

newsforum



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

The London Forum of Amenity and Civic Societies
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The new Housing and Planning Bill

The new Housing and Planning Bill will not help the crisis in affordable housing

The Government switches its financial support to home ownership
Peter Eversden and **Helen Marcus** report

The Government has declared that the the new Housing and Planning Bill currently going through Parliament, will "kick-start" a "national crusade to get one million homes built by 2020", and put the focus on home ownership. But their intervention in the planning process may have an adverse impact on London's communities.

The following measures of the Bill create a huge switch of subsidy from rental homes for people on low wages to homes to own by those on higher salaries. That needs to be considered from a social equity viewpoint.

Starter Homes

The Bill introduces a general duty on all planning authorities to promote the supply of "Starter Homes" for first-time buyers under the age of 40. These will be sold at a discount of at least 20% of the market value with an initial price cap in Greater London of £450,000. On certain residential developments planning authorities may only grant planning permission if the starter homes requirement is met.

The Secretary of State will have power to issue a "compliance direction" ordering a council to pay "no regard" to its local development plan policies if they are incompatible with the starter homes policy.

How will the new "compliance direction", a centrally defined target, fit with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

"This is a massive switch of subsidy from providing rental homes for people on low wages to providing homes to own by those on higher salaries"

Michael Bach

which has given power to authorities to decide how their local plan meets the full, objectively assessed needs for market and affordable housing?

A written ministerial statement in March on brownfield sites said starter homes could be sold at full market rates after five years; this is not mentioned in the Bill. If it is still to be the case, the new owners would be able to sell the properties at full market value, giving a windfall comprising the capital gain and the 20% subsidy to the lucky recipients, but removing forever their benefit to first-time buyers of the future. Housebuilders will then be trying to sell identical products at dramatically different prices.

Extension of Right to Buy

The Bill introduces the Right to Buy at discounted rates, of Housing Associations' homes. This follows a voluntary agreement

reached between the Government and the National Housing Federation, rather than, as originally expected, making it statutory. Grants will be paid from the Greater London Authority and central Government to associations to compensate them for selling homes at a discount.

Pay to stay - higher rents for high income social tenants

'High income' social tenants (expected to be set at £40,000 in London and £30,000 elsewhere) will be expected to pay a market rent as opposed to a social rent – a policy referred to as 'pay to stay.' This measure has been the subject of a consultation which closed on 20 November 2015.

High value local authority housing sell off

To help to fund more discounted homes to buy, local authorities will be forced to sell off high value housing stock that has become vacant, or be required pay a monetary contribution to the Secretary of State, calculated by reference to the market value of such housing. This is intended to provide funding for local authorities to increase their housing supply.

Implications for housing in London

Starter Homes are the new focus of the Government's housing policies. However concerns have been raised that receipts from these sales will not generate sufficient

The new Housing and Planning Bill

(continued)

funding to pay off the debt associated with these properties; provide for replacement of the sold stock; cover the cost of discounts for housing association tenants; or finance a Brownfield Regeneration Fund. It would decrease the stock of affordable housing for rent, and in Inner London, would exacerbate the pressures that are already displacing key workers.

Critics fear that together with the drive to convert offices to dwellings it will have a damaging effect on London's economic and civic life by leaving the capital with no affordable places to live or work. It could reduce the numbers of homes that key workers and others on low incomes could afford to rent. Driven to the outskirts of London or beyond, they would face increased transport charges to work and may be forced also into the higher cost private rented sector. Employers are beginning to understand this - see the report about Savills' findings on page 3.

The Government is also introducing a reduction of 1% annually in rents of social homes. That seems small but it would reduce considerably the income of some boroughs over several years. It also reduces their ability to replace rental homes lost by the Right to Buy and by the enforced sale of existing homes.

Other measures in the Bill include:

Self-build and Custom Housebuilding

The Self-build and Custom Housebuilding Act 2015, is amended to require local authorities to keep a register of people seeking to acquire land to build or commission their own home. It imposes a duty on local authorities to grant "sufficient suitable development permission" of land to meet the demand based on this register. The government's target is that 20,000 of these homes should be built per year by 2020. The problem is that boroughs may not be able to influence what the land is used for.

Tackling 'rogue' landlords

Local authorities will have additional powers to tackle rogue landlords in the private rented sector. They will be able to set up a database of such landlords and apply for banning orders against them.

It will also provide landlords with a clear process to secure repossession of properties abandoned by tenants.

There are big implications for housing need assessment in London. How will all this interact with other planning policies?

"Streamlining" the planning system

The main planning changes are in part 6 of the Bill, "Planning in England", and introduce greater powers for government intervention in the planning process

Permission in principle

A key element of the Bill is the creation of a new "permission in principle" enabling planning permission in principle to be granted for development of land in England, in addition to land already allocated in the Brownfield register, development plan documents and neighbourhood plans. The local planning authority will be obliged to maintain a register of all 'permissions in principle' in their area.

Underperforming Councils

There will be more power for the Secretary of State to "designate" local authorities who are deemed to be underperforming, and to intervene in the local planning process where that is deemed to be the case. If local plans are not being delivered effectively the Communities Secretary will be able to direct that a development plan document be submitted to him for approval, to prepare or revise the document, direct the council how to proceed or to suspend a formal plan examination process.

Developers will be able to make an application for permission directly to the Secretary of State. This will not just apply to major development, but could also include smaller minor developments.

Permitted development rights

Certain permitted development rights can be delegated to the local planning authority so that local conditions can be taken into account in line with localism.

There will be a new obligation on local planning authorities to list the financial

benefits likely to be obtained by the authority as a result of a proposed development whether it is material to the authority's decision to grant planning permission or not. The list must be included in the officer's report to committee or to the authority itself and the financial benefit must be recorded.

Neighbourhood planning

The Bill introduces measures to speed up the neighbourhood planning process by setting time limits on designating a neighbourhood planning area; on holding a referendum on a neighbourhood plan; and on approval of a plan or neighbourhood development order.

There is also a new provision requiring a local planning authority to notify a neighbourhood forum of planning applications in their designated area, if specifically requested to do so.

National infrastructure projects

There will be a new power to grant development consent for housing which is linked to an application for a nationally significant infrastructure project. Major infrastructure projects with an element of housing will be able to apply for development consent through the 2008 Planning Act regime, instead of seeking planning permission.

Changes to the compulsory purchase regime are aimed at making compulsory purchase "clearer, fairer and faster".

Brownfield register

There will be a new duty on local authorities to keep a register of brownfield land suitable for housing development in their area. The Secretary of State can prescribe the description of land and any criteria which the land must meet for entry on the register. As we reported in the last Newsforum, in London a new London Land Commission was announced in February to manage the register for the capital.

Unanswered questions

There are big implications for housing need assessment in London. How will all this interact with other planning policies on housing provision or impact on the number of affordable rented homes developed? Will these homes be genuinely affordable?

It is not clear how the Secretary of State's "interference" in local authority planning will

Savills and Centre for London findings

Even if building targets are met house prices will keep rising; proposed solutions will still be unaffordable to households on the lowest incomes.

be resourced. Will the 20% discount be deliverable? Where will the money to compensate developers come from? Might it be from removing other section 106 obligations? There is major concern about Government intervention taking away local say in local developments. Whitehall will be able to bypass councils to identify land for new building and force housing schemes through the planning system.

Developers providing starter homes will not have to pay CIL, so the provision of local infrastructure to support new residents will be at risk. In some parts of London, the discount on starter homes would be greater than the CIL payment that would not have to be paid and that would discourage developers.

More Powers for the Mayor:

The Bill provides greater powers to the Mayor of London to call in planning applications for his determination, or which he can direct a local authority to refuse. This is also intended to boost housing supply in the Capital, particularly in areas where it is needed most.

The Mayor provided a briefing for the Bill's second reading in which he wrote of the "severe shortage of homes in the capital" arising from "a thirty-year backlog of undersupply". He pointed out the need for "affordable homes aimed at helping vulnerable households".

The Mayor has suggested that with the right support, London could exceed the Governments target of one new affordable home for each one sold. London Forum believes that is essential.

It is perhaps of no small significance that, according to the FinancialTimes, there were endorsements for these measures from the Home Builders Federation, British Property Federation, Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors (RICS), Persimmon Homes and British Land. Are these interests being allowed to distort the process?

Details and links about the Bill as it proceeds are being provided to London Forum's members by email. ■

Stop Press: Autumn Statement Stamp duty is to be increased 3% for buy-to-let and second home buyers; there is to be a new Help to Buy scheme just for London. See more page 19 ■

Research from Savills, the estate agent suggests that even if housebuilding targets are met house prices will keep rising and "remain high relative to incomes". They say that the government's focus on boosting home ownership is set to exclude 70,000 more households each year from either buying or renting at a cost they can afford.

An extra 350,000 English households will be unable to access either subsidised or market-rate housing in the next five years — including London families with annual incomes of up to £60,000.

They also believe that the number of people who will be excluded from the housing market could be even larger, due to the new policies because they will reduce the supply of social housing,

They estimate that in London 26,000 additional households a year will need housing that costs less than the market rate. "Many of the currently proposed solutions (e.g. Right to Buy and Starter Homes) will still be unaffordable to households on the lowest incomes." More than 5,000 of these will be on incomes of £35,000 a year or more.

"The housing market crisis is closely interlinked with our low inflation, high debt economy.some policies will inevitably help more buyers into the market but

owner-occupation will primarily remain accessible to only the richest in terms of both income and wealth."

Centre for London think-tank concurs

Separate research by the Centre for London think-tank has found that, within two years, people with occupations such as senior nursing and teaching will be unable to find housing that they can afford in the Greater London area.

"A lot of national policies are not addressing London problems," said Kat Hanna, research manager at the Centre for London, adding that those unable to afford housing also included "doctors, solicitors and journalists".

Families in this predicament tend to live in shared and often overcrowded accommodation, or become "concealed" households, such as adults living with their parents, Savills' researchers said. They defined "affordable" housing costs as 30 per cent or less of household income.

They considered that the shortage of social housing is likely to become more acute because of policies such as the extension of the Right to Buy scheme to housing association tenants.

<http://www.savills.co.uk/research/uk.aspx> ■

'There is no housing crisis' - a contrarian view

"There is no UK 'housing crisis' and there never was one". With this startling headline Dr Andrew Lilico, member of The Institute of Economic Affairs and Executive Director of think tank Europe Economics adds a dissenting voice to the received wisdom on the UK "housing shortage". He asks "what does 'housing crisis' mean and why is it believed there is a "housing crisis". Is it that there aren't as many houses as there are households? Or is it that it is so expensive to buy a house that many people can't afford to do so?

He examines crucial census and other data, on household and dwelling numbers, to show that there are actually slightly more houses than households overall, although this varies in different parts of the country. The 2001 Census shows that although the surplus had shrunk to 0.2% it was still a surplus.

He emphasizes that much of the argument for the need to build more houses comes from the House Builders Federation, in particular a report "Building a crisis", of June 2002, which argued for a large expansion in housing supply. But that report shows only that growth in housing demand outstripped the number of new houses built during the 1980s; not that there was a shortage of houses overall.

He also questions whether the huge rise in house prices is really due to a shortage, citing the 33 per cent drop in real terms of prices between July 2007 and October 2012 due to poor economic conditions and limited mortgage availability.

<http://www.capx.co/there-is-no-ukhousing-crisis-and-there-never-was-one/> ■

Offices to housing to become permanent

In a press release on 13 October the Government announced that the “3-year experiment” of enabling offices to change to housing without the need for planning consent will become “permanent” at the end of May 2016. Housing and Planning Minister Brandon Lewis claimed that thousands of new homes will be provided, and make the best use of existing buildings “including some that are underused and neglected”.

But far from rehabilitating “underused and neglected” buildings, established businesses are being evicted – there are greater profits to be made from housing. The original “deal” included not only exemptions for the Central Activities Zone and a few other areas, but also promised a review of the impact after it had been operating for three years. This has not happened.

The new proposal does allow all those exempted in 2013, until May 2019 to set in place Article 4 directions to remove the permitted development rights on change of offices to housing. Some London boroughs who were not previously exempted already have Article 4 directions, but these have been heavily constrained by the Secretary of State. Any future Article 4 directions will still be subject to the possibility of intervention by the Secretary of State.

New permitted development rights will now also enable the change of use of light industrial buildings and launderettes to new homes but will be subject to prior approval by the local planning authority.

The conversions have been particularly concentrated in London, and illustrate the crudity of top-down intervention by the Government. It puts London boroughs in the position of having to justify why their offices should not become housing, whilst also having to demonstrate that they have made sufficient provision in their local plans to meet the “objectively-assessed need” for future office space.

In addition to promoting the conversion of offices the Government is also proposing to encourage their demolition and for new housing to be built without any requirement for affordable housing.

Statutory Instrument to bypass consultation

Both these issues will be part of a forthcoming Statutory Instrument which is a means of bypassing due consultation and discussion by Parliament. London Forum is urging MPs to ‘pray against’ the SI

Moreover Government policies on the issue are confused: changes to the planning rules have encouraged the conversion of commercial space to housing. But recent moves to grant councils more power over business rates would incentivise local authorities to retain commercial space.

Widespread concerns ignored

Strong concerns have been expressed about the scale of losses of offices outside the exempted areas. Despite widespread protest the Government has persisted in pressing ahead with this unwanted and ill-

thought out change which has come under fire from industry - ranging from the Federation of Small Businesses to FTSE 100 companies - from councils and from civic groups, but all have been ignored.

In November the Financial Times reported that City and Westminster Property associations representing eight FTSE 100 companies have now also attacked this Government policy and called on candidates in next year’s mayoral election to reverse the trend which is already having an adverse impact on the availability of appropriate commercial space for small businesses. It is “decimating” the central London supply of office space and will damage economic growth.

Action by Westminster Council

Westminster City Council has taken action. At the end of October it launched a consultation on the introduction of a New Article 4 Direction for changes of use from A1 use of a shop to a financial or professional service such as a bank or estate agent (use class A2).

The Article 4 Direction is designed to ensure that planning permission must be required to permit such changes of use.

It will cover the Core Central Activities Zone and designated shopping centres. However it will not come into effect for another year.

Information about the Plan can be viewed on the Council's website at

www.westminster.gov.uk/consultations

More threats to housebuilding targets from the EU and the Office for National Statistics

Housing associations reclassified

In a surprising announcement in October by the Office for National Statistics, (ONS) Britain’s housing associations are to be reclassified as part of the public sector. This will add £60 billion to the national debt, put pressure on the Chancellor’s deficit reduction plans and result in fewer homes being built.

The government said that the change would have “no material” effect on housing providers or tenants and pledged to do everything possible to overturn the decision by the ONS. The ONS apparently made the decision after a review of the 2008 Housing and Regeneration Act.

Housing associations fear they may be unable to raise more debt for new construction in much the same way as local authorities face restrictions. The sector builds about 40,000 properties a year, nearly a third of the total expected this year. Several organisations have warned that the move may worsen the chronic housing shortage.

EU loans rule threat to small builders

A change to EU loans rules could make it too expensive to lend cash to small housebuilders by putting building industry debts in the same high-risk category as the non-performing loans of borrowers who

have defaulted. That would require them to set aside much more capital to meet a 50 per cent increase in capital charges against loans to house builders, and might make lending uneconomic.

The Bank of England has taken the unusual step of writing to the European Banking Authority demanding clarification about whether loans to house builders should really be considered “high risk”.

Larger lenders are unaffected by the guidelines as they are able to use their own internal financial models to calculate their capital requirements.

News on affordable housing initiatives in London

The Mount Pleasant Forum to oppose luxury flats

Residents living near the Royal Mail's Mount Pleasant sorting office have set up The Mount Pleasant Forum to oppose luxury flats scheduled for the site. They have secured the backing of one of Britain's biggest investors, Legal and General, and a major housing association to launch a joint bid for the land, thought to be the first of its kind. It aims to see local residents taking part control over the direction of the scheme and possibly an equity share.

The move follows widespread public concern at the impact of foreign investors buying and building apartment complexes in London mainly as investment safe havens, driving up prices and leaving properties empty despite the housing shortage.

Create Streets, a social enterprise research institute, spun off from the Policy Exchange in 2013, has helped broker the bid. The residents have drawn up their own scheme with 10% more affordable housing and a design based around a traditional circus of seven-storey mansion blocks rather than 15-storey towers. They have worked with Francis Terry, (Quinlan Terry's son). The plan opens up pedestrian routes across the site, which are lacking in the Royal Mail scheme.

The community bid also has the backing of mayor of London contenders Zac Goldsmith and Sadiq Khan.

Dolphin Living new rent structure

Following a campaign by residents the New Era estate in Hoxton was taken over by Dolphin Living, a subsidiary of the Dolphin Square Charitable Foundation. (see Newsforum 69 spring 2015).

This Foundation was set up by Westminster Council using the proceeds of the sale of the famous Dolphin Square mansion blocks as seed funding. It has devised a new rent structure that will see tenants paying different amounts for similar properties, because it will take into account circumstances such as the number of children in a household. They can choose to be means tested and will be asked to prove the income and personal circumstances of everyone living in the property once every three years.

The move will be watched by social landlords who must shortly begin to

The residents own scheme has 10% more affordable housing and a design based around a traditional circus of seven-storey mansion blocks rather than 15-storey towers.

implement the Government's "pay-to-stay" policy, announced by chancellor George Osborne in July. (see page 2). The Dolphin Foundation wished to ensure that nobody had to leave the estate because they could not afford to pay the rent.

Affordable housing in Barking and Dagenham

An innovative asset-based finance model has transformed a housing estate without grant funding or cross-subsidy.

The London Borough of Barking and Dagenham wanted to redevelop the eastern section of the Thames View Estate in Barking comprising four nine-storey tower blocks alongside some poor-quality low-rise stock. The aim was to transform the appearance and deliver high-quality energy efficient affordable homes, including a significant number of family townhouses with private gardens.

To deliver the scheme, the council used an innovative asset-based finance model working with regeneration fund Long Harbour, the first time this model had been used in the country. It meant that the council didn't have to fund any construction costs and therefore required no grant funding or any cross-subsidy. For the investors, it offered the benefit of guaranteed returns, and a very low-risk partner.

It involved the council leasing the land to the private joint-venture funder, which covered the full £36 million construction costs. The funder then received the rental income from the homes until its build costs plus a "modest return" is repaid. Once this has been completed, the properties will return to the council at no additional cost.

The scheme has delivered 276 affordable homes, including 151 family houses, let at a range of 50, 65 and 80 per

cent of the local market rents, and includes good quality landscaping, door-step play areas for young children and an urban sports park for older children.

The council rents the units through a separate corporate entity called Barking and Dagenham Reside. Using a separate corporate entity also means that the Right to Buy legislation does not apply to the new units that have been delivered.

All the homes have now been successfully let, and there is a high level of resident satisfaction.

Top earners cash in on help to buy

Over 3,000 high earners - earning more than £100,000 - have benefited from the cheap mortgages on the Help to Buy scheme since its inception in 2013 according to official figures released in September.

About 113,000 have used the equity loan scheme under which the government lends homebuyers up to 20 per cent of the cost of their property. The scheme, announced in 2013, was supposed help those "who cannot begin to afford the kind of deposits being demanded today". ■

Problems in Europe

Problems for first time buyers spreading to Europe

According to an international survey of homes and mortgages published in September by the Dutch Bank ING, first-time buyers across Europe face worsening conditions as house price indicators report a steady rise in property prices across the continent, and the affordability gap widens.

Even in Germany, the country least concerned about problem faced by first-time buyers, 59 per cent said that it was getting harder to buy a house.

Concerns also extend beyond Europe, with nearly 90 per cent of Australians and nearly 75 per cent of Americans expressing concerns for the prospects of first-time buyers.

Data from Eurostat Statistical Data Warehouse shows that property prices rises in the UK are eight times the European average. ■

Planning4People

Town and Country Planning Association manifesto launch

By **Diane Burridge**

The UK seems to 'have given up on delivering better places'.... Britain invented town planning, yet there are 'now no national minimum space or accessibility standards for new homes, with room sizes the smallest in Europe.'

Planning has been 'systematically dismantled over the past five years', and relaxed permitted development is resulting in 'less thought given to basic needs' such as play areas and doctors' surgeries.

Such bold statements are found in the manifesto of Planning4People, recently agreed by a coalition of organisations and individuals led by the Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA), and supported by the Webb Memorial Trust. This coalition states that members share a 'common belief in the value of place-making to achieve a just and sustainable future. What is needed is a rebirth of creative social town planning with people at the heart of the process'. Launched in The Driver pub in King's Cross, on 21 October 2015, as part of an evening's entertainment, the manifesto asks Government to:

- Amend the 2004 Planning Act to insert a strong outcome-based duty on sustainable development with a specific requirement to reduce social inequality;
- Give councils back the powers over permitted development that they had recently lost;
- Ensure viability tests reflect the long-term costs or savings of actions to the public purse;
- Restore place-making standards for housing, with mandatory standards for accessibility and space.

At times, seeming like a tutorial on the history of key planning developments since the 1600s, the compere for the evening, Dr Hugh Ellis, Head of Policy for the TCPA, managed simultaneously to be humorous and angry.

Titled, Land of Promise, the evening's entertainment included poems, songs and film clips relating to: the Diggers (True Levellers) when they occupied common land in St George's Hill, Surrey in 1649; the impact of the Enclosure Acts from 1760 to 1820 with the loss of common land; the Chartist Movement from the 1830s to 1850s; the influence of the Arts and Crafts movement; and Edward Carpenter's commune

developments near Chesterfield in the 1890s.

Ebenazar Howard (the founder of the Garden City Movement in England) was praised for developing the land-value capture model, as outlined in his book, Three Magnets, and for setting up the TCPA. Lloyd George's work on developing minimum space standards in his Homes Fit for Heroes after the First World War received similar praise. But then, as noted angrily by Hugh, these standards were abolished in 1980.

Onto the 1930s, and Hugh Ellis eulogised Woody Guthrie's song: This Land was Made for You and Me, stating that this was the best song ever about land rights, and should be the lodestone for the TCPA.

But most praise came for the 1947 Planning Act which nationalised development rights and taxed increases in land values. Hugh described the Planning and Housing Bill (announced in October 2015 by the Housing and Planning Minister, Brandon Lewis; see front page) as consigning these requirements to history, and he demanded that Clauses 102 and 103 be taken out.

Given wonderful examples of pro-active planning around mainland Europe, Hugh Ellis queried: 'Why have we become so passive? Why is planning viewed as evil? Instead, we need to be clear about the consequences of an unregulated society, and that planning is not just about plans but about our lives. To quote Kate Henderson, Chief Executive of the TCPA, from their website:

'Land of Promise' is a celebration of our past utopian ideals which were artistic, collectivist, cooperative and occasionally eccentric, but most of all practical. The pioneers of planning built real places that immeasurably improved the lives of millions of ordinary people. This performance offers us the opportunity to explore the spirit of hope and vision that once transformed the nation and apply that drive to rebuild Britain.'

London Forum has signed up to support the Planning4People manifesto; other organisations include the Living Space Project, London Wildlife Trust, Local Government Information Unit, Living Streets, Planning Officers Society, Friends of the Earth, Webb Memorial Trust and CLES. For information: visit

www.tcpa.org.uk/pages/planning4people ■

New APPG for London

Michael Bach reports on progress

11 MPs attended the Inaugural meeting of the new All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on London, on 28 May 2015 and the group officers were elected.

It will be chaired by Steve Reed MP (Lab, Croydon North) formerly a councillor in Lambeth and by Bob Neil MP (Con, Bromley & Chislehurst) formerly an Under-Secretary for Planning and London Assembly Member. Catherine West, MP for Hornsey and Wood Green is Secretary.

The APPG will be serviced by London Councils. Current Membership is 42 MPs and 16 Peers.

The priorities the group will focus on should be:

- City devolution, including fiscal, skills, health, employment.
- Housing
- Public financing, in particular business rates review and the CSR
- Infrastructure, including transport and connectivity

On 8 July a Meeting was held on the subject of devolution with three speakers:

- Professor Tony Travers of LSE
- Mayor Jules Pipe, Chair of London Councils
- Sir Edward Lister, Mayor of London's Chief of Staff and Deputy Mayor for Planning and Policy

Professor Travers provided a paper for the meeting.

APPG for London Reference Group

A reference group has also been set up to bring together London-wide groups who have an interest in the work of the APPG to feed information and views in both directions. 16 Parliamentarians attended.

The organisations currently on the reference group are :

- London Communications Agency
- London First
- Centre for London
- London Chamber of Commerce
- City of London
- Colliers
- London Fire Brigade
- Port of Tilbury
- National Housing Federation

For more information :

<http://www.londoncouncils.gov.uk/all-party-parliamentary-group-appg-london> ■

Viability Open Meeting

24 October

Michael Bach (Chairman, LF Planning and Transport Committee) with guest speakers Sacha Winfield-Ferreira (BNP Paribas Viability and Affordable Housing Team) and John Wachter, S.106 and Development Viability Manager for LB Islington

Peter Pickering reports

Michael Bach opened the meeting by setting out the present context. Planning creates value; how can some be captured for the community? 'Viability' is a modern obsession that had but recently entered the planning vocabulary. Earlier attempts to get landowners to contribute to public infrastructure when planning permission for development was gained included a Development Land Tax and the Land Commission. Section 106 was used by local planning authorities to get contributions from developers for the provision of infrastructure and affordable housing. Following the introduction of the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) which restricted S106 contributions to site specific infrastructure, the 2008 recession made a lot of schemes unviable,

The Government then made provision for appeals, which allowed developers to renege on obligations they had freely undertaken. The future is that there will be much less Affordable Housing.

Sacha Winfield-Ferreira had worked for both developers and local authorities in negotiations on affordable housing. She emphasised that since there was no point or benefit in consenting to a development that could never be built, local planning authorities had to take into account viability. The market crash had brought this problem to the fore, but despite the market recovery it was still of concern.

The question was how to determine 'viability' and hence how much affordable housing a development could reasonably be required to support. Paragraphs 173 and 187 of the National Planning Policy Framework were crucial, and the supplementary 'National Planning Policy Guidance' was categorical that calculations of viability must be based on current costs and values, with no assumptions about future increases. The onus was on developers to demonstrate that a development would not be viable at a particular level of affordable housing. Local authorities should be clear about their aims and must negotiate strongly, scrutinising all the information provided by the developer, both when a development began, and when it was completed, when it might be possible to claw money back. The planning system is

not there to insulate developers from risk, but pushing too far can prevent development. If too much was paid for a site, it is not a reason for reducing the affordable housing element.

Prospective London Mayoral candidates had said that they would enforce affordable housing targets. The crucial question was what the residual land value would be after all costs and reasonable profit. The Government had recently announced that there would be a 1% reduction annually in the rent that was deemed 'affordable'; some developers had as a consequence pulled out of deals.

Not all public benefit took the form of affordable housing: the Battersea Power station development might not have much affordable housing; but it was conserving a listed building and providing an extension to the Northern Line.

John Wachter said that until recently it was exceptional to receive viability assessments, they were now frequent. It was common to argue that development was 'not viable' - and yet still much development was going on.

Local authorities were concerned about the reliability of the evidence put to them. There was increasing media interest in the subject, and in the loopholes that might permit developers to reduce, perhaps to nothing, their provision of affordable housing. Building Design had published an article claiming that there was now "industrial-scale avoidance of Affordable Housing." What was needed was greater transparency and openness.

Islington Council's dedicated in house team had expertise and knowledge of local conditions, lacking to the many councils who relied wholly or mainly on consultants. Recent changes to the planning system had acted to increase land values and reduce the provision of affordable housing. Appeals were at a level not seen since the 1980s. Affordable housing grant had gone; the definition of affordable rent had been changed; the deregulation of change of use from offices to residential (without any affordable housing) put land values up, and starter homes and exemptions for small developments had a similar effect. The large developers aimed to control the market, not to maximise the production of homes.

Local authorities were doing their best to counter these adverse trends, and were forming a London Boroughs Viability Group.

But there had to be changes in the guidance. The planning system used to be concerned with the public interest; now it is economics and viability. The public wanted more houses; what they were getting was increased land values. There ought to be more public debate, but the subject was, in fact, too technical.

Contribution from the floor:-

The Wandsworth Society said that following the government's initiatives the planning system is now broken and needed fundamental repair, not tweaking.

Several speakers agreed with the Kew Society that viability negotiations must be transparent and open, not kept confidential with publication of crucial documents heavily redacted. Mr Wachter and Ms Winfield-Ferreira agreed. There had been applications for public access to viability information invoking the 'public interest' test and he was hopeful the trend was to more transparency.

The Ealing Society suggested that the new London Plan should contain an overriding requirement for transparency, and that this need should be drawn to the attention of Mayoral candidates.

Were the viability models ever tested against reality - what prices a developer actually achieved when he sold the flats compared with the estimate he had made in his viability assessment? High cost figures on schemes for which outline planning permission was sought were very difficult to check. Mr Wachter said that Islington were trying to get actual data on schemes - in one case where an appeal had accepted that no affordable houses could be provided, it had become clear that 40% would have been viable. He observed that the profitability figure used to be 16%; it went up by stages following the financial crisis to 29%, and was not coming down though the crisis was over. Mr Wachter said that all these points would be put in as evidence to the House of Lords Select Committee on the Built Environment.

Elephant and Castle representatives said that they had produced a website "Viability for Dummies" which made participation much easier for community groups. They believed that profitability should be the residual after all costs. ■

London Forum AGM 2015

The AGM and Media Awards presentation at the Gallery, November 17

Reports by **Peter Pickering, Peter Eversden, Bill Tyler** and **Diane Burridge**

Chairman's welcome and introduction

Chairman Peter Eversden welcomed members and highlighted some of the significant achievements detailed in the Annual Report.

The destruction of the planning system continues. Permitted development of conversion of offices to flats has harmed and continues to harm London's economy. Peter said he felt London Forum is becoming accepted by many in the Commons and the Lords as a source of useful information.

Following the election in May, many MPs with whom we had established a good relationship disappeared. We have been developing relationships with the new MPs, as the Annual Report describes. Our aim is to ensure that those representing all parts of London and those on relevant Select Committees and All Party Parliamentary Groups (APPGs) for various topics have the evidence they need to scrutinise and modify Bills and policies and to give informed speeches in the House and challenge Ministers.

Financial Report

The London Forum Treasurer, Tony Allen of the Chislehurst Society, reported on the year. The Accounts showed a surplus for the year of £3,981, due largely to a bequest of £3000 from Mr Bernard Selwyn.

Subscription income had been lower than expected, due to teething troubles with the new system of payments - this had largely been made good after the 30th June end of the Forum's accounting period. There was therefore no proposal before the meeting for an increase in subscriptions. But to keep the Forum financially sound an increase might be necessary for 2016-17.

Approval of Annual Report and Accounts for 2014/15

The Chairman asked for a proposer and seconder for the motion to approve the Annual Report and Accounts. It was proposed by David Bieda (The Seven Dials Trust) and seconded by Caroline Brock (Kew Society), and approved unanimously.

Election of Honorary Independent Examiner

The Chairman thanked John Egan

(Highbury Community Association) for his work as Honorary Independent Examiner. He understood that John Egan was willing to continue in this essential office and the meeting approved his continuing appointment unanimously.

Election of Officers and Trustees:

The Chairman reported that one-third of the present Executive Committee (three Members) retired by rotation. Each was willing to stand for election. Each had been formally nominated: Michael Hammerson, Helen Marcus and Peter Pickering. No other nominations had been received. A motion to elect the three nominees en bloc was proposed by Mike Allsop of Strawberry Hill Residents Association and seconded by Jan Morgan of the Highgate Society and passed unanimously.

No nomination for the post of President had been received; the position remained in abeyance.

Peter Eversden stated that he was happy to continue as Chairman of the London Forum; the other members of the Executive Committee (EC) would be Tony Allen, Treasurer, Michael Bach, Chairman Planning and Transport Committee, Derek Chandler, Secretary, Helen Marcus, Editor Newsforum, Diane Burridge, Membership Secretary, Peter Pickering, Minutes Secretary, Michael Hammerson, Martin Jones and Bill Linskey. Two vice-presidents were co-opted to the EC, David Lewis and Bill Tyler. The Chairman thanked the EC for their work and support, observing that there were vacancies for anyone interested in participating. The Chairman also sought new members for the Planning & Transport Committee.

Tom Ball said there should be more recognition of the contribution of independent, personal members.

The Chairman thanked the officers and committee members for their work over the year. Mrs Marcus thanked societies for contributing articles to News Forum. Mrs Harvey thanked Mr Tyler for his work on the Media Awards.

David Bieda proposed a vote of thanks to the Chairman for his unremitting efforts for London Forum. This was passed to sustained applause. ■

Media Awards presentation

The London Forum Media Awards had been renamed this year and included new categories to reflect a newer take on the way our members get their message out to the public. Members will remember that they were formerly the Walter Bor Awards in memory of London Forum's Founder-President.

The winner in each category this year won £100 through the Selwyn Bequest to London Forum.

1. Membership Increase

Winner: Wimbledon Society - Newsletter extract and membership location analysis

2. Saving/Restoring Building or Feature

Winner: Herne Hill Society - Restoration of Brockwell Park clock-tower

3 Use of Social Media

Winner: Brixton Society - Campaign against advert on Prince of Wales pub

Runner-up: Chislehurst Society - Local campaign to save and restore Scadbury Park

4. Young People Involvement

Winner: Chislehurst Society - Walking quiz for schoolchildren

5. Local History Promotion

Winner: Seven Dials Trust - Street name plates & buildings plaques design and installation

Runners-up: Herne Hill Society - Herne Hill Heritage Trail and Magazine
Enfield Society - History of Enfield 1939-60 book publication

Special award to London Forum Webmaster

The Chairman regretted that Mike Roden, the webmaster, who has done a superb job on the Forum's website had been unable to attend personally to receive his special award, because of illness.

Tom Ball

was warmly thanked for preparing the attractive certificates, which he has done for many years. ■

Rowan Moore at London Forum's AGM

The distinguished journalist presented London Forum's Media awards and gave a keynote speech

Diane Burridge reports

London is a global city above all others; its population is expected to exceed 10 million (by 2036) and continue to grow. The population recently surpassed that reached in 1939 when London was considered too crowded – leading to the development of more Garden Cities.'

'Change has been too brutal and too fast'. Referring to one of his recent articles, titled: London: the city that ate itself, Rowan stated that: 'Not all buildings are of a sensitive nature; viability assessments are being used to destroy the planning system; and we are rolling back public involvement in shaping our city. It is taken as an act of nature that property prices are high but we do not ask why this has happened, and why should industrial units be pushed out to make way for housing.'

In his forthcoming book (out in March 2016), entitled: Slow Burn City, Mr Moore charts major public sector interventions (and inventions) over the years – from Joseph Bazalgette's sewage system, the Metropolitan Board's schools programme, the Clean Air Act, London Transport and council housing. And he noted that: 'These interventions have been copied all around the world.'

Mr Moore gave credit to community activism (and here he cited the spirit and tenacity of London Forum members), which has added so much value to the city. This activism has included battles for common land, for example, starting in Wimbledon (against the Lords of the Manor wanting to build on this land), through to the saving of Hampstead Heath and Epping Forest - where John Stuart Mill led the campaign not to accept a small amount of common land but to fight for the whole Forest.

'The challenge in the future is to decide what battles to fight, as the scale of damaging change is truly shocking'. But Rowan did not support limiting growth, as London has coped with massive growth in the past – the last time being between the wars when the area of London doubled and the population increased by 12%.'

'What London needs now is serious planning', and he stated that URBED's recent proposals for Garden Cities in the Green Belt should be considered. However, he understood why there is a lack of trust by some societies regarding proposals for building on the Green Belt: how would this be controlled and who would benefit are questions that need comprehensive answers. ■

Rowan Moore answers questions from the floor

1. London as a National Park City. Mr Moore said that this was a brilliant idea, which could help protect the less glamorous green spaces (the threat to which was more from lack of care than from development), but it was not clear how it could work in practice.

2. The City of the East was a huge project, with possible consequences for parts of the Green Belt. Mr Moore said that the Thames itself was an undervalued asset.

3. Was there a limit to the size of London? Some other global cities were truly awful. Could London's population growth be deflected to the north? Mr Moore was wary of imposing an artificial limit; serious planning was required; between the wars London coped with great expansion, but at the cost of much land. The Green Belt was more for the benefit of those who lived in it than for the general population of London - and so it was better to destroy the environment of the Thames than the fields

of Surrey. He had been to Oxford and found people accepted the case for more building, but did not trust the authorities.

4. There was not always a right and a wrong side in planning battles - the Tottenham football stadium arguments showed this.

5. London has changed, is changing and will continue to change. We must continue to bash away (Mr Moore's phrase) at all these things. Outer London could be densified, if housing estates could be improved without being gentrified

6. The trend seemed to be for employment to be more and more in central London, while the suburbs became more and more dormitories. It was essential to have more jobs in the suburbs - but the permitted development changes were working the opposite way.

7. For some reason national political parties seemed not to regard it as electorally important, though there were in fact several marginal seats in London. ■

Building on the green belt; parks funding cut

Building on the green belt

According to the Department for Communities and Local Government a total of 3,000 homes were built in England's 14 green belts in the year to the end of March 2014 - three per cent of new-build properties. Of these, about 1,800 were on "previously developed land" and the rest were built in open countryside. Planning permission was granted for 11,977 homes in England's 14 green belts in the year to the end of March, up from 5,607 in the previous 12 months, according to Glenigan, which provides data on the construction industry.

At the same time research from estate agent Countrywide claims that the number of homes built on green belt land has halved since 2001, falling from a peak of 6,700 homes in 2001 to 3,248 in 2014. But in London in 2014, 1,575 new homes were built on the green belt, 48 per cent of all greenbelt development in England. This is up from 38 per cent a decade ago.

Since 1995, Countrywide estimates 96,000 new homes have been built on the green belt, which equates to around 3.5 per cent of the 2.7 million homes built in England between 1995 and 2014.

Britain's urban parks under threat

In June this year London's 32 boroughs issued a joint statement warning of a "slide towards privately run parks in the capital by the end of the decade" "...communities risk losing control of parks, along with democratic accountability for the open spaces that they value so much".

David Lambert, one of Britain's leading parks experts speaking at the Paxton 150 conference at Sheffield University in September delivered a stark warning about the future of Britain's 27,000 local parks: there is no statutory duty for local authorities to maintain parks, and revenue funding is being slashed by local authorities everywhere. Lambert says "we are seeing an unravelling of the consensus on public ownership and public goods, of which parks are such a beautiful example".

Last year a Heritage Lottery Fund report found that almost half the local councils in Britain were planning to sell off green space (usually to housebuilders), and a fifth had specifically earmarked parks for disposal. ■

Spotlight on the Kew Society

All about the Kew Society, founded in 1901 - one of the oldest civic societies in London
by **Caroline Brock**

The Kew Society has inevitably had its ups and downs. We like to think it is on an up at the moment and will long continue. Like all amenity societies we operate through influence, not power. So fulfilling our remit, to enhance the character of Kew, means we need to show we are a significant voice, representative of the community. We need to build constructive relations with those who do exercise decision making power, often working with other like-minded groups.

Reaching younger people

Our membership is about 5-6% of Kew residents but with a demographic that is in the older age range compared to Kew as a whole. I daresay we are not atypical in that. To secure our long-term future we want to encourage younger residents to join, by offering a wider range of events where people can share a knowledge and appreciation of Kew, its heritage and future, and meet and make new contacts.

To reach younger people we have organised picnics, one under the Royal Botanic Gardens iconic Pagoda building, and this year ran a photographic competition for Kew schools, assessed by professional judges and with awards presented by local resident and Channel 4 news presenter Krishnan Guru-Murthy. We write to new households moving into Kew to invite them to join. And we have refreshed our branding with a new website which will shortly have the facility to pay to join the Society on-line. We are building relations with the local press and are venturing into social media with a Facebook page and Twitter account. We hope that we will gradually attract younger members even if not all want to get actively involved in running the organisation.

Kew Heritage

Kew is fortunate in having the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, a World Heritage Site, as well as The National Archives, many listed buildings, notably around Kew Green and Kew Pond, and Buildings of Townscape Merit, several conservation areas, and open green spaces such as the Old Deer Park, North Sheen and Westerley Ware recreation grounds, allotments, the Thames towpath and a hidden gem of a small nature

Kew Society has inevitably had its ups and downs. We like to think it is on an up at the moment and will long continue.

reserve – Pensford Field – protected from development some time ago and we hope for the long-term by Pensford Field Environmental Trust. Kew has examples of buildings from across the centuries, from Queen Anne to 21st century developments of housing and a retail park. Kew Bridge provides a north/south route to the M4 and the south circular running through the Ward, past the quintessentially English cricket club setting on Kew Green.

At the heart of Kew is Kew Village with its local shops, many still independent, clustered around Kew Gardens station. These include a much cherished row of single storey wooden buildings, sometimes affectionately referred to as the beach huts. A notable recent success for the Kew Society and the community was to object to re-development plans for one of these buildings which would have meant the loss not only of the building in its current form, but of the independent bookshop which would not have been able to afford the rental for larger premises. The Kew Bookshop has just completed its own refurbishment, demonstrating the structure does have a future despite the developer's suggestions to the contrary, and so does the independent shop. It's just one example of what we can achieve, objecting to developments where they aren't in the interests of the heritage of Kew and keeping an amenity the community values. We worked with the Kew Traders Association, local Ward Councillors and our local MP to achieve the right outcome.

Planning issues – local and strategic

We have our share of planning applications for housing and infrastructure growth, given the national pressure to build more housing. We have adopted a policy, after consulting our members and now published on our

website, showing how we approach planning applications. We don't comment on individual household applications unless there is an aspect that affects the community in some significant way, quoting the relevant Local Development Management Plan policies so that the Council are able to take account of what we say. Most of our effort recently had been commenting on major housing developments, recently near the river, including plans for high rise housing to enable the re-location of Brentford Football Club in a new and larger stadium adjacent to Kew Bridge. Whilst we wish the Club and its many local supporters well, a major concern is the long-term and irreversible impact on vistas from the Royal Botanic Gardens and other heritage sites on both sides of the river, as well as increasing traffic congestion and consequent air pollution from such a large development. We have used expert independent advice on traffic and air pollution to make our case and obtained Counsel's opinion on this scheme.

The extent of high rise building in London has received a fair bit of news coverage and is a concern for the Kew Society with the large scale regeneration by Hounslow Council of Brentford and other areas in the Borough adjacent to Kew. The regeneration is much needed, as is the housing, but particularly in a predominantly low lying area, high rise buildings have a substantial impact and the scale of development brings problems of traffic congestion, air pollution and infrastructure demands such as schooling and medical provision.

Commenting on planning issues, running events and working on environmental issues takes up a lot of our time but we also try to comment on national and local policy documents which set the framework for individual planning and environmental decisions. Many of the modifications we and other amenity groups in neighbouring Hounslow and Ealing as well as Richmond Council proposed at the Public Examination of Hounslow Council's Local Plan were accepted by the independent Inspector. The Local Plan has now been adopted by the Council and will be a very important reference document for us as other developments affecting Kew are proposed, including along the "Great West Corridor",



Caroline Brock

The Kew Society

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The River at Kew photo:Caroline Blomfield

alongside the elevated M4, where more high rise buildings are proposed, some with illuminated advertising which we have resisted.

We also commented on other strategic documents including the Government's policy on speeding up the national roll out of broadband connection.

We raised with Richmond Council the need for a planning policy on basements – an issue common to many London Boroughs. We commented on Richmond Council's Site Allocation Plan, its Supplementary Planning Document defining the key features of "character areas" within Kew, and in support of Richmond's affordable housing policy.

Throughout London affordable housing is not being delivered on the scale needed and we will be submitting evidence to the House of Lords Select Committee on National Policy for the Built Environment, drawn to our attention by the London Forum, on our experience of this and other issues with the current planning regime.

Working with other local groups

We are making ourselves more visible in the community by leading projects, working with other local groups and organisations, which

Kew street scene; photo:Caroline Blomfield .



demonstrate what we do – improvements to the Kew Plaza around Kew Gardens station were completed some years ago and we recently updated the visitor map here.

Other projects are underway, working with the Thames Landscape Strategy and the West London River Group, to improve the towpath for pedestrians and cyclists in harmony – a difficult task – and for those who want to sit quietly and admire the view and wildlife.

We are also very actively engaged with the Richmond Heathrow Campaign to oppose expansion of Heathrow and its environmental impact – an issue relevant not just to Kew and south-west London but to Londoners under flight paths now or in the future as new flight paths are designed, and to the wider UK economy. Surprisingly, much of the evidence contained in the Airports Commission's final report does not, from the Campaign's detailed and meticulous analysis, support the conclusion that expansion at Heathrow will benefit the UK economy.

We have also worked with the adjacent Richmond Society on events such as a General Election hustings. ■

Age: over 100 years old.

Circumstances of Birth: The Kew Ward Union formed on 15th January 1901 by voters concerned that the existing rate payers' organisation was ineffective. This evolved, becoming the Kew Society in 1969

Biggest Successes: Building relations with local Ward Councillors, our local MP and Council officials. Making ourselves more visible in the community with improvement projects. Attracting new members through events and other activities. Re-branding, including a regularly updated website and use of social media. Getting GP premises included in a large new housing development by putting the developer in touch with a local GP practice which had been searching for some time for new and larger premises.

Biggest Disappointments/Frustrations: Affordable housing policies not being implemented. Access to financial viability assessments for large schemes still kept secret, (we hope that our Freedom of Information appeal for access to information on the Brentford football stadium will set another precedent, alongside the Elephant and Castle and Greenwich cases). Emerging problem with location of new schools as property and land prices escalate in London. Not enough people coming forward to be active as Trustees or Patrons so we can continue our work.

Present Preoccupations: Creating a positive perception of what we stand for – an organisation that objects to things only with good reason, constructively and in the interests of the community; that is a positive voice engaging in public policy formation based on our collective experience; a fun organisation with events which help the community know Kew better and meet new people; that instigates and sometimes funds improvements in the local environment. To attract more and especially younger members to ensure future buoyancy; to understand better how to use social media; to increase the numbers actively engaged in our work.

Working Details: Registered charity in 1987; Constitution and formal structure with sub-committees. Membership: approx. 650 people. Currently 3 Patrons and 7 Trustees plus half a dozen regular helpers. Annual subscriptions: Individuals £10.00; Couples/families £16.00; (concessions for Senior Citizens and Students); Corporates £25.00. Publications: quarterly printed Newsletter and regular communication updates on our website and, increasingly, Facebook and twitter.

Last Word: To win friends and influence people we need to be professional in our approach: considered, measured and factual; always polite even where we disagree; networking with those with a shared interest in the heritage and future of Kew. ■

A significant victory in the Athlone House Saga

by **Michael Hammerson** of the Athlone House Working Group, who have represented the local community over the past 18 years on this extraordinarily long-running saga

In the last Newsforum we reported on the latest failed attempt in June by the developers Athlone House Ltd (AHL) who have been fighting for years for the right to bulldoze Athlone House, the historic building overlooking Hampstead Heath, described in Private Eye in February 2015 as “a real scandal”. The Inspector, Colin Ball, of Smithfield 2014 fame, dismissed their appeal.

Smarting from this decision against their proposals for an oversize pile, described as an “Arabian Nightmare” and a “Stalinist Wedding Cake” – the developers promptly went to the courts to challenge the Government Law Office and the Borough of Camden over Inspector Ball’s decision. Yet again, they sought to overturn the section 106 Agreement to restore the 1870 mansion, which was signed with Camden in 2005 in return for a lucrative planning permission to build three luxury blocks of flats in the ground, from which they have already profited. The AHWG attended the hearing at the High Court on October 20.

Two grounds of challenge:

- that the Inspector had wrongly interpreted Metropolitan Open Land legislation in relation to their development;
- that he had misinterpreted and misapplied the evidence given at the appeal by AHWG on the feasibility of restoring the house in accordance with the S.106 Agreement.

One of their arguments involving costs was contradictory: while claiming that their client wanted to occupy the house himself, they also claimed that demolition and rebuilding was inevitable because of the level of opulence necessary to appeal to the “ultra high net worth individuals” at whom the development was aimed.

If they had been successful:

- It would undermine Metropolitan Open Land and Green Belt protection under the NPPF;
- Section 106 agreements would not be worth the paper they were written on;
- Undesignated heritage assets would be at the mercy of developers and NPPF heritage protection provisions undermined;

- Local authorities would be shown to be toothless, localism a sham, and communities unable to protect their heritage;
- it would signal that developers should always challenge appeal decisions they didn’t like.

Mr Justice Dove noted the building’s significance as a non-designated heritage building and confirmed Inspector Colin Ball’s decision:

- His interpretation of replacement buildings in MOL was correct; the baseline must be “the building as it is now,” not what the developers wanted it to be (with a larger footprint);
- He had not misunderstood, and therefore misapplied, the arguments on costs of restoration as against replacement to an “opulent” and “extravagant” specification. These were new points which the claimants should have made at the time. He also accepted that AHWG’S argument was correct and reasonable.
- He was correct that the S.106 Agreement, securing the restoration of a heritage asset, the loss of which would cause substantial harm to the Conservation Area, was still in force and must be observed. There was therefore no validity in the developers’ case.

Outcome of national significance

This outcome undoubtedly has national significance.

At the time of writing, we await whether the client (reputed to be the fourth richest man in the world) will instruct his expensive legal team to attempt to take it to the Court of Appeal; but the judgment was so decisive that we would be reasonably optimistic that they would fail. What this also highlighted is the work of amenity groups as the defenders of the community against bad development - that communities possess many of the professional skills and expertise needed for good planning and development, and must not be marginalised in the planning process, but, on the contrary, involved from the start. The message to the likes of Athlone House Ltd. must be - “Don’t mess with us.” Hopefully, too, local authorities’ spines will be stiffened by the experience. ■

Affordable housing exemption quashed

Two government policies brought in last November by planning minister Brandon Lewis were quashed in a landmark High Court challenge in August. The policies both reduced the amount of affordable housing that developers are obliged to provide, setting a threshold on the size of developments below which planning authorities could not seek affordable housing contributions through section 106 agreements; and through the vacant building credit policy which reduced affordable housing requirements according to the extent to which a housing proposal involved the re-use or redevelopment of vacant buildings.

West Berkshire Council and Reading Borough Council successfully joined forces to challenge these proposals and as a result of the ruling in August by Mr Justice Holgate some 12 paragraphs have been removed from the National Planning Policy Guidance.

The judge agreed with the councils that the consultation process over the policies had been unfair and unlawful. He argued that there was a failure to take into account “obviously material” considerations when promulgating the policies, including the full implications for the supply of affordable housing land.

However a Department for Communities and Local Government spokesman said they will be seeking permission to appeal against the judge’s decision. “This will have a disproportionate impact on smaller builders who are important in providing homes for local communities.” ■

Quartermain to take over at PINS

Steve Quartermain chief planner at the Department for Communities and Local Government is to take over as interim chief executive of the Planning Inspectorate. The present chief executive, Simon Ridley, moves to a new role at DCLG. ■

What this also highlighted is the work of amenity groups as the defenders of the community against bad development

News from the Mayor and GLA

Review of parking in the London Plan (**David Lewis**); Mayoral call-ins; CAZ Supplementary Planning Guidance; Assembly 'white van' scrutiny; Update on the Outer London Commission by **Peter Eversden**

The DCLG asked the Mayor to review parking in the London Plan

David Lewis reports

How much parking should there be in new housing developments? An Examination in Public of proposed Alterations to the London Plan debated that issue in October and London Forum took part. In pursuit of a general policy of encouraging sustainable modes of transport the London Plan sets limits on the number of car spaces that can be provided, depending on the character of an area, the density of development and the availability of public transport. However, the Government abolished national parking standards in 2011; it discourages local planning authorities from setting their own limits, and believes the market is best placed to decide how much parking should be provided.

The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) asked the Mayor to review this aspect of the London Plan. The GLA proposed that Outer London

Boroughs should be required to demonstrate they have actively considered more generous standards for housing development in areas with relatively low public transport accessibility and have taken into account, as well as other factors, current and projected pressures for onstreet parking and their bearing on all road users.

London Forum objected to this and other related Alterations on the ground that boroughs already have sufficient discretion in deciding what parking standards to put in their Local Plans. Some boroughs objected because they wanted to go further than the GLA had done. Environmental NGOs on the other hand argued the Alterations would risk making public transport uneconomic; increase car use, and thus congestion and air pollution; and might even be in breach of the EU Air Quality Directive. In recognition of this last point the GLA has subsequently

proposed to require boroughs to take into account the implications for air quality.

The fate of these amendments won't be known until the Inspector has presented his report. Even if they come into effect not all London Boroughs will necessarily change their parking policies. The underlying issue, as London Forum emphasised, is that significant housing developments should be steered to areas with good public transport, and good public transport links should be provided where they do not exist already. GLA and TfL say this will be spelt out in Supplementary Planning Guidance on housing now in preparation.

DCLG also questioned a couple of respects in which standards for housing in London are higher than in the rest of the country. The Examination in Public also covered that issue, but London Forum was not invited to participate in that part. ■

Mayoral call-ins

Bishopsgate Goodsyrd scheme

Revised proposals for the Bishopsgate Goodsyrd have been submitted to the London boroughs of Tower Hamlets and Hackney (see Newsforum no. 69).

They propose 1,356 new homes, 65,000 square metres of office space, 17,000 square metres of retail space, and new public realm.

The consultation was due to run until the end of October however in September the Mayor called in the proposals for his own determination.

Putney High Street

A scheme in Putney High Street designed by GRID Architects for developers British Land, has been called in by the Mayor for the

second time. Previously the mayor's concern prompted the height the building to be scaled down from seven to six storeys.

The mixed-use project, which involves demolition of an existing building, would comprise 97 apartments – a mixture of one-, two- and three bedroom properties, including affordable homes – with ground-level shops and restaurants. It would also create community facilities and a public square on Lacy Road.

The Council's planning officers recommended approval but Councillors voted against it and refused planning permission on the ground that "the tall building would be an incongruous addition to the streetscape and of insufficient quality to justify the proposed height." ■

CAZ Supplementary Planning Guidance

The Mayor published the Draft Central Activities Zone (CAZ) Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) for public consultation in September. The closing date for response is 8 December.

It includes guidance on office to residential permitted development rights; culture, arts and entertainment uses/activities; accommodating growth in retail development; enhancing the distinct environment and heritage of the CAZ, supplementary guidance on tall buildings; identifying capacity for residential development; and essential new transport infrastructure, walking, cycling and use of the River Thames

The draft SPG can be downloaded from the Greater London Authority website ■

The Outer London Commission

Peter Eversden reports that the Outer London Commission have started their next round of work which will help feed into the full review of the London Plan. As part of this work, they will be investigating three topic areas, namely:

- Options for Growth.
- Issues For Regional Co-Ordination
- Removing barriers to housing delivery:

The Commission has also canvassed outer London stakeholders for their views on these topics and held a number of sub-regional meetings. more information, on the GLC website on www.london.gov.uk/olc. ■

Housing SPG

London Forum response to Housing SPG

In its response to the Mayor's Draft Interim Housing Supplementary Planning Guidance, the London Forum focused on Part 1 – Supply – and concentrated on:

- Housing targets and objectively-assessed need;
- Optimising housing potential and density. ■

Assembly 'white van' scrutiny

On-line shopping deliveries are causing concern at TfL because of a huge increase in vans making the deliveries.

TfL is looking at ways in which goods could be collected by their purchasers from Tube and Overground stations and car parks or from lockers in shopping centres. The on-line companies should be encouraged to provide such facilities and suggest that their customers use them.

Earlier in the summer the Greater London Assembly called for evidence on how to reduce the impact of the large quantities of white vans for deliveries on London's roads. ■

Heathrow Expansion plans

by **Peter Willan**

Chair, Richmond Heathrow Campaign

www.rhcfacts.org

The Richmond Heathrow Campaign is a joint initiative of the Richmond Society, Friends of Richmond Green and the Kew Society to combat Heathrow expansion and its effect on Richmond Town, Richmond Hill and Kew.

The recommendation by the Airports Commission that Heathrow should expand with a third runway contained several very significant caveats. Amongst them it said that the new capacity should only be released for use if it could be shown that this would not further delay compliance with air quality requirements, since the UK is already in breach of EU standards. These matter for people's health.

Following the High Court judgement won against it by Client Earth the Government has just finished consulting on a new plan to bring its air quality into line with those standards as soon as possible. The consultation said little on what Government will do to ensure that its imminent decision on expanded national infrastructure at Heathrow wouldn't breach standards – what mitigation measures are practicable (in the real world) and at what cost. Greater London is already acknowledged to have the worst record on air quality in the UK and will take the longest to comply, even without Heathrow.

It's hard to see how Government could approve investment in this new infrastructure in such a high risk scenario, given the difficulties in achieving compliance, the costs of realistic mitigation measures and its commitment to sustainable development.

That's one reason why Heathrow expansion is not just a problem for south-west London, nor even just for London, but for the whole of the UK. The Richmond Heathrow Campaign, comprising the Richmond Society, the Kew Society and the Friends of Richmond Green, together with about 2,000 members, has identified more impacts on the UK as a whole if Heathrow is chosen.

Worried about escalating house prices and rents in the south-east? Agree with the need to re-balance the UK economy through a Northern Powerhouse? What would you think about a Government decision that increased the over-heating in the south-east and worked against a re-balancing of the economy?

Some surprising facts

Here are some surprising facts from the Airports Commission's Final report:

- Heathrow's third runway would support an extra 41 million passengers a year. But this growth is concentrated at a single airport in the over-heated south-east, and results in a loss of 58 million passengers a year from other UK airports, including Birmingham, Manchester and Glasgow. Compatible with the Northern Powerhouse?
- Want to increase the UK's aviation capacity and international competitiveness? The Airports Commission own data show a reduction of 17million passengers for the UK as a whole, including business passengers and domestic passengers, as well as a reduction in flights and connectivity if the Heathrow option is chosen.
- Want the passengers using the airspace to benefit the UK economy? Over 50% of the new runway capacity would be used for an extra 22 million International to International transfers, providing little economic value to the UK as these passengers don't step outside the airport.
- And for those of you who are into macro-economic data, a final astonishing fact: the Commission says the investment of £17 billion would result in a net benefit of £1.4 billion (present value over 60 years). This sounds a decent sum but it is negligible in macro-economic terms and within the margin for statistical error. And that's ignoring the fact that the figure may be even smaller if full calculations for noise and air pollution and investment in transport to and from the airport, were to be included. It is poor value for money. The fact is that there is already significant spare capacity at almost all UK's airports including Heathrow itself, which the Commission says has capacity to add another 34 million terminating passengers without any additional flights by using larger planes. Heathrow is far from full. British Airways has just started reducing flights to popular destinations because the flights aren't full – too much capacity at Heathrow? (Capacity is not just about runways, it's about passengers). There is no need for this costly new investment in one airport at the expense of others. Allowing

the market to grow where it is needed is the right answer – no new runways, the runway capacity exists already.

Aviation is a major contributor to the UK economy through provision of jobs and added value by providing a service enabling other sectors to operate. Broadly, the objective is to serve a growing number of passengers with an optimum number and mix of destinations in an operationally and financially efficient manner. Heathrow contributes to the economic benefits.

Whether Heathrow is efficient in converting resources into services, taking the UK economy as a whole, and whether a decision to expand Heathrow is in the national interest and deliverable needs to be tested rigorously, given the costs and risks involved.

And coming back to London, flight paths have not been finalised. It is probable that many people will be affected by noise for the first time and those already suffering noise will have shorter periods of time free from aircraft noise (respite periods) each day. Want to know how it feels to be under flight paths for the first time? Ask the residents of Teddington and Windsor who were hit by noise for the first time as new flight paths were being tested out. Let's just say, with true British understatement, they are none too happy.

The decision by Government on which option to go for - Heathrow or Gatwick - is expected soon. Many organisations are preparing the ground for legal challenges if Heathrow is chosen. Please take a look at the website and help spread the word before it's too late. It's our view, looking at the evidence, that the answer isn't an extra runway at one of these two airports. We don't need new runways. We need to use the currently available UK runway capacity better and take a decision that meets all the Government's aims: sustainable development, compliance with air quality standards, meeting public health requirements for safe air and reduced noise, meeting carbon reduction requirements, and allowing growth where it is needed.

Oh, and let's stop thinking London-centric. The Northern Powerhouse has wide support as a good idea for many reasons.

<http://www.richmondheathrowcampaign.org/about.htm>

<https://consult.defra.gov.uk/airquality/draft-aq-plans> ■

More question marks over airport expansion

Noise, pollution and a budget 'black hole' at Heathrow
Expansion plans at London City Airport

A "black hole" in Heathrow budget

There is doubt over where the £5.7bn for works such as tunnelling the M25 under the runway, widening the M4, diverting a number of local roads and creating a new southern rail link from the airport to London Waterloo, are to come from.

The DfT insists that its aviation policy framework, published in 2013, makes clear that it expects Heathrow "to meet the costs of any surface access proposals that are required as a direct result of airport expansion and from which they will directly benefit."

Pollution

A study by OpenSensors called 'Breathe Heathrow' has recorded average pollution levels around Heathrow that regularly exceed the legal limit. Funded by the Open Data Institute, it placed 20 air quality and noise sensors in local residents gardens from West Drayton, to Windsor and Twickenham between September and October, 2015. It was the widest surrounding area of Heathrow ever to be monitored.

One of the findings – that under the flight path at Isleworth, NO2 levels were even greater – undermines Heathrow's claim that most of the pollution comes from road traffic.

'Breathe Heathrow' will carry out further Heathrow air quality projects with PhD students working with the Greater London Authority, to assess the environmental impact of pollution and an expansion of deployed sensors for more robust analysis. More information at <http://theodi.org/news/breathe-heathrow>

Conflict of interest?

The Independence of the Airports Commission has been called into question after revelations in the Guardian in August about the role of Commission Chairman Howard Davies, as a board member of insurer, Prudential, which spent £300m on properties around Heathrow as the Commission prepared to deliver its report.

Davies chairs the Prudential risk committee, which reviews and approves group investment policies as well as advising the board on risks in the company's "strategic transactions and business plans"

Noise from planes stunts reading

Amongst the thousands of pages of evidence released by the Airports Commission in July was a study prepared for the Commission by academics at Queen Mary University of London. It found that children at schools under airport flight paths are more likely to suffer from poor reading skills and memory problems and sleep disturbance; education in noisy schools was damaged because of lost teaching time, added stress, reduced morale and impaired attention. Exposure to even a small amount of aircraft noise could result in reading ages being delayed by up to two months. The expansion "would result in a considerable increase in the number of schools in the surrounding area being exposed to aircraft noise", with 24 additional schools being affected by 2050.

The Teddington Action Group, which has been campaigning against expansion of the airport, has written to all head teachers in London alerting them to the study and urging them to oppose the third runway. ■

London City Airport plans

London City Airport also has large expansion plans which involve acquiring nearly 20 hectares of land in the Royal Docks Waterway, part of the Blue Ribbon Network protected by the London Plan and would be contrary to BRN policy. London City Airport are considering making a Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) against the GLA for this publicly owned land, including the dockside and water area. If approved such a CPO would be unprecedented; no private company has ever attempted a CPO on land from a public body before.

Newham Council granted permission for these plans in April but was overruled by the Mayor of London.

A Public Inquiry into the CPO and the Mayors refusal is scheduled for the first quarter of 2016. If the Mayor's decision is overturned it would set legal precedents across the UK on public land assets. All the Mayor's public land assets could come under attack from private developers. ■

Roads and Rail

HS2; Crossrail 2;
Baker Street Two Way project

Lords criticise HS2

The Report of the Economic Affairs Committee on The Economic Case for HS2 was debated by the House of Lords in September. Points made during the debate included: "...a great idea, an inspiring business and yet, sadly, a very bad investment" "...the manifest benefits simply do not justify the costs." "HS2 will turn out to be the most expensive white elephant in UK history." Full details can be found in the Hansard report 3:40pm on 16 Sep 2015 Column 1850

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201516/ldhansrd/text/150916-0001.htm#15091643000317>

HS2 cost rises by a third

Meanwhile it is believed that estimated figures submitted to the Treasury before the comprehensive spending review due as we go to print will show that the cost of building HS2 has now increased by a third to almost £30 billion. The previous estimate of £21.4 billion was set in 2011.

Detailed plans for the Crossrail 2 published

Transport for London and Network Rail have issued a consultation document giving detailed plans for the Crossrail 2 line scheduled to open by 2030. It would serve central London through an underground tunnelled section between Wimbledon and Tottenham Hale and New Southgate, connecting with existing National Rail networks in Surrey and Hertfordshire. The Treasury will be asked to provide £13.5 billion - half of the estimated £27 billion budget - on the route.

The consultation ends Friday 8 January 2016. more information at www.crossrail2.co.uk

The Baker Street Two Way project

Westminster City Council and Transport for London are working on plans to return two way flow to Baker Street and Gloucester Place. It is part of a drive across the capital to reconsider large gyratory systems. The project is also supported by the Baker Street Quarter Partnership and the Portman Estate. Consultations on the proposals were held during the summer.

Some residents and community groups are against these changes.

More information and detail can be found on Westminster City Council's website, and at www.westendextra.com/bakerstreet ■

Developments on the Thames

The City In The East

Verina Glaessner attended the October Launch of the Adopted London Riverside OAPF

City in the East seems to cover development east of London Bridge to Bexley and Thamesmead; and on the north bank the Lower Lea Valley and the Royal Docks.

Peter Murray, chaired the meeting and thanked the Mayor for supporting the event.

Sir Edward Lister Chief of Staff and Deputy Mayor Policy and Planning GLA stressed that a priority was to connect East London's numerous local plans and at the same time acknowledge the context of the wider south east (Ebbsfleet and the new ports along the estuary) in relation to jobs, homes and an increasing population. Consideration had to be given to appropriate land use,

Initial projections of numbers of homes had risen hugely with suggestions of 203,500 homes and 283,300 jobs. The need for better connectivity throughout the area was stressed and included the need for improved river crossings.

Presentations were made by Cllr. Darren Rodwell Leader LB Barking and Dagenham who saw the Riverside tunnel (placing a 1.3km stretch of the A13 in a tunnel) to improve traffic flow and improve a blighted area as key.

A deal with SEAGRO for over 90% of the GLA's public land to create an eastern Park Royal Parks was mentioned. The issue of safe-guarded wharves will depend on policy in the Housing Bill; it was a case of safeguarding the right wharves in the right places. Retaining and increasing open green spaces also received a mention.

Other speakers included Alex Williams of TfL and a representative from the LB Havering

There was a dearth of detail and specifics. More is available in the OAPF itself and in borough policy and planning applications. The developments in Barking and Dagenham and Havering seem both welcome and necessary, and, if carried out carefully and in response both to local needs, landscape and requirements as well as to the benefits to be gained from closer connections with inner London, have an expectation of success. The Development Infrastructure Funding studies should be worth watching. ■

Battersea Power Station

David Lewis reports on plans for the Cringle Dock Waste Transfer Station

At a presentation in October about replacement of the Cringle Dock Waste Transfer Station, the Chief Executive of Battersea Power Station, drew attention in his introduction to the increase in construction costs in London (20-30% since 2012, he said) and the effects this has had in stopping work on site on a number of schemes which would no longer be economic. One Nine Elms was one scheme he cited, although the downturn in the Chinese economy may have been a factor there. He said 'this trend had been widely reported in the press, but it had not come to my notice'.

He also said Battersea Power Station is reviewing the size of units in its residential developments. Large apartments are being priced out of the market and the interest of purchasers (UK and international) is now predominantly in small units.

The Western Riverside Waste Authority's plans continue to be based on receiving unsorted waste from lorries and tipping it into barges. In reply to a question from me they confirmed this is their long-term strategy. Rafael Vinoly (who remains closely involved as the masterplanner for Battersea Power Station) told me afterwards that he saw the point of my question but claimed the new building will provide a very large unobstructed space and could be converted to other technologies. The Battersea Society will be considering what attitude to take to the planning application (a full application in the case of the waste building) which is due to be submitted in November.

The Thames Path will be carried over the entrance to the barge dock on a high-level bridge, although it will then be blocked for the time being by the construction site for the Thames Sewer. ■

The Super sewer

Sir Ian Byatt keeps up the pressure on Thames Water

In September Sir Ian Byatt wrote to Ofwat, accusing it of failing to fulfil its legal duties to protect consumers by allowing increases to their bills, in order to pay for a new £4.2bn sewer under London. Sir Ian, who led the privatisation of the water industry in 1989, and was chief executive of Ofwat between 1989 and 2000, is a longstanding critic of the new sewer. He argues that other improvements set to be completed this year as well as new technology, better drainage and storm tanks remove the need for the project. Smaller improvements could have the same effect and meet EU standards more quickly, he says.

He also says that the decision to use private finance to pay for the project will make it more expensive for taxpayers and consumers; government could borrow the money more cheaply. The deal amounts to the "biggest private finance initiative project ever", he says.

Two thirds of the funding will be met by a group of investors called the Bazalgette consortium, which includes the German insurer Allianz, Swiss Life Capital and Dalmore Capital, who will then effectively own it, and will supply sewerage services to Thames Water on a 125-year concession afterwards.

Unusually for a construction project, they will receive an income from the first day, paid for by Thames Water's 15m customers through extra charges to their bills.

Taxpayers will also underwrite the risk during the construction period. Construction is due to start next year after agreements during the summer on a licence by the industry regulator with contractors and investors. ■

More on the Garden Bridge

Lambeth council appeared ready to withdraw support for the Garden Bridge in September over concerns about the amount of public money committed to it.

However talks between Lambeth council, Transport for London and the Garden Bridge Trust, attended by Labour mayoral candidate Sadiq Khan, have now reached an agreement to limit the money Transport for London (TfL) would have to pay towards construction. Lambeth has withdrawn its opposition but will still have to amend the lease on the land in Lambeth, which is occupied by the Coin

Street Community Builders housing trust.

Sadiq Khan, who had pledged to scrap the project if he won office as Mayor next May, has now also said he has changed his mind and would support the project.

Critics have called the bridge an absurd vanity project on a stretch of the Thames already well stocked with bridges, which will block historic views along the river

ComRes poll found that three-quarters of Londoners support the bridge, rising to 84 per cent among younger adults in Lambeth and Westminster. ■

Round the Societies

A round-up of news from our member societies.

By **Diane Burridge**

Green Plaque on Clapham Pottery

The **Clapham Society's** eighth Green Plaque was recently unveiled on the former chapel of Ingleton House Boys' Home in Rectory Grove, now Clapham Pottery, by local celebrity chef, Michel Roux junior. Despite very heavy rain, 50 people assembled for the ceremony with the Mayor of Lambeth.

The Woods Cry Out

Putney Music, in association with **Putney Society, Wandsworth Society, Friends of Wandsworth Museum** and other local societies presented The Woods Cry Out - a programme of words and music to commemorate Wandsworth's involvement in the First World War. Simon Callow, Wendy Gifford and Timothy West and others read poetry written by the men and nurses of Wandsworth's Royal Victoria Patriotic Hospital, as well as poems and comments from the humorous wartime journal The Wipers Times.

Herne Hill Velodrome support

Herne Hill Velodrome Trust reported, in the latest **Herne Hill Society** news, that the green light has been given by Southwark Council to build a new pavilion, replacing the Velodrome's disused grandstand. The Society has been supportive of the Trust's work over the years fighting for the survival of this key sports resource. Dulwich Estate has now agreed heads of terms for a 99-year lease on the site. Sport England, London Marathon Trust, Southwark Council and the Mayor of London's Fund have promised funding totalling £1.8 million.

Plans are to open the new pavilion and rearranged cycle storage, in summer 2016, in time for the Velodrome's 125th Birthday Celebrations (1891–2016). Further fund-raising is needed to fit out the new changing rooms, showers, meeting rooms, and kitchen. Meanwhile, cycling at Herne Hill Velodrome goes from strength to strength, with more than 49,000 coached cyclist attendances in the past year.

Wimbledon Society increase in membership

Surveys show that in 1976, some 370 members' addresses were recorded. In 2007 this number had grown to 910. The 2015 survey lists some 930 addresses - with 150 having joint membership - and so membership now totals some 1080.

Interestingly the surveys show that there are now many more members living in the Town Centre. This may be the result of a joint initiative between the Society and local groups in 1984 which commissioned the Residents' Plan, in opposition to the plans of the then Council - which was subsequently voted out at the next election.

The Isleworth 390 Project

With funding from the London Borough of Hounslow, the **Isleworth Society** is researching 90 of the 390 men listed on the Isleworth War Memorial as having died in the First World War. Working with local schools and in local venues, the Society is developing a touring exhibition which will illustrate these men's lives in depth. The project aims to run to 2018. For information: www.isleworthsociety.btck.co.uk

Civic Awards for Peckham Society members

Five members of the Peckham Society received Civic Awards for 2015 in recognition of good works carried out in the local community. These were presented by the present and previous Southwark Council Mayors in Southwark Cathedral. To add to celebrations this year, the Peckham Society marked its 40th anniversary in October.

New Neighbourhood Forum in Knightsbridge

The **Knightsbridge Association** is part of a newly-set up Forum working to develop a Neighbourhood Plan. Themes are likely to include: protecting, preserving and enhancing the unique character of Knightsbridge; ensuring basement developments are sustainable and properly controlled; and addressing the speed and noise of traffic in Exhibition Road - famously planned as a shared road with priority given to pedestrians!

One immediate area of action is to ask councillors to tighten the wording of the draft Supplementary Planning Guidance about the Community Infrastructure Levy, as this proposes at the moment to give local people less say than that given to Parish Councils and others in the use of these funds.

Islington in Bloom

The annual competition, run by Islington Gardeners and Islington Council, had 11 categories for 2015; these included: Best Window Box, Best Tree Pit, Best Container Garden, Best Front Garden and Best Forgotten Corner. Islington Society, this year, sponsored the Best Community Garden category.

In the most densely-populated borough in Britain local residents and businesses are determined to make their borough brighter and greener, as evidenced by the borough having won the Best Borough category in the London in Bloom 2015 Awards.

Enfield's Local Heritage List

The Enfield Society have agreed criteria with Enfield Council and Urban Vision - consultants appointed by the Council - for listing local buildings and other structures (such as street furniture). Based on recommendations from Historic England, listing categories will cover sites of historic value, townscape value and local cultural value.

Training sessions have been held for 30 volunteers from a wide range of local organisations who will compile lists in each area. These will represent and celebrate the diversity of Enfield and the final Local Heritage List will be completed by the spring of 2016.

Stanmore rights for pedestrians

After many years of campaigning by the **Stanmore Society**, Transport for London finally agreed to add a pedestrian phase to traffic lights at the junction of The Broadway, Stanmore Hill and Church Road. This is despite TfL being adamant for many years that, owing to the high traffic volumes, it was not possible to put in a pedestrian phase even though, most sadly, a fatal accident occurred at this junction last year. It has taken a year to tweak the timings (as part of the integration of the phasing of all the lights in Stanmore), to ensure that the pedestrian phase causes minimal traffic flow disruption. ■

newsbriefs

New and issues of interest and concern to note.

Historic Spitalfields under threat yet again

Norton Folgate, an ancient enclave of Spitalfields granted the "liberty" to govern itself in 1547, has been under threat from developers since 1977. Sitting at the boundary of the City of London, it is a former medieval "liberty" created when the Priory of St Mary Spittal was dissolved during the reformation. The Liberty was an autonomous entity governed by its own residents, independent of the rule of both the City of London and of the church. It was absorbed into the London Borough of Stepney in 1900, although some still claim that Norton Folgate's autonomous political status was never formally abolished.

Local campaigners led by Dan Cruickshank, first banded together 38 years ago and the Spitalfields Trust was born. They are still fighting the same fight. The Trust believes that the City Corporation has been buying up properties in the City Fringe neighbourhood and keeping them empty waiting for the planning green light to throw up more commercial towers.

In July Tower Hamlets council planning committee unanimously refused permission for the latest British Land scheme to demolish more than 70 per cent of Norton Folgate, retaining only a few elements of the facades. The Mayor called in the development plans at the end of September.

It is yet another case of unlisted buildings - apart from the carriageway of Fleur de Lis Street - within a Conservation Area, with many listed buildings close to the site. Part of the site is also within a Scheduled Ancient Monument and there are likely to be medieval and possibly earlier remains beneath the existing buildings or within their basements. The excavation of deep and sometimes double basements (up to 8 metres) across much of the site will have a major impact on archaeological remains.

It is also yet another example of (the then) English Heritage's inglorious failure to protect heritage, having given their approval. The whole episode is examined in a paper by Alec Forshaw who worked as a town planning, urban designer and conservation officer with the London Borough of Islington from 1975 to 2007. His paper can be found at:

http://gallery.mailchimp.com/c7906e2c2fc14cc053efe752d/files/alec_forshaw_norton_folgate_appraisal.pdf

BD Carbuncle Cup

The Prize for worst building of the year goes to the Walkie Talkie. CABE's commissioners once described it as "a successful scheme that would enhance the experience of a world city" but the Walkie Talkie is the most nominated 2015 Carbuncle Cup contender.

Carbuncle Cup jury chair and BD editor Thomas Lane described it as "a bloated carbuncle crashing into London's historic skyline" now dominated by "this thuggish comedy villain of a building." It has melted cars and caused winds strong enough to knock people over. It beat stiff competition "in a vintage year for ugly architecture."

Defying the conventional wisdom in the City that tall buildings tend to taper in order to minimise their impact on the historic environment, its failure on environmental grounds have also been widely publicised.

Other projects that made it on to the shortlist include a student housing complex in North Acton that prompted a local resident to stand for Parliament on a "ban inappropriate development" platform; and the Parliament House apartment tower in Lambeth.

Heritage at Risk

Historic England and the Victorian Society have both issued reports listing endangered buildings. The London 2015 Heritage at Risk Register, issued by Historic England in October, contains 670 entries making up 12.2% of the national total of 5,478. The Register provides an annual snapshot of historic sites known to be at risk from neglect, decay or inappropriate development.

Ladywell Baths, Lewisham now in poor condition, features on both Registers. Containing magistrates courts, churches, tombs, water towers, farms and even an anti-aircraft gun site, the Historic England report makes fascinating, if depressing reading.

They can be downloaded from:

<https://historicengland.org.uk/advice/heritage-at-risk/>

<http://www.victoriansociety.org.uk/news/category/2015-top-ten-endangered-buildings/>

New DCLG Panel to review Local Plan process

A new panel was set up in September by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) to consider how the local plan-making process can be simplified and streamlined.

They are due to report back by the end of February. The members of the panel are:

John Rhodes, director of consultancy Quod who helped draft the National Planning Policy Framework; John Howell MP (Con); Adrian Penfold, head of planning at British Land; Richard Harwood QC, of 39 Essex Chambers; Toby Elliott of Swindon Borough Council; Keith Holland a retired senior planning inspector; Liz Peace, former chief executive of the British Property Federation; Derek Stebbing, of Chelmsford City Council.

CivicVoice has requested that a representative of communities should be on the panel. **London Forum** has submitted its suggestions to Panel members

Tesco £250m land sale

After last year's accounting scandal Tesco has reversed its massive expansion plans of the past decade. It is abandoning proposals to open 49 large supermarkets, some already built, and will also close 43 outlets which weren't performing well.

It is selling off some of the sites that it no longer wants to develop, 14 of them in London, in a £250m deal with Meyer Bergman, a real estate investment management company. Housing is one potential route for the redundant sites, although analysts at Goldman Sachs have warned that the big chains currently value the land on their balance sheets at about double what it would fetch if sold off for housing.

Sites in London to be sold include Fulham High Street, Hounslow (Hounslow bus garage), Lewisham (next to existing Tesco store) New Barnet, Woolwich Phase 3 and 4 (next to existing Extra store) and Kensington (next to existing Cromwell Road store).

Sainsbury is also eyeing the redevelopment of stores with large car parks in prime locations in London and the south-east. It is thought that around 10 sites could be turned into residential developments, including in Whitechapel and Ladbrooke Grove, Nine Elms, and Fulham.

newsbriefs

Damage to UK statistics by ONS move

The relocation in 2007 of the Office for National Statistics (ONS) to Newport in Wales, together with a restructuring of its governance, and budget cuts following the 2008 economic crisis, has had such an adverse impact on the quality of statistics produced that Sir Charlie Bean, a former deputy governor of the Bank of England (BoE), has been tasked by the government to lead a review of the organisation.

Warnings by the BoE that the move would pose risks for UK economic data were ignored. About 90 per cent of the London-based staff quit rather than move, forcing the ONS to rebuild its knowledge base on a huge scale; it has struggled to recruit the right staff. The move has also affected the ability to share knowledge and advice between the ONS, BoE and the Treasury, and the once-common secondments have dwindled.

The Statistics and Registration Services Act, passed in the same year, contained a clause that barred statisticians from automatic access to government data. When the ONS wants information on housing, VAT receipts or benefits payments, it has to make a case which means getting hold of data can take as long as two years. By contrast other countries such as Canada have broad information-sharing legislation giving officials access not only to state but to corporate data, from banks to supermarkets.

Sir Charlie has already warned that the damage caused by moving the authority to Wales cannot now be undone by simply moving key functions back to London. His interim report is due to be published on November 25, to coincide with the Chancellor's Autumn Statement. His full review will be published during next year's Budget in February.

TfL Ten-year plan to build new homes

TfL one of the largest landowners in the capital, has announced more detail of its plans to sell off over 300 acres of its land holdings to raise £3.4bn. The land will be developed over the next decade to provide new homes, offices and retail units

In total, TfL owns around 5,700 acres of land in London and this "first wave" of 75 sites will be followed by scores more over the coming years. 10,000 new homes will be created across London. In addition to the work of TfL's £360m growth fund, which is creating more than 50,000 homes, although it is not clear how many of these homes will be "affordable."

Although many sites are often constrained and difficult, they are all on the transport network. Locations that have been ear-marked include Bermondsey tube station, where around 80 flats will be built above the Jamaica Road site; a Bakerloo line depot at St George's Circus in Southwark where up to 300 homes could be built, and a depot at Parsons Green in Fulham. Three planning applications have been submitted: at Nine Elms, Northwood and Parsons Green. Revenue raised from the developments will be reinvested in the transport network,

Tube map of rising rents

A London Underground Rent Map — "Where you can't afford to live in London, stop by stop" was published in September by the Thrillist London blog. Each Tube station on the map displays the average monthly cost of renting a one-bed flat within a one kilometre radius. It ranges from £552 a month in Elm Park - zone

six at the eastern end of the District Line - to nearly £3,000 a month for Hyde Park Corner and Knightsbridge.

Employers have begun to respond to the problem. Starbucks has offered to lend its workers up to £1,000 interest free as a rental deposit and Deloitte has secured a block of 40 flats in the former Olympic Village in east London for its new graduate intake to rent although they are not cheap.

See london-underground-rent-map and more articles at <https://www.thrillist.com/london/>

Problems and defects of the 'Boris Bus'

At the Assembly's Budget and Performance committee it was revealed that intellectual property rights for the bus remain with Wrightbus until Transport for London (TfL) has ordered 1,000 vehicles from it. Only then will TfL enjoy "the full unrestricted licence to have the buses developed, altered and manufactured by third parties." But Assembly members were told that there were no plans to increase orders beyond the 800 already purchased.

TfL has now admitted that there are several problems including with the high temperatures on the bus. In particular, an Assembly freedom of information request discovered that no pollution checks have been undertaken of the new Routemasters and that TfL do not know the real levels of pollution being created, despite repeated claims that they are the 'most environmentally friendly bus of its kind.' Apparently in their non hybrid mode they are entirely dependent on their diesel engines and 80 of the new Routemasters are running entirely on diesel generators.

Given these problems it is disturbing to find on page 7 of the Transcript of the Agenda of the meeting the remarks by Assembly member Tom Copley relating to the use of Heatherwick Studios to design the bus: "They did not win the design competition but were appointed anyway. TfL also appointed them to design the Garden Bridge, That looks rather strange and suspicious to an outside observer. What is the obsession with Heatherwick Studios?"

Stop Press: the Autumn Statement

From 1 April 2016 stamp duty on buy-to-let and second homes will increase by 3%. Announcing this the Chancellor said: "People buying a home to let should not be squeezing out families who can't afford a home to buy". "Many of them are cash purchases that aren't affected by the restrictions I introduced in the budget on mortgage interest relief, and many of them are bought by those who aren't resident in this country." Purchasers will have to declare that the dwelling will not be their primary residence. More than 1.4m people in the UK are landlords; the private rented sector has doubled in 14 years and buy-to-let lending was up 102 per cent in the last months. It will not affect corporate property development. It has become a cause of concern to the Bank of England who warned in September that the steep house price rises and increasing household debt could pose a risk to financial stability.

The Government also announced a new Help to Buy shared ownership scheme for London: the Government will provide a 40% equity loan interest-free for five years to first-time buyers, if they can raise a deposit of 5%. Other measures include £2.3bn loans for estate regeneration, and infrastructure for new housing. ■

Dates for your diary

London Forum events

Membership renewal - a new system

We have recently changed our membership renewal process so that it can all be done through the London Forum website. Emails have just been sent (in March) to your Society's contact person giving details of how subscription renewals for this year can be made, including on-line.

We are introducing also a secure way in which members can amend the details we hold of their officers and their organisation. Information on how to do this was included in the email sent in March.

As you all know, London Forum relies totally on Members' subscriptions for its budget. We hope you will find this new system easy to use. Please do use the new method of members amending their own data within the web site to make changes to those people meant to receive post and email bulletins otherwise societies might not be kept informed.

Queries can be sent to admin@londondorum.org.uk
Or contact Diane Burridge, (see details below) ■

Delivering Newsforum by email

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

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

We have reduced our costs by sending the summer edition in PDF form only. It is environmentally more friendly, saving paper, and it also saves London Forum a great deal of expense. With the enormous increase in the price of postage this is now becoming a major consideration.

If you do not keep your hard copy and feel you could do without it, relying on the PDF, please let 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. ■

For information about the London Forum contact:

www.londonforum.org.uk

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Registered Charity Number 1093134

London Forum Open Meetings 2016

Save the Dates

Tuesday 26 January 2016

Tuesday 22 March 2016

Watch out for emails and consult the website nearer the time for more information

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 ■

If you have any items of interest for the Newsforum the Editor will be pleased to hear from you at:

admin@londondorum.org.uk

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 ■

newsforum

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While the London Forum is concerned that the views written in articles are relevant and honestly held by the contributor, the opinions stated by individuals may not necessarily be held by the London Forum Executive, who are not in a position to vouch for their factual accuracy.