

December Newsletter

Dear West Londoner,

Neighbourhoods that survive in the long-term are those that have the opportunity to evolve gradually.

Change that comes slowly can be absorbed by the community and developments that seemed unbearable when first built can become part of the scenery. But recent development in the constituency, some of it already being built, some approved for development and some so far merely proposed is too much, too fast.

Local Council Planning Committees are sometimes in a difficult position. They are occasionally opposed to the developments they approve, but pass them because they suspect that they would lose any (expensive) appeal against a rejected application. They end up as the focal point of opposition by local action groups, but in truth our local efforts ought to be directed at the primary causes of over-hasty residential and commercial building projects.

I refer to Ken Livingstone and John Prescott. Both of these ego-centric individuals have bestowed upon themselves increasing powers to permit "development" (destruction, more-like) of both green- and brown-field sites. Increasing the required minimum levels of affordable housing to a point where developers are forced to contemplate unacceptable density levels, in order that they retain a margin of profit. Even the most confident London Borough Councils find it difficult to oppose the Mayor's directives in this regard. The consequences of these arbitrary targets are clear for everyone in the neighbourhood to see:

1. Prestolite Electrics development in Larden Road - over 600 new residencies proposed in the initial application of which close to 100% were originally ear-marked for affordable housing.
2. Allied Carpets on Goldhawk Road - a proposed 10 Storey Tower that even the Leader of the Hammersmith & Fulham Borough Council has opposed...
3. Somerfield, The Vale - closure of the only supermarket between Acton Town Centre and Shepherd's Bush, in order that the accompanying real estate could be made available for the ludicrous "Work-Live" apartments that are planned for the site.
(The "Work-Live" apartments are a cunning means by which developers and Planning Committees get round previously self-imposed building restrictions. If an area is not designated a residential area, then theoretically it ought to be impossible for residential development to take place there. Build "Work-Live" apartments - one bed studio flats to you and me - and suddenly you can build living quarters in an employment zone).
4. The Guinness Sports Field plans on Twyford Abbey Road.
5. The North Thames Sports Ground on Twyford Avenue - here the owner won't let school children play sport on the open spaces and purposefully allows the area to become derelict in order to improve the chances of having a planning application waved through.

There are many others. You probably know of plans near you that you are actively opposing.

And as the numbers of local residents rise, so the local infrastructure comes under intolerable strain. And so we begin to see, for example:

A concrete crushing and waste transfer site forced into an unsuitable area, less than 50 metres from people's homes at the northern end of Old Oak Lane known as the Island Triangle.

The redevelopment of the Shepherd's Bush Central Line Tube station built with virtually no consideration for the residents in the adjacent street, who had even gone to the trouble and expense of drafting alternate plans for the site. Those plans looked superior to me when I observed them, but they were given no consideration by the Planning Committee who voted to approve the developers' plans.

And of course the Gypsy Corner Bus Depot. In spite of a well-organised, reasonable, cross-party and widespread action against the TfL proposals, that ultimately saw the Ealing Planning Committee reject the second proposal, nevertheless Livingstone still had the contempt for those local voices to come to Acton Town Hall and tell us that he would appeal against the Committee's decision.

What would the Conservatives do differently, you might legitimately ask?

First of all, I oppose the imposition by the Mayor of arbitrary minimum affordable housing levels. I am not alone in this - earlier this year the Labour MP for Ealing Southall echoed these views when he declared that further inflow of new residents would place an intolerable burden on the existing community. Local councils should retain the power to set their own levels.

If we are to provide "affordable housing", let's make it available to key-workers through a far wider programme of assisted purchasing than we see at present. Under this initiative, we should see the public and private sector encouraged to help the first-time buyers working in hospitals, fire and police stations and schools, with making a full or even part payment on a place near where they work.

I would like to see the existing housing stock made to work harder - there are hundreds of empty properties around our neighbourhood, as well as sites far better suited to development than most of the easy targets that I have mentioned earlier.

And I would like to see the big Housing Associations scrutinised far more closely by the Housing Departments of the local councils, to ensure that they are doing a good job. I have received complaints about the performance of one or two of the better known names - but it seems that the two local councils just don't care about making sure that the council and social housing stock we already have is offered to the public in the best condition possible. Residents and conservative-minded politicians (note the small 'c') are often accused of NIMBYism when opposing new projects. But it is not NIMBYism to want to preserve the delicate balance of one's local neighbourhood - neighbours know what their local community can bear, and what it cannot. Their voices, by which I mean YOUR voices, should be listened to a lot more closely.

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And so on to other points.

I received a lot of feedback from my newsletter last month when I discussed my thoughts on Policing and Crime. I was not surprised to be contacted by Supt Joe Wadsworth, of Ealing Police, who asked to meet and review the points that had been raised in that message. I was very encouraged by our meeting, and reiterate a point that I made in November - the burdens placed on the police are predominantly those imposed by Central Government and its headline-following directives. I would like to thank Supt Wadsworth for his frank and fair comments. You can read last month's Newsletter on our website www.ealingconservatives.com If any readers of this newsletter would like to know more about the process of becoming a Councillor, please let me know.

We would like to invite you to join us for supper on 14th December, when our guest speaker will be Mark Field MP, Shadow Minister for London and Member of Parliament for Cities of Westminster and London. E-mail me for further details.

For those of you with business interests, you may wish to know more about a business forum that has been established by a number of West London Conservative Associations. Known as "Business and Politics" it allows businessmen and politicians to share ideas and thoughts on topical issues. Let me know if you would like to hear more.

Finally I invite you to submit your answers to our online surveys on www.ealingconservatives.com The survey this month is on smoking, and whether it ought to be banned in certain public places. Let me know your thoughts - next month I will tell you the results.

It only remains therefore to wish you a very Happy Christmas and let's hope the rumour that the H&F Council have cancelled the Hammersmith Broadway Santa Claus is not true.