

A NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN FOR EALING TOWN CENTRE

Workshop report October 2011

This is the report of the discussions and workshop facilitated by Civic Voice for Ealing Council to explore the potential of a neighbourhood plan for Ealing Town Centre.

The workshop was held on Monday 3rd October 2011 and the attendance, agenda and post-it note summaries developed at the workshop are included in the appendices. The presentations given are available as four separate PDF files.

Background

The Localism Bill currently before Parliament introduces new powers for local communities to prepare neighbourhood plans as part of the development plan for their area. Civic Voice was asked by Ealing Council to help it explore the possibilities for neighbourhood planning in Ealing Town Centre by bringing together those with a relevant interest in a workshop. Prior to the workshop Civic Voice met with Ealing Council officers, members of Save Ealing's Centre (SEC) and Ealing Business Improvement District (BID).

Workshop

"Things are going to be different"

Pat Hayes, Ealing Council
Peter Smith, Ealing BID
Will French, Save Ealing's Centre

Pat Hayes (Ealing Council)

Pat Hayes (Executive Director of Regeneration and Housing, Ealing Council) introduced the purpose of the workshop as an opportunity to work together to explore whether a neighbourhood plan would be worthwhile.

He highlighted the opportunity presented by the changes going on (in the wider economy, from Crossrail, in the planning system and in relation to particular development sites) to shape a better future for Ealing. He identified that Ealing had some key strengths in its character, appearance and relative economic health.

"Ealing has the potential to be a great place"

Pat Hayes, Ealing Council

Pat stressed the role played by the Council in representing a wide range of views, not all of whom participated in public debates. He also stressed the limitations on its powers and resources. For example, it must work within the London Plan and has no direct control over policing, trains or buses.

“The Council hasn’t got all the answers and needs to involve everyone to agree how to shape things”

Pat Hayes, Ealing Council

Walkabout

Everyone went on a short walk around Ealing Town Centre in four groups and gave individual feedback on what they liked, disliked and wanted to change as a result of their experience. The resulting post-it notes are included in the appendices.

Presentations

A series of presentations were provided to stimulate the discussion. The first two by Nicholas Falk (Urbed) and Rob Cowan (Urban Design Skills) drew on examples and experience elsewhere relevant to Ealing’s context.

Nicholas Falk placed an emphasis on encouraging a diversity of uses which make places attractive and underpin the local economy, citing examples from Uxbridge and Reading.

“Stations should be pleasant places to linger”

Nicholas Falk, Urbed

Rob Cowan emphasised the importance of the public realm as somewhere where communities mingle and mix. He stressed the need to relate movement to place and the value of important detail such as shop fronts. He also emphasised drawing out what makes places distinctive.

“Make Ealing weird”

Rob Cowan, Urban Design Skills

Drawing on examples including Scarborough and Harlesden he emphasised the value of a “town team” approach which brings people together around a shared purpose, such as a neighbourhood plan.

“Never make a place seem safer than it is”

Rob Cowan, Urban Design Skills

In discussion it was agreed that the process of involving people was as important as the outcomes and sometimes this needed a big external challenge to bring people together and avoid consultation fatigue.

Malcolm Wood (St George) gave a presentation from the perspective of a company that has recently invested heavily in Ealing describing its advantages and disadvantages to different types of investor.

Copies of these presentations are available as separate PDFs.

Peter Smith (Ealing BID)

Peter Smith (Chair, Ealing BID) described the work of the BID with over 650 active businesses in the area and providing them with a forum for communication, discussion and representation.

He explained the BID has no blueprint for they way forward and there hasn't been any recent consultation by the BID with businesses on the regeneration of the area. He stressed how much things have changed post credit crunch and that Ealing retained strong investment potential but retail investment was very weak. He indicated there was strong local loyalty for independent shops and also a need for larger retail floorspaces.

“Businesses support the idea of neighbourhood planning and are receptive to change”

Peter Smith, Ealing BID

Peter indicated support for the idea of Ealing Council applying to be a neighbourhood planning frontrunner.

He encouraged a pragmatic approach from both business and the residential community and focused attention on two sites:

Station – with its poor sense of arrival and weak connections with the town centre – where there was a risk of not maximising the opportunity provided by Crossrail investment and ending up with de minimis standards instead of a *“substantial, meaningful and enduring experience”*

Arcadia site – where there is a risk of short term priorities being driven by the current receivers that would result in piecemeal change that will do nothing to improve the permeability of the site or its connections with the rest of the town.

Will French (Save Ealing's Centre)

Will French (Chair, Save Ealing's Centre) introduced the coalition of 27 residents associations and other local groups that had been working together since 2007 and produced a vision for the town centre. This was being refreshed.

“If you don't know where you want to go it doesn't matter which road you take”

Will French, SEC, with thanks to the Cheshire Cat

Will stressed the need to consider West Ealing and Ealing Town Centre separately and the need for two neighbourhood plans.

Will concluded with a request for the following outcomes:

- A summary of the day
- An application by Ealing Council to become a neighbourhood plan frontrunner
- A programme for preparing a neighbourhood plan
- Development of a partnership for preparing a plan, including councillors

A copy of Will's presentation is available as a separate PDF.

Areas of agreement

Everyone was asked to identify one issue on which there had appeared to be general agreement during the morning session. The resulting post-it notes are summarised in the appendices.

There was one overwhelming issue of agreement – the need to sort out the running sore of **Ealing Broadway station**.

There was a wide ranging discussion about the station and future options. Some thought it easier to identify the problem than find a solution, especially given the complex ownership, multiple responsibilities and the impact of Crossrail investment in the medium but not short term.

There was strong support for a more pro-active approach establishing clear expectations of any future owner or developer. It was recognised that significant funding, perhaps through a joint venture and community investment, was a key issue to break through the current complexities.

A second area of agreement was over the benefits of **civic and community uses, especially a cinema**. There was a strong feeling from the young people in the workshop that there was too little to do in Ealing and it was a major reason why they spend time elsewhere. Many emphasised the potential to do more with what already exists, such as the town hall or giving a longer life to the Open Ealing initiative. The potential of requiring s106 agreements to provide space was raised. It was generally recognised that a key challenge lies in securing the revenue funding needed to manage many community facilities in the long term.

There was also agreement about the need to tackle **traffic and improve the public realm**.

“We’re up for being very radical about this”

Pat Hayes, Ealing Council

Any neighbourhood plan could address the traffic flow through the area and provide a starting point for investment in shared space or other improvement schemes, drawing on the recent local experience in Bond Street. It was recognised that north/south flows of traffic presented particular challenges. More information was requested on how many people are coming to Ealing Town Centre as a destination and how many are passing through.

The other main areas of agreement were:

- The need to plan and work together more
- Recognition that the status quo is not an option
- The potential of Ealing’s green areas.

Areas of disagreement

Everyone was asked to identify one issue on which there had appeared to be disagreement during the morning session. The resulting post-it notes are summarised in the appendices.

The main area of disagreement lies in the **balance between commercial and community uses** in the vision for the future of Ealing. This was expressed in different ways – such as whether there should be more people living in the centre or whether the priority should be to provide small retail units (for independent shops) or larger units (for chains and multiples). Some talked of a different paradigm for the future.

The debate over **retail** provided a focus for this discussion. There was strong support from community representatives and young people for a clear “niche” for Ealing – something that would be a reason for people to visit (e.g. as Hanwell is known for guitars). This might also be provided by animating the public spaces, investing in culture and the arts and making the area more resilient to external shocks.

Others saw things in terms of the imbalance in the retail heart with the need for investment north of the Broadway. There was general agreement there could be improved retail in Ealing without an increase in retail floorspace. There were also some disagreements about the height of buildings. There was general agreement about the need to provide a better night time economy that was less based on drinking.

The importance of planning ahead for the schools, health care, police and other infrastructure needed to accommodate a growing population and the space needed for related development was also mentioned.

A final point was the importance of not leaving agreement at a high level of generality and delving into the detail where differences may emerge.

Next steps

There was universal agreement that the discussions had been useful and that there were large areas of consensus around which to start developing thinking and contributing to a neighbourhood plan. It was recognised that the discussion could usefully be opened up more widely.

It was suggested that this look at the pre and post Crossrail period. The first period was important to manage major economic challenges and the second to harness the investment which Crossrail will provide for the widest possible benefit.

It was also emphasised again by SEC representatives that West Ealing and Ealing Town Centre should be considered separately.

Pat Hayes (Ealing Council) confirmed that he would progress with the application for frontrunner status and would be seeking to do this jointly with Ealing BID and SEC. He indicated there may be ways of treating West Ealing and Ealing Town Centre differently even within a single neighbourhood plan.

Commentary

Civic Voice offers the following commentary on the issues raised during this process:

1. There is a high level of agreement about the potential presented by neighbourhood planning in the face of change and the opportunity it presents both to shape the future and bring people together
2. The way Ealing Council communicates, feeds back, listens to and engages the business and residential community is critical – this needs to be timely, iterative and in the spirit of a partnership of equals
3. Neighbourhood planning frontrunner status provides an opportunity to focus minds and build partnerships. A framework of roles and responsibilities and a timeline needs to be agreed and there is much to commend the “Town team” approach. Local councillors need to be drawn into this process
4. The vision prepared by SEC provides a helpful starting point for its input and would benefit from being refreshed and being more informed about the economic possibilities of its proposals
5. Ealing BID could usefully start engaging its members in thinking about future opportunities and a vision for the area which would contribute to neighbourhood planning
6. There would be merit in a shared workshop / teach-in on the development economics of different options for the future of Ealing Town Centre
7. The issue of the boundary of a neighbourhood plan and the treatment of West Ealing and Ealing Town Centre needs early resolution
8. The role of transport providers is going to be crucial and they need to be brought into the process with the community and business as well as Ealing Council
9. There are significant differences of view which need to be aired and discussed over:
 - The preferred mix of retail uses
 - The balance between retail and community/civic uses
 - Whether Ealing is a town or metropolitan centre
10. There is significant agreement about the need to:
 - Address the running sore of Ealing Broadway station
 - Take a long term approach to the Arcadia site
 - Increase pedestrian priority and address traffic flows
 - Improve the public realm
 - Identify what makes Ealing “weird” and agree how it can become more distinctive
 - Provide for a greater range of community uses in existing and new development
 - Safeguard and make best use of existing green spaces.

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Workshop programme

Alfred Emmet room, Questors Theatre, 12 Mattock Lane, Ealing W5 5BQ

Monday 3rd October

- 10.15** **Arrival – tea and coffee available**
- 10.30** **Welcome and introductions – Tony Burton, facilitator & Civic Voice**
- 10.45** **Purpose – Pat Hayes, Executive Director of Regeneration & Housing, Ealing Council**
- 11.00** **Exercise**
- 11.30** **Successful town centres – learning from others:**
- **Building prosperity: making the economics work – Nicholas Falk, URBED**
 - **Look and feel: strong urban design – Rob Cowan, Urban Design Skills**
- 12.30** **Why invest in Ealing? – Malcolm Wood, Planning Director, St George**
- 12.45** **Two views on what Ealing needs:**
- **Ealing Business Improvement District – Peter Smith**
 - **Save Ealing’s Centre – Will French**
- 1.15** **LUNCH**
- 1.45** **Shared challenges & opportunities: where do we agree? – plenary discussion**
- 2.30** **Contrasting perspectives: where do we disagree? – plenary discussion**
- 3.30** **What should happen next? – plenary discussion**
- 3.50** **Follow up - Pat Hayes, Executive Director of Regeneration & Housing, Ealing Council**
- 4.00** **Close**

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**Workshop attendance
3rd October 2011**

David Chapman, Urban Design Skills
Ricardo Daniel, Apprentice, Ealing Council
Tatiana De Berg, St Benedict's High School
Robert Gurd, Ealing Civic Society
David Hennings, Catalyst Housing Group
John Hummerston, Ealing Arts & Leisure
Eric Leach, Save Ealing's Centre
Tony Miller, Ealing Civic Society
Pavanesh Patel, Featherstone High School
Thomas Robinson, St Benedict's High School
Jaspreet Sangha, Featherstone High School
Malcolm Tame, St George
Corinne Templer, Ealing Civic Society
Nick Woolven, Save Ealing's Centre

Nicholas Falk, Urbed
Rob Cowan, Urban Design Skills
Malcolm Wood, Land Director, St George
Peter Smith, Ealing Business Improvement District (BID)
Will French, Save Ealing's Centre (SEC)

Steve Barton, Ealing Council
Pat Hayes, Ealing Council
Salimah Murphy, Ealing Council
Armelle Racinoux, Ealing Council
Lucy Taylor, Ealing Council

Tony Burton, facilitator & Civic Voice

Walkabout

Likes

Contrast in congested areas and public spaces (Haven Green)
Old architecture and small businesses – community sense
Proximity of open areas (Haven Green / Ealing Green)
Green spaces and character of residential houses
Convenience of local shops and services
Greenery, open space, low rise
Town houses surrounding the park
Lots of small green areas
Bond Street paving and furniture
The peace and tranquillity of the green space – Haven Green, Ealing Green
Walpole Park – just as it is
Haven Green
Dickens Yard – opportunity for more high end / specialist retail
The variety of shops and the amount of High St not only Mall shopping
Haven / Ealing Green open spaces
All the parks
Greenery and open spaces
Green spaces – Have Green, Ealing Green
Good age range of people
Ealing Green
St George's development
Ealing (Walpole) Park
Historic buildings
Green spaces 🍷

Dislikes

Ealing Cinema – left in horrible state
The noise and run down feel of Ealing Broadway
Ealing Broadway centre
Amount of congestion of cars and no space for pedestrians and places for pedestrians to cross roads
Poor range/quality of retail offer
Barrier of Uxbridge Road and railway as a pedestrian
Villiers House / Ealing Broadway station and forecourt
Lack of character of certain buildings
Narrow pavements
Pavements – narrow and crowded
Lack of integrated transport hub
The architecture on buildings are too different – should blend more
Station
Under/undeveloped sites – cinema, Villiers House, Crystal House
Arrival experience at the station
Broadway
The height of new development out of keeping with the rest of the centre
Station complex
Neglect of built environment and public space
Crowded conditions at the train station
Cinema closed down
Design of train station
Poor quality shops

Want to change

Massively improve north/south transportation
Open unused offices as incubator spaces for small businesses
The cinema – to be built and not left as an open space as it looks ugly
Make vacant units more presentable
Put the green back into Ealing
Affordable rent for retail units
Arcadia/Broadway station complex
Noise in high street
Dickens Yard developer
Road in front of Ealing Broadway station
Introduce a cinema
Make more of the hidden gems that town centre doesn't link to enough – Walpole Park, Haven Green, Churchyard
Sort out Ealing Broadway station
Arcadia and 70s/80s shopping centre – dark and poor frontage
Diversity of building design and architecture
Public realm – improving paving etc
Lack of hegemony – integration between various parts of the town centre
More parking
Vacant cinema site – develop it!
Villiers House demolition
Take traffic off Uxbridge Road
Shopping centre
The pile of rubble at cinema
Give greater priority to the pedestrian over the car
Make the most congest roads more civilised – tame the traffic!

Discussion

Areas of agreement

There is potential for development in Ealing
 Some form of development is inevitable....the status quo is not an option nor is it desirable
 Public spaces not traffic
 Good transport
 We need to work together
 Transport into Ealing Town Centre
 We need to work together
 Let's all work together
 Ealing needs a plan (since years ago)
 Need for comprehensive redevelopment of Ealing Broadway / Arcadia complex
 Developing the station so it isn't as crowded
 Station site redevelopment
 Ealing Broadway station deficiencies
 Ideas for change such as to the station and Arcadia centre exist but follow through needs to be carefully considered to be effective
 Important of Crossrail station and development around it
 Integrated transport hub
 Change the station front
 Maximise renewal of transport node around Crossrail
 Everyone wants change and doesn't like the station in particular
 Change / redesign the station
 Finding a long term solution for Arcadia
 Keeping green areas and exploiting them to create income for local businesses, residents and community groups

Areas of disagreement

Ealing is not a metropolitan centre – it is not like Croydon and does not want to be
 The community and council must prevent developers taking charge
 Attracting in more people living/shopping/working
 New homes provision – How much? Who for?
 Small/medium retail units versus large floorplate retail units
 Need to be specific about land use – impose controls on commercial development
 Commercial versus community development
 Small/medium retail units
 How do we use public buildings? What are their uses?
 What use for existing buildings – tourists or residents?
 Uses of town hall space and community facilities – provide for the community first
 Uses of existing buildings – cultural/community purposes
 Tall buildings are possible in key locations – to achieve improvements in infrastructure need investment of certain scale and proportion to be viable
 Height of buildings
 Infrastructure needs – only articulated by SEC
 There is no agreement on a mechanism by which we can work together in the long term. Could neighbourhood planning be the means of doing this?
 Roles and responsibilities
 No major disagreement but likely to be on later detail – quantum of development, design issues
 The devil is always in the detail and we haven't discussed any detail