

ACA CONFERENCE

Monday 17th May 2010

14:00 – 18:00 followed by a drinks reception

The Royal Society of Medicine, 1 Wimpole Street, W1G 0AE



Housing Design Guide: catalyst or obstacle to providing new homes for Londoners?

A special briefing event organised by the Association of Consulting Architects with the London Planning and Development Forum to examine the implications of the new guide and discuss affordable housing policy after the Election. The HCA's public consultation on housing design and sustainability closes on 17 June. This is your chance to understand the issues and respond.

Policy-makers and leading practitioners will examine how design, sustainability and affordable policies are impacting on the industry's ability to deliver new housing in for Londoners.

- Understand how the new guide will work in practice alongside existing policies with presentations from the Guide's authors and local authority planning officers
- Hear from leading developers, RSLs and architects talking about the guide's impact on developments and design using case studies
- Using the new Housing Design Guide - some practical advice
- The hunt for viability: how the design guide and affordable housing policy is affecting housing development
- Achieving planning consent under the new rules
- Debate the implications with policy makers and practitioners

CONFIRMED SPEAKERS INCLUDE:

Julian Hart, Design and Standards Manager, HCA London
Paul Harbard, Managing Director, Pocket Living
Ben Denton, Head of Investment and Asset Management, First Base
John Hughes, Group Development Director, Notting Hill Housing

BOOKING DETAILS:

To find out more and book, contact Luke Wilcox on 0203 178 3671 or luke.wilcox@dialoguegroup.co.uk

Standard rate – £139 + VAT
ACA Members rate – £119 + VAT

The event will be chaired by Lee Mallett, co-publishing editor of Planning in London magazine and Westminster and City Planning newsletters

An Association of Consultant Architects event, in association with

London Planning & Development Forum / Planning in London; Media partner BD; supported by UCL; Organised by Dialogue Group



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Turning the ordinary into good ordinary

The London Region of the RIBA is running a competition under the title 'Forgotten Spaces'. It attracted more than 150 entries, many of them intriguing, covering everything from roundabouts to back alleys, free land in sometimes highly valuable areas, and the near-rural environments of the outer London boroughs.

The ideas generated (the best will go on show at the National Theatre in May) are a reminder that a city like London, with its numerous showpiece buildings and public spaces, is nevertheless for most of the time an aggregation of the ordinary. The experience of moving about the city is not a processional route of Beaux Arts magnificence, but a medley of the everyday and the special, the open and the dense, where scale is truly collaged and where time accelerates or decelerates depending on whether you are stalled in a bus on Oxford Street, or whizzing somewhere on the Jubilee Line.

How to make everyday experience decent is not something that is formally recognized in the planning system for, though it is identified as important in a thousand and one guides to street improvement, public realm, landscape strategies, and regeneration primers.

More attention should be paid to how we create our public realm

when it comes to, say, repaving our streets. From observation, this work is not carried out very well very often, hence the endless replacement of those horrid little pavers that have replaced proper paving slabs in too many parts of the capital. Do these replacements ever grab the attention of the planning system? It seems not. Yet as we move to an era of austerity in public spending, there must be a case for looking at what can be achieved with modest resources when major public projects are put on the back-burner. Here, the argument about how many are affected by a particular public investment will be important. If you are going to spend money improving some areas, doesn't it make sense to invest where it will have the maximum effect?

It often seems that the reverse is the case; that the areas round train and tube stations are more likely to be shabby and ill-paved than other places, even though they are used by far more people. Some of the most dismal spaces in any borough are ones which may be cheapest to transform (think railway arches). And that is before one thinks about the greatest wasted asset in most cities: their rooftops.

Turning the ordinary into good ordinary would be a suitable target for planning alchemy. ■

Less is definitely less with housing

We all agree. London needs more homes. Some of them need to be affordable so essential workers can keep doing what London needs them to. We also all agree that the number of households will increase because of net immigration, household formation, and population growth. It's in the latest London Plan.

Yet Ken Livingstone and New Labour made it increasingly difficult for this extra affordable housing to be provided by constantly inserting new hurdles in the race for planning consent although Ken did relax densities. As a consequence of these, and the credit crunch, there is very little viability about and development site values, in particular, have had to carry the burden. Paradoxically because of our distorted housing market, London house prices for built stock remain robust.

It is the planning system which is destroying development viability. It is having exactly the opposite effect of what is intended –

fewer, not more new homes. This is a disastrous. Less houses built than at any time in post-war history when we need more.

Now the Homes & Communities Agency and the LDA have ripped up deals with developers struck under the London Wide Initiative and propose to put these sites back to market – having usefully exploited the skills of developers to achieve consents and reduce risk on these sites over the last few years. Perhaps we'll hear how much of taxpayers' money has been spent doing all of this when in truth it could have been done by the private sector a lot more quickly without any taxpayers' money – other perhaps than grant to private developers to include affordable housing in their plans – just as the bloated and inefficient RSL sector receives grant at the moment. Its time for change in housing delivery. It is broke and we should fix it. ■

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The London Planning and Development Forum (LPDF).

The LPDF was formed in 1980 following an all-party inquiry into the development control system. It selects topics to debate at its quarterly meetings and these views are reported to constituent bodies. It is a sounding board for the development of planning policy in the capital, used by both the public and private sector. To attend please contact secretary Drummond Robson.

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LEADER: CONSERVATIVE GREEN PAPER

A Tory fix for 'broken' planning

The Conservative Party's 'Open Source Planning' policy green paper calls for a 'radical reboot' of the 'broken' planning system. Despite being painfully naive (it is doubtful any of the authors have ever prepared or processed a planning application), the paper is full of interesting proposals, some of which could, given time, produce improvements to the process and perhaps even to outcomes.

The paper's core proposal is what is called 'open source' planning. The Conservatives describe this as: 'A planning system where there is a basic national framework of planning priorities and policies, within which local people and their accountable local governments can produce their own distinctive local policies to create communities which are sustainable, attractive and good to live in.'

Alongside its 'localism' agenda, the paper has a recurring emphasis on design, but unfortunately this probably means a mixture of prescription, guidelines, local design standards, design by community charrette and new barriers to imaginative development, unless embedded in the local plan.

The paper says: 'We expect local authorities to set out architectural and design standards.' These are likely to be lowest common denominator codes, especially since, as RIBA president Ruth Reed has pointed out, local authorities would not have the skills and resources to do otherwise. Intriguingly, design review gets no mention at all – neither at CABE, nor at a local level.

Our planning system is unusual in that it is essentially discretionary – anything goes if it can jump all the hurdles. Most countries work to rigid codes that preclude exceptions. The Conservative policy calls for plans to be generated locally, meaning through neighbourhoods, parishes or estates. To work, these would have to be unambiguous and up-to-date, as well as consistent with national policies – although the Tories don't explain how they would resource this.

The concept is enforced by seeking to emasculate the appeal system – the only bit that currently works – so permitted schemes that do not comply with the plan can be appealed by third parties. This means committees would be reluctant to approve them in the first place for fear of surcharge. Third parties, like much else, are not

defined, but the paper does clarify that there would be a system to filter out frivolous appeals.

Developers are understandably horrified at this idea, which has been firmly rejected in the recent past. However, Andrew Rogers, chairman of the Association of Consultant Architects planning advisory group, says: 'Any consultant worth his salt will always be able to argue on appeal that the refused (or approved) scheme does (or does not) comply with at least part, if not all, of the neighbourhood plan/unitary development plan/national policy, meaning that appeals will, in my view, continue as they do now.'

On the plus side, the paper creates a huge opportunity for architects to take a more commanding role in development – if you think this might be a good thing. The so-called 'open source' approach would see greater scope for deemed permissions. These are described as 'automatic permissions where sustainable development

meets no objection from a significant majority of immediate neighbours'. It would generally be unlawful for an authority to refuse permission if it conforms to the local plan and is 'sustainable'.

Architects would find themselves with an enhanced role in pre-consultation, with the aim of achieving and demonstrating the explicit support of the majority of neighbours, so that the client gets a quicker, cheaper go-ahead. Compliance would have to be certified by the architect, and would be a real value-added service. Add to this the current movement towards integrating building and planning control and architects would quickly be in a position to regain lost ground, particularly if the Conservatives introduce policies 'designed to bring competition to public service provision', as they promise. That would really transform the culture of planning.

Adding 'automatic' approvals, as the paper suggests, may reduce the workload of planning departments but would increase that of architects and might introduce a focus on seeking out better design. However, to reach the point where open source planning is legislated for and new-style local plans are in place would take at least two terms of Conservative government. Expect the disjointed incrementalism of the English planning system to be with us a while longer. ■



ABOVE: Will Tory planning policy need a rethink, post-election?

HOW THE TORIES SEE THEIR 'NEW LOCALISM' IN ACTION...

Key points in the Conservatives' long awaited Planning Green Paper, providing radical new ideas for the planning system include:

'A Truly Local Plan' – the removal of regional government would put more weight on the Local Development Plan and its need to be up-to-date.

Flexibility of Use Classes – total flexibility within uses defined by the Local Plan in specific areas: could this be an echo of the Enterprise Zones of the 1980s? This has the potential to create all sorts of opportunities.

Incentives for Development – match funding for affordable homes and new house building plus

encouragement for developers to provide voluntary compensation for neighbours in return for support.

National Planning Framework – a new overarching planning framework (voted on by both Houses of Parliament), setting out economic and environmental priorities. Streamlining existing national policy and dispensing with some PPSs.

Needs and Competition Testing for Retail – despite the very recent publication of PPS4, the Conservatives would re-adopt the 'needs test'.

Third Party Appeal – residents as well as developers would have the right to appeal but the grounds for appeal would be limited to just two

categories: 1. following procedures incorrectly, 2. contravention of the Local Plan.

'Major Infrastructure Unit' to Replace the IPC – major linear infrastructure projects would be approved through hybrid or private Parliamentary Bills. The MIU would assess all other major infrastructure projects through planning inquires with the Secretary of State making the final decision rather than the unelected IPC.

New tariff systems to replace CIL – set locally and applied to all residential and non-residential development at graded rates (dependent on size), a percentage of which would be passed down to the local community. *source: Drivers Jonas*