

# Townscape character, the Thames Tideway Tunnel and the Port of London

Hon. Secretary Drummond Robson minuted the September Forum. A full and diverse agenda. Full minutes at [planninginlondon.com](http://planninginlondon.com) >LP&DF

The Chairman introduced Steve Walker from Allies and Morrison, Jim Stride from Thames Water and James Trimmer from The Port of London Authority as the three speakers.

## First Discussion Topic

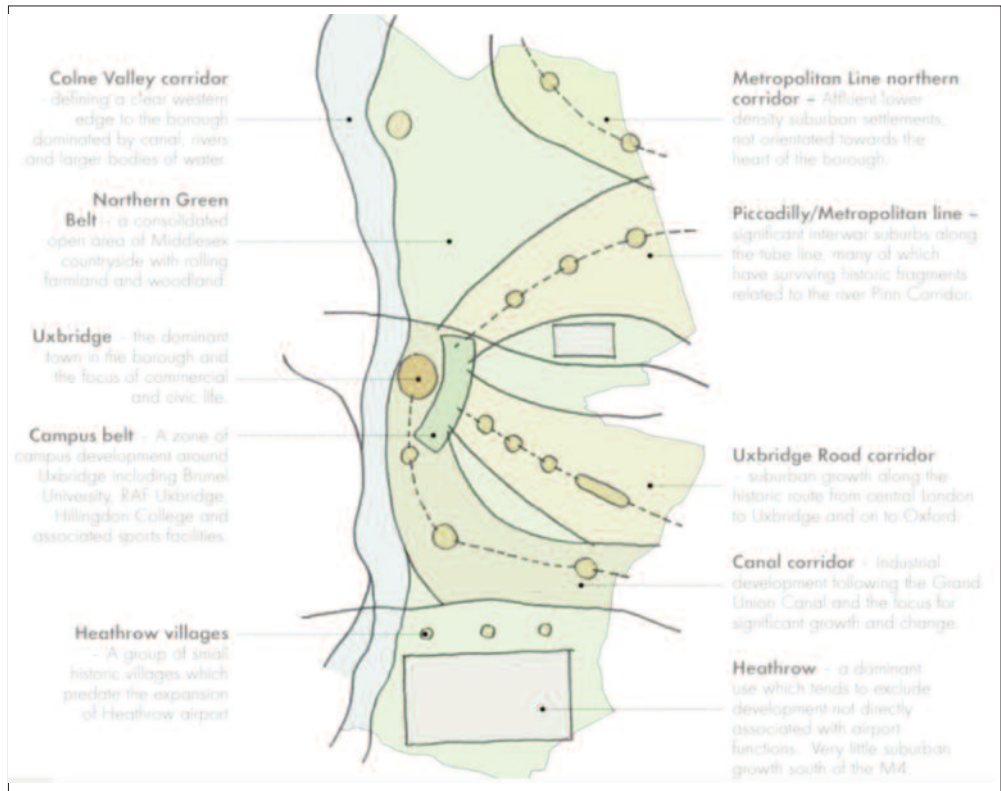
### Townscape Character Study for Hillingdon.

**Steve Walker**, Allies and Morrison Urban Practitioners ("AMUP") explained that he was going to provide a cross section through the urban characterisation work recently completed for Hillingdon. This provides reflections on the journey for how the area has become like it is. In the course of several such studies the approach is being refined. The character of suburban areas demonstrate subtle variations in character. The programme involved a number of useful consultee sessions. It poses the question where one neighbourhood ends and another starts.

The resultant report comprises the origins and evolution of the borough, a description of the place today, urban typology, tall buildings, Hillingdon's places and conclusions.

Looking back some areas such as Metroland have been well documented and recognised (by Betjeman for example). At a fundamental level many settlements are linked back to geology and topography – villages and ancient routes on ridges and towns like Uxbridge at key river crossing points. Other places are linked to the expansion of infrastructure – the rapid inter-war metroland development in the north of Hillingdon traces the route of the tube lines and only loosely relates to the historic villages which were there previously. In many smaller towns and villages this can be easily read, but in London the detail has often been swamped by subsequent generations of development. Overall diagrams such as that for distinctive places like Uxbridge help to explain their character

This distillation is then supported by a series of mapping layers which together describe the overall form of the borough including the topography, watercourses, Green Belt, green spaces, transport network, the PTAL rating that generates and some

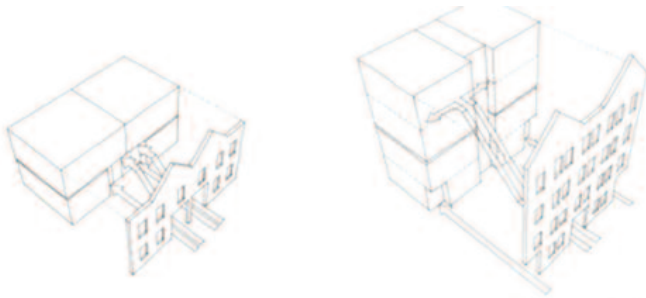




of the headline social factors including population density and deprivation profile. There is also the “software” of social and economic factors such as affluence and poverty.

Hillingdon’s housing is principally low density suburbia of similar density in perimeter or irregular block form. Three distinct types may be drawn out from this: Metroland of private suburbs Garden City Estates, public sector and Plotland Development.

Residential descriptions are not particularly about the architectural style, although that is clearly a factor. The studies focussed on more fundamental elements such as the nature of the street and the front gardens, the plot sizes and configuration, and the role that soft landscaping plays in establishing the character. Of note is the range of variation within suburban inter-war housing. This is important as different areas cope with change in different ways – some much more ably



than others. The root of this goes right back to the development origins of the places themselves.

There are also mixed areas in rural fragments, retail centres and “big boxes”. Retail centres were classified for example to include secondary, tertiary and retail parks. There are also industrial areas and campus sites. There followed identification of places with which people feel associated.

Intensification. Communities in outer London are struggling to come to terms with the step change that is taking place in scale and character of development as urban forms push their way out along transport lines into the suburbs.

At face value this is discussed in terms of character – how do these buildings relate to the context in terms of scale, massing, materials etc.

However, this is also a proxy for concerns about community fragmentation – the shift away from perceptions of suburban family homes with a stable community to much denser clusters of smaller units and expectations of transient populations.

Three key typologies illustrate their ability to accommodate design change. Metroland suburbs are more relaxed and able to cope with change as there is often an element of variation between plots. However, a key feature of the type is the roofscape, often with a symmetrical pair of houses. It is very easy for this symmetry to be fractured by a poorly considered loft conversion, affecting not only the pair of houses, but also the skyline, and hence the sense of openness along the street.

Garden city buildings place a strong emphasis on their group identity and so even relatively small changes can have a disproportionate impact.

Plotland forms with their rather laid-back jumble can easily cope with modest or even quite significant change.

In some instances, characterisation work has helped to identify ways in which existing building types can be adapted to suit new and more dense forms of development in ways which are recognisably of the place (such as the Warner housing in Walthamstow being reinterpreted by Mae Architects to establish a type which is more intense, but definitely of the place).

Spaces between kerblines and buildings are often as important as the building itself in defining space. >>>

**Attendance at 77 Portland Place, RIBA London.** Our hosts were Owen Wainhouse, RIBA London Region and Mark Charlton, Head of Research and Forecasting.

Brian Waters: Chairman

Adam Mills: London Borough of Haringey

Clive Price: London Society

James Trimmer: Thames Water

Jonathan Manns: Colliers International and RTPi London

Laura Broderick: RIBA London

Lewis Roberts: Thames Water

Michael Coupe: London Society and Coupe Planning

Michael Edwards: UCL

Owen Wainhouse: RIBA London

Peter Eversden: London Forum

Phil Stride: Thames Water

Steve Walker: Allies and Morrison (For Hillingdon Council)

Tim Wachter: RICS

Tom Ball: London Forum

Drummond Robson: Honorary Secretary and Robson Planning

Apologies have been received from Alastair Gaskin, Andrew Rogers, Brian Whiteley,

David Bradley, Duncan Bowie and Michael Simmons.



Some places are stripped of this clothing which encourages the area to be increasingly unappreciated.

With building stock approaching a century old in some cases and densities which can't easily sustain a critical mass of transport or local services there is a fundamental question about how we improve the sustainability of our suburbs.

#### Discussion

Brian Waters asked what the context was for this work and its outputs. SW said this would contribute to the evidence base for the local plan with its effects in the Management Regime.

Peter Eversden said that the London Plan imposes a duty on Boroughs who are required to consider character and need. However much encouraged relatively little has been done in London as a whole. Much is influenced by the need to intensify land use. Areas of spiral land use have influenced strongly how people behave. More work is growing with local communities though he questioned the need for a further layer of neighbourhood planning.

Mike Coupe invited giving the study to Nick Boles who he considered could benefit from it. He asked if it would be made available to developers. It clearly has a use in pre application discussions.

Dahlia Lichfield considered the study focuses principally on physical change rather than economic or social and asked whether it is sufficient merely to concentrate on the character of house forms. Should you not leave the residents to want different house forms in response to their needs?

Michael Edwards invited people to read a recent study called "An assessment of the effects of conservation areas on value" written by Gabriel M. Ahlfeldt, Nancy Holman & Nicolai Wendland, Research commissioned by English Heritage and carried out by the London School of Economics (LSE) in 2012 which EH consider has proved the value of conservation areas.

<http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/professional/research/social-and-economic-research/value-conservation-areas/>

Drummond Robson asked what you do with areas where the look is gone. SW suggested they be left alone. DR also said that Conservation Area designation can assist in areas where change is needed rather than simply fixing in aspic. (Does CA designation result in shifting values rather than adding values: see above).

Ron Heath noted the distinct character of areas of Loughton, Buckhurst Hill Chigwell etc. where what has happened echoes the findings of the present study.

Political dilution of what was being attempted is a problem. Also the studies are labour intensive and confront practicalities of staff shortages. SW

added that areas of special value are sometimes identified where a dozen owners are doing roof extensions to overcome negative policies and these may need to be recognised for the changes they make to the character of an area.

#### Discussion Topic 2

##### Thames Tideway Tunnel

The Thames Tideway Tunnel London's Proposed New 15.5 mile (25km) Sewer. **Phil Stride** Head of Thames Tideway Tunnel at Thames Water introduced the item. The Development Consent Application has formally just started to be consid-



ered by the Planning Inspectorate. London's sewerage network was built in the 19th century. The capital's population then was 4 million. It's now over 7 million, and the network is almost at full capacity.

The Plan above shows the preferred route and the combined sewer overflow sites. Without the Tideway Improvements, the annual CSO discharges would reach 70 million cubic metres in a typical year by 2020. The proposed line of the tunnel is determined principally by where the CSOs currently discharge.

The government says that 18m tonnes of effluent discharges into the Thames on an average year. TW gave the figure as 39m tonnes of a total discharge of 60m, which is expected to increase in

10 years to 70m. This currently occurs some 60 times a year. With the new system pumping this up the 65 metres will only occur about 7 times a year when full.

<http://www.thamestidewaytunnel.co.uk/document-library/>

<http://www.thamestidewaytunnel.co.uk/document-library/catalogue-view/?c=7-phase-two-consultation-material>

The scheme has been the subject of several consultations Phase one consultation (13 September 2010 – 14 January 2011), Interim engagement (11 March 2011 – 16 August



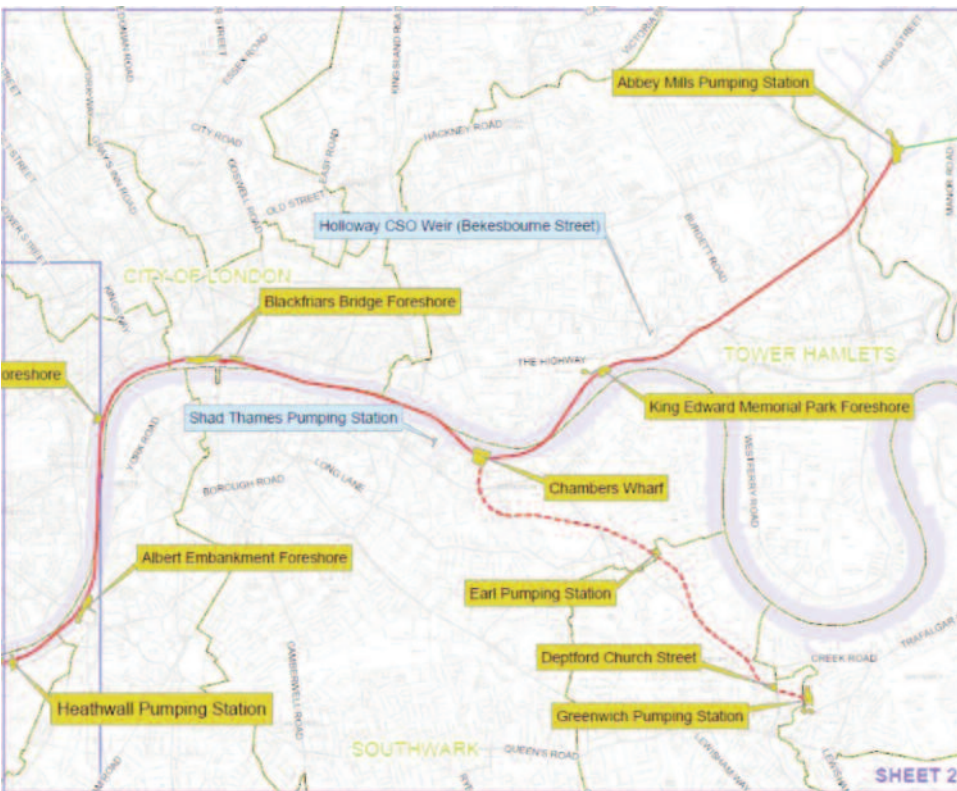
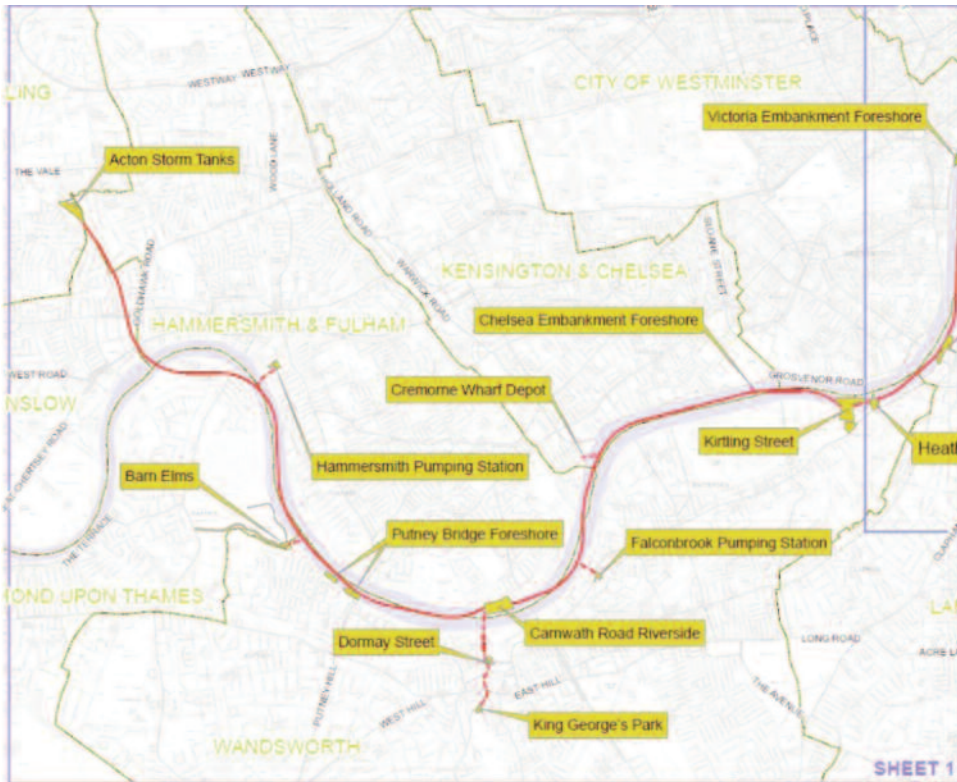
2011)

Phase two consultation (4 November 2011 – 10 February 2012) Targeted consultation

(6 June 2012 – 4 July 2012) and Section 48 Publicity (16 July 2012 – 5 October 2012). The application was accepted by the Inspectorate on 28th February 2013. There have been 117 days of exhibition and 9,400 consultees to date. A preliminary meeting was held on 9th September, chaired by Jan Bissell. The issues identified in the Rule 6 statement are:

1. Air Quality and Emissions, 2. Biodiversity, Biological Environment and Ecology, 3. Coastal/River Change, 4. Compulsory Acquisition, 5. Design, Landscape and Visual Impact, 6. Flood Risk and Climate Change, 7. Historic Environment,





8. Land Use Including Regeneration and Open Space, 9. Noise and Disturbance, 10. Rationale for the Selection of Worksites and Drive Strategies, 11. Socio-Economic Effects, 12. Traffic, Travel and Transportation, 13. Water Quality and Resources. <http://infrastructure.planningportal.gov.uk/projects/london/thames-tideway-tunnel/?ipcsection=overview>

The examination sessions are due to end by

March 2014, with 3 months following this for the Inspectors to report to Ministers to determine it – probably by Autumn 2014.

The Journal of the European Union procurement for category 1 construction is in three packages: Lot 1 West £3-500m, Lot 2 Central £6-950m, Lot 3 East £5-800m. Three frameworks support each lot: Mechanical, Electrical, Instrumentation, Controls, Automation, Security and Occupational

Health. Contractors will call off from these frameworks, and the contracts will be NEC 3 option target price contracts. Category 2 enabling will cost up to £135m and category 3 Thames Water Utility interface works a further £220m. Contract notices were published in July 2013.

There are five large construction sites and 17 smaller ones. Construction is due to last from 2016 to 2022. The tunnel has a width of three London buses: 6.5 and 7.2 metres in diameter, 66 metres underground at its deepest point and 25.1 kilometres (15.6 miles) long – making it one of the largest and deepest tunnels under London, under 40 existing London tunnels. Falls are at 1 in 800.

Comparison was made with American alternatives but the needs there were far higher and not comparable. (Self cleaning velocity of 0.3m/second is needed).

**Discussion**

Peter Eversden raised the question of encroachment. Grouping CSO's is of concern to canoeists. He also asked what happens between now and when the new tunnel is opened. PS suggested that much of the solution will rely on improved use of SUDS to attenuate runoff which was not being pursued vigorously enough by London Councils. PS showed an image of the completed project at the works site at Blackfriars at the end of the Fleet River (see left). A schematic showing what the Blackfriars site contains can be seen on the London First pages in this issue.

Tom Ball asked about the finances for the project and what profit margins were being sought. This is controlled through consultation with Ofwat. The overall cost is £4.1bn. A charge of £80/household will be charged from some 13.5 million customers in the region for a period as yet undefined. Thames Water is seeking an increase in water charges of an average of £29/customer (8 per cent) for next year which is being challenged by Ofwat. It is proposed to fix new figures in November.

Thames Water estimate the capital cost of the project to be £4.1bn, expressed in 2011 prices. The project will not have any impact on bills before 2013 at the earliest. The maximum impact is likely to come a few years later and is estimated to be in the range £70-80 per year, again expressed in 2011 prices.

This means that the average wastewater bill of Thames Water customers, which have for many years been among the lowest in the country, would rise to around the national average.

Tim Wachter wanted to explore Construction sites further. He compared the situation to that confronting Joseph Bazelgette in the 1860s and 1870s. PS explained that the risk was being managed by contractors allowing for their reasonable >>>



profits. Budgetting is not unconstrained.

90 per cent of the arisings (of between 2,400-2,700 Tonnes) from the 380m cubic metre capacity tunnel and shafts is planned to be carried by river.



Discussion Topic 3

### PLA: Working to Promote the Blue Ribbon Network Policies of the London Plan.

**James Trimmer** Port of London's Director of Planning and Environment introduced the item. He explained that the PLA's remit extends wider than London alone to include the whole tidal Thames including Essex and Kent. PLA was founded in 1909 following the first Act of Parliament introduced by Churchill, covering a 95 mile stretch from Teddington to Margate and Clacton. It includes Rivers, Estuary and the Sea. Its role includes conservancy work in these areas where no licences are required. PLA work to keep commercial and leisure users safe, protect and enhance the environment and promote the use of the river for trade and travel.

The PLA, as a statutory harbour authority, has environmental duties under the Harbours Act 1964, specifically to have regard to:

- the conservation of the natural beauty of the countryside and of flora, fauna and geological or physiographical features of interest;

- the desirability of preserving for the public any freedom of access to places of natural beauty; and

- the desirability of maintaining the availability to the public of any facility for visiting or inspecting any building, site or object of archaeological, architectural or historic interest.

The PLA must comply with these requirements when considering an application for River Works or Dredging under the Port of London Act 1968 and also in its own activities and functions.

The PLA is also a competent authority under the Conservation (Natural Habitats &c.) Regulations 1994 and the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. It is therefore a requirement for the PLA to ensure continuing compliance with environmental legislation (including the relevant EC Directives) and to take the environment into account in its actions and decisions.

Under the London Plan PLA seeks to promote the Thames as part of the Blue Ribbon Network. Passenger traffic has been increasing from 4.9 mil-

lion passenger in 2003 to 6.5 in 2012. Freight tonnage is increasing after recent falls from 9.2 million tonnes in 2003 through 7.8 million in 2010 to 8.7m in 2012. 50,000 tons of Cane Sugar come to Tate and Lyle in Silvertown. But though Britain has the biggest cane sugar industry in Europe – and the Tate & Lyle site in Silvertown supplies 40 per cent of Europe's entire sugar cane needs. European CAP tariff quotas have restricted this in recent years to protect sugar beet in which France is dominant and doubling the price of European sugar compared with world averages and put the industry at risk. This affects an 850 strong workforce.

Although car production has ceased in Dagenham the constant movement of parts through the Ro-ro berth at Dagenham moving cars and trailers has increased in tonnage moved.

Over half of the total production by weight in England comes from the East Inshore and East Offshore marine plan areas which accounts for 77 per cent of the licensed area.

The first millionth ton of aggregate has been extracted for the Lee Tunnel between Abbey Mills and Beckton.

PLA is the second largest port in Britain after Grimsby and Immingham by tonnage.

The area Generates over 46,000 FTE jobs and £3.745 billion contribution to regional economy trading with over 80 countries on all continents except Antarctica.

PLA encourages maximising the use of the River using AIS (Automatic Identification System) and transponder technology to serve a World City as strongly as 2000 years ago. Mayor is seeking, through the River Action Plan, a target to increase passenger journeys to 12 million by 2020. This is to be achieved by Better Piers, Better Information & Integration, Better Promotion and Better Partnership working. Commuting in faster ferries is resulting in higher traffic.

PLA competition for trade with Rotterdam Hamburg Antwerp is likely to suffer from increasing ship size resulting in huge vessels stopping at fewer ports giving preference to these larger markets. However M and S have signed up to the new redeveloped old Shell Haven oil refinery site on Canvey Island which came with DP World's £3.9bn purchase of P&O in 2006. Ten years in the planning, work started in March 2010 on the new Thamesport. The port will have the best tidal window access for deep-drafted vessels and a capacity of 3.5m Twenty Foot Equivalent Container Units per annum.

With six berths and the capability to handle the Ultra Large Container Ships 59m wide and 14.5m draft, with capacity for 18,000 containers, the terminal will deploy automated container handling systems and controls. London Gateway

port is designed to provide significant improvement in handling speeds, which will provide a significant reduction in the time spent in port. Automated stacking will reduce the vulnerability to adverse weather conditions.

Prospects are good in terms of major infrastructure projects, development sites and new approaches to logistics.

There are new landside opportunities (e.g. for a Cruise terminal in Greenwich), and building on London's economic fundamentals to provide strong investment and sustainable transport.

### Discussion

Peter Eversden raised the concern that high value land for housing was pricing out boatyards which needed to be safeguarded. JT said that the Blue Ribbon General Conformity provision is not strong enough although the Mayor can now direct refusal.

It was agreed that this reinforces the importance of viability tests, the need to show profitability, a reasonable rate of return. Financial measures are not within the measure itself so the key is to find an operator as a real test of viability. JT added that PLA has CPO powers.

Dahlia Lichfield asked if wildlife is in the plans. JT replied that PLA followed legislation such as the Habitats Directive 1964, SSSI and SSA designations. It is clear that The Environment cannot be divorced from PLA work.

The Chairman thanked all three speakers for their informed presentations.

### Future of the London Society

<http://www.londonsociety.org.uk/>

The Chairman invited **Clive Price** of the London Society as a supplementary item to speak about the future of the Society which had its centenary in 2012 but which is losing its Chairman and many of its officers and so is in danger of having to close. The Society is "concerned with advancing the practical improvement and artistic development of London".

Suggestions of possible assistance came from both the London Forum and Jonathan Manns for the RTP1 which it was agreed should continue after the meeting to see if there were ways of assisting the Society. ■

