

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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The new draft London Plan

The new Draft London Plan

With density limits removed and housebuilding targets raised, **Peter Eversden** queries the environmental costs, and how public transport and social infrastructure will be funded. London Forum has serious concerns

The London Forum team put an immense amount of time and effort into studying the draft, and produced over sixty pages of detailed criticism of this important document to meet the deadline for comments on March 2.

Density Matrix abolished and housing targets doubled

One of the most significant differences between the new draft Plan and the current one is that the Density Matrix has been abolished and design is to be the prime criterion for judging whether a development is acceptable. The New London Plan doubles the housing target for some outer London boroughs, compared with the current Plan 2015. It also assumes that existing buildings will be replaced, extended or built upwards to achieve greater intensity of land use, including building on any small, available site and large garden, particularly in the suburbs.

This could have several damaging consequences: it will encourage developers to pay too much for land and increase land values, and affect the ability of councils and associations to buy land cheaply to provide social housing. It would further remove the development of high-density schemes from public scrutiny. Projects are agreed between developers and their advisors with planners in confidential sessions. We fear this change will give the developers an even stronger bargaining position. This secrecy and the potential for planners to be "captured" in these negotiations and the resulting "done

deals", are a major fear for local communities. It raises strong concerns about openness, accountability and community confidence in the planning process.

Density policies are being breached and the principles of Sustainable Residential quality abandoned in favour of targets relying on intensified use of land with no regard to either the form or mix of homes to be built. In view of these threats it is imperative that Chapter one's Policy GG1, *Building strong and inclusive communities*, ensures that there are sufficient services and amenities for the needs of local people for various types of schools and other educational establishments, shopping facilities, healthcare, places for meeting and socialising and with close access to green and open spaces.

Development must be supported by sufficient social infrastructure, public transport accessibility and capacity for journeys to desired locations. The new Plan recommends that if the required support of those types is not in place, developments should be phased until it is available.

The new Plan will be perceived by communities as a further transfer of power toward developers, just at a time when communities are seeking not only greater engagement in planning and development but also wanting to have more of a role in shaping the future of their community/ neighbourhood.

Emphasis must be refocused on the plan-led process where site allocations and the form of development are agreed with local communities.

The Plan structure

The Plan is set out in 12 Chapters.

Chapter one lists six core 'good growth' policies which should be taken into account for all planning and development in London, and represent the overarching objectives of the Plan:

- Policy GG1 Building strong and inclusive communities
- Policy GG2 Making the best use of land
- Policy GG3 Creating a healthy city
- Policy GG4 Delivering the homes Londoners need
- Policy GG5 Growing a good economy
- Policy GG6 Increasing efficiency and resilience

Chapter two sets out the overall spatial development pattern for London, focusing on growth strategies for specific areas of the city and how they connect with the Wider South East.

Chapters three to twelve cover topic-based policies and implementation: Design, Housing, Social infrastructure, the Economy, Heritage and Culture, Green Infrastructure and the Natural Environment, Sustainable Infrastructure, Funding the New London Plan and the Monitoring of the Plan's Implementation.

A new 'design-led approach'

The London Forum has very serious reservations about the "design-led approach" presented in Chapter 3's Policy D6. Design is a subjective criterion, and many boroughs may not have the professional capacity to cope with the negotiations that would be required.

This Policy is not a tool for planning the location of development; it is purely a development management tool for assessing proposals brought forward by developers – a developer-led approach masquerading as a "design-led approach" – in an attempt to sideline the Density Matrix. In their eagerness to get to the "design-led approach" stage, the authors have bypassed the plan-making stage.

Boroughs are at different stages in the process of revising their own local plans and many might not be fully compliant with the emerging new London Plan. Few have mapped their facilities and their needs, let alone planned for growth at the neighbourhood/community level, and do not see local communities as the fundamental building block.

London Forum believes that this will need to be rectified and has suggested adding to Chapter 2 / 2.0.7, that 'Communities should be fully engaged in development plans and their needs taken into account.' In fact from a community perspective, the "design-led approach" could mean less rather than more opportunities for shaping their own community.

It is now widely accepted that terraces, squares, crescents, town houses, mansion blocks etc. - provide a valuable template for achieving intensification and higher densities, without sacrificing the attributes of civilised urban living.

Housing Policies (Policy GG4 and H1)

The lack of homes to rent at prices people on low to medium incomes can afford is one of the biggest problems in London. For years, the wrong type of housing has been delivered with an excess of market housing, well above the target for homes of that type to meet London's need, many being sold off plan to overseas buyers as investments and left empty. Less than half the affordable housing required has been delivered and this lack is hindering recruitment and retention of

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workers, particularly for "the operation of the emergency services, the health system and London's transport infrastructure."

The Plan sets a figure of 66,000 new homes to be supplied each year. This is more than double that which home builders have been providing and the Plan does not explain how a step change in delivery will be achieved. The intensification of land use in outer London to meet the housing targets, some of which have been doubled to those in the current London Plan, may not be possible and could meet strong local opposition.

The encouragement of infill development (Policy H2 D 2) is not acceptable. What are 'underused sites' referenced in Policy H2? A garden may be an important local amenity for wildlife, mature trees and local drainage. Just because it has not been built on it does not mean it is underused. Back garden development should not be encouraged; the loss of green space would be contrary to the policies for urban greening.

There are also dangerous proposals in Policy D6 'Optimising Housing Density' which states in paragraph 3.6.2: 'It will not be normally necessary for minor developments to undertake infrastructure assessments or for boroughs to refuse them on the grounds of infrastructure capacity'.

Given that nearly 40% of new homes across London are planned to be on small sites (and up to 78% in some outer London Boroughs), it could lead to the construction of a quarter of a million new homes on incremental small sites without any infrastructure assessment. This is of significant concern to London Forum and its community group members.

The statement "London must seek to deliver new homes through every available means" in paragraph 1.4.5 is unacceptable and must be removed. It could lead to social infrastructure, open space, public transport, and acceptable housing standards provision being ignored, and result in potential harm or unsatisfactory living conditions.

Policy H2 D (2) (b) for home extensions seems to conflict with Policy H2 F (3), which states that there should be net additional housing, plus Policy H2 F (5) for additional housing to be self contained. That would imply that home extensions must deliver a self-contained annex or flat for sale or rent.

There have been over 270,000 homes with planning permission not built and there are many empty homes.

Objectionable prescription on boroughs

London Forum objects strongly to the prescription (Policy H12 C and para 4.12.2) that "boroughs should not set policies or guidance that require set proportions of different-sized market or intermediate units to be delivered."

Boroughs must have the ability to resist developers trying to deliver only the type of housing that suits their profit motives, rather than the required local mix of bedroom sizes and tenures. Left entirely to the market developers are delivering units which appeal to the overseas investor market, rather than producing an appropriate mix including affordable for the home market. It is totally inappropriate to prevent boroughs from including such policies in Local Plans. Housing schemes that do not meet local housing need should be refused.

Public sector land should not be sold privately

Public sector land being developed by TfL and by boroughs should not be sold to house builders who will require their usual profit levels for housing delivery. On publicly owned land the target of 50% of affordable homes is too low; it should be 75% minimum.

Chapter 6 The Economy

The role of the central London Heritage sites as iconic tourist attractions is not specifically considered. Measures to control tourism flows are likely to become

increasingly essential in order to avoid conflict with London's residents. Such conflicts will detract from London as a destination. Any loss of reputation reduces the attractiveness of London as a place to live, work and invest.

Chapter 7 Heritage and Culture

The London Forum has sought to strengthen policies on conservation areas and the setting of listed buildings and has requested that 'Consideration should be given to the effect of new development on the skyline.' be added.

London Forum and Historic England both urged the Mayor to develop a new London Heritage Strategy, which would encourage heritage-led regeneration and character-led new development.

The Forum has called for recognition of the role of local historical and archaeological societies, as well as the wider local community: societies often have members at least as expert as many professionals.

Chapter 8 Green Infrastructure

This commits to protection of London's open spaces and Green Belt which "are a vital part of the capital. Its parks, rivers and green open spaces are some of the places that people most cherish and they bring the benefits of the natural environment within reach of Londoners", prevent urban sprawl, and "should be seen as an integral element and not as an 'add-on'". The Forum welcomes this support for Green Belt and Metropolitan Open Land

The Green Belt should be protected from inappropriate development, and development proposals that would harm it should be refused; the enhancement of the Green Belt to provide appropriate multi-functional uses for Londoners should be supported. Metropolitan Open Land is protected in the same way. The extension of the Green Belt where appropriate will be supported. Its de-designation will not.

Chapter 10 Transport

London Forum supports the extension of the Bakerloo Line from Elephant & Castle to Lewisham and beyond, serving Old Kent Road and New Cross Gate but is completely opposed to the loss of any social housing caused by new rail infrastructure in places such as Euston. For

London's open spaces and Green Belt are a vital part of the capital. Its parks, rivers and green open spaces are some of the places that people most cherish

HS2 or Crossrail2 to contribute to the growth of London it is essential that complementary infrastructure, which includes affordable housing, is enhanced not contracted.

The Transport for London budget seems unlikely to provide the transport facilities to support growth in the time periods required. Demands on developers for transport improvements and additional social infrastructure will reduce the chances of achieving the 65% affordable new housing required.

Overcrowding is now a serious problem on many public transport routes.

Other London Forum concerns

These include

- The lack of details for several Opportunity Areas; they should be described in the Plan or there should be an annex describing all of them.
- The impact of major shopping malls like Westfield on nearby town centre businesses, which should be examined, monitored and mitigating actions taken.
- The provision of private amenity space and children's play space; the Mayor should publish a minimum standard for housing developments.
- Boroughs should be able to identify in their Local Plans areas where tall buildings would not be appropriate.
- Basement policies are needed everywhere, not just in inner London
- If health and social care and infrastructure facilities are not provided where they are needed a development proposal should be refused.
- Car-free developments are supported by London Forum as a policy but it means that the Government will have to

withdraw its intervention on parking standards

- Noise is dealt with in many different places and is inconsistent in the current draft (owing perhaps to multiple authors). One of the most annoying aspects of noise is that within buildings. The Forum would propose a specific section, perhaps in the chapter on health.
- Policy D12 Agent of Change , is inadequate in that it seems to cover only noise that existing developments and businesses could cause, and not the introduction of new uses. It fails to cover odours, vibration from underground rail lines, light pollution, air pollution or new uses that would cause disturbance.

The shortfall in finance

The content of chapter 11 Funding the Plan, is the most frank and depressing set of information in any version of a London Plan, showing, as it does, the shortfall in finance to carry out many of the proposed plans. Most of the schemes listed in Table 10.1 for transport improvements are currently unfunded.

Over the next 30 years something in the region of £11 billion will be needed to fund new primary and secondary school places and energy and water infrastructure will require £148 billion and £46 billion respectively. £4.8 billion will be needed just to keep existing health infrastructure operationally functional. If housing is built without the transport and social infrastructure needed it will not be sustainable and would reduce quality of life for everyone. That makes the target of 66,000 more homes annually just an aim that is most unlikely to be achieved.

The next stage

The Examination in Public (EiP) is likely to be in the autumn, led by a panel of Planning Inspectors, who will decide which issues will be discussed at the EiP, and who will be invited to take part. ■

The Plan can be read online at:

■ <https://www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/planning/london-plan/new-london-plan/draft-new-london-plan> ■

The View from the suburbs

Are the views of the outer London suburbs being taken into account?
London Forum members speak out

At the open meeting on the London Plan in January several London Forum members expressed dismay about certain policies which they see as a threat to their areas. Since then we have received emails from our members in outer London on their concerns about policies in the draft New London Plan. Intensification and "Presumption in favour" of development on small sites has provoked a hostile reaction from many societies. There are justified fears of this leading to eight storey buildings in areas that have had two storey ones and compulsory purchase in low rise areas which this Plan might force through.

Sutton Civic Society said that they felt 'embattled' by the draft Plan, which would radically change their area.

Proposals are 'social engineering'

Pinner Association saw some of the proposals as 'social engineering', and almost 'a declaration of war on the suburbs'. Barnet Residents Association felt the same; in their submission to the consultation on the plan, which they also sent to the London Forum, they said "To achieve what the Plan envisages we are faced with nothing less than a major project in social re-engineering, whether intended or not, with the character of large areas of the suburbs changing from 'suburban' to 'urban'. Our impression is that the authors of the draft Plan have viewed the entire issue through a Central London filter, with little understanding of what makes the suburbs tick or what the obstacles to realising their vision might be. At the moment the residents of the suburbs are wholly unaware of what may be about to happen to them, but there will unquestionably be a backlash as major proposals for change start to take effect in their streets."

The threat to suburban houses

The Barnet response continues: "Draft Policy H2 (small sites) ... reveals the true extent of the threat to suburban houses. Existing streets are faced with wholesale changes to their character through additional housing and increases in density (H2B1). This will be achieved by conversions, extensions, infill, demolition and redevelopment (H2D2)." "The intent is

The intent is clear – a massive change to the existing suburban housing stock of family homes by replacement with the creation of many more flats or at best very small houses. ...[it] runs counter to the aspirations of people living in the suburbs

clear – a massive change to the existing suburban housing stock of family homes by replacement with the creation of many more flats or at best very small houses. ...[it] runs counter to the aspirations of people living in the suburbs, many of whom have moved to such areas from more central locations wishing to substitute a house for a flat, which they believe is the right environment for bringing up children, able to have a bedroom each, enjoy the facility and safety of a garden, and be able to take a complex range of journeys in a family car." The existing suburban family houses make an invaluable contribution to the mix of housing available in London, reflecting the aspirations of many thousands of Londoners, and as such should be protected. Largely restricting housing options to flats or small houses may make sense in central London but it will run counter to the reality of suburban life. If the door is opened to wholesale degrading of this housing stock it is London that will ultimately be the loser as families seek more agreeable pastures."

A plan for conflict

On transport they find "There is no analysis of car journeys compared to the extensive analysis of public transport use." "The public transport service is far too thin in outer areas to support complex journeys in the same way that they can be undertaken in inner areas." Under the sub-heading *A plan for conflict*, by forcing unwanted

changes on the suburbs they say "...the Plan is deficient in recognising the reality of suburban life and aspirations and how its objectives, as drafted, run counter to the expectations of suburban residents."

Lack of infrastructure planning and town cramming

The lack of any proper infrastructure planning, town cramming and the threat to gardens is highlighted by Pinner Association in their submission: "The number of new housing units created over the past five years is already well over that proposed in the current Harrow Local Plan Core Strategy to the year 2026. However, insufficient, if any, concomitant improvements in local infrastructure have been supplied and many Pinner residents complain of the difficulty in accessing GP and other health services and school places."

"Policy H1 Table 4.1 appears to take no credence of the very large number of new "homes" – mostly one bedrooned flats – which have already been, or are being, constructed in up to 19 storey towers or converted from office blocks in Harrow town centre and the surrounding town and district centres. The local transport, health, education and opportunity for employment infrastructure has not been increased to keep pace with this rapid development."

"Policy H12 classifying two bedrooned units as "family accommodation" will lead to cramped living conditions for many people, however convenient it may be for the GLA and Local Authorities to use when monitoring whether they have met the required targets."

"A 'presumption in favour of small housing developments' would completely change the character of the suburban areas of the outer London boroughs. In particular, infill developments on garden land ... The loss of garden land, an acknowledged extremely important resource for biodiversity in Greater London, would not be "mitigated" by green roofs and street trees – these items should be in addition to green space and not a replacement for that amenity." They query how Policy G7 for Trees and woodlands can fit with the presumption for development on small sites such as infill development on garden land? ■

The evidence base for the Mayor's Housing Strategy

Housing in London 2017, issued February 2017; the evidence base for the Mayor's Housing Strategy. **Helen Marcus** examines some contradictions: London is now oversupplied with homes that are too expensive

Housing in London 2017 - the evidence base for the Mayor's Housing Strategy - is a curious document because it gives a picture of the numbers on housing in London which contradicts the underlying assumption of the London Plan, that there is a shortage.

It states that "There are now slightly more homes than households in London." Moreover "since 2001 London's housing stock has grown faster than during the post-war decades due to fewer demolitions and more conversions" (1).

7.1: Key statistics for London boroughs

Borough	Sector	Population	Households	Average household size	2011	2015
Barking and Dagenham	Outer	187,400	70,100	2.66	73,180	
Barnet	Outer	357,700	136,300	2.59	145,270	
Bexley	Outer	233,000	92,900	2.5	97,000	
Brent	Outer	313,100	110,700	2.81	115,600	
Bromley	Outer	311,100	131,400	2.35	136,860	
Camden	Inner	220,100	97,500	2.18	101,650	
City of London	Inner	7,400	4,400	1.64	6,230	
Croydon	Outer	364,800	145,600	2.48	152,520	
Ealing	Outer	339,700	124,400	2.7	130,530	
Enfield	Outer	314,000	120,500	2.59	123,800	
Greenwich	Outer	255,500	101,400	2.47	106,880	
Hackney	Inner	247,600	102,100	2.41	106,750	
Hammersmith and Fulham	Inner	182,800	80,600	2.25	85,270	
Haringey	Inner	256,400	102,200	2.49	106,640	
Harrow	Outer	241,100	94,800	2.62	98,410	
Havering	Outer	238,300	97,500	2.43	100,260	
Hillingdon	Outer	276,100	100,800	2.67	107,460	
Hounslow	Outer	255,300	95,300	2.66	98,790	
Islington	Inner	206,600	93,700	2.14	100,760	
Kensington and Chelsea	Inner	158,700	70,400	1.99	86,540	
Kingston upon Thames	Outer	160,500	63,800	2.46	66,410	
Lambeth	Inner	304,800	130,600	2.31	136,260	
Lewisham	Inner	277,500	116,500	2.36	122,820	
Merton	Outer	201,200	79,100	2.53	82,710	
Newham	Inner	311,900	102,300	3.03	108,810	
Redbridge	Outer	281,500	100,000	2.8	102,650	
Richmond upon Thames	Outer	187,500	80,100	2.31	83,780	
Southwark	Inner	209,400	120,700	2.35	128,360	
Sutton	Outer	191,500	78,600	2.42	81,240	
Tower Hamlets	Inner	256,700	102,100	2.48	110,790	
Waltham Forest	Outer	260,400	97,400	2.66	100,310	
Wandsworth	Inner	308,300	130,800	2.32	138,840	
Westminster	Inner	219,600	105,900	2.02	121,120	
London total		8,217,500	3,278,300	2.48	3,454,490	
Inner London		3,247,800	1,367,800	2.37	1,460,840	
Outer London		4,969,700	1,910,700	2.60	1,993,650	

Historical background)

"1.8. Since the turn of the millennium the net increase in London's housing stock has been relatively rapid, due to large numbers of new homes from conversions and changes of use.

"Each year between 2011 and 2015 saw around 18,700 new homes built and stock growth of around 24,100."

It also publishes (p.111) the table shown here with figures showing a surplus of dwelling stock over households in every London borough. London Forum members

may find this useful. It is a pity the authors did not publish up-to-date figures.

According to the Empty Homes in England Report 2017 the total figure for dwellings went up last year to 3,543,444* while the GLA itself gave a figure of 3,541,000 households for 2016.**

If these figures are wrong why publish them?

If they are right then the number of new houses needed to be built each year is being greatly exaggerated. I think we are entitled to an explanation.

There is a severe problem of "hidden homelessness" but a report by the London Assembly Housing Committee, September 2017, makes it clear that this is due to illness, job loss, rising rents, and relationship breakdown. Building more houses they cannot afford will not solve the problems of these people. As John Humphries said on Radio 4, "London is oversupplied with homes that are too expensive." It has also been pointed out that if the *raison d'être* for building tens of thousands of new houses - bringing prices down - were actually to work, thousands of other people would find themselves in negative equity.

There is a big difference between a 'shortage of dwellings' *tout court*, and a shortage of **affordable** dwellings, which needs a different solution. Just leaving the whole thing to commercial housebuilders whose job is not to subsidise affordable housing but to boost their profits, seems misguided, to say the least. The Empty Homes charity suggest that more new affordable homes should be created from empty properties, alongside the building of new homes. Lord Gary Porter, the Conservative head of the Local Government Association, has called for the Treasury to lift harsh restrictions on borrowing to allow local authorities to build the homes themselves. He says: "Ultimately, the private sector will never build enough of the homes the country needs on its own."

Until some of these questions are answered it seems unreasonable to impose the sort of policies proposed in the London Plan. ■

*Department for Communities and Local Government (2016) Live Tables on Dwelling Stock

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Open Meeting - the New London Plan

London Forum's Open Meeting on January 29 heard a presentation from **Darren Richards**, accompanied by a team of six people from the GLA, each responsible for a particular section of the Plan, to answer members' questions
Peter Pickering reports

Peter Eversden and Michael Bach opened the meeting by contrasting the new Mayor's value-driven Plan with the more technocratic ones of his predecessors. It sought good growth - that is, accommodating the increasing population of London in a way that people would be comfortable with. The process would take a long time. The present question was "Are we travelling in the right direction?"

Darren Richards's presentation related the draft Plan to the other strategies that were statutorily required of the Mayor, and, unlike the plan were not subject to an Examination-in-Public. It was more directive than its predecessors - its policies could be applied immediately at the local level, without any need to repeat London Plan policies in local plans. Boroughs were to deliver more locally specific and delivery focused documents. The Plan sought 'Good Growth' - economically and socially inclusive, and environmentally sustainable, growth. It aimed to build strong and inclusive communities - a city open, inclusive and accessible to all, encouraging different communities to meet, interact and integrate, and preserving and enhancing the most valued features and services of London. The Plan protected existing social infrastructure that was needed, and supported the delivery of new facilities accessible for all. It sought innovative design solutions to enable co-location of uses, and would secure the availability of workspace. Town centres should offer a wider range of leisure, culture and community uses to complement retail; the provision of public toilets should be increased. New housing should be accessible. The Healthy Streets Approach should maximise active travel and improve health and wellbeing.

To make best use of land the Plan sought intensification, co-location and optimising density through a design-led approach. Green Belt, Metropolitan Open Land and other important green and open spaces would still be strongly protected; proactively promoting intensification in appropriate locations right across the capital, particularly around stations and town centres, with an emphasis on mixed use development, would ensure that land worked harder. There was no pre-determined maximum or minimum density in the Plan; in its design-led approach the appropriate form and scale

of new development was to be established through a design process taking account of the site context, and the capacity of supporting existing and planned infrastructure. The Plan emphasised the integration of land use and transport, with an ambitious mode shift target of 80% of all trips by walking, cycling and public transport by 2041. The Plan was more spatially specific than previous plans, with a renewed focus on opportunity areas, and had new collaboration agreements with partners in the East and South-East of England. The Plan had several policies to improve health outcomes: increasing green cover; improving air quality; and promoting active travel through 'Healthy Streets'.

Delivering the homes Londoners needed was central to the Plan: around 66,000 homes a year were to be provided while protecting the Green Belt; small sites were to play a greater role in housing delivery. The quality as well as the quantity of new homes was to be increased. The Plan included a strategic aim for 50% of new homes to be affordable, only in exceptional circumstances provided off-site or as a cash contribution; a threshold approach to viability would incentivise 35% affordable housing and help speed-up planning decisions. The Plan focused on growing a good economy, protecting the nationally-significant clusters of high-spec offices as well as small-scale offices and lower-cost workspace and giving stronger protection to industrial premises. The Plan supported the Mayor's vision for a 24-hour city, and his aim for London to be zero-carbon by 2050, and resilient to a changing climate. The Plan would be followed with supplementary Planning Frameworks and Good Practice Guides.

A lively discussion session followed.

Questions and Answers

The density matrix

Mr Eversden emphasised the intensification that would be required by the increase from 42,000 to 66,000 new dwellings a year, and the need to achieve such an increase in a sustainable and acceptable way. The decision to abandon the density matrix and rely on design should be revisited - were the boroughs properly equipped to cope with it? Professor Edwards said that this change would be challenged by many - the upper

limit in the matrix was a deterrent to overpaying by a developer for land, and its abolition could lead to price rises. Mr Bach asked for SPG to help boroughs judge.

A: The Mayor accepted that replacing the matrix by design criteria would require more work and resources for boroughs - the 20% increase in fees would help.

Q: (Wandsworth) Abolishing the density matrix would make it very difficult to object to over-development.

A: That had never been the purpose of the density matrix; boroughs need to be more specific. Mr Eversden added that there were many provisions scattered around the draft Plan that were rather like those of the matrix and could be the basis for reasoned objections to planning applications.

Q: Michael Bach asked why there was nothing corresponding to the minimum density in the current London Plan.

A: The requirement on boroughs to meet housing need would operate against underuse of land.

Q: (Hammersmith) How could the Mayor reassure people that increasing density would not mean more high rise buildings; he must provide more detail.

A: Higher density did not necessarily mean more high rise, though 3 or 4 storey buildings might come into 2-storey environments; the draft Plan asked boroughs to be clear where tall buildings would be allowed, and the design guidance would set out priorities.

Green Belt

Q: The Sydenham Society queried the decision to leave the Green Belt intact - there was marginal land in it, for instance golf courses.

A: Protecting the Green Belt was in Sadiq Khan's manifesto, and regeneration of other land was much the preferable option; but some minor incursions, for instance for schools, might be permitted.

Q: What about building beyond the Green Belt - for instance with New Towns?

A: This subject was being discussed, and Crossrail would extend London's catchment area; but the Mayor had no authority beyond the boundary of Greater London, and had to work with over a hundred different councils.

Opportunity Areas

Q: Fears of a loss of control, (Michael Bach); a democratic deficit in the arrangements

(Professor Edwards); and protection of green spaces (Brentford). There seemed to be no rules for Opportunity Areas (OAs) or any link between density and public transport connectivity or the availability of parking.

A: Cases involving schools and Metropolitan Open Land had to be referred to the Mayor - the judgement might be different according to whether the land was to be used for building or for playing fields. They were working hard on OAs: the King's Cross framework was completed and there would be a programme for supporting the boroughs. OAs differed greatly amongst themselves, and flexibility was needed. But there should be a link with the provision of transport infrastructure, and perhaps requirements about phasing.

Dissatisfaction in the outer suburbs

Q: (Barnet) Defining everything within 800 metres of a town centre and station as being appropriate for densification was an attack on the suburbs (there would be very little in London outside such a boundary). People had chosen to live in the suburbs because that was the ambience they wanted for themselves and their families. There would be a backlash unless local plans could protect the suburbs.

(Sutton) They felt embattled by the draft Plan, which would radically change their area. They had recently been through an Examination-in-Public of their Local Plan. How could they stop the draft Plan and keep family homes?

(Pinner) Lots of housing was going up, either very small or very expensive; why should there be more? Some of what was proposed in the draft plan was social engineering, and almost a declaration of war on the suburbs.

A: The draft Plan was still to be tested at the Examination-in-Public, but the need for more dwellings had to be met (the Mayor's figure for housing need in London was lower than the Government's). Much of the way in which the relevant provisions in the Plan were implemented would be for the boroughs. Only one-third of the family-size accommodation in London was actually occupied by families. The Plan would greatly increase the amount of affordable housing - boroughs would be able to require affordable housing to be occupied by families.

Housing and transport

Q: (Finsbury Park) There was dismay about

what was going on - ugly high rise, luxury developments left empty ('buy-to-leave').

A: The Mayor's aim was to reverse such undesirable trends and to increase the amount of affordable housing. The Government too was reining back on the viability testing that enabled developers to evade their obligations on affordable housing.

Q: Mark Jopling (Udny Park Playing Fields) spoke of the proposal of a developer to build houses on playing fields after giving half of the land for the park; the developer seemed confident of winning on appeal.

A: To defeat such a proposal on appeal there would have to be a robust and up-to-date local plan, and proper arguments would have to be put to the Inspector. Mr Eversden added that a third party right of appeal was desirable to prevent planning authorities from giving approvals contrary to a local plan.

Q: (Sydenham) a developer wanted to clear a site and build a retail supermarket; the Society believed residential would be more appropriate.

A: The team expressed some surprise that this was proposed in the present climate for retail. The aim of the Plan was to integrate retail with residential, transport etc.

Q: Andrew Bosi (Islington) argued that all housing should be 'affordable' in different categories according to definitions and criteria. Densification round stations would work only if the stations could cope and if there were free spaces on the trains (if for instance there were interchanges so that passengers were getting off as well as on). Putney Society queried the way in which stations were built - Network Rail seemed to take no account of the town centre, or of what people actually did when they went out of the station - this had become more relevant with the introduction of the Night Tube.

A: An aim of the Plan was to diversify the way people moved about London and realign the bus network.

Heritage and tourism

Q: (Wimbledon) What about any tourist impact assessment - what growth was expected to be derived from the heritage?

A: They were confident that London could cope with the visitor numbers forecast - they were looking especially at the implications for Westminster.

Q: Michael Coupe (Dulwich Society) said

than the policies in the draft Plan on the heritage were good, but he feared they would not be enforced - witness the dereliction of the duty to protect the World Heritage Sites. There were places in the draft Plan where 'should' should become 'shall', or 'must'. There could be more in the draft about heritage-led regeneration.

A: They were putting more reasons into the draft, so that the Mayor would be able to intervene more often than his predecessor had.

Other concerns

Q: The Camden Civic Society and others asked about collaboration amongst borough councils.

A: This should be through local plans and through boroughs' own desire for growth and provision of housing; the GLA would produce design guides and support design panels. There would be a lot of monitoring by the Mayor to check that collaboration was working. Mr Eversden emphasised that civic societies should examine local plans rigorously to ensure that they included proper site allocation and protected against bad development.

Q: Camden Civic Society raised the particular case of Euston Square Gardens, which they described as scandalous.

A: This was entirely for Camden Council (this was disputed).

Q: Robert Gurd (Ealing Civic Society) regretted the virtual absence from the draft plan of anything about neighbourhood planning, and said that the faith in design panels was misplaced (they had not been a success in Ealing).

A: Since Neighbourhood Plans were not mandatory, and had to be in conformity with the Local Plan it was not appropriate to cover them in the London Plan. As for design panels, the GLA would provide guidance and support - they should match up architects in the public and private sectors.

The team concluded by saying that if people found anything obscure in the draft Plan they should ask the team, who were there to help, about it. Mr Eversden urged everyone to put in comments and have their say before the deadline of 2nd March; the more comments the better the Plan should become. Mr Bach emphasised the need for community focus. ■

Airport Expansion...the horror story continues

An update on what is going on about airport expansion around London from **Daniel Instone**, a member of the Forum's Planning Environment and Transport Committee

Many readers will remember that well before the 2015 election David Cameron's coalition Government appointed a commission under Sir Howard Davies to examine the options for expansion of airports in the south east, and in particular whether any new runway should be built and if so where. As requested by the Cameron Government, Davies reported just after the 2015 election recommending a new runway to the North West of Heathrow, in preference to his other two short-listed options: a runway extension to the east of Heathrow; and expansion of Gatwick. Even though the Gatwick option was considerably cheaper and had much smaller environmental consequences, Davies saw greater economic benefits from Heathrow expansion justifying these disadvantages.

In October 2016 the Government announced that it agreed with the Davies Commission's recommendation. In February 2017 it consulted on a so-called national policy statement reaffirming its belief in Heathrow expansion on Davies' lines. In October 2017 it consulted again, on a revised national policy statement, mainly because aviation demand forecasts had been revised upwards. Most recently, the private sector owners of Heathrow, encouraged by the Government, launched a consultation both on more detailed aspects of the new runway design, and also on how to organise the flight paths into the airport, based on alternative criteria for allocating among different localities the extra noise nuisance that would be caused. This latest consultation will close on 28 March 2018.

All this is highly unsatisfactory for very many Londoners. The London Forum responded both to the Davies Commission's consultation and to the two consultations launched by the Government referred to above.

Key points in London Forum responses

The key points in our responses, shared by many other environmental groups, as well as by the Mayor and most local authorities in west and south-west London, have been as follows:

London Forum will continue to argue against central government that expansion of Heathrow should be strongly opposed. We will not be alone in this view

- The case for expansion rests on a 'predict and provide' philosophy, for both passengers and freight, which has been largely abandoned for many other kinds of transport investment, and so should be for aviation too, replaced by a system of more actively managing demand, including, through greater economic incentives, to reduce impacts on the environment;
- Heathrow already inflicts noise on far more people than any other European airport, much more than Gatwick; and runway expansion will significantly add to this, as well as substantially reducing periods of noise respite for individual communities. Although the Government proposes an independent noise body to monitor and advise on noise issues, it rejected the stronger proposal by the Davies commission (which even Heathrow airport appears to support) to give this body statutory enforcement powers.
- The resulting extra flights and the associated road traffic movements will make it even harder to meet EU air quality limits.
- The cost of the Government's favoured option, last estimated at between £14 and £18 billion, is much greater than the Gatwick option, at around £7 billion (both estimates including construction and surface access costs to travel to and from the airport).
- Transport for London think that the Davies Commission and the Government have underestimated the surface access costs to Heathrow and

the impact the new runway would have on congestion. There is also no clarity on how much of those costs would be borne by the airport's owners, rather than the taxpayer.

- The Government's second consultation on the National Policy statement reported that, even with a new North West Heathrow runway, on its own latest (upwardly revised) forecasts, the airport will be at full capacity by 2028, only about 3 years after the new runway would be expected to open, due largely to pent-up demand. Yet the Government has provided no clarity on what would happen after 2028, other than to endorse the Davies commission's recommendation of ruling out a fourth runway at Heathrow, something that the owners of Heathrow, in their latest consultation, appear to agree with. Would "predict and provide" then be abandoned?

No more than a short-term patch-up

Given these points, the case for Heathrow expansion appears not only very environmentally damaging, but is no more than a short-term patch-up. This makes it entirely unsustainable, in not providing either a durable, or a coherent, solution.

The latest consultation by Heathrow (see above) is difficult to deal with. It is wholly predicated on the assumption, which of course we have not accepted, that expansion of Heathrow will go ahead, a question that is for Government to decide on, rather than Heathrow's owners.

Moreover different communities across London are likely to have conflicting views about where they would like fly-paths to be located. Individual amenity societies may, however, wish to respond to this consultation.

At London Forum, we will continue to argue against central government that expansion of Heathrow should be strongly opposed. We will not be alone in this view. ■

Transport for London in financial difficulties.

Transport for London's (TfL) draft business plan published at the end of last year shows it is facing major financial challenges with falling income from fares and the loss, this year, of its government grant of £700m-a-year. It is now the only major public transport body in Europe not subsidised by central government. On top of that there is the freeze on fares from 2017 to 2020 implemented by the London Mayor which will cost £640m over four years.

At a recent London Assembly Budget Committee, TfL commissioner Mike Brown revealed the scale of the fall in passenger numbers: tube journeys were down an entirely unexpected 2 per cent, (13 million fewer journeys); TfL rail journeys down by 4 per cent and DLR and London Overground demand flat. TfL's 2016 business plan estimated fare incomes of £4.88bn in 2017/2018; this has had to be downgraded to £4.66bn in its most recent business plan.

TfL is currently embarking on a "transformation" programme to drive efficiencies and has succeeded in hitting many of its cost-cutting targets in its first year. It aims to find a further £1.2bn in efficiencies by 2023 through value-engineering.

However the lack of cash puts projects in jeopardy and it already appears to be having some impact. TfL's most recent business plan in November put estimated capital spend across 2020/21 and 2021/22 nearly £1bn lower than what was predicted in 2016. It is hoped that the central part of the Elizabeth Line will open this year and that it will increase footfall.

Nobody quite knows why passenger numbers have dropped; suggestions are that we are seeing lifestyle shifts that reduce leisure travel; or because more people were watching films on new internet channels rather than going to the cinema; or ordering takeaways at home via an app rather than going to a restaurant. Are people switching to other modes of getting around like cycling, walking or using taxi and minicab apps? Or are they driving more because they have found overcrowded public transport too unpleasant? ■

Rethinking Voluntary Action?

Diane Burridge discusses a report by Sir Stuart Etherington: *Voluntary Action - A Way Forward*, published by the Cass Centre for Charity Effectiveness (2018)

Sir Stuart has been Chief Executive of the National Council for Voluntary Organisations since 1994

The boundaries between paid work and voluntary participation need a rethink. 'The state and citizens need to share the burdens of civilized provision for those of us who need it ... with civil society playing a leading role in delivery, organisational form and governance ... acting as a bulwark against an overweening state.' (P5)

Such bold and, to some, contentious statements are made by Sir Stuart Etherington in his report, written in a personal capacity. He notes that: 'A changing demography; an increased focus on well-being; the importance of place, institutions, and connectivity; the limits of the state; and the impact of technology' all require this rethink. To him, 'Citizens are being liberated by new technology and data', and: 'A renaissance of personal responsibility is the answer to meeting many challenges.' (P12)

How can one disagree with this, if you have the capacity – mentally, physically and financially – to take on such responsibility. But what are the sanctions if people do not? And can one sympathise with his views that accountability (when providing contracted-out services) has perhaps been 'too closely monitored' and 'issues may be too complex to adapt to simple economic analysis and linear forms of control'. (P12) But then, who is to blame when something goes wrong? What rights do those receiving services from the charity sector have?

Sir Stuart notes the growing transactional nature of the relationship between the state and the charity sector, and that grants are needed as key components of the funding mix, with more 'flexibility' needed in the contracting process.

When he states: 'We need institutions with an emphasis on innovation, locality and engagement, rather than on uniformity and equality', my immediate thoughts were: when I need care I want equality of treatment with minimum standards adhered to, and pro-actively monitored by the state.

Sir Stuart is keen on the latest organisational form, the B corporation - a for profit organisation that may have an element of public benefit. 'We need more flexible and simpler regulatory regimes to not inhibit the multiple associational responses that will be required in the post-bureaucratic age.' He advises that if organisations opt to change their status, they should not lose their assets. However, there 'would need to be a stopgap

asset lock to prevent abuse'. (P14) I had to think hard to decipher the meaning of this jargon. Is it about allowing registered charities to become private companies, with some public benefit activities? And if they change status, then these new 'B corporations' should be allowed to keep the assets, which they cannot at the moment due to Charity Law? If I have interpreted this correctly, this could be asset stripping on a massive scale over time - from the charity sector to the private sector? With even higher salaries for Directors/Chief Executives?

He advises on the need to understand more societal changes, such as the increase in the engagement of young people in voluntary activity, and the threat of robotics** to many, including lawyers, scientists and medics, which could release citizens to be more active in civil society.

Hearteningly, Sir Stuart acknowledges that: '...tethering larger organisations firmly back to their roots in communities of place and purpose is perhaps the largest leadership challenge for this section of civil society.' (P15)

In 2019, following on from Sir Stuart's very personal report, will be the publication of the 'Civil Society Futures Inquiry', chaired by Julia Unwin, former Chief Executive of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. Launched in April 2017, this two-year review aims to guide developments supporting civil society over the next ten years in England. London Forum members are key components of 'civil society' - active as volunteers, and not under contract to Government Departments to deliver services. Because we are all volunteers, we are able to express what we think about local and regional matters of concern, without worrying about any repercussions to our funding base. Such independence of spirit is surely essential for any healthy 'civil society' and democracy. We need to ensure that the Civil Society Futures Inquiry acknowledges and celebrates the huge amount of community action undertaken by civic and amenity societies, work so often taken for granted until it stops for lack of appreciation.

To keep abreast of this review and to feed in comments, see:

■ <https://civilsocietyfutures.org/about/>

*www.cass.city.ac.uk/cce

**Martin Ford, *The Rise of the Robots*, 2015 ■

Spotlight on the St Marylebone Society

Celebrating 70 years - one of the oldest amenity societies in Central London
By **Gaby Higgs**

The St Marylebone Society (SMS) was founded in 1948 after successful participation in the national campaign to save the Nash Terraces in Regent's Park. Post WW2 Marylebone, which had been badly bombed, was run down and dilapidated and there was common purpose as politicians, landowners, architects and historians joined together with a shared belief that Regent's Park and the Georgian architecture of Marylebone must be preserved and restored.

Early years

The Chairman of the SMS was Alderman Reneson Coucher FRICS, FAI, LCC an influential local politician and also a keen amateur film-maker. He recorded Marylebone during and after the war giving witness to the scale of destruction and a poignant insight of the mood of the early SMS members. As a rare example of colour footage taken during the Blitz these important films were recently digitized and edited by the SMS to bring them to a wider audience and are now archived at the Imperial War Museum.

Documenting and recording the local history and heritage of Marylebone was important to the founder members but from the outset it was unanimously agreed that the St Marylebone Society would be a Civic Society concerned not only with the past, but also with the present and future of St Marylebone, and able to present a considered public opinion on planning matters under the 1947 Planning Act.

One of its early campaigns was over the future of the 17th century St Mary's Chapel, which was on the River Tyburn and gave the village and our neighbourhood its name. Attempts to stop its demolition in 1949 failed but from this act of vandalism the Society managed, however, to secure the site and raise finance to create a public garden, as part of the 1951 Festival of Britain project. The Society restored and re-landscaped the garden in 2013 to improve its character and the setting of Charles Wesley's grave.

The Society settled down to work with committees formed for history, architecture, planning, photography and historical record keeping. A programme of lectures, visits and later photographic and art exhibitions was arranged which recruited members, spread their message and increased their

From the outset it was agreed that the St Marylebone Society would be a Civic Society concerned not only with the past, but also with the present and future of St Marylebone

network power. The first SMS lecture by Mr (later Sir) John Summerson on Architecture in St Marylebone was followed by many other speakers, all eminent in their fields. It would be fair to describe the mid-century SMS as middle class, motivated, self-reliant, highly educated and well connected; a founder member reminisced in conversation that, "... we were only one phone call away from Attlee".

Working with local authorities

The Society acted as Consultative Body to the LCC and Marylebone Borough Council and in 1952 spoke at the Public Inquiry on The County of London Plan. Evidence presented by the Honorary Secretary, Ruth Eldridge, started the fight to get the Marylebone Station Railway Goods Yard released for housing and amenity uses, a vision realised with Lisson Green development decades later.

From 1965 the SMS continued to be consulted by Westminster City Council (WCC) for the whole of the historic Borough of St Marylebone. The Planning Committee met monthly to deal with an increasing volume of applications and policy consultations. The St John's Wood Society was formed in the 1960s and took over as official consultee for the northern part of St Marylebone, thus reducing the area of SMS planning consultation. By the 1980s WCC were concerned that the responses made by the SMS committee were lacking in detail and especially as more complex developments required greater input and expertise. The workload was too great for the volunteers and the solution was to further divide the SMS geographical remit.

The George, Blandford, Baker Society (GBBS) was a residents' group which had come into existence specifically to oppose a modern development bounded by those three streets in W1. It was proposed by WCC that this group take on the planning area south of the Marylebone Road, and act as a consultative body to the Council. GBBS changed their name to be the Marylebone Association to reflect their greater area of interest and the organisation was established in 1982. Today the three amenity societies coexist, collaborate and support similar objectives.

Transport and traffic

One of the reasons the SMS were so stretched in the 1980s was also due to their sustained campaign over 2 years to prevent the demolition of the Great Central Hotel and the closure of Marylebone Station and its conversion to a busway and coach terminus. This was achieved by the Society connecting with many other local and national groups, across the political spectrum, and taking the lead role in coordinating a campaign that lasted over 2 years. Special mention should be made of the late Sam Briddes, who worked tirelessly to lobby residents and argue with experts on the technical problems of the conversion of the tracks into the proposed Bus Rail. This was perhaps the Society's greatest success and has had a lasting positive impact on Marylebone in both townscape and economic terms.

Transport and traffic changes impact everyone, draw the most objections and concerns from residents and in recent years the Society's agenda has expanded to take the initiative in tackling environmental issues such as congestion, safe cycling and pollution.

The Society recently supported the Baker Street 2-Way project, in the face of much hostile local opposition, because having been involved throughout its 9-year gestation, working with the stakeholders, the Society understood and believed in its ambitions to improve the urban environment. That said, in the spirit of our founders' strident independence, over the past 3 years the Society have self-funded the collection of accurate data and collaborated with university researchers at Imperial College to monitor traffic and pollution levels in order to be able to compare and, if necessary,

Profile



The St Marylebone Society

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Chair Gaby Higgs

challenge the official results post-implementation in 2019. On-line interactive pollution maps have been published where one can identify a specific street and get pollution data. In the future we hope that this evidence will be useful to raise public awareness and lobby TfL and Westminster City Council to improve air quality and reduce traffic congestion in Marylebone.

(see <http://www.londonair.org.uk/LondonAir/Default.aspx>)

When the Localism Act 2012 was passed the Society decided not to convert into a Neighbourhood Forum but to retain their autonomy. With volunteers in short supply it makes sense to consolidate, focus on the Society's strengths and be involved in activities which we find interesting or enjoyable and where we can hope to make a difference. The St Marylebone Society trustees and members, and readers of this article, cannot imagine not being involved in protecting and enhancing the place where one lives; but we are a minority. How we inspire a younger generation to feel the same passion for the urban environment, a sense of ownership of public spaces and a belief that one can effect change through civic participation is perhaps our biggest challenge. ■



Memorial garden 1951 copyright The Times

The new Marylebone Station



Age: 70

Circumstances of Birth: Founded in 1948 by local residents who had been active in the Gorell Report and Public Enquiry, which successfully prevented the demolition of the Nash Terraces in Regent's Park.

Biggest Successes: Saving Marylebone Station from closure in 1984. Protecting period street furniture, cast iron bollards, railings and landscaping is also important as these are relatively easy battles to win and accumulate into enhancing the wider townscape.

Biggest Disappointments/Frustrations: The loss of the 17th century St Mary's Chapel; the demolition of Charles Dickens's House at 1 Devonshire Place to make way for a mediocre 1950s office development. In 2008, and despite the support of Westminster Council, the Society failed at the Public Enquiry to save the Magistrates' Courts building, which was formerly one of the first Victorian Public Baths in London.

Present Preoccupations: Campaigning to protect environmental amenity. Trying to save a small Victorian schoolhouse on Bell Street, opposite the Grade 2 * Christ Church on Cosway Street from demolition.

Working Details: The Society's constitution was devised from a template produced by the Central Council of Civic Societies (1939), whose Secretary, Ethel Bright Ashford, was also a founder member of the St Marylebone Society. A 'Council' of 10 Trustees meets every quarter. There are several committees, including a 10 member planning committee (established in 1948) which looks at planning applications and discusses policy, conservation and campaigns. Programme of lectures, visits and exhibitions. Since 2000 the Society has hosted an annual planning walk with Westminster Planning Department and is a statutory consultee for the Marylebone North planning area.

Special Characteristics: In a time of great transience in populations across London the SMS is unusual in representing a membership from a very stable population retaining many loyal members for decades. Almost all members are Freeholders and reside there in their only or main home, an unusual pattern in Central London. The Society enjoys good connectivity and networking possibilities with neighbouring societies, the Marylebone Association and St John's Wood Society.

Last Word: Despite a stable and well-connected membership, it is evident that we are an aging group and, despite concerted efforts, we struggle to attract younger members who are as interested as we are in architecture, conservation and environmental matters, with the time and interest for civic and democratic participation in local politics and planning. ■

Public Parks as economic assets

In the wake of the disastrous court ruling on Finsbury Park

Diane Burridge delves into recent reports about parks for facts and figures

Parks as economic assets, other than as mere generators of income from events? The days of seeing public parks as having intrinsic value in just being parks have disappeared. They are now economic entities with ascribed quantifiable values. How sad is this? But I suppose we need to be grateful for any strategy which promotes the value of parks, even in a utilitarian way - anything to help stall the cuts being made to parks around the country.

How much are parks worth?

We know that London is one of the greenest cities of its size in the world, and we know that our green areas are under constant threat of privatisation. Vivid Economics, commissioned by the Greater London Authority, the National Trust and the Heritage Lottery Fund, estimated that London's public parks have a gross asset value of more than £91 billion (30 years value at £5 billion per year discounted at 3.5% per year - using HM Treasury methods of accounting). This is a 27:1 benefit cost ratio. (October 2017)

Public parks are defined as areas free to enter and use, and do not include, for example, private gardens, golf courses, and canals and rivers. A new field of study, Natural Capital Accounting, describes those components of the natural environment that provide economic benefit to people for free - such as cleaner air, cleaner water, better health, pollination of crops, contact with nature and attractive landscapes. Such accounting is increasingly being undertaken to represent the value of 'ecosystem services', alongside more traditional economic methodology.

Over the last ten years, many studies have linked the existence of public parks to favourable economic and environmental outcomes. In Sheffield, for instance, for every £1 spent on maintaining parks, £34 of benefits are generated through mainly physical and mental health savings to the health service and the economy more widely. (Vivid Economics, 2016)

'Social Return on Investment' methodology was used by Edinburgh Council in 2014 to find that for every £1 spent on parks, there was £12 in wider social returns. And even the World Health

The World Health Organisation recognised in 2016 that urban green spaces enable city residents to live healthier and happier lives.

Organisation, that bastion of 'government spending efficiency savings' recognised in 2016 that urban green spaces enable city residents to live healthier and happier lives. How can it take this long to realise such a truth?

Density of public parks

Back to London: the average density of public parks for the whole of Greater London is 20% - with huge variations: from 40% of Richmond's land area being park land to 8% in Newham. The Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham has 12% coverage only, and both Islington and Southwark have 13% (Vivid Economics Report, October 2017). Unsurprisingly, there is a positive relationship between current local authority spending per hectare of public park and the economic value derived. This is particularly high for the London Boroughs of Islington and Kensington and Chelsea, where there is so little green space. As the report states: 'The high fixed costs of maintaining public parks may mean that boroughs with more parks are able to manage these spaces at lower costs per unit of parkland'. (page 22)

Physical inactivity increases the likelihood of five major illnesses: cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, obesity, colon cancer and breast cancer. (Chief Medical Officer, UK. 2011) The total value of avoided health care costs due to London's public parks is £950 million per year. The exact relationship between mental and physical health and access to parks is still uncertain, as research to date has been based on self-evaluation. More sensitive research techniques need to be developed. The greatest economic benefit of public parks is to house-owners living near parks due to increased house prices. To do so

gives an uplift to house prices of 3.4%.

But who uses parks? The Royal Parks found that 54% of park users were residents of London, 17% were from the rest of the UK, and 24% came from abroad. (2015) And how do different groups of people use parks and benefit from this use? Sport England is now undertaking a multi-year study on the relationship between park use and socio-economic outcomes.

Park budgets are falling

Yet, whilst the positive impact of public parks is obvious, if not as yet fully quantifiable, cuts continue and parks deteriorate. Ninety-two percent of park managers across the UK reported, to a study by the Heritage Lottery Fund in 2016, that overall park budgets have fallen.

Worryingly, the Vivid Economics Report offers suggestions on alternative funding for parks. One idea is to charge residents living near public parks more to fund the upkeep of these, as is done in Green Benefit Districts in San Francisco. The street landscape in areas without parks could be greened rather than have parks, where these are 'difficult' to provide. And could the health service fund parks as they save costs to the health service? You could continue, I suppose, and ask the education service to contribute? My thoughts were: With such a variety of funding sources possible, the cost of managing these could end up being more than the funds generated.

The Outdoor Recreation Valuation (ORVal) tool (Day and Smith, 2016) estimates the economic value people are willing to pay to use a particular park for recreational activities, partly based on the cost of travel to visit. This is £120 per year per person in London. I wonder about those people unable to pay? And children - were they included in this research? How sad that we cannot just support the improvement, retention and ideally the expansion of public parks, in appreciation of how essential they are for our mental and physical well-being on so many levels. They should be statutory responsibilities with dedicated budgets, not just seen as income generators and economic assets, needing to earn their right to exist. ■

Disappointing ruling for Friends of Finsbury Park

There has been a most disappointing ruling in the Court of Appeal on the use of London parks for entertainments. The Court rejected the claims of the appellants, the Friends of Finsbury Park, backed by the Open Spaces Society, that the council's primary duty was to hold the park in trust for public recreation, and that facilitating a major ticket-only event, to the exclusion of the public generally, was a breach of that trust. The court found that section 145 of the Local Government Act 1972, in conferring a power on all local authorities to 'enclose or set apart any part of a park' for the provision of entertainment, implied that Haringey could exclude the public for the purposes of setting up and breaking down the event infrastructure in the periods leading up to and following the performances.

It is a worrying development for the

future of any space for "quiet enjoyment" in London, with the gadarene rush by local councils to squeeze revenue out of "their" assets. As Richard Morrison of The Times, wrote last November in support of the campaign: "A park should be an oasis of peace, not the site of a rock festival."

Hugh Craddock, one of the Open Spaces Society's case officers, said: 'Some councils have acted as if their parks were their own private land, and rented them out to maximise revenue. With that has come maximum disruption for park users seeking quiet recreation, a place to walk the dog, or just an opportunity to reflect.'

Petition for Park funding

On the 38 Degrees website there is petition to seek continuation of the HLF grants to parks which HLF is considering reducing. ■

Parks should be statutory responsibilities with dedicated budgets, not just seen as income generators and economic assets, needing to earn their right to exist.

Natural Capital Accounts for Public Green Space in London

Summarised from: The Vivid Economics, October 2017

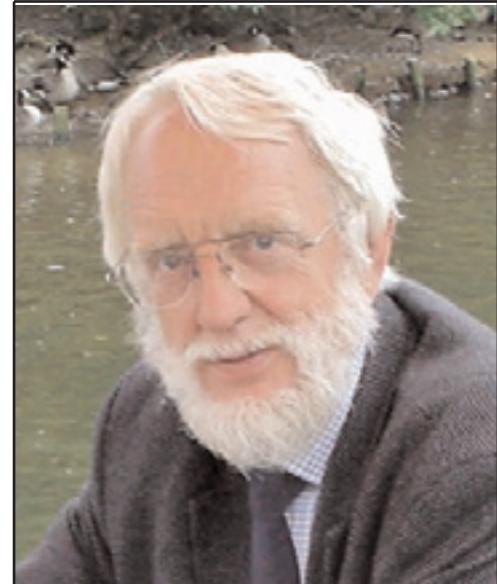
PARK BENEFIT	Economic Value (£billion)=present value over 30 years, using 3.5% discount rate	%	Gross asset value/saving
Physical Health	11	12	£580m/year
Mental Health	7	7	£370m/year
Residential Property	56	61	£930/household/year
Recreation	17	19	£930m/£120/head/year
Others: Carbon in soil and trees* Temperature Regulation**	1	1	Carbon saving: £18m/year Temp regulation: £594m/year
Gross Asset Value	91	100	£5billion/year

*Forestry Commission (2011), the London Tree Eco Project (2015), and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (2017).

**Based on the number of lives saved due to cooler peak temperature, monetised through the value of avoiding premature deaths. (Vivid Economics, 2017)

Derek Chandler

1938 - 2018



London Forum is deeply saddened to announce the death of Derek Chandler, Honorary Secretary to the Forum for many years.

Derek was so special: warm, generous, kind hearted, and funny; he is a huge loss to the Forum and to all who knew him.

Derek fought a long battle with illness with immense fortitude, trying not to let it make any difference to his work for the Forum to which he gave so selflessly.

A Patent Attorney by training, he brought his analytical skills to bear on issues with which London Forum had to deal. His involvement on any subject was always carefully considered, well-reasoned, and quietly and courteously presented. He could always be looked to for a balanced and considered view on committee matters. Ever ready to give his time, from helping to wash up after LF open meetings to combing through the GLA website to compile information about consultations that the committees should consider.

In retirement he was a Director of the Incorporated Benevolent Association of the Chartered Institute of Patent Attorneys, and kept up with old friends from Mercers School.

Our thoughts are with his wife Sue and his family. We shall remember him with enormous affection and will greatly miss him. ■

Woodberry Down Estate Regeneration Programme – for whom?

As 55% of the properties built in Phase 1 have already been sold to overseas investors, mainly from the Asian market, **Diane Burridge** asks will Hackney Council's target of 41% affordable housing be met?

The regeneration programme of the massive 26 hectares Woodberry Down Estate in Hackney is one of London's largest. Completed in the 1970s, the Estate then comprised 57 blocks of 5-8 storey buildings which provided 2,013 new council homes. Of these, 425 had been sold by 2009 under right to buy, leaving 1,588 in public ownership.

Construction works started in 2009 with a forecast completion date of 2032. Of the 2,013 homes, 1,980 of these are planned to be demolished and replaced with 5,557 new ones - 3,292 for private sale, 1,177 for shared ownership and 1,088 for social renting – 500 less than were available at the start of the regeneration programme. Tenants and residents were involved in the planning of this regeneration programme, with the Woodberry Down Community Organisation (WDCO) resident steering group liaising with Berkeley Homes and Genesis Housing Association. Funding is coming from the Homes and Communities Agency, part of the Greater London Authority, Hackney Council, and private investment.

Adopted in 2007, the masterplan was updated in 2009 and again in 2014, allowing for an eight-phase programme, and agreeing 17% more housing than originally approved, seen now in the increased height to 30 storeys of several of the private blocks. Genesis Housing Association will be building 1,900 homes - 41% of new homes - which includes all the new social rented homes.

Community facilities

As well as housing, the regeneration programme has developed: the Skinners' Academy; the Redmond Community Centre; six retail units; the Edge, a refurbished youth centre; the Green park; and the Woodberry Wetlands Nature Reserve, containing the West and East reservoirs which still provide water to Thames Water. This Nature Reserve has new public pathways and the Coal House Cafe, managed by the London Wildlife Trust, and ceremonially opened early 2016 by David Attenborough. Recognised by the Green Flag Award Scheme, and Highly Commended by the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management, this Nature Reserve was the venue for the

With 500 fewer homes for social renting on the Estate there is not much hope for people on the Council's waiting list.

Mayor, Sadiq Khan, when launching his plans to make London one of the greenest cities on earth, in August 2017.

Social regeneration programme

Genesis Housing Association, which directly manages 33,000 homes across London, also developed a social regeneration programme, with projects for this run by the Manor House Development Trust, based at the Redmond Community Centre. These include: all cleaning and grounds maintenance staff being from the local area; the Avanta and Beyond Business programme which provides free advice and support to help residents set up businesses or social enterprises; a volunteer coordinator with 1,000 volunteers registered; a Woodberry Works Club for residents looking to gain employment or training; and a 'Women into Construction' training programme.

Finally, a Community Grants Scheme awards funding for activities including: martial arts; training courses for older people and drama training for young people. Other community benefits include 20% of the 90-person workforce for Berkeley Homes coming from Hackney; as well as 19 apprentices, half of the total number.

And yet.....

It all sounds wonderful. And yet, and yet as I wander around the area, I see incongruously massive 30 storey glass apartment blocks with so few lights on at night. I see the beautiful Wetlands Nature Reserve – so peaceful to look at as a blue space and for bird watching - but where are the green open spaces for teenagers and others to play sports? The cafe is wonderful, if you can afford to eat there. The main centre of activity is the Redmond Community Centre which certainly deserves the many awards that it has

received, and relies upon constant fund-raising and the support of volunteers.

Again we have an estate regeneration programme where many of the new private homes have been sold to overseas investors and left empty - 55% of the properties built in Phase 1 were bought by overseas investors, mainly from the Asian market. (The British Property Federation in 2013 reported that 61% of all new homes sold in London were bought as investments.) A one-bedroom apartment is selling for £490,000 and a two-bedroom for £660,000, with the three-bedroom premium residences going for £1,475,000. The one-bedroom alone costs nearly 14 times the average London salary of £33,720. How can a normal family afford their share of even a shared ownership home? And with 500 fewer homes for social renting on the Estate when the scheme is completed, there is not much hope for people on the Council's waiting list.

Of the eight phases for the building programme to 2032, six remain to be built, and there have been no guarantees for the tenancy mix for these - all are to be subject to the famous 'viability' assessments. Will Hackney Council's target of 41% affordable housing be met?

And I see yet more green open space on council housing estates being built on for housing. Here, on the Woodberry Down Estate, where there were 2,013 homes in the 1970s, there will be 5,557 by 2032. Homes of course are needed, but people also need green open spaces, for mental and physical well-being.

I just hope that the Mayor's Good Practice Guide to Estate Regeneration - Better Homes for Local People, will achieve the balance needed for more housing with green open spaces. And that this Guide rejects housing sold overseas and left empty, only for people on housing waiting lists to gaze at with envy and, most likely, increasing anger. ■

Sources: <http://www.mhdt.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/MHDT-Impact-Report-2009-2015.pdf>

W <https://architectsforsocialhousing.wordpress.com/2017/05/12/class-war-on-woodberry-down-a-national-strategy>
<https://www.hackney.gov.uk/woodberry-down> ■

Growing problems with outsourcing and PFI

Helen Marcus reports on a National Audit Office report on PFI, and increasing problems with outsourcing, PFI, and regeneration schemes

The Private Finance Initiative (PFI) and outsourcing chickens are coming home to roost. The collapse of PFI firm Carillion provoked a flurry of questions as to the viability of these misbegotten schemes and a report by the National Audit Office on PFI and PF2 issued in January raises very serious questions. It examined the costs and benefits of PFI; its use and impact, the ability to make savings from operational contracts; and the introduction of PF2. There are currently over 700 operational PFI and PF2 deals, with a capital value of around £60 billion. The annual charges for these deals amounted to £10.3 billion in 2016-17. Even if no new deals are entered into, future charges which continue until the 2040s amount to £199 billion.

Many facilities built through these schemes are finding it increasingly difficult to repay their ongoing costs amid rising inflation and real cuts in government funding. Schools are 40 per cent more expensive and are having to resort to staff cuts, and increasing class sizes, while hospitals cost 60 per cent more than the public sector alternative and cannot now afford the necessary staff or cope with winter crises due to the reduction of beds which were part of the PFI contract demands.

The real costs

But lessons do not seem to have been learned. Despite this report from its own department, the Treasury has reaffirmed its commitment to using the PFI, and more schemes under the rebranded PF2 name are under way. "Transferring the risks of construction and long-term maintenance of a project to the private sector protects taxpayers' money," it said. Has the Treasury read the report? The NAO found "no evidence" that assets are operated more efficiently and said that prices are often further inflated to cover unforeseen costs. The cost of PFI capital - a mix of equity and debt - has almost always been higher than public borrowing, and in many projects has been more than twice the interest rate on a 20-year government gilt. Moreover in the wake of the Carillion disaster the excuse that the private sector carries the risk of the schemes has been blown apart - the government will have to rescue some of

The NAO found "no evidence" that assets are operated more efficiently and said that prices are often further inflated to cover unforeseen costs. The cost of PFI capital has almost always been higher than public borrowing.

the services now at risk. A further complication is that PFI schemes get sold on to investors, making it obscure who is responsible for future problems.

Several 'regeneration' projects in doubt

There is growing antagonism to the lucrative property contracts on housing projects between London boroughs and development companies in the name of regeneration. Haringey, Camden, Lambeth, Southwark and Westminster are all facing increasing opposition to such plans.

Haringey HDV in disarray

The £2 billion Haringey Development Vehicle (HDV) scheme to demolish and rebuild at least two large council estates is in disarray. Under the HDV plan selected property would be transferred into a company vehicle on the basis of a 50/50 split with developer Lendlease, with the aim of generating homes and jobs. Critics claim there will be insufficient affordable housing and it will force residents out of the borough as estates get demolished. The controversy over the scheme deepened when Party politics took over in January causing the resignation of the Council leader. Two weeks later the High Court quashed local campaigners' attempt to get the scheme stopped in a judicial review.

Haringey has now said it will not set up the HDV until after local elections in May, when only four of Haringey's ten cabinet members will be seeking re-election,

allowing a new administration to decide its fate.

Elephant and Castle scheme deferred

There have been similar upsets over provision of affordable housing at Elephant and Castle where, in December Delancey withdrew their planning application for the Elephant and Castle Shopping Centre and the London College of Communication sites. In January Southwark's planning committee refused approval of the re-submitted application after a marathon eight-hour meeting. A fortnight later, hours before another meeting, Delancey wrote to the council making further offers and indicating that they were prepared to improve the affordable housing offer. As a result councillors voted 7-1 to defer consideration of the scheme till a later date.

The main problem is that none of these schemes is providing the affordable housing that is needed - as Diane Burridge explains in the article on Woodberry Down. The 2012 changes to the planning laws made it easier for developers to cut affordable housing allocations.

Local people see themselves priced out of the area and their communities broken up. They are demanding that local authorities start explaining why they have done these deals allowing developers to reap the benefits.

Insourcing Local government services

There are also increasing reports that councils are reconsidering outsourcing and have begun to bring outsourced services back in-house to reduce spending on external providers, due to poor standards and a lack of flexibility in contracts. About a third of Conservative local authorities and 42 per cent of Labour councils took services back in-house in 2017, according to research by the not-for-profit Association for Public Sector Excellence. ■

The report, *Insourcing: A guide to bringing local authority services back in house* can be found on the APSE website:

apse.org.uk/

The NAO report:

www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/PFI-and-PF2.pdf ■

Round the Societies

A round-up of news from our member societies.

By Diane Burridge

Olympia Exhibition site plans

The new owners of the Olympia Exhibition site, a German-based company YOO, have appointed Thomas Heatherwick Studios and SPPARC architecture as their principal architects/designers.

Members of the **Hammersmith Society** have attended recent consultation events organised by this team, and are pleased to note that the existing main exhibition venues, including the Grand and National Halls, are proposed to be retained and improved.

Now that Earl's Court no longer exists as a venue, Olympia is recognised as all the more important, particularly given that the exhibition market is buoyant. The owners aim to provide 24 hour public accessibility, and to deal with the huge problems of commercial traffic involved with the exhibitions. The architecture team are keen to restore the Upper Pillar Hall to its former glory, but the exhibition halls are the priority and planning applications are being submitted for these in the first instance. The works will have to be phased over several years in order to keep the exhibition halls operational, and further consultation events are planned.

Deadline for protecting Footpaths as Rights of Ways

There is a deadline of 31 December 2025 for claims, using historical evidence, or by providing witnesses, that walking routes have been used for 20 years in order for these to be declared Rights of Way. Some societies are active in protecting such rights, referring to boroughs' Definitive Map of Rights of Way, where these have been drawn up.

After 10 years of campaigning by the **Enfield Society**, the Rights of Way of three footpaths over Vicarage Farm land, to the north of Enfield Road, have been created - using Section 25 of the Highways Act 1980. The Society collected dozens of written witness statements and co-ordinated many meetings for this work, following on from their Footpath Map produced in 2016, costing £2.50.

The **Finchley Society** is working with the local Ramblers Association group to identify footpaths that need to be recorded to protect their status as Rights of Ways. The Society is concerned that any path which came into existence before 1949, and has not been requested to be on the Definitive Map by 1 January 2026, will be lost forever! Even those historic urban and/or recreational paths with footpath signposts are not protected unless they are recorded. Members of the Finchley Society are using the OS 1:25,000 map to identify green dashes which indicate Rights of Way, as part of their work to ensure paths are recorded officially.

The Thorney Island Society Archives

Over 20 students on the BA course in Interior and Spatial Design at the Chelsea College of Art and Design have been visiting the Society's Archives and choosing an item to research further, in order to create new pieces of work. The Society, founded in 1985, covers the area which includes the Houses of Parliament and Westminster Abbey, and members include the Friends of St James Park and The Green Park. Consequently, the students have a rich source of materials to choose from; some of the finished products will be exhibited at future events run by the Society.

Civic Voice speaks out against relaxing planning rules: it will not solve housing crisis

The consultation on a revised National Planning Policy framework began as we were going to press. In anticipation Ian Harvey, Executive Director of Civic Voice said:

"Civic Voice members reject the notion that good planning is a brake on the economy and housing delivery. On the contrary the best planned places are also the most economically successful.

"We agree with the Government that finding a solution to the housing crisis is essential, but another review of the planning system is only going to add confusion, not certainty. The barrier to house building arises from borrowing restrictions and economic uncertainty, not planning.

"If the Government wants to solve the housing crisis, they should look at bringing back into use the large number of empty homes across the UK, many of which are long term empty."

Civic Voice has highlighted five areas of concern identified by its members in its annual member survey, they include:

- Councils are using swathes of green belt for housing to meet housing targets.
- Developers targeting greenfield sites stating that brownfield sites are unviable. Because there is only a "presumption in favour of sustainable development" and no dedicated brownfield land first policy, developers are interpreting the NPPF to suit their needs.
- The Duty to Co-operate is not working and we are not seeing enough strategic planning working effectively across the country.
- The changes to permitted development rights are undermining the performance of our towns and city centres.
- The planning system needs effective resources, particularly at local authority level, commensurate with the important role it plays. Planning is part of the solution not the problem.

Civic Voice held an All Party Parliamentary Group meeting for Civic Societies on March 13th.

'Our Eyes on Islington' - updating the Local List

Islington's schedule of locally-listed buildings is being reviewed by the Building Exploratory in partnership with Historic England and the London Borough of Islington, supported by volunteers, including members of the **Islington Society**. The Local List has not been reviewed for 20 years and contains 1,200 entries, considerably higher than neighbouring boroughs. As well as buildings, the list includes pillar boxes, bollards, paving stones and railings. More than 50 volunteers have been inducted into the two-year programme, supported with training sessions and a Volunteer Handbook. Each volunteer is allocated a set of buildings to review. This work involves visiting the site, desk and archive research, and drawing on historic maps, trade directories and old photographs. During 2018, a public exhibition, showcasing the research of the volunteers and promoting the updated Local List, will tour community venues. For more information:

www.buildingexploratory.org.uk
or email Nicole/Katie on mail@buildingexploratory.org.uk

Increasing planning applications in Barnet

Barnet Residents Association continue to monitor an increasing number of planning applications. In the year to September 2017, they scrutinised 52 applications and objected to seventeen. Fifteen of these were duly refused and only two approved (the Ark school and 141 High St). The Council also refused eleven applications that the Association had scrutinised but not objected to. These refusals included a proposal to convert the offices above Tesco Express to residential; this was rejected on the grounds of unacceptable loss of employment.

Barnet, as an Outer London borough, is being expected by the Mayor, in his draft London Plan, to shoulder the burden to meet a target of 66,000 new homes a year, as opportunities for new developments decline in Inner London. Intensification around transport hubs and up to 800 metres around town centres, with 40% of new homes coming from small sites defined as up to 2.5 hectares, are in this draft plan. Barnet Borough has a target of 3,134 new homes a year over the ten years – a total of 31,340 – on top of those already delivered by 2019 under the current plan. As the Association notes, there are challenging times ahead and much work will be required to continue scrutinising applications.

Cleaning red phone boxes

Two members of the **Highgate Society** voluntarily clean red phone boxes in Highgate. The area has five K2 boxes and some K6 ones which the Society looks after and informs BT when repairs are needed. Due to lobbying by local residents new doors have recently been fitted, with BT having to order a new stock of K2 doors. It is well researched that when people take care of the details of their local environment, there is less vandalism and more local pride. Such practical care and community spirit can only be commended.

Putney High Street

The **Putney Society** has been busy monitoring and influencing many proposed developments along the High Street. At the bridge end, Tideway Tunnel works have begun, near where a 10 storey hotel is proposed. Nearby the Odeon Cinema is undergoing a luxury refit and the owners are seeking a bar licence to 4am. The previous Mayor, Boris Johnson, called in and then approved plans for 100 flats on six storeys above shops at 56-70; and five storey flats are proposed for five other sites, mainly above shops. Within only a few years, the shape and appearance of Putney High Street will have changed greatly.

Grants by the Chislehurst Society

Recent grants have been agreed by the **Chislehurst Society** for a wide range of local initiatives. These include: drainage improvements to footpaths on the NT Hawkwood Estate; fence repairs at St Nicholas Church; brick conservation works above the vestry at Christ Church; sponsorship of new away kits of the Roosters-FC Elmstead Under 10s football team; the first Chislehurst Society trophy for the man of the match of this team; and, finally, support for the memorial – Broken Faces of World War One.

Researching the history of your home - advice from the Brixton Society

The Brixton Society is often asked about the origins of a particular street or house. Alan Piper, the Chair of the Society, gave this advice in a recent newsletter, summarised below for Societies who would like this information:

- Look at the local history of your area to see the overall pattern of development over time - Heritage Trails and the Survey of London may help.
- Compare maps of different dates to get a rough idea of when a street first appeared - using, for example, Ordnance Survey maps and sets of bomb damage maps prepared by the London County Council after World War 2.
- Examine any old-style title deeds and leases which usually recorded the land-owners, developers, builders and the person who bought or leased an individual property. For example, The Lambeth Manor Enclosure Award of 1810 listed the Manor's tenants and how much land each controlled, as well as the common land which was divided between them in proportion.
- Town Planning records since 1947; Directories of postal addresses published in the 19th and 20th centuries locally and for London as a whole; Census Records (noting that records of people in individual properties are embargoed for 100 years); Voters' Lists (noting under-representation of tenants and students); and Council Ward Profiles can be useful.
- Drainage records, which were based usually in local authority archives to about 1985 when the responsibility in London was passed from local authorities to Thames Water, can provide some useful information.
- Social Surveys, such as those undertaken by Charles Booth, who attempted to map deprivation and social class distinctions across Inner London in 1889 and again in 1899.
- Finally, Alan Piper warns that addresses and names of properties should be checked as these can change – for example to reflect changing public opinion or to boost values. ■

newsbriefs

News and issues of interest and concern to note.

Landbanking exposed

London Forum greatly welcomes the recent **Campaign to Protect Rural England**, (CPRE), report on landbanking by developers which received wide press coverage. It is something London Forum has also been highlighting for some time.

Using the figures from the housebuilders' own annual reports, CPRE found that the largest housebuilders held nearly 400,000 plots of land with some form of planning permission in 2016, nearly double what they held ten years ago. They also found the number of homes built by the companies fell by 13 per cent in the same period.

Sir Oliver Letwin is now heading yet another government review - there have been several since 2004 - of the practice of housebuilders sitting on land for long periods before starting to build. This also makes it harder for alternative and small builders, housing associations or local authorities, to build homes.

Andrew Whitaker, planning director of the Home Builders Federation, was reported in the press as saying that "Many of these so-called permissions will not yet be at the stage where builders are allowed to actually start work." But CPRE took their data from housebuilders' own reports to shareholders for the coming year. Is he implying that incorrect information is being given to shareholders? In any case whether they start work immediately (all legal agreements concluded) or they have 'in principle' or 'outline' permission (still subject to satisfactory conclusion of legal agreements), the fact is they hold a huge number of potential building plots.

Sajid Javid attacks nimbys

The Prime Minister's speech on housing was accompanied by blanket coverage in the press of remarks by the Minister, Sajid Javid. He could have chosen a great many culprits to blame for the appalling situation: the hyper-commodification of housing; the deregulation of mortgage lending; the creation of new financial instruments in the 1980s encouraging speculation in property worldwide, coinciding with the abandonment of state provision which had at least created a partially de-commodified sector; wealthy transnational elites hiding their identity in off-shore companies, deliberately pushing up prices to make profits, and the money laundering directly associated with it, to name just some. But he still could not resist the usual gratuitous swipe at "nimbys".

To be fair he does now seem to have got the message that builders' landbanking and reluctance to adhere to commitments to build affordable homes is a problem. He admitted, in the Times, that "There is definitely some hoarding of land by developers" (Some? A mere 400,000 sites at the last count according to CPRE's research); and that how viability is assessed needs to be examined. But he is still wedded to the notion that increasing supply will bring prices down and developers must build ever more houses to do this. He told BBC Radio 4's Today programme: "...successive governments ... have not built enough homes. As a result, prices have risen. When you have a lack of supply developers can feel more confident that land prices will keep rising." But when asked "what if building 300,000 homes a year causes the market to collapse?" he seemed wholly oblivious that

his answer completely contradicted what he had said: "I don't think there's a single economist out there who thinks it's going to force house prices to come down." He has apparently also told Homes England: 'You mustn't be reluctant to use the powers of compulsory purchase when necessary.'

Even his remarks on house price inflation are ill informed: "Over the last 30 years it's been way ahead of average earnings." Actually house price inflation dates back to 1971 when President Nixon severed the final link between gold and the dollar, and Edward Heath and his Chancellor, Barber, deregulated finance in the UK.

It seems to be dawning on him however, that the government's own Help to Buy scheme might actually be part of the problem. He expressed outrage that the chief executive of Persimmon was recently awarded a £110 million bonus when half the building company's homes last year were sold with the use of the government's scheme.

Strong criticism of the Government stance came from Lord Gary Porter, chairman of the Local Government Association, and therefore steeped in local government matters: "The truth is that councils are currently approving nine in ten planning applications, which shows that the planning system is working well and is not a barrier to building ... It is completely wrong, therefore, to suggest the country's failure to build the housing it desperately needs is down to councils. The threat of stripping councils of their rights to decide where homes are built is unhelpful and misguided." He suggests it is Councils who should be encouraged to build affordable housing (see page 5). Nick Boles, former housing minister agreed saying: "This is spot on. We cannot wait for our dysfunctional house-building industry to build the homes we need."

Mr. Javid could have chosen any number of the above problems to focus on, but no, it's all the fault of the Nimbys. Be warned: he has "no time for anyone who is just anti-development for the sake of it. We need to change our attitude. If you are nimby, the government is not going to be your friend. We are on the side of people who want more homes." (Would that be wealthy foreign second home-owners, oligarchs and money-launderers?) So there we have it. Never let inconvenient facts stand in the way of an ideological obsession.

The nimbys are the voters Mr Javid. Are they not entitled to complain when government policy may wreck their environment?

National Planning Policy Framework

On 5th March Sajid Javid published for consultation a draft replacement National Planning Policy Framework at <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/national-planning-policy-framework-and-developer-contribution-consultations>,

Thirteen new City skyscrapers

The City of London skyline is set to have thirteen more skyscrapers added to the existing cluster over the next decade, including one expected to be 290 metres high. All thirteen have permission and are under construction or are due to start construction imminently.

newsbriefs

Thames Water plugs a leak

Thames Water has cancelled dividend payments in the present financial year worth £100 million a year to its mainly international shareholders as it seeks to plug its leakage problem and reimburse customers for its poor services. In previous years its overseas shareholders enjoyed bumper dividend payouts. It will seek to reduce the amount of water it wastes through leaks. As much as 677 million litres a day, 7 per cent more than its leakage reduction target, is pouring away.

It has promised to return £40 million of penalties imposed by regulators to customers next year. That is worth about £8 per household and means that average bills will rise by less than 3 per cent next year, a real terms cut if the latest consumer prices index rate of inflation holds at 3 per cent. But Ofwat, the water industry regulator, said: "The £40 million that Thames Water is proposing to return to its customers in underperformance penalties is as a direct result of them failing to deliver the service they should. Passing this money back to customers isn't optional but a commitment Ofwat holds them to."

Thames Water is Britain's largest water supplier and sewage remover with 15 million customers in London and the Thames Valley bringing in £2 billion of annual revenues. Its main shareholders include the sovereign wealth funds of China, Kuwait and Abu Dhabi, as well as Hermes, the retirement fund for pensioners in BT, the telecoms group. It has now said that it would close its Cayman Islands subsidiaries.

Outsourcing company woes

Carillion was an amalgamation of various companies formerly based in Wolverhampton. In 2017 it issued three profit warnings, paid a dividend and paid off some senior staff with generous severance terms that involved a large salary being maintained for a year after the individuals concerned had ceased to work. It also continued to be awarded contracts from the public sector, including HS2. HS2 Ltd also paid generous redundancy settlements when they moved headquarters to Birmingham, despite an e-mail from DfT (which is paying for them) expressly forbidding it.

They have been less generous in compensating the people whose homes they are seizing, in advance of having produced a workable scheme for building their railway into Euston. The restaurants in the vicinity which are not being seized but which have lost footfall because of the loss of the hotels, pubs and pedestrian routes that are, are not entitled to any compensation.

They undertook not to fell trees in Euston Square Gardens (west side) without an analysis of each tree and whether it needed to be removed to build a railway which they have not yet designed. They broke their word, and tried to pretend that cataloguing the trees prior to chopping them down met their obligation.

On March 5 the Financial Times reported that **Interserve** is seeking emergency funding to keep afloat. It had net debt of £600 million. The new Chief Executive admitted to the FT that the group had expanded too fast into sectors in which it had little experience. Interserve looks after UK military bases, runs probation services, healthcare-at-home for local authorities and cleaning at the London Underground.

The changing face of renting

It is estimated that five million UK households - or 21 per cent - are in private rented accommodation, a quarter of whom are families with children; and 19 out of every 20 tenants rent a property owned by a landlord with four homes or fewer. This is in contrast to North America where institutional investors dominate. However this is beginning to change due to the intervention of large UK financial institutions, and developers from the US or Canada, where a different approach is already long-established. Modern rental developments specialise in hotel-quality living. Flats in these schemes may be small, but they are complemented by shared public spaces full of amenities which provide opportunities to build social networks. The Collective Old Oak near Willesden Junction, northwest London, provides a private cinema, gym, sauna, spa, library, restaurant, bar and a "disco laundrette".

Other developments include Greystar's modular development in Croydon and a canalside development in Greenford and Essential Living's Creekside Wharf in Greenwich. Realstar, a Canadian company, already owns and manages rental apartments in New Cross and Stockwell. UK financial institutions in the sector include M&G and Legal & General. Perhaps the best known development is East Village in Stratford, at the 2012 Olympics site.

Amenities for residents, which can include gyms, residents' lounges, private dining rooms, and childcare facilities, are reckoned to add 11 per cent to the rental price. There is pressure on the operators to lower costs but that would be at the expense of all these extra amenities. A survey by Your Move, a lettings agency, found that British tenants are prepared to pay on average £22 a month extra for an onsite crèche, £20 more for a gym, £10 more for a laundry facility, communal garden or a children's playground, £8 more for a games room, and £7 more for an allotment. The British Property Federation says that there are now 59,271 build-to-rent units in London.

The importance of local plans

Another small victory against demolition of an unlisted building and a potentially damaging basement proposal in a conservation area has been chalked up in Hampstead. At 28 Redington Road, part of the Edwardian Redington Frogmire Conservation area, the Planning Inspector rejected an appeal against Camden's refusal on the grounds of harm to the conservation area and a wholly inadequate Basement Impact Assessment (BIA), which gave unevidenced assurances that harm to neighbouring properties would be minimal, and failed to provide a ground movement assessment.

Significantly the Inspector was influenced by the local plan: "Policy A5 is part of a recently adopted and up-to-date Local Plan and therefore carries full weight. On the evidence before me I cannot, therefore, conclude that it has been demonstrated that the proposal would not be harmful to neighbouring properties". ■

Dates for your diary

London Forum events

Membership renewal

As you all know, London Forum relies totally on Members' subscriptions for its budget. Please do use the new membership renewal facility on the web site:

W http://www.londonforum.org.uk/member_login.php and 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 ■

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

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Registered Charity Number 1093134

London Forum Open Meetings 2018

Save the Dates

Thursday April 19th

This event will cover borough management of street trees, tree planting in parks and open spaces and the greening of London, including the grants provided by the Mayor

Monday 21 May

Tuesday 3 July .

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.

W http://twitter.com/London_Forum

NB - note the underscore: _ in the name ■

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