

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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Examination-in-Public of the Draft London Plan

The new London Plan

We give a brief outline of the structure and contents of the Plan; how the Examination in Public is being conducted and some of the main points that London Forum has put forward to date; the consultation continues as we go to press. **Peter Eversden** reports

Following the Forum's detailed written response in January 2010 to the Mayor's draft replacement London Plan (DRLP), the Forum was invited by the Panel of Government Inspectors to participate in most sessions of the Examination-in-Public of the DRLP. Michael Bach, Roger Chapman and Peter Eversden are involved in that from March to the end of October.

The Plan, a vision from now to 2031, is divided into eight chapters setting out various policy groups:

- new homes, including affordable housing, housing design and quality, inequalities, poverty, disadvantage, social infrastructure and quality of life issues

- economic development and employment; policies for outer London, inner and central London; developing town centres; improving job opportunities, and arts and culture
- tackling environment and climate change; reducing CO2 emissions and heat loss from new developments; increasing renewable energy; managing flood risk; improving recycling performance and waste management
- safe and convenient transport for everyone; encouragement of cycling, walking and low pollution vehicles, managing congestion and reducing the need to travel.
- architecture; historic environment; buildings neighbourhoods, development context sensitivity; views management; air and noise pollution; open space protection, and London's waterways.

The Examination in Public has taken the form of a set of Inspectors' questions about each DRLP policy for which London Forum has submitted fifty-one statements of up to 2,000 words each. We produced additional papers confirming our arguments made during debates for changes to policy wording.

The DRLP differs from versions published by Ken Livingstone when he was Mayor in that the new policies have more than just strategic statements and aims, they include guidance on planning decisions and on the relevant

content of borough Local Development Frameworks (LDFs) for each subject.

Details of the Mayor's Vision for London, the Objectives he has set for the replacement London Plan and policies that the draft plan contains will be put on to the London Forum web site.

Greater devolution

In the course of the Examination the effect of the devolution and localism policies of the Coalition Government have been significant. The Mayor has published suggested changes to his DRLP and issued statements on the progress towards the Big Society in which he gives more power to London boroughs. There will be freedom in future for boroughs to define their own policies for several topics that the Mayor had controlled in the past. They are likely to have management of their own housing funding. The Mayor is seeking to take over the Royal Parks, the Port of London Authority, several rail franchises and to have more control over housing, skills, policing and health.

Many areas for improvement

Although London Forum did not have any fundamental disagreement with the thrust of the new plan, it saw many areas for improvement and changes were sought. London Forum's key points on the DRLP were as follows.

An apology

We received a complaint from a member society following the front page comment piece in the last Newsforum, no. 56, that we had breached protocol by referring to the "Labour" Government, and for publishing the piece during the hustings period before the election. We fully accept that this was a misjudgement on our part and apologise unreservedly. ■

In the Context and Strategy part of the DRLP, (Chapter 1) the objectives do not include reducing the need to travel which is mentioned in the chapter on transport but is something London Forum believes should be taken into account throughout the Plan and be set as an extra strategic objective. We sought a stronger emphasis on sustainability and measurement of targets.

We criticised the Mayor's failure to manage traffic congestion and air pollution and expressed concern at his implied relaxation of limits on car parking in new developments.

Inner London

The policies for Inner London (Chapter 2 London's places) were not thought to be good enough and the Forum argued for more strategic attention to its complex mix of large concentrations of deprivation, workless residents, poor housing, vacant or underused commercial property and town centres that need regeneration. It needs to be supported in accommodating growth in ways that enhance the environment and strengthen its neighbourhoods. The management of its night time economy will be important. Comprehensive changes to Inner London policies were submitted and London Forum will check closely what it has achieved when the Inspectors report next March.

The Central Activities Zone

We have sought to protect residential quarters in the Central Activities Zone (CAZ) from the main DRLP policies for the area, explicitly resisting large-scale office development and specifically resisting tall buildings that would change their character. Definition was sought of preferred office locations and of locations where extra tourist accommodation would be appropriate. Of concern is the implied reluctance to provide additional affordable housing within the CAZ. Objection was raised to the proposed extension of the CAZ to include the Battersea Opportunity Area.

Areas of opportunity and intensification

In the examination of policies for London's 43 areas of opportunity and intensification, London Forum pointed out that many lack a level of transport that would allow their full potential for extra jobs and new homes to be met. The phasing of public transport improvements for such areas should be indicated in the Plan and used as a basis for

development decisions. Potential phasing of the delivery of homes and jobs should be given also and subject to annual monitoring. That requires more urgency to complete the planning frameworks for the areas.

Many participants, including London Forum, sought improvements to policies for regeneration and estate renewal and a session has been set to review those towards the end of September.

Town Centres

On policies for Town Centres, London Forum urged caution in boroughs raising the classification of their District Centres because of the development pressures that could bring and because the whole network has to be coordinated across London. The DRLP town centre policy does not provide a clear strategy for the development of that network and the regeneration needed. The DRLP classification of Brent Cross as a town centre was opposed. It is still a regional shopping centre as in the current Plan. The draft policies fail to recognise the potential contribution and potential role of district and local centres but the Forum supported the policies for a successful and diverse retail sector for those locations. However, we asked for more ambition and focus in policy for small shops.

Arguments were put to the Examination for the application of the sequential test for new supermarkets and for their location to be in town centre or edge of centre locations, with avoidance of large floorplate versions.

The Forum has suggested that emphasis should be much more on improving access to town centres as the foci for employment, shopping, leisure and services, with social infrastructure developed to meet local needs and its facilities to be within walking distances.

Protecting open spaces

Support was given to the DRLP policies for protecting and developing open spaces and London's Green infrastructure. Attention was drawn to the fact that London's waterways comprise its largest area of open space and should be protected and enhanced for their biodiversity, leisure and transport functions. A lot of it is classed as Metropolitan Open Land. It is thought that the policy proposals for LDF content and the map of open spaces need to be improved and that deficiencies in open space and opportunities for green chaining must be addressed.

London's economy

London Forum gave evidence that the policy for developing London's economy (Chapter 4) did not deal well enough with the issues and opportunities identified in the Mayor's Economic Development Strategy, nor sufficiently deal with the needs of small and medium enterprises and social and community ones. We questioned the assumptions in the DRLP for office space and retail floorspace and urged that boroughs must develop preferred location policies for offices, light industry and other economic development uses. The Forum emphasised that policies must specify how affordable workspace will be retained and provided to support new and emerging economic sectors. LDF preparation and planning decision guidance is lacking in that section of the DRLP.

Better links in the chapter on economy were sought by London Forum to giving children a good start in life, identifying space for schools, planning estate renewal and regeneration and providing skill development to improve people's life chances. Social Impact Assessments for Opportunity Area plans were proposed to the Panel so that benefit to local communities is considered.

Draft policy for London's visitor infrastructure is thought to concentrate too much on hotels with a lack of emphasis on information, help, street signage, ease of use of transport, safety, toilets, coach parking, food, etc.

On arts and culture, London Forum criticised the draft Plan for failing to convey the strength and quality of London's heritage as a world-class visitor attraction. The two associated policies do not recognise London's assets, including theatres, stadia and cinemas, whether as infrastructure and part of the economy, let alone as heritage assets.

Climate Change

The Panel conducted a very searching examination of the DRLP policies for climate change mitigation, CO2 emissions, sustainable design and construction and retrofitting of existing buildings. (Chapter 5) Six selected participants failed to attend but the debate was useful. The Mayor withdrew a table of targets for installed energy capacity generated from renewables and will replace it by guidance, in accordance with devolution. Several developers criticised the need, value, viability and cost to users of combined heat and power systems and the

The very low level strategic aim for tall and large buildings to do no better than “not have an unacceptably harmful impact on their surroundings” is a pathetically low ambition

investment required in advance of achieving zero carbon homes which will then not need the heating. The boroughs were more supportive of the draft policies and the GLA promoted the benefits of wider district level schemes. The 60% target for CO2 reductions was queried by many present and interim targets were requested.

The climate change chapter also contains policies on overheating and cooling, encouraging urban greening, the use of green roofs, the management of flood risk, sustainable drainage, water efficiency and the management of water quality. It aims to improve London's recycling performance with a goal of sending zero waste to landfill by 2031.

London Forum expressed concern over what it sees as deficiencies in Flood risk management. Nor is any specific mention made of the risk to the Tube system if flooding occurs. Even a small amount of flooding would cause enormous damage to the business activity of London. The Forum called for a better balance of speed and intrusion in the construction procedure proposed for the Thames Tideway Sewer Tunnel, the construction of which could need considerable land. The Forum suggested that existing canals could augment water supply to treatment plant by transferring water from areas with surplus.

The examination continues in September and will cover housing, transport, waterways and place making, including policies for building design and location. London Forum will participate in the next weeks of the DRLP examination and seek more policy changes for improvements within the following topics.

Public transport

London Forum commented in detail on the Mayor's Transport Strategy (MTS) and on transport policies in the DRLP, (Chapter 6) being particularly concerned that there should be a proper allocation of resources and funding, sustainable integration of development and transport capacity, reduction in the need to travel, congestion management and pollution reduction. London Forum has objected to the Mayor's proposal to remove the western extension of the Congestion Charge Zone and his delay in implementing low emission zones.

Several conflicts between the DRLP and the MTS have been identified and reported.

Step-free access is an MTS aim but not a DRLP policy. Queries have been raised on further transport overcrowding before Crossrail is operating.

Proposals have been made for changes to policies for transport capacity and connectivity, freight management and parking.

London's people and homes

Chapter 7 contains policies to secure equal life chances for all in London with a new and integrated approach to housing and social infrastructure. More emphasis on quality and space – optimising rather than maximising housing density, and with new internal space standards. The London Forum supports the objectives to deliver more high quality homes; reduce health inequalities and support sustainable neighbourhoods. It particularly welcomes the policy to protect and enhance social infrastructure. London Forum will be seeking more affordable housing, homes for families and high standards for estate renewal. The DRLP in this section aims to enhance the environmental quality of London's streets, places and neighbourhoods and improve the places that people live in, work in and visit with better urban design and green spaces. New development must make a positive contribution to existing character, particularly in areas of historic significance, and preserves and improves heritage features.

Protecting views

The Forum campaigned for a strengthening of views policies with a Views Management Framework that would properly protect the important views of London from being blocked by developments. We think that the list of designated views is too small, focusing predominantly on the centre. There are many views in Outer London of great importance not only to their communities, but to those in more central areas. The Forum firmly has opposed the suggestion “that it is not necessary to preserve every aspect of a designated view”.

Tall and large buildings

The Forum is totally opposed to the policy for location and design of tall and large buildings, which is worded to promote them as a means of “changing or developing an area.” We reject also its very low level strategic aim that tall and large buildings should do no better than “not have an unacceptably

harmful impact on their surroundings,” which is a pathetically low ambition and is in direct conflict with other strategic policies. London Forum will be seeking a positive contribution from large scale developments, with enhancement of the amenity and vitality of the surrounding streets. Mindful of the way some communities were harmed by the design, architecture and layout of social housing regeneration projects of the 1960s, the policy should propose full community consultation by boroughs on new developments in an area.

Restoration of the Blue Ribbon Network

The waterways policies in the current London Plan have been weakened in the DRLP version but there are new policies for Blue Ribbon Network restoration, supporting infrastructure and recreational use. London Forum will be working with waterways groups and Environmental Law Foundation's lawyers to seek improvements to this part of the London Plan.

Implementation, Monitoring and Review

The last DRLP chapter deals with the nuts and bolts of delivery and explains how progress will be measured. The Mayor wants to have a yearly monitoring process which is easy to carry out and understand. He will produce an Implementation Plan to describe the key actions that the Mayor and other partners need to do to ensure that the London Plan makes an impact.

London Forum is critical that the key performance indicators (KPIs) and targets proposed are inadequate. Each KPI should be directly linked to the key policy/policies whose performance will be monitored. Some KPIs seem to be either “freestanding,” “contextual” or not directly monitoring the impact of spatial planning policies. Policies on the location of development need to be more ambitious. Proposals for more specific indicators will be proposed. ■

The DRLP is available through the link www.london.gov.uk/shaping-london/london-plan/strategy/download.jsp

This summary represents only a small proportion of London Forum's response to the consultation. Full responses on any draft policy or topic can be emailed to members on request. The AGM will provide opportunities for discussion. ■

Civic Voice

The new organisation to support civic societies has got off to a good start. Griff Rhys Jones has agreed to become Civic Voice's first President. 250 societies have joined

Civic Voice Director Tony Burton has been successful in achieving funding to carry the organisation through its crucial establishment period, and has been active in ensuring that it has been taken note of in government circles.

Meetings with Ministers

Tony Burton has held detailed discussions across the new Coalition Government, and with its advisers, about the implications of the Big Society – with its commitment to handing more power to local communities to control the decisions that affect their lives.

Chairwoman Paula Ridley and Tony Burton attended the meeting at 10 Downing Street at which the Prime Minister David Cameron set out his vision for the "big society". The event was an opportunity to press the civic movement's case in personal discussions with Community Secretary Eric Pickles and Civil Society Minister Nick Hurd among others.

Civic Voice has also met civil servants, partners and others about the Government's proposals for planning reform. Two issues have already emerged: Introducing a public (third party) right of appeal against the grant of planning permission in certain cases – such as where a proposal clearly conflicts with the agreed development plan; and better enforcement

New Planning Minister, Bob Neill, has agreed to meet Tony Burton and discuss the coalition ideas of giving power back to communities. He is keen to engage and involve civic societies. In his words, "the view that you can't trust local communities is not remotely acceptable in the 21st century".

A meeting has been held with new Transport Minister, Norman Baker, to introduce the civic movement and seek Government action on street clutter. Civic Voice has now been invited to meet with

senior civil servants responsible for policy on street clutter and design. The Minister was confronted with photographic evidence provided by civic societies of the problems and has agreed to raise the public profile of the issue with a major speech. He says he wants action to "give streets and town centres back to the people" and confirmed the new Coalition Government's support for clutter-free streets. He has also asked civil servants to support the use of new ways of reporting issues like www.fixmystreet.com.

Mr Baker has written saying he is "encouraged by your enthusiasm for working with the Department for Transport to bring about the sort of streetscapes we all aim for. "...I feel there is much you can contribute in helping us achieve our common aims by addressing these issues from the bottom up."

Evidence of the success of these efforts came in a recent government press release on Street Clutter where Civic Voice was specifically mentioned. This is a welcome boost for the Street Pride campaign.

Joint project with the RSA

Civic Voice has joined up with the influential RSA to develop a special website where everyone can discuss the importance of communities and place. The site plans to bring together RSA Fellows and local civic volunteers in creative ways to share views and ideas. Tony Burton has already used the site to unpack the important difference between "civil" and "civic," terms which are often used interchangeably.

Action points and concerns

Civic Voice is taking action on several matters where it is detecting growing concerns, including:

- the implications of British Waterways development plans for the future of our canals. These are part of wider moves that

would see British Waterway's become part of the voluntary sector as a charity or mutual organisation. The new Government has said it is supportive of these proposals.

- concerns about green street cabinets being installed meet the target for broadband access by 2015. Too many are poorly located, inflexibly designed and made unnecessarily intrusive and unfortunately do not need express planning consent except in conservation areas.
- the proposed new high speed rail line.

Civic Voice would welcome your views on where to focus effort. ■

Civic Voice AGM 2010

**October 8th and 9th 2010,
Peterborough**

Civic Voice's first AGM will take place on 8th and 9th October 2010, the Great Northern Hotel, Peterborough hosted by Peterborough Civic Society.

It will start at 1pm on the Friday and end at approx 4pm on the Saturday. All civic societies who are members of Civic Voice and our partners are invited. There will be a series of guided walks and tours around Peterborough, as well as a visit to Stamford, the home of the first conservation area.

The registration fee is £20 which makes a contribution to costs. The formal AGM on Saturday morning is free and will provide an opportunity to meet the Board, and to suggest ideas to shape Civic Voice's priorities.

Further details can be found on the website and in email bulletins.

If you have any ideas for making the AGM a success then please let us know at info@civicvoice.org.uk.

You can register for the event at www.civicvoice.org.uk/about/meetings/peterborough-2010-agm/

A 'nimby's charter'; chair of the British Property Federation disparages objectors

An unfortunate quote in the Times on May 26 gave an insight into the sort of hostility that Civic Societies are all too familiar with. Under the headline "Nimbys secure their charter", an article on giving local authorities financial incentives to promote new development, Liz Peace, Chairman of the British Property Federation and past Chairman of the National Planning Forum, is

quoted as saying: "Offering incentives... will lead to better development, but we need to ensure that democracy is followed and that vital decisions don't get lost amid the kind of infighting and bickering we often see at local level. The silent majority are often happy with things and it's only those with time on their hands to fill council meeting rooms who are heard." (see Kit Malthouse's

remarks on "democracy", Newsbriefs, p15)

It recently emerged that she had also been a 'Vice-Patron' of the Civic Trust towards the end of its time. With that sort of attitude no wonder Civic Societies lost confidence in the Trust.

It is encouraging that Civic Voice is having some success in combatting these attitudes, as reported above. ■

Camden Civic Society children's Letter Writing Competition

A model of youth involvement

Camden Civic Society has announced the results of its third competition for local children designed to encourage them to think about their area and its environment.

Run in conjunction with Camden Council's Children, Schools and Families Directorate it aims to encourage children in Year 5 (nine to ten-year olds in their penultimate year at primary school), to think about what they and others can do to make improvements, and to encourage them to express and support their ideas logically, in clear grammatical English. It is also hoped that the children will help us to learn what they think of the local environment, in which they are growing up.

The subject: My Local Neighbourhood

The contestants were asked to write a letter to the Mayor of Camden about 'My Local Neighbourhood: What is Good, ? What is Bad? What can be made Better?' 318 pupils participated from 12 Camden primary schools from across the whole borough. The entries were marked by volunteers from the Camden Children, Schools and Families Directorate and Camden Civic Society using two sets of guidelines: a marking plan and an analysis of the contestants' insights. Most schools engaged in a wide-ranging classroom discussion of their neighbourhood as the starting point.

A most interesting study and an excellent way in which to get children involved

The four top 'Good' things were

- Parks and special open spaces;
- Shops and markets, restaurants and cafes;
- Good friends and neighbours;
- Play, leisure, swimming, games facilities and clubs

As might be expected in a borough that includes Hampstead Heath many children listed this in their "good" things, some quite poetically: '...serene lakes with gently quacking ducks sailing by and laughing and weeping willows crying their green hearts out but never reaching the ground.' Other entries included an 'illuminated manuscript' coloured headings and drawings, and a poem. Some of the children were so eager to discuss the problems that concerned them most, that they did not note or discuss any 'good' things at all! This was unfortunate as the subject had been chosen to encourage a balanced approach.

Other 'Good' things included shops at Kings Cross, neighbours, a local football

pitch, recycling in Camden "which makes our environment more clean and beautiful" and a Homezone because it is "a place, where I can meet my friends and cycle for fun without worrying about cars". Notably 'Different Cultures' came low down the list with only 2%.

'Bad' things

These included litter, rubbish, dog-mess, bubblegum and spitting on pavements, graffiti, pollution, noise, road danger and traffic, adult and youth anti-social behaviour including drunkenness, gangs, cracked pavements/ potholes in roads, smoking, concreted over gardens, crime including drugs

The winners and their friends were invited to the Mayor's Parlour to receive their prizes.

It is a most interesting study and an excellent way in which to get children involved. What is most striking is that the issues, good or bad, singled out by the children were little different from those which civic society members regularly campaign about.

The report contains full details of the findings with tables, lists and analysis. It can be emailed to anyone interested in setting up something similar in their area. ■

Heritage Protection

The Future of Heritage Protection - 2010

A Conference was held in London, in June to give information and guidance to the Historic Towns Forum members on the implications of PPS5, how it will change the way in which applications affecting the historic environment are determined and how to use it to best effect; and to explore the new political landscape – how is the planning system likely to change and what are the implications for those working in the historic environment.

View the speakers' presentations at www.historictownsforum.org/London_presentations > ■

Simon Thurley warns about future risk from cuts

The setting of heritage assets

English Heritage invites your views on EH draft guidance 'The Setting of Heritage Assets: English Heritage guidance', in the context of 'Planning Policy Statement 5: Planning for the Historic Environment' and its supporting 'Historic Environment Planning Practice Guide', published in March 2010.

They ask for comments with particular reference to the policies and guidance on

- the definition of setting
- the contribution that setting makes to the heritage significance of places
- approaches to assessing the implications of change within setting.

Closing date for responses is Friday 26th November.

The document can be downloaded from www.english-heritage.org.uk/professional/advice/advice-by-topic/setting-and-views/heritage-assets/ ■

Heritage at Risk

Simon Thurley, Chief Executive of English Heritage recently warned that the looming cuts in local authority spending could lead to "catastrophic" damage to some of England's most cherished buildings. The Heritage at Risk register shows a significant slowdown in the number of Grade I and II* listed buildings that are being saved from neglect. ■

Building the Big Society

A round-up of some of the new legislation from Communities Secretary Eric Pickles of the new Coalition Government which may drastically change the planning environment

Eric Pickles, the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, has announced two new Bills making radical changes to the planning system and the shape of local government.

The emphasis of the new coalition Government is on localism and decentralisation, transferring power from central to local government, and putting more power and opportunity into people's hands giving them the ability to determine the shape of the places in which they live.

Future planning structure

Regional governance mechanisms would be abolished and replaced by

- A National Framework for Development with economic, environmental and social priorities; infrastructure national policy statements under the Planning Act 2008 would be incorporated; this would need the approval of both Houses of Parliament; PPGs and PPSs would be reviewed – including PPS5.
- Development Control: flexible zoning would allow changes of use without planning permission as prescribed in the development plan; there would be a presumption in favour of sustainable development, housing building incentives and 'Neighbourhood Approval', which could include a third party appeal to test conformity with the local plan.
- The appeals process would include new third party rights of appeal – but on limited grounds only.

After a knee-jerk outcry of "nimbyism run riot" and "a charter for Nimbyism" from housebuilders, a more measured response followed, acknowledging that the new regulations would force the industry to re-think the way it engaged local communities and work harder with them if they wanted to get a development through the system.

Mark Clare CEO of Barratt is quoted as saying "We will learn to operate on a more local basis to meet the shift in policy." Recent research by Yougov and the NHPAU shows that 75% of people would support more housebuilding in their area if it was better designed and in keeping with their area, and if they could be sure local services did not suffer.

Decentralisation and Localism Bill

Again, this is intended to "shift power from the central state back into the hands of individuals, communities and councils ..." "...free local government from central and regional control so that they can ensure services are delivered according to local needs" and "...empower local people giving them more power over local government.

Scheduled for the autumn some of the key policies will include:

- Abolition of the Government Office for London
- allowing councils to return to the committee system, should they wish to
- abolition of Regional Spatial Strategies - except for London
- new powers for communities to help save local facilities and services threatened with closure, and the right to bid to take over local state-run services
- giving councils a general power of competence
- giving residents the power to instigate local referendums on any local issue and the power to veto excessive council tax increases
- greater financial autonomy to local government and community groups
- a simplified and consolidated national planning framework
- cutting local government inspection and abolition of the Comprehensive Area Assessment

The Bill also includes the abolition of the Infrastructure Planning Commission but Bob Neill, the CLG Minister has made it clear that until the Commission is replaced it will continue to accept applications for major energy projects. There is to be a new fast track planning process for major infrastructure projects but "the difference being [the decisions] will be made by democratically accountable ministers, not unelected commissioners".

An end to 'garden grabbing'

Following initial moves late in the day by the last administration, the new government has acted swiftly to rectify what many saw as the destructive practice of 'garden grabbing' due to changes to planning guidance which put gardens into the Brownfield category. The practice has been most prevalent in

London and the South East.

It is estimated that about 180,000 homes were built in gardens in the last five years. Planning Policy Statement 3, Housing, has now been selectively revised to remove gardens from the definition of brownfield land.

Minimum housing density target scrapped

The government has removed the requirement for new housing to be built at a density of more than 30 dwellings per hectare. Housing Minister Grant Shapps said: "The current system with its push for high density is seen to have contributed to the lack of family sized homes and flats that local people need.local communities will no longer be victims of a system designed to maximise profits and minimise choice." London has its own housing density policy.

Community Right to Build

This will allow communities to take forward developments for new homes, shops and facilities in their area. It will also allow a community organisation to go ahead with development without the need for an application for planning permission, if there is overwhelming community support for the development and minimum criteria are met. But the Community Right to Build won't be used to expand the size of communities by more than 10 per cent over a 10 year period.

Audit Commission to be scrapped.

In a surprise move in August, it was announced that England's public spending watchdog the Audit Commission, which employs 2,000 people, is to be scrapped saving £50m a year.

It was claimed that "The corporate centre of the Audit Commission has lost its way. Rather than being a watchdog that champions taxpayers' interests, it has become the creature of the Whitehall state".

Councils would be able to ask private companies to carry out audits. It is said that over the past few years a consensus has emerged that the burden of inspection has started to outweigh the benefits.

But without an independent Audit Commission, what will happen to a council that provides inexcusably poor-quality services? Surely it provided a constitutional safeguard to ensure local government resources are used effectively? ■

Bomber Command memorial

What price The Big Society? The new government's promise that power must be given back to the people has fallen at the first hurdle as Eric Pickles refuses a call-in. We reprint the text of a letter sent by **Tom Ball** on behalf of Thorney Island Society

Thorney Island Society and Friends of The Green Park are appalled that the 85m long monument with the spurious title of a 'memorial', was given planning consent by Westminster City Council's (WCC) Planning Committee on 13th May. This was despite policy statements by both the Council and the Royal Parks against any more memorials in the area "unless exceptional".

The Green Park is an historic open space which has remained a 'natural' habitat of undulating ground for centuries, with no flower beds by decree; and with tree planting dating back to Nash. It is clear that there is absolutely no justification for this location to be subjected to violation, destroying trees, changing ground levels, placing entries into the Park where there is no desire; and as a consequence damaging for all time that which the authorities had said they would protect. Even the Mayor of London who is charged to have an overview since the Park is Metropolitan Open Land, declined to make any comment.

One of the most disturbing features of this episode is that this decision was taken by a committee of only three persons on an application that contained a deliberate 'untruth' – namely that as there was no memorial in Central London to Bomber Command it must be granted. (the force is remembered in the RAF church of St Clement Danes in the Strand, see newsforum no. 56 Spring 2010). This misrepresentation was restated forcefully at the Planning Committee by a current Councillor and former Lord-Mayor of Westminster. Even though it was corrected by someone at the table, no apology or comment was made, and the Chairman ignored it as of no consequence. The Society sought to have the application called in by the Minister, Eric Pickles, but he declined. We sought legal advice on a possible Judicial Review, and were advised that legally a case could not be brought forward.

The position is a clear breach of trust by the authorities involved; they claim that the application is 'exceptional' but on what

grounds? So far WCC has failed to describe their grounds; while the Minister for DCMS John Penrose states that "the memorial is seen as being of national importance and therefore fulfils the criteria for being judged an exception....It will be a broadly secular tribute to those who served....and will become a prominent landmark within our capital city".

The 85m long colonnade with a pavilion at its centre is exceptional for its grossness, and for its personalised classical architecture which many have remarked as being reminiscent of that of the work by Hitler's architect Albert Speer. Would those who died in the defence of the Country, support the violation of the Park, in their name? There is an appeal for a further £4m for the monument. ■

***Note:** The author is maintaining a campaign of moral indignation against the misuse of powers, and would welcome support from other London Forum members and friends of a like mind. Thorney Island Society is profiled in our centre-page Spotlight.*

A dangerous threat to the democratic process

Regular high-level reports over the last year have been critical of the creation of too much badly drafted legislation in the last 10 years.

Yet another example that has seriously eroded our rights was exposed recently by the extraordinary case of a Cardiff councillor who made a disparaging remark on Twitter about Scientology, calling it 'stupid'. A Scientologist picked up the Welsh councillor's tweet and complained to the Public Service Ombudsman for Wales who referred it to the monitoring officer of Cardiff Council so that its standards committee could consider whether the councillor may have brought his office into disrepute. All, apparently, rather trivial - and what relevance does it have to local authority conduct?

A great deal. Few people are aware of a series of statutory instruments, legislation and new bodies created, ostensibly, in an attempt to ensure that local councillors do not engage in corrupt practices, that led to this episode.

Councillors are rightly expected to treat the public with respect, to ensure that they

are not rude when carrying out their duties and that they are not behaving in a way that might bring their office into disrepute. But this case revealed the repressive way in which the this Code of Conduct is now being interpreted by some Borough Councils and misused to muzzle councillors' ability to properly represent their constituents.

I had personal experience of this a few years ago when I called my local Camden councillor to discuss a contentious planning application in my street. I was astonished and mystified when she told me she could not discuss it with me. I thought she was just being difficult. As a result of the publicity given to this case I now know that the real reason why that happened was much more sinister.

Under an arcane heading of "fettered discretion", council lawyers are telling councillors that prior discussion with a constituent on a planning issue could be judged as "apparent predetermination" on their part and could result in them losing their ability to speak on behalf of their constituents or to vote at any subsequent planning meeting.

comment by Helen Marcus, Editor

It has wider implications than just planning. If you were elected to the council, having campaigned and spoken out about any matter of local concern, you may find that it is a breach of the code for you to speak or vote on that matter in any subsequent committee meetings. You have "a prejudicial interest" in it and are therefore barred.

It is shocking that a code of conduct designed to stop councillors fiddling their expenses or accepting money for support in planning applications is actually being used to restrict the freedom of councillors to properly represent their electorate.

The "prejudicial interest" policy is a direct assault on freedom of expression. That a public official could rule against an elected councillor for expressing his or her opinion on a matter of public interest is a dangerous threat to democracy.

The coalition partners have apparently committed to legislate to prevent use of the 'prejudicial interest' bar. It is urgently required. ■

Spotlight on The Thorney Island Society

At the heart of the political intrigue and aspirations of the Westminster Village, constant vigilance and action among the local community is always required.

by **Tom Ball**

The Thorney Island Society is centred on the 'Westminster Village' - defined loosely as covering the area between Victoria Street and Horseferry Road, and from Millbank to Strutton Ground; with a major arterial route of Great Smith Street continued into Marsham Street. This is rather larger than the original Thorney Island, or the Village which was based around Great Smith Street and Marsham Street.

Council failure to appreciate

The Village was rich in a wide variety of architecture, from the 18th Century housing terraces to Victorian and Edwardian baroque; and early twentieth century buildings respecting the character of the area by their design and the materials used, predominantly red brick with stone dressings.

The destruction from bombing raids during the 1939 - 1945 war was seen as a great opportunity for development, not least because of its proximity to the seat of Government. The Village was subjected to Westminster City Council's (WCC) plans for redevelopment, to include Government Offices as well as developers' speculations.

Nevertheless it was a shock to the community to learn of the proposed destruction in the 1960s of Marsham Street's village character, and its replacement by the three ten storey slabs of the Department of Environment. This was a massive 'slap in the face' to the historical context, not only of the architectural character, but to the basis of the community life and existence.

Mounting the barricade

A growing spirit of concern at the complete indifference of the Council to the inherent qualities of the Village and all that it represented, caused people such as June Stubbs, who had been resident in Westminster Mansions, to become vociferous about the threats to the unique heritage.

But it was not until 1985, when word got about that even the Westminster Library - the first public Library in London, was to be demolished along with other buildings on Great Smith Street, - the Bath House and Orchard House, that local action became organised.

There are not so many who see the need to protect and cherish our historic past, but those who do, and take part, are the unsung heroes

Bringing the community together

The "Save the Library" campaign brought together representatives of the whole community; protest demonstrations were mobilised on Great Smith Street and a petition of 800 signatures achieved. The Council, who were in favour of the developer, Land Securities' plans for a huge office development, were left in no doubt that the Library as an institution must not be demolished. It was made clear that the type of building proposed by Land Securities was out of the question being totally alien to the character of the village. June Stubbs, Elizabeth Forty, Ann Carlton, and many others 'mounted the barricade'!

A meeting between the community, including Sir William Rees Mogg, Jonathan Aitken, and June Stubbs, and the then Council Leader, Shirley Porter, was successful and the buildings were saved, to be refurbished and renovated. The Library continued in its original building until 1996, when the Council insisted that it should be transferred to the new 'City Hall' (built by Land Securities) on Victoria Street. However the achievement of the saving of the library building and its being cleaned to reveal its full architectural character, was a source of local pride, even while protesting again.

Abbey Community Centre

The Society also campaigned to save the Public Baths and Wash-house building. But only the facade of the building was listed in 1986. The pool was destroyed along with the rest of the building. However behind the facade of what is now the Abbey Community Centre, facilities were created providing meeting rooms, a hall and catering.

The London Plane Tree Memorial

Another cause for alarm was the proposal to cut down the Plane Tree Memorial in Bennett's Yard, planted in memory of the war heroes, Siegfried Sassoon MC and Colonel d'Arcy Hall MC, "and the comrades of The Great War 1914 - 18". The Society succeeded in preserving it with a tree preservation order, but the grounds of the new flats in which it is situated are now inaccessible to the public.

Name changes

Having saved the Library, the protesters took a new name, the 'Great Smith Street Conservation Neighbourhood Group'. June Stubbs was particularly concerned that the whole community of the Village should be represented; the threat to other buildings and activities was ever present. A great celebration was organised to demonstrate respect for the ancient stone in Marsham Street stating "This is Marsham Street 1688". The Street was closed, pony rides and horses from Harrod's were brought in, stalls were set up on the frontage of the DoE, and for a day at least there was a Fair in the old street.

As the Society's concerns widened it changed its name again, to the Thorney Island Society. In 1994, the Society was extended by agreeing to adopt St James's Park and The Green Park taking the designation of 'Friends' and planting a special tree in each of the parks. The Society attends regular meetings with the Royal Parks and the Royal Parks Forum.

Support of local luminaries

The committee included, Sir William Rees-Mogg as President and Ann Carlton as Chairman. Lord Rees-Mogg remained as President of the Society until retiring in 2009.

As "founder, archivist, and liaison", June Stubbs continued her very active role, lobbying and battling for more spot listing of buildings under threat, and recruiting local influential people to join the Society. When Ann Carlton decided to move on, June replaced her as Chairman.

As with most Societies, it relies on subscriptions and donations to pay for its activities but more recently it has been recognised by WCC as a consultative



Thorney Island Society

President: Sir Nicholas Underhill
 Friends of St. James's Park and The Green Park
Contact: Miss June A Stubbs, Chairman,
email: enquiries@thethorneyislandsociety.co.uk
web Site www.thethorneyislandsociety.co.uk



community group, and received a modest grant from the Council.

Events and social activities

The social side of the Society has developed with a regular programme of meetings, talks and events, a Christmas bazaar, an occasional summer fair, and a series of more formal dinners with speakers, that helped to create the Thorney Island Society's presence.

Dealing with planning applications

From the early days, June Stubbs kept abreast of the planning applications affecting the Village, being joined over the years by a number of volunteer professionals. Application such as Queen Anne's Gate, Parliament Square, Selborne House, The Green Park Underground station, and the massive proposals for the somewhat misleadingly named 'Victoria Transport Interchange', require considerable involvement, site inspections, meetings and writing detailed

observations and objections.

A current preoccupation is the application to build the huge memorial to Bomber Command in The Green Park, (see article page 7)

Constant vigilance and action

There are not so many who see the need to protect and cherish our historic past, but those who do and take part, are the unsung heroes of the war of attrition, by those who are all too often either thoughtless or careless of their powers of authority in development of change. Constant vigilance and action is always required. It is as true now as it was then. ■

Help in putting this article together has been received from June Stubbs, Ann Carlton, Elizabeth Forty and David Custance.

Westminster Library



Age: Born 1985

Circumstances of Birth: In response to the threat to demolish Westminster Public Library on Great Smith Street, the first public library in London, the community saw the need to raise local awareness that the rich diverse domestic heritage of the 'Westminster Village' was being destroyed by the Council

Biggest successes: (1) Saving the Westminster Public library. (2) Getting the 1912 'Fegan Homes' building, a kind of model lodging house for very poor working lads, Spot Listed to save it from demolition (3) Saving the Plane Tree War Memorial in Bennett's Yard. (4) Establishing the Archive of the area, which is constantly being added to. (5) A tree to mark the millennium planted in The Green Park.

Biggest disappointments / frustrations: (1) Demolition of too many Georgian, Edwardian and Art Deco buildings. (2) Failure to prevent the over-development in Victoria Street and the massive proposals for the Victoria Transport Interchange. (3) Cardinal Place shopping centre. (4) The demolition of Selborne House and its replacement by a huge building that encroaches into the St James's Park skyline.

Present preoccupations: (1) Dealing with a planning Committee at Westminster Council where a quorum is only two, and democratic representation is virtually non-existent; (2) massive over development; (3) continued failure of the authorities to recognise existing quality environments - such as Parliament Square; (4) the proposals for The Green Park Bomber Command Memorial, a tragic example of misuse of power.

Working details: Membership over 500, including corporate members. Committee structure: Executive Committee, and Planning Committee.

Annual subscription: Member: £12. Joint member: £20. OAP/Student: £7

Publications: Newsletter and Web site - both in state of development

Special characteristics: With its historic connections to Thorney Island, on which Westminster Abbey was founded, the history of the Village is bound into the Abbey, Parliament and the Monarchy; Some of the most historic landmarks in the capital are situated here.

Last word: Bring back proper democracy in WCC planning process, including real and demonstrated accountability. ■

News from the Mayor and GLA

Proposed new Mayor's powers;

Councils move to strip Mayor of powers over skyscrapers; Cultural Strategy; Mayor's London Cycle Scheme

In June the Mayor of London unveiled a plans to give the Mayor and GLA more say, more power and more accountability on key London issues, subject to government approval and changes in legislation.

It is intended to remove needless bureaucracy and overlapping functions across public bodies and devolve more powers to the boroughs.

The Mayor's proposals include:

- devolving the London region of the Homes and Communities Agency and the London Development Agency to the GLA;
- the Olympic Park Legacy Company to be reformed as a Mayoral Development Corporation;
- devolving responsibility for the Royal Parks Agency and the Port of London Authority from Whitehall to the Mayor;
- giving the Mayor greater powers over traffic control and the awarding of rail franchises on routes into London;
- creation of a policing board for London to replace the Metropolitan Police Authority;
- greater powers for the London Assembly with an enhanced role on strategy development and scrutiny

www.london.gov.uk/mayoral/mayors-vision-better-focused-gla

Councils move to strip Mayor of powers over skyscrapers

However in a counter strategy London's 33 boroughs are attempting to strip Boris Johnson of his planning powers over major housing developments and skyscrapers.

They have written to Communities Secretary Eric Pickles to say decisions on controversial developments should rest with town halls instead of City Hall.

The Mayors decisions at the 63-storey Columbus Tower in Canary Wharf and Southall Gas Works, which both got the green light, have dismayed local people who campaigned against them.

The business sector and property developers condemned the plan, sending out their usual warning that it would damage London's economy by slowing up the planning system. (see also item on new legislation on Planning, page 6). It should make for an interesting debate during EIP

I'm a Conservative mayor, but what we're doing is a gigantic communist experiment."

Mayor Boris Johnson on his new cycle scheme

Matter 7H on high buildings and views management at the EIP in September.

Cultural Strategy

The Mayor's Cultural Strategy sets out his vision, priorities and recommendations for how to strengthen the cultural life of Londoners across the capital. It recognises the significance of the cultural and creative sectors in making London a successful world city, and puts forward a case for its continued support and investment – particularly in the run up to the 2012 Olympics and the opportunity it presents for London to undertake a step change in cultural activity and participation.

The strategy was available for public consultation in the summer and the results will be published in late 2010.

The Draft Cultural Strategy can be found at www.london.gov.uk/get-involved/consultations/current-consultations/cultural-strategy

Good news for pedestrians

Pedestrian guard rails – sheep pens as they often called – are being removed on Transport for London's road network. In a letter to the Times David Brown of TfL acknowledged that they are often inconvenient for pedestrians and intimidating for cyclists. About 60km of guardrails have been removed with no adverse safety problems. In fact the number of pedestrians killed or seriously injured fell by 15% in 2009 compared with 2008.

How they do it in Bolivia

This delightful snippet comes from Matthew Parris of The Times (August 26).

While in Bolivia recently he saw a man dressed as a pantomime zebra paid to

The Boris Bike

Boris Johnson's cycle scheme seems to have got off to a good start and already has a dedicated Boris Bike website, calling itself 'An independent community forum for London's Cycle Hire scheme'.

It is aimed to have 6,000 bicycles eventually and new cycle routes. There are 400 docking stations, the design and placing of which has caused problems in some conservation areas. Over 12,000 keys at a cost of £3 each were dispatched to those who signed up for the scheme across the city, allowing them to unlock the 23 kg grey and blue bikes.

In characteristic fashion Mayor Johnson was quoted as saying:

"These are public property now. It's absolutely crucial that people recognise that they belong to all of us. I'm a Conservative mayor, but what we're doing is a gigantic communist experiment." He was also keen to emphasise that it was his idea and not his predecessor Ken Livingstone's.

Those who sign up for membership must pay a deposit of £300 and then it costs £1 for 24 hours, £5 for the week or £45 for an annual membership. The first 30 minutes of any journey will be free, and the next 30 minutes will cost £1, with rising costs for journeys of more than one hour, up to a maximum 24 hours, which is £50. Casual users will be able to hire bikes in about a month's time.

Barclays Bank is spending £25m sponsoring the scheme and the bikes are emblazoned with their blue logos.

It is estimated that about 9% of people coming in to work in central London come by bike, which makes it the seventh highest figure out of 20 European capitals. Those with the highest numbers of commuting cyclists are, not surprisingly, Copenhagen with nearly 60% and Amsterdam with 45.6%. Rome manages only 1%, Dublin 4.8% and Paris 5.3%. Although cycle use in London has doubled in the last decade, the number of fatalities has actually fallen. ■

walk back and forth across zebra crossings in the path of oncoming traffic to teach Bolivians the new idea of pedestrian rights. You couldn't make it up! ■

Trouble on the Tube

With government budget cuts, work needed to the tube is unlikely to be ready in time for the 2012 Olympics.

In a controversial move in May, scarcely noticed due to the election, London Mayor, Boris Johnson, ended the £30 billion London Underground Public Private Partnership by buying out Tube Lines' shareholders, Amey, a unit of Spain's Ferrovial, and U.S.-based Bechtel, for £310 million. The deal was completed in June after mounting problems put the financing of the PPP's next seven years in doubt (see newsforum no. 56) and effectively brings the London Underground back under state control.

It will be financed from TfL's existing annual budget; with its secure debt rating, no middle man and no punishing management fees, it should mean lower debt repayments over the long term. A spokesman for TfL said that the deal would involve no extra financial call on the Government, farepayers or taxpayers in relation to the upgrade of the Tube.

Transport for London will now directly control the day-to-day maintenance and improvement programme for the Jubilee, Northern and Piccadilly lines.

Mayor Johnson said: "This deal is excellent news for London. Freed from the perverse pressures of the Byzantine PPP structure, I am confident that London Underground and private contractors are more than capable of delivering the improvements to London's transport network on time and on budget."

It is hoped that weekend and evening closures of the Northern line in London's West End, which had alarmed businesses, theatres and restaurants, could be avoided, as TfL said it would take a less disruptive approach when it begins to upgrade the service.

Budget problems

However recent reports of government cuts somewhat puncture this optimism. TfL's annual budget is £9.24 billion of which the Department for Transport (DfT) provides £3 billion. But with DfT facing cuts of between 25 to 40 per cent, funding for TfL could fall by between £750 million and £1.2 billion a year from its annual budget. There is also competition for funds from separate Crossrail projects. If TfL cannot find the money it may have to slow down the whole programme putting the upgrade to

signalling at risk. Perhaps TfL's property portfolio, director Charles Stafford, will provide a partial solution towards the savings of £5 billion needed.

£160 million could be raised from consolidation of its 50 office buildings around London. These include offices at Baker Street, Buckingham Palace Road, Broadway and Edgware Road. It rents its present headquarters at Windsor House in Westminster, as well as the Palestra Building in Southwark, where it moved in 2008, and Pier Walk, in North Greenwich, which it has occupied since last year.

In June TfL abandoned its plans to move into the Shard at London Bridge after the skyscraper's owners found tenants willing to pay a much higher rent. It said that the sale of the 30-year lease would contribute "a multimillion-pound cash sum" to its efficiency savings programme, but it would not disclose the amount.

Dire state of the transport network

Various newspaper reports have recently portrayed the dire state of a network in desperate need of investment. The out of date signalling is at the heart of the problem, according to Transport Commissioner Peter Hendy. The District line control room at Earl's Court still uses 1960s technology with household fans rigged up to keep the heat down. Mechanical levers powered by air pressure, are directed by hole-punch reels driven by Hewlett Packard HP1000s, a 1960s computer system discontinued a decade ago.

Two recent incidents give rise for concern: a broken-down train on the Victoria Line at Oxford Circus was one of the 10 brand new, fully automatic, £10 million rolling stock central to the Line's £900 million upgrade. After a year of testing they are still suffering computer software problems.

In August an engineering train on the Northern line doing early morning rail maintenance work near Archway, became detached from a train it was pulling and raced downhill through seven stations coming dangerously close to the train in front. It was only the uphill gradient at Warren Street that stopped it.

The current state of work

Best off is the **Victoria Line**, still scheduled

for completion in spring 2012. A new signalling system is in place and most of the work on renewing track and ventilation systems is complete. The last of 47 new trains, arriving at about one a fortnight from engineers Bombardier, is awaited.

The Metropolitan line will soon be running the first of its 191 new trains, complete with air conditioning. But without new signalling and track, the new trains will make little difference to journey times. Despite nearly £12 billion being spent since 2003 under the PPP arrangements, many of the improvements have been peripheral — new track on outlying sections, spruced-up stations — or else add-ons such as the Oyster system. The major work fell rapidly behind and costs ballooned.

The Upgrade to the **Jubilee Line** signalling system, designed by French electronics group Thales, originally scheduled for completion in December 2009, has also fallen badly behind due to system software problems. It is unlikely to be complete before February 2011.

Circle, District, Hammersmith and City Lines are promised £4.5 billion of investment over seven years with new trains (cost: £1.5 billion), and extended platforms to accommodate them. Work to signalling is to begin next year. Completion is expected in 2017.

New signalling for the **Northern Line**, dubbed the "misery line", is now at least two years behind schedule with only 10-12 per cent of the work done.

Work to the **Piccadilly Line** is three to four years behind schedule and the future is now very uncertain: the 2017 deadline is now seen as optimistic by insiders. As for the **Bakerloo Line**, the last line to be upgraded, it is now anyone's guess when that might happen.

Work will not be completed in time for the 2012 Olympics.

London Underground's new managing director Mike Brown, has admitted that all these delays will mean that work on the Northern and Piccadilly Lines will not be completed in time for the 2012 Olympics. A former LU chief operating officer, Mr Brown has spent the past two years running Heathrow Airport. ■

Air quality in London

The controversy about air quality in London is increased with the publication by the Mayor of pollution data that would challenge his plans to defer introducing more emission zones

by **Norman Beddington** chairman of the Campaign for Better Transport (London branch),

A recent talk given by Simon Birkett, the founder of the Campaign for Clean Air in London (CCAL), to a joint meeting of the Forum and the Campaign for Better Transport (London branch), described the quality of air in Inner London as 'one of the biggest public health failings or 'cover-ups' by a government in modern history'. This statement sounds dramatic, but is probably an accurate description of an environment in many parts of inner and central London that is dirty, smelly and hazardous to health, especially to the many residents, particularly children, suffering from asthma. The major public health concerns relate to NO₂ (nitrogen dioxide) and PM₁₀ (particulates), the main source of which in Inner London is road traffic (for PM₁₀ diesel engines are the major source). Road transport is responsible for 80% of PM₁₀ emissions in central London.

How bad is the UK's and London's air quality? The Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution estimated 12,000 to 24,000 premature deaths from 'short-term' exposure to air pollution in the UK in 1995/6; of these 8,100 urban premature deaths were assumed to be from dangerous airborne particles (PM₁₀), 3,500 from SO₂, and 700-12,500 due to ozone. Boris Johnson estimates 4,300 premature deaths a year due to 'long-term' or continual exposure to PM₁₀. These figures compare to 2,645 road deaths in the UK in 2008. London has the highest annual average NO₂ of any capital city in Western or Eastern Europe.

Air Quality Strategy

The Mayor is required to produce an Air Quality Strategy; a revised version of the original 2002 strategy has now been produced by Boris Johnson in draft form.

'One of the biggest public health failings or 'cover-ups' by a government in modern history'.

Simon Birkett, the founder of the Campaign for Clean Air in London (CCAL).

According to a recent London Assembly report, the strategy has correctly identified the major issues, including the fact that air pollution causes serious ill-health and premature deaths, and that road traffic is the biggest source of NO₂, PM₁₀ as well as other pollutants.

Serious shortcomings

But it also has some serious shortcomings. These include the lack of information provided to Londoners about the health impacts of poor air quality, and the need to develop convincing actions to deal with pollution 'hotspots'. CCAL have also criticised the strategy for failing to provide funding for measures to tackle 'hotspots', concentrated in central London, through planting and other design measures. At UK government level too there is a lack of urgency in tackling air quality nationwide, which contributes to London's problems.

The Mayor has decided to remove the Western extension to the Central London congestion charging zone which would have been an effective measure for PM₁₀ and NO₂ reduction, and plans to defer introducing more emission zones. But at

the same time he is in fact planning a number of practical steps to reduce central and inner London pollution. One is to require all buses to meet the Euro IV standards for NO₂ and PM₁₀ by 2015, and another is to introduce an age limit for taxis from 2012 which will mean that they will all meet Euro III standards by 2015.

These are welcome steps; however an even more effective step would be to introduce buses which do not rely on diesel fuel as their motive power; this has been done in a number of European cities such as Stockholm and Lille which make use of biogas-powered buses. 40 German cities including Berlin have set up their own Low Emission Zones which in Berlin's case targets and penalises all vehicles which do not meet set emissions standards within a clear and effective system.

Government complacency

It is tempting to conclude that all levels of government, whether national, London-wide or borough, remain complacent about the extent of air pollution, and its impact on public health. Meanwhile European standards on PM₁₀ have been breached in London every year since their introduction in 2005, while in January 2010 London breached its hourly limit value for the whole of 2010. It is quite possible that in the next few years the UK will start being fined very large amounts of money for breaching these limits - and it may be this that finally focuses minds on the impacts of urban air pollution. ■

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Microgeneration to become permitted development

The Government is preparing regulations needed to enable the installation of micro wind turbines and air-source heat pumps in England as permitted development without the need for planning permission. The former administration consulted on it last year.

The relaxation of the planning rules will come with strict caveats about size, noise

levels, location and the visual impact on an area.

Other proposals are for on-street charging points and new rights for householders, institutions and businesses including supermarkets and public car parking operators to install off-street charging points.

Energy and climate change secretary

Chris Huhne has announced the Government's plans to repeal the 1976 Local Government Act which currently prevents councils from selling electricity from local wind turbines or from anaerobic digestion plants. This will allow local authorities to take full advantage of the incentives that are available through feed-in tariffs ■

Should London's population keep growing?

What happened to the discussion of population growth?

In all the discussion about climate change and global warming, one of the issues that is seldom discussed is population growth. In the 1960s, those who were concerned for the environment and conservation believed that a fall in population was desirable. In recent years that reasoning has almost entirely been lost sight of.

The Draft Replacement London Plan appears to be predicated on acceptance of a large increase in London's population and London Forum member The City Heritage Society (City of London) wrote to Mayor Boris Johnson to express their concern that these policies still form part of the new London Plan and seem to have been accepted without question. We publish their view here:

"We turn finally to the issue which, in our view, would destroy any possibility of the achievement of the Mayor's aspiration to make London 'the best city on earth'. That is the acceptance in the Plan that London's population will rise from 7.63 million to 8.89million (paragraph 1.10).

In comparison with the resources available to it London is currently over-populated in terms of housing, health and educational facilities and transport. Any improvements which can be achieved in these areas will scarcely, if at all, offset increases in population already occurring. For the Mayor just to accept the inevitability of further enormous increases in population seems to us to be a policy of lunacy.

Would it not be better for Londoners and the status of London if the Mayor were in his Plan to sound a warning note to central government that London, bursting at the seams, must not be expected to cope with another million or so?"

The Society goes on to make the point that if London has to have another million-and-a-quarter more people, London's economy must grow accordingly, and thousands of new jobs will have to be found. But just because there are more people it does not follow that there would be proportionate growth in the economy nor that there would be increased job opportunities. Are these

not legitimate concerns in the light of the current predictions of a "jobless recovery"?

Perhaps discussion of the subject is about to be revived. A recent article in The Times posed the question: "In a world with ever greater strain on natural resources, can any nation afford to be complacent? Is the number of children in a family only a private concern?" The writer pointed out that Jonathan Porritt has criticised fellow ecologists for failing to acknowledge that growing population is the single greatest strain on the planet's resources. A book* recently published also raises the issue calling it "the elephant in the kitchen".

Many feel that London is already overpopulated. There is a shortage of school places and jobs. Should not the London Plan be calling for a stabilisation of London's population?

What do other London Forum members think? ■

**The Global Food Crisis and what we can do to avoid it by Julian Cribbs, University of California Press*

Low-carbon energy from rubbish - the UK is behind the curve.

Environment secretary Caroline Spelman has announced a review of England's waste strategy which will look at the most effective ways of reducing and dealing with waste and the economics of waste and recycling.

Supporters of energy-from-waste argue that it addresses both Britain's need for alternative power sources and the problem of landfill sites. They also contend that modern incineration plants do not produce airborne pollution.

Thames Gateway Power has won consent for an energy-from-waste facility at Dagenham which will produce heat and power from non-recyclable waste material. 35 out of 68 applications made in 2007-2009 for such schemes have been approved.

But planning permission for waste-to-energy incinerators in the UK is difficult to obtain because of fears about airborne pollution from emissions. Environmental groups claim they divert waste from higher-value treatments, such as recycling, and that they produce more carbon

dioxide than gas-fired power stations. In fact a large volume of rubbish sent to landfill sites is not recyclable but could still be incinerated. An estimated 4.5 million tonnes of waste wood are dumped in landfill sites each year.

Some facts and figures

The UK is behind Sweden, Germany and Denmark who have well-established programmes to generate electricity and heat by burning municipal waste and even dried sewage sludge. At present 10% of municipal waste in the UK is incinerated in energy recovery plants accounting for just 3 per cent of all of Britain's alternative energy. But the Institute of Mechanical Engineers estimates that 15-20 per cent of Britain's entire energy needs could come from waste.

The European average is 30%; in Switzerland it is 78% and in Germany 72%. Britain has a population of 61.4 million but only 24 plants producing energy from waste. Denmark has 32 plants with a population of only 5 million. ■

Greening up vacant land

CABE has turned its attention to the wasted space around social housing estates. It has issued two useful guides, Community green and Decent homes need decent spaces, advising RSLs, local authorities and social landlords how to work with voluntary groups to make it easier for people to improve the green spaces on their doorsteps. New research shows that better use of these spaces would offer a major opportunity to tackle inequality and improve health in inner cities in a quick and cost-effective way. CABE recommends there should be more scope for communities to take over temporarily vacant land and green spaces.

Find out more at: www.cabe.org.uk/publications/community-green and www.cabe.org.uk/social-landlords

CABE has launched the Councillor's guide to good design demonstrating ways to create a good quality environment for residents and business.

the PDF version of the guide can be downloaded from

www.cabe.org.uk ■

Round the Societies

A round up of news from our member societies.

Societies are increasingly resorting to judicial review and legal appeals to stop harmful development, and force councils to abide by their policies.

By **Haydn Mylchreest**

Wards Corner redevelopment quashed

After a protracted campaign, the Wards Corner Community Coalition (WCCC), which included Forum member **Tottenham Society**, has saved the old Edwardian department store building at Wards Corner, next to Seven Sisters tube station, from demolition and redevelopment as luxury housing. When Haringey Council granted planning permission the WCCC applied for a Judicial Review but in July 2009, the court upheld Haringey Council's decision. Undaunted the community went back to court, lodging an appeal which was heard in May. The Court of Appeal quashed the earlier decision. Congratulations on a hard fought battle.

Streatham Common saved from Ice Rink

The protection of Streatham Common has been at the centre of another successful campaign waged by an alliance of local groups, Hands Off Our Common (HOOC), including London Forum members **Streatham Society** and **The Friends of Streatham Common**, against the proposal to build a temporary ice rink and leisure centre on common land as part of a redevelopment scheme by Tesco Ltd. The proposal for the new store included the redevelopment of the ice rink and swimming pool, and flats, and was approved by Lambeth Council in March. However, the strength of local opposition to the scheme has now resulted in a change of mind: at the end of July the Council's Cabinet voted through a recommendation not to build on the Common and reaffirmed "its duty to protect and preserve Streatham Common, in accordance with UDP policy, its status as Metropolitan Open Land and the various Acts under which the Common is set apart in perpetuity as open land for the enjoyment and recreation of the public."

HOOC supported the 'continuation of ice' in Streatham, but were totally opposed to the use of common land and green space to achieve this goal. Streatham Society expressed concern at the vast increase in size of the proposed supermarket and what affect it will have on the small local traders; and to proposals to use the common car park for a leisure centre.

Victory at Ealing

The London Green Belt Council recently reported a successful appeal by local people against a decision by Ealing Council to approve a mixed use development near Ealing Broadway station. In the face of all the odds, a small group of local residents raised money to employ counsel to challenge the Council's decision. And the inspector overwhelmingly supported the objectors' case that a development of the size proposed was out of scale with historic Victorian Ealing.

Basement extensions.

The creation of basements to existing properties continues to be a major concern for the Highgate, the Heath & Hampstead, and the Clapham Societies, among others. Planning permission should only be given where it has been established by thorough study by competent structural and hydrological professionals of the effect of the interrupted movement of groundwater as a result of proposed basement extensions, some of which are designed to make significant additions to the floor area of houses.

Challenge to 24 hour drinking culture

The **Knightsbridge Association** is raising funds to challenge the granting by Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea of extended licensing hours to the Brompton Road Mamounia. The response has been 'simply terrific'; the formal challenge will take place in October.

Save our hospital

The **Highgate Society** is campaigning against the closure of the A & E Department at Whittington Hospital. An active campaign is under way demanding detailed analysis of the proposals. 10,000 leaflets have been distributed and members are being encouraged to write to their MP or Councillor.

Traffic concerns – Societies take action

Speed-bumps, pillows, cushions and tables, chicanes, width barriers, and direction priority notices at narrow points in the roads, introduced by Councils to slow down vehicles in residential areas, have been criticised by residents because of the noise created by braking and accelerating, and damage to vehicles.

Schemes for replacing these traffic calming measures with self-policing 20 mph limits, supported by cameras capable of assessing average speed on residential roads, have also been introduced with some success and there are calls for more such zones.

The Bedford Park Society is seeking the extension of a scheme and Living Streets has launched a campaign for a 20 mph limit to be introduced on all urban streets. Battersea, Putney and Wandsworth Societies plan to make a joint approach to Wandsworth Council to establish 20 mph zones in all side roads across the borough. The Battersea Society is asking the members' views on this matter.

An unholy threat to the Green Belt.

Enfield Society has joined forces with other local groups and successfully objected to a proposal by the London Diocesan Fund in collaboration with a developer, to build houses on an important area of the Green Belt between Enfield and Oakwood. The official response of the Enfield Council to the objection has been to state that this land is not required for housing development as there is sufficient land within the borough and that residential expansion into to this Green Belt area is unjustified.

Development at Vauxhall, Nine Elms & Battersea

Battersea Society organised a public meeting in May at which the Philadelphia-based architects for the US Embassy described the design, and answered questions from the 100-strong audience. The developers at Battersea Power Station are seeking permission for residential buildings up to 17 storeys high (to the height of the base of the famous chimneys) but there is still no agreement on the provision of affordable housing. The developers wish to demolish the listed Victorian Water Pumping Station on the same site, the oldest surviving pumping station after the one at Kew. ■

Material for this page is drawn from your newsletters. If you do not already send copies of your own organisations' newsletters, please put Haydn on your circulation list at: London Forum 70 Cowcross Street, London EC1M 6JE.

newsbriefs

Key issues of interest and concern to note.

Clutter Busting -traffic signage and street clutter

In September 2008 the Department for Transport (DfT) launched the most comprehensive review for over 40 years, since the Worboys Committee's Report of 1963, of traffic signs policy. The problem is simple and all too visible in our streets and roads. It looked at the current processes of design and approval and planning consent of traffic sign schemes, to identify where design considerations could be taken into account, and what regulatory changes might be needed, taking into account the impact in terms of the efficient use of scarce resources relative to the benefit.

In March 2010, Alan Baxter was commissioned by English Heritage and the Department for Transport, on behalf of the Signs and Environment Policy Review Working Group, to investigate practical mechanisms, ideally using existing regulatory processes, for reducing the visual intrusion of traffic signs whilst maintaining public safety. Published in June the report sets out simple approaches for local authorities to audit and reduce unnecessary signing. Once finalised, it will form the basis for a DfT guidance document that will be published later in the year.

Meanwhile Civic Voice has been making good progress on their Street Pride Initiative to clear streets of clutter - see page 4..

A-Z of London Government 2010

London Councils is the representative body for London local government, the 32 London boroughs, the City of London, the Metropolitan Police Authority and the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority. It is a cross-party organisation, funded and run by the member authorities to work on behalf of them all.

They develop policy, lobby the government and others on behalf of councils, and also run services designed to make life better for Londoners, for example the Freedom Pass concessionary fares scheme, and a range of housing, consumer protection and other services, and distribute grants to voluntary groups across London. They also act as the employers' organisation for the 32 London boroughs, providing advice, support and training, and representing them in negotiations.

London Councils' main policy decisions are taken by its Leaders' Committee, which brings together the leaders of all member authorities. It has long made the case for greater devolution from central to local government; in February 2010 they launched the Manifesto for Londoners setting out why this should be a priority for a new government.

Their recently published directory for new councillors contains much useful information that London Forum members would find helpful. To find out more, visit:

www.directory.londoncouncils.gov.uk

The planning portal website

The government's Planning Portal delivered by the Communities and Local Government Department is a useful website for anyone wanting to find out about the planning system and building regulations in England and Wales.

it can be found at:

www.planningportal.gov.uk

The planning process is not democratic

London Deputy Mayor Kit Malthouse made a devastating criticism of the lack of democracy in the planning system when interviewed on the BBC Radio 4 1:00 o'clock news recently. In connection with the controversy about the Chelsea Barracks site he dismissed allegations that the Prince of Wales undermined the democratic planning process by his direct lobbying against the project. Malthouse said it was a "fallacy" that the planning system was ever democratic:

"It is stitched up by developers and planning officers. Developers say: you agree to our suggestions or we'll go to the Planning Inspectorate and you'll be overruled anyway. The problem is with the planning system not the Prince of Wales."

He also pointed out that that there had been "a huge campaign by residents complaining about what was a monstrous scheme" and that Charles' intervention in Chelsea was welcomed. As former Deputy Leader of Westminster City Council he should know! It was extraordinary to hear someone of his experience confirming so publicly what many of us know, to our cost, is the case.

Improvement scheme for the West End

The New West End Company chaired by Dame Judith Mayhew Jonas, is the business improvement organisation that represents retailers and property owners on Oxford, Bond and Regent streets. They will approach the Treasury this autumn about joining a pilot to set up the first Tax Increment Finance scheme in England, as part of a wider package to raise funds for wide-ranging plans to improve the eastern parts of Oxford Street and beyond. They plan to open discussions with Westminster council for additional funding by localising the business rates.

Tax increment finance schemes, widely used in the USA are a means of raising funds for regeneration by allowing property owners to borrow money from the government based on the future tax gains from the resulting developments.

The Company's plan includes attracting an extra 50 million visitors a year to London's West End by 2020, an X-style diagonal crossing outside Tottenham Court Road station in time for the opening of the Crossrail station in 2017, cutting buses on Oxford Street by 40% between rush hours, and the introduction of fast and slow shopper lanes [yes, that's what it said, Ed]

Since its creation in 2000, New West End Company has been a leading partner in the £2.2bn regeneration of London's West End for 2017 shared between private sector funds and the construction of two key crossrail stations.

Find out more at: www.newwestend.com/

Harold Martin

London Forum Members will be saddened to hear of the recent death of Harold Martin of Bexley Society. Harold was a chartered surveyor who trained at the former North London Polytechnic. He served in the Royal Air Force during the Second World War. Harold did an immense amount of work in planning matters, serving on Bexley Society's Planning and Conservation Committee for many years. He was a member of London Forum's Executive Committee for several years. ■

London Forum Book Awards

A new venture for London Forum

Date for your diary: London Forum open meeting November 1st

London Forum Book Awards A new venture for London Forum

We have been running a media Awards scheme to promote better communications among our societies since 1999. Over the years Websites and Media Impact became important categories in addition to Newsletters and Printed Publications. The 2011 Award scheme will include a new category for Landscape or other Local Improvement which has been a society project undertaken in the last two years.

The Forum wants to build on the success of the Awards and bring to the attention of the wider public inspiring new writing featuring London's rich environment, history and cultural heritage. Therefore we are launching the London Forum Book Awards project and for which we are now seeking sponsorship. The prizes will be for fiction and non-fiction categories covering history, biography and the environment.

When we have a sponsor and the long-lists of recent publications that meet the criteria come rolling in we shall be appealing to our literary members to help draw up a short list for each of the two panels of distinguished judges. Meanwhile here's a sneak preview of the cover of the sponsorship brochure.....



**Date for your Diary:
A London Forum open meeting
Wednesday 1st November 2010
6 for 6:30pm at the Gallery**

The meeting will provide the opportunity to review recent Government legislation. Further details to be announced



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