

October 1998 Newsletter

Please note that the newsletters contain un-edited extracts which have not been updated

PLANNING LONDON BEYOND THE MILLENNIUM

At the Society's Annual Public Lecture on 18 June 1998 our speaker was Martin Simmonds, Chief Planner of the London Planning Advisory Committee (LPAC). He explained how strategic planning for London will work when the new Greater London Authority comes into existence in 2000.

For forty years after 1945 planning for London as a whole was the responsibility of the London County Council and then, for the larger area, of the Greater London Council. But on abolition of the GLC in 1986 there was no equivalent strategic authority. Instead Whitehall issued 'strategic guidance' to the 32 London boroughs, each of which (plus the City) was responsible for preparing its own Unitary Development Plan. Result - a patchwork of borough plans prepared at different times with no close co-ordination.

Seeking to bridge this gap, the Act abolishing the GLC set up LPAC, a committee representative of the boroughs. LPAC was not required to prepare a London-wide plan but was given the job of advising the Secretary of State on the need for strategic guidance, advising the boroughs on strategic guidance, and representing London on the South East Regional Planning Council. In 1991, advising on parking policy was added. LPAC had carried out these functions with a small staff, about 25, with consultants for specific topics. Although it had issued a series of reports and advice, helping to maintain a London-wide planning dimension, it remains essentially an advisory body.

Now proposed - and endorsed in the 1998 referendum - is the new Greater London Authority (GLA) with an elected Mayor and Assembly, one of whose key functions is to prepare a 'spatial development strategy' for London. The Mayor would prepare the strategy for scrutiny by the Assembly and there would be some form of public consultation and examination. The the spatial strategy would interrelate with the GLA's other responsibilities, for transport, regional development and environmental protection.

Meanwhile, the boroughs remain responsible for their UDPs and development control, but need to take London-wide strategy into account. The GLA would have some powers to intervene where strategic matters were involved, but not to dictate to boroughs. Unresolved issues could be referred to the Secretary of State and the Planning

Inspectorate. LPAC in its present form would cease but will be the basis for the GLA's planning department. The timetable is for GLA elections in 1999.

Martin Sirmmonds emphasised that, in theory, creating the new authority would devolve powers down from central government to the region, rather than taking powers from the boroughs. But he doubted if government would cease to interfere - a great deal depends on the character and mandate of the Mayor.

During discussion the effects of excessive car use - particularly local congestion from the school run - were raised. Many were sceptical about the value of the new authority, which had not been seriously debated before the referendum. The gap between strategic planning and schoolrun gridlock seems huge...

THE FUTURE OF EALING TOWN CENTRE

The future for Ealing Town Centre is currently the subject of active discussion and you have two opportunities to contribute to the debate.

First, Ealing Town Centre Forum is a new organisation involving local residents groups, traders, the council and others with an interest in the town centre. It has produced a booklet with a questionnaire which is available from public libraries.

The booklet explains some of the work already done by the forum and other projects in hand. You are invited to say what you like about the Ealing Town Centre and what improvements you would like to see.

Second, the Civic Society is represented on the forum and the executive committee needs to know what members think about the future of the centre. There are two ways of approaching this - not wholly different, but emphasising different aspects, and which could influence the way in which the centre is developed and managed in the future. One approach emphasises Ealing as 'the capital of West London' and stresses the desirability of developing some, mainly vacant, sites in the Ealing Broadway area for retail, cultural and indoor sports activities to enhance the centre's ability to meet the diverse needs of people in this part of West London and to meet some of the challenges posed by proposed new developments at White City, Brent Cross and Uxbridge. The other approach, whilst not excluding new development of vacant sites, stresses its role as our town centre, rather than as a regional centre. Both approaches emphasise improvements to the environment but the first is an adjunct to its commercial success, while the second puts the emphasis on enhancing its quality in the interests of those who live and work there.

These two approaches are not entirely contradictory. Improving the viability of the centre's environment could also improve its attraction to commercial investment - but there could

come a point where commercial success eroded the environmental quality. Similarly, the centre needs to attract and retain commercial investment to help maintain and improve its quality.

The way forward may be to keep an open mind about future developments but always to insist that they should add to and not detract from those qualities and distinctive features that make Ealing Town Centre attractive.

The Civic Society needs to know what you think about this; what you value about the town centre at present and how you think it should evolve in future.

ANNUAL DESIGN AWARDS 1998

Some of the short-listed schemes are:

Glaxo Wellcome World Headquarters in Greenford Green

Replacement conservatory, Park House (corner of St Mary's Road & The Park W5)

New second storey, Marks & Spencer store, Ealing Broadway Centre W5

New residential block, Hillcrest Heights, Hillcrest Road W5

New entrance, North Acton Station, W3

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