

Planning and Environment Reference Guide

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LONDON BOROUGHS



CITY OF LONDON



Simon Bullock
Principal Planning Officer
Town Hall,
Barking IG11 7LU
T: 0208 227 3803
E: simon.bullock@lbbd.gov.uk

Glyn Bryant
Head of Strategic Planning and Development
Wyncham House,
207 Longlands Road,
Sidcup, Kent DA15 7JH
T: 0208 308 7776
E: glyn.bryant@bexley.gov.uk

Bob McQuillan
Chief Planner
Bromley Civic Centre,
Stockwell Close,
Bromley, BR1 3UH
T: 020 8313 4441
E: bob.mcquillan@bromley.gov.uk

Annie Hampson
Planning Services and Development Director
PO Box 270
Guildhall EC2P 2EJ
T: 020 7332 1700
E: annie.hampson@cityoflondon.gov.uk

Jeremy Grint
Head of Spatial Regeneration
T: 0208 227 2443
E: jeremy.grint@lbbd.gov.uk

Sue Clark
Head of Development Control
T: 0208 308 7761
E: sue.clark@bexley.gov.uk

Marc Hume
Director of Renewal and Recreation Services
T: 0208 8461 7987
E: marc.hume@bromley.gov.uk

Paul Beckett
Policy and Performance Director
T: 020 7332 1970
E: paul.beckett@cityoflondon.gov.uk

Tim Lewis
Development and Building Control Manager
T: 0208 227 3706
E: tim.lewis@lbbd.gov.uk

Adrian Cole
Head of Building Control
T: 0208 308 7802
E: adrian.cole@bexley.gov.uk

Steven Moore
Head of Building Control
T: 0208 313 4315
E: steve.moore@bromley.gov.uk

Peter Shadbolt
Development Plans
T: 020 7332 1038
E: peter.shadbolt@cityoflondon.gov.uk

Dave Mansfield
Development Control Manager Tel. 020 8227 3999
dave.mansfield@lbbd.gov.uk



Stewart Murray
Head of Planning
North London Business Park (NLBP)
Oakleigh Road South
London
N11 1NP
T: 0208 359 4838
E: stewart.murray@barnet.gov.uk

Chris Walker
Director of Planning
4th Floor, Brent House,
349 High Road,
Wembley HA9 6BZ
T: 0208 937 5246
E: chris.walker@brent.gov.uk

Ed Watson
Assistant Director of Planning and Public Protection 6th Floor, Camden
Town Hall Extension
Argyle Street, WC1H 8EQ
T: 020 7974 562
E: ed.watson@camden.gov.uk

Mike Kiely
Director of Planning and Building Control
Taberner House,
Park Lane,
Croydon, CR9 1JT
T: 0208 726 6000 (central)
E: mike.kiely@croydon.gov.uk

Ros Ward
Strategic Planning and Policy Manager
T: 0208 359 4657
E: ros.ward@barnet.gov.uk

Dave Carroll
Head of Policy and Projects
T: 0208 937 5202
E: dave.carroll@brent.gov.uk

David Joyce
Head of Planning Policy
T: 020 7972 5615
E: david.joyce@camden.gov.uk

Tim Naylor
Head of Spatial Planning
T: 020 8726 6000
E: tim.naylor@croydon.gov.uk

Richard Morcom
Head of Building Control
T: 0208 359 4646
E: Richard.morcom@barnet.gov.uk

Stephen Weeks
Head of Area Planning
T: 0208 937 5238
E: stephen.weeks@brent.gov.uk

Frances Wheat
Head of Development Control
T: 020 7974 5630
E: frances.wheat@camden.gov.uk

Rory MacLeod
Head of Development Management
T: 0208 726 6000
E: rory.macleod@croydon.gov.uk

Richard Wilson
Head of Urban Design and Renewal
T: 020 7974 5914
E: richard.wilson@camden.gov.uk

Ric Patterson
Head of Building Control
T: 020 8726 6000
E: richard.patterson@croydon.gov.uk

Kevin Harris
Head of Town Planning and Surveying
Perceval House,
14/16 Uxbridge Road,
London, W5 2HL
T: 0208 825 5929
E: Kevin.harris@ealing.gov.uk

Richard Johns
Head of Planning Policy
T: 0208 825 8446
E: richard.jones@ealing.gov.uk

Sue Foster
Head of Planning
T: 0208 356 8134
E: sue.foster@hackney.gov.uk

Chris Berry
Development Control Manager
T: 0208 356 8067
E: chris.berry@hackney.gov.uk

Patrick Keyes
Head of Planning
T: 01708 432721
E: Patrick.keyes@havering.gov.uk

David Lawn
Development Control Manager
T: 01708 43723
E: david.lawn@havering.gov.uk

Kevin O'Leary
Director of Planning
222 Upper Street,
London, N1 1XR
T: 0207 527 2350
E: Kevin.o-leary@islington.gov.uk

Louise Reid
Development Control Manager
T: 0207 527 8532
E: louise.reid@islington.gov.uk



Jon Whitwell
Assistant Director, Planning
Hammersmith Town Hall
King Street, London W6 9JU
T: 020 8753 3402
Email: jon.whitwell@lbhf.gov.uk

Stephen Tapper
Director of Planning and Transportation
Civic Centre,
Silver Street,
Enfield, EN1 3XY
T: 0208 379 3800
E: stephen.tapper@enfield.gov.uk

Juliemma McLoughlin
Interim Head of Development Management
T: 020 8753 3402
Email: juliemma.mcloughlin@lbhf.gov.uk

Martyn Thomas
Head of Forward Planning
T: 01708 432845
E: martin.thomas@havering.gov.uk

Peter Lerner
Executive Director
Planning and Borough Development
Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea
Rm 328, Kensington Town Hall
Hornton Street
London W8 7NX
T: 020 7361 2944
E: Peter.Lerner@rbkc.gov.uk

Kerry Abbade
Director of Planning Policy
T: 0208 379 4184
E: kerry.abbade@enfield.gov.uk



Jean Palmer
Director of Planning and Community Services
London Borough of Hillingdon
Civic Centre, High Street,
Uxbridge, Middlesex. UB8 1UW
T: 01895 250 622
E: jpalm@hilligdon.gov.uk

Derek Taylor
Head of Development Control
T: 0207 361 2701
E: derek.taylor@rbkc.gov.uk

Julian Jackson
Development Control
T: 0208 379 3857
E: julian.jackson@enfield.gov.uk

Marc Dorfman
Assistant Director of Planning,
Regeneration and Economy

Civic Centre
High Road
Wood Green N22 8LE
T: 0208 489 5208
E: marc.dorfman@haringey.gov.uk

Janet Rangely
Head of Community and Spatial Development
T: 01895 250 553
E: jrangely@hilligdon.gov.uk

Penelope Tollitt
Head of Policy and Design
T: 207 361 2017
E: Penelope.tollitt@rbkc.gov.uk



Paul Tomkins
Head of Development Management
T: 0208 489 5167
E: paul.tomkins@haringey.gov.uk

Geoff Elliott
Deputy Director of Planning and Community Services
T: 01895 250 556
E: gelliott@hilligdon.gov.uk



Stewart Murray
Head of Planning
North London Business Park (NLBP)
Oakleigh Road South
London
N11 1NP
T: 0208 359 4838
E: stewart.murray@barnet.gov.uk

Chris Walker
Director of Planning
4th Floor, Brent House,
349 High Road,
Wembley HA9 6BZ
T: 0208 937 5246
E: chris.walker@brent.gov.uk

Ed Watson
Assistant Director of Planning and Public Protection 6th Floor, Camden
Town Hall Extension
Argyle Street, WC1H 8EQ
T: 020 7974 562
E: ed.watson@camden.gov.uk

Mike Kiely
Director of Planning and Building Control
Taberner House,
Park Lane,
Croydon, CR9 1JT
T: 0208 726 6000 (central)
E: mike.kiely@croydon.gov.uk

Ros Ward
Strategic Planning and Policy Manager
T: 0208 359 4657
E: ros.ward@barnet.gov.uk

Dave Carroll
Head of Policy and Projects
T: 0208 937 5202
E: dave.carroll@brent.gov.uk

David Joyce
Head of Planning Policy
T: 020 7972 5615
E: david.joyce@camden.gov.uk

Tim Naylor
Head of Spatial Planning
T: 020 8726 6000
E: tim.naylor@croydon.gov.uk

Richard Morcom
Head of Building Control
T: 0208 359 4646
E: Richard.morcom@barnet.gov.uk

Stephen Weeks
Head of Area Planning
T: 0208 937 5238
E: stephen.weeks@brent.gov.uk

Frances Wheat
Head of Development Control
T: 020 7974 5630
E: frances.wheat@camden.gov.uk

Rory MacLeod
Head of Development Management
T: 0208 726 6000
E: rory.macleod@croydon.gov.uk

Richard Wilson
Head of Urban Design and Renewal
T: 020 7974 5914
E: richard.wilson@camden.gov.uk

Ric Patterson
Head of Building Control
T: 020 8726 6000
E: richard.patterson@croydon.gov.uk

Francis Dolan
Director of Strategic Planning
Peggy Middleton House
50 Woolwich New Road
Woolwich
London SE18 6HQ
T: 020 8921 5384
E: francis.dolan@greenwich.gov.uk

Steve Merryfield
Development Planning Manager
T: 0208 921 5217
E: steve.merryfield@greenwich.gov.uk

Steve Pallett
Head of Development
T: 0208 912 5229
E: steve.pallett@greenwich.gov.uk



Andy Parsons
Group Manager of Development Control and Forward Planning

Civic Centre
PO Box 57
Station Road, Harrow, HA1 2XF
T: 0208 726 6269
E: andy.parsons@harrow.gov.uk



Cathy Gallagher
Head of Development Control
Civic Centre,
Lampton Road,
Hounslow, TW3 4DN
T: 0208 583 4945
E: cathy.gallagher@hounslow.gov.uk

Michael Jordan
Head of Planning
T: 0208 583 5331
E: Michael.jordan@hounslow.gov.uk

Stuart Harrison
Head of Strategic Planning
T: 0208 583 2000
E: stuart.harrison@hounslow.gov.uk

Roy Thompson
Head of Planning and Development
Guildhall
High Street
Kingston upon Thames
KT1 1EU
T: 0208 547 5317
E: roy.thompson@rbk.kingston.gov.uk

Rob Dixon
Head of Planning Policy and Development Control
T: 0208 547 5317
E: rob.dixon@rbk.kingston.gov.uk

Michael Scott
Manager of Planning
T: 0208 547 5318
E: Michael.scott@rbk.kingston.gov.uk

Les Simpson
Service Manager
T: 0208 736 6150
E: les.simpson@harrow.gov.uk



Sue Foster OBE
Headhousing, regeneration, and environment
Town Hall
Brixton Hill, SW2 1RW
T: 07932 449 369
E: jsmith6@lambeth.gov.uk

Zbig Blonski
Head of Strategic Planning
T: 0207 926 1233
E: zblonski@lambeth.gov.uk

Michael Copeland
Conservation and Urban Design
T: 0207 926 1215
E: mcopeland@lambeth.gov.uk



John Miller
Head of Planning
Laurence House
1 Catford Road
London
SE6 4RU
T: 0208 314 8706
E: john.miller@lewisham.gov.uk

Timothy King
Head of Development Control
T: 0208 314 9785
E: timothy.king@lewisham.gov.uk

Brian Reagan
Planning Policy Manager
T: 0208 314 8774
E: brian.reagan@lewisham.gov.uk



John Hill
Head of Planning and Public Protection
Merton Civic Centre
London Rd, Morden SM4 5DX
T: 020 8545 3052
Email: esenquiries@merton.gov.uk

Maggie Brian
Interim Manager, Development Control
T: 020 8545 3099
Email: esenquiries@merton.gov.uk

Paul McGarry
Physical Regeneration Manager
T: 020 8545 3041
urban.design@merton.gov.uk

Chris James
Interim Manager, Spatial Planning
Policy
T: 020 8545 3041
policyandinformationteam@merton.gov.uk



Seema Manchanda
Head of Physical Regeneration & Development
London Borough of Newham,
Town Hall Annexe, 330-354 Barking
Road,
East Ham, London E6 2RP
T: 0208 430 2000 Extension: 22309
seema.manchanda@newham.gov.uk

Len Davies
Head of Building Control
T: 0208 430 2000 Extension: 47222
len.davies@newham.gov.uk

Peter Rose
Head of Development Control and Planning
T: 0208 430 2000 Ext. 27167
peter.rose@newham.gov.uk



Chief Planning and Regeneration Officer : Chris Berry
Chris.Berry@redbridge.gov.uk
PO BOX No.2 Town Hall
128-142 High Road Ilford
Essex, IG1 1DD
T: 0208 708 2068

Head of Development Control John Pearce
T: 0208 708 2052
john.pearce@redbridge.gov.uk

Head of Planning Policy & Environment: Emma Watson
T: 0208 708 2235
emma.watson@redbridge.gov.uk

Heads of Building Control Amrick Notta
T: 0208 708 2525
amrick.notta@redbridge.gov.uk

Head of Regeneration: Mark Lucas



Trevor Pugh
Director of the Environment
Civic centre., 44 York Street
Twickenham, TW1 3BZ
T: 0845 612 2660
customer.service@richmond.gov.uk

Robert Angus
Head of Development Control
T: 0845 612 2660
E: customer.service@richmond.gov.uk

Philip Wealthy
Head of Planning Policy
T: 0845 612 2660
E: customer.service@richmond.gov.uk



Gary Rice
Head of Development Control
Chiltern House
Portland Street, SE17 2ES
T: 0207 525 5657
E: gary.rice@southwark.gov.uk

David Woolmer
Head of Building Control
T: 0207 525 5588
E: david.woolmer@southwark.gov.uk

Simon Bevan / Julie Seymour
Heads of Planning Policy
T: 0207 525 5411 / 0207 525 0508
E: simon.bevan@southwark.gov.uk
Julie.seymour@southwark.gov.uk



Darren Richards
Head of Planning
24 Denmark Road,
Carshalton SM5 2JG
T: 0208 770 5070
E: Darren.richards@sutton.gov.uk

Karen Fossett
Head of Development Control
T: 0208 770 5070
E: Karen.fossett@sutton.gov.uk

Jeff Wilson
Head of Strategic and Environmental Planning
T: 0208 770 5070
E: jeff.wilson@sutton.gov.uk



Stephen Irvine
Development Control Manager
Mulberry Place (AH)
PO Box 55739
5 Clove Crescent
London E14 1BY
T: 0207 364 5355
E: planning@towerhamlets.gov.uk

Terry Natt
Strategic Applications Manager
T: 0207 364 5204
E: planning@towerhamlets.gov.uk



Martin Esom
Executive Director of Environmental Services
Sycamore House, Town Hall,
Forest Road, London E17 4JF
T: 0208 496 6825 direct
Central: 020 8496 3000
E: martin.esom@lbwf.gov.uk

Vernon Herbert
Executive Director of Planning
T: 0208 496 6876/6882
E: Vernon.herbert@lbwf.gov.uk

Julian Ruax
Head of Building Control
T: 0208 496 6770
E: julian.ruax@lbwf.gov.uk



Robert Erskine
Head of Planning
Wandsworth High Street
London SW18 2PU
T: 0208 871 6626
E: rerskine@wandsworth.gov.uk

Tony McDonald
Head of Forward Planning
T: 0208 871 6627
E: tmcDonald@wandsworth.gov.uk

Thiru Moolan
Head of Building Control
T: 0208 871 7620
tmoolan@wandsworth.gov.uk



Rosemarie MacQueen, Strategic Director, Built Environment
PO Box 240, Westminster City Hall, 64
Victoria Street, London SW1E 6 QP
T: 020-7641-2455
RMacqueen@westminster.gov.uk

John Walker
Operational Director Development Planning
T: 020-7641-2524
E: jwalker2@westminster.gov.uk

Barry Smith
Operational Director City Planning
T: 020-7641-2923
E: mail: barrysmith@westminster.gov.uk

OTHER ORGANISATIONS

Please notify any changes immediately by e-mail to john.richards@knightfrank.com or to planninginlondon@mac.com with the subject 'planning in london directory'.

Department for Communities and Local Government
Eland House
Bressenden Place
London SW1E 5DU
T: 020 7944 4400
E: enquiries.br@communities.gsi.gov.uk
planning.policies@communities.gsi.gov.uk

Greater London Authority
Boris Johnson
Mayor of London
Greater London Authority
City Hall, The Queen's Walk
More London, London SE1 2AA
T: 0207 983 4000
E: mayor@london.gov.uk

Giles Dolphin
Assistant Director Planning
T: 020 7983 4271
E: Giles.dolphin@london.gov.uk

Colin Wilson
Senior Manager, Planning Decisions
T: 020 7983 4783
E: colin.wilson@london.gov.uk

Justin Carr
Strategic Planning Manager
(Development Decisions)
T: 020 7983 4895
E: justin.carr@london.gov.uk

Christine McGoldrick
Strategic Planning Manager
(Development Plans)
T: 020 7983 4309
E: christine.mcgoldrick@london.gov.uk

Martin Scholar
Strategic Planning Manager (Planning

Frameworks)
T: 020 7983 5750
E: martin.scholar@london.gov.uk

Government Office for London
Riverwalk House
157-161 Millbank
London SW1P 4RR
T: 020 7217 3111
Email: enquiries@gol.gsi.gov.uk

Andrew Melville
Head of Planning
T: 020 7217 3111
E: andrew.melville@gol.gsi.gov.uk
Penny Bramwell
Head of Sustainable Development
T: 020 7217 3111
E: penny.bramwell@gol.gsi.gov.uk

The Planning Inspectorate
Registry/Scanning
Room 3/01 Kite Wing
Temple Quay House
2 The Square
Temple Quay
Bristol BS1 6PN
T: 0117 372 6372
E: enquiries@planning-inspectorate.gsi.gov.uk

English Heritage
Covering: Greater London.
English Heritage
1 Waterhouse Square
138 - 142 Holborn
London, EC1N 2ST
T: 020 7973 3000
Fax: 020 7973 3001
E: london@english-heritage.org.uk

English Nature
Natural England, Floor 3, Ashdown
House, 123 Victoria Street, London,
SW1E 6DE
T: 020 7932 2200
Fax: 020 7932 2201
Email: london@naturalengland.org.uk

DEFRA
Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs
Nobel House
17 Smith Square
London SW1P 3JR
T: 020 7238 6000
E: helpline@defra.gsi.gov.uk

London Thames Gateway Development Corporation
Peter Andrews
Chief Executive of LTGDC
9th Floor
South Quay Plaza 3
189 Marsh Wall
London E14 9SH
T: 020 7517 4730
E: peter.andrews@ltgdc.org.uk

Olympic Delivery Authority – Planning Decisions Team
Vivienne Ramsey
Head of Development Control
Olympic Delivery Authority Planning Decisions Team
Mailpoint 32B
23rd Floor
One Churchill Place
Canary Wharf
London E14 5LN
Telephone 020 8430 6020
Email
planning.enquiries@pdt.oda.gov.uk

London 2012
One Churchill Place
Canary Wharf
London E14 5LN
T: 0203 2012 000
www.london2012.com/index.php

TfL
Central Customer Services
23rd Floor Empress State Building,
Empress Approach,
London SW6 1TR
T: 020 7222 5600
E: enquire@tfl.gov.uk

London Development Agency
Public Liaison Unit
London Development Agency
Palestra
197 Blackfriars Road
London SE1 8AA
Phone: 020 7593 9000
Email: info@lda.gov.uk

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Sir Terry Farrell's regular column.

Localism in action

Terry Farrell believes that the planning profession should help local communities develop an understanding of what makes each local place different.

The localism agenda poses some interesting questions for planning in London. The focus of the debate so far has been on the empowerment of local people over local decision-making processes - obviously a good thing in its own right - but the fact is that London is a special case. Its status as the UK's only world city sets it apart, along with its sheer size and its unique system of metropolitan governance. It is the one city within the UK that has a high profile and an influential Mayor who is able to set policy at a strategic level (though I believe that he should be more empowered along the lines of the Mayors of Paris and New York).

Paradoxically, localism in London should mean more rather than less strategic awareness amongst those concerned with its future. I believe that this is the case whether people are acting at local or metropolitan level. The Greater London Authority, the 32 Boroughs, landowners, developers and local communities, will all need to understand how local ambitions fit within a bigger picture, even if these aim at nothing more than

maintaining the status quo.

An awareness of the bigger picture is particularly relevant in relation to London's major opportunity areas. Kings Cross, the Royal Docks, Nine Elms, the Olympic Village, Earls Court - to name but a few - are all enormously different from one another. Emphasising the unique qualities of each place is going to be the key to future success given current market conditions and the need to compete effectively for scarce investment. In other words developers will need to work harder to emphasise the qualities that make each of these places special and different. If this means a move away from formulaic approaches to property development and investment in London, the localism agenda could have an enormously beneficial impact on the city. After all, its diversity is what makes London one of the world's greatest and most liveable cities.

I believe that one of the really important things the planning profession can do is to help local communities to develop an understanding of

what makes each local place different. This means developing an understanding of how a place is evolved, how it relates to surrounding areas, and how it differs from others.

At Farrells we recently completed a piece of work on behalf of Southend Borough Council which does just that. Shaping Southend helps to set short term priorities for regeneration and investment in the context of the strategic vision we helped to articulate and develop for the Thames Estuary as a whole (most recently as part of the Mayor of London's Thames Estuary Steering Group).

A surprising aspect of this work for us is that most people think of Southend as a cockney Brighton, but we found that it has a mature business services sector, it is emerging as a major university town, it has a high concentration of creative and cultural activity, and it is becoming a centre for aviation related manufacturing and engineering.

Effectively communicating things which make places different can help local people to imagine the kind of place they would be happy to pass on to the next generation. One of Shaping Southend's key conclusions - and this is particularly relevant to local government in London - is that it is extremely difficult to set short term priorities and to make the most of limited finances without having a long term vision which takes the bigger picture into account. If localism is to be a success in London, it must help London to maintain its future success in an increasingly competitive - and rapidly changing - world, and planners in London have an important part to play in making sure that a key part of this is to reinforce its diversity. ■

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A Planning Masterclass

Preparing Applications to the IPC

Understanding the Requirements, Getting it Right

15th February 2011, Bircham Dyson Bell, London



Already one of the first two applications to the Infrastructure Planning Commission (IPC) has been rejected due to failings in the consultation process and the Draft Consent Order; this shows the importance of adhering rigorously to the new process.

Whilst the IPC is scheduled to be abolished in 2012, the new Government has made it clear that the fundamentals of the new system will remain in place, with details of a revised process for major infrastructure planning due to be published at the end of the year.

This conference provides a guide for project promoters on how to prepare an application for a Nationally Significant Infrastructure project and how to undertake pre-application consultation to comply with the requirements. It will also provide an update on the changes to the process which have been introduced through the Localism Bill.

Understand what the requirements are and how they can be met successfully and cost effectively to ensure the acceptance of the application.

For local authorities, stakeholders and other interested parties the conference provides a guide as to how the process works and the opportunities to get involved.

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