



EALING MATTERS

PLANNING SERVICE USER GROUP (PSUG) SURVEY FINDINGS

Background

Ealing Matters is a borough-wide alliance of residents' associations and community groups whose aims are to raise awareness of how Ealing is changing and to help local people shape these changes and enhance their quality of life.

Following an invitation from Ealing Council to a number of residents' associations to attend a Planning Service User Group meeting, we decided to gather the views of Ealing Matters members in order to shape our input to that meeting.

Survey objectives

The objectives of the survey were:

- to assess levels of satisfaction with the planning function in the London Borough of Ealing
- to identify our members' concerns with the planning function
- to suggest ways to improve it for residents

Method/sample

We developed a short online self-completion questionnaire comprising five questions using www.surveymonkey.com. We emailed the Ealing Matters membership inviting them to participate in the survey via a link.

Fieldwork dates: 4th – 14th January 2019

Analysis of response

The questionnaire identified respondents in terms of the group/association to which they are affiliated (Q1) and their status within it (Q2).

We received a total of 65 responses. 40 of the responses came from 30 member organisations, with a further 25 responses coming from non-affiliated groups and individuals.

Findings

The findings in the pages that follow summarise the three key questions and are aggregated and anonymous.

Please note that this is a primarily qualitative survey. Its aim is to explore the range of opinion rather than the weight of opinion across the sample. That said, the satisfaction question (Q3) and the broad themes of concern voiced by respondents (Q4) are quantified and indicate the relative strength of feeling within different parts of the sample.

21st January 2019

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Q3 Overall how satisfied are you and your group/association with the planning function in the London Borough of Ealing?

	Total	CG/RA	Individual
Base:	(n = 65)	(n = 30 groups/40 responses)	(n =25)
Very satisfied	–	–	–
Quite satisfied	1	1	–
Not very satisfied	18	12	6
Not at all satisfied	44	26	18
Not sure	1	1	1
No answer	1	–	1

EALING MATTERS PLANNING SERVICE USER GROUP SURVEY FINDINGS (1)

Base: Ealing Matters CG/RAs (30) and private individuals (25)

Broad themes	Number mentioning issue		Q4 What, if any, concerns do you have about the planning function in Ealing based on your/your group's experiences of it?	Q5 Thinking of your/your group's experiences of the planning function, what positive steps could Ealing Council take to make it better for residents?
	EM	Other		
LBE engagement with residents	17	16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of constructive engagement with RAs/amenity groups on plans/strategy/poor consultation/failure to observe SCI • Lack of response to specific resident concerns/objections/time given to objections at PC minimised • Failure to take resident comments/objections into account (salient facts withheld from PC) • Developers' needs prioritised against resident wishes/lack of balance/favour profit over community • Residents feel ignored/treated with disdain/unable to influence planning decisions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formally establish the PUG and meet regularly with limited but widely based community representatives under chairmanship of a councillor who is not a member of the PC and not too close to the ruling party. Agendas and minutes of meetings to be published and circulated widely • Listen to residents and RAs/understand concerns • Recognise the considerable expertise and concern in the wider community and create a forum to embrace this • Give more weight in decision making to local objections to planning applications • Be guided by consultations, petitions • Modernise consultation and engagement processes
Conservation/heritage/design	13	7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planner/PC lack of knowledge of local area • Planner/PC indifference/lack of sensitivity to heritage assets • Lack of specialist skills (loss of Conservation Office post, sympathetic development in existing built environment) • Generic planners do not follow/have no respect for conservation policies/guidelines • Time pressure on senior officers • Conservation issues overlooked/guidelines not followed • New development favoured ('planners pass anything') 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give proper and more positive consideration to local heritage when making planning decisions • Listen more to representations from CA panels • Seek advice from Heritage England et al for planning applications in CAs • Ensure that planning complies with CA guidance (including windows)/issue Article 4 directions • Re-employ a trained Conservation Officer • Increase number of CAs
LBE planning policy	9	7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of clear vision/overall strategy • Obsession with housing numbers to the detriment of everything else • Development not catering for need (lack of social/affordable housing/family homes; too many student/investor units) • Inadequate consideration of scale, height, density, appearance of large developments/rear extension overlooking/loss of front gardens/garden grabbing/basement proposals/creation of HMOs/local infrastructure (e.g. parking) • Adoption of London Plan with minimal refinements mean many detailed policies found in the planning policies of other boroughs (e.g. sub-division of rental property) don't exist for Ealing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create coherent plans for developing town centres that include height limits/design criteria and limit overcrowding • Need a realistic and sustainable housing policy • Restrict approval of planning applications for HMOs • Ban all garden grabbing as in other boroughs • Limit loss of front gardens/dropped kerbs

EALING MATTERS PLANNING SERVICE USER GROUP SURVEY FINDINGS (2)

Base: Ealing Matters CG/RAs (30) and private individuals (25)

Broad themes	Number mentioning issue		Q4 What, if any, concerns do you have about the planning function in Ealing based on your/your group's experiences of it?	Q5 Thinking of your/your group's experiences of the planning function, what positive steps could Ealing Council take to make it better for residents?
	EM	Other		
Application of planning policy/guidelines	9	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Disregard of planning policy/guidelines (NPPF, LBE) Planning reports biased (failure to balance benefits/disbenefits of development proposals (NPPF); conflict of interest: pre-application adviser decides application) Inconsistencies in planning decisions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure that planning policy is properly followed at national, London and LBE level and that planners' submissions are framed in these terms Improve quality of decision making by planning officers and PC/ensure consistency
LBE engagement with developers	7	7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local Plan altered/policy cherry picked to favour developers LBE allows significant changes to original plans Failure to maximise/use for its intended purpose/account for the ancillary benefit (S106, CIL) from developers LBE too close to developers/months of private consultations ending in faits accomplis Developers allowed to wriggle out of affordable housing commitments Developers' needs prioritised against resident wishes/lack of balance/favour profit over community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Involve recognised CG/RAs at pre-application stage with developers to identify contentious issues and try to align views Ensure planning officers not manipulated by developers (e.g. suspend all hospitality)
Planning application information	7	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Difficult to access information, particularly online Unwillingness/inability of to embrace full functionality of IDOX system 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve transparency Covenants to be identified by the developer Ownership of property/land to be checked by planning officers prior to acceptance of application
			<p>Planning website</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not user friendly, difficult to obtain information Applications missing/incomplete/inconsistent development documentation/hidden background papers Links not obvious Public comments not uploaded/acknowledgements not received Objector details incorrect No information about what will happen next (e.g. decision made under delegated powers) Site often down for maintenance at weekends 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Look at other boroughs' websites (e.g. Richmond) Re-design to improve functionality/for easier access of information (e.g. single document to show breakdown of units by size and tenure for all developments) Introduce an interactive map locating planning proposals Disclose all application documents including correspondence between applicants and planning officers Upload all email/postal comments within 24 hours of receipt Make it easier to identify official consultees (vs. general public) Restore facilities for public access and study of planning application files

EALING MATTERS PLANNING SERVICE USER GROUP SURVEY FINDINGS (3)

Base: Ealing Matters CG/RAs (30) and private individuals (25)

Broad themes	Number mentioning issue		Q4 What, if any, concerns do you have about the planning function in Ealing based on your/your group's experiences of it?	Q5 Thinking of your/your group's experiences of the planning function, what positive steps could Ealing Council take to make it better for residents?
	EM	Other		
Planning application notifications	5	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Notification inadequate due to suspension of individual notifications to immediate neighbours/use of yellow PA notices only • Lamp post notifications open to abuse/can be torn down/incorrectly displayed • Failure to inform CENF of planning applications within the NF area 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reinstate postal neighbour notifications of individual planning applications/applicant to pay administrative costs • Go back to sending out regular email planning alerts (H&F, Richmond do it) • Publish weekly list of sites subject to pre-application advice and date received to indicate those that might come forward to a planning application
Enforcement	4	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of interest • Lack of resources • Lack of enforcement of planning conditions, CA infringements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarify responsibility for checking planning conditions • Suspend development if developers breach planning conditions • Ensure planning permission obtained, e.g. HMOs
Planning department	2	8	Officer <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of professional personnel (relies on small number of senior staff supervising others) • Ineffective management/lack of supervision • Staff have very narrow set of skills (e.g. unable to interpret drawings, poor knowledge of essential regulations/legislation) • Lack of communication between staff • Staff turnover very high/staff under pressure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruit more enlightened senior managers/remove and replace all staff with competent individuals who are not constrained by fear of superiors or Council politics • Improve training for case officers (e.g. on reading drawings, Conservation Area policy, guidance and ethos) • Learn how other boroughs' planning departments operate (H&F's town planners perceived to be progressive and visionary) • Make senior officers/directors accountable for managing and improving their staff
			Performance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor administration/clunky systems/inefficient • Difficult to speak to by phone/lack of response to communications • Take too long to respond/constant delays/lack of timeliness in delivering decisions • Lack of due diligence/failure to deal with resident concerns/failure to differentiate between comments from near neighbours vs. others/errors through failure to scrutinise/poor decisions • Lack of transparency ('disingenuous bordering on untruths')/failure to justify decisions/poor accountability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve responsiveness (by phone, email, acknowledgement of correspondence)/introduce time frame of 7-10 days • Appoint a named planning officer to each application • Ensure that the designated planning officer speaks to residents where applications are likely to be contentious • Ensure that planning officers explain things in plain English • For large developments run proper consultations (with two-way communication), publish surveys (environmental, traffic etc.) online, publish business case used to determine viability • Address all comments/objections clearly, precisely and promptly • Option to have planners conduct a site visit for applications to be considered under delegated powers • Release design documents in a more timely manner before the PC

EALING MATTERS PLANNING SERVICE USER GROUP SURVEY FINDINGS (4)

Base: Ealing Matters CG/RAs (30) and private individuals (25)

Broad themes	Number mentioning issue		Q4 What, if any, concerns do you have about the planning function in Ealing based on your/your group's experiences of it?	Q5 Thinking of your/your group's experiences of the planning function, what positive steps could Ealing Council take to make it better for residents?
	EM	Other		
Planning department	2	8	Performance (cont'd)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refer back to PINS comments when applications are re-submitted • Disallow multiple/continuous applications for inappropriate development • Ensure that the PC has the full facts (residents' views/properly submitted objections/petitions) • Scrutinise the vote to ensure that all votes based on fact • Introduce customer/professional care mark standards/output to purpose reviews/performance measures/customer satisfaction surveys • Publish number of affordable housing units achieved compared with number originally approved on relevant sites • Publish S106 payments itemised by development, value and how the money was spent
			Attitude	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rudeness to residents/RAs • Aggressive
Planning committee	–	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many councillors on PC lack the knowledge/unable to make an informed decision • Questionable independent/tendency to vote along party lines/being told how to vote by 'a few individuals' • Local councillors have too much say ignoring the needs of taxpaying residents • Inability of councillors to participate in PC meetings deciding on developments affecting their wards • Lack of respect for residents at PCs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve training for members on Conservation Area policy, guidance and ethos • Allow councillors to participate in PCs affecting their ward • Resident objections to be fully represented at PCs (not single representative for 3 minutes) • PC members who give incorrect information should be reported and their vote removed • Prevent block voting by councillors • Formally record votes instead of 'show of hands' • PC must justify planning approvals in breach of policy/guidelines