



EALING MATTERS NEWSLETTER

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ISSUE 4

The mood of community and residents' groups in Ealing varies from gloomy to angry. Disenchantment with over-development, planning decisions, and planning competence has been well documented by Ealing Matters and on a number of online forums. Adding to this recently has been public anger about planned library and children centre closures, elimination of 'Stop & Shop' and making CPZs all day. On top of this there have been lots of complaints about lack of engagement and flawed public consultation with regard to Ealing Council's transport plans.

NORTH EAST EALING WILL BE THE UK'S BIGGEST CONSTRUCTION/DEVELOPMENT AREA FOR THE NEXT 20 YEARS

The area includes Park Royal, East Acton and South Acton. Part of it is the Ealing portion of the Old Oak and Park Royal Development Corporation (OPDC). The OPDC plans involve 1,000s of new flats and a huge new railway station where HS2 will intersect with the Elizabeth Line.

Local residents' groups have become increasingly concerned about the lack of engagement by Ealing Council and the OPDC. Numerous 30+ storey residential tower blocks are planned and there's little sign of new community infrastructure to service the enormous influx of residents. Ironically a new developer tax introduced by central government to fund such infrastructure is being ignored by both the Council and the OPDC. Most London Councils have implemented a Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) – but not Ealing or the OPDC. The net result of ignoring CIL is that £millions of CIL tax which could have been collected and spent on education, hospitals, social care and transport will instead contribute to property owners'/developers' profits.

EALING COUNCIL PLANS TO CLOSE SEVEN LOCAL LIBRARIES

The public libraries at Greenford, Hanwell, Northfields, Perivale, Pitshanger, West Ealing and Wood End are all almost certain to close down. In order to save £1.4 million annually Ealing Council plans to remove ongoing funding for the libraries to operate. In a series of disastrous public meetings officers, councillors and public relations people have attempted to 'sell' the concept of community managed libraries. In this scenario volunteers raise the funds and provide the person power to run the libraries. However none of these public presentations and slide shows have documented the 'indicative' running costs volunteers will have to raise each year in order for these libraries to function. These Indicative annual costs are Hanwell £70,000, Northfields £67,000, Perivale £49,000, Pitshanger £126,000, West Ealing £98,000 and Wood End £56,000.

It seems highly unlikely that any volunteer community/residents' groups will want to take on such massive fund raising tasks. Ealing Matters knows of no volunteer group that is planning to make a bid. Ealing Council's policy decision is, it says, driven by austerity. Odd though isn't it that Hounslow Council has no plans to close any of its libraries. However Merton has had community managed libraries for 10 years.

SCRAPPING 'STOP & SHOP' PARKING THREATENS SMALL SHOP SURVIVAL

Ealing Council's plans to scrap 'Stop & Shop' car parking has brought howls of protest from retailers. A group of Northfield Avenue, West Ealing retailers harangued Walpole Ward Councillors about this at the Walpole Ward Forum on 11 March 2019. They all wanted to know why this decision had been made and why they had not been consulted.

To rub salt in the wound residents and traders also raised the issue of the Council's plans to make all CPZs all day in duration. The logic behind this initiative and the benefits to residents and traders has yet to be discovered.

PITZHANGER MANOR

After £millions spent on the place it has opened to much acclaim, with special plaudits about the quality of the restoration craftsmanship.

EALING PARKS FOUNDATION

Some of the 127 open spaces and parks in Ealing are described by the Ealing Council Leader Julian Bell as being of "of strategic interest for the Council". It's reasonable to suppose that he means the Council will hold control of these low hanging fruit/cash cows...the ones that can be sold, leased or commercialised. The remaining parks are seen as liability and alternative arrangements are being made to raise funds and resources to maintain them.

In November 2016 Ealing Council responded to this crisis by establishing The Ealing Parks Foundation (EPF). The EPF exists "for the benefit of the public" citing reasons of health and wellbeing, supporting community activities, mental health and active citizenship. It will promote volunteering and healthy recreational activities. EPF will be established as a company limited by guarantee and registered as a charity. Its governance structure will be that of a Trust with a Trustee Board.

The Council is looking to attract funding through the EPF via donations, grants and legacies. In the first year the EPF is looking to raise £35,000. We don't know yet how the business plan stacks-up. The proposal is that the Foundation will be able to work with other local groups, the 10 'Friends of' bodies and residents. At the EPF launch, the South West London Environmental Network (SWLEN) outlined how parks benefit from having Friends groups. Working in partnership with EPF Foundation, SWLEN offered support including help with set-up, promotion and equipment loan.

It is not clear what the benefits of EPF are to the volunteers and the donors. The Council and the Foundation must spell out more clearly how people will benefit. There should be benefits such as training and certification, authority and control, integration of Friends and resident groups into the very structure of the Council.

Ealing Matters is keen to discover how EPF might be effective and are in principle keen to help and be part of this, though we need a strong and constructive dialogue, with the support of Ealing Council.

GREENFORD TO GURNELL 'GREENWAY'

This is a heartening project to improve the land between Greenford town centre and Gurnell. Routes will be opened up and river views created alongside the Brent. It will make the area more attractive and safer. Reed beds, wetlands, meadows, woodland and orchards will be created to boost nature.

A £375,000 grant has been obtained from the Mayor of London and the project is being developed by Thames 21 and Ealing Council. Thames 21 is a well established environmental charity which

works with local communities to deliver improvements for urban rivers. Ealing Council is matching this funding with £375,000. Brent River & Canal Society has already begun work on the project which will run till March 2021.

EALING TOWN HALL

Ealing Council and its development partner Mastcraft continue to behave as though nothing is amiss in their plans to convert most of Ealing Town Hall into a hotel. The reality of the situation is that parts of the town hall are not owned by Ealing Council. Victoria Hall, Prince's Hall and some adjoining rooms are owned by a Charitable Trust set up in 1893. Ealing Council applied to the Charity Commission for permission to allow it to dispose of these rooms. Nearly two years after it was first approached the Commission still refuses to give its consent.

Save Ealing Centre (SEC) and other community groups have led a campaign to investigate and publicise this impasse. Specialist lawyers have confirmed to the Commission and the Council that it is not within the Council's 'gift' to hand over Trust property to Mastcraft. Instead they say the Trust has been mismanaged for years. Financial accounts, which charities must report annually, have not been kept for decades.

All this is costing money. The Council admits it will have to compensate Mastcraft 'around £300,000' should the Charity Commission withhold consent and the scheme not proceed. This, of course, does not include the Council's mounting legal costs. The original 2016 Ealing Council/Mastcraft plans said that the Town Hall Hotel would be opening in 'early 2019'. This clearly is not going to happen.

PERCEVAL HOUSE

Twitter told us recently that developer Galliford Try has signed an agreement with Ealing Council to build new Council offices, 470 flats and a new central library on the Perceval House and car park site. The estimated size of the deal is £275 million. In details released in July 2017 Ealing Council's arms-length property company 'Broadway Living' will purchase 253 of the Affordable Homes for £65.24 million. This money it will have to borrow. To build the 10 storey council office block the Council will also have to borrow £63.74 million.

On the face of it demolishing a building that is just 30 years old seems somewhat idiotic. Surely it could have been refurbished and/or repurposed. But I guess the deal is all about money, building new homes and gaining Council Tax revenue. I suppose it's a logical development for Ealing Council to move from supporting property speculators to becoming itself a property speculator. Let's hope all of that £65.24 million loan does not go sour on the Council. In the 2017 announcement, the project was going to be completed by 2021, with building work commencing in September 2018. Clearly neither date is now achievable

PLANNING SERVICES USER GROUP (PSUG)

Not having met for over three years, this group met on 22 January 2019. Prior to this meeting Ealing Matters hosted a meeting on 17 January 2019 to discuss residents' groups suggested agenda. To back this up we asked residents' groups for their views on Planning Services in Ealing. 17 groups replied and we collated the survey findings and sent them to the Council prior to the PSUG meeting.

Hosted by Ealing Council the PSUG was chaired by its Planning supremo David Scourfield. He opened the meeting by describing how under-resourced and over stressed his department has been

in recent years. Planning users then proceeded to complain about the planning web site inadequacies, planning process failures and inadequate engagement with residents. Specifically on the latter issue it was pointed out that the Council's 2015 Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) no longer reflected reality and it was drastically in need of being updated/re-written. People objected to the Council no longer writing to immediate neighbours of properties applying for planning permission. Issues about planning policy were raised which included the lack of provision for three bedded family homes. We were all encouraged to take part in meetings concerning the creation of the new Ealing Local Plan.

Most of the problems raised by residents at the meeting were not resolved. We get the impression that even if there was a will to solve many of these problems there is not the time, money or resource to bring about these changes. The next PSUG is scheduled for 28 May 2019.

UPDATE ON ISSUES RAISED IN PREVIOUS NEWSLETTERS:

Old Acton Library

A group of local stakeholders – 'Acton Arts Project' - has been trying to take over the repurposing and management of this largely unused asset since 2014. Ealing Council said it would 'market' the building in September 2018. This date was missed and as yet, no 'marketing' information has emerged from the Council.

Business Improvement Districts (BIDs)

A new BID has begun life in Acton and the West Ealing BID has been renewed for another five years.

Southall Town Hall

Following a High Court decision blocking Ealing Council's plan to disposal of the building life in the building has reverted back to normal with no overt signs of Ealing Council having another attempt to dispose of this public asset.

Gurnell, West Ealing

Ealing Council with a Malaysian development partner has every intention of building 608 new homes up to 17 storeys high on the Metropolitan Open Land adjacent to Gurnell Swimming Pool. A new swimming pool and skateboard park are also promised. Public consultation events were set up for 6 and 9 February 2019. However just days before the events Ealing Council 'postponed' them. So far no new dates for consultations have been forthcoming.

Woolworths, West Ealing

Ealing Council Planning Committee decided to demolish the 1926 art deco façade on 20 February 2019. A2Dominion now have three years before they start building a 15 storey block to house 120 flats, with retail on the ground floor.

Elizabeth Line Stations

14 February 2019 was the date we were given for new design contracts to be signed for Acton Mainline, Ealing Broadway and West Ealing Stations. This date has been missed and the new suggested date is now the end of April 2019.

Regards,
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