

Witness Name: **Kit Malthouse**

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THE LEVESON INQUIRY

Exhibit KM3 to the
Witness Statement of **Kit Malthouse**

Columnists

Problem: Heathrow's in the wrong place

Kit Malthouse
November 23 2007 12:00AM

Other countries can move their airports. It would take vision and commitment, but we can too

In politics, as in life, you have to know when to stop digging. Once a fundamental mistake has been made, no amount of cosmetics, new initiatives or improvements can overcome the basic tragic error. This is nowhere more true than on the issue of Heathrow.

Terminal 5, the third runway, Crossrail, the OFT inquiry into BAA's monopoly — all of them are misguided political attempts to gloss over the massive, catastrophic flaw that dogs Heathrow and means it will never, ever be what Britain wants and needs it to be.

After decades of aviation misery, campaigning and protest, it is time to face the truth and admit the problem: Heathrow is in the wrong place.

You need two vital ingredients for a successful international airport: the right wind and loads of space. Heathrow has neither. The prevailing wind in London is westerly. Aircraft have to land into wind; so all those massive beasts (and they are getting bigger every year) have to turn in right over Central London. The noise they cause means only a limited number of flights can land before 6am or after 11.30pm. But as the residents of Wandsworth or Ealing will tell you, it only takes one plane coming over at 4am to wake you up and ruin your day.

Heathrow is also trapped. Hemmed in by the M4, M25 and the A30, surrounded by thousands of residents, our premier airport has nowhere to go and can only cram more and more into what little space is available.

Add to this some truly idiotic planning decisions from the 1950s (Who decided to put the terminals in the middle of the airfield, so the main access had to be through a tiny tunnel?) and you have what is commonly regarded as one of Britain's greatest planning disasters.

Columnists

A home for the homeless

Kit Malthouse
December 15 2007 12:00AM

Rent a few flats, then let them free to those sleeping rough. It works in America, so why not here?

Every Christmas we see two warring camps loosing a volley of accusations at each other. The cause: what to do about rough sleepers. Make no mistake, this debate is a matter of life and death. Life expectancy on the street is as low as 42.

On one side stand some London boroughs and homeless charities who feel that the plentiful volunteer soup runs in the capital serve only to keep people on the streets. Opposing them are Ken Livingstone, the Mayor of London, and other charities, who argue that trying to make such soup runs illegal is cold-hearted and will lead to starvation. But both sides have missed the potential of one novel — some might say outrageous — solution tested in America.

Ten years ago the rough sleeping population in England was more than 2,000 a night. Since then a combination of government focus, lots of money and greater co-operation between boroughs and charities has caused these numbers to fall by two thirds. Most new arrivals today will spend fewer than four nights on the street, and it's vital to keep that number low. After living rough for more than a couple of weeks, habits are formed, addictions are acquired or exacerbated and rescue becomes even more difficult.

In London we are now down to the familiar hardcore cases who have refused so far to be helped. But these chronic rough sleepers are a tough group to help. The likes of Ed Mitchell, the former ITN presenter, driven on to the streets by huge debts is a rarity. Most are casualties of encounters with the State (60 per cent have either been in care, the Army, prison or all three), 70 per cent have mental health problems, 80 per cent have a drink or a drugs problem. Suspicious, paranoid and often irrational, they live a chaotic and brutal life, one 35 times more likely to end in suicide.

Getting them inside is a drawn-out process of contact, familiarisation, flattery and persuasion, the assumption being that the system that has worked well thus far should work for these remaining hard cases; we just need to work harder on them. This logic is flawed. Instead, we need a radical new approach.

Columnists

Let's get building underground

Kit Malthouse
February 26 2008 12:00AM

London has a treasury of unused tunnels. Why not use them, like other cities do?

Solutions to urban space problems usually involve a mere rearrangement of what can be seen. In London, the need to cram more and more into a fixed space demands "thinking big", which has become a euphemism for "thinking up". In the capital, as in other cities, developers are trying to fit as much as they can between the earth and the sky.

There are literally dozens of skyscraper projects planned or under way across London, most meeting with the eager approval of the mayor. But tall buildings in the wrong place can be a big problem, dwarfing the vernacular architecture, blocking light and historic views, and creating an inhuman cityscape of glass and steel. In fact Unesco is so alarmed by the possible transformation of London's skyline that there has been talk of putting the World Heritage sites of Westminster and the Tower of London on its danger list, alongside those in war zones such as Samarra in Iraq and the minaret at Jam in Afghanistan.

If we accept that there are problems with building up, perhaps it's time to consider looking down - not at our feet, but at the ground beneath. Maybe we should start thinking about what can be done with what we can't see.

Over the past few decades, London's flirtation with building below ground has been at best half-hearted; the capital is littered with abandoned underground caverns and tunnels built in more adventurous and ingenious times.

Unsurprisingly, it was the Victorians who first exploited the possibilities presented by what lies beneath. In 1860 they cut the first sod on what was to become the Hammersmith & City Line and, in the 80 years that followed until the Second World War, the bulk of the Tube we know today was created.

Too much time covering in the dark from the Luftwaffe made us uneasy, though, and gave us a sense that the soaring architecture of the New World held the key to urban Utopia. Since the war there has been a slow retreat from life below ground.

Travelling on the Piccadilly Line, you pass through Down Street station, abandoned in 1932, one of nearly 40 such "ghost" stations on the network. If you walk along Oxford Street, a private Tube line runs 70ft below you. Operated by the Royal Mail until 2003, it stretches for 23 miles from Whitechapel to Paddington and now sits empty. Kingsway has a tram tunnel running its length, similarly disused. There are bunkers, caverns and tunnels across the capital, all quietly waiting for their time to come again.

Other cities have of course been burrowing for years. In Canada, they face not a space problem but an issue with the weather: when it's minus 25C, how do you keep people shopping? By digging of course.

Underneath downtown Toronto lies the PATH, an underground city stretching for 16 miles. With four million square feet of space, it is equivalent in size to 1.5 Empire State Buildings, employs 5,000 people in 1,200 shops and connects more than 50 surface buildings with five underground stations. Montreal has the same, only bigger. Paris, of course, has the Forum des Halles, a huge underground shopping mall, with a park on the roof. Delhi, Moscow, Tokyo and many others all take the same approach.

Our short-sighted reluctance to go under problems rather than to concrete over them has cost us dearly in the past. In the early Nineties the English countryside was horribly scarred by the M3 ploughing a huge gash through Twyford Down - a beautiful part of Hampshire lost for ever for want of a little imagination.

In fact once you start to use that imagination and think about what could go underground, all sorts of crazy ideas pop into your head. We could, for instance, drop the dual carriageway that currently blights the north side of the Thames into a tunnel below, replacing it with a four-mile long riverside park from Blackfriars to Battersea Bridge. Bypassing Parliament Square at the same time would allow it to be pedestrianised on two sides.

Similarly a tunnel could take traffic from the Edgware Road under Hyde Park and the gardens of Buckingham Palace and allow it to emerge south of Victoria station, where most of it is heading in any event.

The entire Hyde Park Corner interchange could be dropped below ground, and the three great parks of Central London could be united. You could walk from Parliament Square to Queensway, about three miles, without crossing a road. Park Lane would be freed up for redevelopment, and a grand new public square could be created at Marble Arch.

Does this all sound like another madcap scheme? Well, tell that to the madrileños, who are just putting the finishing touches to Madrid Calle 30, a project that has dropped 35 miles of urban motorway into tunnels, replacing them with parks and housing in the space created. Or tell the Bostonians or Sydneysiders who have both completed extensive urban tunnel projects in the past decade.

It really isn't that crazy. Tunnelling technology is now remarkably advanced. New machines for boring can cope with all kinds of terrain, so work can take place underground with little disturbance. And it isn't as expensive as you think. You can get a nice three-mile tunnel running under Central London for the same price as an Olympic stadium.

According to the AA, driving in a tunnel is twice as safe as on the surface and there are no pedestrians or cyclists to get in your way. Emissions can be collected and new techniques can "scrub" them from the air, allowing all of us to breath a little easier.

Building ever upwards will change London's character irreversibly. Digging down would beautify it immeasurably, and create some of the space the city desperately needs.

Kit Malthouse is a businessman and former Tory councillor and is standing for the London Assembly in 2008

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Hobson's choice of stop and search

Although it's not something we do willingly, searching might prove effective in reducing teenage deaths in London



Kit Malthouse
guardian.co.uk, Tuesday 17 February 2009 10.30 GMT

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Anyone committed to democracy and civil liberties will have a visceral reaction to the notion of a police officer stopping an ordinary citizen in the street and ordering them to undergo a search. Those who are concerned about race and equality will also react badly, knowing that black people are 4.5 times more likely than white to be stopped by the Metropolitan police.

In the 12 months to December, considerably more than 1.2 million Londoners, including me, were stopped under various police powers. Even if only one in 10 were unhappy, they would outnumber the army if they decided to do something about it. Thankfully, though, almost every one of those people is concerned about crime as well, and so more often than not teeth are gritted, jaws are clenched and forms filled in.

Some though feel so strongly that they actively campaign against the police power to stop and search, including in the pages of the Guardian. Mark Thomas and Claudia Webbe have both written here of their doubts and fears. Assembly member Jenny Jones, the prominent Green party representative on the Metropolitan Police Authority, has similarly voiced her outrage.

When Boris Johnson and I were elected in May last year, we were faced with an appalling death toll in the capital, and it was rising. Each morning we would reach bleary-eyed for our BlackBerrys on the bedside table, praying that no teenager (or indeed anyone else) had been killed overnight. Our prayers have gone unheeded 18 times. At the end of one particularly bloody week in July, six people lay dead, four killed in one day. Horrifically, the trend seemed exponential, with teenage killings almost doubling to 26 in the space of four

years. At the rate we were going, we faced a number closer to 40 in 2008. Equally troubling was the weapon of choice: ordinary knives available in most kitchen drawers.

Operation Blunt 2 was launched in that context. Knife arches, search wands, and an increase in geographically targeted stop and search – often the most controversial kind – have resulted in 7,960 arrests and the recovery of 4,439 knives. The year 2008 ended with 28 teenagers dead, a terrible number, but many fewer than we had dreaded, or than the statisticians had predicted.

But success of stop and search is not measurable solely in numbers. What those who object to its use don't acknowledge is the fear that parents already feel, knowing their children might not make it home at night. They might object to their innocent son being stopped and searched. On the other hand, they know that a knife seized on the kerb outside their home is a knife that might have killed him. Faced with Hobson's choice, we opted for the lesser evil.

Boris Johnson has spoken powerfully and often about the need for long-term change in the culture that breeds this violence and for greater intervention at an early age to prevent it. In November he launched Time for Action, a set of targeted, innovative and practical projects to do just that. But they will take time, perhaps years, to take effect. Until then, the teenagers who are dying don't have the luxury of time.

Yes, we have to get stop and search right: it has to be done with respect and courtesy. The communities affected have to be fully informed and understand why our concern for them is more urgent.

Independent observers must attend often. Crucially, those police officers participating have to be properly trained and briefed, and understand that the public consent they need is based on their conduct of each and every encounter.

There has been a lot of touching wood at New Scotland Yard and City Hall over the last few months. In private and in public, we make no claims to success or cite "glimmers of hope", for fear of tempting fate. And as I write, one London teenager, Steven Lewis, lies dead from multiple stab wounds, a dreadful reminder of the challenge we all still face.

THE  TIMES

Muzzles are not enough: dogs are weapons

Kit Malthouse
November 2 2009 12:01AM

They terrorise estates across the land and their numbers are rocketing. We need a bold, humane approach to a serious problem

While all the talk at Westminster is of Lisbon, Legg and quantitative easing, on the streets of London and our other major cities much of the talk is of something else entirely. There is a new weapon in town: lethal, intimidating and yet openly carried, largely with impunity.

While an illegal gun will get you ten years inside, and a knife four years, there is a weapon that can tear off a man's arm but will get you only up to six months or, more likely, a small fine. More and more people are using their dogs as instruments of fear and attack and they are choosing certain types and breeds. It's not just the owners we must be concerned about; there is also something in the dogs that must be considered. These breeds are chosen for a reason.

Over the past few years, the proliferation of the "weapon dog" — American pit bulls and other bull breeds — has been prodigious. From 2002 to 2006, the Metropolitan Police picked up 43 weapon dogs. In 2008 they seized 719. This year they are on target to remove more than 1,000 animals from London's streets. Battersea Dogs Home reports that bull breeds account for nearly 50 per cent of its "inmates", a proportion that has doubled in the past five years. In England and Wales the number of prosecutions brought under the 1991 Dangerous Dogs Act has also more than doubled in the past 10 years, and the number of convictions has tripled. And on any given night there are hundreds of seized dogs in taxpayer-funded kennels, awaiting judgment.

Britain is not alone. In Denmark, the kennel club estimates that the number of these dogs has increased from 1,000 in 2002 to 20,000 today. So concerned are the Danes that dealing with this menace was a major issue in their party conference season. Many countries in recent years, including Germany and Canada, have recognised the rise of the fighting dog and introduced draconian legislation to stem it.

In the UK there is a consensus among people on the front line, from the RSPCA to the police and local councillors, calling for urgent action, not least because of the appalling animal welfare issues involved. Keeping an aggressive dog often involves

torturing it and, of course, fighting it. The RSPCA says its hospitals are "full to the brim" with weapon dogs that have been stabbed, burnt, beaten or injured in fights.

Various attempts to replace or amend the clearly ineffective 1991 Dangerous Dogs Act have been made. This year Lord Redesdale introduced a new Bill into Parliament. Needless to say, it was not allocated enough time to proceed. Westminster, it seems, is too busy to deal with an issue that blights estates and neighbourhoods across the land.

This is a difficult and emotive subject. The dog has a special place in our psyche and the "bull-type" in particular has deep cultural resonance. So it is no surprise that one of the biggest problems the police face is persuading a magistrate that Satan, the eager doggy wagging its tail while a tearful family sobs in the gallery, is a canine thug, forcing people to cross the road and cantering round the park attacking other dogs and terrifying kids.

Indeed, the assumption most people make when trying to tackle this issue is that these dogs are innocent animals. It's not the dogs that are aggressive, it's the owners who make them a weapon, goes the thinking. This approach means that all attempts to amend or replace the Dangerous Dogs Act have focused on the responsibilities and punishment of owners. They have dispensed with the idea of banned breeds or types.

Clearly, owners are part of the solution: they are in possession of a weapon and should be treated as such. But while welcome and vital, this would still miss an important point: certain types of dogs are inherently more aggressive than other. At the top of the list are bull breeds, developed for one purpose: to attack and fight.

Bull terriers were bred as weapons, to duel or bait with, for their owner's entertainment and status, and only once we recognise their atavistic instincts, as those who train them to fight do, can we start to frame legislation that may have a lasting effect. As well as punishing owners appropriately for use of this weapon, we should be bolder about removing it from circulation altogether.

In Ontario, that is what has happened. The provincial government produced a law that banned all bull breeds and derivatives, including pitbulls and the Staffordshire bull terrier. All such existing dogs had to be registered, neutered and muzzled, leading to the bull-types dying out and owners learning to love the labrador or pug. The result? A huge fall in the number of dog-related injuries and incidents. This approach manages to be both humane to those who have a dog of this type and draws a line under the problem.

Serious penalties will make dog owners think twice, but surely it is time for us to look to our Commonwealth cousins and find a way gently to phase out the canine weapons that terrorise the streets of Peckham, Toxteth and Moss Side.

Kit Malthouse is a member of the London Assembly and Deputy Mayor for Policing in London

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THE  TIMES

Away with tax! Abolish the lot (except one)

Kit Malthouse
April 6 2010 12:01AM

No more income tax, corporation tax and tedious debate: just put on a hefty VAT

And so the great election auction has begun: which of the parties will charge us the most, and which can perform the best tax card trick. Politicians will spend the next few weeks arguing endlessly about how much tax to charge, but hardly a word will be said about the method of extraction from your wallet or purse. Rather than arguing about "how much?" we should think about "how?".

Because in the end, all tax, whatever it's called, comes out of that increasingly battered wallet or purse. Companies, for instance, don't actually pay tax, you pay it for them when you buy their goods or services; they just price in tax as another overhead. All that national insurance, corporation tax and even the income tax of their employees forms part of the price of everything you buy, with VAT on top.

So if all taxes, including VAT, form part of the price of the stuff we buy, why do we bother to charge and collect them separately? What would happen if we were to lump everything together, phase out all taxes and just charge higher VAT? Well, several things.

First, everyone would receive their income gross. No more PAYE or self-assessment and, of course, no further need for the Inland Revenue. All that money and all those people currently wasted on arguing about the dozens of different taxes would be redeployed. Billions of pounds and thousands of people, tax collectors (£5 billion) and accountants (at least another £5 billion) liberated for investment and production. Tax would be collected painlessly in small increments if and when you buy stuff.

Second, underlying prices would fall. In brave new corporate Britain, business taxes would no longer feature, so business could drop its prices even further and still maintain their return on capital. Don't forget they wouldn't be shouldering the huge cost of dealing with the Inland Revenue, so that saving could go to reducing prices too. The gross price increase caused by a rise in the VAT rate would be more than offset by the savings made, and in a competitive economy these savings would be passed on to the consumer.

Third, a huge wave of international capital would crash over Britain. Corporations across the globe, fed up with having to skulk in Liechtenstein and Cayman, would

joyfully relocate to the UK, bringing with them even more jobs and investment. Ask the Irish, who dropped their corporation tax rate to 12.5 per cent, and became a magnet for business.

Finally, politicians would be unable to hide behind the current Byzantine system. The Chancellor sets an annual VAT rate, and that's it. Transparent, honest, simple and easy to understand. In other words, politically terrifying.

But surely VAT is a regressive tax that falls unfairly on the poorest? Not necessarily. Certain essential items that are already VAT-free — food, children's clothes, *The Times* — could remain so, and would actually fall in price. Those with higher consumption, including the infamous non-doms, would pay more tax (although no one would need to be a non-dom, of course). Go out and buy a Bentley or a Lear Jet and you'll make a big contribution to the Exchequer. But if you scrimp and save you will pay hardly any tax — what better incentive to cut up the credit card and open a deposit account?

“Ah, but what about the cash economy? Wouldn't it boom?” you ask. Good point, but here's the thing: cash is dying. Last year Marks & Spencer, along with others, stopped accepting cheques. Within my lifetime I expect them to stop accepting cash too. Cash is dirty, expensive to handle, hard to count accurately and easy to steal. Lots of businesses already exist without it. Easyjet, Amazon, iTunes: none of them handles a note or coin.

In London, public transport is now 95 per cent cashless, as use of the Oyster smartcard spreads, and there are plans afoot to use the same technology for small payments in shops. Westminster Council has rolled out totally cashless parking across the centre of the capital. Online banking is now used by close to 70 per cent of UK account holders. Only 16 per cent of 16 to 24-year-olds ever go into a bank branch.

Whichever way you look at it, cash is on the way out, and this means an indirect, universal sales tax could be on the way in, as a replacement for all direct taxes. The amount of tax collected may well be the same, but the big benefit would be an end to the mindless game of cat and mouse among politicians, corporate Britain, the Inland Revenue and the long-suffering public.

Kit Malthouse is deputy mayor for policing in London and a Conservative member of the London Assembly

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THE TIMES**The South Dakota cure for our drink problem**

Kit Malthouse

Last updated August 2 2010 12:01AM

In one US state, alcohol offenders must stay sober or face a day in the cells. It's simple, cheap and effective

We have a drink problem in this country. In a fit of bourgeois Dordogne-villa, Barcelona-weekend madness Tony Blair took the cork out of the bottle and unleashed 24-hour drinking on a population that already had a big issue with alcohol-fuelled crime. His "café culture" is now a £20 billion violence-and-injury nightmare for the police and the health service.

Theresa May, the Home Secretary, seems, thankfully, about to try to put the vodka back in the bottle by tightening the licensing regime. But even if she succeeds, we will be left with a country where heavy alcohol consumption is common and drunks continue to offend.

At the same time, Kenneth Clarke, the Justice Secretary, is sensibly recognising that while prison may have a short-term effect on crime, it can be at the cost of creating much more deep-seated social problems. Yet prison inmates are largely young and inside for violence, drugs or booze and combinations thereof.

We have been here before. In the early 1980s Britain's prison population was approximately 44,000, about half what it is today. The Home Secretary at the time, William Whitelaw, thought the number "dangerously high". He was particularly concerned about a growing "yob culture" (sound familiar?).

His politically attractive answer to the problem was announced in the 1979 Conservative manifesto as a new, alliterative approach to penal policy — the short (cheap) sharp (penal) shock (tough). Politicians love policies that trip off the tongue but, like many, Whitelaw's was a disaster.

Four centres were set up where young men were subjected to a military-style "boot camp". The project was both expensive and ineffective, and had no impact on offending rates. In fact the centres' main achievement was to turn out superfit young criminals who could easily outrun any pursuing copper.

Nonetheless, most practitioners in the crime game will tell you that Whitelaw's instincts were right. For punishment to be effective in deterring crime and changing behaviour, it must be swift, certain and corrective.

Now there isn't much that we can learn about penal policy from our American cousins, but in a sleepy corner of South Dakota, a quiet revolution has taken place that might give us the answer to the problem of booze and the violence to which it often leads.

Twenty years ago Larry Long, the chief prosecutor of Bennett County, South Dakota, had a problem not dissimilar to our own — a population with little work and a terrible drink habit. Bordered on three sides by Native American reservations, with a density of only three people per square mile, it seemed that there was little else to do apart from drinking, driving and beating each other up. He found himself locking up the same people again and again, with little effect. Things had to change. The county needed a system that was tough, cheaper than incarceration, and that would actually change behaviour.

So instead of asking his local judge to lock people up, Long requested something more imaginative. People convicted of drink-driving and domestic violence were required to attend their local police station twice a day to be tested for alcohol consumption. Effectively their permanent sobriety was both punishment and cure, and Long was willing to undertake intensive monitoring and enforcement to ensure compliance.

If offenders passed the daily tests they remained free. If they failed they were marched across the hall straight into a jail cell for 24 hours. No-shows were tracked down and subjected to the same treatment. On release the next day, the testing regime would resume. Crucially the sanction was immediate and certain — straight into the cells, no argument, no court, no lawyers. And to cap it all, offenders were compelled to pay for their own testing rather than being fined. As well as keeping enforcement costs down, this was the money that they would otherwise have spent on hooch.

The results were startling. Something happened in the minds of hardened alcoholics when they were focused twice a day on the choice between booze and freedom. In more than 90 per cent of cases they chose freedom. Drink-driving rates fell drastically. Abused wives were left in peace. And there were other benefits: offenders were able to maintain employment and stay among their families. Driving on the county roads became less of a game of Russian roulette. But crucially — and to the eternal gratitude of the taxpayer — the prison population fell as hardcore repeat offenders stayed on the wagon.

News of the scheme spread. In 2004 the state governor noticed, and three further counties designated as pilots achieved similarly impressive results. In 2007 the state legislature unanimously approved the project for state-wide use and extended it to other offences, including drug-testing and as a condition of children staying in problem homes. Parole boards were allowed to impose testing as a condition of early release from prison.

The figures speak for themselves. Since 2005 nearly 16,000 people have been placed on the programme and been tested 3.1 million times. The pass rate is 99.3 per cent. Jail populations have fallen across the state, in the two largest counties by more than 100 people a day, saving millions. And let's not forget that the project is largely self-financing, as offenders have to pay for their own testing.

In the UK a similar scheme would be relatively easy to establish, given our policing structure. In London, for instance, we have safer neighbourhood policing teams covering the entire capital. The twice-daily testing regime could form part of their offender-management duties. With a plethora of custody suites and prisons across the city, swift and certain incarceration could be achieved. I know that police would much rather spend their time preventing offending during the day than arresting violent young men at night.

Given that the new Government wants to cut policing and prison costs, and at the same time tackle alcohol-related crime, insisting on self-financing, compulsory sobriety from offenders may be the only path to a vomit and blood-free high street on a Sunday morning.

Kit Malthouse is deputy mayor for policing in London and a member of the London Assembly

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THE TIMES

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Chief constables' 'extreme power' should be curbed, says Tory

Kit Malthouse, the deputy mayor of London, said "invisible and toothless" authorities had not rectified "dysfunctional" policing
Paul Rogers for The Times

Sean O'Neill Crime Editor
August 5 2010 12:01AM

Chief constables have become "mini-governors" who control "standing armies" and have "extreme powers" that need to be curbed, one of the Conservatives' most influential voices on policing has told *The Times*.

Kit Malthouse, London's deputy mayor for policing, said that the police service required an injection of democracy in the form of elected commissioners who could "wield the rod against these powerful individuals".

Mr Malthouse, who chairs the Metropolitan Police Authority and was instrumental in ousting Sir Ian, now Lord, Blair as head of Scotland Yard, said the public had "become uncomfortable with the police".

He praised the Government's proposals for police and crime commissioners to replace "toothless and invisible" police authorities. Last month Theresa May, the Home Secretary, outlined plans to give new commissioners powers to set police budgets, determine priorities and hire and fire chief constables. Senior officers would also have to appear in US-style "confirmation hearings" before local panels.

Sir Hugh Orde, president of the Association of Chief Police Officers, has expressed concerns about politicisation that might affect the ability of chiefs to make decisions. But Mr Malthouse said that the Government's plans would help to rectify the "dysfunctional" structure of policing. "The public want someone who is accountable, so chief constables have become public figures — and yet they're not allowed to debate or be debated with," he said.

"They are incredibly powerful individuals. Each one controls a standing army, they have extreme powers to incarcerate you and me and to use force against us when they see fit. Yet none of their beliefs, prejudices or views that may affect their policing style are ever examined in a public arena."

He cited James Anderton, who was chief constable of Greater Manchester for 16 years, as an example of how things could go wrong. Mr Malthouse, 43, said: "He was virulently antihomosexual and regarded himself as a fundamentalist Christian. That affected his policing style, it affected the people of Greater Manchester and I think the people of Greater Manchester should have a say in that."

The current system of police authorities — appointed bodies of councillors and community representatives — had failed repeatedly when police chiefs courted controversy, he claimed.

Mr Malthouse said: "The great example is Ian Blair. There was a commissioner of the Metropolitan Police who got himself into some terrible controversies. The police authority at the time tried to take a stronger line but were ineffectual. Elsewhere there are lots of chief constables who fall out with their police authorities and carry on regardless."

He added: "I get concerned about the governance structure around these very powerful individuals. The truth is that in many parts of the country, because of the inability and the lack of tools available to police authorities, chief constables have become minigovernors of their own areas. A chief is in a very powerful position, they're in a command organisation that looks to them entirely and jumps at their every move. I'm sure there's a huge amount of ego and status involved that could — I'm not saying it has — breed somebody who gives less thought to the niceties of democracy and freedom and liberalism in this country than otherwise might be the case."

Mr Malthouse has courted controversy before, claiming that he had his "hand on the tiller" at Scotland Yard. He said, however, that after an "unsettled" period



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THE  TIMES**We're losing the race for the car of the future**

Kit Malthouse



Last updated September 3 2010 12:01AM

There's a better alternative to oil than batteries. And Germany is way ahead in developing it

Fantastic news: by 2015 you will be able to buy a reasonably priced family car that runs entirely on hydrogen. It will look normal, be swift and silent, have a range of about 270 miles and emit only water. Its fuel is plentiful and will generate power with a small fuel cell, in which a chemical reaction produces electricity. Nasty 19th-century internal combustion will be out; pure 21st-century electrochemistry in.

The only hitch is that you will have to be German or Japanese to buy one. Yet again the UK is about to have its backside whipped in the race for the future. We discovered it and worked on it for years, but choked when it came to putting proper money on the table.

We have been here before. For years after Alan Turing developed the machine that would see him crowned the father of computer science, we competed well with the Americans. As usual, though, it was a garden-shed and university-lab affair — amateurs and academics pursuing their own obsessions. Industry and government looked on benignly and did little. Eventually some self-propelled pioneers emerged, with Clive Sinclair and Chris Curry in the forefront, the latter starting Acorn (the "British Apple", which briefly dominated the educational market in the 1980s).

Then it all went pear-shaped. The Americans and Japanese pulled ahead. They saw it clearly, while most of us didn't — the future, that is. Did we care? Of course not, house prices were rising.

Now we are again in the middle of a similar pursuit, this time for the future of world energy. The Germans are already way out in front. Where are the British? About to be lapped.

Teutonic resolve is especially marked in one of the most competitive parts of the energy race: the global car market. Everyone sane (even Jeremy Clarkson) recognises that the internal combustion engine must be phased out. The more prescient carmakers and governments have quietly invested billions in developing alternatives.

Electric propulsion is, of course, the solution. But there is a divide about how to store and release the power: battery or hydrogen?

With a battery, you charge it up and off you go. Perfect for town, where short, frequent journeys are the norm. But there is a teeny problem: instant refuelling. Battery technology is advancing and recharging time falling substantially. But the imminent mass-production electric cars take between six and ten hours to charge. Given a high enough voltage, this could come down to as little as ten minutes. But you need industrial-scale power supplies.

For the hydrogen car this is not a problem; you fill up exactly as you do with a petrol car. Don't get me wrong, there are problems with hydrogen too. The main one is that it is pretty inefficient — it takes more energy to produce than it produces as fuel. But if we use renewable energy to make the hydrogen in the first place, is this still an issue? Wind, wave, biomass can all be used to produce clean hydrogen. Bank-busting, ash-spewing Iceland has started to harness all that free geothermal power, aiming to be a hydrogen Saudi Arabia by 2060.

"But what about the Hindenberg?" Well, the one thing you can relax about is safety. That airship probably blew up in 1937 because it had been coated with lacquer made from rocket fuel. Anyway hydrogen is less flammable than petrol, and when it does ignite it doesn't hang around. Being lighter than air, it burns and disperses quickly.

The Germans are going for hydrogen in a big way. The Federal Government is spending €2 billion installing a refuelling network across the country, and their car manufacturers have agreed to start mass production of fuel cell vehicles in 2015. The Japanese are not far behind, and the Californians are a close third, enthusiastically propelled by Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, a hydrogen visionary.

The British response has been feeble. Despite having a large vehicle manufacturing sector, leading the world in Formula One engineering, and having globally renowned hydrogen and fuel cell research labs, we have done nearly nothing.

There are some pockets of activity. In London (I declare an interest) we are building six hydrogen refuelling stations and aim to have 120 vehicles in operation for 2012. We will have five hydrogen buses in the capital this autumn. And there are pioneering British companies in the field. Intelligent Energy, based in the Midlands, produced the world's first hydrogen black cab this year. As usual,

We're losing the race for the car of the future | The Times

academics and amateurs are bravely stepping forward, but compare Germans, we look like Dad's Army.

Chris Huhne, the Energy Secretary, has promised an energy policy direction and purpose". He has yet to mention hydrogen, but let's Government will repatriate a technology that we have almost allowed through our fingers.

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