

TEDDINGTON SOCIETY ROADS AND TRANSPORT GROUP AGM REPORT 2004

It has been an interesting and challenging year since the last AGM Report, many things have happened – some welcome – some not so welcome. For one item, the North Lane overflow car park, the year ends on a more optimistic note, with the UDP Inspector recommending that the car park should be retained until a further review is carried out. Even better, Councillor Arbour, Leader of the Council has written to the Teddington & Hampton Times to say that the Council will abide by the UDP Inspector's decision "in a constructive manner". The Society and other local residents and businesses all agree that the best way forward is by consultation and consensus, we have no objection to the valuable, but derelict, depot site being sold for development. Support from local residents and businesses can maximise that value. At the same time, it is vital that we keep the valuable and well-used 26 space overflow car park to support and sustain the economic vibrancy of the Broad Street shopping centre.

1. The Teddington Town Centre Improvements Study

Many members will have attended the 21st March 2001 meeting at the Landmark Centre at which the audience expressed views on a wide range of subjects. A couple of messages came through loud and clear – residents wanted full consultation about improvements to Teddington to ensure that the essentially neighbourly atmosphere was not lost, and that Controlled Parking Zones (CPZs) were not welcome in most parts of Teddington. This Study was the first to take place since the last one in 1989 – and it became obvious from its findings that a decade is much too long a gap, and regular reviews would give more structure to all aspects of the planning process. It would also ensure that the infrastructure was kept up to date, essential maintenance carried out, and overall costs reduced. More importantly, it would allow the major benefit of residents' local knowledge and expertise to be used by Council Officers who have to draft plans for the area, but do not live in the area, do not know the area, and have no feel for the area.

Residents' Working Study Groups were set up to cover environmental, planning and transport issues, many meetings and walkabouts took place, many proposals and plans were discussed and agreed between residents and Council Officers. The results of many of the completed traffic safety measures can be seen in improvements to the walking environment in the High Street and Broad Street areas. The problems of delays and unnecessary air, noise and visual pollution caused by the Broad Street/Queens Road and Broad Street/Causeway traffic lights remain with us, although Colin Tether and his team have been pressurising Transport for London's traffic light section to make programming improvements. The Broad Street/Causeway lights are a particular problem as they cause severe rush hour congestion over the railway bridge, often backing up far into the High Street and Waldegrave Road – particularly during the afternoon school run. In the morning, regular commuters sensibly leave gaps around the roundabout to allow through traffic to pass and minimise delays – in the afternoon this does not seem to happen.

Unfortunately, funds for the Study were withdrawn at the end of 2002, and some safety improvement projects, identified as essential, were left unfinished. However, other safety and environmental improvements have been taking place, some started as part of the Study, some are long overdue improvements previously delayed due to costs, and some are as part of the greener, cleaner borough policy introduced by the new administration.

2. Broad Street bus stops

For some years it was bus company policy to place bus stops in such a way as to hold up following traffic by making passing a stationary bus difficult. It is now recognised that in holding up following traffic as is the case in Broad Street, quite unnecessary delays were being caused to following bus services. The situation is even more difficult now, as modern buses are required to pull up parallel to the kerb for two reasons; one, to allow easy and safe access for all passengers, including those with a disability or parents with children; and two, to avoid hitting street furniture if a bus has to approach at an angle because its long frontal overhang would pass several metres over the pavement. Although there is plenty of pavement space outside Boots, a long layby is not possible, and on the opposite side of Broad Street, the pavement is extremely narrow. So there is a major congestion problem during rush hours.

The most recently approved proposals involve a shift of the south side bus stop and shelter from outside the tobacconists to a place 20 metres towards the Causeway, removal of the kerb buildout, and relocation of the parking bays leading up to the new stop. Overall, at least one parking bay will be lost,

and the narrowness of the pavement will create quite severe pressures on pavement space. A suggestion that the stop should be moved between Elleray Road and North Lane was considered, but rejected by police on safety grounds, although this location has proved to be very successful when used as an emergency bus stop.

The most radical, and best long term solution, would be to close the Broad Street end of the Causeway to create a mini town centre with seating and generous bus stop waiting areas. This would enable the removal of the Causeway traffic lights and linked delays to traffic; create a continuous footpath to and from the railway bridge; improve pedestrian safety; and, of course, completely remove the congestion caused by the present bus stop locations. The Causeway would become a cul-de-sac, with no loss of parking, and would provide the possibility of use as a location for special local events, local markets etc. The Causeway has been closed on a number of occasions in the past, and few consequential adverse traffic problems were ever identified – and certainly none as bad as those currently caused every day by the traffic lights.

3. Unitary Development Plan Inspector's Report - North Lane overflow car park

I ended my last year's report with the following statement:-

"It does look as if our shoppers' car parks have become a political football – they are much too important for that – let's hope local Conservative and Lib/Dem politicians will put aside their considerable differences and support us in our bid to save both Station Road and North Lane car parks – and in doing so - our shopping centres".

Unfortunately this did not happen, the Station Road car park was sold off without consultation or warning, and the North Lane car park was listed for sale along with the derelict depot building. The sale was approved at a January Cabinet meeting, confirmed at a February Overview and Scrutiny meeting, confirmed again at a February Extraordinary meeting of the full Council. There was no real debate on the merits of selling the depot building and the car park as a single package, although all residents consider that much of the car park cannot be developed because of the very close proximity of surrounding housing. A tidied up depot building site probably represents over 80% of the total development value of this site.

The complete lack of consultation from the date of its first listing in an obscure Cabinet document in November 2001, until it appeared as an amendment to the UDP in early 2003 created a considerable amount of alarm and ill-feeling among local residents and businesses. The Society held a public meeting and prepared a petition objecting to the sale of the car park in response to public demand, well over 3000 car park users signed the petitions over a period of 10 days or so. There is little doubt that by spreading the net a little wider, over 5000 signatures could easily have been obtained such was the strength of public feeling about the potential loss of 24% of all Broad Street shopping centre's off-road parking.

Dr Robins, The UDP Inspector has fortunately recognised that Teddington has two shopping centres of quite different character running through the centre of the town. He did not accept that, as was suggested by the Council Barrister at the July hearing, the use of High Street car parks, particularly the new Marks & Spencer car park, would be a satisfactory replacement for the North Lane car park. We hope that the Council will reconsider its marketing strategy and prepare to sell the tidied up depot site as a separate unit, to allow the continued use of our valuable and well-used overflow car park. The Society, local residents and businesses, are all standing by to make positive and constructive contributions to the consultation process.

4. Controlled Parking Zone consultation – results likely to be public in mid-May

At present we have no information about the CPZ consultation other than just over one third of consultees responded, and that Councillor Kreling has indicated in a press release that new CPZs were unlikely, although parking in certain areas might be the subject of further review. It remains the view of the Teddington Study Parking sub-Committee members, that its three options of "no-change", or a 2 hour CPZ, or a "no-charge turnover parking scheme" should have formed the basis of consultation, although this was rejected by local Councillors. If a decision is made not to introduce CPZs, its "free turnover parking" option based on freeing up yellow lines after the rush hour commuters have left Teddington, will create parking space for local residents. The Society will therefore press for reconsideration of the Study's comprehensive Parking Report to ensure that at least some parking improvements are made for the benefit of residents. The full Parking Report can be seen on the Society website and on Teddington-online.