



## Autumn 2006 Newsletter

---

**Ealing Civic Society  
Annual Award Ceremony 2006**

**Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> October, 7.30 pm  
Liz Cantell Room  
Ealing Town Hall**

**Speaker: Sir Pritpal Singh  
Head, Drayton Manor High School**

There will be a display of the plans of the short-listed entries and a short presentation by one of the award judges. Refreshments will be provided at the end of the ceremony.

### **Chairman's report**

Welcome to the autumn 2006 newsletter. In this issue you can read about - among other things - a number of ongoing developments such as the Uxbridge Road cinema and the Hanger Lane bridges, a report on our annual public lecture, and further input to the design considerations for Dickens Yard.

On this last topic, we have a report on a visit which the Executive Committee made to a number of St George's sites around West London to look at the architectural elements which might be incorporated into Ealing's version. I think it would be fair to say that the one which we thought was most comparable to Dickens Yard was the Putney Wharf development. You might like to take a look at it yourself if you are down that way to get an idea of what is possible.

It is particularly interesting because of the largely successful integration of St Mary's Church (famous for the 17<sup>th</sup> century 'Putney debates') into the development. As I said in a previous newsletter, we have been impressed by St George's willingness to listen to people like us, but we are concerned about the realities of negotiations with the Council who may be under

pressure simply to get the best price from the disposal of the site. This may not necessarily be in the best interests of the residents of Ealing, particularly those living near Dickens Yard. St George are committed to a full consultation on their detailed proposals towards the end of the year, and you can rest assured that we will be taking a close interest in the process.

The latest news on the Uxbridge Road cinema is that it is now owned by Empire Cinemas, but that Cineworld has been retained to operate it on a short-term basis pending rebranding. We have received an undertaking from the Empire chief executive that it will be subject to a "light makeover" following the rebranding (including repairing broken seats!). Empire's long-term plans are still unclear but it does look as if some form of redevelopment of the site remains on the cards, although probably not on such an ambitious scale as UGC's original ideas.

We recently had a meeting with TfL about the latest plans for the Hanger Lane bridges replacement. A public inquiry is due to be held this year or early next (because of the exchange land issues) before the work gets underway. Delays are possible, but it is currently anticipated that work will begin in summer 2008 for completion in 2010. TfL is now expected to supply details of the new bridge design (including landscaping and planting) together with the layout of the proposed signalled crossing at Hamilton Road. Compulsory purchase orders are available to view at Perceval House and Ealing Central Library until 14 October. Thanks to input from the Society and local residents' associations there have been many improvements to the plans since the public exhibition in 2003, and hopefully the consultation will be uncontroversial.

As most of you will know, central Ealing traders voted by a fairly respectable margin for a Business Improvement District (BID) earlier this year. We were invited to nominate a director of

the new BID company and after discussion in the Executive it was agreed that I should take up this offer. This continues our tradition of being involved in the work of the town centre organisations (we have been members of Ealing Centre Partnership since its inception).

We are still considering options for celebrating our 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary next year. These range from something fairly modest like a dinner/reception/garden party, to something rather more ambitious, such as a DVD (along the lines of the very successful Brentham DVD) or an illustrated publication. The deciding factor will need to be cost, but if you have any ideas or early memories of the society (we know its first meeting was in October 1967) please let me know about them.

Finally, I should say a few words about Ann Chapman who became a member of the Executive Committee last year. As many of you will know, Ann was elected as an Ealing councillor in the May elections, and the Executive Committee was therefore faced with the decision as to what to do with the situation which, to our knowledge, had not arisen before. After very careful deliberation, the Committee reluctantly decided to ask Ann to stand down because we felt that both she and the Society could potentially be placed in a position where conflicts of interest might arise. In her short period as a member of the executive committee, she made a valuable contribution and we will miss her expertise. However, we wish her the best of luck in her new calling!

I look forward to seeing you at the Annual Award Ceremony on 19 October (7.30 pm).

*Bob Gurd*

### **Ealing Civic Society annual public lecture - *Trams in Ealing***

The Society's annual public lecture - heard by a capacity audience at Ealing Town Hall at the end of June - could hardly have been on a more topical subject. It was given by Professor Malcolm Buchanan, a director of Colin Buchanan and Partners (the international firm of engineers founded by his father Professor Colin Buchanan, who himself was a former Chairman of the Royal Town Planning Institute and the man behind the seminal report *Traffic in Towns* in the early 1960s).

In outlining the background to the current proposals, Prof. Buchanan pointed out that trams had operated from Shepherds Bush to Uxbridge along the Uxbridge Road from 1904 until they were replaced by trolley buses in the 1940s. These were in turn replaced by motor buses in the early 1960s. Over the years, buses have gradually become larger, until today we have the double length, 120-place 'bendy buses'. But we are now faced with a question more fundamental than the mere size of the buses: whether Ealing, like Croydon, should be a part of a re-creation of the heyday of the tram?



*The Uxbridge tram at Shepherds Bush, 1904*

The origins of the West London Tram proposal date back to a 1996 London Transport report: *New ideas for public transport in Outer London*. A total of 45 areas were examined by Transport for London (TfL) leading to nine detailed case studies, from which the West London Tram emerged as one of the four most promising schemes.

The TfL case for the West London Tram is based primarily on the need to provide additional capacity to meet, in a cost effective way, the expected growth in demand for travel in the Shepherds Bush - Uxbridge corridor. TfL also argues that there is a need to improve the quality and reliability of public transport, and thus to achieve a third aim of a modal shift away from the car, itself helping to reduce the adverse impact of the projected growth in car usage. The fourth reason advanced for the tram scheme is to reduce social exclusion and to foster economic regeneration.

In light of these aims, Professor Buchanan posed a number of questions:

- Does the capacity argument really justify a change from bus to tram?
- Does the poor quality and reliability of buses justify a tram?
- Is the modal shift to be achieved from car (and bus) to tram really significant and worth the additional cost?
- Is a tram an obvious and effective way of dealing with social exclusion and achieving regeneration?

Underlying all those questions is a further and wider one: have all the alternatives been fully considered and compared with the tram proposal?

First, *the capacity arguments*.

The new tram is expected to draw its patronage primarily from users of the existing 207/607 bus service and from other bus routes which run along parts of the corridor. In addition, about 10% of the tram's passengers are expected to come from car users and a further 10% from future growth in passenger numbers. This would reduce the expected growth in vehicle traffic overall, but traffic would still grow, and grow quite substantially.

The capacity arguments for the tram are based on assumptions regarding the numbers of buses which it is possible to operate on one service. TfL's arguments are quite complex and seem to suggest that by 2009 the relevant bus capacity would be limited to what can be delivered by 20 buses per hour offering 112 places each, far less than the numbers that could be accommodated by a tram. The tram is expected to have a capacity of up to 300 people and to operate at 20 per hour (1 every 3 minutes).

Professor Buchanan said that he was not entirely persuaded by this capacity argument (i.e. that buses would not be able to cope with the expected increase in demand) because there are bus services elsewhere in the world which operate with large buses and at frequencies of a bus every minute. For example, there are already well over 200 buses per hour operating along Oxford Street in each direction, so it does not follow that there should be such a strict capacity limitation on what could be delivered by buses in the Uxbridge Road. He pointed out however that much of Oxford Street is closed to non-bus/taxi traffic.

### *Reliability*

Prof. Buchanan had more sympathy for the reliability argument in favour of the tram. The 207 is said to be a 'flagship route' but it takes over 100 minutes to cover the 20 kilometres from Uxbridge to Shepherds Bush, an average speed of only 12-13 kph, or just over 8 mph. This is expected to deteriorate to below 7 mph by 2011 as traffic levels increase. Prof. Buchanan said he imagined that future bus reliability would be equally poor but he was surprised that no figures for the standard measure of 'excess waiting time' were available on the TfL website.

At present, buses in the corridor have the benefit of bus lanes at some of the more congested locations and these have in many ways been quite successful. However he thought it ironic that the great strength of the bus - its flexibility - has in some way become a weakness: people cheerfully park in bus lanes whereas they would not park on tram lines. Because buses could be diverted around road works, parked cars, down one-way streets, etc. they are often subjected to delays that would not be tolerated for a tram.

The proposed tram would be a large vehicle (up to 45m long) and it might be thought to be intrusive. But Prof. Buchanan pointed out that in much of Europe very large trams glide quietly through historic town centres and along 'pedestrianised' streets, often passing each other with only a foot between them. People were comforted by the certainty that the tram would remain on its tracks and was unable to swerve onto the footway. Trams therefore had an image which was superior in many ways to that of the bus.



*The Croydon tram in operation*

### *Design considerations*

In looking at the ways in which the tram route had been planned through the Ealing area Prof. Buchanan had two particular concerns:

- the way the route itself had been designed and integrated within the Uxbridge Road;
- the effects which any reduction in road capacity might have in diverting traffic onto side roads.

Such traffic diversion was a deliberate feature of parts of the route. In West Ealing, for example, part of the Uxbridge Road would be closed to all vehicles except trams and buses. Nevertheless, Prof. Buchanan thought that the treatment of the tram in the Ealing Broadway area had developed considerably since the early ideas when there were alarming reports of much traffic being diverted.

### *The economic case*

Even if one were to judge the side effects of the tram as being acceptable, Professor Buchanan said one would need to know its costs and benefits before reaching a decision as to whether the scheme was justifiable. Capital costs have been estimated at £648m (compared with about £20m which might be spent upgrading the bus infrastructure). Oddly, for a scheme apparently so well advanced, he had been unable to find any estimate of the *financial* benefits which the tram would bring and which might justify the apparent requirement for subsidy of nearly £50 million per annum, about 20 times the estimated subsidy to maintain the existing bus services!

### *Have the alternatives been adequately examined?*

Turning to the question of whether the alternatives have been fully examined, he was struck by the statement in TfL's justification that "there is no parallel rail corridor". He pointed out that there is of course a very important main line rail corridor, virtually parallel to the Uxbridge Road. This not only serves many of the centres along the route but there are plans for it to be upgraded as part of the Crossrail proposal, which would radically increase its attractiveness to central London commuters. One might therefore have expected an alternative public transport strategy to have included the widening of the catchment areas of the stations on the main line, either by the introduction of automated feeder systems or by new feeder bus services.

The second alternative which he thought ought perhaps to have been examined was that of bus rapid transit - the provision of intensive bus priority and faster operations due to off-bus ticketing and wider stop spacing. Such schemes are now being widely introduced in countries unable to afford trams or metros. More imaginatively, attention should perhaps be given to the first 'Personal Rapid Transit' (PRT) now being developed at Heathrow. This innovative development would provide journey speeds higher than those that would be available from the tram and comparable to what could be achieved by car. PRT therefore had the potential to provide what transport planners had long hoped to see - a form of public transport that is as good as or better than a car. If the Heathrow scheme turned out to be successful there is likely to be immediate pressure for it to be extended to Uxbridge and possibly into the Uxbridge Road corridor.

### *Conclusion*

Professor Buchanan concluded that, on the data apparently available at present, the case for the West London tram has yet to be proven. Alternative options had to be fully explored and compared with the tram before it could be concluded to be the best option. However, he suggested that in seeking to reopen arguments which should perhaps already have been completed, residents of Ealing must beware of looking a gift horse in the mouth - the large scale funding available from TfL. If Ealing did not accept the tram, there would undoubtedly be other parts of London more than ready to take one on, perhaps leading to long term relative decline for Ealing.

As might be expected, there followed a lively question and answer session, for example: how would a tram cope with obstructions along its route (the recent fire in an Ealing Broadway shop was mentioned)? What impact would there be on other bus services, particularly those that crossed the Uxbridge Road? Would any of the other options to cope with the expected increase in traffic volumes (such as more frequent buses) result in just as much diversion of cars and other traffic onto adjacent roads? Was the projected increase in traffic likely to occur anyway? Was the funding for Crossrail (£16 billion) any more certain than that for the tram?



After lengthy debate, the session had ultimately to be brought to a halt by the chairman, who finally warmly thanked Professor Buchanan for coming to address the Society.

*John Templeton*

### **Planning and licensing matters**

There are at last hopeful signs that the Urban Design Panel on which the Society served some years ago will be reconstituted. We have been told that the problem has been one of resources but the Council is now actively recruiting new design expertise into the planning department which should allow the panel to be reactivated in the near future.

Consultants for the Council are preparing Conservation Area Appraisals for *Hanwell Town Centre*, *Northolt Village Green* and *Old Oak Lane*. The Civic Society was asked to provide comments. The main problems are lack of 'Article 4 directions' - to limit certain permitted development - which results in loss of character, and in Northolt the boundary is too tightly drawn.

We have also objected to applications to redevelop a further two public houses with local character but not protected by listing, on grounds of overdevelopment and poor design. The *White Hart* in Southall is a proposed development for shops and residential use with little open space and very limited parking, whilst the *Sudbury Arms* at Sudbury Heights Avenue, a focal point in a run down shopping centre, would be replaced by modern residential blocks for affordable housing without adequate amenity space and materials which are out of character. Happily, the Planning Committee agreed to turn down the latter application, although the developers have indicated that they will continue to try for redevelopment (which may mean that they will appeal).

On licensing, the Council has recently undertaken a consultation on the continued operation of the special area policy in the centre of Ealing. We have supported its continuation but made suggestions for improvements. Unfortunately, there are indications from recent hearings that the new administration is not taking as strong a line on proposed extension of hours of licensed premises in the central area. The Council recently approved extended hours of operation for two nightclubs until very early into the morning, which will do nothing to reduce

the current problems caused by the alcohol-fuelled activities of young people in the vicinity of Ealing Broadway.

*Judy Harris/Bob Gurd*

### **Visit to St George developments**

Members of the Executive Committee, together with representatives from some of the residents' associations affected by the Dickens Yard development, were hosted by Charmaine Young, the Regeneration Director of St George (the developers chosen by Ealing Council to take the plans forward), on a visit to three of their recent development sites in West London: Imperial Wharf (next to Chelsea Harbour), Battersea Reach just over the other side of the river in Wandsworth, and Putney Wharf, immediately downstream of Putney Bridge. The object was to see other work on which the developer has been engaged, and to gain some ideas of what might (or might not) be suitable for Dickens Yard. Although the first two are still being built, large parts have been finished and there is a clear picture of how they will look and work. Putney Wharf is completed and for the purposes of comparison now fully operational.

Each development has a high proportion of affordable housing, with some innovative schemes for 'discounted market sales' in conjunction with a Housing Association, and in one case provision for student accommodation. We were able to discuss how car parking and links to local transport were provided, as well as see the different proportions of office, retail and community provision in each.

However, it was fairly soon apparent that there are some significant differences between the three developments and Dickens Yard. The main one is that the open aspect of all three, which is created by being bounded on one side by the Thames, provides an opportunity for the architects and designers that they will not have in Ealing.

The scale of Imperial Wharf and Battersea Reach is also much larger. Built as they are on previously derelict industrial land, they have little need to relate closely to neighbouring areas. Imperial Wharf has a river frontage of nearly 400m with a planned marina, and will have a 10 acre landscaped park, 150,000 sq ft of office space, and a new hotel is already built (though the design was not to the taste of several of the

visitors!). Battersea Reach boasts 300m of river frontage, to which there will be a number of dramatically designed 13/14 storey blocks running at right angles, parallel to Wandsworth Bridge.

For these reasons our interest was much more taken by Putney Wharf. A smaller site bounded by a conservation area and a churchyard, the solutions found by the architects to the need to respect the scale and nature of existing buildings are much more relevant to the Dickens Yard site. A single stepped block rising from 12 to 16 storeys (actually a converted office block) is set against lower surrounding buildings in more intimate design with courtyards and private spaces, giving a variety of vistas and a more human scale to the whole. Even here, however, the amount of open space seems to be at a higher proportion than will be easy to fit into the Ealing scheme.



*Putney Wharf – the converted office block  
(St Mary’s Church is on the left)*

One clear conclusion can be drawn about the options open to St George in planning the details of Dickens Yard. A high priority has been placed by Ealing Council on increasing the land value that will be created by the development, and this will rest heavily on how much commercial and

housing development can be got onto the site. The type of retailer that will be persuaded to come in is also critical to the success of the area as a shopping centre, and this will partly depend on how attractive the open spaces will be. The real risk remains that the whole scheme will either be cramped or will have to exceed by a considerable margin the height constraints set out in the original brief. This debate has still to be had!

*Tony Miller*

### **Other items of interest**

The Society participated in a recent initiative promoted by the Royal Society of Arts (RSA) and sponsored by the Starbucks coffee house chain. Bob Gurd went to a meeting at the end of June to discuss various aspects of Ealing life which it is thought might be improved by collective action. Others taking part in the initiative represented various local interest societies and groups.

The discussion identified several aspects of life in Ealing which are thought to be currently unsatisfactory (such as safety in the streets, graffiti, and safety and access at stations). More positively the group then went on to identify areas where it was felt a timely intervention might improve local quality of life, typically things which chime well with the Society’s aims such as the aesthetic quality of new build and use of brownfield site in the borough (including of course Dickens Yard).

Discussion ensued on what this group and its contacts might usefully do. It was felt that applying some pressure to the Council to consult more openly and earlier with residents would be a good thing. It was agreed that those present should aim to have a second meeting with representatives of the newly elected Council. There needed to be pressure to re-establish the Advisory Panels through which local residents and their representative groups might influence Council investment decisions while they are still being considered, in areas such as built environment, public services and hygiene/ security.

*Greg Birdseye*

**Please see the enclosed notice about subscriptions and standing orders. The Society is very dependent on timely subscription income for its day to day operations.**