

LONDON CALLING

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Bo-Jo: A New Dawn for Planning in London

Duncan Bowie takes an early look at the implications for planning in London under the new Mayor, Boris Johnson.

We have come to the end of an era – the era of Ken Livingstone. We have now had eight years of experience of a new form of regional governance – a Mayor who had not only the power to write the regional plan for the capital, previously the preserve of central government, but also the power to intervene in strategic planning applications. Like it or hate it, the impact of Ken Livingstone on London development was significant, and now, following the Mayoral election, everything has changed.

The new Mayor was quick to make his first announcements. Near the top of the list, we have his intention to scrap the 50% affordable housing target, his wish to boost intermediate housing and

his wish to protect historic views by dropping the new Views Management Framework and reverting to the previous guidance (RPG3A). The London Plan of course remains the statutory strategic plan for London as well as continuing to

This does raise the fundamental issue of why have a London Plan at all?

be a component of each borough's Local Development Framework. However, just as the last Mayor was selective in the application of his policies to individual cases, so a new Mayor can be.

Boris Johnson is primarily a localist, supported by the Conservative boroughs, who did not want an interventionist Mayor. Johnson considers that most planning decisions should be made by boroughs and that he will only intervene 'as a last resort and in the most exceptional circumstances.' This does raise the fundamental issue of why have a London Plan at all, or for that matter why have a Mayor? The whole

reason for having a strategic plan and a strategic planning authority is that having 33 local planning authorities with 33 different planning policies does not produce the most effective use of London's limited land resources and development capacity. Some local decisions have wider impacts, which is why the Mayor has strategic development control powers.

However the new Mayor does have some targets of his own – for example to achieve 50,000 affordable homes a year over the next three years. While he has not defined affordable, his predecessor saw less than 30,000 social rent and intermediate homes, defined as affordable in the London Plan, completed over the last three years. Given the current housing market, total completions will fall behind the new 30,500 target – and the 31,000 figure achieved in 2006/7. Of these, only 31% were affordable, so how 16,650 affordable homes are to be achieved each year – that is 55% of the current total homes target, without a London-wide affordable homes target is a mystery. The new Mayor seems to think that he will get more affordable homes if there is no target.

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He has however stated that he wants to agree an affordable housing target with each borough. Presumably this means that if Bromley want a 25% target rather than a 50% target, which is what their policy says, that will be acceptable to him. Boris Johnson has also said that the balance between social rented and intermediate housing should be 60: 40 rather than the current London Plan target of 70:30. When it was pointed out to him that over the last few years the output had actually been 60:40, he said the proportion of intermediate housing should be higher. He has announced a new First Steps shared ownership initiative, but at present it is unclear whether this will be within the London Plan affordability criteria.

At the recent London Planning and Development Forum meeting, Giles Dolphin, head of the Mayor's Planning Decisions Unit, confirmed that for strategic applications referred to the Mayor, the Mayor would still seek the maximum reasonable affordable housing output, tested through a financial viability appraisal, though the GLA is now paying consultants £25,000 a time to carry out appraisals, previously assessed in-house by the GLA. Giles Dolphin indicated that the Mayor and his advisors however prefer to use the Valuation Agency to undertake appraisals, rather than use private consultants, being

concerned about possible conflicts of interest.

What has been a little surprising has been the new Mayor's decision to delegate his planning powers to Ian Clement, the former leader of Bexley Council. Mr Clement has already made the first batch of strategic planning decisions on the Mayor's behalf – with no refusal directions at the time of writing, and not as yet apparently using the new powers to take over strategic planning applications from boroughs. Boris

What has been a little surprising has been the new Mayor's decision to delegate his planning powers

Johnson has stated that he does not have the time to get involved in the details of individual applications – a contrast with his predecessor who considered every case in detail personally. While Sir Simon Milton, former leader of Westminster City Council, continuing as a Westminster councillor and leader of the Local Government Association, is acting as strategic planning advisor to the Mayor, Mr Clement is also dealing with

the Mayor's responses to borough plans in terms of general conformity with the London Plan.

On high buildings, the Mayor supports high buildings in central London, Canary Wharf, Stratford and apparently in Croydon, which he considers not to have views worth protecting, but nowhere else. He has stated that the promotion of high buildings in the London Plan should be removed. He also wants to include in the London Plan an explicit protection of back gardens from new development – not that the London Plan promoted such development.

The new Mayor has also indicated that the London Plan should include protection of standards, including internal space standards, something his predecessor's advisors turned down. There is therefore a possibility that the quality of new homes may be improved, and the new Mayor in his housing manifesto stated that 'London needs more family-sized homes. I will amend the London Plan to include a strong steer in favour of building affordable, family-sized units'. While this is welcome, it is unclear how the funding to do this is to be delivered.

So what of the London Plan's future? Giles Dolphin announced that there will be a comprehensive review of the London Plan and that the Mayor would issue initial proposals later this year, with a draft revised plan to follow in 2009. This will then be subject to an Examination in Public, so a new plan will not be adopted until 2010. Until then, the existing consolidated 2008 version of the London Plan remains in force. Boris Johnson is also going to issue a revised version of the draft Mayor's Housing Strategy. However any changes in planning policy for housing such as housing targets and affordable housing targets, can't take effect until a revised London Plan is adopted, and some of the changes proposed may bring the new Mayor into conflict with central government. Any proposals will also need to be based on evidence otherwise they will not meet the tests of soundness required by the Examination in Public. At this stage it is a little unclear how this evidence is to be obtained.

The view expressed here are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect those of the RTPI London Region or the RTPI.

Savills Triumph in Planners Football Tournament

15 teams made up of planners from across the London Region met up at GOALS Wimbledon to take part in the 2nd RTPI London Football Tournament sponsored by Indigo.

After some hard fought games a team from Savills came out on top with Scott Brownrigg taking the runner up spot.

When awarding trophies to the winners Phil Villars MD of Indigo said he 'was delighted that Indigo were able to sponsor the event and praised everyone for making it a very enjoyable evening.'



Savills Football Champions 2008



Interview: Andrew Jones

In the fourth of our series of interviews with leading figures in planning in London, Rachael Rooney talks to Andrew Jones, Regional Director for UK and European Operations at EDAW.

Going to meet Andrew, one cannot fail to be impressed by the long list of interesting and high profile projects he has worked on; from master planning for the development of Milton Keynes right through to securing the planning permissions which supported the bid for London to host the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games. However, after talking to him, you realise where this inspiration and enthusiasm for planning comes from. Not many can boast of being tutored by one of the leading figures in planning history, Gordon Cherry.

Although Andrew originally studied geography, his fascination in planning grew from an understanding and insight into the interesting relationship between the built and natural environments. Talking about how planning has changed since Andrew began his career, he says the biggest change has been an increase in the awareness of man's impact on the environment. Andrew points out that although geographers have been talking about this for over 20 years it is only now that the planning system, and indeed the world, is starting to take notice.

Moving on to some of Andrew's more high-profile projects, we turn to the 2012 Games. Andrew insists that one of the key challenges of the masterplan for the Olympic Park and surrounding area was to create an environment that is distinctive and works well within London. Understanding the context in which the Games are located is paramount. Most other cities who have hosted the Games have done so under completely different circumstances, usually locating them at the edge of their city, often on greenfield sites. However, as Andrew explains, incorporating the Games within an inner city area creates its own unique and complex challenges.

'The impact of the Games and their legacy is going to be fundamental in

shaping East London, not only in terms of regeneration of the physical landscape but also in terms of how East London is seen by the rest of London and indeed the country'. Andrew explains, 'There is a balance to be struck between delivering a fantastic Games and ensuring the subsequent regeneration of the area meets the needs of the local people and the local area'. With a clear deadline of summer 2012 and staged deadlines all the way through the process, the eyes of the whole country are focused on the outcome and success of this project.

One of the key challenges, is managing the balance between comments and rumours in the press along side the real proposals.

Whilst talking about the experiences of other cities which have hosted the Games, Andrew is keen to stress that one of the most important differences between London and other cities, is the planning of the legacy at the beginning of the process rather than afterwards. This comment is perhaps fitting, coming at a time when the new mayor has criticised the organisers by revealing his concerns over the legacy of the Olympic venues. However, Andrew highlights that the legacy planning has been going on for quite some while and whilst there has always been a masterplan setting out the objectives around housing, open space, community facilities etc., the time is now appropriate to increase

attention on the details of the legacy.

In talking more generally about masterplanning, Andrew explains the need for effective engagement with the local community, to embrace communities' aspirations and also to manage any mis-match between expectations and the realistic potential of an area. 'To achieve bold aims set out in masterplans you must take communities with you'. In relating this back to the Olympics, Andrew describes how different people have reacted to different stages of the master planning process in the Lower Lea Valley. 'There has been a huge amount of support for the Games from communities who, quite rightly, have a focus on the regeneration potential. One of the key challenges, however, is managing the balance between comments and rumours in the press along side the real proposals'.

Andrew has recently been involved in a study commissioned by Central London Forward looking at the infrastructure capacity and future requirements for Central London. As the UK is currently undergoing the largest homes and communities building programme for a century, Andrew emphasises how vital it is that we get the right infrastructure in place. London is a highly complicated environment with a complex web of provision and delivery. With a move away from direct public funding of services and infrastructure towards a combination of public and private provision, Andrew explains how the development industry needs to be clear about what they are required to provide and the public sector needs to be clear about what is needed. 'Infrastructure planning should be done at a strategic city wide level to ensure that London has the right platform for economic growth whilst moving the city towards a more sustainable future.

This cannot be delivered solely at the borough level'.

Relating this work to the impact of the credit crunch, Andrew is up-beat, insisting that this is a good opportunity to pause and get the Community Infrastructure Levy structure set up and working. We are suddenly working in a different world. The basis that investment in infrastructure comes at the same time or ahead of a development has to be considered differently when development stalls. Both the public and private sector need to respond to this'. The next 2 or 3 years will be a challenging time, development will slow down and some schemes won't happen, particularly as they are currently envisaged. More innovative responses are needed in terms of infrastructure provision so that as the

market returns we are better prepared for delivery. Planners should therefore embrace their role as negotiators and advocates. The emphasis will be on securing the right quality of development that will endure, rather than on control. The planning profession again has the chance to step up and rise to the challenge.

CAREER DETAILS

Age: 42

Family: Married, 2 sons

Education History: BA Honours, Geography, University of Birmingham, 1987; PhD Geography and Urban Planning, 1991; Postgraduate Diploma in Urban Planning, Oxford Brookes University, 1995

Career History: 90-93 Chesterton Consulting Group, working on the

development of Milton Keynes; 93-99 Chesterton, London, latterly London Director of Planning and Economics; 2000 to date EDAA, now Principal and Regional Director for UK and European Operations.

Interests: Cartography, the Sunday papers and trailing around after two children - duties include taxi service and badminton, football, cricket etc. supporter.

Heroes: Victorian City Leaders that tackled issues of social deprivation. Those who saw the urban environment as a key factor in the health and prosperity of the population and engendering civic pride as fundamental to economic success and community development; providing the basis of the planning and social legislation we have today.

RTPI London Gets a Makeover!

RTPI London is run by planners, for planners and we are always looking at ways to improve our offer, ensuring chartered members get the best value from RTPI membership at the grassroots level.

With changes afoot across the profession, exciting times lie ahead for planners to reinforce our status as an important and creative force in the development process. To respond to this we feel it is time we gave ourselves a makeover that reflects and celebrates our profession. This summer we will be looking at how we brand ourselves and communicate with members.

One of the most important member benefits we offer is London Calling, an institution that has been going since the late 1980s. We are keen to see it improve and evolve as a primary mode of communication amongst RTPI members in the capital.

As London Calling is part funded through membership fees we realise the importance in giving value for members and with rising postage and production costs we will be looking at more efficient ways of producing the newsletter. Part of this will be attracting

sponsors in the form of planning and recruitment consultancies, and other development related industries. We have a range of sponsorship and advertising opportunities available on request which will give your organisation a vehicle to promote yourself and what you do to over 2,000 chartered town planners living in the capital.

We welcome any views or comments you may have relating to London Calling and any suggestions for future editions. What articles would you like to see? Are there any regular features that we should run? Are there any issues that we should be focusing upon?

If you have any comments on the newsletter, if your organization is interested in sponsoring or advertising in the newsletter, or would like to get involved more generally in RTPI London please email london@rtpi.org.uk and we will get back to you.

Competition:

Can you think of a new name for the RTPI London Newsletter, or do you love London Calling? A bottle of good quality wine awaits anyone who can think of a better name or who convinces us to stick with what we've got. All suggestions to:
london@rtpi.org.uk
Closing date 23rd August.

The Changing World of Planning:

Can we match expectations and deliver?

The University of Westminster's Department of Urban Development & Regeneration held three seminars on planning this Spring hosted by their three visiting professors. The first was given by Lynda Addison (Addison & Associates) on 30 April, chaired by Alan Jago. Brian Whiteley took notes.

Progress since the Planning & Compensation Act 2004: has been a bit mixed, actually . . .

Planners are being successful in raising their game to cope with the present Government's expectation that planning should take a more central role – notably in speeding up the processing of planning applications to meet Best Value Performance Indicator 109. Generally local authorities have re-engineered their services successfully to help improve their performance in the face of rising numbers of planning applications and the greater complexity of processing these – having to take into consideration such factors as affordable housing, design, Section 106 agreements and planning tariffs, travel plans, Environmental Impact Assessments, etc.. LA's view was that authorities still need to exploit and use e-planning techniques more – and they have not yet fully taken on board the role of development management. This can include the production of development briefs leading on from pre-application discussions; active monitoring of the implementation of schemes and ensuring travel plans are acted upon.

Planning's performance in response to the 2004 Act's changes to the development plan system has been less successful. Of the 1000 Local Development Documents proposed by 2007 in the first round of Local Development Schemes, fewer than 150 were delivered according to schedule. The scale of the work needed for Local Development Frameworks (LDFs) and the skills required to produce them were clearly underestimated – on all sides.

Work by the Planning Advisory Service

(PAS) has also suggested that Members have not been involved enough to date – they need to both comprehend the new system and be able to engage with it by balancing their own parochial ward interests against wider borough or Londonwide objectives, e.g. do they view house conversions or higher density housing as good or bad things? PAS also found that stakeholder & public participation (“front loading”) has not been sufficiently developed. Effective / informative / continuous engagement should be the aim, but there is evidence that authorities are still underestimating the time and skills necessary to do that. In particular they are not establishing public ownership of the outcomes of public participation before going on to draft Preferred Options.

The Planning Inspectorate (PINS) is concerned at the lack of co-ordination between LDFs and Local Implementation Plans and in particular whether meaningful, implementable sustainable transport policies are being included in LDFs.

Resources: now there's loads of money . . . (?)

Planning Delivery Grant and increased planning fees have recently poured new resources into planning. The average local authority budget for planning now stands at £311k pa. LA's view is that this has not been matched by much analysis of how resources are being used and whether this has been done effectively. Her concern with the new Housing & Planning Delivery Grant is that it will become a much less reliable funding stream – a prime determinant being the delivery to target of new housing, which can be influenced by a variety of outside factors (interest rates, economic cycles, land hoarding) which are outside the control of a planning authority. Here, as elsewhere, planners are being asked to tackle issues over which they have little control – e.g. to provide more housing at a time of global economic downturn – our performance will be judged on the

provision of more housing when in reality we have no control over the underlying factors controlling its provision.

The scale of resources now needed by authorities for development plan production is probably being underestimated. Initial research following the first round of LDF Examinations in Public (EiPs) suggests that local authorities can spend anywhere between £285k - £890k to put together a sound evidence base – that is before costs of stakeholder engagement, printing & publicity and holding EiPs themselves are taken into account. LA suggested that a major urban unitary authority could spend around £4m in all on producing a full set of documents for its LDF.

Similar problems seem to exist in development management. PAS suggest an objective should be for local authorities to have a caseload of around 150 applications per annum dealt with by development management officers. Their data show this figure is far higher at present. If anything development management officers' caseload is set to become yet more complex shortly with the introduction of such proposals as the Community Infrastructure Levy and Planning Performance.

Faced with the demands of the new development plan and development management systems introduced in 2004 – and given the drift away from planning as a career during the 1980s & 1990s – planning now has a severe skills shortage. This is not being met in either the public or private sectors at present. Notably, vacancy levels are still high in local authorities and they are over-dependent on short-term contract staff as a result. LA suggested that both sectors will be faced with further skills & experience shortages as a 'retirement boom' in the next 5 years takes place when the post-World War II generation start to retire.

Workload for LDF teams has been analysed by LA who suggested they need to spend the following amount of staff time annually on:

	(days)
Local Development Scheme reviews	20-40
Statement of Community Involvement compliance	10-20
Annual Monitoring Report research / preparation	50-100
Evidence Base maintenance	110-220

She suggested such teams require a minimum of 6-10 staff. Core Strategy & Proposals Map preparation alone can take around 660 days to take through to adoption. She noted that LB Redbridge recently spent £250k alone over two years to achieve a sound Core Strategy.

Central Government's View:
Planning's Task is to Deliver Change

(i.e. deliver more: housing, affordable housing, economic growth, biodiversity, sustainable development, etc.) and do the day job . . .

Central Government has been trying to support the planning system in delivering change by issuing ample guidance from a variety of agencies: DCLG, CABE, DfT, PAS. LA acknowledged that the problem for many planners has been finding the time to read through and fully understand all this. She stressed that a series of roadshows have been held around the country for Chief Executives to try and impress on them the increased importance the Government now places on the planning system to deliver its change agenda. It is also now starting on a further review of the whole set of national Planning Policy Statements.

LA drew attention to one publication in particular – the National Planning Forum's 'Conditions for Creative Planning' whose recommendations

included:

- Introducing better pre-application processes
- Engaging planning committee Members more actively in the decision-making process
- Making sure the complexity of planning is clearly appreciated across an authority
- Ensuring sufficient support is in place for the planning service to function

She rounded off by noting how planners need to get to be seen as an effective delivery tool within a local authority for the Community Strategy and Local Strategic Partnership. There is still a problem in many authorities where major service directorates / departments see planning too simplistically as irrelevant to their delivery plans or as an impediment to the delivery of such programmes as Building Schools for the Future.

06/06/2008: Thames Barrier Tour

RTPI London members were given an inclusive behind the scenes tour of the Thames Barrier, hosted by Andy Batchelor, Thames Tidal Flood Risk Manager. Brian Whiteley reports back on an insightful visit.

Some background . . .

The Thames has a tidal range of 7m – tides in its estuary are rising at a rate of 60cm per 100 years. A combination of bad weather and low pressure over the North Sea – which causes a rise in sea level – can result in a storm surge risk back up the Thames and its tributaries. That is what happened in the Great Flood of 1953 when a severe storm and extreme high tide (4.85m at Shoeburyness) caused major loss of life in East Anglia and the South East – 350 lost their lives on Canvey Island alone. The commercial impact was just as severe – e.g. major national printing presses then at Purfleet were put out of action. In central London the waters lapped against the tops of the river walls.

Historically the solution to flooding

was to build higher and stronger river walls & embankments – stemming from the Thames Flood Act of 1879. The 1953 event made the need for a rethink clear. A Thames tidal barrier was decided to be the best option following the Sir Herman Bondi report in 1966. Progress towards its construction was slow. A major concern for a long time was its impact on navigation up to the Pool of London. Various designs came forward and the Thames Barrier Flood Prevention Act for its construction was eventually passed in 1972; the barrier was completed & operational in 1982. Its impact was to effectively give 2-3m additional height to those central London river walls. It cost £535m to build – all publicly funded and led by the former Greater London Council – together with a series of downstream river wall and embankment improvements. Operating & maintenance costs are approximately £8.5m pa and capital costs £12m pa for improvements.

Since 1983 the barrier has provided flood risk management for 340k homes

/ 8m people. It has been raised fully 109 times – the expectation with the South East sinking at a rate of 2mm pa, sea levels rising 4mm pa and with the other impacts of climate change is that its frequency of operation will increase (possibly 30 closures pa will be needed by 2030). The Environment Agency's Thames Estuary 2100 Project has been looking at what will be needed in future. It is due to put forward a flood risk management plan to the Government in 2010 – looking at all options for flood prevention as well as simply building a new barrier. These can include setting back river defences to allow flood waters to spill in a controlled way onto storage areas on the floodplain.

How it works....

10 steel gates span 520 metres across the river. The four largest are 61m wide in the middle to allow navigational access and each weighs 3.7k tonnes. Each pier is 50m in height – they penetrate 15m down into the riverbed – 11m wide and 65m long. They all have machinery rooms, service routes,

stairways, a lift, local control room and a crane for machinery maintenance. The piers each have distinctive stainless steel 'hoods' which are protective covers for the machinery rooms.

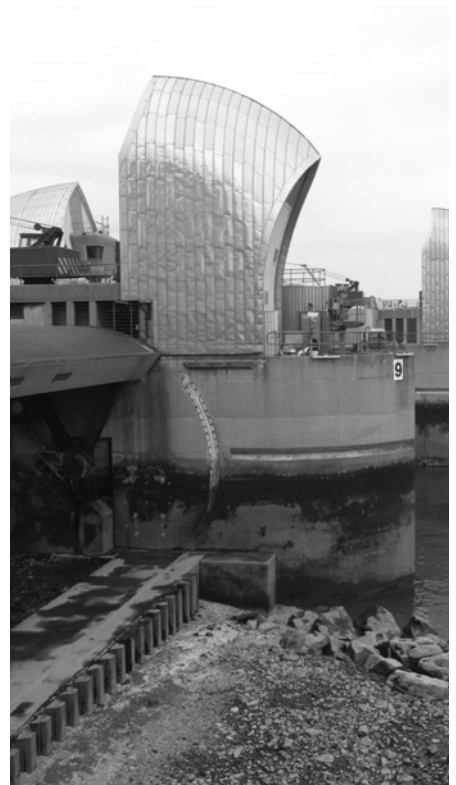
The main barrier control room operates 24/7 and controls all the gates. Each is capable of independent operation if need be. Electrical power is normally used to raise the gates hydraulically; there is diesel engine back up for each gate. The technology relied on to operate the barrier has been deliberately kept 'tried & tested' rather than 'state of the art' and is tested monthly. Two sets of tunnels run across the entire barrier and provide electrical, hydraulic and fire hydrant services – if services in one tunnel fail, the other tunnel provides independent back up.

When a storm surge is expected the barrier is raised shortly after low water. The flow downstream from Teddington is then dammed behind it until the next

high tide starts to ebb – when the barrier is lowered.

In bright sunshine, planners and other built environment professionals enjoyed a walking tour of the Royal Docks in early July. The tour started at the ExCeL exhibition centre, where DLR's Rob Niven provided an insight into recent, current and proposed development projects, including the extension to Woolwich and the three car upgrade.

Attendees then crossed the docks via the high level Royal Victoria Dock Bridge, stopping to hear Marc Clark of London Borough of Newham explain how Silvertown Quays will create a vibrant new heart for the Royal Docks. The tour concluded at Thames Barrier Park, where Professor Andrew Taylor of the scheme architect Patel Taylor explained the concept behind the park and the challenges in transforming a contaminated site into one of London's most impressive green spaces.



RTPI London Events

28th August 2008 – RTPI London/PIA/NZPI Photo Scavenger Hunt

- Details to follow via mailing list.
- To register email: London@rtpi.org.uk

London Licentate Event

Date: 17th September 2008

Time: 18.00 Venue: DTZ, One

Curzon Street, London W1A SPZ

- Jacqui Ward from the RTPI will be presenting an overview of the Assessment of Professional Competence and this will be followed by questions and discussion. There will be a free buffet and drinks available.
- The event is free to RTPI members of any grade and places are limited so please register your interest with london@rtpi.org.uk

Sixth Annual Housing & Construction Conference 2008 Organised by the London regions of RIBA, RTPI, ROOMatRTPI, CIH, CIOB and RICS

Date: Friday 7 November 2008

Venue: CBI Conference Centre, New Oxford St, WC1 Start: 09.30 Finish: 16.00

Cost: £ 99.00 + vat Members, £125.00 + vat Non-members, £ 65.00 + vat Students

How Bad Can It Get?

This year's theme will focus on the housing market as it is now, examine / compare how it was twenty years ago and also look to what the future may hold. Our action packed agenda will include a leading Economist to set the scene, key speakers from the Housing Corporation and Greater London Authority who will share their views and discuss your comments from the floor, both from

a general and local perspective. We will also have a Politicians Panel – a Labour spokesperson has been invited, Grant Shapps MP for the Conservatives and Vince Cable MP for the Liberal Democrats are both confirmed.

To reserve your place

and automatically receive the Publicity and Booking Forms when available, please contact the Event Organiser, Janet Killilea on: jkem@btinternet.com, or Tel: 01606 79596.

Sponsorship & Exhibition opportunities:

If you are interested in possible SPONSORSHIP or EXHIBITION opportunities for this event, please contact the Event Organiser via the details above.



Spot the Building!

The winner of the 'Spot the Building Competition' in the last London Calling was Sebastian Loew of the University of Westminster who spotted the picture as being of St. Paul's Covent Garden seen from its church yard. Congratulations to Sebastian who wins a £10 gift voucher. Thanks to all those who entered. Another building and another £10 voucher on offer to the first out of the hat after 30th August 2008, to jon.barker@atkinsglobal.com. Good luck!

London Region Contacts

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Deputy University Planning Schools Liaison Officer and Deputy Young Planners Representative

Paul Miner, Campaign to Protect Rural England

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Representative on RTPI English Planning Policy Forum and London Planning & Development Forum

Brian Whiteley, London Borough of Waltham Forest

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