



CERA NEWS



News from Central Ealing Residents' Association

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August 2021

Council leadership changes and impact on planning



The fall of Julian Bell as Leader of the Council in May raised hopes of improvements in Ealing Council's management, especially in planning and development control. In taking over the reins our new **Council Leader Peter Mason** announced that he would lead a more open, inclusive and transparent council and one that would engage with local people.

The first step in this direction was a shake-up of the political leadership. Members of an enlarged Cabinet were given new titles and a specific area of responsibility for which they would be accountable for the council's decisions.

One of the most eye-catching promotions was **Councillor Shital Manro's** rise to be the 'portfolio holder' for the ambitiously titled post of 'Good Growth'. Many CERA members know Cllr Manro as the Chair and very strong leader of the

Committee which approved so many of the developments they had objected to. His new role is to 'make sure the growth that takes place in Ealing enhances its character, conserves its future and makes great places people want to live in.' Like many others in the Borough, CERA waits with bated breath to see how Cllr Manro interprets his new role.

One of Cllr Manro's key responsibilities is **updating Ealing's Local Plan**. This should explain exactly what 'good growth' means and is supposed to set out the borough's development policies against which new developments should be assessed. Ealing badly needs a new Local Plan and lags behind all London boroughs in producing one. Work on an update has dragged on for over two years and there is nothing to show for it. While the

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borough is growing faster than most, its current plan is 10 years old and its policies are now widely ignored.

Cllr Mason's elevation has produced some changes among senior officers. **Lucy Taylor**, formerly in charge of 'Growth and Sustainability', has been promoted to the role of 'Executive Director of Place'. Ms Taylor is now responsible for almost everything in the Borough except child and adult services. Her two predecessors in the role were notable for their astonishing anonymity, so we hope she can demonstrate more leadership in checking Ealing's long decline.

Planning is one of the services in Ms Taylor's crumbling empire. We need to mark here the departure from the Borough of the charismatic David Scourfield, who headed the team of

planners that has pushed through so many awful developments since 2016. He is replaced by his deputy (Ms) **Alex Jackson**, whose strong record has been in following the party line.

Ealing's key plan-making responsibilities may have stalled in recent months but other changes have been introduced that are not so widely advertised but could be significant. Most important may be the creation of a 'Community Review Panel' of local people to provide a community perspective on major developments. The Panel was chosen from volunteers, but the selection process was opaque and its members are anonymous. What qualifications or legitimacy they have to speak for the rest of us is unclear. Also unknown is how the Panel will operate and how it will influence local decision-making.

Perceval House

Regular readers of this newsletter will very probably be aware that on 31 March, at the third time of asking, the Council Planning Committee granted consent to redevelop its Perceval House offices in conjunction with housing developer Vistry.

The Committee ignored the pleadings of our MP Dr Rupa Huq, our local councillors Seema Kumar and Anthony Young, and over 2,400 online objectors to push through a scheme which the Government's heritage advisers Historic England say will 'create a high degree of harm' to local Conservation Areas and listed buildings. The development will overshadow and thus deprive nearby homes of daylight.

By approving its own plans this way the Council was essentially 'marking its own homework' to achieve a development of which it is a primary beneficiary. This seems to fly in the face of natural justice, which is why CERA supported requests to both the London



Mayor Sadiq Khan and the Secretary of State Robert Jenrick to use their powers to 'call in' Ealing's plans so that they could be independently assessed. We were deeply disappointed that both refused to do so. The unhelpful message from the Government was that if we don't like what our Council is doing we should vote them out.



Saving the Victoria Hall

In March, after the Charity Commission approved the Council's plans to dispose of this charitable trust property adjacent to the Town Hall, the Friends of the Victoria Hall have resolved to challenge this decision at tribunal.

The Commission has ignored the conflict of interest at the heart of this issue, which means that the Trust property would be subsumed into a commercial hotel and effectively lost to the community that paid for it. The Friends have provided factual evidence that the

Trust property is at least 20% greater than the Council has stated. They have also submitted detailed proposals for how the Hall and related Trust areas could be run as a performance and arts centre – long promised by the Council, but never delivered – for the Trust’s beneficiaries, the people of Ealing. With better management, the Hall could be a successful and self-sustaining community facility.

A fundraising appeal, to cover the legal fees, is ongoing at <https://www.crowdjustice.com/case/save-the-victoria-hall/> and the short video at <https://youtu.be/gyvK0oLXB7o> shows how the Victoria Hall could be re-purposed as a modern community centre for today’s rapidly growing, multi-ethnic community, whose need of such facilities has never been greater.

Manor Road public inquiry

The giant 20-storey tower next to West Ealing Station became the subject of a fascinating two-week public inquiry in July. Faced with the Stop the Towers campaign and 2,400 public objections, including one from local MP James Murray, October 2020’s planning committee had voted against the planners’ recommendation and refused the development.

But property developers Southern Grove appealed against the decision, appointing the UK’s leading planning barrister, Christopher Katkowski, to argue their case. STT mounted a spirited attack against Mr Katkowski. The Council on the other hand failed to field a single officer to explain itself. Instead, it paid a consultant who had never previously worked on the scheme to make its case.

Mr Katkowski seized on the Council’s eight-year failure to publish any information about Ealing’s house-building programme to urge that the balance in the decision should be tilted in his favour. He pursued his criticisms by lodging a claim for costs against the Council. If he succeeds, it will be us as taxpayers who have to pay for the Borough’s negligence. The Inspector’s ruling on the inquiry and the costs claim is expected this autumn.



New cinemas in Ealing

Without a cinema in Ealing for well over a decade 11 screens are now proposed to be open within the next nine months. Can Ealing viably support this number of screens?

The Picturehouse 8-screen cinema (owned by Cineworld) in the centre of the Filmworks development is finally expected to open next spring and is planned to have over 1,000 seats, representing an average 125 seats per screen. There are 23 Picturehouse UK locations, including many in London such as at Notting Hill Gate, Clapham, Fulham Road, Crouch End, Greenwich, Hackney and Brixton.

In addition, the Really Local Group is planning a new 3-screen cinema in the basement of its new community hub in High Street, occupying a large space that was occupied by the notorious nightclub LA Confidential/Karma. Planning permission has been granted and the scheme is a partnership between RLG and British Land.

The cinema will have two screens of a hundred seats each, and one screen of 60 seats. So it will be a much smaller venue than Picturehouse with programming carried out in-house, supposedly ensuring a local family focus.

This cinema will form part of a mixed-use community arts venue with a coffee shop, co-working space and



an exhibition and performance area. Similar venues are operated by RLG in Catford, Canning Town, Sidcup and Hayes, with another soon to open in Bermondsey shopping centre, all rather different locations from central Ealing.

Left: artist's impression of the new Picturehouse cinema in the Filmworks development.

Ealing Broadway Station

After numerous delays the greatly improved and enlarged new station opened in May and building works are apparently to be completed later this year, although the full Crossrail service will not be running until February 2022. The passenger lifts and new ticket gates, in the new ticket hall, have been installed, platform shelters built and public realm work at the front of the station is taking place behind the hoardings on the station forecourt.

However, the public realm in front of the station forecourt (including the road, bus stops, cycle parking etc.) is meant to be controlled by the Council, not Network Rail, and since the public consultation in 2019 no revised plans from the Council have been forthcoming. They were due to come out five months ago, at the end of February, but nothing has been published.

A summary of changes to the external design that were to be considered by the Council included:

- Ensuring that the new cycle parking along the Broadway at least matches the existing temporary provision in Haven Green, which will be replaced, and ideally will provide for increased demand
- Retaining two southbound general traffic lanes instead of the single lane initially proposed



- Providing additional loading space and/or drop-off parking for people with mobility issues, visual impairment, elderly people or people with luggage
- Alternative location for certain bus stops, particularly the one between the station and the junction with the Broadway
- Retaining the existing taxi rank configuration and reconsidering new signalised crossing to this area.

Network Rail is working hard on the station forecourt and hopefully the front of the station, currently unsightly, will soon be improved. But what are the Council's plans for the area surrounding the station and when will those plans be published and implemented?