

# newsforum



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

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

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## Recent planning initiatives

# Encouraging developments on Planning Some chinks of light appear amidst the gloom

Court of Appeal Victory for SAVE: Reasons must be given for Not Calling In Applications.

In a most important decision the Court of Appeal ruled in October that ministers must abide by a published government policy and give reasons for call-in decisions on planning applications. This includes planning applications that were not called in – like the highly controversial Paddington Cube.

SAVE successfully argued that under existing policy, announced in the House of Commons in 2001 and restated in 2010, ministers are obliged to give reasons when they decline to call in planning applications. This policy was overlooked by civil servants and ministers since 2014 without apparent explanation. It means that the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government must now follow his own published advice and give reasons for his decisions.

The case was heard in the Court of Appeal at the Royal Courts of Justice on 13th September in front of Lord Justice Singh, Lord Justice Coulson and Lord Justice MacFarlane. SAVE was represented by Richard Harwood QC of 39 Essex Chambers and Susan Ring from Harrison Grant solicitors.

In the judgement written by Lord Justice Coulson, he said: "Since a promise had been made to operate a particular procedure then, as a matter of good administration and transparent governance, any change to that policy also had to be

*Ministers must abide by a published government policy and give reasons for call-in decisions on planning applications.*

announced publicly. It is not a question of fettering the future exercise of discretion, but simply making public the decision that something which had been promised and provided in the past would not be provided in the future. In my view, good administration and transparent government required nothing less. Of course, this did not happen here because no-one in the Department knew that they were changing a promised policy (because they had forgotten about it)."

Coulson LJ added: "An unequivocal promise was made, and that unequivocal promise should have been publicly withdrawn when (or if) a conscious decision was taken no longer to give reasons for not calling in applications .... For these reasons, I consider that SAVE's legitimate expectation case has been made out." ■

## New Editor for Newsforum

### Can you help?

Helen Marcus has edited the Newsforum for 15 years and would like to retire.

We hope that among our many members there may be someone familiar with desk top publishing, who enjoys editing and might be willing to spare a few hours 3 times a year to produce the Newsforum.

It is produced on the QuarkXPress programme but that can be changed if necessary.

Please contact Helen Marcus or Peter Eversden if you are interested to help or may know of someone who would be suitable. ■



# Beauty for the Built Environment

A Westminster Debate; a Report "Building More, Building Beautiful" endorsed by Secretary of State for Housing Rt. Hon. James Brokenshire MP; a new Commission to "tackle the challenge of poor quality design and build of homes and places"; council borrowing cap on house building removed. Does all this provide some encouragement for the future? Or will it amount to nothing more than 'motherhood and apple pie'?

A new Report from the Policy Exchange, *Building More, Building Beautiful: How design and style can unlock the housing crisis*, with a foreword from Secretary of State for Housing Rt Hon James Brokenshire MP, was the basis of an October Westminster Hall Debate on Beauty and the Built Environment led by John Hayes MP, Conservative, South Holland and The Deepings. He proposed the motion that 'That this House has considered beauty and the built environment'. The Debate, was attended by several ministers including the new Minister of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, Kit Malthouse.

## Mr. Hayes made three demands

- that every local authority has obligatory local design guides with site-specific design appraisals for regenerative opportunities, so that they have to build in a style that is suitable and appropriate to its particular locale.
- a black list of blight should be drawn up which would allow us to demolish many more buildings of that kind;
- to protect urban green spaces and playing fields.

Mr Hayes quoted from the Policy Exchange Report that "most people do not want to live in glass-covered high-rises or sprawling concrete estates. They want homes that are built in traditional styles, such as Georgian and Victorian-style terraced housing, and tree-lined streets."

John Howell (Conservative, Henley), pointed out the lack of environmental infrastructure in the development of new housing estates. The scale of the housing problem means that concerns about style are dismissed as indulgent or even irrelevant. "Aren't there more important things to worry about?"; we hear people say. The focus of housing policy has been on quantity rather than quality with a "competition across the political spectrum to build the most houses the most quickly by stacking them high and selling them cheap, regardless of their quality or what they look like. That is not good enough. It short-changes our countrymen and the generations to come. People now very often look on development with despair. Frankly, that is the result of successive Governments and local authorities of all

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*The focus of housing policy has been on quantity rather than quality... stacking them high and selling them cheap. That is not good enough.*

John Hayes MP,

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political persuasions"

Jim Cunningham (Labour, Coventry South) pointed out that the Parker Morris standards for social housing are all gone now. "Even in the private sector, we very often see houses that are nothing better than boxes."

## Minister of State's commitments

Kit Malthouse Minister of State, who is currently producing the guidance to the NPPF, made some important commitments. "Critically, we want to build the conservation areas of the future. That is a challenge I have put to the housing development community in a number of forums over the past three or four months that I have been in this job." New homes and public buildings need to fit in, in the broadest sense of the term. "We are therefore supporting high-quality, high-density housing such as mansion blocks, mews houses and terraced streets, typical of the English urban townscape and rural context", and in particular, the garden square.

Mr. Malthouse recalled Sir Ebenezer Howard's vision of garden cities more than a century ago. "We are renewing that idea for the 21st century." It is a chance to aspire beyond identikit housing and town centres that look like everywhere and nowhere, and set out clear expectations for high-quality place making across our country, not only building homes but neighbourhoods. "We are running workshops for councillors, to help them to understand and to support their role in ensuring beauty in the built environment." "I always stress how design matters at every level, from planning to community acceptability: build beautifully and get permission, build beautifully and sell more houses, and build beautifully and communities will actually welcome developers, rather than drive them out of town at the tip of a pitchfork."

He believed that small and medium-sized enterprises, from self-build to the refurbishment of historic buildings, are part of the key to the challenge and is directing the home building fund towards them.

He said he is aware of the campaign by London First and other developers to relax the protections for the London views and has asked his team to update him. "So far they remain in the draft London Plan. We shall see where that plan lands."

John Hayes rounded off the debate with a call to the Minister to make the ambition of 100 new parks come to life and prohibit development on the green spaces. He asked the Minister if he would do the three things had outlined?

The Debate ended by agreeing That this House **has** considered beauty and the built environment.

## A new Commission

The Policy Exchange report was co-authored by the philosopher Sir Roger Scruton and former Labour Mayor of Newham Sir Robin Wales. It reiterates many things that London Forum has been saying and particularly emphasises the importance of proper consultation with local residents. It calls for a new designation of 'Special Areas of Residential Character' to give residents confidence that new developments will be in keeping with existing look and style.

It has now been announced that the minister, James Brokenshire, has appointed Scruton to chair a new Commission, 'Building Better, Building Beautiful' to promote better quality in the design of homes and new communities. Many interested parties are concerned whether the commission will ask the right questions, and both the press and the professions have queried the chair's suitability to lead such a review, only time will tell.

## Council house borrowing cap removed

Further good news came in October when the government announced that the Housing Revenue Account borrowing cap for council house building will be removed enabling councils to deliver the council housing needed by their communities. Councils in areas of high affordability pressure have already been invited to bid for a share of £1 billion extra borrowing. ■

*All these reports can be found on the web by typing in their titles*

# London Forum P E & T Committee

John Myers reports

## The end of the Private Finance Initiative (PFI)

Described by Jonathan Ford in the Financial Times as “the very midsummer of financial lunacy”, the chancellor, Philip Hammond, announced the cancellation of PFI in last month’s Budget.

Since its invention in the early 1990s, ministers have handed out contracts to private entities to build and operate public facilities, from soldiers’ barracks to hospitals, on the basis of the oft-repeated mantra ‘value for money’. “The case for PFI was always a polite fiction” with no evidence that it is really that much more efficient than public sector building. These contracts have hobbled public finances with Government departments tied into long-term financial commitments, often at more than twice the going rate - 7-8 per cent returns against the 3-4 per cent cost of government debt - sacrificing operational and financial flexibility and with no possibility of redeploying assets or withdrawing them from use. The truth is that “billions [were] frittered away” “simply to window-dress the public finances” by keeping a tenth of annual capital spending off the nation’s official balance sheet.

Ministers overpaid for infrastructure while risk was left with government, who have to keep services going in the case of the private contractor failing.

Criticised by many over the years, the latest National Audit Office report this year noted that the full lifecycle costs of schools built using PFI were 40 per cent more expensive, and hospitals 60 per cent more than the public sector alternative. Now at last the Chancellor has acted. ■

*This article is based on a comment in the FT 5 November 2018, by Jonathan Ford, a former investment banker at Morgan Grenfell, now FT City editor* ■

The Committee sent in a response to the consultation on the Congestion charge. The Committee believes that a full review of the regime is needed, to take account of recent developments, and that a move over time to a more modern road pricing system might be appropriate. The Committee noted the Campaign for Better Transport’s work on the matter and endorsed Andrew Bosi’s draft response to the consultation about who would pay for the Transport for London (TfL) of the future and the draft he compiled on the Mayor’s Sports Strategy.

As we go to press the Barking/Gospel Oak line improvements were still not running. TfL were proposing in the longer term to take the service to Ealing Broadway from the District Line and make it a branch of the Piccadilly Line. The cost of reinstating a rail service to Croyley Green was escalating, and the idea was likely to be dropped, despite the benefits it would have for freight; being in Hertfordshire it was not among the Mayor’s priorities.

Peter Eversden reported the Forum’s concerns on the Cycle-superhighway 9 (Chiswick) at a meeting of the London Society. It is subject to change following rejection by local residents and businesses. CS11 (Regent’s Park) had a Judicial Review bid by Westminster City Council. CS4 (Tower Bridge to Greenwich) is thought to be going ahead.

## Planning matters

The Committee agreed that the epidemic of pseudo-telephone kiosks that were in reality advertising hoardings must be addressed. The Planning Inspectorate has a large backlog of appeals against refusals by local authorities.

The Committee noted that the Mayor recently had two of his three contentions upheld against McCarthy & Stone. Mr Eversden had been engaged in the public inquiry about the Chiswick Curve, where the GLA had supported the appellant. The Mayor over-ruled LB Hounslow’s decision to refuse development on the nearby ex-Citreon site.

On tall buildings, it is becoming clear that a proper analysis of the impact of tall buildings should give priority to their impact on communities over their impact on inanimate objects.

## Open government

On open government, there were worrying signs that the advances of the past couple of decades were being reversed. For instance, Westminster was becoming much more hesitant about publishing details of consultees.

## Survey of London Forum members

The committee noted the survey of members to be presented for discussion at the AGM.

## Mayor and GLA

Michael Bach and Peter Eversden met James Murray to convey the Forum’s views on density and on the failure of the Mayor to implement his aspirations for 50% affordable housing in actual decisions, for example on construction above Tube stations.

The Forum has been invited to participate in the Examination in Public of the draft new London Plan. Mr Bach and Mr Eversden have devoted substantial amounts of time in preparation.

The Committee invited Nicholas Boys-Smith and Yolande Andon (formerly Barnes) to speak on questions of design at the Open Meeting on 28th November. ■

## Stephen Plowden

Stephen Plowden, who has died aged 85, was an internationally respected consultant and academic chiefly known for his work as a pioneer of safe and sustainable transport.

He was a founding member of the London Amenity and Transport Association (LATA), which brought together over 70 local societies in opposition to the Ringway plans in the 1970s. Together with LATA chairman Michael Thomson, they demonstrated the complete technical inadequacy of the proposals at a public inquiry under Frank Layfield. LATA later merged with the London Forum.

He became a leading critic of poor governance in Britain. He challenged the orthodoxy of the 1960s and 70s that transport planning should provide for unfettered car travel, and was a key figure in fighting unneeded and unhelpful developments such as the planned redevelopment of Covent Garden in 1974 and the HS2 rail link, which he viewed as a wasteful and pernicious project. ■

# The London Forum Annual General Meeting

Minutes of the 2018 AGM of the London Forum Of Amenity And Civic Societies - held 6.30pm, 31st October 2018, at 77 Cowcross Street, London EC1

**Peter Pickering** reports

**P**resent: Peter Eversden (Chairman), and representatives of the Amwell Society, Barnet Residents Association, Barnet Society, Beckenham Society, Bedford Park Society, Brixton Society, Camden Civic Society, City Heritage Society, Clapham Society, Dulwich Society, Ealing Civic Society, Finchley Society, Friends of Greenwich Park, Hammersmith Society, Highbury Community Association, Highgate Society, Islington Society, Kensington Society, Kew Society, Knightsbridge Association, Ladywell Society, Penge Forum, Pinner Association, Putney Society, Regents Network, Stamford Brook Residents Association, Sydenham Society, Thorney Island Society, Wimbledon Society and Sam Dunkley (individual member).

**Apologies for absence** Balham Society, Brentford Community Council, Bromley Civic Society, Enfield Society, Fulham Society, Highbury Fields Association, Isleworth Society, New Barnet Community Association, Positive Plumstead, Southgate District Civic Trust, Stamford Brook Residents Association, Seven Dials Trust, Streatham Society, Wandsworth Society, Westcombe Society, Marion Harvey (Vice-President), Judy Hillman (Vice-President), Helen Marcus (News Forum editor), and Peter Makower

## 1. Minutes of the AGM 12th October 2017.

The Minutes of the 2017 AGM had been circulated in News Forum. The Chairman asked for any comments. In the absence of comments he proposed the acceptance of the Minutes. They were agreed, nem con.

## 2. Chairman's report.

The Chairman thanked his fellow Committee members and recorded the Forum's appreciation of Alan Baxter and his staff in the provision of office and meeting space, facilities and valuable networking opportunities with so many other organisations in their building and for their interest and support for the Forum's work. This was the Forum's thirtieth AGM and the first which Marion Harvey, the founder-chairman, had not attended. Two trustees, Derek Chandler and David Lewis, had died; Bill Tyler had retired from being a vice-President; Tony Allen (Treasurer for many years) and Helen Marcus were standing down from the Committee. The Chairman mentioned particularly Tony's guidance in matters of governance and Helen's

exemplary production of News Forum three times every year.

The Executive Committee was strengthened by the election in 2017 of Andrew Bosi of the Islington Society, and John Myers of the Camden Civic Society who took over the role of Honorary Secretary following Derek Chandler's death. Two other people volunteered to join the executive committee, were co-opted by the trustees and were seeking election. They were Oliver Bennett of the Wimbledon Society and Paul Thornton of the Amwell Society. Paul became Membership Secretary and improved subscription collection and communication admirably.

The Review of the Year in the Annual Report summarised the work and achievements of members of the London Forum's team; there had been more detail in News Forum over the year; he hoped member societies circulated it widely - using the pdf rather than the paper version saved the Forum costs. A new editor for News Forum was required, though Helen Marcus had volunteered to compile News Forum for the time being. Besides the Annual Report and News Forum there were regular ebulletins; much useful material on the Forum's website, especially the 'New Updates' pages; and the Chairman's postings on Twitter.

The Forum had continued engagement with the Mayor's senior officers and with the Assembly committees and responded to consultations. All Londoners were faced with more changes in the planning regime, with a new National Planning Policy Framework and a draft replacement London Plan. There were more proposals by Government to be introduced or consulted upon and it continued its damaging permitted development policies, reducing the ability of London Councils and citizens to influence how development is carried out. The Forum continued to oppose tall buildings in the wrong places.

The draft New London Plan had many changes from previous versions; the main ones being a much higher housing target, densification of the suburbs, the removal of the density matrix and more emphasis on design as a decision criterion. That was perhaps a subjective assessment but had been used by some Planning Inspectors as grounds for rejecting developers' appeals. There would shortly be an open meeting on

design, exploring how to avoid harm to neighbourhoods in the face of intensification of land use. It was important to produce delivery of homes people could afford without harming localities and with all the required infrastructure and public transport in place. The Examination in Public of the draft New London Plan would run through the first four months of 2019 and required attendance by the Forum team and much written input.

## 3. Approval of Annual Report and Accounts for 2017/18:

The Chairman said that the Treasurer was not able to be present; if there were any questions on the accounts he would try to answer them, or refer them to the Treasurer for a response. The Forum's financial position was healthy, with a small surplus and there was no need for a subscription increase. There were no questions. Mr Wood (Beckenham Society) proposed and Mr Luscombe (City Heritage Society) seconded the approval of the Annual Report and Accounts for 2017/18; the motion was passed nem con.

## 4. Appointment of Honorary Independent Examiner:

Mr Egan was willing to continue, and this was agreed.

## 5. Election of Trustees:

Michael Hammerson and Peter Eversden were retiring by rotation and were willing to continue. Oliver Bennett and Paul Thornton had been co-opted during the year and were now standing for election. Ian McInnes of the Dulwich Society and Stephen Speak of the Kew Society had also offered to serve. All had been validly nominated. A motion to elect the five candidates en bloc was proposed by Ruth Boff (Pinner Association) and seconded by Carol Seymour-Newton (Knightsbridge Association). They were elected nem con. The Chairman appealed to member societies to continue to consider people who could be nominated to both London Forum's Executive Committee and for its committee dealing with planning, housing, environment and transport.

## 6. Other Business:

i) Andrew Bosi asked to be provided with evidence relevant to Transport for London's proposals for cuts to bus services.



# AGM discussion: the Survey of Members

- ii) Tom Ball said the the Forum had been neglecting its individual members in recent years and that it should put more effort into recruiting and retaining them. Another speaker supported this plea. Paul Thornton said that he had hitherto concentrated on the membership of societies, but had no intention of disfranchising individuals, and would soon turn his attention to this category.
- iii) Robert Gurd (Ealing Civic Society) said that the last time the London Plan was revised his and other societies had put much effort into commenting without much sign that their comments were taken into account, and their participation in the Examination-in-Public was rather a waste of time. The Chairman said that the London Forum had a high profile in these proceedings and had achieved many alterations to draft London Plan versions in the past. The Forum welcomed support and participation from member societies. If there were matters about which a society felt strongly it should draw them to the attention of the Forum team.
- iv) The Chairman asked if anyone present was unhappy with the Forum's use for communicating with them the data they gave when they signed in. No-one was.

## Discussion of the Survey of Members

Following the business of the AGM the Chairman led a discussion of the results of the Survey of Members conducted in June 2018; he was gratified that the response rate had been over 50% and at the enthusiasm expressed for News Forum. A summary of responses had been circulated in advance of the AGM. The survey questions were taken in order:

### 1. Importance of the objects of the Forum

Most of respondents considered all of the objects to be important or very important; high standards of planning and conservation seemed to be the most popular.

In discussion Tom Ball (Thorney Island Society) emphasised the need to 'spread the word', and regretted the apparent demise of the Media Awards scheme. The Chairman explained that falling interest among members, shown by reducing entries, had led to the decision to discontinue the scheme. Robert Gurd (Ealing Civic Society) suggested that it should be tried again.

Concern was expressed at the average

age of members of civic societies. Working with schools on, for instance, 'designing and making', could increase awareness among parents as well as children. It was clear from the experience of the Bedford Park Society and others that people of working age were concerned with the same issues as traditional civic societies, but through social media and informal networking. The challenge was to harness this concern, while recognising that it was unlikely to be manifested in becoming active in societies, although it might be possible to excite their interest in individual projects.

### 2. Helpfulness of the Forum's activities

on a London-wide basis to advance members' interests. Each of the choices was widely supported. A suggestion was made in discussion that the Forum should instigate petitions through 38°.

### 3. What more London Forum could do

to support the activities or advance the key interests of member societies. The Forum already covers most of the things that members would want. Responses mentioned in particular protecting green spaces, open spaces, parks and common areas; information on what other societies were doing and their success stories; and protecting historic lines of sight. There were requests for Open Meetings on different days and at different times.

In discussion members expressed concern at additions made to planning permissions after approval - "developers bamboozle planning authorities". Tom Ball said that the Thorney Island Society was strongly opposed to the large memorial planned for Victoria Tower Gardens. Sam Dunkley (individual member), supported by others, pressed the Forum to campaign more strongly against the speculative developments that remained empty while disfiguring parts of inner London. Hans Haenlein (Hammersmith Society) said that the new professor of economics at UCL could be invited to speak at an open meeting.

### 4. Informing and supporting members.

There was widespread support for all four options, (Updates on legal and planning developments; Briefings on key issues; Provide access to expertise; Escalate issues to various levels of government on members' behalf), with slightly less for

'providing expertise'.

The discussion centred on Neighbourhood Plans (of which there were few in London), the problems encountered by neighbourhoods which sought them, and other ways of getting local concerns and ideas into boroughs' plans (e.g. planning briefs, charettes, etc.)

### 5. How the Forum could better inform and support member societies.

There was a range of interesting requests, including a monthly newsletter and help with insurance coverage. In discussion the Chairman emphasised the value of his Twitter feed, and emphasised the need for the secretaries, etc., of societies to inform their own members.

### 6. Which communications channels work best for member societies.

Of the alternatives offered (Open meetings; Forum website; NewsForum; Twitter; Email updates; Direct communication with other members) NewsForum and email updates were found most useful, although there was widespread support for all channels except Twitter, with which fewer members are engaged.

The Chairman noted the apparent dislike of Twitter; he said that it was a very important channel to those outside the Forum's membership; it was not necessary to participate in tweeting - just reading tweets was a good way of keeping informed about what was going on and other people's opinions. Robert Arguile said that the Putney Society had a particular member who was active on Twitter, and had more followers than the society had members; Twitter was read by commercial organisations, who could be moved to reply to comments in tweets. Diane Burrige asked societies to let her know directly of important matters, and not leave her to pick them up from newsletters.

### 7. What else the Forum could do for member societies.

Suggestions included a message board ; an inquiry bureau for local urgent planning problems, putting similar member organisations in touch; and early information about consultations, encouraging members to respond. ■

# The Aarhus Convention and the Raynsford Review; Community Engagement in Planning

The guest speaker at London Forum's Open Meeting on July 3, 2018 was **Hugh Ellis**, head of policy at the **Town and Country Planning Association**

**Peter Pickering** reports

**M**ichael Bach opened the meeting by giving some historic perspective, in particular as it affects people's right to have a say.

It took a crisis to bring about real change. The First World War led to council housing; the Second to the planning system; concern over the destruction of heritage to the Civic Amenities Act 1967 and concern about communities' need to have a say in their future to the 1968 Skeffington Report. Subsequently there had been incremental changes in rights of access to information. The Freedom of Information Act 2000 gave rights of access to information held by public authorities, obliging public authorities to publish certain information about their activities; and entitling members of the public to request information from public authorities. The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 required local authorities to produce Statements of Community Involvement to explain to the public how they would be involved in the preparation of local development documents. 2018 was the 20th anniversary of the Aarhus Convention, which provided rights to have wide and easy access to environmental information, to have a chance to participate in the decision-making and legislative process and to have judicial or administrative recourse in case of violations.

The latest crisis was the Grenfell Tower disaster – not the choice of cladding, not post-disaster handling, but the long-term "neglect" of local residents excluded from any say in the future of their housing estates, let alone day-to-day management. This unleashed a demand for a total change in the culture of the local authority, how it governs, and how it engages its local communities in developing their own future, including co-design of any future plans for their estates. The need came to be recognised for a new 'social contract' or 'social covenant' in terms of the relationship between local authorities and their communities for a range of public services – including planning – citizens' rights and the need for genuine engagement.

In Kensington and Chelsea the post-Grenfell process involved restructuring management, changing the approach to governance/decision making, revising

priorities – all estate renewal is on hold and any proposals will be subject to working with residents – and increased opportunities for participation. In particular local people have been given the right to attend Council meetings and meetings of the Executive when key decisions are being considered, find out what key decisions are being considered, see reports and background papers, inspect the Council's accounts and make their views known to the external auditor, and to know how to contact councillors and council officers. They can speak at Committee meetings at the chairman's discretion, and can complain to the Council, the Ombudsman, the Monitoring Officer, the Data Commissioner and the Freedom of Information Commissioner. But still there are no Area Committees or Conservation Area Advisory Committees (though there is participation in Conservation Area Appraisals) and there is only a five-day window for consultation on Supplementary Planning Documents during which time a petition must be mounted and an alternative generated.

There was still a need for a fundamental change in style. In 2010 Local Plan proposals had minimal consultation, which was criticised by the Inspector. In the 2018 Review residents were still not engaged, local amenities being let to highest bidder – 'acting like a property developer masquerading as a local authority'. Though planning is relatively good, compared with other business groups, there is no published business plan for the Planning Department – no consultation on/ input to its content or priorities let alone new initiatives; no forum for public discussion of planning, let alone community engagement on an area or subject basis; and no real understanding of where we need to get to, let alone how to get there.

## **Peter Eversden**

Hounslow Council's Unitary Development Plan of 1993 was not replaced until 2005, after a lot of pressure. The Inspector who inquired into the new plan was very positive as to the community participation, and since then there have been many planning documents, and there is a weekly list of delegated decisions, which can get called to Committee. There is a residents' forum, which can meet with cabinet members. Hounslow has been transformed.

## **Hugh Ellis**

The TCPA sought a proper place for people in the planning system, and had initiated the Raynsford Review; its Interim Report appeared in May, and the final Report would appear in November. The Review was finding that the present planning regime was completely unfit for purpose, and almost amounted to simple 'land licensing'; he said that though the London regime was unsatisfactory it was better than that in the rest of the country (for instance, the Mayors of conurbations outside London did not have elected assemblies to oversee and scrutinise them). Permitted development, particularly that under which offices could be turned into residential with no control over space standards etc. or public participation, was a shameful abandonment to private profit of the public interest, and positively immoral. He and Mr Raynsford had travelled to other European countries; there were many in Northern Europe (e.g. Copenhagen and Berlin) which had much better systems than the English one; with proper planning in the public interest, and authorities with a wider vision and the necessary powers over infrastructure. The French 'Institute of Public Debate' might be a model to follow to improve public participation.

He had personal experience of the gagging of local councils through confidentiality agreements by the promoters of the High Speed 2 railway. The Aarhus convention was ignored. Inadequate resources went to local authority planning departments, and there was too little public awareness of the whole planning system and its purpose; it was indeed surprising that people were not more angry with what is going on. Local councillors on planning committees needed much more training; they had to judge when their officers' advice should be challenged, and not be frightened into believing that they must not have any discussions with the public or study any documents other than the officers' reports. In London they had to be prepared to stand up to some of the Mayor's diktats.

## **The Raynsford Review**

This was likely to recommend sharing responsibility and giving the public much more rights, including that of appealing, in defined circumstances, against local

# The Future of London's Town Centres

Open Meeting 26th September 2018; Guest Speakers: **Rob McNicol** Principal Strategic Planner, GLA, and **Will French** of Save Ealing's Centre. **John Myers** reports

authorities' decisions to grant a planning permission contrary to their development plan. The planning system needed to be recreated from the bottom up.

## Discussion

The discussion revealed the high level of disquiet. Mr. Ellis agreed that there is bitter anger and disconnect between communities and the planning system.

Mr Bach said that people were regarded by the development industry as problematic, nimbys, selfish, and with no right to any involvement in the process. Peter Eversden said that developers are not delivering the type of housing which is needed – merely luxury homes for overseas buyers, not the affordable housing needed. Communities are locked out of pre-application discussions. Mr. Ellis agreed that the issue of developer involvement in Pre-application discussions, and the exclusion of communities from them, is a major one. At recent meetings with MPs, he had "never seen MPs so angry about housebuilders' conduct". They are currently too influential, but this is possibly their high water mark. The fact is that two out of five homes built are heavily subsidised – public subsidy is supporting it all. The lessons of deregulating planning are seen in southern Ireland, where a huge crash left 400,000 half-built homes despoiling the countryside.

Andrew Bosi asked why is there not more power to purchase compulsorily houses that had been built. Mr Ellis saw value uplift as a difficulty.

The Putney Society were unhappy that existing housing estates were being handed over to private interests for regeneration; often with a reduction in space standards and amenity. The point was made that the volume house builders were of such importance to the national economy that their interests were bound to be given considerable weight by the Treasury.

The Charlton representatives said that public participation in planning in Greenwich was improving. New groups were springing up, with a consistent message, and social media were active; all this made the amenity society movement seem less élitist and nimbyish. Councillors were therefore better armed against developers. The national shortage of planning officers was a problem (as was the tendency for the Greater London Authority to poach staff from boroughs). ■

**M**ichael Bach, Chairman of the London Forum Planning, Environment & Transport Committee, outlined the many changes since London Forum's last event on town centres some 5 years ago including the long-term recession; the growth of on-line shopping; closures of many shops, restaurants, post offices, pubs, libraries etc; increasing business rates and changes in planning system.

The All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Town Centre Management was created in 2010 – it is the second largest APPG after the Beer Club! Many London Boroughs had a town centre manager and management team then but there are now far fewer resources for them. The National Planning Policy Framework (2012) and now 2018 "town centre first" approach" has been watered down, and made change of use, especially to housing, easier; Permitted Development Rights allow change of use without requiring planning consent. A growing number of areas have Business Improvement Districts (BIDs), developed and funded by business for business to pay for priorities defined by them. Few involve local residents.

Successive London Plans have been very pro-Town Centre but the draft new London Plan's support for housing growth in Outer London could be seen as a further attack on business space.

Some London Borough Local Plans have an Area Action Plan which should involve public consultation and go through an examination. There is also scope for neighbourhood plans to focus on the town centre but these require a group of highly-committed people to drive the project, significant resources and staying power for what might be three years of hard work. Above all, it requires co-operation from the council, which is not always forthcoming.

## Rob McNicol Principal Strategic Planner, GLA

Mr McNicol has responsibility for town centres within the London Plan team.

The London Plan states that London's town centres are central to the lives of Londoners (para 2.6.1). There is an increasing emphasis from the Mayor on

the social integration of London, and public realm is a crucial part of that. Town centres are important because of the social value that they bring. He noted the GLA's recent report on high streets.

Town centres over the years have absorbed change and new technologies. Town centres are resilient places. They continually change; sometimes dramatically, and sometimes gradually. They responded to the rise of the railways, and then of cars. We have seen historic market towns like Kingston become the metropolitan town centres of the 21st century. Enfield town centre had the world's first ATM, opened by Reg Varney.

## The role of the GLA

The GLA is not responsible for planning individual town centres. That is the job of local planning authorities, who know their town centres. The GLA thinks about them in terms of a hierarchy and a network. The hierarchy sorts them into International, Metropolitan, Major, District and Neighbourhood town centres.

The GLA also looks at them spatially across London. The Metropolitan centres are often medieval market towns that have been around the longest.

The GLA looks at the health of town centres, including total occupied floor space, vacancy rates and other metrics. Mr McNicol showed slides with the number of listed buildings per town centre and employment estimates in Metropolitan centres. Employment has declined in Croydon town centre due to office to residential conversions but has otherwise been fairly stable.

The GLA expects an additional 1.2 to 1.6 million square metres of additional comparison goods floorspace to 2041, 75% of which in International, Major and Metropolitan centres. 60% of District centres are forecast to have surplus comparison goods floorspace. That floorspace could be used for other purposes. That takes into account the rise of internet shopping and the possible variance in economic growth. It is also predicated on the assumed population growth of London of 2 million to 2041,

# The Future of London's Town Centres (continued)

which is the major driver behind the increase. He emphasised that this referred to comparison goods floorspace. He noted that the growth in population is expected to be driven by an ageing population, inward migration from other parts of the UK, births within London and immigration. People who work in offices in town centres spend money there, so it helps to retain them.

## Competition from the internet

Currently 19% of comparison goods spend is done online, and it is expected to go up to 27% over the next five years. Others say it may be higher. He noted that Amazon have put in a bid to use the Homebase stores in London for their own distribution.

The new London Plan policy has a strong 'town centres first' approach. It is no good trying to support town centres and create them as sustainable places if commercial uses are all disappearing into other locations that people drive to.

The GLA is encouraging boroughs to bring in Article 4 directions to protect office space. Rather than convert ugly office 1960s buildings to residential, it would be much better to redevelop them to provide additional residential as well as floor space. Mr McNicol showed a few projects to create better town centres. He noted that some of them may have been controversial. He showed a mini-Holland project in Waltham Forest to try to introduce a more cycling friendly town centre.

He discussed the gyratory reconfiguration at Archway and showed a square in Dalston. Very different communities spend time there. It is noisy and boisterous but a vibrant space.

## The Mayor's Good Growth Fund

This is funding a number of schemes: £1.8 million on The Spark in Ilford, which included conversion of a car park into a covered market; Plumstead power station scheme involves new shop fronts, wider pavements and a renovation of the power station; Queen's Crescent in Gospel Oak will have public realm improvements and support for the market. He said that quite a lot of work has been done by Camden to support local residents. The GLA sees town centres both as part of our past and informing our future.

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*Ealing's strategy for its centre can only be likened to motherhood and apple pie. It is full of waffle and means nothing.*

## Will French of Save Ealing's Centre

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### Will French of Save Ealing's Centre

Mr French introduced Ealing by showing the Victorian and Edwardian shopping streets and the former house of Sir John Soane. The Who first played at the Ealing Club. Save Ealing's Centre ("SEC") was formed in 2007 as an umbrella organisation.

Over the years there have been many public meetings, including a recent hustings with candidates for the general election and leaders of the local party. 350 people attended. There have been two very successful public inquiries where decisions taken by the planning authority have been set aside.

The late Sir Peter Hall was an Ealing resident and supported what SEC did. He saw London as a city of villages and understood the risks from mega malls and internet shopping.

### Is Ealing a Metropolitan centre or a Major Town Centre?

The debate arose whether Ealing is a Metropolitan centre or a Major Town Centre. The Lyric Theatre had been lost in the 1960s, and the cinema in the 1970s. The swimming pool behind the Town Hall was demolished and the pool moved to a brand new out of town, car-dependent location. By 2006 they started to question why Ealing was designated as a Metropolitan centre, and have been asking that at public inquiries ever since.

A regeneration department for the town centre was created in about 2008

allocating much of it for comprehensive redevelopment. When Westfield opened three miles away many brands were lost in Ealing town centre.

The New London Plan clearly states that the role of individual centres needs to be managed and that changes at the Metropolitan level need to be managed by the GLA via the London Plan. Mr. French is very disappointed that there has not been any questioning about that during the current process. It is difficult to raise these issues and get them to be taken seriously. Ealing's strategy for its centre can only be likened to motherhood and apple pie. It is full of waffle and means nothing. The regeneration experts went off to MIPIM every year, did deals to demolish areas of the town centre and built residential on it. The waffle about reinforcing the town centre has not been borne out. There had been an intention to have a cultural quarter, which has not happened.

### A Story of decline

After 14 years since the first London Plan, there has been a steady erosion of town centre functions in Ealing. There has been underinvestment and there are empty shop units, with an increasing scruffiness. Flats have been selling for eye-watering amounts but all the retail units are unlet. Ealing library is being reduced in size to one third of its current size. He showed the last remaining cinema. The post office has retreated to a poky hole at the back of WH Smith. The last remaining place for live entertainment was a strip joint and has now been closed because the public were objecting. The council is trying to sell the Town Hall to be developed as a bespoke hotel, catering for weddings and the like. Ealing is becoming a town centre full of cafés. 6.2% of all units are now cafés, and more and more are coming.

### What is the vision?

Mr French asked what the vision is, and what kind of place Ealing should be. He felt that Ealing has no idea what it wants and that it has allowed big developers to come in and dictate it. The town centre has in large part been acquired by British Land and Berkeley Homes. SEC prepared a better vision for Ealing to reinvent the town



centre. The two centres, east and west, are separate. They have only been bound together to retain the status of Metropolitan town centre. They are a mile apart from each other. They should be planned separately. There is now a neighbourhood plan for each centre but the council did everything it could do to undermine these plans. Highways are being planned separately.

In the last few weeks, someone has suggested developing a Walk of Fame in the town centre. They managed to gather British Land, St George and others. It would include the Rolling Stones, The Who, Sir Alec Guinness, Jimi Hendrix, George Formby and others. It was extraordinary how that encouraged the various interest groups to meet with the community.

### Questions raised

The interesting discussion which followed revealed different experiences of some of these changes, in particular the role of BIDs

### The night time economy

The Brixton Society asked about the night time economy. Mr McNicol cited the Mayor's vision for a 24 hour London; he has established a commission. The London Plan classifies town centres in terms of where they stand on the night time economy. Avoiding conflict with residential neighbourhoods means that care is required.

Mr Bach noted the agent of change principle. When people move into an area that already has loud music, it should be up to the housebuilder to make sure that the housing is insulated. Mr French noted it would be better to have a stronger night time economy that attracted everyone.

### Shopping facilities in stations

The Camden Civic Society asked about the hierarchy of town centres with reference to concern about problems in Camden where large amounts of new shopping were put into stations. Mr McNicol said that the plan to put lots of shops in Euston was not driven by its high Public Transport Accessibility Level (PTAL) rating. Many stations have seen more shops added because of the commuter trade. Euston

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### Will French of Save Ealing's Centre

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has a lot of offices in the immediate area.

Mr French noted the big worry about Crossrail is that people will use it to go to other more attractive places.

The Bloomsbury Residents Action Group noted that villages need residents: what is happening is making it more difficult to live in these areas. Transport changes make the area inaccessible for deliveries.

### Business Improvement Districts

The Islington Society felt that BIDs had been helpful; they are required to improve the place for the benefit for the community. The Society had requested representation on the board of the local BID. It is important that the council, the BID and the community are all working together on these things. He asked what the speakers felt the role of BIDs might be.

Mr McNicol noted that he was rather old-fashioned in that he felt that growth and entrepreneurship could be a good thing. Mr French noted that the community was excluded from the Ealing BID, although there had been the recent progress. Mr Bach noted that a town centre partnership does not preclude a BID

as a partner, but many BIDs would rather plough their own furrow. There is often a disconnect between BIDs and the community.

Hero Granger-Taylor of Camden Civic Society noted that Camden Town had not been a success from that perspective. The "stakeholders" from HS2's perspective do not even include the community.

### Shop rents and business rates

The Barnet Residents Association asked about charity shops, which can afford the high commercial rents because of their subsidies on business rates, staff costs, VAT and rents.

Mr McNicol noted that the level of rents is outside the planning system. The planning system can set the percentage of retail frontages. It may be appropriate to have a different approach to the mix of use that you have on those frontages.

Mr Bach observed that on his high street, primary retail frontages have been taken over by banks and cafes using permitted development rights, displacing shops as a result, which does not bring customers into town centres.

The Brixton Society noted that hairdressers are included as an A1 use, which they have seen growing in number in Brixton.

Michael Coupe asked whether the hierarchy should take into account the range of services available. He observed that rising property values and resulting rising business rates have been fatal.

Mr French observed that the GLA never puts pressure on the local authorities to do something about culture. It is an aspirational policy but it is hard to discern any hard policies. Mr Bach suggested that people should fight for their cinema, pub, and GP offices. Mr Coupe noted that it is important to protect beautiful town centres. ■

# Spotlight on Bromley Civic Society

The Chair of Bromley Civic Society, **Tony Banfield**, describes the tremendous battle to save Bromley's historic town centre

**B**romley or Bromleag, in Anglo Saxon, is an historic Kentish hill-top Market Town now subsumed into London suburbia. The yellow flowering Broom from which the Town gets its name still grows wild on Martin's Hill two minutes from Market Square where HG Wells played as a boy in what he described as, in his imagination, "one of the great battlegrounds in history".

The Manor was given to the Bishop of Rochester by King Ethelred in AD 862 and remained in possession of successive Bishops right up until 1842 when it was sold to, private businessman, Coles Child. The present Bishop's Palace, built in 1776 (Grade II Listed), replaced the original medieval buildings and is now centrepiece of the Council's Civic Centre. Part of the moat survives and there is also a listed Folly, an Ice House and two Pulhamite Rockeries which we were able to get listed after a Council threat of redevelopment in 2006.

The Market Charter was granted in 1205 by King John and is still held every Thursday. Originally a livestock market, animals were slaughtered after sale behind Market Square next door to HG Wells birthplace. He recalled in his memoirs "There was a boundary wall, separating us from the much larger yard ..of Mr. Covell the butcher, in which pigs, sheep and horned cattle were harboured violently, and protested plaintively through the night before they were slaughtered. Some were recalcitrant and had to be treated accordingly; there was an element of Rodeo about Covell's yard."

In the 18th & 19th centuries the Royal Bell Hotel hosted the Mail coaches. In Jane Austen's *Pride & Prejudice* Lady Catherine de Burgh says to Elizabeth Bennett "where shall you change horses? Oh Bromley of course. If you mention my name at the Bell, you will be attended to."

The Jewel in the Crown is the Grade I Listed Bromley College built in 1670 as alms houses for the Widows of Clergy from an endowment from Bishop Warner and still serves much the same function today except retired male clergy are also accepted.

HG Wells was born at 47 High Street in 1856 on one side of Market Square. Bertie's childhood co-incided with rapid development in the town following the coming of the railway in 1858. His memoirs

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*It has been one battle after another to save what is left of our heritage and to avert harmful development.*

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bitterly recall the fields and meadows which hugged the town where he walked with his mother being ripped up for new dwellings. The family left when Bertie was 13 and he never forgave what happened calling Bromley "a suburb of the damnedest".

He never saw the late Victorian flowering of the town with its fine examples of buildings by architects of the Arts & Crafts movement commissioned by Coles Child and newly affluent local traders most notably Ernest Newton's whose Royal Bell Hotel replaced the original coaching inn in 1898. Chain stores and Civic buildings continued this period of civic pride right up until WWII.

## Post War demolition

Civic Pride took a dive after the War but apart from bomb damage the town retained much of its fabric until the mid 60's when Owen Luder's brutalist slab was allowed to replace the lovely White Hart Coaching Inn which had always been the heart & soul of the Town. The destruction continued throughout the 70's as a whole swathe of the High Street was destroyed for what the Deputy Secretary of the Royal Fine Art Commission described to me as "the worst piece of new townscape he had seen in any town in the country".

## The battle for a Conservation Area.

In 1982 The Heart of Bromley residents Association (now Bromley Civic Society) was formed by residents affected in the Council's draft Borough Plan proposals for massive redevelopment of Victorian Housing areas and the Palace lands for a Shopping Mall and bypass Road. As HOBRA's Conservation Officer it fell to me to challenge the lack of heritage protection at the 1984 Plan Public Inquiry in a document dramatically entitled 'Old Bromley – Conservation or Annihilation'

calling for Town Centre Conservation Area to be designated. It was the first time the Town had been appraised for its historic content and contained maps, description and over 70 photos. The Chief Planner's recorded response was that it was not Council policy to preserve buildings in the town only to ensure new development was of a sensitive scale and using appropriate materials.

The Inquiry co-incided with the demolition of a 1712 building in the High Street which became the catalyst for action. SAVE, The Victorian Society and Georgian Group all gave their support to our Conservation Area proposal to no effect. Fortunately we discovered the GLC Historic Buildings Panel had concurrent powers of Conservation Area designation and, at our request, they did a swift appraisal telling the Council if they did not make a designation the GLC would. Under threat of what would be a much larger GLC designation the Council quickly made a small area designation. This was deemed to be inadequate but Bromley refused to budge so in October 1985 the GLC made their own very large designation including all the adjacent Parks & Gardens which had also come under threat.

To complicate matters all this co-incided with the government resolution to abolish the GLC and as the deadline loomed during a planning Inquiry in Bromley it was realised that the formal CA designation notices had not been issued. I found myself in a deserted County Hall standing over a lone committee clerk while he printed the notices and recall rushing into the planning Inquiry like Neville Chamberlain waving the papers and the GLC designation was finally official.

But the Council declared that after abolition they would simply cancel the GLC designation and revert back to Bromley's own tiny area. This was thwarted when the GLC Historic Buildings Division was transferred to English Heritage and Head of Division, Ashley Barker, advised if the Council tried to cancel the GLC's designation English Heritage would re-designate. Finally, after two more years of negotiation the Council adopted most of the GLC Conservation area in 1987. Thus was the painful and controversial birth of our Conservation Area and I doubt that many areas have received so much expert scrutiny along the way.



## The Bromley Civic Society

**Contact:** Tony Banfield, Chair  
**email:** chair@bromleycivicsociety.org.uk  
**website:** www.bromleycivicsociety.org.uk

Chair Tony Banfield,

### Where are we now ?

Things quietened down and the CA was clearly having a positive effect until 2006 when the move for massive retail-led redevelopment re-emerged with the Council's Town Centre Area Action Plan focussing on major Council owned sites as well as the huge High Street area designated Site G; they were intending to compulsorily purchase it all impacting on the Conservation Area. It was at this time we decided to re-group as a Civic Society and it has been one battle after another to save what is left of our heritage and to avert harmful development. Despite all this our working relationship with the Council as a Development Control authority is generally productive. But the other Council role as property owning developer is anything but and the same anti-conservation prejudice we experienced 30 years ago is still in evidence in all their proposals.

On a day to day basis we are dealing with planning applications and I've represented the Town on the Council's dependent CA Advisory Panel since 1987 which does have some influence in day to day planning applications.

But mostly we are embroiled in campaigning against further harm to the historic and green environment. Main concerns at present are the proposed 'Churchill Quarter' a co-council development 15 storey block

of 410 flats which will tower over the High Street & Greens spaces in the CA and is awaiting a decision. It has now been classed as Phase One of a recently published Masterplan for Site G in the Area Action Plan, originally for retail development but now proposed as quarter mile of tower blocks of flats along the ridgeline overlooking the beautiful Ravensbourne Valley. On the fun side, however, we do regular guided heritage walks around the town in summer and illustrated talks in winter and enjoy dressing up in period costume!

In past times, Bromleyites, lamenting the loss of their unprotected heritage had to accept what HG Wells called "the shape of things to come" but we do not. Some battles are won and some lost but the great success of the Conservation Area campaign against the odds gives us our mantra- "never take no for an answer." ■



Churchill Quarter proposed blocks of flats; below: Bromley Palace



Bromley College

**Circumstances of Birth:** founded in 1982 as The Heart of Bromley Residents Association fighting loss of homes and heritage. Regrouped as BCS in 2007 to deal with the emerging Town Centre Area Action Plan.

**Biggest Successes:** Campaign for a Town Centre Conservation Area refused by the Council but backed by the SAVE, VicSoc & Georgian Group, designated by the GLC in 1985 and finally adopted by the Council in 1987. Representation on the Advisory Panel for CAs saving many buildings which otherwise would have been lost without the CA designation. BCS has also successfully gained listing for 9 more buildings and local listing status for a further 8 buildings in the town.

**Biggest Disappointments/Frustrations:** 1. Destructive development proposed by the Council on its own sites. 2. A number of instances where the Council has rightly refused permission for inappropriate new buildings or alteration of important buildings but overruled on appeal.

**Present Preoccupations:** a Council Commissioned 11–15 storey block of 410 flats adjacent to the CA which will dominate the High Street and surrounding public gardens in the Conservation Area and a, so called, Master-plan for comprehensive tower block redevelopment of the remaining west side of the High Street below Market Square. .

**Working Details:** The Executive Committee meets once a month and sub groups meet as necessary to deal with specific issues. A major aspect of our work is raising heritage awareness through popular guided walks in period costume in summer and illustrated indoor talks in winter.

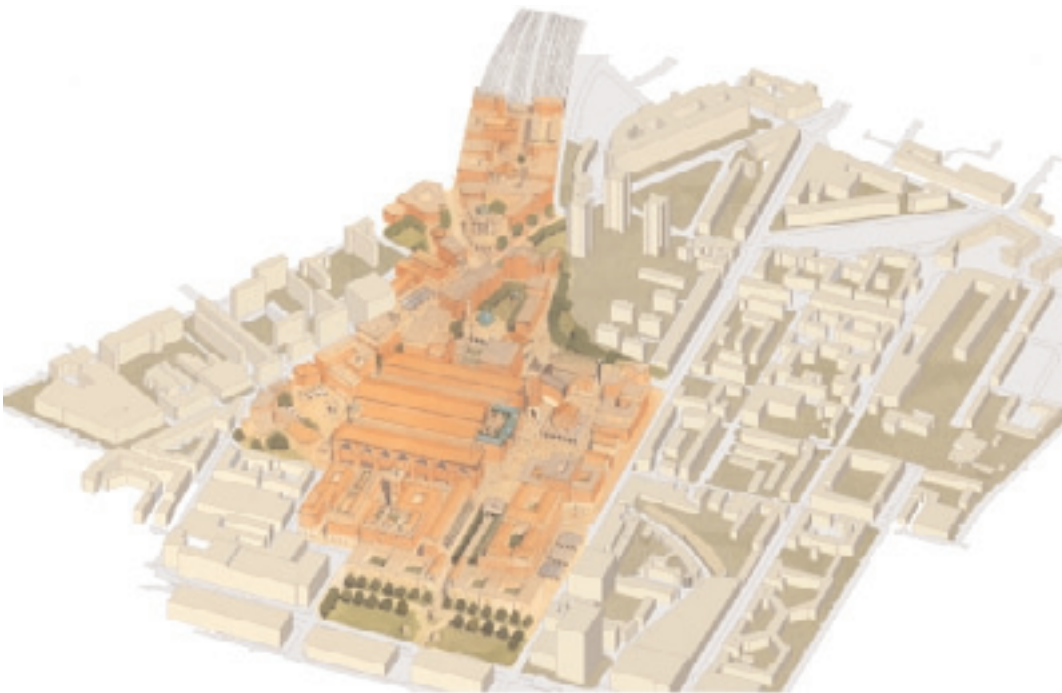
**Special Characteristics:** the Executive Committee comprises 15 regular members most of whom are also key members of other community and Friends groups in and around the Town as well as former Council planning and conservation staff. This gives us a wide range of knowledge and expertise.

**Last Word:** membership tends to be middle aged or older although walks and talks, especially the popular 'Ghost Walk', do attract younger people. The main obstacle to our work is the state of the planning system with so much being granted on appeal, the failure to deal with the damage done by the Shimitzu High Court decision which has seriously stripped conservation area powers down to a minimum and the depletion of Council staffing. We once had a well staffed Heritage and Urban Design department and we are now down to one conservation officer whose role of necessity is severely limited. Consequently, societies like ours are filling the gaps without the status or authority to be properly heard. ■



# A lovely dream for Euston

John Myers reports



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*..... pleasant streetscapes, sympathetic vernacular and a much better use of the land.*

*...overall this masterplan is far better. Squares, colonnades and layouts to reflect the original Georgian streetscape seem far better judged.*

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# Crossrail postponed sine die

by Andrew Bosi

The people-hating monstrosity proposed for Euston that I described in a previous edition of NewsForum compares very badly with a proposal concocted recently by John Simpson Architects and the University of Buckingham Summer School.

In the drawing shown opposite, gone are the blocky high-rises with no step-backs brutalising the edges of the station and the vast wasted space over the middle of the site. Instead we have pleasant streetscapes, sympathetic vernacular and a much better use of the land.

Individual details may not be your cup of tea, but overall this masterplan is far better. Squares, colonnades and layouts to reflect the original Georgian streetscape seem far better judged.

The key is a double-deck design in which the HS2 and Network Rail tracks sit at different levels. It was rumoured to have been considered by Arup early in the design of HS2 but dismissed for reasons never fully explained.

There are promising signs that Grimshaw Architects, who are designing the new station for HS2, are taking account of the community priorities. We can only hope for the same from the architects for the developments over the new HS2 station and for the redevelopment of the eastern, Network Rail, side of the station, if the latter ever happens. ■

On the last Friday in August an announcement was made that the central section of the Crossrail scheme – the new track – would not open on December 9th this year as planned. The new starting date was to be “Autumn 2019”.

A short delay to a scheme whose route was safeguarded when Mrs. Thatcher was Prime Minister may seem relatively trivial in the context of the delays endured over thirty years. However, it has serious implications for the Transport for London budget which was heavily reliant on an expected increase in passenger numbers buoyed by the additional capacity the new line would bring.

Of more immediate concern is why a delay of so long was not identified sooner. (Autumn begins on September 22nd but the Civil Service autumn extends well beyond then, rather like the estate agent’s concept of Hampstead). Crossrail officials and politicians are somewhat evasive about when they knew. Of course they only knew of the Autumn 2019 deadline a couple of days before we did. Many people on the outside were doubtful of the December deadline being met, though we were expecting a postponement to May 2019. When it was announced in July that some of the Network Rail timetable improvement scheduled for December 2018 were being put back to May, there was an ideal opportunity to include Crossrail in the list of delayed improvements. With hindsight, it must have been clear at that stage that a May 2019 start could not be guaranteed.

## Questions over the legality of the TfL budget

Behind this is the question of whether the TfL budget was legally made. However, the sooner a shortfall can be identified, the easier it is to find savings. We are now faced with some potentially disastrous cuts to bus services, which if implemented would undermine the London Plan objective of 80% of journeys by sustainable means in 2041. If the anticipated growth in population is achieved, bus usage will have to rise: planned new rail infrastructure and a tripling of cycling will not be enough.

## Reasons for the delay

Some of the new stations are behind schedule, but this would not prevent trains running. The significant problem is with the increasingly sophisticated signalling systems

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*We are now faced with some potentially disastrous cuts to bus services, which if implemented would undermine the London Plan objective of 80% of journeys by sustainable means in 2041.*

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which permit a high frequency service in complete safety. Crossrail has three different systems: the new one on the middle, and the ones used on the Great Western and the Great Eastern lines at either end. Getting them to talk to one another has proved difficult. When the DLR was taking over the former North London line between Stratford and Canning Town, the signalling had a catastrophic effect on the adjacent Jubilee line and it was two years before it was fixed. When the Crossrail system was switched on for the first time, there was an explosion at Pudding Mill Lane. Ever since then it has been apparent that Crossrail faced a race against time to meet the December deadline and it can now be seen to have finished a distant second.

## Consequences for bus services

To add to the embarrassment, a document detailing proposed cuts in bus services leaked into the public domain in August. The pretext for these cuts was the anticipated modal shift from bus to Crossrail. A remarkably similar document, save for the reference to Crossrail, was formally published for consultation a month later.

## Government loan

The government has announced a loan to meet the additional cost of completing the Crossrail project, the implication being that it will have to be repaid once the line is open and TfL is receiving revenue. In other words, London will have to meet the cost. Whether a major world city can survive as the only major city without subsidy to its public transport remains in doubt. TfL has now announced that the present Chief Executive is to leave after only eight months in the post. ■

# Housing – the narrative unravels

A slew of recent reports contradicts everything that the government (and developers) have said about the housing crisis. **Helen Marcus** reports

House prices are falling; the number of new homes being built in London has dropped; and so has the number of new planning applications in 2018, according to Molior. But this is not supposed to be happening according to the argument that the prices are high because there aren't enough houses and the planning system and nimbys are to blame.

Now the Office for National Statistics (ONS) has even thrown cold water over the numbers themselves announcing in September that government figures for housing need were wrong and based on flawed methodology. There will be 1.4 million fewer households in England by 2041 than originally forecast. Over the last 20 years, government predictions of household need have been consistently shown to be incorrect. Alan Holmans was saying this as long ago as 2013; what a pity no-one paid any attention to him. Newsforum 74 Winter 2016).

The ONS is now saying that the number of households in England will grow by only 159,000 a year, not 250,000. But even their total figure of 26.9 million dwellings nationwide by 2041 is suspect: a recent report about replacing gas and electricity meters with smart meters quoted a figure of 30 million homes to be covered. They presumably must know how many customers they've got? It would therefore suggest that there are way more homes already than the government thinks there are.

## "Drastic oversupply"

More and more commentators are questioning the whole hypothesis. Ed Conway in The Times, who made his own survey for Sky News said "Building homes won't solve the housing crisis... Inflated projections for growth of new households have diverted attention from the real problems"

Charlie Ellingworth of the buying agents Property Vision said bluntly in the Financial Times that there is a "drastic oversupply of prime new homes in London" that "is going to get worse before it gets better. The poor market conditions in central London have not come out of the blue"; he asked "So why do developers

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*The Office for National Statistics has announced that government figures were wrong, with 1.4 million fewer households in England by 2041 than originally forecast. Over the last 20 years, government departments have used a flawed methodology to predict the number of houses needed.*

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seem to be intent on soldiering on?" More to the point, when will it dawn on Government Ministers that something is not quite right about the story they've been sold? For example sales at the redevelopment of the huge 77 acre Earl's Court site for which 7,500 new residential units are planned are reported to have sunk to one a week — at which rate it will take 140 years to sell them all - it's difficult to see the main site being built on any time soon.

Niccolo Caldararo of the Dept of Anthropology, San Francisco State University, took the trouble to write to the Financial Times in August to say "More housing does not lead to affordability; there is a lack of neither housing nor building. There is an oversupply and huge supply of vacant units held off the market. But this is due to the commodification and financialisation of the housing industry."

Property speculators who "flip" homes buying properties and selling them as quickly as possible simply to make a profit have helped push up prices. The FT reported in September that now prices in London have fallen speculators have moved to the regions and are pushing up prices there.

## Gap between prices and earnings

Another key issue behind the housing

crisis in London, pointed out in The Times in August, is the gap between prices and earnings; house prices have risen much faster than wages. According to the Nationwide Building Society house prices have increased by 30 per cent but wages over the same period are up only 8 per cent. The growth of the housing market has outpaced the ability of most consumers to pay for it. Moreover it is a global problem with similar reports coming in from all the major cities.

## Help to Buy making things worse.

Meanwhile the government's misconceived response, Help to Buy, is making things worse. Housebuilders are making record profits out of it. Henry Pryor, a buying agent, was quoted as saying: "This scheme has been like crack cocaine for builders and you can see it in their results. Frankly, it gives them a business model that would be the envy of Mexican cartels. But when the drug is withdrawn, there will be a sting as new-build prices inevitably correct." Simon French chief economist at Panmure Gordon was equally scathing "Help to Buy was economically illiterate at its birth and will be cited as such at its eventual death. Unchecked, its legacy will be a greater, more protracted downturn when the property market eventually falls, hurting the very people it was meant to help." *Reports in The Times, September 2018*

But the correction is already happening and it is the unfortunate new buyers who are suffering the consequences. The Times reported that "Taxpayer cash pouring into the housing market under the government's Help to Buy scheme is creating a bubble that risks leaving a generation of homeowners stuck in negative equity;" "... figures show that housebuilders are using the higher budgets of Help to Buy purchasers to ramp up prices and profits, while young people are being left in overpriced homes that they will struggle to sell."

## House-builders record profits

And of course house-builders have been handsomely rewarding themselves from those record profits. Even housing association executives are taking huge

# Plus ça change

**Michael Hammerson** and **Helen Marcus** invite readers to see if they can guess when the following articles were written

(answers at the bottom of the page)

salaries. At least 179 executives of the 50 largest associations receive over £150,000 each with one receiving a £1 million package last year.

A former chief executive of the Keynote Housing Group, said: "Some associations have lost touch with their tenants, they've lost the trust of the people that they've worked with over a number of years and are clearly seen as [being] out of touch with the current housing crisis."

They have sold more than 1,600 social homes at auction over the past five years, and it is believed that most of them end up in the hands of property investors. *The Times* (July 17 2018)

Yet through it all the siren voices never stop, still calling for the dismantling of the planning system and the destruction of London's environment on the basis of their patently false premises.

Simon Nunn, of the National Housing Federation has called again for more building on the Green Belt and Jasmine Whitbread, of London First, together with the global firm NBBJ have added a new threat with a claim that more homes could be built if the city's 13 "protected views" were got rid of. (*Reports and letters, Oct 6 & 8 The Times*)

However some of these arguments appear to have at last got through to the Government. It was announced in the budget that the cap on council borrowing for house-building is to be lifted. Let us hope they use it to restock the desperately needed supply of low rent homes again. ■

## Swelling the boundaries of the metropolis with new plans of building.

Population increases, and there must be room allowed for the new comers. But population does not increase so as to require a hundred thousand new houses every year: nor have the social wants so much to do with the matter....

The avarice of professional builders (of course the land-owners have no such feeling), conspiring, the houses of the cities and their immediate liberties become comparatively depopulated; the multitudes ... retire in the afternoon to the borders ....

The shops and warehouses of the city are all in busy occupation; but the upper part of the houses is generally "to let". For every three or four of the small houses built on the outskirts, it may be safely conjectured that the spacious apartments of two houses at least, in the centre of the capital, are left vacant.

The geologists have discovered that London is built in the bottom of a chalk basin. There is a piece broken out of the side between Kent and Essex to let the Thames flow out: but the Hampstead hills on the north, and the Surrey range on the south, remain very perfect, and form the only hope, of an impassable barrier to the unbridled rage of building.

The French law has fixed the boundaries of Paris, and it would be well for us if there were some regulation to secure London from the present wanton spirit of enlargement.. It particularly behoved Government not to part with any space which was at all calculated to better the common atmosphere. The Parks were called the lungs of the capital. The first slice taken off will make way for the second: reasoning runs fastest in a bad series.

The sufferings of the poor pedestrians are the most to be deplored. People who work hard six days deserve cheerful recreations on the seventh. The Ministers of Government ought to take care not to inflict any suffering upon that defenceless class.

## The Housing Crisis

The question "where shall the London poor live" is attracting the attention of the legislature. Perhaps no city in the world has been so much improved within the last ten or fifteen years as London.

"Its merchants are princes" and they have palaces accordingly; every day sees poor houses cleared out, dirty neighbourhoods levelled, and magnificent mansions for trade erected. This has been going on for years.

At first the poor found it answered their purpose, when turned out of the annihilated streets to go into the suburbs for a residence; but the suburbs are every day increasing in value, and builders find they can make more money by erecting villas and mansions for the merchants and the gentry than by building houses for the poor or middling classes. This increases the difficulty of finding dwellings for the working classes anywhere near their employment. Densely-peopled districts in some quarters of London are becoming still more densely peopled, and what is to become of the increasing population of mechanics and labourers it is difficult to say.

And are we, as the metropolis extends, to lose every bit of green field that used to skirt its "stone forest of houses"? It would seem so. The ruthless builders are effacing Nature. We Londoners want room to play as well as room to work.

## Lobbying

Political parties exist to secure responsible government and to execute the will of the people.

From these great tasks both of the old parties have turned aside. Instead of instruments to promote the general welfare, they have become the tools of corrupt interests which use them impartially to serve their selfish purposes. ■

### Answers

*The Times*, August 24, 1825 - Swelling the boundaries.  
*Evesham Journal*, March 2, 1861 - The Housing Crisis  
 Theodore Roosevelt, speech, 1912 - Lobbying

# Round the Societies

A round-up of news from our member societies.

By **Diane Burridge**

## Loss of 150 year old timber yard in Belgravia

The **Belgravia Society's** application for the listing of the historic Newson's timber yard, owned by Grosvenor, has been refused. The facilities and services offered by the timber yard have been available for over 150 years and now will be destroyed for the sake of two large retail units. At least the Society did all that they could to try to preserve the unique character of the area.

## Clapham Society puts on the pressure

The Victorian pillar box, outside 3-5 Nightingale Lane, was removed by the developers of Audley Retirement Villages earlier this year. This pillar box had stood for many years outside the former police house which has now been demolished to be replaced by this retirement village. The Clapham Society with local residents asked Royal Mail to restore and return the pillar box once the building work was completed and this was done. The Society is now pressing the developers to keep a footpath open so that Clapham South Underground users, and families going to Oliver House school next to the site, do not have to cross a busy road to get to the station and school.

The Clapham Society's Common and Open Spaces Sub-committee has continued to encourage Lambeth to balance the legitimate use of Clapham Common as a space for events (large and small) with its primary role as a place of calm and beauty for all users. This Sub-committee is a member of the Clapham Common Management Advisory Committee (CCMAC), which came out forcefully against the Winterville Festival being held on the grass in 2018, as in 2017. The extensive ground area used is still severely damaged.

The Clapham Society was able to collect email addresses of just under half of all members and obtain their permission to contact them on matters of interest. This endeavour was instrumental in increasing the number of objections from 60 last year to 300 this year, whilst almost tripling the ratio of objections to supporting comments. Sadly, the Society was not able to stop Lambeth voting through a 'blanket planning' approval once again for an unlimited number of events, each attracting up to 5,000 people, without the need for planning permission. However, the Society has come to the conclusion that to effect a material shift in Lambeth's position on events on the Common will require a more imaginative involvement of the membership in the future.

## London's 'Protected' Land

The Campaign to Protect Rural England's latest report published in August reveals the vital importance of Green Belt and Metropolitan Open Land for Greater London's wildlife and woodland. Based on analysis by Greenspace Information for Greater London (GIGL) CIC, it presents detailed and up-to-date, borough by borough information on the extent, location and character of Greater London's designated Green Belt and Metropolitan Open Land (MOL). Almost half (49%) of it is of local, national or international importance for nature conservation; over 97% of Greater London's ancient woodland is in Green Belt or MOL; outdoor sports facilities account for just over a quarter of MOL and 13% of Green Belt land.

## 88 Licensed Premises in Richmond

Nuisance and disturbance continue with some licensed properties, and it was only after the threat of another licence review that Fullers finally responded to the Richmond Society's and others' complaints by closing their pub for two weeks and installing new management. Hopefully the problems suffered by residents and businesses in Church Court for the last ten years will be in the past.

The Society believes that upholding the Council's Cumulative Impact Policy is essential, whereby the Council would normally refuse new or extended alcohol licence applications in Richmond town. There are now 88 premises already licensed in the town, and alcohol-related anti-social behaviour in Richmond, especially in the summer with the outdoor use of the town and its open spaces, continues. At a recent meeting with the Police and the community the problems remained unresolved.

## Putney Society's Buildings Panel

Delays to agreed developments in the Town Centre are of concern. Plans for a hotel at the 'White Lion' site opposite St Mary's church were approved three years ago, but work has still to start. The new hotel that replaced the old Post Office on Upper Richmond Road remains unfinished, and there has been no update on the rejected plans for the corner of Putney High Street and Putney Bridge Road. The Putney Society is hoping that the Council agrees that neither owner gets a consent until they work together on something better.

## Hackney: Portrait of a Community: 1967- 2017

To mark the 50th anniversary of the Hackney Society, the Society has produced a portrait of the community over the past 50 years. In 1967 Hackney was one of the poorest areas of the capital but could also boast some of the finest historic buildings, which is why Sir John Betjeman was persuaded to become the Society's first President.

Edited by Laurie Elks, fifty pieces have been commissioned from a whole range of authors, who have drawn on their own experiences and expertise. The subjects covered range from social issues such as housing, the question of 'regeneration' and education, to the cultural, with the demise of dog racing, the opening of Centerprise and the flourishing of the theatre, as exemplified by the Arcola and the Hackney Empire. The darker side is not glossed over, with a piece on the death of Colin Roach, written by Duncan Campbell, and the riots of 2011, written by Hackney MP, Meg Hillier. To buy online: Please note, at over 1kg, this book has a relatively high P&P charge of £4.70 for 2nd class, signed-for delivery.

## Notable Tottenham Buildings

The Tottenham Civic Society has a gallery of photographs of notable Tottenham buildings, from grand eighteenth century properties under threat or now restored with the help of English Heritage to the secular and domestic architecture of the late twentieth century - and all points in between, including buildings which have since been demolished. For the archive, please see: Flickr photosite



### **Barnet Residents' Association- constant vigilance of planning compliance**

Protecting and indeed improving the appearance of conservation areas is a constant battle. For example, the 189-191 High Street's replacement frontage and windows (all modern and plastic) were installed without planning consent. After the Association complained the owners submitted a planning application for a new ground floor frontage and to re-install the wooden windows above. The new frontage duly appeared but not the windows. So the Association complained again. This resulted in another planning application, this time to retain the PVC windows. This application has been rejected, and so the original commitment to re-install wooden windows should now be honoured.

Meanwhile at 230 High Street a modern shop frontage was installed, again without planning permission. So yet another complaint from the Association resulted in the Council demanding a retrospective planning application and this too has been refused. And, proposals to demolish a detached house and replace it with seven flats, included introducing a modern property in an area characterised by Victorian family homes, with the garden being built over. Once developers gain a foothold with such a development it may be used as a precedent to justify similar schemes. The Association are pleased that the planners rejected this development also.

### **Making Enfield Beautiful**

As part of the Enfield in Bloom scheme, the Enfield Society sponsored the planting of a rose bed and the cost of hanging baskets in the town centre working with members of the Enfield Town Business Association. The Society is helping to attract volunteer gardeners to look after these greening initiatives and planted containers in the Town and at Southbury Station. The Edmonton Heritage Trail was also recently relaunched. The Enfield Society supported this initiative working with the Council and West Anglia Community Rail Partnership.

[www.dugdalecentre.co.uk/page/enfield-local-history-factsheets](http://www.dugdalecentre.co.uk/page/enfield-local-history-factsheets)

### **Major events in Finsbury Park- residents' response**

Haringey Council agreed in late October that large scale music events could continue to be staged in Finsbury Park, but with new conditions. This park is bordered by Islington, Hackney and Haringey, with Haringey owning the Park and the events conveniently being held in an area facing Hackney and Islington.

The Highbury Community Association submitted a detailed document to Haringey's Licensing Sub-Committee objecting to these major events, which include the Wireless Festival which attracts 45,000 people, noting the major disturbance that these have on the Highbury area from the Park to Arsenal Station.

This licence review had been requested by the Friends of Finsbury Park of which the Highbury Community Association is a member. The Friends are now deciding whether to appeal the decision at a Magistrates court and are crowd-funding to support this action.

Of great concern to residents in Highbury West is that, with no warning, Islington Council withdrew their 65 - page submission to Haringey Council on the first day of the two - day Licensing Sub-Committee hearing, 15 October 2018. Islington stated that this was done due to Live Nation (the events organisers) agreeing to all the conditions set out in their submission. The Highbury Community Association feel that many of these conditions are inadequate and are now responding to this effect. Councillors advised the Association that 'Islington Council was never seeking total revocation of the licence but was asking for critical improvements and changes to be made to address residents' concerns', and that, 'the Council is committed to working with local residents, the operators, as well as Haringey and Hackney Councils, to closely monitor the full implementation of these measures for future festivals and events in the park.'

Islington's reaction is in stark contrast to the response by Hackney Councillors representing the area adjacent to Finsbury Park. They demanded at the Licensing Review meeting that the licence for Wireless be revoked.

Of the 18 pages of conditions that Live Nation have to abide by, many are revamped existing ones and others will have minimal impact. Conditions include: the festival closing at 10pm instead of 10.30pm on Sunday; reasonably requesting that performers do not sing or play vulgar, obscene and banned songs (as these can be heard clearly throughout the area including play areas); having one additional noise-monitoring location; consideration of the use of private security dogs at the entrances; and encouraging patrons not to congregate outside the premises after events have finished. What has dismayed the Highbury Community Association is that there are no expressions of concern in the conditions set by Islington Council about the importance of Finsbury Park as a park to Islington residents (which is the most densely populated borough in the country with the second least amount of open space).

There is no acknowledgement of the sheer number of major events now being held in Finsbury Park: no matter how many controls there are, these large events have a major impact on the area. The noise can be heard everywhere and throughout the Park, and the trucks driving through and around the Park during the setting up and dismantling of events' paraphernalia pollute the air and make a very unpleasant atmosphere.

Overall Haringey and Islington Councils do not seem to be concerned enough about the needs of local children (and others) to have some peace away from noise and pollution – in their homes and when in the park, nor the needs of local students and people working shifts etc.

The Park is an income-generating venue for Haringey Council, earning £1.3m gross this year. The Highbury Community Association will continue to support the Friends of Finsbury Park in their stalwart endeavours to save the Park as a park in this crowded inner-city area. Despite the Friends losing a recent legal challenge, they continue to take on financial burdens to fight for a park. They should be heralded for persistency and tenacity. One day, hopefully, they will succeed, and Councils will be ashamed of the way they treated our precious, green, open spaces. ■

# Westminster City Council Planning Review

## Westminster City Council's Planning Review and the future of Oxford Street.

Issued on 18 October 2018, Westminster Council's Planning Review is of importance to all Londoners. It appears to signal a shift of attitude towards the role of local communities in the planning system

In the wake of the departure of the former chair of Westminster Council's Planning Committee, this review makes a long overdue commitment to "place residents at the heart of the planning process" and that the "changes proposed in this report will require a significant culture change for staff and those externally who use the planning system". "Residents and others will have the ability to take a clearer and more proactive role in the planning and decision making process related to development in their area. This includes Neighbourhood Forums, Amenity Societies and the general public."

Unfortunately there is little in the report to indicate how this will be achieved other than the following astonishing paragraph: "Due to the layout and arrangement of the current committee room, the attendees and general public at committee felt isolated from the committee members. Large individual screens blocked the ability to see the committee members and there is a lack of basic guidance and information which makes the committee process difficult to understand as an attendee."

### Gifts and Hospitality

Three paragraphs on Gifts and Hospitality, clearly an attempt to rectify what had been going on, also give rise for huge concern simply by the fact that the Council felt the need to write them!

"The review recommends that Councillors and officers only attend formally arranged visits and recorded meetings linked directly and specifically to the consideration of planning applications, pre applications or the development of policy. Attendance at hospitality events is not required to deliver a good and professional service"

"The review found no impropriety or failure to follow guidelines and protocols regarding hospitality. However, the practice of accepting hospitality from planning applicants was found to be excessive and unnecessary. It has become 'normalised' in contrast to the practice of most planning services across the country"

"Good practice would be for staff and Councillors to retain a distance from land owners, applicants, agents and community stakeholders other than through formally arranged visits and recorded meetings linked directly and specifically to the consideration of planning applications, pre-applications or the development of the local plan. This provides independence and serves to maintain trust in what is a public and regulatory service". *A shocking report in Private Eye No. 1481, Oct-Nov 2018, makes all too clear what all this refers to.*

### The report makes seven key recommendations:

- 1) Improve the openness and transparency of the planning system:
  - We will record Planning Sub-Committee meetings and make coverage available post-meeting;
  - We will live stream Planning Sub-Committee meetings once an appropriate technological solution has been identified and sourced;
- 2) Make it easier for residents to engage with the planning system:
  - We will introduce "public speaking rights" at Planning Sub-Committee meetings;

-We will review all our digital content on the planning process and planning decisions, particularly that included on the council's website to improve accessibility for the general public;

-We will improve the way we explain planning policies and decisions to make them easier to understand.

- 3) To support resident and ward Councillor participation at an earlier stage of the process, for example in the pre-application stage of major applications, we will adopt a new approach for communicating and engaging their views in proposals.

### Increased delegation

That is all very fine but will the next recommendation cancel out any improvements?

- 4) to recommend to the Planning and City Development Committee to increase delegation and review the call-in procedures, empowering officers to take more delegated decisions, in consultation with ward Members as appropriate without the need for escalation to Sub-Committee, thereby speeding up the process. The details of the revised delegation and call in procedures be reviewed and recommended for decision at the next Planning and City Development Committee
- 5) To submit a report to the next Planning and City Development Committee setting out the detailed proposals for the introduction of public speaking rights. A target date for the introduction of public speaking rights is set for 1 December 2018.
- 6) To direct the Chief Executive to restate to both officers and members their responsibilities in terms of the Council's gifts and hospitality policies. This will include emphasising the importance of exercising sound judgement in dealing with all offers of gifts and hospitality. To note that in terms of the planning service, this will build on the guidance issued in February 2017 regarding Councillor meetings with developers on particular schemes. Council officers and elected members involved in the planning process must retain a distance from land owners, applicants, agents and community stakeholders, other than at formally arranged visits and recorded meetings linked directly and specifically to the consideration of planning applications, pre-applications, or the development of the local plan.
- 7) To create a new Place-Shaping and Planning directorate which reflects the ambitious agenda set by the Leader and Cabinet to deliver a City for All, and for the new service to deliver the direction of travel which will be set out in the emerging City Plan.

### The Future of Oxford Street

Westminster City Council is to develop fresh plans for Oxford Street. It has confirmed that the council does not support the full scale pedestrianisation of Oxford Street and believes a rethink of the whole strategy is now required.

"It was clear through two public consultations and recent council elections that local people do not support the pedestrianisation proposals. But doing nothing to improve the area is not an option either"

"We are now working on our own proposals to improve the Oxford Street district and will share them with residents, business and visitors for discussion in the early Autumn." ■

# newsbriefs

News and issues of interest and concern to note.

## Water: borrowing at customers' expense

Analysis published by Greenwich University's Public Services International Research Unit, of the 28 years as privatised companies, suggests that much of the borrowing by water companies including Thames Water, served only to pay financial returns to investors. They claim that the largest water companies could have funded all of their capital expenditure since privatisation without taking on any debt. Their policy of borrowing to pay returns placed an extra burden on customers. A postgraduate thesis by Karol Yearwood for the London School of Economics found that customers are paying about £53 a year per household to service the debt, and shows that the companies could have funded all of their operations and investments from customer bills, without taking on any borrowing.

## Thames Water 5-year business Plan submitted

Thames Water submitted a five-year business plan to Ofwat in September promising record levels of investment on infrastructure, and reduced leakage. It will cap payouts to investors to "around £20m as we prioritise investment on significantly improving service." This includes building a new reservoir near Abingdon in Oxfordshire which would cost over £2 billion and take 15 years to complete. The Financial Times described the plan as a bid to repair its reputation.

## Grosvenor Group widens its portfolio

The Duke of Westminster's property group, the Grosvenor Group, has plans to increase its residential development outside central London aiming to create a portfolio of 30,000 homes over the next five years, more than three times its current residential pipeline. Alex Robinson, director of development at Grosvenor's strategic land business said: "We can deliver schools, public spaces and amenities to create places you would want to go and live in."

Under its new plans, Grosvenor would work as "master developer", identifying the development sites on greenfield or brownfield land, orchestrating the design, planning process and build of housing schemes, typically of between 2,000 and 5,000 homes, along with their infrastructure. It would then pass individual parts of them on to housebuilders. It is planning to invest £500m in a "build-to-rent" scheme in Bermondsey, and has another two schemes under way in Cambridgeshire, in partnership with Barratt and Oxfordshire in partnership with Oxford City Council and housebuilders Hill and Redrow.

## 20 new drinking fountains for London

At least 20 new water fountains are to be set up in London as part of a plan by the Mayor Sadiq Khan and partners, the #OneLess campaign, to tackle the issue of single-use plastic. The first four were installed in the capital earlier this year, two at Liverpool Street Station and another near Carnaby Street. London's Borough Market installed its own drinking fountains in 2017.

The 20 locations were chosen from a large number of applicants, with £85,000 available to help fund installation – £50,000 of which came from the Mayor and £35,000 from MIW Water Cooler Experts, who also provided the fountains.

## The Lamppost vending machines

*Victorian gas Lampposts that sold cups-of-hot-coffee? You couldn't make it up!*

Correspondence in The Times recently suggesting that lampposts might also function as chargers for electric cars elicited the most wonderful piece of arcane information: gas lampposts erected in Queen's Buildings, Southwark, a century ago, produced a gallon of boiled water for a halfpenny, and for another penny supplied a slab of compressed cocoa or tea with condensed milk and sugar.

Googling this information found that lo and behold it was true! "Pluto Lamps" were early vending machines built into the bases of gas lamps developed by a company founded in 1896 by H. M. Robinson. They were also known as the "Hot Water Supply Syndicate" or the "Refreshment Lamp Syndicate" evidently combining the convenience of a supply of hot drinks with the municipal task of providing lighting. The first one was installed in Leicester Square and there were a number of others around the city.

It was demonstrated at the Great Exhibition of 1897 as a gas lamp that also included an automatic machine which could dispense quarts of hot water in quick succession, or a halfpenny's worth of Beef tea essence, Cocoa, Milk, Sugar, Tea or Coffee, all via enamel vessels secured to the gas lamp by a chain. Cigarettes at four to the penny and even postcards were offered from other slots.

A few newspaper records of it exist, with the picture, below, such as a report in the Pall Mall Gazette of the 8th July 1898, the Sunlight Year Book 1899, and there was a Journal of Gas Lighting, Water Supply & Sanitary Improvement in 1913.

However, it was apparently not a success possibly because the locals found they could replace half-penny coins with small round pieces of tin. Over 1,000 pieces of tin were found inside the vending machine, according to a report into the arrest of one such thief in the Daily Mail of April 6th 1899.

There are 1,500 gas lamps left in London and just five British-Gas engineer lamplighters left to light them, of the hundreds who once paced the city at dusk with long, lighted poles to spark the gas running up the iron posts. That these gas lamps have survived is partly a tribute to English Heritage, which has protected and restored them. ■

For more information :

[www.ianvisits.co.uk/blog/2012/10/01/the-victorian-gas-lamps-that-sold-cups-of-hot-coffee/](http://www.ianvisits.co.uk/blog/2012/10/01/the-victorian-gas-lamps-that-sold-cups-of-hot-coffee/) ■



### Membership renewal

Please keep London Forum's membership system up to date for your society by using the new membership renewal facility on the web site:

[http://www.londonforum.org.uk/member\\_login.php](http://www.londonforum.org.uk/member_login.php)

Do make sure to amend your data so that the right people are receiving post and email bulletins, otherwise societies might not be kept informed. The way in which members can amend their details is secure, as is the information we hold.

**Queries** can be sent to [admin@londonforum.org.uk](mailto:admin@londonforum.org.uk) ■

### The Newsforum team would be delighted to hear from members

Please send us your newsletters - pdf by email preferred - so that any items of interest can be featured in

#### Round the Societies:

[dianeurridge@btinternet.com](mailto:dianeurridge@btinternet.com)

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#### For information about the London Forum contact:

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# Dates for your diary

## London Forum events

### London Forum Open Meetings 2019

#### Save the Dates

#### Tuesday 15th January

Viability assessments for developments, with **John Wacher of the GLA** speaking and leading discussion.

#### Tuesday 12th February \*Afternoon

**\*NB this meeting is in the afternoon \***

#### Thursday 4th April.

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

#### Meetings are held at The Gallery,

75 Cowcross Street, EC1M 6EJ, (Farringdon station)

**All meetings begin with refreshments at 6pm**

**for a 6:30pm start** ■

### London Forum on Twitter

#### Don't forget the London Forum Twitter site.

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

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

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

[http://twitter.com/London\\_Forum](http://twitter.com/London_Forum)

NB - note the underscore: \_ in the name ■

### newsforum

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