

newsforum



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

The London Forum of
Amenity and Civic Societies
Founded 1988

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A planning disaster in the making?

'Planning for a Sustainable Future' or destruction of a democratic system?

The Planning White Paper is now a Bill before Parliament.

Overwhelming opposition has been expressed to the White Paper – 'Planning for a Sustainable Future'. The proposals are seen as a threat to local democracy, to the environment and sustainable development, to future planning controls and to public participation. So far from building on the Government's commitments in the past ten years, about placing emphasis on communities, their needs and their aspirations, it degrades them.

Despite the ubiquitous repetition of platitudes about "effective Community engagement", the Government appears intent on excluding people from having any say in the policies which affect their lives. A coalition of major organisations concerned with environmental and planning issues have banded together to campaign against the Bill, and have established a website at: www.planningdisaster.co.uk. Please look at the site for more details.

The headline proposals include:

- Putting decisions on major infrastructure projects, such as roads, power stations, incinerators and airports into the hands of an independent, unaccountable panel of 'experts';
- Limiting the public right to have a say at public inquiries;
- Making out-of-town developments easier, threatening local shops;

- The introduction of a 'presumption in favour of development';
- A significant widening of permitted development rights, even in Conservation Areas;
- The removal of the need for Statements of Community Involvement (SCIs) to be examined at Public Inquiry.

Deputy Leader of Kensington and Chelsea, Cllr Daniel Moylan, described the White Paper as "a charter for philistines and vandals". Relaxing conservation planning laws, allowing all homeowners, including those in conservation areas, to extend and alter their dwellings without planning permission meant that years of work to maintain the historic character of the Royal Borough could be destroyed by the Government.

Cllr Moylan said: "I urge all those who are interested in maintaining the historic environment of England to make their views known to the Government. I hope that the Government will pay attention to local communities' desire to maintain their own character. At a time when the Government is rightly concerned about cloned streets, it seems that their actions in this White Paper are designed to undermine that aim."

The Joint Committee of the National Amenity Societies has condemned the Government's proposals calling for the law to be tightened up instead.

"A charter for philistines and vandals."

Cllr Daniel Moylan Deputy Leader
of Kensington and Chelsea

People's access to the planning system sacrificed

The Church of England warned that people's access to the planning system should not be sacrificed simply to speed up decision making. The Rt Revd Stephen Lowe, the Church of England's Bishop for Urban Life and Faith and chair of its Urban Bishops' Panel, stressed. 'If there is to be public confidence in the planning system, accessibility is a key issue... [and] should not be sacrificed for speed. We hope consideration will be given to how effective full participation can be ensured at the 'open floor' stage of inquiries.' The bishops said: 'While we applaud the government's commitment to 'creating sustainable mixed communities', we believe that planning legislation should tackle the proliferation of gated communities and similar developments, which have no spatial or social relationship with local communities,'. For the full response visit:

www.cofe.anglican.org/news/pr8007.htm
Members are urged to lobby their MP about this Bill and to track progress through <http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2007-08/planning.html> ■

The Planning Bill – some key points

Sustainability

The Paper pays little attention to environmental aims: the Prime Minister has downgraded the key full cabinet committee on the environment to a sub-committee, endangering the protection of natural and historic resources for future generations. There should be a legal duty on all decision makers to promote sustainable development.

Public Inquiries

The Government's proposals to abolish the right to test evidence by cross-examination at public inquiries reduces the right of residents to be fully involved and their views properly taken into account. This is unacceptable. Excuses that cross-examination can be intimidating or that community groups and charities cannot afford legal representation, is no justification for removing the right.

Retail Development

The proposals in Chapter 7 under the misleading title, *A positive framework for delivering sustainable development*, replace the test of 'need' for retail development. At 7.53 it suggests that the absence of an up-to-date development plan means that an out-of-town development is acceptable. It will weaken the ability of Local Planning Authorities to act to protect town centres and facilitate out-of-town development with its shopping parks, and their associated increased car travel.

Presumption in favour of development

The Barker Report proposal to change the planning system to be more in favour of economic development appears to have been adopted wholesale with a commitment to a Presumption in Favour of Development. The Civic Trust "advised strongly against a market-oriented approach to development" which "would result not in "economic, as well as environmental and social, benefits" but in irreparable environmental damage for short-term economic gains."

Permitted Development Rights

A huge expansion of permitted development rights is proposed, but changes to the GPDO will be the subject of a separate "consultation". There are concerns about implications for conservation areas. The aim appears to be removal of 30% of householder applications from the system.

Major Infrastructure Projects (MIPs) National Policy Statements (NPSs)

The proposed revisions for dealing with MIPs threaten the involvement of local communities and the proper consideration of environmental impacts. Any national statements on major infrastructure projects must consider all the alternatives, and properly involve local people.

There is no requirement in NPSs for a Strategic Environmental Assessment on the impact on the historic environment. They appear to lie outside the Planning system and could anticipate all development implications some time ahead. This risks creating a two tier system where planning policy guidance may be overridden in certain cases. These proposals are dangerously undemocratic.

Third Party Right of Appeal

The longstanding calls by many concerned organisations for a Third Party Right of Appeal have been ignored. Such a right, for local people to challenge projects at a public inquiry, and for the chance to reconsider the need for the infrastructure as part of this process, would be in the interests of democracy.

Independent Planning Commission [IPC]

The proposed Commission will be unelected people appointed by Government. This raises major concerns about democratic accountability. Decisions must be made by democratically accountable politicians, not an unelected commission.

It will also have powers to issue guidance. Unless there is consultation with a full range of relevant stakeholders the Commission will be unable to maintain public confidence that their decisions and advice are impartial and accountable.

The proposal in 9.53-54 that "minor appeals be determined within each local authority by a board of Councillors" are similarly fundamentally unsound. The major value of the Planning Inspectorate is that it is completely independent and effectively incorruptible. A "streamlined" process would be likely, particularly over time when a number of such developments have been allowed, to result in significant cumulative degradation of the local environment and streetscape.

"It is an outrage that the Government are proceeding with these proposals against the combined opposition of every major environmental and civic group in the country."

"Community engagement": The Civic Trust view on the original Planning White Paper

"The Proposals for community engagement in Chapter 8.12 have been drawn up without, as far as we are aware, any consultation with the community sector to seek its views, to benefit from its experience of engagement in the planning system, or learn its concerns and aspirations. Though one of the leading representative bodies for community groups engaged in the planning system, the Civic Trust has not been approached."

"As a result, although this section contains much that is useful, it seriously misreads community aspirations by assuming that the main area in which the community seeks involvement is in plan-making."

"We believe that public confidence in the willingness of Government and business to involve and consult with them is at a low ebb, and that proposals to remove Statements of Community Involvement (SCIs) from the examination process will reduce that confidence further, particularly where communities believe that their local authority is not interested in, or hostile to, community engagement."

"In fact the proposals in Chapter 7 would reduce community involvement in the planning system by relegating their role to the preparation of plans, eliminating their right to comment on individual applications. It offers no assurance that those "with the deepest pockets" will not still continue to exploit the planning system to the overall disbenefit of the local community."

These proposals now form the basis of the Planning Bill before Parliament. It is an outrage that the Government are proceeding with these proposals against the combined opposition of every major environmental and civic group in the country ■

London Forum's Chairman challenges Sir Stuart Lipton

Sir Stuart Lipton recently wrote a piece in the Evening Standard: *Cut the red tape to build more homes*. It is predicated on three questionable assumptions: necessary population increase; the planning system is obstructing needed expansion; a free market will ensure quality and better prices. **Peter Eversden** and **Helen Marcus** look at the evidence.

Sir Stuart's article makes many sensible points, in particular about the failure to provide necessary infrastructure for new developments. But what is the evidence for his assumptions?

The *Evening Standard* published a letter by Peter Eversden, for the London Forum, challenging Sir Stuart:

Peter Eversden's letter

"I don't know where former Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment chair Sir Stuart Lipton gets his figure of 50,000 new homes needed a year in London.

"The London Plan defines housing density and numbers, allowing just over 35,000 new homes a year. If we build more than this, public services, social infrastructure and transport won't be able to cope.

"Already in many developments given the Mayor's approval, there are serious problems with inadequate space standards, daylight levels, amenity space and lack of family homes which break even his own policies.

"A government inspector's report last month showed that currently two-thirds of housing developments over 15 units being built are over the top of the density range appropriate to their sites. Yet the Mayor's Housing Capacity Study has shown all the homes needed can be built around the density mid-point as set out by the London Plan. There is no need to build higher and therefore more densely, as Lipton proposes.

"The planning log-jam would not be a problem if developers' proposals conformed to policies, eliminating the need for planning inquiries.

"Councils should define masterplans for all "brownfield" sites. Early engagement of communities, the Greater London Authority and developers would ensure that everyone knows what will happen and the sustainable communities Lipton hopes for would be built with all civic facilities close by.

"I worry about Lipton's enthusiasm for the Planning White Paper and for the Mayor's new powers giving him the 'last word'. What happened to local democracy?"

Helen Marcus comments on the issues:

Are the forecasts for new homes correct? How much of a shortage of housing will there be in future?

These are questions that are seldom asked although figures emerging in reports and surveys cast doubt on the arguments underlying the calls for a massive housebuilding programme.

One thing is certain, there is a shortage of houses people can afford.

A surplus of homes over households; more empty houses than homeless

Statistics collected by government and other agencies* show that there are more homes than households, with a surplus in every region in the UK. The surplus increased between 1991 and 2001.

In 2005-6 Halifax plc research found 290,862 empty private homes in England. The total number of homeless in the UK is half that figure, at 154,224, (Local authority homeless acceptances, UYC 2005: people forced to stay with relatives or friends; breakdown of relationship with partner; loss of private dwelling, including tied accommodation; mortgage and rent arrears).

In London the GLA figure for homelessness in February 2006 is was around 67,000. But this too, was exceeded by the number of empty dwellings in London, 84,000, found by the Empty Homes Agency.

Such large numbers of empty houses would indicate that the real problem is that they are either in the wrong place, owners will not bring them into use or that too many people cannot afford them.

Affordable homes

The Mayor has a target of 50% of new homes being affordable yet supports schemes resulting in only 31% for 2005-06. He reported that the achievement conformed to target as it "takes into account other policy objectives."

Planning difficulties

Government policies appear unwilling or unable to deal with the broad range of issues contributing to the difficulties, in particular the unsustainable imbalance in the UK economy where everything gravitates towards London leaving large areas of Britain without jobs.

Contributing factors are the 'buy to let' and 'buy to leave' markets, second homes, supermarket landbanks, housebuilders' unimplemented planning consents, oversupply of ever smaller flats and right to buy, all manifestations of the 'free market'.

Moreover the government's household growth predictions have been proved wrong: the Office of National Statistics recorded household growth between 2001 and 2006 in England and Wales from 23.8 million to 24.2 million – an average increase of 80,000 a year, far short of the 223,000 which planners at the DCLG had been predicting.

Will building more and more houses bring prices down?

Thus Sir Stuart Lipton's optimism about the effects of the free market on housing is questionable.

House price inflation is not unique to the UK. Prices have been going up around the developed world, even in countries with lots of land and big increases in housebuilding.

Measures supposed to provide affordable housing do not keep prices down. The 'right to buy' has seen thousands of formerly affordable council dwellings escalate in price when put on the 'free market'.

Even Kate Barker had admitted a massive boost in building homes for sale would make little difference to house prices. Now, with a downturn in the market and prices falling, existing owners could be plunged into negative equity, developers cannot sell their properties and buyers have vanished despite the supposed shortage.

Future planning

We are entitled to call for a more thorough examination of the evidence before our quality of life in London is destroyed and we have insufficient infrastructure and transport. How many people are living in London now? Is the extra housing needed 30,000pa or 50,000?

The Mayor is producing a Housing Strategy and we must all make sure it is accurate.

Comments on these issues from planners, academics, research institutes, etc. are welcomed for future issues ■

*Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), the University of York Centre for Housing Policy (UYC), Halifax plc, the GLA and the Empty Homes Agency.

Alterations to the London Plan – result of Panel assessment of the Mayor’s proposals

Peter Eversden summarises the Inspectors’ report on their findings.

The Mayor is considering recommendations by the Panel of Government Inspectors who examined the alterations the Mayor proposed in 2006 to the London Plan, his spatial development strategy for the capital.

London Forum had objected to:

- the reduction in policies for the protection of the Blue Ribbon Network,
- an inadequate approach to town centres,
- the potential mis-match in types of housing provision to the requirement,
- the weakening of policies for heritage and conservation,
- the uncertainties about transport funding and
- the slow progress in preparing planning frameworks for over forty opportunity and intensification areas.

Our evidence also questioned the basis of the Mayor’s targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions and the continued emphasis on ‘maximising’ the use of land with tall and high density buildings.

The Mayor will publish the updated version of the plan in January and then propose further revisions in 2008, so London Forum will continue to lobby for changes needed.

Blue Ribbon Network (BRN)

The Inspectors approved the Mayor’s transfer of waterways policies from London Plan BRN Chapter 4C to the design chapter but recommended clear cross references. We believe the protection of London’s waterways may be weakened. Only a few of our arguments were accepted including those for enhancement of the Thames tidal foreshore and the use of water transport for bulk materials.

Town Centres

Town Centre policy is important to our members. We support the Inspectors’ recommendation that “a polycentric network of centres and of different scales throughout London should identify capacity to meet anticipated demand appropriate to it and that the distribution of growth at each level should support more cohesive and sustainable development.”

We objected to the lack of future vision and strategy for London’s Town Centres. The Mayor responded in a briefing note (BN23)

but it needs public consultation and the Inspectors want an early review of the London Plan to give more strategic guidance.

Tall Buildings

The Inspectors supported our recommendation for a reference to CABE/EH Guidance on Tall Buildings in the London Plan for development control purposes. But our arguments and those of City of Westminster were rejected, that tall buildings are not a strategic issue and that other policies will determine acceptable densities.

The Panel asked the Mayor to consider London Forum’s proposition for a density matrix for commercial uses.

The Mayor is promoting and supporting tall buildings in locations we think cause harm and London Forum will continue to oppose ones not appropriate for their surroundings. (see pages 6–7)

Housing

London Forum gave evidence that a high proportion of approved developments were above the upper end of the appropriate **density range** in the London Plan. Planning Aid for London had complained that “...the density matrix appears to be used as a secular tool by developers and local authorities... in order to maximise rather than optimise densities on sites...”. The Inspectors wrote that “...it cannot be desirable for two thirds of developments to be above [the range]” and “We recommend that when the Mayor’s Housing SPG is updated it should (a) give clear guidance on the circumstances in which the figures in the matrix might be exceeded, with a view to reducing the exceptionally high proportion of cases in which this occurs; and (b) give further advice as to the kinds of **social infrastructure** which need to be provided in particular circumstances.” They said it would “...help to avoid the excesses to which this policy might lead if untrammelled.”

Several participants, particularly the Tenants Federation, warned of inadequate social infrastructure. The Inspectors’ wrote “The concern about high densities which many of the parties expressed arose at least in part from a concern about the provision of related social facilities, including shops, community and leisure facilities, public and private open space, public transport, and so on. In our view they are right to be concerned about this. It should be a fundamental of

“There were times when we felt uncomfortable about the limitations we faced. We can only express the hope and expectation that the Mayor will have understood the concerns which were expressed and will take them into account in future reviews.”

The EIP Inspectors

good planning – or even of not-so-good planning – that people have access to such facilities and that they should be provided alongside the development of housing.”

The Mayor claimed that the needs are supported by policies elsewhere in the London Plan and the Inspectors called for a strengthening of the text and references to those policies. They wanted the revised Housing SPG to say more on this but wrote that “it is at the LDF [borough] level that many of the important policies and initiatives in respect of social infrastructure need to be considered.”

Changes submitted by the London Forum were accepted by the Mayor for definition of distances to facilities for use with the density matrix.

The Inspectors felt unable to consider earlier plan alterations for housing that had been assessed at an examination in 2006. They commented “There were times when we felt uncomfortable about the limitations we faced. Many of the points made, particularly by residents and community groups, were important. In some cases they went to the heart of the Plan and indeed spoke more widely of the effectiveness (or otherwise) of regeneration policies across London. We can only express the hope and expectation that the Mayor will have understood the concerns which were expressed and will take them into account in future reviews.”

The report mentioned two briefing notes that the London Forum had submitted and five others which they said contain various comments and contributions of relevance. Their content will be stressed during plan revision.

The London Forum led a debate at the examination about ‘**optimising’ and**



'maximising' the density of development, pointing out that the Housing SPG does not refer to 'maximisation' and proposes the "best use" of sites and higher densities only "where this can be justified by local circumstances". The Tenants Federation objected to "...an ever increasing desire for higher densities". The Panel noted that PPS3 does not use the "maximise" word, referring to "efficient use of land" but they felt unable to recommend any further changes to the London Plan.

On **housing 'mix'** the Mayor had said clarifications to the matrix proposed in the alterations would assist. In particular the "...focus on density as assessed in habitable rooms. This is to ensure appropriate housing outputs in terms of bedroom size mix... and recognition that there will be a range of different types of housing in terms of bedroom size mix in different locations." He accepted the concern that a focus on maximising unit output was leading to fewer family sized homes and proposed that housing output should be determined by local requirements. The Panel proposed London Plan changes to incorporate those words.

The shortage of **affordable housing** was discussed at the examination and TCPA pointed out that since 1979 London has lost more than 260,000 affordable homes through the Right to Buy scheme. The Mayor reported that only 8% of schemes of 10-14 homes were affordable and 38% over 15 homes. The Panel supported a new threshold of ten units for notification to the Mayor.

The Panel did not comment on the query raised by London Forum about the proposed **percentage of affordable housing** in the alterations which stated that London needs 35,400 additional homes a year and "Within that figure [the] need for affordable housing is estimated at 23,300 homes a year". That appears to indicate a **target of 66%**, much above the current 50% aim.

Inter-regional considerations

The Inspectors requested a broad review be completed before the end of 2008 on the plans for London, the East of England and the South East of England. This review will be important for community groups in the Outer London areas as it will deal also with growth areas and strategic development corridors.

Sub regions

The Inspectors supported the Mayor's change of London's sub regions to new radial ones:

The area defined as the Central Activities Zone would have its own masterplan with each of the new Sub Regional Implementation Frameworks (SRIFs) signposting it. There will now be a lot of work for boroughs and community groups in preparing new SRIFs to guide development.

Key Locations

We secured a Panel recommendation that boroughs should have policies to protect the historic significance and to safeguard and enhance the setting of **World Heritage Sites (WHS)**. Also that each WHS Management Plan must be given appropriate weight in considering planning applications.

The Inspectors' recommended no further changes to the altered plan sections on **Opportunity Areas, Areas for Intensification & Areas for Regeneration**. The six pages of evidence in the Panel report will be useful when considering SRIFs and planning frameworks and for use in the next London Plan version.

The Olympic and Paralympic Legacy Master Plan would not be complete until 2009 and the Mayor undertook to meet community organisations, outside of the EIP forum, to discuss the social and related issues.

For **industrial land release**, the Inspectors supported the safeguarding of sufficient industrial land for the increasing demands for logistics, increased self sufficiency in waste management and for public transport depots, while carefully releasing an identified surplus for other priority uses and support to Town Centre renewal.

Outer London and the Suburbs were discussed and the Inspectors approved the Mayor's map of inner and outer London with nineteen boroughs designated as 'Outer London' ones.

The Inspectors countered criticisms that the plan would lead to economic decline in Outer London, coupled with increasing social pressures. They pointed out that 57% of the new jobs by 2026 would be in the nineteen boroughs and saw "...no case for anything along the line of a 'suburban heartlands protection' policy..." Organisations expressed concern about the ability of **disadvantaged communities** to access

the new jobs but the Inspectors could not see any way spatial planning could assist.

"London has to accommodate close to 1 million more residents over the next 20 years, and it would be unsustainable and inequitable for the Mayor in some way to privilege particular suburbs. The density matrix is based on a locality's overall character and is supported by a raft of generic policies regarding development quality, which can be amplified in Borough UDPs or DPDs."

Heathrow

The London Forum was disappointed that, despite its arguments for it, the Panel would not support the Mayor's policy of opposition to Heathrow expansion, on the grounds that this is an issue for national policy.

Climate Change

The Inspectors approved of the way the plan's **mitigation** of Climate Change goes beyond current policy. They proposed flexibility and greater clarity be achieved by the use of the term "presumption" in favour of mitigation measures, with the onus on developers to demonstrate where compliance with targets is impossible.

The Panel did not expect the target of 20% for **renewable energy** would be achieved immediately but that it is right to proceed on this basis. They supported the Mayor's aims for decentralised energy and the provision of heating and cooling networks.

Note: Over 40 pages out of almost 200 in the Panel report covered Climate Change. Further comment will be given by London Forum's David Lewis in a future article.

Reducing the need to travel

The fifth bullet point of Objective 5 in the 2004 Plan reads: "Minimise the need to travel and the growth of journey lengths".

After considerable debate, led by the Campaign for Better Transport with support from ourselves and others, the Inspectors recommended to the Mayor revised words devised by the Government Office for London, as follows.

"Reduce the need to travel, especially by car, and the growth of journey lengths".

The Mayor indicated that he would accept that change ■

The assault on London's skyline by the Mayor of London

The Mayor's new London Views Management Framework (LVMF) Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) caused widespread protest.

RPG3A is replaced by the SPG which describes four types of 26 designated views. Many of you are aware of the strong objections that London Forum and its members made to the proposals, which reduce the width of protected viewing corridors towards St Paul's Cathedral, urging that there should be no reduction in these corridors.

The word 'protected' might well be printed in quotes, since the corridors designed to protect strategic views have been significantly narrowed to permit tall buildings where previously prohibited as obstructing valuable view

Despite lobbying of the Government Office for London, The Mayor ignored the many responses, from societies, the Forum, the City of London and the Assembly. His changes were approved in July 2007. As a result London's skyline and heritage is compromised even further. Tower blocks can be built now in Victoria and elsewhere within the previously protected corridor in a way that will 'blink' the view of St Paul's Cathedral from Richmond, Hampstead and other historic viewing points.

The London Forum sent the following letter to Andrew Melville of Government Office for London in April.

The Mayor's intention to reduce the width of the viewing corridors towards St Paul's

Cathedral are unacceptable as it would result in canyonisation of the views, with new tall buildings on the edges.

The GLA London Plan team has tried to reassure the London Forum that some planning policies in section 4B of the London Plan could deal with such 'blinking' of the views. However, the interpretation could be subjective and it is better to ensure adequate protection by retaining the original distance apart of the land points around the cathedral for viewing corridors.

The GLA and the Government should be protecting London's heritage and that includes views loved by residents, workers and visitors.

The recent concerns expressed by UNESCO about the harm that is being allowed to our World Heritage Sites (WHS) indicate that protection of those sites has not been maintained. There is clearly planning policy 'stress' if the London Plan policies for protection of heritage and views conflict with those that are used by the Mayor to require maximum use of land and housing densities well above the appropriate range for a site.

RPG3A has prevented tall buildings in certain viewing corridors and that should continue. The only reason to reduce the protection for views would be to allow tall buildings that are now prevented. There should be consistency of policy in the capital on this important point. It would make a

nonsense of the planning controls that have been applied if several of the developments refused within the Primrose Hill vista were now to be allowed.

If the concerns of UNESCO are to have added to them more adverse publicity about the harm that the narrowing of viewing corridors would bring, London would lose its reputation as a place to visit for its heritage and for the respect that the Government, the LCC, the GLC and the GLA have shown for that in the past.

The Mayor's intentions to achieve intensification of use of land around main line railway stations could diminish the very importance of St Paul's Cathedral that the wider LAA of RPG3A was designed to protect. London deserves the views protection that has been applied. To reduce it further now in the revised views management SPG is unacceptable and should not be allowed.

The Government's decision to over-rule the Inspector's recommendations after the Vauxhall Tower inquiry and grant permission for a building that would harm the setting of the WHS of the Palace of Westminster is not encouraging. The full support given by the Mayor to a large and ugly structure in the buffer zone of the WHS of the Royal Botanical Gardens at Kew (for which the developer's appeal against local authority refusal was dismissed) confirms the risk that exists now ■

London Assembly motion on Strategic Views ignored by the Mayor

Tony Arbour proposed a motion calling for an urgent review of proposals that: "take away the protection of something historic and unique that, once gone, will almost certainly be gone forever. Development in London is necessary, but it can take place without sacrificing our historic views."

The motion in full read as follows:

"The Assembly strongly objects to the proposed narrowing of historic viewing corridors of St Paul's Cathedral and the Palace of Westminster from ten vantage points across London, as directed by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government on 16th May 2007, and set out in the Mayor's draft London View Management Framework Supplementary

Planning Guidance, due for publication in July 2007.

Such iconic views are an important part of London's unique heritage and the quality of life of Londoners, connecting historic landmarks to areas such as Richmond and Camden and maintaining a sustainable built environment. The revised directions will reduce the level of protection for these views against inappropriate development. The Assembly notes the strong representations against these proposals from local authorities, including Westminster, the City of London, Camden, Richmond and Islington, heritage societies and private individuals, and regrets that such informed submissions have not been taken into account.

The Assembly therefore urges the Mayor and Secretary of State to urgently review these proposals, and to retain the existing viewing corridors as prescribed under Regional Planning Guidance: Supplementary Planning Guidance for London on the Protection of Strategic Views (RPG3A) 1991. The Assembly further resolves to support the representations of those who campaign for a similar outcome."

The Mayor's final guidance ignored the Assembly's motion and other objections. As a result, London strategic view corridors have been significantly narrowed in order to enable more tall buildings to be constructed. The 388 page document can be downloaded from www.london.gov.uk/mayor/strategies/sds/spg-views.jsp

The City view by Bob Hall

This article by **Bob Hall**, Chairman of the City of London's Hampstead Heath Management Committee, first appeared in the *Hampstead and Highgate Express* in June 2007.

An issue of major importance for Hampstead Heath and Kenwood has arisen. Ken Livingstone, the Mayor of London, is proposing to reduce significantly the current protection of two iconic cross-London views from Parliament Hill and just east of Kenwood House of St Paul's Cathedral in the City of London. Regrettably, and unaccountably, the Government agrees with this approach. There was a consultation process in 2005, but the sound and proper objections made by the City of London, and many others, were ignored. The revised arrangements, revealed in final form only recently, are intended to come into effect on 13 July 2007.

This is unacceptable. These two views contribute fundamentally to the lasting impression that a visitor experiences from being at Hampstead Heath and Kenwood. Any diminution would seriously threaten this simple pleasure. Anyone who holds London in their heart will be alarmed at this careless disregard of a heritage that is briefly in our hands as trustees for future generations. It appears that the purpose of reducing the width of the viewing corridors is to enable the release of more land for the construction of high-rise office buildings. You can take a view on whether that is appropriate. But it seems curious that the present regime seems happy to emasculate a policy introduced some 25 years ago for the express purpose of protecting the outstanding views of St Paul's Cathedral from the encroachment of tall buildings at a time when very few tall buildings existed. It was precisely this concern that led to the development of the policy in the first place. There was vision and concern for posterity then. What possible justification can there now be to change that policy?

It is not being luddite to say that quality of life is important, and that we need heart-lifting sights around us, of which the two currently protected views of St Paul's from Hampstead Heath and Kenwood are good examples. The reduction in the strategic viewing corridors is neither necessary nor desirable.

The City of London Council has passed an urgent resolution strongly objecting to Mr Livingstone's proposals. We do not accept that one of the prime attributes of Hampstead Heath should be eroded for commercial gain. The City is certainly

not alone in this. Local groups, including in particular the Heath & Hampstead Society and the Highgate Society, are most alarmed at what Mr Livingstone proposes. In addition, the preparation leading up to the draft Strategic Management Plan (Part I) for Hampstead Heath and the subsequent public consultation, which ended last month, all show unequivocally that one of the fundamental concerns about the Heath is that it should be protected from the impact on views from the Heath of development outside the Heath. In other words, just in case it is not clear, leave the views as they are at present.

This position is broadly supported by Camden Council, the City of Westminster (which has its own issues with the Mayor's proposals), the London Forum, some Assembly Members, and by London-wide Amenity Societies.

Nearly 2,500 years ago, Pericles, the great Athenian statesman, was called on to give an oration honouring those who had died in the first year of the Second Peloponnesian War. He said: "Even if only a few of us are capable of devising a policy or putting it into practice, all of us are capable of judging it". This is as true now as it was then.

The glories that we now enjoy at Hampstead Heath and Kenwood are largely with us because our forebears stood up against the seemingly unstoppable proposals of those in positions of authority. This is a similar issue. It would be wholly wrong to desecrate these magnificent views. Following Pericles' example, we are all capable of judging Mr Livingstone's proposal – and we find it wanting. It must be stopped. We call on him to withdraw his proposal and on the Government to withdraw its proposed Directions and to direct Mr Livingstone to see sense ■

Editor's comment

Who will the Mayor listen to?

If the Mayor won't listen to the views of Londoners expressed through civic societies; or to the opinions of the City of London; or to the views of his own Assembly, who will he listen to?

Protected Vistas – SPG briefing sessions

Can we avoid developments harming treasured views ?

The GLA London Plan team held implementation workshops in November 2007 for community representatives, developers and borough staff on the way the Mayor's revised guidance SPG on 'Protected Vistas' in London will be implemented.

At the briefings it was explained that the SPG replaces RPG3A and describes four types of 26 designated views. In response to criticism of changes to the protected views, GLA officers claimed that some were too restrictive; some had buildings within them and that it has to be accepted London is a dynamic world city, constantly evolving.

Peter Eversden, used the opportunity for the London Forum, to challenge again the reasons for reducing the width of the protected view of St Paul's Cathedral from Richmond. He suggested it was done to allow new tall buildings in Victoria near to the mainline station. He expressed concern that the 'blinkering' of the view of the cathedral would be contrary to the SPG aims to 'preserve and enhance the ability to see, recognise and appreciate a strategically important landmark, prevent canyon effects, afford landmarks an appropriate setting and preserve or enhance the viewing experience as a whole.'

The Mayor's representatives claimed that a development that harmed the ability to appreciate landmark buildings would be normally refused. All such development proposals would be subject to Qualitative Visual Assessment including Accurate Visual Representations. There would be Management Plans outlining important elements of each view.

It was stressed early consultation will be essential on all proposed developments affected by the Views SPG.

London Forum's member organisations will need to work closely with their local authority to ensure that the new assessments of impact on protected views are properly prepared and analysed in accordance with Policy 4B.17 of the Sept'06 Further Alterations version of the London Plan (FALP).

Boroughs must be encouraged to identify locally important views, as proposed by FALP Policy 4B.15 ■

Peter Eversden's full report can be emailed to members.

Spotlight on Hampstead Garden Suburb Residents Association

A pioneering suburb is 100. And its amenity society, aged 96, is still fighting for it.

By **Tony Aldous**.

Hampstead Garden Suburb – recognised worldwide as trailblazer in town planning and social development – was founded 100 years ago this year. Its survival, largely intact, as a civilised and attractive place to live, is in large measure due to the existence of a Trust charged with conserving it and armed with unusual powers to manage its environment and limit or guide change.

A Trust and an Association

But alongside the Trust, for 96 of those 100 years, has stood the Hampstead Garden Suburb Residents Association. Why a residents association when the Suburb has a trust with legal powers to protect it? Because, says HGSRA's secretary Richard Wakefield, "the residents felt they needed a voice of their own". And on reflection you can see why. The Trust has quite limited powers and duties – essential to the Suburb's survival and wellbeing, but not enough to ensure the kind of vital and flourishing community its founder, Henrietta Barnett, envisaged and which the overwhelming majority of residents wish to live in.

A threat and an opportunity

The idea of the Suburb sprang from two threads in the lives of Mrs Barnett and her clergyman husband Samuel. He was vicar of an East End parish whose housing and living conditions appalled her; they acquired a modest weekend retreat on the edge of Hampstead Heath where they invited poor parishioners for a break from the dirt and pollution of Whitechapel. When plans were mooted for the Underground to push north from its Hampstead terminus, Henrietta Barnett saw both a threat and an opportunity. The threat was that a poorly planned "march of bricks and mortar" would swallow up open countryside north of Hampstead Heath proper; the opportunity was to build a well-planned suburb on the edge of an extended heath with homes both for the prosperous middle classes and for people of more modest incomes whom the tube would allow to commute to work.

Design influences

The predominant physical character of the Suburb – much influenced by Ebenezer Howard's garden city movement and the pioneer garden city at Letchworth – is of

well-designed, vernacular-style cottages with gardens, skilfully laid out on winding roads linked by green connecting footpaths. Nikolaus Pevsner, writing in 1951, called it "The aesthetically most satisfactory and socially most successful of all C20 garden suburbs". That verdict today needs qualification. Even in Dame Henrietta's lifetime market forces whittled down the proportion of "artisan" or affordable housing and since 1951 all too many of the modest cottages built for the "industrial classes" have been snapped up by young professionals. "There are very few artisans in the suburb now," says Richard Wakefield.

A lively community; a pleasing environment

But it is a good place to live, with a lively community as well as a pleasing environment, as he knows, having lived there as a child and moved back when he had the chance. He was chairman of HGSRA from 1997 to 2002 and as well as being its current secretary, edits its thrice-yearly newsletter. What have been the association's major successes? An early one was helping to block a 1920s plan to run a railway from East Finchley across the suburb. More recently, though unable to prevent the A1 trunk road from cutting through the Market Place, which should have been the Suburb's commercial heart, it has been instrumental in blocking plans for a multi-level interchange at Henley's Corner and road widening which would have wrecked the environment of many of its homes.

The Suburb's visual quality

Other successes have turned on preventing erosion of the Suburb's visual quality – there are no overhead phone wires, and when Barnet council – without any consultation – gave all its street name signs a garish turquoise border, the association fought to get them removed from the Suburb, and succeeded, but only by contributing to the cost. English Heritage, equally appalled, also chipped in. High on the list of recent successes was the key role the association played in this year's celebrations for the Suburb's centenary. Its 90 page souvenir programme gives more than a hint of the huge range of activities and involved organisations, and is something Richard, as its editor, can justly take pride in.

What have been the HGSRA's disappointments? What frustrations has it

suffered? Certainly they must include failing to keep the A1 trunk road out of the Market Place, the Suburb's intended shopping centre which it severs and debilitates. Also the huge increase in the number of cars which, parked on its residential roads, severely damage its carefully designed streetscape. The Trust's president, town planner and architectural historian Mervyn Miller, has aptly described the Suburb's present-day streets as "lined with metal". Indeed, one current preoccupation is about parking control zones. But commuters deterred by parking controls at nearby Golders Green are increasing looking for kerbside parking in the Suburb. Some residents would like the protection offered by a one-hour no parking regime; others fear that, once conceded, parking control would spread, with unsightly signs and lines, and that this would add to pressure from some householders to pave over front gardens.

Other preoccupations include the proliferation of gardening contractors and their use of noisy machinery, and trying to get Barnet's officials to take proper notice of the council's own policies for conserving the Suburb. Part of the problem is that the officers involved in establishing these policies move on, so that implementation suffers from a kind of institutional amnesia. Fortunately the association has plenty of people who have not moved on and are determined to remind them. These include its secretary Richard, chairman David B Lewis, vice-chairman (confusingly) another David Lewis, and Derek Epstein and Gary Shaw, who chair the key Conservation & Amenities and Roads & Traffic committees.

A wide range of activities

The range of activities is, however, much wider than is found in most amenity societies. Committees and working groups include allotments and a theatre club, which at least once a month buses members to West End theatres. Significantly both the association's newsletter Suburb News and its annual Suburb Directory are distributed to all residents rather than just to RA members. "Perhaps that's why we don't have more members," reflects Richard, adding (the retired advertising man coming to the fore) "But then the advertisers wouldn't be happy if we restricted it to members".



Richard Wakefield

Hampstead Garden Suburb Residents Association

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Artisans cottages today

Age: 96, born 1911.

Circumstances of birth: Although the Hampstead Garden Suburb Trust existed to protect and conserve the Suburb, residents felt they should have a voice.

Biggest successes: (1) Preventing the building of a railway across the Suburb (1920s). (2) Stopping the building of a giant highway interchange at Henley's Corner (1980s), also the widening of the A2 at Falloeden Way.; (3) Playing a key role in this year's celebrations of the centenary of the Garden Suburb, notably by publishing a souvenir programme. (4) replacing incongruous street name signs introduced by the council. (5) Funding a programme for the replacement of street trees in the Suburb.

Biggest disappointments/ frustrations: (1) Failing to prevent the Ministry of Transport from pushing a trunk road through the Market Place. (2) The local authority not sufficiently appreciating the environmental quality of the Suburb, and not properly applying its policies for its conservation. (3) Tendency of rich buyers of houses to want to extend, enlarge or even redevelop them, damaging the character of the suburb.

Present preoccupations: (1) Battles over parking control. (2) Noisy machinery used by contract gardeners. (3) Whether the management charge levied by the HGS Trust should be a graduated rather than a flat amount.

Working details: membership some 2,200 households. Subscription £15 pa per household. Elected council of 30, of whom four, along with four elected officers, form the executive committee. Sub-committees include Conservation & Amenities (Comsam), Roads & Traffic, Trees and Open Spaces, as well as Allotments, Events, Publications, and, this year, a 100th Anniversary Celebrations committee. Other activities include litter-picking, running a gallery as showcase for local artists, and a theatre club with coachloads of residents going to West End theatres. Publications include Suburb News three times a year and an annual directory ("All you need to know about living in the suburb"), both delivered to all homes.

Special characteristics: Members appreciate and enjoy the exceptional quality of the suburb's environment and are very protective of it; the Suburb is an extremely lively community with a wealth of local societies – cultural, horticultural and much else – for which HGSRA acts as an umbrella and a central focus.

Would Dame Henrietta Barnett be happy with the Suburb as it is today? She would surely be appalled by the traffic and the tidemark of parked cars, but having learned to edit those out, would probably be pleased with the way buildings and landscape have matured and the liveliness of the community. She would probably be deeply saddened (though in her lifetime she saw it coming) at the gentrification of houses intended for the artisan classes. But she might just evince a glimmer of approval at Richard Wakefield's recent resignation as a matter of principle as a trustee of the Hampstead Garden Suburb Trust. The board had proposed that its management charge should in future be graduated in line with council tax bands instead of flat rate. The association supported this; then several of the trustees changed their minds and a majority voted not to go ahead. Deeply depressing to many residents and, one might have thought, contrary to the spirit in which the Suburb was founded. But fresh Trust elections in mid-September saw Richard re-elected, so this will clearly not be the end of the affair ■

“Its survival as a civilised and attractive place to live, is in large measure due to the existence of a Trust charged with conserving it and armed with unusual powers to manage its environment.”

St. Jude-on-the-Hill, Central Square, described by Sir Simon Jenkins as Sir Edwin Lutyens's 'ecclesiastical masterpiece' and the centrepiece of Hampstead Garden Suburb.



Reducing the need to travel

Stephen Joseph, Director of Campaign for Better Transport and guest speaker at the Forum's AGM, says London Planners need to take this seriously. **Stephen Thornton** and **David Lewis** report on his talk at the Forum's well attended AGM in October.

Last summer's London Plan Examination in Public saw London Forum join with what was then Transport 2000 to press the GLA (curiously reluctant to follow national government) to adopt planning policies that will reduce the need to travel, especially by car. This was also the theme of the talk at our AGM on 9 October by Stephen Joseph, Director of what is now renamed the Campaign for Better Transport. Very topically, because earlier in the day the Panel's report from the Examination in Public appeared, and backs our stand!

'The level and growth of traffic is a big problem, not just in terms of congestion and air quality,' Mr Joseph pointed out, 'but also because of the sheer intrusiveness of traffic, which is underestimated by policy-makers. Over-reliance on the car also promotes social exclusion.' Climate change, the arrival of 'Peak Oil' and the fact that 95% of transport is oil-driven all reinforce the need to take action on a wide range of issues, including promoting increased walking, cycling and use of public transport, and also demand management, re-allocation of road space and charging for parking and road use.

Smarter choices

People should be encouraged to make smarter choices, for example through workplace travel plans. There is a Transport for London pilot study giving people information on travel choices. This approach had been applied in three pilot projects outside London, and had reduced traffic by up to 14% within two years.

The link between land use and traffic is crucial, and has been largely ignored. There is a belated study into the effects of the Newbury by-pass. Traffic in the town was found to have increased to pre-by-pass levels and casualties had not been reduced. This was because changes in land use promoted use of the car. Europe had a more integrated approach to land use and traffic management. New developments started with cycle ways and public transport, and limited parking space.

In London, the aim should be to avoid locating most of the jobs and facilities in the centre. Mr Joseph said he was attracted to the idea that all amenities should be within 'pram-pushing distance'. For example, Hampstead had relatively low car ownership because of easy access to facilities. In Leighton Buzzard, there is a sustainable

"The level and growth of traffic is a big problem, not just in terms of congestion and air quality, but also because of the sheer intrusiveness of traffic."

travel project in which 'shared streets' will promote walking and cycling and cars will be 'under sufferance'. Homes will be provided with screens showing the time of the next bus.

In conclusion, Mr Joseph noted that the Panel's report said other London Plan policies should now be reviewed to ensure they are consistent with reducing the need to travel. He intended to put proposals forward to the Mayor's office under this heading.

In response to a questioner who advocated carbon rationing as the eventual solution, Mr Joseph said more immediate interventions can entrench lower-carbon transport behaviour, for example greater use of car-sharing. There should be detailed planning so that traffic is not always given priority. Government departments should carry out a carbon audit of each of their policies, for example when planning health facilities. Specialist centres require increased travel by patients, which is a major cause of them missing appointments. However, if personal carbon trading is introduced, it will leave scope for individual choice.

On balance, Mr Joseph felt that Crossrail is justified because it will relieve pressure on the rest of the system, which is unable to cope.

Peter Eversden thanked Mr Joseph for a stimulating talk and looked forward to future co-operation between London Forum and Campaign for Better Transport ■

Croydon, and Malden & Coombe

We were sad to hear of the closure of two member societies: in May the Malden and Coombe Society ceased operating and the Croydon Society was dissolved at the beginning of July, after 32 years, having failed to find enough younger members to carry on its work.

Croydon society was founded in 1975 and played a significant role in the public debate on policies which have shaped the borough, including the advent of Tramlink, pedestrianisation of North End and the future of the Cane Hill Hospital site in Coulsdon.

More recently the society was closely involved in discussions over the redevelopment of the Gateway site in East Croydon and regeneration of other parts of the town centre.

The threat of closure first surfaced two years ago when it became increasingly difficult to recruit younger people to the executive committee. The secretary's post had been vacant for some time and other officers, including the chairman, were due to stand down. This year the society's membership fell to 200 members.

Andy Bebington, chairman for nine years before becoming treasurer, recalled that early on the society had members with expertise in planning, architecture and transport. but this expertise had eroded over the years.

He said: "Changes in society out-strip anything we can achieve in changing people's attitudes. "We have won a lot of battles, but we've lost the war."

But he believes there is hope that another organisation will rise and take the society's place:

"It may well be that a federation of residents' associations around the town centre will be created to take on the role we have been performing. We felt that what we had to do was kill off the old to make room for the new."

"We're thinking of putting together a history of the society to honour the work we've done over the years" ■

Improving the Public Realm will need teeth and money

This was the message from a lively presentation to the London Forum by Dr. Vivek Nanda of Alan Baxter Associates. **Stephen Thornton** reports.

Design for London has been established by the Mayor, as an organisation in the GLA, to support the delivery of well-designed projects across London. They have commissioned a Public Realm Strategy for London from Alan Baxter Associates to analyse London's public realm, assess its condition, identify opportunities and establish design criteria for its improvement. Dr Nanda is leading the study and presented some preliminary results. He began by noting that London was a heterogeneous city that had evolved initially from a number of villages. The concept of Public Realm had developed over the last few years with influence from the continent. The idea is of a democratic space, accessible to the public. However, there are many stakeholders who rarely speak to each other, and no-one takes responsibility. The Public Realm Strategy must sit above local guidance, and must be statutory, with its own funding. There should be officers and elected representatives in places of power.

The key themes

Some of the key themes include the need to maximise the use of public transport and shift to more cycling and walking; to accommodate the growing and changing use of space in an increasingly compact and diverse city; and to maintain comfort in a warming world. These themes evolved into a number of main objectives, including — A better balance between the 'Central Activities Zone' and the five sub-regions — Improve civic identity while protecting the local context — 'Future proof' against climate change — Improve conditions for people gathering and resting — Improve governance and maintenance — Co-ordinate knowledge and responsibility — Make privately-managed public space open to all

Dr Nanda pointed out that by 2025, London could have a similar climate to that of Marseilles today. There were measures that could be taken to reduce the effect of the urban heat island, such as urban greening, including the use of green roofs and walls.

London's public spaces are undervalued, leading to a lack of management and maintenance. An economic case can be made for the benefits of investment in public

"London's public spaces are undervalued, leading to a lack of management and maintenance. An economic case can be made for the benefits of investment in public realm — members of the audience were sceptical about whether the strategy would be given teeth and funding."

realm, including the increase in values and rents through public realm improvement.

The first draft of the study would be submitted to stakeholders with up to 200 proposals. These would need to be focused on the most important areas, then the study would go out to consultation.

Dr Nanda concluded by stating that the study would correlate links between social, environmental and economic parameters, and look at the value of the public realm in a city in rapid change.

In discussion, members of the audience were sceptical about whether the strategy would be given teeth and funding. This was seen as the only way in which improvements would be achieved. Dr Nanda agreed, noting that currently only two boroughs have public realm officers. He emphasised that there was a need for central funding for public realm in its own right. It was queried whether the strategy would receive political support. Dr Nanda explained that the public realm strategy would relate to the Mayoral Strategy but would need significant 'buy-in' at the local level. Only time would tell whether the boroughs endorsed the strategy and acted upon it.

The Chairman thanked Dr Nanda for a stimulating and thought-provoking presentation ■

Thames Gateway Bridge inquiry re-opens

Following the Inquiry Inspector's report into the proposed Thames Gateway Bridge in July, the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government announced a decision to re-open the inquiry because she wanted further information on the possible regeneration benefits and traffic implications of the scheme. These concentrated particularly on the failure to follow the WebTag guidance rigorously. In a regeneration area of considerable national importance, it is necessary to ascertain what (if any) difference compliance with that guidance might have on the employment assessment outcome. It is a good example of a promoter failing to do the work properly in support of an application and wasting everyone's time and money. Nick Raynsford MP had the cheek to blame objectors for delays at the session on Housing.

Thames Gateway Bridge is a Transport for London project to link the A13/A406 in Beckton to the A2016 Eastern Way, Thamesmead. The local planning authorities are the London Boroughs of Newham and Greenwich.

The Inspector considered that, whilst receiving specific strategic support, the bridge conflicts with the development plan as the scheme did not comply with Policy 3C.15 of the London Plan. He considered that, although the proposal would appear to offer a good return on investment, it is uncertain because of the limitations of the traffic modeling; that the proposal could assist regeneration, but that the extent of such regeneration is difficult to assess, and that there is evidence that much of the positive result would occur with or without the bridge.

A copy of the Inspector's report may be viewed on the DCLG web site at www.communities.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1502386 ■

Heritage Protection

The draft Heritage Protection Bill was not mentioned in the Queen's speech for this session of Parliament. However, it is expected to be published in May 2008, for discussion in the House in November.

Increasing threats to the Green Belt

By Michael Hammerson.

A threat to Green Belt land at Mardyke Farm in the borough of Havering has been averted by campaigners who persuaded an inspector to overturn the Borough's attempt to designate it as suitable for building in their Development Plan. The 23ha Mardyke Farm is part of a poorly restored and, in places, contaminated landfill site adjoining the Mardyke housing estate, one of the most deprived areas in the Borough. The Council wanted to redevelop it to provide 1500 units, and restore the remaining landfill site to create high quality public open space.

The PPG2 arguments 'exceptional circumstances'

The recently published PPG2 Green Belts advises that 'once the general extent of a Green Belt has been approved it should be altered only in exceptional circumstances'.

The Council argued that the benefits which the proposed redevelopment of the

estate would deliver provided the 'exceptional circumstances' for its removal from the Green Belt. It would provide affordable homes as part of a mixed community with improved infrastructure.

However housing associations had also put forward proposals to redevelop the estate, which would provide more units than at present, but excluding Green Belt land. In the light of those proposals, the inspector did not consider it an 'exceptional circumstance' to justify the removal of land from the Green Belt or that the release of land from the Green Belt was necessary to meet housing supply targets.

Altering boundaries because of dereliction

The Council also claimed that the remediation of the landfill site, and the creation of high quality public open space on the retained Green Belt land was another 'exceptional circumstance'. However PPG2 advises that detailed boundaries should not be altered or

development allowed merely because the land has become derelict.

In the light of PPG2, the Inspector did not consider the restoration of the land alone could form exceptional circumstances, particularly when the Council had not sought enforcement.

There were not, therefore, exceptional circumstances for the removal of the land from the Green Belt, and the proposal was unsound.

PPS12 advises that a key aim of the LDF system is front-loading to seek consensus and to avoid late changes, and that the aim of formal participation on the Preferred Options stage is to give people the opportunity to comment and ensure that the local planning authority is aware of all possible options. In this respect also, the proposal to remove the land from the Green Belt was unsound, and this added to the Inspector's view that it should be retained within the Green Belt ■

A surprising attack on Green Belts

The title of a press release, *Time for a greener green belt*, says *Natural England*, could be described at best as misleading.

Natural England's Chairman Sir Martin Doughty launched what could only be described as an attack on Green Belts: "The time has come for a greener Green Belt. We need a 21st century solution to England's housing needs which puts in place a network of green wedges, gaps and corridors, linking the natural environment and people. England's 14 Green Belts were established in the 1950s to contain urban sprawl. Since then there has been little environmental improvement in the quality of these areas".

Part of Natural England's role as the Government's statutory advisor on landscape, is to advise on the implications of the policy to build 3 million new homes.

Under the guise of assessing the case for a review of Green Belt policy as part of a fresh approach to greening new development, it promotes the case for "Green Wedges" and advocates that:

— England's towns and cities are 'greened' by putting green spaces at the heart of all new development.

— The most sustainable solution of where to locate new housing is sought, including a review of the role of the Green Belt, taking into account quality of life, nature conservation, landscape protection, flood mitigation and the impact of a changing climate.

— The land in and around England's 14 Green Belts is 'greened'. England's Green Belts cover 13% of the country - 1.65 million hectares, an area bigger than all of England's National Parks combined – and is [sic] currently often neglected or of poor environmental quality.

The London Forum believes that the suggestion that Green Belts can be "greened" by discarding them for "Green Wedges" is dangerous double-speak. Green Wedges may work when starting from scratch – when a new town is built with corridors of countryside reaching into its heart. However, such proposals for already-existing Green Belts will simply degrade them. It is ribbon development by another name, and a crude back-door attempt to justify development in the countryside.

The clear, and correct, line taken by the

Civic Trust is that, where Green Belt has deteriorated – or, many fear, been allowed to deteriorate to justify building on it – it should be restored as a public amenity, and used to grow local produce which will reduce "food miles". Ministerial statements answering concerns raised about the Planning White Paper assured us that no alteration to Green Belt protection is proposed. What, therefore, are we to make of a statement of this sort from the Government's own advisers on countryside issues, who concede in their own statement that the purpose of Green Belts is to "contain urban sprawl"?

Green Belts are one of the outstanding successes of the post-war Planning System; as a result, they are the subject of even greater attack from the development lobby, and it is alarming to think that even Natural England have fallen into this trap. They are important to us all, wherever we live. All members are therefore urged to write to their MPs, asking them to seek assurances from the Government that this is not a back-door attack on Green Belts, and that we may rely on their recent statements that no changes to Green Belt protection are envisaged. For more information: www.info4local.gov.uk/filter/?item=505439 ■

Round the Societies

A round up of news from our member societies.

By **Haydn Mylchreest**.

When I began reading through the newsletters and other reports from member Societies, two features struck me as being of particular interest to a wider readership. The first was the work being done by societies in challenging the planning decisions of local authorities and sometimes the frustration of finding inspectors' favourable decisions at public enquiries being overturned by Government. We also have to keep in mind the Mayor's unabated ambition to accumulate far-reaching planning powers over all boroughs.

The second feature was the wealth of fascinating local history that local enthusiasts produce for Societies' editorial teams. Sometimes several local Societies band together and campaigns create sufficient political and civic pressure to cause local authorities to change their minds.

A notable profile

The Dulwich Society autumn newsletter carries an informative article on Sir Giles Gilbert Scott's local connections. Notable buildings include the Salvation Army headquarters building in Camberwell, and Athol House in Dulwich, now Dulwich's Cheshire Home. Most people know that he designed the iconic Battersea and Bankside Power Stations and the famous red telephone box. The original design, the K6, known originally as the Jubilee kiosk, was introduced for King George V's silver jubilee in 1935 and soon became a feature across the country. The reconstruction of the Houses of Parliament after WWII, and the Guildhall extension in the City of London were also his work. He died in 1960.

Consultations and objections

How much notice will a local council take of the views expressed by civic and amenity groups during a public consultation exercise? We report a few losses and gains.

Mill Hill Preservation Society

Meanwhile in north London the Mill Hill Society is one of several interested parties that have attended meetings designed to gather views on the proposed developments at Mill Hill East, principally the re-development of the old Inglis Barracks. There is anxiety about the impact on Mill Hill generally of building more than 2000 homes on this site. "The strength of the Society's voice depends on the quality of the ideas we present." Good ideas from members are sought.

On a different note, the Society reports a scheme by the British Chelonia Group to trap terrapins and transport them to the Mediterranean at £25 each. The City of London Authority has revealed that as many as 150 terrapins live in Hampstead Heath ponds. Oh! and apparently they bite, so beware!

Sydenham Society

The proposed Bell Green retail development was the subject of a public enquiry in 2006 at which the Society presented its case against the scheme with the help of a professional barrister. The cost to the Society was more than £7000 and called for some six months' work by members assembling data and preparing their case. Although the decision granted the developer planning permission for the scheme, this outcome was probably the result of the "fall-back" permissions previously granted by the Council. The Society's case

that the development was against current national, regional and local policies was upheld and therefore they felt they won a moral victory.

Greenwich Society

Another consultation is reported by the Society to discuss the Greenwich Hospital. It is a Crown charity, established in 1694, which provides charitable support to serving and retired men and women of the Royal Navy and Royal Marines and their dependents and is in a World Heritage Site.

It owns a large proportion of Greenwich Town Centre; it does no fund-raising and relies for its income on investments.

Graffiti-removal was done by an active group of 25 – 30 volunteers during 2006, although the Society has over 70 volunteers who have experience in this work. During 2006 just over 2000 defacements were removed in planned sessions. Vigilance in removing graffiti reduces copy-cat markings and residents are encouraged to telephone the Society or send an email if an outbreak is spotted.

Bedford Park Society

Constructing a basement continues to be an attractive way of increasing the size and the value of a property. However, the Society reports a landmark decision by a government planning inspector who has upheld Hounslow Council's refusal to allow the construction of a basement under a listed semi-detached house in Priory Avenue. The inspector's decision makes clear what can and cannot be done with listed houses in Bedford Park, and is likely to affect other local authorities' attitude to the construction of basements.

On the road to Compostela

This last summer Bill Tyler, the President of The Finchley Society, undertook a solo walk along the pilgrim route Camino de Compostela to raise money for two charities, namely the Treehouse Trust for Autism, a national charity for autism education, and the North London Hospice. The path was unexpectedly very rough underfoot with fist-sized stones in places and that caused Bill muscle pain and a crop of blisters. However, in spite of these problems, Bill actually walked 270 miles in 18 days which is an average rate of 15 miles a day. Whilst parts of the UK were experiencing severe floods in UK during the wettest June since records began nearly 100 years ago, Bill said that, apart from one wet day, he had good walking weather. The amount of money Bill raised for the two charities was £11,500.

Wandsworth Museum

Following Wandsworth Council's announcement earlier in the year that the Wandsworth Museum would be closed as part of cost-saving measures, the Wandsworth, Putney, Balham and Battersea Societies all voiced their opposition to the Council's plan and successfully lobbied for a re-think. A major breakthrough was announced in April: the Hintze Family Charitable Foundation offered £2 million over five years to enable the museum to be relocated to the West Hill library which is to close. Some seemingly good news, therefore, but it is tempered by concern about many matters including the re-location timetable, the temporary storage of the collection, and the loss of key members of staff.

➔ *Continued on page 14*

Round the Societies

Wandsworth Society

Over at the Riverside Quarter scheme, planning consent was given in June despite over 400 objections. The Society's concern is that little attention is being paid to objections because of the Council's aim of higher housing densities.

Brixton Society

More and more Society's are developing lively websites. Brixton reported that over the past year they have had 250 to 350 "hits" on their website each month with more than a third from visitors overseas. Topping the list were 7% from Poland with a further 7% from the USA.

Recognising that responses to planning applications has to be done within a relatively short time, and that publicising the applications through the quarterly newsletter is not suitable, a welcome solution has now appeared; www.PlanningAlerts.com was launched in December 2006 and provides summaries within a chosen radius of your post code by searching local council's websites and emailing you about applications in your area. About a third of London is now covered, including Lambeth.

The Blackheath Society celebrates its 70th anniversary this year with an elegant new design on the front page of their summer newsletter.

Crystal Palace Community Association (CPCA)

CPCA's summer newsletter devoted to their campaign to prevent proposals to build housing on highly protected public parkland. The timetable for the "improvements" has been given as 20, 30, even 50 years.

The Society has submitted its detailed response to a proposal by Transport for London (TfL) to extend the Croydon Tramlink to the hilltop of Crystal Palace Park, creating a major new transport hub on the Park behind the bus terminus. The Society thinks the public consultation on these proposals and the MORI –conducted opinion poll were both inadequate and challenges the business case put forward by TfL. In the opinion of CPCA, one clear view has emerged, namely that "routing the tram through protected public parkland is emotive and contentious and is generally considered unacceptable."

Aircraft noise; airport development

The debate gathers pace on airport expansion

The Streatham Society informed its readers of the Government's soon to be unpublished proposal to do away with runway alternation at Heathrow and to introduce mixed mode in which planes will land and take off on the same runway at the same time. Their suspicion that proposals may be extended to include the possibility of a third runway at Heathrow and a 6th terminal was correct.

Meanwhile **Battersea Society** reports the inaugural meeting of the London Helicopter Consultative Group. The noise caused by helicopters at the Battersea Heliport off Lombard Road has been the subject of many local complaints.

Digging for Victory – a memory of WWII

How many readers were puzzled as they walked through St James's Park this summer to see a fenced off area just north of the restaurant? If your curiosity was aroused, you found a small garden (500 square metres) laid out in the style of a WWII vegetable allotment, and the wartime image was emphasised by the presence of an Anderson shelter. An article in *London Landscapes*, the magazine of the London Parks and Gardens Trust, explains that one part of the allotment contained a range of conventional vegetables eaten in the 1940s, and the other part had a wider range of fruit and vegetables reflecting today's concerns with healthy eating and a balanced diet. The exhibition was opened on 24th May and was due to close at the end of September.

The Chislehurst Society

The Society's newsletter, "The Cockpit" recently carried an article describing some of the many events that have taken place on the Commons over the years including the celebrations for Victoria's Golden Jubilee in 1887, and Diamond Jubilee in 1897 and the coronations and jubilees of the various monarchs since.

The Cockpit on the Village Green has been a focal point for many years. It is an old gravel pit adapted for other uses. As its name implies, it was used as an arena for cockfighting (the sport was abolished by Act of Parliament in 1834) though stick fighting and other events still continued in connection with the annual fair until this was also abolished in 1862/63. There was racecourse here up to mid-Victorian times, starting on the path between Bromley Lane and Heathfield Lane, and finishing at the gates of Camden Court where Camden Close is now.

A Thanksgiving Service was held there on 25th June 1919 for returning servicemen at the end of the Great War.

The area continues to be a local centre of events including the May Queen event beginning 1923; a modern event that may take root is the annual national Big Draw.

Comings and Goings

We are always delighted to increase our membership and therefore it was a pleasure for the Executive Committee of the London Forum to welcome The Richmond Hill Residents Association. We look forward to hearing about your activities.

While it is good to note that Blackheath and some other Society's have had a good response to appeals for volunteers and new members, several Societies have reported declining numbers of members because former members have moved away, or resigned after many years service, and so on. Unfortunately two Societies have had to close down this year: The Croydon Society and The Malden & Coombe Society.

We are sorry to see these societies go, and pay tribute to all those who have contributed to their activities over the years. We hope that at some point in the near future other groups of enthusiasts will be inspired to re-activate the Societies ■

Do let us know if your organisation is having problems with resources or membership. Success stories in rejuvenating or growing a society are welcomed, so that we can advise others.

newsbriefs

Key issues of interest and concern to note.

Greater London Authority Act receives Royal Assent

The Greater London Authority (GLA) Act received Royal Assent on 23 October bringing into law a broad package of additional powers for the Mayor of London and the London Assembly. It gives the Mayor new strengthened powers over planning and housing; tackling climate change, waste, and enhanced powers in health and culture.

Under its provisions the Mayor will:

- Publish a London housing strategy, setting out his strategic housing investment priorities for London;
- Be able to determine planning applications of strategic importance in London;
- Publish a strategy for reducing health inequalities between Londoners;
- Be subject to a duty to address climate change, and publish a London climate change mitigation and energy strategy and an adaptation to climate change strategy for London.

They will be brought into force in three stages. The budget provisions (sections 12–16) will commence shortly after Royal Assent in order to apply to the budget setting round for the 2008-09 GLA budget. Most other provisions will come into force early in the New Year except for those on development control (sections 31–36), the London Waste and Recycling Board (section 38) and the Museum of London (sections 45 and 47–49), which will come into force in early April 2008.

The detailed operational aspects of the Mayor's new development control powers will be set out in secondary legislation, and will be subject to public consultation before being finalised.

The public consultation documents on the Mayor of London Order and the GOL Circular are available at www.gos.gov.uk/gol/Planning/624901/?a=42496.

The Mayor's new role in adult skills and employment in London is set out in the Further Education and Training Act 2007.

The Assembly will also be subject to a duty to address climate change, and will be able to hold confirmation hearings in order to scrutinise candidates for key appointments the Mayor intends to make.

A London Waste and Recycling Board will be established to promote the production of less waste in the capital and encourage recycling and re-use of waste.

Local Government Minister, John Healey, said: "The Mayor provides the strong, visible and accountable leadership... And it offers the Assembly more bite to scrutinise the Mayor on behalf of Londoners."

Government claims that "The Act builds on the success of the GLA" and "The package of enhanced powers for the Mayor and Assembly in this Act is great news for London." Is debatable. We wait to be convinced.

To view the Act in full visit:

www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2007a.htm

Public Enquiries: Telephone 020 7944 4400

Prime Minister advocates citizens juries

In a speech to an audience of voluntary and community sector leaders in September, the Prime Minister spoke of his vision for a 'new' politics based on consensus that engages with people and draws on the widest range of talents and expertise, not narrow circles of power. He said we can't leave social challenges to Whitehall or the market, 'It is people who are engaged in changing the world as individuals, parents, neighbours and active citizens that will be the next momentum of change'. [*We seem to have heard all that before. Can yet more government commitments to "the extension of local democracy" be taken seriously? Ed*]

He announced new ways of reaching out including a radical renewal of consultation models, establishing citizens' juries and cross party standing committees on long term and non-ideological issues.

'I want to see vibrant reformed local democracy from neighbourhood level engagement, community calls to action, a renewed focus on the devolution of powers and responsibilities to local government'. The voluntary and community sector were, he acknowledged already putting the principles of 'consulting, listening, engaging, involving and serving into practice every day... this is the new kind of politics I want'. In the local government proposals, he said, the desire of the voluntary sector to be consulted will be fully recognised for the first time and that Hazel Blears, CLG Secretary of State, will be working on proposals for the extension of local democracy.

Would that be the same Hazel Blears who recently overrode a planning inspector and local objectors to allow development of a greenfield site in Hartley Wintney, Hampshire? As one of the objectors in a letter to the CPRE journal said:

"This Government... states objectives, talks about action plans, waffles on about people being in control and then does the opposite".

Concern about Olympic funding

Over 25,000 people signed an on-line Downing Street petition opposing the Government's diverting Lottery funds allocated to other activities to meet the spiralling costs of the Olympics. Heritage Link has written to the GLA Assembly committee investigating this subject. See their web site at www.heritage-link.org.uk/

Ealing Local Agenda 21 Front Gardens Project

Ealing's Local Agenda 21 Group has surveyed 7,675 front gardens in response to increasing concern about their disappearance under hard surfacing. A 50 page Report and a list of detrimental findings is available. Contact Andrew Lyon, 020 8825 7308, or Lyona@ealing.gov.uk, for copies, or for further information.

Guide to useful Planning Resources on the web

This very helpful Guide is published by Heritage Link and is available at www.heritagelink.org.uk/docs/planninglinks.pdf

Transport 2000

Transport 2000 has renamed itself Campaign for Better Transport.

➔ *Continued on page 16*

newsbriefs

Management and Maintenance of Historic Parks, Gardens and Landscapes

A handbook for those interested in understanding and planning the historic landscapes and gardens, Edited by John Watkins and Tom Wright, it examines ten case studies with appendices covering plant tables, useful contacts, funding sources and bibliography. Copies at £35.00 are available from bookshops.

Planning advice and support

Planning Aid, run in most regions by the Royal Town Planning Institute, provides free, independent and professional help, advice and support on planning issues to people and communities who cannot afford to hire a planning consultant. To see if your group might qualify, to see their guidance on planning or to become a Planning Aid volunteer yourself, visit www.planningaid.rtpi.org.uk

Flooding in London

The Environment Agency is conducting a project Thames Estuary 2100 (TE2100) to develop a management plan to prevent flooding along the tidal Thames this century. Consultation commenced in November 2007 ■

London Forum meeting 10th January 2008

Rachael Hill of the Environment Agency

will explain the risk of

Flooding in London

and the options being considered

10th January 2008 at 6pm for 6:30pm

The Gallery, 70 Cowcross Street

near to Farringdon station

Bookings, please, to secretary@londonforum.org.uk or 020 7281 2667

A full update will be given to the report of April 2007 available on the EA web site at: www.environment-agency.gov.uk/commondata/acrobat/item07te2100_1767613.pdf

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London Forum Media Awards November 2007

The Walter Bor Media Award winners

Judging panel: Peter Murray – Chair, Adam Wilkinson, Brian Waters, and London Forum Vice-Presidents, Judy Hillman and Bill Tyler.

Adam Wilkinson, Secretary of SAVE, provided a lively and informative start to the Awards evening with his excellent talk on using the media in heritage campaigning. In presenting the awards, Peter Murray, Curator of New London Architecture, stressed how the clarity of the message is so important in influencing opinion. He gave the panel's comments on each of the winning and commended entries and particularly remarked on the increasing significance and standard of societies' website entries.

A short presentation was made by a society in each of the categories before some concluding thoughts were provided by Brian Waters, Chairman of the London Planning & Development Forum. Marion Harvey, Chairman of the evening, invited Peter Eversden to wind up a very successful occasion with thanks to all those who had made the Awards such a notable and worthwhile event.

Newsletters

Winner

— The Wandsworth Society *Newsletter*

Commended

— The Dulwich Society *Newsletter*

— The Hampstead Garden Suburb Residents Association for *Suburb News*

— The London Parks & Gardens Trust for *London Landscapes*

Publications

Winner

— The Clapham Society for *Discovering Clapham*

Commended

— The Amwell Society for *A Village in London*

— The Enfield Society for *Heritage Walks In the London Borough of Enfield*

— The London Parks & Gardens Trust for *The London Gardener & Cycle Rides & Walks*

Website

Winner

— The Heath & Hampstead Society

www.heathandhampsteadsociety.org.uk

Commended

— The Friends of Brockwell Park

www.brockwellpark.com

— The Finchley Society

www.finchleysociety.org.uk

Media Impact Award

Joint winners for collaboration to save the Wandsworth Museum.

The Wandsworth Museum Campaign Group:

— Wandsworth Historical Society

— Wandsworth Society — Battersea Society

— Balham Society — Putney Society

Commended

The Sydenham Society for The Greyhound Public House Campaign

newsforum

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