

THE ISLINGTON SOCIETY

ANNUAL REPORT FOR THE YEAR 2003/4

David Gibson Architects

29 MAR 2004

This is the fifth report I have presented to an Annual General Meeting of the Society, which this year takes place on Tuesday April 20th, at 7.30 in the Town Hall. Once again I am able to report a variety of activities both within the Society and more widely in Islington.

As always, it would not be possible to report thus without the efforts of many people. David Peel and Frances Balfour have kept the Committee running, Bob O'Dell has broadened the scope of our programme of events, Emma Gowers has maintained and enhanced the popularity of the Annual Dinner, and David Gibson and Jack Winkler have upheld the quality of the newsletter. Donald Mitchell has looked after the pennies and introduced the concept of a dress rehearsal for the dinner.

Adam Bower has decided to step down from the Committee which will continue to combine the work of the old executive and PC & T committees. To comply with our constitution the executive is technically the officers of the Society.

Members are requested to attend the Annual General Meeting of the Society, on Tuesday, April 20th at 7.30 p.m. in the Town Hall Islington, for the transaction of the undermentioned business.

- 1. To receive apologies.**
- 2. To adopt the minutes of the A.G.M. 29th April 2003.**
- 3. To receive the Annual report 2003/4.**
- 4. To adopt the financial report to 31st December, 2003.**
- 5. To agree the levels of subscription.**

6. To elect the officers of the Society.

(A full list will be provided at the meeting).

7. To consider any other relevant business.

This will be followed **at 8 p.m.** with a talk by **Dave Wetzel, Vice-Chair of Transport for London, on "Land Value Taxation".**

Dave is a very entertaining speaker and an expert on this dry sounding but topical subject. With the future of Council Tax under review, and local authorities unable to fund major developments, now is the ideal time to hear Dave's solution and question him about it.

Events in 2003/4

The year began with Leisha Fullick's fascinating insight into the workings of Islington council during her time as chief executive. This was also an interesting precursor to Stephen Twigg's talk on Education in London. As a former councillor in Islington with a ministerial brief for the whole of London, Stephen clearly relished the opportunity to return to address an Islington audience.

Our annual pub crawl in honour of the late Bill Manley took us past fifty different pubs since the event began. For the first time it was juxtaposed with a church crawl, focused on the buildings rather than the worship.

In the autumn, a splendid session with Roger Madelin, chief executive of Argent St. George, gave us an advance preview of what is planned for the Railway Lands at King's Cross, mostly in Camden, but right on our border with a small part in our own Borough. On the other side of Islington, we held a meeting with the Hackney Society at Newington Green.

These meetings were well attended, which is always a relief when excellent speakers have been persuaded to come. We marked the Christmas festive period (which coincides with the Christian penitential season of Advent) with a party at which we and the Archaeology & History Society said good-bye to Janet Wootton, erstwhile Minister of Union Chapel.

The new year began with a trip to Tottenham bus garage, reported in our newsletter. The last major event was the Seventh Annual dinner, at which we were pleased to welcome Her Worship the Mayor and John Dunne of the Highbury & Islington Express. At fifty, we more than filled the space originally planned at the Old Dairy. Later in March, our own Kathleen Frenchman spoke to a joint meeting in the regular slot of the Archaeology & History Society. Her presentation, *Beguiling Barnsbury*, was inspired by the sesquicentenary of St. Andrew's Parish Church in Barnsbury. However, Kathleen's research went back a lot earlier than 1854 and was much appreciated by a huge audience, causing the partition between rooms 5 and 6 to be unfurled for the second time this year.

Interspersed amongst these events have been the monthly "Meet the President" sessions at the Marquess Tavern. If the President is "the father of our community", the Marquess is our mother chapel. We have drawn a small but varied audience at these events and have been able to discuss various issues and the Society's response to them as a precursor to finalising it at our committee. Those issues are described below.

City Road Basin

In the late autumn the Council published a draft planning brief for City Road basin, the canal basin associated with the Islington Boat club. The catalyst for this was the prospect of development, but the brief appeared to be led by a desire to accommodate all the potential players in a full scale development. At the time of writing, a second brief represents something of a step forward, in that aspects of the existing park that were to be lost have been reinstated as prerequisite of any

development. However, there are still two tall buildings, one on top of the canal, which are wholly inappropriate both to this part of Islington and to a canal-side development. (For evidence of the latter, please visit Paddington basin, or see the leaflet advertising the walking routes - around the buildings, not around the canal as they should be).

London Plan

The case for a tall building was based on the draft London Plan, which suggested that the Mayor would support building upwards as the way to meet the need for substantial growth if London is to retain and enhance its world city status. Fortunately, the final version, published in February 2004, is far more measured. Specifically, policy 4B.9 refers to the sensitivity of a waterside development and the importance of the public realm. There are other changes in the final version that we welcome, notably an emphasis on reducing the need to travel that was missing from the first draft.

Future London forum events

Our views on these matters were conveyed directly and reinforced by the London Forum of Amenity & Civic Societies, which is holding a meeting on July 8th to review the result. Their meetings are normally in Islington, at Cowcross Street, and all members are entitled to attend as affiliates. There is normally a small charge to cover costs. Their programme for the next six months is:

Monday April 18th: *London Transport Users Committee*

Tuesday 11th May: *Planning issues*

Tuesday June 8th: *Housing & the Barker report*

Thursday July 8th: *the Mayor's Plan for London*

Thursday September 23rd: *A.G.M.*

Arsenal stadium

It is a curious paradox that whereas old people are being asked to stand on the bus, (see below), all football fans are provided with a seat whether they want it or not. This is why the present stadium is now considered uneconomic, and why the club was determined to move. We are relieved that

they are not moving to a car-dominated destination. Many of the cars would start from and return to Islington. We always took the view that objections to the principle of the new stadium were unlikely to succeed, and that economics would determine whether the new scheme went ahead, but that it was important to ensure that the detail was right for Islington if it did proceed. This being so, it was disappointing to read that Arsenal may be reining back on its offer of a community sports centre, on the grounds that an economic downturn has happened since the original plans were submitted.

Firstly, it is bad politics to withdraw an offer of this nature. The pattern of major developments is more usually to start with something unacceptable to the local community in the hope of placating opposition with a few concessions. Secondly, while the cycle of boom and bust will never be entirely eliminated, we have not seen anything like the depth of recession in the most recent economic downturn. Costs have risen only because it took longer than hoped to stitch up the deal. Developers always incline to over-optimism, sports clubs more so, and "Premiership" football clubs more so still. We hope the Council will stand firm on this matter, if the recent reports prove accurate. While there are votes in keeping Arsenal in the borough, its supporters have made clear in the past that there are boundaries to their loyalty when they thought the Club was over-playing its hand.

Angel Town Centre

The successful launch of the N1 Centre has probably been achieved without detriment to Chapel Market, even though its number of stalls continues to decline. It remains popular with Islingtonians. The Farmers Market on the edge of Camden Passage reaches a new clientele on Sundays, and its success compensates for a decline in the antique market on Wednesdays and Saturdays. Now the Farmers Market is to take its place in Chapel Street, and the council is looking to expand the provision of larger shops, though mercifully it is not pursuing an idea to create a further route through the important terrace that makes up

the low numbers in Upper Street. By the time this report is received, the Council should have approved a new Town Centre Strategy for the Angel. Potential for expansion exists behind the above mentioned terrace, in Parkfield Street, and either side of Chapel Market, but the greatest unfilled potential is the under-utilised ground floor of the Royal Bank of Scotland Building.

King's Cross development

A recent English Heritage publication, *Capital Solutions*, upholds the P & O development (Regent Quarter) as "a classic example of the benefits of conservation led regeneration... set to be a huge financial success." They quote warm words for English Heritage from the Managing Director of P & O developments. They refer to the EH response to the original scheme, but not to give any indication of their apparent acquiescence with that scheme until their social breakfast was picketed by unlikely revolutionaries in the form of Lisa Pontecorvo and Mary Cosh.

The P & O scheme is a great triumph, and would be greater still if York Way reverted to two-way working, slowing traffic to speeds which would facilitate people crossing from the railway station to the many attractions on offer in the new development. My rather cynical analysis of developer negotiations is not really fair here. Had the developer not been encouraged to believe the Council would support any scheme, the end result might have been achieved more painlessly, but it is a fair outcome and one welcomed by us rather than simply accepted as a least worst option.

Ideally it would have been preceded by a sensible reform of King's Cross station. Restoring the magnificent frontage so that it can be appreciated by the millions of visitors and users, and providing much needed circulation space, would have gone a long way to mitigate the disruption which those users have been suffering for more than a year, and which are planned for another thirty months. We hoped that the end of Railtrack with its one track mind, might herald more enlightened thinking, but so far Network Rail seems to be overwhelmed by the plethora of advisors and stakeholders

surrounding it. Instead, to borrow the phrase that came to form a regular part of Trevor Bailey's summaries of England's progress on the cricket field, "Worse was to follow." The railway related work, which precedes the main redevelopment of King's Cross, comprises two distinct parts each split into two phases. One part is the London Underground works. LUL Phase II was supposed to be dependent on the other part happening, but now the Channel Tunnel Rail Link is happening, but phase II is unfunded. This means that there will be serious problems for Union Railways' passengers making their way from King's Cross St Pancras: they will also search in vain for Thameslink 2000 or as it is now known, Thameslink 2012 and rising. Moreover, it means King's Cross will not be compliant with the Disability Discrimination Act. What makes this particularly galling is that a fixed staircase has just been removed for a temporary period of at least five years. The fixed staircase is an important issue for the disability lobby because King's Cross is the nearest station to the RNIB, and guide dogs cannot use moving escalators. As affirmed below, it is a serious mistake to treat all disabled people as a single amorphous group.

However, despite all these set-backs, and the enforcement decision on Coopers Lane (also set out below), Argent St. George have continued to work up their plans for the Railway Lands. Islington Society members were treated to a preview in November, even though Camden were still treating them as confidential three months later. At the end of May we will have the chance to take our understanding further with a visit to the Railway Lands, details elsewhere in this mailing.

Enforcement at Coopers Lane

A major victory for local people over the might of government was secured in February. The Channel Tunnel Rail Act, passed after eighteen months in committees of the Houses of Parliament, is effectively a planning permission for Union Railways and their chosen developer, London & Continental. Like all permissions, it includes conditions, and one of these concerned normal working hours and the grounds for

exceeding them. As work has progressed, there has been more and more pressure on the hours of work, culminating in a request to Camden for a permission silent on any restrictions in this regard. Camden refused, London & Continental appealed, and lost. The judgement, meticulous and unequivocal, compares the protection afforded to the dead with that offered to the living. Most critically of all, it concludes that, as delays built up through the intervention of people like Railtrack, the pressure exerted on local residents to give up their peace and quiet was disproportionate to that applied to Railtrack and others. All too often when public figures refer to the need for hard choices those choices are imposed on the individual rather than the state or the corporate entity. This judgement was a breath of fresh air, even though it leaves unresolved the way forward. The railway, or at least a high speed link to Europe, is needed, but it must be constructed with regard to the lives of those living nearby.

Congestion charge

The congestion charge has now been with us for a year. We are delighted by its success in reducing congestion. Like the scheme in Durham, decongestion has been far more evident than money from the charge. We want it this way. Decongestion brings instant benefits to bus users, the money offers the prospect of public transport improvements at some time in the future.

Consultation is now in progress to extend the zone westwards across the royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea. This is not in our view a good idea, since its effect would be to make commuting from West Ken to the City much cheaper. The risk is that it would increase congestion and raise little or no money. We do want to see an expansion of decongestion, but only if there are separate zones (like the zones of the travelcard) and the reduced rate for those living within the new zone does not facilitate commuting into another congestion zone, or *vice versa*. It is difficult to find logical boundaries, and the present paper system is too low tech to work across a vast area. It may be necessary to await technological advance before extending the provision of

zones, perhaps to the North Circular, and later to the GLA boundary. However, we would support new small zones like the planned K & C extension if they were freestanding as described above. The earliest any change could be made is 2006.

Traffic calming measures

One of the spin off benefits of the introduction of the congestion zone was the availability of funds for traffic calming in the area just outside the zone. There was a genuine fear that rat running might become commonplace around the zone, to avoid the charge. In the event, the scheme has been so successful that even the boundary road (the A501 in Islington) has not suffered an increase in traffic volume. The Barnsbury traffic problems have been addressed more than twenty-five years after the first attempt to deal with them. The problem with that attempt is that it was made when traffic calming was in its infancy, and before measures like road humps were available. We now know that schemes which slow traffic on all potential rat-runs, without closing any of them, are far superior to schemes which involve road closures. Unfortunately, some roads were closed in the 1976 scheme and people living there, particularly those who have moved in since, jealously guard the peace and quiet obtained as a result. No councillor of any party is going to be brave or foolhardy enough to reopen these roads. This being so, there is a strong case for closing other roads, but a majority of residents have voted otherwise. More disappointingly, they have also voted for road humps in preference to more modern traffic calming measures which look less attractive but which better facilitate ambulance journeys, and cycling. This is an area where the councillors might have been more robust, and might have countered one of the few rational arguments against what they are doing. The fact is that ten people are killed on the roads every day. Many are young children. If they were the victims of the SARS epidemic, or a railway accident, their plight would be headline news and the tabloid press would be calling for legislation to incarcerate the Minister responsible. Someone's child is probably only alive because of a speed hump near you,

and it is only because none of us know whose child that we are not celebrating.

Save the 73 campaign

Last year it emerged that Transport for London was intent on replacing Routemasters on the 73 with bendy-buses. Members may recall that Peter Hendy had spoken warmly of the benefits of these vehicles when he addressed the Society in 2002. They have been introduced successfully on the former Red Arrow routes, followed by two longer distance routes to south London, and more controversially, on the 18 from north-west London to Euston.

Their main advantage is the ability to convey large numbers per driver (and no conductor), and their three doors reduce dwell times over conventional one-person buses. Their drawbacks though are numerous: for other road users, particularly people walking and cycling but also cars and other buses, they represent a serious obstacle on account of their length. They require more road space which would mean reduced pavement width - just as for example, Newington Green is benefitting from some much needed measures to make it pedestrian friendly again. They need a lot more garage space, something in chronic shortage following the sell-off of privatised garages ten years ago. Worst of all, they rely on herding people into standing positions, taking away one of the great advantages of the bus over the tube.

TfL has enlisted the support of the disability lobby but in fact disabled people get a very poor deal. There are no extra stops to compensate for the lack of access in traffic jams. The inter-station bus 205 has been driven out of Euston station to accommodate the 18s, which seem to arrive in threes far more than the old double-deckers. This makes for a long walk for those carrying luggage. Off-peak provision has been overlooked: those who the London Transport Users Committee calls the "frail elderly" who can mount a routemaster but need a seat would be turned away. Disability comes in many forms and many degrees. It really is insulting to imply that wheelchair access fits all.

Initially there was a formal

consultation with the promise of further consultation when TfL had expressed a formal preference. We recognize how difficult it is to consult adequately, and we welcome this improved programme which will apply to all subsequent bus route reviews: each tender is for five years. However, certain forces were so wedded to the bendy-bus (and perhaps the savings it offered in addressing a driver shortage) that misinformation appeared in the press and elsewhere that the bendy-bus was a done deal and a date for the end of the 73 was even published.

There is some evidence that the negative forces in TfL were encouraged by the initially lukewarm public response to rumours of the demise of the routemaster and its conductors. I warned then that this was because people were inclined to dismiss such rumours. The Mayor had been elected on a manifesto to increase the number of conductors and had done it; newly acquired Routemasters were still being refurbished. The Mayor's Transport strategy, approved in July 2001, reaffirmed a commitment to more conductors. Sure enough, as conductors disappeared from three routes along Fleet Street, campaigns to save the 73 have begun. At the time of writing, we await a final decision on the next five year's service. However, all is not gloom: three excellently refurbished Routemasters entered service on the 19 route in March 2004.

Newington Green

Following a small scale scheme to improve the pedestrian environment around Highbury station last year, work has now begun on improvements to Newington Green, after a five year campaign. The departure of the petrol station removes the obstacle to a longer term aspiration to restore two way traffic to the west side, easing access to and from the shops, and to make the east side more suitable for children walking to school. In this first phase, the Green itself is being extensively remodelled.

Seven Sisters Road

Another area which suffers severe environmental disbenefit on account of a misguided sixties traffic scheme stretches

from Caledonian Road tube station to Finsbury Park, three tube stops away. The University of Westminster, with support from TfL, has been working with local people to design a more human Seven Sisters Road. I was invited to one of the later stages of this exercise.

Someone living, say, at the northern end of Medina Road has all the disbenefit of heavy traffic including buses passing nearby, yet to reach Nag's Head or the Angel by bus they have to walk to the other end of their road and then cross another road more like Brands Hatch than a local distributor road. People on the Andover estate have two such roads to cross. Unfortunately, any sensible plan involves dealing with the whole of the gyratory and is therefore expensive. TfL has done a marvellous job at Shoreditch, but Vauxhall has been a disappointment and currently there is no money for other schemes. We must work to persuade TfL that these schemes are more worthy than widening the A406 or putting a road bridge across the Thames Gateway.

Formerly public utilities

One of the reasons these schemes are so expensive is the cost of moving cables and pipes from under the road. When the utilities were public bodies, they were quite reasonably given the right to occupy trenches under London. Now that they are private, they are allowed to charge an arm and a leg whenever their property, paid for by our taxes, needs to be moved, and it is more of our taxes that go to them as a result.

Directory enquiries used to be free, but now people vie to tell us how much better one number is than another. We used to be given telephone directories for all of the London postal districts, now we are offered a tiny slice of London irrelevant to our normal patterns of use. The internet may soon render directories and directory enquiries obsolete, but this will certainly hasten their demise. As they are given to everyone and paid for by advertising you would have thought the trend would be towards fewer books covering larger distribution areas.

The Post Office

Many members will have been inconvenienced by the continuing stream of Post Office closures. It is a great shame that, having at long last caught up with the fact that people have plastic cards with which to access cash, a useful local facility is being withdrawn after so short a time. For many of us, a hole in the wall will again be the nearest point at which cash can be found: it is folly to suppose people will walk to the next Post Office, or in my case, the one after next.

Similarly, with stamps widely available, their sale will go elsewhere. At one time, the Post Office encouraged us to use vending machines for stamps: these have now gone. The philatelic counters are also being run down: many items in the catalogue produced by Royal Mail are no longer sold at these counters. Collectable stamps were a licence to print money. It really looks as though the Post Office has a death wish.

Their decision to abandon rail will certainly increase the mortality figures on the roads.

Time will not permit a lengthy report from me at the A.G.M. which is my excuse for a lengthy report in print. The agenda item "Report from the Chair" will be for members to respond to what is written here.

Annual Accounts

Draft annual accounts appear on the back of this report. The surplus reflects our failure to produce as many newsletters as I know you would like. I am sorry that we don't have the person power to meet this desire, though I hope that our monthly "meet the President" evenings and my monthly contributions to the Highbury & Islington Express give you an opportunity to exchange views with us and to hear of the issues which confront us.

I hope you will be able to come to the A.G.M. and other forthcoming events.

Andrew Bosi

Forthcoming Society events

Tuesday May 4th, 9 p.m.	Meet the President, Marquess Tavern, 32, Canonbury Road
Friday May 7th, 2 p.m.	Visit to Building Exploratory, Queensbridge Road, Hackney
Tuesday, May 25th, 6.30 p.m.	Visit to King's Cross Railway Lands (places limited: please apply to the chairman)
Tuesday June 1st, 9 p.m.	Meet the President, Marquess Tavern, 32, Canonbury Road
Wednesday, June 2nd, 6.30 p.m.	Church Crawl, Penton Street to Clerkenwell, & O'Hanlon's P.H.
Tuesday, July 6th, 9 p.m.	Meet the President, Marquess Tavern, 32, Canonbury Road
Friday, July 9th, from 6 p.m.	Annual Bill Manley Pub Crawl, commencing at the York, Islington High Street
Tuesday, August 3rd, 9 p.m.	Meet the President, Marquess Tavern, 32, Canonbury Road

INCOME AND EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT
for the YEAR ENDED 31ST DECEMBER 2003

	£	2003 £	£	2002	£
Subscriptions Donations & Events (Note 1)		4,153		3,400	
Miscellaneous (Note 2)		127		38	
Interest receivable		<u>29</u>		<u>10</u>	
			4,309		3,448
Printing and Distribution Costs		1,029		1,142	
Meeting Expenses (Note 3)		2,155		991	
Development				8,649	
Miscellaneous Expenses				27	
Donations to other Groups		<u>50</u>		<u>136</u>	
			<u>3,234</u>		<u>(10,945)</u>
(Deficit)/Surplus			1,075		(7,497)

BALANCE SHEET AS AT 31ST DECEMBER 2003

<u>Cash at Bank</u>		<u>2003</u>		<u>2002</u>	
		3,380		10,238	
Less: Received in advance		nil		<u>(190)</u>	
			<u>3,380</u>		<u>10,048</u>
<u>Accumulated Funds</u>					
Balance brought forward		3,526		10,048	
Adjustment to prior year accounts				(25)	
(Deficit)/Surplus for the year		1,075		<u>(7,497)</u>	
Total			<u>4,601</u>		<u>3,526</u>

(Signed) Donald Mitchell, Hon. Treasurer

- Notes.** 1. Includes £1300 received from members for Annual Dinner.
2. Includes surplus net of VAT in Calendar Year 2003.
3. Includes cost of Annual Dinner