

Spring 2004 Newsletter

Chairman's report

Introduction

Looking back over 2003, the year was again dominated by the Tram and the work of the Ealing Centre Partnership. There was also news on the design initiative announced by Stephen Sears at the awards ceremony last October.

Consultation on the tram was suspended in the autumn of last year when Transport for London (TfL) decided to reassess its projects in the light of the funding crisis caused by lower than expected revenues from the Congestion Charge. The Mayor decided at the end of last year to move forward with work on the tram and a further round of local consultation, in which the Society is involved, was started and is due to be completed in the spring. Full public consultation will only start after the mayoral election in May. Only after then will the Mayor decide whether to proceed. A final decision will not be taken until after a public inquiry in 2005. TfL have carried out work on a number of options for those areas in the Borough where the width of the Uxbridge Road means that there is insufficient room for both tram tracks and two lanes of traffic: in Southall, Hanwell, West and Central Ealing and Acton. They have ruled out some expensive options - for example, a tunnel through Ealing Broadway - and seem to be moving towards a range of preferred solutions which either envisage shared running of the tram with traffic or diversion of one lane of traffic from the Uxbridge Road. They do not seem to favour schemes which would involve extensive diversion of the track itself. The resultant diversion of at least one carriageway on to neighbouring existing or possibly new roads, particularly near Ealing Broadway, could have a significant environmental impact upon Haven Green and its residents.

Ealing Centre Partnership

The Partnership has been considering the issues arising from their decision last year to apply for pilot Business Improvement District status. Although the government's legislation has still not reached the statute book, the Partnership has been making preparations for a poll of businesses in the centre of Ealing in 2005. A business case prepared last year showed that around Â£300k could be raised from a 1% levy on businesses which would be used for various environmental improvements. These would include removal of graffiti, street cleaning and upgrading street furniture which is

currently only carried out to a very basic level by the Council. The Partnership will have a major task on its hands persuading businesses in Ealing Centre to pay for these services but it hopes that they will appreciate that an improved environment will not only benefit local residents but also local businesses by increasing the number of people who wish to shop in Ealing.

Design initiatives

Some of you will have heard Cllr Stephen Sears announce the Council's new initiatives to promote design in Ealing, in close partnership with the Civic Society. One of the fruits of this initiative was our involvement in the first session of the Urban Design Panel which considered some major planning issues in the Borough: South Acton estate improvements and redevelopment of Daniels, West Ealing. Three architects (two from outside Ealing) and I sat on the panel. We were pleasantly surprised that our views on the proposals were remarkably similar. It remains to be seen whether the applicants will take any notice of our opinions! We hope that the next meeting will look at the various development proposals in Acton in which we take a close interest. At the Society's initiative, Acton Town Hall and Library were listed at the end of last year as buildings of historical and architectural interest. We have suggested that English Heritage should undertake a study of the centre with a view to recommending which of the important buildings and open spaces should be retained and improved and which could benefit from redevelopment. It would also look at the relationship between the town centre and the South Acton estate. This work should prove to be an exciting initiative and would form part of the Society's involvement in the Civic Trust Pathfinder projects.

Robert Gurd, Chairman

Civic Society Annual Awards 2003

The 2003 Annual Awards ceremony was held on the 21 October at Ealing Town Hall. The six nominations covered a broad spectrum of building development in the borough: two refurbished pubs (a possible sign of the times!); new children's playgrounds in Acton; a refurbished arts and crafts house in Ealing; a new bungalow development in Acton; and perhaps uniquely the new Sikh temple in Southall. The entries were judged by local architects John Scott and Jan Bienkowski together with landscape designer Janet Anderson. At the ceremony, Jan Bienkowski gave a short presentation of the panel's findings, which were complimentary of all the nominations. Of the public houses, the Red Lion in St Mary's Road Ealing and the Rocket in Churchfield Road Acton, the judges were impressed by the former's delicacy of approach in maintaining the local character and history of the building; whilst the Rocket in its new form as a "gastro pub" provided a welcome improvement to the amenities of the area. The judges complimented the Council on the children's playgrounds at the North Acton and Springfields Playing Fields in Acton for their safety, variety, colour and fun. At 17 Mount Avenue Ealing the judges found the owners had been both resourceful and sensitive to what was more of a rescue job than a development.

The judges were however unanimous in their view that the Highly Commended Award this year should go to the Gurdwara Temple in Havelock Road Southall and the Commended Award should go to the Farnell Place bungalow development in Pierrepont Road, Acton. The judges described the Gurdwara as a unique building and a magnificent achievement for Ealing in general and the Sikh community in particular. Of particular note was the use of natural light which added a spiritual dimension and prevents what is a monumental structure from being too oppressive. The Temple was also the 'people's choice', coming top of the online vote conducted by the Ealing Times. The judges found Farnell Place to be an adventurous design, providing light and spacious homes unusual in a backland development. Councillor Stephen Sears, Cabinet member with special responsibility for Planning and Transport and 'Urban Design Champion' presented the prizes. In his talk, Councillor Sears outlined his personal enthusiasm for good public design 'to lift the spirits' and commended the Society for its awards initiative of which the Council was wholly supportive. The Urban Design Action Plan demonstrated the Council's commitment to this key area and the Council wished to have close consultation with the Civic Society in developing this further.

Ealing's Replacement UDP

Judy Harris reflects on the inspector's report

The Inspector's report on objections to the replacement urban development plan is now available and the Council response was considered at the UDP Cabinet Committee in March. Changes to the New Plan for the Environment will be placed on deposit for 6 weeks for public comment from May 7 at Perceval House. Nearly 100 planning briefs relating to particular sites which may be near to you and Supplementary Planning Guidance on over 20 topics will also be available for comment. Some responses to our objections to the plan are disappointing and many concerns about format and ambiguity have been rejected. Changes proposed by the Inspector include the loss of 2 sites in the Brent River Park but the good news is that Twyford Sports Ground W3 has been designated as Community Open Space. Unfortunately he does not recommend strengthening the policy on Locally Listed Buildings for which the Society surveyed the borough to help the Council update their list. On Conservation Areas he leaves designation to the Council but said he 'was somewhat surprised, by the strength, extent and eloquence of the objections to the current position' ... 'the lack of positive action to date in respect of implementation'; and he 'expects a commitment to the necessary resources to fulfil all relevant statutory duties in relation to existing, extended or new conservation areas.'

On the street where you live?

In this occasional series on Ealing street names Paul Fitzmaurice describes the little known Steel family of Northfields whose development of the area resulted in many of the street names we know today

Up until the twentieth century the district we now know as Northfields was virtually all fields with a muddy track called Northfield Lane joining the hamlets of Little Ealing and Ealing Dean (or West Ealing). It formed part of the ancient Manor of Coldhall and for centuries was devoted to arable farming and latterly market gardens. During the course of the 19th century the Steel family came to lease much of the area as market gardeners.

The end of the 19th century saw a dramatic increase in Ealing's population largely occasioned by improved public transport to London – the Metropolitan District Railway to Ealing and Hounslow and of course the coming of the trams along the Uxbridge Road in 1901. Mindful of the opportunities this afforded them, the Steel family began to buy up the land occupied by their market gardens and entered into building development. Among the landowners they brought from were Marder and Loveday resulting in today's street names and latterly parts of the larger Elers estate (of which Carew was a family name).

The Steel market gardening association is apparent in the South Marder estate names of Bramley, Wellington and Julien roads – all types of apple trees and a little further north Hessel Road, a pear tree. It is quite probable that these fruit trees were grown in the Steel market gardens. Another market gardener at this time further north round the Uxbridge Road was Charles Lee & Son – hence Leeland Road and Terrace.

The most prominent of the Steel family was Charles Steel (1838 – 1911) who led a very active life, travelling widely seeking specimens for his market gardens. He even got as far afield as Australia and seemed to have a particular affinity for that country. This accounts for the number of Australian road names in the West Ealing area just south of the Uxbridge Road – Sydney, Adelaide and Brisbane roads together with Melbourne Avenue. These were known collectively as the St Kilda estate – St Kilda itself being a suburb of Melbourne. Charles Steel was described as a strong Conservative and represented that party on Ealing Council when it became a municipal borough in 1901. When road names were required for the Marder estate various contemporary Victorian conservative politicians of that time must have sprung to mind – Balfour, Chamberlain and Salisbury roads.

Despite all these associations the only tangible memory of the Steel family is their fruit-packing warehouse which still stands on the corner of Northcroft and Northfield Road. Having served as a warehouse for the old John Sanders shop it is now listed and remains in residential and commercial use.

Licensing Act

Jim McLaughlin considers the effects of the new Act on Ealing

If the problems on our own streets are not enough the chilling scenes shown in the occasional series on BBC1 TV Drunk and Dangerous give rise to sober reflection on the possible results of the new Licensing Act. Partly to simplify the complex licensing laws and partly in an attempt to curtail binge drinking this Act, made law in 2003, abolishes the concept of defined opening times. It also removes the duty of issuing liquor licences from the local Justices and makes it the responsibility of councils including the London Boroughs. The Act requires these authorities to consult with local businesses and residents and publish a statement of licensing policy every three years. Delays in its implementation may indicate concern in the Government that not all of the changes made by the Act are entirely beneficial.

In Ealing the development of shopping centres has resulted in the loss of the traditional high street shops and the conversion of many of these establishments to A3 use. This category covers restaurants, caf  s, public houses, bars and take-aways and allows change from one to another use within each category without involving the usual planning procedures. In Ealing, with its excellent transport facilities, we have seen how change to A3 use has allowed the gradual development of a thriving night-time economy. The economic momentum for much of this is based on the sale of alcohol. The result has been the development of a noisy monoculture which the managers of the A3 establishments claim to control within their premises but which makes for an intimidating street environment. This denies local facilities to the young, the elderly, the infirm and the vulnerable and access to our public transport becomes a particular problem for those arriving late home from work.

One of the concepts behind the new Act is that by abolishing a specified closing time the problems would be more diffused and thus easier to manage. Whether this will be so remains to be seen. Local residents and businesses can lend their voices to support high profile policing of the area and to make sure that our local policy identifies those areas with special problems and includes measures designed to control these problems. The Society participates in a Working Group looking at the Council's licensing policy and will do its best to ensure that these objectives are achieved. There is also a move to redefine the categories in the Use Classes Order and subdivide the present A3 group into three new sections consisting of A3 restaurants and caf  s, A4 public houses and bars and A5 take-aways. Change from restaurant and caf   use to a pub or bar will require permission but not the reverse. This will help over future change of use but is far too late to be of practical help to Ealing where the changes occurred up to 10 years ago when the original controls (similar to those now proposed) were relaxed in the name of de-regulation...