

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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London's skyline: proposals for more towers

The Battle for London's Skyline continues

A string of towers on the South Bank - is this the way to establish a cluster?

Peter Eversden looks at the latest proposals

Boris Johnson came to power proclaiming that, although he had nothing against tall buildings, they should be in appropriate locations, such as the City, Canary Wharf and Croydon. He also stated his opposition to two towers in Blackfriars Road, on the grounds they would impinge on historic views, in this case from St James's Park.

While the government still talks of "empowering" people at every opportunity, the Mayor already seems to be back-tracking in his opposition. The London Plan policies of his predecessor was for high buildings near to all stations with good public transport and for maximisation of use of all development sites. Those can be acceptable policies if new structures are context sensitive, do not harm strategic views and have housing density that conforms to the London Plan range for each site.

Rowan Moore has written that the problems arising are a reflection on the failure of higher authorities - the last Mayor and central government - to establish a coherent plan for tall buildings in London. Could it be, as Moore says, that "officials have told Mayor Johnson that he can't reverse Ken Livingstone's London Plan overnight, and has to stand by the Plan's support for higher buildings near railway stations. If so, they are wrong".

Recent cases have shown the problems that can arise in one strip of land on the south of the Thames joining opportunity areas that have planning frameworks seeking intensification of use.

The Three Sisters

There has been Press criticism of Mayor Johnson for changing his mind about what are dubbed The Three Ugly Sisters at the Elizabeth House site by Waterloo station.

In July 2008 the GLA told Lambeth Council that the proposed towers would almost fill in the gap that exists between Big Ben and Portcullis House, and would diminish the impact of the rest of the World Heritage Site.

However by October 2008, after the Minister, Hazel Blears, had called in the plans for her own determination, Boris Johnson was "content to allow Lambeth Council to determine the case itself", subject to any action that the Secretary of State may take, and was no longer wishing to direct refusal. Although the proposals will be visible from the Westminster World Heritage Site, "the views are kinetic and will vary from different viewpoints"; that, because of its distance from the World Heritage Site, across the River Thames, it will be read as background elements and not damage the outstanding universal value of the WHS. As for the setting of County Hall and the Royal Festival Hall and other views identified in the London View Management Framework, the impact "is not sufficiently intrusive to justify refusing planning permission."

The applicant had provided additional information to demonstrate the visibility of the proposals from the Westminster World Heritage Site. This showed that the merging between the proposal and St. Stephen's

Tower can be seen only in limited areas. Additional material showed that the impact on other views, including views from St. James's Park and of County Hall and the Royal Festival Hall, would not be significant.

In response to the revised application, the Waterloo Community Development Group (WCDG), a London Forum member, concluded that the proposals at ground level are a major improvement on the current development and regeneration of the site is welcome, and therefore do not consider outstanding misgivings regarding the design as sufficient to warrant refusal. The WCDG has outstanding concerns relating to microclimate, the lack of affordable housing and community benefits from the section 106 package.

The Doon Street Tower - a legal challenge

English Heritage and Westminster City Council are planning to issue a legal challenge to the decision of Communities Secretary Hazel Blears in August 2008 to approve the controversial 144m Doon Street tower on London's South Bank.

The then Mayor, Ken Livingstone, wrote in 2007 that the proposed tower would meet the London Plan criteria for assessing tall buildings; accorded with guidance set out in the draft Waterloo Development Framework; and would have an acceptable impact on views identified in the London View Management Framework. The developers, Coin Street Community Builders argued the

43-storey tower was needed to fund a public swimming pool and sports centre.

However at a 3 week public inquiry, last spring, the independent Inspector recommended rejection of the proposals because the tower would cause serious damage, "intruding and overwhelming" many local views. The impact on London-wide views from St James' Park and from Somerset House was considered unacceptable and were alone grounds for refusal.

Minister overturns Inspector's decision

Blears has now over-ruled the Inspector and her own advisers, rejecting concerns and legal arguments by a number of organisations including English Heritage, Westminster City Council and the Royal Parks over the project. She admitted that English Heritage was right to raise fears over views from Somerset House, which would face the development across the River Thames, and that the application is not in accordance with the local development plan.

But she argued that the scheme met national policy requirements, and would bring "substantial community benefits." She argued that the omission of affordable housing fell within the exceptions provided for in the unitary development plan due to its social infrastructure provision, and concluded that the lack of provision of affordable housing was not in conflict with the development plan.

The Secretary of State seems to have dismissed the London Plan and its policies on tall buildings.

English Heritage "appalled"

A statement from English Heritage said: "We [are] appalled to learn that the secretary of state has not only overturned the advice of English Heritage as her expert advisors, but she has also chosen to ignore the learned opinion of an independent Inspector. English Heritage finds it incomprehensible that her reason for doing so was because she considered that community benefits outweigh harm to the historic environment as though one must be at the sacrifice of the other. There are alternative options that would have provided the same community benefits but would have been more sensitive, without causing serious damage to historic buildings spaces and views.

The Secretary of State seems to have dismissed the London Plan and its policies on tall buildings.

Obviously we do not consider this matter closed and we are considering our next steps and the options open to us."

Blackfriars Road towers

The Waterloo Community Development Group has been, or will be, involved in four public inquiries for proposed towers on the South Bank.

In addition to those above, they are opposing a 175M Beetham Tower at 1 Blackfriars Road by the bridge, with £8M luxury flats, a seven storey hotel, nothing for the community and in an area with poor public transport.

The group is also fighting a 140m high tower behind it.

Westminster City Council has expressed itself forcefully on the proposed towers, which would appear in views from St James's Park.

157-183 Waterloo Road

It is proposed to replace a redundant seven storey office block just south of Waterloo station by a hotel of up to twelve storeys. The GLA advised Lambeth Council that the design and lack of context sensitivity of the development did not conform to the policies of the London Plan.

York Road ex-hospital site

There are plans for conversion of the listed former General Lying-In Hospital near County Hall that would include a new 16 storey building.

The Mayor has asked for submission of information to ensure the proposal complies with London Plan policies 4B.16-18, the London View Management Framework, and to demonstrate that it does not adversely impact the World Heritage Site.

Vauxhall Sky Gardens

A 35 storey (120m) tower 500m south of Vauxhall Cross has been criticised by the

Several "landmark" developments across London have been halted as the property market continues to weaken. Towers at Blackfriars Road, the "Cheesegrater" skyscraper at Leadenhall Street, and the "Walkie Talkie" tower at Fenchurch Street are among them.

Mayor for its housing, ground floor design and climate change mitigation and adaptation but is an acceptable structure as part of a planned cluster of tall buildings in the area.

The Albert Embankment

No.10: Overlooking the Thames, 650m north of Vauxhall station a proposal for a 14 storey apart-hotel is opposed by local residents as out of keeping with the surrounding area, and for its impact on the appreciation of the riverside and the unacceptable sense of enclosure to the detriment of the surrounding occupiers.

On the eastern side of Albert Embankment, at **38-46** 300m north of Vauxhall Cross, the Mayor has challenged flood resistance, sound insulation and the quality of social rented units proposed in a 23 storey (75m) building.

Of the proposed development at **no. 20**, even CABE has concerns. They commented that the footprint of the three towers and their layouts have led to tight spaces between them, with open space between towers one and two considered heavily constrained and not providing a pleasant environment. CABE is also concerned that this closeness will impinge on the privacy of residents. They conclude that these issues are a direct result of the proposed quantum of proposed development.

The GLA accepted the scheme, saying that the loss of light and privacy are not strategic planning issues and will be assessed by the local planning authority. The devaluation of property and the loss of view from private properties are not planning matters. ■

Planning Bill: one piece of good news

At last, one piece of good news has emerged as the Planning Bill continues towards becoming law with, so far, few amendments. There had been a proposal to set up local member review panels to determine "minor" appeals, which put elected members in an invidious position and placing local authorities in the ridiculous situation of having to determine whether or not to decide against their own decisions! Minister Baroness Andrews has conceded that, after listening to stakeholders' views, the provision will be dropped. ■

London Forum AGM marks it's 21st year

Chairman **Peter Eversden** welcomed members and the guest speaker Philip Kolvin, chairman of the Civic Trust, to the City Temple Conference Centre, a new venue, our usual venue at The Gallery being unavailable that evening.

Chairman's AGM Address

It always amazes me that we cover so much and are able to be involved in so many activities. The office space we have at the Alan Baxter and Associates building is immensely appreciated..

For the last seven years we have been involved in the London Plan development and last year was intensive. You will have seen from our reports that we felt some satisfaction with what we achieved at the examination in public of the latest alterations, but some frustration also. We have taken up outstanding issues with the new head of the London Plan team, Andrew Barry-Purcell, and will also pursue them with the deputy mayor, Sir Simon Milton. Boris Johnson has published his proposals for consultation on further changes to the plan, so the work will continue to occupy us considerably.

The Department for Communities and Local Government has issued a flood of consultations and planning policy changes in the last year, much of it aimed at reducing the need for planning applications and for community involvement in development control. We have worked directly, and through the Civic Trust and other organisations, to try to ensure that the outcome will not harm our democratic rights, and conservation areas, and not jeopardise our 'empowerment', under the new Government proposals. We will continue to work to help all our members to become "engaged".

Last year's significant events

I thank our Vice Presidents for organising and managing the **Walter Bor Media Awards**. Our members web sites, publications, press liaison and campaigning were most impressive and useful to others.

Thanks to the work of David Lewis our own **Web Site** was launched. Following his departure we are looking for a webmaster to assist with its maintenance and any offers would be appreciated. I thank members for providing us with an e-mail address. It makes it far easier to keep you up to date with news, consultation opportunities, events and various topics that cannot wait for the next newsletter. Hopefully, you are able to pass on some of the items as you develop your own email lists of your members.

Our five-yearly survey attracted a very high response rate from members and we will shortly let you have the results and our

plans to respond to the issues raised at a meeting in November.

Financial report

In Andrew Coleman's absence, the Chairman drew attention to the key points. We had fewer late subscriptions received in the accounts than in previous years and a 130% increase in our expenses above the previous year's level due to our special projects, so all that has reduced our current assets. He thanked Andrew for his work as Treasurer, and Simon Baddeley for examining the accounts.

Election of Officers and Honorary Independent Examiner

One third of the trustees each year should formally stand down and may be nominated for re-election. Andrew Coleman (Hon Treasurer), Haydn Mylchreest membership secretary (Battersea Society) and Jim Nicolson (Vauxhall Society). were all willing to offer themselves for re-election and, having been duly proposed and seconded all three were unanimously re-elected, as was Simon Baddeley.

Committee news; David Lewis steps down

David Lewis (Battersea Society) has unfortunately resigned as a Trustee of the London Forum in order to concentrate on his work for the next three years as Chairman of the Snowdonia Society, in addition to his work in the Battersea Society. He has been a very active trustee, contributing tremendously to our work, particularly in leading on our involvement in climate change, environment and waste subjects, in preparing and giving some of the evidence for the London Plan examination, and in commissioning and maintaining our web site. David has said he will continue to help the London Forum when he can. In recognition of his work for us the Chairman sought approval of David's appointment as a Vice President of the London Forum. This was agreed unanimously, as was a vote of thanks to the Trustees individually for their work during the past year.

Best wishes were expressed for a speedy recovery to our Honorary Secretary, Stephen Thornton, who is in hospital following an operation; and also to our Treasurer, Andrew Coleman for his wife, who has been very ill. ■

Amendments to the Constitution.

Changes had been circulated and were summarised by the Chairman:

- to amend the nomination clause to state that a Trustee must be a member of the Charity or the nominated representative of an organisation that is a member of the Charity or be nominated by two members of the Executive Committee.
- to clarify that the President and Vice Presidents are not trustees by virtue of their office;
- to bring wording for trustees into line with the Charity Commission's recommendations;
- to clarify that the Chair, Secretary and Treasurer will be elected for a 3 year term like other trustees;
- to add the ability to serve notices by electronic communications.

The first amendment is proposed because there are insufficient volunteers coming forward from member Societies; we must have a full complement of trustees in order to enable us to meet our charitable objects. The changes were accepted unanimously and the revised constitution will be submitted to the Charity Commission.

Annual subscriptions

Subscriptions have not been raised for six years but costs have increased year by year. In particular the new 'Large Letter' postal rate has added a significant cost to the mailing of our 600 copies of our newsletter. We have been helped by a grant from the Civic Trust but we must avoid any further erosion of our reserves. So the London Forum will have to make an increase in its subscriptions. It is hoped that members have found the Forum to be good value and that we can continue to be that in future.

An appeal for help

The success of our work relies on the time and effort of volunteers from member Societies. It is our 21st year and it is hoped to have another Thames cruise, this time travelling up river, and other open meetings.

We need your help for this work.

Please consider what volunteers you could find for us. We would like to hear from individual society members who have skills and enthusiasm in:

- Website management; organising events; preparing critiques and consultation responses of planning proposals from the GLA and Central Government and assisting in preparing other submissions. ■

Philip Kolvin at the London Forum AGM

Philip Kolvin congratulated the London Forum on its achievements saying that if it didn't exist it would have to be invented. It is an independent voice for the people of London.

Peter Eversden and **Helen Marcus** summarize his address

Philip Kolvin began by paying tribute to the London Forum and in particular to trustee and Committee member Michael Hammerson for the immensely valuable voluntary work he does for the Civic Trust on responses to Government consultations.

Environmental Assessment

He then discussed and explained Environmental Assessments in the context of his campaigning work at Crystal Palace. These are now required for developments. Community groups should challenge poor schemes and ensure that requirements of local people are expressed in policies. Societies should engage widely for input into what is wanted.

The UK still has no mechanism to provide Environmental Assessment on reserve matter schemes. John Prescott had ignored all requests from campaigners at Crystal Palace. Philip therefore asked for the intervention of the European Commission on the grounds of inadequate Environmental Assessment. The Commission brought a claim against the UK in the European Court of Justice which found for their case; they succeeded in stopping an inappropriate development and the developer pulled out. Only recently had he received news that their file was at last closed. He wryly observed that the whole process had taken fifty percent longer than World War Two!

Running a consultation exercise at a local school on the very day that 9/11 had happened in the USA, had set him thinking. He had initially felt embarrassed but he realised that the consultation had real significance for democracy and the democratic process. The local authority was suborning the will of the people. It is getting more and more difficult for local people, with rules cascading down and huge power given to small numbers of people who are not delivering. New permitted development rules, for instance, are going to have a big impact on people who will in future not even know when some intrusive development is initiated by their next door neighbour.

It has unleashed much anger but also much talent. We can all act in small local ways for our immediate community. People should ask themselves what they are influencing and achieving and make sure they have a full participatory role. They have

People have the talents and imagination and can help community cohesion and plant the seeds of citizenship and democracy

the talents and imagination and can help community cohesion and plant the seeds of citizenship and democracy in making sure community groups embrace all people. Societies have to take up the baton for local people and we need a strong national movement now.

Experience at CPRE

Philip had been on the board of CPRE and admired its central team of fifteen policy officers with good access to Government and other departments. Feedback from their local groups was important and he emphasised that it is key that information flows in both directions from local, regional and national levels.

The attraction of the Civic Trust

The attractions to join the Civic Trust board for him had been the work done on the night time economy, 'NightVision'; the way it is not just a conservation organisation but runs constructive initiatives such as the Civic Trust award schemes, the regeneration projects and work in rejuvenating High Streets; the campaigning and involvement of local people; the Heritage Open Days scheme and, most important, the strength of 750 societies with a quarter of a million people as members. That's more members than the political parties! Imagine what could be achieved if you could harness just a fraction of that energy and talent.

The Civic Trust is a 51 year old organisation, formed when there were 3,000 civic societies. He had found the Civic Trust mansion rather gothic and rusted and wants to create a model of a responsive organisation with trustees answerable to the regions and with much more responsiveness to local groups. To be a member of a civic society is to be a model citizen, exercising citizenship.

Philip mentioned the long list of things Peter Eversden had emphasised that he

wanted the Civic Trust to do. However, the income from civic society subscriptions is only £60,000 and the cost of legal service support alone is around double that. He wants to ring-fence funds for collecting input from societies and speaking on their behalf. To employ a policy officer, a campaigner, a press officer, someone making sure guidance and training is produced and the supply of web based facilities and publications would cost £250,000 annually. That would be the equivalent of 65p for each member of the Civic Trust societies if donated by Gift Aid. Therefore building up a membership of individual subscribers would support the work and could help to strengthen the Civic Trust to be more effective. It could lead, also, to legacy income which had been significant for CPRE.

Problems to solve

The problem is that the Civic Trust has no information about the members of its member organisations and many societies do not have email addresses of their members.

Societies are not sufficiently aware of the full range of activities, support to local authorities and award schemes that the Civic Trust is carrying out. They would form the basis of more such achievements at a local level.

It will be important for the Civic Trust to support societies in their work and to guide them towards greater participation in the new working arrangements that the Government proposes in the *Communities in Control* White Paper. The Civic Trust has applied to the DCLG for an empowerment grant, and as a national network of community groups it delivers precisely to these requirements. It aims to help its members and their local residents to be more engaged with their local authority and participate in all that happens in their area towards a better quality of life for all people.

The aim for the future

Philip aims to strengthen the civic movement by securing involvement by people everywhere, including areas where there are no societies now, but where there are activists and volunteers who share our aims, and create an organisation that will win the respect of local people. ■

Your local Planning Aid service

We are delighted that **Carol Ryall** and **Roz Corbett** of Planning Aid for London have agreed to bring you regular articles on changes to the planning system and issues of interest in London. Here they introduce the work of the organisation and discuss recent planning changes

Planning Aid for London is one of ten services in England, all of which were established to assist individuals and communities to understand and access the planning system. These organisations are very small compared with the areas they are set up to assist. To provide a service for the whole of London for example, PAL has only recently managed to establish 3 community outreach staff and 3 planning advisors to deal with around 600 enquiries every year and a wide range of other activities.

With limited resources it is unable to help everyone and therefore focuses its advice services on those who need it most. For those who cannot afford the services of a planning consultant the advice is free. For those who can afford to pay (or pay something) there are two additional services. The first is a phone advice service for those who may need immediate support but who then need no further assistance – a small fee is chargeable. The second is a standard consultancy service which, on a competitive fee basis, assists largely small businesses, faith groups and individuals.

Whilst the consultancy feeds some welcome income to the charity, the free service will always remain PAL's main focus. In addition to planning advice, PAL undertakes projects which involve people in planning in a variety of ways, in particular young people, who are rarely consulted on planning issues but who are the future recipients of our planning decisions. Through youth groups, schools and colleges, we work to encourage young people not only to take part in that decision-making but to consider careers in planning and the built environment. We have secured a number of placements for young people with planning organisations and employed planning students providing all with valuable work experience.

We work with a number of London Boroughs, undertaking consultations on new policy documents or development proposals, and finding hard to reach groups and working with them to develop their views. Assisting residents facing major change on their estates is a key challenge, and we have, in partnership with Councils and housing associations, set up residents' groups, working with them to develop the relevant skills necessary to secure involvement from the beginning of the development process.

Useful websites

For more information, or should you need direct help from Planning Aid, then do contact us on 020 7247 4900 or email info@planningaidforlondon.org.uk **Information about various web sites** in connection with this article is on the back page

PAL is not a campaigning organisation and must remain independent in all its work, preferring instead to support individuals and communities to give their views. The charity currently has over 100 volunteers including many professional full time planners and barristers who give up their leisure time to assist PAL and its clients.

Planning Changes: Permitted Development

Recent changes to the planning system, issued October 2008, relating to 'permitted development' (PD) rights reflect the balancing act that planning has occasionally to perform. PD effectively provides a 'given' planning permission for certain forms of development providing you keep within certain restrictions.

These rights do not apply if you live in a designated area, such as a Conservation Area, National Park, Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty or the Norfolk/Suffolk Broads. There are also special restrictions if you live in a listed building or if you live in an area covered by Article 4 Directions.

Owners of houses (not flats), outside those areas, will now be able to make certain types of minor changes without needing to apply for planning permission. Go beyond those restrictions and planning permission will need to be sought. You will be able to construct or replace a hardstand or driveway up to 5 square metres in the front garden using traditional materials. Any hardstand or driveway in the front garden greater than 5 sq m is also allowed as long as it is constructed using porous materials. This reflects the increasing use of front gardens for parking, whilst recognising that the extension of hard surfacing has vastly added to surface water run-off leading, in some locations, to serious flooding during storms.

Not every one will be happy with this of course; front garden parking can, for example, remove or limit usable on-street parking and has often resulted in the loss of traditional garden walls and railings.

Whilst not all will welcome some relaxation of development, others will now be able to maximise use of their home. Whilst the changes will make it easier for householders, they may also reduce the number of planning applications received by local Councils - this should free up planners to work on more complex and lengthy proposals.

Planning Performance Agreements (PPA)

Also introduced earlier this year, a PPA is an agreement between a local planning authority (LPA) and a developer, designed to improve the handling of large scale and more complex sites, those likely to contain many different land uses. The agreement seeks to improve the quality of decision-making through greater transparency and certainty, and ensure that LPAs and developers appoint sufficient resources to the planning proposals. PPAs may also encourage early consideration of the impacts of development and engagement with local communities on the project vision and objectives. The agreement is however voluntary.

An LPA must inform Communities and Local Government of its intended use of a PPA. The development proposal will then be removed from what would otherwise be a 'Best Value' requirement. What this means is it effectively allows the LPA and developer to negotiate flexible timescales for the decision-making process that reflect the circumstances of the particular proposal, rather than having to meet the standard 13 week decision target for other planning applications. A proposal cannot become a PPA after submission.

PPA Charters have also been introduced. If they expect to use PPAs regularly a local Council may choose to develop a PPA Charter. This should establish how the LPA will work with stakeholders when dealing with complex development projects. The Charter should include a statement of the Council's expectations for community involvement and should be in line with its Statement of Community Involvement.

So far we have little evidence of the use and/or success of both PPAs and PPA Charters, although we are aware that several Councils and developers in London have started to use them; the LB of Haringey is currently consulting on its PPA Charter. Check out if your planning authority is using or intends to use PPAs or Charters. If they are, let us know if you feel this has made a difference to the process. ■

The Credit Crunch and Housing in London

Duncan Bowie, of London Metropolitan University, assesses the impact of the credit crunch and the broader economic downturn on the ability of all sectors to meet housing needs and demand in our capital city.

The impact of the credit crunch is already being felt acutely, not only in terms of significant falls in house prices but in the collapse of the development programme. Both the market slowdown and the broader economic downturn hit the ability of the housing programme in all sectors to meet housing needs and demand in our capital city. Homelessness, overcrowding, poor quality housing and the lack of affordable housing, remain serious problems for many households in London. It is essential that housing supply keeps up with demographic growth. The urgency of corrective action cannot be understated.

The problem and the lessons

It might be argued that those of us who want more affordable housing should welcome falling house prices. We are all aware that house prices have been at an unsustainable level, inflated by over generous lending policies by banks and building societies, which are only now regarded as irresponsible. With the restrictions on mortgage lending, effective demand has fallen off, so prices will fall further before they match effective purchasing power in the current lending market.

As well as there being a lesson for banks and other lenders, and a reminder for Government that some regulation of both the lending market and development might be required, there is also a serious lesson for developers – build only what is marketable – not just in terms of immediate demand but in terms of long term housing requirements.

There has for some time been a surfeit of undesirable small flats in dense and generally high-rise developments, often in not very attractive locations, and I have always been puzzled by the optimism of some developers and their advisers about assumptions on sales values – perhaps persuaded by their own marketing hype.

However, I also take the view that while refusal of a planning application for a development on the grounds that it is unsaleable may not be strictly valid in planning law, planners should have made more effort, through clearer development briefs and planning policies on housing mix, to ensure that the development pipeline was more appropriate to meeting London's long-term housing requirements.

It is essential that housing supply keeps up with demographic growth. The urgency of corrective action cannot be understated.

What should be done now?

The main Government policy objective should be to increase the supply of affordable housing. This has two components: increasing the overall supply of housing, and ensuring that the supply of both existing and new housing in all tenures is of good quality and more affordable for households on middle and lower incomes.

We must learn from our mistakes so that they are not repeated in the future. But we must focus attention on what corrective action can be taken now.

The focus of Government policy should also be on reducing both the capital and revenue cost of housing to applicants rather than providing financial incentives to existing households to assist them to access housing, which is otherwise unaffordable. This latter strategy by increasing effective demand in an unregulated market, will serve only to increase the price of existing and new housing. Market stabilisation is not achieved by artificial boosting of sales values.

Much of the development programme under construction, but not saleable in the current market, is unsuitable for use of social rented housing for families. It is important that the Housing Corporation does not waive its normal standards to buy up flats, which are inappropriate. It should however look at funding housing associations to purchase schemes, which do include significant numbers of low rise 3 bedroom or larger properties, and be very tough on negotiating discounts from developers. Use of public money has to be cost effective and focused on output not on bailing out specific developers. Some house builders are in urgent need of cash flow and the public sector should not miss this opportunity. Some house builders would rather take 50% of the assumed hypothetical market value than nothing at all.

Opportunities

The current market does provide some opportunities to improve the quality of the development pipeline. Where developers are mothballing projects not yet started because they are no longer profitable, there is an opportunity to redesign the scheme to provide more marketable housing and to increase the quantum of affordable housing. This will in some cases mean significant reductions in unit density, but with larger homes, could still house a similar number of people to the original assumption. It will generally mean less highrise development. If the Victoria scheme can be redesigned to meet affordable housing policy targets, so can other schemes. Redesign may need significantly higher rates of Housing Corporation grant per unit, but this will be money well spent.

The GLA, boroughs and the Housing Corporation should be reviewing every unimplemented residential planning consent in London and talking to landowners, developers and housing associations about revisions required and how much subsidy is necessary to get the scheme started. We cannot afford to wait until the new Homes and Communities Agency is up and running. Government agencies have to be proactive now rather than waiting for developers to come forward with proposals. The Housing Corporation's 'market engagement' process needs to be speeded up with clear and quick investment decision criteria.

Government and local authorities should promote the provision of affordable housing through subsidised land disposal to housing associations and developers linked to the provision of affordable housing in accordance with policy targets. Government, public sector agencies and local authorities should review business management assumptions predicated on disposing of land and assets at full unconstrained market value. Local authorities in disposing of land for affordable housing should have regard to the revenue savings arising from lower homelessness and related social service and education costs.

The local authority role

Local authorities are central to the process. They should be empowered and enabled to guarantee the mortgages of households whom they have nominated to both shared ownership and outright ownership homes.

Former Strategic Planner at the Greater London Authority, Duncan Bowie is currently Reader in Urban Planning and Regeneration, Department of Applied Social Studies and Department of Architecture and Spatial Design, at London Metropolitan University

There is a case for councils re-establishing their own mortgage programmes. There is also a case for local authorities to undertake development directly, especially where land is in their ownership. The Wandsworth 'hidden homes' scheme has been a positive initiative and could be followed by other boroughs with surplus land, so long as there are strict criteria on location and quality of output.

New shared ownership schemes should be discouraged, especially where they involve small units and/or small initial equity stakes. There is a strong case for converting shared ownership schemes into some form of sub-market rent. There are possibilities for developing affordable unsubsidised rental programmes in new housing based on long term investment funding sources such as pension funds. Some house builders are moving away from their historic short term approach to negotiate such arrangements, even if just on a medium term basis pending anticipated market revival.

Government and Housing Corporations have floated the idea of medium term rental, which can be converted into equity share or outright purchase later. The British Property Federation is promoting the idea of a new build private rented sector. Now is the time for this continental approach - a managed and regulated form of Buy to Let, but with institutional investors having long term perspectives and responsibilities rather than individual speculators interested in short term gains.

There is also a strong case for the Homes and Communities Agency to provide funding to a regulated private rented sector for existing stock and new provision. This would enable rents at levels significantly below market levels and would supplement existing social rented provision. Regulation would relate to standards, quality of management, rent and service charges. Such a regime would increase supply by generating additional private sector investment and good quality housing and would be available to middle income households at a cost significantly below the revenue cost of home ownership.

There is another immediate problem. Most estate regeneration schemes will be no longer viable as they depend on private finance or cross-subsidy, which is no longer available. Government must re-

establish the direct regeneration subsidy schemes that previously existed in the Estate Renewal Challenge Fund and Single Regeneration Budget programmes.

The longer term policy issues

Returning to the longer term issues, Government should consider re-establishing the previous total cost indicator grant based regime. This will relate subsidy to the need to fund reasonable costs not met by rent income within the target rent framework. It will remove the reliance of the affordable housing programme on cross subsidy from private development, shared ownership receipts and housing association property disposal. It will re-establish a sound business management regime in the affordable housing sector.

The Government should not introduce any more stamp duty holidays, as the effect is to increase effective demand without necessarily increasing supply. They should consider the replacement of stamp duty, which is a tax on purchase, with taxes on capital gain on disposal and/or an annual tax on value increment.

Implementation of the Community Infrastructure Levy should be dependent on demonstrating that its introduction will neither delay appropriate development, nor reduce the quantum and quality of affordable housing output. Local authorities should consider as an alternative to levying CIL or planning contributions at commencement, the possibility of taking an equity stake in any future value appreciation. While this can be achieved through land disposal covenants or through the establishment of joint venture vehicles, the Government should amend planning powers to allow local authorities to take an equity stake in a private development as a condition of planning permission. This will ensure that a development is not delayed by onerous initial obligations. It will protect the public sector interest in terms of benefiting from any long-term value appreciation.

Government action and new skills needed

Planners and those in related professions need new skills. Planners need to be fully aware of all the factors that impact on the delivery of housing and deliverability of planning applications. This includes

knowledge of housing market factors, funding arrangements and development viability. Government and academic institutions should focus on supporting relevant higher education courses and Continuous Professional Development (CPD) provision.

Government also needs to promote the positive role of planning and the importance of collaboration with other professions. There is also a need to shift the focus from development control to plan making, monitoring and developing appropriate mechanisms for plan implementation.

The Government should establish minimum qualitative and space standards applicable to all residential development. This would ensure that the next time the private market collapses, the homes under construction are fit for use as social housing.

On a final note, Government must ensure that planning policy and guidance is realistic. The plan making system needs to be speedier with the ability for plans to be reviewed quickly in response to changing external factors. Requirements for housing trajectories and site identification for 15 year housing targets are unrealistic in the current context. ■

Shortage of Council houses

A survey by the Local Government Association (LGA) in May found that nearly 1.6 million households are on council waiting lists - about 4 million people. The cause is thought to be partly demographic changes and immigration, but also because of a 12 year fall in the construction of Council and housing association homes.

The situation is likely to worsen as more homes are repossessed and people turn to local authorities for help. Pressure has been growing for some years as house prices have soared out of reach for large numbers of people. The London boroughs with the biggest waiting lists are Brent, Newham, Lewisham, Ealing, and Barnet.

Meanwhile reports from city centres all over country speak of a million empty homes, and huge amounts of over-development with hundreds of unwanted buy-to-let properties on the market.

For more details see the LGA website at www.lga.gov.uk ■

Spotlight on Tottenham Civic Society

Taking new pride in an undervalued C19 suburb

by **Tony Aldous**

The arrival of the Tottenham Civic Society on the London amenity societies scene is very welcome for a number of reasons. The TCS, founded in 2006 and recently welcomed as a London Forum member, is in one of those districts of London where amenity societies are not often found but are desperately needed. It also breaks the pattern of amenity societies valiantly kept going by persons of pensionable age: of its present six committee members, only one comes into that category; the others are youngish professionals who combine TCS work with demanding day jobs and family commitments. It can be done.

Standing up for a Victorian suburb

But perhaps the most important point is that the Tottenham Civic Society is there to stand up for a Victorian suburb with traditionally largely working-class population, the quality and potential of whose buildings and places have hitherto been ignored or dismissed by both the local authority, Haringey, and its own residents.

For Tottenham - which pre-1964 was a separate, Middlesex borough, and accounts for about 100,000 of Haringey's 220,000 population - really has a lot going for it. It has 12 of Haringey's 28 conservation areas; a wealth of sound and attractive buildings, including a surprising number of Georgian ones, which thanks to Haringey's conservation team and help from English Heritage and the Heritage Lottery Fund are being made to shine out as they deserve to; and a population which, thanks to successive waves of immigration from the C19 onwards, constitutes a rich and lively ethnic mix - Irish, Afro-Caribbeans, Latin Americans, Portuguese, Turks, Kurds, Albanians, West Africans and others. This diversity no doubt poses some challenges, but overall means that Tottenham is a lively, vigorous place with great unrealised potential.

The society came into being as local people were fighting (in the event successfully) to defeat a scheme to build a large and overbearing block of flats on an underused site just across the road from Tottenham's historic stately home-turned museum, the Grade I listed Bruce Castle. The council had refused the application, the developer had appealed and been given a flea in the ear by the inquiry inspector.

But even in the thick of battle there was an acute consciousness something like this could happen again. "Somebody said, 'Perhaps we should have a civic society'", remembers TCS chairman Matthew Bradby. In March 2006 they formed one - and it's evidently been going like a bomb ever since.

The Ward's Corner development

Its biggest preoccupation at present is Ward's Corner, an Edwardian former department store which turns the corner from Seven Sisters Road into Tottenham High Road. Boarded up and its windows painted out, at the moment it looks a mess, yet its attractive three-storey façade still gives more than a hint of what could be done with it. The developer wanted to build two eight-storey blocks at either end (its centre is over Seven Sisters tube station so cannot support higher buildings). The result would be an ugly and unbalanced corner building, as English Heritage have observed in their critical appraisal of the scheme. For though - presumably on its advice - the Secretary of State has so far declined to list the buildings, EH has come out strongly against the scheme on conservation and townscape grounds.

Another aspect of the Ward's Corner story is that, despite the boarding-up, no fewer than 60 small businesses, including market stallholders, currently operate in the building. Some of these businesses are run by Latin-Americans, who have now put in an alternative, restore-and-adapt planning application. As part of a Ward's Corner Coalition alongside businesses, residents associations and individuals, the TCS hopes the developer will see sense. It emphasises that this approach keeps this shopping frontage for small independent businesses rather than cloned-high street multiples.

The Tottenham Hotspur stadium

A second current preoccupation is with a stretch of the high road adjacent to the Tottenham Hotspur stadium. The club have been buying up and boarding up sound and potentially attractive buildings on the east side of the high road with a view to building a larger stadium. One possibility seems to be to turn it from its present north-south orientation to an east-west one, in the process demolishing the boarded-up buildings and creating a dead frontage to

the high road. "We would certainly oppose that very strongly," says Bradby. The TCS would like to discuss the matter with Spurs, but the club doesn't seem to want to talk.

Having received a bloody nose from his planning appeal, the developer of the site alongside Bruce Castle (known as "315 Roundway") has engaged new architects and is consulting widely on how to develop it. He is at last listening to the TCS and local opinion. The TCS is keen to help with positive solutions and what may be called creative compromise. Bradby has been surprised to find that lay people like him and his TCS colleagues can actually point out to developers and architects more sensible, productive ways of doing things.

One scheme the society has not objected to concerns retention of a pub, *The Mitre* in South Tottenham, and building new flats adjacent. It has however made a number of suggestions, including the thought that siting flats with their main windows overlooking a (potentially noisy) beer garden might not be the brightest of ideas, not least when it comes to selling them. Surprisingly this seems to have been a factor not previously considered..

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, Haringey's planners passed many poorly designed schemes on the grounds that they would help to regenerate Tottenham. Since the TCS arrived on the scene, for that and (no doubt) other reasons they seem to have become more discriminating - though sub-standard schemes previously approved have still been coming on site. Bradby cites blocks of flats with balconies overlooking busy roads with multiple bus routes, some of them 24-hour, and demolition of sound Edwardian houses to make way for ugly and inappropriate "affordable" housing. "I call it 'disposable housing' rather than 'affordable'," he says.

His other big bete noire is UPVC double glazing. He sees sound window frames and doors which needed only a lick of paint being thrown into skips to make way for out-of-character UPVC replacements. "I get really upset when I see people bashing out sash windows." People think they're saving on maintenance. In fact, quite apart from the materials and energy used in their manufacture, UPVC windows are not sustainable and - as can be seen in



Matt Bradby

Tottenham Civic Society

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w website: under construction.

Tottenham as in other parts of London – soon begin to degrade and look tawdry.

Arguing for conservation

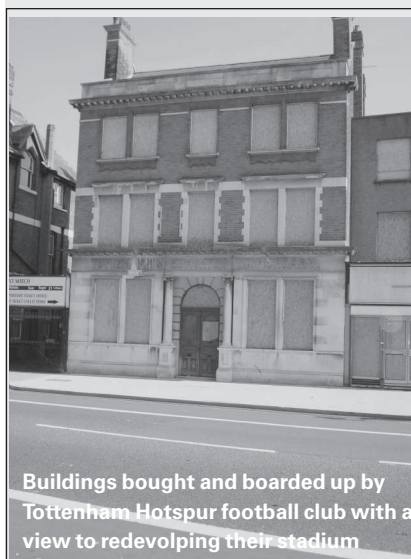
Though the TCS is a new boy on the block with a relatively small membership, it is proving itself very effective in arguing for intelligent conservation and the promotion of high standards of design in new buildings. This is largely down to its small but capable and energetic committee. Besides chair Matt Bradby, it includes vice-chair Alison Armour, a barrister; secretary Joseph Nicholas, civil servant; treasurer Ann Robertson who is also newsletter editor and membership secretary; events organiser Joyce Rosser, its one retired member; and Rowan Kumar, who works for Haringey council.

One pleasing discovery, says chairman Bradby, is that people who have lived in Tottenham for years and watched in despair as good buildings came down and bad ones went up, are now realising with surprise that this process can be stopped and are throwing their weight behind the society.

Bravo, TCS! Now let people in other undervalued Victorian districts follow your example. Neighbouring Wood Green – which also has many good buildings and a fine Edwardian housing stock – could be the first. Such districts and communities are the building blocks of which a healthy and sustainable London is constructed. We cannot afford to neglect them. ■

Tottenham Civic Society is there to stand up for a Victorian suburb with traditionally largely working-class population, the quality and potential of whose buildings and places have hitherto been ignored or dismissed by both the local authority, Haringey, and its own residents

C18 gate to All Hallows vicarage. The gate was brought from the site of the previous vicarage in Tottenham High Road



Buildings bought and boarded up by Tottenham Hotspur football club with a view to redeveloping their stadium

Age: two-and-a-half; born 2006

Circumstances of birth: Proposal to build a huge and overbearing block of flats on a site next to Tottenham's most notable historic building, Bruce Castle.

Biggest successes: (1) Defeat of the above, which led to its founding. (2) Establishment of cordial and productive relations with Haringey council, notably the conservation and

museums departments. (3) Establishment of a more demanding attitude to design standards in new buildings.

Biggest disappointments/ frustrations: (1) Failure so far to attract membership adequately reflecting Tottenham's rich ethnic mix. (2) Failure so far to secure the listing of Ward's Corner, an Edwardian former department store crucial to townscape and good health of the community. (3) Not so far winning over certain elements in Haringey council who don't seem to accept the need for an independent voice for Tottenham.

Present preoccupations: (1) Working with other local groups to make the case for using restoration and adaptation of the Ward's Corner buildings to secure the area's regeneration. (2) Campaigning for investigation and restoration of the historic but underappreciated Swan public house. (3) The football club developer. Spurs have bought up and boarded up sound and attractive buildings on the east side of Tottenham High Road adjacent to their ground, but won't talk to the society about their intentions.

Working details: Membership: 75 and rising; Committee structure: Small but impressive committee headed by chair Matt Bradby whose day job is with a national charity. Unlike most amenity society committees it includes only one retired person and has an average age of around 40.

Annual subscription: £10 waged individual, £5 unwaged/students/retired, £15 any two people at the same address.

Publications: Newsletter Civitas Tottenham four times a year
Activities: Guided walks to make people aware of Tottenham's underappreciated buildings and places; two general meetings as well as AGM; Christmas meal in local restaurant. Its open House tour of Tottenham in September attracted 50 people.

Special characteristics: Largely a Victorian suburb developed following the provision of cheap workmen's trains, but with a rich scattering of fine Georgian buildings and an increasingly valued stock of spacious and well-built Edwardian houses. Multi-centred and multi-ethnic.

Last word: "Our aim is to challenge the negative perception of Tottenham. It has its negative aspects, but people who live here know it has a lot going for it. The longer I've lived here, the more I like it. We need to get people to look around them and see the quality of Tottenham's buildings and its green spaces" ■

The sad state of Parliament Square

Tom Ball raises concern for the lack of recognition or appreciation of the townscape qualities of Parliament Square, one of Britain's best known and emblematic World Heritage Sites

Earlier this year Westminster City Council issued a draft Consultation document in connection with the Conservation Area for 'Westminster Abbey and Parliament Square'. This falls within the area of specific concern of the Thorney Island Society. Founded in 1985 the Society takes its name from the island upon which Westminster Abbey was built. As a conservation and amenity group for residents and businesses in the area, which also includes St James's Park and Green Park, it receives notification of Planning applications for comment from Westminster.

On reviewing the document we were astonished to find there was little if any appreciation of the quality of the inherent design of the central feature of Parliament Square - now reduced to a traffic island, and regarded as such by Transport for London. What was truly shocking was that the statutory planning authority considered Parliament Square as the most "negative feature" of the Conservation Area!

In our opinion the urban landscape design, by the architect Gray Wornum, whose most eloquent building is the RIBA head quarters of 1934, rates as one of the best post World War II examples of its kind and should be recognised for a variety of reasons. He also designed the lighting columns which are still used by Westminster CC and continue to be installed in the borough.

The Society made formal comments to WCC regarding Parliament Square including objections to the lack of proper consideration of the existing design. No reaction of course has been received from WCC which these days is par for the course; and as yet no revised document is available.

The Society, determined to raise awareness of the omission in failing to consider the design let alone recognising its quality, wrote to the MP for Westminster, and to the new Mayor for London, Boris Johnson. The matter was also referred to the Landscape Institute and to the Twentieth Century Society. An article supporting the need to reassess the design of Parliament Square was recently published by the Chairman of the Twentieth Century Society, Alan Powers, in the Spectator.

London's new Mayor, Boris Johnson, put the 'cat amongst the pigeons' when he stated in one of his first pronouncements

We were astonished to find there was little if any appreciation of the quality of the inherent design of the central feature of Parliament Square

on taking office, that he was considering a reassessment of the *100 open spaces list* promoted by Lord Rogers and established through the previous Mayor, Ken Livingstone, which included Parliament Square. Mayor Johnson wished to review the state of the 'proposals' for Parliament Square with the inference that it might be put on hold.

Lord Rogers' plan for Parliament Square was of course, known about, but no contact had been made with the Thorney Island Society, who as the recognised local amenity society, would expect to have their opinions sought. Word had passed around that these proposals were secret. Why was this so? The Society were not alone in wanting information and consultation, especially given the appalling so called design work taking place in

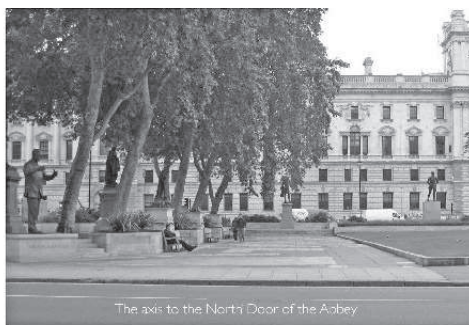
Whitehall under the guise of essential security provision; and also for the poor design in detailing the Trafalgar Square changes; and yet again, the shameful secrecy applied to the planning of the external landscape proposals of the public realm adjoining the former Middlesex County Hall, now being made into the venue for the Supreme Court.

Lord Rogers and his colleagues Baroness Hamwee, and Viscount Falkland, were appalled at this turn of events, considering it very wrong that the project, having had so much time and money spent on it, might not proceed. This being reported in the technical press, including *Building Design*, I wrote to their Lordships, with copies to the Mayor, the MP for Westminster and Westminster Council, stating that while their Lordships might be incensed, how much more incensed were the locals - including the Thorney Island Society, who had not even yet been allowed to see the 'proposals'; and moreover, wished to know whose millions had been spent so far.

No acknowledgement was received from their Lordships, needless to say. However through the due process of the local MP, the Mayor for London has acknowledged my letter and the concerns of the Thorney Island Society, and put a hold on the project stating that he has decided not to proceed with the scheme by Design for London and Transport for London, "for the principal reasons of traffic impacts, the overall cost of the scheme and funding"; and my concerns around the loss of green space.

As to the merits of the Wornum's existing design - all readers should see for themselves, but the photographs are a beginning.

Its mastery is the achievement of a balance between the formal and informal, the serious and the trivial, and a demonstration of supreme compromise which is the underlying essence of all that the surrounding buildings represent, as the spirit of Englishness. Sensitively and carefully detailed, the layout provides formal and informal places to sit, and uses hard features to give a sense of protection, enclosure and focus. Surprisingly, considering the traffic, the Square provides a relatively quiet oasis of trees, paving, statues and grass - that all important feature of English townscape.





Although regarded by some as abhorrent, grass provides a respite from the visual and physical hardness, a relaxing and restful place for sandwich eaters, tourists and above all informality to do one's own thing when the weather is right. It is easy on the eye and the perfect foil to the most important emblems of government, church and state for one of the best known World Heritage Sites.

Principal axes are focussed on the North Door of the Abbey, and on Big Ben but the locations for routes out of the Square incorporated into the design cannot be used because traffic management deliberately does not allow it. There is virtually no pedestrian access to the Square, again, a deliberate policy of Transport for London. This could be rectified relatively easily as at Hyde Park Corner and Trafalgar Square. The attitude of WCC could only partially be explained, by the fact that transport routes and the redesign of the central area, were mooted for consideration in the 'World Squares for All' project. This seemed to have meant that it was no longer an item for serious appraisal - whatever its merits.

Maintenance of the Square is the responsibility of the Mayor for London, but for years, under the previous regime, it has been neglected. What should be done? A programme of repair of the existing damage and the missing Catalpa trees, with skilled fine tuning, modest refurbishment and adjustment to the location of the traffic signals to make proper provision for safe pedestrian access. Then it would be restored to being a 'World Square for All' ■



English Heritage At Risk register 2008

English Heritage published a new Heritage At Risk register in July which reveals that nearly a thousand of London's most historic buildings, parks and monuments are at risk of decaying beyond repair. The list has been expanded to include threatened landscapes and monuments for the first time. It lists 572 buildings - 210 of which are residential; 153 scheduled monuments and 148 parks and gardens in London that are in danger of loss through neglect and decay.

21 per cent of London's listed buildings at risk are publicly owned. Simon Thurley, Chief Executive of English Heritage, made a strong plea that the symbols of public service and civic pride, the traditional town halls, schools, fire stations, swimming baths, court houses and police stations, should be cherished and adapted to modern requirements. They help to unite communities, encourage a sense of belonging and give character and identity to the streets in which they stand. Culturally, it is an act of barbarism to allow a historic building, park or monument to fall into ruin. The Old Bailey, Swiss Cottage Library, Pentonville Prison, the Royal Chelsea Hospital and Harrow magistrates' court are all examples of listed buildings in public ownership which have been successfully updated for use in the 21st century. "Let's not throw any more of historic London into the skip. Let's rehabilitate it, remake it and give it a new life - and by doing so enrich our streets and protect our environment." ■



Views of Parliament Square: top, towards St. Margaret's Church middle: View to the Abbey; bottom: east west to Big Ben.

Opposite page, left: two views of the layout within the square.

News from the Mayor and GLA

Issues of concern to Londoners

Planning for a Better London

This is the Mayor's consultation document on changes to the London Plan.

The Mayor considers the current London Plan too unwieldy with too much focus on detail rather than outcomes.

A new Outer London Commission

He proposes greater focus on the suburbs with better collaboration with individual boroughs. 'More emphasis needs to be given to issues affecting outer London and ways of realising untapped potential there.' A new Outer London Commission will identify ways of realising potential in the outer boroughs to take more advantage of development opportunities there and on brownfield sites. 'Central, inner and outer London are inextricably linked, none can succeed in isolation from the others, and this will be a major theme in our approach to planning in London.' The boundaries between boroughs need to be permeable so that major developments that straddle them can happen. The Commission will have up to 12 members who will be announced early in 2009. It will be chaired by Planning and development expert William McKee former Chief Executive of Merton Council. He is currently Chairman of Tilfen Land and the Urban Exposure Group and chairs the Thurrock Thames Gateway Development Corporation.

New affordable housing target

The Mayor will abandon Ken Livingstone's 50% affordable housing target. Instead there will be a commitment to build 50,000 affordable homes in the capital by 2011, and targets for numbers of affordable homes negotiated individually with the boroughs. £60 million is to be ring-fenced to redevelop vacant or partly vacant listed buildings at risk, particularly for housing.

Protection for the city's landmarks

The Mayor wants to bring in extra protection for the city's landmarks and is not prepared to undermine the "unique character" of historic sites for the sake of tall buildings. Protection of London's world heritage sites will be strengthened, and the London View Management Framework revised. The mayor supports tall buildings "in appropriate locations".

Transport Strategy

The Mayor has published his vision of the future of transport in the capital. *Way to Go!*

"It has not been the chaotic disaster Labour was predicting. The Borisocracy is more of a Cabinet than Livingstone's Stalinist caucus. It is jollier. But it remains to be seen if Boris can evolve a clear picture of what he wants to achieve for London"

Tony Travers, director of the Greater London Group at the London School of Economics writing in the Evening Standard in August: 2008

Consultation lasts until 16th January. Strategy will be reviewed with support for cycling and the use of the River Thames for transporting people and goods. He has stated his opposition to current plans for a 3rd runway at Heathrow and is committed to identifying other options, such as a new airport in the Thames Estuary. The mayor will also consider how to alter the London Plan to raise £200 million for Crossrail through section 106 funds.

The previous mayor's plans for 60 low-carbon vehicles have been cancelled. It was considered that the programme was not set to deliver its objectives of helping to stimulate the market in hydrogen vehicles - therefore making these less polluting vehicles cheaper. The Mayor has said he will still introduce 10 hydrogen buses but is rethinking the policy.

London Climate Change Adaptation Strategy

Measures will include increasing the amount of green space in the capital; designing or adapting buildings to limit demand for cooling; scrutiny of London's ageing flood defense infrastructure and poor drainage network. The aim is to meet London's target for a 60 per cent cut in carbon emissions by 2025. A second version will be published for public consultation next year. For more information see the Mayor's publications web-site.

Mayoral appointments

Sir Simon Milton is Deputy Mayor for Policy and Planning. He will liaise with the Greater London Authority's Head of Paid Service and Executive Directors to ensure the delivery of the Mayor's priorities. Leo Boland Chief Executive of Barnet council since 2001 is the new Chief Executive and Head of Paid Service of the GLA. Richard Barnes has been assigned the role of liaison with the community and voluntary sector. Anthony Browne, of the Policy Exchange, has been appointed as Policy Director. Richard Blakeway has been appointed as housing adviser to the Mayor and Alex Crowley as political adviser. Isabel Dedring, who was Director of the Policy Unit for Transport for London, will take over the Mayor's Environment brief.

The new **London Development Agency Board** has four statutory elected members: James Cleverly, Cllr Peter Truesdale (Lib Dem, Lambeth), Cllr Mike Freer (Conservative, Barnet), Jeremy Mayhew (City Corporation). Its "business" members, are: Harvey McGrath (Chair), Steven Norris, Susan Angoy, Ian Barlow, Fran Beckett, Megan Dobney, Ann Humphries, and Edmund Lazarus.

The London Organising Committee of the Olympic Games (LOCOG): the Mayor has nominated David Ross, Non-Executive Deputy Chairman of Carphone Warehouse to represent him on the board on an unpaid basis.

Open Space Strategies - Best Practice Guidance has been published for consultation. For more details see page 16 Other appointments, including the **London Skills and Employment Board**, the **Design Advisory Panel** the new **Waste and Recycling Board** members and the **London Cultural Strategy Group** can be found on the website:

www.london.gov.uk/mayor/publications/

www.london.gov.uk/thelondonplan

To see the 'Focus on London 2008' reports by the GLA's Data Management and Analysis Group (DMAG) visit

www.london.gov.uk/gla/publications/factsandfigures/fof2008/

The GLA web site is somewhat confused at the moment because Ken Livingstone's documents have to be retained until replaced, updated or scrapped even though some no longer accord with the new Mayor's pledges and priorities. ■

Round the Societies

A round up of news from our member societies.

By **Haydn Mylchreest**

London Forum's Survey 2008.

We would like to thank every organisation which has sent us a completed survey questionnaire. All the information gleaned is now being analysed and will give us a valuable critique of the London Forum's activities. The results will be published later this year and they will provide an excellent guide on the areas we should concentrate on as we develop our future programme.

Heritage Lottery Awards at Brockley Park.....

Herne Hill Society reports that a grant of £3.5 million has been secured from the Heritage Lottery Fund to help improve Brockley Park and to preserve it for the future. The grant will be used to upgrade footpaths, furniture, signage and entrances, and for the refurbishment of the Temple building.

Their autumn newsletter draws attention to a problem many member societies and associations have: where to keep the records and how to add further material. We benefit from the use of electronic methods of storage in some cases, but there is a special pleasure in looking through those fascinating paper documents.

.....and Dollis Hill House

Earlier this summer the London Parks & Gardens Trust newsletter reported a Heritage Lottery Fund grant of £1.2 million towards helping save Dollis Hill House from demolition to return it to the community. Built in 1825, the Regency manor was Prime Minister Gladstone's former residence and Mark Twain's favourite retreat.

Permitted Development strikes in Knightsbridge

Encouraged by Government, both the Association's local Councils seem to accept that subterranean extensions to houses should be treated as "Permitted Developments" with the result that all planning applications appear to gain approval. But should developments be approved that double or treble the floor area of an existing house? The Association is seeking the views of the London Forum and other Amenity Societies on this topic.

Under the heading "Planning and Conservation," Knightsbridge Association newsletter, June 2008, reported that the building works at One Hyde Park are progressing well. The plan envisages that until at least November 2008 the major roadworks at Hyde Park Corner will unfortunately cause constant interruption.....

"Dogs and Waterfowl don't mix" reports that the police have been asked by the Royal Parks to enforce the rule that dogs are not allowed in the water in the Serpentine and Kensington Gardens – there have not been any prosecutions yet but the maximum fine would be £200.

Saving the Mill Hill Angel

Mill Hill Preservation Society's latest newsletter tells readers that a programme of work will start in October to restore Angel Pond to its former healthy condition. The Village High Street Group project, supported by the Society, is the result of a survey and report the Society commissioned from the Environmental Agency. The pond had filled up with dead vegetation, the result of invasion by the

Australian Swamp Stonecrop (*Crassula helmsii*) in spite of efforts to control its spread. This plant was apparently introduced from Tasmania in 1911 for sale as a garden pond oxygenator but it 'escaped' from the domestic environment in 1956 and now is a pest in many ponds. The aim is that Angel Pond will become once again a picturesque feature of the village scene.

Saving a Century

The Victorian Society celebrates the 50th anniversary of its founding this year (the Society was officially launched in February 1958) and the current edition "Saving a Century" contains a wealth of fascinating photographs and notes of buildings lost before 1958, but also of early victories including the saving of the Foreign Office after the 1963 announcement of the government's plan to demolish it. St Pancras was listed in 1967 and the campaign to save and restore the Midland Hotel building was successful; serious work began in 1993 and in 1994 St Pancras was chosen as the London terminus for the Channel Tunnel trains, so securing its future into the 21st century. There are many interesting pages in the publication covering civic, commercial and ecclesiastic architecture across the country.

Tewkesbury Lodge success

The opening paragraph of the August newsletter of the Tewkesbury Lodge Estate Residents Association announces a success: "We are delighted to report that the high powered radio transmitters on the mast in Horniman Drive were finally decommissioned on 6th June which should result in a reduction of electro-magnetic radiation (EMR) by some 80% or more." The Association formed an action committee in 2003 to oppose the installation of the police digital radio system on the mast without any prior consultation with residents. The committee researched into possible health risks posed by the new police system, met experts to discuss the nature of the radiation, reviewed the code of practice for mobile communications network development, examined the related planning legislation, and enlisted the support of MPs and local councillors, and are pressing for further surveys to measure and hopefully confirm the reduction in radiation.

10 year development plan for Battersea

The new owners of Battersea Power Station, Leisure Holdings, have unveiled their outline plans for its redevelopment at an exhibition. The centre piece was a large scale table model showing the proposals for the site which included a 950 feet high tower whose design envisages new levels of energy efficiency. The proposals are technically and commercially ambitious and realising them, if approved, will span the next 10 or more years. Battersea Society will make its views known to the developers this autumn. But this development is only part of a much larger area of Battersea that could see huge changes in the next few years – the "Opportunity Area" defined in 2004 covering 78 hectares takes in the New Covent Garden Market, the now abandoned Stationery Office building, and other sites.

The Society has submitted proposals for a transport interchange at Clapham Junction and these have been discussed

Round the Societies

A round up of news from our member societies.

at GLA and with Wandsworth Council. The Society is pressing for a genuinely comprehensive approach to the Clapham Junction town centre to be formulated including housing and shopping development.

Fascinating lights on local history

Napoleon III in Chislehurst

Society newsletters often throw fascinating light on local history. The Cockpit, Chislehurst Society's newsletter, earlier this year carried a short article reminding us of the days of the French Revolution, the domination of Napoleon (for a while) and the dynasty he established. His nephew, Louis, became Napoleon III, but after he was deposed he lived and died in Chislehurst. He was born 200 years ago this year.

Girl Guides and Arthur Sullivan at Crystal Palace

The Sydenham Society News carries an article on the start of the Girl Guide movement. In the year 1909 a Boy Scout rally was held in Crystal Palace Park and a small group of pioneering girls turned up wearing the Boy Scout uniform and asked Lord Baden-Powell if they could take part. He refused, but soon afterwards he published his scheme for Girl Guides and 6000 girls had registered by the following year. *Girlguiding UK* has grown into the largest voluntary organisation for girls and young women in the UK with 600,000 members. The centenary will be celebrated next year and, to mark it, *Girlguiding UK* will be refurbishing the Crystal Palace Maze in time for the September Girlguide Rally.

In June 1857 Paxton's spectacular Crystal Palace was the venue for staging the Great Handel Festival, the largest choral festival of Handel's works ever held until then – an orchestra of 400 players, and choir of 2000, and an audience of 40,000 including Queen Victoria and Prince Albert. The Journal of the Crystal Palace Foundation reminds us that when the Great Exhibition was opened in the Crystal Palace, then in Hyde Park, one of the choristers from the Chapel Royal singing the Hallelujah Chorus was Arthur Sullivan, later the successful composer, who became professor of pianoforte at the Crystal Palace School of Art at Sydenham many years later [and also professor of composition at the Royal Academy of Music].

The Dulwich Voluntary Battalion

Another piece of early 20th century history has been the subject of extensive sleuth work, reported in Dulwich Society's Autumn 2008 newsletter. A war memorial to soldiers of the Dulwich Voluntary Battalion in the churchyard of St Peter's was restored this summer with a handsome grant from the Dulwich Community Forum, but the forgotten story of the Battalion has only been revealed by diligent searching through several archives. The Volunteer Battalion was apparently formed immediately after the outbreak of the first world war, and in addition to early duties of mounting a 24-hour armed guard at the Fire Station, and being on the alert for Zeppelin raids, it is thought some of the volunteers may have gone on to join the 1/12 County of London Regiment (The Rangers) headquartered at Holborn and may have fought at Arras, Ypres and Passchendaele. This history is one of many which record the dedication of local residents across the country and keep their contribution to society from being lost.

Influencing planning

In three recent cases developers have invited the Streatham Society to comment on their plans before planning applications were submitted to Lambeth Council. This is seen as a refreshing change because it has allowed healthy discussion which can lead to modifications at an early stage.

Another useful approach to planning matters is to walk round an area with Council officials every year to discuss the issues that had arisen the previous 12 months. The last walk, described in the summer edition of St Marylebone Society's newsletter, was attended by two Westminster Councillors, and eight planning officers. The event ended with a "lively discussion" in a restaurant.....An evening well spent.

Development Pressure on Green Belt continues

The Enfield Society raises concern that Green Belt land is under threat in Broxbourne because the Broxbourne Borough Council officers are considering land opposite the Park Plaza print works to provide a strategic employment site. The Society is concerned that pressure for even more development on remaining Green Belt land will increase if this development is approved.

The Society has also received a substantial payment from Spurs, as directed by the Secretary of State, to compensate it for the costs incurred as a result of the withdrawal by Spurs of their planning appeal. Over £11,000 was raised in support of the campaign to oppose Spurs' plans, and the money remaining will now be transferred to a special "Green Belt Defence Fund".

Still on the subject of protecting the Green Belt, the Friends of Brockwell Park highlight the commitment given by a Boris Johnson aide during his successful campaign earlier this year to be elected London Mayor: "Boris is committed to ensuring that no development takes place on green belt and Metropolitan Open Land and will use the Mayor's planning powers to refuse any applications to build on them".

However, the opposition by Bexley Society and others to a planning application for the creation on green belt land of a road/rail transfer depot in Slade Green was dismissed earlier this year by a planning inspector. He argued that there were very special circumstances justifying his decision (in spite of accepting that it would be inappropriate for the Green Belt). The Secretary of State accepted the inspector's recommendation. Will the new London Mayor override such decisions?

The Olympics and Greenwich Park

The Greenwich Society has printed extracts from a lengthy letter received from LOCOG in answer to the many questions being raised about the suitability of the Park for the Olympic equestrian events in 2012. In summary the letter states: the park is not too small and there would be no need to remove trees; the majority of the jumps will be demountable and will only be put in place shortly before an event; the cross country event will take place on a single day and will should not take more than four hours; and there is no plan to close the Park for a prolonged period of time. Further meetings have been promised. ■

newsbriefs

Key issues of interest and concern to note.

Heathrow Expansion: opposition gathers momentum

Arguments against the expansion of Heathrow appear to be gaining ground. David Cameron has positioned the Conservative party firmly in the opposition camp, and rejected the business argument that there was a strong economic case for a third runway. A new cross party group of MPs has been set up to oppose the planned third runway, and at least 21 Labour MPs have backed a Commons motion calling for a rethink.

Six trade unions (UNISON, TSSA, ASLEF, the RMT, PCS and Connect) demonstrated their opposition in October in a full page advert in the Times calling for investment in improved rail instead.

Alternative ways to deal with capacity constraints at Heathrow such as a new high speed rail line are being vaunted. The Environment Agency itself has warned of the risk of increased morbidity and mortality if a third runway were built, and acknowledged that the lives of thousands of people would be blighted by increased noise and pollution. This was echoed by Daniel Moylan, Chairman of the London Councils' Transport and Environment Committee, who is quoted as saying: "The arguments against the plans far outweigh any that could be made in favour. A third runway could only spread the misery... even further across the capital.

The Government's own environment watchdog, the Sustainable Development Commission has said that the proposed expansion should be put on hold.

Crossrail financing still in doubt

Weeks after the Crossrail Bill received Royal Assent, effectively giving the £15.9 billion project outline planning permission it has emerged in the press that in fact vital finance for the rail scheme has not yet been agreed. The line, which will run from Maidenhead and Heathrow under central London to Shenfield and Abbey Wood in the east, is planned to open in 2017.

A year ago the Government claimed that a £16 billion deal had been struck, but questions remain over the three main funding pillars - £3.5 billion from a special levy on London businesses, £2.7 billion to be borrowed on the back of future rail fares and £5.1 billion from the Government. The Mayor's office has not confirmed that the billions expected from the supplementary business rate would be raised. Only Airports operator BAA has finally publicly committed a specific sum of £230 million. The City of London Corporation has pledged £200 million and is to lead efforts to raise another £150 million from business by 2016. It has underwritten £50 million of these extra funds but £100 million remains unguaranteed and it will be more difficult to raise these sums from London businesses in the economic downturn.

Campaign to equalise VAT

There is a campaign to press Government to equalise VAT on new build and repairs and restoration, but setting both at 5% (it is currently 17.5% for the former, placing restoration of historic buildings and others at a major disadvantage. Members are urged to add their signatures to the on-line petition, and to ask others to do so: the website address, via the Civic Trust, is

www.civicsocieties.org.uk/join-a-campaign/vat-on-buildings

Reprieve for Smithfield?

The redevelopment scheme for Smithfield Market has been thrown out by Communities Secretary Hazel Blears. She ruled that the plans "significantly detract from the market complex as a whole" and would "dominate the historic facades and be detrimental to the character of the building".

English Heritage argued that the rich architecture and history of the Smithfield conservation area had London-wide importance: "The proposed replacement would introduce an alien, intensive office use into an area known for its diversity and creativity". The inquiry inspector agreed with English Heritage, and Ms Blears accepted his recommendations.

The scheme, by Thornfield Properties and the City Corporation, included a massive flat-fronted steel and glass building. It is now believed that Thornfield will be loath to spend millions of pounds appealing against the decision in the present financial situation although they have said they will make revised proposals.

Changes to Permitted Development

The Government has described its changes to the permitted development rules as an exercise in "reducing red tape" and removing the "burden" of minor applications from local authorities, leaving planners to be able to concentrate on "major" applications and "strategic" issues. There is wide concern that the main purpose is to save money at the expense of the environment and public realm. (see report in Round the Societies on Knightsbridge Association). Will it merely succeed in substituting one complex system for another, which will result in local authorities being overwhelmed by enquiries about the changes?

There has not been any significant modification of the proposed changes about which we and other similar organisations expressed concerns last year during the "consultation" process. As Carol Ryall has explained, works in Conservation Areas which affect the exterior of a building will still require permission, but only if they are visible from a "public highway"; it is not clear what will be the status of work visible from a public open space, pedestrian precinct, or other parts of the public realm. Local authorities may still, however, restrict rights with Article 4 Directions. It appears that single-storey extensions of up to 10' in depth (regardless of the size of garden) will be permitted in Conservation Areas, and two-storey extensions outside.

It will be important for you to let us, and/or the Civic Trust, know what problems arise in your areas so that evidence for any increase in damage to the local built or natural environment or historic fabric resulting for the changes can be notified to the Government.

Cross party co-operation on credit crunch

A group of business leaders, politicians and public sector officials has been announced to address specific problems in London caused by the economic downturn. Jointly chaired by Tony McNulty, Labour's minister for London, and Mayor Boris Johnson, it includes Merrick Cockell, Chair of London County Councils, Harvey McGrath, Chair of the London Development Agency, and Stuart Fraser, Chair of the City's Policy and Resources Committee. Government ministers will attend to address specific issues.

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The Government's new Chief Planner

The Government has appointed Steve Quartermain, formerly Chief Executive with Hambleton District Council, to be their new Chief Planner. His brief is to drive forward the Government's all-too-familiar agenda for "making the planning system faster and fairer with people and councils engaged in shaping their communities".

He will "spearhead the Government's drive to ensure the planning system supports the delivery of housing growth, climate change, sustainable economic development and works to protect and enhance the natural environment" and to "strengthen the skills and capacity of planning departments through encouraging new professionals and graduates into planning careers."

Making the best use of vacant urban spaces

CABE have published *Land in limbo: making the best use of vacant urban spaces*, which looks at how to transform vacant urban open spaces into public assets. It is available only on the web, at <http://www.cabe.org.uk/AssetLibrary/11601.pdf>

Open Space Strategies - Best Practice Guidance

A joint consultation Draft by the Mayor of London and CABE Space has been published for consultation.

Comments should be referenced to the relevant pages in the draft. It can be found on:

www.london.gov.uk/mayor/strategies/sds/open_space/oss-draft-sept08.pdf

Responses must be received by 5pm Friday, 19 December 2008.

They should be sent to:

Boris Johnson, Mayor of London
(Open Space Strategies)
Greater London Authority
FREEPOST 15799
London SE1 2BR

Or by email to mayor@london.gov.uk with 'Open Space Strategies' as the subject. If you send in a response by email it is not necessary to also send a hard copy. Please note that responses to this public consultation may be made available for public inspection.

See details of London Forum meeting on the subject on this page. ■

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Information on useful Planning websites

The government's Planning Portal web site

This provides a very useful resource on what is now permitted. It can be found at

www.planningportal.gov.uk (then follow Public/ Householder links)

It is user friendly with a number of interactive diagrams explaining the majority of the changes and how they apply to your house. It also provides some useful links for further information and highlights where some development may require building regulations consent.

Planning Aid for London will provide topic leaflets which explore some of the changes and these will be available from the Help part of our web site in the near future.

Planning Performance Agreements and Charters

Further information on PPAs is available from ATLAS (the Advisory Team for Large Applications), part of the government's Planning Advisory Service. Their web site is at

www.atlasplanning.com

It provides both information and case studies.

London Forum event

Open Space Event

18th December 6pm for 6:30pm
The Gallery, 70 Cowcross St, EC1,

London Forum invites you to an open meeting with

GLA London Plan team members including John O'Neil and Tony Leach

to hear about and discuss Borough Open Space Strategy guidance, Green Grid Framework, the Mayor's Priority Parks project and new Open Space Strategies (referred to on this page), and the London Parks and Green Spaces Forum's support to parks' friends groups.

Entry is free to London Forum members

Non-members fee £3, payable at the door.

newsforum

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