

newsforum



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

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

In this issue

Spotlight on the
Open Spaces
Society Page 10

- 1 **Housing and Planning Bill**
- 3 **Neighbourhood right of appeal / Starter Homes**
- 4 **Britain's housing market**
- 5 **Affordable housing initiatives**
- 6 **New Ideas: Housing In London**
- 7 **London Forum Open Meeting:**
- 8 **London Land Commission / City of London open spaces Bill**
- 9 **Lords Select Committee / London Elections**
- 10 **Spotlight: Open Spaces Society**
- 12 **Demands on London's streets**
- 13 **Transport: heritage at risk**
- 14 **Tall buildings: LF response to National Planning Policy**
- 15 **Basements**
- 16 **Round the Societies**
- 18 **News briefs**
- 20 **Events and meetings**

Housing and Planning Bill

Housing and Planning Bill

The Housing and Planning Bill has been heavily criticised, but is now being fully debated in the House of Lords

Peter Eversden and **Peter Pickering** report

The Government is continuing to undermine the planning system in the belief that it is preventing the building of housing and holding back the economy. The Housing and Planning Bill has been heavily criticised, but survived the debates in the House of Commons. It is now being fully debated in the House of Lords, where the Committee stage will probably end before the recess, and Report and Third Reading will follow in April.

The London Forum has provided briefing to members of the House, who have tabled many probing and critical amendments. The Forum has suggested changes to some of them and urged Peers to support ones we think are vital. Peers are particularly unhappy at the number of important matters and detail that is being left to regulations.

The Government Minister in the Lords has promised to consider points made, but at the time of going to press no amendments had been taken to a Division; action of this sort against provisions in the Bill is likely to be held over until the Report stage. We eagerly await the Government's response to a set of amendments providing some rights for third parties to appeal against the grant of planning permission in certain circumstances.

Particular concerns

We set out the London Forum's concerns about the Bill in the last Newsforum. The Forum's chairman Peter Eversden has

The London Forum has provided briefing to members of the House, who have tabled many probing and critical amendments.

described it as "the worst piece of legislation in my lifetime." "The provisions on Social Housing would destroy this vital sector of affordable housing and wipe out the work of decades to produce homes for those unable to buy for themselves because of the unachievable cost of homes in London."

The Bill, is in effect a change from a planned system to a developer-led system, despite all its fine words, and will bring great uncertainty.

Outsourcing planning

One new provision - a pilot scheme to promote competition by allowing the processing of planning applications by people or organisations other than the local planning authority - is especially worrying. It was tabled as an amendment by Communities Secretary Greg Clark and is now part of the Bill.

continued on page 2

Peter Eversden MBE

The London Forum is delighted to announce the award of MBE to Chairman, Peter Eversden with the citation:

"Chair, London Forum of Amenity and Civic Societies. For services to Community Engagement in Planning for London."

Peter commented: "When I was first a chairman of a civic society in the 1970s I had no idea it would just go on wherever I lived and that I would be still protesting, proposing, lobbying and trying to influence things for the better forty years later. At least it is easier now, with computers, the internet, email and social media.

"It is an honour for the whole Forum, and our constructive criticism of Government policies on behalf of our many members." ■

Housing and Planning Bill

(cont)

It would enable applicants to take the processing of planning applications away from local authorities and choose an 'alternative provider' to do it. There is mention of a government approved provider. Local planning authorities participating in pilot schemes "may offer a guarantee to process planning applications more quickly in return for a higher fee (a 'fast-track' service)". Further details on how the pilots will run will be published after the consultation has closed.

While private providers could charge 'premium' rates to fast-track the processing of planning applications, any future increases in councils' fees for processing planning applications would be dependent on their performance in terms of speed and quality of decisions.

It is envisaged that the final decision on the application would still remain with the local planning authority, "to ensure decisions are taken locally and maintain the democratic link between local people and decision makers". But there is concern that a Planning Committee will feel almost bound to accept such a recommendation.

Ministers believe there is a lack of incentive for councils to improve and speed up their planning service leading to "drawn out applications and local frustration" for both housebuilders and individual applicants. They believe the proposals will increase local choice, boost housebuilding and, by making councils compete, speed up the planning application process.

Critics say these proposals are fundamentally undemocratic and will weaken the accountability of local planning services. The "alternative provider", appointed by the developer, will be assessing objections against their own clients' application.

There are calls instead for increased funds to enable local planning authorities to meet capacity requirements themselves rather than outsourcing to the private sector. If any London boroughs are included in a pilot scheme civic societies will have to monitor very carefully what happens, and give publicity to any untoward effects.

Permission in principle

The provision for 'permission in principle' to be granted for development on the basis of location, use (for housing) and amount, leaving details to be determined later, may be seriously damaging to proper planning - much depends on how it will actually work, on which the Government has not so far been clear.

It is being left to secondary legislation no draft of which has yet appeared. It is feared that it will serve to override many of the things which are important for good planning, and which are currently achieved by conditions on the grant of planning permission.

The House of Lords has put down two amendments that would set some limits and mitigate the potential damage. One would prevent permission in principle being granted on brownfield sites with wildlife interest; the other would do the same in respect of land which is an important part of national infrastructure.

Other provisions

- Starter Homes to be considered "affordable" for planning purposes
- new thresholds for designating councils as poor performers
- extending permitted development rights for free schools
- more power to the Secretary of State and the Mayor of London to intervene in the preparation of local development plans ■

Upward Extensions

A new Permitted Development Right

The Government has also launched a consultation on a proposal from the Department for Communities and Local Government and the Mayor of London, for a new Permitted Development Right in London, described as: an "innovative approach to supporting housing supply by providing greater freedom to 'build up' in London, reducing the pressure to 'build out'". It will allow householders to add "a limited number of storeys" to existing buildings in London without the need for planning permission and, by so doing, will "protect open spaces and the Green belt". It says nothing about Conservation Areas and little about historic buildings.

It claims that recent improvements have made the planning system simpler and quicker. The consultation is seeking to identify ways to make it even more flexible to support the delivery of new homes. How it will do this, or produce even one single unit of new housing, rather than simply larger houses, is unclear.

Currently developers are required to submit a planning application to the local planning authority if they want to extend a building upwards, above the height of an existing roofline.

The deadline for responses is 15 April. and can be made at

www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/Z6SGGNB

Responses can be emailed to: londonupwardextensions@communities.gsi.gov.uk ■

Amendments put forward in the Lords

- A right of appeal for parish councils or neighbourhood forums when an authority grants a planning application which does not accord with policies in an emerging or made neighbourhood plan.
- Bring back full planning control over conversions of offices to residential.
- Compensation to businesses expelled from such premises.
- A review of the effectiveness of empty dwelling management orders.
- Curbs on the granting of 'Permission in Principle' for land which is an important part of the national infrastructure.
- Widening 'starter homes' to home ownership more generally.
- Requirement of infrastructure for starter homes.
- An attempt to restrict the right to buy, and time-limit it.
- Measures to deal with overcrowding in shared rented property.
- Affordable housing to be a separate use class.
- Five year time limits for developing land with planning permission to prevent landbanking. ■

Neighbourhood right of appeal

Nick Herbert, Conservative MP for Arundel and South Downs, tabled amendments in the debate in January to try to bring in a Neighbourhood right of appeal, and similar amendments have been tabled in the House of Lords.

Mr Herbert argued that "People are told explicitly that they will have control and be able to determine where development goes". The integrity of the planning process "is undermined when speculative developers try to get in applications ahead of the completion of neighbourhood plans or even after they have been completed."

Local authorities, fearful of losing an appeal, allow schemes to go ahead against the public's wishes. This "undermines confidence in the whole policy of localism." Closing that loophole "would send a clear signal to developers that the abuse of the neighbourhood planning process is no longer allowed."

However the Minister argued that: "The system is already geared towards ensuring that communities' views are taken into account, and local authorities must respect that. If communities are concerned that their plans are not being respected as they should be, the Secretary of State has powers to intervene."

For the full report of the debate see <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201516/cmhansrd/cm160105/debtext/160105-0006.htm> ■

Too few homes for social rent

Only 9,590 homes were built for social rent across the country in 2014-15, according to government data.

Chancellor Osborne's decision in June to cut housing association rents by 1 per cent per year, means that they can borrow less and build fewer houses.

In December the Office for Budget Responsibility acknowledged that fewer new homes will be built by housing associations over the next two years as a result of changes made in the autumn statement. Moreover figures collected by the Greater London Authority suggest that plans to redevelop London housing estates in the name of regeneration will see 7,326 social rented homes and another 1,389 in the "affordable" category lost. ■

Government urged to rethink plans for starter homes

Starter Homes risk adding to further house price inflation

There is widespread concern that Starter Homes and Help to Buy schemes, key elements of the Housing and Planning Bill, will lead to a significant reduction of social-rented stock, with a shift in housing tenure from affordable and social-rented housing to subsidised home-ownership. This will inevitably affect London's social structure, displacing lower income households and redistributing subsidy to the better-off.

Moreover the money from enforced council house and housing association sales will not necessarily be used to provide new social housing where it is needed. There is no requirement for the money to be spent in the borough where the sales occur.

A critical consensus has emerged

A critical consensus has emerged among experts and practitioners in every field, private and public, urging the government to rethink these plans. They will do nothing to alleviate the problems in London because home ownership is now beyond the financial reach of most first-time buyers even with these subsidies. They are inequitable, providing a big windfall to a lucky few, and are a questionable use of public money. Buyers will get a 20% cash subsidy and a subsidised mortgage, paid for by the taxpayer through the sale of high-value rented council housing. The Help to Buy scheme has been roundly condemned on all sides and, is generally agreed, has already contributed to further house price inflation. The Construction Products Association, has noted that such subsidy schemes stimulate demand but do not necessarily increase supply.

Savills

Savills also criticised policies that "could distort the new homes sales market without significantly increasing the number of new homes delivered overall". The London Help to Buy scheme will not help low or even median earners in any London borough, because prices now exceed the maximum typically lent by mortgage providers. Lucian Cook, director of residential research said "It doesn't open the market...." "The regulated mortgage market limits who is able to get on to the housing ladder".

The Lyons Commission

Sir Michael Lyons' Commission, which includes leading figures from house builders, housing associations and councils, as well as investors and academics, has said "...if the government is going to invest in these properties it should be in perpetuity..." "Instead of giving a very limited number of people a windfall gain, this should be spread more evenly."

Mark Field MP

Mark Field, Conservative MP for the Cities of London and Westminster believes the policy is a threat to London's "social capital". He questioned whether it was right to sell-off social housing which had been built with private grants or philanthropic donations specifically for social homes. He also pointed out that allowing housing association tenants the Right to Buy their homes at discounted prices would be unfair to those in the private rented sector who at present have no such right.

The press

FinancialTimes (FT) commentators have been scathing on the issue. Neil Collins wrote: "It is the biggest housebuilding programme since the 1970s! Of all the fantasy constructs in George Osborne's spending review, this one is surely the prime site. Treasury wishes will not turn [money] into houses." He pointed out that private sector housebuilders' business model is essentially a way of making profits by capturing rising land values, not of meeting housing demand. For them "Chronic shortage is essential to keep prices going up. At present, they are actually slowing their rate of building."

In FT Money (February 13) Claer Barrett simply labelled the help to buy proposals as "one of the most perversely named policies ever". Even with the government offer of £600,000 most London property is still too expensive. By "stoking demand" the scheme risks pushing up London prices across the board.

And if the market starts to fall thousands of these buyers will find themselves in negative equity unable to repay the Government. ■

Britain's dysfunctional housing market

The housing crisis: **Helen Marcus** rounds up some of the claims, counter-claims and contradictions.

While the Government continues to assert that there is a housing "shortage" and that the planning system is to blame: - only if it is dismantled can enough houses be built, and only this will bring the prices down - recent reports and comments throw increasing doubt on this premise. There is little evidence for these assertions and increasing evidence that other factors such as speculation and an unbalanced economy may be more significant.

Housing, especially in the south of the country, has been turned into a tradable commodity rather than homes for people, and present policies are doing nothing to address the real problem and, many warn, are actually making things worse.

Population and housing statistics do not support the shortage claims. These figures are easy enough to find and check. (see Newsbriefs, page 19) Why does the Government ignore them? Or are the figures wrong? In which case why publish them?

The astonishing price difference in houses for sale in the north of the UK throws further doubt on current official explanations. House prices outside London "are not much higher than their pre-crisis peak" (The Times March 7).

The latest reports add more confusion: housebuilding is now said to be slowing down, (The Times March 3) and a lack of buyers is creating a glut at the top end of the market as the "Appetite for luxury flats dwindles" (FT February 29). "Brokers, developers and estate agents have begun to whisper that the tower blocks of luxury apartments in Battersea and Nine Elms in south London will struggle to find buyers." (The Times February 13). The FT reported on March 8 that developers are cancelling projects to convert offices to flats. No shortage there then.

Rightmove, the online estate agent, reported that the availability of two-bed homes is at its highest since 2007 - apparently no shortage there either - with prices practically static. They suggest that the changing tax regime for buy-to-let investors might be the cause and higher stamp duty has dampened the market creating a window of opportunity "opening wider for first-time buyers" as it "starts to close" for buy-to-let investors.

The planning system is there to preserve standards protect our environment and ensure safety; it is not merely a conveyor belt for developers' building permissions and profits.

Speculation

Now there is talk of speculation as hedge funds have begun shorting shares on London's luxury housing market. Berkeley, which specialises in upmarket homes in the south-east and London has been targeted but there is also interest in mid-market housebuilders, and share prices of the UK's biggest real estate investment trusts fell. The FT said it "reflects fears that a wave of capital that has flowed into real estate in recent years may retreat" while The Times reported that "some wealthy foreign property buyers are leaving the market and [there is] speculation that prices are heading for a fall," a warning repeated on March 3 in the FT when they reported UBS's view that London property is overvalued.

The "crisis" is not one of supply

We reported in the last Newsforum the contention of Dr Andrew Lilico, of the Institute of Economic Affairs that the 'housing crisis' is not due to a shortage of dwellings, but to prices being unaffordable. Data on household and dwelling numbers show that far from being a shortage, there were, until recently, slightly more houses than households overall.

Gordon Gemmill, Emeritus Professor of Finance, University of Warwick, restated that case in a letter to the FT (December 14, 2015): "The 'crisis' is not one of supply. In each year from 1981 to 2008 the rate of growth of the housing stock in the UK was higher than the rate of growth of the population. There was actually a fall in the average size of household from 2.65 to 2.29 persons over the period to 2008. It is only since 2008 that population has grown

faster than the stock of dwellings, resulting in a small rise in persons per household to 2.30 by 2014." "House prices are being driven by speculative demand that is largely unrelated to extra population. The reason is that interest rates are so low that very large mortgages can be financed."

He too refutes the view that building more houses will reduce prices: "...research shows that the impact of extra building on house prices would be very small." "Building an extra 100,000 houses a year would make hardly any difference to the upward trajectory of prices." And indeed on March 4 The Times reported that the "Cost of a house keeps rising despite an increase in supply."

Developers sitting on planning approvals

Britain's biggest housebuilders are sitting on planning approvals for some 475,647 homes which they are not building, according to a Local Government Association (LGA) study (January 2016). There are already 270,000 London plots with planning permission, enough to solve any perceived "shortage" of housing for the next six years. Why are they not being built? Because, as Thomas Aubrey, senior adviser at the Policy Network think-tank points out: "The government must also address the dysfunctional land market, as there remains every incentive for landowners to withhold land from the market once permission is granted, given it will increase in value as long as demand for housing rises."

Developers also hold landbanks of a further 600,000 plots for new homes. But the Stirling Ackroyd London New Homes Monitor (January 2016) shows the total number of planning applications to build new homes in London in 2015 was only 33,120, well short of the 42,000 yearly figure supposed to be needed. If the developers are not submitting applications for the plots they hold, planning officers can hardly be blamed for not granting approval.

Yet all of them - the Government, the Federation of Master Builders, the Home Builders Federation, Stirling Ackroyd - in the face of all the evidence to the contrary, continue to trot out the tired mantra that the "slow processing of planning applications" "remains the primary obstacle holding back the capital's housing aspirations." with "thousands of new homes 'stuck' awaiting final approval"

Housing market (cont)

Shortage of skills

But while still complaining about the planning system the development lobby has now added a new complaint to account for the lack of new houses: that a construction skills shortage is the "key constraint" to housebuilding; But how is that the fault of the Planning System?

Councils fight back

With builders finding excuses not to construct the homes they have planning permissions for, Councils are seeking to fight back against accusations that delays in planning are the key constraint to building enough homes. The LGA has called for local authorities to be handed powers to force developers to build homes more quickly, such as charging full council tax on unbuilt developments once the original planning permission expires.

Kensington and Chelsea and Islington councils have also taken steps to address the buy to leave problem. Using 2011 Census data and council tax returns Kensington and Chelsea has at least established the size of the problem: that 12 per cent of the borough's total housing stock is empty homes, although some of these may be second homes. Islington has adopted a Supplementary Planning Document requiring all new homes built within its boundaries to be regularly occupied in an attempt to prevent buy to leave.

Lack of proper analysis

Two thirds of planning applications in London were approved last year which seems a reasonable number. There may be any number of good reasons for the third of applications that were refused, or are stuck in the pipeline - underresourcing of Planning Departments being a major factor - but there is no attempt at any proper analysis of what these might be. The planning system is there to preserve standards, protect our environment and ensure safety; it is not merely a conveyor belt for developers' building permissions and profits. ■

New Ideas For Housing In London

Personal views of an international competition

Diane Burridge finds some disturbing ideas and a continuing push for relaxing planning rules

By 2050, London is expected to be western Europe's first megacity - with a population of over 12 million. But even now there is a housing crisis, with 61% of new housing units being bought for investment purposes, and 95% of new build being flats. And let us not even start on the cost of housing.

An international competition to offer solutions to housing needs, organised by New London Architecture and the Mayor, drew over 220 submissions, of which 100 were shortlisted. Many of these ideas were recently on display at the Building Centre in Store Street. Submissions were arranged under the themes: Infilling; Densification; Infrastructure; Construction; Planning and Finance; and Delivery.

Depressingly (to me), the focus was on flats, flats and more flats, with not enough attention given to play areas, green and open spaces and meeting family needs. Who would want to start a family in London nowadays?

Suggestions included creating over 630,000 new homes by building units (flats) above, for example: schools and hospitals; transport interchanges; and existing retail surface car-parks. Owners of such sites could sell the air rights and share any profits.

Width and height could also be added to existing social housing, using pre-approved modular units made off-site. And the 730,000 semi-detached and detached houses in London could have in-fill between them or the owners could build in their gardens. Home-owners could be given more 'rights' to demolish and rebuild their homes to enable this densification. Other suggestions included: '*relaxing*' planning rules on density; giving new design '*freedoms*' to builders; allowing more '*fluid*' housing schemes. (My italics.)

More imaginatively, London's road corridors could be reinvented into urban boulevards, with 6-8 storey buildings catering for mixed use. One brave suggestion would be to build corridors of houses in the centre of very wide roads. Fine, if you have access to an oxygen tank!

Additionally, London's 50 linear miles of rivers and canals, and its 150 hectares of 'developable' waterspace (docks, marinas and basins) could accommodate 7,500 affordable floating homes (two-bed costing £150,000 at current price levels). More bridges should be built in east London to connect both sides and open up currently marooned land for development. Of London's 34 bridges, only one is east of Tower Bridge. Fittingly, the Mayor in December 2015, unveiled TfL's plans

to build 13 new crossings by 2030. Sir Terry Farrell has estimated that there is potential for 47,000 homes within one and a quarter miles of a suggested Thamesmead/Barking bridge.

To build quickly and more cheaply, the use of pre-fabricated modular and stackable homes, with standardised components, were popular suggestions. Urban Space Management suggested 'up-cycled' shipping containers based on steel pillars; others suggested micro-homes, one step up from student accommodation.

One winning idea is to 'shift the focus' of planning rules which relate to transport accessibility (the PTAL ratings*) to the promotion of 'active' transport - cycling and walking. In other words, greater housing densities should be allowed further away from public transport - fine, as long as you are fit to cycle or walk, and routes are safe and accessible, and it is not raining too much!

And, predictably, another winning submission was to build on the Green Belt. My immediate thoughts were how developers would welcome this, when land is so much more valuable in these areas, once planning permission is granted to build. And then - why not build on park land, as is being broached in some areas of London? We often forget what struggles went into having our lovely and world-renowned parks in London. I digress.....

Other ideas included: car-free developments (over 93% of new developments in Hackney have been car-free); subterranean housing; housing on bridges and 3D 'parks' in high rise.

And so the push for relaxing planning rules continues, with little mention of rights to parks and accessible public transport, or what families actually want. Surely London's future prosperity will depend upon having mixed and affordable housing, green and accessible open spaces and an accessible public transport network.

Do we really want London to become a megacity, like so many sprawling and crowded large cities around the world? Isn't a national strategy now needed on population growth and the meeting of housing needs? These international ideas hopefully will aid such debates in the future.

<http://www.newlondonarchitecture.org/news/2015/august-2015/new-ideas-for-housing-working-group> ■

*PTAL is an acronym for Public Transport Accessibility Level. The PTAL value combines information about how close public transport services are to a site and how frequent these services are.

New initiatives in build-to-rent homes market

Will this be better news for generation rent?

Helen Marcus reports

Institutional investors are increasingly becoming involved in the private rental housing market in response to a structural shift towards renting among young people in Britain, and the new constraints on the "buy-to-let" market.

Researchers at Knight Frank said £15bn had been invested in the sector, with a further £50bn planned by 2020. The sector is currently dominated by individual, part-time landlords that own one property or a handful. In contrast, build-to-let consists of large blocks of flats that are purpose-built and professionally run usually by pension funds and insurance companies.

The market is still small: in a nation of 26.7m households, there are 14,276 build-to-let units completed, under construction or planned in London and another 7,112 in the rest of the UK.

But the Autumn Statement with news that corporate landlords would be exempted from a new 3 per cent stamp duty charge levied on homes bought for buy-to-let investments may encourage more into the market.

Legal & General Capital (LGC) has teamed up with Dutch pension fund manager, PGGM to invest £600m in providing over 3,000 homes. PGGM has been in Built to Rent housing for over 40 years with strategic partnerships in the Netherlands and the US.

The partnership is planning the acquisition of numerous sites situated in well-connected urban locations where there is strong demand.

Paul Stanworth, managing director of LGC said: "The UK rental market, compared to the US and Europe, is dysfunctional, with ever increasing rents and increasingly poor accommodation."

Property companies are also moving into the sector. Grainger is seeking to transform itself into a corporate landlord. Other start-ups include Essential Living and Fizzy Living, an offshoot of a housing association. Asset manager M&G launched its UK Residential Property Fund in partnership with housebuilder Crest Nicholson in 2013 and has £300m of assets under management. Of its 13 investors, eight are local authority pension funds.

Hermes launched its Vista fund in the sector this year, which has a £200m pipeline and aims to expand by between £250m and £400m a year.

If such large-scale rental developments take off, they will partly replace the traditional UK tenancy experience - one of amateur landlords, converted Victorian flats and often poor management - with a more professional management and services such as gyms, storage and WiFi, already familiar to tenants in the US or Germany. ■

Integrity of 'viability' statements called into question

Recent events at Bishopsgate Goodsyards are an example of doubts about the integrity of 'viability' statements. In their viability assessment the developers claimed that they would be justified in providing no affordable housing, but offered 10% out of "goodwill".

Tower Hamlets and Hackney Councils, the planning authorities, commissioned BNP Paribas to carry out an independent viability assessment which contradicted the developer's claims. BNPP found many discrepancies and identified 'distortion', 'double-counting' and a 'lack of transparency' throughout the developer's assessment. The developers exaggerated their costs and downplayed profits. BNPP found that more than 30% on site affordable housing with a further £12 million towards off-site provision

would be viable and that the developers could offer far more in S106 contributions than they currently are.

When it became clear that Tower Hamlets and Hackney Councils were recommending refusal, the Goodsyards plans were called in by the Mayor at the request of the developers, on the basis that the two local authorities were taking too long to reach a decision. The public hearing is being held this month.

Will the Mayor take all this into account or will he further undermine local democratic accountability by overriding the decisions of the borough Councils?

(Forum members may recall that viability was the subject of the London Forum Open meeting last October.) ■

'Viability' versus affordable homes

There is growing concern that Viability assessments are being abused to the detriment of local communities. In some cases 'confidential' viability assessments are used to overestimate costs and avoid providing affordable housing. Such activity undermines the plan-led system by effectively determining the outcome of viability assessments before they are even seen by borough planners. Planning authorities are now taking steps to redress the problem.

The London Borough Viability Group

The London Borough Viability Group was formed in 2014 to consider best practice in the assessment of 'viability' in response to the increasing emphasis on it in the planning process. The group draws together planning, housing and surveying officers from councils across London. It has drawn up a draft London Borough Viability Protocol and is currently inviting comments as part of a consultation (until Sunday 20 March 2016).

It does not alter existing policies, but provides additional advice on the information requirements and approaches that local authorities intend to apply when assessing viability to promote consistency across London and public confidence in the process.

The protocol considers key issues such as procedure, transparency, development values and costs, developer profit, land value and the use of viability review mechanisms.

The London Assembly Planning Committee

is also proposing action. Its chair, Nicky Gavron, has written to the Mayor to urge him to bring forward Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) on viability assessments in London: "We believe that there is a strong case to be made for a new approach to viability, in particular one which considers benefits beyond profit for the developer and landowner."

Action at borough level

Meanwhile at borough level the Royal Borough of Greenwich has already taken steps with a new policy which will force developers to publish their viability assessments. Proposals falling short of the borough's 35% requirement of affordable housing will not be able to hide behind the "commercial sensitivity" excuse. ■

London Forum Social Media Event

The Gallery Tuesday 26th January 2016

Michael Bach (Chairman, LF Planning and Transport Committee) with guest speakers **John Knights** the Sheila McKechnie Foundation and **Barbara Weiss** of the Skyline Campaign; **Derek Chandler** and **Carol Rahn** (Battersea Society) report

John Knights worked for four years in the Voluntary Sector then eleven years in Government Departments - Home Office, Education and Cabinet Office before joining the Sheila McKechnie Foundation as head of Operations, which works to develop campaigning skills and promotes the rights of campaigners.

He began by considering the possible Social Media routes - e-mail, website and social media platforms - but warned that the last can lead to confusion.

A poll showed 50% response from a website against 20% for facebook and 15% for Twitter. Always remember that a reader will not want to spend a lot of time reading a message, even on a website, so keep it short:

- Use short sentences to help understanding.
- Always draft the message and if necessary redraft to make it effective.
- Set out in order the Problem, the Solution, the Urgency then a simple Ask.

38 Degrees: can be useful for a local campaign. Government petitions now go to Parliament: 10,000 signatures will get a response, 100,000 will get a debate (usually in Westminster Hall where attendance is typically lower than in the Chamber. Petitions get publicity but often do not change minds. However they can demonstrate the strength of support for the petition.

Society websites.

The Pinner Association is a good example: built on simple software with an attractive front page, and eye-catching main image and "Welcome" text. It is good to put a list of Events on the front page.

Chelsea Society website includes Instagram images, Twitter feed, and events they are helping to promote for other organisations. Instagram can include other people's work; it makes your life easier and gives them a real boost. It is useful to compare your stats with relevant others.

Social Media platforms

These provide the possibility of greater reach to potential supporters that watch for specific topics but you need to act frequently, and at times when your targets will respond: evenings and weekends are

Consider your intentions. Who do you want to reach, what do you want them to do for you, what resources can you offer for their action for you?

usually the best. Consider your intentions: who do you want to reach? what do you want them to do for you? what resources can you offer for their action for you? Remember people participate in social media to present a particular image of themselves.

To attract users of mobile devices use something "visual" or eye-catching. Measure and check the responses and reactions. Aim to sign up "followers". Keep messages short and simple and use ideas likely to engage those that use Social Media. A "meme" can be very effective.

Facebook is the biggest Social Medium in the UK and still growing: 31.5m UK users. A very competitive scene but worth trying to establish a presence because of the large and varied audience. Use photos and videos; the best techniques are a brief story/ introduction with picture or video to give the story. "Likes" can range from 1000 to 10,000. It is possible to "post" questions and "follow" a story as it develops through "postings". Consider using advertising: it is possible to pay for an advertisement on the right hand side of the display. The cost is £300 but can be worth it to attract attention.

Twitter is smaller than facebook, 10m to 15m in UK. Frequent participation is needed to maintain interest. Responses are quick but messages are brief, so easily forgotten if not acted upon at once. It gets to many major influencers and is much used by journalists to catch latest events and trends. Postings are short so the message must be brief and specific, but attractive to potential readers. Use Visual data but keep it clear and simple: photos,

quotes, also stats overlays on images or quotes, as these do not always count against the character limit and can be eye-catching. Use a #(hashtag) to group people or messages. Linked In is also good for reaching groups

YouTube has 1bn subscribers; 1/3 use the Internet. Videos are the most effective - great for reaching the younger audience. 51% of users are under 34 (2013 figure). Good for providing information for a campaign. Use subtitles and a short, strong introduction, use real people - celebrities if you can get them. There are useful free websites.

Expectations

John Knights said his organisation expects about 25% of recipients to open email and 10% to go to a website (they use email mostly to drive traffic to the website). Other organisations get much higher view rates.

The second speaker was Barbara Weiss of the Skyline Campaign who described how the campaign - against 200 proposed tall buildings planned for London - developed, and the current Campaign against the Paddington Pole (catchy names are very helpful)

The priority was a manifesto and a large number of prestigious signatories followed by an awareness-raising campaign with a series of articles in the Journal of Architecture and newspapers to put pressure on decision-makers such as the Mayor.

Having raised the level of interest this had to be maintained. Communications/ PR, Press contacts, Website, Logo, Radio, Personal contact, Attending Hustings, Twitter, Linked-in, and facebook. She too emphasised that images are important. The advice was to AVOID CAPITAL LETTERS.

Peter Eversden thanked the speakers. He demonstrated how he had used Twitter to raise issues with Councils and service providers. Retweeting is useful for adding comment and alerting other groups by including their @ identity, and *bitly.com* can be used to shorten URLs for tweets. London Forum's web site updates page shows examples. Council e-petitions should be used also. ■

What is the London Land Commission up to?

by Helen Marcus

When the London Land Commission was set up last year (see Newsforum 70 Summer 2015) we were told, specifically, that its key role would be to seek to identify commercial and industrial public sector brownfield land that is no longer needed in London and could be redeveloped, and create a register of this land.

Its Terms of Reference spelled this out in the Minutes of 13 July 2015: *"That the defined priority areas, as outlined in the work programme, namely: (i) Developing a robust brownfield register for publically owned land; (ii) Establishing a priority strategy for public land release (around transport nodes and within Housing Zones and Opportunity Areas); (iii) Exploring opportunities for collaboration and changes to improve procurement activities to accelerate new housing supply; and (iv) Developing a capital investment programme to incentivise land release, match funded by GLA"*

These aims are repeated unaltered in every subsequent paper. The minutes of 19 January 2016 emphasize again:

The Commission received a report outlining the progress made in establishing

a London Land Commission register as a single source of data to identify publically owned brownfield land.

In January a map showing the "first release of the London Land Commission Register sites that have been identified" was available to view on the website.

It is a shock therefore, and of great concern, to find that this map lists parks and MOL in a quite random and inexplicable way, including Golf courses and allotments. It also appears to contain errors.

Almost every open space in London appears to have been identified as containing "developable land" including Holland Park, Hampstead Heath, Victoria Park, Valentine's Park and Hainault Forest, Redbridge, and Wimbledon Common. It raises several deeply concerning questions:

- Savills have been involved with this project from the beginning. Why?
- Whole sections of the minutes of January 2016 are withheld from public scrutiny with the message: "This paper is reserved from publication as it is considered that it may be exempt from disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act." Why?
- Why are parks and open spaces in any such list at all?

A press release on a website called

<http://www.publicnow.com/> states that: "The Mayor has released all of his *developable land*, [my italic] which is:

- 414 hectares of land
- 50,000 new homes to house 125,000 Londoners
- 7 million sq mtrs of new workspace to create 60,000 new jobs
- 14 schools for 9,000 students
- 100,000 construction jobs
- 11 new green parks covering 44 hectares"

Again, why do "green parks" appear on a list of "developable land"?

The press release referred to above also states, ominously, that the register has also been "praised by developers in London who have already begun using it and found it a useful tool to identify the scale of public land available and to plan ahead in order to maximise its use for housing."

In view of the onslaught on the planning system currently underway, and open spaces under increasing threat (see Spotlight, page 10) such unexplained activity and the involvement in it of the commercial sector can only arouse suspicion of some untoward ulterior motive.

<https://maps.london.gov.uk/webmaps/LLC/> ■

City of London Corporation Open Spaces Bill 2015-16

The City of London Corporation owns open spaces all over London amounting to almost 11,000 acres. They attract an estimated 23 million visits every year. Most are run as registered charities and are largely governed under special Acts of Parliament, many of which date back to the 1870s. These include for instance, the Hampstead Heath Act 1871, the Corporation of London (Open Spaces) Act 1878 and the Epping Forest Acts 1878 and 1880. Further powers were obtained from Parliament in the 1930s and 1970s.

Although the legislation has generally stood the test of time in recent years the City feels that there are certain areas where the Corporation's legal powers need to be clarified and brought up to date. They are therefore promoting a private Bill with the aim of:

- Clarifying the general management powers available to the City Corporation in the Open Spaces.

- Providing greater flexibility to generate revenue for the benefit of the Open Spaces, in a way that does not undermine their use for public recreation and enjoyment.
- Providing more efficient and effective tools to deal with crime, anti-social behaviour and nuisance in the Open Spaces.

While the first and third aims are generally welcomed the second one, to generate revenue, may be of concern, coming as it does at a time when parks generally are under enormous pressure to stage events to raise money.

The Heath & Hampstead Society and the Open Spaces Society have had discussions with the City and say they achieved some necessary changes.

The H&HS were at first concerned that ostensible protections in the Bill for the promotion of Heath "events" such as

entertainments as well as conferences, exhibitions and filming, were "vague and essentially subjective criteria" and were "an unacceptable qualification upon section 12 of the 1871 Hampstead Heath Act". They urged the City to re-draft clause 7 of the Bill so that events are restricted to the existing fringes of the Heath, the fairgrounds and car parks, where such events have traditionally been staged.

The Bill was presented on 21 January 2016 and had its first reading on 22 January 2016. The Second Reading took place unopposed on 2 February 2016. The next stage will be a bill committee. Formal consultation with interested parties on the final proposals will be part of the Parliamentary process.

More information can be found on the Parliamentary web page and also the City of London website. ■

National Policy for the Built Environment

House of Lords Select Committee - Building better places

The Select Committee was appointed by the House in June 2015 “to consider the development and implementation of a National Policy for the Built Environment, and to make recommendations,” focusing on England. They have looked at the impact of national policy upon local authorities and other sub-national agencies and organisations that play a part in developing and maintaining the built environment.

They make it clear that they were not established to scrutinise the Housing and Planning Bill although provisions in it could potentially have an impact upon some of the topics they considered. But they received evidence relevant to the ongoing discussions of the Bill’s provisions, and have addressed much that is relevant to it.

Extracts from their findings

“It is widely acknowledged that the quality of life, prosperity, health and wellbeing of an individual is heavily influenced by the ‘place’ in which they live or work. Policy towards the built environment in England is not the sole preserve of any one Government department.

“There is an urgent need to co-ordinate and reconcile policy across numerous different areas and priorities. Recently, however, one priority has become dominant in debates concerning built environment policy. Increasing the overall supply of housing, and the speed at which housing is delivered, is a central part of the Government’s policy agenda.

“The private sector, throughout the post-war period, has very rarely achieved the delivery of 200,000 homes a year. We do not believe the Government can deliver the change required for housing supply without taking measures to allow local authorities and housing associations each to play their full part in delivering new homes.”

They say that Government has so far failed to address the gap between planning permissions granted and new homes built and recommend measures intended to address this and other barriers to increasing the number of housing completions.

“More fundamentally, however, we are concerned that the overall emphasis on speed and quantity of housing supply

appears to threaten place-making itself, along with sustainable planning for the long-term and the delivery of high quality and design standards. The Government is pursuing a deregulatory agenda as seen, for example, in the introduction of more flexible arrangements for office to residential conversions and the strong policy emphasis placed on the financial viability of new developments.

“These changes, however, [are] progressively diluting the capacity of local authorities to scrutinise new developments, to safeguard quality and sustainability and to ensure that proposals contribute to an overall and beneficial sense of place. Speed need not come at the expense of quality, and a short-sighted approach runs the risk of repeating the mistakes of the past.”

Recommendations

“We believe it is important that the Government sets high standards for the built environment... This should begin with much better coordination of policy across the various Government departments that have an impact upon the built environment.

“We recommend the appointment of a Chief Built Environment Adviser, appointed to integrate policy across central Government departments, to act as a champion for higher standards and to promote good practice.

“Across England, ... local authority planning departments have been diminished by funding cuts, leading to a loss in capacity and skills. We believe that local authorities need to play a key role in establishing an ambitious ‘vision’ for their area... We would like to see the planning profession regain the status and prestige it deserves.”

They recommend measures intended to address funding, skills and capacity problems and promote greater joint working between departments; and a number of strategies for improvement to the public realm. ■

The full report can be found at:

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201516/ldselect/ldbuilt/100/100.pdf>

A new Mayor for London

A new Mayor and Greater London Assembly will be elected on 5th May.

Much of the business of the Greater London Authority is in the process of closing down, and will not restart in earnest until the summer.

Members of the London Forum Committee are putting questions to the candidates on such important matters as their policy on tall buildings. We are holding a Hustings on 22nd March.

Whoever becomes Mayor, the Forum will have to build contacts and relationships with him or her, and with the new personnel at City Hall.

There will have to be a new London Plan, and the Forum will be much engaged in the long process of drafting and approving it. There are busy times ahead. ■

“The Government is pursuing a deregulatory agenda...”

“These changes, however, [are] progressively diluting the capacity of local authorities to scrutinise new developments, to safeguard quality and sustainability and to ensure that proposals contribute to an overall and beneficial sense of place. Speed need not come at the expense of quality”

House of Lords Select Committee Report

Spotlight on the Open Spaces Society

The Open Spaces Society, Britain's oldest national conservation body, celebrated its 150th anniversary in 2015,

by **Kate Ashbrook**

Throughout its history the Open Society has adopted a mix of methods to champion its cause: direct action, drafting legislation, lobbying and publicity and, nowadays, social media.

It was formed as the Commons Preservation Society in 1865, initially to fight for London's commons which in the mid-nineteenth century were threatened with building development and exploitation for minerals. Its early victories included Hampstead Heath, Wimbledon Common and Epping Forest - but it soon spread its wings far beyond London, to encompass the whole of England and Wales. It was influential in parliament, winning new laws to protect commons, and had many successes in the courts as it engaged top lawyers to fight its cause. It even resorted to direct action, hiring a band of navvies to pull down unlawful fences on Berkhamsted Common, Hertfordshire, in the middle of the night on 6 March 1866.

The public value of Commons

Commons are a special type of privately-owned land over which others have rights such as grazing, collecting wood and bracken and digging peat. Once much of the land was common but following the inclosure movement only a fraction survives. Commons are of immense public value for their natural beauty, wildlife and archaeology and for public enjoyment. Thanks to the Society's efforts they have their own laws and protection.

Early campaigns

The Manchester Corporation Waterworks Act 1879 allowed the construction of a reservoir at Thirlmere in the Lake District. The Society won compensating clauses giving the public a right of access to the adjoining common land - these set an invaluable precedent for future bills, securing access to many other commons when developments were authorised.

In 1895 the Society's early activists, Robert Hunter and Octavia Hill, went on to form the National Trust as a landholding body - so there would be no National Trust were it not for the Open Spaces Society. Local committees of the Society raised funds to buy land and pass it to the National Trust, thereby rescuing it for the

The Society's work is needed now more than ever. With paths and open spaces under increasing threat the Society campaigns for better laws to protect them.

nation. Hindhead Common, Surrey; Pentire Head, Cornwall and Mow Cop, Staffordshire, are examples of this.

The Society extends its interest

At the end of the nineteenth century the Society extended its interest to public paths and won laws ensuring that routes were mapped and recorded and that there was a process to claim them - for paths are public highways in law and have the same protection as roads. In 1899 the Society merged with the National Footpaths Society to form the Commons and Footpaths Preservation Society. Local groups were created to defend the paths.

New directions

Amid all this immense technical work, the Society was oblivious to the growing popularity of hiking among people who wanted to escape into the countryside and not become entangled in the law. Thus the Ramblers' Association, formed in 1935, eclipsed the legalistic and cautious Commons Society, although the latter remained the principal body concerned with the technical essentials. The Kinder Scout mass trespass of 1932 (which the Society and Ramblers did not support) was part of the growing movement for free access to the hills. Rallies throughout the 1930s publicised the outrageous way in which walkers were excluded.

By the mid twentieth century, the Society was pressing the government to designate national parks, provide rights of access to open country, and introduce official maps of public paths. These aims were partially realised in the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949.

The Society went on to advocate the recording of commons, which was at last achieved in the 1965 Commons Registration Act, although the period for registration was an inadequate three years. Consequently, many errors were made which are still being corrected.

Setting up the Common Land Forum

In the early 1980s the Society initiated and served on the Common Land Forum, a gathering of all the interests in commons which thrashed out agreed proposals for legislation, to give the public the right to walk on all commons and provide for their management. Eventually, the right to walk on commons and some open country in England and Wales was won in the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.

1965 Commons Registration Act

The Commons Registration Act 1965 defined village greens as land on which local people have enjoyed informal recreation without challenge or permission for 20 years. Once the land is registered that use is enshrined as a legal right and the green is protected from development.

A major blow was the draconian Growth and Infrastructure Act 2013 which stopped people from applying to register greens in England where the land is threatened with development. However in 2015 the Society managed to prevent the Welsh Government from copying Westminster, so Welsh green spaces have more protection than English ones.

The Society's work is needed now more than ever. With paths and open spaces under increasing threat the Society campaigns for better laws to protect them and it lobbies for the government and local authorities to invest in them while providing support and advice for its members' battles. At this time of austerity the Society believes it is a false economy to cut the budgets for open spaces and paths, which are vital to people's health and happiness.

Defending commons worldwide

Common land, in a strictly legal sense, exists only in England and Wales, but common resources are present all over the planet—they may be land, water, air,



The Open Spaces Society

Contact: Kate Ashbrook
email: hq@oss.org.uk
website: www.oss.org.uk

Kate Ashbrook



The windmill on Wimbledon Common

knowledge, gene pools or the internet. Today the Society is part of a growing campaign to defend global commons and to help communities worldwide to protect and nurture their common resources.

Members' vital role

In Britain the Society's dream is of a land where everyone has open space close to their home, every public path is recorded and protected, and commons are well-managed and in good heart. The Society relies on the generosity of its members and supporters to enable it to continue the crusade it started 150 years ago.

Books to mark the anniversary

The Society has published two books to mark its anniversary: *Saving Open Spaces and Common Land* (£5 each or £8 for two). A third, *Village Greens*, is to be published in spring 2016. ■



Above: Hampstead Heath
 Below: Ambresbury Banks, the remains of an Iron Age hill fort in Epping Forest,



George Shaw Lefevre, MP
 (Later Lord Eversley)



Octavia Hill



Sir Robert Hunter

Age: 150, born as the Commons Preservation Society, later becoming the Commons, Open Spaces and Footpaths Preservation Society and finally the Open Spaces Society.

Circumstances of Birth: The end of the inclosure movement and the start of the era when commons and open spaces were being excavated for minerals and developed for industry and housing. The Victorian population was becoming more mobile and venturing further into the outdoors for recreation. George Shaw Lefevre, MP for Reading and minister in Gladstone's government(s), saw that action was needed to protect London's threatened open spaces.

Biggest Successes: Saved London's green spaces - Hampstead Heath, Wimbledon Common, Epping Forest; won laws to enable the public to claim public paths (1932); to secure the recording of them (1949), to require the registration of all commons (1965), greater freedom to roam (2000) and to improve the protection of commons from unlawful works (2006). Stopped the Welsh government from preventing the registration of village greens where development is threatened (2015).

Biggest Disappointments/Frustrations: Local authorities still have no duty to enforce against unlawful works on commons. The Growth and Infrastructure Act 2013 banned applications to register land as village green where development is threatened. The government has failed to spell out in the National Planning Policy Framework how we can win Local Green Space. The definitive maps of public paths are to be closed in 2026 to claims based on historical evidence. The government is obsessed with the economy and development to the detriment of open spaces.

Present Preoccupations: saving green spaces from development, persuading Westminster and Welsh governments fully to implement laws for registration of lost commons, claiming public paths for definitive map closure in 2026.

Working Details: membership c2,000 including organisations and local councils who benefit from the Society's support and advice; registered charity and limited company, based Henley-on-Thames. Annual subscription: £33 individual, £45 local group. Five staff and 33 local correspondents, publishes tri-annual Open Space magazine, occasional papers, Facebook and twitter.

Special Characteristics: small, nimble and unbureaucratic with rapid response, prepared to be outspoken and to go where others fear to tread.

Last Word: If we allow our commons, green spaces and paths to be sacrificed to short-term gain, we shoot ourselves, and future generations, in the feet. ■

Increasing and conflicting demands for London's streets?

Diane Burridge reports on a conference and an exhibition

Streets (public roads) make up more than 80% of London's public space and demand for this space continues to increase. By 2041 there are predicted to be 32 million separate trips each day on London's streets compared with 26 million today.

How can London's streets cater for the increasing, and often conflicting, demands of pedestrians, cyclists, buses, and private and commercial vehicles? To try to find some answers, in January 2016, Urban Design London held a conference titled: Challenging Practice – Street Design; and in February 2016, Transport for London with New London Architecture organised an exhibition at the Building Centre titled: Streets Ahead - the Future of London's Roads.

Varying solutions

Views on what to do vary greatly - from the Institute of Economic Affairs ('Seeing Red' report, 2015) which calls for most traffic controls to be taken away, to the Guide Dogs Society which wants more controls ('Inclusive Streets' report, 2010).

Whatever the solution, it is already apparent that there is not enough space to cater for today's requirements, let alone when London's population reaches 10 million people - as forecast by 2040. Cycling, car driving, bus usage and the number of pedestrians are all forecast to increase greatly.

Some facts and figures

From 2000 to 2012, the number of daily journeys made by bicycle in Greater London doubled to 580,000, and cyclists now comprise 25% of vehicular traffic in the morning peak period. Transport for London is aiming to double the number of daily cycling journeys to 1.5 million. (The Mayor's Vision for Cycling)

The use of cars for personal needs will also increase. Easy access to Uber, car clubs, long-term hiring arrangements, driverless cars and electric car subsidies will make personal driving more attractive and cheaper. Surface Intelligence Transport Systems (SITS), such as Smart Traffic Signals, real time destination apps and dynamic routing, will make journey times more reliable.

As well as a future of more cars and more cyclists, there will be more buses. Martin Rose, Ian Macbeth and David Field of Transport for London, at the Urban Design

How can London's streets cater for the increasing, and often conflicting, demands of pedestrians, cyclists, buses, and private and commercial vehicles?

London conference, stated that there has been a 65% growth in the use of buses since 2000, and 6.5 million passenger trips are now made each day (supported by 700 bus routes, 19,000 bus stops and 24,000 bus drivers).

Buses mainly used for leisure,

The only public transport system covering all of London, buses are mainly used for leisure, shopping and other personal reasons (57%), with another 17% of passengers using buses to commute. The report, '20 Town Centres' (2013) found that buses were the main movers of people into town centres and these people spent per week more than other shoppers.

To ease the pressure of bus usage on road space and traffic flows, Bus Priority Tools such as contra-flows, bus gates, bus-only roads, selected vehicle detection designs (SVD), and bus lanes (less than 5% of the total length of the network) are being increasingly used. This is in response to Transport for London forecasts that the demand for buses will increase by 7% by 2022. Yet the supply of buses is planned to increase by only 5%, and the Government, which provides 20% of the cost of the service (the other 80% coming from fares), is planning to phase out this subsidy. What will happen then?

Is shared space the answer?

Is one solution to all these demands for road space simply to share it? Shared space is defined by the Department of Transport (2011) as: 'The ability and willingness of pedestrians, facilitated by the sympathetic behaviour of motorists and others, to move freely around the street and use parts of it that, in a more conventional layout, would be considered largely dedicated to vehicular use.'

The farce of Exhibition Road, where cars

continue to speed down the road which was supposed to have been 'shared', makes many worry about such designs. The Holmes Report (Accidents by Design, 2015) called for an 'immediate moratorium on shared space schemes'. This report was based on responses from 852 people who replied to an on-line survey on the matter. John Dales, the Director of Urban Movement, in defence of sharing space, admitted, at the Urban Design London conference, that there is a paucity of evidence to counterbalance Holmes's views. The outcomes for any proposed scheme need to be the first consideration and then the design details should be drawn up.

Heavy goods and delivery vehicles

In the meantime, efforts are being made to reduce commercial and other construction vehicles on London's roads. These include Heavy Goods Vehicles (HGVs), unquestionably the 'kings of the road', due to their sheer bulk. Maxim Lyne, of the London Borough of Camden, outlined the borough's Construction Management Plan, and Camden's work with Islington to develop a Freight Consolidation Service which has resulted in a 46% reduction in construction delivery movements across the two boroughs.

The London Construction Consolidation Centre in Silvertown offers 135,000 square feet of secure storage, and is currently being used for four major developments - at Barts Hospital, University College London, Finsbury Circus, and Bloomberg. This centre aligns delivery vehicles' arrival times with key resources, such as cranes, hoists and forklifts. As Stephen Robbins, the Manager, advised the Urban Design London audience, the London Plan and local plans should be encouraging more such centres to reduce the number of construction vehicles on the roads, and for greater efficiency at building sites.

Plans are now being developed to use drones to deliver small packages along corridors connecting delivery destinations. These have the potential to reduce the need for commercial vehicles.

Today, 25% of all trips are made entirely by foot (compared with one-third of trips made by private car), and the Department for Transport prioritises pedestrians (Manual for Streets, 2008). For this to happen in practice, significant behavioural

London's streets (cont)

changes are required. Active Transport Strategies are being developed and, by 2025, the number of walking journeys is expected to increase by one-third.

All these increasing demands for road space by cyclists, pedestrians, buses and car drivers in the coming years will require compromises and co-operative agreements. With the legal requirement to reduce pollution levels, and for London to be a liveable city, conflicting demands for road usage will have to be resolved. Roads are essential for movement but they are also places where social interaction occurs, contributing to a city's vitality.

For further information:

Inclusive Streets: Design Principles for Blind and Partially Sighted People (Guide Dogs, 2010) Available free from Guide Dogs

Manual for Streets: (Department for Transport, 2007): Available on the DfT website and *Manual for Streets 2*: (The Chartered Institution of Highways and Transportation, 2010).

Safe Streets for London Plan (TfL, June 2013) which aims to cut road deaths by 40% by 2020, via a range of measures, including redesigning "critical" major junctions and streets. ■

Transport plans put heritage and environment at risk

Heathrow third runway, Crossrail, HS2

Crossrail plan puts historic buildings on demolition list

The Victorian Society has raised concern about Crossrail 2 plans which would see several historic buildings across London demolished. They include a late 19th century hotel/apartment building at 193-207 Victoria Street, and 91-99 Buckingham Palace Road including the Shakespeare pub; a Grade II listed 1909 building by H. Percy Adams on corner of Rathbone Place and Oxford Street including the Black Horse pub; the landmark 1867 Prince of Wales pub; a Grade II listed 1904 former fire station by Charles Hanlet Cooper and a former church now housing a branch of Boots in Wimbledon; the Three Johns pub on White Lion Street, Islington.

Euston would see the loss of an early 19th century terrace including the Grade II listed 64 Eversholt Street and in Dalston a block of handsome Victorian buildings including the locally listed NatWest Bank building of 1891 by Horace Cheston RIBA, will go.

The Society awaits the outcome of the public consultation which closed on 8 January 2016. It hopes that focusing attention on threatened buildings now will mean that Crossrail 2 preserves as many historic buildings as possible. This could be achieved by moving some proposed sites to locations of less architectural significance, or by modifying the sites to exclude certain buildings. Londoners should examine the maps of the proposed sites closely to see how plans will affect the areas they care about. (See more page 16) ■

Opposition to Heathrow third runway

The House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee issued a strong report at the end of last year saying that the government should not support the building of a third runway at Heathrow until a number of environmental conditions can be met. The airport must put in place firm plans to deal with emissions and air quality within legal air pollution limits, and commit to introducing a night flight ban which the committee "strongly" supported, before the government gives final approval for the scheme. Heathrow has been reluctant to accept this.

The Government Aviation Committee, chaired by the prime minister, will discuss capacity in the south-east. There is concern that its members are overwhelmingly supporters of the third runway including Chancellor George Osborne, Business Secretary Sajid Javid and Patrick McLoughlin, Transport Secretary. The government decision has been put on hold for six months because of inadequate air quality and noise safeguards.

Andrew Tyrie, the Conservative chairman of the Treasury select committee has also criticised the analysis used to justify an additional runway in a letter to George Osborne. He said the economic case for expansion was "opaque in a number of important respects", "Nor can it be established whether the benefits are significantly different from the option of not building any new runways". He concluded that it was possible that no new runways were needed at all. He called for the process to be moved from the Department for Transport to the Treasury.

Four Conservative Councils close to Heathrow have threatened to launch a legal challenge to the third runway on environmental grounds if it is given the go ahead,.

Tony Eccles Professor of Strategic Management

Cass Business School, wrote of "the major deficiencies in the Airports runway decision" in a letter to the FT in December. He considered "the commission's judgment on intrusive noise is so lopsided as to need major revision". On crash risk over London he says that the commission "first avoided and then evaded" the issue.

"The air pollution problem might be solvable round Heathrow" but he doubts "that Heathrow's flight paths can be sanitised enough in relation to either urban crash risk or noise intrusion for its expansion ever to become acceptable." ■

Ancient woods to be destroyed for HS2

Nearly 100 ancient woodland sites, some dating back a thousand years and included in the Domesday Book, will fall victim to the first phase of the HS2 plans. HS2 had acknowledged that at least 83 ancient woodland sites would be threatened by the proposed new railway line. The Woodland Trust examination of the HS2 Phase 1 Environmental Statement at the end of 2013, uncovered a further 23 areas along the first phase of the route which they believed could be unmapped ancient woodland. Natural England, the body responsible for the Ancient Woodland Inventory, have confirmed

that 14 of these areas are indeed ancient woodland.

Answering a question in Parliament, Robert Goodwill MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Transport, confirmed that Natural England had added the 14 woods along the HS2 route to the Ancient Woodland Inventory.

The Woodland Trust accused HS2 of "error after error, flawed calculations, and methods that go against Government guidance in its vain attempts to justify loss and damage to ancient woodlands" to make its economic case." ■

London Skyline

The Paddington skyscraper and other towers

As opposition mounts to the skyscrapers being planned for London the 72-storey cylindrical skyscraper in Paddington, dubbed the 'Paddington Pole', designed by Renzo Piano, has been withdrawn following protests. Nigel Barker, the planning and conservation director for London at Historic England, opposed the scheme in a strongly worded letter to the developers and Westminster city council. The scheme was to include over 300 luxury homes, offices, shops, restaurants and a small public garden of which Nigel Barker wrote: "This is not a truly accessible public realm that you can enjoy in passing and is the entrance to the bar and restaurant below, which will want to colonise the space." Mr Barker told The Times "If the planning policy is applied correctly, this scheme shouldn't get through. If policy is overturned here, where in London and England will be safe from a tower?"

Sir Terry Farrell, whose studio is based near to the proposed site, had put forward his firm's own plans for a mid-rise development for it. He described the £1 billion scheme as "piecemeal and opportunistic". The Skyline Campaign also protested against the scale of the development, with a petition against the skyscraper which attracted almost 2,000 supporters. They said the tower would "stick out like a sore thumb" against Paddington's existing low-scale architecture and conservation areas.

The developers say they will put forward a new, lower proposal in the near future, taking into account many of the objections.

Proposals for over 400 twenty storey buildings or higher have been submitted for the south bank of the Thames and in east London. Planning permission has been granted on over 200, and nearly 90 towers are already under construction.

93 are planned for Tower Hamlets and 73 for the Greenwich Peninsular. In Whitechapel a 28-storey tower of flats near a listed 17th-century almshouse is being opposed, but another tower close to Canary Wharf has been approved. Permission has also been given for new towers in Battersea while residents of Chiswick are campaigning against a 32-storey tower.

Sir Edward Lister, London's deputy mayor for planning, defended the city's high-rise developments. He is quoted in the FT as saying: "Tall buildings have a role to play. They have considerably improved some of our skyline." ■

London Forum responses

London Forum Tall buildings policy
FOI request on Tall Buildings - February
London Forum response to Proposed Changes to National Planning Policy

London Forum has been pressing for a change to London Plan Policy 7.7 to require tall and large buildings to "make a positive contribution to a coherent public realm, streetscape and to the London skyline" similar to the requirement for architecture generally (Policy 7.6).

Instead the bar for tall buildings is set much lower in Policy 7.7 (A) as "Tall and large buildings should not have an unacceptably harmful impact on their surroundings." Nowhere in Policy 7.7 is there a requirement for tall buildings to make a positive contribution, let alone to make a positive contribution to the London Skyline.

We were, therefore, very disappointed by the recent Historic England/CABE, Good Practice Advice Note: The Setting of Heritage Assets (GPA 3) which failed to get the message across about making a positive contribution to the skyline – although the word "positive" gets scattered around in the document and the press release. Something we will be taking up with Historic England.

Michael Bach ■

Michael Bach Chairman of the London Forum Planning and Transport Committee has made an FOI request on behalf of the Forum on Tall Buildings (20 storeys or more) that are in the planning pipeline

At a presentation given by Colin Wilson in June 2014 information on tall buildings was given on:

- the number, their height and location on a map;
- the number of refusals without intervention by the Mayor (i.e. refusal was agreed)
- the number of Mayoral call-ins and the number granted.

The Forum is now asking for an update on the stage that they reached with a list, plus an analysis indicating:

- application in preparation, approved (plus date and expiry date), or being modified,
- development under construction and expected date for completion
- the height (in metres and storeys)
- the proposed use or primary use where in a mixed use development
- the proposed density (dwellings/ha) ■

LF response to Changes to National Planning Policy

The London Forum has submitted detailed comments on the Proposed Changes to National Planning Policy. A summary of the main points:

- Starter homes will not extend the range of affordable housing and will displace social-renting and reduce the existing supply of such units.
- Increasing residential density around commuter hubs is a poorly considered and poorly defined initiative. This whole issue needs further research with regard to the sustainability, feasibility, scale of the opportunities and whether that is the best use of the land.
- Brownfield first: the basic principle for determining priority should be the sustainability of developing in particular locations. Having been developed previously is a necessary but not sufficient criterion for

choosing sites.

- Housing delivery: with planning consents granted by local planning authorities greatly exceeding delivery by developers - there are 270,000 units in the planning "pipeline" yet net additions to London's housing stock amount to one tenth of this - greater incentives/penalties are needed to bring forward housing.
- Retention of commercial uses: the crude tool of Permitted Development Rights is already undermining the economic success of town centres and is contrary to the NPPF.

The full document can be seen on the London Forum website ■

The Basement controversy rumbles on

Mega-basement turning into an international incident in Kensington!

The number of planning applications for domestic basements in London has more than tripled since 2011 although the rate of growth slowed sharply last year.

New figures from property data company Glenigan show that 887 applications involving a residential basement were submitted to local authorities in the capital during 2015. The growth is not just in the number of applications but is spreading to other parts of London in areas such as Queens Park and Ealing.

However few of them are likely to turn into an international incident as has one in Kensington Palace Gardens.

The billionaire founder of Foxtons estate agency was granted planning consent in 2008 for a mega-basement under his London home in Kensington Palace Gardens to house his vintage car collection.

The grade II-listed four-storey mansion, formerly occupied by the Russian

embassy, is next door to the French ambassador's residence, once home to the 10th Duke of Marlborough. The French Embassy has rented the 19th century residence since 1946. Faced with the prospect of a multi-storey mega-basement being constructed next door, the Ambassador, Sylvie Bermann, applied for a judicial review to try to stop the work, arguing that it would compromise French Embassy security, and challenging the validity of certificates of lawfulness granted by Kensington and Chelsea council.

But the judge rejected the application on most of the embassy's complaints, agreeing only that the council had acted unlawfully by failing to enter the certificates on its planning register. He ruled that the French government will now have to pay the bulk of the council's costs, estimated to be more than £100,000.

However Madame Bermann has decided to take her case to the Court of

Appeal and an alliance of fellow diplomats have weighed in to support her.

Apparently they are invoking Article 22 of the Vienna Convention, which obliges the host state to protect the premises of diplomats against "intrusion or damage" and prevent "disturbance of the peace of the mission or impairment of its dignity." Moreover diplomats from France, Saudi Arabia, Japan, India, Russia and Lebanon, who all live on the street, have also written in protest to the Crown Estate, (the freeholder) copied to Buckingham Palace and the Foreign Office. They call on the Crown Estate to "protect the integrity of their residences" and cite the diplomatic rights guaranteed under the 1961 convention.

Since the start of 2015, three London boroughs – Kensington & Chelsea, Westminster and Islington, have imposed restrictions on basement development of more than one storey below ground. ■

Local authorities to sell government assets

More local authorities are set to sell government assets through the One Public Estate programme, a "new approach to managing land and property".

The Programme, launched in 2013, is jointly run by the Cabinet Office and the Local Government Association (LGA). It brings together all public sector bodies within a locality. The programme has supported 32 of the largest land and property owning councils in England.

Over 100 councils have now joined phase 3 and will be pooling data on their asset holdings and developing joint plans to share property and release surplus land and buildings for other uses. This will also release excess land and property which can be reused for housing and new enterprise, boosting local jobs, growth and house building.

The programme claims to be "a radically new approach to managing land and property" that will "save money for taxpayers, whilst delivering more integrated, efficient public

services... in places which are more convenient for users."

It also claims that it will create an additional 20,000 jobs and around 9,000 homes, raise £129 million capital receipts from land and property sales and save £77 million on running costs.

£6 million of funding for the programme from the government was announced by the Chancellor in the summer budget. A further £31 million has now also been announced as part of the Autumn Statement, which will support further expansion of the programme over this Parliament. The councils will receive funding and practical support from the Government Property Unit and LGA, to remove bureaucratic red tape and unblock barriers. ■

Mayor's Design Advisory Group

The Mayor's Design Advisory Group is appointed by the Mayor and is made up of experts in the built environment covering architecture, planning, housing, construction, development and design.

The group met with New London Architecture, and other key figures to prepare a series of recommendations for the incoming Mayor on how London can deliver a high-quality, socially inclusive environment. Called the *Good Growth Agenda*, it looks at how to plan to accommodate the huge increase in population while still creating places where Londoners will want to live and work.

Papers include

Growing London, which addresses the question of where people are going to live, and how we can balance an increase in density with high quality design.

Public London examines how London's streets and public spaces can be designed, managed and delivered to support increasing pressures on movement and recreation. ■

Round the Societies

A round-up of news from our member societies.

By **Diane Burridge**

Major plans for the Exhibition Road area

The **Brompton Association** received a grant from the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea's City Living Local Life Programme to design improvements to the area. Architects were commissioned to examine neglected open space near the Ismaili Centre, where the Yalta Memorial is situated. Plans have been submitted to the Council, and action is now awaited.

The **Knightsbridge Association** is supporting the Re-imagining Albertopolis Project which aims to transform the public realm area around the Royal Albert Hall and the Albert Memorial. The Association is also supporting improvements to the Natural History Museum, the Science Museum, the Royal College of Music and the Post Office Building, now acquired by Imperial College. The Brompton and the Knightsbridge Associations, together with other organisations, are encouraging TfL to bring forward plans for South Kensington station to deal with congestion and improve way finding and access, whilst respecting the heritage of the station environs.

Whose plan for Brockwell Park?

With various associations operating near Brockwell Park – the Herne Hill, Tulse Hill, Brixton and Norwood forums/societies – now aiming to develop neighbourhood plans, discussions have included which plan should cover the Park itself, if at all? The **Brixton Society** has urged that the Park should be seen as a 'standalone' entity, self-governed by the long-established Brockwell Park Community Partners. The Localism Act requires that definite boundaries be set for any neighbourhood plan, but several of the proposed plans cover sections of the Park. Ultimately, Lambeth Council is responsible for agreeing the boundaries, and the Lambeth Forum Network will hopefully help to resolve matters.

Changed management of Battersea Park

Enable Leisure and Culture (Enable) - a staff mutual consisting mainly of ex-Council employees - has taken over the management of Battersea Park with a contract to October 2019. There will be competitive tendering for the Park's management after this date.

For the **Friends of Battersea Park**, the jury is out regarding these new arrangements, and there is concern as to what will happen after October 2019. Enable have assured the Friends that service levels and quality will not be affected. The company is applying for charitable status which could open up new funding sources. Enable's portfolio includes parks, playgrounds, cemeteries and crematoria, leisure and sport, the Putney School of Art and Design, arts, events and filming in Wandsworth.

The Blackheath Storyboards' Project

Six storyboards around the Heath are planned by the **Blackheath Society**. With £4,800 now agreed from the community premium fund (resulting from the OnBlackheath Festival), matched by the Society, detailed planning is underway. Further funding is being sought; and it is aimed that the trail guided by the storyboards (and information leaflet) will be completed by early 2017.

Crossrail 2 and other plans for Wimbledon

The **Wimbledon Society's** Planning Committee reviewed 150 applications in 2015 sending more than 50 objection letters, and writing to Government on matters relating to affordable housing, council funding and general policy matters.

The Committee is well aware that, although not programmed to start until 2020, important decisions on the basic design of Crossrail 2, and how it affects Wimbledon, are being taken now. This project has major implications for Wimbledon Town Centre and its hinterland. In its response to the TfL consultation, the Society has taken the view that this project cannot be seen as merely a 'rail project', but needs to be fully integrated into the Town's long-term planning future. Demolition of substantial sites will have a major impact on the Town's 'offer', and its local shops and businesses. For a copy of the Society's letter to TfL's consultation see: <http://www.wimbledonsociety.org.uk>

Defending Enfield's Green Belt

Fairview New Homes has submitted proposals to build 300 dwellings, a school and a college on Green Belt land owned by the Church of England between Enfield Town and Oakwood. The **Enfield Society** is a member of Enfield Roadwatch, a new coalition aiming to prevent this development. The Society is also keeping a watch on Berkeley Homes' plans to develop housing where Middlesex University's campus used to be in Trent Park and has objected strongly to the storage and distribution of vehicles on Green Belt land (in an area of Special Character) in front of Trent Park.

The Notting Hill East Neighbourhood Forum

The Notting Hill East Neighbourhood Forum has been set up to supersede the Westbourne Neighbourhood Association (WNA). WNA was set up over forty years ago to fight against losing Moorhouse Road due to Council plans to build an arterial road through the area. That campaign was successful, and since then other successful campaigns have included improving road safety; having quieter buses; as well as saving parks in Shrewsbury Gardens and St Stephens Gardens.

With this formidable campaigning experience, long-term members of the Westbourne Neighbourhood Association are now actively involved in the new Notting Hill East Neighbourhood Forum. For information about their work, see: Notting Hill East Designation Notice.

Practical action in Greenwich – removing defacements

As we are so often aware in our everyday lives, it is the little things that can affect our sense of well-being. Litter certainly can depress one and despoil an area terribly.

Since 2001, **Greenwich Society** volunteers have been removing defacements, such as litter and stickers. In 2015 alone, a team of 17 volunteers removed 567 of these, alongside reporting to the Council markings which were too high or difficult to remove. If only such actions were not needed.

Charging for community events in open spaces in Harrow?

The **Pinner Association** has been active in objecting to the Council's proposals to impose charges for the use of parks, open spaces and streets in Harrow for events organised by charities and other non-profit making organisations.

Events that the Pinner Association have helped to organise include: the four band concerts, the annual Mayor's wreath-laying ceremony in the Peace Garden, the Sunday Remembrance Service, and the Pinner Pantomime Evening. In their representation to the Council, the Association also highlighted the many parties organised by local people to raise money for local charities.

The Pinner Association has calculated that, even with the discount for charities, the cost of organising the four free-to-attend, open air summer band concerts would increase by at least £2,796. Additionally a deposit of £1,000 per day (with no discount for charities) would be required and would only be returnable if, in the opinion of Harrow Council, no damage had occurred to the venue, no noise or other disturbance had occurred, there was no litter to clear up, etc. Such proposals could easily dissuade people from being active citizens. For more information, see:

<http://www.pinnerassociation.co.uk/content/harrow-proposal-to-charge-for-use-of-parks-etc/>

King's Cross Coal Drops

Thomas Heatherwick has designed a scheme to convert the Coal Drops at King's Cross - brick and cast-iron Grade II listed structures built in the 1850s and 1860s to transfer coal to road carts - into a £100 million retail quarter.

The design to be completed by 2018 envisages linking the roofs of the two buildings and the creation of a piazza. The Grade II listed buildings were badly damaged in a fire in the eighties and have been empty and semi-derelict for at least two decades. The proposal was approved by Camden council despite objections from heritage groups and local campaigners including **Camden Civic Society**, **SAVE**, and the **Victorian Society** who said: "The proposals pay no respect to the listed status of the Eastern Coal Drops, disfiguring the roofscape to the degree of substantial harm."

Local conservation groups are dismayed that the scheme was supported by Historic England and that they were denied a hearing by the Council at the Planning Committee meeting. James Dunnett, of the **Islington Society**, was quoted in The Times as saying: "No voice was given to objectors whatsoever. Only one councillor was prepared to say that it was hideous. They kept harking back to the public benefit outweighing any harm."

Heatherwick is no stranger to controversy his design for the new Routemaster bus, and his Thames Garden Bridge plan have been widely criticised. He said that the structures "were never designed for people to walk through and would never have been a successful retail destination if they were simply cleaned and filled with shops." "Rather than adding an entirely foreign new structure to connect the old buildings, we chose simply to bend and stitch the two roofs together, framing a dynamic new public space"

Clapham Through Time - a new book

This fascinating book by Alyson Wilson and Claire Fry of **Clapham Society** traces some of the many ways in which Clapham has changed and developed over the last century through a selection of photographs of Clapham in the past shown alongside exactly the same views taken this year with a brief historical commentary for each pair.

In ancient times Clapham was a secluded Surrey village, clustered round a manor house and church. By the seventeenth century, the wealthy of London were building houses there as rural retreats and, by 1800, their mansions in extensive grounds surrounded Clapham Common, which was becoming a place of recreation. As London and the railways spread outwards those families sold their ground to developers who built the terraced houses which cover the area today. A few mansions have survived and have been put to new uses. The book traces these changes over the years.

Both authors are long-time Clapham residents. Alyson Wilson, a member of the Clapham Society's Local History Sub-committee, is an art historian and researcher, and has written and edited several books about Clapham.

Claire Fry is a graphic designer who has regularly recorded the changes that have taken place in Clapham over the years with her camera.

Clapham Through Time (Amberley Publishing, price £14.99)

The book is available at www.amazon.co.uk.

Inappropriate high rise in Kingston

Eighteen months of concerted effort by the **Kingston Upon Thames Society** and the Kingston Residents' Association has paid off. The Council has finally rejected the St George's scheme for the Old Post Office.

Initial plans included a 19 storey block and, even with changes to reduce this height to 16 storeys, residents were appalled at the impact this development would have on nearby listed buildings and Conservation Areas. Developers were also only providing 10% three bedroom affordable units despite Council policy requiring 25%. And the Development Brief suggested a maximum of nine storeys adjacent to the old sorting office, when 13 storeys were proposed.

The developers are likely to go to appeal as they have now bought the site. The Society has stated that, with the Kingston Residents Association, they are prepared for another long fight.

Restoration of the Glossop Memorial

The **Isleworth Society's** grant application to the Heritage for London Trust for nearly £4,000 to help restore this memorial in Upper Square has been successful. The Society is contributing £2,000 towards the project and has also received funding from the Council's Street Improvement Project. ■

newsbriefs

News and issues of interest and concern to note.

The cost of outsourcing government services

Despite revelations of past incompetence and accounting anomalies, an analysis by the Information Services Group shows a sharp increase in the government's use of private firms to provide public services. Vast sums of money are going to private-sector contractors including Carillion, Serco, G4S, and Capita.

The number of such government contracts had already more than doubled between 2010 and 2014, but doubled again in the past year from £32bn to £60bn.

Capita leads with \$14.5bn sales to the UK government and under a £1bn deal over seven-to-ten years will provide NHS primary care providers such as GPs, opticians, pharmacists and dentists with a range of back office services, the management of clinical records and helping new doctor-led clinical commissioning groups to buy billions of pounds of services for hospitals and GPs.

Leidos, a US company specialising in defence and health services, will deliver bandages, food and medical equipment to forces overseas and in the UK with a \$9.1bn contract for the next 13 years. More than 1,200 Ministry of Defence employees were transferred to the contractor on August 1 as part of the deal.

Carillion has contracts to maintain and upgrade the entire military estate for the MoD, including RAF Cranwell, Catterick Garrison, Sandhurst, RAF Lyneham and MoD Stafford.

However, as the report also points out, this policy does not necessarily lead to cost savings or greater efficiency. Serco and G4S are struggling to shed the reputational damage incurred in the UK for overcharging the government on the electronic monitoring of offenders. Jarvis, the defunct railway contractor, ended up in the High Court over its handling of income that it was due but had not received. Connaught, the council house maintenance group, collapsed into administration after irregularities were found in its largest contracts. Amey, Alfred McAlpine and Mowlem all were beset by accounting black holes before being swallowed by rivals.

Lobbyists at Westminster

The coalition government introduced the Transparency of Lobbying, Non-Party Campaigning and Trade Union Administration Act in 2014 creating a register of lobbyists, after a spate of Westminster "cash for access" scandals. But there is concern that it is considered to be ineffectual, only picking up a fraction of the public affairs activity taking place in Britain. Lobbyists only have to sign up if they communicate directly with ministers or permanent secretaries. Contacts with more junior civil servants or special advisers are not within the scope of the register.

Alison White, registrar of the Office of Consultant Lobbyists - which runs the list for the government - admitted in the Financial Times there were "all sorts of exemptions in the [Transparency of Lobbying] act." "It is quite narrowly drafted, it talks about direct communication with ministers on behalf of a paying business," she said. "It concerns me that the register doesn't pick up the big in-house corporate lobbyists or the legal firms that provide public affairs advice."

Over 100 firms are signed up including well-known names such as APCO, Bell Pottinger, Burson-Marsteller, Edelman, Hanover, Portland and Weber Shandwick. There are also planning public

affairs specialists such as Curtin Communications, Field Consulting, PPS Group and Terrapin Communications. But many in-house public affairs professionals are absent.

The "big four" accountancy firms - Deloitte, Ernst & Young, PwC and KPMG - have all signed up but only two law firms out of the dozen or more that offer public affairs services in Britain have registered - Clifford Chance, and Cooley, a San Francisco-based firm that focuses on the technology sector.

Linklaters' website says "our relationships with public bodies enable clients to benefit from direct access to public decision makers"; yet they can legitimately say their activities are not covered by the register because its limits are so clearly defined. For instance, some say the rules do not apply to them because they only draft communication on behalf of their clients without directly contacting officials themselves.

The Office of Consultant Lobbyists has criminal enforcement powers, but it is more likely that those who fail to register will face civil fines of up to £7,500.

More on the Westminster revolving door

Former ministers and senior civil servants are supposed to seek approval from the Advisory Committee on Business Appointments before accepting potentially lucrative roles in the private sector. Former ministers are banned from lobbying former colleagues for two years after their departure and must refrain from using "privileged information" gained while in government.

Now the Committee chair, Baroness Browning, has admitted its failure to take appropriate action in the past and has decided to "express its concerns publicly".

It is clear that many that former ministers and civil servants have failed to submit applications to it before accepting jobs, or have been referred retrospectively, and it has not publicly rebuked those that have failed to apply to it.

Since the change of government last May the committee has dealt with 109 applications from former ministers so far this financial year, compared with 49 the year before, ranging from non-executive directorships at FTSE 100 companies, consultancy work at City law and public relations firms and advisory roles to banks.

In 2013 Dave Hartnett went from HMRC where he had official dealings with Deloitte to work for the company. Gary Follis, former chief of staff to shadow chancellor Ed Balls, now works for the Association of British Bookmakers.

Former ministers pursuing new careers include Sir Danny Alexander, the former chief secretary to the Treasury, who became vice-president and corporate secretary at Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. Dan Rogerson, former water minister, is now the chairman of Wessex Water. Sir Edward Davey, former energy secretary, now works for energy sector lobbyist MHP Communications. Tony Blair has gone to JPMorgan and Alistair Darling is at Morgan Stanley.

Pimco the Californian bond dealer is a popular destination: Gordon Brown has joined the board chaired by former Federal Reserve chairman Ben Bernanke. Andrew Balls, brother of Ed Balls - Mr Brown's former right-hand man - is chief investment officer for global fixed income at Pimco.

newsbriefs

More books of interest

Slow Burn City: London in the Twenty-First Century by Rowan Moore

Rowan Moore describes a slow burn city as one "renewed by change, not devastated by it," evolving gradually and organically, holding past, present and future in an equilibrium of mutual respect. What has happened to London in the past 35 years is the opposite of that. Moore finds the astonishing pace of change exciting but also devastating - not just to its traditional architectural styles and skyline, but to property prices, the character of neighbourhoods and the quality of life and work for its workers many of whom can barely afford to rent, let alone buy, a home in the capital.

Moore's book discusses many vital issues, provides historical perspective, and is packed with entertaining asides including a mischievously provocative chapter called "You've been Heatherwicked", which lambasts the proposed Garden Bridge. London has always been shaped by commercial forces from John Nash's grandiose plans for the Prince Regent to today's Canary Wharf or the Shard at London Bridge. Moore describes how in the past commercial forces were tempered by interventions of public-spirited reformers "in the name of public good": the rise of town planning regulations beginning with early attempts after the Great Fire of London in the 1660s; the great Victorian urban improvement schemes, and campaigns to protect open spaces; 20th century local authority housing, and more, advances which were emulated across the world.

He finds that present day elected representatives have lost the courage, and maybe the power and resources, to stand up to wealthy and well-connected commercial developers: "market forces are running riot" and "London has yet to find a public response similar to those in the past." He discusses the defects of modern developments and also proposes his own solutions which include re-examining the idea of the Green Belt which he asserts, "mostly serves the people who live in it".

Books to mark the Open Spaces Society 150th anniversary

Village Greens

In this profusely-illustrated guide, Graham Bathe looks at the origin, history, diversity and wildlife of greens, their role during celebrations and periods of unrest, and their ongoing importance today. £5.00

Saving Open Spaces

Kate Ashbrook tells the story of the Open Spaces Society's 150-year struggle for commons, greens, open spaces and paths.

Common Land

Graham Bathe explores the rich heritage of commons, the opportunities they provide for enjoying wildlife, archaeology and recreational access, and their links to folklore and literature.

£5.00

<http://www.oss.org.uk/what-we-do/publications/>

Clapham air raid shelters to open for tours

The Clapham South air raid shelters at the south-east corner of Clapham Common housed up to 8,000 Londoners during the Blitz in 1944, when the bombing of London intensified with the use of V-1 and V-2 rockets.

The tunnels, listed Grade II in 1998, are located 180 steps below ground under the Northern line, opposite Clapham South Tube station. They have occasionally been open for public tours. Now TfL has secured planning permission and listed building consent from Lambeth Council to open them to the public for regular tours as part of the London Transport Museum's Hidden London tours. The park-side rotunda building with views over Clapham Common will be refurbished and leased to a private company as a café or restaurant, with exhibition space telling the history of the tunnels.

Built between 1940 and 1942, it is the only deep-level shelter remaining that retains much of the original signage; one of the signs points to the Anson, Beatty, Collingwood and Drake air raid shelters. And it is one of the few to retain many of the original bunk beds. It had canteens, medical aid posts and lavatories.

The bunker closed in May 1945 and was then used as a hostel for the military and civilians, including 492 Jamaican migrants who were temporarily housed in the shelter in 1948. Since then the bunker has been rented out for secure archive storage. Renovation work could start in mid-2016.

Museum of London to move to Smithfield

Following the blocking of redevelopment plans for Smithfield market, (Newsforum no. 67) the developer TH Real Estate sold the lease back to the City of London Corporation which owns the freehold. This has opened the way for the Museum of London to move to the site which is particularly attractive because the new Crossrail and upgraded Thameslink lines will stop nearby. It is thought that the Museum's current site may be redeveloped as a concert hall.

London demographic statistics

Population, dwelling and household figures

Population

1939	8.6 million		
1951	8,164,416	1981	6,608,513
1961	7,781,342	1991	6,887,280
1971	7,449,184	2001	7,172,036
2015:	8.6 million (GLA Updated figure)		8,173,900

* NB: House prices began to rise steeply from 1970, completely uncorrelated to population numbers which were falling throughout the period

2013	Households	3,266,173 (DCLG)
	Dwelling stock	3,383,030 (DCLG/GLA)
2014	Households	3,541,000 (GLA dataset)
	Dwelling stock	3,427,650 (DCLG Update 1 April 2014)

Average household size in London 2.48 in 2011

Thus during the period before 2014 there was actually spare capacity in the dwelling stock; yet we were consistently being told there was a shortage. Housebuilders already have more than enough actual permissions in London to fill the gap - approximately 113,000 dwellings - that has arisen since 2014. ■

Dates for your diary

London Forum events

Membership renewal

We have recently changed our membership renewal process so that it can all be done through the London Forum website. Subscription renewals reminders will in future be sent by email giving details of how to renew, including on-line.

We have introduced 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 is included in the email reminder.

As you all know, London Forum relies totally on Members' subscriptions for its budget. 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. We hope you will find this new system easy to use.

Queries can be sent to admin@londondorum.org.uk
Or contact Bill Linskey, (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

Peter Eversden Chairman
London Forum, 70 Cowcross Street,
London EC1M 6EJ
Telephone: 020 7993 5754
email chairman@londonforum.org.uk

Bill Linskey Membership Secretary
email membership@londonforum.org.uk

Registered Charity Number 1093134

London Forum Open Meetings 2016

Tuesday 22 March 2016

Hustings meeting

Ticket only - please apply to Peter Eversden

chairman@londonforum.org.uk

(This notice is only appearing in the email pdf edition of Newsforum)

Future meetings - save the Dates

Thursday 12 May

Tuesday 28 June

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

Editor Helen Marcus

Editorial team Diane Burrige, Derek Chandler, Peter Eversden, Peter Pickering

Original design Ross Shaw

Original Spotlight concept Tony Aldous

Print Express Printing. Telephone 01733 230 800

Published by the London Forum, 70 Cowcross Street, London EC1M 6EJ. Telephone 020 7993 5754

Member societies are encouraged to use London Forum news in their own newsletters.

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.