

A workout for London's planning system

The shortage of planning skills and staff is holding back the prospects for the Capital. A new recruitment resource aims to make things easier to 'attract, retain and motivate', as the saying has it.



The lack of planners in the system continues to dog London. If anyone doubted the harmful

effects of this unfitness in the planning system, consider the enormous areas of deprivation there remain in the capital. 'Planning', or the lack of it, must have something to do with this state of affairs.

Londoners and those arriving every day from the regions and the new member states of the EU, and those who have been here for generations, can be condemned by London's creaking planning system to live their lives in dingy locations where the chances of beneficial change are slimmer than they need be.

A report for London Councils (the renamed Association of London Government) published last

November, *Recruitment and Retention of Planners in London*, is unequivocal. 'The percentage of boroughs reporting recruitment problems increased from 71 per cent to 93 per cent between 2003 and 2005, and the situation was very similar in 2006. 80 per cent of boroughs reported problems in 2005 and the situation had not changed markedly by 2006..'

Recruiting temporary staff and non-planning graduates has been a stop-gap measure, but applicants' frustrations with using a complex system staffed in this way are making London increasingly uncompetitive as a place to invest. There are easier places to spend money.

The consequent lack of supply pushes up the prices of what little there is available to buy, further reducing competitiveness and social exclusion, and worse, increasing social tension – and the popularity of

unhealthy political attitudes.

Also there is a noticeable and growing contrast between 'can do' attitudes to growth on the part of Northern local authorities and the curmudgeonly London boroughs. Boroughs need to keep improving their performance in attracting and promoting economic growth and their public realms for the benefit of residents. The planning system should be better used to provide enjoyment and opportunity, not disappointment.

What are the problems? Despite the planning system, London's role as a global city seems to be increasing. Dealing with the system has resulted in a boom for private planning consultants. A poorly paid, bureaucratic job in an unmodernised planning department holds little appeal. The efforts of individual boroughs to tackle their problems have yielded some results, but it is clear that a

more co-ordinated approach to making a career in planning London is needed. Pay, housing, working environments, training, a more autonomous role for officers, the removal of unnecessary bureaucracy, the privatisation of mechanical tasks – all these need tackling.

Planning in London's role in life, representing as it does the London Planning & Development Forum, has always been to present ideas and opinions from both public and private sides of the subject, and we would like to expand what we do.

With that in mind, and the need to provide a better service for our readers and the market for planning talent in the capital, we have launched a jobs website: www.PiLjobs.com. It is open for business and we hope you find it useful. A happy – and more prosperous – new year to all.

New for 2007 from *Planning in London*

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