

TEDDINGTON SOCIETY ROADS & TRANSPORT GROUP AGM REPORT 2009 – INADEQUATE CONSULTATION PROBLEMS CONTINUE

1. Employment of numerous consultants leads to costly inefficiencies, inadequate professional advice to Councillors, and worsening of consultation standards

The current management structure of the Council's Highways and Transport department has proved to be inadequate to manage and control the activities of staff employed by independent consultants, giving rise to numerous, well documented problems. On occasions, not only are residents not consulted, but sometimes, we are told, neither are local Councillors.

When the present LibDem Administration was last in power, the majority of staff were highly qualified and dedicated Council employees with a good knowledge of local areas and issues. Their expertise was supplemented by a small number of directly recruited individual consultants, selected on the basis of their proven skills. The management structure was adequate, but relied heavily on the expertise and experience of the permanent staff, many of whom kept personal records to ensure work was done properly, so any managerial structural weaknesses were not obvious to anyone outside the department. As far as Teddington was concerned, consultation was never less than good **(8/10)**, and was outstanding **(10/10)** throughout the 2001/2002 Teddington Town Centre Improvements Study when officers and residents worked in partnership to introduce many new traffic safety and environmental improvements.

In 2002, a Conservative Administration took over, and as part of a cost – cutting exercise, reduced the number of permanent staff, and employed a single consulting company to administer its transport policies. Unfortunately, it did not order a review of departmental working procedures, or introduce the systems based management structure necessary to ensure maximum efficiency at minimum cost. The new arrangements initially worked adequately under a very competent manager **(5/10)**, but as the Council had no say about who the company employed, massive staff turnover at workface level became a serious issue with inadequate training and an ever increasing series of newly qualified, inexperienced staff being employed. Few of these staff had any experience of consultation with the public, how to identify who should be consulted, or how to recognize priorities. It also appears that record keeping procedures were deficient, giving rise to identical work being done from scratch more than once – with consequential unnecessary additional costs.

In 2006, the present Administration took power, and a decision was made to increase the number of consultants to avoid over-reliance on one company. This has given rise to ever worsening consultation problems, including committee documents lacking the essential technical detail to ensure that committee members are adequately briefed, or sufficiently detailed for members to know precisely what will the actual effect be of implementation of any recommendations made by officers. Even worse, pre-consultation discussions no longer took place with Amenity Societies, businesses or residents, and consultation documents were sometimes sent out to lacking the data necessary for residents to make an informed choice when voting on an issue. In addition, some decisions made by the Cabinet Member for Transport lack clarity, saying that details are to be agreed later with local Councillors. At other times, decisions are made without any public consultation at all – and with little or no publicity. All in all, a very unsatisfactory situation – worth no more than **(2/10)**.

2. CPZ Introduction June 2008 – over 400 empty spaces each morning (see Annex 1)

The CPZ around Teddington station was put in place in June 2008, more or less at the peak of the fuel price hike, and the beginning of the recession. Already there had been some reduction in commuter parking around the station due to these factors, but the introduction of the CPZ removed many other cars that used to park around the station. It is known that some were displaced into Park Lane and Elmfield Avenue, but many seem to have disappeared elsewhere.

It may be that many belonged to Teddington residents who lived fairly close to the station, who then decided to walk or cycle to the station, or to others who decided to drive all the way to work, or to others who were in the process of losing their jobs so did not commute any more. The creation of the fairly empty roads was not unexpected, as the Teddington Residents' Parking Report had suggested that residents should have been consulted about free turnover parking, or a two hour CPZ. The free turnover parking would have automatically excluded commuters' vehicles, thus creating around a hundred and thirty spaces in Community Parking Spaces around the station, plus perhaps another hundred or more spaces left by residents who drove to work.

Annex 1 shows that 411 permits have been purchased for 700 spaces, leaving 289 spaces that will never be filled. Typically, about 250 vehicles are parked within the CPZ each morning, leaving around 450 empty spaces – many of which are in Community Parking Spaces which could be re-allocated to provide more Pay & Display or all day Free Turnover Parking to provide additional parking for shoppers and patients. Last October, a decision to sell permits to residents and businesses living outside the CPZ area was made without any form of consultation with residents living in the CPZ – thus encouraging business staff to drive to work in contravention of Council CO2 policies.

One overall benefit for Teddington residents is that anyone wishing to go to the theatre in London, can now drive to the station with the certain knowledge that there will be somewhere to park. The flipside is that patients for the surgeries in Adelaide Road often cannot find anywhere close to park during the 0830-1030am period, so some more free turnover parking is required.

3. Proposed loss of 120 residents' parking spaces in Fairfax and Cromwell Roads

We found out by accident that 120 residents' parking spaces were to be removed in Cromwell and Fairfax Roads. This scheme has since been modified to provide Collis School with Zig-Zag safety zones outside the school entrances, and the yellow line proposals have been scaled down.

4. CPZ Review December 2008

The CPZ was due to be reviewed in September 2008, but was eventually reviewed between December and February. The boundaries remain broadly unchanged, with the rest of Clarence Road being included on the basis of a very low voting turnout. The Society's and Park Road residents' request for the exclusion of the west side of Park Road, which is virtually empty each day was rejected – had this section of road been freed up, pressure on Park Lane would have been relieved.

5. New parking payment procedures - good, Big Brother aspects - bad

Members will have noticed that the Council has spent the best part of £2 million on replacing all the old parking meters with a new solar panel powered all singing and dancing design, which allows more payment options, including payment by cash, by telephone, and by a Richmond debit card which has to be kept in credit. The Society welcomes the new system which can allow payment for the actual time used, rather than the present half hour minimum, but is alarmed at the enormous cost involved, and concerned about the requirement for residents to register full details of their vehicles on a database to qualify for any discounts (see 6 below). It also objects to the proposed 25% increase on all parking charges, which presumably are needed to pay for the machines.

On behalf of the Society, I addressed the 19th January Cabinet meeting and said:-

(i) The half hour minimum charge must be scrapped as a matter of urgency. Motorists are being ripped off because it gives rise to hidden overcharging, and in some circumstances, pyramid selling of parking spaces in busy car parks or on the road. The new technology will allow drivers to pay for exactly the time they need, whether it is 5 minutes or two hours. It is much fairer than having to pay for time that cannot, for various reasons, be used.

*(ii) The introduction of Waitrose style free parking, a 50% discount for OAPs as per CPZs, and **NEW** free turnover parking to support at risk shopping centres is essential.*

(iii) The Society rejects Councillor Lourie's view that a £2 an hour parking charge will be no deterrent to visitors to the borough – evidence from elsewhere has shown that free or very cheap parking attracts shoppers and visitors – high charges frighten them away. The Society, therefore, strongly opposes any increases in parking charges at present, as these will undoubtedly create a massive threat to our beleaguered shopping centres in these challenging economic times. It suggests freezing, or preferably reducing, parking charges, to stimulate the local economy by encouraging residents, as well as visitors, to support our local shops, and not create additional pollution by driving to out of town Superstores and Supermarkets.

6. Consultation on new CO2 Tax on all Council Parking Spaces – on or off road

The introduction of a new CO2 (carbon dioxide) tax was discussed at the Scrutiny (14th January) and Cabinet meetings (19th January), but the evidence given by all public speakers about the damage to our hard pressed local shopping centres was completely ignored by both committees. However, it was agreed that a public consultation should take place, closing date 30th March.

Unfortunately the consultation document does not make clear that :-

1. If a resident (or a visitor?) does not register his or her vehicle, the parking charge in council controlled parking spaces, on or off road, will automatically be the current charge **plus** 25%.
2. There will be a charge for the registration process (£2.50?).
3. There will be an additional charge of about 20p for each telephone payment (plus, of course, the cost of the call).
4. Data will be recorded about everyone who registers their vehicle, how and where they park if they use council parking spaces - and possibly more data recorded by cameras. All very Orwellian. At present, residents living within Controlled Parking Zones will only have their information recorded if they purchase a resident's parking permit to park on the road, so no major change for them. However, all residents living within CPZs who have off-road parking and do not purchase a resident's parking permit will have data about them recorded for the first time - unless they avoid parking in a council parking space, or opt to pay 125% of the standard parking charge to avoid registration, or park and shop elsewhere. The most likely result will be that these residents, and those living outside CPZs, will desert our local shopping centres and patronise out of town superstores - very bad news indeed for our hard-pressed local shopping centres.

The proposals can, of course, be put to the electorate in 2010 to get a fuller picture of residents' views, as this CO2 tax was not a manifesto commitment in the last local election.

After regularly failing to persuade Councillors and Officers to hold the quarterly CLG meetings

7. Cycling – Cycle Liaison Group to meet after a two year gap

that used to occur, six weeks ago I addressed a full Council Meeting to request that firstly, a CLG meeting should be held as soon as possible, and secondly that the Council should implement a Walking Policy, as both would contribute to a reduction in CO2 emissions and a reduction in air pollution. A CLG meeting is now to take place on Monday 9th March, and a "Smarter Travel Richmond upon Thames" Transport for London meeting, including cycling, walking and public transport is to take place at Twickenham Stadium at the end of March – Mr Kulveer Ranger, GLA Director of Transport Policy and Peter Hendy, Commissioner for Transport will be attending.

8. Rail Issues

Last year, Southwest Trains agreed to extend the 1713 service from Waterloo as far as Teddington, it originally terminated at Strawberry Hill and returned empty to Waterloo, it still returned empty to Waterloo from Teddington. After further discussions with the SWT timetable manager, Peter Brooks, the service will now form the 1756(?) stopping service to Waterloo via Wimbledon – ideal timing for an evening out in London, and for office workers returning to other London locations.

I am due to meet SWT management on Monday 9th March to discuss the general state of Teddington station, in particular to seek the upgrading of the footbridge at the south end of the station to a ramped design to make the bridge fully accessible to anyone who cannot use steps, including wheelchair and pushchair users. The bridge is on a key route from the river direction to central Teddington and Bushy Park.

9. Bus stops

The Council's consultants continue to mess bus stops about, and Councillors say that they are not being consulted about the changes. The strangest move, and certainly the daftest, is the relocation of the Marston Road bus stop to a stretch of Kingston Road by Udney Hall Gardens. Buses never stop there, and travellers never wait for buses there, as the main permanent stop is less than 40 metres away outside the Landmark Centre.

Almost in the same category is the bus stop outside the Methodist Church in Stanley Road, which has twice been proposed for upgrading by preventing any parking across the church frontage – on both occasions, the Society has opposed this unworkable proposal.

10. Teddington Society Web Page (www.teddingtonsociety.org.uk)

I am working with Colin Hicks, the TeddSoc website manager to make the transport section more user friendly, there is a lot of useful information there, including some historical records about various council policies. If any of you would like other information included, please let me know.

11. Are you receiving news via the Teddington Society information/consultation list?

I circulate information on a regular basis, and also seek residents/members' views. If you are not on my circulation list, and wish to join, please email me on brianholder99@aol.com .

Brian A Holder, Leader Roads & Transport Group.

Other issues for coverage in Tidings

I will be covering the problems with revised bus stop layouts, the announcement of an area travel plan for Teddington, and the problems created by the lack of consultation when consultants are employed by the council.

Brian Holder, 6th March 2009