

Autumn 2001 Newsletter

Message from the Chairman

Please note that the newsletters contain un-edited extracts which have not been updated

REPORT OF THE 32nd AGM HELD AT EALING TOWN HALL ON 5 APRIL 2001

The Chairman, Bob Gurd, reported that the Millennium Year had been marked by an interesting variety of activity and that he looked forward to a range of events over the Summer and Autumn 2001.

The Society's Annual Award Scheme last year had attracted a strong and varied field of entries, and awards were made reflecting the two main concerns of the Society, to Willow Tree School, Northolt, recognising high quality architectural innovation that created a building to accommodate 21st century teaching methods, and to the new cloister at Ealing Abbey recognising high quality design and craftsmanship in line with the traditional style of the building. In addition, Ellen Wilkinson School was commended for the community effort by students and staff in designing and creating a Japanese garden.

The Society had again co-operated with the borough in promoting Open House Weekend in September, and would be assisting with this year's event on 22/23 September.

The Society's major involvement had continued to be in the Ealing Town Centre Forum where Brian Harris and Corinne Templer had served on the Board. They had worked very hard to ensure priority for the preservation of noteworthy shopping parades and individual buildings, to the enhancement of green spaces, the upgrading of the streetscape, increased priority for pedestrians and cyclists, and the improvement of public transport. A full consultation was expected to take place in the Autumn, covering both Ealing Broadway and West Ealing.

Responses to planning applications had occupied much of the time of the Environment Sub-Committee, notably the proposals for the redevelopment of Ealing Studios. In general it had favoured the aim to create employment at the centre of Ealing which carried on the traditional media production activities. It welcomed retention of at least some of the original purpose-built sound studios designed by Robert Atkinson, and the White House (which have since been listed) but had expressed concern about traffic management around Ealing Green and the need to improve the view from Walpole Park.

It proposed that the Council should prepare a planning brief for the area from the Studios to Pitshanger Manor to provide a framework for future development proposals.

The Society had continued to be closely involved in the Council's consultative arrangements, which had remained virtually the same despite the reform of the Council's organisation. Thus the Society continued to participate in various Advisory Committees, on transport, open spaces, Local Agenda 21, and on the Conservation Area Advisory Committees.

The Communications sub-committee had been responsible for improvements to the newsletter, under the editorship of John Templeton, the organisation of meetings and events by Margaret Gold, and the development of the Society's website.

Externally the Society had continued its membership of the London Forum of Civic and Amenity Societies, and Brian Harris had reported a very active year engaging with the policy development of the Mayor of London and the Greater London Authority.

RETIREMENT OF MICHAEL BARNES

At the AGM Bob Gurd announced that Michael Barnes, a founder member and one-time Chairman of Ealing Civic Society, had decided to stand down from the Executive Committee. Corinne Templer made a presentation to Michael and the essence of her talk is given below:

Michael had been a professional surveyor for the Church Commissioners but had found time to start the society in the late 1960's and to bring to it much needed expertise and knowledge. Behind the scenes he helped forge the policies and strategies which very quickly gained the Society credibility and respect, not only amongst its members and the councillors and officers of the London Borough of Ealing but also the then rather more responsible local press. He emerged into the greater public arena in the 1976 public inquiry into the redevelopment of Ealing Town Centre, which took another year to prepare.

Michael's contribution was to present evidence on the financial viability of the scheme, the Society's policy of rehabilitation rather than destruction of over 500 homes, and the generally adverse effect on the environment. The society had two other experts presenting its case, Richard Caws on the retail implications and Eric Arnold on the proposed dual carriageway relief road along Mattock Lane and on traffic implications. It was a formidable opposition, and in the final report on the Inquiry, in May 1978, the Inspector refused every single item of the scheme and made a point of reporting that 'the objectors produced authoritative arguments in depth and expressed strong, sustained opposition to the scheme in its present form'.

It didn't end there ! The Society joined other groups in pressing for something better and Michael was deeply involved in the preparation of a new development brief and, eventually, in discussions with the architects who were appointed. When the new Ealing Broadway Centre was finally opened by the Queen in 1985, Michael felt as much pride on behalf of the Society as the rest of us did. And Michael had continued to play an important role on the Committee for a further fifteen years !

Corinne Templer then presented Michael with a cheque, with the warmest and most heartfelt thanks from all the past, present and future members of Ealing Civic Society.

TREASURER WANTED!

Corinne Templer writes:

After quite some years I'd very much like to retire and 'spend more time with...' so please could we have a volunteer ? The job is a doddle- approximately an hour a month on the database, Executive Committee meetings every other month, and preparation of accounts for audit. I am more than happy to help, assist and instruct the new incumbent so please help the Society by offering your services to:

Brian Harris

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VISIT TO CHICHESTER

On Sunday 17 June a party from the Society visited the cathedral city of Chichester, as guests of the Chichester Society. After a pleasant coach drive through beautiful countryside the party were dropped off in the heart of the city in good time for a wander round and a light lunch before assembling at the historic Market Cross (built exactly 500 years ago) to be welcomed by the Secretary and members of the Chichester Society.

Bob Gurd made it clear that the Ealing visitors were not interested in a traditional guided tour round the Roman Walls. Challenge and controversy had always been food and drink to both societies, so it was hardly surprising that we demanded to learn about the current issues facing our Chichester hosts.

First stop was to examine the sensitive restoration of an Elizabethan pub, the Punch House, and adjoining shop containing an Elizabethan plaster ceiling, both of which were badly damaged by fire in 2000. Next, the principles of elevational treatment of the proposed extension of the Grade I Queen Anne Pallant House were discussed at great length, and there was unanimous criticism of the latest design for an extension of this art gallery by the architect of the British Library, who had promised to donate his private art collection provided he obtained the commission to design the extension. (We have since heard that planning permission has been given !)

The half-completed extension to the 18th century East Pallant House, the District Council's offices, was viewed with interest, and after a quick peep into the early 19th century redundant St. John's Chapel, fortuitously holding an open day, and a look at the 19th century Shippams' paste factory, soon to be the subject of development proposals, the party descended on the New Park Road development site, just outside the City Walls. We expressed amazement at the insensitivity of the Council's nominated developers for this sensitive site, adjacent to the Roman Walls, and to the fact that the District Council had never employed a conservation officer, despite a generous offer of financial support from English Heritage.

The party then walked along the north-east arc of the City Walls, admiring the terraces of cottages which would have been swept away in the 1970's a dual carriageway ring road had the Chichester Society not taken action.

The interesting afternoon drew to a close over an enjoyable cream tea at the Army & Navy's restaurant, and the visitors expressed a warm welcome to the Chichester Society to pay a return visit to Ealing on a future occasion.

DEVELOPING A STRATEGY FOR EALING TOWN CENTRE

The Society was very pleased to have a presentation on the Strategy from representatives of the Ealing Town Centre Partnership and to have had the opportunity to participate in the evolution of the draft strategy through the membership of one of its officers on the partnership Board and Strategy group.

A large majority of the 40 members attending the presentation at Ealing Town Hall on 18 June indicated their support for the incremental approach favoured in the document. They accepted the case made for substantial renewal and development over the next decade whilst generally rejecting the creation of a large new shopping mall on the entire Dickens Yard/Longfield site. The incremental approach has the advantage that the scale of development can be adjusted in the light of economic and demographic change.

A central concern of the Society is that a mixture of land and building uses must be integral to the development. Retailing, offices, hotels and commercial leisure facilities are no doubt financially key to attracting private capital but it is also vital to achieve additional community facilities of high quality. A performing arts centre (which the Society has been promoting with Ealing Arts), a linked conference centre and a much enhanced public library together with a public leisure centre including swimming pools, gymnasias and indoor courts, should be key elements.

In the light of the designation of Ealing as a Metropolitan Centre in the draft GLA spatial strategy 'A London Plan', it is imperative that such public facilities be located within easy

walking distance of Ealing Broadway transport interchange.

STREET-LIGHTING EXPERIMENTS

Keep an eye on two recent initiatives by the Council on street lighting in which the Society is involved.

First, an experimental scheme in Haven Lane, W5, where several types of lighting (high pressure sodium and metal halide, orange/white and white in colour respectively) are currently the subject of trials. Also the existing columns have been painted black as a change from the usual brown/cream.

Secondly an experimental replacement 'swan neck' and new style lantern on the former gas column at the junction of Ealing Common/Grange Road, W5 (see below), to assess feasibility for replacement of low pressure sodium lanterns currently being employed.

Let us have your views on these schemes !

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