

(I) H INDIV CASES

In an effort to secure a solution and a better design for the long-delayed but badly-designed **ARCHWAY BRIDGE ANTI-SUICIDE MEASURES**, our Chair David Richmond has designed and submitted our own alternative proposals to Islington. We make clear that we appreciate the need for the measures and do not put forward our alternative solution with the intention of delaying the project, but are proposing a less expensive, more efficient, better designed and – we believe – more effective solution. Full details can be seen on our website; do write in to Islington supporting them.

We have written to Camden suggesting what we consider would be improvements to **Channing Junior School's** proposals for Fairseat, which we think would diminish the appearance of this very fine historic building – originally the home of Sir Sydney Waterlow, which he donated to the public along with the Park – while not adequately meeting their own requirements for improved school facilities. We also support Historic England's request for an appropriate archaeological condition. We have sought a meeting with them to discuss our ideas and await a response. Many people have also asked us about the disappearance of the magnificent old Cedar Tree in the grounds of Fairseat. While it certainly looked stately and healthy, the tree report confirmed that it was seriously decayed and, being in a school, had to be felled on safety grounds. Camden's tree officer said that it had been one of his favourite trees and that he would be requesting an appropriate replacement.

The nursery school at **2 Highgate Avenue** has resubmitted their proposals for new classrooms and facilities in the rear garden, and for work already carried out, seemingly without planning permission, which Haringey's Enforcement section is investigating. Neighbours are very concerned that the revised scheme does little to answer their concerns about the previous proposals, including overlooking of their houses and gardens because the new buildings are on higher ground, increased noise in their back gardens, development of more garden space and loss of playground area, and are objecting strongly. It does appear to us to be contrary to Local Plans, and we will be supporting them.

Given our long experience of ignoring of the local archaeological heritage by planners and developers, we have been urging Historic England to bring forward the review of the Highgate Archaeological Priority Area (APA), scheduled for 2020, as we are convinced that we are losing too many potentially valuable archaeological sites without any record. In particular, we are seeking an archaeological condition on the huge Newstead site in Denewood Road. While it is outside the current APA, we believe that this is far too small, covering only a strip either side of the High Street, and was designated completely arbitrarily on the basis of no proper research. Much of our area covers the Mediaeval Bishop of London's Park, which is suffering extensive large-scale developments, so far without any excavations to explore its potential. While there are many such Parks across England, there has been virtually no archaeological investigation of them as working agricultural and industrial establishments, which is what they were, and the intensive development going on in Highgate presents a unique national opportunity to investigate a major Park archaeologically. As just one example of what may have been lost, a site at the north end of Courtenay Avenue was given permission for a major development, with no provision for archaeological assessment even though it was extremely close to the moated Bishop's Hunting Lodge, a stone palace on Highgate Golf Course. We now know of important prehistoric and Roman sites around the area, well beyond the extent of the mediaeval village. In a recent application in the High Street, a designated APA, we and Historic England both requested an archaeological condition on a development, but the Haringey case officer autonomously decided not to impose one as the development was not going deep enough – thus demonstrating a sad lack of understanding of the nature of archaeological deposits. It is unacceptable that Highgate's archaeology is being disregarded in this manner.

We have also submitted a lengthy and detailed objection to the proposed overdevelopment of the **Former Newstead Nursing Home, Denewood Road** with three blocks of flats and a basement car park covering most of the site. An appeal against refusal of an extension to the home was dismissed in 2006, on grounds of impact on trees, increased traffic from The plans also include a very large basement, mainly under blocks 1 and 2, but also under a part of block 3. Our concerns cover:

- damage to the Conservation Area. Denewood Road is characterized by a varied combination of large villas and smaller houses with front and rear gardens, and many trees. There are no blocks of flats in the road (though the application mistakenly calls nearby buildings flats), the nearest being some distance way. The three substantial blocks of flats proposed are completely out of keeping with the surrounding area, contrary to Haringey policy that developments should "relate positively to their locality, having regard to form, scale and massing prevailing around the site."
- impact on trees, already flagged up in the 2006 application, where the inspector said that "since the character of this part of the conservation area is, at least in part, dependent upon the existence of

mature and semi-mature trees...any damage to [them] would have an adverse effect on the character and appearance of the area." The works propose removing 18 of 36 trees, some inevitably characterized as "of low quality."

- the proposed basement, covering most of the site. Yet the site is located over an underground stream; there is another 5m to the west; and the depth would probably go beneath the water table. The assessment even concedes that adjoining properties might suffer damage from subsidence or diversion of water flow, and it must be feared that it could have an adverse impact on the hydrology of a much wider area.

- parking and traffic. The 2006 appeal decision also took into account increased vehicular movements and considerable extra on-street parking in the area, "to the detriment of its character as a quiet residential road in a Conservation Area." The present application proposes basement parking for only 15 cars and alleges there will be no increase in street parking, which is highly unlikely for 10 units of this nature, in this area, where 2-3 cars per household are common and, since access to public transport is poor, most residents need to travel by car, and there is no visitor parking. There is already congestion in the morning and afternoon by cars delivering and collecting pupils from Highgate School, so the claim that the development will result in "a modest reduction in vehicle movements in the traditional peak periods and is likely to result in less traffic movements throughout the day" is incredible.

We have been annoyed for some time by the ghastly plastic signs attached to railings of the new mega-mansions at 10 view road, warning that they are patrolled by some security firm or other, and in response to our concerns, Haringey's Enforcement team have registered a request that they be removed

We objected to the revised application to convert, and partly rebuild, part of the Victoria pub in North Hill, for housing, and – in response to our previous objection against loss of the pub, retention of a smaller part of the ground floor as a pub. Our objection was that the applicants have still not marketed the premises as a public house – the reason why their previous application to convert the whole building to housing was refused - and have not consulted any potential tenants as to what size of premises they would consider viable, and are concerned that it will prove to be so.

We were also critical of the sometimes inaccurate statements made in the application, including that the Bull and the Duke's head have customer parking, and that other pubs in Highgate have "significantly larger premises." Many of us remember how successful the Victoria it was under its past landlady Emma. The statement that "The premises is [sic] the worst located public house in the area" is given without any evidence, and the impression is given that the pub is not viable because there are other pubs close by. It also asserts that the Victoria is in the "minority of premises which do not benefit from a large outdoor seating area"; yet neither do the Highgate Inn, the Wrestlers, the Duke's Head, the Prince of Wales and or Angel, all successful pubs.

Yet Haringey have naively permitted it; and our four-page letter of objection was reduced in the case officer's report to just three lines. We can now only wait and see.

Many of you will have noticed that the former Old Crown pub on Highgate Hill has reopened as The Tourian Lounge. Unfortunately the large new extension was constructed without planning permission, and Islington have taken action, requesting the removal of the new unauthorised buildings by May 21st.

However, in the case of one of the flats at 12 North Hill, where the owners claimed that their proposal to move the front door on the new side extension was a "minor amendment" to their existing planning permission, and that permission should therefore be given, Haringey's case officer decided otherwise, and has refused it, stating that the previous permission was made on design grounds, that the new design "would not have been acceptable if considered during the planning application as it would not respect the architectural style and integrity of the original building".

We have had many adverse comments on the poor design and materials of the new house recently erected adjacent to the Bull at 11 North Hill, and objected to a subsequent application to instal a renewable energy heat pump on the roof, in a highly visible position, which would exacerbate the ugliness of the building in the historic streetscape. Unfortunately the Conservation Officer was not consulted and permission was given.

Great concern was voiced by neighbours over proposals for a small block of flats in the back garden of 98 Talbot Road. This was a significant infill development on garden land which would loom over adjoining properties and offer a serious risk of overlooking of neighbouring buildings and night-time light disturbance. Equally bad was the poor design quality, which would seriously damage the Conservation Area, while the proposed accommodation would have given a poor quality living environment with inadequate daylighting, particularly the basement living room, the excavation for

which would damage tree roots. Finally, it provided no parking in an area of parking stress. Haringey very correctly refused it.

We have had much heart-searching over a proposed infill development at 50 Lanchester Road, where a new small house is proposed for one of the few gaps in the houses. We previously met the architect to look at her earlier proposals, and were impressed by her conscientious efforts to produce sensitive and well-designed proposals. On the other hand, the Neighbourhood Plan makes very clear that gaps between houses should be protected. Here, we felt it was unlikely that it would set a precedent as it is the only such site in the street; but neither did we want to do anything to undermine an important and pivotal local policy. We have therefore rather sat on the fence here, acknowledging the good quality of the proposal, pointing out the policy concerns, and leaving the decision in Haringey's hands!

A new development at **221/221A Archway Road** has failed to comply with building regulations. We have asked Haringey's Enforcement section to investigate, and we understand that they will be taking action.

We continue to work with the City of London and other local groups (the Heath and Hampstead Society, Highgate CAAC and Kenwood Ladies Pond Association) to fight proposals for 5 houses at **55 Fitzroy Park**. We believe it would not only have a highly damaging impact on trees and on the water supply to the Bird Sanctuary pond since it sits astride a natural underground stream and pond feeding directly into it, but is major overdevelopment on designated Private Open Space, which is protected in the Neighbourhood Plan. Much detailed information is still to be provided, and we have been promised a meeting with Camden to discuss trees and ecology.

Although we objected to works at **37 Shepherds Hill**, the applicants had responded to our concerns and an improved design was given consent.

Following our comments in the previous *Buzz* about major demolition works without permission at **27 Sheldon Avenue**, and the involvement of Haringey's Enforcement section, we and the CAAC were contacted by the developer and after some frank discussions, some improvements to the proposed replacement building have been made, though it still remains a rather pedestrian design and something of a lost opportunity for some really good architecture.

We are opposing the addition of a further storey to the 1920s flats **The Ferns** at the bottom of Southwood Lane, adjacent to the block on Archway Road to which a storey has been recently added. It would make the block overbearing in its context and harm this part of the conservation area.

Two new applications have been submitted for **the Methodist Central Hall site** at Archway. One, by a developer, is to replace it with a 6-storey block of flats. The other, by the Better Archway Forum, is to convert it into a Community Arts Centre. We will be supporting the latter.

At **28 Sheldon Avenue**, we had no objection to the proposed alterations to the house, but have registered our concern at the intention to increase the scale and security aspect of the boundary treatment as being contrary to local policy and harmful to the character of the streetscape. We have consistently opposed boundary gates and railings throughout this part of the conservation area. A critical aspect of the "Bishops" part of the Conservation Area is the low, green garden frontages, without walls, railings and barriers, but planning decisions in recent years have too often honoured the policy on the breach rather than the observance. Dismayingly, if predictably, this has nevertheless been permitted, and Haringey are presiding over the relentless deterioration of the streetscape and character of the Conservation Area.

However, they have refused a large infill extension at **48 Yeatman Road**, on the fine Kenwood Estate, which would have had a bad impact on the existing house, the character of the streetscape, and neighbours' amenities. Frankly, planning in Haringey at present seems to depend more on the individual case officer than on the existence of strong policies.

We have also made a long and detailed objection to a large back garden pavilion for gym, shower and hard surfacing at 23 Denewood Road. This is the sixth of a series of applications – the first to substantially demolish the original Arts and Crafts house, and replace it with a large house and the usual large basement with cinema, games room, gym[so way another?], laundry and plant room. This application was granted, subject to a condition that "no extensions or outbuildings shall be built". Nevertheless, an application was submitted for a poolhouse 66' x 20' in the garden; we and neighbours objected, Haringey cited the condition against further extensions and considering that it was against Conservation Area policy, would damage tree roots and could adversely affect local hydrology, and it was withdrawn, but a subsequent almost identical application was inexplicably

allowed by Haringey, despite the same objections, on the tenuous grounds that, as the original permission had not been implemented, the condition did not apply – a fundamental misconstruction of the legislation, which our latest letter of objection, written by a lawyer, went into in considerable detail, and expressing our view that Haringey's grant of permission (in this case a Certificate of Lawful Development) was actually contrary to law, and the law's intention, and warning that building the poolhouse under this grant would prove troublesome were the owners to sell the house in future, since no planning permission would exist.

The next application was for a 15.5m swimming pool of 15.5 metres, Jacuzzi and landscaping works; neighbours did not object, and permission was granted, and in 2019 the current application was submitted, ignoring the original Condition prohibiting extensions or outbuildings, which remains valid, and also the Highgate Neighbourhood Plan, which has a presumption against loss of garden land, and recognizing it as a particular problem in the "Bishops" part of the Conservation Area. Granting it would clearly set a dangerous precedent for future garden development.

(2) H OTHER

The mid-later Victorian Clinker walls fronting so many of our gardens are a quaint and characteristic part of Highgate's Victorian heritage – indeed, it appears that they are more a feature of Highgate's Conservation Area than anywhere else in Haringey, so merit special protection. However, many are being altered, or demolished and replaced by "nice modern walls", which is seriously damaging the character of the Victorian parts of the Conservation Area. If you have one, please come and talk to us if you are considering and works to them. A reminder, too, that the much disdained Privet hedges lining so many of our Victorian front gardens are, in fact, as old as the houses themselves – 100 to 130 years old – and are an equally important part of our landscape heritage.

The rumour machine struck again, with the Society being blamed by persons unknown for refusal of permission for fish shop in the High Street. Not only is this completely untrue, but we have long said that a fish shop would be a welcome addition, and in fact no such application has been made. We were also disturbed by a recent application on the Camden side of the High Street which, among other inaccurate statements indicating very sloppy heritage research by the acting consultants, stated that "The site overlooks the Highgate conservation area boundary." This is an appallingly derelict statement: did they simply look at the Camden Conservation Area map and assumed that it ended at their side of the High Street, making no effort to ascertain that the site was actually in the middle of the Conservation Area? Was the intention to suggest that the site was on the edge of the Conservation Area and therefore less important. And why did Camden not pick this up and decline to validate the application?

However, on the same side of the High Street, following expressions of alarm as to what was being done to the Prince of Wales, it appears to have been very nicely refurbished.

We were alarmed to learn that Haringey managed to "lose" our lengthy submissions for additions to the Local List for Highgate High Street, North Road and North Hill, resulting in major omissions from the consultation list. We have ensured that the Conservation officers now have this, but have expressed our deep concern that they have actually removed some important 18th and 19th century buildings. While they advise that any buildings removed from the Local List will automatically be reclassified as Positive Contributors, we have responded that we consider this extremely unwise until the Conservation Area Appraisal is updated, and this is not scheduled until 2020. This dates to 2007, and desperately needs updating in the light of experience with developers and appeal inspectors. We have also flagged up with Camden the urgent need for their Highgate Conservation Area Appraisal to be revised, as it is now very out of date. And, yes, Highgate might be one historic village, but Camden and Haringey have separate Conservation Area appraisals for their one sides and have consistently refused to work together to produce a logical, unified one for the whole village.

We have also flagged up with Haringey the need to ensure that permissions for new developments include a condition for the replacement of pavement slabs which are smashed during the course of the works, and for the clearing away of the often large quantities of mud and debris flowing into the streets, gutters and drains during these works. If you see such problems anywhere, please alert us as soon as possible.

(3) TREES & OS

We were taken aback to receive the following notification from Haringey's Tree Officer recently: "[It was] agreed in November last year that [Haringey] would source [its tree] service from another local authority. Discussions were held with Islington and Barnet [and] the proposal Islington submitted was the most favourable. The new arrangement began last week and will be for an initial 6 months, after which it would be reviewed.

“As you know my team have always struggled to allocate sufficient time to support the Planning Service and manage all the other responsibilities we have, in particular our service level agreements with Highways, Homes for Haringey and Parks. My team... lost two officers last year and... have not been able to recruit replacements.

“I will still try to deal with some enquiries... I will also make applications for TPOs where I believe trees are threatened. But it will be officers from Islington that review all the CA notices, TPO applications and planning applications going forward”.

We were incredulous and have flagged up a number of questions:

- There has been no prior public consultation or announcement.
- There is no indication that it has been approved by Cabinet or appeared in any published minutes?
- Even our own Ward Councillors were unaware of the change.
- How will Islington officers will with local groups such as the Highgate Society?
- Will TPO applications still appear on Haringey's planning lists? How will we receive notification of non-TPO applications?
- What exactly is Islington's "proposal" which has been approved? Was it a cheaper or better option than simply taking on new tree staff at Haringey?
- Who will be responsible for assessing and recommending new TPOs?

We have contacted Islington's tree officer to ask for a meeting.

2019 sees the 30th anniversary of the taking over of **Hampstead Heath** by the City of London. We have sat on their statutory Consultative Committee for the entire time – and, amazingly, Richard Sumray of the London Council for Recreation and Sport, and Colin Gregory of the Hampstead Garden Suburb Residents Association, and myself have been on it from the beginning! The three of us were rather surprised to find ourselves the guests of honour at the annual Heath Management Committee Dinner and now feel more like ancient veterans than ever (though we have yet to match the record of senior Ranger Danny Murphy, who revealed that he has been with the Heath for 36 years! We also sit on the Highgate Wood Consultative Committee. Running these nationally important open spaces is a hugely complex task, and from the feedback we get from members over the decades, it seems that most people feel that both spaces are run very well by the City – indeed, if only our local authorities listened to our views as well as the City listen to, and take on board, the views of the Consultative Committee members.

As I regularly advise you, the lengthy minutes and papers of the Consultative Committee meetings can easily be consulted on the City's website; how many of you take the trouble to look at them and inform yourselves of what a mammoth task looking after the Heath and Highgate Wood actually is?

Recent issues include

- the management of the various ponds to balance the needs of wildlife; monitor the stability of the new dams and maintaining the new ecological areas created during those works;
- improving disabled access to the Men's swimming pond;
- the future of the newly-created island on the Model Boating Pond: originally proposed as a place where people can sit, it has now been agreed that, since it has proved to be attractive to waterbirds, it will be permanently closed to the public and designated as a nature reserve, perhaps with deadwood piles for amphibians, reptiles and insects; the "isthmus" connecting it to the mainland will be kept for now, with access to dogs and walkers barred by dense hedging;
- desilting of the ponds, regularly needed to prevent filling in and the growth of algal blooms with deter wildlife – an expensive business: the recent de-silting of the Mixed Swimming Pond cost over £100,000;
- we had a rare visit to the closed-off Bird Sanctuary Pond enclosure, to see the management activities there. Wet meadows are being encouraged to create breeding sites for amphibians and other wildlife. Critically, this meadow is fed by the stream coming from the site of the 55 Fitzroy Park development. Elsewhere, the creation of dry meadows has led to an abundance of wildflowers. It is a major Heath site for Grass Snakes, and work is aimed at providing egg-laying and overwintering facilities for the snakes. It is also believed that the snakes are also breeding in adjoining gardens and allotments, which could be vulnerable to development.
- the City are piloting a new waste management strategy, with recycling bins. Currently, waste is not separated and recycled, partly because visitors regularly contaminate the bins with dog waste. On a busy summer weekend, *the public drop up to 11 tons of litter on the Heath.*
- While the loss of trees at the western end of the Stock Pond was originally regretted, it has in fact opened up the lost views across the pond. Many people have commented that the spillway area created by the new dam works had a problem with accumulating water, which will be remedied. The new wildflower meadow has established well, but will suffer badly once the temporary fencing is removed; should the fencing, then, be retained?

- I was asked to monitor works at The Tumulus, a Scheduled Ancient Monument, where we met the Historic England London Inspector for Scheduled Monuments. I argued that it is now clear that the Heath, and areas around it, at High Archaeological potential and that a proper archaeological strategy for the Heath is needed. This was agreed and there will be future meetings to discuss developing a strategy.

With the unrelenting spread of Oak Processionary Moth across the south-west – some 2,000 nests on Hampstead Heath in 2018 - there is much debate as to how best, or even whether it is possible now, to control them and the hazard their highly irritating hairs can present. The approach currently required by DEFRA is spraying the affected tree, which was done on the Heath in 2018 and is suggested for Highgate Wood this year. Unfortunately, spraying causes serious collateral damage, killing any other moth larvae on the tree, and this could have major impact on the Heath's important biodiversity; oak hosts a higher proportion of moth larvae than any other native tree, my own survey of Highgate Wood has found over 400 species of moths, a high proportion of those oak-feeders, so there could be many more on the Heath. It seems that relatively few medical cases have in fact been reported, despite heavy infestation in other parks (e.g. Richmond), and also in Europe, where it is endemic – as it will undoubtedly become here. It is increasingly felt that spraying is an overreaction and will not in any case prevent their spread, and that other measures, like temporary barriers round trees, removal of nests by hand, and information notices, will be just as effective, and the Heath and Hampstead Society will be taking this up with the City on behalf of the other Consultative Committee members.

We also sit on the **Kenwood Landscape Forum** consultative group and, together with the Heath and Hampstead Society's Heath Committee, had a useful walk round the estate led by the head gardener, Dave Gibbons.

Locally, despite Haringey's severe shortage of tree staff, we have had some success in persuading them to issue Tree Preservation Orders on three trees: a huge and magnificent ancient Hornbeam at 68 Sheldon Avenue; an equally huge, impressive and ancient Holm Oak at 13 North Grove, possibly the finest in the area, and a splendid veteran oak at 10 View Road.

We also achieved a fourth TPO success in Camden, where it was proposed to remove a holly tree, one of a pair, from in front of the entrance to the Holly Village estate, purportedly to "restore the original view of the building, and that the original architect would not have intended a tree for the location", and submitting an 1870 photograph as evidence that the original development was only intended to have low shrubs here. However, the estate was only built in 1865, and a closer look at the photograph indicated that what was claimed to be a "low shrub" was, in fact, a newly-planted Holly, probably the very one, now of substantial size, which it was proposed to fell. We therefore objected strongly to removing what is in fact a very historic tree – possibly from which the Holly Village Estate got its name? The application has been refused and a TPO served.

On another site in Shepherds Hill, an application was submitted to carry out remedial works to a tree damaged by a development next door. We have suggested to Haringey that this is clearly unacceptable, and that they should consider prosecuting the developers for unauthorised damage to a tree, not least "pour encourager les autres". Their Enforcement section has been asked to follow this up.

We monitor and, where necessary, respond to a large number of applications for works to trees, though if a tree has no Preservation Order, all that is needed is six weeks' notice of the works, and if Haringey cannot justify imposing a TPO, it can be felled; a serious weakness in national legislation. In addition, too many tree applications are woefully deficient in detail, methodology, reasons or even knowledge of trees, even when submitted by so-called tree specialists, and should not have been validated by the local authority.

(4) MISC NON-H

Perhaps one positive aspect of Brexit is that it has deflected the Government from their disastrous assault on our planning system, which has achieved little except to deprive local authorities and communities of any ability to have a real say in what happens in their areas, and to create a sort of wild west sloping playing field for developers.

A significant move was the Royal Town Planning Institute's report on the planning system, Chaired by former Minister Nick Raynsford, produced in November, which concludes that the government interference has made the Planning System unfit for purpose.

In particular, it echoes what we and groups like us, and most other bodies connected with planning, have long been saying - the government should drop its proposal to extend permitted development to the demolition and rebuilding of office and commercial buildings, one of seven actions to create an effective and fair planning system. Government should return powers over permitted development to local government urgently. Its other urgent recommendations are:

- ensure that the forthcoming Environment Bill is applied to the planning system;
- providing a new National Planning Framework;
- implement its promise to ensure that citizens can influence local decisions, and publish guidance on how genuine public participation can be promoted;
- implement a cross-sector study of reform of the planning system;
- issue policy guidance on the returns landowners can expect when calculating viability assessments;
- the professional bodies involved in planning should review their ethical codes to embed the principle of 'do no harm'.
- legislate that the planning system should "positively promote the long-term sustainable development of the nation and the health, safety and wellbeing of individuals";
- a duty on local authorities to plan for high-quality affordable homes;
- National Policy Statements to be prepared by an advisory commission, not government departments;
- legislative change to the Land Compensation Act 1961 to remove hope value as a factor in market valuation.

The RTPI is just one of a plethora of organisations which has warned that the widening of Permitted Development (PD) rights has been disastrous, has exacerbated rather than solved the housing crisis, and 'flies in the face of democracy'. It will allow commercial premises and residential properties to be extended upwards, or demolished and replaced with housing, without the need for permission. This will deprive local authorities of planning fees and developer contributions for affordable housing and infrastructure. It will lead to the loss of mixed-use developments, PD rights were only intended for simple or minor changes, not new large-scale developments. Allowing buildings to be extended upwards as permitted development would result in a loss of control of design, the public's right to light, and alter the character of an area. The conversion of offices will create "dead frontages" in high streets, and shop conversions to housing have been shown to create sub-standard accommodation. They are piecemeal, short-term measures that neither help declining high streets nor deliver quality, affordable housing, and are being increasingly abused. The local planning process should be the means of delivering affordable and social housing and ensuring community participation.

The issue has been debated in detail in the Lords, too, and when London MP Helen Hayes raised it in the Commons, the response from the Minister Kit Malthouse suggested he was in denial about the huge damage caused by destruction of local communities and employment, the damage to local democracy, the loss of CIL contributions for infrastructure, and the fact that widening PD has so far mainly produced luxury housing and hardly one unit of affordable and social housing [ADD COMMENT IN CIVIC VOICE APPG MEETING]

Yet, ignoring all this, the government's consultation, *Planning Reform: Supporting the high street and increasing the delivery of new homes*, not only proposes a new PD right allowing for the demolition of commercial buildings and redevelopment as residential, but also to allow shops, financial and professional services, hot food takeaways, betting shops and launderettes to change to office use, and to allow hot food takeaways to change to residential, all without the need for permission. The Planning Officers' Society argue that demolition "should be the subject of full and proper public consultation and engagement as expected for pre-application advice and planning applications. Reducing public consultation through using permitted development rights would undermine the confidence of the public in the planning system". The Royal Town Planning Institute and Town and Country and Planning Association (TCPA) also submitted strong objections, and also strongly objected to proposals to allow upwards extensions as a PD right, arguing that this must remain part of a planning application to establish both the principle of whether it is acceptable in a particular case and the details. The measures will only make a very limited contribution to increasing housing supply, while the long term environmental harm could be severe. "Withdrawing planning controls and letting the market decide is not the answer".

Predictably, the free market think-tank Policy Exchange broadly welcomed the proposals, maintaining that the planning system "has been a brake on the ability of high streets to adapt to prevailing trends in how we live, work and shop" – totally missing the point; if a change is justifiable, it will be permitting. The difference is between "planning" and an uncontrolled free-for-all.

The Heritage Alliance, of which we are members through the London Forum, have co-ordinated an open letter to Government opposing the changes, which the Forum is supporting, and highlighting the disastrous impact it could have on Conservation Area and historic buildings and streetscapes, and on commercial building which have heritage value, such as former cinemas, mills or power stations. The London Forum has submitted very detailed comments and objections, which can be seen on their website (which you should be checking regularly in any case, particularly for its news letter containing important articles on the current planning situation).

Our view is that the widening of permitted development is an abrogation of planning responsibilities, as it is completely devoid of any coherent strategy for housing provision, and could result in none or unpredictable numbers. If we know what housing numbers we need, there should be a coherent strategy to provide them, not a weak and flabby aspiration that letting developers go ahead without the need for permission will solve any problems. All such decisions are best dealt with through the planning process; if there is a good reason for replacing a building, the Planning System is best placed to decide how, and with what, in the context of local requirements.

We are also appalled by the stunning illogicality, and even iniquity, of the Government's ruling that, if local authorities give permissions for housing but do not reach their targets because the developers do not implement their permissions, the Local Authority is penalised. George Orwell could not have dreamed that one up. Local authorities and their communities should be able to decide on **all** planning applications and there should be no permitted development except for small specified works.

In addition, certain realities do not seem to have hit home:

- Experts say that gaining consent for such schemes through PD rights could be as onerous as via a planning application
- Councils' revenue for PD applications is lower than for conventional applications, but the workload is similar;
- upwards extensions to existing buildings are often complex in both structural and regulatory terms;
- The Planning Officers' Society point out that "the prior approval process required to protect neighbours and the character and amenity of an area would result in a process that would be very close to that required for a planning application", while a legal consultant warns that developers may find it is no easier than making a planning application.

Dismayingly, it appears that only 310 homes in the cheapest category of affordable housing — those available for social rent — were completed across London in the nine months to December 2018, and in 13 boroughs not a single home for social rent or London Affordable Rent. Even more astonishing was the Housing Minister's statement on ITV News that we should focus less on building affordable housing in London, and that building more expensive homes will create a healthier housing market.

At least a *Green Belt (Protection) Bill* provides for the establishment of a national register of Green Belt land, the restriction of the ability of local authorities to de-designate Green Belt land, and provision about future development of de-designated Green Belt land, while a *Planning (Appeals) Bill* aims to limit the grounds of appeal against decisions on planning applications consistent with a neighbourhood development plan or local plan.

However, at the same time that PD is being widened, government has, ironically, published its *Integrated Communities Action Plan* emphasising that local communities should be actively involved in the plan-making process and that local planning authorities should seek to involve all sections of the community in the planning decisions that affect them.

In the face of all this, one wonders what value the **£675 million Future High Streets Fund, to transform high streets and town centres** will have, if the community have no power to stop development it doesn't want or need? Even the retail industry has called for a community-focused approach to tackling the challenges facing high streets and town centres in a new report, recommending the empowerment of local leaders to implement their plans to reinvent their town centres.

The Local Government Association has pointed out in its own response to Government proposals that:

- Councils approve 9 out of 10 planning application, and 70% of appeals uphold councils' decisions;
- Councils must be allowed to manage change in high street and town centres depending on the size, location and demographics of a place;
- The government should undertake a wholesale review of the Use Classes Order to consider whether it is still fit-for-purpose and give councils greater local discretion to manage change in their town centres;

- Widening PD rights could have unintended consequences at a local level and undermine the government's focus on quality and well- designed places.
- They have serious concerns about the negative impacts of permitted development rights enabling change of use into housing, and particularly allowing upwards extensions without the need for permission;
- local authorities should be able to dispose of land at any undervalue without seeking consent from the Secretary of State;

Uninformed comment still has the stage. *The Times* picked up on a *Financial Times* podcast by Liz Truss, chief secretary to the Treasury, who said that "a lot more" greenfield land should be built on. Asked whether many nimbys were Conservatives, she said: "I think it is a dwindling number. People recognise the choice is building on more greenfield sites and making sure there are enough homes." In *The Daily Mail*, Geoffrey Lean responds: "what is needed is not more big, expensive houses in the countryside, but cheaper smaller, more densely built homes on the abundant brownfield land in the towns and cities where most young people prefer to live anyway, and where the infrastructure to support them exists", while a *Telegraph* leader says that the "green belt should not be sacrificed" for more housing.

Disappointingly, if predictably, the Government has dismissed the petition to Reduce VAT to 5% on repairs and alterations to Listed Buildings:

"We recognise the valuable contribution to UK Heritage made by owners of listed buildings. We continue to promote our country's heritage and we will ensure that everyone can enjoy and benefit from it. Protecting and making the most of the UK's heritage is important for our economy and society.... The government recognises the particular challenges faced by private owners of listed properties in planning regulations, and this is why we have introduced measures to streamline the listed buildings consent regime. These measures include giving local authorities the power to grant a general consent for minor works to listed buildings, this removes the need for specific applications for these types of works.

"VAT is a broad-based tax on consumption and the standard rate of 20% applies to most goods and services. While there are exceptions to the standard rate, these are strictly limited by domestic and EU law as well as by fiscal considerations. VAT is an important source of revenue which is used to fund the government's public spending priorities including hospitals, schools and defence. Under EU law, a reduced rate of 5% could be applied to alterations or repairs of buildings, but it would not be possible to limit this to alterations and repairs of only listed buildings. Introducing a reduced rate is estimated to cost the Exchequer at least £2.5 billion a year and this would have to be balanced by increased taxes elsewhere, reductions in government spending, or borrowing... the government has no plans to change the VAT treatment of renovations and repairs."

A new threat to our streetscape may have been averted. It comes in the form of so-called telephone kiosks which are little more than a Trojan Horse for advertisements; five have already been refused in the Archway area and have been appealed, but the problem is far worse in central London, where Kensington & Chelsea refused one but was overruled by an appeal Inspector after the appellants argued – correctly - that telephone kiosks were permitted development. Refusing to accept the decision, K&C took the matter to the High Court, where the judge was very firmly of the view that, while telecommunications equipment may be PD, these were dual purpose – for both telephones, and advertising – and were very definitely *not* PD. In addition, a new Government consultation proposes removing PD rights for telephoned boxes.