

ISLINGTON news

The Journal of the Islington Society incorporating FOIL folio

Planning comes under further threat

The localism agenda seems to have taken a back place now that the last Labour government has been displaced as the scapegoat for all our economic woes by planners.

Back to Summer 2011

The theme of the Summer 2011 Islington News was the perceived attack on planning, arising from the government drive to replace over twenty planning policy guidance notes with a couple of sides of A4. After that time, the government seemed to row back from its obsession with deregulation, and the worst excesses of the original proposals disappeared from the NPPF published in April.

But now, anti-planning is back. In this issue we include the response of the Royal Town Planning Institute, which sets out the government proposals and why they are wrong. We also report on planning successes, both in the book review and in the transport news round-up.

London Forum letter to the Evening Standard

The chair of the London Forum had the following letter published in the *Evening Standard* on September 7th.

"Nick Clegg says that relaxing planning laws will lead to more affordable homes. But rules requiring developers to include affordable housing will be dropped by the Coalition and developers can negotiate out of past commitments.

"David Cameron's proposal, meanwhile, to allow anyone to extend their property by up to 8M (26') without planning permission does not square with the Government's policy to ban building on back gardens and get rid of 'beds in sheds'.

"Under this scheme, domestic developments use up the builders needed to construct new homes on sites with planning permission now and pit neighbours against each other as they lose light because of an extension next door (a bonanza for lawyers).

"Offices and hotels are to be allowed to be converted to flats, which is a policy not suitable for London and contrary to the Mayor's London Plan.

"The Coalition seem to have invented these proposals without considering the implications.

Only in April it published a new National Planning Policy Framework, yet now the Government is saying planning laws are out-dated and policies need to be

simplified. The aim seems to be to make it easy to get planning permission, not to achieve sustainable development.

"Good planning can support and encourage growth, determine which kind of schemes are suitable in various locations and give certainty to developers. It delivers the necessary controls."

All party opposition

The Liberal Democrat conference overwhelmingly passed an emergency resolution condemning the latest government stance. Tory controlled London Borough of Richmond, referred to as a flag-ship Tory Borough (it used to be a flagship Liberal Borough), has announced that it will do all in its power to thwart the government on this issue.

Regrettably the theme of this newsletter is once again the attack on planning

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The copy date for our next newsletter is February 4th, 2013.

Local News

Vice-President briefly hospitalised but on the mend

We are sorry to have to report that our Vice-President Harley Sherlock has been seriously ill over the summer following a stroke. A new system devised to make it easier to remember which pills to take when had the opposite effect with disastrous consequences. With some politicians calling for a welfare system based on past contributions it may be good news that Harley's contributions are at last being rewarded, and the

reports we have received particularly since he returned home have been an eye opener as to what is involved in providing NHS health care. The support he is receiving is fantastic if at times chaotic. Harley would like to thank all his friends who have kindly sent him get well cards and messages of support. When he is stronger, he looks forward to seeing members and friends in the pub.

Islington Society Design Awards

The award in 2012 for the best building completed in 2011 has been made. Both the winner and the highly commended entrant are in Britton Street, London, E.C.1 A presentation is being planned for around the time that this newsletter is

despatched and the next issue should include Alec Forshaw's summary of how the decision was reached and the respective merits of these buildings and the rival candidates.

Pump House appeal heard

The optimistic headline in the last issue may have been premature as the Council's decision to refuse permission for redevelopment of the pump house

has been the subject of an Appeal. The hearing has taken place and the decision was awaited as we went to press.

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Society publications

Twentieth Century Buildings in Islington, by Alec Forshaw, £14.99, photographs by Richard Leeney, ISBN 0-9541490-0-9

The Story of Day Flats in and around Islington, by Andrew Bosi, photographs from C.F. Day Limited and Oliver Craxton, £5, ISBN 0-9541490-1-7

An architect in Islington, by Harley Sherlock, £14.99, ISBN 9-78-0-9541490-2-4

[all of the Society's publications are available from the Society at 35, Britannia Row, London, N.1 or from local bookshops]

Books from our President and Vice-Presidents

Suicide of the West, by Richard Koch & Chris Smith, £14.99 and available on Amazon, ISBN 0-8264 9023-9.

A History of Islington, by Mary Cosh, published by Historical Publications at £18.95, ISBN 0-948667-974

53 Cross Street - the biography of an historic house by Mary Cosh & Martin King, photographs by Pauline Lord, published by the Islington Archaeology & History Society

An architect in Islington, by Harley Sherlock, as above.

The Air We Breathe

The census figures published in July 2012 indicate that Islington is the most densely populated unitary authority in England and Wales. Less well-known is the borough's poor health record: high levels of asthma, COPD (chronic obstructive respiratory disease), and poor cardiac (and mental) health. Islington's emergency hospital admissions for COPD and asthma are significantly higher than across London and England. Asthma is the most common long-term condition amongst the borough's children, with a rate more than double that for England. Respiratory disease is the third-largest cause of death in the borough.

Anyone who was in Islington during the Olympics would have noticed the reduced traffic levels and the cleaner air - the ability to breathe more deeply, cleaner hands for cyclists and feet for sandal-wearers - and the contrary since the games ended. Unlike in 1952 when dirty coal was largely responsible for the Great Smog (estimated to have killed over 4,000 Londoners and prompting the introduction of the 1956 Clean Air Act), the principal cause of 21st-century air-pollution is vehicle-exhaust emissions. London has the worst air-quality of any EU capital, and has been failing to meet the EU's legal limits for safe air-pollution levels since the UK signed up. Unable to ignore the growing concerns about air-quality and health, in 2010 London's mayor commissioned a study, carried out by the School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. Its finding was stark: as in 1952, more than 4,000 Londoners per annum were estimated to die prematurely from the effects of air-pollution.

The main culprits of the health-damaging traffic emissions are microscopic particles, known as particulates (PM_{10} and $PM_{2.5}$) - the most dangerous - and nitrogen dioxide (NO_2). Particulates, found in all emissions but highest in those from diesel engines, have been linked to lung cancer and cardiovascular problems but are especially harmful to children. A seminal 2007 New England School of Medicine study showed a link between exposure and (irreversible) reduced lung capacity in those aged 10-18. Nitrogen dioxide - which can itself be transformed in the atmosphere into particulate dust - can harm lung function in people with existing respiratory conditions and cause increased respiratory illness in young children. Two recent studies by local groups in Archway and Highbury showed NO_2 levels at more than 75% over the safe EU limit, in a

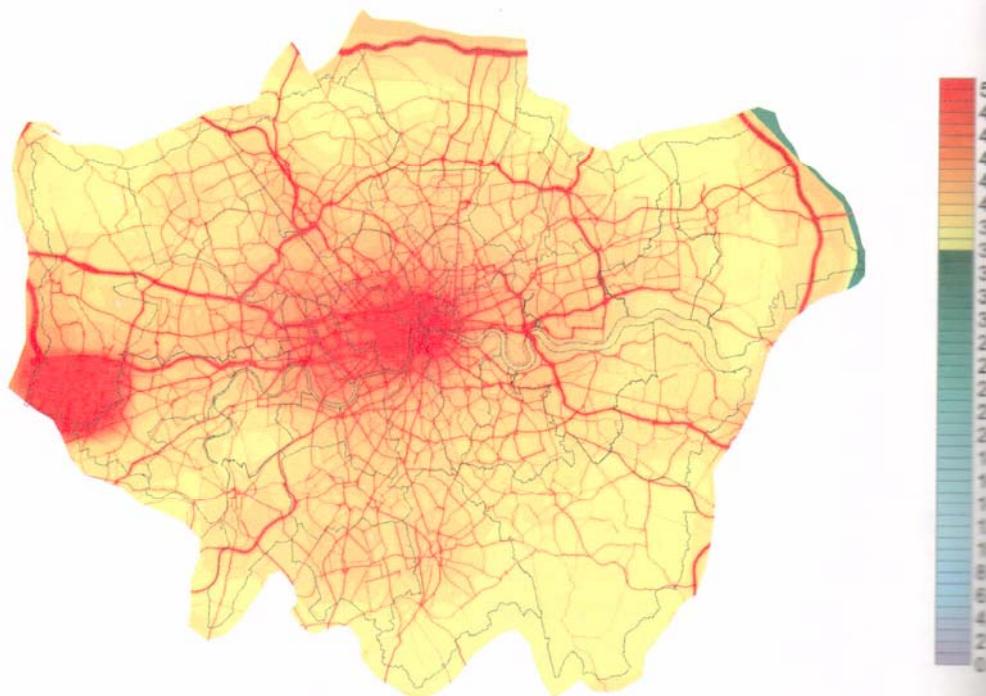
borough where fewer than 50% of residents own a car. The findings shouldn't surprise us. London has been failing the EU's legal limits for safe air-pollution levels - to which the UK's signed up - for several years. The city has the worst air-quality of any EU capital with NO_2 levels comparable with those of Beijing. Asthma, such a significant problem in the borough, can be triggered by air pollution and dust.

Islington is one of five most deprived London boroughs. Though air-pollution is status-blind, it's the poorest who are likely to suffer most with less access to green space, a mitigating factor in pollution levels, living in flats without gardens in the borough with the least green space per head in London. Building high, as is currently planned in order to help meet local housing targets, can in itself worsen air quality through the 'canyon effect' - the trapping of dirty air between taller buildings either side of a road or along heavily trafficked narrow streets. (A walk down West End Lane is enough to prove the latter point.) Parents who think driving children to school will reduce exposure couldn't be more wrong. Many of the borough's schools are close to main roads where pollution levels are highest, and air-pollution levels inside vehicles have been shown to be higher than outside as the dirty air sucked in through vents has less chance of dispersal in a confined space. As for babies in buggies at exhaust-pipe height - the risks speak for themselves. We might have got the lead out of petrol but traffic emissions continue to threaten our children's health.

Air-pollution is a public-health issue, estimated to cost the NHS a staggering £20bn a year through related health problems - more than obesity. Next year, responsibility for the borough's public health transfers to the council's Health and Well-being Committee. Infraction fines for failing the EU safe air-quality standards could also pass to the borough under the Localism Act.

Understanding the effects of traffic emissions on health is essential if Islington's poor health record is to improve. The executive has set up a scrutiny review of the borough's air-pollution but it will need to reconsider those of its traffic policies which encourage short car-journeys - the most polluting - such as its Roamer parking scheme and increasing the numbers of parking bays. Working with the Health and Wellbeing Committee is a must. Blaming traffic passing through Islington for our poor public-health record simply won't do. MH

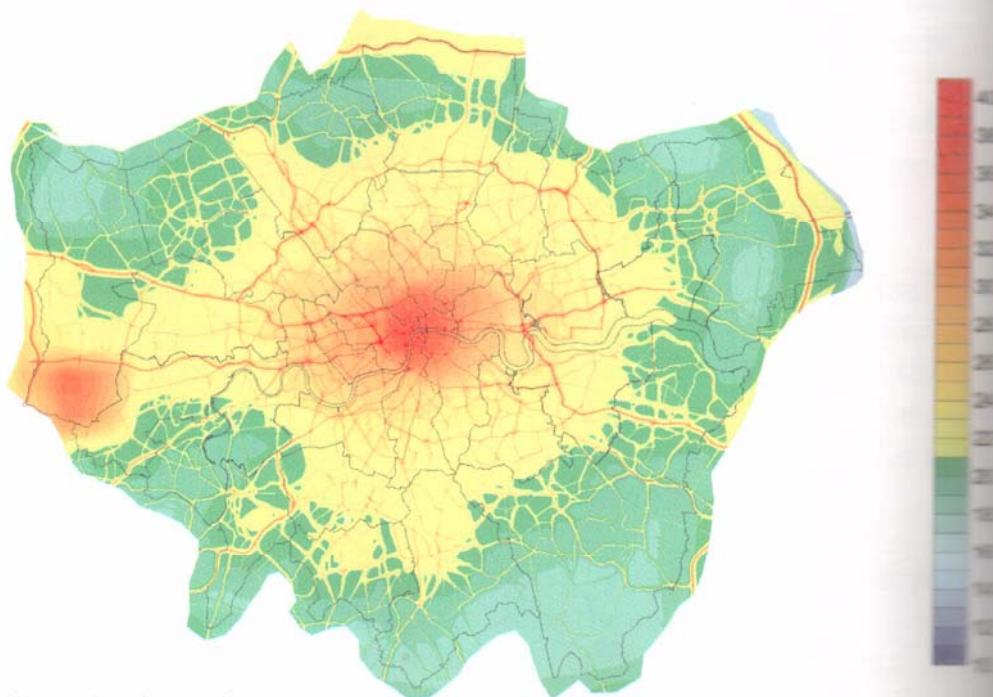
figure 16 Modelled 1999 daily average PM₁₀ concentrations, in number of days exceeding the national objective level



source Greater London Authority and Transport for London, 2001

note Using 1996 weather data. The figure shows days above objective level of 50 µg/m³, which is allowed for 35 days a year, so red and yellow indicate exceedances of objective

figure 17 Modelled 1999 annual average NO₂ concentrations in ppb



source Greater London Authority and Transport for London, 2001

note Using 1997 weather data

Book Review

A sense of impeccable timing

September is a good time to launch a new book because the resultant publicity covers the Christmas present buying season. Local historians will be delighted to see "King's Cross - A sense of place" , and not just because it sits neatly on the bookshelf beside "Twentieth Century Buildings of Islington". It is the story of a series of local campaigns that saved King's Cross from the fate that befell the Docklands and the area west of Euston, both of which are unrecognisable from 50 years ago.

The genesis for the book is the photographic record of King's Cross which the principal author, Angela Inglis has developed over several decades. It became clear to her that behind the continued existence of many of the subjects of her work lay a number of stories of local campaigning, and three of those sagas are related in detail. Like all good non-fiction, it leaves the reader wanting to know more. The focus is very much on the immediate north-east of King's Cross. Chad's Place, the campaign to save the Cally from the worst effects of plan B for the Channel Tunnel Rail link, which reflected a victory for the residents further south, the story of the railway lands, and the ongoing campaign for an east-west link, must all await a future publication.

Part One is the residents' and the locality's story and we are left to wonder why British Rail

thought they could achieve what they wanted for so long. As someone who came in at the tail end of the campaign against the King's Cross (No.1) Bill it seemed obvious in 1990 that the locals were going to win and this book brings out the unnecessary distress caused by the fact that it took until 1994 to have this confirmed.

Part Two is a more considered view of King's Cross. This makes for two different books and the co-author Nigel Buckner, has endeavoured to mark this by splitting many of the photographs from the text. He has also avoided mixing monochrome with colour photography. I personally like the uninterrupted text, although it is not as obvious which section you are reading if you choose a page at random as I believe the compiler intended. The captions are in the attractive font favoured by successive editors of Islington News.

There is a helpful map at the front, and a forward from our President and former M.P.

What makes the book so prescient is its timing, because what links the three sagas is how much can be achieved when enlightened planners are enlisted by a local community, and how the support of politicians can be so valuable when allied to both. *King's Cross: A Sense of Place* is published by Matador. The ISB Number is 978-1-78088-331-1

Guides to Beer and Pubs, 2013

The book reviewed above contains material not readily found elsewhere. What is it that makes for the continued success of publications like Camra's Good Beer Guide 2013, celebrating the fortieth year of the campaign's history, and the Good Pub Guide 2013, the 31st edition of this tome? More up to date information of the kind they contain is available on the internet. The Guides are out of date before they are printed - for example, the Duke's Brew & Que in Downham Road was too new to make it into this year's Good Beer Guide, yet any CAMRA member who has been there would testify to the supreme quality of the home brew.

There is of course a degree of subjectivity in determining the entries, so it is reassuring to see my favourite candidates from most parts of the country with which I am familiar (though oddly, not in Manchester). Reassuring, because of the confidence it gives in the chosen entries elsewhere. Somehow, it

is still preferable to read the entries in hard copy and to flit from one page to another, than to expend the initial effort in locating appropriate web-sites to garner the information. And web-sites can be out of date too: a colleague looked up a chosen meeting point just before setting off, only to discover on arrival that it had closed!

The book industry has survived the e-revolution in better shape than the music industry. Perhaps this is because, whereas you can curl up in bed with a good book, putting a record on the Gramophone or even a compact disc into the record player requires as much effort as downloading music from an external source.

CAMRA's *Good Beer Guide 2013* is edited by Roger Protz and published by CAMRA, ISB Number 978-1-85249-290-8.

Broadband street furniture: no exemption yet for Conservation Areas

Superfast broadband is key to boosting economic growth and creating jobs. The Government however alleges that the delivery of this vital business infrastructure is being held up by unnecessary bureaucracy in the planning system, jeopardising the country's economic recovery. New DCMS Secretary of State Maria Miller has announced new plans to clear away a swathe of red tape. And in a response to a written question on September 18th, junior minister Nicholas Boles has indicated that consultation will take place shortly but that any legislation will happen as quickly as possible.

Under the new plans, broadband street cabinets and other infrastructure can be installed without the need for prior approval from the local council. The only exception is Sites of Special

Scientific Interest. No other designated sites, such as Conservation Areas or settings of listed buildings are mentioned. Broadband cables and cabinets can be installed on or under private land with 'the burden of bureaucratic burden of long-running negotiations'.

The announcement on 7th September indicates the Government will legislate immediately following 'consultation where necessary'. And while overhead broadband lines providers are encouraged to engage with the local community as a matter of good practice there is no similar encouragement over the siting of broadband cabinets.

Civic Voice has launched a campaign "Beautiful Broadband Britain" which encourages us to contact our M.P.s on this matter.

Government proposals to remove the need for consents for changes to listed buildings

The Kensington Society produced this response to government proposals relaxing protection for listed buildings.

1. The proposals would represent a significant change to the current system and in particular potentially deny many of those who are currently able to comment on applications for listed building consent the opportunity to do so. We consider that this is directly contrary to the principle of local community involvement in the planning process.

2. In view of the significance of the changes we consider that the time allowed is totally inappropriate in particular for LPAs who are asked to provide some of the key data which is sought as evidence to help justify the proposed changes. We consider it totally inappropriate to push through this consultation in the absence of quantifiable data to confirm whether or not there is a need for the changes and if so which, if any, are appropriate.

3. We consider that there are some opportunities for improvement, but that many of these proposals will involve a longer time and some duplication of effort. We also consider that there will need to be rigorous and transparent monitoring of the results of the system.

4. We consider that greater improvements could be made by ensuring that applications are complete in every detail, including a full analysis of the conservation issues, thereby allowing the LBA to process the document more rapidly and that it is necessary to inform the applicant of any risks prior

to the application, thus reducing abortive work. This would also be beneficial for local and specialist national groups who may wish to comment on the application but do not have the access or resources to be able to do so on an informed basis.

5. Local and specialist conservation societies can provide a valuable resource of knowledge and expertise available to help assess LBC applications. Denying them the opportunity to comment on applications denies the LPA the benefit of this expertise and is contrary to the basic concepts of localism. It is essential that proper provision is made for consultation at least to the standards applied for a full LBC application.

6. While we believe that proper Heritage assessments by accredited consultants can provide a valuable part of any LBC application to the benefit of the applicant, the LPA and local and national consultees, we have serious concerns about the use of such consultants to replace the role of the LPA staff and do not support this proposal.

7. Overall, we consider that these proposals are likely to cause more delay and wasted effort and would be dangerous to our built heritage. They cut out consultation, remove objective assessment and remove any transparency and accountability in the process. It is the antithesis of localism.

Permitted Development, Building Regulations & Planning Costs

The Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI), the professional body for planners, has produced this briefing note to provide information on particular aspects of the package of funding for, and reforms to, planning and housing announced by the Government on 6th September. The Government proposals and this briefing apply to England.

House Extensions

The Government has announced that it intends to consult shortly on changes to increase permitted development rights for extensions to homes and business premises in non-protected areas for a three year period.

There is little detail at this stage on what the Government proposes. However, the Communities Secretary, Rt. Hon. Eric Pickles MP, told the Commons that:

I use the example of conservatories just for shorthand - this is clearly about extensions. The existing policy on permitted development rights was 3 metres for houses. This would extend it to roughly 6 metres. If current differentiations are followed this would also extend it to eight meters long for detached houses.

Press reports indicate that extensions that would be allowed without the need for planning permission in the three year period would be restricted to single storey extensions and the Communities Secretary has already stated that: there are the safeguards on curtilage and for ensuring that no more than half the garden is built on.

Protected areas such as Conservation Areas, National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty - and listed buildings - would not be affected.

The Existing Position

Permitted Development (PD) Rights already allow people to undertake certain types of minor changes without needing to apply for planning permission. They derive from a general planning permission granted by Parliament.

PD Rights in relation to residential property may include the enlargement, improvement or other minor alteration of a dwelling house. You can see what the existing system allows by looking at the Government's online planning and building regulations resource for England and Wales which shows what you can already do to your home without the need for permission (<http://www.planningportal.gov.uk/permission/house>).

You can see the current regulations at The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995 with updates such as

The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (Amendment) (England) Order 2010

PD Rights which apply to many common projects for houses do not apply to flats or maisonettes. In addition a local planning authority may be able to remove some PD Rights by issuing an Article 4 direction. This will mean that you would have to submit a planning application for work which normally does not need one.

Change of use from offices to housing

The Government announcement has stated that it will:

introduce permitted development rights to enable change of use from commercial to residential purposes, while providing the opportunity for authorities to seek a local exemption where they believe there will be an adverse economic impact.

The current position

Permission is currently required to change use from offices to residential. The current Government position on this is stated in the 2012 National Planning Policy Framework:

Local planning authorities should normally approve planning applications for change to residential use and any associated development from commercial buildings (currently in the B use classes) where there is an identified need for additional housing in that area, provided that there are not strong economic reasons why such development would be inappropriate.

The RTPI's View

House Extensions

The Royal Town Planning Institute will examine the consultation on this proposal in detail and will ask its members and others to contribute to its response. Their initial views are that:

We fully support the view that the planning system should not be the way of controlling very minor developments and have always supported the existence of permitted development rights; However, the building of extensions, particularly in built up areas, can be very contentious with neighbours keen to protect their own homes from being overlooked and from having their natural light reduced.

The Communities Secretary's initial reaction to this issue is that: "With regard to arbitration

between neighbours, we are expecting people to operate in a neighbourly fashion".

Where people do operate in a neighbourly fashion, and there are no objections, applications are often granted well within the current eight week target. The normal 4-6 week period it takes to decide an application includes consultation of three weeks (21 days). This time is often used by many applicants to obtain quotes from builders, prepare the house for work, and allow builders to manage their workload. Appraising and arbitrating neighbours' objections to proposals are the most significant reason for delay.

The current level of PD Rights has been determined following a number of reviews and is designed to reflect a balance between undue interference in a householder's activities and the possible adverse impacts of these on the neighbourhood;

One of the reasons given for the package of reforms is that the fee payable for gaining planning permission is burdensome on householders. The Government-set cost of an application for alteration to/extension of a dwelling is £150. For this fee, the householder receives not only what is, in effect, an independent mediation service if there are any concerns by neighbours about the impact of an extension but a certificate that shows subsequent buyers of the property that the development is lawful

which the local planning authority keeps a public record of. This is important as lenders require such evidence before offering a mortgage;

Whilst the fee is reasonable given the benefits that the service can provide, it is also helps to support the local planning service at a time both when the Government wants development management services to be self-supporting and a time when the cuts to local government services as a whole are hitting planning very hard. The RTPI estimates that fees for applications to house extensions and similar works bring planning departments some £25m per annum.

The latest official figures show that 88 per cent of householder applications are permitted and that 84 per cent of applications are decided on within eight weeks;

Ultimately this proposal without safeguards, may produce poor quality development and create neighbourhood conflict, without any real evidence that it would boost the economy or increase housing supply.

Change of use from offices to housing

This proposal is not new and the Government rejected it in 2012. DCLG consulted on this proposal in April 2011 and published the summary of responses and its own response in July 2012.

The RTPI strongly objected to the proposal in 2011, stating that it may damage the nascent economic recovery, was unworkable, and is at odds with localism and did not fit with neighbourhood planning. Our response stated that:

"We believe that the greatest benefit both to the community and to organisations wishing to create more homes is at the plan-making stage, which allows communities/organisations to balance the need for housing and employment with the need for other land uses, and ensure that all uses are located in the most strategically beneficial sites, with the necessary supporting infrastructure.

DCLG decided not to proceed with this proposal stating that:

The consultation paper recognised that any permitted development right would need to be tailored to ensure that it did not give rise to unintended consequences and that it would be possible to build in effective mitigation provisions. This view was supported by the responses to the consultation, particularly in relation to the need to ensure that local employment needs continue to be met and that housing would be appropriate to its location.

Instead, the Government included the policy on this issue in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) that is quoted above.

The RTPI has not changed its view and will consider the evidence upon which DCLG is minded to override the results of its own extensive consultation and its own previous decisions based on that consultation.



London Forum response to DCLG Select Committee

The London Forum of Amenity and Civic Societies has sent this response on our behalf.

The proposed measures in the Secretary of State's announcement fall into six groups:

1 Intervention in the housing market, increasing investment in the private rented sector, affordable housing guarantees, tackling empty homes and helping first-time buyers - none of these would enable communities to have a greater say in shaping the development of their area.

2 Bringing forward housing proposals more quickly - accelerating large housing schemes and getting public sector land back into use - neither of these are locally-driven nor subject to local control.

In London these are likely to be driven through the Mayor's London Plan Opportunity Areas and the Mayor's Development Corporation. The opportunity for local people to influence these is very slight. The Opportunity Area Planning Frameworks (OAPFs) are proposing a very large quantity of development at densities in excess of London Plan policies and include tall buildings that are out of place with their surroundings. The consultation on the OAPFs fail to address these issues. Local people are powerless to influence the proposed scale of development.

3 Reducing delay and red tape - these proposals threaten to take decision making away from the local level and handing it over to the Planning Inspectorate. The emphasis seems to be on speed of decision making. London Boroughs, considering the complexity of their operating environment have tended to take longer to make decisions than rural areas. A combination of conservation areas and closer proximity to neighbours have meant that the task is more complex.

Whilst we support greater efficiency, the principle of decisions being made at the local level has to be maintained. Recovering jurisdiction over cases purely on the basis of their size is the antithesis of localism. Major developments should be brought through the Local Plan. Effectively "calling in" major schemes to push them through - something done by State Governments in Australia - brings the planning system into disrepute and cuts out local people. It risks the system becoming driven by "cronyism" and lobbying by developers keen to take schemes out of local control.

4 The proposal to introduce an "appeal" process for S106 agreements is the negation of

localism, asking a planning inspector to arbitrate a revised S106 agreement. Local planning authorities are capable of negotiating revised agreements and are better placed to strike the right balance.

5 Supporting locally-led, large-scale housing developments - the use of call-in powers - taking decisions out of the hands of the local planning authority - needs to be retained as a reserve power to be used in the last resort, rather than the first resort, for large housing projects. The sophistry of reserve powers is just that. The risk - as indicated above - is the use of call-in powers not to test the proposals, but to push them through. This risks charges of "favouritism".

6 Helping homeowners improve their homes - the three-year "freedom" to build large conservatories will not create additional housing, but is likely to revive proposals that were previously refused due to their likely impact on neighbours. This "freedom" will appeal to those previously refused, but would greatly reduce local control. The potential impact of such large extensions - not just conservatories - is that it could cut out a considerable amount of light for neighbours. It would also reduce the size of gardens by allowing up to half the garden to be taken for an extension without requiring consent.

- How the use of Planning Performance Agreements and greater powers to award costs in planning appeals will affect the planning process?

Planning Performance Agreements can already be used. If there are to be greater power to award costs this should apply equally to appellants and third parties should also be able to apply for costs.

- How planning authorities should be able to adjust Green Belt land?

The power to adjust Green Belt boundaries already exists through local plans, but this would require local planning authorities to co-operate more fully than at present. However, we do not think that current duty to co-operate is fit for purpose.

- How the Government's review of national and local standards should be carried out and what focus should it have?

The NPPF is largely silent or indeterminate about how to plan for sustainable development and, in particular, how to plan for more sustainable

patterns of development. In particular, it gives no guidance on where and how best to develop our towns and cities, particularly housing.

The main sources of guidance are the previous PPSs and PPGs and the various guidance documents. Local planning authorities, rather than reinvent the wheel, should use these documents to inform their local choices for their local plan strategy and policies. In particular, PPG13 contains useful guidance which is largely lost by the sketchy and incoherent coverage in the NPPF.

There is, however, a need for new guidance to illustrate more sustainable patterns of development, whether to guide urban growth into smarter patterns or to promote town centres as the major drivers of the local economy through exploiting the economic benefits of agglomeration, synergy and choice of jobs, goods and services.

- *What the impact is of the proposal to get empty commercial buildings into use?*

This proposal would do nothing of the sort. Empty, derelict and poorly-located commercial buildings are less interesting to the market than those that are occupied, in good condition and well located. The proposal could, in areas of high housing values, result in the change of use of the more attractive office buildings, reduce the stock of such buildings and undermine the local economy.

This is particularly the case in London, where the price differential would drive out many commercial uses, especially offices. Paragraph 51 of the National Planning Policy Framework already provides a "presumption" in favour of change of use to housing, especially in areas with a shortage of housing, unless there are strong economic reasons for retaining these economic activities. This approach at least provides the local authority with the opportunity to justify retaining the most suitable offices in the most sustainable locations and to retain and promote economic clusters. Changing the Use Classes Order would remove the last vestige of local control or ability to plan for economic development.

This is an ill-conceived, top-down imposed national change in legislation regardless of its appropriateness locally, with the suggestion that local authorities can "opt out" by using Article 4 Directions. The proposal fails to understand or has wilfully misunderstood both the procedural and financial implications of using Article 4 Directions.

The proposal removes entirely the possibility of planning for economic development

by ensuring a supply of the right premises in the right place, by enabling the market free-rein to drive out economic uses which are required by the local economy and should be retained in town centres or close to public transport interchanges - in line with the NPPF.

- *What are the implications of the Government's proposal to make it easier for communications providers to install equipment to provide broadband services?*

The proposals by the Government to remove all controls, except on Sites of Special Scientific Interest, would be very damaging to our townscape generally and particularly in conservation areas. Local planning authorities currently assess broadband cabinets on the basis of their impact on amenity and their siting. Problems have arisen where the broadband provider has been unwilling to establish basic ground rules for the roll-out of their cabinets, as they have not adapted their strategy to fit local conditions. Some operators, such as BT, have been totally intransigent.

Previous controls for telecoms equipment, bus shelters and advertisements have always recognised "special areas" such as National Parks and conservation areas where a different approach is needed.

In summary, many of the proposed planning changes are unnecessary and potentially very damaging to local economies (e.g. the commercial to housing change of use - as well as the hotels to housing proposal) or the local environment (extensions and broadband cabinets).

These are top-down imposed changes and the antithesis of localism - they remove the opportunity for the adoption of locally-specific policies which shape the local environment and maintain, support and promote the local economy. The suggestion that local authorities can "opt out" of the centrally-imposed policy changes through the use of Article 4 Directions is deluded - it takes a year to establish such safeguards and could involve a huge amount of compensation.

The NPPF (particularly para 51) has already made it difficult to retain key economic uses - but at least it enables local planning authorities to justify their policy. An across-the-board legislative change negates any possibility of planning policy being tailored to local circumstances. There is currently nothing stopping local authorities adopting policies to encourage conversions of offices or hotels.

Transport News Round-up

New bus for London

All eight of the new vehicles had entered service by mid-August and from September 10th the Monday to Friday schedule of seven duties commenced. This meant that new buses were less of a novelty and began to appear with a degree of frequency. The tendency to board at the front only continues though. The Mayor has now recognised that in order to fulfill his manifesto commitment of 600 of these buses, it will be necessary for Transport for London to purchase them and lease them to the operators, as was the case with most of Ken's routemasters. The purchase price is of course a lot higher. There is speculation that this will mean higher fares, and talk of RPI plus 2% being applied from next January. However, the scheme to give free bus travel to over 60s, promised by the Mayor in his election campaign, is proceeding.

Moratorium on engineering work ends

For those not of a sporting bent, the best thing about the Olympics may have been that the tube lines all ran on Sundays. The event was a great success for the tube with record numbers carried and few disasters, just one failure on the Central line during a morning peak. The attention to detail - there were daily bulletins about which places to avoid - was rewarded by results. Less attention may have been paid to cyclist safety and questions are being asked in the Greater London Assembly following the fatality of a cyclist underneath one of the Olympic buses.

The bus services were underused, partly because of the dire warnings about road closures and diversions. TfL could have been more specific about when the Olympic lanes would be needed. The result was that anyone reliant on buses to travel into central London gave it a wide berth for all but essential journeys, and the West End shops and theatres suffered in consequence. If a single extra bank holiday caused a double dip recession it will be interesting to see what effect the Olympics and Paralympics had on the third quarter of 2012.

Sadly the engineering work has returned, including further disruption to the Jubilee line which seems to have achieved "Forth Road Bridge" status. The massive construction sites that herald CrossRail, both at Tottenham Court Road and at Moorgate, give rise to significant traffic and bus diversions but at least we will have something new in place when it is all completed.

Orbital route in sight

The final leg of the Overground, completing a circle to Clapham Junction via the West London line, Willesden Junction, the North London to Highbury, the East London through Shoreditch to New Cross Gate, and then westwards along the South London lines, is scheduled to open with the new Network Rail timetable in December.

Trains will terminate at either end of the platform at Clapham Junction and there seems to be little scope for through running from New Cross Gate to Imperial Wharf. Anyone wanting to go to New Cross from Islington avoiding zone 1 will have to change trains; there are quicker ways of doing this.

Thameslink 2000 comes at a price

People who use the Wimbledon loop to destinations north of the river by a single Thameslink train have discovered that the new improved service will come at the price of ending their through journeys. They will be obliged to change at Blackfriars, which is not much of a hardship in the mornings, but involves a circuitous walk in the evenings. Time and again when changes are proposed to the pattern of services we hear all about the benefits and anyone who loses out only gets to hear about it when the time for objections has passed. People choose their place of residence, or their place of work, partly on the basis of the ease with which they can commute between the two and it is not good enough to hide behind the argument that more people will gain than will lose. This is why we need open consultation prior to implementing developments, and why it is wrong to ride roughshod over individual rights in the false belief that a buoyant economy is dependent on so doing.

Transport schemes, when properly thought through and carefully delivered, generate economic growth without any side effects - just look at Haggerston and the popularity of the pub referred to on page #. This site was occupied by a pub that lay disused for five years; it was by no means the only example of dereliction that has disappeared within two years of re-opening the station closed by the Luftwaffe in 1940.

When it is built, CrossRail will have an even bigger effect on the southern tip of our Borough. The construction industry won't have time for 26 feet extensions into gardens. AB

From the Society

Current officers are listed on page 2

What we do

we support conservation planning work to preserve the borough's historic fabric and individual buildings of distinction

- we campaign for a high standard of design in new buildings

- we encourage best practice through awards for good architecture in new or refurbished buildings

- we organise a varied programme of events including talks, walks and site visits

- we campaign for better public transport and for priority for people travelling on foot or by bike

- we produce publications that celebrate Islington's history and its social and cultural diversity

- we publish neighbourhood walking trails to foster exploration awareness and pride of place

- we build links between residents officials and councillors

- we publish a regular newsletter

- we send advisers to Council groups dealing with development, the environment and transport

- we are represented on the London Forum of Civic & Amenity Societies, which takes up cross-borough issues and is a member of Civic Voice

Future Society events

The Society gives reminders by e-mail of meetings about a week before they are held. Please let the Secretary have your e-mail address if you are not on the existing mailing list.

The Annual Dinner 2012 for members and guests will be on Tuesday 30th October at the Amici Restaurant 367 Holloway Road at 7.0 for 7.30 p.m. An application form should be enclosed with this newsletter together with the menu of 3 courses including vegetarian dishes and coffee for £24 per person. Applications to the Treasurer by Friday 26 October.

Our monthly Meet the Officers meetings are at the Marquess Tavern, 32 Canonbury Street on the first Tuesday each month at 9.0 p.m., on Tuesdays 6th November, 4th December 2012 and 1st January 2013.

Other Events in or around Islington:

Archaeology & History Society (8.0 p.m. Islington Town Hall)

17th October: "Black people at the Old Bailey" - Kathy Chater, a 'Black History Month' event

21st November: "The Life and Legacy of Joe Meek" Rob Bradford, editor of the Joe Meek Society journal.

12th December 2012 "The Charles Dickens bicentenary - a celebration" Speaker tbc.

Non-IA&HS members welcome, donation invited. Further information in the website.

London Forum of Civic & Amenity Societies

Meetings at 77, Cowcross Street, 6.30 p.m.

October 17th: Annual General Meeting

November 16th: Creating a Neighbourhood Forum

Islington Museum & Local History Centre

Wednesday 31st October 11.0 a.m. and Saturday 3rd November at 2.0 p.m. "Clerkenwell: Radicals, Religion and Rivers". Walk £6/£5 concessions. Meet at Farringdon Station.

Friday 23rd November 2012 6.30 p.m. "The Cavendishes of Newcastle House". Free.

Estorick Collection of Modern Italian Art, 39a Canonbury Square

Until 23rd December 2012 Bruno Munari (1907-1998) "My Futurist Past". Founding member of the Movimento Arte Concreto in Milan late 1940s.

Almeida Theatre,

Almeida Street, N.1 0207 359 4404

Monday-Saturday 7.30 p.m., Saturday 2.30 p.m.

Until 3rd November 2012 "King Lear" by William Shakespeare, directed by Michael Attenborough. Title role played by Jonathan Pryce.

8th November 2012 -12th January 2013 "The Dark Earth and the Light Sky" by Nick Dear, World Première. Portrait of the poet Edward Thomas.