We began by talking to the Councillors in the Highgate wards in Camden and Haringey and, with their help, set about contacting all the residents' associations, action groups, amenity societies and faith groups in the neighbourhood. A packed meeting of these groups in January 2012 decided to proceed with setting up a Neighbourhood Forum.

Using the Localism legislation

We were agreed that we should make the best use we could of the Localism legislation – ill thought out and neglectful of the needs of urban communities, as we thought it to be. In an increasingly threatening planning climate and as a neighbourhood that is divided between two planning authorities and the priority of neither, we felt we needed to defend and improve our neighbourhood as best we could.

Finding out about Highgate

In May 2012, we held our first AGM, agreed on a Constitution and elected our first Committee. Our initial task was to let people know we existed and find out what the people of Highgate wanted us to do. So we hand-delivered 8,000 leaflets to every household in the area and set up a website with a simple survey form. At the same time, we persuaded our two Councils to meet us together and set up a mechanism for officially designating us as a forum.

We had several meetings with neighbouring areas to discuss Area boundaries. We were (perhaps overly) ambitious from the start and decided to embrace a large area, to accommodate all those residents who wanted to join us and also to ensure that we were considering a diverse area, rather than a small, privileged enclave.

Every meeting with local groups, every table at local events, every article in the local press and every call for help to deliver leaflets or to begin thinking about a Plan

In an increasingly threatening planning climate, and as a neighbourhood that is divided between two planning authorities and the priority of neither, we felt we needed to defend and improve our neighbourhood as best we could.

brought us new recruits. In Autumn 2012, a number of us set about Placecheck walkabouts to look with fresh eyes at parts of the neighbourhood we didn't know so well – making new friends as we went. Later in the year – with the help of the Prince's Foundation – we looked at how we could reach groups who hadn't engaged with us so far. This work culminated in some Community Planning Workshops in January 2013.

Our applications to be a Neighbourhood Area and Neighbourhood Forum were approved by Camden and Haringey Councils in December 2012. We were proud to be the first in Camden and are a little disappointed to be still the only forum in Haringey.

Making a plan

Since then, about 50 people have been working hard on our Neighbourhood Plan. We split into working parties looking at Social and Community, Open Spaces and the Public Realm, Economic Activity, Development and Heritage and Transport and Traffic. Members of a Sustainability group are also embedded in each of the other groups and we have further groups looking at key strategic areas within our neighbourhood. We have also worked together as a larger group in workshops (organised by CABE at the Design Council) or via our Plan Steering Group.

Currently, we are discussing an early draft of the Plan: finding issues and data we have omitted, at the same time as trying to cut it down to a reasonable size.

As will be clear from the list of working groups above, we have chosen to take a holistic view of neighbourhood planning, rather than just tackle Planning Policy, so this is no easy task. But it was clear once we started to ask people what issues they wanted us to tackle that most people are more interested in traffic congestion and encouraging local businesses than the minutiae of Planning Policy.

So we have already begun working with outside agencies, like TfL, on matters that only they can deliver. We guess that this sort of partnership working will become an important part of our activity as we move into implementation of our Plan.

We have a small grant from the Government's Supporting Communities in Neighbourhood Planning programme to pay for the design and print of the Neighbourhood Plan and Consultation materials and will shortly be commissioning a designer to undertake this work for us.

Some useful tips

So what tips can I pass on to communities thinking about becoming a forum and undertaking neighbourhood planning?

- Involve your local Councillors from the outset
- Get your Council officials on side
- Bring as many of your local organisations on board as you can – they will certainly contain individuals who are 'doers'
- Look at who is not involved and think about how to engage them
- Find out about your neighbourhood – there will be surprises!
- Listen to what local people want your forum to do
- Play to people's strengths – let them run with what interests them – you will need everyone's enthusiasm as time goes on
- Be kind to each other – this is a long hard process and individuals will get tired and need support

You can read about all of the above and find out more on our website:

www.highgateneighbourhoodforum.org.uk

Good luck! ■

Spotlight on the Kingston upon Thames Society

A borough-wide society battling the apathy of residents and the remoteness of officers
by **Jennifer Butterworth**

The Society, like so many, was born in the heat of battle over a road – a proposal in 1962 that would have separated the town centre from the river. Some local architects felt this was fundamentally flawed and in 1963 the Society was born when the Royal Borough of Kingston (RBK) refused to speak to anybody without printed writing paper and a committee. The Mayor chaired a meeting in the Guildhall which formed itself into a civic society with the required headed paper and a committee. The public enquiry of 1964 saw the Society presenting its own suggestions for the relief of the acknowledged traffic congestion. These included a road remarkably similar to what was subsequently built in the 1980s, the pedestrianisation of the Market Place, achieved in 2003, and a continuous riverside walk completed in 2001. The experts had all sworn the official proposals were utterly essential if Kingston was to survive, Gerald Bentall, chairman of Bentalls, called for co-operation with the official plan. The Society was treated as a collection of busy-bodies looking for fulfillment by stopping the experts doing what they were trained to do. That attitude is still apparent at times today.

One result of the successful demolition of the case for the 1963 Master Plan was a period of planning blight. I left the area in 1968 and on my return in 1973 nothing much seemed to have changed. I was largely ignorant of the battle described. No absence of five years since would result in such seeming stasis.

Two successful battles

The next two battles that met with success (the unsuccessful were, alas, more numerous) were of the type traditionally typical of civic societies. It “saved”, or perhaps more correctly helped to save, Picton House and the Victorian Kingston Grammar School building. The first is a Queen Anne building closely associated with a black, Senegal-born, Cesar Picton, who later set up as a coal merchant and is an interesting example, therefore, of the now fashionable ethnic minority history. RBK made a sustained effort to get permission for its demolition but a developer was finally found to restore it

Battles have not only to be won but fought over and over again

and adapt it for modern offices which continues to the present day. A plaque records the origins and history of the house and Cesar Picton.

Unlike many, if not most, civic societies, Kingston's covers the whole Borough, admittedly the smallest London Borough apart from the City, but it still has a large remit. Although Kingston Town Centre tends to take a disproportionate part of its time, it does not monopolise it as the battle of Seething Wells in Surbiton, discussed below, will show. But it resembles other societies in including more purely social occasions in its programme, to enable members to get to know each other and make the programme as a whole more enjoyable. And of course attract more members.

Some remarkable history

Settlements date from prehistoric times and continue with coronation of Saxon kings; the oldest charter dates from King John. The Market charter in the 17C precluded any market within radius of 7 miles from Kingston; it provided tradesman for the building of nearby Hampton Court Palace and water supply via Coombe Springs and Conduit Houses. It has a successful university and well-thought of schools (not just Tiffin)

Two ongoing battles

In the next decades there were two long-running campaigns, both ending successfully at the time. The Society was actively involved in opposing the original proposals for luxury flats put forward by Thames Water and Persimmon Homes. These plans were dreadful in themselves but utterly impossible in the sensitive site opposite Hampton Court Home Park. The first application failed and there were four further applications and three public enquiries. All successfully balked Thames Water. The news of this last victory

together with the retention of the Kingston Magistrates Courts came on the day of a committee meeting and for the first and only time to date, the committee drank a celebratory toast in champagne.

Maybe it celebrated too soon. A further round of cuts saw the demise of the Kingston Magistrates Courts; what was once an Assize town, and now with Crown and County courts, no longer has Magistrates Courts and the listed courts stand empty and unused with no alternative use possible.

The Filter Beds saga also continues. Thames Water has sold the site which, subsequently has changed hands many times and now stands derelict and deteriorating fast. Alternative plans have been put forward, rejected by RBK and subject to appeal. To the dismay of many the Society has supported these latest plans which involve a limited development on pontoons, on the grounds they present the best chance of access to the site, protection of its rich wild life and buildings of reasonable architectural merit.

Positive action

In two instances of positive action, the Society has stepped in where RBK has refused to act.. The first was when English Heritage, the guardians of the Coombe Conduit House, one of the buildings controlling the water supply to Henry VIII's Hampton Court Palace, approached RBK unsuccessfully to manage regular openings to the public. The Society responded and not only opens it by appointment to interested individuals and groups, but also opens it regularly on the second Sunday of the month from Easter to September, when, on a reasonably dry Sunday afternoon, 20 or more people are surprised and intrigued by what they see.

The last opening usually coincides with Heritage Open Days, the local organization of which the Society took over from RBK's half-hearted efforts, and has built up a programme with over 30 participants. RBK is the only London borough to support HODs rather than Open House. RBK only finances the direct printing costs of the HODs guide whereas participating in Open House is much more expensive because the Kingston Society gives it services in



Kingston upon Thames Society

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Jennifer Butterworth

organizing the programme completely free. The Society Chairman was quoted in the national publicity for HODs one year saying she did not know a more effective way of fostering a feeling of place than participation in HODs. Needless to say fostering such feelings is one of the Council's main aims so it is galling that the Council seems to believe that their grant allows the Society merely to gratify its own ambitions and vanity as distinct from the Council's!

Award for contributions to townscape

Our remaining regular attempt to be positive is the bi-annual award to outstanding contributions to the townscape. The choice is made after prolonged discussion and debate. The professional architects involved tend to want awards to go to comparatively "grands projects" but the Chairman, together with another committee member, successfully championed what was derisively called "a hole in the wall". What we two wanted to illustrate was what

an enormous contribution to the streetscape can be made for modest outlay by "tidying up" the back entrance to a school on a busy one-way street by the erection of a decent brick wall with a hole into which a vandal proof replica of the school badge was inserted.

The Society tries very hard to avoid being solely negative and continually oppose whatever is proposed. The Townscape Awards are part of this aim but we feel RBK makes it rather difficult for us at times!

Kingston advertises itself on the approaches to the Town Centre as an "historic market town". That is a fact but the only trouble is ensuring that there is any evidence in the townscape to support it. Obviously much work remains to be done. ■

The market place



Coombe Conduit



Age: 50

Founded: 1963

Circumstances of Birth: Born in opposition to proposed relief road dividing town centre from river.

Biggest Successes: 1. Defeat of first relief road proposal. Subsequently planned relief road bears striking resemblance to what the Society proposed as an alternative to the original proposals. 2. Ancient Market regeneration; 3. Applications for Student housing; 4. Pontoons for cycling on the Thames 5. RBK to implement policy re "iconic" entrance point buildings and start with the John Lewis underpass which greets motorists crossing Kingston Bridge

Biggest Disappointments/Frustrations: 1. Need to fight same battle over and over again e.g. Magistrates Courts, Picton House, Charter Quay. 2 Continued loss of older buildings of no great individual merit but whose presence serves to preserve the "historic market town" character e.g. Snappers' Castle, New Malden Vicarage

Present Preoccupations: The Borough is dominated by Kingston Town Centre and its problems but this does not stop us from fighting the good fight in Malden and Surbiton. In the immediate future the battle of Seething Wells looks set to continue, a date for the latest appeal is pending, and, a topic not mentioned already, the future of the Ancient Market.

Working Details: Membership 300; £10 per individual member; £120 Life member, £30 corporate member; Committee 10 including all officers; Publication: newsletter Kingston News; Guides to Coombe Conduit, Richmond Park; 50 years history of the Society: explanatory leaflets, story boards.

Activities: Organiser for Royal Borough of Heritage Open Days; opening of Coombe Conduit to public and additional research into its history; monthly meetings, visits to local and nearby places of interest, visits and guided walks.

Special Characteristics: Unlike many civic societies, Kingston's covers the whole Borough,

Last Word: Continued frustration of the typical resident feeling free to criticise (often based on ignorance of the true position) but reluctant even to lay out £10 to help those who are willing and able to put up a fight. Battles have not only to be won but fought over and over again. ■

Crystal Palace Park – what next?

Ken Lewington, Vice Chairman, The Crystal Palace Foundation reports on proposals to rebuild the Crystal Palace

In 2007 the London Development Agency (LDA) submitted a planning application for the Crystal Palace Park Masterplan. Bromley granted permission in 2008, the Secretary of State called in the application and in 2009 it was the subject of a Public Inquiry. In December 2010 the Secretary of State granted permission. Since then, Bromley has been working with Stakeholder Groups and others on incremental improvements to achieve the vision behind the Masterplan, i.e. to 'create a truly 21st Century Park, with excellent sports, recreational and leisure facilities for local people and once again to make Crystal Palace Park a destination for London as a whole'. The Greater London Authority (GLA) absorbed the LDA during 2012 and so took on the planning obligations attached to the grant of permission.

On 25 July Bromley's Stakeholder Groups received an email revealing that the Council has had conversations with a developer who '...may be interested in developing the so-called top site', and is 'keen to bring forward much-needed improvements to the park.' It continues, '...it is too early to specify what the plans may include...' and, '...when we are able to say more, we will of course, let you know.' The next morning, more appeared in The Times and online in Property Week, which carried the news that the Shanghai-based Zhong Rong Group (ZRG) has proposals to build a 'replica' of the Crystal Palace on the Palace Terrace (the 'top site') and, with the GLA, Bromley and Arup, is working towards the submission of a planning application.

On 3 October London Mayor Boris Johnson, Bromley Council Leader Stephen Carr, and Chairman of ZRG Mr Ni Zhaoxing, attended a press conference in the Park to introduce the £500 million proposal. It is said that: 'This proposition is for the reconstruction of the Crystal Palace...' and 'The Park will be restored in line with the approved Masterplan...' Project brochure & press release at: www.thelondoncrystalpalace.com

On 16 October, Bromley's Executive Committee resolved to enter into an

exclusivity agreement with ZRG for a period of sixteen months (until 1 February 2015), to allow for further negotiations to establish whether an acceptable scheme can be developed.

ZRG's proposed timeline is: Autumn 2013: Community engagement and consultation; Winter 2013: Design development; Autumn 2014: Planning application target submission; Winter 2015: Ready to start on site; 2018: Palace could open within the improved Park setting.

So it seems reasonable to anticipate that, amongst other things, i) a substantial building, approximately the length of five football pitches and up to six storeys, possibly with a 3,000-space underground car park, will be proposed for the Palace Terrace, ii) a fresh planning application would be required, iii) 'very special circumstances' would need to be clearly identified to justify the proposal to place such a building on an area designated as Metropolitan Open Land (MOL) and iv) restrictions such as the size, location and style of any proposed building that may be imposed by legislation, e.g. the 1990 Crystal Palace Act, would need to be 'resolved'. Additionally, the Masterplan would need revisiting and consideration would need to be given as to how the local road and transport infrastructure would handle an extra 2 million visitors a year.

The Crystal Palace Foundation attends Bromley's Heritage and Environment Stakeholder Group meetings; at the 10 October meeting the general feeling towards the proposal for a new Crystal Palace was one of scepticism, allied with a desire for more information. We wait with interest to see what the next sixteen months will bring – particularly as regards the MOL issue which, with over one hundred trees on the Palace Terrace, may well receive a robust response from the community. For discussion of this and other issues, log on to the Virtual Norwood website (see also:

www.theyworkforyou.com/debates/?id=2013-10-29a.894.0 for the 29 October discussion in Parliament. ■

APPG on the Green Belt

Nick Boles attends the first meeting of the All Party Parliamentary Group on the Green Belt

Chris Skidmore, the Conservative MP for Kingswood, Bristol, has set up an All Party Parliamentary Group on the Green Belt. About 50 MPs from sides have signed up and its inaugural meeting was held on June 17. The group is focused specifically on the issue of development in Green Belt, rather than greenfield land or the countryside more generally, the aim being to safeguard Green Belt for the future.

At the Group's first public meeting on Monday 15 July, planning minister Nick Boles made a short introductory statement giving assurances that government still regards protection of Green Belt policies as very important and strong protection will continue. However despite his faith in the system, and claims that the planning reforms had increased Green Belt protection, it was clear that there is great concern amongst MPs that the loss of Green Belt continues, and that government changes may have made the problem worse.

There are increasing reports that the Planning Inspectorate is overriding the democratic process, ordering councils to review their Green Belt boundaries and release green belt land for development in order to meet their housing requirements. Councils themselves are using the "exceptional circumstances" clause to "re-designate" their land to allow building to take place; and boundaries are being changed by councils under pressure to provide more land for housing.

The APPG is aiming to put together a report in the autumn, with ideas about how Green Belt should be preserved. Mr. Skidmore said a community right of appeal against permission of Green Belt development was among the issues they might explore. At the moment developers have a right to appeal but a community cannot do anything if a council decides to allow a developer to build on an area of Green Belt land. ■

The London Assembly questions Thames Water

Verina Glaessner reports

In October the London Assembly's Environment Committee gave Thames Water represented by Richard Aylard, External Affairs and Sustainability Director; John Sweetman, Engineering Manager, Thames Tideway Tunnels and Yvette Degaris, Head of Environmental Regulation, an opportunity to respond to the concerns raised in the Committee's Water Matters report (2012).

Issues considered were progress in improving the efficiency of water use and delivery, and action on the high proportion of treated water lost to leakage. The Committee expected that decisions on leakage reduction and other investments in water infrastructure should fully reflect the environmental as well as financial and social costs and benefits. Questions were raised regarding water charges, social responsibility and the managing of run off due to over use of impermeable surfaces either through sustainable urban drainage systems or the 'interceptor sewer' the Thames Tideway Tunnel.

The Tideway Tunnel

Central to the meeting was cross-questioning on the subject of the Tideway Tunnel. The fact that Thames Water's policy as a company was to ensure it completely 'isolated' itself from its construction: a new and independent company would tender for it, was not encouraging. Thames Water and its shareholders would thereby be insulated from both the risks and costs involved. To keep prices low the government would support any risks deemed 'exceptional'. Mr. Sweetman would be drawn on neither the nature, nor the predicted costs, of such risks. He also seemed to suggest, however fleetingly, that the costs involved as operators of the Tunnel, following completion, might be more than routinely expected.

Leaks and meters

On leaks and the environment, Thames Water's understanding of the term environment appeared to be focused on the immediate effect of carrying out works such as street disruption caused by pipe repair, rather than the broader long term social and environmental costs of wasted water. They were reluctant to acknowledge any connection between increased water abstraction and water lost through leakage.

Interestingly, the priority in leak reduction was prevention of deterioration, working to keep the system stable. Metering was a major way of balancing supply and demand, attempting to limit the public's tendency to use more water in hot weather. Further questioning revealed that by the end of 2020 still only 54% of residences would have meters. The UK was, the Committee noted, the only developed country without full metering. Thames Water was concerned to emphasise the extent to which it worked within constraints exerted by DEFRA, Ofwat and the Environment Agency. Progress, the committee noted, was disappointing and did not meet the Mayor's targets for water metering or indeed cutting leaks.

Bad debts

Unapologetic about the company's policy of off-loading costs to partner bodies (keeping down costs to customers through social tariffs, the Water Sure tariff and the Water Sure Plus tariff which was developed through a charitable foundation) and possibly understandably unwilling to sketch a worst case scenario for the Tunnel at the moment when its construction was to go to tender, Mr Sweetman was prepared to go into details about the mounting bad debts incurred through the untraceability of short term tenants and the Government's reluctance to put through legislation which would enable collection through landlords: a particularly London issue which has recently worsened significantly.

Sustainable Urban Drainage System (SUDS)

Retrofitting SUDS, apparently raised problems. These were not explored more fully. A possible lack of co-ordination between Thames Water, other infrastructure providers and local authorities might be part of the reason. A mismatch between the high profile of the Tunnel as a project, as opposed to the relative invisibility of piecemeal works to counter persistent, but still relatively minor, flooding, might also play a part, regardless of the long term community benefit produced. Progress had been made, however, with slow release water storage systems at Westfield and Nine Elms. The issue everywhere, we were told, was to keep rainwater out of the sewers.

A question from Jenny Jones about

fracking's use, and possible contamination of, water, closed the meeting. Thames Water would seek to be a statutory consultee for any application which involved fracking. ■

Other Thames Water news

The public examination of Thames Water's Tideway Sewer Tunnel began in September. All Written Representations, Local Impact Reports, Statements of Common Ground and responses to the Panel's First Written Questions are now published.

The Inspector made it clear from day one that she would not consider any evidence about alternatives to the Thames Water's proposals. That means other methods of dealing with rainfall such as greening, permeable surfaces and additional sustainable urban drainage would not be considered in the examination.

As the tunnel will not be in operation before 2023 other means of avoiding overload of the sewage system will need to be found anyway to avoid discharges of untreated waste into the Thames. Details can be found on the National Infrastructure Planning web site

<http://infrastructure.planningportal.gov.uk/projects/london/thames-tideway-tunnel> The Blue Green website is a useful source of further information

www.bluegreenuk.com/vision.html Updates can also be found on the London Forum web site Updates section.

Ofwat Ruling on price rise

In November following much adverse publicity about Thames Water's finances, the company was refused permission by Ofwat to put up their charges by £29, or 8%, on customers' bills for 2014-15. Ofwat found that the evidence the company submitted did not justify the proposed increase. For 2014-15 they will be limited to a maximum of 1.4% above inflation, as set in the 2009 price review. The most recent reports - in the Financial Times - said that Thames Water had given up the attempt to impose this one-off price rise. ■

London Councils to challenge government policies in court

Helen Marcus reports on legal challenges approved for Judicial Review

Islington Council, supported by Camden and Richmond upon Thames have been given permission to bring a judicial review against the government's new office-to-residential permitted development rights, introduced in May. This allows the conversions of business premises to homes to take place without the need for planning permission. A High Court hearing will be held on 4 December 2013.

Councils have "lost the ability to protect office space, and they are not able to demand that the new homes are affordable or even meet basic space standards". "With no need for planning permission, residents' rights to be notified in advance and to raise any objection have been swept away."

Richmond Council has received 107 such applications to convert offices, the most of any London borough.

Lambeth is bringing a separate legal challenge to the new rules, which will be heard at the same time, supported by Tower Hamlets, Ealing and Sutton councils. They argue that the way the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) allowed certain areas to opt out from the change, but not others, was unlawful.

Before it introduced the new permitted development rules on 30 May, the government granted exemptions to 17 authorities for the whole or parts of their areas, though 165 councils applied.

Westminster to challenge Waterloo development

Westminster City Council has been granted permission for a judicial review to challenge the Government's decision not to call in the plans for a major mixed-used scheme next to Waterloo station on the Elizabeth House site. The plans to replace the existing 1960s building with two towers of 29 and 10 storeys, providing 142 homes and 88,600 square metres of office space, was granted planning permission by the London Borough of Lambeth and approved by Mayor Boris Johnson. Advice from a Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) planning casework officer to communities secretary Eric Pickles and planning minister Nick Boles, recommending call-in, was ignored. Many believe that the height and bulk of the development will harm the World Heritage site of the Palace of Westminster. ■

Is Localism working?

The London Forum chairman is not the only one querying the Government's commitment to the Localism it proclaims (see AGM report).

A senior Tory MP Tony Baldry has accused Eric Pickles of "running roughshod over any concept of Localism" after the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government supported plans to build housing estates on greenfield land in Oxfordshire. Mr Pickles ruled in favour of developers against the wishes of parish and district councils, and overruling the district council's provisional local plan.

Mr. Baldry, whose Banbury constituency is next to David Cameron's seat in Witney, said that these rulings set a dangerous precedent for local authorities around the country. In a letter to constituents he said "The Secretary of State's decision runs roughshod over any concept of Localism or elected local councillors deciding where new housing should go through a local plan process." ■

Changes in Barnet

Return of the Committee System

Barnet council are proposing to change their governance system from the Cabinet system of governance imposed by the last Labour government under the Local Government Act 2000.

The new Localism Act 2011 gave local authorities the choice of returning to the Committee System. The council are considering options for the structure of a Committee System as a form of governing the council. In which "Decisions would instead be taken in thematic cross-party politically proportioned committees. The full Council would play a more central role than is currently the case." However this would mean the abolition of the Overview & Scrutiny Committees.

The consultation took place at the end of the summer and it is intended that new arrangements will be in place by June 2014.

Outsourcing of services

Following the High Court dismissal of a local resident's legal challenge on the council's failure to consult properly, the London Borough of Barnet and Capita plc signed two key contracts in August outsourcing the council's back office and infrastructure services as part of its One Barnet change programme dubbed the 'Easycouncil' programme. The contracts, outsourcing development and regulatory services, will run for ten years, are worth £474m, and include an £8 million pound investment in technology. It is claimed that there will be savings to the taxpayer of £165 million over ten years. The business will be based in Barnet and will keep staffing at broadly the current level.

It was ruled that the application for Judicial Review had been made too late. ■

Council pension fund fears

UK local government pension funds Concerns are being widely raised about cash-flow levels at some UK local government pension funds as the latest round of valuations showed falling funding levels, with some schemes facing negative cash flows. Levels are said to have fallen on average, from 75 per cent in 2010 to 70 per cent in 2013; in Brent, a pension fund subcommittee report said that its funding levels were likely to deteriorate from 61 per cent of its £751m liabilities in 2010 to just 56 per cent in 2013. Other local authority schemes already heavily underfunded in 2010 include Waltham Forest, at just 60 per cent, Havering at 61 per cent and Haringey at 69 per cent. One of the fears is that boroughs may seek to sell assets in order to raise the cash. ■

Why living near an airport could be bad for your health

Researchers are warning for the first time that there may be a real health risk associated with aircraft noise.

Two studies, published in the British Medical Journal, found evidence that people living in areas with high levels of noise pollution from passing aeroplanes had a higher risk of heart disease and stroke.

The first study was by researchers from Imperial College London and King's College London, who compared Civil Aviation Authority data on aircraft sound levels with hospital admissions and mortality rates for 3.6 million people living near Heathrow Airport.

A second investigation carried out in the US looked at heart disease among 6 million people living close to 89 airports. More than two per cent of hospitalisations for cardiovascular diseases could be attributed to aircraft noise, the researchers from the Harvard School for Public Health and the Boston University School of Public Health said.

Previous studies have suggested a link between a noisy environment and high blood pressure. Although health leaders in

Studies found evidence that people living in areas with high levels of noise pollution from passing aeroplanes had a higher risk of heart disease and stroke.

the UK stopped short of confirming a causal link between aircraft noise and heart problems, the studies show a strong association, which they said should be taken into account in future plans to expand airport capacity.

The Heathrow study covered 12 London boroughs and nine districts outside London. The study area was divided into 12,110 zones with a population of around 300 people each.

The results were adjusted to account for other heart disease risk factors, such as social deprivation and air pollution – although the area-based analysis made separating risks associated with factors such as smoking and ethnicity difficult. ■

Friends of Capital Transport

Friends Newsletter

The latest e-mail newsletter to the Friends of Capital Transport Campaign is now available. If you would like to receive this lively and informative update about transport issues in London please apply to have your address added to the mailing list to: andrewbosi@aol.com

The next issue will appear in January 2014 and the deadline for any items you wish to include is January 7th. In the current issue that went out in November includes: High Speed 2; upper limit on fare rises capped; commuter secures fare rebate; New Bus for London injury scares; major disruption at Camden Road; disruption on other railways; London Council's evidence to GLA Bus review; GLA Bus review published; London Councils response to CrossRail2 consultation; forthcoming events; from the Archives of Capital Transport Campaign. ■

New ideas for funding and building affordable housing

The Affordable Rent Model

The Government's new model the 'Affordable Rent Model' (ARM) is working in London, but may face problems that threaten its future viability according to research by Future of London. Concerns include pressure on the delivery of larger homes and the introduction of caps on housing benefit. London boroughs are generally taking a pragmatic approach to ARM, but with differing policies which can add to provider risk. The full report can be seen on the London Forum's web site at <http://tinyurl.com/mngkkgf>

Million Homes: Million Lives

Natalie Elphicke, lawyer and housing finance expert has launched Million Homes Million Lives, to develop new sources of finance and get more homes built. Together with Calum Mercer, the former finance director of Circle Housing Group, she has established a "new type of housing association" which aims to find

new approaches to financing of social and affordable housing. She believes the housing sector is exaggerating the extent of housing need and challenges the view that we need 6m homes. Million Homes aims to develop a model of "progressive ownership" that will help renters to get a better deal and higher standards of service while they are renting. It intends to develop savings products which would allow residents to share in the increased value of their properties, increase their financial independence and have the ability to move into home ownership over time.

Affordable homes in Hammersmith

Hammersmith & Fulham, the third most expensive borough in the country in which to buy a home, has various schemes under way to provide more affordable housing. It is teaming up with developer Stanhope Plc to form a 15-year 50:50 joint venture, aiming to build more than 300 homes over the next five years, 40 per cent of which

will be affordable housing sold at a discounted market rate to help local people get onto the housing ladder. Existing local tenants on the council's Home Buy register will get first refusal on all of the discounted new homes. The council also has a new build programme converting underused bin stores, pramsheds and garages on council estate land into flats that are sold at a fraction of the market rate. On the Spring Vale Estate there are plans to construct ten state-of-the-art 'Rational Houses' with development partner City House Projects Ltd. There will be two one-bedroom flats, six two-bedroom flats and two three-bedroom houses on the estate. They are made of pre-made panels in a factory off-site, before being winched into position in a matter of days. This is the first time in the country that homes have been built in this manner in such a large quantity. ■

The Waterloo Community Development Group

A Public Meeting was held in October at the Waterloo Action Centre to consider three planning applications

Verina Glaessner reports

Three applications were considered: the 'major overhaul' and extension of the Old Vic, the redevelopment of a one storey hut on top of a Luftwaffe crater directly opposite the Old Vic as a seven storey residential building and, the most contentious, the application by Marks Barfield Architects of the London Eye, and Howard Dawber, Canary Wharf Group, for a temporary, easily dismantable, 4 storey, 200 square metre, glass and steel suite for marketing, aka 'education', in connection with the Shell Centre scheme. The latter building is to be erected on the Hungerford Car Park site, designated Metropolitan Open Land and in a conservation area. Landscaping would take place and the entire space would revert, it was stressed, to an open garden setting for the Shell redevelopment. The presentation by Julia Barfield for Marks Barfield, illustrated the application with ethereal computer images of the building's podium-style construction, a glass box perched on a smaller base, shots of the 'tree top walk' at Kew, and images of some choice shade-loving plants for possible planting

on the site. The aim was to minimize the footprint and maximize the views. Much play, visual and verbal, was made of the reflective and transparent quality of glass and the box within a box concept.

Questions from the floor indicated concern about the building's height: it would be one story higher than existing buildings in the immediate vicinity and higher than the Festival Hall. Its temporary nature was questioned, and the possibilities it might open up for advertising use and the precedent it might set for a permanent building were raised. There was extreme scepticism, passionately voiced, about the choice of location. Why was much-valued open space to be used rather than the part of the very extensive development site (the Shell Centre) itself? Additionally, a number of uncertainties existed regarding the purchase of the land, the fate of the BFI, whether it would be housed under the 'gardens', and the nature of specific Section 106 procedures. The WCDG supported the Old Vic application (it involves, mercifully, only minor changes to the auditorium) and gave thumbs down to both the block of flats and the Hungerford Car Park proposals. ■

Planning-tax waivers

There is growing concern at the use of "confidential viability assessments" being used to determine if the developer is able to pay the full cost of providing 30% affordable housing. Opposition members on Westminster Council have demanded disclosure of the full amount lost last year by the granting of planning-tax waivers to developers who complained they could not afford to make full payment. They have referred the matter to the district auditor detailing £31 million of reductions granted on eight sites since May including £2 million on 31 flats in Chapter Street being developed by Christian Candy.

Westminster is one of the few councils that commission their own independent viability reports. These confidential reports contain detailed financial information on land prices, building costs and the likely end value of the development. It is difficult for any viability study to prove that a developer has paid too much for a site. They are not normally seen by planning committee members deciding the merits of a scheme. Nor will they be made public. ■

New area plans

Euston area plan

A new plan, called the Euston Area Plan, is being prepared for the area around Euston Station to help shape change in the area up to 2031. It is being jointly prepared by Camden Council, the Greater London Authority and Transport for London and seeks to ensure that, whether or not the new High Speed rail link (HS2) goes ahead, to ensure the best possible future for the residents, businesses and visitors to Euston. Public Consultation ended on 7th October

www.eustonareaplan.info/

The Whitechapel Masterplan

The London Borough of Tower Hamlets has just completed its six week statutory consultation on a draft Whitechapel Vision Masterplan which was spurred on by the arrival of Crossrail in 2018. It will be a Supplementary Planning Document

(SPD) to guide new development within the Whitechapel area over the next 15 years and will be a material consideration in the determination of planning applications. However, a public meeting was called on 27 November at Bishopsgate Institute by local residents, "for all who care about the East End's character and built environment and are concerned about how development is taking place". The Council has said the plan will provide greater certainty for developers, Registered Providers, our local community and other key stakeholders. But the meeting organisers expressed their concern about disappearing buildings, the dismantling of local areas, and the coming walls of towers at Bishopsgate, Shoreditch and Whitechapel. ■

New GLA Committee

A new Regeneration Committee set up in June will monitor and review the Mayor's regeneration schemes as well as examine wider regenerative matters of importance to Londoners.

The project officer is Ross Jardine, Scrutiny & Investigations.

www.london.gov.uk/assembly ■

Small Business Ambassador

Mary Macleod MP for Chiswick, Brentford and Isleworth, has been named as London's Small Business Ambassador by the Prime Minister

As part of the Government's on-going efforts to support small businesses, twelve Small Business Ambassadors have been appointed nationwide and will help promote and represent small businesses across the country and to government. Small businesses – those which employ up to 50 employees – contribute half of the jobs and half of the private sector turnover in the economy. ■

Round the Societies

A round-up of news from our member societies.

By **Diane Burridge**

Successful membership Drives

The Richmond Society recently met a long-term goal of having over 1,000 members, making it one of the largest membership organisations in the borough. As the Chairman, Professor Ian Bruce CBE, wrote in the September newsletter, 'Part of the growth is due to the broadening of our offerings. We are keeping all our existing activities but we have added others, such as more family events.....attractive to younger members with children. But above all, people are ready to join simply out of solidarity – to support us in our work of protecting and enhancing what Richmond has to offer'.

Sydenham Society has been running a publicity stall at the new SEE3 monthly market near Sydenham Station Approach (in Venner Square); in three months 60 people have been added to the membership list which has helped boost income. This has resulted in the Newsletter now being produced in full colour, and the sydsoc e-newsletter being revamped.

Accolade and Grant for Blackheath

The **Blackheath Society** carried out an on-line survey of its members earlier this year. At the AGM the results of this were discussed, with the main concern being was that most members are middle-aged. Younger residents need to be encouraged in some way to be members. In all, 211 members responded, 34% of the 620 members receiving information by email. Of this sample, 63% were over 60 years of age, and encouragingly 73% felt that the Society was effective in communicating with members.

Grant for unique Blackheath image archive

The **Blackheath Society** received a grant of £7,900 from the Heritage Lottery Fund in 2012 to promote their unique archive of over 15,000 images of Blackheath. This work is progressing as planned and in September an exhibition was held of over 100 images. As well, a new archive website at www.blackheatharchive.org is exhibiting 1,500 images of the Heath.

Opposing Arsenal

The **Highbury Community Association** recently attended the High Court to hear the Judicial Review, requested by Islington Council, into a decision by the Planning Inspectorate to overturn the Council's refusal for Arsenal Football Club (AFC) to build a 25 storey student block. (The Association represented the local community when this application was refused.) At the High Court, the judge quashed the approval by the Planning Inspectorate and re-instated the Council's refusal. The Club has appealed again, and Highbury Community Association will continue to make representations here.

The Association has also submitted detailed documentation against the Club's application to increase the number of music concerts held each year. This application was recently refused permission by Islington Council, and the Club is appealing. As highlighted by the Association, the number of residents affected by the noise and disturbance of concerts has increased markedly, largely due to AFC's own building programme.

Burying the Hammersmith flyover

The **Hammersmith Society** was mentioned in an Evening Standard article, 11 October, 2013, regarding plans to replace the Hammersmith flyover with an underground tunnel to help reconnect the town centre with the river and to regenerate the area. The Chairwoman of the Society, Rosemary Pettit, was quoted as saying: 'It needs to be clear this is not a golden opportunity for developers to make hay at the expense of Hammersmith'.

Streatham's Common, Green and Library

The **Streatham Society** has been actively represented in consultations with Lambeth Council, regarding the future development of Streatham's Common, Green and Library. The library consultation had a successful conclusion with the promise of a modernised service and additional community facilities. Other positive news includes: The Friends of Streatham Common being successful in a recent grant application to improve the Common; the launch of a new theatre group; and a weekly street market now established near the Green.

Pavement widening in Bayswater

SEBRA (Bayswater) now has responsibility for producing a regular update, in their comprehensive magazine, on highway and associated transport matters in W2, information which used to be provided by the Council. This helps the Society in making regular contact with the Highways Department and in getting things done. One of SEBRA's major achievements has been to help push through pavement widening, and other improvements, in London Road. As well, a street lighting improvement programme in the W2 area has been agreed - with most of SEBRA's suggestions adopted.

Rebalancing the Licensing Act in Brixton

Brixton Society has been negotiating with the Borough of Lambeth on the Borough's revision of licensing policies. They have welcomed the Borough's new policy statement and its intention to bring greater transparency to the licensing regime.

"Rebalancing the Licensing Act" aims to provide a regulatory structure that will radically reduce the effects of alcohol misuse, avoiding problems of anti-social behaviour, noise, crime and disorder which later hours licences and the increasing number of licences can bring, whilst providing safe environments in which alcohol may be purchased and enjoyed without detriment to others. The Brixton Society notes with approval that the Policy is aligned for the most part with the Home Office's current Guidance issued in June 2013 although this is nowhere acknowledged in the Policy statement as it should be.

The Society is also surprised and seriously concerned that the Policy has no reference to seeking the involvement of the local Community Safety Partnership, nor in looking to the Police as the main source of advice on crime and disorder, as specifically required by the Guidance.

continued on next page

Round the Societies

(continued)

Soho Society celebrate 40 years

Actually founded in November 1972, the **Soho Society** recently celebrated their 40 years of vigorous activity with a Reception in the elegant surroundings of the House of St Barnabas, Greek St. The Reception included a display of the wide range of work by the Society since 1972 in preserving the character of Soho and protecting the interests of residents, workers and visitors. Derek Chandler was made very welcome as the representative of London Forum.

Village Green for Isleworth

The **Isleworth Society** has succeeded in its request to gain Town or Village Green registration status under the Commons Act 2006 for the Green in North Street. This is the first such designation in the Borough, providing greater long term protection against any development of the site.

Protection for pub and theatre in Bedford Park

The **Bedford Park Society** has succeeded in its application to Hounslow Council to list its local pub, the Tabard, in Bath Road, Chiswick, as an Asset of Community Value under the 2011 Localism Act. This means that should any owners wish to sell the Tabard pub and theatre or change its use, they must first give local community groups the opportunity to purchase the premises. It also gives added protection to the building, which is already listed Grade II*.

The Tabard was built in 1880 as part of the original Bedford Park estate and designed by famous Victorian architect Richard Norman Shaw. The pub, and the theatre - constructed from a former meeting room inside the pub - remain at the heart of the world's first garden suburb.

Dam Nonsense

Campaign to save Hampstead Heath pond landscape.

The **Heath & Hampstead Society** has launched a campaign to try to persuade the City of London Corporation not to proceed with massive building works to the dams on the Hampstead Heath Ponds, claimed to be in the interests of safety. There has been no breach of any of the dams, no uncontrolled escape of water and no deaths in the 300 year history of the ponds, not even in the torrential storms of 1975.

Yet Government Dam Engineering Inspectors are telling the City that unless huge dams are constructed – some up to 8 foot high, 1,400 people could be drowned. This prediction is based not on facts but on an abstract computer modelled scenario of an extreme worst-case 1:400,000 years' storm (that is not a typing error) that would cause every dam in every pond to breach instantaneously and simultaneously. While the City has a duty to ensure the ponds are maintained in a safe condition, the Society challenges the over-engineered scale of the proposed works which will destroy this historic and much loved landscape. The Society has sought advice from a leading QC in the field of reservoir safety, and from experts in risk management and dam engineering. They may consider mounting a formal challenge. ■

newsbriefs

Key issues of interest and concern to note.

Skyscrapers changing the face of London

Henderson Global Investors plans a new development at **40 Leadenhall Street**. Designed by Ken Shuttleworth's Make practice, it would form part of the Square Mile's "cascading cluster" of skyscrapers alongside the Cheesegrater, the Gherkin, the Heron Tower, the Scalpel and the Pinnacle. The 37-storey tower will cost £391 million to develop, with basic construction costs of about £260 a sq ft. Henderson said that, depending on getting planning permission and a pre-let of at least 30 per cent of the 910,000 sq ft tower, it could be ready by 2019.

Neighbour for the Monument

The City of London Corporation has approved the redevelopment of a site near The Monument in London's Square Mile to create a nine-storey office building. The scheme will see the existing buildings at 11-15 Monument Street, 46 Fish Street Hill and 1-2 Pudding Hill replaced with 12,427 sq m of office space as well as 642 sq m of retail space on the ground floor. Planning officials said the proposals offer a contemporary building that would provide a "dramatic and appropriate" setting for The Monument and would safeguard the settings of the Grade I listed landmark, St Magnus the Martyr Church and the Grade II listed No. 2 Eastcheap.

City Hall to change hands?

In late October there were reports that St Martins, the property division of the Kuwaiti Government, was in discussions to buy the 13-acre site, More London complex next to Tower Bridge, which includes the City Hall. A bid of £1.5 billion was mentioned. More London is currently owned by London Bridge Holdings — a company registered in the Bahamas and controlled by a group of investors led by the principal shareholder Dikran Izmirlan, an Armenian businessman. The Kuwaiti property group already owns the Hays Galleria and Cottons Centre, next to More London, and originally owned the land on which the More London complex sits. £1bn flats and shops project for Lots Road power station

Problems with reporting crime

This problem has been reluctantly aired in the media recently, rather confirming what many suspected from personal experience. When a Metropolitan Police officer retired earlier this year after 47-year career, 18 of them at the Palace of Westminster, he voiced a concern that one of the reasons crime figures appear to be falling is because it has become so difficult to report crime that people won't report it. There is too much bureaucracy and officers are doing "more or less twice the work" they used to.

Since then there have been more reports. Serving and retired officers told a Public Administration Committee inquiry into crime statistics that police crime figures were regularly skewed, with serious offences downgraded, and victims' reports about offending not recorded. Written evidence from the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners said that there was still a feeling that general pressure to show reduced rates of crime might be leading to some downgrading of incidents, such as antisocial behaviour.

newsbriefs

Key issues of interest and concern to note

More trouble at Lords

The former chairman of Rolls-Royce waded into the ongoing bitter row over the development of Lord's. Sir Simon Robertson wrote to Oliver Stocken, the chairman of the Marylebone Cricket Club, warning him of a "serious breakdown of trust between a significant section of the members and the leadership at the MCC." He asked Mr Stocken to set up independent committees to review the development choices for Lords "so the members can make a balanced and informed judgment", and to review MCC's governance.

The dispute relates to redevelopment plans for large parts of the home of cricket. MCC owns most of Lord's freehold and has a partial interest in land — considered suitable for luxury housing — at the Nursery End of the ground. A previous £400 million development proposal was scrapped by MCC in 2011 in a move that prompted Sir John Major to resign from its main committee. It also resulted in a legal dispute with Almacantar, the preferred developer, over £400,000 of fees. MCC has since proposed an alternative, smaller plan that involves remodelling Lord's on a stand-by-stand basis rather than a comprehensive scheme.

Decorating London

How many Londoners ever give a thought to who provides the Christmas lights or the flag decorations for events such as the Diamond Jubilee celebrations and the Royal Wedding? Piggotts, part of the Crown Group, was established over 220 years ago, and has a long history of supplying festive lighting and street decorations at many West End locations, including Regent Street, Bond Street and Marylebone High Street. It has been bringing Christmas lights to London's West End since 1948.

Regeneration of the Lots Road

A regeneration of the Lots Road power station area on the north bank of the Thames was launched in September by Mayor Boris Johnson at an official ground-breaking ceremony. A £1 billion masterplan has been prepared by architect Sir Terry Farrell for the Hong Kong developers Hutchison Whampoa. It will be the last of the three great power stations along the Thames - the other two are Bankside and Battersea - to be returned to use. The eight acres of derelict land, including a previously inaccessible Thames towpath, will be turned into 706 homes — of which 275 are classified as "affordable" — shops, restaurants, a health club, two public squares and three new bridges across Chelsea Creek. It will include two glass towers of 37 and 25 storeys filled with apartments. The power station itself will become 260 apartments.

The Lots Road station was built in 1904 to help power London's Underground and provided power to most of the network until 1990. Two of its original four chimneys have survived, and at 275 ft were the tallest in Europe when built. It was the longest-serving power station in the world when finally decommissioned in 2002.

Crown Estates developments

At a recent NLA briefing attended by Peter Eversden, on developments in London, a representative of the Crown Estates gave presentation of their plans for the Regent Street and St James's areas. They have decided that Crossrail will bring so many extra

people to their estate areas that they are going to widen pavements and reduce traffic lanes in roads. That could make it quite dangerous for cyclists in Regent Street and Haymarket. It could lengthen bus journeys where bus lanes are removed. The Crown Estates is looking at where 'back street' cycle routes could be indicated but it is known that cyclists do not like diverting off a desired route.

The basement saga

Just when Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea thought it had found a way to discourage basements by applying the rules on community infrastructure levy (CIL) and Section 106 agreements to secure income from wealthy owners wanting to extend their basements, the Government decided to change the rules. It has removed the CIL on self-build properties, including all extensions, family annexes and home improvements and also intends to seek to remove housing levies on such annexes and extensions. Ministers called it a 'stealth tax' slowly being introduced by town halls.

However the UK housing industry itself is beginning to realise that basements are a problem. The National House-Building Council (NHBC) insurance provider for new-build houses, is facing soaring claims from homeowners with botched excavations. In two recent surveys of around 1700 sites, they highlighted key problems surrounding the construction of basements; they present an ongoing risk which needs to be effectively managed. NHBC figures reveal that claims on basements built since 2005 have cost the industry a total of nearly £21 million - affecting nearly 890 homes.

The vast majority of new basements (72 per cent) are registered in London. 28 per cent of sites surveyed reported high or unknown water tables, but still used methods and materials which may not be suitable for the site. The majority of the large claims from 2012 were as a result of water ingress and incorrect installation of the damp proof membrane. NHBC is now looking to revise its standards and guidance to help improve basement design and construction. Its advice includes carrying out ground investigation reports before construction.

Southwark Low Carbon Heat Network

Southwark Council and Veolia have announced plans to supply heating and hot water to some 2,500 homes on housing estates in the borough generated through the South East London Combined Heat and Power energy recovery facility (SELCHP) in Lewisham, which processes around 430,000 tonnes of waste each year. The heating network will be the first of its kind in London and will mark the first time that the heating potential of the SELCHP facility has been fully realised since it was built in 1990s by CNIM SA.

To date it has been used only to generate electric power, with no project to make use of the heat that is generated. The scheme, which will run for 20 years fulfils the full potential of the plant by extracting heat which will provide heating and hot water, replacing gas which is currently burned in the boilers resulting in a reduction of around 8,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions per annum.

It is hoped that the scheme will branch out to business customers as soon as possible. According to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), the amount of waste going to landfill has almost halved over the past five years; the amount being put into incineration has risen 60%.

newsbriefs

Key issues of interest and concern to note

Biodiversity Survey in London - GLA survey

London is one of the largest urban areas in Europe, and almost two thirds is made up of green space and wetlands. The London Assembly's Environment Committee ran a survey over the summer on what Londoners value about their urban green spaces asking for people's views and how they think the Mayor and local authorities could better protect them.

Of 841 responses received from nature conservation and community groups, plus individuals, 56 % thought that more could be done to protect London's biodiversity, and over 60 % felt local boroughs were not doing enough. Almost four in 10 respondents were particularly concerned about pressure from developments, and the fashion for decking and paving in gardens - which make up a third of London's green spaces. In the three years up to 2012, some 215 hectares of "open space land" has been lost.

The Committee set out a number of actions it wants the Mayor to consider, urging him to take a lead on issues relating to biodiversity conservation in London, and to update the Mayoral Biodiversity Strategy which has not been updated for more than a decade.

For more information see

www.london.gov.uk/media/assembly-press-releases/2013/11/mayor-urged-to-act-to-protect-london-s-biodiversity ■

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If you do not keep your hard copy and feel you could do without it, relying on the PDF, please let us know via one of the email addresses below, giving your Society name as well as email address, so that we could reduce our postal mailing list and save printing and postage costs. ■

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Dates for your diary

London Forum events

London Forum Open Meetings 2014

Dates for your diary:

Thursday 30 January

Climate Change and Energy efficiency

Tuesday 4th March

subject to be announced

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 ■

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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