

Environment and Planning Report

Summer 2025

By Michael Hammerson

The Committee continues to be jointly chaired by Elspeth Clements and Liz Morris. Its extraordinarily heavy workload continues unabated, and the appointment of joint chairs has enabled the work to be spread far better and has reduced the load on individuals.

271 Bus Stand

We have been discussing the future of the Bus Stand area; preliminary ideas involve a simple solution, paving the area to make it a pleasant link between the High Street and Pond Square, with room for such things as short-term market stalls, seating, and an additional tree. The next step will be to discuss the concept with Camden.

Broadbent Yard

As long expected, Broadbent Yard and the adjoining woodland are being marketed for sale, envisaging a mainly residential development, which raises concerns about the valued local businesses there. The sales brochure clearly differentiates between the Yard and the woodland, which it describes as an important ecological area with little development potential. We met with Haringey's Tree Officer and a Councillor to discuss formal protection for the wood, and await contact from Haringey's ecologist, since it is essential to ensure the protection of the important woodland, a site of Local Importance for Nature Conservation.

Dartmouth Park Healthy Neighbourhood proposals

We welcome Camden's decision to send the DPHN scheme "back to the drawing board". It will not now go ahead according to the original planned timescales though the scheme, potentially with revisions, remains within Camden's Infrastructure Delivery Plan for the 2025 to 2027 period. The Society considered the scheme was poorly designed and based on inadequate and incomplete data. Together with the nineteen other members of the DPHN Joint Action group, we will continue to monitor developments.

On **Townsend Yard**, we have had no response from the developer or Haringey regarding the fire safety report we commissioned for Shepherd's Cottage, which recommended granting a right of way through the passage crossing mews house 1, and other safety measures. The next step must therefore be to submit a notice at the Land Registry which would involve drafting a Deed of Easement to be signed by the mews house and the Shepherd's Cottage to ensure a right of way together with other points that our Fire Consultant recommended.

To make matters worse, an application has already been submitted for an extension to the easternmost mews house. We have objected to it as overdevelopment of an already overdeveloped site, but it would also damage the roots of a mature tree, and we are glad to report that Haringey's tree officer has recommended refusal for this reason and the application has been withdrawn.

The good news is that the **Archway Campus Redevelopment** was refused by Islington Council in a strong 220-page document. The bad news is that it has been called in by the Mayor of London, who could over-rule Islington's decision; experience shows that the majority of Mayoral call-ins are approved. There will be a public hearing at which objectors can speak. The City of London sent a strong objection for impact on Hampstead Heath. We await a decision on our application to have the historic hospital buildings Listed, currently with the Minister of Culture, Media and Sport for determination.

Briefly, the reasons for Islington's refusal include:

- inadequate compliance with affordable housing policies.
- the proposed 27-storey tower for student accommodation does not meet local policy requirements, breaches local height restrictions, and harms heritage assets, local views, and conservation area character.
- Historic England have objected for harm to heritage.
- failure to meet biodiversity targets or carbon concerns.
- Failure to demonstrate sustainable design.

The local community agree that development is needed, particularly for affordable housing. What infuriated them was the disregard for local consultation (an alternative scheme produced by the developers has conditional support locally) and the damaging impact it would have on neighbours' living conditions.

Haringey have produced revised proposals for the **Wellington Gyrotory** site, but they remain unacceptable. There will be a 4-storey block of 16 'affordable' flats (2 with disabled access) and 2 private town houses, all car-free. But the design is crude and poor; their claim of a "palette of carefully considered materials... to ensure an attractive and resilient building that sits carefully in the local context" is absurd, though dismayingly Haringey's Conservation Officer and "Quality Review Panel" have both approved it; it will be an eyesore at the Gateway to the Conservation Area. The problem of living on such a polluted site remains; Haringey's assertion that "fresh air" will be provided from the tiny rear communal garden space is flawed in our opinion, and existing neighbours will be heavily overlooked. The issue of pedestrian access to the site remains vague; a pedestrian crossing will be provided, but it will increase congestion and pollution by obliging the heavy Archway Road traffic to back up when people cross. We asked for the supporting information on air quality, but Haringey refused to let us see it until the application was submitted, leaving far too little time for proper study. We will register a strong objection.

At the final **Highgate School developments** workshop the Head, Adam Pettitt, suggested three areas where continuing communication with the community would benefit the School: Traffic, Community use of School facilities and Biodiversity. The traffic issues are the construction management plans for the developments, for which revised plans will be submitted this summer, and ongoing congestion and parking issues during the school day. A broadly-based community group is proposed, to work with the School on traffic issues. On Community use of School facilities, the school sees the main need as their availability for organisations not otherwise well catered for. On Biodiversity issues, a joint School/community group will be set up.

Despite a series of revised plans for the former **Newstead Retirement Home**, for 11 houses, the proposals remain of major concern to residents in the surrounding area, who have raised them with Haringey without response. Concerns include the placing of Block A on the Denewood Road boundary of the site, unlike all other houses fronting the street, which are set back, while the three massive storeys of Block C constitute a threat to the line of large trees on the site's eastern boundary as there is no adequate plan to protect them during construction.

As ever, we comment on a wide range of smaller-scale developments. Major extension works at the Listed **92 North Road** sporting the well-known Charles Dickens blue plaque cause neighbours concern that it will badly affect their amenities through overlooking and light pollution. We consider that the addition of Crittall units to the front of this Grade II Listed early 19th century building would be completely inappropriate and cause substantial harm.

Revised proposals for the former **Mary Feilding** house at 103-107 North Hill, to provide a new 50 room care home and rehabilitation clinic in View Road and a block of flats in North Hill are little changed from the original proposals other than a reduction from 70 rooms, but they have been approved, despite continued objections from neighbours and the Society and a continued failure by the developer to engage in any meaningful consultation with us.

Camden aim to provide step-free disabled access to the main High Street entrance to **Waterlow Park**. However, since the lowering of the current step will create a small gap below the left-hand gate, they propose a completely unnecessary rebuilding of the fine wrought iron entrance gates and we are endeavouring to persuade them that an equally effective, and far less costly, or historically damaging, alternative would be to simply fill the gap with a small and unobtrusive 10cm-deep skirt. The application has been withdrawn, and discussions are ongoing.

Neighbours, the Society and the CAAC objected strongly to a large garden room erected at **4 Highgate Avenue** to a considerably larger scale than allowed in the planning consent. Concerns included:

- it is already too tall high, and the impact made worse by its being on rising ground, which is not accurately shown in the drawings.
- the actual height is greater than shown in the drawings.
- the windows are so positioned that neighbours can see what is happening inside and, in turn, be overlooked by users of the new building.

- given that it is so obtrusive, the changes cannot be considered 'non-material', not least because the change is being sought to a development which does not have permission because it is not what was permitted.

The response from Haringey's enforcement section should have been to request the owners to rebuild it to the permitted design. Dismayingly, they merely instructed the owners to apply for a "Non-Material Amendment" to what has been built and then granted permission, so neighbours are now faced with being permanently overlooked.

Better news is the dismissal of an appeal against refusal for substantial telecommunications equipment on the roof of **High Sheldon, Sheldon Avenue**, on the grounds that the siting, size and height would be visually obtrusive and damaging to the building, its appearance on the skyline, and to the character of the Conservation Area.

66 Highgate High Street, formerly Costa Coffee, is to be reopened by Urban Baristas. They have applied for a new acrylic fascia board, which we don't think is in keeping with the character of Highgate High Street, where most existing shopfronts feature timber fascias, and have asked Haringey to work with the applicant on a solution using more traditional materials, citing the recent precedent at no. 52, where we succeeded in seeking a replacement of Shelter's red acrylic fascia with a more sympathetic alternative.

We objected to an application for a Certificate of Lawfulness to continue using **293 Archway Road** as 8 self-contained flats. There have been continuing problems of premises in the Archway Road being used for substandard Houses of Multiple Occupation, and in this case the flats are all substandard, being less than 50% of the minimum size specified in the London and Haringey Plans, totalling between only 16 and 24 sq.m. in size. Such applications must be supported by evidence of how long they have been used; in this case, none was provided, and Haringey have very correctly refused it. We await enforcement action.

Following many years' discussions with neighbours and the Society, revisions to the most recent 2024 application for a new house at **6A Grange Road** continue to be submitted, but these still do not address concerns raised previously about the impact of a much larger building in a small infill site on the character of this unique road and the amenity of neighbours.

A huge one and a half storey basement is still proposed, coming within 1m of both neighbouring properties, but after 10 years of work on a design, both the objectors' consultants and Haringey's external consultants agree that the Basement Impact Assessment is *still* not satisfactory and fails to address the key policy requirements for basements in this area. The obstruction of ground water flows by basement damming has already caused damage in the road and so the utmost care is needed, especially where the basement fills most of the constrained site which is abutted on both sides by the walls of the neighbouring houses and contains a large mature listed tree.

The Heritage Report, as with so many others we see, gives an assessment not of the actual character of the Conservation Area, but of what the applicants would like it to be to justify their development. For example, it states that "the built form along Grange Road is suburban in character". Yet the Highgate Conservation Area Appraisal calls Grange Road "semi-rural", with almost all the houses detached and quite spaced. The Heritage report makes several other contestable statements including:

"The proposals are well designed and appropriate for their context...". Whilst views on design can be subjective, in this case it is an overlarge scheme crammed into a narrow infill site in a semi-rural road in a Conservation Area which does not reflect context. Indeed, previous pre application advice and a dismissal on appeal note that earlier approved schemes were considerably smaller and were stepped back to reduce the building's impact when viewed from the street. This scheme presents a full 3 storeys onto the street and will not, as claimed, *"enhance the character and appearance of the Redington/Frogna Conservation Area"*[sic]. Inexplicably, the applicants seem to think the site is in Hampstead! This illustrates graphically why we have to be constantly alert for what are too often bad applications, and why we have to study so many in great detail in order to expose their inadequacies. In addition, the increased size of the above ground build, including an additional storey and building lines reaching further into the front and rear gardens, would if approved, entirely eclipse the family home on the north side from sun for most of the day.

We objected to a proposed dormer window and roof terrace at **21 Highgate West Hill**, one of a row of attractive semi-detached late Victorian villas. Camden's Conservation Area Appraisal notes that *"The conservation area retains diverse historic rooflines which it is important to preserve. Fundamental changes... can harm the historic character of the roofscape and will not be acceptable."* While the application claims that the works will improve living conditions for the applicants' flat, it would be extremely harmful to the character of the Conservation Area and set a disastrous precedent.

We objected to a replacement outbuilding and new swimming pool at **11 Sheldon Avenue**. Its large size and the fact that it includes a kitchen, bedroom and bar suggest it could be used as separate residential accommodation, in conflict with local policies. The pool would cover a substantial part of the rear garden and Haringey's policies emphasise retaining green areas which contribute to local biodiversity, reduce flood risk, and create visual amenity. Importantly, there is no detailed borehole survey, even though the Flood Risk report says that one should be made; the pool could have a major impact on groundwater flow to and from neighbouring properties and badly affect trees in this and neighbouring gardens.

Following a second complaint to Haringey's Enforcement department regarding the proliferation of **Camper Vans, caravans, etc., in Hampstead Lane**, we were told that officers would inspect within 7 days, but we have heard nothing after two months and the situation has possibly got worse.

In March we had a very friendly and constructive **meeting with Haringey's new Head of Planning**, Catherine Smyth, who impressed us with her approach and seemed to show real interest in planning issues in the Highgate area. We briefly introduced the Society, its long experience of working with the Planning system, the range of skills of its Planning Committee members, and the three occasions on which we were able to influence national planning policy: namely, the precedent established by the Athlone House High Court Case on Section 106 agreements; an amendment to the Localism Act enabling Neighbourhood Plans to be cross-boundary; and our being one of the 36 respondents to the 2021 Planning White Paper, selected out of the 44,000 who commented on it, to give oral evidence to the House of Commons Selected Committee Inquiry. We explained that we and the Highgate CAAC had written the current neighbourhood Plan, but that is now very out of date and needs urgent revision. Issues discussed included:

- The revised Local Plan consultation which will take place in late Summer. This has, inevitably, been given priority over the updating of the Local List and the Conservation Area Character Appraisal. We emphasised our detailed participation in preparing the current drafts and hoped they could be brought forward as the current versions now have major weaknesses.

- We explained current problems with the Wellington Gyrotory proposals and with Townsend and Broadbent Yards and summarised the complex Highgate School proposals. We also covered our involvement with the Archway Campus development; she said that Haringey had prepared an objection which would be submitted shortly.

- We asked her to look into the possibility of applying local Article 4 Directions. The area, and particularly Archway Road, is losing too many shops to residential under permitted development rules and recently the change of use of a shop was approved on appeal. Archway Road is a small business incubator and these conversions risk leading to a loss of vitality. There are several vacant sites which are at risk at the moment. We pointed out that Camden had introduced one on their side of the High Street, but Haringey had not. We had been told that Haringey does not have the resources to introduce Article 4 Directions as they would have to cover the entire borough; but Catherine thought it may be possible to cover a small area and will investigate for us.

- We raised our concerns about the inappropriate classifying of too many applications as Non-Material Amendments, even when not conforming to policy was raised.

- We expressed our great concern at Haringey's policy of refusing to take any applications to Planning Committee unless over 5 storeys and/or 10 units, citing the failure to do so even in the face of the 400+ objections to Townsend Yard. She thought, though, that this was unlikely to change.

- We raised the poor quality of applications involving basements and emphasised the need for Haringey to ensure that all such applications are scrutinised by independent consultants with the appropriate brief and necessary experience, in view of the area's complex hydrology and the problems caused by many previous basements.

- We asked if she considered planning department staffing levels were adequate and were told that Planning and Enforcement have 25-30 officers and so are relatively well-resourced, though there are high levels of applications and Government requirements on housebuilding are likely to require more resources.

- We were concerned that the Neighbourhood Forum had decided there was no need to update the current Neighbourhood Plan, without consulting the HS or the HCAAC, who wrote most of it and have the experience of working with it on the planning 'front line'. It now has considerable weaknesses which need to be addressed, and the Society are happy to provide the resource for this.

- We were very concerned that the current focus on new housing at any cost will result in sub-standard housing which will cause future problems. We noted that we had identified 27 local sites with potential for affordable housing in the Neighbourhood Plan but were only allowed 5 at the public examination so it was not the Society who were the NIMBY's! It is also important to consider employment implications; too many employment sites are being converted into housing. Broadbent Yard is an example; it contains a

number of small businesses and is currently up for sale, almost inevitably for luxury private housing. We also want to see the adjoining Woodland designated as an Asset of Community Value.

- We raised the extremely unsatisfactory current position regarding pre-application discussions with community groups like us, not only with developers but with Haringey's own Design Officer and Quality Review Panel, who appear to dismiss our comments as a matter of course. Developers too often undertake only a token consultation with the community, and usually too late in the process for changes to be made, or even after an application has been submitted. We emphasised that the NPPF states clearly that applications which can demonstrate meaningful local consultations have taken place should be viewed more favourably than those which cannot, and we hoped Haringey would emphasise this to applicants. Catherine said that she was very keen for meaningful local consultation to take place. We asked that their Design Officer be included in our next walkabout.

There is much to report on **Trees & Open Space**. Haringey have placed two new Tree Preservation Orders, one on Lime trees in the front garden of 219 Archway Road and another on a fine Magnolia at 14 Bloomfield Road. We have also commented on a range of applications for work on trees.

We were concerned at substantial reduction works proposed for a protected Veteran Oak at **Oakleigh, 42 Hampstead Lane**, one of the hedgerow trees shown on the 1869 Ordnance Survey map. The application failed to provide sufficient detail or justification, and we have argued that the reduction proposed, well in excess of 50%, will deprive it of much of its canopy, possibly fatally weakening it. A decision is awaited.

We objected to an application to fell a protected Hornbeam at **71 Lanchester Road** on the grounds that it *"is an inappropriate species for its location, being too large for the small garden and in close proximity to the house...[and] envelops the garden in shade for most of the year."* Far from being *"an inappropriate species for its location,"* it was present long before the house was built, and it may well be an ancient coppiced hornbeam, originally within a larger Highgate Wood. Further, it is not claimed to be causing any structural problems to the house, and the mere fact of a tree causing shading is not a valid Planning reason for felling. We therefore consider that the solution would be an appropriate level of pruning, and that felling would be unacceptable.

The **Hampstead Heath** Consultative Committee continues to monitor the changes which have been made to the City of London Charities funding arrangements, already operating for Epping Forest and West Ham Park. These are proposed to come into effect at Hampstead Heath and Highgate Wood in 2026, though there has been no previous consultation with the Consultative Committee, which was believed to be statutorily required, but we have been assured of full consultation on the proposed next steps. We were particularly anxious about the proposals to offer an annual grant, the balance to be raised by the charities through external funding, as local experience suggests this will not be successful. However, we understand that the City will act as funder of last resort if there is a shortfall in income from the City of London Corporation grant and fundraising, and that major commercial events to raise funds are not envisaged. In the meantime, the budget for 2025-6 has a 2% inflation increase, plus an additional £1 million. It is proposed to appoint a fund raising consultant to advise on how open spaces can generate more income.

As ever, much goes on at **Hampstead Heath**. Staffing levels are now almost full. As a result of investigations into serious pollution of the ponds by dog flea treatments, it appears that a Parliamentary Select Committee may recommend banning the offending chemicals. It also appears that the pollution does not only affect the ponds; there is evidence that birds have been using the treated dog hairs to line their nests, thus harming their chicks; it is hoped to be able to educate dog owners to avoid these problems. The City have been endeavouring to purchase the contested "Harry's Land" below Athlone House from the developer who purchased it for its speculative development value, since he now realises that it has none, being covered by covenants against building next to The Heath, but getting him to the table has proved difficult, and it may be necessary to report him to Camden for allowing Japanese Knotweed to proliferate uncontrolled on the land and to ask Camden to make a Compulsory Purchase Order. Increased sexual activity, and its accompanying debris, has become an increasing problem on the West Heath, now during the daytime as well as at night, and steps are being taken to address this with a Working Group.

It is pleasing to announce that the City submitted a very strong objection to the Archway Tower proposals, for its potentially damaging impact on views from the Heath.

Highgate Wood was closed on 18 occasions because of high winds in 2024, and on 7 occasions in January to February 2025. Closures rely on weather predictions, but as trees can fail in winds below 40 mph (there were 14 failures from October to March) a 37mph threshold has been taken as the cue for a closure. Late October to January saw four major storms hit the UK. There were 13 days in 2024 when the actual local wind speeds exceeded 37mph, but the Wood was closed on 18 days due to the variance of

predicted wind speeds. The City is now considering raising the closure threshold back up from 37 to 40mph, based on a study which has identified risk of tree failure dropping off significantly below 40mph.

The Roman Pottery Kiln project is going well, with the largest kiln now on display in the Information Hut. Designs for an improved visitor centre are under way. The *Firing London's Imagination* education programme has successfully engaged young people with the history of the Roman kiln, with 529 students from Haringey and neighbouring boroughs participating. Two local schools took part in the new workshop on Archaeology and local Roman history and a 2024 work experience programme, piloted with the nearby Turning Earth Pottery studio, has shown them the range of employment possibilities in the heritage field.

Two new Rangers have joined the team, which is now at full strength, and which further benefits from input from Heath Hands, who held 20 volunteer sessions between October and March. One of the new rangers is a skilled hedge layer and has led them in creating living hedge habitats and laying holly to create enclosures around two large beech trees to protect roots from foot traffic. For further information visit: www.heath-hands.org.uk

The condition of the sports field is suffering through climate change, damage from dogs digging and increased wear and tear from use. No weekend is free throughout the year, increasing wear and tear. However, the football pitch has held up well after a long, wet winter, though it has been a challenge to keep it playable. The English Cricket Board have funded new cricket practice nets at the north end of the field. All the damaged and decayed timbers in the popular playground, and 180 square metres of the safety surface in the play areas, have been replaced.

Highgate and Queen's Wood will be carrying out a follow-up hedgehog survey in June as part of the Zoological Society of London's project

The Wood has also been working with the TreeHouse School in Woodside Avenue, for people with autism. Highgate Wood and Hampstead Heath Staff Members attended a course to help teams better understand how to support people with autism when they visit. This worked well and the School are keen to develop the relationship with the Wood.

Forest Schools have in the past have caused considerable wear and tear in the Wood. Currently there are two operating here under license. One uses the Wood for 95 days a year, and another for 36 days. Both use specifically designated areas which are rotated every six months to reduce erosion and compaction.

The City's North London Open Spaces Tree Team has new compaction alleviation equipment, funded by Climate Action Strategy and will be starting a project in the Wood to measure the effects of compaction on individual trees and monitor the health of some of the older oaks. Root compaction from visitors remains a major concern for many of the older trees, and monitoring the trees and protecting them through the creation of enclosed conservation areas will be critical.

We attended an open meeting at **Kenwood House** in April to learn of their proposals for 2025 and the outcomes of events in 2024. The Christmas Market was not successful, the operator was unsatisfactory, there were only 10 traders instead of the hoped-for 30, it competed with the shop and cafe and will be reviewed for Xmas 2025. Weddings and corporate events remain popular. There will be a charity Barcode Festival in July, a Summer Trail and Financial Times Festival. The Christmas event will run from Nov. 14 to Jan. 4, the Halloween Trail during October half term, and the Xmas Neverland Event Halloween to Xmas to avoid wear and tear. Both were sellouts in 2024, netting £3,000 a day.

Kitchen Garden Tipi events will be held during June-September, and local groups can use the Tipis for their own events when they are vacant.

The House currently has 300 volunteers, but communication with them is poor because a new permanent manager has not yet been recruited. The point was also made that there is a need for better communication with the local community.

Once again people asked why the old Classical music concerts could not be revived. The main problem is that the weather is too unpredictable.

The Sargent exhibition is the first major exhibition at Kenwood for 25 years. It runs from 16th May to 5th October, and the local community are asked to support it.

At the **Kenwood Landscape Forum** meeting the same month, we learned that English Heritage has been badly hit by funding reductions. Although Kenwood has come out better than some other sites in the recent budget allocations, it has been a senior gardener down for a year and much of the planned work will not take place until funds become available; as one of EH's largest sites, it needs to use contractors.

However, biodiversity is doing well, interestingly with no decline in butterflies, unlike much of the rest of

the country, and a Meadow restoration project and survey of flora by the London Natural History Group and Heath Hands will start soon. Surveys have showed many Grass Snakes. Several biodiversity information boards will be installed.

There are 6-monthly inspections of the pond embankments, dams and vegetation. An increased risk of some trees failing has been noted, and if work becomes urgent it will be done; with the aim being to reduce rather than remove. Dogs going into the water on the unfenced side of the lake are damaging the flora and more fencing will be considered. More funding is needed to protect the Ken Wood SSSI.

The Council for the Protection of Rural England have published Ten Housing Crisis Myths in response to the Government's assertion that building must be vastly increased, including on the Green Belt. While the housing crisis is certainly real, many of the claims being made are, at best, half-truths.

Myth 1: There are not enough houses for everyone

The census shows there is more than enough property for the population. In Croydon, the total number of dwellings has increased by 39% since 1971, despite population growth of 13% over the same period; yet house prices have still gone up. While some homes are underoccupied or overcrowded, many are empty. The real crisis is about the price of homes, not the quantity.

Myth 2: Building more homes will solve the housing crisis

House prices have spiralled through high demand, low interest rates, public subsidies such as Help to Buy, and the purchase of property for investment. At the same time, the selling-off of social housing has forced many people into the private rental sector, which has pushed rental prices up. Successive governments have allowed, even helped, housing to become treated as an investment, meaning that homeowners can profit but housing ultimately becomes unaffordable. Most countries regulate their housing markets to avoid homes being treated as assets, on the understanding that housing is essential and it's not in the common interest that it becomes too expensive.

Myth 3: Building more houses will drive down house prices

One study suggests that building 300,000 homes a year for 20 years would reduce prices by only 10%. Thus, logic doesn't work if demand stays high, and in the absence of market intervention, people will pay whatever they have to because they need a home.

Myth 4: The planning system is broken.

The planning system is actually working well, and planning permissions are being granted. 283,000 new homes granted planning permission in London are still waiting to be built. The build rate for the past five years is roughly 38,000 - seven and a half years' supply. Giving councils more ability to work with developers could help bring development forward more quickly. Blaming the planning system is therefore a red herring. The real solutions lie in building social housing, ending Right to Buy, bringing empty homes back into use and controlling the private rented sector.

Myth 5: There isn't enough land - we need to build on green fields

Local authorities are allocating sites in their Local Plans - many more than can be built on in the next 20 years. So, allocating more land does not translate into more houses being built. It just gives developers a wider choice of sites. Brownfield sites are continually available, and research shows there's space for at least 1.2 million homes on previously developed land.

Myth 6: Private housebuilders will build affordable housing.

The quantity of 'affordable' housing required in a development usually falls when developers say their costs have risen. The building of social housing will have to be publicly funded if we are going to come close to solving the housing crisis and reduce the vast sums councils are spending on temporary accommodation.

Myth 7: Building on the Green Belt will solve the crisis

Building on Green Belt won't lead to more houses being built or speed up housebuilding. The speed at which the market delivers is related to what it thinks it can sell, as well as constraints like lack of labour, materials and financing. And it won't deliver affordable housing. Green Belt developments are rarely affordable; they are expensive 'executive homes' in unsustainable locations, marketed to people on high incomes who can afford cars. New roads, and new water and power infrastructure all have to be built. Building on Green Belt is the worst of all worlds; it tears up the countryside, has a massive environmental impact, and fails to solve the housing crisis.

Myth 8: Parts of the Green Belt are 'grey'

Even where Green Belt is "low value scrub land", there is no reason why it can't be restored, and scrubland is an important wildlife habitat. This kind of misleading statement drives speculative purchase of Green Belt and pushes land prices up. However, the Green Belt is increasingly valuable in the climate and biodiversity crises. Real grey belt includes car parks and road layouts, often in town centres, that take up huge amounts of space while underpinning car-centred travel. This forces disinvestment in public transport. The real answer is that national and local government owns 7,555 hectares of surface car parks, enough land to build 2.1 million low-cost homes. Crucially, there is no cost for the land, so new homes are much cheaper to build.

Myth 9: Those who challenge the housebuilding policy are NIMBYs

CPRE London, like others given this label, agrees that we need to build new homes, but the crisis is one of bringing down the cost of rent or house prices. This does not make us 'NIMBYs'.

Myth 10: There's nothing I can do to help.

By understanding the real causes and the real solutions and challenging the "build, build, build" narrative, we might be able to affect change.

In a speech on the Planning Bill, **Gideon Amos MP**, a former London Planner and Lib Dem spokesperson on Housing and Planning, made some valid points about the real housing crisis - which, we fear, will not be listened to. He said that the real need is for social housing - since it disappeared, we have never been able to keep pace with demand. The target for new homes is 150,000 per year, but the Government must provide a target for social homes.

"We want to see a Bill about communities leading in planning and development. Instead, the Bill is part of a growing trend that is taking powers away from local communities.... by allowing the Secretary of State to override planning committees... Consultation is sidelined elsewhere, too. Sport England will no longer have a voice to protect playing fields."

"If the Government believe that local is the problem and that planning committees are the blocker, let us look at the actual figures. Councils approve more than 85% of planning applications... Councillors are not blocking development; they are enabling 90% of permissions to go through... The role councillors play in the planning system is the backbone of that system.... Taking decisions out of councillors' hands is taking decisions out of the hands of local people... Removing people and their councillors from the system does not mean faster planning, but less democratic planning. It will mean that people are shut out and make them lose faith in the system even more; it will mean more legal challenges and more people who feel shut out from the system. The Bill risks making development not only slower, but worse."

"We welcome the provisions that allow compulsory acquisition... to go ahead on the basis of existing use value, not hope value.... However, councils need to be resourced to carry out such projects..."

"There are things to welcome in the Bill, but it hits the wrong target in many important areas, and this is where I must raise some more serious concerns... There are many Henry VIII clauses that give sweeping powers to the Secretary of State and a democratic deficit is becoming a serious concern... the Bill takes aim at communities, when we should be encouraging and empowering them to deliver and create the homes and places we want to see. I say again that racking up permissions—we already have 1.5 million homes with permission—will not ensure a single one gets built. We need to tackle the failure to build out permissions granted by taking back the land or further limiting the lifetime of permissions. 'Use it or lose it' needs to be the message."

"We do need to tackle blockages in the system... Unless we deal with the supply chain issues and the lack of skills, we will have even more blockers on development. By giving more powers to communities, a community-led approach could actually increase supply. It is time, for example, to give councils the power to end Right to Buy in their areas... we also want communities in control of how many holiday lets are allowed in their area... If we build with the economy and with those who want growth, and for nature by developing with nature and for people by developing with people, we will build the homes, jobs and services that [we] so desperately need."

Current proposals in the new Planning and Infrastructure Bill include:

- National rules would set out which planning applications should be delegated to planning officers and which should go to planning committees. The intention is to speed up decision-making "by ensuring that planning committees focus their resources on complex or contentious development where local democratic oversight is required." The Secretary of State would be able to make regulations setting out the size and composition of planning committees. "Best practice suggests that having smaller planning committees can lead to more effective debates and decision making", the bill says - though our

experience says otherwise. Committee members would be required to undertake mandatory training before they can take planning decisions.

- Local planning authorities would be able to set their own planning fees to cover the full expenses incurred in determining planning applications. The income would be ring-fenced for development management services.

- The bill would restore strategic planning across England (though London already has the London Plan). It would require combined authorities to produce a spatial development strategy which would become part of the development plan for the area and local plans would need to be in general conformity with it. The strategies would set a housing figure and distribution but not allocate sites. They would have to ensure that development contributes to the mitigation of climate change and take account of any local nature recovery strategy in the area. They would be tested via an independent public examination.

- The bill requires national policy statements to be reviewed and updated at least every five years.

- The bill would establish an 'environmental delivery plan', drafted by Natural England, to outline measures for nature recovery from certain forms of development. These would set out conservation measures to be taken to address the impact of specified types of development on environmental features.

- A more streamlined process for compulsory purchase orders would be introduced, to enable more effective land assembly through public sector-led schemes. The power to remove 'hope value' would be extended to town/parish and community councils where they are using CPO powers to deliver affordable or social housing.

- The bill would remove the need for licences to permit electric vehicle charging points, in order to streamline their roll-out.