

Environment and Planning Report

March 2024

By *Michael Hammerson*

We were saddened that David Richmond has felt it necessary to stand down as Chair of the Planning Committee, owing to pressure of work. He has been an effective and very hands-on Chair for the past six years and the loss of his expertise in architecture and planning will be keenly felt. We have put in place an interim management system until a permanent Chair can be found; but members with any of the skills we need to carry on our work who can spare us some time and advice and/or take on individual planning applications are urged to contact us.

There seems as yet no resolution to the problem of fire access to Shepherd's Cottage at **Townsend Yard**, where there is an attempt to regularise a small passage to the cottage as a "non-material amendment", which we contest. Neither is there as yet any Fire Brigade approval. Haringey have also said that there is no public right of way across the Yard, which we are also disputing, since the public use the yard to reach Omved Gardens and the garden centre which preceded it.

We felt an application to rebuild the security cabin at the entrance of **Compton Avenue** needed significant redesign, owing to an excessively large increase in size; the bulk of the proposed building in a prominent part of the Conservation Area, clearly visible when walking westwards along Hampstead Lane; insufficient screening (merely a creeper on a trellis); and it should perhaps be built further down on Compton Avenue to minimise its impact/ visibility on views, particularly towards the Grade I Listed Kenwood Estate. London Plan and Haringey Plan policy both state that proposals affecting a heritage asset will be assessed against the significance of the asset and its setting, and that design must be of a high quality. Despite some amendments, we felt they did not go far enough to meet our concerns; but Haringey disagreed and have approved it. Once again, it is a pity we were not consulted at the design stage, rather than having to comment on a finalised design.

The latest in a series of applications for amendments to the 2021 permission for demolition and replacement of the large, detached Arts and Crafts-style house at Oakleigh **42 Hampstead Lane**, directly across the road from the Kenwood Estate, has been submitted, only a few weeks before the original was due to expire for non-implementation. The two previous applications were rejected by both Haringey's Design Officer and their Conservation Officer, as detrimental to the character of the Conservation Area, while in December 2023 Haringey refused permission to replace the existing front boundary wall with a brick wall of increased height which would appear "overbearing and damaging". We have objected that, though described as "non-material", the proposed changes are sufficiently major that they cannot be considered non-material, in view of the sensitive location opposite the Kenwood Estate.

We objected to the scale of proposed basement and rear extensions and other major alterations to revert **42 Shepherds Hill**, currently three flats, into a single 6-bedroom house. Considering Haringey's Housing Policy and the local and national housing shortage, we believe this loss of housing in Highgate is unacceptable, particularly as the area of the house is some 900 sq.m., and the London Plan recommends the following minimum standards for new dwellings: 6 bed house - 138 sq.m; 2 bed flats - 70 sq.m.; 3 bed flats - 95 sq.m. The building could thus accommodate three flats of well above minimum standards. We reject the argument that conversion would "reinforce the character of this area as that of family housing", both for the loss of potential housing and because many of the substantial houses along this part of Shepherds Hill are subdivided into flats. Moreover, the basement is intended as a pool, cinema, gymnasium etc.; maintaining our housing supply is far more critical. Given, too, the problems experienced by neighbours throughout the area with basements, the Basement Impact Assessment is based only on evidence from 5 Shepherds Hill, but that is some distance away and uphill from it; the comparison is therefore unwise. Local policy requires an assessment to ensure no possibility of irreversible damage to the local water regime and we have asked Haringey to commission an independent hydrological report.

Local people have expressed concern to us over **84 Highgate High Street**. The shop shut some months ago and an application for a replacement outbuilding, including a claim that the property is not a retail unit and flat but a live-work unit, was refused by Haringey. Internal works appear to have reduced the retail space significantly. We have asked Haringey Enforcement to investigate..

Following TfL's erection of 4m high unattractive metal fencing around the old **Highgate Overground Station**, we contacted Transport for London's property department to discuss the future of this site, since the 1940 buildings are locally listed as a good example of their type, and the wider area is designated as a site of Metropolitan Importance for Nature Conservation. We are hopeful that a meeting will be held shortly.

The current situation at the **Holborn Infirmary Site** at Archway remains unclear, and we are disturbed by unofficial reports that Islington still favour a 32-storey tower for student accommodation (**visit our website and search for Holborn Union** for reconstructions showing how destructive it would be of views, including from Highgate High Street). Though the site was designated a Conservation Area because of the historic buildings, we have had great difficulty in getting any response from Historic England to our urgent requests that the buildings be Listed; this is quite unacceptable.

The **Highgate School Development Proposals** appear to be in abeyance, following our public meeting in June 2023 where the School appeared to appreciate local concerns and agreed to a programme of consultation workshops. These, it is hoped, will be run by the Kings Foundation during the summer and local residents groups will be fully involved. It now seems likely that the final proposals will need to take into account Haringey's forthcoming revised Local Plan, which will become emerging policy by the summer and with which the Society will be closely involved.

Haringey will be upgrading the **BMX trail** adjacent to Shepherds Hill Library into a permanent trail for children of all ages. This is a Neighbourhood Forum project funded by Haringey CIL money. We met the project manager in October; the site is currently a mess; no trees will be lost and the ecological part of the area will be improved.

We objected to the design of a proposed block of flats at **12 Great North Road**. While we accept the concept of redevelopment, at a preliminary meeting with the architect we expressed our disappointment at the design of the frontage and have repeated this to Haringey. We feel that the design does not rise to the opportunity offered, but unsuccessfully mimics the Victorian terrace to the south, and that a good contemporary design is preferable. It tries to accommodate too many units; it could impact on neighbouring houses and gardens; daylighting to the lower flats would be poor; and tree loss does not appear to be compensated for by any replacement.

We objected to a proposed garden room extension at **4 Highgate Avenue** which would have a major impact on neighbours from light disturbance and overlooking, since the ground level of the rear gardens slopes upwards significantly. Haringey's planners disagreed, though 'the presence of rooflights may lead to some light spillage [but] this is not viewed to be significant' and have approved it.

Haringey have refused a second application to develop the corner site at **29 Milton Park** as a 2-storey plus basement house, little changed from the first, which was dismissed on appeal, the Inspector noting "that when considering the impact of development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight' should be given to the asset's conservation" and considering that infilling the open corners between the two terraces of Edwardian houses would cause harm. We objected to both; the design was an uncomfortable mixture of styles, and Haringey agreed with our contention that filling the gap between Milton Road and Milton Park would harm the original layout and urban form of this part of the Conservation Area where similar pairs of semi-detached dwellings are separated from the terraced housing. The size, scale and design would appear as a dominant, incongruous, out of keeping and visually intrusive addition to the street scene and detract from the homogeneity of the Miltons and harm the character of the street scene and the Conservation Area.

We are also concerned at proposals for the Grade II* Listed **4 The Grove**, an original c.1700 house. Historic England also opposes it.

We also objected, again on design grounds, to proposals for significant extensions to **Sunbury, Fitzroy Park**, one of the best Art Deco houses in the street.

Two proposed developments in **Cholmeley Crescent** are causing great concern for neighbours, and we have objected to both. One, at No.45, appears to us to be an excessive scheme for a single storey rear extension, basement extension, and lightwells to side and rear. The other, at No. 24, proposed the demolition of an original house in the Conservation Area CA. The loss of embodied carbon through demolition and new build is now high on the national agenda and will figure prominently in Haringey's new local plan.

An application at **93 Swains Lane** for an extended ground floor and a very large basement extension, which would be larger than the current footprint of the house, would make it another 6 bedroom house and risks causing major hydrology issues. This is another case where we consider it essential to retain smaller houses in the area as well as large family houses, and we have objected.

Following approaches from some local people, Haringey Councillors are looking at proposals to extend the cycle route from The Spaniards to Highgate village along Hampstead Lane, the grounds being to improve safety for cyclists and to deal with the sudden appearance of often decrepit motor homes in the Lane alongside Kenwood. We believe that the lane is mostly too narrow and the loss of parking will severely affect visitors to Hamstead Heath and Kenwood, particularly those with reduced mobility; and as Kenwood now has to raise its own funding, following the total withdrawal of Government funding from English Heritage, it could have a negative impact on the House. The dumping of vehicles could be dealt with by imposing parking charges for a short period.

Camden has been consulting on the creation of a "Dartmouth Park Healthy Neighbourhood" - a type of low traffic neighbourhood. Despite the name, the area covered also contains a significant area of Highgate, which may lead people to assume that there is no need to comment. The implications for business, movement and communications in Highgate could be serious, as could the impact on roads such as West Hill and Highgate Hill.

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We have had two very productive and positive **meetings with the Planners** from both Camden and Haringey. Both comprised wide-ranging discussions of concerns and aspirations, followed by a walkabout.

On 30 Nov 2023 we met Alex Bushell of Camden Development Management, their Conservation Officer Jane Wylie, and Transport manager Steve Cardno. A small selection of subjects discussed includes:

- Liaison with Haringey. As developments on one side of the village have an impact on the other side; liaison is often essential. As one example, there are Article 4 directions, preventing Permitted Development conversions of shop and offices to residential, only on the Camden side of Highgate; and when Highgate Hill was recently resurfaced by Camden, the Haringey side of the village was not notified. We were advised that there are regular meetings on policy and local plan issues, and liaison between case officers on applications with cross border implications, though we have seen little evidence of this. Importantly, they observed that they would be keen to join our meetings with Haringey as a good way to keep abreast local issues.
- We raised the need to configure the Cholmeley Park junction and the crossing area by Channing School. There have been a number of accidents here and the traffic lights are often jumped. This can be done without losing parking spaces.
- The draft revised Camden Local Plan is being put together for approval, following which consultations will take place.
- We noted that some small and simple applications are currently taking 10-12 weeks to be approved. It was explained that some drag on as applicants take time in supplying requested information, though shortage of case officers and validation staff is also a problem.
- We were concerned that pre-application discussions and agreements effectively undermine us as decisions have essentially been taken before the application goes out for consultation. Camden say that they do make clear that pre-application advice is qualified as officer opinion and that it is in an applicant's interest to consult with local groups and neighbours. They acknowledge that local consultation is valuable and can lead to faster processes by dealing with issues before an application is made.
- We have a good knowledge of the archaeology of the local area but find it hard to get archaeological conditions added to approvals. Camden say they have to rely on Historic England for advice, but that they should engage more with us on this aspect and alert GLAAS where we have flagged up archaeology related issues.
- Barnet automatically take applications with 4 or more objections to Planning Committee; Haringey, by contrast, rely on internal assessments and Councillor call-ins. What is Camden's policy? We were told that

major developments always go to Committee; other applications may be referred if there are only three individual objections or one from a local group. These are considered by a "Members Briefing Panel" (a sort of halfway house), which decides whether the application should go to Planning Committee.

- Camden commission independent Basement Impact Assessments BIA audits to assess individual applications and the cumulative effect of basements in the area. The problem is when developers do not know what they are doing or try to cut corners. Camden sometimes monitor during the construction process and impose controls if justified and in line with policy.

Among the locations visited during the Walkabout were:

- Waterlow Park and the High Street, to look at the impact of the proposed 32-storey tower at the Archway Holborn Infirmary site; We hope Camden will object when an application is made.

- The 271 Bus Stand is currently an eyesore and we have ambitions to make it a focal part of the village. The £8,000 of CIL monies made available seem to have had no positive impact. Camden thought that they, rather than TfL, may own the site.

- The High Street is suffering from competition from areas such as Swain's Lane and Muswell Hill, with minimal public space, a number of empty shops, and conversions to residential on the Haringey side. Haringey's Economic Development Officer is supportive of our concerns and is keen to contact his opposite number in Camden.

- Camden's "Dartmouth Park Healthy Neighbourhood" is misleadingly named as a significant part includes Highgate. We are very concerned about the displacement of traffic wanting to cross the area; the impact must be studied and consulted on before decisions are taken.

Then, on 22nd January, we met Haringey Planners. Issues discussed included:

- The non-appearance of the long-needed revised Conservation Area Character Appraisal, now seriously out of date and full of loopholes, and the revised Local List on which the Society and CAAC did a huge amount of work in 2017 but have since heard nothing. We were told that, because of resource issues, these will not appear until after the new Local Plan is finalised, but the new Conservation Officer is working on the Local List update and we would be consulted soon.

- We once again flagged up the major problem of demolitions in the Bishops sub-area; too many are being approved, and more and more original buildings are being lost, undermining the Conservation Area.

- We once again emphasised the importance of Haringey ensuring that the developers understand the importance of pre-application community engagement and urged that notes of pre-application discussions should be made available once applications are submitted. We also worry about the views of Haringey's Quality Review Panel with which we often disagree. We requested a walkabout with their Chair and were told that this could be arranged.

- We are frequently not notified of the submission of amended drawings to applications. Camden are proposing to post alerts; we urged Haringey to do the same.

- Can Haringey appoint a Heritage Champion? The Society would be happy to help in this process. We were recommended to contact the relevant Cabinet member, who has an interest in Heritage.

- as with Camden, we emphasised the importance of ensuring independent checking of Basement Impact Assessment calculations, and ensuring audits are not just tick-box checklists submitted by consultants.

- How are conditions attached to permissions monitored? Though their Enforcement Department is prompt to investigate concerns raised by us, they have a very heavy workload and it remains important that local groups like us keep alert for breaches of planning control and alert them.

- We were assured that the issue of demolition and rebuild as against refurbishment was high on their agenda and would figure prominently in the new Local Plan.

- We flagged up our great concern at the deterioration of the Archway Road owing to poor developments, loss of good shopfronts, substandard conversions to housing, etc., which was seriously undermining its Conservation Area status.

The walkabout covered the Archway Road and Shepherds Hill Parkland Walk area, and the potential for improving both its amenity value and access to the Capital Ring; we also flagged up concerns about the proposed resurfacing of the Parkland Walk for cycling. We looked at recent developments in and off Archway Road, including the harm caused by permitted development conversions to residential in the absence of an article 4 Direction, and the major loss of historic shopfronts. We showed them development sites of particular potential concern in Cholmeley Crescent and showed the Conservation Officer the current unsatisfactory situation at Townsend Yard. We looked at the 271 Bus Stand area; though in Camden and pointed out that any improvements would equally benefit the Haringey side; they appreciated the point and indicated their willingness to discuss it with Camden.

We have pointed out to Councillors that Highgate is the only ward in Haringey which does not have CCTV cameras. A number of cameras were promised for the Archway Road and High Street, but in the wake of COVID these were never installed; we have asked that they be followed up. Another long-term issue is the blocking of street drainage gulleys, causing heavy flooding after heavy rains, particularly at the junction of North Hill and Aylmer Road, along Bakers Lane, and between Falloden Way and the golf course.

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Though Highgate is surrounded with nationally important **Open Spaces** - Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood, Kenwood, Waterlow Park, Crouch End Open Space, the Parkland Walk - we rarely get any comment from members on them and can only conclude that you are generally content with how they are managed.

The Society is a well-regarded member of the Hampstead Heath and Highgate Wood Consultative Committees, on which I have represented since they were set up, and our involvement and contribution seems valued and any concerns or suggestions can be conveyed through them; contact me should you wish to see the Committees' minutes. I also act as their self-appointed archaeological gadfly - my suggestion that they checked out the proposed drainage works on Parliament Hill in 2017 resulted in the discovery of an important Bronze Age feature - and I am pressing for a full archaeological strategy.

The **Hampstead Heath Consultative Committee** meets three times a year and also has site walks to look at management issues. At the latest, in January, we learned of the current activities of the excellent voluntary work group Heath Hands - how many of you are members? This has had over 7000 participants in its activity programmes; more than 800 young people participated in Heath Friendly Schools activities and schoolwork experience programmes delivered, and they have had 480 volunteer sessions on the Heath and Highgate Wood since April 2023, totalling 12,500 volunteer hours - a huge contribution to the management of the Heath. They run the Kenwood Dairy Interpretation Centre and give guided nature walks on a range of subjects. For more information, sign up to their newsletter at <https://heath-hands.us10.list-manage.com>.

The City's North London Open Spaces now come under the Natural Environment Division, with strategies focussing on Nature Conservation; Access and Recreation; Culture, Heritage and Learning; and Community Engagement. Both Hampstead Heath and Highgate Wood are registered charities. The budget for 2023-4 is £5.6 million, and for 2024-5 £5.3 million.

The Parliament Hill athletics track project, which included resurfacing and new floodlights, was completed in November 2023 and is now a world-class facility which will host the 10,000m Olympic Trials in May and offers opportunities for increased youth activity and wider community participation.

The City received funding through a Just Giving campaign, the Hampstead Garden Suburb Residents Association, and a private donor for a major improvement to the Heath Extension Playground. There are currently four fundraising campaigns for Heath projects.

The Conservation Team have been coppicing below the Vale of Health Pond. This is an important wet woodland, now a designated UK priority habitat. Keeping the tree cover controlled encourages species associated with wet woodland, including rare beetles, birds including woodcocks and water rail, and many mosses and bryophytes. It is a source of the Fleet River and the only remaining site in London where

the famous river can be seen in its semi-natural state before it continues its culverted route down to the Thames.

A major problem has been found with very high levels of pollution of the Heath Ponds from swimming by dogs treated with anti-flea chemicals. This is being studied carefully.

Extensive work continues across Golders Hill park, focusing on horticulture, the grounds, sports facilities, the Pergola and Hill Garden, at the zoo. The children's playground is currently closed for renovation and will reopen in the spring.

Works are need to the 110-year-old Pergola, which will remain closed while repairs are carried out to the stone columns.

The Golders Hill Zoo added four red deer during 2023; they were the first animals to be kept in the park in 1905. It has launched its new social media channels to update supporters and to promote its work (@GoldersHillParkZoo on Instagram, @GoldershillParkZoo on Facebook) and a Just Giving page has been set up. You can adopt an animal!

The vital Heath Constabulary now comprises six Ranger Constables managed by a Senior Ranger and will recruit new Ranger Constables in 2024. The Constabulary are not part of the Metropolitan Police or the City of London Police; they are not police officers and their authority as constables is limited to specific purposes; it does not extend to enforcement of the general law. Its objective is to provide a Constabulary service for Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood, and Queen's Park, to educate users on responsible behaviour, to engage with users, and to enforce bylaws, deter and prevent anti-social behaviour, and reduce the fear of crime through visible patrolling. It has a vital role in the safe management of large events across the open spaces, but maintains an excellent relationship with the Metropolitan Police, London Ambulance Service, Air Ambulance, and London Fire Brigade.

The Constabulary have powers of summary arrest, which can only be exercised by constables in certain specified circumstances. On the Heath, they can detain any person committing a bylaw offence if their name or residence cannot be reasonably ascertained and have the same powers of arrest as any member of the public and may use reasonable force in making an arrest or in the prevention of crime.

The Heath Ranger Team cleans the West Heath, where there has been a marked increase in drug use; the debris is collected and disposed of through a specialist waste company.

In April 2022, the **Hampstead Heath dog licensing scheme** was launched. There are currently 151 licences.

For emergency out of hours contact with the Constabulary, call 0208 340 5260.

The 2023 **Sheep trial** on the Heath Extension was a great success and will be repeated in 2024..

To keep up with the many Heath events, see their **online diary of events**.

At **Highgate Wood**, it has been noticed that, since the introduction of dog walkers' licences on the Heath, there has been a noticeable increase in dog walkers using Highgate Wood; we have reported this to the City. Queens Wood (run by Haringey) is also affected. Good news is that Highgate Wood has now been awarded both the Green Flag and Green Heritage Flag awards every year since the schemes have been in effect - a great tribute to its dedicated staff.

The **Community Heritage Day** attracted approximately 3,000 people, though the publicity was too low key and will be improved to ensure that as broad an audience as possible is engaged. The Society had a large stand and considerable interest was shown by visitors - though it is puzzling why we see relatively few people from Highgate there, the majority coming from Muswell Hill, Crouch End, Finchley and further afield. At my suggestion, a group of re-enactors displaying life in the 12th century was invited to participate; they proved a great hit and are keen to attend again in 2024; if funding can be provided, they could even stage a 12th century battle!

The Consultative Committee was alarmed by proposals for an artificial grass cricket square, as a result of which it has been dropped.

Good progress, too, on the Roman Pottery Kiln (I am a member of the Trust). A £240,000 Heritage Lottery Fund grant will enable the Kiln to be restored and displayed permanently in the information hut, hopefully by summer 2025.

The Society is also represented on the **Kenwood Landscape Forum**. Thanks to the Government casting English Heritage adrift and obliging it to be self-financing from 2023, Kenwood is running at a loss and needs to raise money from events; however, these cannot breach the free access requirements of the Iveagh bequest. "Christmas at Kenwood" is the biggest source of revenue, but smaller events will also be held between April and September in tents in the kitchen garden where other visitors will not be disturbed. In 2023 there were three weddings, a corporate event and a small candle lit concert; the hope is to hold more similar events there. The only event held on the Flower Garden this year was a wedding, but no more will be held there. However, the permission for unlimited events of up to 10,000 people has flagged up great concern among the Forum's members and the impact will be monitored carefully.

The edge of West Meadow is a critical area for biodiversity, and the Sphagnum bog is in good shape and well managed. During 2023, part of the Dairy Meadow was inadvertently mowed and some habitat lost; it was a breeding ground for Whitethroat, grass snakes and butterflies. Mowing will be suspended for two years and a decision made as to the future of the site. It will be essential to ensure that the same mistake is not made at the southern edge of the West Meadow when the Beech Mount is mowed in 2024, a biodiverse area where Buzzards nested in 2023.

Visitor numbers to the House in 2023 were up from 2022 by 12,000 to 57,000 visitors in 2023; the Reynolds exhibition was an attraction. Recycling at Kenwood is being enhanced, and English Heritage will discuss with the City of London becoming part of their licensing scheme for professional dog walkers.

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We continue to carefully monitor the many applications for **tree works** in both boroughs. A notable one was an application for extensive reduction works to a Chile Pine ("Monkey Puzzle") at 37 Southwood Avenue, following Haringey's refusal of a second application to fell it and imposing a Tree Preservation Order on it; Haringey have also refused this as excessive for an important mature tree which is highly visible from the street.

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For those of you interested to know the level of planning expertise and understanding we have to deploy, here is an update on major changes in the all-too-rapidly changing national Town Planning situation.

Yet another new version of the **National Planning Policy Framework** - the national guidance on planning policy - has appeared (and it seems yet another will appear during the year, thus throwing any semblance of planning consistency into chaos). The main changes are, not unexpectedly, on housing provision; a few random observations:

Since paras. 88Ff and 131ff now impose the fraught issue of legislating for 'beauty' on us, we must press our planners to ensure that they involve the community in deciding what is "beautiful". On current experience, we cannot leave such decisions in the hands of our planners, conservation officers and "experts" such as Design Panels, let alone the developers and their consultants for too many of whom whatever makes the most bucks is beautiful. We must also seek involvement in the production of Design Codes, now required under para. 130. On the detail, one does wonder (para. 96b) what a "beautiful cycle route" might look like?

It is, however, a relief that para.137, requiring local authorities to give more favourable consideration to schemes which can demonstrate "proactive and effective" community engagement, has been retained. We have continually reminded Haringey of this, so far to little effect.

Para. 164ff covers climate change and conservation areas, etc, but on a first reading we cannot find anything on embodied energy and retaining existing buildings, one of major relevance to parts of Highgate where applications to demolish original buildings continue relentlessly.

We must also ensure that we include comments on the provisions for conserving and enhancing the Natural environment (para. 180ff)

Finally, in regard to our much-neglected archaeological heritage, the footnote to para. 206b is good in that it stipulates that non-designated archaeological assets (i.e. the majority of archaeological sites) should be given the same consideration as designated ones.

A major element of our discussions with Haringey and Camden includes **community engagement in the planning process**, and the stage at which we are consulted on applications. There are examples of good practice. For reasonably large applications in Westminster, the applicant has pre-application meetings with the Council, but at the same time they are encouraged to hold meetings with local amenity groups and hold public exhibitions to gauge public reactions.

Smaller schemes, in the hands of less professional applicants, often try to circumvent public consultation. We are usually approached too late in the process, and it's a sad fact that some developers and their consultants are not totally honest when reporting the outcome of a meeting with us to a case officer, suggesting we support their proposals when we definitely don't. To get round this problem, Haringey advise us to send a brief note to the case officer outlining our response to the application so any difference can be raised with the applicant.

The 2023 autumn statement included a number of planning-related measures; those most likely to affect London include:

1. A new "premium" planning service allowing local authorities to recover the full costs of major business applications - but the fees will have to be refunded if they fail to meet new "accelerated" deadlines. The more the developers pay for their advice, the more they will expect their schemes to be viewed favourably.
2. A new Permitted Development right allowing houses to be split into two flats, in a bid to "streamline" the planning system, will probably simply allow more substandard accommodation.
- 3 A promise of £32 million to "tackle planning backlogs in local planning authorities".
4. New Permitted Development rights to install heat pumps, ending the restriction on heat pumps one metre from a property boundary. This will cause huge disturbance and problems for neighbours.
5. National planning rules will prioritise electric vehicle charge points.
6. Funding to ensure commercial projects secure planning permission faster.
7. Funding for "housing quarters" in Cambridge, Leeds and London, and £23 million for a bus network in east London to "unlock" housing in the proposed "Docklands 2.0" project area.
8. A "Strategic Spatial Energy Plan" to "cut grid access delays by 90 per cent" and offer up to £10,000 off electricity bills over 10 years for those living closest to new transmission infrastructure.

The Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill, enacted on 26 October 2023, introduces a number of significant planning changes, though bringing it into effect will require a huge raft of further consultations, detailed technical work and secondary legislation which may not be enacted before the election, after which everything may be back in the melting pot again. Major changes impacting on Highgate and London, include:

1. Local planning authorities must have a design code in place covering their entire area, as a framework within which detailed design codes for specific areas or sites can come forward, led either by the local authority, neighbourhood planning groups or by developers. This is to help ensure good design is considered in all cases.
2. A new Infrastructure levy will replace Section 106 planning obligations and the Community Infrastructure Levy. Set and raised by local planning authorities, it will be tailored to local circumstances and will maintain developer contributions to affordable housing, including associated infrastructure.

3. Local authorities must prepare infrastructure delivery strategies.
4. More weight will be given to local plans, neighbourhood plans and spatial development strategies, and strong reasons will be needed to override the plans, giving communities more certainty. Local plans and neighbourhood plans will be required to take account of new local nature recovery strategies.
5. The scope of local plans will be limited to 'locally specific' matters such as allocating land for development, infrastructure and principles of good design". The rest will be covered by new national policies, which will be subject to consultation but not to parliamentary approval.
6. Time limits will be prescribed for local plan preparation.
7. There will be a new power for planning authorities to create 'supplementary plans' for specific sites which need to be prepared quickly.
8. Groups of authorities will be able to produce spatial development strategies on cross-boundary issues.
9. The EU processes of environmental impact assessment and strategic environmental assessment will be replaced by 'environmental outcomes reports', to set clear environmental outcomes against which a plan or project is assessed..
10. A 'simpler to prepare' Neighbourhood Priorities Statement', as an alternative to neighbourhood plans, will be introduced, giving communities a simpler way to set out their key priorities, which local authorities must take into account. Neighbourhood Plans will still have to be consistent with national policy.
11. A 'street votes' system will permit residents to propose development on their street and hold a vote on whether planning permission should be given. There are concerns that this could allow national and local policy - itself established in law - to be overridden, merely by a local 'popular vote', a dangerous precedent which could be used to override any legislation. A vote would need at least 60 per cent support (including at least one voter in at least half of the voting households in the street); but they could override local policy on, for example, intensification of development, and would be exempt from biodiversity net gain requirements. Where the required threshold of votes is met, the Planning Inspectorate would make a street vote development order. Proposals must have special regard to preserving listed buildings, features of special architectural or historic interest and a conservation area, and any effects on a habitats site (though they will be exempt from biodiversity net gain requirements) and must not cause any loss of green space. To us, it sounds not only unworkable, but a recipe for bitter neighbour wars.
12. Local authorities will face a new duty to follow their own development plan.
13. The Act increases local authorities' powers to take enforcement action.
14. Designated heritage assets, such as registered parks and gardens [and Conservation Areas?] will have the same statutory protection in the planning system as listed buildings.
15. Local authorities will be able to use Compulsory Purchase Orders for regeneration purposes, and the "hope value" of land obtained via a compulsory purchase order will be disallowed.
16. Planning authorities will be able to instigate auctions of leases on commercial high street properties vacant for over 12 months and rent them from 1-5 years to attract new tenants.
17. A discretionary council tax premium can be introduced of up to 100% for second homes and for empty homes after one year.
18. New measures to clarify land ownership will enable a better understanding of who ultimately owns or controls land..
19. The secretary of state has new powers to control changes to street names, preventing local authorities from doing so without the consent of those who live there. This follows moves by some councils to change street names considered to be offensive for politically correct reasons.

20. Planning fees for major and minor applications will be increased by 35 per cent and 25 per cent, respectively. There will be a planning skills strategy for local planning authorities.

21. The emphasis of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) will shift to guiding plan-making, and proposed National Development Management Policies will take precedence over local plans.

22. It will be easier for local authorities to force developers to complete permitted schemes and address concerns about land banking.

23. Planning authorities will be able to partially base their land allocation decisions on the option price of sites offered to them by developers; this will be piloted as "Community Land Auctions".

24. Hopefully good for us, powers requiring developers to engage with communities pre-application will be made permanent, and pre-application engagement with communities will be required before a planning application is submitted. There will also be new guidance on community engagement in planning.

25. Councils can refuse to determine applications from applicants who have been slow to implement previous permissions.

26. There will be a new duty on councils to grant sufficient permission for self and custom-build housing.

27. There will be registration of short-term rental properties.

28. The secretary of state can allow planning inspectors to conduct inquiries remotely. However, councils will not have the same right, since one of the core principles of local democracy is that citizens can attend council meetings to interact in person with their local representatives.

As for the government's proposed new National Development Management Policies, these will include a policy specifically related to improvements to historic buildings and "remove barriers and drive energy efficiency in historic homes..., while ensuring that the important historical and beautiful features of these homes are properly protected". Planning was [unfairly] identified "as one of the key barriers for installing energy efficiency and low carbon heating measures... in listed homes and homes in conservation areas...". Achieved through Local Listed Building Consent Orders, it was triggered by the fact that many councils have no conservation officer, and many staff lack the necessary skills; this will be remedied by a £29 million Planning Skills Delivery Fund.

And finally, we learn that 6,000 homes under construction in London have been abandoned, half-built at a time of severe housing shortages. Developers blame the dramatic spike in interest rates after Liz Truss's mini-Budget in September 2022 which sent demand for new homes plummeting and prices falling; the collapse of a number of major building contractors in 2023; soaring costs that have made some schemes unviable; and new Government safety and environmental building regulations which have forced builders to redesign their plans. Since most applications for housing development are approved, perhaps the Government will at last stop blaming the planning system for the failure to build more housing and address the real reasons?