

## The City Cluster and the City's changing ground plan

Guide: Peter Murray, Chairman of NLA  
 Walkers: John Williams, The Instant Group  
 Thursday 7 July 2016, Tower 42, Old Broad Street, London EC2N 1HN

The CoreNet Summer Walk has become an institution. Last year we 'did' Shoreditch and Spitalfields. Previously we have walked different parts of the City, Westminster and the West End, looking 'Up not Down'. This year was the turn of the eastern quarter of the City, essentially around Bishopsgate.

The tour, led by **Peter Murray**, aimed to look at the City Cluster concept - the grouping of tall towers in clusters rather than just randomly scattered across London. Peter is an architect, has been editor of Building Design magazine, RIBA Journal and Blueprint Magazine, and is founder and chairman of the NLA (New London Architecture) which aims to bring people together to shape a better city. He has a particularly well informed view of design and building and we are lucky to have had him as a tour guide.



On a balmy summer evening about 30 of us assembled in front of Tower 42 (formerly the NatWest Tower), one of the earliest tall towers (completed in 1981), where Peter outlined the history of tall buildings in London.

Initially post-war there was a positive view of tall buildings and, while there was no real plan, specific locations were used as markers - Centre Point counterbalanced by the tower at Marble Arch delineating the extent of Oxford Street - single towers

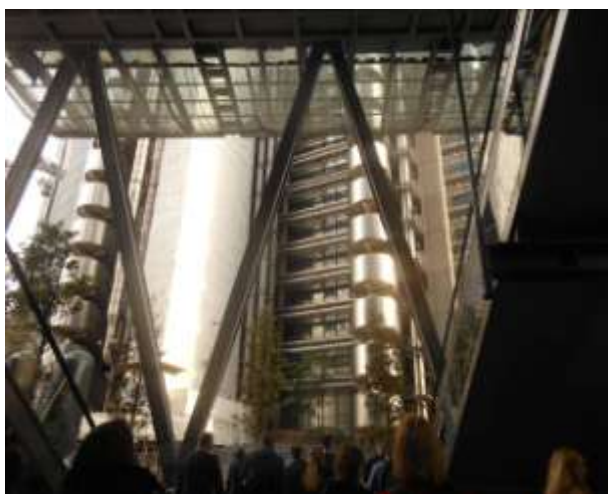
were seen as icons. More recently there has been a change of policy: towards promoting clusters of mixed use tall buildings.

In the City, things were different: because the Corporation doesn't like mixed use, and the City fathers were initially intent on preserving a more traditional feel - 'No towers in the City'. Major developments, such as Broadgate, were all on the outer edges of the City. What ultimately drove a change of policy were three events. The development of Canary Wharf, the IRA bombs, one outside the Baltic Exchange the other in Bishopsgate, and the commercial threat of Frankfurt. The Corporation was forced, by commercial necessity, to re-think its policies on building, and to improve security, allowing the construction of larger buildings in selected areas, and bringing in the 'ring of plastic' which tightened security

around the City and even today records the number plate of every vehicle entering the Square Mile.



The move towards more towers was encouraged by the general acceptance of the 'Gherkin' with 41 stories on the site of the Baltic Exchange at St Mary Axe. This was followed by, among others 99 Bishopsgate, a podium tower, 110 Bishopsgate (the Salesforce Tower, formerly the Heron Tower, 46 stories), for which Gerald Ronson fought off bitter opposition from English Heritage, the Leadenhall Building (52 stories), and 100 Bishopsgate, 22 Bishopsgate and the Scalpel (carefully twisted so as not to obstruct views of St Paul's Cathedral) all of which are still in the early stages of construction.





We also looked at the Aviva Tower/CU Building, a tall block whose classic design was strongly influenced by Mies van der Rohe but which was so badly damaged by the Bishopsgate bomb that it was thought not worthy of listing and is to be demolished and replaced by a new tower planned to have 73 floors.



And finally, having walked underneath the Leadenhall Building, we looked at the Richard Rogers designed Lloyd's of London building, an early example of hi-tech architecture, with the services on the outside allowing a large central floorplate, an arrangement which is entirely flexible and capable of being constantly updated to suit modern systems.

Having absorbed all of this fascinating information, we retraced our steps, admiring some of the public art and open spaces on which the Corporation now insists, to a bar opposite the NatWest Tower to slake our thirst courtesy of Overbury, to which our grateful thanks.