

WHOM TO KNOW Fred Cerullo

■ Actor, lawyer and New York planning commissioner explains the pressures on the Big Apple's developments

W e would cry as kids when our father lifted us across the blood in the Meatpacking District," says Fred Cerullo, on a flying visit to London last week.

Now New York's Meatpacking District is one of the trendiest places in town and a beacon for a new type of development there. The Highline regeneration project, an elevated path on former train tracks, runs for 20 blocks through Midtown. It is an exemplar of how community "advocates" can promote schemes and, perhaps, of how localism and the "big society" could actually be made to work in UK property.

Cerullo, New York planning commissioner, member of the Bar Council and TV actor, was in London last Wednesday to speak at the inaugural Midtown Business Club annual dinner, at the Savoy.

The next day, at a lunch hosted by London Midtown agent Farebrother, Cerullo explained New York's development system in detail to guests from Hines, Transport for London and the Greater London Authority.

In New York, Mayor Bloomberg has the final say over development. Only the courts can overrule him,

and Cerullo found the concept of intervention at a national or federal level bizarre. The New York City Planning Commission, where Cerullo is a commissioner, sits beneath the mayor.

Under that is an administration of five borough offices: Manhattan, Staten Island, Brooklyn, Queens and the Bronx. Developers liaise mainly with the administration, but also have to win over powerful community boards that represent 120,000 to 130,000 people.

Cerullo believes New York's proudest planning achievement has been huge swathes of "rezoning" across the city, which dictates planning policy in an area.

"We saw many small-time developers abusing the land use structure in the city. The last significant rezoning had been done in 1961.

"No one else had gone back to

look at the built character. You also had developers buying one house at the end of a block and creating developments out of character with what those areas had become over the last 30 or 40 years."

Now, almost all of New York has been rezoned, sometimes up-zoned for renewal and sometimes down-zoned for public space. Cerullo can name three main pressures on planning in New York:

Density People always think projects are too big

Parking People do not want it in schemes,

because the city aims to cut down on car use

Affordable housing People will always want more.

"Communities may not be happy with everything," he says, "but they get the point. If they don't, they go to court!"

Both New York and London are wrestling how to get development going in a recession in a way that pleases everyone. The PlaNYC strategy for a greener, greater New York in 2030 is well worth a look.

