

Central Ealing Residents' Association

AGM held 17 October 2022
at Open Arts Centre, W5 2TD



Present: Stuart Morley (chair), Jimmy Umrigar,
Jan Zajczkowski, Will French, Gordon Chard, Gill Rowley

1 Welcome/Chair's report/project update

Owing to lockdowns, this was the first AGM since 18 September 2019.

CERA's Chair, Stuart Morley, welcomed everyone to the meeting then drew attention in particular to the proposals for 10-40 The Broadway (BL Broadway Connection), currently out for consultation. Comments need to be sent in immediately, and members will be emailed with details of how to do this.

Committee member Will French then gave an overview of other major projects around Ealing on which CERA has made or is about to make representations: Perceval House, Manor Road and Hastings Road in West Ealing, the Town Hall/Victoria Hall, and most recently Waitrose, plans for which reveal another extremely high building above a new supermarket. Both speakers used slides to illustrate their talks.

2 Treasurer's report

Jan Zajczkowski outlined the current state of CERA's finances, which had been examined and signed off by Karie Clifford on 20 August. The income and expenditure account circulated covered the three years from 2019/20 to 2021/22 and showed that CERA currently has over £9,000 in the bank. Expenditure has been low for several years owing to the impossibility of holding live AGMs during the lockdowns, but CERA has donated money to local campaigns such as Save the Victoria Hall and Stop the Towers, in addition to subscribing to Ealing Civic Society.

Membership has dwindled a little as people have moved away and also because new residents are very often renting rather than owning their homes, which makes them less likely to join any residents' association – a reflection of the steadily rising property prices mentioned by the speaker later in the meeting.

The accounts were proposed and seconded.

3 Election of officers and committee members

All of the current committee were prepared to stand for re-election, and were confirmed as follows:

Chair: Stuart Morley

Treasurer: Jan Zajczkowski

Secretary: Gill Rowley

Committee members: Will French, Jimmy Umrigar, Gordon Chard

Further committee members would be warmly welcomed.

4 Guest speaker: Peter Mason, Leader of Ealing Council

Peter Mason outlined the housing situation in the borough of Ealing. Although he is not an advocate for growth *per se*, the facts are that there are 10,000 people on the waiting list for accommodation in a borough where the average house price is £650,000 (rising to £3.5m), with flats in central Ealing commanding up to £1m (e.g. at Filmworks), which means there are very few affordable homes.

The consequence of the pandemic is a realignment of how people work, and more infrastructure is needed to support different working practices. More infrastructure means higher land values and ever-increasing house prices, affordable only by people earning high salaries in central London. It is inescapable that London is the centre of all industry, government and entertainment. However, PM would like Ealing to be a destination in its own right rather than a dormitory town for Crossrail commuters. Its position has been defined over many decades by factors such as the Uxbridge Road turnpike, the Grand Union Canal, the railway, the Great West Road and Heathrow Airport, but its 'Queen of the Suburbs' reputation has recently been in decline.

The high street has been suffering for years. Food outlets have replaced much traditional retail as high rents and the internet have killed off many traders.

Jobs need to be brought back to Ealing, and residential centres created.

Ealing has valuable Conservation Areas, heritage and built assets but there is a high volume of new applications, including for villa conversions (to flats), the latter because too few can afford, say, a £3.5m property, so these homes inevitably become susceptible to developers.

Ealing's population has recently declined by 3 per cent, and it also has an older population. While a few decades ago 50 per cent of housing was built by local authorities, now it is private developers who produce 98 per cent of it: they make the decisions on what should be built, and these are largely determined by the land value. As a block of flats containing ten units will yield far more profit than a single semi-detached house, the trend for building flats is unlikely to disappear.

The situation in West Ealing and Northfields is different: there the response to the accommodation need was to build smaller units to house a greater number of people.

PM said he believes, as a politician, in compromise, and has to make compromises every day: politics is after all 'the art of the possible'. He is also aware that we want for our children's future is dependent on the decisions taken today.

Questions from the audience

Will French (who is also Chair of Save Ealing's Centre): he said he had been contacted in the past week alone about developments at Friary Park (Acton), Twyford Abbey and Southall and by Stop the Towers. PM had said when he became Leader that he would put the community 'in the driving seat' and review the tall buildings policy, but there is little sign of change. Why?

PM explained that local authorities are governed by the National Planning Framework and the Local Plan. Although approval has been given for 14,000 units to be built, many have so far not been, therefore the council must continue to grant new planning consents. These are not all bad: for example, the Twyford Abbey proposals will not only renovate the Abbey but provide new homes, a huge school and public parkland. The Civic Society has not objected.

Southall: developers are being asked to reconsider their schemes and not focus solely on residential – jobs are needed even more.

West Ealing has a frail infrastructure (schools, GP services etc.).

Tall buildings policy is now to define areas suited to them and areas that are not. Transport is a key criterion, so denser development will be needed near public transport links. In much of Northolt and Greenford these are very poor. The Local Plan is setting out definitions, which will sometimes require lower buildings than those in some schemes that have received consent.

S106 money is being used for schools, surgeries, etc. However, the number of pupils is falling, reflecting demographic and population changes. CIL (Community Infrastructure Levy) is coming in but has not so far been implemented. It needs to be effectively used, with decisions made by the community rather than councillors.

Everyone is invested in maintaining house prices at their current level: they are entirely market-led.

Stuart Morley: but Perceval House is not market-led, so why has LBE followed, or even exceeded, market-led policies with a 26-storey block of flats which will be used as a benchmark for future market-led schemes?.

PM said he had no power to change the decision. However, some schemes have been paused. The ability of the council to finance schemes is severely limited, especially now in the context of rising interest rates.

Audience member: could planning notices (to individual homes near a proposed development) be reintroduced?

PM: financial situation is such that all expenditure must be prioritised. Some £38m more was needed before the 'mini-budget' owing to salary increases, etc., and the most pressing need is for adult and children's social care. Hence, it is unlikely that planning notices will be reintroduced, but some effort will be made to make the website more easily navigable.

PM clarified that anyone applying for planning consent must consult neighbours, but it doesn't always happen.

He also confirmed that there would be no further MIPIM trips (funded by developers) or further use of the 'Ealing London' brand.

Regarding provision of social rented accommodation, the London Plan target had been 35 per cent, but developers often make a 'smoke and mirrors' case for financial viability of their schemes which is impossible to challenge. One way round the requirement is to provide social housing in an off-site development, but this ghetto-ises sectors of the community. If social housing is a percentage of a development, service charges can be an insurmountable problem, as they are often very high and social tenants cannot claim for them. One example is Dickens Yard, where they are £500/month.

Audience member: I want to shop local, but all the useful shops are closing down.

PM: this is a reflection of high street rents. Council has had to wrestle with the previous Mayor of London saying there was too much industrial land in Ealing, and the current one saying there is too little. There is too little affordable retail, largely because of rental level and the internet [and perhaps Westfield]. There is no way at present to lock in affordable retail in new developments.

Audience member: what about the threats to the electricity supply owing to all the new development?

PM said what most people are unaware of is the huge power usage of data centres, one of which can absorb the power usage of a town. These service internet trading and there are 14 of them in the borough on SSE's books, but no indication of when the required infrastructure will exist. SSE expects the government to pay for it. However, the threat to the power supply will not stop homes being built.

Compared with, say, Hammersmith, Ealing has far less inward investment, also less office space and less employment. The council cannot stop flats being sold in China. Britain is seen by overseas investors as a safe place to put capital – a stable economy. British education is also a big draw. Currently, South East Asian money is coming in a Russian money is going out.

5 Vote of thanks

The Chair thanked the speaker for his very interesting talk and useful responses to the audience's questions.