

newsforum



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

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

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 Kensington Society
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Infrastructure projects face queries

Heathrow

Three major infrastructure projects face major queries over their funding and their utility: the Thames Tideway Tunnel, HS2, and Heathrow where the London Mayor is backing legal action

The government after extraordinary delay has finally announced that Heathrow is, after all, to be allowed to build its third runway. However it indicated that there was likely to be a Parliamentary vote in December 2017. The plans include a sloped runway that would rise at least eight metres above the M25 to avoid putting the motorway in an expensive tunnel. The scheme would generate higher pollution and noise levels than other airports and 783 homes would have to be demolished.

The transport secretary, Chris Grayling, outlined a series of proposed safeguards over air quality, the cost of expansion, and noise from the airport, including a possible statutory aviation noise regulator, in the hope of meeting the concerns of opponents.

Nevertheless there has been a chorus of opposition and criticism from a wide range of interested parties, including councils, environmental groups and even the International Airlines Group, parent of British Airways, Heathrow's biggest customer; it has said that that the project's costs would make the airport uneconomic. The proposal probably faces years of legal challenges. Moreover serious further doubt has been cast on the Airport Commission's (AC) evidence amidst claims that the Government has deliberately concealed the true costs.

"Heathrow is simply the wrong solution Ministers will not be able to ignore Londoners' democratic views without a fight"

The Mayor of London, The Times, November 17

A Department for Transport report

A Department for Transport report published the same day, while sticking to the line that the Commission Report "is a sound and robust piece of evidence to which the Government can give significant weight in making a decision" nevertheless, in guarded and carefully worded phrases, throws doubt over many of its claims. For example (at para. 5.6) "In the department's review of the AC's evidence base, some potential issues were found with the approaches taken." It "identified a number of concerns which cast further doubt on these estimates." One of these was the AC claim that Heathrow would generate up to £147 billion of benefits to the economy over 60 years.

The DfT report says "While the department fully recognises the existence

The London Forum 2017 Awards

Look out for details of
The London Forum 2017 Awards which will celebrate achievements by amenity societies, especially the impact you are having on your local community.

Entries will be needed in July. Awards will be made at London Forum's AGM in October

of wider economic benefits, and supports the framework of impacts set out by the AC the exact magnitude of these benefits is inherently uncertain." And indeed in the Government announcement on October 25 the figure for economic benefits had sunk to £61 billion.

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London's 'super sewer' faces further scrutiny

On jobs it "identified a number of uncertainties with the approach taken" that "could lead to significantly different results".

It described the AC analysis of noise mitigations as having "a low level of analytical assurance and is at best viewed as indicative of some of the potential impacts of mitigation measures on the appraisal".

Further legal challenges

Teddington Action Group has attacked the legality of ministers accepting the recommendation of the Airports Commission on the ground that Sir Howard Davies, its chairman, was a paid adviser to GIC Private Ltd, one of Heathrow's principal shareholders. In a pre-action "letter of claim" to the DfT, it accused Sir Howard of bias and says he did not disclose his roles with GIC in the commission's register of interests. The Group said it would ask judges to block the decision. However Sir Howard dismissed the legal challenges as "complete nonsense" and said that the Action Group had repeatedly "tried and failed to prove bias".

Friends of the Earth has written to the Department for Transport accusing the government of "substantive procedural flaws" by announcing that a third runway will go ahead before it had been scrutinised by parliament or gone through the legal planning process. It said the decision "pre-empts the will of parliament" and "predetermines the outcome of any planning application".

Hillingdon, Wandsworth, Richmond and Windsor & Maidenhead councils, backed by Greenpeace, look set to seek a judicial review of the decision.

In an article in *The Times* on November 17, Mayor Sadiq Khan declared that he will back this legal challenge: "Heathrow is simply the wrong solution. Too many Londoners already have their daily lives plagued by noise and pollution; ... Ministers will not be able to ignore Londoners' democratic views without a fight." ■

The update on HS2 is on page 19

The National Audit Office (NAO) announced in August that it will investigate cost of the Thames Tideway Tunnel.

It will examine

- How the project's public sector steering group gained assurance over the evidence base which informed the target outcome for the project and the choice of the Tunnel over alternative options.
- Its "unusual" financial structure - it is being delivered by a specially created company, and benefits from a contingent support package provided by government in its construction phase. About one-third of the cost for construction will be funded by Thames Water through an increase in customers' water bills, the remaining £2.8bn is being raised by Tideway, whose shareholders have invested £1.2bn of equity.
- How the complex funding model was chosen over smaller, greener alternatives.

It will set out the risks faced by customers and taxpayers as the project moves towards completion, and how these risks are being mitigated.

Construction risks involved range from the potential undermining of Big Ben's foundations to the flooding of the London Underground transport network - though contractors say this is unlikely.

The company has already been criticised by the NAO for taking excessive profits, while paying no corporation tax.

In their 2014 report the NAO had raised the following concerns

- The delivery model for the tunnel is heavily reliant on competition to secure value for money. "The final costs of delivering the tunnel by this route are unknown, since they will be decided through competitive bargaining."
- There are risks "that the infrastructure provider will be unable to secure financing at a reasonable cost, or that financing is not available when needed for contractual payments" and "that the completed tunnel does not operate as expected and therefore does not achieve the intended environmental benefits."
- "The £4.2 billion budget does not include the cost of running and maintaining the tunnel."

Concerns of leading critics

The NAO also set out the concerns of leading critics of the project, Professor Chris Binnie, the former chairman of the Thames Tideway Strategic Study, and Sir Ian Byatt, the former director general of Ofwat.

In his response to Defra's 2011 cost-benefit analysis, Professor Binnie argued:

- "that the benefits of the tunnel had been overstated because of unrealistic assumptions"
- "that further research is needed to confirm the most cost-effective route to compliance"
- "that faulty assumptions in the modelling used to support the Environment Agency's conclusions on SuDs have overstated the number of spills that would occur if a SuDS-only solution were employed."

He also asserts that a combination of SuDS, other measures (such as sewer separation, real time control and detention tanks used where economic to do so), and upgrade works to the sewage system due for completion in 2015 would likely secure continuing compliance with the Directive. He points out that "a combination of options was never explored in the original option appraisal in the Thames Tideway Strategic Study."

Sir Ian Byatt, "expressed concern about the fact that Thames Water will not be financing the tunnel itself. Sir Ian argues both that alternative solutions would have provided better value for money and that Thames Water's reluctance to finance the tunnel itself arises from its recent strategy to increase its borrowing and pay substantial dividends to its owners. He believes this has weakened its credit rating and left it unable to borrow further without injecting equity into its balance sheet. He further argues that if Thames Water were to decline to inject equity it should lose its licence and give other companies the opportunity to invest in ways that would ensure compliance with the Directive."

Sir Ian believes that not only is the tunnel now unnecessary but that it would have been cheaper if the government paid for it, even if it was subsequently privatised.

A further NAO report was promised for the autumn just as the seven-year construction of the 25km tunnel is getting under way. ■

Town Centres and High Streets

Open Meeting Monday 19th September 2016

Gerard Burgess, from the Greater London Authority's Planning Group, discussed the London Plan, Local Plans and support from the Mayor of London.

Professor Mark Brearley, from Cass University, focused on the role and importance of High Streets. **Diane Burridge** reports

The state of London's town centres and high streets is of concern to many: this event looked at how we can maintain their vitality and viability, and the role local communities and businesses can play in shaping their development. How can we make them attractive places to do business, shop, work, enjoy leisure and spend time in, simply meeting others?

London Plan town centres strategies

After introductions from Michael Bach and Peter Eversden, **Gerard Burgess** outlined the current London Plan's three core strategies: for town centres to be the main focus for commercial, leisure and residential developments; to improve access to these centres by supporting public transport, walking and cycling; and to support town centres in providing a sense of place and local identity. Interestingly, recent research has found that cycling is now a faster means of travel than public transport. (Travel times to some town centres around London, using various modes of transport, can be seen on: www.tfl.gov.uk/WebCAT)

Mayor Sadiq Khan has publicly given support to: campaigns to save pubs; prevent conversions to residential use (difficult given Permitted Development Rights); and other actions by communities wanting to keep the character of their town centres intact. But, as is all too clear, town centres are under threat for a variety of reasons - in particular the medium-sized ones, where retailers are consolidating into the larger centres and shopping malls. The 1,000 local clusters of shops in London are also declining in many areas.

We were reminded that Local Plans need to be in general conformity with the London Plan, and boroughs should be developing strategies to support town centres.

The current London Plan was adopted in March 2015, and already preparation is underway for the next one. The GLA Planning Group is undertaking informal consultation (as at this event), and preparing: a Town Centre Health Check; a Retail Floorspace Needs Study; an Office Policy Review; Consumer Expenditure Projections; and a Strategic Housing Land Availability Review. This research will inform draft documents for formal consultation in Autumn 2017, with an Examination in Public in summer/autumn of

2018, with formal Adoption in Autumn 2019 - in time for the next Mayor!

Gerard Burgess finished his presentation by highlighting Mayoral funds supporting town centres. The Regeneration Fund, for example, supported Kingston Ancient Market improvements; 25 new shop front displays in Willesden Green; and creative new pavements in Hornchurch. The Crowdfunding Programme, working with Space Hive, is supporting, as an example, the Peckham Coal Line Urban Park which has 928 backers to date pledging a total of £75,577, with the GLA pledging up to £20,000. This Crowdfunding Programme is now in Round 3; Rounds 1 and 2 supported 35 projects. For more information contact: James.parkinson@london.gov.uk.

Walking the High Streets

The second speaker, **Mark Brearley**, described his highly imaginative and exhaustive research method: walking 51km from Romford to Uxbridge following the High Streets connecting these two areas. Along the way he counted 6,460 businesses supporting 79,425 jobs - the same number as based in Canary Wharf. There are 500km of High Streets (with 600 High Street places) in London - 3.6% of the road network.

These High Streets are more than places to shop: they are also the centre of many people's lives, when we consider that more than 50% of people do not leave their area each day.

Since the days of Abercrombie and the County of London Plan 1943, when High Streets were hardly acknowledged, Mark Brearley asked: could 'urban disaggregation' be slowing? 'Is spontaneous moderation of the car occurring?' Just at the time that housing growth and Permitted Development Rights are stripping away vitality of High Streets. In the last two years, outer London boroughs have lost 10% of their office accommodation. Is 'London eating itself', and suburbanisation occurring to such an extent that we are losing mixed tenures, resulting in less occupational capacity. These developments are weakening possibilities for a shared life.

Question and answer session

During the question and answer session, a major concern raised by those present

from a range of Societies was: 'What is the point of a Local Plan when this is not followed?' And, how do we monitor adherence to rules as set out in the London Plan - for example, those outlined in the Density Matrix, when many housing schemes so patently exceed these?

Some present queried: why do we put so much focus on long-term planning when predictions about the future are often wrong and change is so rapid? On a positive note, although it took 30 years of planning, Crossrail is now being delivered!

Responses from the panel, which included the two speakers and Michael Bach and Peter Eversden, concluded that: the London Plan only provides a broad strategic direction for Local Plans; the London Plan could be more challenging but dynamic changes affect local approvals.

And others present asked that the new London Plan should cover the Buy to Leave phenomenon and the rights of private sector tenants, if we are serious about meeting housing needs including the intensification of town centres. The push for providing more privately-rented accommodation does not acknowledge the fact that the vast majority of people privately renting do not want to do so - they prefer social housing or buying their own property.

One concern voiced is that business rates are based on retail businesses, which can be onerous for other sectors, driving out diversity from the High Street and town centre.

Michael Edwards, Professor at University College London's Bartlett School of Planning, described the recently published 'Just Space' community led Plan for London which has been produced by many organisations across London working together. This calls for a bottom-up approach to planning, and the need to support people working in the care, retail, education and cleaning sectors, not just the finance and IT sectors.

Michael Bach suggested that Councillors need to be held to account for the planning approvals they grant; and Government needs to recognise the differences between London and the rest of the country when deciding upon planning policies. London should be given greater independence in making planning decisions.

And on that assertive note, the meeting was concluded! ■

London Forum AGM 17th November 2016

Report by **Peter Eversden** and **Derek Chandler**

Chairman Peter Eversden opened the meeting and welcomed members. Apologies for absence were noted and the minutes of the 2015 AGM were agreed.

The Chairman thanked Helen Marcus and Peter Pickering for helping to compile the review of the year. It summarises the key activities of members of the London Forum's team and their work. More detail on several topics of the past year can be found in the Newsforum which he hoped is circulated to society committees and members. He reminded members that they are free to use text from it for their own publications. PDFs of it are issued and past editions are on the Forum's web site.

The Chairman continued: "The London Forum has had to continue devoting a lot of time and resources to opposing the Government's proposed planning policy changes. Our concerns have been made known to you so that you could involve your MPs but permitted development and harmful policies in the Housing and Planning Act were driven through by the Ministers.

"Since then the new Government shows signs of reconsidering the top-down planning that we have seen. The Minister for Planning, Housing and London, Gavin Barwell, has indicated in speeches that parts of the Act may not be implemented as expected. We shall see...

"We will continue to work through the All Party Parliamentary Groups in Parliament and several MPs that we know well have been appointed as Shadow Ministers, which could be helpful.

We will continue to seek on your behalf policies that will help the creation of sustainable neighbourhoods and the control of tall buildings and housing densities.

"The election of a new Mayor and Assembly this year has given us opportunities to forge relationships with people who are new and we are working with the key people in the Assembly committees and officers in the planning and housing units. London Forum's people will be participating over the next year in the preparation of the Replacement London Plan and I hope some of you will become engaged in that process, as you have for previous versions.

"We have held some useful open meetings this year on topical issues and, in

"We will continue to work through the All Party Parliamentary Groups in Parliament and continue to seek on your behalf the policies that will help the creation of sustainable neighbourhoods, and the control of tall buildings."

London Forum Chairman Peter Eversden

particular, meeting the new Historic England people."

Financial Report

The Chairman apologised that London Forum's Treasurer Tony Allen was not able to get to the meeting. He therefore continued in his place and would do his best to answer any questions.

There was no need to increase subscriptions this year; the Forum is still in a satisfactory financial position. However, an increase in 2017 is almost inevitable as we have to increase our activities and cover our objects more fully. More use of email was reducing postage costs.

Some societies have been late in paying subscriptions; he urged members to check that their society had paid.

Approval of Annual Report and Accounts for 2015/16

Tom Ball asked about the steep fall in donations. The Chairman explained that in 2015 we had a legacy from Bernard Selwyn of the Open Spaces Society. Tom Ball also asked whether we actively sought donations. The Chairman said there was a request on the Renewal Form but a more positive approach and recognition would be considered. Tom Ball also asked about other figures: he pointed out that the Balance carried forward at 30 June 2016 on page 18 is clearly wrong. After some discussion a Motion to approve the

Accounts subject to checking and correction if needed was approved, proposed by Andrew Bosi (Islington Society), and seconded by Chris David (Earls Court Society).

Election of Honorary Independent Examiner

The Chairman reported that John Egan is willing to continue; this was approved by general assent before request for motion. The Chairman thanked John for his services to the London Forum.

Election of Officers and Trustee

Three trustees retired, two by rotation under the rules: Tony Allen Treasurer, and Derek Chandler Hon. Secretary. They are willing to stand for election and have been duly nominated. Martin Jones ceased to be a Trustee during the year.

Peter Eversden stated that he was happy to continue as Chairman of the London Forum. The other members of the Executive Committee with specific positions as Officers are Michael Bach, Chair Planning & Transport Committee; Diane Burridge, Identifying new Members; Bill Linskey, Membership; Helen Marcus Editor, Newsforum; and Peter Pickering, Minutes Secretary. All are willing to continue as Trustees

David Lewis and Bill Tyler are co-opted. The Chairman suggested that the trustees nominated should be elected *en bloc*. This was agreed *nem con*, proposed by Dick Allard (Westcombe Society) seconded by Jan Morgan (Highgate Society).

An appeal to Societies

The Chairman made an appeal that all Societies looked to see if any of their members would be willing to participate in the activities of London Forum as a Trustee. More Trustees are needed and it is of concern that there were no nominations of trustees from member societies. (*Trustees can be co-opted at any time and do not have to wait for the AGM to come forward*)

In conclusion he thanked all the members for their support, and those in the London Forum HQ team and committees for their work and commitment. ■

How can local societies develop their work and engage younger people?

This was the topic for discussion at this year's Annual General Meeting

Report by **David Lewis**

Peter Eversden introduced the subject, with a presentation on the ways that societies could assess their effectiveness drawing on the experience of his own society (the **Bedford Park Society**). Local people had perceived its aim as stopping residents getting planning permission and it found itself faced with competition from a residents' association. It reviewed its aims and objectives, carried out a SWOT analysis and a risk analysis, and took action to deal with the weaknesses identified. These included the tendency to rely on a single person for detailed knowledge of a key subject. The society now seeks to work through task groups of four or five younger people led by a trustee.

Hammersmith Society

Hans Haenlein described how, following a survey by students, the Hammersmith Society had become a federal body. Despite having a relatively small individual membership it has been active in the community in a number of ways, including local environment awards in conjunction with the London Festival of Architecture, a Clean Air Commission with assistance from Reading University, a partnership formed with the Business Improvement District, celebration of Capability Brown's tercentenary, proposals for transforming Hammersmith town centre, and a community interest company to promote design education in schools following its removal from the National Curriculum.

This led into a general discussion on the role of neighbourhood planning. Hammersmith now has a residents' forum, which is more effective than traditional mechanisms for public participation, and can be regarded as a halfway house to neighbourhood planning. Peter Eversden observed that Neighbourhood Planning has not really taken off in London, which is relatively well provided with Local Plans, but they still leave a gap. Herne Hill has expressed interest in neighbourhood planning but is not sure it will achieve anything. Defeat of a resolution to wind up the Camden Society had brought in some young people. The initiative to encourage children to write letters to the mayor each year about something they would like to see changed in the borough continues (*see report page 16*).

Putney Society

Judith Chegidden described initiatives by the Putney Society (which had been the subject for the Spotlight in the last Newsforum). Their major campaign, started in 2010, has been over the shocking air pollution, worst in Putney High Street. This has involved two citizen science projects, and has been supported by vigorous public relations. GPs and school teachers are generally too busy to be involved but the network of Primary Heads may be a way in, although that will not necessarily produce results in terms of engaging parents. As a general incentive to join the Society a discount scheme has been introduced, even though the Society will no longer be able to claim Gift Aid on subscriptions. It is mainly the smaller shops off the High Street which have agreed to participate. The Society has regular stalls in Putney Library and the café in the parish church, and is negotiating for a stall at the Council's annual ward meetings. Membership is about 600; a quarter of the trustees are of working age and there are usually a couple of new trustees each year. Almost 10,000 people access the website.

Peckham Vision

Eileen Conn explained Peckham Vision's approach. It operates separately from the longer established Peckham Society, which has much of its membership outside the area and focuses on local history. Peckham Vision's aim is to overcome lack of interest and sympathy on the part of councillors and officials for town centre development, by working through a Peckham planning network. This was designed to be informal, although it is becoming more formal with time. Peckham Vision seeks to achieve neighbourhood planning; although this generates proposals for local improvements, these are not necessarily put forward in its name.

Chelsea Society

Sara Farrugia had analysed the Chelsea Society's lack of contact with younger people and was assisted in her presentation by three people still under 35. Her message was 'Us' not 'Them'. Negative stereotyping deters young people from engaging with civic societies.

They attach more importance to sharing and caring roles than to amenity issues. Societies should offer young people opportunities to change their area for the better. Thus the Chelsea Society had collaborated with Chelsea College of Arts on a Christmas project for the King's Road.

The three young people recounted what had inspired them to get engaged with community activities. They pointed out that universities are a vast resource for making contact with young people. Personal contact, being able to put a face to things, is vital; a Facebook group or page is a valuable mechanism for this purpose. Everyone wants to make a difference, although the particular hopes and dreams of young people will depend on their background. They may have a short attention span and are often more effective as a small group than as individuals. Asked how they thought the educational system needed to be improved the visitors said it needs to impart an understanding of how the world works and also incorporate outlets for creativity. Involvement with community projects could provide a broadly based form of vocational education. Societies should consider establishing internships for young people on suitable projects. (*See more about this initiative in Round the Societies, page 16*)

Just Space

Lucy Rogers described the work of Just Space, a group of community organisations seeking to influence planning policy in favour of communities, like the Forum. One of the barriers to progress is the lack of real understanding of planning within the press and even in Parliament, let alone among busy ordinary people. Just Space designed the tabloid-shaped alternative "Community-Led London Plan" to help people to understand how planning policy impacts them. This more interesting - to-look-at format for people, a "citizens' version of a London Plan" has been successful. They are hoping to create some travelling exhibition boards based on this idea, which could be printed and used by other groups. It might be a good way to draw new people in. ■

(*See more on Town Centres and High Streets pp 3, 10, 16 and 17*)

Towards a New Plan for London

A new Mayor, a new London Plan - the process of carrying out a full review of the London Plan has begun; **Verina Glaessner** reports on a discussion of the London Plan's 'Greening' policies at the Urban Design London Policy Symposium, October 2016

The drawing up of a new London Plan offers a good opportunity to amend and redraft the existing London Plan in the knowledge of deficiencies in its execution and application. The UDL Policy symposium on The London Plan's 'Greening' Policies proved pertinent, helpful and well-informed in terms of statements and questions from the floor as well as from the speakers.

Peter Massini, Principal Policy Officer GLA, was keen to emphasise 'greening' as an essential part of infrastructure in general along with energy and transport provision, rather than a decorative 'add on' to see an application through the planning system. As part of this process it is essential to identify and take account of the various components of greening, their specific different functions and how they interact with each other and with the built environment and aspects of the infrastructure. This took the debate neatly away from considering green spaces as passively good things to be protected, as in the existing plan.

Green Infrastructure is to be defined as a network of interacting natural features (green spaces, roofs, street trees etc) engineered to deliver a range of specific identified benefits such as improved health, mitigated flood risk, improved air quality, biodiversity and resilience, and which in urban contexts provides somewhere for cultural, civic and community activity. (See also the London Infrastructure Plan)

Reconsideration of policies

London Plan policies which could usefully be strengthened along these lines include:

- Green Infrastructure (Policy 2.18) This encourages a more integrated and multifunctional network of green spaces and public realm.
- Urban Greening, Green Roofs and SuDS (Policies 5.10, 5.11, 5.13) which seek to encourage design solutions that help address the impacts of climate change
- Biodiversity, trees and rivers (Policies 7.19, 7.21 and 7.28) which seek to conserve and enhance the natural environment and ecology of the city.
- Policy 2.18, Green Infrastructure strategic and planning emphasises what should be done but does not give sufficient emphasis to the ability of such

an infrastructure to deliver benefits and solve problems. The specific benefits required and the problems requiring a solution in order to facilitate dense urban living are not highlighted as requirements within planning and development. Points from Supplementary Planning Guidance should be written in to help ensure proper weight is given and that implementation follows.

- Policy 5.10 Urban Greening could usefully be rethought as delivering measurable benefits and a high quality of life. Due weight should be given to the role context will play in engineering development.

The question of the management of private gardens was raised as less than half of available protected green space falls within government ownership: an issue which could be more closely regulated.

Policy priorities

Policy should prioritise sets of issues such as air quality, water management, noise abatement, where the green infrastructure could be expected to play a major part in control and mitigation. The context of population increase suggests additions to the existing green grid with a re-examination of the space taken up by roads and traffic interchanges are overdue.

As Kevin Barton, SuDs Designer and Landscape Architect with Robert Bray Associates pointed out, road verges and drains are a source of high level pollutants from tyre wear-and-tear. Without a SuDs system in place attractive networks of streams, rivers and canals become less than attractive or productive and a source of danger. The all too common misplumbing of sewage waste into rainfall water disposal pipework points to inadequate monitoring and management on site, leading to heavy pollution (Lee River). There was general agreement that London Plan policy 5.13 SuDS, and policy 7.28 River Restoration, required strengthening to the point of becoming a mandatory part of good practice, in the light of the current difficulties in implementation. Systems that store water, preferably close to where it first enters the local system, should be a basic element of any building or open space.

The green infrastructure should appear in policy as a means of actively addressing the

specific objectives required. Not all 'green solutions' are equally beneficial in every case. Is a green roof necessarily meeting required objectives or is water retention not what is needed? A system of ponds and open ground provide water purification and management in the Olympic Park. London's 25 hectares of green roofs are part of its flood mitigation infrastructure.

Policy implementation

Better spatial and performance information could improve provision. For proper implementation to follow, policy should articulate a hierarchy of different considerations, which will form the basis of the decisions being made in order to ensure that the objectives will be met. The provision of more accessible information regarding, for example, catchment areas and water management would help to ensure satisfactory place management.

Natural and green infrastructure management could benefit from a clearer set of definitions, objectives and policy tools. For example, heritage conservation uses a system of asset designation, from individual buildings to whole areas, and uses a concept of understanding the significance and setting for each. But the designation of a tree, space and/or habitat of importance is less clear, and does not cover changes to the areas around each. ■

Mayor's air quality plans

The Mayor has launched the second phase of his air quality consultation and plans to inject more urgency into measures to improve air quality.

In particular, he seeks to introduce the Ultra Low Emission Zone a year earlier than was planned and an extension to the North and South Circular roads would follow.

Transitional arrangements to help small businesses have not been ruled out provided they do not create a loophole through which others might escape. There is also talk of a scrappage scheme on diesel use.

The consultation ends 18 December 2016 <http://bit.ly/2eTD45M>

The results of stage 1 are published on the London Datastore. ■

Traffic congestion in London

The London Assembly's Transport Committee is examining what the Mayor and Transport for London can do to reduce congestion.

David Lewis reports

London's roads have been getting more congested in the last couple of years. What has upset the previous relatively stable situation, and what should the Mayor and Transport for London (TfL) do about it?

This is the first issue seized upon by the reconstituted Transport Committee of the London Assembly. After receiving evidence from a number of bodies and individuals, including the London Forum, they are now preparing their report. Among the reasons for increased congestion the London Forum cited were increased numbers of home deliveries, increased numbers of minicabs and Uber cars, reserving road space for Cycle Superhighways, and the growth of construction traffic. The Transport Committee say they want to achieve an appropriate balance between the competing priorities Londoners have for their road network.

The Committee have identified six possible approaches, not necessarily mutually exclusive, for reducing traffic congestion in London. Demand management is key to dealing with congestion, particularly in Inner London. The Congestion Charge is a primitive tool and more sophisticated technology is needed. The present flat rate should be replaced by a usage-based charge determined by the distance a vehicle travels within the Congestion Charge zone at a given time. It's urgent to find the most cost-effective system for that purpose. It could be adapted to incorporate tolls for selected river crossings, access roads to airports and other major routes. The current congestion worsens pollution, and radical improvements are certainly needed in air quality, but programmes to reduce emissions from vehicles will not necessarily reduce congestion.

More detailed statistics needed

To get a better picture of the situation the London Assembly should press for more detailed statistics of the numbers and behaviour of different types of vehicles, and of cyclists, together with estimated trends. The numbers of delivery vehicles on the roads may reflect the failure of past Mayors to promote break-bulk and consolidation centres for local deliveries. Local co-ordination of delivery times and waste

collection arrangements can also reduce local congestion. Commuting by car is encouraged by the amount of parking available at office blocks, especially older office blocks; the Mayor already has the power to introduce a Workplace Parking Levy. Car clubs are an excellent way of persuading people to give up using their own car, but boroughs have been reluctant to allocate enough bays for car club cars and vans. A bus is a very economical use of road space and the introduction of hopper fares should facilitate the most efficient design of the bus network. The London Forum has made a separate submission on the specific problem of Oxford Street.

Public transport

Other modes of travel should be used in preference to cars. The Night Tube should reduce demand for taxis and cabs late at nights. But public transport can also become congested: some Underground and suburban rail routes are already overloaded. Congestion on rail lines and inadequate bus services may incline people to use a car, thus boosting congestion on the roads. Next year Crossrail is due to bring relief to some Underground passengers, but elsewhere the prospect of improvements is years away. Greater priority needs to be given to remedying that. In Outer London there is a need for more bus routes to serve places people want to visit for leisure, shopping, sport and entertainment. But able-bodied people should be strongly encouraged to walk or cycle for short journeys in preference to using public transport.

Roads

The London Forum does not advocate construction of major new roads. The evidence is that providing additional road space tends to increase traffic volumes. In planning infrastructure the sensible approach is to design new housing areas in such a way that residents will be able to walk and cycle to the maximum extent and provision of public transport will be viable. Car-free housing is practicable in Central and Inner London, and also in town centres and close to transport interchanges. It has the benefit of preventing congestion in the immediate area, but also avoids placing an additional load on the wider network.

Car-free housing would also cost less, but planning authorities have not done enough to promote it.

The Committee are concerned to maximise the available road space. There are widespread interruptions to traffic because of road works, construction work and excavations by utilities. The lane rental scheme was introduced to control the duration of such interruptions. There is evidence that out-of-hours working has increased, but the benefits of this for traffic may have been outweighed by increases in the amount of work being carried out.

Finally there is a need to be proactive in monitoring and managing traffic in real time, especially through the design and control of traffic signals. There is a widespread impression that TfL is less ambitious and imaginative in this field than some city authorities in other countries. We hope the Committee will have investigated this issue and identified whether there is scope for improvement. You can find out more about the Committee's investigations and read the reports at:

[w https://www.london.gov.uk/about-us/london-assembly/transport-committee](https://www.london.gov.uk/about-us/london-assembly/transport-committee) or [w http://bit.ly/2ftWzOD](http://bit.ly/2ftWzOD) ■

Housing on TfL land

Over coming months the Housing Committee is to study what more the Mayor could do to ensure that Londoners get the best housing deal from Transport for London (TfL) land. In place of formal meetings of the Committee there will be a series of roundtable discussions with experts to inform its investigation.

TfL is one of London's largest landowners. It owns 5,700 acres of land (2,300 hectares). Many of the sites currently being brought forward for development are in Zones 1 and 2. The Mayor can control the price at which TfL land is released to developers, and therefore has considerable influence over how this land is used.

In July the Committee held a discussion with invited experts on Supported Housing in London.

The findings of the Committee are expected to be published over the winter 2016-17. ■

Parliament inquires into the future of Parks

Communities and Local Government Committee, Select Committee Inquiry into the state of public parks

Helen Marcus reports

In response to wide public concern the Communities and Local Government Committee has launched a national Inquiry into the Future of Parks to examine the impact of reduced local authority budgets on these open spaces and consider concerns that their existence is under threat. London Councils has warned of local authority budget cuts leading to a "slide towards privately-run parks" by 2020.

Even more worryingly the 2016 *Heritage Lottery Fund State of UK Public Parks* report found that nearly 50 per cent of local authorities had disposed of or transferred the management or ownership of some of their green spaces in the past three years and 22 per cent of respondents had sold part of a park or garden. In Battersea Park, for example a private company has been allowed to open a private adventure centre in part of the park and charge parents for their children to use the space.

Public opinion surveys

The Campaign group *We Own It* had commissioned Survation to conduct a survey, leading up to the select committee sitting. The survey of 1,013 adults posed two questions:

- 'Privatisation of parks is an acceptable way to raise revenue for councils' and
- 'Councils should have a statutory duty to provide public parks'.

70 per cent said that 'privatising' parks is unacceptable and 75 per cent believe parks should be a statutory duty for local authorities.

The Heritage Lottery Fund has published its second *State of the UK Public Parks* report in September. This comprehensive survey shows that there is a growing deficit between the rising use of parks and the declining resources that are available to manage them. Based on four surveys of park managers, independent park trusts, park friends and user groups, and the general public, the findings show that while parks are highly valued by the public and usage is increasing, park maintenance budgets and staffing levels are being cut.

It warns that without urgent action this continuing downward trend is set to continue and calls for collaborative action to deliver new ways of funding and managing public parks to avert a crisis.

70 per cent of those surveyed said that 'privatising' parks is unacceptable.

The Select Committee hearings

The Select Committee has received nearly 400 formal written submissions and more than 13,000 surveys completed online or face to face in parks since launching its inquiry in July.

The first session took place at the end of October when it received a petition, and heard evidence from a wide range of people.

Chaired by Clive Betts, (Lab, Sheffield South East), the other members are Bob Blackman (Con, Harrow East), Helen Hayes (Lab, Dulwich and West Norwood), Kevin Hollinrake (Con, Thirsk and Malton), Liz Kendall (Lab, Leicester West), Julian Knight (Con, Solihull), David Mackintosh (Con, Northampton South), Jim McMahon (Lab, Oldham West and Royton), Mark Prisk (Con, Hertford and Stortford), Mary Robinson (Con, Cheadle), and Alison Thewliss (SNP, Glasgow Central)

The first group to appear were representatives of the online petition website 38 Degrees who presented the 'save our parks' petition with over 270,000 signatures calling for parks to be made a statutory duty. However sector champion, The Parks Alliance, does not believe that making parks a statutory service is the answer to the parks funding crisis since statutory services are also under severe pressure due to budget cuts. Select Committee Chair Clive Betts also pointed out that although libraries are a statutory service, they are being closed all over the country.

Parks Alliance Vice-Chair, Sue Ireland, who is also Chair of Parks for London and Director of Open Spaces for the City of London Corporation, gave evidence together with other professionals, Ellie Robinson, Assistant Director of External Affairs, National Trust; Drew Bennellick, Head of Landscape and Natural Heritage UK, for the Heritage Lottery Fund, and

Peter Neal, landscape consultant and author of the Heritage Lottery Fund report.

The Committee then heard from Dave Morris, Chair of the National Federation of Parks and Green Spaces; Ben Shimshon, Founding Partner, *BritainThinks*; Emma Boggis, Chief Executive, Sport and Recreation Alliance; and Will Smithard, Strategic Projects Director, ukactive.

Dave Morris who has campaigned for three years to make care of parks a statutory duty, believes we are facing a crisis as serious as that of thirty or forty years ago when the UK's parks fell into neglect, became unsafe spaces, and took a colossal amount of effort and money to rescue. Now we are facing the same thing again. But, he pointed out, at least we now have the Friends groups movement to speak out, although they are reluctant to take on any long-term management responsibilities. We need immediate action to make care of parks a statutory duty.

In a discussion about funding Mr. Morris quoted an Historic England report:

"The history of public park funding models shows local authority management over 170 years has ensured that parks have survived even through late 20th century funding crises. Historically, all other funding models have failed. Since Victorian times, public parks have been dogged by a lack of recognition as an essential infrastructure and service, as local authorities have no statutory duty regarding them. It is critical that the status of public parks is resolved."

Mr Morris pointed out that the general public think that there is a statutory duty to care for parks; they do not realise that there is no such duty. A previous Select Committee on the future of parks recommended in 2003 that it be made a statutory duty with long-term funding solutions. When parks fail, local authorities usually have to pick up the bill and rescue the situation.

More information about the select committee hearings can be found on the Parliament website:

<http://www.parliamentlive.tv/Event/Index/c61f85e1-adc9-452a-95f0-8256fd8fcea3> or

<http://bit.ly/2eTCncF> ■

The Metropolitan Public Gardens Association

Helen Marcus went to this year's AGM

The Metropolitan Public Gardens Association, established in 1882, is one of the oldest environmental groups in London and has played a vital role in the preservation and improvement of countless gardens, neglected sites and green open spaces across the Capital. The first Chairman and moving spirit in its foundation was Lord Brabazon, later the first Earl of Meath.

One of its early aims was the opening up of churchyards and burial grounds which were threatened by neglect and being sold for building development. It was not until the 1930s that they were fully protected by legislation.

It also campaigned for school playgrounds to be made available for public use out of school hours and for private garden squares to be opened to the public at designated times, giving its highest priority to the most deprived inner city areas of London, where over-crowding was at its worst.

It helped in the formation and development of the National Trust and the National Playing Fields Association. Brockwell Park, Telegraph Hill and Myatt's Fields are among the many open spaces which the MPGA helped to preserve and

Lord Brabazon also initiated the campaign in 1908 to add the grounds of Kenwood to Hampstead Heath for the public, later taken up by the Heath Protection Society (now the Heath and Hampstead Society, the oldest civic society in London).

The Association relies entirely on voluntary contributions and funds from investment income from past donations, grants, subscriptions and bequests. With these it provides modest grants to a wide variety of groups, including local councils, schools, hospitals, hospices, museums, voluntary organizations and community groups, for the improvement of the environment.

Amongst the many projects it supports are Trees for Cities, London in Bloom and 'Planting in the Playground'.

Loyd Grossman at the AGM

At this year's AGM the guest speaker was Loyd Grossman who has just been appointed to be the first chairman of a new charity which will manage and fundraise for London's Royal Parks. He made some interesting comments on London's built heritage: London is still different from the many towns and cities across the world, like Shanghai and Dubai, which now all look the

same, and it was important to preserve that. 'Heritage' is what tourists come to see.

When pressed by audience members from the Friends of Regents Park he assured them that he was well aware of current problems around events in parks and would continue to defend the value of public open space.

More information about the MPGA and how to become a member can be found on their website:

<http://www.mpga.org.uk>

A new Royal Parks charity

In February, the Government gave its approval to plans by The Royal Parks Agency and the Royal Parks Foundation (the charity for the Royal Parks) to create a new public corporation to take over the role of managing the parks from The Royal Parks Agency. The new Royal Parks charity will be led by Loyd Grossman CBE following his appointment in July by Culture Secretary, John Whittingdale, as its new Chairman.

<https://www.royalparks.org.uk/>

Safe Under Us? London's Green Belt Under Threat

The London Green Belt Council and CPRE London have compiled a joint report Safe Under Us?, investigating threats from housebuilding in the London Metropolitan Green Belt. A campaign to help raise awareness among MPs was launched at the House of Lords in September.

The report highlights how Government, despite its election promise that the Green Belt would be 'safe under us', is applying intense pressure to councils through its policies and sanctions, to force them to release Green Belt land for development. If councils' Local Plans and site allocation are not up to date by early 2017 the Government is threatening to write their Local Plan for them.

The Government says Green Belt is 'sacrosanct' and has described the CPRE research as misleading and speculative. CPRE claims that both statements are disingenuous and their report shows the

threats are very real. It cites local evidence provided by CPRE branches in Bedfordshire, Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Essex, Hertfordshire, Kent, London and Surrey; and 42 local planning authorities that were surveyed covering nearly 84% of all London Green Belt land.

The report found there were plans for 203 Green Belt sites including proposals for 123,528 homes. There is also pressure from infrastructure such as schools and roads.

The report suggests that Local Planning Authorities are being pressured to deliver housing targets that are inflated by unrealistic economic growth forecasts, forcing councils to give up Green Belt land.

The Government's planning framework commitment that only 'exceptional' circumstances should allow building on Green Belt land seems not to be heeded.

The Planning Policy Guidance asks LPAs to base their plans on aspirations rather than need, or an arbitrary 10% increase as proposed by the Planning Inspectorate. This leads to "madeup targets resulting in local authorities feeling compelled to release land for development to meet the targets".

Land-banking has a major impact on LPAs as they cannot rely on the planning permissions they have granted to count towards their five-year housing supply. Land-banking not only increases the price of land but is a barrier to the housing targets being met. The report recommends that land-banking should be deterred with financial sanctions and housing targets should be supportable and realistic. The report can be found on the CPRE website:

www.cprelondon.org.uk/resources/item/2339-safe-under-us

Spotlight on the Kensington Society

Using knowledge of planning and the area's history to help to turn negative planning action into one which will benefit the area

by **Amanda Frame**

The Kensington Society was formed in 1953 by Mrs Gay Christiansen who lived at 18 Kensington Square just off Kensington High Street. She was passionate about good architecture and planning; she had the time, the friends, a very persuasive personality, in addition, the resources and drive to achieve results, and she loved Kensington. When a planning proposal came forward to demolish several houses on the Council's own property on the street that led into her square, she opposed the application. The application was approved.

What came out of her opposition was a working group of people who lived in Kensington and loved it. Galvanised by the fact that it was clear that 'local opinion' was not considered or reflected in the planning process, Mrs Christiansen formed the Kensington Society.

Only two years later the Society found itself in the middle of a battle to save the Imperial College, the glorious buildings opened by Queen Victoria to commemorate her Jubilee. Within the architectural section of the 1955 Royal Academy's Exhibition were plans developed by the Government to demolish the buildings between the Albert Hall and Waterhouse's Natural History Museum. The Kensington Society organised a public meeting with speakers including John Betjeman, Sir Hugh Casson, and representing the American residents, a Mr Hitchcock. As a result of the fast action, the campanile, Colcutt Tower, was saved. What you see today along Prince Consort Road is the direct result of that community action.

One cannot today imagine such a proposal but those were different times and societies across London have forced the transformation.

Today

The Society's boundary is the original boundary line of the old Royal Borough of Kensington. Our northern boundary is the Harrow Road, the southern boundary runs the north side of Fulham Road, in the west it follows the West London Line and in the east cuts through the Portobello area and follows the Broad Walk across Kensington Gardens.

What you see today along Prince Consort Road is the direct result of community action.

The Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea (RBKC) is the smallest borough with the second highest population density in London. The Society represents 15 of the 18 wards. RBKC is known for its wealthy residents and has some of the highest property prices in the capital; however it also has some of the poorest areas. Three-quarters of the Borough is within conservation areas, with over 3,800 buildings listed.

The 2010 Local Plan, which we helped to shape emphasising keeping life local, policies for tall buildings and town centres, is currently undergoing a major review. This follows revisions to protect pubs, consolidate conservation policies and strengthen the Council's basement policy. We have supported the Council's resistance to the increases in permitted development including offices to housing. The Society is now pressing for a major change in the housing policies to reduce the emphasis on large units which has skewed new housing directly into the international investment market.

Working in partnership

The Society has 32 affiliated societies which represent their own associations. All affiliated societies participate in our Sounding Board meetings held twice a year which inform about changes in, or consultations about, the planning system. In certain cases we work with individual associations on issues which directly affect their area. The most recent is the project where seven residents' organisations formed a working group which concentrated on the problems of the Natural History Museum. This collaboration resulted in the recent approval of the extensive redevelopment of the Museum

grounds. We currently have a working group with TfL for the South Kensington Station, a separate group for South Kensington area, one within Notting Hill Gate, and a recently formed Kensington High Street group. We are represented on the Exhibition Road Cultural Group.

The planning committee is very active in reviewing and commenting on numerous planning applications. Our working knowledge of planning as well as of the site's history will frequently reinforce the local opinions and help to turn a negative planning action into one which will benefit the area.

Individual members receive email alerts informing of issues which will affect their lives for example strikes, road closures, and matches. The autumn newsletter reports on activities we have engaged in since the spring AGM. The annual report has more than 90 pages of in-depth and historic articles. It has won awards from the London Forum for its excellence.

The AGM is held every spring with a keynote speaker and members' reception afterwards. We arrange events each year for members, which may be about our area, or history, or inform about planning issues. Also there are workshops where we address current planning problems with our members with such topics as party-wall law, and noise and nuisance controls. There is one in November where we shall outline the enforcement procedures for planning.

The trustees, particularly the planning committee, are active in all policy developments within the Borough and with those proposed by the Government. Currently we are examining the redraft of the Borough's Local Plan and Wellbeing and Health Consultations. We have coordinated meetings with our affiliated societies to ensure that all issues within the massive planning documents are understood and, where needed, we will assist in commenting on the proposed changes.

We have the second highest pollution in London and 33% of school-age children recorded as obese. We shall be making representations in the Wellbeing and Health Consultation over the lack of air-quality controls and the profusion of takeaway fast food outlets in the Borough.



Amanda Frame

The Kensington Society

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In the future

The Chinese, the Singaporeans and even the Russians have slowed their thirst for our homes while Brexit and the Stamp Duty Land Tax have equal effect. CapCo, the developers of the massive Earl's Court development, is already expanding its plans by an additional 2,500 homes to the 7,500 already approved. We support more homes but no one is saying whether the additional units will be within the same volume as approved, nor what, if any, will be additional community contributions.

The owners of the 1970's Forum Hotel on Cromwell Road have announced they have abandoned their hopes for a huge casino. They now propose to replace it with one of 900 rooms of 5 star quality including spas and ballrooms, and for good measure, some housing. They promise all this without loss of the protected garden.

On Valentine's Day 2017 the appeal hearing for the redevelopment of Newcombe House in Notting Hill Gate begins. It pits the small community of Hillgate Village against many of us who feel the proposal is reasonable and will add to the community amenities. The Kensington Society and other local resident associations had jointly worked with the developer to achieve a reasonable solution, but the people living closest to the development, unfortunately, did not participate. We cannot be all things to all people, but what we have learned is, hopefully, in the future we can work towards speaking with one voice and to an agreed end.

The entire community rallied against the applications to redevelop the Odeon cinema site on Kensington High Street, and the Candy brothers' proposal for the development of the former Dukes Lodge, which included building on formerly undeveloped land and massive basements. Both applications were recommended by the Borough's head of planning who retired following the refusals by the Planning Committee.

If there is a major concern in the future, it is with the appeal process. The Planning Inspectors, who were obviously well-schooled in planning law, but perhaps not fully cognisant of the local history and policies, or the effect of the applications on the historic environment, allowed both appeals.

Mrs Christiansen's starting position was that 'local opinion' must be reflected in the planning process. Little has changed since; we are needed as much today as we were in 1953. ■

The Design Museum
 photograph Luke Hayes



The Grade II* Royal Crescent, Holland Park

Age: formed in 1953

Circumstances of Birth: The Society was formed when a group of citizens came together over their concern that the fine architectural heritage of Kensington was going to be lost under the pressure of development. As Mary Stocks, later Baroness Stocks, said at the time she would never look up during the war for fear of what fine building had been destroyed by the Luftwaffe. At the time, she did not look up for fear of what developers had demolished. Left unopposed, most of the fine buildings of Kensington would be gone today. The goal of the Society was to form planning polices which reflected 'local opinion' and to preserve and improve Kensington by promoting good architecture and planning and by protecting, preserving and improving its buildings, open spaces and other features of beauty or historic or public interest.

Biggest Successes: Our first success was preventing the demolition of the Imperial College tower. Other early successes included preventing the wholesale demolition of Kensington High Street; the demolition of Leighton House and Holland House. Our latest success is assisting in forming a working group of local societies to work with and press for acceptable use of the front lawns of the Natural History Museum.

Biggest Disappointments/Frustrations: Early failures include the Council's own demolition of its Town Hall, the road-widening in Notting Hill Gate and the Westway. Recently we opposed the massive redevelopment of Lancer Square. Loss of the appeals for the Odeon site on Kensington High Street and Dukes Lodge.

Present Preoccupations: TfL's proposed redevelopment of South Kensington Station, which has over 30 million passengers a year, and continued TfL delay of the programme for step-free access. The Holiday Inn on Cromwell Road is proposed to be redeveloped and we fear overdevelopment with another tall building. AirBnB is having the anticipated negative effect. The revision of the Local Plan and our continual battles to save our pubs, our offices and our green spaces.

Working Details: The Kensington Society was registered in July 1974 with the Charity Commission (267778). The constitution was amended in November 2010. We have approximately 700 individual and 33 affiliated society members. Annual subscription is £15. Publications: an annual report and a newsletter. Regular member alerts. Events throughout the year.

Last Word: After 63 years of continual efforts to ensure that 'local opinion' is considered and reflected in the planning process, we find we are needed more than ever. ■

More City sky-scrapers?

Concerns at threats to heritage assets

Skyline Campaign survey finds Londoners want restrictions on new tall buildings

The City of London Corporation is proposing a significant expansion of the area where tall buildings are allowed. Currently, tall buildings in the Square Mile such as the Leadenhall Building, dubbed the Cheesegrater, the Heron Tower and the Gherkin, (30 St Mary Axe), are located in the so-called 'eastern cluster'.

A consultation document published in September proposed expanding the cluster southwards to allow new towers to be developed between the Cheesegrater and the 'Walkie-Talkie (20 Fenchurch Street). Planners may seek changes to the City's protected views.

The Corporation says growth upwards is needed to maintain competitive advantage as a financial district or business could go south of the river or to Westminster. In the wake of Brexit, Frankfurt and Paris are also competition.

Any such expansion would affect protected views of St Paul's from Tower Bridge and would also see more skyscrapers looming behind the Tower of London, viewed from the bridge. Christopher Hayward, the chairman of the City's planning committee, is quoted as saying that computer modelling will be used to assess the effect on protected views which he admitted was a "sensitive" issue.

There is already concern about the effect of towers on the Tower of London World Heritage Site (WHS). Historic Royal Palaces, which has responsibility for five royal palaces in the capital, has written to City of

London planners expressing extreme alarm at "the steady build-up in both density and height of the Eastern Quarter to which the proposed development at 1 Leadenhall Street would contribute"..."their potential visual impact on the wider setting of the WHS and, particularly, on protected views of the Tower" are now "posing a serious threat".

With the developments along the south bank this risks destroying views of the Thames for ever as it becomes walled in by skyscrapers.

New Scotland Yard Redevelopment

The redevelopment of New Scotland Yard granted permission in February by Westminster City Council is causing similar concern. Objectors have said that the scheme with its six towers, the tallest of which will be 20 storeys in height, is not in keeping with the architecture of such an historic part of London. Historic England said "some harm" was likely to be caused to designated heritage assets by the scheme.

In September a letter of protest was published in *The Times* from the architect Quinlan Terry together with the Chairmen of the Cathedral Area Residents Group and the Belgravia Society, saying that the Council's decision to give permission for the redevelopment ignored the views of local residents and is in contradiction of its own planning brief. It "involves the desecration of a world heritage site." They urged Sajid Javid, the communities secretary, to intervene.

Skyline Campaign survey

At the same time as the City wants to build more skyscrapers a survey conducted by Ipsos MORI for the Skyline Campaign has found that Londoners would like to see them restricted.

Based on face-to-face interviews with 504 adults it found that more residents of inner London boroughs, 49%, than outer boroughs, 34%, think that the 270 tall buildings planned, proposed, or under construction in London are too many. (English Heritage got similar results in a survey some years ago).

People in inner London are also more likely to say they are worried about how many tall buildings are being built – 43% say this compared to 33% of outer London residents.

The role of tall buildings in meeting the Capital's housing needs was questioned; terraced houses (24%) and low-rise purpose built flats (21%) were seen as more suitable to meet people's needs. Only 8% say purpose built high-rise blocks (of 20 storeys or more) are what's needed.

For more detail see:

<https://www.ipsos-mori.com/research/publications/researcharchive/3721/Londoners-support-restrictions-on-new-tall-buildings.aspx> or <http://bit.ly/2fRjaW4> ■

Brent Cross centre revamp - Michael Bach reports

Plans to enlarge the Brent Cross centre have been in the pipeline for several years and been through several rounds of consultation. Now Hammerson has unveiled its latest plans which were publicly consulted on earlier this month and are due to go before planners at Barnet council next spring.

The scheme was previously called Brent Cross Cricklewood and was designed by Allies & Morrison. But in 2014 the site was divided into two with the plot north of the A406 North Circular road – which includes the shopping centre – now

being called Brent Cross London. It will be developed by Hammerson and Standard Life.

The 1976 shopping centre will be doubled in size and the bus station will be enlarged and relocated.

Architects working on the scheme include Chapman Taylor, Callison RTKL and Macgregor Smith and the plans include around 400 homes and a riverside park.

The southern portion, Brent Cross South, is being delivered by Argent Related in a joint venture with the council and will include 6,700 homes and more

shops, but configured in a more traditional way like a high street.

But is it sustainable? Will it Hoover up all the retail growth in North London? What will be the impact on town centres in North London? What happened to the 'town centre first' policy? What would that mean in North London? ■

Earl's Court

The problems rumble on

Seven years after it was proposed, the future of one of London's largest redevelopment schemes, the £8bn Earl's Court master plan, is still being fought over. (see Newforum issue 59 Autumn 2011 PDF supplement)

Mayor Sadiq Khan is reviewing the plans and seeking a big increase in the number of affordable homes on the site. At the same time, the market for luxury apartments, which underpin the plans, has slumped.

The Mayor has no power to revoke the existing planning permission, but much of the land is owned by Transport for London, ultimately controlled by the Mayor, enabling him to block parts of the scheme.

Since 2013 when the development was granted planning permission the London Mayorality has switched political control, as has Hammersmith and Fulham, one of the two local authorities, partly because of the project.

Hammersmith and Fulham's Labour administration is now opposing the plan to demolish the two council estates on the site and rehouse 760 households.

Campaigners have produced an alternative plan - to add housing on the estates rather than demolish them - and they have appealed to central government to let the community take over the estates. Their appeal is under consideration.

Various alterations to the scheme are under discussion such as providing more homes for rent, increasing the amount of affordable housing, currently planned at only 11 per cent of the scheme, (far below the mayor's target of 50 per cent on schemes involving public sector land); and an increase in the total number of homes from 7,500 to about 10,000, in taller buildings.

Earth movers and cranes are now working where the Earls Court Exhibition Centre once stood, completing the two-year demolition project. But it is still unclear what will rise in its place. ■

The 2016 Carbuncle Cup

The 2016 Building Design Carbuncle Cup Winner is Lincoln Plaza, in London's Docklands. The high-rise luxury residential building was described as "an assortment of haphazardly assembled facades that are crude, jarring and shambolic" ... "yet another shameful indictment of bad planning as well as bad architecture" with "dubious cladding and incoherent form"... "the worst building amongst a swathe of mediocrity" and "the type of project that gives high-rise housing a bad name."

Designed by BUJ Architects for Galliard Homes it consists of two residential towers, of up to 31 storeys, titled Franklin and Greenwich, and a hotel plus a drum-shaped building. The buildings are notable for geometric patterned facades.

The jury members were BD editor Thomas Lane; author, architect and BD columnist Ben Flatman; LSE director of estates Julian Robinson and architect and architectural critic Ijeah who is quoted as saying: "This year's six finalists may present a variety of different buildings in all shapes and sizes but they are all united by the same old characteristics with which we are now all-too familiar. Contextual incongruity, myopic cladding, woeful detailing, mind-numbing mediocrity, clumsy massing, incoherent form and, of course, poor planning are just some of the woes on gruesome display."

Reader comments were also taken into account during the judging process.

Other London developments shortlisted were 5 Broadgate by Make Architects; The Tower, Southwark by Squire & Partners whose "poor design and inappropriate location wreaks urban damage that extends far and wide"; and the Francis Crick Institute, by HOK with PLP Architecture ■

Basement fightback

Westminster City's latest basement policy; legal action in Camden

The City of Westminster has been making a number of revisions to its City Plan. After consultations in 2015 it has followed Kensington and Chelsea, (RBKC) and made an Article 4 Direction to remove permitted development rights for basement development throughout the city. This was confirmed on 4 July 2016, and came into force on 31 July 2016. For more information see <http://committees.westminster.gov.uk/ieDecisionDetails.aspx?ID=554>

Basement extension in Camden to be tested in the High Court

Camden council meanwhile has been tardy in this respect despite much local lobbying. In Kentish Town, a resident will challenge the council's decision to allow a neighbouring one-storey basement within the footprint of an existing house under permitted development rights. This allows homeowners to bypass the formal planning application process, as long as the extension is only one storey deep.

The claim will argue that permitted development rights were intended to cover additional developments like a conservatory but were never supposed to cover basement developments which require substantial engineering works.

Camden Council is taking a highly legalistic view: "When considering applications such as these the council has to act within the very prescriptive permitted development rules on basements made by central government." The case will be heard at the High Court on November 22-23

STOP PRESS: Camden will be introducing an Article 4 Direction from June 2017, taking basements within the footprint of the house out of Permitted Development. ■

A City for All Londoners - The Mayor's new vision for London

Mayor Sadiq Khan's new vision for London, *A City for All Londoners*, sets out a direction for London over the next four years which the Mayor will later expand upon in detailed strategies. It is out for consultation until 11 December 2016 and can be accessed at:

<http://www.london.gov.uk/get-involved/have-your-say/all-consultations/city-all-londoners> or

<http://bit.ly/2fgLQJl>

email address: yourviews@london.gov.uk

The Mayor's commitment is that current

residents should feel comfortable with the scale of change at local level; that new developments should be desirable places to be; and that tall buildings will only be permitted if they can add value to the existing community.

London Forum is seeking more precise conditions in policy for assessing tall buildings in the Mayor's Replacement London Plan. The Forum believes the onus of proof should be on justifying why high-rise/tall buildings are the preferred solution. ■

Home ownership - a new Review

Peter Redfern, chief executive of Taylor Wimpey, was commissioned in February by John Healey MP, Shadow Secretary of State for Housing, to conduct an independent Review into the decline of home ownership. The results of their investigations, the Redfern Review, make startling reading. **Helen Marcus** reports

Peter Redfern assembled a large team of experts, including Dame Kate Barker, (whose report of 2004 put forward the housing shortage theory). The results of their investigations, the Redfern Review, were published on November 16. Many of the report's conclusions and recommendations contradict conventional thinking, in particular that high house prices are caused by a shortage of housing and only a massive building programme would bring the price down: "The relatively simple 'supply and demand' model whereby increasing supply will reduce prices, which fits most commodities, just doesn't work for housing. ...changes in house prices do not always reflect changes in supply and indeed the availability of housing. A myriad of other factors driving house prices are often at play."

Newsforum has been reporting similar doubts, expressed by several leading market experts and academics, over the last two years.

Redfern says categorically: "It is often suggested that the biggest contribution to this increase in house prices was a shortage of supply in the decade or more leading up to the peak of the market in 2007; however this is a misleading view." He finds that the increase in house prices was not driven by an acute lack of overall supply; that is born out by the Office of National Statistics (ONS) figures, (all available to view online). They consistently show a surplus of dwellings over households. For instance when Kate Barker wrote her report in 2004, asserting that there was a shortage of housing, the ONS figures show there was at the time in Greater London actually a surplus of dwellings: 3,157,520 dwellings for 3,058,000 households.

Challenging the assumptions

Assumptions to be found in many reports, that because fewer new houses have been built than the rise in number of households, there must be a shortage of dwellings for would be home owners to buy, are also thrown into doubt by Redfern who says "...our modelling results suggest there is no clear relationship between new housing supply and the rate of home ownership."

Redfern also finds that "the increase in household numbers over the period [1996-

2006] was more than offset by increases in the number of dwellings. ...new supply outstripped the rate of household formation." The ONS data confirm this and, moreover, show that the surplus of dwellings over households continued right up until 2014, when, as Redfern reports the position reversed.

The various reports also admit that some of the figures have been overestimated and turn out to be wrong. "The 2011 Census showed that the number of households in England had risen much less since 2001 than projections based on the 2001 Census had suggested;"*

Only in 2014, for the first time, the ONS shows household numbers in Greater London exceeding dwellings: 3,427,650 dwellings and 3,452,000 households. But that is a shortfall of 24,350 dwellings, not the much higher numbers that are usually quoted.

Context is also important: the total population in London is now around 8.5 million and, as Redfern says, (and ONS data shows) "In 1961 the average household size for the UK was 3.0 people. Between 1961 and 2001 the average UK household size decreased steadily to 2.4." That, it must be pointed out, is even though the population was steadily increasing from 1980.

The key drivers

Most tellingly Redfern finds that: "Restrictions on new housing supply have not been the main culprit when it comes to price rises over the past 25 years". He also acknowledges that "the key drivers of the fall in home ownership have been a combination of macroeconomic issues, ...arising from outside of the housing market. ...house prices do not always closely reflect the availability of housing – prices can be affected by many different factors"

Recommendations

His recommendations identify "specific focus areas that can be improved", which echo what London Forum has been saying:

- "The resourcing of planning departments.
- "The effective operation of the Duty to Cooperate ...between urban, suburban and rural authorities.
- "The interaction between neighbourhood plans and local plans, which remains unclear.

- "Diversion of funding (from initiatives such as Starter Homes and Modern Methods of Construction) to housing infrastructure and affordable housing should be considered."

A crisis of affordability

The real problem that needs to be addressed is affordability; it is clear that the supposed solutions are not working as prices continue to rise.

According to the GMB website there are 344,294 households on local authority housing waiting lists in London. The likelihood is that they are on these waiting lists because they cannot afford what is on offer and may never be able to no matter how many new houses are built. The same applies to the cases of overcrowding that are cited. This is the need that is not being met.

An impartial and more sophisticated assessment of what is actually London's housing crisis is needed before the planning system and the Green Belt are further degraded to make way for an increase in housing supply which, in many commentators' judgment, is unlikely to address the core problem of affordability.

Redfern gives much valuable analysis. His view that what is needed is "a long-term strategy for the housing market that is based on principles that can be agreed across the main political parties" to achieve a balanced increase of housing supply, is to be welcomed. He also warns that while "recent policy changes to the planning system will, over time, have a significant beneficial effect.....Further significant changes are more likely to have a negative than positive effect on long-term supply."

The new process to assess London's housing need for the replacement London Plan starts with a conference in December. London Forum will be monitoring proposed changes closely. ■

*Alan Holmans *Town & Country Planning Tomorrow* Series Paper 16: New Estimates of Housing Demand and Need in England, 2011 to 2031 for the Town & Country Planning Association September 2013

ONS statistics quoted in this article:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-household-projections>
<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-dwelling-stock-including-vacants>
 See also the CPRE report page 9 ■

The Crossrail archaeological programme

One of the most fascinating aspects of the construction of Crossrail is its extensive archaeological programme which has given archaeologists from Museum of London Archaeology (MOLA) a rare opportunity to study previously inaccessible areas of London. They have unearthed finds from almost every important period of London's history.

Since 2009 over 100 archaeologists have worked on the 40 sites involved. They have found more than 10,000 items spanning London's history and pre-history from prehistoric animal bones, to Roman remains, human remains from the infamous 'Bedlam' psychiatric hospital and remnants of Britain's industrial past.

The Black Death and the Great Plague

In Charterhouse Square two distinct layers of burials were found including the graves of 25 people, the first evidence of the location of London's second Black Death emergency burial ground established in 1348. Pottery found in the graves dates them to the mid-14th century or later.

Buried beneath Liverpool Street station was the former Bedlam burial ground - the New Churchyard - located at the western end of Liverpool Street - in use from 1569 to at least 1738. Scientific analysis of the skeletons has identified the DNA of the bacteria responsible for the 1665 Great Plague. Moorfields marsh, a Roman road and the Walbrook, one of London's lost rivers, have also been found there.

A Tudor manor house in Stepney

At Stepney Green archaeologists found the remains of Worcester House, a Tudor manor house, originally known as King John's Court, built c1450-1550, and several other important buildings that occupied the east end of Stepney Green over a 500 year period.

The house was acquired and remodelled by the Marquis of Worcester, a royalist, in 1597. It was confiscated in 1645 during the Civil War and then owned by a prominent parliamentarian, William Greenhill, who used it as a safe haven for early Protestant nonconformists or Puritans to meet. The Bull Lane meeting house was added to the grounds in 1644, one of the earliest purpose-built nonconformist meeting houses in London.

A moat, cellars, walls, cess pits and wells associated with this and other Tudor houses have been uncovered, along with household goods including a distinctive chamber pot with the humorous phrase inscribed inside: 'what I see, I will not tell'.

An ancient waterway and Roman Pottery

At Royal Oak, a 68,000 year old channel close to the route of the historic River Westbourne was discovered. The ancient waterway contained a large collection of animal bones from species that are now extinct in the British Isles, including prehistoric reindeer and bison and an Aurochs, a large ancestor of modern cattle.

At Tottenham Court Road remnants of Roman pottery and 17th Century artefacts including a clay pipe, pottery and bricks and the remains of a brick building were found in Dean Street.

The first iron ships and a football club

Digs at Limmo Peninsula, Newham, uncovered the remains of the Thames Ironworks and Shipbuilding Company which occupied the entire Peninsula between 1847 and 1912. The works played a significant part in Britain's industrial history and was the first shipyard in the world to produce all-iron ships. Some of the most famous warships in the world were built and launched there, including HMS Warrior which is now docked in Portsmouth.

The Company set up a football club for their employees using the emblem of crossed hammers. The club became known as "The Hammers" or 'The Irons' and is now West Ham United F.C.

Roman buildings at London Bridge

Hundreds of historic artefacts have been found during excavations under the arches of London Bridge station during redevelopment work for Thameslink including early Roman buildings and fragments of Medieval floors and walls.

Crossrail is planning an exhibition of finds at the Museum of London Docklands opening on 10 February 2017 next year.

Full details can be found at: www.crossrail.co.uk/sustainability/archaeology/

Heritage at Risk Register 2016

There are 682 properties on the London section of the 2016 Heritage at Risk Register issued by Historic England in October.

Although there are 12 more than last year some have been rescued and removed this year. These include Wilton's Music Hall, which after decades of dereliction and a lengthy campaign to save and restore it, is finally structurally sound with the aid of a capital project to repair the building.

The 1930s Poplar Baths is also now restored and once again open as a public pool nearly 30 years after closing its doors.

But sites added to the London Register in 2016 include two significant churches. Newington Green Unitarian Church in Islington has had connections to political radicalism for over 300 years; the most famous member of its congregation was Mary Wollstonecraft.

The Church of St Mary Woolnoth, City of London, a Nicholas Hawksmoor church constructed between 1716 and 1727, is where anti-slavery campaigner William Wilberforce worshipped and it was immortalised in T.S. Eliot's poem "The Wasteland".

The Aviary at London Zoo designed by Lord Snowdon in 1965 is now in need of repair and ZSL London Zoo has secured Heritage Lottery funding to turn it into a new innovative space for animals and visitors.

The Register can be downloaded as a PDF from the Historic England website:

<https://historicengland.org.uk/whats-new/news/heritage-at-risk-2016>

Conservation staff resources

An Eighth report on Local Authority Staff Resources was published by Historic England, the Association of Local Government Archaeological Officers and the Institute of Historic Building Conservation, in August.

It compares the levels of historic environment staff resources in local authorities in the early months of 2016 with those available since 2003 but collected consistently since 2006.

Available at historicengland.org.uk/

Round the Societies

A round-up of news from our member societies.

By **Diane Burridge**

The Clapham Society working with local businesses

In August, a blank frontage of a site long derelict in The Pavement was transformed by a large scale 'cultural map' of the area, and panels describing the work of notable local people and other historical connections. The display was created by illustrator Jenni Starks with support from members of the Clapham Society's Local History Sub-committee. The display was the concept of This is Clapham, the local Business Improvement District (BID) which came into existence in October 2014, and since has become a close ally of The Clapham Society in promoting the area.

The Business Improvement District has the ability to levy a modest rate on business premises within its designated area and raises about £220,000 per annum to promote local initiatives, some of which aim to plug gaps in existing services, such as street cleaning.

Richmond Society Landscaping Fund

The contributions of £2 collected from each person attending the Richmond Society Heritage Walks goes into the Society's Landscaping Fund. Projects that have been financed by the Fund include: the David Church memorial bench in Terrace Gardens; topping up grants for the restoration of the Colcutt Fountain canopy at the top of Richmond Hill; and planting the Black Poplar in Petersham Meadow for HM Queen Elizabeth's 90th birthday, in association with the National Trust. After two years' lobbying by the Richmond Society, restoration work has started on the Nightwatchman's Hut at the top of Terrace Gardens.

London Society White Paper

In its second "White Paper", *Building Greater London – an end to the capital's crisis of affordability* written by Ben Derbyshire, the London Society urges that a Royal Commission should be set up to explore options to devolve more powers to the Mayor of London and the Greater London Authority to tackle the housing crisis, including forging greater co-operation across London and its neighbouring counties.

The Paper can be downloaded from:

<http://www.londonsociety.org.uk/building-greater-london-an-end-to-the-capitals-crisis-of-affordability/>

The future of Newson's Yard – an exercise in persistency

The **Belgravia Society** produced an eight-page objection to planning consent being granted to turn Newson's timber yard, Pimlico Road, into two superstores of 10,000 ft each, with alterations to the shop fronts, and the destruction of what is left of the Victorian street. To the Society's surprise, the applicant employed Gerald Eve to respond to this objection – which is highly unusual. The Society noted that planning is not a discretionary matter, but a legal one, and when a Planning Committee takes a decision it must do so on the basis of legal objections, although there is a legal presumption in favour of granting consent.

Camden Civic Society

High SpeedTwo (HS2)

The Camden Civic Society submitted three petitions to the House of Commons Select Committee suggesting, amongst other things, improvements to the proposals for HS2 and alternative railway schemes. These were mainly ignored. Now that the Bill is progressing in the House of Lords, the Society has submitted more petitions. In all, 821 petitions have been received by the Lords Select Committee – of which about 115 are from Camden.

Camden Civic Society Competition

After a year's break due to funding problems Camden Civic Society's Competition for Year 5 schoolchildren, to encourage them to think about their local environment and how they (as our future citizens) would like to change it for the better, resumed this year.

The children are asked to give their views on what is good and bad about their neighbourhood and their suggestions for improvements. But this year, instead of asking the children to write a letter to the Mayor of Camden, as in previous competitions, they were asked to produce a leaflet focusing on the areas immediately round their schools. This encouraged the children to use their artistic talents as well as their literary skills, and added a rich dimension of interest.

Entries were received from seven schools and twelve classes, somewhat below the numbers received in previous years. The Society was particularly disappointed that, for the first time, they had no entries from schools south of the Euston Road.

Several classes formally surveyed each other and presented the results with impressive histograms and pie diagrams. Some talked to older neighbours, to ensure that concerns of other generations do not go unreported.

Almost all the respondents considered Camden and their own districts to be fine places to live. But many spent only a short sentence or two on positives, before pressing on to the interesting topics of what is not so good and what the solutions might be. The most extreme was Primrose Hill School, where only one child mentioned the Regent Canal as a 'good', compared to a whole host who complained most vigorously (and rightly!) about how it needed a good clean up.

Competitors from St Aloysius school, in Somers Town, took a most interesting approach. They looked back over Competition sheets from years gone by and are saddened and feel let down by the Local Authority because old problems have not been solved.

Significantly Parks and Open Spaces came top of the list of 'good' things mentioned and Litter and Rubbish, Dog Mess and Pollution were high on the list of "bad" things. More Personal Community Responsibility came top of the list of 'Desired Improvement'. Clearly these children are going to continue the good work of Camden civic societies of the future!

The report makes most interesting reading, especially in the light of London Forum's AGM discussion. The report was compiled and written by Aileen Hammond, Camden Civic Society with help from Susan Sheahan, Camden Civic Society. We are most grateful to them for sending it to us.

For further information please contact Aileen Hammond: aileenhammond@googlemail.com

The Chelsea Society

How to attract younger members and volunteers?

Young people are interested in engagement, as shown by Ipsos Mori research, on behalf of Step Up to Serve, 2015, which found that 42% of young people aged between 10 and 20 years participate in 'meaningful social action' in the UK. (Source: Community Life Survey, 2015/16). Demos also published a report (Introducing Generation Citizen, 2014) which concluded that 'today's teenagers are more engaged with social issues than ever.'

So how do Societies engage these young people? Sarah Farrugia, writing for the Chelsea Society's newsletter, analysed this research and noted that: "young people engage very differently to older generations. They engage virtually, as much as in person, and use social media to keep in touch and stay up to date, and to connect with others from around the globe. They respond to big brands and to social enterprises, and they flirt between causes and have short attention spans. Many prefer to watch videos rather than read long texts. They want to be change-makers, and are future-focused".

She concludes that although the Chelsea Society has made headway into social media, with over 1,000 Twitter followers and established Facebook and Instagram streams, a lot more needs to happen to ensure the Society is interesting and its aims are relevant to a broader age and social demographic.

The Chelsea Society Architecture Prize

Some buildings which were allowed to be built in past decades have not endeared themselves to the Chelsea Society, and members have been asked to identify which buildings in Chelsea they would like to imagine being demolished and replaced with a building more in keeping with the character of Chelsea.

The Society will choose a building or set of buildings submitted and will then encourage architects to show what they would put in its place. The idea is to get architects to show how they would interpret 'the character of Chelsea'. A prize of £10,000 will be awarded for a proposal put forward by architects, who will retain all intellectual property rights on their materials.

The Judging Panel will comprise: the Chairman of the Chelsea Society; the Chairman of the Chelsea Society Planning Committee; a Member of the Chelsea Society Council; Cadogan, who were the Sponsors, and an Architect appointed by them.

History of Battersea Park

Battersea Park recently published by the **Friends of Battersea Park** covers developments between 1993 and 2016, in particular the thinking behind the restoration programme which ran from 1998 to 2004 – funded by Wandsworth Council and the Heritage Lottery Fund.

Written by Jennifer Ullman, who was Chief Parks Officer from 2005 to 2008, and funded with a pump-priming grant of £10,000 from the John Murray Charitable Trust, this publication follows on from the previous history book, published in 1993 by the Friends.

CivicVoice Convention and Annual General Meeting

Representing the Finchley Society, Peter Pickering attended the Convention and Annual General Meeting of CivicVoice in Chester on 21st-22nd October; some 50 civic societies from across England were there, five from London. It was well organised by the Chester Civic Trust, who led several walks through their historic city, pointing out places where there had been improvements in recent years, and where there were difficulties with inappropriate developments.

Most of the proceedings of the convention, including the dinner, were held in the impressive surroundings of Chester racecourse. After three years Freddie Gick stepped down from the chair at the AGM, and was replaced by Joan Humble, chair of the Blackpool Civic Trust and a former Member of Parliament; there was a new treasurer and other new trustees.

Peter attended two of the many discussion groups into which the convention was divided, one on planning, which looked at the similarities and differences civic societies meet in attempting to come to grips with planning, and the other on conservation areas, which looked at what had been achieved since the first conservation area was designated fifty years ago, and at how to keep up the momentum in what may be a more difficult climate today.

Promoting civic pride – in a practical way

The **Chislehurst Society** organises a bi-monthly litter pick to help clear the litter from the High Street and around Chislehurst.

And the West Greenwich Graffiti Removal Group meets annually involving volunteers from Greenwich, Westcombe and Blackheath Societies, This persistency of effort is paying off, hopefully shaming culprits: 3,172 defacements were removed in 2008, falling to around 300 per year since 2014.

The Bedford Park Society annual Betjeman lecture

Garden City expert Dr Mervyn Miller will be giving the Bedford Park Society's annual Betjeman lecture on December 12th at the Arts Educational Schools Theatre.

Entitled Spirit of Place in Letchworth Garden City, his talk will be illustrated by historic and contemporary images. Sir John Betjeman, was the Society's first patron. Profits from the Betjeman lectures go to the Cure Parkinson's Trust as Sir John suffered from this disease.

Tickets, price £10, are on sale at PostMark, 53 Turnham Green Terrace, W4 1RP. The theatre bar will be open from 7.00pm, and the lecture begins at 8.15pm.

For further information visit the Society's web-site

www.bedfordpark.org.uk

newsbriefs

News and issues of interest and concern to note.

Land Registry sell-off is dropped

The privatisation of the Land Registry has been dropped from the new Government's programme. The sale was to have been part of the Planning and Infrastructure Bill announced in September but was omitted when it appeared, as the Neighbourhood Planning Bill. Sources said no final decision had been taken but it is understood that the privatisation is definitely off the agenda.

There had been fierce opposition to the sale, with 20,000 people participating in a consultation and 318,000 people signing a petition organised by the campaign group 38 Degrees.

Anti-corruption campaigners said that the register has been invaluable in gauging the scale of offshore property ownership in Britain and exposing suspected money-laundering through property deals in London. It was argued that the privatisation would have put that at risk.

Concern about the sale was also raised by the Law Society and the Competition and Markets Authority.

The anti-corruption group GlobalWitness, said: "The public will benefit from a transparent property market that keeps its information public, in a way that makes it easy and inexpensive for people to access it."

National Infrastructure Commission legislation shelved

The Neighbourhood Planning Bill has also unexpectedly omitted provisions which were to place the National Infrastructure Commission (NIC) on a statutory footing.

It had been intended to formalise the NIC as an independent, non-governmental body. While this omission is significant, the NIC continues to operate in its current, non-statutory footing and the government has not officially resiled from its commitment to legislate, although it is unclear when that may happen.

Curiously there is also no mention of the Green Belt. Could this mean a slight relaxation of the threats to the Green Belt or could it mean something worse is still to come?

A Deputy Mayor for environment

The appointment of a deputy mayor for environment and energy was announced in August by the London Mayor.

Shirley Rodrigues, was acting executive director for climate change at the Children's Investment Fund Foundation, a philanthropic organisation which operates in developing countries, and has previously worked at City Hall on implementing London's Low Emission Zone and programmes for retrofitting buildings. She is also former director of policy at the Sustainable Development Commission.

She will immediately take the lead on finalising the Mayor's proposals for tackling London's poor air quality, for which a consultation has already been conducted.

Other Mayoral appointments can be seen at

<https://www.london.gov.uk/people/mayoral>

Links for each person provide details of them and their job descriptions.

London Parks & Green Spaces Forum

Set up as a charity in 2013, the Forum has rebranded itself as Parks for London. It is an independent charity dedicated to promoting and enhancing London's parks and green spaces; working with the people that own, manage, maintain and use them; its aim is to keep them thriving, accessible, safe and beautiful.

Its Chief Executive is Tony Leach and the Chairman of the Trustees is Sue Ireland, herself Director of Green Spaces at the City of London.

For further information visit

www.parksforlondon.org.uk

London Garden Bridge on hold

Since July there have been an increasing number of reports that the Garden Bridge project has run into trouble. The latest and most damning is a report by the National Audit Office which revealed in October that ministers twice overrode objections from civil servants to extend funding for the Garden Bridge. An initial £8.5 million cap on central government funding was relaxed three times, including twice against the advice of civil servants. On the second occasion Sir Patrick McLoughlin, the then transport secretary, was forced to issue a formal ministerial direction to civil servants requiring them to extend taxpayers' exposure, despite warnings that there was a "high degree of uncertainty" over the possible benefits to tourism and that the bridge "was predominantly not a transport scheme and did not align with any of the department's specific policies".

The Department for Transport itself had concluded that it represented "poor value for money" and warned that there was still a significant possibility that it would never be completed owing to a funding shortfall of £56 million.

Hugh Johnson, President of the Metropolitan Public Gardens Association, wrote in his Tradesant blog earlier this year:

"I don't need to tell gardeners how the middle of a major river, exposed to the four winds, is a poor choice of a site to nurture plants, or whether trees can be expected to succeed there.

People will have made up their own minds about whether one of London's grandest views, the great grey tideway with St Paul's as its crown, would benefit from a window-box in the centre ground. ...And this is not even to examine where the money to pay for the bridge is to come from, or who will pay for its maintenance ad infinitum."

The new Mayor, Sadiq Khan, has now ordered an investigation into the bridge, to be conducted by Dame Margaret Hodge, former chairwoman of the Public Accounts Committee.

In addition to lack of funding, it has still not secured a landing site at the South Bank end, and there was even talk of a judicial review over the way in which Lambeth council agreed to vary the terms of a lease for the land on which the bridge might sit on the south side of the river.

Negotiations with Westminster council about land on the north side of the river are not yet concluded and nor is a deal with the Port of London Authority, which regulates navigation in the Thames, to manage the impact of construction work on river traffic.

With the slippage of the timetable it now also risks a clash with the building of the Thames Tideway Tunnel.

newsbriefs

Transport and regeneration

HS2

The government presses on with HS2 against a stream of challenges and critical comment from a wide variety of commentators and rail experts calling for the project to be scrapped on grounds of cost. The latest controversy is the appointment of an interim chief executive who works for a company that is bidding for millions of pounds of contracts on the line. He has been seconded on a temporary basis after the former chief executive left to go to Rolls-Royce.

The budget estimate has been put at about £55 billion, plus a £16 billion contingency fund, amidst warnings that the eventual costs could be far higher if a major overhaul of Euston Station, the determination to run the trains at up to 250mph, the need for new stations, and the lack of existing expertise in building high-speed lines are included.

A report by the Adam Smith Institute in September said it would be "economically irresponsible" to press ahead with the project "on grounds of excessive cost compared with the questionable benefits that may accrue."

Mayor Sadiq Khan has written to Chris Grayling, transport secretary, urging him to pause the scheme until all issues around Euston can be resolved. Nigel Wilson, chief executive of Legal & General, one of Britain's biggest insurance companies, has also called on the government to abandon HS2 in favour of developing a better rail system in the north of England.

As London Forum's Andrew Bosi put it: few politicians on any side seem capable of grasping the detail, and rely on experts who have a vested interest in building the scheme as planned.

Nevertheless Chris Grayling has confirmed that construction of HS2 would begin next year

Transport for London's financial challenge

A detailed analysis published in September, of the increasing financial pressures Transport for London (TfL) is facing, looks at what the Mayor's commitments will mean for TfL and Londoners. Its revenue grant from Government is reducing, it has taken on additional costs for service expansions, and it has also committed to implementing the Mayor's key transport manifesto commitments – such as a four year fare freeze.

Major capital investment in the transport network is needed but the funding to support capital investment is now at risk. Government funding will fall faster than TfL had previously expected. And the Mayor's fares freeze will cut TfL's income even further.

Over the summer of 2016 the London Assembly Budget and Performance Committee questioned TfL and asked how it intends to do more with less. The report identifies many issues and unanswered questions which the Committee expects to return to throughout the Mayor's term.

One of the concerns is that the cost of the £1 billion Northern Line extension southwards and plans to build a new station at Nine Elms due to open in 2020 has recently increased, and it is not yet clear how much of this additional cost will need to be met by TfL. The report can be found at

https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/budget_and_performance_committee_report_tfls_financial_challenge_final.pdf.

Old Oak and Park Royal Development Corporation

The Old Oak and Park Royal Development Corporation (OPDC), the second Mayoral Development Corporation, has been in preparation since 2014. (see various Newsforums) It is intended to secure the benefits of the regeneration and development of Old Oak and Park Royal. The 1,600-acre site in west London has been earmarked for 25,000 homes, the depot and stations for Crossrail and the HS2 high-speed train line.

In June the new Mayor of London commissioned the Greater London Authority (GLA) to undertake a review of the strategic direction and work programme of the OPDC. The Mayor was reported to have said that "it has been left in a mess by my predecessor."

The review found that:

- A memorandum of understanding agreed by mayor Boris Johnson and the government was hastily entered into and should have been agreed on more favourable terms.
- That the deal was on terms less favourable than other similar previous land transfers,
- The detail of the deal is too unclear and the risks inherent to the land are also uncertain and unquantified. Significant work is therefore required to understand the land's development potential and problems,
- The OPDC staff resource does not have the capacity to take forward the land deal work and expert help will be needed.

A series of recommendations have been made, including:

- Better terms on the land deal that are in the best interests of London such as those offered when Greenwich Peninsula was transferred to the GLA in 2012
- A Review of the the nature of the development being proposed, including the level of affordable housing
- A proposal that the new Homes for Londoners team at City Hall, set up by the Mayor in August to oversee homebuilding in the capital and boost the delivery of new and affordable homes, should work on the project
- A revision of the funding arrangements: although discussions with Whitehall about more money had "so far proved fruitless" a strong case must be made to Government to provide financial support, new powers and value capture mechanisms to meet the cost of infrastructure funding.
- It is vital that a credible longer-term plan be put in place for bringing forward a new commercial centre at Old Oak South.
- That the OPDC, working with the GLA, investigates the feasibility and implications of redrawing the Corporation's boundary so as to exclude Wormwood Scrubs.
- The DCLG, DfT, Network Rail and HS2 public officials should be asked to step down from the Board and offered observer status instead. The resulting vacancies on the Board should be used to recruit experts with property and commercial knowledge and experience – and also local knowledge. ■

If you have any items of interest for the Newsforum

the Editor will be pleased to hear from you at:
admin@londonforum.org.uk

Membership renewal

As you all know, London Forum relies totally on Members' subscriptions for its budget.

Please do use the new membership renewal process on the web site and make sure to amend your data so that the right people are receiving post and email bulletins, otherwise societies might not be kept informed.

The way in which members can amend their details is secure as is the information we hold

Queries can be sent to admin@londonforum.org.uk
Or contact Bill Linskey, (see details below) ■

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Dates for your diary

London Forum events

London Forum Open Meetings 2017

Save the Dates

Monday January 30th

The first open meeting of 2017 will launch London Forum's celebration of the 50th anniversary of Conservation Areas.

Wednesday 29th March

Details to be announced

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, and finish at 8.45 sharp ■

London Forum on Twitter

Don't forget the London Forum Twitter site.

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

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

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

http://twitter.com/London_Forum

NB - note the underscore: _ in the name ■

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