

# 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](http://www.londonforum.org.uk)

## In this issue

Spotlight on the  
Knightsbridge  
Association Page 8

- |  |  |  |
|--|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 The draft New London Plan - the Public Examination</li> <li>3 Air pollution</li> <li>4 London Forum Open Meetings: Viability</li> <li>5 Better Urban Design</li> <li>7 Barking up the wrong tree</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>8 Spotlight on the Knightsbridge Association</li> <li>10 Tall Buildings Everywhere?</li> <li>12 Planning, Environment &amp; Transport Committee Report</li> <li>13 News briefs</li> <li>14 Round the Societies</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>16 Events and meetings</li> </ul> |
|--|--|--|

## The draft New London Plan

# Greater love hath no-one....

**than to participate in ninety hearings for the Public Examination of the draft New London Plan!** One year ago, newsforum issue 78 covered the key points of concern raised by the London Forum in its response to the consultation on the draft New London Plan (NLP). The Examination in Public began in January and runs until May 2019. **Peter Eversden** and **Michael Bach** report.

The draft New London Plan (NLP), is the first plan of Mayor Sadiq Khan, covering the next 25 years. The Examination in Public (EiP) of the NLP at City Hall runs from January to May 2019. London Forum Chair, Peter Eversden and Planning, Environment & Transport Committee Chair, Michael Bach have been present almost throughout. This is their report on the first half of the EiP.

### Examination process

Three Inspectors were appointed by the Secretary of State to conduct an (EiP) of the NLP and in November 2018 they published the matters they would consider and the participants for each. The NLP would be examined for conformance with the 2012 National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), as that was in place when the draft NLP was published for consultation.

London Forum was invited to all but four of the ninety four matters for hearings from January to May 2019. That required the compilation of written statements on each of them and then attendance for EiP sessions at City Hall on three days of most weeks. Many other organisations have participated on specific topics, such as the Just Space network, the London Tenants Federation, the Housebuilders Federation and London First, all on housing. However none has had such wide-ranging engagement as London Forum. All sessions are open to members of the public. The Inspectors have shown a particular interest in the housing targets, design, Green Belt and heritage.

### Delivery of Genuinely Affordable Housing

The EiP has discussed the need for 66,000 new homes each year (taken from the November 2017 London Strategic Housing Market Assessment), 65% of them affordable if the needs of

Londoners are to be met. Achievement has fallen a long way short of this, especially for low cost rental homes. NLP policies seem unlikely to improve that sufficiently.

Jennifer Peters, Head of the London Plan team, told the EiP that 80% of the homes that are being built are affordable by only 8% of Londoners. London Forum criticised the Mayor's intention to grant a Fast Track Route to planning approval for schemes providing a minimum of 35% affordable housing. This figure will not achieve the target for genuinely affordable homes. 47% of all new homes are supposed to be for low cost rent but the EiP heard that Government funding to the GLA for affordable homes does not support that.

The **housing need** figures and required home sizes for London were examined. The need for homes to rent at low cost has not been met in past years and is now the dominant requirement, whereas the target for market homes for sale has been exceeded by over 30% in many years. There have not been enough homes that could facilitate downsizing. Several boroughs at the EiP thought their **housing target** in the NLP is too high. LB Bexley estimates that their completions would need to increase six fold! London Forum expressed concern about the way the NLP policies set very high targets for new housing with pressure to optimise density on all sites and "incremental intensification of existing residential areas".

The EiP hearing for **Specialist Housing** identified major problems with the supply of older persons' housing. Developers explained that the extra land needed for the facilities that have to be supplied prevents them from being able to offer affordable homes. London Forum sought affordable extra care housing, not just the luxury type with rents up to £150,000 pa. There must be a better mix. London boroughs should seek a greater choice to enable older people

# Report of the Examination in Public (continued)

to be able to downsize to better located and smaller housing. Few Opportunity Areas have an approved plan so London Forum has sought a full review of the potential homes and jobs that can be achieved in each (the recent collapse of plans for Earls Court demonstrates how quickly the outlook can change, and seldom for the better).

The removal of the density matrix from the NLP and the introduction of new policies on Good Growth and Design will complicate decision making and demand more skills and resources in boroughs for plan-making as well as development management.

London Forum expressed concern about the marginalisation of public transport accessibility (PTAL) as a consideration in determining target densities. It is currently used to determine the capacity of sites for development, so it should continue to influence the density allowed on any site. Excessive densification of land use could lead to overloading of the capacities of public transport and social infrastructure.

London Forum gave evidence that the **Good Growth policies** in the NLP fail to emphasise strongly enough the need for walkable communities with ease of access to local services, amenities, shops, social infrastructure and to public transport of good capacity.

It is clear from EiP hearings that boroughs will need **Site Allocations** describing the character and context of all of their key locations, what the development of each site should achieve (including design considerations), and whether or not they are suitable for tall buildings. At present, too few boroughs have done that, and the others may not get the types of homes and growth they need. Councils are required by NLP policies to engage civic and community groups in that process and in planning for good growth.

The GLA offered a Housing Design Guide for consultation in Summer 2019 which will clarify the approach to be taken and will advise boroughs without Site Allocations. By the end of 2019 there should be a 3D model of London to enable assessment of the potential location and possible impact of tall buildings.

New developments, particularly tall buildings, can have an adverse impact and London Forum has emphasised the need for NLP policies to take account of the **effect of change and development on communities** as a primary consideration. The lack of community engagement in design and other discussions with developers prior to submission of a planning application was also raised by London Forum.

The examination of NLP policies for the best use of housing stock drew out criticisms of **Airbnb**. Short-term lets reduce the amount of housing available for full-time occupation and there are a growing number of companies organising them. Government legislation allows lets of up to 90 days per year, which is impossible to regulate.

The GLA believes NLP policies will encourage building owners in **outer London** to intensify the use of their land to

release capital. Their representative said one house plot could typically support over 20 flats on it. A new NLP policy for **Small Sites**, which are expected to deliver 38% of all new homes, was a topic of considerable debate. The NLP applies a “presumption in favour of small housing developments between 1 and 25 homes” on such sites. This is a controversial policy, and local communities will need to check how their borough intends to comply and what safeguards are in place. London Forum welcomed the NLP policy on Basements and related case law decisions that should enable boroughs to have enforceable **basement** policies.

Following the **Grenfell Tower** tragedy, a new section is in the NLP on **Safety, Security and Resilience**. It should assist also in considering noise.

London Forum sought references in NLP policies to the use of **Conservation Area Management Plans** for decision making on the future of Conservation Areas but the GLA refused to put in that requirement. Further evidence will be provided in support of our proposal.

For consideration of planning applications that could affect **heritage assets** such as Conservation Areas, Listed Buildings, World Heritage Sites and strategic and local views, London Forum raised at the EiP the problem of ‘verified views’ in applicants’ Design and Access Statements. They are taken with a wide angle 24mm lens which reduces the supposed impact of a building, whereas use of a 50mm lens would show the effect as seen by people affected.

London Forum recommended that the London Plan should urge boroughs to draw up a strategy for their **public realm**, including strong policies to control advertising, and to limit the commercial exploitation of parks. We have also recommended that boroughs should develop a strategy for the **night time economy**. London Forum noted that GLA proposals for stemming the **closure of pubs**, whilst welcome, do not address the conversion of many to residential use in this “housing trumps all” economy.

## General

The Inspectors appear to be concentrating on the “soundness” of the NLP – does it meet identified needs, is it justified, is it effective and is it in general conformity with the NPPF. It is not clear how interested they are in suggested improvements to the NLP. That may be the reason why the GLA team is resisting strongly making any further alterations requested by EiP participants.

The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government has indicated that this NLP should be modified as soon as it is approved to bring it into conformity with the latest February 2019 NPPF update and other Government policies such as the way housing need should be calculated and the recent Planning Update. ■

# Air pollution: the issue has taken off; but more action is needed

by Daniel Instone

When I worked on air pollution in central government up to 2013, one of our biggest tasks was to persuade not just colleagues in departments external to my environment department but also outside interest groups, to treat it as a higher priority, so that they would use their own policies and advocacy as vigorously as possible to tackle air pollution, in areas like health, transport, energy and taxation. This was often an uphill struggle, as many, even among environmental groups, felt they had other priorities.

But in the last few years, air pollution has unquestionably risen higher up the political agenda. This has been due to several factors. One is the greater amount of research which clearly shows the link between air pollution and health and mortality, especially through heart and lung disease. Another is the drama of 'emissions cheating', under which several car manufacturers reported highly misleading results of pollution tests on car exhausts. In addition the measures that have already been put in place appear to have made people more aware of the effects of air pollution and therefore readier to accept further measures.

London has the most pervasive air pollution in the UK, mainly as a result of its size; and the London Forum has been pressing for some years for more action to be taken. In April 2019, as many will know, the ultra-low emission zone (ULEZ) in central London comes into effect. This will mean that diesel cars and vans driving inside the inner ring road, which are below Euro 6 standards (which means more than about 4 years old), as well as petrol cars below Euro 4 standards (more than about 12 years old), will incur a charge of £12.50 a day over and above the normal congestion charge. More polluting vans and lorries will also pay more to drive in the ULEZ. These extra charges will apply 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. In October 2021, the emissions charging zone will extend to the whole area inside the North and South Circular roads.

Walking, cycling and using public transport rather than cars also help to reduce air pollution. So does switching off car engines while stationary. These are all steps which individuals can make as their own choices to reduce pollution.

## New commitment to air quality legislation

In January this year, central government published an air quality strategy, which committed to new legislation to control pollution from stoves and various other sources, which will be published as part of a new Environment Bill later in the year. The government has also signalled its intention to require all new cars to be 'zero emission', though not until 2040.

Air pollution in the UK is quite similar in scale to that in other parts of Europe. Here, as there, governments and local

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authorities struggle with taking the measures many demand to reduce air pollution on the one hand, and, on the other, coping with concerns by others who are reluctant to change their daily arrangements, above all in car use, to reduce pollution.

Some people feel, for example, that it is unfair to penalise diesels when they thought they were benefiting the environment by buying what might have been relatively energy efficient vehicles. However the lead-times built into the measures now being rolled out help address this.

While these steps should certainly reduce air pollution, much more is going to be needed. For example in London even the extension of the ULEZ up to the North and South circular roads in 2021 will still leave large parts of London outside the zone – especially Heathrow, where road traffic linked to the airport is the main source of air pollution, and which will certainly increase if the third runway is built. Some busy roads will remain outside the zone, not least the North and South circular roads themselves. And diesel vehicles, even built to current standards, and which will be allowed in the ULEZ, still emit significant amounts of pollution.

## Office for Environmental Protection - a new environmental watchdog

Brexit also has potential to set back action on air pollution, as well as action to address other environmental problems. The government published in January draft legal text, to go in the Environment Bill, to address the issue of how environmental law would be enforced after Brexit, when EU environmental standards may not apply in the same way as they do now. This proposes a new environmental watchdog called the Office for Environmental Protection.

There are, however, doubts about how far that body would be fully independent of government. Moreover, it appears it would only be able to help enforce whatever UK law is at the time, including on air pollution. Yet EU environmental requirements are bound to be updated and made more stringent over time, as they have been to date. But if the UK were out of the EU single market (even if still in the customs union), and if as a result the UK government were to choose not to turn all new EU requirements into UK law, as it would not then need to, then the new body would not be able to enforce these new EU standards; and UK requirements could over time become weaker than EU ones without a mechanism to require standards as good as those in the EU.

So this whole area is very much unfinished business; and the London Forum will continue to press for further action. ■

# Open Meeting - Viability

London Forum's Open Meeting on 15th January 2019 was led by John Wacher (the Team Manager) and Charles Solomon (the Expert Advisor) of the Viability Team at the Greater London Authority.

**Peter Pickering's** report is followed by a summary of the Mayor's approach

Mr Wacher last spoke at an Open Meeting in September 2015, when he was working with London Borough of Islington. He enthusiastically brought the audience up to date. He described the success Islington had had in the Parkhurst Road case, where they had refused permission because the affordable housing proposed was well below the "maximum reasonable level" as required in the Islington Local Plan, and the Council was supported twice on appeal and then in the High Court.

This success demonstrated that developers should abide by the council's planning guidelines – rather than overpaying for land and then trying to bypass their affordable housing requirements. This principle was embodied in the draft London Plan, (now increasing its weight in boroughs' decisions on planning applications) and the Mayor's Affordable Housing and Viability Supplementary Planning Guidance. It was also embodied in the 2018 National Planning Policy Framework and the government guidance that had followed it; this was a significant change from the previous regime, when developers could appeal against the amount of affordable housing required of them on the grounds that the development would then be unviable.

In the London Plan regime there would be viability assessments only in exceptional circumstances, and they would be public - any need for confidentiality would have to be rigorously justified, public interest generally trumping commercial detriment. There would in principle be reviews during and on completion of developments, which could lead to an increase in the quantity of affordable housing required. All this amounted to a move back to a plan-led from a viability-led system. In assessments land would be valued at existing use, with a premium (normally no more than 20%) to encourage landowners to bring land forward. The GLA Viability Team would perform viability assessments as necessary on cases that were referred to the Mayor, and would support boroughs, so that their provision of affordable housing was maximised. Local plans would have to be clear and firm in their requirements.

Mr Wacher explained the different forms that affordable housing could take, as set out in the Supplementary Planning Guidance referenced above (and explained further below). After the interval Mr Solomon, a Chartered Surveyor, went into detail about the way in which viability was calculated, and produced a hand-out with worked examples. The presentations were clear and very detailed. It was all very encouraging. Civic societies should press borough councils to follow this approach in their decisions and in their local plans, as these are revised and brought into conformity with the new London Plan.

For those who were unable to attend the Open Meeting, we set out the key features of the Mayor's approach to affordable housing and viability testing.

## Delivering on the Affordable Housing Commitment

The Mayor's 2016 Affordable Homes Programme Funding Guidance defines a number of affordable housing products, in particular:

- Low cost rented homes for low income households, generally provided by local councils or Registered Providers
- London Living Rent homes for which eligibility is restricted to those households with a maximum income of £60,000 per annum, and are seen as a transitional step towards home ownership
- London Shared Ownership for households with a maximum annual income of £90,000, whereby purchasers buy between 25% and 75% of the property and pay a regulated rent on the unpurchased portion.

## Fast Track Route

How will the Mayor's approach to affordable housing and viability testing stop residential property developers from bypassing their affordable housing obligations? There will be a Fast Track Route, whereby planning applications that fulfil the following conditions will not normally be subject to viability testing and review mechanisms.

- Provision of at least 35% affordable housing (based on number of habitable rooms) without public subsidy
- On-site provision of all affordable housing and conformance with the desired tenure split (a minimum of 30% low-cost rent accommodation and 30% London Living Rent or Shared Ownership)
- Evidence that the use of public subsidy to increase the level of affordable housing above 35% has been fully explored

For land in public ownership or public use, the affordable housing threshold is increased from 35% to 50%. Should an agreed level of progress not be made within two years of planning consent being granted, then an Early Stage Viability Review will be triggered, which could lead to an increase in the affordable housing requirement.

Applications that do not meet the criteria for the Fast Track Route will follow the **Viability Tested Route**. Applicants will be required to submit a viability assessment in a standardized format, with full supporting evidence. Applicants are strongly advised to discuss the viability assessment and the implications for affordable housing with their Local Planning Authority and (where relevant) the Mayor at pre-application stage.

## Supplementary Planning Guidance

The Supplementary Planning Guidance sets out the elements that should be taken into account in the viability assessment. Most significant is the intention that Benchmark Land Value (the minimum value at which a reasonable landowner would bring forward land for development) should be set at existing use value plus a premium of, typically, 20% (so-called EUV+). Note that this EUV+ land value is independent of the proposed development. Over time this is intended to break the vicious circle whereby developers have been able to overpay for development sites, confident in the knowledge that this can be recouped through a reduction in their affordable housing obligations.

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# Open Meeting On Better Urban Design

November 2018 Avoiding Harm in Densification; how can design policies and codes be used to create places and homes people want?

**Peter Pickering** reports

Michael Bach opened the meeting, which was very timely in view of the launching by the Government of a Building Better Building Beautiful Commission and the imminence of the Examination-in-Public of the London Plan, a key issue in it being “what kind of London do Londoners want?”. Londoners mainly know what they don’t want – high rise and/or significantly higher densities, but are they able to say what they do want or at least how much change they are prepared to accept in their neighbourhood? It is not just about better urban design, but about creating or maintaining the types of places that people want to live in.

## Tall buildings and “Good Growth”

Tall buildings - 20 storeys or higher - were the feature of the last ten years. But Londoners never voted for them. Densities have increased. The first London Plan had a density matrix – linking density to, among other things, public transport accessibility, setting an appropriate density range, and guiding the highest densities to locations with high transport accessibility and to Opportunity Areas. The London Forum strongly supported the matrix, but developers and the GLA planners extensively abused the density limits – and promoted tall buildings with inappropriate designs in inappropriate places. The public has developed a severe distrust of developers and planners. With increasing resort to pre-application advice, developers and planners come to agreement in private often well before the public get to hear about the proposals, by which time the deal will have been done.

The new London Plan proposes “Good Growth.” But only if schemes have come through a local plan as a site allocation, or there is a planning brief for the site, will the public get any opportunity to influence what happens. With increasing emphasis on a ‘design-led approach’ in the London Plan in order to get as much development as possible on sites, especially small sites, the community may get left out of the process and have less and less influence on shaping their neighbourhood; their distrust will increase.

Londoners want to have a say in the future of their communities, to understand what decisions are being made and have real engagement in the process.

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LPA are strongly encouraged to use cost consultants so that developers’ figures can be robustly challenged, where appropriate.

Where permission is granted via the viability tested route, an Early Stage Review will be carried out which may lead to the viability review being revisited if inadequate progress has been made. In all cases, a Late Stage Viability Review will be carried out to determine whether the viability of the scheme has improved to an extent that warrants an increase in the affordable housing commitment.

In addition to the main thread described above, the

## Presentations

Four speakers then gave presentations.

Ben Derbyshire, President of the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA), opened. He spoke about the RIBA’s Future Place project, backed up with real research and intended to illuminate best practice (‘the ten characteristics of places where people wanted to live’); not just ‘development control’ but positive, collaborative, planning by local authorities, for which more resources would be needed. Local authorities would have to provide leadership, and facilitate land assembly. There would have to be post-occupancy evaluation of housing developments. Mr Derbyshire spoke highly of Oliver Letwin’s review of build out, which had identified the problem and the need for more market diversity. He was doubtful about the Scruton ‘Building Better Building Beautiful Commission’, which appeared to be a triumph of style over substance and a retreat to the past. Design was not the same as style.

The second speaker was Yolande Barnes, Chair of the UCL Bartlett Real Estate Institute and until recently at Savills. She ranged across the globe to demonstrate that high density need not be harmful. Madrid was the European city with the highest density, with buildings rarely above five or six storeys; there were few parks, but many small gardens with seats at street corners. Other examples were Narbonne, where the Roman street pattern was still recognisable, and Mumbai, which showed how people preferred to live, in dense, multi-purpose neighbourhoods. The Corbusian concept, of massive buildings surrounded by open space - advocated as providing ‘light and air’ and prevalent in the late twentieth century - was wrong and damaging. The digital economy, which did not constrain working to particular locations, would facilitate anthropocentric bottom-up planning of cities.

The third speaker was Sue Vincent, Head of Learning at Urban Design London (UDL) (and a Camden Councillor); UDL was a member of the Design Network of not-for-profit organisations across England. She emphasised the need for councillors on planning committees to have training in matters including the reading of plans - a Councillor’s Companion had just been published. Culture must change and the public must be involved more. There should be community review groups.

Supplementary Planning Guidance deals with a number of special cases, some of which will be of considerable importance to specific LPAs and civic societies. These include Build to Rent, small schemes, estate regeneration, Opportunity Areas and off-site provision of affordable housing / cash in lieu.

Civic societies are strongly urged to familiarize themselves with this document, and to support their boroughs in pressing for a substantial increase in the level of affordable housing in new developments. The London Forum will endeavour to keep members informed as “case law” emerges through the practical application of the above principles. ■

# Open Meeting On Better Urban Design

(continued)

There was great value in having Design Awards.

The final speaker was Nicholas Boys-Smith of Create Streets. He advocated co-design (e.g with charettes) rather than consultation. There were merits in high density living - for instance, more interaction with neighbours. Greenery was not necessarily good for you - it might be threatening by providing opportunities for undesirables to lurk. Properties ought where possible to have clear backs and fronts. Calling a part of a conurbation a village did not make it a village in any real sense. Although it was understandable why disabled access led to the elimination of steps, climbing steps was of itself good exercise. Choice of where a person wanted to live was not necessarily rational, and could be influenced by memories and the like. Mr Boys-Smith favoured neighbourhood planning, properly focussed and not over-complicated, with fine-grain density.

## Discussion:

There was then a session of questions to the panel.

The **Bromley Civic Society** said that Bromley was being inundated by applications for 10-15 storey blocks in the Town Centre redevelopment; the Council seemed target-driven. What had been said in the presentations was totally unrealistic. How could a civic society have any influence? Ms Vincent said it was important to get in quickly, before pre-application discussions had crystallised. Mr Derbyshire said that a problem was that there must be subsidies to enable people to live when they could not otherwise afford to live; if these subsidies had to come from the private sector there would have to be sufficient profit on the market housing to enable the provision of a proportion of genuinely affordable housing. Mr Boys-Smith stressed the value of having a neighbourhood plan in place with clear limits on high density.

The **Charlton Society** said that they too were beginning to see applications for large blocks of flats; the council seemed to favour developers over people; how could this be resisted. Ms Barnes advocated charettes; good developers see the value for them in involving people from the outset; it was too late when large sums had already been invested.

The **Kingston-on-Thames Society** said that they had been involved in consultations with developers where it was clear that there had been pre-application discussions, and there was therefore no intention of making changes; all the society could do was to be reactive. Mr Boys-Smith said that it would help to have in place a clearly focussed neighbourhood plan; that required a lot of work.

The **Stratford Neighbourhood Forum** raised the need to

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*Requirements for high-rise buildings would become difficult and very expensive to achieve. It was likely that many existing permissions would not be implemented. The result could be empty sites and failure to achieve London Plan targets*

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get plans changed. Mr Derbyshire said that when the implications of the Grenfell Tower disaster had been fully digested there would be major changes. The requirements for high-rise buildings would become such as to be difficult and very expensive to achieve, therefore virtually unsustainable in financial terms. Mr Boys-Smith concurred - tall buildings were very expensive to run - witness the service charge for the Barbican. Ms Barnes said that it was therefore likely that many existing permissions would not be implemented. The result could be empty sites and failure to achieve London Plan targets; there would have to be some incentive to landowners beyond existing use value.

The **Clapham Society** asked how best to check local authorities who believed that becoming big developers themselves was the way to make lots of money? Ms Vincent said that many authorities believed that this was the way to pay for social housing. The Clapham Society said that this belief would, in the long run, prove misguided.

Ms Burrige mentioned the need to involve children in decisions that would affect them particularly. Ms Vincent said that there were examples of good practice in this. Mr Boys-Smith observed that some planning decisions had twice as much impact on children as on the rest of the community; small green spaces close to where they lived were better for them than large more distant parks. Mr Derbyshire said that the rules regarding amenity space were quite good; however, dwellings provided through conversions to residential as permitted development never had adequate play spaces (or insulation, for that matter).

The **Barnet Residents Association** said that the destruction of traditional suburban houses with gardens by densification and the onward march of flats was driving away people in the 25-35 age group who were starting families; they were moving out of London altogether to the home counties. Ms Barnes said that many suburbs were currently degentrifying; the demand was for a more urban, less car-reliant lifestyle. The Residents Association demurred. Mr Derbyshire said that there was currently more deprivation in suburban areas, what was needed was 'supurbia', and the transportation revolution would help bring this about.

Mr Bach asked how a design-led approach could be squared with a community-inclusive one. Ms Barnes did not see a conflict, if there was full consultation and engagement before pre-application discussions. Mr Boys-Smith regretted the small part taken by neighbourhood planning in the London Plan, which had too much central control. ■

# Barking up the Wrong Tree

Andrew Bosi reports on chaos on the GOBLIN line and elsewhere

The long running saga of electrification of the Barking Gospel Oak line shows no sign of ending anytime soon. This line, known to its supporters as GOBLIN (Gospel Oak Barking Line Improvements Now), was alone in north-east London in lacking overhead electric wires. As it is heavily used by freight trains, this condemned whole swathes of the country to diesel fumes emitted beneath the wires that did exist.

## The botched electrification

The case for electrification was overwhelming but took decades of campaigning to secure. The split interests of Network Rail and TfL did not help. Finally, Network Rail was entrusted with the electrification project and made an utter hash of it. The wrong equipment was ordered, gantries were erected in the wrong place, both from an operational point of view and in terms of the pipes and cables damaged as a result. The months long closure had to be repeated and even then the need to raise the road bridge at Crouch Hill was initially overlooked.

The botched work contracted to Network Rail was a financial disaster but the plan had been for a long lead time before new electric trains could be built to replace the diesels. TfL gave the contract for these new trains to Bombardier, a Canadian company with an assembly plant in Derby, because this was perceived to provide jobs in the UK. Manufacture is done elsewhere. The Bombardier trains were due to arrive in the Spring of 2018. The lease on the diesel trains ran out in June 2018, and the trains were earmarked for an enhanced service in the West Midlands.

When it became clear that the Bombardier trains were running late, the lease on the eight diesel trains was extended by means of a sub-lease from West Midlands trains. However, one train left to be fitted with a toilet. When a second train followed, there was no slack time in which to maintain trains and cuts were made in the weekend service, giving an odd pattern of service. The rules do not allow a switch to 20 minute headway, trains that do run have to be at an advertised time, so there might be 15 or 30 minutes between trains.

## Belated action by the Mayor

Following the infamous timetable meltdown in May 2018, Network Rail postponed many of the improvements planned for December to May 2019. That allowed TfL to extend further the sub-leases on the diesel trains, but a third train departed in January and the last three left on March 15th.

Belatedly, the Mayor took action and as well as extending

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these sub-leases TfL arranged for a five-car train on the electrified bit of the Overground to be converted back to four-car for use on the GOBLIN. It entered service as the third diesel departed. A second converted five-car train followed in mid-February and a third in the last week of that month, with diminishing levels of refurbishment. The loss of these three trains across the Watford, North London and East London lines will place a strain on their ability to run without cancellations.

## Delays and faulty software

A half-hourly weekday timetable was published less than a week before it took effect, with still no detail of weekend services.

The new trains for the GOBLIN (class 710) are similar to those designed for Crossrail (345). The delays in production are largely for the same cause, problems with the software needed for signalling. The problems on the GOBLIN could have been averted if the 315 trains being replaced on Crossrail's Shenfield branch had been utilised instead of going for scrap. But this would have necessitated the use of guards, and having got agreement not to have guards TfL may have been scared of letting them back.

Since our Winter edition went to press, it has emerged that not only the rolling stock/ signalling issues are delaying Crossrail: none of the central stations is ready. A KPMG report reveals that the delay is costing £30m. a week; the finance team had been stood down in the belief the project would be complete. It seems likely that opening of the central section (phase 3 of 5) will be two years late.

This delay, and the friction between the Northern Powerhouse and the Home counties, mean that the chances of Crossrail 2 arriving by 2041, the end date of the London Plan currently under examination, must be slim. TfL has argued with justification that Euston would not be able to cope with the influx of passengers from HS2, unless Crossrail2 were built. However, there are growing doubts about HS2, with the House of Lords Economics Committee clearly of the view that Old Oak Common would make a satisfactory terminus, still no plan for how the line could reach Euston without demolishing most of Camden, and even HS2 Ltd. admitting that a reduction in frequency (and therefore passengers alighting) might be necessary to keep within budget. ■

# Spotlight on the Knightsbridge Association

The amenity society for Knightsbridge

By **Melville Haggard** – chairman

## From small beginnings

In 1947 Raphael Street was still a street of terraced two-storey houses, mostly empty, with some small shops. adjoining the site of Tattersalls, the bloodstock auctioneers which had been destroyed in 1944 by a flying bomb. The developments which replaced it destroyed the character of one-seventh of the Old Hamlet of Knightsbridge, as it was called in the voting list.

The event, which galvanised local residents into action in 1961, was a proposal by Harrods to move their auction gallery to the large block which is now Cheval House, at the corner of Montpelier Walk and Cheval Place, in the middle of narrow, residential streets. The idea of pantechnicons loading and unloading daily was fearsome. Harrods even suggested that the cars of the customers could all be safely accommodated in their existing car park.

Following the refusal of Westminster City Council to grant permission, the campaigners set up the Association to resist future such proposals, (which were to include moving the Basil Street fire station either to Cheval Place or Relton Mews). Since when the Knightsbridge Association's central objective has been to preserve and enhance the character and amenities of Knightsbridge for the benefit of its residents and those who work there.

His Honour Judge Sir David Croom-Johnson, a former Association chairman, said his chief regret was that the Association was powerless to prevent the erection of 'that monstrous eyesore' the tower of Hyde Park Barracks. Planning restrictions do not apply to the Crown and the Barracks is on Crown Property. Ironic that he wrote 'Perhaps one day the tower ... will come down'. Now the future of the Barracks itself is at risk.

## Heritage

When the Association was founded, it covered only the Trevors and Montpeliers, but as the almost wholesale destruction of Victorian London got underway, its interests spread westwards to Queen's Gate and now includes the Museums and cultural institutions and both sides of Brompton Road (so partially in Westminster and partially in Kensington & Chelsea). To the east, we stretch along Knightsbridge to Hyde Park Corner.

## Imperial College expansion plans

The expansion, plans of Imperial College led to the destruction of the Imperial Institute buildings and two thirds of Princes Gardens and replaced them with a series of ugly post war buildings. The Association successfully sought listing for several groups of Victorian terraces, the spot listing of the façade of 55-91 Knightsbridge leading up to Hyde Park Corner (currently being developed behind the retained façade); and

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*Knightsbridge Association's central objective has been to preserve and enhance the character and amenities of Knightsbridge for the benefit of its residents and those who work there.*

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commissioned a report on the triangle of buildings bounded by Brompton Road, Sloane Street, Basil Street and Hans Crescent, when the whole block changed hands and might have been at risk. This is also being redeveloped, in two phases, but keeping the historic frontages.

Conversely, when Imperial wanted to demolish and redevelop the utilitarian halls of residence in Princes Gardens, one of which had been listed, the Knightsbridge Association supported their application to de-list and demolish. The new buildings, modern but in keeping, have restored the Gardens to a more human scale in keeping with its Victorian origins and neighbours.

To celebrate our 25th anniversary, we promoted and contributed to the restoration of heritage railings and lamps along Knightsbridge. Twenty five years later these are again in need of attention and we are hopeful that Westminster City Council will agree to using Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) money to this end.

## Restoration of the Albert Memorial

In the early 90s when it looked as if money would not be forthcoming for the restoration of the Memorial, which was in a parlous state and had been closed to visitors for some ten years, the Association together with the Victorian Society decided to take action. A conference was organised to which the government, English Heritage and various other influential organisations and people were invited. A charitable trust was set up: the government contributed £4 million and the remaining £6million came from various bodies and members of the public. The Queen re-opened the Memorial in 1998 – to reveal Prince Albert resplendent in gold leaf.

## The Knightsbridge Neighbourhood Forum and Referendum

In October 2018, the Knightsbridge Neighbourhood Plan, produced by the Knightsbridge Neighbourhood Forum and supported throughout by the Knightsbridge Association, was backed by an overwhelming 93% of those voting in a local referendum. Turnout of 376 people (19.2%) was good for a referendum in London. Westminster adopted the Plan on 11 December 2018.

The Plan is therefore now part of the statutory development plan for Westminster and will be used alongside the council's own planning documents and the Mayor's London Plan in determining planning applications in the Knightsbridge Neighbourhood Area until 2037. The Knightsbridge Neighbourhood Forum was the first of 17 forums in Westminster to reach this stage after three years' work. Details of 40 new planning policies and everything else at [knightsbridgeforum.org](http://knightsbridgeforum.org).



## The Knightsbridge Association



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Chair Melville Haggard

The Knightsbridge Association will now have a say, with the Forum and Westminster, in the use of the 25% neighbourhood portion of the CIL monies raised from developments in the neighbourhood area. Priority projects include restoring heritage assets, improving utilities, tree management plans and measures contributing to a clean, safe and quiet neighbourhood.

The Forum has also been given the green light to progress '85' neighbourhood actions at least once. These are matters, such as 20mph speed limits on local roads, that were identified as priorities but could not be included in the neighbourhood plan because they are not 'land use' policies.

### The Councils

The area covered by the Association is split two thirds to one third between the City of Westminster and Kensington & Chelsea. This is creates problems when trying to pin down responsibility, particularly in Brompton Road and part of the Knightsbridge thoroughfare which being a Red Route, fall under TfL ■



**Age:** Founded in 1961

**Circumstances of Birth:** Protecting narrow residential streets from large pantechnicons resulting from proposed re-siting of Harrods auction house; subsequently opposition to demolition of the Victorian and Edwardian heritage..

**Biggest Successes:** Thwarting Al Fayed plans to use Harrods' roof as his private heliport; licensing of a commercial Balloon operation in Hyde Park, alongside South Carriage Drive; extended licensing hours for Mamounia and McDonalds restaurants and, recently, cutting back licensing hours for tables and chairs on pavements. Opposing redevelopment plans for most of Princes Gardens, eventually resulting in an enhanced design and scale.

**Biggest Disappointments/Frustrations:** revocation of the McDonald's licensing decision on a technicality.

**Present Preoccupations:** Heathrow expansion: more frequent flight paths directly and lower over Knightsbridge. Air Pollution: Brompton Road one of the worst polluted streets in London with levels of toxic nitrogen dioxide (NO2), around 50% above legal limits in 2018. Future of the Barracks: the Defence Infrastructure Organisation plans to pursue a partial sale of the Hyde Park Barracks site. Future of Brompton Road: proposed changes to Class Uses- ever increasing number of cafes and resulting litter and in danger of becoming a monoculture. Large landowners considering a cross-boundary Business Improvement Deal between Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea and City of Westminster. Demographic changes – loss of community: several consultations and referendum of the Knightsbridge Neighbourhood Plan engaged many people, businesses and cultural institutions. This has been a very welcome fillip for the local community after fears that buy-to-leave developments and other Central London trends, such as Airbnb, were eroding it. Over commercialisation of the Parks due to lack of government funding. Commercial and residential waste management: acute instances of fly-tipping

**Working Details:** Annual subscription: £20 single, £30 family, £40 corporate, £500 life. KA Executive Committee meets quarterly. Sub-committees: Planning & Conservation, (meets monthly), Transport & Environment, Law & Order and Licensing, meet quarterly. Consultation papers from National Government, the GLA and Local Authorities are scrutinised. All major developers encouraged to set up Community Liaison committees and the KA plays its part in these. We have regular meetings with Imperial College, The Royal Parks and recently, with Harrods. ■



Where next for the Barracks?

# Tall Buildings Everywhere?

**Diane Burrige** rounds up evidence against tall buildings

Many London boroughs are revising their Local Plans with some seeming to be over-zealous in supporting tall buildings, including Islington and Redbridge as noted below. The 2011 London Plan specified density ranges for housing developments in Central, Urban and Suburban locations. The new Draft London Plan, currently being tested at the Examination in Public, abandons the density matrix in favour of a "design-led approach," leaving it to Local Planning Authorities to set out where tall buildings are acceptable in principle.

In March 2019, 541 tall buildings (over 20 storeys) were in the pipeline in London (from the pre-planning stage through to completion), of which 90% will be for residential use (New London Architecture Survey, 2019). This is despite well-researched problems with residential tall buildings. London has a housing crisis, but the crisis is about affordability. The questions to ask are: Who will live in these tall buildings? And why build them when they give rise to so many problems?

## They will not solve London's housing crisis

Many new units in London are being sold overseas (nearly 80% in 14 developments analysed by Transparency International in 2017). And how many are left empty? 184 units in the 50-storey St George's Tower at Vauxhall had nobody registered to vote in May 2016, and one-quarter of units were owned by companies registered in tax-havens.

The City North development at Finsbury Park, of two 21-storey buildings linked by one of 12 storeys, is now rising up and overpowering the area. Agreed by Islington Council, against their own policies (of no more than 10 storeys outside the Central Activities Zone), the developers have sold most units off-plan overseas, leaving 12% for social housing (47 of 355 dwellings). The recently revised Islington Local Plan proposes four more tall buildings in this area, one of which will be a 'landmark building' of up to 25-storeys.

Molior Reports (2018/19 Quarterly Reports) have found that there is a huge backlog of unsold flats in central London, after having interviewed all the developers of the 714 schemes of 20 homes or more. These flats continue to lie empty whilst there is a housing crisis in London. New home starts in 2018 were down to 27,356 compared with 33,774 in 2015. The Mayor's target of 66,000 new homes being built each year, with 65% affordable (all types) and 47% London Affordable or Social Rent, will not be met – again. (2017 Strategic Housing Market Assessment)

## Tall buildings cost more to construct and maintain

High prices are needed to build tall buildings, with little open space and communal facilities provided. Sturgis Associates (Islington Tall Building Study, 2018) found that tall buildings are

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*Molior Reports have found that there is a huge backlog of unsold flats in central London. These flats continue to lie empty whilst there is a housing crisis in London.*

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less sustainable than medium-rise buildings of comparable size, due to their: vertical travel and servicing requirements; use of glazing materials which cause over-heating and thus require intensive mechanical ventilation; and overshadowing, necessitating a greater reliance on artificial light. Tall buildings can cause solar glare and generate adverse micro-climatic conditions, such as wind-funnelling at the base of the buildings. And when they become dated, they need complete re-development.

## Families do not want to live in tall buildings:

Most families want to have access to a garden. A study for the Greater London Authority by the London School of Economics (June 2018) concluded that, overall, residents of big, densely-populated blocks (of those reviewed) are happy with their homes. (Page 59)

And so, what is the problem? One has to read further to see that only 12% of the households questioned had children and 4% had more than one child. Many respondents stated that they did not intend to make their homes long-term ones, as they associated family life with a house and a garden. (Page 30) Admittedly, the 2017 Strategic Housing Market Assessment calculated that 55% of annualised demand for new homes is for 1-bed, and 16% for 2-bed. One has to ask: Is this because families do not want to live in London as larger homes are too expensive or not available?

And many respondents in these densely-populated blocks studied had relatively high household incomes, and so do not reflect the local population. Is this what we want in these housing developments – mainly wealthy households with no children?

Not surprisingly, there was more of a sense of community in the older estates, which would now be considered low-rise, and which performed better in terms of the use of outdoor space. Danish architect Jan Gehl, in his various publications, states that buildings above six storeys provide less scope for meaningful communication and engagement – essential for community life.

## Tall buildings are not needed to meet housing demand

Edwardian Mansion Blocks have residential densities of 200-450 units per hectare. Such densities can be delivered with buildings of less than 10 storeys - with a common height range of six to eight storeys. The current London Plan's maximum density thresholds for the highest Public Transport Accessibility Level (PTAL 6), and the Central Character Setting, is 405 units per hectare. Urban Initiatives Studio (2018) conclude that: 'there is no need, from purely a residential density point of view, to promote tall buildings, as increased densities can equally be achieved with compact medium-rise development forms such as urban perimeter blocks.' (Page 55)

### Tall buildings do not necessarily 'regenerate' an area:

Definitions of regeneration usually emphasise actions which seek to bring about a lasting improvement in the economic, physical, social and environmental conditions of an area. Tall buildings can prevent regeneration, owing to the disruption these can cause during building works, their lack of community facilities and the poor environment, within and nearby, that these can create.

At Finsbury Park, the works for City North, since 2016, have necessitated the closure of the Wells Terrace entrance to the Underground, leaving only one main entrance open – at the busiest transport interchange in London outside Zone 1. This caused the Station to be closed (fully or partly) 83 times in the first six months alone, negatively impacting on local businesses, let alone long-suffering commuters. And now the re-opening of this entrance has been delayed from April 2019 to the 'end' of 2019.

Redbridge Council is planning a range of very tall buildings in Ilford Town Centre as part of a regeneration strategy. This is despite the controversial 683 homes on the Sainsbury's site (of which 4% will be for 'low earners') being agreed in 2018 by Sajid Javid MP, then Secretary of State at the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government, over-ruling Redbridge. Now the Council is supporting three 23-storey buildings for 354 flats (26% for shared ownership), and a 42-storey building with 380 homes (33% for first-time buyers).

These tall buildings are being considered as another cluster of tall buildings near completion nearby, overlooking Ilford Station, with no greenery or other community space in sight. Where will children play and neighbours meet? Will families want to live here even if they have no choice? And who will ensure that housing units are 'affordable' and do go to first-time buyers and 'low earners'?

As we are all too well aware, inappropriate tall buildings, once agreed, can have a major deleterious effect on an area – socially, environmentally and economically. One has to ask: why is Government at all levels encouraging residential tall buildings so keenly?

### Your Society may want to investigate further:

- the sites that your borough indicated to the GLA as likely to become available for redevelopment for the Mayor's 2017 Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment;
  - your borough's Site Allocations and the context and character analyses for these; and,
  - the criteria for the support for tall buildings in Local Plans.
- London Forum's response to the Mayor's 2016 A City for All Londoners stressed the need for communities to feel comfortable with the type of developments being progressed. We need to ask: which communities feel comfortable, and whose housing needs are these tall buildings meeting? ■

### References/Notes:

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London Forum: 'What Kind of London do Londoners Want', November 2016: Response to Mayor's 2016: A City for All Londoners.  
London Tall Buildings Surveys 2019. New London Architecture. Exhibition from 5 March to 5 May 2019 at The Buildings Centre, 26 Store Street, WC1.  
National Planning Policy Framework (2019) specifies that Local Plans should include the use of minimum density standards, but is largely silent on tall buildings.  
Residents' Experience of High-Density Housing in London. London School of Economics for the GLA, June 2018.  
St George's Tower:  
<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2016/may/24/revealed-foreign-buyers-own-two-thirds-of-tower-st-george-wharf-london>.  
Tall Building Study. Urban Initiatives Studio for London Borough of Islington, October 2018. ■

City North development at Finsbury Park Station dominates a local street



# Planning, Environment & Transport Committee

John Myers reports

As reported on the front page, much of Michael Bach and Peter Eversden's time has been taken up with the Examination in Public of the draft New London Plan at City Hall, which is lasting many months. The Inspectors have made clear that they are examining only the soundness of the draft before them. They do not wish to discuss suggestions for improvements, which were remitted to the GLA. However, the provisions about development on Small Sites appear likely to be changed to embody a presumption in favour that almost amounts to 'permitted development'. There may be a proposal for a review of the Green Belt and of Metropolitan Open Land; that has extremely worrying implications for Metropolitan Open Land, which generally comprises highly valuable green space within London.

## Permitted developments and the High Street

The Forum responded to the Government's proposals on permitted developments and supporting the High Street. The Forum's response was particularly critical of the proposals on permitted development. The Forum has also responded to the changes to developer contribution rules.

The Committee notes the new Labour Planning Commission and has not yet responded to the Call for Evidence:

## Transport

Andrew Bosi is drafting a response to the Williams Rail Review and reviewing the new proposed Guidance for Licensing Authorities. The Committee is reviewing the Consultation on Heathrow airspace and future operations.

The opening of the Elizabeth Line has been put back to late 2020. The impact on TfL's budget is getting worse, and makes bus cuts inevitable before the Elizabeth Line opens. It seems impossible in these circumstances to start thinking about CrossRail 2.

The Committee notes that the Ultra-Low Emissions Zone, which will require non-compliant vehicles to pay £12.50 at all times to enter the Congestion Charge area, comes into force on 8th April.

## Meeting the Housing Minister

After reconsideration of the numbers on housing need in relation to the new National Planning Policy Framework, the Government has reverted to the 2014 figures, and included a reference to the need for economic development.

Michael Bach and Peter Eversden will be meeting with the Housing Minister, Kit Malthouse, later in the spring.

## The Mayor's call-in powers

The Mayor's call-in powers are being used to overrule boroughs even where there appears to be little strategic ground for the decision. The Mayor has directed approval of all but one development scheme that he called in for his own

determination. The exception was the latest decision on a proposal in Greenwich.

The Mayor called in a development in Brentford on the former Citroen site and negotiated a few more affordable units in return for allowing it to be built higher, even though the height in relation to the Kew World Heritage site had been one of the reasons for Hounslow's refusal. The Minister may now intervene to decide on that scheme in conjunction with the outcome of the appeal inquiry on the nearby 'Chiswick Curve' which would also affect several heritage assets.

## Old Oak Common

In Old Oak Common, Car Giants has decided that the original proposal would not be viable owing to the poor performance of the Development Corporation. How to link the stations has not yet been worked out. The Development Corporation's Local Plan is to be examined in April. The Earl's Court Opportunity Area seems to be in a mess, with its owners apparently attempting a sale. ■

## A Lost Park All Summer - Diane Burridge reports

Four major events are planned in Finsbury Park between 13 May and 25 September 2019, including two for 45,000 people (including Wireless). For 56 of these 136 days (41%) there will be truck and other movements setting up, holding and then taking down all the paraphernalia associated with large events, including a huge security wall, making it difficult to access the Park. And so for nearly half the summer the area of the Park facing Islington and Hackney (surprisingly, not Haringey) will be used for major events. As well as these, a series of smaller events, for about 7,000, are being considered. There will be very few days when the Park can be peaceful and just be a Park – in an area where most homes are flats without gardens.

The Highbury Community Association, which has 1,000 members, many of whom live near the Park, has objected to Haringey Council. School exams start mid-May and continue to end of June. The noise levels, and the late night anti-social behaviour, can be most distressing.

The Association also raised great concerns with the Conditions that Islington Council had required, with little consultation, in order to support the Wireless Festival continuing. It was felt that these were not strong enough and had undermined moves by the Friends of Finsbury Park to have fewer large events in the Park. The Council Leader and other senior Islington Councillors asked to meet a delegation from the Association where it was agreed to set up a Reference Group to monitor and have input into traffic management schemes, crowd and anti-social behaviour management etc. ■

# newsbriefs

News and issues of interest and concern to note.

## Rejecting building on the Green Belt in Enfield

The Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) London has worked with local groups Enfield RoadWatch and The Enfield Society to publish 'Space to Build, Enfield' – evidence they intend to use to support their responses to Enfield Council's Local Plan consultation. The Council is considering building on the Green Belt (for example, at Crews Hill)

The CPRE report states that there is plenty of space in the borough's 21 wards to build new homes within previously-developed land; building on Enfield's Green Belt would mean giving up large swathes of valuable green land for very few new homes, most of which would be expensive ones. "Large 'opportunity' sites, like the Southbury area, can and should be 'master planned' for high quality, high density (though not high-rise) housing developments which are 'walkable' and where space is used for housing rather than lots of car parking, as happens with low-density Green Belt development. This type of high density housing is more affordable for young people and people on lower incomes – people who are also more likely to rely on public transport and are less able to afford a car. It can also include office space, schools, shops – everything people need." For more information see CPRE London, Enfield RoadWatch and The Enfield Society: Space to Build Enfield: <http://www.cprelondon.org.uk/projects/item/2427-space-to-build-in-enfield>

## Sale of Holloway Prison site to Peabody

Hundreds of new social rented homes and a dedicated women's centre will be built on the site of Holloway prison, the notorious women's jail. Housing association, Peabody, has acquired the site from the Ministry of Justice for a reported £81 million, with the help of a £42 million loan from City Hall. The site will be developed in partnership with housebuilder London Square. The intention is to build 1000+ homes, of which 600 will be "genuinely affordable" with about 400 available for social rent. This appears to be a major achievement as a result of extensive work done to challenge the viability claims made to justify the development of luxury homes on the site.

## London's night time economy

A report on the night time economy of London, Think Night: London's Neighbourhoods from 6p.m. to 6 a.m. (626), was launched on January 31st. It is wide ranging, covering cost and availability of transport, business rates and the night time levy, under-represented groups using the night time economy, workers' rights, and promoting this area of potential growth. The most significant element of it may be the redefining of "night time." It captures some older people – theatre audiences are predominantly older citizens – although they remain an under-represented group. Key concern to many of our members will be the issue of noise, which is far more significant after dusk and when ambient noise subsides. The Night Czar, Amy Lamé, will be responsible for taking forward the report's recommendations.

## Islington Society birthday party for Mary Cosh

Andrew Bosi reports: The Islington Society held a birthday party for Mary Cosh, the distinguished historian, at Frederick's Restaurant, on the occasion of her attainment of 100 years.

There was a card from the Nation's first citizen, and speeches from the Society and the Archaeology & History Society – Mary is a Vice President of both. Andrew Gardner spoke of the support Mary had given him when he became Chair of the Arch & Hist. Andrew Bosi recalled Mary's time as Secretary of the Islington Society and her role in saving the Royal Agricultural Hall and the Bravington block at King's Cross. Chris Smith, President of the Society, spoke of how Mary's books on the squares of Islington enhance a stroll through them.



In reply, Mary reflected on the irony that you had to reach a great age to receive so many plaudits. Recalling her years at a school over-concerned with sporting prowess, of which she had little, she felt she had been very lucky ever since as things had only got better.

Over forty people attended, including representatives of several amenity societies within Islington and Mary's M.P., Emily Thornberry.

## Holocaust Memorial and Learning Centre - the right building in the wrong place?

At the turn of the year, Westminster city council received the long-awaited planning application to locate the United Kingdom Holocaust Memorial and Learning Centre in Victoria Tower Gardens, adjacent to the Houses of Parliament on the Embankment. The plan is for the Centre, designed by Adjaye Associates, to be located largely underground. However much of the Gardens will be given over the entrance concourse, and a new landscaped slope some 8m high will partly disguise the entrance pavilion.

The proposed location is highly controversial, and is opposed by local civic and community groups. Victoria Tower Gardens is one of very few publicly accessible green spaces in that part of Westminster and is well used by the local community. The site and surrounding areas are very constricted for an attraction that could draw in up to a million visitors annually. And there are concerns that the proposed security arrangements will prove inadequate and need augmenting with intrusive barriers comparable to those protecting Parliament itself.

The consultation period has now expired with some 700 objections received. The decision is awaited. ■

# Round the Societies

A round-up of news from our member societies.

By **Diane Burridge**

## Payphones – filthy and obsolete or sinister and new?

Thirty-five phone booths have been counted and photographed along Streatham Hill and High Road by members of the **Streatham Society**. Most are filthy and covered with graffiti and advertising displays. The Society has asked Lambeth Council why these unused booths are not being removed, particularly when planning permission needs to be obtained for new ones.

Meanwhile, planning applications continue to pour in for new payphones. In a letter to the Islington Tribune, The Islington Society explained that many of these transmit Bluetooth low-energy signals to send advertising messages to mobile phones. The new payphones also have Near Field Communication Connection which allows for the sharing of data between several devices, including accessing information and carrying out commercial transactions. Are these new payphones playing a sinister role in gathering information about people passing by that can be sold on to others? When the Society approached Islington's Legal and Planning Departments, Officers replied that this matter did not fall within their remit. In the light of data protection are these payphones operating legally? And who is responsible for finding out?

## Green action by Enfield Society

The Enfield Society continues to green the area. The Trees Group meets regularly at the Trentwood Side tree nursery to look after the 100 saplings they have planted. They are now in discussions with the Council and the Friends of Parks Groups to plan moving the larger trees to sites across the borough. Members supported a joint Trees for Cities and Enfield Council initiative to plant over 3,000 trees at Montagu Recreation Ground in Edmonton - as part of a London-wide programme to plant 25,000 trees in one weekend. And discussions have been held with the Trent Park Conservation Committee to ensure minimal loss of trees during the development of a junior adventure course at the Park. As thanks, four members of the Enfield Society received a Gold Award in the 2018 Enfield in Bloom competition for their colourful container planting on the platforms at Enfield Chase Station.

## Protecting Front Gardens

The **Putney Society** meeting in January 2019, organised by their Buildings Panel, focused on the subject of front gardens. All over Putney, front gardens are under pressure from the continuing desire of residents for off-street parking and the growing trend to dig basements under even small houses. Wandsworth Council are starting the process of reviewing the Local Plan, and the Putney Society is organising feedback from members and others, with the aim to protect front gardens.

## Developments in High Barnet Town Centre

Residents have been divided on plans for a 100-bed Premier Inn on the site of Barnet Market in the Town Centre. The **Barnet Residents' Association** has supported these plans, on behalf of the Chipping Barnet Town Team, at various public events - where it was estimated that 80% of people attending were either in support or neutral.

The **Barnet Society** consulted 23 members living nearest the site and the majority of those who responded were in support, whilst local residents from Chipping Close opposed the proposals. As a result of feedback, the hotel was reduced in size (from originally 120 rooms), and windows will be glazed to reduce overlooking into people's houses.

This episode of debate has raised important issues of the changing role of town centres and whether hotels regenerate these or not. The 2018 Winter edition of the Barnet Society newsletter outlines many aspects of this debate, which may be relevant to similar town centre developments around London.

## Magna Carta Returns to Greenwich

In the summer of 1215, West Greenwich helped to secure the rule of law that is recognised and valued all over the world. Its Baron, Geoffrey de Say, was among the rebels who confronted King John at Runnymede, demanding that he hear their grievances and recognise that even he was not above the law of the land. An authorised facsimile of the Magna Carta from the British Library was produced with the help of The Royal Greenwich Heritage Trust and **the Greenwich Society**, for the Magna Carta celebrations in 2016. Printed on vellum, together with a translation of the document – both bearing the Great Seal of King John – this facsimile has recently been hung in the West Greenwich Library after use elsewhere for the celebrations.

## Yet More Developments at Waterloo

In one of London's busiest places, even more development is planned. This includes: building Elizabeth House, the largest office block in the area; a new entrance into Southwark Station; proposed removal of Waterloo Bridge roundabout (where the IMAX is); massive 23 and 26 storey towers at Paris Gardens/Hatfields; proposals to transform Waterloo into central London's only Metropolitan Town Centre; and various plans for Lower Marsh. This is after Lambeth Council has approved 23 new hotels in recent years.

The **Waterloo Community Development Group** which won the battle to develop the Coin Street area for mixed use, including social housing, is embarking on a Mass Observation exercise. This will involve volunteers counting new homes and getting detailed facts about the use of existing buildings - with the aim of building up a clear picture of what is really happening in the area. A programme of meetings has been organised as part of this process.

### Olympia Building Overdevelopment

The **Hammersmith and Fulham Historic Buildings Group** endorses in principle the aspirations of the £1 billion redevelopment of the Olympia Building to have a range of facilities attracting a wider visitor demographic. Concerns focus on the overbearing glass offices and a conference centre which rise up above Olympia Central, and the Group remain opposed to the insertion of mezzanine floors into the Grand Hall and the National Hall. The Victorian Grand Hall and the Pillar Hall have been upgraded to Grade II\* after a review by Historic England. This decision adds weight to the work of the Hammersmith and Fulham Historic Buildings Group which will continue to monitor developments, despite the recent approval of the scheme by Hammersmith and Fulham Council.

And nearby, the Group, with the St Peter's Residents' Association, were successful in attracting £10,000 from the Heritage of London Trust towards the restoration of a 1959 sculpture by Karel Vogel next to St Peter's Church.

### Protecting Common Land

Lambeth Council applied to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) for consent for the former One O'Clock Club building on Windmill Drive to be replaced by a considerably larger structure for use as a pre-school nursery. This development was opposed by the **Clapham Society** and others, principally on the grounds that it would result in the enclosure of part of the Common for non-recreational activities, excluding the public from this area.

The decision to challenge the scheme was controversial as many residents considered the nursery a worthy proposal. The Society, however, felt that this was an inappropriate site for a school, and an undesirable encroachment on the Common which is held in trust by Lambeth Council for recreational purposes on behalf of the wider community.

In December 2018, Lambeth's application was turned down by DEFRA, as the Government's Inspector concluded that the 'public recreation test' would not be met by the proposed enclosure and development. Hopefully, this ruling will help other groups who are struggling to protect public space, as there is always a 'good' reason to develop on this.

### Listing More Buildings in Fulham

The **Fulham Society** succeeded in getting statutory Grade II listing for the street-facing mansion block, gates and railings at the Sir Oswald Stoll Foundation - in recognition of their special architectural and historic interest. Stoll was a theatre entrepreneur who was concerned at the neglect of those returning from the Crimean War. He devised a 'War Seal', a diamond shaped stamp, which was used to seal the backs of letters. Five million of these were sold as part of a fundraising campaign to support housing and other services for disabled servicemen.

### Wimbledon Town Centre Masterplan

Two years after the **Wimbledon Society** produced its own plan for the town centre, Merton Council has now released a welcomed 136-page draft 'Future Wimbledon Masterplan'. The Society organised consultation meetings where concerns were raised that the plan proposes to convert Wimbledon's current status, as a Major Town Centre, to a Metropolitan Centre. This would mean doubling the amount of commercial floorspace, requiring large new developments of up to 18 storeys high, and the trebling of heights of some existing office buildings. Earlier proposals to have a new Civic/Arts/Concert Hall on the Hartfield Road site are not mentioned in the draft Masterplan. A detailed response by the Society has been submitted.

### Chislehurst Society's Small Grants Fund

The **Chislehurst Society's** grants scheme (made possible due to legacies from past members) has part-funded various schools, Scouts and church projects, as well as footpath and signage projects in Scadbury Park and the Hawkwood Estate. Specific projects have included the all-ability roundabout at the Recreation Centre; the gardens at Elmstead Woods Station; the purchasing of equipment for the Commons Trustees; and the largest grant for some time, £20,000, supporting the new pavilion at the Recreation Centre. As a charity, Society follows a formalised process to ensure that deliverable projects are funded. However, this has resulted in most projects being delivered by well-established organisations, and no recent grants have gone to fund neighbourhood-based and small ideas. Due to this, over the next 12 months, the Society will be setting aside £5,000 as a Small Grants Fund.

### Allotments and Parkland Saved at Syon Park

As widely reported in the London press, the **Isleworth Society** helped to stop substantial building proposed in the Park Road Allotment Gardens, and the relocation of these allotments into the Grade 1 listed Syon Park, beside the Lion Gates - all Metropolitan Open Land. The Inquiry Inspector dismissed the Northumberland Estate's Appeal - due to the loss of Local Open Space as set aside for this purpose in 1917 by an earlier Duke of Northumberland. The Isleworth Society took Rule 6 to become a full party in supporting efforts to overturn the Appeal, and worked painstakingly with allotment holders, Icen Projects and the Environmental Law Foundation - who provided pro-bono support. The Gardens have been designated an Asset of Community Value, and now the Society is working to secure protection of these allotments within the Isleworth Riverside Conservation Area. ■

### 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 so that any items of interest can be featured in

#### Round the Societies:

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

### Delivering Newsforum by email

The Newsforum in PDF form sent by email can be widely distributed at no cost. If you do not keep your hard copy and feel you could do without it, please let us know via one of the email addresses below, giving your Society name as well as email address, so that we could reduce our postal mailing list and save printing and postage costs.

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

[w](#)

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# Dates for your diary

## London Forum events

### London Forum Open Meetings 2019

#### Save the Dates

**Thursday May 16**

**Wednesday June 19**

**Wednesday July 10**

**Subjects under consideration are planned to be Considerate Contractors, Street clutter and Tourism 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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