

NOOKS and CORNERS

JUST what a catastrophe the 2012 games will be for London and Britain will emerge soon enough, when all available funds are redirected from the arts to funding the developments required by the Olympics.

The government will ride roughshod over local interests and the normal planning system, as developers clamour to exploit all the lucrative opportunities. If sport really were the issue, it would be more useful if the government reversed the wicked practice of selling off playing fields and made sure every local swimming pool was well maintained rather than building a couple of huge new stadia in the Lea Valley.

The shabby story of the Arsenal football ground gives a hint of what lies in store. As recounted in *Eye* 1046, Arsenal is leaving its 38,000 capacity stadium in Highbury and building a new 60,000-seater arena next to the main railway line out of King's Cross. Named the Emirates Stadium as a tribute to the tolerant, democracy-loving Islamic states on the Persian Gulf, this is now nearing completion. But next to nothing has been done to improve the transport systems to cope with the



huge crowds anticipated: Arsenal FC has been much more concerned to maximise profitability of the enabling development on adjacent land, which has greatly increased.

Outline planning permission was granted by Islington council for 557 housing units – mostly flats – in 2002. Now a new so-called “revised” application has been submitted for 711 homes. Of these, a mere 49 are to be “affordable” housing (for purchase) and only six, for the disabled, are to be (rentable) social housing. The proportion of social housing in the 2002 proposal was already below that specified in both Islington's development plan and the mayor of London's plan, so what is now proposed is almost an insult.

Yet Islington nodded the new plans through in June, banning one ward councillor from the meeting as “she has a personal interest by living close to the site.” Islington council has also done well out of what is in essence a big money-making exercise by selling the site of its old waste disposal plant to Arsenal for the new stadium.

Then there is the question of what happens to Highbury stadium, for while the East Stand (which

is listed) and the West Stand are staying and being converted into flats, the North and South Stands are coming down. Arsenal FC was originally furious when the East Stand was listed, as that frustrated its plan to redevelop the stadium, but now it is pleased. Why? Because the indirect consequence is that the North and South Stands are to be replaced by blocks equally high so as to maintain the character of the stadium rather than have low-rise developments on the old football ground similar in scale to the surrounding modest terraced housing and to what was swept away when Arsenal arrived from Woolwich in 1913. Local residents will now be overshadowed by a huge private residential fortress – gated like a development in Docklands. And all for the sake of football.

TALKING of modest terraced housing, deputy prime minister John Prescott continues to press for the destruction of acres and acres of it in the north under his pet Pathfinder scheme.

One of the many victims of his crazed, 1960s utopianism is poor old Middlesbrough, a city which has already suffered enough from crude redevelopment and where, in Gresham Ward alone, 1,500 houses in 37 streets are to be bulldozed. Most of these are perfectly sound and many have been modernised and improved by their owners. Petitions against the plans have been organised by local residents, one signed by 1,250 people. No matter: the OPDM has decreed that Middlesbrough, like other cities and towns, will only benefit from government funding if it pursues “radical” and “sustainable” redevelopment schemes.

Prescott's willing accessory is the controversial former “Robocop” of the Cleveland police, Ray Mallon. Mr Mallon has a column in *The Northern Echo*, and on 22 July he explained that the demolitions are justified because Gresham, despite being a socially stable mixed community, is “an area of terraced houses, some over 100 years old” and so did not have garages or en-suite bathrooms and other essentials.

This sentiment echoed one of Mrs Thatcher's sillier remarks, when she complained it was a scandal that half of our nation's children still went to school in Victorian buildings, not reflecting that those children may have been the lucky ones.

In his column a week later, the mayor then enthused about his first ever visit to Rome, where “you can stroll through parks littered with 2000-year-old architecture.” No bad thing, it would seem, as “Rome is wonderful.” So it is fine for Italians to retain buildings aged by millennia but wrong for the benighted people of Middlesbrough to live in houses over whose roofs a mere century has passed. Some contradiction here, surely?

‘Piloti’

I-SPY Civic Centre, Chelmsford



Submitted by Asher Heighlam. £10 paid for similar submissions. (SAE required for return of photographs)

Down on the Farm

NO COUNTY apart from Cumbria was hit harder by the 2001 foot-and-mouth disaster than Devon.

In August that year, local farmers were still in shock as they met at the Devon county show, wondering whether their industry could ever recover. Among those trying to see a way forward was Kenneth Campbell, whose background in the hospitality industry had given him an idea for encouraging Devon's restaurants, pubs and hotels to use local products. When he met Jonathan Smye, an official of Devon county council's Devon Food Links unit, he learned that the council might be interested in his “Devonshire Flavour” project. Smye told him the council would support an application to Defra for funding, so long as Campbell produced a business plan.

By the end of September, he and Smye were setting up presentations to introduce the idea to farmers and catering businesses. Campbell submitted his application to Defra, and set about registering Devonshire Flavour as a company and trade name. All seemed set fair.

Now, however, the story became murky. In January 2002, Smye told Campbell that a £50,000 grant had been given to Devonshire Flavour, not by Defra but by the South West Regional Development Agency (SWRDA). This came as a shock to Campbell. He knew nothing about any application to the SWRDA. Only gradually did he discover that another council official, Ian Hutchcroft had used Campbell's business plan and the name Devonshire Flavour to make a totally separate application for funding. Furthermore, the fact that the SWRDA had given £50,000 to Devonshire Flavour ruled out any chance of Campbell getting his grant from Defra.

The story now became murkier still. When the council realised Campbell had registered Devonshire Flavour as a trade name, it quickly changed the name of its own project to “Eating Out, Eating Local”. Campbell found he had been frozen out altogether, even though the £50,000 had been awarded to Devonshire Flavour, based on his business plan. Thus began a Kafkaesque correspondence with the council and the SWRDA which was to last another three years.

What made this even more mysterious was the way the SWRDA seemed to have become complicit in this double-dealing. Dr Sue Brownlow, its head of “Devon Operations”, repeatedly insisted that the £50,000 had been awarded to the council's “Eating Out, Eating Local” project, even though the document which might prove this had somehow got lost. Only in February 2005 did an application under the freedom of information act finally unearth the allegedly “lost” document. This showed that both the council officials and the SWRDA had consistently been lying. The £50,000 had indeed been awarded to Devonshire Flavour, and for the project proposed by Mr Campbell.

As for what became of the £50,000 of taxpayers' money, an internet search reveals that the last recorded reference to Eating Out, Eating Local on the council website was in 2003. Apart from paying to keep a few officials busy, its contribution to helping Devon's farming community recover from foot and mouth appears to have been non-existent.

‘Muckspreader’

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS

BY BIRCH

