

Autumn 2002 Newsletter

Message from the Chairman

Ealing Town Centre Consultation: Message from the Chairman

Most of you will have seen the results of the recent consultation exercise on the Town Centre strategy that appeared in the Gazette in July. Some messages came through clearly: Ealing has to move forward; but a balance has to be struck between new shopping facilities (Richmond/Chiswick rather than Uxbridge or Brent Cross style) and generating more traffic, particularly on residential roads. Above all, the various interests should work together in partnership to achieve these aims. This supports the approach the Society has taken from the earliest days of the Forum when it would have been so much easier to have criticised from the sidelines.

But there are also some mixed messages that emerge from the consultation, particularly on what to do with the Town Hall car park (the 'Dickens Yard' site) and the Library. Most respondents agreed that the car park should be redeveloped but disagreed over what form that redevelopment might take. Local residents favoured offices and housing whereas businesses and other residents favoured mixed use (which includes community uses such as a new library). On the Library, residents favoured the current location whereas businesses mainly supported a move to the Dickens Yard site. Not surprisingly, younger people, local businesses and non-residents of the central area favoured encouraging the evening/night-time economy whereas local residents, community groups and small businesses were against. The greatest challenge will be to achieve a balance between attracting new development and protecting the environment on the one hand; and meeting the needs of the borough-wide community and business interests whilst safeguarding the interests of central area residents on the other. We'll keep you informed of developments.

A Suburban Village - John Delafons

'Haven Village' is not a name to be found on any map or plan, but it certainly exists as a place. I have just invented the name 'Haven Village' to describe this interesting area. The village is clustered around Haven Green, which does appear on the maps. On Carey's map of 1786 the hamlet is named 'Ealing Haven'. There is no development around the Green earlier than about 1840, when the short row of cottages on the north side was built. It is possible that what is now the village post office was once a small smithy for shoeing horses.

The buildings around the Green are of no great architectural importance, although the row of shops on the east side is on the local list, as are the cast iron railings on the north side and the unused cattle trough and drinking fountain provided by a private donor in 1898. Lewis the Chemist's has an Art Nouveau shop-front and is listed Grade II. But it is not the buildings that make the urban village. What makes the place is the extraordinary variety of uses that take place in and around them - churches, cafes and restaurants and a range of shops and services. These, together with the pulling power of Ealing Broadway Station and its central place in the pattern of bus services, make it a very lively place, despite the traffic. I call it an urban village because it seems to meet the criteria for such places - a small compact, relatively high-density place within a larger urban area, with a diversity of activity, enterprise, and housing types. It is set within a much larger borough which has other potential villages within it and which is in turn part of the huge metropolitan area of west London. It is places like this that give London much of its variety, especially in the outer suburbs.

Planning powers do not extend (beyond the limited scope of the General Development Order and the Use Classes Order) to prescribing the types or character of the shops to be provided in a shopping centre (although a freeholder or leaseholder may have such control). Those elements are left to private enterprise and local demand. One feature of urban villages is that they should afford some scope for 'intensification' - by infill, redevelopment, and conversion. This is part of the on-going process of renewal, which is more organic than conservation. There is not much obvious scope for this in Haven Village, which appears to have little unused or derelict land. But it has happened in the past, with the redevelopment of the sites on which Haven Green Court, Greenlaw Court and the station office block were built.

Ealing's unitary development plan does not accord Haven Green any particular identity, nor are there any policies related directly to Haven Village. But the fact that all the surrounding neighbourhoods are part of the Haven Green conservation area in itself endows the area with a raft of conservation policies, more implied than explicit. The planning authority has produced a useful design guide for shops and other commercial properties on the east side of the Green that is intended to influence changes to shop-fronts, including fascia boards. These guidelines also give the Haven Green Conservation Panel a stick to lean on. Ealing Civic Society has produced a handbook on houses in Ealing, which gives practical advice on how to retain and enhance the character of these areas and other parts of Ealing.

It would be a good idea if unitary development plans and other plans in towns and cities recognised the existence of urban villages within their area and took steps to preserve and enhance them where possible.

RIBA Award for the Brooke Coombes House

The Brooke Coombes House 52 Mountfield Road, W5, winner of the Ealing Civic Society Award for 2001 is one of 14 new buildings to win a RIBA Award for 2002. In making the award the judges said 'The house demonstrates a new, yet mature attitude to space and integral living The building represents a creative and sustainable building design but also plainly a reflection of a way of life for its owners.'

Ealing Civic Society Annual Lecture, 23rd May 2002

The Annual Lecture this year attracted a lively audience of 60 members and guests in the Queen's Hall, Ealing Town Hall, to hear about the past history and future proposals for trams in Ealing.

Tommy Thompson of the LCC Tramways Trust and a former president of the National Tramway Museum at Crich in Derbyshire, gave the first talk with some historic slides of the early trams. Tommy moved to Uxbridge as a child in 1927 and became familiar with the 12-mile No 7 route to Shepherd's Bush via Ealing. He was able to give firsthand reminiscences of trams sharing the roads with traffic - not always successfully. It was interesting to see the contrast in styles between the early London United Trams with open cabs, balconies and upper decks and the streamlined London Transport 'Feltham' double decker trams which served the route from 1931 to 1935. The early trams completed the 12-mile route in an hour and ten minutes for five pence. There were three tram depots - Acton (a bus garage today), Hanwell and Hillingdon. The No 7 route closed in November 1935 and was replaced by a trolley bus.

Ian Ross, a trustee of the LCC Tramway Trust and a railway engineer with the Great Eastern Railway, supplemented Tommy's talk with information about LCCTT's project to restore No 159 London United Type W 69-seater open top tramcar. No 159 ran the No 7 route and cost £850 in 1902. It is expected to be ready for use and display at the National Tramway Museum by 2007 at a projected cost of £165,000.

Phil Cummings, the Route Project Manager for the proposed West London Transit Scheme, spoke about the Mayor of London's proposal to replace the existing 12-mile (20km) 207 (and 607 express) bus route with trams, trolley buses or bendy buses. The number of stops would be reduced from 72 to 40 'mini' stations and the predicted journey time would be one hour. The tram option would cost £200million, including forty 300-seater trams costing £1.4m each. He mentioned the recent introduction of the new 28km Croydon-Wimbledon tram-route using 20km of a former railway and 8km of roadway which has apparently reduced the traffic and increased the numbers of shoppers in Croydon.

A number of critics of the tramway proposal in the audience predicted that the tram routes would drive most of the present Uxbridge Road traffic onto adjacent residential roads

such as Madeley Road and Gordon Road. There were also fears that Ealing would suffer 2-3 years of traffic chaos while the tramway was being built. They also pointed out that the proposed tramway would make it very difficult to enable delivery vehicles to supply shops and businesses along the Uxbridge Road.

Bob Gurd, who chaired the meeting, took a 'straw poll' at the end of the discussion to gauge the audience's preferred transport option. There appeared to be a small majority in favour of trolley buses over trams. The meeting was timely as the Mayor of London decided in favour of the tram option for the route a week later. Ealing Civic Society expects to play an active part in the continuing debate in supporting the most appropriate transport option for Ealing along the former No 7 tram-route.

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