



NEWSLETTER

3/98

April 1998

EDITORIAL

Once again we had a good turnout for the AGM, despite the wet weather - which was better than '95 when we had snow !

The visiting speaker Ken Wilson revealed a dry wit when he gave his illustrated talk on the development of atmospheric railways. These were capable of speeds up to 80 mph and had marked advantages over the steam trains of the day. However, in the 1840's those advantages were nullified because rats ate the dressed leather seals of the vacuum pipes which provided the propulsion. He wove into the talk the sighting of a buried carriage, skeletons dressed in Victorian clothing and the evidence that passengers may have been left entombed when the railway closed down!

Turning to the business of the AGM

Election of Officers The Officers holding the posts of Chair, Secretary, Treasurer and Auditor were all prepared to continue and were re-elected. However, the Treasurer Brian Sanders did forewarn that by the next AGM he would have served for 5 years and according to our Constitution should stand down.

Subscriptions After discussion it was agreed to maintain the subscription at £5 per household with senior citizens and unwaged making a contribution between 5p and £5.

Millennium Project Leslie Tucker gave an illustrated presentation with approximate costings of the alternative projects which had been identified at previous Meetings as an appropriate way of recognising the millennium which would add to our area. It was agreed that two of the projects should not be pursued further. They were:

- a) Improving the children's play area in Warren Avenue playing fields, as costs were beyond our means; and
- b) providing bench type seating, as no really suitable location had been identified.

The 3rd project of marking the meridian would be explored further. The 0° latitude line crosses several roads in our area, but except for Farnaby Rd near the golf course and the Green Chain walk footpath between Warren Avenue playing fields and Millwall FC training ground, the angle is extremely oblique.

It was agreed that Leslie should continue to look into options for marking the meridian at the 2 preferred sites, with a budget figure of £2,000 in mind.

Thanks

The Society's thanks were formally recorded to Miss Frenkel for the continuing use of the facilities at the Bromley Court Hotel and to Quinny Lawrence for producing the layout and masters of our Newsletter.

Dates for the Diary

The next Members' Meetings will be held on Thursday 7th May and Thursday 2nd July. As usual the venue is the Bromley Court Hotel. Please check the Hotel's Activity Board for the room which has been allocated to us.

The long awaited public consultation meeting on the Beckenham Place Park Management Plan and likely ways forward for the Park will at last be held this spring after the Council elections. The venue will be the New Studio Club which is near the Old Bromley Rd entrance to the Park. The date and time are:

Wednesday 20th May at 7.30pm.

Peter Pain (Editor)

BECKENHAM PLACE PARK

Management Plan and Consultancy

Since the last Newsletter, the Management Plan has been accepted by Lewisham's Leisure and Environmental Services Committee. In accepting it they stipulated that it should be used as a material document for the Park and future decisions must take full account of the contents and recommendations.

The problems with the consultancy for a feasibility study for a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund have increased and it is no longer an option. The reasons are threefold:

- The chosen consortium claimed that their original tender was flawed and wanted to increase the price by half as much again.
- The government have diverted nearly a third of the resources of the Heritage Lottery Fund for other purposes. That left the Fund no option but to narrow the goal posts.
- The matching funding promised by Lewisham Council has been lost as it was not spent by the year end and they made no allowance for further funding in the 1998/9 budget.

As a result the Management Plan team reconvened and came to the conclusion that the only way ahead was to see to what extent private finance could be involved. This is known as Private Finance Initiative (PFI). We shall probably hear more about this as the government intend to cease Compulsory Competitive Tendering (CCT) for Council services and replace it by PFI. Lewisham is one of several trial boroughs before the change is promulgated.

To find out who might be interested, the Park will be "soft marketed". That is modern management speak for placing an advertisement in various journals and seeing what happens. One thing the Management Plan Team insisted upon is that all of the constraints on the Park should be up front so that there would be no surprises later on. The non-negotiables will be:

- Continued public access.
- Recognition of the Park's status as Metropolitan Open Land.
- Recognition of the listed buildings and their constraints.
- Recognition of the Park's Conservation Area status.
- Implementation of the approved Management Plan.
- Incorporation of the Borough's Parks Strategy.

River Ravensbourne

There is unlikely to be any more work to the river and its banks by the Environment Agency in the foreseeable future. The main reasons are money and the need to clear some of the war damage rubble which was used to level up the Common and part of Summerhouse Field. The EA will doubtless be even more strapped for cash after the recent flooding in the Midlands.

Summerhouse Field and the Goan Sports Ground

There has been some progress here. The interested parties have at last had a meeting, but no decisions were taken. To refresh your memories, the concept is to reintroduce pitch sports to Summerhouse Field, rebuild the pavilion as an extension to the Goan pavilion to bring it up to standard and to astroturf part of the Goan ground. To achieve that it needs a consortia of clubs to get together, agree a plan and seek lottery funding from the Sports Council.

REFERENDUM FOR A MAYOR AND ASSEMBLY FOR LONDON

In the January Newsletter we drew attention to the proposals for a referendum to be held in conjunction with the Council elections in early May. We apologise for returning to the subject again and for the length of this article. The justification is simply that the proposals could mean far reaching changes to the way that London is run and its infrastructure managed. It is too early to say whether or not those changes will be beneficial for London's services or for Londoners as a whole.

The referendum is of course a Yes/No affair. If the result is No then presumably responsibilities and authorities will remain much as now. If the result is Yes then enabling legislation would be passed early in 1999 with elections for a Mayor and Assembly possibly later that year.

Since the January Newsletter every household should have received a leaflet entitled "Mayor and Assembly for London". That leaflet more or less summarises the White Paper on the same subject. We have bought a copy of the White Paper and this article attempts to bring out aspects of that Paper which are either not covered at all or covered only briefly in the Leaflet.

This Society is non political and what follows is intended to inform. It is not intended to influence. If anyone feels that this article shows any bias, we strongly recommend that they read the White Paper for themselves. However the subject is already becoming politicised, perhaps inevitably, with various people indicating their intention to stand and groupings being formed within the main political parties to support or stop them. Some of the stop groups even come from within the parties of the potential candidate. There is therefore a strong possibility that politics may cloud the very real issues facing Londoners.

Voting Systems for the Mayor and Assembly

Firstly the electoral systems to be used will not be the simple first past the post.

For the Mayor it will be the Supplementary Vote System where each voter makes two choices. If a candidate gets more than 50% of the vote, then that is it. If there is not a clear leader with at least 50% then the second vote is taken into account to find the candidate with most votes overall.

Voting for the Assembly will use a different system. The Additional Member System. Again there will be two votes. Of the 25 members, 14 will represent combinations of the existing 32 boroughs on a first past the post system based on the first vote. The second vote will be for a political party and the remaining 11 seats would be divided between the parties according to the votes received. The political parties will then allocate these 11 seats from their own lists of candidates. So only 56% of the Assembly will be directly accountable to the electorate, the rest are party nominees.

This means that the directly elected Members of the London Assembly will have a very much larger constituency than the average London Member of Parliament!. About three times larger.

Functions

Like the Mayor and his Deputy, members of the Assembly will be full-time and paid. Their task will be to check the Mayor's activities, seek changes to his plans and budgets and check the performance of the various new bodies which will be set up to

run different parts of London's infrastructure. Some of the Assembly members could also be appointed by the Mayor to sit on these new Authorities. The word Quango is not mentioned in the White Paper, it does say however that the Mayor will have "sweeping new powers——"

The proposed new Authorities are:

A Transport Authority

Which it is intended will control the Underground, Bus services, Taxis, The Docklands Light Railway and most main roads. The "Transport for London" (TfL) Authority will be chaired by either the Mayor or his nominee. It will also have between 8 & 15 members directly appointed by the Mayor, who will also have the power to create subordinate bodies as he sees fit. It is not intended that the TfL Board should have any political representatives sitting on it. Members will be chosen for their relevant expertise -political considerations will be introduced by the Mayor and the Assembly who will oversee the Authority.

A Development Agency

The new London Development Agency (LDA) will be responsible for advising on and implementing the Mayors economic and regeneration strategy. That strategy will impinge on social, physical and economic regeneration; tourism; marketing London for business; controlling inward investment; promoting technology transfer between educational institutions and businesses and taking a leading role on European Union (EU) structural funds. The Chair of the LDA Board will be appointed by the Mayor as will the other 12 Board members. Four seats will be available for elected members of the Assembly again appointed by the Mayor.

A Police Authority

It is intended that the new Metropolitan Police Authority should take over the direct responsibility for London's police force from the Home Office. whilst still retaining a three way link between the new Authority, the Police and the Home Office. The MPA will have 23 members, 11 drawn from the Assembly and 1 from the District Councils outside Greater London but within the Metropolitan Police area. The remainder to be made up from independents and magistrates etc. The Mayor will appoint the Assembly members to the Authority and these will include his Deputy. Because the Metropolitan Police have a wider range of responsibilities than any other police force in the UK, the Commissioner will still ultimately be appointed by the Crown.

A Fire and Civil Defence Authority

The London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority (LFEPA.) will take over responsibility for London's Fire Service and the old civil protection function of the Civil Defence Corps. It will not include the London Ambulance Service. The LFEPA

will have 17 members, 9 will be Assembly members appointed by the Mayor who will also choose the Chair. The remaining 8 members will be nominated by the boroughs to represent all 32 of them, again however the Mayor will appoint the actual 8 borough representatives.

Apart from the new Authorities, some of which will subsume the work of existing bodies, the Mayor will have a responsibility for;

Planning

The Mayor will set a new strategic planning framework for London and produce appropriate guidance, this will be known as a Spatial Development Strategy. Local Unitary Development Plans will be expected to conform to the new guidance. Boroughs will also have to get the Mayor's "blessing" to a new or revised UDP before it is submitted to the Secretary of State for approval. Although boroughs will remain development control authorities for their own areas, the Mayor will be able to intervene and instruct boroughs to refuse or grant approval in what he sees as strategic cases. The definition of what is strategic will be the subject of secondary legislation, but it will include significant developments in housing, retail & town centres, leisure, urban quality and environment & waste management. Indeed the Mayor becomes a statutory consultee for planning applications deemed to be of strategic importance.

Environment

The Mayor will have powers to promote and co-ordinate sustainable development improve air quality, waste management and deal with noise - except that from neighbours. Local boroughs will be encouraged, as now, to continue with local action. If a local authority departs from any strategy that the Mayor develops he will have the power to direct that authority to comply.

Health

The Mayor will have a duty to take account of the health of Londoners when considering his policies. The White Paper is not clear on how this will be achieved as no executive function will be transferred to the Greater London Authority or the Mayor. However the Mayor has the power to appoint a Director of Public Health or an advisor to help him in this task. Mechanisms for co-ordinating policies with those of the Regional NHS are to be developed later.

Culture, Media and Sport

An existing body, the London Heritage Forum which has no executive powers will be reconstituted as the Cultural Strategy Group for London. They will still not have any executive powers but will be required to advise the Mayor on shaping his strategy. Members are likely to represent the arts, tourism, museums, sports parks libraries

films and historic palaces. The Mayor will also be able to make appointments to the boards of key cultural organisations and may become responsible for various historic sites and institutions.

Costs

The Greater London Assembly will take over existing spending for Fire, Police and Economic Development - about £3.3bn from central and local government budgets. The White Paper is not specific on how the funding of all the other responsibilities they will be given will be achieved.

It is estimated that the Mayor, Assembly and their back up staff would cost an additional £20m a year. The White Paper states that it is intended that most of that money would come from central funds, that is the Treasury which of course gets its money from taxes. It does not say how long that arrangement would obtain. The monies not met from central funds would come from Londoners by way of a levy on Council Tax. The estimate is that this would be between £1 and £2 a year for a household in a Band D house. Again it does not say whether these are only initial costs or whether they are expected to continue.

Conclusion

If you have stayed with it so far, congratulations. What on the face of it seems to be a simple question - A Mayor and Assembly for London? becomes much more complicated and the consequences more far reaching than just saying lets have a figurehead for London.

The White Paper clearly indicates that considerable authority and responsibility will move from both central and local government to the new Mayor and Assembly. The direct electoral responsibility of the members of the Assembly and the new bodies which will be set up appears to be fuzzier than those for MPs and Councillors or even the old LCC and GLC. Whether that is good or bad is for individuals to decide. This article only attempts to shed a little more light on the subject and summarise nearly 100 pages of the White Paper.

If anyone wants to read the White Paper for themselves it should be in the Central Library. Alternatively it can be obtained direct from HMSO for £11.60. The title is "A Mayor and Assembly for London" (Cmnd 3897) and the telephone number for ordering is 0171-873 9090.

As we said in the January Newsletter the referendum could have far reaching consequences for Londoners. Because of that members are encouraged to find as much as possible, to form their own opinions and of course vote. Hopefully the last thing anyone wants is a result based on a minority of the electorate as has happened elsewhere.

R.V.P.S OFFICERS (APRIL 1998)

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