

# Turn again, Whittington

Camden, Westminster, Islington and the City Corporation. Are you men or mice?

**We've written** in previous issues about planning in recession and the need for London's planners to get real. Amid the sturm und drang of the developer's lot, where nothing is viable and there is no money to build it even if it was, it is easy to get depressed.

There are a lot of grim-faced architects and developers out there, especially those who've crossed swords with twits who suggest re-building an uneconomic, nostalgic past. For those who attended the recent Planning for a Changing London conference, however, a sturdier vision of the future was laid out (*page 6*) which looked well beyond our current woes.

Crossrail and the £80bn that Transport for London is spending in the capital will transform its efficiency. 200m-long trains every five minutes will add 10 per cent to London's rail capacity. It will improve the capability of London to do what it does best, which is to encourage, accommodate and then distribute the economic and cultural benefits that flow from global agglomeration – ie lots of clever people from everywhere making money working energetically in close proximity.

The fly in the Crossrail ointment is that the local authorities above ground at the key central

stations – particularly Tottenham Court Road and Farringdon – have so far failed to demonstrate enough vision to capitalise on the opportunity. For the record, that is Camden, Westminster, Islington and the City Corporation. Are you men or mice?

Peter Bishop and Design for London's vision for the legacy of 2012, however, is rather more robust and coming into focus nicely. The linear park running from the Olympics down to the mouth of the River Lea looks very promising and will help to switch on the engine of regeneration in East London – increasing land value.

The other key drivers will be increased density and a flexible attitude to land use. The Mayor it seems is up for ditching all that redundant industrial land. Why can't the current two-storey settlements east of the River Lea be transformed into something that looks more like a modern version of five or six storey Kensington and Chelsea?

Meanwhile the other major factor in

London's future is air traffic. Demand is being suppressed by lack of capacity.

We must decide what we want to do and, more importantly, do it. London has historically always gone for growth. It consistently rewards those who reach for it as Sir Richard Whittington, its most famous mayor, discovered.



## Creatives count in the capital

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**A leitmotif** of the draft London Plan, and indeed the extant document, is the declining proportion of the population that will be employed in manufacturing. That decline is not uniform across London, and indeed needs to be set in the context of employment definitions, whereby construction workers are not counted, even though they are engaged in manufacturing of a sort. (William McKee, who heads the Outer London Commission, gave some interesting perspectives on this at the recent *Planning in London* conference at the NLA).

Conventional wisdom has it that financial services and associated sectors are the contemporary substitute for the factory jobs of yesteryear, and this is no doubt true. Nevertheless there is a more difficult to define sector of employment which has a key part to play in the life of London – the so-called creative industries, by which one does not mean accountants. Defining creatives is

not easy, though few of them seem to wear ties. But in aggregate they account for huge levels of activity and revenue, including significant export earnings.

So how to plan for them? At one level it is just a question of keeping out of the way, as the recent government task force into the creative industries discovered. It is more a question of limiting the number of barriers to entry than engaging in active promotion.

Not the least of those barriers is the ready availability (or lack of it) of low-cost premises from which small firms – some of which will grow into big ones – can take root. While headlines appear about empty shops being turned into artists' studios, it is worth noting that creatives like to cluster, so many local authority wishing to promote this sort of employment would do well to bear that in mind. It is groups of premises, not

one-offs that are most useful.

One of the most ambitious projects in the London creative pipeline is the 'media city' concept being pursued by the BBC and others around White City. Even though much of the BBC's output is moving to Broadcasting House in the West End or to (God help us) Salford, imaginative initiatives for regeneration of a huge chunk of Hammersmith are under way, with help from the Mayor's planning unit.

Meanwhile over in Hackney, there is hope that the broadcasting and media facilities for the Olympics, not far from Hackney Wick station, will attract other creatives to east London from 2013.

Boris should support both areas. They could both work in their different ways, and on current trends the need for non-manufacturing jobs is unlikely to decline.