

# Changing London

AN HISTORIC CITY FOR A MODERN WORLD

In October 2002, English Heritage launched *Changing London*, a radical new vision for managing change in London.

*Changing London* sets out the crucial contribution London's special historic character makes to people's quality of life and to the capital's economy.

This newsletter demonstrates what it means in practice. All those involved in London's development must stop polarising old and new: both are vital for the daily lives of the 7.5 million people who live and work in this great city. Conservation is about managing, not preventing, change.

Working together, planners, developers and conservationists can ensure that London's past has a sustainable future. It is the only way to assure the capital's continuing prosperity as a modern and prosperous world city.

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'The London Plan proposes reducing the number of designated strategic views and diluting their protection'

Philip Davies  
English Heritage's London Region Director.

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# MIND THE GAP THE LONDON PLAN

Mayor Ken Livingstone's draft London Plan comes up for public examination in March.

London stands at an important moment in its history. This is a real opportunity to shape London's future. Who doesn't share Mr Livingstone's enthusiasm for a London that's 'vibrant, successful, efficient and socially inclusive' as he says in his introduction? We all want a city that is 'clean and green'. Our shared ambition

is for London to be 'an example to the world'. It is just a question of how we do it.

The Plan is driven by forecasts of growth: London is booming, so we have got to house people. We have got to enable them to get around. We must make the most of opportunities to remedy past neglect in many areas of the capital. But reading the full 400-page document, it is hard to avoid the feeling that this is a business plan, not a development plan. There seems little awareness of what kind of place London is, how it has developed and the problems this has produced. There are huge gaps that need to be addressed.



Under threat: the protected view towards St Paul's Cathedral from King Henry's Mound, Richmond.

## LONDON'S HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT DESERVES MORE THAN INDIFFERENCE

London is one of the world's great historic cities. It contains 40,000 listed buildings, 860 conservation areas, three World Heritage Sites and over 600 protected London squares. Its historic environment is vital to its economic health. It is not a brake on London's prosperity, but a prime reason for it.

Conservation is one of London's great success stories, yet it is rarely celebrated and too often taken for granted. There is scant recognition of it in the Mayor's draft London Plan.

People value places, not just individual buildings. There is overwhelming public support for conserving the whole historic environment. Opinion polls tell us that 77% disagree we preserve too much. The 'Urban Task Force' predicts that 90% of our urban fabric will still be with us in 30 years time: enlightened stewardship is essential. The continuing adaptation and reuse of our existing buildings and spaces is a key component of a sustainable future – which is why the Mayor's emerging London Plan is so important.

The draft Plan makes a commendable commitment to fierce environmental protection for London's waterways and green spaces, but no similar pledge is made to London's historic environment. This is deeply worrying. In the best plans, conservation permeates the entire policy framework. Here it is given little weight.

### TALL BUILDINGS & STRATEGIC VIEWS

Tall buildings and strategic views are two of the most controversial issues.

If higher density housing is needed, this does not have to mean high-rise. Successive studies have demonstrated that tall buildings are not necessary for the future of London as a global financial centre. There is no evidence to suggest that London will lose jobs to other cities if tall buildings are not developed. We know too that they are unpopular: Our various MORI polls have shown that most people (62%) do not want to see any more very tall buildings in London over the next few years. Two thirds do not want any new tower blocks for living accommodation, whilst only 10% want to live in them, less than any other building type.

So why the overly permissive approach to tall buildings in the Mayor's Plan? Boroughs are actively required to promote them, but there is a lack of clarity about where they might or might not be appropriate based on a thorough analysis of their environmental impact.

We must not repeat the mistakes of the 1960s. Tall buildings in the wrong places are inherently unsustainable. They can suck the life out of surrounding communities. It would be a mistake to pepperpot them all over London, or



Philip Davies, London Region Director.

'IF WE CHOOSE TO HAVE TALL BUILDINGS, THEN THERE ARE PLACES WHERE THEY COULD ENHANCE LONDON WITHOUT DAMAGING THE HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT'



Canary Wharf: dramatic modern architecture has played a key role in the area's renewal.

to allow them to squeeze out cherished historic views – like that of St Paul's – that are central to London's self-image. The London Plan proposes reducing the number of designated strategic views and diluting their protection. No consideration at all is given to protecting views from within London's Royal Parks or World Heritage Sites.

#### RIGHT BUILDING – RIGHT PLACE

English Heritage is not against tall buildings per se. We have supported several including Lord Foster's spectacular 'gherkin' for Swiss Ré. In our joint guidance on tall buildings with the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) we made it very clear that "the overriding consideration is whether the location is suitable for a tall building in terms of its effect on the historic environment at a city-wide, as well as local level. If not, then no building will be acceptable, however good the design".

The recent report of the Parliamentary Urban Affairs Sub-Committee endorsed many of our arguments, and the government has now invited English Heritage and CABE to expand and strengthen their joint guidance to reflect the Committee's concerns.

If we choose to have tall buildings, then there are places where they could enhance London without damaging the historic environment, or the qualities which made London special. Canary Wharf, the Greenwich peninsula, the Thames Gateway. Croydon and Stratford all offer wonderful opportunities for world-class designs.

#### THE LONDON PLAN – STILL TIME TO GET IT RIGHT

The answer is not ad hoc, reactive, piecemeal responses to unplanned, speculative proposals. That is not the way to create cities people enjoy living in, or the way to maintain London's unique competitive advantages. The Mayor's Plan must provide clarity and certainty – a rational, plan-led approach reinforced by national guidance.

We believe the starting point should be to carry out detailed character appraisals of London's historic environment – to identify important strategic and local views and other constraints – and only then to highlight areas that are either appropriate or inappropriate for tall buildings. In appropriate locations more detailed urban design frameworks can then be prepared. This would ensure that new tall buildings are only

countenanced when they are of the highest quality and form part of a coherent whole, informed by a clear vision of the nature of the place being created.

By failing to start from an understanding of the importance of what is there, the emerging London Plan policies for tall buildings and strategic views are fundamentally flawed and, potentially, hugely damaging. There is still time to get them right, which is why all those who care about London's historic environment should make their views known at the forthcoming examination in public into the draft Plan which is due to commence on 3 March and last for about seven weeks.

#### INFORMATION POINT

**Changing London is available on the English Heritage website at [www.english-heritage.org.uk](http://www.english-heritage.org.uk)**

**Hard copies can be obtained free of charge from English Heritage Customer Services – call 0870 333 1181**

**The draft London Plan and related documents can be downloaded from [www.london.gov.uk](http://www.london.gov.uk)**

**Revised EH-CABE 'Guidance on Tall Buildings' will be published in early March.**

# LONDON... GREEN CITY... CITY OF THE PAST... CITY OF THE FUTURE...

SNAPSHOTS OF WORK THROUGHOUT THE CAPITAL ARE A REMINDER THAT ENGLISH HERITAGE'S PORTFOLIO EMBRACES ALL ASPECTS OF LONDON'S HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT.



Blackheath.

## SLUMBERING GIANT

Dominating its surroundings since the early 1930s, Battersea Power Station patiently awaits its rebirth. It is now five years since English Heritage signed up to an ambitious redevelopment of the site to include the grade II listed power station, two hotels, offices, residential units and a showcase for the creative industries.

English Heritage is currently discussing radical proposals, by Nicholas Grimshaw & Partners, to upgrade nearby Battersea Park railway station (listed grade II) and bring a high level 'skywalk' directly into the power station site. A proposed new footbridge over the River Thames into Pimlico is also being discussed.

Phase I of the development is expected start on site in 2004, with completion by 2008.



Battersea Power Station.

## BLACKHEATH THE NEXT 50 YEARS

Blackheath has played a crucial role in London's history, but today it is blighted by traffic. There is a haphazard accumulation of signs, leaning lampposts and a bleak, degraded landscape.

That's set to change. English Heritage formed the Blackheath Steering Group in Spring 2002. The group is a partnership of English Heritage, the London Boroughs of Lewisham and Greenwich who are jointly responsible for the Heath, the Royal Parks Agency, Transport for London, the GLA and the Greenwich Development Agency.

By summer 2003 we hope to have a management plan in place to guide change over the next 50 years and to begin phased improvements to reinstate the Heath.

## WASH & BRUSH-UP – ROMAN STYLE

In an entirely unexpected discovery, probably the largest recorded Roman Baths in London have been unearthed in Shadwell, Tower Hamlets. Work on a housing development was halted as archaeologists uncovered the impressive remains.

The large bath complex dates from the late second or early third century AD. So far excavations have revealed a series of hot (caldarium) and warm (tepidarium) rooms heated by a hypocaust system, of which several pillae stacks survive, together with the plunge baths.

Early indications suggest that the buildings were deliberately demolished around 400AD, but very appropriately the site is directly opposite modern day swimming baths. English Heritage has advised Tower Hamlets that the remains are of national importance and the developers will need to ensure their preservation beneath the new build.



Roman Baths, Shadwell.

# COULD OUR HERITAGE BECOME HISTORY?

THE THREE PROJECTS FEATURED OPPOSITE ARE TYPICAL OF THE SHEER RANGE OF CONSERVATION, REGENERATION AND MANAGEMENT INITIATIVES HAPPENING ALL OVER LONDON WHERE ENGLISH HERITAGE'S LONDON REGION STAFF ARE INVOLVED. YET, ARGUES RICHARD DUMVILLE, WE NEED TO DO MORE IF WE ARE TO PREVENT OUR HERITAGE BECOMING HISTORY.

Whether it is ancient parkland like Richmond or Greenwich, great iconic buildings such as the Palace of Westminster or the Victorian and Edwardian terraces of the outer suburbs, London's historic environment is all around us, ubiquitous and inescapable.



Richard Dumville, Policy Officer, London Region.

'Thoughtless change could sweep away the precious resource that is London's historic environment'

What is also inescapable is that it is subject to constant change. Of course, without change there would be no history. But thoughtless change, driven by ignorance or hope of short-term gain could sweep away the precious resource that is London's historic environment. With it would go the social, economic and environmental benefits it provides. Heritage could so easily become history.

How substantial are those benefits? Some examples: on a social level, the way in which neighbourhoods across London have grown and developed as distinct entities, almost self-contained villages in some cases, has helped people gain a strong sense of community and personal 'belonging'.

Economically, the historic environment of London encourages tourism – 54% of those questioned recently said it was the capital's historic buildings that encouraged them to visit. The vast bulk of the income those visitors bring – as much as 96% – benefits the wider economy. And the conservation of the historic environment not only delivers physical improvements: it creates jobs.

For the environmental benefits of London's historic environment, just try to imagine the city without its parks and gardens, its trees, even the tiny patches of managed open space to be found on many street corners. It wouldn't be London.

## SO WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

First we need to start with an audit.

At the request of the Government, in December 2000 English Heritage published *Power of Place*, a comprehensive review of policies relating to the historic environment. One of its many recommendations was that English Heritage should initiate a regular report on the condition of the historic environment in England and develop ways of measuring the sector's cultural, economic and social impact through the development of appropriate indicators.

The result, published in November 2002, was the *State of the Historic Environment Report* (SHER). This is the first ever national audit of all aspects of the heritage. Its findings reveal that whilst history and historic buildings have never been so popular; the historic environment is a massively underused asset, and perhaps more worryingly, is under threat from many directions.

As this is the pilot year for SHER, it has only been possible to produce a summary of basic information. However, regional steering groups have been set up, involving partners from across the historic environment sector; to work toward a more comprehensive edition for 2003.

In London this will fall to the London Historic Environment Forum (LHEF) which encompasses a range of bodies

and agencies that share an interest in and understanding of London's special qualities. The GLA, the London Tourist Board, the London Forum of Amenity and Civic Societies, the Government Office for London, Historic Royal Palaces, Royal Parks and the London Development Agency are all involved.

Research, commissioned by the LHEF, will provide hard evidence demonstrating the immense value of the historic environment to the economic, social, cultural and environmental life of the capital. It will also make clear recommendations for action to ensure that London, just one of a handful of true "World Cities", gives full weight to the historic environment in future decision-making.

## INFORMATION POINT

**Power of Place – The Future of the Historic Environment can be found on [www.english-heritage.org.uk](http://www.english-heritage.org.uk)**

**The State of the Historic Environment Report (SHER) 2002 – summary, main data document and nine regional factsheets – can be found on the project website at [www.historicenvironment.org.uk](http://www.historicenvironment.org.uk)**

**Hard copies of both documents can be obtained, free of charge, from English Heritage Customer Services – call 0870 333 1181**

ENGLISH HERITAGE HAS BEEN CALLED MANY THINGS OVER THE YEARS, BUT 'REGENERATION AGENCY'?

CHARLES WAGNER:

It's true that few people would think of English Heritage as a "regeneration agency". But since 1999 we've been targeting the bulk of our grant funds towards conservation areas, listed buildings and archaeological sites in deprived areas.

MARTIN O'ROURKE:

We don't just give grants. Increasingly we're getting involved in community-based partnerships, putting together regeneration packages.

# CONSERVATION BUILDS COMMUNITIES



Woodgrange Road, Forest Gate, Newham.



Brick Lane.



St John the Baptist Hoxton.



Poplar Library, Tower Hamlets.



Charles Wagner (left) and Martin O'Rourke, Historic Areas and Regeneration Advisers, London Region

#### HOW DOES THAT HELP?

M O'R: We're acting as a catalyst, helping revive communities. Many people think, "English Heritage – Grand Heritage", complete with capital letters! They don't expect us to take an interest in the 'humble' workaday local environment.

CW: Which is unfortunate, because it's been proved time and again that the best approach to regenerate run down areas is to build on their historic value. Look around you in many areas of London and you'll find banks, libraries, hospitals, police stations and schools standing empty and neglected. They've lost their original purpose...

M O'R: But they can still play a vital role as familiar neighbourhood landmarks. They give an area a distinctive sense of place and local identity. Brought back into use, these buildings can help an area start to live again.

#### HOW DO YOU SET ABOUT IT?

CW: We devised Heritage Economic Regeneration Schemes or HERS. These are in place in some of the most rundown conservation areas in London. To date, they've been concentrated on commercial streets in neighbourhood centres, often along key historic "corridor" routes out of the capital.

M O'R: It almost always unlocks access to further large-scale funding from the major regeneration agencies. But of course it's dependent on the vision and enthusiasm of local people and their councillors: English Heritage can set the ball rolling but the community itself has to make it happen.

#### CAN YOU GIVE ME SOME EXAMPLES?

CW: **Woodgrange Road** in Forest Gate. It's in Newham in East London and the change has been dramatic. The scheme's been operating since 2000. The main target from the start was the key terrace in the shopping centre. With Newham in the lead, nearly every owner and tenant in the block agreed to (and contributed to!) an "enveloping scheme". This enabled the roofs, brickwork and windows of the terrace to be repaired and the main decorative features of the shopfronts to be restored. English Heritage offered £200,000 towards the works, which levered in £216,653 of other funding.

M O'R: Another conservation area where we've been involved over a longer period is **Spitalfields** on the eastern fringe of the City of London. In the 80s and early 90s, our partnership schemes with Tower Hamlets were targeted towards the wonderful streets of listed Georgian houses, but once this area was "discovered", the increase in property values meant that grant subsidy was unnecessary. So since 1995, the area grant scheme has shifted its emphasis to the mixed-use buildings around **Brick Lane**. Partnership funding has come from the Cityside Regeneration Agency. Over the last seven years grant aid has been given to many of the buildings owned by Bengalis and Bangladeshis. For Cityside, this has been the most successful regeneration project in its portfolio.

#### ARE ALL REGENERATION SCHEMES AREA-BASED?

CW: Not at all. Take the church of **St John the Baptist, Hoxton**. Over a period of years, this impressive grade II listed church dating from 1824, has gone from near-ruin to a thriving parish and community centre. It all started with an English Heritage grant of £515,000 to repair the roof and restore the spectacular ceiling paintings. The parish went on to form a wider partnership including us to develop a family crisis centre and nursery. The crypt was adapted for use as a community gym, an employment project and a café. The churchyard is currently being re-landscaped to give the church and its various new uses the right setting.

#### HOW MUCH DID IT ALL COST?

CW: The total project cost was over £2,000,000. The bulk of funds were raised from English Heritage, the Heritage Lottery Fund, the Church Urban Fund, SRB grants and a variety of charities.

#### ANY OTHER EXAMPLES OF A SINGLE-BUILDING CENTRED SCHEME?

M O'R: If you've ever sat in a car queuing to get into the southbound Blackwall Tunnel, you've probably seen the forlorn **Poplar Library**. It's a grade II listed "Building at Risk", built in 1904. It had been disused for years when it was passed to Leaside Regeneration Ltd for refurbishment and conversion. It's now been converted into affordable work units. English Heritage gave grant aid of £50,000 with Leaside providing £100,000 and £500,000 from the European Union. The Heritage of London Trust found £5,000 and their operation branch, HOLTOP, commissioned the refurbishment works with the aid of a loan from the Architectural Heritage Fund. This is a great example of the partnership approach.

The resurrected Poplar Library should be the centrepiece of the renewal of the wider area.

CW: Then there's the **Priory Green Estate** near Kings Cross. It was designed in 1947 by Bertold Lubetkin as social housing. Recently, the estate was transferred to the Peabody Trust who found that money was tight. There wasn't enough to restore Lubetkin's pioneering modern architecture. The Peabody Trust, Islington Council and English Heritage worked together prepare a bid for a Heritage Lottery Fund Townscape Heritage Initiative scheme (THI). The well-developed scheme put forward by Peabody, and the recognition of the historic interest of Priory Green, resulted in a £2,000,000 lottery grant. Lubetkin's work can now be properly restored. And residents see their homes treated with proper care and attention.

English Heritage – Regeneration Agency: not such an unlikely description after all. Close work with London Boroughs, community groups, housing associations and regeneration agencies can secure the sustainable improvement of some of the most run down historic areas in London, improving the quality of life for all concerned. Through HERS, the local historic environment sometimes built up over centuries, can play a full part in people's lives today and be preserved for generations to come.

#### INFORMATION POINT

These and other grant-aided schemes are described in **Heritage Dividend 2002**

This is available free from **English Heritage Customer Services on 0870 333 1181**.

# CHANGING LONDON THE CHALLENGES

LONDON'S HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT FACES ENORMOUS CHALLENGES.

We need to:

- Integrate the historic environment into the strategic and local plan-making processes.
- Tackle under-investment in the maintenance and improvement of parks and open spaces.
- Enhance the public realm by removing clutter and making streets places for people to enjoy – a recent MORI poll identified the condition of streets and pavements as the most serious problem for London's historic environment.
- Find imaginative, beneficial new uses for historic buildings at risk from redundancy or neglect.
- Regenerate our historic neighbourhoods to create a liveable city for all to enjoy.
- Encourage good new buildings which respond creatively to their context and reinforce local character.
- Direct tall buildings to areas where they are appropriate and where they can enhance and not damage the qualities that make London unique.
- Celebrate local distinctiveness and diversity.
- Nurture London's historic environment as a key component of a sustainable future.

*All these issues affect the daily lives of the 7.4 million people – 15% of the total population of England – who live and work in the capital.*

*In a densely populated city, with twelve times the average density of people per square kilometre found in the rest of the country, we owe it to Londoners to get matters like these right.*

*We would like to work in partnership with you, so that together we can meet these challenges.*



## NEXT ISSUE

**London's Lungs: championing the capital's unique open spaces.**

**English Heritage working in partnership to provide Streets For All.**

**The Blue Ribbon: integrated plans for London's waterways.**

## CONTACT DETAILS

We would welcome comments and suggestions on this first edition. These should be sent to

**Richard Dumville (Regional Policy Officer)**  
**London Region, English Heritage**  
**23 Savile Row, London, W1S 2ET**  
**T: 020 7973 3783**

**Alternatively you can e-mail us at**  
**[london@english-heritage.org.uk](mailto:london@english-heritage.org.uk)**

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