

Submitting on behalf of the London Culture Forum- Heritage and Culture Network for London borough officers comments

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The London Culture Forum's response letter to the London Plan

Introduction

The latest London Culture Forum (LCF) event was held on 22 February at London Councils. The theme of the event discussed the role of culture in place and planning. This letter serves as a summary of the event and a snapshot of the discussions that were facilitated on the day.

This response to the London Plan consultation provides a summary of verbal feedback captured during the recent LCF event. The feedback of attendees was recorded by members of the LCF Advisory Group. The feedback and views expressed in the Forum session are not and should not be attributed to the position of London Councils, The GLA, Arts Council England or any other organisations to which the LCF advisory group belong. The LCF submits this response to help inform the GLA of conversations related to the London Plan, and to give a sense of attitudes towards proposals from officers working on the frontline of culture in London.

The London Culture Forum

The London Culture Forum brings together officers from across London's 33 local authorities, with additional cultural representatives from key agencies operating in the capital.

Membership includes officers from all London local authority cultural services – across arts, culture, events, libraries and heritage – and representatives from organisations including Arts Council England, the Greater London Authority (GLA), London Councils and London & Partners.

The officers who attend the Forum have responsibility for a wide range of local cultural services including programming festivals, delivering workshops and participatory events, commissioning public art, working with local social, health and economic development agendas and supporting local arts and culture organisations and creative businesses through capacity building and other support services. Many officers also have responsibility for running arts venues such as theatres, museums and galleries.

The Forum's aims are to:

- Develop and promote local authority arts and cultural provision across the capital.
- Share information and good practice.
- Identify areas for collaboration.
- Support advocacy work for local arts and culture services.
- Embed a clear role for arts and culture in wider agenda.

The Advisory Board

The LCF is organised by the Advisory Board, made up of volunteers from several organisations invested in London's cultural offer. The organisations for which they work do not have any say in the management and steer of the LCF. Their notes and observations form the basis of this letter, and the membership is as follows:

Paul Hogan, London Borough of Barking & Dagenham

Rachael MacMillan, Historic England

Nick Bodger, City of London

Tracey Sage, Royal Borough of Greenwich

Jen Wood, London Borough of Southwark

Sara O'Donnell, Enable Leisure & Culture (London Borough of Wandsworth)

Carol Boswarthack, Association of London Chief Librarians

Sophie Lancaster, Arts Council England

Clive Lyttle, Arts Council England

Chenine Bhathena, Greater London Authority

Lucia Masundire, Greater London Authority

Spike van der Vliet-Firth, London Councils

The Event- discussing the New London Plan

The LCF event on 22 February was organised to allow officers from London Boroughs the chance to discuss elements of the Draft New London Plan that impacted on their role delivering cultural policy in their borough. Officers were given the chance to collaborate and share thinking on how they may incorporate the priorities and policies of the London Plan into individual local borough plans. It was also designed as an opportunity for officers from London boroughs to hear from GLA officers who work closely on elements of the new London Plan relevant to the group and ask them questions to make sure they were clear on how the New London Plan affected them.

The event had several keynotes discussing the importance of culture in place and planning, as well as several breakout sessions discussing elements of the London Plan in more detail.

To read more about the keynote speakers and facilitators of the break-out, please see our agenda (appendix 1). The four breakout sessions that fostered conversations about the Draft New London Plan were:

Protecting, Growing and Retaining Cultural facilities

The session discussed:

- How to use the London Plan policies to retain and grow your local cultural provision.
- CEZ policy
- E2&E3 for affordable artists and creative workspace.

Heritage, Conservation and Views in a Growing City

The session discussed:

- Protected views
- Developing a clear understanding of your local historic environment
- Protecting heritage in regenerative change
- Heritage at Risk /bringing heritage buildings back into use

Supporting the Night Time Economy

The session discussed:

- Balancing the Night Time Economy
- Agent of Change
- Pubs

Using Planning Gain for Cultural Facilities

The session discussed:

- What it can be used for.
- Where section 106 is applicable to culture in the London Plan.
- Where it is applicable locally.
- How to write effective Section 106 agreements for culture.
- CIL

The event was well attended and popular amongst those signed up to the LCF. Around 50 people from a wide range of London boroughs and relevant stakeholders attended.

Outcomes from the Draft New London Plan breakout discussions

Introduction

The following snapshots of conversations are based on notes made by members of the Advisory Group, reflecting conversations in the above breakout sessions.

To reiterate, the following summary of discussions and the points raised are not the opinion of any organisation that members of the LCF Advisory Group are employed by. This seeks to share the views of officers attending the Forum when given the chance to discuss the impact of the New London Plan on their work and developing local strategic responses.

Summary

Overall, attendees of the LCF event spoke with positivity about the relevant policies in the New London Plan. A dedicated chapter and policies for Heritage and Culture was widely raised as a very welcome addition to the New London Plan. The importance given to Heritage and Culture for other policy aims such as place-shaping, regeneration, economic development, and community cohesion was also welcomed by the group.

In addition to the dedicated Heritage and Culture chapter, officers were keen to discuss E2: Low Cost Business Space, E3: Affordable Workspace and D12: Agent of Change Principle.

Within all breakout discussions there were some overarching themes that give a good perspective on how the way officers received the London Plan:

- The need for joined-up working and cooperation between the boroughs and the GLA
- The impact of funding reductions on culture and a recognition of the challenging environment borough culture officers operate in.
- The benefit the London Plan will have in fostering local conversations and developing local strategies.

Protecting Retaining and Growing Cultural Facilities

Some key themes emerged during this breakout session, which focused on New London Plan policies local plans need to be in conformity with. Conversations in the breakout sessions recognised:

- The benefit the London Plan provides in galvanising the development of local cultural strategies. The London Plan will make this work within boroughs more proactive, and will act as a good basis from which officers can engage local stakeholders within their organisations.
- Mechanisms to protect cultural venues through the Agent of Change principal were incredibly welcome.

- The benefit of having cultural and community assets on the CIL Regulation 123 list was raised during one of the breakout sessions, enhancing the powers and ability of boroughs to facilitate cultural and creative industries.

- The importance of cultural wellbeing/ health and wellbeing was raised. Methods of formalising and giving this more importance was discussed amongst the group.

- Officers spoke at length of the delicate balance between community engagement/ participation and decision-making, particularly when actions are taken that are not in accordance with the views contributed by the community. Officers spoke about the importance of managing expectations and that community consultation can sometimes be negatively affected by decision-making contrary to the views expressed locally.

- There was widespread positivity around projects that make use of meanwhile space. These spaces can be used for experimentation but it was raised that legacy and managing expectations must be fully considered. It was noted that meanwhile spaces can also occur on public land e.g. when a street is closed for development and should be encouraged.

- The groups looked forward to seeing how the Heritage and Culture chapter in the New London Plan would be incorporated or complimentary to Good Growth Policies/ Planning London's Future in Chapter 1.
- One breakout group felt that affordable creative and cultural workspace should be supported on a pan-London basis and would like to see as much distribution and development of these spaces as possible. It was raised these should be supported outside of Cultural Enterprise Zones.
- There was some confusion sensed amongst the group as to the difference between low cost business space and affordable workspace. The New London Plan could benefit from making the distinction clearer. There was also some confusion expressed as to what low-cost and affordable meant and could benefit from further definition.

Breakout Session- Heritage, Conservation and Views in a Growing City

- Both breakout sessions agreed that it was a positive step to see heritage and culture more closely aligned within the Plan; there was a lot of agreement that you cannot (and should not) see heritage and culture as separate entities, they are intertwined and it is obvious both disciplines complement one another.
- The prominence given to heritage and culture in the same chapter of the London Plan may encourage more London boroughs to develop their own cultural heritage strategies, ensuring these also think more widely of their cultural assets. This was seen as a very positive step and may encourage closer working/partnerships between cultural organisations and institutions at a regional and borough level.
- Both groups recognised that heritage (whether below ground archaeology or above ground built infrastructure and landscapes) adds to the interest in their local areas, makes them distinctive and provides a 'sense of place'. The historic interest in individual boroughs also provides the stories which can inspire a myriad of cultural activities (as well as providing places to host cultural activities on a temporary or permanent basis).

- Both groups were also positive about the forthcoming Cultural Infrastructure Plan and saw the benefits of this in terms of highlighting the cultural heritage in their borough. A couple of boroughs wondered if their own local authority may be interested in developing a local version of the Plan, but recognised that this might not be necessary. Others felt it would be useful if you could extract demographic data from the New London Plan to see who is/isn't engaging with the cultural offers in a borough and use this data to develop strategies to widen participation.
- There was also agreement in both groups, in terms of Creative Enterprise Zones, that whilst it is important not to create 'false' creative quarters and is much better to recognise (and enhance if needed) existing areas, some new quarters do work well, but it is important to create suitable new spaces for the creative sector.
- One group discussed the KPIs for both heritage and culture in the Monitoring section (Chap 12) of the draft London Plan. It was noted that it is important to also measure the positive impact heritage and culture have on people's lives. However, mapping/measuring this is difficult as impact is often best measured after a specific period of time (i.e. one year, two years, five years). Having a baseline to measure this type of impact against is also key. A framework could be provided to measure outcomes against, but this raised other questions around who would be gathering the information for a framework and who would develop a framework? One way to measure impact was suggested in terms of how deliverable things are, the number of people involved/engaged and providing case studies. It was also noted that universities etc. could be used to support data collation in terms of engagement with/enjoyment of cultural activities.
- A suggestion was made that perhaps some sort of App could be made available for people to provide instant feedback on a cultural activity they have taken part in, with an incentive to complete it attached. One member mentioned an App used by the GLA at the recent Lumiere event in London, a geo-mapping exercise, which mapped where people went and what other activities in an area they took part in, this sort of data would be really useful for all London boroughs.

- Boroughs need to work in partnership with communities and developers to ensure everyone understands the character of a place and what cultural assets are already a strong community draw, rather than this being imposed on an area. It was noted that boroughs could perhaps do more themselves to ensure that conservation, planning, regeneration, housing, transport, arts and culture teams could all do more by working more closely together in areas earmarked for large developments.

Breakout session- Using Planning Gain for Cultural Facilities

Less feedback was captured from the group during this session, which was designed more to inform cultural officers of technical planning policy that impacted on their work, delivering local cultural strategies and supporting cultural facilities in their borough.

- One group wished to discuss basement theatres in particular. The specialist advice to ensure safe design was discussed and the ability to use CIL for the purpose of operational maintenance of infrastructure.
- The groups discussed that S106 had forced boroughs to become better informed and more sophisticated in their approach towards negotiating with developers. The relationship and restrictions between S106 and Regulation 123 lists was also discussed by the group.
- It was asked whether Regulation 123 lists could be used to fund meanwhile projects, pop-up projects and other temporary provisions that do not feature on the list. Officers heard about how imaginative linking to public realm can achieve this, however it really needs a separate heading on the Regulation 123 list. If a strong link could be shown to the benefits of softer uses (i.e. pop-ups) achieving this could be possible.
- The role of informed planning officers within boroughs was discussed, particularly when theatres and other cultural institutions lack in building and construction terminology and knowledge of legislation. It was hoped the GLA could look at facilitating professional development between planning and culture colleagues on a pan-London basis, creating a more fluid landscape receptive to the needs of culture and creative industries.

Breakout Session- Supporting the Night Time Economy

- The sessions both raised alcohol-free night offers and the trend amongst under-25s which show less and less are drinking alcohol. It was important to boroughs that they continued to work towards a better balance in local night time offers.
- Representatives of boroughs expressed that they would welcome more information on wages in the night time economy as a foundation for a living night-wage.

- Boroughs spoke of the importance of collaboration amongst offers within a local authority. Success was shared in developing a night-time offer when cultural officers approached regeneration and community safety colleagues at an early stage in project design. They found it was easier to receive effective support in delivering the project further down the line when other officers felt involved in decision-making. It also allowed officers across the council to see the benefits of the Night Time Economy, gaining more endorsement across the Council.

- Lots of borough officers shared that they were approached strategies for particular town centres. Borough-wide strategies were less common amongst the breakout participants.

- Officers shared success in building unique offers for town centres. Officers had found that projects were less likely to be successful when they tried to replicate another offer elsewhere without consideration of local demographic factors.

Going forward with the delivery of the New London Plan, The London Culture Forum looks forward to working with the Greater London Authority to support cultural officers working in boroughs as well as their local partners. The London Culture Forum successfully brings officer from across London together, and we would like the GLA to keep an active relationship with us for the benefit of all London Boroughs. We look forward to working together with the GLA in order to utilise the London Plan, support borough officers in maximising opportunities brought about by the Plan, and continue to grow culture in London.

