

A world city needs big ideas, big decisions

The major planning issues for London's future as we get ready to enjoy our Olympic year are all at an epic scale. The biggest, the proposals for an estuary airport produced by Foster + Partners and Halcrow, are a reminder that the capital can still think big. Not only does this bold proposition put into context the potential benefits a change in airport location might bring, but reminds us that assumed certainties about London's physical infrastructure are not divinely ordained perpetuities. Nobody believed the London docks would close 40 years before they did; equally, many find it impossible to believe that Heathrow could be the equivalent of the Royals by 2050.

So let's remember our history, and look at the Foster plan with all due seriousness. At first sight, given the extra elements envisaged, such as a new Thames Barrier, it is reminiscent of ideas being promoted by Terry Farrell before his attentions were claimed by West London and the high-speed rail proposal. This is another big issue, with heavy doses of political worry and opportunism thrown in for good measure. It is tempting to see it as part of a European programme of fast train travel aimed at combating carbon emissions as much as speeding up the journey time between London and Birmingham.

There is no conflict between these two gigantic transport proposals and they should not be regarded as alternative investment ideas. They do different things in different ways; what they have in common is a belief that world class transport facilities, with maximum interchange possibilities built in, are essential to maintain London's place at the forefront of global cities, with all that implies for its future as a financial centre.

As to the other big planning and development propositions for London, most are about opportunity rather than problems. Nine Elms, King's Cross, Earls Court, the Royals – all extraordinary areas at different stages of evolution, but all showing that the appetite for development is still with us, despite worries about the broad economic environment. Even Battersea Power Station, that perennial subject of failed proposals, has finally received the boost it needed with a government commitment to see an Underground connection built albeit dependent on new forms of local financing.

It should be noted that all this is happening in advance of the supposedly revolutionary reforms taking place in the planning system, and hasn't had a huge amount to do with localism except in the sense that it took 20 years too long for something to happen at King's Cross. So will the government's new policies produce a huge boost for the development market, or will we spend the next few years building out what has been produced under the existing regulatory regime? Probably the latter, at least as far as 2012 is concerned; the emerging policies for post-Games regeneration show that our old friend the development corporation is alive and well. The Mayor's version will have powers even the old LDDC would have envied.

The key point in all this is that London is still a focus for intense development and planning activity, supplemented by transport investment; the stakes are high, but it is a good game to be in. ■

Ignorance is not bliss

The sudden disappearance of planning performance statistics will do nothing for planning or performance. The genesis of the "Development Control Forums" was to monitor the perceived poor timeliness of planning authorities in processing planning applications. They were the government's response to a parliamentary inquiry into development control in 1976. Regional fora and a national forum, intended to bring together representatives of local authorities and the development industry, held local planning authorities to account with particular reference to their speed (or lack of) in processing applications. Only the renamed London Planning & Development Forum (LPDF) and the National Planning Forum (NPF) still function today.

The consolidated planning performance statistics have fallen victim to The Cuts, replaced it seems by a memo telling authorities to publish their performance on their websites. This of course, even where they bother, will mean little to the locals who will have no basis for comparison and will make this important data effectively inaccessible to applicants and their professionals. If performance slides who will be surprised?

In recent years LPAs have been well incentivised to meet handed-down targets. The Planning Delivery Grant was replaced by more abstract targets relating to housing starts, but encouragingly the culture of the eight and thirteen week deadlines continues and data should be reported to the DCLG. At least until cuts took their toll last March, since when no data has been collated by the department.

We have sought to remedy this omission, asking London boroughs to supply basic performance figures with their profiles published in this Yearbook. Not all have obliged. Where they are posted on their websites they lack the essential comparison with their peers and we are only able in this issue to print the last available set up to last March (see Briefing, page 68).

Planning departments have to be well resourced and their fee income has to be adequate. We believe that if the government does allow a fee free-for-all with boroughs charging what they like (justified by full cost recovery) then competition along the lines of Building Control has to follow. We are talking about the applicant being given a choice of provider. That is, to process the application before submitting a planning report to the relevant LPA for its decision.

The competition may be achieved by allowing any LPA to offer the service or the introduction of "approved inspectors", or a combination. A degree of "self certification" by approved agents would also make sense, as the government is now considering for listed building applications. Planning, unlike Building Control, has a democratic dimension, hence the need for the local authority to take the decision, but this should not be overstated since 95 per cent of applications are in any case delegated to officers. And planning inspectors manage to do this job!

Such a regime would relieve development control of much unnecessary donkey-work and free skilled officers to focus on the neglected art of visionary plan making. But in order to operate, the need for comparative performance statistics would be even greater than it already is. Efficient boroughs and approved inspectors would want them to be easily available as much as the customers of the planning system. ■

Localism – how did a good idea go so wrong? questions Paul Dimoldenberg



I am supporter of localism. It must make sense to give local communities a bigger say on new developments in their area. At its best it can contribute new ideas that can be incorporated into new buildings and environments and make them better places to live and work. At the very least, it can help to build an understanding of the development process and how it works. And, if the new localism can also include a financial incentive through contributions to facilities or infrastructure needed locally, then that builds in real local benefits and helps make the area work better for everyone. Sadly, however, the Government has sold localism more as a means of stopping development rather than as a means of encouraging better development. Coupled with a streamlined NPPF, the Government

appears to be saying that it wants to give local communities a bigger say (to say no), but at the same time appearing to be making it easier for developers to win planning permission for developments that local people don't want.

Politicians need to make localism work. This means central and local government, together with developers, doing more to involve local communities in planning issues. Local benefits need to be at the heart of the discussion. "What's in it for us?" is a legitimate question for communities to ask. Responding effectively to this question is the key. There is no 'one-size-fits-all' process. Councils, companies and communities need to work out what suits them best and then get on with it. ■

Paul Dimoldenberg is leader of Westminster's Labour Group

Neighbourhood plans to take off or will LDFs take the strain? asks Seema Manchandra



2012 has the potential to host a series of changes to the planning system and planners will continue to work in interesting times. The National Planning Policy Framework is expected in spring 2012. I hope that the recommendations of the Select Committee are taken up as these were helpful. Planners can then expect more information on the test of conformity against which our own Core Strategies will be assessed. Also it will be interesting to see whether government seeks stakeholders to come forward to draft streamlined guidance, who comes forward and why?

I follow the progress of the Bermondsey Neighbourhood Plan and am fascinated how the local community living under the shadow of The Shard will take things forward. Local partnerships haven't emerged yet in Wandsworth. I suspect that most residents are not keen to push for more development than already in our Local Development Framework Documents.

Boroughs will be taking forward their own Community Infrastructure Levies as they need to progress these by 2014. Redbridge and the GLA

have already forged forward with this work and Wandsworth expects to be at the Examination Stage during the first half of 2012, leader of Westminster's Labour Group (see Nick Cuff interview p. 10)

The Planning Inspectorate will take over from the Infrastructure Planning Commission in April 2012. In due course the Thames Tunnel, a major proposal for infrastructure in London, is likely to be submitted for consideration. This is more complex than existing major infrastructure applications as it impacts all boroughs along the Thames. Can a speeded up process work well with so many planning authorities to engage?

Most London Boroughs were hoping that the Government would bring forward legislation that would enable locally set charges for planning applications. A clear response on this would be welcome and from an officers' perspective it would be beneficial if this legislation were passed as it would bring in income to cover the costs of the development management. That can only help us to address all of the challenges ahead! ■

Seema Manchandra is Wandsworth's assistant director of planning

It's about attitudes and relationships argues Rob Perrins



Planning is all about localism in 2012. This is partly about a change in policy. It's also about a shift in culture. Just as local people should now consider their responsibility to back good schemes for the homes and jobs they bring, we as developers need to think through our response. Take the statutory requirement for pre-application consultation. This new regulation is common sense. In fact, it often makes sense for schemes half the size of the new threshold. Berkeley has been doing it for a while and our experience last year at sites like Atkinson Morley in Wimbledon reinforced two things for me.

The first is that attitude matters. On this scheme, our process didn't break new ground. It was a simple case of early engagement, public consultation, then feedback and promotion of final proposals. What made the difference was a very open-handed approach. There was a visible commitment to deal with local people on their own terms.

The second is about relationships. The Localism Act has abolished the concept of predetermination. The Standards Board regime



Berkeley's Atkinson Morley scheme in Wimbledon

will soon disappear. At Atkinson Morley, ward councillors and cabinet member were actively involved in shaping the scheme before it came to committee. The positive consensus at the end of the process was the result of a healthy dialogue over the previous 18 months.

What this tells you about planning in 2012 is that residential development in sensitive locations and urban areas can be delivered with active community support. Localism is about engaging and having a debate. I think this year should be about working together. ■

Rob Perrins is managing director of the Berkeley Group

The possibility of change might encourage new thinking hopes Roger Hepher



None knows quite where the planning system is heading. We don't know how neighbourhood planning will work; we don't know what the final version of the NPPF will contain; we don't know how the Local Enterprise Partnership is going to operate; we don't have a clear indication of ministerial priorities (and thus we find it difficult to anticipate appeal and call-in decisions); we don't know whether/how the Use Classes Order might be changed; and we don't know how priorities will be re-ordered by under-resourced borough planning departments.

You might ask which developer would launch any new project when there is so much uncertainty and potential for delay? Not to forget two levels of CIL charge, withdrawal of funding for affordable housing, and rising design and sustainability expectations. It would be easy to get quite despondent. Personally, however, I'm not. Partly because London's unique property market has proved reas-

suringly buoyant in recent times, and – as economic and political turmoil continues to grip much of the rest of the world – is likely to continue to do so. And partly because out of change, opportunities often arise.

When Planning is charged with serving multiple agendas – as it increasingly has in recent times – it can become possible to justify proposals that would in the past have been unjustifiable. That site might be land everyone has always assumed would be kept open, but, if a new scheme would generate jobs, and be a model of sustainability and inspired design, and make a substantial contribution towards affordable housing and CrossRail, developing it may now be acceptable whereas previously it would not.

Planning evolves constantly, as conditions shift in the world around us, being at the leading edge of that process is an exciting place to be. ■

Roger Hepher is Savills' Head of Planning

We should be wary of the cuts eroding civic values argues Sarah Gaventa



2012 My biggest fear is a growing lack of generosity and civic-mindedness in planning approaches and attitudes, combined with short-termism (recession shouldn't be an excuse for abandoning the vision), which combined could result in planning disaster.

Local authorities may become more inward looking, as beleaguered professionals trying to do two or three people's jobs (being more "efficient") might not have time to look up and think about the impact of their local planning decisions on the wider area, across other boroughs and boundaries. Forgetting that the public view London from neighbourhood and city perspectives but rarely by borough, (I'm proud to be a Wandsworthite is not something I hear anyone cry...).

The public want a city that is joined up and works from east to west, north to south as well as from the end of their street to their nearest transport hub or school. I fear LAs will not have the time, capacity or even the opportunities for discussion, advice sharing, training and support that

is necessary to ensure that planning mistakes aren't replicated, and that best practice is shared and learnt from.

The other fear is that the impact of the protest outside St Paul's will mean other LAs, fearful of further civil unrest as cuts start to really bite, will become increasingly nervous about planning civic space for gatherings and legitimate protest.

The knock on effect is evident in barricaded Paternoster where the signage informed you that no it isn't a public space actually (despite the fact that it behaved like one) and entry without a pass is prohibited forthwith (or evidence of a restaurant reservation one presumes...) – a sad reminder that our public spaces are becoming increasingly less so.

Let's hope that LAs will not become timid, insular and nervous just at a time when the public needs them to be exactly the reverse. Imaginative, ambitious, open and planning for the longer term needs of Londoners. ■

Sarah Gaventa is former director of public space at CABE

Bermondsey's new Localism has not been without hitches says John Corey



When the Localism Bill was first discussed publicly, a "group" of local residents and business owners on or near Bermondsey Street, SE1 were actively engaged with Southwark Council concerning the proposed Supplementary Planning Document. One key to the SPD was the identification of a tall building zone. The draft document caused alarm as many residents had not realized that being so central to the City might mean that the London Bridge area could become a "third financial centre".

When some members of the neighbourhood spotted an opportunity to be awarded Front Runners status under the Localism Bill, the Bermondsey Neighbourhood Forum was formed.

Lessons learned include how people are more inclined to engage when there is a current, immediate, and a specific threat. Collectively we have been less able to focus on the area wide

planning agenda.

Other lessons followed Bruce Tuckman's* model for the lifecycle of new groups: "storming, norming, forming and then performing".

The most surprising issue have been conflicts over the process. Traditionally trained professionals from the planning profession expected a formal exercise lead by consultants who were fully independent of the local community.

The alternative view was the work could be adequately performed by local volunteers who have direct connections to the Bermondsey neighbourhood. Spats, including the blocking of the website when people did not like the majority's decisions, took place. Not always a positive reflection on the professionalism one would expect from one's neighbours. ■

**Bruce Tuckman, the US psychologist and group dynamics theorist, published this theory in 1965*

John Corey is chair of the Bermondsey Neighbourhood Forum

Funding infrastructure remains a major challenge thinks Robert Evans



I am optimistic about Enterprise Zones. Not so much because of the proposed business rates discounts, simplified planning or superfast broadband, but because local enterprise partnerships will be able to keep, for 25 years, the uplift in business rates revenue from 2013-14. That means Enterprise Zones offer the certainty of revenue necessary for Tax Increment Finance ("TIF")-style borrowing. For example, public sector loans through the Public Loans Works Board; borrowing against an authority's general fund; the use of municipal bonds; or entering into "pay as you go" arrangements with developers. The recent (19 December 2011) Local Government Finance Bill refers to such arrangements as "Option Two" TIFs and, within Enterprise Zones, they will not need

any further approvals or consents from Government.

I am less optimistic about the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL). I fear some authorities will be tempted to propose unrealistic charges that then survive limited scrutiny, for example about the impact on viability and assumptions around affordable housing. Once a CIL charging schedule is adopted, it offers precious little discretion or flexibility, for example to respond to changes in economic circumstances or even to credit on-site provision of social infrastructure. We will see developers paying twice even if, as hoped, the Government addresses the particular problem of Section 73 applications triggering CIL. And major question marks remain over infrastructure delivery. ■

Robert Evans is a director of Argent

Don't let reforms stymie the economic benefits argues Baroness Jo Valentine



The year ahead for London will be an interesting one – national planning policy is still in a state of flux, with the final publication of the NPPF and amendments to the CIL regulations still outstanding. It is vital the reforms proposed recognise the need to balance environmental and social aspects of development with economic benefits. Quicker and clearer decision-making processes by having clear up-to-date local plans and a presumption in favour of sustainable development in its absence should breathe confidence into an industry which has far from recovered.

For East London in particular the future is bright – the transfer of LDA

and HCA land assets to the Mayor could lead to significant regeneration, with tendering for proposals to come forward in the Royal Docks and Silvertown Quays and plans for a major residential development and commercial development scheme all in process.

But across the capital there are other areas of concern. The cumulative burden on development to pay the Mayoral CIL, borough CILs and s106 planning obligations, will place a strain on the viability for development. In a difficult economic climate where lending conditions are tough this will be a real and present threat to growth in London." ■

Baroness Jo Valentine is chief executive of London First



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From policy to action Angela Brady welcomes the opportunity localism provides



In a year when localism will move from the desks of Whitehall to the local community centre, there are still big questions about how it will work in practice. Ministers have pinned their hopes on localism as a means of delivering their ambitions. Bringing people into the design and planning processes should, they argue, make it more difficult for poor development to slip through. Regardless of whether you subscribe to the theory, there is no doubt the desire to give communities a stronger voice means local people will be able to demand more from professionals. This will be a challenge, but I see it as an opportunity for architects to use their skills and expertise and to help communities create exciting and bold visions for their future.

Localism will mean professionals have to adapt – the quality of the places created in the future will be increasingly dependent on our ability to appropriately engage with local people and local issues, right from the start. But it also provides an opportunity to break down barriers, change attitudes and demonstrate the value of what we do, in a less remote way, so that communities get a better understanding of the difficult decisions and trade-offs that have to be made along the way.

Localism doesn't mean we have to surrender the design or planning processes, but will increasingly mean we share the responsibility – this can only be a good thing. ■

Angela Brady is RIBA President

The draft NPPF is a welcome provocation writes Julian Barwick



2012 brings opportunities tinged with uncertainty for the property industry. The Government introduced reforms to the planning system to boost economic growth and this year will see some significant changes: the Localism; the new Community Infrastructure Levy; transferring greater development powers to the London Mayor.

And then there is the National Planning Policy Framework. The Government has – rightly – taken an axe to the one-thousand-plus pages of planning guidelines and given precedence to the much contested 'presumption in favour of sustainable development'. The thrust of the draft NPPF is a step in the right direction and the inclusion of such statements as "the default answer should be yes" to be necessarily provocative.

Simplifying the process and returning decisions to a local level are to be welcomed. However, the NPPF relies on the agreed vision for development outlined in a local plan. To date, only 30% of local authorities have these in place. Without an agreed roadmap for development and an enforceable obligation on local authorities to produce and maintain Local Plans, there is a danger that projects will be caught up in the cycle of rejections, approvals and appeals that has plagued the planning system. Especially in difficult economic times, the process needs to become less of an obstacle course.

We have faith enlightened local authorities will grasp the nettle. Our



Development Securities' Hammersmith Grove development

fear remains that in the absence of robust local plans, under-resourced authorities risk being excluded from economic growth as projects are blighted by indecision.

Giving communities a greater say in local development is a positive change. Streamlining the planning system equally so. But how those two objectives work in harmony is the question the Government must answer convincingly in 2012. ■

Julian Barwick is director of Development Securities

O tempora, o mores! Giles Dolphin predicts London's fate this memorable year...



The summer will be the wettest ever. A Frenchman will win the 100m. The Aquatics Centre roof will leak and flood the pool. Jacques Rogge will declare it the best Games ever. He will also declare it the worse-designed ever, following international scorn over the logo, mascot, stadium exterior, Orbit, etc.

Plans to reconfigure the Olympic Stadium will fail. West Ham United will ground-share with Dagenham & Redbridge, having sold Upton Park for a supermarket. The Orbit will be sold off to whichever Gulf state wins in 2020 Olympics. The undeveloped bits of the Olympic Park will remain undeveloped until 2040, when London will become the first city to stage the

Olympics four times. Plans will be made to replace the Jubilee Line with a cable car. Parking will be outlawed in Westminster. The Thames will be decked over. Some Green Belt will be built over. Nothing will happen in the Royal Docks. With luck, Battersea Power Station will fall down, and the Irish economy will be saved. Parliament will decree HS2 will terminate at Ruislip. Unesco will de-designate the Tower and Westminster World Heritage Sites.

Boris will win the Mayoral election. Or Ken. Either way, strategic planning will be the winner. More opportunity area planning frameworks will appear, and not a single neighbourhood plan will see the light of day. And the NPPF won't make an ounce of difference. ■

Giles Dolphin is retiring as head of Planning Decisions, GLA